

Second Lieutenant Arthur Forbes Gordon[©] 1st Battalion, Cameron Highlanders

born: 1896 – died: 18 April 1918

Arthur Forbes Gordon was born in 1896 in Johannesburg, South Africa, to John Ernest and Agnes Gordon.¹ Regrettably, very little information was found about Arthur's years in South Africa or whether he had any siblings.

Arthur emigrated from South Africa to England, arriving aboard the *Saxon* on 27 November 1915. He had left from the port of Durban, and disembarked at Plymouth. At the time, Arthur was 20 years old and his occupation was identified as farmer. It was his intention to make England his future permanent residence.²

Little information was found about Arthur's military career, but from what is known, it appears that he may have very quickly joined in the war effort, first with the 28th London Regiment, and then with the Cameron Highlanders. He appears to have quickly advanced from private to second lieutenant within the Cameron Highlanders.³

The 28th Battalion, London Regiment (Artists Rifles) was an infantry regiment in the British Army, part of the Army Reserve. This was a popular unit for volunteers, particularly recruits from public schools and universities, with recruitment eventually restricted by recommendation from existing members of the battalion. More than two thirds of its members became officers,⁴ so it is likely that Arthur took officer training prior to being transferred to the Cameron Highlanders as a second lieutenant. The Cameron Highlanders was a line infantry regiment formed during the height of the French Revolutionary War in 1793.⁵

Arthur was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 18 April 1918 suffering from gunshot wounds to his right arm and right leg, which was also fractured. He died that same day and was buried at Pernes British Military Cemetery in Plot 1, Row C, Grave 29.⁶ He had sustained the wounds at "Windy Corner" near Givenchy during the Battle of the Lys.⁷

The origin of the name "Windy Corner" is not clear, but it was described as a "choke point" for transporting anything to or from the trenches in front of Givenchy. It was also the location of a battalion HQ.⁸

During early 1918, the area in northwestern France near the Belgian border was considered quiet, and it was used by the British High Command to train new divisions in the day-to-day activities of trench warfare.⁹ During April 1918 the Germans pushed their offensive in Flanders, with the objective of capturing Ypres, forcing the British forces back to the channel ports and out of the war. With the US entering the war, the Germans desired to defeat the Allies before the full might of the Americans reached the Front. This became known as the Battle of the Lys or, by the Germans, as Operation Georgette.

At the time, the British First Army was a relatively weak force, including several worn-out formations and two undermanned divisions of the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps that had been posted to the quiet sector. The battles raged during the month, but on 17–19 April during the first Battle of Kemmel the German Fourth Army attacked and was repulsed by the British. On 18 April the German Sixth Army attacked south from the breakthrough area toward Bethune but was also

repulsed. It was likely during one of these battles that Arthur was fatally wounded. As more French troops arrived in the latter part of April, and with the Germans having suffered many casualties, it became clear that Operation Georgette could not achieve its objective and on 29 April the German high command called off the offensive.¹⁰

Pernes British Cemetery was not opened until April 1918, when the 1st and 4th Canadian Casualty Clearing Stations pulled back to Pernes, driven back by the German advance in Flanders. There are 1,078 First World War burials in Pernes, including five from South Africa. Arthur's grave bears the additional quote:

LORD GOD OF HOSTS
BE WITH US YET
LEST WE FORGET
LEST WE FORGE¹¹

Arthur was posthumously awarded both the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).¹² It is possible that Arthur's father, John Ernest Gordon, died in 1946 in Transvaal Province, South Africa.¹³

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¹ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 9 August 2017), entry for Gordon, Arthur Forbes

² "UK, Incoming Passenger Lists, 1878–1960," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 9 August 2017), entry for Mr. Arthur Forbes Gordon

³ "Medal Index Cards Transcription," *Lives of the First World War* (www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org: accessed 10 August 2017) entry for Second Lieutenant Arthur Forbes Gordon

⁴ "Artists Rifles," *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artists_Rifles: accessed 10 August 2017)

⁵ "Unit History: Cameron Highlanders," *Forces War Records* (www.forces-war-records.co.uk: accessed 10 August 2017)

⁶ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 10 August 2017), entry for Gordon, F.

⁷ See Endnote 1

⁸ "The Famous Windy Corner at Givenchy," *Great War Forum* (<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/topic/198547-the-famous-windy-corner-at-givenchy/>: accessed 10 August 2017), entry by IRC Kevin posted 26 August 2013

⁹ *Battlefield Guide: Armentieres to Loos* (<http://battlefields1418.50megs.com/f2guide.htm>: accessed 10 August 2017), written by Paul Reed

¹⁰ "Battle of the Lys (1918)," *Wikipedia* (www.wikipedia.org: accessed 10 August 2017)

¹¹ See Endnote 1

¹² "UK, WWI Service Medal and Award Rolls, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 9 August 2017), entry for 2 Lieut. Gordon A. F.

¹³ "Transvaal Province, South Africa, Estates Death Notice Index, 1855–1976," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 9 August 2017), entry for John Ernest Gordon