

Joseph Henry Baylis



Joseph Henry was born in Isleworth in 1886 and was the first child born to Joseph George and Emily Baylis (nee Hall) who had married in 1885 in Brentford. By the time Joseph was 4 years old, the family had moved from 39 Eve Road Isleworth, to Bromley and Joseph had a baby sister, Lottie.

Joseph senior was a Lighterman, a highly skilled man who operated a 'lighter', a type of flat-bottomed barge, moved by oar and water currents in the Port of London. Ten years later the family had moved to Rotherhithe and three more children had been born, Clara, Frederick and Charles. The 1911 Census tells us that Joseph was 24 and a clerk in a bank. On the 20th May 1911, shortly after the 1911 Census had been taken, Joseph married Emma Jackson at All Saints Church, Rotherhithe.

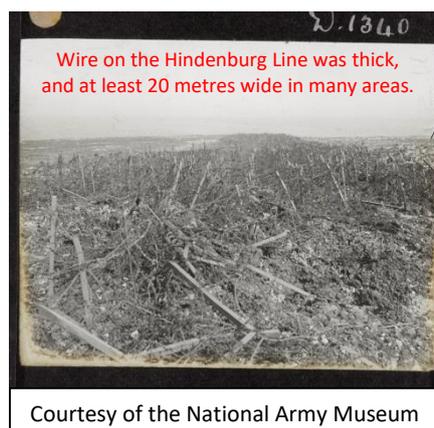
Joseph enlisted at Deptford and joined 12th (Service) Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps. This Battalion was part of the 60th Brigade, attached to the 20th (Light) Division. After training, the Battalion proceeded to France on the 22nd of July 1915, landing at Boulogne and moved to the Fleurbaix area for familiarisation.

There is no date of enlistment for Joseph. Forces War Records lists all the battles that his regiment fought so Joseph may well have been involved in all the 1916 battles on the Somme - The Battle of Mount Sorrel, The Battle of Delville Wood, The Battle of Guillemont, The Battle of Flers-Courcelette, The Battle of Morval, The Battle of Le Transloy. He must have been exhausted both physically and mentally. By late November, military operations on the Somme were stopped by both sides due to rain, snow, fog, mud fields and water-logged trenches.

From Feb 1917, Joseph's regiment were also "in action" during The German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line - known by the Germans as The Siegfried Line. They began to build a strong line of fortifications behind their own front line and started their "scorched earth policy" of destroying everything that might be of any use to the allies as they "retreated" (the Germans needed to free up their army divisions to go to the Eastern Front). As they moved back they made the ground as uninhabitable and as dangerous as possible with booby traps and hundreds of mines. Some German troops armed with machine guns were left behind to keep up the pretence of trench warfare. They were so convincing at deceiving the British, they enticed the British heavy guns to furious bombardments of what was already a deserted strip of land.

There are no records of 12th KRRC fighting in any well-defined battles in February and as Joseph is recorded as 'Killed in Action' on 20th February 1917, it is very possible that Joseph died as a result of one of the skirmishes on the Hindenburg Line. His body was never found.

Joseph is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme and he is also remembered on the war memorial at St Luke's church, Evelyn Street, Deptford, although this memorial is no longer on display in the church.



Courtesy of the National Army Museum

