

Captain Arthur Michael Durrant, MC Royal Engineers



Captain Arthur Michael Durrant MC, R E was killed in action by shellfire on 5th December 1916 north of Winchester crater near Estaires. He is buried in Pont-Du-Hem Military Cemetery, La Gorgue, Nord, France. He was 27 years of age, came from Leverstock Green near Hemel Hempstead, but had married Jemima Wilson of Cedar Cottage, Greywell.

Michael Durrant was born on 29th September 1889 in West Ham London, the second child to parents Arthur and Alice Durrant. In 1899 Arthur senior became the Vicar of Leverstock Green where the family remained.

The 1901 census notes that Michael was away at school in Malvern, but when home he joined in village concerts and fairs. He was a very talented young artist and studied as an architect, gained his A.R.I.B.A. and specialised in church building. He also served four years in the Sussex Yeomanry until 1913.

War was declared on 4th August 1914 and Michael enlisted on 29th aged 25 years. He was first posted as a Private in the 10th Battalion Royal Fusiliers. He later applied for a commission, which was confirmed on 30th November and was posted to the 8th Battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment arriving in France on 4th December 1914. He was later attached to 171st Tunnelling Company Royal Engineers mining and tunnelling near Ploegsteert.



On 23rd December 15 he was in charge of a mining party when an enemy tunnel and listening post was accidentally broken into, then destroyed.

An account of the incident was published in the London Gazette along with the announcement of Michael's award of the Military Cross for his actions:

"For conspicuous gallantry and resource near Frelinghein on 23rd December 1915. When a charge placed by our miners in a German

gallery had only partially exploded and warned the enemy; Second Lieutenant Durrant, with two other officers, succeeded in placing a second charge which demolished the enemy's gallery. There was imminent danger throughout of the Germans exploding a mine.

For several months Second Lieutenant Durrant has been carrying out dangerous work in almost constant contact with the enemy, and has set a fine example of coolness and determination."



On 2nd February 1916 Michael was officially transferred to the Royal Engineers and on 30th March was temporarily attached to the Controller of Mines for the 3rd Army.

On 1st July 1916 he was promoted to the rank of Acting Captain, commanding a section of a Tunnelling Company and next day joined the newly arrived 257th Tunnelling Company attached to the 3rd Australian Tunnelling Company.

On 9th October 1916 east of Winchester crater he was in action again, trying to blow a Bangalore torpedo under the German wire. It failed to explode but he and his company all retired back to the British lines safely.

Michael was killed in action during an enemy bombardment on 5th December 1916 at 2.30 p.m. north of Winchester crater.

In addition to his Military Cross, Capt Arthur Michael Durrant was awarded the 1914/15 Star, The British War Medal and the Victory Medal. He was mentioned in dispatches by Gen. Sir Douglas Haig.

Michael's widow Jemima continued to live in Greywell at Cedar Cottage until 1923 when she remarried.