

Brothers lost in the Great War - 47 years apart

By Dan Hill

Newly discovered family collection tells incredible wartime story



Sadly, a family losing two sons in war was not altogether uncommon during the period of 1914-1918 but the story of the Satterthwaite brothers, Walter and Jack stands out as one that tells of the terrible legacy of war, even claiming victims decades after the events took place.

When the Great War broke out in 1914 Letchworth Garden City was a young town, founded on socialist principles and renowned nationally as a free-thinking utopia. Consequently the garden city movement drew people from all around the region including families like the Satterthwaites of Finchley, Middlesex.

Of working-class stock, the Satterthwaite family with their two oldest sons John (known as Jack) and Walter moved to Letchworth in the late 1900's to work in the town's emerging printing industry. During their time in Letchworth both brothers joined the local Territorial unit, the Hertfordshire Regiment. At the time this would have meant that the brothers would have spent their weekends and summer holiday's training for a war that most did not even consider as a possibility. Jack, the older of the two was soon found to be a highly capable soldier and rose to the rank of Sergeant, becoming Platoon Leader of those men from his home town of Letchworth, Hertfordshire.



Walter Satterthwaite, left, his brother, Jack, right.

When war was declared in late summer of 1914 men rushed to enlist from all over the country, although for ready assembled units such as the Hertfordshire Regiment, the wait was significantly less. The Herts were called on to follow the regular army out to the Western Front to meet the threat of the numerically superior German Army who were invading the low countries via Belgium.

Sgt Jack Satterthwaite, minus his younger brother Walter, left the train station at Letchworth Garden City in October 1914 to head off to war. This image, recently re-colourised, captures the exact moment 100 years ago that Jack and his comrades left Hertfordshire for war.



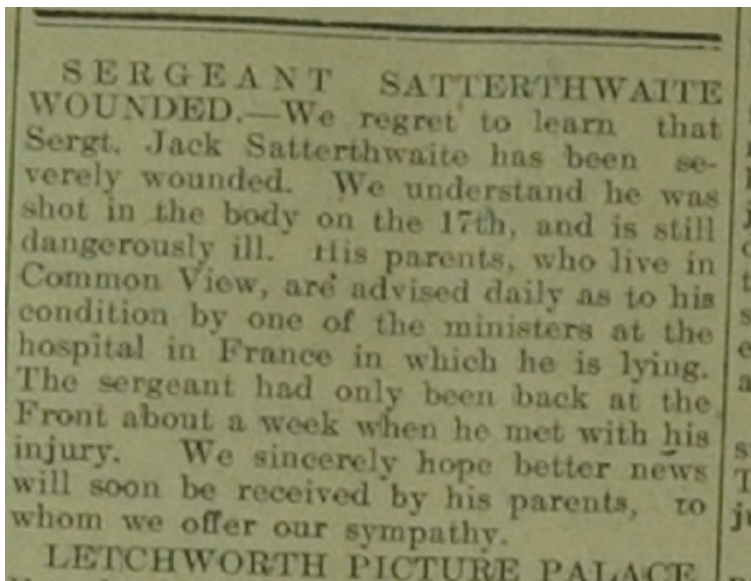
For Jack and his comrades the early months of the Great War saw the inexperienced part-time soldiers serving in the illustrious 'Guards Brigade' alongside the cream of the British Army; the Grenadier, Coldstream and Irish Guards. The Herts soon earned themselves a solid reputation and earned the affectionate nickname 'Hertfordshire Guards'. This image, dated late 1914 shows Jack's Platoon, he can be seen 2nd row, 4th from left.



For Jack, the newly promoted Company Quartermaster Sergeant of No. 4 Company, his duties aside from his day-to-day military tasks included writing home to thank local residents for their generosity in sending comforts from home. It also fell to him to write home to the family of his men informing them of the loss of their loved ones. Often these articles were published in newspapers.

The two Satterthwaite brothers were to meet again in November of 1915 when Walter joined his comrades of the Hertfordshire Regiment on the Western Front. Under the command and protection of his older brother Walter saw his first action in trenches on the 'Somme' sector of the Western Front.

Tragically, within a few months the brothers would be parted once more. On the 17th April 1916 the Hertfordshire Regiment were in trenches at Festubert. The following article appeared in the North Herts Mail that week.



The news that Jack was severely wounded came as a shock to the residents of Letchworth as he had been the main point of contact for news from the Front and was well respected within the town. For his brother, who would have been close by at the time it must have been a terrible ordeal.

Jack had only returned to the front a week or so before his wound, and had given an interview to the local paper at the time. He had spoken fondly of the local Skittles Inn, Letchworth's only 'pub', although as a 'Temperate' town

at the time, alcohol was not on sale. The recently discovered collection relating to Jack and Walter contains a photo of the two brothers playing Billiards at the 'skittles inn' of which he spoke so fondly.



The following week's North Herts Express contains the following article relating news of Sergeant Jack Satterthwaite:

...place.
SERGEANT JACK SATTERTHWAITE DIES OF WOUNDS.—It is with regret that we have to announce the death of Sergeant Jack Satterthwaite, Herts. Regiment, on the 22nd ult. The sergeant was undoubtedly one of the best known of our Letchworth Territorials, having been in the Territorial Force for a long time before the war broke out, and having been at the front since the autumn of 1914. He had been home on leave three times since the war began, the first time after a short period in the trenches. Some months ago he was home on leave for a period of service in the Territorials which the country demands in war time. In a spirit of patriotism and from a sense of loyalty to his Letchworth comrades in the trenches, Sergt. Satterthwaite signed on again for foreign service. In recognition of this the authorities granted him a month's furlough, which he spent at Letchworth. Only three weeks before he was again home on seven days' leave from the trenches. He was in good health and full of his jovial spirits. He had only returned to the firing line a week when he received the injuries which resulted in his death. The sergeant underwent an operation, and on Tuesday his father, Mr. and Mrs. James Satterthwaite, who live at No. 6, North Avenue, received a letter from the minister of the War Office in France saying that he had been killed in the body on the 17th inst. and was dangerously ill. His condition became worse, and he gradually sank, and on Tuesday morning his parents received a letter from the kindly minister to say that their gallant son had passed away. Sergt. Satterthwaite was one of the brightest fellows in Letchworth. He possessed a fine physique, and was of a sunny, genial and amiable nature, and was widely known and well liked by all. He was previously employed at Messrs. W. H. Smith and Sons' bookbinding works, afterwards at the Letchworth Model Dairy in Station-road, and later at the Garden City Press. He was very well-known at the Skittles Inn, and was frequently used to go for a game of billiards. We are quite sure that the members of Letchworth will join us in offering our deepest sympathy to his bereaved parents and their family in their terrible loss. Mr. and Mrs. Satterthwaite's only surviving son is also in the Army. Reg. Gray, who, as we previously mentioned, was expected to arrive in England from France, where he had the misfortune to lose his leg, is now in a hospital at Wetherhead. We trust he will soon be able to return home.

Undoubtedly the Satterthwaite family would have been devastated by the loss of their eldest brother and son. For Jack's parents, whose only other son Walter was now alone on the Western Front, the daily fear and uncertainty for his safety must have been a sobering and terrifying ordeal.

Jack was buried in St Venant Military Cemetery with full military honours.



As was the custom at the time, Jack's parents were asked if they would like to add an inscription to the base of his headstone, they chose: "Though far away we mourn him still. Peace perfect peace"



For the remaining son of the Satterthwaite family the war was far from over. Despite the untimely demise of his 25 year-old brother, Corporal Walter Satterthwaite fought on.

Following the devastating losses on the Somme of many Regiments, Walter was transferred to fill the ranks of the 6th Battalion Berkshire Regiment. With the Berkshire's Walter fought bravely in some of the fiercest battles of the Great War including the infamous 3rd Ypres, today known as Passchendaele. As a mark of his ability as a soldier he too was promoted to Sergeant and earned the coveted Military Medal for "bravery in the field".

Like his brother, Walter's luck was not to last. He was severely wounded in the knee in the latter stages of the war and spent many months in hospital recovering from his wound. After recuperation in the United Kingdom, Walter was honourably discharged in 1919 as a result of the wounds he sustained which left his right leg immobile for life.

Despite his debilitating injuries Walter adapted back in to civilian life well. He worked full time for over thirty years, rarely missing a day's work. To aid his mobility Walter was given a specially adapted motorised bicycle that allowed him to travel freely and also made him a well-known figure in the local area. In an interesting twist, Walter's wife Alice was of German descent and the Satterthwaite brother had cousins serving in the German Army during the Great War, a fact that makes their dedication and devotion to duty all the more commendable.

Like so many old soldiers, Walter did not speak about his wartime experiences, and when asked by his grandson before his death what had happened to his leg, would reply "don't you worry about that, I earned it".

Tragically, even over forty years later, the impact of the Great War would not still affect the lives of the Satterthwaites. With increasing pain from his wartime wound, Walter attended hospital for an operation to amputate the limb and sadly died the following day as a result. One of the last casualties of a war that was fought from 1914-1918 but took its toll for many years more.

The story of the Satterthwaite brothers and their wartime experiences came to light in June 2014 when Walter's grandson donated a collection of medals, photographs and wartime documents belonging to the soldiers to Letchworth's First Garden City Collection, a major partner of the Herts at War Project.

Brian Satterthwaite, 77, speaking to Dan Hill of the Herts at War Project said of his family "*my grandfather never spoke about the war and although we knew that Jack had died in the Great War, we have never known any detail about what he did. I wanted the collection to go to somewhere where it could do some good and help others learn about the Great War*". In commenting on the collection, Dan Hill of Herts at War said "*this collection and the family story are incredibly poignant. The ordeal that the Satterthwaites endured at the time and the impact of the Great War so many years after the event serve to highlight the legacy of the conflict and the people who served in it. With the centenary over the Great War fast approaching we are proud to be able to share this story with the people of Hertfordshire and feel that every previously unknown story that is told is a success for those who believe in the importance of remembrance and the preservation of our wartime history*".



Collection contents:

A selection of wartime postcards including images of Jack & Walter Satterthwaite together (above left), men of the Hertfordshire Regiment, Photograph of the grave of Jack Satterthwaite, civilian pre-war images and Satterthwaite family photographs. Medals to Jack Satterthwaite (1914 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal) and to Walter Satterthwaite (Military Medal, British War Medal, Victory Medal). Silver War Badge awarded to Walter Satterthwaite. Royal Berkshire Regiment Cap Badge. Bronze 'Death Penny' and George V memorial scroll give to the parents of Jack Satterthwaite.