

# CHICHESTER IN THE GREAT WAR

**Charles W Boniface (b-1878-d-1915), Royal Sussex Regiment**

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Charles W Boniface was a soldier in the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment. He was born in 1878 in Poling, Sussex, his parents were Steven and Harriett Boniface and he was the husband of Amy M Boniface (nee Lillywhite). They resided in Worthing, West Sussex he had a son Frederick Charles Boniface.

Charles served in the Royal Navy Reserve for 5 years but bought himself out of this force, which could have been for a number of reasons. Without records, his true reason for making the decision is hard to establish. Before signing up for the Army in 1914 he worked as a gardener in the convent in Worthing, but at the outbreak of war he volunteered and enlisted in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Sussex Regiment on the 5<sup>th</sup> September 1914. He served in the British Expeditionary Force in France from 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1914 and was wounded in December at La Basseé which led to him being sent home for treatment for a gunshot wound to the right arm on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 1915. He returned to the front line by 25<sup>th</sup> May 1915 as fit to serve.

The battle of Basseé took place 10<sup>th</sup> October to 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1914, as part of the 'race to the sea'.<sup>1</sup> After convalescing he re-joined his regiment on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 1915 and was killed in action at the battle of Loos on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 1915. This Battle was the precursor to the battle of the Somme, but the military did not learn from the mistakes of Basseé as they made the same errors at the Battle of the Somme where over 1,000,000 men were either wounded or killed.

The battle of Loos, where Private Charles Boniface lost his life, was presided over by General Douglas Haig, who had serious misgivings about this offensive: however he still sent in 6 brigades to fight this battle. At the same time the French were fighting at Champagne and also at Arras.

The British enjoyed massive numerical supremacy against their German opposition at Loos, in places of up to 7 to 1. Once the preliminary artillery bombardment had concluded, Haig's battle plans called for the release of 5,100 cylinders of chlorine gas (140 tons) from the British front line.<sup>2</sup> This strategy of gassing the Germans had mixed results, as the wind blew some of the gas back into the British trenches and wounded over 2000 soldiers of which 4 died.



He was survived by his wife and child who were awarded a war pension of 17/6 per week from the 17<sup>th</sup> April 1916. The Family continued to live at the family home of 16 Jubilee Terrace, Penfold Street, Broadwater, Worthing.

### **Medals awarded posthumously**

Charles Boniface was awarded the 1914-1915 Star campaign medal of the British Empire for his service in World War One. He also received that British War Medal and Victory Medal - these medals were sometimes referred to as Pip, Squeak and Wilfred.<sup>3</sup> Charles is mentioned in the Roll of Honour book volume 2 for his service to the war effort.

The regiment has a commemorative board in Chichester Cathedral where several Boniface's are listed and, along with the commemorative boards in the cathedral, there is a commemorative plaque in Bognor memorial hospital dedicated to the members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion who lost their lives in WW1, which also features Charles Boniface.

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<sup>1</sup> A series of battles that established a line on the western front to the North Sea.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.firstworldwar.com/battles/loos.htm> (accessed 06/04/16)

<sup>3</sup> A series of British First World War campaign medals was introduced at about the same time that the comic strip gained widespread acclaim; these were subsequently given a nickname to represent each cartoon character: bizarrely the names stuck.

'Pip' was in fact used to describe two separate campaign medals, the 1914 Star and the 1914-15 Star (the former more commonly if incorrectly referred to as the 'Mons Star'). Holders of the 1914 Star were not eligible for the 1914-15 Star, thus only one could be held at once.

'Squeak' was the named used to describe the British War Medal; and the Inter-Allied Victory Medal was referred to as 'Wilfred' (the medal was also simply referred to as the Victory Medal or the Allied War Medal).

