

HAROLD WILLIAM FIELD



27th May 1918

1897-1918 Aged 23

Second Lieutenant, 9th Battalion Army Cyclist Corps (IX Corps Troops).

Had Harold Field survived the War he would have been the third generation of the family to run the firm of Field Son & Co. Ltd. Lithographic Printers. He was born on 29th July 1894 when the family lived at 45 Athol Road, Heaton, the only child of Hannah Denby and William Taylor Field, Master Printer. In the early 1900s the family moved to the healthier atmosphere of Baildon and lived at a house named 'Rockmount', 28 Bank Crescent, Baildon. Harold entered Bradford Grammar junior school in 1903 when he was nine. and left in 1908. In each of his five years at BGS he came first or second in Art, winning the subject prize for 2nd Modern Upper in July 1908. The following September he went to St. George's School at Harpenden (Hertfordshire), which was one of the first co-educational boarding schools in Britain. When he left school he joined the family company, and he stated later that his only qualification was in Art. To judge by the clubs he belonged to, Harold was an enthusiastic sportsman: he was one of the original promoters and a playing member of Baildon Rugby Football club, and also a member of Baildon Golf Club. In the light of his later Army career it is likely he also cycled.

Harold was one of the first Baildon men to join the forces after Britain declared war, enlisting on 5th August, the day after war broke out. He wrote later to the local newspaper to state that 'I consider all able-bodied men of suitable age and condition, especially sportsmen, should at this time do their utmost to help their country.' Although he had left Bradford Grammar School in 1908, Harold played rugby and golf with former school-fellows which made it natural he should join the Old Boys' company ('H', later 'C') of the Bradford Territorials, 1/6th West Yorkshire Regiment. His service number was 1804. There is some confusion in the records about his service in France. It is certain that he crossed with the battalion in April 1915. He wrote to the Golf Club Secretary, 'As you know I am with several other Baildon boys and we sometimes forget the war for a short period and think of the glorious times spent on the links, often replaying a game hole by hole and finding keen enjoyment in doing so... I shall be glad when I can once more feel a golf bag



on my back instead of my rifle and a few good balls in place of ammunition. I am writing this by candle light in a diminutive dug-out ..." For some unrecorded reason he returned from France and then served with 2/6th Battalion, crossing the Channel with it in January 1917 (service number 240309). He was made unpaid Lance Corporal on 29th April to test his leadership skills prior to being sent home a month later for officer training. He was commissioned into his chosen unit, the Cyclist Corps, on 3rd November and posted to 9th Battalion. The cyclists' primary roles were reconnaissance and message taking, but they were also used for trench holding and could provide mobile firepower if required. Field's unit was part of IX Corps which, after suffering heavy casualties in March and again in April 1918, was sent to serve under French command on the River Aisne to recover and refit. Field lost his life when the Corps was overwhelmed by the surprise German attack, called Operation Blucher-Yorck, at 3 a.m. on the morning of the 27th May. It is thought that Harold was buried in the churchyard at Crugny, but his remains were removed to Montcornet and their location is now lost. The Chairman of the Baildon Military Tribunal (of which William Field was Clerk) expressed sympathy with Harold's parents thus: 'I am sure we all understand how intensely sad parents must feel at the loss of their only one. I have always felt that there was not a more manly or cleaner living boy that I knew than Harold Field.' Although he had served overseas in 1915 Harold was not awarded the 1914-15 Star to which he was entitled.



Acknowledgements:

The photo is from the School memorial book courtesy of the O.B.A. and B.G.S. The family was researched using Ancestry.com. Field's years at B.G.S. are recorded in the Annual Reports 1904-08. His military service record is in his Officer Personal Record ,TNA WO339-106874, although the entry in one record that he did not serve overseas until 1917 is contradicted by several other sources. There is an incomplete biography of Field at <http://www.shipleyyw1.org.uk/People%20Field,%20Harold%20Wm.html> (accessed 19-5-2018), from which I acknowledge the quotations in the text, taken from the *ShIPLEY Times and Express* for 25-6-1915. The obituary in *idem*. 26-6-1918 is the source for Harold's part in Baildon RUFC's formation. For the Army Cyclist Corps, I used <http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/army-cyclist-corps/> (accessed 19-5-2018).

There is confusion in the records relating to Field's military service. The Military History Sheet in his Officer Record (page 14) only records his service in France from 1917, and Medal Index Card gives his date of entry into an overseas theatre of war as 6-1-1917, and the Medal Award Roll only records his service with 2/6th West Yorks. However he was not included in the lists in E. C. Gregory, History of the 6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment Vol. II 2/6th Battalion, (Percy, Lund, Humphries & Co, Bradford, 1923). Against this, on the same sheet in the Officer Record he is recorded to have entered France 16-4-1915 and he is included in the list of men who crossed on the night of 15/16-4-1915 in E.V. Tempest, History of the 6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment Vol. I 1/6th Battalion, (Percy, Lund, Humphries & Co, Bradford, 1921), 293. There is also the evidence of the letter he wrote from the Front in June 1915. Therefore it seems indisputable that he should have been awarded the 1914-15 Star.

Field appears in a photo of 'Horton and Baildon R.U.F.C.' taken at Strensall Camp in September 1914 which is in an anonymous album of snapshots taken by a member of 1/6th West Yorks.—for further details, see the biography of A.K. Bloomer, O.B. Field was also commemorated in the *Yorkshire Rugby Football Union Year-book and Roll of Honour, 1919*. Both items contain several more Old Bradfordians.

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper in May 2018. For further information, contact Nhooper1956@googlegmail.com, or see <http://www.bradfordgrammar.com/former-pupils/bradford-grammar-school-in-ww1/>.