



First World War Memorial Replaced CAPTAIN D. P. HIRSCH VC

By Jarvis Browning

On 23rd April 1917, Acting Captain David Philip Hirsch was killed whilst standing on the parapet above the position his men were holding. The approximate spot where he died was marked by a cross which, over the years, had suffered the ravages of time and weather. A replica was made and on that same day, ninety-five years on, it was placed in position by his niece, Mrs P. Holliday, and his great-nephew, Mr Jarvis Browning.

Aged 20, Hirsch, from Westwood Grove in Leeds, was serving with the 4th Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment (Green Howards), part of 150 Brigade, when on 23rd April 1917, as part of the 50th Division, he and his men were ordered to attack the German positions in what became known as the Second Battle of the Scarpe. This offensive was to be carried out over a nine-mile front and the 50th Division was given objectives ahead of Wancourt. The attack would be made by the 150th Brigade with the 4th East Yorks on the right and 4th Yorks on the left. Each battalion kept one company in support.

They moved forward but after only about 100 yards ran into their own creeping barrage which was advancing too slowly.

Intense enemy fire also held up the 4th Battalion which was only able to charge into the German front trench after help from one of the supporting tanks. However, by 0525 hours, they reached the German trench and found it filled with bodies.

Their success was not matched by the two battalions on either side of them and the 4th Yorks soon found themselves alone and under fire from three sides. They therefore began to dig in along a line 100 to 200 yards to the west of the first objective. Though enemy rifle and artillery fire had practically ceased, machine-gun fire was increasing in intensity – particularly from the left flank. Captain Hirsch, who was by this time the only officer left, established a defensive flank with half of 'Y' Company along a line above and parallel to the River Cojeul. With the remainder of the Battalion – only about 150 men – he decided to hold on to his position and sent back for reinforcements and ammunition.

The situation was critical for the Yorkshiremen. The Germans were seen massing for a counter-attack and Hirsch knew that something extraordinary would be needed if the position was to be held. The subsequent announcement of the award of the Victoria Cross, published in *The London Gazette* of 14 June 1917, explains a little of what happened next:

Having arrived at the first objective, Captain Hirsch, although already twice wounded, returned over fire-swept slopes to satisfy himself that the defensive flank was being established. Machine-gun fire was so intense that it was necessary for him to be continuously up and down the

line encouraging his men to dig and hold the position. He continued to encourage his men by standing on the parapet and steadying them in the face of machine gun fire and counter-attack until he was killed. His conduct throughout was a magnificent example of the greatest devotion to duty.

The remnants of the 4th Yorks were forced to withdraw back to their own lines. At least 109 men lost their lives that day.

Philip Hirsch's actions on 23rd April were remembered by his relatives in 2012, as the new memorial was placed at what was known as Kestrel Copse.



The ground over which Captain Philip Hirsch and the men of the 4th Battalion the Yorkshire Regiment fought on 23rd April 1917. Kestrel Copse is the area of trees to the left. The front line ran roughly from the corner of Kestrel Copse across to the corner of the wood seen here on the right.

Above right: The original wooden cross that marked the spot where Captain Philip Hirsch was killed in action.

Opposite right: Captain Philip Hirsch's niece, Mrs P. Holliday, and his great-nephew, Mr Jarvis Browning, beside the replacement cross at Kestrel Copse.

Photos courtesy Jarvis Browning.

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