**Laurence Guy Holt**

Laurence Guy Holt, born in 1894 in Sevenoaks, Kent, was the third son of Horace William Holt, a shipping agent, and Alice Margaret Holt, of Finch Cottage, Finch Lane, Bushey. He spent his early childhood in Reigate before moving firstly to Watford and then to Bushey. He attended Aldenham School from 1908 to 1913 and gained a Foundation Scholarship to Trinity College, Oxford. When war broke out he joined the Bedfordshire Regiment immediately as a Private, later receiving his commission and transferring to the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment.

On 4 February 1916, at Lillers, a small town in northern France, a Field General Court Martial was convened and Lieutenant Holt, then aged 22, was one of four presiding officers at the trial of Private William Hunter, a soldier from his own regiment. Private Hunter, aged 18, had enlisted two years earlier by lying about his age. He was found guilty of desertion but the court strongly recommended mercy on the grounds of extreme youth and service in the field. Cases of desertion in his battalion had been unduly high and Private Hunter’s military record was not good.On 16 February 1916, General Douglas Haig counter-signed Private Hunter’s death sentence:

I recommend that the death sentence be put into execution. The man is very young but his Commanding Officer says he is no good as a fighting soldier.

Private William Hunter was shot at dawn on 19 February 1916 by a firing squad from his own regiment. 306 soldiers were shot for cowardice or desertion during the First World War. Many were suffering from shell shock and several were under age. In 2006, following a campaign in the High Court, a pardon was granted and all these soldiers are now commemorated at the [National Memorial Arboretum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Memorial_Arboretum) in [Staffordshire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Staffordshire). Immediately behind the monument, 306 wooden stakes are driven into the ground, each bearing a plaque engraved with the soldier’s name and details.

Lieutenant Holt was promoted to Captain and in July 1915 gained the Military Cross for conspicuous gallantry. ‘He went out with a sergeant and brought in a wounded man from a shell hole in full view of the enemy. On the previous night he took up a machine-gun on his own initiative to the head of a sap and helped to beat off an enemy counter attack’. (West Herts & Watford Observer October 1916)

 He was killed in action in France on 27 September 1916, one of 163 Old Aldenhamians and Masters who gave their lives in the Great War.

He is remembered with honour at Warlencourt British Cemetery and is commemorated on the Bushey Memorial, at St James’ Parish Church in Bushey, and on the memorial in Aldenham School, Elstree.





