

## Surviving Family Shame: Three Cruikshank Brothers, a Sister and the Great War

*This is the story of three brothers who had to face the shame of their father's disgrace as a convicted felon and recidivist. All joined the army pre-1914 and all were to die in uniform. Between them they earned three 1914 Stars, one OBE, one DSO, one MC and two Mentions in Despatches. Their mother lived to see her only daughter killed on active service during the next world war. This may be seen as a story of family redemption made possible by war.*

Guy Lindsay, Jasper Wallace and Eric Onslow Cruikshank were descendants of the branch of the Cruikshank family whose fortune was founded on estates in the West Indies, but who were living in the early nineteenth century in Keithlock, Forfarshire, where their great grandfather was a Deputy Lord Lieutenant. The family had firm military connections, for the boys' grandfather, James, heir to the family property, was Lieutenant and Adjutant in the 36<sup>th</sup> Regiment Madras Native Infantry and was married to the daughter of his senior officer. He was well thought of, for after he died at sea in October 1857, aged 32, his fellow officers subscribed to a memorial tablet to mark 'their esteem and regard'.<sup>1</sup> James' young widow, Louisa, and her four children, two boys and two girls, returned to England and in 1861 were living in Camberwell, then still a genteel place of new middle-class villas.

When the boys, James Henry Irvine and Charles Lindsay, grew up they took advantage of the opportunities offered by the expanding British Empire. Soon after leaving school they travelled to South Africa, where they were involved in diamond prospecting in the region later made famous by Cecil Rhodes.<sup>2</sup> Charles was to remain there until 1876, when he returned to England, married and then migrated to Canada. In June 1872 James married in Natal Elizabeth Spalding, the widow of the commander of the Cape Province Mounted Cavalry.<sup>3</sup> Three years later the couple returned to England, where James soon found himself in financial difficulties. An investment in a company that proposed to mine nickel, cobalt and chrome in New Caledonia was lost and in May 1876 he successfully petitioned the High Court In London to wind up the company. Worse was to follow, for in September 1877 James was declared bankrupt after his failure in a farming venture in Warlingham, Surrey. It took him nearly four years before he could discharge his bankruptcy.<sup>4</sup> Discharge enabled him to give up his modest house in Lee, South London, and his position as a company secretary (clerk). He moved to Warwickshire, where in August 1881 he joined the 3<sup>rd</sup> (militia) battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. In July 1882 he was promoted to Captain.<sup>5</sup>

How honest James Cruikshank's business dealings had been since he returned to England remains unknown, but in the militia he was addicted to gambling and living in the fast lane. In 1883 he took a family friend as a mistress and was soon again in debt. His tangled affairs forced him in November 1884 to transfer from the Royal

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Rogers, *Monuments and Monumental Inscriptions in Scotland*, vol. 2 (London 1871), p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> [Canada] *Winnipeg Free Press*, 28 July 1938.

<sup>3</sup> [London] *The Times*, 9 June 1888.

<sup>3</sup> *London Gazette*, 7 April, 19 May 1876; [New Zealand] *North Otago Times*, 22 March 1876.

<sup>4</sup> *London Gazette*, 9 February, 21 September 1877, 1 March 1881.

<sup>5</sup> *London Gazette*, 16 August 1881, 21 July 1882.

Warwickshires to the 3<sup>rd</sup> (militia) battalion of the East Surrey Regiment. In the following April, however, he resigned his commission and one month later was declared bankrupt for the second time. At this point he deserted his wife.

Although an undischarged bankrupt, James continued to raise money by acting as a 'company promoter', in his case a polite term for swindling and deception.<sup>6</sup> Among those he duped was Stanlake Batson, a wealthy young gambler whom Cruikshank knew from his days in the Warwickshire militia. In 1888, after lending £13500 to Cruikshank on the security of a worthless patent for the improvement of military rifles and cartridges, a bankrupt Batson was forced to resign his commission in the Scots Guards.<sup>7</sup> Another who claimed to be swindled was Miss Constance Onslow, a relation of Cruikshank and daughter of an army captain. She was defrauded of all her savings in 1892.<sup>8</sup>

By this time Cruikshank's wife Elizabeth had divorced him on the grounds of desertion and adultery. His mistress was possibly Marie Eveline Pearpoint, whom he married towards the end of 1888 at St George Hanover Square, several months before the period of *decree nisi* relating to his first marriage ended.<sup>9</sup> She was to produce three sons, Guy, born in November 1889, Jasper, born in 1891, and Eric, born in 1894, and one daughter, Violet, born in 1892.

A man of roguish charm, Captain Cruikshank turned to high-class married women to support his ostentatious lifestyle. Using his racecourse connections with aristocratic gamblers, he insinuated himself into the lives of prominent socialites who, usually themselves short of money, were prepared to invest in any scheme that offered the prospect of quick and high returns. Cruikshank tempted them with a series of fraudulent schemes, including an American railway speculation and a 'Havana Cigar syndicate'. He swindled more than £10,000 out of the gullible, enabling him to live in West End hotels and own properties in Rye and Reading, as well as keeping horses, carriages and servants.

Cruikshank's downfall came when he used Arthur Cadogan, MP, brother of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, to entice the recently bereaved Lady Randolph Churchill, mother of Winston Churchill, and her two sisters to invest in an American railway scheme. American born, the sisters had been part of a migration across the Atlantic of *nouveaux riches* heiresses, who married into the European upper classes when the wealth of many old families was in decline. This new money was not always well spent. Lady Randolph's elder sister Clara married Moreton Frewen, a speculator so inept that he was known as 'Mortal Ruin' and 'the splendid pauper'.<sup>10</sup> Her younger sister, Leonie, married John Leslie, who spent most of his time on the racecourse mixing with chancers like Cruikshank. Lady Randolph herself was always in debt and often needed her lover, the Prince of Wales, secretly to bail her out. They were easy prey for the smooth talking Cruikshank. Together they invested £4000, which

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<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, 9 January 1917.

<sup>7</sup> *The Times*, 21 November 1889.

<sup>8</sup> *New York Times*, 26 November 1897.

<sup>9</sup> *The Times*, 9 June 1888, 28 September 1897.

<sup>10</sup> Ralph G. Martin, *Lady Randolph Churchill*, vol. 2 (London 1972), p. 18.

was never seen again once it had disappeared into Cruikshank's secret bank accounts.<sup>11</sup>

Clara Frewen was to admit that she told Cruikshank, 'You know all our family are great gamblers, and if the speculation comes off we shall be delighted, and if it does not you will never hear an unkind word from us'.<sup>12</sup> But unkind words he did hear. Encouraged by Winston Churchill to 'prosecute [Cruikshank] unremittingly . . . and have at least your revenge', in 1897 the three sisters accused him of obtaining money by false pretences.<sup>13</sup> Arrested on Doncaster racecourse where the St Leger was about to be run, he was tried in London in October 1897 and sentenced to eight years in gaol. The judge described Cruikshank as 'a type of a class—a large, growing, and dangerous class—of men who lived and thrived on the follies of mankind'.<sup>14</sup> The length of the sentence may have surprised (and pleased) Lady Randolph, for she had told her son Winston that Cruikshank 'will cut a sorry figure in the witness box' and that 'it will be a satisfaction that the creature will get a few years prison'.<sup>15</sup>

Cruikshank served his prison term in the gaol in Portland, Dorset. It is possible that his wife, Marie, went abroad for a time to escape the scandal, possibly visiting her sister in Nova Scotia. If so, she went alone, for Violet was living in that year with her grandmother and the three boys were boarding, Guy at Snettisham Grammar School in distant Norfolk and the younger two with a surgeon in Hampstead.<sup>16</sup>

Guy, Jasper and Eric were too young to understand the implications of their father's trial in 1897, but would have become aware of the family disgrace during their teenage years. For Guy, Eric and possibly Jasper these were spent at the King's School, Rochester. In the years leading up to the Great War the King's School, which claims to be the second oldest school in the world, embraced the public school ethos of duty, honour, loyalty and Christian morality, which together made up the ideal virtues of the English gentleman. Primarily a choral school, King's nevertheless embraced the huge enthusiasm for team sports that engulfed Edwardian society. Cricket was experiencing a golden age and Eric played as an all-rounder for the school's 1<sup>st</sup> XI in 1911-12.<sup>17</sup>

By this time his two brothers were in the army and on leaving school Eric joined them.<sup>18</sup> All followed in their father's footsteps by joining 3rd (special reserve) battalions of regiments which, following the Haldane reforms of 1908, replaced the old militia units. It appears that, as far as the army was concerned, the sins of the father did not fall on the sons. James, after all, had broken the Army's unwritten code of honour: 'if [an officer was] caught transgressing the manners and morals which were stressed by the culture of the Army, resignation was expected'.<sup>19</sup> But by

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<sup>11</sup> Charles, Higham, *Dark Lady. Winston Churchill's Mother and her World* (London 2006), p. 162: Martin, *Lady Randolph Churchill*, p. 67.

<sup>12</sup> *New York Times*, 14 September 1897.

<sup>13</sup> Winston Churchill to Lady Randolph Churchill, 18 November [1896], Churchill Archive, Churchill College, Cambridge, CHAR 28/22/26-27.

<sup>14</sup> *The Times*, 26 November 1897.

<sup>15</sup> Lady Randolph Churchill to Winston Churchill, 21 September [1897], Churchill Archive, CHAR 1/8/107.

<sup>16</sup> 1901 Census.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.cricketarhive.com/Archive/Players/1011/1011340/1011340.html>.

<sup>18</sup> *London Gazette*, 2 September 1913.

<sup>19</sup> Simon Robbins, *British Generalship on the Western Front 1914-18* (London 2005), p. 5.

resigning he had gone some way to mitigating his offence, even if he did not change his ways in civilian life.

Guy, who had matriculated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge in 1908 but stayed only one term, obtained a Special Reserve commission in the 3rd Gordon Highlanders in January 1909 and also began to learn to fly, receiving his Royal Aero Club certificate in August 1913. In June of the following year he became attached to the fledgling Royal Flying Corps and in September was given a commission in the regular army.<sup>20</sup> Both Jasper and Eric obtained Special Reserve commissions in the 3rd Wiltshire Regiment, the former in 1909 and the latter in 1913. Jasper, however, resigned his lieutenancy in January 1914 and thus, when war was declared in August, he had to reapply for a commission. Initially, he was appointed lieutenant in the 3rd Highland Light Infantry but within days this was cancelled and he received a commission with the 2nd Durham Light Infantry.<sup>21</sup> By the end of September all three brothers had arrived in France and one had already been killed.

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Eric arrived in Rouen with the 1st Battalion Wiltshire Regiment only ten days after war was declared. The battalion was in the 7th Brigade, 3rd Division, part of Major-General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's II Corps. It played no significant part in the battle of Mons on 23 August but was heavily involved in the fighting at Le Cateau on the 26th when, holding the northern edge of Coudry under heavy shellfire and infantry attacks, the battalion suffered nearly one hundred casualties. During the exhausting retreat to the Marne, which they crossed on 3 September, the Wiltshires often acted as a fighting rearguard for the brigade. On Sunday the 6th, with the tide of war turning, they began their advance northwards.<sup>22</sup>

By Monday 14 September the Wiltshires had advanced through Braine with the intention of crossing the River Aisne at Vailly. While waiting to use the new bridge erected by the Royal Engineers the previous night (it was under heavy artillery fire), the Wiltshires were suddenly ordered to cross the river by another route, a blown-up railway bridge with only one plank linking its two sides. Their role was to support 8th Brigade, which was already on the northern side of the river under heavy pressure defending a pronounced salient. Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel W H Bird of the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles, the Wiltshires moved up to cross the single-planked bridge, only to find the withdrawing 1st Lincolnshires of 9th Brigade blocking their way. Moving past them under heavy shellfire, the Wiltshires advanced up a hill in the salient, part of which was still held by 9th Brigade. There they dug in while the Royal Irish Rifles and the 3rd Worcestershires extended the line to the west. Half-hearted attacks by the Germans were beaten off that night and the next day.

The battalion remained in this position for several days. In fact, the advance had now come to a halt on this part of the Aisne; the age of static trench warfare was about to begin. The brigade was more concerned with defending its position than with advancing, for in the early evening of Saturday 19 September, following very heavy shelling, the Germans attacked. This assault was repulsed but about 11am the next day a group of 200 Germans with two machine guns passed through a thick wood and caught the 3rd Worcestershires in the rear. They broke through the trench system, but

<sup>20</sup> *London Gazette*, 30 June 1914, 30 September 1914.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 January 1914, 4 September 1914, 6 October 1914.

<sup>22</sup> War Diary, 1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire Regiment, 23 August – 3 September 1914, NA PRO WO 95/1415.

were stopped about 100 yards from the Wiltshires. 'During this time', according to the Wiltshire's war diary, 'a lot of close fighting took place'.<sup>23</sup> By the early evening the brigade had regained its position.

The war diary recorded Lt Eric Cruikshank's death on 20 September. One other officer had also been killed, another subsequently died of wounds, while a subaltern and the battalion's commanding officer had been wounded. Altogether, the BEF suffered nearly 2200 casualties that day. Whether Eric had been killed during the close-quarter fighting or earlier remains uncertain, for various sources give different dates for his death. Eric's Medal Index Card, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission records and *Soldiers Died in the Great War* state that he was killed in action on the 19th, but an *In Memoriam* notice inserted in *The Times* by his parents in 1919 gives 18 September as the date, although an earlier notice of theirs in 1915 was printed on the 20th. His service record papers no longer exist, so no confirmation can be obtained from that source. Given that the war diary would have been written up in chaotic circumstances, there remain a number of possibilities: that Eric was killed either by shellfire or during the enemy's abortive attack on the evening of Saturday 19 September; that he was mortally wounded on the Saturday and died the following day; or that he was killed during the hand to hand fighting on the 20th. He was just twenty-one, but had packed a great deal of action into his short life in the firing line. He left just over £116 in his will and made sure that his sister, not his father, was executor.

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Guy Cruikshank had been confirmed as a Flying Officer in the RFC in June 1914 and at the outbreak of war was serving at the Central Flying School at Upavon in Wiltshire. He was among the first group of officers to go to France but, according to the future war ace James McCudden VC, he was not one of those chosen to fly an aeroplane across the Channel. Rather, he drove a Sunbeam touring car carrying four mechanics to Southampton docks, from where they sailed to Boulogne on the evening of 12 August. Guy's war almost ended before it began, for en route to Amiens to join No. 3 Squadron he was a passenger in a Daimler touring tender with poor brakes driven by 'a most dashing driver' who, thoroughly frightening McCudden, just managed to avoid a train at a level crossing.<sup>24</sup>

No. 3 Squadron played a vital reconnaissance role during the long retreat from Mons. By a happy chance, given where his youngest brother was at the time, Guy's Flight was attached to II Corps and, according to Smith-Dorrien, he was one of five named pilots to bring back 'quite invaluable, and what always proves to be true, information'.<sup>25</sup>

Guy was to become a successful and popular pilot. One aircraft mechanic described him as 'a fine flyer and very clever airman and most popular in the 70th Squadron'.<sup>26</sup> Alan Bott, an observer in the same squadron, described him as 'one of the greatest pilots of the war'.<sup>27</sup> Guy spent more than a year with No. 3 Squadron, during which

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 September 1914.

<sup>24</sup> James T. B. McCudden, *Flying Fury: Five Years in the Royal Flying Corps* (Folkestone 1973), pp. 24-25.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in *Flight Magazine*, 17 March 1949, pp. 314-315.

<sup>26</sup> Statement by Aircraft Mechanic G. Brown, 5 October 1916, NA PRO WO 339/8950.

<sup>27</sup> "CONTACT" [Alan Bott], *An Airman's Outings* (Edinburgh 1917), p. 51.

time he was awarded the Military Cross in the King's Birthday Honours list and a DSO for being the first pilot successfully to land an agent behind enemy lines, a special mission described as 'involving very great risk'.<sup>28</sup> This flight took place during the morning of 28 September 1915, with Cruikshank piloting a Morane Parasol carrying a spy, *Leonard*, and his carrier pigeons. He landed near Quesnoy, but the spy accidentally knocked the petrol switch as he alighted and stopped the engine. The anxious spy was unwilling to help start up the engine by swinging the propeller, until Cruikshank drew his revolver. Cruikshank returned safely from the expedition, but the Germans caught *Leonard* soon afterwards and he was executed.<sup>29</sup>

This was a most unusual operation; much of Guy's time in the air was spent on artillery reconnaissance, the main preoccupation of the RFC in 1915, or on bombing raids. He would normally have flown Morane Parasols, which Charles Portal, later to be Commander in Chief, Bomber Command in 1940 but in July 1915 a very inexperienced observer in No. 3 Squadron, claimed was treated with very great respect by its pilots: 'the chances of death by misadventure on the aerodrome were infinitely greater than by enemy action'.<sup>30</sup> This was perhaps a pardonable exaggeration, especially from mid-1915 when the German Air Force was supplied with Fokker E.1s. With their forward-firing synchronised machine guns, they were superior to any aircraft available to the allies. One of the leading German pilots at this time was Oswald Boelcke, who with Max Immelmann developed fighting tactics that led to heavy RFC losses for many months. Both Boelcke and Immelmann were regarded by admiring British pilots as their most dangerous adversaries. According to Bott, it was Guy Cruikshank's 'great ambition to account for Germany's best pilot' (Boelcke, after Immelmann's death in June 1916).<sup>31</sup>

Promoted to Flight Commander, Guy spent much of his time flying a plane rather than a desk. According to Portal, Flight Commanders of No. 3 Squadron were not keen administrators: their 'administrative work consisted of an "orderly room" about every three days and an inspection of Flight Stores about every week. Everything seemed to run perfectly'.<sup>32</sup> Guy managed to survive the period of German air superiority and at the end of 1915 he was sent back to England both for a well-earned rest and to assist in the programme to develop an aeroplane that would counter the enemy's air superiority. For three months he was officer in charge of the Experimental Flight programme at the Central Flying School at Upavon. In March 1916 he joined the newly-formed No. 70 Squadron and returned to combat flying when A Flight was sent to France at the end of May. On 7 July, during a reconnaissance flight over Cambrai, Guy was involved in a fight with three Fokkers. Although one of the enemy planes was forced down, his machine was badly damaged and his observer mortally wounded. In a desperate, risky but vain attempt to save his colleague, Guy flew his ailing plane directly to a hospital in St Omer.<sup>33</sup> It has been suggested that his observer, Andrew John Tuke Cruickshank, who had been in France

<sup>28</sup> *London Gazette*, 22 June 1915, 2 November 1915.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Occlshaw, *Armour against Fate. British Military Intelligence in the First World War* (London 1989), p. 228.

<sup>30</sup> Arnold D. Harvey, 'Portal's World War I Experience, 1915-1918', *Air Power History*, Winter 2009, p. 38.

<sup>31</sup> Bott, *Airman's Outings*, p. 41.

<sup>32</sup> Harvey, 'Portal', p. 38.

<sup>33</sup> *The Times*, 11 February 1919.

only a few days, was his cousin.<sup>34</sup> Although there is no evidence to suggest any close connection between the families, they were likely to have been distant kinsmen.

No. 70 Squadron was the first to be equipped with Sopwith 1 1/2 Strutters, two-seater fighter/reconnaissance planes that, together with the DH2 and the FE2b, could compete with the Fokkers. Gradually, the RFC began to regain control of the skies and for the first ten weeks of the Battle of the Somme they had air superiority over the battlefield, as the allied policy of offensive patrols kept the German aeroplanes pinned back well behind the front lines.<sup>35</sup>

But the wheel of fortune was about to turn again, with Boelcke being supplied with a new aircraft, the Albatros, and given the command at Bertincourt of the first *Jagdstaffel*, a hunting squadron of fourteen fighter aircraft flown by selected and experienced pilots.<sup>36</sup> This formation, which fought as a pack or "circus", first appeared in the skies during the third major phase of operations on the Somme, which came to be known by the British as the battle of Flers-Courcelette. The battle began on 15 September 1916 and gave Guy the opportunity to come to grips with his famous adversary, Boelcke.

As well as carrying out intensive bombing raids on selected targets and flying contact patrols to report the situation on the ground, the RFC's main role on 15 September was to fly aggressive missions to keep German aeroplanes well away from the battlefield. As Bott explained the orders given to No. 70 Squadron on 14 September, 'No German machines could be allowed near enough to the lines for any observation. We must shoot all Hun machines at sight and give them no rest'.<sup>37</sup> Although it was a guest night, the mess that evening was rather sombre and 'dinner talk was curiously restrained'. Most pilots retired early, including Cruikshank, whose final words were, 'Night, everybody. . . . Meet you at Mossy-Face [Havrincourt Wood] in the morning!'

When Cruikshank took off the next morning at 5.45am in Strutter A895 he was accompanied by observer Lt Rudolph Arthur Preston, who had celebrated his twenty-third birthday only a fortnight earlier. The second son of a Commissioner of National Education in Ireland who had died while Preston was an infant, Rudolph was set for a career in the Royal Navy until he failed the eye test. On leaving school he travelled to Australia where he spent four years as 'a colonial farmer', until war broke out and he returned to England. He joined the 10th Lincolnshire Regiment (the Grimsby Chums) as a Private, but in March 1915 was commissioned into the 8th battalion and went to France in the following October. On the first day of the battle of the Somme he won a Military Cross at Fricourt when he 'repelled strong hostile bomb attacks, consolidated his position and captured some 20 to 30 prisoners'.<sup>38</sup> On 15 September he had been in the RFC for merely six weeks.

If the exact circumstances of Eric Cruikshank's death are difficult to determine, those of Guy's are even more so. In the former case, there is a lack of evidence; in the latter case, there may perhaps be too much and that contradictory. Clausewitz's 'fog of war'

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<sup>34</sup> McCudden, *Flying Fury*, p. 97.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Hart, *Somme Success: The Royal Flying Corps and the Battle of the Somme, 1916* (Barnsley 2001), chap. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Quentin Reynolds, *They Fought for the Sky* (London 1958), pp. 96-97, 107.

<sup>37</sup> Bott, 'Airman's Outings', pp. 33-34.

<sup>38</sup> *London Gazette*, 22 September 1916.

may be an overused term, but caught in the maelstrom of battle it is perhaps understandable that participants' perceptions of events can be substantially different. This certainly appears to be the case in surviving accounts of what happened to Cruikshank and Preston on their final mission.

There are five existing versions of what happened to Cruikshank and Preston, only one of which, Boelcke's, is not in some way secondhand. One is by Major J H K Lawrence, C.O. of No. 70 Squadron, who informed Cruikshank's solicitor that it remained uncertain what had happened to his client, but that 'he was seen engaged with a German machine and immediately afterwards one of our machines was seen descending in a steep, but controlled dive in the neighbourhood of Ytres, South East of Bapaume'.<sup>39</sup> This left open the possibility that Cruikshank and Preston had survived the attack and were prisoners of war, a version of events that appeared to have been current in the squadron for a while. The Red Cross, for instance, when seeking information on the fate of Cruikshank and Preston in October, interviewed a No. 70 Squadron mechanic in hospital in Norwich. He reported that Cruikshank was attacked by '4 or 5 German machines which came upon him out of the clouds and surrounded him and shot his machine down'.<sup>40</sup> Despite what Boelcke wrote (see below), this part of Air Mechanic Brown's testimony may have an element of truth in it, but his subsequent assertion that 'The Squadron received a wireless message from Germany saying that Captain Guy Cruikshank was a prisoner of war' is certainly false. There is no other evidence to support this statement, which was obviously based on rumour and hearsay. Nevertheless, it may have bolstered the idea that pilot and observer had survived the crash.

The canonical view of Cruikshank's fate, from the British perspective, is in the *Official History* of the air war, first published in 1928. Based mainly on the squadron war diary, it states that, leading six other planes over Havrincourt Wood, Guy saw a German fighter below and dived to attack. His antagonist was, unknown to him, Boelcke who, 'after a brilliant duel, shot down the British aeroplane, to fall to pieces in Havrincourt Wood'.<sup>41</sup> This is probably the origin of the legend that the Cruikshank-Boelcke fight was one of the longest in the history of the war, lasting for as much as thirty minutes.

Boelcke's own account is somewhat more prosaic and triumphalist and does not confirm the view of an exceptional struggle:

No. 25 [victory] had to give best to me . . . . A squadron of seven English Sopwith Biplanes flew over our aerodrome on their way home. I took off at once and chased them. I came up with them near Hervilly, eastward of Peronne, but could do nothing for the moment because I was flying below them. The fellows took advantage of this to attack me. Impudence! I soon turned the tables on them and got one in my sights. I came nicely up to him and gave him about fifty rounds from close range--about twenty to forty metres. Then, having had enough, he went down—after Lieut von Richthofen

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<sup>39</sup> Lawrence to Unknown Solicitors, 22 August 1917, NA PRO WO 339/8950.

<sup>40</sup> Statement of G. Brown, 5 October 1916, *ibid*.

<sup>41</sup> H. A. Jones, *The War in the Air*, vol. 2 (1928: Uckfield 2010), p. 280.



had also given him a few superfluous rounds—into a wood near Hesbecourt and crashed.<sup>42</sup>

Alan Bott was an observer in one of the planes in Cruikshank's flight on 15 September, but if he were an eyewitness to the beginning of the combat, he had his own distractions that meant he had to rely on the reports of others to explain the finale. He states that Cruikshank headed straight for "Mossy-Face" Wood, close to Boelcke's aerodrome. As they approached, eight German machines, 'ranged one above the other, like the rungs of a Venetian blind', passed about three thousand feet below the Flight. Suddenly, a cluster of small enemy scouts swooped down from above, but Cruikshank, 'evidently' not seeing them, 'dived steeply on the Huns underneath, accompanied by the two machines nearest him'. The other pilots in the flight, including Bott, were forced into a melee with the scouts and thus lost sight of what happened to the pilots below.

It was not until Bott returned to base after an adventurous flight that he learned that Cruikshank 'was down at last. . . . In the dive he got right ahead of the two machines that followed him. As these hurried to his assistance, they saw an enemy plane turn over, show a white, gleaming belly, and drop in zigzags. C's bus was then seen to heel over into a vertical dive and to plunge down, spinning rhythmically on its axis. Probably he was shot dead and fell over on to the joystick, which put the machine to its last dive'.<sup>43</sup>

It is now known that Cruikshank's Strutter crashed between Hervilley and Hesbecourt, but at the time, because no British combatant saw the final moments, the authorities followed normal procedures and pronounced the two officers missing. Having made inquiries through the usual channels, which included Red Cross volunteers interviewing possible witnesses, the Army Council finally officially declared Cruikshank and Preston dead in May 1917. On hearing this, Marie Cruikshank asked the War Office if her son's grave had been found. She received no response until August, by which time, following the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line, Guy's place of burial had fallen into allied hands and a Grave Registration Unit had found it. Both Guy and Preston had been buried under a cross that carried an inscription, in German, that here were the remains of Lt Breaton (or Breton) and an unidentified companion.<sup>44</sup>

Although both families were informed of this discovery (leading Preston's sister Antoinette to ask the War Office for a photograph of the grave and offering to pay for its upkeep), officially the identification was not clear-cut.<sup>45</sup> For one thing, another RFC lieutenant called Preston had been killed in January 1917 and his fate remained unknown. Moreover, at some point officialdom had confused *Ytres*, where the Strutter crashed, with *Ypres*, making the burial site an inexplicable distance from the crash site.<sup>46</sup> Not until after the Preston family had pursued the matter further was the issue finally resolved. Following a Foreign Office letter to the neutral Netherlands Legation in Berlin in May 1918, the Prussian Minister of War, after a further two

<sup>42</sup> Johannes Werner, *Knight of Germany: Oswald Boelcke, German Ace* (1932: Newbury 2009), pp.239-240.

<sup>43</sup> Bott, *Airman's Outings*, pp. 41-42, 50.

<sup>44</sup> Correspondence in NA PRO WO 339/8950.

<sup>45</sup> Antoinette Preston to War Office, 28 August 1917, NA PRO WO 339/48962.

<sup>46</sup> NA PRO WO 339/8950.

months, finally reported that a Sopwith, No 895, had been shot down on 15 September 1916 near Hesbecourt and that both occupants had been killed.<sup>47</sup> It is perhaps indicative of the Cruikshank parents' uncertainty as to Guy's fate that they did not insert an *In Memoriam* to their son in *The Times* until September 1919.

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Guy Cruikshank's ambition to defeat Boelcke in combat; his reputation for spending more time in enemy airspace than anyone else; his utter fearlessness; and 'his fatalistic creed that Archie [anti-aircraft fire] should never be dodged',<sup>48</sup> may have been encouraged by a determination to repair the family reputation, for while Guy was involved in his fatal duel with Boelcke, his father was once again languishing in prison. In the years immediately preceding the war James had continued his reckless gambling on the turf. He may have been "warned off" English racecourses, for he spent much of his time on the continent, in Paris, Brussels and Berlin. Although still an undischarged bankrupt, he set up a company called Harding Coutts Lindsay through which he raised money by fraud, both from susceptible individuals and from banks. His ploy was to obtain overdrafts and loans, with security being based on a mythical legacy about to come from his brother in Canada. In May 1915 he was sentenced at the Central Criminal Court to eighteen months' hard labour for obtaining credit by false pretences and failing to disclose that he was an undischarged bankrupt.<sup>49</sup> He came out of prison at a time when Guy's fate was still not officially determined.

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Jasper was now the only son left. He was probably the least dashing of the three and had married in 1911. But he had quickly sought to rejoin the army when war was declared. He arrived in France in late September 1914 but did not join the 2<sup>nd</sup> Durham Light Infantry in the trenches at Rue du Bois near Armentieres until 25 October. He was to remain with the battalion for nearly six uncomfortable months of trench holding. The battalion's war diary is not very illuminating for this period and all that is known is that in February 1915 Jasper led one minor and inconsequential trench raid at Houplines. On 5 April he left the regiment.<sup>50</sup> Following in his brother's footsteps Jasper was posted to the RFC, as an observer with No. 16 Squadron, which had been formed only a month earlier.<sup>51</sup> He spent a year with the squadron, for some of the time as Adjutant, before returning to England, where he became C.O. of a training establishment.<sup>52</sup> Later in the year he was appointed Commandant of No. 4 School of Military Aeronautics, based at Hart House in the University of Toronto, Canada. Holding the rank of temporary Lt-Colonel, Jasper remained there for the rest of the war, returning to Britain in January 1919.<sup>53</sup>

He was to remain in uniform after the war, receiving an OBE in the New Year's Honours List in January 1919 and a permanent commission in the RAF in the following August, his rank changing from Major to Squadron Leader in 1920.<sup>54</sup> He

<sup>47</sup> Netherlands Legation, Berlin to War Office, 26 July 1918, *ibid*.

<sup>48</sup> Bott, *Airman's Outings*, p. 51.

<sup>49</sup> *The Times*, 9 February 1917.

<sup>50</sup> I am grateful to John Sheen for this information.

<sup>51</sup> I am grateful to "Nils d" of the Great War Forum for this information.

<sup>52</sup> *Flight Magazine*, 10 August 1916; *London Gazette*, 17 April 1917.

<sup>53</sup> *University of Toronto Monthly*, vol. 20 (1919), p.20.

<sup>54</sup> *London Gazette*, 1 August 1919, 30 March 1920.

was posted to No. 4 Flying Training School at Abu Suier in Egypt, where pilots were trained for service in the Middle East. In May 1922, towards the end of the Iraqi revolt against British rule, Jasper was posted to RAF HQ in Baghdad, where he commanded an armoured car company. But in February 1925 he contracted typhoid and died.<sup>55</sup> He left a widow and one son, named Eric Guy Lindsay in memory of his brothers. Eric was to serve in the Second World War, as a Captain in the Royal Garrison Artillery and the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment.

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James Cruikshanks, con man and fraudster, outlived all his sons, dying in London in 1925 at the age of 74. His only daughter, Violet, never married but lived separately from her mother in London until, with tragic irony, while serving in the ambulance service she was killed by a bomb in High Holborn on 15 September 1940, the twenty-fourth anniversary of the death in action of her brother Guy.<sup>56</sup> A year later, Marie died, having lost all her children to the insatiable demands of twentieth-century warfare.

From the mid-nineteenth century four generations of Cruikshanks served in the armed forces. Only one, James Henry, did not serve overseas. Without his criminal escapades, the Cruikshanks might be viewed as a fairly typical middle-class family wedded to the military that, like so many others, suffered tragedy as a result of the Great War. But the three brothers' father had brought disgrace on the family. This blot on the family's name was wiped clean by the gallant actions of Eric, Guy, Jasper and Violet, all of whom were to die on active service. They had redeemed the family's honour.

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 June 1922; *The Times*, 24 February 1925.

<sup>56</sup> Probate of Violet Beryl Lindsay Cruikshank, 1941; *The Times*, 7 October 1940.

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