

**RECORD OF THE 7th (SERVICE) BATTALION  
IN FRANCE, FLANDERS, AND SALONIKA, 1915-1916.**

**BASED ON EXTRACTS FROM THE REGIMENTAL CHRONICLES**

On the 1st August 1915 the Battalion was at Sandhill Camp, Longbridge Deveril, Salisbury Plain, undergoing Divisional Training and preparing to proceed overseas in the near future.

**Extracts from Major C. Wheeler's diary.**

**August 29th—7th September.**—Between these dates the men of the Battalion (50 per cent, at a time) were granted 4 clear days' leave prior to embarkation, which removed the staleness that had been caused by the uncertainty as to whether the Battalion was really going overseas.

Officers taking the Field.

Lieut.-Colonel P. J. Newton-King, Commanding Battalion.

Major C. Wheeler, Second in Command.

Captain L. J. Ellis, Adjutant.

Lieut. T. Powell, D.C.M., Quartermaster.

Lieut. R. B. Pemberton, Transport Officer.

Lieut. C. L. Wicks, Commanding Grenadier Company.

Lieut. G. C. Miller, Machine-gun Officer.

Lieut. A. H. Ditchburn, Signalling Officer.

Lieut. G. H. C. Keble, Reserve Machine-gun Officer.

[Lieut. D. A. Evans, R.A.M.C5, Medical Officer, attached.]

**Company Officers.**

<b>Company</b>	<b>Commander</b>	<b>Second in Command</b>	<b>Platoon Commanders</b>
A	Capt H A Henry	Lt N J Pierson	Lt C F Baker 2nd Lt C P Ker 2nd Lt W A Young 2nd Lt C A W Manning
B	Capt J Guise	Capt B L Simpson	Lt T Bowman 2nd Lt J T S Hoey
C	Capt G B Martin	Capt M G Arnett	Lt F A Durno-Steele 2nd Lt W Garland 2nd Lt E Riley
D	Maj F Debenham	Capt C A Salvesen	2nd Lt S L Symonds 2nd Lt A P Boor 2nd Lt P L Molyneux

Strength of the Battalion proceeding overseas.—29 officers, 990 other ranks.

Left behind.—9 officers, 29 other ranks.

Horses.—76 (including 12 of the 26th Divisional Train).

Vehicles.—25 (including 6 wagons of the 26th Divisional Train).

About 75 per cent, of the men came from the two counties, Wolverton Railway Works contributing a magnificent contingent of some 150, who had enlisted together. Among the others were about 100 Welsh miners, most useful men as fighters, diggers, and glee-singers, who, though always proud of their nationality, rapidly became infected with loyalty to the Regiment, and never asked for transfer to a Welsh regiment.

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Lastly, there was our mascot "Jack," a wire-haired terrier, possessed of all the dignity of a Regimental Sergeant-Major, and wearing a collar inscribed, "I am Jack, of the 7th Oxford and Bucks Lt. Infantry. Whose dog are you? ("Jack" had many adventures and was frequently missing. He got on shore at Alexandria and was absent when the ship sailed, but rejoined at Salonika. He died in Greece in January 1916.)

**September 19th.**—I left Longbridge Deveril at 1 a.m. in charge of the advanced party, consisting of all the Regimental Transport, Lewis-gun Section, Signallers, and 109 other ranks under Lieuts. R. B. Pemberton and G. C. Miller. Entrained at Warminster, and spent a dreary day in the docks at Southampton. Formed part of a large convoy. Astonishing amount of shipping about.

**September 20th.**—After helping to clean our ship, we marched to No. 8 Rest Camp, on the outskirts of Havre. Much struck by the absence of able-bodied Frenchmen among the civilian population. The whole place suggested war, and was a great contrast to England.

**September 21st.**—Entrained at 4 p.m. for our Divisional concentration area, where we hoped to rejoin the Battalion. Left Havre at 8.45 p.m. Very tedious journey and very uncomfortable for the men.

**September 22nd.**—Detrained at Longueau at 8 a.m. Marched 14 miles to Briquesmesnil and Saisseval, where I had been told to arrange billets for the Battalion, which was due to arrive from Boulogne about midnight. This took a long time, as the villages were three miles apart, and I found my bicycle most useful. The Battalion arrived at 3 a.m. by an unexpected route. Everyone was dead tired, so all slept where they halted in Briquesmesnil.

**September 23rd.**—After breakfast the Battalion took up its allotted billets and got comfortably settled in. Most of the day spent in censoring the men's letters.

**September 24th.**—Marched to Ferrieres (4 miles), where our Brigade (78th) was inspected by General Sir C. C. Monro, commanding the Third New Army. Heavy rain. Poor billets.

**September 25th.**—Marched out from Ferrieres at 7.30 a.m., passing through southern outskirts of Amiens. The Brigade marched past Lieut.-General H. H. Wilson, commanding the XIIth Army Corps. Billeted at Foulloy, after a hard march of 18 miles in the wet.

**September 26th.**—Sunday. Brigade Church Parade at 10 a.m. Billets very fair. One old woman was very pleased to see us, as she said she had billeted Germans in 1870 and 1914. Here we reduced our kit as much as possible, making a big dump in the school (where we had our H.Q.), with the object of increasing our mobility, in case we were required to assist in the operations at Loos.

**September 27th-28th.**—Improved our billets. Company training, chiefly rapid loading and open order work.

**September 29th.**—Marched to billets at Meaulte and Becordel (10 miles). Attached to the 54th Infantry Brigade for instruction in trench warfare. Under fire for the first time, Becordel being lightly shelled during the night. The Battalion got poor billets here, as the villages round about are crowded with other troops and the civil population. Battalion H.Q. at Meaulte.

**September 30th.**—At 3 p.m. Officers and N.C.O.'s of two platoons of each company went to the trenches for 24 hours' instruction in trench routine, being attached to the 6th Northamptonshire Regiment and 15th Middlesex Regiment.

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From the Battalion Diary.

**October 1st.**—The platoons (whose Officers and N.C.O.'s were in the trenches yesterday), together with the Service Section Machine-Gunners under Lieut. Miller, went into the trenches for 48 hours' duty, being attached to the two regiments mentioned above. The remainder of the Battalion at drill.

Casualties.—2 men wounded (Privates Cude and Wootton, D Company).

**October 2nd.**—The two platoons still in the trenches.

Casualties.—1 man killed (Corporal Hobbs, A Company, who had volunteered for wiring), and 1 man gassed (Private Mopley—the result of the explosion of a German mine).

**October 3rd.**—Other platoons went into the trenches for 24 hours' instruction.

**October 4th.**—The remaining platoons, and the Reserve Machine-Gun Sections, under Lieut. Keble and 2nd Lieut. Ker, went into the trenches for 48 hours' instruction.

Casualties.—1 man wounded (Private Tooley, D Company).

**October 5th.**—Trench instruction continued.

Casualties.—1 man wounded (Private Davis, B Company).

**October 6th.**—Two platoons of B Company and two of D Company evacuated the trenches at 3 p.m. The two remaining platoons of A and C Companies entered the trenches at 2 p.m. for 24 hours instruction as companies. The Machine-gun Section, under Lieut. Miller, also went into the trenches at 2 p.m.

Casualties.—10 men killed; 2nd Lieut. C. A. W. Manning and 25 men wounded.

These men all belonged to No. 1 Platoon, A Company. They were shelled by German trench-mortars while occupying a shelter. 2nd Lieut. Manning was wounded whilst directing the rescue party engaged in excavating the men who had been buried in the debris of the shelter.

**October 7th.**—A and C Companies, with the Machine-gun Section, evacuated the trenches at 3 p.m. B and D Companies, and the Reserve Machine-gun Section under Lieut. Keble, went into the trenches at 2 p.m. for 24 hours' instruction.

**October 8th.**—At 2 p.m. B and D Companies (and the Reserve Machine-gun Section) evacuated the trenches.

Casualties.—1 man wounded (Private Beasley, B Company, hit by shrapnel in his billet during the night).

**October 9th.**—The trench instruction having concluded, the Battalion paraded at 9.30 a.m. and marched from Meaulte and Becordel to billets at Fouilloy, rejoining the 78th Infantry Brigade 26th Division (10 miles).

**October 10th.**—(Fouilloy.) The Battalion attended Divine Service; Afterwards there was a lecture on the use of smoke-helmets, and; all ranks walked through gas waves wearing smoke-helmets.

**October 11th-17th.**—Battalion training in the vicinity of Fouilloy.

**October 18th.**—At 9.30 a.m. the Battalion paraded, and marched from Fouilloy to camp at Laneuville (15 miles).

The Service and 1st and 2nd Sections Machine-guns remained at Fouilloy for instruction.

The Battalion was attached to the 80th Brigade (27th Division).

**October 19th.**—Battalion training in the vicinity of Laneuville.

Painted the tents green, to make them invisible to enemy aircraft.

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**October 20th.**—Furnished digging parties for R.E. near Cappy.

**October 21st.**—Marched back to Fouilloy (15 miles).

**October 22nd.**—Marched to Bertangles, where the 78th Brigade was concentrated.

**October 23rd-November 9th.**—During this period the Battalion remained at Bertangles, carrying out Battalion training with an occasional Brigade route-march.

Between the 1st and 9th November reinforcements of 21 other ranks arrived from the Base, and 3 privates were sent to the Base. The Battalion received 18 mules in lieu of 9 heavy draught horses, and 10 mules in lieu of 2 pack cobs, handed over to the Divisional Ammunition Column.

Orders had now been received for the Battalion to proceed to the Mediterranean. Its seven weeks' service in France had been devoted entirely to training and instruction; but it had lost 11 men killed, and 1 officer and 31 men, wounded.

**MEDITERRANEAN.**

When it became known, towards the end of September, that the Germans, Austrians, and Bulgarians had made up their minds to invade and crush Serbia, with a view to opening the through railway route to Constantinople, the Allies decided to go to the assistance of Serbia and endeavour to prevent the enemy making use of the railway.

France declared war on Bulgaria on the 5th October, and on that date the 1st French Division, under General Sarrail, was transferred from the Dardanelles to Salonika, and was followed by two other Divisions. Shortly afterwards the British 10th Division (Mahon) was dispatched from the Dardanelles to Salonika. On the 10th October the French moved north into Serbia, with the object of getting into communication with the Serbian army. Two Battalions of the British Division moved forward, on the 27th, to support the French.

The Serbians were being driven south and their country over-run by the enemy, and, although the French succeeded in gaining touch with the Serbians, it soon became evident that it would not be possible to extricate the whole of the Serbian army. Early in November the remainder of the British Division advanced into Serbia and took over the French front, when General Sarrail moved forward. Desultory fighting took place during the month, but on the 27th the French, finding that they could be of no help to the Serbian army, retired southwards, in accordance with their original instructions.

On the 3rd December they were back in line with the position taken up by the British.

On the 5th and 6th December the Bulgarians delivered heavy attacks on the British, who withdrew to their second position, and on the 8th to their third position, the French retiring level with the British on the 11th. By the 12th the enemy had pushed forward as far south as the Greek frontier, thus cutting off the Serbian army, who were now forced to retreat south-westward through Albania. Meanwhile the French and British forces retired on Salonika.

Such, in brief, were the events which had taken place prior to the arrival of the reinforcing British troops from France, or were in progress at the time of their arrival. All immediate prospect of military operations was at an end, and the first four months of 1916 were spent in throwing up defences to cover Salonika against a possible attack from the north and east by the Bulgarians. The diary extracts which follow show that the Battalion, with the rest of the British force at Salonika, had plenty of hard work, little excitement, and a minimum of recreation.

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Major C. Wheeler's diary.

**November 9th.**—Paraded at 2.30 p.m. and marched to Longueau (8 miles) for entrainment to Marseilles. Transport animals and riding-horses were left behind at Bertangles, in charge of Lieut. Pemberton, to follow later. Lieut. and Quartermaster T. Powell and 10 other ranks, being medically unfit, did not proceed with the Battalion.

Entrained at Longueau at 7.30 p.m. Very wet. The men travelled in horse-boxes, the floors of which were scantily covered with straw.

**November 10th.**—En route to Marseilles. Halted at Goussainville and Villeneuve, the men getting excellent coffee made by French soldiers. The people of 'Southern France were very pleased with us; khaki was a novelty to them.

**November 11th.**—Journey continued. Halted at Montereau, Macon, and Pierrelatte. Arrived at Marseilles at 6.30 p.m., marched to the Docks, and embarked on H.M.S. "Terrible" (strength, 27 officers and 899 other ranks). Transport vehicles were loaded on H.M.S. "Invernin."

**November 12th.**—Other troops embarked.

**November 13th.**—H.M.S. "Terrible" (Captain O. H. Hughes-Onslow) sailed from Marseilles at 6 a.m., having on board :—

7th Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry, 27 officers, 899 other ranks.

12th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 20 officers, 558 other ranks.

11th Scottish Rifles, 11 officers, 120 other ranks.

H.Q. 77th Infantry Brigade, 14 other ranks.

Total: 58 officers and 1,591 other ranks.

We form part of a convoy—all bound for Salonika. Enemy submarines have been active recently, so we are continually changing our course. We have no escort, and rely on ourselves for protection. The "Terrible" has been rescued from the scrap heap, and has been trooping for some time. The crew is not at full complement, so we have to supply look-outs, and Lewis-gunners help to man the light guns, while some 40 others assist as stokers.

All the omens are against us: sailing on a Friday and on the 13th day of the month ! Moreover, we remember that detachments of our Regiment and of the A. and S. Highlanders were on board the illfated "Birkenhead" half a century ago.

**November 18th.**—Reached Alexandria at 3 p.m. after a very pleasant voyage. The decks were too crowded to organize games. As we have not enough coal to reach Salonika, we go to Port Said for coal tomorrow.

**November 19th.**—Sailed at 5 p.m.

**November 20th.**—Reached Port Said at 1.30 p.m. All troops disembarked and marched to a rest camp near the docks while coal was being taken on board.

**November 21st.**—Re-embarked at 5 p.m.

**November 22nd.**—Sailed from Port Said at 1.30 a.m.

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**November 26th.**—Entered Salonika boom at dawn; transferred to lighters, and disembarked at 2.30 p.m. We marched through part of the town to the Lembet Rest Camp, on the Salonika-Seres road. Very cold, with frost and snow. The men have only one blanket apiece, and the camp is on a windswept ridge. We should have fared badly, arriving as we did in the dark and unable to find fuel or water, had not an enterprising Greek got a canteen ready for our arrival.

**November 27th.**—Wind-and snow. Everyone feeling very cold after the warmth of Egypt. Much handicapped by the absence of our transport with kits, etc. Sheepskin coats issued.

**November 28th.**—Hearing rumours that our transport was in Salonika we sent a party to investigate. In a big pound near the docks we found odd half limbers, and eventually, with the aid of the A.S.C., we got twelve out of our sixteen vehicles. Many things were lost. We should have been allowed to send a guard with the transport.

**November 29th.**—All our vehicles were taken away from us in order to complete the establishment of the 22nd Division, which is beginning to go north to reinforce our 10th Division (from Gallipoli).

**November 30th.**—Snow melted, and weather quite warm at times. It looks as if we shall be here some time, as we are now without transport. Everyone is restless, as we are more or less surrounded by Greek troops. Even in Salonika officers have to go about armed by day. Rumour says that the Bulgarian Consul has representatives at the docks who count our troops as they land. This is quite probable, as we are in neutral Greece. Any day we may find ourselves fighting our unwilling hosts. But our position here is justified by the fact that Greece was under obligation to help Serbia in case of attack, and so we, as allies of Serbia, are here to help Greece redeem her pledge, and we intend to use the Serbian right of way through Greece to accomplish our purpose.

**December 5th.**—Our Division cannot do much, as we are still refitting after our voyage, but we have plenty to do, road-making and making the camp habitable.

**December 10th.**—Weather very foggy for the last few days.

**December 12th.**—Road-making. Marched out about five miles, and commenced making a road through the mountains. The Welsh miners very useful. Back to camp at 8.30 p.m. very tired.

**From the Battalion Diary.**

**December 13th.**— Out from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m., digging trenches at Tumba. Hard day's work. Marched altogether 22 miles. Roads through the mountains bad.

**December 14th.**—Paraded at 8 a.m. and marched to Lajna, 10 miles, there to encamp. Arrived at 12.30 p.m. Digging trenches near Tumba. No tents arrived, so the Battalion bivouacked. Weather dry and cold.

**December 15th.**—Digging trenches from 8 a.m. to 6.30 p.m. Some tents arrived, but part of the Battalion bivouacked for the night. The camp is on a spur about 3 miles north-east of Langaza Lake.

**December 16th-23rd.**—In camp at Lajna, trench digging each day.

**December 24th.**—Moved camp to Watercress Gully, a little nearer the digging area.

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**December 26th.**—Digging trenches until 11 a.m., after which Christmas Day was kept. Bread was issued for the first time since the 14th instant, and the men were provided with plum pudding, fresh meat, oranges, nuts, a pint of beer, and a rum ration. A heavy mail of parcels and letters arrived, and everyone was very cheerful.

**December 26th-31st.**—Trench digging continued. One man (Private F. G. Miles, B Company) died in hospital. The transport, which had been left behind in France, had now rejoined the Battalion.

**1916.**

**January 1st-20th.**—At Lajna Camp, digging trenches. Occasionally German aeroplanes came over, and some bombs were dropped. The weather was at times bitterly cold, blizzards blowing from the north, and the transport animals had to be protected with hoods made out of sacks.

**January 21st.**—Moved camp to Jajladzik.

**January 22nd-February 15th.**—Camp at Jajladzik. The daily routine consisted of work on the defence line, improving the camping area, and bombing and machine-gun classes.

**February 16th.**—A Company manning trenches ; B Company road-making ; the remainder at various forms of training.

**February 17th—March 7th.**—At Jajladzik Camp. During this period the Battalion worked on the defence line and carried out training of different kinds.

**March 9th-12th.**—Very heavy rain. Difficult to carry out training.

**March 13th-18th.**—At Jajladzik Camp. Every available man employed on the defence line, making good the damage done by the rain.

On the 18th the Battalion took part in the 78th Brigade Machine gun Competitions, and out of seven events won four and was second in two.

**March 19th-April 30th.**—Throughout the whole of this period the Battalion was encamped at Jajladzik, and occupied on defence work, or carrying out training. A few days were devoted to Brigade Training, and great attention was paid to the training of specialists in machine-gun, signalling, bombing, loading mules, etc., while Battalion and Company training and musketry went on continuously.

Winter ended officially in the last week of March, when fur coats, leather jerkins, and fur gloves were handed in to Ordnance Stores, and the summer timetable came into force. The daily routine was then as follows : Reveille, 5 a.m.; breakfasts, 6 a.m.; work, 7 a.m. to 3 p.m (with a break for lunch from 11 to 11.30 a.m.); dinners, 3 p.m.; teas, 6.30 p.m.; retreat, 6.30 p.m.

**From Major Wheeler's diary.**

**April 26th.**—We have been very busy lately, as a new order concerning health and age of senior officers has come out, and a more or less clean sweep has been made of Brigadiers and Commanding Officers. Our Brigadier (Thomas) has had to go, as well as our C.O. (Newton-King). The latter was succeeded by Lieut. - Colonel Sir E. Grogan, of the Rifle Brigade, on the 21st.

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**May 2nd-9th.**—During these days we took part in an eight days trek with the rest of the 78th Brigade over new ground. Divisions and brigades are carrying out these treks as a form of training now that the defences are well developed. The first day we marched to Sarijar (10 miles) and bivouacked; the next day to Hadzi Mah (6 miles); then to Kara Omerli, Cernik, Vulajli, Kurfali, and Langaza, bivouacking a night at each place, and returning to camp at Jajladzik on the 9th. The march was entirely in the hills; there were no roads, and everything was carried on pack mules; water was scarce, and, as we were manoeuvring all day, we had a strenuous time.

**May 30th-June 3rd.**—At a camp 3 miles north of Laugaza undergoing Brigade training.

**June 8th.**—This has been our hottest day so far. Most of us are unfamiliar with hot climates, and we are feeling the heat a good deal. The worst of it is we cannot sleep during the middle of the day, as flies abound in spite of all our devices. We have now moved to a camp in the hills in another part of the line, with very little water.

**June 16th.**—Major A. T. Robinson (2nd East Surrey Regiment) took over the command of the Battalion from Lieut.-Colonel Sir E. Grogan, who has gone on the Staff.

**June 20th.**—Moved to a camp half a mile west of Dremiglava.

**June 30th.**— (Dremiglava.) Our camp here is one of the pleasantest we have been in, although down in the plain. We have a splendid spring within a hundred yards, and there are vineyards and fig-trees, which break the monotony of the otherwise treeless and parched landscape. But it is hotter than ever, and the flies are a perpetual worry.

Casualties (in France).

11 men killed.

2nd Lieut. C. A. W. Manning and 33 men wounded.