



Major TURNBULL, MAURICE JOSEPH LAWSON – Age 38

Service Number 107563
Commanding No.2 Company 1st Battalion Welsh Guards
Killed in action at Monchamp, 04 August 1944

Husband of Elizabeth, and father of Sara, Simon and Georgina, Thorpe Road, Harthill

Buried at [Bayeux War Cemetery](#) , France XX. C. 3., and also remembered on Harthill War Memorial

Major Turnbull was educated at Downside School and was the husband of Son of Philip B. and Ann M. Turnbull, and the son-in-law of W. J. Brooke, Esq., J.P., of The Hollies, Harthill.

Maurice Joseph Lawson Turnbull was born in Cardiff on 16 March 1906. Maurice played cricket for Glamorgan whilst still a 17 year old schoolboy. At Cambridge he captained the university cricket team before going on to captain Glamorgan. He was an outstanding rugby player, playing as a half-back for both the Cambridge University and Cardiff, and went on to win two Welsh caps in 1932. He was Glamorgan's first ever Test Cricketer, and played nine times for England. In 1938, he became a test selector.

On the 7 September 1939, Maurice married Elizabeth C R Brooke in Scunthorpe, and they had three children, Sara, Simon and Georgina, whose births were registered in the Rother Valley District. The family lived on Thorpe Road, Harthill.

On 27 January 1944, he was Lieutenant, Temporary Captain, in 1st Battalion Welsh Guards (No.2 Company Second-in-Command). By 4 August 1944 he had been promoted to Major and was now in charge of No.2 Company

Maurice was killed in action near Montchamp, Normandy. On 4 August 1944, during an attack, his company was cut off and while making a reconnaissance he was shot through the head by a sniper, he died instantaneously.

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Extract from 1st Battalion Welsh Guards War Diary

1944 August 4

At 0600 hours a substantial artillery concentration was brought to bear on the German positions with what result was not known.

At 0630 hours the Battalion attack on a two Company front and all went well and without opposition, as did the exploitation to LES FIEFFES.

Some 20 Prisoners were taken the majority of whom were Poles and Russians, and only too pleased to be in our hands.

So far the Battalion had not had a casualty.

In the evening the Battalion was ordered to advance further, to MONTCHAMP, but at the beginning of the attack, the Commanding Officer was most unfortunately wounded by a sniper in civilian clothes, whilst looking out of his Scout car, and had a miraculous escape from death.

MONTCHAMP

Only about two hours' time had been allowed for preparation and information was practically non-existent, save that, the town was believed to be held.

It later transpired that 9 S.S. Panzer Division was in reserve just South of the town with a counter-attack role on the town itself.

The Battalion attack went in at 1730 hours supported by 55 Field Regiment ROYAL ARTILLERY, 3 Squadron on of 1st Armoured Battalion COLDSTREAM GUARDS, but no 17-pounder Anti-Tank guns.

The attack was in two phases:

Phase 1 being to capture LE PONT ESNAULT which overlooks the road running East from MONTCHAMP, and Phase 2 being the capture of MONTCHAMP itself.

Phase 1 went well and No's 3 and 4 Companies reached their objectives without casualties.

Prince of Wales Company and No. 2 Company then attacked astride the road running North from MONTCHAMP with No. 3 Company to follow up behind them and No. 4 Company to remain at LE PONT ESNAULT.

All went well for a start, but shortly after Lieutenant-Colonel HEBER PERCY had been wounded by a sniper, and Major G.G. FOWKE had taken over, messages came through that enemy tanks and infantry had counter-attacked, putting Prince of Wales, No's 2 and 3 Companies in an extremely awkward position, as they had not yet had time to dig in.

The enemy had penetrated into the town from East and West, and owing to the nature of the country, it was impossible to get our tanks or Anti-Tank guns to the leading Companies.

By now Prince of Wales Company had been cut in two by tanks - No. 2 Company were surrounded in an orchard and wireless communication with leading Companies had broken down.

No. 3 Company meanwhile were having trouble in a field, past the town, but were eventually most skilfully extracted by Lieutenant RETALLACK, who had himself had a series of miraculous and hairbreadth escapes, and brought back to LE PONT ESNAULT where they dug in

Eventually about 30 men of Prince of Wales Company under Major MILLER and some 50 men of No. 2 Company got back and dug in North of the town.

Prince of Wales Company had been slightly discouraged by firing at several PANTHERs with PIATs, without any noticeable effect.

The forward Companies had no alternative but to withdraw slightly as they were without tanks and supporting arms, and surrounded by tanks.

No. 4 Company, which had heard enemy digging in 150 yards to the front, then were withdrawn by Major EVANS to conform to the Battalion position.

The enemy did not follow up this counter-attack and there the matter rested.

Casualties were Major TURNBULL and Lieutenant LESTER killed and Captain Sir RICHARD POWELL missing.

After fighting an outstanding gallant action, 33 Other Ranks killed and 78 wounded.

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Maurice was killed instantly by a sniper's bullet during the intense fighting. His body was recovered from the battlefield by one of his men, Sergeant Fred Llewellyn, and his personal possessions were sent home to his family.

BBC News Wednesday, 5 December 2001 Family thank veteran for courage

A war veteran who rescued the body of his commanding officer during the Normandy landings has held an emotional meeting with the dead man's family.

Major Turnbull was killed by a German sniper advancing with the Welsh Guards through Normandy.



Sergeant Fred Llewellyn of the Welsh Guards spotted the body of Major Turnbull and carried him away from the frontline.

Mr Llewellyn found a photograph of the officer's wife and children in his wallet.

He made sure the wallet and other personal possessions were returned to the Turnbull family.

Emotional meeting



Mr Llewellyn met with the son and daughters of Major Turnbull, 46 years on.

This family photo was found in Major Turnbull's wallet

He was shown the same photo, which had been, dispatched home from France, which he admitted brought tears to his eyes.

"I have been rather moved by all this, but being a Welshman, you are rather emotional anyway.

After meeting the man who recovered her father's body, his daughter Georgina said: "I know that my father was looked after and that the honour of the man was properly shown by Fred Llewellyn."

His son Simon added: "I will never forget the duty and care shown to my father."

Details of the act of heroism and respect for the officer have been written about by author Andrew Hignall.

"The Germans were counter-attacking and for Fred to have the presence of mind to get his body and look after it I think was remarkable."