

Volume 5 Section 341

Armistice and Beyond

1st Battalion - November 1918 to September 1920

Escarmain

11th - 16th November 1918

When the Armistice was signed, the first Battalion was at Escarmain. Its strength had fallen to 32 officers and 492 men.

Armistice day was marked by a four mile cross-country race for all ranks in the morning and a football match in the afternoon when the Battalion team was defeated by the 6th Field Ambulance by 0-1

While they were at Escarmain they were mainly engaged on clearing up the mess of war, collecting salvage and repairing roads.

On the 14th they were all allowed to bath and then everyone was given a medical examination to see if they were fit to march to the Rhine. As a result 57 other ranks were sent to the Divisional Reception Camp on the 15th as being unlikely to complete the march.

The March to the Rhine

16th - 24th November 1918

The Battalion was assigned to be part of the initial Army of Occupation of the Rhineland and advanced there almost immediately after the armistice.

They set out at 11:06 on the 16th for the first leg of their journey, marching via Capelle, Beaudignies and Le Quesnoy, reaching Villerspol at 14:00. The next day (Sunday) they had a Battalion parade in the morning, spent most of the day clearing up and a voluntary Church of England service at 17:30.

On the 18th the second leg was to La Longueville, via Gomegnies, Amfroipret, Bermereies and Bavay. It was a long day's march from 11:10 to 16:25 and the men welcomed the rest the next day.

The third leg saw them almost reach the Belgian frontier. They left La Longueville at 08:10 on the 20th going via Douzies, Maubeuge and Bersilles arriving at Villers-sire-Nicole at 12:05. Here Capt W J Green rejoined them from a 6 month tour of duty in England.

They spent 4 days at Villers sire Nicole, clearing roads, playing football and resting, interspersed with the odd Company drill.

25th - 27th November 1918

The fourth leg took them into Belgium soon after leaving Villers sire Nicole at 08:10. They marched via Montliaux and Estinne au Mont to Binche where they rested in billets for the afternoon. At 09:55 the next morning they were on the road again via Anderloes and Fontaine l'Eveque to Marchienne au Pont on the outskirts of Charleroi. Here they stayed for 3 days, beating the MG Battalion at football (3-2) on the 27th and having a bath that morning.

28th November - 3rd December 1918

The fifth leg began at 09:45 on the 28th. They marched via Charleroi and Trieux to Chatelet where each of the Companies had their photographs taken. At 09:02 next morning they were on their way again via Presles and Vitruval to La Fosse where they arrived at noon. They were on parade at 09:00 the next morning and then the Divisional Commander came to inspect the billets.

Although the nominal strength of the Battalion was 730 ORs and 40 officers at the end of November the ration strength was down to 555 with so many men being at Divisional Camp.

While they were at Fosse they found time to bath on the 2nd December and then lose to 2nd MG Battalion at football (1-4) in the afternoon. For light relief they went on a 2 1/2 hour route march to Aisemont on the 3rd.

4th - 11th December 1918

The march began again at 08:45 on the 4th. The route took them via Sart St Laurent, Buzet, Gros Buisson, La Plante, and Namur to Beez. One man fell out during the march and boots were becoming somewhat worn out.

The 5th saw them on the road again via Marche les Dames, Maneche, Foresse and Sclayn to Andenne where they arrived at 13:15.

They carried on next day via Ben Ahin, Huy and The Sarte to Vierset Barse, thankful for two days of fine weather after all the rain.

On the 7th they marched via Stree, Seny, Ouffet and Comblain Fairon to Comblain La Tour with a stop at Ouffet for tea. Here they had a day and a half resting.

At 09:18 on the 9th they set out again via Awan, Aywaille and Bellevaux to Basse Desnie marching

through driving rain.

After another day's rest they were off again via Spa and Francorchamps to Burneville with a tea stop at Malchamps. The border into Germany was crossed at 13:30.

12th - 14th December 1918

This bit of Germany was destined to be transferred back to Belgium. The next overnight stop was at Lager Elsenborn, a former German Army Camp in the Ardennes which was to become one of the launch points for the later German assault at the end of the Second World War, which would become known as The Battle of the Bulge. They reached the camp via Malmedy, Xhoffraix, Sour and Brodtwith a 30 minute tea stop at Longfaye, the rain was continuous.

They were off again at 09:00 on the 13th via Elsenborn, crossing the modern German frontier about half way to Monschau. Just the other side of Monschau (referred to then as Montjoie) they stopped for the night at Imgenbroich.

By now the wear and tear on the boots were beginning to tell. Many of the men were issued with new ones which were crippling to wear-in on a march so five men fell out on the way to Nideggen on the 14th which was reached at 13:40 after nearly 6 hours on the road.

15th to 19th December 1918

They were able to get a good rest at Nideggen as the army tried to sort out where everyone would go to.

There was a church service on the 15th and PT on the 17th, but otherwise the men were able to relax a bit and tend their feet.

They were off again on the 19th leaving Nideggen at 07:15 via Drove, Niedran and Duren to Arnoldsweiler about half way between Aix la Chapelle and Cologne.

Arnoldsweiler

19th to 26th December 1918

Here, later on the 19th they were joined by a contingent of 258 other ranks, mainly from the 3rd Ox and Bucks. The new draft was paraded for inspection by the CO on the 20th. He noted that while their general turn out was good they lacked training with equipment having been in the army for an average of only 6 months.

One of the first acts on reaching Arnoldsweiler was to send out a party to reconnoitre for football grounds, having heard that they were to stay there until after Christmas.

It was here that demobilization began. Officers were interviewed about filling in their Army Form Z15 and orders were received to send coal miners back as soon as possible. The first batch of 26 miners left on the 26th

and a further 19 on the 28th. They were replaced by a draft of 62 men from the Divisional Wing on the 29th

On the 23rd they marched off to Duren for their Christmas bath but on arrival at 2nd Army reception Camp they found the baths were not working and there was no sign of the bathing officer and his staff. The CO was not amused.

Christmas day was a great success. They had all had the 24th off to get ready. There were church services in the morning with a parade at 11.00 and the men unanimously pronounced the dinner the best they had since being overseas.

The Army of Occupation

27th - 31st December 1918

On the 27th they moved again, this time to Steenstrath and Lich about 8 miles away. Another move on the 28th took them to Nettesheim to await their final disposition as an army of occupation.

On the 30th the Major General came to inspect C Coys billets and a party of 50 men were deployed in clearing up the roads.

They seem to have had a good reception by the locals while they were in the Rhineland despite being an occupying force.

Bases

They were based at Nettersheim, about 30 miles south west of Cologne. at New Year. A Coy was on detachment at Anstel. B Coy were sent on detachment to Eckum on the 7th January. The companies rotated their duties around these three centres.

Demobilisation

Demobilization began in earnest on the 3rd January when 5 other ranks went. Gradually over the next three months handfuls of officers and men were released. On the 15th January 20 other ranks joined the battalion but it is not clear whether these were Royal Berkshiremen or men transferred from other regiments. On the 22nd February 15 men and 2 officers from the 99th Brigade Trench Mortar Battalion were transferred to the Royal Berks as their battalion had been disbanded. Before each batch left the regiment the Brigadier (Brigadier General Fanshawe) came down to inspect the men and say farewell to them.

By this time the army was being considerably re-organised and the role of occupying the Rhine was to be transferred to what were known as 'graduated' battalions. These were former Training Reserve Battalions which were transferred to Infantry Regiments. The 106th, 107th and 104th TR battalions became the 51st, 52nd and 53rd Royal Warwicks and were assigned to

take over from the area where the Royal Berks were. As an interim measure 10 officers and 100 Other ranks of the 5th Royal Irish arrived on 1st March to take over the 1st Battalion's duties. Then 8 officers and 269 other ranks were transferred to the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers on the 15th March pending the arrival of the three Royal Warwickshire battalions. They had arrived by 31st March and a further five officers and 64 Other ranks left to join the 52nd Royal Warwicks.

Keeping the men Busy

It was a major job keeping the men occupied while they waited for demobilisation. There were numerous concerts given by troupes from other units, whist drives, cinema shows and lectures with a good variety of active sports.

Football

An inter-company football competition was organised and on the 11th January a trial was held to pick the battalion team. They managed to play a few games with other units:-

13/1/19	483Field Coy RE	lost 0-6
22/1/19	23rd Royal Fusiliers	drew 1-1
25/1/19	Brigade HQ & TMB	won 4-0
19/2/19	1st KRRC	lost 2-5
21/2/19	RAMC	lost 1-8

In addition there was a game between the Officers and the NCOs which resulted in a 1-1 draw on the 16th January and one between the officers and the rest of the battalion which the officers won 2-0 on the 20th January. An inter-platoon six a side competition was organised.

Tug of War

An inter-company tug of war competition was won by C Company on the 24th February and on the 27th they triumphed over the rest of the battalion.

Boxing

The first rounds of a Brigade boxing competition were held at a factory on 3rd February - the battalion won both the light and welter weight competitions. They went on to the Divisional semi-finals on the 10th March when Pte Smith won and Pte Pickford lost. Pte Smith lost the final the next day.

Cross-Country

There were regular cross-country runs, on the 8th, 14th, 24th and 31st January. mostly they were three mile runs but on the 31st about 60 of the competitors took the wrong course and strayed into the French area. They finished up having to run 12 miles.

Military Training

Military training was kept up with occasional route marches; on the 15th January they went from Anstel to Evinghoven, Okhoven, Sinsteden and Eckum; on the 6th February they marched to Stommeln for tactical exercises; on the 13th February the march was via Rommerskirchen, Sinsteden, Okhoven, Evinghoven and Anstel..

A Brigade signalling competition was held at Gilol on the 4th February, won by the 1st KRRC with the 1st Royal Berks coming second. A platoon drill competition was started on the 15th February but it had to be abandoned on the 17th as a thaw set in with heavy rain.

Return of the Cadre

By the 15th March the battalion had been relieved of all its duties and was ready to return to England. They moved to billets at Rommerskirchen on March 17th and celebrated Tofrek day on the 22nd. By the 2nd April the war came officially to an end with the closure of the war diary. By this time the battalion had been reduced to cadre and a few officers, including Capt Miles Dempsey had been sent on extended leave. They set off for Cologne to catch the train home.

They left Cologne on Friday 4th April and were travelling almost non-stop on their way back to Reading. They disembarked at Folkestone on the morning of Tuesday 8th April. They were greeted at Victoria Station by Gen Dickson, a former Colonel of the Regiment. On the way back they were accompanied by a number of men from the Ox and Bucks LI who were welcomed as honorary members of the battalion for all the celebrations.

They had been due to land at Folkestone on the Monday morning and move directly to Reading by train. The citizens of Reading were given a countdown on the Reading tramways siren. - 4 blasts meant approximately 4 hours before arrival, 3 blasts - 3 hours etc. Shopkeepers and householders on the line of route had been warned on the Saturday to be prepared and to decorate their properties with flags etc. The streets were to be lined by troops, cadets, volunteers and Boy Scouts. All men who had recently been demobbed from the Battalion were invited to parade as well.

The first warning Reading had was at 10:30 on the Tuesday when six blasts were sounded to indicate an arrival at 16:30. This was later deferred to be 18:50. Flags, banners and all sorts of favours were floated from every available window and fixed to every part of the buildings. Every inch of pavement space was taken up with spectators and the route was lined with troops etc as arranged.

The train arrived at Reading just before 19:00 with 58

other ranks and 7 officers. They were greeted by the Lord Lieutenant, Mr J H Benyon,, Brig-Gen Weston, Col JGR Walsh, Col AF Ewen, Col AF Poulton, Col Whitehead (of the 1st/4th) and Major Turner who had recently been repatriated after having been a POW since November 1914. There was the Regimental Band under Bandmaster C White as well as the drum and fife band under Sgt Trevelyan. They lined up on the platform and then marched out into Station Square to a tumultuous reception from the huge crowd. As well as cheering people were sounding rattles and banging tin cans.

After an address from the Lord Lieutenant Col Walsh read out a message from Col Graham, a former OC of the Battalion who was then Assistant Military Secretary at the War Office:-

Please convey to all my hearty welcome on your safe return. I much regret I am unable to meet you in person. Please convey my warmest congratulations on the magnificent record of the 1st Battalion. I look on you with great pride having been associated with you since the early days of the war.

The first stop was at the Town Hall where the Mayor welcomed them and give them refreshments. The route from the station was via Station Rd, Friar St, West St, Broad St, Butter Market and Market Place. Despite the troops lining the road, children broke through and mingled with the men, many of the children carried the rifles for them. As well as the men of the 1st, former members were on parade, together with men from the 1st/4th who had arrived home the week before. The refreshments were supplemented by donations in kind from Messrs WH & G Simmonds, Reading's leading brewers.

By the time they were through at the Town Hall it was getting dark and many of the men had over-indulged so the march down Oxford Rd to the Barracks almost degenerated into farce. At the barracks Sergeant Major Trinder welcomed them and then they all went for dinner which lasted until a late hour.

A service at St Mary's church was planned for 15:00 on the following Sunday, April 13th. The service was joint with the 1st/4th. The morning was fine but just before the service there was a torrential downpour, which did not daunt an enormous crowd. All seats in the church were filled.

The nominal roll of the cadre was:-

Lt Col Brett
 Lt Lapworth *
 Capt Mason MC
 Capt W C Hanney MC
 2Lt Greaves
 Lt T E Bryan
 Lt R Frost
 QMS Hammond MM *

18345 CQMS A Thornton
 6135 Acting CSM J R Tiesteel MM *
 9007 CSM George D Adams DCM MM *
 10085 Sgt F G Dilling of Stanford Dingley
 5393 CSM W Ashley MSM *
 39494 Cpl R Hume
 10006 Cpl C Pride
 24881 Cpl John Jackman of Maidenhead
 39096 Cpl Elliot
 220649 LCpl Keen
 35114 LCpl Christopher Mellett of Reading
 18800 LCpl Jack Shuff of Wantage
 50804 LCpl Dunnington
 39211 LCpl Causer
 9136 Pte P J Pickford
 46141 Pte Cox
 46197 Pte Tapping
 46292 Pte Newcombe
 38308 Pte Croombes
 50763 Pte Heaton
 46203 Pte Bailey
 43734 Pte Fergus
 43761 Pte Fletcher
 39217 Pte Medlands
 38374 Pte Lake
 43128 Pte Poole
 46125 Pte Chesterman
 43593 Pte Williams
 41271 Pte John L Matthews
 44789 Pte Barker
 46218 Pte Jarvis
 46226 Pte Overall
 10117 Pte A E Grace
 10081 Pte A H J S Hales
 44788 Pte Bond
 46201 Pte Bowler
 46167 Pte Wilkins
 46229 Pte Heard
 46187 Pte Taylor
 25744 Pte H Hayter
 46148 Pte Reynolds
 36726 Pte William C Shurmer
 45081 Pte Fry
 44409 Pte Frampton
 33415 Pte Syndey Thatcher of Newbury
 39107 Pte Gomm

43845 Pte Crutchley
 46264 Pte Lee
 7236 Pte William George Purton
 22152 Dmr Albert Edward Horne of Wokingham
 46051 Dmr Constable
 46053 Dmr Taylor
 7823 Dmr W Sumners *
 9582 Dmr Cpl H Y Smith
 220422 Dmr Cpl Buchan

Those marked with * went out with the battalion in August 1914.

Back to Normal

On 29th April 1919 the Battalion, under the command of Captain (Act Lt Col) R J Brett arrived at Chisleton to reform to its regular role.

On the 16th June it moved to Chatham awaiting orders to embark for foreign service.

Embarkation was at Gravesend on 18th September under the command of Major (Bt Lt Col) W B Thornton. They sailed for Karachi immediately.

Persia

While the expedition to North Persia was after the armistice had been signed and the battalion had returned to regular duties, it is inevitably seen as part of the tidying-up afterwards. The Russians had dropped out of the war following the Bolshevik revolution (see section 300) but Britain still harboured hopes that by helping the White Russians they could nip the threat of a Bolshevik expansion in the bud. This was particularly acute in Persia where there had been an unholy alliance of Britain, the United States and Russia to control Persia that had collapsed shortly before the war. A peace treaty had been signed between Britain and Persia on Aug 19th 1919. This involved the payment of some \$750,000 in bribes, the construction of a new railway and the issue of a large loan by Britain. Also there was a requirement for Britain to send both military and civil 'advisors' whose main role seemed to have been to make sure that Russian influence was curtailed and that Bolshevik incursions were repulsed. Three 1st Royal Berks were to be pitchforked into this unsatisfactory situation.

Included in the officer strength of the Battalion was Captain Miles C Dempsey who was to achieve fame years later as the Commander of the British Armies at Normandy in 1940. He wrote the following account.

After spending ten days at Karachi the battalion reached Basra on 2nd October, and Nasiriyeh, a small town on the Euphrates, on 15th November. On 19th December, in consequence of minor trouble on the Upper Euphrates the battalion was moved to Hillah—near the ruins of ancient Babylon where it remained until, in the latter half

of April 1920, it moved to Karind. Lieut.-Colonel (Brevet-Colonel) A. Mudge, C.M.G., had taken over Command of the battalion on 15th March.

The village of Karind, situated at a height of some five thousand [feet] above sea-level, is fifty-two miles by road over the Persian border, and some hundred and forty miles north-east of Baghdad.

The country round Karind village had been chosen as the hill station to which British troops in Iraq could be sent to escape the extreme heat of the summer, and a large camp was erected there. It should be remembered that, with the exception of a small line in the extreme north-west corner of the country, and a few miles in the extreme south-east, Persia is entirely devoid of railways. On the journey from Baghdad to Karind the railway ended at Quaraitu, which place served as railhead to the battalion for the next twelve months, for the greater part of the time at a distance of some four hundred and fifty miles.

The troops in Northern Persia at this time consisted of the 36th Indian Mixed Brigade of:

Four Battalions (1 British, 3 Indian).

Guides Cavalry.

"A" Battery Royal Horse Artillery.

One Pack Battery.

The Head-quarters of the Brigade were at Kasvin, where the reserve was, and the remainder of the force was disposed between that town and Enzeli on the Caspian Sea, which was also occupied.

In consequence of the Bolshevik landing at Enzeli, the battalion left Karind for Kasvin on 25th May in two echelons. The distance to be covered was three hundred and twenty miles.

Battalion Head-quarters, B and D Companies, moving in motor-lorries, arrived at Kasvin on 30th May - A and C Companies, marching, covered the distance in twenty-four days, arriving at Kasvin on 18th June. The Band, married families, and various details, together with the battalion baggage, remained at Karind. On arrival at Kasvin the battalion came under the orders of Brigadier-General H. F. Bateman-Champaign, commanding the 36th Indian Mixed Brigade.

The battalion occupied tents on the northern outskirts of Kasvin until, on 6th August, it, in conjunction with the 1st Battalion Royal Irish Fusiliers, and the 2nd Battalion York and Lancaster Regiment, occupied an outpost position west and north of Kasvin, at a distance of from three to four miles from the town, to prevent a further advance on the part of the Bolsheviks who at one time advanced as far as Kuhin—twenty-two miles from Kasvin - driving the Persian Cossacks before them.

On 31st July A and C Companies had moved out to the Kuhin area to help the retirement of the two Indian battalions from their position there. On completion of this duty they returned to Kasvin.

The battalion occupied this position until 20th August, when, in consequence of a rapid Bolshevik withdrawal towards Enzeli, it returned to camp at Kasvin. There it remained until, on 27th October, in consequence of the collapse of the Persian Cossacks and subsequent advance of the Bolsheviks, it moved in Ford vans and lorries to Gangah (82 miles from Kasvin and 60 miles from Enzeli). There, with the 2nd Gurkha Rifles "A"

Battery R.H.A., and one Squadron Guides Cavalry, it remained for the winter.

Lieut.-Colonel (Brevet-Colonel) S. G. Francis, D.S.O., was now commanding the battalion. The small Persian village of Gangah, situated on the Safed Rud, consisted of only a few mud-huts adapted for a Persian winter with its heavy snowfalls, frost, and gales. Rations were short throughout the winter, as the passes which had to be crossed on the way from railhead were frequently blocked with snow, and weeks would elapse without the arrival of a mail. Despite these conditions, the health of the battalion did not suffer greatly.

The force at Gangah was in touch with the Bolsheviks throughout the winter, and various patrol encounters and raids took place. Major-General Sir Edmund Ironside was now commanding the 36th Indian Mixed Brigade. The most important of these raids was carried out on 18th November when the battalion, in conjunction with the remaining troops of the small force at Gangah, advanced some seven miles into the territory occupied by the Bolsheviks, driving them back without serious difficulty, and remaining out until 27th November when it returned to Gangah. The chief share of the work fell to "C" Company, who met with some resistance in crossing a small river - the Tariq Rud - on the 18th when two men were wounded, the only casualties in the battalion.

The battalion had no further encounters with the Bolsheviks during the winter, though one or two small raids were carried out in the hills around Gangah against Persian brigands in Bolshevik pay.

From 24th January 1921 until the battalion left Gangah one company was kept at Manjil, eleven miles from Gangah on the only road to Kasvin. There was a bridge over the Safed Rud at Manjil.

On 9th April the battalion left Gangah for Kasvin, which it reached on the 16th, after a difficult march due to the amount of water in the various mountain streams which had to be crossed, and the fact that in many places the only existing road had been washed away.

The battalion remained at Kasvin for six days, and on 22nd April commenced its three hundred and seventy-eight miles' march to railhead at Quaraitu. The march was completed in twenty-seven days (including four halt days) an average of over sixteen miles a day actual marching. On 22nd May the battalion left Persia and entrained for Baghdad.

A treaty between Persia and Russia was negotiated and signed on Feb 26th 1921, four days after the previous Persian Government had been overthrown. The result was the abrogation of the 1919 treaty with Britain and the withdrawal of British troops.

Sources

Reading Mercury 5/4/19, 12/4/19

Berkshire and the War pp 925 ff

Petre pp 61-64

War Diary WO95/2371