

P (Soar Valley) Company, 1st Volunteer Battalion Leicestershire Regiment

1900 - 1908

Introduction

In the latter years of the 19th Century there were major changes in the organisation of the army's reserves. In Leicestershire, the 1st Volunteer Battalion, Leicestershire Regiment was formed in 1883 from the various volunteer rifle corps that existed across the county. By 1899 the Battalion, with its HQ at the Magazine in Leicester consisted of some 1500 men serving in 6 Companies based in Leicester and a further 6 Companies dispersed across the county. At that time the nearest local unit to Mountsorrel was H (Loughborough) Company of 104 men commanded by Capt F R Griggs, supported by Lt S J Wright and Sergeant-Instructor A Rudge.

As the century turned, the 2nd Boer War was in full swing and there was a wave of patriotic talk and action across the country. Volunteers came forward in numbers to join both regular and reserve units in answer to what was seen as a threat to the nation's interests. This flow of new volunteers led to the formation of new reserve units bolstering the size of infantry reserve battalions.

Mountsorrel and the Soar Valley

The initial moves for the formation of a new company based in Mountsorrel came with the return, in 1898, of Robert Edmund Martin to work in the family business, The Mountsorrel Granite Company. Educated at Eton, he had graduated from King's College Cambridge as an MA. Whilst at Eton and University he was a member of the Cadet Rifle Corps and the Officer Training Corps and on returning home he joined the 1st Volunteer Battalion of the Leicestershire Regiment. On 6th May 1900 a meeting was held at St Peter's School, Mountsorrel to discuss the formation of a company of Volunteers in the Soar Valley villages. The meeting was chaired by Mr RE Martin, who was by now a Captain in the Volunteers. In organising the meeting he was supported by Mr. W. R. Diggle (William Richard Diggle, Company Secretary, Mountsorrel Granite Company), Dr. Skipworth (Herbert Skipworth, Surgeon, Medical Officer of Health to Quorn Urban District Council and Surgeon at Mountsorrel Cottage Hospital) and Mr Hambleton (William Roscoe Hambleton, Sub Post Master and Clerk to the Parish Council). In the Leicester Chronicle of 12th May 1900, the meeting, which was addressed by Colonel Sarson, Commanding 1st Volunteer Battalion, is described as being "large and enthusiastic". At the end of the meeting Mr. Hambleton moved the resolution: "That this meeting is of opinion that it is desirable to form a company of Volunteers, and pledges itself to do all in its power to that end." This was seconded by Mr. Saunders, and was carried unanimously.

That initial enthusiastic meeting was rapidly followed up as volunteers came forward to join and there was a notable a show of support by H Company from

Loughborough who marched from Loughborough to attend a Church Parade at St Peter's, Mountsorrel the subsequent Sunday morning.

Behind the scene's the essential administration was being set in place with a bank account being opened with the Loughborough branch of Pares's Leicestershire Banking Company Limited which in 1902 was were taken over by Parr's Bank.

By late summer sufficient volunteers had come forward and had regularly attended local training sessions for P (Soar Valley) Company to be officially formed. As reported in the Leicester Chronicle of 11th August 1900, a large crowd assembled in the Market Place Mountsorrel on Sunday 5th August to watch as P Company fell in and then at 07:15, headed by the Mountsorrel Brass Band and commanded by Captain Martin, marched to Sibley Station. From there they travelled by train to attend, as a formed unit, their first annual training camp on Salisbury Plain

That first heady show of enthusiasm, undoubtedly fuelled by the effect on the population of the Boer War, was maintained throughout the period with the Company strength reaching and being maintained at about 60 all ranks. The majority attended the annual training camps in addition to local field training and regular rifle competitions held both in Mountsorrel and the location of the other companies of the battalion.



P Company at Annual Training Camp – Conwy 1906

Annual Training Camp Locations

- 1900 – Salisbury Plain
- 1902 – Strensall Camp, York
- 1905 – Strensall Camp, York
- 1906 – Conwy
- 1907 - Towyn

Mountsorrel Drill Hall

By 1901 the Mountsorrel Granite Company had made good on a promise made at the initial meeting in May 1900 and built a Drill Hall alongside the village recreation ground on Loughborough Road. This was accidentally burnt down in 1912 but a new and larger Drill Hall was built on the same site that served the successor units in Mountsorrel.



Personalities¹

P Company Personalities – 1900 - 1908				
Surname	Forename	Number	Rank	Comments
Baker				Served with P Company in 1900. Possibly John Baker born 1877 in Mountsorrel. 1901 & 1911 Census shows as resident in Woodgate, Rothley employed in the Shoe trade as a rivetter. Probably identical with Sergeant J W Baker, serving in F Company 5th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment 1908/9.
Ball				Served with P Company 1901 – 1908. Possibly Raymond Ball Born 1887, of Watling St (1901 Census), and "Devonia", Mountsorrel (1911 Census). employed as a commercial clerk at Mountsorrel Granite Company. Served in F Company, 5th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment 1909 - 1914.
Barrs				Served with P Company 1901 - 1908
Bates	T		Sergeant Instructor	Unit Instructor 1900
Bell	J	6446	Sergeant Instructor	Unit Drill Instructor 1903. James Bell, enlisted in 1st Battalion in Leicester in 1883 and served in Bermuda, Canada and as Colour Sergeant in the Boer War. Served with the 5th Battalion until 1908. Rejoined as a Recruiting Sergeant age 52 in 1914 and served in France. Discharged 1919. Born 29 Oct 1862 and died at Illston on the Hill, 3 March 1948
Bishop			Private	Served with P Company in 1907. Possibly Herbert Bishop of The Green, Mountsorrel. Enlisted in 3rd Battalion Leicestershire Regiment 1 Oct 1900, Sentenced for insubordinate language 1907 and transferred to Army Reserve 1908. Re-enlisted into 3 rd Battalion in 1912 and mobilised 1914. Posted to 2nd Battalion, deserted, posted to Depot. Sentenced to 21 days detention for desertion 1915 and again 1917 serving with 3rd Battalion, held at Detention Barracks, Hull. Discharged February 1919 to live at 13 Cemetery Road, Sileby

¹ The names listed are drawn from a variety of the very limited extant sources and have been checked, as far as is possible, with the 1901 and 1911 Census and other reference materials.

Bland				Possibly Charles William Bland, aged 38 (1901 Census), born in Barrow but a resident porter at the Barrow Union Workhouse on Union Lane, Mountsorrel.
Boyer	Elon		Private	Elon Boyer, married, aged 45 (1901 Census), Foreman at Mountsorrel Granite Company, born Nuneaton, resident of Quorn Rd, Mountsorrel. Served as a Volunteer in P Company but resigned in 1908 on formation of the Territorial Force. Re-enlisted into F Company, 5 th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment August 1914, listed on the "Men called to the Front" List. Served during WW1 with Leicestershire Regiment and later the Lincolnshire Regiment
Campbell				Served with P Company 1902 – 1904. Possibly George Acheson Campbell, aged 28 (1911 Census) a domestic coachman resident at New St, Barrow on Soar
Chapman				Served with P Company in 1906
Collis	G			George E Collis aged 16 (1901 Census) a Quarryman resident on Quorn Road (Father Mark, was a Police Sergeant). Later joined the Police and was based at Coleorton (1911). Transferred from P Company to Leicestershire Howitzer Battery Royal Field Artillery on formation of Territorial Force and served with them during WW1
Daws		7955	Lance Corporal	Promoted from Private in P Company 1 April 1905. Probable typographical error for Frank Dawson, serving with F Company 5th Battalion in 1909. Formerly Private, 1546, with 3rd Battalion Leicestershire Regiment. Born 1867 in Mountsorrel. Served in South Africa, and at Regimental Depot, Glen Parva in 1891. 1911 Census shows him as married aged 42, living at Neale St Leicester working in the shoe industry
Evans			Sergeant	Awarded LS&E medal for 12 years service in 1913 whilst serving with F Company, 5 th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment
Hallam			Private	Served with P Company in 1907. Probably William H Hallam aged 23 Quarryman resident on Main St, Mountsorrel (1901 Census) Subsequently served in F Company 5th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment and with that Battalion during WW1. Awarded DCM for conspicuous bravery at the Hohenzollern Redoubt assault in October 1915

Hambledon			Sergeant	Awarded the LS&E Medal for 12 years service in 1913 whilst serving with F Company 5 th Battalion, Leicestershire Regiment. Probably William R Hambleton (spelling varies in different records) aged 35 (1901 Census), Post Master resident at Post Office, Main Street Mountsorrel.
Harrington				Served with P Company 1906 – 1908. Possibly Charles Harrington, aged 19 (1901 Census) a mercantile clerk of Main Street and later (1911 Census) of Dulce Domum, Rothley Lane, Mountsorrel.
Jowett	JH	7002	Corporal	Probable Typographical error for George Henry Jowett of Warner Street Barrow. Promoted Corporal from Lance Corporal with P Company in April 1901 and later to Sergeant. Awarded Territorial Force Efficiency Medal in 1913 for 12 years service.
Mantle	T			Possibly Thomas Henry Mantle aged 22 (1911 Census), bricklayer of Mill Street Barrow. Later served with the Canadian Corps during WW1 as a Sergeant
Manton				Serving with P Company in 1901. Possibly Joseph Henry Manton, aged 37 (1901 Census) shoe trade - rivetter of Park Road, Anstey and later (1911 Census) Rothley Lane Mountsorrel
Marlow				Serving with P Company in 1904. Possibly Frank Jesse Marlow, aged 25, assistant School Master. Born in Mountsorrel resident (1901) on Barrow Road, Sileby
Martin	RE		Captain	Captain and Company Commander of P Company 1900 – 1908. Director of the Mountsorrel Granite Company and resident at The Brand, Woodhouse Eaves. Later, Major, Company Commander of F Company and the Regimental Second in Command, 5th Battalion. Promoted Lieutenant-Colonel to command 1st/4th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment 1915. Chairman of Leicestershire County Council 1924 - 1960

Neal			Private	Probably George Neal, age 22 (1901 Census) married, Quarryman working for Mountsorrel Granite Company. Born Laughton, resident Hawcliffe Rd Mountsorrel. Served with P Company and transferred to F Company, 5 th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment on formation of Territorial Force in 1908. Called Out for regular service 5 Aug 1914 and transferred to 1/4th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment 1 Jun 1915. Discharged on completion of enlistment 9 Sept 1915
Osborne	J		Colour Sergeant	A long term member of the Volunteers moving as a Sergeant from Loughborough on formation of P Company in 1900. Retired after 34 years service in 1910. Probably Alfred J Osborne aged 46 (1901 Census) a Hosiery Manager resident at 46 Forest Road Loughborough.
Overton	A		Colour Sergeant Instructor	Serving with P Company in 1907
Palmer	G	6943	Sergeant	Promoted from Corporal with P Company in April 1905. Probably George Palmer, born Wisbech, aged 28 (1901 Census) of 30 Quorn Road, Mountsorrel. Engine Fitter with Mountsorrel Granite Company. Served later with F Company 5 th Battalion, awarded LS&E medal in 1913 for 12 years service. Listed on the Called to the Front List 1914.
Peters			Private	Served with P Company in 1907. Probably John Henry Peters born 1887, Bulkington Warwicks, resident variously, Bond Lane, Main St and later Hawcliffe Road, Mountsorrel. Quarryman - Blocker working for Mountsorrel Granite Company. Transferred to F Company 5 th Battalion on formation of Territorial Force and served with the Battalion in WW1
Porter	W	7332	Lance Corporal	Promoted from Private with P Company April 1905. Possibly John W Porter, aged 36 (1901 Census) of Barrow Road, Sileby, an engine driver at the lime works
Preston	HJ	6967	Sergeant	Promoted from Lance Sergeant with P Company in April 1905, later transferred to F Company 5 th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment on formation of Territorial Force in 1908. Awarded LS&E Medal in 1913 for 12 years service. Probably Harry J Preston aged 30 (1901 Census), School teacher

				resident at Union Lane and later Rothley Lane (1911 Census). Listed on the 1914 Men Called to the Front List
Saunders	B	6941	L/Cpl Cpl	Served with P Company throughout the period. Transferred to F Company 5 th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment on formation of Territorial Force and resigned in 1912. Probably Bertram E Saunders, born Mountsorrel, aged 18 (1901 Census) of Main Street and later Roeclyffe Cottages Mountsorrel. A carpenter working for Mountsorrel Granite Company.
Sharman				Served with P Company in 1902. Men called to the Front List 1914 includes A Sharman, a single man employed by Mountsorrel Granite Company.
Thornton				Served with P Company 1906 – 1907. Probably identical with Sergeant WF Thornton serving with F Company 5 th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment documents include 1908 – 1914. Included on the Called out list 1914 shown as a single man from Quorn working for the Mountsorrel Granite Company. Probably William Frederick Thornton, single age 26, (1911 Census) born Marylebone. Clerk for Mountsorrel Granite Company, resident Barrow Rd Quorn
Wagstaffe			Sergeant	Resigned from P Company April 1905. Probably Joseph Wagstaffe aged 31 (1901 Census) of Watling Street Mountsorrel a Schoolmaster born in Upper Mutton Worcestershire
Wakeling			Private	Serving with P Company in 1907. Probably either Frederick William Wakeling, age 25 (1911 Census), resident Sarson St, Quorn, or John W Wakeling, age 26 (1911 Census), resident Rothley Lane, Mountsorrel. Both Quarrymen working for the Mountsorrel Granite Company and both subsequently served in F Company 5 th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment.
Wardle			Private	Served with P Company in 1907. Probably Joe Wardle, aged 12 (1901 Census), Grocer's assistant and later, (1911 Census) a Shoehand – Finisher. Resident on Crown Lane, Mountsorrel. Later served with F Company 5 th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment prior to and during WW1. Promoted to Warrant Officer Class 2 (CSM) and awarded the DCM for bravery in an attack at Pontruet in 1918

Whittle			Sergeant	Resigned from P Company in 1905. Possibly William Whittle, aged 29 of Meeting St Farmhouse, Quorn.
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The End of P Company

The changes that had started in the previous century continued at the start of the twentieth due to the lessons learnt in the Boer War. The 1907 Territorial and Reserve Forces Act led to the regular army being reshaped to fit it for expeditionary force operations overseas. Supporting that change the Volunteer and Yeomanry forces were formed into a new Territorial Force of fourteen infantry divisions, fourteen cavalry brigades, and a large number of support units. This led in 1908 to the 1st Volunteer Battalion Leicestershire Regiment being split into 4th and 5th Battalions (Territorial Force). 4th Battalion was based and recruited within Leicester and 5th Battalion, with a headquarters at the Drill Hall, Granby Street in Loughborough, recruiting across the county. P Company became F Company 5th Battalion, still based in Mountsorrel and recruiting across the Soar valley villages.