

CHAPTER 1

Albert Enlists

ENLISTMENT:- Militia – Yeomanry – Volunteers – Territorial Forces, Standing Army – Crimea War – Lord Truro – West London Rifles – Childers - South African War, The Kensingtons - 1st & 2nd Boer Wars, The Boy's Brigade – Thompson McKay & Co. – Hauliers – Horse Work - Embarkation – WW1...

This story follows the life of the Kearey family and in particular Albert Kearey [1889-1971]... In the list of births, fifth. The Kearey's' came from Ireland, at the turn of the eighteenth century. They settled, raised their children, and became proud Londoners; eventually the first generation moved to the northwest of the city - to Bayswater. Albert volunteered - to be a Kensington Rifles recruit... and eventually, over a period of almost thirty years, became their Regimental Sergeant Major...

The country in the late nineteenth century was defended by a small standing army, and Militia - a body of troops raised from the citizenry, by voluntary enlistment. In ancient times, it was a force raised by the Lord Lieutenant of a county, for the sovereign – to be on hand, in times of invasion, rebellion, or similar emergency. The men were to keep themselves available and serve for six years; training was to be for twenty-four days annually... whilst providing their own arms and equipment. Initially, the Lord did this by detailing off one-hundred men from his estates, placed under the command of a captain. This recruitment was achieved by compulsion, but later, the body of men were Volunteers. The final acts of the Militia were in the Crimean War followed a little later by the South African War. Thereafter the Militia was superseded - to become a more professional force of trained Volunteers; this came about in May 1859.

After the Crimea War the government realized that the country had insufficient forces available to defend the state. It was decided to have a Volunteer Force made up of three part-time corps: of infantry, gunners and engineers. It did not take long for this force to be considered an important part of the nation's defence.

On April 29th 1859, war broke out between France, under Napoleon III, and the Austrian Empire - the Second Italian War of Independence, and there were fears that Britain might be caught up in a wider European conflict. Lord Truro, one of a number of aristocratic county landowners, raised the 4th Middlesex Volunteer Corps [West London Rifles], based at Islington. He maintained command for twenty years. The 1st Middlesex [Victorias] and the 2nd Middlesex [South] were raised by Lord Ranelagh. All three were to prepare for this possible encounter. Two years later many of these isolated bodies of troops were amalgamated into battalion-sized units. By 1862, the government issued a grant: to provide headquarters, drill-halls, transport, uniforms and equipment. Later, the government, appreciating the worthwhileness of the scheme, removed the financing from those of county precepts – to become a national commitment. To carry out the reorganization of the commission, The Volunteer Act of 1863 was announced, whereby each man was to offer their services to her Majesty through the Lieutenant of a County. An annual inspection process, overseen by an officer from the regular army, was put into place, and the standards set by order in council.

In 1872, The Secretary of State for War, by the Regulation of the Forces Act, ordered the jurisdiction removed from the County Lieutenants. The Childers Reforms of 1881, nominated, 'that the rifle volunteer corps should be volunteer battalions of the new 'county' infantry regiments'. Childers set about ensuring that regiments were henceforth made up of two battalions – one based at home the other overseas. The intention was that there would always be a body of troops capable of responding to an emergency. These changes took a further twenty years to be completed,

including adopting a standard dress and designated names and badges. The Volunteers now numbered a quarter of a million men. This reserve force incorporated: the Militia – the country regiments, the Yeomanry – the mounted infantry, and the Volunteers – the urban regiments.

In 1859, the 4th [North] Middlesex Rifle Volunteer Corps was formed at Islington, and the 2nd [South] Middlesex Rifle Volunteer Corps formed in Fulham. The West London Rifles became the 2nd. Volunteer Battalion of The King's Royal Rifle Corps in 1881; four years later they moved to Kensington changing title to the 4th Middlesex Rifle Volunteer Corps. A further six years saw its title change yet again to 4th Middlesex [West London Rifles] Volunteer Rifle Corps.

The stimulus for all these changes was the South African War of 1899-1902. Three-quarters of those that volunteered were declared physically unfit - to fulfil the duties of a soldier. This shocked the Home Office. A call was made to recruitment officers throughout the country, and through the Inspector General, to find out why so many men were in such poor health. The conclusions: the plight of the poor - their sub-standard housing, and lack of healthy diet. Both these were considered equal factors. The legislative reforms made by the Liberal government went some way to correct the deficiencies. However, this correction process took another ten years.

In The South African Wars Britain sustained nearly thirty-four thousand casualties for the cost of two hundred million pounds. It was declared, 'that the war had been a shambles.' It did however point the finger at national shortcomings. Britain signed an alliance with Japan, in 1902, France by 1904, and Russia in 1907.

The formation of The Boys' Brigade, by Sir William Smith, and The Boy Scouts, by Baden Powell, was to improve the physique and mental health of young boys, who might in the future become army volunteers. Both these organizations and others like them gave the young, especially children from inner cities like Glasgow and London, something to work for and benefit by.

Albert Kearey joined the 6th London Company, Boys' Brigade in 1900, at the age of eleven. The first company was set up by Sir William Smith seventeen years before, on 4th October 1883. The organization quickly caught on in Glasgow, and the first company in London started soon after.

The Brigade's uniform aped that of the army – white haversack, brown belt and Pill Box hat [The bands of the pill box hat were pipe-clayed and the buckles of the belt and haversack polished brass]. The lads conventional school uniform, plus lapel badge and everyday black shoes, formed the basic uniform... Dummy rifles were issued to provide the necessary equipment for drill and parade purposes. All the drill commands and actions followed those of the Army Manual, of the 1880s. In effect, The Boys Brigade, taking boys from the age of eleven to seventeen, was a valued recruiting arm of the country's military establishment. Sir William introduced camping to continue the boys association with each other during the school's summer holiday.

The Edwardian economy, business structure and social attitudes rested in part on the philosophy of Imperialism, and that was about benevolent exploitation and economic advantage. However, what marks the period was the direct intervention by a number of well meaning individuals to improve the social and economic opportunities for all.

Britain's population in 1901 was 42 million and growing fast. Railway goods traffic grew by one thousand per cent and the first of many steam tractors were now used to tow pantechnicons. The numbers of carmen, carters and carriers grew in London to over a quarter of a million and the delivery of coal and heavy equipment soared. In 1903, Joseph Chamberlain used the Imperialistic mood in the country to suggest a series of tariff reforms. Over six million frozen rabbits were imported from Australia. This and the import of wheat just two of the items which undermined British goods. The tariffs were meant to protect the country from the dumping of foreign goods and gather taxes to help promote new social measures. This hint of protectionism undermined the idealistic concept of free trade weakening the country's great imperial dream... the concept of Imperialism never really recovered...

At this time a team of private individuals launched the 'Garden City' programme in an attempt to marry town conveniences to country pursuits. Its first experiment was at Letchworth... This social manipulation was a follow on to other Liberal reforms.

Albert Kearey started work in 1904, at the age of fifteen, as a three month probationary clerk... serving the Grand Central Railway freight department - attached to Paddington Main Line Station. [The Headquarters of the Grand Central Railway Company] [GCRC] He served out his probationary period but unfortunately there was no vacancy for a full-time clerk.

Thompson McKay & Company, a large freight haulage company, held the license to deal with all the railway company's freight. They had their warehouse and distribution centre next door to the railway company. The GCRC suggested to Albert that he should transfer to this company - who were advertising for a trainee clerk. He applied immediately and was offered an interview by return of post. At his interview he mentioned his membership in The Boys Brigade. This greatly influenced the selection committee. The Board recognised the dedication and discipline necessary to be a corporal, which he then was - heading up a section of boys. They complimented him on his excellent school report and the railway company's recommendations, telling him that his application was likely to be accepted, which it was, two days later. The next ten years saw his development from junior clerk to cartage manager.

1904 was the year the *Entente Cordiale* was signed. This was a treaty which gave France a free hand in Morocco allowing Great Britain to take over the 'governorship' of Egypt. Germany saw this as aggressive... any move by Britain was a stab in the back to the Kaiser, who was paranoid about Britain's grand designs - he saw this as an attempt to corral his ambitions of expansion... This was the start of Britain and France becoming allied against Germany and the creation of the British Expeditionary Force - by Haldane at the War Office. In 1905 the 4th Middlesex [Kensington] Volunteer Rifle Corps was formed.

The General Election of 1906 brought a Liberal Government, under Campbell-Bannerman, to power. Richard Haldane was appointed Secretary of State for War. The Liberal Party's manifesto centred upon social reform. They intended to do something about the poor health of the working class and the amount of unemployment - 'greater equality and equal opportunities for all', was the cry. The Liberals were determined to push through all their schemes related to social reform even if it created a quarrel between the two Houses of Parliament. Poor Campbell-Bannerman did not live long enough to see the fight for he died two years later. The only bill he did see become law was, 'that medical inspection was to be introduced into state schools'. This laid the foundation of the modern system of school clinics. His other great works involved his Resolution, 'that within the limits of a single parliament the final decision of the Commons should prevail'. This broke the power of the House of Lords.

Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary of the minority Liberal Government of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, appointed Richard Haldane to the post of Secretary of State for War. Grey had committed The British Army to go to the assistance of France, if attacked, needed a strong pair of hands to ensure the army was up to the task. After much studied thought Haldane concluded that an Expeditionary Force was needed - settled on six infantry units. These six units required back-up to cater for leave, sickness, casualties and deaths by a home-defence force. Haldane further supported his suggestions by having drawn up two Field Service manuals implemented by the new Director of Staff Duties Douglas Haig. The supply of officers was filled by volunteers from universities and public schools trained by Cadet Corps and university Rifle Corps.

It was realised by Chancellor St. John Broderick, that the army was not capable of fighting a protracted war without the support of additional troops. Volunteers had to be brought in to fight in

the war... afterwards reform was necessary to change the system... the Liberal Secretary for War Haldane set about forming the Territorial Force. These Volunteers were mainly local business people, craftsmen and professional, lower and middle-class men training at weekends and at the summer annual camp numbering two hundred and thirteen rifle corps.

Haldane engaged Colonel Ellison as a member of his staff. A year later the reorganization of the army was complete. The National Army was to consist of a Field Force and a Territorial Force. The Field Force organized to be ready for mobilization in the event of war. The Territorial Force would be there to train – to support and effect the expansion, a new force of fourteen divisions. Was created by Richard Haldane in 1908, [Territorial and Reserve Forces Act 1907] becoming the new reserve volunteer force, made out of the previously civilian-administered Volunteer Force. This included the Militia, Yeomanry and Volunteers: the Militia, being mainly officers and men from the counties; the Yeomanry - the mounted rifles; the Volunteers - men from the towns and cities. The new volunteers, with an overall strength of just over a quarter of a million men, were part-time soldiers paid the same rate as the regulars whilst engaged on military activities. This Territorial Force was under no obligation to serve overseas. In reality most of the men did. [The Territorial Force was disbanded soon after WWI only to be reinstated in 1920 as the Territorial Army]