

Oxford Chronicle, 9 November 1917 [transcribed by Barry Burnham]

Lieut. Ronald Stevens

Widespread sympathy has been extended to Mr W.H. and Mrs Stevens of 16, Western Road, Grandpont, Oxford, in the death of their only son Lieut. R.W. Stevens, M.M. of the Worcester Regiment, who died of wounds on the 30th of October. He was only 24 years of age, and had every prospect of a brilliant career. In September last he was awarded the Military Medal for what that the time he modestly described as "a little bit of work". In the official records however, it was set forth that Corpl. Ronald Stevens as he then was, was in charge of an advanced post and the trenches right and left had been obliterated. The garrison had been withdrawn, but he held the position and consolidated it in a very able manner. Educated at Bedford House School, he went into the counting-house of Messrs Elliston and Cavell, joining the Oxford and Bucks Territorials when he was about 18, and was one of the first of his battalion to receive the Military Medal. He went out in 1915, and during 21 months service at the front met with rapid promotion. After being awarded the Military Medal he was sent home to take up the Cadet course, and was stationed at Newmarket. He distinguished himself in various exams, and as a result was given his commission. He was attached to the Worcester's and only returned to the front about four weeks before he was killed. Before the war Lieut. Stevens was a prominent member of the Oxford Harriers and a valued member of the YMCA. Highly popular with officers and men, his loss will be keenly felt. It will be some consolation to his parents in their great sorrow to know that his memory will be long cherished by his comrades and friends, and that he died nobly in defence of his King and country.

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Mr W.H. Stevens of 16 Western Road, Grandpont, Oxford, has this week received details of the circumstances under which his only son, Lieut. Ronald Stevens whose death was announced in our last issue was killed. A Captain in the Worcestershire Regiment writes: "I was commanding his Company "D" and though I only knew him five days, I was much impressed with his ability and indifference to danger. He took a great interest in his men, and in every way I was looking forward to having his services as a most valuable help to me in the Company work. The night of the 30th ult. I had to clear up the situation in front of my line, and I could not be sure how near the enemy's night positions were and had no knowledge of his defence's. There is a maze of old trenches just there and it was a matter of great importance to know just what the position of affairs was. It was not really your son's turn to take the patrol that night, but the officer whose turn it was had just been wounded and carried down. So I had to alter the arrangement and it was your son's turn then. He took an N.C.O and two men with him. I knew it was a task of some danger, and so I remained in the front line trench all the time he was out. They started off down an old trench that ran out to the front at right angles to ours into No Man's Land. They had been gone about three quarters of an hour, when word was passed to me that he had been hit. I went along at once and found they had just got him back into our front line trench. He had got on a trench coat over his

uniform, and I set to work at once cutting his clothes off him as it was impossible to get him out of them otherwise. A bullet had passed into his left shoulder-blade and out again – not through the body. It was moonlight, but I am not skilled enough in medical matters to give any more exact location of the wound than that. It was not bleeding much. He had been in a good deal of pain, though how much pain he was conscious of I can't tell. He was able to move his head and his limbs a little, but he was wandering in his speech very soon. I had cut the clothing clear, put iodine round the wounds, and got a dressing and pin ready when a stretcher-bearer arrived who was able to dress it properly. He was got on a stretcher quickly and carried away. To expedite the work of getting him to the Aid post and putting him under the Medical Officers hands I had a relay of men waiting half way. They took him to the Regimental Aid Post of a Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters on our left flank which was much nearer that part of our line than our own R.A.P. was. It was a most painful surprise to me to learn next day that he had died on his way back, after receiving aid at the R.A.P. I had no idea it would prove to be a mortal wound. I think probably the bullet must have touched the spinal column, or possibly pierced the aorta artery, only I can't then understand his being able to move his limbs. Also in the latter case, one would expect more extensive haemorrhage, as the bullet in its passage would have opened the way. All I know is that every effort at speedy aid was made by a number of most willing hands, though owing to deep sticky mud progress was necessarily very slow. It was a quiet night, with just a small amount of random rifle and machine gun fire. I should think it was a stray bullet (not an aimed shot) that hit him. It was the only one fired at the patrol. He had gone forward with only one corporal when he was hit, having left the two men a short way behind him. He was about 80 yards out at the time. Trusting that you will accept my most heartfelt sympathy". The Major commanding the Worcestershire Regiment writes, "It is impossible for me to find words to adequately express my sympathy of my regret at losing your son, who was one of the most promising young officers I have ever met. Although he had been with us such a short time, he had already earned the respect and affection of all ranks in the Battalion." The Chaplain has also sent a letter, in which he says: "I wish to express my heartfelt sympathy with you in the loss of your gallant son. He was a magnificent soldier and good comrade, and his death is mourned by us all. Although advised by his Company Commander to report sick, as he had a frightful cold, he asked to be allowed to stay with his men. He was really quite unfit for duty, but insisted on remaining at his post. He was hit by a machine gun bullet, and died just as he reached the dressing station. The place of his burial will be forwarded to you in due course. Your son was beloved by everybody, and his death was a great blow to us all. May God comfort you in your great sorrow".