

NORMAN HERBERT SMITH



20th November 1917

1897-1917 Age 20

Second Lieutenant 2/5th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment.

Norman Smith was born on 7th January 1897 in Little Horton. He was the only son of Walter Smith and Eva Robinson who married in 1896. Walter, whose father John was a school board super-intendant, spent his working life as a commercial traveller for a tea merchant, perhaps Abraham Altham whose premises on Manchester Road were convenient for the houses the family occupied. Eva's father Amos was a worsted manufacturer and before she married she was a school-teacher. Norman was a pupil at Bradford Grammar School for eight years, starting in Form Second Classical Upper in September 1908. In the Sixth Form he continued to study Classics, and had the war not intervened it is likely he would have gone to Oxford. He was a member of the Debating Society, he had special responsibility for gymnastics for Sixth Classical, and was one of the house rugby officers. Norman joined the School O.T.C. when it was formed at the end of 1914, and was appointed Lance Corporal shortly before he enlisted. In addition, he was an 'enthusiastic worker in the primary department of Ryan Street Congregational Church', where his father was the church choir-master.

In December 1915, a few weeks short of his nineteenth birthday, Norman attested to fight. He was called up in February 1916 and was posted to the 3/6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment at Clipstone Camp in Nottinghamshire. He was soon made up to Lance Corporal (unpaid), and was then transferred to the 2/5th Battalion. In November his Colonel recommended him for a commission and so he was ordered to report to the officer training school at Newmarket on 3rd January 1917. Days later the 2/5th Battalion finally left for the front as part of 62nd West Riding Division. Norman passed his course in late April and unusually he was posted to the same battalion in which he had served in the ranks. He arrived at the front in early June to re-join a unit which had been severely mauled at the Battle of Bullecourt a month earlier.

The 2/5th Battalion remained near Bullecourt until early October. In mid-August Second Lieutenant Smith led a patrol of twenty men into no man's land, a mass of shell holes, but no



enemy were encountered. Over the following month the 2/5th's fighting patrols established supremacy over no man's land. Then after rest and re-equipping, in early November the 62nd Division trained in co-ordination with tanks and aircraft for the attack planned at Cambrai. On the night of 19th November the 2/5th moved into the front line to attack at dawn. 'A' Company was detailed to support the 2/6th West Yorkshires attack on Havrincourt while the other three companies were in the second wave. 'A' Company had a tough task fighting its way into Havrincourt Park where the Germans had felled the trees which impeded the tanks spear-heading the attack. Considerable casualties were inflicted by German machine guns in outposts. Norman was the 2/5th's only officer to be killed on the first day of the battle and it may be there that he fell.

In his final letter to his parents Smith expressed confidence that 'we are fighting for ideals, which will improve the world, and the lives of generations to come ... with high religious motives ... fighting for our country ... is among ... the noblest work one can perform... in this struggle, I am your representative. You have given to me all that I could have wished for ... among many things a sound education ... I cannot hope to repay you sufficiently, but in some measure I am trying to do so by representing you here. Finally, it is assured that all who lay down their lives shall reap a rich reward.'





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. were recorded in the *Annual Reports* for 1909-1916, and in *The Bradfordian* October 1915 and March 1916. His military career is detailed in his Officer Personal Record, T.N.A. WO374-63664.

For his service with 2/5th West Yorkshire and Cambrai, see Fraser Skirrow, *Massacre on the Marne. The Life & Death of the 2/5th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment in the Great War* (Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2007), 126, 130-31, 150-55. For Smith's obituary and letter to his parents, see *Yorkshire Observer* 5th December 1917 (the letter is reprinted in Rose Rouse, *Last Letters to Loved Ones* (John Blake Publishing, London, 2008) (https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=rB0lhKeOjfQC&pg=PT43&lpg=PT43&dq=Second+Lieutenant+Norman+Herbert+Smith&source=bl&ots=3pqEVB8k7t&sig=u5Di9GHnC-PM2ZSPydxwj8yyyp4&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi-obvZpO_SAhVHicAKHbICB0QQ6AEIHzAB#v=onepage&q=Second%20Lieutenant%20Norman%20Herbert%20Smith&f=false), a reference I owe to Fraser Skirrow. The register of Bradford war memorials by P.D. Lodge records the Ryan Street Congregational Church memorial tablet, whereabouts now unknown, and Walter Smith's connection.

Norman was originally buried in Havrincourt Communal Cemetery, and was re-buried in Flesquieres Hill British Cemetery in 1925 (see records on [cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)).

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