

2nd Corporal John Simpson DCM®

Regimental number: 129722

"G" Special Company, Royal Engineers

born: 1895 – died: 30 April 1918

2nd Corporal John Simpson was born in 1895¹ in Warwick Bridge, Cumberland, the son of Joseph Simpson and the former Jane Thompson.² Joseph, who was born in Warwick Bridge in about 1862 and Jane, born in Blanchland, Cumberland, two years later, were married near Carlisle, Cumberland, in 1883.³ They had 12 children—5 of whom died before 1911.⁴ They were probably:

- Rebecca (born in 1884),⁵
- Isaac (born in 1886),⁶
- Thomas Edward (born on 1 April 1889),⁷
- Henry (born in 1889),⁸
- Joseph (born in 1893, but died in 1896),⁹
- John,
- William (born in 1896),¹⁰
- Joseph (born in 1898, but died the same year),¹¹
- James Harrison (born in 1899 and died within a few months),¹²
- Charles (born in 1900, but died the same year),¹³
- George Ernest (born in 1903 and died soon after)¹⁴ and
- Florence (Florrie) (born in 27 December 1905).¹⁵

In 1891, the family was living in Low Buildings, where John's father Joseph was a carter and his mother was a woolen weaver.¹⁶ Three of their children were living with them; Thomas was probably with his grandparents, John and Margaret Simpson, at Marks Court, Port Road, Caldewgate in Carlisle.¹⁷ Ten years later, the family was living in Allenwood Cottages, described as being workmen's cottages. Joseph was now working as a carter for a cooperative society. With six children at home, Jane was no longer working outside the home.¹⁸ It was a difficult period for her—between 1893 and 1903, she lost five children in infancy.

By 1911, the family was living at Burn Riggs, Heads Nook, just a couple of miles from Warwick Bridge. Joseph was now a farm labourer.¹⁹ John was not living at home—it is not known where he was at the time of the census. Three of John's brothers were also not living at home but, with the exception of Thomas, who was possibly a servant working on a farm at The Flatt, How Mill, Carlisle,²⁰ the whereabouts of the brothers is not known.

When John enlisted in the British Expeditionary Force on 21 March 1916 in Codford, Wiltshire, he was a carpenter and living in Burns Rigg.²¹ He had previously served with the 3/7th Battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers. He appears to have joined the Special Companies of the Royal Engineers at the beginning of his service. The Special Companies were created during World War I to develop Britain's response to German gas attacks.²²

It is not clear when John first went to France, but he was gassed in June 1916 and was sent back to England in July 1916. He rejoined his unit in France in October 1916 and was appointed a lance corporal on 18 April 1917 and then a 2nd corporal on 8 May of the same year.

John was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his actions on the night of 6/7 May 1917, when he saved men and tended to the wounded after an enemy shell exploded bombs he was preparing for a battery of projectors.²³

In August 1917, John sprained his left ankle while returning from special operations at outposts. The disability it caused was described as “trivial.” Before Christmas 1917, he was given a week’s leave to the UK. He appears to have been hospitalized again in December 1917 for venereal disease, but returned to his unit in January 1918.

129722 Pnr. J. Simpson, R.E.

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He was assisting in preparing a large battery of projectors. An enemy shell hit one of the wagons containing the bombs and detonated some of them, which caused severe casualties. He removed the unhurt men to cover, and under a very heavy bombardment proceeded to dress the wounded and help carry them away.

John Simpson’s DCM citation

Source: *The London Gazette*

John’s next injuries were more serious. He was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 29 April 1918, with gunshot wounds to his right arm and shoulder, both legs and his head and face. He died the next day and was buried that day in Pernes Military Cemetery (Plot 2, Row A, Grave 21) with the Canadian chaplain G. C. d’Easum presiding.

Pernes British Cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when No. 1 and No. 4 CCCSs came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.²⁴ John was one of 110 soldiers admitted on 29 April 1918 and one of 46 soldiers to die at the station that month.²⁵

The chaplain sent a letter to his sister Florrie at Burn Riggs to notify her of her brother’s death²⁶ and she requested the following inscription for his gravestone:

HE DIED A HERO
FOR HIS COUNTRY²⁷

Although his parents were still alive and living at Edmond Castle Lodge, Hayton, How Mill, his sister Florrie received the monies owing to him from the army upon his death²⁸ and his personal effects, which included letters, photos and photo case, a purse, cards and a badge.

In addition to receiving the DCM, John was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).²⁹

Little was discovered about John’s siblings after the war. His sister Rebecca may have had a daughter in 1913—Sarah Jane.³⁰ In 1914, she married Walter Jolly³¹ and they had at least three more children—Zillah, born in 1915,³² Joseph Henry, born in 1917,³³ and Walter, born in 1924.³⁴ Rebecca probably died in 1933.³⁵

John’s brother Isaac also served in the Great War.³⁶ Before the war, he was a farm labourer, working for Mr. Armstrong in Broadwath, just over a mile from Warwick Bridge. He enlisted (regimental number: 19443) in Carlisle in March 1915 and went to France with the 11th (S) Battalion of the Border Regiment (Lonsdale) in November 1915. On 15 June 1918, Isaac was discharged as no longer being physically fit for war service. At discharge he was described as having a very good character and being “reliable and well conducted.”

Before the war, Isaac had fathered a son, Reginald, born to Isabelle Jane McClelland on 20 January 1913.³⁷ During his service, some of his pay was stopped to cover his child payments of 4/- a week. The payments went to Isabella's mother, Mary Jane McClelland, who appears to have been given guardianship of the child. She lived at Holly Tree Cottage, Cumwhinton, near Carlisle. A couple of years later, Isabella married Henry Borthwick.³⁸

It is not known if John's brother Thomas served in the war. He may have married Frances Sanders in Carlisle in 1912³⁹ and, if so, in 1939, he and Frances were living at 2 Paper Mill Cottages in Jarrow, Durham.⁴⁰ He was a grave digger.

Florence married Willie Quean in Brampton, Cumberland in 1931.⁴¹ At the outbreak of the Second World War, she and Willie were living at Brampton in Cumberland.⁴²

Nothing is known about his other surviving brothers Henry and William. John's father and mother may have died in 1921⁴³ and 1928⁴⁴ respectively.

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¹ "GRO online index-birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 December 2019), entry for Simpson, John, Registration district: Carlisle, Volume 10B, Page 518

² "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 December 2019), entry for John Simpson, Registration district: Carlisle, Sub-registration district: Wetheral, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 3, Piece: 4863, Folio: 40, Page: 14, Household schedule number: 89

³ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 December 2019), entry for Joseph Simpson, Registration district: Carlisle, Inferred county: Cumberland, Volume: 10b, Page: 661

⁴ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 December 2019), entry for Joseph Simpson, Registration district: Carlisle, Registration district number: 574, Sub-registration district: Wetheral, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 3, Piece: 31299

⁵ "GRO online index-birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 December 2019), entry for Simpson, Rebecca, Registration district: Carlisle, Volume 10B, Page 479

⁶ "GRO online index-birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 December 2019), entry for Simpson, Isaac, Registration district: Carlisle, Volume 10B, Page 479

⁷ "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 December 2019), entry for Thomas Simpson, Schedule number: 272, Sub-schedule number: 1, Enumeration district: FFVK, Registration district: 556A-1

⁸ "GRO online index-birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 December 2019), entry for Simpson, Henry, Registration district: Carlisle, Volume 10B, Page 479

⁹ "GRO online index-birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 December 2019) entry for Simpson, Joseph, Registration district: Carlisle, Volume 10B, Page 485; "GRO online index-death," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 December 2019), entry for Simpson, Joseph, Volume 10B, Page 281

¹⁰ "GRO online index-birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 December 2019), entry for Simpson, William, Registration district: Carlisle, Volume 10B, Page 493

¹¹ "GRO online index-birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 December 2019), entry for Simpson, Joseph, Registration district: Carlisle, Volume 10B, Page 511; "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 21 January 2019), entry for Joseph Simpson, Registration district: Carlisle, Inferred county: Cumberland, Volume: 10b, Page: 361

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- ¹² "GRO online index-birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 December 2019), entry for Simpson, James Harrison, Registration district: Carlisle, Volume 10B, Page 561; "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 9 December 2019), entry for James Harrison Simpson, Registration district: Carlisle, Inferred county: Cumberland, Volume: 10b, Page: 341
- ¹³ "GRO online index-birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 December 2019), entry for Simpson, Charles, Registration district: Carlisle, Volume 10B, Page 553; "GRO online index-death," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 10 November 2019), entry for Simpson, Charles, Volume 10B, Page 335
- ¹⁴ "GRO online index-birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 December 2019), entry for Simpson, Ernest George, Registration district: Carlisle, Volume 10B, Page 588; "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 9 December 2019), entry for Ernest George Simpson, Registration district: Carlisle, Inferred county: Cumberland, Volume: 10b, Page: 300
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- ¹⁶ "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 December 2019), entry for Joseph Simpson, Sub-registration district: Wetheral, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 3, Piece: 4284, Folio: 32
- ¹⁷ "1891 England, Wales & Scotland Census," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 11 December 2019), entry for Thomas Simpson, Registration district: Carlisle, Archive reference: RG12; Piece number: 4290, Folio: 89, Page: 13
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- ²⁰ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 December 2019), entry for Thomas Simpson, Registration district: Brampton, Registration district number: 572, Sub-registration district: Hayton, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 6, Piece: 31258
- ²¹ "British Army WWI Service Records, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 December 2019), entry for John Simpson. Unless otherwise specified, all information about John's military career comes from this source.
- ²² "The Special Companies RE," *The Long, Long Trail* (<http://www.1914-1918.net/specialcoyre.htm>: accessed 26 November 2014)
- ²³ *The London Gazette* (<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/>: 10 December 2019), entry for J. Simpson, Publication date: 15 June 1917, Supplement: 30135, Page: 6012
- ²⁴ "Pernes British Military Cemetery," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/>: accessed 13 January 2015)
- ²⁵ "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* (http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText_1=2005082&Operator_1=AND&SearchIn_2=&SearchInText_2=&Operator_2=AND&SearchIn_3=&SearchInText_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10: accessed 28 March 2018)
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- ³⁰ "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 11 December 2019), entry for Simpson, Sarah Jane, Registration district: Carlisle, Volume 10B, Page 1087
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- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ "England & Wales Marriages 1837–2005," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 12 December 2019), entry for Isabella J. McClelland, District: Carlisle, County: Cumberland, Volume: 10B, Page: 1207
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