

PREFACE

The special difficulties of writing the history of a regiment of British infantry of the Line in the war of 1914-1918 can only be really appreciated by those who have ventured on the attempt. The place of the regiment in the British Army is important and peculiar; regimental traditions and sentiment, all that is covered by the phrase "esprit de corps," have played a part of incalculable importance in the history of the British Army, which is much the same as saying "the history of the British Empire"; their influence over the fortunes of the war of 1914-1918 was by no means the least of the many factors which affected its course, what they contributed towards making possible that miracle of improvisation, the "New Armies" of Great Britain, must most certainly not be overlooked. It is only natural that regiments should desire to have the history of their achievements and experiences in this great struggle put together.

Unfortunately, it is undeniable that for purposes of narration the regiment is not a convenient unit. It is not a tactical unit as the Division and the battalion are; it is only for certain purposes an administrative unit; it is not an exact unit of measurement as it is in foreign armies, for a British regiment may have had as many as forty battalions or as few as six, and these great variations in size involve corresponding variations in experiences between one regiment and another. It did not necessarily follow that because a regiment put a score of battalions into the field between 1914-1918 it was therefore represented on many fronts, or that because it had but few battalions its experiences were confined to one or two quarters. As a rule the different battalions of a regiment all served in different Divisions, except in the Territorials or in the Divisions composed of "local" Service battalions it was unusual for any two battalions of the same regiment to have gone through the same actions, much more to have fought side by side.

Normally each battalion means to the would-be regimental historian a separate set of incidents, often involving a good deal of detail of what other units were doing at its side, but as a rule each battalion's story is quite disconnected from the stories of the other battalions of the regiment. There is thus a great lack of unity and coherence about the experiences of a regiment, and the larger the number of its battalions the more varied and distinguished its achievements, the more marked the difficulty of combining them into one narrative. The battalion makes a better subject for a narrative, it is small enough to be treated in real detail, space can be found in a battalion history for the many minor incidents that bring back the conditions and the circumstances that distinguished different phases of the war, to bring out the characteristics of the many individuals who made up and influenced the battalion. That a battalion history needs to be written by someone who served in it goes without saying; it should be intimate and individual.

That an ideal regimental history would consist of a collection of separate accounts of all the different battalions, each written by someone with inside knowledge, may be admitted, but not perhaps without some qualification. So spacious a method of treatment is bound to be expensive; it must also involve a good deal of overlapping. Even though the different battalions may have all taken part in different stages of such major operations as the Somme or Third Ypres there would bound to be repetitions. Even in a battalion history some account of strategical situations and tactical conditions is needed to explain the why and wherefore of what the battalion was called on to attempt, the reasons for its success or failure, the importance of the individual episode in which it shared. The attempt to combine in one narrative the stories of the different battalions at any rate reduces considerably this overlapping and without trying to provide anything like a comprehensive story of the war ought to give a better impression of what a very distinguished regiment of the Line contributed towards the final victory of Great Britain and her Allies than the piece-meal

method of treatment can produce.

This volume, therefore, represents an attempt to put on record the part played in the war by all the battalions of The Queen's Own, whether they served overseas or were occupied with the maintenance of those actively employed. Between them these battalions served in all but one of the major theatres of war, took part in nearly fifty operations officially reckoned as "battles" in France and Flanders alone, and in nearly a dozen elsewhere, besides innumerable minor actions, had over twenty one thousand casualties, including and killed, received hundreds of distinctions and honours and earned many more. Necessarily therefore, their record has had to be severely compressed in order to keep it within anything like moderate dimensions, details that might have given life and individuality to the accounts of the different battalions have had perforce to be omitted, and extensive periods have had to cursorily summed up. The main aim of the volume has been to produce as accurate a record of the achievements and experiences of The Queen's Own as the often imperfect evidence will allow and to bring this within the compass of a volume which could be produced at a price within the means of all members of the Regiment.

It will be noticed that in the text honours and decorations have not been mentioned after the names of officers and men and that initials have only been inserted where needed to distinguish between individuals of the same name. This has been done in order to economize space, a matter of some importance, while to secure accuracy in the matter of decorations would have entailed an expenditure of time and labour quite disproportionate to its importance. Economy of space again is the justification and apology for the use of the abbreviation "R.W.K.," by which a really substantial saving has been effected. The general remarks on the situations and the references to the doings of other units have been as far as possible severely kept down, the aim being merely to mention those things which nearly affected the fortunes of The Queen's Own.

In the matter of maps and plans the main object has been to provide all the diagrams needed to elucidate the actions and movements described in the text. These diagrams are in most instances copied or adapted from plans in the War Diaries of the different battalions or of the Brigades and Divisions in which they served. A few have been taken from "Invicta" or the Queen's Own Gazette. It has been decided to have a large number of rather rough diagrams rather than the smaller number of more elaborate and detailed maps which was the other alternative, partly from considerations of price, partly because in trench warfare in particular the narrative must otherwise have been considerably enlarged.

For one who has not the honour of being a member of the great Regiment whose story he is trying to tell, who has not even had the privilege of having served with any of its battalions at any time, the task of writing its history presents special difficulties. Not to know the personal equation is a grave disadvantage, it leaves the compiler dependent on written records which he has probably often misinterpreted where he has not had the great advantage of being assisted and corrected by those more fortunately situated. At the same time, for writing a regimental history inside knowledge is perhaps rather less essential than for writing the story of a battalion; no one could have much inside knowledge of more than a minority of the battalions of a regiment, and one who is equally a stranger to them all at least approaches all from the same standpoint.

In the compilation of this account the chief source of the evidence is naturally that contained in the official War Diaries which every unit is required by Field Service Regulations to keep. When it has been admitted that the War Diaries are often inadequate, that as a foundation for a narrative history they lack much of what is most wanted, the compiler must still express a real debt of gratitude to those who kept them, often under very difficult conditions and without much idea of the purpose for which this onerous duty was imposed upon Them. Naturally War Diaries vary in value; some are good as a rule,

others are good more occasionally, of others it may be said that had they fallen into the hands of the Germans during the war they would have afforded singularly little satisfaction or profit to their captors' Intelligence Section - to that extent they also may perhaps be reckoned good.

As a rule the defect of the War Diary lies in its reticence. It was not indeed a battalion of The Queen's Own which could find no more to say about the battle of the Aisne than: "Sept. 14th. - Battle of the Aisne; hard fighting, heavy casualties, rain at night"; but one battalion - which shall remain unspecified - omitted to record the departure of a C.O. who had commanded it in the field for over a year. All with one accord fail to provide copies of the recommendations submitted on behalf of officers and men who had distinguished themselves and those who do mention the award of honours or decorations usually omit to mention the service for which the reward was conferred, or the occasion on which the incident occurred. Occasionally reference is made in the text of a Diary to a special report on some action, no copy of which is attached to the Diary. It is touching, however, to notice the confidence which those who have not kept or read Battalion Diaries place in them as repositories of information. Often officers who have been asked to supply information to fill gaps in the story have written back cheerfully: "That was the day when Pte. X did such good work with his Lewis gun, but no doubt there will be full details about him in the Battalion Diary." Still, though they have left a most tantalising amount unsaid, the battalion Diaries have provided the information which forms the backbone of this account, though, of course, efforts have been made to check and supplement their information from other sources.

To follow the fortunes of a battalion a good many sources other than its own Diaries have to be laid under contribution. In the first place Diaries of the Brigade and Division in which it served are indispensable, and in some cases those of the other battalions of the brigade have also been consulted. For access to all these Diaries the compiler's thanks are in the first place due to Brig.-Gen. J. E. Edmonds, Director of the Military Branch of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence, and to the Staff of that Section, more particularly to Mr. E. A. Dixon. Every facility has been placed in his way and the help that the Section has given has been unflinching and invaluable.

After the War Diaries comes the Q.O.G. It was no small achievement to keep the paper going throughout the war, and its Editors, Colonel Brock in particular, are to be heartily congratulated on a notable feat, which it is believed no other regimental paper equalled. It has been of the utmost value and has greatly lightened the task of the compiler of this account. The earlier numbers are naturally the more valuable, they are allowed to mention many things with a degree of preciseness and definiteness which was prohibited later on when the heavy hand of the Censorship had descended on regimental journals. Even then it continued to give casualty lists, information as to appointments, promotions honours and awards, which has been of great value in the compilation of this account. To have, for example the lists of D.S.O.'s, M.C.'s and D.C.M.'s given in the Q.O.G., often with the statement of the services for which these decorations were awarded, has saved hours that must otherwise have been devoted to the laborious task of chasing them through the London Gazette, though it must be admitted that in a good cases the information given has lacked the identifications of time and place needed before the episode could be utilised in the narrative. Many of these deeds, therefore, have had to be omitted, and some, it is to be feared, may, despite all precautions, be incorrectly identified.

Beyond the War Diaries, the Q.O.G. and the London Gazette, the main sources utilised have been the official dispatches, notably those of Sir Douglas Haig, General Montgomery's "Fourth Army in the Hundred Days," which helps to elucidate the story of the 6th and 7th Battalions, with two histories of Divisions, the Fifth and the Eighteenth, in

which battalions Of The Queen's Own served and, naturally, the two battalion histories which have been published for the 1st and 8th Battalions. Colonel Wenyon and Major H. S. Brown have produced an admirable account of the 8th Battalion, which has been of the greatest assistance. "Invicta," Major Molony's history of the 1st Battalion, unfortunately only appeared after this account had been written, it has only been possible to utilize it to make some corrections and minor additions. Reference is made in the text to the few other works utilized, to one or two articles like General Wauchope's accounts of the Qalat Shergat operations, but for the majority of "war books" - other than histories of different units - the compiler must confess to a profound distrust which had caused him to leave them severely alone.

But to all the information contained in these different sources the compiler has been fortunate enough to be able to add a great deal which has been provided by surviving officers and men. A certain amount was collected by Captain Palmer, the first secretary of the Regimental History Committee, before the book was begun, a great deal more has been supplied by those who have been kind enough to read over, criticise and amplify the chapters dealing with the events with which they themselves were familiar. To get into touch with the different battalions in this way has been of the greatest help. Where the official sources have often been information thus obtained has been specially welcome. It has frequently helped the compiler to avoid pitfalls into which he would otherwise have blundered; it has brought into relief things that did not deserve to be overlooked. Those who have helped in this way have been many, so numerous that it would hardly be possible to mention them all and invidious to make a selection of names from among them. The compiler would therefore like to thank all these helpers collectively, many of them for welcome encouragement as well as for help; he must, however, be allowed to thank Colonel Charles Bonham-Carter for all he has done to help him. Colonel Bonham-Carter has taken on himself the laborious duty of preparing and checking the appendices, he has been indefatigable in getting hold of the right people to supply information, he has been a kind as well as a helpful critic; if this volume in any way fulfils its object of providing an accurate record of the doings of The Queen's Own in the greatest of all its wars it is very largely due to Colonel Bonham-Carter's keenness, energy and encouragement. That it falls far short of doing full justice to a truly remarkable record the compiler is painfully conscious.

C. T. A.

[For permission to reproduce plans and photographs and help in doing so the Regimental History Committee is much indebted to the Author of "Invicta," and to its Publishers (Messrs. James Nisbet & Co.), to the Authors of "The History of the 8th Battalion." and to its Publishers (Messrs Hazell, Watson, & Viney), and to the Editor of the Queen's Own Gazette]