

Volume 2 Section 106

A note on

Regimental Numbering

The Numbering System

Every man who entered the army after 1829 was allocated a Regimental number. This was to enable him to be positively identified regardless of whether or not there was another man with a similar or identical name. Regiments were given the option of either a unique numbering system which spanned Battalions, or numbering within Battalions, in which case the regimental number was formed by prefixing the battalion number with the number of the battalion eg 5/3452 would be a man within the 5th Battalion. The latter system tended to be used by Territorial and Reserve battalions especially where a regiment was entirely territorial.

The first numbering scheme started around 1829 when the Regiments numbered regulars in order of their length of service. One man of the 66th Foot had joined in 1793 at the age of 40 and was still serving in 1829 - He received the number 1. In 1856 the Regiments of Foot began a new series with new recruits receiving 1,2,3 etc. This lasted until 1873 when regiments with only one battalion were grouped in pairs to form local Brigades. This effectively merged the 49th and 66th of Foot into the Berkshire Regiment and new men received B numbers eg B/73. In this case it was 41st Brigade.

A new scheme was introduced on the 1st July 1881 under the Cardwell Reforms and a new Berkshire Series was started. Where there was no duplication men already serving retained their old numbers but where there was duplication men were renumbered. New recruits taking the numbers vacant after 1881. The Territorials began their scheme after the Haldane reforms of 1908 when all the Volunteers were renumbered into a new series. Within the Royal Berkshires a further set of numbers were used to identify Special Reservists, these were prefixed by 3 eg 3/9500. Thus when the Great War began the Royal Berkshires had three separate numbering systems in use.

Once fighting began and the necessity arose to re-establish a battalion with drafts from other regiments, further blocks of numbers were allocated to the individual battalions in the field. They were supposed to have been allocated in batches at least 5000 above the latest numbers being used at home but numerous misunderstandings occurred. Certainly by 1916 the allocation of blocks of numbers was taken on by the Army's Infantry Record Office in Warwick and Commanding Officers had to request blocks of numbers from them. One result of this was that when a block was

allocated to a field unit the names were often not reported back to Regimental HQ.

As men were moved from one regular or Kitchener battalion to another they kept their same number, However the Territorials used the numbers from 20000 to renumber men transferred to Territorial battalions from regular or Kitchener battalions or from other regiments, although at first men transferred from other regiments were given numbers in the earlier Territorial series. Conversely any man transferred from a territorial battalion to a regular battalion was renumbered into the Regular series. The basic Territorial numbers continued to be allocated up to around 8000 when the Kitchener scheme came to an end and men were conscripted under the Derby scheme.

By this time the distinction between Territorial and other battalions was getting blurred and it was obvious that the duplications in numbers were causing considerable confusion. So by an Army Order of December 1916 it was ordered that all Territorials would be renumbered starting from 200,001 with each additional battalion taking numbers 40,000 on from the previous one, however as the Royal Berks had only one territorial battalion a second block was not required. AC1 2414 of Dec 1916 gives full details of the original allocations. The Royal Berks renumbered the 4th battalion men in order of their former territorial number including men transferred from other Royal Berks battalions who had been renumbered into the territorial series starting at 20,001. Numbers over 205000 were allocated in blocks to indicate a territorial commitment for men transferred from a territorial to a regular battalion. 219xxx was used in the Salonika Theatre and 220xx on the Western front. Some other groups were used to indicate territorials who had become POWs or who had died.

It would appear that the new numbering system was used posthumously for many men, probably so that their service records would not get confused when there was a duplication.

Royal Berkshire Numbers

The Royal Berkshire Regiment opted for a single numbering system for the Regulars, a separate series for Reservists and later another separate numbering system for the Territorials. Thus it would be common for different men to have the same number. When it came to accommodating the Kitchener Battalions the numbering system adopted was an extension of that for the

Regulars. On the last day of peace the number 10235 was issued to Pte T Hogburn of Wokingham.

Men who had been transferred to the Reserve when their term of engagement ended before the war had been allocated numbers of the form 3/xxxxx. As soon as war broke out the 3rd Battalion focussed on calling up the reserves. Many reverted to their former regular number but even more continued to use their reservist number dropping the 3/ prefix. As these were moved quickly to re-inforce the 1st and 2nd Battalions the confusion was soon apparant.

Blocks of numbers were allocated to the Battalion Base Depots on the Front and were used when men were transferred from other regiments to make good losses in the field. At one time no less that 400 men were drafted in to the 8th Battalion in one day and some thirty of them had been killed before the Base Depot could get around to allocating new numbers making it very difficult to properly notify next of kin. After the Armistice the unused numbers in the blocks allocated to Field Base Depots were used up first for new recruits.

The Commander of the Reading Depot asked for 200 new numbers on the 15th February 1917 and was allocated 34754 to 34953 for his use. The allocation was accompanied by a note from Major J W Southey at Warwick:-

It is noticed that of your previous allotment the following numbers have not yet been used: 33427 to 33435 and 34125 to 34162. Please kindly explain.

to which the CO responded on the 17th:

This is correct, these numbers are still for use, it is not considered advisable to wait until all the numbers have been used before applying for more, as this would necessitate keeping recruits here whilst these numbers were obtained.

One gets the impression that the new system was proving irritating to the Regimental HQ.

In the regular series the highest number recorded by the Project is 56062 (Pte Henry H Tedora although 6 higher numbers have been recorded (80366, 84331, 88308, 125982, 132144 and 184757) but these latter are thought either to have been mistranscriptions or were MGC or ASC numbers which got mixed up with Royal Berkshire numbers. The official record books show numbers up to 56156 when the second scheme was abandoned in 1920.

It would seem however that after 1917 the Regiment used the opportunity to also renumber men from the other Battalions where there had been duplication using some of the 200 series numbers.

It does appear however that the first three digits of the six digit numbers did have some significance and the best interpretation so far is as follows:-

200xxx - 204xxx used to renumber men with former Territorial numbers in the same sequence as their old numbers.

210xxx - not sure why this series was used

219xxx - allocated to the 7th Battalion for use in Salonika.

220xxx - used in 1917 to number men transferred from other regiments on the Western Front.

223xxx - the first 23 were men transferred from the Ox and Bucks and 24-39 from the Glosters - many seem to have been pows

226xxx - used after the war to renumber POWs whose service numbers were not unique.

227xxx - used after the war to renumber men transferred to the Royal Berks from other Regiments who had either died or been transferred on and who had been allocated conflicting numbers.

In addition most of the men who re-enlisted during the war, having completed their term of regular engagement were given new numbers on re-enlistment.

The scheme of Regimental numbering was abandoned by an Army Order dated 9th August 1920 when Army numbers were introduced which stayed with a man whichever unit he served in. The Royal Berkshire Regiment were allocated numbers in the range 5328001 to 5373000.

The Regimental Registers

Preserved at the Regimental Museum at Salisbury are the Registers covering the period up to the renumbering of 1920. There are 4 volumes as follows:

Volume 1 - Numbers 1 to 10000 [*Period 1881 to 2nd September 1913*] This is not the original register and appears to be a copy made in 1920 when the new Army numbers were allocated. This and the following register gave details of the man's discharge or renumbering as well as his date of engagement.

Volume 2 - Numbers 10001 to 18957 [*Period 2nd September 1913 to 26th July 1915*] Again a copy made in 1920. Provision was made for numbers up to 19788 but they seem to have given up at 18957. This covers almost all the Kitchener volunteers.

Volume 3 - Numbers 19789 to 29259 [*Period 22nd January 1916 to 15th July 1916*] This covers men who were conscripted under the Derby scheme. There are men posted to the 3rd and 9th battalions and to the 11th and 12th battalions but no mention of the 10th battalion although there is a huge gap between 22901 and 23319 which we may presume was used for the 10th and 11th battalions but not reported to regimental HQ. This and the next register also gives details of the man's occupation, place of enlistment and attestation and lots of details and note of transfers.

Volume 4 - Numbers 29260 to 37226 [*Period 15th July 1916 to May 1918*] This covers the end of the formation

of the 12th Battalion, the formation of the 13th and 1st Home Service Garrison Battalions and blocks of numbers allocated to battalions in the field, many of which were not able to be recorded at the Regimental Depot.

Postings

After war was declared the 3rd Battalion was used to recall reservists and move them either to the regular battalions or to add fibre to the new battalions. Initially it was the 4th battalion which took most of the volunteers (using the Territorial numbering sequence) but within a week or so the volunteers were sent first to the newly formed 5th Battalion, so from 4th August 1914 the first 1000 or so men (numbers 10236 to 11293) went to the 5th. The next 722 recruits (12019 to 13018) were sent variously to the 5th, 6th, 1st and 2nd Battalions. The third major batch (12019 to 13018) formed the bulk of the 6th Battalion. From 13026 to 13252 the nucleus of the 8th Battalion was formed and from 13253 to 13575 it was the 7th Battalion being formed. Thereafter men were sent to the 7th or 8th Battalions almost indiscriminately and in the block from 13576 to 15233 there was a lot of swapping to and fro.

After the initial allocations there is very little pattern to the postings, men being sent to almost any of the Kitchener battalions in groups of 10 to 20. Quite likely this was because they had first been used to form the 9th Battalion and were then moved on to their final battalion.

From 15712 onwards the new recruits were also being used to replenish the 1st and 2nd Battalions. Presumably these were men who had previously served and thus had some military experience as some of these were at the front within a few weeks of enlisting.

The 12th Battalion were mostly men transferred from other regiments (23320 to 29526) Then men were transferred into the 1st Home Service Garrison Battalion (29528 to 29695) Next follows the 13th Battalion (29696 to 31474) This last block is liberally interspersed with directly recruited men who went mainly to either the 3rd or 9th Battalions. From 31476 to 31550 Depot works companies were formed and then intake to the 1st HSG Bn. resumes at 31604 and runs to 32798.

Thereafter there is very little pattern with blocks of men being transferred into the R Berks for Garrison, Works or Labour duty, or entering directly from the call up, generally to the 3rd Battalion.

When the Derby scheme was introduced there is a marked change in the pattern. Now two dates are shown. First the date the man attested, which was usually within the period of initial registration (28/10/15 to 12/12/15). Then several months could go by before the man was called up and mobilised. No longer were the majority of the men from Berkshire. Aside from the blocks of men transferred in from other regiments, the registers show

that men were coming into the Royal Berks directly from recruiting centres all over the country, although predominantly from south central England. There was even a small group from Chicago. (scattered between 35316 and 35339) Presumably these arose from the delegation sent to the United States as "The British and Canadian Recruiting Mission" at the invitation of the US Government in July 1917.

Some Royal Berkshire Difficulties

Some unfortunate mix ups were reported in the China Dragon of December 1920 by H Stratford. (TX01595)

First the case of Cpl Frank Gough. His correct regimental number was 12656 but he appears to have been recorded in his battalion by his reserve number 10237. His case first came to notice when he was recommended for the Military Medal at a time when he had nearly two years service. After some searching it was found that there had been another man named James Gough who had served only a few weeks and whose number was 10273 and it appeared these two had been confused. By the time a communication putting the matter right had reached his C O, Cpl Gough was missing.

There were two men named A Hall who served in one of the service battalions for thirteen months bearing the same number. Their case only came to light when they were both killed in action on the same day. Their Commanding Officer reported both deaths but the Base Record Office struck off the second name believing it to be a duplication. Thus only the relatives of the first man were notified. The matter came to light a few days later when the father of the second man enquired as to his son's fate. His records were eventually tracked down to another regiment where they had lain for thirteen months as 'untraceable'. A number was allocated to him after his death. 12078 Sgt Albert Hall had been serving with the 6th Royal Berks until he was transferred to the 17th Manchester Regiment on 1/9/16. He was killed on the 23/4/17 when he was serving as 43305 in the Manchesters. He is buried at Cuckoo Passage cemetery, On the same day 27045 Pte A Halliday of the 19th Manchesters was killed and it seems that it was his record was accepted as the duplicate of Albert whose record was marked as 'untraceable' and he was later allocated the Manchester number 43305.

There were also two men named Kelly who had rejoined the Regiment at the same time. The first man re-enlisted and was told to report to the Reserve Battalion (3rd), the second man arrived just as the first man's name was being called and assuming he did not need to re-enlist he went along as well. About eight months later one of them was killed in action and the other admitted to hospital on the same day. The question then arose as to whether the second man was or was not in the army but on referring the matter to the War Office it was decided that by accepting pay he had in fact accepted the

conditions of service. There were 13 men named Kelly who served in the Royal Berks but the only two who seem to fit this case were reservist 10008 Edward who re-enlisted and was killed 29/6/15 serving with the 1st Bn and 18921 George Edward who enlisted 24/10/14 and served at the Depot.

An unfortunate situation arose when two brothers named Maslin were transferred from another regiment in France and received their new numbers at the Base Depot. They then went off to their new battalion having swapped numbers. Thus when one of them was killed, the parents were informed of the death of the other. James and William Thomas Henry Maslin from Winterbourne were serving in the 1st/4th TA battalion and were transferred to the 5th Royal Berks being renumbered 37379 and 37378 respectively. James' death was reported in the Reading newspapers 13/4/17 but it was actually William who had been killed.

A similar situation arose with three men named Poynter, two brothers and a cousin. They were all serving in the same battalion and when one was killed the wrong number was reported and a wrong notification sent to the next of kin. These appear to be 7579 Edward, 7350 George Robert and 7434 Harry Umpton. All were serving in the 1st Battalion when Harry was killed 14/11/1914. It was his cousin Edward who was reported killed in the Berkshire Chronicle of 12/2/15.

Two men named Clarke, one in the 7th and one in the 8th bore the same regimental number. When one was killed it was the father of the other who was notified. He wrote back to the War Office enquiring why it was that he had received a letter from his son in Salonika written some days after his reported death. 14517 Albert Frederick Clarke was serving with the 7th Battalion in Salonika when 13238 Philip Chistian Campbell Clarke of Canning Town was killed 23/9/16 serving with the 8th Battalion. Philip had enlisted 3/9/14 and Albert 9/9/14. The 7th and 8th Battalions did all their training together and one of them must have accidentally adopted the wrong number.

Depot Allocations

The following blocks of numbers were allocated to the Reading Depot by the Warwick Infantry Record Office:-

From	To	Date
32884	32983	31/10/16
36222	41221	23/8/16
33548	33549	29/12/16
33569		29/12/16
33627		29/12/16
33652	33667	29/12/16
33875	33954	29/12/16

32833	32877	15/1/17
33389	33430	15/1/17
34055	34162	15/1/17
34754	34953	16/2/17
35025	35224	27/2/17
35435	35634	31/3/17
35836	36035	6/4/17
36080	36221	5/5/17
41222	41280	5/5/17

The final allocation was made somewhat reluctantly as there had been a King's Regulation forbidding serial numbers greater than 39999. However pressure of events forced the issue and on 3rd August 1916 the Regiment was informed of a change to be made in the Regulations to allow this.

Unallocated Numbers

The following batches of numbers do not appear to have been allocated:-

6691 to 6790

a scattering of numbers between 12000 and 15000

40364 to 41222

In addition a large number of numbers between 30000 and 57000 have no known holder. In many cases it is because they were allocated to men who served only temporarily with the regiment having been transferred in the field but there were blocks that were allocated to Base Depots in France which were never used.

Army Numbers

The confusion caused to Army Records by frequent renumbering and duplication of series within a regiment got too much for the Army and so in 1920 they published a scheme of renumbering using up to 7 digit numbers where each regiment was allocated a block and renumbered its existing men in the order of their old regular regimental number, first allocating new regular regimental number to men who still retained a reservist or 200,000 series number. The Royal Berkshire Regiment was allocated 5328001 to 5373000.