

## S/6238 Private Edwin I. Barnett



Edwin Irving Barnett was born in 26 Victoria Street, Kirkwall on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1886, the sixth son and last child of James Barnett and Mary Barnett (née Nicolson). James Barnett was Orkney's last Crown Chamberlain, whose duties included those of Inspector of Works and the distribution of postage stamps in the county, while he was also a Captain in the 1st Orkney Artillery Volunteers.

Edwin attended Kirkwall Burgh School, but his father died suddenly of heart failure when Edwin was only 12 years old. His older brother James had returned from London, where he worked as a clerk, for his father's funeral. Edwin and Mary, his elder sister, and his mother left Orkney to live with James and Edwin finished his schooling in Ilford, Essex. When the 1911 Census was taken, Edwin and his mother had returned to Kirkwall, living in 26 Victoria Street. Edwin was working as a storeman in the town, while his mother took in boarders.

Orkney had a long and proud history of raising volunteer artillery units, but various regiments had recruited soldiers for the Regular Army in the county. Edwin was among the large group of young Orcadians who signed up to join the Seaforth Highlanders when Sergeant James Smith visited the islands with a recruiting party in November 1914. After successfully passing a second medical in Fort George, Edwin travelled to Bordon in Hampshire where the Kitchener volunteers were forming several New Army battalions of the Seaforths. Edwin was assigned to 7th Battalion, Seaforth Highlanders in 26th Brigade of 9th Division.

Edwin had completed six months training, when 9th Division was the first of the New Armies to cross to France in May 1915. 7th Seaforths left Bordon on the 9<sup>th</sup> and crossed on SS *Queen* from Folkestone to Boulogne. After a train journey and four days billeted in Arques, the Seaforths marched to Bailleul, near the French-Belgian border. From the 24<sup>th</sup> onwards the Seaforth companies in turn were attached to battalions of 17th Brigade of 6th Division in the line near Armentières, for instruction in trench warfare.

7th Seaforths moved on the 27<sup>th</sup> to billets in Armentières, from where its companies continued spells of trench duty. Although the front there was in a "quiet" time, there was always a trickle of casualties lost to occasional artillery and mortar fire on the trenches, also to machine gun and sniper fire on work parties. On the night of 28<sup>th</sup>/29<sup>th</sup> May Captain W T Henderson and three other ranks were wounded. The Seaforths had their first fatality on the night of 31<sup>st</sup> May/1<sup>st</sup> June, when S/4917 Private James McKenzie of Glass, Aberdeenshire was killed by gunshot fire.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> June 7th Seaforths marched to billets around the farm of La Becque, 2 miles south of Bailleul. Moves followed about weekly to billets in Ames, Busnettes and Annezin, with different training at nearby sites. After marching to billets at Locon, 7th Seaforths took over the nearby front line trenches on the 30<sup>th</sup> from 2nd Bedfords. The tour started badly, with three Seaforths killed in working parties on the first night, but there were no more fatalities in the first week. After a week in billets, there were only eight wounded during the second week in the front line.

While 7th Seaforths were holding the Brigade Reserve Line trenches, a soldier was fatally wounded by shell fire on 31<sup>st</sup> July. The Seaforths were required to provide a 380-strong work party to assist the Royal Engineers working just behind the front line on the night of 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> August. Shell fire wounded an officer and killed S/2147 Private David Kirk of Glasgow. Privates S/6328 Edwin Barnett and S/3187 Peter Lennie of Kilmarnock were badly wounded. Both made it back to No. 1 Casualty Clearing Station in the nearby village of Chocques, where they died of wounds on the 8<sup>th</sup>. S/1829 Private John Boyd of Ardrossan, wounded in a work party on the next night and died on the 9<sup>th</sup>, lies in the middle of their three-grave group in Chocques Military Cemetery.