

William Henry Bufton

Private

2376

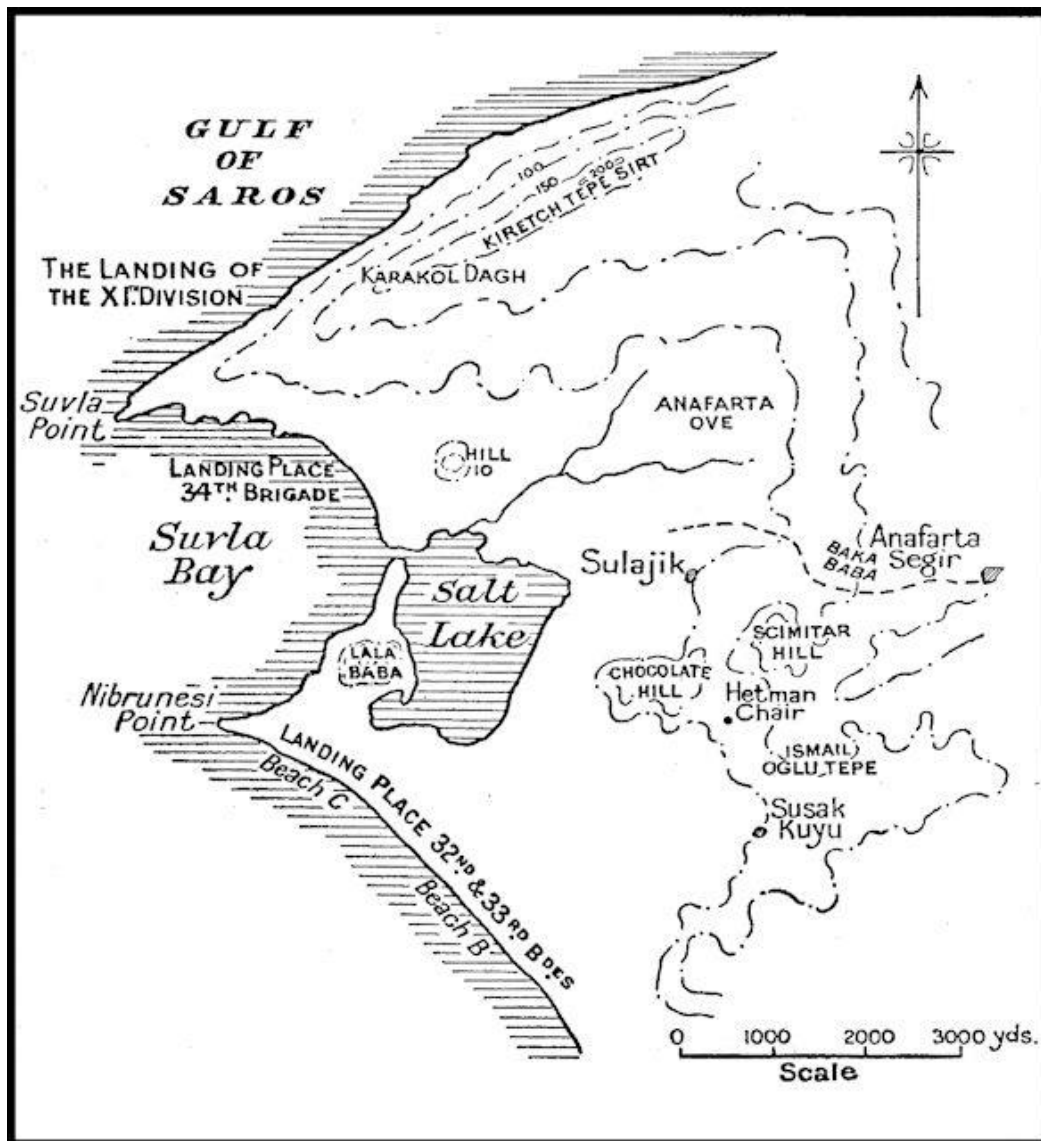
Herefordshire Regiment



William Henry Bufton (Harry) was born in the autumn of 1896 in Rodd Hurst just outside Presteigne on the road to Kington. A look at the 1901 census provides an indication of Harry's early life and at first glance it looks pretty bleak. He is living with his grandfather, John and grandmother Mary, his mother Mary Ann Bufton, sister Maud aged six and younger brother Edgar just two, at his grandparents' house in the Dingle, Rushock. Harry and Edgars birth certificates give no indication as to who their fathers were but we do learn that on both occasions Mary Ann was employed as a domestic servant. Sadness afflicted young Harry and his family when his grandmother, Mary Bufton, died in the winter of 1906. By the time of the April 1911 census the Bufton family had moved closer to Kington, just along The Rackway, not far from the golf course. Grandfather John is recorded as the head of the family and Mary Ann appears to have assumed the role of matriarch. Harry initially attended Kington Boys School on Gravel Hill, but by 1911, at the age of fourteen, it appears he no longer attends school. The family was again hit by tragedy toward the end of 1911 when Mary Ann sadly passed away however, about this time some small measure of happiness lightened the family's circumstances when in 1913 Harry's sister Maud married Aaron Thomas Lloyd, but as each year passed so the Bufton family got smaller and smaller and life on the Rackway must have become lonelier for Harry. When old enough Harry found work at Womaston, near Walton, working as a farm labourer for a Mr Goodwin but, with little to hold Harry to Kington, when the call to arms came in August 1914, Harry was one of the first to enlist.

On the 11th September 1914 Harry enlisted into the Herefordshire Regiment and became Private 2376 Bufton. He was soon training with his new pals, first in

Northampton and in November moving to Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk, where the regiment were employed entrenching along the east coast. By July 1915 the regiment were considered fully prepared for overseas service and on the 3rd July received orders to prepare for service in the Mediterranean. The regiment travelled to Devonport by train and on the 16th July boarded the S.S. Euripides and sailed south. Their ultimate destination was kept secret but the men were fully aware of events in the Dardenelles and would have guessed that to be their destination. The initially April landings on the Gallipoli peninsula were completely bogged down and another front was needed if any further advances were to be achieved.



The Herefords landed at Suvla Bay, Beach 'C', on the 9th August 1915 and were immediately in the thick of fierce fighting. Harry's service records partially survive and from those we learn that he was not involved in the initial landings but finally went ashore on the 22nd August. Conditions were appalling, hot, insanitary and with very limited water and food supplies. It was inevitable that sickness would soon debilitate the fighting efficiency of the Herefords and sure enough, on the 15th September, Harry was admitted into medical care with severe diarrhoea. His condition deteriorated and on the 24th he was evacuated to Cairo and hospitalised. However, by the end of October he had recovered sufficiently to be readmitted to the regiments Base Depot at Alexandria. It was about this time that Harry heard the distressing news from home

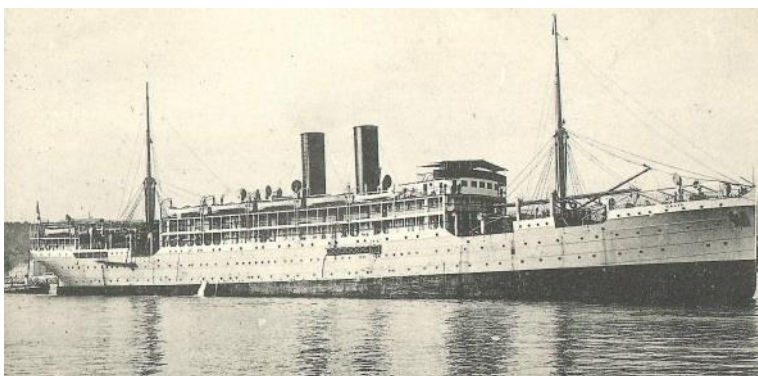
that his grandfather, John Bufton, had passed away at the age of 73. His family circle continued to decrease but it was in Alexandria that he recuperated and on the 20th November was fit enough to re-join his pals at Gallipoli. These were unbearably hard times for Harry but when we discover what happened next we realise things only got worse.

In November the regiment were entrenched at Azmak Dere, just to the north east of Hill 10 on the map above. Azmak Dere, is a deep ravine which takes water runoff from the surrounding hills and runs south-westward into the north side of the Salt Lake. During the hot, dusty, dry months the ravine had been barricaded at either end by both the British and the Turks, across these barricades the protagonists faced each other. In November torrential rain and thunderstorms soaked everything and everyone. But more severely the water which should have ran freely down the Dere was dammed by the barricade's and when the weight of water behind the Turkish barricade at the top became too much the dam gave way and tons of water rushed down the ravine and entered the British trenches. Reports suggest the torrent of water was eight or nine feet in depth and swept all before it. It was dark when the flood came and to escape the torrent the men were forced to evacuate the protection of their trenches and, in fear of being shot, scabbled onto the tops of their trenches. They need not have worried, the Turks had done exactly the same and both forces simply walked around in disbelief. Not a shot was fired. The next day the ambient temperature plummeted, everything and everyone started freezing and then it snowed.

The men struggled to keep warm, forced to endure the effects of the extreme conditions. Many Herefordshire men suffered, some died and some were evacuated from the peninsula. Consulting Harry's medical record we discover he was one of those evacuated and on the 7th December was admitted to St. David's hospital on Malta, suffering from exposure. St. David's was a large tented hospital facility established as a response to the increasing numbers of casualties emerging from Gallipoli. Malta's central location in the Mediterranean meant it was the ideal location for casualties to be removed to from various theatres of war, it was to become affectionately known as the 'Nurse of the Mediterranean' and treated many thousands of casualties. Severely affected by frost bite Harry spent Christmas 1915 in St. David's. Progress back on the peninsula was non-existent and conditions were devastating, as a result, plans were made to withdraw all troops. Following the exposure incident in November very few of the original Herefordshire's regimental strength survived. Just eighteen weeks earlier,

750 Herefordshire men had landed at Suvla Bay, when they were evacuated in December there were less than 100. The bedraggled unit were sent to Alexandria and from there to Cairo where they proceeded to lick their wounds and regroup.

Harry was only considered fit to leave hospital on the 13th February 1916 at which time he was released for duty



Salta before her wartime service. Sunk 10th April 1917 when she hit a mine laid by a German U-boat off the entrance to Le Havre

equates to about £180, which doesn't seem much for the sacrifice of a life. In July 1919 a Peace Service was held at St. Mary's church and Harry's name was read out with a further sixty-four Kington men who lost their lives. Later, in May 1922, a memorial plaque was unveiled at Kington Boy's School. 'Old boys' who lost their lives were remembered and honour was paid to all three services on the memorial. This magnificent memorial plaque was designed and produced by a member of staff, miss Lois Maxwell, and as such forms a unique memorial to the fallen. Sadly, the school closed long ago and the whereabouts of the memorial are unknown today. Harry may not have been at the sharp end of war for very long but he did his duty and suffered for it.

As for what happened to Harry's remaining family. When old enough Edgar also joined the Herefordshire Regiment, but because of his age was put on a reserve list. At wars end he married Violet Rosa Holmes in Bedford, where he stayed for the rest of his life until his death on 18th Feb 1948, at the relatively young age of 49. Aaron and Maud continued to live on Haywood Common with Aaron employed as a waggoner on School Farm, Upper Hergest. He died on the 19th September 1963 in Hereford at the ripe old age of 75. His wife Maud, or Lillian as she preferred to be known, survived Aaron for a further thirteen years and in 1976 she too passed away in Hereford at the grand old age of just 82 years.



This biography has been researched and produced by

Mark Wheatland

A member of 'Kington Remembers'