

KING, GEORGE ROWLAND - Died 10th November 1916 aged 19

4055 / 40501 Private, 2nd Battalion, Lincolnshire Regiment



Photograph courtesy of Tony King, his nephew.

Although he was christened George Rowland, he has always been R.G. King on our War Memorial and Roland King, the name he used, on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website.

Roland was a bachelor, the second child of Walter and Demaris (nee Holland) King. He was born on 14th October 1897 and had an older sister Beatrice and younger brothers and sisters Harry Hemshall, Gertrude Lillian, Evelyn Annie, Florence Sarah, Albert James and Walter Leslie.

His parents had married at St. Peter's Church on 30th November 1896.

The family ran the village fish and chip shop on Gainsborough Road from about 1910 to 1940.

After attending the local school he worked as a second horseman for R.J. Day in the village.

Roland enlisted at Grimsby in May 1915 and arrived in France on 27th October.

In June 1916 he was wounded. The Battle of the Somme began on 1st July. His battalion was part of 25 Brigade and, with the 2nd Royal Berkshires, attacked Oivillers-la-Boisselle and were expected to capture Thiepval village that day.

Roland was part of the first wave and went over the top at 7:30am in the morning. They were met with fierce machine gun and rifle fire but still managed to get 200 yards into the German trenches. In theory they were supposed to have some shelter from enemy fire, but felt the full weight of a German counter barrage, and half their number fell before seeing the enemy front line. Due to a lack of reinforcements the 2nds were unable to hold their position and eventually received the order to withdraw. Such was the slaughter during the first days of the battle that, of around 30 officers and 700 men of the 2nd Lincolns, 21 officers and 450 men were casualties.

On 23rd July 1916, the Gainsborough News reported:-

'Roland King... has written to his parents... that he is in hospital in France suffering from shrapnel wounds in the neck and chest.'

His battalion spent much of the next 3 months in the trenches. Attacks north and east continued throughout October and into November in increasingly difficult weather conditions.

On the morning of the 10th November they were relieving the 1st Sherwood Foresters near Lesbœufs when they came under attack from shelling, including gas, during the relief. The Battalion War Diaries recorded 4 other ranks killed, six wounded and six missing.

Roland was killed by a shell.

Just a week after his death the Battle of the Somme finally ended with the onset of a severe winter.

On 9th December 1916 the Lincolnshire Chronicle reported in its Scotter section:-

'We regret to announce the death of Pte. Rowland King of this village which occurred on November 15th [sic] by a shell which dropped into the trenches and killed him instantly. The sad news received by his parents from Capt. G. Thatcher, 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment stated:-

*"We all feel his loss very much, as he was a good soldier, always carrying out his duties with the greatest steadiness and courage. He joined the 2nd Lincolns on May 20th 1915 and was only 17 years of age. He was wounded in the neck and chest in June 1916 and after between seven and eight weeks in hospital returned to his duties in the trenches in France."
The sympathy of the whole village folk is felt with the father, mother and family in their sad bereavement'.*

His name is one of 72,000 listed on the Thiepval Memorial for men with no known grave. PLOT – Pier and Face 1C.

His cousin Harold King was killed in World War Two and is also remembered on the War Memorial.