Private Alexander Low Rae©
Regimental number: 366560
125th Heavy Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery

born: about 1886–died: 9 May 1918

Private Alexander Low Rae was born in about 1886, the son of Thomas and Helen Rae.[1] Thomas and his wife, the former Helen Low, both born in about 1855, were married in 1875 in Dundee.[2] They had at least seven children:

- Jane (born in about 1876),
- James (born in about 1877),
- William (born in about 1880),
- Mary (born in about 1883),
- Thomas (born in about 1885),
- Alexander and
- Helen (Nellie) (born in about 1890).[3]

In 1881, Thomas and Helen were living at 18 Bell Street Lane in Dundee, where Thomas was a coachman.[4] Ten years later, they were at the same address and Thomas was still a coachman. His wife Helen was a jute reeler but was unemployed when the census was taken in the spring. Their daughter Jane was a linen weaver and their son James a message boy.[5]

When Alexander was born in 1886, the family was still living on Bell Street Lane,[6] but they moved to 10 Small's Lane in Dundee in 1892/93.[7] By 1901, Thomas was now a railway carter; Alexander, a butcher's assistant; Thomas Junior, a groom, and Mary, a jute weaver.[8]

The family was still living at 10 Small's Lane in 1911, when Alexander, who was then a laundry van driver, married. He married Jane Stewart, a jute weaver, on 29 December 1911, at 44 Thomson Street, Dundee. Jane Stewart was born in about 1884, the daughter of Thomas Stewart, a ship's cook, and his wife, the former Jane Barr.[9] Alexander's wife Jane was pregnant early in 1912, but she suffered from eclampsia and septic pneumonia and died on 31 March 1912 at 10:50 a.m. at the Royal Infirmary in Dundee. The newly married couple had been living at 28 Carmichael Street in Dundee.[10]

Alexander's father died on 14 January 1915. Since he died intestate, probate was not awarded until 9 March 1917. It was awarded to his daughter Helen, because Thomas' wife had died about two months earlier, on 31 January 1917.[11] Their daughter Helen married two days after the death of her mother. Perhaps this was because her future husband, Robert Anderson, was home on leave from the Front—he was serving with the Army Service Corps and was attached to the 16th Field Ambulance.[12] Helen and Robert married on 29 January 1917[13] and were living at 10 Small's Lane when her father's probate was awarded.[14]

A few months after his sister's marriage, Alexander, whose occupation was now a domestic coachman, remarried. He married Mary Agnes Kirk Murray on 7 April 1917, at 44 Thomson Street. Mary Agnes, a confectioner's assistant, was born about 1888, the daughter of John Murray, shoemaker, and his wife, the former Janet Kirk. By the time of his second marriage, Alexander had enlisted and was a lance corporal in the Royal Engineers.[15] He probably enlisted in about March 1916[16] and served initially with the 2/3rd Highland Field Company of the Royal Engineers

(regimental number: 404291). At some point, he transferred to the 125th Heavy Battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery.

The Royal Garrison Artillery was one element of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, which ". . . developed from fortress-based artillery located on British coasts. From 1914 when the army possessed very little heavy artillery it grew into a very large component of the British forces. It was armed with heavy, large calibre guns and howitzers that were positioned some way behind the front line and had immense destructive power."[17] "Siege Batteries RGA were equipped with heavy howitzers, sending large calibre high explosive shells in high trajectory, plunging fire . . . As British artillery tactics developed, the Siege Batteries were most often employed in destroying or neutralising the enemy artillery, as well as putting destructive fire down on strongpoints, dumps, store, roads and railways behind enemy lines."[18]

In May 1918, Alexander's battery was stationed in northern France. On 9 May, he was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station with shrapnel wounds to his leg. His leg was amputated, but he died the same day and was buried that day in Pernes British Military Cemetery (Plot 2, Row B, Grave No. 21) with the Canadian chaplain R. K. Lambert presiding.

Pernes British Military Cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when No. 1 and No. 4 CCCSs came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.[19] Alexander was one of 331 injured soldiers admitted to No 1. CCCS on 9 May 1918 and one of 115 soldiers to die at the station that month.

The No. 1 CCCS chaplain sent a letter to his next of kin, probably his wife Mrs A. Rae, who was living at 36 Hilltown in Dundee.

Alexander was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).[20]

It is not clear what happened to all members of Alexander's family. His parents had died during the war and his youngest sister, Helen, who married Robert Anderson in 1917, may have died in Dundee in 1984.[21] His wife, Mary Agnes Kirk, died in Dundee in 1976.[22] It is possible that one or more of his other siblings went to the United States, since the newspaper announcement of his mother's death states "American papers please copy."[23]

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[1] ""Statutory Registers–Marriages," *ScotlandsPeople* (http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/: accessed 27 April 2019), entry for Rae, Alexander Low, Reference: 282/1 53, Registration district: St Peter

[2] "1891 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2019), entry for Alexander Rae, Registration district: St Clement, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 10, Household schedule number: 219, Line: 12, Roll: CSSCT1891_91

[3] Ibid.

[4] "1881 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 January 2019), entry for Thomas Rae, Registration district: St Clement, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 12, Household schedule number: 296, Line: 1, Roll: cssct1881_84

[5] "1891 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2019), entry for Alexander Rae

[6] *Scottish Post Office Directories* (https://digital.nls.uk/directories/browse/: accessed 27 April 2019), entry for Dundee, 1886–1887

[7] Ibid., entry for Dundee, 1892–1893

[8] "1901 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2019), entry for Alexander Rae, Registration Number: 282/1, Registration district: St Peter, Enumeration District: 2, Household schedule number: 109, Line: 13, Roll: CSSCT1901_90

[9] "Statutory Registers–Marriages," *ScotlandsPeople* (http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/: accessed 27 April 2019,) entry for Rae, Alexander Low, Reference: 282/1 10, Registration district: St Peter

[10] "Statutory Registers–Deaths," *ScotlandsPeople* (http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/: accessed 27 April 2019), entry for Rae, Jane, Reference: 282/2 214, Registration district: St Mary

[11] "British newspapers," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2019), entry for Ellen [*sic*] Low, *Dundee People's Journal*, 3 February 1917

[12] "Scotland, National Probate Index (Calendar of Confirmations and Inventories), 1876–1936," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2019), entry for Thomas Rae

[13] "Statutory Registers–Marriages," *ScotlandsPeople* (http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/: accessed 27 April 2019), entry for Rae, Helen, Reference: 282/1 27, Registration district: St Peter

[14] "Scotland, National Probate Index (Calendar of Confirmations and Inventories), 1876–1936," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2019), entry for Thomas Rae

[15] "Statutory Registers–Marriages," *ScotlandsPeople* (http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/: accessed 27 April 2019), entry for Rae, Alexander Low

[16] Based on "War Gratuity Calculator" (https://wargratuity.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/gratuity-calculator/: accessed 18 May 2017); "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 25 April 2019), entry for Alexander L. Rae

[17] "The Long, Long Trail: The British Artillery of 1914–1918," (http://www.1914-1918.net/cra.htm: accessed 2 December 2014)

[18] "The Long, Long Trail: The Siege Batteries of the Royal Garrison Artillery," (http://www.1914-1918.net/siege-battery-index.htm: accessed 2 December 2014)

[19] "Pernes British Military Cemetery," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (http://www.cwgc.org/: accessed 13 January 2015)

[20] "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 25 April 2019), entry for Alexander L. Rae

[21] "Statutory Registers–Deaths," (index only) *ScotlandsPeople* (http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/: accessed 27 April 2019), entry for Anderson, Helen Smart Tay [*sic*], Reference: 350/ 389, Registration district: Dundee

[22] "Statutory Registers–Deaths," (index only) *ScotlandsPeople* (http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/: accessed 27 April 2019), entry for Rae, Mary Agnes Kirk, Reference: 350/ 896, Registration district: Dundee

[23] "British newspapers," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2019), entry for Ellen [*sic*] Low