

THE HISTORY
OF THE
KING'S REGIMENT
(LIVERPOOL)

1914—1919

BY
EVERARD WYRALL



VOLUME I 1914—1915

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I THE 1ST BATTALION MOBILISES AND LEAVES ALDERSHOT	1
II THE BATTALION ARRIVES IN FRANCE	5
III THE BATTLE OF MONS	12
IV THE RETREAT FROM MONS	18
V THE RETREAT FROM MONS: THE LAST STAGE AND THE FIGHT AT VILLERS-COTTERETS	32
VI THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE, 1914	44
VII THE ADVANCE TO, AND BATTLE OF, THE AISNE, 1914	54
VIII TRENCH WARFARE ON THE AISNE	63
IX THE CALLING UP OF THE SPECIAL RESERVE, AND MOBILISATION AND EXPANSION OF THE TERRITORIAL BATTALIONS OF THE KING'S REGIMENT	71
X THE BATTLES OF YPRES, 1914:	
THE BATTLE OF LANGEMARCK, 1914	74
THE BATTLE OF GHELUVELT	83
THE BATTLE OF NONNE BOSSCHEN: THE PRUSSIAN GUARD ATTACK	85
XI (i) THE FIRST WINTER IN THE TRENCHES, TO 31ST DECEMBER, 1914	93
XII (ii) THE FIRST WINTER IN THE TRENCHES, TO 10TH MARCH, 1915	101
XIII THE BATTLE OF NEUVE CHAPELLE: THE HOLDING ATTACK AT GIVENCHY	110
XIV THE BATTLES OF YPRES, 1915:	
THE GAS ATTACK: BATTLE OF GRAVENSTAFEL RIDGE	116
THE BATTLE OF ST. JULIEN	121
XV THE BATTLE OF AUBERS RIDGE	132
XVI THE BATTLE OF FESTUBERT	140
XVII THE SECOND ACTION OF GIVENCHY	153
XVIII THE FIRST ATTACK ON BELLEWAARDE	156
XIX THE ACTIONS OF HOOGE	160
XX THE REGIMENT IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS AT THE END OF THE FIRST YEAR OF THE WAR—AUGUST, 1915	163
XXI THE BATTLE OF LOOS: MAIN OPERATIONS	180
XXII THE BATTLE OF LOOS, II. SECONDARY AND SUBSIDIARY OPERATIONS	191
XXIII THE BATTLE OF LOOS, III. THE GERMAN COUNTER-ATTACK IN OCTOBER, 1915	197
XXIV THE SECOND WINTER IN THE TRENCHES TO THE CLOSE OF 1915	202
APPENDIX I THE KING'S REGIMENT DURING THE GREAT WAR	217
APPENDIX II CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE TO THE 1/9TH KING'S REGIMENT IN OCTOBER, 1915	219
APPENDIX III EXTRACT FROM "LONDON GAZETTE": CITATION OF AWARD OF VICTORIA CROSS TO L./CPL. J. TOMBS	220
CASUALTY LIST TO THE END OF 1915	223
INDEX	236

**THE HISTORY OF
THE KING'S REGIMENT (LIVERPOOL)
1914—1919**

**MILITARY HISTORIES BY
THE SAME AUTHOR**

**THE HISTORY OF THE
SECOND DIVISION, 1914-1918
(2 VOLS.).**

**THE WEST YORKSHIRE REGT.
IN THE WAR, 1914-1918
(2 VOLS.).**

**THE HISTORY OF THE 62ND
(W.R.) DIVISION, 1914-1919
(2 VOLS.).**

**THE DIE-HARDS IN THE GREAT
WAR, 1914-1919
(2 VOLS.).**

**THE HISTORY OF THE
SOMERSET LIGHT INFANTRY
(PRINCE ALBERT'S) 1914-1919
(1 VOL.).**

**THE EAST YORKSHIRE REGT.
IN THE GREAT WAR, 1914-1918
(1 VOL.—SHORTLY).**

ETC. ETC.



HIS MAJESTY KING GEORGE V.
Colonel-in-Chief of The King's Regiment (Liverpool)

THE HISTORY OF
THE KING'S REGIMENT
(LIVERPOOL)
1914—1919

BY
EVERARD WYRALL

VOL. I 1914—1915

WITH MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON:
EDWARD ARNOLD & CO.
41 & 43 MADDOX STREET, W.1.

First Published in 1928

2002 reprint by N&M Press

2012 digital version by Andrews UK Limited

FOREWORD

IT is my proud privilege as Colonel of the King's Regiment to introduce to the public the History of the Regiment in the Great War, which has been compiled so ably by Mr. Everard Wyrall, who has spared no pains to give a faithful record of the doings of each of our Regular, Special Reserve, Territorial and Service Battalions. The History teems with instances of heroism in the field, of tasks well done, of real devotion to duty.

To those of us who have been brought up in the Regiment our Regimental History has always been a sort of Bible since the day we joined. In it we could always read with pride of the doings of our battalions in various parts of the world during the past two hundred and forty-two years, of the glorious way in which the Honours on our Colours were won by those whom we are proud to follow. We like to read of the Regiment performing splendid service under the Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim, Ramillies, Oudenarde, Malplaquet, and of the distinction gained in its early days. We like to follow the doings of our predecessors in Canada, India, Afghanistan, etc., in later years, and we were proud of the part played by The King's Regiment in the Defence of Ladysmith and in the South African War.

All the above forms a chapter which is dear to the hearts of all Kingsmen.

It may here be noted that on 1st July, 1881, the title of the Regiment became The King's (Liverpool Regiment), and on that date began a friendship with the City of Liverpool which has grown stronger and stronger as the years have gone by and to which I shall allude again later.

That brings us to the opening of the next great chapter in our History—The Great War.

To paint this picture it is necessary to go back to August, 1914. The 1st Battalion was then quartered at Talavera Barracks, Aldershot, as part of the 6th Infantry Brigade. The 2nd Battalion was in India. How well do I remember those days. I was commanding a company in the 1st Battalion at Aldershot all the summer of 1914, but just before the Expeditionary Force sailed I was taken away to fill an appointment on the Staff of the III Corps.

Two pictures will remain in my memory for all time. The first is the grey dawn of an August morning on the Barrack Square at Talavera Barracks, when the 1st Battalion, under that splendid Commander, Lieut.-Colonel W. S. Bannatyne, marched off to entrain—an inspiring sight, a magnificent battalion at war strength determined to carry on the great traditions of The King's—and to answer any calls which might be made upon it. We little thought what that journey was to contain.

The second picture was one which I alone was privileged to see. I inspected the same battalion outside Cologne soon after the Armistice. It was then under Capt. (now Major) D. M. King, D.S.O., M.C. It was not easy to address that

battalion. There it was before me, having reached its goal. Of the 1,000 officers, non-commissioned officers and men I had seen start out from Aldershot in August, 1914, on that journey, not a single officer and barely a handful of non-commissioned officers and men remained, and yet the battalion had won through. There were the Colours before me with their pre-war Honours on them. How many new ones had they earned? My heart was too full to say much to the battalion. My greatest friends, my brother officers, all my old company except one or two, had gone; the majority had paid the supreme sacrifice. How I missed the sight of Lieut.-Colonel Bannatyne at the head of the Regiment, and all the others. I wanted them all with me to see the sight before my eyes—to see the officers and men standing before me, officers and men who had joined the Regiment from all parts of the Empire, who had proudly worn our badges, who had made themselves heart and soul into Kingsmen, the survivors of the thousands and thousands who had helped to bring the Regiment through its great trial with infinite credit and who seemed to be giving me a silent message as if to say, "Here are your standards—we have reached the goal. Here is your Regiment safe in port at last and with credit added to its great name."

I remember trying to thank them in the name of all old Kingsmen. How I wished others could have been with me, and, more than all, how I wished all our comrades who had fallen by the way could have seen their task accomplished.

May I be pardoned for painting that picture? They were my friends and comrades with whom I lived and played.

But that picture is the picture of all the other battalions. We are indeed proud that our Regiment contributed no less than forty-five battalions to the War, each one of whom came through with infinite credit. We were represented not only in France and Flanders, but in Macedonia, on the North-West Frontier of India and in North Russia.

I have met many Commanders who had battalions of the Regiment under their command. One and all have praised them as battalions who never failed them in tight places. That is the real test. I am thankful to think that their great work will go down to History.

I am very grateful to the Lord Mayors of Liverpool and to the citizens of that great City both for the help given to battalions of the Regiment during the War, and for their kindness and generosity since—without it these volumes could not have been produced.

I am very grateful to all those who have lent their Diaries to help the historian in his great task.

The names of Kingsmen inscribed on the Menin Gate at Ypres are a History to themselves alone.

It is my earnest hope that before many years we shall have a Regimental Chapel in Liverpool Cathedral, in which will be kept a Roll of Honour of the names of all those Kingsmen who gave their lives in the service of their King and Country, and whose memory will be ever dear to us. It is in great measure due to their bravery and devotion to duty that His Majesty was pleased to honour the Regiment by becoming its Colonel-in-Chief in 1925—an Honour

for which all past and present Kingsmen and the citizens of Liverpool are deeply grateful.

I feel sure that all those who have been associated with the King's Regiment will find this History of much interest, and our best thanks are due to Mr. Everard Wyrall for all his trouble. It is only too true to say that he has written it, not only as an expert historian, but as a real friend of The King's Regiment.

C. H. Sturges

General.

Colonel, The King's Regiment

(Liverpool)

Quetta,

1st November, 1927.



THE KING'S REGIMENT (LIVERPOOL). [8]

West Lancashire Area.

The White Horse within the Garter. "*Nec aspera terrent.*" In each of the four corners the Royal Cypher ensigned with the Imperial Crown.

The Sphinx superscribed "Egypt."

"Blenheim," "Ramillies," "Oudenarde," "Malplaquet," "Dettingen," "Martinique, 1809," "Niagara," "Delhi, 1857," "Lucknow," "Peiwar Kotal," "Afghanistan, 1878-80," "Burma, 1885-87," "Defence of Ladysmith," "South Africa, 1899-1902," "Afghanistan, 1919."

The Great War—45 Battalions.—**"Retreat from Mons," "Marne, 1914," "Aisne, 1914," "Ypres, 1914, '15, '17," "Langemarck, 1914, '17," "Gheluvelt," "Nonne Bosschen," "Neuve Chapelle," "Gravenstafel," "St. Julien," "Frezenberg," "Bellewaarde," "Aubers," "Festubert, 1915," "Loos," "Somme, 1916, '18," "Albert, 1916, '18," "Bazentin," "Delville Wood," "Guillemont," "Ginchy," "Fleurs-Courcelette," "Morval," "Le Transloy," "Ancre, 1916," "Bapaume, 1917, '18," "Arras, 1917, '18," "Scarpe, 1917, '18," "Arleux," "Pilckem," "Menin Road," "Polygon Wood," "Poelcappelle," "Passchendaele," "Cambrai, 1917, '18," "St. Quentin," "Rosières," "Avre," "Lys," "Estaires," "Messines, 1918," "Bailleul," "Kemmel," "Béthune," "Scherpenberg," "Drocourt-Quéant," "Hindenburg Line," "Epéhy," "Canal du Nord," "St. Quentin Canal," "Selle," "Sambre," "France and Flanders, 1914-18," "Doiran, 1917," "Macedonia, 1915-18." "N.W. Frontier India, 1915," "Archangel, 1918-19."**

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

IN his admirable Foreword to this History of the King's Regiment (Liverpool), General Sir Charles Harington refers to the inspection of the 1st Battalion at Cologne soon after the Armistice. That was in 1918, and now, ten years after the last year of the War, this, the first volume of the Regimental History is available to all those who would read the story of one of the finest line Regiments in the British Army, from the outbreak of War to the end of the year 1915. To some, ten years may seem a lengthy period, but the History was begun only two or three years ago and two more volumes have yet to be written. The writing of this History necessitates the reading of over a thousand Battalion Diaries alone, to say nothing of the diaries kept by Brigade and Divisional Headquarters, with their bulky appendices, all of which have to be carefully scrutinised in order that items of particular interest to the Regiment may not be missed; private diaries, documents and letters, have also to be read and maps studied, as well as the dispatches and all available authorities compared with the narratives in the official diaries.

The popular conception of a military historian is of a hard-headed, calculating, unemotional person, who, having to deal with facts, feels nothing (and therefore can impart nothing) of the thrills and excitement felt by fictional writers; and the popular conception (I take leave to say it) is wrong. Comedy and tragedy, laughter and tears, all the elements of fiction and far more are to be found in these human documents kept in the field. The stark naked truth is here, the ghastliness of the front-line trenches, the gaiety of the back or (so called) "rest" areas, where Divisional Concert Parties soothed the quivering nerves of those who had just come out of the inferno; may be it is only a slip of paper which sets the emotions working, for those few square inches are scrawled over with a pathetic and frantic message for reinforcements or help; and the paper itself is muddy and blood-stained. Or perhaps a trench map, torn and battered, such as came into my possession recently, with the following words written by an illiterate hand in indelible pencil in one corner, "I tried my best but they would not appreciate." What speculations of the conditions under which those words were written, lie here!

I need not comment on the splendid deeds of the King's men as recorded in this volume, only to say that they are worthy of the great city after which the Regiment is named; worthy also of that great county which bred them. Enough to write that in every sense of the word they *were* "King's men."

I should like to add how grateful I am to General Sir Charles Harington, G.B.E., K.C.B., D.S.O., Brigadier-General C. J. Steavenson, C.B., C.M.G., and Colonel T. W. S. Graham and those officers of the Regiment who so kindly read the manuscript of the History before it passed into the hands of the printers; for their very valuable comments and suggestions and ready assistance

xii HISTORY OF THE KING'S REGIMENT (LIVERPOOL)

in obtaining for me further information without which the work must have suffered.

Also, I would again express to Brigadier-General J. E. Edmonds, C.B., C.M.G., Director of the Historical Section (Military Branch) of the Committee of Imperial Defence and his Staff, my gratitude for their invaluable help at all times.

EVERARD WYRALL.

Author's Club, S.W.I.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

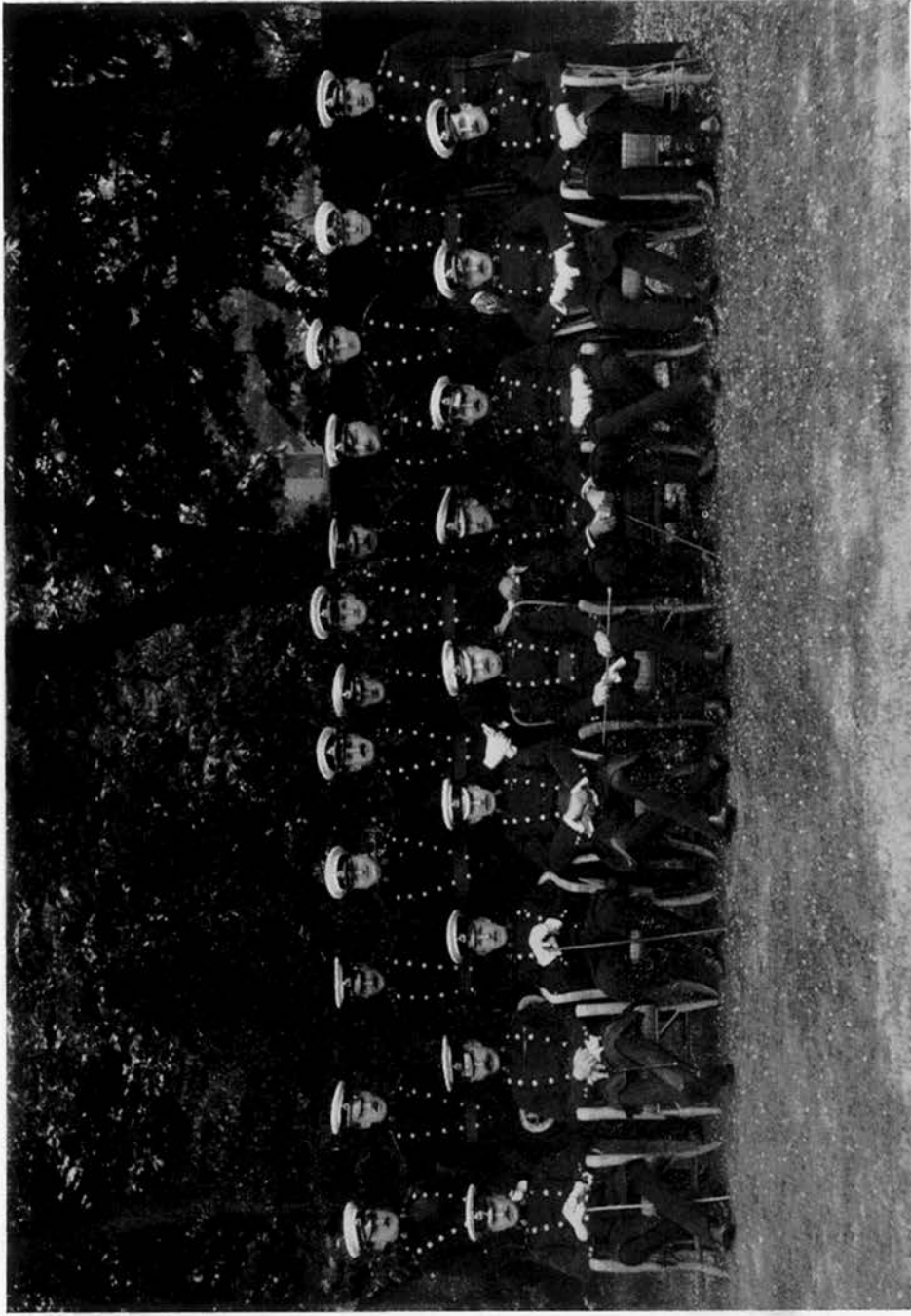
H.M. THE KING (<i>Downey</i>)	<i>Frontispiece</i>	
	FACING	
	PAGE	
OFFICERS OF THE 1ST BATTALION KING'S REGIMENT		1
OFFICERS OF THE 1/5TH BATTALION KING'S REGIMENT (<i>Stringer</i>)		98
L./CPL. J. TOMBS WINNING THE V.C. (<i>Lieut.-Colonel B. Granville Baker</i>).		150
THE LIVERPOOL SCOTTISH (1/10TH BATTALION KING'S REGIMENT) AT BELLEWAARDE (<i>Fyfe</i>)		156
THE LIVERPOOL SCOTTISH (1/10TH BATTALION KING'S REGIMENT) AT BELLEWAARDE		158
N.C.O.'S OF THE 1/7TH BATTALION KING'S REGIMENT AT VERMELLES (<i>Chaddock</i>)		166
THE GAS AND SMOKE CLOUDS AT LOOS, 13TH OCTOBER, 1915 (<i>Imperial War Museum</i>)		196
A TYPICAL FRONT-LINE TRENCH IN 1915 (<i>Imperial War Museum</i>)		202
GAS RESPIRATORS IN USE AT THE END OF 1915 (<i>Imperial War Museum</i>)		208

LIST OF MAPS

From drawings by John S. Fenton

THE RETREAT FROM MONS AND ACTION OF VILLERS-COTTERETS		42
THE ADVANCE TO THE AISNE AND ACTION OF HAUTEVESNES		62
YPRES, 1914		92
YPRES, 1915		130
THE BATTLE OF FESTUBERT		152
THE FIRST ATTACK ON BELLEWAARDE		155
THE BATTLE OF LOOS		181
THE REGIMENT IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS AT THE END OF 1915		216

**THE HISTORY OF
THE KING'S REGIMENT (LIVERPOOL)
1914—1919**



OFFICERS OF THE 1st BATTALION KING'S REGIMENT, JUNE, 1914

<i>Standing:</i>	Lt. P. C. SNATT wounded	Capt. A. K. KYRKE- SMITH killed	Capt. R. E. TANNER died of wounds	Capt. E. R. A. HALL v. s. wounded	Lt. P. W. R. DOLL killed	Lt. J. L. KINNEAR killed flying R.A.F.	Lt. P. T. FURNEAUX killed	Lt. W. A. T. SYNGE	Lt. C. J. PHIPPS died 1918	Lt. L. E. L. HORTON v. s. wounded
<i>Sitting:</i>	Capt. F. E. FENERAN killed	Capt. H. C. POTTER wounded	Capt. T. W. SHEPPARD	Major C. H. HARINGTON	Lt.-Col. W. S. BANNATYNE killed	Major C. J. STEAVENTON	Capt. P. HUDSON wounded	Capt. F. MARSHALL killed	Capt. N. B. C. B. GROUNDS wounded	

THE HISTORY OF THE KING'S REGIMENT (LIVERPOOL)

CHAPTER I

THE 1ST BATTALION MOBILISES AND LEAVES ALDERSHOT

AMONGST the many errors made by the German General Staff when the War began in August, 1914, was an entire miscalculation as to the efficiency and striking power of the British Army. Admittedly, against the conscript Armies of the Great Central Powers, the small voluntary Army of Great Britain seemed insignificant. But never had the military Forces of the Crown entered upon hostilities with a foreign nation, better trained, better equipped or in better fettle. Indeed, many of those competent to express an opinion, who passed through all the years of the Great War, have said of the British soldier of 1914:

“We shall not look upon his like again.”

Be that as it may the fact remains that when, at 12-15 a.m. on 5th August, the Foreign Office issued the now-famous statement that a state of war between Great Britain and Germany had existed as from 11 p.m. on 4th August, the divisions in the United Kingdom forming the British Expeditionary Force had only just completed their annual training, and there was not an officer or man who was not able to march comfortably in one day his twenty to thirty miles. In the use of the rifle the British soldier had no equal, either in marksmanship or bayonet fighting. The troops of no other nation in the world were able to fire as rapidly as his fifteen shots a minute, well and accurately aimed; a feat which later so astonished the Germans at Mons that they declared the British Army was armed with thousands of machine guns, whereas the allotment per battalion was but two. In those early days there were no such formations as machine-gun companies or machine-gun battalions, they had never existed in the British Army, just as hand-grenades and bombs had been relegated to a past age. In discipline also our soldiers were a splendid example of what a thorough and efficient training could produce. In every officer and man there shone a glorious *esprit de corps*, or “pride of regiment,” that wonderful thing for which throughout the grim and bloody struggles between 1914 and 1918 many yielded up their lives, sacrificed them upon the altar of duty, often dying with the name of their beloved Regiment upon their lips: in the official diaries of the War, kept by battalions in the field, there are many such instances.

It was this small, but perfectly trained, equipped and disciplined army, which the Germans referred to as “contemptible,” a term which stuck to the

1st Battalion

old British Regular Army of 1914, so that the divisions which formed the original Expeditionary Force became known as the "Old Contemptibles."

For several days, before the declaration of war with Germany, the United Kingdom from John o' Groats to Land's End was in a state of suppressed excitement, intermingled with a strange restlessness bordering on fear. The whole country was afraid lest the Government of the day should not honour the signature of Great Britain to the treaty which guaranteed the neutrality of Belgium and thus abandon the Belgians and French to the fury of the Germans.

4th August

In Aldershot on the 4th August the tension was extreme; the whole camp was awaiting orders to mobilise, but until they arrived nothing could be done. The troops had all been confined to barracks, for at any moment mobilisation might be ordered.

In Talavera Barracks, where the 1st Battalion of the King's Regiment¹ was quartered, it was perfectly obvious that something extraordinary was expected to happen. The men stood about in groups, or marched to and fro on the barrack square, discussing eagerly the prospects of war: in the Officers' Mess the same subject was the sole topic. No one feared war, for war is the aim and object of a soldier's life and training: what everyone did fear was lest the pacifists in the Government should gain the upper hand and Great Britain should stand aside to her eternal shame. These fears, however, were set at rest at 5 p.m. when mobilisation orders were received and it became known that unless Germany accepted the ultimatum presented by Great Britain, war with her was certain.

The mobilisation of a battalion for war is not an operation which can be carried out in a few minutes. In 1914 three days was the official period and every hour had to be accounted for by a time-table worked out previously. Mobilisation schemes were devised and compiled by Battalion Headquarters and had to be kept continually up-to-date. Occasionally partial mobilisation was practised, and it so happened that during divisional training in July, 1914, the 1st King's had carried out such a scheme, so that when actual orders were received to mobilise the battalion was already half mobilised, and when each officer received an envelope containing his instructions he knew exactly what to do and how to set about doing it.

In peace time a battalion was seldom up to war strength: it included a certain number of recruits, men under age, and others medically unfit for foreign service. Immediately on receipt of mobilisation orders a roll was made of all men with the battalion and sent to the Depôt: the Depôt of the King's Regiment was at Seaforth Barracks, Liverpool. On receipt of the roll the Depôt despatched reservists to complete the war strength of the battalion. These men arrived on the second day of mobilisation and were at once fitted out with clothing, rifles and equipment, while for the whole battalion field conduct sheets and pay books were prepared.

If there was one person in a battalion who underwent a complete change

¹The Army List of 1914 gives the old title of the Regiment, *i.e.*, The King's (Liverpool) Regiment; its designation now is The King's Regiment (Liverpool).

on mobilisation it was the Quartermaster. In peace time he was the autocrat of the Regiment and not even a bootlace might be issued without his sanction, while as for obtaining a pair of boots—well, drawing blood from a stone was easier. But on mobilisation the doors of the Quartermaster's stores were thrown open and one had but to ask and receive without the possibility of a refusal. In the long years of the War a good Quartermaster was a battalion's most priceless possession.

Other things besides dress and equipment had to be issued to the troops on mobilisation, for all men had to carry into action a first field dressing, identity disc, jack knife and "iron" (or emergency) ration. The latter consisted of a tin of bully beef, six biscuits, some tea and sugar in a tin, and two tubes of meat extract. This emergency ration was not to be consumed unless by order of an officer.

The Battalion Transport had also to be mobilised, additional horses being required to bring it up to war strength. These horses had to be collected and fitted with harness.

In addition to seeing that their men were properly fitted out and equipped, the officers had also to complete their own kit. Each unmounted officer was only allowed 35 lbs. and it was not easy to condense it to that weight. A "base" kit of 100 lbs. was allowed, but senior officers knew only too well the futility of relying, on active service, on kit at the base; it is better left at home.

Finally, the President of the Officers' Mess had to see that the Mess silver, plate, pictures, etc., were carefully packed and sent off for storage and, so far as possible, all accounts were settled up.

On the 8th August, 1914, the 1st Battalion, King's Regiment, stood ready mobilised for War. The battalion, commanded by Lieut.-Colonel W. S. Bannatyne, formed part of the 6th Infantry Brigade of the 2nd Division which, with the 1st Division, constituted the I Corps under the command of Lieut.-General Sir Douglas Haig,¹ Commander-in-Chief of the Aldershot Command. The 1st King's were brigaded with the 2nd Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment, 1st Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment, and 1st Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps; the Brigade was commanded by Brig.-General R. H. Davies, and the 2nd Division by Major-General C. C. Monroe.² The other Infantry Brigades of the 2nd Division were the 4th (Guards) and the 5th.

At the end of the third day of mobilisation the 1st King's were (to use the words of an officer of the battalion) "ready for anything": the battalion's belongings had been stored, all regimental documents had been handed in and disposed of, bayonets and swords had been sharpened, and every man was well shod, clothed and equipped, and in possession of one hundred rounds of ammunition.

Several days elapsed, however, before the battalion left Aldershot, but they were days of real hard work spent in making final preparations and in

¹Field-Marshal Earl Haig of Bemersyde.

²General Sir C. C. Monroe.

1st Battalion

training the reservists and bringing what knowledge of soldiering the latter possessed up to modern standards. These men, having been in civil life some years and mostly employed in sedentary work, were naturally somewhat "soft" at first, though a week or two later they were to show of what splendid stuff they were made and how superb a man was the old soldier. On mobilisation, however, they found themselves a bit "out of the way of things," the new short rifle was unknown to many of them and they had to master the first principles of handling it and firing with it. They were, also, in poor marching condition when they first rejoined, but in a few days, after several marches to the Ash Ranges (a distance of about six miles), they improved wonderfully. Other things, such as changes in drill and training, they soon mastered, so that when on 12th August, the 1st King's (in brigade and division) left Aldershot, the battalion was keen and well prepared for the grim struggle overseas in France and Flanders. Never indeed, had troops better trained or equipped left England to engage in warfare with a foreign nation.

One of the most extraordinary incidents in the early days of the War was the secrecy which surrounded the departure of the British Expeditionary Force for France. The Press knew of it, yet for once refrained from publishing the news. But, saving a few, the first the public heard of the Force was its arrival in France and action with the enemy.

12th August

There were no cheering crowds to speed the troops on their way when the 1st King's (991 W.O.'s., N.C.O.'s and men and 27 officers) left Talavera Barracks at 6 a.m. on the morning of the 12th August. At Farnborough Station, where they entrained, two or three porters, a few officers' wives and a sleepy paper boy, were the only witnesses of their departure. The train left Farnborough at 8 o'clock and reached Southampton Docks at 9.30 a.m. where, with the 2nd South Staffords, the 1st King's embarked on the S.S. *Irrawaddy*. About mid-day the boat steamed slowly out of the Docks into Southampton Water. No farewell scenes, no frantic cheering, just a few shouts from dock labourers and the crew of an American yacht. Quietly, but quickly, the *Irrawaddy* and other vessels carrying more troops steamed down Southampton Water on the greatest expedition the world has ever known. So great an undertaking yet so little noise. So few of the thousands of troops crowded on the decks of the vessels, straining their eyes to catch a last glimpse of the white cliffs of old England, would ever look upon her shores again; but that knowledge was mercifully hidden from them. Being soldiers, perfectly trained and disciplined for war, it is possible there was not one amongst them who would have bartered his chances of a fight for a King's throne. For such was the spirit of the British soldier in 1914.

CHAPTER II

“Troops to our England true,
 Faring to Flanders,
 God be with all of you
 And your Commanders.”

CHARLES WILLIAM BRODRIBB.

HAVRE had been allotted to the 2nd Division for disembarkation in France, and dawn was breaking on the morning of 13th August as the *Irrawaddy* arrived off the mouth of the estuary. As the vessel nosed her way into the harbour the sun was just breaking through the slight haze which hung over the ancient town. A small fleet of French fishing boats, their brown sails flapping lazily, was the only sign of activity at that early hour, but presently as the transport moved slowly up the wharves, some French soldiers on guard on the quayside sent up a cheer, and soon a number of children were running alongside the ship clamouring for “souvenirs” in the form of buttons, cap badges or shoulder plates. Unable to resist these appeals, many a kind-hearted British soldier parted with his cap badge or shoulder plates or a button from his tunic, a breach of discipline which had its sequel in the “Orderly Room” next morning.

1st Battalion
 13th August

After the *Irrawaddy* had been docked, very little time was lost before the troops were disembarked and, without waiting for their transport, marched off *en route* for the rest camp at St. Adiesse, which was situated on a hill outside Havre, about three miles from the town. But, meanwhile, the sun had risen, the morning was intensely hot, and as the 1st King’s marched through the town of Havre, many of the men began to show signs of distress from the excessive heat. The battalion had had no breakfast and, having been cooped up all night within the narrow compass of a vessel crowded with troops, it was not surprising that some of them fell out. A halt was called in the town and, during the “stand at ease,” French people—men, women and children—rushed from their houses, their arms full of bottles of beer and wine, and before they could be prevented, distributed them to the thirsty troops—a kindly but disastrous thing, as every soldier who has marched in great heat knows. Eventually, however, order was restored, and continuing its march through the town, accompanied by the cheers and cries of delighted welcome from the inhabitants, the battalion (less several sunstroke cases which had to be sent on afterwards) reached the rest camp. The 2nd South Staffords were with the King’s, but the two other battalions of the 6th Infantry Brigade (1st Royal Berks. and 1st K.R.R. Corps), with Brigade Headquarters, went on to Rouen.

And here, for a little while, it is necessary to digress from the story of the King’s Regiment in order to outline briefly the composition and rôle entrusted to the British Expeditionary Force, and the area in which it was to concentrate

1st Battalion

before moving up to take its place in the line of battle in accordance with the plans of the Allied Commanders-in-Chief, details necessary to a clearer understanding of the subsequent operations in which the King's men were engaged.

At the outbreak of war in 1914, the Expeditionary Force of the British Regular Army consisted of six divisions and one cavalry division, organised some years previously.

Each division (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th) comprised three infantry brigades (twelve battalions altogether) with divisional mounted troops, artillery, engineers, signal service, supply and transport train and field ambulances. The total war establishment of a division was some 18,000 all ranks, of whom 12,000 were infantry with 24 machine guns and 4,000 artillery, the latter being armed with 18-pounders, 4.5-in. howitzers and four 60-pounders.

On the 5th and 6th August, at a War Council, it was decided that the British Expeditionary Force, less the 4th and 6th Divisions, should embark for the Continent; the 4th and 6th Divisions were moved to strategical positions where they could best oppose a German landing should the enemy attempt such a manœuvre. Of the four divisions ordered to France, the 1st and 2nd formed the I Corps, and the 3rd and 5th Divisions the II Corps. The I Corps was commanded by Lieut.-General Sir Douglas Haig, and the II first by Lieut.-General Sir James Grierson (who, however, died in France on 17th August, before the operations began), and then by Lieut.-General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien. The British Expeditionary Force was commanded by Field-Marshal Sir John French. The decision as to the position which the British Expeditionary Force was to take up in France, was left to the French to decide and General Joffre said that "In the event of its arrival its employment was looked for at the place which should be logically reserved for it, on the left of the line of the French Armies, which it would thus prolong."

On the 14th August, Sir John French arrived in France, and between that date and the 17th, the British Expeditionary Force crossed the Channel and landed on French soil. The Force had been ordered to concentrate between Maubeuge and Le Cateau in an area about twenty-five miles long from north-east to south-west and about ten miles wide; the cavalry were at the north-eastern end ready to join hands with the Fifth French Army.

Into all the details of the French offensive in Alsace in the very early days of the War, before the British Expeditionary Force arrived, and the reasons which induced the French Commander-in-Chief to change his plan of action, it is impossible to go,¹ but by the 16th or 17th August, the scheme of operations formulated by General Joffre may be briefly summarised as follows: The Third and Fourth French Armies were to make the principal attack through Luxemburg and Belgian Luxemburg, so as to strike at the flanks and communications of the Germans, who had crossed the Meuse between Namur and the Dutch frontier, and, if possible, attack them before they could deploy for battle by

¹The first volume of "The Official History of the War (Military Operations) France and Belgium, 1914," should be studied.

wheeling south. The First and Second French Armies were to support the offensive by a secondary attack between Metz and the Vosges, so as to hold the enemy, who appeared to be moving gradually westwards and who might possibly take in flank the French Armies attacking in Luxemburg. Finally, the left wing, consisting of the Fifth French Army, the British Army (when it should arrive) and the Belgian Army, was to move up so as to check any German forces that might advance from the Meuse, thus giving sufficient time to allow the attack of the Third and Fourth Armies to become effective. In brief, the object of the French Commander-in-Chief was to break the enemy's centre and then fall, with all available forces, on the right, or western, wing of the German Armies.

1st Battalion

The general advance was to take place on the 21st August, and, in the meantime, the British Expeditionary Force was concentrating in the area allotted to it.

The 14th August was spent by the 1st King's in the rest camp at Havre. At 6 a.m. both officers and men went down for a bathe in the sea, which, after the tiring experiences of the previous day, was a rare pleasure. The remainder of the day was spent in collecting kits, filling water bottles and generally preparing to move up to the concentration area; maps were issued to the officers. The night of 14th/15th was wet, but on the morning of 15th the rain ceased and the battalion, early astir, marched off to Havre Station and there entrained. The destination of the train was Busigny, *via* Rouen. It was a journey never to be forgotten, for all along the route the troops met with a great reception. From the windows of every house, and indeed, every little cottage within sight of the line, French people waved flags and handkerchiefs; at every halt at a station crowds of people flocked to the carriage windows and threw bunches of flowers in upon both officers and men. Shouts of "à bas Guillaume," followed by the significant action of a finger drawn across the throat, left no doubt as to the hatred felt by the French people for Germany. From Rouen, where the train had arrived at about 4.30 p.m., the journey was continued, and about 3.30 a.m. the next morning (16th), Busigny was reached where the battalion, tired and still sleepy, tumbled out on to the platform and was soon on the march to Hannappes, a distance of about eight miles. Part of the 6th Brigade had already arrived, the units being split up and billeted in Hannappes, Iron and Venerolles. The 1st King's were settled in their billets in the first-named village by about 8 a.m.

14th August

15th August

16th August

The march from the station to Hannappes was almost a repetition of the train journey from Havre to Busigny, everywhere the utmost enthusiasm, the French peasants pressing in upon the ranks of the troops and giving them a hearty welcome to France. "They seemed to place so much confidence in us," said a King's officer, "that one could almost hear them saying as we passed through: 'Ah! there go *les braves Anglais* (as they called us): all is well, we are quite safe now.'" Colonel Bannatyne's second horse was literally covered with bunches of flowers, and many a tiny child broke into the ranks with something, sometimes a single "flower, sometimes a bunch of forget-me-nots or other wild flowers." The gardens and the hedgerows, from which they were plucked, had

1st Battalion

not then been trodden by the heavy foot of the invader. "We little thought," said this same officer, "as we marched through these villages on that Sunday morning how soon we should be marching through them again, in the opposite direction, and perforce, leaving the villagers to their fate."

Hannappes was quite a small village, about five miles north of Guise and about three miles south-west of Etreux. It lay a short distance from the main road, in a slight hollow: a canal, bordered by poplars, ran through the southern end of the village. It possessed, in 1914, two or three small shops, after the small village shop in England, stocking a little of everything, but mostly of the cheaper kind. A pleasant spot in which to billet, the 1st King's being housed at the southern end. This little place is worth mentioning, for here the battalion spent four or five days' rest and quietude with only route marches and the necessary final preparations for the move up to the battle area, to occupy them during duty hours.

The system of billeting at this period is not uninteresting. Up to their arrival at Hannappes, the officers of the battalion had been feeding, as in peace time, at a Headquarters Mess. But now a system of company messes was adopted. Each company's officers were billeted together, and as far as possible, in the middle of their company; thus each company became a small complete unit of its own. Battalion Headquarters had its own mess consisting of the C.O., the Second-in-Command, the Adjutant, the Quartermaster, the Machine-Gun Officer, the Transport Officer, and the Battalion Medical Officer.

20th August

By the evening of 20th August, the concentration of the British Expeditionary Force was virtually complete. The cavalry were east of Maubeuge in the villages of Jeumont, Damousies and Cousolre, with Headquarters at Aibes; the II Corps was east of Landrecies, the 3rd Division occupying the villages of Marbaix, Taisnieres and Noyelles, and the 5th Division, Maroilles, Landrecies and Ors; the I Corps, east of Bohain, was billeted as follows: 1st Division in Boue, Esqueheries and Leschelle, 2nd Division, Grougis, Mennevret and Hannappes; II Corps Headquarters were at Landrecies and I Corps Headquarters at Wassigny. It will thus be seen that on this date the British Expeditionary Force was concentrated from north-east to south-west in a pear-shape area. It was to move forward in the order given.

On 20th August, important events had taken place. British aeroplanes, flying over the Belgian frontier, discovered a column of German troops stretching through Louvain as far as the eye could reach. It was a column of the First German Army (von Kluck) who, diverting his III Reserve Corps, followed later by the IX Corps and the equivalent of five divisions, was pressing westward with the remainder of his army. Brussels was entered by German troops on this day; the main Belgian Army retired into Antwerp; the enemy had approached within decisive range of Namur and General Joffre issued his orders for the general advance. In the great movement then ordered by the French Commander-in-Chief, brief reference to which has already been made, the British Expeditionary Force was to advance on the left of the Fifth French Army, north-east, by way of Soignies, in the general direction of Nivelles. Thus,

if the First German Army wheeled south from Brussels, von Kluck's right was not expected to extend much beyond Mons and if the British were in line about the latter place they would be ready when the Fifth French Army had passed the Sambre to wheel eastwards and envelop the enemy's right. In order to make the enveloping movement complete, Sordet's Cavalry Corps, which on this day had fallen back midway between Charleroi and Binche, was ordered to take up position on the left of the British Expeditionary Force. Three French Territorial divisions, still further to the west, were also to join in the movement by pushing gradually forward. But to students of military strategy it will be evident that already the initiative was passing into the hands of the Germans, whose plans in fact were based on an *envelopment of the Allied left wing*.

1st Battalion
20th August

In the meantime, on the night of 20th, British General Headquarters issued orders to the cavalry and II and I Corps to move northwards during the three ensuing days.

On the morning of 21st the advance began, the 1st King's Regiment marching with the remainder of the 6th Infantry Brigade Group to Landrecies, a distance of about eleven miles. Landrecies was reached about 3 p.m. and the brigade billeted in the village and neighbourhood. All ranks were glad to get a rest for the heat was intense and the hard cobbled roads affected the feet of the reservists, who were still not quite in marching trim; new boots added to their difficulties, whilst the crushing weight of the pack told on them terribly. On this day the II Corps, marching in rear of the cavalry, reached a line level with, and west of, Maubeuge, the 3rd Division on the right (Bettignies—Feignies—La Longueville), the 5th Division on the left (Houdain—St. Waast—Gommegnies). The I Corps occupied the line Avesnes—Landrecies, about ten miles behind the II Corps; the 1st Division on the right and 2nd Division on the left. On the right of the British Expeditionary Force the Fifth French Army was already in contact with the Second German Army along the whole line of the Sambre, on either side of Charleroi from Tamines to Pont-à-Celles.

21st August

Apart from the movements of troops to their allotted positions in the battle-front-to-be, the 22nd August is an important date, for on this day the British first came into contact with the enemy. An officer's patrol of the 4th Dragoon Guards, encountering a German picquet near Soignies, fired on it—the first shot of the War fired by the British on the Continent. This affair took place at dawn on 22nd. In the meantime the I and II Corps had begun to move forward again. The 1st Division of the former marched at 4 a.m. from its area of the previous night and between 3 and 5 p.m. reached positions north and south-west of Maubeuge (Bettignies—St. Remi Mal Bati—Limont Fontaine); the 2nd Division, marching at 5 a.m., halted at noon in depth at La Longueville—Hargnies and Pont-sur-Sambre, the 6th Infantry Brigade billeting in Hargnies. But the 1st Division was moved still further forward so as to help fill the gap between the right of the II Corps and the left of the XVIII French Corps on the Sambre. It was far into the night and the early hours of 23rd before the 1st Division reached its allotted position, Villers Sire Nicole—Croix lez Rouveroy—Grand Reng.

22nd August

1st Battalion
22nd August

The II Corps had started its forward movement later than the I Corps, the 3rd Division at 7 a.m. and the 5th Division at 6 a.m. At about 1 p.m. the former reached its billets round Mons, in the area Nimy—Ghlin—Frameries—Spiennes, and the latter the line of the Mons Canal from Jemappes to Boussu from one to two hours later. The outpost line of the 3rd Division extended in a wide sweep eastwards through Villers St. Ghislain, St. Symphorien, the bridge at Obourg, the bridge at Lock 5 to Nimy.

The two Corps were now occupying the positions allotted to them in General Headquarters' orders of 20th.

The close of the 22nd August, however, witnessed a dramatic change in the Allies' situation and especially in the rôle assigned to the British Expeditionary Force. During the afternoon, aeroplane observers had ascertained that at least two German corps were attacking the Fifth French Army on the Sambre, and in the evening returned with the grave news that the French centre had been driven back, the X French Corps retiring to a line extending from thirteen to ten miles south of the river; the III French Corps had likewise fallen back about the same distance, only the XVIII French Corps, on the right of the British Expeditionary Force, remained in its original position, echeloned to the rear between Marbaix and Thuin. The British troops along the Mons Canal were, therefore, some nine miles ahead of the main French line, the 1st Division at Grand Reng being a similar distance from the left flank of the XVIII French Corps. Moreover, from the Mons Salient to Rouveroy, a distance of about nine miles was held only by one British Infantry Brigade—the 8th. And the enemy's main bodies, in great strength, were reported at various points within dangerous proximity to the British Expeditionary Force.

In view of the reports of his aeroplane observers, it seemed obvious to Sir John French that the Germans were even then engaged in carrying out a turning movement, threatening the British left.

At a conference held at Le Cateau on the evening of 22nd August, Sir John French announced that the British offensive could not take place; the retreat of the Fifth French Army had made it impossible. About 11 p.m. a French staff officer arrived at British Headquarters with a request from General Lanrezac to Sir John French, that the latter should attack the flank of the German columns which were pressing the Fifth French Army back from the Sambre. To this request the British Commander-in-Chief felt it impossible to accede. He, however, promised to remain in his present position along the Mons Canal for twenty-four hours and he ordered the I Corps to take over that portion of the outpost line of the II Corps (held by the 8th Infantry Brigade) which lay east of Mons, by 6 a.m. on the 23rd, *i.e.*, the following morning.

All unconscious of the disappointment awaiting them (for they were confidently expecting to attack the enemy, not to be attacked by him), the British troops—line regiments and divisional troops—slept soundly that night, or at least those who had reached billets in time to obtain several hours' rest before dawn on the 23rd. The 1st King's were in a large farm at Hargnies, where, "by using up some rather ramshackle lofts," recorded an officer of the

1st Battalion in his private diary, "we managed to get nearly all the men under cover. Most of the officers, at any rate the company officers, slept outside. We pitched our company mess in a dry, grassy ditch. The farmer's wife was a splendid person and within a very short time of our arrival had prepared two or three great bowls of bread and milk, and most excellent it was. Here we heard the guns for the first time, booming away in the distance, presumably at Liège and Namur. We also saw two English biplanes and a French monoplane flying out on a reconnaissance, and so we began to feel that we were getting very near to business."