



CAPTAIN GEOFFREY HARRIS GOTELEE

7TH BATTALION, SOUTH WALES BORDERERS

DIED 18TH SEPTEMBER 1918 AGED 25



Lt. G. H. GOTELEE,
South Wales Borderers.

Geoffrey Harris Gotelee was born in Odiham in the second quarter of 1883.¹ He was the son of Arthur, a Stationer and Printer, and Esther Gotelee and in 1901 the family was living at the Post Office in Odiham High Street.² By the time of the 1911 census, Geoffrey, aged 18, was a boarder at The School, Abbey Mill Lane, St. Albans.³ Here he "distinguished himself both in learning and sport. And served in the School Battalion in which he he rose to the rank of sergeant".⁴ From his obituary in the Hants and Berks Gazette dated 19 October 1918 we learn that "When war broke out he was in the employ of the London and Brazilian Bank in London, and joined the Artists'

Rifles the day after war was declared, going out to France in October 1914." In 1915 he received a commission in the 1st Battalion, the South Wales Borderers, remaining on the Western Front. The following year (1916) Geoffrey, a Second Lieutenant, was wounded in the leg and arm during the Battle of the Somme and sent home to recover. His wounds must have been serious for he was entitled to wear a "Wound Stripe" and did not return to the battlefields until August 1917 when he was attached to the 7th Battalion of the South Wales Borderers in Salonika.⁵ This Battalion was part of the 22nd Division in the 67th Brigade. Here he was Acting Captain for much of the time prior to his death⁶. The British Salonika Force was involved in fierce fighting in 1917 and 1918, mostly unsuccessfully. Sickness was rife and this was one of the main reasons for the reduction in fighting forces to half their original number.⁷

¹ England & Wales Births 1837-2006, www.findmypast.com

² Source - 1901 Census Odiham, Class RG 13, Piece: 1102; Folio: 31; Page: 20

³ Source - 1911 Census, St Albans, Class RG14; Piece: 7688; Schedule Number:412 – www.ancestry.com

⁴ Source – Obituary, Hants and Berks Gazette, 19 October 1918

⁵ Hants and Berks Gazettes, 19 October 1918 and 2 September 1916

⁶ Hants and Berks Gazette 19 October 1918

⁷ Source – Commonwealth War Graves Commission register in memory of Geoffrey Harris Gotelee.



At the end of September 1918 Mr and Mrs Gotelee were notified that their youngest son, Captain G.

H. Gotelee, was wounded and missing.⁸ The war in Salonika ended on 30th September 1918 after the final assault by British Divisions in the Lake Doiran area.⁹ The main, disastrous battle for the British Forces began on 18th September when they were required to attack the 2000 ft high, heavily defended mountain range, Pip Ridge, which included Grand Couronne with its fortress.¹⁰

The 7th South Wales Borderers was the third Welsh Battalion to be involved in this attack. An idea of this disastrous assault has been included in a paper "I saw the Futile Massacre at Doiran", which has been quoted in 'Salonika and Macedonia, 1916 – 1918' and is worth repeating here.

"They nobly stormed up though the haze of battle until they had come near the Hills of The Tassel and The Knot. Then, all at once, the haze lifted, and they were left exposed in the open to a sweeping and overwhelming fire. Melting away as they charged, a party of Welshmen ran up the slopes of Grand Couronne itself and fell dead among the rocks. Of the whole battalion, only one officer and eighteen men were alive at the end of the day. All night, unheard in the tumult of a new bombardment, wounded men were crying on the hillsides or down in the long ravines."¹¹

Captain Geoffrey Harris Gotelee was one of the casualties of this 18 September 1918 attempted assault on Grand Couronne. He is commemorated on the Doiran Memorial in Greece. After efforts made on his behalf by his father, he was awarded the 1914 Star, British War Medal 1914-20 and the Victory Medal 1914-19. He is also commemorated on a brass plaque erected in All Saints Church, Odiham, with the agreement of the Parish Council in 1919 with the 'cost of about £15 to be defrayed by the Donor, Miss Carter, who was engaged to the late Lt. Gotelee. (sic)' in All Saints Church Odiham.¹² He is also commemorated on Robert May's Grammar School War Memorial 018.¹³

⁸ Source – Hants and Berks Gazette 5 October 1918

⁹ Source – Salonika and Macedonia 1916 – 1918, paper by Malcolm G Fergusson of Balerno, Edinburgh

¹⁰ Source - ibid

¹¹ Source - ibid

¹² Source – Hampshire Records Office, Faculty Papers, Winchester Diocese 21M65

¹³ Source - ibid

