



# Private Lord Crawford's Great War Diaries: From Medical Orderly to Cabinet Minister

*Christopher Arander*

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This unusual account is written by the 27th Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, an active Lancashire MP for 18 years until he inherited the title on his father's death in 1913. In 1915 his sense of patriotic duty drove him to join the RAMC as a Private, although he was married with 7 children, head of a large company and well over age. Despite his privileged status in civilian life, he cheerfully served as a humble medical orderly on the Western Front for some 14 months and was given responsibility for two operating theatres. A gifted author and diarist, his daily entries provide a fascinating insight into life near the front over this period and, together with his letters home, his writings reflect the stark contrast between his home life and the one he experienced in Flanders. Of particular interest are his astute observations on his contemporaries of all ranks, the conduct of the war, medical services and life in wartime France. Remarkably he never complains at his lot (although often sharply critical of GHQ and politicians) or regrets his decision. As the Author was the only Cabinet-level politician to serve 'in the ranks' during the conflict, this is a record without any parallel. In 1916 Crawford was persuaded eventually to return to London and join Asquith's Cabinet before staying on under Lloyd George until 1922. After the war, he became a director, trustee or advisor of several museums, such as the British Museum, National Gallery and others. The Crawford Papers (his diaries, edited by Prof John Vincent) describe his civilian experiences from 1892 to 1940 and are seen as an invaluable source for students of politics, art, industry and society in Britain. The book contains three maps and 75 illustrations. This fascinating book fills a needy gap at a time of unprecedented interest in The Great War. One of The Times' 'Books of the Year' 2013. As seen in Britain At War Magazine and The House Magazine

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