

Private David MacAulay DCM MM

Private David 'Jock The Sniper' MacAulay DCM MM ((1875-1918) The luck ran out for David Macaulay on 18 October 1918. He was one of 30 men killed when two companies of the 1st Battalion South Wales Borderers were ordered to attack the hamlet of Rejet de Beaulieu just west of the Sambre et Oise Canal. It was during one of the last allied offensives at the end of four appalling years on the Western Front. Three weeks later the Armistice was signed. Private David Macaulay was one of just a handful of men still serving in the battalion from the heady days of August 1914 when they all set off for France with high hopes of a quick victory, but David Macaulay was more than just another casualty of that terrible war. The regimental archives contained little information about David Macaulay himself. Yet he is one of the few private soldiers whose exploits are documented in the regimental history. Nevertheless he is a bit of a mystery. Some four years ago I wrote an article for The Western Mail to see if I could locate the Macaulay family to find out more about this unknown gallant soldier; the article produced no response. However, a few weeks ago I received an unexpected call from Mr. Duxbury of Stockport who turned out to be David Macaulay's grandson. His story about his grandfather was at first hard to believe. David Macaulay was born on 12th August 1875 at New Street, Paisley; his parents were John and Agnes Macaulay. David initially worked in the local shipyards as a riveter. In December 1906, he married Mary Donnelly, also from Paisley. After the birth of their daughter in 1907, David Macaulay joined the Merchant Navy. He was in Valparaiso, Chile when news of the likelihood of a war in Europe reached him. When his ship finally docked in Cardiff, he took his discharge from the Merchant Navy and enlisted in the army. After training he was posted to 1st Battalion South Wales Borderers and was one of nearly 1,000 men who sailed to France from Gloucester Castle on 12th August 1914 (incidentally his 39th birthday). After the retreat from Mons, there was stalemate on the Western Front. In October 1915, patrols were frequently sent out into no-man's land at Loos. One of these patrols, consisting of Private Macaulay and two other men, encountered a much stronger German party and was forced to retire. However, Macaulay remained behind to cover his comrades' retreat, killed two Germans at close quarters and eventually escaped, bringing his opponents' helmets back as trophies. Private Macaulay received the Distinguished Conduct Medal and later the Croix de Guerre from the French for his gallantry. He earned the nickname 'Jock The Sniper'. Later, in May 1916 in the same sector, the battalion's patrols in no-man's land were very energetic and had several brushes with the enemy. On one occasion, Privates Quicke and Macaulay were out near the German wire when the enemy opened fire on another patrol. One man was hit and the Germans came out to capture him, whereupon Quicke and Macaulay turned the tables by opening fire, driving the Germans off, and they were able to help the wounded man to safety. Macaulay received a bar to his Distinguished Conduct Medal for this action. During the three years in the trenches Private Macaulay had never been wounded by shot or shell. However, in August 1917, as the result of an accident, he was sent home for an operation on both his knees and was subsequently discharged from the army through ill health. On his recovery he was sent to work in a factory in Newport. Finding life dull, he returned to the sea and made several voyages. During one of these voyages his ship was torpedoed by a German U-Boat, but being a good swimmer he was able to keep himself afloat for several hours until rescued and brought safely to land. Eventually he returned to Cardiff Docks and applied to get reinstated in his old regiment - 1st Battalion South Wales Borderers. He was successful and Private Macaulay returned to the trenches. It was on 15th September 1918, during the great allied offensive on to Hindenburg Line, near Omignon, that the battalion made great progress sustaining only a few casualties. Twenty prisoners were taken and four enemy machine guns were captured. Private Macaulay was one of a number of soldiers of the 1st Battalion to be awarded the Military Medal. Private David Macaulay was described as the bravest man of his regiment. His record of gallantry awards was unique for a private soldier. He consistently gave inspiration to many in difficult and trying conditions.

