

VILLAGE ECHOES

In January 1916 Goudhurst and Kilndown were hit very hard, very suddenly, by an unforeseen consequence of their young men's sense of comradeship. The community then was far more close-knit than today, with the vast majority of residents working – and playing – within two or three miles of home. Opportunities for travelling further afield were limited, but one possibility open to young men with a sense of adventure was to join the Territorial Force, created by the government in 1908 as a more cohesive successor to the existing Volunteer units, and structured within the established system of county regiments. A large proportion of the nation's armed forces was stretched around the globe to patrol the British Empire, and in the event of war, the UK-based part of the Army would be expected to go where the fighting was, leaving the home territory exposed – hence the need for Territorials. Its members joined up for a fixed term of four years, during which they could be mobilised if a national emergency arose, though for service in the UK only.

Apart from the opportunity to join other like-minded young men in regular activities locally, one of the big attractions of the TF was to get away from home for the annual camp. Thus it was that early in August 1914 a number of young men from our parish belonging to the local TF unit, the 5th Buffs, found themselves – and thousands of others – at Longmoor Camp near Liphook in Hampshire when war was declared. They were immediately mobilised and sent to the regimental barracks at Dover. In the spirit of the time, more young men from the parish were prompt to enlist and, as village lads tend to stick together, especially in times of crisis, some of these volunteered specifically for the 5th Buffs, thus enlarging our mini-community inside the regiment. At the same time, cities and towns all over the country were creating "Pals" battalions by encouraging men to embark upon the great adventure of war alongside their friends, neighbours and workmates: it was a persuasive and successful tool for recruitment, but a fatal flaw was exposed later on when men who had lived together died together, at the same time and in large numbers.



**Goudhurst & Kilndown Men
1/5th Buffs 1915**

The scale of the war quickly spiralled in every way: growing numbers of recruits for the TF in Kent led to the creation of two extra battalions, and the 5th Buffs were re-named 1/5th; Territorials were invited to volunteer for service overseas; many responded positively. By the end of October 1914 the 1/5th Buffs were on their way to India, releasing Regular troops for the Western Front. In April 1915 28 of the battalion's men from our parish posed together for a

formal photograph at their base at Kamptee in central India; but by December their turn to fight had come and they had arrived in Mesopotamia (now Iraq). In January 1916, four of the Goudhurst & Kilndown "Pals" were killed in action and another was destined to die as a prisoner of war. The unforeseen consequence of civilian comradeship transferring into the military had come to pass.

Local History Society