

Volume 11 Section 347

The Armistice and Beyond

7th Battalion - 11th November 1918 to November 1919

On Armistice Day the 7th were part of the Army of Occupation of Bulgaria being at Adrianople on the borders of Turkey and Bulgaria. (Continued from section 327)

Rustchuk and Dobritch

15th November 1918 to 1st April 1919

On the 15th November, the battalion started for Rustchuk on the Danube, which was only reached on the 10th of December. At this time the men were suffering not only from the effects of the old enemy malaria, but also from a devastating epidemic of "Spanish" influenza.

Rustchuk is a poor place, but, after Mustafa Pasha, was a haven of bliss in which the battalion remained till the 11th December, when it went by rail to Dobritch as the Bulgarians had renamed the town generally known as Bazardjik, north of Varna. Here they were not as well off as other troops which were sent to Varna.

The Royal Berks were well received by the Bulgars and certainly preferred Bulgaria to most of the places where they had been serving over the past few years. A member of the 7th Royal Berks writing home said:-

"We have been moving a bit in this part of the world. 'some move' it was. We are now resting for a day or two; I do not suppose it will be much more than that. We are getting on famously with the Bulgars, in fact we had one of their bands to entertain us last night, it was quite a treat after not having one for so long a time. This is a much better country than Greece or Macedonia, it is more like Blighty with green meadows and trees, quite a treat after where we have been. The Bulgars are glad it is all over for them and of course we are not that sorry ourselves. I wonder if the people are still saying what are the forces doing out here, I guess it is different now, is it not? [TX00107]

Dobritch is the principal place in the Dobrudja, the southern portion of which had passed from Bulgarian into Rumanian possession after the Second Balkan War of 1913. The Bulgarians had again been in possession since the defeat of Rumania by the Germans, and it was now the turn of the Rumanians to be reinstated, and of the Bulgarians to be ejected by the Allies.

Major Marks has furnished us with details of the activities of the battalion in overawing any threat of resistance to the transfer of authority in the villages. Generally, the functions of the battalion were the sending out of parties of about twenty-five men, under

an officer, to occupy villages where there was any show of opposition to the re-entry of the Rumanian authorities. Ordinarily, this was sufficient, but in one or two cases half a company had to be used to overawe more serious threats of disturbances.

On one of these occasions, Major Marks was in command of about one hundred men. The resistance, if any was really contemplated, collapsed without any fighting in the face of this show of force. On another occasion, reports of a threatened attack on Silistria by Bulgarian Bolsheviks again led to Major Marks being sent out with a composite force of Royal Berkshire, Worcestershire and two guns. This also came to nothing.

These instances must suffice to indicate the sort of work on which the battalion was engaged at Dobritch. From the social point of view the place was dull in the extreme, notwithstanding dances for officers and other ranks, and sports and football. The most characteristic feature of Dobritch seems to have been its mud.

During the time at Dobritch the acting R.-S.-M. disappeared one night and was never heard of again. It was believed he had been murdered.

The battalion, having been relieved at Dobritch by Italian troops, left for Varna on the 1st April 1919, being the last British troops in the Dobrudja. They were seen off by the Mayor and other Rumanian officials, now firmly established.

Varna

1st April to 4th May 1919

After remaining in camp at Varna without any special duties, the battalion was shipped, on the 4th May, across the Black Sea to Batum,

Batum and Tiflis

4th May 1919 to October 1919

At Batum they were attached to the 27th Division. Thence they went by rail to Tiflis to relieve the 2nd Cameron Highlanders.

Demobilization had been proceeding for some time, and the battalion's numbers were rapidly decreasing, though at times raised by additions of men from other battalions.

In June 1919 the battalion went to Kodor, the hill station of Tiffis, about twelve miles off. Affairs were very disturbed with the operations of General Denikin's army then in progress, and severe training was re-commenced. This was varied by brigade sports and games.

On August 31st 1919 representatives of the Battalion were present at Brock Barracks for the presentation of colours. These were later laid up in the Chapel of St George in St Giles Church Reading.

The battalion again went to Batum in September. Major Marks had already taken a detachment of one hundred men, in the middle of August, to Gagri near Soukhom on the Black Sea, in relief of the 10th Jats. He rejoined the battalion at Batum in the second week in September.

Exactly what the political situation was at this time seems to be still wrapped in mystery. Anyhow, the battalion had little to do till it left Batum in October.

Constantinople October to November 1919

Lieut.-Colonel Dene who, except when wounded or employed temporarily in higher grades, had commanded the battalion since 1915, was left behind on duty at Batum. Whilst with the battalion he had earned the C.M.G., D.S.O., and Legion of Honour.

The command was now taken over by Major Marks who sailed with the remains of the battalion for Constantinople where they were quartered at Haidar Pasha on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus.

Demobilization had reduced the battalion to very small numbers, with which were amalgamated, under Major Marks' command, the remains of a Gloucestershire Battalion. The unit so formed was absorbed by the beginning of November in the 8th Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and so ceased to exist.

When the disbandment occurred the only two officers remaining of those who went out in 1915 were the two junior subalterns, who had now become Major J. B. Marks, commanding the battalion, and Captain A. K. Barrett, second-in-command.

Sources

Petre pp 315-317

Berkshire Mercury 29/11/18

This concludes the story of the 7th Battalion