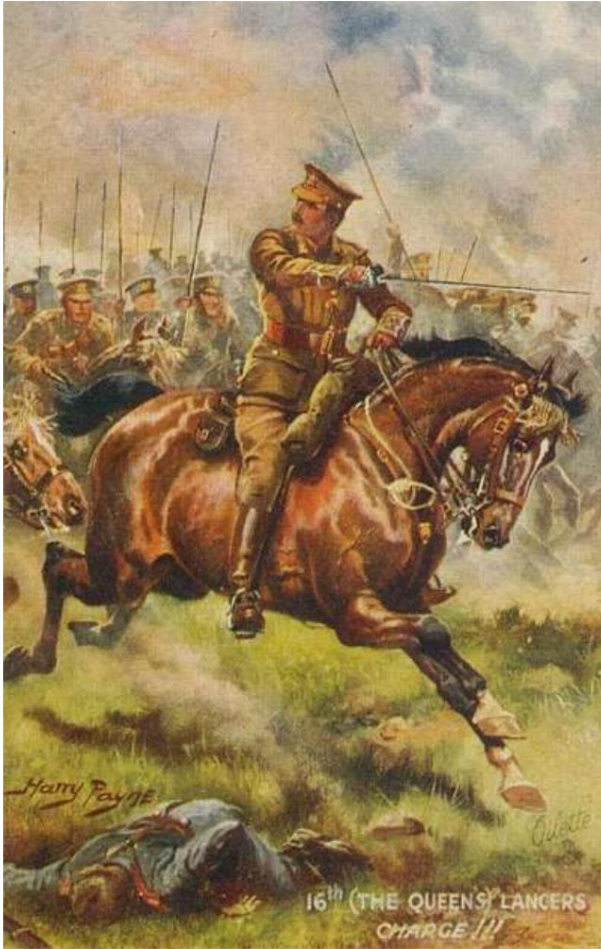


# English cavalry during the First World War

## Introduction



While searching the Internet, I came across an exciting documentation of a piece of thoroughly carried out genealogical research, in which the story behind an old photograph is unravelled.

The authors are an American couple - *Mark and Cyndi Howells* - who, on the basis of documents in various English archives and the benevolent assistance of a number of good people, describe *Lieutenant Charles J. Aris* and his service in the English lancer regiment *16th (The Queen's) Lancers*.

My own angle on their article is the military historical one, as the reader gets a good impression of the service in an English cavalry regiment and its efforts in the Boer War and the First World War, as well as in the career of a junior officer. At the same time, however, the material can serve as a good introduction to the subject of English cavalry during the First World War.

With my warmest recommendation, I therefore pass on the address [www.oz.net/~markhow/chasaris.htm](http://www.oz.net/~markhow/chasaris.htm) in order to give others the opportunity for similar experiences. I recommend that you print out the document, but please note that it takes up 24 A4 pages, including pictures and maps.

## About English cavalry during the First World War

In the years following the Boer War, there was debate over whether the cavalry's days as a mounted battle formation were numbered. One side of the debate claimed that there was a need for mounted infantry who could conduct reconnaissance and then be quickly deployed where it was necessary to create weight. The other side i

the debate put forward, it was still considered possible and necessary that one could also draw blank and - following the best and centuries-old equestrian traditions - beat the enemy with mounted attacks.

When the First World War broke out, no conclusion had been reached, but the English cavalry was trained and, in principle, equipped for both tasks. The cavalry division soon came to handle tasks such as shock cavalry in occasional mounted attacks, but the modern battlefield soon showed how risky mounted attacks were.



From then on, the cavalry were deployed on foot and their skills as infantry were seriously put to the test. The units' high level of training meant that the individual rider shot as well as his comrades in the infantry, but the weaknesses showed themselves on the organizational and equipment side.

A cavalry regiment, with its many horses, necessarily had to have personnel to take care of the horses while the regiment fought on foot, and for this you had to use at least  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the force. This reduced the effective fighting force to just under 400 men.

In terms of equipment, horsemen did not carry bayonets, which limited their effectiveness in close combat. Furthermore, the individual man was not equipped with entrenchment tools, which made it difficult for the units to dig in when necessary.

During the autumn of 1914, the equipment deficiencies were remedied and it was concluded that a detached cavalry brigade could, in principle, only be able to perform tasks which corresponded to what could be assigned to an infantry battalion.



Later, the cavalry was freed from actual combat duties and the mounted units were kept as a reserve force that had to gallop forward through the German lines when the decisive breakthrough had been made. Only in the autumn of 1918, however, did it really become possible to deploy the cavalry in this way, and throughout the war it was debated - often at the highest level - whether one could afford to tie up resources to keep the many thousands of cavalry horses cared for, so that one might day could benefit from them.

The terrain conditions that characterized the war in Europe did not apply to the same extent in the Middle East, where British, Australian, New Zealand and Indian mounted units did well.

The large expanses made it possible to take advantage of the cavalry's mobility, although the possibilities of access to water supply had to be taken into account at all times in the planning and execution of the operations. However, it is surprising to read about how long it was actually possible for horses - and men - to do without water. It was not uncommon that you often had to wait 36 to 48 hours before it became possible to water the horses.

However, the conditions for mounted attacks were no different here than those encountered in Belgium and France in 1914 - a mounted attack was still costly in fallen horses and men, but there are also - especially in the Middle East - a number of examples of favorable occasions could be taken advantage of fortunately.

After the war, the justification for cavalry continued to be debated and while supporters found support in the operations in the Middle East, opponents pointed to the battles in Europe. The long and the short of it was that in April 1928 two regiments - *11th (Prince Albert's Own) Hussars* and *12th (Prince of Wales's Royal) Lancers* - were converted into armored car regiments.

## **Om 16th (The Queen's) Lancers**

The regiment in which Charles J. Aris served was in 1914 part of the cavalry division which was part of

The English Expeditionary Force. The Division's *Order-of-Battle* is shown at the end of this article.



The expeditionary corps included a further 5<sup>th</sup> *Cavalry Brigade*, which was an independent brigade, but which often grounded together with the cavalry division. The brigade's organization is described in my article *Scotland For Ever!*.

The organization of a cavalry regiment in 1914 is discussed in my article *Britain's Horse-Drawn Trains, Part 3*.

### **About the postcards**

The postcards shown here were all drawn by *Harry Payne* around the time of the outbreak of the First World War and give a good and accurate impression of how the officers and privates of *the 16th (The Queen's) Lancers* got out in August 1914.

A description of uniforms, equipment and armament can be found in the article *English Cavalry 1914* by T. Claudius, Chakoten Nr. 1/1971.

### **Sources**

1. *A History of the British Cavalry 1816-1919, Volume 5: Egypt, Palestine and Syria, 1914-1919* af The Marquess of Anglesey, Leo Cooper, London 1994, ISBN 0-85052-395-8.
2. *A History of the British Cavalry 1816-1919, Volume 6: Mesopotamia, 1914-1918* af The Marquess of Anglesey, Leo Cooper, London 1996, ISBN 0-85052-433-4.
3. *A History of the British Cavalry 1816-1919, Volume 7: The Curragh Incident and the Western Front, 1914* af The Marquess of Anglesey, Leo Cooper, London 1996, ISBN 0-85052-437-7.
4. *A History of the British Cavalry 1816-1919, Volume 8: The Western Front, 1915-1918, Epilogue, 1919-1939* af The Marquess of Anglesey, Leo Cooper, London 1997, ISBN 0-85052-467-9.



## Postscript

This postcard - also drawn by Harry Payne - is not named as belonging to a particular lancer regiment, but gives an impression of the difficulties of carrying out a mounted attack across a trench and thus some of the conditions of the English cavalry after 1914.

Uniforming and equipment are basically the same as in 1914. However, the soldiers now have a steel helmet and the private lancers' horses are equipped with an extra cartridge belt that is worn around the horse's neck, with which the soldier could carry an additional 100 rounds.

### **The Cavalry Division** (Order-of-Battle pr. 8. August 1914)

*Chef: Major-General EHH Allenby*

*Chief of Staff: Colonel J. Vaughan*

*Artillery Commander: Brigadier-General BF Drake*

#### **1st Cavalry Brigade**

*Chef: Brigadier-General C.J. Briggs*

2nd Dragoon Guards (Queen's Bays)

5th (Princess Charlotte of Wales's) Dragoon Guards 9th (Queen's Royal) Lancers

11th (Prince Albert's Own) Hussars

1st Signal Troop

#### **2nd Cavalry Brigade**

*Chef: Brigadier-General H. de B de Lisle*

4th (Royal Irish) Dragoon Guards

18th (Queen Mary's Own) Hussars

2nd Signal Troop

#### **3rd Cavalry Brigade**

*Chef: Brigadier-General H. de la P. Gough*

#### **4th Cavalry Brigade**

*Chef: Brigadier-General Hon. C.E. Bingham*

4th (Queen's Own) Hussars

Composite Regiment of Household Cavalry

5th (Royal Irish) Lancers

6th Dragoon Guards (Carabiniers)

16th (The Queen's) Lancers

3rd (King's Own) Hussars

3rd Signal Troop

4th Signal Troop

### **Cavalry Divisional Troops**

*Artillery:* III. Brigade, Royal Horse Artillery

D & E Battery

III. Brigade Ammunition Column

VII. Brigade, Royal Horse Artillery

I & L Battery

VII. Brigade Ammunition Column

*Ingeniørtropper:* 1st Field Squadron, Royal Engineers

*Telegraftrøpper:* 1st Signal Squadron

*Forsyningstrøpper:* 1st Cavalry Divisional Army Service Corps

*Sanitetsenheder:* 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Cavalry Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps

### **Source:**

*Official History, Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1914* af J.E. Edmonds, London 1922.

Per Finsted