

# Charles Vaughan

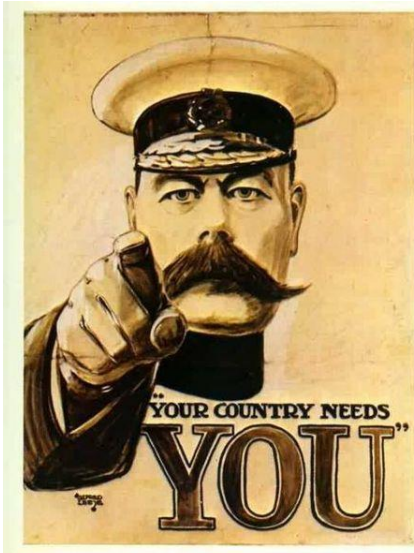
2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant

1<sup>st</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> Herefordshire Regiment



Charles's story starts with the marriage of Henry Albert Vaughan and Mary Alice Whitaker in 1889 Kington. Henry was a porter on the railways and the 1891 census reveals that he and his wife were living at the railway station in Pembridge. It was here that their first son Charles was born in the spring of 1891. He was followed by four siblings, three brothers and one sister. Alexander born in 1893, James 1895, Linda 1898 and the youngest, Thomas in 1902. From the 1901 census, we find that sometime between the birth of Linda in 1898 and the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1901, the date of that year's census, Henry had moved his family to 19 Sunset, Kington. This had them living close to Kington railway station where Henry had taken a step up the employment ladder and was then working as the station signalman. Records indicate that Charles was educated at Kington Boys School on Gravel Hill and by 1911 had followed his father into the railways and was indeed a porter at Kington station. By 1911 the family had moved again, this time just up the road to 23 Victoria Road, and it could be suggested that this move was a step up the housing ladder. Things were certainly looking up for the Vaughan family. Prior to the outbreak of war Charles, perhaps disaffected with the railways and attempting to become independent of the family, took a position as a travelling salesman for a wholesale cloth warehouse. But advancement in his new profession was curtailed by the outbreak of war in August 1914.

Regrettably, as is often the case, few of Charles's service records survive having been destroyed during a World War 2 air raid. However, his epitaph in the Kington Times reveals that he was a territorial volunteer in the Herefordshire Regiment prior to the outbreak of war and was therefore immediately mobilised in August 1914. Private 1079 Vaughan was one of many Kington men serving in 'D' Company,



1<sup>st</sup> Battalion the Herefordshire Regiment when war was declared and would have been regarded as a senior member of the Company. Because of his undoubted knowledge and seniority in November 1914 he was rated Lance Corporal and would have been heavily involved in training the rush of new volunteers following Lord Kitchener's call to arms. The Kington Times proudly informs us in their 7<sup>th</sup> November edition that he and his chums had been inoculated and were in every practical sense ready for overseas service. We also learn that Charles's brothers James and Alexander answered the call, James enlisting into the Herefords and Alexander into the Mechanised Corp.

The 1<sup>st</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> Herefordshire Regiment formed part of the Welsh Border Brigade and on the 16<sup>th</sup> July 1915 boarded the SS Euripedes in Devonport and shipped out to



Kington volunteers 1914

Gallipoli. Both Charles and James were aboard and on the 9<sup>th</sup> August were involved in the initial landings at Suvla Bay. The campaign went badly with many Herefordshire men being killed or having fallen seriously ill and on the 12<sup>th</sup> December 1915 the regiment, by then seriously depleted, were evacuated from the peninsula. The regiment were transferred to Alexandria in Egypt via the island of Lemnos. From there they moved south of Cairo where they regrouped and replenished their numbers and were given the task of defending the vitally important Suez Canal. As 1916 progressed so the Turkish army, supported by German commanders, grew in strength and confidence. Together they started to advance across the Sinai Desert and to threaten the Suez Canal. Attack being the best kind of defence, the Herfords were sent to halt this advance and in July 1916 were heavily involved in the Battle of Rumani on the mediterranean coast.

Following this success allied forces moved further north and embarked upon the Palestine Campaign of 1916/17, this designed to rid the middle east of Turkish and German armies. The battalion was at all three battles of Gaza, and also at the battle for Beersheba, reaching Jerusalem in December 1917, two years after their ignominious evacuation from Gallipoli.

During this period Charles continued his advancement up through the ranks reaching the rank of Acting Company Quarter Master Sergeant (A/CQMS). This rank meant he was the second most senior NCO in his company and was responsible for organising Company supplies. He would have also been deputy to the company sergeant major, the senior company NCO. Not only was Charles a senior NCO but also appears to have led by example. On the 16<sup>th</sup> August 1917 Charles was recognised for a singular act of bravery when he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM). This medal is awarded for 'Distinguished Conduct in the Field' and his citation reads as follows:

*For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. At a moment when his battalion were in front of the rest of the Brigade and consequently in danger of coming under their fire, he walked calmly across the fire-swept zone about 400 yards and informed the firing line of the position of his battalion. He had previously shown the greatest skill and courage in leading his company to the attack. (16<sup>th</sup> August 1917)*



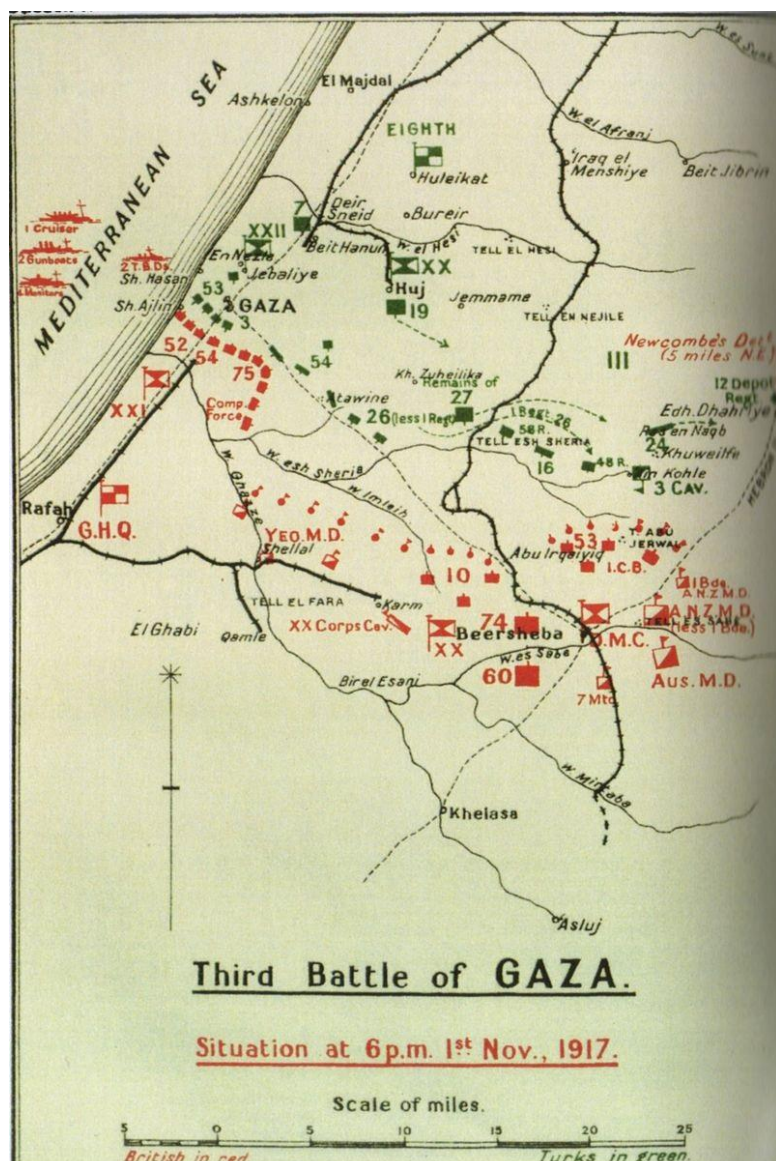
Shortly after this act of gallantry his leadership attributes were further recognised when he was 'commissioned in the field' on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1917, becoming 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Vaughan and taking command of his company.

I would now like to turn to the excellent publication *Manu Forti*. This book, written by Lieutenant-Colonel T.J.B. Hill MBE, provides an historical account of the regiment from 1860 – 1967. A large section of the book deals with the regiments involvement in the Palestine Campaign and gives a blow by blow account of the Herefordshire Regiments involvement in the fighting. As stated earlier the allied forces had driven the enemy back out of the Sinai Desert, but then became bogged down at the small coastal town of Gaza. Gaza had been heavily fortified by the

enemy and provided stiff resistance, halting the allied advance. Following two unsuccessful attempts to capture Gaza in March and April 1917 a new plan was devised. Sir Archibald Murray had been relieved by General Sir Edmund Allenby, his plan was to attack Gaza from the east since two attacks from the south had failed. To achieve this the town of Beersheba and the high ground to the north had to be taken. An advance upon Gaza could then be enacted by attacking the heavily fortified Hureira-Sheria line, then forging on toward Gaza. Troops to the south would harry and advance upon fortress Gaza whilst also protecting the left flank of the forces fighting around Beersheba. The Herefordshire Regiment formed part of the 158th Infantry Brigade of the 53rd Division. The 60th and 74th Divisions were set the task of taking Beersheba with the 53rd providing defensive support on the left flank of the attack, west of Beersheba.

Extreme secrecy surrounded the preparations for the advance on Beersheba and as the troops of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) started to concentrate for the attack to the south of Beersheba, bivouacs and tents were left in place in campsites. A skeleton team were tasked with regular patrols and activity in the camps to mislead the enemy into think the camps were fully manned. 158th

Infantry Brigade started the advance on Beersheba on 20th October with slow and steady progress being made toward their objective. The Herefords, closely followed by the rest of the 158th Brigade, led the way as they looped around the south and west of Beersheba. Final positions for the three Divisions were achieved by sunrise on the 31st October, all was set for a massed attack on Beersheba. The 60th and 74th Divisions advanced on Beersheba, which was routed of Turkish defenders with little resistance. The 53rd Division were then ordered to advance to the north of Beersheba to occupy the hills overlooking the enemy forces below. By 3.15pm on the 31st 53rd Division, supported by the Imperial Camel Corps on their right, had advanced onto the high ground and were in position. Upon arrival, the

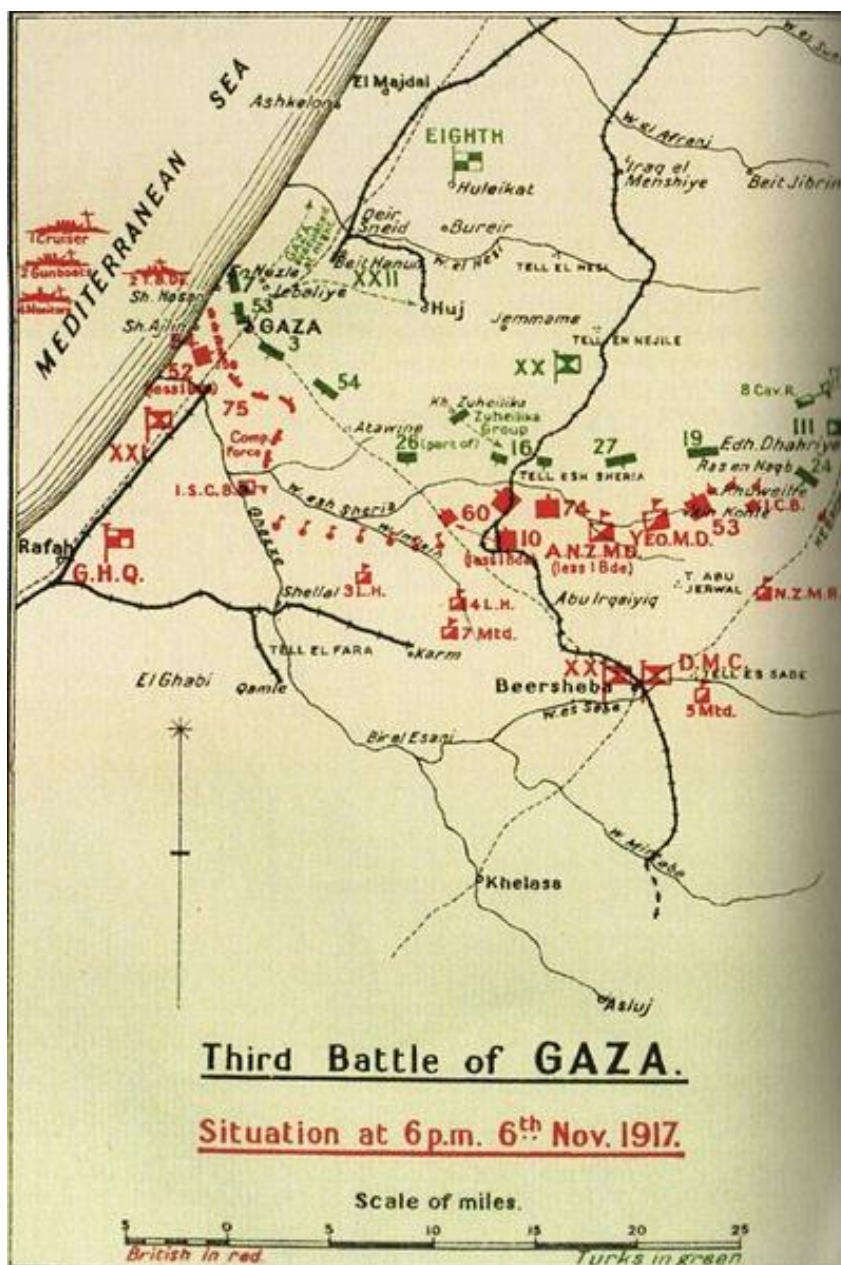


Cyril Falls and A.F.Beck

Herefords were thrust forward to outposts, guarding the Division behind them. The included map, produced by Messrs. Cyril Falls and A.F. Beck, shows the deployment of forces at 6pm on 1<sup>st</sup> November. 74<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> Divisions hold Beersheba and the 53<sup>rd</sup> are to the north of the town on the high ground. Gaza lies to the west and is being encroached by allied forces from the south.

Conditions on the hills for the Herefords were hard and water was in short supply, the only good source was back in Beersheba. All horses were evacuated from the hills and sent back to Beersheba, as for the men, they had to suffer until supplies could be brought up to them the following day. Being rather exposed in their outposts, and regularly harried by enemy forces, it was decided to draw the Herefordshire Regiment back into the protective fold of the Division. In front of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Division lay the Khuweilfe Heights with a strategically important flat topped hill named Tell to the left. The Heights were heavily defended by enemy forces and a plan was devised to take these two important points and thus set the scene for the encirclement of Gaza.

Early on the 4<sup>th</sup> November the division started their push forward with 160 Brigade taking the brunt of the enemy's wrath and 158, including the Herefords, in reserve supporting the advance. The advance on the Khuweilfe Heights was murderous with the 160<sup>th</sup> Brigade taking the full force of the enemies wrath. As the heights were approached command made the decision to make the final assault using fresh troops, that being 158 Brigade. However, 160 Brigade made strong representations stating that after their efforts all day they should be given the honour of taking the heights. The original order was rescinded and 160 were given the order to attack the heights on 5<sup>th</sup> November. At this point local weather conditions intervened. The



Cyril Falls, A.F. Beck

khamsin is an oppressive, hot, dry and dusty south or south-east wind which intermittently occurs in north Africa, around the eastern Mediterranean and Arabian Peninsula. This wind is prevalent in late winter and early summer, but most frequent between April and June. On 5th November, the khamsin was at its strongest making operations impossible and consequentially the assault on the Khuweilfe Heights was postponed until the 6th. The original plan for 158 Brigade to attack was reinstated and with support from the whole of the divisional artillery the brigade, including the Herefords, advanced upon the Khuweilfe Heights.

In the included map above Gaza can be seen on the left with Beersheba centre right. The 53<sup>rd</sup> Division can be seen pressing the Khuweilfe Heights to the north of Beersheba. At 8am on the 6th the battalion moved into their allotted attack position. The four companies were arranged in platoon waves with each of the companies having one platoon in the front line. Following an immense artillery and machine gun barrage the Brigade advanced. D company, in conjunction with the 6th RWF, moved over the top of Tell el Khuweilfe shooting and bayonetting the enemy as they advanced. They happened upon nine Turkish guns limbered up in a ravine, ready to be extricated. The company charged the scene and took control of the guns. As this happened a thick mist descended upon the hill and confusion ensued. Units became confused and mixed up such that the 7th Royal Welsh Fusiliers mistook the Herefords in the ravine as the enemy and called in artillery support. The company commander Capt. Berney and others from his company were killed but, in the fog of war, it was unclear if it was a friendly fire incident or not. The remainder of Berney's team were forced to leave the guns and retreat. In amongst all this confusion enemy snipers played their part in disrupting the advance of the Herefords, to devastating effect. The division spent the rest of the day consolidation positions gained, all the while under heavy enemy bombardment and counter attacks. Casualties were high. Six officers of the Herefordshire battalion were killed and five wounded. Charles Vaughan was one of those officers 'killed in action' on the assault of the Khuweilfe Heights on **6<sup>th</sup> November 1917**. That evening the battalion was relieved by the 5th Royal Welsh Fusiliers and moved back behind brigade headquarters. They had performed gallantly in appalling conditions with extreme heat, dust and a severe lack of water making their task even more harrowing. Gaza and Tel el Khuweilfe finally fell to the allied forces on the 7th November, with the Turkish army putting up limited resistance in the end. For the Herefordshire Regiment the third battle of Gaza was over but had cost them dear.

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Charles Vaughan is buried at Beersheba War



Cemetery, grave reference E.15. The Cemetery is situated on the south-west of Beersheba town and as can be seen is now surrounded by modern development. The cemetery was established directly following the assault on Beersheba and was in constant use until July 1918 by which time 139 burials had taken place. This number was greatly enhanced following the armistice when burials were brought in from a number of smaller sites scattered around the area. The cemetery now contains 1241 Commonwealth burials from the First World War.

Probate for Charles was granted in London on the 13th December 1918, when his effects of £153 10s were passed to his father. Later, in February 1919, Charles's military account was made up and £129 12s 5d was passed to his father Henry Alfred with a further £25 war gratuity granted on the same day. All this equates to roughly £10,000 today, arguably an insignificant sum for the loss of a beloved son. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Charles Vaughan was further awarded the Victory and British War medals to accompany his Distinguished Conduct Medal. Back home in Kington, on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1919, his name was read out along with 64 of his comrades, at a memorial service to all those Kington men who lost their lives during the war. Charles did his duty for his country and paid the ultimate sacrifice. His devotion to duty will long be remembered.

