MAJOR-GENERAL R. E. BARNESLEY, C.B., M.C., M.A., M.B., B.Ch.

(1886-1968)

Walter Stoneman

OBITUARY

Major-General R. E. Barnsley, C.B., M.C., M.A., M.B., B.Chir.

MAJOR-General R. E. Barnsley, Honorary Secretary of the Royal Army Medical Corps Historical Museum, and a former Colonel Commandant of the R.A.M.C., died suddenly on 11 September at the age of 82.

He was born on 25 April 1886, the son of the late Brigadier-General Sir John Barnsley of Edgbaston. He was educated at Rydal School, Trinity College Cambridge and St. Bartholomew's Hospital. He qualified as M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., in 1912, and graduated M.B., B.Chir., in 1930.

His long connection with the R.A.M.C. began in 1912, when he received a commission in the Territorial Army. He joined a City of London Field Ambulance, T.F., which he described as one of the most remarkable field ambulances in the Corps. One section was commanded by Ernest Waggett, E.N.T. specialist at Charing Cross Hospital, another by Reginald Vick, later surgeon to St. Bartholomew's. The transport was horse and, in the early days, was staffed by the R.A.M.C. The transport officer was Captain Fairbank, later Sir Thomas Fairbank, the distinguished orthopaedic surgeon, while Lance-Corporal Julian Taylor was quite content to ride a light draught horse, although already an F.R.C.S. He said of the 3rd City of London Field Ambulance that "we thought no small beer of ourselves".

He went to France with his field ambulance, was wounded at the battle of Ypres, and took part in the battle of Loos. After Loos he went with the unit to Salonika, where he became D.A.D.M.S. to Colonel, later Major-General W. H. S. Nickerson, V.C. What he said about Nickerson, that he knew every officer in the R.A.M.C. and many of the other ranks by name, can surely be said of himself.

He was awarded the M.C. in November 1916, and was Mentioned in Despatches in 1921, while serving with the Army of the Black Sea.

He decided to make the Army his career, and received a regular commission in the R.A.M.C. in 1918. Between the wars, he served at home, in India, and in Egypt. He kept up his connection with the Territorial Army, while serving as Adjutant with the 50 (Northumbrian) Division R.A.M.C., T.F., from 1921 to 1923.

At the Royal Army Medical College in 1929, he was first in order of merit on the Senior Officers' Course and passed with distinction in medicine. He did not, however, specialise, but continued to serve in general duties, thus maintaining that close relationship with the soldier which he so much valued. On his leaves at home from overseas, it was his practice to visit the homes of the soldiers under his command, bringing, in those days of poor communication and long overseas tours, first-hand news of their sons to anxious parents. Towards the end of his life, he said that he had spent some 17 years in company and field ambulance work, and so had been in closer contact with the rank and file than many other officers; it had been a joy to him to see those whom he had known as young soldiers steadily climbing the ladder of promotion and responsibility.

Early in 1940, he was sent as A.D.M.S. to East Africa, where he remained until after the fall of Addis Ababa. He then came home to be D.D.M.S. Southern Command at Wilton, where he served through the anxious days before the invasion of Europe. Here he made many lasting friendships with distinguished soldiers and members of the medical profession who were serving as war-time consultants to the Army. He retired

from the Army as a Major-General in 1946. He became Honorary Surgeon to the King in 1941, was awarded the C.B. in 1944, became an Officer of the Legion of Merit (U.S.A.) in 1946, and was Mentioned in Despatches in 1941.

After his retirement, his life entered upon a second stage, in which he remained active until the day of his death. This period was one of devoted service to the Army and, in particular, to his old Corps. He has left on record how it began, when the then D.G.A.M.S., Lieutenant-General Sir Alexander Hood, said at a meeting in 1946 to found an R.A.M.C. War Memorial Fund, "General Barnsley will take on that job". The job was that of Honorary Secretary to the Fund, and the General said that this short remark led to some twenty of the happiest years of his life.

It brought about his connexion with the R.A.M.C. Association and the R.A.M.C. Charitable Funds, and led to his undertaking the Editorship of the Army Medical Services Magazine from 1948 to 1956. He was Colonel Commandant of the R.A.M.C. from 1948 to 1951.

In 1951 began a task which was the lasting enthusiasm of his latter years; he was entrusted by Lieutenant-General Sir Neil Cantlie with the formation of the R.A.M.C. Historical Museum. Over the years, he built up the Museum from a small start to an important position among regimental museums. It was a great disappointment to him that, owing to the financial climate, the building of a new museum to replace the existing huts had to be postponed. He took great pride in the fact that the Museum is situated in the R.A.M.C. Depot, first in Queen Elizabeth Barracks at Crookham, and latterly in Keogh Barracks, Mytchett, so that it plays a living part in the training of all recruits and apprentices.

General Barnsley was a much-consulted authority on military medical history, upon which he wrote a great deal. He was a Vice-President of the Army Historical Society, and a member of the Faculty of the History of Medicine of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London, of which he had been a Liveryman for many years.

One of his most prized possessions was a silver salver inscribed with the signatures of many of his old friends, mostly then generals, and including the names of at least three Directors-General of the Army Medical Services.

He was the subject of a special presentation on 10 February 1965 at the R.A.M.C. Headquarter Mess, when the D.G.A.M.S., Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Knott, in the presence of a large company, handed him a cheque to which more than 500 friends of all ranks in the R.A.M.C. and in other services had subscribed. This presentation acknowledged the debt which was owed to him by the R.A.M.C. for his work in establishing the R.A.M.C. Historical Museum, for his interest in Corps history, and for his work as first Editor of the Army Medical Services Magazine.

General Barnsley never married, and, after his retirement, lived in the Officers' Mess of the R.A.M.C. Depot until his death. Here his enthusiasm for the Corps, and his liking for the company of the young, exerted for him a widespread influence throughout the medical services of the Army and beyond. Only a few days after his death, an overseas visitor asked what had happened to the kind old general who lived in the Mess. It is sad to think that we shall no longer see him in white tie and tails at guest nights, taking lighted cigarette after lighted cigarette into his mouth, or walking slowly in the rain with his old hat and umbrella towards the Museum, firmly refusing all offers of lifts.

At the funeral, his coffin was carried by Warrant Officers and N.C.Os of his old Corps, and the Last Post and Reveille were sounded by a trumpeter of the R.A.M.C. Staff Band.

We extend our sympathy to his family in their loss.

R.J.N.

MEMORIAL SERVICE

The following note has been received from Major-General J. M. Macfie, C.B., C.B.E., M.C., M.B., F.R.C.P.

Surely no more fitting, no more affectionate tribute could have been paid to Eric Barnsley than the memorial service on the 11th October in the lovely twelfth century Priory Church of Saint Bartholomew the Great close by "Barts" his beloved hospital.

" Who would true valour see
Let him come hither.

.....

He'll fear not what men say;
He'll labour night and day
To be a pilgrim."

Following the Sentences and the singing of Psalm 121, Chapter XXXVIII of Ecclesiasticus was very beautifully read and the pure singing by the choir of a Purcell anthem was a joy to hear.

Very excellent was Sir Neil Cantlie's address outlining Eric's magnificent service to his Corps and near the end was read the Collect of the Royal Army Medical Corps.

The church was packed. Members of the Barnsley family faced the Representative Colonel Commandant Royal Army Medical Corps, The Director-General of Army Medical Services, many of Eric's closest friends in the Corps and in the Army in general. There were many representing activities in the City of London and elsewhere in which Eric was especially interested.

There was no sadness here. His race was well and truly run and those who left the Priory Church after the service must have done with an uplift of spirit.

Address by Lieutenant-General Sir Neil Cantlie K.C.B., K.B.E., M.C., M.B., F.R.C.S.

I am fully conscious of the honour which has been done to me by the Director-General in being invited to deliver the funeral oration on our late brother officer Eric Barnsley, here in the ancient chapel of St. Bartholomew, the medical school where he qualified 56 years ago. I am glad too on my own account to have the opportunity to pay tribute to a great friend and a man of outstanding character and ability.

If I were asked to choose a single phrase to describe Barnsley's devoted service to the Corps throughout his long career I would select the word 'dedicated'. Most of us after our retirement from service are satisfied that we have earned a right to enjoy our newly won leisure. In Eric Barnsley's case—after spending his active life in service it is perhaps ironic that in the 20 years after his retirement he achieved the greatest fulfilment of his work and career.

He joined the Corps as a Territorial officer in 1912 and was justifiably and rightly proud of his Territorial connection. No doubt a liking for Army service ran in his blood for his father was an Army officer of distinction. Throughout his army career he chose to serve in what we inadequately term the general duty side where he had contact with officers and men and not with patients, and he took up posts such as company officer, Territorial adjutant, and field ambulance duties. He rejected the idea of becoming a specialist in a professional subject, decidedly not from lack of brains for he showed his ability of being first in order of merit with distinction in medicine in the senior officers' course. He was the only officer in this class who had been known to choose a non specialist career in the 20 years which elapsed between the wars. No one can deny, however, that he was not a specialist in his own choice of career. Here was a man with the common touch, with a wonderful sense of comradeship not only with officers but with the rank and file of the Corps. The appointments which he took up all pointed to this end, and I verily believe he refused to become a professional specialist for this would have diminished his association with the men and the opportunity of leadership which he enjoyed.

Barnsley was a man of great and unswerving principles, with a jealous regard for the honour and prestige of the Corps, but his complete lack of pomposity and that touch of humour which he possessed never made him overbearing, and he never talked down to his juniors. No one who has ever been entertained by him at Guest Night in the mess will ever easily forget his gaiety when strumming his banjo or performing his feats of juggling. This gaiety in company made him a good social mixer but he had an acute perception and sensitivity to any form of social snobbery.

During his army career he achieved the promotion and the rewards which his talents deserved; one special distinction he received was in the shape of the Legion of Merit of the United States Army. This shows the high regard he was held in by our Allies for his co-operation during the strenuous years between 1941 and 1946 when he was D.D.M.S. Southern Command and had so many American units in his area.

His service in peace and war for 32 years would have merited our commendation but after retirement began the work with which his name will ever be remembered. He tells us it was General Hood who first set his foot on this ladder when he was asked to accept the post of honorary secretary of the R.A.M.C. War Memorial Fund, and this led, as he himself said, to twenty of the happiest years of his life.

It was in this way that he continued his connection with the Corps and spread his wings to become closely associated with the Corps Funds and the R.A.M.C. Old Comrades Association, in which capacity his popularity took him to many parts of the Kingdom and saw him seated as the guest of honour at innumerable dinners—with an ever widening circle of friends.

Barnsley has rightly been called a father figure and an elder statesman, and he acted precisely in this way when he was the secretary to the Council of Colonels Commandant. But he was more than this—he had a great affinity for the young and he enjoyed their company, for his absence of pomposity and his friendly approach and sincerity made them feel at ease in his company. And now untrammelled by domestic connections (he never married) and dedicated to the service, he chose to spend the rest of his life at the very heart of the Corps. It is true he had no official standing but for twenty years he met every newly joined officer who passed through the Depot, and his influence—both a

friendly and a moral influence—was exerted in a way which must have left its mark on the outlook and the career of every officer—nay of every man too who passed through that Depot.

Truly he was guide, philosopher and friend to all, and instilled into officers and men alike the sense of tradition and the pride of the Service.

Luckily he had time to devote himself to literary and historical work. He wrote with a light and amusing touch. His 'Mars and Aesculapius' and his 'Story of the R.A.M.C.' which he wrote for recruits, deserve to be read by every officer and man, for in it he displayed his jealous regard for the honour of the Corps and depicted its history in glowing terms.

As a would-be historian I shall miss him as my adviser on many aspects of regimental history of which he had an astonishing knowledge and this interest is borne out by his membership of the Army Historical Society of which he became Vice Chairman. His love of tradition and his leaning towards medicine drew him towards the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of which he became a Liveryman and as such a Freeman of the City of London.

Immersed as he now became in the history of the Corps, his immense labours in the Muniment Room at the College where he collected innumerable documents and books create a most valuable collection for future generations to see and read. These labours alone call for our grateful recognition.

But in all his post retirement work none will live in his memory so much as the creation of the R.A.M.C. Historical Museum.

When I decided to start a museum I was lucky to find a chosen instrument at hand. For sixteen years Barnsley has nursed it with loving care, and it is now a source of pride, and a valuable record of the accomplishments of the Corps over many years.

During the celebrations of his 80th birthday I made the suggestion that the time had come to commemorate its founder and creator. But Eric, modest and unassuming as always, pooh-poohed the idea and nothing was done in his lifetime. Surely the time has now come when some adequate recognition of his services to the Corps should receive our earnest attention.

There come to my mind well known lines of Shakespeare—

The evil that men do lives after them,

The good is oft interred with their bones.

Here surely we can confute the bard, for the good that Eric Barnsley did will certainly live after him.

I will quote you the lines which his brother, Dr. Barnsley, tells me Eric had written on the fly leaf of his pocket note book which he always carried with him. It shows him to be a man of deep religious feelings. I quote—

And I said to the man at the gate of the year

'Give me a light, that I may tread safely into the Unknown'
and he replied—

'Put thine hand into the hand of God. That shall be
better for thee than light, and safer than a known way.'

Worthy it is today that we should commemorate such a man for I feel we shall not readily come across his like again.