

# The Salonika Front

This part of the Great War is little known as a place where British and Commonwealth troops served and in which many Cosgrove men died or were injured. British troops were sent there in 1915 to help the Serbians, who were already beaten by the time they arrived. During their march to Salonika, the troops were unaware of what awaited them.

*Wolverton Express 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1916*

## **The Trek at Salonika**

On the morning of May 2<sup>nd</sup>, the 7<sup>th</sup> Oxford and Bucks LI started on their great march. The morning was not very promising, rain threatened at any moment. We left camp at 8 am and the boys soon set up singing a few of their old songs. A small village called Saina, which we had camped close to about three months ago, looked splendid with its fine orchards as we marched past. Immediately following were fields and fields of barley tinted here and there with poppies and other flowers. The sun was now beginning to shine on us, and we looked the true "British Boys" with our bugles shining and our boots thumping on the hard ground. It was a good hour's march before we sighted Sangaza, another small village. Here there was an avenue of trees, which afforded us a little shade, and it was the best bit of scenery that we had seen in the country. In the marshes and in the swamps were storks hunting for food, an occasionally was heard the croak of the frog as it swam about in the watered places.

As we marched through Sangaza we noticed various nice buildings, and how clean the peasants were; quite different to those we had left behind. We arrived at a suitable camping place about 2 pm. The boys, though much strained with their heavy packs and the long march, went cheerfully to work, and soon erected their bivouacs to sleep in, and with the help of "Tommy's Cooker" were soon well away, feeding on meat and onions.



At night all was quiet, except for the occasional footsteps of the military police, or a deep snore from Tommy, dreaming of home.

Wednesday – The march continued this morning at 9.15 am, in splendid weather, but instead of keeping to the track we had to take to the hills and valleys. This proved a very sweating job, as the sun became very hot, and the boys were very glad to throw their packs off at every halt.

Eventually after miles of plodding we reached our new camp, which was situated in a nice spot, but the

Tommies were too tired to take much interest in it. At night they got very little rest, owing to the braying of the mules and the cold air.

The following morning the boys were aroused from their restless sleep by the voice of the sergeant-major, crying “Fall in with your water bottles”. Of course, every one of them was dying for a drop of water, and one by one, half asleep and half awake, they staggered out of their bivouac to get some of the much needed mineral – nature’s best drink. We had a food fill of Mac and biscuits for breakfast and a supply of lemons and oranges from the hawkers to keep us fresh on the march.

About 9.15 am the Battalion left camp and after toiling for miles in the broiling hot sun we came in sight of the enemies’ positions, and the boys were eagerly waiting for the word charge so as to get the job over quick and have a rest before marching to the new camp, which was about three miles distant, and they were about done up when they arrived, mainly through the shortage of water. The bivouacs were then pitched, and after a scanty meal the boys were ready for their blankets.

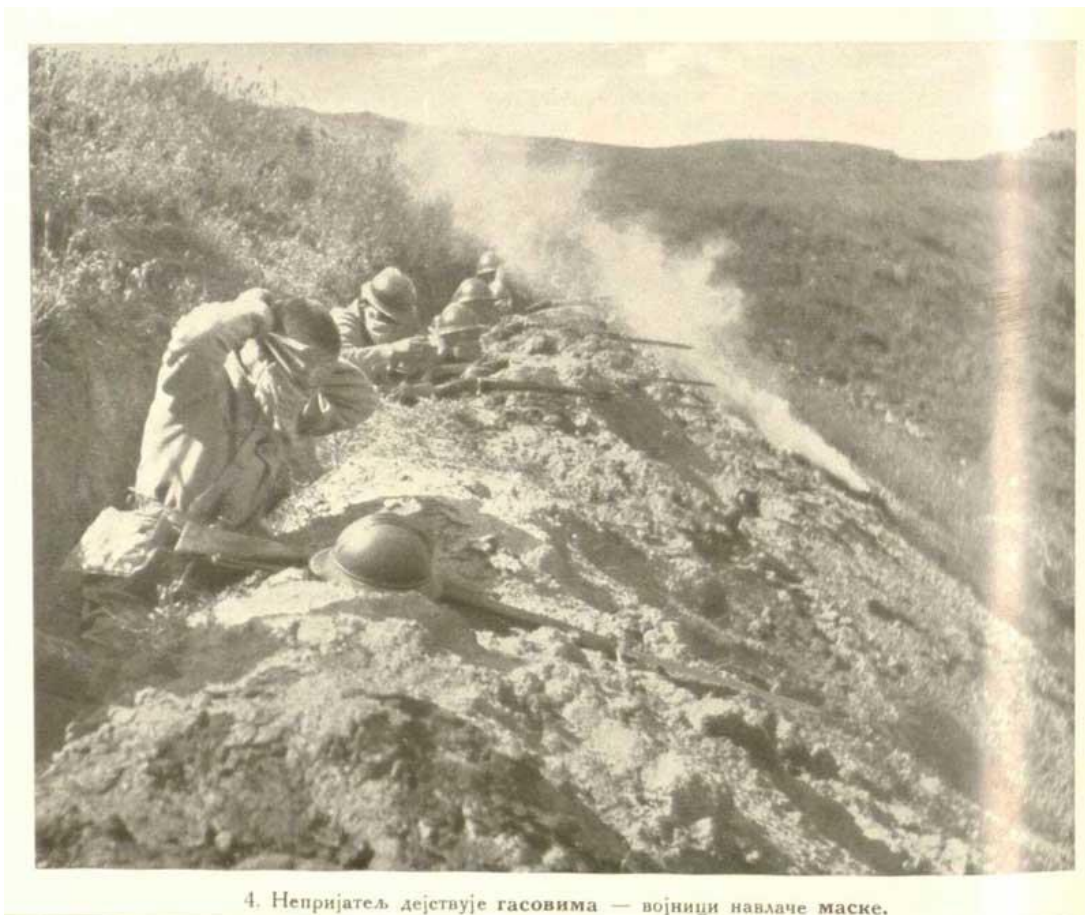
Friday – The Tommies were about early, getting ready for another wet start. As usual the Battalion started out late, the time being about 9.05 am, just when the rain was getting stronger. We were getting on well with the scheme, when we had the news that a Zepp. had been brought down at Salonica. The cheered the boys somewhat, but the continual climbing up hills knocked all the go out of them. It was only the good training that we have had that kept us from falling out.

Saturday – We continued a rearguard action, but the boys did not take much interest in it for they were retiring towards our camp. The next morning we finished the rear action which brought us on the plain.



Behind the trenches, soldiers lived in encampments of bell tents, wearing gear adapted from the servicemen posted in India.

Thousands of British troops, later joined by French, Italians and Russians, faced the Bulgarian army, an ally of the Central Powers, on the Salonika Front. Like the Western front they dug an extensive trench system, and while there were big battles, the greatest threat was from disease, especially malaria.



During the conflicts mustard gas was also used, blinding and debilitating soldiers with lung disorders – it was their greatest fear.

*Wolverton Express 29<sup>th</sup> September 1916*

The Oxfords, who got through, have lived through absolute hell, as we were exposed to frontal fire, enfilade fire from both flanks and defilade fire from our left flank by the Bulgarian batteries, which were absolutely raining shrapnel and high explosives on to us. Some of the high explosive shells were 9.5 and never will I be able to realise how the fellows got through that barrage of fire, how they escaped casualties in repelling two counter attacks made by 600 Bulgars and how any of us got out of that hell-spot alive.

A P Boor



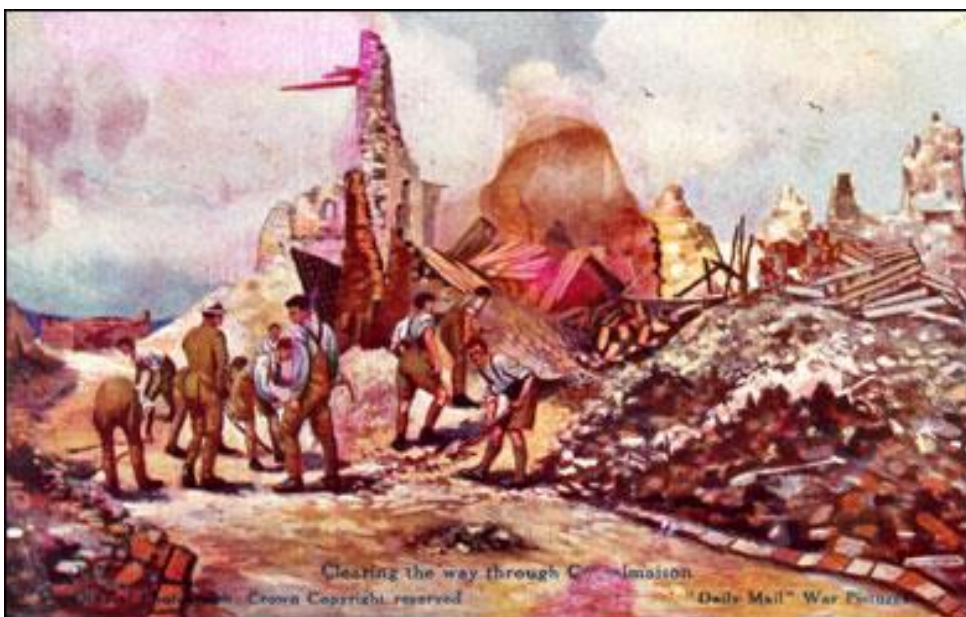
By the end of the campaign more than 10,600 British soldiers had died in Salonika, many of disease rather than bullets or shells. Soldiers called it "Muckydonia", instead of its other name, Macedonia.

Some early film footage of the Salonika front exists, which can be viewed at <http://www.britishpathe.com/>

A Castlethorpe man, Jack Brown, brought back coloured postcards showing the later years of the war in Salonika.



Wiring party, Salonika, WW1



Clearing party, Salonika.

In 1917 the town of Salonika was largely destroyed by a huge fire, which seems not to have been related to the conflict.



Corner of  
the Quay,  
Salonika



Salonika –  
Tunsky  
Street

The Salonika Front remained quite stable, thanks to the combined Allied troops, despite local actions, until the great Allied offensive in September 1918, which resulted in the capitulation of Bulgaria and the liberation of Serbia.