

Benjamin Tyler

1897 - 1917

Born in Oxford

Died near Ypres, aged 20, on 22 August 1917

Family and Education

Benjamin Arthur Tyler was born in Oxford between July and September 1897. His father, James Eli Tyler, was a manager in a joinery works, his mother was Margaret Ann, and he had two brothers and two sisters. The family lived at 99 Botley Road, Oxford. At the 1911 census Benjamin was at school.

War Service: 2/4 Battalion, Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry

When Benjamin turned 17 in 1914 he was old enough for the Territorials, but still two years too young to be sent overseas. He joined the 2/4 Battalion of the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. This was a second-line unit, formed at the start of the war to take the Territorials of the 4th Battalion who had not volunteered for overseas service, and who might be needed to repel an invasion. Benjamin was allocated a four-figure service number, which indicates early enrolment. Francis Liddell, an older man linked to Wesley Memorial Church, was a Company Sergeant Major in this battalion (he is also on the church memorial). In 1916 conscription was introduced and the unit was sent to France. It landed on 24 May, and by the end of June it was taking part in raids across the front line. On 19 July it was in reserve for the disastrous attack at Fromelles (north of the action at the Somme) when little was gained: it suffered heavy shelling and significant casualties, though fewer than the front-line troops. It may have been at this time that Benjamin became a Lance Corporal.

After this the battalion had a period away from noteworthy action. In his book Captain Rose records: 'It was a fine autumn. The French civilians were getting their crops within a mile or two of the trenches'. But at the end of October they marched to the Somme and did stints in the misery of its front-line trenches. They were there on Christmas Day, when fighting continued.

January 1917 was bitterly cold and in February the unit frequently experienced gas shelling. Then it was involved in pushing back the Germans and following their retreat to the Hindenburg Line. In June the battalion played a small part in the Battle of Arras. The Germans were now routinely using planes for bombing as well as for observation and machine-gun attacks: the danger extended far behind the front line.

In August the 3rd Battle of Ypres, or Battle of Passchendaele, was fought in appalling mud due to unusually high rainfall. On 22 August the 2/4 Battalion advanced across farmland amid machine-gun and sniper fire. Part of the battalion established a new position, still under fire from in front, but found themselves shot at from behind as well. One company was held up as it tried to take Pond Farm: the fifty German soldiers there did not surrender until the

evening. Benjamin was among many killed that day: he was aged 20. His body was recovered and he has a war grave in Tyne Cot Cemetery.

This is the story of one of the men who appear on a war memorial at Wesley Memorial Methodist Church in Oxford, UK. For Benjamin Tyler's experience, 'The Story of the 2/4th Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry' by Captain G K Rose, published in 1920 by Blackwell, Oxford (and available at the Gutenberg Project website), was particularly helpful.