

Percival Samuel HARRIS

Born Exeter, Q4, 1893

Died 28 September 1918, aged 24

Private 30485

"Y" Coy. 11th Bn. East Lancashire Regiment

P S Harris was the grandson of Samuel and Elizabeth Harris. Samuel was born in Crediton ca 1844 and Elizabeth came from Tedburn St Mary and was two years younger. He worked on the land and they settled in Tedburn and were at Little Uppacott in 1871 with three children, but the census form shows that two were born blind. The other child was named Samuel (1866-) and he appears to have been a healthy child. In 1881 the family had moved only a short distance to 2 North Park Cottage. The youngest blind child, John (1869-), is no longer shown in their household but James (1864-) also blind, is still living but without an occupation at 17 years of age. They went on to have eight children of which two died before 1911. Blind John survived and became an organist at the parish church when the parents returned to live at Tedburn St Mary and Samuel was a council road worker.

Samuel the son married Rose Chenneour in Exeter in 1886 (GRO ref Exeter Apr-June 1886, vol 5b, p153) when he was 19 and they were shown living at Commercial Road in the Parish of St Mary Steps, Exeter in 1891, with three children:

Alice,	dau,	4	(1887-)
Albert,	son,	2	(1889-)
Frederick,	son,	5 months	(1890-)

Rose Chenneour can be found on a family tree (Ancestry – Sanders tree) as one of nine children of Frederick and Mary Honeychurch Chenneour of Exeter. The indication here is that the surname is derived from Chenoweth which may be of Cornish origin. Rose was born in 1859.

Samuel had employment as a Carter and Rose as a Shopkeeper in 1891, and in 1901 and 1911 Samuel is described as a Carman, possibly working with motors which were appearing on the streets. Their five children were at home at 18 James Street, Exeter:

Alice,	dau,	24	Tailoress, at home	born	Exeter, St John
Albert,	son,	22	Glass worker		"
Frederick,	marr son,	20	Cellarman		Exeter, Mary Steps
Percival Samuel	17	Apprentice, woolen trade			"
Lily,	dau,	13	School		"
Annie Julia	dau-in-law	20			Thrushelton

Thus far there is no hint of a connection to Dawlish, but in 1917 **Percival** married Emily Jane Short in Exeter (GRO ref Exeter, Oct-Dec 1917, vol 5b, p168). Her parents were also from Exeter. William Robert Short (1866-1940) and Mary Emma (nee Salter) lived in Summerland Row in 1871-1901 when William changed from general labouring to the plastering trade. The Shorts were living at 1 Portland Road in 1901 and moved to 39 Russell Street by 1911.

Army records show that Emily Jane Harris (1894-1975)(born 13 November 1894) was notified of her husband's death when she was living at "The Mount", Dawlish, and later at Cyprus House, Dawlish. One may imagine that Emily was not told about the preparation for a War Memorial in Dawlish, or that, because her husband had never lived in Dawlish, he may not have been eligible for a listing here. But he is not included on any of the Exeter war memorials, and it is therefore fitting that he is remembered where his wife would have been most at a loss after his death.

Percival Samuel Harris was a Private, service no 30485. He was first attached to the Army Service Corps as a driver, no. T4/210594, then given the ASC no.773 before finally transferring to the 11th Battalion, East Lancashire Regiment, "y" company (also known as the "Accrington Pals" Battalion). The Pals Battalion suffered greatly in the Battle of the Somme in July 1916 and was eventually rebuilt to full strength.

The 11th Battalion was engaged in the Battle of Ypres (The final advance on Flanders) from 28 September to 2 October, 1918 and on the 28th September they attacked Ploegstreet Wood in Belgium where P S Harris was killed.

(extract from the website – Accrington Pals)

A fresh series of Allied offensives opened on 26th September 1918 when more than 700 tanks supported by infantry of the French 4th Army and US 1st Army struck on the Meuse-Argonne front. On the 27th, the Hindenburg Line near Cambrai was breached by the British 1st and 3rd Armies. Then at 5.30am on the 28th, the Belgian Army and British 2nd Army attacked at Ypres.

On the right of the main offensive at Ypres, the 11th East Lancashire Regt. (Accrington Pals) and the 10th East Yorkshire Regt. (Hull Commercial) were deployed for attack on Hill 63, north-west of Ploegsteert Wood.

At 3pm on the 28th, the East Lancashires advanced down the eastern slopes of Hill 63 under the cover of a creeping barrage. The battalion immediately came under machine-gun fire from the right. Minutes later, German artillery opened fire. Despite sustaining heavy casualties while moving across ground tangled with old shell holes, wire, trench systems and concrete emplacements, the East Lancashires managed to make good progress.

At 3.34pm "X" and "Y" companies of the East Lancashires were seen nearing their first objective. "W" and "Z" companies then took over the attack.

By 4pm "W" Company, led by Capt. John Duff, was nearing the final objective despite being caught in heavy machine-gun fire from the left. Duff then ordered a further attack on La Douve Farm, which was taken and held against heavy counter-attacks. On the right, "Z" Company was still moving forward but more slowly. Two hours later, the exposed right flank of "Z" Company, though supported by artillery and machine-gun fire, was struggling to contain German counter-attacks. At 6.20pm the battalion was forced to form a defensive flank along the high ground 400yds north of Ploegsteert Wood facing south. The battalion front then stabilised on or ahead of the line of the final objective on the left, but 400yds short of it on the right. Overnight, Ploegsteert Wood was evacuated by the enemy.

The successful advance of the 11th East Lancashires - made in spite of both flanks being exposed - came at a heavy cost of 358 killed, wounded and missing. Some 50 prisoners were taken, along with a field gun, 17 machine-guns, 2 trench mortars and an anti-tank rifle.

By evening on the 28th, the Allied armies had taken 4,000 prisoners at Ypres, and were in control of the Passchendaele ridge. Ludendorff, Chief of the German General Staff, now saw no alternative but to seek an armistice. The following day, the British 4th Army smashed through the Hindenburg Line. The end of the war was in sight.

Percival Samuel Harris died on 28 September, 1918 and is shown as 'Killed in action'. He is buried at Underhill Farm Cemetery, Comines-Warneton, Hainault, Belgium in grave D.52. (Commonwealth War Graves entry).

He is not listed in the Devon Roll of Honour for Dawlish, nor on the Dawlish War memorial.

Next of kin: Wife, Emily Jane Harris. The death of Emily Jane Harris is recorded in June 1975, aged 80 within the Newton Abbot District. (GRO ref 1975 Apr-Jun, N.A., Vol 21, p 1584) She received the Death Grant of £1. 0s. 9d. And the War Gratuity of £17. 19s. 3d.

He was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

CWGC entry

HARRIS, PERCIVAL SAMUEL, Private, Service Number 30485

Died 28/09/1918, Aged 25

"Y" Coy. 11th Bn. East Lancashire Regiment

Son of Mr. and Mrs. S. Harris, of 137, Monks Rd., Exeter; husband of Emily J. Harris, of "The Mount," Dawlish, Devon.

References:

CWGC

Free Birth Marriage and Death refs

The Accrington Pals story - <http://www.pals.org.uk/psteert.htm>

Refs from subscription sources:

Forces War Records

Census data

Ancestry family trees (Sanders family tree and James family tree)

UK, Army Register of Soldiers' Effects

Army Medal Record Card