

Lance Corporal Charles “Charlie” Allen Christiana (1882-1916)

Charlie Christiana was born 16 November, 1882, at Cornwall, England, to parents W.H.L. and Matilda Christiana. He may have been an only child (undetermined at this time). At the time of his death, his parents were residing at Menair Cottage, St. Mawes, Cornwall. Before emigrating to Canada, Charlie served as a corporal with the Duke of Cornwall Light Infantry for three years.

Charlie makes his first appearance in the newspaper, *The Hedley Gazette*, in January 1912, at the age of 29. The event is a meeting of the organization, Nickel Plate Camp of the Modern Woodsmen of American. At this meeting, Charlie was installed as an officer of the organization, specifically, “Sentry.”

He next appears in the local newspaper in June 1912, when it is noted he has had an accident while working at the stamp mill, having injured his finger and is taking a few days off work.

In December of 1912, the *Gazette* wrote a “thank you” to Charlie in the newspaper for “throwing in the type of last week's issue” while the editor was busy with other tasks. The paper notes that Charlie is “an old typo” and that he is currently employed at the stamp mill. Related to this mention, is Charlie's self-described trade in his Attestation Paper (enlistment paper) a few years later, where he states he is a “printer.”

In March 1914, a Loyal Orange Lodge notice in the newspaper lists Charlie as its Secretary, and this is a post he held throughout 1914 at least.

Charlie resided in Hedley for at least three years total before traveling east across Canada a few months into the start of the Great War. On 11 January 1915, at the age of 32, Charlie enlisted in the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force in Quebec, Quebec. He was first enlisted with the 23rd Battalion before being transferred into the 15th Battalion, originally known as the 48th Highlanders of Canada, which was a militia unit before the outbreak of the war.

His Attestation Paper states that he was single and his religion was “Protestant nonconformist.” His physical description at that time was, height 5' 8 ½”, complexion “dark,” eyes “hazel” and hair “dark turning grey.”

In February 1915, the *Gazette* wrote, “We were shown a picture of Charlie Christiana all togged out in his military suit and he certainly looks fit.” He was in Quebec at the time.

By May of 1915, Charlie was in the front lines with his unit, the 15th Infantry Battalion, in France. He wrote a letter home to a friend in Hedley which was published in *The Hedley Gazette*. He was in the machine gun section of his battalion. In this letter, he laughs about wearing kilts!

The Hedley Gazette makes mention of two more letters from Charlie, one in November 1915, where he is said to be in good spirits and “hopeful of the final outcome of the war.” And, the second letter mentioned was written in January 1916, wherein he thanks the Hedley residents for a Christmas package received in Belgium. Two more letters from other Hedley soldiers made mention of Charlie and his whereabouts, somewhere in France, but no further details were given.

The last year of Charlie's life is known only by the official documents of his battalion. In early June of 1916, Charlie was transferred out of the machine gun section into the No. 1 Company of the 15th Battalion. And, two weeks later, on the 23rd of June, he was promoted to Lance Corporal.

1 July 1916, at the Somme, has gone down as a day of infamy in the history of World War I. But that was only the first day of a battle which would drag on for five long months. It would become a series of smaller battles trying to gain the high ground which had seemed so near. One of these battles was the Battle of Thiepval Ridge of which Charlie's unit, the 15th Battalion, was a part.

From www.15thbattalioncef.ca/battle-honours: Battle of Thiepval Ridge, 26-28 September 1916
“The next objective assigned to the Canadian Corps was the taking of all the high ground remaining in enemy hands extending over a front of some 3,000 yards north and east of Thiepval towards Courcelette.... At 7:00 pm on the 25th the unit moved into the front line. They were in trenches facing north just to the west of the recently captured village of Courcelette... In preparation for the attack scheduled for 26 September an intense three-day artillery bombardment poured over a hundred thousand shells including gas onto the ridge... The 15th Bn's initial objective was to cross Fabeck Graben, an old German trench just to their front that was reported to be empty then seize the German front line. Secondary objectives were to capture any other positions up to and including the formidable Regina Trench. Almost as soon as Number 1 and 2 companies left the front line they came under intense fire from Fabeck Graben which had been occupied during the night. The unit suffered numerous casualties before this position was cleared. By mid-afternoon of the 26th the 15th had achieved their first objective and with Regina Trench in sight the battalion followed a creeping artillery barrage towards their objective. The unit however was unable to reach the position and instead of assaulting it they established a line of advanced posts opposite, thus forming a new line... The attack on 26 September 1916 produced the unit's second highest casualty list. The 15th Bn lost two officers and a hundred and fifteen NCOs and men killed.”

Amongst these soldiers killed on 26 September was Lcp. Charles A. Christiana. His name is on the Vimy Memorial in France, as he has no known grave. Charlie was 33 years of age.

Christiana is also memorialized on a stone in his family's burial plot at St. Just in Roseland Church, near St. Mawes, Cornwall, England.