

Section 101

Logistics and Organisation

Recruitment

Recruitment

There were two ways into the Royal Berkshire Regiment, either you joined the regiment as a private soldier or with a commission or else you were transferred into the regiment from another regiment.

The Army is physically demanding and set physical criteria for new recruits. In the table below we set out

these criteria. As the war progressed the needs for men increased dramatically and standards had to be adjusted accordingly.

There were additional requirements relating to such things as eyesight and foot conditions and when a man joined he had a medical examination which placed him in one of the categories for service.

Conditions of enlistment

<i>Date</i>	<i>Min height</i>	<i>Min Age</i>	<i>Max Age</i>	<i>other factors</i>	<i>notes</i>
pre-war	5'3"	18	25	weight 112 lb min, chest 33½ ins nin with 2 in expansion, hearing, sound and no disease	boys could be 14-16 but could not be sent on active service until age 19
7-8-14	5'3"	19	30	chest min 34"	including married men and widowers
27-8-14	5'3"	19	35		age 45 ex soldiers or 50 years ex NCOs
11-9-14	5'6"	19	35	chest min 35½	designed to slow down rate of recruiting
11-10-14	5'5"				
23-10-14	5'4"	19	38		
5-11-14	5'3"			chest min 34½	
2-15	5'2"				
5-15	5'1"				
31-5-15	5'2"	19	40	chest min 33½	AO 217/15
1-16		18	41	single and childless widows	conscription
5-16		18	41	all men	
4-17					reduced fitness and industry protection
7-17					extended to Britons living abroad and Allies living in Britain
2-18					exemptions reduced
4-18		18	56		end of most exemptions

The Country Goes to War

At the Council of War on August 5th 1914 Lord Kitchener was summoned to give his appraisal of the situation and his advice. The Regular Army consisted of six Infantry and one Cavalry divisions and there were two further divisions, the 7th and 8th, scattered around the Empire on garrison duty. There were also two divisions of the Indian Army and a Territorial Army of 14 divisions with 13 mounted brigades. The Territorials for the most part were made up of old soldiers and men who had volunteered for service before the war and who had received only limited military training.

Kitchener explained to the Cabinet Council that whereas popular opinion was that the war would be over by Christmas, the country could not afford to take the risk that the unexpected would not happen. A long war must be planned for and the British Empire must be prepared to put into the field an army which was commensurate with its standing as a world power. This meant planning for an army of several millions to be in the field for a long time - a daunting task. Kitchener was given the job of Secretary of State for War and told to get on with it.

He had no faith at all in the Territorials and he was adamantly opposed to conscription. So far as he was concerned neither produced men with the right motivation. He wanted to set the agenda and fulfil his aspirations by means of volunteers. His recruitment campaign was an instant success. Vast numbers flocked to the recruiting offices, so many that in a very short time they had to impose a height limit to decide who would be allowed to join up immediately and who would have to wait.

His first task was to raise six new divisions, then a further six and then a further 12. His main problem and the limiting factor was equipment. There were no spare rifles, no spare guns and no spare ammunition for the new troops. Admiralty stores were ransacked to provide 30,000 rifles and a Royal Naval Division was formed made up of three brigades, of Royal Marines, of Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and Royal Fleet Reserve men who had enlisted, but for whom no ships were available. This division was also handed over to Kitchener.

The recruits were organised into three New Armies designated K1 to K3. K1 comprised 9th-14th Divisions (which included the 5th Royal Berks), K2 15th to 20th Divisions (including 6th Royal Berks) and K3 21-26th Divisions (including 7th Royal Berks). In addition a number of 'Army Troop' battalions were formed (including 8th Royal Berks) many of which eventually went to replace regular battalions in the regular divisions. A fourth Kitchener Army (K4) was formed in the Autumn of 1914 (30th-35th Divisions) which included the 9th Royal Berks but these were later broken up to form reserve battalions to train recruits and support the other Kitchener Battalions. [75-JAMES]

After the first flush of enthusiasm, with so many men being rejected, recruiting began to fall off and the height limit was relaxed. Writing in the Reading Mercury of Jan 2nd 1915 'Patriot' blamed the War Office for not having given the rejects a half a crown or so as a retainer and called them up when time was opportune rather than waiting for them to re-enlist. He made the appeal however that the war was not with the War Office and men were fighting for the Nation and their own lives. He stated that it had been proven that one Englishman was worth ten Germans, but even so it would be better if the balance of numbers could be a bit more favourable to the British. [RM 2/1/15]

Kitchener's Message

As every soldier was ready to go abroad he received a special letter from Lord Kitchener which he was supposed to keep in his pay book and refer to regularly. It read:-

You are ordered abroad as a soldier of the King to help our French comrades against the invasion of a common enemy. You have to perform a task which will need your courage, your energy, your patience.

Remember that the honour of the British Army depends upon your individual conduct.

It will be your duty, not only to set an example of discipline and perfect steadiness under fire, but also to maintain the most friendly relations with those whom you are helping in this struggle. The operations in which you are engaged will for the most part take place in a friendly country, and you can do your country no better service than in showing yourself in France and Belgium in the true character of a British soldier.

Be invariably courteous, considerate and kind.

Never do anything likely to injure or destroy property and always look upon looting as a disgraceful act.

You are sure to meet with a welcome and to be trusted. Your conduct must justify that welcome and that trust.

Your duty cannot be done unless your health is sound, so keep constantly on your guard against any excesses. In this new experience you may find temptation both in wine and women. You must entirely resist both temptations and while treating all women with perfect courtesy, you should avoid any intimacy.

Do your duty bravely

Fear God

Honour the King

KITCHENER, Field Marshall

To The Colours in Berkshire

At the outbreak of war the Royal Berkshires' two regular battalions were out of town, the 1st at Aldershot and the 2nd in India. They were sent to the front as fast as could be arranged. The 3rd and 4th moved pretty quickly also but only to Portsmouth leaving Brock Barracks and other depots manned by only a small headquarters force to organise the flow of recruits to sustain the battalions.

At 1000 on Wednesday 5th August advance guards from the eight companies of the 4th Battalion were mustered to march to Reading Town Hall to hear the King's proclamations. First mobilizing the Reserves, second putting the Territorials into the Reserves and finally declaring the state of war. Two companies came from Reading and the remaining six from Newbury, Windsor, Maidenhead, Abingdon, Wokingham and a combined company from Wallingford and Wantage. By that evening they were on their way to Portsmouth. A notice was posted at the Barracks inviting recruits for the 4th.

The Yeomanry also mobilised that week setting up remount depots in Station Road, at the GWR Hotel Meadow and at Arborfield. Bovril announced that they would continue to pay full wages to any of their employees who wanted to enlist. The Yeomanry were the cavalry part of the Territorial Army and they took over a camp at Bearwood under the command of Lt Col J B Karaluke. They were joined on the 24th September 1914 by a party from the Royal Horse Artillery and were due to be joined by the Army Service Corps. The accommodation was described as as very suitable and 600 men were under cover. Capt Parker at the Yeomanry's HQ at Yeomanry House Reading was inundated with gifts of blankets from the public, so many that he was able to provide each man with two apiece. It was announced that all cavalry and artillery units were full up but that the ASC was still in need of drivers, butchers and bakers.

Within a week recruiting stations had been set up in 14 towns across the county and recruiting sergeants named for most of them. J Herbert Benyon, the Lord Lieutenant and Lord Haversham, Chairman of the Territorial Association, placed adverts in the local papers listing the recruiting stations and inviting the men of Berkshire to rally to the colours.

At the Barracks on the Oxford Road in Reading there was accommodation for 1000 men.

Three companies of the Berkshire National Reserve totalling 120 men, were sent to Newbury Racecourse to guard German prisoners.

Committees were formed to organise the recruiting in the various parts of the County and immediately set up recruiting meetings. The famous advert bearing Lord Kitchener's portrait was posted all around the county.

The Territorials

The Territorial Army had been formed in 1908 from the former Volunteer Battalions. They were intended for Home Defence only and on the outbreak of war they were transferred to the Reserve. One of the first tasks was to get men to change their terms of engagement from Home Service to General Service. to enable them to serve abroad: almost all did so immediately

In the initial weeks of the war the 4th Battalion was the principal recruiter in Berkshire from their HQ at St Mary Butts in Reading. They were much closer to the centre of town than Brock Barracks which anyway was far more concerned with calling up and equipping Reservists than additional recruiting.

The 4th Battalion was soon up to strength and all those who had volunteered for General Service were formed into the 1st/4th Battalion with a 2nd/4th being formed from men who had not opted for General Service and many of the new recruits being formed in early September.

The 1st/4th had the immediate problem that many of their instructors and NCOs were reservists or seconded from the regulars and had therefore been immediately withdrawn either to serve in the regular battalions or to form the cadre of the New Army battalions. The 4th had to call upon men who had long since retired and to select men from their own ranks for promotion to NCO or to be commissioned as officers.

In addition the Territorials were pretty low on the army's priority list for supplies.

Colonel Lionel H Hanbury set up camp for the second 4th at his farm, Hitcham Farm near Taplow in Buckinghamshire. A third 4th Battalion was formed at Aldermaston and moved to Reading on October 15th 1915. They had their Christmas dinner for 300 at the Corn Exchange in December and moved on to Weston Super Mare with their C/O Col W A Ellison MVO on the 15th January 1916. [RM 1/1/16] One of their first officers was Sgt HP Tate who had been injured and was commissioned into the 3rd/4th instead of returning to his battalion. [RM 24/7/15]

The Reserves

There were basically two different reserves on the outbreak of war. The first were divided into classes A to D and were made up of men who had served already with the Colours and still had time to go with their total of twelve years of engagement. The second was the 3rd battalion or Special Reserve formed of men who had received the same basic training as the regulars and had then kept their skills up to date by 28 days of annual training. There was technically a third reserve formed of men who had completed all their reserve obligations and who remained upon a National Register.

Immediately war broke out all the men of the 3rd battalion and the class reservists were recalled to the Colours and assembled first at Brock Barracks for re-equipment. They were then assigned to one or other of the regular battalions and sent off to the 3rd battalion at Portsmouth to await actual posting.

Recruiting in Reading

At one of the first recruiting meetings in Reading held in the week ending 22nd August, the speakers were immediately challenged about the tactics being used at the recruiting centres. A speaker from Newbury stated that of 21 men who responded there only one was accepted, the others were all sent home without even a medical examination. The adverts had all offered a special enlistment for three years service, or to the end of hostilities but the centres were accepting only 12 year enlistments as regulars. Mr Mount the MP for South Berkshire who was one of the speakers had to agree, five men had gone from his village of Wasing and all had been rejected.

Meetings were held several times a week and in the week ending Sept 19th a Great Patriotic Meeting in Reading was addressed by Lord Curzon.

The Mercury published a letter from Col Hanbury of the 4th Battalion on 3rd October calling men to rally to the colours. "*Many young men do not seem to realise the seriousness of the situation*" he said and he exhorted them to join and volunteer for overseas service. Two weeks later the 4th put an advert on the front page urging men to sign on at either the Depot in St Mary Butts or the Camp at Burnham, they had to be between 18 and 35 on the 9th December 1914, unless they were former NCOs who could be up to 50. Especially wanted were men who had skills as motor and lorry drivers, fitters, blacksmiths, wheelers and electricians.

On Tuesday December 29th 1914 the Reading Citizens Recruiting Committee organised a recruiting parade through the town. 600 men of the 2nd/4th Reserve and the 8th Service Battalions assembled at the GWR Station and set off at 1430 led by the band of the Caversham and Reading Veterans Association. They marched via Station Road, Queen Victoria Street, Broad Street, Oxford Road, Kensington Road, Tilehurst Road, Castle Street, Bridge Street, Southampton Street, Mount Pleasant, Silver Street, London Street, Queens Road, Kings Road, Broad Street, West Street and Friar Street to the Corn Exchange. Several officers were mounted, these were Colonel Hanbury, Commanding Officer of the 4th, Captain Coots, Commanding Officer of the 8th, Major M White and Major CF Simmonds. Tea was served at the Corn Exchange and there were speeches by local dignitaries. The Mayor, Councillor Leonard Sutton, congratulated the men on their smart turn out and the speed at which they had learned their drill. They

belonged, he said, to a regiment which had glorious traditions and he was sure that if the war lasted long enough for them to go to the front, they would add to the glory that the Regiment had already earned. [RM 2/1/15, BC 1/1/15]

Capt M L Porter issued a further appeal for recruits to the 2nd/4th Bn saying that 800 more men were needed to bring it up to strength. To support his efforts the Reading Citizens Recruiting Committee offered a prize of a £2 wrist watch to the person signing up the most recruits for either the Territorials, the Regulars or the Service Battalions between January 16th and 25th. However recruiting sergeants were specifically disqualified. [BC 165/1/15]

Col Wilson, the recruiting officer for the Reading sub-area resigned in March 1916 due to ill health and was replaced by Lt Col Jocelyn Otway [RM 11/3/16]

Recruiting in East Berkshire

In east Berkshire the Recruiting Committee consisted of Lord Haversham, President of the local Liberal Association, Lord George Pratt, President of the Local Conservative and Unionist Association and Ernest Gardner, MP for East Berkshire. They held regular meetings as part of their recruiting drive and between March 15th and 20th 1915 they held meetings in Bracknell, Crowthorne, Clewer, Winkfield, Sunninghill, Wokingham and Earley. Meetings were preceded by a parade led by a model armoured car with a band, Cadet Corps and Boy Scouts followed by private motor cars. Meetings were advertised by means of window stickers and handbills distributed by children from local schools. They were addressed by Mr AC White of the Central Parliamentary Committee and in this one drive the results were 1593 recruits from Wokingham, 768 from Maidenhead and 1167 from Windsor. [RM 21/8/15] A number of men took the decision to join on the spur of the moment as Private J H Harwood of the 6th Royal Berks later recalled:

I worked for the County Council and, one morning, I left home to go to work; we were repairing the roads in Windsor Park at the time, but on the way I met a friend who was going to enlist. Instead of going on to work, I went home, changed into my best clothes and went with him to the Recruiting Office in Reading.

Recruiting in South Berkshire

Recruitment in what we now know as west Berkshire, which was regarded as south Berkshire at the time followed a similar pattern. In December 1914 a contingent, 230 strong, from the Newbury Racecourse Camp marched from the Racecourse to Newbury's Market Place to hear an address from Sir John French which was read with hearty cheers. The Racecourse was a Prisoner of War camp for German soldiers and the

contingent were from the guards at the camp. It was noted that out of a population of 12,000, 710 had already volunteered from Newbury. If that same rate (6%) were reflected all over the country then there would already be an army of over two and a half millions. Of the figure of 710 however only 241 had enrolled since the start of the war. The remainder were mainly regulars who happened to live in Newbury. [RM 12/12/1914]

The New Berkshire Battalions

To accommodate the recruits the 5th and 6th Battalions were raised in Reading later in August 1914, both by Colonel Foley. The 7th by Col Fitzhugh at Reading. and the 8th by the end of September 1914. They formed part of Kitchener's New Army. Drafts came in from Surrey, Birmingham, London and from Wales. Lt Col W C Walton, Indian Army, took over Command of the 8th at Codford Training Camp in the first week of October 1914.

Four Pioneer Battalions were formed, the 10th, 11th and 12th at Portsmouth and the 13th in France. They all saw service in France. The first two were formed by the 9th Battalion from men found in Portsmouth who seemed unfitted for any other duties, not necessarily from the Berkshires. One battalion came to Reading when 300 were billeted around the Oxford Road area over Christmas 1915, the rest having gone home on leave. [RM 1/1/16] They were later handed over the the newly formed Labour Corps in May 1917 and lost all further connections with the rest of Regiment except when they were disbanded and their colours laid up in Reading.

The Derby Scheme

The first step towards conscription came about because of public pressure against men seen as 'slackers' who had refused to volunteer for service with colours. In practical terms the number of volunteers was still greater than the army could cope with or equip but attention focussed on those people, said to number 650,000 who had avoided the call. Lord Derby was appointed Secretary of State for War in October 1915 and immediately came up with a scheme for registration that has been named after him. Voluntary recruitment was to be ended and all unmarried men between 18 and 41 were obliged to register and await call up.

On 16th October the Chief Whips of all three main political parties sent out a note to all their constituency organisations telling them to place their canvassing expertise at the disposal of the local recruiting committee. In Reading a new parliamentary Committee was formed to organise a canvas of all men possibly eligible. The Mayor, Leonard Sutton presided; Capt FA Simonds, Mr Sydney Brain and Mr B Russel represented the political parties; Alderman AH Bull, Mr Walter S

Belcher and Mr L Quelch were the joint secretaries and the Committee was completed by Alderman GC Field, the Deputy Mayor and Mr CE Hewett. They sent out 16,000 individual letters and the GPO delivered 65,000 leaflets and 3000 posters. Canvassers, doctors and magistrates were enlisted to search out details, conduct medical examinations and take attestations respectively and they set up shop in the Town Hall. [RM 8/12/16]

The campaign opened on 28th October, by 6th November the canvassers had dealt with 677 men, by 13th November 2554, by 20 November 5100, by 27th November 6300 and by 3rd December 7801. They were called to attend an interview at the Small Town Hall and on the peak day no less than 1400 were seen.

The following results were obtained:-

	single	married	total	
Enlisted for immediate service	462	248	710	
Enlisted for B Reserve	622	1218	1840	
Promised immediate service	0	0	0	
Promised to join B Reserve	557	1132	1689	

--	1642	2597	4239	
rejected	979	991	1970	

--	net total enlisted or offered	2620	3588	6208

---	Foreigners		58	
	Dead or over age		90	
	Moved and traced to another area		198	
	Moved and not traced		135	

----	total not interviewed		481	

	Think themselves unfit	223	185	408
	War work, Munitions, Railway, Marine	59	78	137
	Civic servants, Post Office, Police	11	51	62
	Refused by Employer	26	20	46

----	Total not recruited but otherwise willing	319	304	623

	Set conditions	27	103	130
	Unwilling with no sufficient reason	213	498	711

----	Total unwilling	240	601	841

Summary				
	Single	Married	Total	
Enlisted or Promised	1642	2597	4239	
Rejected	979	991	1970	

Not available			481
Otherwise willing	319	304	623
Not willing	240	601	841

Total Canvassed	3180	4493	8154

The deadline set by Lord Derby was the 12th December but Reading were one of the first to complete and had their report in his hands on December 6th. [RM 29/1/16]

All in all this was regarded as a highly satisfactory outcome and from February 1916 single men began to be called up. [RM 19/2/16] The net result however was a fall in recruitment as married men in the reserved occupations were denied the right to enlist. Soon the call up had to be applied to married men as well.

The Call Up

The first call up was for single men who had to report on March 8th [RM 19/2/16] But whereas the volunteers had been allowed to choose the regiment with which they would serve, with the coming of the draft there was no choice. The first prosecution in Reading for failing to heed the call up was made on Tuesday 28th March 1916. Vernon Ballard of 7 St John's Road, Reading was charged with being absent from the military reserve on March 18th. He had wanted to go into the Army Service Corps but there were no vacancies. He was fined 40s and handed over the military authorities. [RM 1/4/16]

The call up could impose severe hardship on a family when the man was the chief provider and even more so when he was involved in running a small business. There were immediately appeals for deferment and a tribunal was set up to hear appeals. The notice was posted 3rd Feb and employers and conscripts had 10 days in which to lodge their appeal. [RM3/2/16]

The first sitting of the tribunal was in the week ending Feb 26th George William Henwood of 16 Willow St Reading was a carman employed by Messrs C&G Ayres Ltd. He told them he had to support and look after a widowed mother and a crippled brother but this was not sufficient and his appeal was turned down. Arthur West managed to persuade them to defer his call up until 21st May and Joseph Albert Gear obtained a temporary deferment until September so that he could wind his practice down and ensure that the treatments his patients were undergoing could be completed. Most of the rest were unsuccessful. [RM 26/2/16]

In many cases it was the employers who were appealing as they suddenly found themselves faced with the loss of several of their key employees. Menpes Fruit Farm in Purley grew a wide range of horticultural products under glass. They had 12 large greenhouses and among the first to be called up were AW Dix, their manager, WC Dunster the foreman and OW Clark the carter. In their

case no objections were put up by Capt Waring, the military representative at the tribunal held in Pangbourne on 24th May and they were given an exemption until September 30th. [RM 27/5/16]

Those who had moral or religious objections to war could put their case to a tribunal for conscientious objectors but few were successful. Many tried to avoid fighting by simple refusing to obey orders. Thirteen men who had been conscripted into the Royal Berks were put on trial in May for this offence. They had failed to obey the orders of Sgt Major Arthur Trinder and were all found guilty and sentenced to 112 days in prison. Several were Baptists and local Baptist Ministers appeared to plead their cause and testify to their sincerity, but to no avail. [RM 27/5/16]

The Berkshire County Volunteer Regiment

Another means whereby men were recruited was via the local volunteer forces. There were three such in the Reading Area: The Reading Volunteer Defence Force; The Athletes Volunteer Force and the Earley Volunteer Defence Force.

The Reading force was formed on Wednesday 16th September at the Sports Field on Kensington Road when drill practise was made available to all men who were not eligible to join up. Over 100 turned up the first time and 400 paraded on Sept 19th under their C/O Colonel Hodgson.

The Reading Athletes announced on 3rd October 1914 that they already had 125 recruits.

The Earley force had been formed 25/11/1914 with 30 carbines [RM 21/11/14]

In order to become official these volunteer regiments had to satisfy a number of stringent conditions:-

- *Only those ineligible to serve in the regular or territorial army could join*
- *No arms were to be provided from public funds*
- *Uniforms could be worn but they had to be distinguishable from the regular troops*
- *They were allowed to wear a red armband 3" wide inscribed GR*
- *Ranks and uniforms could be used only while in training*
- *No attestation or oath was allowed*
- *Army recruiting officers could inspect and recruit at any time.*

Periodic checks were conducted and anyone found taking part in its activities who were qualified for

service were immediately drafted. [RM 26/12/14]

In July 1915 these three were merged to form the first battalion of the Berkshire County Volunteer Regiment. They held a meeting at which Colonel Hodgson, the C/O of the Reading Force was elected C/O of the new Battalion. Colonel Kensington, who lived at Exton, Erleigh Road, Reading, was requested to be his deputy, [RM 17/7/15] but he was appointed to 'a very important position at Woolwich Arsenal' and was unable to oblige. [RM 24/7/15] Captain Collins from the Athletes was elected Adjutant. They agreed to restrict their recruitment to within 8 miles around Reading and they formed themselves into 8 companies. They continued however to organise training and events as before, using the old names.

In the great centres of population the local regiments could not cope with the flood of volunteers and so passed men on to other County Regiments. Thus the Royal Berkshire Regiment received large numbers of men from South Wales, Birmingham, Bristol and London and it would seem provided these other centres with recruiting support. Certainly in 1916 there were numerous references to men arriving at Reading having come from the Depot at Bristol with no mention that they had been handled by other regiments.

Other Berkshire Regiments

As well as the Royal Berkshire Regiment there were several other regiments which either included 'Berkshire' in their title or in that of one of their units. In some cases official or unofficial records got mixed up on being copied and occasionally one finds men from these other units recorded as being in the Royal Berkshires.

The main other regiment was the Berkshire Yeomanry. This had a long and distinguished history originating from the citizens armies and militias raised from time to time by local landowners to defend their own homes.

A second unit was the Berkshire National Guard. This recruited men only from former serving members of the army or navy and they were designated in three classes:-

- *Class I - under 42 years of age*
- *Class II - 42 - 50*
- *Class III - 50 years and older*

Almost all the Class I men were eventually called up and saw service at the front in other regiments. The Regiment was organised in four battalions known as Reading, Windsor, Newbury and Wantage. They were employed on guarding prisoners and internees and defending key installations such as railway bridges.

Other Regiments

A number of regiments including the Guards and the cavalry, plus the specialist Corps such as the Royal Engineers and the Army Service Corps recruited on a national basis. Within county boundaries however it was the local County Regiments which did the recruiting. Many men from Berkshire went across the border to join the Oxford and Buckingham Light Infantry, The Hampshire Regiment, The Royal West Surrey Regiment and the Wiltshire Regiment. Equally many men came in the opposite direction.