



CHARLES GAWAIN RALEIGH HUNTER

Lieutenant, A Coy, 2nd Battalion, Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry

Died on Saturday, 24th April 1915, nr. Zonnebeke, Flanders, age 21

"At midday, the 13th Brigade was called upon to assist the 10th Canadian Brigade in retaking the lost line north-east of Wieltje. The Canadian line was at the time being subjected to a heavy bombardment and the trenches preparatory to an advance were crowded with Canadian Highlanders. So the newcomers had to lie out in the open under the shell-fire, where they suffered. Lt. C.G.R. Hunter was killed..."

Thus reads the Battalion history about this minor action north of Ypres, without more comment, though much could have been added about the folly of these orders, resulting in the waste of many lives. The diary goes on to record that, as a result, for the advance next morning the 2nd KOYLI could only muster 250 bayonets.

A world away from these shell-cratered and blood-soaked Flanders fields was the peace of a small Warwickshire village, Hunningham, near Leamington Spa, where Charles was raised. It must have been a boisterous childhood, being the third youngest of no less than ten children of William George and Isabella Kathleen Fayer Hunter and born in 1893.

Charles' father, William George Hunter, 11th Laird of Burnside, Forfarshire (*photo next page*), born in 1847, followed a family military tradition by becoming a Captain in the 69th Regiment and West Yorkshire Militia before retiring in 1879 and marrying Isabella Hickey, 13 years his junior, the daughter of a former Indian Army officer. Although born in Kashmir, she had returned to England with her family in the mid '60s, when Robert, her father, became a prison Governor, firstly at Portland, then Dartmoor. After this bleak childhood, maybe she



was reluctant to spend her life in the wilds of the north-east of Scotland, but, in any event, William George sold his Scottish estate and bought The Elms, a large Victorian house in rural Warwickshire, settling down to the life of a Landed Proprietor, Justice of the Peace and father of an increasingly large brood. In the 1881 census there was one child and six servants, including a page. Ten years later there were still six servants; no page, but with the addition of two nurses to cope with the seven youngsters.

The full complement of ten children was at home in

1901, with a governess for the young Charles and his siblings. Educated at Welsh boarding schools and keen on sport, by 1911, as a 17 year old, he had returned home and was recorded as a clerk to the manager of the Triumph Motor Cycle Works. Interestingly, there was another family living at the house: Frank Hulbert, his wife and two children. He was the manager of the Triumph factory at nearby Coventry.



The Elms, Hunningham



Although Triumph had made pedal cycles since 1889, it was only from 1902 that they started to manufacture motor cycles. In the first Isle of Man TT, run in May 1907 over 158 miles, the 38-year-old Frank Hulbert had come third on his Triumph, at an average speed of just over 35 m.p.h. Maybe Charles persuaded his father to buy him one for the five mile ride to the Triumph Works at Priory Road in the centre of Coventry. The contemporary photo (not Frank) shows the unprotected belt drive, everlastingly prone to slipping and the auxiliary pedals, just visible in front of the engine, essential for climbing hills.

This would have been only temporary, as five months later he became one of the next generation of military Hunters by being gazetted a 2nd Lieutenant in the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion of the KOYLI, (known irreverently in WW1 as Keen On Young Ladies Eyes), where he trained in 1912 and 1913. Transferred to the 2nd Battalion, he served in Ireland for a time before being promoted to Lieutenant in September 1914. In trenches at Wulverghem, between Ypres and Armentieres, he joined the battalion with a draft of 60 soldiers on December 6th. In common with all Regular Regiments, who had been fighting almost continuously since the outbreak of war, the Kings Own were desperately short of men. The Regimental History records a total of 650 officers and men being sent to the 2nd Battalion between November 20th and the end of December, almost two-thirds of their strength.

It was no picnic for the new arrivals. The battalion occupied trenches half-filled with water and thick, cloying mud after heavy rain. With the enemy only fifty yards away, on one occasion it took some hours to drag four men out by ropes, and 80 men were evacuated with trench foot before the battalion retired to billets at the end of 1914. From increasing German activity, it was obvious that trouble was brewing around Ypres. To forestall at least some of this, a British attack was planned to capture Hill 60, to the south-west. No natural hill was this, just a 45ft high, 250yd long spoil heap from digging a railway cutting, but bristling with



Above: from Hill 60, 1930s. Ypres on the centre skyline (Photo A.J. Insall "Twenty Years After")

Right: Hill 60 after the battle (IWM)



machine guns, snipers and artillery observers, who could call down fire on anything and anybody that moved on the flat plain below.

On April 17th, six mines were exploded and the hill captured, but, in a counter-attack, recaptured by the Germans. The next afternoon the 2nd KOYLI, with the Duke of Wellington's Regiment, were ordered to retake and hold it "at any cost", which they did, in spite of being pounded by forty four artillery batteries, hammered by numerous counter-attacks and even having to use German rifles and bullets when their guns became red-hot and ammunition ran out. Hill 60, though bloody, was only a prelude to the battle that became known as 2nd Ypres, which started on April 22nd with the first full-scale gas attack of the war on mainly French Algerian, but also Canadian troops to a lesser degree. It was to the latter's assistance that the 2nd KOYLI were sent, to be decimated on open ground as described in the opening paragraph.

A 0 1074		POST OFFICE General Order		7.16 WAR OFFICE 27 11	
O.H.M.S.		WAR OFFICE		WAR OFFICE	
TO: Mr. C. G. B. Hunter, KOYLI, 27th 11		Mr. C. G. B. Hunter, KOYLI, 27th 11		Mr. C. G. B. Hunter, KOYLI, 27th 11	
FROM: War Office		War Office		War Office	

The only three records we have to connect Charles Hunter with Pirbright are, firstly, the telegram (left) advising Isabella of her son's death. Secondly, the probate of his Will, granted in September 1915, which gives the address at the time of his death as Sunfield, Pirbright (off Dawneys Hill). The only other mention is in a letter to her from the War

Office in 1919, addressed to Sunfield, but forwarded to the West London address she and her husband occupied for some years after the war. By 1914, all but the two youngest children would probably have left home, so The Elms would clearly have been far too large. Father William George's WWI Medal Index Card shows that he served as a Captain, firstly in the 2nd Battalion Welsh Regiment, who went to France in August 1914 and stayed for the duration and later the 3rd (Training) Battalion KOYLI, which was stationed at Pontefract, so the reason for the move to Pirbright remains a mystery.

Charles Gawain Raleigh Hunter's remains were never found, as his name is recorded, with 54,895 others, on the memorial at the Menin Gate at Ypres, where the Last Post has been sounded daily for the past 99 years.



'And the spirit shall return to God who made it'

so long the dream of youth spun from the blood-red love of the heart for the heart, and the flesh for the flesh, whispers to the coming night elegies of a summer's day. beautiful boy, charles gawain raleigh hunter, fresh from the shires, oak of oaks, flower of flowers, commissioned on your seventeenth birthday; for king and country, regiment, and the burden of entitlement,	you threw yourself away so bravely, so gladly, so defiantly on that hell-mired field of speechless slaughter that april morn after the inundations of flame and thunder, and the beautiful, deathly grass-green mists that rolled in on the mourning breeze.	how selflessly you fell, defying them all the invisible foe, the hateful hun, and never let the men see that you too were terrified in your proud young heart, and that with your passing, god, king, country, and captain w hunter should never smile again.
---	---	---

Written by Mark Bullock on visiting Hunningham Church: moved to write by the tablet there in remembrance of Charles Hunter