

Stanley James CROOK

Born, Dawlish Q1 1895 Died, 24 August 1915, Maricourt, France, aged 20
Lance Corporal 9636, 1st Battalion, the Devonshire Regiment

Stanley James Crook was the oldest son of James Henry Crook (1874-1923) and Alma Leah Saunders.

His father was shown as a Mason (1901) and a Bricklayer (1911), possibly indicating changes in methods of construction at that time. They had five children Stanley (1895-1915), Clarence (1896-1915), Alice May (1898-), John (1903-), and James (1904-).

Alma Crook died in Q3 1908 (*free BMD*).

James Henry Crook married again to Louisa Hamilton and is shown living at Golden Terrace by the 1911 census, with one more child, Edith Louisa (1909-1993).

Stanley went to Dawlish Boys' School and is recorded on their Roll of Honour. He became a bricklayer's labourer, probably working with his father, and in 1911, at age 16, he was living with his grand parents William and Elizabeth Crook at 8 Badlake Hill. His attachment to his grand parents is more marked by the fact that his War Gratuity was paid to them, rather than to his father. William was a bricklayer in 1891, when they lived in Commercial Road.

The Devon Heritage site also mentions that "*9636 Lance Corporal Stanley James Crook of the 1st Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment was the grandson of William and Elizabeth Crook of Badlake Hill, Dawlish.*"

At some point before the outbreak of war **Stanley** enlisted with the Devonshire Regiment and was promoted to Lance Corporal by the time of his death at age 20.

Stanley was the older brother of Clarence Henry Crook (*died 17 March 1915, see separate casualty data sheet*).

His uncle, James' brother, was Edmund Charles Crook (1884 – 1918) (*see separate casualty data sheet*).

Another uncle, Leonard C Crook (born 1889) was reported in the Western Times of 4 February, 1915, to have enlisted in the Wessex Territorial Engineers.

The 1st Battalion, Devonshire Regiment had been based in Jersey as part of the Channel Islands' garrison at the outbreak of war and were soon transported to Le Havre to become a lines-of-communication battalion, before joining the 3rd Division fighting on the Aisne to form part of the initial defence of France and Belgium.

Stanley Crook is first mentioned in the *Dawlish Gazette* in an article of Saturday 5th September, 1914.

"Pte. Stanley Crook, of the 1st Devons, son of Mr. James Crook, a member of the Dawlish Town Band, was in the memorable fighting on the French frontier last week. In a letter to his grand-father, Mr. W. Crook, he gives the information that he was wounded, but lightly passes over his hurts (doesn't even say what they are) and seems chiefly anxious to get back to the fore-front again.

In the course of his letter he writes:

“Just a few lines to let you know that I am wounded and on my way to a place for treatment, where I don’t know. My wound is not serious now, it’s going on fine. The sooner it’s well the better, as I want to get back to the front again. I can tell you we had a warm time in the firing line. The bullets and shells were flying past us like the wind. It’s a wonder any of us poor devils are alive. The Germans came out to attack us in great masses. The fighting lasted about 40 minutes and it was a terrible affair, as fast as we shot them down others came up and took their places. Very few of our fellows killed as far as I know, but a large number were wounded, D company suffered most and our Officer told us there were only about 10 uninjured out of the whole company.

The Germans even robbed our wounded of their khaki and wore it themselves, thinking we might not recognise them in it. A German Officer pinched some of my clothes and I had to go 100 miles before I had another rig out. What you have read in the papers this week about the fighting is quite true. I can’t remember much of it as all we thought about was getting hold of the Germans. All our boys fought like Britons and people at home ought to know what they went through for their countries sake. My rifle and bayonet are hungry waiting for a little more work. Roll on, so that I can go back to the front again.”

A second item in the same newspaper two weeks later is headed,

“A DAWLISH WOUNDED SOLDIER.
THE FIRST HOME.
HIS EXPERIENCE AT MONS.
GERMAN ATROCITY.”

We had a talk with Private Stanley J Crook, of the Devons, the smart young Dawlish Soldier who was wounded in the terrible fighting at the Battle of Mons. He is convalescent and arriving home on Thursday for a fortnight’s leave. Regarding his share in the fighting, he said that two days after reaching Havre they were ordered to draw four days emergency rations and proceeded to the front. He was with a section put to guard the communications about 15 miles from Namur. So quickly however did the Germans come on that this section soon found themselves behind the main British column and had to make a dash to the trenches. They got shelter with a Middlesex Regiment. Here they were under heavy artillery fire and continual attacks from the German Infantry for two days and a night. German aeroplanes marked the position of the trenches and gave their artillery the range.

Crook came scathless out of this ordeal, but that he had a close shave three shot holes in his cap bear quite elegant testimony. The Germans, he said, were at least five to one. He saw their artillery make great gaps in them, but as fast as they were made they filled up with others.

“It was enough to mesmerise anybody to see it,” he remarked. “Shoot!” he said, in reply to a question, “their Infantry couldn’t knock the place they were born in, leave alone us.”

As the French reinforcements failed to come up, at length the order was given to retire. It was then that Crook got hurt. A nearly spent bullet struck the right side of his ankle. He felt a kind of pin-prick at first. He then took off his boot and bandaged

up his wound. He struggled on, but became numbed all up one side and eventually fainted away for a time.

When he came to he found that the Germans had robbed him of his shirt and trousers. Putting on the overcoat of a dead soldier of the Lancashire Regiment he crawled on and came to a "First Aid" party of four. These had had their hands cut off by the Germans (of this Crook was positive) who did this and then told them to pick up the wounded. These men had the Red Cross badge on their sleeves. He soon came across another sound Red Cross section, who carried him back for medical attention. He was taken to Paris, thence to Havre and home to England."

Stanley James Crook died in action one year later. The Devonshire regiment moved to lines on the Somme near Carnoy. Steps had to be taken to improve trench profiles against rifle fire and a mining war was in progress. Royal Engineers dug tunnels towards enemy lines and set large mine charges, and infantry removed the spoil in heavy bags to the rear. It is not known how he died, but his grave was marked as 'Killed in Action' and the Register of Soldiers' Effects records that it was at Maricourt.

The Commonwealth War Graves entry reads:

Crook S J, L/Cpl 9636 died 24/8/15 of the Devonshire Regiment, 1st Battalion.

Burial at CERISY – GAILLY Military Cemetery, grave ref 11.M.12

The cemetery is located near the Somme and about 10km south west of Albert.

Cerisy-Gailly Military Cemetery (originally called the New French Military Cemetery) was begun in February 1917 and the cemetery was increased after the Armistice when graves were brought in from the battlefields of the Somme and the following small cemeteries:-

MARICOURT MILITARY CEMETERY was at the South-East corner of the village, on the road to Clery. It was begun by French troops in December, 1914, and was known to the French by the name of Ferme Caudron. It was taken over by British troops in August, 1915, and used until July, 1916. It contained the graves of 887 French soldiers, 260 from the United Kingdom and six German.

Stanley James Crook is shown in the Devon Roll of Honour and on Dawlish War memorial as:

CROOK S.J. L/CORPL DEVON REGT

He is listed on Dawlish Boys' School Roll of Honour (now at Dawlish Community College)

References:

Free Birth Marriage Death records

Newspaper accounts in the Dawlish Gazette held by Dawlish Museum.

'West Country Regiments on the Somme' by Tim Saunders

Refs via subscription sites:

Census records

UK Register of Soldiers' Effects 1901-1929