

THE STORY OF THE
QUINTINSHILL
RAIL DISASTER

AND THE AFTERMATH

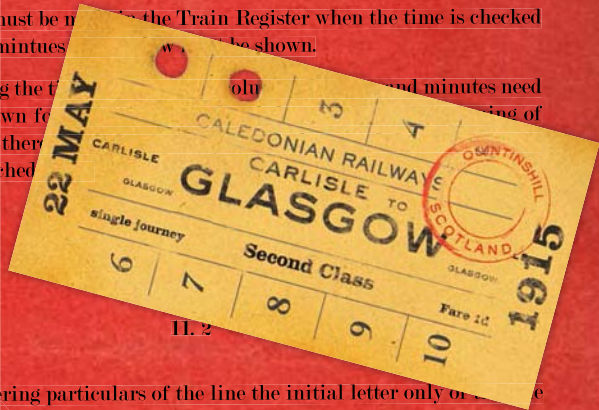


WW100
SCOTLAND

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM ALL THIS?

SIGNAL INSTRUCTIONS

1. Particulars of any emergency or other signal forwarded or received for which there is not a proper column, must be entered across the page.
2. A remark must be made in the Train Register when the time is checked daily; the minutes and seconds must be shown.
3. In recording the time of arrival and departure, minutes and seconds need only be shown for the first arrival and departure on each page; thereafter only the hour is reached.



4. When entering particulars of the line the initial letter only of the line need be used, e.g. M - Main, F - Fast, S - Slow, G - Goods, R - Relief.
5. In the case of parallel running lines the fact that a train is received on one line and despatched on another line must be recorded in the "Line" column, e.g., M.S.

THE STORY OF THE
QUINTINSHILL
RAIL DISASTER
AND THE AFTERMATH

Saturday 22 May 1915

UP TRAINS.

Is Line Clear? asked from Signal Box in rear, and refused.		Is Line Clear? asked from Signal Box in rear, and Line Clear given.		Train entering Section received from Signal Box in rear.		Description of Train.	Number of Engine.	Arrived		Train out of Section given.		Departed or passed		Is Line Clear? forwarded to Signal Box in advance.				Train entering Section forwarded.		Train entering Section received.		REMARKS.	
														Signal refused		Line Clear received.							
Hours.	Mins.	Hours.	Mins.	Hours.	Mins.			Hours.	Mins.	Hours.	Mins.	Hours.	Mins.	Hours.	Mins.	Hours.	Mins.	Hours.	Mins.	Hours.	Mins.		

Saturday 22 May 1915

DOWN TRAINS.

C.R. TRAIN REGISTER

Is Line Clear? asked from Signal Box in rear, and refused.		Is Line Clear? asked from Signal Box in rear, and Line Clear given.		Train entering Section received from Signal Box in rear.		Description of Train.	Number of Engine.	Arrived		Train out of Section given.		Departed or passed		Is Line Clear? forwarded to Signal Box in advance.		Train entering Section forwarded.		Train entering Section received.		REMARKS.	
Hours.	Min.	Hours.	Min.	Hours.	Min.			Hours.	Min.	Hours.	Min.	Hours.	Min.	Hours.	Min.	Hours.	Min.	Hours.	Min.		Hours.

At 6.49am on Saturday 22 May 1915 a Liverpool bound troop train carrying half of the 1st/7th (Leith) Battalion, The Royal Scots (The Royal Regiment) (1/7RS) collided head on with a local passenger train at Quintinshill just North of Gretna.

A minute later, a Glasgow bound express ploughed into the wreckage. In the inferno that followed a total of 216 Royal Scots and 12 others died making this the worst rail disaster for deaths in British rail history.

*Burning Train, Gretna Green Railway Disaster
May 22, 1915.*



BRITAIN'S GREATEST RAIL DISASTER

At 6.49am on Saturday 22 May 1915 a Liverpool-bound troop-train carrying half (498 all ranks) of the 1st/7th (Leith) Battalion, The Royal Scots (The Royal Regiment) (1/7RS) collided head on with a local passenger train which had been 'parked', facing north, on the south-bound main line at Quintinshill just North of Gretna, to allow a following express to overtake it. Normally the local train would have been held in one of the loops at Quintinshill but both of these were already occupied by goods trains. The troop train overturned, mostly onto the neighbouring north-bound mainline track and, a minute later, the Glasgow-bound express ploughed into the wreckage causing it to burst into flames.

The ferocity of the fire, and consequent difficulty of rescuing those trapped in the overturned and mangled carriages, was compounded by the fact that most of the carriages were very old, made of wood and lit by gas contained in a tank beneath them. Between the crash and the fire a total of 216 all ranks of 7RS and 12 others (see Note 1), mostly from the express, but including the driver and fireman on the troop-train, died in, or as an immediate result of what was, and remains, Britain's worst railway disaster for numbers killed.

Note 1.—The 12 non-Royal Scots dead, in addition to the two crew of the troop-train were from the Glasgow-bound express, listed as two RN Officers, three Officers from 9th Battalion The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, two civilians and a sleeping car attendant, and, from the local train, a mother and her baby.

The train that left Larbert at 195 metres long
was reduced to 61 as a result of the crash.

Ambulance Train, Gretna Green Railway Disaster, May 22, 1915.



THE ROYAL SCOTS

1/7RS, a Territorial Battalion recruited mostly from Leith, then a separate Burgh from Edinburgh, had been mobilised at the start of World War I they were initially employed on Coastal Defence duties on the Forth until April 1915 when they moved to Larbert, near Falkirk, to concentrate with 52 (*Lowland*) Division before deploying to France. At the last moment orders were received changing the Division's deployment to Gallipoli. The Battalion was meant to leave Larbert on 21 May to board the troopship Aquitania in Liverpool but she ran aground in the Mersey and the move was delayed twenty-four hours. At 3.45am on Saturday 22 May the first train left Larbert Station carrying Battalion Headquarters, A and D Companies. The train was delayed twice en route and running some 20 minutes late when the crash happened at 6.49am. The reaction to the accident was swift and spontaneous.

"The survivors at once got to work to help their stricken comrades and soon the whole neighbourhood was alarmed, and motor cars from near and far hastened to the spot with medical and other help. The kindness shown on all hands will never be forgotten, especially by the people from the surrounding area and Carlisle who gave such valuable assistance to the injured. Their hospitals were soon overflowing, but all who needed attention were quickly made as comfortable as possible. Their Majesties The King and Queen early sent their sympathy and gifts to the hospitals."

Of the half-Battalion on the train only 62 survived unscathed. These survivors, including the Commanding Officer, continued on to Liverpool where six Officers embarked, and sailed on the Sunday on the troopship, HMT Empress of Britain, with the second half of the Battalion, while one Officer and the 55 NCO and soldier survivors were sent back to Edinburgh.

It was a devastating blow to the Battalion and to the whole population of Leith – it was said that there was not a family in the town untouched by the tragedy (see Note 2), *probably made worse by the fact that, out of the 216 who died in the disaster, or soon afterwards from their injuries, only 83 were ever identified.* The remaining 133 bodies could not be identified or were, literally, cremated within the firestorm of the wreckage.

TENDING THE WOUNDED, GREYNA GREEN RAILWAY DISASTER.
MAY 22 1915.



To Col Peckles list of the 62 survivors after the crash



Note 2.—As a result of the Haldane Reforms of 1908 the Territorial Force (TF) was created from the old Volunteer and Yeomanry units. This led to five Royal Scots Territorial Battalions, the 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 9th (Highlanders) Battalions being based in and recruiting from different areas, and often different trades and similar groupings, across Edinburgh and Leith. The 7th Battalion, with their Drill Hall in Dalmeny Street, just within the then Burgh of Leith, drew nearly all its recruits from that Burgh, Portobello and, a sizeable number, concentrated in A Company, from neighbouring Musselburgh. This very local recruiting had not altered much by 1915 although the Battalion had been reinforced to War establishment for deployment overseas by a Company from 8th Battalion The Highland Light Infantry, drawn mostly from the Lanark area, two of whom died in the crash. Within the Battalion nominal roll of those involved in the crash are listed a few men from the Lothians and from Fife and one, Pte John Fyfe, who was killed, from Lima, New York, USA.



On Sunday 23 May, 107 coffins were taken back to Edinburgh and were placed in the Battalion's Drill Hall in Dalmeny Street, off Leith Walk.

On the afternoon of Monday 24 May, 101 of these were taken in procession for burial in a mass grave that had been dug in Rosebank Cemetery, Pilrig Street, about a mile from the Drill Hall.



The route was lined by **3,150** soldiers, thousands of citizens stood shoulder to shoulder on the pavement; shops were closed, blinds drawn and the traffic stopped.

By comparison, the total figure on parade for Her Majesty's Birthday Parade in London in 2014 was given as 1,000, including street liners.

MEMORIAL

Very soon after the crash it was decided to raise a Memorial, paid for by public subscription, alongside the communal grave in Rosebank Cemetery. The Memorial, unveiled by the Earl of Rosebery, Honorary Colonel of the Battalion, on 12 May 1916, takes the form of a Celtic cross, standing 15ft 6ins, made from Peterhead granite with an inscription and an explanatory plaque to the front and shields, bearing the Regimental Badge and Leith Burgh Coat-of-Arms, one on each side.

On either side to the rear, against the Cemetery wall, are tablets each with five bronze plaques. On these plaques are the names of 214 who died in, or immediately after the disaster, arranged by rank, and in alphabetical order. These include the name of Sgt James Anderson, who died in September 1917 having never recovered from his injuries, and was added later. For some unknown reason the name of **Pte George Garrie** was missed out on the plaques, although he appeared on all the lists, including those of the plaques, published later. His name, together with that of **Pte William S Paterson**, who was also missed out, is to be added on a separate plaque during the 2015 Commemoration, bringing the final official total of 1/7RS killed in, or as a direct result of the crash, to 216. Although funded by public subscription, the Memorial has been adopted by The Commonwealth War Graves Commission who maintain it, and the grave area, superbly.



Every year, on the Saturday closest to 22 May, the Regimental Association, supported by local organisations, hold a Memorial service and wreath laying at the Memorial. Additionally, in 2015, under the leadership of The Leith Trust, schoolchildren are planting a '**7th Battalion Copse**' of 216 trees, one for each of those who died, within the Woodland Trust's Dreghorn Wood World War I Centenary Project in the Pentland Country Park. It is planned that the copse will be high enough up the hill to be seen from Leith.



THE SIGNAL BOX

Early on the morning of Saturday 22 May 1915, as so often happened during World War I, the overnight expresses from London to Glasgow were running late. A local passenger train for Beattock was allowed to leave Carlisle ahead of them, heading north on the main line.

En route, as it passed through Gretna, it gave a lift to James Tinsley, the relief signalman for the Quintinshill Signal Box who should have been on duty there at 6 o'clock. When it arrived at Quintinshill, soon after 6.30, the local train would normally have been shunted into the north-bound passing loop (the down siding) to allow the two expresses, following it, to pass. However, both up and down loops were occupied by goods trains and the local passenger train had to be shunted from the down main line to the up, south bound, main line.

This operation would have been perfectly safe if George Meakin, the signalman still on duty at the time, had, firstly, remembered to put a collar on the signal lever; this simple device would have prevented the lever from being moved so halting any train coming from the North, and, secondly, sent a 'blocking back' signal to the next signal box to the North, at Kirkpatrick, to indicate that there was a train on the line and no traffic should be allowed through until it was reported clear.

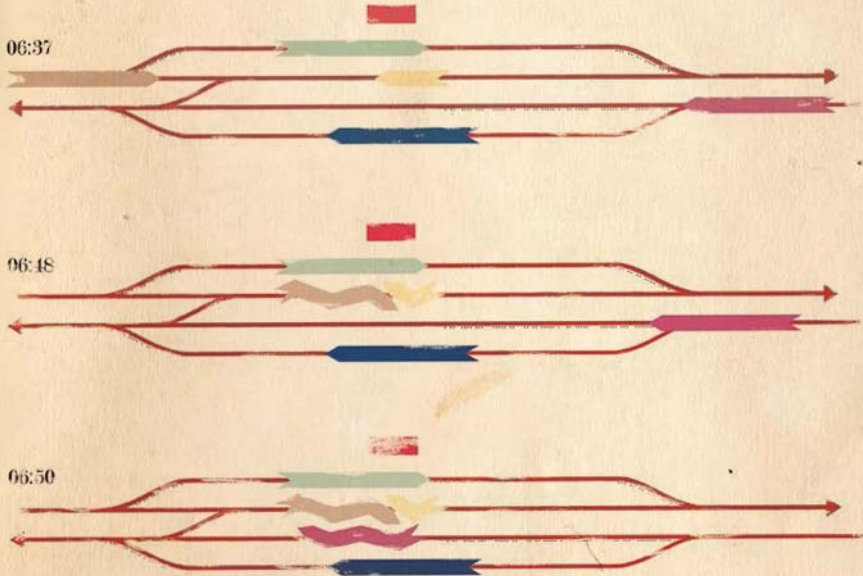
At 6.38 the first of the late running, north-bound expresses ran past. At 6.42, Tinsley, who had now taken over duty, with no formal handover from Meakin who had simply moved back to read the paper Tinsley had brought with him with the latest War news, forgot the local on the wrong line, and changed the signal to allow a south-bound special, the troop train, to continue towards Quintinshill.

The troop train itself was running late and making best speed to catch up its timetable. At 6.50 it thundered under Blacksike Bridge, some 200 yards before the Quintinshill Signal Box, and only then could the driver see the local train halted on the line in front, giving him no time to apply the brakes; the troop train ploughed into the local. Less than a minute later, the second express from Carlisle, whose driver's sightline was affected by the long left-handed curve as he approached Quintinshill, ran, with its brakes full on, having been alerted to the crash by the quick response of the Guard from the local train running back down the track waving his arms, but still at high speed, into the wreckage of the two trains which now blocked both main lines.

The troop train was made up mainly of older wooden six-wheeled coaches, many lit with gas oil lamps with the fuel stored in tanks under the carriages. The wood of the coaches, combined with escaping gas, led to fire spreading very quickly and fiercely, killing many who had not died in the crash itself. The express, being mainly steel coaches lit by electricity, suffered relatively few casualties.

At the subsequent Board of Enquiry blame was laid on the signalmen, Meakin and Tinsley, since they had been making irregular, and unauthorised, hand-overs of duties to suit themselves – at around 6.30am rather than at the correct time of 6 o'clock. Meakin kept a pencil note of the train movements that took place after 6.00 am until the arrival of Tinsley, who then copied the notes into the train register in his own handwriting – otherwise the railway authorities would have noticed the irregular practice when they checked the record.

Up mainline to Carlisle
 Gretna Junction 1 mile, 31 chains / 2,230m



Down mainline to Glasgow
 Kirkpatrick 2 miles, 68 chains / 4,590 m

-  Goods ex-Carlisle
-  Local ex-Carlisle
-  Express ex-Carlisle
-  Empty coal wagon train
-  Troop special
-  Quintinshill box

George Hutchison, the fireman of the local passenger train, who had followed Tinsley into the box to sign the register as he was required to do, was also blamed for failing to check that a collar was on the signal lever. He later appeared in the High Court with Meakin and Tinsley but was found not guilty.

The lack of a proper handover, the pressure of writing up the register, while operating the signals (*minus the key safety collar*) and points levers on what was an excessively busy section of line at that time, and the continuing presence of Meakin, together with the brakemen of the two goods trains in the passing loops, who were also, wrongly, hanging about in the signal box until slightly before the crash, must all have contributed to Tinsley forgetting the local on the wrong line, despite the fact that he had just travelled to work on the footplate and it was parked only some 65 yards to his left and below where he was in the signal box.

Certainly the combination of irregularities would not have helped in creating the calm and professional attitude that should have prevailed in a signal box on such a busy main line. One further contributory factor may have been the design of the signal box. It was old and lower in height than the newer ones and, unlike the majority of signal boxes, the 'frame' of signal levers was set back in the centre of the box rather than immediately behind the front window. This window in turn, and unusually, did not run the full length of the box. Part of it was a wall with a desk against it on which the train register was kept. Thus Tinsley, concentrating on writing up the late entries into the Register, could not see immediately to his front and, in turning to change the unguarded up signal would not have looked down onto the track as he would have on the more conventional layout with the frame at the front. Additionally, due to the lower height of the box, the line of quite high empty coal wagons parked in the up loop may well have at least partially hidden the local train on the main line if he had indeed glanced to his left.

Both Meakin and Tinsley were subsequently tried in the High Court in Edinburgh in September. It was a short trial and the jury took only eight minutes to reach a unanimous finding of Guilty of culpable homicide. The Judge, Lord Strathcyde, Lord Justice-General of Scotland, saw room for drawing a distinction in the case and sentenced Meakin to eighteen months' imprisonment whilst Tinsley went down for three years hard labour.

In the event Tinsley, after public pressure, was released at the same time as Meakin and both were immediately re-employed by the railway, though in lower grade non-signalling jobs.



A HOME MADE GRENADE BEING LAUNCHED (1915)

ONE BATTALION'S WAR
1ST/7TH (LEITH) BN THE ROYAL SCOTS
THE ROYAL REGIMENT

THE AFTERMATH, GALLIPOLI AND THROUGH TO 1918

The Territorial Force (TF) was formed from the former Yeomanry and Volunteer Forces in 1908. Their role was to provide Home Defence, replacing the Regulars deploying with a British Expeditionary Force (BEF) overseas. Individuals, *provided they met the standards for regular enlistment*, and units, if sufficient individuals came forward, could, however, volunteer for overseas service on mobilisation – again conceived as replacing Regular Garrisons overseas rather than joining any BEF. Most TF Battalions were at 50–60% of their War establishment at the outbreak of the War. All seven TF Battalions of The Royal Scots (RS) mobilised on **4 August 1914**. All immediately volunteered for overseas service and six of them began raising second Battalions, based on those either ineligible or not volunteering (*very few*) for overseas service, but reinforced by the many untrained volunteers who swarmed to their local TF Drill Halls. Later, third Battalions were raised. The role of these additional TF Battalions was to replace their, now, 1st Battalions in their home defence role and to provide reinforcements to the latter if, and when, they deployed overseas.

The 1st/7th Battalion (1/7 RS) was reinforced by two companies from 8th Battalion, The Highland Light Infantry (8HLI) to bring it up to the War Establishment of 30 Officers and 972 Other Ranks. These were divided, under the command of a Lieutenant Colonel, into a Headquarters, including a machine-gun section of two Vickers-Maxim guns, a small signals section, an administrative support element with some horse-drawn transport and the band. The fighting element of a Battalion consisted of four rifle companies (*replacing the earlier eight smaller ones*), each commanded by a Major or a Captain, six Officers and 221 soldiers. The company was further divided into four, 50 strong platoons commanded by a Lieutenant, and then further divided into four sections of 12 men under a Corporal. This was the structure of 1/7 RS when it set out from Larbert to embark at Liverpool for Gallipoli as reinforcements to the failing Dardanelles Campaign.

The Campaign, strongly supported by **Winston Churchill** as First Lord of the Admiralty, was originally conceived as a naval operation to force the Straits of the Dardanelles with the aim of capturing the Ottoman capital of Constantinople (*modern-day Istanbul*) and forcing the Ottoman Empire (*Turkey*) out of the War. A force of 18 older British and French battleships launched the attack on 18 March 1915 at the narrowest point of the Straits, after preliminary bombardment of the shore defences. Six of the battleships, however, were quickly sunk or severely damaged by Turkish mines and the attempt was abandoned. Planning began immediately for an alternative amphibious landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula, on the north side of the entrance to the Straits, to be followed by an overland approach to Constantinople. The initial landings took place on 25 April by the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC), the British 29th Division, which included 1st/5th Battalion The Royal Scots, and a diversionary landing by the French on the south side. After the landings, not all of which were successful, little was done by the Allies to exploit what limited successes they had achieved. Apart from a few short advances by small groups of men, most of the troops stayed on, or close to the beaches. The initiative was lost and the failure to secure the high ground dominating the Peninsula then, or later, doomed the Campaign to failure, in spite of reinforcements in May and June. Amongst these was the 52nd (Lowland) Division, including the surviving elements of 1/7RS.

THE QUINTINSHILL CRASH SURVIVORS

The seven Officers and 55 Other Rank uninjured survivors from the Quintinshill crash, under Lieutenant Colonel William Peebles, the Commanding Officer, reached Carlisle by train at about 5pm on the Saturday and marched through crowded, cheering streets to Carlisle Castle, the military depot in the town. There they had a wash, were given a meal and medical examination and ordered to rest. At 2am they were woken, returned to the station and set off for Liverpool.

On arrival in Liverpool, after some delay, during which the survivors were amazingly, after what they had been through, used as a work detail at the station, the party eventually joined B and C Companies on HMT Empress of Britain.

Later that Sunday morning, however, the War Office ordered that the 55 Other Ranks under an Officer, Lieutenant Bell, should return to Edinburgh. **The party marched back to the station during the course of which it is reported that they were stoned by some street urchins who, because of their untidy appearance, thought they were German prisoners of war.**

They reached Edinburgh that evening and were taken to Craighleith Hospital for the night. The following afternoon, Monday, they paraded for the funeral of their comrades before going on leave for two weeks. They, together with those who had recovered from their injuries, subsequently rejoined the Battalion as reinforcements in Gallipoli on 13 August.

HMT Empress of Britain sailed for Alexandria on the evening of Sunday 23 May, arriving there on 3 June. After five days ashore, the Battalion re-embarked and sailed for the Island of Lemnos, south-west of the Gallipoli Peninsula on 11 June, sailing to the Peninsula, by small cargo ship, the next day.



KRITHNIA NULLAH TO THE
EAST OF GULLY RAVINE (1915)

BATTLE OF GULLY RAVINE

1/7RS, still only two companies strong, played a major part, alongside the 1st/4th Battalion (1/4RS), in the battle of Gully Ravine on 28 June where they lost **11 Officers** and **230 Other Ranks**, killed, wounded or missing (*presumed killed*).

It is reasonable to assume that, if A and D Companies, lost in the rail crash, had been present, casualty numbers would have been double.

On 7 July, pending the arrival of reinforcements, particularly of Officers for 1/4RS, who had suffered 22 Officer casualties in the battle, including their CO, out of 31, and 345 Other Ranks, the surviving elements of 1/7RS combined with those of 1/4RS into a single Battalion of three companies, one 1/7RS and two 1/4RS, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Peebles. The merged Battalion, 4/7RS, was again in a major action on 12–15 July when the 1/7RS element suffered a further **53 casualties**.

On 11 August the 'merger' ceased with the arrival of a new CO and other Officers for 1/4RS. 1/7RS, however, were still only at a strength of nine Officers and 159 Other Ranks, formed into two small companies each of two, very understrength, platoons. Ten Officers arrived that day, however, followed, two days later, by a further 13 Officers and 440 Other Ranks from 2/7 RS.

Included among the latter, as mentioned above, were many of those who had been injured in the Quintinshill crash but had now recovered. The Battalion was reorganised into four companies each with an 'old' platoon, A Company with the Quintinshill survivors, B Company with the 2/7 reinforcements and C and D Companies with the earlier, pre-deployment, 8HLI reinforcements.

Fighting on the Peninsula, although still referred to as 'trench warfare' was very different from that in France. The advance, after the initial landing at the southern tip, never extended more than three to five miles up the Peninsula, with a front-line length of four miles running diagonally across it from south-east to north-west, giving a total area, occupied by tens of thousands of allied troops at any one time, of some 16 square miles. Trenches were generally much closer than in France and, with much less in the way of wire obstacles in 'no man's land' between them, even greater alertness was required to prevent sudden attacks.



7TH ROYAL SCOTS AT GALLIPOLI (1915)

NOWHERE TO HIDE

In a number of cases opposing trenches were in bombing (*grenade*) range of each other and, if too far for hand throwing, the home-made grenades were launched at the enemy from improvised catapults (see page 14). Nowhere on the Peninsula was absolutely safe from Turkish bullets. It was, in fact, often safer to be in the limited protection of the front-line trenches. Those troops in reserve were more vulnerable to snipers, a number of whom managed to operate behind the Allied lines. Furthermore, the heaviest shelling, including from very large calibre Turkish guns firing across the Dardanelles, invariably fell on the rear trenches and the so-called rest camps near the beaches.

At least in France, when you were 'out of the line', which probably averaged one month in two, you were safe from enemy fire and could have showers, a change of clothing, regular, well-cooked meals and a proper rest. 1/7RS, and 1/4RS, *never left the Peninsula for a single day* in the eight months they were there.

LACK OF WATER

As if this alone did not make life worse than in France, every single drop of water, apart from run-off after storms, had to be brought to the Peninsula by sea. Consequently, it was mostly used for cooking and drinking. There was never enough for the latter, especially in the heat of the summer.

Even less was available for personal hygiene, making troops more susceptible to sickness and disease, although there was some limited sea bathing in sheltered coves when 'out of the line'.



OUT OF THE LINE

THE STENCH

Despite several truces arranged to recover and bury the dead, there was a constant smell of a mix of human excrement (*diarrhoea was a major problem and troops could not leave their trenches for proper field latrines*) and that from human bodies decomposing in the heat.

Swarms of flies and mosquitoes, and pervasive dirt and sand were everywhere. At the end of October uncertain weather and very varying temperatures further affected the general health of the Battalion with a steep rise in the number of cases of jaundice and dysentery. At night temperatures plummeted and men found it difficult to sleep, even without the almost constant noise of guns.

A NEW ALLIANCE

On 21 September, 1/7RS's War Diary recorded that '*25 Newfoundlers and one Officer joined for instruction*'. This is the first recorded meeting between The Royal Scots and what was to become one of our allied Regiments, The Royal Newfoundland Regiment. Newfoundland was an independent Dominion until it joined with Canada in 1949. Its 'army' therefore served within British formations rather than Canadian ones during World War I.

On 4 November, again as a result of falling numbers in both Battalions, 1/7RS formed a composite Battalion '*for tactical purposes*' with 1/4RS, to be named 7RS, which remained until the end of the campaign and until it reached Egypt after the withdrawal.

On 15 November the Battalion successfully attacked and held a Turkish trench to their front, with very low casualties. This was subsequently held against a counter-attack, earning the congratulations of the Corps Commander.

The weather deteriorated rapidly from that point with heavy rain and snow flooding trenches and dugouts, the former becoming canals forcing men to stand precariously on the narrow fire-steps and risking becoming targets for snipers. One particularly violent storm, with hurricane force winds, rain, sleet and snow, swept the Peninsula from 26–28 November destroying the piers and lighters on the beaches upon which the Force was entirely dependent for its supplies. This only strengthened the arguments for abandoning the campaign, a decision which followed in December.

7RS remained in the line to the very end, being the last unit of 52 (*Lowland*) Division to leave Gallipoli at 3am on 9 January 1916, sailing on the Battleship HMS Prince George to Mudros. In contrast to the failure of so many operations during the campaign, notably the failure to push rapidly forward from the initial landings on 25 April, the withdrawal was a brilliant success with the whole force slipping away unnoticed and without casualties.

STRENGTHS OF 1/7RS MAY 1915 - JANUARY 1916

22 May	Entrained Larbert	31 Officers	1026 ORs	Total 1057
23 May	Embarked Liverpool	20 Officers	477 ORs	After Quintinshill
12 Jun	Landed Gallipoli	18 Officers	458 ORs	
15 Jul	After Gully Ravine	6 Officers	169 ORs	
22 Jan '16	In Egypt	20 Officers	336 ORs	Total 356

The Battalion left Mudros on 19 January for Alexandria, in Egypt, arriving there on the 21st, from where it moved inland to Abbassia. On 25 January the 4RS elements left to reform their own Battalion.

With the 23 Officers and 440 Other Ranks recorded as reinforcements over the period, 1/7RS's casualties from departure from Larbert, exactly eight months earlier, totalled 34 Officers and 1,110 ORs or 108% of the entrained strength.

THE 7TH BATTALION ACCLIMATISING IN EGYPT (1916)





THE VIEW FROM NEBI SAMWIL LOOKING TOWARDS JERUSALEM
21ST NOVEMBER (1917)

END TO THE CAMPAIGN IN PALESTINE

For the first six months of 1916, 1/7RS were employed guarding the Suez Canal. They trained hard; in particular they got used to marching long distances in the desert sand and observing strict water discipline.

In July a Turkish force advanced across the desert and attacked the British positions. 1/7RS were in a rest camp near Alexandria when the Turks were first spotted and were quickly moved forward by rail. The Battalion experienced little close fighting, however, and the Turkish attack was halted by mounted counter-attack.

In October the British advanced to the north-east but were halted, at the end of the year, after a failed attempt to capture the town of Gaza. The Battalion was involved in a second, again unsuccessful, assault in March 1917. The town eventually fell to a third assault in early November in which the Battalion distinguished itself but at a cost of almost 100 casualties. The capture of Gaza was followed by a rapid advance, although with some tough actions, first north and then turning east to Nebi Samwil and towards Jerusalem, which fell on 9 December. 1/7RS, however, by then had swung back north-west towards Jaffa, which fell on 22 December. This marked the end of the campaign in Palestine, the only major Allied success of 1917.



7TH BATTALION, IN PALESTINE (SUMMER OF 1917)
PHOTOGRAPH BY CAPTAIN W.R. KERMEL

In April 1918, 52 (Lowland) Division, including 1/7 RS, were moved quickly to France after the German spring offensive of March and April. The Battalion experienced its first spell of trench warfare in the Vimy Ridge sector in May after the German offensive against the British, but not the French sector farther to the south, had been halted. Initially, after Palestine, they suffered more discomfort from the weather than the enemy, but they soon acclimatised. Furthermore, they quickly realised that, although the bombardments in France were heavier than those experienced before, the protection afforded by the trenches was much better.



LT. COLONEL WILLIAM CARMICHAEL PEEBLES DSO TD DL

In May 1918, Lieutenant Colonel Peebles handed over command of 1/7RS to Lieutenant Colonel Ewing. *Peebles was a remarkable man by any standards.* He was a member of the major family firm of Peebles Engineering in Leith.

He had been commissioned into the then 5th Volunteer Battalion in 1894, and assumed command of the 7th (Territorial) Battalion, as it had then become, in 1910. He mobilised the Battalion in August 1914, and commanded it (as the 1st/7th Battalion) in Gallipoli, Egypt, Palestine and France. Of all the battles in which 1/7RS was engaged while he was in command, he only missed the Third Battle of Gaza, when he was on home leave. A man of legendary bravery, commanding his Battalion from the front, he was awarded the DSO and Bar, the Serbian Order of the White Eagle and several times *'Mentioned in Dispatches'* – additionally he was described as always being the **best turned-out man in the Battalion!** It is most unlikely that any other British Commanding Officer in World War I mobilised his Battalion on 4 August 1914 and remained in unbroken command of it through to May 1918, including three years of almost continuous operations.

THE END OF THE BATTALION'S WAR

The British counter-attack began on 8 August, described by General Ludendorff in his memoirs as "*the Black Day of the German Army. It put the decline of our fighting powers beyond all doubt*". 1/7RS entered the battle on 23 August advancing rapidly and taking many prisoners, guns, mortars and machine guns. It was not entirely one-sided, however, as by 3 September, when it was relieved, while the Battalion had **only lost a total of 17** all ranks killed, **a further 396 had been wounded**. On 8 November the Battalion crossed the frontier into Belgium before the Armistice took effect at 11am on 11 November 1918. The reaction in the Battalion was recorded as:

"Strange though it may appear this announcement failed to raise any excitement probably owing to the fact that the feeling of strain was to take a long time to wear off, and the one idea of All Ranks was to get into billets and have a sound and prolonged sleep. Billets were arranged in Herchies, and for the first time for many months no sound of guns came to disturb the rest of the weary that night."

Thus ended the 1st/7th Battalion's War. The Battalion remained in Belgium/France over the winter of 1918–19 preparing for demobilisation, reduced to minimum strength in March 1919 and returned to Edinburgh for final disbandment in May. The 1st/7th, although having a more varied war than many, was only one of a total of 35 Battalions of The Royal Scots, more than in any other Scottish Regiment that served in World War I, of which 18 saw active service.

In all, over 100,000 men served in the Regiment of whom 11,213 were killed (*including over 550 from 1/7RS*), again more than in any other Scottish Regiment and equating to roughly 10% of the total Scottish military deaths in the War, a staggering percentage from a single regiment. In addition to those killed, over 40,000 Royal Scots were wounded, a total casualty rate of over 50% among those who served.

Nemo me impune lacessit



The Royal Scots Regimental Bay,
The Scottish National War Memorial, Edinburgh Castle.

At the foot are carved the Scottish Royal Coat of Arms flanked by the Fleur de Lys of France and the Three Crowns of Sweden, commemorating the Regiment's time in the service of those countries.

The Regimental Museum and Library are located in Edinburgh Castle where we always welcome visitors with links to the Regiment.

www.wc100scotland.org

Conceived and compiled by Colonel Robert Watson.

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