

## The Guernsey Irishmen

During World War I, the Royal Irish Regiment raised a total of 10 battalions from the pre-war two regular and two reserve battalions. The additional battalions included two service battalions in Kitchener's First and Second Armies, a battalion formed in 1917 from the dismounted South Irish Horse, a further service battalion and two Garrison Battalions. The regiment won 42 battle honours and one Victoria Cross, but lost 2,780 men as casualties.

The 6th (Service) Battalion RIR formed at Clonmel in Ireland on 6th September 1914 and in March 1915 it was joined by a company from the Guernsey Militia. On Thursday 30 July 1914 the "General Order Embodying the Royal Militia of Guernsey" was published in French and English. This stated that "Whereas by article 9 of the Ordinance relating to Royal Militia of the Island of Guernsey....it is provided that, in certain special circumstances, the States of the island of Guernsey shall furnish a contingent of militia consisting of 2,000 non-commissioned officers and men, to be embodied for such period of active service as shall be prescribed by Royal Proclamation or by General Order of the Lieutenant Governor, and whereas in my opinion such special circumstances have arisen; now therefore in pursuance of the said Ordinance I do hereby order that 1,000 non-commissioned officers and men, Effectives of the said contingent of Militia, be forthwith embodied from this date until further orders, and further that the remainder of the above said contingent, viz: 1,000 men of Section "A" of the Reserve, be prepared to join their respective Regiments when called upon..(signed), H.M Lawson, Major-General, Lieutenant Governor and General Officer commanding the Troops in the Island of Guernsey and its Dependencies.

The militia men went into camps on the island and continued their training. Soon afterwards, in the early wave of patriotism that swept the country the States agreed to offer the War Office formed units of volunteers from the Militia to join Kitchener's New Army. The island undertook to send a double company of Infantry to the newly formed 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division based at Fermoy in Ireland. The Regimental history<sup>1</sup> states that they chose to join the RIR because they were "...delighted with the conduct and cheery hospitality of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion who were stationed there just before the war." It also notes that about half of the Guernsey contingent could speak no English but this may have been a ploy to ensure that they only took orders from their own officers and NCOs.

Part of the agreement was that the units would keep their Guernsey identity. A Billet d'Etat for 1915 notes that "...le présence d'une telle force représentant Guernesey sur le champ de bataille sera la cause d'une vive appréciation de la part des habitants et démontrerait que l'île prenait sa part dans la présente crise." A Divisional Ammunition Column was also formed which was attached to the 9<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division and Jersey sent a Rifle Company from their Militia

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<sup>1</sup> Geoghegan, Brigadier General S, C.B., (1927) *Royal Irish Regiment, 1900-1922*, facsimile 2007, Naval and Military Press, East Sussex

which formed part of the 7th Battalion, Royal Irish Rifles. Some Guernsey men later went to the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Irish Fusiliers.

The first group of Guernseymen to leave the island went directly to the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Irish Regiment, forming D Company and a machine gun section under Major D.C. Lloyd. This contingent of seven officers and 239 other ranks left the island in March 1915. In April they were joined by a further 39 men commanded by 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant MHC Slaytor. This draft brought the company up to strength. The Regiment was based at Fermoy in Ireland until September 1915 when it moved to Blackdown Camp near Aldershot in the South of England. On 9 October 1915 the Guernsey contingent had its first casualty when 3312 Private Leonard Pasquire was killed in an accidental shooting involving a misfired round of machine gun ammunition used by mistake in training instead of blank round. He is buried at Aldershot Military Cemetery.

On 17 December 1915 33 officers and 996 men of the 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Regiment, including the Guernsey contingent, travelled via Southampton and Le Havre to join the British Expeditionary Force in France. It formed part of the 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division. On 19<sup>th</sup> December they went into billets at Drouvin, from which parties of officers and men were attached to the 8<sup>th</sup> London Regiment (Post Office Rifles) and went into the trenches for two days at a time for instruction. On 30<sup>th</sup> December the battalion was withdrawn from the Front for a course of bombing training, returning to the front on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1916. This time they were attached to 44 Brigade for another tour of instruction. A Company went into the trenches with the 9<sup>th</sup> Black Watch, B Company with the 10<sup>th</sup> Gordon Highlanders, C with the 7<sup>th</sup> Cameron Highlanders and D (the Guernsey contingent) with the 8<sup>th</sup> Seaforth Highlanders.

During this period several men were wounded and Major George Le Page was killed in action on 26 January 1916. He is buried at Noeux les Mines Communal Cemetery, where his headstone gives his regiments as Royal Irish (the stone bears its badge) and Royal Guernsey Militia. The night after Major Le Page was killed the battalion moved into rest billets at Febvin Pallert where they were instructed in drill, musketry and bombing until they returned to the front line from 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> February. C and D companies were this time attached to 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade and took over from two companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Highland Light Infantry east of Festubert. From February until April 1916 the Guernsey contingent alternated between short periods in the front line and support line, training in rest camps and being attached to work parties mending roads and carrying stores.

On 6<sup>th</sup> April 1916 they moved up to Hulluch, near Loos and on 9<sup>th</sup> they relieved the 6<sup>th</sup> Connaught Rangers in the front line. They were relieved on 16<sup>th</sup> and went into barracks in Philosophe. 8 men from the Regiment were killed and 19 wounded during this period. In terms of local casualties, on the day that they were relieved 3320 Private James William Quin was killed in action and is buried at Bois-Carré Military Cemetery. Private Hilary John Carré from the Castel died

of wounds on 10<sup>th</sup> April and is buried at Béthune Town Cemetery. 3201 Private James Dumaresq had already been killed in action on 3 April and 3272 Private Wilfred Charles Le Ruez died of wounds on 6<sup>th</sup>. Dumaresq is buried at Mazingarbe Communal Cemetery Extension and Le Ruez at Dud Corner Cemetery, Loos. 3197 Private Harold Domaille died in hospital at Le Tréport on 22 April as a result of this same action.

The battalion spent the month of May alternating between the front line and Brigade Support. Incidents during this period included a trench raid by the Germans on 9<sup>th</sup>. Casualties for the whole Regiment for this period were 45 killed and about 100 wounded. Guernsey men included 3255 Private Abraham Le Cheminant, killed in action on 11 May and buried at Dud Corner cemetery, 3361 Private Clifford Watts who died of wounds on 29<sup>th</sup> and is buried at Bethune Town Cemetery, and 3207 Private George H Falla who was killed in action also on 29<sup>th</sup> and is buried at Dud Corner cemetery.

They continued in this area until 24<sup>th</sup> August 1916, doing two tours in the front line, one in support and one in reserve. The support line carried ammunition and stores up to the front line, a very dangerous occupation resulting in the many men being killed or wounded as by this stage the Germans were using trench mortars and aerial torpedoes. The RIR also became known for their trench raids during this period, again leading to heavy losses. Six Guernseymen from 6 RIR died in June 1916. They were 3218 Private William Gartell on 4<sup>th</sup>, 3219 Private Alfred Gavey on 6<sup>th</sup>, 3213 Private Eugene ( aka Edward) Flatres on 7<sup>th</sup>, 3204 Private Thomas Ferbrache on 8<sup>th</sup>, 483369 Private Albert Gillman on 10<sup>th</sup> and 3226 Private James Guille also on 10<sup>th</sup>. Flatres, Gartell and Gavey are all buried at Dud Corner, Loos, Ferbrache is at Bethune Town and Gillman is at Noeux les Mines. Guille, who died of wounds, is buried at Lillers Communal Cemetery, the burial place for several nearby Casualty Clearing stations. On 12 July the island lost a further two men from 6 RIR: 514049 Private Louis Orvin and 3350 Private William Thoumine were both killed in action and are buried at Dud Corner Cemetery. On 17 July 498345 Private Arthur Le Page died of wounds in hospital and is buried in St Omer Souvenir Cemetery. A further five men died in August 1916. They were 3295 Private Clifford Mitchell, killed in action on 11 August 1916 and buried at St Patrick's Cemetery, Loos, 3132 Sergeant Ernest Fleury, 3124 Lance Corporal Charles Flux and 3488 Private Thomas Russell who all died on 17<sup>th</sup> and are all buried at St Patrick's, and 3144 Sergeant Yves Le Cocq who died of wounds on 19<sup>th</sup> and is buried at St Matthew's Churchyard, Cobo, in Guernsey.

At the end of August 1916 the Battalion moved by road and rail to the Somme and on 3 September they moved to attack Guillemont, with their final objective being the sunken road. They achieved this, consolidated the line, held against three counter attacks and 3130 Sergeant Don Bisset won a Distinguished Conduct medal. His citation states that although badly wounded at the start of the attack he refused to leave his guns and led them through the heavy barrage to the final objective. However casualties were very heavy. Eighteen Guernseymen

from 6 RIR were killed in action on that day alone and another man died of wounds within the next few days. Those killed in action were, in alphabetical order;

3456 Pte James Batiste, who has no known grave but is commemorated on the Thiepval memorial to the missing of the Somme

3178 Pte William Cherry, who is commemorated in the same place.

3181 Lance Corporal Charles Collings who is buried at Combles Communal Cemetery Extension.

3183 Private Eugene Coquelin who is buried at Guillemont Road Cemetery.

3187 Private Harry de Carteret of Sark and 3188 Private Peter de Carteret, both of whom are commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial.

3196 Private George Dimmer, commemorated on the Thiepval memorial.

3206 Private Fred Falla , buried at Dive Copse British Cemetery.

3244 Lance Corporal Albert Keyho, 3259 Lance Corporal Cyril Le Lievre and 3267 Lance Corporal Harold Le Page, all commemorated at Thiepval.

3284 Private Nicholas Martel buried at London Cemetery, Longueval.

Finally 5434 lance Corporal Wilfred Mitchell, 3293 Private Harold Mudge, 3305 Private Basil Ozanne, 3309 Private John Ozanne, 3313 Lance Corporal Clifford Pattimore and 3490 Private Arthur Williamson are all commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial.

3205 Private Edgar Falla died on wounds on 8 September and is buried at Bois Guillaume Communal Cemetery.

They were relieved by the 12<sup>th</sup> King's Royal Rifles on 4 September and spent the next couple of days in bivouac at Carnoy. Then on 7 September they returned to the front line to relieve the 8<sup>th</sup> Inniskilling Fusiliers. On the afternoon of 9<sup>th</sup> September 6 RIR attacked the village of Ginchy. However the enemy was said to be "well prepared" with five machine guns lining the parapet of their objective, which could not be captured, and at dawn next morning they were relieved by the 4<sup>th</sup> Grenadier Guards. Again casualties were heavy.

Local men from 6 RIR lost at Ginchy on 9<sup>th</sup> September or died of wounds soon after were:

2175 Sgt Charles Austin, killed in action and buried at Delville Wood Cemetery.

3156 Cpl Charles Barnes, killed in action, no known grave so listed on the Thiepval Memorial to the missing of the Somme.

3162 L/Cpl Henry Bisson, MM. , killed in action, no known grave so listed on the Thiepval Memorial to the missing of the Somme.

3169 Pte (Drummer) James Brehaut, killed in action, no known grave so listed on the Thiepval Memorial to the missing of the Somme.

3466 L/Cpl Philip Duquemin, killed in action, no known grave so listed on the Thiepval Memorial to the missing of the Somme.

5456 Pte Peter Roland (Rowland, Ruelland) , killed in action, no known grave so listed on the Thiepval Memorial to the missing of the Somme.

3367 Pte Edward Wood , killed in action, no known grave so listed on the Thiepval Memorial to the missing of the Somme.

In addition the following men from the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers were lost on the same day:

23556 Pte George Butland, killed in action, no known grave so listed on the Thiepval Memorial to the missing of the Somme.

21832 Pte Walter Gallienne, killed in action, no known grave so listed on the Thiepval Memorial to the missing of the Somme.

22054 Sgt Eustace Nicholson, killed in action, buried at Delville Wood cemetery.

Two men from 7<sup>th</sup> Btn Royal Irish Rifles were also killed in action on the same day. They were

4080 Rifleman Harry Cauvain , killed in action, no known grave so listed on the Thiepval Memorial to the missing of the Somme.

4185 L/Cpl George Pearce, killed in action, no known grave so listed on the Thiepval Memorial to the missing of the Somme.

On 10<sup>th</sup> September a further two men from 7<sup>th</sup> Btn Royal Irish Fusiliers died of wounds. They were

21891 Pte Fred Queripel, who is buried at Cote 80 French National Cemetery, Etinehem

21901 Pte Alfred Salmon who is buried at Corbie Communal Cemetery Extension.

21808 Cpl John Cluett died of wounds on 11<sup>th</sup> and is buried at La Neuville British Cemetery, Corbie.

Survivors from the Guernsey contingents of the Royal Irish Regiments transferred into the Royal Guernsey Light Infantry on its formation in December 1916.

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