

One Man and His War

by Eve Bendall

[Frederick William Duffield Bendall, known as Fritz to the family, was born in Manningtree Essex 6th July 1882. He graduated from Selwyn College Cambridge in 1904 and then taught at Bridlington School in Yorkshire, where he took charge of the OTC. In September 1914 he was given command of the newly formed 2/3rd London Regiment, which a young Richard Agius was about to join, having left Downside in the July and now caught up in the call to arms that his brothers were already engaged in. Richard was 18 on 19 Sep 1914.]

On August 4, 1914, war was declared against Germany. The British Army now needed urgent expansion and the first group to whom the War Office looked was the Territorials; within two weeks, a daily newspaper was printing the names of many Territorial Officers who had volunteered.

'Captain Bendall, commanding officer Bridlington Grammar School OTC, with the permission of his headmaster, has applied for and obtained more important work in the Army, being gazetted temporary Lieutenant Colonel.'

Fritz received a letter from the City of London Territorial Association -

'Sir

You have been recommended to take Command of the 3rd (Reserve) Bn, City of London (Royal Fusiliers)

On a Sunday in early September, Fritz wrote to his aunts from the Great Northern Hotel, Kings Cross Station, London:

Dear Aunts

I am up here in command of 1000 men - the battalion is called the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion Royal Fusiliers. I am staying at this hotel because it is near the depot - and at present the men go home each night - but we shall soon move out to a camp of some kind - if possible in a large house as tents are cold for the winter. I am pretty busy with various things - have a nice lot of officers. The men drill in Regents Park - all London is full of drill parties working hard all day. I am only Captain at present as I am not yet "gazetted" but hope to be either Major or Lieut Colonel when the gazette appears.

Best love to both - Fritz.

[This was probably just before Richard joined the Battalion - Ed]

It must have been quite a change from a schoolboy OTC. There is nothing more recorded for nearly 3 months, during which time, presumably, the battalion continued training - there is one press photo of the battalion parading through the streets.

However, clearly, by December, they were considered ready for some form of active service. The strategy used by the War Office was to move units of the Regular Army from various non-combatant places in the Empire, to fight in France, replacing them with units from the 'new' Territorial Army.

On December 15 Fritz sent a telegram to Ipswich

" Warned for Malta next Tuesday probably home weekend will wire when further news" . On Dec 23 another wire was sent 'Boat Neuralia sails tonight'. The voyage was punctuated by letters and telegrams; on Dec 28 a wire from Gibraltar 'All well' and on Dec 31 from Malta 'Arrived safely'.

[Arthur's letter of 3rd Jan 1915 talks about the 1/3rds leaving Malta, having been replaced by the 2/3rds, and how the Neuralia was in the convoy with them.]

Letters gave more detail though they took a while to arrive. Fritz began a letter from the ship

Dearest Mater

This is begun on Xmas Day in the middle of the Bay. I am very comfortably quartered - one of the State cabins with 2 beds and a private bathroom etc electric lights and fans all over the place. The boat is one of the British Indian Mail Co and the 4th Officer is an old Bridlington boy. We got on board at 3 on Wednesday and were off by 4:30 - I have 600 men on board and 250 on the Avon - being the middle battn we had to split up. There are 1500 men on board and I suppose 200 or 300 of crew - lascars and stokers - the boat is about 10,000 tons and only 2 years old - beautifully fitted up - she and a lot of other BMs were taken for trooping when the war began. I have been quite fit all the time a slightly 'swimmy head' being the only sign at all. The other Cot is not very well and only appears at intervals. Only half the officers were at breakfast this morning, but most of them are recovering now and I expect they will be alright by the time we pass Cape Finisterre We have all lascar waiters and attendants - whom I don't like very much.

The men were pretty wretched at first but have mostly bucked up now - tho' I don't think it will be much of a Xmas for them. The TFA sent a plum pudding for each man - I am keeping ours till we get to Malta.

I had a letter from Marie on Monday; I had written her one as what I said to her on Saturday I said very badly owing to nervousness. She said frankly that she could say nothing to help me - and that she wanted me to wait 1 ½ years before trying again. She says ' Love is a miracle - which hasn't happened to her yet - tho' she hopes it will.' I'm afraid she is looking too high. I don't want her to mistake pity for love and say 'yes' from pity - but in her case there is a danger of her looking for too big a thing. I don't think my love for her is a miracle; I feel it is the right sort - but I daresay it is not one of the great things of history - and if she is waiting for something like that she may never find it..

[Fritz had fallen in love with Marie while teaching at Bridlington School. She was the younger sister of two boys he had taught in the school and lived nearby. At this point he was 34 and she 20 so her father thought the relationship unsuitable. More to follow! - Ed]

Boxing Day 12 noon: Much warmer - am writing this with the portholes open and a nice bright day - we are halfway down the Spanish coast - and shall pass Gib sometime tomorrow. There are all kinds of rumours as to what we shall do in Malta Some say the Front in 4 months Others that we shall supply drafts for the 1st Battn (the Regular Battalion in France) I think the latter is unlikely as my officers are so young and inexperienced. We get wireless news from the Eiffel Tower and have a paper each day. Had quite a festive Xmas - saloon decorated and the band (ours) played nobly nearly all day longSundayposting this now in case we put in at Gib - fondest love Fritz.

[The Battalion arrived in Malta on 31st December. Arthur and Alfred in the 1/3rds departed on 3rd January. We have no record of any meeting of all 3 brothers...and their sisters. - Ed]

Jan 1st Dearest Mater -we got to our destination at 11.0 this morning and were in the harbour at 1.0.. . I have seen a good many officers of the old battns - they are all very fit - and they say this place is quite nice for the next 3 months; the first hour we were besieged by bum boats of every shape and size with everything to sell from cigarettes to underclothes. A huge official envelope came up for me - I thought it was from the Governor, but it was only a barbers touting circular written in the quaintest English!

Dearest Mater - I write on Sunday Jan 3 from the barracks; this island is indescribable - to begin with the chief populace is children and goats - Then outside the towns every inch is cultivated - tiny fields - stone walls - and they get 3 crops a yearWe are up on a hill - we marched 7 miles here and have a magnificent view.

The barracks are the best in the British Empire- the officers quarters are a palace - and my house, if I cared to use it, is immense but I have take two rooms in the 'palace' instead. The quarters are in a square with an open court in the middle -open porticoes below and above and open verandahs all round above and covered with bougainvilleato the left, 5 miles away I see the sea - to the right a deep valley and the old capital ,Notabile, its walled town and hugh cathedral just opposite our barracks. I lunched with Lord Lucan, the brigadier, on Friday - he was very nice. I am going to call on Sir Leslie Rundle, the Governor tomorrow or Tuesday.

[These are the officers quarters at Imtarfa that Arthur and Alfred had rooms in. Now a school. - Ed]

Dearest Mater Jan 12;

I had a ripping budget of letters by the mail yesterday - the only ones I have had so far as mails are not at all regular - occasionally a few letters through Italy but mostly by sea once a week. I am beginning to be quite proud of the men they are jolly good. I have to look after the adjutant a good deal, as he is learning everything. Lord Lucan motors up every other day and has not found much wrong so far.

We got some papers of Jan 2 yesterday - and of course we get Reuters wires sent to the club and they telephone them to my office as a rule. I don't know when we shall be considered fit - but gather that it may be about April - then it only depends on who comes to relieve us ; one of my men who developed diphtheria has died - it was the third time he had it.- best love and wishes and many thoughts of the home I have always loved - Fritz.

Dearest Mater -

no special news - the flowers are lovely -beautiful violets and roses in my room every day - I enclose a snap of Prance and one of the Serg Instr. Love to everyone - tell them to write to me - Fritz

Dearest Belle [Fritz's sister]

Many thanks for your letter. This is a weird place -all rocks and wind - but buildings and flowers are fine; no milk except tinned and only frozen meat. I write this from the club at Valetta -the only Englishy town -we come in on Thursdays and Saturday afternoons as a rule; the place makes one rather homesick in unoccupied moments -which luckily are few in number. I don't know when or where we shall go from here - it depends what is happening in April or May or thereabouts; write as often as you can - best love, your loving brother. Fritz.

There-was little fresh news during February Fritz played some golf and continued to be pleased with 'his' men. At one point he was given a car - a Do Deon and despite never having driven 'set off for Valetta after 20 minutes coaching from Prance'. The war seemed to be coming nearer - he heard from his mother that Colchester had been bombed and 'did you see that the 1st/3rd got it at Neuve Chapell - 7 officers wounded and 4 killed.'

[The action that we heard all about in March 1915 from Arthur - Ed].

The Governor dined with the officers in the barracks and the evening went well.

On April 8th Fritz sent a telegram to his mother 'Leg worse- tell Nafferton' this was obviously some pre- arranged code to explain where he was going - and Nafferton was Marie's home.

A letter followed also dated 8th

'Dearest Mater -

have got an hour from the transport to write letters to you and Marie. Our orders only came this morning at 2.10am and I have been very busy ever since. We have a horrid old boat - but shall only be 3 days - I will write when we land - only 1 battalion was ordered from the brigade and mine was chosen, which is a great compliment. The Governor saw us embark and was extremely nice and so was Lord Lucan and Lady Lucan; Address after this - 'Malta, please forward' the PO will do the rest. We ought with luck to see great things - I am almost looking forward to it - and hope that if I have a chance I shall be helped to take it and make the most of it. I shan't have time for many letters now so you must pass mine round. I think God will bring me back - your loving son.....Fritz

Moving to Khartoum

A telegram was sent from Port Said on April 13 'All well'. This would at least have told his mother the direction in which he was heading; it was followed by an undated letter, written in pencil

Dearest Mater -

I am writing a line from Suez; we came through the Canal last night and the day before - and had a very interesting an at times exciting journey - we called at Alexandria and Port Said before. Our destination is spelt by - 1st letter of your Christian name - 6th letter of your second daughters ditto - 2nd letter of your Christian name - ' and so on until he had spelt KHARTOUM. 'I cant write it or the censor would cross it out; we are all fit and well and ready for anything Address letters Egypt - it is going to be very hot I expect - we are all very proud to have been chosen from our Brigade - and Lord Lucan said some very nice things about the battalion - pilot going-I must stop - your loving son.....Fritz

19.4.15 Dearest Mater

Just a line - we are off to Khartoum tomorrow - ½ battalion went yesterday. We were entertained at the club yesterday. It is very hot but far hotter in Khartoum - no-one goes out between 9 and 4 I hear. The Sirdar (British Commander of Egyptian Army) is going to see me on the journey - I have to run a Camel Corps of 100 camels and men. Get a good map of the Sudan and you will know the places. I leave 2 Company at Sinkat and a party at Atbara -and the rest go to Khartoum. Men all fit so far and seem to stand the heat well - it is quite a healthy place as the heat is dry - but it is i think very trying. This is quite a good hotel - and the Red Sea is a weird place - we had a fair view of Sinai. I am dining with the OC of the district to-night.

Best love - address simply Egypt - Fritz

27.4.15 Dearest Mater -

I never thought when I told you to read 'With Kitchener to Khartoum' that I would ever see these places - much less that I should ever be OC British troops here. I had to wait 3 days in Port Sudan and was very kindly treated there - and here it is the same. All the men have been up to call and we have heaps of invitations. Most of the ladies have just gone away for the hot weather. There are 350 or 400 officials in Khartoum and others (mostly Oxford men) all over the Sudan. Khartoum is fairly English - good houses and fine streets with electric light - but over the river Omdurman is essentially Sudanese - and men are only allowed there in groups of 4 which must not separate.

The 7th Manchester - whom we relieved- were here for 6 months - but it was in the cool weather. I don't know how long we shall stay - it is an expensive job moving troops.

It is hot - average 102 or 103 in the shade - but very dry heat -one sweats enormously but it dries up in no time - drinks profoundly -and keep quiet in the middle of the day. After a bath there is no need for a towel - you put on a shirt and are dry in 3-4 minutes. The gardens are quite good - but they have little ditches which are kept full of water from the Blue Nile. The tennis lawns are grass or mud. There are no mosquitoes luckily - but heaps of loathsome tho harmless crawling things..... I have 2 horses - one from Malta and an Arab stallion from here which suits me very well.- but it is too hot to ride often. One jogs about the barracks and to the club on a donkey - mine is a big black one - and little a black boy - Bishir who runs behind. I think a lot of home and Nafferton - I hope it wont be 12 months before I see them both again but it is in God's hands -very best love Fritz

Sinkat 11.5.15 Dearest Mater -

A diary of an interesting week; Wed last - dined at Sirdar's palace; am to stay with him 3 days. Thurs Ordinary routine in barracks -tennis with Adjutant General; Friday - ditto. Sat am -work; pm tennis with Col Pearson - dinner in mess. Rode to station at 9.30pm for State arrival of Sirdar with escort and suite - on board his train at 10.30 - slept v badly - too hot

B'fast near Atbara - waited 2 hours for English mail coming from Cairo. Visited detachment of 40 men under Capt Clarke - all well. Went on at 12.0 -still hot - coaches v good and Reuters news for Sirdar at most stations. About midnight train left our coaches at summit at Erkowit. Slept well.

Sunday - up at 5 to see Sirdar's camel train load up his baggage - 100 camels - local natives - fuzzies - to load. Introduced to local Sheikh. Sirdar left in car at 6.30 - motor trolley for me and Fowler (my man) back to Sinkat - jolly ride in open car on line; got here about 7; found Simmonds and B company(200) in good camp by railside - 3000 ft up beautifully cool.

After lunch took trolley 15 miles for shoot - got 2 dig-digs (small gazelle) 3 hares and 2 pigeons - all for pot as well as shooting. Today -up dry watercourse for pigeon -shot badly but got 3. Go to Erkowit for 3 days on Thurs - Khartoum Sunday ; best love to all -Fritz

The war seemed to be receding again and clearly he was enjoying himself.

[To be continued... Ed]

The 7th Manchesters (who they relieved) have on their website...

On the 10th **September** 1914, the battalion sailed from Southampton in a convoy of fourteen transport ships for Egypt, part of the first Territorial division to leave England on Active Service. Passing Malta on the 21st September, (passing the regulars going the other way the next day) arriving Alexandria, 25th September.

On arrival, half of B company stayed on board and proceeded to Cyprus, where they stayed until the battalion departed to the Dardanelles. **The main part of the battalion then went to Port Said and sailed down the Canal to Port Sudan on the 30th September, a half company was left there to garrison the port. the remainder traveled on by train to Khartoum and relieved the Suffolks there.**

In the Sudan in the next three months, the battalion were allotted many different tasks including guarding the railways (with armoured trains), occupying hill stations and even a half company being transformed into the British Camel Corps.

In **April** 1915 the battalion moved, after a pleasant stay, from Khartoum to Cairo. On the 3rd May the battalion embarked aboard the Ionian and on the 7th **May** they arrived at V beach Gallipoli as part of the 127th Brigade, 42nd (East Lancs) Division.

[So we may assume the 2/3rds were doing similar work. - Ed]