

Gunner Ernest Victor Walker[©]

Regimental number: 22695

Anti-Aircraft Brigade, Royal Marine Artillery

born: 24 May 1897–died: 31 July 1917

Gunner Ernest Victor Walker, born on 24 May 1897¹ and baptized six weeks later at St Thomas Church, in Manchester, Lancashire, was the son of James and Eliza Jane Walker.² James, a clerk, had married the former Eliza Jane Hanson at St Thomas' on 5 June 1895.³ Their second son, Albert, was born nearly two years after Ernest, on 20 April 1899.⁴ Sadly, his mother died at home at 33 Sunderland Street, Harpurhey, Manchester, on 6 May as a result of childbirth complications: puerperal septicemia and peritonitis.⁵ Probably because of the loss of his mother, Albert was only baptized on 17 January 1906 at St Stephen's Church in Harpurhey.

In 1901, James and his eldest son were living with his parents, Robert and Martha Walker, at 9 Archer Street in Manchester, along with six of James' siblings.⁶ James was a yarn agent and warehouseman. His younger son, Albert, just 2, was probably staying with a neighbour from the family home in Harpurhey—Frank and Helen Tetlow at 31 Sunderland Street.⁷

James remarried, wedding Susan Elizabeth Consterdine on 18 May 1907 at Christ Church in Harpurhey.⁸ In 1911, the family—James, his second wife, the two boys and a cousin—were living at 14 Baywood Street in Harpurhey.⁹

On 30 August 1916, Ernest, aged 19, enlisted as a private in the Royal Marine Artillery (RMA). In 1917, he became a gunner in the Anti-Aircraft Brigade and joined the "B" Battery.¹⁰

The RMA, established in 1804, was not part of the British Army.¹¹ It was, and remains, a separate unit of the British armed forces, although it served as part of the army in the field. In October 1914 the RMA was reorganized to provide two artillery brigades for the Western Front: one became an anti-aircraft unit and the second was the Howitzer Brigade. The Anti-Aircraft Brigade first went overseas in April 1915, with Ernest's battery, "B" Battery, arriving on 14 April and firing its first shells near Dunkirk on 28 April.

The brigade remained in northern France and Belgium for the period of the Great War. Ernest was in the area of Nieuwpoort, Belgium, when there was a major enemy offensive in the area. The enemy made extensive use of mustard gas and then blew up a large ammunition dump. Ernest received recognition for this work in rescuing wounded from this attack.¹²

However, Ernest was injured and admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 28 July 1917^{13, 14} with gunshot wounds to his thigh and buttocks.¹⁵ He died at the station three days later and was buried the next day in Coxyde Military Cemetery (Plot 3, Row A, Grave 15).

On 31st July, a large ammunition dump was blown up within a few yards of the guns causing a crater of an acre in extent. The complete detonation of this dump was caused by a bombardment of six-inch howitzers. Very good work was done in rescuing wounded under fire by Lieutenant Haszard and Gunners Bristow and Walker. Lieutenant Haszard was awarded a bar to his D.S.C., and Gunner Bristow was awarded the D.S.M. Gunner Walker unfortunately died of wounds.

Extract from *Britain's sea soldiers*

Source: Blumberg, H. E. (Herbert Edward). (1927). *Britain's sea soldiers: A record of the Royal marines during the war 1914-1919*, p. 309

His father requested this inscription for his gravestone:

UNTIL THE DAY BREAKS
AND THE SHADOWS FLY AWAY¹⁶

Ernest was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).¹⁷

After the war, Ernest's father, stepmother and brother were living at 109 Ingleton Road in Stockport, Cheshire, where James was now an employer and son Albert was working for him at James Walker & Co., cotton yarn agents.¹⁸ The company was at 85 Corporation Street, Manchester. Ernest's parents were still living at 109 Ingleton Road just before the Second World War.¹⁹ His father was at the same address when he died on 20 May 1946 at the Shaw Heath Hospital in Stockport.²⁰

Ernest's brother, Albert, had also served in the Great War and also in the RMA.²¹ He enlisted on 28 April 1917, immediately after his 18th birthday and three months before his brother's death. Albert followed a similar path to his brother—he was promoted to a gunner a year into his service—but he survived and was demobilized in July 1919. He was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).²²

Albert married Dorothy M Preston in 1930²³ and, in 1939, they were living at 31 Eldon Road in Stockport with their daughter, Audrey.²⁴ Albert was a cost accountant for an electrical engineering firm. It is not known when he died.

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¹ "Web: UK, Royal Marines Registers of Service Index, 1842–1925," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 24 April 2025), entry for Ernest Victor Walker

² "Manchester, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 24 April 2025), entry for Ernest Victor Walker

³ "Manchester, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754–1930," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 April 2025), entry for James Walker, Reference number: GB127.M330/3/2/1

⁴ "Manchester, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2025), entry for Albert Walker

⁵ "GRO death certificate," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 26 April 2025) entry for Walker, Eliza Jane, Registration district: Prestwich, Volume: 08D, Page: 322

⁶ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 April 2025), entry for Ernest V Walker, Registration district: Prestwich, Sub-registration district: Cheetham, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 18, Piece: 3769, Folio: 181, Page: 25, Household schedule number: 144

⁷ "1901 England, Wales & Scotland Census," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2025), entry for Albert Walker, Registration district: Prestwich, Sub-district: Blackley, Enumeration district: 11, Archive reference: RG13, Piece: 3776, Folio: 117, Page: 32, Schedule: 242

⁸ "Manchester, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754–1930," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2025), entry for James Walker, Reference number: GB127.M415/1/2/5

⁹ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 April 2025), entry for Ernest Victor Walker, Registration district number: 467, Sub-registration district: Blackley, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 01, Piece: 24214

¹⁰ "Web: UK, Royal Marines Registers of Service Index, 1842–1925," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2025), entry for Ernest Victor Walker

¹¹ All information on the Royal Marine Artillery and the Anti-Aircraft Brigade comes from two entries in *The Long, Long Trail*

(<https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/>: accessed 3 May 2025)—“The Howitzers of the Royal Marine Artillery” and “The Anti-Aircraft Batteries of the Royal Marine Artillery” and Blumberg, H. E. (Herbert Edward). *Britain's sea soldiers: A record of the Royal marines during the war 1914-1919*, (1927), Devonport: Swiss & Co., Hathi Trust

(<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000403728?type%5B%5D=title&lookfor%5B%5D=Britain%27s%20Sea%20Soldiers%20&ft=ft>: accessed 3 May 2025)

¹² The entry in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (*Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 26 April 2025), entry for Gunner Ernest Victor Walker, Service No: RMA/2269(S)), suggests that Ernest was mentioned in dispatches at some point in his service, but no evidence has been found to support this.

¹³ A casualty clearing station was a military medical unit behind the front lines, usually located near transportation. Casualties who did not soon die or could not be adequately treated in the CCS were stabilized before being transported to a field or military hospital. (Casualty Clearing Station,” *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualty_Clearing_Station: accessed 2 May 2020)

¹⁴ There is a discrepancy in the information provided in Blumberg’s account of the anti-aircraft battery and that of the chaplains’ journal. According to Blumberg, Walker assisted with the recovery of bodies after the explosion on 31 July, whereas the chaplain recorded that Walker was admitted to No. 1 CCCS on 28 July. However, his death is reported in both sources.

¹⁵ “Name Index,” *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 5 September 2025), entry for Walker, E.V., Research source: No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station

¹⁶ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 26 April 2025), entry for Gunner Ernest Victor Walker, Service No: RMA/2269(S)

¹⁷ “British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2025), entry for Ernest V Walker

¹⁸ “1921 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 April 2025), entry for James Walker, Registration District: Stockport, Registration District Number: 443, Enumeration district name: Stockport Cb, Enumeration district: 12, Schedule: 234, Schedule type code: E

¹⁹ “1939 England and Wales Register,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2025), entry for James Walker, Schedule number: 149, Sub-schedule number: 1, Enumeration district: Lcje, Registration district: 443-2

²⁰ “England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 April 2025), entry for James Walker

²¹ “Web: UK, Royal Marines Registers of Service Index, 1842–1925,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2025), entry for Albert Walker

²² “UK, Naval Medal and Award Rolls, 1793–1972,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 May 2025), entry for Albert Walker, Register Number: 2510

²³ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 November 2025), entry for Albert Walker, Registration district: Stockport, Inferred county: Cheshire, Volume: 8a, Page: 309

²⁴ “1939 England and Wales Register,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 May 2025), entry for Albert Walker, Schedule number: 245, Sub-schedule number: 1, Enumeration district: Lcje, Registration district: 443-2