

## ‘I remember him’

The date was 30th April 1916... the date Thomas Harrison died aged 38.

I remember him saying that he was born in Preston, Lancashire born to Henry and Margaret Harrison. He married Margaret Ellen Harrison and had 3 children – Lily, Ivy and Walter. He told me he worked as a lamp lighter for the Corporation but he always wanted to fight for King and country so he leaped at the chance to sign up on the 9th April 1915. Just over a year he served before he was wounded during the third attack on Sanniyat. He was rushed to my hospital where I cared for him. He told me all about his war experiences and what he had to endure.

Once he signed up he went through weeks of intensive training along with other people in his regiment; he said it was very tiring but he enjoyed it still the same. After his training was completed he had a twelve day voyage to Kuwait, he described the journey as calm with the weather being fairly cool and that he passed fierce rugged hills. His regiment then travelled up river arriving at Basra in a “terrific thunderstorm with torrents of rain”. He described the Arabs as extremely picturesque when they came out of their tents or huts to see them pass by surrounded by nude children and women wrapped in scarves holding baskets above their heads. However he told me that things soon turned dark as once they reached camp there was a lot of fatigue due to lack of food and that the Indian tents in which they slept in were “quite uncomfortable”.



He described things as only getting worse as once they heard that General Townsend and his troops were surrounded by the Turks Thomas and his regiment were sent to force the lines on the left bank, creating a way for them to escape. He explained how they rode down to Sheikh Said on horseback. Thomas had never ridden a horse so he joked to me about how uncomfortable the journey was and how he had nearly fallen off several times. I laughed along with him. He remembered being assembled in large

groups, the attack plan being explained to them – he told me about how he remembers seeing the nervous looks on his fellow comrades' faces. He also relived the excellent tea they had that night with strawberry jam which was an unheard luxury; he said it was just as good as the hospital food. He would outline the amount of extensive training they underwent out on the plain of the Turkish trenches and how the night before there was torrential rain soaking all of them to the skin.

The first two attacks were unsuccessful in freeing General Townsend and his troops. He described how they came under heavy artillery fire with the sound of explosions that still rang in his ears up to his dying day. His last battle started on the 22nd April 1916, he went into some detail about the battle although he explained that he didn't remember some parts. He remembered hearing gunshots all around him, the scream of his fellow comrades dying in the cold darkness. He remembered hearing and seeing his deep breathing as he tried to fire a gun with his cold, numb fingers. He told me how he looked up at the stars when it was safe and dreamed about his family and how he wished he could see them again. He explained to me how he had a gut feeling that something was going to happen. He was right. Not long after he felt a sharp pain in his back and shoulder then everything went black...



Thomas Harrison then woke up in hospital with me next to him. His last few days of life were painful for him physically and emotionally. He was bedridden so he had plenty of time to tell me his story and I'm glad he did because I will never forget it. A little birdy told me that he received the Victory medal, also called the Inter Allied Victory Medal, which after what he endured he deserves it.

RIP Thomas Harrison.