

PRIVATE WILLIAM HAROLD CRIPPS

31504, 12th Service Battalion (Bristol), Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 19 on 3 October 1917

Buried with honour in *Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Ypres*; XXIV E 20A

Commemorated in Tewkesbury in the Methodist Church



Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Ypres



Gloucestershire Regiment

WILLIAM HAROLD CRIPPS was not born in Tewkesbury but in Devizes, Wiltshire, in 1898 to George Cripps and Mary Ann (formerly Harris). George was from Orpington, Kent, and Mary Ann from Houghton in Huntingdonshire. In 1901 George was a Draper's Manager, but by 1911 he was a Shoe Shop Manager, living at 5 High Street, Chepstow, Monmouthshire. William was the youngest of seven children: the others were Violet, Howard, May, Lilian, Ivy and Sydney. The family lived in Tewkesbury for a short time and was evidently Methodist as William is commemorated in their Church at the Cross.

In January 1917 William enlisted in the 12th (Service) Battalion (Bristol) of the Gloucestershire Regiment at Gloucester. The battalion, which became known as 'Bristol's Own', had originally been formed at Bristol on 30 August 1914 by the Citizens Recruiting Committee, which was independent of the War Office. The expense of raising, clothing, feeding, housing and training these battalions was met by the Recruiting Committee until they were formally taken over by the War Office in 1915. These battalions were to become known as Locally Raised Battalions and provided the majority of the infantry for the 4th New Army (K4).

In June 1915 the 12th (Service) Battalion came under the command of the 95th Infantry Brigade (32nd Division) at Wensleydale, Yorkshire; it was adopted by the War Office on 23 June 1915 and moved to Salisbury Plain in August. The battalion landed in France on 21 November 1915 and on 26 December 1915 was transferred with the Brigade to the 5th Division.

In October 1917 the *Tewkesbury Register* reported that :

'The sad news has been received by Mr. and Mrs. Cripps of Stroud, formerly of Milward's Boot Stores, High Street, to the effect that their son, Private William Cripps, Gloucester Regt, died of wounds in France on Oct 3rd. Private Cripps, who was only just 19 years of age, was apprenticed with Mr. G. L. Dixon, clothier, High Street and on leaving went into a situation at Portsmouth. At the age of 18 he came to Tewkesbury and joined up at the end of January and was here again previous to going to France about six weeks ago. Much sympathy is expressed in the town for his parents, who were well known and highly respected.'

Private William Harold Cripps died of his wounds on 3 October 1917 and is buried in *Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery* next to a Casualty Clearing Station near Ypres in Belgium. It is almost certain that Albert was wounded during the *Third Battle of Ypres*, sometimes referred to as *Passchendaele*. It comprised a series of set-piece battles and Albert was undoubtedly wounded during the fourth phase, the *Battle of Polygon Wood*, which lasted from 26 September to 3 October 1917; it was a tactical success. The Australian Corps carried out the main thrust of the offensive whilst the 5th Division, of which the 12th Battalion was part, was responsible for providing flank protection to the right (south) of the main assault and successfully repulsed a number of counter-attacks by the Germans who were intent on recapturing lost ground.