

The University of Glasgow Story

Captain (Temporary Commission) Alexander Scott

Biography of Captain (Temporary Commission) Alexander Scott

Alexander Scott was born on the 31st July 1889 at Lesmahagow. One of a family of eleven, he had five brothers and five sisters. He was the sixth and youngest son of Gavin, a Lanarkshire farmer, and his wife Mary Waugh, whom he married in 1876. It was a remarkable family. Seven of them graduated from the University of Glasgow, and all of them had successful lives. Although the family was deeply attached to the land, there was something of a Scott 'diaspora'.

The eldest brother, Gavin, went off to make a career in Rangoon. Another, George, became a Medical Officer on the rubber and tin estates in Malaya. James became a Mining Engineer in Nairobi, Bella farmed in Rhodesia and Alexander spent much of his working life in Malaysia. Perhaps it is not surprising that their father, Gavin, became a conscientious and prolific letter writer. Ruth Richens, his granddaughter, edited and published these letters, which offer a unique insight into Scottish society in wartime and into young Alexander Scott's war experiences as a newly qualified Doctor at the Front.

Alexander, or Sanny as he was known to his family, went up to the University of Glasgow in 1909 to study Medicine. He had a good first year and passed all his exams. Then he began to struggle, most probably because he had been ill for a spell, and he had to re-sit all his subjects in his Second Professional Exam. He had no trouble with the Third Professional Exam in 1913, but when it came to his Finals in 1914, he failed. In March 1915 he failed again. Sanny was optimistic that he'd pass the re-sit in June, however, because, as he told his father 'doctors are so scarce'. They were.

Immediately after graduating [MB ChB](#) in 1915 Sanny was off to training camp to prepare for service in the 79th Brigade of the 26th Division. He wrote of 'a great life', plentiful good food and a lot of drill. He also came to value his Scottish identity;

"It may be a remnant of the clan system but I assure you birth north of the Tweed is the best qualification I can find for a man down here."

Sanny's father thought he was pleased to have a status now. 'After having been a failure so long in gaining his diploma, and an abject dependent on the family so long on that account.'

He was posted to France as Medical Officer of the 30th Brigade of the Royal Garrison Artillery in September. In the winter of 1915-1916 it was very cold in the field and his letters have more to say about the weather, and about French farming practices than about the war. As winter turned to spring he marvelled at the way the farms kept the rhythm of the seasons and described how a farmer ploughed around the holes recently made in his field by German guns.

He was, however, frequently bored, and noted that, while there was a lot of action on some parts of the line, others were very quiet. *"I am well and rather fed up,"* he wrote home. His spirits lifted when he had access to a motorbike and got around a bit. In May 1916 he was moved to Number 12 Clearing Station. Where *"I have all home comforts and there are no shells."* He moved on to another station, where it seems he was kept very busy.

In July 1916 he wrote to his father, describing how busy his casualty station (Number 36) was, but not in danger as some stations up the line were. Sanny wrote that though he hated shells, *"I can never feel altogether satisfied back here. Somebody must be among it, and I am just the person who ought to be, young and without wife or children. Many doctors with infantry have both."* In September Sanny was promoted to Captain. He wrote to his father;

"Unfortunately in the [RAMC](#) this does not mean an increase of pay. All the difference it makes is a form of address."

Though his letters do not dwell on the sights and sounds of death, the tale of the war is there in his description of the fields. *"The last bit of standing corn in sight was cut by two men with scythes in the rain this morning."* Harvest time came, and Sanny found himself worrying about fields 'dropping ripe' with oats that couldn't be brought in. Sanny remained in good health, at least outwardly, though when he wrote that two surgeons, exhausted by the work being sent home, he noted that this would not happen to him since he had *"an unfortunate habit of looking in the best of health."*

His health was finally broken, however. In the summer of 1918 he wrote from a Red Cross hospital in Rouen, *"I have had another relapse of this wretched (trench) fever and they are sending me home."* He was sent to Manchester to recover. He found Manchester rather like Glasgow, but now in convalescence hated being cooped up most of the day in a *"dirty, smoky, stinking Hospital."*

Captain Alexander Scott survived the Great War. He married Jean Kinnear, a niece of his brother George's wife. He went out to Malaya to join George as a medical officer on the rubber and tin estates. He retired to general practice in Westray, Orkney in 1943, and finally to Jedburgh. He died in 1961.

University Connections

WWI Roll of Honour

- [View Captain \(Temporary Commission\) Alexander Scott's entry in the First World War Roll of Honour](#)

Summary

Captain (Temporary Commission) Alexander Scott

Rank: Captain (Temporary Commission)

Regiment: Royal Army Medical Corps

Degree: MB ChB

Awards: N/A

Comments: N/A

Note/Press Clipping: N/A

Photo ID: N/A

Sources

Ruth Richens (ed.), *Your Loving Father, Gavin Scott: Letters from A Lanarkshire Farmer, 1911-1917*, 6 volumes. (Cambridge: Ruth Richens, 1981-1992)

University of Glasgow Registry, Faculty and General Council Records

[Comments \(0\)](#)

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