

## S/10944 Private Peter Allan



Peter was born on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1887, the second child and son of fisherman Peter Allan and Jessie Heddle Allan (née Ross), of West Shore, Burray.

Peter's father was drowned in the Firth of Forth on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1891, working as an Able Seaman when the steamship *Bear* collided with the *Britannia*. The family had a tough time, thereafter. Peter's mother worked as a knitter and her younger brother, James, moved into the house, while working as a fisherman. When the 1911 Census was taken, Peter was working as a fisherman and his mother as a fish worker.

Peter was called up under the Military Service Act in early 1916. After several months training he crossed to France in the late summer and joined 7th Seaforth Highlanders, serving in 9th (Scottish) Division. Peter was wounded in the Battle of the Somme at the Butte de Warlencourt on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1916, when ten Orcadian Seaforths of 7th Battalion were killed and two more were fatally wounded.

Peter returned to France in 1917, joining 2nd Seaforth Highlanders in 4th Division. He was wounded again, probably at Roeux on 11<sup>th</sup> April during the Battle of Arras. After another recovery, Peter returned to France and joined "C" Company of 1/6th Battalion, Seaforth Highlanders, in 152nd Brigade of 51st (Highland) Division.

After a week of heavy fighting in France during the German Michael Offensive, on 1<sup>st</sup> April 51st Division reached Béthune, near the Belgian border. It rested there and absorbed about 3,000 reinforcements over a few days. 51st Division was transferred on the 7<sup>th</sup> to the command of XI Corps and moved to the rear of Portuguese 2nd Division, holding 10,000 yards of front line about Richebourg l'Avoue, Neuve Chapelle and Fauquissart. 152nd Brigade was billeted in Ham en Artois while it waited to move to the front.

At 4.15am on 9<sup>th</sup> April the German Lys Offensive started with an intense artillery bombardment of phosgene gas and heavy shells on the back areas behind the Portuguese Division and British 55th Division on its right. When at 6.30am 152nd Brigade ordered its battalions to move to reserve positions, 1/6th Seaforths were directed to move to Lacouture. It was soon evident that the German infantry assault which started at 8.45am had made good progress and most of the Portuguese Division's defences had been swept away, but reliable information was hampered by heavy mist which did not clear until about noon.

It was 12.45pm before 1/5th and 1/6th Seaforths began their advance, through heavy shelling, to reinforce the dismounted detachments of 11th Cyclist Battalion and 1st King Edward's Horse, clinging on in posts between the villages of Lacouture and Bout Deville. 1/6th Seaforths intended placing two companies in Lacouture, but the leading company was stopped by heavy enemy rifle and machine gun fire when it reached the footbridge east of Vert Lannot (subsequently called Boundary Bridge). Two companies took position along the western bank of the River Lawe, up to the southern bridge at Vieille Chapelle, another moved into the western outskirts of that village, while the fourth was held in reserve at Les Lobes. Despite heavy German fire the line was held until nightfall.

Peter Allan may have lost his life in the advance to the River Lawe, or to German artillery or small arms fire while holding the line there. He was listed among 1/6th Seaforths' casualties on 9th April as "missing in action". 51st (Highland) Division lost almost 3,000 casualties in a week of heavy fighting to stop the Lys Offensive, but added new laurels to its, already formidable, reputation. Although Peter Allan was eventually classified "killed in action", his body was not identified and he has no known grave. Private Peter Allan, who died aged thirty, is commemorated on Panel 112 of the Loos Memorial, which forms the side and back of Dud Corner Cemetery, in the village of Loos-en-Gohelle, Pas de Calais district, France.