

"IT WILL ALL BE OVER BY CHRISTMAS"

The thoughts of the last three months echoed in the saying "it will all be over by Christmas", the population of the town began to learn that it was going to require maximum continuous effort and sacrifice if the country was going to pull through.

CONCERTS, DANCES,

whist drives and other entertainments were now arranged regularly, the proceeds of each social effort being devoted to the war relief fund or the Red Cross Hospital Fund.

The government were concerned about the state of the food stocks, now that it was apparent the War was going to continue for some time. Once again directives came from the relevant ministers to all the local authorities as follows:

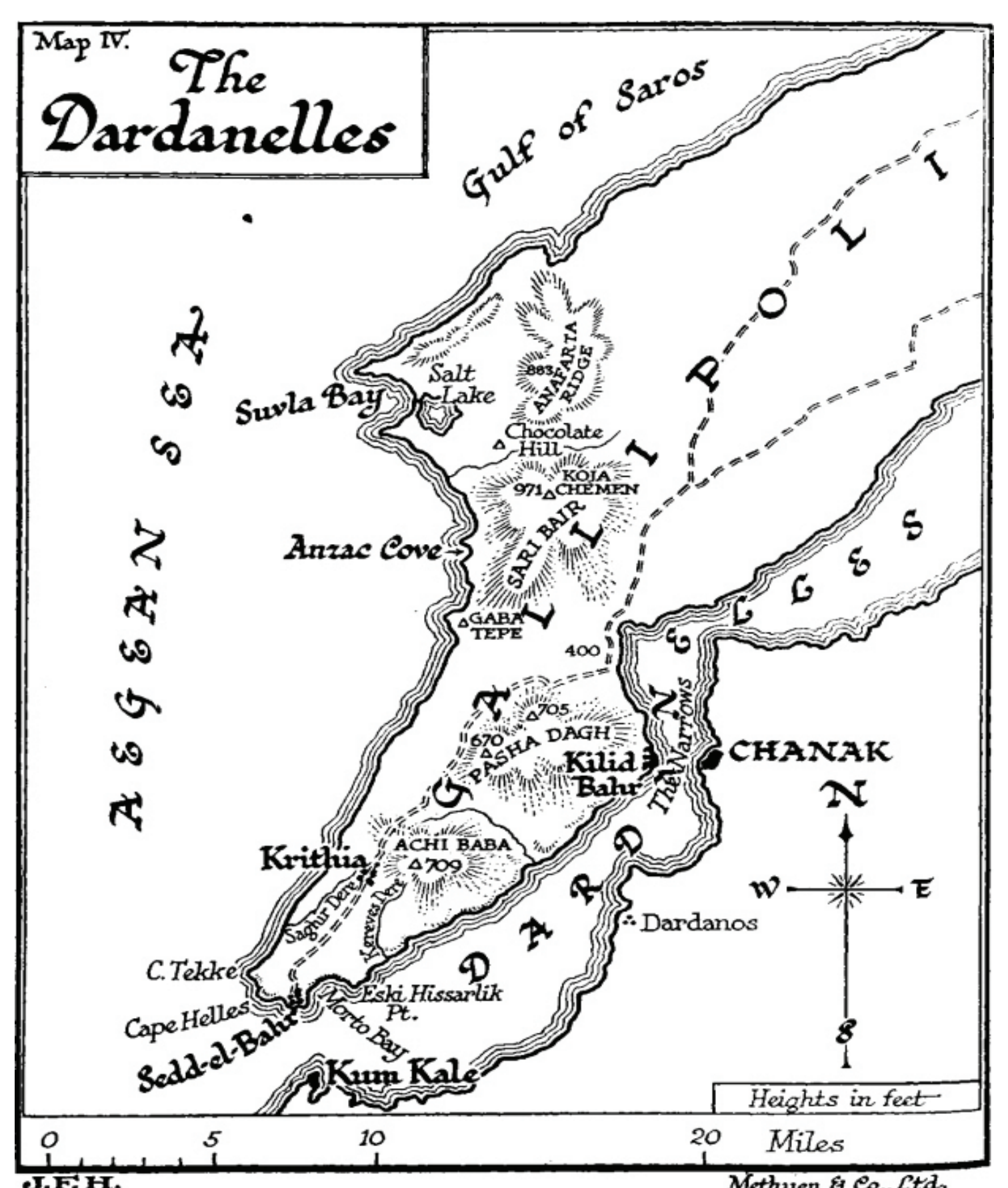
- A 4lb loaf would now be a 3 1/2lb loaf which cost 8d
- A 2lb loaf would now be a 1 3/4 lb loaf
- A rise in the price of milk of 25% (at present milk was 4d per quarter)

THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY FARM LABOUR COSTS HAD RISEN

by 15% since the outbreak of war and the price of corn had risen by 15% over the same period. In view of the general situation in Agriculture the local Agricultural Society decided the Annual Show was not to take place in the coming September, as everyone had too many commitments concerned with the war effort. The old Horticulture Society decided to amalgamate with the Agricultural Society in order to pool their resources and manpower, their first combined effort for the war relief fund, and the hospital fund was to hold a large cheese sale in the Town Hall, the proceeds being divided between the two funds.

The Comforts committee were anxious about the plight of the prisoners of war in Germany, after they had received postcards from some of the prisoners, saying that they had "black Bread" to eat. Mrs Roylance Court contacted the vice-consul at Montreux Switzerland and arranged for food parcels to be despatched by him. Each prisoner was to receive food parcels at regular intervals consisting of biscuits, cheese, cooked veal, "Maggi Soup" and chocolate to the value of 10/- . Several prisoners wrote back to the comforts committee saying they had received the parcels intact and how grateful they were. The comforts committee not only received letters of thanks but expressing opinions and other information Pte J Wharton of the 1st Battalion Cheshire Regiment.

"I have had one of my toes amputated but am progressing favourably. We have a lot of wounded soldiers here, 60 some of them are suffering from the effects of poison shells. Some of the wounds are very bad, but we are looked after very well by the sisters. I would have been in France again but for my foot being wrong. I really feel I am not doing my duty as I should. Although I have been out since, I am not afraid of going again. I was indeed very sorry to hear of young Oswald Dunn being killed in action, which makes four out of the old town who have laid down their lives for sovereign and country. There are one or two youths in Middlewich yet who are capable of bearing arms, but I suppose they don't like leaving their young ladies at their firesides. I sincerely hope that after the war they will be ashamed of themselves"

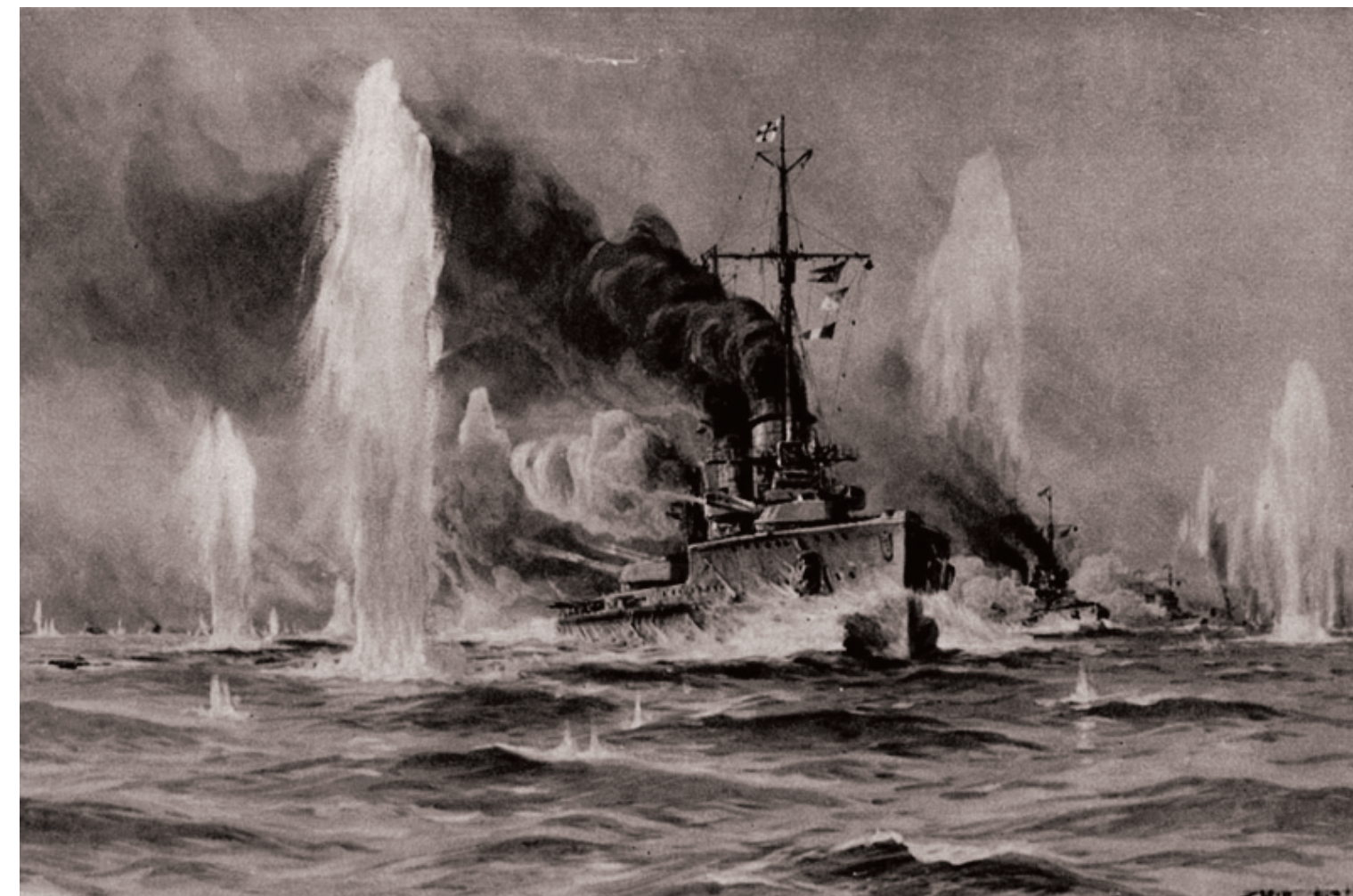


ZEPPELIN RAIDS ON MAINLAND BRITAIN

The next stage in the war, that drew utter condemnation from many neutral countries, was the first zeppelin raid on mainland Britain. Prior to the first attack the German Public and Naval High Command were eager to begin this stage of the war as soon as possible, and plans were made to bomb London. The Kaiser was worried that this attack on a prominent British city would produce outrage from many neutral countries so he decided against that plan, saying he thought like many other people, the war would be over soon. However he gave orders on the 10th January 1915 for aerial bombardment on Britain to begin, damage to royal palaces and historic buildings was forbidden. Coastal defences and the London docks were to be bombed in order to avoid large civilian casualties. Six Zeppelins were made available immediately; these were from the German Naval High Command. Other airships under the command of the German Imperial Army were to play their part as the war went into spring and summer of 1915. The bombing raids by the enemy on British civilian targets brought in immediate response by the British Government, they provided a directive entitled "Protection against Aerial Visitors" and issued it to all local Authorities. Middlewich UDC responded by ordering the church clock not to be lit, and all Public street lamps to be dimmed as far as Possible to the best ability of the Gas Co. All cyclists had to paint black bars across the face of their front lights (which were carbide Lamps)



The battle of Dogger Bank was one of the first naval battles to be fought between squadrons of the British Grand Fleet and German High Seas Fleet;



Willy Stower Dogger Bank 1915

it took place in the North Sea, on the 24th January 1915. Decoded radio intercepts by the British naval authorities gave the British fleet advanced knowledge that a German raiding squadron was heading for Dogger Bank, so they dispatched a force to intercept it. The Germans were found at the time and place as expected and the slower, smaller German squadron turned and fled for home. Long range gunfire, during the chase, with the British Fleet at the rear of the enemy, ensued. The German ship "Blucher" was disabled, but the German reply put HMS Lion out of action. Having sustained heavy damage due to a signalling mix-up the remainder of the British Force broke off the engagement, and proceeded to sink the "Blucher".

February brought grave concern over two things nationally; Salt Orders could not be fulfilled because the coal industry had not got enough miners to supply the demands of any industry or the naval fleet. On top of that the war office is diverting railway wagons that carry both coal and munitions to southern England en route to France.

FARMING INDUSTRY NEWS UPDATE

As spring approached, the farming industry made it known to the government that local labour exchanges were not working and suggested that children should be employed solely on farms, for a limited time. Labour exchanges were not good enough to fill the vacancies, letters were circulated asking for labourers but received little reply. The education committee said that boys from age 12 in school could be employed on local farms but they should still have some schooling, it was agreed that during the agricultural crisis, that boys and girls 13 to 14 years to work from 1st March to 31st October on farms if available. During this period they must have respectable hours and a fair wage. Employment would last for 2 months at a time, and then apply again; this was to ensure that the children were not overworked and that they had some schooling.

DARDANELLES FORTS BOMBED

Several Middlewich men were with the allied forces in the Dardanelles, the second serious action being on Feb 25th 1915. The British Navy bombarded the Dardanelles forts, the first action having limited success. It was to be an attack to silence the Turkish guns, so that the minesweepers could clear the channel to allow a landing by Allied Troops and also supply ships to gain access to Russian ports. The Church of England vicar the Revd. A G Child had volunteered to join the armed forces as an army chaplain, he became the service chaplain for the 53rd Division, was wounded and mentioned in despatches.

The older men in the county, those over military age were encouraged to form the County Volunteer Regiment, over 9,000 men volunteered. The Middlewich detachment was 80 strong by early summer, uniforms were ordered and their HQ was a room in the Town Hall.



During the summer meetings, an appeal was made for sandbags for the front;

these were 33" x 18" wide and made of hessian type of material. Middlewich was asked to provide 5,000; government information stated that 100,000 sandbags were needed for every mile of trenches. Mr Lidbury the Council school headmaster and Mrs Roylance Court set about this task in their usual organised manner. The hessian required was begged from many local traders and working parties of senior girls were asked to stay behind after school and assemble in a room in the Town Hall, the Girls Friendly Society also joined the 'Sandbag Parties'. The total of over 5,000 was achieved, after which the Friendly Society Girls made weaving baskets to carry shells at the front. The situation on the Home Front was becoming very serious, with shortages of Labour in the salt industry and in the Agricultural industry. All food stuffs were in short supply, the harvest of whatever type had to be got in to feed livestock, and to harvest barley and oats for food, without labour there would soon be a disaster. The Minister for Agriculture approached the army council for a limited number of soldiers, for a short space of time. These men came from the territorials in training and the County Volunteer Regiment when they were allowed off their normal occupations. The pay was 4/- for a soldier who found his own food and lodging and 2/6 per day if provided by the farmer, the farms also had to provide transport to a few railway stations, the usual amount of time granted to army personnel was 14 days.

During July and into August the government introduced what was obviously the first step towards compulsory "call up". They ordered that all eligible men should register with their respective local authorities. This was of course to obtain the maximum number of men possible for the armed forces so Middlewich was divided into 11 districts and enumerators were sent to each household to ascertain the age, occupation etc. of the males in the house. By the middle of October the local government board had written to the MUDC regarding the local recruiting committee. The Committee had to decide which men should be starred in relation to the barring from enlistment because they were indispensable at their work. As each man was interviewed as to why they should not join the forces, the local recruiting officer had a right to be present at the interview and had a right to appeal to a higher tribunal against any decision made. This higher tribunal became known as the "Munitions Court" because it had difficult decisions to make and would send a man to work in a munitions factory if the circumstances were not straightforward. Women, who had volunteered to work in the munitions factories earlier on in the year when there was a serious labour shortage, were known as "munitionettes".

THE LADIES OF THE RELIEF COMMITTEE

In December 1915, 350 Middlewich men were in uniform. The relief committee had to raise £100 in order to send each man a Christmas gift wherever he was stationed, each parcel this year contained, a writing pad, pencils, a Christmas card, a radium pocket stove, tinder lighter, pair of mittens, packet of candles, packet of chocolates, 6 packets of cigarettes, 1 tin of Oxo cubes, 1 yard of muslin, 1 tablet of soap. The box timber was supplied by MC Worth, the Manager of Anglo Swiss Milk Co. It was the same timber used to contain the condensed milk tins, these was taken to the woodwork room at the Council Schools where the boys made up the boxes. The boxes were then transported to a room at the Town Hall where the ladies of the relief committee did the packing and labelling.

There was a serious shortage of eggs throughout the country and everyone was encouraged to keep a few fowl whether it is backyard, garden or orchard.

The gangs of women were now employed on farms generally worked as dairy maids or milkmaids, looking after pigs, calves and poultry. Because of the shortage of eggs, the vast majority of farmers increased their flocks of poultry. Eggs were sent as a first priority to the base military hospitals in this country and France. This increase in the number of flocks in the country led inevitably to an increase in the pure bred flocks both for meat and eggs so that within a few years hatcheries and breeding stations were common in Lancashire and Cheshire.