

Dan Burges was born in 1873 and educated at Winchester College from where he went to Sandhurst. He was commissioned into the Gloucestershire Regiment on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1893, aged 20.

Dan joined 2<sup>nd</sup> Gloucesters in Devonport and seven years later, in 1900, he went with the Battalion to the South African or Boer War. After a short period with the Battalion he commanded the Mounted Signallers Company at Army HQ. Radios did not exist so signalling was by telegraph or heliograph. Dan was then signalling officer successively to various columns which is how the war was waged in the later stages, before becoming signalling officer to General, later Lord, Kitchener until the end of the war.

He married in October 1905 and two months later he joined 1<sup>st</sup> Gloucesters in India. He and his wife must have enjoyed the country because having remained with the Battalion until 1908 he then became the Adjutant of the Punjab Volunteer Rifles until 1913 when he joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gloucesters in Tientsin in China, which is where he was when the War broke. The Battalion returned to England and by December 1914 was in Belgium with Dan commanding C Company who were soon manning the trenches to the East of Ypres. On 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1915, the Germans launched the Second Battle of Ypres with the first use of gas for which the Allies were totally unprepared. He was wounded on 9<sup>th</sup> May in some exceptionally fierce fighting at the inappropriately named Sanctuary Wood. He cannot have been out of action for long however because he was Mentioned in Despatches on 12<sup>th</sup> June. He was promoted to Major in September and two months later, as a temporary Lieutenant Colonel, he became Commanding Officer of the 10th Battalion, East Yorkshire Regiment in Egypt. He brought the battalion back to the Western Front and prepared them

for the Somme Offensive due to start on 1st July 1916 but was relieved of his command on 30<sup>th</sup> June.

It is rumoured that a few days earlier an officer from another unit, who was said to be the son of a well-known politician, was killed and Dan's battalion was ordered to recover the body. Two attempts failed leading to casualties so Dan refused to risk any more of his men in a third attempt and was immediately sacked. He then became an instructor at the Senior Officer's School in Aldershot before returning to 2<sup>nd</sup> Gloucester in March 1917, who were in Macedonia opposing the Bulgars. There was little action so the challenge for commanders was to keep men fit and avoid them becoming bored. Seven officers of 2<sup>nd</sup> Gloucesters were sent to command other battalions in Macedonia. One was Dan, who was appointed to command 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion South Wales Borderers on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1917.

In June 1918 he was awarded a DSO and in September the Allies launched a major attack to defeat the Bulgars. The main attack by French and Serbian Divisions was in the West while the three British Divisions and four Greek were tasked with defeating the 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army who were holding formidable defensive positions in the East. At 5.15 in the morning exactly 100 years ago today Dan's battalion was the left forward one of the brigade leading the attack by 22<sup>nd</sup> Division, with a Greek brigade to their left. The two British battalions on his right only got as far as their second objectives before being halted and the Greek attack also faltered. Only the 7<sup>th</sup> South Wales Borderers continued advancing for nearly a mile over appalling ground, through wire obstacles that had not been cut and suffering heavy casualties as all the enemy machine guns were able to concentrate their fire on them. Only a few men, including Dan who had been wounded, managed to reach the Battalion's final objective, where he was wounded twice more and lost consciousness. There were not

enough men left to hold the position without the support of the other battalions and the Greeks and so the South Wales Borderers were forced to withdraw leaving their wounded behind. Of the 17 SWB officers that went into the attack only the Medical Officer was unhurt. Ten officers and 98 other ranks were killed or died of wounds. Despite it being a disastrous day the gallantry of the South Wales Borderers was recognised exceptionally by the award of the French Croix de Guerre; an honour only granted to four other British battalions who were all on the Western Front during the War. Dan was awarded the Victoria Cross the citation for which stated:

*“For most conspicuous bravery, skilful leading and devotion to duty in the operations at Jumeaux (Balkans) on 18 September, 1918. His valuable reconnaissance of the enemy first line trenches enabled him to bring his battalion without casualties to the assembly point, and from thence he maintained direction with great skill, though every known landmark was completely obscured by smoke and dust. When still some distance from its objective, the battalion came under severe machine-gun fire, which caused many casualties amongst company leaders. Lieutenant Colonel Burges, though himself wounded, quite regardless of his own safety, kept moving to and fro through his command encouraging his men and assisting them to maintain formation and direction. Finally, as they neared the enemy’s position, he led them forward through a decimating fire, until he was again hit twice and fell unconscious. His coolness and personal courage were most marked throughout and afforded a magnificent example to all ranks”.*

Dan was taken prisoner by the Bulgars, but was abandoned in a dug-out with one of his legs shattered, when they withdrew a few days later. He lost his damaged leg and remained in hospital until February 1919. He was decorated with the VC and DSO by King George V. He also received the French Croix de

Guerre and the Greek Military Cross. After some staff appointments and command of a Military Detention Barracks, he retired in 1923. His medals, gold watch presented to him by the Lord Mayor, Sheriff and Citizens of Bristol, and an oil painting were generously given to the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum in Gloucester Docks by his family, where they are on display.