



# THE LOCHNAGAR CRATER MEMORIAL

## An account by Pte. Billy Disbrey 11<sup>th</sup> Suffolks (Cambridge Pals)

For many years, Les Disbrey, one of the founding members of the Friends of Lochnagar would lovingly lay a wreath to his 'Uncle Billy' who fell at the Crater on the 1<sup>st</sup> July. Here is Billy's story – 15812 Pte. Herbert William Disbrey, 11<sup>th</sup> Bttn., The Suffolk Regt – the Cambridge Pals.

Amidst great enthusiasm, the young men of the small village of Barton in Cambridgeshire answered Kitchener's call in 1914. One of them was a cheerful 22 year old farm labourer called Billy who found himself, on the morning of 1<sup>st</sup> July, in the trenches 1,000 yards (approx. 900 metres) in front of their objective, the formidable German strongpoint of Schwaben Höhe. As he waited for the whistles to blow, the huge Lochnagar mine, to their left, exploded.

Billy's battalion set off following the Grimsby Chums. Both were untried in battle but they resolutely walked through the hailstorm of machine-gun fire that viciously swept back and forth along their ranks as, all around them they witnessed their lifelong friends cut down.

Miraculously about a dozen men even got as far as the relative shelter of their objective only to be engulfed by flame-throwers placed on the trench parapet.

By nightfall over half of the 11<sup>th</sup> Suffolks lay dead or wounded in no-man's-land and the original Cambridge Pals were no more.

On that one, terrible day Barton alone lost two of its young men, among no less than ten who died in the war and who are honoured on the village war memorial.

Billy's body was never recovered from the battlefield. He is commemorated on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme.



Herbert William Disbrey, 11<sup>th</sup> Suffolks (Cambridge Pals). Courtesy of Stuart Disbrey.

## Le récit du Soldat Billy Disbrey 11<sup>ème</sup> Suffolks (Cambridge Pals)

Pendant longtemps, Les Disbrey, l'un des membres fondateurs des Friends of Lochnagar, a déposé chaque année avec amour une gerbe, en souvenir de son 'Tonton Billy', tombé au Cratère le 1<sup>er</sup> juillet. Voici son histoire - 15812 Soldat Herbert William Disbrey, 11<sup>ème</sup> Bataillon, Suffolk Régiment, les Cambridge Pals.

Pleins d'entrain, les jeunes hommes de Barton, un petit village du Cambridgeshire, répondent à l'appel de Kitchener de 1914. L'un d'entre eux est un ouvrier agricole de 22 ans fort sympathique nommé Billy. Le matin du 1<sup>er</sup> juillet, il se trouve dans les tranchées à environ 900m de l'objectif, le redoutable point fort allemand Schwaben Höhe. Alors qu'il attend le coup de sifflet, l'énorme mine de Lochnagar, située à la gauche des Pals, saute.

Le bataillon de Billy se lance, à la suite des Grimsby Chums. Aucun des deux bataillons n'a encore jamais combattu, mais ils avancent résolument à travers l'orage de balles des mitrailleuses qui balaient leurs rangs sans merci, tandis qu'autour d'eux, leurs amis de toujours se font abattre. Miraculeusement, une douzaine d'hommes atteint l'abri relatif de l'objectif, mais sont dévorés par le feu des lance-flammes disposés sur le parapet de la tranchée.

A la tombée de la nuit de ce jour noir, plus de la moitié des 11<sup>ème</sup> Suffolks sont morts ou blessés dans le no man's land et les Cambridge Pals sont décimés.

Lors de cette seule journée terrible, le village de Barton a perdu deux de ses jeunes hommes, sur les dix au total disparus pendant de la guerre et auxquels hommage est rendu sur le monument aux morts du village.

La dépouille de Billy n'a jamais été récupérée sur champ de bataille. Son nom figure parmi ceux inscrits sur le Commonwealth War Graves Commission Mémorial de Thiepval aux disparus de la Somme.



The Lochnagar Crater is privately owned by Richard Dunning MBE and is dedicated to Remembrance, Respect and Reconciliation.  
[www.lochnagarcrater.org](http://www.lochnagarcrater.org)



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thanks the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) for its support with this visitor information project.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission commemorates members of the Cambridge Pals at the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, Ovillers Military Cemetery and Gordon Dump Cemetery. The CWGC commemorates the 1.7 million Commonwealth servicemen and women who died in the two world wars. For more information visit [www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) or download the free CWGC War Graves App.



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