

The Man behind the Medal

Captain R.J. Walker – Gordon Highlanders

Group of 3 – WW1 Trio – 1914-15 Star, War Medal, Victory Medal



Being a Gordon, and with my Dad's family originating from Huntly, where I am told, the Gordon Highlander Regiment was raised by George Gordon, 5th Duke of Gordon, as the 100th (Gordon Highlander) Regiment of Foot on 10 February 1794, any Gordon Highlander medal or Group is of interest to me. Apparently, initial recruiting for the Regiment, was slow until the Duke's wife, Duchess Jean, rode around the north and north-east of Scotland offering recruits a kiss and the first day's pay of a shilling.

On a trip to the U.K. in August 2000 I attended a medal fair and was attracted to this WW1 Trio by the substantial research that accompanied the Group. Although quite expensive, I couldn't leave until I had made the purchase, and on getting back to South Africa, was pleasantly surprised with the story that I was able to put together relating to 'the man behind the medal'.

Robert Jardine Walker was born on 16 February 1891, and after completing his schooling in Glasgow at the Allan Glen's Technical School, graduated from the Glasgow University as a Mechanical Engineer. He applied for an appointment on the Supplementary List of the Gordon Highlanders directly from the University in November 1913, was appointed on probation on 17 December 1913 and commenced his probationary training with the 1st Battalion of his Regiment on 4 July 1914, continuing with the 3rd Battalion from 4 August 1914.

On 2 October 1914 he was indifferently reported upon and was put under the personal observation of the Officer Commanding the 3rd Battalion for a further period of probation. On 23 December 1914, it was reported that 2nd Lieutenant Walker did not learn his work, seemed to take little interest, that his manner



was very bad both with officers and men, and on 6 January 1915 it was recommended that he should be called upon to resign his commission. This recommendation received the approval of council and on 17 January a letter was sent to the Commanding Officer stating that Walker should resign his commission.

However, in the meantime, early in January, the Commanding Officer of the 3rd Battalion had placed Walker on a list of 2nd Lieutenants 'ready and fit' to be sent overseas and had in mid-January proceeded with a draft for Walker to join the 1st Battalion. A 'communiqué', dated 20 January 1915, from the Garrison Commander, 3rd Gordon Highlanders, in Aberdeen, to the Officer Commanding No.1 District in Perth records – *"In reply to your confidential C445, 2nd Lieutenant R.J. Walker was ordered by War Office to proceed to 1st Batt. Gordon Highlanders with the last draft and left on 17 January. He was senior on the list some time ago, and I had no order to keep his name back when sending in the list of Officers available. 2nd Lieutenant Walker's name was kept back for some time, and when the C in C visited Aberdeen on 12 December 1914, this Officer personally asked the C in C if he might be sent out to the front. It is possible that this Officer may do better on service and I would suggest that the O. C. 1st Battalion be asked to report on him before any further steps are taken"*.

On 5 March 1915, a Confidential W.O. 339 was received, which recorded – *"2nd Lieutenant R.J. Walker, Special Reserve Gordon Highlanders (on probation) attached to 1st Seaforth Highlanders, appears of average ability, he has not had much experience, but he has shown true ability in the trenches and his Company Commander reports that he is very willing and eager to do anything that he has been required to do. I am of the opinion that with a little more experience he should prove quite a useful Officer. I do not know in what respect his former Commanding Officer reported unfavourably"*. It was signed by R.B. Ritchie of 1st Seaforth Highlanders.



Picture: British Solders on the Western Front in France fixing scaling ladders in the trenches prior to a raid



On 12 March 1915 Walker was hospitalised with a gunshot wound to the head. On recovering, he re-joined his unit and was in the trenches at Hooze for the second battle of Bellewaarde. Bellewaarde Ridge was about 2.5 miles (4 km) east of Ypres in Flanders in Belgium, and was one of the easternmost sectors of the Ypres Salient where much fighting between German and Allied force took place. He was killed in action on 25 September 1915.

Lieutenant W. Morrison, Adjutant of the 1st Battalion Gordon Highlanders, wrote the following to Walker's father – *"It is with regret that I have to report that your son, Captain R.J. Walker was killed by a shell on the morning of 25.9.1915. This gallant Officer was supervising the distribution of grenades to the bombers that had reached the German trenches, when he was killed. At night his body was brought back to the reserve line and buried in the Soldier's Cemetery at the edge of Sanctuary Wood, along with four of his brother Officers who had also been killed during the day. I am personally attending to the erection of a small cross to mark the place. The Commanding Officer and myself tender our most heartfelt sympathy to the mother and relations of Captain Walker. His loss is keenly felt by the Regiment, but we know he fell doing his duty as a soldier and British Officer."*

Captain Robert Jardine Walker is remembered on the Menin Gate Memorial in Ypres, on Panel 38.



Picture: The Menin Gate, Ypres, Belgium

REMEMBER to keep an eye on our website (www.battletoursza.com) - our blog has regular posts on Anniversaries / Battles / Activities / Births & Deaths / etc.

Allan Gordon