

Wilfred Cooke

Private

2081

1st Battalion, Herefordshire Regiment



When James Cook married Jane Matilda Angel, toward the end of 1890, he was working as a labourer in one of the Dolyhir quarries. He had married into a family of Kington Stone Hauliers with Jane's parents, James and Ann Angel, managing the business from premises in Floodgates. Shortly after their marriage James and Jane gave birth to their first child, Ernest (1891) with Wilfred Cook arriving just three years later in 1894. Five years later a sister for the two boys, Gertrude, arrived. Sadly James Angel died in 1894 and in the next census return, 1901, James Cook was working for the new proprietor of the haulier company, Ann Angel. The whole family were living under the same roof, still in Floodgates. Wilfred attended Kington Boys' School on Gravel Hill but by the 1911 census, aged 16, he is recorded as working with his father James and both of them are now working for Ann Angel, who by this time is aged 77 and it would appear still running the hauliers business. The indomitable Ann Angel died in 1912 and we must assume that her son-in-law James Cook took over the company.

As is the case with many of the lads on the memorial little is known of their service history due to their records having been destroyed in the Second World War. The records which do survive indicate Wilfred joined 1st Battalion the Herefordshire Regiment as Private 2081 Cooke in late 1914. Wilfred's Medal Index Card (MIC) provides the information that Wilfred first entered the war on the 9th August 1915 at Suvla Bay, on the Gallipoli Peninsular. Wilfred's experiences with the 1st Herefordshire's

would have been the same as Ivor Boucher and his namesake Thomas Cooke. All three would have boarded the SS Euripides at Devonport and sailed to join the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. Only once they had sailed would they have discovered their destination was Gallipoli.



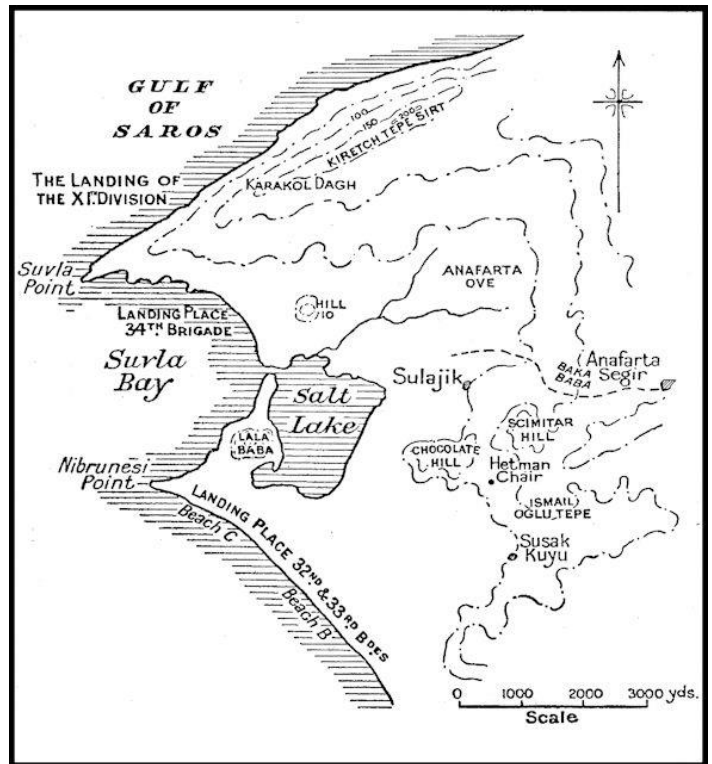
Herefordshire Regiment Landing at Suvla Bay, 9th August 1915

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 this enabling the Allied Army to defeat the enemy and then proceed further into Turkey and safeguard the Dardanelles channel. Ivor Boucher was to die on the day of the landings, the 9th August with Thomas Cooke dying the following day.

Wilfred survived the initial onslaught only then to be forced to endure the unimaginable horrors of the infamous Gallipoli Campaign. Following the failed attempt to cut off the peninsula and thus isolate the Turks the battalion dug-in and a period of trench warfare ensued. The Turkish army held the high ground and were able to strafe and bombard the British troops at will. As if that did not make their lives difficult enough they were plagued by swarms of murderous flies and combined with the heat and insanitary conditions, it was inevitable that sickness levels would begin to rise. Dysentery and jaundice were serious and major causes of ill health. In spite of the rising sickness levels defences around the British positions were enhanced and miles upon miles of barbed wire barricades were erected. The battalion stayed in their frontline position until the 25th of September when they were relieved and able to return to the relative safety of Karakol Dag, not far from where they had initially landed.

They might have expected some creature comforts here but no, conditions at Karakol Dag were as harsh as if the men were in the trenches on the frontline. There were no

tents or hutments for the men to live in and they were forced to exist in the open on the bare hillside. Employment at Karakol Dagh was centred on fatigues, essential and hard work designed to keep the men occupied. The most arduous and disliked was 'water fatigue'. Their encampment was located high above the beaches of Suvla Bay and water had to be collected from the beach twice a day. The men would descend to the beach via a precipitous path with petrol cans in hand. When on the beach they would top the cans up with water and then start their return journey. This was even harder, climbing the steep path loaded with water. The men hated it but understood the essential need for that particular fatigue.



In October the weather changed, from oppressive heat to heavy rains and bitterly cold winds. During the dry period the regiment had developed defensive positions at a place called Azmak Dere, in a small ravine which ran toward the salt lake at Suvla Bay. Both the British and Turkish troops had built barbed wire barricades across the ravine, the Turks at the top. When the rains came the Turkish barricades formed a sort of dam in the river which held back tons and tons of water. Suddenly, on the 26th of November, the dam broke allowing a cascade of water to flow down onto the British trenches. Devastation resulted and many casualties occurred. As if that wasn't bad enough it then started snowing, leaving the men wet, cold and in need of some decent food. They had no option but to bivouac amongst the open sand dunes and the temperature continued to fall. To compensate for the atrocious conditions a double ration of rum was ordered. Overnight on the 28th of November the daily food ration and rum were delivered by wagon. The wagon crew must have been desperate to return to the relative comfort of their headquarters because, not reporting their arrival, they simply left the rum and rations lying by the side of the road. In the morning when the men awoke and started walking around, as men do, they came upon the provisions. Despite being hungry some set about the rum and the effect on empty stomachs was predictable. Being suitably warmed on the inside, some of the men lost their senses and set about discarding their boots and clothing. In the extreme cold conditions the results were unimaginable. Many of the exposed men were taken to hospital and survived, but many did not.

We will never know if Wilfred was one of these men who froze to death but the records show he died of exposure on the **29th of November 1915**. On the 11th December Wilfred's death was reported in the Kington Times, the report stated that he had died of exposure. The official records simply record that he 'died'. On the 12th of December the Herefordshire Regiment were evacuated from the beaches of Gallipoli, their ordeal over. Wilfred was buried on the Gallipoli Peninsula and his name is included on the



Helles War Memorial, Gallipoli Peninsula

Helles Memorial, panel 198. The Helles Memorial is an obelisk which stands on the tip of the Gallipoli Peninsula and is over 30 metres tall. The memorial now bears the names of more than 21,000 Commonwealth men, many who have no known grave. Not only does it commemorate the sacrifice of military men but it is so prominent that it now serves as a navigation aid to shipping. Wilfred was just 21 when he died.

A year later, on the Sunday 24th of September 1916 a memorial service was held for Wilfred at St Mary's Church, Kington. The service was not only attended by his family and the people of Kington but also members of the Herefordshire Regiment, some of whom had served through the Dardanelles Campaign with Wilfred. Wilfred's passing was also remembered during the July 1919, Kington Peace Service, where his name was read out along with 64 other Kington men who failed to return.

At wars end Wilfred was awarded the Victory and British War medals and also the 1915 Star for his efforts in the Gallipoli campaign.

