

## **Biog No 2 W H Anderson, VC**

### **Morag Cross 8 December 2013**

\*\*\* 2.1 William Herbert Anderson (29 December 1881- 25 March 1918), known as 'Bertie', was born at 17 Woodlands Terrace, Glasgow, in the exclusive Park Circus area of Glasgow. He was the eldest of five sons born to wealthy stockbroker and accountant William J Anderson and his wife, Nora (née Eleanora Kay of Cornhill, Biggar), although their middle child, Harry, died in infancy in 1887. By 1900, the family had moved to nearby 18 Woodside Terrace, (neighbours included the City Council's lawyer or Town Clerk, and the Allan Shipping Line owners) where they remained until 1918. [Source: Statutory Registers of Births, Deaths at [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk); *Glasgow Post Office Directories 1880-1920*].

### \*\*\*2.2

Anderson attended Glasgow Academy and Fettes College and was a member of the 1st Lanark Rifle Volunteers from 1900-08. He joined the accountancy firm founded by his grandfather, Kerr Anderson and MacLeod in West George Street, and in 1907, passed his professional examinations. The following year, he became a partner in the business, and also married Gertrude Gilmour, of Woodbank, Balloch, Dunbartonshire, moving to Tighcruachan, Cardross, where they had two sons. [Source: *The Scotsman*, 1 May 1907, p1; *Glasgow Post Office Directories 1880-1920*; *London Gazette*, 19 Dec 1902, p8762; 8 Sept 1908, p6532; *Glasgow Herald* 8 April 1918, p6; *The Outpost (17th HLI Magazine)* April-May 1918, p182].

Among the other partners in Anderson's stockbroking firm was (later Sir) John M MacLeod, MP for Glasgow Central in 1915, and father of the more famous Rev George F Macleod (later Lord MacLeod of Fuinary). George MacLeod's own harrowing wartime experiences profoundly affected him, and he eventually founded the Iona Community. [Source: *The Scotsman*, 3 July 1917, p5; *Inventory Acc 9084, Papers of Lord MacLeod of Fuinary and Iona Community*, p2, National Library of Scotland, at [www.nls.uk](http://www.nls.uk)].

### \*\*\* 2.3

In 1914, Anderson and both his parents volunteered their services, albeit in different capacities. Anderson Senior became Honorary Treasurer of the Red Cross Society's Scottish Branch, based in St Andrew's Halls (now part of the Mitchell Library). He tirelessly raised funds for hospitals, ambulances and clothing for troops and refugees, the Society having issued over 47,000 garments to local hospitals alone by early 1915. For this work Anderson received the CBE, meagre compensation for the eventual loss of his four sons. Mrs Nora Anderson was involved in sending supplementary rations, or 'comfort' packages to various Highland Light Infantry (HLI) battalions, the regiment in which all of her sons served. [Source: *The Scotsman*, 6 Nov 1914, p7; 9 Apr 1915, p6; 14 January 1922; *Glasgow Herald*, 13 Oct 1917, p1; *Highland Light Infantry Chronicle*, April (published July) 1915, p85].

### \*\*\*2.4

In September 1914, Glasgow Chamber of Commerce (which included many prominent local businessmen) raised a battalion from technical colleges, and men from various trades and

professions within Glasgow. Captain W H Anderson, a volunteer, originally with 'C' Company, was afterwards promoted to major, as second in command of several other battalions, and reached France in 1916. He was briefly 'invalided home' from France in March 1917, when he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, and returned to France to command the 12th HLI. [Source: *Glasgow Herald* 8 April 1918, p6; *Highland Light Infantry Chronicle*, July 1918, p85-6; *The Outpost (17th HLI Magazine)*, April-May 1916, p182; *Supplement, London Gazette* 8 May 1918, p5547; J W Arthur, I S Munro 1920, *The Seventeenth Highland Light Infantry ... Record of War Service 1914-1918*, Glasgow, pp 13-16, 91-2, 100]. \*\*\*2.5

The War Diary (official record) of the 12th Battalion tells the story:

*21<sup>st</sup> March 1918 'Lt Col W H Anderson returned & took over command of Bn. Camp was shelled all day & night by enemy 8" long range gun ... [On 23rd the Battalion travelled to Bray Sur Somme]*

*24th Bray, Bois Faviere near Maricourt ... strongly attacked by enemy cavalry and infantry ... [we were] forced to withdraw with severe losses after sharp hand-to-hand.*

*25th At 8am enemy attacked ... Lt Col Anderson immediately led counter-attack – capturing 70 prisoners & 12 MGs [machine guns]. At 11.30am the whole Divl front was strongly attacked by the enemy in overwhelming numbers. ... A Coy ... accounted for hundreds of the enemy. The battalion retired to the line of the Bois Maricourt ... but owing to the great number of men ... who had become detached, it was divided into 3 parties – one under Lt Col Anderson ... and counter attacked at 4.30pm... [this] was very successful and cleared the enemy several thousand yards east of Maricourt & all gains held. Lt Col Anderson & 3 Coy Commanders were killed this day...*

\*\*\*2.6

*26th Major Dixon ... gallantly fought the enemy all the next day back to Morlancourt .... [Source: War Diary of the 12th HLI, Courtesy of The Royal Highland Fusiliers Museum, Glasgow].*

The official, published citation of the action for which Anderson received the Victoria Cross, as published in the *London Gazette*, reads:

*For most conspicuous bravery, determination and gallant leading of his command. The enemy attacked on the right ... and succeeded in penetrating the wood held by our men. Owing to successive lines of the enemy following on closely there was the gravest danger ... Colonel Anderson made his way across the open in full view of the enemy ... and ... succeeded in gathering the remainder of the two right companies. He personally led the counter attack and drove the enemy from the wood, capturing twelve machine guns and seventy prisoners, and restoring the original line.*

*His conduct in leading the charge was quite fearless ... inspiring the men during a most critical hour.*

*Later on the same day ... the enemy ... were holding a timber yard in force. Colonel Anderson ... led the attack in person ... show[ing] the utmost disregard for his own safety. The counter-attack drove the enemy from [their] position ... He died fighting within the enemy's lines, setting a magnificent example to [his men]'. [Source: *Seventh Supplement to London Gazette of 30 April*, published 3 May 1918, pp5353-4].*

The 'Highland Light Infantry Chronicle' (the regimental journal) recorded:

*Great sympathy is felt ... with his father and mother, their four sons, all of whom held commissions (three in the HLI) having been killed in the present war'. [Highland Light Infantry Chronicle, July 1918, pp85-6].*

\*\*\*2.7

Anderson's fellow officers testified to their high regard for him: 'If you could have seen Colonel Anderson ... counterattacking thousands of Germans with a mere handful of men, you would believe in the British Army for all time. If ever a man won the VC it was Colonel Anderson'. Another wrote: 'I was with him when we counter-attacked that day ... He was cheering me on and his face was wreathed in smiles at the way the counter attack was progressing. His last words to me were "Carry on with those on the left ...", and the last I saw was the swing of his stick and going on'. [Source: *The Outpost (17th HLI Magazine)*, April-May 1918, p182].

\*\*\*2.8

French General Foch, 'Generalissimo [supreme commander] of the Allied Armies' praised Anderson while addressing the Scottish Divisions on the battlefield: 'Under [Anderson's] leadership the men charged and charged again ... through bullet-swept ground, and held on ... [I] ask you in the name of Colonel Anderson to go forward in the path he trod without fear'. [Source: *The Outpost (17th HLI Magazine)*, June-July 1918, pp1-2].

\*\*\*2.9

'Bertie' Anderson may be gone, but he is not forgotten. His great grandson, journalist Robin Scott Elliot fictionalised the four brothers' story in 2007. W H Anderson is buried in the Peronne Road Cemetery, at Maricourt, on the Somme near where he fell. [Source: 'Anderson, W H, Casualty Details', *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, at [www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)].

He is commemorated on at least twelve memorials, listed in the section of the website covering his brothers' story, including:

\*\*\*2.10

Glasgow Academy War Memorial (he and brother 'Ronnie' were ex-pupils)

\*\*\*2.11 and 2.12

Cardross War Memorial (where W H Anderson lived with his wife and two sons)

Old Kilpatrick Church Graveyard, Bearsden. All five brothers including Harry (died 1887) are inscribed on the headstone above the graves of the youngest brother, Edward Kerr Anderson (d 1918), and their father William James Anderson (d 1922)

\*\*\*2.13 and 2.14

Anderson Brothers Memorial, Glasgow Cathedral, bronze plaque erected by their parents in 1920.

Chamber of Commerce Roll of Honour, The Royal Highland Fusiliers Museum, Glasgow