

Cheltenham & Gloucester Branch
of
The Western Front Association

Remembering one of Gloucestershire's Fallen



Captain Allastair Malcolm Cluny McReady-Diarmid VC
4th Battalion Middlesex Regiment (attached to the 17th Battalion)

The History of the Second Division 1914-1918 described it as 'probably the finest bombing exploit of the whole war.' This was a reference to an act of gallantry performed by Captain Allastair Malcolm Cluny McReady-Diarmid, 17th Battalion Middlesex Regiment, on 1 December 1917, during the German counter attack, which followed the initial British advance at the Battle of Cambrai.

Allastair Malcolm Cluny McReady-Diarmid was born Arthur Malcolm Drew, at Southgate, North London, on 21 March 1888. He later lived in Barnet, north of London and in Jersey for a short while, before his family moved to Acton in West London, now part of the London Borough of Ealing in 1905. Little is known of his life between leaving school and his commissioning, via the University of London OTC, into the 4th Battalion Middlesex Regiment in March 1915.

Soon after his arrival at the Front he was wounded and it is believed that he was sent on convalescence to the Gloucestershire town of Dursley. Here, in something of a whirlwind romance, he met his wife-to-be and he was married in the Parish Church in September 1915. Evidently it was a marriage of which his family did not approve. About this time he changed his name by deed poll: the circumstances are probably related.

He returned to the Front in October 1915 and it appears that he was wounded again, which meant that he missed the Somme campaign. After a period with a training battalion in Kent, he returned to France in late 1916 and joined the 17th Battalion Middlesex Regiment in April 1917, when it took part in the Battle of Arras. On 1 July 1917 he was promoted to Lieutenant and about

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this time came home to Dursley on leave, to see his daughter, born in May of that year, for the one and only time. On 26 October 1917 he was promoted to Temporary Captain.

The Battle of Cambrai opened on 20 November 1917 and after an initial significant advance, thanks to the deployment of tanks in numbers for the first time, the Germans counter-attacked strongly. The 2nd Division was due to travel to Italy, to bolster the Italian Army, following the Austrian attack at Caopetto but was rushed to Cambrai and into the line near the village of Moeuvres. On 30 November Allastair led his men in a successful counter-attack to stem a significant German attack across the Canal du Nord, then under construction. There was no let-up the next day and the Divisional History records: *It was at this period that what was probably the finest bombing exploit of the whole war took place. Captain A M C McReady-Diarmid of D Company, 17th Middlesex Regiment, seeing the position, called for volunteers from his company. Arming himself with a plentiful supply of bombs, he rushed forward and attacked the enemy. With extraordinary gallantry, and with such splendid bomb throwing as was seldom seen, he gradually drove the enemy back up the trench down which*

his troops had forced their way. "By throwing all the bombs himself," said the Official Report, "this officer killed and otherwise disposed of 94 of the enemy – 67 dead and 27 wounded were actually counted after the recapture of the trench, a feat which can hardly, if ever, have been equalled in the past." Every foot of the 300 yards of lost trench was regained, and by his deliberate disregard of danger, his cheerfulness and coolness, Captain McReady-Diarmid inspired all who saw him. It was a marvellous performance but alas! the gallant officer, having won back for his battalion the lost ground, was himself killed by an enemy bomb almost at the moment of his final triumph. He had, however, by his brave action, and by the same spirit of devotion displayed on the previous day, won for the 2nd Division the second Victoria Cross awarded to it during the Cambrai operations of 1917.

Captain Allastair Malcolm Cluny McReady-Diarmid's body was never found and he is commemorated on the Memorial to the Missing of the Battle of Cambrai, at Louverval. He is also remembered on the War Memorial at Dursley. His posthumous Victoria Cross is now in the possession of the National Army Museum.

