Fitter Cecil Walter Knights, great great uncle of Lola Borrell

Died of wounds 13 October 1917, aged 21, during the 3rd Battle of Ypres.

Son of Beatrice Eleanor and the late John Percival Knights of 46, Queens Street or 7 Market Street, King's Lynne. His brother, Vernon, was two years younger.

Buried in Solferino Farm Cemetery, Ypres.1B 13. His inscription (which cost his mother 5s 10d) reads: 'Sweet Spirit Comfort Me'.

A fitter, service number L/8246, in the Royal Field Artillery: C Battery of 152nd Brigade in 34th.Division (a New Army unit). There were three brigades of field artillery (RFA) attached to 34°' Division. (The other two were 160th Brigade and 175°' Brigade.)

A battery consisted of 4 18 pounder field guns and an ammunition column. In August 1916 that was raised to 6 guns. There were four batteries in a brigade and each battery had:

4 officers (1 Major and 3 Subalterns)
1 Battery Sergeant-Major. 1 Battery Quartermaster-Sergeant and 5 Sergeants
1 Farrier. 3 Shoeing Smiths of which 1 would be a Corporal, 2 Saddlers. **2 litters or wheelers**)
S Corporals, 8 Bombardiers, 47 Gunners, 46 Drivers and 8 Batmen
42 riding horses and 83 draught horses.

Solferino Farm was named (after a famous battle in 1859) by the French when serving in the area in 1915. The British created the cemetery in 1917. Of the 296 WW1 casualties, 100 are artillery, 21 engineers and 24 Army Service Corps, indicating that the site was an artillery base behind the front tine in 1917. That only one casualty is unidentified is another indicator of the nature of the site. There are also 3 German WW1 burials and 3 British WW2 burials (from the 1940 retreat to Dunkirk).

34th Division (part of Kitchener's New Army) arrived in France in June 1916 and was posted to French Flanders, south of Armentieres. They arrived on the Somme in early June. By the middle of the month the batteries were registering their guns (adjusting the fire of guns onto their targets by observation, and recording the final data of elevation and deflection needed to hit particular targets) and digging their gun pits.

The bombardment started on 24 June (U Day) and was meant to last until Z Day 29 June, but the battle was postponed until 1 July due to poor weather. By Z Day the diary records that the guns are showing distinct signs of wear. Individual artillery units would fire in 2 hour periods, with a rest in between. The first two days were devoted largely to cutting the barbed wire defences. For the final three days the heavy artillery were to destroy trenches, emplacements, strong points and enemy artillery, and the field guns to continue the removal of the wire. In places there were releases of gas and smoke, to deceive the enemy as to intentions. Roads and tracks were shelled at night, to stop supplies and relief units coming up. There was also a daily 80-minute intensive bombardment. Very little of the British an artillery was ranged against the German artillery. At this stage of the war the techniques for spotting the enemy's guns were still developmental and gunnery techniques could not be accurate enough to hit them had they been identified. In the opening attack, unsuppressed German artillery effectively barred no man's land to British reserves. Those troops that did get into enemy lines were cut off, with no way back. The effects of the bombardment varied considerably. In some places the wire was flattened and the enemy artillery silenced. In others, the attacking infantry faced virtually untouched and deep belts of wire, with alert enemy gunners behind it. Despite the heavy and prolonged bombardment, it had been insufficient to destroy the defences and suppress the enemy. Many of the rounds fired were "duds" (failed to

explode). In addition about two-thirds of the bombardment had been of shrapnel, not high explosive, and it failed to make sufficient impact on blowing away the wire or damaging the deep enemy dugouts,

152nd Brigade were supporting the 34th Division attack in the centre of the front line. Despite blowing of the mines either side of the village of La Boiselle, the attack was unsuccessful and 34th Division suffered the worst casualties of any division that day, losing 6380 men. The Division was subsequently involved in further battles on the Somme, but moved back to the Armentieres sector in August 1916.

At the end of January 1917 they moved-to the Arras sector to prepare for the Battle of Arras (9 April - 16 May 1917). They took part in the battle with some limited success.

In July 1917 they moved to the Hargicourt area for training and to take part in some offensive operations, but on 9 October to Proven in Belgium (20 kilometres behind the front line) to take part in the 3rd Battle of Ypres which had started on 31 July 1917. 34th Division went into the line but did not take part in any specified battle, although they were involved in the fighting for the Broenbeek (stream) north-west of Langemark from the 13 - 23 October. The brigade diary constantly refers to the conditions as being 'cold, wet and windy'. In fact the conditions were appalling. Rain - and shelling - had made the ground almost impassable for infantry, let alone horse-drawn artillery.



The diary records that on 12 October the brigade was in readiness to support the 144th Corps attack, but that the orders were cancelled at 11 a.m. They appear to have been situated at Sint Sixtus. nearer to Ypres than Proven. On 13 October advanced parties of the Brigade moved forward to take over the position of 295 RFA Brigade. The diary records that one howitzer was put out of action by a direct hit while being moved forward, causing two casualties, Bombardier Smith and Fitter Knight, who died of his wounds.