

Harry CRUSE

Born Cockwood, 1889

Died France, 20 October 1918, aged 29

Corporal Service no. 20705

Devonshire Regiment, 1st Battalion

Were it not for the outbreak of war **Harry Cruse** may well have become a shopkeeper. His grandfather, Robert Cruse, was born in Kenton on 7 January 1817 to Samuel and Mary Cruse. They appear in the 1861 census at Cockwood Hamlet:

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|------|------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Robert Cruse | head | 44 | (1817-1898) | blacksmith | born Kenton |
| Sarah | " | wife | 45 | (1816- 1897) | Dowland |
| Grace Ann Cross | " | dau | 14 | (1847-1927) | Dawlish |
| John | " | son | 14 | (1847-1924) | Dawlish |

Robert Cruse' death at the age of 81 was registered in Newton Abbot district in 1898, (Jan- Mar, vol 5b, p 89). His wife Sarah died in 1897, aged 82 (GRO ref 1897, July-Sept, N.A. vol 5b, p70).

By 1881 John Cruse had married Ellen Turner (GRO ref 1875, July-Sept, N.A., vol 5b, p 267) and they were living in a nearby cottage at Cockwood to his father and sister, Grace, who was a seamstress. John was also a Master Blacksmith by this time, aged 37.

Ellen shows her birth place on the census form as Witheridge and there is a record of her birth in 1847 (GRO ref, 1847, Jan-Mar, South Molton, vol 10, p 216).

John and Ellen Cruse had two children by 1891:

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|-------------|----------------|--------------------|--------|---|
| Annie S Cruse, | dau, | 9 | (1882-1979) | Cofton | " |
| Harry Cruse, | son, | 1 ¾ yrs | (1889-1918) | | |

Harry's birth was registered in Newton Abbot district in 1889, July- Sept, vol 5b, p 108.

Annie was not listed with the family in 1901, but the 1911 census shows that the only two children were still living at that time, and both had left home. There is a death record for Ellen Cruse, aged 67, in 1914 (GRO ref 1914, Apr-June, N.A., vol 5b, p 128).

John Cruse died in 1924 aged 79 (GRO ref 1924, Exeter, vol 5b,p 74). He had moved from Starcross and the CWGC site shows that he had lived at Friars Walk, Exeter.

Harry Cruse was working as a grocer's shop assistant in 1911, aged 21, and boarding with the Heath family at 9 Belgrave Terrace, Teignmouth. He was to join the Devonshire Regiment, 1st Battalion, but probably not until 1916 as his medal roll card does not award him the 1915 Star.

The 1st Devons were sent to Jersey in 1911 and recalled at the outbreak of War. They left barracks on 21st August 1914 and landed at Le Havre.

In September, during their first spell in the line, they suffered 100 casualties from shelling. In October on the La Basse Canal they supported the badly mauled 1st Dorsets and helped capture Givenchy Ridge. The Devons performed well during a bitter three-week battle but lost two thirds of their officers and a third of their men. From November they occupied Messines Ridge in rain and sleet, often knee- or waist-deep in mud and icy water.

On 21st April 1915 they occupied Hill 60, which had been captured on 17th April. Counter-attacks and heavy shelling cost them more than 200 casualties.

Dawlish World War One Project

On 31st July 1915 they moved to the Somme. When the offensive began on 1st July 1916 the Devons were at Arras but returned to the Somme, to consolidate the line around Longueval. Shellfire and German counter-attacks cost them 265 casualties. In September they made two very successful advances near Guillemont at a cost of 376 casualties.

In the Battle of Arras, in April and May 1917, their losses in four attacks nearly wiped out the Battalion. Near Passchendaele in early October they attacked Polderhoek and suffered 327 casualties. A month later, supporting another attack at Polderhoek, a single company lost another 100 killed and wounded.

In November 1917 the Devons were sent to Northern Italy, where the Italians had been routed at Caporetto. Here they held the line near Vicenza and served on the Piave front before the German onslaught in France in March 1918 caused their return to the Somme.

In mid-April 1918 the 1st Devons held a salient near Nieppe, successfully defending their positions against repeated German counter-attacks. They remained around Nieppe until late July. In August the German army began to fall back and the Devons took part in the rapid Allied advances that characterised the rest of the war. Between 21st and 31st August they attacked and captured German positions, repulsing some fierce counter-attacks. During one German attack on 22nd August Lance-Corporal George Onions and Private Henry Eades alone took 200 German prisoners. Onions received the Regiment's second Victoria Cross of the War and Eades the Distinguished Conduct Medal. But those ten days cost the Devons 263 casualties.

In September and October they suffered fewer casualties in successful attacks near Beauchamp and Ovillers, where despite a gas attack and terrible weather, they were the first battalion in their division to reach their final objective.

The War Diary shows that on 19 October 'the Battalion moved forward and assembled east of river Selle by 23.30 hrs in readiness for the attack next morning.'

'20th Oct. At 02.00 hrs the 13th Brigade attacked and captured part of the railway line running from SOLESMEs to LE CATEAU. At zero plus 34 minutes the 95th Brigade passed through the 13th Brigade with the intention of capturing the Green Line (the 1st objective) 1000yds east of the railway. The Green Line was captured by 04.00hrs. The Battalion consolidated in depth and remained in this position according to orders for 3 hours. The 42nd Division was attacking on our left and 1st Bn. E Surrey Regt on our right. At zero plus 300 minutes the support Companies passed through the Green Line and continued the assault on the Brown Line (Final Objective) which was situated on the crest just west of SOLESMEs – OVILLERS Road. Owing to heavy artillery and machine gun fire from front and flanks and heavy condition of ground this objective was not reached by all and advanced elements had to withdraw.'

'Eventually the Battalion withdrew to a line just east of the Green Line and took up position by about 12.00 hrs. About 100 prisoners and machine guns were captured during these operations. Orders were received that the Corps would again attack the Brown Line at 16.00 hrs. At this hour Nos 4 and 3 Companies advanced under a creeping barrage and captured the Brown Line. Patrols were pushed forward to the SOLESMEs – OVILLERS Road which was found to be held by the enemy. During these latter operations at least 100 prisoners and numerous machine guns were captured by the Battalion.'

Dawlish World War One Project

One officer was killed and three wounded. 22 other ranks were killed, 7 were missing and 55 were wounded. **Corporal Harry Cruse** was among those killed that day.

On following days the Battalion held their position and remained near Bethencourt.

The 1st Devons' last action was in the final week of the war beyond the Sambre Canal, when they advanced under heavy shell and machine gun fire, losing 19 killed and more than 60 wounded. Except for their five months in Italy, the 1st Devons served continuously in France from August 1914 until November 1918 and earned them 26 battle honours. The war had cost the Battalion – whose total strength at any one time should have been 800 men – more than 1,150 killed and three times that number wounded.

Harry Cruse is inscribed on the Cofton War Memorial by St Mary's Church.

His death was listed in the personal column of the *Western Times* for 1 November 1918.

CRUSE – Corpl H Cruse – Devons, only son of John Cruse, 225 Friars Walk, Exeter, and late of Starcross, killed in action, in France, on October 20th, aged 29 years.

He was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

The death grant was paid in part to his sister Annie - £5. 0s. 0d. , in part to a co-legatee Audrey Crump - £2. 0s. 0d., and to his father John - £2. 12s. 5d. His War Gratuity was paid entirely to his father, John, on 27/9/19 - £15. 0s. 0d.

Commonwealth War Graves entry:

Corporal CRUSE, HARRY Service Number 20705

Died 20/10/1918 Aged 29

1st Bn. Devonshire Regiment

Bethencourt Communal Cemetery, B.2. Northern France.

Son of John and Ellen Cruse, of 22c Friars Walk, Exeter. Native of Cofton, Starcross, Devon.

Last known address: 9 Belgrave Terrace, Teignmouth

Next of kin: father, John Cruse

References:

Free BMD refs

The Long, Long Trail for Battalion history

Refs via subscription website:

Census data

Uk, Soldiers died in the Great War

UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects

British Army WW1 Medal Rolls Index Cards

Devonshire Regiment War Diary

Jarrow family tree – Ancestry.co.uk

National Newspaper Archive