

VC Biog 10 Turnbull, James Yuill, VC

Morag Cross 17 Feb 2014

***VC10.1

The impersonal, official account of the proverbially disastrous first day of the Battle of the Somme, is too detached to adequately convey the individual soldiers' personal experience of 1 July 1916. Pte John L Hardie, active-service editor of the 17th Battalion, The Highland Light Infantry (HLI) magazine, 'The Outpost': *'There is a silence for which there is no name, the awful stillness of a battlefield. Above and beyond the roar of the guns, the bursting shells ... there is the all-pervading sense of muteness that is a thing apart ... that only they can know who have ... survived its spell'*. [Source: 'Editorial, In Memory of ... July 1916', *The Outpost*, (17th HLI Magazine), August 1916, p133; J W Arthur, I S Munro, 1920, *The Seventeenth Highland Light Infantry ... Record of War Service, 1914-1918*, Glasgow, p42].

***VC10.2

'The first VC of the Division [approximately 20,000 men] was gained in this battle', by Sergeant James Y Turnbull of the 17th Battalion, The Highland Light Infantry. This was the only unit *'operating in that ghastly sector ... which reached and occupied and held the enemy's trenches'*. The preliminary artillery barrage intended to 'soften up' the enemy, and cut their barbed wire entanglements, had failed to do so and proved ineffective. [Sources: J W Arthur, I S Munro, 1920, *The Seventeenth Highland Light Infantry ... Record of War Service, 1914-1918*, Glasgow, p41; 'The British order of battle of 1914-1918', *The Long, Long Trail*, at www.1914-1918.net].

***VC10.3

The HLI's regimental history: *'The 17th HLI had no luck this day ... they were all shot down on the [German] wire ... the 16th HLI lost 19 officers and 492 [men] out of ... 800 .. The 17th HLI ... consolidated on the ... Leipzig Redoubt and held it. Their casualties were 22 officers and 447 rank and file'*. Sgt 'Jimmie' Turnbull died in this action, and his VC was awarded posthumously. [Sources: L B Oates, 1961, *Proud Heritage: The Story of the Highland Light Infantry*, Glasgow, Vol 3, pp269-71].

***VC10.4a and / or b as needed two versions same pic

The 17th Battalion was raised in September 1914 as part of Glasgow's civic response to the government's appeal for army recruits, sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, the Royal Technical College and city businesses. By July 1916, they were in trenches at Authuille, north east of the town of Albert, in north-eastern France. The Germans had strongly-fortified the village of Thiepval, facing Authuille, and their nearby defences curved prominently towards the British lines, this 'bulge' being the 'Leipzig Salient'.

***VC10.5

This section *'fell to the unhappy lot'* of the 17th HLI to attack on 1 July, especially as it also contained the 'Leipzig Redoubt', or 'Granatloch', a chalk quarry turned into a near-impregnable strategic position. The 17th Battalion's padre reflected *'It should have been renamed the HLI Redoubt, had old customs been observed'*. [Sources: L B Oates, 1961, *Proud Heritage: The Story of the Highland Light*

Infantry, Glasgow, Vol 3, p267-8; 'Granatloch', *The Border Regiment: A Knowledge Base*, at <http://border-regiment.co.uk>; 'Leipzig Redoubt', *Battlefields in Danger*. Discussion Thread started 14 Jan 2004, *Great War Forum*, at <http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com>].

***VC10.6

The long-planned and anticipated 'big push' or British advance of 1 July was preceded by six days' artillery bombardment. One of Turnbull's comrades wrote: 'A thousand trains rushing past ... the tremendous thud of the shell that makes the trench rock like a boat on a heavy sea ... I saw a bird fly over ... buffeted as ... in a great gale of wind'. The opposing view in Thiepval, from German Private Eversmann, 143rd Infantry, 'Thou fearsome night ... Five nights has this hell-concert lasted. One's head is as a madman's; the tongue sticks to the roof of the mouth'. [Sources: 'MAWD', 1916 'The Great Adventure', *The Outpost*, (17th HLI Magazine), August 1916, p149; L B Oates, 1961, *Proud Heritage: The Story of the Highland Light Infantry*, Glasgow, Vol 3, p268].

***VC10.7

Sgt Turnbull was one of the first to go over the parapet on at 7.23am on 1 July. In just 90 minutes, two HLI companies '*had been almost annihilated ... It was now 9am and casualties amounted to 22 officers and 400 other ranks*'. [Sources: J W Arthur, I S Munro, 1920, *The Seventeenth Highland Light Infantry ... Record of War Service, 1914-1918*, Glasgow, p40].

***VC10.8

There seems to be only one published, contemporary eyewitness account of Turnbull's heroism, given by soldier-journalist L/Cpl J McKechnie. He was active-service editor of the battalion's magazine, 'The Outpost', and told the *Glasgow Herald*: '*Turnbull's party ... were told to attack the redoubt ... Turnbull was a fine cricketer and ... [so] could throw a bomb further than any other man in the battalion ... we had to 'carry on' for about 14 hours ... Turnbull saved the situation by his initiative. He kept four men carrying bombs to him*', from an abandoned German arms cache they had located earlier, and then hurling them at the enemy. If he had to wait for new supplies, '*he got hold of a machine gun and played it on the Germans ... he kept this up for about 18 hours, practically holding up the whole of the German flank and saving the battalion*'. [Sources: *Glasgow Herald*, 28 Nov 1916, p7].

***VC10.9a and b and c use all of them sketches by participants in battle so important

The 17th Battalion's official history relates that Turnbull was at the tip of the wedge of troops attacking the Leipzig Salient. '*From three sides enemy machine guns swept [Turnbull's] position, snipers took deadly toll ... it was hopeless. Yet it was necessary to hold on till nightfall. Turnbull ... shouldered the responsibility*'. [Source: J W Arthur, I S Munro, 1920, *The Seventeenth Highland Light Infantry ... Record of War Service, 1914-1918*, Glasgow, pp93].

***VC10.10

Pte Christopher B Meadows, 17th Bn, HLI, (killed in 1918), wrote of the confusion, gunfire and lack of support troops during the attack on Leipzig Redoubt: '*We found the barbed wire impossible to cut through and [a 17th Battalion officer] gave us the order 'Every man for himself' ... We ... found it*

disorganised ... orders got mixed ... Fortunately the 17th HLI bombers ... in an advanced position ... [were] driving the enemy back with [German] bombs ... The Leipzig defences, a maze of trenches ... made advancing ... extremely hard. [Sources: 'Casualty Details: Meadows, Christopher Bentley', *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, at www.cwgc.org; J W Arthur, I S Munro, 1920, *The Seventeenth Highland Light Infantry ... Record of War Service, 1914-1918*, Glasgow, pp45-7].

*****VC10.11**

Late in the afternoon, a sniper picked off Turnbull, who died instantly. *'It was chasing [Germans] round corners at the head of the communication trench ... that we lost Sergeant Turnbull, VC.'* [Sources: J W Arthur, I S Munro, 1920, *The Seventeenth Highland Light Infantry ... Record of War Service, 1914-1918*, Glasgow, pp45-7].

*****VC10.12 a – must use a; and either b or c; use citation and portrait**

James Yuill Turnbull's Victoria Cross was officially notified in the *London Gazette*, under the wrong name, of 'James Young Turnbull', and the mistake has been frequently repeated. His father and sister received the medal at Buckingham Palace in 1917, and invited his old comrades to view it in Glasgow. Likewise, newspaper accounts were quickly filled with inaccuracies, claiming he spoke before dying, and could throw bombs farther than anyone in the entire army, rather than just in his own battalion (a much smaller unit). [Sources: *London Gazette*, Issue 29836, *Supplement of 24 Nov*, Published 25 Nov 1916, p11526; *The Outpost*, (17th HLI Magazine), July 1917, p106; Typescript notes, p4a, and Correspondence, from M E Taylor, 1974, p8 in 'Biography T35: Sgt James Y Turnbull VC', VC Files, Canon William Lummis Collection, National Army Museum, London; *Evening Telegraph*, 28 Nov 1916, p3].

*****VC10.13a or b; and also use VC10.13c use pics of both windows**

James Turnbull (born Glasgow, 1883-1916) was the third son of a timber salesman turned joiner. Turnbull became a 'clothing warehouseman' for Wallace, Scott & Co, waterproof garment makers and wholesale drapers of Cadogan St, Glasgow, and later worked in Oban. He had been a member of the Third Lanark Rifle Volunteers and a keen amateur sportsman before the war, and his personal qualities led to the offer of a commission (becoming an officer) in the HLI, which he refused. One of his brothers, Gavin Yuill Turnbull, Royal Engineers, also died in France, in October 1917. [Sources: *Glasgow Post Office Directory*, 1911-12, p689; Census 1911, at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk; Census 1881-1901, at www.ancestry.co.uk; 'Victoria Cross', *Highland Light Infantry Chronicle*, Jan 1917, p28; *Glasgow Herald*, 27 Nov 1916, p6; *The Scotsman*, 28 Nov 1916, p5; 'Casualty Details: Turnbull, Gavin Yuill', *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, at www.cwgc.org].

*****VC10.14a and b use both**

In 1974, Duncan M Paterson, who had served with Turnbull remembered: 'A strong, forthright personality who would not suffer fools gladly. He took care of his men to the risk of being court-martialled for insubordination where their welfare was concerned'. Turnbull was physically athletic and imposing, as L/Cpl J McKechnie told: 'He ... always took charge of affairs, but we had all the greatest confidence in his judgement ... [he] was almost tireless'.

*****VC10.15a or b or c**

'The Outpost', his battalion's magazine: 'Without worrying about ... anyone of higher rank ... [on 1 July] he took charge of the whole operations around in his immediate storm centre ... He won his honour dearly'. [Sources: Correspondence, from M E Taylor, 21 Aug 1974, p8 in 'Biography T35: Sgt James Y Turnbull VC', VC Files, Canon William Lummis Collection, National Army Museum, London; *Glasgow Herald*, 28 Nov 1916, p7; 'Battalion Notes', *The Outpost*, (17th HLI Magazine), Dec 1916, p57].

*****VC10.16a and one of either VC10.16b or c**