

Henry John GASCOYNE

Sgt 3360 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards **Killed in Action aged 35yrs 1.1. 1917**

Date of Birth: 1882/83, Leamington

Henry John Gascoyne was born in Leamington in Warwickshire in 1882/83, son of John Henry Gascoyne and Annie Elizabeth Gascoyne (nee Griffin), his parents having a total of nine children. In 1899 aged about 16/17, he joined the Coldstream Guards and served for seven years.

As a Corporal, Gascoyne was awarded the Queens South Africa Medal and the Kings South Africa medal. The first was awarded to Military personnel who served in the Boer War in South Africa between October 1899 and May 1902, and the second for those in theatre after 1 January 1902 and had completed 18 months service by 1 June that year. He was based in London when on 22 February 1907 he was appointed to the Guildford Borough Police and served as Police Constable 23; he wasn't sworn in until 7 March 1908 by the Mayor at Guildford Police Station. On 10 November 1908, aged 25, he married Nellie Balchin (aged 19) at St Saviours Church, Guildford. Nellie was from Guildford and the 1901 records showed she lived at that time with her parents at 122 Addison Road, Guildford. In later years Nellie appears in the records as Nellie Elsie Yarnall (formally Gascoyne) of Lloyds Bank Chambers, Henrietta St., London. In 1911 Henry and Nellie lived with their 3 year old nephew Archie Love, at 2 Mary Rd, Guildford.

In his Police service he rose from Constable 4th Class to Constable 1st Class by February 1911. He was twice commended for stopping runaway horses in Guildford. However, his record wasn't spotless; he was reprimanded for partaking of refreshments in a public house whilst on duty (for which he was fined 5 shillings), and for "gossiping" with another Constable whilst on duty (he lost one day's leave as punishment). On 4 August 1914, at the outbreak of the First World War, he rejoined the Coldstream Guards serving with the 1st Battalion as a Private.

In August 1914 the Battalion was stationed at Aldershot as part of the 1st (Guards) Brigade of the 1st Division. They mobilised for war and moved to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force. It was engaged in various actions on the Western Front, including in 1914 The Battle of Mons and the subsequent retreat, The Battles of the Marne, the Aisne and the First Battle of Ypres. In 1915, the battalion saw action at the Battle of Aubers, and the Battle of Loos; the following year saw them fighting at the Battles of Albert, Bazentin, Pozieres, Flers-Courcelette and The Battle of Morval.

In 1915, Henry Gascoyne was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM). The notice appeared on page 6132 of the London Gazette dated 23 June 1915 with the notice: "The King has been graciously pleased to approve of the award of the Distinguished Conduct Medal...for acts of gallantry and devotion to duty whilst serving with the Expeditionary Force in France and Flanders". On 30 June the Gazette published the citation (on page 6377) and that the award was "For conspicuous gallantry throughout the campaign in continually volunteering for dangerous patrol work, and bringing in valuable information". He was promoted to

Company Sergeant Major, which was published in the Leamington Spar Courier on 30th April 1915, along with reference to his DCM and his father's address of ("Modwena") no. 78 Tachbrook Street, Leamington Spa. During the last week of August 1915, Henry received the award at a ceremony at Windsor Castle. In the summer of 1916 Henry was invalided home from the front with rheumatic fever, and, after some months in hospital, served as a Sergeant Instructor at Windsor. He returned to the front on 21 September that year. He was twice offered a commission but turned it down.

Henry was killed in action on 1 January 1917 and was buried in the British Cemetery at Saily-Saillisel on the Somme in France. The Battalion War Diary for 31st December 1916/1st January 1917 states: 31st Dec. Place Maltzhorn, "[Companies] paraded at 4pm and marched up to Combles area and were distributed as follows - No 1 [Company] T18 Central, No 2 [Company] Haie Wood No 3 & 4 [Companies] in Combles trenches. 1st Jan 1917 Place Combles, "No 2 & 3 [Companies] went on carrying fatigue to Saillisel Chateau during the morning. Relieved 3rd [Battalion, Coldstream Guards] in the line. Relief complete 8.10pm. No 2 [Company] right front No 1 [Company] left front, No 3 [Company] support & No 4 [Company] Reserve".

His wife received a letter from another pre-War Guildford Constable, serving in the Coldstream Guards, Signaller Bruce Goodwin, which was published in the Surrey Advertiser newspaper of 17th January 1917, explaining what happened to her husband. "With the sincerest regret I am writing to tell you that poor old Harry was killed on the night of the 1st of this month. At the time I was putting a telephone in the front line and seeing a stretcher pass, asked who it was. They said "[Sergeant] Gascoyne". I had a look and he was quite dead. Harry was looking at a gap in the wire when a flare light went up and he and the man with him both jumped into a shell hole. A sniper fired at them and the bullet penetrated Harry's brain. When we were relieved after our tour in the trenches I went and saw his grave. It is situated at the back of a chateau at -----, with a neat cross at the head. [Sergeant] Semcox and the men of his platoon join me in offering you our sincerest sympathy in your sad loss. He was a good chum and a splendid soldier". Mrs Gascoyne also received a letter of sympathy from Henry's Captain, Cecil Green, and the Reverend F W Head, the chaplain who conducted Henry's burial service. Captain Green said Henry was "far away the best sergeant in my company and I feel his loss both as a soldier and a friend. To my mind he was the ideal of what a soldier should be." Henry was 34 and he is buried in the British Cemetery at Saily-Saillisel on the Somme in France.