

## Lieutenant Andrew Victor Barclay RGA

(Baron Collingwoode Seymour Underhill's friend, neighbour and brother-in-law)

Andrew was born on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1887<sup>i</sup> in Govan, Lanarkshire to Andrew and Lillias (a Scottish form of Lillian) Barclay. He was the second of five children and the eldest of the three boys.

His father and mother are recorded as living at Livingstone Terrace, Govan, Lanarkshire in 1891 with their, then, three children. Andrew's father was a bread and biscuit maker by occupation.

In 1901, Andrew senior moved the family south to Birmingham, possibly for better working prospects, taking up the position of a Bakery Manager. Annie, a daughter born in 1891, had since died, but two sons Frederick and David had increased the family to four. The family moved into 80, Oakfield Road, Balsall Heath, but by 1911 the family had relocated to a larger residence at 22 Park Road, Moseley. By this time Andrew had left school and was working as a commercial traveller, selling biscuits.



*Victor Barclay, eldest son of Mr and Mrs Andrew Barclay, of Penrhyn, Park Road, Moseley, was married to*

**Figure 1**  
Second Lieutenant B C S Underhill with his brother-in law Second Lieutenant A V Barclay. From the Graham Underhill archive

At some time after the declaration of war on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914, Andrew enlisted in the South Midland (Warwickshire) Heavy Battery RGA. On August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1915, he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant.<sup>ii</sup> The photograph on the left shows Andrew with his friend and next door neighbour Baron Collingwoode Seymour Underhill RGA (known as Coll to his friends and family) in their officer uniforms.

Two months after obtaining his commission, Andrew married Coll's sister Dorothy Arline Underhill, the girl next door on 16<sup>th</sup> October. The following is an account of the wedding that appeared in the Evening Despatch on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> October:

*There was an attractive military wedding today at St Anne's Church, Moseley where Lieutenant Andrew married Miss Dorothy Arline Underhill, only daughter of Mr and Mrs Collingwoode Underhill, of Charlecote Lodge, Park*

Road, Moseley.

There were a number of officers present, including Colonel A H Halse. The ceremony was conducted by Canon Mosse.

The bride was given away by her father, and was attired in white satin and ninon with silver trimmings.

There were four bridesmaids: Miss Liliias Goldie Barclay (sister of the bridegroom), Miss Enid Waltho (friend of the bride) and Misses Marjorie and Clarice Nightingale, cousins of the bride. The two older bridesmaids wore powder blue taffeta silk dresses, with brown hats, shoes and stockings, and carried bouquets of chrysanthemums and white heather. The other two bridesmaids were dressed in white shadow lace mob caps and carried garlands of chrysanthemums.

The best man was Lieutenant B. C. S. Underhill, RGA, brother of the bride.

On leaving church the bride and bridegroom passed under an archway of swords of sixteen brother officers..

The reception was held at the Moseley and Balsall Heath Institute, and later the newly-wedded pair left for a short honeymoon in London.



Figure 2

The wedding of Dorothy Arline Underhill to Second Lieutenant Andrew Victor Barclay on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1915

There is no record to indicate when Andrew went to France, but his British Army medal index card lists only the Victory and British War medal, signifying that it would have been from 1916 onwards. There is also no record of the RGA Battery Andrew was attached to, but the 1<sup>st</sup> Midland (Warwicks) RGA was attached to the 48<sup>th</sup> Division so he would have been operating somewhere within the theatre of war of this Division in France and Italy.

The 1<sup>st</sup> South Midland (Warwicks) Heavy Battery, RGA left for France on 16<sup>th</sup> April 1915, but Andrew was not part of this contingent. As he was in officer training he would have joined them on completion of his course in preparation for the 'Big Push' on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916.

The Heavy Batteries of the RGA were equipped with heavy guns, sending large calibre high explosive shells in fairly flat trajectory fire. The usual armaments were 60 pounder (5 inch) guns able to send a shrapnel shell a distance of nearly 7 miles. Over the course of the war, the necessity of war time construction methods and maintenance requirements led to the simplification of the barrel construction and the modification of the carriage to meet the prevailing conditions at the time.



**Figure 3 Royal Garrison Heavy Artillery**



**Figure 4. 9.2" BL Mk1 Siege Howitzer ready to fire in 1917. Imperial War Museum**



**Figure 5. 9.2" Railway Mounted Gun on the Somme in 1916. Imperial War Museum**

The Batteries were also equipped with heavy howitzers capable of sending high explosive shells in high trajectory fire, in addition to, 9" Railway Mounted Guns. As British artillery tactics developed, the Heavy Batteries were most often employed in destroying or neutralising the enemy artillery, as well as putting destructive fire down on strong points, dumps, stores, roads and railways behind enemy lines.<sup>iii</sup>

The first task of the artillery was to pin-point the enemy gun positions, which was made difficult because they were out of direct sight, usually hidden behind a hill or ridge sometimes several miles away. By 1915 the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) had devised a system where pilots could use wireless telegraphy to identify specific targets. The RFC aircraft carried a wireless set and a map and after identifying the position of an enemy target the pilot was able to transmit messages such as A5, B3, etc. in Morse code to a RFC land station attached to a heavy artillery unit, such as

the Royal Garrison Artillery Siege Batteries.<sup>iv</sup>

The other problem for the artillery was to range the guns accurately to hit the target. At the start of the war this had meant firing some ranging shots which could be observed and corrections made until the target was being hit. This was a slow and wasteful process, but more importantly it gave away any possible surprise and let the enemy know where your guns were. The development of predicted fire, meant a level of tactical surprise was at last possible. This was achieved by calibrating each gun individually and each batch of ammunition. Very detailed maps accounting for elevations and depressions were compiled together with complex tables of data involving wind-speed, humidity, and temperature data enabling the gunners to compute with incredible accuracy, exactly what coordinates to dial into a specific gun in a specific location so as to hit any specified spot on the map. The first battle in which the fireplan consisted entirely of predicted fire was the Battle of Cambrai in 1917, in which the British guns were moved into surveyed positions at the last moment, achieving tactical surprise when they commenced firing.<sup>v</sup>

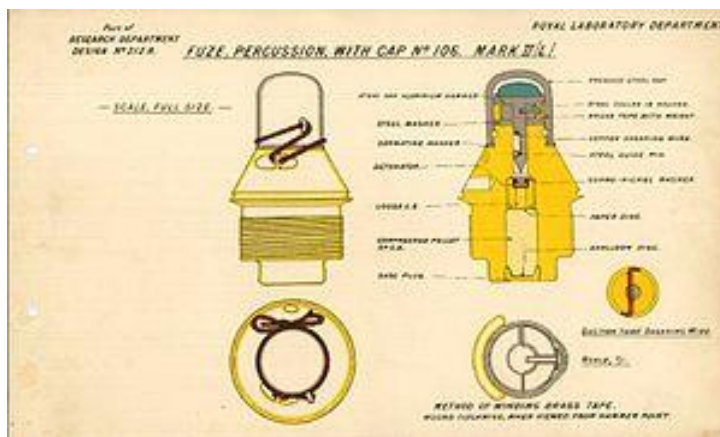


Figure 5  
The 106 Fuze Percussion Cap

Another problem to be addressed was the unreliability of shells to explode on impact, a result of mass production methods at the start of the war. An important British development of 1916 was the Number 106 Fuze, which was based on an existing French technology. For the first time, the artillery had a highly sensitive contact fuze; so sensitive that it would explode the shell as soon as it touched barbed wire. Before this, contact (or percussion) fuzes needed to hit the ground before exploding. The 106 fuze gave much

superior ability to clear barbed wire defences.<sup>vi</sup>

Shells were also developed to contain compressed poison gas in addition to the high explosive or shrapnel used from 1914. This added the ability to accurately deliver gas into enemy positions and was much more effective than the cloud gas released from cylinders, which relied on the wind. A similar shell was developed for delivering smoke, which proved valuable in masking the enemy's visual observation of British attacks.<sup>vii</sup>

Another consideration made after the Battle of the Somme in 1916 was the ability of the enemy to survive the bombardments and cut down the attacking British infantry in large numbers, from small arms fire from the trenches and from shelling by their artillery. Something had to change. Attention turned to firing on the enemy's artillery and communications: if the German guns could not fire and their batteries could not receive instructions, the British attacks were more likely to succeed.<sup>viii</sup>

By 1918 a 1000 60-pounder guns had been made for the British Army. It was so successful as an artillery weapon it was still being used in 1944, although the 12 horses needed to originally move it had been replaced by mechanical methods. These and other factors including the development of the creeping barrage by the Royal Field Artillery helped turn the tide against the German Army.<sup>ix</sup>

On 17<sup>th</sup> October 1917, Andrew was promoted to Lieutenant with precedence as from the 1<sup>st</sup> June. He was allowed to retain his rank on demobilisation at the end of the war, when he relinquished his commission.<sup>x</sup>

In 1924 Deryk the only child of Dorothy and Andrew was born.

In 1939, Andrew and Dorothy are recorded as living at 90 Woodcock Hill, Wembly, Middlesex. His occupation is recorded as a commercial traveller in plant oils and animal fats for the catering industry. At the outbreak of WW2, Andrew's son Deryk served in the RAF.

Andrew died on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1969.

**Researched and written by Edwina Rees, Moseley History Society**

## Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> England & Wales Deaths, 1837-2007. DOB on death certificate
- <sup>ii</sup> Birmingham Daily Post, August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1915
- <sup>iii</sup> The Heavy Batteries of the Royal Garrison Artillery  
<http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-royal-artillery-in-the-first-world-war/the-heavy-batteries-of-the-royal-garrison-artillery/>
- <sup>iv</sup> Royal Garrison Artillery  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal\\_Garrison\\_Artillery](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Garrison_Artillery)
- <sup>v</sup> How the British Artillery developed and became a war-winning factor in 1914-1918  
[http://www.1914-1918.net/artillery\\_development.html](http://www.1914-1918.net/artillery_development.html)
- Battle of Cambrai  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predicted\\_fire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predicted_fire)
- <sup>vi</sup> No. 106 Fuze  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No.\\_106\\_Fuze](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No._106_Fuze)
- <sup>vii</sup> See vi
- <sup>viii</sup> See vi
- <sup>ix</sup> The Royal Garrison Artillery  
<http://www.denniscorbett.com/seek.html>
- <sup>x</sup> London Gazette, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1921, Issue 32512, page 8902  
<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/32512/supplement/8902/data.pdf>

## **Illustrations**

Figures 1 & 2 From the Graham Underhill archive

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Figure 3      Weaponry used in the First World War  
<http://www.gpembertononline.co.uk/Legion/ww1HeavyArtillery.html>

Figure 4 & 5    The Royal Artillery Heavy Batteries  
<http://www.hacknegunners.co.uk/the-gun-battery/the-gun/>

The Siege Batteries of the RGA  
<http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-royal-artillery-in-the-first-world-war/the-siege-batteries-of-the-royal-garrison-artillery/>