

Factsheet

NUMBER 13: THE 16th BATTALION KRRC



16th (S) Battalion The King's Royal Rifle Corps (Church Lads' Brigade) - *'The Churchmen's Battalion'*

The Battalion was formed about a month after the outbreak of war in August 1914, by Field-Marshal Lord Grenfell, Governor of the CLB, and an honorary colonel of the King's Royal Rifles. Grenfell was responding immediately to Lord Kitchener's appeal for men to join - up. Grenfell appealed to past and present C.L.B. lads to join a battalion exclusively for themselves, many thousands had, of course, already joined-up nationally, often as members of their local 'Pals' Battalions.

CLB lads made perfect recruits; they had after all, been Cadets since November 1911. By 1914 many were already in khaki and trained in shooting, marching, camping, signalling, bugle bands, first aid etc., they were smart, uniformed, and were used to taking orders. As part of their cadet activities they had often played 'War Games', which were great fun. Two sections would fight a mock battle over a whole day. War was entertaining when you could retire for a pint in the local hostelry with the enemy at the end of the day. However, smiles would soon be wiped from youthful faces.

At Moor House Farm



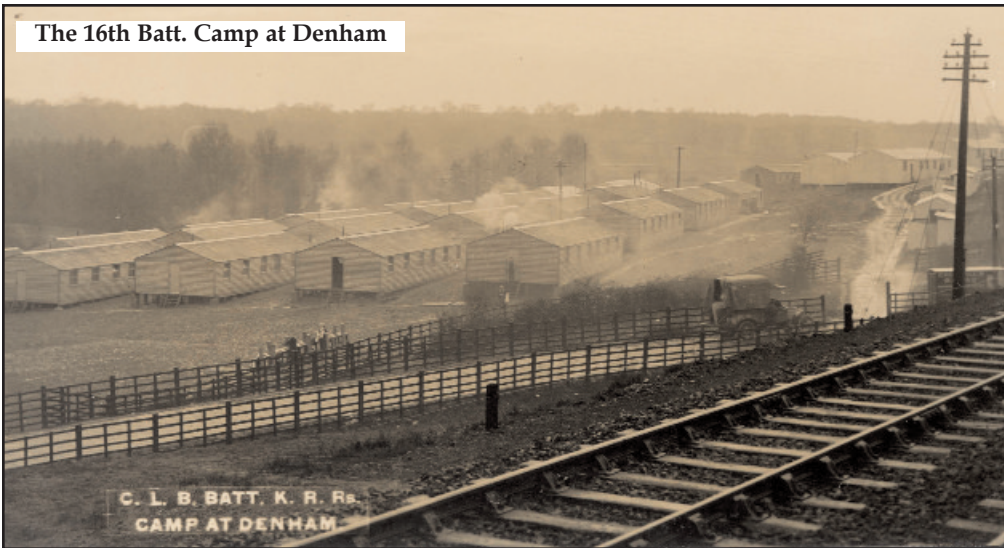
The 16th (Service) Battalion comprising ex-members and serving members of Church Lads' Brigade which was to be raised at Denham Bucks, needed 1,000 plus members by September 1914 and there were nearly 2,000 applications in a matter of days. Some towns sent large groups of recruits, for example Bolton sent 120 lads and Rochdale 109 lads. Some individual companies sent as many as 21 lads. A

reserve Battalion (the 19th KRRC) was also formed from CLB lads. Those not old enough to join - up, continued their service in the CLB Cadets.



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The 16th Batt. Camp at Denham



About three weeks after registering the recruits of the 16th were sent to a camp which was being built in Denham Buckinghamshire, about three miles from Uxbridge.

Unfortunately the huts, being constructed under a Government contract

amounting to about £10,000, including officers' quarters, stables, shower baths, lavatories, etc., were not complete upon the men's arrival, so the men were billeted temporarily in various barns and farm buildings such as Court Farm, Moor House Farm, and Mercer's Mill. A Church Hall in Uxbridge, St. Margaret's Church parish hall, was popular because that was where recreation was provided for them by the local branch of the Church of England Men's Society. Games were played, impromptu concerts arranged, and facilities placed at the disposal of the men for the writing of letters. Magazines and illustrated newspapers were also provided at the hall.

The Battalion was inspected, on the Golf Course, by Lord Grenfell, The Archbishop of Canterbury, Lt Col Kindersley-Porcher (C.O.), Walter M. Gee, (Founder and Chief Staff Officer) Edgar Rogers (Brigade Chaplain) and others. Because this was not long after formation, many of the men had to drill on that day with broom handles because rifles had not yet been issued! Many men also had to wait some time for their uniforms to arrive.

The Inspection on the Golf Course



Eventually, the men were housed in huts, and were splendidly treated by the inhabitants of



Denham village and of the neighbouring town of Uxbridge. The reputation of the Battalion as 'The Churchmen's Battalion' was impeccable, and they had their own Battalion Chaplain: Rev 'Jimmy' Duncan. They stayed at Denham until March 1915, when they were transferred to Rayleigh, Essex, for three months training in trench digging. From Rayleigh the battalion again went to Denham, and then on to Clipstone Park, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, for divisional training. Following this Andover was the Battalion's quarters for a time until it was sent to France embarking on the cross-channel ship on 15th November 1915.

Once in France, the 16th were held in reserve over winter and spring, but were occupying firing trenches for short spells. They were relatively lucky, but still suffered some casualties including fatalities, through short skirmishes and sniper fire.

The movement into the front line of the Somme Battlefield in July 1916 as part of the 100th Brigade, 33rd Division, was to prove devastating for the Battalion. The 16th were part of the second wave of the big 'Push' on the Somme in July 1916 and went in to relieve a number of other Battalions at High Wood (Near Delville Wood). On the early morning of Saturday 15th July, along with the 1st Queen's and Glasgow Highlanders they attacked uphill, in the open, against an enemy well entrenched and in concrete blockhouses, all in the cover of dense woodland. Tragically, many were mowed down by enfilade fire. Many advances were made only to be repeatedly beaten back. Even when companies from the Battalion got into the wood it was almost impossible to drive out the enemy, who stayed and resisted attack. By evening on that day it was clear that the attack had been unsuccessful. According to Cpl. Jack Beament MM from Croxley Green who was in No 1 platoon, A Coy: *'It was a horrible, terrible massacre...'* One hundred and twenty from the 16th were killed and many more wounded. By September the Battalion had more than half its number (550) as casualties (Including 220 dead) and sadly there were more to come. Perhaps one of the most devastated of all the British front-line Battalions on the Somme. A number of men were awarded the Military medal for their bravery. It would be two months to the day, September 15th, with the use of tanks, for the first time on the Somme, before High Wood was finally taken.



In the spring of 1918, the Battalion was in bitter action again in the Ypres Salient at Ypres, Zonnebeke, Neuve Eglise and Hill 70, with many being killed and wounded. In many ways the fighting here was as hard as it had been at High Wood.

The CLB 'Brigade' Magazine, throughout the years 1914 - 1919 reported on the War with particular prominence been given to the 16th Kings' Royal Rifle Corps, one of the few Service Battalions fighting in a regular division. Appeals were made for 'comforts' for the troops, such as blankets,



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The Memorial at Hoog



woollen gloves etc. However in late 1916 there was little hint of the disaster which had overcome the Battalion except for the fact that appeals were made for members to join-up to replace dead or wounded men, and photographs of those killed, began to appear on a more regular basis.

In late 1916 the Brigade launched its 'Million Shilling Fund' to raise money for a memorial to all CLB members who had perished in the conflict, and to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of the CLB. Some of the cash was used to purchase the St Martin's Banner, housed in Westminster Abbey. (See Factsheet No. 20) At local level, many Churches acknowledged fallen members from their particular

company, by way of a plaque or even a window. The French Government awarded the Brigade a 'Diploma of Honour' in the form of a certificate and a medal. For many years after the war veterans of the 16th paraded to the Church at Denham for a service of remembrance. Almost identical memorials to the Battalion exist at Hoog near Ypres in Belgium and Poziers near High Wood in France. There are also memorials in St George's Memorial Chapel in Ypres.

From 1917 the whole of the CLB Cadet Force, still numbering nearly 80,000, more than half the strength of the National Force, came under the direct auspices of the King's Royal Rifle Corps, in memory of those who died. (This arrangement existed until 1930). A special cadet cap badge and mufti badge was approved similar to that of the KRRC.

After the war, the Brigade started to go into blue uniforms, as an alternative to khaki, (from 1924) and the blue uniform was adopted completely in 1936 when the Cadet affiliation finished. CLB caps had, as they still do to this day, a band of Light Division Bottle Green in memory of the CLB members who died, in particular those in the KRRC. The Brigade's Memorial Garden at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire is the place where, today, memories of those Brigade members no longer with us can be remembered, whether they served in war or in peace.

Suggested reading list:

The Hell they Called High Wood - Terry Norman. William Kimber, London, 1984.

(This is a detailed factual description of the battle for High Wood)

With the CLB Battalion in France - Rev James Duncan. Skeffington & Son, Strand, London 1917.

(A very sanitised description of the CLB Battalion and its exploits, written by their Chaplain) Now re-printed

Somme - Lyn Macdonald, Macmillan, London, 1983

(Record of interviews with veterans of the battle. Includes some 16th KRRC men)

Somme Mud - E.P.F. Lynch, Bantam Books, London, 2006.

(A vivid, explicit description of trench life as an Infantryman, not for the feint-hearted!)

In Preparation: The Church Lads' Brigade in the Great War - Jean Morris. Pen & Sword Publications, Barnsley, (Sometime after June 2014).

