

1914, by John French, *Viscount of Ypres*

CHAPTER XIV

THE ENTRY OF THE TERRITORIAL ARMY

On November 16th the Prince of Wales joined the Army in the Field. It was the first time since the days of the Black Prince that the Heir Apparent to the Throne had taken the field in war. His Royal Highness was received by the troops with delight and acclamation. The courage, devotion and endurance which he has since displayed on active service have secured him the love and admiration of every officer, non-commissioned officer and man of His Majesty's Army, and his name will descend in history, bright with the honour which he won in the field.

Early in the month a certain amount of heavy artillery began to arrive in France. Special positions were selected and prepared all along the front, and the few guns we had were interchanged between them as occasion required.

It was from such crude beginnings that we reached the wonderful developments in the use of heavy artillery which have been witnessed during the progress of the war. It is of some interest to compare the number of 6-in. guns and over which we had at that time, with the number which were deployed on the same front later in the war.

During the latter part of the First Battle of Ypres the weather was very wet and stormy. The rain gave place to cold northerly winds, and on the afternoon of November 19th there was a heavy fall of snow. That evening a hard frost set in which lasted for several days. The men in the trenches began to suffer severely.

It was at this time, the third week of November, 1914, that the serious evil known as "Trench Feet" first made its appearance in the Army in France. The cases were at first labelled "Frost Bite," but as they were subsequently found to occur without any fall of the temperature to freezing point, this term was evidently a misnomer. Indeed, cases have occurred during the month of August.

The condition is caused by prolonged immersion in water, and certainly can occur when the temperature of the water is as high as 50°F. It is seldom caused unless the immersion is as long as 24 hours, but the cooler the water the less is the time required to produce it. In most cases the temperature of the water has been below 40°.

In addition to cold water, the onset is favoured by

- (a) Prolonged standing in one position, as is often the case with men deep in mud.
- (b) Tight puttees and tight boots.
- (c) Exhaustion and want of food.
- (d) A natural tendency to feeble circulation, *e.g.*, men who suffer from chilblains.

- (e) Lying out, after being wounded, in wet and cold weather.

The condition observed varies very much according to the severity of the case :

- (a) The feet may be merely very painful and tender.
- (b) Much more often they are very swollen and cold, with but little feeling in them.
- (c) Frequently the whole foot is like a big "chilblain" and is very hot, red and swollen. *Blisters* are common in all such feet.
- (d) The toes may be black and the foot blue.
- (e) The toes especially, and the foot much more rarely, may die and become gangrenous.

Except in slight cases, the men affected are quite unfit for duty for two or three months at least, especially for duty in trenches in cold weather. If men are sent back to duty too soon, a short exposure at once brings back all the trouble in an aggravated form. Of course, if gangrene occurs, the man is permanently invalided.

The only *real* preventative is to arrange that the men do not remain deep in mud or cold water for prolonged periods. If this is not possible, cases of "trench feet" are inevitable. Apart from avoiding this, the primary cause, various subsidiary causes can be guarded against; and, from the experience gained in dealing with the

condition, the following instructions were formulated and communicated to the officers in charge of the men :

- (1) Boots and puttees should not fit tightly and must be taken off once *at least* every 24 hours and the feet well rubbed and cleaned, dry socks put on.
- (2) The feet should be kept as clean as possible so as to avoid septic complications in case of blistering.
- (3) *Rubber thigh-boots* should be supplied to all men in waterlogged trenches, and these should be large enough to take two pairs of socks.
- (4) Trench-boards should be provided, or brushwood or straw laid down.
- (5) Men should be kept dry by the use of mackintosh over the shoulders.
- (6) Hot food should be supplied whenever this is possible.

It is, of course, evident that all these precautions are often quite unobtainable. In the Ypres region in the winter of 1914-1915 many men stood for days and nights up to the middle in water, and some of the communication trenches were impassable because of the depth of the water. Indeed, a good many men were drowned.

The treatment varies with the severity of the case. Rest with the feet up and careful washing of the feet is all

that is at first needed in slight cases. If there are blisters or sores these must be treated. Later on various forms of electrical treatment and massage are of use. In all but slight cases treatment does not prevent the man being unable to walk for many weeks without pain.

The number of men invalided for "trench feet" during the winter of 1914-1915 was over 20,000. The 27th Division lost 3,000 men the first week they were in the trenches in February. With good trenches and proper care "trench feet" should be of rare occurrence. If under these conditions they are numerous, someone is to blame. As a result of the experience gained during the winter of 1914-1915 and the adoption of the recommendations issued, in the winters 1915-1917, in the Ypres salient, the "trench feet" cases did not average more than two a day in an army of over 200,000 men.

It was in the closing days of the First Battle of Ypres that the bulk of the Territorial troops sent to France at that time entered the fighting line.

In the course of a telegram which I received from Lord Kitchener on November 2nd, the Secretary of State for War said :

"The total number of Territorial Battalions in France and ordered there is 19. I am selecting two more to make up one per Brigade."

These arrangements had been made in response to my urgent requests that whatever Territorial regiments of

yeomanry or battalions of infantry were ready and available should be sent to France at once and incorporated with the regular forces there, and that we should not wait for the divisional formations to be prepared and completed.

The history of the Territorials is well known. The Volunteers, from which the Territorial Army sprang, came into being in the years just following the Crimean War.

For some 10 to 20 years afterwards the Volunteers may be said to have met with little better than derision. It was said that they only wanted to wear a uniform and play at soldiers, and hardly anyone believed in the wonderful spirit which really animated them from the start. The military and other authorities gave them but little help and hardly any encouragement, in fact they refused to take the Volunteers seriously.

In spite of all these drawbacks this wonderful force, under the leadership of such men as the late Lord Wemyss, Lord MacDonald, and others, went steadily on, struggling against adversity, but increasing in strength all the time. The great patriotic spirit which has always been the soul of the Volunteers, was kept alive by their great leaders in face of slights and neglect, but it was reserved for Lord Haldane to devise the scheme which was to make the fullest use of the Volunteers and bring them to the zenith of their reputation. He realised that their patriotic ardour might be put to good purpose, and drafted the scheme whereby, whilst remaining

volunteers, they were formed into a great Territorial Army, administered by the so-called Territorial County Associations, to whose energy and devotion the country owes so much.

The result of Lord Haldane's statesmanlike foresight has been clear to anyone who, during the past four years, has cast his eyes across the Channel and seen the splendid behaviour of our citizen soldiers in the field.

I have spoken already elsewhere of what I have always regarded as our great initial administrative mistake in the war, namely, the raising of an entirely new Army, when the machinery for expanding the Territorial Force — especially established by Lord Haldane for the purpose — I mean the Territorial County Associations — was already at hand and would have proved by far the most efficient and economical method of raising the troops required.

Lord MacDonald and those who are left of the early Volunteer soldiers must, in their old age, rejoice in the knowledge that they have lived to see the force, which they tended and nurtured against such appalling difficulties, actually for several months standing between the Empire and disaster.

Such a spirit as that which the Volunteers cultivated and maintained is bound sooner or later to make itself felt, and, as the years rolled on, the country came at last dimly and slowly to realise the Volunteers' true value. They figured in the field as early as 1882 in the

Egyptian Campaign, and played their part afterwards in much greater numbers throughout the South African War.

After Lord Kitchener had made his call upon the country for the New Armies, the Territorials found themselves neglected and put in the shade.

It is true that by the terms of their engagement, Territorial soldiers were only available for home defence; but even in peace time a certain proportion of the force had volunteered to serve anywhere in case of war, and it was always anticipated that, when the necessity arose, a renewed call would be made upon the whole force to do likewise. The response to the call which was subsequently made upon them shows quite clearly that, had they been asked at first, they would have come forward almost to a man.

However, as it turned out, they were ignored and the call was never made upon them. Officers and men alike, naturally and inevitably made up their minds that they were not wanted and would never be used for any other purpose than that for which they had originally taken service, namely, the defence of the United Kingdom.

But the time for the employment of troops other than the Regulars of the old Army arrived with drastic and unexpected speed. The wastage of war proved to be so enormous that the fighting line had to be reinforced almost before the new Armies were in existence.

It was then that the country in her need turned to the despised Territorials.

The call came upon them like a bolt from the blue. No warning had been given. Fathers and sons, husbands and brothers, left families, homes, the work and business of their lives, almost at an hour's notice to go on active service abroad.

It seems to me that we have never realised what it was these men were asked to do. They were quite different to professional soldiers, who are kept and paid through years of peace for this particular purpose of war; who spend their lives practising their profession and gaining promotion and distinction; and who, on being confronted with the enemy, fulfil the great ambition of their lives.

Equally distinct were the Territorials also from what has been called the New Army, whose officers and men had ample time to prepare themselves for what they were required to do.

I wonder, sometimes, if the eyes of the country will ever be opened to what these Territorial soldiers of ours have done.

I say without the slightest hesitation that without the assistance which the Territorials afforded between October, 1914, and June, 1915, it would have been impossible to have held the line in France and Belgium, or to have prevented the enemy from reaching his goal, the Channel seaboard.

Between the beginning of November and the end of the Battle of Ypres, Territorial battalions were constantly arriving. A special training camp was formed for them at St.Omer under a selected commander. This post was admirably filled first by Brigadier-General Chichester, and later by Brigadier-General Oxley.

I have already told of the fine work done by the Oxfordshire Hussars and the London Scottish—the first Territorials to enter the line of battle.^[6] Their splendid example was well followed, and the record they established nobly maintained by each unit of the Territorial Army as it successively took its place in the trenches.

Of these units, the Warwickshire Horse Artillery Battery detrained at St. Omer in the beginning of November. Of the cavalry, the Oxfordshire Hussars disembarked at Dunkirk about the middle of September; the Northumberland Hussars came to France in October; the Leicestershire, North Somerset, Essex and Northampton Regiments of Yeomanry during November; and the Surrey towards the end of December.

All these units received a course of training in the St. Omer camp of instruction. I often rode amongst them, and was much impressed by the fine material in men, horses and equipment of which they were composed, and with the rapid progress which they made.

I knew from my experience as Inspector of Yeomanry a good many years ago what efforts these Yeomanry Regiments had for a long time made to live up to the times and render themselves efficient. Although I now found that the old type of hunting farmer was not so fully represented in their ranks as formerly, yet a valuable leavening of this class still remained, and they were for the most part commanded and officered by county men of position and influence, accustomed to hunting, polo and field sports.

In a very short time we were able to use the Yeomanry in the front line. The Oxfordshire, Leicestershire, North Somerset and Essex were incorporated in brigades of the Cavalry Divisions, and the Northumberland, Northampton and Surreys were employed as Divisional Cavalry. The same practical value attached to the Warwickshire Battery of Horse Artillery, upon which Lord Brooke had expended so much time and energy for years preceding the war.

Twenty-three battalions of Territorial infantry were sent to France in 1914. Of these the London Scottish and the infantry battalion of the Honourable Artillery Company arrived in September. The 5th Border Regt., Artists' Rifles, 6th Welsh, 5th Black Watch, Queen's Westminsters, 10th Liverpools (Scottish), 13th London (County of London), 8th Royal Scots, 9th Highland Light Infantry, 5th Scottish Rifles, 9th London Regt., 4th Royal Welsh Fusiliers, 2nd Monmouths, Hertfordshire, 4th Seaforth Highlanders, 4th Suffolks,

6th Cheshires, and 6th Gordon Highlanders arrived in November, whilst the 7th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and the 12th London came in December.

These units were all put through a course of training at St. Omer. There was a great difference between individual battalions as regards their actual condition when they came out, and the time required to prepare them to take their places in the trenches.

Some were much better commanded and officered than others. There was a marked distinction to be noted in their physique and quality. But, on the whole, it may be fairly said that they promised to furnish most valuable reinforcements to our severely tried army. The energy they displayed and the progress they made were really wonderful.

As Inspector-General of the Forces between 1908 and 1912, I had constant opportunities of watching the training of the Territorial Army in the first years of its existence as such. I was familiar with the earnest and successful endeavours they had made to profit by the vastly improved conditions and status secured to them by Lord Haldane's wise and skilful administration. The same zeal which characterised them so remarkably as Volunteers was applied in greater force and with intensified confidence when, as Territorials, they were organised, commanded, staffed, equipped and trained on sound methods and up-to-date lines.

All this seven or eight years' experience operated to the greatest advantage when these Territorial battalions arrived in the theatre of war and commenced their final preparation to fill the gaps in our line, through which, as I have shown, the Germans must have penetrated had the Territorial Army not existed to step into the breach.

The H.A.C. was the first unit to follow the London Scottish. I inspected them at the front on November 9th — the day upon which they joined the Indian Corps — and they presented a splendid appearance. I never saw a finer lot of men. They afterwards established a record in the war which is well worthy of the fine old corps from which they spring.

The Queen's Westminsters and the 8th Royal Scots only embarked on the 1st and 4th of November respectively, yet their condition was so good that they were able to be sent to the front immediately after the H.A.C.

The Queen's Westminsters were sent to the 7th Division to relieve the Artists' Corps, which then became an Officers' Training Corps.

I saw a great deal of the Hertfordshires during the very few days they were training at Headquarters, and found them a particularly fine regiment. Although they only embarked on November 5th, they were at Ypres in the 1st Corps Reserve ten or eleven days later and before the end of the battle. The 10th Liverpools have a fine record. They embarked on November 1st and joined the

9th Brigade on the 25th of the month south of Wytschaete, where they were in the first line trenches on the 27th, between the Royal Fusiliers on the left and the 5th (Northumberland) Fusiliers on the right.

The 9th Highland Light Infantry were incorporated in the 5th Brigade (2nd Division) on November 24th, about ten days after their arrival in the country. The 2nd Monmouths, the London Rifle Brigade, and the 5th Scottish Rifles were incorporated in the 3rd Corps on November 19th, after some eleven or twelve days in the country.

Many other examples can be quoted to show how quickly these Territorial troops, following the lead given to them by the Oxfordshire Hussars and the London Scottish, accustomed themselves to the severe and trying conditions of war, and of what real value they were at this critical time.

The inexperience of regimental officers was, of course, the greatest difficulty we had to contend with when these troops first took the field. This was a most serious drawback in view of the vastly increased responsibility which falls upon leaders of all ranks in war as it is conducted to-day, but they improved beyond all expectation, and every week found them more efficient.

I have so far spoken of the Territorial Army in regard to its employment in units of regiments and battalions at a most critical time in the war, when reinforcements were badly needed. I come now to the time when, a few

months later, they entered into the campaign as complete divisions.

The great mass of military opinion held that the highest practical unit in which Territorial soldiers could be organised was the brigade of four battalions. The regular gunner had no use for Territorial horse and field artillery. Engineer Volunteers had for some time existed, but only in small numbers and in particular localities. Although the Army Service Corps and the Army Medical Corps had for years been represented in the Volunteer Forces by small units and detachments, it was never considered that those services could be efficiently and practically performed by any but "whole-timers."

Backed up by the opinion and advice of a very few soldiers of experience, the Secretary of State for War cast all this prejudice to the winds, and determined upon a regular and complete divisional organisation for the Territorials. It was indeed a great and courageous decision. "What!" exclaimed the gold-bedizened smart young horse artillery commander, "do you mean to say you are going to allot Territorial horse artillery batteries to your mounted brigade? You must be mad! It takes years even to approach the necessary degree of efficiency."

The field gunner, immersed in his latest developments to ensure the utmost accuracy of fire, the howitzer and heavy field artillery expert, the scientific and highly-trained sapper, all joined in the hue and cry, until Lord

Haldane's conceptions almost collapsed and expired in a ferment of ridicule. But he remained steadfast. The mounted brigades received their Territorial batteries of horse artillery. Fourteen complete Territorial divisions were formed of three brigades of infantry, three brigades of field artillery, one brigade of howitzers, one brigade of heavies, field and signal companies of Engineers, companies of Army Service Corps and Army Medical Corps.

Lord Haldane had only some eight or nine years to wait for his reward. Within that time he saw his Territorials doing splendid and invaluable work as complete divisions in the field, and fighting with success against the most powerful and efficient army in the world. When I say he "got his reward," I may well be misunderstood. He got nothing but calumny and grossly unjust abuse; but the "reward" to such a man does not come in the ordinary way. He had proved the value of his great work, and that is all the reward he ever wanted.

It is to this organisation that I largely attribute the success of the Territorials in the field throughout the war. Each unit learned by degrees its own relative place and position in the great divisional machine. Enthusiasm was raised in the idea engendered in all ranks that they formed part of a great engine of war, furnished by their own counties and immediate neighbourhoods. At first, certainly, they were crude and untrained, but every day they improved through instruction, and developed great

intelligence under a thorough and practical exposition of the objects to be aimed at.

The strength of the new arrangement lay chiefly in the fact that each division was commanded by an experienced general officer of the regular forces, assisted by a well-selected and competent staff of regular officers.

Six divisions in all arrived in France between November 3rd, 1914, and April 30th, 1915, namely, the 46th (North Midland), the 47th (London), the 48th (South Midland), the 49th (West Riding), the 50th (Northumbrian), and the 51st (Highland).

A prominent part was taken in the fighting of 1915 by all these divisions, as will be more fully recounted in subsequent pages.

Footnote 6 : The North and South Irish Horse went to France much earlier than these troops but were employed as special escort to G.H.Q.