

The 1914-1918 military service history of Josiah Alexander Chancellor Kennedy

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Dear Richard,

It has been a great pleasure to conduct research into the 1914-1918 military career of Josiah Alexander Chancellor Kennedy. I thank you for your business and hope that you enjoy reading this short report.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Baker

28 March 2006

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The military service career of Josiah Alexander Chancellor Kennedy

The results of our search for official documentary evidence

1. Military service file

The primary and most comprehensive source of information concerning a soldier's military career is his service papers. These covered the entire process between enlistment and discharge, and often provide us with personal, family and medical details, in addition to the facts of his training, postings to units, disciplinary record, and so on. The officer's files were thinned out in the 1930's leaving only miscellaneous correspondence; they have in general survived. Unfortunately, although Josiah appears in the index to these records, his actual file is not present in the collection of files at the National Archives and his index entry is marked "P". No one seems certain about what the "P" stands for, but it is known to mark officers whose files have been withdrawn at some point. Given the dates that we discuss elsewhere in the report, it is conceivable that the file is still held by the British Ministry of Defence.

2. Campaign medal entitlement documents

The records at the National Archive include a reference for every man who qualified for a campaign medal in the Great War. This is in the form of a card index, where every soldier's details were written on a card that has since been microfilmed. Every soldier who served in a theatre of war in 1914-1918 earned at least one campaign medal, so this is the most complete record of the men of army.

Copies of Josiah's index card and all entries on the medal rolls that it refers to are attached to this report. Josiah qualified to wear the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and Victory Medal. The medals were issued to him, after he applied for them, in July 1925. It appears that a duplicate Star was also issued at some point but returned. The Star were marked with his details as a ranker in the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

3. The London Gazette

All commissions, promotions and appointments of officers were announced ("gazetted") in the London Gazette, which is still today the official newspaper of the British Parliament. We understand that you already have copies of the relevant entries.

4. Gallantry Awards

There is no record of a gallantry award.

5. The Army List

A monthly compilation of officers by regiment and seniority, the Army List is a most useful adjunct to the London Gazette, which rarely gives regimental detail.

Josiah first appears in the December 1916 edition, under the 2nd Battalion, the Royal Irish Rifles as a Second Lieutenant with seniority from 25 October 1916. By February 1918, he is with the 8th (Service) Battalion of his regiment. The final entry is in the edition for June 1920, when all those officers serving under the now-disbanded Service battalions are grouped together. He is now shown as a Lieutenant, with seniority from 28 April 1918.

6. Operational records

Josiah is not mentioned in the daily war diary of the 12th Battalion at the time of the chaotic defensive fighting against the German attack on 21 March 1918. Unusually, few officers are mentioned but the diary appears to have been hastily written after the event so it is perhaps not surprising.

7. Records of prisoners of war

There are very few accessible sources of information concerning soldiers who were taken prisoner in the Great War. We can confirm that Josiah is not listed in WO161, the National Archives collection of records that were originally compiled by the Committee on the Treatment of British Prisoners of War. He is, however, given in the *"List of British Officers taken prisoner of war in the various theatres of war between August, 1914 and November, 1918", compiled from records kept by Messrs. Cox & Co.'s Enquiry Office at Harrington House, Craig's Court, Charing Cross, London SW1"*. Josiah is listed under the 12th Battalion, the Royal Irish Rifles as being captured on 21 March 1918 and repatriated on 6 December 1918.

It would be worth contacting the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, for they hold a large archive of records and correspondence relating to prisoners of the Great War period and are likely to hold some information on Josiah Kennedy. According to the ICRC website, "The archivists carry out, free of charge, searches requested by the victim himself/herself or the next-of-kin (that is, father, mother, brother(s), sister(s), son(s), daughter(s), husband or wife) of the victims of the Second World War or more recent conflicts. In all other cases an hourly fee of 80 Swiss Francs is charged; each request generally takes 1 hour to 2 1/2 hours work". It can take up to three months for a response.

The postal address is
Archives Division, International Committee of the Red Cross
19 Avenue de la Paix
CH 1202 Geneva
Switzerland.

Interpretation of the documents found

In this section, we re-assemble Josiah's army career by arranging the facts from the official documents into chronological sequence and where necessary adding explanatory notes and other information. We have not repeated information that you are already aware of from other sources, other than as confirmation.

Josiah Kennedy landed in France with a draft for the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry on 22 May 1915. He was at this time Private 51288. [It is known from his Canadian attestation papers that he enlisted on 9 February 1915, which was presumably not long before his 19th birthday, the lowest age at which he could legally be sent to a theatre of war].

He was discharged to take up his commission on 24 October 1916 and next day became a Second Lieutenant, commissioned into the Royal Irish Rifles.

It is not entirely clear whether he was physically posted to the 2nd Battalion or only from an administrative viewpoint, being attached to the 8th (Service) Battalion as given in the Army List – although the London Gazette entry suggests it may be the latter, with Josiah being posted to the Service battalion on being commissioned.

The 8th (Service) Battalion was disbanded in early February 1918, and it appears that Josiah went to the 12th (Service) Battalion at that time.

He was taken prisoner on 21 March 1918. [You have considerable detail about his time in captivity from his diary].