

THE HEREFORDSHIRE REGIMENT

The First World War 'Story' – August 1914

The European Stage

The intense diplomatic activity continues, but the entrenched positions of the protagonists means agreement remains unachievable, and the dominoes continue to fall towards the inevitable European war. On 28 July Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia and launches operations to invade Serbia. On 1 August Germany declares war on Russia and on 3 August Germany declares war on France.

The obligations of a complex network of European alliances are called on and for Britain the final domino fell with the invasion of neutral Belgium by Germany on 3 August.

British War Plans

British War Plans were recorded in the 'War Book' containing a detailed catalogue of actions, and associated actions and requirements to be taken to prepare the Forces (Army and Royal Navy) and to a degree industry and the general population for war.

The plans had been drawn up in anticipation of an European war, where Britain would support France and deploy a British Expeditionary Force (BEF) to the continent of 6 Infantry Divisions, 5 Mounted Brigades plus Lines of Communication troops (90,000 troops). The detailed mobilisation plan was to be in 2 parts, the first a precautionary stage prior to the physical movement of troops. Such was the expectation of war in July 1914 that the Precautionary Stage was activated on 29 July, guards were also put on some vulnerable sites.

The plan was sequential, the precautionary phase would be used for planning, then during actual mobilisation, Reservists would be recalled, units would be brought up to War Establishment (WE) of personnel and equipment, the Territorial Force (TF) would be embodied, the BEF would deploy and their role for the defence of the British Mainland taken over by the TF. This mobilisation stage, with the BEF deploying to the continent was planned to take no more than 12 days.

The Precautionary Stage was a period of staff checks, checking plans and generally making sure the mobilisation stage would work. The plan relied on identifying the resources required to support the mobilisation; this included:

- The recall of Reservists.
- Checking rail resources – the plan relied totally on rail for the rapid recall of individuals and the redeployment of units and their equipment. Only the use of railways (by all European countries) could move large numbers of troops and equipment in the timeframe required. This was complicated as in Britain there were over 120 independent railway companies.
- Checking the availability of shipping to support the continental deployment.

- Checking the availability of horses and Mechanical Transport (MT) to bring units to their WE.
- Checking the availability of war stores, weapons, ammunition, rations, forage, tentage, spares etc to support the BEF.

During this period it was recognised that a considerable number of TF units were at annual camp, and would need to be returned to their peacetime location prior to their embodiment; this put an additional strain on the rail resources. Any planned TF camps were cancelled. It was further recognised that a number of Reservists worked on the railways and their recall to the Colours could hinder the rail plan.

The Mobilisation Stage

On 4 August at 4.40pm the War Office sent the 'Mobilise' telegram to units. The 12 day countdown had started and was broken down into 3 periods:

- Days 1-4: Concentrate/ prepare in peacetime location
: TF embodied – move to war station
- Days 5-8: Deploy
: TF takes over from Regular Army for Defence of UK.
- Days 9-12: Shake out and deploy in theatre

The War Book plan now kicked in:

Regular Reservists were recalled. Reservists received one day musketry training per year and held in their documents a rail warrant to travel to their Regimental Depot. At the Depot they would receive a medical examination, complete documentation, be issued with a rifle and other kit, ideally they would have the opportunity to 'zero' their rifles before being formed into drafts to travel (by rail) to the required unit. Over 145,000 Reservists were recalled, over 93% had reported by the end of August, only 560 failed to report without a valid reason. 462 deserters/absentees returned to their units and were granted an amnesty and returned to the ranks. Some units would only reach their WE with the addition of between 25 and 30% of Reservists. Given this reliance on Reservists there was concern about their fitness, some had been out of the Army for 7 years, yet they were expected to receive new equipment – which could be unfamiliar to them, receive new boots – which would need to be broken in, and be an efficient and effective part of an operational unit, possibly involved in battle within 12 days. There was some justification to these concerns and many Reservists would suffer during the retreat from Mons, but morale and efficiency in all units was reported to be high.



Herefordshire Reservists report for duty at The Drill Hall, New Street, Ledbury.

Railways & Shipping. On the 3 August the railways were brought under control of the Government. Over 5 days 1,800 trains arrived at Southampton – the principle port of embarkation, 70 trains a day were leaving Waterloo station. Trains were arriving from all over the country. The planning worked with many trains arriving at Southampton early! Up to 31 August Southampton handled in excess of 118,000 personnel, 37,000 horses, 5,000 vehicles and 4,500 tons of baggage. An average of 13 ships a day were being loaded and sailing, (all before the advent of roll on/roll off ferries!). In addition to Southampton: MT and petrol left from Avonmouth, spares and supplies from Newhaven and MT and frozen meat from Liverpool.

Horses & MT The Regular Army's WE of horses was some 55,000 compared to the Peace Establishment (PE) of 19,000. Again a detailed plan was implemented taking up horses from stock, and mobilising 'earmarked' horses for which the peacetime 'owner' received an allowance knowing that on mobilisation the animal would be 'taken over' by the Army; many still had to be requisitioned. The number of vehicles required also increased and again there was a 'boarding out' scheme with vehicles being taken over, and some even deploying to France in their civilian livery. These numbers did not account for the WE of the TF.

Other Equipment The quantities of stores and equipment to be acquired, to feed the growing number of forces and to build up reserves were massive, and there was frenetic activity on the part of provisioners and quartermasters. Advance parties were also sent to France to put into place the necessary support arrangement there.

The plans ran like clockwork the BEF was deployed, in good order by 20 August, slightly outside the 12 days, but the sceptics, based on the BOER War deployments has estimated it would take at least 2 months.

The Territorial Force

The TF had been formed in 1908, its specific function was the defence of the British Homeland once the Regular Army had deployed. As such there was no general obligation to serve overseas, but elements of each unit committed themselves to do so; these volunteers were known as Imperial Service Soldiers and wore a badge on their right breast.

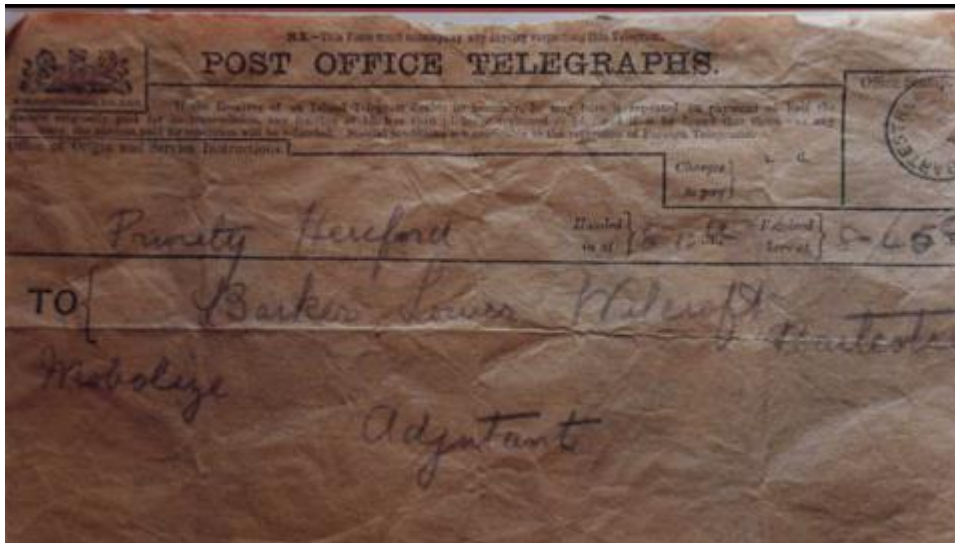


Members of the Herefordshire Regiment wearing the Imperial Service Badge.

The soldiers of The Herefordshire Regiment knew there was a strong likelihood of them being mobilised; as many did throughout the country they looked upon it as a great opportunity scarcely thinking about the danger, merely that they were going off with their pals on a grand adventure.

The order to mobilise the TF was issued from Whitehall in the late afternoon of 4 August. It was not received by the Regiment until some time later. The Commanding Officer (Lt Col Gilbert-Harris), the

second in command (Maj Wood-Roe) and the Adjutant (Capt Legg) set about the administration to mobilise the Battalion. Officers were sent a telegram:



The telegram sent to Capt Barker with just one word 'Mobilize'.

Other ranks were sent an Embodiment Notice (AFE 6365)

No. _____ Army Form E. 635.

Territorial Force.

EMBODIMENT.

NOTICE TO JOIN.

No., Rank and Name } 7 Pte E. Perks

1st Herefordshire Regt. Regt. or Corps.

Whereas the Army Council, in pursuance of His Majesty's Proclamation, have directed that the 1st Herefordshire Regt.

_____ be embodied on the _____

day of 5 AUG. 1914

You are hereby required to attend at BARRACKS

not later than 6-30 o'clock that day. Should you not present yourself as ordered you will be liable to be proceeded against.

4 AUG. 1914 W. Wood-Roe Adjutant.
1st Herefordshire Regt.

Date _____

The Embodiment Notice sent to No 7 Pte E Perks

Throughout the county members of the Battalion assembled at their local Drill Halls, ready to move to Hereford to form up with the rest of the Battalion. In every location the crowds turned out to see them off and wish them well. At Ledbury the band of the 1st City of Westminster Boy Scouts, who were camping at Bosbury played the company, led by Capt Holman from the Drill Hall in New Street to the station.

The scene was recorded by WH Tilley:





The European War. Mobilization & departure of the Territorials from Ledbury, Aug. 5th, 1914.



The European War. Mobilization & departure of the Territorials from Ledbury, Aug. 5th, 1914.

The local Boy Scout troop also played the volunteers at Knighton to the station:



On assembly in Hereford the Battalion entrained and moved to their war station at Pembroke Dock.

The Battalion was about 650 strong against an establishment of over 800; more recruits were needed. Capt Carver had been appointed Adjutant of the Depot – which remained in Hereford, and the Commanding Officer had tasked him to try and find recruits; to quote from the Regimental history:

After seeing the Battalion off, Carver returned to the Drill Hall at about 9.00pm. Not a soul was about other than John Bethell, the caretaker. Half an hour later there was a loud hammering at the door, going to investigate, Carver found more splendid youngsters outside, all clamouring to enlist. There was nothing in the Drill Hall – no forms, not even pen and ink – but after a hectic rush round these were obtained. With the help of a couple of men, who had been clerks, nominal rolls were made out; by midnight all had been enlisted.

This is the way it would be for the coming weeks' hundreds of men eager to enlist turned up at Drill Halls throughout the County; there was no administrative or logistic support and only a few experienced soldiers in their numbers to assist in the organisation and training, in some cases after being enlisted they were sent home to wait to be called back.

Reg Griffiths, the station master's son from Old Radnor, recalled cycling, with some of his pals to Hereford to enlist; they pawned their bicycles had a good feed and then signed up – Reg remembered having his name and address taken then being told to go home and wait for the call. They were unable to redeem their bikes and Reg remembered the long walk home!

Reg later served and was wounded at Gallipoli; he also served in The Imperial Camel Corps, and the Royal Flying Corps.

He was for many years secretary of the Herefordshire Old Comrades (1914-19) Association.



The Battalion spent several days in Pembroke Dock, before moving to the East of England, as part of 158 (Welsh Border) Brigade part of 53 (Welsh) Division. The Battalion settled down to 'regular' Army life, with kit checks, route marches and training.

Lord Kitchener called for all Territorials to take the Imperial Service obligation and the Battalion, almost to a man took up the obligation. The men were given medical examinations and a number of men were found unfit or unsuitable (generally due to being too old!) for overseas service and were returned to the Depot at Hereford.

This greatly eased Capt Carver's burden in organising and training the new volunteers, but further depleted the numbers of trained men available in the Battalion.

At about this time Lt Col Gilbet-Harris stood down as Commanding Officer, and Lt Col G Drage was appointed in his stead. Lt Col Drage was a recently retired regular Royal Marines officer.

The rest of August was a whirlwind of training and generally getting used to Army life for the Battalion, and in the Depot one of administering and organising recruits ready to launch them at full pace into Army training and their preparations for whatever the war would bring to them.