



James Septimus PUNCHARD

Lieutenant, 1/5th Battalion The King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment

James Septimus PUNCHARD's experience is quite unusual in comparison with the other 'old boys'. The circumstances of his death cannot be attributed to a single action of the conflict, and in fact the date of his death was 2nd April 1919, almost 5 months after the First World War ended.

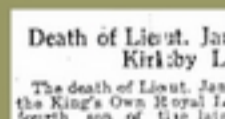
On first impressions PUNCHARD seemed to have gained a reprieve during the First World War, narrowly escaping involvement in the notorious Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele). At the beginning of July 1917 his unit, 1/5th Battalion The King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment, was involved in intensive training behind the lines. In mock-up trenches the Battalion practiced a large-scale assault, combining their movements with infantry, aerial and armoured activity. The role of the 1/5th King's Own was pivotal as they were to form the centre of General Gough's Fifth Army, which was to begin the Third Battle of Ypres on the 31st July 1917. On the night of the 28th July the men moved into the front line in preparation for the attack. PUNCHARD would have been with his men, somewhere near St Jean, ready for 'the big push'. However while the final preparations for the assault were taking place PUNCHARD was shot in the right thigh. It is unknown whether this gunshot wound was the result of a sniper, enemy rifle fire or a negligent discharge in the trenches. What is certain is that the wound was serious enough to result in PUNCHARD being returned to England, where he arrived on the 7th August. Consequently when the Third Battle of Ypres opened on the 31st July, PUNCHARD was not with the advancing 1/5th King's Own. It could be said that PUNCHARD was lucky. The involvement of the 5th Battalion in the operation was to result in 255 casualties, and in total, of the 9 British Divisions (c.100, 000 men) that advanced on the opening day of the Battle, 27,000 were casualties. Unfortunately, in PUNCHARD's case the damage of the war had already taken its toll. He recovered well from the wound in his thigh, spending time in Reading Hospital and then the Military Convalescent Hospital in Ashton-in-Makerfield. During this period, however, he began to complain of a cough, which was attributed to the fact that he had "lived in a gas environment for nearly two months previous to being wounded." This condition became steadily worse and in July 1918 PUNCHARD was forced to relinquish his commission of grounds of ill health. He was subsequently admitted to a Red Cross Hospital, known as Whites Lodge, at Bournemouth, where it was hoped the climate might improve his condition. This was not to be. PUNCHARD grew weaker and weaker and died at Bournemouth on 2nd April 1919. In a cruel twist of fate, PUNCHARD had been reprieved from the carnage of Passchendaele, only to succumb to Tuberculosis resulting from gas exposure, and die in a hospital in England. His death illustrates that the legacy of the war could create victims long after the Armistice was signed on the 11th November 1918.

PUNCHARD was an extremely well known and esteemed member of the Kirkby-Lonsdale community. He was educated at Queen Elizabeth Grammar School and also spent a period of time at Sedbergh Grammar School. Upon leaving school he embarked on a legal career successfully serving his articles with Messrs Buck, Dickson and Crockshott, of Preston, and qualifying as a solicitor in November 1898. As a practicing solicitor he worked in Leicester at Sir Thomas Wright & Sons, and subsequently spent a brief period working at Blackpool and Lancaster. PUNCHARD reached the pinnacle of his legal career when he was made a partner in Messrs Talbot & Rheam, of Milnthorpe, which subsequently became Talbot, Rheam & PUNCHARD. In addition to his prominent professional career PUNCHARD was also an ardent sportsman. He played cricket for Lancaster Cricket Club, where he became vice-captain in 1907. Here he was described as a "consistent run-getter" often leading the batting average of the club. Moreover, he brought his cricketing skills to Kirkby Lonsdale Cricket Team, where in the summer of 1908 he played alongside a 14 year old Arthur Armer. This young man was a QES scholar, and would go on to serve and die for his country in the First World War. PUNCHARD was also a keen Rugby player at both the Kirby-Lonsdale and the Vale of Lune clubs. Additionally he was said to be passionate in football, golf, fishing and shooting.

Sporting ability was a desirable attribute for military service, and although over military age, PUNCHARD nevertheless felt it his duty to serve and joined-up on the 15th August 1915. Unlike all the other 'old boys' on the memorial, PUNCHARD joined up as an officer, and he was gazetted with the rank of Second Lieutenant in the 5th Battalion KORL Regiment on the 23rd August 1915. He proceeded to Weeton Camp for training, and spent several months in England before being sent to the Western Front around January 1916. Once at the front, he served predominantly in the Ypres area. He was rotated into the front-line many times and certainly saw plenty of action. Perhaps one of the biggest 'shows' he would have witnessed was the explosion of the 19 mines on Messines Ridge, 7th June 1917. The noise of this detonation could be heard in London, and PUNCHARD, located near Ypres, would have not only heard it, but would have seen it and felt the force. He was a very competent officer, taking command of 'D' company in the absence of its usual commander, Captain Harris, in October 1916. It is thus unsurprising that PUNCHARD gained promotion to full Lieutenant on 1st July 1917. It was thus as a Lieutenant that he was wounded and sent back to England. It was also as an honorary Lieutenant that he died in the hospital at Bournemouth.

Following his death, PUNCHARD's remains were brought back to Kirkby-Lonsdale, where he was buried in St Mary's Churchyard. His funeral was given full military honours. The Union Jack draped coffin was preceded by a force of Volunteers under Lieutenant A. Pearson, a firing party under Sergeant Briggs and, very fittingly, the Cadet Corps from Queen Elizabeth Grammar School. After the service, three volleys were fired over the grave and the 'Last Post' was sounded. PUNCHARD actually has two headstones in the churchyard, both of which can be viewed to this day. It is fitting that the last of the QES 'old boys' to be killed in the war should be buried in Kirkby-Lonsdale. His grave provides not just a site of personal remembrance, but acts as a focal point for remembering all the 'old boys' that gave their lives in the First World War

Click on the images below to enlarge and for more information



Links

James Septimus PUNCHARD's entry on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Website, http://www.cwgc.org/search/casualty_details.aspx?casualty=4024167

James Septimus PUNCHARD's confirmation to 2nd Lieutenant in the London Gazette, [Link](#)

James Septimus PUNCHARD's confirmation to Lieutenant in the London Gazette, [Link](#)

For more information on the Battle of Messines see, <http://www.firstworldwar.com/battles/messines.htm>

For more information on the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) see, <http://www.firstworldwar.com/battles/ypres3.htm>

For more information on the use of poison gas see, <http://www.firstworldwar.com/weaponry/gas.htm>

For further info on the King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment explore the Regimental Museum website <http://www.kingsownmuseum.plus.com/gallerywone008.htm>