

Private Robert Walter Harrison
Regimental Number: 204335
1st Battalion, Northumberland Fusiliers

born: 29 April 1898 - died: 20 May 1918

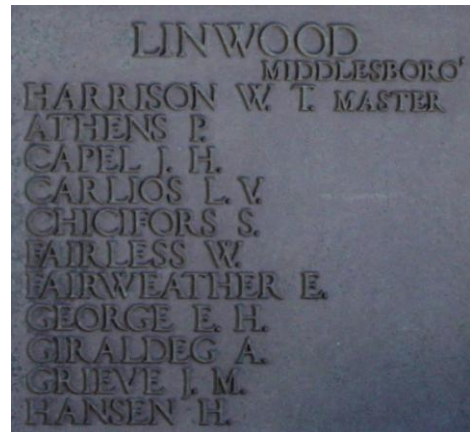
Robert Walter Harrison, the son of Walter and Sarah Harrison, was born on 29 April 1898 and baptised on 8 June at St James', Hartlepool, Durham.¹ His father, Walter Tell Harrison, was born in 1864 in Brancaster – the son of George and Lydia Harrison.² His mother, Sarah Isabella Hasker, was born in 1874 in South Shields, Durham – the daughter of Robert Walter and Margaret Hasker.³ Walter and Sarah married in 1895.

Robert was the couple's eldest child. After Robert, they had three more children: Gwendoline (born 11 September 1901),⁴ Kathleen (born 19 July 1907),⁵ and Myles Gilbert (born 1 April 1909).⁶ Walter and Sarah had a fifth child who did not survive childhood⁷ – probably Charles Edward, born in 1903 and died at the age of 5.^{8 9}

Robert's family was closely tied to the sea. His father, Walter, was a merchant seaman. His father's father, George Harrison, was a coast guard in Cromer, Norfolk¹⁰ and his mother's father, Robert Hasker, was a seaman.¹¹ Had Robert not died at the young age of just 20, he too would perhaps have made a living at sea.

Walter certified as a Master of a foreign-going ship in the Merchant Service in 1895 – the year that he and Sarah married – and, as such, was often away from home. In 1901, his wife and son, Robert, were living with his wife's mother, Margaret Hasker, and Sarah's sister, Louise in West Hartlepool.¹² In 1911, Sarah was living with all four children at 42 Carlton Street, West Hartlepool.¹³ A few months later, Robert's mother died. Robert was only 13 and his youngest sibling was just 2. His father remarried, but not until the autumn of 1916, when he married Mary Westoll in Knaresborough, Yorkshire.

Only a few months later, Walter himself died. In 1917, he was the master of the Linwood, a steam cargo ship carrying iron ore. "On Jan. 22, 1917 she left Gibraltar with a crew of twenty-two, she was never spoken of again. Even today we still don't know what happened to her and the crew."¹⁴ Walter is remembered on the Tower Hill Memorial to members of the merchant marine.¹⁵



Tower Hill Memorial¹⁶

Robert had enlisted the Northumberland Fusiliers, in West Hartlepool, Durham and served first in the 11th Battalion, then the 1/6th Battalion and, finally, the 1st Battalion. The Northumberland Fusiliers was the second largest infantry regiment of the British Army during the war.¹⁷ The 1st Battalion, which Robert was serving with at his death, was a regular army battalion assigned to the 9th Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division throughout the war.



R. W. Harrison in Pernes British Military Cemetery
(Source: Author, July 2015)

Robert was injured on 20 May 1918 and admitted to the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station with shrapnel wounds to his left hand, right and left thighs and right buttock. He died the same day and was buried the following day in the Pernes British Military Cemetery (Plot 1, Row F, Grave 21). He was described as Church of England and the chaplain, J. K. Tibbits presided at the burial.

On 20 May, 370 soldiers were admitted to the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station – by far the highest number of admissions in any one day that month.¹⁸ This brought the total number of patients to 522. In the whole month of May, there were 115 deaths at this CCCS – more than in any of the other three and a half months that the 1st CCCS was in Pernes. The Pernes British Military Cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when the 1st and 4th Canadian Casualty Clearing Stations came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.¹⁹

The chaplain's journal indicates that notification of his death was sent to his father, Captain W. T. Harrison, with three addresses being given for the notification: Newport, Monmouthshire, Wales; 7 Houghton St. West Hartlepool, Durham; or Messrs. Worms & Co. Marseilles, France. These are

likely the addresses of the company for which Walter Harrison had been working. Obviously the information was out-of-date as Robert had died in 1917. The monies owing to Robert from the army after his death were sent to his step-mother, Mary T. Harrison.²⁰

Private Harrison was awarded the Military Medal, which was given to Other Ranks for gallantry and devotion to duty when under fire in battle on land. He also received the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre.)²¹

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¹ "England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538-1975," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 7 March 2015), entry for Robert Walter Harrison, FHL Film Number: 1519299, Reference ID: item 1 p 226

² "1871 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 7 March 2015), entry for George Harrison, Registration district: Erphingham, Sub-registration district: Cromer, ED, institution, or vessel: 8, Household schedule number: 106, Piece: 1799, Folio: 12, Page Number: 18

³ "England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538-1975," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 9 March 2015), entry for Sarah Isabella Hasker, FHL Film Number: 1894145

⁴ "England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538-1975," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 9 March 2015), entry for Gwendoline Harrison, FHL Film Number: 1519299, Reference ID: item 1 p 265

⁵ "England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538-1975," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 9 March 2015), entry for Kathleen Harrison, FHL Film Number: 1519301, Reference ID: V. 177 p 128 cn 2009

⁶ "England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538-1975," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 9 March 2015), entry for Myles Gilbert Harrison, FHL Film Number: 1519301, Reference ID: V. 177 p 5 cn 65

⁷ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 5 January 2015), entry for Robert Walter Harrison, Registration district: Hartlepool, Registration District Number: 545, Sub-registration district: Hartlepool, ED, institution, or vessel: 15, Piece: 29615

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- ⁸ "England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538-1975," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 9 March 2015), entry for Charles Edward Harrison, FHL Film Number: 1519301, Reference ID: V. 177 p 53 cn 848
- ⁹ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Death Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 9 March 2015), entry for Charles Edward Harrison, Registration district: Hartlepool, Inferred County: Durham, Volume: 10a, Page: 106
- ¹⁰ "1871 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 27 January 2015), entry for Walter T. Harrison, Registration district: Erpingham, Sub-registration district: Cromer, ED, institution, or vessel: 8, Household schedule number: 106, Piece: 1799, Folio: 12, Page Number: 18
- ¹¹ "1881 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 9 March 2015), entry for Sarah J. Hasker, Registration district: Hartlepool, Sub-registration district: Hartlepool, ED, institution, or vessel: 28, Piece: 4909, Folio: 34, Page Number: 10
- ¹² "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 7 March 2015), entry for Robert W. Harrison, Registration district: Hartlepool, Sub-registration district: Hartlepool, ED, institution, or vessel: 31, Piece: 4637, Folio: 176, Page Number: 41, Household schedule number: 248
- ¹³ "1911 England Census," entry for Robert Walter Harrison
- ¹⁴ "Maritime Quest," (http://www.maritimequest.com/daily_event_archive/2010/01_jan/22_ss_linwood.htm; accessed 7 March 2015)
- ¹⁵ "Tower Hill: We Will Remember Them," (<http://www.benjidog.co.uk/Tower%20Hill>; accessed 9 March 2015)
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ "List of Northumberland Fusiliers battalions in World War I," *Wikipedia* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Northumberland_Fusiliers_battalions_in_World_War_I#1st_Battalion; accessed 31 January 2015)
- ¹⁸ "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* (http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G; accessed 15 December 2014)
- ¹⁹ "Pernes British Military Cemetery" *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/11600/PERNES%20BRITISH%20CEMETERY>; accessed 13 January 2015)
- ²⁰ "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 19 January 2015), entry for Robert W. Harrison
- ²¹ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 26 November 2014), entry for Robert Walter Harrison