

Private David Kerr Neil[©]
Regimental number: 20674
1st Battalion, Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders

born: 1897– died: 24 April 1918

Private David Kerr Neil was born in about 1897 in Cockpen, Midlothian, Scotland.¹ Both his parents came from Midlothian—his father, John, was born in Lasswade in about 1863² and his mother, Margaret (née Kerr), in Liberton in 2 January 1874.³ They married in Lasswade in 1895.

David had six younger siblings:

- James (born in 1898, but sadly died in 1902)⁴
- John (born in 1900)⁵
- Andrew Kerr (born in 1902)⁶
- Samuel Kerr (born in 1905)⁷
- Christina Young (born in 1907)⁸
- Isabella (born in 1910)⁹

His father, John, was a coal miner and, in 1901, the family was living at 8 Portland Square in Hamilton, Lanarkshire.¹⁰ Ten years later, they were living in Beath, West Fife, Fifeshire, where John was a shaftsman in a colliery.¹¹

David probably enlisted in August 1915¹²—just after his 18th birthday—in Cowdenbeath, Fifeshire.¹³ He went to France on 17 November 1915 as a private with the 1st Battalion of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders.¹⁴

On 16 April 1918, David's battalion was in the field and relieved the 2/5 Battalion of the King's Regiment in a support line¹⁵ near Bethune in northern France.¹⁶ Two days later the battalion was facing heavy enemy bombardment, with the enemy approaching so close to the battalion headquarters that staff began to destroy maps and documents. In the end the enemy never reached the headquarters. When it appeared that the enemy advance had been stopped, some of the battalion went with the Black Watch Regiment to recover some of the lost trenches. This never happened because of the lack of artillery support.

Over the next few days, David's battalion moved from the support line to the front line and back. The day he was injured, the battalion was relieved by the 2/5 Battalion of the King's Regiment and went into billets in Noeux-les-Mines.

No evidence was found to explain how David was injured, but on 23 April, he was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station with gunshot wounds to his legs and feet. He died the following day and was buried the same day in Pernes British Military Cemetery (Plot 1, Row D, Grave No. 35) with the Canadian chaplain Robert K. Lambert presiding.¹⁷

The Pernes British Military Cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when No. 1 and No. 4 CCCS came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.¹⁸ On 24 April, 77 soldiers were admitted to No. 1 CCCS, bringing the total number of patients to 279. In the whole month of April, there were 46 deaths at this CCCS.¹⁹

The chaplain sent a letter to his parents, who were living at 11 East Row, Hill of Beath, Crossgate, Fifeshire.

David was awarded posthumously 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).²⁰

None of David's brothers were old enough to serve in the Great War. His mother died in 1925²¹ and his father probably in 1933.²²

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¹ "1901 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 July 2023), entry for David Neil, Registration number: 647, Registration district: Hamilton, Enumeration district: 15, Household schedule number: 241, Line: 22, Roll: CSSCT1901_338

² Ibid.

³ "Scotland, Select Births and Baptisms, 1564–1950," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 16 August 2023), entry for Margaret Richardson Kerr

⁴ "Index of Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 16 August 2023), entry for Neil, James, Reference: 693/ 106, Registration district name: Liberton (Midlothian)

⁵ "Index of Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 16 August 2023), entry for Neil, John, Reference: 647/ 1415, Registration district name: Hamilton

⁶ "Index of Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 16 August 2023), entry for Neil, Andrew Kerr, Reference: 647/ 975, Registration district name: Hamilton

⁷ "Index of Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 16 August 2023), entry for Neil, Samuel Kerr, Reference: 476 / 1 / 42, Registration district name: Denny

⁸ "Index of Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 16 August 2023), entry for Neil, Christina Young, Reference: 410/ 84, Registration district name: Beath (Fife)

⁹ "Index of Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 16 August 2023), entry for Neil, Isabella, Reference: 410/ 487, Registration district name: Beath (Fife)

¹⁰ "1901 Scotland Census," *Ancestry*, entry for David Neil

¹¹ "1911 Scotland census," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 30 May 2023), entry for Neil, Margaret, Reference: 410/1 11/ 20, Page 20

¹² Based on "War Gratuity Calculator" (<https://wargratiuity.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 12 July 2023), entry for David Neil

¹³ "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 10 August 2023), entry for David Neil

¹⁴ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 12 July 2022), entry for David Neil

¹⁵ The support line provided a second line of defense in case of a breach of the front line trench. They also contained first aid stations and kitchens to support men in the front line. ("WW1 Trenches: The Heart Of Battle! How Did They Work?," *History on the Net* (<https://www.historyonthenet.com/ww1-trenches-what-is-a-trench>: accessed 15 August 2023))

¹⁶ "1 Infantry Brigade: 1 Battalion Cameron Highlanders," *The National Archives* (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk: accessed 15 August 2023), 1918 Jan 1 - 1918 Aug 31, WO 95/1264/5. Unless otherwise indicated, all information about the movements of his battalion come from this source.

¹⁷ "Search Name Index," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 4 July 2023), entry for Neil, D.

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 “War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31,” *Library and Archives Canada* (<https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/Pages/war-diaries.aspx>: accessed 26 March 2023)

²⁰ “British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920,” *Ancestry*, entry for David Neil

²¹ “Index of Statutory Registers–Deaths,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 30 May 2023), entry for Kerr, Margaret, Reference: 410 / 1 / 113, Registration district: Cowdenbeath

²² “Index of Statutory Registers–Deaths,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 30 May 2023), entry for Neil, John, Reference: 410 / 1 / 18, Registration district: Cowdenbeath