

The Newnham Family

Service and Sacrifice in the Great War



John Francis Newnham

[Courtesy Maureen Newnham Menakis]

By Richard Bryant
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Introduction

The Newnham family was chosen for a detailed study as they were one of two families in Lindfield with the loss of three sons in the Great War commemorated on the Lindfield War Memorial. Interest was initially sparked by an enquiry from a descendant living in USA.

Jesse Newnham met Elizabeth Johnson, his wife¹, while serving in the Army². After leaving military service they lived at Wotton³, Surrey where Jesse worked as a coachman. In the early years of the 1900s, the family settled in Lindfield near Haywards Heath. During the years prior to the Great War they lived at 1 Laburnum Villas⁴, [No 10] Compton Road, subsequently moving across the road to Earlsmere⁵ [No 7].

By 1914, Jesse and Elizabeth Newnham had nine children⁶:

Alfred Edward Victor born 1894 at Aldershot

John Francis, 1896 at Wotton

Jesse, 1898 at Wotton

Noel Herbert, 1900 at Wotton

Harold Percy, 1903 at Lindfield

William Ewart, 1905 at Lindfield

Mary, 1907 at Lindfield

May, 1910 at Lindfield

Harry, 1912⁷ at Lindfield

Everything seemed to be going well – a growing healthy family and the two eldest sons in full time military service. However, with the outbreak of war everything was about to change as within three months, Albert died in France from wounds received while at the front. Tragically two more sons were to die, but the family's service to King and Country was undiminished.

Jesse Newnham [Father]

Jesse was born at Wivelsfield, near Haywards Heath in 1869⁸ and after leaving school worked as a groom⁹. On 29 June 1887, aged 18 years he enlisted in the Regular Army joining the Royal Sussex Regiment¹⁰ at Chichester. As a Regular he would have signed up for a standard term of twelve years, with the first seven years in the Army and the remaining five years as a Reservist.

Between August 1887 and March 1890 he was stationed at Aldershot, Preston, and Fleetwood then returned to Aldershot in September 1890. His service record also shows that on 6th December 1890,¹¹ Jesse transferred to the Army Service Corps in Aldershot. Then in 1892, some

time was spent in Chatham before being transferred a couple of years later to the Reserve. Upon completing his twelve years he was discharged from the Reserve on 28 June 1899 with the rank of Driver.¹² That would, of course, have been a horse driver.

After completing his time 'under the colours' in the mid 1890s, Jesse worked as a coachman¹³ and the family lived at Broadmoor, Wotton, Surrey. Moving to Lindfield in c1902, Jesse was employed as a groom/coachman at The Welkin, a large house in Lindfield. In 1904 the family rented Osborn Cottage, High Street, Lindfield, when he became the School Attendance Officer for the district. The job involved following up truants. The family moved to Compton Road, Lindfield in c1906.

Jesse was well known in the village through his work and as the Secretary for the Lindfield Cricket Club, the Reading Room and the King Edward Hall, also as Captain of Lindfield Church Lads Brigade¹⁴ and a local football referee¹⁵. He was also the 1911 Census Enumerator for the Lindfield district.¹⁶

At the King Edward Hall Annual General Meeting in February 1915¹⁷, Jesse was elected as Secretary for a further year and offered to forego the annual eight guinea [£8.40p] stipend until the end of the war. Although the Hall expenditure exceeded income due to the war his offer was declined. Also that month he was appointed Secretary¹⁸ to the Lindfield Miniature Rifle Club and additionally agreed to act as an instructor. From these community commitments he appeared to be intending to remain in Lindfield for the war's duration.

However, the Roll of Honour listing men 'Who are serving their King and Country' published each week in the Mid Sussex Times, records Jesse Newnham entering service as 'Sergeant, Recruiting Staff, Depot 35th Regimental District' in late spring 1915. This was at Chichester¹⁹ with the Royal Sussex Regiment, a position he held until end August or beginning September 1915²⁰.

Whether as a result of Alfred's death in France or for patriotic reasons, Jesse at 46 years of age enlisted in the Army Veterinary Corps [AVC]. He attested at Chichester on 7 August 1915 and joined the Corps at their Woolwich Depot a week later as a Horse Keeper.²¹ At that time volunteers who had previously been in the Army were being accepted up to 45 years of age and it will also be noted that he had given up his sergeant's rank.

On the 21 November 1915, Jesse's AVC unit became part of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force²² [MEF] and subsequently embarked for the Middle East.

The Mid Sussex Times²³ published, on 4 January 1916, a letter written by Jesse in Egypt to his wife; at this time he is a Lance-corporal. He says 'After nine months absence, I can truly say there is no place like home'. Jesse explains he is keeping a diary of sights and experiences which he intends to share with the children and teachers in his district. A further letter²⁴ published on 25 January 1916, recounts the three week voyage

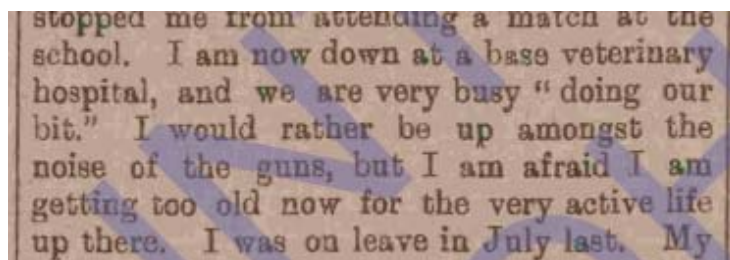
from England dodging German submarines and describes a local funeral and wedding. He comments they had not received any post as it had been wrongly delivered.

Following promotion to Corporal on 30 January 1916, he was further promoted to Sergeant on 9 March 1916²⁵. In June 1916, Jesse is on the Western Front in France with his AVC unit attached to the Royal Field Artillery.

In a letter to a friend published in October 1916,²⁶ Jesse writes about meeting a pupil teacher from Lindfield School while riding to attend a wounded horse. He then lists the places he has been since leaving England – Mudros, Alexandria, a place near Cairo, Suez, Suez Desert, Marseilles and France.

In July 1917, Jesse is home on leave²⁷ from France having been away two years; this was shortly after the death of Noel, the third son lost to the war. At the end of his leave he returns to France.

Writing in January 1918²⁸ to an old football friend from '24th Vet Hospital BEF', Jesse tells him 'I have had a fairly good spell out here in France. I have been in three different places on the Somme and twice at Ypres and once on the Arras front'. He explains he is at a veterinary hospital but is missing the front:



stopped me from attending a match at the school. I am now down at a base veterinary hospital, and we are very busy "doing our bit." I would rather be up amongst the noise of the guns, but I am afraid I am getting too old now for the very active life up there. I was on leave in July last. My

Mid Sussex Times, 29 January 1918, p7

It was not until August 1918²⁹ that Jesse, then stationed five miles from the front, returned home again. He went back to France until after the end of the war.

On returning home Jesse continued to live in Lindfield until his death on 13 May 1934.³⁰

Alfred Edward Victor Newnham [First son]

Alfred Edward Victor Newnham was born in 1894 and after completing his schooling in Lindfield worked as a gardener.³¹ Aged 14 years he had joined 4 Royal Sussex Regiment, Territorial Force, as a Bugler. In 1913 on reaching the age to enlist in the Regular Army he joined 2 Royal Sussex Regiment [2RSR], becoming Private L10100.

When war was declared, the battalion based at Woking, Surrey was immediately mobilised³² as part of 2 Brigade 1 Division and joined the

British Expeditionary Force [BEF] which left for France on 12 August 1914.

After concentration at Le Havre, 2RSR advanced to Rouvroy on the Mons – Chimay road, as part of the Allied plan to defend Belgium and northern France. On 23 August the BEF bump into the German 1st Army near Mons, Belgium. This held up the German advance giving the Allies a chance to retreat towards the outskirts of Paris. The 2RSR took no part in this battle.

The German advance on Paris was stopped when the Allies counter attacked at the first Battle of the Marne on 31 August 1914. Near Priez the 2RSR went into action for the first time suffering over 100 casualties.

The German army started to retreat north to the far bank of the Aisne River chased by the Allies who wanted to follow up their success at Marne. At the start of the Battle of Aisne on 14 September 1914, the 2RSR occupied the high ground above Vendresse, near Troyon. Heavy fighting raged for three weeks with neither the Germans nor the Allies making any significant gains with both sides becoming entrenched. This was the start of trench warfare and the creation of the Western Front. The 2RSR suffered over 300 casualties out of over 13,000 BEF casualties.

Alfred sent a cheerful postcard dated 23 September 1914 to his parents thanking them for a recent parcel³³. Two weeks later he was wounded during the Battle of Aisne. The date given in his Death Announcement³⁴ is 8 October 1914, but the Battalion's War Diary does not indicate any casualties or action at Troyon on that day. However on 7 October 1914, 2RSR was shelled for the first time by 'Bolos' high explosive heavy shells, taking casualties³⁵, with the majority being at 5.00pm when a party was drawing tools from headquarters – five killed, 16 wounded.

How and when Alfred was wounded may never be known for certain, but he received severe wounds to both legs. Following treatment in a Casualty Clearing Station he was evacuated by ambulance train to Paris and admitted on 13 October 1914 to British Red Cross Society No 1 Hospital, at the Hotel Astoria, Paris³⁶. As a Red Cross hospital, established that month, it was partly manned by British volunteer nurses.

The matron advised the family, 'we fear greatly that his chances of recovery are very small.' Nevertheless, Alfred was able with difficulty to send a last message to his family before he passed away at 5.00am on the 16 October 1914³⁷.

PRIVATE A. E. V. NEWNHAM.
Another smart young private of the 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment has laid down his life for his country. We allude to Private Alfred Edward Victor Newnham, the eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Newnham, of Compton Road, Lindfield. The first intelligence received by his parents that he had been wounded was in a letter from a fellow soldier, followed on Friday morning by a communication from the First Auxiliary Hospital, at the Hotel Astoria, Paris, bearing date of October 13th, and reading thus:—"I am writing a note to tell you that Alfred Newnham was admitted to this Hospital to-day, suffering from severe injury to both his legs, and we fear greatly that his chances of recovery are very small. You must rest assured, however, that absolutely everything possible will be done on his behalf, both in the hope of saving his life and if such cannot be at least his end shall have all the comfort it is possible to give him. He is to receive the Holy Communion to-morrow morning.—Believe me, yours faithfully, E. A. Lee, Matron." By the same post came a picture postcard from Private Newnham, evidently written with great effort. Affectionate messages were sent to various members of the family. "This place in the hospital where you receive all the attention needed. By the time you receive this, you may have received another postcard telling my address." The last and news was conveyed to the parents by means of a telegram, worded thus:—"Paris—16th—14 40 a.m.—To Newnham, Lindfield, Angleterre—Regret Alfred died five this morning, peacefully. Matron." The young fellow was twenty years of age. For nearly ten years he was a member of the Lindfield Parish Church Choir, and he had also belonged to the Lindfield Company of the Church Lads' Brigade, of which his father—an old soldier himself—was Captain. At the age of 14 he joined the local Territorials as bugler, and when he was old enough he enlisted. He was justly proud of the fact that, young as he was, he never fell out of a Territorial march.

Mid Sussex Times 20 October 1914 p6

Before leaving for France, Alfred promised his little sister May he would bring her back a doll from France³⁸. Realising he would be unable to buy May her promised doll, Alfred asked one of the nurses to go into Paris and buy a doll for him which she willingly did. After his death, the nurse made a special journey to Lindfield delivering the doll to May, staying with the family for a couple of days before returning to France.

Alfred was buried in the City of Paris Cemetery, Pantin, Paris, along with nearly one hundred other British soldiers. His grave reference is 6.21.25.

In late 1915 Elizabeth Newnham received a lengthy letter³⁹ from Paris written by Madame de Faye, following her recent visit to Pantin, describing Alfred's grave and the cemetery. She explains that Alfred's grave is marked with a black painted wooden cross, decorated with tributes, well tended and lying with about 20 other English soldiers in a secluded part of the graveyard.

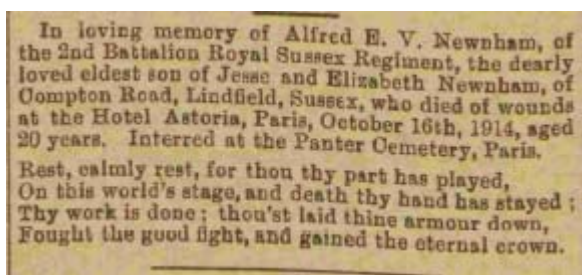
His father writing⁴⁰ to a friend in January 1918 reflects that one of Alfred's last regrets was that he would not play football again.

the game. That spirit has never left them.
One of the last regrets of my first boy who gave his life was that he "would not be able to play football again." This he told his nurse the night before he died. A peculiar coincidence in regard to your "dreaming of

Mid Sussex Times, 29 January 1918, p7

Perhaps the nurse he confided in was the same nurse who brought May her doll.

The anniversary of Alfred's death was regularly commemorated, such as in the announcement below:



Mid Sussex Times, 16 October 1917, p5

By invitation Mrs Elizabeth Newnham attended⁴¹ the Great Choral Commemoration of the glorious First Seven Divisions [commonly known as The Contemptibles] at the Royal Albert Hall, London on 15 December 1917. The event was held in the presence of the King, the Queen and other members of the Royal family. Alfred was in the First Division of the British Expeditionary Force.

John Francis Newnham [Second son]



John Francis Newnham Courtesy Maureen Newnham Menakis

John Francis Newnham was born in 1896 and like his elder brother Alfred, also gave up his gardening job⁴² and volunteered for military service the year before the Great War.

On 21 August 1913, John enlisted⁴³ in the Royal Marine Artillery [RMA] at Eastney Barracks, Portsmouth. His service number was RMA13608. On completing his training at Eastney, he would be posted to a RMA Detachment on board a ship. Traditionally, the RMA manned a gun turret towards the stern, namely X or Y turrets.

In October 1914 HMS Tiger⁴⁴ was hastily completed and sailed in a rush from the Clyde bound for the English Channel. John joined Tiger as a Gunner at this time and expressed his pleasure in the ship and her 13.5 inch guns⁴⁵. She called at Plymouth but due to enemy activity was immediately sent back to sea, sailing via the Straits of Dover to the Firth of Forth.

On 6 November 1914, Tiger joined the First Battle Cruiser Squadron [1BCS] part of the Grand Fleet based at the Firth of Forth. Life was initially quiet with time spent on drills and training with an occasional sweep of the North Sea.

A German cruiser force with destroyer escort bombarded Hartlepool and Scarborough on 16 December 1914⁴⁶. The Admiralty, aware the Germans were at sea ordered the 2nd Battle Squadron and the 1BSC [HMS Lion, Queen Mary, Tiger and New Zealand] to sail. This would have been John's first experience of an enemy engagement, but the two fleets did not engage despite passing at about ten miles distance.

The next mission on 24 January 1915⁴⁷ introduced John to a sea battle, when Tiger took part in a major action that became known as the Battle of Dogger Bank. In a letter⁴⁸ to his parents he wrote:

"I expect you have heard or seen in the papers of the splendid work we have accomplished, and of our remarkably low percentage of casualties. Our poor fellows died with a good heart, I am sure, because one and all of us have been anxiously waiting for the day to come when we might try our strength with the Germans. We are proud to be able to say that we are on the conquering side. On Sunday morning at daybreak, we were all closed up at our guns, waiting in case anything should happen. To our great delight something did happen. The enemy's ships were sighted on the horizon, and we started pouring down lead upon them. After about an hour's fighting we noticed that two of the German ships were badly burning, so we altered our target and came to the Blucher. Then she suffered grief and pain from our guns, and pretty soon caught alight and sank."

It is worth remembering that letters home were subject to censorship and an account of the engagement records Tiger's gunners fired 255 shells during the battle but scored just one hit on the Seydlitz.⁴⁹ Despite being hit six times by heavy shells, the damage suffered by Tiger was slight although sadly ten men were killed and 11 wounded.⁵⁰

The battle had been a decisive victory for the British fleet with damage and casualties being light, compared to the German loss of an armoured cruiser, severe damage to the Seydlitz and less serious damage to two other cruisers, with over 1000 men dead.

The Tiger was under repair until 8 February 1915, when she returned to service.

In a further letter home in February 1915,⁵¹ John tells his parents he is on No 5 Hospital Ship, SS Rewa but not to worry as he only has 'something the matter with my neck' and hoped to return to Tiger in a few days.

John was no doubt back on board Tiger by the 25 March 1915 when both the British and German fleets were trying to draw each other into a trap⁵². However due to bad weather the German fleet did not proceed far from base before returning. Rear Admiral Beatty's force, which included Tiger, cruised off the Horns Reef for 24 hours but the nearest the two fleets came to contact was 60 miles or more.

It was not long before Tiger was on another mission, as on 24 April 1915 a German battle cruiser force put to sea with an assignment to shell Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth. The Admiralty was aware of the sailing as the German radio message had been decoded, but the targets were unknown. The Tiger⁵³ together with other battle cruisers put to sea but passage was slow due to rough seas and the opportunity to attack the Germans was missed by some 130 miles.

Two weeks later Tiger⁵⁴ was at sea again, on 4 May 1915 a sea plane raid on the Zeppelin airship shed at Tondern was carried out with defensive cover being provided by 1BCS. The sea plane attack provoked no response from the Germans and again the Tiger returned to port without engaging the enemy.

Life onboard Tiger for John became quite routine as despite regularly cruising the North Sea there were no further encounters during the remainder of 1915 and early 1916. In a cheery letter⁵⁵ to his mother received in March 1916, John details one day's menu as, 'Breakfast, fresh haddock or tinned salmon. Dinner, fresh pork, apple sauce, carrots, roast potatoes, cabbage, suet pudding or jam pudding. Tea, pancakes and jam, bread and butter. Supper, sausages. And very nice it is too!' He comments the weather is bitterly cold but has a fur coat and fur lined gloves.

Tiger next went into action at the Battle of Jutland at the end of May 1916. The following is the narrative by the ship's Gunnery Officer of the first hour of the battle⁵⁶:

"On the afternoon of the 31st May, 1916, the 1st and 2nd Battle Cruiser Squadrons were out on one of the usual weekly cruises towards the Fisher Banks. The 3rd BCS had gone up to Scapa Flow for target practice, and the 5th Battle Squadron had come down to join us in the Forth in their place. It was the first time the 5th B.S. had come out with the battle cruisers from the Forth.

At about 3.30 p.m. we received the signal to prepare for immediate action, and soon afterwards the *Lion* reported enemy battle cruisers in sight to the N.E.

At 3.45 we sighted enemy ships, apparently battle cruisers, five in number, which I estimated to be *Hindenburg*, *Lützow*, *Derfflinger*, *Seydlitz*, and *Moltke*. (I was wrong; the *Von der Tann*, not the *Hindenburg*, was there). Their bearing was approximately north, on our port bow; the weather was misty in patches, the visibility varying from 12 to 6 miles; wind west, force 3; sea calm. I gave the target as 4th ship from the right. At 3.46 the range-finders gave a first range of 21,300 yards.

At 3.49 the enemy opened fire. The first salvo I saw drop was quite 2,000 yards short of us, and did not seem to have a very small spread.

3.50 *Lion* opened fire, and we opened fire. Target 4th ship from right, range 18,500. Our first salvo missed for deflection, second salvo was over. The submarine screen of destroyers on our engaged bow were causing great interference with their funnel smoke, and the enemy line was covered in cordite smoke from their guns firing. The smoke and flashes of the enemy salvos when coinciding with our fall of shot made spotting very difficult. The enemy were firing very rapidly. The Top reported that the funnel smoke of our battle cruisers ahead made their view very bad, so I did not shift my position to the Top. I think that at this time all the battle cruisers except *Princess Royal* had under-estimated the rate; we had.

3.52 the Germans were firing rapidly and getting our range; I saw splinters fly from our fo'c'sle past the gun control tower.

3.53 "Q" and "X" turrets did not come to the "ready." I had felt the concussion from hits on our armour, though I did not know for some minutes that both these turrets had been penetrated. "X" turret came in again after missing two or three salvos.....

4.40 there was a lull with no enemy in sight. I got permission to go and see the condition of "Q" and "X" turrets and see if I could assist them. The following was their condition, although I did not find it all out until later:—

"X" Turret. An 11-inch shell had hit the barbette, level with the upper deck. It had penetrated the 9-inch plate, killed the centre sight-setter, and was found intact, except for its nose and fuse, in the gun-house exactly in the geometrical centre of the turret, between the two guns and between the upper and lower floors of the gun-house. No other damage was done except the cutting of the main director firing circuits and the temporary jamming of the gun-loading doors by fragments of shell and of armour, and the smashing of one firing dynamo".

A very similar account⁵⁷ is given by Captain Alan Bourne RMA, the Officer of X Turret:

"At 3.56 pm X Turret hit by 11" shell on the barbette, directly between the guns. The body of the shell and a large piece of the barbette lodged on top of the lever for jacking up the guns and two more large pieces covered the manhole between the centre setter's position and working chamber..... The central sight setter was reported probably killed. This was confirmed when "Check fire" was ordered at 5.10pm but his body could not be removed until just before dusk."

The shell did not explode and the damage was caused by its impact.

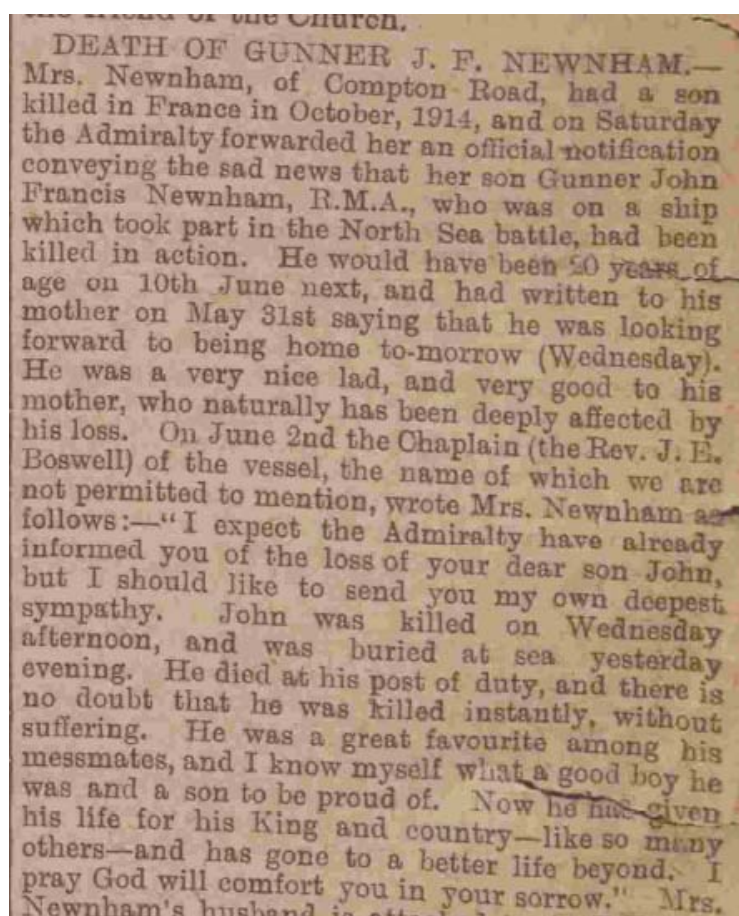
Hence no one other than the central sight setter in X turret was killed or

injured. The central sight setter was killed instantly on impact with the turret roof.

Although John Newnham is not named in the reports, he was the only member of the Royal Marine Artillery on Tiger killed in this engagement on 31 May and the X turret was manned by Royal Marines. The casualties⁵⁸ on Tiger were 2 officers and 22 ratings killed with 37 wounded, the ship having been hit 21 times.

The next evening, 1 June 1916, John was buried at sea⁵⁹.

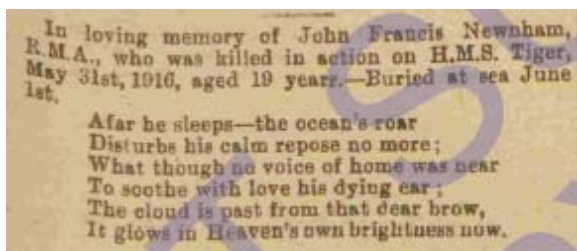
Two days later Mrs Newnham received official notification of his death and a letter of condolence from the Tiger's chaplain.



Mid Sussex Times, 6 June 1916, p5

His mother also received a letter⁶⁰ from 57 Mess, HMS Tiger, expressing their sympathy and confirming 'he died instantaneously, suffering no pain'. Sadly John had been due to come home on leave on 7 June 1916.

John's death is commemorated on the Lindfield War Memorial and the Royal Navy Memorial, Portsmouth. To commemorate the first anniversary of John's death, his mother placed the following in the Mid Sussex Times.



Mid Sussex Times, 29 May 1917, p5

Note: The Battle of Jutland was the major sea battle of the Great War, involving 250 warships, 25 admirals and 100,000 men. The Royal Navy lost 14 ships (112,000 tons) and nearly 7000 men while the Germans lost 11 ships (62,000 tons) and nearly 3000 men. It could be said that in terms of losses it was a German victory, but it had the effect of keeping the German High Seas Fleet in harbour for the remainder of the war, which was a victory for Britain.

Jesse Newnham [Third son]

Jesse was born on 22 October 1898. Before the war he lived at the family home in Compton Road, Lindfield and on leaving school worked for Walter Tower at Old Place, Lindfield, as a gardener.⁶¹

Aged 14, Jesse joined A Company, 4 Royal Sussex Regiment [4RSR], a Territorial Force battalion in 1913 as a Bugler. Haywards Heath, Lindfield and Cuckfield were the recruiting area for A Company and boys aged 14 could enter as buglers. He was no doubt motivated to participate in the military by his elder brothers Alfred and John who enlisted that year in the Royal Sussex and Royal Marines respectively. Also Alfred had previously been a Territorial bugler in 4RSR and their father had also served with the Royal Sussex.

Jesse's name was included in the list of 'those serving' that was pinned in the parish church porch⁶² following the outbreak of war. He was subsequently listed⁶³ as, Bugler, A Company, 4 Royal Sussex Regiment in the Mid Sussex Times Roll of Honour. The battalion was mobilized while on annual camp at the outbreak of war, thus at age 15 years he entered into full time military service.

The 4RSR were headquartered at Horsham⁶⁴ and in April 1915 moved to Cambridge and then to Bedford in May before leaving for Gallipoli. Details of his service during 1915 and 1916 are not known. However being under the age for foreign service Jesse appears to have remained in England. In July 1917 he is described⁶⁵ as a Lance-Corporal of the Royal Sussex Regiment.

He requested a change of service and at age 18 years 10 months, on 22 August 1917 he enlisted⁶⁶ in the Royal Marine Artillery [RMA] at Eastney Barracks, Portsmouth. His service number was RMA15845. At the time of his transfer two elder brothers had died serving in the RMA, Noel having died only six weeks before.

His service record shows that following training Jesse was promoted to Gunner 2nd Class on 1 January 1918 and subsequently Gunner before

being posted to the battleship HMS St Vincent on 15 October 1918 as part of the RMA detachment.

At the time Jesse joined St Vincent⁶⁷, she was part of the 4th Battle Squadron, Grand Fleet, undertaking routine patrols in the North Sea. The ship was being deployed in an increasingly secondary role. During the remaining four week of the war St Vincent was not engaged in any hostile action, thus for Jesse the war ended peacefully.

He left St Vincent on 31 December 1918 and following a period at a shore base Jesse joined HMS Sovereign in March 1919. He was discharged from the Royal Marines and became a Reservist on 23 April 1920.

Noel Herbert Newnham [Fourth son]



Noel Herbert Newnham
[Courtesy Maureen Newnham Menakis]

Noel Newnham was born on 18 December 1900. He attended Lindfield School and was a choirboy at All Saints church, also a member of Lindfield Boy Scouts. He left school aged 14 and worked for Mr. Driver, fishmonger & poulterer in the High Street, Lindfield⁶⁸.

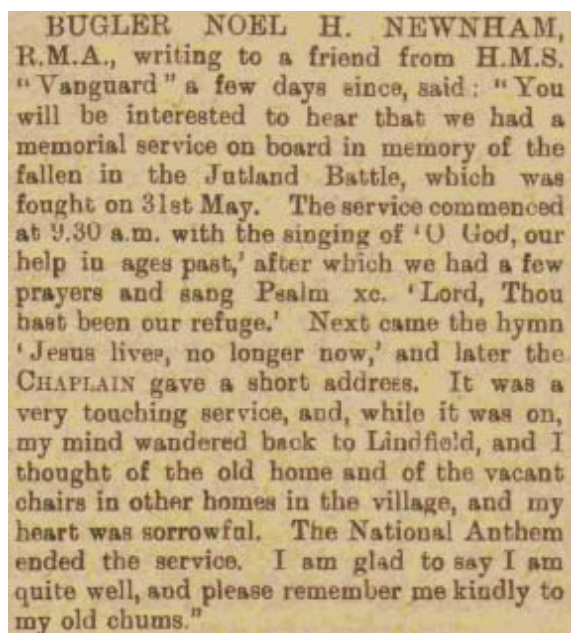
Aged 15, Noel volunteered for military service enlisting⁶⁹ on 29 April 1916 in the Royal Marine Artillery [RMA] at Eastney Barracks, Portsmouth as Bugler 14935.

Boys were able to join the RMA from age 14 as a Bugler⁷⁰ and when trained buglers served with the Royal Marine Detachment on a warship. The detachment usually had two buglers. Being under the age of conscription and having volunteered for service within the Admiralty, Noel could not under the terms of the Military Service Act 1916 subsequently be conscripted into the Army.

Noel spent time at Eastney Barracks⁷¹ and probably the adjacent Fort Cumberland while undergoing bugle and gunnery training. While at Eastney Barracks he captained the boys' football team⁷². Upon completing his bugle training Noel was drafted on 1 January 1917 to the battleship HMS Vanguard which was then part of the 4th Battle Squadron, Grand Fleet, based at Scapa Flow.

As one of the more obsolete ships in the Grand Fleet, Vanguard⁷³ undertook increasingly secondary roles including routine patrols and fleet manoeuvres in the North Sea. Consequently during Noel's time on the ship there were no hostile engagements.

In late May 1917, Noel wrote⁷⁴ to a friend regarding a memorial service for the fallen at the Battle of Jutland, which included his brother. In a little over five weeks Noel was also to die.



BUGLER NOEL H. NEWNHAM,
R.M.A., writing to a friend from H.M.S.
"Vanguard" a few days since, said: "You
will be interested to hear that we had a
memorial service on board in memory of the
fallen in the Jutland Battle, which was
fought on 31st May. The service commenced
at 9.30 a.m. with the singing of 'O God, our
help in ages past,' after which we had a few
prayers and sang Psalm xc. 'Lord, Thou
hast been our refuge.' Next came the hymn
'Jesus lives, no longer now,' and later the
CHAPLAIN gave a short address. It was a
very touching service, and, while it was on,
my mind wandered back to Lindfield, and I
thought of the old home and of the vacant
chairs in other homes in the village, and my
heart was sorrowful. The National Anthem
ended the service. I am glad to say I am
quite well, and please remember me kindly to
my old chums."

Mid Sussex Times, 5 June 1917, p8

On morning of 9 July 1917, Vanguard undertook routine exercises around Scapa Flow. The ship returned to its anchorage with the rest of the fleet at about 6.30pm.⁷⁵

At 23.20pm on the 9 July 1917 while Vanguard⁷⁶ was lying at anchor in Scapa Flow, with most of her crew asleep a fire was observed from ships nearby. Almost immediately there was a massive explosion, the centre of which was located amidships. The ship was literally blown apart and sank. All of the crew who had been on board that night, apart from two

survivors perished including Noel. The death toll was over 800 men. Noel's body was never recovered⁷⁷.

No definitive explanation for the explosion has ever been made, although it is thought to have been caused by cordite that had deteriorated becoming unstable.

Two letters received from the Royal Marines by Mrs Newnham on the tragic loss of a third son were published in the Mid Sussex Times⁷⁸.

DEATH OF BUGLER N. H. NEWNHAM.—We deeply regret to have to chronicle that Mrs. Newnham, of Compton Road, whose husband is now serving his country in France, has sustained another loss, her son, Bugler Noel Herbert Newnham, R.M.A., having made, with many others, the supreme sacrifice on H.M.S. Vanguard. He was but 16 years of age, and makes the third son lost since the war. One was killed in France, and another on H.M.S. Tiger. From Captain and Adjutant A. L. Forster, R.M.A., Mrs. Newnham has received the following letter:—"On behalf of the R.M.A. buglers, I wish to express our sincere sympathy with you in the loss of your son on H.M.S. 'Vanguard.' His loss will be much regretted by us all. I know well how much you have suffered in this war, and hope it may be some consolation to you to know that your sons have fulfilled the highest duty in giving their lives for their country, and that the example of keenness and smartness set by your son to the remainder of the buglers here remains as a high standard for them to follow. He was a loyal, straightforward and keen boy, and I personally very much regret his loss." Prior to joining the senior service Bugler N. H. Newnham was in the employment of Mr. J. Driver, fishmonger and poulterer. He was a member of the choir of the Parish Church and of the local troop of Boy Scouts. The eldest surviving son of Mrs. Newnham is Lance-Corporal Jesse Newnham, of the Royal Sussex Regiment, formerly in the service of Mr. Walter E. Tower, at Old Place.

Mid Sussex Times, 17 July 1917, p8

THE LATE BUGLER N. H. NEWNHAM.
—Mrs. Newnham, of Compton Road, has received a sympathetic letter from Lady Aston on the death of her son, Bugler N. H. Newnham, which was recorded in our last issue. The letter concluded: "Brigadier-General Sir George Aston wishes to add his regret at the loss the Royal Marine Artillery has sustained now that two of your sons, who were his comrades in the Corps, have given their lives for the great cause which we are fighting in this war. All ranks of the R.M. Artillery will sympathise with you in your great trouble." Many other sympathetic letters and messages have been received by Mrs. Newnham, and through this medium she wishes to return her heartfelt thanks to one and all.

Mid Sussex Times, 24 July 1917, p8

In addition to the Lindfield War Memorial, Noel is commemorated on the Royal Navy Memorial, Portsmouth and the recently erected Buglers Memorial at the School of Music, Royal Navy Base, Portsmouth. The Buglers Memorial lists the names of the 51 Royal Marine Buglers who died in the Great War.



Buglers Memorial, Royal Marine School of Music, HM Navy Base, Portsmouth
[Acknowledgements www.royalmarinesbands.co.uk]

Harold Percy Newnham [Fifth son]



Harold Percy Newnham
 [Courtesy Maureen Newnham Menakis]

Harold was born in Lindfield on 10 February 1903. He attended Lindfield School and after leaving school he had worked briefly as a grocer's errand boy⁷⁹.

Just two months after Noel died on Vanguard, Harold then aged 14 years 7 month volunteered as a Bugler in the Royal Marine Artillery, at Eastney Barracks, Portsmouth on 17 September 1917. On enlisting Bugler 15897 Newnham measured just over 4 feet 8 inches tall⁸⁰.

At the time of volunteering the family had already lost three sons in the war. His surviving elder brother had joined the Royal Marine Artillery a month previous and his father was in the Army Veterinary Corps in France. This left his mother at home with her four youngest children, aged between 5 and 12 years.

According to Harold's service records⁸¹, he was based at Eastney Barracks for the duration of the war and through to September 1920 when he joined a ship for a few months. Another posting ashore followed until 3 November 1921 when he joined HMS Barham before being discharged and returning home on 22 May 1922. He received the British War Medal.

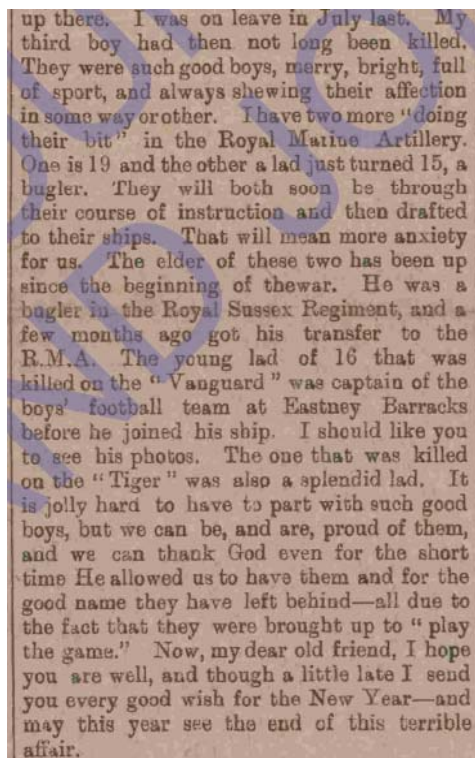
In the years after the war, Harold joined the Merchant Navy as a Steward. During World War II while serving on the SS Ceramic, the ship was torpedoed by a German U boat on 6 December 1942 and sank. Harold was among the 655 who perished.

Epitaph

The grief and anguish suffered by John and Elizabeth Newnham and their surviving children is partially expressed in a letter⁸² written by Jesse to an old football friend:

'They were such good boys, merry, bright, full of sport, and always shewing their affection in some way or other. It is jolly hard to have to part with such good boys, but we can be, and are, proud of them, and can thank God even for the short time He allowed us to have them and for the good name they have left behind – all due to the fact that they were brought up to "play the game."

The letter was written in January 1918 while two sons were still serving in the Royal Marine Artillery. The letter was published in the Mid Sussex Times and an extract is given below.



up there. I was on leave in July last. My third boy had then not long been killed. They were such good boys, merry, bright, full of sport, and always shewing their affection in some way or other. I have two more "doing their bit" in the Royal Marine Artillery. One is 19 and the other a lad just turned 15, a bugler. They will both soon be through their course of instruction and then drafted to their ships. That will mean more anxiety for us. The elder of these two has been up since the beginning of the war. He was a bugler in the Royal Sussex Regiment, and a few months ago got his transfer to the R.M.A. The young lad of 16 that was killed on the "Vanguard" was captain of the boys' football team at Eastney Barracks before he joined his ship. I should like you to see his photos. The one that was killed on the "Tiger" was also a splendid lad. It is jolly hard to have to part with such good boys, but we can be, and are, proud of them, and we can thank God even for the short time He allowed us to have them and for the good name they have left behind—all due to the fact that they were brought up to "play the game." Now, my dear old friend, I hope you are well, and though a little late I send you every good wish for the New Year—and may this year see the end of this terrible affair.

Mid Sussex Times 29 January 1918, p7

The Newnham family served King, Country and Empire. Their sons died in the Great War for freedom and honour.

Postscript

At the unveiling of the Lindfield War Memorial in November 1922, Jesse Newnham jnr carried the Processional Cross to the Memorial and his younger brother, Harry, laid the wreath on behalf of the Boy Scouts.

Another sad loss for the family was the death of their son, Harold Percy Newnham in World War Two. The family suffered the loss of four sons, the greatest of any Lindfield family during the two wars. To mark this loss, their mother Elizabeth Newnham, was invited to be part of the formal unveiling party at the ceremony to unveil the 1939-1945 names on the Lindfield War Memorial.

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