

Walter Pinches

Private

236361

1st Battalion, Herefordshire Regiment



Walter Pinches was the youngest son born to Abraham and Elizabeth Pinches in the early months of 1896. Abraham from Lingen was an itinerant waggoner who married Elizabeth Evans from Llangunllo in the Spring of 1885. Their marriage was swiftly followed by the birth of their first child, William in the summer of the same year. There was to be a large family with William followed in 1888 by Edward, 1891 George, 1894 James, the focus of this biography Walter in 1896, Mary Elizabeth 1899, Sarah Ellen 1901, Emily Dorothy 1904, Alice Agnes 1906 and the baby of the family Hilda May in the spring of 1909. In all ten children although in the 1911 census Elizabeth declares that she had delivered eleven children and all survived. The eleventh child has not been identified to date. As stated earlier Abraham was an itinerant waggoner who moved around following work. In 1891 the fledgling family were living at Strangeworth, Stansbatch. In 1901 the family had grown and were living in The Cottage, Little Brampton near Nash and by 1911 they had found residence at Arbor Cottage in Evenjobb. In the 1911 census, we discover that Walter appears to have left the family home and was living at Hergest Court Farm working as a farm labourer for the Owens brothers, William and Percy. In fact, by 1911 all the boys had left home and Abraham was a lone male, surrounded by his female prodigies.

As is often the case few of Walter's service records survive but from those which do we are able to piece together the following details of his military and personal life.

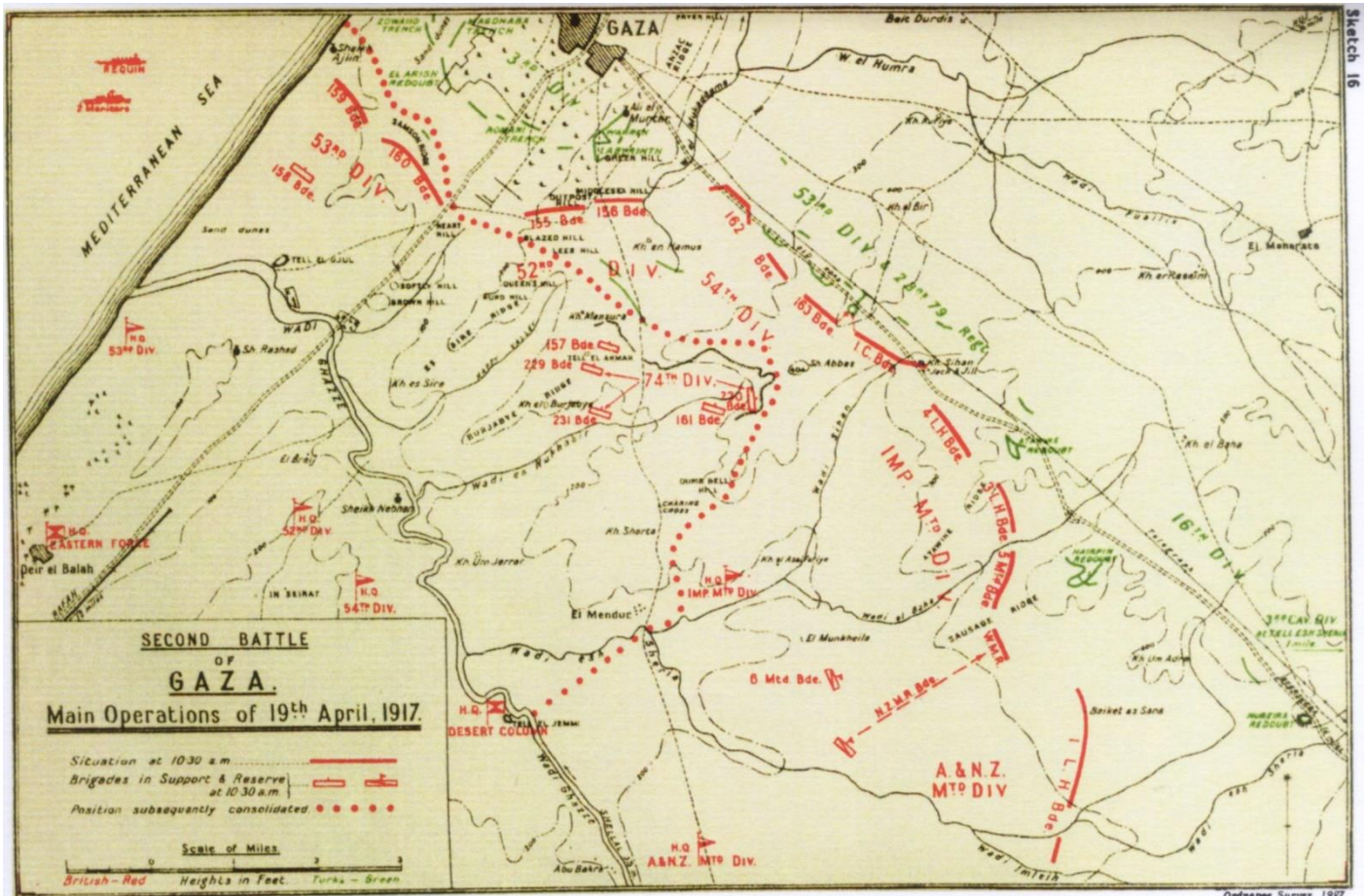
Walter and his father got themselves into a whole heap of trouble in the October of 1908 when they were summoned to appear before the magistracy. Abraham was charged with not sending Walter to school regularly enough. The School Attendance Officer, Mr Leonard Wislade informed the court that Walter had only attended 26 days out of 45 and this was not considered sufficient. In his defence Abraham suggested that he only kept Walter from school on one half day per week. Might this suggest that Walter was bunking off for the other times. No matter, Abraham was found guilty and fined 5 shillings plus costs. It appears this rural lad preferred the outdoor life to an academic one. Sadly, none of Walters service paper survive and hence we do not know exactly when he enlisted. When war broke out in 1914 he would have been eighteen and a half and ripe for recruitment. However, Walter was only awarded the Victory and British War medals at the end of the war which might suggest he enlisted after 1915. What we do know for sure was that he enlisted locally into the Herefordshire Regiment and as Private 3708 Pinches his life was to change forever. When fully trained, he was transferred into the active battalion of the regiment, the 1/1st Herefordshire Regiment. He was now a fully-fledged fighting soldier. In March 1917, an exercise was undertaken to renumber all men serving in Territorial Force (TF) infantry units, the 1/1st being one of these. Walters service number changed overnight and on the 1st March 1917, he was reinvented as Private 236361 Pinches.

The 1st/1st Battalion was formed in 1914 as part of the Welsh Border Brigade. They embarked at Devonport on the SS Euripides on 16th July 1915 bound for Port Said. They landed on 'C' beach at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey on the 9th August 1915 at 7.20 am. After their withdrawal from Gallipoli on 12th December 1915, they were transferred to Alexandria in Egypt, via the island of Lemnos. The battalion were based in Cairo and through early 1916 were tasked with the defence of the Suez Canal. When Ottoman troops started a march toward the Suez Herefords were involved in manoeuvres to halt and turn back the enemy advance. They took part in the Battle of Rumani in July 1916 and then moved deeper into Palestine taking the war to the Turks and Germans. Under General Allenby this action began the Palestine Campaign which was designed to drive Ottoman forces out of Palestine. The battalion was at the heart of all three battles for Gaza, and fighting around Beersheba, reaching Jerusalem in December 1917. It is unlikely that Walter fought in the Gallipoli campaign but we can be sure that he took part in the struggle to take Gaza.

In April 1917, the 1st Herefordshire Regiment formed part of the 160th Infantry Brigade, 53rd (Welsh) Division operating under the newly appointed Brigadier General S. F. Mott. Allied forces had previously assaulted Gaza in late March 1917, the 1st Battle of Gaza. During this fighting early gains were made and Gaza was almost taken. However, due to poor communication and a lack of headquarters staffs' appreciation of the battlefield, commanders ordered troops to withdraw,

much to the consternation of commanders in the field. Despite strong Turkish resistance progress had been made and with further investment of troops victory was at hand. The withdrawal meant that territory gained in gallant advances on the 26th March was effectively handed back to the enemy. Losses during the first battle were high with an estimated casualty list of some 4000 men killed or incapacitated. Many, if not most, of those casualties came from the 53rd (Welsh) Division, of which the Herefordshire Regiment were part. The three-week lull in fighting between the 1st and 2nd Battles of Gaza allowed both sides to regroup. Ottoman forces, supported by their German allies, quickly built a formidable defensive line stretching over 12 miles, from the Mediterranean in the west to Beersheba in the east. The whole battlefield was a mass of barbed wire protected trenchworks and myriad traps ready to ensnare an attacking force, Gaza was particularly heavily re fortified. Depleted allied forces were supplemented by fresh drafts of men but when battle recommenced on the 17th April the 53rd Division were still seriously under resourced.

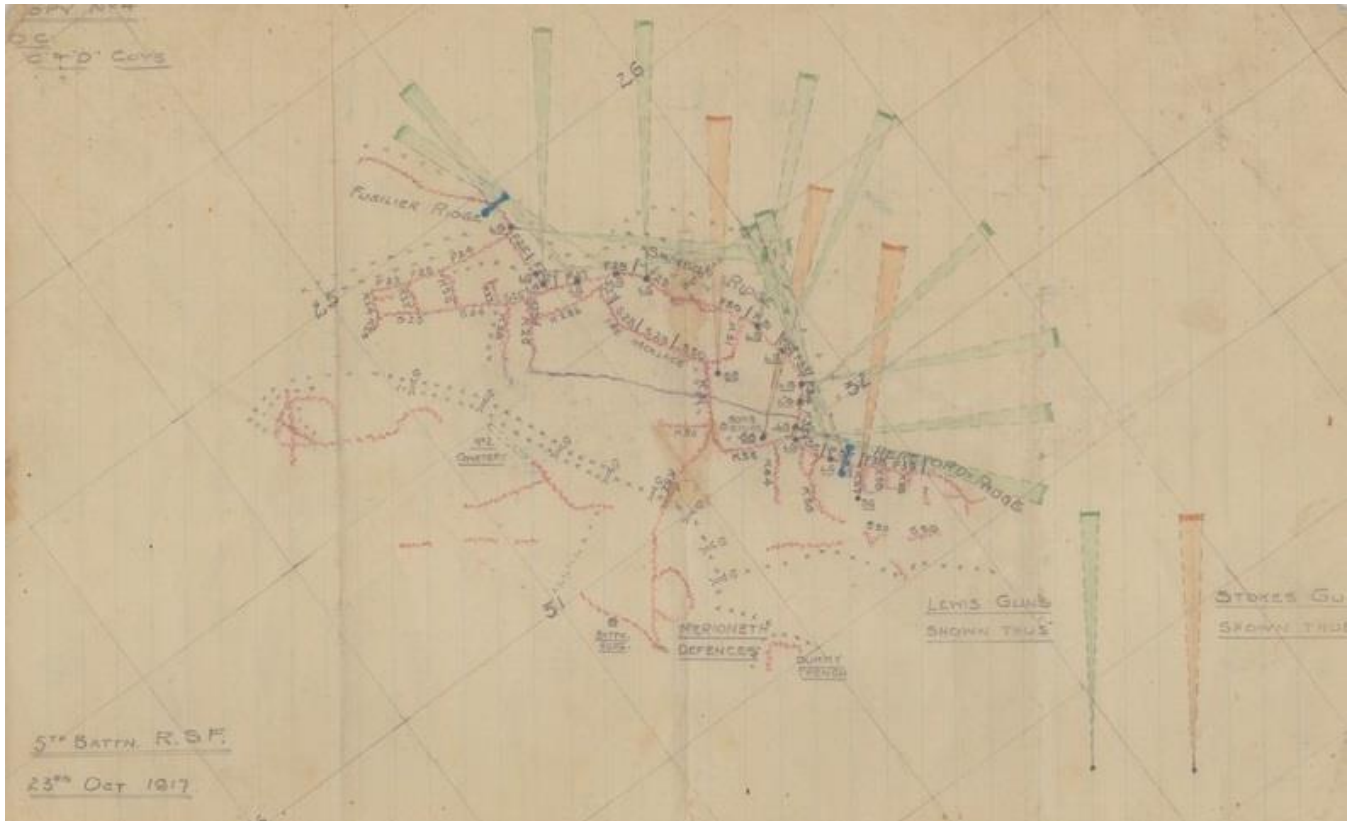
Fresh reconnaissance of Gaza defences was undertaken and a new plan of attack developed. On 15 April 1917, Ottoman forces were estimated to be 1,500 to 2,000 cavalry, 60 to 70 guns, and 20,000 to 25,000 infantry with a small reserve near Akra. Facing the enemy were three Divisions of allied troops, the 52nd (Lowland) Division, the 54th (East Anglian) Division and the 53rd (Welsh) Division, considered the most battle hardened and including the men of the Herefordshire Regiment. The 74th (Yeomanry) Division was to be held in reserve and two mounted Divisions of



the Desert Column were to mop up and deter Ottoman reinforcements on the right flank of the main attack. The dispositions of these troops can clearly be seen on the included map dated 19th April 1917. All this land based activity was to be supported by aerial reconnaissance aircraft and Naval Gunfire Support (NGS) from Monitors located off the coast of Gaza. And so, the scene was set for an epic battle with the two protagonists facing each other across the Wadi Ghuzze, a great dried up watercourse which drained water from the hills around Beersheba in the east down to the Mediterranean in the west

A two-phase plan was conceived starting with the 52nd and 54th Divisions, with 74th Division in reserve, swooping across the Wadi Ghuzze forcing the Ottoman forces back and then preparing for phase two, a full-frontal assault on Gaza. The 53rd (Welsh) Division, not to be confused with the 53rd Turkish Division seen in the map above, were given the phase two task of advancing upon Gaza from the south west along the Mediterranean coast. At 04:30 on 17 April the Canterbury Mounted Rifles Regiment led the way across the Wadi and four infantry Divisions followed.

I now turn to the excellent account of the Herefordshire Regiments, regimental history, **Manu Forti, written by Lieutenant-Colonel T.J.B. Hill, MBE, KSLI**. Hill provides a breath-taking and comprehensive account of the regiments actions during World War One, particularly in the Palestinian theatre of war. The 53rd (Welsh) Division consisted the 158th, 159th and 160th Brigades with the Herefords forming part of 160th Brigade. 159th and 160th Brigades were to be in the vanguard of the advance with 158th Brigade held in reserve. The Division started its advance in the early hours of the 19th April. The 160th Brigade had been set the task of taking Samson Ridge, clearly seen on the map above. Capturing the ridge was essential and provided an excellent observation position over the surrounding battlefield and Gaza itself. By mid-day on the 19th Samson Ridge was in the hands of the 160th Brigade. The Herefords were not involved in the initial advance but were soon called upon to reinforce Samson Ridge. Across the whole front the allies met with stiff Ottoman resistance and progress was halted. The following day, under the circumstances, it was decided not to advance further but to consolidate newly held ground. The Herefords were on the far right of Samson Ridge and staunchly held their ground against accurate incoming fire. Such was their determination to maintain their position that the sector they defended became known as Hereford Ridge. The hand drawn, Royal Scots Fusilier map attached, dated 23 October 1917 shows Hereford Ridge to the right of Samson Ridge. This map is significant in so much as it shows that the 2nd Battle of Gaza effectively ended on the 19th April in failure. Positions gained during the second battle were held and consolidated but Gaza was not taken. For the next six months, the Herefordshire Regiment were rotated in and out of the trenches many times ending up in the trench system named after them. The battle lines remained unchanged throughout those six months however this second lull in fighting once again allowed the Turkish army to reinforce



Gaza and as Hill eruditely states 'Gaza was converted into a veritable fortress'. The strategically important target of Gaza only fell to the allies in November 1917, this following a further major assault, the 3rd Battle of Gaza, in which many more good Herefordshire men lost their lives.

So, what was the fate of Walter? The 12th May 1917 edition of the Kington Times reported that 'W. Pinches has been wounded and taken prisoner by the Turks'. The 2nd Battle of Gaza began on 17th April 1917 and it is possible Walter was injured during that battle and taken prisoner by the enemy. The Kington Times goes on to record the names of three other Herefordshire men who were taken prisoner at that

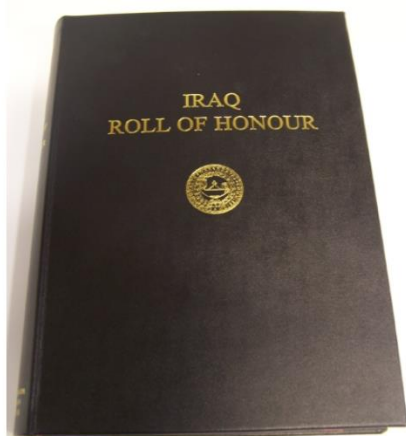


Baghdad (North Gate) Cemetery

time. Private Fred. W. Fuller of Shobdon, Private George Hughes from Brampton Bryan and Private Willard Reynolds from Leominster. Research reveals that Fuller, Hughes and Pinches all died while in the hands of Turkish forces and were originally buried in

cemeteries close to where they were held prisoner. Walter is recorded as having died on **25th September 1917** and was originally buried in Nigde Cemetery, Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. Nigde is a town in the south of the country just north of the border with Syria. At the end of the fighting Walters body was exhumed and reinterred in Baghdad (North Gate) War Cemetery in Iraq, grave reference 21.V.26. Baghdad (North Gate) War Cemetery is in a very sensitive area within the city of Baghdad. In 1914, Baghdad was the headquarters of the Turkish Army in Mesopotamia and was the ultimate objective of the Indian Expeditionary Force 'D'. The city finally fell in March 1917, but the position was not fully consolidated until the end of April. Nevertheless, it had by that time become the Expeditionary Force's advanced base, with two stationary hospitals and three Casualty Clearing Stations. The North Gate Cemetery was begun In April 1917 and has been greatly enlarged since the end of the First World War by graves brought in from other burial grounds in Baghdad and northern Iraq, and from battlefields and cemeteries in Anatolia where Commonwealth prisoners of war were buried by the Turks, Walter being one of them. Recent conflict in Iraq, particularly in and around Baghdad, has made maintaining this cemetery

to the standard expected an exceptionally difficult task for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The cemetery was extensively damaged in 2009 when a car bomb was detonated close to the cemetery, the target being an adjacent embassy. The Cross of Sacrifice and many gravestones were severely damaged and urgent repairs were required. In 2012 the



Commission managed to repair the boundary fencing of the cemetery and to re-erect 511 damaged headstones. A further 500 required renovation and as of 2013 the Cross of Sacrifice still required major repairs. Such are tensions in Iraq at present that pilgrims are deterred from visiting the graves, instead a two volume Roll of Honour listing all casualties buried in Iraq has been produced and are on public display at the Commission's Head Office in Maidenhead. To this day, one hundred years after his death, Walter still struggles to be at rest.

For the Pinches family in Evenjobb, the war was to have a catastrophic outcome. In November 1916, Abraham and Elizabeth learnt of the death of their son James during fighting in the Salonika conflict. Now, just ten months later, they had lost a second son, but the war had not finished with them yet. Just two days later, on the 27th September 1917 a third son, Edward, was to lose his life fighting on the Western Front. War is a cruel and unforgiving endeavour and today we can but try to imagine

the suffering it caused the Pinches family. A Peace Service was held at St. Marys church on the 6th July 1919 at which Edward, James and Walters names were read out along with sixty-two other Kington men who gave the ultimate sacrifice. Abraham and Elizabeth's other two sons, William and George, appear to have survived the war and the record shows that by 1917 the family were living at Rough Close in Walton. Abraham died in 1937 at the age of 76 and Elizabeth survived him by a further five years, also dying at 76, in 1942. For his efforts and sacrifice Walter was awarded the Victory and British War medals, which seems like scant recompense for his suffering. These quiet men from Kington, who fought in places they had probably never heard of, will always be remembered.

