

Chapter 16

To War Stations at Hemel Hempstead

The London Territorials

At the same time as “F” Company was assembling at the Drill Hall at Bury Road, and marching off to join the rest of the Hertfordshire Regiment at war stations in East Anglia, Territorial soldiers were enacting similar scenes throughout the Country. In particular the 6th London Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, Territorial Force, was assembling at 105 Holland Road, Brixton, prior to marching to Hemel Hempstead.

Before describing the journey that they, and their colleagues, made to Hemel Hempstead it is appropriate to say something of the London Regiment of Territorials¹. The Territorial Force came into existence in April 1908, and was created out of the various volunteer units that had existed around the country for many years. The oldest unit was the Honourable Artillery Company, with a charter dated 1537. The Force was modelled on the Regular Army, and the most relevant difference was that field artillery batteries were organised on a four-gun rather than a six-gun basis. Members of the Territorial Force were liable to be called out for service in the United Kingdom but could not be sent abroad, although members could volunteer for the Special Service section that would be called out in a national emergency at any time. They could also volunteer for overseas service.

The R.F.A. Brigades

The 5th and 6th London Brigades R.F.A., each with three batteries of four 15 pounder guns, attended their annual training camp in July, 1915. At the time the 5th Brigade was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel E. C. Massy, who had previously served in the Regular



Territorials training at Larkhill, Salisbury Plain, circa 1909²

Army³. The most senior officers in the 12th, 13th and 14th County of London Batteries were Major W. P. G. Mylrea, Major A. G. Scammell, and Captain R. L. York respectively. Captain E. R. Hatfield was in command of the ammunition column. The 6th Brigade was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Machugh, who had extensive experience of wars all over the world as a war correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*. The 15th Battery was commanded by Hadrian Bayley, who had fought with the City Imperial Volunteers in the Boer War, while Captain P. J. Clifton was the most senior officer in the 17th Battery. The Ammunition Column was commanded by Captain W. D. Austin.

Adrian Charles Gordon, who was shortly to be billeted in Hemel Hempstead with the Locke family, was the senior officer in the 16th Battery. He was born at Enfield on 4th July, 1891, the son of Charles Wood Gordon and Florence Campbell Gordon, née Cunningham. He

¹ Detailed information is given in Appendix C, *The Organisation of the London Territorial Force*. For a good introduction to the Territorial Force during the First World War see Ray Westlake, *British Territorial Units, 1914-1918* (Osprey Publishing, London, 1991).

² N.D.G. James, *The Gunners at Larkhill* (Gresham Books, Henley on Thames, 1983)

³ The officers are taken from the *Army List* published in August, 1914. Brief biographies of the officers are given in Appendix D, *Who's Who in the R.F.A.*

was educated at Bishop's Stortford Grammar School, and joined the Volunteers when in his teens. He became a lieutenant in the 16th Battery on 1st April, 1910. Early in 1912 he married Irene Maud Rowney and their twin daughters Doreen Florence and Thelma Constance were born on 8th September, 1912. He worked with his father in the family firm of R. Gordon & Co., Steam Ship Brokers, of 36 Lime Street, London EC. Two brothers, Victor Frederick Gordon⁴ and Kenneth Gordon also worked there. He was promoted Captain in the Territorial Force on 1st January 1913, and Major on 1st August, 1914, after the annual training camp. At the outbreak of the War he lived at Oakdene, Grove Avenue, Church End, Finchley.



Adrian C. Gordon⁵

Lieutenant Colonel Chambers commanded the 7th Brigade R.F.A., with battery commanders, Majors Mead, Lord Gorell, and Peal, while the 8th Brigade R.F.A. was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Emery, supported by Majors Eton and Eley.

August in London

While the 5th and 6th artillery brigades had completed their annual training in July, the 7th and 8th brigades, together with the 2nd London Division infantry battalions, were just about to start their training. Many years later Captain J. E. March⁶, recollected what happened:

The Civil Service Rifles camp for 1914 was scheduled to be held on Salisbury Plain, and on July 30th I left Cardiff to join them in London. ... I got into uniform on 31st July, 1914, and only cast it aside on April 21st, 1919. We were in bed in camp on the Plain on August [2nd] when at 10 p.m. we were all turned out, ordered to pack up, and early next morning entrained for London again as war was imminent. We were standing by at our H.Q. in the Strand when war was declared on August 4th.

As soon as war was declared volunteers started to turn up. Edwin Collen went to the headquarters of the 2nd London Division on 5th August. He was a retired major of the Royal Garrison Artillery, who had served on the North West Frontier of India in 1897-8, and won the D.S.O. in South Africa. He was appointed as General Staff Officer, Grade 2, and immediately started work on billeting and horse purchasing⁷:

6th August: Hard at work all day on the billeting scheme, which was finally handed to units about 8 p.m. The Divn. is concentrating at its temporary war station, St Albans. The only likely problem is "horses" but these are coming in fairly well. The horse census scheme seems to work smoothly.

8th August: Busy now on horse purchasing returns trying to make up totals by classes of what the purchasing officers have actually brought and handed over. Horses do not come in as quickly as they ought and my private opinion is that many of the purchasing officers, not having had any military training, do not keep the detailed account of their purchases carefully enough and confusion inevitably arises ... By tomorrow evening units will probably be up to full strength as regards men and complete as regards equipment, etc. (except uniform for some recruits) ... The horse purchasing has been stopped tonight till the Exped. force has gone.

⁴ Lieutenant Victor Frederick Gordon died on 1st July, 1918, while serving in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

⁵ Sir O'Moore Creagh & E M Humphris, *The V.C. and D.S.O. Volume 2*.

⁶ From an account, written by Captain March in 1953, in the Imperial War Museum. In the Autumn of 1914 he was a private in the 15th battalion and was billeted at Potter's Crouch and later at Bedmond, a few miles south east of Hemel Hempstead.

⁷ Diary of Lieutenant Colonel E. H. E. Collen, Imperial War Museum.

Major Collen's work on billeting required officers to visit the areas in western Hertfordshire when the 2nd London Division was to take up war stations. It appears that the first advanced party to visit Hemel Hempstead included Second Lieutenant Henry Chitty, who had only been commissioned on the 3rd August. The result was probably the first wartime casualty in the 6th London Brigade R.F.A. Sir Henry John Newbolt wrote to his friend Alice Hylton on 13th August, 1914⁸:

My nephew and godson - Henry Chitty - who only left Oxford last year and has just got his commission as a gunner, was shot - on Thursday I think - by a friend⁹ - a fellow subaltern probably - with a revolver which the idiot was fooling with. He was shot through both lungs and his father was fetched at 1.0 at night by a stranger in a motor, to go from South Kensington to Hemel Hempstead. They took two nurses.

Another new recruit was Philip Pilditch who had done a good deal of artillery work in the O.T.C. while at Cambridge University. On August 1st he was worried about the European situation, but was still making preparations for a planned climbing holiday in Switzerland. Over the Bank Holiday weekend he took part in the usual family outing and the next day he went to the headquarters of the 7th London Brigade R.F.A., in Fulham High Street. He was seen by the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Chambers, and the adjutant, Major Marryat, and they sent him home to get some uniform. He was commissioned a second lieutenant. Over the next couple of weeks he was based at the Fulham headquarters, sometimes sleeping under a tree in a near-by park, and sometimes on the floor of the officers' mess. There was some training in Richmond Park, and the officers messed at the London Rowing Club, which provided good food and pleasant company.



Philip H. Pilditch¹⁰

The March from London to Hemel Hempstead

On Sunday, 16th August, the London gunners moved from their London headquarters to their war stations at Hemel Hempstead. It was a strenuous journey. The officers were mounted, as were the drivers on the guns and wagons, most of which were commandeered commercial vehicles. The men, many of whom had been in office jobs until a fortnight before, marched all the way. Second Lieutenant Pilditch describes the journey from Fulham to Boxmoor, as seen from the rear of the 7th Brigade.

In Brigade Orders overnight I was posted as 'Officer in charge of Brigade 2nd Line Transport' ... It meant looking after the water-carts and transport wagons of all the batteries on the march. These, owing to being slower than guns and limbered wagons, are collected in the rear and march as a separate unit. ... We were off by 6.30. I had to collect a water cart and two transport wagons from each of the three batteries and the ammunition column; making twelve in all.

⁸ Extract from letter provided by Sir Thomas Chitty, son of the casualty, Sir Henry Chitty.

⁹ It is understood that the friend died in the war. There are several possible "candidates", the most likely being Lieutenant Robert Bruce, who is known to have acted as a billeting officer in Hemel Hempstead, and who died in the battle of Loos.

¹⁰ In the absence of any diary kept by Major Gordon, Major Pilditch's extensive diary, *The War Diary of an Artillery Officer, 1914-1918*, (privately mimeographed in 1939) in the Imperial War Museum, has proved a valuable substitute. It should be noted that some entries were written several weeks after the events described, and that some post-war editing took place when it was typed up in the 1920's.

I soon found I had much more to look after than mere wagons. Every battery left a rag, tag and bobtail of odd horses, sick men and other items too disreputable to march with the Battery. ... I soon found I had too much to do to worry much about our appearance! I saw it would take me all my time to get them all to Boxmoor.

The 7th Brigade, with Second Lieutenant Pilditch's collection of oddments trailing in the rear, marched up Fulham Road, and past Hammersmith Broadway and continued on the Hendon Road.

About midday, when we were all tired, dusty, and very thirsty, the column halted at the Welsh Harp, Hendon, and the horses were watered at the ponds. It was a strange sight, hundreds of horses being ridden into the lake. Luckily there was plenty of room. ... After about an hour there, and a sandwich and drink, we harnessed up and started off again. I found I had almost doubled the lot I



The R.F.A. on their way to Hemel Hempstead, 16th August 1914¹¹

started with. ... We went along a broad road past Edgware, Stanmore and Bushey. We created lots of interest everywhere. People ran to windows and garden gates. ... Later on in the afternoon it got baking hot and I had to put the men up on the horses and make them walk in turn. ... Near Watford people came out with beer, and water, cups of tea, apples, bread and butter and all sorts of things for the men. ... Some angels in human form had taken a restaurant and gave us all free tea.

The dismounted men began to straggle and get into pubs and sit down. ... Some were so bad that I got them a lift in the Doctor's cart. Many of the horses, too, showed signs of wear. ... [At Kings Langley] we halted for twenty minutes until most of the men were up and then started a sort of "March to Kandahar" at about two miles an hour, me walking in front leading Marie by the bridle. ... They certainly came along the last miles wonderfully well; poor devils, it was a stiff march for a start, all fresh and soft as they were. Thirty four miles at least and on a baking day.

Pilditch arrived at Boxmoor at 10.30 p.m., and returned the wagons to their various batteries. The 18th Battery lines were on the common at Boxmoor, and after tying up his horse to a gun wheel, he went to the nearby Heath Park Hotel. There was considerable confusion there, and he spent the night wrapped in a travelling rug and sharing a bathroom with a fellow subaltern, Second Lieutenant Pixley.



London Scottish marching through Watford, August, 1916¹¹

¹¹ *Watford Illustrated*, 22nd August, 1914

1916¹¹

Also on the Sunday the 4th London Territorial Infantry Brigade assembled near Marble Arch, in Hyde Park, before marching to their war stations. Each man carried a full pack, ground sheet, and 250 rounds of ball ammunition. Each battalion broke their journey. The Kensingtons bivouacked at Canons Park before arriving at Abbots Langley on the Monday. The Queen's Westminster Rifles marched 12 miles to their overnight bivouac and a final 10 miles to Leverstock Green. The



The Peahen Hotel, St Albans¹²

The London Scottish set up their headquarters at Garston, with some troops billeted in the Leavesden Hospital. During the period they were in the area 2nd London Division troops were billeted in most towns and villages between Watford and Luton, and from Hemel Hempstead to Hatfield. The County of London Cyclists (25th Battalion) was based in Redbourn.

The 2nd London Divisional Headquarters moved into the Peahen Hotel in St Albans, as Lieutenant Colonel Collen described⁷:

As we have about 20 officers (including R.A.M.C., A.V.C., etc.) and some 70 batmen, grooms, orderlies and military police, we cannot very well go into a private house that is not centrally situated. We have to pay 4/- a day extra and give the manager



The Supply Column at Two Waters¹³

¹² St Albans City Library Ref. Y234.608 G5

¹³ Alan H. Maude, *The 47th (London) Division* (Amalgamated Press, London, 1922)

of the Hotel our rations or the money equivalent.

Late Arrivals and Local Recruitment

At the time of the march to Hemel Hempstead the Territorial units were not up to strength, and were actively recruiting new recruits, both in London and Hertfordshire. For instance Bernard Brookes¹⁵ joined the Queen's Westminster Rifles after the outbreak of War. He had an easier journey when he travelled to Leverstock Green at the end of August, as he took the tube to Euston and the train to Boxmoor.

There was also recruiting at Hemel Hempstead, and later in the war the *Gazette* frequently included news of local men who had joined the 2nd London Division in the Autumn of 1914. When the 21st Battery, 8th London Brigade R.F.A., took up quarters at Shendish in August, 1914, Mr. T. Norton Longman (of the Longman publishing company) appealed to his employees to help their country, with a promise to keep their places open. Seven immediately came forward. E.A. Colliver, son of Mr. F. P. Colliver of Chaulden, Boxmoor, became a Second Lieutenant with the 2nd London Division Army Service Corps.

Typical of the former public school young men to join up was Nevill Christopherson, who had been playing cricket with the Hemel Hempstead Cricket Club in July. He was born in 1894, and educated at Lockers Park School, where his father, Percy, was headmaster. In 1907 he went to Winchester, where he joined the O.T.C, leaving in 1913 as a Corporal. In the Autumn of 1913 he went to Oxford University. He abandoned his studies when War broke out, enrolling as Second Lieutenant in the 5th London Brigade R.F.A. with effect from 18th September, 1914. Initially he trained with the 13th Battery, Reserve Brigade, at Kennington, but was then transferred back to Hemel Hempstead, where he joined the 12th Battery, and was billeted at home in Lockers Park School.



Nevill Christopherson¹⁴



Commandeered Carts at Hand Post Farm¹⁶

¹⁴ From Nevill Christopherson's photograph album.

¹⁵ B. J. Brookes, typescript journal, Imperial War Museum (PP/MCR/283)

¹⁶ Detail of photograph, Dacorum Borough Council archives

Extract

Section 4 – The Soldier’s Tale

Chapter 16 – To War Stations at Hemel Hempstead

from

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