

Second Lieutenant Guy Maddison Vaisey AM[©] 1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

born: 15 July 1889 – died: 18 April 1918

Second Lieutenant Guy Maddison Vaisey was an exceptional young man, winning two medals for bravery, one while still in high school at the Merchant Taylors' School. Although he was born in London, England, he emigrated to Alberta, Canada, where he homesteaded. When the war commenced, he joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force but later transferred to the Imperial Army. He was also identified as a descendant of Edward III, King of England (1312–1377).

Guy was born at Hampstead, London, England, on 15 July 1889, the first of two children born to Charles Thomas St. Clere Vaisey and Emily Jessie Sparke.¹ Charles was baptized on 27 February 1857 in Cirencester, Gloucestershire.² Emily was born on 6 November 1857 and baptized on Christmas Day 1857 in Peshawur, Bengal, India, while her father was in the service of the Bengal Staff Corps.³ Charles and Emily married in the summer of 1888 in Birkenhead, Cheshire,⁴ having Guy the following summer. Their second child, Monica, was baptized on 6 June 1891 at Westminster, London.⁵

The ancestry of Charles, and thus his son Guy, has been traced back to Edward III, King of England.⁶ Edward III was born 13 November 1312, becoming King at the age of 14 after his father was deposed by his mother Isabella of France and her lover Roger Mortimer. Edward III was noted for his military success and transforming the Kingdom of England into one of the most formidable military powers in Europe. King Edward III died on 21 June 1377.⁷

When Guy was born, his father Charles' occupation had been noted as bank cashier. In the 1891 Census for West Hampstead, London, Charles was listed as a bank clerk, but Monica was not yet born.⁸ An announcement in the London Gazette for 1896 named Charles to be Secretary and Accountant of the Union Bank of Spain and England, Limited. The company was to be wound up with the appointment of Charles and another gentleman as liquidators.⁹

In the 1901 Census for West Hampstead, Charles was a bank manager, Guy was 11 and Monica was 9.¹⁰

Sadly, Charles died at the age of 48 on 5 June 1905 at Flower-house, Catford, Kent. At the time he was living in Oystermouth, Glamorganshire, Wales, so he most likely died while travelling on bank business. His estate of £1200 was left to his widow, Emily.¹¹

For several years up to his graduation from secondary school in 1907, Guy was a student at Merchant Taylors' School, which was fully funded by Merchant Taylors' Company.¹² This was one of the Great Twelve Livery Companies of London, or one of the guilds that had begun in mediaeval times as mainly religious fraternities to protect the interests of particular trades. The company started as an association of working tailors, known as the Fraternity of St. John the Baptist, receiving its first royal charter in 1327, in the name of the Company of Tailors and Linen-Armourers. Linen armour was the padded clothing worn beneath metal armour.¹³

During his last year at the Merchant Taylors' School, in 1907, Guy received the Royal Humane Society Medal.¹⁴ No further information was obtained about the specifics of the award Guy received, but it was awarded for acts of bravery in the saving of human life and for effecting successful resuscitations.¹⁵ Guy would have been less than 18 years old.

According to his school records, Guy commenced studying at the Veterinary College in Camden Town, but in 1909 he emigrated to Canada, where on 7 October 1909 he commenced homesteading at Stauffer, Alberta. In homesteading records, he indicated that he did not intend to become a citizen of Canada. He commenced living on the land on 5 April 1910, living in a shack he had constructed. He owned one heifer and had broken only one of the 150 acres that could be cultivated. About 20 acres were used for hay and he had a large forest of poplars on 140 acres. By the following year, he had built a log cabin and barn, had broken an additional 15 acres and had fenced a portion of his lands. After Guy's death, his uncle, also a banker like Guy's father, communicated with the local authorities on behalf of Guy's estate.¹⁶

In 1913, at the age of 24, Guy returned to England, where, like his father and grandfather, he became a member of the Cirencester Society in London. This was, and continues to be, a Gentlemen's Dining Society in existence before 1702. This society originally provided apprenticeship fees for poor Cirencester boys in trades such as dyers, hatters, tailors, leather workers, silversmiths and barbers/surgeons. Today, the society sponsors children's programs and apprenticeships around the world.¹⁷

But then war broke out and Guy was one of the earliest to enlist. His regimental number was 18100. He was transferred to Valcartier, Quebec, with A Company, 9th Battalion and traveled to the Front aboard the *SS Zealand*, leaving on 4 October 1914. He was transferred to the 3rd Battalion and saw active service in Ypres from 5 March 1915. Within 10 days, however, Guy was admitted to the No. 1 Canadian Field Ambulance; by 23 April 1915 he was still fighting diarrhoea and enteritis and was transferred to England. On 7 May 1915 he was discharged and returned to the Front.

On 2 January 1916, Guy was promoted to corporal, and on 2 April 1916 he was sent to attend cadet school with a view to being granted a commission. On 4 September 1916, Guy was discharged to a commission in the Imperial Army at Shoreham, England.¹⁸

Guy had applied for and was appointed to a commission in the Special Reserve as a second lieutenant with the Gloucestershire Regiment on 8 November 1916. He quickly rose in the ranks and was appointed to a regular commission as a second lieutenant on 18 December 1917, serving with the 1st Battalion.¹⁹

His quick rise through the ranks was likely a reflection of the kind of man Guy was. As the London Gazette reported, in 1918 the King posthumously awarded Guy the Albert Medal in recognition of gallantry displayed in saving life in France:

"Second Lieutenant Guy Maddison Vaisey, 3rd Battalion (attached 10th Battalion), Gloucestershire Regiment.

On the 6 April 1917, during bomb-throwing practice at a Divisional Bomb School in France, one of the men under instruction, having extracted the pin from a Mills grenade, allowed the grenade to slip out of his hand. Lieutenant Vaisey, seeing what had happened, dashed around a traverse in the trench from which the practice was being conducted, picked up the grenade, and threw it clear of the trench; it exploded almost immediately.

The action was performed at great personal risk, as the thrower was in his way and was dazed with fright. Lieutenant Vaisey by his courage and prompt action undoubtedly prevented a fatal accident."²⁰

The Albert Medal for Lifesaving was a British medal awarded to recognize the saving of life. In 1917 the titles of the medals changed with the "Albert Medal, first class" becoming the "Albert Medal in gold" and the bronze "Albert Medal, second class" being known as the "Albert Medal." There were only 45 gold medals and 282 bronze medals awarded.²¹

On 20 May 1917, Guy was on special leave when he married Elizabeth Jessie Cameron, aged 21, at St. Peter, Notting Hill, Kensington and Chelsea. Her father, Peter Cameron, was already deceased when Elizabeth married Guy.²²

The war diary of the 1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment²³ (commonly referred to as the Glosters) describes the terrible battle at Givenchy and Festubert in northwestern France, which commenced on 9 April and ended 18 April 1918, the day on which Guy was fatally injured. This was known officially as the Battle of the Lys. Throughout the month of April, all the low-lying land around the La Basse Canal was wrapped in a thick mist, which often lasted all day. It was seldom possible to see more than a few hundred meters away, often much less. This, of course, made it difficult for the airplanes and led to one incident of allied bombers attacking their own soldiers.

On 17 April, the regiment captured a German soldier who had become disoriented in the mist. He had been engaged in spotting positions for heavy trench mortars. As a result of questioning, information was obtained about an imminent attack. On 18 April, from 4:00 a.m. to 6:30 a.m. the Germans attacked with an intense firing of gas shells aimed at the back areas and gun positions. The Glosters' artillery suffered significantly. However, having been forewarned, possible prominent works had been temporarily evacuated for more advanced positions. An enormous amount of gas, mostly "yellow cross," was fired by the enemy, and with the mist and dust from falling buildings and the deafening noise, the Battalion endured several anxious hours. At 6:30 a.m. the enemy gunners shortened their range, firing on the village and HQ. Fortunately, the Glosters' trenches were in splendid condition, so little damage occurred.

About 8:15 a.m. the infantry attack commenced with the Germans swarming from their lines, heralded through the mist by a chain of Very Lights, which are essentially flares. A few breaches of the lines occurred, and although subjected to hot fire the advancing Germans could not be checked. A serious breach had occurred in A Company's line, cutting A Company in two. It was during this attack that Guy was mortally wounded.

A number of Germans got through a gap into the orchard and village behind Allied lines, but one line was quickly reorganized to contain the Germans and prevent reinforcements from arriving. Still, this group of German snipers had a choice location and did grave damage once the mist lifted: machine gunners, runners and stretcher bearers were shot down as fast as they appeared on the road. Even the dressing station was penetrated, killing and wounding several of the medical staff and casualties.

The battle raged with the Germans having some successes. Once the fog had lifted, German airplanes were flying low and were busy bombing and shooting up various keeps in the lines. By 11:00 a.m. Glosters' casualties included eight officers and about 150 other ranks. Even HQ was under significant attack, so all orderly room records and material were destroyed and the last two pigeons released. The first pigeon went off well, but unfortunately flew in the wrong direction, and the second was blown up by a shell within 50 yards of HQ.

A decision was made to clear the Germans from the orchards and village before nightfall. A Welsh company took the situation in hand with a company of Camerons, and they succeeded in capturing or killing this group of Germans.

By noon, the Germans appeared to realize that their attack had failed. As they attempted to crawl back to their lines from shell holes between the village line and the German lines, they were shot in scores. Very few prisoners were taken, and most of those were already wounded. One German American had suddenly loomed out of the mist, hands in his pockets and a large cigar in his mouth, and he announced to the nearest soldier that he was “thoroughly fed up.”

By 5:00 p.m. the action was over, and by 10:00 p.m. the Glosters were relieved. In reviewing the attack, it was found that the Germans had not attempted to advance in mass formations or successive lines but tried instead to infiltrate by groups. Some of the Germans were not even armed, instead carrying blankets, ammunition and three days’ rations. Their goal had been to reach Bethune, but they had failed.

On that fateful day, two officers besides Guy were also killed and five were wounded. Of the other ranks, 53 were killed or missing and 123 were wounded.²⁴

Guy was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 18 April 1918 with gunshot



Photo of grave stone of Guy Maddison Vaisey
Source: *Find A Grave* (www.findagrave.com)

wounds to his abdomen and wrist. He died that same day and was buried at Pernes British Cemetery in Plot 1, Row C, Grave 25.²⁵ His wife Elizabeth requested an additional engraving on his gravestone²⁶

LORD GRANT HIM PEACE
IN THE AMPLE FOLDS OF THY GREAT LOVE

Guy was posthumously awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914–15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).²⁷

Guy’s mother Emily died at Hilltop Preparatory School, Hucknall, Nottinghamshire, on 6 August 1942. She was 85 and had been living with her daughter Monica, who was a teacher at the school.²⁸ Guy’s wife Elizabeth died on 30 October 1950, never having remarried. She was just 54 years old, living at Lemsford Nursing Home.²⁹ Monica, who had never married, died 21 February 1956, at the age of 65, at Lincoln, Lincolnshire.³⁰

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