

FRANK CLOUGH MITCHELL



15th March 1917

1874-1917 Age 42

**Private 9561 2nd Battalion Honourable
Artillery Company (Territorial Force).**

Frank Mitchell was one of eight children born to William Mitchell and his second wife Eliza Walker. William was an accountant who became wealthy and prominent in connection with the Third Bradford Equitable Building Society. The family lived for over two decades at 3 Fairfield Road, Manningham. Frank was William's fourth son, born on 24th July 1874. He went to Bradford Grammar School when he was nine and left in 1890 when he reached 16. Later in life he was a well-known tennis player, and his interest may have started at school. Frank began work as a clerk in a wool manufacturer's office. By 1901 he was in partnership as a woollen merchant, and he subsequently set up his own business, Frank C. Mitchell & Co. of Bolton Road, specializing in linings. In 1904 he married Laura Garnett, the second daughter of Joshua Garnett, a cloth merchant who lived in Greengates. They lived in Nab Wood, Saltaire and were active members of the Congregational Church. They had no children and Laura may have had poor health for during the war years she lived at Cairn Hydro Hotel, Harrogate, which had its own baths and spring waters.

When war began Frank was 40 and above the age for military service at that time. It is therefore hardly surprising that he did not volunteer. However, in December 1915 he attested under the 'Derby Scheme', stating his willingness to serve when required. He gave his age as 40, in reality he was a year older. He was called up a year later on 1st December 1916. Frank was posted to the Honourable Artillery Company, a London Territorial Regiment which raised two infantry battalions. This was a socially exclusive regiment and serving in it was seen as prestigious. Many public school and university men together with City workers enlisted, and admission to its ranks was vetted. How Frank came to join is not known—he possibly had contacts in London and made this choice to avoid serving with an 'ordinary' regiment. He was posted to the 1st Reserve Battalion for basic training, and after only two months he embarked for France on 11th February 1917. On 20th February he joined the 2nd Battalion as part of a draft of 25 recruits. This battalion was comprised mainly of rather young and



rather elderly men like Frank, and it had only been in France since October. He joined them in the midst of the worst winter of the war, and trench service was a shock for men of his age. The O.C. described how younger men had the resilience to recover after three or four days rest; for the older recruits, however, repeated exposure to mental and physical fatigue induced complete breakdown.

In early March 1917 the Germans began to conduct a phased withdrawal to a new line of defences. The 2/ HAC were at Bucquoy, north of the Somme. On 15th March the battalion was ordered to ascertain whether the Germans had pulled back from the village, having repulsed an attack the previous night and caused heavy casualties. The O.C. sent two platoons to bluff the Germans into showing their strength. Shortly afterwards he wrote: 'It was no good, the two platoons went straight on up to the German wire without faltering until they were practically all hit ... It seemed almost murder.' Out of 70 men involved, 18 were killed including Frank Mitchell, and more than 40 were wounded. The Divisional Commander came round personally to congratulate the battalion for its 'magnificent bravery' and for obtaining much useful information. The O.C. added that 'I am very sad about it.' Frank Mitchell's military career had been brief and his death futile. His body was later reburied in Gommecourt British Cemetery no. 2, and he is commemorated on two memorials in Saltaire. His official age at death was 40—in reality he was 42.



Acknowledgements:

Frank Mitchell's photo is courtesy of his great nephew Gordon Green, with thanks. There is another image on Ancestry.com. The family details were researched using Ancestry.com. No school records for the 1880s are available at present. For Frank's business, <<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/27477/page/6169/data.pdf>> (1902) and <<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/31047/page/14372/data.pdf>> (1918) (accessed 15-2-2017), and Kelly's Directory of Bradford and Suburbs 1912. For the Cairn Hydro Hotel, <<http://www.strathmorehotels.com/Cairn/history>> (accessed 15-2-2017).

For the Derby Act and Conscription I used <<http://www.1914-1918.net/recruitment.htm>> (accessed 15-2-2017). Mitchell's Service Record is available through Ancestry.com. Records relating to his enlistment with the HAC are on findmypast.co.uk. My knowledge of this regiment benefitted immensely from a talk given by Michael Orr, "Bunny and his artillery company" - problems of command in the 2nd Battalion HAC, 1914-1919", delivered to the York Branch, Western Front Association, 17th January 2015. He kindly sent me several documents from the HAC archives relating to Mitchell's posting, and Lieut. Col. A. Lambert Ward's report on the action of 15th March, dated 18th March, which I quote from. The Bradford Daily Telegraph reported the death on 6th April 1917. It wrongly named his father as John. The photo of Frank's grave reproduced below was supplied by Gordon Green.

This biography was researched and compiled by Nick Hooper, February 2017

