



Saturday August 8<sup>th</sup> 1914 (4 days after war declared)

## SCENES AT THE BARRACKS

### 1600 Men Come to Ashton to report themselves. THRILLING INCIDENTS

#### The March and the Departure from Charlesworth Station.

Since the Reservists were called upon on Tuesday to proceed to their various depots, the scene on the way to the Ashton Barracks, which is the recruiting depot for the Manchester Regiments, have been of an animated character. There has been a constant stream of reservists along Mossley Road, some accompanied by their wives and others by their mothers and friend; some cheerful and joyous at the prospect of active service, some serious of face as they reflected on what their departure meant to those left behind. At the locked gates of the barracks a dense crowd assembled. Over 1600 men had been called up and the response was surprising. Men, who had previously served in the "Manchesters" came from all parts of the country and a 'Reporter' representative had the privilege of witnessing the arrival of men who had come from France, from Holland and in one case Germany. This reservist stated that as he crossed over the frontier of Germany he saw the German army mobilised and the sun glistening on their accoutrements and on the artillery. The war spirit, he said, was obviously in the air and Germany meant business.

Six out of every ten were men who had served in the South African War. There was to be seen the successful business man as well as the ne'er do well who had obviously spent his allowance in liquid refreshment but in the majority of cases the arrivals were of the working class. About them all an indefinable something that always stamps a man who has been a soldier; a squaring of the shoulders, the evenness of the step or the poise of the head-all these little characteristics pointed to the military training received at some time. Old comrades met and were soon plunged into animated reminiscences of other days. The scene was not without its humorous side for Tommy Atkins is generally speaking-especially when he sees a chance of active service,-full of high spirits. A Reservists broad of shoulder and erect pushed his way through the dense crowd to the little gate at the side. The Corporal in charge addressed him, "are you a reservist?". The reply was instantly forthcoming in a rich brogue, "Faith an' is it ye? How dare ye spake so familiar to yes superior officer. Don't ye know I'm Lord Kitchener?", and with a twinkle in his eye the 'distinguished' arrival passed within where he soon was the centre of a merry group. Another Reservist came up slightly the worse for his journey. He kind of felt his way to the gate. "Is this Ashton (hic)?" he murmured, "I've come from Belgium!". "Come inside", said the Corporal, "You'll soon be back". The staff were constantly engaged with anxious inquirers and the invariable formula was, "Is it your husband you want to see or your son? Then come inside".

#### THE FIRST CONTINGENT LEAVE

The scenes on Wednesday night before the first detachment of 200 men left the Depot supposedly for the Curragh, almost beggared description. No true marching order could be kept because the wives and relatives clung to their husbands and sons in a passionate agony of farewell. The reality of warfare seemed then to clutch one's heartstrings and against the triumphant music of the band there rose the wail of the separated, subdued and no doubt, but I was there all the same.

An incident occurred in the Depot on Wednesday night which is an excellent testimony to the spirit and enthusiasms of the Reservists. As is perhaps known, once the Reservists entered the barracks; he was not supposed to leave it until he left with his detachment. However 140 men appealed to the Commanding Officer on Wednesday night to be allowed to go out for a short time. The C O addressed them "Will you play the game boys and promise to come back at seven o'clock?" "Make it an hour later Sir", said a number. "All right then, eight o'clock". It is pleasing to say that when eight o'clock arrived there was not a single absentee of the 140.

The Reporter representative was permitted to witness the rapidity with which the mobilisation proceeded. So exhaustive were the arrangements that the men who had charge of the stores were capable of equipping 2000 men with everything required in twelve hours providing that the doctors could pass them at that rate. As each Reservist came in, he went to the table where he gave his name, and the address of his dependents. A wise proviso was noticeable here. Every man was allowed to say how much money he required to be sent to his family or dependants at once for temporary assistance and whatever amount he indicated would be sent at once by the Government and stopped out of his pay at a certain proportion rate. The Reservist was then given a card and told to make his way to the doctors for medical

examination.

No less than six doctors, including Dr Price, Dr Hughes, Dr Bleasdale, Dr Morison, Dr Mamourian and Dr Graeme Hamilton were engaged in examining the men and were favourably impressed at the physique and general bearing of the Reservists. There were very few rejected-about 17 out of 1400 examined up to Thursday afternoon. After being examined the men made their way to the stores which contained nearly £160,000 worth of equipment and inside an extraordinary spectacle was seen. As fast as the men presented their tickets, they were fitted with exactly the right size of boots, clothes, hats and the full equipment down to a razor and a knife and fork. We were shown the arrangements whereby the stores was divided into thousands of compartments and each containing the necessary boots etc for the Reservists. In only a few cases had the men to change anything and then it was mainly due to the hat being too tight or the tunic failing to cover all the adipose tissue which civilian life had permitted the Reservist to develop. As fast as the men were dressed they were inspected by the commanding officer and those who were to depart first attacked their kits in readiness near the entrance. The open square was alive with men clad in familiar khaki and the main theme of conversation was, of course, the war, and the attitude of the Kaiser.

As we left the Barracks the Reservists were still coming up and a section of the crowd was still waiting, waiting for what they did not know. Peering with curiosity through the locked gates, whilst here and there weeping women consoled each other.

#### THURSDAY'S SCENES

On Thursday night 500 men left the Barracks about 9 o'clock headed by the Regimental Band for Charlestown Railway Station where they entrained and left about 9.30pm for the Curragh (At least that was the general opinion).

The news that the Reservists were to leave had become well noised abroad with the result that as the time approached for the men to leave the depot the road from the Barracks was crowded with thousands of people. Some had been there from the early afternoon but as it grew dusk the crowd gained enormous dimensions. The road in front of the depot was practically impassable and Superintendent Yates of the county police and several of his men had to clear a way so that the men could march out. To the tune of 'Marching through Georgia,' the men marched briskly through the gates amid the cheers of their comrades who have yet to follow. Keeping the crowd well in front the police kept the road clear for the troops and as they came past Darnton Road the large crowd there broke into a deafening cheers and waved flags of all descriptions. Falling in step instinctively to the swing of the popular airs over a thousand youths marched in front of the band. All along Mossley Road and Katherine Street the huge crowd surged and as the soldiers marched through the dense masses assembled on the footpaths to the tunes of 'Fall in and Fallow Me,' and 'I wonder if You'll Miss Me', sometimes the crowd joined in lustily in the choruses. As on the previous night, no true marching order could be maintained. Wives clung to their husbands in grim despair, and many of them were sobbing convulsively, and holding up their children. As the troops neared the Town Hall the sight of Katherine Street was like a sea of humanity. Nothing but heads swaying to and fro and waving sticks and handkerchiefs was to be seen. The police were adroitly disposed of by the crowd which had preceded the Reservists and left a clear space for the men to march through. Outside the station a large ring had been formed, the police having to exert all their powers of persuasion to keep the crowd back. The band went to one side and played 'Auld Lang Syne', as amidst the hundreds of cheers and plaudit's the men entered the hall. They were obviously highly delighted at the warmth of their farewell and some raised their caps on their rifles and waved them to the throng. As the last of the men entered the band struck up the National Anthem and heads were bared as the solemn strains were sung.

Suddenly there was a commotion. A woman burst through the crowd and screamed hysterically as someone attempted to stop her. "Let me go, let me go to my husband!". And she darted along the passage to the departure platform with the fleetness of fear and despair. The train was in waiting and the carriages were soon filled. "Where are we going to?". "I really don't know", replied the officer, "No one knows. But I think it is the Curragh.". Small groups of women and men congregated around the doors of the carriages, talking feverishly, as to delay the parting. Then the whistle blew and the band struck up "Auld Lang Syne" and amid cheers and the waving of hands the train steamed off. A woman fell into a companion's arms...A voice from a carriage called out "look after the wife". In the distance the gradually diminishing red light on the rear of the train twinkled wickedly.