



Walter Parker

17542 – 19th Battery Royal Field Artillery
5635 – 2nd Battery Royal Field Artillery
17542 – 107th Battery, Royal Field Artillery
17542 – 174th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery

Walter was born on 19 May 1882 at 48 Northampton Street, Cambridge, England. He was the third of four children born to Alfred Parker and Eliza Jane (née Lee). The 1891 Census shows Walter, age 9, living at 38 New Street, Cambridge with his parents Alfred and Eliza and his siblings, Alice Maud (age 10) and Edith May (age 4). Walter's brother Frank Alfred was at this time living at Desford Industrial School after being sentenced to serve four years at this 'Boys under order of detention' facility for truancy.

It appears that Walter's military service records were amongst those destroyed when the War Office was bombed during the Second World War as they cannot be found in the online databases where these records are stored at www.ancestry.co.uk and www.findmypast.co.uk.

Nevertheless, it has been possible to piece together this summary of Walter's service in the military based on the following records, which are listed in date order:

- A roll of Individuals entitled to the 'Queens South Africa Medal and clasps' dated 7 March 1903. This record shows Walter at the rank of 'Gunner' with the 19th Battery of the Royal Field Artillery. It also indicates Walter served in the Cape Colony and the Orange Free State districts.
- A nomination list of men transferred (or re-transferred after mobilization) to 1st Class Army Reserves dated 13 October 1904, which provides Walter's regimental service number as 17542, his rank as 'Gunner' and his location as 19th Battery, Royal Field Artillery.
- A marriage certificate, which indicates that Walter married Susan Catherine Nepgen at the Church of St Barnabas in Middelburg, Cape Colony, South Africa on 2 July 1904. The marriage certificate states Walter is a 'Gunner' with the 19th Battery, Royal Field Artillery. Susan's nationality is described on the marriage certificate as being 'Cape Dutch'.¹
- A birth certificate for Walter and Susan's son (Walter Alfred) born on 10 October 1904 at Middleburg in Cape Colony. Walter (junior)'s birth certificate provides Walter's regimental service number as 17542, his rank as 'Gunner' and his location as 19th Battery, Royal Field Artillery.
- A birth certificate for Walter and Susan's daughter (Alice Maud Valentine) born on 14 February 1906 at Middleburg in Cape Colony. Alice's birth certificate was issued by the 'Royal Horse and Royal Field Artillery Depot' and provides Walter's regimental service number as 17542 and his rank as 'Gunner'.
- A birth certificate for Walter and Susan's son (Howarth George) born 22 February 1910 in Kirkee, India. Howarth's birth was registered by 'Commander 2nd Battery, Royal Field Artillery' and provides Walter's regimental service number as 5635 and his rank as 'Gunner'.
- A baptism record for Walter and Susan's son (George Howard – baptised Howarth George) - baptised on 5 March 1910 at Kirkee in Bombay, India.

¹ Cape Dutch are people of the Western Cape of South Africa who are descended primarily from Dutch, Flemish, French, German and other European immigrants along with a percentage of their Asian and African slaves, who, from the 17th century into the 19th century, remained more or less loyal subjects of European (first Dutch, later British) powers.

- The 1911 census (undertaken on 2 April 1911) shows Walter living at Shorncliffe Camp, Sandgate, Kent, England. It states his rank as 'Gunner' with the Royal Field Artillery.
- A birth certificate for Walter and Susan's son (Frank Albert) born on 19 March 1912 at the Military Camp Hospital in Bulford, [Wiltshire], England – Frank's birth certificate provides Walter's rank as 'Bombardier' with the 107th Battery, Royal Field Artillery.
- A birth certificate for Walter and Susan's daughter (Gertrude Florence May) born on 4 May 1913 at the Military Camp Hospital in Bulford, [Wiltshire], England – Gertrude's birth certificate provides Walter's rank as 'Bombardier' with the 107th Battery, Royal Field Artillery.
- A birth certificate for Walter and Susan's son (Ernest Victor) born on 19 August 1915 – Ernest's birth certificate provides Walter's rank as 'Sergeant' in the Royal Field Artillery. His address is stated as 55 St James Place, Plumstead [Kent].
- A Graves Registration Report (Army Form W3372) for Bethune Town Cemetery dated 18 March 1919, which indicates 17542 Corporal W Parker was attached to the regiment 'Y1/T.M.B., R.F.A.' (Y.1 Trench Mortar Battalion of the Royal Field Artillery) who died 16 May 1916 and is buried at grave number C.68.
- The Imperial War Graves Commission comprehensive report of headstone inscriptions indicates [regimental number] 17542 Corporal W. Parker of the Royal Field Artillery died 16 May 1916 has his grave at Plot 5, Row C, Grave 68, Stone number 1858, which is marked with a cross.
- A certificate issued by The Commonwealth War Graves Commission which provides Walter's regimental number as 17542 and states that Walter served in 'A' Battery, 13th Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery.
- An obituary for Walter located in the index for Bethune Town Cemetery in France which states Walter died of wounds on 16 May 1916, age 34 while he was serving in 'A' Battery of the 174th Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery. It also states he served in the South Africa campaign and his grave is located at plot 5. C. 68
- A roll of individuals who served in the Royal Field Artillery who are entitled to the Victory Medal and/or the British War Medal granted under Army orders, which provides Walter's regimental service number as 17542, his rank as 'Corporal' and the unit he served in as the Royal Field Artillery. It also states that he died on 16 May 1916.
- A Medal Roll Index Card, which provides Walter's regimental service number as 17542 and states that he reached the rank of 'Sergeant' with the Royal Field Artillery.
- 'A Short History of the 39th (Deptford) Divisional Artillery: 1915-1918' by Lt. Col. H. W. Wiebkin, published in 1923 Appendix D provides a list of casualties in the 174th Brigade, including Corporal W Parker – killed in action on 16 May 1916.

Anomalies

Army unit/regiment

Various documents relating to Walter's burial at Bethune Town Cemetery in France provide different accounts of which unit/regiment he was attached to around the time of his death, specifically:

The certificate issued by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission states that Walter was in 'A' Battery. 13th Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery.

The obituary in the index for Bethune Town Cemetery in France states Walter was serving in 'A' Battery of the 174th Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery.

The Graves Registration Report for Bethune Town Cemetery dated 18 March 1919, states Walter was serving in 'Y1/T.M.B., R.F.A.' (Trench Mortar Battalion of the Royal Field Artillery).

It is not uncommon for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to hold incorrect information about servicemen and there is even a process on their website for changing incorrect grave inscriptions. This is perhaps unsurprising given the sheer number of deaths that were accounted for in the Great War.

It was found that Walter's obituary in the index for Bethune Town Cemetery states that Walter is the son of Mr and Mrs Parker of 1 Sutherland Road, Hammersmith London and wife of S.G. Parker of Berg St, Potchefstroom, Transvaal, South Africa. It is known that Walter's mother died in 1895 and that it was Walter's sister Alice Maud and her husband Albert Hitchings who were living at 1 Southerton Road, Hammersmith at the time of Walter's death. It is also known that Walter's wife Susan was living at Plumstead at the time and in the period immediately after his death, although she originated from the Cape Colony in South Africa.

The certificate issued by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission provides the only reference to Walter being in the 13th Brigade, so this can probably be dismissed as being incorrect.

Further information detailed below suggests that Walter certainly served in the 174th Brigade of the Royal Artillery when they transferred to France in March 1916. It is known that shortly after arrival in France some men from the 174th Brigade were transferred to Trench Mortar Battalions, which remained part of the 174th Brigade. However, 'Y1 Trench Mortar Battalion' formed part of the Divisional Artillery in the 1st Division of the British Army, to which the 174th Brigade was not attached. Without his service records, it is impossible to know for certain if or when he was transferred to and from various units/regiments after he arrived in France, but it has been possible to trace some of his military service history through various records relating to the units/regiments it was known he was attached to.

Rank

Another anomaly relates to Walter's rank. Various records indicate that Walter received a number of promotions and progressed through military ranks (Gunner, Bombardier, Corporal and Sergeant).

The birth certificate for Walter and Susan's son (Ernest Victor) issued in August 1915 and the Medal Roll Index Card both state Walter's rank was 'Sergeant'. However, documents from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission relating to Walter's burial indicate that he was at the lower rank of 'Corporal' at the time of his death. The photograph shown further on of Walter with his Army unit just before they embarked for France in March 1916, shows him in uniform with two stripes on his sleeve suggesting that he was a Corporal.

It was common for soldiers to undertake acting positions at higher ranks for short periods after which they returned to their lower substantive rank. This could explain the differing accounts of Walter's rank on the various records.

THE SECOND BOER WAR, SOUTH AFRICA - 19th Battery, Royal Field Artillery

According to Harts Annual Army List the 19th Battery of the Royal Field Artillery were located at Exeter prior to being dispatched to South Africa.² The 19th Battery of the Royal Field Artillery landed at Durban in South Africa on 1st January 1900. The brigade division comprised of the 19th, 28th, and 63rd Batteries³ and it was attached to the 5th Division under Sir Charles Warren. On the 9th January they commenced marching with the division towards SPRINGFIELD but were greatly impeded by torrential rain, which made the road a quagmire and rendered the spruits passable only with great difficulty. On the 13th the force was massed at SPRINGFIELD and SPEARMAN'S and then moved to TRICHARD'S DRIFT, six miles up the river from POTGEITER'S. They were engaged in battles at VENTER'S SPRUIT and SPION KOP from the 19th to 24th January 1900. On some of these days they were on the extreme left with Lieutenant General Hildyard who commanded 2nd Brigade. They were at VAAL KRANTZ in the beginning of February 1900, Lieutenant Colonel A J Montgomery, the commander of the brigade division was severely wounded in that conflict. They were later engaged at COLENSO in mid-February and PIETER'S HILL on 26th February. The 19th Battery along with 61st (Howitzer) Battery and 4th Mountain Battery were made corps troops after VAAL KRANTZ. After LADYSMITH was relieved (1st March 1900), the 19th formed part of the Drakensberg defence force acting from about LADYSMITH, and in August 1900 they moved up to NEWCASTLE, where they remained for a considerable time. In 1901 the 19th did some column work in the TRANSVAAL. In General Buller's final despatch of 9th November, he mentioned one officer and said, "the battery was a good one".⁴



*British advance up Spion Kop: Battle of Spion Kop on 24th January 1900*⁵

² Harts new annual army list, militia list, and yeomanry cavalry list, July 1899 -

<https://archive.org/details/newannualarmylis1899lond/page/n157/mode/2up?view=theater> - accessed 7 October 2021

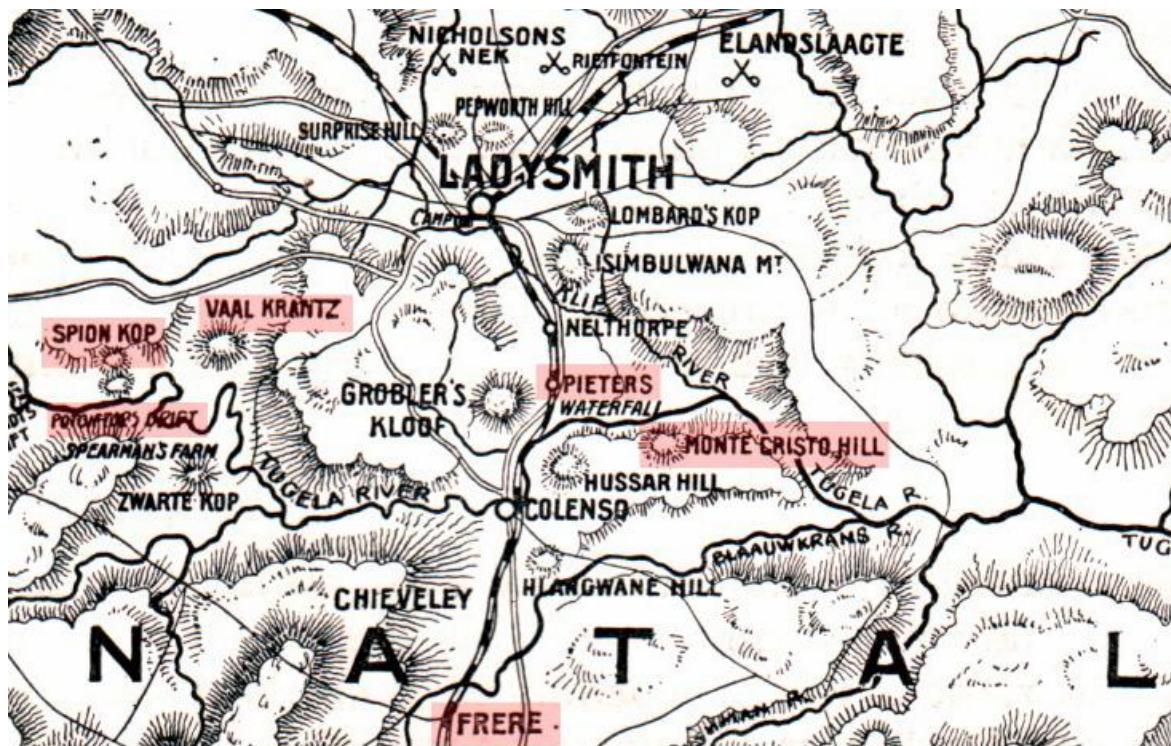
³ The artillery composition for the 5th Division is recorded as being comprised of the 19th, 20th and 28th batteries of the Field Artillery in Arthur Conan Doyle's book 'The Great Boer War' - published by Smith, Elder & Co 1900, (p.205)

⁴ Anglo Boer War.com: Royal Field Artillery - 19th Battery - <http://www.angloboerwar.com/unit-information/imperial-units/598-royal-field-artillery-19th-battery> - accessed 7 October 2021 and Anglo Boer War.com: Royal West Surrey Regiment (Queen's) - <http://www.angloboerwar.com/unit-information/imperial-units/658-royal-west-surrey-regiment> - accessed 7 October 2021

⁵ Picture by Richard Caton Woodville at British Battles.com: Great Boer War - Battle of Spion Kop - <https://www.britishbattles.com/great-boer-war/battle-of-spion-kop/> - accessed 7 October 2021



This is a photograph of officers from the 19th Battery of the Royal Field Artillery, who arrived 1 January 1900 and moved to India in 1905. There is no index of the men in the photograph, so it is left to try to identify Walter based on the photograph taken of him in 1914.⁶



*Map of Natal*⁷

⁶ Anglo Boer War.com: Imperial Units, Royal Field Artillery - 19th Battery - <https://www.angloboerwar.com/unit-information/imperial-units/598-royal-field-artillery-19th-battery?showall=&start=1> – accessed 7 October 2021

⁷ Anglo Boer War.com: Maps, Map of Natal - <https://www.angloboerwar.com/other-information/16-other-information/2006-maps> - accessed 7 October 2021

Battle of Spion Kop - 24th January 1900

Place: On the Tugela River in Northern Natal in South Africa.

Of all the Boer War battles, the *Battle of Spion Kop* retains an appalling notoriety for the incompetence of British leadership and the slaughter of a number of men engaged on each side in the struggle for the top of the hill on a roasting hot day. The 20,000 strong British armies were defeated by the significantly smaller force of 8,000 Boers. The British suffered 1,500 casualties, 243 of them dead in the trench on the peak of Spion Kop, while the Boers suffered 335 casualties. News of the defeat at Spion Kop caused consternation in Britain and nearly brought down the government.⁸

The Royal Field Artillery fought with 15 pounder rifled breach loading guns at Spion Kop.⁹ The 19th Battery, Royal Field Artillery were attached to the 11th Brigade (commanded by Major General Woodgate who was killed during the battle), which formed part of the 5th Division under Sir Charles Warren.¹⁰



*General Warren's 5th Division leaving Frere Camp before the Battle of Spion Kop*¹¹

The Battle of Val Krantz and Pieters - 5th February to 28th February 1900

Place: The Tugela River, Northern Natal in South Africa involving 20,000 British and colonial troops against between 4,000 to 8,000 Boers.¹²

The Royal Field Artillery fought with 15 pounder rifled breach loading guns at The *Battle of Val Krantz and Pieters*. The 19th Battery, Royal Field Artillery were attached to the 11th Brigade which formed part of the 5th Division under Sir Charles Warren in this battle.¹³

After three failed attempts by General Buller to cross the Tugela River, the enemy's positions were bombarded with the long range naval guns, before General Lyttelton's 4th Brigade crossed the by a pontoon bridge at MUNGER'S DRIFT, a mile to the east of POTGEITER'S DRIFT and headed

⁸ British Battles.com – Great Boer War, Battle of Spion Kop - <https://www.britishbattles.com/great-boer-war/battle-of-spion-kop/> - accessed 7 October 2021

⁹ British Battles.com – Great Boer War, Battle of Spion Kop - <https://www.britishbattles.com/great-boer-war/battle-of-spion-kop/> - accessed 7 October 2021

¹⁰ British Battles.com – Great Boer War, Battle of Spion Kop - <https://www.britishbattles.com/great-boer-war/battle-of-spion-kop/> - accessed 7 October 2021

¹¹ British Battles.com – Great Boer War, Battle of Spion Kop - <https://www.britishbattles.com/great-boer-war/battle-of-spion-kop/> - accessed 7 October 2021

¹² British Battles.com – Great Boer War, Battle of Val Krantz - <https://www.britishbattles.com/great-boer-war/battle-of-val-krantz/> - accessed 7 October 2021

¹³ British Battles.com – Great Boer War, Battle of Val Krantz - <https://www.britishbattles.com/great-boer-war/battle-of-val-krantz/> - accessed 7 October 2021

for VAL KRANTZ but a failure by senior command to commit further forces resulted in a failure to penetrate further and ultimately withdrawal.

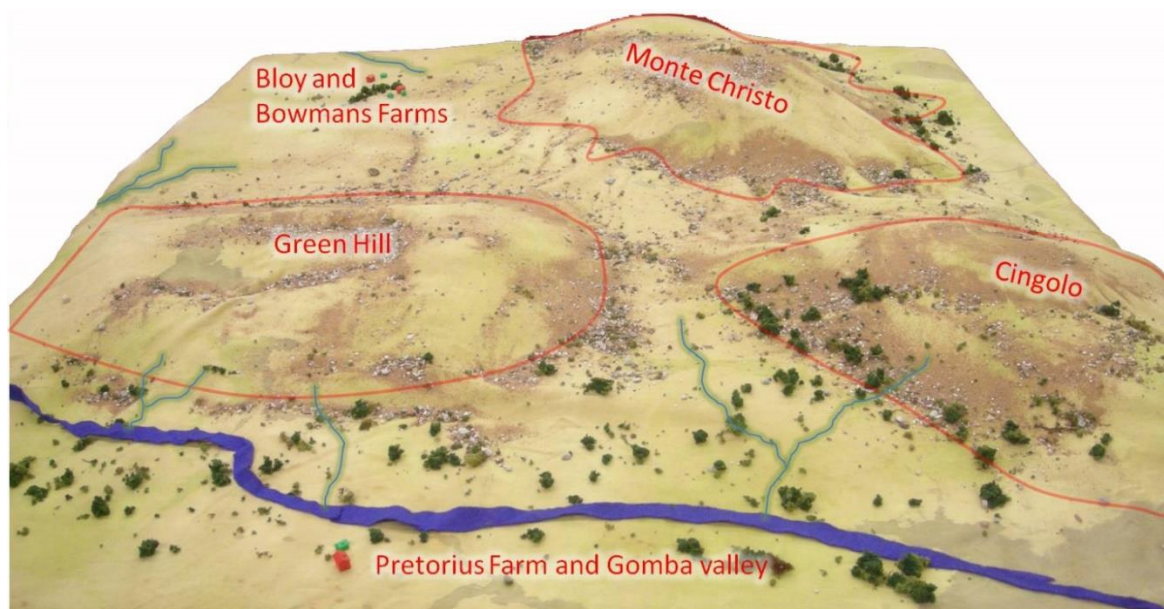
On the Thursday night, the operation was abandoned, and the British troops withdrew across the Tugela River, ending the conflict known as the *Battle of Val Krantz*. The British suffered 400 casualties.¹⁴

On 14th February 1900, the attack resumed, and HUSSAR HILL was taken. From there the offensive assumed an unstoppable momentum. The British troops moved from hill to hill, pushing back the despondent Boers, whose morale was sinking at the news of defeat in the West. The hills of CINGOLO, MONTE CRISTO and finally HLANGWANE were taken, forcing the Boers back across the Tugela River.

The next stage involved the inevitable attack across the Tugela River which was launched west of COLENSO.

On 27th February 1900, the pontoon bridge was moved to a position further east along the river and the army launched an attack across the Tugela on the hills leading to LADYSMITH. The 19th Battery are recorded in the war dispatches as occupying a position on GREEN HILL (located just south of MONTE CRISTO HILL, part of a battery of 76 guns on a front of 4½ miles and were connected by signalers and special observation principal points.¹⁵ In the final fighting of the battle, PIETER'S HILL was captured. Kitchener's Eleventh Brigade took RAILWAY HILL. The Boer positions crumbled, and they retreated in some confusion towards the border, joined by the Boers from the siege lines around LADYSMITH which was relieved the next day and the Boer invasion of Natal brought to a close.

The extended period of fighting during the *Battles of Val Krantz and Pieters* cost the British around 3,000 casualties, with the Boers estimated to have suffered around 1,500 casualties.¹⁶



*A model showing the area and landscape around Monte Christo Hill and Green Hill*¹⁷

¹⁴ British Battles.com – Great Boer War, Battle of Val Krantz - <https://www.britishbattles.com/great-boer-war/battle-of-val-krantz/> - accessed 7 October 2021

¹⁵ The Boer War 1899-1902, Despatches from the Front by John Grehan & Martin Mace – published by Pen & Sword Military 2014, p.179

¹⁶ British Battles.com – Great Boer War, Battle of Val Krantz - <https://www.britishbattles.com/great-boer-war/battle-of-val-krantz/> - accessed 7 October 2021

¹⁷ TooFatLardies: Monet Christo, Attack on the Tugela - <https://toofatlardies.co.uk/monte-christo-attack-on-the-tugela/> – accessed 7 October 2021

Marriage

Walter married Susan Catherine Nepgen at the Church of St Barnabas, Middelburg, Cape Colony, in South Africa on 2 July 1904. Susan was a few months older than Walter and born in Dortsher in the Cape Colony. She is described as being 'Cape Dutch' on their marriage certificate although her family originate from Germany. Her grandparents Arnold and Elizabeth Nepgen travelled from their home area in Cologne to South Africa in 1833.

INDIA

Harts Annual Army List shows the 19th Battery in South Africa for the years 1900 to 1902 and in Middleburg, Cape Colony [South Africa] in 1903 and 1904. In 1905, 19th Battery moved to Allahabad, India, where it remained until 1909, when it moved Barrackpore (for Cawnpore), India.¹⁸

The birth record for Walter's daughter (Alice Maud Valentine), shows that Walter was still in Middleburg, South Africa on 14 February 1906, so he did not travel to India with the 19th Battery in 1905. Alice's birth certificate was issued by (or at) the 'Royal Horse and Royal Field Artillery Depot' at Middleburg in Cape Colony. This is referred to as No. 5 Depot in Harts Annual Army List for 1906.¹⁹ Depots provided static forces to defend key positions, served as training units and provided mobile artillery forces for use in the event of enemy attack.²⁰

By 1908, Walter, Susan and their two children (Walter junior and Alice) had travelled to India. The 1911 census states that Walter and Susan's third child (Frederick James) was born in Kirkee, India on 6 March 1908. The birth record for Walter and Susan's fourth child (Howarth George), shows that Walter was in the 2nd Battery of the Royal Field Artillery at Kirkee on 22 February 1910. The birth was registered by the Major H L Lithgow, commander of the 2nd Battery and shows Walter's regimental service number as 5635 and his rank as 'Gunner'.

Harts Annual Army List states that the Royal Field Artillery had four batteries stationed at Kirkee in 1908 and 1909 (2nd, 5th, 8th, and 44th) and three batteries in 1910 (2nd, 8th and 44th).

Kirkee is located near the city of Pune, which is 143 kilometers (72 miles) south-east of Bombay.

By 1911, Walter and his family had returned to England. The census undertaken on 2 April of that year shows Walter at Shorncliffe Camp, Sandgate, Kent. It appears this is where he joined the 107th Battery, who were, according to Harts Annual Army List, located at Shorncliffe at the time.²¹

¹⁸ Harts Annual Army List index accessed via Fibis: Stations of the Royal Artillery in India – https://wiki.fibis.org/index.php/Stations_of_the_Royal_Artillery_in_India - accessed 7 October 2021

¹⁹ Harts new annual army list, militia list, and yeomanry cavalry list, 1906 - <https://archive.org/details/hartsannualarmy1906hart/page/221/mode/2up?view=theater> - accessed 7 October 2021

²⁰ The Long, Long Trail - The Royal Artillery depots, training units and home defenses - Royal Artillery depots, training and home defence units - The Long, Long Trail (longlongtrail.co.uk) - accessed 7 October 2021

²¹ Harts Army List 1911 - <https://archive.org/details/hartsannualarmy1911lond/page/236/mode/2up?view=theater> - accessed 7 October 2021

WORLD WAR 1, FRANCE



Milford Camp – February 1916

Walter Parker is the man seated in the middle with (two) Corporal stripes on his right sleeve.

This photograph was posted on Ancestry.com by Stuart Nichol of Short Hills, Essex, New Jersey, USA with the following narrative:

“Postcard of Corporal Walter Parker (centre with stripes) with comrades Postmark: GODALMING 1.30 pm 22 Feb 1916. Sent to: Mrs Parker (wife) 55 St James, Bloomfield, Plumstead. Notes: I arrived back safe about 1 oc this morning. Am quite well. ???? ???? ???? Just a card the boys had done. ???? ???? my leave. What do you think? ???? ????”

This postcard was sent just nine days prior to 174th Brigade’s departure to France on 3 March 1916. The War Diaries for 174th Brigade indicate that they had been based at Milford [Surrey] (4.5 kilometres (3 miles) from Milford town) between 14 – 16th February from where there undertook a two-day musketry course at Ash Range in Aldershot. Half of the Brigade left for four days final leave (prior to being deployed to France) on 16 February with the other half of the Brigade taking four days leave from 23 February. Godalming is 4.5 kilometres (3 miles from Milford).

Milford Camp formed part of Whitley Camp, a temporary army camp located on Whitley Common,²² which is located 3 kilometers (1.8 miles) south of Milford.

Photographs of Whitley Camp shows buildings of the same type as in the photograph of Walter’s unit.²³ This along with the date and location of postage suggest that the photograph is of Walter’s Battery, which was attached to 174th Brigade and was taken at Milford Camp (within Whitley Camp) just a few days prior to their departure for France.

As noted previously records indicate that Walter died of wounds on 16 May 1916 and was buried at Bethune Town Cemetery, although there are a number of anomalies relating to which unit/regiment he was attached to around the time of his death. Three possible scenarios have been considered in the following pages to establish Walter’s last days.

²² Canadian Expeditionary Force - Whitley Camp - <http://www.tudorrow.com/202battalion/witley.html> - accessed 7 October 2021

²³ Canadian Expeditionary Force - Whitley Camp - <http://www.tudorrow.com/202battalion/witley.html> - accessed 7 October 2021

Scenario one - 107th Battery, Royal Field Artillery

The birth records for Walter's children (Frank Albert on 19 March 1912 and Gertrude on 4 May 1913) state that Walter was in the 107th Battery of the Royal Field Artillery. It appears that Walter joined the 107th Battery upon return to England from India in 1910/1911 and remained with them until at least 4 May 1913.

The 107th Battery, along with the 108th and 109th Batteries formed XXIII Brigade (23rd Brigade), which was under the command of the 3rd Division of the British Army. In August 1914 it mobilised and was sent to the Continent as part of the British Expeditionary Force, where it saw service until 1917.²⁴

It is possible that Walter was with the 107th Battery, when they were posted to France in August 1914 and he later returned to England prior to his second tour of duty with the 174th Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery, which is discussed further on. It was common for soldiers to return to England for convalescence if they were wounded, sick or injured or for compassionate leave.

However, Walter's seventh and last child, Ernest Victor was born on 19 August 1915, which suggests that Walter, based on time of conception, was still in England after the 107th Battery embarked for France one year earlier.

In addition, the 23rd Brigade were engaged in the *Battle of St Eloi Craters* that was fought over soggy terrain in Belgium from 27 March 1916 to 16 April 1916,²⁵ at a location about 400 kilometers (247 miles) south of BETHUNE where Walter died on 16 May 1916. Noting that Walter did not depart England with the 107th Battery, the 107th Battery was not mentioned in any of the records relating to Walter's death and subsequent burial, along with the fact that the 107th Battery was operating a significant distance from the area in which he was buried suggesting that Walter had left the 107th Battery before August 1914.

Scenario two - 174th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery

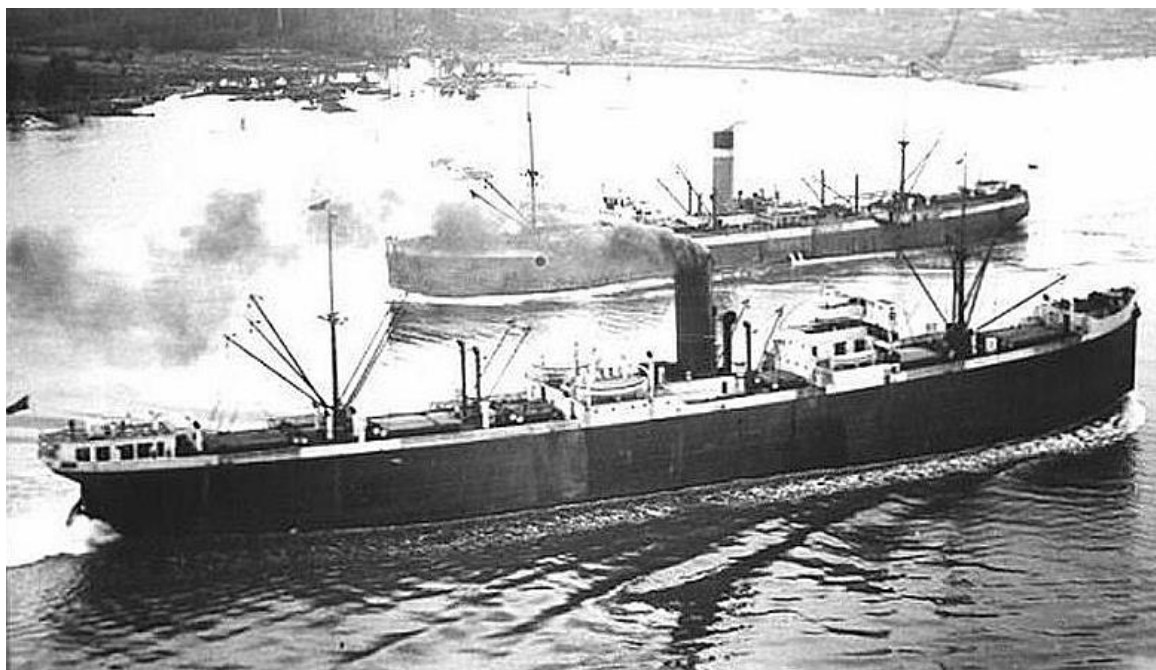
After forming in Deptford on 19 May 1915, the 174th Brigade was embodied into the Army on 25 September 1915 and equipped with 18 pounder field guns. It comprised of four batteries and formed part of the 39th Deptford Divisional Artillery.

39th (Deptford) Artillery 1916			
174th Brigade RFA (18 pounder guns)	179th Brigade RFA (18 pounder guns)	184th Brigade RFA (18 pounder guns)	186th Brigade RFA (4.5-inch howitzers)
A Battery	A Battery	A Battery	A Battery
B Battery	B Battery	B Battery	B Battery
C Battery	C Battery	C Battery	C Battery
D Battery	D Battery	D Battery	D Battery
Ammunition Column	Ammunition Column	Ammunition Column	Ammunition Column
39th Divisional Ammunition Column			
X/39, Y39, Z39 Medium Trench Mortar Batteries (2-inch mortars, later 6-inch mortars)			
V39 Heavy Trench Mortar Battery 9.45-inch mortars			

²⁴ Wikipedia: 23rd Brigade, Royal Field Artillery - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/23rd_Brigade_Royal_Field_Artillery - accessed 7 October 2021

²⁵ The Canadian Encyclopedia: Battle of St. Eloi Craters - <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/battle-of-st-eloi-craters> - accessed 7 October 2021

After a period of training at Aldershot and then later at Milford Camp, near Goldalming, the 174th Brigade embarked on the 'Southwestern Miller' which departed Southampton at 7:30 pm on 3rd March 1916 for Le Havre. From there they were conveyed by train to STEENBECQUE and then onto a camp some 25 miles behind the British front line. It was bitterly cold, and sleet and snow were falling as the Brigade marched the final 10 miles to the camp where the batteries were billeted in farmhouses between BLARINGHEM and SERCUS.



*Photo: Southwestern Miller*²⁶

On 9th March, the 174th Brigade was ordered to proceed to a forward area at ESTAIRES for their first taste of action. They were billeted in farmhouses between ESTAIRES and NEUF BERQUIN before proceeding to LAVENTIE where they took up firing positions. They were withdrawn from the frontline on 23rd March and were posted to reserve billets. After marching in snowy weather, they arrived at their new billets at MOLINGHEM (AIRE) on 25th March, where they were re-supplied and undertook further training.

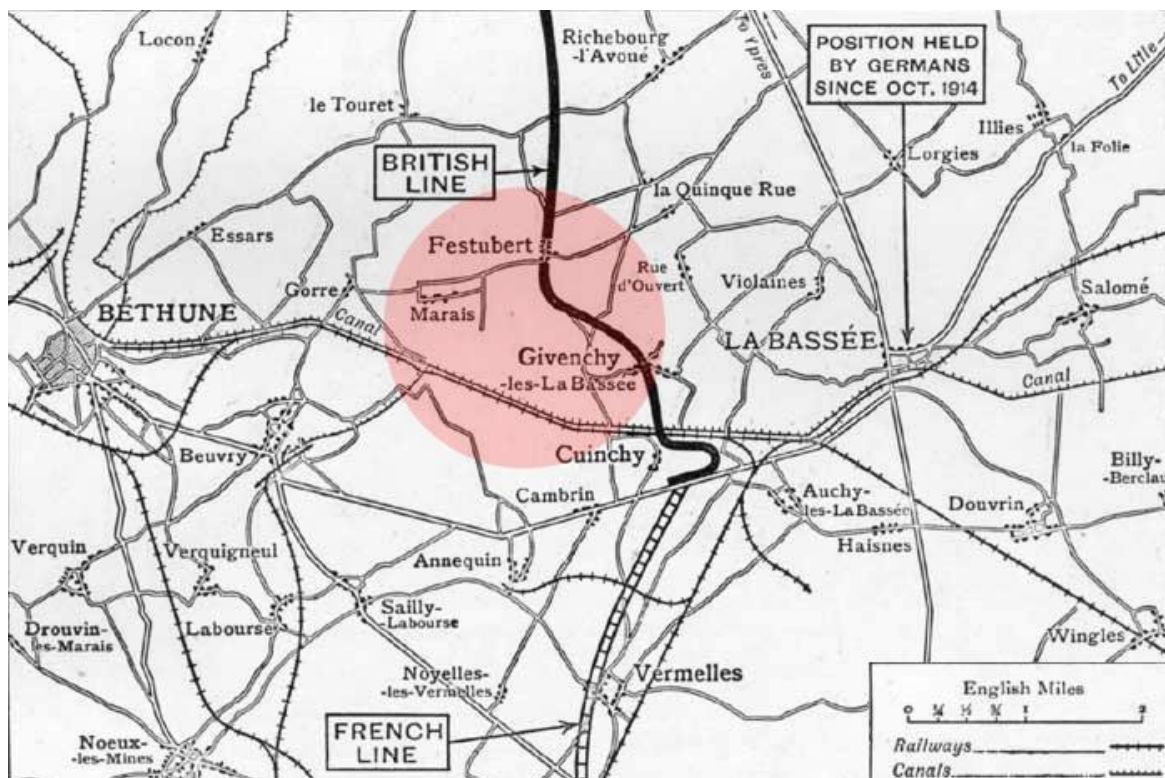
On 21 March, instructions were received to form three Medium Trench Mortar Batteries, which were to be designated X39, Y39 and Z39 Trench Mortar Batteries. Personnel required to form the new batteries were obtained from Brigades and Columns of the Divisional Artillery.

After various attachments to other divisions for training in action, the 39th Divisional Artillery went into action under their own staff and commanders for the first time, when they relieved the 38th Divisional Artillery in the FESTUBERT-GIVENCHY area (four mile east of Bethune) on the 14th April ten months approximately from the day the first recruits joined at Deptford.

Registration of the enemy's front-line machine-gun emplacements and observation posts and shooting at any visible working parties on the enemy's side of the line, were the chief targets engaged during April and May. During this period they were subjected to enemy shelling and gas attacks.

On 13 May 1916, the 174th Brigade were relieved and moved to reserve billets near LOCON (about two miles north-east of BETHUNE), where they remained until 25 May.

²⁶ Tyne Built Ships: A history of Tyne shipbuilders and the ships that they built - <http://www.tynebuiltships.co.uk/S-Ships/southwesternmiller1915.html> - accessed 7 October 2021



A Map of the area east of Bethune ²⁷

Walter was killed on 16 May 1916. It seems unlikely that he was wounded while being located at the rest billet, therefore it is possible that Walter sustained his wounds in action prior to 13 May when 174th Brigade were relieved and was transferred to a hospital at BETHUNE where he later died of wounds. Alternatively, it is possible that Walter was attached to another unit/regiment such as one of the Trench Mortar Batteries (X39, Y39 and Z39) or the Y.1 Medium Trench Mortar Battery mentioned in Graves Registration Report (Army Form W3372). No specific mention was made about the Trench Mortar Batteries (X39, Y39 and Z39) in the 174th Brigade War Diaries, so it is difficult to gauge whether Walter may have been in one of these Batteries. However, there are records about Y.1 Medium Trench Mortar Battery, which are summarised below.

Scenario three - Y.1 Medium Trench Mortar Battery attached to First Division, British Army

Y.1 Medium Trench Mortar Battery of the Royal Field Artillery joined the 1st Division as part of its Divisional Artillery on 16 March 1916.²⁸

The 1st Division stayed in the LOOS sector until early 1916. They were located in a line from held from LENS to LOOS on 24 April²⁹ and launched an attack at DOUBLE CRASSIER³⁰ on 28 April,³¹ which is 6 miles south-east of BETHUNE. Other sources indicate that the 1st Division launched a diversionary attack on the DOUBLE CRASSIER (near LOOS) at 3:45am on 30th June.³² This places Y.1 Medium Trench Mortar Battery also within the vicinity of BETHUNE at the time of Walter's death.

²⁷ The Long Long Trail: Campaign and battle maps for the British Army, 1914-1918, British and French positions before Bethune 25 January 1915 - <https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/maps/givenchy.jpg> - accessed 7 October 2021

²⁸ The Long Long Trail: 1st Division: The history of 1st Division - <https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/order-of-battle-of-divisions/1st-division/> - accessed 7 October 2021

²⁹ Wikia.org: Gas attacks at Hulluch - https://military.wikia.org/wiki/Gas_attacks_at_Hulluch - accessed 7 October 2021

³⁰ The Double Crassier was two 1200-yard-long embankments about 100 feet high formed from the waste of mining pits at Loos

³¹ Wikia.org: Gas attacks at Hulluch - https://military.wikia.org/wiki/Gas_attacks_at_Hulluch - accessed 7 October 2021

³² Battlefields: British Infantry Divisions of the Great War 1914-1918, Part 1 – The Regular Army: 1st to 4th Divisions - <http://battlefields1418.50megs.com/divisions1.htm> - accessed 7 October 2021



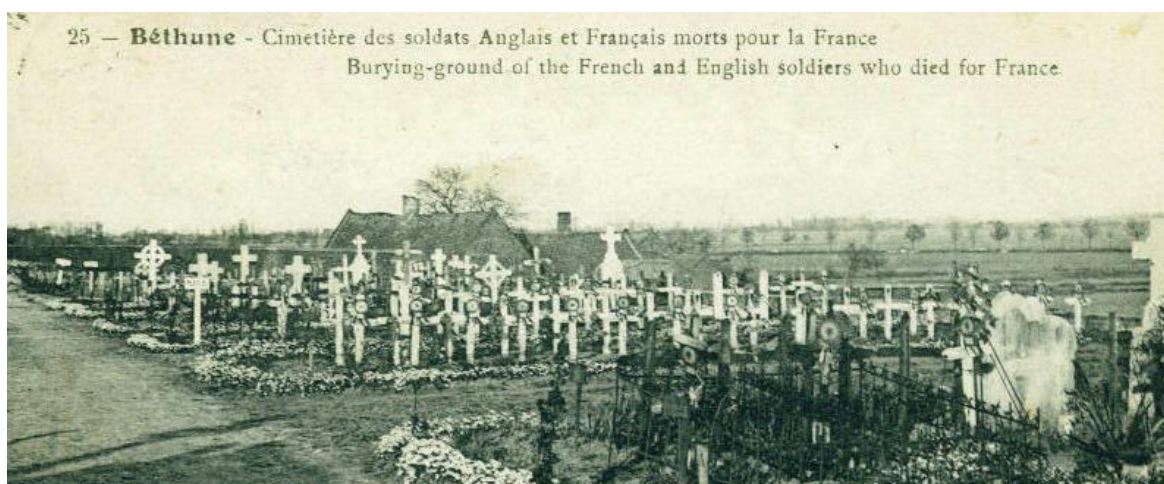
(above) Double Crassier 1915³³

(left) an illustration of British soldiers in a trench mortar position. Two of the men prepare the mortars, one man stands and loads the mortar into the barrel of the weapon, while another kneels behind it and adjusts the trajectory.³⁴

Summary

There remains a degree of uncertainty about which unit/division Walter was attached to, although the records indicate he was located in an area east of BETHUNE between FESTUBERT and Loos when he sustained wounds that ultimately lead to his death.

The Graves Registration Report (Army Form W3372) states that Walter was buried Bethune Town Cemetery (Plot 5, Row C, Grave 65, Stone number 1858),³⁵ which is some distance from the frontline where Walter appears to have been engaged in action at the time he was wounded. This suggests that Walter may have been evacuated from the front line to a hospital in or near Bethune after being wounded and then died sometime later. This conclusion is drawn on the basis that there is also a War cemetery at Loos, which appears to be much closer to the area in which Walter's units were posted at the time, or just prior to his death.

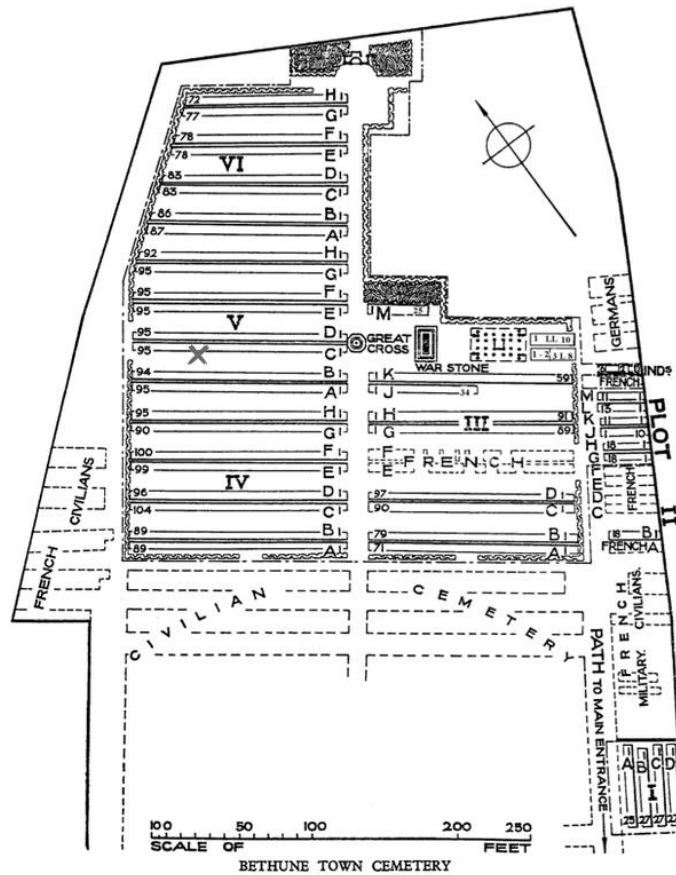


Bethune Town Cemetery in 1915

³³ The Project Gutenberg EBook of The History Of The Prince Of Wales' Own Civil Service Rifles - <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/51387/51387-h/51387-h.htm> - accessed 18 February 2018

³⁴ Imperial War Museum: Study For A Trench Mortar Firing At Evening (IWM Art 3910) - <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/20028> - Accessed 18 February 2018

³⁵ 'Find A Grave' web site at <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/56166332> - accessed 18 February 2018



*Bethune Cemetery
(Row C is behind the Great Cross)*³⁶



*A photo of Walter's memorial stone at
Bethune Cemetery*³⁷

Walter served in the British Army for over 16 years, including postings in three different continents and engagements in the Boer War and World War 1. It is humbling to look at the photo of his gravestone and reflect upon his military service and what he gave for his country.

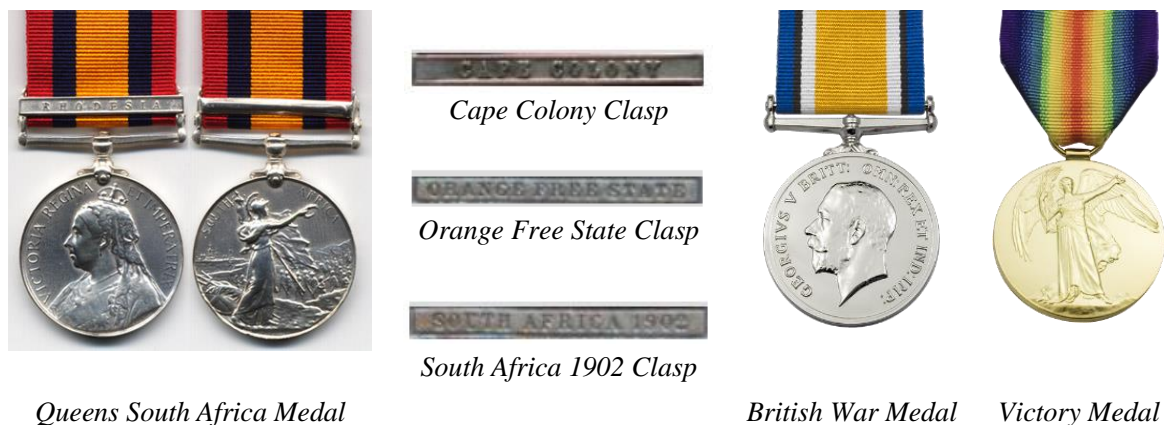
³⁶ Commonwealth War Graves Commission: Bethune Town Cemetery - <https://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/6000/BETHUNE%20TOWN%20CEMETERY> – accessed 7 October 2021

³⁷ There is a memorial for Walter of the 'Find A Grave' web site at <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/56166332> - accessed 7 October 2021

Medals

Nomination rolls from 1902³⁸ indicate that Walter was entitled to Queens South Africa Medal³⁹ with 'Cape Colony',⁴⁰ 'Orange Free State'⁴¹ and 'South Africa 1902'⁴² clasps.

The WW1 Service Medal Award rolls⁴³ and Walter's Medal Roll Index Card⁴⁴ indicates he was entitled the British War Medal⁴⁵ and the Victory Medal.⁴⁶



Family

Walter and Susan had seven children:

Walter Alfred – born in the Cape Colony on 10 October 1904

Alice Maud Valentine – born in Middleburg in the Cape Colony on 14 February 1906

Frederick James – born in Kirkee, India on 6 March 1908

Howarth George – born in Kirkee, India on 22 February 1910

Frank Albert – born in Bueford in Wiltshire, England on 19 March 1912

Gertrude Florence May – born in Bueford in Wiltshire, England on 4 May 1913

Ernest Victor – born in Woolwich, England on 19 August 1915

Gertrude died from meningitis/cardiac failure on 25 May 1916 - just nine days after Walter's death in France. Susan is recorded as living at 55 James Place in Plumstead (which abounds the borough of Woolwich) at the time of Walter and Gertrude's death.

On 25 September 1921, Susan is recorded as returning to London from Cape Town, South Africa on board the Union-Castle Steam Ship 'Gascon' with her children, Alice, Frederick, Howard (sic), Frank and Ernest. Susan's father died in January 1921, therefore it is possible her trip was

³⁸ National Archives of the UK; Kew, Surrey, England; War Office Campaign Medal and Award Rolls 1793-1949 (WO 100); Class: WO 100; Piece: 138 – accessed via Ancestry .com online database – 7 October 2021

³⁹ The Queen's South Africa Medal is a British campaign medal that was awarded to British and Colonial military personnel, civilians employed in official capacity and war correspondents who served in the Second Boer War in South Africa.

⁴⁰ A clasp inscribed 'CAPE COLONY' was awarded to all troops in the Cape Colony at any time between 11 October 1899 and 31 May 1902 inclusive, who had not received a clasp for a specific action in the Cape of Good Hope, or the 'Natal' clasp.

⁴¹ A clasp inscribed 'ORANGE FREE STATE' was awarded to all troops in the Orange Free State at any time between 28 February 1900 and 31 May 1902 inclusive, who had not received a clasp for a specific action in the Orange Free State.

⁴² A clasp inscribed 'SOUTH AFRICA 1902' was awarded to all troops who served in South Africa between 1 January 1902 and 31 May 1902 inclusive, who were not eligible for the King's South Africa Medal.

⁴³ The National Archives of the UK; Kew, Surrey, England; WWI Service Medal and Award Rolls; Class: WO 329; Piece Number: 90: Royal Field Artillery, accessed via Ancestry.com online database 7 October 2021

⁴⁴ British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920 [database on-line], original data: Army Medal Office, WWI Medal Index Cards. In the care of The Western Front Association website - accessed via Ancestry.com 7 October 2021

⁴⁵ The silver or bronze medal was awarded to officers and men of the British and Imperial Forces who either entered a theatre of war or entered service overseas between 5th August 1914 and 11th November 1918 inclusive. The recipient's service number, rank, name and unit were impressed on the rim.

⁴⁶ This medal was awarded to all those who entered a theatre of war between 5 August 1914 and 11 November 1918. The front depicts a winged classical figure representing victory. The recipient's service number, rank, name and unit were impressed on the rim.

motivated by his state of health or even his death. It is believed the following photograph of Walter and Susan's children was taken during this trip to South Africa.



*Standing (left to right): Frank Parker, Alice Parker, unknown man, Fred Parker.
Seated (left to right: Ernest Parker, George (Howarth) Parker⁴⁷*

In 1936, Susan appears on the electoral register in Heath Avenue, Erith, Kent where she was living with her children, Alice, Howarth and Frank. She remained living in the area until her death at the age of 85 in 1967.

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⁴⁷ Photograph posted on Ancestry.com by Stuart Nichol of Short Hills, Essex, New Jersey, USA – accessed 7 October 2021