



Private 8247 Frederick James Turner

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Born: Great Lyde Farm, Yeovil - 15th May 1889

Died: Valletta Military Hospital, Malta - 5th November 1915

Notes by Ian Turner:

My Great Uncle Fred Turner was the youngest of the seven children of my Great Grandparents, George and Emma Turner. Displaced agricultural workers from West Dorset, they eventually settled in Moordown where George worked as a jobbing Gardener. From 1906 until about 1919, the family lived at 17 Nursery Road. Fred left school in 1903 and worked as a Shop Assistant. However, this life didn't seem to suit him and in 1908, along with his best friend George Pardy, he joined the Hampshire Regiment. His Service Number was 8247. After basic training, he was assigned to 2nd Battalion, then on overseas duty in the new Republic of South Africa. He sailed to Cape Town and joined the Battalion at Bloemfontein, before it moved to Wynberg Barracks at Cape Town. There were a large number of Bournemouth men in the Battalion at that time; Fred was a member of the Battalion's HQ Company for the duration of his service.

At that time, Units on overseas service would normally undertake a three-year posting before being moved to another part of the Empire. So, in 1911, the Battalion transferred to Mauritius, where it stayed until 1913, when it moved again, this time to India. Fred and the rest of the Battalion arrived there in December 1913 and had only been in India for eight months when war broke out. Initially, they were based in Mhow. On August 31st 1914, the Battalion was directed to leave Mhow immediately and move to Mumbai (then known as Bombay). There the Battalion took over the duties of 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters, who were being recalled to Britain in readiness for deployment to France.

The Hampshires were based on the fortified island of Colaba which guarded the sea approaches to the city of Mumbai. While there, the Battalion was called into action to help remove ammunition from a ship that had caught fire in the nearby dockyard.

Shortly after this, notice came that the Battalion was being recalled to Britain in order to prepare for active service. In the middle of November 1914, the Hampshires were relieved by the Regiment's 1/7th Battalion. On November 16th, 21 officers, 43 sergeants, 15 drummers, and 816 rank and file boarded the RMS Gloucester Castle¹ and sailed for England as part of a convoy. On December 22nd, having passed through the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean, the ship reached Plymouth; from there, the Battalion travelled by train to Romsey. The men were each allocated a few days' home leave over the Christmas and New Year period. Fred spent the time with his parents at Nursery Road and was able to see his sisters and brother Tom (my grandfather). He had been overseas since 1908 and the only communications he had had with his family for six years were letters and parcels. By this point in the war, Fred's oldest brother Walt (serving with 1st Wiltshires) had been taken prisoner of war in France and his next oldest brother Will was serving with 71st Field Company, Royal Engineers and, like Fred, soon to be posted to Gallipoli.

The 2nd Hampshires became part of the 29th Division and the Battalion was attached to the 88th Brigade. On 13th February 1915, the Division was concentrated around Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick. The 2nd Hampshires were supplied with 2 drafts of men, 181 on January 31st, and 50 on February 20th. The 29th Division was at first identified for service in France. However, pressure came upon the General Staff to open a second front, against the Ottoman Empire, and the Division was one of those reassigned for the operation being planned at Gallipoli. Before they left Britain, the men were allowed a short period of embarkation leave. It would be the last time that Fred and his family would see each other.

¹RMS Gloucester Castle was built in Glasgow for Union-Castle line and launched in 1911. Requisitioned and served as troopship and later hospital ship in WW1. Torpedoed off IoW 1917 but salvaged. Returned to civilian duty on African service. Sunk 1942 off Ascension Island by German commerce raider Michel.

On March 12th 1915, the whole of the 29th Division passed in review of King George V. The battalion, comprising 26 officers and 993 other ranks embarked on March 28th; W and X companies sailing on the H.T. Aragon², Y and Z in the Manitou³. There was a brief stop in Malta and then Alexandria on the 2nd of April. From there they sailed to Mudros, on the Greek island of Lemnos, arriving on 10th April. On April 24th, HQ, Y and Z companies left Lemnos in the RMS Alaunia⁴ for Tenedos, where they transferred to the River Clyde⁵ and headed for Gallipoli, to take part in the initial assault on V Beach, at Cape Helles. Also on the River Clyde were 1st Battalion Royal Munster Fusiliers and 1st Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers; these two units were part of the 86th Infantry Brigade (The Fusilier Brigade) of the 29th Division.

The River Clyde was designated to be beached at V Beach and used as a staging point for troops landing there. To this end, her superstructure was armoured and a disembarkation port cut in her bows. The ship was beached at Cape Helles, as planned, early on 25 April 1915. The plan was for the troops on board the ship to be ferried ashore by boats towed by lighters and for them to secure the beach. Once this had been accomplished, it was intended to place a floating pontoon bridge from the ship to the beach so that the troops could walk ashore. The Dubliners were assigned the task of going ashore first but, as they embarked into the landing boats, four hidden Turkish machine gun posts opened fire, causing very heavy loss of life amongst the Dubliners. It was then decided to construct the pontoon bridge, the construction of which led to further heavy casualties of Dubliners and men of the Royal Navy. Once the pontoon was completed, two companies of the Munsters were ordered ashore. On exiting the River Clyde's bows, the Munsters were totally without cover on the pontoon bridge and were mown down by the Turkish machine guns; many more fell from the pontoon bridge and were drowned. It is impossible to comprehend how Fred and the other soldiers

2HT Aragon, was a Royal Mail Steam packet, requisitioned for troop transport. Sunk by torpedo off Alexandria in 1917 with loss of 610 lives.

3SS Manitou, a transatlantic liner built Hartlepool 1897 and used as a troopship throughout the Great War. Broken up 1925.

4RMS Alaunia, a Cunard ship built at Greenock and launched in 1913. Use as a troop transport until it struck a mine in the channel in 1916 and sunk off the Sussex coast

5RMS River Clyde, a collier built at Port Glasgow and launched 1905. Deliberately beached at Gallipoli 1915 – re-floated after the war and used as a civilian ship until scrapped in 1966.

must have felt inside the ship as they awaited their turn to go ashore hearing the cries of their fellow soldiers and the sound of machine gun bullets hitting off the hull.

The Hampshires from the River Clyde finally made it ashore under the cover of darkness. While their casualties were nothing like those of the Dubliners and Munsters, the Battalion still had 7 men killed, 16 wounded with 5 men missing. Among those injured was Fred's best friend George Pardy, who was evacuated from Gallipoli. He eventually reached Britain, where he convalesced. George's injuries meant that he was discharged from the army in April 1916. George married his childhood sweetheart and lived until 1969. During the next six months, the 2nd Hampshires took part in many major battles of the campaign, including the battles for Krithia and the Achi Baba heights.

Throughout their time in Gallipoli, the men of 2nd Hampshires lived in the open, enduring searing heat, drought and plagues of flies. There were almost as many casualties caused by the living conditions as through enemy action. Eventually, the conditions took their toll on Fred. His last letter home, dated 14th/15th September 1915, describes how his hands are swollen and gives an indication of the conditions – hot during the day and cold at night with flies everywhere. He had not been off of the Peninsula for rest and recuperation during the four months since the landings. In mid-October, Fred became so unwell that he was evacuated to a casualty Clearing Station before being taken by hospital ship to Malta, where he was admitted to the Valletta Military Hospital. He was so unwell with Pneumonia and that he asked the Chaplain to write home on his behalf. Fred took a turn for the worse and a decision was made to undertake an emergency operation to try to relieve the pressure on his lungs caused by Empyema. Unfortunately, he was too weak to survive the operation and died at about 8.30am on 5th November 1915. Fred is buried at Pieta Military Cemetery in Malta. To the best of my knowledge, the only member of the family who has ever visited the grave is my Uncle.

The Battalion eventually left Gallipoli on 2nd January 1916, as part of the general withdrawal and moved to Egypt. The battalion then sailed for France, landing at Marseilles on 20th March 1916. The Battalion saw active service on the Western front until the end of hostilities in November 1918. My research indicates that, between April 1915 and February 1916, 1199 Officers and Men of the 2nd Battalion Hampshire Regiment lost their lives during the Gallipoli campaign. At least as many were injured and another large group of men were discharged in 1916 as they were no longer fit for military service. This was due in large part to the terrible environmental conditions in which they served.

Incidentally, the war service of the other Turner boys is briefly as follows:

William George (Will) Driver 60018 – latterly Acting Corporal. Volunteered in December 1914. Served in Gallipoli and Mesopotamia with 71st Field Company, Royal Engineers. Demobbed 1919.

Walter Charles (Walt). Private 6093 1st Battalion Wiltshire Regiment. Reservist called up in August 1914. Battalion arrived in France September 1914. Taken prisoner in France on 25th October 1914. Forced to work in a German salt mine until November 1918, when repatriated by Red Cross.

Tom Henry (Tom) (my Grandfather) Private 29087 4th Battalion Dorset Regiment. In reserved occupation (Baker) until called up in July 1917. Served in Palestine, Egypt and Sudan (latterly in 1/8 Battalion Hampshire Regiment) until demobbed in April 1920