

CHARLES HEREWARD BECKER

Acting Captain

Died

3rd Battalion Special Reserve

9th August 1918

East Surrey Regiment

Camp Sherman

Att. 9th Battalion

Chillicothe

'A' Company

Ohio

Royal Fusiliers

U.S.A

36th Brigade

12th Division

Att. British Military Mission
to U.S.A.



"Cap Badge of the Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regt.)."

Charles Hereward Becker had strong German family origins. His grandfather Charles Otto Gustave Becker was a German born medical practitioner who had spent his working life in military service in a number of war zones. He served with United States Forces in Mexico, the French Army in Africa, the German Army in the war against Denmark, tended to the medical care of British troops in the Crimean War, and then became the Principal Medical Officer for the hundreds of troops of the King's German Legion when these men were stationed in Colchester in Essex.

Charles Otto had then, in 1857, married Henrietta Margarete Schwalb von Schuler in Colchester and set up a private medical practice at 8 Eld Lane in the town. By the late 1880's the couple, with their large family of three daughters and five sons, had moved to 74 High Street, Colchester; the extended building was later known as 'The Minories'. One of their five sons, Jonathan Ernestus Augustus George Becker, also became a Doctor and a Surgeon and he in turn produced two sons both of whom became "Colchester Heroes" of the Great War; Jonathan Otto Becker and Charles Hereward Becker.



Charles, or Charlie as he was registered on his birth certificate, was the youngest son of Jonathan Ernest Becker and Phyllis Olive Susannah Beattie who had married, it is believed, in 1884. Charles was born on 7th July 1897 at 15 Queen Street, Colchester, which was both the family home and his father Jonathan's medical practice. From 1906 Charlie attended Colchester Royal Grammar School as a day scholar but left when the family moved to London to live at 87 Belgrave Road, a large twelve roomed house in South West London, where his father practised as a Consultant Physician.

"The family home at 15 Queen Street, Colchester, Essex."

Whilst in London Charlie attended Colet School and then St. Paul's School (although his attendance at these is not verified by their School Archives) and then, from early 1912 at the age of 14 years, he boarded at Framlingham College in Suffolk where he proved adept at sports, playing football for the College First Eleven in the 1913 winter season and also for the Cricket and Hockey First Elevens in 1914. He also became a Sergeant in the College's Officer Training Cadet Unit and attended two of the O.T.C.U's annual camps in 1912 and 1914. Upon leaving Framlingham in August 1914 aged 17 years, Charlie became an Engineer's Apprentice but then in March 1915 came the tragic news of his older brother Jonathan's death in a friendly fire incident on the Western Front in Belgium whilst serving with the East Surrey Regiment.

After his 18th birthday Charlie applied, as his brother had done before him, for a Commission with the Special Reserve of Officers in the 3rd Battalion East Surrey Regiment, then based in Dover in Kent. His application was supported by a written reference, dated 28th October 1915, from the Headmaster at Framlingham College who stated that he had known Charlie for four years. On 11th November 1915 Charlie was appointed Probationary Second Lieutenant (Gazetted 15th November 1915, p11309) with instructions



to attend a short formal officer training course prior to joining the 3rd Battalion. Consequently on 20th November he attended Cambridge University Officer Training Cadet Unit at Pembroke College and then on 26th December, after a brief home leave, reported to the 3rd Battalion East Surreys at Dover where he was to be based for the next year. During this year he had a spell of sick leave in April 1916. In late May 1916 he attended a course at 12 Division School in Bedford before being posted to the 8th Battalion Royal Fusiliers and embarking for France where he joined his new battalion in the field at Agny in December 1916 as part of 36 Brigade in 12 Division.

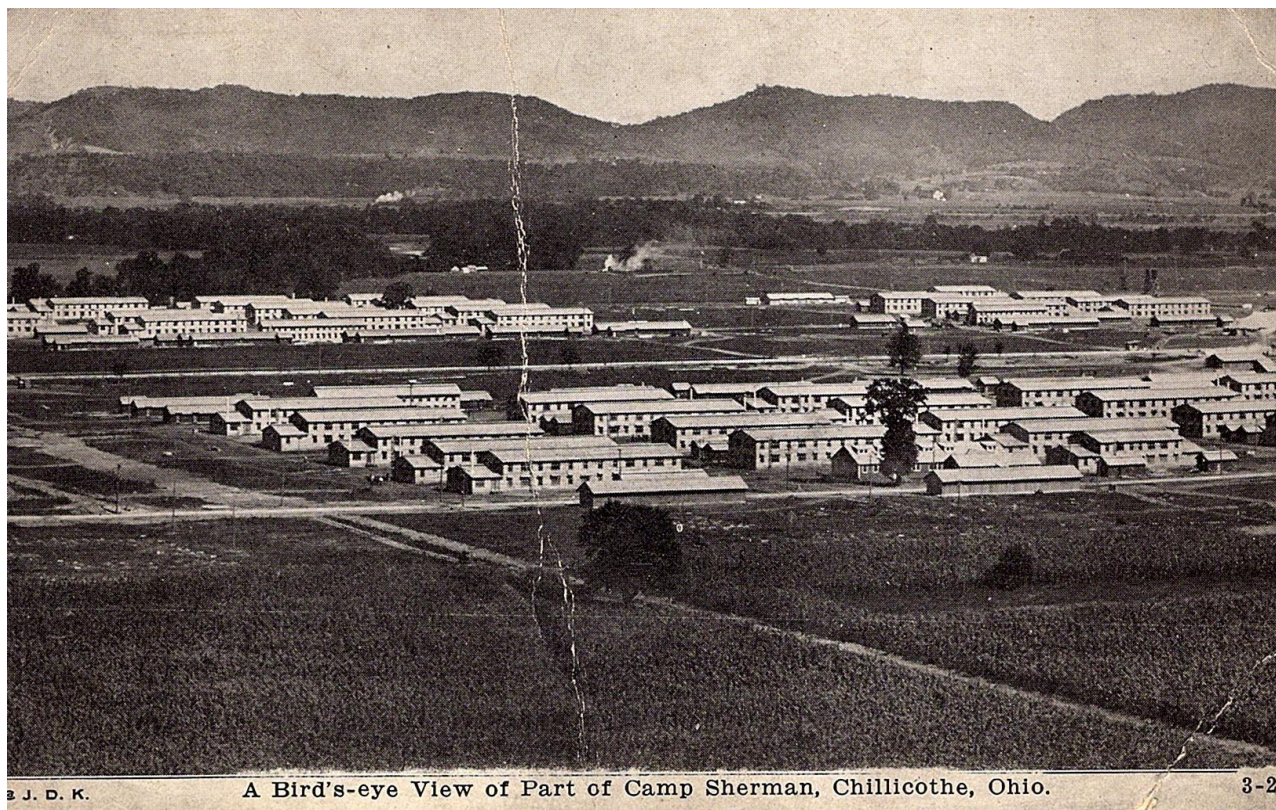
"East Surrey's Badge."

2nd Lt. Becker then attended a course at 12 Division School at Fouquieres in France from 19th February to 15th March 1917 but after returning to his battalion he was wounded in action on 9th April on the first day of the Battle of Arras though he stayed on duty with the battalion. He had already been promoted to Lieutenant in March and then from 13th June to 29th June 1917 he was on leave at home in 24 Gordon Square in London with his parents. After returning to his unit he was made Acting Captain on 20th July 1917 but there were obviously some stress / health issues which were beginning to affect this young officer of only 20 years of age. He was on home leave again from 4th November to 18th November 1917 which was then extended, possibly for health reasons. Following this on 1st December 1917 Captain Becker reported back to 3rd Battalion East Surreys at Dover and then two months later on 30th January 1918 he was posted for a return to the Western Front. He rejoined just as the 8th Battalion was being disbanded and was attached to the 9th Battalion Royal Fusiliers, also in 36 Brigade of 12 Division, joining them on 5th February at Wye Farm where he was posted to 'A' Company.

However Captain Becker's health/stress problems persisted and there were several leave periods before, on 15th March 1918, he returned to England and was graded for six months light duties, possibly with the 3rd Battalion East Surrey Regiment. (His father had died on 5th March 1918.)

In April 1918 he was attached for duties with the Military Section of the British War Mission to the United States of America; his particular work to be related to helping with the training of the rapidly expanding American Army. On 8th July 1918 he embarked for the USA to Washington D.C from where he was posted as an Assistant Instructor / Staff Lieutenant to Camp Sherman near Chillicothe in the State of Ohio, where he worked in the Intelligence Section.

Construction of the huge Camp Sherman had begun in June 1917 after America's entry into the war. The camp covered 2,000 acres of flat land, accommodated more than 40,000 soldiers in training, and was on the site of the original Camp Bull where British prisoners had been held in the War of 1812. Now a century later British soldiers were returning as Instructors to the new American recruits. When Captain Becker arrived at the camp in July 1918 it held the troops of the American 84 Division who were being trained for their eventual departure to the Western Front in Europe.



On the evening of Thursday 8th August 1918, Captain Becker was preparing to depart that coming weekend from the Warner Hotel in Chillicothe where he had been staying during his attachment at Camp Sherman. In the bar of the hotel he met up with several army officers and civilians including a Lieutenant Pohlman, with whom Becker had worked in the Intelligence Section of 334 Infantry Regiment at Camp Sherman, and a Mr Wadley. In the course of the conversation Mr Wadley offered to take the group out for a ride and went off to get a car. He returned with a motor car and a driver from the (84 Division ?) Motor Pool and after a further short delay the group left the hotel at approximately 11:30pm. The group consisted of 2nd Lt. Arthur Spillman of 325 Regiment Machine Gun Section, Lt. William Neal, Lt. Pohlman of 334 Infantry Regiment, Captain Charles Becker, Mr Wadley and Mr Jack McCory the car driver, with three of the men sitting on the front seat, including Captain Becker who sat in the middle next to the driver. What happened next, just after midnight, was revealed in witness reports and evidence taken at the resulting Board of Inquiry and in the conclusions reached by the Board.

It appears that the car had not been travelling fast, at approx 10mph, but the driver did not know the Stoney Creek Road very well and about 11 miles out of Chillicothe, near Pride Post Office and the artillery range, he overshot a sharp bend. The car teetered on the edge of a drop, giving time for several men to scramble out, but then rolled over down the embankment landing upside down and trapping Captain Becker and Lt. Neal underneath it. Someone went for help and soldiers from the artillery base came and lifted the car and retrieved the trapped men. Lt. Neal had a damaged shoulder and was taken to the camp hospital but Captain Becker was unconscious and there was some uncertainty as to whether he was still breathing at the time, though he was taken to Ware's Mortuary in Chillicothe.

A Board of Inquiry consisting of three army officers was convened for 11:00am on Friday 9th August at Camp Sherman ***“to investigate the circumstances attending the death of Captain C H Becker, R.F”*** and called witnesses who had been present at the scene. Their conclusions were summarised in a report and a summary of it sent to Captain Becker’s mother on 12th August:

“It is the opinion of the Court that Captain Charles H Becker, Royal Fusiliers, British Military Mission, was killed instantaneously by having his neck broken by the overturn of an automobile in which he was riding at the time. At the time of this automobile accident, the occupants of the car were taking a ride to the country in the vicinity of Chillicothe, Ohio; that there was nothing unusual in connection with this ride; that at the time the accident occurred the car was proceeding along the highway at a moderate rate of speed; that no particular individual can be held responsible for this accident, but on the contrary it is apparent the accident was the result of the unfamiliarity of the parties in the automobile with the road over which the journey was being made.”

“Stoney Creek Road and the location of the accident; now protected in modern times by a safety barrier.”



The Board had visited the scene and had made a careful investigation of the ground immediately surrounding the point where the automobile turned over. It had failed to negotiate a sharp turn downhill and had gone over the edge with men being trapped under the overturned car. The Medical Officer on the Board recorded his opinion that Captain Becker had died as a result of a broken neck but the witnesses could not agree as to whether Captain Becker had still been breathing when the car had been lifted. The Board issued the Death Certificate.

In the meantime the W.O.Telegram notifying of his death had been sent to his sister-in-law, the widow of his brother Jonathan at 7 St John's Wood Park, NW London. She had, unusually, been recorded as his next of kin and this situation may have arisen after the death of Charlie's father in March 1918 with Charlie not wishing to put more stress and worry onto his widowed mother.

The local newspapers in both Chillicothe and Colchester publicised the incident, with some minor inaccuracies. At home the local Essex County Standard of 19th October 1918 reported that Captain Becker had been *"killed by a bombing accident in USA where he was acting as a bombing instructor to transatlantic troops"*, and this was well after the report from the Board of Enquiry had been received by Charles' mother.

In Chillicothe, before the official report appeared, the Sciotto Gazette of Friday 9th August, the day of Captain Becker's death, reported:

CAPTAIN BECKER OF THE BRITISH MISSION KILLED WHEN MACHINE GOES OVER HIGH BANK

"Capt. Charles E Becker of the British Army lies dead at Ware's mortuary, and Lt. William H Neil of the American army is in the Base Hospital with a broken shoulder as a result of an early morning drive to the Artillery Range in the Stoney Creek section, for the big car which was driven by Jack McCoy, went over the steep embankment near the Morgan Wood house and crushed the occupants under it. Capt. Becker had his neck broken and died almost instantly and Lt. Neil was caught on the shoulder. There were in the car, besides these two, Chub Wadley and the driver and two other lieutenants from Camp Sherman.

The trip was essayed about two o'clock Friday morning and was the result of the driver not knowing the roadway, and but few of the occupants, if any, were thoroughly familiar with it. One Lieutenant said that he would direct the driver and when the sharp turn came, after crossing the little iron bridge at Pride, he yelled "turn to the right", but the car's momentum was too great for it to respond quick enough, and it went over the bank with the disastrous results noted.

The aid of the neighbors men from the Artillery Range were secured and the injured man was rushed to the Base Hospital after a first aid dressing.

The body of Capt. Becker was taken to Ware's mortuary, where it awaits instructions from the British Embassy at Washington as to its disposition."

Once the Board of Enquiry had made its report and the death certificate had been issued, arrangements for burial could now be implemented. They were well published in the local Sciotto Gazette of 10th August:

MILITARY FUNERAL FOR CAPT. BECKER

Burial Will Be In Grandview Cemetery on Sunday

"Military funeral services for the late Captain C. H. Becker, of the British Mission, an instructor at Camp Sherman who was killed Friday morning when a taxicab in which he was riding turned turtle, will be held Sunday morning at 10 o'clock at Grandview Cemetery.

The trustees of Grandview cemetery have given a lot specifically for the burial place of Captain Becker. The senior chaplain of the 84th Division will likely conduct the funeral services. Captain Becker will be laid to rest on Grandview hill alongside of five past governors of Ohio territory as well as other well-remembered men. The burial of Captain Becker is to be accorded with all the military honors.

Flags at Camp Sherman have been at half mast ever since the tragic death of the British officer occurred. Arrangements have been made to forward Captain Becker's Sam Brown Belt, which he was wearing at the time of the accident, to his mother, the only remaining member of his immediate family."

Fourteen British soldiers of the Great War lie in the State of Ohio but Captain Becker is the only one linked with the town of Chillicothe. As a result of the publicity the actual funeral in Grandview Cemetery on Sunday 11th August 1918 was very well attended with both British and French Military Missions strongly represented and with full military honours from Camp Sherman. The Scioto Gazette for 12th August gave extensive details of the burial:

LAST HONORS PAID TO CAPT. CHAS. BECKER

"Amid a large crowd of sympathized civilians and a military escort comprising headquarters troop of the 84th Division, mounted, the remains of Capt. Charles E. Becker, of the Royal Fusileers, who met his death in an automobile accident on the Stoney Creek road, was consigned to mother earth in beautiful Grandview, Sunday. The grave was located under a giant beech tree, near the old original Renick family burying lot where the remains of that family have been interred for more than a century and within a hundred yards of that point on the brow of the hill where the two valleys, the Scioto and the Paint Creek, converge, and give what Bayard Taylor the eminent traveler and writer described as one of the most beautiful views he had ever beheld in his travels.

The sun was sweltering hot but notwithstanding this every male in the large crowd uncovered as the depot brigade band led the cortege up the winding path of the hill to the grave site, swung up, followed by the mounted company with drawn sabers, their color bearers carrying the stars and stripes and the union jack of Great Britain. The column of mounted infantry swung into company front and the coffin which was draped in the flag of the United States in whose service he was when he met his death, was lifted from the caisson of the 309 ammunition train which bore it to the cemetery and loving hands of his compatriots carried it to the grave.

Grouped under the giant beech were Gen. Hale, his chief of staff Col. Halstead, Brig. Gen. Devore and Gen. Hale's aide, Capt. Cummings.

The active pall bearers were Captain A. Drew Arundel and H. Train; Lts. J. MacFarlane and R. Stancliff; Sergeant Major Harper, J.T. Harper and Sergeant E. R. Rogerson, all of the British Military Mission.

These veterans, all of whom had brushed elbows with death on the field of honor, stood beside their former comrade, while First Lieutenant Walter Briggs, Chaplain, read the impressive funeral service. The chaplain took for his text the words of St. John, 11th chapter, 25th verse, "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in Me though he were dead, yet shall he live."

At the conclusion of the service the escort troop dismounted, the firing squad advanced, and fired three rounds of blank cartridges over the British Captain's grave. A bugler then sounded taps, and the body was lowered to its last resting place.

At the graveside were General Hale, Colonel Laurence Halstead, Brigadier General D. B. Devere, Lieut-Col. F. W. Van Duyne, Colonel L. F. Kilbourne, Major A. E. Lonn, Captain L. B. Cummings, aide-de-camp, and other national army officers; Captain H. Hanford, Chief of the British Military Mission at Camp Sherman, who represented General F. F. Trotter, C. B., C. M. G, M. V. O., D. S. O., Chief of the British Military Mission to the United States, and the British Embassy at Washington; Lieuts. W. J Brothers and A. Phoenix of the British Military Mission; Captain G. Devineau, Chief of the French Military Mission at Camp Sherman; Captain J. Jano and Lieuts. L. Bazin and M. Blanck, of the French Military Mission, and officers and enlisted men of the national army.

The following officers acted as honorary pall bearers; Captain M. Bugaud and Lieutenant L. Bazin of the French army; Major Henry H. Adams and Captain Charles C. Lewis, Willis H. Hale and George W. Bliss.

Captain Becker was the last of his family. Three brothers were killed in the fighting in Flanders and two sisters are in the service in England. His mother survives at Nottinghall, London, the home place. The Sam Brown belt worn by the deceased will be sent to the sorrowing mother. The service was a most impressive one.

The newspaper report relating to family details was not entirely accurate as Captain Becker's only brother had already been killed in France and he also had only one sister. His mother lived in Notting Hill. However, he does now lie in Grandview Cemetery at grave reference L.29, S.10, G.67.





"Different types of headstone for Captain Becker's gravestone; the original I.W.G.C. Headstone being on the left."

A wooden grave marker originally marked the location, but in 1924 there was a written discussion between the Imperial War Graves Commission and the Department of National Defence, Militia Service, in Ottawa in Canada, as to whether Captain Becker's grave should be recognised as a war grave. Arising from this the grave was marked by a granite Imperial War Graves Headstone carrying the badge of the East Surrey Regiment. In more recent years a Commonwealth War Graves Headstone has replaced the original one; the differences between the two headstones can be seen in the photographs.

Captain Becker's personal effects were returned to his mother at 24 Gordon Square in London. She also received various Pay and Credits totalling £232-16-3d (£232.82p) but, as Captain Becker did not make a will, she had to apply for Letters of Administration to access the probate from his estate of £271-0-9d (£271.04p). When she received this amount in May 1919, she was living at 17 Colville Square in Notting Hill but when in 1921 she received her youngest son's British War Medal and Victory Medal she was living at 26 Aldridge Road Villas in London, W11. Mrs Phyllis Olive Susannah Becker had been widowed when she had lost her physician/surgeon husband at the relatively young age of 49 years in March 1918, and now the war had brought the deaths of both of her sons, Jonathan and Charlie, in incidents which need not have happened. She did not re-marry and her death was registered in 1943 in Kensington in London.

Captain Charles Hereward Becker is now remembered on Memorial Plaques at Colchester Royal Grammar School and Framlingham College (where his army rank is recorded as Major).



OFFICERS.			
Adams, J.L.	Lt.	Barry, F.R.	
Adcock, P.R.	Lt.	Barton, C.P.	Capt.
Adams, G.A.	2nd Lt.	Bartram, A.A.	2nd Lt.
Armistage, G.D.	2nd Lt.	Bate, E.R.H.	2nd Lt.
Armstrong, H.W.	2nd Lt.	Bayne, E.G.	2nd Lt.
Arnold, T.S.	2nd Lt.	Beatty, D.H.	Lt.
Astington, T.J.	2nd Lt.	Beaumont, G.	Capt.
Ayres, S.F.	Capt.	Becker, C.H.	Lt.
		Becker, J.O.G.	Lt.
Bailly, H.P.	2nd Lt.	Begbie, S.C.H.	Lt.
Ball, F.G.	2nd Lt.	Bell-Irving, K.	Capt.
Barber, H.M.	2nd Lt.	Benning, M.S.	Lt.
Barclay, S.G.	2nd Lt.	Benson, J.P.	Capt.
Barnett, C.E.	Capt.	Bentham, G.A.	2nd Lt.
Barnett, H.T.	2nd Lt.	Bigger, J.A.W.	2nd Lt.

His name as a Lieutenant also appears in the Book of Remembrance held in the Chapel of Holy Trinity inside the Church of All Saints in Kingston-upon-Thames. This chapel was dedicated in 1921 as the Regimental War Memorial for the East Surrey Regiment and it also contains a number of oak panels on its walls commemorating some of its officers who died in service with the regiment.

"Page in the Book of Remembrance in Holy Trinity Chapel."

"The 1924 Dedication Service of the Memorial Gates at All Saints Churchyard."



In 1924 new Memorial Gates into the churchyard were erected in memory of the men of the East Surreys who had given their lives in the Great War.

"The Regimental Memorial Gates into All Saints Churchyard as they are today."

Captain Becker's name is not included on the Royal Fusiliers' Memorial Roll. This is a Roll of nearly 22,000 recorded names, kept in the Fusiliers Regimental H.Q inside the Tower of London, of those who died in the Great War serving with the City of London Royal Fusiliers.

Only one other memorial location has been found which commemorates the death of Captain Becker and that is "*The London Online Memorial*". This is a new and developing website where Captain Charles Becker is listed, though unusually his brother Jonathan, who was also a London resident, is not similarly listed. However this current absence will in due course be rectified.

Captain Charles Hereward Becker lost his life at the age of 21 years in an unfortunate incident far away from the fighting zones of the war, yet this young officer had experienced battle conditions and led men into action, and had been wounded in action. By virtue of his birth and initial education in Colchester he can be rightly seen as a "Colchester Hero" of the Great War.

Further Acknowledgements:

Essex C & Bailey H: Memorial Archives, Framlingham College Records

NRA Kew: WO339/47722 Officer Records

NRA Kew: WO95/1857/1 War Diary 8th Battalion Royal Fusiliers

NRA Kew: WO95/1857/2 War Diary 9th Battalion Royal Fusiliers

Ray M: Senior Student, Chillicothe High School, Photographs

Ross County Historical Society, Ohio: Newspaper Articles