

## **James Davies**

Born: 1891

Died: 17 April 1917

Father: Charles Davies

Mother: Elizabeth Davies

Not married

Brothers: Thomas William, Albert, Richard, William

Sisters: Louisa, Eliza, (Annie?)

James Davies was born in 1891 to Charles and Elizabeth Davies in the town of Leominster, Herefordshire, England. He was the youngest of eight children. His family were hard working people, mainly agricultural labourers, involved in working for local farmers and landowners. Sadly, his mother Elizabeth, known as Betsy, died when James was just a young boy.

At some time between 1901 and 1911 James, his father and two brothers, Thomas and Albert, moved to the Derwent Valley in Derbyshire to work on the building of the Derwent and Howden dams. They lived at Birchilee, a temporary village built to house the navvies working on the dams and known locally as 'Tin Town.'

When the call came for young men to join up following the outbreak of the First World War, James answered the call like many thousands of other young men. It's not certain where he joined up. Most likely he initially joined the York and Lancaster Regiment in Sheffield, and then was transferred at some point to the 23<sup>rd</sup> (Service) Battalion, Royal Fusiliers, City of London Regiment (1<sup>st</sup> Sportsman's).

The battalion was nicknamed the 'Hard as Nails' Battalion. The battalion was sent to France on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 1915. They were transferred to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division of the 5<sup>th</sup> Army on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1915 under the command of Lieutenant General Hubert de la Poer Gough. It is likely that James was transferred to the Royal Fusiliers as they lost men and needed replacements from other battalions.

### ***Precis of an extract from 'Hard as Nails' by Michael Foley***

The actions at Miraumont, 17-18 February 1917:

In the beginning of February 1917, the battalion moved again to Miraumont, where an attack was planned for early in the month. The 99<sup>th</sup> brigade was to lead the attack on a 500-yard-long front, between West Miraumont Road and East Miraumont Road. On the right, one and a half companies of the Sportsmen's Battalion were to attack and hold Grandcourt Trench, the front line of the German trenches.

The 'Sportsmen' moved up to the line on 16 February and had a hard time getting through the mud, slush and congestion. When they finally arrived at the front, they were subjected to heavy artillery bombardment. When they eventually attacked, they were raked by heavy machine-gun fire, guns which the British artillery barrage had not touched. The attacking forces became muddled. The attack failed on the right where the 2<sup>nd</sup> South Staffs were moving forward, which meant that the Germans in that part of the trench could then turn their machine-guns on the 'Sportsmen'.

The report of the attack in the newspapers at home gave a more positive slant than reports from the men who took part in it. On 19 February, *The Times* reported about the attack on enemy positions opposite Miraumont and Petit Miraumont. This supposedly took place on a mile and a half front and captured the enemy lines after progressing 1,000 yards into enemy territory. There was also a copy of the German report on the engagement saying that the attack failed – which was closer to what the men who participated said about it.

Extracted from:

Foley, Michael, 'Hard as Nails: The Sportsmen's Battalion of World War One,' Spellmount Ltd, 2007

This attack took place on 17 February 1917 – the date that is given as James Davies's death, so it's fair to assume that he died in this attack.

He is buried in Regina Trench Cemetery near Grandcourt in France. Plot 1 Row F30.

Regina Trench Cemetery, Grandcourt, France

