

Pte. William Edgar Curnuck
7th Princess Charlotte of Wales's
(Royal Berkshire Regiment)

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Commemorated on Newbridge War Memorial as W. C. Carnock

Commemorated on Tabernacle Baptist Church Roll of Service as W Carnuck

Family

William Edgar Curnuck was born on 27th March 1885, the fifth child of Alfred and Rhoda Curnuck, his elder siblings were Charles, Thomas, Amelia and Ada. None of the family could speak Welsh.

In 1891 the family were living at 37 Mill House, Mynydd Maen, William's father, Alfred, was working as a colliery roadman and his eldest brother, Charles, was working as a coal miner. The younger children were all at school.

By 1901 the family had moved to Crumlin and were living at 27 Glen View Terrace. All five children were still living with Alfred and Rhoda. At the age of sixty Alfred was still working underground as a coal miner as were his three sons Charles (28), Thomas (24), and William (16). Amelia (22) was working as a dressmaker. In addition to cooking and cleaning for her family, Rhoda also had to make provision for a lodger George Gough.

The 1911 Census shows Thomas as the head of the family, his father Alfred having died on 26th May 1901 leaving an estate of £135 5s to his widow Rhoda.

Although Charles had left, the remaining four children were still at home. Thomas, Amelia and William were still single aged 35, 32 and 25. Only Ada was married, her husband was not recorded in the census but her six year old son Charles was. Maud Bright (cousin) and William Morgan (boarder) were also resident in the house.



Military

William Curnuck enlisted in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve on 25th February 1915. His service number was WALES Z/431

When he joined up he was described as 5' 3" tall with a 35" chest. He was of fair complexion with dark hair and grey eyes and had the letter "C" tattooed on his left forearm.

The Royal Naval Division was formed in August 1914 from naval reserve forces when warships of the fleet were fully crewed. The tradition of naval personnel serving on land had been long established and a shortfall in infantry divisions in the army led to the formation of the RND to supplement the army. The RND was retained under Admiralty control even though they were fighting on land alongside the army. Reserve personnel from the Royal Naval Reserve, Royal Fleet Reserve and the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve with a brigade of Marines were assembled at Crystal Palace to form the RND.

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After initially being based at Crystal Palace, William Curnuck was transferred on 10/07/15 to the 5th Battalion RND based at Blandford. From there he was transferred to the 3rd Reserve Battalion RND on 18/04/16 and then to the 2nd (Hawke) Battalion on 10/05/1916.



This photograph shows him in the khaki uniform of the RND. His cap bears the ribbon of the Hawke Battalion which was informally added to the traditional army uniform when it replaced the naval uniform.

The 2nd (Hawke) Battalion formed part of the 1st (Royal Naval) Brigade but the brigade was broken up on 2nd July 1916 and the men allocated to other units. This meant that William was on the move again – this time to the 4th Reserve Battalion RND.

He was eventually discharged from the RND and transferred to the 13th Labour Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment on 25th September 1916.

His new service number was 31584, 5 other men transferred from the RND to the 13th Royal Berkshire Regiment on the same day -

31586 J Cotton
31587 M Brown
31588 J Thomas
31589 F Harvey
31590 J McIntyre.

Although he was only transferred from the RND to the 13th Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment on 25/9/1916, William was soon on the move again when he (and the men mentioned above) were transferred to the 7th Battalion destined for Salonika. This may have been because the majority of the 13th Battalion had already departed for France on 19/9/1916 possibly leaving them stranded.

Pte. Curnuck died of wounds on 26th April 1917, his wounds were probably inflicted on 24th April when he was in action in the vicinity of Doiran Lake. The 7th Battalion War Diary for the 24th reveals that the battalion were involved in heavy fighting which resulted in nearly 250 casualties.

24th April 1917 Greece, C SECTOR LEFT

Our bombardment continues and enemy retaliated during day. The operations took place between DOIRAN LAKE and P5 and 4 1/2. The 79th Bde (3Bns) attacked from the lake to PETIT COURONNE. The 78th (2Bns) 05 1/2 and 06 and Bde (2Bns) of 22nd Div on the left.

The attack took place at 2145hrs. D Coy on left attacked Z42 Z43. C Coy Y15 and Y16 and A Coy Z40 and Z41. C and D Coys took their objectives in spite of encountering a heavy barrage. A Coy did not move forward on account of the heavy barrage at point K. C and D Coys held their captured positions and started consolidation, but having run out of

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bombs and had 3 Lewis guns destroyed were forced to retire in face of a heavy counter attack.

The Bns of 79th Bde were unsuccessful in capturing their objectives and the order to retire to our trenches was given at 0430hrs. The BNs of 22nd Div captured their objectives, succeeded in holding and consolidating in spite of heavy counter attacks.

The barrage put up by the enemy was extremely heavy. We had the following casualties killed CAPT D.S. CURREY, 2Lt G.H. DAY, missing 2Lt H.B. THOMPSON MC, wounded CAPT J.B. MARKS, 2Lts C.W. JOHNSON, P.J. WILLIAMS, B.P. REILLY, Y.R. WATTS and Lt S.J. DALE slightly wounded to duty. Casualties of OR 245.

The Berkshire Chronicle reported on 28th June 1918:-

On April 24th 1917 the Berkshires participated in the attack on the Bulgarian positions and succeeded after severe fighting, in reaching their objectives. In his description Mr John Buchan said:- "On April 24th the British, after a long bombardment, attacked the Doiran fortress which was of formidable strength. The first enemy line had Pip 4½ as its western sentry. Its principal bastion was a bare sugar loafed hill called the Petit Couronné. In front of it along the whole length to complete the likeness to a mediaeval castle ran a moat, the deep gully called the Jumeaux Ravine. The British troops crossed the parapets at 9.45 pm - the latest hour at which any battle in the campaign had begun. On the left all the enemy's first positions were taken from Doldzeli village to Pip 4½. In the centre and on the right the difficulties of the Jumeaux Ravine were so great that only a few of the Devons and Berkshires reached the other side and, during the night, that handful was driven back by counter-attacks. The end of the battle left us with the western half of the enemy's first position which we succeeded in securing and holding"

How terrible were the tasks which faced the Berkshires and the other troops may be gauged from the following description:

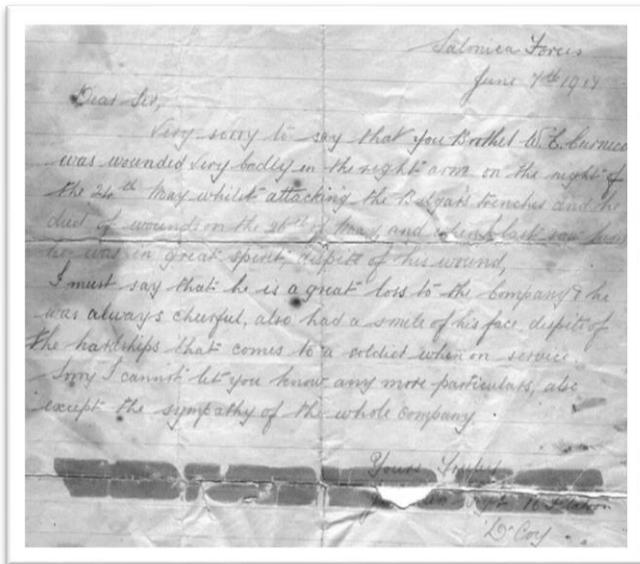
"The foremost line of all, the whole of which we entered, though we were forced back from the right hand sector of it under desperate counter-attacks, has a principal bastion, a bare round-topped sugar-loaf hill called the Petit Couronné. But running along almost its whole front, exactly like a mediaeval moat is a deep and forbidding nullah called the Jumeaux Ravine. When the infantry attacked this particularly difficult sector went over their parapets at a quarter to ten o'clock at night they had first to clamber into this ravine under a hail of machine gun bullets to ford, often waist deep, the cascade at the bottom and then to scale the steep slope on the other side with the Bulgars waiting for them in their trenches along the top. As soon as the first wave of our men went over the Bulgar trench mortars started dropping a barrage which was absolutely dead in its accuracy into the ravine and to this barrage was added the bombardment by 8 in howitzers of our front line trenches and the ground before them. From a quarter to ten until nearly eleven o'clock shells were dropping along the length of the nullah and the effect was exaggerated by the fact that when they burst on a rock they splintered into clouds of stony shrapnel. Soaring Very lights and two powerful enemy searchlights kept the bare ground under a ghastly illumination. Heavily though we shelled the Bulgar front line his men had found secure shelter in the ravines close behind and they were now rushed up to the trenches where they fought with fierce determination"

Official recognition of the great devotion displayed by the Berkshires was forthcoming in the dispatch of General Milne who made this striking comment:

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"During the night several determined hostile counter-attacks were repulsed with heavy loss but eventually after several hours hard fighting the attackers were forced back to their own trenches. *This operation was carried out with the greatest gallantry and determination by representative battalions of English County Regiments among whom the Devonshire Regiment and the Berkshire Regiment deserve special credit for their dash and tenacity*"

Following the battle Pte. Curnuck's family received a letter from his Platoon Sergeant detailing the circumstances of his death.



Dear Sir,

Very sorry to say that you Brother W. E. Curnuck was wounded very badly in the right arm on the night of 24th May whilst attacking the Bulgar trenches and he died of wounds on 26th May and when I last saw him he was in great spirit despite of his wound.

I must say that he is a great loss to the company and he was always cheerful, also had a smile on his face despite of the hardships that comes to a soldier on service.

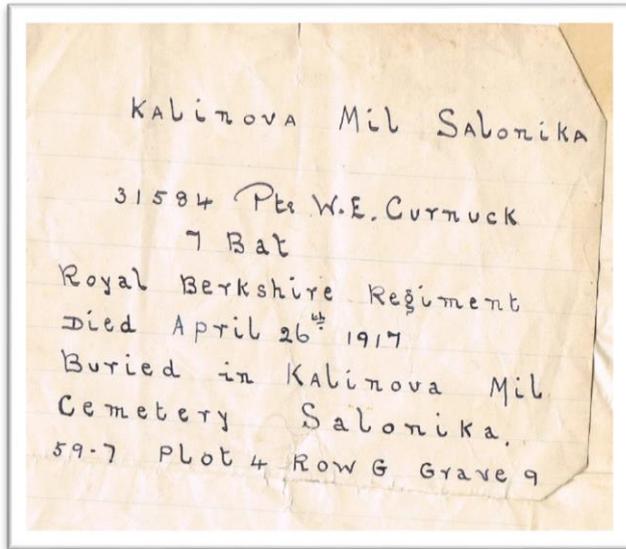
Sorry I cannot let you know more about the particulars also accept the sympathies of the whole company.

Yours Truly
xxxxxx Sgt 16 Platoon

D Coy

The dates in the letter are one month later than the actual events, the number of letters to be written may have taken many weeks so errors were likely to be made.

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The letter also included information on the location of Pte Curnuck's grave.

He was buried in the Kalinova Military Cemetery in: Plot 4 - Row G - Grave 9.

Kalinova is a village two miles North East of Caussica, at the foot of the hills which stand between Lakes Ardzan and Doiran.



At the Armistice there were 52 burials at the Kalinova Military Cemetery but early in 1919 a number of casualties were moved from surrounding cemeteries into Kalinova.

In December 1920 all the burials in Kalinova were moved to the Karasouli Military Cemetery.

Karasouli Military Cemetery is on the edge of the town of Polykastro (formerly Karasouli) which lies some 73 kilometres from Thessaloniki, between the River Axios (Vardas) and the south end of Lake Ardzan (now dry

and replaced by a reservoir)

Sources

Photographs & letter - Alan Pitcher

CWGC.org

Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919

RNVR Medal Roll

British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920

1891, 1901, 1911 Census

The Berkshire Chronicle

England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1966

www.royalnavalmuseum.org

www.thewardrobe.org.uk (website of the Royal Berkshire Regiment)

www.purley.eu The Biscuit Boys - Kitchener Battalions Project