

## CHAPTER 32

### DEMOBILIZATION

Nov-Dec  
1918

When hostilities were actually suspended on the Western Front it so happened that no single battalion of The Queen's Own was in immediate touch with the retreating enemy; the 1st had withdrawn from the front line the day before the Armistice, the 6th had been back in billets since October 28th, the 7th was at Le Cateau, also in rest, the 8th had been "leap-frogged" on November 9th, while the 10th only missed by a few hours the distinction of being in action up to the last moment. The terms of the Armistice had included the occupation of the German territories West of the Rhine by a mixed Allied force, but to allow of the withdrawal of the Germans behind the Rhine and to facilitate the necessary readjustment of the administrative arrangements, a halt of a week had to be called on the British front, and it was not till November 17th that the advance towards Germany could be resumed, and only on December 1st did British troops cross the German frontier and begin the occupation of the zone assigned to the British forces about Cologne. The opening stages of the advance were carried out by the Second and Fourth Armies, but by the time the frontier came to be crossed the frontage to be occupied did not require more than a single Army command and the final advance was carried out by the Second Army only. This had been very largely reconstructed, and as finally organized did not include any of the Divisions in which The Queen's Own was represented. Later on both the 6th and 10th Battalions were included in the Army of Occupation, but in the period immediately succeeding the Armistice all the five battalions remained at rest, though a certain amount of changes of station took place.

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Nov-Dec  
1918

For the Regiment the outstanding event for this period was a sad one, the death, on December 3rd, of Colonel Dawson from the wounds he had received at the end of October. From the first their gravity had been clear, but he had struggled long and gallantly for life and it was with the greatest regret that not only his own 6th, but all battalions of The Queen's Own heard the news of his death. His record in the war was truly remarkable: junior subaltern in August 1914, battalion commander in November 1916, a D.S.O. and three bars, a Brevet Major at an age when some subalterns have hardly achieved their second star. Seven times wounded, he had always contrived to get back to his battalion, usually with his wounds barely healed. He had repeatedly refused offers of Staff employment which would have meant leaving the 6th. What he had been to the 6th Battalion only those who served with and under him can say. He had played a large part in building and training it, he had helped to give it high standards and aims. In its first serious engagement at Loos he and his company had been conspicuously successful, in the bitter struggle for the Hohenzollern Craters he had stood out as the life and soul of the defence, and it was under his command that the 6th had achieved the majority of its most striking successes. That after suffering virtual annihilation at Cambrai it had been able in 1918 to accomplish so many brilliant things was largely because it still had Colonel Dawson to lead it and to inspire it afresh with his energy and fighting spirit. But it was not merely for what the 6th had done that Dawson will be remembered, but for his personality, his leadership, his high standards, his devotion to duty, his endurance, his fearlessness and resource in action, above all for the extraordinary confidence he inspired in his officers and men, there was nothing of which the 6th did not believe him capable, nothing which it was not prepared to undertake if he were there to lead it. What made

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his influence over his battalion so specially remarkable was his youth

In the middle of December the 1st Battalion, which had spent the last month in billets at Herbignies near Le Quesnoy, moved forward into Belgium, arriving in new quarters N.W. of Namur on the 22nd, where it was rejoined by a Colour party consisting of Lieut. Lewis Barned, 2nd Lieut. Marke, C.S.M. Hylands and Sergts. Weston and Gilbert, which had been sent off to Maidstone to fetch the Colours from the Depot. This incident was symbolical of the change from war conditions. Though the agreement signed on November 10th had been called an "armistice" it was in effect nothing short of a surrender on the part of the Germans, and accordingly among the problems which the military authorities had to tackle was that of the reconstruction of the Regular Army on as near an approach to normal lines as the very abnormal conditions then prevailing would admit. The task bristled with difficulties. Four years of war had left but the scantiest remnant of Regulars serving on "pre-war" engagements, and these were scattered about the different battalions, which, whether called Regular or Territorial or Service, were all composed of a mixture of men enlisted on different terms, volunteers "for duration," "Derby" recruits, conscripts, some entitled to a prompt discharge, others liable to be retained with the colours. Thus while those Service and Territorial battalions not required for the various Armies of Occupation in Germany, in Palestine and in other Eastern theatres, had to be disbanded or disembodied as soon as circumstances would allow, the Regular battalions had equally to be reduced to cadres by the demobilization or transfer to other units of all men not available for service with the battalion when reconstructed.

In the same way when the 6th and 10th Battalions were detailed early in 1919 for transfer to the Army of the Rhine they had to be in large measure reconstructed.

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The 6th, which had since the beginning of December been commanded by Captain (Acting Lieut.-Col.) Peplow, underwent a good many changes, many of its officers and men were demobilized, their places being filled from other battalions of the Regiment or from other regiments. Thus on the final reduction of the 1st Battalion to cadre strength in April Major Kay and over a dozen other officers proceeded to join the 6th. In like manner the 10th received a draft of 200 men from the 1st Battalion, Colonel Hickson from the 7th, half-a-dozen officers, including Captains Penton and Drumgold, from the 8th, and about twice as many from the 2/20th Battalion of the London Regiment. In posting these officers to a battalion of The Queen's Own the authorities were certainly happily inspired, as the 20th London were the old 2nd Volunteer Battalion Royal West Kent and had as their recruiting area Blackheath and Woolwich.

In the middle of March the 1st Battalion moved to Fleurus, where the reduction to cadre was completed, the last big batch to depart being the 200 men sent to the 10th Battalion. Then on April 17th the cadre, 6 officers and 46 men, started for England, Major R. Brown being in command and having with him Captains Doe, Mattinson and Lewis Barned, Lieut. Marke and 2nd Lieut. Purchase, of whom Captain Doe was an "old original" of August 1914, having gone out as R.S.M., in which post Major Brown had succeeded him in December 1914. There were eight other "old originals" in the cadre who had left Dublin with the battalion in August 1914, Sergts. Keane, Haynes, Cutter and Banfield, Corpl. Weatherall, L/Cpls. Hannant and Wyatt and Pte. Simpson.

Landing at Dover on April 23rd the cadre proceeded direct to Gravesend where they found a reinforcement awaiting them in the shape of a nucleus party under Major Nelson, released from his captivity in Turkey. This party had been formed at Maidstone

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Nov-Dec  
1918  
1<sup>st</sup> Battalion

1919

1919  
6<sup>th</sup> Battalion

1<sup>st</sup> Battalion

and had moved to Gravesend early in April. The two parties between them came to just over 100 officers and men, but to this additions were constantly being made as the battalion was due for service in India, for which country it eventually departed in October, being then fully “up to strength” and having Colonel P. M. Robinson once again in command. Meanwhile the other Regular battalion was on its way home from the East. Shortly after the conclusion of the final operations against the Turks the 2nd Royal West Kent had been withdrawn down the Tigris to Tekrit after spending some time on railway construction on the way. Here it received orders in March 1919 that it was to be reduced to a cadre and dispatched to India for embarkation for home. Demobilization had begun some time before this, but the cadre was destined to be a long time on the homeward way. It suffered minor delays both at Baghdad and Basra, and then, on reaching Bombay, found affairs in India in such a disturbed condition and the troubles with Afghanistan so serious that it was dispatched forthwith to Deolali and detained first there and then at Nasik and then at Delhi, so that it did not finally leave India until the end of July. It mustered four officers, Colonel Woulfe-Flanagan, Majors Grey and Hardy, and Captain Bredon, the first two of whom had gone out with it to Egypt in September 1899. Of the forty-six other ranks all but one were wearing the 1914-1915 Star and had had a long dose of service in Mesopotamia. Arriving at Devonport on August 16th the cadre was directed to proceed to Rugeley Camp in Staffordshire. Here were already established the “Home Service Details” destined to form part of the battalion. These had been provided in part from the Depot, but the majority came from two recruit companies of the 3rd Battalion which had been transferred to the 2nd in June shortly before the disembodying of the 3rd. Thus by September 1919 both 1st and 2nd Battalions were well on the way

1919  
1<sup>st</sup> Battalion

2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion

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towards reconstruction while the 3rd had been disembodied, (1) as had also the Reserve Territorial units.

The “first line” Territorials, however, were still abroad; indeed the 1/4th had at last, after over four years of garrison duty, seen something of active service on the Indian Frontier. It had moved up to the Frontier early in 1918, being stationed at Quetta, where it remained until detailed in May 1919 for the operations against the Afghans. The chief action in which it took part was the capture on May 27th 1919 of the Afghan position at Spin Maldak, about the strongest post in Afghanistan, in which the battalion was at last given a chance of distinguishing itself. It took its chance to some purpose, the position being stormed after an action lasting over eight hours in the hottest weather. The Afghan resistance was stubborn, but so well did the 1/4th fight that its Brigadier, B.-Gen.J.L. R. Gordon, presented it with the drums captured from the enemy as a memento. After this action the battalion remained on active service until the conclusion of peace with Afghanistan in September. It then returned to Quetta and was placed under orders for home in October, eventually leaving Karachi on October 30th 1919, just five years since its departure for India. Of the nineteen officers who returned with the battalion only Major A. M. Cohen and Captain R. D. Watney had held commissions in it on the outbreak of war, so greatly had the vicissitudes of the past five years altered the composition even of a battalion which had been debarred from participating in the chief operations of the war. The voyage home was soon accomplished; on November 21st the battalion landed at Plymouth, proceeding to Crowborough, and after a most cordial reception at Tonbridge on November 24th made its way

1919  
2<sup>nd</sup>  
Battalion  
1/4<sup>th</sup>  
Battalion

(1) Since August 4th, 1914, no less than 936 officers—almost a full battalion—had done duty with the 3rd Battalion; it had sent 717 officers overseas, 9 of them three times, with 14,527 other ranks, besides sending off to various wilts at home, exclusive of the Machine. Gun Corps, an additional 4,654.

to the Crystal Palace to be finally demobilized. It was two months ahead of its sister unit, the 1/5th.

1919  
1/4<sup>th</sup>  
Battalion  
1/5<sup>th</sup>  
Battalion

This battalion had been retained to form part of the garrison of Mesopotamia, being quartered in the Mosul district. It had been in large measure reconstructed, being reduced to one company of its own men, another drawn from those men of the 2nd Royal West Kent not eligible for demobilization, and a third of them of the same description from the Highland Light Infantry. It had spent over a year in the Mosul area before it was reduced to cadre and detailed to proceed home. The chief incident of this period was a punitive expedition to Amadia in Central Kurdistan. There had been a good deal of unrest in that district culminating in July in a mutiny among the Gendarmerie and the wiping out of the small post at Amadia. Two columns were despatched to restore order, to one of which, drawn from the 54th Brigade the battalion contributed several officers and men. These operations were brought to a successful conclusion in October and soon after that came orders for home. Leaving Mosul on November 27th, 1919, the cadre negotiated its journey to Basra in three stages, by motor-lorry to railhead at Shergat, by rail to Baghdad, by river to Basra, where a short delay was caused by the receipt of an order that no fighting troops were to leave the country. By December 27th, however, the embargo had been removed and the cadre reached Bombay five days later, transhipped promptly to a homeward bound troopship and reached Plymouth on January 22nd 1920. But its homecoming was sadly marred by the death from influenza of its commanding officer, Colonel Clark, who had embarked with it in October 1914, and actually succumbed after the transport reached Plymouth. The next day the cadre disembarked and that following saw it back on Kentish soil at Tonbridge, moving two days later to its own Head-

1920

January 23<sup>rd</sup>

quarters at Bromley, where disembodiment followed promptly.

1919

Long before the return of the Territorials to England the four Service battalions which had survived till the Armistice had ceased to exist. The 7th and 8th had been the first to go, both being broken up in the early summer of 1919. Before disbandment, however, both battalions had, like other Service battalions, the honour of being presented with a King's Colour. The Eighteenth Division had not been among those selected for the Army of Occupation and therefore remained in the Le Cateau area until the middle of March, mainly occupied in clearing up the battlefields. The 7th had remained at Prémont till the middle of January, then moved to Bertry, where it was reorganized in two companies, one destined for the Army of Occupation, the other for demobilization. At the end of February Y Company departed for the Rhine and from that time demobilization went forward steadily. By March 19th it had proceeded so far that the Division was formally announced to have ceased to exist and its units, which had nearly all been reduced to cadres, were shortly afterwards transferred to England. The cadre of the 7th remained till May at Clary whither it had moved on March 1st, most of its remaining officers left it to join the 6th Battalion on the Rhine, Major Kirk went home to be demobilized in March and was succeeded in command by Major Stewart of the East Surreys, by whom the 7th was brought back to England to be finally mustered out on July 17th.

7<sup>th</sup> Battalion

The 8th Battalion had moved to Tournai towards the end of December, and here its King's

8<sup>th</sup> Battalion

Colour was presented to it. The ceremony was performed on February 11th, 1919, by Lieut.-Gen. Sir Arthur Holland, commanding the First Corps. It was the last outstanding incident in the career of the 8th Royal West Kent. Not being required for the Army of the Rhine it was soon drawn upon for drafts for battalions

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in that force and the gaps made in its ranks by demobilization were not filled up. On March 5th orders were received for its reduction to cadre strength, and on the 17th a big draft, nearly 150 strong, proceeded to join the 10th Battalion on the Rhine. Other detachments proceeded later to the 10th, to which in all some 250 of 8th Battalion were transferred, and by the end of April the battalion had been brought down to cadre establishment. It was some time, however, before this cadre was finally broken up. It had left Tournai at the end of March for Lamain, on the road to Lille, where it remained for a couple of months awaiting orders for home. These finally arrived at the end of May, and on June 7th the remnant of the 8th landed at Tilbury, proceeding to Whitchurch in Shropshire, where the last stage in the disbandment of the battalion was carried out.

1919  
8<sup>th</sup> Battalion

Thus by the middle of 1919 both the 7th and 8th Battalions had passed out of existence. In their brief but crowded hour both had added many fine pages to the record of The Queen's Own. The 7th will be remembered mostly for its brilliant achievements on the Somme in 1916, for its gallant stand on the fateful March 21st, and for its series of successes in the Hundred Days that closed the war. But perhaps the page in its story to which even greater credit attaches is that which tells how the remnant that was left after March 21st fought on courageously and undismayed, played so great a part in keeping the Germans back from the very gates of Amiens and succeeded in linking up the battalion which was all but wiped out in the defence of Moy with the successors who took full and ample revenge in the Hundred Days. The 8th had the misfortune of starting with losses that might have shaken any battalion; within a month of its landing in France it had to be practically recreated. But the steadiness and tenacity which it showed in its first action, disastrously though that resulted, marked

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it all through its career. There are many things in its story on which its survivors may dwell with pride, its stout defence of Delville Wood, the gallantry, enterprise and resource of which it gave such ample proof in the Lens area in 1918. That to one of its members fell one of the two V.C.'s awarded to battalions of The Queen's Own in the war is a notable feature in its record, but if it were the practice of the British Army, as it is of the French, to award distinctions to units as well as its individuals the 8th's surprising gallantry, endurance, discipline and devotion during the "March retreat" could hardly have failed to win reward.

1919  
7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup>  
Battalions

The 6th and 10th Battalions remained in existence 6 some months longer. The 6th, after having had the honour of receiving its King's Colour from the Prince of Wales in February, had moved up to Wahn, seven miles from Cologne, and spent a not unpleasant summer in various Rhenish villages, ending up at Lohmar on the Agger, a picturesque spot in forest country, which was a popular holiday resort for the inhabitants of neighbouring industrial towns and villages. Its stay here was uneventful though it had plenty of opportunities of holding its own in friendly competitions with other units, both military and athletic. In August came its orders for home, and on the 18th it started on its last journey, reaching Ripon three days later and at once beginning demobilization. It had been preceded by one day by the 10th Battalion, which had likewise had a quite enjoyable time in the occupied territory and now found itself once more alongside the Senior Service battalion of its

6<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup>  
Battalions

Regiment. Here the two battalions remained until November, dwindling gradually as one officer after another departed either to civil life or to some new sphere of military duty, and as batch after batch of men obtained their discharge.

In November both were disbanded. Of the 6th it may be said that it will stand out in the annals of The Queen's Own as "Dawson's battalion," and that the 6<sup>th</sup>

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will be content to be so known. The first formed of the Service battalions, it had been the first to show that it was possible for these new formations on whose successful development such vital issues impended to reach standards of discipline and efficiency that had seemed unattainable when it was ordered to be raised. The way in which the new battalions acquired the spirit and traditions of The Queen's Own is a feature which it is hard to over emphasize; it was indeed remarkable how the regimental reputation not for gallantry and steadiness in the field only but for discipline and good conduct in camp and billets was maintained by all its battalions. The 6th went through many hard trials but had many triumphs. If on the Somme in 1916 it shared in none of the conspicuous successes that fell to other battalions of The Queen's Own, that was in no sense due to any defect on its part. Its 1917 record with Arras and Infantry Hill and the great success of November 20th may be the more brilliant, but it had really given as good proofs of its quality and spirit at Gun Trench and in the Hohenzollern, at Ovillers, at Pozières and at Le Sars. 1917 brought it also its most crippling disaster, but how the 6th rose superior even to that its brilliant record in 1918 both in defence and attack affords ample proof. The 10th, too, has left a fine record. It was fortunate in being raised by a man of really remarkable ability as a trainer of troops, and though it did not arrive in France until 1916 was well advanced it saw hard fighting enough to satisfy any fire-eater. It belonged to a Division which had a remarkable record of success and in those successes it had a great share, culminating in a prominent part in an episode which has somehow hardly received its due recognition, the great advance through Flanders in the last months of the war.

In the course of 1919 there had been much discussion of the question of setting up some permanent memorial of the services of the Regiment in the War and

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commemorating the officers and men, little short of 7,000 in all, who had given their lives during the war. In November a meeting of the Regimental Memorial Fund decided upon setting up at Maidstone a replica of the Cenotaph in Whitehall. Sir Edwin Lutyens, the architect of the Whitehall Cenotaph, agreed to design a replica of rather smaller size, bearing on two sides the inscription: "The glorious dead of The Queen's K Own Royal West Kent Regiment," and on the other two the dates MCMXIV and MCMXIX. A site was obtained in Brenchley Gardens and work was pushed steadily on during 1920, having been entrusted to a Maidstone firm, Messrs. Wallis & Sons. It was actually ready for unveiling in the spring of 1921, but owing to the coal strike, the mobilization of the Defence Force and other circumstances, it was not till the end of July that the ceremony of unveiling actually took place.

There was a great concourse of people present to see the unveiling, old members of the Regiment, relatives of the fallen, representatives of local authorities, clergy of all denominations, with a guard of honour of 50 men from the Depot under Captain Anstruther, and two unarmed parties, one of 100 men from the Depot, the other of 50 men of the 5th Battalion. The actual unveiling was performed by Major Gen. Sir Edmund Leach, the Colonel of the Regiment, but as he felt his strength to be unequal to the task of addressing such an assembly, Lieut. -Gen. Sir E. A. H. Alderson undertook this duty; he

1919  
6<sup>th</sup> Battalion

10<sup>th</sup>  
Battalion

1919

1920

July 1921

spoke of the memorial as a tribute to those who had fallen, of the great fame that the war had brought to the Regiment, and of the splendid example The Queen's Own had set, not only in the war, but to generations to come. Then after the Archbishop of Canterbury had blessed and dedicated the memorial came the hymn "O Valiant Hearts, who to your glory come," followed by the Last Post, the hymn "The Strife is o'er," the Reveille and a blessing

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from the Archbishop. At the close of the service wreaths were laid at the foot of the memorial by Sir Edmund Leach, by Colonels Buchanan Dunlop for the 1st Battalion, Fiennes for the Depot, and Wood-Martyn for the 10th Battalion, by Captain Mills for the 2nd Battalion and Lieut. Gould for the Old Comrades' Association, with a number in memory of individual officers and men.

July 1921

This impressive and moving ceremony was followed in the afternoon by the solemn laying up of six King's Colours belonging to Service and Territorial battalions in All Saints' Church, that of the Kent Cyclists who had given so many good drafts to different battalions being deposited along with them. This ceremony began with the parading of the colours at the Barracks from which they were carried through the streets under an escort of 50 men, the colours being carried by officers of the different battalions. Captain Baker carried that of the 2/4th, Lieut. Hill-Reid that of the 3/4th, Captain Hughes that of the 6th, Lieut. Duffield the 7th's, Major H. S. Brown the 8th's and Captain Drayson the 10ths (1) On reaching the Church the Colours were carried up to the screen while the escort lined the central aisle. A special form of service was conducted by Canon E. H. Hardcastle, in the course of which the Colours were handed over by their bearers to the Vicar and laid upon the altar. After this had been done the Archbishop of Canterbury dedicated a bronze tablet on the North wall of the nave to the memory of all ranks of the Regiment who had fallen in the War. In the address which he delivered the Archbishop spoke of the past history of Maidstone, the Kentish capital, and of its place in English history, and then went on to show that while the Cenotaph, unveiled that morning, the Colours laid upon the altar, and the tablet on the wall commemorated more particularly the part played

(1) That of the 11th had already been deposited in the Parish Church at Lewisham.

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by West Kent and its Regiment in the great World War, it and all the other local and special memorials should remind people not only of the local effort and the local sacrifice, but of the greater effort and the greater sacrifice of which it had formed a part.

July 1921

The laying up of the Colours was, as the Archbishop pointed out, as symbolical of the fact that the war was at an end as they themselves had been symbolical of the spirit of devotion, steadfastness and endurance in which the war had been fought. It forms, therefore, a natural termination to the record of The Queen's Own in that great ordeal. Before the outbreak of war The Queen's Own had had a great past and high reputation; the Army and the county of Kent knew its quality and confidently expected that in the time of trial it would acquit itself worthily of that past and would fully sustain the great traditions it had inherited. Of what The Queen's Own accomplished and endured, of the conditions—at times positively appalling—under which its men had to live and fight, of the way in which all its battalions, Regular, Territorial, Service, Local and Reserve, not only maintained but enhanced that reputation until the achievements and reputation of the Royal West Kent's became known to the whole British Empire, despite even the cold shadow of the Censorship under which

our soldiers had to fight, these pages have given but an inadequate account. Still, even the barest record of achievements so remarkable and varied must in some measure bring out the great strength and power of a great regimental tradition like that of The Queen's Own. The traditions of the Regiment for steadfast courage, for mutual trust, loyalty and discipline among all ranks, contributed much directly and far more indirectly to the great achievements of the years 1914-1918; it was largely because they had so high a standard to aim at and such traditions to maintain that the men who, with little previous military experience,

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replenished all ranks of the old and built up the new battalions succeeded in so greatly enriching the story of the Regiment during the long years of the sternest struggle in history.

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THE UNVEILING OF THE CENOTAPH AT MAIDSTONE, JULY 30th, 1921.