

## The Inns of Court O.T.C.

THE GREAT WAR was only a few weeks old when the Northumberland Fusiliers arrived in Berkhamsted. There was scarcely a rifle to train with, but these stocky men from the wolds and Tyneside were up for physical drill from 6.30 to 7.30 a.m., followed by three hours' foot drill before noon, and drill with arms (or the next best thing to arms) from 2 to 4.30 p.m.

They exercised in the Park and Butts Meadow, were provided with makeshift recreation rooms in the Court House and various church schoolrooms, and were invited to concerts three evenings a week in the Town Hall. The men quickly made friends, especially with the children, but their thick Northern accents were strange to Berkhamsted ears. Stranger still was the sight of hundreds of men squatting on the footpaths, a familiar custom in mining towns.

Church parade was a great event. Never before had our rector, the Rev. R. Hart-Davies, addressed a congregation of 1,500 officers and men.

### IN BILLETS

The men were billeted in private houses, at rates of remuneration which seem absurdly low by present-day standards. A leaflet headed 'Billets', printed at Tring on 21st September, 1914, gives the following rates:

Lodging, including bed and bedding, ordinary means of ablution, attendance and light, 9d. per night.

Breakfast (6 oz. bread, 1 pint tea with milk and sugar,  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. bacon or its equivalent), 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.

Dinner (1 lb. meat,  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. bread,  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. potatoes or other vegetables, 1 pint beer or minerals of equal value), 1s. 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.

Supper (6 oz. bread, 1 pint tea with milk and sugar, 2 oz. cheese), 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.

After being billeted in Berkhamsted for about a fortnight, between 3,000 and 4,000 troops of the Third New Army left the town on 3rd October to continue training at Halton. The whole town turned out with St. Peter's Band at 7.30 a.m., and Major Parsons led three hearty cheers for the men.

The Northumberland Fusiliers were still in Berkhamsted when the town made its first acquaintance with the Inns of Court Officers Training Corps ('The

Devil's Own'). What was intended to be a stay of six weeks lasted until the summer of 1919. In this time over 12,000 men were welcomed and admired by the whole town. The respect was mutual. The official history of the Corps credits Berkhamsted with having given the men the time of their lives.

### THIRD CHOICE

Why did the Inns of Court come to Berkhamsted? The commander, Lieut.-Col. F. H. L. Errington, first sought permission for a camp in Hatfield Park, but as that was already crowded Lord Salisbury suggested Ashridge Park. But the water supply and roads were inadequate, and Lord Brownlow (whose wife opened a military hospital at Ashridge) advised the use of Berkhamsted Park.

And so, on 28th September, 1914, the Corps moved to Berkhamsted, camping in the field behind the railway station. Lord Brownlow's private waiting room and the large shed behind the station became the quartermaster's office and stores.

While the infantry left-wheeled to the Park, the cavalry headed for the old brewery in Water Lane, where production, to the regret of the newcomers, had ceased some months earlier. Men and horses were installed in the rambling brewery buildings and remained there until the squadron (but not the infantry) left Berkhamsted in 1916.

### GOOD FOR TRAINING

It was the excellence of the surrounding country for training which kept the Inns of Court O.T.C. here for nearly five years, not six weeks. For the cavalry, to quote the Corps' history, there were long treks without touching a road, wide movements and direct reconnaissance. For the infantry every form of open training was available: wood-fighting, canal and river crossings, big fights on the open commons and downs, and local fighting among the enclosures.

'In the neighbouring villages—Nettle-den, Little Gaddesden, Aldbury, Ashley Green, Bovingdon—the awakened villager turned to sleep again with greater security when he realised that the outburst of firing and the swift rush

ed... "Devil's Own", wrote Col. Errington.

In November, 1914, the men moved into billets. Meals were taken in Key's timber yard, the greater part of which was taken over for the troops. The Court House became an orderly room. Two huge marquees were erected in the Castle grounds for a musketry school. Local ladies organised a hospital first at Barncroft and then at The Beeches.

Out of the Corps' savings, five company huts, each holding 400 men, were erected for lectures and recreation. Two of these huts survive in the town. One is Mr. P. C. Osborn's auction room in Middle Road; another was transferred to Gossoms End and is now a garage and workshop. A third hut was burnt down in the Armistice Day celebrations.

Astonishingly, in the middle of the war a cinema was built—named the Court Theatre in honour of the Corps. Here, occasionally, pantomimes and revues were presented by the soldiers, many of whom were professional actors, musicians, writers and artists.

### THE CORPS' ANTHEM

In various huts, halls and public-houses there was an almost endless round of entertainment, providing gaiety for the townsfolk as well as for the troops. The old town was often young with laughter, and some of that laughter can still be recaptured by reading the Corps' publications, the *Gehenna Gazette* and the *Hades Herald*. Not that there was anything devilish about the gentle humour of the writers who served in 'the Devil's Own.'

Just as one remembers best the sunny summers of boyhood, so the fun and gaiety of those sombre years remain in the mind of one who was eight years old when the war ended. Other facets of the war will be told in a later article. Meanwhile, many memories will be stirred by the Inns of Court anthem:

On Monday, you go out with a shovel,  
On Tuesday, you make your soft feet hard,  
On Wednesday you're out, just learning to shout,  
On Thursday you're on guard,  
On Friday you do some little Night Ops.,  
On Saturday you'll just be coming to,  
On Sunday there's collection,  
Likewise sermon—and inspection,  
Till we make a dinky sub. of each of you.

'BEORCHAM'

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