

HARRY GORDON WOOD



9th June 1917

1895-1917 Aged 22

Lieutenant 11th (Service) Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment.

Gordon Wood was the second son of Harry Wood and Mary Ellen (nee Smith), born in Clayton in 1895. Harry was from Halifax and ran the family company of William Wood and Son, Wool Merchants, of Halifax and Bradford, founded by his grandfather. In 1890 he married Mary Ellen Smith, the daughter of a railway worker, from Bradford. They had three children, a daughter and two sons. The brothers Leslie and Gordon both started at the Bradford Grammar School in 1905. Leslie was the academically more successful of the two, coming first in his form in two of his three years at the School. He left in 1908. Gordon stayed on until July 1910. In his final year, in 4th Modern upper, he finished around the middle of the form order in most subjects, apart from Geography in which he came second. The brothers both went to work in their mid teens as assistant wool merchants for their father, although they were not formally bound as apprentices. In its obituary the *Shipley Express* noted that Gordon was a 'young man of genial gentlemanly disposition and was looked upon as having a promising career before him.' He was also an 'enthusiastic member' of the Clayton Musical and Dramatic Society.

When war broke out both brothers volunteered for the Bradford Pals battalion and appeared in the list of the 'First Thousand' published by the *Bradford Daily Telegraph* at the start of November 1914. Gordon had enlisted on 19th October, at the age of nineteen years 289 days. He was allotted the service number 1075. After two months' experience as a private soldier, in early January Gordon submitted an application for an officer's commission, which was granted on 25th February. A day later his elder brother was commissioned into the 18th Battalion, 2nd Bradford Pals. Gordon was appointed to the 3rd Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, and then served in Britain with the Training Reserve. His medical record shows that he was 5' 8" tall and weighed 125 lbs. His physical development was good, his hair was black and his eyes brown. In December 1916 he was promoted to Lieutenant, then in January 1917 he was transferred to the Base at Etaples in France. He was subsequently attached to the 11th



Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment and joined them near Ypres at the start of May.

At 3.10 am on 7th June 1917 the Battle of Messines opened with the detonation of 600 tons of explosives divided between nineteen mines which had been tunnelled under the German front line. The explosion was heard as far away as Dublin. The 11/West Yorkshire attack at Hill 60 'proceeded entirely according to plan', in the words of the Battalion War Diary. By 4.30 am the first objective had been taken, and by 5 am the battalion was consolidating the second objective. Despite the surprise that had been achieved, officer casualties were described as 'very heavy'; over three days in the line the battalion lost six officers killed, nine wounded, and one was 'wounded and missing believed killed.' This latter was Gordon Wood. He was initially reported dead, and 7th June is the date on his gravestone and in the records of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. However, Wood had actually been taken to the 69th Brigade's Field Ambulance and it was there that he died of his wounds on 9th June. His parents received a telegram bearing this news on 11th June, the day they were to have accompanied their elder son Leslie to London where he was to be invested with the Military Cross for conspicuous bravery. Gordon was buried in Railway Dugouts Burial Ground (Transport Farm). He is also on the War Memorial of St. John's Parish Church, Clayton. Leslie survived the war.



Acknowledgements:

This photo of Wood is from Dan Eaton, *The men from Clayton who died in the two World Wars* (Roundtuit Publishing, Durham, 2007), 72. I have attempted to contact Mr. Eaton for permission, without success so far. There is very little information about Harry Gordon and his family in the biography (<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=e5y-OxKqpDgC&pg=PA72&lpg=PA72&dq=Lieutenant+Harry+Gordon+Wood&source=bl&ots=_X1-ISEgUb&sig=NF8-o0MEfBQorni-yKnVv3Zne19M&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj8sLLdmr3RAhWFNIAKHWaJD1cQ6AEIGjAA#v=onepage&q=Lieutenant%20Harry%20Gordon%20Wood&f=false>).

I used Ancestry.com to research the family and military records. Gordon's and Leslie's school careers are from the B.G.S. Annual Reports for 1905-1910. Gordon's Officer Personal Record is in The National Archives, WO 339-35204. It does not contain a record of his service, being concerned mainly with correspondence between Gordon's father and the War Office about the correct pay he was owed. Several documents in the file explain the circumstances of Wood's death and correct the date. Soldiers Who Died in the Great War, and the Probate Register, give the correct date. The account of his service given here is gleaned from references in these documents. His obituary in the *ShIPLEY EXPRESS & TIMES* 15-6-1917 (<http://search.findmypast.co.uk/bna/viewarticle?id=bl%2f0001711%2f19170615%2f077>) was very helpful. His death was also reported in the *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser* 26-6-1917. His grandfather John Henry Wood had business connections there 'doing a big business with Border farmers and wool buyers'; however, the census does not seem to support the statement that John Wood was a 'native of Berwick.' The War Diary of the 11th/West Yorkshire is available on Ancestry.com. For Messines, see Ian Passingham, *Pillars of Fire. The Battle of Messines Ridge June 1917* (new paperback ed. 2004, Stroud).

I am grateful to Stuart Downey of Clayton Historical Society for his help with the photo.

For J. Leslie Wood, see David Raw, *Bradford Pals* (Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2005), 68, photo at 105, 106.

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper (Nhooper1956@googlemail.com) in May-June 2017.