

Three Orphir Seaforths



Charles Scott

When the Orphir Recruiting Committee sent to the Orkney Central Committee in December 1914 its Roll of Honour of men from the parish serving then in the British armed forces, it listed a total of 26 names. More than half: 11 Territorial gunners, 2 other Territorial soldiers, a doctor living in New Zealand and 4 Royal Naval Reserve sailors, had mobilized in August to join 2 Regular Army soldiers and one Royal Navy sailor already serving. The other five Orphir men had all responded to Lord Kitchener's appeal for volunteers: 4 had joined the Seaforth Highlanders.

Thomas Anderson was one of many militia soldiers of the Toronto 48th Highlanders who joined the volunteer overseas 1st Canadian Contingent. James Hay had enlisted into the Seaforths in early November, Charles Scott, George Robson and John Shearer did so together in mid-November.

Possibly James Hay also, definitely Charles Scott, George Robson and John Shearer, had been "gently encouraged" to join the Seaforth Highlanders by a recruiting party of the regiment led by Sergeant James Smith, which spent November 1914 touring Orkney to sign up volunteers. When Charles, George and John reached the Seaforth Highlanders Depot at Fort George to formally enlist, they were allocated the consecutive service numbers S/6261 to S/6263.

Perhaps because John Shearer was a little older when he enlisted, aged 21 – then considered the age of maturity, he was posted to France in May 1915 to join the Regular battalion 2nd Seaforths in 4th Division there. Charles Scott was aged 20 when he enlisted, but George Robson was only aged 17 and must have "lied about his age", because only soldiers aged 19 or over could then be sent on overseas service. Charles and George crossed together to land in France on 10th May 1915 in 7th Seaforths, the first (K1) battalion that the regiment formed of New Army volunteers and part of British 9th (Scottish) Division.



George Robson

9th Division spent several months alternating between spells in relatively quiet front line sectors and time spent resting and training. However, when the Battle of Loos was launched on 25th September, 9th Division was used as an assault division on probably the most strongly defended 1,500 yard sector of the German line there. 9th Division carried out its attack with determination, but lost over 6,000 casualties in three days of desperate fighting. 7th Seaforths lost nearly half its strength and Charles Scott, aged 20, was among the more than 100 killed 7th Seaforths lost at Loos.

George Robson survived the Battle of Loos, after which 9th Division moved north to spend its most difficult winter of the war in the detested Ypres Salient. While there George Robson contracted diphtheria and was evacuated to hospital in the south of England. George died in East Sussex Hospital on 2nd January 1916, aged 18, and is buried in Hastings Cemetery.



John Shearer

John Shearer was seriously wounded serving with 2nd Seaforths in the Battle of Arras in April 1917. He did recover enough to return to the Western Front, where served during late 1918 in 8th Seaforths. John emigrated after the war to New Zealand. John's family report that he never fully recovered from the effects of his war service and he died in New Zealand in 1930, aged just 37.

Scotland lost about one in seven of the soldiers who served in four fine divisions (two Territorial and two New Army) during the four long years of the Great War. Those who joined up during the early months of the war suffered even higher proportional losses. Thomas Anderson, Charles Scott and George Robson all died during their war service, while John Shearer's life was cut short by his ordeal.