

Private William Creed©
Regimental number: 13069
1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

died: 19 April 1918

Private William Creed is somewhat of an enigma, unfortunately. When he was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, he had no papers with him. It appears little was known about him other than his name, regimental number and regiment.¹ Regrettably, only about 30% of UK service records still exist due to a fire resulting from a 1940 air raid on the Army Records Office in Walworth, London,² and it appears that William's records were not saved. As a result, certain specifics of William's personal life and military experience were not obtainable.

From those records that were identified, it was determined that William enlisted with the Gloucestershire Regiment and entered the war in France on 9 August 1915.³ As a result, William was awarded posthumously 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).⁴

William's next of kin was identified as his father William Creed, who was paid William's war gratuity of £17.⁵ The war gratuity was introduced in December 1918 as a payment to be made to those men who had served in WWI for a period of at least six months, or for home service for any length of time if the man had served overseas.⁶

William was reported as having been with the 1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment in France. He was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 18 April 1918 with gunshot wounds penetrating his left side. He died the next day and was buried that day at Pernes British Cemetery (Plot 1, Row C, Grave 27) with Chaplain G. C. d'Easum presiding.⁷ Pernes British Cemetery was opened in April 1918 when the 1st and 4th Canadian Casualty Clearing Stations pulled back to Pernes, driven back by the German advance in Flanders. There are 1,098 First World War burials in Pernes.⁸

The war diary of the 1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment⁹ (commonly referred to as the Glosters¹⁰) describes the terrible battle at Givenchy and Festubert in north western France, which commenced on 9 April and ended 18 April 1918. This was known officially as the Battle of the Lys. Throughout the month of April, all the low-lying land around the La Basse Canal was wrapped in a thick mist, which often lasted all day. It was seldom possible to see more than a few hundred meters, often much less. This, of course, made it difficult for the airplanes, and led to one incident of allied bombers attacking their own soldiers.

Early in the first attack, a Portuguese battalion had yielded to the German advance, but the 55th Division had held firm, beating all attacks and capturing almost 800 prisoners. The following week, even with considerable shelling and intense aerial activity by the Germans on the battlefield, the Glosters' sector was relatively calm as the enemy was engaged in bringing up more troops, effectively tripling the number of guns for the second attack.

On 17 April, the regiment captured a German soldier who had become disoriented in the mist. He had been engaged in spotting positions for heavy trench mortars. As a result of questioning, information was obtained about an imminent attack. On 18 April, from 4:00 a.m. to 6:30 a.m. the

Germans attacked with an intense firing of gas shells aimed at the back areas and gun positions. The Glosters' artillery suffered significantly. However, having been forewarned, possible prominent works had been temporarily evacuated for more advanced positions. At 6:30 a.m. the enemy gunners shortened their range, firing on the village and HQ. Fortunately, the Glosters' trenches were in splendid condition, so little damage occurred.

About 8:15 a.m. the infantry attack commenced with the Germans swarming from their lines, heralded through the mist by a chain of Very Lights, which are essentially flares. A few breaches of the lines occurred, and although subjected to hot fire the advancing Germans could not be checked. A number of Germans got through a gap into the orchard and village behind the Division lines, but one line was quickly reorganized to contain the Germans and prevent reinforcements from arriving. Still, this group of German snipers had a choice location and did grave damage once the mist lifted: machine gunners, runners and stretcher bearers were shot down as fast as they appeared on the road. Even the dressing station was penetrated, killing and wounding several of the medical staff and casualties.

The battle raged with the Germans having some successes. Since the fog had lifted, German airplanes were flying low and were busy bombing and shooting up various keeps in the lines. By 11:00 a.m. Glosters' casualties included eight officers and about 150 other ranks. Even HQ was under significant attack, so all orderly room records and material were destroyed and the last two pigeons released. The first pigeon went off well, but unfortunately flew in the wrong direction, and the second was blown up by a shell within 50 yards of HQ.



Grave marker for Pte. W. Creed

Source: *Find a Grave* (www.findagrave.com)

A decision was made to clear the Germans from the orchards and village before nightfall. A Welch company took the situation in hand with a company of Camerons, and they succeeded in capturing or killing this group of Germans.

By noon, the Germans appeared to realize that their attack had failed. As they attempted to crawl back to their lines from shell holes between the village line and the German lines, they were shot in scores. Very few prisoners were taken, and most of those were already wounded. One German American had suddenly loomed out of the mist, hands in his pockets and a large cigar in his mouth, and announced to the nearest soldier that he was "thoroughly fed up."

By 5:00 p.m. the action was over, and by 10:00 p.m. the Glosters were relieved. In reviewing the attack, it was found that the Germans had not attempted to advance in mass formations or successive lines, but tried instead to infiltrate by groups. Some of the Germans were not even armed, instead carrying blankets, ammunition and three days' rations. Their goal had been to reach Bethune, but they had failed.¹¹

At some point during that horrible day, William received his fatal injury. Of William's personal life, we know he was born in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, and this was also where he enlisted.¹² The Cheltenham memorial identifies William, but suggests he was the son of William Charles Creed and Ellen Turner.¹³ Unfortunately, although William and Ellen had a son named William, he was only born in 1905,¹⁴ making him but 10 years old in 1915 when Private William Creed enlisted with the Glosters. A more likely, but unsubstantiated, connection would be that found in the 1901 England Census for Cheltenham, where a 6-year-old William was living with his father William Creed, 55, stepmother Louisa, 34, and sister Florence, 12.¹⁵ That would have William born about 1895, making him about 20 in 1915, an appropriate age for a young soldier.

Perhaps due to the lack of paperwork accompanying William at his death, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) erred when creating the headstone for William,¹⁶ inscribing his surname as Greed. In the early 1990's a researcher with the Gloucestershire Regimental Museum visited the graves of a number of Cheltenham soldiers. He informed CWGC of the error and the headstone was corrected.¹⁷ In fact, the CWGC records alternately identified his surname as "Green" and "Greed."¹⁸ Sadly, William's life remains an enigma.

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¹ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 8 February 2018), entry for Creed, Pte W.

² "How to research a soldier," *The Long, Long Trail, The British Army in the Great War of 1914–1918* (<http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/soldiers/how-to-research-a-soldier/>: accessed 30 May 2017)

³ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 8 February 2018), entry for William Creed

⁴ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 16 November 2018), entry for William Creed

⁵ "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 8 February 2018), entry for William Creed

⁶ "What was the war gratuity?" *The war gratuities of WWI* (<https://wargratiuity.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/what-was-the-war-gratiuity/>: accessed 6 October 2017)

⁷ See endnote 1.

⁸ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, (www.cwgc.org: accessed 6 October 2017), entry for Pernes British Cemetery

⁹ "UK, WWI War Diaries (France, Belgium and Germany), 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 9 February 2018), Regiment or Unit: Gloucestershire Regiment; Sub Unit: 1st Battalion; Division: 1st Division Piece Description: Piece 1278/1-5:3 Infantry Brigade: 1 Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment (1914 Aug – 1919 Apr); Piece Number 1278; pages 391-400

¹⁰ *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gloucestershire_Regiment: accessed 9 February 2018) entry for Gloucestershire Regiment

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 9 February 2018), entry for William Creed

¹³ "Family Tragedies," *Leaving Cheltenham...and all that was dear* (http://www.remembering.org.uk/family_tragedies.htm: accessed 9 February 2018), entry for Creed

¹⁴ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 9 February 2018), entry for William Creed, Registration district: Cheltenham, Sub-registration district: Cheltenham, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 2, Household schedule number: 72, Piece: 15537

¹⁵ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 9 February 2018), entry for William Creed, Registration district: Cheltenham, Sub-registration district: Cheltenham, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 51, Household schedule number: 128, Piece: 2466, Folio: 18, Page: 18

¹⁶ *Find a Grave* (<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/123047256/w-creed/photo>: accessed 3 May 2018), entry for Private W. Creed

¹⁷ Email of 18 February 2018 to author from Joe Devereaux, WW I researcher, Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum

¹⁸ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, (www.cwgc.org: accessed 18 February 2018), entry for Creed, W.