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## CHARLES JOHN VENABLES

Major, 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Killed in action on Sunday, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1915, Chunuk Bair, Gallipoli, age 50



Childhood in the Bahamas must have been idyllic for the young Charles Venables. His father, the Bishop of Nassau, had the distinction of two Prime Ministers as Christian names, Addington and Robert Peel, the latter being his god-father. Addington Robert Peel Venables, (*left*) born in 1827, was educated at Eton and Oxford, and ordained in 1851. A High Churchman & follower of the Oxford Movement, he became a curate first at Cuddesdon in Oxfordshire, then served with distinction for ten years at one of the poorest parishes in Oxford, St Paul's. In 1862, the year before he was appointed Bishop, he married his cousin, Elizabeth Anne King, known as Lilla.

When the couple arrived, the Bahamas were enjoying something of a boom due to blockade-running during the American Civil War, but after it ended in 1865 came a slump and later that decade the government, mainly Dissenters, voted to disestablish, giving Addington many headaches. However, life could still be pleasant, in spite of the rainy season and the occasional hurricane. He had the episcopal yacht (*right*) to sail round the many islands of his diocese and a growing family. Charles John



Venables was born on Providence Island in 1865 and his sister Anne Caroline a year later, but she was one of three children to die young, in 1875. The only other survivor was William Alfred, born at New York in 1873, who we will meet up with again later.

The tropical idyll would be shattered by their father Addington's illness and death from bowel cancer in 1876. Lilla, left comfortably off, (he left over £¼ million in today's money) returned to England to live at Packham House in Fordingbridge, Hampshire with her two youngest sons, a governess, housekeeper and three servants in 1881. Charles was packed off to Charterhouse, where the crowded and spartan conditions would have been a far cry from the sun-soaked Caribbean. His mother remarried two years afterwards, Maj.-Gen. Charles Cumberland, late of the Royal Engineers and went to live with him at his large house in Maidstone.

Charles Venables, having decided on a military career, passed the entrance exam to Sandhurst, entering the Army in August 1885 and then joining the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, the Gloucester Regiment, who were in India. While there, he would have heard the sad news that his mother had died early, but the next year came promotion to Captain and, in 1893, a posting to Malta. It was probably on leave from here in 1896 that he married Helen Margaret Terry (grand-daughter of Joseph Terry of York, the founder of the confectioners) at the British Consulate in Naples. Helen must have returned to England, as Lilla Anne, their first daughter, was born at Winchester the following year.

The Boer War was the chance to see action and the Glosters were in the thick of it. Charles took part in operations at Rietfontein, Lombard's Kop and Ladysmith, being Mentioned in Despatches, awarded the Queens Medal with two clasps and the D.S.O., which was presented by the King in October 1901. Helen gave birth at Clifton to their second and last child, Joane Margaret in 1903, the year before Charles was promoted to Major. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Glosters were posted to Malta again and he appears at Vendala Barracks there in the 1911 census, two years before his retirement after twenty five years service in November 1913.

Less than eight months later there was an urgent recall to the colours at the outbreak of war. With his experience, Charles was sent to Bristol to help set up the newly formed 7<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion, composed of volunteers from the county, some eager to escape the Forest of Dean mines or drudgery on the land, others filled with patriotic fervour, but all keen to 'do their bit'. After the usual shortage of uniforms, equipment and arms, the 7<sup>th</sup> were knocked into shape over the next ten months by seasoned N.C.O.s and officers, including Major Venables, until they sailed from Avonmouth on June 19<sup>th</sup> 1915 for action in the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign.

After a week reorganising on the Greek island of Mudros, they landed at Cape Hellas on July 11<sup>th</sup> and spent the next eighteen relatively quiet days in and out of the firing line, forcing back the occasional Turkish attack, before embarking again for Mudros. This was to be a short stay before more serious action.

On August 3<sup>rd</sup> they sailed again, this time for Anzac Cove.





The Glosters leave their trenches for the attack



However, Battleship Hill on their right and Hill Q on the left, untaken by too weak a force of Gurkhas, were still occupied and a fierce fire was opened from both flanks as soon as it was light. The Glosters, late in starting, were caught and suffered very heavily. What remained of the first platoons were able to find some cover below the summit and the later ones below Rhododendron Ridge (on the right of the photo). Except for two Wellington companies on top of Chunuk Bair, who were then virtually wiped out, the rest of the attackers were now below the ridge. None had any line of fire. They were fired on with shrapnel, by rifle and machine gun from both sides and the ground was such that digging was hardly possible. Reinforcement and the evacuation of wounded were impossible. There the dwindling survivors and mounting dead and wounded had to remain until sunset. Of the almost 1000 Glosters who went into battle, only 181 were unscathed and of the battalion's twenty officers, ten were wounded. The other ten were killed, including the fifty year-old Major Charles John Venables, in yet another Gallipoli fiasco.

Back in England, Helen would probably have received the fateful buff telegram at 'Malden', Worplesdon, the address shown on the Grant of Probate on November 20<sup>th</sup> that year (he left just over £7,000, worth £490,000 today). She would have been comforted, no doubt, by William Alfred, Charles' younger brother and his wife Marjorie. William was also educated at Charterhouse and fought in the Boer War as a Lieutenant in Col. Nesbitt's Horse, an irregular force of some 300, used mainly as patrols and scouts and was wounded in May 1900. In 1902 he became a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the 7<sup>th</sup> Glosters, at that time a militia battalion and two years later he also followed Charles by marrying in Italy; in his case at the Consulate in Florence. His bride was Marjorie Mary Mure, a brewer's daughter. In the 1911 census they were living at Fords Farm in Pirbright with two sons and a daughter, as well as four servants, and his occupation was given as a clerk at the War Office. The Rate Books, which record him there from 1910 with John Cherryman of Causeway Farm the owner, also show a John Venables in 1910 and 1912, who was probably Charles John. If that is so, it would account for his entry on the Pirbright War Memorial as a resident. Brother William's wound in the Boer War, which led to a request in 1901 for a pension, may have done longer term damage, as he died in 1920 from pneumonia and heart failure from a pre-existing condition. By this time, Helen, Charles' widow, had moved to a flat in Kensington, where she lived for much of the rest of her life. She probably died in Sussex in 1966 at the age of 97. Both daughters married and had children.