



***Brief but Glorious: A Brief History of the 8th (Service) Battalion The Royal Fusiliers 1914-1918*** by Charles Messenger (London, ONE, 2007) RRP £25.00. ISBN 0955605109

**Review by Dr Stephen A Hart, Department of War Studies,  
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The fact that the word “brief” appears twice in the title of this book might give some clue that this work “does what it says on the tin” – namely present a short overview of this battalion’s experiences during the Great War. One reason for its brevity – the main text is just 90 pages long – is the fact that the battalion only existed for 45 months, from its raising in August 1914 as part of Kitchener’s New Armies through to its disbandment in February 1918. The other explanation, as the author sets out clearly in his introduction, is the relative dearth of sources available. These caveats aside, the author has nevertheless produced a useful work on an historically neglected battalion – despite the fact that it saw service in three of the key battles waged on the Western Front during the Great War.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first three chapters deal with the battalion’s formation, initial training, and its first experiences in trench warfare. Chapter four presents an account of the part the battalion played during the crucial Battle of the Somme during 1916. The next two chapters explore the unit’s participation in the Allied offensives at Arras and Cambrai during 1917. Chapter seven rounds off the analysis with details of the battalion’s disbandment in early 1918; with the British forces suffering from an acute manpower shortage, each division had to disband three battalions, and for the 12th Division this meant axing the 8th Royal Fusiliers. Following on from these chapters, the work contains photographs, some helpful sketch maps and three useful appendices – the battalion’s roll of honour, a list of awards, and a detailed biographical list of the officers that served in the battalion. The work is rounded off with some notes on the sources used by the author.

The work combines a detailed analysis of the battalion’s day-to-day activities on the Western Front with some nice first-hand accounts that bring some welcome colour to the work. The end result is a genuinely insightful exploration of the experience of being in the 8th Battalion the Royal Fusiliers during those climactic months of the Great War – both at the front and in quieter moments behind the line. The work is written in Messenger’s usual clipped and fluent style, rendering it a pleasant read; this also means that the author covers a surprisingly large amount of ground in the mere 90 pages of the main text. All things considered, this work should be a definite read for serious students of the Great War; undoubtedly, through this book Messenger has saved from historical obscurity one of the lesser-known units of the Great War.

### **Editor’s Note**

Like Stephen, I was very impressed with what Charles has achieved given the dearth of sources. I was particularly intrigued – and moved - by the listing of deaths chronologically so you got some idea of the impact of a serious engagement on a battalion – 260 deaths would



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mean the total reconstitution of the battalion – which must have been required two or three times during the war and that probably for most battalions on the Western Front.

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