

THE PROVISION AND MANAGEMENT OF CASUALTY
REPLACEMENTS FOR BRITISH INFANTRY UNITS ON
THE WESTERN FRONT DURING THE FIRST WORLD
WAR

by

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Abstract

Casualties during the First World War were far higher than had been anticipated in pre-war planning. They required rapid replacement in order to maintain operational effectiveness.

This Thesis considers the provision and management of British Other Rank replacements for Infantry battalions on the Western Front. The initial influx of volunteers meant a much larger Army, which in turn required an increased number of draft-finding units and changes to reinforcement procedures for its maintenance. It has previously been assumed that these changes, together with the introduction of conscription, destroyed the previous cohesion of regiments.

A chronological approach is used in order to trace the evolution of changes. Although predominantly pitched at the management level, implicit in this examination are the effects of political decisions together with the impact on battalions of changes in the drafting and reinforcement process. Amongst the conclusions reached are that there is little or no evidence that the Government actively withheld reinforcements. Analysis of details of soldiers of selected Infantry battalions from the English/Welsh Marches also indicates that, despite the growing scarcity of men, drafts continued to be provided to a large extent from Western Command even at the end of the war.

Dedication

To my long-suffering husband, Nigel, in grateful thanks for his love and support.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following formats have been used in referring to Regiments/Battalions: eg First Battalion The Cheshire Regiment is shown as 1st Cheshire, with its soldiers referred to as Cheshires.

A Branch	Administrative Branch dealing with personnel matters
ACI	Army Council Instruction (January 1916 onwards)
AF	Army Form
AG	Adjutant General
A&Q	Combined Administrative and Logistics branch at a Headquarters
AO	Army Order
AOC	Army Ordnance Corps
APC	Army Pay Corps
ARO	Army Routine Order
ASC	Army Service Corps
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
Bde	Brigade
BOH	British Official History
CAB	Cabinet
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CinC	Commander in Chief
CO	Commanding Officer
Col	Colonel
CRA	Cheshire Regimental Archives
CRAO	Chester Records and Archive Office
DAG	Deputy Adjutant General
DAAG	Deputy Assistant Adjutant General
Div	Division
DGMS	Director General of Medical Services
DGNS	Director General of National Service
DMO	Director of Military Operations
DOW	Died of Wounds
DPS	Director of Personal Services
DRLS	Despatch Rider Letter Service
FM	Field Marshal
FSR	Field Service Regulations
Gen	General
GHQ	General Headquarters
GS	General Staff
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GOC-in-C	General Officer Commanding-in-Chief
Grad	Graduated (as in Graduated Battalion)
GRO	General Routine Order
HD	Home Defence
HE	Home Forces
HLRO	House of Lords Record Office

HMSO	His Majesty's Stationery Office
HS	Home Service
IBD	Infantry Base Depot
IGC	Inspector General of Communications
IS	Imperial Service
ISO	Imperial Service Obligation
IWM	Imperial War Museum
KIA	Killed in Action
KR	King's Regulations for the Army
KSLI	King's Shropshire Light Infantry
LofC	Lines of Communication
LHCMA	Liddle Hart Collection of Military Archives
Lt Col	Lieutenant Colonel
Lt Gen	Lieutenant General
Maj Gen	Major General
MG	Machine Gun
MML	Manual of Military Law
MNS	Ministry of National Service
MT	Motor Transport
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
nd	not dated
N&MP	Naval & Military Press
OC	Officer Commanding
OH	Official History
OR	Other Rank
PB	Permanent Base
PU	Permanently Unfit
Q Branch	Logistics staff
QMG	Quartermaster General
RA	Royal Artillery
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RE	Royal Engineers
RFA	Royal Field Artillery
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
RGA	Royal Garrison Artillery
RHA	Royal Horse Artillery
RMO	Regimental Medical Officer
RO	Routine Order
RWF	Royal Welsh Fusiliers (reverted to Welch in 1920)
SAA	Small Arms Ammunition
SC	Staff Captain
SME	Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire
SMLE	Short Magazine Lee Enfield
SR	Special Reserve
SWB	South Wales Borderers
TB	Temporary Base
TF	Territorial Force

TNA	The National Archives
TR	Training Reserve
TRB	Training Reserve Battalion
TR Bde	Training Reserve Brigade
Vol.	Volunteer and Volume
WAAC	Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (later Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps)
WO	War Office
WOI	War Office Instruction (up to the end of 1915)
YS	Young Soldier

Introduction

During the First World War almost 5,000,000 individuals enlisted in the British Army. Of these, over 700,000 British soldiers died, more than 170,000 were reported as prisoners of war and the number of wounds received by soldiers totalled nearly 1,663,000. The gaps caused by these casualties needed to be filled by replacements as quickly as possible if units were to continue to function effectively.

Pre-war plans for the expansion and renewal of the British Army had been created, albeit not on such a scale as would be needed.¹ Similarly, pre-war plans for the replacement of losses had been developed but would need adaptation and refinement from virtually the start of the war. This latter aspect of manpower management during the First World War has received very little attention. Those who have written on manpower have tended to concentrate on political aspects or on constituent parts of the Regular Army, Territorial Force (TF) and the New Armies.² Huge casualty figures have been identified and losses mourned but nothing has been examined about how they were replaced and to what extent their arrival changed the composition of the units they joined. This thesis seeks to address that gap through examination of the management of non-officer reinforcements for British Infantry units during the First World War.

¹ See Edward Spiers, *Haldane: An Army Reformer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1980), K.W. Mitchinson, *Defending Albion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) and Ian F.W. Beckett, *The Amateur Military Tradition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991).

² Keith Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Beckett, *Amateur Military Tradition*; Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's Army* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985); Ian F.W. Beckett and Keith Simpson, eds., *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); Jon Cooksey, *Barnsley Pals* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2008); Michael Stedman, *Manchester Pals: 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd and 23rd Battalions, Manchester Regiment: A History of the Manchester Brigades* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 1998).

In the past many writers have concentrated solely on the frontline operational experience of formations and units, with manpower issues mentioned only as an aside. More recently work has started on organization, infrastructure and command and control within the BEF but there remains little on the reserve and drafting system, training of replacements and the social and geographical composition of units.³ The lack of such research has enabled misperceptions to persist. For example, it continues to be suggested that the 2,504,183 who enlisted after January 1916 were all conscripts.⁴ Numerically this is incorrect since the appointed date for the introduction of conscription was 2 March 1916 (a difference of 164,594) but, more importantly, to the end of the war it remained possible for boys and men to volunteer before they were actually called up. Another prevailing misperception is that there was deliberate intent, fostered by the often-quoted comment of Captain Dunn RAMC in *The War the Infantry Knew*, to ‘destroy the Regiment, the immemorial foundation of Armies, and nationalize the Army’.⁵ It has also been suggested that after July 1916 there was a deliberate policy change to draw casualty reinforcements from a common pool rather than their parent regiments, partly to lessen the concentrated impact of battle losses on particular communities. The evidence contained in the relevant Army Council Instructions indicates otherwise. Such prevailing misapprehensions and the lack of research into this area indicate that there are questions to be addressed.

Some previous writers have concentrated on the political aspects of military manpower. Keith Grieves, in *The Politics of Manpower*, gives a comprehensive and useful analysis but many of

³ Peter Simkins, *From the Somme to Victory* (Barnsley: Praetorian Press, 2014), p. 11.

⁴ For example: Richard Holmes, *Tommy* (London: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 89 and David Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 256. Enlistment figures are given in War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War* (London: War Office, 1922; Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 1999), p. 364.

⁵ J.C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew* (1938; London: Abacus, 1994), p. 245.

his sources are from within the Ministry of Munitions, and therefore opposed to unrestricted manpower for the Army. He also makes extensive use of Lloyd George's memoirs, which are inevitably somewhat biased. The War Office perspective, which is, of course, equally biased towards the Army's requirements is visible in the memoirs of Sir William Robertson and General Sir Nevil Macready.⁶ Below the political level, Army manpower aspects are touched upon in such works as Charles Messenger's *Call to Arms* and Richard Holmes's *Tommy*, but these are broad-brush works covering a variety of topics, which do not touch on manpower in sufficient depth to give a clear picture.⁷

In searching for works about soldiers in the First World War, it is easier to find books about volunteers than about conscripts. The first books about the New Armies were published during the war itself: Ian Hay's *The First Hundred Thousand* and Basil Williams's *Raising and Training the New Armies*.⁸ These were followed during the 1920s and 1930s by many personal memoirs. Those of Sir William Robertson, together with Charles Carrington's *A Subaltern's War*, written under the pen-name Charles Edmonds, and Frank Richards's *Old Soldiers Never Die* are examples of the range, but inevitably far more accounts were written at that time by officers than by former soldiers.⁹ More recently, soldiers' diaries have come to light, such as Geoffrey Husband's, edited by John Bourne and Bob Bushaway and published as *Joffrey's War*, and Harry Drinkwater's *Harry's War*, edited by Jon Cooksey and David Griffiths.¹⁰ The advent of e-publishing on the internet has also enabled transcripts of diaries, such as George Culpitt's,

⁶ Sir William Robertson, *From Private to Field Marshal* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1921) and General Sir Nevil Macready, *Annals of an Active Life Vol. 1* (London: Hutchinson, n.d.).

⁷ C. Messenger, *Call to Arms* (London: Cassell, 2005) and R. Holmes, *Tommy* (London: HarperCollins, 2004).

⁸ I. Hay, *The First Hundred Thousand* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1916) and B. Williams, *Raising and Training the New Armies* (London: Constable, 1918).

⁹ C. Edmonds, *A Subaltern's War* (London: Peter Davies, 1929) and Frank Richards, *Old Soldiers Never Die* (London: Faber & Faber, 1933).

¹⁰ J. Bourne & R. Bushaway (eds), *Joffrey's War* (Nottingham: Salient Books, 2011) and J. Cooksey & D. Griffiths (eds), *Harry's War* (London: Ebury Press, 2013).

to reach a wider audience.¹¹ From the perspective of this thesis, however, the difficulty with the various personal accounts is that, whilst they may provide snatches of evidence concerning reinforcements, they rarely if ever (Robertson excepted) consider manning issues from a management level.

Although a proportion of replacements would undoubtedly have been provided by conscripts from mid-1916 onwards there has been far less written by and about these men. As Gordon Corrigan noted, in *Mud, Blood and Poppycock*, in later years old soldiers did not advertise the fact that they had been conscripted. Similarly, Ian Beckett commented that relatively few soldiers who wrote memoirs or left diaries or letters admitted to the stigma of conscription.¹² Of those accounts that are known to have been definitely written by conscripts, Frederick Voigt's makes no mention of his conscript status while that of Alfred Hale reads almost like a spoof document, so different is it from the usual accounts of life in training units.¹³ An apparent start on researching this group of soldiers was made by Ilana Bet-El, but her views are based on the false premises that all those who enlisted after January 1916 were conscripts, and thus by definition unwilling soldiers, who, on being called up, became pawns in an inflexible bureaucratic process.¹⁴ One of the individuals she cites in support of these views is Private W.D. Tonkyn. In reality, Tonkyn was a civil servant who, early in 1917, applied to his government department for permission to volunteer. He was able to move his medical examination to a more convenient location than the one initially offered, and was accepted to

¹¹ www.culpitt-war-diary.org.uk/index.htm.

¹² G. Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock* (London: Cassell, 2003) and I. F.W. Beckett, 'The Real Unknown Army: British Conscripts 1915-19', *Great War*, 2 (November 1989).

¹³ F. Voigt, *Combed Out*, (London: Swarthmore Press, 1920) and P. Fussell (ed), *The Ordeal of Alfred M Hale, The Memoirs of a Soldier Servant* (London: Leo Cooper, 1975).

¹⁴ I. Bet-El, *Conscripts, Forgotten Men of the Great War* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999).

join the unit of his choice, the Civil Service Rifles.¹⁵ The lack of any detailed research into the men recruited in the second half of the war means that there is a gap that has not yet been satisfactorily filled.

There is also a relationship between casualty figures and operational aspects that has not been fully explored. Throughout the war, GHQ withdrew divisions that had suffered particularly heavy losses from the line in order that they might recuperate and be refilled. Paddy Griffith commented, in *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, on the ensuing amount of movement within corps caused by this, and the consequent effect on the continuity of relationships formed by and within divisions. The adverse effect of this lack of continuity of command amongst British corps was also noted by Gary Sheffield and echoed by Andy Simpson in *Directing Operations: Corps Command on the Western Front 1914-18*.¹⁶ The inference drawn was that the more permanent structure of the Dominion Corps was preferable and should perhaps have been adopted by the British Expeditionary Force.

What this view ignores, however, is the reason why divisions were moved around: the need for time and space to enable them to be returned to full strength. This could be achieved more quickly for some divisions than others and was dependent on the availability of replacements. Some divisions could be reinforced close to the front and re-join the line, such as the 39th Division which took part in three battles during 3rd Ypres, whilst others such as the 38th (Welsh) Division, which suffered 2,922 casualties between 31 July – 3 August 1917, had of necessity

¹⁵ IWM: Con Shelf: Letters and Diary of Private W.D. Tonkyn.

¹⁶ P. Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), Gary Sheffield, 'The Indispensable Factor: British Troops in 1918', in Peter Dennis & Jeffrey Grey, eds., *1918: Defining Victory* (Canberra: Department of Defense, 1999), pp. 72-95 and A. Simpson, *Directing Operations: Corps Command on the Western Front 1914-18* (Stroud: Spellmount, 2006).

to be withdrawn after just one action. It would not attack again until July 1918. In discussing 38th (Welsh) Division's subsequent success during the Hundred Days, Gary Sheffield suggests that the time spent on trench-holding duties indicates that 38th Division was not regarded by GHQ as an elite formation.¹⁷ Perhaps not, but for GHQ there was also the difficulty of finding replacements for a Welsh Division. This is another area which merits further examination.

There is a definite gap in the historiography on how manpower was managed within the Army during the First World War, on how the different types of soldier were assimilated and the effect on the composition of units of the frequent influx of replacements. It is commonplace to read that battalions increasingly lost their links with their traditional recruiting areas as the war progressed. This view has been challenged by Helen McCartney, who argues the case strongly for continuing homogeneity within units.¹⁸ Her conclusions were based on very detailed research but concentrated only on Liverpool Territorial units. There remains scope for research into a wider selection of units in order to test the conflicting arguments – and to what extent they might or might not remain valid for the later years of the war.

The subject of manpower management is vast and it has been necessary to limit the approach of this thesis. It does not seek to examine political aspects in great depth, but it has been necessary to touch on the background to political decisions in order to trace their impact on the provision of Army manpower and their effect on the organizations and formations of the BEF. It is pitched predominantly at the management level but draws on the experiences the individual soldier where these add flesh to the analysis. It has also been limited to the Infantry as the area

¹⁷ Gary Sheffield, 'Finest hour? British forces on the Western Front in 1918: An overview', in Ashley Ekins, ed., *1918 Year of Victory* (Auckland: Exisle, 2010).

¹⁸ Helen McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

most closely in contact with the enemy and hence suffering the greatest losses. It examines how replacements were obtained, trained and assimilated, their effect on the character and composition of the units they joined and to what extent the men of 1918 might have differed from those of earlier years of the war. In looking at unit cohesion it considers whether there was any visible impact on operational effectiveness. Different frameworks were considered but a thematic approach was discarded in favour of a chronological one concentrating on the Infantry on the Western Front as this would show any developments and effects most clearly.

In moving from the general to the specific, in order to analyse the impact of policy changes together with the impact on units of high casualties followed by an influx of reinforcements, it was decided to concentrate on four Infantry Regiments drawn from an area not previously studied in depth during the First World War, namely the English/Welsh Marches. Although the experiences of various battalions are considered, one Regular, one Territorial Force and one New Army battalion from each of the four Infantry Regiments have been chosen for specific analysis into their composition as the war progressed. The Regular battalions chosen are the 1st battalions of the Cheshire, King's Shropshire Light Infantry (KSLI) and the South Wales Borderers (SWB) Regiments, and the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers (RWF); these battalions were all serving with the Home Army in August 1914.¹⁹ Fewer Territorial Force (TF) battalions served on the Western Front initially as many were sent overseas to relieve Regular Line battalions. Of those that did serve in France and Flanders, 1/6th Cheshire and 1/4th RWF have been chosen, together with 1/4th KSLI and 1/1st Herefordshire, which arrived in

¹⁹ This spelling was the official one during the First World War, although Welch was the version used unofficially by both the RWF and the Welsh Regiment. It was not until 1 January 1921 that the use of Welch was officially authorised.

France in 1917 and 1918 respectively. For the New Army, 9th Cheshire, 6th KSLI, 5th SWB and 9th RWF have been chosen.

Although general works have provided pointers, it has been necessary to use original sources to a large extent, cross-referencing with others where necessary. Extensive use has been made of the *Official Histories* and original documents have been consulted at The National Archives (TNA), including War Office and Formation correspondence, War Diaries, Army Council Instructions (ACI) and Army Orders (AO). It has been difficult to find some documents and the contents of war diaries are not always accurate due to the circumstances under which they were often written. Regimental histories have also been used; although many of these have been drawn from the unit war diaries there are also other inclusions which provide amplification. Personal memoirs, papers and diaries, both published and unpublished, have been consulted, including those at the Imperial War Museum, but it was decided not to use oral history recordings made later in veterans' lives on the grounds that memories can unwittingly become false after too long a period of time.²⁰

Extensive use has been made of *Soldiers Died in the Great War* (SDGW) and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) website in order to analyse the composition of units.²¹ Both these sources contain errors but overall there is sufficient information to enable broad conclusions to be drawn. Given that the death-toll during the Great War was roughly 20 per cent of those who served in the British Army, the details contained in these two sources represent a sample of that size. The evidence of the composition of units is also backed up by

²⁰ Dan Todman, *The Great War, Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon & London, 2005), pp. 187-8.

²¹ *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914 -19* (London: War Office, 1921; Uckfield: Naval & Military Press CD Rom, 2011) and www.cwgc.org.

the use of unit War Diaries, which normally state the arrival of drafts and occasionally where they have come from. Using the information thus obtained, together with the Regimental Numbers of the soldiers concerned, it has been possible to at least a certain extent to plot the dates of their joining a particular Regiment. This has been backed up by examination of individual Service Records, where they exist, and Medal Rolls using www.ancestry.com.

The thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter One provides a brief background covering pre-war manpower planning, the different types of units then existing and the composition of the Reserves, and then considers the events of 1914. Chapter Two examines developments in 1915, both at home and on the Western Front, up to the introduction of the Derby Scheme, whilst Chapters Three, Four and Five cover the years 1916, 1917 and 1918 respectively. The effects of political decisions, such as the introduction of conscription, are examined, as are the development of the Training Reserve, the reorganisation of formations and the creation of new corps and units. Each chapter contains analysis of the composition of the selected units during July – November of the years concerned. The evidence from the preceding chapters is then drawn together in the Conclusion.

Chapter 1

Planning, Preparation and First Contact

The British Army that mobilized in 1914 was the product of reforms and reorganizations initiated less than a decade earlier; the Army's performance during the Second South African War had shown that there was an urgent need to review the structures necessary for it to fulfil its role. Consequently, much detailed work into its future shape and requirements was carried out between 1905 and 1908 by both the War Office and the Government. What was put in place then, with some further refinements in the intervening years, would form the basic structure of the Army for 1914.

The General Staff in the War office had considered potential scenarios in which the Army might be deployed in future, together with the size of force necessary for each one. The outcome of their analysis was circulated in January 1906. Five scenarios had been identified: a Boer uprising in South Africa; war against the United States, Russia or France respectively; and war in alliance with France against Germany.¹ Of these scenarios, war against France seemed improbable, war with Russia or the United States, or a further Boer rebellion could be possible but the most likely conflict was deemed to be war against Germany, which appeared not only possible but an eventuality to be seriously considered.

¹ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (LHCMA): Robertson Papers, 1/2/6: Director of Military Operations (DMO) Major General J.M. Grierson, 'Memorandum upon the military forces required for over-sea warfare', dated 4 January 1906.

Each scenario was analyzed in detail, identifying potential force levels on each side together with various external factors that might come into play, and detailed estimates produced of the number of troops likely to be required over a possible time frame. Distance meant that war against the United States would require the greatest number of troops but war against Germany was considered more likely and would require the next greatest force level. It was concluded that for planning purposes the standard level of requirement should be the estimated force level necessary to conduct a war with Germany, namely 75 Infantry divisions plus Cavalry, Artillery, Engineer and other supporting units.² It also decided that during the first six months of any Continental War permanently organized Regular units would be needed to confront opposing Regular troops, whilst troops that might be called upon later could feasibly exist as cadres during peacetime. Thus the idea was already developing of formed Regular units being maintained at home to form an Expeditionary Force in case of war, with a second line ‘fit for active service abroad after six months embodiment or training’, and behind that a ‘third line army to be ready, say, 12 months after the commencement of war’.³

In December 1905 the new Liberal Government appointed Richard Burdon Haldane as Secretary of State for War. He had also been giving thought to the future size and role of the Army and in January 1906 submitted a Memorandum to the Army Council on ‘a highly

² *Ibid*: ‘The Regular field troops to be maintained as units at home for the purpose of over-sea warfare should, therefore, be:

18 Cavalry regiments
10 batteries Horse Artillery
63 batteries Field Artillery
9 batteries heavy Artillery
3 batteries Mountain Artillery
Cadre of a Siege Train
75 battalions of Infantry

besides Engineers, Ammunition Columns and Departmental Services in due proportion.’

³ Grierson, ‘Memorandum upon the military forces required for over-sea warfare’.

organised and well-equipped striking force that could rapidly be transported to any part of the world where it might be required'.⁴ Haldane's proposals would, however, be constrained by demands for financial economies and the need to reduce the annual Army Estimates to below £28 million. Whilst any future Army needed to be highly mobile, 'it ought to be on a strictly limited scale, and perfect rather in quality than in expanded quantity'.⁵

The General Staff had also considered how the Army should be maintained in the event of war, studying lessons learned from recent campaigns particularly the Russo Japanese War of 1904-5. In April 1906 a study entitled 'Wastage in War' identified that during the first year of any future conflict a further 80 per cent of the original Expeditionary Force would be required to replace Infantry casualties from all causes. Drafts amounting to 10 to 20 per cent of the Expeditionary Force should be available in theatre within six weeks of the commencement of the war, with subsequent drafts following each month. Those drafts required in the first six months should be mobilized with, or immediately after, the Expeditionary Force and consist of men already fully trained and ready for active service. After the first six months, men who had been only partially trained on the outbreak of war, together with a proportion of men invalided and since recovered during those months, would be fit to proceed to the front.⁶ This important study would inform the subsequent plans for the provision of reinforcements that would be in place at the start of the First World War.

⁴ R.B. Haldane, 'A Preliminary Memorandum on the present Situation. Being a rough note for consideration by Members of the Army Council' National Library of Scotland (NLS) Haldane Papers 5918, cited in P. Simkins, *Kitchener's Army* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p.6.

⁵ Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 1906, CLIII, cols 663-76 cited in *ibid* p.6.

⁶ TNA: WO 32/8813 General Staff Study 'Wastage in War' (April 1906).

Haldane's key proposal was for the creation of an expeditionary force immediately available for war service overseas with behind it a territorial organization 'capable of supporting and expanding it'.⁷ To create this home-based expeditionary force, the Infantry would be re-structured by withdrawing or disbanding some of its overseas units leaving a balance of seventy-four paired battalions, one of each pair being home-based and the other overseas. An Expeditionary Force of 150,000 men could be created from the home-based Regular units, formed into six 'great' infantry divisions of 18,000 – 20,000 men and four cavalry brigades, with artillery and supporting arms. In support would be a new Territorial Force (TF), consisting of fourteen infantry divisions and fourteen mounted (Yeomanry) brigades, which would be formed from the existing Militia, Yeomanry and Volunteers and its administration decentralized into County Associations under the leadership of Lords Lieutenant.

Serious opposition was initially encountered from within the Militia, Yeomanry and Volunteers who saw their traditions and independence being eroded by the proposed subservience to County Associations. The Militia in particular, firmly entrenched within its local areas and wielding significant influence in Parliament, posed the greatest threat to the scheme. The difficulty was ultimately resolved by a suggestion from the new DMO, Major General Spencer Ewart, that the Militia Depots should become seventy-four reserve battalion cadres, which on mobilisation could become draft-producing battalions for the Regular Army. This was agreed and the Militias effectively became the future Special Reserve (SR) battalions.

There still remained questions over the proposed use of the new TF. By the time Haldane's proposals finally went before Parliament, he had been forced into a compromise. Instead of

⁷ TNA: CAB 3/1/38A 'Notes on the organization and administration of the military forces of the United Kingdom', 18 June 1906, p.2.

becoming the future source of reinforcements for the Expeditionary Force, the new TF would be limited to home defence. The County Associations would be responsible for recruiting and organizing their TF formations and units in peace and war and responsibility would pass to the War Office only those units were called out for training or for actual military service. In March 1907, when presenting the Territorial and Reserve Forces Bill to Parliament, Haldane was careful to emphasise that it would exercise direct control over the calling out of the new TF and to reaffirm its primary purpose as home defence. It was a compromise but one that would enable the Act to be passed, with an effective date of 1 April 1908.

Haldane's reforms created an Expeditionary Force and rationalised the organisation of the auxiliary forces, integrating them more closely with the Regular formations. The draft-finding system was improved but by limiting the TF to a Home Defence role the Army was deprived of the planned second line support for active service abroad. After the First World War, Haldane would claim that his reforms had been underpinned by a single strategic concept, namely the possibility of sending an army to France in the event of a German invasion. Few military advisers shared that view since a force of 150,000 was always going to be too small to intervene effectively against the conscript armies of the Continent. As Spiers concludes:

The size of the Force did not relate to a strategy, Continental or otherwise; it simply reflected the exigencies of peacetime, particularly the restrictions imposed by a financial ceiling of £28 million, the draft-producing requirements of the home army, and the political opposition to conscription.⁸

⁸ Hew Strachan, 'The Continental Commitment, 1904-14', in D. French & B. Holden Reid (eds), *The British General Staff* (London: Cass, 2002), p. 76; E.M. Spiers, *Haldane – An Army Reformer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1980), pp. 192-3.

The BEF was simply the largest formation that could be made out of the units left at home after the demands of Imperial policy had been met.⁹ It was still a very small force, albeit almost twice as large as the entire Army today.

The necessary legislation had been passed, however, and re-organization proceeded apace from 1908 onwards. The new Army structure would contain three components: the Regular Army, the Special Reserve and the Territorial Force.

The Regular Army

The Regular Army was little changed other than the Infantry, which now consisted of seventy-four paired battalions, one serving at home and the other overseas. In 1908 the 1st Battalions of both the Cheshire Regiment and the King's Shropshire Light Infantry (KSLI) were based in Ireland, whilst both 2nd Battalions were serving in India; 1st South Wales Borderers (SWB) was in Hampshire whilst 2nd SWB was in China; and 1st Royal Welsh Fusiliers (RWF) was in Malta with its second battalion in Dorset.

The traditional recruiting areas for Infantry Regiments remained as laid down in the nineteenth century reforms initiated by Cardwell and Childers, which had created designated areas where Regiments would recruit and have their Depots.¹⁰ These 'Regimental Areas' were numbered with the old Regimental numbers: for example, No 53, which covered Shropshire, Herefordshire and Radnorshire, remained the recruiting area for Regular soldiers of the 53rd Regiment of Foot, now the King's Shropshire Light Infantry (KSLI).¹¹ The Regimental Areas

⁹ J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War* (London: Arnold, 1989, 1994), p. 13.

¹⁰ TNA: WO 123/23 General Order (GO) 41/1881 of 1 May 1881 amended by GO 70/1881 of 1 July 1881.

¹¹ Regimental Area No 22 (**Cheshire Regt**): Cheshire; Regimental Area No 23 (**Royal Welsh Fusiliers**): Denbighshire, Flintshire, Carnarvonshire, Anglesey, Merioneth and Montgomeryshire; Regimental Area No 24

were themselves grouped into Military Districts. No 4 Military District, based on Shrewsbury, covered Cheshire, Shropshire, Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, the whole of Wales and that part of South Lancashire where the South Lancashire Regiment was recruited. Together with No 3 Military District, (Cumberland, Westmorland, Lancashire (except part of South Lancashire) and the Isle of Man) it formed Western Command. This Command thus covered a huge, geographically diverse area from the Scottish Borders southwards through the industrialised areas of south Lancashire, to Cheshire and the rural counties of Shropshire and Herefordshire; westwards it included the whole of Wales.

The home-based battalions would form the new Expeditionary Force of 150,000. The plan looked good on paper but their strengths were seldom up to their effective war establishment: not only were they perennially under-recruited but they also contained recruits undergoing training before being sent to the overseas based battalion, plus men ineligible for service overseas because they were either under the age of 19 or medically unfit for active service. The units that would form the Expeditionary Force were weakened in order to keep the overseas battalions fully manned.

Recruiting was easier in some locations than others but the individual regimental numbers of soldiers in different battalions indicate that, prior to August 1914, an average of about 200 recruits joined up annually.¹² The under-recruited home-based Regular battalion was thus reliant on being augmented by men from the Reserves. In 1870 the then Secretary of State for

(**South Wales Borderers**): Brecknockshire, Cardiganshire, Monmouthshire, Montgomeryshire; Regimental Area No 40 (**South Lancashire Regiment**): South Lancashire; Regimental Area No 41 (**Welsh Regiment**): Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Glamorganshire; Regimental Area No 53 (**King's Shropshire Light Infantry**): covering Shropshire, Herefordshire and Radnorshire.

¹² It is possible to identify when particular cohorts joined up by using a combination of *Soldiers Died in the Great War (SDGW)* and Service Records. The 1911 census also shows some 200 recruits in training at Chester Castle.

War, Edward Cardwell, had introduced short service engagements in the Army followed by reserve service. A man could, if he did not want a full career of 21 years, serve a period with the battalion and then a further period on the Reserve to make up a total of 12 years. The Reserve consisted of three main sections: A, B and D. Sections A and B consisted of men completing the Reserve term of their original engagement; those serving in Section A had undertaken a higher liability for call-out in an emergency which did not call for general mobilisation. Those in Section D were men who on completion of their twelve years Colour and Reserve service had re-engaged in the Reserve for a further four years. Army Reservists were liable to be called out for twelve days annual training and on mobilization were liable to serve as long as their services were required up to the expiry of their term of service in the reserve. Provision also existed under the Army Act for an addition of twelve months or more service if a state of war existed or in times of imminent national danger or great emergency. Reservists would expect, on mobilization, to return to the unit to which they had formerly belonged; under Section 83 of the Army Act consent was required before a man could be appointed or transferred to an arm or branch of the service other than that in which he had previously served.¹³

Prior to 1908 the length of time spent on the Reserve was changed frequently and confusingly. In May 1902 the ratio between colour and reserve service of seven and five years respectively had been changed to three and nine years, in order to attract more recruits.¹⁴ This did not prove successful and in November 1904, as a result of a growing manpower crisis, the ratio of service was reversed to nine and three years. Then, in September 1906, the ratio reverted to the original

¹³ On enlistment a soldier was appointed to a Regiment or Corps and was bound to serve in any part of it; he would usually spend the whole of his military life in one part or other of that Regiment.

¹⁴ TNA: WO 123/44 Army Orders (AO) 73 and 117 of 1902.

seven and five years respectively.¹⁵ There was a potentially serious effect arising out of the rapid changes in length of service commitments: both the 1905-6 and the 1907-8 enlistments would be due to transfer to the Reserve in 1914. They could be retained for a further 12 months in time of war but this was a problem that would need addressing in 1915.

The 1906 Reserve Forces Act also introduced a significant change. In future, a soldier enlisting after the implementation of that Act could, if called out whilst subsequently serving in the Army Reserve, be appointed to any regiment or corps and could also be transferred within three months to any other regiment or corps. This was a major change and a break with decades of tradition and accepted practice. It is early evidence not only of recognition of the need for greater flexibility in times of crisis but also, and more unexpectedly, of a previously unheard of readiness to sacrifice regimental loyalty. For some reason, the Notice paper signed and given to recruits on enlistment was not amended to show the new liability until 7 July 1908 so the change could not apply to those enlisted before that date.¹⁶ It would thus remain hidden for the next few years since none of the post-1908 enlistments would become eligible for transfer to the Reserve until 1915 at the earliest.

Special Reserve

The second, draft-finding, line of the new structure was the Special Reserve (SR), created out of the old Militia. It consisted of men with no previous military experience who signed on for six years. They accepted the same liability for service abroad in the event of general mobilization as did men of the Army Reserve, namely completion of the unexpired portion of

¹⁵ TNA: WO 123/46 AO 209 of 1906.

¹⁶ Sir H. Jenkyns, 'Constitution of the Military Forces of the Crown', in *Manual of Military Law 1914* (London: War Office, 1914), pp. 202 & 744.

their term of service plus a further period not exceeding 12 months if so directed by the competent Military Authority. On enlistment they received six months full time basic training and thereafter three to four weeks training annually. Re-engagement for a further four years was permitted but there was an age limit of forty. On enlistment, the man could elect to serve in either Section A which contained those willing to accept a higher liability for call out for up to 12 months in any part of the world when war was imminent or in progress or Section B which consisted of all the rest, who were equally liable to serve in any part of the world but could only be called out by Proclamation in case of imminent national danger or of great emergency.¹⁷

In order to provide drafts for the Regular battalions, and in the event of war to train recruits and forward drafts to keep the battalions up to strength, the SR was organized on a scale of one SR battalion to two Regular battalions within each regiment of the line. It was usually designated simply as the 3rd (SR) Battalion. In those Regiments with four Regular Battalions, such as the Worcesters, the new SR battalions became the 5th and 6th (SR) Battalions. Although draft-finding for an Expeditionary Force would be their primary role, the SR battalions were also an integral part of the plans for home defence.¹⁸ The 3rd (SR) Battalion of the Cheshire Regiment would form part of the Mersey Garrison, defending the ports of Liverpool and Birkenhead, whilst the 3rd KSLI, formed out of the 3rd (Shropshire) Militia and the 4th (Royal Herefordshire) Militia, would on mobilization move to its War Station at Pembroke Dock.

¹⁷ *Manual of Military Law*, p. 202.

¹⁸ *Manual of Military Law*, pp. 202 – 5, and K.W. Mitchinson, ‘The Special Reserve’, *Stand To!* 70 (April 2004), pp. 5-9.

Territorial Force

The third component of Haldane's new structure was the TF, created out of the earlier Volunteer and Yeomanry units. The four TF Battalions of the Cheshire Regiment were created from volunteer battalions: the 1st Volunteer Battalion became the 4th Battalion TF, the 2nd and 3rd Volunteer Battalions combined to form the 5th (Earl of Chester's) Battalion TF, the 4th Volunteer Battalion became the 6th Battalion TF and the 5th Battalion became the 7th Battalion TF. The transformation was not achieved without some bitterness: the *Macclesfield Courier and Herald* reported the farewell order issued by the Commanding Officer of the 5th Volunteer Battalion on Tuesday 31 March 1908:

After an existence of nearly 50 years, the 5th Volunteer Battalion Cheshire Regiment will tomorrow be merged in a new battalion known as the 7th Battalion Cheshire Regiment. I trust that those who served so long in the 5th will not be prevented by [new conditions of service] from continuing their service for another two years at least, to give the new battalion a fair start, and to show the country that England still has some men willing to protect her shores even at the cost of a little personal inconvenience.¹⁹

After the reorganisation, the TF consisted of fourteen infantry divisions and fourteen mounted (yeomanry) brigades. It was recognized, however, that in the event of war it would take six months for the TF to become fully trained. Moreover, in manpower terms, it lacked flexibility. Under the 1907 Territorial and Reserve Forces Act a recruit could select the particular TF unit in which he wished to serve and could not subsequently be transferred without his consent; furthermore, although recruits could agree to 'subject themselves to the liability – (a) To serve in any place outside the United Kingdom ...', they could not be compelled to do.²⁰ The role of the TF was thus very definitely restricted to home defence and its men protected from being

¹⁹ Extract from *Macclesfield Courier and Herald*, Saturday, 4 April 1908 (Cheshire Regiment Archives).

²⁰ *Manual of Military Law 1914*, p. 763: Territorial & Reserve Forces Act 1907 s. 13.

forced to serve in a different unit or abroad against their wishes. This meant that unless the legislation was changed, the TF could not be used to reinforce a BEF serving abroad.

Development of Strategy

Consideration was needed on how the new structures could be used in the event of war. In 1908 the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) considered the possibility of invasion, concluding that, in the event of the BEF being sent abroad, at least two Regular divisions should remain behind for Home defence until the TF was ready.²¹ In the event of war with Germany it was suggested that an Expeditionary Force of four Infantry Divisions and one Cavalry Division should be sent to operate on the left flank of the French Army.

By 1911, increasing tensions with Germany were giving growing cause for concern. In the aftermath of the Agadir crisis of July, on 23 August the CID discussed the possibility of giving armed support to France in the event of a German assault.²² Major General Henry Wilson, the Director of Military Operations (DMO), confirmed that the earlier plan to send the BEF to the left flank of the French Army remained extant and had been worked out in minute detail. Although no formal conclusions were reached as a result of this meeting, the Naval Assistant Secretary to the Committee, Maurice Hankey, privately considered that from then on there was no doubt as to 'the Grand Strategy in the event of our being drawn into a continental war in support of France'.²³ It remains debatable, however, whether this 'Grand Strategy' could be said to have become national policy after 1911. Hew Strachan argues that had this been so, the army would immediately have been restructured in order to provide a large European-sized

²¹ Lord Hankey, *The Supreme Command 1914-1918* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961), pp. 66-68.

²² TNA: CAB 2/2 Minutes of the Committee of Imperial Defence 114th Meeting, 23 August 1911.

²³ Hankey, *The Supreme Command 1914-1918*, p. 82.

army.²⁴ There was no impetus to do this, however, as there was neither the political nor the military will to create the size of army that would be required. The CID and the General Staff continued to believe that the appearance of six British Divisions on their left flank would be of immense moral value to the French and thus sufficient.²⁵ They saw no need to plan for the provision of more troops on European lines as this would have meant conscription.

Conscription had been debated for some years but had few supporters. The National Service League, created in 1902 to call for conscription in peacetime for the purpose of home defence, continued to lobby for its introduction and between 1909 and 1912 League membership tripled to almost 100,000. There was little significant political support, however. Apart from Governmental concern that conscription might precipitate the very conflict with Germany that they were trying to avoid, both the nation and the Liberal party were opposed on principle to compulsion. The Liberals were also averse to the expense it would incur, which would curtail many schemes for social reform.²⁶ Nor was there any support from the Conservatives. Electorally it would have been a disaster; conscription was not a vote-winner and thus not an option at that time.

If conscription was not to be considered, increasing anxieties over German intentions meant that existing structures needed to be viable. Concern remained over the size and viability of the TF in the event of the Expeditionary Force being mobilised and sent abroad. In 1908 the TF had been set ambitious recruiting targets of just over 312,000 men. Although initially growing rapidly, with numbers in the region of 144,600 in June 1908, 183,000 in July 1908 and 270,000

²⁴ Strachan, 'The Continental Commitment 1904-14', pp. 78 & 91.

²⁵ TNA: CAB 2/2 CID 114th Meeting, 23 August 1911, p. 5.

²⁶ Hankey, *Supreme Command 1914-1918*, p. 137.

in October 1909, it never achieved its target. A pre-war high water mark of about 276,096 was reached in October 1910, from which it steadily declined until it numbered 268,777 officers and men in July 1914.²⁷ Attention had been diverted from home defence and the TF had suffered delays in the provision of ranges and drill halls and consequently had been criticised for poor training and musketry. In 1910 a third of the force failed the musketry requirement of firing 23 rounds. Attendance at the annual training camp was poor: in 1912 only 155,000 men had camped for a full 15 days and 6,000 had not turned up at all.²⁸ The fundamental problem, however, was the TF's lack of liability for overseas service. Haldane had always rather optimistically hoped that after embodiment on the outbreak of war and six months subsequent training, the TF units would be ready to say 'We wish to go abroad and take our part in the theatre of war'.²⁹ A more formal footing was obviously required and in 1910 members of the TF were invited to accept liability for overseas service in the event of mobilization by signing the Imperial Service (IS) obligation.. This did not meet with a resounding response and by September 1913 only 7.7 per cent of its 245,779 members had committed themselves. By July 1914, although TF membership had risen to 268,777, the number of those who had committed themselves would fall to 18,683 officers and men, just under 7 per cent of the whole.³⁰

Preparations and Planning

Although no further plans had been made for expanding the Army in the event of war, other contingency planning had continued. The outcomes relating to manning would include such

²⁷ Simkins, *Kitchener's Army*, pp. 17-18.

²⁸ I.F.W. Beckett, *The Amateur Military Tradition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 222.

²⁹ Spiers, *Haldane*, p. 109, quoting Parliamentary Debates, Fourth Ser., vol.169 (25 February 1907) cols. 1,286-301.

³⁰ I.F.W. Beckett, 'The Territorial Force', in I.F.W. Beckett & K. Simpson (eds), *A Nation in Arms* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985; 2004), pp. 129-30 and *Statistics of the Military Effort* p.30.

publications as *War Establishments (Expeditionary Force)*, *Field Service Regulations*, covering both operational and administrative matters, and detailed *Mobilization Regulations*.

In 1909 two volumes of *Field Service Regulations* (FSR) were produced by the War Office. The second volume, FSR Part 2 Organization and Administration (FSR Part 2), included procedures for the maintenance of manpower levels in the field.³¹ The Department responsible for all matters concerning personnel, including manning, casualties and invaliding, was that of the Adjutant General (AG) in the War Office, who ranked second in the Army hierarchy below the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS). These responsibilities were cascaded from the AG down the chain of command to Divisional level. In the field, the work of the AG's branches would cover the whole range of personnel matters including: the organization of new units; drafts to replace casualties; discipline; medical and sanitary matters, including the removal and care of the wounded; and later the registration of graves.³² The replacement of casualties and the maintenance of appropriate levels of manning, in accordance with the procedures laid down in FSR Part 2, would thus fall to the AG staffs of the operational theatre concerned.

The number of reinforcements required was based for planning purposes on a 1906 analysis on 'Wastage in War'. The War Establishments (Expeditionary Force) laid down the numbers of personnel to proceed overseas for each unit, which included an element known as 'First Reinforcements': 10 per cent of the rank and file of the unit plus one officer if the number was over 40. On the unit's arrival overseas these First Reinforcements were to be left at the appropriate Base Depot ready to replace the first casualties as required. Subsequent

³¹ FSR Part 2 *Organisation and Administration 1909*, published by HMSO for the General Staff, War Office, 1909. NB Minor amendments were made to this document in October 1914.

³² General Sir Nevil Macready, *Annals of An Active Life Vol 1* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1925?), p. 200.

reinforcements would be sent out from UK, if possible in anticipation of the requirements of the CinC, as notified by the Deputy Adjutant General (DAG) in charge of the AG's office at the Base. Within six weeks of the outbreak of war, further drafts amounting to 10 – 20% of the army in the field were to be available in the Base Depots of the overseas theatre. Subsequent drafts were to follow each month, with an additional increase about the sixth month; they were to arrive at the Base before, and not after, the losses occurred.³³

The Base Depots to which the drafts were to be sent were holding camps located within easy reach of the ports of entry to the theatre. They were to be organized according to the War Establishments manual and would come under command of the Inspector General of Communications (IGC), the officer in charge of the Lines of Communication (LoC). This organisation would be responsible for sending forward all items required from the Base, including reinforcements, and for the evacuation of anything, including casualties that needed to return in the opposite direction.

The replacement of manpower depended on accurate and timely notification of the numbers of losses incurred. FSR Part 2 made a very clear distinction between management information regarding the fighting strength of units or formations, which had to be received by commanders as quickly as possible, and the accurate details necessary for the notification of casualties to relatives and the public.³⁴ In order to obtain replacements for casualties, units were required to forward sufficient information as quickly as possible to the AG branch at divisional headquarters. Small losses of personnel, due to normal wastage such as sickness, were to be

³³ FSR Part 2, pp. 56 – 58.

³⁴ *Ibid.* Part 2 Section 133, pp. 167-8 Casualty reports were to be notified to the AG's office at the Base as soon as they occurred. After verification and confirmation, the names of all officers and men who had been reported as dead, wounded or missing would be telegraphed to the government concerned with the least possible delay.

notified by unit commanders through divisional headquarters directly to the IGC, copied to AG's office at the Base. These small losses were to be replaced by the IGC at the earliest opportunity. When heavy casualties occurred the IGC would receive instructions from AG's Branch at General Headquarters (GHQ) as to the priority and extent to which, units were to be completed. The orders and timetables for each move were then to be issued by the IGC's organization to the commanders of the base depot concerned, who was then responsible for warning the necessary personnel, ensuring that they were ready to move at the time ordered and sent to the front fully clothed, armed and equipped.³⁵ In hindsight, the planned information flow, being split between AG at GHQ and the IGC at the Base, was bound to cause problems. Until the system was put to the test, however, the full extent of these was unappreciated.

As has already been mentioned, units of the Home Army were perennially under-strength and also contained men who were unready for whatever reason to be sent overseas immediately. In order to reach its War Establishment, which for an Infantry Battalion in 1914 was 30 officers and 977 men, a unit would need to be brought up to strength by trained soldiers of the Reserve.³⁶ Under the Mobilization Regulations, the Officer In Charge (OiC) of the Records Office in each Military District was responsible for planning the allocation of the personnel under his control 'to the best advantage, with due regard to the efficiency, not only of the regular units and depots affiliated to his record office, but also of the reserve units, including any to be formed on mobilization'.³⁷ In Western Command, there were two Infantry Record Offices, Preston (No 3 District) and Shrewsbury (No 4 District), for the Regiments whose Regimental Areas came

³⁵ *Ibid* pp. 54 & 58 – 59.

³⁶ The Peace Establishment of a unit was the number of officers, W.Os, N.C.Os., men, animals, guns and vehicles provided for it annually in Army Estimates; the War Establishment was the number in each category required for war. The 1914 edition of War Establishments (Expeditionary Force) laid down the numbers of personnel to proceed overseas.

³⁷ Regulations for Mobilization 1914, p.18.

within these Districts. Notices for regular and special reservists and the TF to mobilize, together with addressed envelopes, were prepared, kept up to date and held by the Record Offices and the Officers Commanding SR and TF units. On Mobilization, the letters would be sent out ordering Reservists and TF soldiers to report to their units.

Detailed plans, including mobilisation timings and embarkation arrangements, for the BEF to join the left flank of the French Army had been in place since 1911. Plans for the handling of reinforcements had also been drawn up, based on the instructions in FSR Part 2. On arrival in France, each Infantry Division would set up a Base Depot at Le Havre to handle reinforcements for its units whilst six General Base Depots at Harfleur would handle reinforcements for the supporting arms.³⁸ Large Rest Camps were also to be established at the ports of entry to receive troops on arrival and then despatch them to the appropriate Base Depots.

A sub-branch of AG's office at GHQ, known as the 3rd Echelon, would also be located at the Base, where it would be responsible for the huge amount of personnel administration arising from any army in the field: management of personal records so that casualties could be quickly and accurately traced and reported to the War Office; taking on strength reinforcements, both officers and men, and keeping track of their despatch to the front; and recording and promulgating AG's decisions in order to ensure the existence of an identical system on routine personnel matters throughout the BEF. It would be commanded by a Deputy AG (DAG), and initially consist of about 200 officers and clerks. As yet, there could be no inkling that as the BEF expanded in size, so the Echelon's strength would eventually grow to close to 4,000, mostly officers and men incapacitated from active work.³⁹

³⁸ No 1: RGA; 2: RHA and RFA; 3: RGA, ASC and RE; 4: RE; 5: RAMC and Cavalry; 6: Corps Details.

³⁹ Macready, *Annals of an Active Life Vol 1*, pp. 199 – 201.

In August 1914 the Army was as ready as it could be. Details had been worked out for the BEF's movement to France, the mobilization of the Reserves and the TF and the provision and drafting of reinforcements. Even at the outset, however, the manpower numbers did not add up. The Regular Army's Other Rank (OR) strength was some 9,000 short of its establishment of 245,860. The Army Reserve contained 145,347 ex-Regular soldiers but these were men of varying ages, experience and physical fitness and would not all be usable. The SR, specifically created to provide drafts for an Expeditionary Force, numbered 61,376: : about 16,000 below its establishment.⁴⁰ Finally, the Territorial Force (TF) was now effectively the third line but there had been little planning for its use in the event of war and the poor training record and attendance at training camps did not bode well for its efficiency. Furthermore, it remained highly questionable whether the restriction of the TF's role to home defence could be overcome. In July 1914 the TF numbered 268,777 officers and men but only five complete TF units, had taken the Imperial Service (IS) obligation enabling them to be sent overseas.⁴¹ On the face of it, there might be enough men to maintain the Army to meet current commitments around the Empire, for home defence and to bring the BEF up to strength and maintain it in the field - but only if the war was over quickly.

Mobilization

War was declared on 4 August 1914 and mobilization began. Regimental depots, in accordance with pre-war plans, split from their respective SR battalions, becoming separate units ready to

⁴⁰ War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War (SME)* (London, 1922; Uckfield: Naval & Military Press 1999), p. 30.

⁴¹ Beckett, 'The Territorial Force', pp. 129-130. *BOH 1914 Vol II*, pp. 2, 3: Northumberland Yeomanry, Dorset Fortress Company RE, 6th East Surrey and 7th and 8th Middlesex. Full bibliographic citations for the British Official History may be found in the Bibliography, below.

receive and process Reservists.⁴² The Line battalions implemented their particular mobilization plan. In Londonderry, 1st Cheshire had six days to complete the process. Like other battalions they were under-strength and during the next three days received three drafts of Reservists from the Depot, totalling 556 men. Many of these men had seen only two or three years' service, and that as much as nine years before.⁴³ They would find many differences. In 1913, the organisation of Infantry battalions into eight companies, each of four platoons, had been changed to four companies, each with four platoons and four sections in each platoon: 'We reservists were a little muddled at first by all this'.⁴⁴ Most battalions were also now equipped with the new Short, Magazine Lee-Enfield (SMLE) rifle on which the incoming Reservists needed hasty familiarisation and training. Across Britain, Depots were hastily processing and equipping men before despatching them to the Line battalions. The KSLI Depot despatched drafts daily to 1st KSLI which remained in Tipperary until 14 August, before moving to camp near Cambridge with the rest of the 6th Division where they were kept continuously at intensive training until 'all ranks had become hardened and were fighting fit'.⁴⁵

In all, some 136,781 non-commissioned officers and men from the Army Reserve rejoined the colours in August, with a further 2,699 in September and 932 in October 1914. Of these, some 1,816 became non-effective almost immediately: 1,528 were unfit, 181 had completed their engagements, 24 were discharged and 83 died from unspecified causes.⁴⁶ After the Regular battalions had been brought up to strength, the remaining Reservists were sent to the SR

⁴² Major W. deB. Wood, *The History of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry in the Great War* (London: Medici Society Limited, 1925; Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, n.d), p. 301.

⁴³ A. Crookenden, *The History of the Cheshire Regiment in the Great War* (Eastbourne: Rowe, nd), p. 338.

⁴⁴ F. Richards, *Old Soldiers Never Die* (1933; Uckfield: N&P reprint, nd) p. 11. Frank Richards rejoined the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in August 1914.

⁴⁵ Wood, *King's Shropshire Light Infantry in the Great War*, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁶ TNA: WO 162/23 General Mobilisation: Review of Arrangements 1 November 1914.

battalions, now at their pre-planned War Stations. The 3rd (SR) Cheshire had assembled at Chester to draw equipment and stores and was now at its War Station at Birkenhead. On mobilization, it had numbered only 16 officers and 500 men but was soon joined by older trained soldiers, retired NCOs, Army Reservists plus those who had already completed their time on the Reserve, and newly enlisted recruits. The 3rd (SR) KSLI mobilized at the Depot in Shrewsbury and on 11 August, numbering 1,052, left by train for its war station at Pembroke Dock. Within a very short space of time its numbers would be up to 1,600.⁴⁷

The TF was embodied on 4 August 1914 and mobilized as quickly and effectively as its Regular and SR counterparts. The four Territorial Battalions of the Cheshire Regiment, the 4th, 5th (Earl of Chester's), 6th and 7th Battalions, formed the Cheshire Infantry Brigade of the Welsh Division. The Regimental History commented that the:

response to the order to mobilize was exceedingly creditable, especially as many of the men were clerks and cashiers, holding responsible jobs which they would have to hand over.⁴⁸

Within six days, all four TF Battalions of the Cheshire Infantry Brigade were at full strength.

Arrival in France and the First Test of the System

The BEF, consisting of I Corps (1st and 2nd Divisions) and II Corps (3rd and 5th Divisions) and numbering about 100,000 men, moved to France between 9th and 17th August. Three Large Rest Camps had been established at the ports of entry. There had been no mention of these in FSR Part 2 and plans appear to have been somewhat vague: the designated CO of No 2 Large Rest Camp complained that it was only on arrival at Southampton that they had discovered that

⁴⁷ Wood, *King's Shropshire Light Infantry in the Great War 1914-1918*, p. 315.

⁴⁸ A. Crookenden, *Cheshire Regiment in the Great War* (Chester: Evans, no date), pp. 340-1.

they would be under the orders of a Base Commandant and received some idea of their role – and furthermore that they would be leaving for France immediately! No 2 Large Rest Camp arrived at Rouen on 10 August and took over two camps previously set up by the French. By 13 August they were ready to arrange the reception and accommodation of troops arriving in France until their departure for the Front by rail.⁴⁹

The 1st SWB left Hampshire for France on 12 August, arriving at Le Havre in the early hours of the following morning. After a couple of days in a rest camp, they moved forward and arrived at Leschelle in the BEF's concentration area by 16 August. The rest of 3rd Brigade and the 1st Division were close by; forming part of I Corps. The 1st Cheshire left Londonderry for Belfast early on 14 August in order to sail direct for France, arriving at Le Havre mid-afternoon on 16 August. Following a night spent in a Rest Camp, they entrained the next day for an unknown destination. By 18th August, with the rest of the 5th Division, they were in the Le Cateau-Landrecies area as part of II Corps. The 2nd RWF arrived to France by 13 August, initially to act as LOC troops but on 21 August was posted to 19th Brigade at Valenciennes.

The Divisional Infantry Base Depots (IBDs) were slowly getting organised. Having arrived at Boulogne on 20 August, No 2 IBD moved to Le Havre the next day where it took over Camp No 8 containing 100 tents. No 3 IBD also arrived at Le Havre on 21 August. Both received their first reinforcements from England the next day: 15 officers and 1143 ORs for 2nd Division and 13 officers and 1279 ORs for 3rd Division, including 1 officer and 113 ORs for the RWF. Drafts were sent up to the Front on 25 August, with the next ones arriving from England on 27 August. At this point the Rest Camps and the IBDs had expected a lull but the BEF's retreat

⁴⁹ TNA: WO 95/4116 War Diary of No 2 Large Rest Camp.

after Mons on 23 August meant there was nowhere to go for the reinforcements that had already been sent up to Advanced Base at Amiens, so they were returned No 2 Large Rest Camp. Matters deteriorated and Rouen was ordered to be evacuated; No 2 Large Rest Camp entrained on 30 August with 65 officers and 6000 men for Le Mans where it arrived the next day. The IBDs had also been ordered to move and were now en route by sea for St Nazaire.⁵⁰ Huge numbers of men and stores were forced to be moved at speed away from the newly set-up Bases.

The fighting in the Mons area was the first real test of the FSR Part 2 procedures. Casualties began to flow back and by 25 August it was already apparent that the toll exacted by modern warfare was going to be far heavier than expected. On 24 August, 1st Cheshire had gone into action at Audregnies with 27 officers and 934 men; by the time the roll was taken at Les Bavay that evening only 6 officers and 200 men were present.⁵¹ Of those absent, 55 had been killed, 500 taken prisoner and the rest wounded. Whatever the cause, they were all out of action. The Cheshire losses were particularly high owing to their having failed to receive orders to withdraw, but the Infantry as a whole had suffered significant casualties during the first real contact with the enemy. The approximate figures for the BEF for August 1914 would later show a total of 14,409 casualties of whom 105 officers and 1,277 soldiers were dead.⁵² The continuing fighting at the front made it difficult to get accurate casualty returns back to the Base and only rough estimates could be made of the reinforcements required. AG GHQ needed a firmer handle on casualty numbers and the first amplification of the FSR 2 procedures was made on 29 August: divisions were to obtain from units the details of officers and the numbers of ORs killed, wounded and missing and to report these by the quickest method direct to GHQ.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, and TNA: WO 95/4185 War Diaries of No 2 and No 3 IBDs.

⁵¹ Cheshire Regiment Archive (CRA), 1st Cheshire War Diary, 24 August 1914.

⁵² *SME*, p. 253.

In slower time the DAG, GHQ 3rd Echelon, would receive direct from units the regimental numbers and names of the dead and missing and from the commanders of medical units the details of those wounded; after the information had been verified the DAG's office would cable home the names of all individuals reported as killed, wounded and missing.⁵³

The 'First Reinforcements' were waiting at the Base Depots and Rest Camps but until a pause could be expected in some definite locality it would be impossible to send them up the line.⁵⁴

Mons was followed by Le Cateau and the Retreat. When a halt was finally called in early September, some 20,000 were missing from the BEF's original numbers. Not all were casualties: on 2 September No 2 Large Rest Camp contained 3,340 stragglers in addition to about 5,970 reinforcements. The reinforcements were sent up on 3 September and on 4 September stragglers numbering 18 officers and 1064 men were re-equipped and despatched back to their units. There was concern about the numbers unaccounted for and GHQ Army Routine Order (ARO) 59 of 4 September notified that in future stragglers were to be given written instructions on where and to whom to report.⁵⁵ A proportion of the missing would rejoin later but the official casualty figures for the period up to 5 September still showed just over 15,000 casualties ie killed, wounded and missing. The temporary halt at last enabled the 'first reinforcements' to be brought up from the IBDs, reaching most units by 6 September.⁵⁶ The Cheshires received one officer and 90 men on 5 September but still remained at less than half strength. By 7 September, all available men from the Base had been used to replenish units.

⁵³ TNA: WO 95/25 GHQ – AG Branch War Diary – Army Routine Order of 29 Aug 14.

⁵⁴ Macready, *Annals of An Active Life Vol I*, pp. 199–201, 203-4.

⁵⁵ TNA: WO 95/25 GHQ – AG Branch War Diary.

⁵⁶ *BOH 1914, Vol. I*, pp. 286-7, 301.

The experience of the first extended contact with the enemy had revealed significant deficiencies in the pre-war plans and organisations. The AG GHQ, Major General Sir Nevil Macready, realised pre-war casualty estimates needed revision and immediately increased future indents on the War Office. There had also been friction between the respective roles of the AG GHQ and that of the IGC at the Base, where the latter's designated role had been to anticipate requirements and push as much forward as possible, including reinforcements, in readiness for when required. In practice this proved unworkable. A tetchy letter of 24 August from Macready to the IGC at the Base, Major General F.S. Robb, illustrates the problem of the passage of information and conflicting roles and responsibilities:

Theoretically I am aware that your jurisdiction extends to rendezvous points, but I have always held, and present experience confirms me in the idea, that in the area immediately in the rear of the troops it will be better to advise the officer of GHQ concerned before any action is taken, in case we may have information that possibly may not have reached you.⁵⁷

Individuals had done their best and reinforcements had been waiting to be sent forward but all had not gone smoothly. On 4 September Robb wrote back to the CIGS, General Sir Charles Douglas, concerning mistakes he felt had been made in the replacement of casualties. He had sent reinforcements up to Advanced Base and been most anxious to send them further forward only to be told that until units disentangled from the enemy they could not take them. Eventually they were called forward on 3 September. Robb claims to be telling CIGS this only to show the 'extraordinary difficulties they have in the fighting line'. In a further letter he continues to make the point that he had been ready and willing to send men and stores forward but the time taken to fill gaps of all sorts 'is governed by the ability of the unit to receive and not the LofC to send up'. It had also proved impossible to forecast events and to place

⁵⁷ TNA: WO 95/25 – GHQ – AG – War Diary – Macready letter dated 24 August 1914.

reinforcements ahead in view of the daily changes and the inability of the Army to retire on its own LofC.⁵⁸ That these letters were flying back to London from the Base cannot have endeared Robb to an already hard-pressed GHQ. There was a further difficulty in that Robb reported directly to the C-in-C BEF rather than through the BEF's principal staff officers, AG and QMG. The latter at the time was Major General Sir William Robertson. This dual chain of command caused problems since Robb was independently sending indents for men, stores and matériel to the War Office at the same time as the 'A' and 'Q' staffs were also sending indents to London, thus causing confusion at both ends. This was not something that could be allowed to continue, and the system was changed so that in future Robb would receive his orders from the GHQ Staff, in the same way as any officer commanding one of the larger formations at the front.⁵⁹

By the end of the first week of September, the inadequacy of pre-war estimates of the reinforcements necessary was already apparent. The drafting system was working so far but already the numbers were too few and the manpower pot was not bottomless. Steps were already in hand to obtain more men but this would take time.

The Expanding Army

The new Secretary of State for War, Field Marshal Lord Kitchener, who had accepted the appointment on 5 August 1914, was well aware of the need for more men. He rejected the prevalent view that economic conditions precluded a long war and instead considered it necessary to plan for at least 3 years, with a significant manpower requirement. Recruiting

⁵⁸ TNA: WO 79/63 – Sir A.J. Murray Private Papers. Letters from Robb to CIGS dated 3 September 1914 and 16/17 September 1914. Murray was then COS GHQ so it may be assumed that GHQ had sight of these letters.

⁵⁹ Macready, *Annals of an Active Life*, p. 210; Field Marshal Sir William Robertson, *From Private to Field Marshal* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), p. 200; TNA WO 163/45 Minutes of Meeting of Military Members of Army Council of 9 Jan 15.

started immediately. The first ‘call to arms’ for 100,000 men, aged between 19 and 30, to enlist for general service for a period of three years or the duration of the war appeared first in the national daily papers on 7 August and subsequently in local weekly papers. On 24 August Kitchener updated the House of Lords on the Government’s intention to prepare:

an Army in the field I cannot at this stage say what will be the limits of the forces required, or what measures may eventually become necessary to supply and maintain them. The scale of the Field Army which we are now calling into being is large and may rise in the course of the next six or seven months to a total of thirty divisions continually maintained in the field.⁶⁰

Whilst the ultimate size remained unclear, what was recognised was the need not only to create a large Army but also the requirement for it to be maintained.

Much has been written about the raising of the New Armies, in particular by Peter Simkins in *Kitchener’s Army*.⁶¹ It is not intended here to re-iterate here the sequence of events except in so far as they had a bearing on the future provision of replacements. During the early weeks of the war men enlisted in large numbers daily.⁶² The peacetime recruiting organisation, used to handling less than 100 recruits a day in total, found it increasingly difficult to cope and the Regimental Depots and 3rd (SR) Battalions were rapidly over-loaded. The flood of recruits was not destined solely for the embryo New Armies as the recruiting organization distributed the volunteers to different parts of the Army. By 22 August, for example, some 2,450 men had joined the Colours in Chester and had been allocated as follows:

Enlisted for normal Army Service	950
Joined the 3 rd (SR) Battalion of the Cheshire Regiment	600
Enlisted in the Service Battalion, Cheshire Regiment for Lord Kitchener’s army	350
Joined the Special Reserve	250
Enlisted in Engineers, Army Service Corps and other regiments	300 ⁶³

⁶⁰ HLRO: ‘Debates on Army Affairs, House of Lords, Session 1914’ (London, HMSO, 1915), c. 504.

⁶¹ Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army*, *passim*.

⁶² TNA: WO 162/3, ‘Approximate number of recruits raised day by day from 3rd August 1914’.

⁶³ Cheshire Records Office (CRO) *Cheshire Observer*, Saturday, 22 August 1914 (mf 225/37).

There were more volunteers than the existing units could take and some form of organisation for the surplus was urgently needed. This led to the creation of the new battalions to be known as Service battalions. By 21 August, the first 'Service' battalions had been grouped into six new Divisions and by the end of the month the first New Army (K1) was virtually complete. The SR battalions remained the primary draft-finding source, however, and on 28 August Kitchener appealed for a second 100,000 men, to be used initially to fill all the SR battalions up to 2,000 strong. Any balance above this figure would remain for training at the regimental depots.⁶⁴ On 1 September the AG, General Sir Henry Sclater, informed his Army Council colleagues that further new divisions would be formed once the K1 battalions had reached their war establishments of 1,000 all ranks and the SR battalions a strength of 2,000. The next six divisions would form K2, or the Second New Army. By 9 September, the influx of new recruits had been such that the formation of two further New Armies, K3 and K4, was organised.

Unfamiliarity with the scale of losses they were now encountering was such that the draft-finding process was nearly destroyed when on Wednesday 9 September the Army Council was informed that the Secretary of State had decided to organize the SR battalions into six Divisions, to form the 2nd New Army (K2).⁶⁵ At a stroke this would have removed the draft-finding sources for the Regular Army, already fully occupied in sending reinforcements to the BEF whilst at the same time manning their war stations. Fortunately, by 13 September, the plan had been reversed; there is a simple entry in the Minutes that the Secretary of State had 'approved changes in nomenclature', which almost certainly indicates some fast footwork by the Staff reminding him of the obvious difficulties that would be caused by turning the draft-finding SR

⁶⁴ TNA: WO 163/44 Meeting of Military Members of the Army Council, 27 August 1914.

⁶⁵ TNA: WO 163/44 30th Meeting of Military Members of the Army Council on 9 September 1914.

Battalions into Service battalions destined for the Front. The ‘changes in nomenclature’ returned the composition of the Second New Army to New Army battalions and divisions. The SR battalions would retain their draft-finding role and any surplus manpower used to create new infantry battalions for six divisions of a Fourth New Army (27th to 32nd Divisions).⁶⁶ The revised plan was promulgated immediately by an Army Order formally announcing new titles of ‘the several additions to the Army’.⁶⁷

Many more battalions were also being enthusiastically raised by local authorities, industrialists and committees of private citizens eager to play their part in the war effort. The main benefit of the scheme was that it relieved the hard-pressed War Office staff of the burden of housing, clothing and feeding yet more thousands of potential recruits until they were ready to adopt these ‘locally raised’ battalions. These battalions, which would become known emotively as ‘Pals’ battalions, often adopted very specific identities and loyalties to those who had raised them. Many were raised in specific geographic areas, such as major cities, but this in itself did not differentiate them a great deal from Infantry battalions raised within their own Regimental recruiting areas. Indeed, the recruiting of ‘local squads’ was a common approach for the New Armies.⁶⁸ The main difference with the locally raised battalions was that the men frequently shared common social and occupational backgrounds as well as a geographical one or were recruited from particular pools, such as the Sportsmen’s and the Public Schools battalions.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ TNA: WO 163/44 34th Meeting of Military Members on 13 September 1914.

⁶⁷ TNA: WO 123/56 AO 388 and 389 of 14 September 1914.

⁶⁸ *Whitchurch Herald*, Saturday, 19 September 1914, p. 4. On 14 September 1914 a recruiting meeting for the county regiment was held in the Shropshire village of Whixall since it was the ‘desire of the Government to form the squads, to get young men from neighbourhoods to go forward for the defence of their country.’ Any Whixall lad joining at that meeting would have joined 6th (Service) KSLI, of the Second New Army.

⁶⁹ The 15th (Service) Battalion Highland Light Infantry (HLI) (1st Glasgow) contained many recruits from the Glasgow Tramways whilst its sister battalion, the 16th (Service) HLI (2nd Glasgow) was always referred to as the Glasgow Boys Brigade Battalion, having drawn many of its officers and soldiers from graduates of the Glasgow Battalion of the Boys Brigade.

Once overseas, however, they would need to be reinforced in the same way as other battalions but their recruiting pool was often more limited.

The TF had been embodied on 4 August and was also expanding rapidly. On 10 August TF soldiers were again invited to volunteer for overseas service and on 21 August it was announced that units in which 80 per cent of the men had taken the IS obligation could be sent overseas as formed units. The initial response was not overwhelming with only seventy battalions reaching the 80 per cent mark initially so on 31 August the percentage was lowered to the more realistic figure of 60 per cent.⁷⁰ The County Associations had been authorised, on 15 August, to raise new units to replace those volunteering for overseas service and this now enabled first line TF units to make up their numbers for overseas service whilst those men remaining ‘home service only’ could move to the second line, forming a nucleus of trained soldiers. Once the First Line battalions went overseas, the Home Service (HS) battalions would replace them at their war stations and also provide drafts for overseas service from new recruits who had signed the IS obligation. By 31 August most of the officers and 80 per cent of the men of 6th Cheshire TF battalion had volunteered for overseas service and a home service battalion, 2/6th Cheshire, was created at Stockport in September.⁷¹

There remained ambivalence over the use of the TF overseas and it is apparent from statements made in August and September that they were not expected to be sent abroad in a hurry, or at least not before they had received considerable training and reached a sufficient level of efficiency.⁷² Expediency forced this to change, however, and by October TF units were being

⁷⁰ Beckett, *Amateur Military Tradition*, p. 228.

⁷¹ C. Smith, *War History of the 6th Battalion The Cheshire Regiment* (Chester: 6th Cheshire Old Comrades Association, 1932), p. 2.

⁷² K.W. Mitchinson, *Defending Albion* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 62.

rapidly despatched to different parts of the Empire to replace Regular battalions recalled for active service. In late October 4th KSLI embarked for Garrison duties in India but by then the first TF units were already in France. Intended initially as LofC troops, 1/14th London (London Scottish) and 1/1st Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars had landed on 16th and 22 September respectively. The arrival of TF units in various parts of the Empire enabled Regular battalions to return home to make up new divisions for France. The newly formed 7th Division landed in Belgium in early October and was followed by a new 8th Division in November. Further Regular Army battalions returning from overseas later in the year were formed into three new Regular divisions, the 27th, 28th and 29th.

The creation of the new Regular divisions meant several organizational changes to the New Armies but as yet these would make little impact on the newly formed Service battalions. Of more concern for the future was that no system for the replacement of their losses had yet been put in place other than that provided by the already overworked 3rd (SR) battalions. Authority was given in December for the locally raised battalions to recruit above the War Establishment in order to form additional Depot companies, each 250 strong, but as yet there was no provision for reinforcements for the battalions of the New Armies.

Meanwhile in France and Flanders.....

On 6 September the BEF had again turned north as the Allies and the Germans tried to outflank each other and gain the crucial Channel Ports. The next few weeks would see a succession of battles: the Marne 6 – 10 September, the Aisne 13 – 28 September, La Bassée 10 – 31 October, culminating in the First Battle of Ypres from 19 October to 21 November. The BEF was steadily increasing in size through what the *Official History* refers to as efforts to 'improvise'

armies and by 15 September it numbered 163,897.⁷³ The 6th Division arrived in mid-September having been released from home defence duties as fear of invasion receded. The 1st KSLI, fresh from training in Cambridge with the rest of the Division, landed on 10 September with 27 officers and 970 other ranks.⁷⁴ They would make a welcome arrival in the rear of III Corps on 16 September where the Division was temporarily broken up to provide relief to the weary troops; 16th Brigade, containing 1st KSLI, was attached to II Corps.

Between 15 August and 30 September some 485 officers and 31,888 men were sent out to the BEF as reinforcements.⁷⁵ The heavy and unexpected wastage within the BEF's first month in France had exhausted the supply of Regular reservists for many regiments and men of the SR were already beginning to take their place; the first draft of 100 Special Reservists had left for 1st KSLI on 15 September.⁷⁶ More drafts arrived to fill the weary battalions but some were only penny-packets: the draft arriving at 1st Cheshire at Sormoise on 24 September numbered four officers but only 21 men. It would be 17 October before a draft of any real size reached them: 3 officers and 248 men would reach 1st Cheshire on 17 October.⁷⁷ These were a mixture of Reservists such as 6407 George Playfoot, who had originally enlisted in 1900, and new recruits such as 27 year old John William Beard who had enlisted ten weeks earlier, on 5 August 1914.⁷⁸ Since Mons, 1st Cheshire had received 359 men to replace the losses of Audregnies but the battalion was still only just over half strength. The reinforcement system was working but it had already had to provide many more replacements than expected.

⁷³ *BOH 1914 Vol I*, p. 8fn.

⁷⁴ Wood, *King's Shropshire Light Infantry in the Great War*, pp. 1-2.

⁷⁵ *BOH 1914 Vol I*, p. 467 fn 1.

⁷⁶ *BOH 1914 Vol I*, p. 440 and Wood, *King's Shropshire Light Infantry in the Great War*, p. 318.

⁷⁷ Crookenden, *Cheshire Regiment in the Great War*, p. 25 and TNA WO 95/1571 1st Cheshire War Diary.

⁷⁸ <http://www.ancestry.co.uk/> The Medal Index Cards (MIC) for 6407 Pte George Playfoot and 10103 Pte John William Beard show that both arrived in France on 7 October 1914. Pte Beard's Service Record shows his date of enlistment.

It was also already proving necessary to switch particularly depleted units out of the Line for rest and replenishment.⁷⁹ Such moves must have been confusing for the divisions and units themselves but an absolute nightmare down at the Base for the IBDs to know where to send reinforcements. On 9 October, 3 IBD transferred 2 officers and 199 men destined for the Devonshires to the 5th Division IBD, receiving in return 5 officers and 351 men of the Suffolks. Similarly, No 2 Rest Camp noted the transfer of 100 men from 3rd to 5th Division between 10 – 12 October.⁸⁰ Men and units were moving in all directions with consequent disruption and disorientation.

The IBDs were at this this point still where they had been rushed at the end of August during the Retreat. It would be early November before 3 IBD moved from St Nazaire to Rouen and could become properly established. No 2 Rest Camp remained at Le Mans until 21 December when it moved back to Boulogne, where it could fulfil its role of receiving individual reinforcements from UK and despatching them to the base depots now settled at Étaples, Harfleur and Rouen.⁸¹

Fierce fighting continued through October and into November. The 7th and 8th Divisions arrived but other Regular battalions were still en route from overseas. Only TF battalions were readily available and on 26 October, Kitchener telegraphed the CinC promising six TF battalions to replace six units, including 1st Cheshire, that had suffered the heaviest casualties. On 30 October he telegraphed that the battalions were either already on their way or about to leave and the

⁷⁹ TNA: WO 95/25 – GHQ – AG Branch War Diary 29 Sep 14.

⁸⁰ TNA: WO 95/4185 3 IBD War Diary and WO 95/4116 No 2 Rest Camp War Diary.

⁸¹ TNA: WO 95/4185 3 IBD War Diary and WO 95/4116 No 2 Rest Camp War Diary.

following day notified that a further 6 TF battalions would be sent.⁸² Nineteen TF battalions had arrived in France by early November when 1/6th Cheshire and 1/4th (Denbighshire) RWF landed at Le Havre for use as L of C troops. The 1/6th Cheshire had been augmented by 100 men from its Reserve battalion, which now replaced it in its Home Defence role.⁸³

By late October, II Corps had suffered nearly 14,000 casualties, of whom 10,000 were Infantry. Against its established Infantry strength of 24,000, it could muster only 14,000, of whom 1,400 had been with their battalions less than a week. The 5th Division numbered just over 7,600 Infantry, but 800 of these had joined as reinforcements only on 25 October. There were doubts over whether battalions containing so many new men, Reservists, SR and young soldiers, would be able to withstand a really determined attack.⁸⁴ This is the first instance of what would later become regular complaints that the new men were never as good as the old. Yet, even with these so-called inferior troops, on 28 October at La Bassée British troops showed:

a superiority over the enemy in fortitude and endurance through all the varying phases of a battle, and once more their fire discipline had, in his eyes, multiplied the small force opposing him into immense superiority of numbers.⁸⁵

The switching around of units and formations was also causing strain. By early November the Fifth Division history notes:

a regular jumble everywhere; Brigades, Battalions and Batteries were sent hither and thither to patch up the holes in the strained British front, and many units had no notion to what formation they belonged; Battalions were attached for a day or two to a Division or a Brigade, and then spirited away elsewhere as the circumstances demanded.⁸⁶

⁸² *BOH 1914 Vol II*, pp. 252 and 276 fn.

⁸³ Smith, *6th Cheshire*, pp. 2-3.

⁸⁴ *BOH 1914 Vol II*, pp. 209-10.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 220.

⁸⁶ Brigadier-General A.H. Hussey & Major D.S. Inman, *The Fifth Division in the Great War* (London: Nisbet & Co, 1921), p. 44.

It would be the end of the month before the component units of the Division would be gathered together again. All units were low in numbers but by then 1st Cheshire, still suffering from the legacy of Audregnies, was again so weak that they were kept back in Corps Reserve. The battalion had lost a further 35 killed, 99 wounded and 65 missing between 5 – 20 November but no reinforcements are shown as having arrived. Although 1 officer and 64 men would arrive on 6 December it would not be until 24 December that 6 officers and 444 men would make a real difference.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, divisions were being bolstered by newly arrived TF units: 1/6th Cheshire joined 1st Cheshire in 15th Brigade, 5th Division from the LofC in December whilst 1/4th (Denbighshire) RWF joined 3rd Brigade, 1st Division.

Changes to Procedures in the Light of Experience

The FSR Part 2 procedures had needed several further amendments as the ‘A’ staff struggled with the passage of information. Incorrect information had occasionally been passed: in mid-September II Corps units were reminded to ensure that officers ‘missing’ were not shown as killed or wounded unless this was absolutely certain as there had been several cases of officers reported to GHQ as killed who had subsequently been found alive in England - after the publication of the casualty lists in the Press. Information had also been passed by a variety of routes, causing overlapping demands and delayed replacements. In late October, Army Routine Orders (ARO) 248 noted that **all** demands for replacements, arising from both casualties and normal wastage, were now to be submitted by formations to AG, GHQ, who would pass them to DAG 3rd Echelon GHQ at the Base. Only LofC units were to submit demands for replacements due to normal wastage direct to DAG, 3rd Echelon GHQ at the base.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ 1st Cheshire War Diary 24 November 1914 and 24 December 1914.

⁸⁸ TNA: WO 95/25 AG GHQ War Diary September and October 1914.

Analysis

The BEF continued to increase in size; on 19 December its estimated British strength was 229,782 officers and men.⁸⁹ On the debit side, between August and December it had suffered a total of 95,654 casualties: 16,965 of whom were dead.⁹⁰ Analysis of the deaths in selected battalions of the Marches Regiments will serve as a baseline for future analysis of these battalions through the rest of the war.⁹¹

Recruiting from the Regimental areas seems to have varied, as is shown in Table 1.1 below.

Enlistment Locations	1st Cheshire		1st KSLI		2nd RWF		1st SWB	
Regimental Area	187	82%	63	61%	18	24%	148	42%
Elsewhere in No 4 District - England	1		8		7		8	
Elsewhere in No 4 District – Wales	3		3		5		29	
Total enlisted in No 4 District	191	83%	74	71%	30	41%	185	52%
Enlisted in No 3 District	2		9		3		5	
• Liverpool/Manchester	12		7		2		5	
Total Enlisted in Western Command	205	90%	90	87%	35	47%	195	55%
Northern Command	5		1		1		16	
Southern Command	5		2		13		33	
• Birmingham	3		3		23		11	
Eastern	7		3		1		17	
London District	4		4		2		81	
Scotland/Ireland			1				1	
Overseas							1	
Total Other Commands	24		14		39		160	
Total Deaths	229		104		74		355	

Table 1.1. Enlistment locations of soldiers of selected Regular battalions who were killed/died between 4 August – 30 November 1914.

Some 83 per cent of 1st Cheshire had enlisted in its own Regimental area but only 59 per cent of the KSLI. The latter, however, shows a further 11 per cent enlisted in other parts of No 4 District and when enlistments for these two battalions in their parent Home Command (Western) are considered the percentages are 90 per cent for 1st Cheshire and 85 per cent for 1st

⁸⁹ *SME*, p. 64 (iii) NB This does not include 15,357 British members of the Indian contingent.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 253.

⁹¹ Sources of data: Soldiers Died in the Great War (Naval & Military Press CD Rom Version 2.5) – Western European Theatre and www.ancestry.com.

KSLI. The figures for the two Welsh battalions look very different. Only 24 per cent of 2nd RWF and 43 per cent of 1st SWB had enlisted within their respective Regimental areas. Even when enlistments within Western Command are considered the percentages for these two battalions remain low: 47 per cent for the RWF and 55 per cent for the SWB. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the RWF's previous recruiting patterns, some 31 per cent of those who died in the first months of the war had enlisted in Birmingham. However, of similar note is that some 23 per cent of the SWB had enlisted in the London area.

It might be thought that these men were Welshmen who had left to find work elsewhere but the figures for those born in the respective Regimental recruiting areas show that only 11 per cent of the RWF and 19 per cent of the SWB had hailed from those areas originally (see Table 1.2 below). Even when the figures for those born in the rest of Wales are taken into account, the percentages for both the RWF and SWB rise to only 39 per cent.

Birth locations	1st Cheshire		1st KSLI		2nd RWF		1st SWB	
Regimental Area	125	55%	51	49%	8	11%	69	19%
Elsewhere in No 4 District - England	3		8		12		14	
Elsewhere in No 4 District – Wales	5		6		8		54	
Total born in No 4 District	133	58%	65	63%	28	39%	137	39%
Born in No 3 District	22		13		4		9	
• Liverpool/Manchester	31		3				4	
Total Born in Western Command	186	81%	81	78%	32	42%	150	42%
Northern Command	16		7		7		26	
Southern Command	6		4		15		58	
• Birmingham	4		1		16		10	
Eastern	6		4		1		31	
London District	8		2		3		71	
Scotland/Ireland	2		2				8	
Overseas	1		3				1	
Total Other Commands	43		23		42		205	
Location of Birth Unknown								
Total Deaths	229		104		74		355	

Table 1.2. Birth locations of soldiers of selected Regular battalions who were killed/died between 4 August – 30 November 1914.

Even in the two English battalions, the percentages for those born in their respective recruiting areas are also significantly lower than their enlistment percentages. The figures for those born within Western Command remain high, however, with 82 per cent of 1st Cheshire deaths and 76 per cent of 1st KSLI deaths having been born within Western Command. The Welsh battalions show just under half having been born in the parent Command.

So it would appear that neither the 2nd RWF nor the 1st SWB were particularly Welsh at the start of the war whilst both the English County regiments of 1st Cheshire and 1st KSLI show a high degree of homogeneity.

Situation at the end of 1914

By the end of 1914, a total of 962 officers and 108,310 men had already been sent out as reinforcements for the BEF.⁹² The reinforcement procedures had worked but under extreme pressure as far more men had been needed than previously anticipated; it was now only too apparent that the new industrial form of warfare would require reinforcements far in excess of the pre-war planning figures. Furthermore, there were doubts over the quality of the men arriving who were alleged by some units to be practically untrained and by others ‘to have neither the will nor physique to fight’. One report claimed that many of the men were ‘old, worn, drunken wasters’ and no young recruits were being sent.⁹³ In December 1914 there were already many who felt the old Army had gone forever.

⁹² *BOH 1914, Vol. II*, p. 467 fn 1.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 449 and fn 1.

Chapter 2

1915: The Realities of War

The War that had been expected to be over by Christmas moved inexorably into 1915. With the arrival of the 28th Division in mid-January, the number of British Infantry Divisions on the newly-styled Western Front had risen to eleven in which the Marches Regiments were already well represented by 7 Regular and 6 TF battalions.¹ In manpower terms, the total number of British troops in rations on 15 January 1915 was 326,278. Some 103,957 casualties had been notified up to that date, however, which was some 4,000 more than the total strength of the BEF that had landed five months previously.² Pre-war planning estimates of the reinforcement requirement had been well exceeded and far more men would be needed.

The year 1915 would see various debates and changes in approach to the prosecution of the war. On the political front there would be debates between ‘easterners’ advocating the opening of other fronts, particularly the Dardanelles, and ‘westerners’ who were adamant that the war must be won in France and Belgium. At home, recruiting continued but concerns were beginning to be raised over the effect of indiscriminate recruiting on industry.³ The Army’s manpower requirements continued to escalate but the Government needed urgently to balance them against the demands of the nation as a whole and conscription began to be debated at

¹ 1st, 2nd, 1/5th and 1/6th Cheshire; 1st, 2nd and 1/4th RWF; 1st SWB; 1st and 2nd KSLI; and 1/1st, 1/2nd and 1/3rd Monmouthshire Battalions.

² TNA: WO 95/25 – AG GHQ War Diary 15 Jan 15. Total ration strength, including LoC and Army troops, was 326,278: 9,609 officers (plus 674 Indian) and 270,785 men (plus 12,641 Indian contingent). A further 848 officers and 31,721 were at the Base Depots, sick in hospital and prisoners (presumably German who still had to be taken on the ration strength). Total casualties notified up to and including 14 January 15 were 4222 officers (1021 killed, 2435 wounded and 766 missing) and 99,735 other ranks (11,066 killed, 44,856 wounded and 43, 813 missing).

³ *Parliamentary Debates Fifth Series Volume XVIII House of Lords 1914-15* cc 231-62 and 352.

every opportunity in Parliament. It is not the purpose of this thesis to analyze the path towards conscription but it would be impossible to proceed further without some reference to the different initiatives to provide manpower for the Army.

The War Office and senior military authorities were confronted by an Army of a previously unimaginable size and composition, and were feverishly occupied in trying to work out new organizations to meet the changing demands caused by both the numbers of men coming forward and the different nature of the war that was developing. At home, where the threat of an attack on Britain had not as yet been completely discounted, the Home Army needed to be revitalized whilst continuing to train the TF and the New Armies. Many changes, both political and military, would be made during 1915, some of which would be of an ‘ad hoc’ nature and need subsequent refinement but on the manning side it would be a year in which foundations were laid for what would come later. For clarity it has been decided to consider firstly events on the home front and then on the Western Front.

Provision of Reserves

The escalating losses on the Western Front made it essential that the SR battalions were kept up to strength to provide drafts for the Line battalions. In early February instructions were issued that no more men were to be posted to 4th New Army or Extra Reserve (ER) battalions until the SR battalions were up to their establishments.⁴ This was timely: already almost 20,000 reinforcements were required in France per month and this number was rising.⁵

⁴ TNA: WO 293/2 WOI 16 of 2 February 1915.

⁵ TNA: WO 95/25 AG GHQ War Diary – February 1915.

Reserves were also needed for those TF units already on active service. In January it was announced that it was intended to raise 2nd Reserve units for six TF Divisions and that the 1st Reserve units in those divisions should be recruited up to 30 per cent in excess of establishment ‘with a view to forming 2nd Reserve units later on’.⁶ Fortunately this rather woolly provision was soon clarified with the instruction that all Home Commands were to start raising a 2nd Reserve unit as soon as they were notified that a TF unit from their Command had been selected for service on the Continent.⁷ The titles of TF units had now become cumbersome and a first attempt at clarification was published at the end of January. The original I.S. battalion remained as 1/... eg 1/6th Cheshire; the First Reserve would become 2/... eg 2/6th Cheshire; and the Second Reserve shown as 3/.... eg 3/6th Cheshire.⁸ The titles I.S, 1st Reserve and 2nd Reserve rapidly proved confusing, however, so within a month they were dropped in favour of 1st, 2nd and 3rd Line respectively.⁹

In March it was determined that the Third Line’s function was to train and provide drafts for both the First and Second line units. All recruits were to be sent to the Third Line depots in the first instance and not transferred to a First or Second line unit until they had completed the recruit musketry course and were otherwise considered as trained soldiers. The Second Line units would replace the First Line units when the latter deployed, or be otherwise employed as directed. They would provide drafts for the First Line units serving abroad only when absolutely necessary and this draft finding duty would cease as soon as the Third Line unit was in a position to carry out these functions.¹⁰

⁶ The Divisions indicated were N and S Midland, 2nd London, West Lancashire, Northumbrian and West Riding Divisions. TNA: WO 293/2 WOI 92 of 13 January 1915.

⁷ TNA: WO WOI 151, 15 February 1915.

⁸ TNA: WO 123/57 AO 54, 3 January 1915 and WO 293/2 WOI 258, 30 January 1915.

⁹ TNA: WO 293/2 WOI 228, 24 February 1915.

¹⁰ TNA: WO 293/2 WOI 72, 6 March 1915 – L. 121/1720, AG 2a.

The New Armies would soon be ready for overseas service but still needed their own source of reserves. In April it was decided to provide these by breaking up the 4th New Army and turning its battalions into reserve units, to be known as the 2nd Reserve. They were to retain their Regimental designations and would train recruits and provide reinforcements for the divisions of the first three New Armies, whilst the existing SR battalions continued to provide training and reinforcements for the Line battalions.¹¹ In the Marches Regiments, 14th Cheshire, 12th RWF, 9th SWB and 9th KSLI now became 2nd Reserve battalions for their respective Service battalions.¹²

The Brigades of the former 4th New Army were re-numbered as Reserve Infantry Brigades, 89th Brigade becoming 1st Reserve Infantry Brigade, 90th Brigade becoming 2nd Reserve Infantry Brigade and so on, and attached to the six Home Commands as units of the Home army.¹³ They were located within the Home Commands they served and contained the Second Reserve battalions for the Regiments of that Command. The 11th Reserve Brigade was based at Prees Heath in Shropshire, 13th and 14th Reserve Brigades was at Kinmel Park in North Wales whilst 16th Reserve Brigade was at Altcar in Lancashire. The creation of dedicated reserves for the first three New Armies was timely; by May 9th (Scottish), 12th (Eastern) and 14th (Light) Divisions were in France and in June 13th (Western) Division, containing 8th Cheshire, 8th RWF and 4th SWB, would sail for Egypt and then Gallipoli.

The creation of the 2nd Reserve necessitated clarification of the distribution of recruits. It was confirmed that SR battalions were to be filled first until they reached their establishment of

¹¹ TNA: WO 293/2 WOI 96, 10 April 1915.

¹² See Appendix 3 for more details.

¹³ K.W. Mitchinson, *Defending Albion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p. 124.

2,085 all ranks; then the 2nd Reserve until they reached 1,500; and then Extra Reserve battalions, where they existed, until their establishment of 1,020 all ranks was reached. Any recruits over this number were to be retained at the depot until they numbered 300 when the War Office was to be informed so they could be diverted elsewhere.¹⁴

Although they had been provisionally designated as the 5th and 6th New Armies, the War Office had not as yet taken over any of the 'locally raised' units being created by private citizens and municipalities. The original 4th New Army having been broken up, the 5th and 6th New Armies now became the 4th and 5th New Armies respectively. Their constituent divisions were renumbered, with, for example, the 43rd Division becoming the 38th (Welsh) Division. They would also need reserve units and in mid-1915 the Depot companies of the locally raised battalions were combined to form Local Reserve battalions.¹⁵ These new battalions, 68 in total, took their numbering from their parent Regiment: 17th (Reserve) Cheshire being formed from the depot companies of 15th and 16th Cheshire, 13th (Reserve) SWB grew out of the depot companies of 1st Gwent (10th SWB) and 2nd Gwent (11th SWB) battalions and the depot company of 3rd Gwent (12th SWB) became the 14th (Reserve) SWB. The Local Reserve battalions joined the same Reserve Brigades as the Second Reserve battalions of their parent Regiments. For the Marches regiments these were either 13th Reserve Infantry Brigade at Kinmel Park, near Rhyl in North Wales, or 11th, 14th and 17th Reserve Infantry Brigades at Prees Heath in north Shropshire.¹⁶

¹⁴ TNA: WO 293/2 WOI 145, 18 May 1915.

¹⁵ TNA: WO 293/3 WOI 205, July 1915.

¹⁶ E.A. James, *British Regiments 1914–18* (London: Samson Books, 1978), pp. 65-6, 69, Appendix III to Part II.

Legislative Changes

Legislation designed to provide greater flexibility for Army manning was enacted early in 1915. The first was the Army (Suspension of Sentences) Act of 16 March. Its inspiration was claimed by Major-General Sir Wyndham Childs, the Assistant Adjutant General (AAG) GHQ, who was responsible for discipline. Walking through St. Omer he spotted a group of soldiers, cheerfully singing and whistling, as they were being marched under escort to the Base to serve sentences of imprisonment. Whether Childs was correct in his immediate assessment that ‘certain types of men would commit crimes solely to avoid duty at the front’, it was certainly true that sentences of penal servitude or imprisonment would remove men from the front line. Under Military Law, the highest penalty was the death sentence, below this came penal servitude for a minimum period of three years, which had to be served in a civilian prison in the UK, and imprisonment, with or without hard labour, for a maximum of two years and which could be served in a military gaol.¹⁷ Childs immediately dusted off a previous proposal for a form of ‘probation’ for soldiers found guilty of offences. It was submitted to Parliament where it was passed within two weeks.¹⁸

The Army (Suspension of Sentences) Act enabled sentences of imprisonment or penal servitude awarded for offences committed on active service to be suspended. Suspensions would be reviewed every three months and might at that stage be either remitted on the grounds of good conduct or cancelled and the original sentence invoked.¹⁹ Only the CinC had the final decision on whether a death sentence should be confirmed or commuted to a lesser penalty, which could now be suspended.

¹⁷ *Manual of Military Law* (London: War Office, 1914), pp. 110 – 119 Offences and Punishments.

¹⁸ Major-General Sir Wyndham Childs, *Episodes and Reflections* (London: Cassell, 1930), pp. 137-8.

¹⁹ *Public General Statutes 5 & 6 Geo 5 1914-16* (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1916), pp. 47-8.

The Act was promulgated to the BEF on 26 April by means of GRO 300 and an explanatory pamphlet. Rowland Feilding, a battalion commander, thought it good that the bad soldier had a threat hanging over his head whilst the otherwise good soldier, who might simply have lapsed momentarily, had the chance of gaining a complete reprieve through good conduct or gallantry on the battlefield.²⁰ From the point of view of the Manning staffs, it also enabled men to carry on fighting rather than needing to be replaced. It is difficult to arrive at an exact figure for the number of sentences subsequently suspended but it appears likely that around 38 per cent of sentences overseas were suspended.²¹ Between 1 October 1915 and 30 September 1916 some 2417 sentences were suspended but this does not include those that were suspended after the Court Martial proceedings had been finalised. The Act undoubtedly closed a loophole and was a useful tool in retaining men in the frontline, although it is debateable how much of a deterrent it posed to anyone considering transgressing solely to avoid duty; a large number of those subsequently executed were already on suspended sentences for previous offences.²²

The second area to be addressed was Section 83 of the Army Act. Under this section a Regular soldier could be transferred within three months of his attestation to any Regular corps of the same arm or branch; after three months his consent was required. Thus, after completing three months service a Regular soldier of the Cheshire Regiment could not be transferred to (say) the KSLI without his consent. By early 1915 this was restricting flexibility over the provision of

²⁰ R. Feilding, *War Letters to a Wife* (London: Medici Society, 1929; Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2001), pp. 175-6.

²¹ *Statistics of the British Military Effort, Table (x)(g)* p. 666; 1 Oct 16 – 30 Sep 17: 2532 sentences suspended; 1 Oct 17 – 30 Sep 18: 3078 sentences suspended.

²² Private Evan Fraser's death sentence for desertion in April 1915 was commuted to penal servitude and suspended. He made three more attempts to desert within two months of returning to his unit. There appears to have been insufficient evidence on the new charges of desertion to prove his guilt beyond reasonable doubt but the FGCM invoked the original death sentence, which was subsequently confirmed by the formation commanders and the CinC. Pte Fraser became the first man to be executed for reoffending whilst under a suspended sentence. Cited in C. Corns & J. Hughes-Wilson, *Blindfold and Alone* (London: Cassell, 2002), pp. 338-40.

replacements. The first amendment to Section 83 was contained in the Army (Amendment) Act, 1915, of 16 March, which removed the time limitation on transfer between corps of the same arm or branch during time of war but only for any Regular soldier enlisted after 4 August 1914. The amendment was passed with no difficulty.

The War Office now sought to gain greater flexibility in the use of TF soldiers. Under the *Territorial and Reserve Forces Act of 1907*, a TF soldier could not be transferred without his consent from one corps to another nor, unless embodied, could he be posted without his consent to any unit, even in the same corps, other than that which he had joined on enlistment. He certainly could not be posted without his consent to any regular unit.²³ The War Office had begun trying to chip away at this in mid-January 1915 and had tentatively proposed the transfer of 'IS men in TF reserve formations who may be willing to transfer to the regular army'.²⁴ This was followed by a similar instruction in February but by March it had obviously proved too difficult and the proposal was retracted.²⁵ All that could be done was to ease transfer by consent between embodied TF units of the same corps. In April it was announced that in future transfers between one TF unit and another would be handled administratively on the lines laid down in Kings Regulations for the Regular Army.²⁶

It was already proving difficult to reinforce TF units overseas. The success of the earlier legislative actions seems now to have prompted the War Office's first attempt to obtain greater flexibility for the use of TF soldiers through legislation. In late April a Bill was proposed which

²³ Territorial and Reserve Forces Act 1907, Section 7(4), *Manual of Military Law* (London: HMSO, 1914), p. 760.

²⁴ TNA: WO 293/2 WOI 118, 16 January 1915.

²⁵ TNA: WO 293/2 WOI 258, March 1915.

²⁶ TNA: WO 123/57 AO 188, April 1915.

removed the need for TF members to consent to being transferred to other TF units or from one TF corps to another. It was rapidly apparent, however, that it would have a far more difficult ride through Parliament since it immediately came up against the strong TF lobby in the Commons. The Bill was seen as yet another attack on TF terms of service. Mr Joynson-Hicks reminded the House of the ‘very great pressure’ that had been put upon Territorials to induce them to agree to serve overseas. He continued:

... it seemed to me, even then, a form of conscription on the very type of men who did not need conscription. They had already joined the Army for Home Defence, and pressure was put upon them to induce them to consent to go on foreign service.²⁷

There was much more in this vein during a lengthy and heated debate and, considerably bruised, the Government adjourned the matter. It was going to be no easier to change the TF’s terms and conditions of service, even during a war, than it had been to create it in the first place.

The following week the Government replaced the TF Bill with a Bill further amending Section 83 of the Army Act, which applied to Regular soldiers.²⁸ It is apparent from the ensuing debate that some MPs remained, at least initially, a little confused as to which part of the Army they were now debating. Introducing the new Bill, the Under Secretary of State for War, the Rt Hon H. J. Tennant, explained that:

...it is very desirable that we at the War Office should be enabled to ... employ such soldiers as are available in the capacity in which they are most required ... where you have considerable wastage in a particular battalion, and there are not sufficient Reserves in the Reserve battalion for that particular unit, it is desirable that the process of transfer should be made more simple and more easy. The whole object of this Bill is to empower the Army Council to make such transfers.

The difference between this proposal and the earlier Army Act amendment was two-fold: it would apply to all members of the Regular Army, irrespective of their length of service, and

²⁷ Hansard HC Deb 27 April 1915 vol 71 cc611-23.

²⁸ Army Act Amendment (No 2) Bill. HC Deb 06 May 1915 vol 71 cc1311-20.

enable a man to be transferred to a different arm or branch of the Army from the one in which he had previously been serving. Various matters were raised in the Parliamentary debate: the position of friends and workmates who had enlisted in the ‘Pals’ battalions; the reluctance a man might feel to be transferred to ‘any Line or Cavalry or Artillery regiment’; Welsh, Scottish and Irish national feelings; the transfer of non-combatants to combat units; and the question of re-transfer at the end of the War. The matter was adjourned but, despite much further discussion in both Houses, the Bill was subsequently passed relatively easily. The only amendment inserted was that a soldier who was compulsorily transferred might transfer back to his original cap-badge after the war.²⁹ The Army (Transfers) Act, 1915 received Royal Assent on 19 May.

Interestingly, the provisions of the new Act were not immediately promulgated to the Army as a whole. It would seem that the War Office, despite having gained the authority, were as yet reluctant to invoke it too widely, perhaps since it was such a fundamental change to a soldier’s terms of service. The only relevant AO simply amended the Pay Warrant to ensure that soldiers who were transferred, and remained in the same rank, would retain their existing rates of pay if they were more advantageous than those of the corps to whom they had been transferred.³⁰ The new powers were instead publicised by correspondence from the War Office to Home Commands, details of which were contained in two War Office Instructions (WOI), both dated 23 May 1915. These related to transfers to the Infantry from firstly the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) and secondly from the Royal Horse Artillery (RHA and Royal Field Artillery (RFA). Both letters contained space to insert the number of transfers to be made within the Command concerned and an exhortation that whenever possible volunteers for transfer should

²⁹ This sometimes causes confusion when researching a soldier since his unit on demobilization can be different from the one in which he spent the bulk of his Great War service.

³⁰ TNA: WO 123/58 Army Order (AO) 211, 25 May 1915.

take precedence over others. Those selected should also be those least likely to make the grade as medics or artillerymen. Furthermore, ‘Scotsmen, Irishmen, Welshmen and Englishmen’ should be transferred as far as possible to ‘regiments of their own nationality’ and men of the same nationality serving together would be transferred together to the same regiment of infantry.³¹

By June the effect of the Act was becoming visible. James Jack, serving briefly with 3rd Cameronians, noted on 9 June that 84 volunteers from the RAMC had reached the battalion for training as infantry.³² Also in June some 200 Gunners were transferred to 3rd Cheshire. Harry Parkinson, Wilfred Yates and William Joseph Fleming were part of this group and all would find themselves in France in December 1915.³³ Similarly, Pte George William Hall, RAMC, was transferred with a group of about 40 from the RAMC Training Centre to 3rd Cheshire. All these men had enlisted in 1914 or very early in 1915 so were six months through their initial training. It would be a further six months before they would find themselves at the Front.

Although men of the same nationality were supposed to be transferred together, there seems to have been less effort in 1915 to post men from the same regional Commands together. A group of about 100 men was transferred from the Sherwood Foresters in Northern Command to 3rd Cheshire on 9 July. Many of these men had enlisted in late 1914/early 1915, although their regimental numbers show that others were pre-war soldiers, presumably Reservists recalled to

³¹ TNA: WO 293/2 WOI 199, 23 May 1915 - Transfers from RAMC to Infantry and ACI 200 of 23 May 1915 - Transfer of men from RH and RFA to Infantry.

³² John Terraine (ed), *General Jack's Diary* (1964; London: Cassell & Co, 2000), p. 106.

³³ www.Ancestry.com Service records (SR) and Medal Index Cards (MIC) for 28062 Private H. Parkinson, 28113 Private W. Yates, 28275 Private W.J. Fleming and 28024 Private George William Hall.

the Colours. Unlike the medical and artillery transferees, some of these men would arrive in France within a week of their transfer: a draft of 33 joined 1st Cheshire on 24 July.³⁴

Growing Use of Medical Categories

Earlier in 1915 the need for some means of ensuring uniform standards of medical fitness amongst drafts had been recognised. In March instructions were issued for the establishment of Standing Medical Boards (SMB) in all stations providing drafts for service abroad. Composed of two or three medical officers, one of whom was to be a Regular RAMC officer, they were to examine all men reported by their unit as unfit for service abroad, using the following classifications:

- A Fit for service home and abroad;
- B Temporarily unfit for service abroad;
- C Fit for home only;
- D Unfit for service home or abroad.

This was the beginning of classification by medical fitness. Later, in July 1915, Travelling Medical Boards were established to inspect and classify all men reported as being permanently or temporarily unfit for overseas service.³⁵

It was decided in late April that SR battalions should create supernumerary companies or platoons containing men permanently unfit for service overseas.³⁶ In a subsequent initiative to provide further units for Home Defence, Garrison companies were formed in August from these supernumerary companies. There were some interesting caveats:

... care should be taken ... to compose each company of men drawn from the same class as far as possible ... [and] ... men sent from the locally raised units ... should be formed

³⁴ Cheshire Regimental Archives (CRA) – 1st Cheshire War Diary, July 1915.

³⁵ Major-General Sir W.G MacPherson, *Medical History of the War Volume 1* (London: HMSO, 1921), p. 120.

³⁶ TNA: WO 293/2 WOI 232, 25 April 1915.

into separate companies whenever the numbers available render it possible, so as to keep together all men coming from the same class or locality.³⁷

In late 1915 these Garrison companies would be expanded into home service (HS) Garrison battalions and allotted to Regiments.³⁸ Not all Regiments would have such battalions: in the Marches Regiments the only one was the 3rd (HS) Garrison Battalion Cheshire, formed in November 1915.

It had also been realized that although men in Medical Category B might not be fit enough for service on the frontline they might still be sent overseas to relieve battalions on garrison duties. This led to the formation of Overseas Garrison Battalions from mid-1915 onwards. The 1st Garrison battalions of the RWF and the Cheshire were formed in July and August respectively and both were sent to Gibraltar in September 1915. Whilst initially they were formed from 'B' men, a revision of medical categories in October also enabled the use of men unable to return to active service at the Front. The 2nd Garrison Battalion Cheshire, raised in October 1915, was composed mostly of such men who had become casualties earlier in the war but were now fit enough for garrison service overseas. Cheshire soldiers were grouped as far as possible into A and B companies whilst C and D companies were composed largely of men from the South Lancashire and the Loyal North Lancashire Regiments. They were given 'light training, sport – in so far as (their) disabilities would permit – and plenty of good appetising food' and the battalion was soon brought up to standard.³⁹ In due course it would leave for Egypt in March 1916 along with the 2nd Garrison Battalion RWF thus releasing two TF battalions for the Western Front.

³⁷ TNA: WO 293/3 WOI 88, 10 August 1915.

³⁸ TNA: WO 293/4 ACI 5 of 2 Jan 16; ACI 325, 9 February 1916.

³⁹ A. Crookenden, *The History of the Cheshire Regiment in the Great War* (Chester: Evans, nd; Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, n.d.), p. 348.

The basic medical categories were now: general service; field service at home; garrison service (a) abroad or (b) at home; labour; sedentary work; and unfit for any military service. It had also become apparent that there was a need for longer term treatment of sick and wounded men evacuated from the EF, who were unlikely to recover sufficiently to return to overseas service within three months. This led to the establishment towards the end of 1915 of Command Depots, run by the respective Home Commands. The Western Command Depots were in Manchester, Prescott, just outside Liverpool, and at Catterick. On arrival at the Command Depot, the convalescent soldier would be examined by a medical board and allocated to an appropriate company according to his physical fitness. He would continue to receive any necessary medical treatment together with graduated exercises, massage and ‘therapeutic gymnastics’ designed to ‘harden’ him ready for drafting overseas. Every fourteen days he would be re-boarded to assess his progress and when he had recovered sufficiently he would be posted to the appropriate reserve battalion.⁴⁰

TF Difficulties

It continued to prove difficult to provide TF drafts both for overseas and home defence. Although the attempt to obtain legislation allowing TF soldiers to be transferred without their consent had failed, the matter continued to rumble on with the War Office seeking ways round it and the now vigilant TF lobby on its guard against any perceived assault on TF terms of service. In late May serving Territorials who had previously accepted IS liability were invited to sign an amended version of the original IS declaration indicating their consent to being

⁴⁰ MacPherson, *Medical History of the War Volume 1*, pp. 91 & 114.

transferred between corps if necessary. In June, a new version, to be signed by recruits was also produced, containing the words:

and where, with a view to service overseas, my transfer to another corps is required, I hereby consent to such transfer notwithstanding that the corps to which I am to be transferred may be different from that in which I am serving.⁴¹

The topic of these forms was immediately raised in the House of Commons. Despite Mr Tennant's insistence that signature was voluntary, and that transfers would be made only in exceptional circumstances, MPs remained unconvinced.⁴² In early July, the matter reached the Lords with the suggestion that it was desired 'to obtain by a side wind what was directly excluded from the Army (Transfers) Act itself'. Lord Derby noted that something had affected TF recruiting in West Lancashire during the previous fortnight. He could not say if it was definitely due to the reluctance of recruits to agree to be transferred from one battalion to another but whereas an average of 1,100 recruits per week had been joining the figure was now down to 250.⁴³ Within a week, the forms had been withdrawn and the question of TF transfers had to be dropped for the time being, even though it was already proving impossible to reinforce some of the TF units serving in France.

There was another problem concerning the TF, namely its use for home defence. Until March individuals could continue to enlist in the TF for home service (HS) only. Although many came under pressure to take the IS obligation, some 82,588 HS men would still be shown on TF returns in August 1915.⁴⁴ The population of the Second Line battalions was thus a mixture: genuine HS men, others who had enlisted too late to go overseas with the First Line but still

⁴¹ TNA WO 123/58 AO 249 and Appendix XXVIII of 15 Jun 15.

⁴² *HC Deb 09 June 1915 vol 72 cc249-50 and HC Deb 22 June 1915 vol 72 cc1040-1.*

⁴³ *HL Deb 01 July 1915 vol 19 cc182-99.*

⁴⁴ Ian F. W. Beckett, *The Amateur Military Tradition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 230.

hoped to do so and those who were willing but unfit to serve abroad. The problem was how to use these different categories to best advantage whilst ensuring the Second Line formed an efficient part of the Home Army.

Steps had been taken in late April 1915 to separate HS from IS men by organizing the former in coast protection units and using the latter to complete the Second Line units so that they might be available to serve wherever required.⁴⁵ In June the HS men were organized into 56 composite TF battalions, known as Provisional battalions, to act as front-line anti-invasion units. They were grouped into Provisional Brigades, with other infantry and support units from the same regions, and placed under command of the GOCs of the Home Commands.⁴⁶ The intention was that they would be deployed closest to the coast and in the event of invasion would engage the enemy on the beaches and immediately inland.⁴⁷

These Provisional battalions contained both HS personnel and also soldiers of low medical categories. The prohibition on transferring TF soldiers was circumvented by enlisting the men in Second or Third Line battalions and then simply attaching them to the Provisional battalions, whilst showing them as supernumeraries on the rolls of their parent units. Training and exercises were carried out and drafts received from Second and Third Line units: on 5 October, 37 men of the 2nd Monmouthshire joined the 48th Provisional Battalion in Norwich, and on 9 December some 82 men from the 2nd Line 1st Herefordshire plus a further 113 Monmouthshires arrived.⁴⁸ Although the Provisional battalions were not intended as draft-finders, pressure was

⁴⁵ TNA: WO 293/2 WOI 220 of 24 April 1915 – Separation of Home Service men from IS Men in the TF.

⁴⁶ TNA: WO 293/3 WOI 31 of 4 July 1915 Composition of Provisional Bde; refers to AO 314 of 1915.

⁴⁷ Mitchinson, *Defending Albion*, p. 101 and Appendix III, p. 208.

⁴⁸ TNA: WO 95/5458 – War Diary of 48th Provisional Battalion, September 1915 – March 1916.

increasingly placed on those men who became fit enough for overseas service as the need for reinforcements grew. In October the 44th Provisional Battalion noted:

During the month a total of 42 recruits have been received from the 7th, 8th and 9th (King's Liverpool Regiment) Depots. These men are shaping very well and will be used for Guard duties as soon as their training is completed. They are all Imperial Service men and will be sent to 2nd or 3rd line units when medically fit and trained.⁴⁹

The problem for the Provisional battalions was their rapid turnover of manpower which made coherent training difficult. Furthermore, their coastal locations were not ideal for training and they were also very far down the line for the provision of ammunition and equipment. In September 1915 the Norwich-based 48th Provisional Battalion undertook a tactical exercise travelling by train from Thorpe to Melton Constable, a journey of over 2 hours, and then seem to have dug trenches. On 8 September it was noted that 193 Japanese rifles were given out to 'A' Company in exchange for 193 Japanese carbines.⁵⁰ Men posted from such units and drafted out to the Front were in for a rude shock, as were the units that would receive them.

Behind and in support of the Provisional Battalions were the TF Second Line Divisions. Kitchener appears to have promised not to use these as draft finders, but it proved impossible to hold to this.⁵¹ In May, Kitchener pessimistically informed the War Cabinet that the Second Line had been 'bled white' by despatching drafts and was now incapable of fulfilling its Home Defence role.⁵² Some drafts had been sent to the First Line by the Third Line but the Third Line depots had taken time to create and as yet there were simply not enough trained men so drafts had of necessity been sent from the Second Line Home Defence units.

⁴⁹ TNA: WO 95/5458 – War Diary of 44th Provisional Battalion – October 1915.

⁵⁰ TNA: WO 95/5458 – War Diary of 48th Provisional Battalion September 1915.

⁵¹ Mitchinson, *Defending Albion*, p. 100.

⁵² TNA: CAB 22/1/21 War Council Meeting 14 May 1915 cited in Mitchinson *Defending Albion*, p. 99.

The difficulties of providing TF replacements and the constant tension between home defence and the BEF were highlighted by the situation of the 50th Northumbrian Division. It had proceeded overseas in mid-April and by 23 April had arrived at its concentration area to the west of Poperinghe with 572 officers and 16,858 men.⁵³ A newly arrived division would usually undergo a period of training but 50th Division's arrival coincided with the German attack at Ypres on 22 April so it was rushed into the heavy fighting of the Second Battle of Ypres, suffering heavy losses: 186 officers and 5018 men between 22 April and 31 May 1915.⁵⁴ Replacements for the 50th Division, the only TF division to have been involved, would need to come from its Second and Third Line units. However, its Second Line units had originally been full of HS only men and the Third Line units had been very late in forming.⁵⁵

With these constraints the Division was still seriously undermanned nearly six months later when in late September it became the subject of a series of War Office Minutes. The trigger for these was a note from AG's branch, containing drastic proposals to replenish the Division from its Second Line units. Since 1 September 1,474 men had gone or were under orders to join the First Line units in France but this was still inadequate. The only way to increase this figure would be to take every trained man from the Second Line, a total of 1,336. This would leave the Second Line units very weak but would ensure the Division's Infantry units received a total draft of 2,810 during September.⁵⁶ The proposal sparked a serious reaction from the then Director of Home Defence (DHD), Major General L. E. Kiggell, who wrote to the CIGS on 27 September warning of the continuing possibility of invasion and the low fighting strength of the HD force which would have to confront such an event with partially trained and

⁵³ E. Wyrall, *The Fiftieth Division 1914 – 1919* (1939; Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, n.d.), p. 5.

⁵⁴ *BOH 1915 Vol I*, p. 356. The 28th Division had lost 15,533 and the 4th Division 10,859.

⁵⁵ TNA: WO 32/5268 The Present Situation as Regards Home Defence.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

inadequately armed troops led by inexperienced officers. The nub of the minute was a request for a decision on whether the already 'dangerously' weak TF divisions at home should be weakened still further for the sake of the BEF.⁵⁷ The matter reached Kitchener, who on 7 October ruled that the Northumbrian Territorials should receive the available reinforcements. The immediate problem for that Division had been eased but the underlying difficulties remained, namely the constraints the TF transfer regulations placed on reinforcing units and the conflicting requirements of the Home Army and the BEF.

Growing Manpower Problems

The consequences of uncontrolled recruiting were becoming apparent for the nation at large. Many industries had been affected but the loss of skilled and experienced munitions workers in particular meant that the output of equipment and weapons was failing to meet requirements. The main problem was a lack of any centrally held information on the distribution of manpower. On 1 July 1915, a remedy was sought with a Bill proposing compulsory registration of the capabilities and occupations of everyone in Great Britain, male and female, between the ages of fifteen and sixty-five was put before Parliament.⁵⁸ It was designed to obtain information on the numbers employed in each industry from which could be calculated those needed for munitions work, shipbuilding, agriculture and other essential activities and the consequent surplus available for the army and navy. Despite some opposition from those who saw it as a precursor to conscription, the National Registration Act was passed in July and registration took place on 15 August. The outcome showed 2,832,210 married and 2,179,231 single men of military age not serving in the forces. Those considered indispensable for work essential for

⁵⁷ *Ibid* and Mitchinson, *Defending Albion*, p. 108.

⁵⁸ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th Ser., Vol.72, cols 1651-55.

national survival were 'starred' as being in 'reserved occupations'; of the single men, 690,138 were thus 'starred', leaving 1,489,093 technically available for military service.⁵⁹

Opposition to conscription continued alongside growing realization of the inadequacy of a voluntary system to meet the manpower demands placed upon it. A War Policy Committee was set up in early September to examine the existing voluntary recruiting system and 'some general consideration of the alternative of compulsion'.⁶⁰ It based its considerations on a projected British Army strength in the field on 1 April 1916 of 1.5 million or about 70 divisions, the figure Kitchener had pledged in discussions with the French High Command at Calais in July 1915, and the need to maintain that force at its full establishment until the end of 1916. The War Office contended that recruiting would have to be raised to 25,000 per week in order to maintain a force of 70 divisions throughout 1916.

Statements were taken from Government departments which inevitably accorded both with the responsibility of the Minister concerned and, to a lesser extent with his political leanings: the First Lord of the Admiralty, Balfour, questioned the concentration on the Army when ships were more important; the Chancellor of the Exchequer, McKenna, contended that 50 divisions were the maximum that Britain could afford to recruit and equip; and Kitchener not only needed 70 divisions but regarded 100 as the ideal. He confirmed that more recruits would be needed to maintain the Army in 1916 than could be obtained under a voluntary system which currently produced about 20,000 men per week, enough to keep only 1,000,000 men in the field.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Report on Recruiting by the Earl of Derby, Director General of Recruiting Parliamentary Papers 1914-16 XXXIX Cd 8149 cited in Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's Army* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p 148.

⁶⁰ TNA: CAB 37/134/9 War Policy Committee Report, September 1915.

⁶¹ *Ibid* p. 8.

The War Policy Committee put forward three options: maintain the current system and tell the French that 70 Divisions were unobtainable; increase the number of voluntary recruits through the threat of later compulsion; or introduce compulsory service. The report was signed by the six members of the Committee.⁶² However, in a Supplementary Memorandum dated 7 September 1915, four of the signatories, Churchill, Curzon, Selborne and Chamberlain, broke ranks and offered six more positive conclusions: 70 divisions would be possible; sufficient munitions would be available from March 1916; the required numbers of men existed, albeit unobtainable on a voluntary basis; men could be spared from industry if a proper form of selection was employed; financial arrangements could be made to maintain 70 divisions up to the end of 1916; and it would be desirable to increase the number of divisions to 100 for which munitions would be available by August 1916.⁶³ The decision required of the Cabinet was clear:

Whether the 70 division scheme is to be cut down to the limits which can be supplied by voluntary enlistment, or whether it is to be maintained and carried out by compulsion.⁶⁴

Action of some kind would shortly become necessary as it became increasingly difficult to replace the high level of casualties occurring on the Western Front and elsewhere. A month later, Kitchener informed the Cabinet that the voluntary system was failing to produce the 35,000 men now needed each week to maintain the armies in the field.⁶⁵

⁶² Lords Crewe, Curzon and Selborne, Austen Chamberlain, Winston Churchill and Arthur Henderson.

⁶³ TNA: CAB/37/134/7 Supplementary Memorandum dated 7 September 1915.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 15.

⁶⁵ TNA: CAB/37/135/15, 8 October 1915.

A final attempt at voluntary enlistment was made with the announcement in mid-October by Lord Derby, recently appointed Director General of Recruiting, of the 'group' or 'Derby Scheme'. Under this scheme, not applied to Ireland because of continuing fears of unrest in that province, men between 18 and 41 not employed in 'reserved occupations' were asked either to enlist immediately or to attest their willingness to serve when required. The attested men would be divided into 46 groups by age and marital status; single men in groups 1-23 and married men in groups 24-46. Groups would be called up as required, beginning with single men aged 19 (Group 2), but no married men would be called up until all the single men had been summoned.⁶⁶ Those who attested but chose to defer their service would receive a day's pay at Infantry rates and were then transferred to Section B Army Reserve to await call up. This change to the normal form of Reserve service necessitated a hasty amendment to the Army Pay Warrant to ensure that the 'Derbyites' received no further 'emoluments from Army Funds' or any normal Reservist entitlements before being called up.⁶⁷ Applications by attested men for further postponements would be considered by specially established Local Tribunals. A network of some 2000 local tribunals was created by the Local Government Board (LGB). They each consisted of five members, drawn mostly from the local registration authorities that had conducted the August registration, and mirrored existing urban and rural council boundaries.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Roy Douglas, 'Voluntary Enlistment in the First World War and the Work of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee', *Journal of Modern History*, 42 (4) (December, 1970), p. 580; *HC Deb* 2 November 1915 vol 75 c520.

⁶⁷ TNA: WO 123/57 AO 415 of 1915, published 22 October 1915. This amendment ensured that the 'Derby' men would not receive a gratuity under Article 1117 of the Pay Warrant, nor a suit of civilian clothes or a money allowance in lieu. WO 293/3 WOI 221, 23 October noted that they would not be appointed to a Corps or Regiment until actually called up.

⁶⁸ *Minutes of the Corporation of Glasgow of 5 November 1915* (GCA CI.3.54); TNA: MH 10/195 LGB Circular R1 of 26 October 1915.

The Derby scheme was initially successful and its original end date of 30 November was extended until mid-December 1915. Enlistment into the TF had been allowed under the scheme and this was also extended until its completion.⁶⁹ The processing of recruits seems to have worked well although there were some delays and also resentment of those who turned up only to attest: a ‘haughty ‘grouper’’ who complained of having been kept waiting in the Recruiting Office was greeted by the retort: ‘What the devil are you grumbling at, we have been waiting for you for sixteen ***** months.’⁷⁰

There was a late rush of attestations before the cut-off date of 11 December but by 24 December 1915 it had become apparent that almost a third of the 3,145,760 unstarred men were unavailable for various reasons: medical, Government employment, or employers’ consent refused. Only 55 per cent of available men had enlisted or attested; almost 47 per cent of the available married men had refused as had 40 per cent of the single men.⁷¹ It was estimated that the scheme had produced only 343,386 single men forcing Derby to conclude that ‘it will not be possible to hold the married men to their attestation unless and until the services of single men have been obtained by other means.’⁷² The scheme had failed but this was due not so much to insufficient single men volunteering as that the demand for 35,000 volunteers per week was far too high a target for any industrial society to be able to meet after sixteen months of war.⁷³ The Government was now reluctantly faced with the inescapable conclusion that conscription was the only way forward.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ TNA: WO 70/50: Summary of Principal Changes in Organisation and Administration of TF since Mobilization, p. 51; letters 27/Gen No/4507 (AG 2(b)) dated 23 October 1915 and 9/Gen No/5764 dated 9 December 1915.

⁷⁰ *The Oak Tree Vol 1 1915-1916* (Chester: December 1915 edition Vol 1 No 1).

⁷¹ Based on figures cited in Douglas, ‘Voluntary Enlistment in the First World War’, p. 582.

⁷² Lord Derby, Report on Recruiting, cited in Simkins *Kitchener’s Army*, p. 156.

⁷³ K. Gieves, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914-18* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988), p.22.

⁷⁴ J. McDermott, *British Military Service Tribunals 1916-1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 13 and Ian F.W. Beckett & K. Simpson, eds., *Nation In Arms: a Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 12-13.

It might be thought that those left at home had a far easier time than those overseas. True there was little risk to life and limb but the demands on the Government, the War Office and the Home Army in seeking to prosecute the war were multi-faceted. This was particularly the case in the provision and organization of the necessary manpower. In contrast, the role of the BEF was more hazardous but simpler: they just had to use the men provided to them.

Western Front

By late 1914, the organization that had brought the BEF across the channel was insufficient to manage eleven infantry divisions and five cavalry divisions, with more on their way. Instructions were issued on the evening of 25 December for the BEF's immediate re-organization into two Armies: First Army, under General Sir Douglas Haig, would comprise I, IV and the Indian Corps, whilst Second Army, under General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, would contain II and III Corps plus the 27th Division. The impact of the new structure on existing systems and procedures appears initially not to have been recognized. On 28 December, Haig produced a note on staff duties in which he noted that the Army HQ should not become simply a 'post office' and that GHQ would continue to deal direct with Corps on almost all subjects except 'operations'. Corps were to forward to the Army Commander 'Everything that affects operations, and which the Army Commander should know in order to command his forces in action'.⁷⁵ This was endorsed on 29 December by a GHQ Routine Order noting that the 'A' staffs at Army HQs would deal only with disciplinary matters, courts martial and medical arrangements. The rest of the 'A' work, including reinforcements, casualties, posting and

⁷⁵ TNA: 95/589 1st Army 'Notes regarding Staff Duties', 28 December 1914, cited in Niall Barr, 'Command in the Transition From Mobile to Static Warfare, August 1914 to March 1915.' in Gary Sheffield & Dan Todman, *Command and Control on the Western Front* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2004), p. 31.

transfer of officers would 'for the present' be dealt with by Corps direct to GHQ.⁷⁶ The introduction of the Army level of command was a new departure, so perhaps it is not surprising that there should have been some muddled thinking over quite what an Army Commander might need to know. The numbers of effective troops under his command and the necessity for reinforcements would, however, appear to be key information.

In the meantime, reinforcements continued to arrive and some 23,815 regular infantry were sent up to the Front during January. They were of variable standards. Some were half-trained SR men, some were time-expired re-enlisted soldiers past military age and some were recruits who had joined since the outbreak of war.⁷⁷ Others were not fit: in January the CO 3 IBD commented that whilst the general behaviour of the troops from home had improved, and they were better equipped and of good physique, the pre-drafting medical inspections did not seem to be sufficiently rigorous and many men were being sent to Medical Boards immediately on arrival at the Depot on account of bad teeth. This meant they were not fit for the Front and were practically useless.⁷⁸ The AG staffs at GHQ attempted to keep units up to strength but it was difficult: on 20 January the AAG visited HQ 2nd Corps and 27th Division to discuss an unaccountable shortage of men in certain units. There, he learned that a proportion of weak or older men had been removed from units to form corps and divisional reserve 'without the fact having been reported' to GHQ.⁷⁹

New formations were soon to arrive as well and plans had to be made for the creation of their Base Depots. In mid-February, DAG 3rd Echelon attended various meetings concerning the

⁷⁶ TNA: WO 95/25 GHQ AG War Diary 29 December 1914.

⁷⁷ *BOH 1915 Vol. I*, p. 54.

⁷⁸ TNA: WO 95/4185 No 3 IBD War Diary January 1915.

⁷⁹ TNA: WO 95/25 AG War Diary of 20 January 1915.

imminent arrival of both TF and New Army Divisions. On 25 February the Base Depots for the Territorial units due to arrive shortly and for the North Midland Div (TF) 'which are now landing' were discussed.⁸⁰ In the event, Territorial Camps were established to act as receiving units and IBDS were then created; in mid-March No 6 General Base Depot at Rouen was recycled as No 46 (North Midland) IBD, receiving details from No 2 Territorial Camp.⁸¹

The split of responsibilities relating to manpower continued to require refinement and the necessity for Army HQs to have visibility of the reporting of casualties and the provision of reinforcements was soon realized. New instructions were issued to come into effect on 1 March 1915. In future, Divisions would telegraph daily reports of casualties, as at 12 noon daily, to their respective Army HQ where the reports would be consolidated and forwarded to AG, GHQ and the DAG 3rd Echelon, Rouen. If heavy fighting was in progress then Divisions or Corps, as previously arranged by the Army HQs, were to telegraph round numbers of heavy casualties in any particular units direct to AG, GHQ. This was to enable advanced warning to be given of the need for reinforcements either from the Base or from England. Demands for replacements due to casualties and normal wastage such as sickness were now to be submitted directly to DAG, 3rd Echelon by the Army Corps, and no longer through AG, GHQ. The DAG would decide how reinforcements for the same Regiment would be apportioned. He would also send weekly tables showing reinforcements at Bases direct to Army HQs as well as to GHQ. Daily routine strength returns showing the fighting strengths of brigades were to continue to be compiled and submitted to AG GHQ and a weekly statement showing the strength of each unit

⁸⁰ TNA: WO 95/43 DAG 3rd Echelon War Diary for February 1915.

⁸¹ TNA: WO 95/4186 No 46 IBD War Diary 1915.

together with details of reinforcements at the Base on that date would in future be sent by Corps to Army HQs and copied to DAG, 3rd Echelon and AG, GHQ.⁸²

These new reporting processes would be tested at the battle of Neuve Chapelle, 10 – 13 March. This was the first planned British offensive of the war, and the outcomes would provide lessons and methods that would form a model for most British attacks for the rest of the war.⁸³ The passage of information was particularly acute concerning the reporting of casualties.

The First Army plan was to capture the village of Neuve Chapelle and then seize the heights of Aubers Ridge. On 10 March, an Advanced Report Centre for AG GHQ was established at Hazebrouck by the AAG, Colonel Cooke and the DAAG, Captain Jeffcoat, where arrangements were made for the rapid reporting in round numbers of casualties from Neuve Chapelle and St Eloi. The contents of the telephoned reports back to GHQ show the steepness of the learning curve and the difficulty of obtaining accurate information. On 11 March, the AAG reported on his visits to the Advanced Reporting Centres for the 1st, 2nd, 7th and 8th Divisions. The 1st Division had so far had no casualties above the normal level, three battalions of the 2nd Division had suffered heavy casualties but no confirmed figures were as yet available for the 7th and 8th Divisions. They had ‘promised to wire definite information as they get it direct to GHQ’. Unofficially, the DAQMG of 8th Division understood that 2nd Berkshires had lost 9 officers and 170 ORs and the Divisional staff considered:

...that we shall be on the safe side if we indent for 400 men each for the 2nd Scottish Rifles and 2nd Middlesex. In the remaining battalions of the 23rd and 25th Brigades they consider we shall be about right if we ask for 200 men each.⁸⁴

⁸² TNA: WO 95/25 GHQ AG War Diary GRO 674 Appendix 1 – “A” Staff Duties – Headquarters of Armies wef 1 March 1915 and WO 95/43 DAG 3rd Echelon War Diary for 1 March 1915.

⁸³ Barr, ‘Command in the Transition from Mobile to Static Warfare’, p.33.

⁸⁴ TNA: WO 95/25 AG War Diary entry for 11 March 1915.

Matters were not much better at HQ First Army. An Advanced Report Centre had been set up on 9 March at Merville, manned by the AQMG, Lt Col Holman, and a clerk. By 11 March another officer had joined him as Holman had ‘found he had too much to do’ but even then they had difficulty obtaining information. The estimated total casualties for 10 – 13 March inclusive were given as 463 officers and 13,120 men but accompanied by the comment:

As, however, practically no casualty figures are available from 4th Corps, these figures being merely estimates based on remaining strength as far as it is known, the estimate is necessarily very much a matter of guess work.⁸⁵

On 14 March, the report telephoned back to AG branch GHQ shows increasing signs of frustration:

Col Cooke went out today to the 4th Corps and the 1st Army Headquarters, and he pointed out clearly that the matter of reporting casualties must be quickened up. He then went on to the 7th Division, and he understands from them that 113 names of officers have been submitted already. As regards other ranks in the 7th Division, estimated casualties are 2448. Col Cooke impressed upon the 7th Division that they must have some better system, on future occasions, of sending out a staff officer to collect information. He then went on to the 8th Division advanced reporting centre. All he could get from the 8th Division was the strengths on this morning. The unofficial figures may be correct, but Col Cooke does not know what they actually include. He thinks they may mean only men in the trenches. Col Cooke’s opinion is that these casualties are not over-estimated. They are gained from quartermasters and transport personnel of the formations mentioned.⁸⁶

The frustrations were not all one-sided, however. First Army complained that the present system of collecting casualty returns had given rise to ‘very numerous enquiries and telegrams’, requesting that:

a more speedy and accurate scheme .. be devised for rendering these returns without unduly harassing Divisional and other Staffs during periods of active fighting.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ TNA: WO 95/181 First Army AG&QMG War Diary – March 1915.

⁸⁶ TNA: WO 95/25 AG War Diary 10-14 March 1915.

⁸⁷ TNA: WO 95/181 First Army A&Q Branch War Diary entry for 15 March 1915.

That several lessons had been learned during the fighting is evident from Col Cooke's subsequent report:

1. That it is very advisable for representatives of AG GHQ to keep in touch with HQ of Divisions during the progress of heavy fighting to ensure early information reaching the AG (and through him the CinC) regarding casualties.
2. That it is essential that Divisional Commanders shall have some organized system of communicating casualties rapidly in round numbers from Brigades to Divisional HQ.
3. That ordinary routine work of the administrative staff of Divisions, Corps and Armies must be suspended to a sufficient degree to enable sufficient numbers of the staffs to deal with the unusual casualty and reinforcement work.
4. That, in order that Division staffs may not be worried with unnecessary questions, the General Staff (GS) Liaison officers should not concern themselves with any figures of casualties, which it is the business of AG's staff to collect.⁸⁸

A new instruction on Casualty Reports and Reinforcements was published on 17 March.⁸⁹ It was produced too early to incorporate all the lessons from the recent fighting but, in replacing nine previous instructions, its aim was clearly to consolidate procedures. It was still broadly based on FSR Part 2 but the key change was that when fighting was actually in progress round numbers of casualties were to be notified to AG GHQ as quickly as possible so that a forecast of the situation and the reinforcements required might be made. The need for speed was paramount in notifying casualty numbers, but absolute accuracy remained essential in the subsequent report to DAG 3rd Echelon of personal details of the dead and missing. Only after further verification would the names of the dead, wounded and missing be forwarded to the War Office.

The casualty figures for Neuve Chapelle were later shown to be 583 officers and 12,309 men.⁹⁰ Despite the difficulties in obtaining accurate figures, the reinforcement system appeared to

⁸⁸ TNA: WO 95/25 AG GHQ War Diary entry for 17 March 1915.

⁸⁹ TNA: WO 95/25 AG GHQ War Diary – March 1915 Casualty Reports and Reinforcements Pamphlet, issued with GRO No 720 of 1915.

⁹⁰ *BOH 1915 Vol. 1*, p. 151.

work effectively as practically all losses had been made good by about 18 March, with total reinforcements sent forward from the Base Depots between 10 – 20 March numbering 387 officers and 19,558 men.⁹¹

What had evolved from FSR Part 2 in the light of experience was the key role now played by DAG 3rd Echelon. All applications for the provision of reinforcements were to be made through him and he was the sole authority for submitting, when necessary, demands for manpower to the War Office. Once reinforcements arrived in theatre their processing remained based on the original procedures: all troops, other than formed units, but including casualties and returned stragglers, were to be sent to their respective Base Depots where the OC Reinforcements would await the DAG's orders concerning the numbers to be sent to the Front. Demands to replace casualties and wastage were now submitted directly to the DAG from formation headquarters.⁹² On receipt of such demands, if sufficient troops were available in the Base Depots, the DAG would send orders to the appropriate OC Reinforcements to prepare the necessary personnel for entrainment as soon as rail transport could be provided. If insufficient numbers were available to meet demands, the DAG would dispatch what was available and take steps to demand the residue from England. Where the request was for replacements for normal requirements, such as routine casualties and wastage through sickness, the DAG would use his discretion in deciding whether to comply at once or to wait until a sufficiently large number was required in the Brigade or Division from which the demand emanated. Overall, it was a large and growing area of responsibility and one that overlapped in places with the responsibilities of the IGC, who was responsible for the training, administration, interior economy and discipline of all

⁹¹ TNA: WO 95/25 AG GHQ War Diary – March 1915 Appendix 3.

⁹² TNA: WO 95/181 1st Army War Diary 30 March 1915 - correspondence between DAG 3rd Echelon, AG GHQ and 1st Army on subject of sick wastage reports. In future Divisions were to forward a weekly report direct to DAG 3rd echelon as before, and a daily report to AAG 1st Army.

reinforcements, including formed units, and arrangements for their onward movement by rail once orders were received for them to proceed to the Front.

Lessons were still being drawn from Neuve Chapelle and a conference at GHQ on 23 March discussed future arrangements for accelerating the reporting of casualty numbers during heavy fighting. The outcome seems to have been a constant round of visits by AG staff officers to explain what was wanted. It was, for example, 'explained to 27th and 28th Divisions that they must have some system of sending staff officers round to collect information as to casualties and let us know at the earliest moment'.⁹³ In early April Army HQs were informed of future arrangements to be introduced by AG Branch GHQ for dealing with casualty numbers during severe fighting. An advanced report centre would be set up, consisting of sufficient AG GHQ staff officers to connect with each Army involved in the fighting, plus an officer representing the DGMS. These AG staff officers would be always out during the day visiting the different divisional headquarters in order to gather information: collecting the earliest possible information regarding round numbers of casualties, ascertaining which units had been, or were likely to be, most heavily engaged and generally gaining any other information likely to be of use in forecasting probable casualties and requirements. This information would be correlated to provide the CinC with the latest figures of casualties and strengths of units and of reinforcements expected and a daily estimate of casualties to date and of reinforcements expected would also be furnished to the General Staff report centre.⁹⁴

The battle of Neuve Chapelle had been for many of the staffs of the newly expanded BEF a first introduction to the casualty reporting procedures. Evidence of the steep learning curve is shown

⁹³ *Ibid* March 1915.

⁹⁴ TNA: WO 95/181 First Army A & QMG War Diary of 5 April 1915 and its Appendix 1.

by the plethora of detail in the respective 'A' Staffs' War Diaries for March and April 1915. Such detail does not occur for the periods during which the subsequent battles of 1915 were being fought: Second Ypres, Aubers Ridge, Festubert and the actions around Hooge. It may therefore be assumed that the lessons learned from Neuve Chappelle and the casualty reporting procedures developed from them remained in place unchanged.

The rapid expansion of the Army had led to shortages of experience at all levels. The *OH* notes a report from GOC First Army on the shortage of experienced officers and NCOs 'and that in some battalions neither the training of companies nor the general cohesion came up even to a moderate standard of efficiency'.⁹⁵ The problem was also acute at the staff level; qualified officers could not be found for the growing number of staff posts created by the increase in the number of formation headquarters at home and overseas. Increased size brought increased complexity. Instead of the previous generalists, specialist staff officers would now be needed who understood the routine of one branch or department of the staff.⁹⁶ In the 'A' area a programme of 'on the job' training was instigated at GHQ. For example, between 15 and 26 April Captain C.V.O. Gray, Seaforth Highlanders, was attached to AG's office for instruction in 'A' staff work. This was followed by a fortnight at the DAG 3rd Echelon's office and then a further period, 9 – 28 May, at the AG Advanced Report Centre. On 29 May he assumed the duties of a Staff Captain in 2nd Infantry Brigade. At a more senior level, Lt Col White, Connaught Rangers, spent from 8 June – 14 July on attachment to AG's staffs before assuming his appointment as AAG 3rd Army. These were just two of a large number of officers who passed through monthly for training. It might not have been in depth training but at least it gave

⁹⁵ *BOH 1915 Vol. 1*, p. 26 fn 3.

⁹⁶ *BOH 1915 Vol. 1*, p. 55.

six weeks' grounding in procedures and, perhaps more importantly, created personal contacts between 'A' staff officers at different levels.

Some idea of the numbers of men now required for reinforcements may be gained from figures for the Second Battle of Ypres. The total losses for the period 22 April to 31 May were 2,159 officers and 57,125 other ranks. In April, 24,301 plus 3,325 TF were sent from the Base and the May infantry numbers were even higher: 37,774 plus 4,041 TF.⁹⁷ The Fifth Division figures show 71 officers killed, 209 wounded and 13 missing plus 1,068 men killed, 5,478 wounded and 1,155 missing giving a grand total of 7,994 casualties over the whole period of Second Ypres.⁹⁸ Reinforcements were sent up as they became available: between 23 April and 4 May 63 officers and 3544 men were received by Fifth Division.⁹⁹ The system set in place seems to have been coping.

Between 1 January and 30 June 155,000 Infantry reinforcements were dispatched to the Front from the various Base Depots. However, these overall figures mask a chronic shortage of reinforcements for the TF. As early as 23 April French had protested to the War Office about the weakness of TF units. In early May he and Macready considered retaining a portion of the Highland Division as a reinforcement pool as it had been sent from England in place of TF reinforcements 'which the War Office are not able to find'.¹⁰⁰ In the event this did not happen but by 18th May drastic action had become necessary. Three of the weakest battalions of the London Regiment, 5th (London Rifle Brigade), 12th (Rangers) and 13th (Kensingtons) were withdrawn to the LofC and temporarily formed into a composite battalion. The 7th and 9th

⁹⁷ TNA: WO 95/25 – AG War Diary April and May 1915.

⁹⁸ *BOH 1915 Vol. 1*, pp. 355-6.

⁹⁹ TNA: WO 95/25 – AG War Diary May 1915.

¹⁰⁰ TNA: WO 95/25 – AG War Diary April and May 1915.

Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were also temporarily amalgamated as were the three battalions of the Monmouthshire Regiment, which had been particularly badly hit. Official notification from AG GHQ reached Army HQs on 25 May: as TF reinforcements would be unobtainable for a considerable time if the strength of a TF battalion fell below 400 ORs a proposal for its amalgamation with another battalion was to be submitted to GHQ. A battalion of a TF division requiring such action would be amalgamated with another in the same division and if possible a TF battalion from amongst those attached to Regular Infantry Brigades would be transferred to the TF division to keep up the prescribed number of battalions in the division.¹⁰¹ There was an immediate outcry at home, particularly from the TF lobby in Parliament and within a month the policy had been discontinued. In future any TF battalions falling below 400 in strength were to retain their identity unless they expressed a desire to be amalgamated or to be attached to a Regular battalion as a separate company, in which case the matter was to be referred to AG before any action was taken. Meanwhile, the WO had notified that drafts were being prepared for certain TF units.¹⁰² The establishment of all TF battalions in France was also to be reduced to 800 men from 2 July.

Fortunately for the BEF, the first divisions of the New Armies were now arriving. The 9th, 12th and 14th Divisions arrived during May followed by five more divisions in July. Kitchener did not want to waste the excellent material of his New Armies and had great faith in their esprit de corps.¹⁰³ Consequently he remained reluctant to allow them to be broken up, as GHQ had suggested earlier, and the First New Army divisions went to the Front unbroken; in June, for

¹⁰¹ TNA: WO 95/181 First Army DA&QMG War Diary May 1915.

¹⁰² *Ibid* 28 June 1915.

¹⁰³ Lord Hankey, *The Supreme Command 1914-1918* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961), p. 260.

example, the 12th Division replaced the 27th Division in the line north-west of Armentieres whilst on 1st July the 9th Division relieved the 7th Division near Festubert.

The Base Depots were by now well settled into their routine, sending drafts to the Front as and when required. Drafts were allocated to particular units and were not to be diverted to other units without specific authority from GHQ.¹⁰⁴ In early July James Jack commanded 93 men of the 2nd Cameronians at No 8 IBD at Harfleur where facilities included practice trenches, assault courses and a rifle range. Parades were held morning and afternoon, and training consisted of tactical exercises, route marches, lectures, drill and other training. Reinforcements arrived from various sources; on 8 August Jack noted that ‘a smart draft’ composed mainly of Cameronians, who had recovered from wounds received at Neuve Chapelle, had arrived on 27 July and a draft of 60 from the 12th (Service) battalion had arrived three days later. The latter were ‘splendid material but insufficiently trained ...’.¹⁰⁵

Training available at the Base depots could not replicate frontline conditions. A partial solution to this was found by the creation of ‘Entrenching Battalions’.¹⁰⁶ These would be closer to the Front and also provide much needed manpower for work such as digging, wiring and trench boarding. By the end of the month ten such battalions, each containing 20 officers and 1000 men, had been formed and two were already at work at the Front. For draft-finding purposes they remained under the orders of the DAG and were effectively an ‘Advanced Base Depot’. As drafts were posted out to units they would be replaced by further drafts from reinforcements

¹⁰⁴ TNA: WO 95/181 1st Army RO 57 of 17 May 15.

¹⁰⁵ Terraine, ed., *General Jack's Diary*, pp. 106 – 7.

¹⁰⁶ C.E.W. Bean, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918 - Volume 3 – The Australian Imperial Force in France, 1916* (12th edn., 1941), p. 176.

available at Base Depots.¹⁰⁷ Men were normally attached to Entrenching battalions in regimental batches accompanied by their own officers; when they were drafted on as reinforcements it was usually, at least in 1915 and early 1916, to battalions of their own regiment.¹⁰⁸

Medical facilities were also being refined in order to facilitate the return of men to the Front. The policy was to evacuate as few casualties as possible to England 'in order to avoid general loss of manpower' but the increasing number of casualties caused greater congestion in the Base hospitals than the single convalescent hospital mobilized in 1914 could handle. By July eight convalescent depots had been established on the LofC at Boulogne, Wimereux, Rouen, Le Havre, Étaples, Dannes, Camiers and Le Tréport. Their purpose, similar to that of the Command Depots at home, was to reduce congestion in the hospitals and treat convalescent patients until they were sufficiently recovered to be fit for duty.¹⁰⁹

Planning had begun in June for a British attack in support of the French later in the year. The battle of Loos would take place between 25 September and 16 October. Preparations for casualty reporting and replacements had been made. On 21 September the indefatigable AAG GHQ, Colonel Cooke, visited the Headquarters of 1st, 2nd, 9th, 15th and 47th Divisions and First Army to discuss arrangements and on 22 September the War Office was warned to expect about 30,000 casualties. Once the attack started on 25 September, he spent that day and the next two going round various headquarters and on 28 September visited 1st Army, 9th and 15th Divisions,

¹⁰⁷ TNA: WO 95/43 DAG 3rd Echelon War Diary July 1915 and WO 95/181 First Army DA&QMG War Diary 9 August 1915.

¹⁰⁸ K.W. Mitchinson, *Pioneer Battalions in the Great War* (London: Leo Cooper, 1997), pp. 193-4.

¹⁰⁹ Major-General Sir W.G. MacPherson, *Medical History of the War Volume II* (London: HMSO, 1923), pp. 84-5.

arranging for these two divisions to be brought up to strength as early as possible on being drawn back into reserve. By 30 September AG GHQ's Branch was able to note that the system of wiring estimated casualties had worked well, enabling the War Office to begin sending out 30,000 reinforcements within three days of the start of the battle. On 4 October, however, following information received from the CinC, Colonel Cooke had to warn Sclater at the War Office to expect a further 50,000 casualties before the end of October.¹¹⁰

The British casualties at Loos were heavy: 2,013 officer and 48,367 other rank casualties between 26 September and 16 October, of whom some 800 officers and 15,000 men were killed or missing.¹¹¹ All these would need to be replaced, particularly the NCOs. On 22 October HQ First Army received an enquiry from DAG 3rd Echelon as to whether its battalions would accept Cavalry NCOs from England on condition that these NCOs would be promoted to the next rank on transfer. The answer was that a considerable number of battalions would accept such NCOs.¹¹²

The omission of mention of further changes to casualty reporting in any of the relevant 'A' Branch War Diaries may be taken to show that the procedures had worked well. The reinforcement system had also been effective with replacements on hand. During September and October 75,062 men were sent up from the Base.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ TNA: WO 95/25 AG GHQ War Diary September and October 1915.

¹¹¹ *BOH 1915 Vol. II*, p. 391.

¹¹² TNA: WO 95/181 First Army AG&QMG War Diary 22 October 1915.

¹¹³ TNA: WO 95/25 AG GHQ War Diary September and October 1915: September: Cavalry 512; Infantry 17,449; Yeomanry 150; TF Infantry 6,183; October: Cavalry 3,784; Infantry 38,017; Yeomanry 348; TF Infantry 8,619.

The *Official History* analyzes Loos in some detail and attributes at least part of the problems encountered during it to the composition of the Army. The commanders and their staffs lacked experience and ‘their divisions were not yet the instruments demanded by the exigencies of modern war.’ The Regular Army had been refilled with half-trained officers and men, the TF were as yet untried in war and also lacked professional officers and NCOs and the Divisions of the New Armies had received ‘only hasty and imperfect training’, hampered by the late arrival of weapons and equipment.¹¹⁴ In short, there was a chronic lack of experience at all levels.

Analysis of Changes to the Composition of Marches Battalions

Five of the Marches battalions selected for analysis had taken part in the battle of Loos. On 25 September their reported casualties were 1st SWB (121), 2nd RWF (7 + 113), 9th Cheshire (3 + 54) and 9th RWF (11 + 240).¹¹⁵ The 1/1st Monmouthshire, the Pioneer battalion of the 46th (North Midland) Division, had suffered 13 + 147 casualties, including 27 killed, on 13 October.¹¹⁶ Based on information in *SDGW*, the geographical details of enlistment and birth locations for selected battalions have been analysed.¹¹⁷

Many of those who died in the second half of 1915 were pre-war soldiers, as evidenced by their Regimental numbers, who had joined a Regiment presumably of their choice: there are numerous examples such as 8269 Pte William Holden who was born and enlisted in Blackburn, Lancashire but joined the Cheshire Regiment. In many cases, however, enlistments also

¹¹⁴ *BOH 1915 Vol. II*, p. 394.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid* pp. 223, 254, 258.

¹¹⁶ The three battalions of the Monmouthshire Regiment which had had to be amalgamated in May due to lack of replacements had been re-constituted in July/August 1915. The 1/1st and 1/3rd Monmouthshire both became Pioneer battalions in September and were posted to 46th Division and 49th Division respectively. The 1/2nd Monmouthshire rejoined 4th Division but would be posted to 29th Division as its Pioneer battalion in May 1916.

¹¹⁷ The data has been drawn from *SDGW*. Percentages have been used for comparison although this may occasionally obscure the picture due to the differing sizes of the samples analysed.

reflected the need for men to move around to find work. Within Western Command that might mean the cotton industries of Lancashire or the mining areas of South Wales. Men frequently joined the local regiment where they worked, as for example 10940 Pte Alfred Hunt from Salisbury who enlisted in Pontypool in the SWB. Sometimes those volunteering reported to their nearest convenient recruiting office with a request for a particular Regiment: 19530 Pte John McKeown was born in Talke and enlisted in Burslem, both in Staffordshire, but chose to enlist in the SWB. At its most extreme, two Cheshire soldiers, 25860 Pte Frank Alden Gallagher and 25854 Pte William Harry McCarty, were born in Canada and enlisted in Barry, presumably straight from the ship. In a few cases in late 1915, the effects of the Army (Transfers) Act may also be seen; some of the men transferred in mid-1915 from the Sherwood Foresters to the Cheshires were killed in October. The information in SDGW simply allows a broad analysis and an identification of trends during the period in question. Greater visibility of the picture may be gained by drilling down into the geographic details for selected battalions.¹¹⁸

The enlistment figures (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2 below) invariably show a higher percentage enlisted within the Regimental areas than do the birth figures but whilst the KSLI figure of 59 per cent remains exactly the same as 1914, the Cheshire's has fallen from 83 per cent to 69 per cent. This is not such a marked drop as it might appear, however, since it is caused simply by 3 men (12 per cent of the total number of those killed) having enlisted in Northern Command. Conversely, local enlistments for the Welsh battalions have increased slightly, although 2nd RWF remains low on 28 per cent. Looking across No 4 District as a whole, 1st SWB seems to

¹¹⁸ NB Where the figures are low the corresponding percentages may give a skewed picture: e.g. 18 Cheshire soldiers, 69 per cent of 26 deaths, enlisted in No 4 District. This rises to 88 per cent of enlistments within Western command with the addition of just five more soldiers.

be more successful recruiting in the rest of Wales, having enlisted 16 (23 per cent) to 2nd RWF's 3 (5 per cent), and only 2nd RWF has enlisted less than 66 per cent from No 4 District as a whole. This trend continues for Western Command where three battalions have enlisted over 80 per cent whilst 2nd RWF recruited 19 (29 per cent) in Birmingham (Southern Command).

Enlistment Locations	1st Cheshire		9th Cheshire		1st KSLI		6th KSLI	
Regimental Area	18	69%	35	92%	67	59%	30	97%
Elsewhere in No 4 District - England					4			
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales					4			
Total enlisted in No 4 District	18	69%	35	92%	75	66%	30	97%
Enlisted in No 3 District	2				12			
• Liverpool/Manchester	3		2		6			
Total Enlisted in Western Command	23	88%	37	97%	93	82%	30	97%
Northern Command	3		1		3		1	
Southern Command					3			
• Birmingham					5	(4%)		
Eastern					3			
London District					6	(5%)		
Scotland/Ireland								
Overseas								
Total Other Commands	3	12%	1		20	18%		3%
Total Deaths	26		38		113			

Table 2.1. Enlistment locations of soldiers of selected English Regular battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1915.

Enlistment Locations	2ndRWF		9th RWF		1st SWB	
Regimental Area	18	28%	43	36%	36	52%
Elsewhere in No 4 District - England	12	18%	6	5%	1	1%
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales	3	5%	47	40%	16	23%
Total enlisted in No 4 District	33	51%	96	81%	53	77%
Enlisted in No 3 District	2		4		3	
• Liverpool/Manchester			1			
Total Enlisted in Western Command	35	54%	101	86%	56	81%
Northern Command	1		7		1	
Southern Command	10		5		2	
• Birmingham	19	(29%)	5	(4%)		
Eastern					10	
London District						
Scotland/Ireland						
Overseas						
Total Other Commands	30	46%	17	14%	13	19%
Total Deaths	65		101		69	

Table 2.2. Enlistment locations of soldiers of selected Welsh Regular battalions who were killed/died on the Western Front between 1 July – 30 November 1915.

The difficulty with drawing any firm conclusions for the four Line battalions is that the differing sizes of the samples, 270 deaths against 765 in 1914, means that some percentages may give a

disproportionate picture. However, overall the figures for the Line battalions bear out the finding above that they were more homogenous in late 1915 than in 1914, despite the large numbers of replacements that the draft-finding organisations had already had to produce.

It might have been expected that the figures for the New Army battalions would show universally high recruiting in the Regimental areas. This is the case for enlistments into the two English regiments: 92 per cent for 9th Cheshire and 97 per cent for 6th KSLI. The 9th RWF, however, shows only 35 (36 per cent) recruited within its Regimental area, although a further 47 (40 per cent) were recruited in the rest of Wales making the enlistment figures for No 4 District roughly balance: 9th Cheshire 92 per cent; 6th KSLI 97 per cent and 9th RWF 81 per cent. The Western Command figures are similarly over 80 per cent for all three.

The percentages of those born in the respective Regimental areas for 1st Cheshire, 1st KSLI, 2nd RWF and 1st SWB (see Tables 2.3 and 2.4 below) remain similar to those of 1914 although 2nd RWF shows a marked increase from 11 per cent to 20 per cent. To the latter may be added a further 8 per cent for those born elsewhere in Wales; however, at 28 per cent the 2nd RWF could not have been said to be ethnically Welsh in late 1915. Traditionally 2nd RWF had recruited in Birmingham and this is borne out by the 26 per cent born in that city. The 1st SWB appears more Welsh with 39 per cent having been born in Wales. In contrast, the two English battalions show 61 per cent and 50 per cent respectively for 1st Cheshire and 1st KSLI having been born within their Regimental Areas, rising to 88 per cent for 1st Cheshire and 72 per cent for 1st KSLI having been born within Western Command. For the Service battalions, the figures for birth locations are more varied: whilst only 16 per cent of 6th KSLI were born in other Commands, this rises to 26 per cent for 9th Cheshire and 31 per cent for 9th RWF.

Birth locations	1st Cheshire		9th Cheshire		1st KSLI		6th KSLI	
Regimental Area	16	61%	24	63%	56	50%	21	68%
Elsewhere in No 4 District – England			1		3		2	
Elsewhere in No 4 District – Wales			1		6		2	
Total born in No 4 District	16	61%	26	68%	65	58%	25	81%
Born in No 3 District	3		1		13		1	
• Liverpool/Manchester	4		1		3			
Total Born in Western Command	23	88%	28	74%	81	72%	26	84%
Northern Command	3		7		7		3	
Southern Command					7		2	
• Birmingham					5			
Eastern			1		7			
London District					3			
Scotland/Ireland			2		3			
Overseas								
Total Other Commands	3		10		32		5	
Location of Birth Unknown								
Total Deaths	26		38		113		31	

Table 2.3. Birth locations of soldiers of selected English Regular battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1915.

Birth Locations	2ndRWF		9th RWF		1st SWB	
Regimental Area	13	20%	35	30%	14	20%
Elsewhere in No 4 District – England	12	18%	7	6%	5	7%
Elsewhere in No 4 District – Wales	5	8%	33	28%	13	19%
Total born in No 4 District	30	46%	75	64%	32	46%
Born in No 3 District			3		5	
• Liverpool/Manchester			4			
Total Born in Western Command	30	46%	82	69%	37	54%
Northern Command	5		13		4	
Southern Command	10		15		12	
• Birmingham	17		3			
Eastern	2		2		12	
London District			2			
Scotland/Ireland			1		3	
Overseas						
Total Other Commands	34		36		31	
Location of Birth Unknown	1				1	
Total Deaths	65		118		69	

Table 2.4. Birth locations of soldiers of selected Welsh Regular battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1915.

Tables 2.5 and 2.6 below show the equivalent data for TF battalions in 1915. The numbers of TF soldiers who died in 1915 were too small for meaningful analysis but have been produced to form a baseline for future consideration. Enlistments show 100 per cent from the Regimental area for all the battalions surveyed, which is unsurprising given the local nature of TF recruiting and service and the inability to transfer men between TF units.

TF Battalions – Enlistment Locations	1 /5th Cheshire		1 /6th Cheshire		1 /4th RWF		1 /1st Monmouths		1 /3rd Monmouths	
Regimental Area	19	100%	1	100%	14	100%	30	100%	11	100%
Elsewhere in No 4 District - England										
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales										
Total enlisted in No 4 District	19	100%		100%	14	100%	30	100%	11	100%
Enlisted in No 3 District										
• Liverpool/Manchester										
Total Enlisted in Western Command	19	100%		100%	14	100%	30	100%	11	100%
Northern Command										
Southern Command										
• Birmingham										
Eastern										
London District										
Scotland/Ireland										
Overseas										
Total Other Commands										
Total Deaths	19		1		14		30		11	

Table 2.5. Enlistment locations of soldiers of selected TF battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1915.

The birth locations for the English TF battalions also show 100 per cent as having been born in the regimental areas. The Welsh birth locations are far more scattered, with only around half having been born in Wales.

TF Battalions – Birth Locations	1 /5th Cheshire		1 /6th Cheshire		1 /4th RWF		1 /1st Monmouths		1 /3rd Monmouths	
Regimental Area	19	100%	1	100%	7	50%	12	40%	5	45%
Elsewhere in No 4 District – England					1					
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales							5	17%	2	18%
Total born in No 4 District	19	100%	1	100%	8	57%	17	57%	7	63%
Born in No 3 District										
• Liverpool/Manchester										
Total Born in Western Command	19	100%	1	100%	8	57%	17	57%	7	63%
Northern Command							1			
Southern Command							2		1	
• Birmingham										
Eastern							2			
London District							1			
Scotland/Ireland										
Overseas										
Total Other Commands							6		1	
Location of Birth Unknown					6		7		3	
Total Deaths	19		1		14		30		11	

Table 2.6. Birth locations of soldiers of selected TF battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1915.

Conclusions

The year started with continuing reliance solely on the recruiting of volunteers but by its end it was clear that the introduction of conscription was imminent. A National Register had been compiled providing the Government for the first time with information on the employment of manpower throughout the country and the first steps towards greater organisation of the nation's manpower had been taken.

Legislation had also been put in place enabling greater flexibility over the transfer of Regular soldiers between cap-badges, although as yet the TF remained obdurate and consequently its usefulness both overseas and at home was reduced. Reserve units had been created for the New Armies, including the locally raised battalions, and were now organised into Reserve Brigades. Administratively, greater medical classification had been introduced enabling those less than 100 per cent fit to fight to be used in other ways.

On the Western Front, casualty reporting procedures had been refined in the light of experience at Neuve Chappelle and both these and the reinforcement procedures and structures had been tested successfully at Loos. Inevitably the reinforcements coming through as the year went on were less experienced than their predecessors but the new camps at home contained better training facilities and the Base depots were also better equipped. The creation of the Entrenching battalions was an attempt to give experience near the Front whilst at the same time assisting in basic maintenance work.

Finally, analysis of fatalities during mid to late 1915 shows as yet no marked decrease in the homogeneity of battalions. Indeed, analysis of the two Welsh Line battalions shows that they were slightly more Welsh at the end of 1915 than they had been in 1914.

The *Official History*, in referring to operational events, notes that its ‘very misfortunes and mistakes make 1915 particularly worthy of study’.¹¹⁹ It is also worthy of study in the manning and administration spheres, not for mistakes, but for the steady development of structures and procedures which laid foundations for what was to come.

¹¹⁹ *BOH 1915 Vol. I*, p.vi.

Chapter 3

1916: Into the Melting Pot

The first part of this chapter considers political and military developments at home during the early part of the year as the Government and the War Office struggled with the manpower problem. The coming of conscription is not explored in great detail but some analysis of its provisions and impact is required since men called up under the Military Service Acts (MSAs) would become future casualty replacements. The second and third parts consider events on the Western Front during 1916, including analysis of the experiences of selected Marches battalions and men, their performance and reinforcement. Later developments at Home are then considered in the fourth part. Finally, the geographic origins of fatalities are analysed in comparison with earlier years.

The prologue for 1916 was the Inter-Allied Military Conference held at Chantilly in early December 1915, attended by military representatives of the four Allied armies, French, British, Italian and Russian. The main agreement was to the launching of offensive actions on their respective fronts, if possible simultaneously, in order to prevent Germany from transferring forces to defend one front after another. For the British and French this would be a major joint offensive in Picardy, on either side of the river Somme.¹

Governmental agreement to the planned offensives was needed so the Conference outcomes were incorporated in a General Staff paper on the 'Future Conduct of the War' for consideration

¹ *BOH 1916 Vol. 1*, pp. 4-9.

by the Cabinet War Committee. The principle underlying its recommendations was that ‘every possible division, fully manned and equipped in every respect’ should be placed in France in order to ‘break the enemy’s resistance in that theatre’.² The crucial question of manpower for 1916 was thus firmly in the spotlight.

On 28 December the War Committee agreed that France and Flanders would be the main theatre of operations and that every effort would be made to mount an offensive in the spring in ‘close co-operation with the Allies and in the greatest possible strength’.³ By late December, therefore, and contrary to those who would wish later to portray the Battle of the Somme as a purely military initiative, the British Cabinet had endorsed the Allied military proposals for 1916. There would be some back-pedaling in early January when the War Committee noted that ‘it must not be assumed that such offensive operations are finally decided upon’, but it was clear that there would be a joint offensive with the French in 1916.⁴ All subsequent manpower deliberations of early 1916 would be conducted against that backdrop.

The military men who would handle the events of 1916 had changed during December 1915. General Sir Douglas Haig had replaced Sir John French as CinC BEF and Lieutenant General Sir William Robertson also moved from being CGS BEF to replace Sir Archibald Murray in London as CIGS. Whilst this deprived Haig in his new post of the assistance of an experienced Chief of Staff, it meant that the most senior Military men in London and France not only knew each other well but also the new CIGS had had over 12 months experience of fighting on the

² *Ibid*, p.9.

³ TNA: CAB 37/139/59 Meeting of the War Committee held on Tuesday December 28, 1915. The War Committee of the Cabinet was formed in October 1915 and consisted of the Prime Minister, the Secretaries of State for War, Foreign Affairs and India, the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Minister of Munitions (Lloyd George).

⁴ TNA: CAB 37/140/29 Meeting of the War Committee held on 13 January 1916.

Western Front. When in February 1916 General Sir Nevil Macready left his post as AG BEF to return to London to become AG in the War Office, this meant that the two top military positions in London were now filled by men with recent BEF experience.⁵

Developments at Home: January – June 1916

The manpower estimate for the financial year 1915-16 was originally 3,000,000 men but on 21 December the Prime Minister sought Parliamentary authority for an additional 1,000,000 by 31 March 1916. Wastage at the Front was running at 15 per cent per month and extra men were needed for future reinforcements: for every man kept abroad there ought to be 1.8 (sic) at home in reserve. A lengthy debate ensued, covering the perennial topics of the need to recruit all available single men; the merits of the voluntary system over conscription; and the demands of trade and industry and effects on labour.⁶ The urgent need for TF reinforcements was also raised, particularly for the under-manned second line, prompting one MP to ask whether, in the interests of economy in staffing and recruiting, the distinctions between the Regular Army, TF and New Armies should be removed. The Under Secretary of State for War, Tennant, noted that different terms, conditions and lengths of service would make it difficult to implement such a change during wartime but concluded ominously that ‘if we have the opportunity before us, (such change) may very properly form the subject of legislation, if legislation is required’. The Vote was eventually passed the day before the Commons adjourned for Christmas but the debate had highlighted aspects that would re-occur throughout the year.⁷

⁵ HQ BEF was not so fortunate: Robertson was replaced by Lieutenant-General Launcelot Kiggell who until then had spent the war in England, initially as Director of Military Training at the War Office and then as Director of Home Defence. Macready was replaced by Major-General G.A. Fowke, all of whose previous service had been with the Royal Engineers. Whilst he had been serving in France he had no previous personnel experience.

⁶ *HC Deb* 21 December 1915 vol 77 cc213-437.

⁷ *HC Deb* 22 December 1915 vol 77 cc536-574.

Committee on Co-ordination of Military and Financial Effort

Parliament might have adjourned for Christmas but the Cabinet continued to meet to discuss various matters, including manpower, recruiting and the disappointing outcome of the Derby scheme. Serious concerns were also raised over the complete lack of co-ordination of military, financial and industrial resources. The situation was succinctly summed up by Sir William Robertson, writing to Haig on 31 December:

There has been no co-ordination of the different departments. I have been working up to 70 Divisions. Lloyd George has ordered material for 100 Divisions. The Chancellor of the Exchequer did not till yesterday know either of these things. Now he says the money will not run to it and I do not think it will.⁸

The upshot was the creation on 31 December of a Cabinet Committee for the Co-ordination of Military and Financial Effort.⁹

The Committee took statements from the War Office, the Treasury and the Board of Trade on their 'respective desiderata' concerning the size of the army, the finance available and the numbers that could be spared without dire results for the country's trade and industry. The War Office stance was that no limit could be placed at present on the numbers of men which might be necessary for a successful conclusion to the war: 'we should aim at placing in the field every man we can possibly pay for and get'. The Committee accepted this as a general principle, subject to the requirements of the Navy and obligations to the Allies.

⁸ Robertson Mss I/22/4, Robertson to Haig, 31 December 1915, cited in Keith Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914-1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 23.

⁹ TNA: CAB 37/139/70 PM letter to the King of 1 January 1916 reporting on the two Cabinet sittings of 31 December 1915.

The Committee reported on 4 February.¹⁰ The report gives useful insight into the structure and state of the British Army in early 1916. Of its 70 Divisions, 50 were abroad (including 1 division just about to leave UK), 3 TF divisions were in India, 4 New Army divisions would be ready for overseas service within a few months and 13 TF second line divisions, containing weak battalions of about 600 men, were allocated to home defence. A key question was whether any of the TF divisions should be prepared for active service. The Committee decided to focus its deliberations on 67 divisions, since the TF divisions in India were unlikely to require many reinforcements, and requested the War Office to produce manpower estimates of the numbers required to maintain 67 divisions in various permutations of active service and home defence. Two of these estimates were then selected for further consideration: the requirements respectively for 62 and 54 divisions serving abroad and their maintenance at full strength until the end of September.¹¹ Robertson's position was that all 67 divisions were required and should be made ready to take the field as soon as possible.

The estimates were scrutinized in detail. The first requirement would be to bring all divisions up to establishment. Some 69,000 (44,000 Regulars and 25,000 TF) would be required for 54 divisions and 148,000 (44,000 and 104,000) for 62 divisions. The reserves needed to cover anticipated wastage during January to March for either force would be 56,000 (39,000 Regulars

¹⁰ TNA: CAB 37/142/11 dated 4 February 1916.

¹¹ Under the 54 divisions scheme, 13 TF divisions would be retained for Home defence at their weak strength ie 600 and with no reserves. Under the 62 divisions scheme, 8 out of the 13 TF divisions would be brought up to full strength plus reserves ready to be sent abroad by June if needed; the remaining 5 TF divisions would be brought up to full establishment of 1,000 men per battalion and retained for home defence, but would not have the usual three months reserves ie they would not be available for service abroad unless reserves were subsequently provided for them.

and 17,000 TF). The numbers needed by the end of March would thus total 125,000 for 54 divisions and 204,000 for 62 divisions.¹²

Wastage after March was estimated at 108,000 all arms per month for 54 divisions and 123,000 a month for 62 divisions.¹³ Total manpower requirements for the period January to June were estimated at 648,000 for 54 divisions and 703,000 for 62 divisions, the latter figure having been discounted by 35,000, as some of the TF divisions would remain at home for some months. Finally a figure of 60,000 was included in order to form new units 'extra to divisions' such as Tank Corps and Machine Gun Corps units. The total estimated requirements for the period January – June came to 833,000 for 54 divisions and 967,000 for 62 divisions.

The monthly requirements were then broken out. January's figures, at 243,000 and 259,000 respectively, reflected the need to bring divisions up to strength so the subsequent monthly figures up to and including June were less: 118,000 for 54 divisions and between 137,000 and 145,000 for 62 divisions. Assuming a decision not to provide reserves for the 5 TF divisions remaining at home, the total numbers for July, August and September would amount to 354,000 for 54 divisions and 399,000 for 62 divisions. The total recruiting requirement up to September would be 1,187,000 for the 54 division scheme and 1,366,000 for the 62 division scheme, which would keep the divisions at full strength until the end of the calendar year.¹⁴ There were now definite and visible calculations showing the numbers required but it remained to be seen

¹² TNA: CAB 37/142/11 dated 4 February 1916 pp. 4 & 5; a footnote to the pre-March requirements notes that 'These figures are arrived at after credit has been taken for 358,000 infantry in the depots at home (including 88,000 men returned from the Expeditionary Force who will eventually rejoin their units'.

¹³ Monthly wastage was calculated at 13.5 per cent for the infantry, 6 per cent for cavalry, 3 per cent for artillery, 4 per cent for engineers and 2 per cent for other arms, making an overall monthly average of 9 per cent. NB: The infantry wastage had been reduced from 15 percent; it was considered that it had previously been inflated by the retreat from Mons and the 'highly wasteful Gallipoli campaign'.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 6. NB: Men recruited at the end of September would not be available for drafting until the end of December.

whether sufficient men were available, whether they could be spared from their civil occupations and whether they could be called up as quickly as needed.

The Board of Trade (BoT) eventually agreed that if necessary 250,000 men could be called up so long as certain safeguards were put in place: call up should be by trades rather than by age and celibacy; after 1,275,000 had been taken no more men (beyond the army's proper share of the new crop) should be raised from industry for the last seven months of 1916; and the BoT should be able to 'watch the pressure gauge' weekly and immediately reduce the rate of enlistment if grave industrial dangers become apparent.¹⁵

The Treasury inevitably submitted that there was insufficient money to support the increase in manpower. Despite this, the Committee concluded in favour of implementing the 62 divisions scheme, although it considered it unlikely that the Army would meet its proposed timetable. Indeed, it was already estimated that the shortfall against the 473,000 required by the end of March would be 94,000.¹⁶ Any such delay, however, would both ease the situation concerning industry and save expenditure. The Committee's final recommendation was that there should be a further review in April when the effect of recruiting on trade would be more obvious.

The First Military Service Act (MSA)

On 28 December, the same day that the War Committee agreed to a joint offensive with the French, the Cabinet had formally considered conscription. A first draft of a Military Service Bill to introduce compulsion for single men was considered on 30 December.¹⁷ Not all the

¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 7-10.

¹⁶ TNA: CAB 37/142/17 Comment by Kitchener on the Report of the Committee on Co-ordination of Military and Financial Effort dated 7 February 1916.

¹⁷ TNA: CAB 37/139/58 PM letter to the King of 28 December 1915; TNA CAB 37/139/67 30 December 1915.

Cabinet supported it, the Home Secretary, Sir John Simon, resigning over the issue, but work on the Bill continued and it received its first reading in Parliament on 5 January. Key to the debate was the recently received report on the Derby scheme highlighting the disappointingly large numbers of single men who had neither enlisted nor attested. Large numbers of married men had come forward but on 2 November Asquith had pledged that married men enlisting under the Derby scheme would not be sent abroad whilst single men held back. In order to uphold this pledge, it was planned to retain voluntary enlistment for the married man whilst introducing compulsion for the single man.

Unsurprisingly, the Bill did not have an easy ride during four extremely lengthy Commons sittings. Many entrenched positions were aired in great detail: the voluntary system versus any form of conscription, the effects on trade and industry, warnings of industrial unrest, the omission of Ireland (and should Scotland not be omitted too – which was ignored) and accusations that by introducing conscription the Government would be introducing the very Germanic approach that the nation was fighting against.¹⁸ Despite passionate debate, the outcome was never in any real doubt. The Government gained the support it needed and, despite further lengthy scrutiny in the Lords, the Bill returned to the Commons to be passed on 27 January 1916 as the Military Service Act (MSA). Its effective date would be 10 February and the ‘appointed date’ 2 March 1916.¹⁹

The Act applied to single men and childless widowers, aged between 18 and 41, resident in Great Britain on or since 15 August 1915, the date of National Registration, and who had been unmarried on 2 November 1915. After the ‘appointed date’ all men falling within the terms of

¹⁸ *HC Deb* 5, 6, 11 and 12 January 1916, vol 77.

¹⁹ *Public General Acts 5&6 Geo 5* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1916), Chapter 104.

the Act would be deemed to have been enlisted in the regular forces for the duration of the war and been immediately transferred to the reserve.²⁰ There were exceptions, listed in Schedule 1, including those already serving in the Navy or the Marines; men previously discharged from service due to disability or ill-health; ministers of religion; and members of the TF already liable for overseas service. By definition, the terms of the MSA had removed the TF HS option for single men but significantly only the Liberal MP, Percy Molteno, had spoken against its removal whilst the rest of the normally vocal TF lobby had acquiesced.

Section 2 of the MSA allowed applications for exemptions to be submitted to Local Tribunals up to the ‘appointed date’ and clearly defined the allowable grounds for exemptions: employment on essential war work or in education or training; hardship owing to exceptional financial or business obligations or domestic situations; ill-health or infirmity; or conscientious objection to the undertaking of military service. Schedule 2 laid down the constitution of new tribunals and the process for appeals against their findings.²¹

A form of compulsion had been introduced but the allowable exceptions and exemptions enabled many to escape the net. The Act applied only to those of age in August 1915 and thus disregarded all who had turned 18 after that date. Moreover, the retention of voluntary enlistment for married men whilst introducing compulsion for singles was always going to be

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Under Schedule 2 the previous ‘Derby’ tribunals were abolished and new ones created which might contain as many as 25 members. The process remained largely the same although a new layer was introduced at the county level in order to hear appeals against decisions made at the local tribunals. TNA: MH 10/195 LGB Circular R36. Britain was alone in recognising a legal right to exemption on grounds of conscience. Ian F.W. Beckett & K. Simpson, eds., *Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 13.

an uneasy compromise. Robertson was certainly disappointed in its provisions and later described it as a half-baked measure'.²²

Re-organization of the Reserves

In January 1916 Sir John French had been appointed to the new post of CinC Home Forces (CinC HF), responsible not only for Home Defence but also for the home-based training and draft-finding units. It would be useful to have someone in that post who understood the needs of the BEF but balancing the BEF's ever-increasing demands against those of home defence would prove a continuing struggle. The problem for French was two-fold: the populations of training and draft-finding units changed constantly as replacements were posted overseas, whilst entire New Army divisions and overseas units of the TF were sent abroad as soon as they became efficient. It made for a very fluid Command.

The creation of the new CinC HF, plus the anticipated influx of men under the MSA, prompted a review of the Home Forces, including the Reserves. The Infantry Reserves now consisted of the SR units, TF Reserves and 18 Reserve Infantry brigades supporting the New Armies. The SR units were settled at their War Stations and dispatching drafts as required. At Birkenhead, 3rd Cheshire numbered over 3,000 men at the end of 1915 although not all were available for drafting as these numbers included convalescents and those awaiting discharge.²³ Similarly, 3rd KSLI numbered over 3,300 men and was sending out each month some 300-400, in weekly drafts to replace casualties, plus a further 50 specially selected men to the Machine Gun Corps

²² Field Marshal Sir William Robertson, *From Private to Field Marshal* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), p. 263.

²³ A. Crookenden, *The Cheshire Regiment in the Great War* (Chester: Evans, n.d.), p. 340.

(MGC).²⁴ Not all men were fit for General Service, however, and Garrison Reserve battalions were now created to train and supply less fit men as reserves for both overseas and home service Garrison Battalions. The TF reserve organization consisted of third line battalions formed into fourteen Territorial Groups, one for each pre-war TF division. In February 1916 these third line battalions would assume drafting responsibility for both the first and second line units, but as yet the TF Reserve system had not been fully tested.²⁵ The area that needed attention, however, concerned the reserve battalions of the locally raised battalions of the New Armies. As locally raised battalions were adopted by the War Office, Local Reserve battalions were created from their depot companies; for example, in late 1915 when the 3rd Gwent battalion was adopted as 12th (Service) SWB, its depot company became 14th (Reserve) SWB. These Local Reserve battalions were incorporated into the Reserve Infantry Brigades, which now increased in number to twenty-six with an overall establishment of 225,300.²⁶ The links with the parent Command and Regiment remained: 14th (Reserve) SWB and 20th, 21st and 22nd (Reserve) battalions of the RWF joined 14th Reserve Brigade at Kimmel Park. There was now a viable Infantry Reserve organization available for home defence.

Call-Up of the 'Derby' Men and the First Conscripts

The Derby scheme had been re-opened on 10 January until such time as the MSA should take effect. Some 'Derby' men had already been called up: in December single men aged 19 – 23 in Groups 2 – 5 were warned for call up on 20 January 1916. This had produced some 30,158 men plus a further 34,050 direct enlistments but the total was already about 195,000 short of

²⁴ Major W. de B. Wood, *King's Shropshire Light Infantry in the Great War* (London: The Medici Society, 1925; Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 2003), pp. 319-20.

²⁵ In April they would lose the '3/' prefix becoming simply Reserve battalions: 3/4th Cheshire became the 4th (Reserve) Cheshire; 3/4th KSLI the 4th (Reserve) KSLI; and 3/1st Herefordshire the 1st (Reserve) Herefordshire.

²⁶ Colonel T. Cave, 'The Reserve and Training Reserve', *Stand To!* 36 (Winter 1992); K.W. Mitchinson, *Defending Albion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p. 125 and TNA: WO 293/4 ACI 205 of January 1916.

the 259,000 required. In early January, the next four groups were warned for call up on 8 February with the rest of the Groups of single men following by 18 March. On being called up men were appointed to a Corps or unit, wherever possible the one for which they had applied on attesting, and finally approved for service; if not accepted they were retained in the reserve and sent home. Detailed administrative procedures for recording those accepted for service were necessary so that the Registrar-General's records based on the National Register could be updated.²⁷

Determined not to repeat the chaos of the early weeks of the war, the recruiting organizations were better prepared this time. In Chester:

Frantic plans and preparations were made – rooms set apart for them to don their long deferred khaki – thousands of tickets for their meals printed – complete kits marked in advance for the embryo “Cheshire” lads – recruiting orderlies increased in number – a string of NCOs belted and ‘sticked’, ready at a moment’s notice to scurry to the station to meet arrivals, or to conduct khaki clad recruits safely to their trains – and – all is working smoothly.²⁸

Pte Bert Oakes, born in 1885, was called up in Group 13 on 29 February 1916 and joined 9th (Reserve) KSLI at Prees Heath. On 4 March he wrote home describing his new life at the camp:

The parade ground is an awful place, up to your ankles in water and as you march it splashes, wetting putties (sic), overcoat and all making them in an a fearful mess. Still it finds us something to do. ... The camp is as large as Ironbridge, Madeley and Broseley all combined...²⁹

A normal day’s training for the recruits was:

Six o’clock get out of bed, dress, make bed and tidy room, first parade 6.30am. Physical training till 7.45am. Breakfast, buttons cleaned, shaving and boots till 8.45am. Bayonet fighting till 10 o’clock. Marching and other drill till 12am. Rest and dinner till 1.45pm.

²⁷ TNA: WO 293/4 ACI 86 of 12 Jan 1916.

²⁸ ‘Depot Doings’ in *The Oak Tree*, 1 (3) (February 1916), p. 35.

²⁹ Letter dated 4 March 1916 to Mrs E Oakes, 5 Barber Street, Broseley from 22219 Private BWO Oakes, D Company, 9th Batt KSLI, No 28 Hut, 4th Camp, Prees Heath. NB Broseley lies across the R Severn from Ironbridge and Madeley, both of which are now part of Telford.

Musketry till 4pm. The trench digging comes in the drill from 11 till 12 am so you see it is a good day. Then some nights we have an hour lecture and others silent marching to the trenches in the dark.³⁰

Instruction in the history and traditions of the recruits' regiments would shortly be added to the training syllabus, in order to develop *esprit de corps* in the new men.³¹ With a short break in June to get married, Bert Oakes stayed at Prees Heath for 6 months before leaving for France on 10 July. This was double the 3 months training normally allowed but would hardly equip him for France.

The Derby scheme finally closed at midnight on 1 March but even with the extended period, far fewer single men had been obtained than expected. Consequently, on 7 March the married 'Derbyites' of Groups 25 to 32 were warned by Proclamation for Call Up on 7 April. Although these men had attested voluntarily there was a storm of protest that they should be sent when there were still single men available. Attention turned to the single men liable for service under the MSA who from 2 March were now deemed to have been enlisted and passed to the Army Reserve; they were not attested immediately but their names simply noted on the new Record of Service form.³² On 10 March the first men were called up under the MSA when a Proclamation notified the calling up of men of both Group and Class 1.³³ These were the youngest men; those who were still under 19 would be medically examined and given the option either of returning home or of remaining and undergoing special training until they were of age

³⁰ Letter dated 17 April 1916 from 22219 Pte BWO Oakes, No 28 Hut, 4th Camp, Prees Heath.

³¹ TNA: WO 293/4 ACI 850/16 of 19 April 1916 Instruction in History and Achievements of Regiments.

³² TNA: WO 293/4 ACI 336 of February 1916. *BOH 1916, Vol. 1*, p. 152. AF B 2513 - Record of Service Paper – For Men deemed to be enlisted in H.M Regular Forces for General Service with the Colours or in the Reserve for the period of the War, or ex-Soldiers recalled for Service with the Colours, under the provisions of the Military Service Acts, 1916.

³³ Under the MSA men were placed by age in Classes in order to avoid confusion with the Groups of the Derby Scheme; it also avoided the perceived 'slur of compulsion' being cast on the latter.

to be sent abroad.³⁴ Other Classes followed and the married Derby men also continued to be called up with Groups 33 to 41 being warned for call up on 29 May and the older marrieds of Groups 42 to 46 being warned for call up on 13 June.

The application of the MSA to single Territorials who had not taken the IS obligation before 2 March would appear to have been varied. Instructions were issued by the War Office and notices placed in local papers but there remained an element of confusion. Questions were raised in Parliament to which the response was unequivocal: if TF HS officers and men had not applied for exemption from the MSA by 2 March then they should be discharged, becoming Reservists under the MSA until such time as they should be called up.³⁵ The administrative process does not appear to have been actioned in many units, however, as no examples of discharges have been found to date. Many single HS TF soldiers also appear to have taken early action to avoid conscription, either by signing the IS obligation or seeking exemption.

Second Report of the Committee on the Co-ordination of Military and Financial Effort

Manpower continued to form the Army Council's main topic of discussion during April following the production on 6 April of the review required by the Cabinet Committee.³⁶ The situation was gloomy: by 30 June the Infantry would be 179,000 men short. An anticipated 287,000 recruits for April, May and June plus 90,000 earlier recruits delayed for various reasons might cover the shortfall but the 198,000 remaining would scarcely maintain the Infantry to the middle of August and provided 'no margin for any abnormal wastage such as that arising from very heavy fighting'. Furthermore, they anticipated that the flow of recruits would cease

³⁴ TNA: WO 293/4 ACI 839 of 18 April 1916.

³⁵ *HC Deb* 07 March 1916 vol 80 cc1340-1.

³⁶ TNA: WO 33/881 Minutes of 176th, 177th and 178th Meetings of the Army Council.

altogether before the end of August as a result of the MSA's inadequacies: only 212,000 men had been obtained between January and March, despite the 358,000 considered by the Board of Trade to be available. There were further manning problems requiring resolution but these would need legislative action: the compulsory extension of time-expired men; inclusion within the MSA of all youths reaching the age of 18 after August 1915; and the ability to transfer any men, including TF soldiers, from their own arm or branch of the service to any other where their services might more urgently be required. The bottom line for the Army Council remained the need for every fit man not required by the Navy or for essential employment to be made available for the Army.³⁷ With the impending offensive this was now becoming urgent.

The Cabinet Committee produced its second report on 13 April. Having reviewed the numbers of men available for military service through both the Derby system and the MSA it concluded that there were actually more available than had been demanded but that the War Office recruiting processes were inadequate. Further conscription continued to be resisted but the Committee did at least endorse the Army Council's proposals for the compulsory extension of time-expired men; compulsion of TF soldiers to serve in any unit where they were needed; and that all youths reaching the age of 18 should be brought within the scope of the MSA.³⁸

The Committee met the Army Council on 15 April to discuss their conclusions and to emphasize how difficult it would be to introduce compulsion for married men of military age. Figures provided by the Registrar-General, however, showed that no appreciable intake of recruits would be available under the present system after the end of September. For the Army

³⁷ TNA: WO 33/881 Minutes of 176th Army Council Meeting of 6 April 1916, Item 2.

³⁸ TNA: CAB 37/145/36 Second Report of the Cabinet Committee on the Co-ordination of Military and Financial Effort dated 13 April 1916.

Council time was of the essence; it was already unlikely that 62 divisions could be in the field by the start of the offensive at the end of June and the 52 divisions currently abroad were short of 66,000 men. They remained adamant that they required all available manpower, and emphasized the need for haste so that due notice could be given the men concerned and not less than three months allowed for their training.³⁹ An attempt was made to break the impasse on 19 April, with a proposal by a Cabinet Member, Arthur Henderson, that a further effort be made to obtain men by voluntary enlistment but that if by 27 May 50,000 unattested married men had not voluntarily enlisted then the Government would immediately ask Parliament for compulsory powers. The Army Council could only reiterate the need for haste, placing the onus firmly on the Government to decide the necessary steps to be taken.⁴⁰

The balance was finally tipped by the latest recruiting figures, which were insufficient to maintain the Army at the agreed size and to replace casualties in the anticipated summer offensive. The subject of general compulsion had been raised in both Houses of Parliament during April and on 29 April Asquith informed the King that the Government had no alternative but to introduce further legislation as soon as possible. The whole Cabinet was in agreement, although Henderson and Runciman voiced some disquiet over the labour issue but Lloyd George believed their fears and forebodings were exaggerated.⁴¹ On 3 May 1916 the second Military Service Bill was introduced.

³⁹ TNA: WO 33/881 Minutes of 177th Army Council Meeting of 15 April 1915, Item 2.

⁴⁰ TNA: WO 33/881 Minutes of 178th Army Council Meeting of 19 April 1915, Item 2.

⁴¹ TNA: CAB 37/146/24 Asquith letter to the King dated 29 April 1916.

The Second Military Service Act

The new Bill extended the first MSA making all single and married men between the ages of 18 and 41 liable for military service. The exceptions shown in the first MSA remained but the extension of liability to all married men would remove home service as an option for married TF soldiers fit enough for overseas service. The ‘appointed date’ would again be thirty days after the Act was passed or 30 days after their 18th birthday for boys turning 18, thus enabling, as the Prime Minister emphasized, boys to enlist before the month was up so that they could come in ‘voluntarily without any exercise or threatened exercise of the compulsory powers’.⁴² It was clearly stipulated, however, that youths would not be sent abroad under the age of 19.

Further sections of the Bill tidied up various Army regulations. Clause 2 amended the existing Army Act so that for the duration of the war Regular, Reserve and TF soldiers would be required to continue serving beyond their discharge dates unless they had completed 12 or more years’ service and had reached 41. Clause 3 enabled the recall of time-expired former soldiers who remained within military age and also the re-examination of men previously discharged or rejected as medically unfit for service. Later sections related to the TF and, in particular, Section 14 finally resolved the transfer problem by enabling a TF soldier to be transferred without his consent not only between units but also between TF corps and to be posted to ‘regular units of the corps to which he belongs or to which he is transferred’. Much time and debate was expended upon the Bill in the Commons, and to a lesser extent the Lords, throughout May.⁴³ Essentially, however, it received an easier ride than the first MSA since the failings of the latter were only too apparent and was finally passed as the Military Service Act 1916

⁴² Hansard *HC Deb* 3 May 1916 Vol 82 cc 41 – 100.

⁴³ Hansard *HC Deb* 4 May 1916 Vol 82 cc142-267.

(Session 2) (MSA2), receiving Royal Assent on 25 May 1916.⁴⁴ It came into force 30 days later on 24 June.

The new Act was followed by a flurry of AOs and ACIs to enable its implementation. On 8 June AO 202 notified the retention in service of time-expired Regular and TF soldiers unless at their due date they were aged 41 and had served for 12 or more years, plus the additional twelve months' war service.⁴⁵ The pill was sweetened a few days later, however, by the payment of a bounty for these men and also for those recalled for service by the Act or who had voluntarily re-enlisted.⁴⁶ The more contentious issue of compulsory transfer was formally publicized on 9 June.⁴⁷ The Army Transfers Act 1915 had already enabled compulsory transfers for Regular soldiers but this had not previously been notified in Army Orders, nor had its impact yet been felt on the Army at large. It was now made absolutely clear that Regular and TF soldiers of any rank could be transferred without their consent to any Corps. For clarity, the changes for a TF NCO or soldier were enumerated: he could now be transferred without his consent from one Corps to another of the TF; if he had taken the IS obligation he could be drafted to serve abroad in any TF unit within the Corps to which he belonged or to which he might be transferred; and then be posted without his consent to a Regular unit of the Corps to which he belonged or was transferred. The administrative procedures for such transfers were outlined, and the records of soldiers so transferred were in future to be annotated, 'Transferred under authority of AO 206 and ACI 1166 of June 1916'.

⁴⁴ *Public General Acts Passed in the Sixth and Seventh Years of King George The Fifth* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1916), pp. 33-38.

⁴⁵ TNA: WO 123 AO 202 of 8 June 1916 - Discontinuance of Discharges on Completion of Engagement. During 1915, soldiers who had come to the end of their engagements or, if they were Reservists mobilised on the outbreak of war to the end of the extra year for which they were liable, had been offered the opportunity to continue serving until the end of hostilities. TNA WO 123/57 AO 252 of 1915 published June 1915.

⁴⁶ TNA: WO 123/58 AO 209/16.

⁴⁷ TNA: WO 123 AO 204 of 9 June 1916 and WO 293/4 ACI 1166 of 9 June 1916.

Many TF soldiers undoubtedly had cause to feel aggrieved over the changes to their terms of service. They had originally enlisted for home defence but were now compulsorily liable for service abroad and, for the duration of the war, they could also be posted without their consent from the unit they had originally joined. The TF lobby had fought to protect their position during the MSA debates, remaining unconvinced by Army Council statements that transfers would be carried out only when absolutely necessary, and that they had no intention of allowing ‘any injury to the Territorial Force now or in future’, but their opposition had been overruled.⁴⁸ The problem for Macready, the Manning authorities and the BEF, however, was that the very inflexibility of the original TF regulations had prevented it fulfilling its original function of a second line capable of supporting and expanding the regular force. Furthermore, many TF units at the Front could no longer be reinforced and had not only been fighting with insufficient manpower but had had to be withdrawn from the front line thus forcing other units to take their places. The two viewpoints were diametrically opposed and would never agree. The second MSA created the necessary tools to address the difficulties but the TF grievances arising out of what would become known as the ‘Transfer Controversy’ would continue for a long time to come.⁴⁹

Review of Medical Categories

In early May, in anticipation of reviewing those previously rejected for service on medical grounds, the existing medical categories had been expanded and lettered: A – General Service (ie active everywhere); B – Abroad, further sub-divided into B1- Garrison Service, B2 Labour

⁴⁸ Hansard 1916 Series 5 Vol 82, 986-993 – Commons Sitting 11 May 1916.

⁴⁹ K.W. Mitchinson, ‘The Transfer Controversy’, *Stand To!* 33 (Winter 1991), pp. 29 – 32 and K.W. Mitchinson, *Gentlemen and Officers* (London: Naval & Military Press and IWM, 1994), pp. 130 – 6.

and B3 Sedentary Work; and C – Home, further sub-divided into C1 Garrison Service, C2 Labour and C3 Sedentary Work. The new categories, however, were insufficiently specific to categorize casualties from the BEF and in June they were extended and amplified by the addition of comprehensive guidelines for the benefit of medical boards.⁵⁰

Mid-1916 Diversity

The various changes since the beginning of the war meant that by mid-1916 soldiers of the BEF could fall into some nine distinct types: surviving pre-war Regulars; reservists, both SR and Army, mobilized on the outbreak of war; ‘Kitchener’ volunteers; TF soldiers, both IS men and those HS men caught up for overseas service by the MSA; Derbyites who had delayed their enlistment; conscripts; and those continuing to volunteer rather than be called up. Differing perceptions of their relative capabilities were inevitable and widespread. An early, and somewhat naïve comment, was that of Lieutenant Eric King, who had written home in January 1916:

no man who is dragged into the Army through Conscription will ever be able to look the world in the face with a clear conscience. ... one feels such contempt for the miserable slackers who wait until they are fetched.⁵¹

In contrast, 3rd (Reserve) KSLI would find that the introduction of conscription brought ‘men of superior education, drawn from all kinds of trades and professions’ into the battalion. They were not physically of so high a standard as the farm hands and ploughmen who had enlisted after the 1915 harvest ‘but training quickly improved them in all ways’.⁵² Others felt that conscripts had at least shown the courage of their convictions by waiting to be called up and it

⁵⁰ TNA: WO 123/4; *BOH 1916, Vol. 1*, pp. 152-3 and TNA WO 293/4 ACI 1241 of 1 June 1916. See Appendix 4 for details.

⁵¹ Lieutenant E. King, ‘A Ripping Lot of Fellows – Letters from a Grenadier Battalion Officer’, *Stand To!*, 70 (April 2004), p. 17.

⁵² Wood, *The King’s Shropshire Light Infantry in the Great War*, p. 317.

was the ‘Derby’ men who were despised: to be called or even thought a ‘Derby’ man in some units was an insult.⁵³ This resentment against ‘Derby men’ would continue for some time. Walter Williamson attested in late 1915 but was not called up until June 1916. On joining 6th Cheshire in December 1916 he would note that ‘We were made very welcome, and knowing that the battalion had been in France since 1914, it was a pleasant surprise to hear no remarks about ‘Derbies’.⁵⁴

Western Front: January – June 1916

During early 1916, whilst establishing himself as CinC, Haig was also initiating planning for the anticipated offensive. A key preoccupation would be the number of men at his disposal and much of his attention and time during the first half of 1916 would be taken up by the requirements of munitions and manpower.⁵⁵

In early January Haig instituted weekly meetings with the three Army Commanders and set them to working out schemes for operations to wear out the enemy and for a decisive attack.⁵⁶ At this time, General Sir Herbert Plumer’s Second Army occupied a 20 mile front from Boesinghe to Armentières, First Army, temporarily commanded by General Sir Henry Rawlinson, held the next 25 miles south to Loos after which the French Tenth Army occupied a gap of 20 miles before the Third Army, under General Sir Edmund Allenby, covered the 22 miles from Ransart down to the Somme near Curlu. The task of working up an attack in the Third Army area initially fell to Allenby, who was instructed that it might be either an isolated

⁵³ R. Feilding, *War Letters to a Wife* (1929; Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2001), p. 47.

⁵⁴ D. Priddy, ed., *A Tommy at Ypres, Diary and Letters of Walter Williamson* (Stroud: Amberley, 2011), p. 46.

⁵⁵ *BOH 1916, Vol. 1*, p.21.

⁵⁶ G. Sheffield, & J.M. Bourne, *Douglas Haig, War Diaries and Letters* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2005), p. 178, diary entry for Saturday, 8 January 1916.

attack with 15 divisions on a 13 – 14 mile front for about the 20th April or a later attack astride the Somme in co-operation with the French and using 25 divisions.

By the end of January the BEF in France consisted of 5 Cavalry divisions and 12 corps, containing 38 Infantry divisions, and for the first time had a total strength, including Indian troops, of over one million: 874,900 at the Front and 133,500 on the LofC. Of the 38 Infantry divisions, however, nine had been in France less than four months and sixteen had never been involved in anything other than trench warfare.⁵⁷ Four more divisions were expected over the next few months but tellingly their despatch depended ‘upon the progress made in arming the new formations with rifles’.⁵⁸ Even more tellingly a subsequent letter noted that the 40th (Bantam) Division’s training would be delayed owing to the physical inadequacies of a number of its men and the need to replace them. Arrangements were being made to prepare the 61st South Midland Division in its place, for despatch by 1 May.⁵⁹ Haig was uneasily aware that he had ‘not got an Army in France really, but a collection of divisions untrained for the field.’⁶⁰

The expansion of the BEF now necessitated the creation of a Fourth Army, to be commanded by Rawlinson. Its HQ was formed on 5 February and its troops arrived from March onwards. These were obtained in the first instance by taking over three Third Army Corps, XIII, X and VIII, and the 20 mile stretch from the Somme to Fonquevillers that they had been holding.⁶¹ Rawlinson now took over planning for the offensive. On 6 March he outlined to his Corps Commanders the general nature of the undertaking although as yet there was neither a clear

⁵⁷ *BOH 1916, Vol. 1*, pp. 19-20.

⁵⁸ TNA: WO 158/21 Letter from Robertson to Haig dated 16 Jan 16 re move of further divisions to France.

⁵⁹ TNA: WO 158/21 Letter from Robertson to Haig dated 10 February 1916.

⁶⁰ Sheffield & Bourne, eds., *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters*, p.183 Wednesday, 29 March 1916.

⁶¹ This initially gave Rawlinson just 8 divisions: XIII Corps: 7th, 18th and 30th; X Corps: 32nd, 36th, 48th and 49th; and VIII Corps: 31st.

objective nor a definite date. He expected to receive more troops and planning was to proceed on the assumption that there would be 15 infantry divisions if the offensive opened on 1 May or 17 divisions a month later, plus in either case a cavalry division. A further three divisions and one or more cavalry division would be held in GHQ reserve.

It was still not definite that there would indeed be an offensive and Haig was coming under pressure from the French. On 4 April he wrote to Robertson asking for confirmation that he had the Government's authority to agree 'to co-operate with the French armies as requested.'⁶² Robertson replied by wire on 7 April that the War Committee had given authority, sending a letter on 9 April confirming the War Committee's conclusions:

The War Committee approve of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff informing the British Commander-in-Chief in France that he is given the authority for which he asks in the last paragraph of his letter No O.A.D 679 of the 4th April 1916.

All now seemed clear but Robertson sent a further personal letter on 10 April:

I desire, in order to avoid any possible misunderstanding, to make it clear that the approval of the War Committee extends only to your co-operation with the French in offensive operations and not to the force to be employed by you, which is a matter entirely within your discretion. I am not at present able to guarantee that you will receive any troops beyond those already notified to you.⁶³

Haig now had authority for an offensive in conjunction with the French but it had come with a warning over the number of troops available.

Fourth Army was gradually building up.⁶⁴ Rawlinson would eventually have five Corps, none of which would have been stable for more than a couple of months, only one contained four

⁶² TNA: WO 158/21 Haig letter OAD 679 dated 4 April 1916.

⁶³ TNA: WO 158/21 Robertson correspondence with Haig dated 7, 9 and 10 April 1916.

⁶⁴ *BOH 1916, Vol. 1*, p. 254 fn 1. In early March Fourth Army comprised VIII Corps (4th, 31st and 48th Divisions), X Corps (32nd, 36th and 49th Divisions), and XIII Corps (7th, 18th, 21st and 30th Divisions). HQ III Corps arrived

divisions and two would not receive their third divisions until mid-June. Furthermore, most of the battalions were New Army. Six of the sixteen divisions (17th, 18th, 19th, 31st, 34th and 36th) were totally New Army, three (31st, 34th and 36th) being completely locally raised. Seven of the divisions had yet to see action on the Western Front, other than trench warfare, and many of their officers were inevitably inexperienced in battle. Equally, in those units that had seen previous action, many officers and NCOs had been wounded and replaced. It was thus a simple statement of fact when Rawlinson noted on 19 April that many of the battalions

are new troops with little experience, and amongst whom the standard of discipline, leadership and tactical training of company commanders is not what obtained in our troops of a year ago.⁶⁵

Haig was also concerned and on 4 May noted in his diary that ‘My divisions ... want much careful training before we could attack with hope of success.’⁶⁶ He reiterated this to Rawlinson a couple of days later, making it clear that he had no intention of attacking in force until the Armies were as strong as possible, the divisions adequately trained and the ammunition supply ample.⁶⁷

Fourth Army’s five Corps would attack the objectives of Montauban, Contalmaison, Pozières, the Miraumont spur and Serre whilst Allenby’s Third Army staged a diversionary attack to the north at Gommecourt. The attack would be on a wide front and Haig had concerns that it would be difficult to control any subsequent movement. Accordingly he informed Rawlinson that once operations had begun Lt Gen Gough, then commanding the Reserve Corps, was to stand

on 24 March with 8th Division but 19th and 34th Divisions would not join until early May. In April VIII Corps was joined by the 29th Division but concerns about its strength meant that on 11 April the DA & QMG Fourth Army visited GHQ to discuss reinforcements for it. A new XV Corps was also formed, taking over the 7th and 21st Divisions from XIII Corps on 29th April, but it would not be joined by 17th Division until 11 June. The XIII Corps now retained only the 18th and 30th Divisions and the 9th Division would not arrive until mid-June.

⁶⁵ *BOH 1916 Vol. 1*, Appendix 10, p.77; Table 3 – Composition of Fourth Army Prior to 1 July 1916.

⁶⁶ Sheffield, & Bourne, *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters*, p. 186.

⁶⁷ *BOH 1916, Vol. 1*, p. 258.

by to command Rawlinson's two corps on the right wing in order to drive home attacks on that flank, warning also that it might subsequently become necessary to make Gough's force an independent one directly under the orders of GHQ.⁶⁸ Matters progressed more quickly, however, and on 23 May the Reserve Corps became the Reserve Army.⁶⁹

On 17 May Rawlinson informed his corps commanders of their precise objectives and issued 'Fourth Army Tactical Notes', based on a GHQ Memorandum dated 8 May entitled 'Training of Divisions for Offensive Action', which were to form the basis of training whilst troops were in reserve. It was again emphasised that the inexperience and lack of previous training of officers and troops meant that it could not be assumed that military skills that had become second nature would automatically take over in unforeseen circumstances. Divisional and Brigade Commanders were therefore to hold special training exercises on the actions of subordinate commanders in unexpected situations. The need for all ranks to have a clear understanding of what was required in different and unexpected situations was emphasised together with the necessity, in the absence of officers or NCOs, for someone to assume leadership and the remainder to act under his control.⁷⁰ In conducting this training, Brigades were also to be trained over the same kind of ground as they would advance across with the distance of the various objectives being marked out.⁷¹

The training objectives were highly laudable but the problem for those trying to implement them was that, whilst in reserve, troops were constantly required to provide labour for numerous preparatory tasks necessary for the offensive. Only two RE Labour battalions and three Infantry

⁶⁸ *Ibid* p. 258.

⁶⁹ TNA: WO 95/518 Reserve Army War Diary 23 May 1916.

⁷⁰ *BOH 1916 Vol. 1*, p. 131 Appendix 18.

⁷¹ *BOH 1916 Vol. 1*, p. 262.

labour battalions were available for Fourth Army. Consequently, in the months preceding the attack the ‘troops wore themselves out in digging assembly and communication trenches, cable trenches and dug-outs’, vast dumps of ammunition, material and warlike stores of all kinds had also to be collected and miles of railways and trench tramways to be built. At the same time the line had to be held and ‘most important of all, tactical training of the new levies had to be carried on.’⁷² The adverse effect on training was noted on 28 May by Captain Jack of the 8th Cameronians:

... Training Programmes, submitted to a zealous High Command even before we left the line, are scheduled to cover 6½ hours daily, commencing on our first day in reserve...But the fine-looking programmes, all neatly typed, have been pretty well ruined. Since the 26th half our dutymen have been required to spend the whole of most nights on fatigues near the line, and although they proceed there and back in motor transport the men are too tired on their return for more exercise that morning.⁷³

The 8th Cameronians moved back to the Front on 4 June, following their fortnight’s training. Jack noted that they had done their ‘level best to instruct all ranks and tune them up for the battle ahead’ but in his opinion they were still not ‘PROPERLY TRAINED’(sic).⁷⁴

Meanwhile, the GHQ Staff Branches had also been making preparations. In early February a comprehensive memorandum entitled ‘*Preparatory Measures to be Taken by Armies and Corps Before Undertaking Offensive Operations on a Large Scale*’ was issued. It mainly covered G and Q matters, apart from reminding Divisional Commanders of the need to keep AG GHQ constantly informed of estimates of casualties in units in accordance with previous instructions.⁷⁵ These instructions were the casualty and reinforcement procedures which had worked well during the fighting of the previous year and remained in place.

⁷² Crookenden, *Cheshire Regiment in the Great War*, p. 64.

⁷³ John Terraine, ed., *General Jack’s Diary* (1964; London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 136-7.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 138.

⁷⁵ *BOH 1916, Vol. 1*, Appendix 16 p. 108.

Meanwhile business continued as usual for AG Branch GHQ. No major actions had taken place during January but even so the total monthly casualties were 530 officers and 9424 men. Furthermore, many units remained undermanned from the previous fighting with a total shortage of nearly 75,000 men. Reinforcements continued to arrive: some 629 officers and 28,198 men in January, 702 officers and 27,030 men in February and a further 43,538 in March, but the BEF would continue to fall below establishment until April.⁷⁶ Both at home and in France the 'A' Branches were working tirelessly to gain manpower.

In February Macready had been replaced as AG GHQ by Major General GH Fowke, formerly the BEF's Engineer in Chief and whose only previous personnel experience had been as AAG RE during peacetime. The post of AG BEF would probably not have been his preferred appointment, despite promotion to lieutenant general, and it seems equally surprising that despite the efforts being made to train 'A' staff officers for their roles, eight officer learners having passed through AG's Branch in January for example, the most senior personnel officer in the BEF should have no prior familiarity with his new operational responsibilities.⁷⁷ Fortunately, the rest of his staff were by now well-experienced in their various roles.

On the manning side replacements for TF battalions remained a problem. On 1 January the Army Council had ordered that priority be given to returning the strengths of TF battalions in France to 1,000 but in many cases the men were simply not available.⁷⁸ In mid-February one of Macready's last acts as AG was to interview the COs of the 1/4th and 1/5th Black Watch, the

⁷⁶ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary January – March 1916.

⁷⁷ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary for January 1916.

⁷⁸ TNA: WO 163/21 Minutes of 179th Army Council Meeting of Saturday 1 January 1916.

1/9th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (A&SH) and 1/4th Cameron Highlanders. Casualties had reduced each of these battalions to about 500 and insufficient drafts were available to make them up to full strength in the near future. It was proposed to amalgamate the Black Watch battalions and to use the other two battalions as drafts for their respective Regular Battalions. The COs 'thought there would be no great objection on the part of the men to the proposals being carried out'.⁷⁹ The Black Watch battalions were duly amalgamated, forming the 4/5th Black Watch which was posted to the 39th Division, whilst the other two battalions were returned to the Base in late February to provide drafts for other battalions.⁸⁰ Some 300 men of the 1/4th Cameron Highlanders were sent to join the 1st Entrenching Battalion whilst a further 100 remained at the Base. Other Scottish TF battalions were proving difficult to reinforce and a further four were amalgamated in May on the orders of the War Office: the 1/5th and 1/6th Royal Scots and the 1/5th and 1/6th Scottish Rifles.⁸¹

Some Service battalions were now also very weak due to lack of reinforcements. In April War Office approval was given for the amalgamation of 7th and 8th Kings Own Scottish Borderers (both K2 battalions), 6th and 7th Royal Scots Fusiliers (K1 and K2 respectively), 10th and 11th Highland Light Infantry (both K1) and 8th and 10th Gordon Highlanders (K1 and K2 respectively). It was not only the Scots who were having difficulties: authority was also received for the disbandment of three Public Schools battalions, 18th, 19th and 21st Royal Fusiliers. These men could be drafted to other battalions of the same regiment and many were subsequently commissioned.⁸² In May the DA&QMG Fourth Army saw the GOC 32nd Division about the state of 19th Lancashire Fusiliers and the next day visited GHQ to discuss with AG

⁷⁹ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary February 1916.

⁸⁰ E.A. James, *British Regiments* (Heathfield: Naval and Military Press, 1998).

⁸¹ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary May 1916.

⁸² TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary April 1916 and James, *British Regiments*, p. 50.

the possibility of breaking up the battalion. It was decided that it would be impossible to replace it, however, so the proposal was abandoned.⁸³

The problem for the Manning staffs was that whilst they were replacing previous losses and building up the BEF for the anticipated offensive, trench warfare continued. During the first six months of 1916 there were some nine local actions, including Mount Sorrel, The Bluff, St Eloi and Vimy Ridge, plus five more, three of which were German gas attacks. Considerable losses were incurred, for example in the Ypres area on 14/15 February there were some 67 officers and 1759 OR casualties.⁸⁴ Furthermore, G Branch GHQ actively encouraged raids as a means of gaining experience and fostering the so-called 'aggressive spirit'. Between 19th December 1915 and 30 May 1916, there were 63 British raids of which 47 were successful. The total battle casualties during this period were 4067 officers and 83,862 men, all of whom had to be replaced. Reinforcements were arriving, albeit slowly. A further 976 officers and 39,496 men were sent up from the Base in April and by 18 May the manpower deficit had been reduced to 46,200.

Between January and June some units suffered (comparatively) few losses, depending on their location and the actions they had been in. The 1st KSLI lost 62 dead plus at least 117 wounded whilst 10th RWF had 108 fatalities.⁸⁵ Conversely 1st Cheshire lost 33 killed but received 385 replacements for earlier casualties.⁸⁶ Amongst a draft that arrived on 21 April was a contingent of about 40 from the Isle of Man (IoM) Volunteers who had volunteered for overseas service

⁸³ TNA: 95/441 Fourth Army AG & QMG War Diary 21 and 22 May 1916.

⁸⁴ *BOH 1916, Vol. 1*, pp. 155-6 and 242-3; TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry dated 17 February 1916.

⁸⁵ SDGW, 1st KSLI Regt History and 1st Cheshire War Diary for January – June 1916.

⁸⁶ CRA: 1st Cheshire War Diary January – June 1916: drafts received February 80, March 50, April 104, May 104.

and had joined 3rd Cheshire in late November 1915.⁸⁷ On 1 June 1916, a draft of 47 from 15th Cheshire, a Bantam battalion, was received via 8th Entrenching Battalion. Their arrival excited no comment as to their size, presumably because they were already Cheshire soldiers.

Base Depots

Both the draft-finding units at home and the Bases in France were now working flat out to replace losses and build up units before the offensive: in May 1463 officers and 51,685 men were sent from the Base areas.⁸⁸ The Bases had increased in size exponentially as new divisions and units arrived in France and were now almost the size of small towns. At Rouen there were nine hospitals plus two convalescent camps each taking 1000, plus depots for supplies, remounts, ordnance and mechanical transport. Similarly, at Le Havre and Boulogne there were supply and remount depots and Boulogne was also the principal base for the evacuation of the wounded. Reinforcement camps for 40,000 each were provided at Rouen, Le Havre and Étapes.

An example of the operation of an IBD in early 1916 is 38th IBD which had landed at Le Havre on 2 December 1915. On arrival at Étapes, the IBD staff spent the next few days putting their camp in order before beginning to receive men discharged from hospitals. The 38th Division battalions were all locally raised in Wales: five RWF, six Welsh and two SWB. On 16 December the first draft of 30 NCOs and men for 10th Welsh arrived, having been sent from 20th (Reserve) Welsh at Kinmel Park. By 29 June 1916, 38th IBD would have received 2775 men from Kinmel Park and forwarded 2862 men to 38th Division or other Welsh battalions.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ <http://www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/fulltext/gw1922/index.htm> B.E> Sargeaunt. The Isle of Man and the Great War (Douglas, Brown & Sons Ltd, nd).

⁸⁸ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary – May 1916.

⁸⁹ TNA: WO 95/4186 38th Infantry Base Depot War Diary – December 1915 – June 1916.

One of the men was George Culpitt who had joined up in 1915. He had no Welsh connections but had joined the RWF because he had a Welsh friend joining at the same time.⁹⁰ His diary starts when his draft left Kinmel Park on 27 April 1916 to join 15th RWF. By early afternoon the next day they had arrived at Le Havre where they were accommodated overnight. The following morning they left for Étapes, where they found a very large tented camp with dining halls in large marquees and one or two wooden buildings dotted about. Having drawn brand new rifles and bayonets from the stores they made their way to 38th IBD; the 38th IBD War Diary for 29th April shows a draft of 50 arriving for 15th RWF. The next afternoon the draft started training started on the Bull Ring, on the sand hills some two miles outside the main camp:

we turned off the road and made our way to the position set out for the 38th I.B.D. about half way up the ridge and here awaited the coming of the sergeant instructors. During the afternoon under the supervision of the sergeants and closely watched by the officer we went through rapid loading, extended order drill, and bayonet fighting and we were much relieved when we finally made our way back to the road, the instructors took their leave and we made tracks for the Depot.

For the next two weeks the draft practised bayonet fighting, bombing and extended order drills, apart from two days when they went on route marches to the coast and a single day live-firing at targets some 75 yards away on the Sandhills Range just outside the camp. It did not take long and they had returned to camp before lunch. The following day, 11 May, Culpitt and his draft learned they would shortly be leaving for the Front but for 10th RWF instead of 15th RWF as originally intended. He was one of 80 men transferred from 15th to 10th RWF to replace casualties suffered by that battalion in a German gas attack on 30 April.⁹¹ This transfer between RWF battalions confirms that reinforcement by regiment was already happening. Culpitt does

⁹⁰ www.culpitt-war-diary.org.uk/index.htm.

⁹¹ TNA: WO 95/4186 38th IBD War Diary – 13 May 1916.

not appear to have been disturbed by the switch of unit; he was simply relieved to find himself in the same company as others of his draft from Kinmel Park.

Labour

As preparations for the offensive progressed so more miles of railway line were required to move men and matériel. Mention has already been made of the problems of finding labour. In 1915 eleven RE labour battalions containing elderly labourers and tradesmen had been formed for defence works such as roads and water supply. In early 1916 Infantry Labour battalions began to be raised from men of Reserve Infantry units who were not fit for service at the Front and were without specialist trades or professional qualifications. By June 1916 there were in France 11 RE Labour battalions, 12 Infantry Labour battalions, 30 Labour Companies ASC (for the disembarkation of stores and formation of depots), 3 Naval Labour companies and 8 Non-Combatant (conscientious objectors) Labour Companies. The 2nd and 6th RE Labour and 12th (Labour) Devonshire battalions, each with companies distributed between the various Corps, were allocated to Fourth Army whilst on 26th May 19th Cheshire was temporarily allotted to XV Corps for work on the Dernancourt railway. Labour would continue to be a problem throughout the offensive.

Medical Arrangements

The Medical Services were also making preparations for the offensive. Originally it had been policy to evacuate casualties to England as insufficient facilities were available for their treatment in France. The 1915 casualty numbers, however, had focussed attention on the need to retain lightly wounded men in France so that they could be returned to duty as soon as possible. Plans were now reviewed, based on anticipated casualties and the need for their

collection and evacuation as quickly as possible if lives were to be saved and earlier convalescence encouraged.⁹² Changes were introduced, including the doubling of regimental stretcher bearers from 16 to 32, the establishment of relay bearer posts every 1000 yards and the reserving of special communication trenches for the removal of wounded. The wounded would be evacuated from the Regimental Aid Posts (RAPs) to the Advanced Dressing Stations (ADS) in the usual manner and then moved on using supply and transport vehicles or whatever other transport was available, including improvised trains; there would be 28 ambulance trains for the Somme. Casualty Clearing Stations (CCS) were now grouped together in twos and threes and expanded to accommodate an average of 1000.

Arrangements were improved for the reception of casualties and their rapid treatment and onward evacuation if necessary although the CCS were now better equipped and manned and able to conduct surgery. Whenever possible they were located near broad gauge railways for increased comfort and speed of evacuation back to hospitals where greater care could be given. Hospital bed spaces existed for about 61,000 men in a total of 58 hospitals on the LofC and in convalescent and stationary hospitals in the front area. However, only 36,237 vacancies would exist on 1 July and a large number of wounded were sent back to UK in order to free up space and create a reserve of beds for men too ill to be moved and for sudden surges of fresh cases. There were also now seven convalescent depots in France (the equivalent of the Command Depots in England) giving spaces for 35,000 but it was recognised that more capacity would be needed. A further large Convalescent Depot would open at Cayeux on 24 July.⁹³

⁹² Major- General Sir W.G MacPherson, *Medical History of the War Volume III* (London: HMSO, 1924), p. 24.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

Reorganization of IBDs

Since mid-May, the DAG's staffs had been instructed to reinforce by Regiment instead of by battalions.⁹⁴ The Army HQs were informed of this on 22 May but as the new instruction did not provoke comment it appears to have been simply regularizing what was already happening. The decision led to the reorganization of the divisional IBDs since reinforcements needed to be centralized by regiment for the system to work. In mid-June the IGC, Lt Gen F. T. Clayton, informed the War Office that GHQ had authorized the re-organization of the IBDs in France and forwarded details of the intended amalgamation by Regiments and Districts. The intended effective date was 1 July and the letter's purpose was to seek agreement to reinforcements being directed to the new IBDs from that date.⁹⁵ The changeover was rapidly implemented: 38th (Welsh) IBD became simply 38th IBD and began to receive Royal West Surrey, East Surrey and East Kent men in early July. The last Welsh draft, nine men for the SWB, was sent forward on 10 July.⁹⁶

The IBDs continued to be split between Rouen, Le Havre and Étaples. Those serving the Regular battalions of No 4 District were at Rouen, where No 4 IBD would serve the Cheshire, KSLI and Monmouth Regiments, No 5 IBD the RWF and SWB and No 6 IBD the Welsh and South Lancashire Regiments. No 3 District IBDs were all at Étaples with Nos 23, 24, 25 and 30 IBDs serving the regiments recruited in Lancashire, Westmorland and Cumberland. The TF Base Depots at Rouen and Le Havre continued to be linked to the TF Divisions, but TF reinforcements for units not within the TF Divisions would be allocated by the regimentally

⁹⁴ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary, WO 95/181 First Army AG&QMG War Diary May 1916, WO 95/441 Fourth Army AG & QMG War Diary May 1916.

⁹⁵ TNA: WO 95/3969 IGC letter AD 2074 dated 13 June 1916.

⁹⁶ TNA: WO 95/3969 Letter 121/8528 (AG2a) dated 20 June 1916 and WO 95/4186 38 IBD War Diary for July 1916.

affiliated Base Depots. The final list of Base Depots in France with their affiliated units was sent to the War Office at the end of July.⁹⁷

Final Plans for Reinforcements

On 14 June AG GHQ requested that the War Office send out 20,000 men per week, preferably ordinary trained reinforcements but partially trained men could be sent provided they had fired their musketry course. On 20 June the War Office wired that 20,000 Regular and New Army and 17,500 TF reinforcements would be sent out, leaving the next week. Of these the TF were only partially trained but had at least completed their musketry training. During June some 1823 officers and 72,131 men were sent from home – huge numbers but still short of the 20,000 a week requested. The War Office telegraphed on 28 June that 2,500 partially trained men were being sent at the end of the week, 15,000 partially trained men would be sent on 2 July and a further 15,000 partially trained men would be sent during the first fortnight of July.⁹⁸

On 14 June Rawlinson issued his formal Operations Order and on 22 June held his final conference with his Corps commanders. The planning was over and on 26 June Advanced GHQ opened at Beauquesne in readiness for the attack.

Western Front: July – December 1916

Casualties on 1 July were far higher than the worst forebodings with a total of 19,240 men killed and 37,646 wounded or missing. Thirty-two battalions out of the thirteen divisions taking part in the actual assault had suffered more than 500 casualties each.⁹⁹ As the offensive continued,

⁹⁷ TNA: WO 95/3970 IGC War Diary and IGC letter A.D./2074 dated 31 July.

⁹⁸ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary for June 1916.

⁹⁹ M. Middlebrook, *The First Day on the Somme* (London: Allen Lane, 1971; Penguin edn., 1984), p. 330.

estimated casualty figures were wired daily to AG's office in GHQ by all divisions involved in operations. At 09.00 each morning AG's staff closed the previous day's list, totaled it up and forwarded the figures to DAG at the Base and to the AG in the War Office. Every night a list of casualties by division was telegraphed to Advanced GHQ.¹⁰⁰ Occasionally the system required a slight tweak to ensure its smooth running but broadly it continued to function as planned. On 25 July AAG Reserve Army, Lt Col C. F. Hunter, notified all Reserve Army Corps and Divisions that, whilst estimated casualty numbers would continue to be wired by divisions to AG GHQ, Reserve Army 'A' Branch and their parent Corps, in future, to reduce telegraph traffic, divisions should send long 'actual' casualty returns by Despatch Rider Letter Service (DRLS) to the parent Corps and Reserve Army 'A', with the envelopes marked 'Casualty Return Urgent'.¹⁰¹

Sometimes there were difficulties in obtaining the casualty figures. Reserve Army 'A' staff tried to pre-empt problems by meeting incoming Corps staff and briefing them on casualty reporting requirements.¹⁰² This did not always work: diary entries from 26 July – 1 August continually note the non-receipt of casualty figures from the Australian Divisions. On 31 July the A&QMG staff called a conference with the Australian Staff Captains and the figures soon began to appear.¹⁰³

Estimated casualty figures were essential for the reinforcement system to operate as quickly as required. On receiving the consolidated lists, the GHQ GS Operations Branch would each

¹⁰⁰ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary for 1 July 1916.

¹⁰¹ TNA: WO 95/523 Reserve Army A&QMG War Diary entry 25 July 1916.

¹⁰² TNA: WO 95/523 Reserve Army A&QMG War Diary entry 27 July: 'VIII Corps being relieved by XIV Corps. Met XIV Corps advanced staff and discussed reports of casualties etc'.

¹⁰³ *Ibid* Entries for 26 July – 2 August 1916.

evening notify AG and DAG Base of the priority for reinforcements. On 9 July, for example, it was notified that 70th Brigade should be brought up to strength as soon as possible and on 16 July divisions were grouped into priority categories. The system would continue unchanged throughout the battle: on 19 November the message to AG and DAG Base was that reinforcements were to be prioritised for 3rd, 31st and 32nd Divisions for Fifth Army and for 17th, 50th, 33rd and 8th Divisions for Fourth Army.¹⁰⁴ During the battle, there was also frequent contact between the 'A' staff and the Armies, with Fowke visiting Advanced GHQ almost daily and his staff making frequent visits to the Fourth and Reserve Armies.

Despite the disastrous first day, reinforcements seem to have been available, at least to begin with. On 7 July Rawlinson impressed upon Fowke the need to refill 7th Division as soon as possible; on 10 July the Fourth Army 'A' staff reported the satisfactory arrival of drafts for 7th and 21st Divisions, and that 7th Division was now practically back up to establishment. As casualties mounted, however, their replacement was required as quickly as possible. On 16 July Fourth Army was informed that some 2,000 reinforcements might be expected daily. In the event, these figures fluctuated: on 21 July they received 2,742 men but for the last seven days of July the daily average was just 1,338. From 12 July, when Fourth Army started recording incoming figures, to 31 July they received just 30,605 men against estimated casualties for the whole month of 4,428 officers and 116,270 men.¹⁰⁵

The problem for AG GHQ was that losses were not limited to those on the Somme, estimated at 5054 officers and 146,130 men for July. The rest of the BEF was not unscathed and the total

¹⁰⁴ TNA: WO 95/5, 95/6, 95/7, 95/8, 95/9 GHQ GS War Diaries for July, August, September, October and November 1916.

¹⁰⁵ TNA: WO 95/441 Fourth Army A&QMG War Diary July 1916.

losses for July on the Western Front were 9,228 officers and 180,115 men: battle casualties accounted for 7,835 officers and 155,767 men and a further 1,375 officers and 24,348 men were classed as 'sick wastage'. Reinforcements from home numbered just 1,669 officers and 106,552 men.¹⁰⁶ Battle casualties were to be expected, and many of those shown in the overall casualty figures would recover sufficiently to return to the line, but nonetheless the figures for July were high. In a letter to Robertson on 1 August summarizing his views on the present situation, Haig rationalized them somewhat cavalierly:

Our losses in the last month's very heavy fighting – totaling to about 120,000 more than they would have been if we had not attacked – cannot be regarded as unduly heavy, or as sufficient to justify any anxiety as to our ability to continue the offensive ... our ranks have been filled up again and our troops are still in excellent heart.¹⁰⁷

Had all the divisions involved in the previous month's fighting been expected to carry on then there might well have been anxiety over their ability to continue the offensive but from the earliest days of the war the BEF had withdrawn weakened divisions from the line so that they might be rested and refilled with reinforcements. This continued during the Somme battle with divisions being withdrawn from the frontline for short periods and being switched with divisions from other Armies if longer rest was needed.

Orders for the movement of divisions were given by GHQ. For example, GHQ GS Ops letter (O.A.D.41) of 4 July initiated the following merry-go-round:

- II Corps was to transfer from GHQ Reserve to Fourth Army
- 3rd Division was to transfer from II Corps to XIII Corps, Fourth Army
- 12th Division transferred from III Corps, Fourth Army to X Corps, Reserve Army
- 8th Division (II Corps) to be held in readiness to entrain for I Corps, First Army,
- 1st Division (I Corps) to be held in readiness to entrain to II Corps, Fourth Army
- 35th Division, Third Army to move to VIII Corps, Reserve Army¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ TNA: WO 95/26 GHQ AG War Diary entry for 31 July 1916.

¹⁰⁷ TNA: WO 158/21 – GHQ OAD 90 dated 1 August 1916.

¹⁰⁸ TNA: WO 95/5 – GHQ GS War Diary dated 4 July.

As a result of this instruction, 3rd Division, including 7th KSLI and 10th RWF and newly arrived from the Ypres area, on 7/8 July relieved 18th Division, which had been in the line since the start of the offensive and had lost over 3,400 all ranks. The 12th Division, originally in GHQ Reserve, had been called forward overnight 1/2 July to III Corps and on 3 July had attacked Ovillers, losing nearly 2,400 officers and men. It would now move to X Corps, Reserve Army. The 8th Division, having lost 4,921 officers and men on 1 July, was now warned for a straight swap with 1st Division and would entrain on 6 July for the First Army area where it would remain until mid-October. Plans remained flexible, however, the 1st Division being diverted on its arrival on 8 July to III Corps. The 35th Division moved to VIII Corps but was to be held in Reserve and not employed without agreement from GHQ.¹⁰⁹ Similar divisional movements would continue throughout the battle as divisions needed to be withdrawn from the line to rest and recuperate; on 13 Nov, GHQ instructed that the 7th Division in Second Army would be exchanged in mid-November with the 39th Division in Fifth Army.¹¹⁰

Occasionally brigades were switched. On 5 July GHQ issued orders for the 110th, 111th and 112th Brigades of 37th Division to be transferred to the Somme as quickly as possible. On arrival 110th Brigade exchanged places with 63rd Brigade from 21st Division whilst 111th and 112th Brigades replaced the 102nd and 103rd brigades of 34th Division, III Corps, which had lost 6,811 all ranks in the first three days of the battle. The 111th and 112th Brigades immediately went into the line with 34th Division on 10 July. The Brigades leaving the Somme joined 37th Division in Third Army on Vimy Ridge.¹¹¹ Such switches of Brigades were few, however,

¹⁰⁹ TNA: WO 153/1265 Fourth Army 'Tartan' and Days Spent in the Line 1 July – 31 October 1916; WO 95/5 GHQ GS War Diary for 4 – 8 July 1916; and *BOH 1916 Vol. 2*, pp. 4, 8, 12 and 40.

¹¹⁰ TNA: WO 95/9 – GHQ GS War Diary dated 13 November 1916.

¹¹¹ TNA: WO 95/5 GHQ GS War Diary for 5 July 1916, E.A. James, *A Record of the Battles and Engagements of the British Armies in France and Flanders 1914 – 1918* (1924: London: The London Stamp Exchange, 1990), p. 11 fn 1 and *BOH 1916 Vol. 2*, p. 13.

quite possibly because, apart from dislocating divisions, it became too difficult to keep track of them.

The Fourth Army staff created a brightly coloured chart, referred to as the ‘Tartan’, in order to keep track on which division was doing what and when. A check was also kept on the number of days up to 31 October that each division spent in the front line, including whether those days were north of the Ancre.¹¹² The extract below refers to 3rd and 18th Divisions:

Division	Days in the Line – First period			Days in the Line – Second Period			Total Days in the Line to 31 October
18 th Division	1-7 Jul	13-17 Jul	12	26 Sep–5 Oct	16 Oct-31 Oct	26	38
3 rd Division	8–25 Jul	15–19 Aug	23	8-19 Oct (north of Ancre)	22-31 Oct (north of Ancre)	22	45

On 20 July 18th Division, having lost 5437 all ranks in just 12 days in the line, was warned for transfer from Fourth Army to Second Army.¹¹³ It would not return until mid-September when it would join the Reserve Army. In late August the 3rd Division was also sent north to recuperate, having spent 25 days in the front line and lost about 8000. It had spent 18 days in the front line until 25 July, taking part in the battles of Albert, Bazentin and Delville Wood, and had lost 248 officers and 5854 ORs. Reinforcements had been received, for example on 21 July 7th KSLI received a draft of 130, including Bert Oakes who had finally left Prees Heath on 10 July, but the Division as a whole was still much below strength.¹¹⁴ Despite this it went into action again on 15 August, losing nearly 1900 before being withdrawn on 19 August and sent north. It would return to the Somme in early October, going into the line again on 8 October as part of Reserve Army.

¹¹² TNA: WO 153/1265 Fourth Army ‘Tartan’ and Days in the Line for Each Division 1 July – 31 October 1916.

¹¹³ TNA: WO 95/5 GHQ GS War Diary entry for 20 July and WO 95/26 GHQ AG Table of Estimated Casualties for July 1916.

¹¹⁴ *BOH 1916, Vol. 2*, pp. 88 and 193.

In early August GHQ notified Second and Third Armies of divisions to be sent to reinforce the Somme battle front and those with which it was intended to replace them. Details were also sent to the Reserve and Fourth Armies with forecasts of the replacement divisions they might expect.¹¹⁵ A workable and familiar system was obviously in place for divisions but problems over individual reinforcements were now becoming apparent.

In response to a complaint by Montagu, the Minister for Munitions, Macready explained the reinforcement process:

... France indents on us for the number of men required per battalion, and we send them out by regiments. That is to say, we may send out to France 1,000 men belonging to one regiment and when they arrive in France they are drafted to such battalions of that regiment as are likely to require to be made up to full strength at once in conformity with the plans of the General Staff. Also it may be necessary where the supply of men for any particular regiment is short to supplement it from other regiments in the same recruiting district ...¹¹⁶

Despite the caveat in the final sentence above, units continued to expect drafts belonging to their parent Regiment. This did not always work as planned and Fourth Army complained in early August that

reinforcements do not appear to be coming up very satisfactorily, and in two or three cases drafts appear to have been sent to units to which they do not belong – apparently without reason. DAG Base has in some cases asked that these drafts should be sent back to the Base, but it has been decided to ask that these drafts may be readjusted within the Army.

In a meeting with Fowke on 14 August, Rawlinson noted that ‘there was a great deal of apparently unnecessary mixing up of reinforcements for various units’, and urged that slightly wounded men returning from the Base should be posted to their original units, as was supposed

¹¹⁵ TNA: 95/6 GHQ GS War Diary for 4 and 6 August referring to letters OAD 94, 95, 96 and 97.

¹¹⁶ General Sir N. Macready, *Annals of an Active Life Vol I* (London: Hutchinson, n.d.), p. 256.

to happen. He proposed a pool of reinforcements for Fourth Army but this was not agreed by Fowke, presumably because it would cut across existing systems.¹¹⁷ In practice Fourth Army continued to sanction the transfer to their own regiments of men who had arrived at other regiments. Captain Dunn, the RMO of 2nd RWF, describes the arrival in late July of ‘men recruited and trained for the Cheshires, Shropshires and SWB ... resentful of their transfer and unwanted by us.’ When the opportunity occurred, the Shropshires ‘were bartered for half their number of RWF from a neighbouring division’.¹¹⁸

Casualties for August were fewer than the previous month enabling Haig to write to Robertson that they had ‘not been more than some 28,000 greater than would ordinarily have occurred during three weeks of normal trench warfare ...’.¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, they were still high and the Manning authorities were struggling to bring Infantry battalions and divisions back up to strength. The official Infantry strength of a division was 12,000, made up of three brigades each containing four battalions of 1000 men, but the average divisional strength during the Somme was only 10,000. On 30 August AG GHQ was instructed to bring specified divisions up to full establishment at once. All other divisions in Fourth and Reserve Armies, except those going to defensive fronts, were to be kept over 10,000 strong and no battalion was to be under 850 strong; the strength of battalions in divisions on defensive fronts was to be not less than 700.¹²⁰ The figures for August show that great efforts were being made to supply reinforcements, some 1431 officers and 74,414 ORs having arrived from home, of which 34,727 had gone to the Fourth Army. However, although the total estimated casualties for units

¹¹⁷ TNA: WO 95/441 Fourth Army A&Q War Diary of 8, 14 and 17 August 1916.

¹¹⁸ TNA: WO 95/441 Fourth Army A&Q War Diary of 12 August 1916 and J.C. Dunn, *The War The Infantry Knew 1914 – 1919* (London: Abacus edn., 1987), pp. 245-6.

¹¹⁹ TNA: WO 158/21 GHQ OAD 119 dated 23 Aug 16 – Letter from Haig to Robertson.

¹²⁰ TNA: WO 95/6 GHQ GS War Diary entry dated 30 August 1916.

engaged in active operations for August were 1155 officers and 36,330 ORs, the total BEF losses, including sick wastage, were 5197 officers and 101,965 ORs.¹²¹ Whilst many of the minor wounded and the sick would be returned to duty as soon as they were fit enough, there still remained immediate gaps to fill.

September was a month of successes but also heavy losses: estimated casualties noted by AG GHQ were 18,900 for Martinpuich, Flers and Courcellette; 5,000 at Mouquet Farm; 1270 at Morval and Les Boeufs; and 7,200 at Geaudecourt, Thiepval, and Combles. Divisions continued to be moved around and reinforced according to the GHQ priorities. For the first time, however, AG Branch's end of month figures showed that more reinforcements had been received (4167 officers and 107,625 ORs) than the total battle casualties (5254 officers and 105,588 ORs).¹²² The War Office was obviously finding men from somewhere but the standard was gradually declining. On 16 October it was learned that 15,000 recruits due to arrive gradually from England would need to be trained to shoot the short rifle before being sent forward.¹²³

The experiences of 1st Cheshire from July through to September provide an illustration of losses suffered and their replacement. The battalion, in 15th Brigade of 5th Division, arrived on the Somme from Third Army in early July. Later in the month, 5th Division was involved in attacks towards Longueval but 15th Brigade remained in Divisional Reserve. During 25 – 26 July 1st Cheshire suffered about 45 casualties.¹²⁴ On 27 July 15th Brigade attacked Longueval with the 1st Norfolks and 1st Bedfordshires whilst 1st Cheshire carried out a separate attack on an alleged

¹²¹ *Ibid* entry dated 31 August 1916.

¹²² TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary for September 1916.

¹²³ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary for 16 October 1916.

¹²⁴ TNA: WO 95/1571 1st Cheshire War Diary for July 1916.

German strongpoint: the regimental history notes some doubt about its existence! At 08.38, three parties, each led by a Second Lieutenant, went forward. The leading two parties made strenuous attempts to reach their objectives but were met by cross fire from machine guns at High Wood and Longueval. Both officers were killed and nearly all the men killed or wounded. The objective was not reached, although an advanced post protecting the left flank was established, but heavy fighting continued all day. The CO, Col M. F. Clarke, had been wounded, some 24 ORs had been killed and a further 12 would be lost over the following two days as the Battalion moved up and occupied the northern and western edges of Longueval. By the time 15th Brigade was relieved on 30 July and back in Divisional reserve near Mametz, the Cheshire's remaining strength was under 300 all ranks; a total of 44 soldiers had been killed in action during July with a further 4 dying of their wounds.¹²⁵ A quarter of the dead had been with the battalion since 1914 but almost all the rest had arrived in 1915, with only a couple having joined in early 1916. Fifteen were pre-war Cheshire soldiers with varying lengths of service but none of the rest had had previous operational service with other regiments.¹²⁶ Of the 48 who died, 41 had enlisted in Cheshire, 2 in Lancashire, 2 in the IoM and 1 each from Nottinghamshire, Essex and Derbyshire; all except 3 had thus been recruited originally in Western Command.¹²⁷

Replacements were quick to arrive. A draft of 70 reinforcements joined on 31 July bringing the total received that month to 100. During August a further 5 officers and 189 men arrived.

¹²⁵ *SDGW*.

¹²⁶ 8641 Pte Frank Ernest Fox had joined the SR in 1910 and was mobilised on 8 August 1914 with 3rd Cheshire. On 19 September he deserted rather than be sent to France and was not arrested until March 1915. A District Court Martial (DCM) in April sentenced him to 1 years' detention which was mitigated to 56 days detention. On 29 May 1915 he rejoined 3rd Cheshire and was posted to 1st Cheshire in France in early July after which he seems to have stayed out of trouble until being killed a year later on 28 July 1916.

¹²⁷ *SDGW* and www.ancestry.com.

This included a draft of 50 from the Shropshire Yeomanry, who were initially attached on 19 August and then compulsorily transferred to 1st Cheshire on 1 September. The Regimental History notes that the dismounted ex-Yeomanry needed intensive training to become fit for trench warfare but ‘once they realised there was no alternative, they soon learnt the work and made excellent reinforcements’. Once the battalion could be got together in a rest area, ‘these [new] men soon became one with the unit’, aided presumably by their coming from the neighbouring county.¹²⁸

The 5th Division spent the next few weeks training near Abbeville before returning to the Somme on 26 August and relieving 35th Division on the eastern slopes of Maltz Horn Ridge. It was now part of 14th Corps in Fourth Army and would participate in the attack on Falfemont Farm, on the high ground between Combles and Guillemont. On 1 September 1st Cheshire moved into Chimpanzee Trench, immediately northwest of Hardecourt; the War Diary notes that ‘casualties during the day were not very heavy but amounted to about 23 OR’. The attack was again postponed but 15th Brigade ordered that strong patrols were to go out at 8.30pm that evening and to establish strongpoints if no opposition encountered. It obviously was encountered as the Cheshire’s final casualty toll for the day was 67, including one officer and seven ORs killed. The soldiers who died had all, with one exception, been with the battalion since 1915.¹²⁹

The evening of the following day 15th Brigade was withdrawn into support but 1st Cheshire, having been relieved by 14th Warwickshire, was detailed as immediate reserve for a 13th Brigade attack on Falfemont Farm at 9am on 3 September. The attack went in but soon failed due to

¹²⁸ CRA: 1st Cheshires War Diary for August 1916 and Crookenden, *Cheshire Regiment in the Great War*, p. 77.

¹²⁹ CRA: 1st Cheshire War Diary for 1 September 1916 and SDGW 1st Cheshire deaths for 1 September 1916.

lack of artillery support. Mid-morning 1st Cheshire was ordered forward to reinforce 13th Brigade but on reaching the front line found a very confused situation: 'the KOSBs and the Warwickshires had suffered heavily and did not seem to be in a position to fully explain the situation'.¹³⁰ In mid-afternoon the Cheshires were told to push forward patrols to try to 'clear up the situation'. Messages were received that the enemy was retiring; then that the enemy was not retiring but being reinforced with 5000 troops, which was later corrected to just 50. At about 5pm the battalion was ordered to send a company to support the West Kents, whilst keeping two companies in the front line and one in support. Commander 13th Brigade then ordered the Cheshires to attack the still strongly defended Falfemont Farm at 6.30pm. The attack failed within five minutes, heavy machine gun fire having caused many casualties, and the Cheshires regrouped in the front-line trench, reporting to 13th Brigade that the front line was now full of various regiments and asking 'for some other battalion to take over to enable us to re-organize'. By now the Cheshire casualties were estimated at over 300, including one officer and 20 ORs killed.

Overnight 13th Brigade was withdrawn but 1st Cheshire remained in the front line to be joined by other 15th Brigade units: Norfolks on the right, Cheshires in the middle and Bedfords on the left. During the morning, orders were received for the three battalions to attack Falfemont Farm mid-afternoon. Despite their depleted numbers, the Cheshires were to attack the Farm and the trenches immediately to the north of it, the Norfolks would attack the south side of the Farm whilst the Bedfords would attack the German trenches to the west of the Farm and south of Wedge Wood. The attack went in at the planned time soon failed on the right under heavy machine gun fire. There was more success on the left: the German trenches to the north of the

¹³⁰ CRA: 1st Cheshire War Diary for 3 September 1916.

Farm were entered by the Bedfords and Cheshires and then a bombing party eventually gained a footing in the Farm itself. By dark the position had been won but the Cheshire casualties had again been heavy: 3 officers killed and 7 wounded plus 43 ORs killed and 407 wounded. The regimental history estimated that only 280 men remained untouched.¹³¹

For 1st Cheshire, however, the losses had been heavy and the battalion that was withdrawn during late afternoon on 5 September was only some 280 strong. Reorganization began immediately with the return of those officers and men who had been left behind with the transport, bringing the strength up to 442. Fortunately two large drafts also arrived: on 8 September a draft of 136 from 2/6th Cheshire and three days later a draft of 102, mostly from 2/7th Cheshire. These TF drafts had arrived at No 4 IBD during August and were transferred, under AO 204 and ACI 1499 of 1916, to 1st Cheshire in early September when the scale of the battalion's losses became evident.¹³²

The 1st Cheshire next found themselves 'very worn out and wet and of no fighting value' holding the line on the right of the attack on Flers-Courcelette.¹³³ Their next objective would be Morval, on the right of a much bigger British attack heading north-east towards Bapaume on 25 September. The 15th Brigade's task would be in three stages: the first objective was the German front line in the valley between Ginchy and Morval; the second objective was the German support line halfway up the slope towards Morval; and the Cheshires were to capture the third objective, the eastern edge of Morval itself. The attacks went well and 'objectives were taken in every case at the first assault'.¹³⁴ Morval itself was captured by 1st Cheshire at

¹³¹ Crookenden, *Cheshire Regiment in the Great War*, p. 83.

¹³² www.ancestry.com Service Records for 1st Cheshire soldiers.

¹³³ CRA: 1st Cheshire War Diary 21 September 1916.

¹³⁴ CRA: 1st Cheshire War Diary 25 September 1916.

about 3pm with relatively light casualties, although 23 had been killed. The battalion consolidated its new position but the following day the trenches were steadily shelled and a further eight killed. Fortunately, the Battalion was relieved and by 10.30pm they were able to move back. Altogether they had sustained 140 casualties during the events around Morval, of whom 31 had been killed.

Between 19 July and the end of September 5th Division had suffered 559 officer and 11,186 OR casualties. The Cheshire Regimental History noted that 1st Cheshire had taken part in three separate operations and had suffered about 20 officer and over 1,000 soldier casualties but that ‘after each action they had received large reinforcements, many of the men having no connection with the county’.¹³⁵ This perception, however, is not entirely borne out by analysis as large drafts had arrived from Cheshire TF battalions. Detailed analysis of the 140 soldiers killed 1–26 September shows that 92 had enlisted in Cheshire and 122 had originally enlisted in the Cheshire Regiment, either as Regular or TF. A further 6 had enlisted in No 4 District which, with 29 in No 3 District, made an overall total of 127 enlistments in Western Command. Of the 13 who had enlisted outside Western Command, 6 had served with the Cheshires for over a year having been transferred in 1915 from other Regimental Depots as a result of the Transfers Act. Whilst these figures could be taken to indicate that those killed had been pre-Somme reinforcements, in fact 29 of the 32 men killed in September were Cheshire TF soldiers, who had arrived in France only a few weeks before. The other 3 were from the Shropshire Yeomanry who had arrived in August. Overall, analysis shows that during September drafts for the Cheshire Regiment had continued to come from their own Regimental reserves, albeit

¹³⁵ Crookenden, *Cheshire Regiment in the Great War*, pp. 87-8.

predominantly TF soldiers, many of whom were Derby men, who had been transferred on arrival in France.

The Somme offensive continued into October with the battles of Le Transloy, 1–18 October, and Ancre Heights which lasted the whole of the month and into November. By November the weather had turned, with continuous rain between 24 October and 3 November and further bad weather after that. The Reserve Army, now retitled Fifth Army, continued the battle of Ancre Heights whilst Fourth Army attacked Le Transloy. The offensive was drawing to a close although it was still intended to exert pressure on the Germans to avoid their reinforcing other theatres with troops from the Western Front.

Some twelve divisions which had been sent north for rest and refit after fighting on the Somme in July and August now returned to the line.¹³⁶ One such was the 32nd Division, which had been badly mauled on 1 July in the attack on the Leipzig Salient. The 11th Border (Lonsdales) of 97th Brigade, raised in Cumberland and Westmorland and therefore within Western Command, had lost 100 killed, 371 wounded and 19 missing on that day and even after re-organization their OR strength on 7 July was only 480.¹³⁷ The other battalions of 32nd Division were in much the same state and the Division had been sent north to the area of Bethune and Cambrin where it recuperated and reorganized amid ‘conditions of comparative serenity’ whilst waiting for reinforcements.¹³⁸ There were frequent minor moves and some spells in the trenches but very little action.

¹³⁶ TNA: WO 153/1265 Days in the Line per Division 1 July – 31 October 1916.

¹³⁷ Colonel H.C. Wylly, *The Border Regiment in the Great War* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1924), p 85 and TNA: WO 95/2403 War Diary for July 1916 – 11th Border Regt.

¹³⁸ T. Chalmers, *History of the 16th H.L.I* (Glasgow: M’Callum & Co, n.d.), p. 47.

Between 1 August and 22 October the Lonsdales received 378 men, including a draft on 11 October of 212 TF soldiers from the 1st Reserve Herefordshire Regiment.¹³⁹ This draft was a mixture of former HS men, who had joined 3/1st Herefordshire between August 1914 and May 1915, and Derby men who had enlisted in the 3/1st Herefordshire Reserve Battalion and had since been called up. Most of the HS men, roughly one third of the draft, were in their late twenties and early thirties and almost all came from Herefordshire. From mid-June 1915 the HS men had been defending the Norfolk coast with the 48th Provisional Battalion where many of them had pre-empted compulsion by signing the IS Obligation before the appointed date of MSA 2: 3064 Pte Joseph Loader and 2786 Pte Henry Pryce signed the IS Obligation at Cromer on 21 June.¹⁴⁰ On 19 July 1916 they had been returned to their parent battalion. The other two thirds of the draft were ‘Derby men’, mainly from Herefordshire but with a few from Radnorshire, Monmouthshire and South Wales. Both the HS and the Derby men were compulsorily transferred to 3rd (SR) KSLI on 22 September and, after being medically examined and pronounced ‘Fit for Draft’, they had become part of a draft of 250 which arrived on 1 October at No 4 IBD in Rouen. They were earmarked for 5th KSLI, but on 11th October some 212 were posted to 11th Border Regiment. Although the KSLI and the Borders belonged to different Districts, the draft did at least remain in a unit from Western Command.

In late October 97th Brigade moved south again, carrying out some training at La Vicogne during the first two weeks of November. By 15 November 32nd Division was in Fifth Army, preparing to take part in the final operations of the Battle of the Ancre and on 17 November, they received orders for an attack on Frankfort Trench early the following day.¹⁴¹ The 97th

¹³⁹ TNA: WO 95/2402 – 2nd KOYLI War Diary and TNA 95/2403 11th Border War Diary August – October 1916.

¹⁴⁰ Service Papers searched using www.ancestry.co.uk.

¹⁴¹ TNA: WO 95/2368 Appendix 16A – Narrative of Operations 18 November 1916.

Brigade's objective was the capture of Munich Trench in front of the Frankfort Trench, using all four battalions 'by the express desire of the corps'.¹⁴²

The 32nd Division took over the front-line trenches and began to move up to the start-line. The 97th Brigade had difficulty getting through very swampy ground caused by the recent heavy rains and the situation was compounded by the men having no previous knowledge of the area and the trenches.¹⁴³ At 06.10 on 18 November the attack went in but was not a success. On the right, 17th HLI was checked by rifle and machine gun fire and to the left 2nd KOYLI and 11th Border were held up by an enemy redoubt. Some Borders managed to get into Munich Trench and some even reached Frankfort Trench but were driven back to hold a line about 200 yards in front of it.¹⁴⁴ By noon the attacking force were back in their front line, except for a party of 7 officers and some 120 Other Ranks of 11th Borders and 16th HLI who would hold two dugouts in Frankfort Trench for a further few days before being taken prisoner. The attack had cost 97th Brigade 491 men killed and many others were wounded and missing.¹⁴⁵ The 11th Borders had lost 141 men killed, of whom over a third (53) were Herefordshire TF soldiers who had been part of the draft of 212 rushed out just five weeks earlier.¹⁴⁶ It would be tempting to say that the failure of the attack was due to the large proportion of newly arrived former TF HS men in the battalions. Many other reasons might be cited, however, but a key one must be that this was a division that had spent just 10 days on the Somme front line in July before being sent north.¹⁴⁷ Since then it had played no part in the subsequent actions that by November had created a very differently experienced force from that of early July.

¹⁴² *BOH 1916 Vol. 2*, p. 521.

¹⁴³ TNA: WO 95/ 2402 2nd KOYLI entry for 17/18 Nov 16.

¹⁴⁴ TNA: WO 95/2368 Appendix 16A.

¹⁴⁵ SGD: 2/KOYLI 107; 16/HLI 162; 17/HLI 81 and 11/Border 141.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid* 11/Border Regt deaths for 18 Nov 16 and *SDGW*.

¹⁴⁷ TNA: WO 153/1265 Days in the Frontline 1 July – 31 October 1916.

The 1916 Battle of the Somme officially ended on 18 November. The *Official History* shows that the BEF suffered 419,654 casualties up to 30 November 1916, although this includes some absentees who had returned.¹⁴⁸ The *Statistics of the British Military Effort* gives a figure of 498,054 (excluding sick) during the period of the Somme Offensive, of whom 108,724 were dead, 343,431 were wounded and 45,899 missing or prisoners.¹⁴⁹ Prior and Wilson give a total casualty figure of 432,000 for divisions based on an untitled document in the Australian War Memorial.¹⁵⁰ All these figures are at odds with the estimated casualties at the time given in AG GHQ's War Diary:

	July	August	September	October	November	December	Total
Total strength of BEF	1,465,200	1,520,000	1,539,584	1,520,900	1,524,110	1,590,700	
Total battle casualties (k, w, m)	163,602	77,191	110,842	70,812	47,887	11,290	481,624
Total sick wastage	25,723	29,970	37,660	32,209	47,093	55,660	228,315
Total losses	189,343	107,161	148,502	105,021	94,980	66,970	711,977
Reinforcements from home (excluding RA, RE and RFC)	108,221	75,845	111,792	88,732	71,786	119,859	576,235
Estimated casualties by Divisions engaged in Active operations (Somme)	151,184	37,485	90,249	31,015	26,604	(no separate figures shown)	336,537

Source: TNA WO 95/26 GHQ AG Branch War Diary for July – December 1916 (NB Estimated casualty figures)

The disparity between the total figures during and after the event shows the huge difficulty of obtaining accurate data, which inevitably compounded the problem for those providing reinforcements. The GHQ figures show that 576,235 men, less those for the RA, RE and RFC, were received from home, enough to cover the battle casualties but short of the overall number required. The replacement figures were augmented, however, by the achievements of the

¹⁴⁸ *BOH 1916 Vol. 1*, p. 497.

¹⁴⁹ *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire* (London: War Office, 1922; Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 1999), p. 324.

¹⁵⁰ AWM 252/206 'Casualties by divisions', untitled document in the Australian War Memorial, cited by R. Prior & T. Wilson, *The Somme* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 204 fn 2 and p. 300.

medical services in returning a third of those wounded and over half the sick to duty within theatre.¹⁵¹

Whenever possible, men were returned to their own units.¹⁵² On 31 July the IGC confirmed that less seriously wounded cases were, as far as possible, to be retained in France for treatment and to rejoin their own units as early as possible when fit.¹⁵³ The policy was certainly applied as far as Bert Oakes and George Culpitt were concerned. Bert Oakes had finally arrived with 7th KSLI on 21 July but on 22/23 was buried by a shell bursting over the trench. He survived but was badly shaken and was back at the Base recuperating by 28 July where he remained during early August. He was fit enough to return to his Battalion by mid-August and wrote home on 21 August that he had been in action the previous week ‘but am glad to say I came through safely although had many narrow escapes’.¹⁵⁴ George Culpitt of 10th RWF had been in action with 3rd Division but in late July was evacuated with influenza. After nearly three weeks in hospital he was declared fit enough to go to the recently established No 5 Convalescent Camp at Cayeux where he spent a further three weeks before being returned to the IBD at Rouen, where those who had been wounded or sick did only light training ‘and did not train with the new recruits from England’. After about a week he and eleven others were warned for the line, six each for 10th and 9th RWF. By now it was about 24 September and 10th RWF was near Bethune, where Culpitt was happy to rejoin ‘A’ Company.¹⁵⁵ Admittedly these are just two men out of thousands, but there is no reason to suppose that they were especially unusual at that time.

¹⁵¹ *BOH 1916 Vol. 1*, pp. 91 – 94.

¹⁵² TNA: WO 95/441 Fourth Army A&Q War Diary 16 July 1916.

¹⁵³ TNA: WO 95/3969 IGC War Diary 31 July 1916.

¹⁵⁴ Letters dated 10, 17, 28 July and 3, 11 and 21 August 1916 from 22219 Pte Bert Oakes; *KSLI History*, p 229.

¹⁵⁵ www.culpitt-war-diary.org.uk/index.htm Chapter 5.

Not all the men who arrived in France or who recovered from slight wounds or sickness could be sent to the front line. Men were medically examined again on arrival at the IBDs and classified as: 'A' – fit for General Service; 'TB' - Temporary Base until fit for general service; 'PB' – Permanent Base but fit enough for service on the LofC and in Army Corps; or 'PU' – Permanently Unfit: never likely to become fit for active service but could be employed in the same way as PB men. With the Manning problems back home, there was constant pressure from both the War Office and GHQ for fit men in the Base Areas to be 'combed out' and sent forward to fight, their places being taken by PB men; in July the IGC was employing 16,000 PB replacements at the Bases, Casualty Clearing Stations and the various hospitals.¹⁵⁶ These men were also employed by Armies at Ammunition Railheads and also to relieve men of fighting units on such duties as 'sanitary fatigues, Officers and Mess Servants, cooks, charge of Divisional recreation rooms etc'.¹⁵⁷

It was all a bit piecemeal, however, and a definite organization was required to administer the PB men, both on the LofC and with Armies. On 7 September the CinC requested authority from the War Office for the creation of organizations to administer the PB men at each of the Bases, Le Havre, Rouen, Étapes and Calais. At this point the proposed organizations were simply intended to organize and administer the constant flow of large numbers of PB men rather than to form them into battalions of a particular size.¹⁵⁸ Such organizations would be less viable with the Armies as the PB men were scattered over very wide areas so it was proposed to have 7 NCOs per 100 PB men and one officer at Army Headquarters, responsible for their

¹⁵⁶ TNA: WO 95/3969 IGC War Diary - 22 July 1916.

¹⁵⁷ TNA: WO 95/3969 IGC War Diary entry 25 July 1916.

¹⁵⁸ TNA: WO 95/3970 IGC War Diary – 21 September 1916.

administration, periodical re-classification and the replacement of casualties.¹⁵⁹ By early November, however, it had been realized that a more formal organization was needed and battalions of 4,000 and upwards were now formed to administer PB men at Le Havre, Rouen and Étapes with a battalion of up to 2,000 at Calais. On 11 November No 3 Employment Base Depot noted the formation of the PB battalion with 4,300 men. Two weeks later the camp strength was 1,472 and the 4,906 men of the PB battalion were providing labour for POW camps, Schools of Instruction, Bases and Army Headquarters.¹⁶⁰

New units were also brought out for work behind the Front line; in August the 2nd Garrison battalions of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry arrived for employment on traffic control work.¹⁶¹ Further dedicated labour units, both skilled and unskilled, arrived in the form of Army Service Corps (ASC) Labour Companies and Infantry Labour battalions. By the end of August six more Labour battalions would arrive and the War Office considered that the deficiency of 9,000 unskilled labourers in France would then be practically made good.¹⁶² However, yet more were required and on 5 October the 14th (Labour) Devonshire and the 21st (Labour) Cheshire arrived at Havre. Altogether, thirty-three Infantry Labour battalions were formed in 1916 of which thirty went to France for employment mainly on road maintenance.

Other sources of labour included large numbers of German prisoners of war who were formed into companies and set to work, primarily repairing roads, guarded by PB men.¹⁶³ There were

¹⁵⁹ TNA: WO 95/3970 IGC War Diary – 7 September 1916.

¹⁶⁰ TNA: WO 95/4186 No 3 Employment Base Depot War Diary – November 1916.

¹⁶¹ TNA: WO 95/26 GHQ AG War Diary – 18 and 23 August 1916.

¹⁶² TNA: WO 95/3970 IGC War Diary – 1 August 1916.

¹⁶³ TNA: WO 95/26 – GHQ AG War Diary – June – September 1916.

also labour units drawn from various parts of the Empire and units made up of non-combatants, who had been accepted by the Tribunals as conscientious objectors. The main aim behind the provision of skilled and unskilled labour was the reduction of demands on the fighting troops whilst out of the line.

Planning for the following year had already begun and the question of future reinforcements was raised by Haig in a report to Robertson dated 21 November, which the latter attached as an Appendix to a note to Lloyd George.¹⁶⁴ The Infantry strength of the 55 divisions on the Western Front was 576,079 against an establishment of 689,680, although 22,881 reinforcements at the Base reduced the deficit to 90,500. Looking ahead to 1 March 1917 it was estimated that some 302,500 infantrymen would be needed to provide a surplus of 10% with units, cover estimated winter wastage of 113,000 and enable adequate drafts to be available at the Base on 1 March 1917. Haig continued to regard ‘the prospects of success on this front next year as most favourable’ but emphasized that the first essential was ‘an adequate supply of men, sufficiently trained, and on the spot, to fill vacancies in the ranks immediately they occur’.

Developments at Home July – December 1916

The provision of manpower remained at the forefront of attention at home. There were two aspects: the immediate drafting organization to send out reinforcements and the longer term provision of manpower for the future.

¹⁶⁴ TNA: CAB 37/160/15 Memo by CIGS to Secretary of State dated 24 November 1916.

Creation of the Training Reserve

Reinforcement by regiment with the consequent streamlining of Base Depots in France during July enabled re-organization of the home draft-finding units. In early August it was announced that a new Infantry corps, to be known as the Training Reserve (TR), would be created on 1 September.¹⁶⁵ Full details were issued in ACI 1528. The Regimental reserves (SR, ER where they existed, and TF Reserve battalions) were to be brought up to strength immediately with men from their Second and Local Reserve battalions. Thereafter they would be kept at full strength by the allocation of Infantry general service recruits raised in their regimental area. Once a regiment's reserve battalions were full, surplus recruits would be allocated in the first instance to regiments of the same Command which had been unable to obtain sufficient recruits from their respective areas. Once all the Command's regimental reserves were full, its surplus recruits would be posted to TR battalions affiliated to the Districts of the Command. When a draft was required for a battalion, available trained men would be taken from its regimental reserves. The ACI was very clear that only when insufficient men were available would they be drawn from an affiliated TR battalion.

The TR battalions were formed from the Second Reserve and Local Reserve battalions which lost their regimental designations and were numbered consecutively as TR battalions. From 1 September men remaining in them after the regimental reserves had been filled received new regimental numbers, prefixed by 'TR/', the number of the District in which the Record Office of the unit was situated and then the actual number eg TR/4/12345. The existing Reserve Infantry Brigades were reduced to twenty-four, each containing between four and six TR battalions, and with an overall establishment of 208,500. To arrive at this establishment 33 of

¹⁶⁵ TNA: WO 293/5 ACI 1528 of 6 August 1916 and WO 123/58 AO 259 of 1 August 1916.

the 145 Second and Local Reserve battalions were disbanded. In the Marches area, four RWF battalions were combined into two TR battalions but otherwise the changes for No 4 District units were simply of nomenclature with the brigading and locations remaining the same. The 9th (Reserve) KSLI, for example, now became the 48th TR battalion but remained within 11th Reserve Brigade at Prees Heath.¹⁶⁶ The No 3 District TR battalions were more scattered with five at Altcar in Lancashire, six at Prees Heath and two apiece at Cannock Chase, Wareham in Dorset and Seaford in East Sussex. In total, 26 TR battalions were affiliated to Western Command, 9 for No 4 District and 17 for No 3 District.

The 194 TF Reserve battalions in their 14 Groups also became, through amalgamations, 87 battalions in 14 Reserve Brigades.¹⁶⁷ For the Marches this meant the absorption of the 5th, 6th and 7th TF (Reserve) battalions of both the Cheshire and the RWF by their 4th (Reserve) battalions; 1st (Reserve) Monmouthshire absorbed its 2nd and 3rd Reserve Battalions. All the No 4 District TF (Reserve) battalions remained in the Welsh Reserve Brigade TF at Oswestry.

It is clear from careful reading of the whole ACI that the intention was to preserve regimental and territorial connections and that TR men were only be drafted to battalions which could not be supplied with men from their regimental reserves. Some Regiments seem to have had little difficulty with the new TR battalions: the KSLI noted that ‘when the personnel [of 49th TR Battalion] became mixed with officers and men of other regiments, the spirit and traditions of the KSLI were always preserved’.¹⁶⁸ For others, however, misperceptions lingered to be repeated in works written after the war. In writing of 1st Cheshire’s reinforcements in late

¹⁶⁶ See Appendix 3.

¹⁶⁷ Mitchinson, *Defending Albion*, p. 142.

¹⁶⁸ Wood, *King’s Shropshire Light Infantry in the Great War 1914 – 1918*, p. 323.

July/August 1916, the Regimental historian appears to have confused the MSA provisions for compulsory transfer with the as yet uncreated TR noting that ‘In future, Battalions were to receive men from a pool formed by recruits and reinforcements from units whose recruiting areas were contiguous. It was felt that this would destroy ‘esprit de corps’ ...’.¹⁶⁹ He was not alone in his post-war misperceptions: the oft-quoted comment by Captain Dunn of 2nd RWF that some ‘hairy-eared theorist’ had told the new War Lord ‘that the way to win was to destroy the Regiment and nationalize the Army’, although dated 28 July 1916, was clearly accorded greater credibility in retrospect.¹⁷⁰ At the time referred to by both these comments, the TR had not yet been created.

Creation of the Manpower Distribution Board

The main conflicting demands for manpower in the longer term were those of the War Office and the Ministry of Munitions and there was some concern when on 8 July, following the death of Lord Kitchener in June, Lloyd George moved from Munitions to become Secretary of State for War. Within a couple of weeks, however, and much to Macready’s relief, he had been persuaded that many men employed on munitions could be spared for the Army without jeopardizing the output of material.¹⁷¹ On 28 July the Army Council, including Lloyd George, decided that the War Office should press for the creation of a strong central committee to organize the distribution of manpower, and that a sound working agreement should be reached with the Ministry of Munitions over the release of skilled men from the military for civil work.¹⁷² Macready had first proposed a strong central committee for the distribution of

¹⁶⁹ Crookenden, *History of the Cheshire Regiment in the Great War*, p. 77.

¹⁷⁰ Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew*, p. 245.

¹⁷¹ Macready, *Annals of an Active Life, Vol 1*, p. 252.

¹⁷² TNA: WO 33/881 Minutes of the 184th Meeting of the Army Council held on 28th July 1916.

manpower in May 1916 but nothing had come of it.¹⁷³ He now re-submitted the proposal for a small Board, with a Chairman and two civilian Members, ‘able to determine the relative importance of competing demands and [possessing] powers of final and absolute decision as to the allocation of men available’, in a Memorandum to the Cabinet on 2 August.¹⁷⁴ The War Committee discussed the matter favourably on 5 August, creating a small committee to draft Terms of Reference for what would become the Manpower Distribution Board (MPDB).¹⁷⁵

Specifically, the Board was to:

determine all questions arising between Government Departments relating to the allocation or economic utilization of manpower for the purpose of the successful prosecution of the war and ... to direct the Government Departments concerned to create the machinery necessary to co-ordinate their activities in regard to the distribution or utilization of men and women.

It was also to decide on the feasibility of any future large-scale demand for manpower by any Department. Although agreement to its creation had been given, it would be 12 September before its composition was finally agreed and work could begin; by now it had grown to five members. The Army Council considered it was all taking too long and Robertson continued to stress the need for urgency. Recruiting was the ‘reverse of satisfactory’ with a large number of men rejected as unfit and many employers releasing older men rather than the younger ones needed. Some 400,000 men would be required by 15 March 1917 to keep the present number of divisions up to strength and provide for RA and RFC expansion.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Macready, *Annals of An Active Life Vol 1*, p. 253.

¹⁷⁴ TNA: CAB 37/153/12 Memorandum on Proposed Establishment of a Manpower Distribution Board.

¹⁷⁵ TNA: CAB 37/153/19 War Committee Meeting of 5 August 1916 and CAB/37/154/11 War Committee Meeting of 22 August 1916.

¹⁷⁶ TNA: CAB 37/155/17 War Committee Meeting 12 September 1916 and Appendix III dated 11 September 1916.

On 26 September, Macready and Brigadier-General Auckland Geddes, Director of Recruiting, informed the MPDB that British forces in France were short of 80,000 men and it was estimated that no more than 105,000 would be sent to France over the next three months. Macready blamed the shortage on the lack of co-ordination between departments, the demands of the Ministry of Munitions and the actions of the Tribunals.¹⁷⁷ Over the next few days evidence was taken from Government Departments and the MPDB's first report was submitted to the War Committee on 3 October.¹⁷⁸ There would be two subsequent reports, on 12 October and 9 November respectively, but ultimately Macready felt that 'nothing effective developed from its activities'.¹⁷⁹ The situation between the War Office and the Ministry of Munitions was eventually resolved through a series of bi-lateral meetings between Montagu, the Minister for Munitions, and Lord Derby and agreement that, through a process of de-badging, some 50,000 semi-skilled and unskilled munition workers, aged under 30, could be made available for general military service by the end of January 1917.¹⁸⁰ Their places in munitions factories would be filled by substituting women and men unfit for general service. Most importantly, there was to be 'close co-operation' between the two Ministries.¹⁸¹

However, this addressed only part of the problem. On 24 November the Army Council discussed the need to scrutinize men employed at home: as at 1 November there were nearly 400,000 men employed within Home Forces and Macready was tasked to reduce this number by 100,000 by the end of current year. It was also proposed to send a senior officer 'familiar with the man-power situation and the difficulties which have to be overcome in providing

¹⁷⁷ IWM: MPDB 77/66/1, Manpower Distribution Board, First Day, evidence of C.F.N. Macready, 26 September 1916, cited in Grievess, *Politics of Manpower*, pp. 45-7.

¹⁷⁸ TNA: CAB 37/157/4 War Committee Meeting 3 October 1916 and Appendix dated 29 September 1916.

¹⁷⁹ Macready, *Annals of an Active Life, Vol 1*, p. 253.

¹⁸⁰ TNA: CAB 37/159/48 War Committee Meeting 17 November 1916.

¹⁸¹ TNA: CAB 37/160/33 War Committee Meeting 30 November 1916.

reinforcements for the fighting troops' to France to examine the number of fit men employed on the LofC and at the Bases with a view to their replacement by others. Finally, it was agreed that Macready was to prepare 'a complete survey of the recruiting prospects for the next 12 months' for submission by the Army Council to the War Committee.¹⁸²

Macready's survey took the form of a strongly worded Memorandum on the Supply of Men for the Army which warned that:

unless steps are taken at once by His Majesty's Government to introduce some better system of utilizing the manhood of the nation untrammelled by conditions that in practice now nullify to a great extent the objects of the Military Service Acts, it will be impossible after April next to keep the armies up to strength.¹⁸³

It was estimated that, with the monthly intake running some 20,000 below requirements, the total number of recruits obtained in 1916 would be 95,000 short of the number agreed the previous February. The Army's anticipated requirement for 1917 was 940,000 men and a further 250,000 to 350,000 would be required by Munitions. To raise these numbers it was suggested that all men up to 55 'should be utilized for such national service as HM Government deem to be essential to the effective prosecution of the war'. The Army Council submitted the memorandum to Lloyd George for presentation to the War Committee but he, presumably for reasons of his own, now decided that it should be sent by the Military Members only so that the 'Parliamentary members of the Army Council (held) themselves free to press its adoption on the Cabinet'.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² TNA: WO 33/881 Minutes of 194th Meeting of Army Council on 20 November 1916.

¹⁸³ TNA: CAB 37/160/25 Memorandum by the Military Members of the Army Council to the Secretary of State for War dated 28 November 1916.

¹⁸⁴ Macready, *Annals of an Active Life, Vol 1*, pp. 253-4.

Matters were reaching a head. The MPDB may not have made universally accepted or indeed effective proposals but a passage in its Third Report initiated a step towards national service. On 30 November the War Cabinet agreed unanimously that the military situation overall was such that the time had come 'for the adoption of compulsory national service' for all men up to the age of 60.¹⁸⁵ It was hoped that once the necessary details had been worked out the necessary legislation could be enacted before Christmas but this did not happen, not least because the Government fell with the resignation of Asquith on 5 December. The new Prime Minister was Lloyd George, with Lord Derby replacing him at the War Office. It is not within the scope of this thesis to examine how much the manpower problem might have contributed to the political crisis. The Government's fall, however, would delay consideration of compulsory national service until 1917.

Analysis of Battalions' Composition

The total number of deaths during 1916 for Marches battalions on the Western Front, both Regular and TF, was 5,763, an increase of 2,439 over the previous year, reflecting the greater intensity and length of the Somme battle.¹⁸⁶ It is not possible to calculate the total number of casualties but taking the deaths at roughly 20 percent, the total casualties could have been in the region of 28,000. Some of these would have been minor, and their recipients soon treated and returned to duty, but other casualties would have taken longer to recover and some might never again have been fit enough. Whatever the outcome it seems fair to say that the Marches Regiments on the Western Front had probably required well over 20,000 replacements during 1916, the equivalent of over 20 new Infantry battalions. A view of quite where these

¹⁸⁵ TNA: CAB 37/160/7 War Committee Meeting 21 November 1916 and CAB 37/160/33 War Committee Meeting 30 November 1916 (the President of the Board of Trade was the only absentee at the meeting of 30 November 1916).

¹⁸⁶ SDGW figures for Marches Regiments serving in Western European Theatre during 1916.

replacements had been obtained may be gained from detailed analysis of deaths in selected battalions for the period 1 July – 30 November 1916.¹⁸⁷

Details of the enlistment locations for the English battalions are shown in Table 3.1 below.

Enlistment Location	1st Cheshire		9th Cheshire		1st KSLI		6th KSLI	
Regimental Area	146	71%	100	66%	66	57%	89	82%
Elsewhere in No 4 District - England	3		7		9		2	
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales	3		3		20		7	
Total enlisted in No 4 District	152	73%	110	72%	95	83%	98	90%
Enlisted in No 3 District	19		8		5		8	
• Liverpool/Manchester	16		19		4		0	
Total Enlisted in Western Command	187	90%	137	90%	104	90%	106	97%
Northern Command	13		8		2		2	
Southern Command	1		2		2		1	
• Birmingham	1		1		2			
Eastern	2		1		2			
London District	1		3		2			
Scotland/Ireland	2				1			
Overseas								
Total Other Commands	20	10%	15	10%	11	10%	3	3%
Total Deaths	207		152		115		109	

Table 3.1. Enlistment locations of soldiers of selected English Regular battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1916.

For 1st Cheshire enlistments in the regimental recruiting area remained roughly the same at 71 per cent but those for 9th (Service) Cheshire had dropped from 100 per cent in 1915 to 66 per cent. The figures for those recruited in No 4 District, however, remain around 72 percent and in both cases the numbers enlisted in Western Command were 90 per cent, due to the proximity in No 3 District of the conurbations of Liverpool and Manchester and the rest of Lancashire. Similarly, the composition of the KSLI remained recognisably similar to earlier years. Enlistments in the Regimental area had dropped for both 1st and 6th KSLI but those in Western Command as a whole stood at 90 and 97 per cent respectively. Some 17 per cent of 1st KSLI

¹⁸⁷ Tables drawn from SDGW figures for the Western European Theatre between 1 July and 30 November 1916.

had been recruited in Wales reflecting its proximity to mid-Wales and fewer men were recruited from No 3 District.

Poor recruiting in Wales made reinforcements for the two Welsh regiments more problematical although greater efforts were being made to post Welsh recruits to Welsh regiments.

Enlistment Location	2ndRWF		9th RWF		1st SWB		10th SWB	
Regimental Area	44	23%	28	22%	54	45%	46	94%
Elsewhere in No 4 District - England	18		12		6		1	
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales	43		41		21		2	
Total enlisted in No 4 District	105	54%	81	64%	81	67%	49	100%
Enlisted in No 3 District	16		3		4			
• Liverpool/Manchester	9		6		2			
Total Enlisted in Western Command	130	67%	90	71%	87	72%	49	100%
Northern Command	9		17		10			
Southern Command	12		3		2			
• Birmingham	26		11					
Eastern	2		1		4			
London District	15		4		17			
Scotland/Ireland	1				1			
Overseas								
Total Other Commands	65	33%	36	29%	34	38%		
Total Deaths	195		126		121		49	

Table 3.2. Enlistment locations of soldiers of selected Welsh Regular battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1916.

By late July 1916 2nd RWF had become recognisably more Welsh with 46 per cent having enlisted in Wales as opposed to 32 per cent in 1915. In 1915, 45 per cent of those who died had enlisted in Southern Command, mainly from the Birmingham area, but this had decreased to 19 percent in 1916. Western Command enlistments had risen to 67 and 71 per cent for 2nd RWF and 9th RWF respectively. Conversely, some 62 per cent of 1st SWB had enlisted in Wales, a slight drop on the 1915 figures, and 72 per cent in Western Command. The 10th SWB had arrived in France in December 1915 and its 1916 deaths were those of original Kitchener recruits, all except one of whom had enlisted in Wales.

The figures for those born in Cheshire (see Table 3.3 below) were more varied but again comparison of those born in Western Command show that the percentages remain high at 78

per cent for 1st Cheshire and 81 per cent for 9th Cheshire. The Cheshire Regular battalions thus remained recognisably the same as they had always been. Births in the regimental area and Western Command for 1st and 6th KSLI also remained similar across 1915 and 1916.

Birth location	1st Cheshire		9th Cheshire		1st KSLI		6th KSLI	
Regimental Area	92	44%	79	52%	57	50%	74	68%
Elsewhere in No 4 District – England	5		5		8		2	
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales	9		5		11		4	
Total born in No 4 District	106	51%	89	59%	76	66%	80	73%
Born in No 3 District	25		16		7		7	
• Liverpool/Manchester	30		18		3		1	
Total Born in Western Command	161	78%	123	81%	86	75%	88	81%
Northern Command	19		11		6		6	
Southern Command	2		4		5		3	
• Birmingham	2		1		1		2	
Eastern	3		5		2		5	
London District	6		2		2			
Scotland/Ireland	6		2		1		3	
Overseas								
Total Other Commands	40		25		17		19	
Location of Birth Unknown	6		4		12		2	
Total Deaths	207		152		115		109	

Table 3.3. Birth locations of soldiers of selected English Regular battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1916.

It is thus fair to say that both the English county regiments in the Marches remained remarkably homogeneous in late 1916.

The picture changes again for those born in Wales, however, since in 1916 fewer than half the soldiers from either 2nd or 9th RWF battalion had actually been born there, although the surnames of most were Welsh (see Table 3.4). Roughly half of 1st and 10th SWB had been born in Wales, many of the rest having been born just across the border in Gloucestershire or else in London. The composition of the Welsh battalions thus reflects regional recruiting problems but also the growing emphasis on posting Welsh recruits to Welsh regiments. Roughly one third had enlisted in England for service in Welsh battalions but scrutiny of the Medal Index Cards (MIC) does not as yet indicate previous operational service in English battalions for these men.

Birth location	2ndRWF		9th RWF		1st SWB		10th SWB	
Regimental Area	53	27%	26	21%	31	26%	24	49%
Elsewhere in No 4 District – England	17		9		7		3	
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales	26		33		22		4	
Total born in No 4 District	96	49%	68	54%	60	50%	31	63%
Born in No 3 District	15		7		9		0	
• Liverpool/Manchester	7		4		1		0	
Total Born in Western Command	118	61%	79	63%	70	58%	31	63%
Northern Command	18		22		10		2	
Southern Command	19		10		12		12	
• Birmingham	14		6		1			
Eastern	3		6		4		1	
London District	11		1		18		1	
Scotland/Ireland	6				3		1	
Overseas					1			
Total Other Commands	71		45		49		17	
Location of Birth Unknown	6		2		2		1	
Total Deaths	195		126		121		49	

Table 3.4. Birth locations of soldiers of selected Welsh Regular battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1916.

The Marches were a fertile recruiting ground for the TF and Table 3.5. consequently, with the exception of 1/4th RWF, shows a continuing high percentage of enlistments from within the regimental areas. Although less than half of 1/4th RWF had enlisted in the Regimental area, roughly two-thirds had at least enlisted in Wales. This probably reflects traditional custom in crossing county and regimental boundaries. For example, the Stockport-based 1/6th Cheshire had always contained men from Glossop in Derbyshire, nineteen of whom show up as the 17 per cent enlisted in Northern Command. Overall, in 1916 TF enlistments from within No 4 District remained almost universally high.

TF Enlistment Locations	1/5 th Cheshire		1/6 th Cheshire		1/4 th RWF		1/1 st Monmouths		1/2 nd Monmouths	
Regimental Area	104	93%	90	78%	20	49%	34	92%	64	91%
Elsewhere in No 4 District - England	5		4		2		1			
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales			1		7		1		5	
Total enlisted in No 4 District	109		95	83%	29	71%	36	97%	69	99%
Enlisted in No 3 District	1								1	
• Liverpool/Manchester			1							
Total Enlisted in Western Command	110	98%	96	83%	29	71%	36	97%	70	100%
Northern Command	2		19	(17%)	5					
Southern Command										
• Birmingham										
Eastern					7		1			
London District										
Scotland/Ireland										
Overseas										
Total Other Commands	2	2%	19	17%	12	29%	1	3%		
Total Deaths			115		41		37		70	

Table 3.5. Enlistment locations of soldiers of selected TF battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1916.

The birth locations for TF soldiers are more scattered, as shown in Table 3.6.

Birth locations	1/5 th Cheshire		1/6 th Cheshire		1/4 th RWF		1/1 st Monmouths		1/2 nd Monmouths	
Regimental Area	75	67%	48	42%	12	29%	23	62%	28	40%
Elsewhere in No 4 District – England	5		4		2		2		2	
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales	2				6		2		11	
Total born in No 4 District	82	73%	52	45%	20	49%	27	73%	41	59%
Born in No 3 District	7		9							
• Liverpool/Manchester	6		8				1			
Total Born in Western Command	95	85%	69	60%	20	49%	28	76%	41	59%
Northern Command	5		16	(14%)	7				4	
Southern Command	5		1				2		6	
• Birmingham					1					
Eastern	1				3		1			
London District	1				1		1		2	
Scotland/Ireland			1				1		1	
Overseas	2						1		1	
Total Other Commands	14		18		12		6		14	
Location of Birth Unknown	3		28		9		3		15	
Total Deaths	112		115		41		37		70	

Table 3.6. Birth locations of soldiers of selected TF battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1916.

The large number of unknown places of birth for some of the battalions make it difficult to draw any firm conclusions. Of those whose birth locations are known, however, fewer had actually been born within the Regimental areas and Western Command.

Conclusions

Much had changed during 1916 as the demand for men became ever greater. The first tentative moves in January towards compulsory service for single men under the age of 41 had by December appeared to become the realization that national service was required to ensure that best use could be made of the nation's population. How much this quantum leap would change the Army's composition in the future remained to be seen.

The legislation that brought about compulsion had also had a major effect on the TF, allowing TF soldiers for the first time to be transferred without their consent between units and corps, and into Regular units. This legislation had enabled TF replacements, many of them former HS and Derby men, to be used to fill gaps caused by Somme casualties. The side-effect, however, was deep-seated resentment against the way in which their terms of service had been changed which would continue to fester for years.

The need for men had also prompted re-consideration of how existing Army manpower should be used. The Medical Services had played a significant part in this by introducing more accurate classifications enabling better use of less-fit men in order to release fit men to fight. Improvements had also been made in the treatment of casualties, enabling more men to be returned to duty in theatre.

The Army's procedures for casualty reporting and demanding replacements had continued to prove effective under the severe testing of the Somme but a need to streamline the reinforcement organization had been identified before the battle started. Replacements were now drawn from regiments rather than battalions and the Base Depots had been re-organized to implement this. At Home further streamlining of the Reserve organization had occurred in September. Regimental reserves continued to be maintained as the first port of call for replacements but once the regimental reserves were full surplus recruits could fill up other neighbouring regiments; only when all the Command's regimental reserves were full would surplus recruits be sent to the new TR battalions for use where needed. Despite perceptions in the Army at large, however, emphasis remained on preserving regimental affiliations.

Analysis of selected battalions from the Marches regiments during the period 1 July to 30 November shows their composition remaining remarkably similar to that of earlier years. The English county regiments continued virtually the same whilst the Welsh battalions had become more Welsh. The numbers enlisted in the parent Command remained high overall: over 67 per cent of those who died had enlisted in Western Command and nine of the fourteen battalions analysed showed 90 percent or higher.

By the end of 1916, manpower remained problematical but steps had been started towards its better use across the nation. The Army was attempting to make better use of the men that it had but as yet there is no evidence that the localized regimental system was being eroded, either by design or circumstances.

Chapter 4

The 'Man Question' and its Effects

This chapter starts in late 1916, when the seeds of much that would happen in 1917 were sown, and then considers developments both at home and on the Western Front. It briefly outlines political attempts to address the manpower problem and then considers developments in the recruiting and training organization and changes intended to make better use of existing structures and Army manpower. Inevitably, some initiatives would cause tension between the Government and the Military and between the War Office and GHQ France. For coherence, some of the latter, such as the implementation of the Lawson Report and the employment of women, have been handled as discrete topics rather than attempting to split them between home and France. The focus then shifts to the Western Front where it is more appropriate to consider developments chronologically. Much has been written on the Arras, Messines, 3rd Ypres and Cambrai offensives so examination has been limited to general manpower aspects, although some analysis of training is included together with the effects on battalions from the Marches. All the 1917 offensives would prove costly, requiring large numbers of replacements and the effect of these on the composition of selected Marches battalions in the second half of 1917 has been analysed in comparison with the same period of preceding years.

Political Aspects at Home

The provision of manpower for the Army would become increasingly difficult during 1917 as the Government sought to balance the needs of the nation with those of the Army. In late 1916 the new War Cabinet had agreed to compulsory national service for all men up to the age of 60

but further progress was delayed by the fall of the Government on 5 December.¹ Lloyd George became Prime Minister, with Lord Derby succeeding him at the War Office, but the former's previous interest in the 'Man Question' now appeared to have waned.² Furthermore, it was soon apparent that resistance from the Labour movement towards anything implying industrial compulsion, and the Cabinet's unwillingness to jeopardise the newly created Coalition Government would colour the manpower situation for the next few months.

It had provisionally been agreed in late 1916 that a Director-General of National Service (DGNS) would be appointed to take charge of both military and civilian compulsory National Service.³ By 19 December, however, it was apparent that enrolment into an 'industrial army' was to remain on voluntary with no set time limit for its end. Only if the voluntary effort failed would the Government ask Parliament to release them from any previously given pledges concerning industrial compulsion.⁴ It was clear that compulsion was a long way off.⁵

Neville Chamberlain was appointed as DGNS but he could make little progress during the next few months since he lacked a clear definition of his powers and responsibilities. It would not be until late March that a Ministry of National Service Act was passed 'for the purpose of making the best use of all persons, whether men or women, able to work in any industry, occupation or service'. No greater powers were conferred on Chamberlain, however, and those he had were circumscribed by the inclusion of specific pledges to allay fears of industrial

¹ TNA: CAB 37/160/7 War Committee Meeting 21 November 1916 and CAB 37/160/33 War Committee Meeting 30 November 1916.

² K. Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 91, citing Robertson's letter to Monro dated 12 January 1917.

³ TNA: CAB 37/161/26 War Cabinet Meeting No 7 of 14 December 1916.

⁴ TNA: CAB 37/161/42 War Cabinet Meeting No 11 of 19 December 1916.

⁵ <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1916/dec/19/prime-ministers-statement>.

compulsion: there would be ‘no compulsory employment or transfer of any person in or to any industry, occupation, or service’.⁶ Although Chamberlain produced regular reports, progress became increasingly frustrating for all concerned, as ‘committees without end sat and investigated the needs of various trades and requirements of Government departments (and) recommendations were made only to be put aside or watered down owing to pressure from various interests’.⁷

A Bill amending the 1916 MSAs was finally introduced but it was limited to a single clause enabling the medical re-examination of men who had been discharged from the Navy or Army due to disablement or ill-health, men who had previously been rejected for service either after volunteering or having been called up under the MSAs, or who had been exempted from overseas service. On 5 April, the Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Act 1917 was passed.⁸ It was to prove a highly unpopular Act and would subsequently cause questions to be raised in the Commons over its operation.⁹

By 22 June and Chamberlain’s Tenth Report it was apparent that National Service was not working. Insufficient men had come forward as volunteers for National Service, there were delays in employing them and despite the country-wide creation of an elaborate organization to provide substitutes for men called up for service, few such vacancies had been created and Chamberlain’s substitutes were unwanted.¹⁰ Furthermore the Army was still not obtaining the

⁶ *Public General Acts Passed in the Seventh and Eighth Years of the Reign of King George V* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1918), pp. 6 & 7: Ministry of National Service Act, 1917.

⁷ General Sir N. Macready, *Annals of an Active Life Vol. I* (London: Hutchinson, n.d.), pp. 263-4.

⁸ *Public General Acts Passed in the Seventh and Eighth Years of the Reign of King George V* pp 13 – 15: Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Act 1917.

⁹ TNA: CAB 23/3/17 169th Meeting of 26 June 1917.

¹⁰ TNA: CAB 23/3/33 Minutes of 185th Meeting of the War Cabinet on 13 July 1917.

men it required. In an effort to end the deadlock, the Army's Director of Recruiting, Brigadier-General Auckland Geddes, now produced a memorandum proposing the transformation of the whole recruiting administrative machine from an age to an occupational basis as soon as possible and to end all Government protection of lads between 18 and 19.¹¹ Effectively he was proposing the transfer of the Army's recruiting organization to civilian control. This was not such a maverick suggestion from within the War Office as it might be supposed – in March 1916 Macready had unsuccessfully proposed to Kitchener the formation of one central authority to be responsible for the distribution of the nation's man-power.¹²

It did not take long for the War Cabinet to agree to the transfer of Army recruiting to a civilian organization, which it was subsequently determined would be the Ministry of National Service.¹³ That the DGNS would no longer be Chamberlain was by now patently apparent and he finally left office on 10 August. On 11 August Auckland Geddes was offered the post but before accepting he made sure of a clearly defined role from the outset with a seat in Parliament and the status of a Cabinet Minister. These increased powers would allay the War Office's previous concerns and give the new DGNS a better chance of balancing the demands of the fighting services with those of the civilian world.

There would be differences between the War Office and Geddes in the future but there was now confidence that the latter understood the needs of the military and that whatever he might decide in the future 'would be in the best interests of the nation, whether those interests were civil or

¹¹ TNA: CAB 24/20/83 Memorandum by Brigadier General Auckland Geddes on the Theory and Practice of Recruiting dated 23 July 1917.

¹² Macready, *Annals of an Active Life Vol. 1*, p. 238.

¹³ TNA: CAB 23/3/49 201st Meeting of 1 August and CAB 23/5/58 210th Meeting of 19 August 1917.

military'.¹⁴ Geddes' knowledge of manpower issues and his increased powers would enable him to assess the relevant merits of the conflicting demands for manpower and address problems that up to now had been systemic rather than deliberate. By now, however, the position of the Army was serious as by August the total deficit was 347,560 physically fit men and 39,143 men of lower physical categories.¹⁵

Allocation of Recruits

The political resistance to universal compulsion meant that it remained possible to volunteer before being called up and many continued to do so. In February William Tonkyn, a 23-year old civil servant, who as such could have remained exempt, requested permission from his Government Department to enlist.¹⁶ The young Ivor Hanson had attested four days before his 18th birthday in November 1916. He could then have waited to be called up on reaching 18 years 8 months but instead enlisted in early January 1917. On the suggestion that he had already been called up, he rather curtly informed the hapless enquirer: 'That's not true, for I shall not be of military age until about nine months' time, but I am enlisting as a volunteer'.¹⁷ There are numerous other examples of both men and boys who continued to volunteer rather than wait to be called up.

Army recruits were categorized by Recruiting Medical Boards and then allocated to Arms and Services according to monthly instructions.¹⁸ As many 'A' men as possible were to be sent to

¹⁴ Macready, *Annals of an Active Life Vol. 1*, p. 267.

¹⁵ *Statistics of the British Military Effort*, p. 369 and Macready, *Annals of an Active Life Vol. 1*, p. 263.

¹⁶ IWM: Con Shelf Letters of W.D. Tonkyn'

¹⁷ J.I. Hanson & A. Wakefield, *Plough and Scatter* (Yeovil: Haynes, 2009), pp. 48, 56 – 57 & 67. In mid-January 1917, he joined the RFA and was posted to Bettisfield Park Camp in Shropshire.

¹⁸ TNA: WO 293/5 ACI 2418 of 24 December 1916; WO 293/6 ACI 158 of 26 January 1917, ACI 358 of 1 March 1917; ACI 536 of 28 March 1917; ACI 688 of 26 April 1917; all entitled 'Posting recruits who are called up from Class B, Army Reserve, or who come forward for service before being called up, on or after 1 [month] 1917'. ACI

the Infantry Regimental Reserves (Reserve, Extra Reserve and TF Reserve Battalions) and the Training Reserve. Those not destined for the Infantry were allocated elsewhere according to monthly requirements: in March, 11,000 'A' men were to go to the Artillery and 100 to the Mounted Military Police (MMP). Allocations were distributed by Commands: Western Command were to provide 2,440 of the 11,100 Artillerymen. Men in lower fitness categories, B(i), B(ii), C(i) and C(ii) were allotted to other arms as appropriate to their fitness levels.

The monthly Recruit Posting ACIs emphasized that recruits should be posted to units in which they wished to serve, provided they were suitable for them. Allocations to each corps or unit were to include men who had originally volunteered to serve in a particular one; should there be no vacancies then he should be posted to other units, Regular or Territorial, raised in the same county or district.¹⁹ William Tonkyn naturally asked to join the Civil Service Rifles. Two weeks later he learned that he had been accepted and that he would be released from Government service so long as he passed the medical examination. Pronounced fit, he was posted to the Civil Service Rifles on 1 March and arrived at Hazeley Down Camp a week later to join 3/15th London Regt (Civil Service Rifles).²⁰

The emphasis on meeting recruits' preferences continued throughout the year. At the end of May the message was clear:

The fullest consideration must be given to recruits' preference for ... their own national or even local corps. Advantage must be taken of everything that tends in any way to foster *esprit de corps* and these national and local sentiments are a valuable asset which

865 of 27 May onwards: 'Arrangements for posting men to the Army who present themselves for service during the month of (June) 1917'. See Appendix 4 re medical categories.

¹⁹ TNA: WO 293/6 ACI 158 of 26 January 1917.

²⁰ IWM: Con Shelf Diary of W. D. Tonkyn. 535391 Pte W D Tonkyn 12B Pl C Coy, 3/15th London Regt (Civil Service Rifles), Hazeley Down Camp, Winchester.

must be kept in view ... In the case of Infantry of the Line, recruits who have any such preference should be posted, wherever possible, to their own local regiments.²¹

In September it was noted that volunteers were to be posted their chosen corps irrespective of the numbers allotted, providing they were physically and technically suited. Any man over 18 years 8 months wishing, with good reason, to be posted to a particular Infantry Regiment should have his request granted by the posting officer:

the fullest consideration must be given to the men's preference for what they regard as their own national or even local corps provided that they are suitable as regards Medical Categories etc. Advantage must be taken of everything that leads in any way to [their] *esprit de corps* and these national and local sentiments are a valuable asset which must be kept in view.

Lads under 18 years 8 months, who expressed a preference for a particular regiment, were not to be posted 'indiscriminately to a TRB in the Command in which (they) presented (themselves) for service' but should be posted to a TR Brigade affiliated to the same District as their chosen Regiment and their documents endorsed showing this choice.²² It seems that, despite the pressures on recruiting, the value of *esprit de corps* accruing from keeping soldiers with others from the same locality continued to be recognized throughout 1917.²³ The operative phrase, however, was 'wherever possible'.

²¹ TNA: WO 293/6 ACI 865 of 27 May 1917.

²² TNA: WO 293/7 ACI 1329 of 29 August Arrangements for posting men to the Army who present themselves for service during the month of September 1917.

²³ This would appear to contradict Captain Dunn's reported conversation with Major Roger Poore concerning an 'inspector's comment: 'I suppose this is another piece of your *esprit de corps*. Well, there's to be no more of it'. NB: Poore was not attached to 2nd RWF until early 1917 so would have been with 2nd Wiltshire Yeomanry at the time of the alleged comment. J.C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew 1914-1919* (London: Abacus edn., 1987), p. 246.

Infantry Recruit Training

Adult recruit training followed a fourteen weeks syllabus designed to produce men able to march and shoot to a standard where they could take their place in a rifle section.²⁴ No one was supposed to be sent overseas unless he was ‘up to the standard required for the particular draft concerned, both as regards training and physical fitness’.²⁵ For various reasons, however, not all men did complete their training before being drafted. In early 1917 3rd TRB consisted of six companies: three for recruits, two for returned BEF men and one containing unfit men and permanent staff.²⁶ The Battalion noted bitterly that in December 1916 over half their Category ‘A’ NCOs had been required for overseas reinforcements, thus reducing the number of instructors by about 40. Furthermore, after February no officer, WO or NCO fit for General Service should be retained in a TRB for more than six months, which meant that potentially two thirds of the instructional staff of NCOs could be sent overseas at any moment. There were also difficulties in conducting training. The scale of SMLE rifles and bayonets for TR battalions was set at just 25% of the establishment which meant that, however carefully training was organized, units found it impossible to ensure that each man used the same rifle continuously throughout his musketry course, with consequent problems for zeroing the weapon and successful completion of the marksmanship tests.²⁷ As a result of the training problems, all 415 drafts sent to France by 3rd TRB in the first six months of 1917 were shown as partially trained.²⁸ Such men were categorized as ‘A(ii)’ (recruits who should be fit for ‘A(i)’ as soon as trained) and the nominal roll for such a draft was to be headed ‘SPECIAL’. If it was the full musketry course that had not been completed, a note was also to be placed against each man’s name:

²⁴ TNA: WO 293/5 ACI 1968 of September 1916.

²⁵ TNA: WO 293/6 ACI 431 and 432 of 11 March 1917 and 533 of 28 March 1917.

²⁶ TNA: WO 95/5460 3rd TR Bn War Diary. NB ‘Employed men’ were the Permanent Staff of the unit.

²⁷ TNA: WO 293/6 ACIs 313, 986 and 987 of 1917.

²⁸ TNA: WO 95/5460 3rd TR Battalion War Diary.

‘Fired only parts ... GMC’.²⁹ It was expected that training would be completed on arrival at the Base(s) overseas.

New instructions for the organization and roles of men within a platoon, culled from lessons learned on the Somme, had been issued in February, and aspects of these were introduced into recruit training as soon as possible.³⁰ Initially, it is unlikely that many of the recruit training instructors had the necessary experience for this training. It would not be until August that Infantry recruit training syllabi would be specifically amended to ensure that not only would every man be ‘sufficiently trained to take his place in his platoon overseas, but also that the training of Infantry drafts (met) the requirements of SS143 Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action, 1917’.³¹

In January, the War Cabinet had agreed to lower the age at which men were warned for call up from 18 years 7 months to 18 years.³² At that time, young recruits were posted with others of all ages to reserve units although the youths were trained in separate squads until turning 18 years and 8 months, when they would be posted to the draft-producing companies of their unit.³³ Robertson and Macready were unhappy with this approach, and from February onwards changes to the training of young soldiers were gradually introduced, starting with the announcement that all future ‘A(iv)’ recruits under 18 years 8 months were to be posted to selected TR battalions for their training.³⁴ There was of necessity a transition period: on 26

²⁹ TNA: WO 293/6 ACI 431 and 432 of 11 March 1917 and 533 of 28 March 1917.

³⁰ General Staff instructions: SS 143 Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action, 1917 and SS 144 The Normal Formation for the Attack, both issued in February 1917; TNA WO 293/6 ACI 322 of 22 February 1917.

³¹ TNA: WO 293/7 ACI 1230 of 6 August 1917 Training of Infantry Recruits.

³² TNA: CAB 23/1/39 Appendix II to Minutes of 39th War Cabinet Meeting of 19 January 1917.

³³ TNA: WO 293/5 ACI 2418 dated 24 December 1916 and WO 293/6 ACI 158 of 26 January 1917.

³⁴ Sir William Robertson, *From Private to Field-Marshal* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), p. 304 and TNA: WO 293/6 ACI 358 of 1 March 1917, ACI 536 of 28 March 1917 and ACI 688 of 26 April 1917.

February 4th TRB became an 'A(iv)' battalion to train recruits aged under 19, whilst 2nd TRB followed on 6 April and 5th on 1 May.³⁵ For young recruits already in the system, the changes could have long-term effects. Clyde Hulme, from Burslem in Staffordshire, volunteered on 22 January 1917, a month before his 18th birthday. Mobilized on 2 April 1917, he reported to the local Depot. His age meant that he was destined for a YS battalion and he should have been posted to one serving his local district, No 6. The process of re-designation of TRBs, however, threw up anomalies and although Clyde was posted fairly locally, to Rugeley, it was to 8th TRB, serving No 5 District. Both these Districts belonged to Northern Command but this initial posting placed Clyde, now TR/5/31291 Pte Hulme, with recruits from elsewhere in the Command and his future postings would be to units of No 5 District.³⁶

Further rationalization of young soldiers training came during May.³⁷ Under the 'General Scheme' all youths enlisting under 18 years and 8 months, except those allocated elsewhere under the monthly recruit disposal ACI, were to be posted to selected TR battalions. On completion of four months' training they would be transferred to Infantry battalions to continue training until they turned 19; non-Infantrymen would continue their TR training or be transferred to other arms. The June posting ACI confirmed the new approach but the whole area was now so complicated that a chart was necessary.³⁸ An abbreviated version is given below.

³⁵ TNA: WO 95/5459 1st TR Brigade War Diary.

³⁶ www.ancestry.com Service Record for 64802 Pte Clyde Hulme DLI.

³⁷ TNA: WO 293/6 ACI 803 of 17 May 1917 'Posting and Training of Men under 19 Years of Age'.

³⁸ TNA: WO 293/6 ACI 865 of 27 May 1917 'Arrangements for posting men to the Army who present themselves for service during the month of June 1917'.

Category	<18y8m	> 18y 8m & < 25y	25y & < 30y	30y and over
A	TR	Regimental Reserves, TR, Foot Guards, monthly allotments to other Arms		
B (i)	TR	RH, RFA and RGA according to allotments in monthly posting ACI; surplus to TR		Arms other than Infantry, according to allotments; TR
B (ii)	TR	TR	Arms other than Infantry: as allotted; Labour Units, Employment Companies	Arms other than Infantry: as allotted; Labour Units, Employment Companies; ASC MT learners
B (iii)	TR	TR	Clerks – or to Reserve ‘B’	Clerks – or to Reserve ‘B’
C (i)	TR	RFC, RFA and RGA according to allotments; and TR	RFC, RFA and RGA as allotted; and TR	Arms other than Infantry: as allotted; RFC, TR, ASC MT Learners
C (ii)	TR	TR	Arms other than Infantry: as allotted; Labour Units, Employment Companies	Arms other than Infantry: as allotted; Labour Units, Employment Companies
C (iii)	TR	TR	Clerks – or to Reserve ‘B’	Clerks – or to Reserve ‘B’

Specific instructions as to the allocation of Infantry recruits by age and medical categories followed:³⁹

Units	Age of Recruits	
Young Soldiers Battalions	18 years 1 month	A (iv) B (i) C (i)
Junior Training Reserve Battalions	Under 18 years 8 Months	A (iv) B (i) C (i) (not required for the YS bns) B(ii), B(iii), C(ii), or C(iii)
Regimental Reserves (Reserve, Extra Reserve, TF Res Bns)	Over 18 years 8 mths	A (ii)
Senior Trg Res Bns	Over 18 years 8 mths	B (i), B(ii), B(iii), C (i), C(ii), and C(iii)
NB. After six weeks training men in the lowest medical categories considered unlikely ever to be upgraded to Categories A, B(i) or C(i) would be transferred to other arms or the Labour Corps.		

The previous instructions had placed the youngest recruits in Young Soldiers (YS) battalions for the first four months of their training but were then vague about what happened afterwards. This was remedied a few days later by the creation of Graduated Battalions, which were to be affiliated in pairs to each YS battalion.⁴⁰ The youngest recruits, those aged 18 years 1 month, in Categories ‘A(iv)’, ‘B(i)’ and ‘C(i)’ would complete four months’ training in a YS battalion before being posted to a Graduated battalion. Companies in both YS and Graduated battalions

³⁹ TNA: WO 293/6 ACI 873 of 31 May 1917: Disposal of Recruits Allotted to Infantry in Monthly ACI for Posting of Recruits.

⁴⁰ TNA: WO 293/6 ACI 925 of 12 June 1917: Training of Junior Training Reserve Battalions, Young Soldiers Battalions and Graduated Battalions.

were organized specifically by age: for example the 3rd Company of a YS battalion would contain lads aged 18 years 2 to 3 months. On reaching 18 years 5 months they would move as a formed company, 250 strong, to an affiliated Graduated battalion which they would also move through by age.⁴¹ The YS training followed the ACI 322 syllabus up to the eighth fortnight, with the proviso that they were to have fired the GMC on the SMLE rifle during this period. On joining the Graduate battalions, those selected as bombers, Lewis gunners and signallers would begin specialized training. Before leaving the Graduated battalions, all recruits would be put through a refresher course on the SMLE rifle, including live firing. Allowing two weeks for inoculations and a further two weeks for leave the combination of YS and Graduated battalions would take recruits up to the age of 19 when they could be drafted overseas.

The slightly older youths posted to Junior TRBs would receive six months training. It was recognised that these recruits were still developing so any below 'B(i)' and 'C(i)' would initially undergo six weeks fitness training. After that, those unlikely ever to become 'A', 'B(i)' or 'C(i)' would be transferred to other units whilst any who might be upgraded would start their six months' recruit training as soon as considered fit. The training syllabus was organised in fortnightly blocks; after the eighth fortnight, some of the hours allotted to 'field work', 'field engineering' and 'bombing' would train the recruit to take his place in a platoon organized in accordance with SS143.⁴² On completion of six months' training, the recruit would be transferred as required.

⁴¹ TNA: WO 293/6 ACI 986 of 21 June 1917.

⁴² General Staff, *Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action 1917* (London: HMSO, 1917).

For the TR Brigades, there would now be a period of flux as their TRBs were converted to the new organization: 28 Graduated battalions would be linked in pairs to 14 designated YS battalions whilst the remaining 60 TR battalions would consist of Junior and Senior TRBs.

Posting and Drafting

Demands for replacements continued to be made by DAG 3rd Echelon to the War Office, which then issued orders to the appropriate Commands for the preparation and despatch of the necessary drafts. Men selected for drafts were to be 'A(i)', unless destined for garrison or labour units or designated 'special' drafts requiring completion of their training on arrival overseas. Men who had previously been returned sick or wounded would be available for drafting as soon as they were 'A(i)' again.⁴³

The increased flexibility over postings and the frequency of transfer had led to administrative difficulties in keeping track of soldiers. This was particularly the case for the TF in which each TF battalion issued its own series of regimental numbers which meant the allocation of new numbers each time a TF soldier was posted between units even of the same Regiment. The increasing frequency with which men were being transferred to different units on arrival at the Bases had meant increased clerical labour and consequent risk of errors. In order to make it easier to keep track of TF Infantry soldiers it was decided that new TF Regimental numbers were to be allocated by March 1917. Each Infantry Regiment was allocated a block of six figure numbers starting at 200001, broken down into blocks for each TF battalion.⁴⁴ Each soldier was

⁴³ TNA: WO 293/6 ACI 432 of 11 March 1917 Despatch of Cavalry, Yeomanry and Infantry Drafts to units serving with the Expeditionary Force.

⁴⁴ TNA: WO 293/5 ACI 2414 of 23 December 1916: Infantry of the TF – Re-Numbering of Personnel and Alterations in Administrative Arrangements. For example, 4th Cheshire was allocated 200001 – 240000, 5th Cheshire 240001 to 265000 and 6th Cheshire 265001 – 290000.

allocated a new number from his battalion's block which he would retain as long as he continued to serve in the same regiment, irrespective of whether he was posted to a TF or Regular battalion. Only on posting to a new regiment would he receive a new number.⁴⁵ Conversely, in future a regular soldier would retain his regular number even when posted to a TF unit of his regiment. It was also confirmed in the same ACI that after 1 March the only men who could become TF infantry soldiers would be those directly enlisting into a TF unit or TF soldiers from other arms transferred to TF Infantry. However, a further category who could receive TF numbers were men posted to TF units as their first unit, having been called up from Army Reserve Class B.

Releasing Fit Men to Fight

The Army Council, under increasing Governmental pressure, needed to be sure that the men sent overseas were being used to best advantage, and in late 1916 had sent a senior officer 'familiar with the man-power situation and the difficulties which have to be overcome in providing reinforcements for the fighting troops' to France to take a radical look at the situation.⁴⁶ The officer selected, Lt Gen H.M. Lawson, spent most of December visiting various locations in the Base areas and scrutinizing the manpower figures. On 3 December there had been 10,084 officers and 241,589 men on the LofC, of whom over half (7596 officers and 126,069 men) could be classed as effective.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ On being transferred to a different Regiment, a TF Infantry soldier would be posted initially to a TF unit of that Regiment and allocated an appropriate number which he would then keep on being posted to a Regular battalion of that Regiment.

⁴⁶ TNA: WO 33/881 Minutes of 194th Meeting of Army Council on 20 November 1916.

⁴⁷ TNA: WO 95/43 DAG War Diary 14 December 1916 and WO 95/26 GHQ AG War Diary 30 December 1916. TNA WO 106/362 Report by Lt Gen H.M. Lawson on the Number and Physical Categories of Men Employed out of the Fighting Area, dated 16 January 1917.

Lawson concluded that it would be possible to reduce or reorganize the many units which had gradually collected at the Base and on the LofC and to comb out manpower for the Front. He had also found the physical conditions in the rear areas much less severe than at the Front and concluded that only 'B' men (those fit for garrison service, labour and sedentary work abroad) need be employed there. There should be medical re-examinations at regular intervals and any 'A' men combed out for duty at the Front. Overall, he considered that better organization and supervision could reduce the numbers in the rear areas, estimating that some 26,000 'A' men could be combed out and sent to the Front plus a further 12,100 if their places were taken by women. A constant watch would be necessary, however, to ensure 'co-ordination and co-operation with the consequent prevention of overlapping and waste of manpower'.⁴⁸

It took two weeks for Lawson's report to be received in France, the delay probably being the first of a series of irritants for GHQ.⁴⁹ A holding response was received a month later, noting that some parts of the report could be actioned at once whilst others would require more detailed investigation 'as to the most economical method of replacement of fit men by men of a lower category and women'.⁵⁰ As a first step GHQ had considered how best to allocate non-'A' men. With the Armies, it would be possible to release 'A' men to fight by employing Permanent Base (PB) men in newly created Labour Companies and with POW companies in the rear parts of the Army areas. PB men not required by the Armies could be employed on the LofC as could Permanently Unfit (PU) men not required at the Base. Those PU men unable to be employed at their trades in France should be sent home. Garrison battalions, currently split up between the Army Railheads and the LofC, should be withdrawn and any 'A' men made available as

⁴⁸ TNA: WO 106/362 Report by Lt Gen H M Lawson on the Number and Physical Categories of Men Employed out of the Fighting Area, dated 16 January 1917.

⁴⁹ TNA: WO 32/5093 WO letter No 121/France/287 (AG1) dated 27 Jan 17 and TNA WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry for 1 February 1917.

⁵⁰ TNA: WO 32/5093 AG -C94 dated 25 February 1917.

reinforcements, their places being taken by PB men. Also possibilities for employment on the LofC and at the Base were 'coloured labour' (sic) and women.

By 11 March, tension between the War Office and GHQ is visible in Haig's personal covering letter to a thirty one page report from GHQ:

There is every wish and intention on my part to comb out fit men, and the Army Council may rest assured that the importance of this matter is fully appreciated, and that elimination will be carried out to the limit compatible with safety.⁵¹

A thorough investigation had now been carried out and such of Lawson's recommendations as were considered 'advantageous and feasible' were being implemented. It was necessary to make the changes gradually, however, and there was also a limit

to the extent to which replacement by unfit men, women and coloured labour can be carried out with safety, and this limit can only be decided in this Country. Conditions in England and France differ, and the failure of any service in this Country through inefficient personnel may directly affect the troops, and even endanger operations.

Pressure to release men in lower medical categories for service in France was also being applied at home, both in the HD organization and through greater substitution of women for men.⁵² A conference to discuss how to obtain as many 'A' men as possible for the Infantry took place at the end of March.⁵³ The Agenda was lengthy, covering topics including economizing in personnel at home and abroad; the employment of women 'in every possible sphere'; the release of lower category men at home for work on LofC abroad; and reduction in the categories of men accepted for the Technical Corps. Every possible avenue was being explored. In April a further pool of men for overseas service became available at the stroke of a pen: conditions on the Western Front were really very similar to those at home and the definition of Category C

⁵¹ TNA: WO 32/5093 GHQ letter dated 11 March 1917.

⁵² TNA: WO 32/5093 Lawson letter dated 14 March 1917 covering Memo on 'Urgent Need of Setting Free for Service in France of trained men of B & C Categories in the Home Establishments'.

⁵³ TNA: WO 162/34 Calling notice for conference on Manpower to be held on 29 March 1917.

was now amended to read 'Fit for service at home or in North Western Europe'.⁵⁴ This enabled 'C' men to be posted to the Base for employment in garrison or labour units or on sedentary work thus releasing fitter men for the Front.

Work on Lawson's proposals continued in France, where it had been decided to revise the classifications: 'A': men fit in all respects for fighting and who would be kept exclusively for fighting units; 'TU': temporarily unfit men likely to be reclassified A at the periodical inspections; and 'PU': permanently unfit men who for some reason would never be upgraded to 'A'.⁵⁵ The 'TU' men were waiting to go to fighting units as soon as they were passed fit and who could in the meantime be used on work being carried out by 'A' men, thus releasing the latter for service at the Front. The 'PU' men would replace 'A' or 'B' men on the LofC but any not fit for work in France would be returned to England in order to release others for France. It was noted, however, in an irresistible dig at the War Office that large numbers of 'A' men continued to arrive in units intended for duty on LofC and the process of combing them out was often delayed since it was entirely dependent on supply from home of 'an adequate' number of 'B' men, 'coloured personnel' and women.

Progress reports and instructions on the implementation of Lawson's proposals continued to pass between GHQ and London. In early July, the War Office stated that AG GHQ should be authorized to investigate the numbers, category, nature of the employment of all personnel employed in the BEF and should issue all instructions as regards allotment and distribution of such personnel.⁵⁶ In return, GHQ noted that the replacement of fit men by those of lower

⁵⁴ TNA: WO 293/6 ACI 679 of 26 April 1917.

⁵⁵ TNA: WO 32/5093 GHQ letter dated 8 April 1917.

⁵⁶ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary for 7 July 17: receipt of War Office letter 121/France/872 AG1.

categories was continuing with the men so released being sent for training before being posted to the Infantry. The arrival of 1859 'Cape Boys' had enabled the replacement of a similar number in ASC horse transport companies on the LofC and about 1,000 women had already arrived.⁵⁷ In August the Army Council demanded monthly statistics from GHQ on the progress made on the various measures adopted.⁵⁸ The staff in GHQ obviously felt that London was labouring the point unnecessarily; the clerical effort entailed was considerable and by December GHQ declined to send any more such reports.⁵⁹

Creation of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC)

Even before Lawson reported that the employment of women in France could release over 12,000 men for the Front, consideration was being given to their greater use by the Army. By 1917 women were already serving overseas in various capacities, mainly medical, and many more had taken on new roles at home. Voluntary organizations had grown up, including the Women's Legion. This was a private organization which hired out cooks from its cookery section to the War Department; by the end of 1916 detachments totaling 2,000 cooks and kitchen staffs were working in 200 camps in England, where the standard of catering had been improved, with less wastage.⁶⁰ The only people not delighted were the men who would now be posted overseas. The Women's Legion had also formed a mechanical transport section and the QMG's Department was only too happy to hire 'ready made chauffeurs ... uniformed and clothed and paid at a certain rate'. They were a great success although inevitably there were

⁵⁷ TNA: WO 32/5093 GHQ letter O.B/1070 dated 16 July 1917.

⁵⁸ TNA: WO 32/5093 AG1 letter 121/France/287 (AG1) dated 12 August 1917

⁵⁹ TNA: WO 32/5093 GHQ Letter dated 6 December 1917.

⁶⁰ S. Bidwell, *The Women's Royal Army Corps* (London: Leo Cooper, 1977), p. 6.

pockets of resistance: it was noted that some Home Commands were not happy with ladies driving staff cars at night.⁶¹

The suggestion of employing women clerks in France had been mooted in August 1916 but discounted, ostensibly due to lack of suitable accommodation.⁶² By December the increasing seriousness of the manpower situation caused the question to be raised again, and on 4 December Macready gained Haig's acceptance to the introduction of women for duty in the rear areas.⁶³ The way was further paved by Lawson, who explained wherever he went how successful the substitution of women for men in many roles had been in England. That is not to say that he was totally enlightened as his views were inevitably coloured by the prejudices of the time: 'It does not look well, nor is it fair on the men themselves, to have quantities of men in khaki doing work which all over England is being done by the other sex'. To the obvious objection being raised, he simply noted that results at home had shown 'that the sex difficulty has not been anything like what some have predicted'.⁶⁴

On 5 January Macready called the first of a series of conferences to discuss the future employment of women by the Army.⁶⁵ It was already clear that it was a question of when and not if women should be employed with the Army but what Macready wanted to establish was how that 'woman power' could be organized simply, and with central control, in order to avoid the proliferation of small groups. Initially the proposed employments were clerical, housekeeping and driving and several requests for these services had already been received,

⁶¹ TNA: WO 162/31 Conference on the Organization of Women Employed by the Army – 5 January 1917.

⁶² TNA: WO 95/3970 IGC War Diary - 15 August 191.

⁶³ Dame Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, *Service with the Army* (London: Hutchinson, 1941), p. 12 and Bidwell, *Women's Royal Army Corps*, p. 10.

⁶⁴ TNA: WO 106/362 Lawson Report, 16 January 1917.

⁶⁵ TNA: WO 162/31 Conference on the Organization of Women Employed by the Army.

including female clerks for Rouen and elsewhere. Although catering staff and drivers for employment at home had previously been obtained from the Women's Legion, it was anticipated that in future women should be recruited through DGNS and 'belong more or less to the Army'. That raised the question of potentially differing terms of service and the thorny question of rates of pay.

Further conferences were held, chaired by Macready, and attended by members of his staff plus the heads of the Women's Legion Sections: Cookery and Housekeeping; Motor Drivers; and Clerks.⁶⁶ Discussions covered terms of service, discipline and the proposed enrolment form, concerning which the Head of the Cookery and Housekeeping Section stated that 'as far as she could speak for her women, they were willing to sign anything, and that what they wanted was to be soldiers, that they wanted to take the place of a man in every sense'. The need for central organization effectively meant a new corps for which an interim title was decided upon: Women's Army Service Department.

Lawson's first report in mid-January identified 12,100 posts in France that could potentially be filled by women. This gave further impetus to what was already moving forward very positively and on 6 February Macready outlined full details of the proposed scheme.⁶⁷ By now a new AG branch, AG11, had been formed and the corps' first head appointed: Mrs Mona Chalmers-Watson, the sister of Sir Auckland Geddes, Director of Recruiting, and Sir Eric Geddes, then DG Transportation in France.

⁶⁶ TNA: WO 162/33 Conferences on Organization of Women Employed by the Army held on 10, 15 and 17 January 1917.

⁶⁷ TNA: WO 162/34 Conference on Organization of Women Employed by the Army 6 February 1917.

The GHQ response to Lawson's report opened the way for women to be employed in France.⁶⁸ It confirmed that 2,430 women clerks could be accepted for work in different locations, such as Étaples, Rouen and Montreuil. It was understood that they would come out under their own officers and be employed in parties of not less than one officer to twenty women. 'As an experiment' a domestic section consisting of eleven cooks, six waitresses, two scullery maids and a clerk was requested for each of Calais, Étaples, Rouen, Le Havre and Boulogne, and it was also noted that women drivers could be used. Armed with GHQ's agreement, Mrs Watson visited France at the end of February, together with the newly-designated Chief Controller overseas, Mrs Gwynne-Vaughan, in order to see where women could be employed and accommodated.⁶⁹

On their return to London, feverish planning ensued to establish what was now confirmed as the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and to start recruiting women. Aspects requiring attention were the corps organization, areas of employment, rates of pay and the design of a khaki uniform and badges of rank. One area examined in detail was the legal status of women posted to a theatre of war to replace combatant soldiers since, unlike medical personnel, they would not be protected by the 1906 Geneva Convention. Rather unflatteringly it was agreed that women serving overseas could be defined as 'camp followers' and as such be covered by the Army Act whilst those serving at home would be covered by civil law. It was thought necessary, however, for there to be a written contract so female recruits were required to sign enrolment forms confirming their agreement to serve for twelve months or the duration of the war, whichever was the greater, to fulfil the rules, regulations and instructions laid down from time to time for the Corps, to work wherever the Army Council required, to obey all orders, to

⁶⁸ TNA: WO 32/5093 AG -C94 dated 25 February 1917.

⁶⁹ Gwynne-Vaughan, *Service With the Army*, p. 14.

perform any work, and finally to be discharged at a week's notice (later extended to a month) if their services were no longer required, or without notice for breach of conditions.⁷⁰

In mid-March Mrs Gwynne-Vaughan took up her post in France with the immediate task of organizing accommodation suitable for use by women. She toured locations in the rear areas, including Abbeville, Rouen, Le Havre, Dieppe and Étapes, meeting Commandants, inspecting accommodation and discussing possible employment with the employing officers. She was disconcerted to find that however helpful the officers she met were during the official side of the visits, she would later be told that wherever it was 'was the one place where women ought not to come'. Indeed she discovered almost universal objection to the employment of women, largely because the military distrusted the complications working with women might bring and disliked 'the intrusion into their offices and workshops of an alien element'.⁷¹ It would take time for the new Corps to be accepted but the manpower situation meant there could be no turning back.

On 28 March details of the proposed employment of women at the Base and on the LofC were announced.⁷² There would be six categories: clerical, typist and shorthand typist; cooks, waitresses and domestic staff; motor transport services; storehouse women, checkers and unskilled labour; telephone and postal services; and a miscellaneous category covering any employments not falling into any of the above. The publication of the ACI was not a moment too soon because women were about to start arriving in France.

⁷⁰ Gwynne-Vaughan, *Service With the Army*, p. 21.

⁷¹ Gwynne-Vaughan, *Service With the Army*, p. 26.

⁷² TNA: WO 293/6 ACI 537 of 28 March 1917: Employment of Women with the Armies Abroad.

The first detachment of fourteen cooks and waitresses for the Officers Mess in Abbeville arrived on 31 March. They were followed almost immediately by a draft for the Officers' Club in Boulogne and a further twenty-two clerks arrived on 7 April for the Forestry Directorate at Le Touquet. By mid-April the first of the big camps for females was nearly finished: a collection of hutments just outside Abbeville to accommodate clerks and others at the Advanced Mechanical Transport Depot (AMTD) where spares for all kinds of vehicles were stored and distributed.⁷³ In mid-May a detachment of women clerks would arrive for the DAG's office in Rouen.⁷⁴ Pay clerks were also arriving for the Command Pay Office at Wimereux, where there would soon be several hundred women and a request was received in mid-May for twenty-four domestic staff for the Fourth Army School.⁷⁵ Also in May, the first draft of postal workers arrived for employment in the Army Post Offices in the rear area and at Le Havre, Boulogne and Calais. These women had answered a notice in the *Post Office Circular* for female Sorters, Sorting Clerks and Sub-Office Assistants with at least four months service with the GPO to enrol in the WAAC for service in France with the Army Postal Service. They were under the impression that their duties would be similar to those back home, so were somewhat shocked to find they were working on the counters in the Army equivalent of an ordinary post office.⁷⁶

Accommodation, thought originally to be a major obstacle, in fact proved perfectly manageable. It varied according to locality: where available, hotels and villas could be used, as at Wimereux, but elsewhere large wooden huts accommodating twenty or thirty women or Nissen huts holding eight women were used. It would soon become necessary to create female Base Depots

⁷³ Gwynne-Vaughan, *Service With the Army*, p. 31. In later years the Mautort MT Camp would be remembered nostalgically as the 'old camp built on the high hill on the Ancienne route de Blangy'. AGC Archives: *QMAAC Old Comrades Gazette*, 8 (February 1921).

⁷⁴ TNA: WO 95/43 DAG War Diary 14 May 1917.

⁷⁵ Gwynne-Vaughan, *Service With the Army*, p 34.

⁷⁶ AGC Archives: Extract from the Forces Postal Historical Society Newsletter, No 247 p. 199.

in France. Eventually there would be two depots, one at Étaples and a second one outside Le Havre. The big camp at Étaples, housing over 500 women, would eventually have between 70 – 80 Nissen huts as well as dining huts, recreation huts and washing facilities.

Developments had moved very quickly and several hundred women had already been sent overseas before the publication in July of a comprehensive ACI codifying numerous aspects to do with the new organization.⁷⁷ The Corps' purpose was 'to effect substitution of women for soldiers in certain employments throughout units, formations and offices administered by the Army Council ... at Home, and at the Bases and on the Lines of Communication Overseas'. Such substitution was to be based on clear, if unflattering, guidelines: four women clerks or four technical women for the RFC and ASC Motor Transport would be considered respectively as equivalent to three soldier clerks or three technical soldiers. A certain number of women would be required for clerical and domestic duties, and a scale was laid down for the employment of the latter in military messes and cookhouses. It was also specifically stipulated that no woman would be employed unless her employment relieved a soldier for other purposes. There followed detailed instructions on administration, hierarchy, pay and allowances, uniform, discipline and accommodation.

The main effort initially was the provision of women for overseas but it was noted that the Military Cookery and the Motor Transport sections of the Women's Legion could be gradually absorbed into the WAAC. Existing contracts would be honoured but any Women's Legion member who wished and passed the medical standard could enrol in the WAAC. At home the substitution of servicewomen for soldiers was initially very slow: only 815 in September but

⁷⁷ *Statistics of the British Military Effort* p. 205 and TNA 293/7 ACI 1069 of 7 July 1917 – Women's Army Auxiliary Corps.

then rising to 15,696 in December. The number of women in France grew steadily: by September there would be 2,280 and 4,105 in December.⁷⁸ Although this equated to a few battalions' worth of men, it was still well short of Lawson's anticipated 12,000. The problem was that women were not coming forward in anything like the numbers anticipated, mainly because of the many other job opportunities that had opened up for them in the absence of men serving abroad. The munitions industries, for example, were booming and an unskilled worker could earn far more there than doing domestic work with the Army. As a result, WAAC domestic trades were to prove surprisingly difficult to fill. Clerks proved easier to recruit as the work offered encouraged them to make use of their skills, gain different types of clerical experience and retain their job status. The most likely recruits were young unmarried women with no domestic commitments at home; married women could volunteer but were not eligible for overseas service if they had husbands serving in France. It was a big step, however, for a young woman to enrol and it was probably not surprising that recruiting was slow.

Formation of Labour Corps

The Labour Corps was also formed in early 1917 in order to make better use of men employed as labour.⁷⁹ Existing ASC Labour Companies and Infantry Labour battalions were absorbed into the new Corps and men of lesser fitness categories were transferred to it.⁸⁰ The men of the new Corps were generally older or of lower medical categories than infantrymen at the Front, although every Labour Corps soldier was medically re-examined each month to see if they were fit enough to be upgraded. They were organized in Employment companies, of which there were two types: Labour companies (450 men under 5 officers) and Area companies (2 officers

⁷⁸ *Statistics of the British Military Effort*, p. 206.

⁷⁹ TNA: WO 293/6 ACI 611 of 13 April 1917.

⁸⁰ For example, the Cheshire Regiment had provided five Labour battalions in France: 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st and 22nd (Labour) Battalions. In April 1917, these were split up to form 56th – 65th Labour Companies respectively.

and 270 men). Men of Divisional Employment Companies could be employed as Brigade clerks, loaders for divisional trains, on salvage duties and in the divisional canteens in each case to replace men who were fit for active duty.⁸¹ In July, GHQ could report that some 7,000 unfit men from England had been formed into Divisional Employment Companies, and that Area Employment Companies for Army and Corps HQs were also now arriving.⁸²

The Western Front

It had been agreed at Chantilly during the preceding November that current operations would continue over the winter. Co-ordinated offensives would start again in the spring with attacks by the French between the Oise and the Somme, and by the British between Bapaume and Arras. Haig felt he could, if necessary, launch attacks by 1 February but would have preferred to wait until May when the BEF would be in a better position. The preferred date had to be a joint decision with the French, however, so it was agreed that they should be ready by the first fortnight of February but that if the enemy remained contained then they might delay the offensives until a more favourable date.⁸³

The winter was a period of consolidation and rebuilding after the battles of 1916. Reinforcements were arriving; between 21 November and 31 December 171,802 were despatched to France with a further 35,738 under orders to move.⁸⁴ It had been decided that all Infantry battalions should be brought up to 100 men above establishment and that the training

⁸¹ TNA: WO 95/1519 5th Division A&Q Branch War Diary entry for 23 May 1917.

⁸² TNA: WO 32/5093 GHQ letter O.B/1070 dated 16 July 1917.

⁸³ *BOH 1917 Vol. 1*, pp. 9-10.

⁸⁴ TNA WO 162/28 AG2 document dated 1 January 1917 Drafts despatched 21 November – 31 December 1916. The grand total of those despatched to all Theatres was 205,188. Of those despatched to France, the total included 146,700 Infantry (114,408 British plus 32,292 Colonial) with 35,680 British and 58 Colonial under orders.

of untrained men should be completed at the Front.⁸⁵ There was also increased awareness of the need to take care of the battle-hardened men they already had: a Fourth Army Routine Order on Wastage Returns exhorted:

The replacement of trained men is a very costly business, and it is difficult to place any limit to the value to our country of the trained man who has been through the experience of the Somme Battle. His loss from bad man mastership is, therefore, a reflection on his Officer of the most serious nature. Every effort should be made by all officers to keep the men in good health, good spirits, and training. Care and forethought are necessary in arranging duties and work, so that the men may be spared the unnecessary fatigue entailed by waiting, falling in too soon etc etc.⁸⁶

The intention was good but many soldiers would have been surprised by the last sentence.

The BEF now contained 56 Infantry divisions, divided between five Armies, but these would increase with the arrival of more TF divisions during February and March. The 42nd (East Lancashire) Division arrived from Egypt in February plus a further five second line TF divisions from England. As was by now usual, they would gradually be introduced into the line: in mid-February 64 officers and 178 men from the 66th Division were attached to the 5th Division for familiarization purposes.⁸⁷

The events of the first few months of 1917 were described by the *Official History* as: winter fighting on the Somme battlefield, the pursuit of the enemy as he withdrew to the Hindenburg Line during February and March, the capture of outposts in front of that line and the battles of Arras. The 'short-range enterprises' of the winter fighting were 'almost all successful and frequently at small cost', but even so the BEF's overall casualty figures for January were

⁸⁵ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry 19 December 1916.

⁸⁶ TNA: WO 95/441 Fourth Army A & Q War Diary December 1916.

⁸⁷ TNA: WO 95/1519 5th Division A & Q Diary for 14 February 1917.

12,535.⁸⁸ More alarming were the sick wastage figures, 41,543 in January, 41,302 in February and 54,950 in March, undoubtedly due to the atrocious weather conditions of the winter of 1916/17.⁸⁹ Reinforcements continued to arrive but in declining numbers: 82,165 in January and 62,672 in February (both exclusive of RE, RA and RFC), but it is difficult to draw comparisons since in March the way in which the reinforcement figures were shown was changed to show only those sent to the divisions: 58,860 Cavalry and Infantry had been despatched.⁹⁰

During the winter, ‘troops of all arms showed an intelligence and adaptability ... which was the fruit of hard-won experience and training’.⁹¹ Once the Germans withdrew to the Hindenburg Line, however, it became a different kind of warfare with rising casualty figures: 21,023 and 22,361 respectively for February and March. The *Official History* would subsequently note

Our inexperienced young soldiers seemed quite at sea when they got into the open, and enterprising young leaders were non-existent through lack of training in open warfare.

and that

many men come out quite untrained - sometimes only nine weeks after enlistment ... It will be realized that the art of movement so as to gain every inch of advantageous ground can only be learnt by careful training ...⁹²

Arrangements for completing the training of untrained drafts seem to have varied according to the formation concerned. In 2nd Division, 1st KRRC complained that a draft of 128 untrained

⁸⁸ *BOH 1917 Vol. 1*, p. 543.

⁸⁹ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary figures for January – March 1917.

⁹⁰ There is a difficulty in playing with figures since those in the AG’s War Diaries accord with neither those in the *Statistics of the Military Effort* nor in the *Medical Services: Casualties and Medical Statistics of the Great War*. This was highlighted in the *Official History 1917 Vol 1* p. 557. I have chosen to use the AG’s figures as these were compiled from the information available at the time for those fighting the war and would be the basis on which reinforcements would be requested.

⁹¹ *BOH 1917 Vol. 1*, p. 543.

⁹² *BOH 1917 Vol. 1*, quoting an un-named GSO2 and Maj Gen C.E. Pereira, GOC 2nd Division, pp. 544 and 555.

men was received on 19 March and that ‘close order drill, and the handling of arms, at both of which the untrained Draft are particularly slow’ required great attention.⁹³ In the Fifth Division, however, as early as January it had been decided that untrained drafts would be sent to Brigade Training Centres on arrival; on 3 March 1st Cheshire noted the arrival of 40 reinforcements that had come from the XVth Brigade Training Depot but there is no mention of the need for any further training.⁹⁴ There would continue to be general comments about men being untrained – but occasionally these were recognized as perceptions as much as reality: a May 1917 poem apparently put out by GHQ described the ‘Lads who have scarcely been out a year ... are to Alf but as untrained boys’; Alf being the old soldier who had been out since 1914.⁹⁵

New drafts needed time to be absorbed by units and the larger the draft the longer this might take. However, as the Cheshires had found in 1916 ‘given the opportunity to get the Battalion together in a rest area, these men soon became one with the unit’.⁹⁶ Training helped weld a unit together and the publication in early 1917 of two General Staff pamphlets based on lessons learned in 1916, SS 135, *Instructions for the Training of Divisions for Offensive Action* and SS 143, *Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action* meant that there was plenty to be done before the anticipated spring battles. In SS 135 there was growing emphasis on the need for both careful preparation before any action and the co-ordination of different types of weapon into a coherent whole whilst in SS 143, the platoon was treated as a self-contained unit with four fighting sections. All men were riflemen and bayonet fighters but each section had its own specialty: a section of picked shots and bayonet fighters, and scouts; the bombing team;

⁹³ TNA: WO 95/1371 1st KRRC War Diary 19 March and 1 April 1917.

⁹⁴ TNA: WO 95/1519 5th Division A & Q Branch War Diary entries for 2 and 4 January 1917 and WO 95/1571 1st Cheshire War Diary for 3 March 1917.

⁹⁵ C.H. Dudley Ward, *Regimental Records of the Royal Welch Fusiliers Vol III 1914-1918* (Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 2005), p. 307.

⁹⁶ A. Crookenden, *The History of the Cheshire Regiment in the Great War* (Chester: Evans, n.d.), p. 77.

the rifle bombers; and the Lewis gun team.⁹⁷ For trench-to-trench attacks the concept was now that platoons would attack in two waves: the first wave would be the assault team of the riflemen and bombers, and the second wave the fire team with rifle grenades and the Lewis gun.

The collective training necessary to absorb the new organization and tactics was started at once. The 13th Cheshire spent the afternoon of 16 February re-organizing its companies, platoons and sections 'under the scheme set out in GHQ letter No OB 1919 dated 7 February'.⁹⁸ The 1st Cheshire's War Diary shows training being carried out whenever the battalion was out of the line. From 23 January onwards training is shown daily for nine days, including time in early February on the Divisional Range at Le Quesnoy where 40 men from each company fired 100 yards grouping, 200 yards application and 200 yards rapid fire. After a spell in the trenches, training continued through late March and into April. On 27 March the battalion practised an attack in wave formation, from 9-10.45 am with specialist training after that and on 4 April the battalion spent the day on a 'Brigade manoeuvre'.⁹⁹ Similarly, the 7th KSLI in 3rd Division was heavily involved in training from January onwards. Their training through February is described as 'progressive' and, after a spell working on the fortification of the caves under Arras, they moved back with the Brigade on 21 March to Liencourt for training in open warfare; practice attacks were held daily until 30 March, when the battalion returned to Arras to take over a section of the trenches opposite Tilloy.¹⁰⁰ The examples of these two battalions, one

⁹⁷ SS 135, *Instructions for the Training of Divisions for Offensive Action* issued by the General Staff December 1916 and SS 143 *Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action 1917*, issued by the General Staff February 1917.

⁹⁸ TNA: WO 95/2246/3 13th Cheshire War Diary for February 1917.

⁹⁹ TNA: WO 95/1571 1st Cheshire War Diary 1917.

¹⁰⁰ Major W. de B. Wood, *History of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry* (London: The Medici Society, 1925; Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 2003), pp. 234-36. The main excitement on 3 April was a raid in order to capture a prisoner for identification purposes; the ground was thick with snow and there was a nearly full moon but the men, dressed in sheets and ladies' nightdresses purchased in Arras, entered the enemy trenches and returned with a prisoner, having not suffered any casualties themselves.

from First and the other from Third Army, indicate the type of detailed training and preparation now incorporated into the build-up for the forthcoming Battles of Arras.

The anticipated spring offensive would start in April and GHQ had been moving Corps and Divisions between Armies in order to create the attacking force required in First and Third Armies. It was another period of organizational change: letters on the 'Distribution of Corps and Divisions to Armies' were sent on 26 January and 7 February, with a forecast being issued on 21 February of the 'Movements to be carried out between Armies before the commencement of operations'. In order to ensure that the attacking divisions would be up to strength AG's staffs were notified of those, such as 24th and 34th Divisions, requiring immediate priority for reinforcements.¹⁰¹

The effectiveness of the casualty reporting procedures had been reviewed, and, in late March, Fowke confirmed the continuation of the previous year's system of reporting approximate Cavalry and Infantry casualty numbers by telegram during heavy fighting. There were to be a couple of minor adjustments: divisions in which any battalions had suffered 50 or more casualties were to wire the numbers by battalions not later than 6 pm daily to AG GHQ and the DAG, 3rd Echelon. Should further casualties in excess of 50 occur during the night another wire would be sent the next morning as soon as the total numbers for the Battalion could be estimated. Casualties would be reported by phases, the duration of which would vary according to the fighting and the number of casualties suffered; effectively a running total was kept as each wire was to begin with: 'Total estimated casualties from ... (date of commencement of phase inserted)'. A further change was that battalions would now be represented by letters of

¹⁰¹ TNA: WO 95/11 GHQ GS War Diaries for January and February 1917.

the alphabet and the words ‘officers’ and ‘other ranks’ were not to be used. An example was given: ‘Total estimated casualties from 10th March, B 5 and 315 ...’ which indicated that since 10 March the 2/4th North Lancashire had lost 5 officers and 315 other ranks. As before accurate casualty reports were still to follow the estimated reports.¹⁰² The rapid transmission of approximate numbers indicated as quickly as possible the numbers of reinforcements that would be needed, whilst the introduction of codes saved on signal traffic and to an extent would also hide the identities of the battalions concerned.

The Armies were also making their own various arrangements for reinforcements during the offensive. Only Third Army, however, is specifically mentioned as having gained approval from GHQ for the formation of a reinforcement camp in each Corps where the personnel not taking part in an attack would assemble, and where reinforcements would join. These would not replace casualties from day to day but would be kept there to reconstitute units at a definite point.¹⁰³

The Battle of Arras was in fact a series of battles during April and May, starting on 9 April with the attack on Vimy Ridge and the first battle of the Scarpe and culminating in the Battle of Bullecourt in May.¹⁰⁴ Twenty-six Infantry divisions took part altogether, including four Canadian, and nine Marches battalions were in action. Of these, 7th KSLI, took part in all three Battles of the Scarpe, whilst 1st Cheshire was in support to the Canadians for the attack on Vimy and during the Second Battle of the Scarpe. These battalions have been selected for analysis.

¹⁰² TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary for 28 March 1917 and Appendix I for that month.

¹⁰³ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary for 11 March 1917.

¹⁰⁴ 9-14 April First Battle of the Scarpe and Battle of Vimy Ridge; 23-24 April Second Battle of the Scarpe; 28-29 April Battle of Arleux; 3-4 May Third Battle of the Scarpe with capture of Fresnoy; 3-17 May Battle of Bullecourt, fought after a first unsuccessful attack on 11 April.

On Easter Monday, the three Brigades of 3rd Division took part in the First Battle of the Scarpe with the German first, second and third lines as their objectives. The 7th KSLI, in 8th Brigade, took part in the final assault to capture the enemy's third line and secure the high ground immediately south of Fenchy Chapel, known as Chapel Hill. At 08.50 the Brigade advanced towards the third line but on reaching Tilloy in the second line it was found the village had not been cleared. The KSLI left-front company decided to move around the village's northern flank and capture the Bois des Boeufs. Having fought off a German party sent to assist the garrison in the wood, they proceeded to clear it and then continued towards the third line. At about 2.30pm they were stopped by intense rifle and machine gun fire from the flanks and had also found very strong uncut wire in front of the position. A further bombardment to cut the wire was ordered at 5.30, to be followed by a further infantry attack at 7pm. Both were unsuccessful. The KSLI dug themselves in overnight about 600 yards from the enemy in readiness for a subsequent bombardment and attack the following morning which proved successful. During their attack they had advanced over 5,000 yards and captured 156 prisoners. Their own casualties amounted to 167: one officer killed and eight wounded, and 22 other ranks killed, 131 wounded and 5 missing.¹⁰⁵ They would hold their newly captured sector of the enemy line until being relieved on the night of 13/14 April. Between 23-27 April, the battalion returned to the trenches during the Second Battle of the Scarpe; during this period they suffered a further 29 casualties: 8 killed, 20 wounded and 1 missing.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Wood, *History of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry*, pp. 237-8; TNA: WO 95/1384 3rd Division A & Q War Diary note dated 16 April shows KSLI OR casualties 9-13 Apr as 22 killed, 129 wounded and 16 missing; SDGW shows 34 deaths for the same period, of which 30 were KIA. This highlights the difficulty of obtaining accurate figures.

¹⁰⁶ TNA: WO 95/1384 3rd Division A & Q War Diary note dated 30 April 1917 showing casualties 23-27 April.

A return from Third Army giving the strengths of its divisions as at 6pm on 1 May shows the 3rd Division as having 399 officers and 11034 men, plus a further 33 officers and 401 men in the Corps Depots. Although it had suffered estimated casualties of 139 officers and 3027 men the Division was still considered fit for fighting.¹⁰⁷ Some 39 officers and 2142 men had been sent to units as reinforcements during April.¹⁰⁸ Not only was this 885 fewer than the number of casualties incurred but some battalions were receiving nothing like the replacements they needed: 17 men reached 7th KSLI during April, with a further 16 at the Corps Depot, against a total casualty toll of 187.

The 7th KSLI was in action again in early May, advancing at 04.45 on 2 May in support of an attack on the Bois des Vert. The attack was checked by machine-gun fire and the battalion dug themselves in about 8am. No further advance was possible so they were employed in consolidating the ground gained until relieved on 7 May. During this time they had suffered 5 officer and 98 soldier casualties. They were again in the trenches between 10 – 15 May and suffered a further 2 officer and 40 soldier casualties.

The 3rd Division War Diary shows that between 9 April and 16 May 7th KSLI suffered 383 soldier casualties, of whom 46 had been killed, 307 wounded and 30 missing. *SDGW* shows 107 deaths for the same period which includes many of the missing plus those who would die of wounds. The 7th KSLI was a Service battalion which had arrived in France and joined 3rd Division in October 1915. It had fought on the Somme and by now might have been expected

¹⁰⁷ TNA: WO 158/20 State of Divisions in Third Army as at 1 May 1917. NB Other Divisions were less fit: eg 31st and 33rd would be fit for fighting in about seven days but the 34th was tired and needed three or four weeks rest; the 29th Division was 'weak and has had hard fighting but spirit very good'; whilst the 12th Division was fit for fighting and the 18th Division had yet to be used and was 'Fresh and fit for fighting'.

¹⁰⁸ TNA: WO 95/1384 3rd Division A & Q War Diary for April 1917.

to be showing a serious change in its composition. Analysis shows, however, that two thirds of those who died had enlisted in its recruiting area, with a further 18 per cent having enlisted in No 4 District, mainly the neighbouring areas of Cheshire and North Wales. Altogether 96 per cent had enlisted in Western Command, many of those enlisting in No 3 District having come from southern Lancashire. Of the men who died, with the exception of 5 each from the Shropshire Yeomanry and the Cheshire Regiment, plus 1 from the Somerset Light Infantry, all (96) were originally KSLI soldiers, although not all had started out in 7th KSLI. Just under one third had arrived in France in 1915; at the other end of the scale eight appear to have been mobilized in the second half of 1916, although whether they were 'Derby men' or conscripts is unknown due to the dearth of Service Records, and would have arrived with the battalion in early 1917.¹⁰⁹ The fact that 90 per cent were original KSLI soldiers from various battalions would indicate that men previously wounded were being returned to their parent Regiment. The 7th KSLI was continuing to show remarkable homogeneity in its composition.

The 1st Cheshire, in 15th Brigade of 5th Division, would play a less active part in the battles of April/May. With the exception of 13th Brigade which was in action on 9 April, the 5th Division had been in reserve for the Canadians and it would not be until 13 April that it moved up to relieve the 4th Canadian Division. At dusk 1st Cheshire deployed in former German trenches but as contact with the enemy had been lost it was decided to push forward to a line of outposts towards La Culotte. This had just been done when a peremptory order from 15th Brigade instructed the Battalion to withdraw to the line they had left. By the time this had been done, fresh orders were received that the battalion was to act as advance guard to the Brigade. As the Cheshire Regimental History notes: 'Practically none of the officers had any experience of this

¹⁰⁹ SDGW and www.ancestry.com ; there are very few KSLI Service Records available.

form of manoeuvre and only after very strenuous work by the Battalion staff was the unit ready to advance at the appointed time.’ On nearing La Culotte they came across a formidable entrenched position, protected by three deep belts of barbed wire and fully manned. The houses, mine buildings and factory had also been strengthened, fortified and occupied by machine gun posts. No further advance was possible. To make matters worse, a party from a neighbouring battalion, on approaching from the rear, mistook the Cheshire Battalion HQ for the enemy and opened fire, killing A/RSM Eldridge who had arrived from England less than 3 weeks earlier.

Taking the same dates as for 7th KSLI, 40 soldiers of 1st Cheshire lost their lives between 9 April and 14 May. Half were TF soldiers who had joined the battalion in August and September 1916, having been transferred under the authority of AO 204 and ACI 1499 of 1916, and five men were from a draft of over 100 from 2/1st Denbigh Yeomanry which was sent to France and transferred to 1st Cheshire in early October 1916. Virtually all the previously TF soldiers had joined in 1914 and 1915 and their transfer to a Regular battalion had been made possible by the second MSA. Of the rest of those killed, eleven were pre-war soldiers recalled in 1914, a couple were ‘Derby’ men and just one, Alexander Tydd, was a conscript. The most unfortunate were eight men who had joined the battalion in February 1917, one of whom, Sydney Goodier, was killed a month before his nineteenth birthday. Some 70 per cent had enlisted in Cheshire with a further 10 per cent from North Wales and Shropshire; altogether 88 per cent had enlisted in Western Command. Despite the losses of the Somme, the great majority of 1st Cheshire continued to have a connection with its traditional recruiting areas.

It is difficult to be sure how well-trained the reinforcements were that arrived at units during this period. For the GHQ Manning staffs it was often a balance between the need for

reinforcements to reach units as quickly as possible against time spent at the Base to familiarise them with conditions in France. It also depended on the availability of trained reinforcements to meet the specific requirement. On 11 April, it was decided that:

11 April 1917: Owing to the necessity of rapidly bringing up to establishment Divisions which have been temporarily withdrawn from the line for training and refitting ...in certain cases it might be necessary to send reinforcements up to Divisions from the Base before completing their 9 days Base Training.¹¹⁰

What is not absolutely clear, however, is how this dovetailed in with the arrangements preferred by the different formations: 5th Division had their Brigade Training Battalions; Third Army had its Corps reinforcement camps and the XIII Corps of First Army had the following arrangements in place by early May:

Railhead for reinforcements is at Pernes. From there drafts are brought under Corps arrangements to Ecoivres, where they are met by Divisional Guides and conducted to transport lines of units. Privates who have not previously served in this country, on arrival at Pernes, are sent to a Corps Training Depot at Floringhem for purpose of completing their training.¹¹¹

In many cases, reinforcements continued to be men returning after having been wounded who would need little or no training. In mid-May 5th Division commented that ‘Since April 9th 1,147 ORs have joined as reinforcements. These are composed chiefly of men returning from hospital.’¹¹²

The *Official History* gives the total losses for Third, First and Fifth Armies for April and May as 158,660, of whom 29,505 had been killed.¹¹³ The War Office suggested in mid-May that a

¹¹⁰ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary April 1917.

¹¹¹ TNA: WO 95/1519 5th Division A&Q Branch War Diary of 6 May 1917.

¹¹² TNA: WO 95/1519 5th Division A&Q War Diary for 14 May 1917.

¹¹³ *BOH 1917 Vol 1*, p. 558.

Cavalry Division be dismounted and formed into four Infantry battalions but GHQ requested delay, as the Cavalry Corps was in the process of taking over a considerable portion of the front line and any alteration would seriously affect current plans.¹¹⁴ The number of Cavalry and Infantry reinforcements dispatched to divisions during April and May was 150,733 but most of these had been directed to the divisions preparing for the next offensive, plans for which were already nearing fruition.¹¹⁵ On 7 May, Haig had informed the Army Commanders that he hoped to capture the Messines Ridge in a month's time.

Second Army was to attack the Messines ridge with twelve divisions which had not fought in the Arras area. The whole battle would be prefaced by the explosion at zero hour of nineteen mines underneath the German lines. Prior to the battle, training areas had been laid out to the rear of each corps sector on ground resembling that to be crossed during the assault and marked with tapes and coloured flags showing the various farms, woods, strongpoints and objectives. The assaulting brigades carried out several rehearsals with the men wearing full kit and practising every detail.¹¹⁶ The attack on the Messines Ridge went in as planned on 7 June and was a 'stunning success' due to the careful planning and preparation.¹¹⁷ By 14 June the battle was over with all objectives having been gained.

There had been comparatively few casualties during the assault but many more were caused by subsequent heavy and accurate German shelling of the newly-gained lines. Altogether 24,562 casualties were incurred by the Second Army between 1 – 12 June. Had the Messines casualties

¹¹⁴ TNA: WO 95/16 AG GHQ War Diary entries for 12 and 14 May 1917.

¹¹⁵ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary end of month returns for April and May 1917 and *BOH 1917 Vol. 1*, p. 508.

¹¹⁶ *BOH 1917 Vol. 2*, p. 34.

¹¹⁷ J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War 1914-1918* (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), p. 72.

been the total for the month of June, life would have been a lot easier for the Manning staffs both at home and in France but the total soldier casualties for that month were 64,962 which with sick wastage of 38,925 made a total of 103,925 all arms. The Cavalry and Infantry reinforcements despatched to Divisions numbered only 83,134. It was now agreed that six Corps Cavalry regiments could be disbanded and the men posted to the Infantry.¹¹⁸

Planning for the next offensive had started and in mid-July Casualty Reporting procedures were further refined: in future when an Infantry battalion had lost 50 or more men missing in any single day a footnote was to be added to the Daily Casualty list stating the probable number that had been taken prisoner. At the end of each week a separate return was to be submitted showing the total missing by Divisions, plus the numbers included in the totals thought to have been taken prisoner alive.¹¹⁹

The 3rd Battle of Ypres would start on 31 July. Again, training of the assaulting battalions had been fitted in around the need to provide working parties for the preparation of the front. The main attack would be launched by Fifth Army and during the preceding weeks models showing the lie of the ground to be crossed had been constructed in Corps training areas. Lectures and practical demonstrations had been given on how to deal with various possible situations and each Infantry Brigade had thoroughly rehearsed its task over ground on which was shown the outlines of the trenches and strongpoints to be attacked, particular attention being paid to attacks on pillboxes with parties of bombers, supported by Lewis gun fire and rifle grenades. The numbers for the initial objective had been calculated on one man for every three yards of front plus half or a whole platoon for the capture of each group of farm buildings in the intermediate

¹¹⁸ TNA: WO 95/16 AG GHQ War Diary entries for 26 and 28 June 1917.

¹¹⁹ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry dated 14 July 1917.

area. The *Official History* notes that battalions taking part in the offensive had been brought up to strength, averaging 35 officers and 925 ORs, but only some 16 officers and about 660 ORs would go into action with the rest remaining behind in order to provide a nucleus of reinforcements.¹²⁰ In reality, the strengths of many of the battalions were lower: 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th RWF in 38th Division would go into battle with 551, 294, 420 and 456 ORs respectively.¹²¹

At 3.50 on 31 July, the Second and Fifth Armies attacked. The Second Army managed to extend its line in many places but further progress was dependent on the Fifth Army's progress along the high ground of the main Ypres Ridge towards Gheluvelt. Unfortunately, Fifth Army after a good start met with mixed fortunes. On the left and in the centre two German lines had been over-run and the line advanced about 3,000 yards with the capture of the Pilckem Ridge. On the right, II Corps had been less successful in assaulting the Gheluvelt Plateau, although it had captured the German front line and had advanced about 1,000 yards beyond. The estimated casualties reported to AG GHQ by the 14 divisions actively engaged on 31 July were 592 officers and 17,022 ORs and for the 1-3 August amounted to 481 officers plus 12,925 men.¹²² These numbers were fewer than those of 1 July 1916, but the nine leading divisions of Fifth Army had already lost 30 – 60 per cent of their fighting strength.¹²³

Sixteen Marches battalions were involved, although not all would take part in the initial attack. At about 10.00 am 6th Cheshire, in 118th Brigade of 39th Division, moved forward to connect

¹²⁰ *BOH 1917 Vol. 2*, p. 147 and fn 2.

¹²¹ Ward, *Regimental Records of the Royal Welch Fusiliers Vol III 1914-1918*, p.328.

¹²² TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary for 31 July and 1, 2, 3 August 1917.

¹²³ *BOH 1917 Vol. 2*, pp. 178 and 179. The *Official History* divisional losses, which include field artillery and machine gun companies, show 39th Division with the highest loss of men: 3,871.

the left of the main attack with the defensive front along the Steenbeek. They advanced steadily through pouring rain, passed through St Julien and captured the final objective, the German Third Line west of Aviatik Farm, some 1,100 yards north-east of St Julien. Unfortunately, the troops on the right had been held up short of St Julien and the Cheshire's right flank became exposed. The Germans spotted this and attacked, causing many casualties. Fierce fighting ensued and a heavy German barrage then compounded the situation. Eventually the Cheshires were able to withdraw and the whole line fell back to the east bank of the Steenbeek – where yet more casualties were caused by the British guns shelling them during the evening.¹²⁴ During the day 6th Cheshire had lost approximately 500 men, killed, wounded or missing. They were relieved in the evening of 1 August, by which time their strength was 3 officers and 57 ORs but returned to garrison the captured trenches the next day with 3 officers and 121, having been rejoined by returning stragglers. By the time they were relieved on 5 August, the total casualties would be 3 officers and 193 men killed or missing with a further 12 officers and 269 men wounded.¹²⁵

The Cheshires moved back to rest and re-organize, and were re-joined by the men who had been left out of the action. For the Battalion clerks, one of whom was Walter Williamson, it was a period of feverish activity. Williamson's diary gives a clear account of the work necessary to identify casualties after a battalion had been in action. In this instance, the difficulty of obtaining accurate information had been compounded by a shell having taken out the Orderly Room dugout, with the loss of the companies' records, so it was very difficult to sort out details of the casualties.

The Record Office at the base had furnished us already with a fresh roll of the Battalion. Working from this we first found out who were still present with the

¹²⁴ *BOH 1917 Vol. 2*, p. 168 and Crookenden, *Cheshire Regiment in the Great War*, p. 113.

¹²⁵ TNA: WO 95/2590 – 6th Cheshire War Diary 31 July – 5 August 1917.

Battalion. Evidence was then taken from officers and men, of particulars of men known to have been killed. The list still remaining was then gone into again with lists received from Officers in charge of burial parties. Lists were also coming in daily from casualty Clearing Stations. Still a long roll remained of men still unaccounted for. For the time being these had to be reported as 'Missing', until such times as evidence came through that they were officially notified as Prisoners of War. Of those that still remained unaccounted for, and reported as missing, after a statutory period, the casualty lists would contain their names as No Reported Missing July 31st 1917 now presumed Killed in Action.¹²⁶

A total of 114 6th Cheshire men are shown in *SDGW* as having been killed on 31 July. Unfortunately, very few of their Service Records have survived but examination of available information indicates a battalion still predominantly made up of Cheshire soldiers. Over 90 of those killed had enlisted in Cheshire, many in the battalion's home town of Stockport, with a further 13 from neighbouring counties. Over a third (45) had been with the battalion since 1915, 18 of whom had arrived in France with it in November 1914. The loss of so many 'originals' must have hit the battalion hard. Of those arriving after 1915, 19 were shown as already belonging to 6th Cheshire on arrival at the IBD and appear to have been drafted from the Reserve battalion as replacements during the latter part of 1916. Some 16 of the rest had had previous service in other Cheshire battalions, both Regular and TF but it is likely that many of the late 1916 arrivals shown on arrival at the IBD as unallocated Cheshire soldiers were Derbyites like Walter Williamson who had attested in late 1915, was called up in June 1916 and, with the number 44170, had joined 3rd Cheshire. In December 1916 he had been posted to France and allocated to 6th Cheshire at the IBD with the number 15362 before joining the battalion as part of a draft of 283 which joined the battalion on 12 December.¹²⁷ Of the men who died on 1 July, only 8 had regimental numbers in the 15xxx range which were higher, and thus later, than Williamson's; they may not have been part of the same draft but it is safe to

¹²⁶ Doreen Priddey, ed., *A Tommy at Ypres – Walter's War, The Diary and Letters of Walter Williamson* (Stroud: Amberley, 2011), p. 155.

¹²⁷ *Ibid* and TNA: WO 95/95/2590 – 6th Cheshire War Diary entry for 12 December 1916.

assume that they had arrived with the battalion before 1 March 1917 when the new 6-figure numbers were allocated. However, it remains impossible to identify how many might have been conscripts rather than volunteers. Geographically, of the total who died only 18 had not originally enlisted in the Cheshires and 12 of these had already been transferred to the Regiment prior to arriving in France. In late July 1917, therefore, the 1/6th Cheshire remained predominantly a Cheshire battalion, which had been able to replace previous losses from within Regimental resources.¹²⁸

The manpower situation was becoming increasingly serious for the BEF as a whole. Correspondence passed rapidly between London and GHQ as the two AG Branches sought to obtain men. In early August the War Office warned GHQ that the estimated minimum number of Infantry reinforcements to become available for France during the months of August, September and October would be 123,000 British and 34,250 Overseas Contingents.¹²⁹ Although it was noted as a minimum, it was unlikely that there would be many more to replace the anticipated further losses of the offensive. A General Staff Memorandum on 11 August showed the infantry to be 85,000 men deficient, an average of 1,650 men short in each division. On 17 August the situation was made even clearer in a letter from Robertson to GHQ warning that probably less than 8,000 men would arrive as drafts during September.¹³⁰ As a special measure it was decided temporarily to deplete certain arms (unspecified) of the Service at home in order to provide drafts for Infantry units in France. This would free up an additional 20,000 Infantry Reinforcements for August, September and October.¹³¹

¹²⁸ *SDGW* deaths for 6th Cheshire on 31 July 1917 plus Medal Rolls and Service Records on www.ancestry.com

¹²⁹ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry 7 August 1917.

¹³⁰ *BOH 1917 Vol. 2*, p.234 and fn. 2.

¹³¹ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry 22 August: War Office letter 121/Drafts/7509 (AG1).

The increasing need to transfer men between cap-badges had thrown up certain anomalies, and by August it had become necessary for the War Office to issue amended instructions on the procedures for posting and transferring all soldiers.¹³² The extent of the problem may be seen by it being thought necessary to confirm that, irrespective of whether he had a Regular or TF Regimental number, a man serving on a Regular attestation or record of service paper was a Regular soldier whilst a man serving on a TF attestation was a TF soldier. A recruit called up under the MSAs or who enlisted voluntarily was now to be allotted a Regular number irrespective of whether his first posting was to a Regular or a TF unit, unless he was posted to units of corps without any regular unit, such as the Honourable Artillery Company (HAC). For ease of reference a chart was contained in the Instruction (abbreviated for the purpose of this thesis) to make the transfer procedures absolutely clear:

A. Description of Corps in which a Regular soldier is required to serve	Transfer	Posting	Re-numbering
Any Corps (except HAC etc)	He will be transferred to the Corps in which he is required to serve.	He will then be posted to a Regular or TF unit of the new Corps as required.	The Officer i/c Regular Records of the new Corps will allot the soldier a Regular number
B. Description of corps in which a TF Soldier is required to serve on transfer	Transfer	Posting	Re-numbering
A corps containing one or more TF units	He will be transferred to the Corps in which he is required to serve	He will then be posted to a regular or TF unit of the new corps as required.	The Officer i/c TF Records of the new Corps will allot the soldier a TF number from the series assigned to the TF unit or units of the new corps.
A Corps including both Regular and TF soldiers but not containing a TF unit.	He will be transferred to the corps in which he is required to serve	He will then be posted to a unit of the new corps as required	The Officer ic Records of the new corps will allot the soldier a regular number.
A corps not containing a TF unit and not including TF soldiers	He will be enlisted on a regular attestation, posted to a unit of the corps in which he is required to serve and discharged automatically from his former corps under para 144 of TF Regulations.		The Officer ic Records of the new corps will allot the soldier a regular number.

It was also now decided to make a subtle change concerning the provision of Infantry drafts by placing the onus on Reserve units to telegraph the War Office as soon as they anticipated that

¹³² TNA: WO 293/7 ACI 1245 of 11 August 1917. Procedure on Transfer and Posting of Regular and Territorial Force Soldiers. Amended Instructions.

they would have drafts completely ready for despatch. The telegram was to show the numbers available, their state of training and when they would be ready for despatch. The War Office would then inform the Reserve unit for which theatre and regiment (or unit) the draft should be prepared, or whether it was to be allocated on arrival overseas. Lists of drafts available would be sent daily from the War Office to the Commands concerned for calling forward as required.¹³³ It was a simple change but designed to speed up the despatch of appropriate drafts.

Haig held a Manpower Conference on 21 August at which he warned the Army Commanders that British divisions in France would probably be 100,000 men below establishment by the end of October, and emphasized the necessity for 'A' men to be released for the Infantry whenever possible.¹³⁴ The same day he directed that immediate steps should be taken to examine all Directorates and departments and to send to the Base Depots 'all personnel, trained and untrained whose services can be dispensed with temporarily'. Daily reports were to be forwarded of the numbers despatched to Base Depots and a roll of the men sent to HQ 3rd Echelon stating to which Base Depot they had been sent.¹³⁵

AG Branch GHQ continued to seek more men from other sources already in theatre. In early August the disbandment of all except four of the ten Entrenching Battalions was proposed and instructions were subsequently given for the disbandment of all Entrenching Battalions except Number 7, which received Guards and reinforcements from Rouen and Le Havre and Number 10, which received reinforcements from Étaples and Calais.¹³⁶ Later in the month the Infantry

¹³³ TNA: WO 293/7 ACI 1301 of 21 August 1917 Despatch of Infantry Drafts to Units serving with the Expeditionary Forces.

¹³⁴ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry 21 August 1917.

¹³⁵ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry 21 August 1917 – CinC letter C/408/1 to QMG, DGMS, EinC, DGT, GOC LofC Area.

¹³⁶ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entries dated 3, 6, 11, 25 and 27 August 1917.

attached to the RE Tunneling Companies were also withdrawn for use as ordinary reinforcements.¹³⁷ Attention had also returned to the Cavalry. On 4 August it was decided that twelve Corps Cavalry Regiments were to be dismounted and the men thus released withdrawn to the Base for training as Infantry. It was also decided that since only 2000 reinforcements were to be maintained in country for the various branches of the MGC, only 100 were necessary for the Cavalry Brigade MGC thus releasing a further 400 for Infantry reinforcements. Any possible source of manpower was being considered.

The level of training of reinforcements remained problematical. It remained possible for drafts to arrive in France requiring completion of their training but time at the Base for these men was now reduced to five days.¹³⁸ There was a need to get them to units at the front as soon as possible but training capacity was also now needed to turn fit men ‘combed out’ at the Base and on the LofC into Infantry, which seems to have taken about six weeks. In early September the War Office offered to despatch 10,000 ‘B1’ men to be substituted for a similar number of ‘A1’ men so long as the latter could be made available as reinforcements before 1 October. GHQ had obviously responded that the ‘A1’ men thus released would not be available as reinforcements until 1 November since the War Office offer was withdrawn on the grounds that the men could be better used for substitution at home.¹³⁹ Time was also needed to train the Cavalry as Infantry. They had been dismounted in August but it would be October before the 16th Warwickshires would receive a draft ‘for the most part fellows of good physique; mostly cavalrymen from the base drafted into the infantry’.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ TNA: WO 95/26 AG War Diary entry for 21 August 1917.

¹³⁸ TNA: WO 95/26 AG War Diary entry dated 22 August 1917.

¹³⁹ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entries 1 and 11 September 1917.

¹⁴⁰ J. Cooksey & D. Griffiths, *Harry's War* (London: Ebury Press, 2013), p. 264, Wednesday 17 October 1917.

The *Official History* shows the number of casualties for the period 31 July – 28 August as 3,424 officers and 64,586 ORs but for the BEF as a whole the August figures were 5,096 officers and 103,998 ORs. The total Cavalry and Infantry reinforcements dispatched to divisions had been 4,111 officers and 90,844 men. It was a massive shortfall, although the bulk of the reinforcements would have gone to those divisions engaged in the offensive. Some 22 British divisions had been in action on the Fifth Army front, 14 of which had been withdrawn for replenishment but despite the nucleus of officers and men held back from the battle, would not be fit for action again for some weeks.¹⁴¹ A further indication of the seriousness of the manpower situation is visible in the dwindling recruiting figures. Drafts arriving in France during August would have had to have started their training in April. That month the number of ‘A’ men required had been 267,494 but only 55,857 were actually recruited, of whom 18,660 were lads who could not be posted abroad until they turned 19.¹⁴²

Some battalions were more fortunate than others. The 6th Cheshire received several drafts during September, most of whom were returned casualties from their own and other Cheshire battalions. The question of the absorption of these drafts was always a consideration but Walter Williamson felt that:

The CO had a thoughtful way of dealing with these. He would call all men out who had been with the battalion previously, and put them in the companies that they wished for, so that they could get amongst their old friends again. The remainder were then divided amongst the four companies to bring them as near as possible to equal strength.

¹⁴¹ *BOH 1917 Vol. 2*, p. 209 and TNA 95/26 AG War Diary figures for August 1917.

¹⁴² *Statistics of the Military Effort*, p. 369.

The 6th Cheshire War Diary notes that between 9–17 September 33 men rejoined and 216 reinforcements arrived.¹⁴³

Planning was continuing for the next stage of the offensive. The lead had now passed to Second Army and Plumer produced a plan based on a series of steps, each with a strictly limited objective, culminating in gaining the Gheluvelt plateau. On 20 September, Second and Fifth Armies attacked with 11 divisions at the start of the Battle of the Menin Road Ridge. It was a complete success. There were of course casualties: those for the Infantry on the first day were estimated at 450 officers and 13,028 ORs.¹⁴⁴ In 19th Division, 9th RWF was in reserve but was hurried up to hold the line at Hessian Wood, arriving in time to ward off a German counter-attack but coming under heavy shell-fire. Over 20-21st September they suffered 109 casualties: 3 officers wounded, 21 ORs killed (including 7 died of wounds), 73 wounded and 12 missing.¹⁴⁵ Analysis of the 21 men killed shows that one third had not originally enlisted in the RWF, although only two had enlisted outside Western Command. The other two-thirds had all served previously in 9th RWF or other RWF battalions but the effect of the ‘combing out’ activities of earlier in the summer is clearly visible: four men had come from being attached to Tunneling Companies, two had been in 4th (Garrison) RWF and two had been in the 19th Division Cyclist Company. However, the fact that two thirds of those killed had previous RWF service would appear to indicate that even during ‘combing out’ some attention was paid to regimental affiliations.

¹⁴³ Priddey, *A Tommy at Ypres*, p. 171 and TNA: WO 95/2590 – 6th Cheshire War Diary.

¹⁴⁴ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry for 20 September 1917.

¹⁴⁵ TNA: WO 95/2092-1 9th RWF War Diary 20 – 21 September 1917.

The second 'step', the Battle of Polygon Wood, began on 26 September. The main attack, by I ANZAC Corps, was intended to gain the whole of Polygon Wood and the southern part of the village of Zonnebeke. The X Corps was to cover the right and attack with two divisions either side of the Menin Road whilst on the left the Fifth Army was to reach a line between Zonnebeke Station and Kansas Crossroads. Four Marches battalions would be involved, 2nd and 10th RWF, 6th Cheshire and 7th KSLI, although none would take part in the first assault. The 10th RWF and 7th KSLI of 3rd Division had arrived in the Salient about a week earlier whilst 2nd RWF in 33rd Division had been moved south from the coast arriving in the line on 23 September. The newly arrived divisions had trained as much as they could: the 10th RWF had spent 10 days training before they left their previous location, the 3rd Division's Brigades having practised assembling at night on taped positions and by day attacking strong-points with rifle and rifle grenade.¹⁴⁶ What they brought to the attack, however, were fresh troops in units that were up to strength: 7th KSLI's strength was 44 officers and 957 ORs.¹⁴⁷

At 05.50 am on 26 September the Second and Fifth Armies attacked with seven divisions. The estimated Infantry casualties reported during the first day were 161 officers and 4,969 men but by the end of the period 26 September – 3 October the 'all arms' casualty figures were: 681 officer and 14,694 OR.¹⁴⁸ For the four Marches battalions the casualties totaled 1046 ORs, although it is difficult to draw exact comparisons as the War Diary figures for each battalion cover different periods.¹⁴⁹ All the battalions had lost a large proportion of their fighting

¹⁴⁶ Ward, *Regimental Records of the Royal Welch Fusiliers Vol III*, p. 348.

¹⁴⁷ Wood, *King's Shropshire Light Infantry*, p. 243.

¹⁴⁸ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry for 26 September 1917 and *BOH 1917 Vol. 2*, p. 293.

¹⁴⁹ TNA: WO 95/2423-1 War Diary of 2nd RWF for 26/27 September 1917; WO 95/1436-2 War Diary of 10th RWF for 26/29 September; WO 95/2590-3 War Diary of 6th Cheshire casualty figures for 20 – 27 September; Wood, *King's Shropshire Light Infantry*, p. 244.

strength; although 2nd RWF's total casualties look the least they were said to be one-third of the trench strength with which they had gone into action.¹⁵⁰

Battalion	Brigade/Division	In Action	Killed	Wounded	Missing	Total Cas
2 nd RWF	19 th Bde, 33 rd Div	26–27 Sep	31	121	37	189
10 th RWF	76 th Bde, 3 rd Div	26-29 Sep	39	202	38	279
7 th KSLI	8 th Bde, 3 rd Div	26-30 Sep	36	237	27	300
1/6 th Cheshire	118 th Bde, 39 th Div	20-27 Sep	60	167	51	278
			166	727	153	1046

The BEF's OR losses for the whole of September were 101,253 (total casualties all arms 59,201 and sick wastage of 42,052). The number of Cavalry and Infantry reinforcements sent to the Divisions, 116,982, was the highest of the whole year, presumably due to the 'combing out' measures taken in August.¹⁵¹ As ever, however, the availability of specific reinforcements was patchy. The Welsh battalions seem to have had the greatest difficulty in getting speedy reinforcements. It would be 5 November before 2nd RWF received 168 ORs from the Base, whilst 10th RWF received 'penny packets' of 8 ORS during October and a further 179 by 22 November.¹⁵² On 3 October 7th KSLI showed a strength of 670 ORs but drafts amounting to only 53 were received during that month and a further 14 during November.¹⁵³ In contrast, 1/6th Cheshire received its first draft on 29 September and by the end of October 62 men had rejoined and 410 reinforcements had arrived.¹⁵⁴ It is difficult to draw specific conclusions since it is apparent that the War Diary writers did not all have the same priorities: both 2nd and 10th RWF War Diaries are meticulous in mentioning every single officer but ORs appear rather as an afterthought, whilst 6th Cheshire separates out those ORs rejoining the battalion and those newly

¹⁵⁰ Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew*, pp. 404-5.

¹⁵¹ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary figures for September 1917.

¹⁵² TNA: WO 95/2423-1 War Diary of 2nd RWF for 26 September – 5 November 1917; WO 95/1436-2 War Diary of 10th RWF for 26 September – 22 November 1917.

¹⁵³ Wood, *King's Shropshire Light Infantry*, pp. 243-4.

¹⁵⁴ TNA: WO 95/2590-3 6th Cheshire War Diary for September – October 1917.

arriving from the Base. It was not just a problem of numbers, though, as however many reinforcements arrived they could not necessarily replace the loss of experience: of those who had been killed, both 2nd RWF and 7th KSLI had lost Company Sergeant-Majors, 6th Cheshire had lost five Sergeants, whilst 2nd and 10th RWF had each lost four and between the four battalions some 21 Junior NCOs had been lost. Although men would be promoted into their vacancies, it takes time to grow into a more senior rank and the different responsibilities devolving upon it.

The 3rd and 33rd Divisions had taken part in only one attack, Polygon Wood, but would play no further part in 3rd Ypres.¹⁵⁵ The 33rd Division, to 2nd RWF's disgust, was moved south to an 'inactive' Corps, near Messines.¹⁵⁶ The 3rd Division moved to 3rd Army, and arrived in the St Omer area. It would be involved in a subsidiary attack near Bullecourt in November but as far as 7th KSLI was concerned it was a quiet period; the battalion's total casualties for November were 2 officers and 9 ORs wounded and 3 ORs killed.¹⁵⁷ The 39th Division had taken part in three battles, Pilckem Ridge, Menin Road and Polygon Wood, but remained in the area, presumably because sufficient TF reinforcements were available to bring it rapidly back to strength. It did not take part in any further attacks although 6th Cheshire would have an uncomfortable time during the Battle of Poelcappelle supplying working parties at Hell Fire Corner from 5 am to 5 pm for five days for the ANZAC Corps.¹⁵⁸

The success of the 'steps' so far encouraged GHQ to attempt a third: to capture the eastern edge of the Gheluvelt Plateau and the village of Broodseinde with twelve divisions on a frontage of

¹⁵⁵ TNA: WO 158-20 Items 737 and 738 Divisions taking part in attacks 31 July – 12 October 1917, Ypres.

¹⁵⁶ Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew*, pp. 406-8.

¹⁵⁷ Wood, *King's Shropshire Light Infantry*, pp. 244-5.

¹⁵⁸ Crookenden, *Cheshire Regiment in the Great War*, p. 123.

14,000 yards. Three Marches battalions would take part: 1st Cheshire in 5th Division, 1st RWF in 7th Division and 1/2nd Monmouthshire in 29th Division. The attack started on 4 October and the main objectives were rapidly gained, although there were more difficulties on the flanks. The total Second Army losses for 4–8 October were 12,498, of which 10,862 were Infantry, whilst between 4–6 October the four assaulting divisions of the Fifth Army lost 4,283 and the assaulting divisions of X and IX Corps lost 8,114.¹⁵⁹ It was a further successful step, with the line having been advanced about 1,000 yards closer to the Passchendaele Ridge and almost all the Gheluvelt Plateau had now been gained, but the casualties continued to mount: a total of 24,895 for this operation.

The battles of Poelcappelle, and then First Passchendaele, followed in quick succession but there would be little Marches' involvement until Second Passchendaele which started on 26 October and lasted officially until 10 November. By now it had been raining continuously since 4 October and conditions had become atrocious. The Canadian Corps put in the main attack but on the right X Corps made a third attempt to capture the Gheluvelt and Polderhoek spurs. Later in the battle the 1st Division, including 1st SWB, would play their first part in 3rd Ypres, having spent the previous months some miles west of Dunkirk preparing to land on the Belgian coast once the anticipated gains of the Ypres battle had been exploited. There their training had been limited to embarkation and disembarkation, and scaling replicas of the high walls of the German coastal defences. They were brought south in late October and at 5 am on 10 November 1st SWB was to attack north-eastwards beyond Goudberg. They came up against fierce opposition and by early afternoon were forced to fall back from the line they had reached. They

¹⁵⁹ *BOH 1917 Vol. 2*, pp. 311 and 315.

had suffered heavy losses with 372 OR casualties, well over two thirds of those who had gone into action.¹⁶⁰

On 20 November Haig finally decided to close down the Ypres campaign. By then he had been required to despatch five British Divisions to help the Italians, including the 5th and 7th Divisions so 1st Cheshire and 1st RWF were now away from the Western Front. It would be April before they would return. The total all ranks casualties for 3rd Ypres, 31 July–10 November, were 238,313 of which the Infantry casualties amounted to 170,534. Some 33,713 ORs had been killed plus a further 29,036 were missing, many of whom would never be found.¹⁶¹ The overall figures for the BEF in France were much higher: between 1 August and 31 October the total losses were 404,629 (276,674 casualties and 127,955 sick wastage). From their peak in September the number of Infantry and Cavalry reinforcements sent to divisions had dropped in October to 4,899 officers and 78,233 men.¹⁶²

The offensives of 1917 continued, however, with the Battle of Cambrai, 20th November–7th December, which would still further deplete the BEF's manpower. Several Marches battalions took part in the various stages of the battle but for the purpose of this thesis it is not proposed to go into any detail as it would be largely repetitious.

¹⁶⁰ C.T. Atkinson, *History of the South Wales Borderers* (London: Medici, 1931; Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, n.d.), pp. 345-9.

¹⁶¹ *BOH 1917 Vol. 2*, p.360 and fn 2; p.361; p. 364-5.

¹⁶² TNA: WO 95/26 Figures from AG GHQ War Diary for August – December 1917. NB the War Diary does not contain the overall figures for November 1917.

Analysis of Selected Battalions

The selected Battalions, with the exception of 1/4th KSLI, had been in action throughout 1917.¹⁶³ It would be expected by now that analysis of the men who had died would begin to show a lesser ability to reinforce from within the traditional sources for the particular Regiments. As Tables 4.1 and 4.2 show, this is true to an extent but not as much in every case as might have been anticipated.

Enlistment Location	1st Cheshire		9th Cheshire		1st KSLI		6th KSLI	
Regimental Area	70	59%	62	67%	43	53%	104	73%
Elsewhere in No 4 District - England	1				10		10	
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales	14		1		11		7	
Total enlisted in No 4 District	85	72%	63	68%	64	79%	121	85%
Enlisted in No 3 District	9		11		5		8	
• Liverpool/Manchester	8		4		2		6	
Total Enlisted in Western Command	102	86%	78	85%	71	88%	135	94%
Northern Command	9		7		4		3	
Southern Command	3		4		2		1	
• Birmingham	0		1		1			
Eastern	1		2				4	
London District	2				3			
Scotland/Ireland	1							
Overseas	0							
Total Other Commands	16		14		10		8	
Total Deaths	118		92		81		143	

Table 4.1. Enlistment locations of soldiers of selected English Regular battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1917.

The Cheshire's ability to reinforce its Regular battalions with men enlisted within its Regimental area of Cheshire has dropped for 1st Cheshire from 71 per cent in 1916 to 59 per cent but has remained steady for 9th Cheshire at 67 per cent. The KSLI enlistments in their Regimental area have also dropped from the 1916 figures: 1st KSLI is down by 18 per cent to 53% whilst 6th KSLI has fallen 9 per cent to 73%. Turning the figures round, however, in the second half of 1917 about two-thirds of 1st and 9th Cheshire had enlisted within the Regimental

¹⁶³ 1/4th KSLI had been in Far East since February 1915; landed at Le Havre 29 July 1917 and joined 190th Brigade, 63rd Division on 18 August 1917.

area whilst the KSLI varied between just over half for 1st KSLI and almost three-quarters for 6th KSLI. The ability of the two English county regiments to make up their numbers from within No 4 District remains visible with, at the lowest, 9th Cheshire showing 68 percent and, at the highest, 6th KSLI at 85 per cent enlistments in that area. Looking at the figures for enlistments in Western Command as whole, the enlistment figures have fallen since 1916 but still stand at 85 per cent for both Cheshire battalions and 88 and 94 per cent for 1st and 6th KSLI respectively having been enlisted within their Home Command. It is apparent that even by the second half of 1917, the Cheshire and the KSLI Regular battalions are still able to draw to a large extent on men from their traditional recruiting areas.

Enlistment Location	2ndRWF		9th RWF		1st SWB		10th SWB	
Regimental Area	39	<i>28%</i>	11	<i>14%</i>	45	<i>31%</i>	39	<i>45%</i>
Elsewhere in No 4 District - England	20		4		8		6	
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales	26		15		33	<i>23%</i>	7	
Total enlisted in No 4 District	85	<i>61%</i>	30	<i>38%</i>	86	<i>60%</i>	52	<i>60%</i>
Enlisted in No 3 District	16		16	<i>20%</i>	3		2	
• Liverpool/Manchester	13		14	<i>18%</i>	9		4	
Total Enlisted in Western Command	114	<i>81%</i>	60	<i>76%</i>	98	<i>67%</i>	58	<i>67%</i>
Northern Command	6		5		10		1	
Southern Command	3		2		2		5	
• Birmingham	2				3		1	
Eastern	5		7		11	<i>8%</i>	16	<i>18%</i>
London District	8		5		18	<i>13%</i>	6	<i>7%</i>
Scotland/Ireland	2				1			
Overseas								
Total Other Commands	26		19		45		29	
Total Deaths	140		79		143		87	

Table 4.2. Enlistment locations of soldiers of selected Welsh Regular battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1917.

Turning to the RWF and the SWB, the picture is more varied. Only 28 and 14 per cent respectively were enlisted into the 2nd and 9th RWF in their Regimental area. Traditionally, however, their recruits had come from throughout Wales and neighbouring English counties so the figures for No 4 District rise to 61 per cent for 2nd RWF but reach only 38 per cent for 9th RWF. The influence of Lancashire and particularly Liverpool and Manchester can be seen,

however, contained within the figures of 81 per cent and 76 per cent enlistments in Western Command. The Birmingham influence on 2nd RWF has virtually disappeared now with only two men out of 140 having enlisted in that city. The SWB show greater numbers than the RWF as having enlisted in the Regimental area, with an increase of 5 per cent over 1916 for 1st SWB although there is a serious drop of 45 per cent for 10th SWB. For both SWB battalions 60 per cent had enlisted in No 4 area, rising to 67 per cent for both from Western Command.

Again, a growing spread of birth locations across all sample battalions is visible in Tables 4.3. and 4.4.

Birth location	1st Cheshire		9th Cheshire		1st KSLI		6th KSLI	
Regimental Area	47	40%	43	47%	39	48%	80	56%
Elsewhere in No 4 District – England	4				10		10	
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales	5		2		2		6	
Total born in No 4 District	56	47%	45	49%	51	63%	96	67%
Born in No 3 District	17		15		6		8	
• Liverpool/Manchester	8		3		0		5	
Total Born in Western Command	81	67%	63	68%	57	70%	109	76%
Northern Command	15		11		4		11	
Southern Command	2		6		4		5	
• Birmingham	0		1		1		1	
Eastern	2		1		3		6	
London District	4		1		3		1	
Scotland/Ireland	1		1		2			
Overseas	0							
Total Other Commands	24		21		17		24	
Location of Birth Unknown	13		8		7		10	
Total Deaths	118		92		81		143	

Table 4.3. Birth locations of soldiers of selected English Regular battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1917.

For the English battalions, the numbers of those born within the respective Regimental areas has fallen slightly. Those born in Cheshire has dropped but only by four and five per cent respectively for the 1st and 9th battalions. For 1st KSLI, the number of those born in Shropshire, Herefordshire or Radnorshire has fallen by just 2 per cent, although the drop for 6th KSLI is 12 per cent. For all four battalions, however, the numbers of those born within Western Command remains above two thirds of the whole.

For the Welsh battalions, less than a quarter of those who had died during the period were born in the Regimental areas of their respective battalions. Even when the numbers of those born in Wales are added, the percentages for all battalions are still well below 50 per cent. Overall, they are lower, but not markedly so, than the 1916 figures. Conversely, the figures for those born in Western Command are slightly higher for 2nd RWF and within 1 per cent for 9th RWF and 1st SWB. Only 10th SWB shows a fall of 10 per cent having been born within Western Command; in part, however, this may be qualified by the men born across the Welsh border in Gloucestershire and Somerset, and thus shown against Southern Command, who had moved to the South Wales coalfields for work.

Birth location	2ndRWF		9th RWF		1st SWB		10th SWB	
Regimental Area	30	21%	12	15%	26	18%	21	24%
Elsewhere in No 4 District – England	21		4		11		10	
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales	24		10		32	22%	10	
Total born in No 4 District	75	54%	26	33%	69	48%	41	47%
Born in No 3 District	17		13	16%	6		3	
• Liverpool/Manchester	6		10	13%	7		2	
Total Born in Western Command	98	70%	49	62%	82	57%	46	53%
Northern Command	12		9		11		2	
Southern Command	7		3		9		17	
• Birmingham					3		1	
Eastern	6		3		8		13	
London District	6		5		18		4	
Scotland/Ireland	2		3		3			
Overseas			1					
Total Other Commands	33		24		52		37	
Location of Birth Unknown	9		6		9		4	
Total Deaths	140		79		143		87	

Table 4.4. Birth locations of soldiers of selected Welsh Regular battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1917.

The figures for enlistments in the TF battalions (see Table 4.5 below) reflect even greater continuing homogeneity, although for 1/5th Cheshire, 1/4th RWF and 1/4th KSLI, the totals are small and consequently skew their percentages. It is clear from the figures for 1/6th Cheshire and 1/2nd Monmouthshire that they were continuing to be able to replace largely from within

their own Regimental areas. When enlistments in No 4 Area are considered 80 per cent of 1/6th Cheshire and 86 per cent of 1/2nd Monmouthshire had enlisted there, rising to 89 per cent and 99 per cent respectively for Western Command. It seems likely that these higher figures reflect both the number of original TF HS soldiers that had become available for posting overseas as a result of the 1916 MSAs and also the number of Derby men who had enlisted in the TF.

Enlistment Location	1/5th Cheshire		1/6th Cheshire		1/4th KSLI¹⁶⁴		1/4th RWF		1/2nd Monmouths	
Regimental Area	7	88%	188	77%	36	97%	9	50%	59	66%
Elsewhere in No 4 District - England			6		1		1		8	
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales							4		11	
Total enlisted in No 4 District	7	88%	194	80%	37	100%	14	78%	78	86%
Enlisted in No 3 District			15				2		6	
• Liverpool/Manchester	1		9						4	
Total Enlisted in Western Command	8	100%	218	89%	37	100%	16	89%	88	99%
Northern Command			15				1			
Southern Command			1						1	
• Birmingham			1							
Eastern			3				1			
London District			4							
Scotland/Ireland			2							
Overseas										
Total Other Commands			26				2		1	
Total Deaths	8		244		37		18		89	

Table 4.5. Enlistment locations of soldiers of selected TF battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1917.

¹⁶⁴ 1/4th KSLI had been in Far East since February 1915; landed at Le Havre 29 July 1917 and joined 190th Brigade, 63rd Division on 18 August 1917.

Birth location	1/5 th Cheshire		1/6 th Cheshire		1/4 th KSLI		1/4 th RWF		1/2 nd Monmouths	
Regimental Area	6	75%	121	50%	28	76%	4	22%	31	35%
Elsewhere in No 4 District – England			9						11	
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales			2		3		1		14	
Total born in No 4 District	6		132	54%	31	84%	5	28%	56	63%
Born in No 3 District	1		22				1		4	
• Liverpool/Manchester			10				1		3	
Total Born in Western Command	7	88%	164	67%	31	84%	7	39%	63	71%
Northern Command	1		22				1		1	
Southern Command			2		2				6	
• Birmingham										
Eastern			9				1		2	
London District			3		3				1	
Scotland/Ireland			4							
Overseas			1							
Total Other Commands	1		41		5		2		10	
Location of Birth Unknown			39		1		9		16	
Total Deaths	8		244		37		18		89	

Table 4.6. Birth locations of soldiers of selected TF battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1917.

The TF birth locations (Table 4.6. above) appear to show an ever-widening gap between those of the English and the Welsh, particularly 1/4th RWF, battalions. As with enlistments, however, the small number of deaths skew the percentages.

Overall, the figures in the Tables show that for the Regular battalions of the English and Welsh Marches the majority of those who had died had enlisted in Western Command. For the TF, the figures are even higher, presumably since many of their numbers had not become available for use as reinforcements until late 1916. Overall, it appears that the pre-war plans for the provision of reinforcements from local and Command areas were still proving effective to a greater extent, at least for the Marches Regiments, than might have been anticipated by this stage in the war.

Developments at Home later in 1917

Under normal circumstances the lead time from enlistment to arrival at a frontline unit for an adult recruit was some four months, so it seems appropriate here to return to events concerning training and recruiting during the second half of 1917.

Changes to Young Soldiers Training

In the continuing search for re-deployable manpower it was soon realized that Graduated battalions could be used for Home Defence. With five companies each they could send a company abroad every two months and still have four companies containing youths at various stages of training.¹⁶⁵ From July onwards Graduated battalions would gradually replace Second Line and HS Garrison battalions in the 71st, 72nd and 73rd home-service Divisions.¹⁶⁶ The battalions replaced were thus freed up to provide replacements or substitutes for other men released for service overseas.

Although serving their purpose, the TR in general remained unpopular in an Army used to Regimental links for the Infantry.¹⁶⁷ For adult Infantry recruits who spent only fourteen weeks in training it was a lesser problem but for the youths who would spend almost a year in the system some change was deemed necessary. In late October a further nine YS and eighteen

¹⁶⁵ Robertson, *From Private to Field-Marshal*, p. 305.

¹⁶⁶ In mid-July, 4th TRB left 1st TR Brigade for Ipswich becoming 258th (Graduated) Battalion in 215th Brigade, 72nd Division. In mid-August all but one of 1st TR Brigade's battalions were re-designated: 2nd and 5th became YS battalions and 3rd and a new 4th became Graduated battalions. The subsequent departure of 3rd TRB to Surrey and 4th TRB to Stockton on Tees as the 276th and 273rd (Graduated) Infantry Battalions respectively and the arrival of 12th and 13th YS battalions meant that by October the 1st TR Brigade would become solely a YS Brigade.

¹⁶⁷H.E.L. Mellersh, *Schoolboy into War* (London: William Kimber, 1978), p. 125. Harold Mellersh found his posting to 5th TRB during September 1917: 'entirely impersonal. The men did not know each other nor have anything in common. ... In belonging to the 5th TRB one belonged to nothing. ... And the conscripts did not want to be there any more than I did ...'. It is not clear how much this view was due to Mellersh's own antipathy to 'another home-service job' or to misplaced hindsight: at that time 5th TRB was a YS battalion taking recruits aged 18 years 1 month.¹⁶⁷ He may simply have been echoing the prevailing view of the TRBs.

Graduated were added to the existing fourteen YS and twenty-eight Graduated battalions and allotted to twenty-three Infantry Regiments. The Graduated battalions became the 51st and 52nd battalions of each regiment with the YS as the 53rd battalions. Scant regard was paid to the provenance of the original Reserve battalions, although usually the new battalions had originated in the same recruiting District; nine, however, changed recruiting districts but remained within the same command. The new 51st Cheshire had started life as 13th SWB, both in District 4, but the 225th Graduated Battalion, formerly 50th TRB and previously 14th (Reserve) Cheshire, would become 51st Manchester thus moving from District 4 to District 3 albeit remaining within Western Command.

Changes to the Recruiting Organization

The major changes in late 1917 were to the recruiting organization. It had been agreed in August that responsibility for recruiting was to pass to the MNS but this would take some time to effect. The Solicitor General had initially advised that the transfer of any of the Army Council's statutory powers for recruiting would require legislative action but, in the interests of speed, the Council decided that in the meantime an ACI of limited duration should authorise the DGNS to act on its behalf in connection with recruiting.¹⁶⁸ Although it seems to have remained unclear whether legislation would be needed, the War Cabinet agreed on 8 October that one of the functions of the DGNS should be 'to obtain for the Army, Navy and Air Service such men as could be withdrawn from civilian life without detriment to the maintenance of essential public services'.¹⁶⁹ The Army Council now agreed the transfer of its statutory powers

¹⁶⁸ TNA: WO 163/22 Minutes of Army Council Meeting of 27 September 1917 and WO 293/7 ACI 1483 of 28 September 1917: Ministry of National Service and Recruiting. ACI to remain in effect until 31 October 1917.

¹⁶⁹ TNA: CAB 24/4/10 Minutes of War Cabinet Meeting No 246 of 8 October 1917 and Appendix I.

for recruiting to the MNS and concluded a formal agreement with the MNS as to future responsibilities.¹⁷⁰ The need for legislative action had been circumvented.

On 1 November the MNS assumed responsibility for 'recruiting, enlistment, the call up of men of the Reserve Forces individually and otherwise in relation to the provision of men for the Army'.¹⁷¹ At midnight on 31 October the Army's recruiting organization had been subsumed into a new regionally based one, with the former Regimental Area Commanders becoming 'Assistant Directors of Recruiting' responsible to the appropriate Regional Director of Recruiting for the 'efficient working and organization of their Areas'. There were to be ten Regions, which differed slightly from the Home Commands. The Regimental Areas of the Cheshire and the South Lancashire Regiments were now in North Western Region for recruiting, the Shropshire and Herefordshire area became part of the West Midlands whilst Wales now formed a region on its own. The number of recruits required monthly for Military Service would be allotted proportionately among the regions.¹⁷²

The effect of these changes, however, was not as fundamental for the Army as might appear, since the Military authorities retained the right of final approval and posting of recruits. The MNS Recruiting Areas were the old Regimental Areas and once a recruit had been enlisted he was sent to the appropriate Infantry Depot for the Area, now known as the 'Reception Depot', for posting in accordance with the continuing monthly ACIs. It remained possible for men to volunteer, either before being sent a calling up notice or through what was called 'Direct' enlistment, when an individual was not liable, usually through age, under the MSAs. Such

¹⁷⁰ TNA: WO 163/22 Minutes of Army Council Meetings No 232 of 11 October and No 233 of 22 October.

¹⁷¹ TNA: NATS 1/859 Press release of 1 November 1917.

¹⁷² IWM: *Ministry of National Service Instructions Issued During November and December 1917, Numbers 1-47 (inclusive) of 1917* (London: HMSO, 1919).

enlistments might be conditional on the man being posted to the corps of his choice, so long as he was not below the physical or technical standard required. If he could not meet the standards required, and declined to be posted to any other corps, he could return to civilian life. In the case of the Infantry, irrespective of whether he was a volunteer or not, full consideration was to be given to the individual's preference provided he was of the right medical category: 'if a man over 18 years and physically suited desires to be posted to a particular infantry regiment with good reason, his request should be granted by the Posting Officer, and no other authority is necessary'.¹⁷³

Later in November a Recruit Distribution Battalion was created for each Command. The main function of these units was to post or 'otherwise dispose of' all 'B(2)' and 'B(3)' recruits received. Any men thought likely be upgraded to 'A' or 'B1' after a three month course of physical training were to be retained until the end of this period and then posted according to the result of the course.¹⁷⁴

In order to aid administration under the new regime, the medical categories had been simplified by the abolition of the distinction between 'B' and 'C' with effect from 1 November.¹⁷⁵ Those in categories lower than 'A' who were likely to be sent overseas would in future be selected on the basis of a special medical examination at the time they were required to proceed abroad. There seem to have been a few disparities in the results of the medical boards, however, as in

¹⁷³ TNA: WO 293/7 ACI 1621 of 29 October: Arrangements for posting to the Army men who present themselves for service during the month of November 1917 and ACI 1731 of 28 November 1917: Arrangements for Posting to the Army men accepted for service during the month of December 1917.

¹⁷⁴ TNA: WO 293/7 ACI 1702 of 20 November 1917: Organization of Recruit Distribution Battalions, Training Reserve, for the reception and disposal of Category 'B(2)' and 'B(3)' Recruits.

¹⁷⁵ TNA: WO 293/7 ACI 1606 of 25 October 1917: Alteration of Classification of Men by Categories. Details of the categories are at Appendix 4.

December it was dictated that the Medical Officer inspecting every draft was to ‘enter in his own handwriting against each man’s name on the nominal roll of the draft, his remarks as to the man’s fitness for service, and [was to] sign the roll’.¹⁷⁶

Conclusions

Throughout 1917 manpower had been the predominant question. There seems little evidence that men were being deliberately withheld since early in the year it appears to have been more of a systemic problem with the Government simply unable rather than unwilling to force the Departments of State to release manpower. Although a step towards universal compulsion appeared to have been taken at the end of 1916, it was recoiled from and even the introduction of National Service was based firmly on the voluntary principle. It would not be until later in the year with the arrival of Geddes, with his understanding of national manpower issues, as DGNS that any real co-ordination of the nation’s manpower would become possible.

Within the Army, the shortage of recruits had forced greater attention to be focussed on both the allocation of men to appropriate parts of the Army with the monthly posting ACIs and the ‘combing out’, at home and overseas, of men who were fit to fight. Lawson’s evidence that there were ‘A’ men not being used to best advantage in France had prompted positive action and the fruits of the efforts of GHQ may be seen in the replacements being provided during 3rd Ypres. The revisiting of the medical categories throughout the year had also enabled better use of manpower, particularly in the newly created Labour Corps. The arrival of women to serve with the Army, although not in as many numbers as hoped for, had also played a part in freeing up fit men to fight.

¹⁷⁶ TNA: WO 293/7 ACI 1829 of 16 December 1917: Regulations for ensuring fitness of men sent to join Expeditionary Forces, and fixing responsibility for same.

Infantry recruit training had been streamlined for the youngest recruits with the introduction of new units. Since late 1914, comments had been made on how poorly trained new drafts were and there seems little evidence that the 1917 drafts were really any less well-prepared than before.

The procedures for reporting casualties and obtaining replacements remained the ones that had been tried and tested on the Somme and earlier. Although difficulties in obtaining replacements were undoubtedly being encountered by some Regiments, analysis of the deaths suffered by selected Marches battalions shows that the majority of men had been enlisted in the traditional recruiting areas of the battalions concerned. Despite gloomy predictions to the contrary it still remained possible for a man to choose to serve in his local regiment and there continued to be mention of the value of *esprit de corps*.

Chapter 5

1918: Just Enough

After a brief review of the end of 1917, this chapter has been divided into three sections: January – April, May – July and the ‘Advance to Victory’. In the first two sections, events at home and on the Western Front are considered in tandem with mention of the German offensives and the involvement of some of the Marches battalions in them. The third section intentionally concentrates on the composition of units in the remaining months of the war. Mention of the manpower crises of 1917-18 is unavoidable but political aspects have been kept as far as possible to a minimum in order to remain within the scope of this thesis.

Situation at the end of 1917

At the end of 1917 Haig required sufficient fully trained men to return the BEF to full strength as soon as possible, whilst in the longer term new recruits would be needed for drafting later in 1918 and potentially into 1919. The passing of responsibility for recruiting from the military to the MNS in November did not of itself enable the raising of greater numbers of men. Some 36,543 had been recruited in October, 23,372 of whom would be old enough and sufficiently trained to be drafted in about February, but by December the overall figure had fallen to 24,923.¹ The availability of men in the country as a whole was rapidly dwindling.

¹ War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War (SME)* (London: War Office, 1922; Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 1999) pp. 364, 370.

In early November, the AG's Branch in London informed Haig of a likely deficit of 259,000 against his anticipated requirement of 857,000 Infantry for the following year.² It was expected that at least 140,000 men would be sent to France by 1 April 1918, which would be augmented by an estimated 15,000 per month returning to duty from hospitals in France, making a total of 215,000 by that date. Every effort would be made to increase these figures by cutting out non-essential men at Home, but the letter ended on a slightly confrontational note: 'a process which must be continued with vigour throughout the Force under your Command'.³ Haig's response inevitably reminded the Army Council of 'the very serious situation which is likely to arise in regard to manpower' in the British units in France. By 31 March the BEF's Infantry would be approximately 40 per cent below establishment, which would not only paralyze the BEF's offensive power but also reduce the amount of line that could be held. Unless more men could be made available it would be necessary to break up 15 divisions in order to bring all infantry battalions up to establishment in just 31 divisions. Urgent decisions were needed so that plans for holding the line and the distribution of troops over the winter could be made.⁴

The Army Council was only too aware of the situation and was conducting its own battles with the Government. On 15 November, Geddes had produced a Memorandum reviewing the state of the nation's manpower and seeking decisions from the War Cabinet on the priorities to be given to the various demands.⁵ Amongst these was a demand for 600,000 Category 'A' recruits for the Army between December 1917 and June 1918, plus 320,000 men of lower categories. At the same time the Navy would require 90,000 but industries such as munitions, ship-building

² *BOH 1918 Vol. I*, Appendix 3 War Office letter from AG2 (signed Corcoran) to Haig dated 3 Nov 17. (Extract at Appendix 6).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *BOH 1918 Vol. I*, Appendix 4 Letter from Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig to the War Office dated 24 November 1917.

⁵ TNA: CAB 24/4/24 G.174 Problem of the Maintenance of the Armed Forces dated 15 November 1917.

and agriculture also required men. Having considered all available facts and statistics, Geddes had concluded that it would be impossible to meet in full the demands of the Navy and Army under the existing legislation. It was for Cabinet to decide but Geddes proposed that priority for manpower should be given to the Navy, with only a proportion, 200,000, of the Army's demand being met. He had concluded that 150,000 Category 'A' men could be recruited from men of military age still in civil life but after meeting the Navy's demand for 90,000 only 60,000 would be available for the Army, leaving a deficit of 140,000 on the already reduced proportion that had been suggested. Legislation would be necessary if any more men were to be obtained. To that end Geddes made the following proposals:

- Lowering the age at which youths might be sent overseas. Legislation was not strictly necessary for this, as the MSA 2 (1916) had simply stated that 'steps shall be taken to prevent as far as possible the sending of men abroad before they attain the age of 19', but was probably advisable.
- Lowering the Military Age to 17.
- Raising the Military Age to 45, with further power to raise it to 50 by Order in Council.
- Abolishing the period of grace automatically given when exemptions expired or were withdrawn.
- Limiting the power of tribunals.
- Cancelling Occupational exemptions.
- Extending Compulsory Service to Ireland.

Geddes' detailed analysis of the need for additional labour for both civil industries and military service placed action firmly in the War Cabinet's domain; his Memorandum informed their future discussions.

The War Cabinet's immediate reaction to Geddes' paper on 3 December was that the proposed legislation was impossible. Further discussions highlighted the gravity of the manpower situation, however, and on 6 December it was proposed that a Cabinet Committee be created to produce a scheme that the Government could present to Parliament.⁶ It was subsequently decided that Lloyd George would himself chair the Manpower Committee, which would contain four other Cabinet members.⁷ The gravity of the situation was succinctly defined by its Secretary, Maurice Hankey:

The economic crisis instead of being a danger to be guarded against, is actually present; and, second: that the seriousness of the military man-power crisis is not merely that we shall not smash the enemy if the men are not forthcoming, but that the enemy may smash us. The problem that confronts the Committee, therefore, is to avert a military catastrophe without plunging us into an economic catastrophe equally fatal to the cause of the Allies.⁸

The Manpower Committee (MPC) would take evidence from the various Government departments. A measure of Geddes' importance, however, is that he attended all the MPC's main meetings in his capacity as DGNS. Despite his previous military role as Director of Recruiting, he was now seen as an expert advisor on manpower as a whole and played a key part in providing information and analysis. In addition to the recommended legislative changes, Geddes also now proposed the revision of the Schedule of Protected Employments. This would require negotiations with the Trades Unions but the urgency of the situation was such that on 20 December Lloyd George alerted Parliament to the impending revisions.

⁶ TNA: CAB 23/4 War Cabinet Meetings WC 289 of 3 December 1917 and 293 of 6 December 1917.

⁷ The other members were Lord Curzon, Leader of the House of Lords and member of the War Policy Committee; George Barnes, Minister of Pensions; Sir Edward Carson, Minister Without Portfolio; and General Smuts, Cabinet Member and Member of the War Policy Committee.

⁸ TNA: CAB 27/14 Manpower Committee (MPC) 2 Note by Secretary 8 December 1917.

There remained the question of immediate reinforcements for France from those already in the Army. In December 1917 some 60,534 reinforcements, both Cavalry and Infantry, were despatched to divisions but the overall all Arms losses in the BEF for that month had been 102,109 (47,581 casualties and 54,528 sick).⁹ As far as GHQ was concerned, the men they needed were in England and should be released immediately. There were indeed trained soldiers at Home but it proved hard to identify many that could be released under normal circumstances. Geddes had identified 490,000 men in categories A1, A2 and A4 who would at some point be available for drafting plus a further 90,000 men who were for various reasons unavailable.¹⁰ A minute submitted by Lord Derby to the War Cabinet on 24 November 1917 explained that the figure of over 500,000 'A' men at Home included men in units preparing for overseas, draft-finding units, Home Service men and those in depots and administrative units.¹¹ They represented only about a third of the whole, however, as a note by Robertson analyzing the numbers retained for Home Defence indicated that there were in fact 1,420,000 men on the strength of the Army at home, of whom only 410,000 were Home Defence troops held against an establishment previously authorized by the War Cabinet.¹² The balance was made up by men employed by different War Office departments: some 80,000 belonged to the RFC; close to 50,000 were in the Medical Corps; some 90,000 belonged to the Army Service Corps (ASC); others to the Army Ordnance Corps (AOC) and the Army Pay Corps (APC); and there were nearly 200,000 employed by the Labour Corps. Some 46,000 soldiers were also employed under the Ministry of Munitions, in agriculture, and on dock and transport work. Finally, there

⁹ TNA: WO 95.26 AG GHQ War Diary figures for December 1917.

¹⁰ TNA: CAB 24/4/24 G. 174 Problem of the Maintenance of the Armed Forces dated 15 November 1917. The numbers were broken down as follows: A1: 192,000 who should be immediately available; A2: 124,000 recruits now in training who should be available within three or four months; and A4: 174,000 youths in training who would be available at some point before 30 September 1918. Included within the 490,000, however, were some 113,000 men engaged variously in munitions, skilled trades, dock and transport battalions and Home Service Units.

¹¹ TNA: CAB/24/33 Note on Recruiting for the Army submitted to the War Cabinet by the Secretary of State for War on 24 November 1917.

¹² TNA: CAB/24/38 Troops Required for Home Defence dated 3 January 1918.

could be between 3-400,000 sick and wounded at home. After deducting these figures from the whole, less than a third were potential drafts for overseas service once they were sufficiently trained and old enough to go to the front.¹³

Lack of manpower was not the only reason that the BEF's plans for the Western Front in 1918 were on hold: in early November the British, French and Italian Prime Ministers had agreed to form a Supreme War Council, to be composed of the Prime Minister and a Member of the Government of each of the countries whose Armies were fighting on the Western Front. Its overall aim was the creation of:

a central body charged with the duty of continuously surveying the field of operations as a whole and, by the light of information derived from all fronts and from all Governments and Staffs, of co-ordinating the plans prepared by the different General Staffs, and, if necessary, of making proposals of their own for the better conduct of the War.¹⁴

The Council would be based at Versailles where its members would be assisted by 'Permanent Military Representatives' acting as technical military advisers without executive functions. At the second meeting in early December the Military Representatives were instructed to examine the military situation and make recommendations on future plans of operations. This was way too late and meant that there could be no decisions on future military policy for the foreseeable future. Consequently, on 7 December Haig advised his Army Commanders that it would be necessary to adopt a defensive posture for the next few months. The withdrawal of Russia from the war meant that Germany could move some 30 more divisions to the Western Front if she wished.¹⁵ The implication was that Germany could and probably would mount an offensive in the spring.

¹³ Sir W. Robertson, *From Private to Field-Marshal* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), pp. 342-3.

¹⁴ HC Deb 14 November 1917 vol 99 cc389-91 Statement by the Prime Minister.

¹⁵ G. Sheffield & J. Bourne, *Douglas Haig, War Diaries and Letters* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2005), p. 358.

Over the preceding two years the BEF had concentrated on offensives. If the anticipated German offensive was to be withstood, then ‘training in defence, as well as the material preparations which defence involved’ were urgently required.¹⁶ Detailed instructions on defensive measures were issued by GHQ on 14 December.¹⁷ Preparations were initiated immediately and progressed as quickly as labour, weather and other conditions allowed. They were conducted, however, against what must have been a frustrating set of unknowns for GHQ: the future availability of manpower for the Army, the role and decisions of the Supreme War Council, the organization of divisions in France and the continuing French requests for the British to take over more of the line.

January – April 1918

The MPC’s draft report was circulated at the beginning of January. It was discussed by the War Cabinet on 9 January, when the accuracy of some figures was queried, and then again on 22 January when a subsidiary question was raised relating to labour for the shipyards.¹⁸ In fact the report was never fully signed off but became effectively a working document with decisions being taken on its initial findings and further negotiations being conducted with the Trades Unions.¹⁹

The draft’s underlying conclusions were that the staying power of the Allies must be safeguarded until such time as American forces had arrived in sufficient numbers to restore the

¹⁶ *BOH 1918 Vol. 1*, p. 39.

¹⁷ *BOH 1918 Vol. 1*, Appendix 6.

¹⁸ TNA: CAB 23/5/11 Minutes of 319th Meeting of War Cabinet on 9 January 1918 and CAB 23/5/30 338th War Cabinet Meeting of 22 January 1918.

¹⁹ TNA: CAB 24/4/36 Final Revise of Draft Report of the Cabinet Committee on Manpower (Paper G.185) dated 2 April 1918.

balance of numbers on the Western Front in the Allies favour and that the maintenance of that staying power involved not only that of the armies but of the Allied nations as a whole. Accordingly, the MPC had ‘carefully considered and balanced the requirements of the fighting forces and of the nation and of the Allies’ in recommending priorities for the distribution of the nation’s manpower:

1. The fighting personnel requirements of the Royal Navy and the Air Services.
2. Shipbuilding, and then the construction of aeroplanes and tanks.
3. Food production, timber felling and the provision of food storage accommodation.²⁰

To the dismay of the Army Council, the priority to be given to manpower for the Army was not specifically stated. Instead there was a rather optimistic exhortation that ‘every effort should be made to avoid wastage of manpower by the adoption of suitable strategy and tactics, and by the development of fortifications’ plus recommendations concerning the redistribution of existing Army manpower, including reduction in the number of battalions per division and a review the force allocated to Home Defence. Macready was told by ‘a very despondent Auckland Geddes’ that, even if the Cabinet’s proposals were carried out without being weakened by the Trades Unions or Parliament, he did not expect to be able to give the Army ‘more than 150,000 A men and 100,000 lower category men’ up to 31 December 1918.²¹

The MPC had considered Geddes’ proposed legislation with mixed results. It was agreed that legislation should be introduced as soon as possible to remove the period of grace automatically added to exemptions, and also enabling the DGNS to cancel occupational exemptions, which was required to complement the proposed revision of the Schedule of Protected Occupations.

²⁰ *Ibid* pp. 27-8.

²¹ General Sir N. Macready, *Annals of an Active Life* (London: Hutchinson, n.d.), pp. 283-4.

The MPC had not agreed, however, with Geddes' proposed extensions to the age limits for military service, nor with extending compulsory military service to Ireland.

On 14 January a two-clause Military Service Bill was introduced in the Commons.²² Its intention was to create 'an easily understood system of clear cuts by age, by occupation'. There was some opposition from the Labour Party but the Government decided to press ahead in view of the urgency of the manpower situation and the new Act received Royal Assent on 6 February. A revised Schedule of Protected Occupations, which the new Military Service (No 1) Act 1918 was designed to complement, had already been issued on 1 February.²³ Recruiting increased slightly due to the revised Schedule, with, for example, the number of munition workers released rising from 3,700 in the third week of March to 9,000 in the second week of April.²⁴ Consequently, no immediate use was made of the power to withdraw exemptions. Adult men recruited from February onwards would, however, not be trained and ready for drafting until mid-June at the earliest.

Reduction in Size of Divisions

Of more immediate impact on the BEF was the long-anticipated re-organization of divisions. It had been under consideration since early 1917 when the Cabinet had asked the War Office to consider the possibility of reducing the number of battalions in a division.²⁵ The Army Council had responded that no such reorganization should be made until it had become clearly impossible 'to obtain the number of men required to maintain divisions at their present

²² Hansard HC Debate 14 January 1918 vol 101 cc 58-134.

²³ TNA: MH 47/142/3 M.M. 130 (Revised) Schedule of Protected Occupations for men employed on Admiralty, War Office or Munitions Work or in Railway Workshops.

²⁴ *History of the Ministry of Munitions VI Part 2* (London: HMSO, 1922), pp. 49-50 cited in K. Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914-18* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 192.

²⁵ TNA: CAB 23/1/55 Minutes of 55th Meeting of War Cabinet on 5 February 1917.

establishment'.²⁶ That moment had now arrived and the MPC firmly recommended reduction of the number of battalions in British divisions on the Western front from twelve to nine.

GHQ had for some months anticipated that a future lack of reinforcements would make it necessary to organize down to the numbers of men available. In both August and November the GS Staff had analysed alternative organizational permutations, concentrating in the end on two options: breaking up divisions or reducing the number of battalions per division.²⁷ The first option would create least dislocation, both organizationally and tactically, reduce the number of trained commanders and staffs to be found and could also 'afford an opportunity of breaking up certain divisions who do not, perhaps, quite pull their weight.' There would, however, be strong political resistance to this option in view of the likely reaction of the French since a reduced number of divisions would affect the length of the British front line. The alternative option of reducing the number of battalions would mean far more widespread dislocation, the revision of current and familiar tactical doctrine, the reorganization of all supporting arms within divisions and would also not help address the shortage of trained staff officers. Against these aspects was the knowledge that both France and Germany had reduced the number of battalions in their divisions and it was recognized that concentrations were easier with larger numbers of small formations than with smaller number of large ones. It was also admitted that whilst there were

sentimental objections to reducing the number of battalions and any such decrease would be unpopular, at any rate to start with. Experience shows, however, that the feeling soon disappears and all amalgamations carried out heretofore have been a success.²⁸

²⁶ TNA: CAB 24/19/97 and WO 163/22 Army Council Memorandum of 10 February 1917 cited in *Precis* No 855 prepared for Army Council 204th Meeting of 6 March 1917.

²⁷ TNA: WO 158/20 GHQ Item 139: Notes dated 11 August 1917 and G.S Note Reduction of number of divisions or Reduction of number of battalions in each division dated 28 November 1917.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Logically, it would have been preferable to break up divisions but the decision was in the end to be political. In their draft report the MPC followed the French and German examples and recommended reducing the number of battalions.

The Army Council appears to have decided to forestall a direct order from Cabinet and on 5 January warned GHQ that divisions in France were to be re-organized. The order was subsequently confirmed by War Office letter on 10 January.²⁹ Divisions were to be reduced in strength from twelve to nine battalions, plus a pioneer battalion, and a list of 145 battalions was sent to GHQ from which those to be reduced were to be chosen. Care was to be taken 'to break up battalions with the shortest service to their credit, and to preserve as far as possible Regular battalions, first line Territorial battalions, and the earlier units of the New Army'.³⁰

It took an enormous amount of hurried planning but GHQ's plans were notified to the War Office by 18 January. Rather than leave some divisions untouched it was decided to reduce all British divisions in France, starting on 29 January and completing by 15 February.³¹ On 23 January GHQ issued Corps with details of the organizational changes required. These were then amplified by AG GHQ with instructions concerning disposal of personnel of battalions selected for disbandment or amalgamation: they were to be posted to other battalions of their own Regiment or withdrawn to a general pool of reinforcements for subsequent posting. As far as possible parties posted to new units were to be composed of men who had served in the same

²⁹ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War diary entry of 5 January 1918. Confirmation was subsequently received in War Office letter 121/Drafts/8579 dated 10 January 1918.

³⁰ Macready, *Annals of an Active Life*, p. 283.

³¹ *BOH 1918 Vol. 1*, pp. 54 -5.

sub-units.³² Once all postings had been carried out as instructed any surplus personnel were to be withdrawn to Corps Reinforcement Camps or to newly reformed Entrenching battalions.³³

The 19th Division was notified that all four battalions of 56th Brigade (7th King's Own, 7th East Lancashire, 7th South Lancashire and 7th North Lancashire) were to be disbanded on 4 February. The Brigade would then be reconstituted by the movement within the Division of 9th Cheshire and 8th North Staffordshire, from 58th and 57th Brigades respectively, and with the arrival of 1/4th KSLI from 63rd Division. Instructions for all postings of men of disbanded battalions were sent from the DAG 3rd Echelon's office: for example, ten officers and 202 men from 7th East Lancashires were to be sent to 1st East Lancashires whilst the 9th RWF, remaining in 58th Brigade, received five officers and 147 men from 10th RWF, disbanded in the 3rd Division.³⁴ Drafts from 10th RWF, together with those from 19th RWF, were also sent to other battalions of the RWF and the remainder amalgamated to form the 8th Entrenching Battalion.³⁵ The 38th (Welsh) Division was ordered to disband four locally raised battalions, distributing the officers and men amongst other battalions of the Division, but received 2nd RWF from the 33rd Division.³⁶ The impact on battalions of the Marches Regiments may be seen at Appendix 7, which confirms that wherever possible men had been posted to battalions of their parent Regiments.

³² TNA: WO 95/2056 19th Division GS War Diary and WO 95/2058 19th Division A&Q War Diary, both for January 1918. The A & Q War Diary contains copies of relevant letters from GHQ, Third Army and Third Echelon.

³³ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry for 12 February 1918.

³⁴ TNA: WO 95/2058 19th Division A&Q War Diary entry dated 20 February 1918.

³⁵ Major C. H. Dudley Ward, *Regimental Records of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers Vol III 1914-1918* (London: Forster Groom, 1921), p. 378.

³⁶ Lt Col J. E. Munby, *A History of the 38th (Welsh) Division* (London: Rees, 1920; Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 2003), pp. 31-2. The battalions disbanded were: 15th (London Welsh) RWF, 113th Bde; 10th (1st Rhondda) Welsh, 114th Bde; 11th (2nd Gwent) SWB and 16th (Cardiff City) Welsh, both of 115th Inf Bde.

The MPC draft report had suggested that it might be possible to bring the reduced British divisions back up to strength by incorporating newly-arrived American battalions but by the end of January it had become clear that there would be no American agreement to this. In any case, their numbers in France were increasing only gradually. On 1 December 130,000 men were in France but this gave a false picture: on 9 January the War Cabinet was informed that the actual American fighting force numbered just 58,000 rifles and machine guns, the equivalent of four American divisions.³⁷

Haig's timetable for re-organizing the British divisions proved wildly optimistic, as reorganization was not completed until 4 March. By then 115 British battalions in France had been disbanded, 38 had been amalgamated to form 19 units and seven had been converted to Pioneers.³⁸ It had been a period of both heartache and great organizational flux and, although battalions were again at or near full strength, 'it would have been less detrimental to efficiency if the change could have been spread over a long period'.³⁹

Some divisions escaped. The British divisions in Italy retained their 12-battalion structure, as did the Dominion divisions in France, although some re-organization of the latter was necessary to ensure a continued supply of drafts. The 4th New Zealand Brigade in England had already received instructions that it was to be disbanded in order to provide reinforcements for the rest of the New Zealand Brigades. This was completed by 15 February.⁴⁰ Similarly the 5th Canadian Division was broken up in order to provide 100 men over establishment for each Canadian

³⁷ *BOH 1918 Vol. I*, p. 35 and TNA: CAB 23/5 War Cabinet Meeting No 319 of 9 January 1918.

³⁸ *BOH 1918 Vol. I*, p. 55.

³⁹ Macready, *Annals of an Active Life*, p. 283.

⁴⁰ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entries for 15 December 1917 and 15 February 1918 and *BOH 1918 Vol I*, p. 55.

battalion in France. The five Australian Divisions had sufficient drafts, for the time being, to maintain twelve battalions in each.

Re-organization of Base Depots

Re-organization of the draft-receiving units had started in late 1917 with reduction in the numbers and role of the Base Depots. The previously large numbers of reinforcements retained at the Base for nine days for assessment of their level of training had made for huge camps and in September there had been a serious disturbance at the largest of these, Étapes. There is some evidence that this disturbance prompted Haig to decide to move the training of newly arrived Infantry reinforcements away from the Base to Corps Reinforcement Camps, but whether it was his decision alone is unsubstantiated.⁴¹ In December 1917, however, the number of IBDS was reduced to twelve, now numbered by letter A to M. On 15 December twenty IBDS at Étapes were replaced by just five (E, F, G, H, J), plus a Medical Board Depot through which all hospital discharges were to pass.⁴² As the time spent at the Base was now much shorter, fewer IBDS were needed, but there is some evidence of continued Regimental links: reinforcements for the Cheshires passed through 'C' IBD at Rouen whilst those for Southern Command Regiments seem to have passed through 'D' IBD.⁴³ Completion of the reorganization was dependent on the creation of all Corps Reinforcement Camps, which was not finished until 4 February.⁴⁴

The changes were formalized in the January 1918 revised edition of SS 152 *Instructions for the Training of the British Armies in France*. In future, any further training required by Infantry

⁴¹ TNA: WO 256/22 Haig's diary entry for 23? September 1917 cited in C. Messenger, *Call to Arms* (London: Cassell Military Paperbacks, 2006), p. 404.

⁴² TNA: WO 95/4027 Étapes Base War Diary entry dated 15 December 1917.

⁴³ TNA: WO 95/4186 'D' IBD War Diary.

⁴⁴ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry for 4 February 1918.

reinforcements would occur at Corps Reinforcement Camps or with their units. The roles of the Camps were two-fold: as holding locations for trained Infantry reinforcements awaiting despatch to their units, and where personnel not taken into action by their units should be sent, and also as training camps for ‘combed-out’ men transferred to the Infantry and inefficient Infantrymen returned from their units. The Reinforcement Camps were organized in Divisional Wings for the Corps concerned, although these were sometimes referred to as Divisional Depot Battalions. The VIIth Corps Reinforcement Training Camp, for example, contained ‘Wings’ for 16th (Irish), 39th, 21st and 9th Divisions. Once sufficiently trained, men could be sent immediately to their units so long as these were not in action and would have seven clear days in which to absorb the draft.⁴⁵

Preparation and Planning

It had long been anticipated that the Germans would mount a large offensive early in 1918. The collapse of Russia in 1917 had enabled the movement of large numbers of German divisions from the Eastern to the Western Front, whilst for the German High Command the build-up of American troops meant that any offensive must be undertaken sooner rather than later.

In January the BEF had taken over part of the line from the French and now stretched from north to south: Fourth Army from north of Ypres to north of Armentières; First Army from north of Armentières to Gavrelle, six miles north-east of Arras; Third Army from Gavrelle to Gouzeaucourt; and Fifth Army from Gouzeaucourt to the Barisis-St Gobain railway.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ General Staff, *SS 152 Instructions for the Training of the British Armies in France* (London: HMSO, January 1918) and TNA: WO 95/521 Fifth Army GS Box containing VII Corps Reinforcement Training Camp diary for 21 – 29 March 1918.

⁴⁶ *BOH 1918 Vol. 1*, p.115. Fourth Army reverted to being called Second Army when it was taken over again by Plumer on his return from Italy.

Arrangements had been agreed in principle for co-operation between the French and British Armies. By March these had been firmed up: relief was to be asked for only in the event of the British being engaged in a battle on another part of their front, whilst intervention might be requested in the event of a serious and sustained German offensive against any part of the British front making it difficult for the British to find sufficient reserves to continue the fight.⁴⁷

It was a period of tension. In his despatches, Haig later wrote:

Towards the middle of February 1918, it became evident that the enemy was preparing for a big offensive on the Western Front ... By the end of February 1918 these preparations had become very marked opposite the front held by the Third and Fifth British Armies ... As the 21st March approached it became certain that an attack on this sector was imminent.⁴⁸

21 March – 5 April: The First Battles of the Somme 1918

The German attack opened at 4.40 am on 21 March with a terrific bombardment on the whole of the Fifth Army's front, on three-quarters of that of the Third and stretching as far north as Armentières. It was the first act of an offensive that would last until into April and consisted of six distinct phases.⁴⁹ The subsequent Infantry attack followed some five hours later in thick mist. Casualties rapidly mounted and it became impossible for reliable casualty returns to be produced until later and then they would cover a period of several days.⁵⁰ The first estimated casualties shown in the AG GHQ War Diary cover the period up to 23 March: 1861 officers and 53,691 ORs. Emergency steps to find reinforcements had been taken in theatre: all leave

⁴⁷ *BOH 1918 Vol. I*, pp. 48, 101-2.

⁴⁸ E. Wyrall, *The Nineteenth Division 1914-1918* (London: Edward Arnold, 1932; Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 1999), p. 132.

⁴⁹ Battles of: St Quentin, 21 - 23 March; First Battle of Bapaume, 24 - 25 March; Rosières, 26 - 27 March; First Battle of Arras, 28 March; the Avre, 4 April; and the Ancre, 5 April 1918. NB There was a subsequent action at Villers Bretonneux in late April.

⁵⁰ *BOH 1918 Vol. I*, p. 216.

had been stopped as had the sending home of officers on courses; the 3rd Echelon had been instructed on the policy concerning reinforcement of divisions and transfer of personnel; and the DGMS had been ordered to 'comb out drastically' the convalescent depots in order to obtain 5,000 'A' men at once and 500 more in a few days. Finally a cipher telegram had been sent to the War Office explaining the situation and asking what reinforcements could be provided as an emergency measure. The War Office had responded that 2,000 Infantry drafts would be sent daily and the number would be increased.⁵¹

The need to find additional reinforcements for the BEF dominated War Cabinet's discussions on 23 March.⁵² The CIGS, now General Sir Henry Wilson, informed the Cabinet that the Executive War Board in Versailles had decided that two French divisions and one British should be brought back from Italy. Whether British divisions should be brought from Palestine and Mesopotamia was also discussed but no decisions reached; moving divisions from Salonica was actively ruled out since, although up to strength numerically, they were weakened by malaria. Discussions then turned to resources available at home. Major General Hutchinson, Director of Organization in the War Office, had identified a total of 231,000 from which drafts could be produced. Not all these men were in fact available, however, since the impact of the calling up of 16,000 trained soldiers working on munitions plus 45,000 from agriculture required further study. The remaining 170,000 men could be sent, including 88,000 currently on leave from the BEF, 5,000 men on commissioning courses and 50,000 boys aged over 18½ but under 19 who had completed their training. The release of this last group would require a Cabinet decision since it had previously been pledged that boys under 19 should not be sent abroad except in national emergency. It was reluctantly decided that that time had come and

⁵¹ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry for 23 March 1918.

⁵² TNA: CAB 23/5 Minutes of War Cabinet Meeting 371 of 23 March 1918.

that trained 18½ year olds should be sent. The measures available, however, were short-term. The War Cabinet at last decided that Geddes should produce further proposals to increase the number of men available for military service, noting that the present military situation could enable previously insurmountable political difficulties to be overcome.

In France, immediate and longer term arrangements continued to be made. It was recognized that this might not be the only German onslaught and on 24th March instructions were given that divisions in First and Second Armies were to be kept up to strength.⁵³ Men returning from leave and hospital, belonging to these Armies and VI and XVII Corps of Third Army were to proceed there but the remainder, with the exception of staff officers, were to be detained at Base Camps until further orders. When a division was definitely pulled out of the line 3rd Echelon was to be informed and battalions brought up to 800 ORs as soon as possible, with the 6th and 34th Divisions being placed on the priority list for reinforcements. A War Office telegram advised that once men returning from leave had been sent, 10,000 reinforcements (all arms) would be sent daily.⁵⁴

On 25th March, the War Office notified GHQ that available shipping capacity limited drafts to 12,000 a day but asked whether more could be ‘digested in France’ if that number could be increased. In response, GHQ requested as many as possible be sent, at least for the next ten days. Drafts were currently unable to reach units on the battle front but the War Office would be notified if congestion at the Bases made a pause necessary. It appears to have taken time for the number of reinforcements to build up as on 27 March 3,969 arrived at Boulogne with a

⁵³ Fourth Army had been retitled Second Army on the return of Plumer from Italy on 17 March and the departure of Rawlinson for Versailles.

⁵⁴ TNA: GHQ AG War Diary entry for 24 March 1918. NB. The instruction that Infantry drafts, casualties or returned leave men should be sent to VI or XVII Corps was countermanded on 26 March.

further 6,280 due the following day. On 29 March a further 4,720 arrived there and 2,098 via Calais. On 30 March 7,886 were due to embark for France. Fortunately sufficient accommodation was available at different Bases for the retention of returning leave men and drafts as by now operational considerations were beginning to affect their onward movement. On 30 March it was noted that drafts arriving at Boulogne and Calais were not to be sent to Bases at Rouen or Le Havre but were to be retained at Étapes and Calais and sent from there when required. On 31 March it was noted that railway traffic from the south and south-west of Amiens was to be kept to a minimum but that every effort was to be made to get through reinforcements from Rouen and Le Havre.⁵⁵

In the short term there may have been a disconnect between what was promised and the numbers actually arriving in France, but on 25 March Lord Derby informed the War Cabinet that 106,000 men, of whom 95,400 were Infantry, were available for immediate transfer. Together with the 88,000 on leave at Home and a further 18,000 trained men who would be available as drafts by 20 April, a total of 212,000 men was available for France. What was needed was more shipping so that 20,000 – 25,000 might be sent daily. Having confirmed the immediate availability of reinforcements, the War Cabinet now turned its attention to further sources of manpower. Some actions could be taken immediately and the Cabinet agreed to reduce the size of Medical Boards, thus speeding up the rate of examinations and enabling Travelling Medical boards to deal with 90,000 examinations a week, and also to reduce the ‘calling up notice’ from 14 to 7 days. Macready also informed them that a new eye-test was to be introduced that should gain more ‘A’ men for the Army. The perennial topic of the withdrawal of men from the

⁵⁵ TNA: GHQ AG War Diary entries for 25, 27, 29, 30 and 31 March 1918. NB The figures for arriving reinforcements seem to be minus those for returning leave men. The *Official History 1918 Vol II* p. 11 shows 39,384, including leave men, being sent over between 24 – 28 March.

munitions industry, coal mines and dockyards was also discussed together with the stopping of recruiting for the Navy and even the recall of wounded men who had been discharged. The main topics under consideration, however, were Geddes' earlier proposals to raise the upper age limit for recruiting to 55 and to extend conscription to Ireland. This time the War Cabinet decided to take advantage of the situation in France to obtain from Parliament the necessary powers and Geddes was now tasked to produce a short bill for its consideration.⁵⁶

The arrival rate of reinforcements rapidly increased and during the first week of April 73,618 men landed in France.⁵⁷ The 1st TR Brigade noted that its battalions had been 'practically denuded'; on 6 April a draft of 123 boys, aged between 18½ and 18¾, with four months training was despatched, without the normal pre-draft leave.⁵⁸ Against this, however, casualty numbers had continued to rise: the estimated running total reported to GHQ by 31 March was 4,477 officers and 119,985 ORs. By 5 April this had risen to 8,344 officers and 169,145, but as the *Official History* points out these are gross, uncorrected figures. When figures for the approximate number of missing, who later returned are applied, it seems the total casualties were about 160,000, of whom about 22,000 were probably killed, 96,000 wounded or gassed and 42,000 unwounded taken prisoner.⁵⁹ The Germans had also lost heavily but by the end of 5th April had advanced some 40 miles and had come within reach of the vital railway junctions at Amiens.

⁵⁶ TNA: CAB 23/5 Minutes of War Cabinet Meeting No 372 of 25 March 1918.

⁵⁷ *BOH 1918 Vol. 2*, p. 11.

⁵⁸ TNA: WO 95/5459 1st Training Reserve Brigade Diary entries 31 March and 6 April 1918.

⁵⁹ TNA: WO 95/26 for 51 March and OH p. 489-490.

Battalions from the Marches had played their part in resisting the onslaught, although only three were in Fifth Army which bore the full brunt of the German onslaught.⁶⁰ On 21 March the 39th Division was in Reserve to the north of Péronne but was released at noon and placed at the disposal of VII Corps. Its 118th Brigade, containing 1/6th Cheshire, 1st Cambridgeshire and 4/5th Black Watch, was ordered forward at 5pm to construct a switch line from Tincourt Wood to Saulcourt. The next day the 118th and 117th Brigades occupied the new trench, and as other units retired through them, they became ‘the front line as far as active resistance was concerned’ until 7pm when they received orders to retire.⁶¹ The following morning they retired again, and occupied a trench on Mont St Quentin, to the north of Péronne, facing south-east. The enemy attacked at about 4pm and 6th Cheshire was withdrawn only just in time to avoid being entirely captured: ‘there was no chance of getting any of the wounded away and a certain number of men must have fallen into [the enemy’s] hands’.⁶² By nightfall 118th Brigade had crossed the Somme and was in position opposite Cléry. The following two days seem to have been relatively quiet but on 27 March the enemy attacked in force, and 118th Brigade was forced to retire, having suffered a number of casualties from machine gun fire. Further retirements followed with units and men becoming scattered; late on 27th 6th Cheshire found only 3 officers and 35 men. The following day composite battalions were formed of all units; the 118th Brigade Composite Battalion taking the place of the individual battalions.⁶³ Further withdrawal followed to the area of Aubercourt before a very depleted 39th Division was relieved on 31 March and withdrawn to south-east of Amiens. By now its total all ranks strength was 4538. It had suffered 3941 casualties, although it had received 801 reinforcements.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Fifth Army: 6th KSLI in 20th Division, 15th Cheshire in 35th Division and 1/6th Cheshire in 39th Division.

⁶¹ E. Riddell & M.V. Clayton, *The Cambridgeshires 1914 to 1919* (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1934; Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 2004), p. 156 and TNA: WO 95/2590/3 War Diary of 1/6th Cheshire March 1918.

⁶² TNA: WO 95/2590/3 1/6th Cheshire War Diary entry for 23 March 1918.

⁶³ TNA: WO 95/2590/3 1/6th Cheshire War Diary entry for 28 March 1918.

⁶⁴ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary figures for March 1918.

The 6th Cheshire War Diary shows a total of 332 soldier casualties for the period 21 – 30 March: 20 dead, 139 wounded and 162 missing whilst the SDGW total deaths for the battalion up to 31 March is 51.⁶⁵ The discrepancy may be explained by the confusion of the retreat plus in many cases dates of death were assumed. Analysis of available details for the SDGW individuals gives a cross-section of the battalion in early 1918. It still consisted predominantly of Cheshire Regiment men, some 76 per cent having arrived in France as Cheshire soldiers, both Regular and TF, but despite its being a TF battalion, the available Service Records show that only 18 were original TF soldiers. Even at this late stage of the war over half of those who died (30) had attested in 1914 and 1915, although 8 of these were Derby men mobilized after mid-1916. Twelve were attested after mid-1916, five of whom were volunteers and seven conscripted. Experience of service in France varied with 22 having arrived before the end of 3rd Ypres. Some 18 men had joined the battalion 1918 (6 having been part of the draft of 100 men from 16th Cheshire).

Other Marches battalions in Third Army were encountering much the same experiences as those of Fifth Army.⁶⁶ The 19th Division contained 9th Cheshire, 9th RWF and 5th SWB. By 6.30 pm on 23 March, the remnants of 9th RWF already numbered about 9 officers with 60 ORs.⁶⁷ As the offensive wore on, units became totally disorganized. At nightfall on 25 March, 56th Brigade was ordered to withdraw and concentrate on Hébuterne, which was carried out with difficulty as it was not known where units had halted for the night. ‘As many men as possible

⁶⁵ TNA: WO 95/2590/3 Appendix 1 to 1/6th Cheshire War Diary for March 1918 and SDGW deaths for 1/6th Cheshire 21 – 31 March 1918.

⁶⁶ Third Army: 7th KSLI in 3rd Division, 1st KSLI in 6th Division, 9th Cheshire, 9th RWF, 1/4th KSLI and 5th SWB in 19th Division, 10th Cheshire, 11th Cheshire and 6th SWB in 25th Division and 1/4th RWF in 47th Division.

⁶⁷ Wyrall, *The Nineteenth Division*, pp. 153-5.

were collected and two weak battalions were formed: practically the whole of the 9th Cheshire Regiment was unaccounted for.’ The 58th Brigade was in the same state. At 4pm it was thirty strong with four officers; 9th RWF were eight strong with one officer. Between 21 – 26 March, 56th and 58th Brigades had lost 970 and 1434 all ranks casualties respectively.⁶⁸ Losses in 9th Cheshire and 9th RWF had been 369 and 460 respectively.⁶⁹ Late on 26 March 19th Division was relieved by 4th Australian Brigade and a few days later it was moved north to the Messines sector.⁷⁰

On 1 April, amongst Haig’s 58 divisions were nine ‘used’ divisions containing 800 infantry each (with drafts posted, arrived or en route), seven ‘used’ divisions in the course of being made up, three exhausted divisions which could not be refilled at present, and fifteen exhausted divisions, still in or near the line. Fresh divisions were sent south to reinforce the Third and Fifth Armies whilst some of the most battered divisions were now sent north to Second Army, to be placed in a ‘quiet’ area.⁷¹

Reinforcements were gradually arriving. Between 3-8 April, 9th Cheshire received 477 ORs and by 10 April, when the battalion moved to Nieppe, numbered 12 officers plus 752 men: 63 per cent having arrived during the previous week. The 9th RWF had received some 400 men, but it was noted that very few had any battle experience.⁷² Some reinforcements were returning wounded: Major Clayton of 1st Cambridgeshire rejoined the 39th Division with ‘a large draft,

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 166-7 and 173.

⁶⁹ A. Crookenden, *The Cheshire Regiment in the Great War* (Chester: Evans, nd; Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 2005), p. 131 and C.H. Dudley Ward, *Royal Welsh Fusiliers Vol III 1914-1918* (London: Forster Groom, 1921; Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 2005), p. 406.

⁷⁰ *BOH 1918 Vol. 1*, p. 524 and TNA: WO 95/2079/1 9th Cheshire War Diary for 29 March 1918.

⁷¹ *BOH 1918 Vol 2*, pp. 113, 13.

⁷² TNA: WO 95/2079 9th Cheshire War Diary April 1918 and Dudley Ward, *Records of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers*, p. 410.

many still in bandages, picked up on the railway line at Calais'.⁷³ Reinforcements were also rapidly arriving for the 25th Division, now in the Ploegsteert sector, and its battalions were practically up to strength. Its Divisional History notes that many reinforcements were aged 19 and 'most excellent' material but that the absence of older men suitable for promotion to NCO rank was, in some units, a serious disadvantage. Like the other divisions, the 25th now needed several weeks of hard training to enable officers to get to know their men; to absorb reinforcements and to become a useful fighting force again. With this in mind it had been placed with other divisions in the same state 'in what was supposed would be a quiet sector for at least an appreciable time'.⁷⁴

The Military Service Act (No 2), 1918

The basic problem remained, however: more manpower would be needed. As requested by the War Cabinet on 25 March, Geddes had produced proposals for a further MSA. They were far-reaching, perhaps in anticipation of their being toned down: the age limit for military service should be lowered to 17 and raised to 55; compulsion should be extended to Ireland; and the tribunal system should be abolished and replaced by Military Service Advisory Committees to consider priorities for conscription.⁷⁵ After discussions during several Cabinet meetings it was agreed that a lower age of 17 would be impracticable and that the furthest they could go towards introducing conscription in Ireland would be to place a provision in the Bill giving the Government the power to extend it at a future date by Order in Council.⁷⁶ The Bill did not have an easy ride but was passed by Parliament on 18 April. In its final form the Act raised the upper

⁷³ Riddell & Clayton, *The Cambridgeshires 1914 to 1919*, p. 156.

⁷⁴ M. Kincaid-Smith, *The 25th Division in France and Flanders*, (Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 2001), pp. 193-4.

⁷⁵ TNA: CAB 24/46/37 NSR 32 dated 26 March 1918.

⁷⁶ TNA: CAB 23/5/68 Minutes of War Cabinet Meeting 376 of 28 March, 377 of 29 March, 383 of 5 April and 384 of 6 April 1918.

age limit for conscription to 50, which could be extended to 55 by Order in Council if necessary in the future, it made possible the extension of conscription to Ireland by Order in Council, enabled closer regulation of Appeals Tribunals and granted power by proclamation to withdraw certificates of exemption in case of national emergency.⁷⁷

The powers in MSA (No 1) of 1918, enabling the withdrawal of exemption certificates granted on occupational grounds, had so far remained unused but under the new Act this could be done by Proclamation. The first ones were now issued on 20 April withdrawing exemption from men under 23 who were fit for general service. Recruiting for the Army began to increase from 30,197 in March, to 78,298 in April, 84,019 in May and peaking in June at 88,950.⁷⁸ It could not continue at that rate without serious damage to the nation's economy. In the Army Council's eyes, the new legislation was too little too late since the earliest the April recruits would be available after the minimum of training would be September. Moreover, just under a third of the recruits were under 19 and therefore unavailable until even later.

9 – 29 April: Battle of the Lys

The next German offensive, Operation Georgette, was aimed at strategic targets just behind the British lines in Flanders: Hazebrouck with its rail network linking the British lines to the Channel ports and the high ground around Mont Kemmel over-looking Ypres. The plan was to attack south of the River Lys, heading towards Hazebrouck, with a second attack on the following day between the Lys and Ypres. If successful the British occupation of the Ypres Salient would become untenable.

⁷⁷ *Public General Acts, 8&9 Geo 5* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1918), pp. 5-12.

⁷⁸ *Statistics of the Military Effort*, pp. 371-2.

The area to be attacked was roughly bisected by the River Lys with the British First Army holding the southern part of the line and Plumer's Second Army north of the river. It had been a relatively quiet area since 1915 and five of the six divisions facing the attack had been sent there to recuperate after the March offensive. Second Army's IX Corps occupied the line from just north of Armentières, including the Messines Ridge, to a mile north of Ypres. From right to left its divisions were the 25th, 19th and 9th, all of which were still refitting. The last thing they needed after their losses on the Somme the previous month was another German offensive.

The Germans attacked on 9 April and there was to be fierce fighting over the next three weeks with a succession of battles.⁷⁹ The British line was relentlessly pushed back until the German advance was halted within sight of Ypres. They had failed to take Hazebrouck and nor had they ousted the British from Ypres. In repelling them the British lost 82,040 casualties.

The Marches battalions of 19th and 25th Divisions that had been involved in the March offensive had again been mauled. Amongst the Reserves hurried into line had also been 2nd SWB of 29th Division and 1st Cheshire of the 5th Division, newly returned from Italy. The experiences of March were repeated with battalions moved between brigades and companies becoming separated. As early as 10 April, 9th Cheshire had in the space of a few hours been transferred from 19th to 34th and then to 25th Division, being joined in the latter division by 4th KSLI.⁸⁰ Further north near Wytschaete, the 9th RWF, with 58th Brigade, had been placed under command of 9th Division on its left. By the evening HQ 9th RWF had to send out patrols to

⁷⁹ Battles of the Lys: Estaires 9 – 11 April (XI and XV Corps, First Army), Messines 10/11 April (IX Corps, Second Army), Hazebrouck 12 – 15 April (First Army), Bailleul 13 – 15 April (IX Corps), Kemmel 17 – 19 and 25/26 April and Scherpenberg 29 April 1918.

⁸⁰ Wyrall, *The Nineteenth Division 1914 – 1918*, p. 177; Crookenden, *The Cheshire Regiment in the Great War*, p. 136.

discover where its companies were. Two were found but the front and support line companies, A and D, had lost heavily and there were only vague rumours of small parties holding out.⁸¹ By 12 April IX Corps' line, extending from Nieppe, across the forward slopes of the Neuve Eglise rise, to the slopes of the Wulverghem spur and almost to Wytschaete, was held by a mixture of brigades and units of five different divisions.⁸² Even the Pioneer battalions of 19th and 25th Divisions, 5th and 6th SWB, had been pressed into use to defend the line. What was effectively crisis management continued as the line continued to fall back. Finally, overnight on 18 April 19th Division was relieved by the 28th French Division, more slowly than usual owing to 'difficulties of interpretation'.⁸³ 'Very tired and much reduced in numbers,' the troops rested during 19 – 20 April and then moved to the Proven area for a further rest and refit. On 20 April, 53 officers and 2626 ORs arrived from the 19th Divisional Wing of the IX Corps Reinforcement Camp for distribution to units; 9th Cheshire received 156 reinforcements over the next couple of days.⁸⁴

The 19th Division's total casualties between 9 – 30 April were 4,565.⁸⁵ Those for 25th Division were 7,584; between 9 April – 4 May its three Marches battalions lost:

<u>ORs</u>	<u>Killed</u>	<u>Wounded</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>Total</u>
10 th Cheshire	32	295	336	663
11 th Cheshire	32	305	532	869
6 th SWB	32	293	82	407

Although replacements had been found in a hurry after the March offensives, their quality had been variable:

⁸¹ Dudley Ward, *Royal Welsh Fusiliers Vol III 1914-1918*, p. 412.

⁸² *BOH 1918 Vol. 2*, p. 272.

⁸³ TNA: WO 95/2079-1 9th Cheshire War Diary entry 18/19 April 1918.

⁸⁴ TNA: WO 95/2058 19th Division A&Q War Diary entry 20 April and WO 95/2079 9th Cheshire War Diary entries 22 and 24 April.

⁸⁵ *BOH 1918 Vol. 2*, p. 493.

It had been abundantly proved during the recent battle that the units with their abnormal proportion of boys under 20 years of age and older men over 35 were not up to the previous standard. The scarcity of men of the best fighting ages between 21 and 28 was most noticeable in every unit. The older men, largely men combed out from administrative employment and past the best fighting age, proved the fallacy of the theory that it is possible to make a fighting soldier of the man of 35 equal to the continental soldier of the same age who has performed military service in his youth.⁸⁶

Analysis of the 80 men of 9th Cheshire killed between 10 - 29 April, shows that some 33, or 41 per cent, had arrived between late March and 8 April and that just over 50 per cent had joined the battalion during 1918.⁸⁷ It might have been expected by this stage that most would be conscripts but of those joining between late March and early April, some 21 were volunteers and 12 were conscripted.⁸⁸ Looking at the 80 men overall: 57 per cent (46, including 7 ‘Derby-men’) were volunteers, 20 were Conscripts and 4 unknown. Over a quarter had seen previous Cheshire Regiment service in various battalions and at least eight had come to France with the original battalion in 1915. The age profile may be charted:

<u>Age</u>	<u>Numbers</u>	<u>Comments</u>
18	4	Arrived early April; posted from TRBs to 9 th Cheshire
19	32	All joined 9 th Cheshire in 1918
20	2	
21 – 28	22	Optimum fighting ages
29	2	
30s	10	
40s	2	

Despite the views of the 25th Division’s historian, replacements in their 20s were not necessarily the best specimens. Several who joined 9th Cheshire were returning from UK having been

⁸⁶ Kincaid-Smith, *The 25th Division in France and Flanders*, pp. 243, 251-2.

⁸⁷ SDGW records for soldiers of 9th Cheshire 10-29 April 1918. Analysis of the Service Records of these men is possible because unusually 75 per cent has survived. NB: Some 54 soldiers are shown as having died between 10-18 April but a longer period has been analysed to give greater evidence of the composition of the battalion. The battalion remained close to the line and was subjected to heavy shelling on 26th, 27th and 29th April. Drafts were received: 22 April: 148 and 24 April: 8.

⁸⁸ The Record of Service/Enrolment Forms have been used to analyse the types of engagement. Army Form B 2513 was used to attest conscripts.

evacuated for treatment for wounds and ailments such as trench feet and diarrhoea; at least three had been 'combed out' from their recuperation at the Western Command Depot in late March. Others, for example former members of the ASC and AVC, were the products of 'combing out' in 1917 and had needed re-training as Infantrymen. The 'boys' had actually received longer training than the adults: all had received six months and many of the 19 year olds nearer a year. Regardless of ages and previous training, the major difficulty for the battalion had been the lack of time to absorb the newcomers. Finally, looking at the available enlistment details, some 23 had enlisted in Cheshire and a further 21 in Wales. Together with 20 from Area 3, this makes a total of 64 or 80 per cent of those killed had enlisted in Western Command Area. Even considering those who joined in late March/early April, 30 out of 33 had enlisted in Western Command. It would seem therefore that, despite the rush to send out reinforcements after the March Offensive, emphasis was still being placed on sending reinforcements from the battalion's parent Command.

Cadreization of Divisions and New Arrivals

The 39th Division, having lost 4,588 casualties between 21 March and 5 April, had moved back to Le Tréport for refitting and training. On 10 April orders were received to organize a strong Composite Brigade of four battalions and move hurriedly to Hill 60, near Ypres. No 4 Battalion, containing men of 1/1st Cambridgeshire, 4/5th Black Watch and 1/6th Cheshire, was allotted defences in and around Voormezele. With 39th Division's spare transport at Watten, Major Clayton of the Cambridgeshires was endeavouring:

to teach musketry and fire tactics to transport-drivers and cooks. This was a hair-raising job; 'England's last hope', as the force was irreverently called, had unorthodox views regarding the safety of firearms, and it was just as well they did not go into action!⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Riddell & Clayton, *The Cambridgeshires 1914 to 1919*, pp. 167-8.

The manning situation continued to worsen and on 20 April GHQ decided to reduce the 14th, 16th, 30th, 34th, 39th, 40th, and 66th Divisions to cadres. This usually meant reducing infantry battalions to 10 officers and 45 ORs, with the surplus being sent to the Base Depots for re-posting. In this instance, battalion training staffs from 16th, 30th, 39th and 66th Divisions were to be used to train Americans when they arrived, but the depleted battalions were left in place and continued to receive reinforcements.⁹⁰ The 1/6th Cheshire sent 3 officers and 14 men ‘to join the 77th Division American Army as specialist instructors’ but the battalion continued to exist, receiving 2 officers and 85 men from the Base and 40 men from hospital. It was now effectively in three parts, with further men still with the 39th Division’s Composite units.⁹¹

Reinforcements began arriving from other theatres, with ‘divisions and brigades turning up of whose existence the troops in France had never before heard’.⁹² The 52nd and 74th Divisions began to arrive from Egypt and more shipping was made available for the transportation of the American Armies. Slowly numbers began to improve and at the end of April, AG GHQ reported on an improvement in Infantry and Cavalry strengths:

	<u>Officers</u>	<u>Men</u>
Strength beginning of April	21652	482817
Battle casualties	4112	108286
Reinforcements	6490	179668
Strength at end of month	23550	538334 ⁹³

⁹⁰ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry for 20 April 1918 and *BOH 1918 Vol. 3*, p. 5.

⁹¹ C. Smith, *War History of the 6th Battalion, The Cheshire Regiment (TF)* (Chester: 6th Cheshire, 1932), p. 3.

⁹² Robertson, *From Private to Field Marshal*, p. 337.

⁹³ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entries 22, 28 and 6 May 1918.

May – July 1918

On 6 May AG GHQ reported that the total casualties between 21 March and 30 April had been 9,704 officers and 230,089 men.⁹⁴ Inevitably, the quest was now on to apportion blame and both the Government and the military authorities were under attack.

The Maurice Debate

In introducing the proposed MSA 2 to Parliament on 9 April, Lloyd George had made two inaccurate statements, namely that the Army in France had been stronger on 1 January 1918 than on 1 January 1917, and that there were only three ‘white’ (ie British) divisions in Palestine and Egypt. The figures were queried in some newspapers and on 18 April a question was raised in Parliament as to whether the numbers given Lloyd George for January 1918 included labour units and non-combatants. It is clear from the response given that not only was there a misunderstanding over the composition of the figures but also that the War Office had provided incorrect figures for France and Flanders, which included 86,000 based in Italy.⁹⁵ A subsequent Parliamentary statement by Bonar Law on 23 April also suggested that the extension of the British line in January 1918 had been an arrangement made solely by the British and French military authorities. If correct, the implications of these statements were that on 21 March the British had had more fighting troops than the Germans on the Western Front and had not been weakened by any action of the Government.

Matters came to a head on 7 May with the publication in *The Times* and other newspapers of letters by Major-General Frederick Maurice, the former War Office Director of Military Operations. It was a brave move, which put him in breach of military discipline and cost him

⁹⁴ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry May 1918.

⁹⁵ *HC Deb* 18 April 1918 vol 105 c563.

his career. He charged that the Government had deliberately misled the House of Commons over the decision to extend the front, the strength of the Army in France on 1 January 1918 and the number of British Infantry divisions in Egypt and Palestine and wanted some sort of public inquiry into his allegations.

In fact Maurice's allegations were correct as the statements made to Parliament had been inaccurate: the extension of the line had been decided by the Supreme War Council, at the time of Lloyd George's speech there were six British divisions in Egypt and labour and non-combatant figures had incorrectly been included in the figures for the Army in France. The latter error might have been a genuine mistake, albeit never admitted by Lloyd George, particularly as the War Office continued to provide conflicting and inaccurate figures.⁹⁶ Maurice was not to get a public inquiry, however. Instead the issue was raised in Parliament and turned by the Government into what was effectively a vote of confidence in the country's war leadership. Lloyd George made a powerful speech, if based on somewhat doubtful material, refuting all Maurice's charges.⁹⁷ The Government did not fall but further mistrust had been sown between it and the military authorities.

Reinforcements for France

In early May the War Office warned GHQ that the maximum number of British Infantry reinforcements that could be expected from England by the end of August was 93,000.⁹⁸ In addition, battalions and divisions were being brought back from the Middle East but there was

⁹⁶ TNA: WO 32/10085 Minute from Colonel Kirke, Colonel GS, to DMO dated 10 May 1918 cited in N. Maurice, *The Maurice Case* (London: Leo Cooper, 1972) p.140.

⁹⁷ *HC Deb* 9 May 1918 vol 105 cc2355-2405.

⁹⁸ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry for 8 May 1918: War Office letter 121/Drafts/9946 (AG2b) dated 8 May 1915: May - 20,000; June - 23,000; July - 22,000 and August - 28,000.

a long lead time between notification of their departure and their actual arrival. The 74th Division left Egypt in April and completed disembarkation on 11 May. Word also came that some 23 Infantry battalions were being released from Egypt but would not arrive in France until June.⁹⁹ Other sources were tapped: seven former TF battalions, including 23rd Cheshire, arrived from UK at the end of May to become Garrison Guard battalions. They were not the fittest of men but medical categories were beginning to be blurred.¹⁰⁰

Changes to the Reception of Reinforcements

It was decided in late May to abolish Corps Reinforcement Camps, perhaps because too many of them had been caught up in the fighting of March and April and had proved unable to send reinforcements forward. Instead, two Reinforcement Training Camps were to be established near the Bases, for 'combed out' men and those requiring training, and Reception Camps were to be established for each Army, Corps and Division. By mid-June the new organization was in place. Army Reception Camps had been formed: Second Army's at Watten, First and Fifth Army sharing a camp at Auvin, Third Army's at Doullens and Fourth Army's at Longpré. Corps Reception Camps had been formed for all Corps except the IXth and Division Reception Camps for all divisions except those previously cadreized. No 1 Reinforcement Training Camp had been completed at Audresselles and orders issued for No 2 Camp to be prepared at Ste Marguerite.¹⁰¹ The purpose behind the changes would appear to have been the requirement to have reinforcements as close behind divisions as possible.

⁹⁹ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entries for 9 and 11 May and 30 June 1918.

¹⁰⁰ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry for 30 May 1918. The seven arrivals were: 25th Liverpool; 15th Essex; 2/6th DLI; 11th Somerset LI; 11th R Scots Fusiliers; 36th Northumberland Fusiliers; and 23rd Cheshire.

¹⁰¹ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entries for 25 May, 15 and 21 June 1918.

Re-organization and Rebuilding

The divisions that had been reduced to cadre continued to limp along. In early May the plan was for 30th and 34th Divisions to be reconstituted as first-line divisions, with battalions arriving from Egypt and Palestine and for 40th and 59th Divisions to be refilled with 'B' men as garrison divisions. The 14th and 16th Divisions were to be sent to England in mid-June to be reconstituted with Infantry battalions of 'B1' personnel and then return to France.¹⁰²

The 39th Division remained as a cadre for training American troops but its battalions were beginning to be dispersed. Both 1/6th Cheshire and 1/1st Cambridgeshire were sent to join divisions with largely the same Home Command affiliations. On 25 May 1/6th Cheshire moved south to the 25th Division, where it joined 10th and 11th Cheshire. In mid-May 1st Cambridgeshire had joined 12th (Eastern) Division, absorbing 11 officers and 408 men from 7th Suffolk thus making it effectively an amalgamation of three battalions since the 7th Suffolk had already absorbed the 8th Suffolk in February. It had also received drafts and was now up to strength again with experienced NCOs and men, mainly 'slightly wounded men returned to duty after the Spring battles'.¹⁰³ Training was now the Cambridgeshires' main activity in order to weld the battalion into 'an effective fighting weapon and give it the essential qualities of self-confidence and *esprit de corps*'.¹⁰⁴

There was a pause in German attacks during the first three weeks of May but the line still had to be held. All along it were Divisions in various states of rebuilding but there were still some that had seen very little action so far. During early May 38th (Welsh) Division held the line in

¹⁰² *BOH 1918 Vol. 3*, pp. 5-6 and TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entries of 17 and 18 June.

¹⁰³ Riddell & Clayton, *The Cambridgeshires 1914 to 1919*, pp. 178 – 181.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

the now quiet area of the Somme. They were withdrawn for a fortnight's rest on 20 May when 'considerable drafts' were received and the time was spent largely on musketry training, culminating in a rifle meeting held on the day before the Division went back into the line. During June all three battalions of 318th American Infantry Regiment were attached to the Division for instruction but life for the Welsh remained relatively quiet.¹⁰⁵

Other divisions were not to be so lucky. It had been agreed with the French in April that four, possibly five, 'tired' divisions should be sent to a quiet French sector, the Chemin des Dames, to recuperate and refit whilst releasing French divisions for a General Reserve. Four divisions, 8th, 21st, 25th and 50th would be sent with IX Corps to French Sixth Army on the Aisne front, west of Reims, and the 19th Division would join VIII Corps with the French Fourth Army near Chalons sur Marne.¹⁰⁶ HQ IX Corps had arrived on 26 April and its divisions had followed over the next couple of weeks. The 19th Division arrived later, on 18-19 May; on arrival 9th Cheshire found their new location at La Chaussée very comfortable with 'exceedingly good' billets. The surrounding countryside 'was very fine and the canal offered good facilities for bathing, which was much enjoyed by all during the hot weather that followed'.¹⁰⁷ It was a peaceful existence for the battalions of these divisions, which between the 19th and 25th Divisions included eight from the Marches Regiments.

27 May – 6 June: Battle of the Aisne

On 26 May warning was received of a German plan to attack the Chemin des Dames either the next day or the day after, and the IX Corps divisions were moved into the front line by the

¹⁰⁵ Munby, *A History of the 38th (Welsh) Division*, pp. 43-7.

¹⁰⁶ *BOH 1918 Vol. 3*, pp. 12, 30-1.

¹⁰⁷ TNA: WO 95/2079 9th Cheshire War Diary entry 18 May 1918.

French Sixth Army Commander, General Duchêne. On 27 May the German opening heavy bombardment on front and support lines, headquarters and other vulnerable points, was ‘generally agreed to have been the heaviest, most terrible and most destructive of the war’.¹⁰⁸ The assault that followed it up was swift and brutal. By the end of the day the Germans had crossed the Rivers Aisne and Vesle, had driven a salient 25 miles wide at the base and nearly 12 miles deep into the Allied line.¹⁰⁹ The British divisions in the line had been virtually destroyed for a third time:

in their exhausted, untrained and unwelded state, both out-numbered, ungunned and practically unprovided with aeroplanes [they] were totally unable to withstand the shock of the German assaults and successfully defend the sector of the line assigned to them along the Aisne.¹¹⁰

Over the next four days the Allies gradually fell back before the onslaught and it became a similar tale as the previous German offensives with changes of command within divisions and composite units being formed. On 29 May the much-depleted divisions of IX Corps were joined by 19th Division from VIII Corps and the following day about 500 all ranks in small parties from 8th, 25th and 50th Divisions were temporarily absorbed by the 19th Division battalions. During further heavy fighting during the day practically the whole of 9th RWF and 9th Welsh became surrounded, and were killed or captured, and the following morning the remnants were organized into a composite company and placed under command of 9th Cheshire.¹¹¹ On 1 June the remains of 74th Brigade of 25th Division was withdrawn to reorganize; it would now be composed of two composite battalions of 25th Division and two of 8th Division.¹¹² The fighting finally began to die down and 25th Division noted no further enemy attacks between 2 – 5 June

¹⁰⁸ Crookenden, *The Cheshire Regiment in the Great War*, p. 142.

¹⁰⁹ *BOH 1918 Vol. 3*, p. 8.

¹¹⁰ Kincaid-Smith, *The 25th Division in France and Flanders*, p. 25.

¹¹¹ Wyrall, *The Nineteenth Division 1914-1918*, p. 203.

¹¹² Kincaid-Smith, *The 25th Division in France and Flanders*, pp. 267 – 8.

apart from heavy shellfire. There was a further flurry of activity on 6 June when the enemy launched a big attack against the Montagne de Bligny. The 58th Composite battalion, formed of remnants of 2nd Wiltshire, 9th RWF and 9th Welsh, left their trenches and fought off the enemy with bayonets. A further attack was made mid-morning against which a 9th Cheshire counter-attack failed but 1/4th KSLI was brought up from reserve and staged a further counter-attack, going forward ‘with great dash, the remnants of 9th Cheshire being carried forward (for the second time) by the magnificent dash and spirit of their comrades’. The enemy was taken by surprise and by 12.15 the Montagne de Bligny was again in British hands. It was not without cost, however. The 19th Division OR casualty figures for 1 – 8 June show totals of 25 killed, 298 wounded and 378 missing with a note that the majority had occurred on 6 June.¹¹³ Overall, the IX Corps casualties between 27 May and 19 June were 1,298 officers and 27,405 ORs.¹¹⁴

Further Reorganization and Re-building

The process of rebuilding continued. Sir Henry Wilson, who had replaced Robertson as CIGS in February 1918, had promised a further 70,000 shortly but admitted that almost all would be ‘B’ men, obtained by reducing the number of Home Service Divisions in France to four. GHQ’s plan for rebuilding both the cadreized divisions and those that had been mauled on the Aisne was outlined by Haig in a letter to Foch on 10 June, which clearly shows the shortage of completely fit men.¹¹⁵ In outline, the 8th, 21st and 19th Divisions were to be withdrawn and refilled with ‘A’ men; battalions from Palestine and Salonika would be used to reconstitute the 30th, 34th and either the 25th or 50th Divisions; ‘B’ men already in France would reconstitute the

¹¹³ Wyrall, *The Nineteenth Division 1914-1918*, pp. 207-8 and TNA: WO 95/2058 19th Division A & Q Branch War Diary for June 1918.

¹¹⁴ *BOH 1918 Vol. 3*, p. 159. The totals for the 19th Division were 151 + 3,460 and for 25th Division were 201 + 4,137.

¹¹⁵ *BOH 1918 Vol. 3*, pp. 168-9.

40th and 59th Divisions whilst the cadres of 14th and 16th Divisions, together with that of either the 25th or 50th, would be sent to England to be refilled with 'B' men before returning to France. The 39th and 66th Divisions would remain as training cadres for the five American Divisions in the British zone.

The 25th Division had learned on 9 June that it was to be broken up and its battalions used as reinforcements for other units. Wherever possible the policy of retaining Regular, TF and the earlier Service battalions continued. On 8 July 1/6th Cheshire moved to 30th Division where it was joined by the 25th Division's Pioneer battalion, 6th SWB. Both 10th and 11th Cheshire had lost heavily on the Aisne and were now effectively disbanded. Men from the 10th were absorbed by 9th Cheshire of 19th Division, whilst 11th Cheshire, which had lost over half its number in casualties on the Aisne, sent 16 officers and 492 men to be absorbed by 1/6th Cheshire. The latter battalion was highly relieved as it had feared that it might be the other way round!¹¹⁶ The 25th Divisional cadre left for England where it was refilled with nine battalions from British divisions from the Italian front.

After a period of uncertainty as to its future, in mid-June 40th Division learned that it was to become a 'semi-mobile' division of 'garrison' battalions.¹¹⁷ Some of these had been formed from 'B1' men collected from various labour companies which were now given regimental titles: 8th Garrison Battalion, for example, became 13th (Garrison) East Lancashire. Others were 'Garrison Guard' battalions formed from TF Home Service battalions that had arrived in France during May, one of which was 23rd Cheshire. The Brigade Commander of 119th Brigade, Frank

¹¹⁶ D. Priddey, ed., *A Tommy at Ypres – Walter's War, The Diary and Letters of Walter Williamson* (Stroud: Amberley, 2011), p. 281.

¹¹⁷ F.E. Whitton, *History of the 40th Division* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, nd), p. 274.

Crozier, was dismayed to see the quality of the men arriving for his Brigade and instructed the Regimental Medical Officers of his new battalions to comb out any ‘old fellows whom they consider beyond hope of physical redemption’. The process was repeated with fresh drafts and eventually Crozier had three battalions and a trench mortar battery.¹¹⁸ Intensive training was needed to get the men fit, together with musketry training as many of the men had done no military training for a very long time and some had never fired a rifle. Almost equally as important was the need to develop self-confidence and *esprit de corps*. The title ‘Garrison’ was quietly dropped from the battalions during July.

The remains of the 19th Division were relieved on 19 June by the 8th Italian Division and withdrawn for rest and refit. It still contained many men from other divisions who had been temporarily attached to it and these were now sorted and returned. The 3rd Worcestershire was transferred from 25th Division and reinforcements arrived from the 19th Divisional Wing. On 30 June the Division began moving back to the British zone where it was to be held in GHQ Reserve.¹¹⁹ It would spend July resting and training the new drafts before moving back into the line at Locon and Hinges in early August. It would be in and out of the line from then on but would not take part in a major operation until the Battle of the Selle in mid-October.¹²⁰

Sickness

There must have been times when the hard-pressed staff of ‘A’ Branch in GHQ felt the odds had been stacked against them. On 30 June it was discovered that men of the various battalions that had arrived from Salonika and Palestine had malaria and would need medical treatment

¹¹⁸ F. Crozier, *A Brass Hat in No Man’s Land* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930), p. 215.

¹¹⁹ TNA: WO 95/2038 19th Division A & Q War Diary for June 1918 and TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry for 30 June 1918.

¹²⁰ Wyrall, *The Nineteenth Division 1914-1918*, pp. 210-11.

and two months isolation before being posted to divisions. The battalions, including 4th and 7th Cheshire and 1st Herefordshire, would be used to reconstitute the 30th and 34th Divisions when fit but in the meantime were to be sent to a separate camp in Serqueux where they would be administered by the now cadreized 50th Division. Perhaps more in hope than expectation, GHQ suggested to the War Office that 9,000 reinforcements from England should be earmarked for malarial battalions but there is no indication of their response.¹²¹

During May and June there had been outbreaks of a mild but highly infectious type of influenza amongst units of First Army. Patients usually returned to duty after a week or ten days but the numbers affected were such that 3,000 beds made available at Étaples for these cases on 21 June were filled within three days. It was yet another factor to be taken into account in the use of divisions: on 20 June an attack by 29th Division against La Becque had to be postponed.¹²²

Manpower Outlook for the Rest of the Year

In mid-July Geddes submitted a paper to the War Cabinet seeking decisions on recruiting priorities for the rest of the year. Over 450,000 men had been raised for the Armed Forces since 1 January 1918 but the Admiralty was now owed 37,500 to meet its original demand, the Army Council had requested 551,000 recruits for July-August with more demands anticipated later in the year and the Air Ministry wanted 196,000 men for the period 1 July – 31 May 1919. These demands could not be met in full since in Geddes' view the total recruitment for 1918 could not

¹²¹ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entries for 30 June and 16 July 1918.

¹²² Major-General Sir W.G. Macpherson, *Medical Services General History Vol III* (Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 2009), pp. 258-9.

much exceed 700,000 men 'without shattering industry and severely crippling our whole war effort.'¹²³

Manpower was discussed by the War Cabinet on 19 July.¹²⁴ As ever, the Prime Minister having taken advice from anyone not in the British military, an aside was made as to whether the Army was making the best use of its manpower in France but the main issue was manpower in the nation as a whole. The strain on industry was proving too great and output was being affected. Geddes commented that the physical standard of the men left was very low and that, apart from boys coming of age, only older men were available who were 'difficult to get and not worth much'. The Cabinet failed to adopt any formal resolution. Instead it would be left to Geddes' discretion as to how to allocate the man-power at his disposal.

August – November 1918

Recruits obtained from August onwards would be unavailable for drafting until 1919. This final section therefore ignores further political aspects and concentrates on the Western Front during the last months of the war. The virtual destruction of large parts of the Armies in France and their subsequent rebuilding with drafts from various sources has been examined in the earlier sections. The effect of this on the composition of battalions from the Marches will now be considered rather than dwelling in detail on the battles of the Hundred Days.

Drafts for the rest of 1918 would have to be made up from what was available. Requirements for men of below Category 'A' would be met from the Home Army whilst 'A' men continued

¹²³ TNA: CAB 24/58 War Cabinet Paper GT 5127 Memorandum by the Minister of National Service on the Manpower Situation Second Half of 1918 dated 16 July 1918.

¹²⁴ TNA: CAB 23/7 Minutes of the War Cabinet Meeting WC 449 of 19 July 1918.

to be those ‘combed out’ or youngsters coming into the age bracket. The tap of under-19 year olds was turned off in August, however, with a War Cabinet decision that the national emergency had now passed and no more were to be sent on active service overseas.¹²⁵ There had been mixed views on the usefulness of 18 year olds in units. Most ‘were most excellent material’, having received longer training at home than adult recruits, but a proportion were insufficiently developed and had to be held back at the Base.

Owing to age and physique some of these immature boys were quite incapable of carrying the weight and doing the work required of an infantry soldier in the line: their presence in the ranks rendered them a danger to their units. To use them at the time was only a waste of those who might later on, with proper training and physical development, have become valuable reinforcements for the Army.¹²⁶

Only 50,000 ‘boys’ had been available to be sent in the initial surge at the end of March but more had followed and in August the perception in Third Army was that at least 50 per cent of the infantry in its thirteen divisions were ‘boys’.¹²⁷ The implication is that these were 18 year olds but they could equally have been newly-called up 19 year olds.

August – September 1918

No Marches units took part in the Battle of Amiens in early August but many would be involved soon after, both on the Somme and in Flanders. Those divisions, such as 19th Division, who had been hardest hit during successive German offensives remained for now in the north but many others were further south. The largest concentration of Marches battalions was now in

¹²⁵ TNA: CAB 23/7 Minutes of War Cabinet Meeting WC 455 of 7 August 1918 and WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry for 16 August 1918.

¹²⁶ Kincaid-Smith, *The 25th Division in France and Flanders*, pp. 193-4 and TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary for September 1918: During September two ‘YS’ battalions were formed for ‘immatures’, designated No 1 and No 2 YS Battalions.

¹²⁷ *BOH 1918 Vol 4*, p. 181.

the 38th (Welsh) Division which had been largely uninvolved in the offensives of earlier in the year. It had been on the Somme since April and would now play a full part in the advance from the Ancre to beyond the Sambre.

The 2nd RWF had joined 38th (Welsh) Division in the February re-organizations. There seems to have been a certain amount of ambivalence about the move which meant leaving 19th Brigade, described by Dunn as the ‘step-child’ in every Division to which it had been attached or belonged, and joining a division which had ‘been in GHQ’s bad books since the Mametz muddle’.¹²⁸ By August the battalion was fully part of the Division and was in action over the period 21 August – 3 September, during the Battles of Albert and then Bapaume. Examination of the composition of 2nd RWF is difficult as very few Service Records are available for the 87 men who died over this period but rough analysis of their Service numbers provides at least an outline picture.¹²⁹ Leaving aside the eleven men with TF Service numbers, some 55 per cent of the rest had pre-1917 RWF numbers. A further 26 per cent had arrived during 1917, some of the later ones probably as a draft of 169 which arrived with 2nd RWF on 5 November 1917 and a further 18 per cent had arrived during 1918.¹³⁰ The bulk of those killed had thus been RWF for some time. Over a third, 39 per cent, had enlisted in Wales, although only 16 per cent in the Regimental area, but around eighty-five per cent continued to have been enlisted in Western Command. This shows a very high percentage still being drawn from the parent Command in 1918.¹³¹

¹²⁸ J.C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew* (London: King, 1937; Jane’s 1987), p. 440.

¹²⁹ I am grateful to ‘hywyn’ of the Great War Forum for advice on RWF Service Numbers.

¹³⁰ TNA: WO 95/2423 2nd RWF War Diary for 5 November 1917.

¹³¹ Riddell & Clayton, *The Cambridgeshires 1914 – 1919*, p. 194. In August the 1/1st Cambridgeshire which had moved from the 39th Division to 12th Division, received a ‘large draft of men, mainly Cambridgeshires and Suffolks – a good useful lot, but many had spent too long under Base Depot conditions, and were not looking as hard and bronzed as the remainder of the Battalion’.

Comparison of the ages of the 2nd RWF fatalities with those of two other Third Army battalions in action in the same area, 1st Cheshire and 7th KSLI, enables examination of the effects of their involvement in the earlier German offensives, including the proportion of ‘boys’ they contained.¹³² 1st Cheshire had returned from Italy with Fifth Division in April, and had taken part in the Battle of the Lys. Since then it had remained in the area of the Forêt de Nieppe where further attacks were constantly expected but none materialised. In mid-August it had moved south, arriving in Bayencourt on 19 August ready for its attack in the area of Bucquoy; by 3 September it had reached Beugny. In March, 7th KSLI of 3rd Division had been driven back in the Arras area during the Spring offensive after which it had then been moved north only to be caught up in the Battle of the Lys. On 19 August it arrived at Monchy ready to attack near Courcelles; by 3 September it was near Lagnicourt.

Casualties were heavy in all three battalions, with a total of 290 being killed between them.

Battalion	2 nd RWF (38 th Div)	%	1 st Cheshire (5 th Div)	%	7 th KSLI (3 rd Div)	%
Total deaths 21 Aug – 3 Sep 18	87		110		93	
Known ages	74		100		84	
18	2		8		17	
19	11		22		17	
20	8		8		5	
Total aged 18 – 20	21	28%	38	38%	39	46%
Total aged 21 – 29 – best fighting age in terms of physical strength and maturity	36	49%	47	47%	31	37%
30s and 40s	17	23%	15	15%	14	17%
Average age of those known	26		24		23	

The effects of their earlier losses during 1918 with the consequent influx of replacements are clearly visible in the average ages of those killed. Not surprisingly, 7th KSLI shows the highest number of 18 and 19 year olds: 40 per cent (34) of the known ages. In 1st Cheshire the figure

¹³² The data has been extracted primarily from CWGC and then by using Census records and BMD on www.ancestry.com for the ‘unknowns’. Where there has been any doubt, or the name is too common to search, the age has been left as unknown. The percentages are against the known ages.

was 30 per cent but only 17.5 per cent in 2nd RWF.¹³³ The proportion of ‘boys’ in all three battalions is thus less than 50 per cent, even when twenty-year olds are included. The perception of the extreme youth of Third Army battalions may therefore not be universally accurate. It is dependent on how heavily particular battalions had been used during the preceding months.

How the ‘boys’ performed in action is rarely noted in battalion War Diaries but some references appear in Battalion Histories. The 1/1st Cambridgeshire, now in 12th Division, had received drafts amounting to 350 in late August. About 50 were experienced men but the rest were boys, called up in the spring and with an average length of service of about 15 weeks. Although they had fired their musketry course, they knew nothing about Lewis guns and, having come straight from the Base, had never been under fire. In early September, when the battalion was in action around Nurlu, the CO was impressed by the newly-arrived youngsters’ performance, noting that ‘as long as they had leaders they kept steadily on’. It was only when the officers and platoon sergeants became casualties that ‘they quickly lost cohesion and were scattered in depth, to become victims of their inexperience in how to make use of ground and cover’. Once out of the line again, the battalion had time for a week’s intensive training and ‘the youngsters daily grew more like hardened veterans.’¹³⁴

Between 8 August and 26 September the British Armies advanced an average of 25 miles on a front of 40 miles, with casualties of about 180,000.¹³⁵ The continuing forward momentum meant that reinforcements had to be moved forward in the wake of the fighting divisions. On

¹³³ Captain Dunn believed that all but twenty of the drafts received by 2nd RWF in early November 1917 were eighteen year olds. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew*, p. 414.

¹³⁴ Riddell & Clayton, *The Cambridgeshires 1914 – 1919*, pp. 216, 228-9, 231.

¹³⁵ *BOH 1918 Vol. 3*, p. 509.

3 September 38th Division established a Reinforcement Staging Camp at Contalmaison. Three days later it moved to Beaulencourt where the arrival the following day of the Division's Reception Camp relieved it of its function.¹³⁶ Fifth Division laid down clear instructions that reinforcements, together with men returning from leave and 'casuals' (usually those returning individually from hospitals or courses), were to be sent up automatically each day whenever Brigades were in Support or Reserve, and could also be sent up on demand by Brigades actually in the Line. 'Dumped' personnel, the nucleus left behind when battalions went into action, would rejoin their Brigades, if demanded, when Brigades were withdrawn into Divisional Reserve.¹³⁷

Replacements were arriving but numbers in Divisions were steadily decreasing. On 4 September the total strength of Fifth Division was 392 officers plus 9228 ORs, including 70 plus 1077 'dumped' personnel. By 30 September it was 373 officers plus 8497 ORs, including 87 plus 1040 'dumped' personnel.¹³⁸

Reinforcements were still arriving in France from other parts of the world but not always of the quality or quantity required. Malarial cases continued to arrive from Salonika with a further 12,000 due during October. In order to administer all Infantry reinforcements suffering from malaria 197th Infantry Brigade was withdrawn from 66th Division. Its place in that division was taken by the South African Brigade, now re-organized into three battalions due to lack of

¹³⁶ TNA: WO 95/2541 38th Division A & Q War Diary for September 1918.

¹³⁷ TNA: WO 95/1520 -3 5th Division Standing Administrative Instructions for Battle dated 23 September 1918.

¹³⁸ TNA: WO 95/1520 -3 5th Division War Diary figures for 4 and 30 September 1918.

reinforcements. Even the Australians were running short of men and their Divisions were also now forced through lack of reinforcements to reduce to ten battalions per division.¹³⁹

October – November 1918

The great advance continued. In the north, the battle of Ypres took place 28 September – 2 October, followed by Courtrai in mid-October, but the main thrust continued to be further south and eastwards, in Artois and Picardy.

In perhaps its ‘stiffest fighting of the whole advance’, the 38th Division was in action on 8 October at Cambrai, when its task was to advance over five thousand yards through Villers Outreaux.¹⁴⁰ During the attack, some 89 men of 115th Brigade died, for whom the ages of 76 are known. Analysis shows an average age of 24 for each battalion, a decrease of two years for 2nd RWF since a month earlier. The majority of men killed in each battalion, however, remained in the age group 21-29.

Battalions in 115 th Brigade	2 nd RWF	%	17 th RWF	%	10 th SWB	%
Total deaths 8 – 9 Oct 18	16		38		35	
Known ages	11		34		31	
Total aged 18 – 20	4	36%	10	29%	9	29%
Total aged 21 – 29 – best fighting age in terms of physical strength and maturity	6	55%	20	59%	17	55%
30s and 40s	1		4		5	
Average age of those known	24		24		24	

¹³⁹ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary for September 1918. Much to their disgust, the Fifth Division, which had escaped reorganization whilst in Italy, would also lose battalions in early October. TNA: WO 95/1520/3 Fifth Division War Diary entry for 1 October 1918.

¹⁴⁰ TNA: WO 95//2541 38th Division A & Q War Diary for 1918. The Estimated casualties are carefully noted for each day throughout the advance and the arrival of all officer reinforcements by name but the diary makes absolutely no mention of OR reinforcements. It does, however, note occurrences such as the departure on 27 September of the OC 38th Division MT Company on 7 days Special leave to England in order to purchase for the Division a new Cinema engine and soda-water plant!

Enlistment locations have also been analysed and these battalions continue to show remarkable homogeneity. Although figures for their recruiting area were low, both the RWF battalions show over 50 per cent as having enlisted in Wales; conversely some 57 per cent had enlisted in 10th SWB in its home recruiting area. For each battalion fewer than 25 per cent had enlisted outside Western Command.

The Battle of the Selle took place over the period 17 – 25 October. Amongst the divisions involved were the 1st, 6th and 19th. The 1st Division, which included 1st SWB, had been fighting steadily forwards since the attack on the Drocourt-Queant Line in early September. The 6th Division, including 1st KSLI, had spent the summer in Flanders, in the Kemmel-Dickebusch sector, before moving south in mid-August to take part in the attacks on the Hindenburg Line. The 19th Division, which included 9th RWF, had been mauled and rebuilt on three occasions earlier in the year and was now taking part in its first action since the Aisne. The total number of deaths across the three battalions was 85, the ages of 80 being known.

Battalion	1 st SWB	%	1 st KSLI	%	9 th RWF	%
Total deaths 17 – 25 October 1918	24		31		30	
Known ages	21		30		29	
18			2		2	
19	4		5		6	
20	4		4		5	
Total aged 18 – 20	8	38%	11	37%	13	45%
Total aged 21 – 29 – best fighting age in terms of physical strength and maturity	9	43%	13	43%	10	34%
30s and 40s	4	19%	6	20%	6	21%
Average age of those known	24		24		24	

The average age of those who died in all three battalions was again 24 but all three battalions are showing a greater number of youngsters amongst the dead, with 9th RWF showing 45 per cent. Presumably this battalion which had had to be refilled three times earlier in the year had received a higher proportion of the available ‘A’ men, who by now were almost all youngsters. The average ages of each battalion would have been lower had they not contained a proportion

of men over thirty but these were not necessarily men who had been conscripted late; 39 year-old Pte David Hughes of 9th RWF had first arrived in France in November 1914 with 1/4th RWF.

The 19th Division was relieved overnight on 23/24 October, having lost 111 killed, 603 wounded and 25 missing during the recent battle. It now had a few days rest during which a large number of reinforcements arrived, mostly young soldiers without any previous experience of the war.

Time was short in which to prepare them for the next battle, but training in open warfare began at once and it was surprising to see how quickly they grasped the principles; they were taught by instructors who were by now seasoned warriors.¹⁴¹

Having come late to the 'Advance', 19th division was now to be in action up to the end: Valenciennes, the Sambre on 4 November and the Grande Honnelle 5 – 7 November. Reinforcements continued to arrive but now in 'penny-packets' rather than large drafts. Between 20 – 30 October, 9th Cheshire, in reserve for the Selle, had received 19 ORs. The casualties, however, were now appreciably fewer, although whether this is due to the different style of warfare or the reduced size of battalions is difficult to say. The table below, however, shows that the composition of the three Marches battalions in 19th Division in their last action of the war remains predominantly drawn from Western Command.

¹⁴¹ Wyrall, *The Nineteenth Division 1914-1918*, p. 222.

3 – 9 Nov 18	9th Cheshire	9th RWF	1/4th KSLI
Total Killed in Action	13	13	24
Enlisted Regimental Area	7	4	7
Elsewhere in No 4 District – England			2
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales	2	5	1
Total enlisted in No 4 District	9	9	10
Enlisted in No 3 District		3	7
• Plus Liverpool/Manchester	1	1	3
Total Enlisted in Western Command	10	13	20
Northern Command	2		1
Southern Command	1		1
• Plus Birmingham			
Eastern			1
London District			
Scotland/Ireland			
Overseas			1
Total Other Commands	3	0	4

Reinforcements continued to arrive and between 10 – 27 November 9th Cheshire received 42 replacements.¹⁴² The reinforcement tap had thus not been entirely turned off but the men available were appreciably fewer. They had been just enough.

Conclusions for 1918

The manpower crisis of early 1918 had been coming since 1914 but the German Spring Offensive threw the shortages into stark relief and forced long overdue actions to be taken. Many of those rushed out initially were not new men but those already in the Army and employed at Home by different War Office Departments. The General Staff had long been urging a reduction in their numbers and this was now forced upon them.¹⁴³ Other measures were taken and Macready subsequently doubted whether

the Government would have cared for the fierce light of publicity to have been thrown on the methods which had to be employed, or indeed, in thousands of cases, on the class

¹⁴² TNA: WO 95/2079 9th Cheshire War Diary entries for October and November 1918.

¹⁴³ Robertson, *From Private to Field-Marshal*, p. 342-3.

of men who had to be sent, men who were in reality not fit in any capacity for the theatre of war.¹⁴⁴

The Army Council continued to blame the Government for the shortage of manpower, never fully recognizing the impact of its continuing demands for men upon the nation's industries, including those heavily involved in the war effort. The Government's need was to balance the conflicting demands within the prevailing political climate. The dilemma was, perhaps, felt most acutely in the coal mining industry. Miners were essential to the war economy but they also made excellent soldiers. Throughout 1918 the Government, and especially Lloyd George, flip-flopped over conscripting miners and releasing them back to the Home Front.¹⁴⁵ In August, for example, GHQ received a demand for 500 'B' miners to be returned home.¹⁴⁶ There seems little or no evidence, however, that the Government actively withheld men from the Army. It was more a case of delayed action, misleading statements and growing distrust on both sides.

The Cabinet did take the decision to allow under-19 year olds to be sent during the immediate emergency. Many of those sent proved to be excellent material but although they had received longer initial training they lacked time to gain experience of the Western Front before being thrust into action. Many were killed and there was a feeling of future capital being expended, together with an undoubted paternalism amongst senior officers at the sight of younger men in action. The perception that the youngsters made up half the Infantry in the later months of the war does not appear to be founded in reality.

¹⁴⁴ Macready, *Annals of an Active Life Vol. 1*, p. 287.

¹⁴⁵ See David Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall: Victory and Defeat in 1918* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), p. 386. For the problems of coal mining during the war, see Barry Supple, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume 4: 1913-46 The Political Economy of Decline*, (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2004), pp. 43-116.

¹⁴⁶ TNA: WO 95/26 AG GHQ War Diary entry for 30 August 1918.

It has long been thought that by 1918 battalions were made up of men drawn from all over the country. The evidence of the Marches battalions surveyed does not support this, showing that well over two-thirds continued to have enlisted originally in Western Command. The surpluses obtained by the re-organization of divisions early in 1918 were largely distributed to other battalions of the same Regiment and the Reserve battalions and TRBs of the parent Command continued to supply newly trained men. Men of 1914 would have talked about the same football teams as those of 1918.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the provision and management of OR replacements for British Infantry battalions on the Western Front. It is difficult to obtain an accurate view of the size of the problem since the statistics compiled after the war show figures reported up to March 1920. Furthermore, the figures for the wounded relate to the number of wounds and not the number of individuals wounded. Enough can be gleaned, however, to indicate the magnitude of the problem confronting the Army's manning staffs in meeting the need for replacements for just one theatre of the war:¹

Infantry Casualties on the Western Front				
	Killed	Wounded	Missing	Total
Regular Army	307,975	908,692	155,450	1,132,117
TF	91,558	287,649	46,968	426,175
Totals	399,533	1,196,341	202,418	1,798,292

Reinforcement Process

The over-arching requirement was to provide sufficient reinforcements for units in the field as quickly as possible. Plans and procedures for this had been laid down pre-war, based on the requirements of previous conflicts but the demands of industrial warfare inevitably forced changes in the process. These might not have been as dramatic as developments in weaponry and tactics but nonetheless showed a steady evolution to meet changing demands.

At the start of the war a single Special Reserve unit serving the Line battalions of each Infantry Regiment (with occasionally an Extra Reserve unit for large regiments) prepared drafts when notified of requirements by the War Office. Once ready the draft would be despatched to the

¹ *Statistics of the British Military Effort of the British Empire (SME)* (London: War Office, 1922; Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 1999), pp. 249, 240 fn 1.

theatre concerned, to the Divisional IBD for the appropriate battalion. After several days spent training at the Base the men would be sent forward to join their units, arriving in many cases almost a month, if not more, after they had been demanded. By the end of the war, the emphasis in the reinforcement system had changed from demand to supply. Regimental Reserve units, both Regular and TF, together with TR units affiliated to the Regiment's parent Home Command prepared drafts, informing the War Office as soon as they were ready. The Command concerned was then informed of their availability and called drafts forward as required. On arrival in theatre these drafts were moved rapidly forward to Divisional Reception Camps, close behind the fighting units, from where they could be fed into units as soon as they had time to absorb them. A speedier, more streamlined process had evolved.

Behind this evolution lay a willingness to change systems and organizations in the light of experience and in the interests of greater efficiency. Initial confusion arising out of the pre-war plans between the roles of the IGC and the DAG 3rd Echelon was resolved before Christmas 1914, with the latter assuming sole responsibility for the calling forward of drafts from home. The process of casualty reporting to GHQ and the 3rd Echelon was speeded up by late 1915 with the introduction of daily submission of estimated numbers. This remained unchanged for the rest of the war, with the sole refinement in early 1917 of the introduction, in the interests of accuracy and the avoidance of double counting, of running totals per unit for the phase of battle concerned. In France, the processing of drafts developed with the IBDs being re-organized twice to reflect changing circumstances. Firstly, in May/June 1916 it was decided in the interests of greater flexibility to reinforce by regiment rather than battalion. This necessitated the re-organization of Divisional IBDs into larger ones serving groups of Regiments from the same Home Command. Subsequently, their size and role would be

reduced in late 1917, effectively turning them into transit camps, simply receiving and posting men to units and then sending them rapidly forwards towards reinforcement units further towards the front. The cause of this later reorganization is said to have been the disturbance at Étaples in September 1917 but it coincided with the move to situate reinforcements closer to corps and subsequently divisions.

Provision of Manpower

The fundamental requirement for the reinforcement process was obviously the availability of sufficient manpower. Initially the influx of volunteers provided ample resources but the recruiting downturn in late 1915 led to the introduction of compulsion in 1916. The problem for the nation as a whole was that the indiscriminate recruiting of earlier years had caused manpower shortages in various industrial sectors. It was now intended to regulate the occupations from which men were called up but the necessary mechanisms were not in place and throughout 1917 the Government proved unable rather than unwilling to force the Departments of State to release manpower. The introduction of the concept of National Service early in that year proved ineffective, despite the creation of the Ministry of National Service and it would not be until later in the year that the appointment of a DGNS with Ministerial authority would enable any real co-ordination of the nation's manpower to become possible. By then, however, the situation had become critical.

The manpower crisis of early 1918 had thus been coming since 1914 but the German Spring Offensive threw the shortages into stark relief. Since the end of 3rd Ypres the Army Council and GHQ had been demanding more men to replace the losses suffered during that offensive. The War Cabinet's problem was the distribution of manpower for the country as a whole; the

large numbers demanded by the War Office ran the risk of destroying the nation's industries, including those required for the war effort. The Army Council appeared unable or indeed unwilling to recognize this, failing even to agree amongst its members in response to the question:

assuming a choice had to be made between a considerable reduction of men in the Army and a proportionate reduction in munitions and supplies, including those of our Allies, which would the War Office prefer? The Adjutant General of the day had always answered that they must have the men, whilst the Master General of Ordnance and the Quarter Master General had said that they must have the supplies.²

The Government and the Military hierarchy increasingly distrusted each other since neither accepted, nor even understood, the other's position.

Despite the views of the *Official History*, and Lloyd George's many comments on the subject, there is little evidence in Cabinet papers that the Government actively withheld men.³ Other fronts had been opened up, all requiring manpower, and on the Government's insistence divisions had been sent to Italy in late 1917. The Government's real role was in the taking-up of men from civilian life. This had to be governed by the industrial requirements of the nation as a whole, and also by the increasingly difficult political climate of the time, with the growing Labour and Trades Union lobby. The two 1918 MSAs were passed, simply because of the national emergency caused by the German offensives.

The calling up of men from civilian life was always a long-term measure. By the time notice had been given and men called up and trained, some four months would elapse before the

² TNA: CAB 23/7 Minutes of War Cabinet Meeting 449 of 19 July 1918.

³ *BOH 1918 Vol. 1*, p. 52 fn 1: 'It is obvious that the British Armies in France could have been brought up to full establishment before 21st March without unduly weakening the forces elsewhere had the Government so willed.'

earliest time at which they could be drafted. The men rushed to France to confront the German offensives were men already trained and retained at home. The sole decisions made at that time by the Cabinet related to the sending of under-age boys who had completed their training and the release of men from units earmarked for Home Defence, the latter bringing a complaint from Sir John French, the C-in-C Home Forces.⁴ The rest of the manpower rushed to France came from men employed by different departments of the War Office.

The Need for Greater Flexibility

There was early recognition of the need for greater flexibility in the use of manpower. One facet of this was the need to be able to transfer men to different units and arms within the Army, which would require legislation to alter terms of service. This was passed for Regular soldiers in 1915 but the TF remained obdurate and consequently its usefulness both overseas and at home was reduced. It would not be until the 1916 MSAs that it would become possible to transfer TF soldiers without their consent between units and corps, and into Regular units. The side-effect, however, was deep-seated resentment against the way in which TF terms of service had been changed. The flexibility thus gained, however, shows a willingness to sacrifice unit and cap badge loyalty to meet the needs of expediency.

The Medical Services also played a significant part in increasing both flexibility and the availability of manpower. Medical classifications were refined which enabled greater use of less-fit men in appropriate employment in order to release fit men to fight. Improvements were also been made in the treatment of casualties, enabling more men to be returned to duty in theatre. The medical authorities subsequently calculated that some 64 per cent of the

⁴ TNA: CAB 24/46 GT 4030 Troops Available for Home Defence dated 25 March 1918.

wounded returned to duty in the front line and a further 18 per cent returned to employment on LofC or garrison duties, or in sedentary occupations.⁵

The growing shortage of recruits had also necessitated greater attention being paid to how and where men were employed. The monthly posting ACIs allocated men by fitness category and aptitude to appropriate parts of the Army. Men already serving and who were fit enough to fight were 'combed out' so that they could be sent to the front. New Corps were also created, specifically to release fitter men to fight: the Labour Corps and the WAAC. Although fewer women had joined the latter Corps for service overseas than hoped, they had also played their part and their conduct during the March 1918 offensive won them recognition in the form of their name being changed to Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps (QMAAC).

Training

Adult recruits were posted on enlistment to draft-finding units for their training. New Reserve units had been created in 1915 to cater for New Army battalions and also for the TF but the anticipated increase in manpower with the introduction of conscription led to the creation of the TR. This did not replace the Regimental Reserve battalions but augmented them by taking surplus manpower within a Home Command after the former were filled. Despite perceptions in the Army at large, however, emphasis remained on preserving regimental affiliations. It still remained possible for a man to choose to serve in his local regiment and there continued to be mention of the value of *esprit de corps*.

⁵ *BOH 1918 Vol. 5*, p. 597.

Infantry training for the youngest recruits had evolved during 1917 with the introduction of new units. Later in the year these would become specifically YS battalions from which the lads would move to Graduated battalions, becoming part of the Home Army. Under normal circumstances, the youngsters would receive up to a year's training whilst adult Infantry recruits received a minimum of 14 weeks, long enough to train the man to at least the minimum standard required to take his place in a rifle section. What could not be imparted was the experience gained by being in action. Even in late 1914, the Army's perennial complaint had been heard that the new drafts were not as good/well trained as those that had gone before. There seems little evidence that drafts later in the war were in fact any less well-prepared than before. What was lacking was time to acclimatize them to the front – and also the experienced officers and NCOs to lead them.

Soldiers' Ages

It has been assumed that the drafting of 18 year olds earlier in the year and the conscription of youths immediately they turned 19 meant that 50 per cent of Infantry units during the Hundred Days were made up of 'boys'. Analysis has shown, however, that the average age was 24, towards the middle of the optimum fighting ages of 21 - 28.⁶

Composition of Battalions

Before the war both the recruiting and the reinforcement organizations were based on territorial affiliations: the Regiment's recruiting area, the Military District in which that was located and the parent Home Command to which it belonged. It has long been assumed that by the end of the war these territorial affiliations had been seriously eroded and even that there

⁶ Rough analysis using CWGC data of 1st Cheshire soldiers who died between 8 August and 11 November 1914 provides 73 known ages, and an average age of 26/27.

had been a definite intention to ‘destroy the Regiment and nationalize the Army’.⁷

Selected battalions of Regiments of the English/Welsh Marches have been analysed over a comparable period of time for each year of the war in order to test this assumption. Those for 1918 are below.⁸

Enlistment Location	1st Cheshire		9th Cheshire		1st KSLI		6th KSLI	
Regimental Area	95	39%	35	50%	55	35%	14	39%
Elsewhere in No 4 District - England	8				14		3	
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales	17		6		28		6	
Total enlisted in No 4 District	120	50%	41	59%	97	61%	23	64%
Enlisted in No 3 District	30		7		21		5	
• Liverpool/Manchester	25		5		12		2	
Total Enlisted in Western Command	175	73%	53	76%	130	82%	30	83%
Northern Command	31		7		2		1	
Southern Command	8		3		17		3	
• Birmingham	3				2		1	
Eastern	11		2		5		1	
London District	7		4		1			
Scotland/Ireland	6		1					
Overseas					2			
Total Other Commands	66		17		29		6	
Total Deaths	241		70		159		36	

Table 5.1. Enlistment locations of soldiers of selected English Regular battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1918.

Enlistment Location	2nd RWF		9th RWF		1st SWB		10th SWB	
Regimental Area	49	25%	19	19%	22	22%	63	36%
Elsewhere in No 4 District - England	14		6		9		10	
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales	55		32		23		39	
Total enlisted in No 4 District	118	60%	57	58%	54	54%	112	64%
Enlisted in No 3 District	28		15		15		23	
• Liverpool/Manchester	19		8		10		5	
Total Enlisted in Western Command	165	84%	80	81%	79	79%	140	80%
Northern Command	10		4		4		5	
Southern Command	3		1		2		6	
• Birmingham	5		1				3	
Eastern	2		3		5		11	
London District	10		9		10		9	
Scotland/Ireland			1				1	
Overseas	1							
Total Other Commands	31		19		21		35	
Total Deaths	196		99		100		175	

Table 5.2. Enlistment locations of soldiers of selected Welsh Regular battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1918.

⁷ J. C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew* (London: King, 1938; Abacus, 1997), pp. 245-6.

⁸ For ease of comparison and to include soldiers who died immediately post the Armistice the date period has been kept the same as that of previous years.

Inevitably, the dwindling availability of manpower had had some effect and by 1918 the numbers originally enlisting in the respective Regimental areas had decreased for the Regular battalions of the Cheshire Regiment, KSLI and SWB, although those for the RWF remained the same as in 1914: around 25 per cent. The percentages for those enlisted in No 4 District had also decreased by 1918 but nonetheless remained above 50 per cent for all the Regular battalions, and had actually risen for the RWF as it had become more Welsh. The pattern continued for those enlisted in Western Command where, despite a fall from 1914 levels, 73 per cent and above had been enlisted in that Command.

The 1918 birth locations (see Tables 5.3 and 5.4) do not show such a great difference from those of 1914.

Birth location	1st Cheshire		9th Cheshire		1st KSLI		6th KSLI	
Regimental Area	69	29%	26	37%	49	41%	8	22%
Elsewhere in No 4 District – England	6				14		3	
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales	14		5		21		4	
Total born in No 4 District	89	37%	31	44%	84	53%	15	42%
Born in No 3 District	38		11		24		4	
• Liverpool/Manchester	20		8		5		4	
Total Born in Western Command	147	61%	50	71%	113	71%	23	64%
Northern Command	35		7		9		3	
Southern Command	7		3		20		4	
• Birmingham	2				3		1	
Eastern	10		3		6		2	
London District	10		2					
Scotland/Ireland	7		1					
Overseas			1		2			
Total Other Commands	71		17		38		10	
Location of Birth Unknown	23		3		8		3	
Total Deaths	241		70		159		36	

Table 5.3. Birth locations of soldiers of selected English Regular battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1918.

Birth location	2ndRWF		9th RWF		1st SWB		10th SWB	
Regimental Area	37	19%	17	17%	11	11%	38	22%
Elsewhere in No 4 District – England	11		8		6		10	
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales	39		21		19		40	
Total born in No 4 District	87	44%	46	46%	36	36%	88	50%
Born in No 3 District	32		11		17		23	
• Liverpool/Manchester	14		5		8		3	
Total Born in Western Command	133	68%	62	63%	61	61%	114	65%
Northern Command	15		3		9		7	
Southern Command	11		6		6		17	
• Birmingham	4				1			
Eastern	3		5		4		12	
London District	7		8		9		11	
Scotland/Ireland	1		2		2		3	
Overseas	2						2	
Total Other Commands	43		24		31		52	
Location of Birth Unknown	20		11		8		9	
Total Deaths	196		99		100		175	

Table 5.4. Birth locations of soldiers of selected Welsh Regular battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1918.

The greatest fall had been for 1st Cheshire, from 55 per cent in 1914 having been born in Cheshire to 29 per cent in 1918. In 1st KSLI and 1st SWB, the drop had been just 8 per cent whilst for 2nd RWF the number of those born within its recruiting area had risen by 8 per cent. Whilst the figures for the Cheshire soldiers born within Western Command had fallen from 1914 levels, for the other battalions, both English and Welsh, the numbers of those born within Western Command remained above 60 per cent.

The existence of Lancashire, with the conurbations of Liverpool and Manchester, in the other District of Western Command had undoubtedly helped retain the homogeneity of the battalions surveyed, as it always had done. Overall, around three-quarters of those killed in the Regular battalions of the Marches had continued to come from the traditional recruiting areas of Western Command.

The smaller numbers of TF deaths in 1918, except for those for 1/6th Cheshire and 1/4th KSLI, slightly skew the percentages. However, although the localized recruiting for TF battalions

had inevitably been eroded, Table 5.5 shows that over 77 per cent continued to be drawn from Western Command.

Enlistment Locations	1/5 th Cheshire		1/6 th Cheshire		1/4 th KSLI		1/4 th RWF		1/2 nd Monmouths	
	Regimental Area	13	81%	30	53%	20	24%	14	42%	10
Elsewhere in No 4 District - England					14		5		2	
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales			1		5		4		1	
Total enlisted in No 4 District	13	81%	31	54%	39	46%	23	70%	13	76%
Enlisted in No 3 District	2		7		16		2			
• Liverpool/Manchester			6		10		2		2	
Total Enlisted in Western Command	15	94%	44	77%	65	77%	27	82%	15	88%
Northern Command			4		3		4			
Southern Command			4		8					
• Birmingham							1			
Eastern	1		4		3		1		1	
London District			1		4				1	
Scotland/Ireland										
Overseas					1					
Total Other Commands	1		13		19		6		2	
Total Deaths	16		57		84		33		17	

Table 5.5. Enlistment locations of soldiers of selected TF battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1918.

Birth Locations	1/5 th Cheshire		1/6 th Cheshire		1/4 th KSLI		1/4 th RWF		1/2 nd Monmouths	
	Regimental Area	11	67%	19	33%	17	20%	9	27%	4
Elsewhere in No 4 District – England					8		4		1	
Elsewhere in No 4 District - Wales			3		5		1		1	
Total born in No 4 District	11	67%	22	39%	30	36%	14	42%	6	35%
Born in No 3 District	2		10		17		3		1	
• Liverpool/Manchester			3		9		1		1	
Total Born in Western Command	13	81%	35	61%	56	67%	18	55%	8	47%
Northern Command			6		5		6			
Southern Command			4		7		1		2	
• Birmingham			1		1					
Eastern	2		4		6				1	
London District			1		3				1	
Scotland/Ireland					1				1	
Overseas					2		1			
Total Other Commands	2		16		25		8		5	
Location of Birth Unknown	1		6		3		7		4	
Total Deaths	16		57		84		33		17	

Table 5.6. Birth locations of soldiers of selected TF battalions who were killed/died between 1 July – 30 November 1918.

Details of the birth locations are less conclusive, but the smaller numbers of deaths for 1/5th Cheshire, 1/4th RWF and 1/2nd Monmouthshire affect the percentages.

Overall, analysis of selected battalions of Regiments from the English/Welsh Marches indicates that their composition remained largely the same as it always had been. A soldier of 1914 would have found the same regional accents amongst those he served with in 1918, even though the individual battalions had been rebuilt several times.

Appendix 1 - Home Commands¹

Commands	Districts	Counties
Scottish – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HQ Edinburgh 	1 – HQ Perth	Aberdeenshire, Argyll, Banffshire, Bute, Caithness, Clackmannan, Dumbartonshire, Elgin, Fifeshire, Forfarshire, Invernesshire, Kincardine, Kinross, Nairn, Orkney, Perthshire, Renfrewshire Ross and Cromarty, Shetland, Stirlingshire, and Sutherland.
	2 – HQ Hamilton	Ayrshire, Berwickshire, Berwick-on-Tweed (Regulars and Special Reserve only), Dumfries, Edinburgh, Haddington, Kircudbright, Lanarkshire, Linlithgow, Peebles, Roxburgh, Selkirk and Wigtownshire.
Western – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HQ Chester 	3 – HQ Preston	Cumberland, Isle of Man, Lancashire (except 40 th Regimental District) and Westmorland.
	4 – HQ Chester	Cheshire, Herefordshire, Shropshire, that portion of Lancashire in the 40 th Regimental District and Wales: Anglesey, Brecknockshire, Cardiganshire, Carmarthenshire, Carnarvonshire, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Glamorganshire, Merionethshire, Montgomeryshire, Monmouthshire, Pembrokeshire and Radnorshire.
Northern – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HQ York 	5 – HQ York	Durham, Northumberland, Yorkshire, Berwick on Tweed, (except Regulars and Special Reserve)
	6 – HQ Lichfield	Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Rutland and Staffordshire.
Southern – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HQ: Salisbury 	7 – HQ Warwick	Warwickshire, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire (except Windsor for Regular troops and that portion of the County included in the Aldershot Command)
	8 – HQ Exeter	Devon, Somerset, Cornwall, Dorset, Wiltshire, Hampshire (except that portion included in the Aldershot Command)

¹ *Army List* (London: HMSO, August 1914)

Commands	Districts	Counties
Eastern – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HQ: Horseguards, London 	9 – HQ Warley, Essex	Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Suffolk
	10 – HQ Hounslow	Kent, Middlesex, Sussex, Surrey (except portion included in Aldershot Command) and Woolwich (exclusive of Territorial Troops therein).
Ireland – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dublin 	11 – HQ Dublin	Londonderry, Antrim, Donegal, Tyrone, Down, Fermanagh, Armagh, Monaghan, Louth, Cavan, Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow and Carlow
	12 - HQ Cork	Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, Longford, Meath, Westmeath, Galway, King’s County, Queen’s County, Clare, Tipperary, Kilkenny, Wexford, Limerick, Waterford, Kerry and Cork.
Aldershot – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HQ: Aldershot 		Parts of Berkshire, Surrey and Hampshire
	London District – HQ: Horseguards, London	The County of London, the Guards Depot at Caterham, Purfleet, Rainham Rifle Range, and (for Regular troops) Windsor.

Appendix 2 – Military Recruiting Areas for Marches Infantry Regiments and Changes under Ministry of National Service

Military Recruiting Areas²

Western Command: Cheshire, Lancashire, Shropshire, Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, Cumberland, Westmorland, the Isle of Man and the whole of Wales.
HQ in Watergate Street, Chester

Subdivided into two Military Districts, each containing Regimental Areas numbered according to the former Regimental Number:

No 3 Military District – covering Cumberland, Westmorland, Isle of Man and Lancashire (except 40th Regimental District). HQ in Preston. Infantry Regiments recruited in No 3 Military District:

- **The King's Own (Royal Lancaster Regt)**
 - Regimental Area No 4: Part of Lancashire (including Barrow in Furness, Lancaster, Morecambe and Ulverston)
- **The King's (Liverpool) Regiment**
 - Regimental Area No 8: Part of Lancashire (including Bootle, Liverpool and Southport) and IoM.
- **The Lancashire Fusiliers**
 - Regimental Area No 20: Part of Lancashire (including Bury, Middleton, Radcliffe, Rochdale and Salford).
- **The East Lancashire Regiment**
 - Regimental Area No 30: Part of Lancashire (including Accrington, Blackburn, Burnley, Clitheroe and Darwen)
- **The Border Regiment**
 - Regimental Area No 34: Cumberland and Westmorland
- **The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment**
 - Regimental Area No 47: Part of Lancashire (including Bolton, Chorley and Preston)
- **The Manchester Regiment**
 - Regimental Area No 63: Part of Lancashire (including Ashton-under-Lyne, Manchester and Oldham)

² *Kelly's Directory of Cheshire 1914*, p 229; *Kelly's Directory of Shropshire 1913*, p 222; *Army List - February 1915*, *Army List - January 1917*

No 4 Military District – covering counties of Cheshire, Flint, Denbigh, Anglesey, Carnarvon, Merioneth, Montgomery, Radnor, Cardigan, Brecknock, Monmouth, Pembroke, Carmarthen, Glamorgan, Hereford, Shropshire and that portion of Lancashire in the 40th Regimental District). HQ in Shrewsbury

Infantry Regiments recruited in No 4 Military District:

- **The Cheshire Regt** Depot: Chester
 - Regimental Area No 22: covered County of Cheshire
- **The Royal Welsh Fusiliers (RWF)** Depot: Wrexham
 - Regimental Area No 23: covered Denbighshire, Flintshire, Carnarvonshire, Anglesey, Merioneth and Montgomeryshire ie North and Mid Wales
- **The South Wales Borderers (SWB)** Depot: Brecon
 - Regimental Area No 24: covered Brecknockshire, and Monmouthshire,
- **The South Lancashire Regiment** Depot: Warrington
 - Regimental Area No 40 – part of Lancashire including St Helens and Warrington
- **The Welsh Regiment** Depot: Cardiff
 - Regimental Area No 41: covered Cardiganshire, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Glamorganshire ie South and West Wales.
- **The King's Shropshire Light Infantry (KSLI)** Depot: Shrewsbury
 - Regimental Area No 53: covered Counties of Shropshire, Herefordshire and Radnorshire (NB Herefordshire and Radnorshire came under Area 53 for Regular Recruiting but not for TF.

TF-only Regiments in No 4 Military District

- Herefordshire Regt
- Monmouthshire Regiment

Recruiting Areas Under Ministry of National Service wef 1 November 1917³

Instruction No 2 of 1917 dated 15 November 1917: *Constitution and Organisation of Regions, Regional Headquarters and Recruiting Areas, and Transfer of Recruiting to Civil Control under the Minister of National Service* formalised the new Recruiting organisation in place from 1 November 1917. .

- Regional HQs were established to take over administration of respective regions wef ‘midnight 31 October 1917’ (see below)
- Organization of Regional HQs:
 - Director of Recruiting: ‘the principal representative of the Ministry of National Service in the Region so far as concerns all matters relating to the raising of men for the Armed Forces’.
 - Deputy Director of Recruiting – assisted by Heads of Sections:
 - Official to deal with exec work of Recruiting machinery
 - Official to act as Legal Adviser
 - Commissioner of Medical Services – assisted where necessary by Deputy Commissioner
 - Deputy Controller of Registration – plus Assistant Controller where necessary.
- Deputy Controller of Statistics. From 1 Nov 17 the Area Commanders of the Military Recruiting Areas became Assistant Directors of Recruiting, directly responsible to the Director of Recruiting for their Region for the efficient working and organisation of their Areas.
- Posting Arrangements – wef 1 Nov 17.
 - Recruits would be posted by the Military Authorities
 - The Recruiting Authorities had no further responsibility or duties for posting ‘except where a man who cannot for any reason be compulsorily posted volunteers to serve in a Corps of his choice. In these cases it will be the duty of the Recruiting Authorities to enlist the man (but not to finally approve him) and despatch him to the Reception Depot. A slip will be attached to his documents to the effect that he has volunteered for service on condition that he is posted to a certain corps. If the man is not accepted for the Corps selected and declines to join any other corps, he will be allowed to return to civilian life, and in this case the posting officer will make an entry to the following effect on the third page of the man’s attestation paper ‘not finally approved for corps selected,’ and return the documents to Area headquarters for necessary action by the Assistant Controller of Registration.’

³ Ministry of National Service *Ministry of National Service Instructions Issued During November and December 1917, Nos 1-47 (inclusive) of 1917* (London: HMSO, 1919)

Appendix I to National Service Instruction 2 of 1917

Region	Location of Regional HQ
London	War Office (temp) then Newington
Causeway	
East Anglia	Paddington (82 Westbourne Terrace)
South Eastern	Paddington (84 Westbourne Terrace)
South Western	Bristol
Yorkshire and East Midlands	Nottingham
West Midlands	Queen's College, Birmingham
North Western	Liverpool University
Northern	Newcastle on Tyne
Scotland	Edinburgh
Wales	Cardiff

The new Regions as applied to the Marches Regiments

Region	Regimental Area	Recruiting Areas	HQ
North Western	8 th	Liverpool	Seaforth
	8 th	Isle of Man	Seaforth
	22 nd	Cheshire	Chester
	47 th	N Lancashire (Preston)	Preston
	47 th	Lancashire (Bolton)	Preston
	20 th	Lancashire (Bury)	Bury
	4 th	Lancashire (Lancaster)	Lancaster
	40 th	South Lancashire (Warrington)	Warrington
	30 th	East Lancashire (Blackburn)	Preston
	63 rd	Lancashire (Ashton-u-Lyne)	Ashton-u-Lyne
West Midlands	53 rd	Shropshire	Shrewsbury
	53 rd	Herefordshire	Shrewsbury
Wales	23 rd	Carnarvonshire	Wrexham
	41 st	Glamorganshire	Cardiff
	41 st	Carmarthenshire	Cardiff
	24 th	Brecknockshire	Brecon
	24 th	Monmouthshire	Brecon

Appendix 3: Marches Reserve Battalions (Regular Army)

Battalion	1915	1916	1917
3 rd (SR) Cheshire	Birkenhead (Mersey Defences)	Birkenhead (Mersey Defences)	Birkenhead (Mersey Defences); December to Newcastle on Tyne
3 rd (SR) RWF	Wrexham until May; then Liverpool	Litherland, Liverpool	Litherland, Liverpool; November to Ireland
3 rd (SR) SWB	Pembroke Dock; 4 coys in Edinburgh; June to Liverpool	Hightown, Liverpool	Hightown, Liverpool
3 rd (SR) KSLI	Edinburgh; March to Pembroke Dock	Pembroke Dock	Pembroke Dock December to Ireland
14 th (Reserve) Cheshire	April: became a Second Reserve Bn in 11 th Reserve Bde; Kinmel Park and then Prees Heath, Shropshire	September: became 59 th TRB in 11 th Reserve Bde at Prees Heath	May: became 225 th (Grad) Bn in 203 rd Bde, 68 th Div at Halesworth, Suffolk; October: retitled 51 st (Grad) Bn Manchester Regt at Yarmouth.
12 th (Reserve) RWF	April: became a Second Reserve Bn in 14 th Reserve Bde; Kinmel Park, N Wales	September: became 62 nd TRB in 14 th Reserve Bde at Kinmel Park	May: became 62 nd (YS) Bn in 14 th Reserve Bde; at Kinmel Park; October: retitled 53 rd (YS) Bn Cheshire Regt
9 th (Reserve) SWB	April: became a Second Reserve Bn in 13 th Reserve Bde; at Kinmel Park	September: became 57 th TRB in 13 th Reserve Bde at Kinmel Park	May: became 282 nd (Grad) Bn in 201 st Bde, 67 th Div at Canterbury October: retitled 52 nd (Grad) Bn SWB
9 th (Reserve) KSLI	April: became a Second Reserve Bn in 11 th Reserve Bde; Kinmel Park and then Prees Heath, Shropshire	September: became 48 th TRB in 11 th Reserve Bde at Prees Heath, Shropshire	Remained 48 th TRB in 11 th Reserve Bde; at Prees Heath, Shropshire
13 th (Reserve) SWB	August: formed as local reserve bn from Depot Coys of 10 th (1 st Gwent) & 11 th (2 nd Gwent) SWB; at Kinmel Park	September: became 59 th TRB in 13 th Reserve Bde; at Kinmel Park	May: became 213 th (Grad) Bn in 194 th Bde 65 th Div; at the Curragh, Ireland October: retitled 51 st (Grad) Bn Cheshire Regt, remaining at the Curragh, Ireland

Battalion	1915	1916	1917
17 th (Reserve) Cheshire	August: formed as local reserve bn from Depot Coys of 15 th (1 st Birkenhead) & 16 th (2 nd Birkenhead) Cheshire in 17 th Reserve Bde; at Prees Heath, Shropshire	September: became 74 th TRB in 17 th Reserve Bde; at Prees Heath, Shropshire	May: became 74 th (YS) TRB in 17 th Reserve Bde; at Prees Heath, Shropshire October: retitled 53 rd (YS) Bn Manchester Regt; at Prees Heath but soon to 14 th Reserve Bde at Kinmel Park
18 th (Reserve) RWF	August: became local reserve bn in 14 th Reserve Brigade; at Kinmel Park	September: combined with 20 th (Reserve) bn to form 63 rd TRB in 14 th Reserve Bde at Kinmel Park	May: became 226 th (Grad) Bn in 203 rd Bde 68 th Div at Halesworth, Suffolk October: retitled 51 st (Grad) Bn Welsh Regt
21 st & 22 nd (Reserve) RWF		April: in 14 th Reserve Bde at Kinmel Park September: combined to form 64 th TRB in 14 th Reserve Bde at Kinmel Park	May: became 64 th (YS) Bn in 14 th Reserve Bde Oct: became 53 rd (YS) Bn Welsh Regt
14 th (Reserve) SWB	September: formed as local reserve bn from depot coy of 12 th (3 rd Gwent) SWB; at Conway	January: to 14 Reserve Bde at Kinmel Park September: became 65 th TRB in 14 th Reserve Bde; at Kinmel Park	Remained 65 th TRB in 14 th Reserve Bde; at Kinmel Park

Source: Brigadier E.A. James, *British Regiments 1914 – 18* (Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 1998)

Appendix 4: Medical Categories from 1916 onwards

Early 1916

The following categories were recognized⁴:

- General Service
- Field Service at home
- Garrison service abroad
- Garrison service at home
- Labour
- Sedentary work (clerks, storemen, batmen, cooks, orderlies, sanitary duty men)

May 1916

The categories were revised:

- A: General Service
- B1: Abroad: Garrison service
- B2: Abroad: Labour
- B3: Abroad: Sedentary work
- C1: At Home: Garrison service
- C2: At Home: Labour
- C3: At Home: Sedentary Work⁵

June 1916

Further revision of categories and additional guidelines added, primarily for use by Medical Boards assessing the fitness of soldiers recovering from wounds⁶:

A: able to march, see to shoot, hear well and stand 'active service conditions'.

A1: Men fit for overseas service in all respects: training, physically and mentally fit.

A2: Recruits who will be fit for A1 as soon as trained.

A3: Returned EF men who will be fit for A1 as soon as hardened.

A4: Men under 19 years who should be A1 or A2 when 19.

B: free from serious organic diseases, able to stand service on the lines of communication in France or in Garrisons in the Tropics.

B1: Abroad: Garrison service: able to march 5 miles, see to shoot with glasses and hear well.

B2: Abroad: Labour: able to walk 5 miles to and from work, see and hear sufficiently for ordinary purposes.

B3: Abroad: Sedentary work: only suitable for sedentary work.

C: free from serious organic disease, able to stand service conditions in garrisons at home.

C1: At Home: Garrison service

C2: At Home: Labour

C3: At Home: Sedentary Work

⁴ BOH 1916, Vol. 1, pp. 152-3.

⁵ TNA: WO 293/4 Army Council Instruction (ACI) 1023 of May 1916.

⁶ TNA: WO 293/4 ACI 1241 of June 1916.

- D: Men unfit for service in A, B or C but likely to be fit in six months
- E: Those not likely to be fit for service in A, B or C

April 1917

Category C was amended as it had been realised that there was very little difference between UK and North West Europe:

- C: Fit for service at home or in North Western Europe, but not fit for General Service
 - C1: In garrison or labour units.
 - C2: In labour units or in Command, Garrison or regimental employments
 - C3: Sedentary work: clerks, storemen, batmen, cooks, orderlies, sanitary duties etc.⁷

October 1917

All previous ACIs were cancelled and the distinction between Categories B and C was abolished in order to simplify administration.⁸ With effect from 1 November 1917 all soldiers in Category C were to be placed in the corresponding sub-division of Category B. From that date all soldiers serving at home, whether recruits on enlistment or on being called up from Class B Army Reserve, serving soldiers or men who had been sent home sick or wounded from an Expeditionary Force or from a garrison abroad, were to be classified in the categories shown in the table below.

Selection of those in categories lower than ‘A’ who were fit for service in NW Europe only and those fit to serve anywhere was in future to be made by special medical examination when they were actually required to proceed abroad.

Categories	Standards	Guidance
A Fit for general service.	(i) Men actually fit for general service in any theatre of war in all respects, both as regards training, physical and mental qualifications. (ii) Recruits who should be fit for A (i) as soon as trained. (iii) Men who have previously served with an Expeditionary Force, who should be fit for A (i) as soon as ‘hardened’. (iv) Men under 19 years of age who should be fit for A(i) or A(ii) as soon as they are 19 years of age.	Able to march, see to shoot, hear well and stand active service conditions.

⁷ TNA: WO 293/6 ACI 679 of April 1917.

⁸ TNA: WO 293/7 ACI 1606 of October 1917: Alteration of Classification of Men by Categories.

<p>B Not fit for general service, but fit for service at home (and abroad in the case of men passed fit for service overseas)</p>	<p>(i) In field units (at home only) and in Garrison units, or on duties of an analogous nature.</p> <p>(ii) In Labour units, or on garrison or regimental outdoor employment</p> <p>(iii) On sedentary work as clerks, storemen, batmen, cooks, orderlies, on sanitary duties etc or, if skilled tradesmen, at their trades.</p>	<p>Free from serious organic disease; and in addition if classified under:</p> <p>-B(i) Able to <i>march</i> at least 5 miles, see to shoot with glasses and hear well.</p> <p>-B(ii) Able to <i>walk</i> to and from work a distance not exceeding 5 miles, see and hear sufficiently for ordinary purposes.</p> <p>-B (iii) Only suitable for sedentary work or on such duties as storemen, batmen, cooks, orderlies, sanitary duties etc. Also, if a skilled tradesman, fit to work at their trades.</p>
<p>D Temporarily unfit for service in categories A or B, but likely to become fit within six months, and meanwhile either:</p>	<p>(i) In Command Depots (ii) In Regimental Depots (iii) In any unit under or awaiting medical or dental treatment (who on completion of treatment will rejoin their own original category).</p>	
<p>E Unfit for service in categories A or B and not likely to become fit within six months.</p>	<p>Awaiting discharge, re-classification or invaliding home from abroad.</p>	

Appendix 5 – Military Service Acts 1916 – 1918

Act	Date Passed	Appointed Date	Provisions
<p>1916 An Act to make provision with respect to Military Service in connexion (sic) with the present War. Military Service Act, 1916⁹</p>	27 January 1916	2 March 1916	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conscripts all male British subjects both resident in Great Britain and aged 18 – 40 on 15 August 1915 and who were unmarried or childless widowers on 2 November 1915 • Provisions for certificates of exemption • Schedule 1: Exceptions • Schedule 2: Constitution of Tribunals
<p>An Act to make further provision with respect to Military Service during the present War. Military Service Act (No 2) 1916¹⁰</p>	25 May 1916	24 June 1916	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conscripts every male British subject resident in Great Britain since 14 August 1915 aged 18 – 40 from the ‘appointed date’. • Prolongs expiring terms of service for the duration of the war. • Modifies exceptions contained in the previous Act. • Provisions relating to certificates of exemption • Authorises transfers of officers and men of the TF without their consent to another Corps and/or their posting to regular units of their own or the Corps to which they are transferred.

⁹ *Public General Acts, 5&6 Geo 5* (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1916), Chapter 104.

¹⁰ *Public General Acts, 6&7 Geo 5* (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1916), Chapter 15.

1917

An Act to enable the exception from Military Service of Men excepted on the ground of previous rejection, or the previous relinquishment of, or discharge from, Naval or Military Service, or unsuitability for Foreign Service, to be reviewed.

Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Act, 1917¹¹

5 April
1917

- Enabled the call up for examination of certain categories of men excepted under the 1916 MSAs: TF soldiers not suited for foreign service; men previously discharged from Services on grounds of disablement or ill-health; men previously rejected on any grounds.
- Did not apply to agricultural workers employed on work certified to be of national importance or to men disabled as a result of wounds received during the present war.

An Act to enable His Majesty in Council to carry into effect conventions which may be made with Allied and other States as to the mutual liability of His Majesty's subjects and subjects of the Allied and other States to military service.

Military Service (Conventions with Allied States) Act, 1917¹²

10 July
1917

30 days after
the Order in
Council
applying the
Act

- Allows for conscription of British subjects living abroad and of Allied citizens in Britain.
- Convention signed with Russia (July) and with France (October).

¹¹ *Public General Acts, 7&8 Geo 5* (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1918), Chapter 12.

¹² *Public General Acts, 7&8 Geo 5* (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1918), Chapter 26.

1918

An Act to repeal subsection (3) of section three of the Military Service Act 1916 and to provide for the cancellation of certificates of exemption from military service granted on occupational grounds.

Military Service Act, 1918¹³

6 February 1918

- On the expiration of certificates of exemption, only two weeks now allowed before the man is deemed to have been enlisted.
- Enables Director General of National Service to withdraw certificates of exemption granted on occupational grounds at any time by order. Applies to any certificates of exemption granted on occupational grounds by tribunals or Government Departments. Effective from fourteen days after the order, providing neither House of Parliament has objected within that period.

An Act to make further provision with respect to Military Service during the present war.

Military Service (No 2) Act, 1918¹⁴

18 April 1918

18 April 1918

- Extension of conscription to men aged 41 to 50
- Allows for extension of the age limit to 55 by Order in Council
- Allows for extension of conscription to Ireland by Order in Council.
- Enables provisions as to applications for certificates of exemption and as to calling up.
- Power by proclamation to withdraw certificates of exemption in case of national emergency.
- Penalty for avoidance or assisting the avoidance of service: up to six months imprisonment, with or without hard labour.

¹³ *Public General Acts, 7&8 Geo 5* (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1918), Chapter 66.

¹⁴ *Public General Acts, 8&9 Geo 5* (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1918), Chapter 5.

Appendix 6 - Abstract from Directed letter from AG2 to Haig dated 3 November 1917.¹⁵

(Included to show how manpower numbers were calculated.)

The letter informs Haig of ‘the following facts in regard to Manpower for the next twelve months so far as concerns units other than those belonging to the Overseas Dominions’. During the coming year:

- It was estimated that 110,000 men would be needed for new units: expansion of RFC 48,000; artillery approx. 40,000; remainder MGC, Tanks and Military Railways.
- DGNS calculated that possibly 20,000 A men will be drawn from the Army for civil work; a further 80,000 be set aside to meet the wastage in arms other than infantry
- Therefore 210,000 men would be deducted from the numbers that can be made available for the Infantry.

Assuming that wastage for the year commencing 1 November 1917 would be the same as the previous year, drafting prospects for the Infantry between 1 November 1917 – 31 October 1918 appeared to be:

Ai, Aii and Aiv men in hand who will become available	163,000
Returned EF men becoming fit	250,000
	413,000
New recruits DGNS hopes to provide	275,000
 Total	 688,000
 Less the figures noted earlier	 210,000
 Numbers available for Inf drafts up to 31 Oct 18 all theatres	 478,000
 Wastage in France up to October 1918 likely to be	 782,000
Plus current deficit against establishment	75,000
Total	857,000
 Therefore deficit	 379,000
(Does not include estimated numbers required to make good Infantry wastage in other theatres (60,000))	

Towards the deficit it was thought likely that 180,000 would become available from sick and wounded men becoming fit in France – reducing the total deficit to 259,000

It was also estimated that 140,000 men would be sent from Home to France by 1 April 1918 to which could be added an estimated 15,000 per month returning from hospitals in France making an anticipated total deficit up to 1 April of **215,000**.

¹⁵ *BOH 1918 Vol. 1*, Appendix 3: War Office letter from AG2 (signed Corcoran) to Haig dated 3 November 1917.

Appendix 7 – Re-organizations/Movements and Arrivals of Marches Battalions on the Western Front during 1918¹⁶

Regiment/ Battalions	1 January 1918 ¹⁷	Occurrences During 1918		11 November 1918
		February 1918	Rest of 1918	
Cheshire				
1 st	Italy: 15 th Bde/5 th Div		April: returned to France	15 th Bde/5 th Div; France
1/4 th (TF)	Egypt:53 rd Div		From Egypt: 1 July to 102 nd Bde/34 th Div	102 nd Bde/34 th Div; Belgium
1/5 th (TF)	56 th Div; Pioneer			56 th Div; Belgium,
1/6 th (TF)	118 th Bde/39 th Div	6 Feb: absorbed 5 officers + 100 men from 16 th Cheshire;	28 May to 75 th Bde/25 th Div; 17 June absorbed 16 officers & 492 men from 11 th Cheshire; 8 Jul to 21 st Bde/30 th Div	21 st Bde/30 th Div; Belgium
1/7 th (TF)	Egypt:53 rd Div		From Egypt; 1 July to 102 nd Bde/34 th Div	102 nd Bde/34 th Div; Belgium
9 th (Service)	58 th Bde/19 th Div	Feb: moved to reconstituted 56 th Bde	June absorbed personnel from 10 th Cheshire	56 th Bde/19 th Div; France
10 th (Service)	7 th Bde/25 th Div	Feb: absorbed personnel from 13 th Cheshire;	21 Jun reduced to cadre; personnel to 9 th Cheshire;	
11 th (Service)	7 th Bde/25 th Div	Feb: absorbed personnel from 13 th Cheshire;	17 Jun reduced to cadre; personnel to 1/6 th Cheshire; 3 Aug disbanded in France	
13 th (Service)	74 th Bde/25 th Div	16 Feb: – disbanded in France; personnel to 10 th & 11 th Cheshire		

¹⁶ Brigadier E.A. James. *British Regiments 1914-18* (Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 1998).

¹⁷ Battalions in France or Flanders unless otherwise stated.

Regiment/ Battalions	1 January 1918	Occurrences During 1918		11 November 1918
15 th (Service)	105 th Bde/35 th Div	6 Feb: absorbed 15 officers + 310 men of 16 th Cheshire		105 th Bde/35 th Div; Belgium
16 th (Service)	105 th Bde/35 th Div	6 Feb: disbanded ; 5 officers + 100 men to 1/6 th Cheshire; 15 officers + 310 men to 15 th Cheshire; rest to II Corps Reinforcement Camp – later to 12 th Entrenching Battalion		
23 rd (TF)	At Home: 224 th Bde/Garrison Guard Battalion		May to France: 178 th Bde/59 th Div; June joined 121 st Bde/40 th Div	121 st Bde/40 th Div; France
RWF				
1 st	Italy: 22 nd Bde/7 th Div			22 nd Bde/7 th Div; Italy
2 nd	19 th Bde/33 rd Div	6 Feb: to 115 th Bde/38 th (Welsh) Div		115 th Bde/38 th (Welsh) Div; France
1/4 th (TF)	47 th Div; Pioneer			47 th Div; Pioneer; Belgium
9 th (Service)	58 th Bde/19 th Div	Feb: absorbed 5 officers + 147 men from 10 th RWF		58 th Bde/19 th Div; France
10 th (Service)	76 th Bde/3 rd Div	8 Feb: disbanded ; 5 officers + 147 men to 9 th RWF; others to 8 th Entrenching Battalion		

Regiment/ Battalions	1 January 1918	Occurrences During 1918		11 November 1918
13 th (Service) (1 st North Wales)	113 th Bde/38 th (Welsh) Div			113 th Bde/38 th (Welsh) Div; France
14 th (Service)	113 th Bde/38 th (Welsh) Div			113 th Bde/38 th (Welsh) Div;
15 th (Service) (1 st London Welsh)	113 th Bde/38 th (Welsh) Div	Feb: disbanded ; men used to reinforce other battalions in 38 th Division		
16 th (Service)	113 th Bde/38 th (Welsh) Div			113 th Bde/38 th (Welsh) Div; France
17 th (Service) (2 nd North Wales)	113 th Bde/38 th (Welsh) Div			113 th Bde/38 th (Welsh) Div; France
19 th (Service)	110 th Bde/40 th Div	6 Feb: disbanded ; men to 8 th Entrenching Battalion		
24 th (Denbighshire Yeomanry) (TF)	Egypt: 231 st Bde/74 th Div		May: to France; 21 June joined 94 th Bde/31 st Div	94 th Bde/31 st Div; France
25 th (Montgomery & Welsh Horse Yeomanry) (TF)	Egypt: 231 st Bde/74 th Div		May: to France;	231 st Bde/74 th Div; Belgium
26 th (Service)	4 th Garrison Guard Battalion		May: to 176 th Bde/59 th Div; July became 26 th RWF	176 th Bde/59 th Div; Belgium
SWB				
1st	3 rd Bde/1 st Div	Feb: received 100 men from 12 th SWB		3 rd Bde/1 st Div; France
2nd	87 th Bde/29 th Div	Feb: received 100 men from 12 th SWB		87 th Bde/29 th Div; Belgium
5 th (Service)	19 th Div; Pioneer	Feb: received 50 men from 12 th SWB		19 th Div; Pioneer; France

Regiment/ Battalions	1 January 1918	Occurrences During 1918		11 November 1918
6 th (Service)	25 th Div; Pioneer		2 July: to 30 th Div as Pioneers	30 th Div; Pioneer; Belgium
10 th (Service) (1 st Gwent)	115 th Bde/38 th Div			115 th Bde/38 th Div; France
11 th (Service) (2 nd Gwent)	115 th Bde/38 th Div	Feb: disbanded ; men reinforced battalions in 38 th Div		
12 th (Service) (3 rd Gwent)	119 th Bde/40 th Div	10 Feb: disbanded ; 50 men to 5 th SWB; 100 men each to 1 st & 2 nd SWB; remainder to 9 th Entrenching Bn together with remnants of 11 th King's Own and 19 th Welch		
KSLI				
1st	16 th Bde/6 th Div	Feb: received men from 5 th KSLI		16 th Bde/6 th Div; France
1/4 th (TF)	190 th Bde/63 rd Div	4 Feb: to 56 th Bde/19 th Div; received men from 5 th KSLI		56 th Bde/19 th Div; France
5 th (Service)	42 nd Bde/14 th Div	4 Feb: disbanded ; personnel to 1 st , 1/4 th , 6 th and 7 th KSLI		
6 th (Service)	60 th Bde/20 th Div	Feb: received men from 5 th KSLI		60 th Bde/20 th Div; France
7 th (Service)	8 th Bde/3 rd Div	Feb: received men from 5 th KSLI		8 th Bde//3 rd Div; France
10 th (Shropshire & Cheshire Yeomanry)	Egypt: 231 st Bde/74 th Div		May: to France;	231 st Bde/74 th Div; Belgium

Regiment/ Battalions	1 January 1918	Occurrences During 1918		11 November 1918
Monmouthshire				
1/1 st (TF)	46 th Div: Pioneer			46 th Div: Pioneer; France
1/2 nd (TF)	29 th Div: Pioneer			29 th Div: Pioneer; Belgium
Herefordshire				
1/1 st (TF)	Egypt: 53 rd Div		From Egypt; 30 June to 102 nd Bde/34 th Div	102 nd Bde/34 th Div; Belgium

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