

## THE BRITISH OPERATIONS AT ANWERP

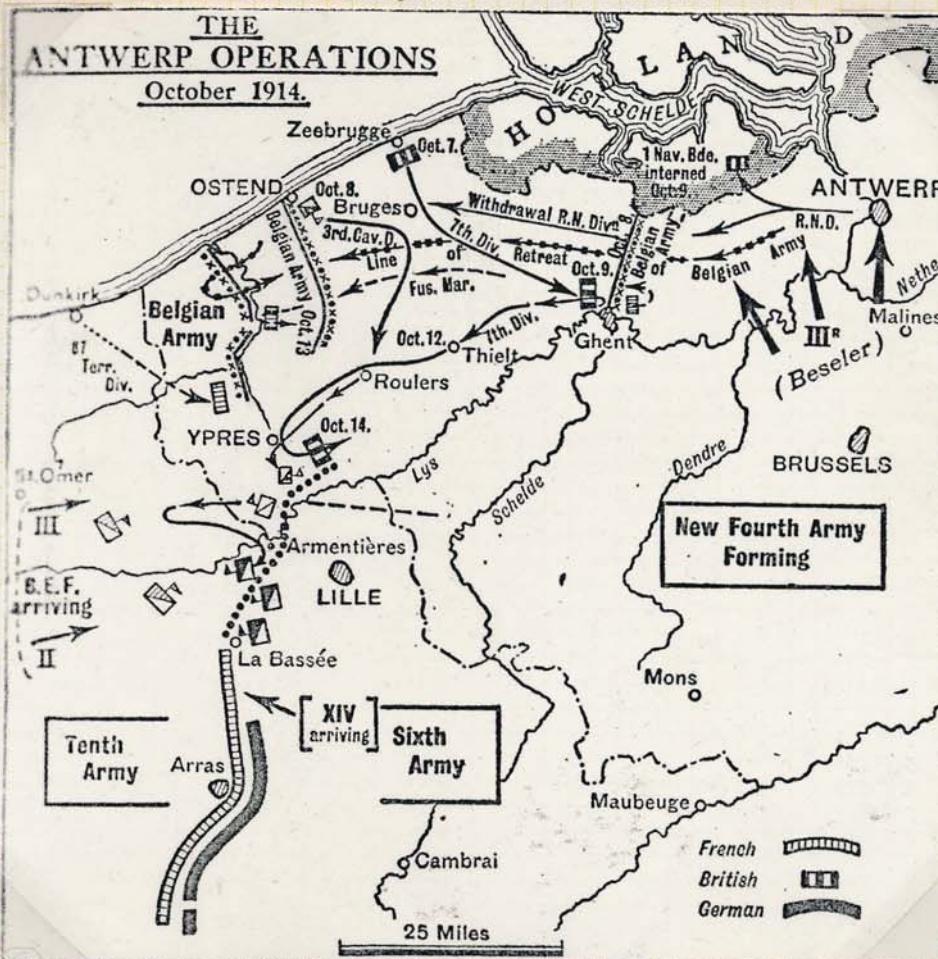
IN OCTOBER 1914

### THE BACKGROUND TO THE EXPEDITION - 2ND TO 15TH OCTOBER 1914

At the beginning of October 1914 much of Belgium was in German hands and the Belgian Army (six divisions) was concentrated in the fortified city of Antwerp. The French (including British) and German armies were facing each other on the line of the River Aisne - 130 miles south of Ostend and Antwerp. These armies were beginning to move northwards in what was to become 'the race to the sea'. Belgium asked for British assistance with the defence of Antwerp while the Belgian Field Army was withdrawn to Ostend, from where they could link up with the Allied line which was being extended from the south.

The only British troops immediately available were a Marine Brigade which was patrolling from Dunkirk, and two Naval Brigades - recently recruited and training in Kent for the defence of naval bases. These were immediately sent to Antwerp, organised as the Royal Naval Division and were followed by newly formed 7th Infantry Division (comprising battalions withdrawn from overseas garrisons) and 3rd Cavalry Division to cover the line of the Belgian withdrawal from Antwerp to Ostend.

These British operations enabled the Belgians to hold on longer at Antwerp before withdrawing, and then allowed them to achieve a safe withdrawal to the Ostend area and thus play an important role in the coastal sector of the allied line for the rest of the war. These operations also held up large numbers of German troops sufficiently long to enable the British Expeditionary Force to be transferred from the Aisne front to the Ypres area before a German breakthrough could be effected there.



The Royal Naval Division, 7th Infantry Division and 3rd Cavalry Division did not form part of the British Expeditionary Force during the Antwerp operations, and postal arrangements differed considerably from the B.E.F. They were not accompanied by army post offices, and so made use of the Belgian civil mails. On arrival in London such mail was postmarked with "PAID" postmarks to avoid possibilities of being surcharged as unpaid Belgian civilian mail. Most of the mail shows no evidence of unit censorship, but passed through the British censorship in London, being stamped with a circular mark "P.C." (= Passed censor, or, more likely, Postal Censor).

# THE BRITISH OPERATIONS AT ANTWERP

IN OCTOBER 1914

## THE ROYAL NAVAL DIVISION IN ANTWERP

The Royal Marine Brigade arrived in Antwerp on 3rd October, followed on the 6th by 1st and 2nd Naval Brigades. On the evening of 6th October, the Royal Naval Division withdrew from the area between the outer and inner defences to the line of the inner forts (the forts themselves being occupied by Belgian garrison troops). At 5pm on 8th October the Division received orders to withdraw from Antwerp, the Belgian Field Army having by then been safely evacuated towards Ostend. The orders did not reach 1st Naval Brigade until it was 10pm before that Brigade withdrew. Most of the Division's time in Antwerp was spent in improving the inner defences. The outer defences (about 8 miles further out) were already in German hands.

Two cards from members of the 2nd Naval Brigade posted on 6th October - the day of arrival. By mid-day the next day the post offices were closed. The mail was received in London on 7th October, but was apparently held up for a week for security.



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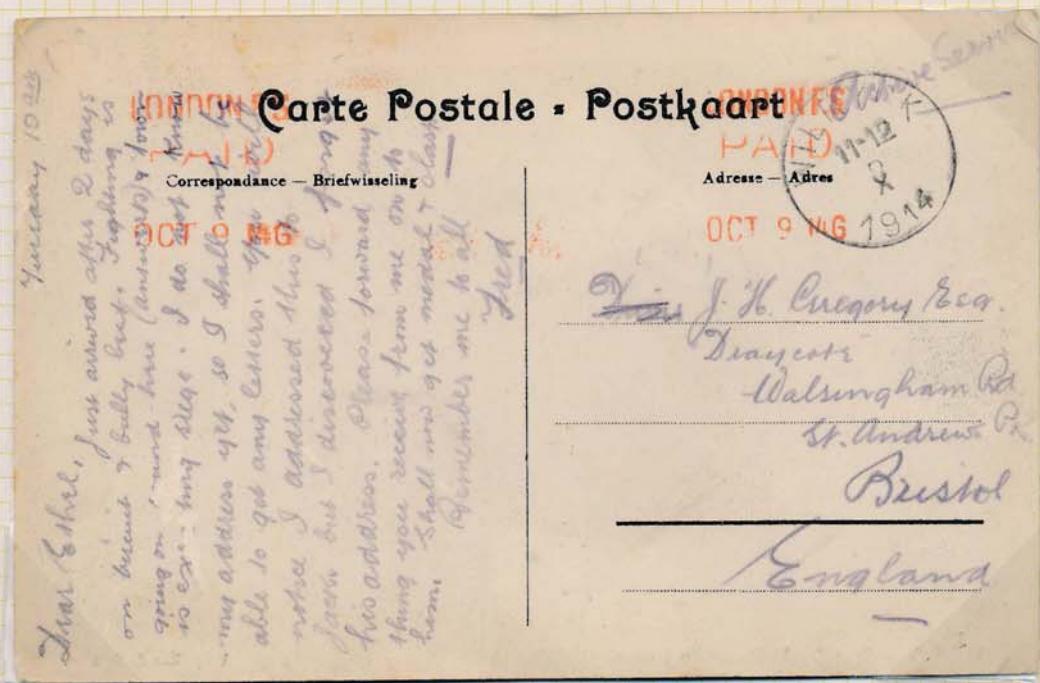
2ND ROYAL NAVAL BRIGADE - WILRYCK

The 2nd Brigade arrived at Antwerp on Tuesday morning, 6th October 1914, and immediately marched to the south of the city - into trenches in front of Forts 6 and 7 of the inner defences completed in 1869. This area was close to the town of Wilryck.

Postcard at Wilryck dated Tuesday 10 am, presumably from a member of the Brigade "Just arrived," Postmarked at WILRYCK 11-12 (AM)

9-X-14 (perhaps figure 6 inverted?); LONDON F.S. PAID postmarked OCT 9 14 on arrival.

Orders were issued in the evening of Thursday 8th October to withdraw, and this was effected safely, arriving at Dover on 11th October.



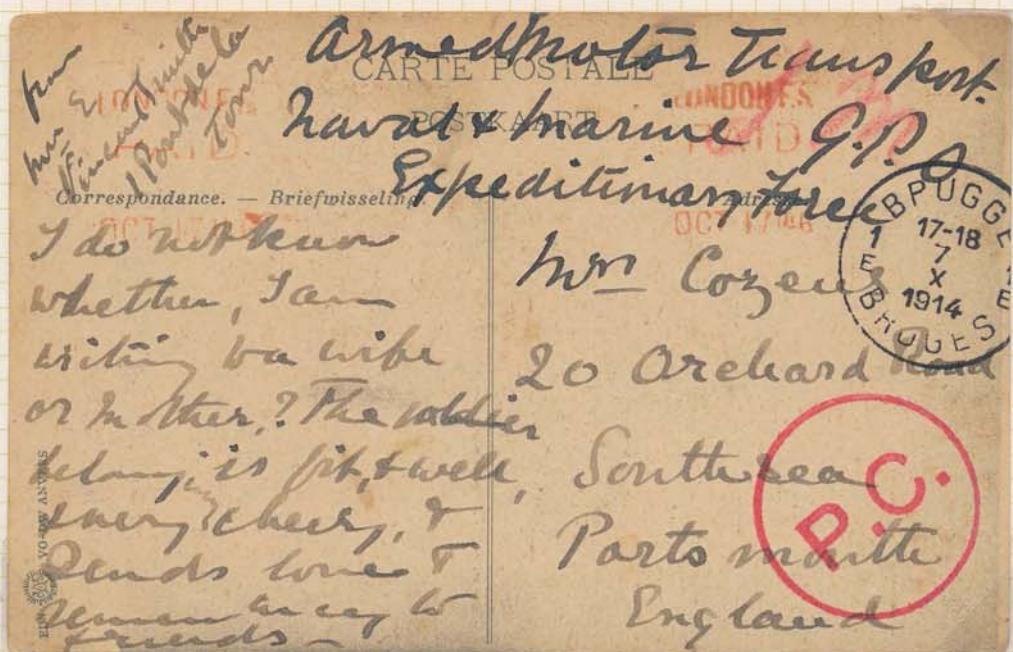
THE BRITISH OPERATIONS AT ANTWERP

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ARMED MOTOR CARS ATTACHED TO THE ROYAL NAVAL DIVISION

The Royal Navy was quicker than the Army to appreciate the use that could be made of motor vehicles, and had a number of armed and armoured cars at Dunkirk. These were ordered to join the Royal Naval Division when the latter was sent to Antwerp.

Postcard written by an English lady at Bruges on behalf of a member of the Naval Armed Motor Transport, who had presumably just passed through Bruges on the way to Antwerp.



THE NAVAL BRIGADE'S ARMED MOTOR CARS.

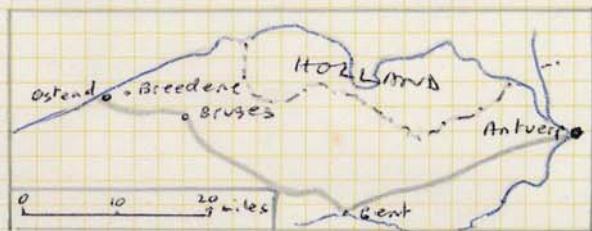
(The Times History of the War)

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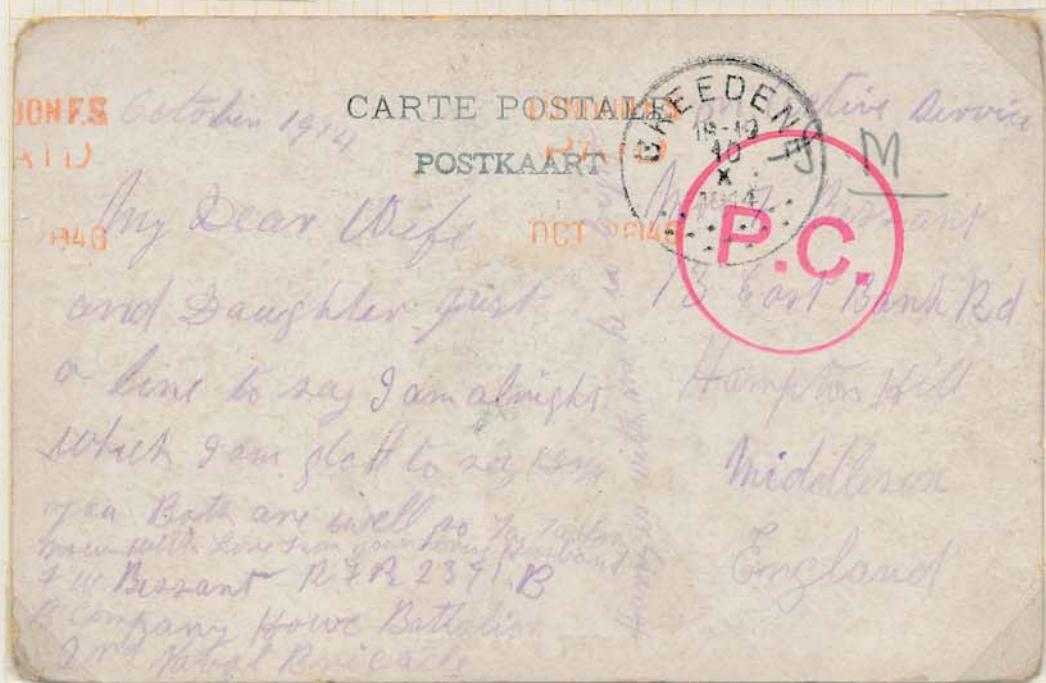
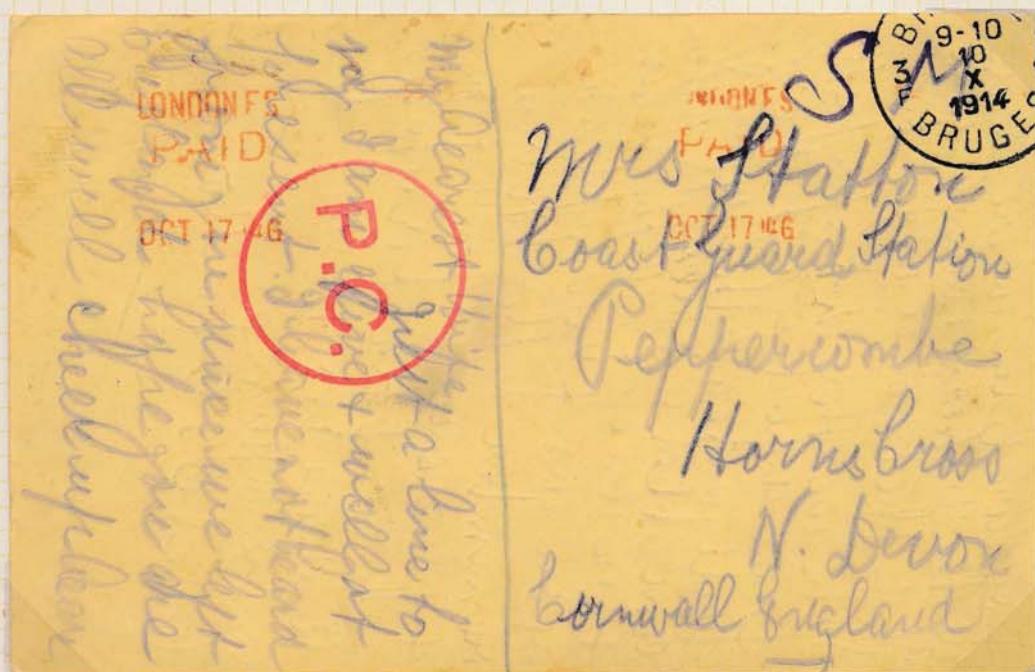
IN OCTOBER 1914

WITHDRAWAL FROM ANTWERP TO OSTEND

At 5pm on 8th October the Royal Naval Division received orders to withdraw from Antwerp, and the greater part of the division commenced withdrawal within an hour. 1st Naval Brigade were delayed by non-receipt of orders. Those who were able to withdraw on time reached the safety of the Ostend area by 10th October, and were back in England by the 12th.



Cards posted at Bruges or Breedene on 10th October.



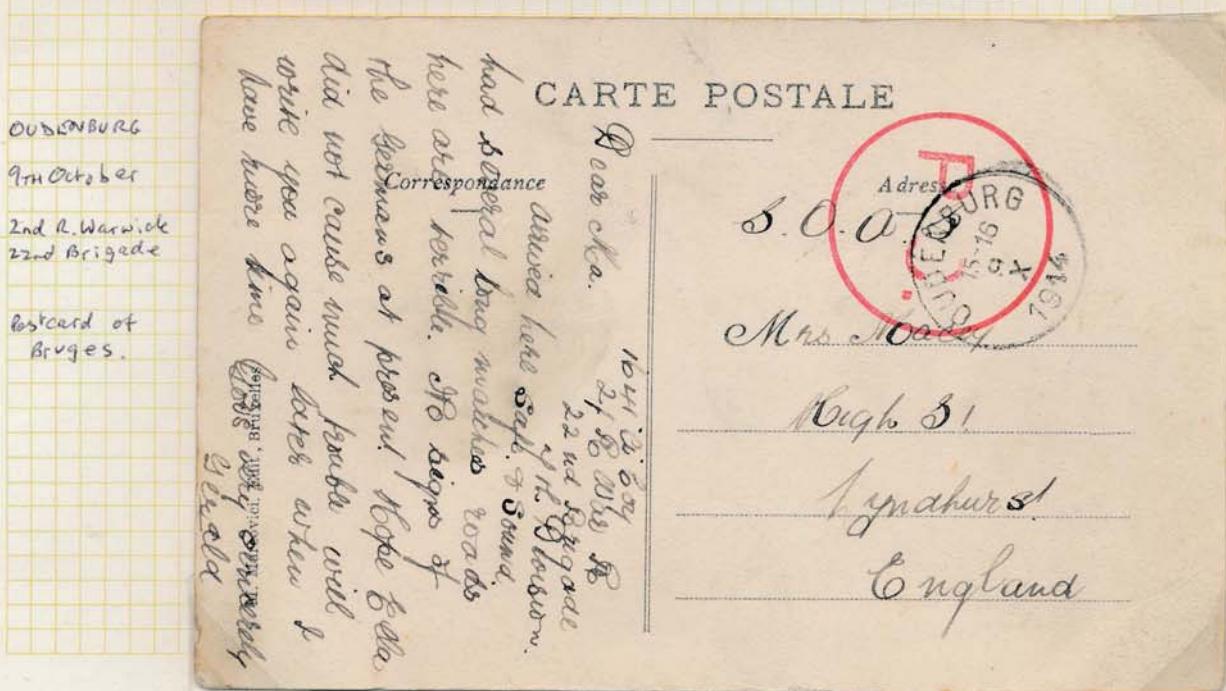
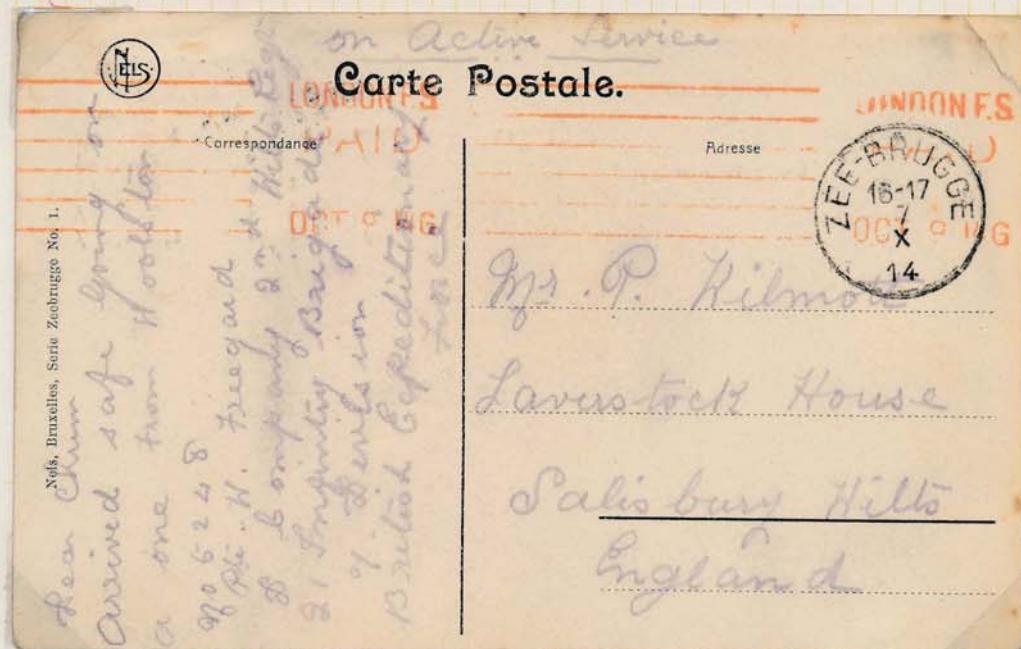
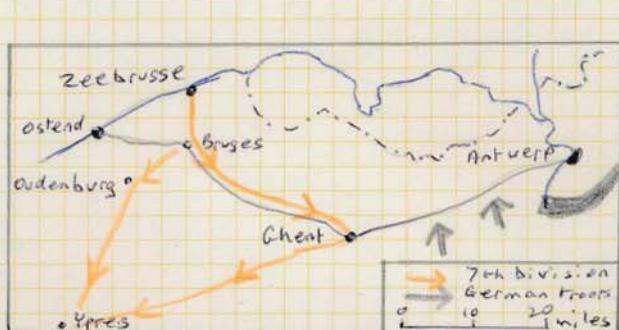
Howe Bn  
2nd Naval Bde

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7TH DIVISION

7th Division (formed from units returning to the United Kingdom from overseas garrisons) landed at Zeebrugge on 7th October, and moved to Ghent to cover the withdrawal of the Belgian Army and the Royal Naval Division from Antwerp to Ostend. After completing this function, 7th Division moved to the Ypres area, where they joined up with the newly arriving B.E.F. transferred from the Aisne.

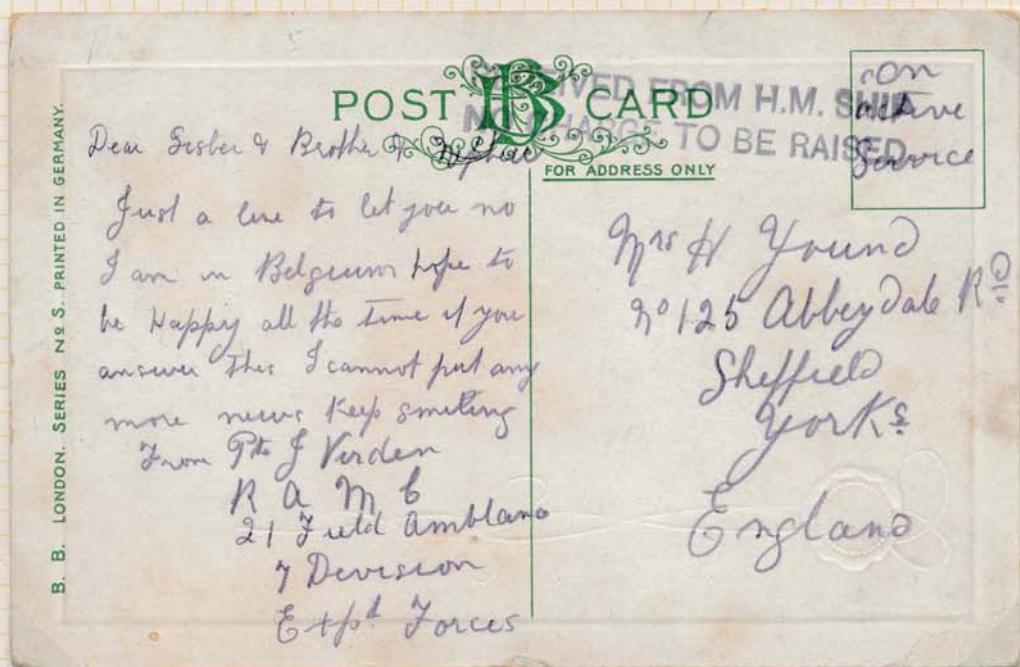


THE BRITISH OPERATIONS AT ANTWERP  
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21ST FIELD AMBULANCE, 7TH DIVISION

7th Division landed at ZEEBRUGGE on 7th October 1914, to support the Royal Naval Division at Antwerp.

Postcard from a private of 21st Field Ambulance, advising of his arrival in Belgium. The card was sent back to England (probably Dover) by warship and bears an arrival handstamp "RECEIVED FROM H.M. SHIP / NO CHARGE TO BE RAISED".

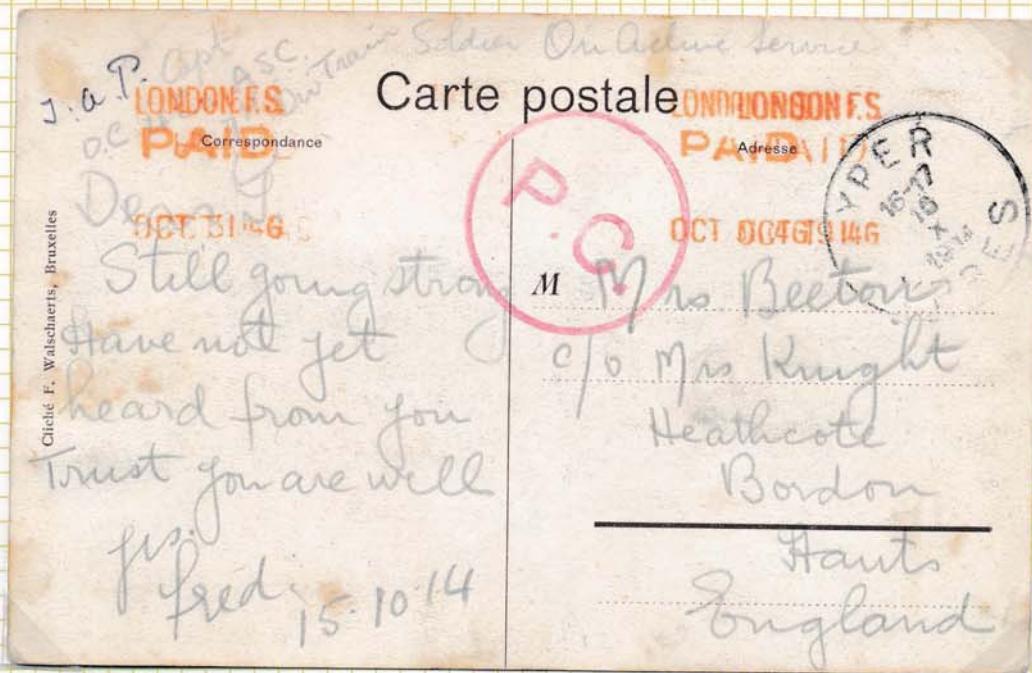


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7TH DIVISION SUPPLY TRAIN - YPRES

After the safe withdrawal of most of the Royal Naval Division to England, and the establishment of the Belgian Army in the coastal sector of unoccupied Belgium, 7th Division moved to Ypres (Ieper) to join up with units of the B.E.F. just arriving from the Marne area.

Picture postcard at Ypres, dated 15.10.14, initialised (as censor) by J.A.P. Q.C. 4 Coy, 7 Div Train. Postmarked YPER/YPROS 16.X.15. Postmarked LONDON R.R. PAID on OCT 9 14 and again on OCT 31 (delayed for security). Also circular P.C. censor stamp applied in London.

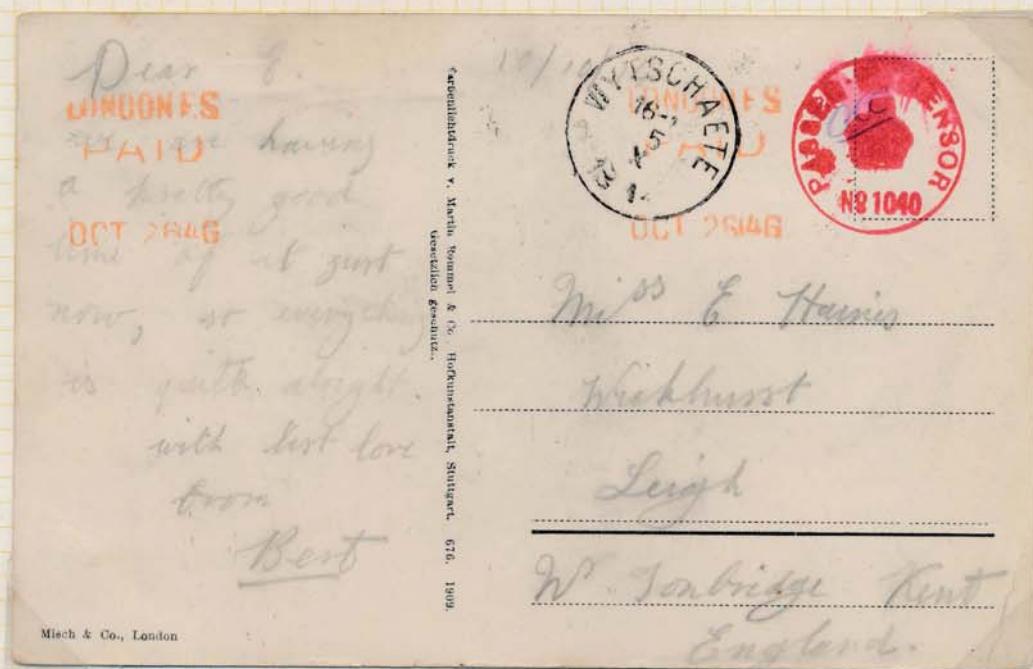
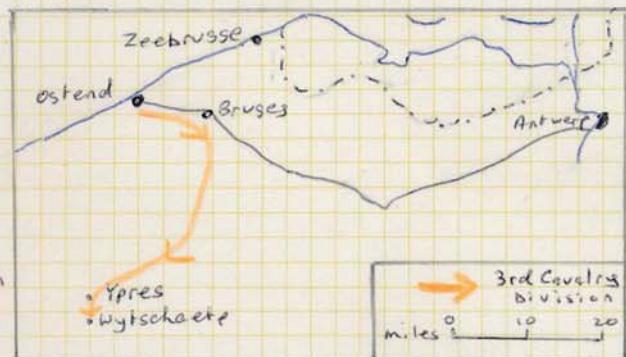


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3rd CAVALRY DIVISION

The recently formed 3rd Cavalry Division followed 7th Division across the Channel, landing at Ostend on 8th October. It moved out to Bruges, and, after the safe withdrawal of the Belgian Army and the greater part of the Royal Naval Division from Antwerp to Ostend, it moved south to the Ypres area. 6th Cavalry Brigade of this division reached Wytschaete on 14th October, meeting up with 3rd Cavalry Brigade - the vanguard of the B.E.F. being transferred from the Aisne.



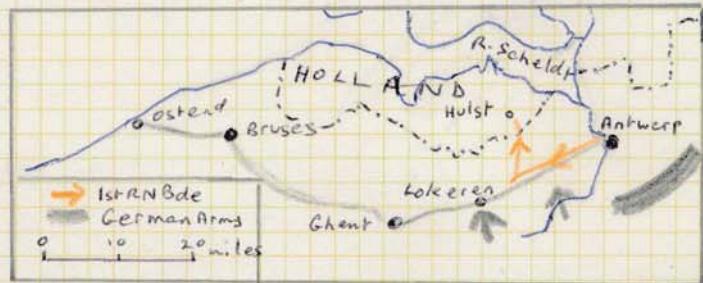
Card dated 10th October, posted at Wytschaete on 15th October - a rest day. Censor 1040 is within a range of numbers associated with 3rd Cavalry Div. On 10th October the Division was probably in the Bruges area.

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## 1ST NAVAL BRIGADE - INTERNED IN HOLLAND

Orders for withdrawal from Antwerp were issued on the evening of 8th October, but did not reach 1st Naval Brigade, which was around Forts 1 to 4 on the East of the city, with the exception of Drake Bn on the right of the line. Finding themselves deserted, the Brigade withdrew, but twenty miles out of Antwerp found the Germans were already in front of them, at Lokeren. The Brigade therefore turned North and crossed into neutral Holland at Hulst, and were interned. - a total of 1541 officers



and men, being the greater part of Benbow, Hawke and Collingwood Battalions. They were held at Groningen, in northern Holland, for the duration of the war.



Monday, 19th October 1914 - soon after internment in Groningen.

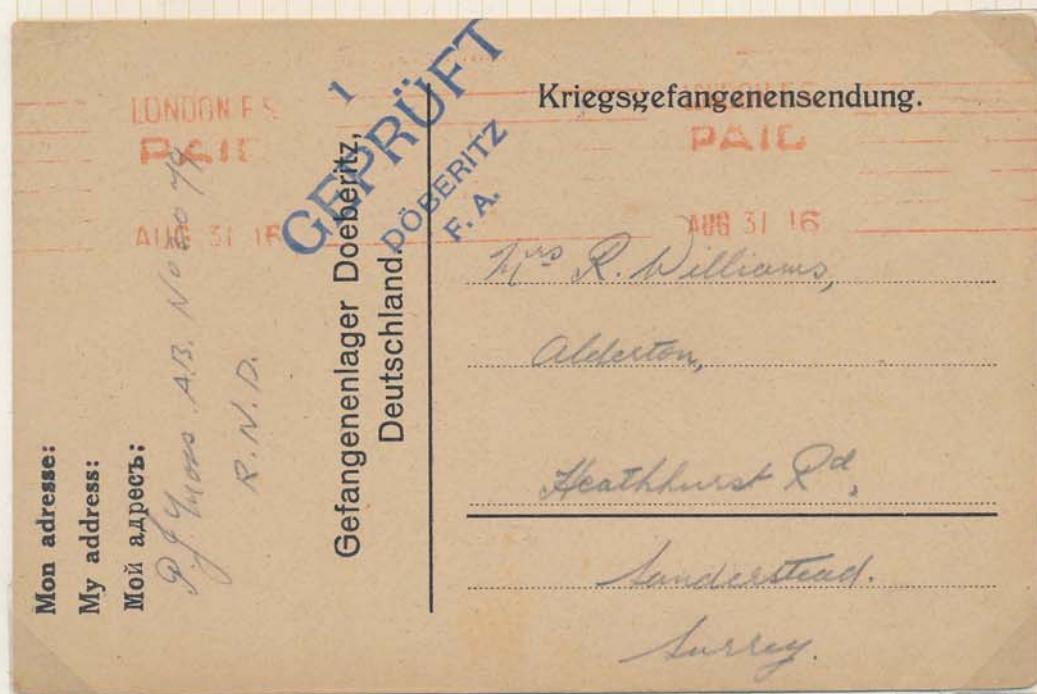
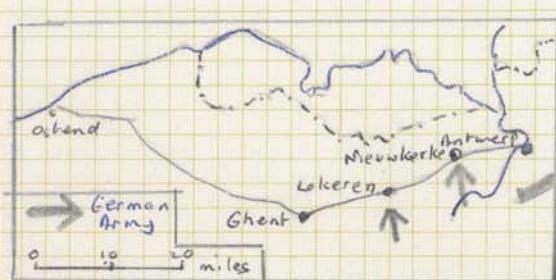
"After a thrilling week - a prisoner of war!"

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PRISONERS OF WAR IN GERMANY

Antwerp was evacuated on the evening of 8th October, but before the whole of the Royal Naval Division reached safety, German troops reached the railway line at Lokeren and Nieuwkerken. Men of the 10th Royal Marine Battalion were captured on arrival at Lokeren, and stragglers were captured at Nieuwkerken. These prisoners of war were held at Döberitz P.O.W. Camp.



Card dated  
3rd October 1916



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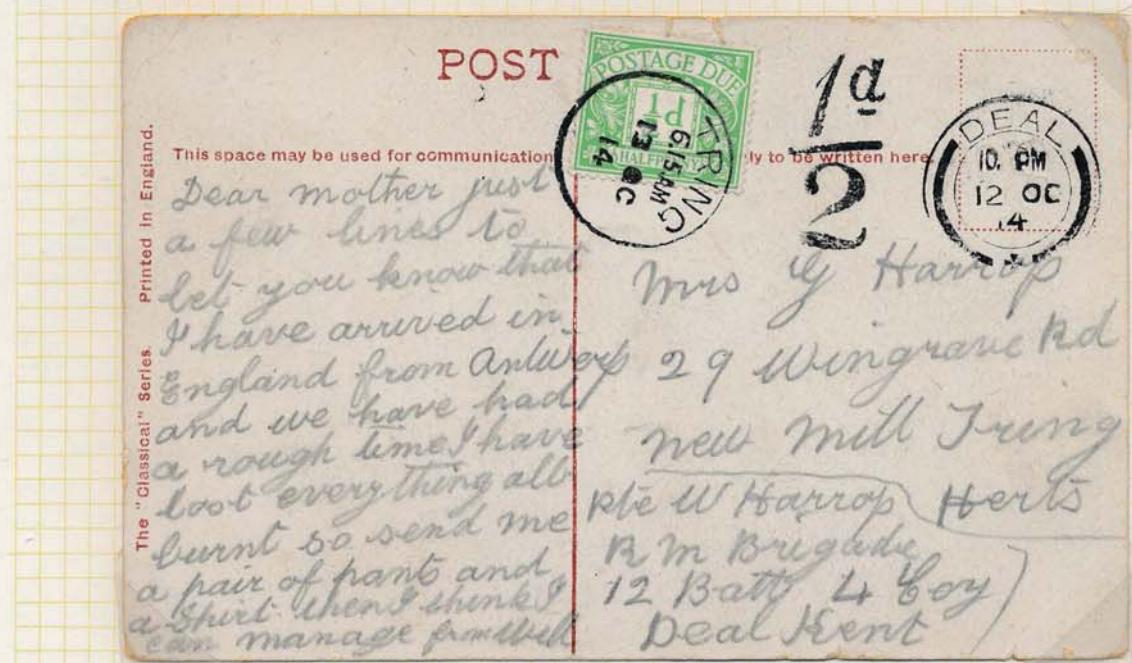
IN OCTOBER 1914

### THE ROYAL MARINE BRIGADE - BACK HOME

The Royal Marine Brigade received orders at 5pm on 8th October to leave Antwerp. The last battalion to leave, 10th R.M. Bn, was captured by Germans at Lokeren, a short way out of Antwerp, but the bulk of the Brigade reached Ostend safely, and crossed from there to England.

Postcard from a member of 12th R.M. Bn posted at Deal on 12th October, posted unpaid and charged single postage (not double the deficiency) on delivery (in accordance with the standard instructions for mail from troops in the United Kingdom, published in the Post Office Circular on 11th August 1914).

The writer had lost everything.



THE TIMES HISTORY OF THE WAR.



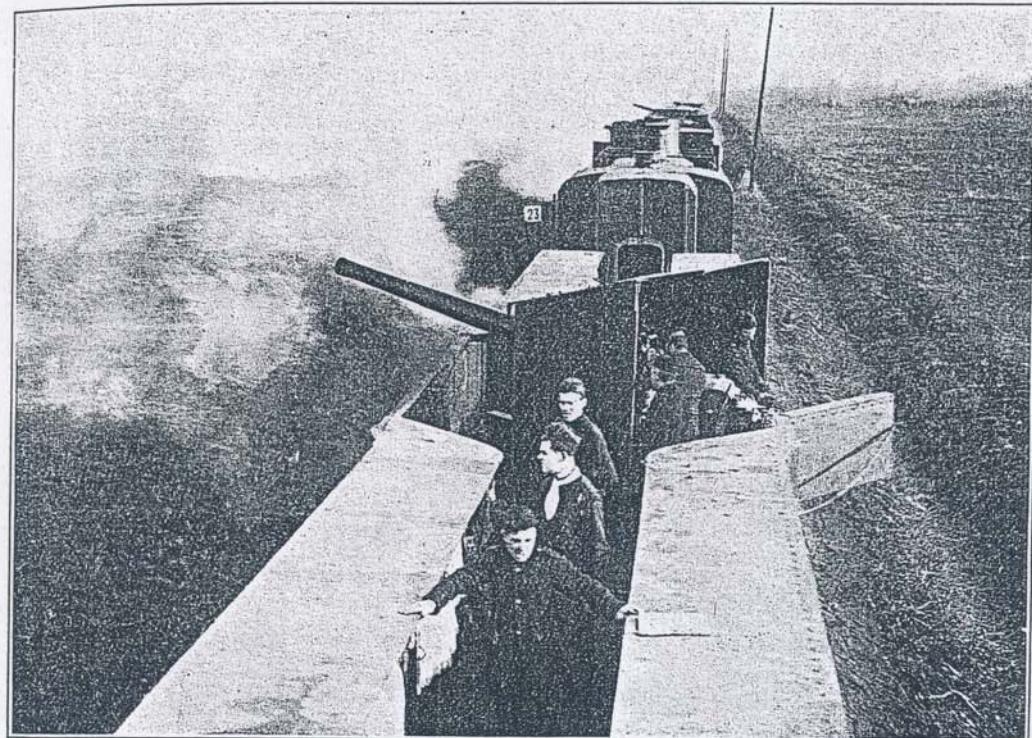
MARINES MARCHING TO THE TRENCHES.



MARINES IN THEIR IMPROVISED SHELTER.  
Our men sustained their reputation for cheerfulness in spite of hardships.



THE NAVAL BRIGADE AT ANTWERP.  
Men of the Royal Naval Division carrying ammunition into the trenches.



[Newspaper Illustrations.]  
AN ARMoured TRAIN WITH BRITISH NAVAL GUNS IN ACTION.

THE TIMES HISTORY OF THE WAR.



A LONDON MOTOR OMNIBUS TAKEN IN ANTWERP BY THE ENEMY.  
Motor Omnibuses have done excellent service in the transport of troops and supplies.



BRITISH MARINES UNDER ESCORT OF DUTCH GUARDS.

