

Henry Charles RICHARDS b. Standlake, Oxon Sept. 1876

Henry Charles Richards enlisted in the Royal Engineers on the 2nd January 1896 at Aldershot on Short Service (12 years). He was aged 18 years 3 months, occupation *Groom*. He had been a member of the 3rd Battalion Royal Berkshire Militia.

The enlistment papers describe him as 5 feet 4 inches, 128 pounds, chest 34-35, complexion fresh, eyes grey, hair brown. His army rank at enlistment is described as *Driver*.

Ist Division Telegraph Battalion was usually stationed at Aldershot, engaged in purely military work. The 2nd Division worked with the Post Office in the South of England. The 1st Section (or Division?) consisted of 16 staff sergeants & sergeants, 3 trumpeters, 18 corporals & 2nd corporals, 4 artificers, 77 sappers & 58 drivers with 65 horses.

Each section had 20 miles of line, part air-line & part insulated cable: 2 horse carts for the latter & 3 6-horse wagons for airline; other vehicles for supplies, equipment & baggage. The division was expanded during the South African War.

Between 26/10/1897 and 1/1/1898 he was confined to isolation hospital with scarlet fever.

In January 1899 the 1st Division was in Aldershot with Major Hawkins & Lieutenants Skipwith & Ommaney. In February Lts. Hildebrand & Moir were present & in April 2nd Lt. Henrici. (*RE Journal*)

The chartered troopship Jelunga (British India Steam Line) left Southampton for Natal on 21/09/1899 with 55 Royal Engineers of 1st Div. Telegraph Battalion from Aldershot. Arrived Gibraltar 26/09, Malta 29/09, Crete, Natal (Durban) 26/10.

Freighter SS Gascon left Southampton 21/10/1899 with 160 officers, 1520 soldiers & 6 horses. Mainly 2nd Regiment Coldstream Guards but also members of Telegraph Battalion. Arrived Cape Town 13/11/. **HCR travelled on this ship to South Africa** and whilst on board received an anti-typhoid inoculation. This was voluntary but was a sensible precaution as many men were to die from Enteric or Typhus. Only 20% of soldiers chose to have the inoculation.

HCR had extended his service by 4 years on 10/12/1898 and was promoted to Lance Corporal on 17/4/1899. Lt.Moir's signature confirms both.

Lt. Relf left on the Gascon & went to De Aar Junction with 3 other sections under Capt. Godfrey- Faussett, so there were 6 sections initially, although a 7th section is mentioned. Relf's section did not accompany Methuen, but stayed to lay telegraph network for defence of De Aar. Later, he moved up to Modder River to effect repairs. Eventually his section was sent to Ladysmith . Relf was invalided home & died on the journey

The RE Journal for Nov.1899 refers to a Field Force with officers Capt. Godfrey-Faussett, Lts. Moir, Relf, Henrici, Mackworth which went abroad 21/10/1899 (presumably on the Gascon)& were the 4 sections. Also a Field Force which left on 30/09/1899 (?) with officers Maj. Hawkins, Capt. Boys, Lts. Hildebrand, Wright, Webber, Sherrard (MacInnes not noted) & appear to be the other 2 sections.

The sections became broken & were reformed around May 1900 as A to F sections. RE Journal of Sept. 1900 refers to HQ & 4 sections in Orange River Colony. Webber replaced Relf. Also to 2 sections in "Kimberley etc." with Capt. Wright, Lts. Macfie & Sherrard.

Medals awarded to HCR (to Corporal H. Richards) were the **Queen's South Africa Medal** (clasps for Relief of Kimberley, Belfast, Orange Free State) & **The King's South Africa Medal** for service 1901-1902. According to an officer's article in the RE Gazette, initially, 2 sections under (Lts) Wright & Sherrard were sent towards Kimberley. Wright became A.D.A.T Western Section & Macfie took over . Sherrard's section was given to MacInnes & attached to Lord Methuen. It was Methuen who advanced with an army corps to relieve Kimberley. McInnes received a medal clasp for the Defence of Kimberley, so probably was in charge of the small detachment in the town itself. Lieutenants Moir and Mackworth received clasps for the Relief of Kimberley, so could have been HCR's officers at this time. Moir is perhaps more likely as he confirmed the promotions. Early in the advance the Army corps camped at an ostrich farm. Was this where HCR obtained the ostrich feathers which he brought back to the UK? On 29/11/1899 Boers attacked Methuen's troops at Belmont & then cut the railway & telegraph wires at Graspan, necessitating repairs. It is noted that the RE maintained the telegraph during Methuen's advance. There were battles at Modder River & Magersfontein. It was finally Gen French who led a cavalry charge to relieve the diamond town of Kimberley in which Cecil Rhodes was living. The town was relieved on 15th February 1900.

HCR was promoted to 2nd Corporal (a rank unique to the RE) on 1st September 1900. The promotion was certified by Lt. Bannerman.

He was promoted to Corporal on 1st February 1901. Promotion certified by Capt. Boys.

According to the official casualty roll HCR was “captured but later released” on 1st May 1900 at Bloemfontein. The town had been taken on 13th March and the Boers began to fall back. It seems likely that he was in a repair party and was caught by Boers who were still in the area during the time that Lord Roberts was preparing to advance northwards. The advance began on 3rd May. The whole of the Tel Div. on the advance met at Kroonstadt. North of here the Boers made nightly raids to cut the wire & , according to the letter in RE Journal, many linemen were “wiped out”, only one being known as in captivity. The British Army advanced from Kroonstadt ,eventually taking Johannesburg & Pretoria. After the fall of Pretoria P.O.Ws were released from the camp at Waterval on 6th June, although many were moved to Nooitgedacht (releases on 30th August) & thence to Barberton (remainder released Sept. 1900). HCR was awarded a clasp for the battle of Belfast (Wonderfontein) in Natal on 26th August.

In the last phase of the war, 1901-2, with their towns captured, the Boers changed to guerrilla tactics in the countryside. The British Army was reformed into localised columns with RE & telegraph groups attached. In this period HCR probably served in various parts of Orange Free State, for which he received his 3rd clasp.

The Dilwara left for England on 31/07/1902 with 28 men of the RE Tel .Battalion. The Aurania left on 14/08/1902 (from Durban?) but disembarked 147 men of the Tel. Batt. with Major Schreiber, Capts. Wilton, Hildebrand & Macinnes at Cape Town due to overcrowding. The Pinemore left for England on 24/09/1902 with the 1st Div. Telegraph Battalion with Lt_ Major E.G. Godfrey-Faussett, Lt. H.H. Gandy & 127 men. HCR returned on this ship. The Britannic left on 07/10/1902 with Major J.S.Fowler, Lt. J.P. Moir & 133 men of the 2nd(?) RE Tel. Battalion.

The RE Journal of Dec. 1902 notes the 1st Division Tel.Battalion as being in Aldershot with officers Major Wright, Lts Fowler, Godfrey-Faussett, Capt Moir & Lt. Gandy. Their return date is given as 16/10/1902. (arrival of SS Pinemore?)

The 2nd Division is also noted as “never abroad” but officers Boys, Skipworth & Mackworth are mentioned.

HCR extended his service by 5 years on 20/12/1902. He was promoted to Sergeant on 04/02/1905. He was married to Isabel Barson on 10/07/1905 at Cumnor. First son William Henry was born at Aldershot on 08/06/1906.

On 06/07/1906 he was re-engaged to complete 21 years and on 01/05/1907 posted from mounted to dismounted duties.

On 06/06/1908 he was “transferred to Supy Dist (sic) at Cardiff.” The Welsh Divisional Telegraph battalion was formed in 1908.

Second son Ronald Charles was born in Cardiff on 01/02/1910.

Senghenydd Colliery Disaster 1913

Over 400 miners were killed by an explosion on Tuesday 14th October 1913. Rescue attempts were hampered by fire in the pit. During a break of 3 days , newspapers reported the following on Thursday October 23rd.

Western Mail

‘PHONE IN THE PIT

NOVEL AID TO SAFETY AT SENGHENYDD

With the object of facilitating matters in case of a critical breakdown, such as that of Wednesday morning, a military field telephone was installed on Wednesday night from the colliery offices to the point where the men are working.

It is believed to be the first occasion on which a telephone line has been laid in a colliery. The work was completed in just over 2 hours. The apparatus, comprising a cable and field telephone instrument was lent by Capt. Isaac of the Welsh Company, RE, Cardiff. Sergeant-Instructor H.C.Richards of the RE went down the pit and fixed the apparatus in the Lancaster level, where so many men were gassed. He was assisted by Mr. McCormick and the first message was sent from the workings to Mrs. A.P. James, a Red Cross nurse, who was at the colliery offices.

The distance from the place to where the men are working is about a mile

South Wales Echo

TELEPHONE INSTALLED BELOW

Early this morning the working parties at Senghenydd were placed in telephone communication with the colliery offices, the distance between extreme parts being over a mile. This was done by means of Army field telephones and a reel of cable, together with other necessary apparatus lent by Capt. Isaacs of the Welsh Telegraph Company, RE, Cardiff. The apparatus arrived at the colliery at 10 p.m., the cable was laid and the system was working satisfactorily within 3 hours. The work was facilitated by making use of an old electric cable which runs down the shaft to the bottom of the pit. Sergeant-Instructor H.C. Richards of Cardiff supervised the installation, gallantly going down the pit and laying the cable as far as the Lancaster level, where so many men were gassed the previous night. He was assisted by Mr. McCormick, instructor of the Ayrshire Rescue Station.

The first message passed over the wire from below was received by Mrs. A. P. James , who is in charge of Red Cross staff. It was the somewhat prosaic but useful information that coffee and eggs were desired for the sustenance of workmen engaged at the bashing. This is said to be the first occasion on which a military field service has been employed in a mine. It is intended that when the exploration work is recommenced that the men shall carry a portable telephone with them so that they will be in constant touch with the surface

1914 53rd Welsh Divisional Signals formed (1920 became part of Royal Corps of Signals)
Also appears to be 38th Signals Company. He received GC medal with gratuity Oct .1914

Appointed T (temporary?) CSM 26/02/1915.
Promoted Company Sergeant Major (WO class2) 02/01/1917.

In February 1919 he volunteered for a further year's service.

According to his Military History Sheet, under *Special instances of gallant conduct*, the following is stated:

Brought to the notice of the Sec. of State for War for valuable services rendered in connection with the War. Vide War Office Communiqué of 27.3.19.

Service with the BEF is noted from 18/11/1918 to 19/01/1920 and that he joined the British Army of the Rhine on 02/05/1919.

He was discharged to pension on 24/02/1920 with 24 years 54 days pensionable service

Further service according to Army Records Centre

3rd child, Grace Isabel, b.28/01/1920, Cardiff

Signals Depot RE (Cardiff). 29324. CSM WO2. Termination of engagement 24/2/1920

Royal Signals (Cardiff) 2313057. Sergeant. Termination of engagement 25/1/1924.

Joined Territorial Army 2/7/1924. Classified as Sapper, Clerk , Group C Class 2

3/7/1924 Promoted to Sergeant.

Attended annual training 27/7 to 10/8 1924.

4/11/1924 Promoted CQMS

2/12/1924 posted to the 246 Field Company

Thereafter attended annual training every year .

Discharged 1/7/29 on having reached the age for discharge.

Next of kin stated as Mrs I. Richards, Kirtlands, Fidlas Road, Llanishen, Cardiff

