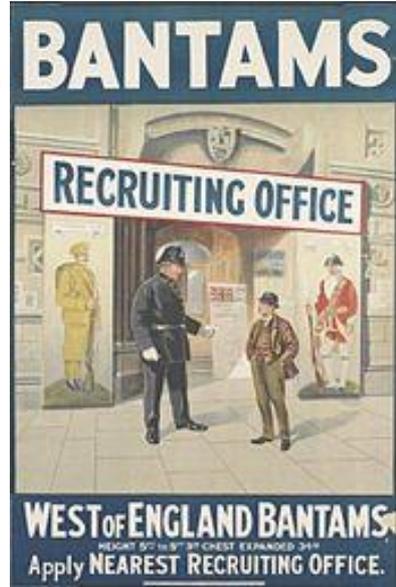


Hardy Parsons, Victoria Cross 1897 - 1917



Methodist minister's son

Educated at Kingswood School, Bath, and Bristol University

Died near Epehy, aged 20, on 21 August 1917

Family and Education

Hardy Falconer Parsons was born on 13 June 1897 at Rishton, Hyndburn Borough, Lancashire. He was the son of the Rev J Ash Parsons, a Wesleyan Methodist minister, and his wife Henrietta. He had a brother and a sister. At the 1901 census he was living with his family in Islington, London while his father was at Wesley's Chapel in City Road. In 1909 the family moved back to Lancashire, to live at St Annes on Sea, Lytham St Annes, and Hardy attended King Edward VII School. His headmaster commented that he had never met a boy of his age with 'so remarkable a personal influence for purity and goodness'.

Another move in 1912 took the family to Arneside, Westmoreland, and Hardy became a boarder at Kingswood School in Bath, a Methodist foundation. War broke out just before he returned there for his final year. He played in the school's first rugby team but contracted pneumonia, and as a result he missed the final term.

In 1915 Hardy's family moved to Bristol where his father served at the Old King Street Wesleyan Chapel. Hardy started at Bristol University, taking a medical course with a view to becoming a medical missionary. He joined the university's Officers' Training Corps, but he was an unlikely soldier, a man in relatively poor health, who was described by his friends as 'a refined, gentle spirit' to whom 'the idea of war was utterly repellent'. Nevertheless, when in the autumn of 1915 the Derby Scheme sought additional recruits for the war, he volunteered, and was transferred to Army Reserve B. He turned down a safe post in a

government laboratory and in May 1916 he applied for a commission. His own doctor considered him unfit for service, but he was accepted and was delighted. He had been training as a Methodist local preacher, and had just preached a sermon on the theme of 'The Second Mile'.

War Service: 14th (Service) Battalion (West of England), Gloucestershire Regiment

Hardy did his officer training in Oxford, from 5 October 1916, in 6th Officer Cadet Battalion. This was one of two Oxford officer cadet battalions, and was nominally at Balliol, but the cadets were quartered at various colleges: most were not members of the university. Whilst training he was chosen to drill his company at a review by the Duke of Connaught.

Hardy joined the Gloucestershire Regiment and is first recorded in the 1/2 Battalion, but moved to the 14th Battalion. He was a tall man according to Kingswood records, but the 14th had originally been formed for men known as 'bantams' who were under the minimum army regulation height of 5ft 3ins (its recruiting poster is pictured above). It was part of the 105th Brigade of the 35th Division, who were mostly bantams. The division had sustained many losses, and in December 1916 its commanding officer complained that the replacement drafts he had received were not of the same tough physical standard as the original bantams. Medical inspections were held and large numbers were rejected from the ranks. Brigades were ordered to accept no more bantams, and after this their numbers in the division gradually dropped.

Hardy was commissioned Second Lieutenant on 25 January 1917. In March he went to France, where the division had been in action since July 1916 at the Battles of the Somme. When Hardy arrived his division was shadowing the German army as they retreated to the Hindenburg Line. His unit occupied trenches with an ebb and flow of local raids and attacks, and on 21 August at Epehy his actions led to his being awarded the Victoria Cross:

'For most conspicuous bravery during a night attack by a strong party of the enemy on a bombing post held by his command. The bombers holding the block were forced back, but Second Lieutenant Parsons remained at his post, and, single-handed, and although severely scorched and burnt by liquid fire, he continued to hold up the enemy with bombs until severely wounded. This very gallant act of self-sacrifice and devotion to duty undoubtedly delayed the enemy long enough to allow of the organisation of a bombing party, which succeeded in driving back the enemy before they could enter any portion of the trenches. The gallant officer succumbed to his wounds'. (London Gazette, 17 October 1917)

Hardy died on 21 August 1917, aged 20. He was buried at Villers-Faucon Communal Cemetery. His Victoria Cross was presented on 8 November 1917 to his father by King George V at Durdham Downs, Bristol.

Very sadly for Hardy's parents, his younger brother Lieutenant Ewart Moulton Parsons, who joined the RAF, died in a flying accident on 17 July 1918 when scouting from Eastbourne Aerodrome. He was also aged 20, and was described by

his Squadron Commander as 'quite exceptional, both as a pilot and as an instructor'. He had repeatedly applied for active service, and was finally expecting to cross to France within days.

Hardy's Victoria Cross medal is at the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum in Gloucester; a replica of the Victoria Cross is displayed in the Officers' Mess of Bristol University Officers' Training Corps, and the mess is named after Hardy. Kingswood School has a plaque in his memory; on 21 August 2017 a paving stone was laid at Rishton War Memorial in tribute to him; and on 8 November 2017 (the centenary of the presentation of his Victoria Cross) a blue plaque was unveiled at his 1915-16 family home in Redlands in Bristol.

This is the story of one of the men who appear on a war memorial at Wesley Memorial Methodist Church in Oxford, UK. These stories were compiled in 2018-19 from a variety of family history and military sources. In particular, Chris Baker's site, 'The Long, Long Trail' has provided valuable details of the men's experience of battle:

<https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/>

Hardy Parsons's story incorporates details from Kingswood Magazine, kindly provided by the Kingswood School Archivist, and from 'The VC and DSO', vol 1, edited by Creagh and Humphris, published by Standard Art.

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