

2nd Lieutenant Guy Barnett

Died 12th March 1915 aged 24

Guy Barnett was born in July 1890 in Church Stretton, to Horatio Barnett MA MB and Margaret Barnett. Horatio was a General Medical Practitioner. He had been born in Walsall and Margaret was from Coalbrookdale but they settled in Church Stretton and Horatio spent his whole working life as the local doctor.

They lived first at Burway house, and as would be expected of a professional man they kept a number of servants including a nurse for Guy and even a young boy described as a page.

Guy went to boarding school in Wolverhampton and later returned to live with his parents and studied agriculture. The Barnetts had by now moved to Woodcote, on Cunnery Road. Guy was an only child.

When war broke out Guy was one of the first men to sign up. He received his commission on 15th August 1914 and was assigned to the 5th Battalion of the Worcester Regiment as a 2nd Lieutenant, later transferring to the 1st Battalion.



Guy entered the French Theatre of War on 20th February 1915 and his tragically short military career was centred on The Battle of Neuve Chapelle in northern France.

In February the British Commander-in-Chief decided that the First Army should attack the German lines covering Lille. The plan was to crush the salient in the German line formed by the village of Neuve Chapelle and break a gap in the German defensive line. Through that gap the British reserves and cavalry were intended to push forward to seize the Aubers Ridge and possibly Lille itself. The trenches in front of Neuve Chapelle were being held by Guy's Battalion, the 1st

Worcester Regiment at the beginning of March. A great concentration of men and artillery were quietly brought up to support them.

At 7.30am on the morning of 10th March some 500 British guns opened fire, the heaviest bombardment experienced till then in any war. The German trenches disappeared in a whirlwind of flame and smoke and the battalions of the 23rd and 25th Brigades advanced.

The 1st (Guy's battalion) had moved off from their billets towards the old trench line where they were held. A lack of information meant that a golden opportunity to exploit an open

gap was lost. By 2pm they did get orders to join the 23rd regiment where there was heavy fighting.

As night fell the Germans worked hard to complete their defences, having been taken badly by surprise and losing ground as a result.

The British communications and information were not good at this point. Nevertheless, the British Artillery opened fire again at 6.45 on the morning of 11th March. The ground held by the 1st Worcestershire was vulnerable to the German battery and suffered heavy fire. Shelling went on all day and into the night and, according to the Worcester Regiment, it was on this day that Guy Barnett was killed.



The counter-charge of the 1st Worcestershire against the 21st Bavarians (by Gilbert Holiday. Courtesy of Worcestershire Regiment Museum.)

The fighting continued on 12th March but by night fall both sides were exhausted. The trenches which the 1st Worcestershire had held against the Bavarian attack became part of the new line but there was little else to show for the fighting.

The losses were severe. 9 officers were killed, including Guy, and 10 wounded. 92 other ranks died with 226 wounded and 37 missing. But the 21st Bavarian Reserve lost 25 officers and 1139 other ranks.

Guy is commemorated on the Le Touret Memorial in the Pay de Calais region, along with 13481 other soldiers.

He was awarded the British War Medal, The Allied Victory Medal and the 1914-15 Star.

Dr and Mrs Barnett continued to live in Church Stretton at The Limes. Dr Barnett acted as the Medical Officer of The Union as well as being the local GP. He died in 1938 but Margaret lived to be 88, dying in 1953.

Sources:

Census and other records courtesy of Ancestry.com

Details of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle are taken from the Worcestershire Regiment website. (http://www.worcestershireregiment.com/wr.php?main=inc/h_neuve_chapelle)