



HISTORY OF 15 INFANTRY BRIGADE

Formation in Ireland

The 15th Infantry Brigade was first formed in 1905 at Fermoy and up to the outbreak of the First World War continued to serve in Ireland. The Brigade, which at that time consisted of 1 Norfolks, 1 Dorsets, 1 Cheshires and 2nd Highland Light Infantry, was mobilized on 5th August 1914 and crossed to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force.

World War I

During the opening months of the War the Brigade had its full share of fighting and saw action at Mons, Le Cateau, at the crossings of the Marne and Aisne and in the first battles in Flanders. The last battle of the Great War in November 1918 found 15 Brigade in the forefront of the advance, east of the River Sambre.

In the interval between that early fighting and final victory the Brigade distinguished itself in various battles. One of the most notable was the attack on Hill 60 near Ypres in 1915. Hill 60 was the highest point on what was known as the "Caterpillar Ridge" and as such was an excellent post for observation of the ground area around Zillebeke and Ypres.

5th Division, composed of 13, 14 and 15 Brigades, had the task of securing Hill 60 and the ridge line. The Hill was taken between 17 and 19 April 1915 with heavy losses, and the subsequent German counter attack in early May was particularly ferocious.

The Germans, unable to obtain victory, eventually resorted to the use of chlorine gas and Brigade casualties during the first week in May 1915 were 33 Officers and 1,553 men. However, the line was held until reliefs were brought forward and the Brigade withdrawn.

The Inter-War Years

Following the war the Brigade returned to Belfast where it commanded 1 Dorsets, 1 Somersets, 1 Durham Light Infantry and 1 Kings Royal Rifles. In 1924 the Brigade moved to Germany and was renamed 1 Rhine Brigade. The Brigade was reformed, as 15 Infantry Brigade in Oct 1929 and returned to York with battalions stationed at York, Strensall and Lichfield.

World War II and Disbandment

At the beginning of the Second World War the Brigade consisted of 1 Green Howards, 1 Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and 1 York and Lancaster, and was stationed in Yorkshire as part of 5th British Division. It joined Lord Gort's British Expeditionary Force in the last few days of 1939 and early in January 1940 manned part of the defensive line in France.

In April 1940 the Brigade left France for Norway to assist the Norwegian 2nd Division in preventing the German advance North to Oslo. In this theatre the Brigade was involved in a classic continuous withdrawal from Kvam to Andaalsnes. The withdrawal was carried out

against overwhelming odds, with inadequate fire support and transport, and in the most severe physical conditions.

Now began a period of almost continuous movement for the Brigade. As part of 5th Division it had to be prepared to fight in any theatre of war. It did, in fact, appear in every theatre except the Pacific, travelling some 30,000 miles.

In April 1941 the Brigade was stationed in the frontier county of Tyrone, Northern Ireland, in order to repel any German attempt to invade the United Kingdom through Eire.

In January 1942 it was moved to England as part of Montgomery's South Eastern Command, and then sailed to India to prepare for a possible Japanese invasion of Bengal. Whilst stationed in Bihar, the Government foresaw a more serious threat in the Middle East, owing to its wealth of oil reserves; consequently the Brigade moved via the North West Frontier, across the Baluchistan Desert and into Persia from the south.

With the successes of the 8th Army at Alamein and the German defeat at Stalingrad there was no further need to maintain a force in Central Persia. The Brigade therefore was moved to Damascus, in Syria, in preparation for the assault in Sicily in July 1943.

From July 1943 to June 1944 the Brigade distinguished itself in 5 major battles in Sicily and Italy. After securing the bridgehead for the Sicily landings the Brigade fought at the River Sangro, the Garigliano Crossing, Anzio and Rome.

The Brigade finally returned to North West Europe in 1945 to take part in Operation Enterprise, the crossing of the River Elbe, where it secured part of the bridgehead west of the Elbe-Trave canal.

15 Brigade was disbanded on 31 March 1948 in Hannover.

Reformation

On 1 January 1982, 15 Infantry Brigade was reformed at Topcliffe in North Yorkshire as part of the Army restructuring plan and with 24 and 49 Infantry Brigades on 1 January 1983 constituted 2nd Infantry Division. This Division had a NATO role and acted as the reinforcement division for 1st British Corps.

The Brigade Headquarters moved from Topcliffe to Imphal Barracks in York in November 1992. Following the Government's Strategic Defence Review in 1998 the Brigade was retitled 15 (North East) Brigade.

15 (North East) Brigade is now responsible for the training and administration of over 10,500 Regular and Territorial Army soldiers, preparing them for operations.

The Brigade Battle – Ypres, November 1914

The Brigade has chosen Ypres, November 1914, as the Brigade Battle and there is an annual Brigade Dinner to celebrate it. The Brigade fought in all 4 battles.

The following major places of interest were visited in July 1983 by a Staff Officer from Brigade Headquarters:

Menin Gate, which is a memorial to the armies of the British Empire who defended Ypres from 1914 to 1918, and to those who fell but have no known grave.

Hill 60, a man-made hill being constructed with earth taken from the cutting when the railway was built prior to 1914. Hill 60 was strategically very important as it commanded a clear view of Ypres and beyond.

Sanctuary Wood Trench Museum, which is a portion of front line and support trenches dating from 1916. Sanctuary Wood Museum building contains artefacts and photographs which show what the front-line battle area was like in 1914-1918.

The Menin Road running directly eastwards to the front line. A cross-roads called "Hellfire Corner", about 1½ kilometres from Ypres, was a particularly dangerous place because it was a focus for German artillery.

Tyne Cot Cemetery, situated on the slopes of Passchendaele Ridge. It was a Northumbrian Division that named the group of German pillboxes there as "Tyne Cot". After the war, 11,500 dead were brought from the surrounding battlefields and buried at the cemetery.

The Memorial to the Missing is on the curved back wall of the cemetery, and lists those who fell in the Ypres Salient from 16 August 1917 to the end of the War but who have no known grave. There are 34,888 names.