

## The Story of the Yeomanry

*This account was written in 1969 by Lieutenant Frank Wood formerly of the East Riding Yeomanry, who lived at Humbleton Hall. It was recently donated to Hedon Museum by his niece. This transcript is published with their kind permission.*

October 27<sup>th</sup> 1915, the regiment ER Yeo as again [word missing] week of infantry for Gallipoli), cavalry under the command of Col. The Honourable Guy Wilson, DSO, T.D., sails from Southampton in HMT Victorian. Alexandria was reached on November 9<sup>th</sup>. Mena camp Cairo on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and Deir El Azab in the Fayoum Oasis (Egypt) on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 1915.

Twelve months of dreary uncomfortable desert life in the western frontier force was to be the regiment's lot for 1916. Among the many camps being El Azab (Brigade HQ), El Gharack, Medinet Mahdi, Abu Gandir, El Shawashana, Kasr el Gebali etc.

On April 28<sup>th</sup> 1916 the title was changed to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Mounted Brigade and four days later Major T.G.N. Bardwell MBE, T.D., with many NCOs and men left to join the newly formed Imperial Camel Corps. 120 officers and men selected from all squadrons joined the Arabian forces under Col. T.E. Lawrence.

On December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1916, A squadron entrained for the Suez Canal zone, reached Hill 40 (Kantara) on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, to be followed a few days later by B and C squadrons. Transfers from the Libyan to the Sinai desert added little to the men's comfort except that the weather was by this time somewhat cooler. Water was rationed for all purposes to one gallon per man per day.

The names of the main camps or bivouac areas occupied in the weeks that followed in early 1917 will bring many memories – Hill 40, Hod El Aras, Dueidar, Romani, Mohammedyia, Bir-El-Abd, El Arish, Sheikh Zowaid, where in the Anzac Mounted Division (Major General Sir H.G. Chauvel) the regiment was performing a protective screen to the rapidly advancing railhead.

On February 24<sup>th</sup> 1917, on Rafa patrol the regiment first set foot in the Hold Land and a fortnight later moved to Birl El Melalha at the northern extremity of the Turco-Egyptian frontier.

March 25<sup>th</sup> 1917 (a reconnaissance in force) provided us with our first distance glimpse of Gaza and the following day the unsuccessful First Battle of Gaza was in full swing. For not more of 6 hours out of 96 were our horses off saddled.

Leaving Deir El Belah in the evening of April 16<sup>th</sup> 1917 the regiment took up position on the extreme right flank in the Second Battle of Gaza, an operation which met with no greater success than that of a few weeks earlier.

At the end of June 1917, General Sir Archibald Murray was succeeded as C-in-C by General Sir E.H.A. Allenby and in the reorganization which followed, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Mounted Brigade was transferred to the Yeomanry Mounted Division.

On October 26<sup>th</sup> 1917, the ERY left the coast at Tel El Marakeb for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle of Gaza the opening of which was so successfully marked by the fall of Beersheba on the 31<sup>st</sup> October. Weeks of constant movement followed – Knaweilfeh, Sheryia, Tel-El-Negili, Hatta, Mejdal, Ehud, Yebna, El Buggar, Akir, Naaneh, Abu Shusheh, Anwas (Emmaus), Ramleh, Ludd (Lydda), which latter place was reached on November 17<sup>th</sup> 1917.

Then came the advance in to the Judaeen hills , the aim being to cut off Jerusalem from the north. Ain Arik was reached on November 20<sup>th</sup>, the ER Yeomanry being the most forward regiment when only 1 and a half miles from Ram Allah, our advance was halted, by which time, as the official history states both men and horses were half starved – the East Riding Yeomanry, for example, had in 60 hours one half days rations and a few figs.

Enforced withdrawal over the roughest ground to BEIT-UR-EL-TAHTA (BETH HORON) and operations, which met with varying success, in the area around TAHTA and BEIT-UR-EL-FOKA continued on November 30<sup>th</sup> 1917. The regiment was relieved by the HLI and finally withdrawn from the line. Jerusalem fell on December 9<sup>th</sup> 1917, by which time the Yeomanry Mounted Division was back resting in the AKIR area.

By April 11<sup>th</sup> 1918, the East Riding Yeomanry, along with other Yeomanry regiments had reached the high ground once more, but embarkation on HMT Caledonia did not take place until 6 weeks later, on May 25<sup>th</sup> 1918 at 1500 hours.

The Kaiser-i-Hind convoy sailed for France, the centre boat in the convoy, the Leasowe Castle being torpedoed and sunk on the first night at sea.

Entrained at Marseille on June 5<sup>th</sup> 1918 in box wagons bearing the inscription 40 hommes, 8 chevaux. The regiment reached Etaples June 8<sup>th</sup> 1918, Cuq and Wurmhoudt a week or so later. The training on the Vickers machine gun commenced in earnest for the role we were to play in France – for combined with the Lincolnshire Yeomanry, we now held the title of the 102<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Machine Gun Corps (Mobile) under the command of Colonel Granville.

From May 1918 to the armistice the 102<sup>nd</sup> Battalion served as shock troops to several infantry divisions and were in close touch with the enemy at Curgies, where the armistice was called.

The battle honours of the East Riding Yeomanry in the first world war were:

Selles

Valenciennes

Sambre

France & Flanders 1918

Egypt 1915-1917

Gaza

El Mughar

Nebi Samuel

Palestine 1917-1918

After the 1914-18 war, many Yeomanry regiments were reorganised and the regiment became the 26<sup>th</sup> (ER Yeomanry) Armoured Car company, Royal Tank Corps and was commanded in turn by the late Colonel C.G. Wilson, CMG, DSO, TD, the late Lt. Colonel J. Walker, CBE, DSO, TD, who commanded until 192[?]. Lt. Colonel (now Brigadier) RES Chichester Constable DSO, DL, who commanded until 1934 and Lt. Colonel W.D.V. Thompson, DSO, MC, TD.

The late Colonel J.B. Stracey Clitherow CBE, TD, DL, honorary Colonel of the 26<sup>th</sup> (ER Yeomanry Armoured Car Company) from 1921-1931 and was succeeded by Colonel the honourable Guy G. Wilson DSO, TD.

The regiment formed two lines. The first regiment went to France, sailing from Southampton and became part of the original BEF as Corps Cavalry to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps, which was commanded by General Sir Robert Adam, Bart., KCB, DSO, CBE. They took part in the fighting, first near Ath, south of Brussels and were engaged in the rearguard actions until the final stand at Cassel.

In 14 days it fought 7 major rearguard actions, covering the withdrawal of other troops in every case. It was in turn switched from 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps to the 44<sup>th</sup> Division to the 48<sup>th</sup> Division, then to Mack Force and finally back with the 48<sup>th</sup> Division. It was left with the unenviable task of defending Cassel with the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. This force stayed at Cassel until the night of the 29<sup>th</sup>/30<sup>th</sup> May, by which time the town was surrounded, but [...] the advance of the German forces to Dunkirk had held up.

On 29<sup>th</sup> May all the B echelon vehicles of the 145<sup>th</sup> infantry brigade were destroyed, plus the motorbikes of the regiment. The regiment was then given the task of the rearguard to the 145<sup>th</sup> infantry brigade in an endeavour to reach the coast and had under command the remaining battalion carriers of the Gloucestershire regiment and the Oxford & Bucks Light Infantry.

Dawn found the force in country strong with enemy troops, including the elements of a panzer division. Fighting as best they could against heavier armour and guns and anti-tank guns of the enemy, the regiment's AFV's were slowly liquidated, but gave a good account of themselves. In this fighting, most of those in the regiment who were not killed, were taken prisoner. A few however made it to the beaches.

Some days before the 30<sup>th</sup> May, the regiment B echelon transport with the remains of the crews of the AFV's which had previously lost their vehicles in action got to the coast and were evacuated to England, where they became the nucleus of the reformed regiment.

For its part in this campaign, the regiment received one DSO, 3 MC's, one DCM, 5 MM's and 9 officers and men of the regiment were mentioned in Despatches.

When the remainder of the 1<sup>st</sup> ERY (4 officers and about 230 men) were finally gathered together at Bovington on their return from Dunkirk, they were amalgamated with the 2<sup>nd</sup> ERY under the command of Lt. Colonel R.B.B.B. Cooke (17<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> Lancers).

In 1941 by Lt. Colonel W.F. Fisher (12<sup>th</sup> Lancers).

In 1942/43 by Lt. Colonel Agnew (15<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> Hussars)

In February 1943-45 by Lt. Colonel T.C. Williamson, DSO (Inniskilling Dragoon Guards).

The residue of the 2<sup>nd</sup> regiment then became part of a battalion of the Green Howards, a large proportion of which were later made into an Airborne battalion.

The reformed regiment was re-equipped in about 2 months with Beaverettes, standard 14HP cars with machine guns and boiler plates for protection. They were known as an Ironsides regiment for anti-invasion duties and moved to Braxted Park in Essex.

Here they remained in constant readiness until the invasion scare was over. They were then put in the 9<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division and completely re-equipped with Covenanter tanks. This division did not sail as expected for the Near East and many of the regiment's men were drafted to other regiments. They were made up with more untrained men, some of them infantry from the East Yorks. depot. In April 1943 they were then put in the 79<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division for special amphibious training and were the first regiment to be completely equipped and trained with Duplex Drive (DD) amphibious tanks. These were first Valentines and then Shermans. Training was severe and uncomfortable and all ranks had to pass out in submarine Davis escape apparatus. The regiment did their invasion training in the north of Scotland on the Moray Firth, moved south to Petworth in Essex and landed on the first tide at D-Day in support of the 9<sup>th</sup> infantry Brigade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division. They took part in all the beachhead battles and after 50 days were re-formed, leaving the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division and joining the Highland Division. The regiment then went with the Highland Division and the 49<sup>th</sup> Division (I Corps) through the north of France, through Liseux, fought a battle in the loop of the Seine, captured 500 prisoners, crossed the [...] where the 1<sup>st</sup> regiment disembarked in France in 1940. They then spent the autumn fighting continually in Holland, north up to the Maas and then west of the Maas to Venlo.

After a short rest, they were hurried down for the defence of Brussels and then helped with the 51<sup>st</sup> and 53<sup>rd</sup> Divisions drive of the Germans out of the Ardennes, alongside the Americans. After this very cold campaign, they were quickly re-equipped with another amphibious tracked vehicle called the Buffalo. In these they ferried over the 227<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the 15<sup>th</sup> Scottish Division. After this successful operation, the regiment was completely re-equipped with their own tanks, went under the command of the Canadian army, who liberated Rotterdam and northern Holland.

After the fighting was over, they were stationed at Laboe on the opposite side of the estuary to Kiel and were responsible for looking after Area F, which was one of the areas where the German army was disbanded.

This brought to an end nine months of continuous fighting in which the Yeomanry took part in practically every major battle from the beaches to Germany. Casualties were light in comparison to the action seen – the total was 145 of which 55 were killed. 59 honours and awards were received for this campaign, 2 DSO's, 2 MBE's, 8 MC's, 9 MM's and 3 foreign decorations.

The East Riding Yeomanry was put into suspended animation in 1946 and was re-formed again as a TA unit in March 1947. The present commanding officer being Lt. Colonel V.C. Ellison MC.

Brigadier R.C.J. Chichester-Constable DSO, DL, JP accepted the appointment of honorary colonel in succession to the late Colonel, the honourable Guy Wilson, DSO, TD.