

# Harry Parker

Private

15083

Kings Shropshire Light Infantry



The community of Kington suffered from the mental and physical scars of four years of war. If residents were not affected directly; they knew someone who was. Those who returned had no guarantees they would survive their injuries or indeed the illness's they contracted during the conflict. Never was this truer than in the case of Samuel Henry Parker, Harry Parker as he preferred to be known.

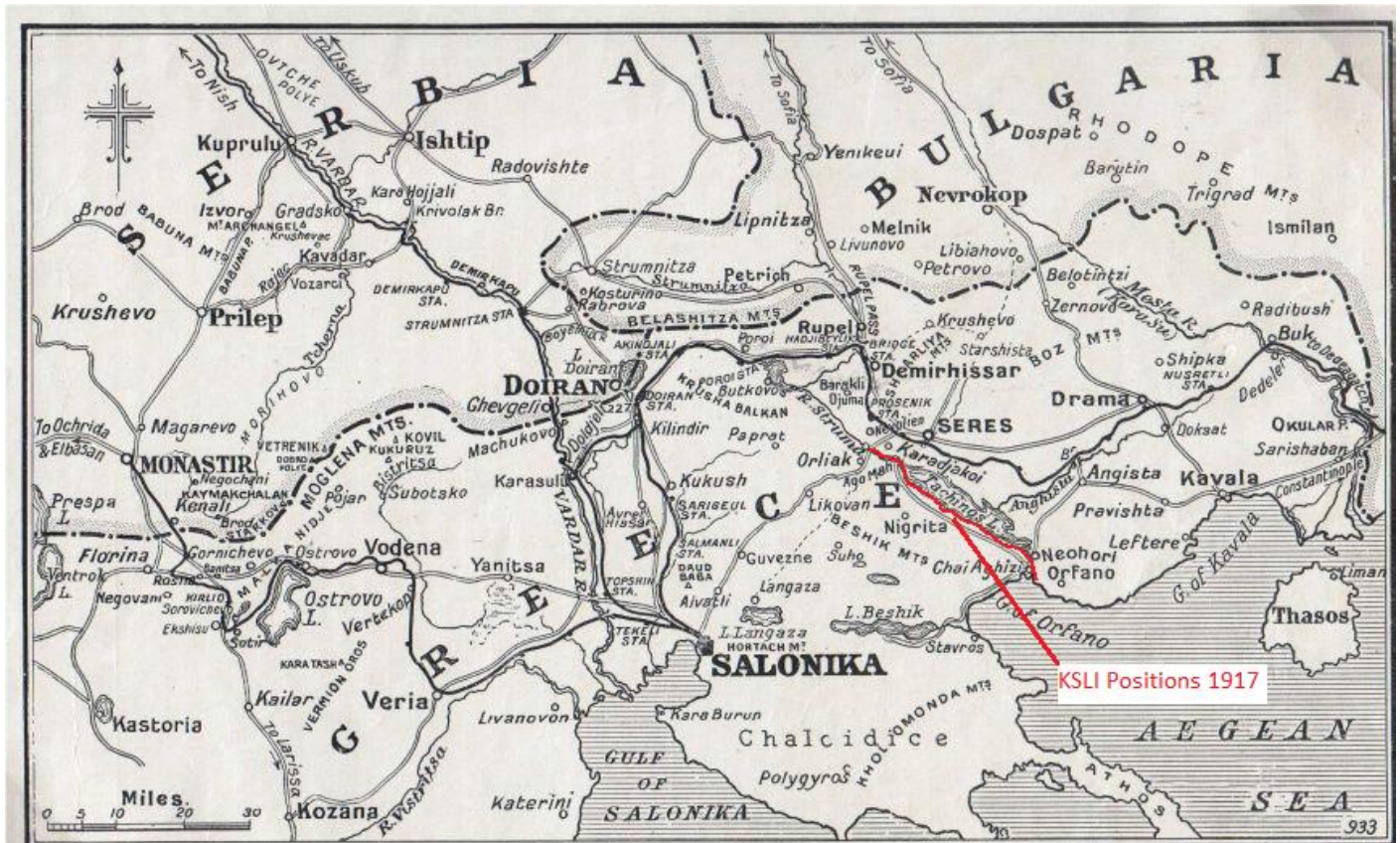
Harry was the second child and oldest son of Samuel and Charlotte Parker. Samuel and Charlotte Green had married in Tenbury in 1896 and shortly after, in early 1897, gave birth to their first child, Annie Maria Parker. Less than a year later, in the autumn of 1897, the focus of this biography Samuel Henry Parker was born. A year later Harry was followed by Dorothy (1898), all three of these children being born in Tenbury, Charlottes birth place. By 1901 the fledgling family were living at 84 Upper Goalford, Ludlow, where Samuel was employed as a Shoe and Boot maker. Shortly after the family was again extended when Nora Mary Parker was born in Ludlow in 1901 as was Charlotte Agnes in 1904. By 1906 the expanding family had moved to Kington and established themselves in Oxford Cottage, Market Hall Street. Here, Joseph (1906), William (1907) and Richard (1910) arrived. It can be imagined that such a large family,

in what was a small dwelling, must have been a tight squeeze. The 1911 census assures us that Samuel continued to be employed in the boot making trade.



At the outbreak of war in August 1914 Harry was one of the first to volunteer in Kington. He enlisted into the King's Shropshire Light Infantry (KSLI) on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1914. The observant mathematician may have worked out that he was just seventeen years old at the time and definitely not eligible for overseas service until his nineteenth birthday. Private 15083 Parker recorded his occupation as farm labourer and was given a pre-recruitment medical examination in New Radnor, by a Dr. Richard Harding. Dr. Harding declared Harry fit for service and recorded his age as nineteen. Here was a young man keen to serve his king and country. The next day, 21<sup>st</sup> October, he joined his regiment in Shrewsbury and following initial training, on 18<sup>th</sup> May 1915, Harry was posted to his permanent unit, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Kings Shropshire Light Infantry.

Turning now to the excellent *History of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry in the Great War* edited by Major W de B. Wood, we can fairly accurately trace Harry's journey through the war. At the outbreak of war, the 2nd Battalion KSLI were serving in Secunderabad, India. On the 13th October they sailed from Bombay arriving at Plymouth in the November. On 20th December they were fully kitted out for trench warfare and sailed from Southampton bound for France and by early January 1915 found themselves in the frontline. Action after action followed until May 1915 when they took part in the Battle of Frenzenberg Ridge. Casualties were heavy and on the 18th of May Harry was one of a 130 strong draft of new recruits sent to bolster the battalion and raise it to fighting capability again. Almost immediately he was to see action in the Battle of Bellewaarde Ridge near Langemarck. Here the enemy released clouds of poison gas over the allied trenches and followed this up with a heavy barrage, prior to a full-blown infantry attack. Truly a baptism of fire for Harry. Toward the end of 1915 the battalion were pulled out of the Western Front and redeployed to Macedonia. On the 18<sup>th</sup> October the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion boarded the H.M.T. *Huntsgreen* arriving in Salonika on 4<sup>th</sup> December. The next six weeks were spent establishing the battalion in this new theatre of war. Winters were harsh in the region and the terrain unforgiving. The battalion were constantly rotated between entrenching duties and wiring tasks, to road making and guard duties. On 20<sup>th</sup> January 1917 the monotony of barrack duties was broken and the battalion were sent forward to the fighting line at the Rendina Defences. Here they stayed until 26<sup>th</sup> June when they were again moved forward to Kar Tasle Derband on the shores of the Gulf of Orfano. The scenery may have changed but the duties of trenching, road repairs and providing water supplies did not. On 27<sup>th</sup> July the battalion were again on the move, this time to Neohori at the mouth of the River Sturma. They crossed the river and set about establishing defensive positions, which now stretched from Lake Tahinos to the Gulf of Orfano in the allied eastern sector.



*General map of the Salonika region and KSLI positions in 1917*

Shortly after the whole battalion were struck down with malaria. Although trench warfare was the order of the day malaria ravaged the battalion and became its chief adversary in the months ahead. Harry remained with the 2nd Battalion until 30<sup>th</sup> December 1917, at which point he was briefly transferred to the 8th Battalion KSLI, before being shipped out for England on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1918. He arrived back on British soil on the 4<sup>th</sup> March 1918.

Until July 1918 he spent some downtime at the KSLI base depot in Shrewsbury but by mid-July he was again on the move, this time posted to the 1/4th Battalion KSLI in France. The 1/4th had been badly mauled during fighting in June and throughout July they were gradually reinforced again to full fighting strength with regular drafts arriving from home. By this time the German Spring Offensive had come to an end and the allied armies were pursuing the enemy back across France and into Belgium. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of October the battalion entered Cambrai and the following day had the honour of being selected to form the Guard of Honour for a visit by the French Premier. Cambrai was of considerable sentimental significance to many long serving members of the battalion since they had spent many weeks overlooking the town from Welch Ridge during 1917. The irony of Harry's war occurred on the 6<sup>th</sup> November 1918 when he received a 'gunshot wound' to his arm. The severity of his injuries ensured he was sent back to Britain for treatment and then on to the regimental depot in Shrewsbury.



Harry had been one of the first men to volunteer, at the very tender age of just 17. He had endured the horrors of France and Mesopotamia, had suffered the bomb, bullets and gas the enemy threw at him. He suffered the deprivations of mud and cold in the trenches and malaria in Mesopotamia. He survived all these ordeals only to be injured just five days before the armistice on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918.

Harry was discharged from the army on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1919, his record stating he was 'no longer medically fit'. In total he had served his country bravely for 4 years 126 days. He returned to his mother and family in Kington where he was issued with a Silver War Badge (B158929). Service personnel, no longer fit for war service, who had been honourably discharged due to wounds received or sickness contracted as a result of military service, were issued with the Silver War Badge. The sterling silver lapel badge was intended to be worn on civilian clothes and Harry was forbidden from wearing it with any form of military uniform. The badge was a sign of respect toward those who had served and suffered due to the war and to deflect any criticism of the individual for not playing an active part in the war effort. Harry had survived the war in spite of being injured and suffering from a lung disorder. He was just twenty-two years old when he took a job in the town as a grocer's porter. Harry's pension record reveals he was discharged from the army suffering from tuberculosis, which was attributed to his military service. On 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1919 he started receiving a war disability pension.



*Silver War Badge*

Harry's fight with ill health took its toll and on **11<sup>th</sup> November 1922**, at the age of just twenty-five, he succumbed to tuberculosis. Harry was buried in Kington cemetery on 15<sup>th</sup> November, plot number 2413. Those who loved him most were at his graveside. Sadly, trying to find Harry's final resting place has proven difficult, there is no headstone to identify his resting place or to recognise his sacrifice. For his amazing endurance and bravery this young, fine-looking, Kington man was awarded the 1914/15 Star, along with the Victory and British War medals. Harry's sacrifice must not be forgotten and may he rest in peace forever.



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