

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions

The crucial element in a Territorial battalion's morale during the Great War has been shown to have been its sense of community identity. It is this sense of belonging and identification with a specific spatial and social community which was largely responsible for its discipline and combat effectiveness. This relationship was a symbiotic one with the local community, or communities, identifying most with the local Battalion and using this focus to concentrate their own commitment to the War and its aftermath. The relationship between 7th King's Liverpool Battalion and the local communities of Bootle and Southport demonstrates that the concept of a gulf between these two aspects of the First World War is nearer myth than reality.

While the main thrust of this thesis is that a sense of community identity had an extensive impact on the local communities and also on the development of the fighting unit's morale, secondary aims have been to show the development of tactical awareness and success in the Territorial Force during the course of the War, and to highlight the post-War adoption scheme to assist reconstruction. Both aspects of the thesis need to be seen in the context of the historiography, much of which has demonstrated the persistence of the concept of a gulf between the Home and War Fronts. Recent study has continued to focus on one or other aspect of the War rather than reviewing the episode in a more holistic framework. For instance, a study of the Territorials' contribution to the battlefield success would require a full appreciation of its community roots in order to properly understand the way it worked and fought. Similarly, little attention has been paid to the non-governmental rebuilding of France and Flanders yet this study indicates its importance, not least as an expression of continued links between the experiences of civilians and soldiers.

The nature of identity is such that one individual or group may have many competing identities at any one time or situation. Just as an individual is likely to focus on a prime identification to suit a particular need, so a group or community will coalesce around the predominant identity in order to maintain its unity. In the case of 7th King's it coalesced around a sense of belonging to the community from where the majority of its members were recruited. Despite the reduction in numbers of such men it retained that focus, sustained in this instance by the gradual widening of the definition from a part to the whole of Lancashire. For the communities themselves with their even more varied and competing identities, the Battalion itself was the

single most important feature around which to centre their commitment, War effort and post-War commemoration.

The methodology of the study has been to follow a conventional, low profile, Territorial battalion with existing long-term community roots, through the War, to establish the extent to which long-held views of events and relationships, raised in the historiography, are supported by the evidence. This has been done chronologically to provide cogency and coherence to the argument, and to demonstrate more effectively the tactical learning curve of the fighting unit and the levels of constancy of community involvement. Links with particular persons and events, including Lord Derby, the battle of Givenchy, and the British League of Help adoption scheme, have served to demonstrate the importance of community identity during the War. The extensive accounts of the Lusitania riots in local newspapers have been used to analyse their spontaneity.

The detailed study of private correspondence, the routine official War Diaries, the more detailed battle reports and correspondence with Edmonds in the compilation of the *Official History*, has opened up new perspectives on particular battles. Festubert, previously not seen as an event of any great significance, was an important finale to the Neuve Chapelle and Aubers Ridge attacks, as well as being tactically important for its night attack, while the success of the stand at Givenchy can now be seen to have been based on a defence system championed by Jeudwine but contrary to GHQ plans. The study has also revealed more about Jeudwine himself, and his significant role, both as a middle-ranking tactician and an enthusiast for the Division's identity. The study has brought his own private notebooks and correspondence together with his more public writings to highlight his significance.

Private correspondence has been used in connection with published memoirs and a thorough investigation of the courts martial records to demonstrate the good disciplinary record of the unit. Given the social composition of the unit, which was established from newspaper records, socio-economic indicators, and an extrapolation from the records in *Soldiers Died*, this high standard of discipline was a significant feature. The study has also revealed the extent and importance of the British League of Help's charitable scheme to assist devastated France after the War. The distance between its originators' political motivation and the practical effects of sending schoolchildren to France every year up until the Second World War is marked. The paucity of English language studies, at least, on the subject of

reconstruction, is perhaps a further demonstration of our isolationism. Along with Givenchy and the Territorial Force, these charities merit further research. Most significantly, however, this thesis has demonstrated the usefulness and importance of local and compact holistic studies of the War, in order to uncover and promote the widest evidence base on which to develop our understanding of the War as a whole.

The social composition of 7th King's is an important element in understanding its morale, its level of discipline and its combat effectiveness. The area on which it based its sense of identity was a varied one. Variations existed within Southport and within Bootle, in terms of economy, population, religion and politics, but the greatest social differences were between the two towns themselves. As the companies of the Battalion appear to have mixed men from both areas there could have been difficulties in trying to establish trust and understanding between men from such diverse backgrounds. The anecdotal evidence only suggests that the Battalion had large numbers of dockland workers, but even the more obvious evidence demonstrates that there were different social groupings. Although the Battalion was predominantly working class it ranged from labourers through organised trade unionists to skilled craftsmen, artisans, lower middle classes, clerks and teachers. In subsuming these various identities and personalities they centred on their common denominators, their home communities.

The communities themselves had a role to play as the second Front. Here too there is evidence that the varied elements of society came together on committees and agencies in running the welfare, support and employment needs for the War. There is little evidence of co-operation between Bootle and Southport but within each Borough that co-operation was to the fore. This manifested itself in the early months but continued for the duration, as demonstrated by the level of involvement in munitions, for example.

Women, in both Bootle and Southport, came to represent the civilian community at War. Their experience was central to the communities' experiences, demonstrated in the riots sparked by the sinking of the **Lusitania**, but maintained through the organisation and commitment of resources to the War effort. In Southport, there was a withdrawal from the political and suffragist movements in favour of a more traditional role, although not exclusively so. Women were still knitting socks but they were also at the forefront of the medical care which was being given to casualties arriving in the Borough hospitals. They were also the first to feel the impact of the

War as dependents, and employment assistance and relief were vital elements in the communities' responses to the success of the voluntary recruiting in 1915. They were also very often the first to feel the impact of those casualties of war, as husbands, sons and brothers were maimed or killed.

At the same time, the evidence demonstrates that women were at the forefront of organising relief and fund raising events themselves, letter writing, sending out comforts to the soldiers. Significantly, women were sending comforts to the local soldiers, establishing those links early on in the war. Women were also the key to the employment problem. Even before conscription there were steps being taken to employ women in what had been traditionally men's jobs. This was seen in Southport and in other towns in the area. As they developed this independence of existence however, they also became targets for criticism. It was a very mixed message which praised women for working on the one hand, but on the other castigated them for making money and for promoting their independence. This culminated in the slurs against women as drunks, when elements in the press and judiciary appeared to hide behind the new licensing laws to criticise women for drinking. This same community was also quick to raise the dangers of having so many young men billeted in the area where there was a high preponderance of single women available.

The local munitions industry, in Bootle in particular, demonstrated the value of women in the armaments industries. Their role fulfilled two ideals. Firstly, they were able to fill the gaps left by men who were conscripted and therefore any argument to protect the men's position became weaker. Secondly, they were more actively involved in the War itself. The making of arms and armaments was only one step away from actually firing them and in this way, local women were able to support the War aims and indirectly, their various menfolk so much more directly. The level of employment of women in the area demonstrated very clearly the commitment and desire of women in the community to be involved. Their loyalty to the munitions and agricultural industries was a measure of their commitment to the local War effort. This study has shown that the degree of involvement in Bootle, for example, was exceptionally high.

A further opportunity for women to demonstrate their commitment came after the sinking of the **Lusitania**. The natural desire to react to such an act of aggression was fuelled by local newspapers and their ambivalent attitude to the violence and destruction. Building on existing studies of the anti-German riots, this examination

has established that the spark for the riots and the events immediately after the sinking on Friday 7th May 1915 were entirely local, and apparently dominated and driven by local women. Certainly, that is the evidence from contemporary accounts and subsequent court reports. The riots were an expression of one aspect of community identity and this translated to the War Front, where men went into the charge at Festubert with the name of the **Lusitania** on their lips.

The role of women was also significant in the process of memorialisation, when they were seen as symbols of what was being fought for and not as active leaders. At the same time as the female Mayor was effectively excluded from the first dinner of the Battalions' Comrades Association, women and children were given centre stage at the inauguration of the Southport War Memorial. While they were less obviously at the centre of the press reports in Bootle, the War Memorial itself in Bootle's Derby Gardens was a depiction of a mother and child – an image, religious or secular - demonstrating the most basic of the War aims: the protection of home. Women had quickly been removed from their involvement in war to being onlookers and receivers of its effects. They were also to suffer from the demobilisation from munitions industries and the return to the traditional Edwardian occupations, as evidence from the 1921 census demonstrated. Conversely, their participation in local politics and organisations, as evidenced in this study, especially in Southport, during and after the War, demonstrated that their position had certainly moved on from being one of spectator in political society to one of actor.

The community identification with the Battalion and the growing sense of identity within the Battalion were brought together at the Battle of Festubert. It was this action which solidified the Battalion's own sense of identity and it also became the focus for the communities after the War to recognise the shared war experience. Veterans of the battle were revered within the Battalion during the War and afterwards it was the focus for the Battalion Association and their reunions. Both because it was their first action and because it occurred before the gaps in the ranks started to be filled by conscripts, Festubert achieved a kind of mythical position in the Battalion's folklore. Undoubtedly it was more important than 'history' remembers it but nor was it the unqualified success reported at the time. The fact that it retained that status with the veterans gave the local community a common history to focus on after the War. Despite Critchley's view on Ypres – he was a volunteer in August 1914 – it is Festubert which has survived as the Battalion's main battle honour into modern times.

There is no doubt that Festubert would not have had such resonance locally if it had not been for the wider involvement of the West Lancashire Division in the Lys area, especially in the Spring Offensive in 1918. The Divisional Memorial at Givenchy gave an important message about the significance of that attack, but its close proximity to Festubert was also important. More men from the Battalion lay in cemeteries in that sector than anywhere else. It was therefore an important demonstration of the continued emphasis on community identity that when the British League of Help initiated its system of adopting towns in France, Southport chose to adopt Festubert, while Liverpool adopted Givenchy. It was not just the adoption which was important, but also the continuation of that link until the outbreak of the Second World War, which showed the significance of the battle to the town. The new evidence regarding the League which has been collected in preparation for this thesis has shown that this was typical of these adoptions. Although the local links were certainly longer lived than the national charity, Southport's continued contact may have been much rarer. The analysis in this study of this particular charity has shown that there is still a great deal of investigation overdue on the work of local and national charities at the end of the War, particularly in assisting in the regeneration of France and Flanders. The League of Help was only one of a number of organisations engaged in the process uncovered by this thesis, and whatever the political motivation of the founders, the local organisations provide an important precedent for the twinning movement of the 1940s and 1950s which deserves some investigation and appraisal.

The reports of Festubert, printed in local newspapers, were such that the Home communities understood the full flavour of the War from an early stage. Not only were letters printed with quite graphic descriptions of conditions and deaths, but the long lists and photographs of casualties peppered every edition. Even with fluctuations in the extent of local reporting, these lists were constant. There is also evidence of local letters being reproduced in the newspapers throughout the War. In the absence of any major study of the consistency of these reports the actual reaction of the community can be hard to gauge but it is certain that the community was able to read, in some detail, what was going on for much of the War. Their level of understanding of what they read had to be based on more direct contacts with their own families and friends.

The official 'line' maintained by the local newspapers in Southport and Bootle can be seen throughout the War and beyond. There was little overt criticism of the

Government or War strategy and the main emphasis was on recruiting and supporting the local Battalion. After the War they were keen to reinforce the shared experience of the War and to promote and encourage the various memorialisation activities as 'community' events for veteran and civilian alike.

Festubert's real significance lies in its pace in the forging of identity between the Battalion and the home communities. It now has only limited strategic significance, forgotten as an afterthought to Neuve Chapelle and Aubers Ridge. It did have some importance however, if not for the night attack then for the continued attempts to understand the failings of a strategy of bombardment followed by a wave assault. The Battalion's ability to learn and develop while the Army as whole followed a learning curve was a crucial element in keeping the Unit in existence and usefully and reliably occupied in Front Line situations. This development can be tracked through the attacks on the Somme and at Ypres in 1917, to the more mobile and continuous assault in the Final Advance.

The Battalion, the local difficulty at Loos notwithstanding, proved itself to be a reliable component of the 55th Division for the rest of the War. Despite fluctuating numbers they spent an above average length of time in the Front Line and were involved in an above average number of combat engagements. On the Somme, their tactical success developed from the tortuous attempts to capture Guillemont to the successful implementation of preparation, use of the creeping barrage and an all-arms approach at Gueudecourt. Of course this was not achieved alone, but within the Divisional operation. Nonetheless, 7th King's were in the first wave of assault on both occasions.

Again, at Third Ypres, the Battalion was in the first attack on 31st July and captured enemy strongpoints. Their second attack, on 20th September, was across a familiar battlefield. Both reasonably successful operations from a Divisional point of view, the campaign's deterioration demonstrated still the need for better planning and communication, for more consistent provision of reliable equipment, and for more flexibility in attack and the ability to adapt more effectively to worsening conditions. In attack, these factors fell into place in the Final Advance where the concentration on more local level initiative and organisation meant that Battalions such as 7th King's formed the Advanced Guard, following up the German retreat.

In defence, it was somewhat ironic that as Kitchener's successor, Haig had to rely on a Territorial Division to hold back the German attack in April 1918. Givenchy was tactically and psychologically important for the Battalion and the Division. Jeudwine's preparation, training regime and confidence in his men to deliver inspired the confidence in him of his Corps commanders to rely on a system of defence which was contrary to GHQ's policies. His offensive defence doctrine, developed as the Cambrai Enquiry so unfairly blamed his Division, relied on local flexibility and commitment. In front of Festubert village, 7th King's demonstrated that with fortitude under a severe attack it might bend, but did not break the Line. The details of the after battle narratives, a concept championed by Jeudwine, show that platoons were reduced to limited numbers, often without officers or even NCOs.

Although costly in lives, the defence of Givenchy was a success. It was followed by a frenzy of reporting, motivated as much by relief as celebration. The focus of attention was again on local identity. The emphasis on Lancashire troops echoed the reaction to Festubert and indeed the attention on West Lancashire troops after the Battle of the Menin Road Ridge in 1917. The fact that this direct link between the community identity of the Division and its battle success occurred in the same area as the Battle of Festubert further bolstered the links with the area. The strength of the community identification with Givenchy and Festubert in the years following the War gave the home community not only a feeling of a shared War experience, but an opportunity to demonstrate it through the adoption of local towns and villages.

A key issue of the thesis has been to show the significance of local and community identity for the maintenance of good morale in the Battalion. The level of morale was important in order for discipline to be good and for the Battalion to focus on combat success. The Battalion showed itself able to perform ably under pressure and the influence of an increasingly effective Division can be seen. Its discipline was good, typifying the generally high standard of collective discipline within Jeudwine's 55th Division.

The contribution of community identity to maintaining good morale was recognised by Jeudwine and he pursued various methods to develop the Lancastrian identity of the Division. This regional identity was significant on the battlefield and also after the War, in the shape of grave markers and memorials. The battlefield success was directly linked to that identity. In 7th Battalion, as in other similar battalions, a reduction in the numbers of local men could have resulted in a decline in this cultural

connection. However, the original identification with Bootle and Southport was simply expanded to the wider county.

The identification of the Battalion with the Home community was based on a diverse community, in both Bootle and Southport. The ability to maintain that identity was because elements within the community were reflected within the Battalion. Nonetheless, the ability of the Battalion to maintain its good order despite these varying and competing identities was equally based on the unit's ability to create an identity for itself. Festubert became its focus in the field, and that this was carried through to the local community after the War is a demonstration of the significance of mutual identification and recognition.

This thesis has demonstrated the importance and usefulness of local holistic studies to draw out key issues which have been somewhat neglected in the past. In relation to the King's Liverpool Regiment, the increasing study and interest should now be brought together to facilitate a modern, insightful appraisal of its experiences in the Great War. This potential work of synthesis should draw on the various local and community studies which have been developed in recent years. Other questions, too, call for a holistic analysis of the Territorial Force and of the co-ordination and development of charitable and voluntary assistance in the aftermath of the First World War.