

GREAT GRANDAD'S ARMY – 3 – PALS IN THE PARK

By Mike Hinson

Two previous articles (1) have given accounts of Sutton's Rifle Volunteers in the late 19th and early 20th century and have underlined the importance of Sutton Park in the training schedule of part-time soldiery. This article moves forward to World War I (1914-1918) when Sutton Park was, once again, utilised by the military authorities. It incorporates information from Minutes of the Sutton Coldfield Borough Council and reports in local newspapers, mainly published in 1914 and 1915.

THE 'BIRMINGHAM PALS' BATTALIONS

Background - Early Days

In 1904, Britain entered into an *Entente* with France and, three years later, it entered into a *Convention* with Russia. In consequence of these agreements, Britain was obliged to support both France and Russia in the event of their going to war with Germany. The crisis that precipitated World War I began on 28 June 1914 with the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, by a young Serb nationalist in Sarajevo. In order to exact stern retribution on Serbia, the Austria-Hungarian government enlisted the support of Germany. Russia mobilised its forces to support Serbia; Germany and Austria-Hungary declared war on Russia; France then went to Russia's aid, and Britain was obliged to lend its support to both.

Count von Schleiffen, Chief of the German General Staff devised a bold plan to defeat France in six weeks by invading it through neutral Belgium. German troops attacked in the early hours of 4 August. The British Government, having also entered into a treaty to protect Belgium's neutrality, honoured its commitment by declaring war on Germany at 11.00 pm the same day.

This prompted spontaneous celebrations by the British public in the belief that the war would be over by Christmas and that victory over Germany was a certainty. Thereafter, events moved swiftly. British Army and Navy Reservists were mobilised first, quickly followed by the Territorials. In this part of the Midlands, the 5th, 6th and 8th Battalions of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment received their mobilization orders on 5 August and, after parading near Birmingham city centre, boarded trains from Snow Hill Station bound for camps in Dorset. These Territorials were destined to become part of the BEF (British Expeditionary Force). On 14 August, 100,000 troops embarked for France and, thence, were deployed to Belgium.

On 23 August, the Battle of Mons took place. The BEF's army of 70,000 men and 300 artillery guns faced the might of the German army comprised of 160,000 men and 600 artillery guns. Initially, the Germans fared badly due to skilled British marksmanship. Eventually, however, British and French troops were forced to retreat because of Germany's superior numbers. Nevertheless, the Battle bought valuable time for French and Belgian troops to form a new defensive line. British forces suffered 1,600 casualties, but the Germans sustained almost four times as many.

A Call to Arms

The British Expeditionary Force (or BEF) was the force sent to the Western Front during World War I. The Force had been created as a result of the reforms to the British army introduced in 1908 by Richard Haldane, the Secretary of State for War in the Liberal government. Reputably, the BEF was better prepared for active service than any previous British army, but was limited by its size as compared with the large armies being mobilized by other warring powers on the Continent. It consisted of six infantry divisions and a cavalry brigade. Additionally, the British Army could muster sufficient troops at home and throughout the Empire to form a further five infantry and two cavalry divisions, thought to be sufficient to fight one campaign lasting about three months in the event of war in Europe (2).

On 5 August 1914, the Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, appointed Field Marshal Earl Kitchener of Khartoum as Minister of War. Kitchener did not subscribe to the popular belief that the war would be over by Christmas, rather that it was more likely to last for at least three years, would cost a great deal and would require at least 70 divisions in the field. He proposed to vastly expand the regular army by recruiting wartime volunteers. Each recruit would sign up for three years or for the duration of the war, whichever was the longer, agreeing to serve wherever he was most needed. On 6 August, Parliament sanctioned an increase of 500,000 men of all ranks.

Within a few days, recruiting offices opened and a recruiting campaign was in full swing.



Posters were distributed, the most famous being one bearing an imperious image of Kitchener pointing his accusing finger with the command that 'Your Country Needs You!' Patriotic fervor ran high. Those men who were slow to join up were likely to find themselves accused

of cowardice, sometimes being handed white feathers, or not being served in shops and even subjected to rough treatment. John Pimlott explains:

'Patriotism, opposition to Germany and a desire not to be left out of the excitement were uppermost in the majority of minds. The cheering crowds and recruiting bands represented a unique social phenomenon for Britain, a largely innocent and loyal curiosity to see what modern war was like.' (3)

Formation of the Birmingham Pals

The recruiting campaign for Kitchener's New Army had begun in earnest on 11 August when a proclamation was issued calling for the first 100,000 men to enlist. Exceeding all expectations, this target was achieved in two weeks! On 21 August, an Army Order specified that six new Divisions would be created from units formed from these recruits, collectively called 'Kitchener's Army', or K1. A second campaign to recruit a further 100,000 men was quickly under way, from which a further six Divisions would be formed to become Kitchener's Second New Army, or K2. The next tranche of volunteers became K3; the Birmingham Pals were to become part of K4.

Terry Carter has written a full history of the 'Birmingham Pals' (4). He explains that, during the last week of August and early September 1914, up and down the country, committees of leading citizens in large cities and towns were set up to discuss ways in which to recruit further volunteers for local Battalions:

'A further incentive for recruiting was now introduced; these battalions were to be composed of men from the same social background, or who lived in a particular district, and who shared the same occupations. These committees would provide food, billets, uniforms, kit and a basic military programme until the War Office was ready to take them over.'

On 28th August, a rousing editorial was published in the *Birmingham Daily Post* urging young single men, between the ages of 19 and 30, from non-manual occupations to come forward. Following local consultations, the Deputy Lord Mayor, Alderman Bowater, sent a telegram to Lord Kitchener offering to raise and equip a battalion of young businessmen for service in HM Army, 'to be called the Birmingham Battalion'. Lord Kitchener accepted the offer, pointing out that these recruits would become *regular* servicemen serving with the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. (Volunteers were drafted to Service Battalions that formed part of existing infantry regiments.)

An unusual aspect of recruitment was the role taken by the local newspaper, *Birmingham Daily Post*. It opened a register of names of men wishing to join the new battalion. This was an attempt to move matters along whilst the military formalities were being finalised. The list was started on 29 August and by 1 September more than 1,200 names had been registered. City officials then explored with the War Office the possibility that a second battalion might be raised and the suggestion was met with an equally positive response. By 5 September, the newspaper's list closed with the details of 4,500 young men who were willing to volunteer. On 14 September, the War Office gave its official approval that a third battalion should be established. Each volunteer received a postcard inviting him to present himself for enlistment at the temporary recruiting office that had been set up in a recently built extension to the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in Great Charles Street. On attestation, successful recruits were paid sixpence per day (two and a half pence in modern money) until they were called up, thereafter receiving the private soldier's daily pay rate of 1/9 (about 18p).

Equipment and Training

Lt Colonel Sir John Barnsley, a well-known local military man, had been appointed as Chief Recruiting Officer. An Equipment Fund Committee was also appointed (it included Alderman Neville Chamberlain). One of its first tasks was to advertise for tenders for supplying the new battalions with clothing and equipment. The War Office had already stipulated that, due to a shortage of khaki cloth for uniforms, Kitchener's Army was to wear blue serge uniforms and blue caps with red hatbands whilst in training. Since even these uniforms would take some time to make, the Committee decided to issue all recruits with a lapel badge to wear, thereby attempting to obviate unpleasant comments from an over-patriotic public.

The location of possible training grounds was also discussed. The most favoured locations were **Sutton Park** for two battalions and Castle Bromwich Playing Fields for the third.

Soldiers in the Park

The Minutes of the Sutton Council's Park, Estate and Buildings Committee, 1912-1921 (5) record that Sutton Park had continued to be used for army training during the early 20th century. For example (22.07.1913):

Chartley Castle,

Stafford,

26 June 1913

Dear Sir,

Now that the training season at Sutton is ended, I write to express to you and the Committee my thanks for your kindness in allowing us to use the Park for our training. It has been of very real assistance to us, and I am sure you may feel that you had materially assisted to make two battalions of His Majesty's Army more efficient than they could otherwise have been this year. I much hope your Committee and the people of Sutton Coldfield have nothing but a pleasant recollection of my Brigade, and that you will therefore, in future years, be able to admit us to share in your famous Bishop's munificence.

Believe me, dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

(signed)

William Congreave

Brigadier General

Commanding 18th Brigade

At a Special Meeting of the Committee held on 3 September 1914 (6), the Mayor reported the visit of the Brigadier General, Colonel Ludon and Colonel Barnsley with a view to recruits camping in the Park and that, on behalf of Sutton, he had offered the use of the Park for military purposes. Members of the Committee approved of the Mayor's actions, authorising the Mayor and its Chairman, Alderman Sadler, to make the necessary arrangements, also notifying local clubs that any privileges previously granted to them regarding the use of the Park must be subordinated to military purposes. The Crystal Palace site near Town Gate had been chosen to become the headquarters for the 1st Battalion. The boathouse and tearooms by Powell's Pool. Boldmere Gate were to be the headquarters of the 2nd Battalion. (As far as the 3rd Battalion was concerned, Castle Bromwich Playing Fields had been rejected because the area was liable flooding by the River Tame. Eventually, the Battalion was based at Moseley College.)

Building the Camps

The War Office directed that the recruits were to be housed in huts in order that training might be conducted under stricter military conditions. The problems of ordering building materials and constructing the huts needed to be urgently addressed. At a Special Meeting of the Sutton Coldfield Council's Park and Estates Committee it was resolved that the matter be left in the hands of the Chairman, Alderman Emery and the Borough Surveyor. Plans were to be prepared according to War Office designs. The dimensions of each hut were to be 60ft by 20ft, each hut to accommodate 30 men; 38 huts to be built for each battalion. Huts would be lined with boarding. Provision would also be made for the commissariat, guard and orderly rooms, officers' and NCOs' quarters and showers. The estimated cost for the two camps was £40,000.

The 1st Battalion huts were to be built on the high ground that was intersected by the roads to Keepers Pool and Wyndley Pool. The huts of the 2nd Battalion were to extend in rows on either side of the road leading from Powell's Pool to Streetly. By November, the South Staffordshire Water Company had been granted permission to lay the necessary water mains (after payment of a nominal fee) on condition that these were removed when the camps were eventually demolished. Permission was also granted for telegraph poles to be erected on the two encampment sites.

The pious hope, publicly expressed by Birmingham's Deputy Lord Mayor, Alderman Bowater, that the huts would be completed 'by Christmas' was not fulfilled, in fact doubts about constructing the huts at all were expressed when the price of timber increased by 10 per cent. Nevertheless, building began on 30th November. Areas of gorse were cleared away and three avenues of trees that were in the way had to be lifted and replanted near Hollyhurst Cottage. Over the winter period, building proceeded as the weather allowed. By February 1915, a six-inch drain had been laid into the park and four-inch drains had been laid to the huts.

In the meantime, it was important that army training got underway, therefore the recruits had to be billeted near the Park. Householders in Sutton and Four Oaks showed their patriotism by opening their homes to men of the 1st Battalion, whilst residents of Boldmere, Wylde Green and Chester Road accommodated men from the 2nd Battalion. An order from Lt Col Barnsley, dated 2 October 1914, gave details of the meals that any 'keeper of a billeting house' was expected to provide:

BREAKFAST (8.00 am) – Six ounces of bread, one pint of tea with milk and sugar, four ounces of bacon, or equivalent.

HOT DINNER (1 pm) - one pound of meat previous to being dressed, eight ounces of potatoes or other vegetables and pudding.

TEA (5 pm) - six ounces of bread, one pint of tea with milk and sugar, one ounce of butter.

SUPPER (9.30 pm) – bread and cheese. (7)

The Government allowed 2/9 (14p) per day for board and lodging - it is likely that some 'keepers' lavished more than the basic diet upon their patriotic guests.

‘Tipperary via Sutton’

This was one of the optimistic slogans chalked on the special train that left New Street Station at 08.50 on Monday 5 October 1914, transporting A and B Companies of the 1st Battalion to Sutton. (Men living in Sutton and Erdington were ordered to make their own way to Sutton Park.) Much cheering, waving and many fond farewells accompanied the train’s departure. A second train bearing C and D Companies departed shortly afterwards. The recruits detrained at Sutton Park Station (by the Post Office buildings in Upper Clifton Road), then marched to Town Gate and assembled in front of the Crystal Palace where they were allocated to their billets. They had previously been advised that they would be wearing civilian clothes until their uniforms had been made, but all wore their lapel badges.

The 2nd Battalion entrained at New Street Station on 10 October, many recruits alighting at Wylde Green Station, near which their billets were situated.

‘None of them possessed a uniform, some had brought with them their mackintoshes and walking sticks, but nevertheless they made an imposing body of recruits.’ (8)

Under ideal conditions, the War Office aimed to turn ‘civilian recruits into soldiers ready to fight at the front in six months. However, with shortages of equipment, arms, experienced instructors and suitable accommodation, the process would take at least twelve months.

Troops in Training

From October 1914 onwards, weekly editions of *Sutton News* often included accounts of the recruits’ training activities. For the 1st Battalion, training began in earnest at 0700 on Tuesday 6 October; for the 2nd Battalion it began on Monday 12 October. The parade ground for the 1st Battalion was in front of the Crystal Palace, that of the 2nd Battalion being located in front of the tearooms at Powell’s Pool [the area now occupied by the restaurant car park and over towards the fun fair].

The first objective of the training programme was physical fitness. Each day began with a session of ‘Swedish Drill’ (PE exercises), after which the men divided up into small groups for ‘squad drill’ practice of basic drill movements such as marching and saluting. On 14 October, 1st Battalion experienced its first route march: through the Park to Streetly; thence along Streetly Lane to Four Oaks, returning to Sutton via Lichfield Road, Mill Street and Park Road.

In common with other basic kit items, rifles were in short supply. During October, each Battalion received an allocation of 200 rifles from the War Office. Unfortunately, they were not to be fired, being of an obsolete pattern, but to be used only for drill purposes. This allowed for a sentry system to be established, each man on duty being armed with a rifle and bayonet. The old Butts in Longmoor Valley were not reinstated as they had been condemned and dismantled in the 19th century. However, a 100-yard rifle range was constructed in the gravel pit by Blackroot Pool, the plans having been prepared according to War Office specifications and approved by the Society of Miniature Rifle Clubs. Officers had revolver practice in the gravel pit near Keepers Pool. There was also a miniature rifle range in the basement of the Crystal Palace that had been constructed some years before for the use of Royal Army Medical Corps.

On wet days, 1st Battalion received lectures in the Crystal Palace; the 2nd Battalion using four large marquees that had been erected on ground between the Powell’s Pool parade ground and Hollyhurst.

Most men in the Battalions were granted four days leave at Christmas. Those who were detailed for duty over the holiday period, celebrated Christmas with their hosts’ families in their billets and

then went on leave for the New Year. Training resumed with increased intensity after the holidays. The hutment camps were still far from completion, therefore the Battalions' officers had to make the best of the opportunities they had:

'Advanced military work with frequent lectures and equally frequent route marches are the present orders, and what the officers are waiting for now as much as anything is the completion of the hutment camps, so that they can have the men completely under proper military discipline.'
(9)

By March, three route marches, each of 9-12 miles, were included in the weekly training programme. The men carried Full Service Marching Order, their full kit including: a belt with two ammunition pouches containing 150 rounds of ammunition; a haversack containing a waterproof, mess tins and rations, attached by two shoulder braces; the head of an entrenching tool, suspended on the right hand side of the belt; a filled water bottle; a bayonet and the haft of the trenching tool (on the left hand side of the belt). On his back, each soldier carried a large canvas pack (valise) containing: a greatcoat; a spare pair of socks; toothbrush; shaving brush; razor, towel and soap; comb; holdall and 'housewife'. The large pack was attached to shoulder straps and belt by buckles. The total weight of the kit, including ammunition, was almost 60 lbs (10)

Practising for Trench Warfare

News from the front line indicated that, by December 1914, the opposing armies were engaged in trench warfare. This development might well have generated the request received by the Sutton Council from Brigadier-General Evatt (appointed to be the 'competent Military Authority' for the Borough) for the Battalions to be granted facilities to carry out 'entrenching practice'. The Council gave its permission for an area of ground near Royal Oak Gate to be utilised for that purpose, on condition that all excavations were filled in and leveled afterwards. The *Sutton News* gleefully reported that B Company of the 1st Battalion had its first experience of trench digging on 9 and 10 February, most men finding it 'a little more arduous than the labours they were used to in the good old days of peace' (11). Both firing and communication trenches were dug.



Boldmere readers may be interested in this photograph for in 1914 and 1915, these men were their guests.

The photograph was taken in April 1915 during trench digging practice near Coppice Wood, and not far behind them

was the original Parson and Clerk.

The men were of a section of number two platoon of the Second City of Birmingham Battalion (Royal Warwickshire Regiment).

Of those 11, six were killed or fatally wounded at Arras, the

Somme and Ypres.

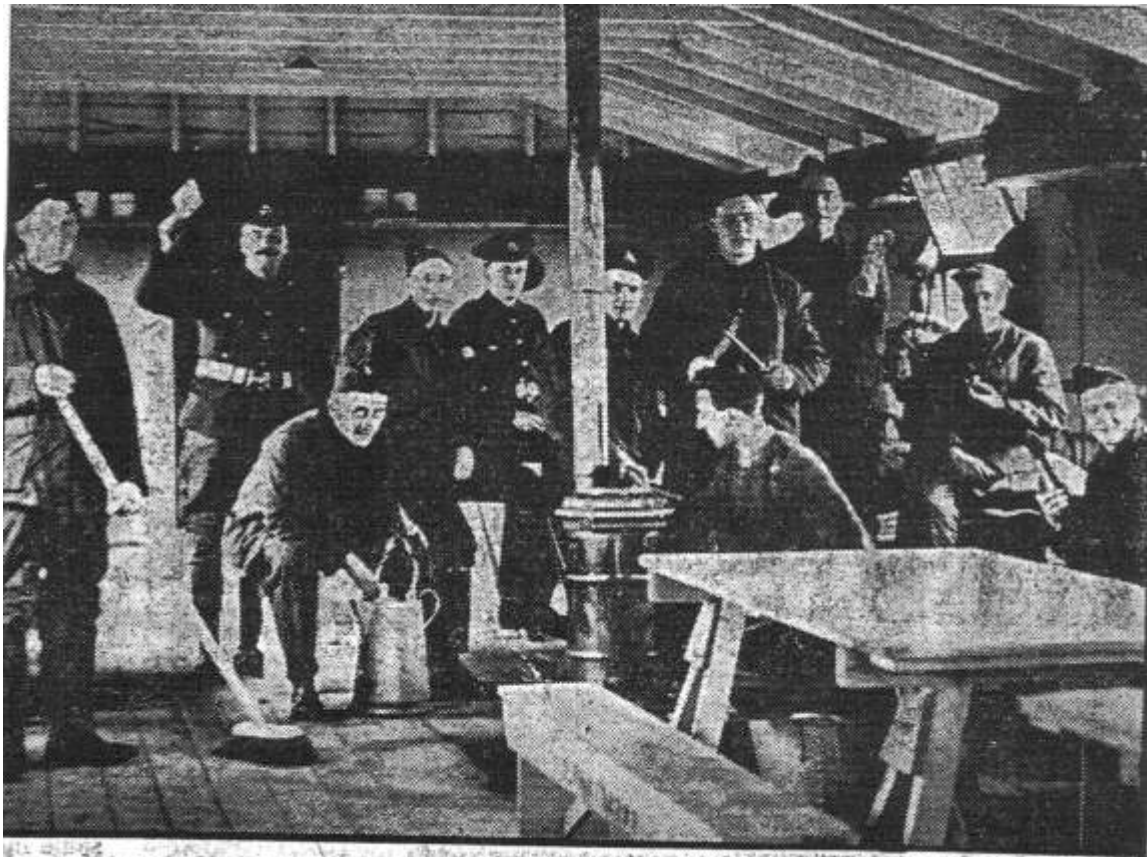
Three more were lightly wounded more than once and two survived to celebrate the peace.

The photograph was lent to us by a reader who wishes to remain anonymous.

Trench warfare involved using a form of field fortification consisting of parallel rows of trenches. The front line directly faced the enemy, with the excavated earth piled up in front of the trench to form a parapet. Trenches would usually be deep enough for men to stand upright and many had a built-in 'firing step'. Behind the front line were the second or 'reserve' trenches. Communication trenches formed a third line. They ran back to safety and were used for moving men and supplies. The practice trenches dug by the recruits were less complicated, but, nevertheless, rated as 'a capital effort'.

On the Move

The huts on the chosen sites were finally completed in the early Spring of 1915 and the troops moved in during the first two weeks of April. The huts were well built – their occupants rated them as being very comfortable. Sections and platoons now messed and lived together, thereby engendering a more homogeneous body of men.



CITY battalion volunteers in a Sutton Park hut, 1915. Second World War veterans may consider that barrack rooms had not changed much by 1945 . . .

Recreation had not been neglected: the YMCA had a hut in each camp; the men were allowed free access to the swimming baths at Keepers Pool, and regular entertainments were organised in the Sutton Town Hall. (In contrast, the 3rd Battalion had been moved to a tented camp at Malvern and was, perhaps, experiencing a less comfortable time.)

In late April, the War Office undertook a reorganization of its army Divisions. The 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions, by then more correctly titled as the **14th, 15th and 16th Service Battalions of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment** respectively, became part of 95 Infantry Brigade, along with the 12th Service Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment. This Brigade was, in turn, part of the 32nd

Division. As the next stage in its training programme, the Division was ordered to move to an extensive tented camp situated at Leyburn in North Yorkshire.

The *Sutton Coldfield News* for 26th June (12) described the ‘great event of the week’, namely the departure of the City Battalions from Sutton Park Station:

‘On Thursday [24th], the 1st Battalion, and on Friday the 2nd Battalion, said goodbye to its generous-hearted citizens who had made so much of them, and proceeded to Yorkshire where the 3rd City Battalion and the Gloucester Battalion, which complete the brigade over whom Brigadier-General Evett is placed in charge, will join them. The enthusiasm of the leave-taking was great. ‘Good cheer’ was the keynote and among the many hundreds of women and young folk – not a solitary one showed a sorrowful face.’

The first train steamed out punctually at 08.50 to rousing cheers and patriotic songs as the ‘lads in blue’ crowded the windows of the coaches, waving farewell. A second train followed at 10.30.

In a letter to the Mayor of Sutton Coldfield, Councillor, J H Parkes, Colonel Lewis expressed his appreciation (13):

Dear Mr Mayor,

I desire, on behalf of all ranks, to express our sincere thanks to inhabitants of the Royal Borough for their many kindnesses we have received during the past nine months. The attention and hospitality we have received has taken so many forms and has been given by so many people that it is impossible for me to thank all individually, but I trust that our friends in Sutton will not think that we are not appreciative of them.

The people with whom we were billeted did everything they could to make us comfortable and spared no trouble or inconvenience to help us. To those who organised concerts and other forms of entertainment for us during the winter months, and to you and the Borough Council for granting the use of the Town Hall, our thanks are due. We shall take away pleasant recollections of our stay in Sutton and we hope, in future, to renew many of the friendships we have made whilst stationed here.

Yours very sincerely,

G W Lewis (Col.)

Commanding 1st B’ham Batln, 14th (S) Royal Warwicks Regt.

The men from the Reserve Companies left behind after the departure of the 14th, 15th and 16th Service Battalions were amalgamated to form the 17th (Reserve) Battalion which moved into the vacated huts near the Crystal Palace site under the command of Captain Harding, formerly Adjutant of the 14th Battalion.

Entries in the minutes of Parks, Estates and Building Committee record that further sites for trenching on the Streetly side of the `Park had been approved and a site for a temporary miniature rifle range was under consideration. However, by November 1915, the Reserve Battalion had vacated the Park hutments.

CIVILIAN VOLUNTEERS

Even though the British Navy’s fleet had grown to become the largest in Europe during the first decade of the 20th century, the government was nevertheless concerned because Germany had also greatly increased the size of its navy. The declaration of war exacerbated long-held public fears of Britain’s coastline being invaded. Fuelled by the popular press, there was widespread concern, in 1914, that Germany already had secret agents in place in this country and might seize the opportunity offered by the dispatch of the BEF to the Continent to attempt a landing on the east coast of England (14). Consequently, for those unable to join the army for reasons of health, age,

occupation or personal circumstances, becoming a member of a new volunteer force seemed an ideal way of 'doing their bit' to defend the country.

Despite War Office reticence, volunteer groups were being formed up and down the country. In Sutton, inaugural meeting of those interested in forming a civilian corps was held on 12 September 1914. Colonel Howard Wilkinson was appointed Commander with Mr R A Reay Nadin (Town Clerk) as his Deputy. Only men who were ineligible for service in the Regular or Territorial Armies were allowed to register their names. A quarterly subscription of five shillings payable by each volunteer was agreed. Uniforms and equipment were to be obtained at members' own expense and had to be different from military uniforms. Recruits attended early drills wearing their civilian clothes. The uniform suggested was:

'Norfolk jacket with shoulder straps made of green-grey rainproof drill or woollen cloth, a closed collar and military cuff-bands for officers;

Coat to be worn with breeches or trousers of whipcord or cloth same as the coat, plus brown leather gaiters or boots;

Headgear – an ordinary military, peaked cap or a forage cap or a felt hat.' (15). All volunteers wore an armband bearing the letters GR (unkindly interpreted by some cynics as 'George' Wrecks' or 'Genuine Relics'.)

By December 1914, the Sutton Civilian Corps had 150 volunteers with a busy training programme:

- Drill at 8.00 pm on Wednesdays and Fridays [one platoon drilled at Victoria Road Schools, two platoons drilled at the Grammar School and two at the Town Hall. The Crystal Palace was also used];
- General instruction at 8.00 pm on Tuesdays;
- Field training and a route march at Blackroot at 2.45 pm on Saturdays;
- Special nights for signalers;
- Miniature rifle practice at Blackroot Quarry on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons.

The Sutton Council had given permission for a miniature rifle range to be set up in the basement of the Council House and the Civilian Corps was allowed to use this on Monday, Thursday and Saturday afternoons. Target practice under service conditions was provided at Kingsbury rifle range (the Corps had obtained 100 rifles for £3 each).

The *Sutton News* reported that, on 9 January 1915, the Corps had been joined by the Birmingham Rifle Reserve on a eight-mile route march. About 130 of the Rifle Reserve joined about 100 Corps members in King Edward Square and thence proceeded to march to Lindridge, Langley Heath, Thimble End, Walmley and back to Sutton via Maney Hill Road.

However, the powers that be were enthusiastic to recruit more Corps members. Concerned that recruitment in Sutton was falling behind that of other towns, an appeal was published encouraging men, who for any reason were unable to enlist in the regular army, to come forward because 'the duty of training themselves for emergency is one that should not require much urging'.

The local newspaper reported on weekend drills and training activities during the early months of 1915, when the Sutton Civilian Corps often joining forces with other volunteer groups from neighbouring districts such as the Birmingham Rifle Reserve, the Erdington Volunteer Training Corps, the Aston Home Defence League and the Schoolteachers Voluntary Training Corps. A report dated 24 April commented:

'The smart uniforms of the Athlete Volunteers lent a sense of realism to the work and while the other units, with a few exceptions, were in ordinary clothing, they were really the more martial as they were all armed and fired blank cartridges while the men in uniforms contented themselves with the use of rattles and the clapping of hands.'

Woman's Volunteer Reserve

In March 1915, a group of local ladies had expressed an interest in forming a Sutton Company of the Woman's Voluntary Reserve that was to be attached to the Birmingham Battalion. Women between the ages of 18 and 50 would be expected to pass a medical examination. Successful recruits would undergo a probationary month's service. They would be trained to become proficient in the rudiments of special skills such as: open air cooking; first aid and nursing; signaling; the care of horses and cattle, and other branches of agriculture. The uniform cost £2.10.0 and comprised: a dark brown woollen coat and skirt, brown shoes, brown stockings, brown felt hat and blouse. Recruits would pay an enrollment fee of one shilling, plus a penny per drill afterwards.

An interesting entry in the Park and Estate Minutes for 28 March 1916 records its resolution to supply the Women's War Aid League with sphagnum moss from Sutton Park for making wound dressings.

MILITARY USE OF SUTTON PARK, 1915-1921

As previously stated, the 17th Reserve Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Service Regiment had vacated the Park hutments in November 1915 when the War Office had designated the hutments to be transformed into a Military Convalescent Camp for wounded soldiers. Paths around the huts were laid, latrines were improved and by March 1916, a site on which to accommodate tents for a further 700 men had been agreed. A bowling green and skittle alley were also constructed at Powell's Pool, with stakes and ropes around them to keep off the cattle. Land was also designated for trenching and bayonet practice. Men were allowed to cultivate land around the huts and officers had a garden near Boldmere gate. At the end of the war, some of the huts were occupied by New Zealand troops posted to Sutton prior to their demobilization. A commemorative plaque stands near Town Gate describing Sutton Park's important contribution to WWI.

Volunteer companies continued to use the Park for training purposes for the remainder of the war. The *Volunteer Act* of 1916, brought the Volunteer Training Corps under the control of the state, administered at county level by the Lords Lieutenant. The volunteers were then issued with khaki uniforms, the cost of which was subsidised by the War Office. Companies were organised by full-time professional Adjutants, Sergeant-Majors and Musketry Instructors, provision also being made for training local officers and NCOs. In effect, the VTC became the World War I forerunner of WW2's Home Guard. It was disbanded in 1918.

In January 1919, the Parks Committee received an evasive answer from the Army Council to its query about the future of the hutments. In October, the Borough Surveyor reported that the army's Area Disposal Officers had promised to have them removed 'as soon as possible'. A minute dated 24th February 1920 records that an auction of the huts had been arranged, but it was not until May that the sites of the camps had finally been cleared.

Also in January 1919, the Town Clerk received an offer from the War Office of the gift of a German machine gun. The Parks Committee resolved to accept, but in its reply, intimated that the Town also expected to receive two large guns. In a further quest for war memorabilia, by April, a Sub-committee had been formed to negotiate for a tank! Subsequently, a tank and five guns were

placed in fenced position near Town Gate and the unveiling ceremony took place on the 20th March 1920.

After their departure in June 1915, the three Pals regiments were posted to a training camp under canvas in North Yorkshire. This came as a shock to the men who had previously lived in comfortable new huts with individual beds. On 28 July, the Pals were posted to a one-week camp at Hornsea for practice on standard issue Short Magazine Lee Enfield 0.303 Mk III (SMLE) rifles. From there, they transferred to Salisbury Plain for the last stages of their training and, thence, on 21 November embarked for France from Folkestone, The 14th, 15th and 16th Regiments served with distinction on the Western Front and many of the soldiers were decorated for their gallantry. Tragically, 2,400 were killed in action or died of their wounds, or of illness, whilst serving their country.

The War Office praised the Sutton Council for its patriotic spirit in agreeing to the Park being used for military purposes during World War I.

References and Notes:

1. Hinson, Mike, 'Great Granddad's Army: The Loss of the Rifle Range' in *Proceedings*, Vol 7: Summer 2004, pp32-45; 'Great Granddad's Army 2: Home by Christmas' in *Proceedings*, Vol 9, Spring 2009, pp5-14.
2. Pimlott, J (1998) *The Guinness History of the British Army*. Guinness Publishing: London, Chapter 5.
3. Pimlott, J op.cit.
4. Carter, Terry (1997) *Birmingham Pals: 14th, 15th & 16th (service) Battalions of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. A History of the Three City Battalions*. Pen and Sword Books Ltd: Barnsley, Chapter 2.
5. Minutes of Sutton Coldfield's Park and Buildings Committee, 1912-1921, 22 July 1913.
6. Minutes op.cit. 3 September 1914.
7. Order from Commanding Officer, 2 October 1914, reproduced in Carter. T (1997), op cit.
8. *Sutton Coldfield News*, 17.10.1914.
9. The soldier ate from his mess tins. His knife, fork and spoon were often described as 'eating irons'. A 'housewife' was a sewing and mending kit. Later, general issues were made of steel helmets (1916) and gas masks and respirators (1917).
10. <http://wiki.answers.com/Q/WWIsoldierskit>
11. *Sutton Coldfield News*, 13 February 1915.
12. *Sutton Coldfield News*, 26 June 1915.
13. *Sutton Coldfield News*, 3 July 1915.
14. Mackenzie, S P (1915) *The Home Guard*. OUP: Oxford, Chapter 1.
15. *Sutton Coldfield News*, 16 January 1917.