

## STORY BEHIND THE NUMBER – JIMMY SANDERS



HERITAGE GROUP

Within two weeks of the declaration of the outbreak of the First World War, both of the Leeds Rifles Battalions, the 7th and 8th of the West Yorkshire Regiment, as well as the Leeds Engineers - who were part of the Northern Signal Corps - were full and turning recruits away.

At the beginning of September 1914, men from local communities were encouraged to enlist together and 'Pals' regiments were formed in the cities, Leeds being among the first and becoming the 15th battalion of the WYR.

Several Leeds rugby players joined as a group, among them Jimmy Sanders (heritage number 231).

Born in Newport on 29th December 1889, he was a sporting all-rounder, representing Wales in the schoolboys football international against England in 1902 when just a teenager.

Two years later, he was in the Pill Harriers Extras rugby side, their second team and, at 16, was a member of their senior side.

He was recommended to Leeds and at 18-years-old made his debut at scrum half on the opening day of the 1909-10 season, an 11-8 win over Halifax at Headingley.

The following week, at Hull, a ground he enjoyed playing at, he lodged his first try in a 10-8 triumph, one of five he scored in his inaugural season.

It ended in spectacular fashion, Leeds reaching the Northern Union Cup Final for the first time but it was bittersweet for Sanders.

The match, against Hull, played at Fartown, ended in a 7-all draw, the first Challenge Cup decider to go to a replay but Sanders only lasted 15 minutes before succumbing to a severe shoulder injury which required him to go straight to hospital.

The Athletic News report of the game stated, 'Sanders was smart during the brief period he was on the field' but Leeds's 12-men heroically hung on and two days later, also at Fartown, claimed the trophy by a record score, 26-12.

Sanders returned to become a mainstay of the side, three times scoring two tries in a game, in a 22-15 win over Huddersfield in March 1912, the feat repeated against Keighley, also at home, and Bramley away at the start of the following season.

He kicked a goal in the club record 102-0 rout at home to Coventry at the end of the 192-13 season, his last game before joining the army being once more against Hull on October 16th 1915, an 8-3 win.

In a total of 183 games, he scored 23 tries and three goals.

Following Lord Kitchener's 'Calls to Arms' he registered as a private in the Leeds Pals and travelled to Breary Banks in Colsterdale near Ripon for 'rigorous' training.

The land was owned by the waterworks department and was being used for the building of a new Leighton reservoir but the huts were signed over to the Pals.

He was among a number of other sportsmen to join the Battalion including Evelyn Lintott (later to be commissioned) a Leeds City and international half back and fellow footballer Morris Fleming, Yorkshire cricketers Major Booth, Arthur Dolphin and Roy Kilner and athletes such as Albert Gutteridge and George Colcroft.

Initially, the Pals enlisted some 1,275 men after rejecting many on medical grounds, the final number eventually rising to just over 2,000.

According to expert historian on them, Stephen Wood, "To be accepted to these elite units the recruits were to pass certain requirements. Education and intelligence were considered paramount to being accepted in the majority of cases.

"It would appear that each man chosen to be a pal had something to offer be it previous military experience, leadership qualities, or physical prowess. A certain high standard had been set and each individual reached this although the average age was 20-21 years old."

In January 1916, the Pals were shipped out to defend the Suez Canal for their first deployment instead of going to France, as expected.

From there, on 2nd March, they left Port Said in Egypt for Marseille and the Somme. It was on that battleground, on 13th October 1916, that Jimmy Sanders lost his life, killed in action.

The tragic news filtered back to the club where tribute was paid by secretary James Goldthorpe. "He was a clever half-back and most popular with his colleagues and his death will be regretted," he said.

Writing, later on, in the official programme as friendly fixtures continued, Goldthorpe called him, "Sanders the humourist," adding, "He could always see the funny side of things."

He also included a letter Jimmy had sent him from the front.

"I have been in it thick and thin just lately and I have been over the top twice and back a winner