

Gunner William Henry James Wood
Regimental Number: 31301
151st Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery

born: 1892 - died: 20 May 1918

Gunner William Henry James Wood was born in the third quarter of 1892 in Plymstock, near Plymouth, Devon.¹ Nothing is known about his family. In 1911, he was already in the army² and was recorded in the census as being a Gunner in the No. 8 Company of the Royal Garrison Artillery and was serving in Gibraltar.³

In the Great War, William first served with the 35th Siege Battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery and then with the 151st Siege Battery. The Royal Garrison Artillery was one element of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, which "... developed from fortress-based artillery located on British coasts. From 1914 when the army possessed very little heavy artillery it grew into a very large component of the British forces. It was armed with heavy, large calibre guns and howitzers that were positioned some way behind the front line and had immense destructive power."⁴ "Siege Batteries RGA were equipped with heavy howitzers, sending large calibre high explosive shells in high trajectory, plunging fire. ... As British artillery tactics developed, the Siege Batteries were most often employed in destroying or neutralising the enemy artillery, as well as putting destructive fire down on strongpoints, dumps, store, roads and railways behind enemy lines."⁵

William was admitted to the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 19 May 1918 with gun shot wounds to his thighs, left leg, buttocks and abdomen.⁶ He died the following day and was buried the same day in the Pernes British Military Cemetery (Plot 1, Row F, Grave 7). William was a member of the Church of England and his burial was under the care of J. K. Tibbits, chaplain at the Clearing Station.

On 19 May, 40 soldiers were admitted to the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, bringing the total number of patients to 290.⁷ In the whole month of May, there were 115 deaths at this CCCS – more than in any of the other three and a half months that the 1st CCCS was in Pernes. The Pernes British Military Cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when the 1st and 4th Canadian Casualty Clearing Stations came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.⁸

William was married. His wife, Phyllis Irene Wood, was living at 145 Gates Avenue, Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A.⁹ However, as the chaplain was unaware of his next of kin, notification of his death was sent to his adjutant.¹⁰ However, the monies owing to him after his death were sent to his widow, Phyllis.¹¹ In 1920, his widow, Phyllis I. Wood (born about 1890), was a British-born nurse boarding with Elizabeth Hamilton, a superintendent at the hospital in Brooklyn, New York.¹²

William was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).¹³

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¹ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 1 December 2014), entry for William James H. Woods, County: Devon, Volume: 5b, Page: 248. Wood's name is presented in a number of different ways: William Henry James or William James Henry and either Wood or Woods. This has made it difficult to find any information on William in which one can have confidence.

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- ² "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 1 December 2014), entry for William Henry James Wood, County/Island: Military, Country: England, Military Unit: No 8 Co R G A , Registration district Number: 641, ED, institution, or vessel: Arabia, Cyprus, and Gibraltar, Piece: 34996
- ³ "The Companies of the Royal Garrison Artillery: The Long, Long Trail," <http://www.1914-1918.net/rga-companies-index.html>; accessed 1 December 2014.
- ⁴ "The Long, Long Trail: The British artillery of 1914-1918," <http://www.1914-1918.net/cra.htm>; accessed 2 December 2014
- ⁵ "The Long, Long Trail: The Siege Batteries of the Royal Garrison Artillery," <http://www.1914-1918.net/siege-battery-index.htm>; accessed 2 December 2014
- ⁶ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Library and Archives Canada, (records accessed 2013 & 2014), Record Group 9, series IIC10, volume 4556, Record number 503
- ⁷ "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* (http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINN&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G; accessed 15 December 2014)
- ⁸ "Pernes British Military Cemetery" *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/11600/PERNES%20BRITISH%20CEMETERY>; accessed 13 January 2015)
- ⁹ "Commonwealth War Graves Commission," (www.cwgc.org; accessed 2 December 2014), entry for Wood, William Henry James
- ¹⁰ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Record number 503
- ¹¹ "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 19 January 2015), entry for William Henry James Wood
- ¹² "1920 United States Federal Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 19 January 2015), entry for Phyllis I. Wood
- ¹³ "British Army WWI Service Medal and Award Rolls, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 25 November 2014), entry for William Henry James Wood