

Sergeant Charles Downs[©]

Regimental number: 50734

15th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery

born: 1892 - died: 3 July 1918

Sergeant Charles Downs, born in 1892, was the son of Charles and Catherine Downs of Basford, Stoke-on-Trent in Staffordshire.¹ He was baptized on 31 July 1892 in Wolstanton.² His father, Charles, was born about 1866 in Longbridge Hayes, Staffordshire, the son of Aaron and Emma Downs.³ His mother, the former Catherine Cartwright, was born in about 1865 in Church Lawton, Cheshire, the daughter of William and Mary Cartwright. Charles and Catherine were married on 9 January 1890 in Wolstanton, Staffordshire.⁴ They had seven children: Evelyn Mary (born in 1890),⁵ Charles, Dorothy (born in 1895),⁶ Frederick (born in 1897, but died soon after birth),⁷ Catherine (born in 1899),⁸ Annie Louisa (born in 1902),⁹ Leonard (born in about 1905),¹⁰ James Cartwright (born in 1907)¹¹ and Marion Elizabeth (born in 1910).¹²

In 1891, Charles and Catherine, with their first daughter, were living on Sparrow Terrace, Wolstanton either with or next door to Charles' parents, Aaron and Emma Downs. Charles was an earth potter and his father, Aaron, was a potter's foreman. By 1901, the family, now with four children, was living at 2 Greengates in Turnstall, Staffordshire. Charles was a potter's flat presser. Sadly, in 1907, Charles' mother died¹³—perhaps in childbirth—leaving his father with an infant and five other children under the age of sixteen. Two years later, his father remarried. He married Elizabeth Lawton late in 1909.¹⁴ Together they had at least one child—Marion Elizabeth, born in 1910.¹⁵ By 1911, the family now included eight children,¹⁶ who were all still living at home at 27 Clarence Street, Basford, Stoke-on-Trent.¹⁷ Charles was still a potter's foreman and three of his children were working in the potting industry.



C. Downs in Pernes British Military Cemetery
(Source: Author, July 2015)

Charles enlisted in the Royal Garrison Artillery. The RGA was one element of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, which "From 1914 when the army possessed very little heavy artillery ... grew into a very large component of the British forces."¹⁸ "The Siege Batteries were deployed behind the front line, tasked with destroying enemy artillery, supply routes, railways and stores. The batteries were equipped with heavy Howitzer guns firing large calibre 4, 6, 8 or 9.2 inch shells in a high trajectory."¹⁹ Charles served with the 15th Siege Battery, which went to France on the 11 July 1915.²⁰ Charles followed six days later.²¹

Charles survived three years of the war, only to die of pneumonia in 1918. He was already dead when he was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 3 July 1918. He was buried the same day in the Pernes British Military Cemetery (Plot 5, Row D, Grave 18) with the chaplain J. K. Tibbitts presiding. Charles was identified as being a member of the Church of England. His father, who was still living at 27 Clarence Street in Basford, was notified of his death.

On the day that he was admitted and died, No. 1 CCCS had received 138 patients and Charles was one of 39 to die at the CCCS that month.²² There are over 1,000 First World War soldiers buried in the Pernes British Military Cemetery—most of them were soldiers who died at one of the nearby clearing stations.²³ This cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when No. 1 and No. 4 CCCS came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.

Charles was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914-15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).²⁴

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¹ “1911 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2015), entry for Charles Down, Registration district: Stoke upon Trent, Registration District Number: 361, Sub-registration district: Stoke upon Trent, ED, institution, or vessel: 3, Household schedule number: 114, Piece: 16551 –

² “England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538–1975,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2015), entry for Charles Downes, FHL Film Number: 1517617, Reference ID: item 7 p 281

³ “1881 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2015), entry for Charles Down, Registration district: Wolstanton, Sub-registration district: Wolstanton, ED, institution, or vessel: 1a, Piece: 2704, Folio: 15, Page Number: 23

⁴ “England, Select Marriages, 1538–1973,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2015), entry for Charles Downes, FHL Film Number: 1517618, Reference ID: 2:26Q0SBX

⁵ “England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538–1975,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2015), entry for Evelyn Mary Downes, FHL Film Number: 1517617, Reference ID: item 7 p 252

⁶ “England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538–1975,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2015), entry for Dorothy Downes, FHL Film Number: 1517617

⁷ “GRO online index,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>; accessed 18 November 2016) entry for Downs, Frederick, Volume 06B, Page 95; “England & Wales, FreeBMD Death Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2015), entry for Frederick Downs, Registration district: Wolstanton, Inferred County: Staffordshire, Volume: 6b, Page: 60

⁸ “England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2015), entry for Catherine Downs, Registration district: Wolstanton, Inferred County: Staffordshire, Volume: 6b, Page: 116

⁹ “England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2015), entry for Annie Louise Downs, Registration district: Stoke upon Trent, Inferred County: Staffordshire, Volume: 6b, Page: 228

¹⁰ “England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2015), entry for Leonard Downs, Registration district: Stoke upon Trent, Inferred County: Staffordshire, Volume: 6b, Page: 191

¹¹ “England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2015), entry for James Cartwright Downs, Registration district: Stoke upon Trent, Inferred County: Staffordshire, Volume: 6b, Page: 224

¹² “England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2015), entry for Marion Elizabeth Downs, Registration district: Stoke upon Trent, Inferred County: Staffordshire, Volume: 6b, Page: [unknown]

¹³ “England & Wales, FreeBMD Death Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2015), entry for Catherine Downs, Registration district: Stoke upon Trent, Inferred County: Staffordshire, Volume: 6b, Page: 237. Catherine’s death was registered in the 2nd Quarter of 1907 and the birth of her son, James Cartwright Downs, was registered in the 3rd Quarter of the same year.

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- ¹⁴ "England & Wales, Marriage Index, 1916–2005," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2015), entry for Charles Downs, Registration district: Stoke upon Trent, Inferred County: Staffordshire, Volume Number: 6b, Page Number: 342
- ¹⁵ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 18 November 2016), entry for Marion Elizabeth Downs, Registration district: Stoke upon Trent, Inferred County: Staffordshire, Volume: 6b, Page: 229
- ¹⁶ The 1911 census indicates that Charles (presumably with his two wives) had had nine children, one of whom, Frederick, had died before 1911.
- ¹⁷ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2015), entry for Charles Down
- ¹⁸ "The Long, Long Trail: The British artillery of 1914–1918," <http://www.1914-1918.net/cra.htm>: accessed 2 December 2014
- ¹⁹ "15th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery," *The Wartime Memories Project - The Great War* (<http://www.wartimememoriesproject.com/greatwar/allied/rga15siegebty.php>; accessed 28 April 2015)
- ²⁰ "15th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery"
- ²¹ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2015), entry for Charles Downs
- ²² "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)
- ²³ "Pernes British Military Cemetery" *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/11600/PERNES%20BRITISH%20CEMETERY>: accessed 13 January 2015)
- ²⁴ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," entry for Charles Downs