

CHAPTER 9 THE TERRITORIALS IN 1915

The Regular and the three senior Service battalions were not the only portions of The Queen's Own to see active service in 1915. The opportunity of representing the Regiment in action came to a Territorial battalion also. This was not, however, one of the two "pre-war" Territorial battalions which spent the year with their Headquarters at Jubbulpore and Jhansi respectively, busily employed in preparing themselves for the expected but always deferred orders for "the front," and in going through the various experiences that fall to British battalions in India. Both 4th and 5th R.W.K., 1/4th and 1/5th as they were now styled, had plenty to occupy them, but little to deserve special mention, except the adoption of the four-company organization. Both lost a certain number of men from sickness, and the 1/5th, in addition to losing Lieut. Burr from this cause, suffered a severe loss when Captain Cooper was murdered by two sepoys who ran amok at Jhansi in June and killed three British officers and an N.C.O. Both battalions, as has been mentioned, found drafts to reinforce the 2nd in Mesopotamia and suffered various changes of personnel through officers obtaining staff appointments and through N.C.O.'s and men obtaining commissions, but for both 1915 came to an end without a change of station.

1915
1/4th & 1/5th
Battalions

The Territorial unit of The Queen's Own which did see active service in 1915 had come into existence under somewhat remarkable circumstances. While several of the Territorial Divisions had proceeded overseas as complete formations, others had been not a little handicapped and disorganized by the dispatch

1915
2/4th Battalion

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of selected individual battalions or R.E. companies to France. The Welsh Division had suffered severely in this way, and when, in the spring of 1915, it was decided to bring it forward for overseas service a whole infantry brigade was needed to supplement what were left of its original units, lit was to the Home Counties Reserve Division, then quartered in the Thames and Medway Defence area, that recourse was had. Each of its three brigades, Kent, Middlesex and Surrey. was called on to provide a battalion, which the Kent Brigade formed by taking a company from each of its four battalions. Captain E. W. Dillon commanded the company which the 2/4th contributed to the new unit, with Captain Dowling as his second-in-command, and from the 2/5th came Captains Palmer and Savage. To this composite unit, known in its early days as "the Kent Battalion," the 2/4th R.W.K. in addition supplied a battalion headquarters and a machine-gun section, with a C.O. in Colonel A. T. F. Simpson, and an Adjutant in Captain Johnson. On April 25th the Kent Battalion joined the Welsh Division at Cambridge, moving to Bedford in May, while recruiting was vigorously carried on by the 2/4th and 2/5th R.W.K. to replace the men contributed to the new battalion. Then came a change in the nomenclature of the Kent Battalion. For administrative reasons it was desirable to allot it definitely to one of the two County regiments, and as the 4th R.W.K. had provided the C.O. and battalion headquarters it was to The Queen's Own that it was assigned on June 14th, 1915. Thus Colonel Simpson found himself again commanding a 2/4th R.W.K., while his old battalion of the Home Counties Reserve Division, by this time numbered as the Sixty-Seventh, was renumbered 3/4th (1) and was reconstituted as a unit for foreign service on July 1st, 1915, whereupon all those who had only undertaken or proved fit for home

1915
2/4th Battalion

April - July
1915
2/4th Battalion

(1) Colonel J. D. Laurie had succeeded Colonel Simpson in command.

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service were drafted to a Provisional battalion. The reconstitution of the 3/4th as a foreign service unit made it necessary before the end of the year to raise yet another off-shoot of the 4th Battalion, and on October 26th a 4/4th came into existence to act as the feeding unit for those on active service. Major Disney Roebuck was appointed to command this new unit, and at the same time a 3/5th R.W.K. was formed under Major Jenyns to discharge the same function for the 5th Battalion.

1915
3/4th & 4/4th
Battalions

The 2/4th R.W.K., after a couple of months of “intensive training” at Bedford, received its embarkation orders early in July, and along with them came equipment for a tropical climate so that it was clear that France was not its destination. Actually the Fifty-Third, as the Welsh Division was now numbered, the 2/4th R.W.K. being in the 160th Brigade, had been selected to reinforce the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force for the new effort to secure the Dardanelles by landing in Suvla Bay and simultaneously taking the offensive from the “Anzac” position. Its move to the Eastern Mediterranean was uneventful. Leaving Bedford on July 18th (1) it sailed two days later from Devonport on the S.S. “Northland” and reached Alexandria on the 31st, where it landed the Orderly Room Staff required for Base duties along with a “first reinforcement” provided rather paradoxically by cutting down its strength by 25 per cent, a method of robbing Peter to pay Paul that bordered on the farcical. From Alexandria the “Northland” proceeded to Mudros,

July 1915
2/4th Battalion

(1) Officers who went overseas with 2/4th R.W.K. : Lieut.-Col. A. T. F. Simpson, commanding; Major H. Smithers, second-in-command; Captain F. Johnson, Adjutant; 2nd Lieut. Bailey, M.G.O., Lieut. Ruse, Quartermaster. A Company: Captains Jude and Taunton, Lieuts. Dixon and Filmer, 2nd Lieuts. Larking and Morgan. B Company: Captains Greatorex and Lamarque, Lieuts. Keble and Wood, 2nd Lieuts. Willows and Griffin. C Company: Captains Dillon and Dowling, 2nd Lieuts. H. J. Wilson, L.E. Wilson, Woollett and Le Fleming. D Company: Captains Palmer and Savage, Lieuts. Stern and Tharp, 2nd Lieuts. J. C. Cobb and R. S. Cobb.

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where it arrived on August 8th, the day on which the originally bright prospects of the Suvla landing were finally destroyed by the inertia which seemed to paralyse the whole Ninth Corps, and by the fatal withdrawal from the all-important Anafarta Hills of the two battalions who had obtained a foothold on them. The consequences of this were made only too evident in the next day’s fighting, and when, on the evening of August 10th, the 2/4th landed at West Beach at Suvla the fate of the whole operation was practically settled. Positions which might have been had for the asking on August 8th were firmly held by the Turks in considerable force; their guns were up, surprise had vanished.

August 8th
2/4th Battalion

August 10th

Not till the third day after landing did the 2/4th reach the firing-line; it had spent the intervening time on the beach, digging in, for even the furthest beach was within range of the Turkish guns, unloading lighters and discharging other beach fatigues. It took no part, therefore, in the unsuccessful effort of the rest of the Division to storm the Turkish positions opposite Sulajik, and did not move forward till the evening of August 13th. It was then to find that instead of being in support, as it had expected, it was in the front trenches, if that name could properly be applied to the shallow little scrapes made with entrenching tools, which did duty for trenches on the 700 yards’ front assigned to the battalion. Immediately in front the ground was fairly flat but was dotted with bushes

August 13th
See sketch 13

and trees, affording ideal cover for the numerous and active Turkish snipers who made it necessary for the men to set promptly to work to improve their scanty cover. But some uncertainty prevailed as to the way in which the existing line was to be regarded; the higher authorities had apparently not yet abandoned hopes of a substantial advance and were disinclined to have the line dug and wired for permanent defence.

It was a trying experience for a raw battalion, newly landed after a three weeks' voyage and decidedly "soft"

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in consequence. Neither officers or men were accustomed to active service conditions, even to make the most of the rather indifferent rations available, and to add to the battalion's troubles Colonel Simpson was among its earliest casualties; he was wounded while going round the position on the morning of the 15th and had to be evacuated, Major Smithers replacing him in command. Gradually, however, as the battalion settled down to the new conditions, things improved. Steps were taken to deal with the snipers, the trenches were deepened and made more habitable and defensible, especially after the night of August 17/18th, when, with the guidance and assistance of a company of the 2nd South Wales Borderers from the famous Twenty-Ninth Division, an advance of 250 yards was made and a straighter line taken up and consolidated. By September 1st. when the battalion was relieved and taken back to Divisional Reserve at West Beach, not only had a satisfactory front line been constructed, but a fair second line was also in existence. The battalion had suffered somewhat severely from snipers, but though occasionally shelled had lost little from this cause, and the arrival, on August 23rd, of the "first reinforcements" left behind at Alexandria, more than balanced the casualties even when those from sickness, already fairly numerous, were included.

August 1915
2/4th Battalion

The period spent by the 2/4th R.W.K. at Suvla was one of monotonous hardships. Though shelled from time to time and constantly under rifle-fire, which varied from intermittent heavy fusillades to occasional sniping, it had no opportunity of distinguishing itself either in attack or defence, though its discipline, its cheerfulness and its powers of endurance were severely tested and not found wanting, as is clear from the reports of the authorities as to its work and conduct. Periods in the front-line trenches alternated with periods in reserve near the beach, but even in the reserve areas there was no real shelter, either from the weather or from the enemy's

Aug-Dec 1915
2/4th Battalion

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shell-fire, which was indeed more troublesome there than to the troops in the front line, who had at least the satisfaction of getting their own back in duels with the Turkish snipers, no longer as predominant as when the battalion first went into the line. In reserve, too, there was as much or more hard work; stores had to be loaded and unloaded, roads made and repaired, trenches and dug-outs kept in condition. Battalions in reserve in France usually found that a period out of the line, whether in huts or billets, did mean some degree of comfort and real rest; the troops in Gallipoli had no baths or laundries, no chances of recreation, no "leave," their rations, if plentiful, were monotonous and hard to cook for lack of fuel and appliances. Casualties in action were few, but the battalion dwindled rapidly from sickness till, when it embarked for Mudros on December 13th, it was down to a dozen officers and little over 200 other ranks, Of

Aug- Dec 1915
2/4th Battalion

the officers who went out in July less than half were present at the end of the year and these included some who had been to hospital but had returned to duty. Four officers only had been wounded, and the casualties in action among the rank and file were under a hundred. Of the four original company commanders Captain Dillon went sick in August, Captain Greatorex in November, Captain Jude in December, and only Captain Palmer remained. Major Smithers was invalided early in October and was succeeded by Major Vaughan, a Regular officer from the Devons, who retained command till after the evacuation. No drafts were received, though a party of young officers from the 3/4th R.W.K. arrived just in time for the famous blizzard of November 15th, which did havoc among the trenches, filled the hospitals with exhausted, frost-bitten and incapacitated men, and stands out in memories of Gallipoli as the summit of hardship and misery.

The Fifty-Third Division was about the first to be withdrawn from the Peninsula when evacuation was

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begun and the remnant of the 2/4th R.W.K., which during the closing days of its stay had been employed on rearward defences round Lala Baba, made but a brief stay at Mudros before embarking for Alexandria. Here the battalion arrived on December 20th, proceeding at once by train to Wardan, near Cairo, where it was to enjoy its first real rest since its arrival in the Eastern Mediterranean. Colonel Vaughan left almost at once to command the 160th Brigade, but the battalion was fortunate in getting back Colonel Simpson, who had just returned from England after recovering from his wounds, and its depleted ranks were replenished by the numerous convalescents whom it found awaiting it in Egypt. ' Fortunately, if the sick-rate had been very high the number of deaths had been low, and early in 1916 the battalion, rested, refreshed, re-organized and re-equipped, was again an effective unit, though sadly below establishment.

December 1915
2/4th Battalion

Of the Battalions of The Queen's Own who remained in England throughout 1915 the 3rd carried on with its normal duties of training recruits, finding guards and providing drafts. If its duties remained unchanged this could not be said of its composition. Colonel Sir A. Griffith-Boscawen remained in command (1) and most of the permanent staff continued with the battalion, though in November Captain Waring handed over the Adjutancy to Captain Knox. Major Allfrey left to be second-in-command of the 20th Manchesters and various other officers went off to different employments in England, but the majority of those who left went to one of the battalions on active service, mostly to the 1st and 2nd, for the duty of keeping the Service battalions up to strength was assigned more particularly to the 9th Battalion. This unit, in common with the rest of "K 4," had been converted from an active service into a draft-finding formation early in the year, a change

1915
3rd Battalion

(1) He left the battalion in April, 1916, to command a Garrison Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment, being succeeded by Major Barrow.

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especially appropriate because "K4" had originally been formed by splitting up the Special Reserve battalions when they had swollen to unmanageable proportions. But to keep the two Regular battalions up to strength involved a tremendous drain on the 3rd. By the end of the first twelve months of the year it had sent out no less than 2,450

1915
3rd Battalion

N.C.O.'s and men, the equivalent of two-and-a-half battalions, and this though as yet the 2nd had not begun to make itself felt as a draft consumer. Officers in like manner were trained and sent out with almost greater rapidity, and in the early months not a few were sent to other units which were in even worse straits for trained subalterns than The Queen's Own.

Two drafts from the 3rd Battalion, however, did not find their way to any battalion of the Regiment, being composed of rather older officers and men who, though not up to the strain of active service, were quite fit for garrison duties. One of these went out to Lemnos, the advanced base of the M.E.F., with a Garrison Battalion of the Essex Regiment, the other joined a Garrison Battalion of the Norfolks. Another and much larger draft of 7 officers and over 300 men, despatched in September by the 3rd Battalion to reinforce the 2nd in Mesopotamia, had a remarkable career. Its transport, which also carried similar drafts for the three British battalions of Townshend's Sixth Indian Division, was nearing Suez when it was suddenly diverted to Mudros, and the 1,200 officers and men on board were pitch-forked headlong in the Tenth (Irish) Division, just placed under orders for Salonica and woefully below strength, since but scanty drafts of genuine Irishmen were available. Thus Lieut. Le Cocq and his 300 found themselves forming a substantial proportion of the 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers, for which battalion they helped to gain not a little credit. Their first fighting was on December 7th – 9th 1915 on the Graeco-Bulgarian frontier near Kosturino, when the

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Tenth Division made so fine a stand against heavy odds to cover the retreat of the French troops who had pushed up the Vardar in the belated effort to succour the Servians. With the 7th Dublins this detachment did good service again in the fighting on the Struma in the autumn of 1916, and was transferred to Palestine in 1917 in time to share in Allenby's triumph at Gaza and the deliverance of Jerusalem. Some of its officers and a fair number of men ultimately proceeded with the battalion to France in the spring of 1918 and finished the war as members of the 2nd Dublins, into which the 7th had been absorbed. Still it is permissible to wonder whether the campaign in Mesopotamia was not a little adversely affected by the diversion to Salonica of a reinforcement which would have made Townshend's British battalions at Ctesiphon half as strong again. In war trifles sometimes have far-reaching results.

1915
3rd Battalion

Behind the 3rd Battalion during this period was the Depot, which continued to receive recruits and pass them on to the various battalions for training as soon as they were equipped, and to carry on all its multifarious duties. In April 1915 Colonel Maunsell, who had succeeded to the command when Major Robinson had joined the 6th Battalion, received a Staff appointment in France and proceeded overseas; his place was taken by another old officer of The Queen's Own, Colonel Dalison.

1915
The Depot

Despite the conversion of the 9th Battalion into a draft-finding unit the despatch of the 8th to France did not exhaust the "New Army" battalions which the Regiment was preparing for service. If the Southern and Eastern counties of England did not produce very many of the battalions specially raised by local committees to represent some particular town or occupation, of which the more populous industrial areas of the North and Midlands provided so many, such as the "City battalions" of the King's and the Manchesters or the Yeomen Farmers' Battalion raised in Yorkshire

1915
10th & 11th
Battalions

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for the Sixtieth Rifles, West Kent at any rate raised two such units who were to achieve high distinction.

The earliest of these came into existence in reply to a letter addressed, early in 1915, by the Army Council to Lord Harris, the Vice-Lieut. of the County. This letter requested him to appeal to the local governing bodies in the County for assistance in recruiting a brigade of artillery, the special idea governing the raising of the unit being that as far as possible definite portions should be found by different villages or towns. The County, however, did not feel able to undertake this, but suggested as an alternative that it should raise a battalion of infantry to be commanded by Colonel A. Wood Martyn, the Secretary of the Kent Territorial Association, himself an old officer of The Queen's Own. It was further suggested that as the battalion was to be raised in the Buffs' recruiting area as well as in West Kent it should be known by the title of "Kent County." Actually in the end the bulk of the recruits were raised, not by local authorities as suggested, but by Colonel Wood Martyn, speaking from his own motor car and attended by his own band, the instruments of which belonged to him personally, while the musicians came from Blackpool, none being available in Kent. Moreover, as its commander belonged to The Queen's Own the new unit was allotted to that regiment as its 10th Battalion. Colonel Wood Martyn was well backed up by other old members of the Regiment Captain C. V. Molony, for example, who had already distinguished himself with the 1st Battalion in the Ypres Salient, joined the new unit on recovering from his wounds, becoming second-in-command with the rank of Major.

Penenden Heath Camp, near Maidstone, was the scene of this battalion's earlier days, and if it took some time to reach its establishment, this was only natural, seeing how many recruits the Regimental District had already raised, and that the voluntary system was already on its last legs when the decision to raise the battalion was

taken. But excellent progress was made in its training and it showed itself inspired by a zealous determination¹ to reach the high standards of efficiency and hard work which the other battalions of The Queen's Own had set up. By the end of 1915 the 10th R.W.K., which had moved into billets at Maidstone on November 1st, had already made great headway.

About the same time as the 10th, an 11th Battalion (1) came into existence. The task of raising this unit was entrusted to the Mayor of Lewisham, Mr. R. Jackson, who, backed by a strong local committee, made rapid progress with the undertaking. Lewisham had already contributed a large number of recruits, but within a month from the start 400 men had been collected and more were coming in daily. Major H. L. Searle, from the 8th East Surreys, was transferred to the 11th R.W.K. to command. (2) Major A.J.P. Annesley, of the 9th Battalion, became second-in-command, and a notable acquisition was secured in September when Major A C Corfe of the South African Defence Force, who had already done good service under General Botha in German South West Africa, joined and took over A Company. Several old N.C.O.'s joined the new unit, notably Sergt.-Major Goulds and C.S.M. Tranter, a veteran with 18 years' service to his credit, so that even the junior battalion was well supplied with connecting links with the older branches of the Regiment. By the middle of September the battalion was within 200 of its establishment, and on November 12th the 11th R.W.K.

(1)Both the 10th and 11th Battalions belonged to the category of "local" battalions which were not on quite the same footing as other "Service battalions." A "local" battalion was raised by an individual or corporate body who undertook all responsibility for raising, housing, feeding, clothing, equipping and training the unit, appointed officers, and then after a

certain number of months produced the battalion for inspection by the War Office, which took it over if the inspection proved satisfactory, and in that case paid the bills for the expenses incurred, which till then had been the risk of the person or body responsible for raising the regiment.

(2) Colonel A. F. Townshend, formerly of the Scottish Rifles, was appointed to the command of the 11th shortly after its move to Aldershot, Colonel Searle being unfit for active service.

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was formally” taken over” by the War Office on reaching its full complement. Both the 10th and the 11th had originally been posted to the Thirty-Ninth Division but were subsequently transferred to the Forty-First, the last formed “New Army” Division, the 10th Battalion being in the 123rd Brigade, the 11th in the 122nd. Early in December their Division was concentrated at Aldershot, the 10th moving thither from Maidstone and the 11th from Catford, where it had till then been quartered, and with these two battalions entered on the last stage of their preparation for War.

Depot companies of these two battalions had been left behind at Maidstone and Catford to maintain recruiting, and out of these was formed in February 1916 yet another battalion of the Regiment. This, which was numbered the 12th, was described as a “Local Reserve” battalion. Its original commander was Colonel A. G. Jeffrey of the Wiltshire Regiment, who had with him as company commanders Major Molony, Captains Bowes-Lyon, Bracewell and Hawes, all from the 10th, while the 11th supplied him with a senior Major in Major Annesley and an Adjutant in Captain Stopford - Holland. The battalion was transferred to Northampton at the end of February, where it found itself in a brigade composed of seven similar “Local Reserve” units. Northampton was not a very satisfactory spot as regards facilities for training, but matters improved in May when the battalion moved to Bourley, near Aldershot, shifting later in the summer into barracks in Aldershot itself. Shortly after this the battalion’s designation was changed and its connection with the Regiment was officially severed on its becoming the 99th Training Reserve Battalion, the 9th R.W.K. at the same time being converted into the 22nd Training Reserve.

This change was necessitated by the difficulty of adapting the supply of reinforcements to the demands of particular regiments.

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Heavy losses simultaneously suffered by several battalions of one regiment might find its feeding units short of trained recruits, while those of another regiment were overflowing; hence the conversion of “K4” and “Local Reserve” battalions into a pool on which all regiments might draw indifferently, regardless of their territorial connections. The plan was doubtless convenient and necessary, but it had obvious drawbacks, and it was a little inconsistent with the insistence of the authorities on the necessity of maintaining a high standard of regimental patriotism and esprit de corps. A battalion like the 12th R.W.K., whose officers and N.C.O.’s had nearly all served in that regiment, many of them being old soldiers with long associations with it, lost part of its incentive when the recruits it had trained so care and had specially taught to be proud of the chance of doing credit to the old regiment went off to almost any other than The Queens Own. It did not so much matter that almost from the first recruits had come to the 12th from other counties as well as Kent; it was not difficult to make a Northern or a Midland recruit proud of The Queen’s Own, it was disheartening not to have the traditions of The Queen’s Own to set before the recruits. About a year later the 99th T.R. became a “graduated battalion” (1) and shortly afterwards found itself becoming a battalion of the Royal Sussex, a regiment and a county with which few of its members had any connection. Indeed, up till that time the “99th T.R.” had cherished its old

1915
10th & 11th
Battalions

1916
12th Battalion

1916
12th Battalion

membership of The Queen's Own, and even the recruits had liked to pretend that they belonged to The Queen's Own, and are believed to have displayed its cap badge when on leave. It was a pity that in allotting it to a definite regiment the authorities should not have taken the trouble to

(1) This meant that it received its recruits at 18½ years of age, kept them six months, was organized into six companies according to age, each company going off overseas together, and that the training could proceed on more systematic lines.

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inquire who the "99th T.R." had originally been and to have restored it to its old regiment. The officers and N.C.O.'s who had worked so hard at a task rendered difficult by its combination of hurry and monotony would have been gratified and encouraged by such a simple concession.

1916
12th Battalion

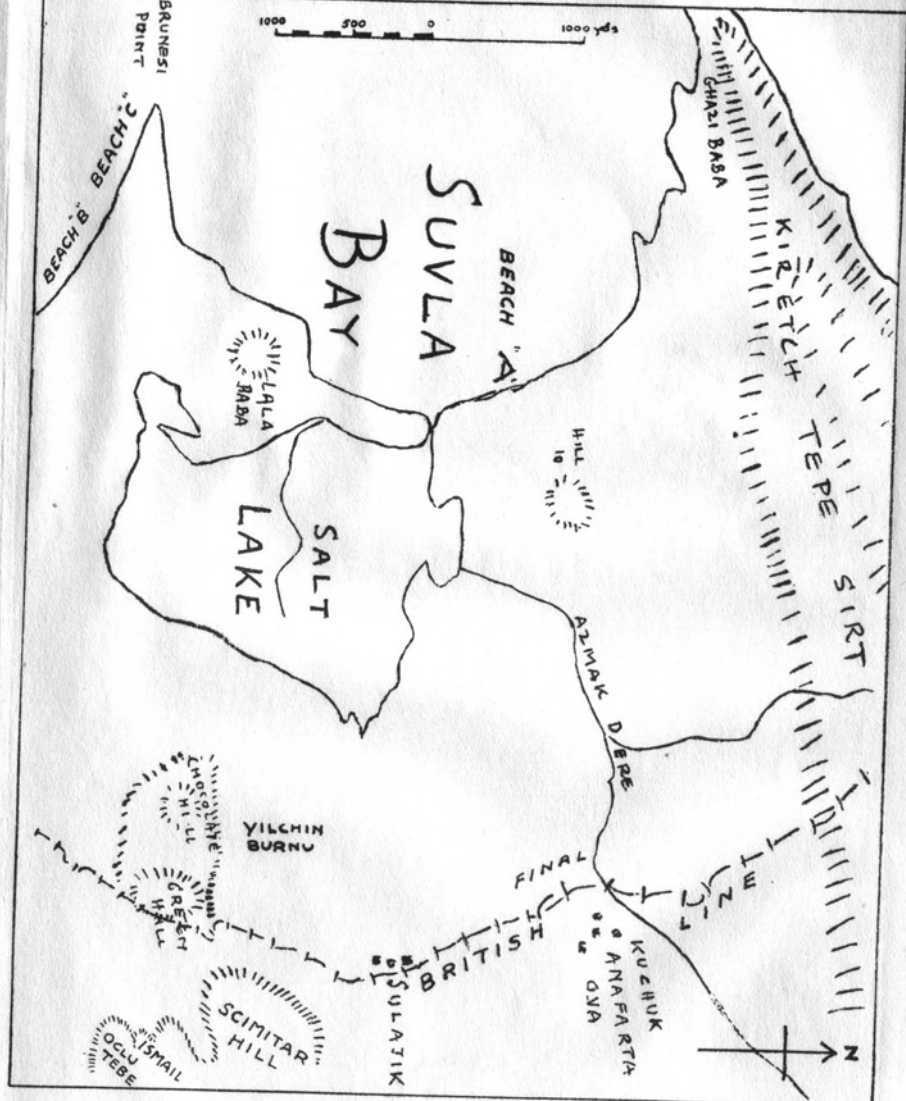
Meanwhile the Territorial battalions still at home had been pursuing the even tenor of their way. In the course of 1916 the 4/4th and 3/5th, the two draft-finding units, were combined into one battalion, known as the 4th (Reserve) Battalion and commanded at first by Lieut.-Col. Disney-Roebuck, to whom Lieut.-Col. McKergown succeeded later on. In June Colonel Simpson, on recovery from illness, took command of the 3/4th, and in September Colonel E. B. Willis resigned command of the 2/5th on transfer to T.F. Reserve. That battalion had just been depleted by finding a draft of nearly 400 N.C.O.'s and men, but it gradually filled up the vacancies. Major Savage was in command of it from September 7th to November 21st, when Lieut.-Col. C. L. Willoughby Wallace was appointed to it as commanding officer. (1)

1916
4th (Reserve)
Battalion

(1) In March, 1916, the Regiment formed yet another unit, a Home Service Garrison Battalion, which did not prove very long-lived, being transferred to the Royal Defence Corps shortly after its formation.

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SUVLA BAY
 TO ILLUSTRATE OPERATIONS OF
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SKETCH 13.