

Great War 1914-18

Documents relating to John Robert Cowan (changed in 1916 to Cowan-Douglas), who fought in many engagements on the front line, was wounded, taught in the Grenade School in Troon & Edinburgh and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order and the Military Cross and was mentioned in dispatches in relation to the battles of Neuve Chapelle (March 1915) and Ypres/Richebourg-l'Avoue in May 1915. Other documents relate to his family and relatives who were involved in (a) an air attack on HMS Venerable in the Channel (b) a Zeppelin attack on Edinburgh and (c) service in Greece.

The letters copied were transcribed by JRC's sister Lilian and kept in a journal, together with press cuttings, photos and other memorabilia of the period.

Documents provided by JRC's grandson (through his elder daughter Jennifer), Christopher John Hamer 10 April 2008.

Index to .pdf files:

- A. Letter from JRC in the field 27th December 1914: re Battle of Givenchy involving the Ghurkas. Shot through his balaclava helmet.
- B. Letter from midshipman R.H. Cowan from HMS Venerable 12th March 1915. This 15,700 ton London class battleship that was heavily involved in the fighting on the Belgian coast in 1914-15 before serving off the Dardanelles and in the Aegean. She had Four 12in guns, Twelve 6in quick firing guns, Sixteen 12pdr quick firing guns, Six 3pdr guns and Four 18in torpedo tubes. The letter details attacks by aircraft and floating mines. Photo of the author.
- C. Letter from JRC in the field 20th March 1915 re Battle of Neuve Chapelle. Fierce fighting near the Bois de Biez with very heavy casualties "all my best chums are gone". Photos of JRC and his younger brother Hugh on leave in St James's Park in April 1915.
- D. Letter from JRC in the field 5th May 1915 re fighting in near the Ypres Salient.
- E. Letter from JRC in the field May 1916 re Battle of Richebourg-l'Avoue. JRC shot through both legs whilst receiving orders and lay wounded for 9 hours before being rescued.
- F. Photo, Obituary and poem from the Wykemist of July 1915 re a relation Isaac Bayley Balfour, killed in action 28th June 1915 whilst fighting with the King's Own Scottish Borderers.
- G. Photos and press cuttings re JRC and his Military Cross award. 1915-16.
- H. Letter re Zeppelin raid on Edinburgh 2nd April 1916 witnessed by JRC's sister Lilian Cowan and friends.
- I. Diagram of "303 Short Hand Grenade" from JRC's time as a grenade instructor in Scotland.
- J. JRC poem "Life in a Dug-out"
- K. Letter from JRC's younger brother, Hugh Cowan-Douglas, an officer in the 6th Rifle Brigade from Piraeus in Greece 21st July 1917: Bastille Day celebrations with French and Russian troops.
- L. Photo of JRC's medals from First and Second World Wars and his HLI regimental clasp badge.