

## **The resignation letter of Lt. Norman Cameron Crichton, East Riding Yeomanry**

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Norman Cameron Crichton (1889-1949) is an interesting study of the problems a man might encounter as an officer in the British Army at this time, coming as he did from a less than privileged background.

Born at Hull, he was an apprentice fitter with the engineering firm of Amos & Smith, before enlisting with the Territorial Army (4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, East Yorkshire Rgt) in 1908. After going absent without leave whilst abroad, he was released from the TA on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1911. He subsequently enlisted in the Merchant Navy as an engineer.

On 26<sup>th</sup> August 1915 he joined the East Riding Yeomanry (ERY) as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, but following the events detailed below, involving allegations of drunkenness, amongst other issues, he left the regiment (the London Gazette for 27<sup>th</sup> March 1917 notes he was removed from the Army for being absent without leave). Crichton's letter attempts to explain his conduct, defend his own character and makes various observations on the failings of army procedures.

The story did not end there however, as he enlisted (as a Private) in the Royal Army Service Corps on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1917. Interestingly, his later service was under the name Harold Norman Curtis-Cooke and he gave his place of birth as being Aberdeen. However, the significant detail in his medical records that he was missing part of his left little finger allows the researcher to track his service under an assumed name. Crichton was promoted Acting Corporal in July 1919, being finally discharged in December of that year.

In 1924 he was working as a musician on an ocean liner. Crichton died at York on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1949.

10.6.17

To the Secretary of State for War

War Office

Sir,

I have the honour to submit the following statements to you and to express the hope that you, after reading the same, will cause a notice to appear in the Gazette of my removal from the Army or resignation.

I enlisted in the 4<sup>th</sup> Batt E. Yorks Regt. TF as a private in Oct 1914 and was passed for Home Service only. In Dec 1917 I was promoted Lance Corporal and Drill Instructor to the Depot recruits. I was subsequently promoted rank by rank to that of Company Sergeant Major and as such was Instructor to a class of officers in drill. In Oct 1915 I was offered a commission by Bob Easton, Secretary of the East Riding of York TF Association, to proceed to the Dardanelles as an instructor of infantry work to the East Riding Yeomanry who were under orders to proceed there. I accepted the offer and in due course (Oct 2<sup>nd</sup> 1915) I was gazetted a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in that regiment. Upon reporting I was considerably surprised to learn that the regiment was not going out and I received orders to report to the 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Reserve Regt at York for instruction as a cavalry officer. During my short stay in York I qualified as an instructor in signalling at Farnley Park and I may also mention that I took the Chelsea course as a corporal in January 1915 and the musketry course at Strensall in July 1915. At York, owing to the fresh training, responsibility and expense of living in mess, my health gave way. I therefore resigned my commission and my commanding officer, Maj. Cooke, telegraphed me and stated that he would transfer me to a northern unit if I would reconsider my decision. I accepted this offer but instead of a transfer I was placed in York Military Hospital in lieu of a lunatic asylum. Major Cooke believed (?) I was insane. However I was in the hospital a fortnight with nerve trouble and after being discharged I was offered a position as assistant recruiting officer at Beverley, E. Yorks. I accepted this. The medical board had given me three months sick leave but as I had no desire to remain idle during this period. It is not my desire or wish to make any accusations against any of the recruiting staff there but I must state in my own defence that 95% of the

actual recruiting work was done by myself. My period at Beverley was from March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1915 until Dec 20<sup>th</sup> 1915. The recruiting officer, Capt. Buyler (?) was the limit of incompetency and the majority of the work that should have been done by him fell on to my shoulders. I am not making this statement at random as it was well known at the depot who did all the work. On calling up days the RO was usually conspicuous by his absence and I had the assistance of an ex Sergeant Major to help me in getting the majority of the men away. All the documents were signed by myself, I had also charge of the cash. During this period I made appointments for many hundreds of medical examinations all of whom I saw personally. I was instructed in nothing and had every detail of the work to study myself. The sub-area was in a state of chaos until put into a business order by 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. J Lee Smith of the same regiment as myself. I do not believe that Col Connau (?), Commanding the 15<sup>th</sup> Regt area was aware of these chaotic conditions. I will now proceed to give an explanation of how I came to resign my commission and leave the Regimental Depot. I am very well known in the East Riding as a pianist and recitalist and my services were very frequently requested in the cause of charity work etc in the vicinity of Beverley and for which services I have been thanked many times publicly by the Mayor. I was invited to become the solo pianist of the YMCA concert party in the town, the members of which comprised three ladies, well known in the town and three Lance Corporals attached to the clerical staff at the depot. These corporals were all equal status to me in private life one being an Oxford BA. I accepted this position and then commenced a series of concerts several of which Colonel Connau (?) attended. At the conclusion of one of these concerts given in the depot lawn I was accused of being drunk and insulting the wife of the man who is responsible for my present position. I refer to Mrs Munro the wife of Capt. Munro MO at Beverley. The insult took the form of presenting or rather daring to present, the male members of the concert party to her. My "drunkenness" was not with drink but with the natural excitement due to a super sensitive and highly strung man like myself at that period. I am not a teetotaler as I have found very great assistance from stimulants to enable me to carry out my work at the depot. But I would swear on my honour that no one in Beverley or outside it has ever seen me the worse for drink. I may be a trifle eccentric and may also have different ideas socially, politically and in religion. The tongue of gossip, scandal and jealousy will always wag and once started leads to unheard of heights. The 20<sup>th</sup> December 1915 saw the end of my career as an

officer at Beverley. I was unwell that day owing to violent palpitation of the heart which I have suffered from for some years. Before lunch I drank two Vermouths and after lunch I relieved to the ante room and slept there from 2pm until 6pm when I woke with another attack. The adjutant gave me brandy and also sent across for the doctor Capt. Munro who ordered me to bed. Here I made a mistake, the mistake that led to my undoing. Instead of going to bed I went out to a rehearsal for a concert that was to be given the following evening. I walked from the depot to Beverley town, a distance of over two miles in a little over half an hour. I needed fresh air and not bed. I returned to the depot at 10pm. The doctor came to my room the following morning and proceeded to hurl the greatest insults at me that man ever listened to. He said he would have me court martialled for being drunk the night previous and also said that I visited a low public house in Beverley on the purpose of consorting with a prostitute. In the afternoon of the same day I had an interview with Col Connau (?) and in the course of his remarks to me he said that he had never seen me take drink or had seen me the worse for it, he did not think my visiting a low public house was the conduct of an officer and a gentleman and that I had made too much of my friends in the concert party when away from military duties. He finally told me to pack up and leave the depot. This I did at once. All the cash in hand I handed over to Capt. Robson and I still hold his receipt and I also instructed him in the manner of posting and paying recruits before I left.

With regard to the low public house I would state that it is kept by some great friends of mine, friends who have done more for me than anyone else. The allegations that my friend's wife is a prostitute is the vilest lie that Dr Munro ever uttered in his life. But no more of that I will settle accounts in full when I return, if ever, to civilian life again.

Here, Sir, you have my statements which I swear are true. Should circumstances arise again I think I should do the same again. I am in a London Regt as a private and have been since January. I am, comparatively speaking, happy, & here I wish to remain. The only thing that has worried me is the non-payment by me of my mess bill for Dec[ember] at Beverley, an amount of about £8-0-0 or so. I have not the money to pay it, my assets are absolutely nil. I wrote to Messrs Cox's a short time ago requesting a statement account debit or credit. I received a reply enclosing my pass-book in which I found I was in credit to £7-3-2. I then replied asking for information as to how I could claim this amount

as I had not a cheque book. The reply came in the form of a Detective to the house of a friend in Hull & to whom I had had my letter addressed c/o. Needless to say, I have been in Hull myself but got a friend to bring it for me. I cannot think for what purpose I am to be continually living under a perpetual fear. I have been, if my resignation has not been accepted, an absentee for nearly six months. Many an officer has been removed from the Army for far less a crime than that. Mercy(?) I ask no pray(?) for, justice for a subaltern or a Private is a farce, there is no such thing. A man is condemned unheard, unless he happens to be well connected + [have] private means. I am a ranker & as such was at one time proud of the fact.

I will not weary you further, but in conclusion I would ask that I may be removed from the Army as an officer on that a notification may appear in the Gazette that I have resigned. Either will make no difference to a broken hearted man.

I have the honour to be, sir,

Your obedient servant

N.C. Crichton