



G. I. S. Inglis *The Kensington Battalion: Never Lost a Yard of Trench Pen and Sword*, 2010. Price £25. ISBN 1-8488-4247-3

I have had the pleasure and great privilege to see this book in manuscript form for some time, have always been a big fan of it and am delighted at the chance to review it in its final form. Geoff Inglis has been working on 22nd Royal Fusiliers (Kensingtons) for more than twenty years; he co-edited Christopher Stone's letters¹ with Gary Sheffield back in 1989. Now he has given us an excellent addition to any library of battalion histories; the work of a conscientious and thoroughly reliable historian.

Once again a London battalion is blessed with highly literate personnel, a wonderful veterans' magazine ('The Mufti') and an historian who knows how to make good use of this rich material.

Raised in the great recruiting drive of September 1914, 1,100 men signed up in two days, and in another two days a further 1,300 were available to create a second line battalion. The Borough of Kensington went out of its way to let men who signed up together serve together.

The battalion was an intriguing mix of white and blue collar workers, boosted by absorbing an interesting bunch trying to form a 'colonial infantry' battalion that didn't recruit quickly enough.

It went overseas in November 1915, to join 99th Brigade, 2nd Division. We first get the usual descriptions of settling in to army and trench life from this wonderfully literate, and very humorous battalion. It is extraordinary (or perhaps not so extraordinary) how all the early experiences are replicated in almost all battalion histories.

The unit is caught in the ferocious German attack that retook Vimy Ridge in May 1916; is in support for the taking of Delville Wood in July and fights all through August to retain it; at the battle of the Ancre in November 1916 they attack Redan Ridge. Here their 'most famous' soldier, H. H. Monro (the short story writer, 'Saki') died. He had rushed back from a hospital sick bed to be 'in the show' and was killed by a sniper.

They had a torrid time in 1917, being heavily engaged at Miraumont in February, at Oppy Wood in April and May and at Cambrai in November and December. Sadly in February 1918, during the great 'downsizing' of the BEF, the battalion, weak in numbers, was selected for disbandment.

The remarkably active Old Comrade's Association published an excellent journal full of the reminiscences that inform this splendid book. It kept going until 1978. I strongly recommend this, even if you have no particular 'thing' for unit histories of the Great War, as an all round thoroughly good read. Share the experiences of the French-Canadian Destrubé brothers, natural comedians and very good soldiers. Watch them toss up to see who gets a lance-

¹ GD Sheffield, G Inglis (eds) *From Vimy Ridge to the Rhine: The Great War Letters of Christopher Stone*, D.S.O., M.C., 1989



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corporal's stripe (it goes to the loser!) and share the sadness of them both being killed in action just as they are about to go for officer training.

John Lee