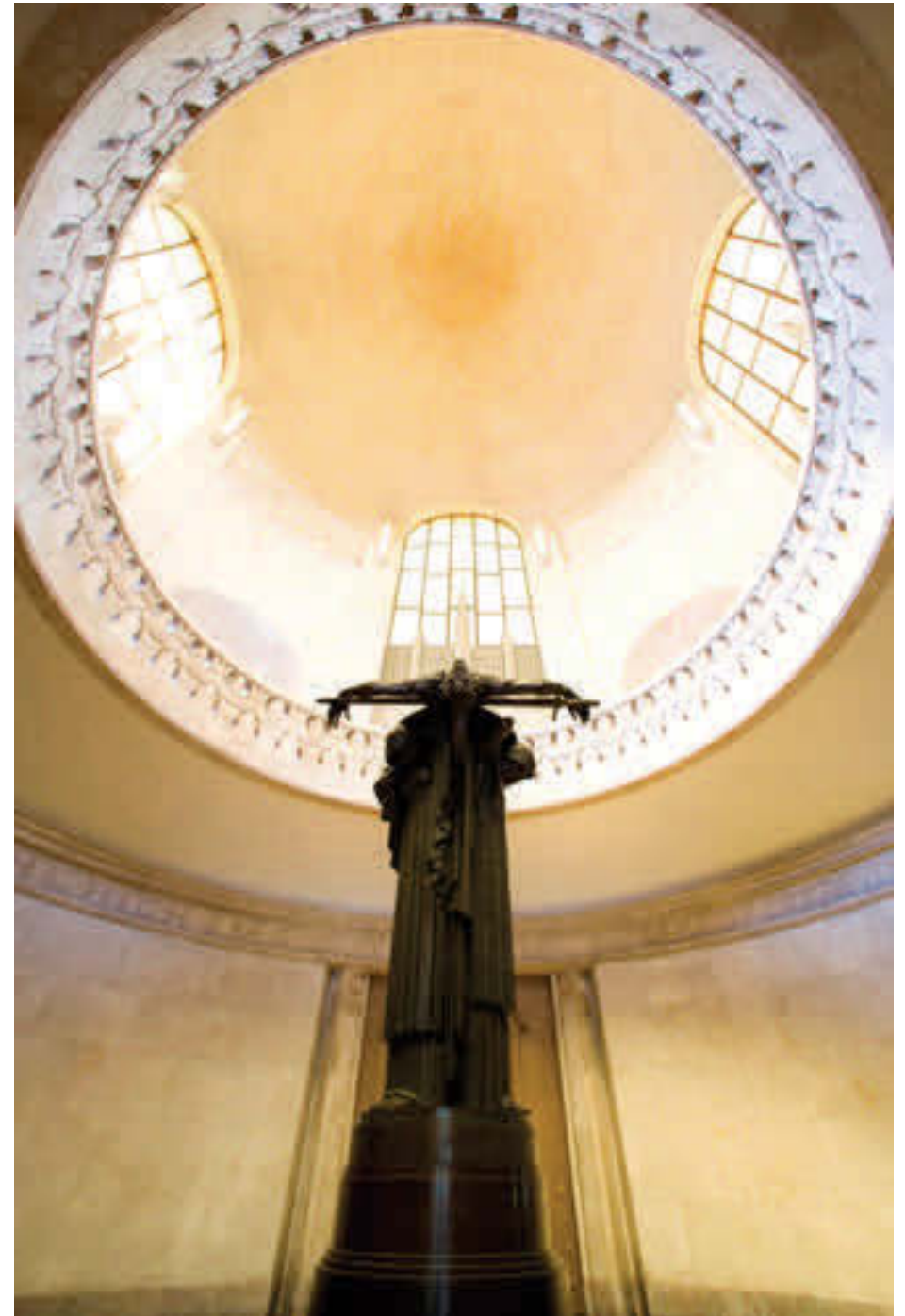




ANZAC MEMORIAL
HYDE PARK SYDNEY

SCULPTOR GEORGE RAYNER HOFF AT WAR

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At the heart of the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park, Sydney, is the sculpture *Sacrifice*. The artist who created it, George Rayner Hoff, was a poet and a storyteller in bronze and stone. His works have extraordinary power.

Those who know me are well aware that I am no artist, so my untutored opinions on the quality of Hoff's work have no place here. However as a military historian I would like to understand this remarkable talent and ask what we know of his experience in the First World War.

Anzac Memorial visitors frequently ask for information about the artist's war service so I hope this brief paper can make some contribution to our knowledge of the military life experienced by the sculptor/soldier George Rayner Hoff.

Brad Manera 2 January 2014

SCULPTOR GEORGE RAYNER HOFF AT WAR

From rural Nottinghamshire to Kitchener's New Army

George Rayner Hoff had not turned 20 when Britain entered the Great War in August 1914.

Hoff was living at home with his parents at Cloister Cottage Old Lenton, Nottingham. He was studying at Nottingham School of Art and assisting his father, a stone and woodcarver, with architectural modelling contracts.

With the outbreak of the war Britain, like the rest of Europe and much of the Western world, became intoxicated with war fever and patriotism. Young men rushed to enlist. Ten days after his 21st birthday George Rayner Hoff registered his intention to enlist and follow his brother Thomas into the Army Cycling Corps.

He entered his faith as 'Church of England', his profession as sculptor and stated that he was not married. He gave his name as George R Hoff and listed

his mother, Elizabeth Amy Hoff, of Cloister Cottage, Nottingham, as his next of kin. On initial examination his height was recorded at 5' 6¾" and chest measurement of 36" when fully expanded. Hoff was graded 'A1' and the inspecting medical officer even noted that he had a small scar on the back of his right hand and 'good teeth'. On 8 December 1915 Private George Rayner Hoff was accepted into the British Army Reserve. And given the registration number 383.

As casualties mounted and the training camps sent their graduates off to the war, Hoff was called to report for full-time service. George Rayner Hoff became Private (Pte) G R Hoff with the regimental number 15664 but the infantry needed men and Hoff's intention of enlisting in the Cycling Corps with his brother Thomas was ignored.

In 1916 Hoff was given a new army number 57714 and posted to the 18th (Service) Battalion of the Kings Liverpool Regiment. The third Hoff brother, Sidney, would serve in the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire (Notts & Derby) Regiment.

Until late 1915 training in the Kings Liverpool Regiment, as in any other county regiment in the British Army, was conducted in much the same way it had been done in the wars against the Romanov Army in Crimea in the 1850s and was little different to the training received by the British Army that fought Napoleon a century earlier. The only real addition was an encouragement of attaining skill in sustained rifle fire with their brand-new weapon the Short Magazine Lee Enfield, .303" calibre, bolt action service rifle.



There was little attempt to harness the specialised talents that individuals were bringing to the ranks of this volunteer army drawn democratically from across Britain and inspired by patriotism and duty.

Training consisted of a basic introduction to the life of a soldier that taught a man how to lace his heavy, ankle-length, leather and hob nail 'ammunition' boots, wind his 9 foot (almost 3m) long woollen puttees and assemble the complex tangle of straps and bags that made up his 1908 pattern webbing equipment or, for the New Army, the 1914 pattern leather equipment.



British 1908 pattern webbing equipment in marching order

The recruit had to be taught that three five round clips of ammunition are stored in 10 small pouches on the front of the belt, rations and eating kit he stuffed into the haversack on his left hip with his bayonet while an enamel water bottle sat uncomfortably on his right and a spade head hung in a bag behind. On his chest beneath his chin he wore a bag containing his gas mask in what the Army called the 'ready' position. In marching order he buckled a heavy pack loaded with blanket, overcoat, helmet and other necessities to his back. The soldier learnt how to use his rifle, without shooting himself or his mates, and how to stand still at attention or march in step with the hundreds of equally inexperienced novices around him.

These new soldiers had to develop a knowledge of tactics. They had to learn and understand the relationship between sub-units like the section of 12 men he belonged to, within the platoon of 40 men, within the company of 200 men, within the battalion of 1,000 men that was his unit. They had to know where their unit fitted within the brigade of 4,000 men within the division of 15,000 men within the corps of 30,000 men within the army of 100,000 men or more.

Pte Hoff the soldier had to acquire knowledge that Rayner Hoff the artist would never even have considered. He had to understand how an infantryman related to an artilleryman or a signaller or a medic or an engineer or a transport driver of the Army Service Corps or any of the thousands of other jobs and military skills an army requires of its soldiers.

We can only wonder at how an artistic temperament dealt with military hierarchy, routines and orders. Hoff would have had to learn his place and how it related to his corporal section commander, with his platoon sergeant and the officer, a lieutenant, who led his platoon. He learnt that his company was commanded by captain or a major and that his battalion was commanded by a lieutenant colonel. His brigade was initially commanded by a full colonel and later a brigadier general and so on as the formations got larger up to the generals and field marshals that Pte Hoff was never likely to meet.

This was all of the arcane knowledge that a private soldier needed to assimilate before he could go on to battalion training and learn how all of the sub-units of a coordinated body of 1,000 soldiers needed to function as a single body and think with a single mind. He had to acquire the basic skills of marksmanship, field craft, first aid, and learn to beware of military crimes that could earn him field punishment or worse.

After 20 weeks of this the British Army considered Pte Hoff ready for war, or at least at the end of his basic and battalion training.

The scant surviving records maintained by the British Army during the First World War indicate that Hoff applied himself to his new role. The only misdemeanour on his service record occurred at the end of his basic training when he decided to award himself an unofficial 24-hour leave pass for his 22nd birthday. Pte Hoff went missing on the afternoon of 26 November 1916, spent his birthday absent without leave, and turned himself in at 3pm the following day. Hoff must have been reasonably popular with his officers as the punishment he received for this offence was, by the British Army standards of the time, relatively light. He forfeited two days' pay and spent six days confined to barracks.

Pte Hoff and his draft of reinforcements were shipped to France on 11 December 1916 to join the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). On arrival in France Hoff was sent to No. 24 Infantry Base Depot at Etaples in the Par-de-Calais area of northern France.



'The Bullring' at Etaples, Winter 1916/17

Etaples had the reputation for being one of the toughest training camps created by the British Army during the First World War. Its main parade ground was nicknamed 'The Bullring'. The facilities were primitive

and the drill instructors were notorious for their brutality and savagery. The camp suffered the biggest mutiny in the BEF during the First World War and its military prison was the site of several executions.

The changing war

The new technologies available to First World War armies combined with the huge number of men mobilised made the battlefields of 1914-18 horrific, deadly and terrifying places.

Technological developments in the late 19th century had made artillery and machine guns extraordinarily effective defensive weapons, creating a deadly zone of fire in front of the defenders' positions. Soldiers on both sides had to dig themselves into the earth for protection .

On 1 July 1916 the BEF launched its first major offensive on the northern banks of the Somme River Valley on the Western Front . They lost 60,000 men on the first day. The slaughter went on until it bogged down in the November mud. The ground captured could be measured in hundreds of yards while the dead could be counted in hundreds of thousands.

The BEF High Command was suddenly and brutally made aware they must learn how to fight a 20th century war. They needed to coordinate arms and men and materials. They needed to be able to communicate and to provide effective and timely logistic supply. They needed to take advantage of new technologies.

The BEF needed to know exactly where its own position was, where the enemy was and the general rise and fall of the ground between the two positions.

They needed survey. They needed maps. The best the French could provide were 1:80,000 scale maps of varying accuracy and with no contours. This was not good enough.

The BEF needed to find, hone skills and train map makers. Failure to do so was not an option.

Hoff's war changed

Back in the 18th (Service) Battalion of the Kings Liverpool Regiment Pte Hoff had impressed his superiors. He was obviously energetic and had literacy and artistic skills. In the new war a man like Hoff could do more damage with a pen and protractor than with a rifle and bayonet.

On 7 January 1917 Pte George Hoff was seconded from his battalion of the Kings Liverpool Regiment to No. 3 Field Survey Company of the Royal Engineers, one of the specialist units tasked with gathering and collating the data from aerial photographs and infantry patrols and turning them into modern usable military topographical maps.

In February 1917, as Pte Hoff was settling in to his new posting, the Field Survey Companies were given a fixed establishment comprising a headquarters, topographical section, map section, observation section and sound-ranging section.

With his official transfer into the RE he was given the army number 244735 and the rank of Sapper (Spr). (In one of the few known pictures of Hoff in uniform during the war he is photographed wearing the service dress of a Sapper in the Royal Engineers.)

Spr Hoff and his men worked with



A French soldier using a plain table to survey an artillery battery position, c1917

the existing maps. Some of them operated in the field with plain tables, theodolites and compasses. Others interpreted aerial photographs.

Spr Hoff's drafting skills equipped him to bring all this information together and make finer and finer maps. As a draughtsman he collated all of the information provided by his mates in the field and turned them into trench maps that were the envy of every army in the Great War.

Craftsmen like Spr Hoff turned their work over to the publishers who churned out these maps in their tens of thousands. At the beginning of the war only generals had maps. By 1917 the most junior lieutenant in his early 20s had one in his tunic pocket and usually a second to pass on to his platoon sergeant.



1917 trench map of the Ypres salient, British military prismatic compass and First World War Royal Engineers cap badge and RE shoulder title

Spr Hoff stayed at his drawing board through 1917 and the disastrous battles for the Passchendaele ridgeline above the Ypres Salient in Belgium.

At the end of the battle of Passchendaele Spr Hoff received further recognition for his skills by having his

military trade rating increased to that of 'Superior Draughtsman (Topographical) – Skilled'. It didn't mean promotion but it did see an increase in his pay.

1918: Year of Victory

In March 1918 the Germans launched their massive spring offensive on the Western Front. The BEF was forced to retreat almost as far as the positions they had held in the disastrous days of 1914.

The change in the front and a war of movement meant the need for more maps quickly.

At the end of the month the German offensive had been fought to a standstill. The war of movement and outmanoeuvre had ended in Britain's favour and much of that was due to the quality of their maps.

In May 1918 the Field Survey Companies were reorganised into Field Survey Battalions. The British and French were preparing to launch their own offensive. A British Field Survey Battalion comprised headquarters - including survey printing sections, two artillery sections, incorporating the sound ranging and observation sections, and a corps topographical section.

There was one Field Survey Battalion for each of the five British Armies. For tactical purposes they were placed under the General Officer Commanding Royal Artillery in each army. The Field Survey Battalion in which Spr George Rayner Hoff was serving was part of Sir Julian Byng's 3rd Army.

By the summer of 1918 the balance of power on the Western Front had swung in favour of Britain and France and their allies. US troops were arriving in massive numbers. The new weapons, like powerful and effective tanks and specialist fighter, bomber and reconnaissance aircraft, could be counted in their hundreds. Transport, artillery and communication was faster and more effective than it has ever been.

The allies were ready to go on the offensive. On 8 August an irresistible tide of tens of thousands of British, Canadian and Australian troops, led by tanks and aircraft and supported by massive artillery barrages, swept over the thinly held German positions beside the Somme Valley. The German Army was thrown into headlong retreat. They fell back on the Siegfried Line (referred to by the British as the Hindenburg Line) but even this could not stop the allies.



After 100 days of bloody fighting, facing defeat in the field and revolution at home the Imperial German Army's High Command surrendered.

At the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918 the guns fell silent on the Western Front. Spr Hoff would turn 24 a fortnight later. In December he was granted 14 days leave to

Britain, He could have Christmas and the New Year with his family.

After the Armistice

Hoff had not been sent to the Front until the end of 1916. He had received no decorations or war wounds. He did not have dependents desperately awaiting his return. As a result his repatriation and discharge was given a low priority. The combat veterans of the early battles of 1914 and '15 were repatriated first and on top of this Hoff's specialist skills were still useful. Despite the Armistice he would have to serve on. Peace had settled on a devastated landscape that demanded almost as many maps as the fighting had. The Army still needed the skills of men like Spr Hoff. For the time being he would have to stay in uniform and in France.

Spr Hoff returned to France from home leave in January 1919 and was transferred to the 4th Field Survey Battalion, part of the Royal Engineer component of the British Occupation Army that was to deploy to post-war Germany on garrison duty.

In Germany he found none of the devastation that had been suffered in France or Belgium. Spr Hoff and the other Royal Engineers were based in Cologne.

As a survey engineer in the British Occupation Army Sapper Hoff's days were unlikely to have been busy. He could have taken advantage of sightseeing and explored the ancient city. We can only imagine what the young artist must have made of this mediaeval city untouched by the ravages of war.

With the war over, leave was more plentiful. On 28 June 1919 Hoff was given another 14 days leave to Britain so he could share a little of the summer with his family.

By mid-July Spr Hoff was back in Germany and spent the rest of the summer and early autumn studying the countryside. On 13 September 1919 he was finally told to pack up and go home

In October 1919 244735 Spr G R Hoff the warrior was demobilised and discharged and could be George Rayner Hoff the sculptor once again.

Hoff returned to Britain and civilian life. He entered the Royal College of Art and studied under Derwent Wood winning the coveted Prix de Rome. He spent time in Italy in 1922 and migrated to Australia the next year to take up a teaching position at the East Sydney Technical College. Thomas, his brother from the Cycling Corps joined him in Sydney. George Rayner Hoff established himself in the Australian art scene very quickly and employed Thomas in his studio.

In 1930 Bruce Dellit, the Sydney architect, won the international competition to design the Anzac Memorial. Dellit's submission incorporated a range of proposed sculptural elements and having now won the commission he approached Hoff to join him in the development and execution of the artworks.

When the building opened in 1934 Rayner Hoff made one of his few public statements about the relationship between his own war service and the inspiration provided for his sculptures that are such an intrinsic part of the memorial. He said that "he had seen too much of war to glorify it in the Anzac Memorial."

It is interesting to speculate on Hoff's reluctance to expand on his own war service. He played a vital role in the Great War but it was a role that relied on artistic skill and administration rather than valour in combat.

The sculptures that Hoff created for the Memorial cover a range of military and naval service from the provision of technical and mechanical skill to the depiction of frontline soldiers. The reality is that Hoff's inspiration for the sculptures of soldiers who saw the most savage of frontline fighting was the result of his own talent and imagination rather than experience. Likewise the many symbols of mourning were drawn from imagination and vicarious experience as he and his brothers all survived the war.



Hoff's Anzacs standing on the four corners of the Memorial

Today we are moved by the remarkable work of George Rayner Hoff at the Anzac Memorial but some of our visitors still question why the young warrior being returned to his family dead on his shield in the statue *Sacrifice* is not the hulking and aggressive man-at-arms so common on other Australian war memorials?

In 1932 Lionel Lindsay interviewed Hoff about the Memorial sculptures and noted this explanation of *Sacrifice*:

Fronting the empty sky, his arms resting on the great sword, the naked soldier lies across the eagle emblazoned shield. The head is sunk far down, and in the rigid wasted thighs and contracted belly – a focus of pain – the final agony is expressed with relentless truth. Three female figures, their heads bowed beneath the covering shield, form with their draperies a trinity of caryatides. Here it is the old mother supporting her dead son, the ashes of remembrance in her mouth, and here the brotherless sister, and here the young mother with her babe, holding in the cup of her hand the fallen-back head – a gesture that troubles the heart, for this also is the hand that gathered about the round neck of a lover with a caress that shall never be renewed.

(*Art in Australia* 3rd Series, No. 46, page 12).



His other works around the Anzac Memorial are equally rich in symbolism. We can speculate that the reason the bas reliefs above the eastern and western entrances to the Anzac Memorial are of the logistics and the lines of communication of war and not the face of battle may be that Hoff's contribution to the war and military experience was that of a supporter of those who faced battle rather than the perspective of a combat soldier?

Tragically George Rayner Hoff did not live long enough to answer many of the questions we would like to ask about his art.

In the three years that followed the opening of the Anzac Memorial Rayner Hoff's life fell apart. Conservative elements of Sydney society questioned his work. His marriage suffered and he drank heavily. Weakened by an accident in the surf Hoff died of pancreatitis a week before his 43rd birthday.

We must mourn a talent cut short.