

ALLIED WARSHIPS WITHDRAW

FOLLOWING THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE ALLIED FORCES FROM DARDANELLES ON DECEMBER 19TH 1915,

the navy was assembling warships and smaller merchant vessels to ensure the complete withdrawal from the peninsular with the minimum loss of life, equipment and ships. This was achieved with success on January 8th 1916. The losses of men, killed, wounded and missing was considerable of the British and allied troops -

- 177 officers and 1,990 other ranks killed
- 412 officers and 7,087 other ranks killed
- 13 officers and 3,586 other ranks missing

The organisation of dances, whist drives, concerts etc. went on as regularly as clockwork, and was still supported by a population that gave as generously as ever of their time and money.

Half a million men from Britain

were now killed, missing or wounded. Following the registration of all males some weeks previously the government introduced the Military service act, which meant conscription throughout Britain. It was introduced on the 27th January 1916 to come into force on February the 10th. As if to reinforce the fact that all of Britain was at war and not just France, the first week in February was the week that German forces began to concentrate their zeppelin raids on various counties in southern England. They dropped over 300 bombs in this week resulting in 59 people killed and 101 injured as well as a large amount of damage to property. Many local authorities took measures to try and combat the threat. Middlewich UDC consulted the Supt. of police, the result being that lighting was now more stringently enforced; windows, skylights and gas lamps had to be blacked out or extinguished altogether. On February the 10th the first 'call ups' were for single men only, posters were placed throughout the country by March 18th. As well as the men, 400,000 women were recruited for all types of agriculture work. The Revd. Fortnum was the recruiting officer aided by Mr O B Whitehead (chairman of the MUDC) Mr W Roylance Court, Mr F A Lidbury, Mr J Innes and Mr C F Lawrence (clerk).

EXEMPTION TRIBUNALS

One of the first tribunal cases to be heard was an appeal by a farmer on behalf of his teams-man and general labourer aged 35. As well as this man the farmer had one boy to help him on a farm of 120 acres, of which 55 acres was corn, with 44 head of stock, 34 of them milking cows, plus nine working horses and a colt. The recruiting officer said the man was "starred" and the tribunal gave a certificate of exemption on condition he remained as a teams-man in which occupation he was habitually engaged. The names of the applicants for exemption were never published.

The food supply situation was gradually getting worse on the home front; the farmer's task of growing enough food for the families at home and the forces was enormous. It was the Government's task to create a balance between the two.

Other economic measures had to be introduced, the national organising committee for war savings, issued its first poster which read:

- Don't use a motor car or motor cycle for pleasure purposes.
- Don't buy new clothes, needlessly, don't be afraid of wearing old clothes in War time
- Do not keep more servants than you need.

MANPOWER SHORTAGES

In April 1916 it was realised that the military service act brought in weeks earlier was causing a tremendous shortage on manpower in all sections of industry, but particularly in the farming industry, where as in other sectors like mining, railways and steel, many able bodied men were exempt for obvious reasons. Women were asked to take on some of the farm labouring jobs, despite some opposition clearly displayed in newspaper articles of the time. In Middlewich a number of women could not take up farm work or even training (this was done on a county area basis, with teams of women being taught by an experienced female farm labourer) because they had small children to look after. In response to this, Mrs Roylance Court opened a day nursery at No 16 Hightown at the end of May to try and help the situation. Now for the first time mothers could leave their children to be cared for, as they went to the farms in the morning to do the milking.

**TO ENSURE THE ARMY
had enough hay and straw for the horses
and asses, the army council requisitioned
all stocks of hay and straw in the hands
of merchants and dealers.**

Prices at the market had been rising steadily over the past 18 months, e.g. Eggs 4 for ½ d, Butter 2/- to 2/2d per lb; chickens 3/- to 5/- each (dressed); Beef 1/- to 1/8d per lb; mutton 1/- to 1/8d per lb; Potatoes 10/- per cwt. On the farmers credit side, dairy cows now averaged £55, 3 year old bullocks £30 and oats were 48/- to 52/- per quarter.

A memorial service was held at the end of May in the congregational church Queen Street for No 4054 Pte 'Bert' Fortnum of the 21st Royal Fusiliers. He was killed on the 9th March 1916. He was attached to a mining company of The Royal Engineers, on enlistment he gave his age as 19, but was actually 17 years and 9 months old. The activities of the Royal Engineers mining companies were kept secret for over 2 years. He was the son of the Revd. Fortnum.

LORD KITCHENER LOST

On June 5th HMS Hampshire struck a German mine off the Orkneys with the loss of many lives, Lord Kitchener; one of its passengers was drowned. A national memorial fund was set up to his memory; a memorial service was held on a Sunday afternoon, in the parish church.

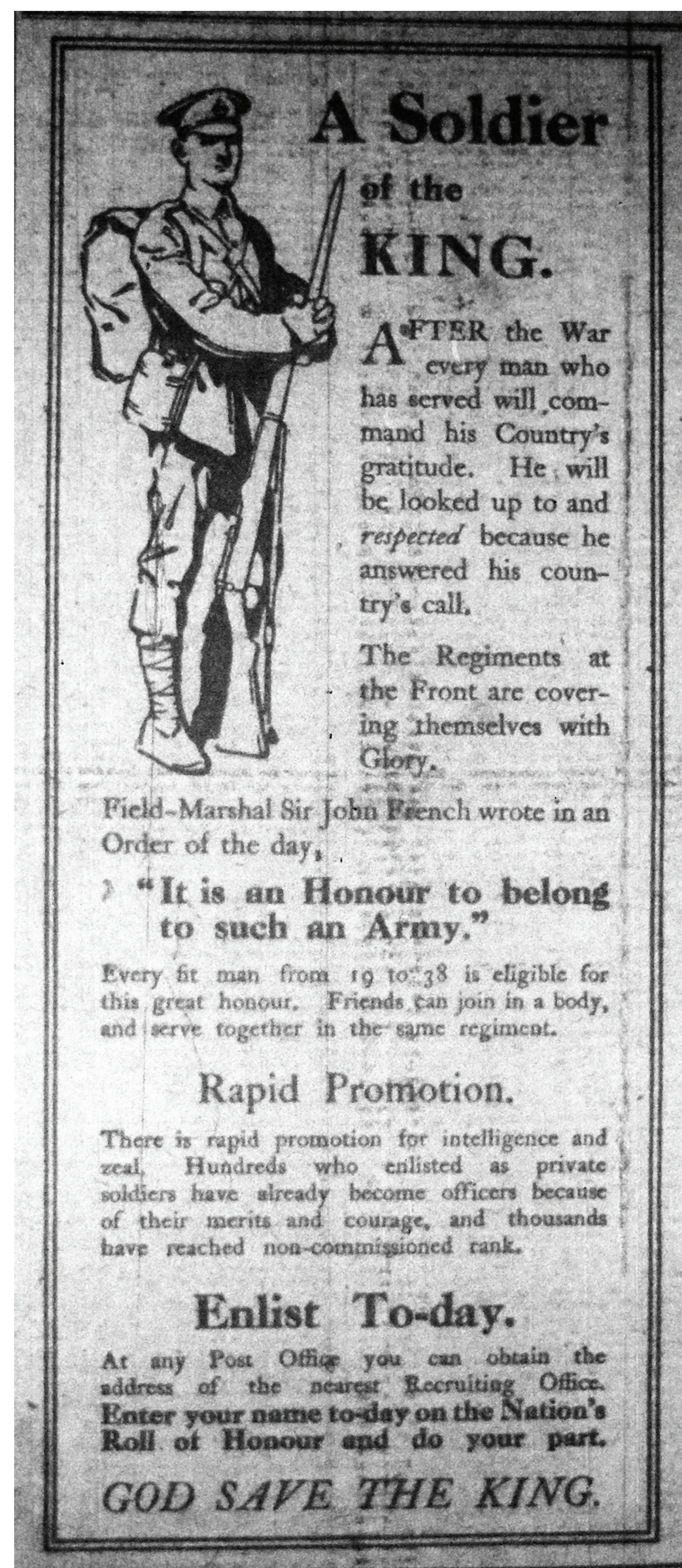
FOOD RIOTS

The war had now been on for far longer than anyone had anticipated and as each month passed there was no sign that the conflict was about to cease. The British population were not the only people short of food, there had been food 'riots' in Berlin earlier in the year. The British government had information about the German economy, their general retail prices had raised by 61% since the beginning of the war and the price of potatoes by 30% during May and June.

Several well-known families heard of their loved ones being killed or wounded, the local papers had separate columns for the Winsford, Northwich and Middlewich war news. As news of the soldier or sailor became available it was printed for wider distribution giving the details of being killed, wounded or taken prisoner. A photo of the man concerned plus details of age, regiment, his home address and where he was previously employed was reported.

THE BATTLE OF JUTLAND

On the first of June the battle of Jutland involved the British Navy, losing 3 battle cruisers, 3 cruisers 8 destroyers and having 6,784 casualties. The initial plan decided by admiral Scheer was that the German navy were to attack ports on the North East coast and lure out the British Fleet from Rosyth and scapa flow and fall into the path of 10 German submarines waiting a few miles of shore in the North Sea. Unknown to the German high command the messages to the German Admirals were being intercepted and decoded. The first German idea failed, so admiral Scheer decided on a far riskier action, to attack merchant shipping off Norway to try to trick ships of the Royal Navy out into the north sea to be attacked by surprise. Admirals Jellicoe and Beatty again received the intercepted and decoded messages and sent out their respective fleets at night. Five hours before the German fleet left Wilhelmshaven, neither of the two sides knew this, so by midnight on 31st may the British fleet had avoided the waiting German submarine and was well out into the North Sea and sailing towards an area south of Norway and Sweden. At a range of 14 miles the German warships sunk 2 British cruisers', in a matter of minutes they blew up. The German shells had penetrated the ammunition hold; the defensive armour of the British ships was weak. The Royal Navy did succeed in sinking 1 battle cruiser, 1 dreadnought, 4 light cruisers and 5 destroyers. The enemy turned away under smoke and headed back to Wilhelmshaven, with several warships so badly damaged they would take months to be seaworthy, probably for the remainder of the war, and so the German Navy remained in Port. Admiral Jellicoe reported to the First Sea Lord he had 24 battleships ready for action.



RISING FOOD PRICES

Middlewich was like the rest of the country having to combat rising food prices, 8 out of 10 loaves were baked with imported wheat, so farmers were encouraged still further to put more land under the plough. Under the cultivation of land order 1916, all local authorities were empowered to take possession of unoccupied land, or by agreement to rent for the duration of the war. This land was to be divided up into allotments or not less than 300 sq. yards each. Farmers and small holders were also encouraged to buy the new small tractors that were available. These tractors were meant to replace the 'half hunters' (horses) that were now at the front. That left the heavy horse, the shires that were unsuitable for army work. Middlewich UDC began to negotiate with various landowners to comply with the land order, the triangular piece of land in front of No's 1 to 5 New King St (now numbered 4-12) was cultivated and a fence erected around it, this was the play area for the children of New King St and Lichfield St. A much larger area divided into allotments was off Long Lane in the Manor Fields area.

On a much grander scale but still under the cultivation of land act 1916, the army wanted farmers to grow more oats for the horses and mules now at the front, this request put the farmers in a quandary, on one hand they were asked to put land down to grass for bullocks, cows and sheep and on the other to put the same land to grow oats; this led to many small acreages of land, often in poor condition, and never considered to be of any use for agriculture, now having stock on it, or corn.

THE CHESHIRE WAR AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEE

On top of this dilemma the Cheshire War Agricultural Committee divided the county into 10 areas to try and estimate the amount of seed potatoes, for example, that all producers would require in the drive for increased food production. The committees of all land organisations had been informed and notice posted on every sale yard in the county.

As a result of the Battle of the Somme 'disaster' on 1st July the government decided to step up its propaganda and in the Guardian of Friday July 14th a statement appeared listing recent captures of German guns and equipment, plus lists of German infantry captured up to July 1st. The list included 7,300 prisoners, 26 field guns, one naval gun, one anti-aircraft gun, one heavy Howitzer. The British troops since the Battle of the Somme commenced had captured 189 officers, 10,779 other ranks, eight Howitzers, nine heavy guns, 37 field guns, 38 trench howitzers and 68 machine guns.

During the summer reports of men killed, wounded, missing or taken prisoner appeared every week, many of them in the various Cheshire battalions, private No 14242 George Yoxall of Woods Row, Newton Heath in the 10th Cheshire killed in action aged 28 years. He joined Kitchener's army soon after the declaration of war and had been on the front since September, he was employed by Messer's Brunner Mond at Winnington. He died during a bomb attack and was described as a 'valuable good worker, trusted in an emergency, his death was instantaneous.

A new licensing system for petrol came into force on August 1st reducing by 20% the fuel for commercial and private use together with a new duty of 6d per gallon authorised by the new licenses.

Constructional work had to be licensed if over £500 in value. This did not apply to any hospital extensions.

The third Christmas

of the war was fast approaching and the names and addresses of the 400 men now serving with the armed forces was as follows:-

28 in Mesopotamia and India, 60 in Salonika and Egypt, 150 in France, 14 in the Royal Navy, 143 at Home stations and 14 prisoners of war.

CHRISTMAS PARCELS APPEAL

As in previous years appeals went out to the population of the town for woollen socks, woollen helmets, mittens and scarves, for inclusion with the other personal items in the Christmas Parcels. In a very short time all the items were available and being sorted and packed by the committee ladies in a room at the Town Hall. The produce from the Harvest Festivals in September at all the churches and chapels was donated to the two hospitals plus the harvest gifts from Sproston Wesleyan Church.