



**CECIL CLIFFORD QUERIPEL MM**

**1896 - 1917**

“When the First World War broke out a month before my 7<sup>th</sup> birthday, Father was working as Herds Manager for a Mr Hamley (one of the biggest farm owners in Guernsey) at St.Sampson’s. Cecil was in America with Bill but although he was only seventeen years he returned to Guernsey and joined the Army. He was underage but said he was eighteen years. That’s how old the lads were when they were called up to fight in France. Cecil won the Military Medal just before his twenty-first birthday. He was badly wounded on the last day of November 1917 and died on December 1<sup>st</sup>. Dear Jack was taken a prisoner of war about the same time. I well remember the sadness in the home for years after.”

Those were the words of my grandmother, Lena Queripel Fallis in December 1981 as recorded in the Queripel family history. She was remembering the brothers who left Guernsey to fight in France. John Frederick (Jack) Queripel served with the Royal Guernsey Light Infantry and was taken prisoner at Cambrai on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1917. He was a prisoner of war in Germany and was repatriated on 25<sup>th</sup> December 1918. He married, raised a family and lived in Guernsey until his death in 1978. This is the story of the other brother who never came home.

Cecil Clifford Queripel was born on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 1896 at Les Boudes, St Saviour's, Guernsey to William and Mary (Le Prevost) Queripel. He was their third child, the eldest being William Torrens (who was born at sea aboard the MV Torrens on the journey home from Australia where his parents had tried unsuccessfully to settle in Adelaide) and the second being another son, John, who died in infancy.

The 1901 census lists four year old Cecil as the son of William and Mary Queripel of Old Beaucamps, Castel. William was thirty-seven years old and his occupation is given as farm labourer (other sources say that he was a sailor), his wife was thirty-one and they were both born at St Peter in the Wood. At that time there were five children in the household; William T aged seven, Cecil C aged four, John F (Frederick) aged three born at St Sampson's, Cecille M (Elise Mary) aged one born at Castel and an eleven day old baby (Lydia Moriah). The family would later be expanded to include Sydney, Archibald Edward and Austin Enright and was completed in September 1907 with the birth of Lena.

In 1913 Cecil left Guernsey to join his brother William in America where he had been working since his arrival in May 1911 as a herdsman of Guernsey cattle in New York State. Cecil is recorded in the Port of New York passenger lists as having arrived from Southampton aboard the Majestic on April 17<sup>th</sup> which would have been just before his seventeenth birthday but his age is given here as eighteen.

He had only been in America for a short time when the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and his wife Sophie in Sarajevo on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 1914 by Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian Serb nationalist, sparked a series of events which saw Austria-Hungary declare war on Serbia, Russia mobilise in support of Serbia and Germany declare war on France. Up until that point Britain had remained neutral and the Germans could see no reason why they would enter the war alongside Russia and Serbia. In Britain too the general feeling seemed to be that there was no good reason to go to war with Germany.

In early August, however, Germany announced its intention to enter France through Belgium with or without their agreement. This was a clear contravention of the 1839 European treaty which recognised Belgian sovereignty and guaranteed its neutrality and an attack on Britain's ally by a co-signatory of the treaty was considered to be a step too far. Still Germany believed that Britain would not go to war "over a slip of paper." The matter was debated in parliament (Britain was the only major power to do this) and an ultimatum was issued but on the morning of August 4<sup>th</sup> 1914 German troops marched into Belgium and by that night Britain was at war with Germany.

At that time the British Army was made up wholly of volunteers but it was clear that a much bigger army would be needed to fight this war and recruitment began in earnest. In Guernsey the Militia was mobilised so that the regular army units of the garrison would be free for service overseas and many local men joined up. Cecil returned from America arriving in Liverpool on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1914 aboard the Lusitania and joined the Royal Guernsey Militia (at the age of eighteen) where he would have received basic training.

In March 1915 Cecil was in the first group to leave Guernsey to join the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division which was forming at Fermoy in Ireland. Guernsey had agreed to offer the War Office formed units of the Militia for the new divisions of what would become known as Kitchener's Army and Cecil was to be part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Irish Regiment in D Company. In the Autumn of that year the Division left Ireland for further training and the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion settled in Blackdown Camp near Aldershot.

On 17<sup>th</sup> December at four in the morning the battalion left Blackdown Camp, arriving in Southampton at eight. That afternoon they set sail for France to join the Expeditionary Force – some on the SS La Marguerite and some, plus the regimental transport, on the SS Belerophon. On the morning of 18<sup>th</sup> December they arrived at Havre and marched to a rest camp where they stayed for only a short time before leaving to travel to Chocques (near Bethune in the Pas de Calais department) by train. From there they marched to Drouvin where they went into billets and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December they began their instruction in trench warfare.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion formed part of the 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division and by April 1916 after four months of training which included attachments to other experienced Brigades on the front line the Division was considered to be fully trained and took over a section of the line at Hulluch near Loos. At the end of that month the Royal Irish Regiment had settled into a routine of five days in the line, five days in support and five in reserve and had become noted for their trench raids.

In his excellent book "Diex Aix: God Help Us" Major Edwin Parks describes the involvement of the Division in some of the major actions of the war including the Battle of the Somme during which 6 RIR were involved in the attacks on Guillemont and Ginchy in September 1916 and D Company lost six men killed in action. When the battle officially ended on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1916 there had been heavy casualties on both sides and the British army introduced conscription for the first time during the war. The Division spent the rest of the winter of 1916 and the spring of 1917 in a cycle of four days in the line, four in reserve and eight in support.

In April 1917 preparations were being made for the attack on the Messines-Wytschaete ridge and the war diaries of 6 RIR document one of the trench raids for which the Regiment had become well known. They had relieved 2 RIR in the right subsection of the Wytschaete sector and had two companies in the line and two in reserve. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> it snowed heavily and it was virtually impossible to patrol but that evening the enemy trenches were bombarded in preparation for the attack and there was very little retaliation. The next day however, their bombardment was met with "a fair amount" of extremely accurate fire creating a box barrage around the trenches. The 5<sup>th</sup> was the day of the raid which was described as "a most successful undertaking". Twenty-one prisoners were taken and a great amount of valuable information was gained from them. A "greatly elated" Battalion were relieved by 6<sup>th</sup> Connaught Rangers and moved to Brigade support at Butterfly Farm.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of April Major General W B Hickie, Commander of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division visited to congratulate the Battalion and Cecil was one of those awarded a “parchment”. This was a postcard sized certificate headed with a shamrock and “The Irish Brigade” in Celtic lettering which was awarded for bravery when no official recognition for gallantry was made (a practice introduced by Major General Hickie). Cecil was, however, also recommended for the Military Medal (awarded to personnel of the British Army below commissioned rank i.e. “other ranks” for bravery in battle on land – first instituted 25<sup>th</sup> March 1916) for his part in the raid on 5<sup>th</sup> April and the award was made on 13<sup>th</sup> April.

In November 6 RIR were in the line North of Bullecourt and the beginning of the month was a relatively quiet time with very little hostile shelling. On the 20<sup>th</sup> the action of Croisilles Heights commenced in conjunction with the opening of the battle of Cambrai and the 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade launched a successful attack on Tunnel Trench. The Battalion was in support and C Company was employed on wiring in front of the trench. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> the Battalion moved from Durrow Camp where they had been in Brigade Reserve into the line and from then until the 27<sup>th</sup> it seems to have been pretty quiet. On the 28<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> however, there was heavy hostile bombardment of the front and support lines and of the communication trenches and at some point Cecil received serious chest wounds. He was taken to the 43 Casualty Clearing Station at Boiseux-au-Mont where he died on the 30<sup>th</sup> November 1917 aged twenty-one.

The report of his death published in the Guernsey Weekly Press dated 8<sup>th</sup> December was as follows:

“Mr and Mrs W Queripel, Salt Pans, St Sampson’s received news on Tuesday from a Chaplain that their second son, Corporal Cecil Queripel, Royal Irish Regiment, was in hospital seriously wounded in the chest, and that he had undergone an operation, and that everything possible was being done for him. On Thursday Mr and Mrs Queripel received a letter from the Chaplain informing them that their son had died.”

He is buried at Bucquoy Road Cemetery, Ficheux, France and is commemorated by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, in Ireland’s memorial records and in Guernsey on the Bailiwick memorial and on the Parish war memorials at Castel and St Sampson’s.



**Notes:**

On his return from America in December 1914 Cecil sailed from New York to Liverpool on the Lusitania, a ship of the Cunard Steamship Company. This was the ship which was sunk off the south coast of Ireland by a German U-boat on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1915. She sank in twenty minutes and, of the 1,959 passengers and crew on board, 1,198 were drowned. Among the dead were 128 U.S. citizens and the sinking of the Lusitania was one of the factors which eventually persuaded America to enter the war.

The Royal Guernsey Light Infantry Nominal Roll of Service 1914 -1920 includes details of Archibald Edward Queripel as follows:

Service no. 7674

Rank. Boy

Enlisted from. St Sampson's

Discharge Badge. B111313

He was one of Cecil's younger brothers and the Queripel family history says that he was a private in the British Army in 1917. This struck me as being rather strange as he would only have been around fourteen years of age at the time! I asked his daughter Margaret about this and here is what she said:

“The information is correct on the age of my father when he lied about his age to join the army. The story goes that his commanding officer began to suspect he was too young so decided that their unit would all grow mustaches. Well guess who couldn't? So Major whoever he was called Archie into his office to ask just how old he was. Rather than send him home he let Daddy remain in the army only if he was not in harm's way, therefore making him his valet and driver. And do you know I never saw my father without a mustache all the days of his adult life.”

## **Sources and acknowledgements:**

Catastrophe by Max Hastings

Diex Aix: God Help Us by Major Edwin Parks

Royal Irish Regiment 1900 – 1922 by Br Gen S Geoghegan CB

The RGLI Nominal Roll of Service 1914 – 1920

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The National Archive

War Diaries of 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Irish Regiment

Channel Islands Great War Study Group

Port of New York Passenger Records

UK Incoming Passenger Lists 1878 - 1960

The Family of William Queripel 1863 -1982 by June Porter Queripel

Major Edwin Parks

Margaret Gilmore – USA

Rosemary Dorey – Guernsey

Daphne Queripel - Guernsey

Sally Brehaut – Guernsey

Linda Q Foster – USA

Alison Mauger - Guernsey

Kay Hinde

6<sup>th</sup> December 2018 (revised 24/7/19)