

Sidney Howard Motion

Lieutenant, 7th Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment



Picture courtesy of: Marlborough College Archives

Sidney Howard Motion (known as Howard) was born on 20 March 1895 in Sutton, Surrey. He was the elder of two sons born to Sidney Herbert Motion and Clara Louise Motion (née Dipple). The couple married in London in 1894. A second son, Donald, was born in 1899. Sidney Herbert Motion became a chartered surveyor, auctioneer and valuer. The company, Sidney H. Motion and Roper, was based at 23 Hart Street, Bloomsbury. His brother, James Motion, was in the same line of business and was based in Bloomsbury Square. In the national press in 1897 the brothers advertised for sale tickets for seats in a stand to watch Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee procession.

In the 1901 Census the family was living at 76 Connaught Road, Fulham, with 3 servants. They moved from there to Buckinghamshire early in the 20th century, but seemed often to maintain a London address as well.

In the *Bucks Herald* in 1905 Mrs Motion was advertising for a plain cook. Sidney Howard Motion was educated at Marlborough College, where he is recorded in the 1911 Census. He was a member of the school O.T.C. for four years. The school registers show his parents' address as Stanley Wood House, Amersham Common. The house was probably built in 1678 as this date appeared on the chimney together with the initials IH. The house was demolished in 1960 and the site is now occupied by Little Reeves Avenue. Sidney, the father, was a Councillor on the Rural District Council. The house may have been used as a convalescent home during WWI. *The Auckland Star* of 13th December 1915 reported that a New Zealand soldier had convalesced there before moving on to London. On leaving school Howard completed his first year as an undergraduate studying medicine at Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge. He was also a member of the University O.T.C. (Royal Army Medical Corps) for one year.



Stanley Wood House (Photo: Hunt, Julian, A History of Amersham)

On 3 September 1914 Howard signed his Attestation papers at Westminster to enlist for military service. He had applied from Cambridge for an appointment to a temporary commission in the Regular Army for the period of the war. 2,000 temporary commissions were granted to the University of Cambridge. His medical report from Cambridge gave his vision as R 6/18, L 6/18 and colour vision as normal. He stated on his form that he was unable to ride and wished to join the Infantry. His father sent a telegram to the War Board at Cambridge consenting to his son's application for a commission.

Also on 3 September he underwent a medical examination at 64 Victoria Street, London. Records show that he was 5' 11" tall, weighed 11st. 7lb and had a 38" chest. He had black hair, grey eyes and a dark complexion. His religion was Church of England. On enlistment he joined the 18th (Service) Battalion (1st Public Schools) of the Royal Fusiliers with the regimental number 3843, but this became non-effective by discharge on receiving a commission on 28th September 1914, only 17 days after the battalion had been raised at Epsom.

Howard was gazetted 2nd Lieutenant and probably underwent training at Shoreham. He served with the Expeditionary Force in France and Flanders from 1 Sept 1915 as a Lieutenant in the 7th (Service) Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. The battalion landed in Boulogne on 2 September. He took part in the **Battle of Loos** and in the operations on **the Somme**. Lt. Motion was wounded at **Guillemont** on 18 August 1916 and was invalided home. A telegram was sent to Motion, Stanley Wood House, Amersham Common on 23 August 1916. It stated "Beg to inform you that Lt. S.H. Motion Northants Regiment was admitted 8 General Hospital Rouen Aug 20th with gunshot wound forehead slight". He was brought from Le Havre on the evening of 23 August, arriving in Southampton on 24 August. He was then taken to the King Edward VII Hospital, where he remained until 12 September. He appeared before a medical board at Caxton Hall on this date and was declared likely to be unfit for 1 month. The report stated: "The Board finds he was wounded by pieces of shell in 2 places over R. Frontal area – punctured wounds – nearly healed – pieces of shell extracted."

Following this, Howard appeared before several medical boards and was initially granted leave until 11 October 1916. He requested another medical board on this date in a letter written from 18 Lansdowne Place, Hove, but was still pronounced unfit and was assigned to light duties for 6 weeks. A letter from someone named Maclaren to the Assistant Director, Medical Services, Bedford District stated: "Lt. Howard Motion, whom I have known all his life, was wounded in the head on 1 August, was brought to England 22 August [NB: *incorrect dates*] and remained in King Edward

Hospital till 12 September. He was sometime unconscious and his eyesight failed. He has improved in every way but he cannot yet walk more than ¼ mile without being exhausted. He has almost constant headaches and all the usual nervy feelings. I have told him to remain in the country for some time yet." A medical board at Caxton Hall on 20 October stated: "This officer is still in a very nervous and exhausted condition. He suffers from constant severe headaches, is anaemic and sleeps poorly. Likely to be unfit 3 months."

A medical board at Aylesbury on 8 December 1916 pronounced him fit for general service and he rejoined the 3rd Reserve Bn. Northamptonshire Regiment for light duties but on 21 December a medical board at Chatham still found him unfit stating: "The Board find that he sustained a bomb wound of frontal region at above place [Guillemont] and date [18th August 1916]. No fracture. On exertion he gets giddiness and headaches. He is nervous and grumpy. He has bulging below old appendix scar which gives him some pain. He is not yet fit for general service."

On 12 December he wrote from Stanley Wood House to request a wound gratuity and again on 21 January 1917 he wrote from 42 Fort Road, Newhaven, applying for a wound gratuity. At this time he seems to have been working with the Royal Flying Corps. He was then applying for medical boards until 14 March when it was declared that he would be fit for general service after a Lane's abdominal belt had been fitted.

On 11 April 1917 he was able to report for duty with the 3rd Battalion of his regiment at Gillingham and he returned to France in May 1917. On 22 April his father wrote to the War Office asking them to note the alteration of his address from Stanley Wood House, Amersham, Bucks to 6 Holland Park Avenue, London W.11 stating 'as my son, Lt Howard Motion, 7th Northamptonshire Regiment, has now recovered from wounds and is likely to be sent overseas again any day, I am anxious that his correct address be recorded with the proper authorities.'

Lt. Howard Motion took part in the **Third Battle of Ypres** in 1917. This included the battle on the **Messines Ridge** in June 1917, where a huge explosion heralded the latest British attack. Nineteen enormous mines blew up simultaneously and 3,000 guns unleashed 4.5 million shells. The effect was less than hoped for as the late summer rain had turned the battlefield into a morass. Lieutenant Motion was mentioned in despatches. His Company Commander wrote "There is one thing I may tell you, that he had charge of my Company in the Messines show, whilst I was on leave, and when I returned my Company Sergeant-Major came to me on behalf of the N.C.Os and men of the company to ask if 'Mr Motion could be put in for something, as his conduct in cheering up the men during a terrifically intense bombardment was the best thing they had seen', and they again expressed the wish that he should be recommended. I discussed it with the Commanding Officer, and accordingly I recommended him [Lt. Motion] to him for the Military Cross; unfortunately the regiment was not giving any."

During the first half of July 1917 the Battalion was based at Bayenghem, where they undertook training and sporting activities. On 18 July they moved 15 miles by route march to Renescure starting at 4.10 a.m. The new billets were good but a long distance apart. The men's packs were transported by motor lorry. On the 19th the battalion moved out at 6.00am and travelled 9 miles to camp half a mile north of La Kreule. Their accommodation was in tents. On the 20th they left at 8.15am and marched 4 miles to billets in Eecke. The men carried their packs and wore steel helmets. It was very hot marching, but the Commanding Officer was complimented by the B.G.C. on the excellent marching of the battalion. On the 21st they left Eecke at 6.00am and marched 9 miles to bivouacs 1 mile west of Reninghelst. On the following day the Battalion cricket team played a team from the 6th Btn Northamptonshire Regiment, who were encamped nearby. The following day there were company inspections and a football match against the 6th Battalion. At 6.40pm they moved to camp near Micmac Camp, three and a half miles distant. In the next days the men were able to have baths. During the night of 27 July enemy aircraft flew over and dropped bombs, a few in the vicinity of the camp. Operation orders for a forthcoming attack were issued on the afternoon of the 28th. The following day they received orders to move to the line that night. The Battalion moved up by companies, although 'A' Company didn't move until the next day.

On 31 July the 'A' and 'C' Companies of the Battalion took part in an attack on **Shrewsbury Forest**, east of Zillebeke. Operations were handicapped by the bad conditions of the ground due to the severe weather on and prior to that day. The ground was boggy and ploughed up with shells. Enemy artillery and machine gun fire was heavy during the advance. In spite of all these difficulties and opposition, the 7th Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment and the 2nd Battalion Leinster Regiment drove the enemy from their position on the high ground, which the Brigade had been ordered to seize. Lt. Motion was wounded while in command of his company and died the following day at an advanced dressing station. The Battalion also lost their Commanding Officer, Lt. Col. E.R.Mobbs, 11 officers and 246 men in this operation.

Howard Motion lies buried and is remembered with honour at
Brandhoek New Military Cemetery, Vlamertinghe, Belgium,
grave reference I.B.11

Howard had not made a will, but his father applied via his solicitor for letters of administration citing his address as 6 Holland Park Avenue, Middlesex. He confirmed that his son had died intestate and wrote that he "left no will, neither did he possess anything of value." His son's effects totalled £130 19 shillings and 7 pence. This consisted of £19 16 shillings and 3 pence cash at the bank, £10 in personal effects and £101 3 shillings and 4 pence pay and allowances from the War Office. Probate was granted on 18 March 1918. In the same letter, Sidney Motion enquired about the whereabouts of his son's field kit, saying that he felt there might have been "letters and one or two little personal things we should like to have". A death certificate in letter form was issued by the War Office on 18 December 1918.

Howard's effects had been forwarded from the Standing Committee of Adjustment, General Headquarters, 3rd Echelon, British Expeditionary Force to Messrs Cox & Co.'s Shipping Agency Ltd., 16 Charing Cross, London S.W. on 12 August 1917. These consisted of: 1 cigarette case, 1 signet ring, 1 wrist watch with strap & guard, 1 tie pin, 2 collar badges, 2 discs 1 with broken chain, 4 large buttons, 6 small buttons, 1 charm, 1 whistle & strap, 1 leather case, and 1 card.

Lt. Motion was awarded The Allied Victory Medal and The British War Medal 1914-18 and in October 1919 his father made application for The 1914-15 Star due to his late son.

After the war the parents moved back to Surrey. They erected a memorial stone to their son in St. Bartholomew's Churchyard, Leigh.

Like his father, Howard's brother Donald became a chartered surveyor, and he joined the family business. He married Nicoletta Handlay in Horsham, Sussex, in June 1924. He had enlisted in the army in July 1918, but joined the Royal Air Force in the Second World War and died aged 41 in 1940. His addresses at the time of his death were Church Cottage, Leigh, and 23 Bloomsbury Way, Holborn. Sidney Herbert and Clara died within a fortnight of each other in 1953 after 59 years of marriage.

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