

Lest we Forget – Henry (Harry) Hall

We continue with our occasional articles on those who lost their lives in military service during World War 1 and are remembered on our War Memorial in the grounds of St Mary's.

Harry was the son of an Agricultural labourer and was born in Wick in 1879. The eldest of four children, it seems that Harry left the village in his teens, probably as a result of getting a job elsewhere – although his family remained in the village for some years after. The last published census of 1911 records that his mother, Elizabeth, was then a widow and living alone.

There is very little evidence available now about Harry, his life after he left Wick and his military service during WW1.

What is recorded on the plaque inside our church is that Harry joined the 5th Princess Charlotte of Wales Dragoon Guards. It seems that he was one of the very first to join the regiment in August 1914 and it is assumed that he volunteered immediately when war was declared that month.

Records from around that time indicate that a number of men who were either recalled to military service in the regiment or where new recruits found themselves sent to Dunbar in Scotland before being moved down south and then off to France,



Soldiers of the 5th Dragoons in Dunbar at the Cavalry Depot.

The War Diaries of the Regiment are held in the National Archives in Kew and are now available. They recorded in some detail the movement of the troops and daily reports of action. From these we know that the Regiment, led by Lt. Col. Ansell had a total strength of 549 men consisting of 30 Officers and 519 "rank and file" when they departed on 15th August 1914 from Farnborough by train and then ship across the Chanel on their way to the Front.

The diaries provide an account of each day and the first couple of weeks are spent moving around the borders of France and Belgium before the regiment take up position on the

outskirts of Mons in an attempt by the British Forces to hold back the advancing Germany army. The following extract from the diary dated 1st Sept provides a graphic account of their first real encounter with the enemy

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| Tuesday Sept.1 | <p>Partridge shooting begins! *</p> <p>A very thick misty morning. The ball opened with half a dozen shells bursting over the village. Immediately all was bustle. Everybody ran to the lines to saddle up, under the shell and rifle fire. "C" Squadron was ordered to hold the houses facing E. "A" and "B" Squadrons were quickly collected and galloped under Colonel Ansell to the N. with the object of turning the German right flank....</p> <p>"L" Battery, Royal Horse Artillery suffered most heavily of all. All their officers and men who were in the battery were killed or wounded except Major Sclater-Booth commanding, the Battery Sergeant-Major and their French interpreter. The two latter were left at the end of the fight, still serving a gun. Captain Bradbury, Royal Horse Artillery, had a leg shot off and continued doing his duty until his other leg was carried away by a shell, when his only request was that he be carried away to the rear, in order that his men might not hear him groaning. All the gun team horses were found shot and lying in their teams.</p> <p>Colonel Ansell's move to the flank had the desired effect of making the Germans withdraw but he unfortunately he was killed in the doing of it. He had ridden to the crest of a bluff to view the situation and was shot through the right breast. A corporal and two men carried him to shelter, where he died in a quarter of an hour. His last order to them was to get back to the firing line and leave him.</p> |
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**Not sure if this phrase was a play on words or not – "C" Squadron was led by a Captain Partridge. Clearly though the diary writer had an interesting turn of phrase as demonstrated by one of the last entries for that day which states "The only desire of the English at Nery at that moment was to get outside an excellent breakfast!"*

As can be seen by the above extract, the diaries make mention of Officers but rarely give the name of other ranks in accounts. There is nothing known about how Harry fared in all of this fighting but we know the 5th Dragoons spent the whole of the War in France and Belgium and were in the thick of the action.

After Armistice was declared in November 1918, the Dragoons were ordered into Germany.

Whilst most of the soldiers were slowly being allowed to demobilise and return to Britain, records show that Harry died on 16th February 1919 and was laid to rest in a military grave in Cologne Sothorn Cemetery.

In All Saints Garrison Church at Aldershot there is a plaque that names every Officer and Other Ranks who gave their lives in the Great War 1914-1918; all 192 of them. However, Harry's name does not appear on this. Perhaps this was because he died of "natural causes" and may even have fallen victim to the Spanish Flu that was sweeping across Europe at that time. Despite this omission from that Memorial, clearly his mother made sure his name appears on our memorial in the grounds of his home church of St Mary's in order that his sacrifice is not forgotten.