

Sidney Harold Kerswell had been born in Dawlish in 1894 to James Kerswell (1837-1908) and Frances/ Fanny Little Rickard (1856-1935). James Kerswell had been born in Crediton, became a seaman and he married Frances (Fanny) Little Rickard in Dromore West, Sligo, Ireland in 1875. Fanny had been born in Looe, Cornwall.

James and Fanny had eleven children of which eight survived by the 1911 census. It is likely that he was with the Coastguard branch of the Royal Navy at this time. When James retired the family came to Dawlish and Sidney was an apprentice grocery worker, living at home with his mother, brother and three sisters. Sidney moved to London and was working in Chiswick when war broke out, and he joined up in November 1914.

Private Sidney Harold KERSWELL was with the London Regiment, 3rd (City of London) Battalion, (Royal Fusiliers) at Gallipoli. The 2/3rd Battalion was formed in London in September 1914. By December 1914 it had moved to Epsom Downs and Tonbridge for training. On 31 December 1914 it left to relieve the 1/3rd Bn in Malta, and from there moved to Egypt, before landing at Cape Helles, Gallipoli. His medal record card show that he arrived in Egypt on 19th April 1915.

By October 1915 the tragic episode of the Gallipoli campaign was coming towards an end. The initial attempt by the allied navies to force a passage through the Dardanelles to Constantinople (now Istanbul) had failed due to the loss of ships and men to minefields, and then the threat of more mines floating down on the current. The naval strategy framed by Winston Churchill was deemed a failure and he was replaced as First Lord of the Admiralty.

After some delay an army was assembled for a seaborne invasion. The invasion of 25th April had taken place at a number of beaches on Gallipoli from which it was hoped that the troops would be able to fight to the hilltops and overcome the Turkish forces, capturing the hill forts that controlled the passage through the Dardanelles to Constantinople. What actually occurred is that the allied forces were in some cases trapped on the beaches, and even when they managed to move inland and up the gullies to fight at higher levels, the beaches were still under fire from guns and snipers on still higher ground. By this time in 1915 it had been realised that a land force supported by bombardment from ships offshore was gaining no ground and it led to a decision to withdraw all forces from Gallipoli by January 1916.

It is not known how Sidney Kerswell was wounded but he would almost certainly have been brought down to the beach by a stretcher party for treatment and probable evacuation. All the loading and unloading was done at night, and the wounded were evacuated by lighters to hospital ships lying offshore.

The experience of the wounded in Gallipoli is recorded in diary entries by Aubrey Herbert, M.P. who was attached as an Intelligence Officer.

May 1st. I woke to hear the howitzers that have been haunting men's minds here droning over us, and watching great columns of water when they hit the sea. Then there came the sigh and the snarl of shrapnel. A lot of men were hit all round and it has been difficult to wash one's face in the sea."

The beach produced a profound impression on almost everyone, and in some cases made the seaside distasteful for the rest of their lives. The perpetual ripple of the waves was sometimes loud enough to be

mistaken for shrapnel which was also perpetual, splashing in the sea or rattling on the beach.

By August the heat, and stench of dead mules, had been matched by the spread of dysentery and a plague of flies. Conditions on the beach were terrible.

Sunday August 8th, " I went back outside the hospital, where there were many wounded lying. I stumbled upon poor C-S (a schoolfellow), who had been wounded about 3am the day before, and had lain in the sun on the sand all the previous day. He recognized me, and asked me to help him, but was light-headed. There were fifty-six others with him; Macaulay and I counted. It was awful having to pass them. A lot of the men called out: 'We are being murdered.' The smells were fearful and they had not been cleaned."

"I came to a field hospital, situated where the troops were going through. While I was there shelling was bad. Several of the wounded were hit again. One man was knocked in on the top of me, bleeding all over." (Mons, Anzac and Kut — A Herbert, publ 1919)

Sidney Harold Kerswell died aboard the Hospital Ship NEVASA en route to Malta.

Sidney Kerswell's memorial is in Malta where the hospital ship would have brought the survivors for treatment in better conditions. The eventual retreat from Gallipoli was conducted in January 1916 with, thankfully, very few further casualties.

Sidney's eldest brother, James Edwin Kerswell, served in Egypt with the Royal Engineers and he died at the 33rd Clearing Hospital, Haifa on the 25th October 1918, just a few days before the Armistice. We will remember him in three years time.