

Thomas George Cooke

Private

1259

1st Battalion, Herefordshire Regiment



In the Kington summer of 1895 George Cook married a girl from Bolton, Cicely Ellen Tomlinson. Within the year their first son Thomas George Cook arrived, followed a couple years later by a brother John Victor Cook. Cicely was to have a further four children but all of them died. George was a 'timber feller' who has proven elusive and hard to trace. However, in the 1901 census we find Cicely, Thomas and John living with Cicely's mother, Mary Tomlinson, at 6 Baynams Yard in Bridge Street, Kington. Thomas is four at this time and soon after started going to Kington Boys School for his education. In the 1911 census Cicely has moved out of her mother's home and is found living in Yarpole with her husband George. The two boys are still living with their Grandmother but now at 3 Ashmoor Place which was just up Kingswood Road, Headbrook. By this time Thomas has left school and at the age of 14 is working as a Grocers Errand boy.

When the time came for volunteers Thomas was one of the first Kington men to step up to the mark. We find that by November 1914, Private 1259 Cook has enlisted, along with many other Kington lads, into 'D' Company the 1st Herefordshire Regiment and has been assessed fit and inoculated ready for overseas service. Throughout 1914 the regiment were training around Britain serving as home defence in Pembroke Dock, Oswestry, Northampton, Colchester and Rusden. Considered fully trained, on 16th July 1915 the Regiment embarked aboard the SS Euripides at Devonport and sailed to join the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. The ultimate destination of the Battalion was kept a secret but the men on Euripides had no doubt where they were headed, Gallipoli. The Gallipoli campaign of 1915 was fought in an attempt to force Turkey out of the war and to open a supply route to Russia through the Dardanelles and into The Black Sea. The Allies

initially landed on the peninsula on 25th and 26th April but the advance up the peninsula was soon bogged down with bitter trench warfare ensuing. To relieve the stalemate a plan was devised to land troops at Suvla Bay on the north side of the peninsula and to isolate the Turkish Army on the peninsula thus enabling the Allied Army to proceed further into Turkey.



Herefordshire Regiment Landing at Suvla Bay, 9th August 1915

At 7:20am on the 9th August 1915 the 1/1st Herefordshire Regiment landed on a beach just below Nibrunesi Point in Suvla Bay. Communications between invading forces was poor, the distribution of Turkish forces was unknown, and the terrain was appalling and heat oppressive. The regiment soon became disorientated but fought on gallantly. Sir Ian Hamilton, the Commander in Chief of the landings later wrote. "Some of the units which took part in this engagement acquitted themselves very bravely". The Divisional Commander speaks with appreciation of one freshly-landed battalion of the 53rd Division, a Hereford battalion, presumably the 1/1st Herefordshire, "which attacked with impetuosity and courage between Hetman Chair and Kaslar Chair, about Asmak Dere, on the extreme right of the line". For their part in the landings at Suvla Bay on the 9th August 1915 the regiment was mentioned in dispatches and forever immortalised in a painting by Charles Dixon which for many years hung on the wall of the stairway in the Shire Hall, Hereford. This painting is now proudly displayed at the Herefordshire's Regimental Museum in Hereford.

Private Thomas Cook is recorded as having 'died of his wounds' on the 10th August 1915, the day after the regiment landed. Whether he was injured in the landings or the following day we may never know, what we can say is that Thomas served just two days in a theatre of war. He was not to suffer the torment of the Herefordshire Regiment during their ill-fated Gallipoli campaign. Some might suggest he was fortunate.

Thomas George Cook is buried at the 7th Field Ambulance Cemetery, Gallipoli, grave number Sp Mem B29, not that far from where he landed in Suvla Bay. The cemetery lies 190m up a track from the road connecting the Anzac and Suvla areas. The cemetery is on low ground, close under the shelter of a hill



7th Australian Field Ambulance Cemetery, Gallipoli

between Chailak Dere and Aghyl Dere. The cemetery was named after the 7th Australian Field Ambulance who landed there in September 1915. There are now 640 graves in the cemetery, 350 of which were brought in from smaller burial sights after the Armistice. It is highly likely Thomas was one of those. His death was reported in the 11th September 1915 edition of the Kington Times and for his sacrifice was awarded the 1914-15 Star, British and Victory Medals.

In an unexpected twist Thomas's medals, Pip, Squeak and Wilfred, along with his death plaque, came up for sale in 2014 in an Ipswich auction house. Kington Museum and the Herefordshire Regimental Museum were both interested in acquiring the medals and to bring them home. Both museums were unsuccessful and the medals are now owned by an unknown bidder.



Little more is known of the family after the war. There are no records to suggest John Victor went to war and the whereabouts of George and Cicely are shaded in mystery. There is however a Weobley marriage record between a Cicely Cook and Edward Morgan in 1932. So it is possible Cecily remarried.