



The Other Gallant 600

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Who were the Met's 'own 600' who were prepared to go into the valleys of etc.

The answer to this question seems to be the result of the 'Kaiserschlacht' or 'the Kaiser's Battle', officially the Spring Offensive of March 1918.

When the War was declared on 4th August 1914 by Great Britain on Germany, all reservists with the Army and Navy were called up. Over 1,000 men of the Metropolitan Police were thus recalled to the 'Colours' having seen previous military service which required them to be on the reserve list up to about 5 years.

Many others then left the police without previous military service to join up as Kitchener's New Army was being formed. However the Commissioner soon realised he would have staffing problem and made orders so that men could not just resign but needed permission. This was relaxed at differing times as the fortunes or misfortunes of the military occurred during the war. Few men however were, I believe, allowed to leave during this period.

However the initial success of the German Army in their Spring offensive of 1918 when, in some places, over 40 miles were captured in days from mainly the British 5th Army, compared with nearly 4 years of fighting when success had been measured in tens of yards. This called for a massive injection of new recruits and reinforcements to the BEF. [The battle which started on the 21st March carried on till 5th April and even with reinforcements from the Eastern Front, the German Army was denied victory in the last gamble of the 1918 offensives.

The early success of these offensives proved entirely illusory. Desperate as the fighting had been, Franco-British forces had finally blunted the assault. During the battles of March-April 1918, Haig's army of 59 Divisions had met 109 German Divisions in the field and had fought them to a standstill once more. At the cost of over 250,000 men to both sides, Ludendorff ultimately therefore achieved little more than saddling his own army with an extended front line, and vastly diminished resources with which to hold it. The turn of the tide came with the successful French counter-attacks during the Second Battle of the Marne in July 1918. By this time fortunately the Germans had ran out of steam and out-stripped their supplies and follow up troops. They were of course also stopped by the British Army, with tremendous Australian and French Army aid being rushed in, as mentioned above, and then the 100 days advance from August 8th onwards which resulted in Germany asking for an end to the fighting i.e. an Armistice on eleven hour of the eleven day of the eleven month on 1918.]

But that's all another story which I will not go into here. Suffice to say that Field Marshall Haig then issued his famous Special Order of the Day on 13th April 1918 '.....believing in the righteousness of our cause ... Victory will belong to the side which holds out longest.....There is no other course than to fight it out with our backs to the wall each one of us must fight on to the end etc.

Lloyd George as Prime Minister, horrified at the loss of men had tried to control the Army (Haig) by stopping or controlling the supply of reinforcement from the UK. But with the early success of the Kaiser's Battle, troops were rushed to the front.

Police (Met) that is (I'm not sure how the other forces operated) 'allowed' volunteers to rush to join at what was seen as a very critical time. The following Police Order is the result with the above setting briefly the scene:

Police Orders.

Saturday 11th May 918.

At the urgent request of the Minister of National Service, the Commissioner has undertaken to release at short notice a considerable number of Police Officers for Military Service.

The list of men to be released has been compiled in order of seniority in the Service, commencing with the junior Constables, without regard to the nature of the duty on which the officer is employed.

The list cannot be completed until the returns from dockyards and military stations are available, but a nominal roll of 600 constables, medically examined at New Scotland Yard and classified Grade 1, has been submitted to the Minister of National Service, and calling up notices will be issued forthwith to the men whose names are included in this list.

The exigencies of the situation do not in the case of these 600 Constables admit of permission being granted to take Annual or Special Leave prior to attestation, but the Commissioner recognising the importance to those concerned of having an opportunity to arrange their domestic affairs has approached the Military Authority through the Ministry of National Service, and has pleasure in announcing that the Army Council has agreed to sanction a grant of 7 days leave to each officer immediately after he has joined the unit to which he is appointed.

The necessary instructions will be issued by the Army Council to Commanding officers. In conclusion the Commissioner desires to record his appreciation of the way in which the very large majority of Police eligible for Military Service have, on realising the needs of the country, made voluntary tender of their services. E.R. Henry. Commissioner

All six hundred are listed in Police Orders dated 22nd May 1918, which also states 'Pay to the 19th'. police pay that is, so all had joined up by the 20th. No chance of two lots of pay even for a day!!!! Interesting to note that the Commissioner could not allow the 600 time away from their beats/duty although they would be gone less than a week later, and that he was making promises on behalf of another organisation; the Army. One has to wonder how many got their 7 days leave. Of this six hundred, 5 were killed. Of the original 1000 or so who were recalled in 1914, 370 were killed, nearly 25%. Under the Police Constable (Naval and Military Service) Acts 1914/5 their job was guaranteed if, and a big if, they were fully able to perform duty after demob. Of those that failed to get back into the police, I am not yet sure as more work has to be done to compare before and after. I'll let you know in about 5 years.