

= Reginald Pinney =

Major @-@ General Sir Reginald John Pinney , KCB ( 2 August 1863 ? 18 February 1943 ) was a British Army officer who served as a divisional commander during the First World War . While commanding a division at the Battle of Arras in 1917 , he was immortalised as the " cheery old card " of Siegfried Sassoon 's poem " The General " .

Pinney served in South Africa during the Boer War with the Royal Fusiliers , and at the outbreak of the First World War was given command of a brigade sent to reinforce the Western Front in November 1914 . He led it in the early part of 1915 , taking heavy losses at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle . That September he was given command of the 35th Division , a New Army division of " bantam " soldiers , which first saw action at the Battle of the Somme ; after three months in action , he was exchanged with the commander of the 33rd Division .

He commanded the 33rd at Arras in 1917 , with mixed results , and through the Spring Offensive in 1918 , where the division helped stabilise the defensive line after the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps was routed . After the war , he retired to rural Dorset , where he served as a local justice of the peace , as High Sheriff for the county , and as a Deputy Lieutenant ; he was also the ceremonial colonel of his old regiment , the Royal Fusiliers .

= = Early career = =

Reginald Pinney was born in 1863 in Clifton , Bristol , the eldest son of the Reverend John Pinney , vicar of Coleshill , Warwickshire , and his wife , Harriet . His paternal grandfather was Charles Pinney , a prominent merchant and former mayor of Bristol , whilst his maternal grandfather , John Wingfield @-@ Digby , was a previous vicar of Coleshill ; an uncle , John Wingfield @-@ Digby , would later be the Conservative MP for North Dorset . John and Harriet Pinney had five more children , four sons and a daughter , before Harriet 's death in 1877 . At least one of Reginald 's brothers , John , also passed into the Army , joining the Central India Horse .

After four years at Winchester College , Pinney entered the Royal Military Academy , Sandhurst in 1882 . He passed out of the Academy and was appointed to the Royal Fusiliers ( 7th Foot ) as a lieutenant on 6 February 1884 . He spent five years with his regiment before attending the Staff College , Camberley in 1889 ? 90 ; after leaving Camberley , he was promoted to captain in December 1891 . From 1896 to 1901 he served on the staff as the deputy assistant adjutant @-@ general at Quetta , in India , with a promotion to major in December 1898 . He married Hester Head in 1900 ; the couple had three sons and three daughters .

Pinney saw active service in the Boer War , arriving in South Africa in November 1901 as second @-@ in @-@ command of the 2nd Battalion , Royal Fusiliers . He served with the battalion until the end of the war , following which he was promoted to lieutenant @-@ colonel and given command of the 4th Battalion , with a brevet promotion to colonel in 1906 . He relinquished command of the battalion in 1907 , going on to half pay , and later took up the position of assistant adjutant @-@ general in Egypt in 1909 . He held this posting until 1913 , aged fifty , when he was transferred to command a reserve unit , the Devon and Cornwall Brigade of the Wessex Division in the Territorial Force .

= = Brigadier in France = =

Following the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 , an Expeditionary Force of seven regular divisions was mobilised for service in France . At the same time , the Territorial Force was activated to replace them for home defence duties . The Expeditionary Force represented almost all the regular units stationed in the United Kingdom , but only about half the strength of the regular Army ; the remainder was scattered in various stations around the Empire , mainly in India and the Mediterranean . These units were withdrawn as quickly as they could be replaced by Indian or Territorial units , and formed into new divisions to reinforce the Expeditionary Force .

The Wessex Division ? now numbered as the 43rd ? had been assigned for duty in India to free up

regular units there , with its staff and support units held back to form the framework of the new 8th Division , which was formed from returning regular battalions . As a result , Pinney was relieved from command of his Territorial brigade in October and assigned to command the newly formed 23rd Brigade , made up from three battalions that had been on garrison duty in Malta and one from Egypt . All were regular units , with very few reservists , but having spent a long period in colonial stations they were considered as only partially trained compared to the units serving with the Expeditionary Force .

The 8th Division was sent to France in November 1914 ; immediately after arrival , two battalions were deployed to hold a section of the front line for a week during the closing stages of the First Battle of Ypres . However , the brigade did not see its first major action under Pinney 's command until 10 March 1915 , when it was committed to action as part of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle . The 23rd Brigade met heavy resistance when it began its attack , due to a failure by the divisional artillery to bombard a large section of the defenders ' trenches ; the 2nd Middlesex , making a frontal attack , were wiped out almost completely . The other lead battalion of the brigade , the 2nd Cameronians , was enfiladed from the undamaged sector and took heavy losses , losing almost all its officers and retreating in confusion . Pinney quickly learned of this ? he was only two hundred yards from the front line ? and decided to continue the attack . As he was not able to call for artillery support , the only possible approach was to send in the two reserve battalions . The second assault suffered heavy casualties at the outset , and quickly had to be called off when it was discovered that the corps artillery was about to fire on the positions being attacked ; the Devonshires and West Yorkshires were withdrawn , having taken high casualties and achieved little . After this , the attack continued to bog down , and whilst there was some success elsewhere in the divisional sector , nothing more was achieved by 23rd Brigade . Following Neuve Chapelle , the brigade was reinforced with two Territorial battalions . At the Battle of Aubers on 9 May , 23rd Brigade was held in reserve by 8th Division and so escaped the heavy casualties of the two attacking brigades . Around noon a scratch force of all available infantry was pushed forward by the divisional commander to support these two brigades , including some units of Pinney 's brigade .

= = Divisional command = =

Pinney relinquished command of the brigade to Travers Clarke in late June , when he was promoted to major @-@ general and returned to England to take command of the newly formed 35th Division , a New Army volunteer division . The division was mainly drawn from industrial areas of Northern England , with a high proportion of " bantams " , men who were under the normal regulation height of 5 ft 3 in ( 160 cm ) for Army service . Among the officers Pinney first encountered in the 35th was Bernard Montgomery , recently posted as brigade major of the 104th Brigade , who would later serve under him as the GSO2 in the 33rd Division .

The division was transferred to France in early 1916 , in preparation for the summer offensive of that year . It moved into the line in February , and Pinney ordered a series of small raids in company or battalion strength through the following months . The 35th was deployed for the Battle of the Somme , assigned to XIII Corps in Fourth Army . It was held in reserve during the Battle of Albert , the opening phases of the attack in early July , but fought in the Battle of Bazentin Ridge and the subsequent attacks on High Wood , where it took heavy casualties ; in a week , one brigade lost a thousand men , a third of its strength . The division rested for a week in early August , but returned to the line almost immediately . At the end of the month , a badly planned and potentially suicidal attack on Falgemont Farm was cancelled by Pinney at the last minute when the " facts were pointed out " by Montgomery , and a new plan substituted ; the attacking battalion took the farm with light casualties . Following this , it was withdrawn to a quiet sector of the line .

In September , Major @-@ General Herman Landon , commanding the neighbouring 33rd Division was relieved of his command . It was arranged that he would exchange with Pinney in the 35th Division , and the transfer was made on 23 September . The decision to rotate commanders appears to have been a desire to give Landon a less active command , as the 35th was occupying a relatively quiet sector ; presumably , it was felt that Pinney was a more effective commander for an

active division . When Pinney met the officers of one of his new battalions in early October 1916 , they recorded that he seemed " pleasant and human " , and " not too old " . However , some of his habits were unpopular ; most gallingly to his men , he stopped the regular issue of rum in the division shortly after taking command , replacing it with tea instead . The infantry were greatly displeased , with one NCO describing him as " a bun @-@ pinching crank , more suited to command of a Church Mission hut than troops " . There was some justification to the jibe ; as well as being teetotal , Pinney did not smoke , and was devoutly religious . The most lasting description of him was written in this period by Siegfried Sassoon , then an officer in one of the 33rd 's battalions , who used Pinney as the subject of his satirical poem " The General " .

The 33rd was a New Army division of the same wave as the 35th , but it had lost its original New Army composition ; by late 1916 , it was composed equally of Territorial , Regular and New Army battalions . Rather than the 35th 's bantams , the 33rd had originally been formed from " Pals battalions " , units drawn from local communities so that men could serve alongside their friends and colleagues , and the Public Schools Battalions , made up of former pupils of the elite public schools . Many of the initial units had been transferred out ? or , in the case of the latter units , disbanded so that their men could be trained as officers ? but a number of these close @-@ knit units still remained in the division .

Following Pinney 's arrival the division was withdrawn for two months to reorganise , missing the Battle of Flers @-@ Courcellette , and saw some fighting in the very end of the fighting on the Somme when a " pretentious " plan produced by the divisional command to capture a German trench system at night failed . The 33rd remained on the Somme front until March 1917 , when it was transferred to Amiens to participate in the Arras Offensive . Here , the division fought at the Second Battle of the Scarpe in late April , where it took 700 prisoners but suffered heavy losses . This was followed by a series of attacks on the Hindenburg Line in late May , the first of which , on the night of 20 May , was masterminded by Pinney ? one observer noted that " his tail is right up over his back ... he was out for a gamble with his troops and he had it " , though sadly added that despite its great success , he still refused to authorise an issue of rum . A second attack on 27 May was a complete failure ; Pinney later explained the attack as having been a distraction in support of the coming Battle of Messines , an interpretation greeted with some cynicism by observers .

Following the fighting around Arras , the 33rd was moved to Nieuwpoort , Belgium , as part of the build @-@ up for the planned Operation Hush , a breakthrough along the coastal front coupled with an amphibious landing behind German lines . After the operation was cancelled , the division remained at Nieuwpoort , where Pinney was hospitalised and temporarily relinquished command . He remained in hospital for two months , during which time he missed heavy fighting by the 33rd at the Battle of Passchendaele . After VIII Corps Commander Hunter @-@ Weston had sacked the current divisional commander , Philip . R. Wood , for lack of aggression ( unjustifiably , in Simon Robbins ? view ) , Pinney returned to the division on 30 November , amid rumours that he had got the return posting through personal influence .

The division remained in reserve until April 1918 , when German forces attacked as part of the Spring Offensive . During the Battle of the Lys , the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps was effectively wiped out , leaving a two @-@ mile wide gap in the British lines . The 33rd was ordered into position , and Pinney personally commanded the divisional machine @-@ gun battalion , which ? with the assistance of various stragglers from retreating units ? helped turn back a heavy German attack at the Battle of Hazebrouck on 12 and 13 April . For his service in April , Pinney , along with the commanders of the 12th , 55th and 61st Divisions , was appointed a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath . The 33rd was used to train the American 30th Infantry Division through the summer , but went over to the offensive in September , seeing action at the Battle of the St Quentin Canal , the Battle of Cambrai , and the Battle of the Selle . At the Selle , Pinney organised a dawn attack with improvised bridges , allowing the 33rd to force a bridgehead and successfully clear the opposing bank in a short time . The division finished the war in the Sambre valley , and began demobilisation . In February 1919 , with the division mostly demobilised , Pinney retired from the Army , aged fifty @-@ six , after thirty @-@ five years service .

= = Retirement = =

Following the end of his Army career , Pinney took up residence at Racedown Manor , in the village of Broadwindsor , Dorset , where he lived the life of a retired country gentleman . He became a Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant for the county , and served as its High Sheriff in 1923 . He did not return to an active Army post , though he held the ceremonial colonelcy of the Royal Fusiliers from 1924 to 1933 , as well as the honorary colonelcy of the Dorset Coastal Brigade , Royal Artillery , and the 4th ( Territorial ) Battalion of the Dorsetshire Regiment .

Pinney died on 18 February 1943 , survived by his wife and five of his children . All three of his sons served in the Second World War ; his eldest son , Bernard , was killed in action in November 1941 , commanding J Battery Royal Horse Artillery at Sidi Rezegh in North Africa . His daughter Rachel was part of the notorious " Ferguson 's Gang " who hit the headlines in the interwar years with masked appearances with bags of money to save properties for the National Trust . A scholarship fund , to provide access to higher education for the children of Dorset ex @-@ servicemen , was established in Pinney 's name in June 1943 , and remains in existence .