Private Ernest Harrison

Ernest Harrison, the son of Thomas Cope Harrison and Mary Ann Chadwick was born about the end of 1895 in Thorpe, near Ashbourne. His father, Thomas (1869-1946) married Mary Ann Chadwick (1866-1895) on 7 February 1893.

Ernest had 2 older siblings from this marriage: Percy (possible registered as William born 1893) and Hannah (born 1894). Sadly his mother died at the end of 1895 and as Ernest's birth does not appear to have been registered, this may have coincided with his mother's death in child birth. This is not confirmed, but the dates do link this possibility.

Following Mary's death, John went on to marry Emma Chadwick (1871-1927) at the end of 1896. They had 11 children, all half siblings to Ernest; Thomas (born 1897), Arthur (born 1898), Harry (born 1900), Alice (born 1902), Emma (born (1903), George (born 1905), Edith (born 1907), Frank (born 1909), Ada (born 1909), Walter (born 1910) and Fred (born 1910)

Census records for 1901, finds the family living in Thorpe, with John recorded as a general labourer.

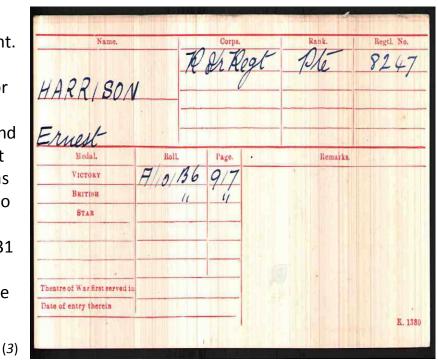
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Moving forward 10 years to 1911, Ernest had moved from the area and was a groom on the estate of Francis William Forester at Saxelbye Park, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. The census shows details all the grooms on this estate. His father and younger family had moved to Alstonefield by this time.

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(2)

Ernest enlisted into the 2nd
Battalion, Royal Irish Regiment.
His medal card does not give
any detail of when he listed or
any theatre of war. He was
awarded the Victory medal and
the British War medal but not
the 1915 Star. This award was
made to officers and men who
served in any theatre of war
between 5 August 1914 and 31
December 1915. This would
imply the Ernest may not have
enlisted until at least 1916.



Ernest was killed in action on 21 March 1918. This was the first day of the German Spring Offensive; however, the offensive was a failure and marked the beginning of the end of the War.

Below is an extract from the battalion diary for that day:

In March 1918, the 2nd Battalion served with the 49th Infantry Brigade in the 16th Division. The Division was responsible for defending the northern side of the Cologne Valley north of St. Quentin and was deployed along a ridge centred on Ronssoy. The 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Regiment was in the forward sector of defence, based on the neighbouring village of Lempire. To their front was a network of machine gun emplacements. On the morning of March 21st 1918, when the German offensive began, there was a thick mist and the machine guns were ineffective. A heavy artillery bombardment caused severe losses on the right flank of 49 Brigade, exposing that flank when the enemy infantry advanced at about 9 a.m. Within an hour and a half, the 49th Brigade had been virtually destroyed. The 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Regiment recorded 78 men killed outright and by March 30th 1918, the Battalion had been reduced to 1 officer and 31 other ranks.

On the morning of the 21st March, as the right flank collapsed, the 2nd Battalion was exposed with the enemy surrounding them on three sides. Led by a Major Harrison, they refused to give up and fought from defensive position to defensive position until their ammunition ran out. They fought their way out to safety in the evening when the 6th Battalion Connaught Rangers counter-attacked.

(4)

Ernest is remembered at the Pozieres Memorial, France



Source of information

- 1. Census 1901 © Ancestry.co.uk
- 2. Census 1911 © Ancestry.co.uk
- 3. Medal card © Ancestry.co.uk
- 4. Battalion diary © The National Archives