

CHAPTER ONE

Why I joined the Territorial Force in 1912

Prior to the '14/18 war, as a reader of the Sunday Chronicle, I read the *Awake England* articles by a trio of writers — Lord Roberts, Admiral Fisher and an ex-regimental soldier and socialist writer and M. P. whose name I forget. I read books they suggested e.g. Erskine Childer's *Riddle of the Sands*, Van Bern-Hardi's *Der Tag*¹, and others, and was convinced of the build-up to war and that the youth of Britain should 'Be Prepared'.

To this was added my hate for the only German I had contacted - a partner called Hirsch in the firm Kleine Fireproof Flooring Co. Ltd., for whom my employers Hutchison and Weston, Builders' Merchants of Dale Street, Liverpool were agents. Visiting principals of other firms we represented, would tender their cards at the enquiry desk and await their call into the private office, but not so our German, Hirsch. His was a stiff soldier-figure with the 'Kaiser' moustache — arrogant, ruthless, mannerless. He would crash into the office, lift the counter-flap and walk straight into our principal's office — unheralded and unsung — and we in the outer office would hear his staccato stentorous broken English, apparently 'laying down the law'. Our Mr Hutchison, an ex-army officer, was Colonel commanding a Territorial Army Artillery Unit in Harrowby Road, Birkenhead. We wondered how he took it. I hated this German and was determined to get my own back.

I joined the Territorial Army when I was twenty-one, on 13th February 1912. I had to wait till I was 'of age'. When I joined up, my father kicked me out. I went into 'digs' with the aunt of George Pickles who was in the 6th Liverpool Rifles, First Line Battalion.

My father kicked me out because he was a socialist and believed wars were engineered by the capitalists. No son of his would serve in any army to keep the country safe for them. Labour was, he believed, so organised that every man would 'down tools' and prevent any future war. So, I was kicked out, but it was one of the best things to happen in my life. I served three years and one month to the day, 23rd March 1918, in France and Belgium and never had a scratch, in spite of eighteen months in the Ypres Salient and the rest on the Somme-Festubert area. Had I joined later, would my history have been so packed with Good Luck? Ah! That is the question. I would certainly never have gone to France as a Lance Corporal, been a Company Sergeant Major and missed the last battles of 1918, by being home at No.8 Officer Cadet Battalion, Lichfield, getting my commission in January 1919, prior to being demobilised.

In the 1930's, I was agent for German, Czech and Austrian firms in display advertising, when I had an inside view of history repeating itself. Maybe it will even again happen.

My father lived to be bombed out by the Germans in 1940.

¹ Similar to Hitler's *Mein Kampf*