

Walter Prior

died of wounds (gas) 19 May 1918

age 25 years



Walter Prior was born in 1893 in Dummer, the son of James Prior, a farm labourer and carter, and Mary Eales. Walter was one of 8 children, the only son. They were living in Dummer in a cottage next to the Church. Mary's father George, a widower aged 61, lived next door. Walter's father died in 1899 at the age of 36, leaving Mary a widow with eight children, the youngest being barely a year old.

By 1911, Walter was working as a farm labourer and living at home. All the girls had left home except Ethel.

He enlisted in late 1914 as a gunner in the 14th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery. His first posting overseas was in April 1915 when part of the 14th, armed with two of their four 6" Howitzers, joined the 29th Divisional Artillery and landed in Alexandria. Walter returned to the Western Front in 1916 and remained there until his death.

On the 9th and 10th May 1918 the 14th Siege Battery was heavily shelled by mustard gas shells for about 6 hours. Walter was slightly wounded and gassed and transferred by Field Ambulance to No. 54 Casualty Clearing Station in Aire, Pas de Calais. He was then transferred again to the British General Hospital No 3 in the Trianon Hotel at Le Treport. He died there 9 days later.

Walter's mother Mary died a year after her son, aged 55.



The British General Hospital No 3 in the Trianon Hotel on the cliff-top at Le Treport, 30 kilometers along the coast from Dieppe.



Crew of the 6-inch howitzer battery of the RGA sighting the howitzer and attaching the firing lanyard. 27 May 1918. IWM Q11029



Crew of the 6-inch howitzer battery of the RGA moving the howitzer on to a new target. 27 May 1918. IWM Q11026

May 1918 in the Pas-de-Calais

In October 1917 the 14th Siege Battery (SB) relieved the 142nd at Canal Bank and during the winter were given an additional howitzer, bringing their artillery up to 6 guns. Canal Bank was a series of dugouts sufficient for an entire company on the banks of the canal at Ypres.

During the last days of March and early April 1918, the siege batteries were almost continuously on the move around the Pas-de-Calais department. All SB's moved out of Canal Bank on March 26th. Over the next few days they moved to Stralzeelo, on to Vieux Berquin, to Vaudricourt via Drouvin, to Viller au Bois and Gouy-Servins. There they remained in reserve administered by the Canadian Corps.

At the beginning of April 1918 the 79th Brigade including the 14th SB came into the line in positions between Arras and Roclincourt where they engaged in harassing fire.

However, on April 15th they were on the move again, this time via Haillicourt and Lillers to Thiennes. At Lillers, 2 heavy batteries and 2 SBs, including the 14th SB, were rerouted to Morbecque where again they laid down harassing fire.

On May 9th the 14th SB, the 174th SB, the 1st Sussex Heavy Battery were heavily shelled by gas shells for around 6 hours. the 14th SB were particularly badly hit.

In 1918 Germans developed the use of the persistent mustard gas to block the flanks of areas attacked. They used gas shells in unprecedented numbers and they were integral to their spring and summer offensives. Against artillery the ratio of gas shells was as high as 80 mustard to 20 high explosive. Areas outside the attack zone were heavily shelled with mustard to prevent counter attacks. At one point in 1918 the British had the equivalent to two divisions in hospital suffering from mustard gas injuries.

Name	Corps	Rank	Regt. No.
PRIOR Walter	R.G.A.	Serj	43705
Motiv.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks
VICTORY	RGA/14/8	1696	DofW. 19-5-18
BRITISH	do	do	
15 STAR	RGA/134	314	
Theatre of War first served in	3) Egypt		
Date of entry therein	3-4-15		



Royal Garrison Artillery, 14th Siege Battery

Siege Batteries were equipped with heavy howitzers, sending large calibre high explosive shells in high trajectory, plunging fire. The usual armaments were 6 inch, 8 inch and 9.2 inch howitzers, although some had huge railway- or road-mounted 12 inch howitzers. 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.

Once there were enough Batteries to require a higher organisation, the Heavy and Siege Batteries were organised into Heavy Artillery Brigades (HAB). This title was altered to Heavy Artillery groups (HAG) in 1916, but was changed back to Brigades in 1917. In many cases though, particularly in the War Diaries, the two terms are used interchangeably.

The 14th Siege Battery moved to Alexandria in 1915 as part of the 29th Divisional Artillery. One section of the 14th were sent to Gallipoli but Walter Prior was in Egypt.

On 15 Apr 1916 they arrived at the Western Front with 24th Heavy Artillery Brigade (HAB) They remained on the Western Front, moving between different Heavy Artillery Groups and up and down the line in the Pas de Calais.

In May 1916 they became part of the 16th Heavy Artillery Group. Then, over the next year, part of the 36th, the 70th, the 6th, the 64th and the 89th HAG. On 20 Oct 1917 the 14th SB finally transferred to 79th Heavy Artillery Group and remained with it until the end of the war.

In Memory of
Gunner
Walter Prior

43705, 14th Siege Bty., Royal Garrison Artillery who died on 19 May 1918 Age 25

Son of the late James and Mary Prior.

Remembered with Honour
Mont Huon Military Cemetery, Le Treport

Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission