

SLEIGHT, WALTER - Died 26th August 1914 aged 31

6198 Private, 1st Battalion, Lincolnshire Regiment



Walter's Memorial Plaque. Photograph courtesy of Linda Hempsall, great granddaughter of his brother, Amos.

Walter was born at Scotton in the first months of 1883; the son of William Day and Mary (nee Green) Sleight (pronounced Slight.) His older brothers and sisters were Mary Jane (died 1898), Frederick, Emily and Herbert and he had a younger brother named Amos.

His father was an agricultural labourer and the family lived at Scotterwood Lodge. For a time they resided at Cote Houses but after his mother died in 1899, Walter lived on West Street with Amos and their father.

The two brothers moved to Lincoln where their older brother Herbert was living.

He enlisted into the Army at Lincoln (his service number suggests this was early in the 1900's) and was sent to the regimental base at Portsmouth.

Two men named Walter Sleight were serving in the Lincolnshire, Regiment. An Army Old Comrades annual report shows a Walter Sleight donating in 1908 and 1909.

This man was with E Company serving at Kamptee in the Central Provinces India. In 1910 the battalion moved to Aden and eventually returned to bases at Portsmouth in 1912.

Scotter's Walter Sleight may have finished his enlistment term, returning to Lincoln to become a reservist with either the 3rd (Special Reserve) Battalion or the 4th (Territorial) Battalion.

The 1911 census lists him as single, working as a machine moulder, living with Amos and his family at 5 Carlton Street.

When war was declared on 4th August 1914 Walter Sleight was with A Company of the 1st Lincolnshire Regiment. At 6:00pm they received orders to mobilise and were among the one hundred and twenty thousand men of the original British Expeditionary Force. They formed part of II Corps, 3rd Division, 9th Brigade. On 8th August five hundred and forty three mobilised reservists joined from the depot at Lincoln where they had been fitted out with clothing and equipment. Several days were spent in strenuous training for overseas service and on the morning of the 13th they marched out of Victoria Barracks (very close to Amos's home) and went by train to Southampton.

They set sail on the Union Castle liner SS Norman, not knowing their destination. By 2:30am on the 14th they arrived at Le Harve and disembarked immediately. Companies formed up in a large shed and as they passed through a French civilian served them coffee.

Less than two weeks later Walter would be one of the first casualties of the Great War.

At 10:00am they marched from the docks through the town and up the hill as the hot sun beat down on them while they undertook a gruelling six mile march over rough roads. They reached a plateau and sheltered in an orchard. That night a violent thunderstorm broke and it rained all the next day as they marched to a railway station. At each halt citizens gave them gifts of chocolates, flowers and handkerchiefs.

They reached Landrecies at 8:00pm on 16th August and billeted in Dupleix Barracks. Next day they marched to Noyelles and then on the 20th to billets in Leval. They moved to the left flank of the French Army and defended the Mons to Cuesmes road occupying houses, digging trenches and erecting barricades across the road.

On 22nd August the first skirmishes between the BEF and the enemy took place. As the German infantry approached the Lincolnshire's opened fire with rifles and machine guns but were forced back with heavy casualties.

The battle for Mons took place on 23rd and 24th, with the Allies encountered overwhelming German forces, which forced them to withdraw.

On 26th August the Battle of Le Cateau began as part of the retreat from Mons. It was said of that day:-

'Through the course of the entire war, never were British troops as heavily outnumbered.'

His battalion was in the trenches until 16:00 when they were ordered to retire. He and two others were killed during this operation.

Private Walter Sleight is buried at Troisvilles Communal Cemetery in northern France. PLOT – Sp. Mem (Special memorial). The top of his head stone states:-

'Known to be buried in this cemetery'

With the base inscribed:-

'Their glory shall not be blotted out'

Walter's gravestone is the middle of the three on the left of the cemetery photograph, although his remains could be anywhere in this plot, as four others were also killed on the same day, and have Sp. Mem against their names on the source link.

His nephew, Frederick Wray was also killed, and his brother Amos served and survived. Both are mentioned in the section, 'Others associated with the parish during the Great War.'



Photographs by kind permission of Pierre Vandervelden
Source: <http://www.inmemories.com/Cemeteries/troisvilles.htm>