

Gunner William Charles Samuel Crooke

Regimental Number: 83143

B/306 Brigade, Royal Field Artillery

born: 1892 - died: 23 May 1918

William Charles Samuel Crooke was born in the 3rd Quarter of 1892 in Pershore, Worcestershire,¹ the eldest child of Samuel Crooke (born about 1870) and Elizabeth Beard² (born about 1867).³ In 1911, William was living with his parents and his siblings on Bridge Street, Pershore. His father was a boot and shoemaker, working out of their home. All four children were living at home: William, his younger sister (Dorothy Winifred, born about 1896) and two younger brothers (Charles Robert, born about 1900, and George James, born about 1902). His grandmother, Hannah Beard, was also living with them. At the time, William was an apprentice baker.

William enlisted in Worcester as a gunner in the Royal Field Artillery. The Royal Field Artillery was one element of three in the Royal Regiment of Artillery. It was the "most numerous arm of the artillery, the horse-drawn RFA was responsible for the medium calibre guns and howitzers deployed close to the front line and was reasonably mobile. It was organised into brigades."⁴ The military historian, John Terraine, wrote "The war of 1914-18 was an artillery war: artillery was the battle-winner, artillery was what caused the greatest loss of life, the most dreadful wounds, and the deepest fear."⁵

On 20 May 1918, William was admitted to the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station with penetrating shrapnel wounds in his abdomen. He survived until 23 May when he died. He was buried the following day in Pernes British Military Cemetery (Plot 2, Row C, Grave 16) with the chaplain J. K. Tibbits presiding. William was a member of the Church of England.

The Pernes British Military Cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when the 1st and 4th Canadian Casualty Clearing Stations came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.⁶ On 20 May, 370 soldiers were admitted to the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station – by far the highest number of admissions in any one day that month.⁷ This brought the total number of patients to 522. In the whole month of May, there were 115 deaths at this CCCS – more than in any of the other three and a half months that the 1st CCCS was in Pernes.

Just months before he died, William had married Elizabeth Mary Bennett in Pershore.⁸ She was his next-of-kin and was notified of his death. At the time, she was living at The Paddock in Pershore. She also received the monies the army owed William after this death.⁹

William was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).¹⁰

William's father also served on the home front in World War I.¹¹ He enlisted on 16 November 1914 in the 2nd Supply Company of the 8th Battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment. His specialist military qualification was master shoemaker.

The 2nd Company was formed in 1914. "On August 31st it was announced that those who could not at once accept the obligation for service overseas were to be withdrawn from the Territorial units to form "Second Line" Territorial formations intended for Home Defence (The formation of the "Second Line" battalion was authorized on 31st August 1914). The "Second Line" personnel of the

Worcestershire battalion was organized at Worcester into a new unit, the 2/8th Worcestershire, which was commanded by Colonel M. Dixon V.D.; and there followed an active campaign to recruit the new unit up to the strength of full battalion. Thanks to the energy of the officers appointed to command the new unit, the ranks of the new 2/8th Territorial Battalion was filled within only three weeks.”¹²

On joining he was promoted to Sergeant but, at his own request, reverted to Private on 31 March 1915. He was demobilised on 9 April 1919.

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¹ “England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 January 2015), entry for William Charles S. Crooke, Registration district: Pershore, Inferred County: Worcestershire, Volume: 6c, Page: 330

² “England & Wales, FreeBMD Marriage Index, 1837-1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 20 January 2014), entry for Elizabeth Beard, Registration district: Pershore, Inferred County: Worcestershire, Volume: 6c, Page: 419

³ “1911 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 5 January 2015), entry for David Wright Mawby, Registration district: Pershore, Registration District Number: 380, Sub-registration district: Pershore, ED, institution, or vessel: 16, Household schedule number: 133, Piece: 17735

⁴ “The Long, Long Trail: The British artillery of 1914-1918,” <http://www.1914-1918.net/cra.htm>

⁵ “The Long, Long Trail: The British artillery of 1914-1918.” <http://www.1914-1918.net/cra.htm>: accessed 7 December 2014)

⁶ “Pernes British Military Cemetery” *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/11600/PERNES%20BRITISH%20CEMETERY>: accessed 13 January 2015)

⁷ “War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31,” *Library and Archives Canada* (http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G: accessed 15 December 2014)

⁸ “England & Wales, FreeBMD Marriage Index, 1837-1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 January 2014), entry for William C. S. Crooke, Registration district: Pershore, Inferred County: Worcestershire, Volume: 6c, Page: 335

⁹ “UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 19 January 2015), entry for

¹⁰ “British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 January 2015), entry for William C. S. Crooke

¹¹ “British Army Service Records 1914-1920,” Findmypast (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 13 January 2015), entry for Samuel Crooke, Series WO 363

¹² The Worcester Regiment 2/8th Battalion Worcestershire Regiment – 1914, (http://www.worcestershireregiment.com/bat_2_8_1914.php: accessed 20 January 2015)