

## FITCHETT, GEORGE WILLIAM - Died 1st July 1916 aged 29

13356 Private, 10th Battalion, York and Lancaster Regiment



Photograph courtesy of Vivienne Allison, granddaughter of his sister, Alice.

Billy, a bachelor, was born on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1886, the son of George (a farm labourer from Scotter) and Hannah Elizabeth (nee Rushby of Blyton) Fitchett. The family lived on High Street and then Gainsborough Road. He had an older sister called Alice Jane but two others, Harriet and Betsy, died in infancy.

His father was a farm labourer and when Billy left our local school he also found work as a farm hand.

By 1911 he had moved to Rotherham and was lodging there at 97, Badsley Moor Lane, the home of Samuel and Martha Padley. At the outbreak of war he was working at the Bessemer Steel Works as a steam roller labourer.

On 31<sup>st</sup> August 1914 he enlisted at Rotherham and joined the 10th (Service) Battalion which had been formed at Pontefract in September 1914 as part of the 63rd Brigade of the 21st Division. The Division was ordered to be stationed at Halton Park, between Tring and Wendover and for a time Billy was at Frensham Camp, Surrey where the picture on the left was taken.

With his battalion he landed in France on 27th August 1915; they were very raw troops and part of the General Reserve. When the Battle of Loos began in September 1915 it was a baptism of fire for them and like all other units they suffered heavy losses.

On 16th April 1916 his mother died aged 59 as a result of a very serious burning accident.

On 1st July the Battle of the Somme began.

On his sector of the front the attack was commenced at 7.30am by the 4th Middlesex and 8th Somerset Light Infantry. His Battalion then passed through the 4th Middlesex, who were now in the German front line trenches, and at once came under very heavy machine-gun fire from Fricourt and Fricourt Wood. The leading waves got some distance in advance of Dart Lane, where they were held up by the machine-gun fire from Fricourt Wood.

At the same time three large parties of the enemy attempted to bomb their way up all the trenches south of Dart Lane, while the battalion bombers were having a hard struggle with numerous German bombing parties in Lonely Trench. Three barricades that the enemy had erected were destroyed.

The following is an extract of the diary of Private Walter Hutchinson of the 10th Battalion who said of the 1st July 1916:-

*'The order came down to "fix bayonets, you have got to fight for it lads." We obeyed the order like men and was soon out of the trench. I was running across a trench when the grid broke and let me through. I scrambled out and ran after the other boys but had not gone far before I was hit on the hip with a piece of shell. We then landed at the trench we was making for and found out it was our own original front line trench. We saw some awful sights in it for a lot of wounded men had not been got out.....'*

Billy was killed that day.

The Battalion history records the losses for the 10<sup>th</sup> York & Lancasters from the 1st to the 3rd July as '7 officers and 53 other ranks killed or died of wounds.'

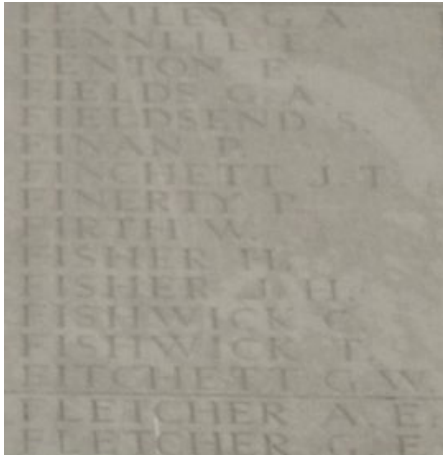
The first day of the Somme was the deadliest day in British military history with 57,470 casualties, of which 19,240 personnel were killed.

The name of Private George Fitchett is one of more than 72,000 listed on the Thiepval Memorial in France for those with no known grave. PLOT – Pier and Face 14A and 14B

His father produced a memorial card which reads:-

*'Jesus, while our hearts are bleeding  
O'er the spoils that death hath won,  
Though cast down we're not forsaken,  
Though afflicted, not alone;  
Though didst give and Thou hast taken,  
Blessed Lord, "Thy will be done."*

On the Commonwealth War Graves website the date of his death is incorrectly listed as 3rd July 1916



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granddaughter of his sister, Alice.