

S/13412 Private William Tulloch



William was born at Newhouses, Papa Westray on 12th January 1888, the only son of Elizabeth Tulloch. William took up farm work when he left school. He was the first ploughman at Newark Farm in Lady on Sanday when he married Betsy Cooper of Newbigging, Westray on 24th January 1908. They had two daughters, Betsy and Mary, and William was the foreman at Newark Farm, when he was called up under the Military Service Act in June 1916.

William reported to Fort George, where he enlisted in the Seaforth Highlanders. He probably spent about three months training at Cromarty in 3rd Seaforths, before left with several other Orcadians in a draft to join one of the Regiment's two Regular Army Battalions, 1st Seaforths. They had served in Iraq, then known as Mesopotamia, as part of 7th Indian Division for nearly a year, when William's draft arrived as reinforcements in early December.

Early 1916 had been disastrous for the British Empire troops serving in Mesopotamia, with the original invading force besieged by the Turks in Kut-al-Amara. 3rd and 7th Indian Divisions sent from the Western Front and British 13th Division from Gallipoli service lost heavily during increasingly desperate attempts to reach Kut, until the siege ended in surrender on 29th April. Both sides suspended operations over the hot summer months in 1916. Reorganisation of the British-Indian force in the second half of 1916, including a complete overhaul of the supply arrangements and General Stanley Maude appointed new commander, gave it back the initiative.

When the Seaforths took part in a diversionary attack at Sannayait on 22nd February 1917 four Orcadians lost their lives, but it provided cover for a flank attack which crossed the River Tigris and recaptured Kut. The Turks fell back in some disorder towards the historic city of Baghdad. The British-Indian advance followed up, with 7th Indian Division close behind the Cavalry Division. On 11th March troops of British 13th Division entered Baghdad from the east, while 7th Indian Division captured Baghdad Station from the south.

There were few Turkish troops within Baghdad, so the British-Indian troops pushed on to fan out in a wide semi-circle to the north and west. The Turks were regrouping there in some strength with the intention of counter-attacking to try and retake Baghdad. 1st Seaforths made a series of long marches and had several brief skirmishes during the next month, maintaining pressure on the Turks to push them north-west towards Samarra.

7th Indian Division was ordered to advance along the line of the railway from Baghdad to Samarra and take the Turkish defences close to the railway station at Istabulat, about 12 miles from Samarra. The attack went in just after 5am on 21st April, with the support of 76 guns and howitzers. The Turks fell back from their outposts after token resistance, but defended their main position with great determination. 1st Seaforths advanced on the left and 28th Punjabis on the right, to cross two miles of open plain under heavy fire. They assaulted the main Turkish line about 7.30am to take it about 700 yards along its length, with heavy hand-to-hand fighting. 125th Rifles moved up in support and the line was consolidated and held, despite continuous Turkish machine gun and artillery fire, interspersed with several Turkish counter-attacks.

1st Seaforths lost 3 officers and 37 other ranks killed in the advance and assault, with 7 officers and 110 other ranks wounded. The killed included four Orcadians: Malcolm Harray of Harray, George Linklater of Sandwick, George Sinclair of Kirkwall and John Yorston of Birsay. Among the seriously wounded was William Tulloch. William joined the other four Orcadians in being commemorated on the Basra Memorial, after died of his wounds on 23rd April, aged 29. William is remembered in Orkney by listing on both the Sanday and Papa Westray War Memorials.