



Army Units from Worcestershire

Battalions of the Worcestershire Regiment



4th Battalion After three years in Malta followed by spells in India and Burma, the 4th Battalion joined 29th Division in England in March 1915 and sailed for Alexandria and thence Gallipoli.

The battalion landed half its force at V Beach Cape Helles on 25th April but the remainder could not get ashore and moved onto W Beach where the Lancashire Fusiliers had established a strongpoint. The Worcestershire Battalion fought up the high ground eventually capturing Turkish redoubts and into 26th April the landing at Cape Helles was secured.

Several land battles were based around Krithia through April, May and June. In just a few short days at the end of April the battalion suffered 300 losses and rarely had time to spend in reserve before the next assault was upon them. The Worcestershire Regiment won its first Victoria Cross in Lieutenant H James at the third Battle of Krithia on 3rd July. With the new assault in August, attention moved to the Sari Bair hills and Scimitar Hill in particular. At one point the Yeomanry and the 29th Division were camped together at Suvla and able to renew old friendships.

After the Gallipoli Campaign they were sent to France and remained on the Western Front for the rest of the War.

1/7th and 1/8th Battalions These were the two first line territorial battalions of the Regiment, fighting in the same Division and often alongside each other in 144 Brigade. They had arrived on the Western Front at the end of March 1915. After fighting in France and Flanders for 2 ½ years they were sent to Italy in late November 1917.

Between their engagements on the Piave and at Vittorio Veneto, both Worcestershire Territorial battalions were involved in a raid in early August against Bosnians on the Asiago Plateau, followed by a number of other raids throughout that month until 1/8th Worcestershire's were withdrawn and returned to France to make up for depletions on that Front.

The fighting in Italy subsided quite quickly and troops were able to rest after the ceasefire. However, 1/7th were sent to Taranto in southern Italy to quell a mutiny at a British base and ended their war in the sunshine. They were the first overseas battalion to return to England in March 1919.

2/8th Battalion After the Armistice steps were taken to prevent disturbances in the old Ottoman Empire. The 2/8th Battalion was dispatched to Alexandria in June 1919. The battalion was disbanded there in September.

9th Battalion In Kitchener's First New Army, the 13th Division, which included 9th Worcestershire Regiment, was sent to Gallipoli as reinforcements in June 1915, landing near Gully Ravine on 14th July when the campaign had reached deadlock. The battalion ended up in the rear guard of the evacuation, again at Gully Beach and landed in Alexandria on 14th January 1916.

A month later they sailed through the Suez Canal, in to the Persian Gulf and landed at Basra to join in the Mesopotamian Campaign, fighting along the River Tigris, to Baghdad and beyond by April 1917. The battalion fought in Persia, as far as Baku on the Black Sea, but finished their war career in retreat and under attack in October 1918.

The situation in the region was unstable and the 9th Battalion and 39th Brigade were sent to the Caucasus in November. Here they were part of a 'policing' force, between Armenians, Georgians, Azerbaijanis, Kurds and the White Russians who were by now fighting the Bolsheviks.

Ultimately 9th Battalion left, bound for Constantinople, along with 11th Battalion. After merging with the 11th Battalion in September, the 9th Battalion was finally disbanded on December 19th, 1919.

11th Battalion The 11th Battalion was in the third of Kitchener's New Armies, in the 26th Division, 78th Brigade. They arrived in France in September 1915. After training on the Somme, but seeing no action, the Division left for Marseilles, from where they sailed to Salonika, via Alexandria, landing at the end of November 1915. It was eight months before anything other than training or small scale raids was developed with an attack on Horseshoe Hill in early August 1916.

Training and tours in the trenches continued until December when the fierce winter prevented any further fighting. On April 23rd they suffered heavily at the Battle of Doiran, failing to break through and with renewed attacks into May casualties mounted. As the Macedonian heat intensified the Division remained along the River Vardar, in conjunction with French forces, until the end of 1917.

In 1918 the battalion was involved in small offensives throughout the year, leading up to another battle at Doiran in September. The Bulgarians agreed an armistice on 1st October but 11th Battalion's war continued until the end of the month when Turkey finally surrendered.

The 11th Battalion however remained in the region peopled variously by Bulgarians, Romanians, Serbians, as nations and peoples settled uncomfortably to the new regimes. Disturbances in the Caucasus became of more concern and the Battalion sailed across the Black Sea to Georgia in April 1919.

In common with 9th Battalion, they stayed there on peacekeeping and governance duties until it was subsumed by its sister battalion in September 1919.

The Royal Field Artillery – 48th Division

The original 1st, 2nd and 3rd Worcester Batteries of the Royal Field Artillery, based in Worcester, Kidderminster and Redditch, were constituted as II South Midland Brigade RFA. There was also the Divisional Ammunition Column that had been based at Malvern prior to the War. From May 1916 these Divisional troops were enhanced with 144 Brigade Machine Gun Company and Trench Mortar Company.

Throughout these re-formations the troops units at the lowest level remained those men recruited in Worcestershire.

Their employment through the war was wherever the 48th Division went and, as with the two territorial battalions from Worcestershire in that Division, that meant from November 1917, Italy.

Worcestershire Yeomanry The Queen's Own Worcestershire Hussars - the Worcestershire Yeomanry – was formed up in the 2nd Mounted Division, 1st South Midland Brigade and trained largely in East Anglia in 1914.

They left Avonmouth on 8th April 1915 for Alexandria. For four months they camped and trained in Egypt but on 14th August were sent to Gallipoli, landing as infantry at Suvla Bay. They returned to Egypt after the fighting in the peninsula and remained, under various Divisional reorganisations, to the end of the campaign, ending up in Damascus at the Armistice.

The Battle of Qatia occurred on 23 April 1916 where Turkish troops overwhelmed their garrison, which lost three and a half squadrons of Yeomanry – an event still commemorated every Easter and now marked by a poppy memorial in Cripplegate Park, Worcester.

During the part of the campaign against Gaza in November 1917, the Worcestershire Yeomanry, then part of the Australian Mounted Division, famously attacked Turkish guns, head-on, with swords drawn, routing the enemy with their bravery and audacity at Huj.

Although they were not at the capture of Jerusalem in December 1917, the Worcestershire Yeomanry did enter the 'holy city' in the following April.

Like other units, the Yeomanry were to remain in Palestine after the Armistice for a further 9 months, officially arriving back in Worcester on 6 August, 1919.



Lieutenant Herbert James VC
4th Battalion Worcestershire Regiment.



TO THE CAMPAIGNS



The Mediterranean Campaigns

Much of this conflict was directed against the Turkish Empire, a close ally of Germany, which included the Western Desert in Egypt, Palestine, Mesopotamia, the Dardenelles and Gallipoli, Bulgaria and the Caucasus. These are places rarely free from conflict throughout modern history.

Britain's prime motive was to protect their interests in the Persian oilfields and the control of the Suez Canal. Militarily, the Dardanelles Campaign was a political tactic of the so-called 'easterners' including Winston Churchill, who wanted to detract attention and resources from the Western Front.

The campaigns produced some of the highest non-direct casualty deaths, mainly from disease and malnourishment, but also due to the inability to treat injuries efficiently. Many prisoners of war were also taken during the campaigns.



11th Battalion Worcestershire Regiment in Salonika

SOURCES

The Worcestershire Regiment in the Great War – Captain H FitzM Stacks – 1928
The 48th (South Midland) Division 1908–1919 – K Mitchinson – 2017
The Yeomanry Cavalry of Worcestershire 1914–1922 – C – Stourbridge 1926
The White War – Life and Death on the Italian Front 1915–1919 – M Thompson – 2008
Commonwealth War Graves Commission www.cwgc.org.uk



About Worcestershire World War One Hundred

Cultural and heritage organisations from across Worcestershire have come together to commemorate the 100th anniversary of World War One with an outstanding 4 year programme of events and activities under the banner Worcestershire World War One Hundred. The programme, which received the largest Heritage Lottery Fund Grant outside of London for a project commemorating the First World War, will commemorate the role Worcestershire played in World War One and tell the stories of Worcestershire people, their involvement with and personal legacy from the War.

Worcestershire World War One Hundred

www1worcestershire.co.uk/
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World War One
Worcestershire



Mediterranean Campaigns

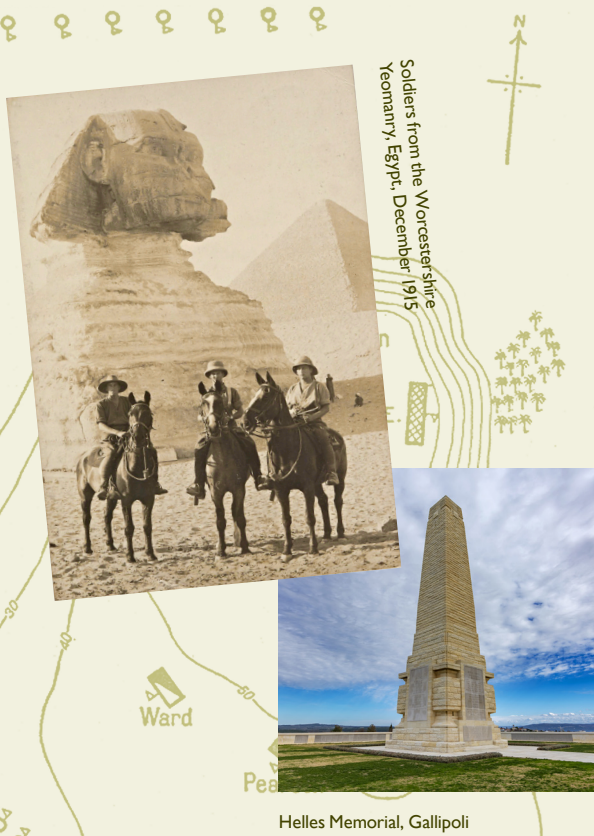


Introduction to the World War

The First World War was called a 'world war' for a reason – it spread across continents and involved a wide range of countries. Men from Worcestershire were heavily involved in the conflicts around the perimeter of the Mediterranean, primarily in the 4th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 11th Battalions of the Worcestershire Regiment; the Royal Field Battery of the 48th Division; and the Queen's Own Worcestershire Hussars – the Yeomanry.

This trail highlights those battlefields, as well as some of the memorials and cemeteries that survive and that can be visited today.

Consult an expert for up to date travel information in association with these locations.



ITALY

For the early years of the War, Italy fought alone in what became known as the ‘White War’ due to the almost permanent snow. At the 11th Battle of the Isonzo (river), September 1917, the Italians pushed the Austrians back but at the end of October a combined German and Austrian force broke the Italian line in the Battle of Caporetto and the Italian army was decimated. Casualties were huge, 10,000 killed, 30,000 wounded and over 600,000 troops taken prisoner or otherwise dispersed.

Italy called for help from its Allies on the Western Front and French and British troops were redirected to northern Italy from November 1917. Five British Divisions arrived including not only the 7th and 8th Battalions, the Worcestershire Regiment, but also Worcestershire batteries in the Royal Field Artillery. The newly-established Royal Air Force was also to play a significant role in offensives during 1918 including Asiago, Piave River and the decisive victory at Vittorio Veneto in October 1918

Major-General Sir Robert Fanshawe commanding 48th Division was ordered home after the successful Austrian offensive in June at Asiago, a humiliating comedown which historians have long criticised. Fanshawe was appointed honorary colonel of 1/7th Worcestershire Regiment after the War.



World War I in the Italian and Austria Alps. Italian troops skiing in single file, in white uniforms so they will blend in with the snow.



EGYPT

Alexandria was the key port during the War for the Palestine Campaign, but also as a launchpad for Gallipoli. Egypt became the largest foreign British military base. The Suez Canal was also a vital route to bring troops to the Western Front from India, New Zealand and Australia, as well as access to Persian oilfields through Basra.

The Turkish invasion began in January 1915 but proved unsuccessful and they withdrew by the end of February. After the Gallipoli Campaign collapsed however, more allied divisions landed in Egypt so that by January 1916 there were several yeomanry and infantry regiments.

Allied Command decided to improve the canal defences and extend into Palestine by constructing a railway and water pipeline to Qatia, involving advance across Sinai in the Spring. On 23 April the Yeomanry divisions in the 5th Mounted Brigade were overwhelmed by the Turks.

In June 1916 the Arab Revolt began against the Ottoman Empire and here Lawrence of Arabia made his name. Meanwhile, the allied forces slowly progressed northwards, eventually taking Jerusalem by Christmas 1917, under General Allenby. The complexities and legacies of relations between the Arabs and the British Army and the subsequent impact of the peace treaties in the Middle East still impact today.

A number of Worcestershire men are buried at Chatby War Memorial Cemetery in Alexandria, having been wounded perhaps in Gallipoli or Egypt, including 19035 Thomas Bourne of Droitwich, wounded at Gallipoli on 12th May 1915, aged 16. Nearly 100 men of the Worcestershire Yeomanry – Queen’s Own Hussars – are commemorated on the Memorial to the Missing in Jerusalem.

MACEDONIA

The joint German, Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian armies swept through Serbia in the autumn of 1915, driving them through Greece, Montenegro and Albania and finally to Corfu. The Serbians joined the British at Salonika (Thessaloniki) and marched north but were soon forced to retreat to Greece, a neutral power.

Political indecision and conflict in the region was rife. Through 1916 casualties and deaths through sickness and bad weather grew on both sides. Greece had particularly divided loyalties until in June 1917 they declared war on Germany.

There was little significant action in 1918 until the Battle of Doiran in September, near the Vardar River. The Bulgarian army was soon on retreat, pursued by 78th Brigade, including 11th Worcestershires, through Gjavate, Chernitza, Valandovo, through the mountain pass and on to Popcevo. On 2nd October at Palazli the Battalion halted and received news that Bulgaria had capitulated. The Brigade then moved on past Sofia and towards Adrianople where, on 31st October, news arrived that Turkey had surrendered.

Doiran Memorial and cemetery commemorate the battles in 1917 and 1918 and the missing of the Salonika Campaign including 11th Battalion men, most with no known grave.

THE DOIRAN MEMORIAL AND CEMETERY



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Cross erected by RE at Oghratina Hill, Qatia 1915



British Cemetery Mesopotamia – shells bursting in distance



General Allenby

MESOPOTAMIA

The war in what is modern-day Iraq, opened up the eastern flank of the Ottoman forces, initially with great success. Basra was soon occupied, followed by Kut el Amara, on the road to the allied target of Baghdad. Key to operations was the protection of the Persian oilfields.

Turkish forces concentrated on the siege of Kut which the British finally surrendered on 29 April 1916, after 147 days. Conditions in the siege and for the prisoners taken to Anatolia were appalling with high numbers of non-battle casualties caused by disease, weather and starvation.



German soldiers marching through the Serbian town of Paracin in 1915, during World War I

GALLIPOLI

Allied troops landed at dawn on 25th April 1915, the 29th British Division at Cape Helles and the Australian and New Zealand force at Gaba Tepe, now known as Anzac Cove. Ottoman Turk resistance was fierce and little progress was made into the mainland of the peninsula. Trench warfare soon took over with intensive casualties. In the heat, sickness and swarms of black corpse flies spread dysentery.

A second assault in August at Suvla Bay failed to break the stalemate and the Allies evacuated Anzac and Suvla in December and then Helles in January 1916.

Gallipoli saw some 500,000 casualties from all sides including sickness due to the insanitary conditions, including dysentery, diarrhoea and frostbite.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission maintains 31 cemeteries on the peninsula and 3 on the island of Lemnos, the last port of call for many of these men. The main memorial is at Cape Helles.



Australian troops charging a Turkish trench. Dardanelles Campaign, 1915.



British troops firing through a communication trench between the fire and support trenches at Kut-al-Amara.

EGYPT

OTTOMAN EMPIRE

