

Cheltenham & Gloucester Branch
of
The Western Front Association

Remembering one of Gloucestershire's Fallen



Lance Corporal Sidney Sysum (2715)
D Company, 5th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Sidney Sysum was born in Gloucester on 9 June 1895, one of twelve children, to Charles and Mary Sysum. After leaving school in 1909 he worked first as a marble polisher before joining the Gloucester Railway Carriage and Wagon Company Limited. Sidney was a keen rugby footballer and played for Gordon League before joining the Gloucester Rugby Football Club at the start of the 1913-14 season. After a hesitant few games he gradually became a regular member of the First Fifteen and played, primarily at Centre in twenty-six of the thirty-seven games, scoring seven tries. William Bailey, the rugby correspondent of the *Citizen* and the Gloucester club itself were full of expectation for their new found rising star but

were equally concerned that he would become the target of Northern Union scouts who would lure him away with their '*money bags*' to become a professional rugby player. However, the declaration of war banished any concerns and in August 1914 Sidney along with the majority of the Gloucester rugby squad joined the 5th (later the 1/5th) Territorial Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment.

It was not surprising based on the Gloucester talent within its ranks that the 5/Gloucesters Rugby Fifteen went through the war undefeated by any of the other service sides despite being subjected to several strong challenges.

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Throughout his training Sidney was a member of G Company but with the company re-organisation, he landed in France on 29 March 1915 as a member of D Company.

Initially the 5/Gloucesters were stationed south of the Ypres Salient but moved further south in the autumn and remained in the region to support the Somme Offensive in July 1916. On 19 July the battalion took over captured German trenches north-east of Ovillers-La-Boiselle and were ordered to attack the German trenches defending the fortified village of Pozières. Between 19 and 22 July the Battalion launched several unsuccessful attacks but on 23 July, as part of 145 Brigade of the 48th (South Midland) Division, it launched its final assault as part of a concerted attack with the 1st Australian Division. After the initial attack by A and C Companies had failed, a second bombardment was ordered followed by a fresh attack by the B and D Companies. However having to attack uphill at the

top end of the remnants of Mash Valley against German trenches that followed the high level contours and against unmolested machine gun emplacements and in the face of a strong German bombardment the attack failed disastrously. The following day the trenches were captured with very little opposition as the Germans had fallen back to Pozières.

Five Gloucester rugby players died in the attack and several more were wounded. Only four of the 5/Gloucesters soldiers actually managed to enter the German trenches and they were killed, while Sidney's body was found on the parapet of the German's foremost trench.

Despite initial recovery and burial, his body, along with those of his comrades, was subsequently lost following the 1918 battles. Today he is commemorated as one of the missing on the Thiepval Memorial, Pier and Face 5A and 5B; he was single and twenty-one years old.



Thiepval Memorial