

Caversham in WW1

Berkshire Yeomanry

The Volunteers

Originally formed as mounted cavalry in 1794, to counter the threat of invasion during the Napoleonic Wars, the volunteers of the Berkshire Yeomanry were largely engaged in local defence until the Second Boer War in 1899. Drawn from the Berkshire Downs, Thames Valley and the Vale of the White Horse, their badge was based on the White Horse.



Trooper Alonzo Ward Rider, Derby Road, Caversham. Killed in action



Trouper Alex Barker, Albert Road and later Matlock Road, Caversham - shown here in 1914 at Hamilton Camp, Salisbury Plain. He suffered dysentery, malaria and sand-fly fever and was invalided home in October 1915 before re-engaging January 1916.

For the remaining three months of the Gallipoli campaign, the Regiment remained in defence, plagued by heat, disease, lack of shade and water and the continuous shell and rifle fire of the Turks. On 1 November 1915, the Second Mounted Division finally embarked for Mudros and Egypt.

Mobilisation

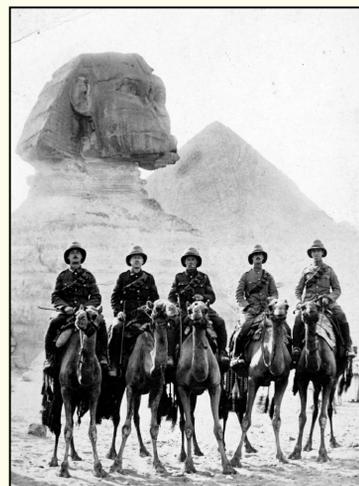
Until conscription was introduced in 1916, recruiting was the responsibility of the County Associations. On 4 August 1914, at the outbreak of war, telegrams were sent to assemble in drill halls. By September 1914, the 1/1st Berkshire Yeomanry received some 190 volunteers. By the middle of January 1917, 800 men had joined the 3/1st. Many Caversham men were with the Berkshire Yeomanry. Caversham had remained part of Oxfordshire until 1911 and the muster in Caversham was for the Oxfordshire Yeomanry.

These photographs from the Griffin Inn, Church Road, show the mustering of the local Oxfordshire Squadron in August 1914. They were taken by the the Taylor family who re-built the Inn in 1906.



Egypt and Palestine

In Egypt, a combined force, including the Berkshire Yeomanry, was formed in December 1915, to counter attacks from the Senussi (a fanatical sect) on British troops and the Suez Canal. After further reorganisation, many yeomanry swapped horses for camels.



Yeomanry, mounted by the Pyramids, Giza, Cairo in June 1915. Sgt Major Cox from Caversham is in the centre.



Sgt Major William Charles Cox, born in Caversham. Killed at Matruh, November 1915, age 30.



Tpr Lewis Salter, Hemdean Rise, Caversham. Saw action in Gallipoli, Egypt and Palestine - wounded at the 2nd Battle of Gaza.



Gallipoli

At first, the Berkshire Yeomanry remained on Home Defence duties and training, but in April 1915 the Division, complete with horses, was sent to Egypt. Duties were largely to escort prisoners and guard government buildings. It was extremely hot and infested with mosquitoes and they longed for "a few English cold days".

Though they trained as mounted troops, the decision was made August 1915 that they would fight dismounted. The Regiment sailed from Alexandria on 14 August and, after trans-shipment at Mudros, landed at Suvla 18 August. The Regiment's first contact with the Turks at Gallipoli was a bloody affair. Over 50% of the Yeomanry were killed, wounded or taken prisoner.



Tpr Thomas Bourke, Blenheim Rd Caversham. Invalided home August 1915.



Sgt Babister, Priest Hill, Caversham. Wounded and taken prisoner in Constantinople, August 1915. Awarded Meritorious Service Medal May 1919 for upstanding conduct whilst a POW.

The Yeomanry joined the advance on Jerusalem and the battles of Gaza through 1916 and 1917. In December 1917, General Sir Edmund Allenby reported of the Yeomanry Mounted Division, "They have done splendid work, in the pursuit and in the mountains fighting."

The Final Offensive

In 1918, the Yeomanry were amalgamated with the Machine Gun Corps and ordered to France in May 1918. After their ship was torpedoed, they arrived for the final Allied offensive August 1918. They saw action at the Battle of Scarpe on 29 August 1918 and in September, moved to Belgium for the assault on the Comines Canal. They were in Courtrai on 11 November 1918 and remained there until being demobilised a few months later.



Signaller Cecil F Burbidge of 'Shenley', Matlock Road, Caversham was one of 200 men sent in September 1916 to reinforce under strength infantry units on the Somme. He provided telephone line communications within the battalion. Though wounded in June 1917 at the Battle of Messines Ridge, he survived the war.