

Clarence Henry CROOK

Born Jan/Mar 1896, Dawlish Died 17 March 1915 aged 19
Private 3/6616 2nd Battalion, Devonshire Regiment

Clarence Henry Crook was the second son of James Henry Crook and his first wife Alma.

James Henry Crook was the first son of William Crook (1841-1923) and Elizabeth Crook (nee Gilpin) (1846-1916) who had six children by 1891 when they were living at Commercial Road, Dawlish.

William was a bricklayer. The children were Sarah, 20, a student in a farming college, James Henry, 16, a billiard maker, Ernest, 9, Edmund, 7, Annie, 5 and Leonard, 2.

(Edmund Charles Crook (1884 – 1918) (*see separate casualty data sheet for 12/4/1918.*))

James Henry Crook (1874-1923) had been born in Cockermouth, Cumbria, in the October – December quarter of 1874 and married Alma Leah Saunders (1871-1908) in 1894.

He was a mason.

By 1901 they had three children, Stanley (1896-1915), **Clarence,5**, and Alice May (1898-) and they were living at 2 Manor Row, Dawlish.

(Stanley James Crook (1896 – 1915) (*see separate casualty data sheet for 24/8/1915.*))

After the death of Alma in the July- September quarter of 1908, James Henry Crook remarried later that year and is shown living with his new wife, Louisa Hamilton (1888-).

In the 1911 census return, James Henry Crook's occupation is crossed out as a mason and bricklayer substituted, possibly indicating changes in methods of construction at that time. There were two more children, John, 7,(1904-) and James, 6, (1905-) from his first marriage and Edith Louisa, 18 months, (1909-1993) from his second marriage. They were living at Golden Terrace, Dawlish.

Clarence Henry was 15 and working as a Telegraph Messenger for the Post Office.

He may have been with the Territorials before the war as he arrived in France on 5th November 1914 which made him eligible for the 1914 Star. His father received in due time a Death Grant of £5.10s.0d and a War Gratuity of £3.0s.0d, as well as the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Clarence Henry Crook's death was reported in The Western Times of Thursday 25 March, 1915:

"Dawlish people heard with much regret yesterday of the death of Pte. Clarence Crook, of the 2nd Devons, who was recently killed in action. His father, Mr James Crook, who resides at Golden Terrace, Dawlish, received the news through a chum of his son, who witnessed the death."

The Dawlish Gazette of Saturday, March 27, 1915 carried the following:

Mr J H Crook, of Golden Terrace (a member of the Dawlish Town Band), received the sad news on Tuesday of the death at the front of his second son, Pte. Clarence Crook, of the 2nd Devons. The news was sent by Pte. H Langdon , of C Company, a comrade, who said his death, on the 18th inst., was instantaneous. He added: "I feel his death very much as he

was a very great chum of mine. I saw that he was buried alright and saved his belongings, which are in the charge of the Company Sergeant- Major"

– In view of subsequent events, a letter which Mr Crook received from his son only a day or two before, dated 16th inst., is of pathetic interest. In this he says:

"We have had a big battle and given the Germans what they want. Have had a very rough time of it. Should not like to go through very much of that, but it's got to be done. Roll on the time for coming home again."

The deceased was only 19 in December last year. He went to the front in November. Pte Stoyle, whose death we record above, was in the same company. There is also another Dawlishian, Pte. Sid Crook in this company.

Further information came in an article in the Dawlish Gazette of Saturday, April 17, 1915:

With reference to the late Pte Clarence Crook, of Dawlish, who was killed at the front on March 17th, his grandparents, Mr and Mrs W Crook, of Badlake Hill, have received a letter from deceased brother, Pte Stanley Crook, also at the front, enclosing a letter he had received in response to enquiries, from the C.O. of C Company, 2nd Devons, Capt. J R Partridge, which reads as follows:

"With reference to your letter dated 23/3/15, I am sorry to have to inform you that your brother was killed in the trenches on March 17th. He was killed by a bullet which came from no one can tell where and died almost at once. You who have no doubt done many months in the trenches will understand this better than those at home would. Your brother was a very good steady soldier and his loss is greatly felt by myself and the whole company."

Clarence Henry Crook is listed in the Devon Roll of Honour.

The Dawlish War memorial inscription is: CROOK C.H. PTE. DEVON REGT

The Commonwealth War Graves entry reads:

Crook, Clarence Henry, Private, Devonshire Regiment, 3/6616, died 17 March 1915, France & Flanders, killed in action. Le Touret Memorial, Departement de Pas de Calais.

Almost all of the men commemorated on the Memorial served with regular or territorial regiments from across the United Kingdom and were killed in actions that took place along this part of the Western Front, which was the scene of some of the heaviest fighting of the first year of the war, including the battle of Neuve Chapelle (10 – 12 March 1915).

Still, the regiment had reason to feel proud of its share in Neuve Chapelle. It had done all that had been asked of it; It had been mainly instrumental in capturing its brigade's objective; it had given proof that the long winter in water-logged trenches had not sapped its initiative or dulled its fighting-spirit; and the Commander-in-Chief, who visited it early in April, spoke warmly in praise of its services. These were recognized later by the award of the C.M.G. to Colonel Travers.

Some indication of the reputation which the regiment enjoyed was afforded by the experience of a draft which joined the 2nd Battalion just after Neuve Chapelle. As it marched through La Gorgue, near Estaires, it was greeted with "What regiment?" On the reply "Devons," came shouts of " Good old Devons," " Well done, Devons," and the men standing and watching the drafts march through dived into any shops which were handy, and pressed cigarettes, tobacco, chocolate and other presents on the men.

Dawlish World War One Project

<http://lib.militaryarchive.co.uk/library/infantry-histories/library/The-Devonshire-Regiment-1914-1918/files/assets/basic-html/page101.html>

References:

Free Birth Marriage & Death records

The Devonshire Regiment 1914-1918

Refs via subscription sites:

Census records

Newspaper extracts via National Newspaper Archive

Forces War Records

WW1 Service Medal Rolls

UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919

UK, Register of Soldiers' Effects 1901-1929

Philcymro family tree (Ancestry.co.uk)

Oliver family records

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