

HAROLD SMITH



22nd November 1917

1889-1917 Age 28

Acting Captain, 2/6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment.

Harold Smith was born in Liverpool on 12th April 1889. His father Samuel William Smith had married Bessie Milner in the Liverpool suburb of West Derby in 1886. Their fathers were both grocers. Harold was the second of their three children and their only son. In the early 1890s the family moved to Baildon. Samuel was a manager for the wool broker's company Messrs. Thomas & Cook of London in which he became a partner. The family home was Sefton Lodge on Station Road, Baildon. Harold entered the Bradford Grammar School junior department in 1895 when he was six. He missed his second year and then left at the age of ten in July 1899. His final year was not a success, and he completed his schooling at home with his sisters under the charge of a governess. He went to work as a clerk for his father where he was well known on the floor of the Bradford Wool Exchange.

Harold Smith was twenty-five when war broke out. He was not among the first wave of young Bradford professional men who formed the initial officer corps of the newly-raised reserve 6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment in September-October 1914. He volunteered shortly after and was commissioned in March 1915. Three months later at Baildon Parish Church he married Ellen Robinson. She was the daughter of a cloth manufacturer and was almost literally the 'girl next door'. If Harold was expecting an early posting abroad he was frustrated as on at least five occasions 62nd Division's orders to go overseas were cancelled. However, this had the advantage that Harold was able to take home leave and his wife gave birth to two children, the second after Harold's death.

The 62nd Division finally went to France on 6th January 1917. Harold Smith was a platoon commander in 'B' Company, however for the 3rd May attack on Bullecourt he seems to have been in the reserve echelon or at head quarters. There is no doubting that he was an extremely brave officer. On 13th September when 'B' Company was holding an exposed position, the Germans raided in force at 5 a.m. in revenge for a British raid two days before. When his Company commander was killed by a shell Smith took command and continued to move from post to post with complete disregard for his own safety. For this brave behaviour he



was awarded the Military Cross. He was also made Acting Captain and took command of 'B' Company. On 20th November, the opening day of the attack at Cambrai, Smith was liaison officer with the next battalion. He had rejoined the 2/6th West Yorkshire Battalion north-west of Graincourt when the Germans launched a strong counter-attack on the morning of 22nd November. The 2/6th held an exposed trench resembling a reversed letter 'L'. They had to man the north-south trench on both sides as the Germans worked round their flanks. At the end of the confused fighting Smith was found to be missing. Soon afterwards a fellow officer wrote in a letter, 'Harold Smith, no trace, last seen manning a Lewis gun.' His Commanding Officer wrote 'Smith is missing—I have no doubt he is killed.' His former Commanding Officer wrote to Harold's family, 'Captain Harold Smith when last seen was leading his company with absolute coolness and disregard for danger ... knowing him as I do, I have no doubt that he was killed at the head of his men.'

A fortnight before his death Smith had come home on leave. It was only in July 1918 that the War Office confirmed there was no possibility that he was a prisoner and that for 'official purposes' he was dead. In August 1918 a concert for wounded soldiers was held in his memory at Baildon Golf Club. His wife remarried in 1921.





Acknowledgements:

Smith's photo is from the School memorial book courtesy of the O.B.A. and B.G.S. The family was researched using Ancestry.com. His years at B.G.S. are recorded in the Annual Reports for 1896-1899. In the 1901 Census, Sefton Lodge and Ingfield where the Robinson's later lived were neighbouring entries, although in the 1911 Census there were intervening properties. In 1901 Ellen lived on nearby Kirklands Avenue. For Harold and Ellen's children, Barbara and Peter, I follow <<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/family-tree/person/tree/54756041/person/27113298146/facts>> accessed 20-11-2017. Their wedding was reported in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* 15th June 1915.

Smith's Officer Personal Record, T.N.A. WO374-63427, is a slim file containing the correspondence relating to confirming his death for probate purposes. The detailed accounts of the German raid of 13th September, E.C. Gregory, *History of the 6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment. Vol. II. The 2/6th Battalion*, (Percy Lund, Humphries, Bradford, 1923), 118-121, where Smith is not named; *Shipley Times and Express* 19th October 1917 records the citation for the M.C. Gregory, 124-34, repeats the operation orders for 20th November, with map, and notes Smith's function as liaison officer, 133. For the fighting of 22nd November, Gregory 143-4, 145-6, and *Shipley Times and Express* 12th July 1918. Much sense is made of the confused fighting by E. Wyrall, *The West Yorkshire Regiment in the War 1914-1918. Vol. II* (John Lane Bodley Head, London, n.d.), 163-65; F. Skirrow, *Massacre on the Marne. The Life and Death of the 2/5th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment in the Great War* (Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2007), 156-61. Excerpts from Private Billy Kirby's graphic account of the fighting are in Bryn Hammond, *Cambrai 1917. The Myth of the First Great Tank Battle* (Phoenix, London, paperback edn. 2009), 241-4.

For the concert, *Shipley Times and Express* 9th August 1918.

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