

DULCE ET DECORUM EST...

Generally I believe that 'hero' stories are of interest only to the collector who owns the relevant medals, but in the following case I believe that there is enough of the unusual to ask other researchers whether they have come across anything similar, and if so, is there an explanation, because I frankly do not understand it.

Some time ago I bought a single 1914-15 Star named to CAPT.H.CHAPMAN. YORK.R. I did the basic research (Army List, London Gazette, regimental history) and found an interesting but not particularly remarkable story. Harold Chapman had been gazetted Captain in the 6th Bn Yorkshire Regt on 16 January 1915. He went with the Bn to Gallipoli, was wounded there, found himself in command of the unit for some time (during which he was gazetted acting Major), went into hospital in January 1916, and was finally invalided home, relinquishing his commission on 11 April 1916. This was enough for me at the time, and I filed Mr Chapman away for possible further research at a later date, regretting at the same time that I did not have his complete trio.

More recently, however, I was researching in the Green Howards Gazettes for the First World War period, and in the issue for September 1917 I came across the following obituary notice: 'PRIVATE HAROLD CHAPMAN, Canadian Infantry - better known to Green Howards as a Major in one of our Service Battalions - was killed in Action on <sup>15th</sup> August 1917. Born in 1877, he was the third son of the late Mr JJ Chapman of Whitby and brother of Captain Wilfred Chapman who was killed at the Suvla Bay landing. After leaving Eton, where he was Captain of Mr Somerville's house, he took up Colonial life and joined the British South Africa Police in Southern Rhodesia in 1897, serving in the Matabele and Mashonaland rebellions (Rhodesia Medal and Clasp). In the South African War he was with General Plumer's column, and was at the Relief of Mafeking (South African Medal with 3 clasps and King's Medal with 2 Clasps). He resigned his commission in 1910 and settled in Vancouver'.

The obituary went on to describe his First World War service, and recorded that he had returned to his family in Vancouver. It then continued: 'As soon as his health was restored, Harold Chapman enlisted in a Canadian Regiment, came to England, November 1916, and went to the Front in May last. He had been recommended

for the Military Medal for great courage and ability displayed during an attack'.

Two questions immediately came to mind after reading this story: why did he do it, and did many others do the same?

Answers to the first question can range from the simplistic to the most profound. Perhaps he was suffering from a kind of neurasthenia. Perhaps he had a straightforward lust for action (his previous record in South Africa might support this view). He could have been simply doing his duty as he saw it. Or he could have been suffering from an overwhelming sense of guilt which he felt compelled to expunge. Not only had his brother been killed at Suvla Bay, but also the battalion commander, his cousin Edward Chapman. Harold Chapman had not been killed on that day because he had been left behind at Imbros with reinforcements, and perhaps he felt that he should have died with his relatives. Without wishing to become hopelessly entangled in Freudian psychological analysis, I can think of no other motivation strong enough that would take a man from a wife and two sons, for a second time, into the carnage of that dreadful war.

Whatever his motive for going, there is yet another question: why did he go as a private soldier? He had had several years of combat experience as an officer, both in South Africa and Gallipoli, experience which he must have realised would have been invaluable at the time he re-enlisted. He obviously did this under his own name, because the CWGC records list him as such with no indication of an alias (he is commemorated on the Vimy memorial); did anyone try to stop him enlisting, or encourage him to go for a commission? Was he debarred from taking a commission for some reason? Whatever the cause, he served and died as a private, one of hundreds of thousands of others, when he could have made a much greater contribution as an officer, probably with a battalion of his own by August 1917.

Do other collectors have similar stories? Can anyone suggest a reasonable, knowledgeable explanation for behaviour that I find almost incredible. Only one other similar instance occurred to me, and although it is fictional it must have been based to some extent on fact. The late novelist John Masters, who served in the 4th Gurkha Rifles (1934-1948), retiring as Lieutenant-



Colonel, DSO OBE, wrote a novel called Far, Far The Mountain Peak (1957). His hero, Peter Savage, is a natural leader, a man of ruthless will and ambition who must be best at whatever he does, particularly mountaineering in India where he is a civil servant. On the outbreak of war in 1914 he volunteers. He wins the DSO in the Middle East, and a bar to it on an in-depth secret reconnaissance in the Italian mountains in 1915, being promoted Lt.-Col. However, on the second occasion his best friend is killed, and this alienates Savage's wife so much that she leaves him, unable to tolerate any longer his remorseless desire to win which has such tragic results. 'He knew what he was going to do. He was going to join the New Armies as a private soldier of infantry. It was as deep, as anonymous a place as he could think of, and no one would think to look for him there. There, in the universal slime of the trenches, he would be made to feel kinship and renounce leadership. There he would be helpless in the power of others, as so many had been helpless in his...Above all, he would never influence a soul again, for good or evil'.

Whether this has any relevance at all to Harold Chapman, I don't know (the fictional Peter Savage at least enlisted under the assumed name of William Smith) but perhaps it indicates that this sort of phenomenon - natural officers enlisting as rankers - was (is?) not all that unusual. It still baffles me.

JOHN SLY

1 August 1984

## DULCE ET DECORUM: A SECOND LOOK

In the Winter 1984 edition of the Journal I wrote on the subject of the one-time Captain Harold Chapman, who, after resigning his commission in the Yorkshire Regiment in 1916 owing to ill-health, re-enlisted as a private soldier in the Canadian Army and was killed in August 1917. I wanted to know whether any other collectors/researchers had come across similar stories, and, if so, could anyone explain this apparently eccentric behaviour?

I have had five specific replies, two relating to Chapman himself and his medals, two relating to similar circumstances, and one general comment on motivation. First I'll deal with the two examples of men whose careers seem to parallel that of Chapman.

Major B.R.Brown wrote to me from Ontario, Canada, with the story of his grandfather. Apparently this officer had served in the British Army in the First World War and into the 1930s, eventually reaching field rank; he then resigned his commission, emigrated to Canada, and re-enlisted as a private soldier in the Canadian Army at the outbreak of the Second World War. As I<sup>am</sup> still waiting for a follow-up letter from Major Brown I can't go into any more details at present, but even from this outline the similarities with Chapman are striking.

The second story is perhaps even more remarkable, and came from Ben Strickland in the UK. By one of those co-incidences that only happen in real life, the Miscellany of Honours volume that was issued with the Journal in which my original article appeared included a feature on DCM and MM awards to the Royal Tank Regiment. Among the MMs was one to 7886113 Sergeant Eugene Vincent Strickland, who won his medal 'for coolness and resource in fighting his tank on 28th May 1940, in the vicinity of LA BASSEE...' Ben pointed out that this was his father, who had originally been commissioned into the Indian Army from Sandhurst in 1934, and had resigned that commission a year later for personal reasons. He enlisted as a ranker into the RTR just before the outbreak of the war, and gained promotion eventually to Major-General. His career was recorded in obituary notices in the Times and the Daily Telegraph, but a summary here will give some idea of his achievement, as General Strickland's 'second' army career was astonishing. By the time he died on 19 December 1982 he had either won or been awarded: CMG, DSO, Commander of St. John, OBE, MM and Grand Cross Star of Jordan. In the Second World War he had served in North Africa, Italy and Greece, and he won his DSO as a



Lieutenant-Colonel commanding the North Irish Horse in the breaching of the Adolf Hitler line in March 1944. The long citation included the fact that he 'was almost continuously in the forward area, organising and inspiring the repeated tank attacks in support of the infantry...In re-organising the armour, Col.Strickland on several occasions found it necessary to dismount from his tank...His personal example of coolness, determination and indifference to heavy enemy fire was an inspiration...' After the war he served as Senior British Officer, Jordan 1956-7, and was Director of Plans, War Office, 1960-3.

Ben admits that the family doesn't really know the reason for his father's re-enlistment as a ranker. He could only suggest that any commission Eugene Strickland might have been given in the late 1930s would have depended on his returning to the Indian Army, something which he had no desire to do. Whatever the reason, he lived long enough to gain a second commission and to serve his country well for many years in positions for which his talents qualified him.

On this intriguing subject of motivation, my third correspondent was Brian Lane, who referred me to the memoirs of Alexander of Tunis, Carton de Wiart and Capt.A.O.Pollard, all three highly decorated men. Brian was certain that, like this trio, Harold Chapman was a 'veritable salamander, a fire-eater who thrived on action'. I am fairly sure that this has more than an element of truth in it, but it still doesn't answer the question why Chapman should have re-enlisted as a ranker. Since I wrote the original article I have received, from the Public Archives, Canada, a copy of his Attestation Paper. Chapman quite clearly lied at first about his previous military experience, because his answer to Question 10 (Have you ever served in any Military Force?) was: NO. This has been crossed out (when?) and: Yes, inserted with the addendum: '1 yr York Regt BEF. 15 yrs B.Sct. Police.S.Africa'. The difference between: No, and 16 years military service experience is rather large, and surely one which should have led the Canadian authorities to offer Chapman a commission more or less immediately. Unless the record was amended after his death, and the Canadian Army was therefore ignorant of his previous career, Chapman's continuation in the ranks must have been simply because he wanted it that way.

And if this is true, I still can't understand his reasons. The three names Brian Lane mentioned were all officers, and presumably they illustrated the officer mentality and outlook of those times. This

would surely imply that a man should do his best for his country notwithstanding any private feelings he might have; in this case Harold Chapman, an obvious officer, was certainly not doing his best by serving in the ranks of the Canadian infantry. I would be fascinated to know the answer, but I suspect that this died with the man himself.

Now to my two other correspondents, and to information about Chapman and his medals. Brian Taylor wrote to me from Chinoyi, Zimbabwe, referring me to the book Rhodesia Served the Queen by Col.A.S.Hickman. In this work about the British South Africa Police the author refers to Chapman having been a Sergeant at one time, and also records that he had been taken prisoner by the Boers in the area of Pitsani-Potlugo on 14 March 1900, and later released.

Then I had a letter from Tony Upfill-Brown in Harare, and this just about capped everything as far as I was concerned. Tony wrote: 'I had this group in a glass case consisting of Death Plaque, QSA 3 clasps Rhodesia, Relief of Mafeking, Transvaal to Lieutenant BSAP. KSA two clasps BSAP. 1914-15 Star CAPTAIN Yorkshire Regiment (the medal you now have) 1918 War Medal 1918 Victory Medal to SERGEANT 7 CANADIAN INFANTRY'. This was, for me, absolutely wonderful news, confirming as it did all the research about Chapman that I had done (except for one thing). It was qualified only by the sad realisation that this 'group' no longer existed. Tony had sold it on, and a later purchaser had, for whatever reason, split the group. It has been suggested to me that anyone buying the medals without the glass case could quite reasonably have suspected that they did not belong together as a group: to go from Lieutenant, BSAP to Captain, Yorkshire Regiment would be conceivable if not highly unlikely, but to go from that to Sergeant, Canadian Infantry is virtually incredible, and H.Chapman is not a particularly uncommon name. Tony went on to say that he had bought back the QSA/KSA pair from a British dealer, and he agreed to sell them to me. So I now have 60% of the group that Tony had in the early 1970s - does anyone have the BWM/Victory and Plaque, by any chance?

The one thing that didn't tie up was the medal referred to in the obituary notice in the Green Howards Gazette: the 'Rhodesian Medal and Clasp'. Tony and Brian discovered what I had already found: no H.Chapman exists on the roll for the BSAP for this medal,



and I was coming to the conclusion that this had been a mistake (particularly as Tony had sent me a photograph of Chapman in Yorkshire Regiment uniform wearing the QSA/KSA ribbons but not that of the BSA Co. medal) when Tony wrote to me again: on the 1896 roll for the medal he had found 3511 Pte.H.CHAPMAN 7th Hussars! If this is our man it would surely make his full group quite unbelievable (I have yet ~~to~~ carry out the necessary research), It would also be an indication that he was used to serving in the ranks, although what one is prepared to put up with in Rhodesia at age 19 might not be so appealing in Flanders at age 39. Considering Chapman's rather privileged background, this whole story is unlikely to say the least - as Tony Upfill-Brown wrote: 'Old Etonian as a Private!!!'

This piece of research has been an object lesson for me, and I hope that it has been instructive to others. In a way I hope that Chapman did not qualify for the BSA Co. medal, as it would mean I'd have another one to search for.

JOHN SLY

28 June 1985

## DULCE ET DECORUM - A POSTSCRIPT

I would like to add what I hope will be the final chapter in the story of Captain/Sergeant HAROLD CHAPMAN, Yorkshire Regt. and 7th Canadian Infantry, whom I wrote about in the Winter 1984 and Winter 1985 editions of the Journal. I believe I have found the reason why the man hid from the Canadian authorities his previous military service when he re-enlisted in 1916 as a ranker.

It was brought to my attention by Keith Northover, a friend and assiduous researcher into matters of this kind, that there was a kind of obituary for Harold Chapman and his brother Wilfrid in the Eton College Chronicle for 25 October 1917. I say a kind of obituary, because it was virtually a eulogy. It made much of the school career of the two brothers, but then concentrated on Harold, describing him as 'a born leader, and... invaluable to the House when he became captain, setting an example of truth, honour and uprightness, of modesty and unselfishness, of hard work and straight going. He was... always keen to be a soldier...'

It went on to give details of his military career, and I was particularly interested in the sentences relating to the events in and after Gallipoli, because Chapman was evidently more seriously wounded than I had appreciated. In fact, the obituary recorded that his wounds 'kept him in hospital at Imbros, and then he tried to do light duties in England but a medical board pronounced him unfit for further service...'

It seems to me that Chapman gave up his commission with extreme reluctance. Once back in Canada, and possibly re-invigorated by his healthy out-door farming environment, he might have felt fully fighting fit again. But he had a serious problem. There was no way that he could be re-commissioned into the British Army after the manner of his discharge, or, if he were to be successful, he would most likely have ended up behind a Whitehall desk. As a natural fighting man he would presumably have found this anathema. Once again, if he offered himself as an officer to the Canadian Army he would have to admit to his background, and



the result would have been the same. Enlisting as a ranker was almost the only way in which he could have achieved his goal of being part of a front-line force.

I'd like to add one final observation about his death. All I knew was that he had been killed in action on 15 August 1917; the Eton Chronicle filled in the details: 'At Lens, early in August, he was shot in the neck, and was killed instantly by a shell while being carried to the dressing-station'. How ironic and tragic some of those Western Front deaths could be.

Finally, I am still looking for the BWM, VM and Death Plaque that Tony Upfill-Brown once owned and which have gone missing since he sold the group. If anyone comes across a pair named to 646232 Sgt.H.CHAPMAN 7th Canadian Infantry, I'd be delighted to hear about it.

John Sly  
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