

Lieutenant Cyril Henry Harrison



Image from author's own collection

By Pamela Lee

Lieutenant Cyril Henry Harrison

Summary

Lieutenant Cyril Henry Harrison enlisted on 3 September 1914 as Private Harrison, No 1251, 3rd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment.

He was commissioned as 2nd Lieutenant on 25 January 1915, on transfer to 10th Battalion South Lancashire Regiment. His battalion was subsequently attached to 1st/5th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers.

Following service in Egypt and the Gallipoli campaign, Cyril moved to the Western Front. He saw action with his battalion at Passchendaele, where on 6 September 1917 he was killed, aged 20.

Cyril has no known grave but he is commemorated on the rear wall of Tyne Cot Cemetery in Belgium and on the grave of his older brother, Victor William Harrison, at Buckenham, Norfolk. The names of both brothers are on the War Memorial in Worthing.

Introduction

Lieutenant Cyril Harrison was my uncle. This project enables me to record his short career in memory of my mother, Nielia, who was his beloved younger sister.

Background

Cyril was one of eight children whose father was a Justice of the Peace, a stock broker and an import/export merchant in Madras. The family lived in Worthing, Sussex. On the outbreak of War, he enlisted in the 3rd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment. Cyril's brother Victor served in the Royal Flying Corps and a case study on his war service has also been compiled.

Detail

Cyril Henry Harrison was born on 26 November 1896 at Oaklands, Squirrels Heath, Romford, Essex. He was educated at Bishop's Stortford College.

Following the outbreak of the First World War, he enlisted at Worthing on 2 September 1914 in the 3rd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment as Private Harrison No 1251. He was, therefore, 3 months under age. On 25 January 1915, aged just 18, he was commissioned into the 10th Battalion South Lancashire Regiment, which was attached to 1st/5th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, for posting to Egypt as part of 42nd East Lancashire Division.

The division had been defending the Suez Canal since late 1914 against a threat from Turkish troops that were massed in Palestine. A Turkish attack took place on 3 February 1915 which was successfully repulsed. The

division remained in the Canal Zone until reinforcing the beleaguered garrison in Gallipoli.

The initial landings at Gallipoli, which had taken place on 25 April 1915, had come within an ace of success in the face of amazing difficulties, but had ended in glorious failure. Immediate reinforcements for the stalled campaign were urgently needed. These were quickly provided on 5 May 1915 by the Lancashire Fusiliers.



Image from Imperial War Museum Q13219 (www.iwm.org.uk)

'Lancashire Fusiliers heading for the beaches on the trawler which had taken them off their transport, the SS "Nile"... The makeshift nature of the Gallipoli transport system is illustrated by this crowded ship.'¹

They landed at Cape Helles and immediately attacked the Turks at the Battle of Krithia Vineyard. Fierce fighting and appalling conditions resulted in severe losses from combat, disease and the harsh weather. The overall division, having lost two thirds of its normal establishment, was therefore evacuated to Mudros on the island of Lemnos. Mudros was used as an advanced base and naval harbour for the Gallipoli campaign. Cyril is recorded as having safely disembarked at Mudros on 22 November 1915. From there he and the surviving members of his division were transported by RMS 'Olympic' back to Egypt. The 'Olympic', which was a sister ship of the ill-fated 'Titanic', was kept busy ferrying up to 6,000 troops per journey to and from Gallipoli. During 1916 the division was engaged in Egypt in further action against the Turks, and the successful outcome of the Battle of Romani helped secure the safety of the Suez Canal.

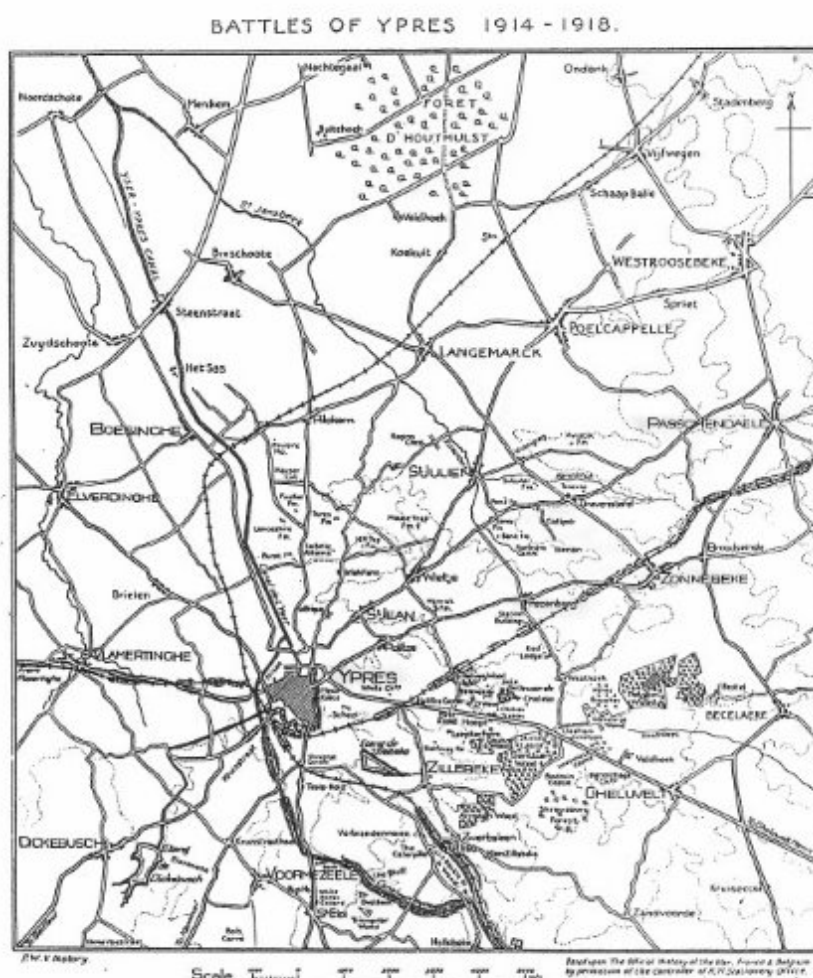
In February 1917 the division was posted to France, landing at Marseilles, and for the first time became engaged in action on the Western Front. On

8 June 1917, Cyril's brother Victor, serving with the Royal Flying Corps, wrote to his cousin Horace:

"I shall be going home shortly for a few days leave, as Cyril is coming home for his first leave since he went to Egypt in 1915."²

Sadly it was the last time that the brothers would meet.

In August 1917 Cyril's battalion, having been training in preparation for trench warfare, moved up to the Front for what was to be the Third Battle of Ypres, known to us now as 'Passchendaele'. The 1st/5th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers took its place in the line near Frezenberg, a small village on the cross-roads on the Ypres/Zonnebeke road.



'Map provided by The Queen's Lancashire Regiment to show the area of operations of September 1917.'

It was decided that an attack should be launched to straighten the line. At 7.15am on 6 September 1917 the attack commenced against strongly held German pill-boxes. Although initially successful, the advance was halted by heavy machine-gun fire. A counter-attack by the Germans followed. The net result of the day's fighting was to gain a shallow wedge

of ground, 150 yards at its widest. The casualties had been very heavy. The 1st/5th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers had lost nearly 500 men and 7 officers, one of whom was Cyril Harrison.

A month following Cyril's death, the Gazette dated 23 October 1917, recorded that Second Lieutenant C H Harrison was promoted to Lieutenant as from 1 July 1917. So his promotion was announced 6 weeks before he died.

Cyril has no known grave, but his name appears on the 'rear wall' of the famous Tyne Cot Cemetery. The rear wall is a Memorial to the Missing. It bears Cyril's name, along with the names of 35,000 servicemen who fell in the vicinity after 16 August 1917. The Tyne Cot Memorial continues the list of names inscribed on the Ypres Menin Gate. Cyril is also commemorated on his brother Victor's grave at Buckenham, Norfolk and on the War Memorial in Worthing.



The memorial at Tyne Cot Cemetery, Belgium showing Cyril's name
Image from author's own collection

Cyril was awarded the following medals:

- Victory Medal³
- British War Medal⁴
- 15 Star⁵

Conclusion

All my life I have remembered my mother, Nielia, mourning the loss of my uncles Victor and Cyril, saying how difficult it had been for her and her

mother and sisters to celebrate with everyone else at the time of the Armistice.

With thanks to my cousin Christopher Harrison, who helped me to write this Case Study and my cousin Ian Petherick who researched and provided pictures and letters for much of Cyril's story.

Endnotes

- 1 David Chandler and Ian Beckett, *The Oxford History of the British Army* (Oxford University Press)
- 2 Letter from Victor Harrison to Horace Harrison 8 June 1917 written from Upavon
- 3 Medal Index Card Off/153
- 4 Medal Index Card Off/153
- 5 Medal Index Card Off/153