



BEDFORDSHIRE FREEMASONS

Brother Brian Clarke Cumberland

A Bedfordshire Freemason's Sacrifice at Gallipoli

Brother Brian Clarke Cumberland was born on 11th March 1889, the only son of Hugh Cumberland JP, a respected land agent and auctioneer in Luton, who also served as Provincial Grand Secretary for the Province of Bedfordshire. His mother was Jeanie Cumberland, née Clarke, from whom Brian received his middle name.

Educated at a boarding school in Harpenden and later at Dunstable Grammar School, Brian's name is still commemorated on the wooden fireplace in the school's memorial library. The Cumberland family lived at The Lynchets, Hart Hill, Luton, alongside Brian's sisters.

Following his education, Brian qualified as a member of the Auctioneers & Surveyors Institute and joined the family business, based in Castle Street, Luton.

In 1911 he obtained a commission as Second Lieutenant in the 5th Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment, the Territorial battalion of the regiment. Promotion followed quickly, becoming Lieutenant in May 1913 and Captain at the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914.

On 17th January 1912, Brian was initiated into Bedfordshire Lodge of St John the Baptist No. 475, the Lodge in which his family was already well known. The Lodge's Past Masters boards reflect the Cumberland family's longstanding involvement. The commanding officer of the 5th Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Brighten, was also a member of the same Lodge.

At the outbreak of war, the battalion was attending annual camp at Ashridge Forest before beginning intensive training for overseas service. During periods stationed in Bury St Edmunds, the local Masonic Lodge generously supported the regiment and welcomed the many Freemasons serving within its ranks.

In August 1915 the battalion embarked for Gallipoli, arriving in the Dardanelles on 12th August.

Three days later, on Sunday 15th August 1915, the 5th Bedford's advanced into one of the fiercest actions of the Gallipoli campaign during the assault on Kidney Hill. Captain C.T. Baker commanded B Company on the right flank, while Captain Brian Cumberland led A Company on the left, where enemy fire was known to be especially severe.



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Under relentless artillery, rifle and machine-gun fire, the battalion advanced with remarkable determination. The men of the Bedford's earned the nickname "The Yellow Devils" from the amber triangular flashes worn on their uniforms, clearly visible as they pressed forward across open ground toward the Turkish positions.

A Company suffered devastating casualties as it neared the heights of Kidney Hill. Despite this, Captain Cumberland rallied his men and led a bayonet charge toward the summit. Eyewitnesses later recalled seeing him at the head of his company, courageously urging his men onward, before he was struck in the head and killed instantly.

Kidney Hill was taken, but at terrible cost.

After the battle, Lieutenant Colonel Brighten found Brian's body and arranged for his burial. Today, Captain and Brother Brian Clarke Cumberland is remembered with honour at Azmak Cemetery, Suvla, Gallipoli.

Lieutenant Colonel Brighten later wrote personally to Hugh Cumberland, describing the bravery with which his son had led the attack against the Ottoman positions.

Although many Bedfordshire Freemasons served during the Great War, Brother Brian Clarke Cumberland is believed to be the only known member of a Bedfordshire Lodge to have been killed in action during the conflict. Cumberland Lodge continues to commemorate his sacrifice.

Another Bedfordshire connected Freemason, Second Lieutenant Harry Reginald Hipwell, initiated into Stuart Lodge in 1903 before later joining Cowper and Newton Lodge in Buckinghamshire, was killed in action during the Battle of Arras on 23rd April 1917 while serving with the Machine Gun Corps.

Their sacrifice should never be forgotten.

W. Bro Ian Church

Provincial Assistant Secretary