

Lance Corporal Harry Reuben William Knight

Regimental Number: 13441

13th Battalion, Middlesex Regiment

born: 1892 - died: 20 May 1918

Harry Reuben William Knight came from a military family. He was one of five sons, four of whom are known to have served in the military – all enlisting well before World War I. They were career soldiers.

Harry was one of seven children of Richard Thomas Knight and his wife, Alice Maud Mary of Kent.¹ They had two other children who died prior to 1911.² Harry was born in Belvedere, Kent in the summer of 1892³ and baptised in the Church of England at All Saint's, Belvedere on 25 September of that year.⁴

In 1901, the whole family was living at 1 Waverley Terraces, 1 Paroma Road, Erith, Kent – just on the outskirts of London. Richard was a wood machinist.⁵ By 1911, only the two youngest children – both daughters – were at home with their parents. Richard was then a labourer at the Crossness Sewage Works.⁶ None of the sons were at home – four had already enlisted in the army.

Harry's eldest brother, **Albert George Victor** (probably born in 1887 or 1888), enlisted in 1908 in the Royal Tank Corps (Regimental number 531579), having previously serviced in the Hussars.⁷ He was posted in India from September 1909 to October 1914. He then served on the British Expeditionary Force to January 1919, when he was discharged. After the war, he re-enlisted in March 1921 in Section D Reserve, Royal Corps of Signals.

The second son, **Richard Ivor Stanhope** (born 1888),⁸ served in Royal Sussex Regiment, Special Reserve and R.A.M.C. in the Special Reserve before enlisting in the regular army.⁹ He enlisted in the Royal Sussex Regiment in Chichester in February 1910. He transferred to the Middlesex Regiment in April 1910 and became a Lance Corporal in January 1913. He was killed in action on 24 February 1915 on the Western Front in Europe. In April 1920, his body was moved to the Wytschaete Cemetery, south of Ypres, Belgium, which includes graves brought in from isolated positions surrounding Wytschaete and the small battlefield cemeteries.

The third son, **Richard Thomas** (born 1889),¹⁰ served initially with the Royal Army Medical Corps and then joined the Army Reserve in June 1908.¹¹ In October of the same year he joined the regular army, enlisting in the Middlesex Regiment (Regimental number 5225). He transferred to the 8th Hussars in March 1909 and served in India from October 1909 until probably mid-1914. In May 1915, he was appointed Lance Corporal. He rejoined the Middlesex Regiment, transferring to the 13th Battalion in September 1916, at which time he was promoted to Corporal. He became a Lance Sergeant in November 1916. Then in June 1918, he was promoted to Sergeant. At the end of his career he was an instructor. After twelve years in the military, he was discharged in October 1920.

There is no evidence that the fourth son, **Edwin Reginald** (born 1891), served in the military.

Harry Rueben William, the fifth son, was a butcher's assistant when he enlisted.¹² He, like his brothers, was a slight man. At the age of 18 years and 2 months, he was 5' 2½" and weighed 107 pounds.¹³ He is described as having a fresh complexion, brown eyes and dark brown hair and being physically fit. His only distinctive mark was a scar on the back of his left thumb.

On 10 October 1910, he enlisted as a Private in the Royal West Kent Regiment (No. 8120) at Woolwich, Kent. He had received two positive recommendations from former employers: a meat carrier for whom he worked as a stable boy for 4 weeks and a gun manufacturer for whom he had worked for six months as a machinist.

During his time in the Royal West Kent Regiment he was awarded his 3rd Class Certificate of Education from the Army Council. A third-class certificate was required for promotion to the rank of corporal. Requirements included being about to read aloud and write from dictation passages from an easy narrative, and to work examples in the four compound rules of arithmetic and the reduction of money.¹⁴

On 3 March 1911, he joined regular army, enlisting as a Private in the 4th Middlesex (L/13441) at Aldershot. The recommendation for his enlistment described him as "A nice looking recruit, where older brother is in the Middlesex Regt." He wanted to join the Middlesex Regiment because his brother was in that Regiment. This was confirmed by the recruitment authorities. It was probably Richard Ivor.

During his time in Middlesex Regiment, Harry served long periods at home and overseas. He was in Britain on home duty until October 1912 when he was sent to the East Indies with the 6th Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment, where he served until November 1914. While in the East Indies, he had several disciplinary actions for shirking work in the barrack room, having a dirty rifle, being dirty and unshaven on parade, disobedience of an order, and being late. Punishment was never more than two to five days confinement to barracks, with some loss of pay. Before leaving the East Indies he received training in "ambulance and sanitation" in Cawnpore, in what is now India.

He returned to Britain on home duty until January 1915 when he left for a short two-month stint with the British Expeditionary Force on the Western Front in Europe, leaving for France on 18 January 1915.¹⁵ He returned to Britain on home duty again until September 1916. In February 1915 he was admitted to hospital in London for fourteen days with pain in his knees and ankles. His knee was operated on in May 1915 in Fort Pitt, Chatham and then he convalesced at the Howard de Walden Convalescent Home in Maidstone, Kent. He probably returned to the base at Gillingham, Kent. In August and October he had three more disciplinary actions, including "oversleeping his pass from Tattoo till Reveille."

For some of the time in Britain Harry was posted to J. Shaw, Son and Greenhalgh Ltd., manufacturers of high pressure boiler mountings, valves and steam specialties, working on war munitions. In August 1916, the Ministry of Munitions reported that it needed men for other munitions work and his employer released him, specifying that he was being released only because of this need and that his "work and behaviour have been perfectly satisfactory."

In September 1916 he was sent to France and served with the 13th Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment until his death in May 1918. In December 1917 he was appointed Lance Corporal, although was not paid as a Lance Corporal until January 1918. He was initially wounded in action on 28 March 1918, receiving a spine concussion, for which he appears to have been treated in Rouen, France. Then, on 20 May 1918, he received fatal wounds. He had shrapnel wounds to his legs and they had been blown off.¹⁶ He died the same day at the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Stations and was buried in Pernes British Military Cemetery (Plot 1, Row F, Grave 6) under the care of the chaplain, J. K. Tibbits.

On 20 May, 370 soldiers were admitted to the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station – by far the highest number of admissions in any one day that month.¹⁷ This brought the total number of patients to 522. In the whole month of May, there were 115 deaths at this CCCS – more than in any of the other three and a half months that the 1st CCCS was in Pernes. The Pernes British Military Cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when the 1st and 4th Canadian Casualty Clearing Stations came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.¹⁸

The chaplain informed his wife, Florrie, who was living in Moll View, Netherton, near Hull, of his death.¹⁹ He had married Florrie Brown in the parish church in Darton, Yorkshire on 1 December 1917.²⁰ She also received the monies owing to him after his death.²¹

His total service in the regular army was 7 years and 79 days.²² His wife received a separation allowance, an allotment of pay and a pension. His property, returned to his wife in September 1918, included letters, photos, cards, wallet, photo case, gold ring, badges, watch and chain, knife, mirror, religious book, cigarette case, specs and notebook. These were the last possessions of a career soldier.

Harry received 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).²³

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¹ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 November 2014), entry for Harry R. Knight, Registration district: Dartford, Sub-registration district: Bexley, ED, institution, or vessel: 39, Piece: 701, Folio: 80, Page Number: 47, Household schedule number: 289

² "1911 England, Wales & Scotland Census," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 30 November 2014), entry for Richard Knight, District: Dartford, County; Registration district number: 43, Subdistrict: Erith, Subdistrict number: 2, Enumeration district: 16, Piece number 3756, Schedule number: 27

³ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 November 2014), entry for Harry Reuben W. Knight, Registration district: Dartford, County: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 4355

⁴ "Thames & Medway Baptisms," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 26 November 2014), entry for Harry Reuben Wm Knight, All Saints Belvedere 1861-1900 baptisms

⁵ "1901 England Census," entry for Harry R. Knight,

⁶ "1911 England, Wales & Scotland Census," entry for Richard Knight,

⁷ "Royal Tank Corps Enlistment Records, 1919-1934," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 28 November 2014), entry for Albert George Victor Knight

⁸ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 30 November 2014), entry for Richard Ivor S. Knight, Registration district: Woolwich, Inferred county: London, Volume: 1d, Page: 1195

⁹ "British Army Service Records 1914-1920," *findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 28 November 2014), entry for Richard Ivor Stanhope Knight, Series: WO 363

¹⁰ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 30 November 2014), entry for Richard Thomas Knight, Registration district: Woolwich, Inferred county: London, Volume: 1d, Page: 1216

¹¹ "British Army Service Records 1914-1920," *findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 28 November 2014), entry for Richard Thomas Knight, Series: WO 364

¹² Unless otherwise noted, all the information on his military career comes from "British Army WWI Service Records, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 16 November 2014), entry for Harry Reuben Knight, WO 363

¹³ His brothers Richard Ivor and Richard Thomas were also between 5' 3" and 5' 5" and weighed about 100 pounds.

¹⁴ "Certificates of Education," <http://www.reubique.com/educatn.htm>: accessed 29 November 2014. Quoting from SKELLEY, A.R. *The Victorian Army At Home: The Recruitment and Terms and Conditions of the British Regular, 1859-1899*. Mc Gill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1977, p. 94, 95, and 311.

¹⁵ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 November 2014), entry for Harry Reuben Knight

¹⁶ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Library and Archives Canada, (records accessed 2013 & 2014), Record Group 9, series IIC10, volume 4556, Record number 502

¹⁷ "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: accessed 15 December 2014)

¹⁸ "Pernes British Military Cemetery" *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/11600/PERNES%20BRITISH%20CEMETERY>: accessed 13 January 2015)

¹⁹ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Record number 502

²⁰ "West Yorkshire, England, Marriages and Banns, 1813-1935," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 November 2014), entry for Harry Reuben William Knight

²¹ "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 19 January 2015), entry for Harry Reuben Knight

²² "British Army WWI Service Records, 1914-1920," entry for Harry Reuben Knight

²³ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," entry for Harry Reuben Knight