



## John William HAYGARTH

Lance Corporal, 2876, 1/7th (City of London) Battalion

John William Haygarth's war service takes us back to a major offensive of the First World War; The Battle of Loos. Additionally, in the incorporation of poison gas during this offensive, we learn about a further dynamic being developed during the war.

By September of 1915 the war had been running for over a year and it was decided by the French that a huge offensive was needed to break through the German defences. The French attack would be in the Artois area, and the British would support by attacking near Loos. Moreover, as adequate artillery was lacking, the British pinned their hopes on the incorporation of poisoned gas. The Historian of the 47<sup>th</sup> Division, which incorporated Haygarth's Battalion, commented that the gas-cylinders containing this new weapon were treaded "with a certain holy dread." In the opening days of September, Haygarth would have been involved in meticulous training behind the lines. Mock-up trenches were set out and the movements of each unit in the forthcoming attack were rehearsed. During this time Haygarth wrote home to tell his family that he was going into the trenches, and that they must not be alarmed if his letters were irregular. On the morning of 25<sup>th</sup> September at 'Zero-Hour' (5:50 a.m.) the Battle of Loos began with the release of the gas. The event was described as follows

"The cloud rolled slowly forward, and its effect was apparent from the lessening force of the enemy rifle fire."

Forty minutes later, at 6:30 a.m. the infantry advanced. Haygarth, with the 7<sup>th</sup> (City of London) Battalion, advanced on the Double-Crassier, which was a twin set of mining slag heaps. The first objective was a front line trench near the Double-Crassier, which was reached with few casualties. However the Germans soon re-mustered after the confusion that the gas had caused, and put up a massive resistance. Additionally, due to the lack of artillery fire the wire remained intact, resulting in many casualties. Despite this, all the objects were achieved, and the 7<sup>th</sup> held off a sustained German counter-attack. Total casualties of the 47 Division, were described as light, standing at 1,500. Haygarth was one of these casualties, most probably being killed during the initial assault on the Double-Crassier. He was the first lad who went directly from Dent to fall in the war, and he was just 21 years old.

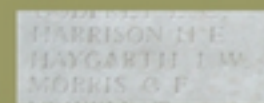
The death of John William Haygarth was even more tragic due to the promise that the young man had shown in life. He was born on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1894, and educated at Dent Church School until he was 12. His academic ability, however, won him a scholarship at Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, where he went for 5 years. At the school he was held in high esteem for his scholarly ability, his sporting prowess, especially at cricket and football, and his charismatic personality. Mr J.L. Johnson, who became Headmaster of the school in 1911, described how Haygarth had greeted him when he had first arrived:

"[John William Haygarth] was somewhat shorter and rotund with a round face and a merry twinkle in the eye, which plainly told the observer that the possessor of the said eye could laugh if an occasion arose."

This cheerful and unassuming disposition was later said to have won him great respect wherever he went, and would certainly have been an asset during his war service. Upon leaving school he gained an appointment as a bank clerk at the banking house of Glyn, Mills, Currie and Co. of London, which he took up in 1911. When war broke out in August 1914, Haygarth was still working at the bank, but quickly responded to the call of his country, and by September he was training with the 7<sup>th</sup> City of London Regiment. The regiment spent some time training in England and did not go to France until March 1915. Haygarth, however, didn't reach theatre until the 18<sup>th</sup> August 1915, perhaps reinforcing the Battalion ready for the upcoming attack at Loos. During his first year in service Haygarth's abilities had set him apart, and he joined the regiment in August with a promotion to Lance Corporal. Unfortunately before Haygarth's ability, apparent from his early school days onwards, could develop further he was killed in the shadow of the Double-Crassier at Loos. His body was never recovered, and he is remembered on the Loos Memorial alongside 20,000 other men. His friends from QES also remembered him, and a former 'old boy', Captain W. Haythornthwait, wrote to the headmaster thanking the school for their remembrance, and specifically drawing attention to the honourable sacrifice of John Haygarth.

John's story, however, reveals yet further tragedy. His brother Benjamin Haygarth joined up shortly after his younger sibling had been killed. He was transferred to the Royal Field Artillery and sent to serve in India. However, on the 5<sup>th</sup> October 1918 Benjamin was struck down by pneumonia and died. A father, Mr. R Haygarth, had now lost two sons. Benjamin also left a widow, Mrs Margaret Haygarth (nee Morphet), who had also lost her brother in the war. Through John William Haygarth's story a picture of the enormous rippling impact of the First World War is glimpsed. Just one family had to bear the loss of three men in the prime of life, and unfortunately the Haygarth's story was not unique, and was instead replicated countless times between 1914 and 1918.

Click on the images below to enlarge and for more information



### Links

John William Haygarth's entry on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Website, [http://www.cwgc.org/search/casualty\\_details.aspx?casualty=731525](http://www.cwgc.org/search/casualty_details.aspx?casualty=731525)

John William Haygarth is also included in Cravens Part in the First World War, <http://www.cpqw.org.uk/viewDetail.cfm?sID=106-02&view=main>

Benjamin Haygarth is also included in Cravens Part in the First World War, <http://www.cpqw.org.uk/viewDetail.cfm?sID=107-05&view=main>

For more details on the Battle of Loos please see, <http://www.firstworldwar.com/battles/loos.htm>

For more details about the use of poison gas please see, <http://www.firstworldwar.com/weaponry/gas.htm>