

PRIVATE PERCIVAL CLARENCE HAWKER

15/1636, 14th Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment

Died aged 24 on 23 July 1916

Remembered with honour on *Thiepval Memorial*; Pier & Face 9A 9B and 10B
Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross, in the Abbey and in the Methodist Church



Thiepval Memorial, France



Royal Warwickshire Regiment

PERCIVAL CLARENCE HAWKER was born in Tewkesbury in 1892, the second son of John Hawker, a steam launch engine driver, and Eliza (formerly Penrose). Both came from Tewkesbury and were living at 2 Quay Street in 1901 with their five children. The family was still in Tewkesbury in 1911, although Percival had moved to Birmingham where he was lodging with his mother's family, the Penroses, at 66 Adderley Road, Saltley, with another Tewkesburian, Albert Freeman; both were working as engine cleaners on the Midland Railway. John and Eliza appear to have moved to Birmingham shortly afterwards as Eliza's death was registered in Solihull in 1912. At the time of Percival's death in 1916, the family was living at 73 Adderley Road. Although little is known about his early life, he is commemorated in the Methodist Church so it is assumed that his family were members. Although Percival had moved away from Tewkesbury he was hailed as a YMCA volunteer in October 1914. He had also served for four years in the 'Tewkesbury Territorials', presumably 'D' Company of the 5th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment.

Because he was living in Birmingham when he volunteered, Percival enlisted in the 14th Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment, also known as the Birmingham Pals, because it was raised by the Lord Mayor. The battalion was part of the 32nd Division and landed at Boulogne on 21 November 1915 when it was soon transferred to the 5th Division. Percival does not appear to have qualified for the '1914-15 Star' so it can be assumed that he was posted to France to join his battalion in 1916. In March 1916 the Division was holding the front-line near Vimy Ridge, in

front of Arras: *'This was a lively time, with many trench raids, sniping and mining activities in the front lines'*. At the start of the joint Anglo-French Somme offensive, a series of battles now known as the *Battles of the Somme 1916* (1 July-18 November 1916), the Division was enjoying a period of rest and re-fit. That soon ended when they took part in a subsidiary action known as *The Attacks on High Wood* (20-25 July 1916), one of several unsuccessful attempts to take that key position. One of the Birmingham Pals, Private William Bernard Whitmore, recalled his memories of the action: *'On Saturday night, 22 July at 10pm, the Battalion attacked ... with very serious losses, A Company returned with 4 men & 1 Officer, afterwards 3 more men come in, after lying in a shell hole for 48 hrs. Reported they saw German snipers shoot our wounded ... or tried to take off their equipment. We were enfiladed by machine gun fire, in a field of oats which had to be crossed, between our lines & the Germans, about 350 yards'*.

Private Percival Clarence Hawker was killed in action on 23 July 1916, no doubt in this unsuccessful attack. His body was never recovered and he is commemorated on the *Thiepval Memorial to the Missing*.

Percival's younger brother Cecil was working as a solicitor's clerk for Brookes & Badham, Solicitors, in 1911; in 1912 he emigrated to Canada where he worked as an engineer. In January 1915 he volunteered for overseas service with the Canadian Expeditionary Force and joined A Squadron, 9th Royal Engineers, Canadian Mounted Rifles, as a Sapper. He survived the war but suffered a shrapnel wound in November 1918, just before the Armistice.