

THE HEREFORDSHIRE REGIMENT

Their First World War 'Story' – October 1914

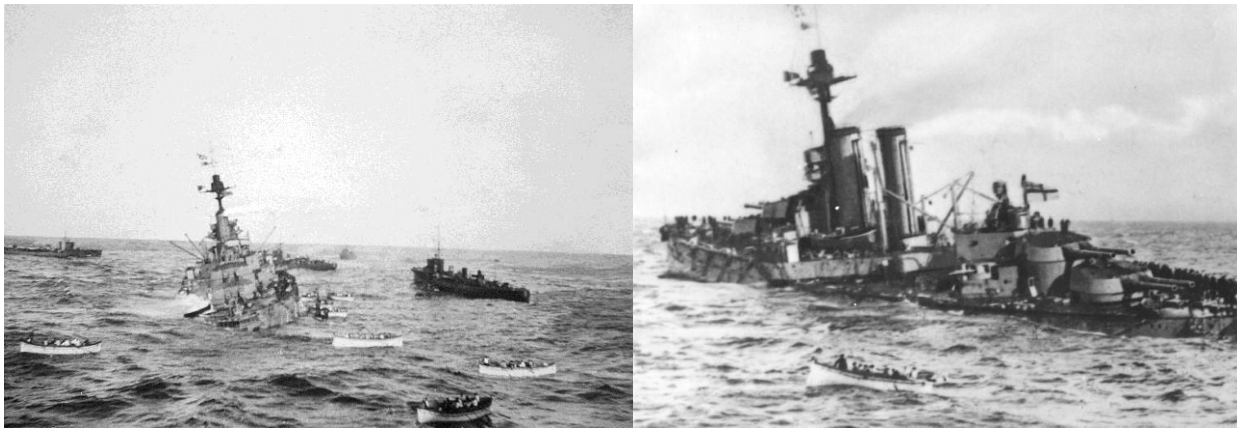
The 'Bigger' Picture

The Western Front The 2 sides continue to jockey with each other for position and local ground advantage. The opposing armies were digging in and would hold, more or less the same trench line for the next 4 years. This included establishing positions about Ypres (known as the First Battle of Ypres), a town which was to gain an infamous reputation amongst the British Army.

British Troops were also sent to assist in the defence of Antwerp; the 63rd (Royal Navy) Division comprised of 2 RN Bdes and 1 RM Bde¹. This Division had been formed from RN Reservists for who there was no sea berth available; they were generally unprepared for land warfare. They arrived too late to be of any significant value, nearly 700 were taken POWs and 1500 escaped to and were interned in neutral Holland for the duration of the war.

Other Fronts Throughout the world colonies and outposts of the British and German empires were positioning against each other, relying greatly on local/native troops, the colonial powers were vying for strategic position, routes and natural resources. Encounters took place in East and West Africa.

At sea German U Boats were active, both military and civilian (32 ships at 92,000 tons) being sunk; Germans mines were being laid in the North Sea.



HMS Audacious sunk by a German mine off Donegal coast on 27th;
all crew members were rescued.

The first troop ships left Canada and Newfoundland bound for England and the first contingent of the Indian Expeditionary Force sailed for East Africa.

In East Europe again the jockeying for position and ground continued about Galicia, Serbia and Warsaw and on 29th Turkey commenced hostilities against Russia.

¹ 1st RN Bde - Benbow, Collingwood, Hawke and Drake Battalions; 2nd RN Bde - Howe, Hood, Anson and Nelson Battalions; RM Bde - Chatham, Portsmouth and Plymouth.

The 'Herefords'

The Depot at Hereford continued to function. It received a constant flow of soldiers from the 1st Battalion who were unsuitable for overseas service, mainly through age or fitness; some of these men were easily employed drilling and administering the new recruits which continued to enlist. In the month over 400 young men enlisted.

Recruits often failed the more rigorous enlistment and medical demands and over 40 were discharged in October including 2554 Pte William Henry Morgan who had enlisted on 3 October and was discharged on the 13 October aged 46 years and 291 days as 'no longer fit for military service'.²

Sgts Bethell and Colley, both 'old' soldiers, but with a wealth of experience and ability in organising the recruits and introducing them to military ways provided much support!



Sgt John Colley



CSgt John Bethell and Boy Barber – Battalion's oldest and youngest soldiers!
(probably taken in the 1920s)

1st Battalion

The Battalion was billeted in Irchester and Rushden area in Northamptonshire; numbers had been reduced by those returned to Hereford about October saw the first draft of several hundred reinforcements from the 2nd Battalion to the 1st. The 2nd Battalion was on parade and volunteers asked for, for the 1st Battalion; almost to a man everyone volunteered! Officers from the 1st Battalion were at the parade and walked up and down the ranks, inspecting individuals, quizzing them and then making selections for the reinforcing draft.

² - The 1911 census shows a William Henry Morgan, born in Hereford in 1868 as living in Bank View, Malvern with his wife and one servant; he was employed as a 'poor law rate collector'. This *could be* the same man.

It was at this time that the members of the 1st Battalion were 'miffed' that the 2nd Battalion was wearing the same shoulder title as the 1st; there was nothing to distinguish the 2 and acknowledge the fact that the 1st were the senior and the original volunteers. The order was given for the 1st's soldiers to file down the 'T' on their shoulder titles to make a '1'. The filing down was left to individuals and there are several styles of '1'.



Original 'T' shoulder title



'Filed-down' shoulder title

There were no barracks available and soldiers were billeted in barns, factories and private houses. The billeting officer would chalk on the wall outside a house – the regiment, sub unit and number of soldiers to be accommodated. Often a street would see a complete platoon or company billeted in it, and strong bonds were established. Householders often had their sons away in the Army and treated those billeted with them as they would wish their sons to be.







2nd Battalion

The 2nd Battalion remained in Aberystwyth throughout October. The Battalion was engaged in preparing the large number of recruits for military service; this involved issuing and familiarising everyone with uniforms and equipment, an introduction to military life, terms and traditions and on top of this fitness and military training. Route marches were routine – often involving an overnight stay in a barn or farm buildings. Individuals were also introduced to basic tactics and military skills – musketry, bayonet work and skirmishing. Whilst this was a busy and demanding time, the younger volunteers thrived on the camaraderie, activity and ‘thrill’ at being part of the ‘adventure’.

Below is an anonymous extract from a contemporary personal account; if it is not from a Herefordshire man then the same would have been true for the Herefords.

On the Fourth of August in 1914, like many thousand other civilians, I tried to join up. I went to the nearest recruiting station in my local town, but was promptly rejected on account of varicose veins. This was the first set-back, and I had visions of being marked "C.3" and having to peel potatoes, or do some such wearisome job, "for the duration," in a Canteen. In order not to be outdone I retired to a Nursing Home to have the defect in my anatomy put right.

But it was not until October that I was allowed, on medical advice, to try again. By that time many of my friends had already joined up. By a stroke of luck I became a subaltern in the 2nd Battalion of my County Territorial Regiment, and my War-service began.

This Battalion was composed mostly of country folk—and a very sporting lot too. My duties for the first few weeks consisted chiefly of inspecting billets, cook-houses, men's kit, and so forth—rather a contrast to what one had expected, but it was all in the day's work towards getting to the Front. Having donned khaki I felt every inch a soldier and quite expected, of

course, to be going out to fight Germans in a few days. However, this was not to be. Some of us knew nothing about soldiering, and no doubt the higher authorities thought we should be of more use at the Front when we had learnt a thing or two. Needless to say the training was tedious and one realised that a complete khaki rig-out was not the only thing necessary to make a complete soldier.

In the early days, on Parade, subalterns marched meekly behind their Companies, feeling very proud when passing admiring crowds of onlookers. When time permitted the Regimental Sergeant Major, usually an " old salt " from the Regulars, gave subalterns private drill instruction in some secluded corner, so that the wily Tommy might not learn of their inefficiency!