



20th Hussars in the Great War

BY
MAJOR J. C. DARLING, D.S.O.



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DEDICATION.

TO THOSE GALLANT FELLOWS WHO GAVE THEIR
LIVES IN THE SERVICE OF THEIR KING AND COUNTRY
AND IN UPHOLDING THE GOOD NAME OF THE 20TH
HUSSARS THIS BOOK IS MOST HUMBLY DEDICATED.

PREFACE.

The 20th Hussars do not pretend that they won the war. As Colonel Richardson said, at the first Regimental dinner after the armistice, "all we claim is that whenever we were given a job to do, we did it". In this little book I have tried to describe the jobs we were given and how we did them. If my descriptions are inaccurate I beg to be excused, my defence being that it was not until after the Regiment had been disbanded that it was suggested that I should write the book. I have not been able to consult many of those who would have given me great assistance. Those I have consulted have taken a lot of trouble to give me all the information they could, and to them are due my best thanks.

INTRODUCTION

BY

LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR PHILIP CHETWODE, BART.,
K.C.B., K.C.M.G., D.S.O.

My dear Darling,

I am very glad you have taken the trouble to place on record the more intimate doings of your distinguished regiment, the 20th Hussars, in the Great War. I congratulate you on the result which I have read with the greatest interest.

No regiment of cavalry entered upon the great adventure better trained and prepared for war than the 20th, and the value of that good training in peace time was apparent from the first day they met the enemy. All ranks were imbued with a splendid spirit and knew exactly what to do in the many arduous and difficult tasks they had to perform.

I was proud to have under my command the regiment on which I could always depend no matter what I asked them to do. The 5th Brigade were, as you say, a happy family not only because they got on well together, but because the various units knew they could always depend on each other absolutely.

It is tragic to think that the regiment with such a fine record has, for the moment, lost its full status as a separate regiment. No one will rejoice more than I shall when they regain it.

Yours ever,

PHILIP W. CHETWODE.

COMMAND HEADQUARTERS,
ALDERSHOT.

4th July, 1923.



Lieut.-Colonel G. T. G. Edwards, C.B.

CHAPTER I.—We go to War.

(See Map I.)

WHEN war first threatened and then broke out in Europe in 1914, the 20th Hussars, commanded by Lieut.-Col. G. T. G. Edwards, were stationed at Colchester, where they had been since 1911. They formed a unit of the 5th Cavalry Brigade under Brig.-Gen. Sir Philip Chetwode. The other regiments of the Brigade were the Royal Scots Greys and the 12th Royal Lancers, stationed respectively at York and at Norwich. These regiments were no strangers to the 20th. We had been brigaded with the Greys at Pond Farm, on Salisbury Plain, during the manœuvres of 1908; and while we were there together the regiments had got to know one another very well. Since the 12th had come to Norwich we had seen a good deal of them; and the officers, at any rate, had become acquainted with one another. We thus found ourselves destined to fight alongside two regiments whose fine soldierly qualities we had already appreciated in peace. As time went on the good feeling and mutual confidence existing between the three regiments became more and more marked, and I think I can say without fear of being contradicted that throughout the British Army no happier family existed during the War than the 5th Cavalry Brigade.

I do not intend to dwell long on the events following the receipt of the order to mobilize. This was received about 6.15 p.m. on the 4th of August. Everything proceeded "according to plan" with a clockwork-like monotony that did the highest credit to those who had been responsible for the mobilization scheme. Reservists arrived in batches from the *Depôt* at Scarborough, and officers on detached duties hastened to rejoin. Major Richardson had just finished his time as Adjutant of the South Devon Yeomanry, and in his haste to be in time for the

hunt he drove his Ford car from Exeter to Colchester throughout the night, and reached barracks about breakfast time.

I need hardly recall the zeal with which Officers of the Reserve volunteered to join their old Corps, or the keenness among men of all ranks, reservists as well as serving soldiers, to be included among the original Expeditionary Force. Similar scenes must have occurred in every barracks. The C.O. had indeed a hard job in settling who was to go. Many had to stay behind and bide their time.

The only officer from the Reserve who accompanied the regiment to France was Captain S. H. Cristy, D.S.O.

Horses arrived almost daily, the stables in barracks were soon filled, and a remount camp was started at Middlewick. Thus, by the appointed day, the regiment was up to strength in officers, men and horses.

I think I am right in saying that it was during the afternoon of Saturday, 15th August, that the news leaked out in the mess and in the barrack rooms that the regiment was to leave Colchester the following day. The secret had been well kept.

Before going any further, it may be of interest to give the names of the officers, warrant officers and some of the senior N.C.O.'s who accompanied the regiment. I therefore set them out in the following table :—

Officer Commanding Regiment, Lieut.-Col. G. T. G. Edwards.

Second in Command, Major G. T. R. Cook.

Adjutant, Capt. G. A. Sanford.

Signalling Officer, Capt. J. C. Darling.

Machine Gun Officer, Lieut. J. K. McConnel.

Quartermaster, Lieut. W. Adams.

Regimental Sergt.-Major, Mr. Austin.

Regimental Quartermaster-Sergt., R.Q.M.S. Addis.

Farrier-Major, F.Q.M.S. Churchill.

<i>Squadrons.</i>	<i>" A " Squadron.</i>	<i>" B " Squadron.</i>	<i>" C " Squadron.</i>
O.C. Squadron ...	Major M. E. Richardson	Capt. A. C. Little	Capt. C. G. Mangles
2nd in Command	Lieut. W. H. M. Micholls	Capt. S. H. Cristy, D.S.O.	Capt. S. Barne.
O.C. 1st Troop	Lieut. G. W. I. Bairstow	Lieut. D. S. Peplow	Lieut. R. W. Sparrow
O.C. 2nd Troop	Lieut. J. T. Upton	Lieut. H. M. Soames	Lieut. D. C. M. Beech.
O.C. 3rd Troop	Lieut. J. Galbraith	Lieut. W. D. A. Hall	Lieut. R. M. Thompson

O.C. 4th Troop	Lieut. W. A. Silvertop	Lieut. S. Carew	Lieut. J. H. Goodhart
S.S.M.S.S.M. Morwood	S.S.M. Wyborn	S.S.M. Smith
S.Q.M.S.	...S.Q.M.S. Stratford	S.Q.M.S. Traylen	S.Q.M.S. Whittingham

All details not accompanying the regiment joined the 13th Reserve Cavalry Regiment, which took over the barracks at Colchester, under the command of Lieut.-Col. A. M. B. Jones late 20th Hussars. This regiment was formed to supply drafts to make good casualties in the 14th and 20th.

The "first reinforcement," which was proceeding overseas almost simultaneously with the regiment, was under the command of Lieut. Dodgson. Sergt.-Major Clemenson, of orderly room fame, was destined to watch over our interests from the advanced base.

The following seconded officers did not accompany the regiment :—

- Major Jennings-Bramly (serving with the Egyptian Army).
- Major J. S. Cawley (Brigade-Major, 1st Cavalry Brigade).
- Capt. E. W. P. Love (Adjutant, Duke of Lancaster's Own Yeomanry).
- Capt. F. B. Hurndall (Adjutant, Berkshire Yeomanry).
- Capt. R. H. Osborne (Instructor at the Cavalry School became on Mobilization, Staff Captain, 1st Cavalry Brigade).

It was about 7 a.m. on Sunday, 16th August, 1914, that the regiment began to entrain at St. Botolph's Station, Colchester, for "an unknown destination." Far more unknown was what the future might hold in store for us. I do not think many of us were worrying much about what was ahead of them. We had our best pals with us. We were off on this, the greatest adventure of our lives. We formed part of a regiment which each one considered was second to no other, and which we felt sure would do its duty, come what might. If any, more inquisitive than the rest, tried to discern the future, I am quite sure not one came anywhere near the truth in guessing the course of the momentous events which were crowded into the next few weeks—events in which each one was destined to act his little part.

Some may have guessed that within six days we should be in touch with the Germans; but I do not think any anticipated that within eight days the British Army would be in full retreat.

As our train, having skirted the northern suburbs of

London, emerged on to the main line of the South Western Railway, it became obvious that we were bound for Southampton. The various trains reached Southampton Docks during the afternoon and evening. "A" Squadron embarked that night; the rest of us went to a rest camp, as our ship, the "Indore," was not ready. Our reception at Southampton was a most cordial one, though the town had by now become accustomed to troops passing through on the way to France. The following day, Monday, 17th, Regimental Headquarters "B" and "C" Squadrons embarked, and at 4 a.m. on the 18th sailed for the "unknown port." We reached Le Havre about 6 p.m.

The scene was one not quickly to be forgotten. As the transport approached, cheers broke out from the crowds collected on the pier. The cheers were answered from the ship. Some of the bolder spirits even experimented with their French by shouting "Vive la France" in answer to the "Vive l'Angleterre" of our gallant allies. Already small French boys had learnt to shout for "biscuits," of which the men seemed to have plenty to spare. I do not remember that as yet there were any cries for "du bully beef."

The work of disembarking proceeded slowly, yet surely. The only untoward incidents were when Lieut. Goodhart and two horses fell down two decks into the hold, and when Sergt.-Major Lee's horse was dropped by the crane on to the quay and got loose. Whether that gallant steed intended returning to his native shores or not, it is vain to conjecture. Certain it is that he leapt into the sea and swam out into the harbour. After a cruise round, however, he seems to have settled that desertion when on active service would bring discredit on his regiment. He therefore returned to the ship and got wedged in between it and the quay. From that position he was rescued at no small personal risk by Lieut. McConnel, who contrived to get down and fasten a rope round him, thus early demonstrating his readiness to take on any job that was going. This incident took place by the scanty light of a few gas jets on the wharf. The unloading went on all night, and was not finished till early the next morning. The regiment, as it landed, spent the night 18th—19th in one of the goods yards on the quay. On the morning of the 19th we set out, guided

by a diminutive boy scout, to find "La Gare." We found it and entrained.

The progress of the train was leisurely, as is the way of troop trains in France. The men, seated in the open trucks that are labelled "Hommes 40, Chevaux 8," had ample opportunity to exchange salutations with the population, consisting mostly of women, who turned out to see the train go by. Girls threw bunches of flowers into the cattle trucks, often shouting for "Souvenirs" in return.

I am afraid not a few cap badges were deficient by the end of the journey.

The reception given to the British Army was magnificent. Everyone realised that this "Entente Cordiale" of which they had heard so much was a very live reality. When the train halted, the engine-driver was only too pleased to supply hot water from the boiler for making tea. The station masters and other officials were very important and busy. One station master in particular was most scrupulous in demanding from the Colonel to know whether the contents of the train were quite accurately represented on the document in his possession. With pride he showed us his 1870 medal. He had been through it in "Soixante-dix," and now had come the time for "la revanche." Everyone was in the best of spirits. The enthusiasm of the French nation had infected us.

At midday we stopped at Rouen, where the men got a meal and horses were watered and fed. Then the train lumbered on again. Towards evening the journey began to become tedious. Night came on and found us still rumbling through the monotonous French landscape. We slept as best we could, and woke next morning to find ourselves arriving at Hautmont. Here at last we were released. Our train journey was at an end. We were greeted by our Staff Captain, Capt. Willie Palmer, an old 20th himself, though now a 10th Hussar. He gave us the programme with his usual assurance—for all the world as if he had arranged it himself. "To-day we rest; to-morrow we march; and Monday *la grande bataille*." Hautmont is not far from Maubeuge, and after detraining we marched to Limont-Fontaine, a few miles away, where we went into billets. We were joined here by Lieut. Harlet of the French Artillery. He was our liaison officer,

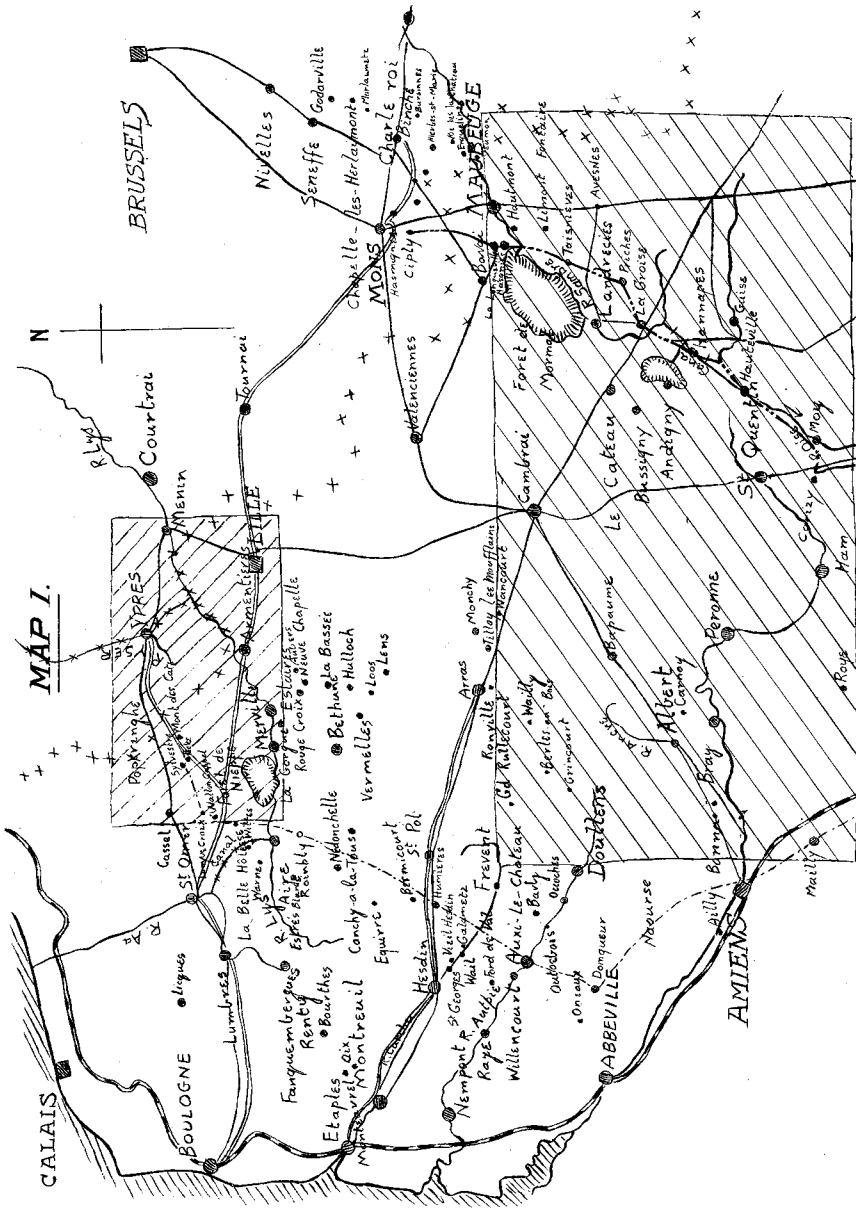
and brought with him twelve French N.C.O.'s as interpreters. One was sent to each troop.

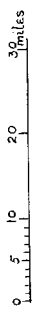
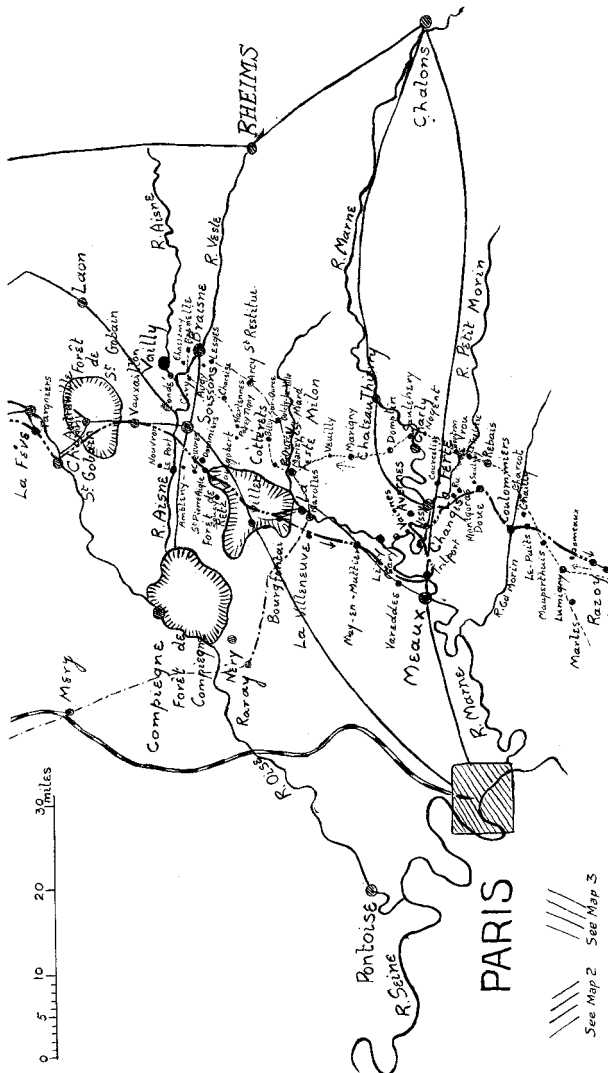
We left Limont early on the morning of Friday, 21st, for the Brigade rendezvous, which was on the Maubeuge-Avesnes road. From there the Brigade, consisting of Greys, 12th, 20th, "J" Battery R.H.A., and 5th Cavalry Field Ambulance, marched, skirting Maubeuge, via Jeumont and Euquelines. Between these last two places we crossed the frontier into Belgium. The population all turned out and gave us a tremendous reception, being profuse with their offers of flowers, cigars and wine. As we were moving at a trot there was not much opportunity for accepting these tokens of hospitality. The march continued by Merbes-le-Chateau and Merbes-Ste-Marie. At the latter place there were rumours of Germans somewhere. Rifles were loaded. Lieut. Beech and Lieut. Sparrow were sent off in command of patrols, but found nothing. Lieut. Beech was also to try and get touch with French cavalry on our right. It will be as well here to note the rôle of our brigade at this phase.

The British Army, as is well known, was disposed at the battle of Mons on the left flank of the Allies; 1st Corps on the right, 2nd on the left, Cavalry Division, under General Allenby, patrolling to the front and guarding the left flank. General Allenby's Division consisted of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Cavalry Brigades. The 5th Cavalry Brigade was not under his command. It had originally been told off as "protective" cavalry, whereas the Division was "independent." Actually we were disposed on the extreme right of the British Army, and our rôle at this time was to reconnoitre to the front and to keep touch between the right of the 1st Corps and the left of the French 5th Army, under General De Lanrezac who were holding a line running roughly east and west through Charleroi. The French cavalry we were looking for was a cavalry corps who had already done considerable fighting in Belgium, and who had fallen back to cover the left of the 5th Army.

I think I am right in saying that the Merbes-Ste. Marie to Binche road, up which our brigade advanced, was the dividing line between the French and British Armies. We halted for the night just short of Binche. "B" Squadron were disposed:—Two troops under Capt. Little at Buvrinnes,

MAP I.





- See Map 2
- See Map 3
- Line of march of Recé during retreat from Mons.
- Railway
- Line of march during Battle of Marne up to R. Aisne.
- Road.
- Line of march from Aisne to 1st Battle of Ypres.
- Wood