



CAPTAIN
JAMES GERALD WILLOUGHBY
33RD QUEEN VICTORIA'S OWN LIGHT CAVALRY

James Gerald Willoughby was born on 13 October 1883 to Mary Ann and Major General James Fortnom Willoughby JP of the 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry. He was baptised on 8 November at Disa in the archdeaconry of the diocese of Bombay.

In 1897 James became a day boy then a boarder at Cheltenham College and in 1901 represented the college in the Ashburton School competition at Bisley. He left the college in 1902 for New College, Oxford. He was there until 1903 where he received a direct commission to the army and was accepted at the Royal Military College at Sandhurst. James was commissioned as a subaltern in the Essex Regiment in 1904 when he went to India with the 2nd battalion. He transferred to the Indian Army in 1905 and became a Lieutenant in 1906. In 1910 he was a Squadron Officer in 33rd Queen's Own Light Infantry and qualified as an interpreter in French. Whilst at the Cavalry School at Saugor he was promoted to Captain in January 1913.

When war broke out in 1914 the 33rd Queen Victoria's Own Light Cavalry was stationed at Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India. They were sent to Mesopotamia as part of the 6th (Poona) Division to

counter Turkish advances and to protect the oil pipeline of the Anglo-Persian Oil Co which ran from Abadan Island to Ahwaz. The conditions in Mesopotamia were dreadful. The climate, sickness and disease produced large losses in addition to battle casualties. About as many men died of disease as were killed in action. The Mesopotamia front was part of a strategy hoping for success at lower cost than the Western Front but no decisive victory was achieved.

On 3 December James together with Lieutenant Colonel A G W Browne, Lieutenant & Adjutant C Edward-Collins, 34 Indian ranks and 48 horses disembarked from SS *Sofala* at 1.20am, arriving at Busra in a stern wheeler at 5pm. On the 17th he arrived by river boat at Camp Tigris, Kurna.

On 1 January 1915 at 8.30am James, with one troop of C Squadron, engaged a body of hostile Arabs in marshes. After about 20 minutes the Arabs retired in bellams. At 10.45am they occupied mounds to the west of Mazaableh village. They found wheel tracks of small guns but otherwise no sign of the enemy's occupation. A considerable

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Turkish Camp was visible some three miles to the north with two creeks separating them.

They later advanced along the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, pushing Turkish units back through Mesopotamia with a view to capturing Baghdad. In one action against an enemy advance his charger was slightly wounded.

It was during an action on 3 March that James was killed; he was 31 years of age.

The War Diary for that day reads:

3 March

Ordered to parade as strong as possible for demonstration against enemy's position, the idea being to divert their attention whilst the ships went up the EUPHRATES and bombarded their camp.

The enemy's mounted troops came out in great numbers and the Bde retired and fought a retiring action for about five miles. After the first three miles the pursuit by the enemy slackened. But several hundred fresh horsemen appeared on left rear and seeing this the remainder of the enemy continued to follow up our force. The Artillery horses were tired and it became more difficult to keep the enemy at a distance and thus prevent the gun teams from being shot. Eventually we came up with the supporting troops consisting of Infantry and RFA and the enemy then retired. The Regt had received orders that a demonstration was to be made to divert the enemy but not bring on a general action. The Regt paraded 123½ files strong and the total Bde numbered about one strong Regt and a S Batt RHA less one section.

Owing to the early start the horses would not drink properly before starting and there was no opportunity of watering them till we arrived in camp in the evening.

The following were killed during the action: Capt J G Willoughby, Lt C Grantham, Jemadar Katbaddin Khan, 2809 Daffadar Afzal Khan,

3099 Lance Daffadar Nabi Bakhsh Khan, 3217 Sowar Kesar Singh, 3224 ALD Umrao Ali Khan (missing), 53 horses killed, 2 missing, 18 wounded. Buried Captain J G Willoughby and Lt C A Grantham 1.30pm.

The following report appeared in the *Gloucestershire Echo* on 5 March 1915:

CAPT J G WILLOUGHBY (OC)

Capt James Gerald Willoughby, of the 33rd Queen Victoria's Own Light Cavalry (Indian Army), who has been killed in action against the Turks in the Persian Gulf operations, was the son of Major-General J F Willoughby, JP, Colonel of the same regiment, and of Mrs. Willoughby, of Gabari, Parabola-road, Cheltenham. Capt Willoughby was in his 32nd year, having been born on Dec 13, 1883 [sic]. He was educated at Cheltenham College, from 1897 to 1902, and one year represented his College at the Bisley Rifle Meeting. On leaving Cheltenham he went to New College, Oxford for a time, but then received a direct commission from the University into the Army, and was made a subaltern of the Essex Regiment. He went to India in June, 1904, to join the 2nd Battalion of his regiment, and the following year exchanged into the Indian Army, in which he became a lieutenant of the 33rd Q.O. Light Cavalry in 1906 and captain in January, 1913. Among other military qualifications he was an interpreter in French.

Captain James Gerald Willoughby is buried in Basra War Cemetery, Plot III, Row C, Grave 21. He is remembered on the Christ Church Roll of Honour, Cheltenham War Memorial, New College Oxford War Memorial, Bourton-on-the-Water War Memorial, the 1921 Masonic Roll of Honour and in the chapel of the Military College. He is also commemorated on a stained glass window in St Lawrence's Church, Bourton-on-the-Water which is also dedicated to his mother who died in November 1915.

Sources and acknowledgements:

Leaving all that was dear : Cheltenham and the Great War by J Devereux & G Sacker
Cheltenham College Archives

Ancestry

www.ancestry.co.uk

British Newspaper Archive

www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

www.cwgc.org

Find My Past

www.findmypast.co.uk

Forces War Records

www.forces-war-records.co.uk

Masonic Great War Project

www.masonicgreatwarproject.org.uk