

Dunkley, LG

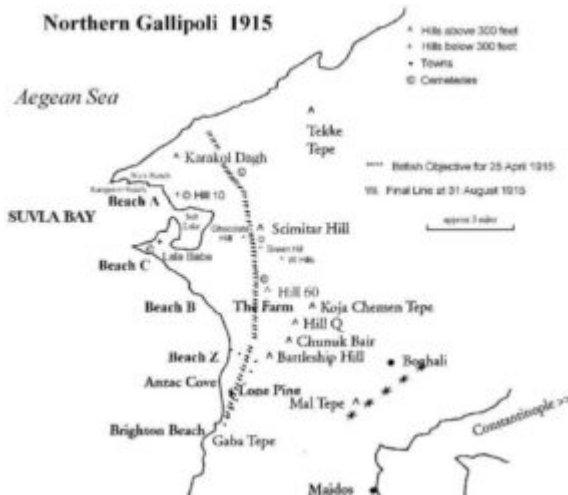
Leonard Dunckley was born in 1888 in Barnes. Later, his parents Henry, a cabinet maker, and Mary Dunckley moved first to 48 Cranbrook Road, Chiswick and, by 1911, to Linden Gardens, just outside the parish, on the South side of Chiswick High Road. He had older siblings: Elizabeth, b.1877, Alice, b. 1880 and Henry W, b.1882. They had all been born in Kent.

Old registers at St Michael's tell us that Leonard was a regular worshipper, and for seven years from 1907 acted as a server and thurifer. His name appears in this capacity not just on Feast Days and Sundays, but at early morning masses on Tuesdays and Saturdays regularly as well. By felicitous chance, his last recorded official duty turns out to have been on Tuesday, 29 September 1914, St Michael's Feast Day. In the 1911 Census he is recorded as have been employed as a clerk for the N.S.P.C.C.

Leonard volunteered and enlisted with the 3rd County of London Yeomanry, "The Sharpshooters", a volunteer cavalry unit. As part of the 2nd. Mounted Division, it sailed for Egypt on 28 April 1915. The Battalion diary records that, as reinforcements, 13 Officers and 317 Other Ranks landed, unmounted, at Suvla Bay, Gallipoli on 18 August 1915, "unmolested, but shelled soon afterwards". By then, as we now know, the amphibious attack which was to have retrieved the disastrous failure of the first Gallipoli landings that April had already ground to a stalemate. The division moved into reserve positions at Lala Baba on the night of 20 August. On 21 August it advanced to Chocolate Hill under heavy fire and took part in the unsuccessful attack on Scimitar Hill together with the 29th Division (see map). For the next two months or so, Leonard's unit clung on in the inhospitable terrain, taking turns in the front-line trenches, constantly under desultory fire from Turkish snipers and artillery. Leonard's

letter to the Vicar from Gallipoli can be seen below.

A few extracts from the adjutant Lieutenant Underwood's official war diary for the battalion gives just a glimpse of what it must have been like:



“21.8.15: regiment in advance to Chocolate Hill under heavy shell fire ... attacked position E of Hill 112 which was held and improved. casualties: 7 Killed, 27 wounded, 8 missing”

5.9.15: ...digging communication trenches all day. Water here plentiful from well close by, and drinking water from another well further to our left. Heavy sniping at night and by day the only safe approach is along the trench we are digging now ...

10.9.15: ... various casualties from snipers' chance shot, enfilade shrapnel etc. Troublesome sniper from a certain tree and dugout some way in front of the Turkish trench. Two men tried to crawl out to deal with the sniper – one killed, the other recovered body with aid of covering party ... “

19.9.15: 8 Officers, 201 Other Ranks. Heavy bombardment of all British positions at 17.30 – batteries and ships replied and silenced bombardment. More bullets fall here than in the front trenches ... daily loss of sick men to hospital is getting serious. Men very weak and diarrhoea is prevalent.”

27.9.15: Water in trenches very bad – rising levels need

pumping out. Enemy broomstick bombs from trench mortar. 8 Officers, 175 Other Ranks."

3.10.15: *In last 3 days, 39 Other Ranks have gone sick. The amount of digging, draining and fatigues has been too much for them after 4 months of the Egyptian summer. Smell very bad from bodies in and around the gully."*

16.10.15: *Sentence on Trpr. B--, (court-marshalled for sleeping at his post) : Guilty – 3 years penal servitude – punishment remitted by GOC in C in view of special circumstances ... "*

By 20 October, the battalion had been told that they would not take over the front line again. They left Gallipoli on 3 November. The diary records that the whole Mounted Division required 3,500 men to replace the 80% lost sick, wounded or killed. By then, Leonard Dunckley's unit was down to 110 men.

On 16 November 1916, 3rd County of London Yeomanry embarked at Alexandria with 20 Officers, 429 Other Ranks and 471 Horses, bound for Salonika harbour, as part of the joint campaign with the French in Macedonia against the Bulgarian part of the Central Powers' Balkan Troop positions. For Leonard's unit this was a fairly quiet period in high contrast with the horrors of 15 months previously. It only saw brief front-line service around Lake Doiran in March 1917 in which there had been only a single day of significant bombardment, with no casualties. A similar number of its complement returned to Egypt in June 1917, in readiness for the expected Autumn campaign in Sinai, Gaza and into Palestine.

Leonard's second letter to the Vicar, see below, speaks clearly of the prolonged waiting, misery and sheer boredom of wartime military life for the ordinary soldier, were it not interrupted by the ghastliness and terror of the brief bursts of action. His letter also speaks of a homesickness, and a yearning for peace, and conveys a sense of tranquillity and

forgiveness.



In July 1917, Leonard's cavalry unit , with other yeomanry, was reorganised to form the 8th Mounted Brigade, 74th Mounted Brigade, 21st Division of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. In late Autumn Leonard seems to have been transferred to the 21st Machine Gun Squadron of that Division as part of General Allenby's Offensive in Gaza and Palestine. He would have been active at Beersheba in the battle for Tel el Khuweilfeh on 6 November. Rapid advances followed and the Brigade would have entered Ramleh by 15 November. The Battle for Jerusalem followed, from 21 November, accompanied by fierce resistance from the Turkish enemy. It is during this action that Leonard Dunckley will have sustained his fatal wounds that led to his death on 27th November. Allenby formally entered Jerusalem on 11 December, in time for Christmas as he had promised. [In the map, the red arrows indicate where Dunckley's unit fought]

Leonard George Dunckley is buried and commemorated at Jerusalem British War Cemetery, Plot G, Grave 29. He was aged 28. His parents caused to be inscribed on his headstone: "He sacrificed All for England". He was awarded the 1915 Star and the War and Victory medals. His parents received total back pay of £9/12/1, and a War Gratuity of £14/10/0.

In January 1918, in the Parish Magazine, the Vicar Jacob Cartmel-Robinson wrote:

"During the past month Dunckley, Bavin, Taylor and Tolson have

been reported as killed. ... Dunckley, dear old Dunckley, most earnest of Servers at the Altar, and a famous swinger of the thurible – how we shall miss his cheery face. To think he is gone! A staunch churchman, and helpful in Services even on the field of battle, as we learned from a chaplain. Yet we will not grieve: he has but gone to higher service, near to us, though hidden from sight, where he is not alone: for friends with whom he worshipped here are there to join with him in “the new song” ...Good-bye Dunckley, and God be with you!”

LEONARD DUNKLEY’S LETTERS TO THE VICAR

From St Michael’s Parish Magazine

“Here’s a letter from dear old Dunckley, one of the keenest Servers we ever had, and one of the best. He has helped at St Michael’s now for many years. May God spare him to come back again as he desires! There has been terrible fighting since he wrote, but so far, thank God, he has come through.”

“August 29th, 1915

Dear Vicar,

Just a few lines from amidst the sand and sun, with a little lead flying about, to let you know that up to the time of writing I am quite well and whole.



After a long, weary wait we have at last taken our position in the firing line. We have been dismounted, and have been sent out as Infantry, the ground at present being too hilly for us to use our horses. We have had a baptism of fire, and, in fact, have been under fire since we neared land. The landing itself was difficult, but we had very few casualties. I am sorry to say, though, that now several of the poor fellows have been unfortunate. It is a terrible country out here, and the heat that we have had to endure, coupled with the sand and dust storms, has been too awful for words. I often think of the dear old place, and wish it were possible to be back with you all again. Oh! how lovely it will be at peace once more, and how it will strike home to many of us when we hear the words before the Procession: 'Let us go forth in peace'. I only hope that the time will soon come when I shall hear those delightful words once more. I am always thinking of St. Michael's, and the beautiful times I had there. It is very hard to be away from it all, and also one's dear friends. The only consolation we have is that we are doing our duty. I am sorry to be away from our Annual Feast

again this year, but perhaps we shall be having a big procession of our own out here about that time through one of the enemy's cities.

Well, dear Vicar, I do not know that there is much else to tell you at present, so I think I had better close. I wrote to you and Mr. Stevens soon after we left England, but as he never received his, I suppose yours got lost in transit also. For the present I must say "good-bye" , trusting that God will bless our efforts in the cause of right, and spare us to meet once more in dear old St Michael's.

Yours very affectionately

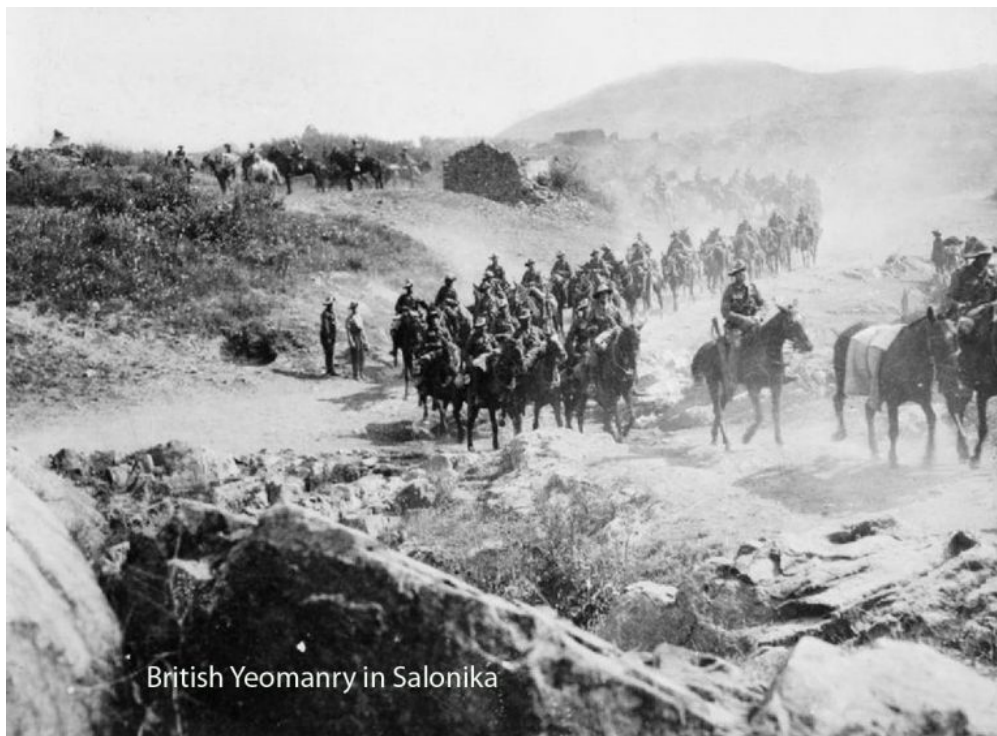
Leonard Dunckley, "A" Squadron, 4th. Troop, 3rd County of London Yeomanry,
4th Mounted Brigade, 2nd Mounted Division, BMEF"

And another:

"July 3rd. 1917 – In the Field

Dear Vicar,

I am afraid it is a very long time since I last wrote to you, and possibly you have thought that I had forgotten you; but let me hasten to assure you, while I have omitted to write, my thoughts and prayers have continually been with you and all other dear friends at S. Michael's.



Well, since you last heard from me I have travelled far and visited many places, and seen some strange, as well as painful, scenes. I have recently arrived in Egypt from the Macedonian Front. This makes the fourth time I have landed in this country and the second time I have visited Macedonia" [He must have some local leave in Egypt]. "With regard to the inhabitants and customs the two countries are very much alike; but the countries themselves differ very much. Greece and the surrounding country are very hilly and mountainous, besides being very green and in parts well wooded; while Egypt is all glittering sand, both tiring to walk over and very trying to the eyes. The heat also is a big trial. It is now well over two years since I left the dear little grey island home in the West, and I am sure it seems like twenty. many of our fellows have been fortunate enough to get home on leave, but that good fortune has not come my way yet. One really wonders sometimes if we ever will see the dear homeland again, or whether this terrible strife is going to last for all time. I have the Magazine sent on from home every month, so I am kept fairly up to date with all the happenings at S. Michael's.

Oh! how one misses the dear old place at Festal Seasons, and

what a joy it will be when once again (DV) we shall be able to resume our old places and take up the duties we were privileged to carry out! Our Chaplain is a splendid fellow, and we are lucky in having one who carries on the teaching that we have always been accustomed to. We have had some very jolly services. Tents, old barns, ruined villages, and straw-matting huts have all provided shelter for us, as well as the open air. Last Sunday we had Mass in a nice little building of wood and matting. All was complete, and I had the privilege of serving. How it brought back the dear old days at S. Michael's! Since I came away there seems to have been quite a lot of additions and alterations, and I shall hardly recognise the dear old place when I have the happiness of once again visiting it. I was very pleased to hear of the Calvary to be erected as a Memorial for those who have made the great sacrifice. It was , indeed, a pleasure to be able to send a small subscription towards the cost.

It must be strange in the old country now to see the ladies do so many things. They seemed to have quite dropped into the way of things now, and nothing appears too arduous for them to attempt. They are certainly wonderful, and we are all very proud of the way they are helping us to carry on.

We have not received much news of late from the other fronts; but no news is good news – so the saying goes – and no doubt before long we shall receive tidings of great doings by our warriors on the other far-reaching battle lines. Where we are at present we are more or less resting, and expect any time now to proceed up the line, where no doubt we shall find things rather warm. well, now I am afraid I have come to the end of the chapter, but I will endeavour to let you have another letter shortly ... With best wishes for yourself , trusting that in the near future we may meet again, I must say adieu.

Yours affectionately
Leonard Dunckley"

Leonard had no other opportunity to write to the parish before his death on 27th November 1917.

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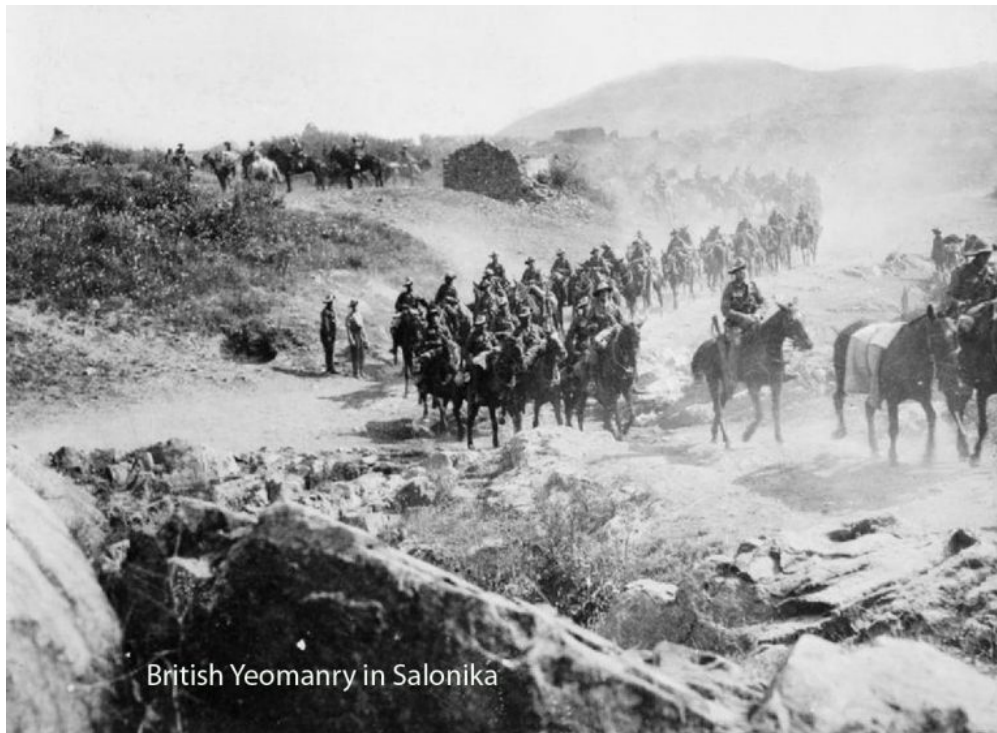
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