

PORTSOY IN 1914



The Square, Portsoy



The New Harbour, Portsoy



The 6th Gordon Highlanders on Summer Camp 1914

On August 4th 1914, when Britain declared war on Germany, Portsoy was a thriving port with a population of just under two thousand

The herring industry had brought prosperity to the town and many businesses flourished here, including 2 butchers, 6 bakers, 9 grocers, a printer/stationer, a rope and twine maker and a jeweller. The town had a railway, a Post Office, a police station and a gas works; the Campbell Hospital was just ten years old.



The battalion leaving Portsoy station Courtesy of The Gordon Highlanders Museum

People in the town had been expecting war, as tensions had been building between European nations all through the summer. On August 2nd the local Naval Reserve was asked to report, in uniform, to Macduff. On August 4th the 6th Gordon Highlanders, a territorial battalion which included young men from Portsoy, was immediately recalled from its summer camp. On August 6th the battalion went south for training; and on November 10th they left for France.



The Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, was planning a new 'model army' of 100,000 men to add to Britain's regular army. Recruitment posters quickly appeared in the town, along with other patriotic propaganda, and recruitment meetings were held in the Town Hall. Medically fit men between 19 and 38 years of age, 5 ft 3 inches and over, were needed. By December 1914 alone, 120 young men from Portsoy had volunteered for active service.



EXCERPTS FROM THE BANFFSHIRE REPORTER
AUGUST 12th 1914

Members of the force in their khaki and kilts were early astir (in Portsoy)... much comment was made on their smart and serviceable appearance. About 10.30 am the command was given to fall in. This took place in front of the Drill Hall; and thereafter the men were marched inside and drawn up in line.

Provost Sutherland then stepped forward and addressed them. As British soldiers they would be expected to do their duty. Whatever they did, let them remember that they were Gordon Highlanders and that they belonged to Portsoy. The people at home would have their eyes turned towards them, and would not forget them...

Bailie Gray also addressed the men:

"Better that every son of Scotland should die on the battlefield than dishonour should fall on our spotless banner. Men, we know we can leave it safe in your hands; we trust you; we are proud of what you have done."

The (station) platform was thronged by people from end to end, while over the bridge which spans the line a living archway was formed. It was not a dismayed or downhearted gathering, though there were doubtless those who deep down felt what the farewell might mean...



Dear Native Land!
thy fortunes frown,
And ruffians would
enslave thee;
Thou Land of honour
and renown,
Who would not die
to save thee?



"Throughout Banffshire a great wave of enthusiasm is spreading in connection with the recruiting campaign now being undertaken in every town, village and hamlet all over the county"