

Ragtime



RAGTIME

Hertfordshire Yeomanry – Gallipoli

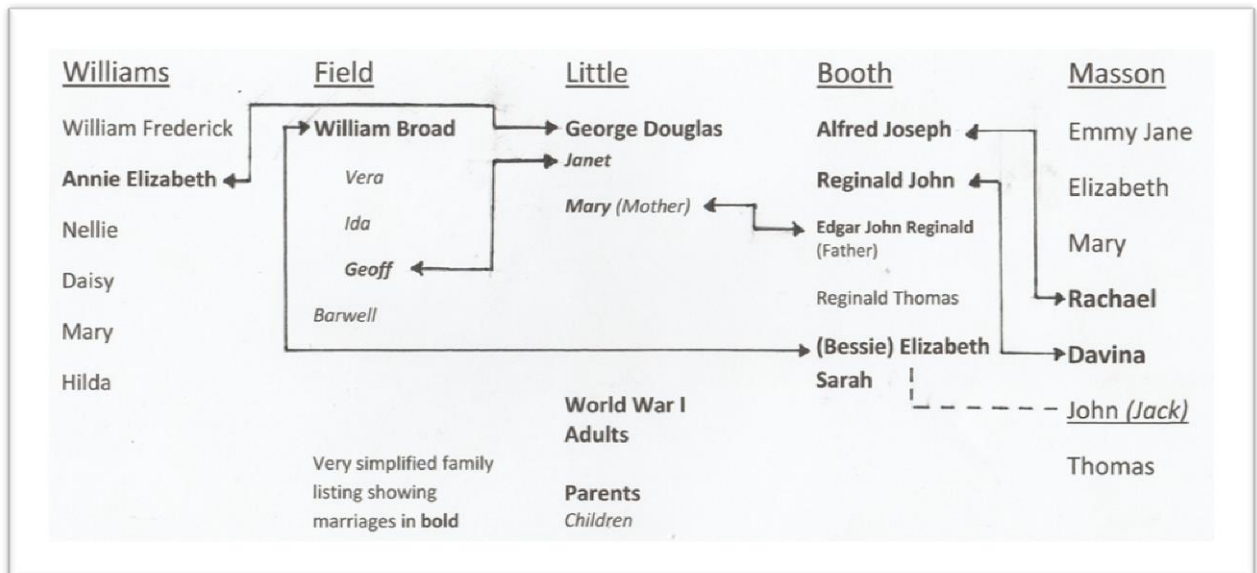
Families – Farms – Horses

Booth / Little / Masson / Field / Williams





Reginald John Booth (1893- 1961) & **George Douglas Little** (1883 – 1958)



Ragtime – Grandfathers in the Great War

*Photos, maps and credits: Google and click on 'images' –
Hertfordshire Yeomanry
1915 Suvla Bay*

Introduction

During World War I, Grandfather George Little, Grandfather Reginald Booth and Grandma Davidina (Davina) Booth's brother, John Masson, were all in the Hertfordshire Yeomanry cavalry. Two of them went to Gallipoli - one was invalided out and the other did not return.

Other close relations were Reg's elder brother, Alfred Booth (1890-1965) and Grandma Little's brother, William Frederick Williams were in the Yeomanry artillery around 1908. Alfred was always known as 'Major' later in life – probably a World War II commission – and married Davina's sister, Rachael. Logically it would seem that Alfred would have joined the Yeomanry along with his younger brother.

Finally William Broad Field, who was to become Reg's brother-in-law as a direct consequence of the war, might also have joined up. Unfortunately many World War I records were lost through German bombing in World War II. I have not been able to trace any war records for Alfred or the two Williams.

As a child I remember once sleeping on Grandfather Little's army camp bed. It had been set up in the attic at Bradwell Abbey (now Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre) when the farm was full up. I then assumed that he must have used it at the Western Front. That night's rest would have happened in the late fifties as I am sure both George (1883 – 1958) and Annie (1882 – 1960) were both alive.

Mother, Mary Isabella Booth (1915-2007), could only recall that Grandfather George had nearly won the regimental cup for marksmanship, but instead got a teaspoon for being runner-up. When war was declared she said he was stopped from going abroad when deployed because the Yeomanry already had enough Sargent Majors.



I can't really remember being told much about Grandfather Reg's wartime exploits other than one of the reasons given for their divorce was Davina had blamed Grandfather for encouraging her brother to go off to war. I'm not sure if it was true but there was a story that the children Edgar John Reginald Booth, father (1914-1970), and his younger brother Tommy (1919-1996) sat at the dining table relaying messages from one parent to another.

This was the extent of my knowledge until only five years ago - 2011 - when I went to the 90th birthday party of Baibe (Barwell William) Field (1921- 2013) at Warrengate Farm, Potters Bar. There pinned to the

Ragtime

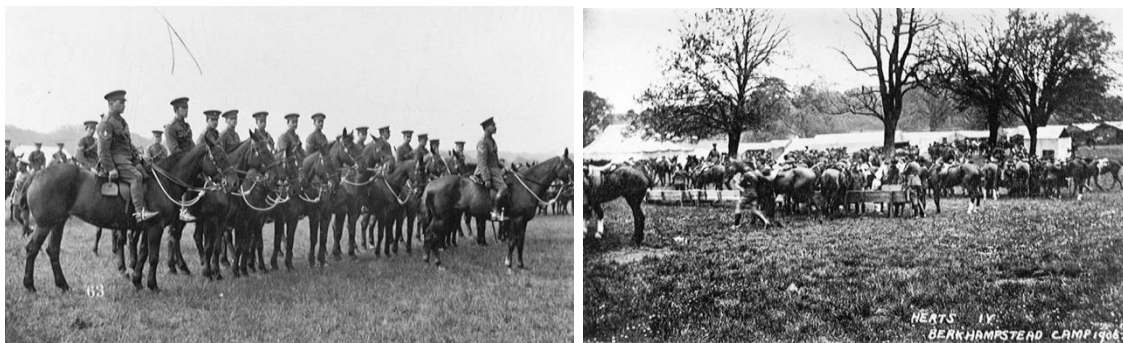
wall was Reg's obituary. Dated 1961, it went on to state –

'The oldest tenant on the Gorhambury Estate (Butlers Farm) . . . A well-known farmer and sportsman in the county, he was a fine horseman, and in 1913 had outstanding success on his horse Ragtime IV. At a point-to-point . . . He won the farmers heavyweight steeplechase and then came second in the Yeomanry race later in the day . . . He was also a good shot . . . A trooper in the Herts Yeomanry, he served in Gallipoli.'

For me, this lit the blue touch paper of research to find out more as I had inherited his 1913 Enfield Point-to-Point cup from our step-Grandmother Millie about 30 years ago. Also I was beginning to use the Ancestry website, which had access to the National Archive war records. To back this up I read a few books on the Hertfordshire Yeomanry, Gallipoli and Sulva – cross referencing them with various other websites.

Hertfordshire Yeomanry

First to explain is that the Yeomanry was not part of the regular army. The Yeomanry was raised in response to the threat of the French Revolution spreading to Britain at the end of the 18th century. This threat continued with the possibility of a Napoleonic invasion. While the regular army was fighting abroad, it was decided to raise a volunteer force to act as a separate self-defence.



Herts Yeomanry annual pre-war training camps

The Hertfordshire Yeoman was a cavalry and field artillery unit made up mainly of landed gentry and farmers – yeoman. This was necessary as they had to provide their own horses. As further threats came and receded during the 19th century the Yeomanry was disbanded and reformed twice. It became more ceremonial as the British Empire became more successful and less threatened; although members often did go on to join the regular army – the Imperial Yeomanry.

The Hertfordshire Yeomanry did supply troops to the Boer War 1889 – 1902 and saw action in Ladysmith, Mafeking and the Orange Free State. Following various setbacks in South Africa the British Army decided it was necessary to improve the basic training back home.

The Yeomanry trained at weekends and had an annual two week camp, but were not professional soldiers. Some considered it a glorified Boys scouts with a free summer holiday. There were four Hertfordshire Yeomanry cavalry squadrons based around the county – A-Watford; B-Hertford; C-St Albans; D-High Barnet. Along with the Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex Yeomanry, Herts were responsible for defending the East Coast as the East Anglian Division.

Ragtime

There were two Hertfordshire artillery batteries - the 1st was based at St Albans and the 2nd based at Watford. They were part of the Bedfordshire Regiment and became part of 4th East Anglian Brigade on mobilisation.

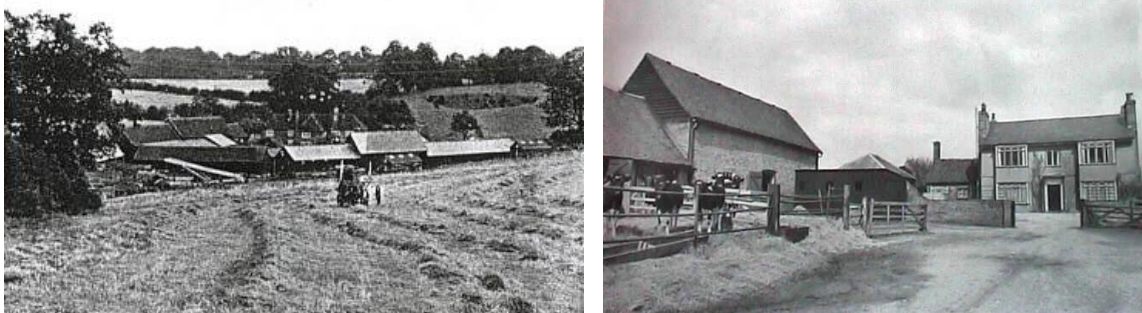
The 1st Herts (St Albans) went to the Western Front after the cavalry were sent to Egypt in May 1915, were then forwarded down to Marseilles and sent to Alexandria in February 1916 to join with the cavalry that had withdrawn from Gallipoli. They fought across Sinai with the cavalry 1917 and then into Palestine and finished in Beirut.

The 2nd Herts Battery remained in the UK for training purposes and in August 1915 were located around Thetford as part of In May 1916, the 2/IV East Anglian Brigade was numbered CCCXLVIII Bde RFA (348 Bde). Although not sure whether he was still with the battery at the beginning of the war, there was a QSM Sargent W. Williams in the team that won the Kings Cup in 1910. This was the top artillery prize between the various UK batteries conducted at Okehampton on Dartmoor. Later in the war they moved up to Harrogate, Doncaster and finally to Darlington.

Recruitment

The first family member to join the Hertfordshire Yeomanry was George Douglas Little (1883-1958) of Westwick Hall farm, Levestock Green, also on the Gorhambury Estate between St Albans and Hemel Hempstead. His War Record shows he joined at Watford on 14 March 1902 aged 18 years 4 months and was able to provide his own horse. His regiment number was 497.

On 15 May 1908 he transferred to Hemel Hempstead as a S2MS (Squadron Sargent Major or Squadron Quartermaster Sargent?). He attended every annual training camp – usually held at the end of May or beginning of June for two weeks. He was promoted to Sargent Major at the 1910 annual camp at Patcham just outside Brighton on 11 May. A number of the local exercises were held on the Gorhambury Estate in fields next to Westwick Hall Farm.



Westwick Hall and Attimore farms

Next to join for a four year commission was Reginald Booth (1893-1961) then living at Dugdale Farm, Potters Bar (now a housing estate but would have been the farm butting up to Warrengate); regiment number 1791; aged 17 years and 4 months on 14 November 1910. Records changed in 1907 with the new Territorial Act. Unfortunately there was nothing to indicate how his training and attendance went. Another cup which Sarah has - dated 1911 - stated - *Best Section Prize - D Squadron - Herts Yeomanry* – which confirms he was based at High Barnet only four miles away. By

Ragtime

this stage, regulations no longer required recruits to provide their own horses, but by taking part in the Yeomanry Point-to-Point indicated Reg had his own horse.

At present I have not been able to obtain any details of John Masson's enrolment so assume he was a later recruit – possibly at the beginning of the war - although with a lower regiment number: 1425 and would presume he also had his own horse knowing the family's continuing commitment to horses. He was only just younger than Reg – born 1894 – and was then living at Attimore Hall farm (now the Attimore Hall pub) in Tewin. He probably joined B squadron as he was only 5 miles from Hertford. He was commonly called Jack as his father was also John.

Outbreak of World War I

World War I started on 28th July 1914 and the embodiment of the Territorial Force was proclaimed on 4th August. They had to report to their squadron headquarters by 1.00pm on 5th August.

There was urgent need to bring the regiment up to full complement of horses as not everyone now owned a horse. It is estimated that around 250 horses were required and there was stiff opposition from other regimental groups trying to obtain them. The Herts Yeomanry fortunately had a Government horse buyer in their midst and was able to get enough horses to mount all ranks. Prices paid for the horses varied between £30 for a trooper's horse and £70 for an officer's charger.

Also there was a mad rush for weaponry as all Yeomen were given an allowance to supply their own uniform. One member had difficulty finding a revolver as the usual gunsmiths and outfitters had run out. Fortunately an old Irish one was found in local ironmongers.

On 8th September the regiment moved out of temporary accommodation – D squadron were in Barnet inns and A squadron in the cinema. They started a two-day trek to their initial war station at Mountnessing, Essex and finally reached Culford near Bury St Edmunds on 21 August.

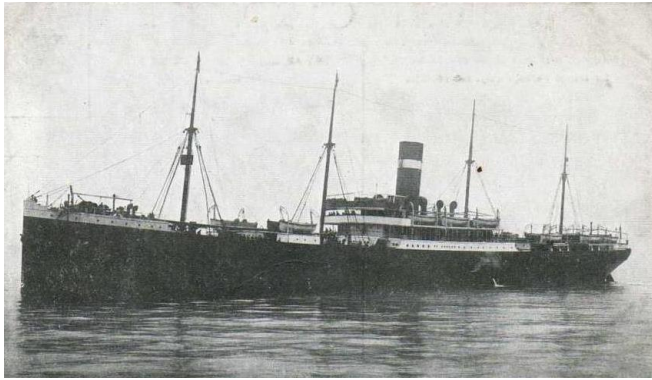
The Hertfordshire Yeomanry was then divided into the active service squadron 1/1 and the home defence 2/1. Later a 3/1 section was set up responsible for training new recruits. It was here on the following day that men were invited to volunteer for service abroad. It was one of the special conditions of the Yeomanry as they were already a defence force so they could not be made to go abroad. 80% of those present volunteered immediately for a war 'that would be over by Christmas'.

Reg and Jack volunteered for Imperial service while George remained in home defence. If Jack was pushed into going it was more likely peer pressure rather than just Reg's persuasion. Many who did volunteer did not go because they failed the medical test or ruled too old for Imperial service.

Why George did not go is not clear – whether it was, as Mother said, that they had more than enough SSMs who had already volunteered to go to Egypt; or as Bub suggests that George's mother had died earlier that year and he was responsible for running the farm. Also Janet had only been born that January.

Maybe they just wanted competent people to carry out the important job of ensuring supplies were efficiently provided from the UK to tactical forces in the field – especially as it became clear that the troops were going Egypt.

Ragtime



Allan Royal Mail Line steamer 'Ionian' and arriving in Alexandria

Deployment to Egypt

This rapid deployment of troops to Egypt was necessary to replace the regular troops there who were urgently needed for the British Expeditionary Force in France. The new forces were required to take over the responsibility of protecting the Suez Canal. (For this section I have used 'The Hertfordshire Yeomanry, An Illustrated History' by J D Sainsbury Hart Books Welyn 1994.)

They took the train from Bury St Edmunds on the 9 September and embarked on Allan Royal Mail Line steamer 'Ionian' at Southampton and arrived in Alexandria on 25th. Ragtime IV probably went with the rest of the horses on SS Messaba, one of five ships in the convoy carrying 3,000 horses.

For Hertfordshire farm lads arriving in Egypt must in itself have been a life changing experience – the heat, the sounds and the dust. They hardly touched ground in Alexandria as that evening they were loaded onto a train and sent directly to Cairo. Early next morning they marched into the Abbassia Cavalry Barracks to relieve the 3rd Dragoon Guards. Their horses arrived by train the following day.



The Pyramids and sand-bathing the horses at the Abbassia Barracks

At the outbreak of the war Egypt was still technically part of the Turkish Empire, but was administered under the Protectorate of Great Britain and France who still administered the Suez Canal. Many of the Egyptians were more sympathetic to the Ottoman Empire than the British one, so there was a pre-war brigade force of about 5,000 troops around Cairo to ensure no disturbances. This quickly expanded to 50,000 in the couple of months following the outbreak of the European war. Turkey came into the war on the German side on 31st October. It was then that the British

Ragtime

Protectorate replaced the Turkish Khedive and the Herts Yeomanry were part of the necessary escort to ensure that the new Sultan made it safely to his palace.

The British mounted troops – Hertfordshire Yeomanry, Westminster Dragoon and the Duke of Lancaster's Own Yeomanry - were then formed into the Yeomanry Mounted Brigade. They were fortunate to have as their base the Abbassia Barracks which were only newly constructed in Heliopolis on the north eastern side of Cairo – most later arrivals were tented. Even so extra men and horses had to fit in. (After Gallipoli the barracks were used as a hospital.)

The Dragoon Guards had left behind 700 Arab stallions and the Herts squadron leaders drew lots for the horses. Major E B Sheppard of D squadron won and kept his English horses, so probably Reg kept his Ragtime. However there was some trouble when they merged the two groups together as some of the English horses were mares. Initially there were no immediate threats so the troops could enjoy sightseeing and there are a number of photographs of Yeomanry on camels in front of the pyramids. Also some officers started bringing their wives out to stay in local hotels. They came via train through France and then by steamer across the Mediterranean.



Yeomanry Officers including G & E Sheppard and on Cairo patrol

Reg and Davina had married in the previous April, so while he was in Cairo, Father was born on 23 November. Christmas in the barracks was celebrated with a massive 'feast in the middle of the day and a smoking concert'. A few days later they had a steamer trip up the Nile paid for by the previous commanding officer - Colonel Abel H Smith. All very civilised.

In January the current commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel T E Harrison who had been brought out of retirement (and was not from Hertfordshire) had proved himself unfit for duty being 'always half stupid with drink'. He was sent home. In his place Major S Gurney Sheppard was promoted to commanding officer and his brother Major E B (Ted) Sheppard was appointed second in command. Both would have direct contact with Reg and Jack in Gallipoli.

Turks attack the Suez Canal

By the end of January the Turks had crossed the Sinai Peninsular with about 4,000 troops and approached the Suez Canal which was defended by Indian and New Zealand Brigades. The advance party attacked on 28th January and on the 3rd February they attempted to cross the canal but failed. With mounting casualties on both sides, they started to retreat on 4th February.

Ragtime

*Horses crossing the Canal*

It was on the same day that the Yeomanry Mounted Brigade arrived by train and bivouacked near Ismailia to await orders. Not to be caught out by Turks counterattacking with reinforcements, the decision was made to wait until air reconnaissance reported that the Turks were still in retreat. The Mounted Brigade with the Bikaner Camel Corps (Indian) then gave chase but it was too late and they had to return through lack of water. Some horses died as they had been watered at 4.00am and did not get back for further drink until 8.00pm.

The Yeomanry Mounted Brigade stayed at El Ferdan just north of Ismailia on the Canal until 24th January under active services conditions and then returned to Cairo by train. This gained them their first battle honour of the Great War – *Suez Canal* - as covered by the *Egypt 1915* medal. Although only a small involvement, it gave no inkling of the conditions that they would experience in Gallipoli, but it did trigger a more serious approach to training.

Weaponry also was changed. The No.3 rifle which was still carried in an 1884 pattern butt 'bucket' was changed to a muzzle down bucket on the offside behind the saddle. Also now swords were being issued which they should have received before coming out. The machine gun section relied on pack transport.

*Desert Patrol*

It was now that the Yeomanry came in contact with the Anzacs around town. The major difference was pay as the Anzacs were on 6/- a day while the Yeomanry were on 1/9p. It is easy to imagine who had the best of the Cairo night life. After an argument, the Anzacs set a brothel alight which caused a riot! With such an influx of troops the Mounted Brigade had to act as detachments of the Mounted Military Police.

Ragtime

Jack had his 21st at the end of the month while in Cairo. Mother had only just been born at the beginning of July while George was still with the 2/1 Hertfordshire Yeomanry in Suffolk.

Gallipoli campaign

From March the build-up of the British campaign to capture Constantinople became more apparent as Alexandria became the headquarters of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force with General Sir Ian Hamilton as Commander in Chief. It was Winston Churchill's idea as the First Lord of the Admiralty to break the stalemate on the Western Front and the Balkan wars by outflanking the Germans to the East and helping establish a supply route to their Russian allies. The initial idea was to just send the British Navy from the Mediterranean through the narrow Dardanelles passage into the Sea of Marmara and then batter Constantinople into submission. This would not only defeat the Ottoman Empire but also open the Bosphorus to enable naval access to the Black Sea.

This first part of the campaign resulted in failure after three of the battleships were sunk by mines while attempting to force the Dardanelles. The Navy drew back and requested Army support to take the Gallipoli Peninsular on the west hand side of the channel. It was only about 10 miles wide and 40 long and had only limited defences.

The idea to make two large amphibious landings meant that planners were attempting a campaign never before planned at this scale and in such a short time. They had less than a month to organise the logistics while it should be noted that the D-Day landings in World War II took two years.

When one reads about the campaign in detail, it just becomes a classic tragedy. The disaster becomes inevitable. There were so many opportunities that were wasted – so many near misses – if only . . . Alan Moorhead's book on Gallipoli (Aurum Press 2015 – originally 1956) is the classic on the subject and goes to show how there were continuing disagreements at political and military levels did not help.

With the main commitment of allied forces on the Western Front, old generals with little experience and determination were brought out of retirement to fill the gaps. There were problems with plans, equipment and logistics. Intelligence of the area proved to be poor and communications continued to be bad. No one realised how difficult the terrain was with the peninsular a maze of ravines and gullies covered in low shrubs that caught fire easily in the summer heat and gunfire. There were very few waterholes which limited the ability for thirsty and unclean men to work properly.

The invasion started on 25 April with the 29th Division landing at Helles Cape on the southern tip and the Anzacs landing half way up on the western side of the peninsular. Both beachheads were exposed to Turkish fire when landing and the invading forces were never able to dislodge the Turks off the higher ground so were always in an exposed position. This meant that the troops had no rest areas that were safe to recuperate as these beach zones remained a constant target.

Suvla Bay

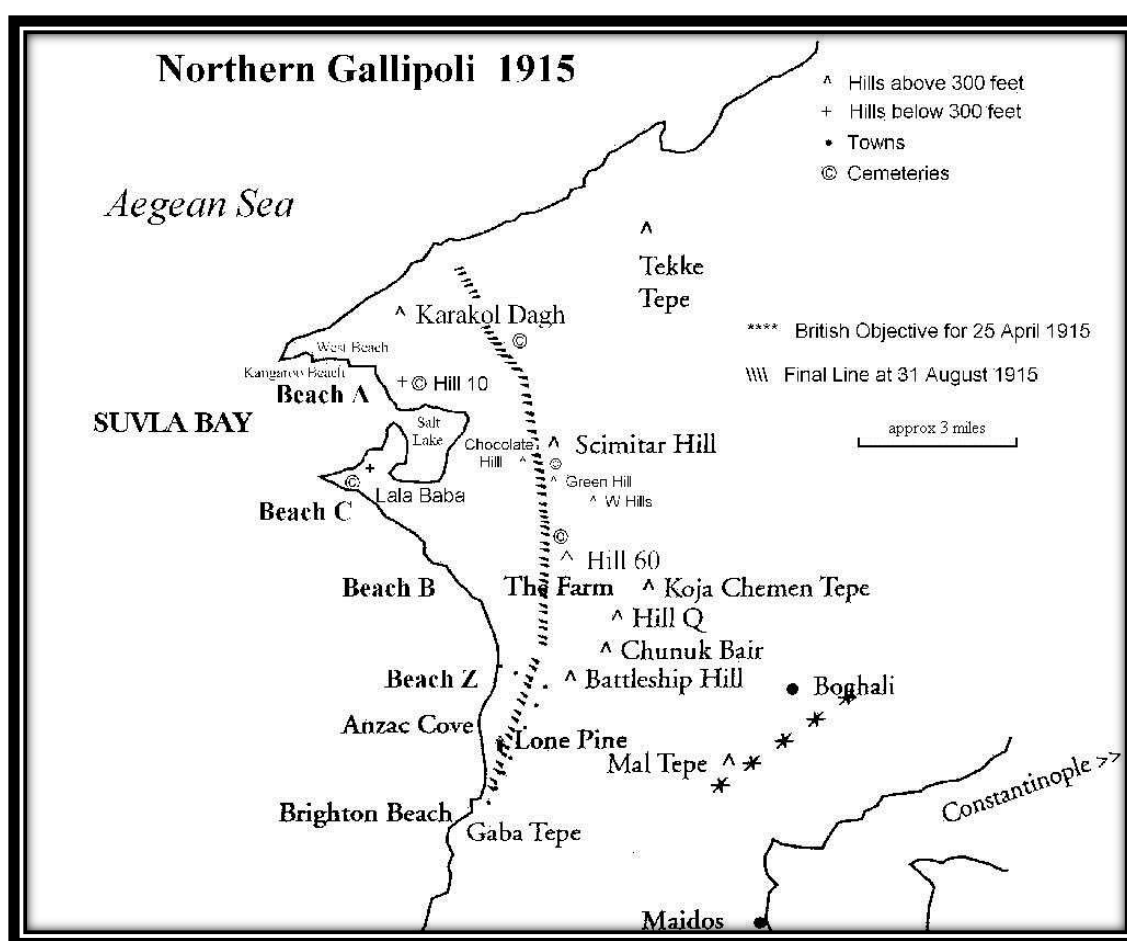
As these two fronts ground to a halt it was decided to open another beachhead at Sulva Bay to relieve the Anzacs who had been hemmed close to the sea. Unlike the other two landing sites Suvla

Ragtime

Bay was a relatively flat plain with a dried out saltmarsh in the middle. Still it was overlooked by a semi-circle of hills and spurs.

This area was lightly defended so when the initial landings took place on the night of 6/7th August by the IX Corps consisting of 16,000 British troops they were initially only opposed by about only 1,500 defenders. They had about 30 hours before Turkish could further reinforce the area. Diversionary attacks were enacted on other fronts to confuse the Turks where the landings would take place.

[To go into proper detail of the plan and various attacks and failures it is too complex and chaotic to cover here. 'Gallipoli: Sulva – August Offensive' by Stephen Chambers, Pen and Sword 2011 provides most detailed explanation of the campaign. He also provides battlesite tours to this area. Simplified versions of the campaign are found online with maps and photos.]



True to the disconnected approach on the other fronts, the plan was not carried out properly due to disrupted landings, poor communications and differences in strategies with those taking part. Down at squadron level troops did not know what to do and waited until the initiative was lost as the Turkish reinforcements arrived. Over the next two weeks a series of fierce attacks took place against the Turks in their raised positions on the hills. In places the opposing trenches were in yards of one another.

While the fight was going on at ground level, at headquarters more senior staff was being dismissed in the middle of the battle. Through this confusion some of the gains were not supported and the frontline troops had to withdraw. At Sulva another opportunity was missed and another stalemate

Ragtime

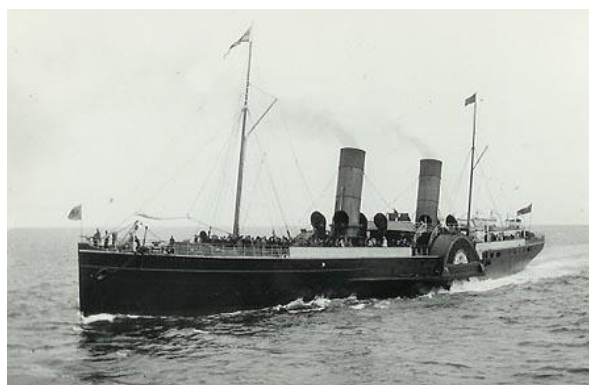
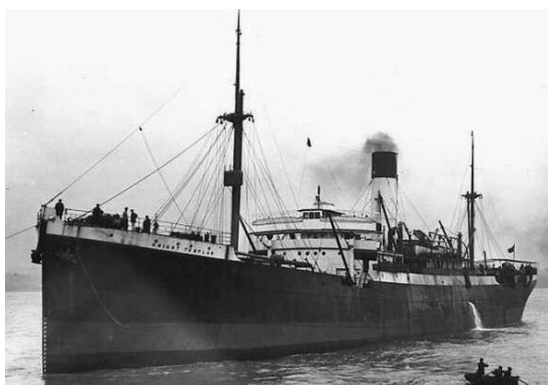
was being established. To break this impasse more troops were needed and there were no spare infantrymen available in the region.

It was on 9th August that in Cairo the Hertfordshire Yeomanry were given a Warning Order to prepare for Gallipoli. They were ordered to go not as cavalry but as a dismounted regiment. The 5th Mounted Brigade, along with the Westminster Dragoons, were attached to the 2nd Mounted Division that had just come out from England.

This change was significant. The whole ethos between a cavalryman and an infantryman is different - the training, weapon handling and the uniform. The uniform was sufficiently different that they had to get infantrymen to help them dress properly. To their horror they had to discard their riding breeches and wear infantry 'slacks'. The cavalrymen had landed on the ground with a bump and within four days they were on their way by train for Alexandria.

Although they did attempt to take transport mules, which were later left at Lemnos, they did not take horses. A Rear Party was left under the command of Major Ted Sheppard to look after the horses. If Reg still had Ragtime with him this would have been the last time they saw each other as Reg did not return to Cairo and horses were not repatriated even after the war.

After Gallipoli sections of the Yeomanry were remounted and initially were moved to western Egypt to fight the Senussi. Later they were split up and went as lines of communication to Iraq or with the Australia Light Horse to Palestine. What actually happened to Ragtime and Jack's horse one could only guess?



Knight Templar and Queen Victoria

After delays they boarded the 'Knight Templar' transport boat on the 14th August which took them two and a half days of plain sailing to Mudros Harbour on Lemnos. There the transport wagons and mules were left with some officers. 20 years ago when we went on holiday to Lemnos I was totally unaware that it was the main supply harbour and depot for the whole Gallipoli campaign.

The troops transferred to the 'Queen Victoria', an Isle of Man paddle steamer, which in the evening completed the final 30 miles to Sulva Bay. Early on 18th they were directed to a Rest Area on the sloping cliffs by the sea. Although sheltered from view by the Turks the area was still subject to harassing fire, but it did provide a chance to bathe.

Ragtime

The final major push

On the 20th August while the Hertfordshire Yeomanry were moving forward from the beachhead, Reg was being brought up in front of a disciplinary 'meeting'. In his war records there is a Punishment Sheet which indicates 'Absent from (work?) in the forge at 10.00am'. As his later Discharge sheet gave his character as 'Good' probably the misdemeanour was not serious – or it never caught up with him by the time he was discharged back in the UK. It should be noted that discipline was tough as one soldier was executed for desertion because he visited the Anzacs.

More significantly the document was signed by 'Major G Sheppard'. This would have been one of his last acts as Commander of the Hertfordshire Yeomanry. The following day he was killed.

The troops travelled light from their beachhead location to their action stations with only a haversack and two days iron rations (one piece of bully beef, one tin of tea, sugar and two squares of Oxo and half a dozen 'dog' biscuits). They had no overcoats, blankets, waterproof sheets or spare clothing - even no toiletries. All the water that they would get for a while was in their water bottles.

The 21st August attack at Suvla Bay was the largest offensive in the whole Gallipoli campaign involving three divisions. The 29th Division was brought up from the Helles beachhead for this offensive and were the most experienced division. They originated from different regular army units brought back from the Empire at the beginning of the war.

The 11th (Northern) Division was part of Kitchener's New Army all volunteers who had been at Sulva since the original landing on 6/7 August. The final division was made of the newly arrived 2nd Mounted Division and two brigades of the 10th (Irish) Division – again New Army. This offensive was the only major attack that Reg and Jack took part in together.



Sulva beachhead and plain

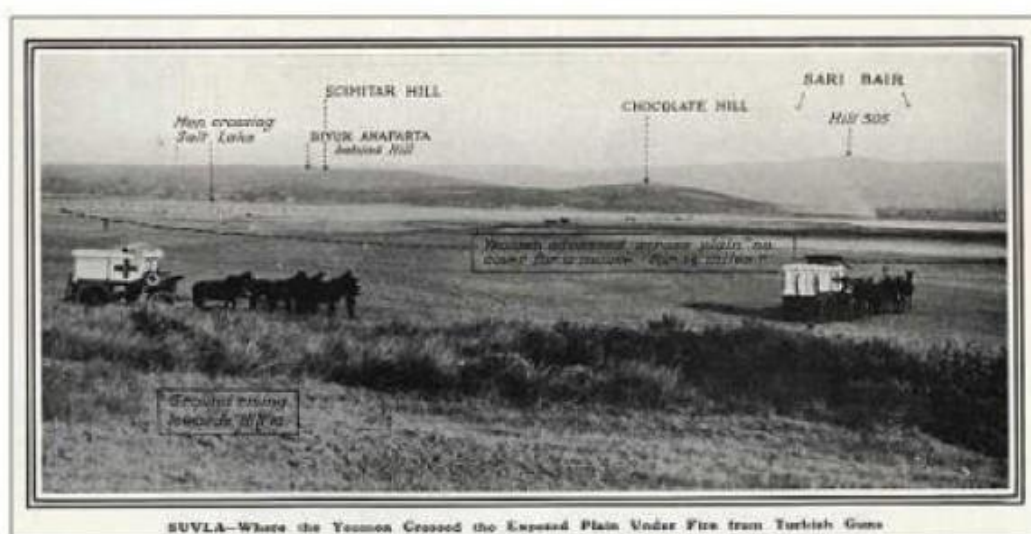
The plan was to capture the hills surrounding Sulva Bay and then to push on to the higher ground running right across the peninsular to the Dardanelles. This offensive was done in conjunction with the Anzacs to the south who had their own parallel objectives.

The attack from the coast was planned to start at 3.00pm with the intention of having the sun highlighting the Turkish trenches on the hills to the east while forcing them to stare into the western sun. But like all their plans even this went wrong as at midday the sun disappeared into the clouds and an unseasonal haze arose across the plain to dissipate this advantage.

Ragtime

The 11th Division on the right (south) were to seize Azmak Dire and the W Hills next to the Anzacs. The 29th Division on the left (north) would advance from Chocolate Hill (which was named because of being already the shrub was burnt) to take Scimitar Hill and Point 112 (height mark between Chocolate and W hills). The 2nd Mounted Division was to start on the seaward side of the Salt Lake at Lala Baba. They had to cross plain to get to take up their reserve position on the western slopes of Chocolate Hill ready to advance through 29th Division once they had taken Scimitar Hill.

At 3.30pm one by one the five Mounted Yeomanry Brigades of about 1000 men each marched across the Salt Lake in squadron order in full view of the Turks. It was compared to the Charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimean War – minus horses!



Major

Aubrey Herbert from an Anzac outpost noted *'The Yeomanry never faltered. They came on through the haze of smoke in two formations, columns and extended. Sometimes they broke into a run, but they always came on. It is difficult to describe the feelings of pride and sorrow with which we watched this advance in which so many of our friends and relations were playing their part.'*

Captain Wedgwood Benn (later killed), 1/1 County of London Yeomanry noted *'Their morale and enthusiasm was high, this would be their first action, in fact the first time under fire for most. The spectacle of the Yeoman of England and their foxhunting leaders, striding in extended order across the Salt Lake and the open plain, unshaken by the gruelling they were getting from shrapnel, which caused many casualties, is a memory that will never fade.'*

Les Allen Carlyon – Australian of Cornish origin - in his book on Gallipoli (2002) was not so complimentary *'the yeomanry was a throwback to the days of Crecy and Agincourt: its heartland was in the fox-hunting shires and many of the officers came from rural aristocracy. The Turks, unhappily, were not sporting chaps.'*

During the afternoon the 29th Division made two attempts on Scimitar Hill but by 5.00pm the attack had failed with the western slopes on fire and strewn with dead. Most of the officers were killed and many of the wounded were burnt alive. Now the unprepared Yeomanry Division were asked to complete the task that the Regular infantry had been unable to do. The 2nd Mounted Brigade was to attack Scimitar Hill while 4th and 1st Brigades were to pass through Green Hill (see cemetery details

Ragtime

later) and take Point 112. The 3rd Brigade was there in support with 5th Brigade including the Hertfordshire Yeomanry were in reserve.

Lord Longford's 2nd Brigade did make the top of Scimitar Hill they were beaten back he was killed by enfilade fire – by flanking machineguns. By dusk all that was achieved was a ragged line on the lower slopes, so by midnight the 2nd Mounted Division was ordered back to Lala Baba. In the early hours 22 August they retreated while taking as many wounded and picking up as much abandoned arms and equipment as they could on the way. Having taken no part in the attack the Hertfordshire Yeomanry lost several men to sniper fire on the way back. Of the 14,300 troops of the IX Corps who took part 5,300 were killed, wounded or missing in this action.



Illustrated London News –September 1915

After a day's rest at Lala Baba the 5 Mounted Brigade returned to front line trench duties in the Chocolate Hill area on the next evening and alternated regularly with periods in reserve trenches. Within days it was realised the Yeomanry regiments were not big and strong enough to carry out duties as individual units.

On 31 August it is recorded in Reg's War Record that he is admitted to hospital with dysentery and anaemia. He was then transferred to Troodos, Cyprus and on to Mustapha Camp, Alexandria on 28 September.

One soldier's diary read *'The water was death; the bully beef was death; everything was death. I was afraid to eat a thing. It terrified me; it made me feel dead. A man would pass me holding his stomach, groaning in agony, and a few minutes later I would take him off the latrine, dead. The men contracted dysentery and fever every day. The bullets did not take a big toll. It was the death of germs.'*

Ragtime

'Conditions on Gallipoli defy description. The terrain and close fighting did not allow for the dead to be buried. Flies and other vermin flourished in the heat, which caused epidemic sickness. Of the 213,000 British casualties on Gallipoli, 145,000 were due to sickness; chief causes being dysentery, diarrhoea, and enteric fever.'

Following his brother's death, early on 10th September Major Ted Sheppard arrived from Egypt to take over command of the Hertfordshire Yeomanry. It is from his diary that the death of Jack Masson is recorded. This is unusual for him to be mentioned as so few individual deaths were recorded.

Major E.B. Sheppard's Diary, 15th September 1915: *'Woke up 3.30 a.m. raining hard. Found I was sleeping in a pool of water. The trenches were in an awful state and the men looked very miserable. However sun came out and dried things a bit. Poor Masson was killed by a shell on his way to Chocolate Hill. This got an awful doing. Some sniper seemed to know exactly where I wash. The bullets were whizzing over my head the whole time. I think he must see my bald head. However I had a bath this afternoon. Archie C. rather sick now.'*

Cemeteries

Jack must have had a decent burial during the campaign when so few did. Afterwards he was reburied in an official war grave on Green Hill Cemetery, Suvla, Gallipoli, Canakkale – (Plot: II.F.2). His name is listed on the Tewin war memorial and the Hertfordshire Yeomanry memorial in St Albans Cathedral. Lord Longford was also buried in the Green Hill Cemetery and there is a gravestone for David Niven's father although his body was not found.



Green Hill cemetery, Suvla Bay & St Albans cathedral memorial *Trooper J Masson top right-hand column*

Alan Moorhead visited Gallipoli in the Fifties when there were few visitors or tourists, he commented on how Major Millington OBE, an old Australian soldier (born 1896 Hobart – died 1963 Byfleet Surrey), had for nearly forty years tended the cemeteries with the help of Turkish and white Russian gardeners. He was responsible for maintaining thirty-six cemeteries and memorials on Gallipoli, and three in Istanbul, commemorating the soldiers and sailors of the British Empire who died in the Dardanelles campaign.

Ragtime

Now Anzac Cove is well visited by the Australians as it was so symbolic of their emerging nationhood, but Suvla is not so visited. Still it is 'Suvla Bay' - the popular 'folk' song – that is written from an Australian view. [see lyrics below].

By 25th September the Hertfordshire Yeomanry were now down to less than 160 men and, with the autumn rains arrived, had only 44 men fit enough for digging trenches so cooks, clerks and officer's batmen were moved forward to the front line trenches. Lacking numbers, they had been amalgamated a couple of times with other regiments before becoming the 1 Composite Mounted Brigade.

On 31st October they were given rest on Murdos. Finally it was decided to evacuate Gallipoli so the remaining 1/1 Hertfordshire Yeomanry were returned to Egypt on the troopship 'Hannibal' in November. They had lost their commanding officer and 23 men during the campaign.

The final evacuation from the three beach heads at Gallipoli in January 1916 is well documented and like Dunkirk is admired more than the rest of the campaign. Original estimates expected 50% to be killed in the withdrawal, but by evacuating most of the men and equipment at night and setting up devices to indicate more soldiers were there than were in reality, the retreat went efficiently. In the end 'miraculously' no one was killed in the withdrawal. Both sides were exhausted and the Turks, who were experiencing mutinies on their side, had won just by letting the Allies go.

'The strategic consequences . . . Twenty Turkish divisions were now set free to attack Russia and to threaten Egypt. All contact with Russia and Rumania was lost . . . the war dragged on ... for another three years . . . Before the Ottoman Empire fell nearly 750,000 soldiers were sent to Salonika, and another 280,000 fought their way across the desert from Egypt to Jerusalem and Damascus. Except for the Anzacs none of the troops evacuated from Gallipoli were ever employed against the Germans . . .' as they remained in the Middle East. Alan Moorhead

The official casualty figures were – 55,127 killed; 100,177 wounded; 10,067 missing; 21,498 died of disease; 64,440 evacuated sick.

Aftermath

Reg was discharged on 13 November 1915 exactly five years after he enrolled with 1 year and 66 days abroad in 'Egypt' – no reference to Gallipoli. In September 1920 he received the '1914-15 Star' medal. Jack's medals were returned. He (his family) were issued with a War Gratuity of £8/7/-.

In World War II Reg received a commendation from the Ministry of Agricultural and Fisheries for his work on the St Albans and Watford District Committee of the Hertfordshire War Agricultural Executive Committee. He still won a point-to-point race in 1949.

George, who was the earliest recruit, remained in post until 1 April 1916 having served 13 years and 353 days with the Hertfordshire Yeomanry. He had a medical examination at Barnham Cross Camp on 30 August 1915 - age 33 – had 6/6 vision and remained a good shot for some time. Military facilities had existed at Barnham during World War I and presumably were where the Eastern Mounted Brigade was supplied with equipment from the UK. (During World War II, Barnham became a chemical weapons storage and filling station for Mustard Gas. During 1953 or 1954, a high-security RAF atom bomb store was built on Thetford Heath.)

Ragtime



George was in some significant way greatly appreciated – maybe as the ‘Father’ of the Brigade. On discharge he was presented with a silver plated breakfast dish, which I have. It is engraved ‘*To SSM G D Little from Warrant Officers, Staff Sergeants & Sergeants – 2/1 Herts Yeomanry – as a token of esteem on his leaving the regiment – March 1916*’. Anthony also has a clock given to George engraved ‘*Squadron Sergeant Major Little - with kind wishes from the Officers, NCOs and Men of C Squadron 2/1st Herts Yeomanry - March 31st 1916*’.

One of the consequences of Jack’s death was his ‘sweetheart’ Bessie (Elizabeth Sarah) Booth (1892-1973), Reg and Alfred’s sister, married William Broad Field (1879-1962) – in September 1920. William and Bessie’s son, Baibe, took over Warrengate farm on the Hatfield Estate. It is still in the family now.

William’s first wife, (Minnie Jane) Phoebe (1872-1919), died in the influenza epidemic at the end of the war. She and William had had a son, Geoff (1913-1985), who was born at Hawkshead farm (now the Royal Veterinary College campus) before the family returned to Warrengate, another family farm. Later Geoff married Mother’s sister, Janet (1914-1986). After the war George continued to farm at Westwick Hall until 1950. It was while here that Mother enjoyed her hunting. One newspaper cutting showed her riding pillion to a hunt meeting as she did not have a fit horse then. After Westwick Hall, George and Annie moved in with Geoff and Janet at Bradwell Abbey farm, where they both died some years later.

Another repercussion of Jack’s death was that his younger brother Thomas Love Masson (1898-1969) took over Dugdale farm when their father, John Masson (1854-1937) died. Tom was an excellent horseman and not interested in farming. He was a first-rate showjumper and performed at Bertram Mills Circus, so he sold the farm and bought a racing stable in Lewes, Sussex. He ran that until his death following a car accident driving away from Newbury races. His grandson and great grandsons continue their connection with horses as top level polo players.

Father, who presumably had not been encouraged by his father’s experiences in Gallipoli, remained as a farmer – a reserved category – in World War II. He successfully expanded his work into helping build wartime airstrips amongst other earth moving contracts. After the war he moved his family from Marshalswick farm (now a housing estate on the north east side of St Albans) to a Furzegrove farm Chailey, six miles from Lewes. He briefly ran a couple of racehorses – Watastra and Blue Petrel – which were trained by Tom.

Ragtime

Suvla Bay

In an old Australian homestead
With the roses 'round the door
A girl received a letter
'Twas a message from the war
With her mother's arms around her
She gave way to so-obs and sighs
And as she read this letter
The tears came to her eyes

Why do I weep, why do I pray
My love's asleep so far away
He played his part that April day
And now he sleeps... on Suvla Bay

Oh-de-lo-oh-de-oh-de-oh-lady-de ...

She joined a band of sisters
On the little cross of red
To do her noble duty
To her lover who now lay dead
Many others came to woo her
But was sadly turned away
As she told them her sad story
Of her love on Suvla Bay

Why do I weep, why do I pray
My love's asleep so far away
He played his part that April day
And now he sleeps... on Suvla Bay..

2nd Mounted Division (dismounted)

Major-General W. E. Peyton, C.B.

1st (South Midland) Brigade:

1/1st Warwickshire Yeomanry
1/1st Royal Gloucestershire Hussars
1/1st Worcestershire Yeomanry

2nd (South Midland) Brigade:

1/1st Buckinghamshire Yeomanry (Royal Bucks Hussars)

1/1st Dorsetshire Yeomanry
1/1st Berkshire Yeomanry

3rd (Notts & Derby) Brigade:

1/1st Sherwood Rangers

1/1st South Notts Hussars

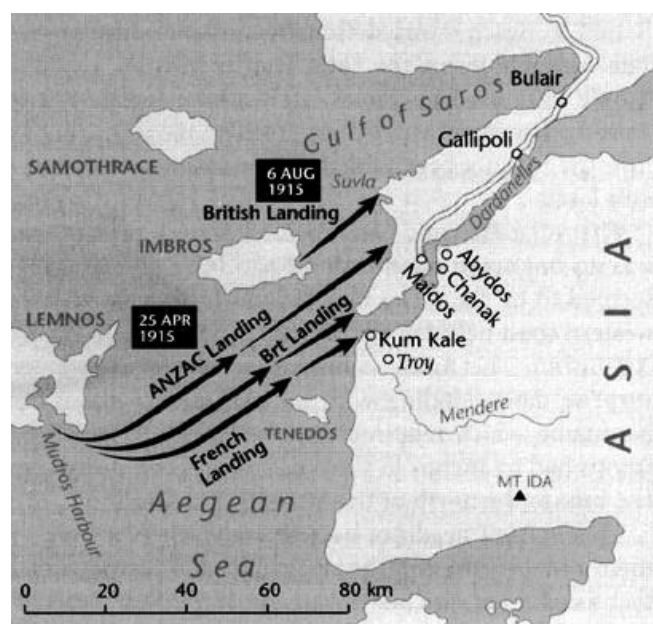
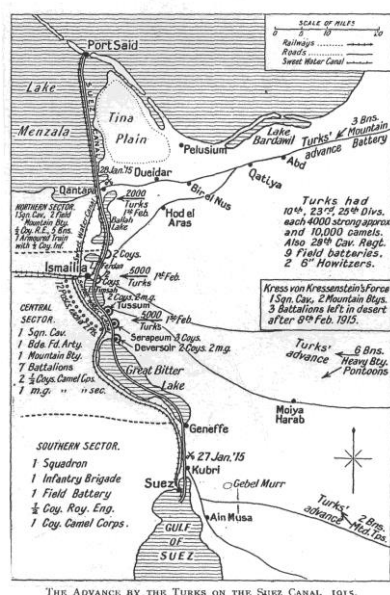
1/1st Derbyshire Yeomanry

4th (London) Brigade:

1/1st County of London Yeomanry
1/1st City of London Yeomanry
1/3rd County of London Yeomanry

5th Brigade: (attached)

1/1st Hertfordshire Yeomanry
1/2nd County of London Yeomanry
(Westminster Dragoons)



Ragtime

