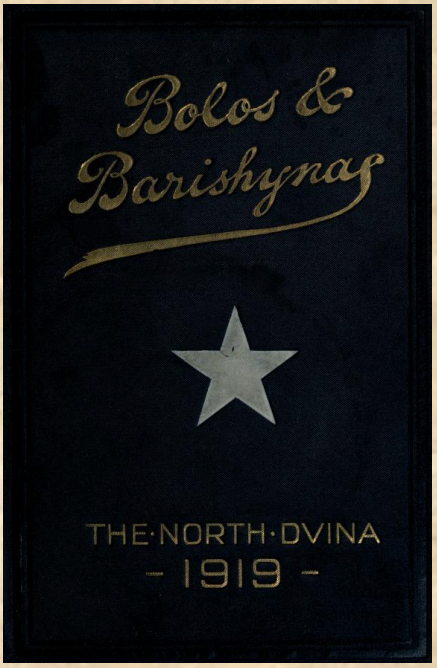
Russian Relief Force in Folkestone 1919

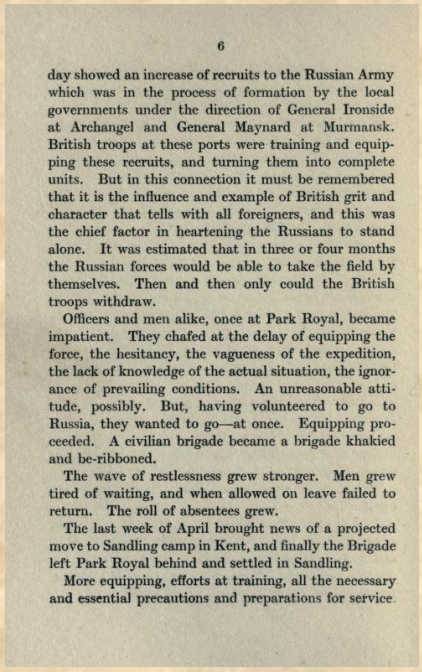
The clue to Folkestone's connection to this little known aspect of WW1 lies in the engraving on an isolated stone cross just off the old A20.

East Sandling Camp was an extension of the long established Shorncliffe Camp and was used extensively during WW1.

It is not intended here to give an account of the Russian Relief Force, its mission and activities, but simply to establish its presence in Folkestone before sailing to Murmansk.

A useful book is:





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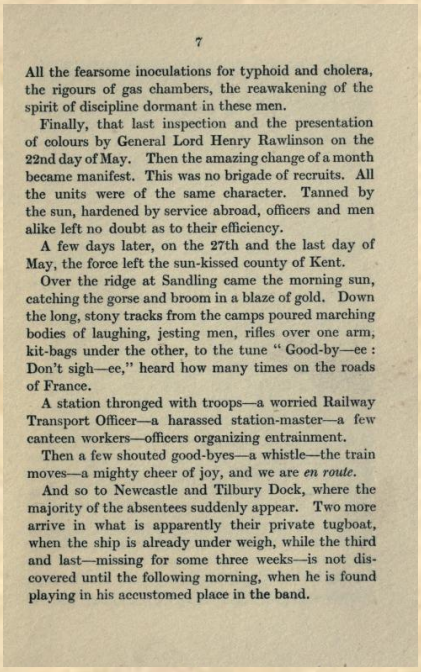
day showed an increase of recruits to the Russian Army which was in the process of formation by the local governments under the direction of General Ironside at Archangel and General Maynard at Murmansk. British troops at these ports were training and equipping these recruits, and turning them into complete units. But in this connection it must be remembered that it is the influence and example of British grit and character that tells with all foreigners, and this was the chief factor in heartening the Russians to stand alone. It was estimated that in three or four months the Russian forces would be able to take the field by themselves. Then and then only could the British troops withdraw.

Officers and men alike, once at Park Royal, became impatient. They chafed at the delay of equipping the force, the hesitancy, the vagueness of the expedition, the lack of knowledge of the actual situation, the ignorance of prevailing conditions. An unreasonable attitude, possibly. But, having volunteered to go to Russia, they wanted to go—at once. Equipping proceeded. A civilian brigade became a brigade khakied and be-ribboned.

The wave of restlessness grew stronger. Men grew tired of waiting, and when allowed on leave failed to return. The roll of absentees grew.

The last week of April brought news of a projected move to Sandling camp in Kent, and finally the Brigade left Park Royal behind and settled in Sandling.

More equipping, efforts at training, all the necessary and essential precautions and preparations for service.



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All the fearsome inoculations for typhoid and cholera, the rigours of gas chambers, the reawakening of the spirit of discipline dormant in these men.

Finally, that last inspection and the presentation of colours by General Lord Henry Rawlinson on the 22nd day of May. Then the amazing change of a month became manifest. This was no brigade of recruits. All the units were of the same character. Tanned by the sun, hardened by service abroad, officers and men alike left no doubt as to their efficiency.

A few days later, on the 27th and the last day of May, the force left the sun-kissed county of Kent.

Over the ridge at Sandling came the morning sun, catching the gorse and broom in a blaze of gold. Down the long, stony tracks from the camps poured marching bodies of laughing, jesting men, rifles over one arm, kit-bags under the other, to the tune "Good-by—ee : Don't sigh—ee," heard how many times on the roads of France.

A station thronged with troops—a worried Railway Transport Officer—a harassed station-master—a few canteen workers—officers organizing entrainment.

Then a few shouted good-byes—a whistle—the train moves—a mighty cheer of joy, and we are *en route*.

And so to Newcastle and Tilbury Dock, where the majority of the absentees suddenly appear. Two more arrive in what is apparently their private tugboat, when the ship is already under weigh, while the third and last—missing for some three weeks—is not discovered until the following morning, when he is found playing in his accustomed place in the band.

IN ENGLAND.

General Lord Rawlinson and the Chaplain-General to the Forces presenting and consecrating the Colours at Sandling, Kent, in May.

IN RUSSIA.

The Review on Troitsa Heights after the completion of the Attack and immediately before the Withdrawal by General Lord Rawlinson.

The book can be read online by clicking this hyperlink:

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