

Pte. Horace WALLER VC. (1896 – 1917).

10th Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

'For Valour'

The words imprinted on all Victoria Crosses.



Of all the sixty two names on the Batley Grammar School Roll of Honour, Private Horace Waller received the highest distinction in awards for bravery. He was awarded the Victoria Cross, for his actions on the day of his death, April 10th 1917.

The Waller family were plumbers by trade and hailed from the Soothill area of Batley. In 1881 Strickland Waller and his wife Sarah lived with their five children at the 'Top of the Town' in Soothill, Batley. John Edward Waller, Horace's father was thirteen years old at the time.

Ten years later, in 1891, John Edward Waller had married his first wife Esther and he was following in the family tradition of being a plumber and glazier. By 1901 John Edward and Esther had had two children, John Strickland Waller, who was nine years old in 1901 and Horace Waller, who was four years old.

Horace had been born on September 23rd 1896 at 11 Woodhill Terrace in Batley Carr. Horace's mother, Esther, died in the summer of 1899 and the family moved back in with John Edward's mother Sarah, who was by now herself a widow and running the family plumbing business herself, with her sons John and Arthur both working in the business with her. The family lived at 82 Upper Road Batley at this time, a terraced house which still exists today.

In October 1903 Horace's father John Edward married Sarah Elizabeth Prescott, a spinster, four years older than himself and by 1911 they were living as a family on their own with Horace and John Strickland, at Upper Road in Batley. John Edward was still working in the

plumbing business, at the time, but seemingly his wife Sarah, had given up her previous employ as a cook. Horace was at Batley Grammar School by this time.

Horace Waller had attended Purlwell Junior School in Batley and won a free scholarship to Batley Grammar School, where he began his studies in the autumn term of 1909. By the age of seventeen he had to leave the school and was apprenticed in the family firm of plumbers, which went by the trading name of Strickland Waller and Sons. He was able to continue his studies at Batley Technical College.

Horace joined the army as a private on May 30th 1916. It was his third attempt to do so as he had been classed as medically unfit on the first two occasions he had tried to enlist. He was attested into the 9th Service Battalion of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, as 'Class C' in terms of medical fitness. The 10th Battalion KOYLI had been formed in Pontefract in September 1914 and exactly a year later found themselves fighting in France.

Horace Waller's service records do not exist, sadly and his medal record card tells us very little about his service. The card itself does not even record that he was awarded the Victoria Cross, noting only that his family were entitled to the Victory Medal.

It is impossible to know when Horace went to France then. However, he was certainly in France in April of 1917 when the 9th and 10th battalions of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry were involved in an attack on the German Hindenburg Line. In early April 1917, in order to prepare for the attack, the two battalions were practising attacks near Boisleux au Mont on the River Cojeul, to the south east of the town of Arras.

On April 8th 1917 the 9th Battalion went into the line and the 10th Battalion were held in reserve. The attack on the German trenches began on the afternoon of April 9th 1917. Unfortunately the original barrage by the Royal Artillery was not strong enough to break most of the German wire and the first attack by the 9th battalion soon faltered, with many casualties lying in front of the German wire and in shell holes. Soon after dusk on the 9th April 1917 the 10th KOYLI's were brought out of reserve trenches. The 9th battalion were ordered to fall back and the 10th battalion took their place on the left flank of the line. A bombing position here was being held at all costs in order to stop the Germans counter attacking and taking the British trenches.

The war diary for the 10th KOYLI's records that on April 9th 1917 at 7-30 pm:

"At about 7-30 pm A and C Companies under Captain Marsh were sent up to reinforce the 1st East Yorkshires and 15th Durham Light Infantry (DLI) who had succeeded in penetrating the Hindenburg Line and were holding about 1000 yards. A difficult operation which was carried out successfully in the dark."

On the following day, April 10th 1917, at 3.30 am. the diary reports that:

“ C Company of 10th KOYLI relieved the bombing posts of the 15th DLI on the left and held the line from the communication trench to the left of the captured line” Private Horace Waller was part of the bombing party from C company who had gone forward to hold part of the Hindenburg Line captured from the Germans the day before.”

The war diary for April 10th 1917 gives details about how Horace Waller was recommended for the Victoria Cross:

“8 am. C Company repulsed a very determined bombing attack throwing over 300 bombs. Private Waller of C Coy distinguished himself on this occasion. Although wounded he stuck to his post and continued bombing until he died. He has been recommended for a Victoria Cross”

Private Horace Waller was one of fourteen other ranks killed, along with two officers who lost their lives in the attacks on April 9th and 10th 1917. Seventy one other ranks were wounded and seventeen missing.

The award of a Victoria Cross to Horace Waller was announced in the London Gazette of June 8th 1917. The citation for the award read:

“For most conspicuous bravery when with a bombing section forming a block in the enemy line. A very violent counter-attack was made by the enemy on this post, and although five of the garrison were killed, Pte. Waller continued for more than an hour to throw bombs, and finally repulsed the attack. In the evening the enemy again counter-attacked the post and all the garrison became casualties, except Pte. Waller, who, although wounded later, continued to throw bombs for another half an hour until he was killed. Throughout these attacks he showed the utmost valour, and it was due to his determination that the attacks on this important post were repulsed.”

Brigadier General H. R. Headlam, the commander of 64th. Brigade, which the 10th KOYLI's formed part of wrote:

“I command the brigade in which is the battalion to which he belonged and consequently know very well the situation during which Private Waller performed his magnificent act of bravery. His fearless conduct and splendid bravery on that occasion were deciding factors to a critical period, and no man ever won the Victoria Cross more deservedly”.

On July 21st 1917 Horace Waller's parents made the journey from Batley to Buckingham Palace to be presented with the Victoria Cross he had won, by the King. The Times newspaper announced that Horace Waller's parents had attended the ceremony on July 21st

1917, on page 9 of the edition of July 23rd 1917. It recorded that after investing many surviving officers with medals

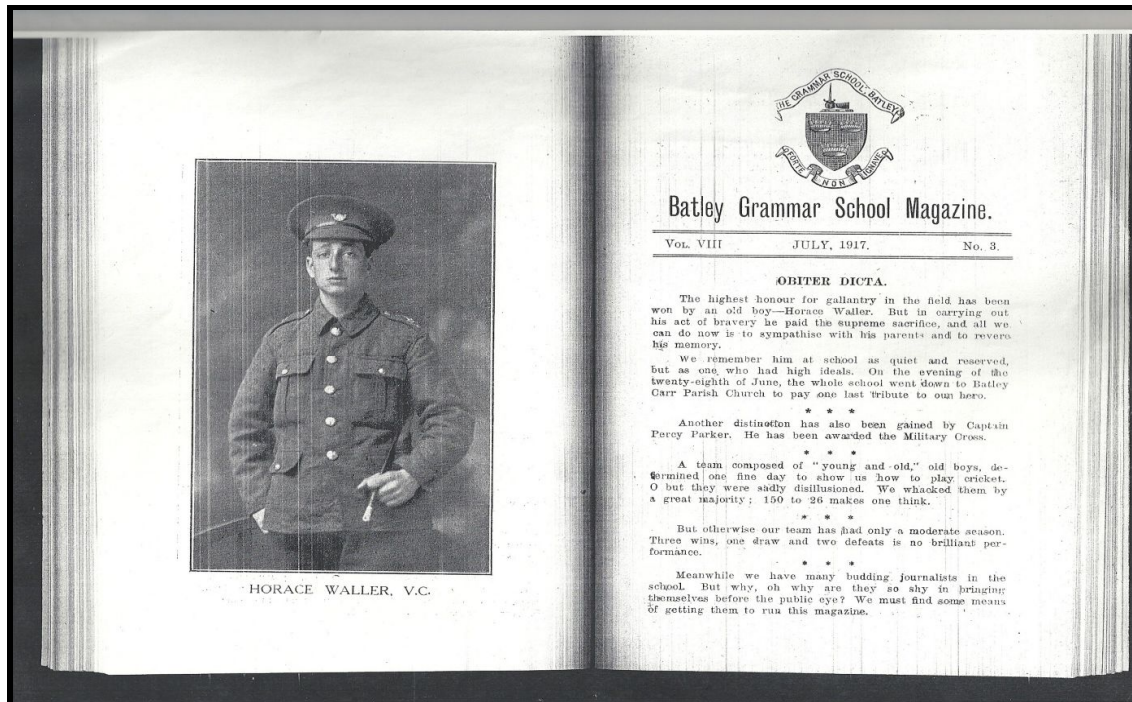
“...the King subsequently received the following ‘Next of Kin’ of deceased Officers and Men and handed to them the Victoria Crosses which had been awarded in the war to their relatives’.

Mr and Mrs Edward Waller to receive the Victoria Cross awarded to their son Private Horace Waller, late The King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry”.

The July 1917 edition of the Batley Grammar School magazine opened with the news of Horace Waller’s death and the award of the Victoria Cross. Under the heading ‘Obiter Dicta’ his death was posted in two following paragraphs:

“The highest honour for gallantry in the field has been won by an old boy – Horace Waller. But in carrying out his act of bravery he paid the supreme sacrifice and all we can do now is sympathise with his parents and to revere his memory.

We remember him at school as quiet and reserved but as one who had high ideals. On the evening of the 25th of June the whole school went down to Batley Carr Parish Church, to pay one last tribute to our hero”.



The page in the Batley Grammar School Magazine

which announced his death in July 1917.

Horace Waller left a total of £184.7s2d in his will to his father, John Edward Waller. His older brother, John Strickland Waller, who had been a Corporal in the KOYLI's, survived the war.

Private Horace Waller is buried at Cojeul Military Cemetery, France. The village of St Martin-sur-Cojeul was taken by the 30th Division on 9 April 1917, lost in March 1918, and retaken in the following August. Cojeul British Cemetery was begun by the 21st Division Burial Officer in April 1917, and used by fighting units until the following October. It was very severely damaged in later fighting. One other soldier who received a Victoria Cross is buried there, along with Horace Waller. Captain Arthur Henderson of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders rests in the next row of graves to Horace Waller VC.

In February 1980 the Victoria Cross won by Horace Waller was sold at auction by Christie's. It was still in its original case and fetched £8,000. Waller's name is memorialised in the Shaw cross area of Batley with a road being named after him. In 1992 the Mayor of Batley opened 'Horace Waller VC Parade'.

Private Waller's Commonwealth War Grave headstone bears the bugle badge of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and also an engraving of the Victoria Cross to show its importance. The words '**Honour'd Beloved Mourn'd**' make a fitting epitaph for a Batley lad, of whom it was said, '**... no man ever won the Victoria Cross more deservedly**'.



Cojeul British Cemetery, France.

Researcher : Philip Wheeler

Taken from Philip Wheeler's book - '*BATLEY LADS*' (The story of the men on the Roll of Honour at Batley Grammar School who died in the Great War 1914-1918). Published 2014.