



Lancashire North Branch

Despatch – October 2022

Sixth Email edition.



Keeping communications open



Editor's Notes



It has been a rather sorrowful period since our last edition and while it has been the first opportunity for many to visit the battlefields of northern Europe we have experienced the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, suffered the loss of the Queen Elizabeth II and the sad demise of our branch Chairman Stan Wilkinson.

On a more upbeat note, the branch has been fortunate to have a series of excellent speakers over the summer months and by September we were able to welcome Iain Adams who has stepped up and taken over as our new branch chairman.

Tom Williams

(Unless otherwise indicated, articles are by the editor.)

Stanley Wilkinson (1949-2022)

Just over twenty-five years ago I met Stan for the first time and on that occasion it was agreed to form a local branch of the Western front Association. Shortly afterwards, what is now called the North Lancashire WFA branch opened in Lancaster with Stan as its Chairman. He fulfilled this role for many years until he decided to step aside in order to give another member the chance to fill the post. Recently however he returned as chairman when a vacancy occurred. Unfortunately he was only able to attend a few meetings before his untimely death.

As Chairman he would invite visiting speakers to a nearby restaurant before the talk and after opening the meeting and holding the two-minute silence he would introduce the speaker in his own inimitable way. Stan attended some of the annual WFA Chairman's meetings and for many years joined the WFA members at the Cenotaph in London in November.

His favourite talk to members (given to members from Cleveland to Merseyside) was on the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, placing special emphasis on the role of the car, the 'Graf & Stift'. The Christmas branch meeting, under his Chairmanship encouraged members to give a short informal talk on any WW1 topic. He would always start the meeting with an artefact from his own extensive and varied collection!

The branch organised many coach trips to the Western Front during which Stan was a fount of knowledge and had many stories to tell whilst enjoying the Belgian beers. His favourite area was the Ypres Salient and he loved visiting and staying at Talbot House in Poperinghe. Because of his personal support of

this establishment, our branch also made regular financial contributions over many years.

In 2007 Stan and his younger son Oliver, made a nostalgic trip to the Western Front following in the footsteps of Stan's grandfather, 'Willie Wilk', from where he fought in Ypres to where he was captured and became a POW, near Rheims. Subsequently Oliver, after further research, documented this story for his degree dissertation.

Stan was surrounded by a close family. Matthew, his elder son, followed Stan, a former policeman, into the service and is married with two children. Oliver, perhaps influenced by Stan's interest, now holds a Doctorate in History and is working at Lancaster University. Marilyn, his wife, has recently retired and once the Covid restrictions were over they were both enjoying being able to see and visit their grandchildren, after almost a two-year break.

Stan had many interests and one that rivalled the WFA was his love of motor vehicles (he owned vintage cars, motor bikes and even a tractor). A keen F1 fan, he had made trips to Monaco to watch the racing.

He was a big man in every sense of the word. Cheerful, thoughtful and intelligent, he lived life to the full. He will be sorely missed.

Andrew Brooks



Introducing our new branch chairman

Iain Adams



The statue ‘All Together Now’ in Messines village square

Iain Adams and his wife, Holly, moved to Lancashire in December 1996; Iain having retired from being Chief Pilot of Vectair Aviation and a government pilot examiner due to hearing loss. Holly became head of Abbeystead School and Iain a Senior Lecturer in Sport at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan). Previously Iain had pursued dual careers in aviation and physical education. Iain and Holly met at the University of North Dakota where Iain was pursuing a PhD in philosophy and Holly a degree in Cytotechnology. They then worked in Los Alamos New Mexico, Jordan, Bahrain and Indonesia before settling in Portsmouth, Hampshire in 1988 where Iain began working for Vectair Aviation and Portsmouth College, and Holly became a primary school teacher. Iain moved to UCLan’s Newton Rigg campus as Director of Outdoor Education in 2002 before heading back to Preston as research co-ordinator for sport, tourism and the outdoors in 2008. Iain had become interested in researching football and the First World War within the nexus of the International Football Institute, a joint research endeavour of UCLan and the National Football Museum. He published his first research article on the Christmas Truce in 2005. This interest led him to join the WFA.

Captain James Price Lloyd and the Propaganda Machine

A recent speaker at the July branch meeting Mike Coyle gave a well presented talk on propaganda in its widest forms – *‘Propaganda and Reportage: How the press reported the war and how the news was received at home’*. It reminded me of an account I came across, of an Oxford classics scholar who, when his active war service was cut short on the Somme in July 1916, ended up working for the War office propaganda machine.



Captain James Price Lloyd

Second lieutenant James Price Lloyd of the Welsh Regiment was shot and wounded in the right thigh and left hand during the fighting at Mametz Wood on 7 July 1916. During his recovery he responded to an appeal by the War Office in July 1917 for officers serving with His Majesty’s Forces ‘who may be qualified in giving valuable assistance with the work of counteracting propaganda emanating from enemy sources which is calculated to injure the causes and interests of the Allies’. Second lieutenant James Price Lloyd was subsequently invited to submit an article not exceeding 2,000 words dealing in a ‘popular’ way, and descriptive rather than opinionated, on any aspect of the war which appealed to him in a manner which he considered would be helpful to the

Allied cause. It was emphasised that; ‘such an article was to be considered as suitable for publication in the press for the purpose of propaganda and the information of our own public and the peoples of other countries regarding the Allies activities in the war. Human interest was most important; descriptive work was valuable but strategy and tactics were out of place’.

At the start of the First World War the responsibility for censorship of the press and cables (telegraph) and the issue of War Office communiques, was in the hands of a small subsection of the Directorate of Military Operations manned by just two General Staff Officers. This section was soon expanded and by February 1915, a new Directorate of Special Intelligence had been formed, now designated MO7. Under the direction of the War Office, MO7 was concerned with press publicity and the authorisation of correspondents visiting the Western Front. Its principal duty was to ensure that the military authorities controlled the press and their correspondents work. There was further expansion when the Imperial General Staff was reorganised in January 1916 and a new Directorate of Military Intelligence was established. MO7 now became Section MI7.

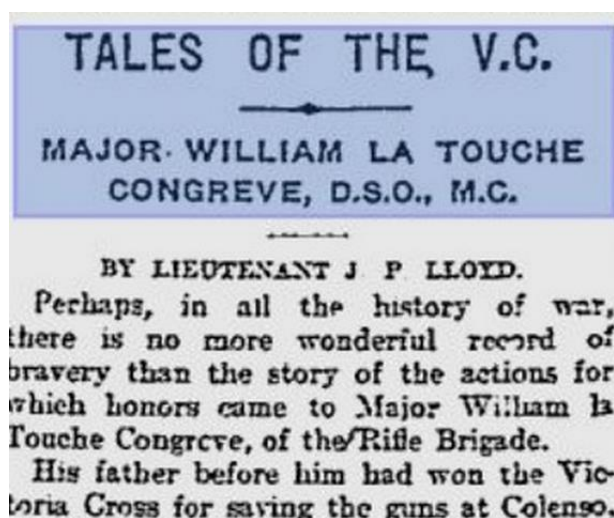
MI7 was further divided into a series of sub-sections.

- MI7 (a) – Censorship
- MI7 (b) – Foreign and domestic propaganda, including military press releases
- MI7 (c) – Translation and from 1917 the regulation of foreign visitors
- MI7 (d) – Foreign press propaganda and review (previously part of (b) until 1916)

Section MI7 (b) had the responsibility of countering any real or perceived war weariness after the severe losses on the Somme in 1916 and the effects of the German unrestricted submarine warfare on food supplies. Around this time

there was the threat of domestic insurrection in Ireland and later at home, particularly in the dark days of 1917 and the news of the Russian revolution. The nation's faith and support for the war had to be maintained.

Lieutenant James Price Lloyd was one of a number of literary men, illustrators and artists who were recruited into MI7(b). Many added their first-hand experience of life at the front when producing articles on military actions and the progress of the war in general. The author A. A. Milne was a member of the section and Bruce Bairnsfather provided many of the illustrations, particularly his 'Old Bill' cartoons and 'Fragments from France'. Officers from MI7 (b) were regularly sent out to the front to witness actions and ultimately provided accounts that were published in the national and international press.

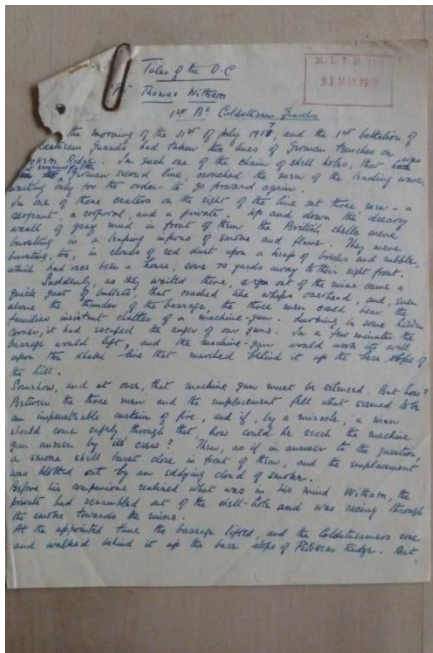


An example of James Price Lloyd's work.

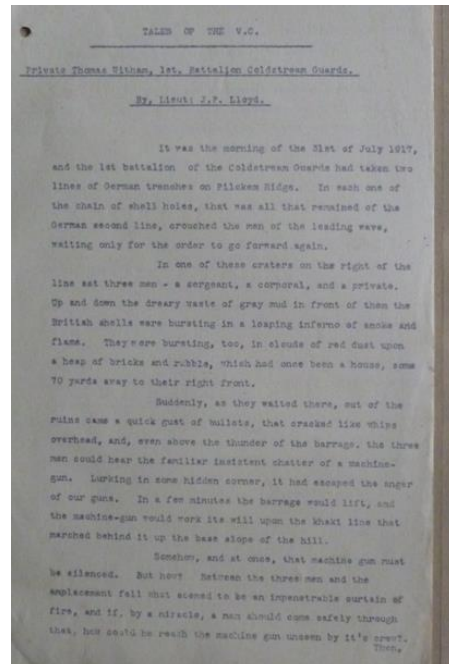
It is estimated that from July 1916, MI7 (b) produced an impressive 7,500 articles of acknowledged literary merit for circulation at home and abroad. At the end of the war the government ordered all the files of MI7 to be destroyed. However, by a sheer stroke of fortune a number of these files survived within the private papers of Captain James Price Lloyd Following his death in January

1955 at the age of 64, Captain Lloyd's great nephew Jeremy Arter was clearing his aunt's home in Talybont-on-Usk, near Brecon, when he discovered the papers as they were to be thrown into a skip. They were fortunately saved when Jeremy Arter spotted an MI7 (b) stamp on some of the documents.

The papers contained 150 articles, including original manuscripts. This valuable archive contains elements of ‘*Tales of the VC*’, describing 94 individual accounts of the heroic deeds that led to the award of a Victoria Cross. Each had been written by Lieutenant James Price Lloyd. The manuscripts include an account of the events that led to the award of the VC to Lancastrian, Pte Thomas Witham, 1st Coldstream Guards (see Despatch December 2019).



Manuscript account of Thomas Witham's Victoria Cross



Thomas Witham – Typescript ready for circulation

Jeremy Arter has placed the papers on the 1914-1919 Europeana website. Europeana 1914-1918, Europe - CC BY-SA.

https://www.europeana.eu/item/2020601/https_1914_1918_europeana_eu_contributions_5454



Captain Thomas Carey Owtram

1/5th King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment



When the Territorials of 1/5th King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment embarked for France on 14 February 1915, Second Lieutenant Thomas Carey Owtram was a twenty-one year old subaltern. He was typical of many of the young Territorial officers of that time; he was educated, a keen sportsman and came from a comfortable middle class family.

Thomas Owtram was born on 18 April 1893 at Barnfield Cottage, Woodplumpton, Preston. His father Herbert Hawksmoor Owtram was a Cotton Manufacturer in Preston. By 1901 the family had moved to Newlands Hall, Dolphinholme, Lancaster. The household employed a Governess, Nurse, Cook, two housemaids and two servants. Thomas Owtram attended Rugby School before going up to Christ Church College, Oxford to study law. He was a member of the University Officers training Corps and at one time played for the Vale of Lune Rugby Club.

Thomas Owtram joined the 5th King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment on 25 August 1914 as a Temporary Second Lieutenant. His father had been a Captain in the Mounted Infantry Company of the 2nd Volunteer Battalion of the

Manchester Regiment. In 1916 Captain Herbert Hawksmoor Owtram was invited to take command of the Volunteer Corps in the Blackpool and Lancaster Area. He was gazetted 19 October 1916 as Major in H M Volunteer Forces to command the, 13th Battalion, West Lancashire Volunteer Regiment. He was later given responsibility for the procurement of horses in the North West on behalf of the War Office. He was promoted to the rank of Colonel and was later awarded an OBE for his services.

Mobilisation

The 5th King's Own Royal Lancaster, was mobilised at Lancaster and immediately assigned to guarding the shipyards and railway at Barrow in Furness. On 14 August 1914 the battalion moved by rail to Didcot, Oxfordshire to guard a section of the railway between Swindon and Reading. The new reality of war duties offered limited opportunities for training. The railway guard duties continued until 14 November 1914, when the battalion now designated 1/5th King's Own Royal Lancaster, joined the West Lancashire Division concentrated at Sevenoaks, Kent where they finally began their continuous training for war.

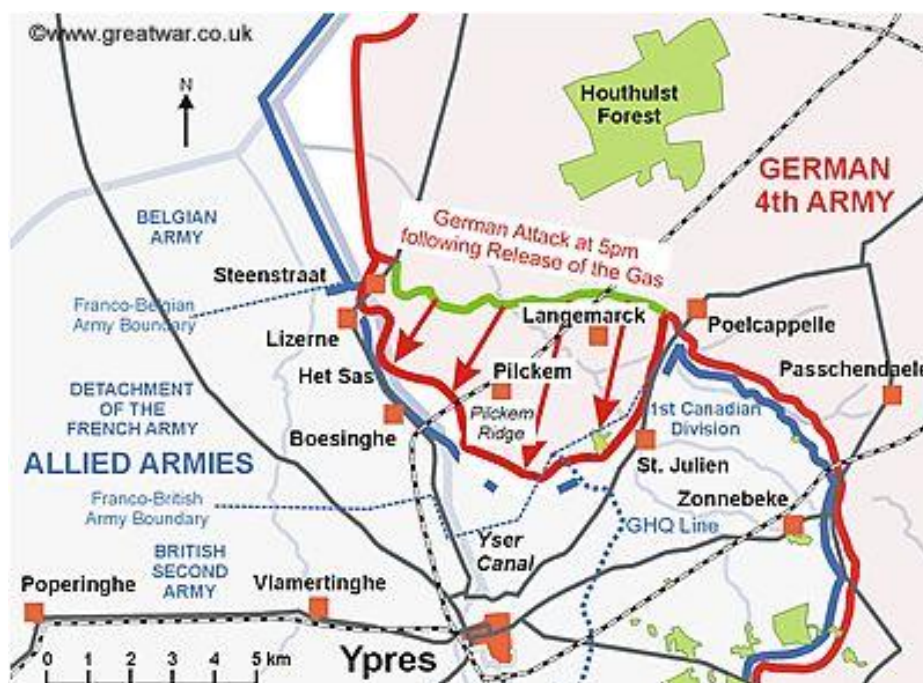
Introduction to trench warfare

The 1/5th King's Own arrived independently in France on 15 February 1915. They undertook a very short period of training in trench warfare near Ypres with regular troops, The battalion then moved to Bailleul on 2 March, where it was attached to 14th Brigade, 5th Division. The Regular Army officers were most helpful, and did all in their power to initiate the battalion into their strange new life. From 6 March, Companies were detailed for 24 hour periods of trench instruction near Messines ridge at Wulverghem and Neuve Eglise. On 27 March 1915 they were transferred to the 83rd Brigade, 28th Division. The battalion then

moved to billets in Ypres. The whole of the Salient was a dangerous place to be and at the apex, in Polygon Wood, the battalion had a very hard time. The constant shelling produced heavy casualties and made it extremely difficult to evacuate the wounded.

Second Battle of Ypres – German Gas Attack

When the Germans first used poison gas to attack the Allied line north of Ypres on 22 April 1915, the 1/5th King's Own Royal Lancaster formed part of Geddes' Detachment, a rapidly assembled ad hoc force, quickly put into the four mile gap in the Allied line to stop the Germans from advancing on Ypres (see Despatch November 2020 for a full account).



Closing the gap

At 12.30 am on the 23 April all troops in the St. Jean area were put under the command of the most senior officer present, Colonel Geddes of the 2nd Buffs. The four battalions in the immediate area, 2nd Buffs, 1st York & Lancaster, 1/5th

King's Own Royal Lancaster and 3rd Middlesex now formed 'Geddes' Detachment'. Colonel Geddes was ordered to deploy his troops in positions north of the Ypres-Poelcappelle road.

Two companies of the 1/5th King's Own Royal Lancaster were ordered forward from St. Jean and to advance up the centre, along the line of the Pilkem road to connect up between the 3rd Middlesex and the 2nd Buffs. The remaining two companies of the 1/5th King's Own Royal Lancaster moved forward and re-joined the battalion about a mile north of St. Jean in the direction of Pilkem and dug- in near the crossroads between La Belle Alliance Farm and Hill Top Farm.

23 April 1915 – 1/5th King's Own in action for the first time

Orders were issued to Geddes Detachment to attack the new German positions at 3.45 pm by advancing on Pilkem. They were to advance parallel with the Pilkem–Ypres road. The plan was for the 1/5th King's Own Royal Lancaster was to follow the attack in reserve moving with its left on the Pilkem-Ypres road.

Colonel Cavendish, Commanding Officer of 1/5th King's Own Royal Lancaster had only the vaguest outlines of the objective and direction of the attack. There had been no opportunity for officers to reconnoitre the ground or establish the position of the enemy. The order had arrived so late that the battalion finally moved off at 5.0 pm, following the two regular battalions; the 2nd East Yorkshire and the 1st York and Lancaster. There was about a mile of open ground that gently sloped up to the enemy positions on Mauser ridge. German artillery soon brought effective fire down on the advancing troops. As the 1/5th King's Own Royal Lancaster came into the line, a gap developed between the leading units, drawing the battalion into the front line. They were now under heavy shellfire, shrapnel, machine-gun and rifle fire.

Second Lieutenant Owtram wounded

A few elements of the attacking troops reached farm buildings in front of the main enemy positions. It was here that Second Lieutenant Owtram went forward to reconnoitre these positions before returning and then to lead his platoon against them. They briefly occupied one of the buildings before Second Lieutenant Owtram was wounded. He persisted in his attempts to advance and although twice wounded in the leg and side he was finally forced to retire when he was wounded a third time. Despite their determined efforts the remainder of the battalion was unable to reach the enemy line. The Germans had excellent fields of fire which ensured that most British troops were stopped two to three hundred yards away. The lack of artillery support compounded the problems and eventually there were insufficient numbers to rush the enemy line. A halt was finally called and men sought whatever cover they could find.

Second Lieutenant Thomas Owtram was evacuated back to England to the Princess Patricia's Hospital, London. For his determined actions on 23 April 1915 he was awarded the Military Cross on 15 April 1916. The citation in the London Gazette read -

Second Lieutenant (temporary Lieutenant) Thomas Gary Owtram, 1/5th Battalion, The King's Own (Royal Lancaster Regiment), Territorial Force. For conspicuous gallantry. After volunteering for and carrying out a dangerous reconnaissance, he led forward his platoon to the attack, and, although twice wounded, continued to advance until he received a third wound.

Return to the Front

Second Lieutenant Thomas Owtram recovered from his wounds and along with five fellow officers who had also been casualties at the Second Battle of Ypres,

they returned to the battalion on 27 September 1915. The 1/5th King's Own Royal Lancaster had by this time moved to the Loos battlefield where they spent most of their time acting as reserves. The battalion was returned to the 166th Brigade, 55th (West Lancs) Division in January 1916.

The Somme

From February to July 1916, the 1/5th King's Own Royal Lancaster were in a quiet area south-west of Arras before moving to the Somme at the end of July. The battalion took little part in the fighting on the Somme but provided numerous working parties. Captain Owtram took over command of 'C' Company on 10 August 1916. The battalion moved to the Delville Wood and Montauban sector where it was engaged in providing working parties often under enemy fire. On 20 September, near Flers, a knocked out tank was providing cover for the enemy harassing the British lines. Captain Owtram took out a patrol on the night of 23 September and 'dismantled' the tank which had been causing so much trouble. By the end of September the battalion had made its final contribution to the Battle of the Somme, where it had dug and dug, paving the way for others but never had the opportunity to come to grips with the enemy.

Return to Ypres

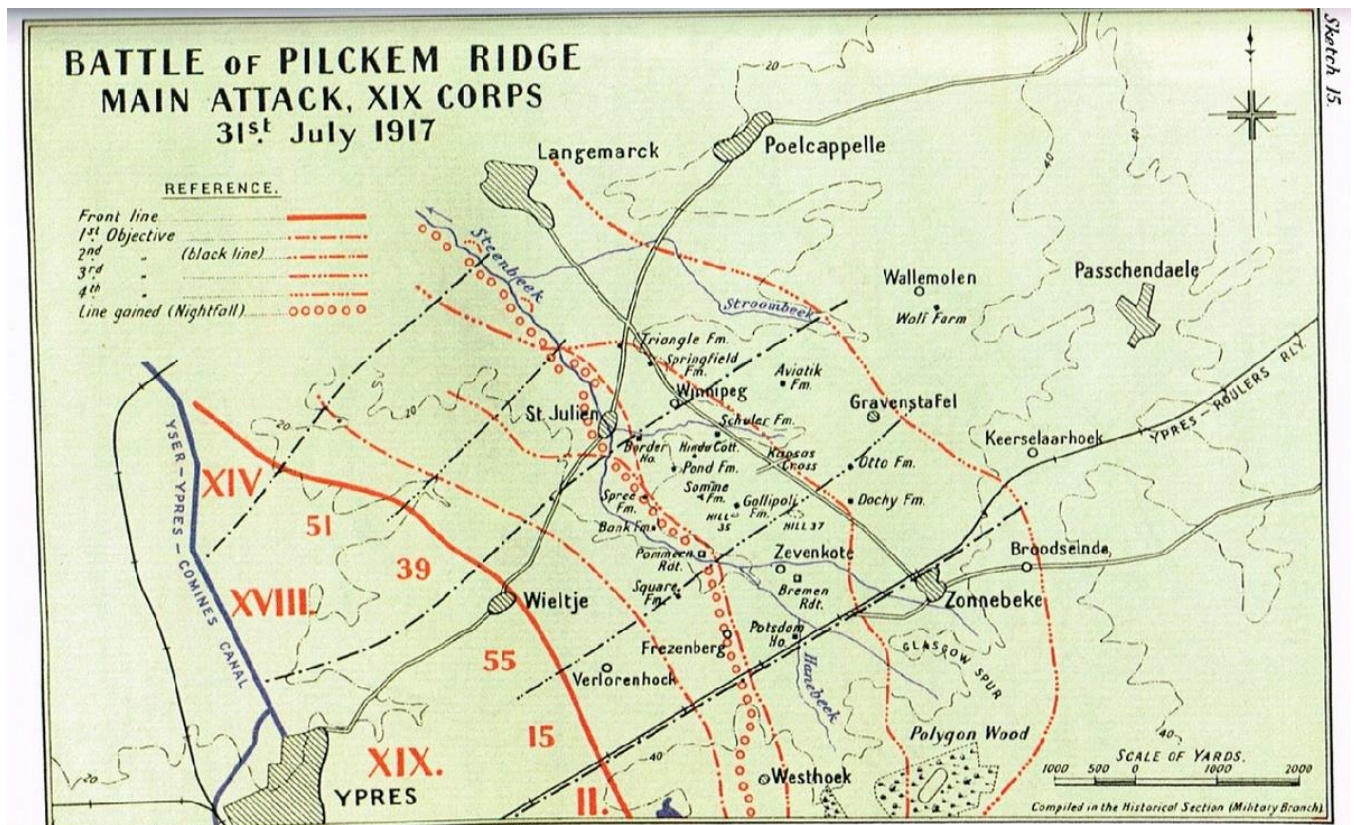
The 1/5th King's Own Royal Lancaster once again returned to the Ypres sector on 4 October 1916 where they were to remain for almost a year. The battalion was occupied with trench duties, training and constant working parties. Under the direction of Royal Engineers they assisted in the construction of railways and airfields.

By June 1917 the battalion was in the Potijze – Railway Wood area, again providing working parties in preparation for the forthcoming offensive. The

Commanding Officer and Company Commanders were sent to reconnoitre their future area of operations in the Wieltje sector,. The battalion was removed from the front line on 29 June. For the next four weeks they trained on the practice grounds of dummy trenches while Officers and NCOs studied models of the ground they were to advance over in the forthcoming attack.

Third Battle of Ypres

On 24 July 1917 the battalion moved up to the Wieltje sector, north east of Ypres, along the Wieltje – Gravenstafel road. The 55th Divisional front straddled this road with the 166th Brigade (to which the 1/5th King’s Own Royal Lancaster, belonged), on the left, and the 165th Brigade was on the right of the road.



The plan was for the brigade to advance with the 1/5th Loyal North Lancs on the left and the 1/5th King's Own on the right. They were to capture the German front line, a series of three trenches about 100 yards apart, then establish a defensive line 400 yards beyond the German reserve line. This was their ultimate objective - the Blue Line. The 1/10th Liverpool Scottish and the 1/5th South Lancs would then pass through them to take the Black Line. When these positions had been taken the 164th Brigade would finally pass through these positions and secure the final Green Line.

'A' Company led the 1/5th King's Own Royal Lancaster followed by 'C' company on the right of the Wieltje – Gravenstafel road and 'B' Company, led by Captain Owtram, in front of 'D' company on the left of the road. About 1.0 am on 31 July, the leading companies 'A' and 'B' moved out into No Man's land and lay down in two lines just in front of their own wire. The following companies then moved up into the front line.

At zero hour, 3.50 am on 31 July 1917, the artillery barrage fell on the German front line for six minutes, then moved on to the support line for the next four minutes, before lifting 100 yards at four minutes intervals until it reached about 250 yards beyond the Blue Line. The bombardment halted here for the next forty minutes, forming a protective barrage. When the barrage started the men rose after lying on the ground for hours and advanced closely behind the falling shells.

Captain Owtram and his men arrived at the first line of enemy trenches where they could just make out the presence of Germans, who attacked them with grenades before climbing out of the trench and running to the rear. Keeping the momentum going the King's Own passed over the trenches leaving the 'moppers up' to deal with any remaining pockets of resistance. As they neared

the reserve line which was their final objective, they ran into heavy machine gun fire. Captain Owtram's runner standing beside him was killed instantly, at the same time he was hit at the top of his left leg, the force of the blow knocking him over. Bullets were hitting the ground all around him. The parapet of the trench that was their final objective was only five yards in front of him. As he rose to make a dash for the trench he was hit again, the bullet passing through his right knee.

By now both officers of 'C' company had become casualties and command was taken up by a corporal as the only surviving NCO. At 11.30 am the 1/10th Liverpool Scottish passed through on their way to attack their objective at the Black Line. Fortunately they did not encounter the same devastating machine gun fire but by now the enemy had realised that their front line had been lost and began to shell the area fairly heavily. The trench Captain Owtram was sheltering in was deep enough to offer protection but the blast from shells falling close by aggravated his wounded knee.

During a pause in the shelling Captain Owtram was aware of someone stopping where he was sheltering. He recognised the familiar features of the Liverpool Scottish Medical Officer, Captain Noel Chavasse, whose tunic was decorated with the VC he had won the year before on the Somme. After dressing his wounds Captain Chavasse returned an hour later with a party of stretcher bearers. Captain Owtram was carried back to a large dugout at Wieltje where he received an injection of morphine before being evacuated the next day.

Captain Owtram was only one of many who owed their life to Captain Noel Chavasse over the next two days. Although Chavasse had been wounded in the head on the first day of the battle, he and his stretcher bearers went out into No

Man's Land repeatedly to rescue the wounded. He was mortally wounded on 2 August 1917 and died two days later in hospital. Captain Noel Chavasse was awarded a posthumous bar to his VC for his actions during the Third Battle of Ypres.

Evacuated to England

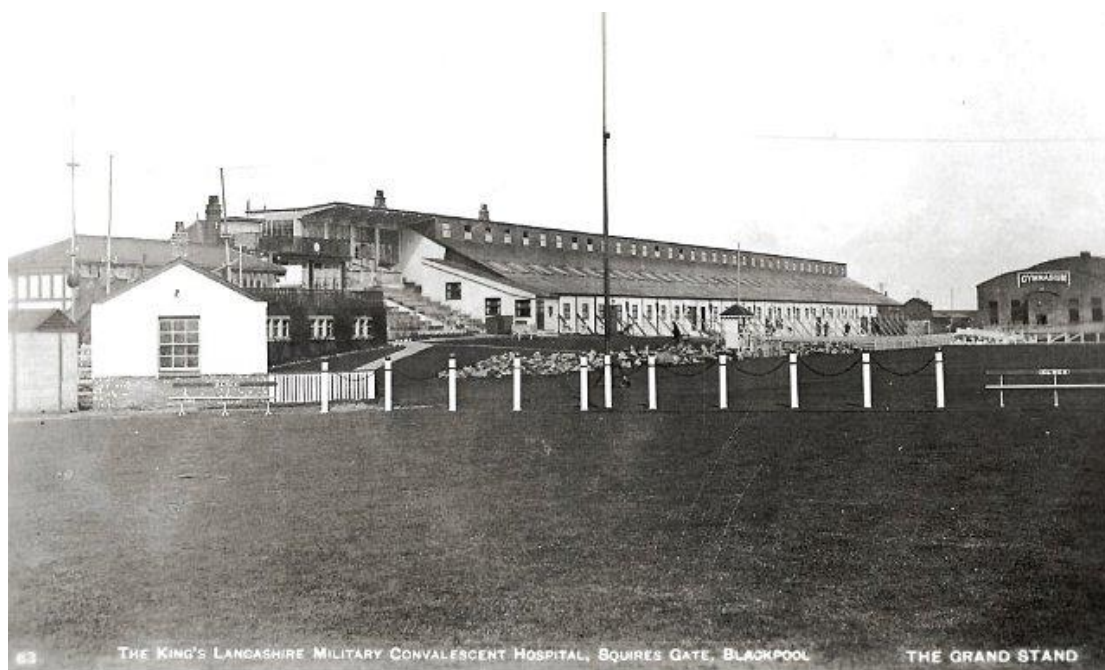
Captain Owtram was treated initially at No.14 General Hospital, Wimereux, Boulogne, before being evacuated to England. A Medical Board assessment on 23 August 1917 recorded the state of the wounds sustained by Captain T C Owtram of 1/5 K. O. R. Lancs at Wieltje on 31.7.17.

The Board find in action as above, he received the following rifle bullet wounds (1) wound of right knee joint, bullet entering on inner side below the joint and making its exit on anterior aspect of knee above joints. Joint implicated both condyles of femur fractured and also inner tuberosity of Tibia confirmed by X-Rays. The joint was opened up, 2.8.17, and fragments of femur removed. Thomas' splint applied. (2) Bullet wound left buttock and groin, bullet entering L. buttock close to lower end of anal cleft and escaping at upper part of L. thigh over adductor tendons.

All wounds became septic, was evacuated home 14.8.17 to Astley Hospital, Dorchester House. Is doing well, knee joint comfortable, limb still in splint. Wds of buttock and thigh granulating up. Remains in above hosp.

The Astley Hospital for Officers in Dorchester House Park Lane was once the American Embassy and home of the ambassador. The Hospital had 25 beds, 18 of which were in rooms overlooking Hyde Park. It was demolished in 1929 and the Dorchester Hotel built on the site.

Convalescence



Captain Owtram was transferred to the King's Lancashire Military Convalescence Hospital at Squires Gate, Blackpool. His condition was reviewed by a Medical Board on 6 December 1917.

All wounds are healed 3 months. The right knee is still stiff and cannot be bent to a right angle. The wound in the left groin is quite well. Improvements slowly taking place. He can just walk and makes up his own pace. He is fit for C.ii (Sedentary employment) at any time and has applied for such work.

He is presently assessed as being 70% disabled. Treatment is whirlpool baths and massage.

In January 1918 Captain Owtram was still convalescing at Blackpool. A Medical Board on 20 January 1918 records:

He can now move his knee to almost a right angle and is in general good health. He is fit for C.ii (Sedentary) work for three months. Presently assessed as being 60% disabled. Treatment is massage and whirlpool baths.

He was now ordered to report to Whitehall Place, London, S.W. His address was given as 98, Eaton Terrace, Belgravia, London, S.W.

A Medical Board review in London on 6 July 1918 reports:

The power of flexion is increasing – is undergoing a series of exercises. Knee joint is considerably enlarged and thickened. Fit for C.ii duties. He is assessed as being 20% disabled. It is uncertain that this disability is permanent. To be re-examined in two months. Treatment is in practicing certain exercises.

Two months later on 2 September 1918 a Medical Board review notes:

He is improving. General health is good. The knee now bends to a right angle and the muscles are shrunken - Should be further improvement with exercise – to return to min of mobility. He is assessed as being 20% disabled. Fit for C.ii duties.

On 10 December 1918 a Medical Board review was held at Caxton Hall, London.

Continuous progress is reported. He has recently had influenza and Bronchitis. General health is fair. Chest clear. Knee movements good. Fit for C.i (Home service, active duty with troops). He is assessed as being 20% disabled. To be reviewed in three months.

His permanent address was given as Newlands Hall, Lancashire.

Demobilisation

Prior to demobilisation from the army Captain Owtram made a statement of disability on 11 April 1919.

A claim for disability was made due to – Gunshot wound to right knee caused on July 31st 1917, resulting in partial disability of right leg. I am at present in receipt of £50 pension and am due for re-examination on July 31st 1919.

Captain Owtram was released from the army on 1 May 1919.

A Medical Board held at Lancaster on 13 June 1919 reviewed the original injuries and his present condition:

The buttock wound does not give him any trouble. Can flex right to right angle.

Extension unimpaired.. Quick movement and hard walking both rendered impossible.

Assessed as 20% disability due to military service.

The proceedings of the Medical Board were reported to the Deputy Director Medical Services, Western Command, Chester on 7 October 1919. It reported the present state of the wounds and injury sustained by Captain Thomas Carey Owtram 1/5th King's Own TF. At Ypres, France (sic), July 31st 1917. The Board found that:

There is some permanent loss of function of the right knee-joint. The lower extremity of the femur is considerably increased in width. The patella is displaced outwards.

There is grating in the joint. There is loss of tone in the muscles of the right thigh.

Flexion is only possible to the extent of 90°. Full extension is possible.

Classified as permanently incapacitated.

Post War Life

Thomas Carey Owtram returned to finish his law studies at Oxford. He was later called to the Bar. He practiced as a Barrister in London and Manchester before joining the legal department of Shell Oil. He married Gioia Grant Richards on 27 July 1925 at the Parish Church of St. James, Westminster.

During the Second World War he re-joined the army where he was seconded to the War Office on Oil intelligence work. He was awarded an MBE for his contributions.

Following retirement, he and his wife Gioia moved to Italy where her mother's family originated. After the death of his wife in 1969 he returned to live with his brother at Newlands Hall. Thomas Carey Owtram died in October 1992, just six months before his 100th Birthday.

BRIGADIER GENERAL REGINALD JOHN KENTISH (RJK) & HIS 15th TALE



K9 “MOLARS AND MINCING MACHINES”

Terry Dean

In the November 2013 issue of Despatch, Terry Dean first told of his visit to the Imperial War Museum to view the papers of RJK and his discovery of the tales he had drafted around 1940. The tales describe amusing incidents RJK had experienced during WW1. Terry has transcribed Tales 1 to 14 in earlier editions of Despatch, and as mentioned in the last February's edition, Terry has occupied his 'spare' time created by Covid, to transcribe the suitable remaining Kentish tales, this now being RJK's 15th Tale.

SCENE: TIME: PLACE: A small house in the village of Hamel-sur-l'Ancre, the Battalion Headquarters of the 1st East Lancashire regiment, sometime in July 1915.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE: Captain Hamilton, Staff Captain, 10th Infantry Brigade, 4th Division: Lieut. (now Major General) H. T. McMullen, Adjt. 1st East Lancashire: Lieut. Kingham, Battalion M.O. --- and myself, commanding the Battalion.

In June 1915, the 1st Battalion East Lancashire Regiment, which I was commanding at the time, and which had been holding a sector on the Ypres

salient all the winter of 1914-15 and the spring of 1915, was sent south along with the rest of the 4th Division to take over part of the line in the Somme area, some 30 – 40 miles east of Amiens, and at the time of this story we were actually in the line which ran due north and south, but just east of the village of Hamel, with my right resting on the river Ancre.

My Headquarters were in a small house about 400 yards from the actual front line and up to then, it had escaped a direct hit and was more or less intact. At the time of the story, about 11 a.m. one lovely June morning, the Germans had been shelling the area immediately behind the front line for some time, and with shells, chiefly 5.9's --- most terrifying and unpleasant customers --- falling all around us, I along with my Adjutant, my medical officer, two or three Battalion 'runners' and our servants, had gone to ground in the cellar.

Whilst the shelling, which I had at once reported both to Brigade and to the Artillery, was at its worst, Hamilton, our Staff Captain, very comfortably and safely housed in a very safe, solid Chateau about three miles back from the line, thought it an appropriate moment to inform my Battalion that a supply of mincing machines had been authorised for every unit in France, and this is the message I actually received when, as I have already stated, we were all being heavily strafed by the enemy's artillery, and were taking cover in the cellar of our house:-

The O.C. 1st Batt. East Lancashire Regt.

'It has been decided to issue mincing machines for the benefit of those men, whose teeth cannot cope with the ration biscuit stop, please inform me how many mincing machines your battalion requires forthwith stop.'

(Signed) Staff Captain 11th Inf. Brigade

“What a d----d stupid message,” I said to McMullen, “for the Staff Captain to send up to the front line when he knows perfectly well, we are being shelled to hell by the Boche! Why the devil don’t they keep this kind of message until we come out of the line or else send them to the Quartermaster who is out of the line to deal with?” “Give me a message form,” I said, “ and I’ll answer it at once,” and this is what I wrote:-

Staff Captain, 11th Inf Brigade.

‘Your message re mincing machines received stop my medical officer now engaged in making most minute inspection of my men’s molars stop when same is completed will inform you how many mincing machines *each* man of my battalion requires stop’

O.C.1st Batt. E. Lancashire Regt

“Now send that off,” I said, “and I hope that’ll satisfy the Staff Captain and at the same time discourage him from sending us any more of these b----y idiotic fool messages when we are in the front line.”

And indeed it must have done, for it is was the last I heard of the mincing machines --- at any rate whilst the Battalion was in the trenches, and it was also the last of that kind of message I received, whilst in the 11th Brigade and commanding the 1st East Lancashire Regiment!

But it gave us a good laugh all the same!!



Sanitation and the British Army in the field



Field latrines – ‘Thunder boxes’. (IWM (Q 29235))

In every war a soldier faces two enemies; one is the armed forces of the enemy and the other is a silent and far greater foe, the grim purveyor of death that is disease. Field hygiene and sanitation are two aspects of military medicine that have prevented disease and maintained the health of the fighting men.

Each military unit within the British army had personnel assigned to perform sanitary duties. They were known officially as the ‘Sanitary Section’. A rather inglorious name among the fighting troops of the First World War. They were often known by rather more earthy and pithy titles among the soldiery, although most of the sanitary personnel were educated or skilled men. Their contribution to the war effort has been mainly overlooked and underappreciated.

During the Crimean War with Russia in 1853 the British army had woefully unprepared and inadequate medical services with virtually no medical supplies. Before the fighting began more than 1,000 men had been admitted to hospital

with cholera which killed more than 60% of the men. Six months into the campaign it was estimated that less than half the British forces in Crimea were fit for active service.

In 1855 a committee was sent to the Crimea to investigate the medical services and prepare a report on ‘the means of elucidating the nature of diseases’. The final report was submitted to parliament in 1857 and contained a detailed descriptions of diseases and illnesses suffered by the troops. Shortly after the war in Crimea, the Army Medical Services were reorganised. An Army Medical School was first established at Fort Pitt in Chatham in 1860 before moving to the newly opened Netley Military Hospital near Southampton in 1863. The training at the Army Medical School now incorporated bacteriology, microscopy and laboratory studies in hygiene and pathology.

When the war in South Africa started in 1899 it became apparent that the British Army in the field had learned little since the Crimea and the army medical authorities were once again distressingly unprepared. Field hygiene tended to come under the control of the unit commander who often ignored Field Regulations relating to these matters. There were limited facilities available for the purification of drinking water which resulted in an estimated 57,684 cases of typhoid fever during the South African war; of these 19,454 were invalided and 8,022 died of the disease. A typhoid vaccine had been developed at Netley by this time but only around 4% of soldiers had been inoculated. The army had been unwilling to make it compulsory. Of the estimated 20,000 British deaths in South Africa only around 8,000 were killed in action.

The shortcomings of the Army Medical Service during the South African War prompted improvements and the medical service was again reorganised in 1902 with a complete overhaul of the recruitment and training of Medical Officers.

There was to be an increased emphasis on the recruitment and role of Sanitary Officers. Laboratories were also established for the first time in British Military hospitals.

During the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 the Army Medical Service sent observers to study the medical arrangements of the Japanese Army. The Japanese had recognised that prevention of sickness through sanitation was better than attempts at cures. This was to lead to improved sanitary training of British Medical Officers while the health of a regiment now became the responsibility of the Commanding Officer with advice from the Medical Officer. Army regulations now required all regular troops to receive instruction in field sanitation and hygiene. In 1906 the Army School of Sanitation was founded at Aldershot for the education of officers and non-commissioned officers who would serve in the new Sanitary Sections. Sanitation was added to the syllabus of the Army Staff College and the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich.

By 1914 the Royal Army Medical Corps was much better prepared for service when it arrived in France. The Medical Officers were well trained in practical methods of field sanitation. Initially each military unit was assigned a Medical Officer with two to eight men who were to perform some of the sanitary duties. By November 1914 with the beginning of trench warfare, every division was allocated a Sanitary Section of the Royal Army Medical Corps. This consisted of a Lieutenant or Second-Lieutenant, 2 Sergeants, 2 Corporals, 20 Privates and 1 batman. By March 1916 the Sanitary Sections were allocated to a particular location rather than moving around with a division. In this way they maintained an intimate knowledge of their own area. By the end of 1917 the Sanitary Service had expanded to a force of 25,000 officers and men. The Sanitary Sections assisted the Regimental Medical Officers in the field where they

supervised the removal and destruction of excreta and refuse, constructed latrines, disinfected billets and clothing and provided bathing and delousing facilities. They also looked after the purification and integrity of water supplies and food safety.

To support the work of the Sanitary Sections and the Medical Officers in the field a number of hygiene (bacteriology) laboratories were needed. In October 1914 the War Office was requested to provide mobile hygiene laboratories to provide for the analysis of water and food supplies and the bacteriological examination of effluents and infected wounds, particularly with cases of tetanus, gas gangrene, typhoid and meningitis. With the assistance of the Lister Institute of Preventative Medicine, London, a modified Austin motor caravan was fitted out as a mobile bacteriology laboratory and sent to France. However, this vehicle proved to be unsuitable for the rough terrain of the Western Front. A second vehicle was provided by HRH Princess Christian.



HRH Princess Christian's mobile laboratory



No 1 Mobile Laboratory near Poperinghe, 1915

The weight of the laboratory equipment again proved too much for what was basically a motor car and later models were mounted on lorries. Fourteen such mobile laboratories were made available for use on the Western Front and one for use in Macedonia. Each was manned by a Medical Officer and a Laboratory Assistant. A motorcycle and sidecar were usually made available to assist in the collection of samples.

Royal Army Medical Corps responded to the demands of the war with the establishment of a highly efficient sanitation service aided by the recruitment of better trained Medical Officers accompanied by Bacteriologists in hospital and mobile laboratories. The improvements in the standards of hygiene and sanitation were directly responsible for the prevention of the loss of manpower through major disease outbreaks.



HMT *Leasowe Castle*

Peter Denby

A highlight of a recent visit to the *Williamson Art Gallery and Museum* in Birkenhead - after my customary brunch in its splendid café of course - was Room 8, the Maritime Gallery, which brings together scale models, pictures and artefacts relating to ships built in the nearby Cammel Laird shipyard.



The permanent displays in the Gallery tell several interesting stories. Take for example that of HMS *Birkenhead*. She was launched from Laird's in 1845 as 'the fastest, most carrying and comfortable vessel in Her Majesty's service as a troopship', showing the advantage of iron over wood for ship construction.

In January 1852 she set sail for Africa's Eastern Cape with her naval crew and 479 soldiers on board, along with a number of accompanying women and children. After disembarking the sick and many of the civilians at Simon's Town, seven women and thirteen children continued the journey with the menfolk to Port Elizabeth.

Just before 2am on the 26 February the ship struck an uncharted rock off the aptly named Danger Point at Gansbaai. The hull was ruptured and water flooded the lower troop deck drowning more than 100 soldiers asleep there. Awakened by the impact, the remainder scrambled to the decks to man the pumps and free the lifeboats, only three of which were operational. Calm was maintained as the lifeboats were lowered, and the troops helped the women and children into them; discipline held firm even as the ship split in two and rapidly sank.



Women and children first.

The next morning the schooner *Lioness* picked up survivors; the rest had either drowned or had been taken by sharks. Of the 638 people aboard *Birkenhead* when she sank, only 193 were saved, but through the conduct of the soldiers who had stood fast throughout, not a single woman or child was drowned: this was the first occasion in which women and children were taken to safety first, an example of heroism which is remembered today, and which has given rise to the convention of “*Women and Children First*”, otherwise known as the “*Birkenhead Drill*”. The phrase became famous as an example of ‘Britishness’ and featured in a Rudyard Kipling poem:

Soldier an’ Sailor Too

*To take your chance in the thick of a rush, with firing all about,
Is nothing so bad when you’ve cover to ‘and, an’ leave an’ likin’ to shout,
But to stand an’ be still to the Birken’ead Drill
Is a damn tough bullet to chew.*

HMS *Birkenhead* was the world’s most famous ship disaster until RMS *Titanic* sank in 1912, when the Birkenhead Drill was again famously used.

The incident is commemorated on a plaque on the wall of the Danger Point lighthouse at Gansbaai, Western Cape, South Africa, and - albeit not until 2014 - by a memorial close to the Woodside Ferry terminal at Birkenhead. I also came across this commemorative street mural in Birkenhead.



Also featured in the Maritime Gallery is a model of CSS *Alabama* (launched 1862), a confederate raider clandestinely built at Laird's in defiance of this country's neutrality in the American Civil War. *Alabama* was sunk off the French coast in 1864 by the USS *Kearsarge*, but by this time *Alabama* had inflicted huge losses on Union shipping, leading to a major diplomatic crisis with Britain whose neutral stance had been so blatantly flouted by Laird's; in the end the government paid a huge sum in compensation.

But I digress! This article is supposed to be about HMT *Leasowe Castle*, the model of which also caught my eye, and which brought to mind our May 2022 branch talk by Dr Scott Lindgren about the World War One U-boat campaign.



Model of HMT *Leasowe Castle*

On 30 May 1918 a newspaper report read:

TROOPSHIP SUNK BY U-BOAT

His Majesty's Transport Leasowe Castle (Captain E J Holl) was torpedoed and sunk by enemy submarine on 26th May in the Mediterranean. Thirteen military officers and 79 other ranks and the captain, two wireless operators, and other members of the crew - a total of 101 - are missing and presumed drowned. Names will be made known as soon as lists are available.

The *Leasowe Castle* actually began life as a passenger steamer ordered by the National Steam Navigation Company of Greece but when work was nearing

completion she was requisitioned by the Government for the transport of troops and she was launched in 1917 as HMT *Leasowe Castle*, her hull painted in dazzle camouflage. She could carry 3,000 men.

On 20 April 1918, while conveying wounded men back to Liverpool she had a lucky escape: torpedoed by submarine *U-35* when 90 miles off Gibraltar her hull was damaged, but there were no casualties and she limped back to port for repairs. Her second encounter with a submarine the following month was not so fortunate. On 27 May 2018 she was part of a convoy of six vessels sailing from Alexandria to Marseilles, carrying troops from the Middle East to the Western Front. The convoy was protected by several vessels, including the naval escort sloops *Lily* and *Ladybird* and the Japanese destroyer *Katsura*.

Just after midnight on 27 May, some 100 miles north-west of Alexandria, the convoy was spotted by *U-51*, and *Leasowe Castle* was struck by a torpedo on her starboard side below the waterline. The ship did not sink for 90 minutes, allowing time for the lifeboats to be lowered and many of the 2,903 soldiers on board to get away; others jumped into the sea to be picked up later.

The death toll (101 in total) would have been much higher had not the men from the lower berths been ordered to sleep on deck, so that when the torpedo struck they were at their muster stations ready to put on their lifejackets; in addition *Leasowe Castle* was well supplied with life-rafts and lifeboats to transfer the men to *Lily* and *Katsura*. The lessons of earlier disasters had been learned. Captain Noel Sutton, one of the soldiers on board ship, described his experience:

“We had got about 9 hours out. Nearly all of us were asleep...I was subconsciously aware of a sudden jar, but what I do remember was sitting on my berth and asking what happened, and was told if I didn't get out pretty quickly I should pretty soon know what it was. I pulled on a

pair of shoes and tying on my lifebelt scuttled along the corridor, and I slipped up at the foot of the stairs. I went straight to our emergency station and found the other men arriving. They were awfully good on the ship, and there was no panic...

The ship soon stopped. There was a very slight list. The boats were got off and the rafts too and when all the men were off the ship and I said to about half a dozen still there “Well we’ll go now” the water was then awash in the after well deck. So clad in pyjamas, canvas shoes and a wrist watch, I climbed down about six feet of ladder, held my breath, looked at the black water, and dropped quietly in.

I had a swim of about 30 to 50 yards. I had a life belt on, a splendid thing. When we got the life raft (a collapsible canvas sided boat), we rowed and rowed round in circles till a motor launch came and took us in tow, and then we arrived in an auxiliary ship of war...Thank God. A few minutes after, the ship went down with a rush.

We made off back towards Alexandria with over 1,100 survivors on board. The night was wonderfully warm and I never felt cold, even in wet pyjamas. However some kind naval officer fitted me out in a naval tunic and a pair of trousers, and of course I was the butt of many jests. All were fitted up with blankets or something...and some food. About ten hours afterwards we arrived back in Alex. On the quay we were given clothes, army issue, and the Red Cross gave us tea and biscuits”.

Further reading: *Made of Iron: Six Vessels*, a booklet produced by, and on sale at, the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum (price £1-00)



The End of the Voluntary System



On 6 August 1914 Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, appealed for Parliament to sanction an immediate increase of 500,000 men for the army. At this stage Kitchener had no clear idea of how many men would eventually be needed. By September 1914 the demand had increased to fifty Divisions, around 1 million men. By June 1915 this estimate had increased to sixty divisions before being revised in April 1916 to fifty-seven divisions abroad and ten divisions at home. The peak in the number of volunteers at 2.5 million was reached by December 1915. It was at this time that Parliament sanctioned an upper limit of 4 million men for the army.

In early 1915 it was noted that the flow of recruits for the army was now dwindling. It had become clear that voluntary recruitment was unlikely to provide the total number of men required. At the time conscription was deemed

to be unacceptable and Kitchener did not wish to divide the country over the issue but he was persuaded to sanction a scheme where all men were nationally registered by occupation and an attestation scheme introduced to identify all men, married or single who were prepared to enlist when needed. It was considered that if sufficient single men enlisted, conscription could be postponed.

The government passed the National Registration Act on 15 July 1915 in order to establish the number of men between the ages of 15 and 65 and record their occupations. The registration cards of those men employed in agriculture, industry or war work had their cards stamped with a star. These ‘starred’ men were considered vital to the national war effort. The results presented in mid-September 1915 showed there were almost 5 million males of military age who were not in the forces. Of this total 1.6 million men were deemed to be in ‘starred’ occupations vital to the war effort.



Born in 1865, Edward Stanley became the 17th Lord Derby in 1908. He played a major part in raising volunteers, especially for the King’s (Liverpool) Regiment, before being appointed Director-General of Recruiting in October 1915.

On 11 October 1915 Lord Derby was appointed Director-General of Recruiting. Five days later he brought forward a programme, often called the ‘Derby Scheme’ although its official title was the ‘Group System’. It was his intention to demonstrate that the system of voluntary enlistment had outlived its usefulness. Men aged 18 to 40 were informed that under the Derby Scheme they

could continue to enlist voluntarily or attest a willingness to enlist if later called upon. The War Office announced that voluntary enlistment would soon cease and that the last day for enlistment would be 15 December 1915. The public were informed that under the new ‘Derby scheme’ groups of single men would be called up before the married men.¹

**THE PRIME MINISTER'S
ADVICE TO THE YOUNG UNMARRIED MEN
and
PLEDGE TO MARRIED MEN**

“ I am told by Lord Derby and others that there is
“ some doubt among married men who are now being asked to enlist
“ whether, having enlisted, or promised to enlist, they may not be
“ called upon to serve, while younger and unmarried men are holding back
“ and not doing their duty. Let them at once disabuse themselves of
“ that notion. So far as I am concerned, I should certainly say
“ the obligation of the married man to serve ought not to be
“ enforced or held to be binding upon him unless and until - I
“ hope by voluntary effort, but if it be needed in the last resort by
“ other means - the unmarried men are dealt with .

“ I have far too much confidence in the patriotism and
“ the public spirit of my fellow-countrymen to doubt for one moment
“ that they are going to respond to that appeal - that the young men,
“ the unmarried men with whom the promise of the future lies, are
“ not going in this great emergency to shirk and to leave the fortunes
“ of their country and the assertion of the greatest cause for which
“ we have ever fought, to those who have given greater hostages to
“ fortune and are least able to bear the brunt”.

HOUSE OF COMMONS, NOVEMBER 2ND, 1915.

MARRIED MEN !

ENLIST NOW. YOU HAVE THE PRIME MINISTER'S PLEDGE THAT
YOU WILL NOT BE CALLED UPON TO SERVE UNTIL THE YOUNG
UNMARRIED MEN HAVE BEEN SUMMONED TO THE COLOURS.

SINGLE MEN !

SURELY YOU WILL RECOGNISE THE FORCE OF THE PRIME
MINISTER'S STATEMENT AND ENLIST VOLUNTARILY. YOU CAN
GO INTO YOUR PROPER GROUPS TILL YOU ARE WANTED.

¹ See - Ian F W Beckett & Keith Simpson, *A Nation in Arms. The British Army in the First World War*, and J M Winter, *The Great War and the British People*.

Lord Derby reported to Parliament with the results of the Registration scheme. He also provided figures on the breakdown between married and single men who had come forward between 23 October - 15 December 1915.

Single Men

- A total of 2,179,231, of which 690,138 were in starred employment
- 103,000 enlisted
- 840,000 attested
- 207,000 were rejected – for whatever reasons
- Total men who attested, enlisted or tried to enlist **1,150,000**
- Total men who had not attested, enlisted or attempted to enlist **1,029,231**

Married men

- A total of 2,832,210, of which 915,491 were in starred employment
- 112,431 enlisted
- 1,344,979 attested
- 221,853 were rejected – for whatever reasons
- Total men who attested, enlisted or tried to enlist **1,679,263**
- Total men who had not attested, enlisted or attempted to enlist **1,152,947**

Total figures

- Of the total **5,011,441** men available for enlistment
- A total of **2,829,263** men attested, enlisted or attempted to enlist
- A total of **2,182,178** men had **not** attested, enlisted or attempted to enlist

Lord Derby stressed that “the men in the married groups can only be assumed to be available if the Prime Minister’s pledge to them has been redeemed by the

single men attesting in such numbers as to leave only a negligible quantity unaccounted for.”

SINGLE MEN FIRST
HOW THE GROUP SYSTEM WORKS

THE GROUPS	
SINGLE	MARRIED
1st GROUP Single Men of 18	24th GROUP Married Men of 18
2nd GROUP Single Men of 19	25th GROUP Married Men of 19
3rd GROUP Single Men of 20	26th GROUP Married Men of 20
4th GROUP Single Men of 21	27th GROUP Married Men of 21
5th GROUP Single Men of 22	28th GROUP Married Men of 22
6th GROUP Single Men of 23	29th GROUP Married Men of 23
7th GROUP Single Men of 24	30th GROUP Married Men of 24
8th GROUP Single Men of 25	31st GROUP Married Men of 25
9th GROUP Single Men of 26	32nd GROUP Married Men of 26
10th GROUP Single Men of 27	33rd GROUP Married Men of 27
11th GROUP Single Men of 28	34th GROUP Married Men of 28
12th GROUP Single Men of 29	35th GROUP Married Men of 29
13th GROUP Single Men of 30	36th GROUP Married Men of 30
14th GROUP Single Men of 31	37th GROUP Married Men of 31
15th GROUP Single Men of 32	38th GROUP Married Men of 32
16th GROUP Single Men of 33	39th GROUP Married Men of 33
17th GROUP Single Men of 34	40th GROUP Married Men of 34
18th GROUP Single Men of 35	41st GROUP Married Men of 35
19th GROUP Single Men of 36	42nd GROUP Married Men of 36
20th GROUP Single Men of 37	43rd GROUP Married Men of 37
21st GROUP Single Men of 38	44th GROUP Married Men of 38
22nd GROUP Single Men of 39	45th GROUP Married Men of 39
23rd GROUP Single Men of 40	46th GROUP Married Men of 40

YOU CAN ENLIST NOW
and become at once a Soldier in training
OR
YOU CAN ENLIST UNDER
THE GROUP SYSTEM

Under this system you will be enlisted for one day, and at your own request you will be transferred at once to Section B Army Reserve, and allowed to return to your home until the Group in which you are placed is called up for service.

You will be given an Armlet bearing the Royal Crown. Opportunities will be given you of voluntary preliminary drill. You will be given a fortnight's notice before you need actually join your unit.

You will, therefore, be able to continue your usual work until you receive this call, which will allow you time to give notice to your employer, or arrange your affairs.

There are 46 Groups, which are set out at side. The Single Men will be put into the first 23 Groups according to age and the men entered upon the National Register as Married Men will be put into the following 23 Groups, also according to age.

The Groups will be called up in the order of their numbers (but in no case will anyone be called up until he has attained the age of 19 years).

In short,
SINGLE MEN WILL BE CALLED FIRST

Men who have married since their Registration, and Widowers without children, will be regarded as Single Men.

When a Group is called up by Proclamation, any man in that Group will be able, if he so desires, and if there are very special circumstances in his case, to make an appeal to be placed in a later Group.

Printed by the PARLIAMENTARY REGISTRATION COMMITTEE, LONDON. PAPER NO. 125. (SPECIAL PUBLICATION OF THE LONG PAPER CO.)

During the last few days of the scheme a total of 1,070,478 men attested on the four days starting Friday 10 December, with over 325,000 coming forward on the Saturday and Sunday. The men who attested under the Derby Scheme and chose to defer their call up were placed in Class ‘A’. Those who agreed to immediate service were assigned to Class ‘B’. The Class ‘A’ men were given a day’s army pay for the day they attested and were also provided with a grey armlet bearing a red crown, as a sign that they had

volunteered. The attested man’s armlet was sometimes satirically known as ‘A badge worn by married men to show their sympathy with the principle of “Single Men First”’.²

The attested men were officially transferred into the Army Reserve and provided with a completed Army Form (AF) W.3914, also known as the ‘white card’ containing their personal details and their mobilisation group number. With these items the men were sent back to their homes and jobs until they were called up.

² quoted in *East Ham Echo*, 29/12/1915

The Class ‘A’ men, who had attested a willingness to enlist if called upon under the Derby Scheme, were further divided into single and married men and then placed into one of twenty-three groups according to their year of birth. ³

Derby Groups

Year of birth	Group	Year of birth	Group
1897	1	1897	24
↓	↓	↓	↓
1875	23	1875	46

Mobilisation

1916	Groups
January	2-5
February	6-13
March	1, 14-23
April	25-32
May	33-41
June	24, 42-46

Most groups were given one month’s notice of their mobilisation date, apart from the youngest single and married men who were put in groups 1 and 24. They were the last to be notified and called up in their classification. Not all men under the scheme were called up on the date their group was to be mobilised, and those who attested after their group was mobilised were granted a month’s notice before being called up.

³ For full details of the individual Derby scheme groups see Chris Baker & Sidney Theme’s article at The Long, Long Trail.co.uk

Appeals

As part of the campaign, the Government stressed two things. Firstly, that men would be able to appeal against their call up, with the strong implication that men who had not attested would be unable to appeal against their later conscription. It was emphasised that men could leave the decision to the local tribunal whether their personal or employment situation affected whether they should be mobilised. This was important for many men who joined up, since it meant that they could attest on the assumption that their circumstances would keep them out of the army – they would appear patriotic but not actually have to fight. It probably also increased the number of ‘starred’ men attesting.

The second strong message was even more important: the single men would go first. Prime Minister Herbert Asquith made an explicit pledge to married men to this extent on 2 November 1915 when he told the House of Commons:

“I am told by Lord Derby and others that there is some doubt among married men who are now being asked to enlist whether, having enlisted, or promised to enlist, they may not be called upon to serve, while younger and unmarried men are holding back and not doing their duty. Let them at once disabuse themselves of that notion. So far as I am concerned, I should certainly say the obligation of the married man to serve ought not to be enforced or held binding upon him unless and until – I hope by voluntary effort, but if it be needed in the last resort by other means – the unmarried men are dealt with.”

The official nature of this promise was emphasised in the recruiting poster shown above, which stated clearly:

‘MARRIED MEN! ENLIST NOW. YOU HAVE THE PRIME MINISTER’S PLEDGE THAT YOU WILL NOT BE CALLED UPON TO SERVE UNTIL THE YOUNG UNMARRIED MEN HAVE BEEN SUMMONED TO THE COLOURS.’

Like the potential for exemption, the promise that men could patriotically attest without actually having to serve (at least until the single men had gone) may have swayed men to attest on the assumption that they would not actually have to serve. This pledge to the married men was to become very important in early 1916

Men had the opportunity to appeal for an extension or exemption to being called up by applying to their local Tribunal who could grant or deny an extension of deferment. Many chose to appeal for an even later call-up date and these cases were referred to local tribunals.

Reporting for duty

Local newspapers frequently published the instructions that men were to follow. The instructions were in a Notice Paper, stating that each man must strictly follow the instructions given to him. Every man must be in possession of Army Form W3194, the White Card, previously issued to him on attestation and his armband, both of which would be handed over at the Recruiting office where he was required to present himself. It was essential that all men who had married since 15 August 1915 should bring with them their Marriage Certificate, ostensibly in order that no delay may be caused in the issue of a separation allowance to their wives.

Was the Scheme a success?

The National Registration Act of 1915 showed that there were almost 5 million men of military age of whom about 1.6 million were in ‘starred’ employment. This would leave around 3.4 million men available for military service. When registration was completed in December 1915, around 215,000 men had enlisted under the Derby scheme and another 2,185,000 men had been attested for deferred enlistment. There were still around one million men not in ‘starred’ jobs who were thus avoiding military service. The reluctance of this group to enlist was to be a major factor in the introduction of compulsory military service. Voluntary attestation re-opened on 10 January 1916 while the government considered the position. Eventually, in realising that the Derby Scheme had failed, full conscription was introduced with The Military Service Act of 27 January 1916.

Call up under the Derby scheme began when Groups 2 to 5 were called up during the last two weeks of January 1916. They were followed by Groups 6 to 13 in February 1916. The last groups of single men, other than the 18 year-olds, were called up in March 1916. The final batches of ‘Derby Scheme’ volunteers were called up alongside the first men to be conscripted under the Military Service Act of 1916. Recruits under the Group Scheme and the conscripts from 1916 were rarely posted to their local regiments or their regiment of choice.



Local Military Service Tribunals

**THE
MILITARY SERVICE ACT,
1916,**

APPLIES TO UNMARRIED MEN WHO, ON AUGUST 15th, 1915, WERE 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OVER AND WHO WILL NOT BE 41 YEARS OF AGE ON MARCH 2nd, 1916.

ALL MEN (NOT EXCEPTED OR EXEMPTED),
between the above ages who, on November 2nd, 1915, were Unmarried or Widowers without any Child dependent on them will, on
Thursday, March 2nd, 1916
BE DEEMED TO BE ENLISTED FOR THE PERIOD OF THE WAR.
They will be placed in the Reserve until Called Up in their Class.

MEN EXCEPTED:
SOLDIERS, including Territorials who have volunteered for Foreign Service;
MEN serving in the NAVY or ROYAL MARINES;
MEN DISCHARGED from ARMY or NAVY, disabled or ill, or TIME-EXPIRED MEN;
MEN REJECTED for the ARMY since AUGUST 14th, 1915;
CLERGYMEN, PRIESTS, and MINISTERS OF RELIGION;
VISITORS from the DOMINIONS.

MEN WHO MAY BE EXEMPTED BY LOCAL TRIBUNALS:
Men more useful to the Nation in their present employments;
Men in whose case Military Service would cause serious hardship owing to exceptional financial or business obligations or domestic position;
Men who are ill or infirm;
Men who conscientiously object to combatant service. If the Tribunal thinks fit, men may, on this ground, be (a) exempted from combatant service only (not non-combatant service), or (b) exempted on condition that they are engaged in work of National importance.

Up to March 2nd, a man can apply to his Local Tribunal for a certificate of exemption. There is a Right of Appeal. He will not be called up until his case has been dealt with finally.
Certificates of exemption may be absolute, conditional or temporary. Such certificates can be renewed, varied or withdrawn.
Men retain their Civil Rights until called up and are amenable to Civil Courts only.

**DO NOT WAIT UNTIL MARCH 2nd.
ENLIST VOLUNTARILY NOW.**

For fuller particulars of the Act, please apply for Leaflet No. 65 to the nearest Post Office, Police Station, or Recruiting Office.

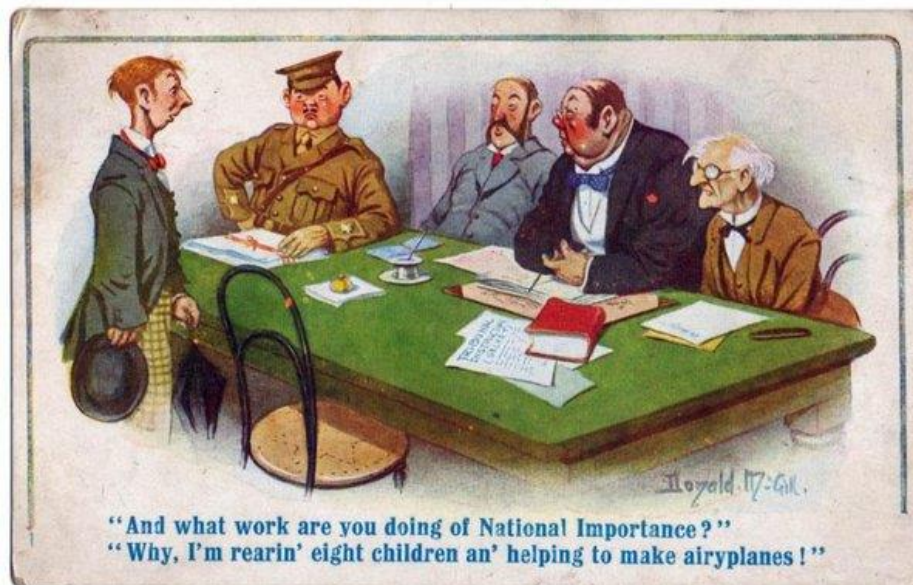
IWM

The Derby Scheme was the last effort to save the voluntary recruitment system. The Military Service Act of January 1916 called for all single men and childless widowers between the ages of 18 – 40 to be enlisted. However, various exemptions and discrepancies in medical examinations resulted in fewer men than expected being available. Between 1 March and 31 March 1917, 371,500 men were compulsorily enlisted while 779,936 were exempted for various reasons. This increased the pressure to call up those married men who had

attested under the Derby Scheme. This was in contradiction to Prime Minister Asquith's earlier pledge. The second Military Service Act of May 1916 now conscripted all men between the ages of 18 – 41. In 1918 the age range was extended up to 51.

The Asquith government of 1915 had to include some form of appeal process against the compulsion of the Military Services Bill if it was to be passed into law in the form it eventually appeared. The appeals would be heard by representatives of the community and not Whitehall appointees. The appeal process was for men who had received their enlistment orders and had been passed as medically fit. The first appeal was to a local tribunal usually based in the man's locality. This process was not universally popular, Viscount Esher – the *eminence grise* of the Liberal party complained to Asquith – 'that the tribunals would no doubt be composed of the applicant's neighbours and that the Military Representative was possibly a friend or neighbour.'

Local Military Service Tribunals



Local Military Service Tribunals (Tribunals) were to be established to hear applications for exemption from compulsory military service. A total of 2,086 Tribunals were set up across Britain (conscription was never used in Ireland). They were supported by 83 County Appeal Tribunals at which the decisions of the local bodies could be challenged. In Lancashire this was held at Preston. A Central Tribunal in London dealt with the complex cases, particularly those that would set precedent for local and county tribunals to follow.

The Local Military Service Tribunals had the twin requirements of meeting national demands by directing men to the army while meeting the local social and business needs. Although created by a controlling and centralised state, the tribunals were set up as part of local government. At that time local government was very largely separated in its day-to-day activities from central government. The tribunals in effect acted as a buffer between a controlling and central state while protecting their communities from the excesses of both the military and state intervention.

Local Government Board

Overseeing the administrative running of Military Service Tribunals was the Local Government Board (LGB) who had national responsibility for the supervision of the laws relating to Public Health, the relief of the poor and local government. By 1912 the local government system was coming under increasing threat from central government who considered local government an impediment to increasing state control. The LGB promoted localism and recognised the needs of different geographical districts on how each individual tribunal panel was made up to best represent the needs of their community. The LGB issued guidance instructions in pamphlets and booklets to the local tribunal members but had no influence on the selection of Tribunal panel

members. It also had no power to overturn or change any decision made by the local Tribunal.

The LGB guidance stated that the Tribunal panels should be composed of men and women of experience and training, who would give consideration to even extreme cases. The panel should consist of between five and twenty-five members to allow for adequate representation of labour in the district. The local Tribunal was of a judicial nature and the members of the panel were appointed to consider all cases impartially and reach their decision with due regard to the national needs of the country.

Members of the Local Military Service Tribunal

The local authority appointed members to the Tribunal panel. The LGB advice was that wherever possible they should not appoint members who are serving on the local authority. The Tribunals should represent the various interests of the district including the working classes, with a fair and just representation of labour. Women were encouraged to be appointed to the Tribunals. It was strongly recommended that men of military age, unless they were attested or medically unfit for military service, should not be appointed. Local authorities were advised against appointing any person who has publicly expressed sentiments that would jeopardise their impartiality. The Tribunals should therefore be constituted to command public confidence whilst representing the various interests of the district. Most councils in local authorities were made up of councillors who were local businessmen, employers or ‘Gentlemen’. Joining them on the panels were members of the ‘respectable’ working class – a section of society that generally opposed state interference, looked after themselves and avoided so-called government help.

The Military Representative

The final member of the local tribunal was the Military Representative (MR). Many but not all, were serving or retired officers selected by the District Commanding Officer. Unlike the civilian members of the panel, the MR had a dedicated brief:

1. To appear at all Tribunals where there is an application for a certificate of exemption.
2. They will protect the nation by obtaining as many men as possible for the Army.
3. They must watch the list of certified occupations and carry out the spirit of the instructions laid down by the various departments concerned.
4. While maintaining a firm attitude throughout, it is essential that they should avoid raising friction and resentment in the committees with whom they will have to operate.

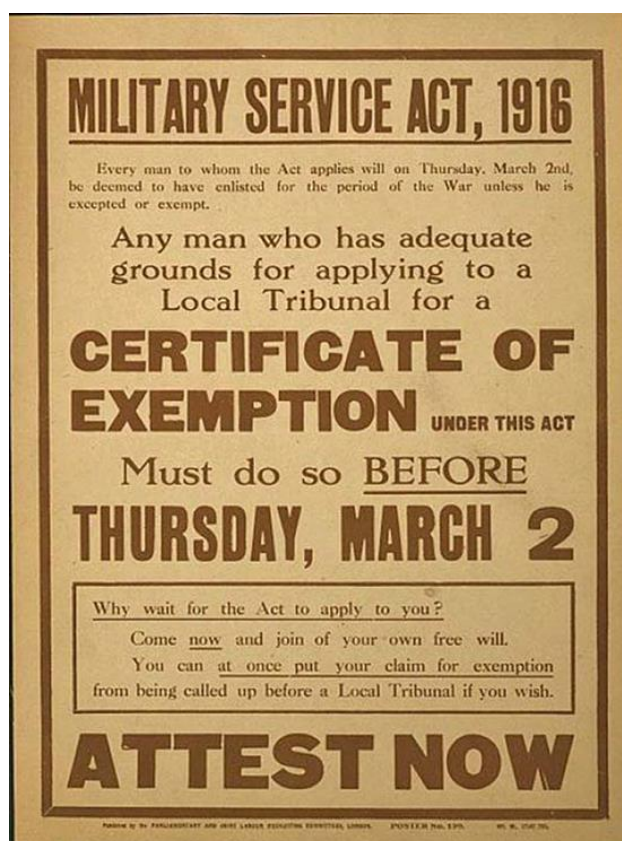
They were an equal member of the Tribunal, able to ask questions and vote on decisions.

Local Interpretation of the Military Service Act

The LGB had provided comprehensive guidance on the formation and composition of the local Tribunals but the articles of the Military Service Act were set out in rather subjective and imprecise terms. There was little uniformity of interpretation between Tribunals. The exemptions included within the Military Service Act were so broad in character that Tribunals found little difficulty in offering exemptions. The independence of the Tribunals allowed them to exercise a great deal of latitude in their interpretation of the Act.

Tribunal hearings would generally take place at Town Halls, local council buildings and other community buildings. Interestingly, at the end of the Great War the government issued instructions to destroy the Tribunal records, keeping only two sets for future study. The loss of these records means there are no accurate numbers of the appeals heard. Fortunately a limited number of complete sets of local Tribunal minutes survive in the Lancashire records office and local newspapers often contained contemporaneous accounts of the Tribunal proceedings.

Exemptions and the major exemption groups



By November 1916 the Army Council had set out a requirement for 940,000 new men for the coming year. Recruitment at this time was about 20,000 men short of the monthly target. By 30 April 1917 Local Tribunals had exempted

40,146 men and provided conditional or temporary exemptions to a further 739,790.

The Military Service Act allowed for men to delay their call up due to various personal circumstances. The reasons for seeking exemption needed to fall within the following categories:

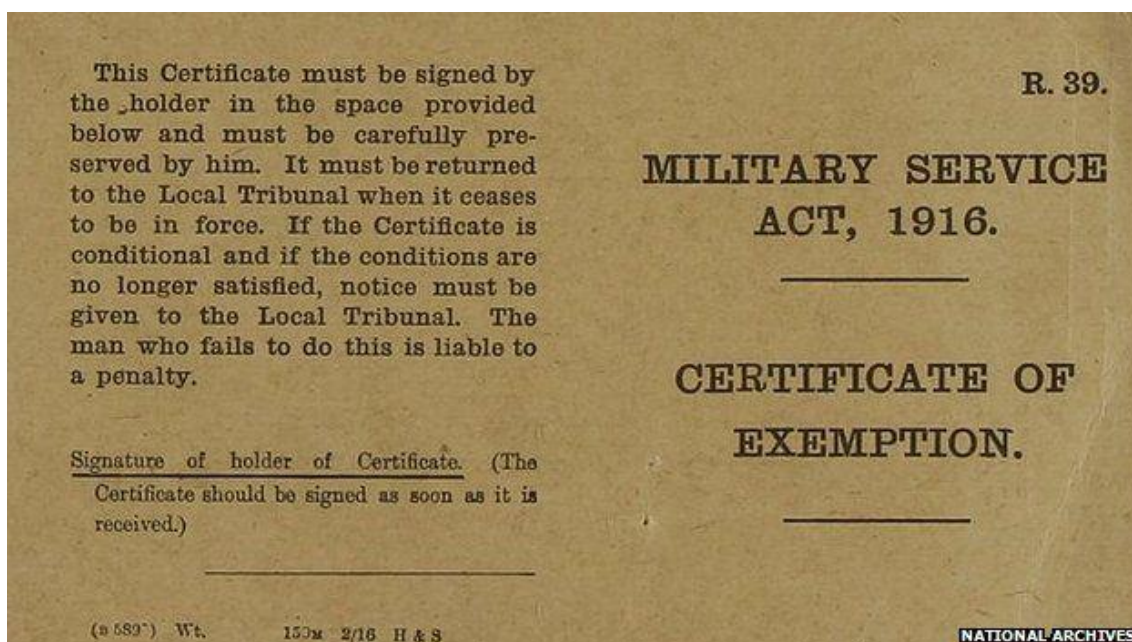
1. On the grounds that the man's work is in the national interests; he is in a reserved 'starred' occupation.
2. On the grounds that in the national interests that the man should be engaged in other work which he wishes to be engaged in.
3. The man is being educated or trained for any work that is in the national interest.
4. On the ground that there would be serious hardship if the man were called up for Army service, owing to his exceptional financial or business obligations or domestic position.
5. On the ground of ill-health or infirmity.
6. On the ground of a conscientious objection and undertaking of combatant service.
7. On the ground that the principal and usual occupation of the man is one of those included in the list of occupations certified by Government Departments for exemption.

Applications for Exemption

Applications for exemption were made by applying to the local Tribunal, usually held at borough, district or town level. The application could be made

by or on behalf of the man, by a family member or his employer. The local Tribunal had the power to grant an absolute, conditional or temporary exemption alternatively, as with appeals by conscience objectors, they could recommend a non-combatant service. If the appeal was rejected the man would remain liable for military serve. The Tribunals would hear both the case put by the man and the case presented on behalf of the Army by the Military Representative.

The decision made by the local tribunal could be appealed to a County Appeal Tribunal. In Lancashire this was held at Preston. The same individuals could raise the appeal on behalf of the man, while the local Military Representative could raise an appeal on behalf of the Army, if the decision of the local Tribunal was considered too lenient. A final level of appeal was through the Central Tribunal in London.



Exemptions

There were a high number of men who had been granted certificates of exemption because their work was deemed of national importance. Added to this were the men waiting to have their appeal heard and those awaiting a substitute employee to be appointed which would then allow them to enlist.

Exemptions in numbers

914,298 Men were directly employed in government establishments

516,838 Colliery Workers

1,796,728 Railwaymen, government employees, men with exemption certificates granted by the War Office or the Army Council

111,019 Men awaiting an appeal to be heard

15,719 Men who had their appeal dismissed now waiting for a substitute

38,586 ‘Others’

In the view of the Army these figures represented nearly two million eligible men ‘lost’ to the war effort.

The Military Service Acts 1916 - 18

Military Service Act, January 1916

Conscripts all single men and childless widowers aged 18 – 41.

Military Service act (n.2) May 1916

Conscripts all men aged 18 – 41.

Military Service Act, Military Service (review of exemptions) Act, April 1917

Combs out more men from industry, agriculture and mines. Including many previously judged as unfit, notably those born between 1895 – 1898.

Military Service Act, February 1918 – Removes a variety of exemptions.

Military Service Act (No.2) April 1918 –

Conscripts men aged 41–50 and allows for extension of the age limit to 56. Cancels most exemptions if the need arises. Allows for the extension of conscription to Ireland.

A Snapshot of local Military Tribunals

A very quick review of the Local Military Tribunals held on the Fylde coast in June 1916 a week after conscription was introduced for all men between the ages of 18-41 and reported in the local press, showed a total of 143 appeals being made, for a wide variety of reasons ranging from employers attempting to hold on to skilled or scarce labour, sole traders who would put their business in jeopardy, men with large families who would leave their family almost destitute.

On a somewhat lighter note, one application for exemption was on the grounds that his wife's nerves were already severely affected by any newspaper accounts of the war because she already had two brothers serving at the front. Another appeal came from a family run building contractor who, with reduced building work, was now expanding into munitions production. They were seeking to have a large number of men exempted. The tribunal however, were more interested in their two sons, both of military age, employed by the firm but showing no inclination to sign up.

2 June 1916	Blackpool	Appeals heard	69
		Exempted	2
		Conditional	27
		Temporary	20
		Adjourned	3
		Granted	52 (75%)
8 June 1916	Fleetwood	Appeals heard	34
		Exempted	0
		Conditional	15
		Temporary	9
		Adjourned	2
		Granted	26 (76%)
9 June 1916	Fleetwood	Appeals heard	40
		Exempted	1
		Conditional	14
		Temporary	17
		Adjourned	2
		Granted	34 (85%)

Admittedly, this is a very small model to extract any form of analysis from, but interestingly in one week the press reported that 143 appeals had been heard and of these 122, that is more than 75%, had been granted some form of exemption. On this, statistically insignificant example, it rather tends to confirm the Army Council's fears for the men lost to the war effort as local tribunals looked after their own.

For further reading see: *A Nation in Arms*, Ian Beckett and Keith Simpson.

The Great war and the British People, J. M Winter

The Local Military Service Tribunals of Holme and Colne Valleys of West Yorkshire.
Thomas Ashworth, PhD Thesis, University of Leeds, 2021

British Ex-Servicemen's Organisations



Blackpool Old Comrades Club Memorial

Inscription: This memorial was erected by the members of the Blackpool branch of the Comrades of the Great War in memory of those who made the supreme sacrifice.

Photo: Juliette Gregson

A feature of post-war Britain was the formation of a number of ex-servicemen's organisations, with some initially founded as pressure groups. The historians Ian Beckett and Keith Simpson consider these organisations to be the most lasting legacy of the 'nation in arms'. With no previous mass conscript army, the government had never had to make any provision for such large numbers of ex-servicemen. No official body had been formed to look after the needs and interests of both the able-bodied and disabled ex-servicemen. The government of the day merely dealt with matters such as pensions, rehabilitation, and resettlement on an *ad hoc*, if not, haphazard basis.

From the start of the war, there was little or no support for the wounded, the infirm, or their families; assistance if present at all was woefully inadequate. A few voluntary groups such as the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association (SSFA), were organised with charitable funding but were able to provide only the most limited assistance. There was almost no representation for serving or

former servicemen, and no entitlement to pensions or compensation payments to widows or other dependents. Gradually this began to change during the war. By 1916, wounded soldiers were a common sight on the streets of most towns and cities in Britain.

The National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers



During 1916 and 1917 three pressure groups were formed to represent the interests of ex-servicemen; however, the early organisations were split on political lines. In early 1917 groups of local men in Blackburn who had served in the war and had been discharged came together and formed what became the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers under the initial leadership of a James Frankland, local Blackburn Labour councillor.

The association campaigned for better pensions and more opportunities for re-training. It formed close links with the trade unions and the Labour party. The leadership was soon taken up by a Labour MP James Howell. The association sponsored a number of candidates in the 1918 general election. They formed part of what was known as the ‘Silver Badge party’. Only one candidate was elected as an independent conservative; around this time the association cut its ties with the Labour party. In 1919 the Liberal MP James M Hogge was appointed as president.

The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers



A number of London based veterans’ groups in joined together in January 1917 to establish the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers. This group was strongly opposed to the Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Act of March 1917 which made it possible for men invalided out of the armed forces to be re-conscripted in an effort to meet the manpower demands of the army.

The federation was led by left wing Liberal MPs James Hogge and William Pringle. They sought improved pensions and representation on relevant government committees. A member of the Federation stood unsuccessfully on behalf of the ex-servicemen at the 1917 Liverpool Abercromby by-election against the son of Lord Derby of the Conservative party. In the 1918 general election, the Federation sponsored thirty candidates, none of whom were successful.

Among the unsuccessful candidates of the December 1918 election was Frederick Lister, a former lance-bombardier with the RGA who was wounded and discharged in 1916. He was appointed president of the Federation following the poor results at the general election. Lister was to become the first chairman of the British Legion in 1921 and held the position until 1927.

Comrades of the Great War



The Comrades of the Great War was founded in 1917 by John Woodward and Edward Stanley (Lord Derby) as a right-wing organisation representing the rights of men and women who had served or those who had been discharged from service during the Great War. The movement was considered to have been created as a ‘buttress against Bolshevism’. It was led by the Conservative MP Wilfred Ashley, a grandson of the reformer Lord Shaftesbury. He was also secretary of the Anti-Socialist Union and was much later associated with the British Fascists movement and a supporter of appeasement with Hitler.

Ashley’s military career was spent in the Militia and as a regular officer in the Grenadier Guards having served in South Africa. He commanded the 20th King’s Liverpool in 1914 and returned from France in 1915 to resume his political duties. Ashley was elected as an MP for Blackpool in 1902 and held the seat until 1918 when he became the member for Fylde until 1922.

The National Union of Ex-Servicemen



The National Union of Ex-Servicemen was formed in early 1919 as the first socialist ex-servicemen's association, closely associated with the Labour party. Some considered that it added a new dimension to the Labour politics. At one point it was considered to 'have aims at constituting itself the ex-Service Department of the Labour Movement'.

The movement initially grew very rapidly during the first twelve months but the National Union of Ex-Servicemen was considered a disruptive element within the ex-service community – 'a bitter brooding group of militant Marxists seeking to frustrate the emergence of a united ex-service movement from which politics was excluded'.

By 1921 the union had all but disappeared. Some historians argue that the union had simply missed the boat. There had been no effective alliance between ex-servicemen and trade unionists to challenge state power, while they had a fear that radicalised ex-servicemen might be mobilized against such left wing elements.

The Officer's Association

The Officers Association was founded as a non-partisan organisation ensuring that officers and their dependents lived with dignity and independence.

The British Legion



It had become clear to Field Marshal Haig that there was a need for one large organisation to support all the Armed Forces, including Officers, that would hold the Government to account on behalf of the men and women it represented. Haig had previously refused to be associated with any one of the ex-Service organisations separately and pushed for them to come together to focus on care for ex-Servicemen and their families.

By Spring 1920 the four remaining organisations, the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, the National Federation of Discharged and

Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers, the Comrades of the Great War and the Officers Association, had realised that unity was the only way forward. A conference was called, and invitations sent to other organisations.

On Sunday 15 May 1921, a small group of ex-Servicemen and representatives from the four organisations walked to the Cenotaph, in London's Whitehall. As Big Ben struck nine, the four men representing the organisations laid a wreath with the badges of the four organisations.

The following day 16 May 1921, the Unity Conference in London was chaired by the President of the Federation, Sir Frederick Lister, who successfully argued for the amalgamation of the four existing bodies. The constitution was presented and agreed by the 700 delegates. The Prince of Wales was invited to become the British Legion's first Patron. Earl Haig was appointed as the newly constituted British Legion's first President and Sir Frederick Lister became the National Chairman.

Thus, the British Legion was founded by and for ex-servicemen and women and as a demonstration of its attitude towards its members the constitution was proposed by a soldier and seconded by a General - there would be no distinction between rank, religion or political affiliation.

In some ways the establishment of the British Legion may be seen as a neutralisation of the ex-servicemen's movements, with the British Legion moving away from being a political pressure group and concentrating on securing employment and the provision of benevolent support for ex-servicemen. A slightly more jaundiced view by two modern historians noted that the British Legion:

‘..was a product of the First World War and the combination of altruism towards, and fear of, the working class. ... The social dislocation caused by veterans' mental and physical trauma, coupled with the industrial unrest and disillusionment with war as an instrument of foreign policy, made the need to bring officers and men together in one body seem more pressing.’

It may be considered that the development of ex-servicemen's associations had more to do with problems of civil resettlement rather than any expression of shared military or war service. Most of the organisations were considered

antagonistic towards the military services, while there was at this time a shared ‘attitude of antipathy’ towards the Army and military matters.

Further reading:

Ian Beckett & Keith Simpson, *A Nation in Arms*, 2004

J M Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, 2003

M Garnett & R Weight, *The A-Z Guide to Modern British History*, 2003

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