

In Memory Of
Lance Corporal

GEOFFREY WILLIAM LEWIS

Service Number: 201075

1st/4th Bn., King's Shropshire Light Infantry who died on 25 November 1918 Age 20

Son of William and Alice Lewis, of Sherborne Farm, Tenbury Wells, Worcs.

FATHER IN THY GRACIOUS KEEPING LEAVE WE NOW OUR DEAR ONE SLEEPING

Remembered with Honour

AWOINGT BRITISH CEMETERY

III. F. 18.



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Remembrance Sunday Talk - 2021

Lance Corporal Geoffrey William Lewis, who was 20 when he died at the 45th Casualty Clearing Station at Awoingt to the east of Cambrai near the border between France and Belgium on November 25th 1918. He survived the First World War by 2 weeks, which makes him the last serviceman from our parish to die. His family would have celebrated the Armistice on November 11th believing him to be safe, which makes his death particularly poignant.

The same thing happened many times in Iraq and Afghanistan when British soldiers injured by IED's or sniper fire were "medi-vacced" out of dangerous situations in Helmand province only to die in the operating theatre at Camp Bastian. At least with modern satellite communications the news would have reached their families within hours - but the grief and the long lasting impact on their loved ones would be exactly the same.

Geoffrey William Lewis was the second son of William and Alice Lewis from Nash. The Lewis family were farmers. Geoffrey's father, William, was born at Wichenford in Worcestershire on 8th December 1863 and his mother, Alice Waith, was born locally at Hope Bagot in 1865. They married at Whitton Church on April 8th 1896 and then briefly lived at Coreley, where Geoffrey's older brother, Harold, was born in December 1896.

We know from the Civil Registration Birth Index that Geoffrey was born at Nash in the third quarter of 1898 (July, August or September), although without ordering his birth certificate, I can't give you a precise date. Despite being born at Nash, he wasn't baptised here because he isn't in our Baptism Register!

When the 1901 Census was taken, the Lewis family was living at Ryley (shown on modern OS maps as Ryley) in Nash. (If you follow the lane from The Shear towards the T-junction near the Clee Hill Road, the entrance to Ryley is on the left between Redford Farm and the end of the lane). Harold and Geoffrey, who were then aged 4 and 2, had a 1 year old sister, Kate, and a little brother, Arthur, who was only 2 months old. Geoffrey's parents, William and Alice, were quite well off by the standards of the time, because they could afford to employ a general domestic servant and a labourer to work on the farm.

By the time the next census was taken in 1911, the family had moved from Ryley to Sherborne Farm, Nash - the address which is recorded for Geoffrey's father as next of kin when he died in November 1918. Geoffrey's older brother, Harold, aged 14 had already left school and is listed as "working on the farm". This is probably just as well, because by then they had another 4 younger brothers and sisters:- Gilbert, Marjorie, Leonard and Robert; and with 2 adults and 8 children in the house, there was no more room for hired help.

We know from his headstone, Medal Roll and Pension Record that Geoffrey William Lewis served with the 1/4th Battalion of the Kings Shropshire Light

Infantry. However, because two thirds of the WW1 Service Records - including his - were destroyed when the army records office was bombed in 1940, we don't know exactly when or where he signed up, although it is possible to piece his story together from the KSLI regimental history.

The Military Service Act of 1916 deemed all males between the ages of 18 and 40 to have enlisted, so Geoffrey was probably conscripted shortly after his 18th birthday in summer 1916. Each man had to attend a medical - and if he passed, he was "attested for service", placed on the army reserve and sent home briefly to await his mobilisation notice. Other than choosing Navy service, the men were given no choice about the unit to which they were assigned.

The 1/4th Battalion Kings Shropshire Light Infantry was raised in August 1914 and spent the first half of the War in India, Singapore and Capetown. It is likely that Geoffrey Lewis completed his training in the UK during the latter part of 1916 and spring 1917 and was assigned to the battalion when it returned to England in June 1917.

The 1/4th sailed to France on July 27th 1917 and was initially attached to the 190th brigade of the 63rd (Naval) Division, so Geoffrey would have seen action in Operations on the Ancre river, the Second Battle of the Scarpe and at Passchendaele. On the February 4th 1918 it was transferred to the 56th brigade of the 19th (Western) Division, remaining in the same part of the Western Front and participating in the First Battle of Arras, the Battle of Albert, the Battle of Cambrai and the final pursuit of the German Army across the Sambre.

In the First World War, Casualty Clearing Stations like the one where Geoffrey Lewis died were part of a casualty evacuation chain which began with Aid Posts and Field Ambulances in the trenches where basic first aid was administered. The wounded were then taken to Casualty Clearing Stations manned by the Royal Army Medical Corps with attached Royal Engineers and men from the Army Service Corps. Their purpose was to triage the wounded and treat each man either sufficiently for his return to duty, or prepare him for evacuation to one of the Base Hospitals near the Channel ports at places like Boulogne, Le Touquet and Etaples.

Some Casualty Clearing Stations were tented camps, although where possible the accommodation would be in wooden huts or (occasionally) in abandoned buildings. They moved quite frequently with the ebb and flow of battle, especially in the wake of the big German attacks in the spring of 1918 and the victorious Allied advance later that year.

A typical CCS could hold 1,000 casualties at any one time and admit between 15 and 300 cases in rotation, and they were often grouped in clusters of two or three around a railway line a few miles behind the Front. Even though most of them were quite large, they were frequently overwhelmed during a big push. Their locations can often be identified today from the cluster of military

cemeteries that surrounded them, which is the case at Awoingt where Geoffrey Lewis is buried. The 38th and 45th Casualty Clearing Stations were located there from October to December 1918, plus the 59th Casualty Clearing Station for a brief period in December 1918.

To give you a feel for the place where Geoffrey Lewis died, I'd like to read you an abridged extract from Captain John A. Hayward's account of his work as a surgeon in one from "firstworldwar.com".

Before the War, John Hayward had been in general medical practice for 20 years, with a brief spell at the Red Cross Hospital at Netley near Southampton in 1914. In April 1918 he responded to an urgent call for more surgeons and was initially posted to a Base Hospital near Trouville. He didn't enjoy the regimented way of working there and requested a front line posting - so in early July he was sent to the Casualty Clearing Station at Crouay near Amiens. This is his account of arrival there, and his first experience of a major battle.

"A greater contrast to the Base hospital could hardly be imagined. All military discipline, red tape and formality were reduced to a minimum. Within the camp, officers donned flannels or shorts; and the mess, a dozen {of us} altogether, formed a family party. There was a small number of highly trained sisters and forty or fifty orderlies.

The essential parts of a Casualty Clearing Station were:-

- 1) A large reception marquee.
- 2) A resuscitation tent, where severely shocked or apparently dying cases were warmed up in heated beds or given a blood transfusion before operation.
- 3) A pre-operation tent, where stretcher cases were prepared for surgery.
- 4) A large operating tent with complete equipment for six operating tables.
- 5) An evacuation tent, where {the walking wounded} and {post operative} cases were sent to await the train for the Base hospital.
- 6) A ward tent for cases requiring watching for twenty-four hours or too bad for evacuation.

I had two days to settle down and get some idea of my new surroundings. Everyone was immensely kind, but I realized how inexperienced I was in the work which would be required of me. My colleagues were all young men with 2 or 3 years War service.

On my third evening the attack began, with a continuous roar of heavy guns, while the horizon was brilliantly lit with the flashes of exploding dumps, Very lights and star shells. The camp was quietly resting and I was left with a few orderlies in the dimly lit reception tent.

About 1 a.m. the ambulances began to arrive. It is impossible to convey an adequate picture of the scene. Into the tent are borne on stretchers - or come wearily stumbling - figures in khaki, wrapped in blankets or coats, bandaged or

splinted. All of them stiff with mud or caked with blood and dust and salt sweat, with labels of their injuries attached.

I had no instructions how to dispose of such numbers, or the method of procedure - but I realize that they must be examined briefly, sorted and sent to one or other of our hospital tents. My orderly was at my side with whispered suggestions, and soon we had the stretchers on one side and the standing cases on the other - and, leaving the slighter cases to be dressed, I gradually sorted out the bad ones for the "resuss", "pre-op" and "evacuation" tents.

I had never seen such frightful wounds and could not conceive how we three surgeons could deal with them on the ensuing day. It was 7 a.m. before I had cleared the tent, and I felt tired out after nearly twenty-four hours' work - but at 10 a.m. I should have to begin to operate for another twelve hours and on cases like these!

I got a bath and some breakfast, and at ten o'clock we began operating - three of us at first. Later in the day we were reinforced in response to S.O.S. calls by four visiting teams from distant Casualty Clearing Stations each consisting of a surgeon, an anaesthetist, a nursing sister and a trained orderly.

My first experience of a Casualty Clearing Station rush ended at 7 p.m. after thirty-six hours of continuous work, and somehow I had got through. I was completely exhausted with anxiety and fatigue".

Later in his memoir, John Hayward recounts that after he became used to the work "A quick surgeon might get through fifteen to twenty cases in twelve hours. I certainly could not do more than ten or twelve. Among so many cases it was a sickening thing to have to make a choice for operation. We were dealing with a mass - not individuals - and if selection had to be made, it must be made in favour of those who by operation had a chance of being made fit again to return to the Front".

Coming back to Geoffrey William Lewis, because the army's medical records were lost along with most of the service records in 1940, we don't know exactly when or why he arrived at No 45 Casualty Clearing Station.

If he was wounded before the Armistice on November 11th, he would probably either have died or been shipped to one of the Base Hospitals near the coast within the first 2 or 3 days. I found a transcript of a handwritten one-page list of admissions for CCS No 3 on a single day in December 1917 on The Wartime Memories Project site which reveals that when each sector was quiet, they included a significant number of men suffering from complaints associated with the crowded, unsanitary conditions in the trenches such as conjunctivitis and ear infections. Spanish Flu was rife in November 1918 - so if Geoffrey was admitted after the Armistice, we have to consider it as a potential cause of his death.

After the War, Geoffrey's parents continued to live at Sherborne Farm for at least another 20 years. According to the 1939 England and Wales Register which

was compiled at the start of the Second World War, his father, William Lewis, then aged 63 was a Retired Farmer living with his wife, their 3 youngest children, his wife's unmarried sister and 1 domestic servant. By then Geoffrey's older brother, Harold, had married and moved to Lower Whitcliffe Farm, Ludlow, with his wife, Violet; and his next brother, Arthur, had also married and was living nearby at The Bache in Nash. His 3 youngest siblings Marjorie, Leonard and Robert were all still at home:- on the Register Marjorie is listed as a housekeeper, Leonard as the Farm Manager and Robert as a farmer/ploughman. Local resident, Louise Roberts, remembers Marjorie and Robert Lewis, who never married, living together in their old age at Baymount on the Tenbury to Cleobury Road.

I'd like to end with a reflection about peace written by Kath Bills for our pew sheet a few weeks ago. Our regular congregation know Kath well as a member of our Local Ministry Group who sometimes leads services at both churches.

Her words need no explanation, so I'll just leave them with you:-

"Peace (the Hebrew word shalom) occurs more than 250 times in the Bible from the book of Genesis onwards. It has many different meanings – from a courteous greeting through health and well-being, physical safety, good relations between nations, tranquillity, contentment, wholeness and completeness; as well as what we all long for and what the world needs most – "the peace of God which passes all understanding"."


Bobbie Matulja

November 11th 2021

Sources


- Ancestry.co.uk
- Wikipedia
- Imperial War Museum website (www.iwm.org.uk)
- The Commonwealth War Graves website (www.cwg.org) – Information about the Cemetery at Awoingt, its association with Casualty Clearing Station 45 and Geoffrey William Lewis's grave
- wartimememoriesproject.com : The Wartime Memories Project - Information about conscription (from the entry for Pte 50854 Francis William Bailey by Yeoman Warder Bob Brown) and No 45 Casualty Clearing Station
- The Long Long Trail website (longlongtrail.co.uk) - Information about Casualty Clearing Stations (including Awoingt) and the list of Kings Shropshire Light Infantry battalions
- forces-war-records.co.uk – Unit History : Kings Shropshire Light Infantry
- firstworldwar.com : memoirs and diaries - for Captain John A Hayward's account of working as a surgeon in a Casualty Clearing Station which was first published in *Everyman at War* (1930) edited by C.B. Purdom

Location Plan and History Information for Awoingt British Cemetery from the Commonwealth War Graves Website


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LOCATION INFORMATION

Awoingt is a village some 3 Kms east-south-east of Cambrai and a little south of the main straight road, the N43, from Cambrai to Le Cateau. Travel along the N43 to the roundabout at the junction of this road and the D157. At this junction is the first sign for the Cemetery. Turn right along the D157 and travel approximately 300 metres then turn left along a narrow road. The Cemetery lies 125 metres along this road on the left.



[Download Cemetery Plan](#)

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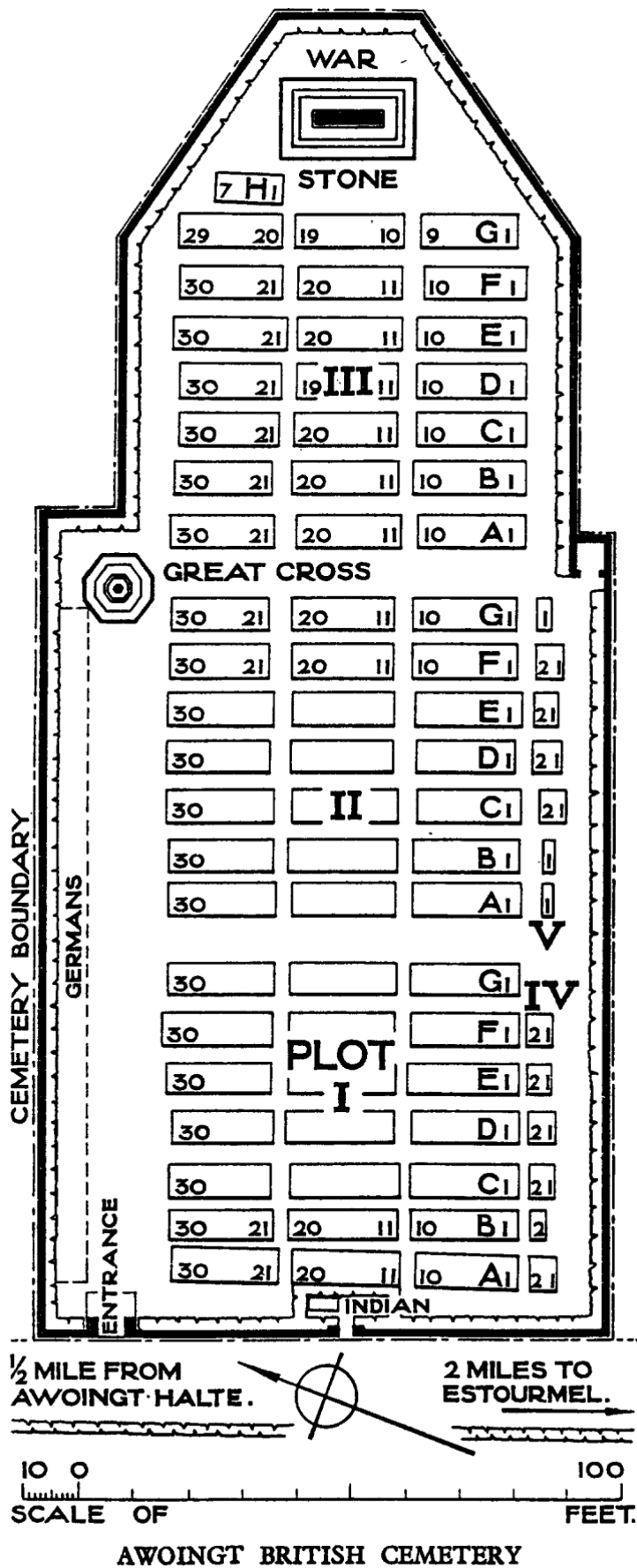
HISTORY INFORMATION

Awoingt British Cemetery was begun in the latter half of October 1918 and used until the middle of December; the village had been captured on 9/10 October. By 28 October, the 38th, 45th and 59th Casualty Clearing Stations were posted in the neighbourhood, and the great majority of the burials were made from those hospitals, but 16 graves in Plot III, Row H, and Plot V, were brought in after the Armistice from the country immediately surrounding the village. Awoingt British Cemetery contains 653 Commonwealth burials and commemorations of the First World War, including a special memorial to one casualty whose grave in the cemetery cannot now be found. The cemetery also contains 63 war graves of other nationalities, most of them German.

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Plan of Awoingt British Cemetery near the Eastern Outskirts of Cambrai



AWOINGT BRITISH CEMETERY

1901 Census showing Geoffrey living with his parents and siblings at Riley in Nash

Administrative County		The undermentioned Houses are situate within the boundaries of the										Page 4		
Civil Parish of Nash		Ecclesiastical Parish of Barford (1st Part) (1899)		County Borough Municipal Borough or Urban District		Ward of Municipal Borough or of Urban District		Rural District of Barford		Parliamentary Borough or Division of Nash		Town or Village or Hamlet of Nash		
House No.	ROAD, STREET, &c. and No. of NAME of HOUSE	Unoccupied	Occupied	Name and Surname of each Person	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family	Age last Birthday	PROFESSION OR OCCUPATION	Employer, Worker, or Own account	If Working at Home	WHERE BORN	(1) Blind and Dumb	(2) Blind	(3) Lunatic	(4) Inebriate, Reformed
19	Riley Nash		2	Jesse Wilkie Head M 42	Head	70	Maggon's Farm	Worker		Nash				
				Anne Evans M 40	Wife	70				Nash				
				Arthur Wilkie Son S 12	Son	12				Nash				
				Annie Wilkie Daughter S 10	Daughter	10				Nash				
				John Wilkie Son S 8	Son	8				Nash				
				Mary Wilkie Daughter S 6	Daughter	6				Nash				
				William Wilkie Son S 4	Son	4				Nash				
20	Blue Farm		1	Robert Munnery Head M 45	Head	58	Ag. Agricultural Labourer	Worker		Barford				
				Mary Munnery Wife M 58	Wife	58				Barford				
				William Munnery Son S 31	Son	31	Private (Police)			Barford				
				John Munnery Son S 19	Son	19	Ag. Agricultural Labourer	Worker		Barford				
21	Riley Barford		1	Thomas Munnery Head M 65	Head	65	Farmer	Employer at Home		Nash				
				Elizabeth Pope Wife S 50	Wife	50	Housekeeper	Worker		Nash				
				William Lewis Head M 34	Head	34	Farmer	Employer		Nash				
				Maria Lewis Wife M 32	Wife	32				Nash				
				Harold Lewis Son S 10	Son	10				Nash				
				Geoffrey Lewis Son S 7	Son	7				Nash				
				Kate Lewis Daughter S 5	Daughter	5				Nash				
				Elizabeth Pope Serv. S 33	Servant	33	General Servant (Domestic)	Worker		Nash				
				David Owen Serv. S 23	Servant	23	Ag. Agricultural Labourer	Worker		Nash				
End of Ecclesiastical Parish of Barford 1st Partion														
Total of "Schedule" of Houses and of Tenants with less than Five Rooms		4	1	Total of Males and of Females		13	86	X Includes farmhands						

1911 Census Record for Sherborne Farm, Nash where Geoffrey was living with his parents and 7 brothers and sisters

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.														
Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink.														
The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, or in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.														
NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family	AGE and BIRTHDAY	PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE	PROFESSION or OCCUPATION	BIRTHPLACE	NATIONALITY	INFIRMITY	INSTRUCTIONS						
								1	2	3	4	5	6	7
William Lewis	Head	44	Married	Farmer	1870	English		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ada Lewis	Wife	43	Married		1870	English		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Harold Lewis	Son	19		Working on Farm	1891	English		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Geoffrey Lewis	Son	12		School	1899	English		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Kate Lewis	Daughter	11				English		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Arthur Lewis	Son	10				English		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Elizabeth Lewis	Son	8				English		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Margaret Lewis	Daughter	6				English		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Leonard Lewis	Son	5				English		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Robert Lewis	Son	2				English		1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Geoffrey William Lewis - Register of Soldiers Effects

Showing his pay of 17 shillings and 6 pence plus back pay of £25 17 shillings and 11 pence as being returned to his father, William (next of kin)

Book No.	Registry No.	Soldier's Name	Regiment, Rank, No.	Date and Place of Death	CREDITS			CHARGES			Date of Authority	To whom Ascribed	Amount Authorised			No. of List in which advertised
					Account and Date	£	s.	d.	Account and Date	£			s.	d.	£	
896846	1/11/1918	Lewis Geoffrey William	1st Bn. Royal Lancs 251075	25-11-18 55th St. L. France	Shrewsbury 1-19	-	17	6			17-6-19/1	for William	-	17	6	Sum #2511-11-18/21/95030
		See also 821/18 55030														
896847	1/11/1918	Jessie Annet	1st Bn. Royal Lancs 251075	14-10-18 55th St. L. France	Shrewsbury 1-19	2	16	8			5-4-19/1	for Annet Jessie	2	16	8	
		See also 804/821 55030														
896848	1/11/1918	Ladcliffe John Brown	1st Bn. Royal Lancs 251075	25-11-18 in action France	Shrewsbury 1-19	5	6	6			21-6-19/1	next. Dennis	5	6	6	

Admissions to No 3 Casualty Clearing Station on 18th December 1917

Because almost all the official army medical records were lost when the records office was bombed in 1940, this transcript of a handwritten list of admissions is a rare survivor I found among the First World War documents on The Wartime Memories Project website (wartimememoriesproject.com). I've included it so you can get a feel for the triage process and the mix of cases that arrived at a typical CCS on the Western Front on a quiet day in the trenches.

18th Dec 1917

Sick and Wounded

Admissions No. 3 Casualty Clearing Station:

- M2/073974 Pte. A Abrams, 51st Divisional Supply Column, Army Service Corps. Injury to eye, left, Severe. Transferred to No. 41 Ambulance Train 19th Dec 1917.
- 10522 Cpl. J Cheeseman, 9th Loyal North Lancashire Regiment. Gunshot wound of the lower extremities. Simple flesh contusion or wound. Transferred from 75th Field Ambulance. Transferred to No. 41 Ambulance Train 19th Dec 1917.
- 55179 Pte. S. Colwell, 10th Btn. Royal Welsh Fusiliers. Dislocated elbow, accidental. Transferred from 7th Field Ambulance. Transferred to No. 41 Ambulance Train 19th Dec 1917.
- 9956 Sgt. R T Curtis, 20th Btn. KRRC. Gunshot wound IX.1 (Gunshot wound of the lower extremities. Simple flesh contusion or wound.), high explosive. Transferred from 7th Field Ambulance. Returned to Duty 21st Dec 1917.
- 17274 Pte. J Duncan, 1st Btn. Gordon Highlanders. Bayonet wound, buttock. Transferred from 7th Field Ambulance. Transferred to base 21st Mar 1918.
- 35128 Pte G H Heather, 9th Loyal North Lancashire Regiment. Gunshot wound IX.1. Lower extremities. Simple flesh contusion or wound. Transferred from 7th Field Ambulance. Transferred to No. 41 Ambulance Train 19th Dec 1917.
- R35725 Pte. H F Hillyer, 1st Btn. KRRC. Diarrhoea. Sick. Transferred to No. 41 Ambulance Train 19th Dec 1917.
- M2/04-943 Pte. H James, F Corps Signals Park, Army Service Corps. Conjunctivitis. discharged to duty 22nd Dec 1917.
- 522183 Spr. A R King, 483rd (East Anglican) Field Company, RE. transferred from 5th Field Ambulance, Inflammation of connective tissue, finger, severe. Transferred to No. 41 Ambulance Train 19th Dec 1917.
- 15219 Pte. E Knell, 20th Btn. Middlesex Regiment. Conjunctivitis. Transferred from 136th Field Ambulance. Returned to Duty 27th Dec 1917.
- 203344 Pte. O McNulty, 1st Btn. Gordon Highlanders. Gunshot wound Face II.1 (Contusion or simple flesh wound), high explosive. Wounded. Transferred from 7th Field Ambulance. Transferred to No. 41 Ambulance Train 19th Dec 1917.
- 9820 Pte. A H Pryke, 20th KRRC. Gunshot wound IX.4, Gunshot wound Compound fracture of the lower extremities. high explosive. Transferred to No. 8 Ambulance Train 24th Dec 1917.
- 28396 Pte. F J Rose, 9th Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, Gunshot wound I.4. Gunshot wound of the head. Penetrating the cranium. Transferred from 75th Field Ambulance. Died.
- 202203 Pte. L Scholes, 9th Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, Gunshot wound of the upper extremities. Simple flesh contusion or wound. Transferred from 75th Field Ambulance. Transferred to No. 41 Ambulance Train 19th Dec 1917.
- 115333 Pion. W Taylor, No. 1 Army Troops Company RE. Inflamed middle ear, Sick. Transferred to No. 3 Canadian Stationary Hospital 20th Dec 1917.
- 28378 Pte. W Williams, 9th Loyal North Lancashire Regiment. Gunshot wound of the lower extremities. Simple flesh contusion or wound. Transferred from 75th Field Ambulance. Transferred to No. 41 Ambulance Train 19th Dec 1917.