

Sergeant Charles William Pears, MM[©]
Regimental number: 9578
1st Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment

born: 1893 – died: 20 April 1918

Charles died just months after receiving the Military Medal for bravery in battle, at the young age of just 24.¹ Sadly, his brother died shortly after the war ended and his nephew died in the subsequent world war.

Charles had been born in the fall of 1893 in Emsworth, Hampshire, England, as the seventh child of Annie Witchell and James Pears.² James had been born in October 1854 in Billesdon, Leicestershire, to William and Elizabeth Pears.³ Annie had been born in April 1861 in Buckland Denham, Somerset, to Charles and Joanna Witchell.⁴ James and Annie had married in the spring of 1881 in Frome, Somerset, when she was just 20 and James was 26.⁵ In the 1881 Census for Humberstone, Leicestershire, prior to his marriage, James was living with his family and was noted as a domestic servant, while his father was a farm labourer.⁶

When the 1891 Census was taken, the Pears family was living at the Cross Roads, Flint Cottages in Emsworth, Warblington, Hampshire, and had grown to include four children: Gertrude, 7 (born about 1884); Victor, 5 (born about 1886); Edith, 3 (born about 1888); and Louisa, 1 (born about 1890). James was a butler.⁷

By the time the 1901 Census was taken, the Pears family had moved to Belgrave, Leicestershire, and then included seven children: Gertrude, 17; Victor, 15; Edith, 13; Louisa, 11; plus Annie, 9 (born about 1892); Charles, 7, and James, 3 (born about 1898). James was then managing a public house, the Clowes Arms, in which the family lived. Victor was a house painter and Gertrude was a barmaid at the family pub.⁸ The final child of the family, Frederick, was born in the winter of 1904.⁹

Sadly, Charles' mother Annie passed away at the age of 47 in the summer of 1909.¹⁰

In the 1911 Census, most of the Pears family was still together, living in Leicester and continuing to manage the public house.¹¹ James was managing the pub with Gertrude. Louisa and Annie were hosiery hand menders and Charles was a hand finisher of shoes. Only Victor had married and moved away, but he still lived in Leicester with his wife Mary Ellen and his one-year-old daughter Annie May.¹²

Both Charles and his brother Victor joined the war effort. Charles was quick to join, entering the war on 13 August 1914 from Northampton.¹³ It appears, however, that Charles did get some down time and was able to marry Rose Wright during the winter of 1915.¹⁴ Within six months, however, Charles' father passed away at the age of 60.¹⁵

Regrettably, only about 30% of UK service records still exist due to a fire resulting from a 1940 air raid on the Army Records Office in Walworth, London,¹⁶ and it appears that many of Charles' records were not saved. As a result, certain specifics of his military experience were not obtainable.

Charles appears to have joined the 1st Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment and remained with this unit during his tenure in the war. The war diary for this regiment records Cpl. C. Pears receiving the Military Medal on 5 December 1917.¹⁷ The medal was likely received as a result of

activity during November of that year, when his regiment had three trips to the Front. The diary records the difficulty on the first trip of the regiment finding their way to a line southeast of Poelcapelle due to the significant mud and standing water. The rain was constant and the shell holes that the men were occupying were full of water. Many became sick and were admitted to hospital. Hot soup was brought up from the transport lines at night by carrying parties, but after two trips, tea was sent instead, as it seemed more popular.

Hill Top Farm, where the regiment fought during the second trip, was continually being shelled. German airplanes flew over dropping bombs most mornings, and while they did not actually do much damage, they were frightening. The diary notes that in preparation for their third trip to the Front that month, the men rubbed their feet with whale oil. While at Dambre Camp, a high-velocity gun was constantly trained on their location. They were “greeted” there by about six high-velocity shells, which killed four mules attached to one wagon. The situation was difficult enough, but the

site was next to an ammunition dump, which made the men even more on edge. During that month 26 men were killed, 65 were wounded and 13 went missing.



Photo of grave stone of Serjeant Charles W. Pears, M.M.
Source: *Find A Grave* (www.findagrave.com)

Unfortunately, there was no information which specifically identified the circumstances of Charles’ actions in earning the Military Medal. This medal was awarded to personnel of the British Army and other services below commissioned rank for acts of gallantry and devotion to duty under fire. It had been established in March 1916 and was equivalent to the Military Cross, which was awarded to commissioned officers.¹⁸ It is likely as a result of his actions during that November that Charles was promoted to serjeant.

Charles was wounded on 20 April 1918. His regiment was at the Cambrin area, which was involved in significant activity from 18 April, with very heavy bombardment, attacks and counter attacks. On 20 April, before dawn, two of the companies moved from Cambrin into Givenchy trenches, launching an attack as dawn was breaking. By 6:00 a.m. the companies were established in their final objective in fairly strongly held positions.

Many of the enemy retired on the approach, but many were also killed and 18 prisoners were taken. The enemy opposed the advance with heavy machine gun fire and sniping with light machine guns and rifles at close range. During the evening the trenches were heavily bombarded. Casualties included two officers and 40 other ranks.¹⁹

At some point during the bombardment of 20 April, Charles received gunshot wounds to both of his legs and his right arm. He was transported to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station but



Photo of grave stone of Victor E. Pears and his son Victor H. Pears
Source: *Find A Grave* (www.findagrave.com)

2018), entry for Charles William Pears, Registration district: Havant, Inferred county: Hampshire, Volume: 2b, Page: 402

³ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 June 2018), entry for James Pears, Registration district: Billesdon, Inferred county: Leicestershire, Volume: 7a, Page: 29

⁴ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 June 2018), entry for Ann Witchel [*sic*], Registration district: Frome, Inferred county: Somerset, Volume: 5c, Page: 626

⁵ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 June 2018), entry for Annie Witchell, Registration district: Frome, Inferred county: Somerset, Volume: 5c, Page: 747

⁶ "1881 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 June 2018), entry for James Pears, Registration district: Billesdon, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 16, Piece: 3124, Folio: 84, Page: 15

⁷ "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 June 2018), entry for Annie Pears, Registration district: Havant, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 12, Piece: 852, Folio: 98

succumbed to his injuries that same day. He was buried at Pernes British Cemetery on 21 April 1918 in Plot 1, Row C, Grave 3.²⁰ His grave marker contains the additional inscription:²¹

FAIR IN HIS PURITY & GRACE
WITH SMILE OF HEAVEN
UPON HIS FACE
HE SLEEPS IN DEATH

It does not appear that Charles and Rose had any children during their brief marriage, but no further information was found about Rose.

Charles' brother Victor was a sapper with the Corps of Royal Engineers, Regimental Number 164325.²² He had married Mary Ellen Musson in the fall of 1909.²³ They had two children, Annie May, born in 1910, and Vincent, born in 1916. Victor completed his tour in the war, but died in the Leicester Infirmary on 1 March 1920 at the age of 34.²⁴ Vincent is buried with his son in Gilroes Cemetery, Leicester, Plot EE 528. The younger Vincent Pears was an air gunner with the Royal Air Force and died 21 August 1943.²⁵

© 2018 BIFHSGO

¹ "UK WWI Diaries Northamptonshire Regiment, 1st Division" *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 18 February 2018) page 296

² "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 June 2018), entry for Charles William Pears, Registration district: Havant, Inferred county: Hampshire, Volume: 2b, Page: 402

-
- ⁸ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 June 2018), entry for Annie Pears, Registration district: Leicester, Sub-registration district: North West Leicester, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 68, Piece: 2993, Folio: 116, Page: 7, Household schedule number: 43
- ⁹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 June 2018), entry for Frederick Tom Pears, Registration district: Leicester, Inferred county: Leicestershire, Volume: 71, Page: 221
- ¹⁰ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 June 2018), entry for Annie Pears, Registration district: Leicester, Inferred county: Leicestershire, Volume: 7a, Page: 90
- ¹¹ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 June 2018), entry for James Pears, Registration district: Leicester, Registration district number: 407, Sub-registration district: North West Leicester, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 45, Piece: 19209
- ¹² "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 June 2018), entry for Victor Ernest Pears, Registration district: Leicester, Registration district number: 407, Sub-registration district: North West Leicester, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 46, Piece: 19210
- ¹³ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 June 2018), entry for Charles W Pears
- ¹⁴ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 June 2018), entry for Charles W Pears, Registration district: Kettering, Inferred county: Northamptonshire, Volume: 3b, Page: 273
- ¹⁵ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 June 2018), entry for James Pears, Registration district: Leicester, Inferred county: Leicestershire, Volume: 7a, Page: 176
- ¹⁶ "How to research a soldier," *The Long, Long Trail, The British Army in the Great War of 1914–1918* (<http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/soldiers/how-to-research-a-soldier/>: accessed 30 May 2017)
- ¹⁷ "UK, WWI War Diaries (France, Belgium and Germany), 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 June 2018), entry for Northamptonshire Regiment, Sub unit: 1st Battalion, Piece description: Piece 1271/1-3: 2 Infantry Brigade: 1 Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment (1914 Aug–1919 May), Piece number: 1271, pages 292 to 296
- ¹⁸ *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_Medal: accessed 29 June 2018), entry for Military Medal
- ¹⁹ See endnote 17
- ²⁰ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 29 June 2018), entry for Pears, C.; *Find A Grave* (<https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/2177893/memorial-search?firstName=&lastName=Pears>: accessed 29 June 2018), entry for Serjeant Charles William Pears, M M
- ²¹ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 29 June 2018), entry for Pears, Charles William, Service No: 9578
- ²² "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 June 2018), entry for Pears, V.
- ²³ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 June 2018), entry Victor Ernest Pears, Registration district: Leicester, Inferred county: Leicestershire, Volume: 7a, Page : 353
- ²⁴ See Endnote 25
- ²⁵ *Find A Grave* (<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/56052154/victor-ernest-pears/photo>: accessed 29 June 2018), entry for Spr Victor Ernest Pears