

## **The Turnover of Officers during the Raising of a Kitchener Battalion: The 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment, August 1914 – May 1915**

The desperate struggle to find experienced military men both to lead and to train the huge number of volunteers who responded to Lord Kitchener's call for 500,000 men in the first year of the Great War is well known. The classic account of this process is Peter Simkins' *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies 1914-1916*.<sup>1</sup> Simkins points out that finding sufficient officers, especially senior officers, for Kitchener battalions became more difficult as time passed, with the First (Service) New Army, formed in August 1914 and known as K1, having fewer problems than subsequent ones. To date, there has been no detailed assessment of a Kitchener battalion's turnover of officers during its training phase. This article attempts to fill this gap by analyzing the officer turnover of one K1 battalion, the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal West Regiment. The 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion was formed in Maidstone on 14 August 1914 and was assigned to 37<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 12<sup>th</sup> (Eastern) Division. This division initially concentrated at Colchester, with the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion moving to Purfleet in late August. When it finally moved to France, landing in Boulogne on 1 June 1915, it took 27 officers out of a current complement of 38. Between August 1914 and the end of May 1915, however, sixty-two officers at one time or another had been taken on the battalion's strength. Of these, seventeen were senior officers, that is, they held the rank of Captain or above when first attached to the battalion. The remaining forty-five were subalterns.

Table 1 shows the number of officers joining the battalion for each month between its formation in August and its embarkation for France at the end of May 1915.<sup>2</sup> It also displays, by month, the number of officers who left the battalion. More than one-third were to pass through the battalion, staying for various short periods of time until the officer cadre settled down from February 1915, when the battalion moved to Aldershot for its final training.

**Table 1: Movement of Officers August 1914 – May 1915**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Officers Joining</b>	<b>Officers Leaving</b>	<b>Battalion Numbers</b>
<b>1914</b>			
August	9	1	8
September	22	5	25
October	4	3	26
November	6	2	30
December	13	0	43
<b>1915</b>			
January	3	8	38
February	1	1	38
March	3	0	41
April	1	2	40
May	0	0	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>40<sub>3</sub></b>

<sup>1</sup> Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies 1914-1916* (1988: Barnsley 2007). See also, Victor Wallace Germain, *The Kitchener Armies: The Story of a National Achievement* (1930: Uckfield n.d).

<sup>2</sup> The data come from 'Historical Record of Sixth Service Bn Royal West Kent Regiment', TNA PRO WO95/1861. This record was compiled by the adjutant, Lt GE Wingfield-Stratford, who copied it into the first pages of the battalion's War Diary.

<sup>3</sup> I have been unable to find the departure date of two officers. One was Captain DJ Johnston who, as Machine Gun Officer in 1<sup>st</sup> Royal West Kent Regiment, was wounded in September 1914. He joined the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion on 27 January 1915, as a "light duties" officer only. He subsequently returned to the Western Front, surviving the war as a Major attached to the Machine Gun Corps. The other was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt CGL Elverson.

### Senior Officers

It is easy to forget the enormous task that faced the officers, especially those holding senior positions, of a New Army battalion at the outset of the war. A battalion's establishment was more than one thousand men and although the volunteers did not descend on the base at the same time, they were usually supplied in batches of several hundred at very short intervals.<sup>4</sup> Uniforms and equipment were difficult to obtain and the catering and billeting arrangements had to be organised from scratch.<sup>5</sup> In damp and dreary Purfleet, which came to be known as "Purfleet on the Mud", the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion lived under canvas, still without proper uniforms, and when they moved to Sandling the newly-built huts were so poor (and porous) that the battalion had to be transferred to Hythe.<sup>6</sup> Out of this potential chaos the first senior officers and their NCOs were expected to bring some sort of order, even before company structures were organised and basic training considered. Not having a settled senior staff did not help, but slowly military discipline and regularity took over, although when the first CO left the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion in November he felt it necessary to issue an order expressing the view that 'the prevalence of absence without leave which now exists is a sign that the necessary standard [of discipline] has not yet been attained'.<sup>7</sup>

Among the sources mined by the War Office to fill the senior positions in the Kitchener battalions were retired officers (colloquially known as "dug-outs"); "surplus" or supernumerary officers left behind by battalions forming part of the first BEF; officers stationed overseas who were home on leave; and senior NCOs who were given commissions. All four categories can be found among the appointments to the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion's officer cadre. Despite their different routes to appointment, all could draw on common experiences of living and working within an infantry battalion of the British or Indian Armies. At the same time, by creating his New Armies as extensions of regular regiments rather than expanding the Territorial forces, Lord Kitchener tapped into regimental traditions and processes that became the bedrock of the new battalions. A considerable number of senior officers posted to each New Army battalion thus came from the same regiment, which helped to promote uniformity of purpose and similarity of outlook (see Table 2). Moreover, the deeds of the regiment's 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion during the first months of the BEF's deployment acted as strong encouragement to the new battalions as they underwent their training programme.<sup>8</sup>

CT Atkinson, the Royal West Kent Regiment's historian, wrote that 'Of all the Service battalions of The Queen's Own the 6<sup>th</sup> was perhaps the most closely connected with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion . . .' at its creation.<sup>9</sup> That may be true with regard to the large number of NCOs from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion initially attached to the 6<sup>th</sup>, but the connection is not so clear-cut with the officers (see Table 2). The first four officers took up their positions with the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion on 19 August and included Major PM Robinson, who that day was confirmed as the battalion's CO.<sup>10</sup> The three others were Captain RL White, Lt JSN Snelgrove and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt WJ Alderman. By the end of the month another five officers had joined: Captain JC Parker, Captain FC Waterfield, Lt PN Anstruther, Lt JEG Brown and Hon Lt and Quartermaster E. Mills. Three

<sup>4</sup> 112 NCOs and men made up the original cadre on 19 August 1914. Two more batches brought the numbers up to 426 by the end of the month. Three further batches on the first three days of September brought another 394 men. 'Historical Record', 19, 23, 31 August 1914, 1, 2, 3 September 1914.

<sup>5</sup> Clive Hughes, 'The New Armies', in Ian F.W. Beckett & Keith Simpson (eds), *A Nation in Arms: The British Army in the First World War* (1985: Barnsley 2004), pp. 108-9.

<sup>6</sup> *The Queen's Own Gazette*, No. 475 (December 1914), p. 3267; Paul Foster (ed), *The Letters of Arthur George Heath 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment* (Sittingbourne n.d), p. 37.

<sup>7</sup> 'Historical Record', 10 November 1914. This was a common feature of many Kitchener battalions whilst they were in training.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, *Queen's Own Gazette*,

<sup>9</sup> Captain C. T. Atkinson, *The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment 1914-1919* (1924: Uckfield n.d), p. 71.

<sup>10</sup> *London Gazette*, 1 September 1914, p. 6975.

of these officers were attached while currently on leave from India. Two, Anstruther and Brown were from the regiment's 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (the former having transferred from the Indian Army's 108<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment a year earlier).<sup>11</sup> Waterfield was also an Indian Army officer. Mills was a Colour Sergeant who had only just been commissioned.<sup>12</sup> Alderman, too, previously a Quartermaster Sergeant, was commissioned about the same time.<sup>13</sup> With Snelgrove, a Special Reserve officer, being attached from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, only three of the first ten officers were closely linked to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion (Robinson, Parker and White: one Major who, as CO, would be given the rank of Acting Lt-Colonel, and two Captains).<sup>14</sup>

**Table 2: Sources of Senior Officers**

Senior Officers	Number	RWK Officers
Dug-outs	7	5
On Leave	3	2
Surplus Regular	3	3
Convalescent	1	1
Other <sup>15</sup>	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>11</b>

In the following month a further 32 officers joined the battalion, only three of whom held senior rank. All three were in retirement in August 1914. The senior officer was Major FH Hotham, who was appointed second in command. He was forty-nine years old with a long career with the Royal West Kent Regiment in India behind him. Unfortunately, he died of a paralytic seizure in his tent at Purfleet only six weeks after joining the battalion.<sup>16</sup> Captain HCW Beeching (1866-1928) was the first dug-out to be appointed to the battalion, on 1 September. He had been commissioned in the Royal West Kent Regiment in 1886 and had retired in 1898.<sup>17</sup> Before his posting to the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion after re-joining the regiment on the outbreak of war, he had spent a short time as Recruiting Officer in Maidstone.<sup>18</sup> Captain HW Snow (1879-1969) had retired from the Royal West Kent Regiment only ten weeks before the outbreak of war—after fifteen years' service—and was in the Reserve of Officers. From 1910 he had been attached to the Egyptian Army.<sup>19</sup>

Of the seven senior officers serving with the battalion six weeks after its formation, only two—Parker and Beeching—were among the officer cadre that took the battalion to France on 1 June 1915. Some of the others spent very little time with the battalion before being transferred elsewhere. White was with the battalion for only eleven days before returning to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in France, Snow twelve days before being appointed DAAG of 15<sup>th</sup> Division. Snelgrove was attached to the new 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion after three weeks. Waterfield went to France in November. He was subsequently killed serving with the 45<sup>th</sup> Sikhs in May 1915.<sup>20</sup> Even Robinson departed after less than three months, posted to replace the wounded CO of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in France.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 19 August 1913, p. 5934.

<sup>12</sup> *Queen's Own Gazette*, No. 470, September 1914, p. 3231; *London Gazette*, 21 August 1914, p. 6677.

<sup>13</sup> *Queen's Own Gazette*, No. 470, September 1914, p. 3231.

<sup>14</sup> In 1914 Parker was on the Regular establishment of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion but stationed with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in Dublin.

<sup>15</sup> Towse, Margetts and Rowe.

<sup>16</sup> *Essex County Chronicle*, 6 November 1914; *Queen's Own Gazette*, No. 472 (November 1914), p. 3249.

<sup>17</sup> *London Gazette*, 29 January 1886, p. 443, 2 September 1898, p. 5262. Hotham and Beeching were commissioned on the same day.

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.lynsted-society.co.uk/Projects/WW1/Home\\_Front\\_1914\\_September.html](http://www.lynsted-society.co.uk/Projects/WW1/Home_Front_1914_September.html)

<sup>19</sup> *London Gazette*, 20 May 1899; Radley College Register, 1847-1912, p. 267, [www.radleyarchives.com](http://www.radleyarchives.com)

<sup>20</sup> Commonwealth War Graves Commission, [www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/61724](http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/61724)

<sup>21</sup> 'Historical Record', 30 August, 12, 19 September, 10 November 1914.

Robinson's replacement was the elderly Brevet-Colonel GE Even (1855-1924). Commissioned into the Indian Army in 1875, his first taste of combat had come in the Afghan War of 1879-80. Between 1897 and 1902 he commanded the 27<sup>th</sup> (subsequently 127<sup>th</sup>) Baluch Light Infantry and was promoted to Brevet Colonel in 1907. He retired in February 1913, after 38 years' service. He took command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion on 26 November but resigned less than three months later, in February 1915.<sup>22</sup> It is possible that the task of commanding a New Army battalion was too much for him, although D Company's correspondent to *The Queen's Own Gazette* expressed 'great regret ... at the departure of our Colonel ... to take an important position at the War Office'.<sup>23</sup>

At 59 years of age in 1914 Even was the oldest of the senior Regular officers attached to the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Their average age was 48.4 in 1914. By contrast, the average age of the three officers, all Captains, who had previously served with the part-time Volunteer battalions was 38.3. The oldest Volunteer senior officer was 45 year-old Captain CH Towse, a bank clerk who had served with the Artists Rifles in the Boer War and was in the Territorial Reserve in August 1914. His temporary commission with the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion was dated 11 November 1914. Towse was to be one of the originals going to France in June 1915, being killed the following November.<sup>24</sup>

The senior Regular "dug-outs" had had long careers in the army. Their average length of service was 24 years, with Captain and Honorary Major WT Ward being commissioned in 1875 and retiring in 1913, duplicating Even's service period of 38 years.<sup>25</sup> Neither Even nor Ward served with the Royal West Kent Regiment before 1914. One who had was Major EF Venables, Even's second in command and his replacement as CO in February 1915. Venables (1863-1924) had joined the Royal West Kent Regiment in 1887 after being first gazetted to the Manchester Regiment and served, mainly with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, on the North West Frontier and in South Africa, Hong Kong and Singapore. His military career had come to an abrupt halt in 1908 when he was declared bankrupt, a circumstance that (unofficially) required officers to resign their commissions.<sup>26</sup> In the emergency conditions of the Great War the old military code of honour became malleable and Venables was reemployed in his old regiment. He proved to be a highly effective commander and took the battalion to France in June 1915. He was eventually replaced on 15 November 1915 after being wounded by a shell splinter in the foot six weeks earlier.<sup>27</sup> Venables, despite his age of 52, lasted for six months leading a frontline battalion, although age was a contributory factor in his retirement.<sup>28</sup> The expectation that 49 year-old Beeching, his second in command, might replace him was unfulfilled and he fell sick soon afterwards. Having spent months recuperating, some of the time in the South of France, he too was replaced.<sup>29</sup>

It is interesting to note, given the belief that K1 battalions found senior officers more easily than battalions established later, that of the four Royal West Kent Service battalions sent to France, the 6<sup>th</sup>, with three, had the greatest turnover of commanding officers during the training phase. The 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Battalions had only one, although the 7<sup>th</sup> notionally had

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 February 1915.

<sup>23</sup> *Queen's Own Gazette*, No. 476 (March 1915), p. 3306.

<sup>24</sup> Service Record (hereafter SR), Clifford Henry Towse, TNA PRO WO 339/19528; War Diary, 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment, TNA PRO WO95/1861, 8 November 1915.

<sup>25</sup> Ward remained with the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion for only a month before being transferred to the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion. War Diary, 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment, 28 December 1914, 29 January 1915. In March 1916 he took the 1<sup>st</sup> Garrison Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment to India.

<sup>26</sup> *Edinburgh Gazette*, 7 January 1908, p. 12001; *London Gazette*, 3 March 1908, p. 1497.

<sup>27</sup> Atkinson, *Queen's Own*, p. 137.

<sup>28</sup> *Queen's Own Gazette*, No. 486, January 1916, p. 3437.

<sup>29</sup> Beeching became sick in January 1916. He survived the war attached to 3<sup>rd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion Hampshire Regiment in Gosport.

two. The 7<sup>th</sup>'s situation was strange, for initially Indian Army Colonel CH Clay was appointed CO on 6 September 1914, yet was replaced by Colonel AW Prior of the North Staffordshire Regiment on the same day.<sup>30</sup> The 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion also had two, with the first, Lt-Colonel Herbert F Searle, first commissioned in 1886 and formerly of the Niger Protectorate Force, being replaced after eight months on account of his age (he was 51).<sup>31</sup> It is possible, of course, that without the officer casualty crisis suffered by the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in France Robinson may have remained as the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion's CO for a much longer period.<sup>32</sup>

In the event, seven of the seventeen senior officers attached to the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion during its training phase went to France in June 1915 (41.2%). As well as Venables, Beeching, Parker and Towse the original officer cadre included Captain ABC Francis, a chartered accountant whose only previous military experience had been a period of eight months as a subaltern in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Volunteer Battalion the Royal Fusiliers in 1900.<sup>33</sup> He joined the battalion on 3 October 1914. Captain HG Margetts joined a fortnight later. He too appears to have had no recent military experience, although he had seen active service as a Corporal in Robert's Horse during the Boer War.

The final non-Regular original senior officer was an even stranger appointment. Reginald Percy Pfeiffer Rowe (1868-1945) was forty-six years of age when war was declared. A graduate of Magdalen College, Oxford, where he had been a prominent rower, Rowe qualified as a barrister but for many years before the war had been Secretary of the New University Club in St James' St, London. Despite his age he was desperate to play a part in the war. Initially he became a committee member of The United Arts Volunteer Force that was formed within days of the outbreak of war. It was a Home Defence unit and its ranks were open 'to all the Members of the Dramatic, Musical, Literary and Artistic Professions ... including Art Students and the Staffs of Theatres, who from professional or other unavoidable reasons are at present unable to join the active or Territorial Forces, and is to afford facilities for drill and rifle practice under fully qualified Army instructors, until final instructions have been received from the War Office'.<sup>34</sup> After 'drilling hard' for two months Rowe sought a commission, with the expectation of receiving 'a Lieutenancy to start with, with the chance of getting my company before long'.<sup>35</sup> Whoever was his patron was influential, for Rowe was commissioned as a Captain in the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion on 3 December 1914.<sup>36</sup> After the war, which he finished serving with the Military Intelligence Directorate, Rowe published a 'concise chronicle of events' of the conflict and subsequently received a knighthood for his work in civil administration.<sup>37</sup>

### Subalterns

Quite what the Regular and retired subalterns who stayed with the battalion thought of the three Captains appointed with little or no military experience is unknown, but both the huge number of casualties in 1914 and the great expansion of the army offered the opportunity of

<sup>30</sup> Clay's appointment was not officially gazetted for three weeks, by which he had left. *London Gazette*, 28 September 1914, p. 7664.

<sup>31</sup> Captain R.O. Russell, *The History of the 11<sup>th</sup> (Lewisham) Battalion The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment* (Lewisham 1934), p. 23.

<sup>32</sup> By 1 December 1914 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had suffered 34 officer casualties, 18 killed and 16 wounded. *The Queen's Own Gazette*, No. 473 (December 1914), p. 3259.

<sup>33</sup> *London Gazette*, 6 March, 13 November 1900.

<sup>34</sup> Edward Potton (ed), *A Record of the United Arts Rifles 1914-1919* (London 1920), p. 10; James Fox, *British Art and the First World War, 1914-1924* (Cambridge 2015), p. 29. The United Arts Volunteers called themselves "The Unshrinkables", a reference to the white sweaters the first recruits wore.

<sup>35</sup> Rowe to Dr Warren, 10 November 1914, Magdalen College Oxford Archives, C3/1031. I am grateful to Dr Robin Darwall-Smith, Archivist of the college, for sending me a copy of this letter.

<sup>36</sup> *London Gazette*, 8 January 1915, p. 281.

<sup>37</sup> R.P.P. Rowe, *A Concise Chronicle of Events of the Great War* (London 1920). Both Francis and Rowe went to France as company commanders.

swift promotion for all experienced officers. Lt GE Wingfield-Stratford, who joined the battalion on 9 September, was swiftly promoted to Captain and Adjutant. WJ Alderman, having spent nearly eighteen years in the ranks, went from 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in August 1914 to temporary Captain by April 1915. He was to be killed as Acting CO of the battalion on 20 November 1917.<sup>38</sup> He was filling in for the remarkable but currently wounded Lt-Col WRA (Bob) Dawson who, when war broke out, was serving with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in Dublin. He had only joined the battalion in June from the Special Reserve, having initially begun his military career in the Royal Field Artillery.<sup>39</sup> Dawson was furious at being left behind when the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion went to France. He joined the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion on 3 September 1914, was promoted to Lieutenant a fortnight later and was a Captain by the end of March 1915.<sup>40</sup>

“Dug-outs” were not confined to senior officers in the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt EJ Hudson arrived at Purfleet on 5 September. He had previously served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Volunteer Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment between February 1899 and July 1902 and in 1911 was a thirty-two year-old married stockbroker living in Walton-on-Thames.<sup>41</sup> He was promoted to Captain in October 1914 and subsequently went to France with the original officer cadre. Within six weeks he was repatriated to England sick and was struck off the battalion’s strength.<sup>42</sup> Following his recovery, he served as Adjutant for the No.1 Infantry Base Camp Depot in France.<sup>43</sup>

A notable feature of the first months of the war was the return to Britain to volunteer for military service of thousands of young, and not so young, men who had been working or travelling overseas, not just within the Empire but also in countries such as Argentina and the United States. One such was CGL Elverson, who was posted to the battalion as a junior subaltern in mid-December 1914. The son of a Major, he had served eighteen months with 3<sup>rd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment between 1902 and 1904, spending a short time in South Africa at the end of the Boer War. Following his resignation he became a rancher in Calgary, Canada. In August 1914, following his wife’s death from a miscarriage, Elverson enlisted as a Private with the first Canadian Expeditionary Force and as soon as he arrived in England successfully applied for a commission. How long he spent with the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion is not known, but in July 1915 he was with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion and he subsequently served with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion in Mesopotamia. He returned to Canada after the war.<sup>44</sup>

It was amongst the senior subalterns, officers posted to the battalion as Lieutenants, that the greatest turnover took place during the training phase. Of the twelve Lieutenants attached, only one stayed with the battalion. This was Wingfield-Stratford, the Adjutant. The rest became victims of the other Royal West Kent Kitchener battalions. Three were transferred to the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion on 12 December. Another five followed Captain WT Ward to the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion on 29 January 1915, although none was to be in the first officer contingent that went to France with the 8<sup>th</sup> in August 1915.<sup>45</sup> Mainly promoted Regular officers filled their

<sup>38</sup> SR, W.J. Alderman, TNA PRO WO 339/10150.

<sup>39</sup> Dawson was commissioned into the RFA in February 1912 from the Oxford University OTC. *London Gazette*, 16 February 1912, p. 1175.

<sup>40</sup> Jonathan Saunders, ‘A précis of Colonel Dawson and the Sixth (Service) Battalion, The Queen’s Own (Royal West Kent) Regiment, 1914-1918’, *The Queen’s Own Buffs Journal*, Summer 2011. I am grateful to Jonathan Saunders for sending me a copy of this article.

<sup>41</sup> *London Gazette*, 3 February 1899, p. 725, 15 July 1902, p. 4512; 1911 Census.

<sup>42</sup> War Diary, 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment, 26 July 1915.

<sup>43</sup> *Queen’s Own Gazette*, No. 486, January 1916, p. 3437.

<sup>44</sup> The Elverson Family, <http://galianomuseum.ca/elverson.html>

<sup>45</sup> Atkinson, *Queen’s Own*, p. 125. One officer, Lt ET Williams, returned to the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion in time to go overseas with the first contingent. Another, HM Luttmann-Johnson, the son of a Royal West Kent Major, had returned from Canada to join up. He subsequently transferred to the Royal Engineers.

positions in the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion.<sup>46</sup> With three new battalions being raised almost simultaneously, the regiment's expertise had to be spread thinly.

The enthusiasm to become involved in the war demonstrated by Hudson, Elverson and Rowe was mirrored in the actions of many much younger men in the first weeks after 4 August. Twenty-seven temporary 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants were posted to the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion between 9 September 1914, when RK Foulkes and LCR Smith arrived at Purfleet, and 17 March 1915, when A Symes reported for duty. Most had arrived by the end of September. The turnover among the junior subalterns was to be minimal, with only Foulkes and CI Blackburne-Maze transferring, the former to the Army Cyclist Corps after four months and the latter to the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion after a week. Blackburne-Maze was unusual among the first group of junior subalterns appointed in that he had not been to university (his school, however, was Charterhouse). But at the age of 25 he had already published two books, both dealing with safaris in Africa that he had undertaken. He was also unusual for marrying in 1915 the Adjutant's sister, the daughter of Brigadier-General CV Wingfield-Stratford of the Royal Engineers.

The very slight turnover of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants is easy to explain. There was no value posting them elsewhere (unless they were not up to scratch). They had little to offer. They were all inexperienced (even if they had been members of a school or university OTC) and needed to learn the job of platoon leader preferably in a settled environment with, if they were lucky, an experienced non-commissioned officer at their side. The efficiency of the battalion depended to a significant extent on stability and continuity at the platoon level. The company, of four platoons, was of course important and was to remain so, at the tactical level, until 1917, but for the private soldier the platoon officer set the tone and the mood, especially when virtually the whole battalion comprised volunteers who were starting their military training from scratch. They were the essential link between the men and the rather distant senior military authority.

The need for continuity is best shown by the choice made in May 1915 as to which subalterns would go with the battalion overseas and which would stay at the depot. It is clear that those who joined the battalion earliest were more likely to be chosen (see Table 3). None of the volunteer junior officers joining in early 1915 were sent. Age was also a factor, although not a determining one. Only one of those chosen—2<sup>nd</sup> Lt LCR Smith—was under the age of majority in 1914, whereas six of the eleven left behind were.<sup>47</sup> At least six of the eleven, however, subsequently joined the battalion in France.

**Table 3: Volunteer 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants  
Arrivals and Outcomes**

Month	Number	Overseas June
<b>1914</b>		
September	14	10
October	1	1
November	3	2
December	4	2
<b>1915</b>		
January	1	0
February	1	0
March	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>15</b>

<sup>46</sup> Of the remaining three, two returned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion and one, a former Territorial officer of the 4<sup>th</sup> Royal West Kent Regiment, transferred to the 9<sup>th</sup> East Lancashire Regiment.

<sup>47</sup> The average age of the Service 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants was 22.2 in 1914 and the median age 22.

### Conclusion

The study of the turnover in officers of one K1 Battalion cannot on its own lead to generalisations about the experiences of all Kitchener battalions as they struggled to fill their officer establishment (the usual number was thirty). In the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment, however, there is some evidence that at the senior levels change was more frequent than would have been wished, but that it occurred for a variety of reasons and was not evidence of mistakes having been made at the War Office. The puzzling appearance of three officers gazetted to Captaincies even though their military experience was so slight suggests that real and recent experience was at a premium even in the first months of the war. At the more junior levels, the sheer speed of raising the second and third New Armies (K2, which included the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion and K3 which included the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion) did disrupt the organisation of the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion at two points, marginally in September 1914 but much more thoroughly in January 1915. This perhaps reflects the growing difficulty of finding suitable junior officers by the New Year, mirroring the problems with the higher ranks. The battalion could cope with these junior losses, partly by promoting to Lieutenancies a couple of the volunteer 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants and the rapid rise in rank of the regular officers (see Table 4). Despite the appearance of some “dug-outs” who had not served with the regiment before, the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion went to war with its higher command comprising officers who had. In its original manifestation, the 6<sup>th</sup> was very much a Kentish battalion.

**Table 4: Internal Officer Promotions August 1914 – June 1915**

Name	Status	Rank 1914	Rank June 1915
Alderman, WJ	Regular	2/Lt	Captain
Dawson, WRA	Regular	2/Lt	Captain
Hatton, GAL	Service	2/Lt	Lieutenant
Hudson, EJ	Vol Ret	2/Lt	Captain
Matthews, MLW	Service	2/Lt	Lieutenant
Williams, ET	Vol Ret	Lt	Captain
Wingfield-Stratford, GE	Regular	Lt	Captain & Adjutant

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