CHESTERFIELD WFA

Newsletter and Magazine issue 22

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Welcome to Issue 22 the March 2017 Newsletter and Magazine of Chesterfield WFA.

The next Chesterfield Branch Meeting will be held on Tuesday 4th April with a 7.30 start

Making a welcome return visit to the branch as our speaker will be Richard Pullen

"Munitionettes" By June 1917, roughly 80% of the weaponry and ammunition used by the British army during World War I was being made by women who became known as munitionettes. Richard will explain their story.

The Branch meets at the Labour Club, Unity House, Saltergate, Chesterfield S40 1NF on the first Tuesday of each month. There is plenty of parking available on site and in the adjacent road. Access to the car park is in Tennyson Road, however, which is one way and cannot be accessed directly from Saltergate.

Western Front Association Chesterfield Branch – Meetings 2017

Meetings start at 7.30pm and take place at the Labour Club, Unity House, Saltergate, Chesterfield S40 1NF

January	3rd	**Branch AGM** Tony Bolton- ***"1917 – an Overview of the Year"***. Book Sale – all at a pound !
February	7th	Niall Cherry – **Cambrai 1917.** Church bells rang out in Britain to celebrate the success of the British attack, but the Germans countered and soon all was back to square one. Why ? – and what lessons were learned
March	7th	Peter Hart ***"Guns of Passchendaele 1917"***. On his talk Peter will cover guns and the Royal Artillery during the Third Battle of Ypres.
April	4th	Richard Pullen – **"Munitionettes"** By June 1917, roughly 80% of the weaponry and ammunition used by the British army during World War I was being made by women who became known as munitionettes. Richard explains their story
May	2nd	Malcolm Sime - ***"Kaiserschlact"*** this presentation will examine the performance of the 66th (2nd East Lancs) Division and the British system of defence in depth on 21 and 22 March 1918, covering the political and military background, the quality and training of the troops involved, both British and German, the planning and implementation of the defences in that sector and the events of the first two days of the Kaiserschlacht.
June	6th	Rob Thompson – **Messines 1917**.It has been argued that the Battle of Messines was the most successful local operation of the war, certainly of the Western Front. Carried out by Plumer`s 2nd Army it was launched on 7 June 1917. Rob will explain why this offensive was a success.
July	4th	Charles Beresford - **The Forgotten Story of Derbyshire's Major Role in the Nation's Commemoration of the Great War.**
August	1st	Alan Atkinson – "Propaganda – The British Way !" Drawing on his researches for his MA, Alan will explain how the British exploited Propaganda to their advantage.
September	5th	Tony Bolton – " **Iraq Inquiry – 1917.** The Mesopotamia Campaign was a major defeat for the Imperial Forces – Tony will explain why and the outcome of the subsequent inquiry.
October	3rd	Murray McVey – **Battle of Broodseinde** was fought on 4 October 1917 near Ypres in Flanders, at the east end of the Gheluvelt plateau, by the British Second and Fifth armies and the German 4th Army. The battle was the most successful Allied attack of the Battle of Passchendaele.
November	7th	Arthur Lacey - **'Medical Anecdotes from the Great War**- what did the RAMC do?. An introduction to the RAMC history and organisation, but also about casualties, heroes and diseases with reference to individual soldiers stories as illustrations.
December	5th	Prof John Derry - **`Haig Reconsidered`** Sir Douglas Haig was the victorious commander of the BEF, but still divides opinion. Prof Derry will look at recent researches into his command.

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A Personal note from the Chair (15)

Glancing through yesterday's *Daily Telegraph* my eye was drawn to the daily reproduction of the headlines 100 years ago in the First World War feature. I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised but nevertheless was that it took until 21 March 1917 to report the abdication of the Tsar. In fact the quite detailed report makes clear the chaotic circumstances surrounding the abdication. Initially the Tsar sought to abdicate in favour of his son the Tsarevitch with the Tsar's brother as Regent but it was far too late, the dynasty and not just Nicholas II fell on 15 March. In Russia the different calendars meant that the first revolution was known as the February Revolution and it was almost entirely a metropolitan revolution, the countryside and even the most of the army knew nothing about it until it was over. The abdication of the Tsar however had one significant advantage for the Entente; it removed one of the hurdles to America joining the war.

From the recommencement of Unrestricted Submarine Warfare on 1 February 1917 until Wilson signed the declaration of war on 6 April the United States had been in crisis, with the anti-war

voices articulated by Wilson himself very much in the forefront. Wilson saw himself as the broker of peace and clung to neutrality in the face of American losses in ship and sailors. The evidence of German intentions towards the US demonstrated by the ham fisted Zimmermann telegram and the removal of a totalitarian regime in Russia strengthened American voices which finally encouraged Congress and the President into belligerency.

American entry into the war, never as a member of the Entente but only as an 'Associated Power' gave a huge morale boost to the Entente Powers and their populations but in practical terms in the short term there were serious problems, not least of which was the American seizure of all British and Empire merchant shipping under construction in US yards and this at the height of the U-boat onslaught. April 1917 saw the loss of 800,000 tons of shipping a total never exceeded even at the height of the Battle of the Atlantic in the Second World War. There is a lingering suspicion that the seizure policy was driven at least in part by American desire to challenge British domination of world shipping in the post war world.

The more I study the First World War the more fascinated I am in the inter-relationship of apparently disparate events.

One last point –last but not least I would like to express my thanks for the donation of the laser pointer cum slide changer. I understand that it was not just my technophobia which prevented us being able to use it at last March meeting but a replacement (which apparently work perfectly) is winging its way to us, Thanks again.

Tony Bolton

Secretary`s Scribbles

Welcome to the second Branch Newsletter of 2017. This year has seen the Branch Meetings get off to a great start with virtual `full houses` at all three meetings, something which has brought a great deal of satisfaction to your Committee – we must be doing something right ! Now that we are getting into evenings with more light some folks might find other outlets, garden etc., but I hope that the good programme of speakers coming up will tempt them to keep coming. It has also been encouraging to see some new faces, I hope you liked what you saw and heard and will return soon – be assured of a warm welcome.

There are a number of Western Front Association organised events coming up full details are found elsewhere in this Newsletter /Magazine. You may have noticed that I have changed the titled from `Newsletter` to `Newsletter/Magazine` as I feel including the word `Magazine` more accurately reflects the content.

As you all know Pam Ackroyd stood down as Branch Treasurer at the last AGM but since then she has been far from idle with respect to Branch affairs and has completely revamped the Branch website (www.wfachesterfield.com) .In addition to the usual information there are two new interesting features, Pam has introduced a `Gallery` section where members can have photographs displayed. If any member wishes to have any of their pictures displayed they can be e mailed to the Branch e mail address (chesterfieldwfa@gmail.com) or if not in digital format bring them along to a Branch meeting and we can arranged to have them scanned for posting on the website.

Another new section is `Members Books` - we are aware that several members have had book published – this website section allows them to showcase their efforts. The latest of these is the biography of Rev. Bernard Vann, VC MC by Charles Beresford (details elsewhere in the Magazine). There was an `official` launch of Charles`s book at a function in Nottingham Castle on March 24 – see elsewhere in this issue. Whilst we are on the subject of books former Branch Chairman / Secretary Peter Hodgkinson brought out a book late last year - `Glum Heroes` - a review of which is to be found elsewhere in this issue.

The Branch also has an active Facebook page – WFA (Chesterfield Branch) or https://www.facebook.com/groups/157662657604082/ . This is managed by Branch Vice Chairman, Mark Macartney.

April 4th, our next meeting sees Richard Pullen make a welcome return as speaker, this time to present on the ***`Munitionettes`.*** With so many men having joined the armed forces there was a crisis in the manufacturing of all types of war materiel. The Minister for Munitions David Lloyd George joined forces with his hitherto arch–enemy Emmeline Pankhurst (she had once blown up his house as part of the Suffragettes Campaign) to bring women into all industries vital to the war effort. By 1917 80% of all munitions were being manufactured by women and undoubtedly without their efforts the war could not have been won. Not only was this a war winning effort, women taking jobs that had hitherto been exclusively for men heralded in much social change in British society. Richard will tell their story.

As always I am looking for content for future Newsletters…perhaps you visited a cemetery looking for a relative…maybe a museum…or indeed just some anecdotes to share.

Now that we are into the second quarter of 2017, my thoughts are now turning to arranging speakers for next year. Please let me know if there is any particular speaker you would like to hear – or any topic which you think would be of interest to our branch members. Speak to me at the next meeting – drop me a line using my e mail address.

Please send all items for inclusion to grantcullen@hotmail.com

Thank you for your continued support

Grant Cullen – Branch Secretary

WFA Book Review Editor Appointed

The Western Front Association Executive Committee is pleased to announce the appointment of David Filsell as Book Review Editor to succeed Lt Col Bob Wyatt.

David will take over the appointment formally with effect 1st March 2017.
All future dealings should be through him from this date.
David is a working journalist and a former Editor and has been a prolific writer of book reviews in Stand To!

He joined The Western Front Association shortly after its formation and has been a trustee and also a past committee member of the Surrey Branch.
The WFA Executive Committee expresses its enormous gratitude to Bob for his professional and reliable work over very many years. Bob was awarded a plaque last year to mark his 'outstanding work for the WFA'.

Steve Oram, Honorary Secretary, WFA

February Meeting 2017

Branch Chairman Tony Bolton opened the meeting in front of a `full house` - it was good to see quite a few first time visitors. Before introducing the speaker for the evening, Tony drew members attention to the availability of Charles Beresford`s new book – `The Christian Soldier` - the life of the Rev. Bernard William Vann VC, MC, which has just been published. Charles had some copies available for members to purchase at a substantial discount from the cover price – indeed as Tony quipped –*"cheaper than Amazon!"*

The opening proceedings out of the way, Tony then introduced our speaker for the evening, Niall Cherry, this being Niall`s second visit to the branch having spoken on the Battle of Loos 1915 several years ago.

Niall began with telling members a little bit about himself, his own military background in the RAMC, how he developed his passion for The Great War from his maternal grandfather who, despite passing away before Niall was born had had an interesting career in the Royal Engineers, finishing the war as a Captain in a trench mortar regiment. Ingesting gas during the war shortened his life and he died in 1943. For Niall, this interest has led to speaking engagements and the eleven books which he has authored.

Then on to the talk on `Cambrai` which as Niall said is pretty well known to most with an interest in The Great War as being the first *mass* use of tanks but other aspects of the battle are not so well known. Cambrai can be looked upon as an afterthought of the horrible battles earlier in 1916 and1917 – Somme, Arras, and Ypres (Messines and Passchendaele) plus the last 100 Days battles in the Advance to Victory of 1918 – a point often overlooked. He then put up a slide comparing the daily losses (killed/missing/wounded/prisoners) of the BEF in these battles, pointing out that the Battle of Arras was actually the worst for casualties.

Somme	2943
Arras	4076
Ypres	2323
100 Days	3645

After the relative success of the Battle of Messines, the BEF was thrust into the mincing machine of the battles of Third Ypres - Passchendaele – where around a quarter of a million British and Empire troops became casualties. As we know the plan was to seize the Passchendaele Ridge, swing north and drive the Germans from the Belgian channel ports like Zeebrugge from where German submarines were operating against shipping in the Western Approaches. This offensive, of course petered out in the Flanders mud, the artillery bombardments wrecking the drainage system of the reclaimed land, combined with the wettest autumn in a generation.

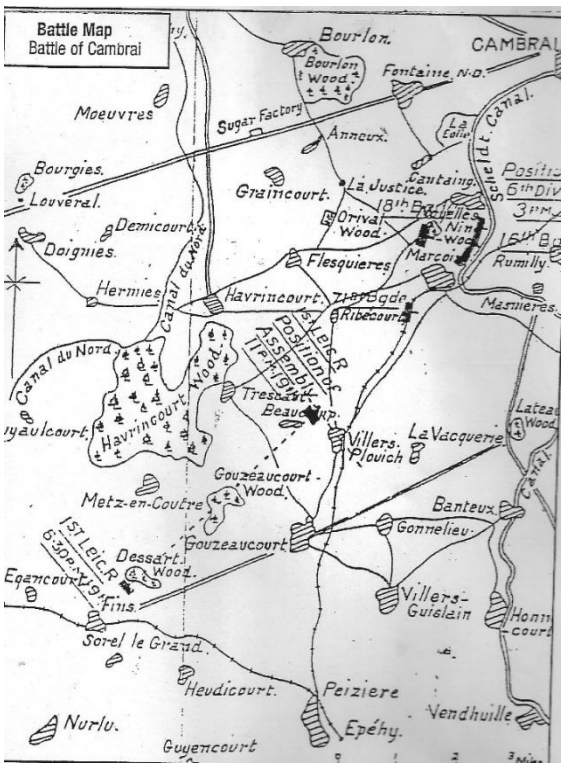
Within ten days of the Canadians finally seizing the ruins of Passchendaele, the BEF were on the offensive again this time in what became known as the Battle of Cambrai. The town of Cambrai, which had a pre-war population of around 20000 was an important centre for the German forces being ideally situated to receive men and materials by rail from Germany and to send troops north towards the Ypres Salient and south to the Arras and Somme sectors. The BEF, in particular Douglas Haig had long known of the strategic importance of Cambrai as a logistics

base for the German army but it was only the German retreat to the Hindenburg line in the spring of 1917 that brought the town tantalisingly close to the front line.

In the spring of 1917, a conference of Allied commanders, led by French General Robert Nivelle (left) who proposed an attack by the BEF and French army in the St. Quentin sector, with the British taking the northern flank. The French south towards Herbincourt. This proposal suited Haig and after the conference he ordered the staffs of 4th and 5th armies to make plans for and assault on the Hindenburg line around Cambrai. The commanders of these armies, Rawlinson and Gough set about the planning and Haig reported to Nivelle that `wheels were in motion` for this attack. In June 1917 4th army was moved north to take part in the Passchendaele offensive, it being replaced by 3rd army which has been involved in the Battle of Arras where it had suffered heavy casualties.

It was now commanded by Lieutenant General Sir Julian Byng (left) who had distinguished himself commanding the Canadians in the successful capture of Vimy Ridge. Byng had learned the lessons of this assault, particularly the part played by the artillery bombardment. Niall then distributed a map of the Cambrai sector to all present to compliment that being projected on the screen.

This map showed the entire battlefield zone and pinpointed the assembly location for the tank force.



One young officer was full of enthusiasm for this proposed attack in Third Army area was 40 year old Brigadier General Hugh Ellis (left), commander of the tank corps. In August 1915, he was one of three officers specially selected by CIGS Sir William Robertson to liaise with troops at the front and pass the information directly to the British General Headquarters. In January 1916, as a GSO, he was sent by Haig to investigate the first tanks being built in England. He attended the first trials of `Mother` or `Big Willie` and reported back to Haig on its success. During the summer of 1916, he was tasked to report back from the Somme, where the tanks were first used. He was appointed to head the Heavy Branch (the first tank units) of the Machine Gun Corps in France on 29 September 1916, with the temporary rank of Colonel. His responsibilities included its advanced training and tactical employment. He also commanded the large central depot and workshops established near Bermicourt. Ellis`s Chief of Staff was Lieutenant General J C Fuller and with Lieutenant General Henry H Tudor the tank attack plan was formulated. His suggested method was to have artillery ranging by surveying rather than the accepted ranging and registration, otherwise trial and error, shots which gave warning to the enemy that an attack was forthcoming. For him the tanks should crush passages through the wire through which the troops could pass. Thus no wire cutting shellfire would be necessary and no guns need fire before zero hour. Thus, for the first time in the war a major offensive would commence with a surprise attack. However, nothing concrete happened based upon these recommendations except that the Tank Corps and the artillery should plan to cooperate in smashing through the fortifications once battle commenced. By September 1917, Byng, who was very keen on the idea of a surprise attack with the tanks and artillery gave approval for more detailed planning to take place. Byng impressed upon all the need for absolute secrecy, under no circumstances were any of the preparations to be seen by the Germans. With the offensive around Passchendaele grinding to a halt, on October 12th 1917, Haig approved Byng`s plan for the drive through the Hindenburg line towards Cambrai. Haig`s problems were piling up and on October 24th, a combined force of Germans and Austrians broke through the Italian front at Caporetto. Haig was instructed by his political masters in Italy to immediately send two Divisions to Italy to support the Italian allies with a further two divisions of heavy artillery to follow. Herbert Plummer, in Niall`s opinion, one of the most successful British Generals of the Great War, was instructed to go immediately to Italy and take command of the British forces there. Relations between Haig and the Prime Minister David Lloyd George had broken down and in Haig`s eyes, Lloyd George was keeping him short of troops. The BEF were also faced with the prospect taking over more of the Western Front from the French army which was still recovering from the mutinies which followed the disastrous Nivelle offensive on the Chemin des Dames. Niall believed that deep down Haig believed he need some form of success and that was not going to come in mud around Passchendaele, so he gave the go ahead for the offensive at Cambrai.

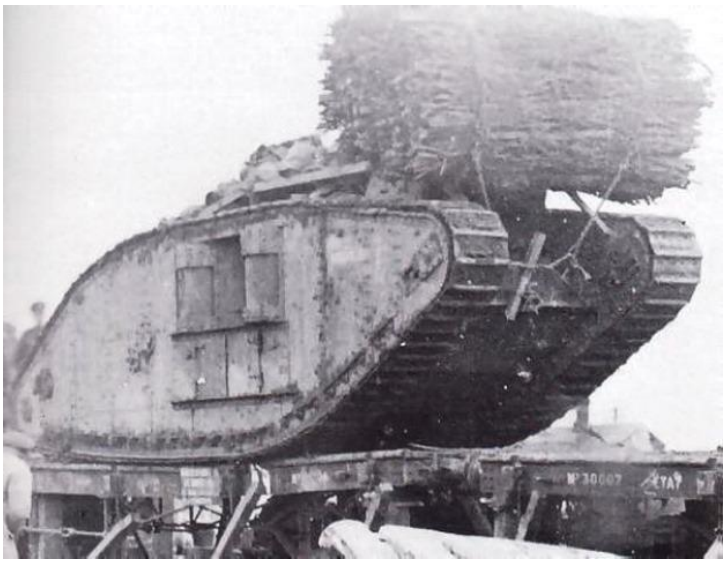
Before going on to describe the battle itself, Niall, discussed briefly the development and use up until that time of tanks in the Great War. In 1915 a press officer at BEF GHQ suggested that there was a need for `machine gun destroyers` and cited the caterpillar tractors pulling heavy guns up to the front. From this the idea of `landships` came about, the name `landships` coming about as it was proposed that these machines be manned by men of the Royal Naval Division, indeed the earliest tanks – the Mark 1 (male) had six pounder naval guns in the sponsons. Fosters, an engineering company in Lincoln developed the first tanks from `Little Willie` to `Big Willie` or `Mother`, the genesis of the classic rhomboid shaped armoured fighting vehicles of the Great War.

Little Willie, the first prototype tank, has survived and can be seen today at the Tank Museum at Bovington near Wool in Dorset. It was designed in July 1915 and trialled in September of that year. It weighed 16.5 tonnes, had a crew of six and a projected top speed on flat ground of 2mph. The original plan was to have the main armament in a turret on top of the tank body

The basic concept of the Number 1 Lincoln Machine, or Little Willie showed up a number of potential shortcomings and the idea of using tracks that ran all around the vehicle was developed and construction of an improved prototype began on 17 September. For this second prototype (later known as "HMLS [His Majesty's Land Ship] Centipede", and, later still, "Mother"), a rhomboid track frame was fitted, taking the tracks up and over the top of the vehicle. The rear steering wheels were retained in an improved form, but the idea of a turret was abandoned and the main armament placed inside sponsons. It weighed 28 tonnes, had a top speed of 3 mph and was crewed by eight guys. After a demonstration witnessed by amongst others, The King, the Prime Minister Lloyd George and Lord Kitchener, the War Office ordered production of 40 machines. As well as the `Male` versions armed with 2 six pounder naval guns a variation with machine guns only, which became known as `Female` were ordered. The order was quickly raised to 100 and shortly after increased again to 150.

As most people are aware tanks (Mark 1`s) first went into combat action of September 15th 1916 at Flers during the Battle of the Somme, a gamble by Haig which saw 49 tanks line up. Performance could best be described as `variable` with over half of these breaking down before reaching the start line, with others getting bogged down shortly after the advance commenced with the result that only 12 took part in actual fighting. The Germans were unimpressed by this new weapon and did not take serious steps to produce their own effective tank only a few A7Vs being produced and these had no impact on any fighting. The infantry who accompanied the tanks into that first action *were* impressed as they felt that at last they had a weapon which could make their in assaulting the German lines, easier. Haig too was impressed and he sent his Chief of Staff to London to press for production to be increased to 1000 machines. Moving on to Arras in 1917, the tanks were badly used, being split up into small groups out of only 40 being available. Again at Ypres, the offensive, soon to become known as Third Ypres or the Battle of Passchendaele, commenced on July 31st. After weeks of dry weather the rains came and that together with the artillery bombardment which had shattered the drainage ditch system and culverts resulted in the battlefield becoming an impenetrable morass of mud which meant the tanks could make no headway and little or no contribution to the battle. Lieutenant-Colonel Fuller of the Tank Corps warned Haig and Gough than the preliminary bombardment would render the tanks useless but his warning went unheeded. Because of this and the reports from Arras, the CIGS `Wully` Robertson felt that tanks were somewhat of a desperate innovation and he was backed by most infantry commanders, indeed in 1917 the War

Office wanted to draft tank crews back into the infantry to make up for some of the recent losses. Forward to October 1917, the Tank Corps still existed and it still considered its best role was that of a surprise attack over favourable ground with no preliminary bombardment. Planning continued on the attack towards Cambrai, it being considered that the Hindenburg line was very lightly manned in this sector and that a surprise attack could succeed before the Germans could rush reinforcements to that area. Surprise was to be the key element, there would be no preliminary bombardment, the artillery having to use surveying techniques for target registration. Initially Haig was not enthusiastic and given the situation in Flanders reserves could not be spared for a new front, but by October his mood changed as the situation in the Salient was affecting morale and criticism was mounting from London. He needed a success, and in late October he gave his blessing to the plans. The plan was for an attack along a six mile front with the intention of capturing two pieces of high ground, Flesquieres Ridge and Bourlon Hill, then passing cavalry through the gap to liberate Cambrai itself, about seven miles distant from the initial start line. Once Cambrai was secured the plan was to head north east to Valenciennes, rolling up the German positions. To maintain secrecy, various ruses were employed – Italian speaking officers to the Tank Corps training grounds – extensive use of camouflage netting. Even the weather played its part – dull, wet and misty – helping to hide the build up from German aircraft and balloon observation. Byng was adamant that secrecy be preserved and there was no preliminary registration for the artillery. 1003 artillery pieces were assembled, the bulk of these (498) being 18pdrs. One million shells were stockpiled and to supply the tanks there was a petrol reserve of 30000 gallons of fuel whilst each tank was filled up, this totaling another 50000 gallons. 100000 shells for the male tanks 6pdr guns were brought up whilst for the tanks, both male and female 6.5million rounds were available for the tanks machine guns. Brigadier Elles oversaw the largest concentration of tanks – by now predominantly the much improved Mark IV type – by collecting from every other sector on the Western Front – so determined was he to demonstrate that tanks could be the most decisive weapon of the war. 476 were therefore assembled on the eve of the battle starting. 376 machines were supplemented with 54 supply tanks tasked with bringing forward fuel, ammunition and other stores. 32 were assigned to drag away the barbed wire entanglements to clear paths for a cavalry advance. The very wide trenches needed some sort of bridging to allow the tanks to cross. The solution was bundles of brushwood or branches in what was called fascines. These were carried on top of the tank, shackled to the ditching beam rail.



A Mark IV Female tank, with fascine bundle arrives on a railway wagon – the sponsons on each side being swung inward to fit the railway loading gauge. Each bundle weighed two tonnes

which meant that over 400 tons of suitable wood and 12000 ft of chains had to be found. Assembly of the fascine bundles was undertaken by the 51st Chinese Labour Company. They also built 110 wooden sledges which would be carrying supplies and be dragged behind the tanks allocated to re-supply those in the initial advance.

By November 18th, 36 trainloads of tanks had arrived at the assembly zone, all this and the preparation work being done mostly at night to preserve secrecy.

On the evening of November 19th, Brigadier Elles issued his famous special order No. 6 and he was to lead the Corps into battle in Mark IV `female` tank `Hilda`

"Tomorrow the Tank Corps will have the chance for which it has been waiting for many months, to operate on good going in the van of the battle. All that hard work and ingenuity can achieve has been done in the way of preparation. It remains for unit commanders and for the tank crews to complete the work by judgement and pluck in the battle itself. In the light of past experience I leave the good name of the Corps with great confidence in their hands. I propose leading the attack of the centre division."

He also proposed to fly the new Tank Corps flag which he himself had designed – three horizontal bands of brown, red and green depicting *'From mud, through blood to the green fields beyond'*. The flag is flown with the green band uppermost.

Looking at the infantry, third army had 19 divisions under its command on the third day plus 4 divisions of the Cavalry Corps. What was seen to be developing was an `all arms` battle, with the Royal Flying Corps having a major role to play in this battle, 298 aircraft being amassed, fighters, bombers and photographic reconnaissance planes. It was planned for attacks on German airfields around Cambrai, strafing attacks on the German lines and using the sound of the planes` engines to muffle the sounds of the tanks assembling and advancing. Acting as flank guard on the right was 7 Corps and the 55th Division.

Haig made several important points to Byng before the attack got underway – most importantly, that he (Byng) would call a halt to the battle after 48 hours (or earlier) if the general situation did not justify continuing.

The tanks were sent in in groups of three – why – because in this sector the Hindenburg Line consisted of three lines of trenches. The first tank came forward, dropped its fascine into the trench, then turned life and tried to take out the defensive positions. The second tank crossed the first trench using the first tank`s fascine, approached the second line and dropped its fascine, turned left, the third tank doing likewise for the third line, the theory being that the infantry following would cross through the lines, with the tanks shooting up the remaining defenders. Prior to the attack, some of the infantry had been taken out of the line to practise these tactics. The three tanks were to be followed by four sections of infantry at approximately 25 to 50 yards, in single file, not the normal infantry attack pattern of extended lines. Basically the men followed behind the tank taking advantage of the limited cover it offered.


Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1971-092-20
Foto: o.Ang. | Dezember 1917

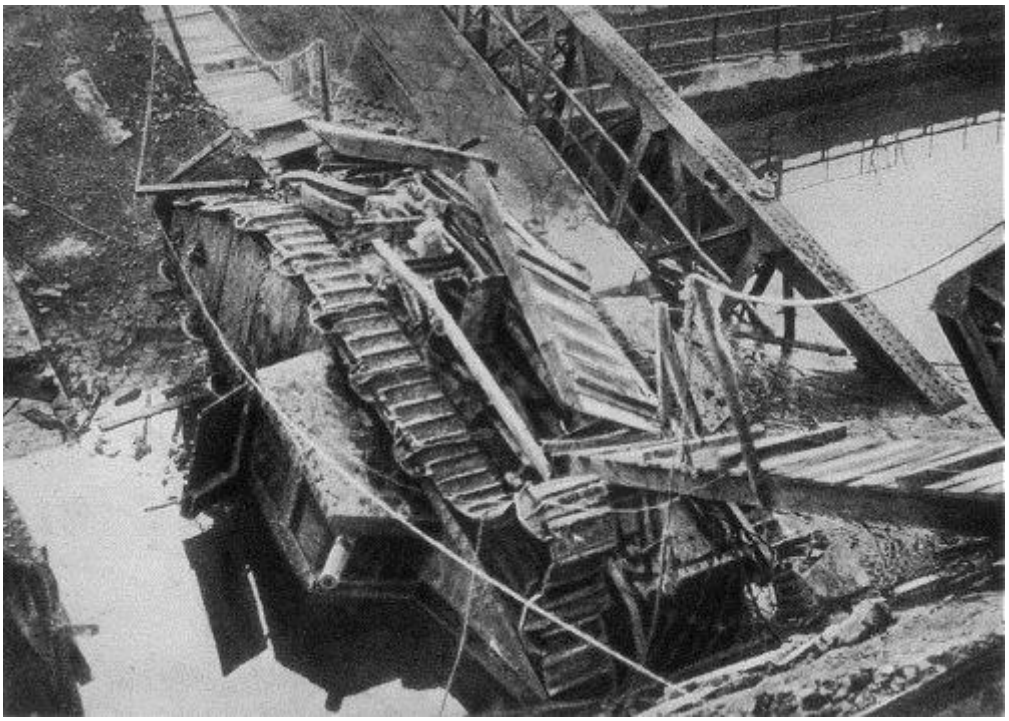
The opposing German forces were commanded by General Johannes Von der Marwitz, seen here on the right of the picture with the Kaiser near Cambrai. Von der Marwitz put out a communique on November 16th saying that an attack on the front of Second Army was *not* to be expected for the *foreseeable* future which indicated that all Byng`s instructions and attempts at preserving secrecy had been successful.

As soon as night fell on the late afternoon of November 19th the engines of the tanks were cranked up and with the engines just turning over moved forward from their assembly positions. A two inch wide tape was laid just as darkness fell and the tank drivers had to follow this so as to reach the correct position from which the attack would be launched. Progress was painfully slow, only a couple of hundred yards per hour, indeed some officers walked in front of their tank, guiding the driver by means of a lighted cigarette. By 4am on the 20th the tanks were in place about 1000 yards short of the German front line. At 6am the tanks rolled forward, the sound of their engines being muffled somewhat by the constant overflight of aircraft of the RFC. At 6.10am the artillery opened fire plastering the German lines, initially with high explosives, then smoke shells to hide the British advance from German artillery on the Flesquieres ridge. The advance started well with the Germans being caught completely by surprise, many soldiers retreating rather than be crushed by the tanks. To the British infantry it appeared as though the entire German front was collapsing. In many areas the advance was a runaway success, succeeding all expectations. Casualties amongst the advancing infantry had so far been light except in the Flesquieres section where the 51st Highland Division suffered heavily. The handling of this Division has proved controversial. Despite having been trained in tank-infantry cooperation, the commander Major General Gerald Montagu Harper (pictured left) who did not like tanks, disregarded these instructions and replaced them with his own ideas of brigading the advance guard tanks and kept his infantry 100 yards behind the tanks and in open order. The groups of three tanks he employed as wirecrushers and after the division secured its first objective Harper called a halt to the advance, by which time both tanks and men had become disoriented due to the smoke. Much criticism of Harper came as he had ignored Haig`s instruction for the need for speed to get through the three lines, take Bourlon on the first day and get men across the St Quentin Canal.

The main thrust planned of the British advance was to take Bourlon Wood and isolate Cambrai and this sector was defended by 3 brigades of infantry, two machine gun companies, two field gun batteries and 9 howitzer batteries. The German gun crews had been trained to fire at moving targets and additionally had experimented in using their field guns in an anti-tank role. Therefore, in this area they were able to engage the tanks of B and E battalions of the RTC, successfully knocking out 16 machines before they had even reached the wire and by nightfall the losses had mounted to 40, approximately 10% of the attacking force. There were, however, sufficient tanks in the area to overcome the German defences who started to fall back. All in all, November 20th, was, in the context

of The Great War, and what had gone on before, a great day. As the British tanks regrouped for the next phase of the assault, British field artillery could be seen galloping forward to take up new positions and may in the infantry wondered when the cavalry would appear to exploit this initial gain and gaps in the German wire. Where then, were the cavalry, they had been tasked with moving up to the Grande Ravine and Bourlon after they had been taken by the Highlanders. Unfortunately, this had not happened by 11.30 on the 20th and their orders were changed to advance through Flesquierres which became an impossible task. The second cavalry brigade became completely tangled up with the rear echelons of the 51st Highland Divisions and it took those most of the rest of the day to get through to the Grande Ravine.

On the left flank, the 62nd division had advanced more or less in line with the Coulliet Wood and had succeeded in takin Havrincourt and Graincourt. These gains were supported by the 86th Brigade and the 29th Division who had advanced to the Cambrai to Bapaume Road whist the 36th (Ulster) Division also gained ground in their sector. Over on the right, troops of the 12th (Eastern) Division set about creating a defensive flank along the Gonnelieu Ridge. There were still some 70 tanks available for 3 Corps and these were spearheading another advance to the St Quentin Canal, Men of the 12th Division took Nine Wood and Marcoing but the Germans were able to destroy the bridges over the canal just before the British troops arrived. With nowhere to cross this delayed the creation of the cavalry `gap` called for in the battle plan. Despite this some cavalry units were moving forward from Villers Plouich towards Marcoing. In the village of Masnieres men of the 11th Rifle Brigade supported by a few tanks managed to drive the Germans across one of the few remaining bridges over the St Quentin Canal, although one tank `Flying Fox` commanded by Lieutenant Edmundson fell into the canal when a damaged bridge collapsed under its weight



Niall told a humorous story from this action, apparently Lt. Edmundson wore a hair piece which got lost when he and the crew abandoned `Flying Fox`. Edmundson later submitted a claim to the War Office for a replacement which was granted!

Whilst the bridge was of no further use for tanks, members of the Fort Garry Horse, a Canadian cavalry regiment managed to get themselves across later that afternoon and succeeded in scattering a battery of German artillery. This success was, however, short lived as the Germans regrouped and forced the Canadians to abandon their horses and retreat.

Despite these delays, failures and setbacks, many of the objectives designated during the break-in phase of the battle had been achieved, a breech, some six miles wide had been created in the Hindenburg Line and in some areas up to a depth of 4000 yards. In the Marcoing sector, the Siegfried Two line had been penetrated. Up to this point, British casualties (killed / wounded/missing) amounted to 4000 whilst of the other side of the `balance sheet` 4200 Germans had been taken prisoner plus over 100 artillery pieces, all of which made for good propaganda.

The Germans, as ever the masters of inventiveness, quickly rushed up reinforcements to strengthen the line. Of the 390 tanks which had advanced on the morning of the November 20th, 179 were now out of action, 65 by direct hits, and 114 either ditched or broken down. Slow and cumbersome as the tanks were they had done a superb job of eliminating the German barbed wire but their vulnerability to artillery fire and armour piecing rifle rounds was cruelly exposed, Over the next few months, Ellis, the tank builders and the Tank Corps would work hard to overcome these issues.

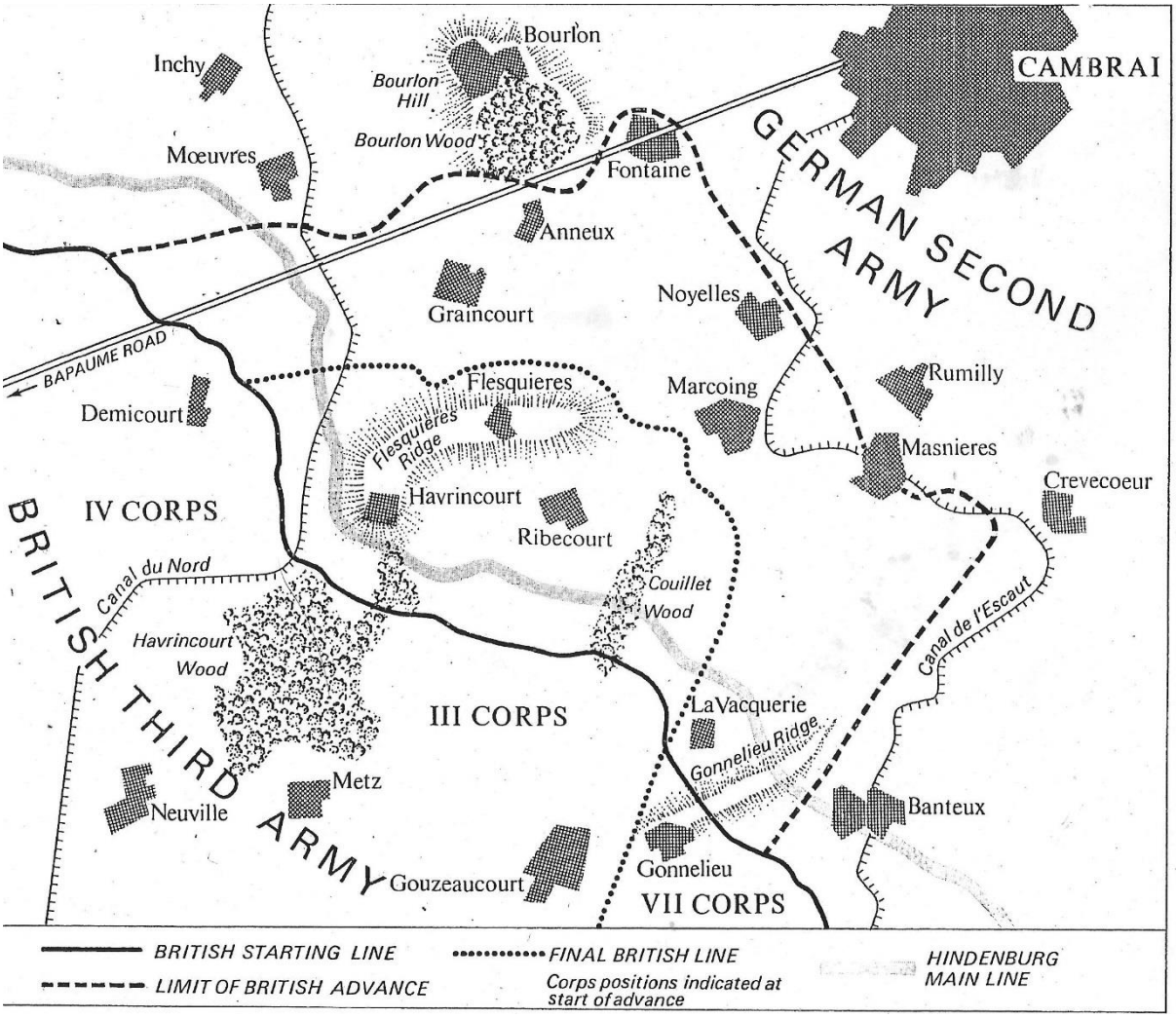
News of the initial success quickly sped back to England and church bells were rung to signify a great victory – or so the politicians claimed.

Whilst the introduction of tanks was to revolutionise warfare and ultimately render trench warfare redundant, the Battle of Cambrai was to end in disappointment. November 21st saw the BEF again resume their advance but the momentum was lost and progress slow. At first light the 51st Highland Division moved to occupy the now deserted village of Flesquieres and the gap in the Siegfried Two line extended to two miles wide. 154 Brigade, assisted by the Dragoon Guards captured Cauntaing, taking over 300 prisoners. Exhausting of the troops and the lack of vital supplies – water, petrol and ammunition was telling and the situation could not be effectively exploited and the BEF seemed to be content with taking part in a series of minor consolidating actions. The Germans, perhaps sensing that this was not an all-out effort launched a counter attack. On the evening of November 21 st, despite the fact that the main objectives had been taken and he had gone beyond Haig`s deadline Byng decided to let the battle continue, primarily to take the Bourlon Ridge but like so many previous Great War offensives which started so promisingly, it quickly degenerated into an infantry attritional slogging match. On November 22nd the BEF lost Fontaine as heavy German counter attacks forced out the men of the 51st and 62nd Divisions. The fighting in Bourlon reached a climax on November 23rd and over 423 guns opened fire in support of an assault on Bourlon Wood by the 40th Division, a Bantam division, in this its first real battle. 100 tanks supported the attack. The sector was defended by two German divisions, with two more in reserve and they were backed by over 200 artillery pieces. The Bantams entered Bourlon Wood but over the next four days could not clear out the Germans, suffering 4000 casualties in their endeavours.

Haig was not happy, but like Passchendaele, he allowed the fighting to continue so that BEF would be well placed for the 1918 campaigns, indeed he demanded renewed efforts. However, with shortages of manpower beginning to influence the battle Byng authorised IV Corps to use

their cavalry as infantry in a dismounted role. He also ordered a Guards Division to relieve the 51st Highland Division. An all-out effort against Bourlon Wood was ordered for midday on November 24th, led by the 40th Division. It was a risky plan as one of the flanks was weakly held by a small number of dismounted cavalry troopers. The Guards Division was ordered to attack and re-take Fontaine whilst the 36th and 56th Divisions had to move against German positions between Moeuvres and Inchy in the north east of the sector. Fighting was fierce around Bourlon village and it seemed that the village might fall but the Germans rallied and managed to force the Bantams out except for a small group which managed to hang on for a further 48 hours before being rescued. The Germans gained a foothold in Bourlon Wood and on November 27th a further attempt to force the Germans out was made by the Guards Division but they were driven back with heavy losses. At this time Haig admitted that the task was beyond the resources of his exhausted 2nd Army and the offensive was halted on November 28th and orders went up to secure the gains without delay by putting up wire.

At this point Niall circulated another map which follows this page which shows the British start positions, the limit of their advance, and the final British line.



The Germans launched an attack on Bourlon salient, as it was on the 30th and by using a combination of a short bombardment an infiltration tactics – the latter being used to good effect in the *Kaiserschlact* in March 1918 – and ground attack aircraft. The BEF held on and the battle effectively ended on December 5th with a tactical withdrawal to the line south of

Graincourt as shown on the map. The troops on both sides dug in to undergo the `pleasure` of another winter staring at each other across `no man`s land`

The Cambrai offensive had cost the British army 45000 killed and wounded with a further 6000 being taken prisoner. Two thirds of the original tank force had been lost due to enemy action and mechanical failure. Niall then put up a slide showing all the units which had participated in the battle. German casualties amounted to about 50000 killed and wounded with a further 11000 taken prisoner. The German tactics of infiltration were to be improved and used again in the Spring Offensive of 1918. The "all arms battle" of the BEF was to be improved and led finally to the victories of Hamel and Amiens in the summer of 1918.

As a hit and run raid, the battle of Cambrai was a failure, and as a strategic operation to punch a hole in the German line it was a defeat although at the time it was considered that the breakthrough opportunity had just been missed. Delay and hesitation had eroded the advantage gained in those early hours of the attack. Three years of immobility interspersed with unimaginative mass attacks deprived the commanders of the capacity for bold spontaneous decisions. For the first time since 1914 the dream of the generals, the war of dashing movement, had been within grasp, but the dream was based upon an illusion, an army led by vintage men of pre-war experience lay buried in the trenches. The subsequent introduction of the Mark V tank had the advantage of higher speed but could be steered by only one man. Indeed the Battle of Cambrai proved that the tank *could* break the deadlock of the trenches and ended any further thoughts of disbanding of the Tank Corps indeed the tank did prove a significant tool in bringing an end to the fighting a year later.

This concluded Niall`s talk and after a short refreshment break there was an excellent question and answer / discussion session which raised a few very interesting points.

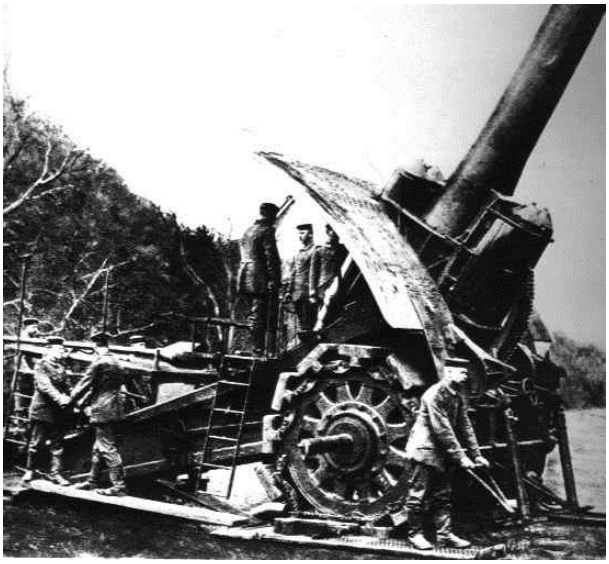
Once this was concluded, Branch Chairman, Tony Bolton thanked Niall Cherry for his efforts on the evening, to which the members joined in appropriately.

March Meeting

Branch Chairman Tony Bolton opened the meeting in our traditional manner, once again in front of a `full house` attendance. He then handed over to our speaker for the night, the irrepressible Peter Hart to discuss `The Guns at Passchendaele`.

Peter opened by saying he was by no means an expert on the Third Battle of Ypres but would commence his presentation by quoting a poem which sums up the artillery and (in his opinion) just how `crap` the war poetry is. It went like this “Boom, boom , boom; Boom, boom, boom; Boom, boom, boom…….etc. etc. Some hilarity ensued!! Indeed that `quotation` certainly set the scene for the rest of the evening. He then said that his friend Rob Thomson (a regular presenter to WFA Chesterfield) would say that the Great War is all about logistics and there is truth in that but over the piece the war was all about `The Guns`. From the BEF`s perspective gunnery started from an unsophisticated position – almost a blank paper. Some of our gunners had been educated at Woolwich but some (most?) of these teachings - like meteorology - was

ignored because the information came from `stupid scientists` - what did they know about war? The BEF paid little attention to heavy guns because light guns were wanted to support the infantry or charge forward with the cavalry. We had insufficient quantities of ammunition as there were no plans to fire for an extended period – all battles would be quick. There was no concept in the early stages of The Great War of the difference between trying to destroy or kill the enemy or attempting to neutralise the enemy`s guns so that they cannot fire back. Having said that, this was not a criticism of the BEF as there was no concept anywhere of neutralising artillery fire. The BEF of 1914 has no concept at all of the `all arms` battle and Peter commented that he found it funny that the first two VCs of the war were presented to men who set up their machine gun on a bridge, rather than locating in a flanking position which would have given them a far more effective field of fire. The BEF learns quickly though and to create the picture Peter discussed the leaning process, one of the early steps on that journey being Neuve Chappelle on March 10th 1915. The point about that battle was that it actually had quite a powerful bombardment – 430 British guns opposed by 60 on a front of just 1200 yards and the Germans really only had one line of properly prepared trenches. The bombardment here was probably the most dense, concentration of artillery fire until 1917. The barrage worked here except where there was gaps in the barrage but off course the battle petered out in stalemate as once the troops got though that front line nobody really knew what to do then and this allowed the Germans the time to bring up reinforcements and counter attack. At Loos the front was widened - but we did not have any more guns – so the concentration of the barrage was very much reduced. At Loos the BEF tried to make up for lack of guns, lack of shells, by using gas and that failed although some progress was made. Not only was the BEF adapting, but more importantly the German tactics in response was changing. In Peter`s opinion, it was *not* a single learning curve – there is in fact two – something often overlooked by critical historians. There was the BEF learning curve *and* the German learning curve. So the BEF increase the barrage and in response the Germans build two more lines.



The next set piece battle was that of the Somme and we hear of the Somme barrage being a `big ` barrage – and yet the Somme barrage was – in Peter`s opinion – a `joke` - compared to Neuve Chappelle. It was not that `big` - yes there was 1500 guns but they were spread out along a front of 15 to 20 miles. The Germans now don`t have three trench *lines* they have three trench *systems* , they also have redoubts, concrete bunkers and deep underground dug-outs 40 feet below ground level. The barrage was *no good* – it was too thin, not enough guns firing and firing the wrong sort of shell because most shells fired were shrapnel. There is a lot of nonsense talked about shrapnel not cutting barbed wire – shrapnel was the *only* way to cut barbed wire *at that time*. They did tests before Neuve Chappelle which proved that shrapnel fire, well aimed by trained gunners, shells set to detonate at the right height, could cut the wire. On the other hand, high explosive shells without a graze fuse doesn`t cut wire. It merely blows all the tangle of wire up in the air which just falls back into its original position, virtually undamaged. Barbed wire is not the only obstacle to be overcome in the German trenches – deep dugouts which protect the defenders are unaffected by shrapnel shells and these defenders emerge when the barrage lifts to wreak havoc amongst the advancing troops. The Royal Artillery in 1916 had virtually no concept of counter-battery fire – it was thought about and some guns were assigned to it but it was mostly ineffectual. All

this, poor artillery work, poor infantry tactics, wrong kind of shells, combined to create the disaster of July 1st 1916. From reading eye witness accounts, it was not always the machine guns which dominated the killing fields of no man's land – but unsuppressed artillery fire which poured howitzer shells into the assembly points and jumping off trenches killing and incapacitating many before their advance had even started. Even when some units did successfully penetrate the German first line system, they were frequently cut off by an unsuppressed German `box barrage` which denied them reinforcements of men and munitions and prevented casualty evacuation taking place. In this case ultimately – like the Irish at Schwaben Redoubt – they were driven out, back to where they started for no result just heavy losses. However, during the Somme the BEF start to learn, there had been some - but not much - experimentation with the `creeping barrage` - most of the artillery fire was by `lifts` in which case the fire initially concentrates on the German front line, then, as the attacking troops rise from their trenches and advance across No Man`s Land, the barrage `lifts` and moves forward on to the next target. The problem at the Somme was that as soon as this `lift` took place the Germans climbed out of their deep dug outs, few of which had been seriously affected by the shelling (shrapnel ??), made ready their machine guns and subsequently cut down the advancing infantry. With a `creeping barrage` the `curtain` of shells moves just ahead of the advancing troops and id intended to keep the defenders heads down until the last minute by which time the attackers are upon them and they have no time to set up their machine guns. That was the sort of thing they *start* to learn properly during the Somme. There was also an increase in the numbers of heavy calibre guns as British industry started to get its act together. Training of gunners improved – gunners need more training than the infantrymen – officers need training, there is a need to adopt a more scientific approach, for example a knowledge of trigonometry to enable them to do the calculations *without* making mistakes which often had fatal consequences. Counter battery fire becomes more and more important as they start to realise that here is a need to take the German gunners out - *before* the infantry set off across No Man`s Land. Methods of locating the German guns were evolved – sound ranging, flash spotting and aerial photography. Meteorology refined gunnery still further as barometric pressure affects the flight of shell flying through the air.

All these improvements are ongoing during the Battle of the Somme and the question becomes `Is it worth it ?` The answer has to be yes for much that is learned is used to good effect in 1917 and finally 1918. There was some successes at the Somme – it is not all about July 1st. The German army came to view the Somme – and Verdun – like a meat grinder that `chewed up` the best of their army.

Moving on to 1917, the first big battle for the BEF was Arras which Peter said he was going to pay little attention to, for the simple reason that the artillery practices at Arras are virtually unchanged later in the year at the battles which became known as Third Ypres. Good observation has become a key factor in accurate artillery registration and Peter mentioned how a number of years ago he had interviewed a veteran artilleryman who had explained the process of registering on a target, a process which is clearly crucial if you are planning a big offensive. The Forward Observation Officer (FOO) calls up the gunnery officer with map coordinates of the target. The elevation of the gun is set and the shell fired the FOO reporting it landing sixty yards beyond the target. The gun layer adjusts the elevation (degrees / minutes/seconds and they fire again, this time the shell falls short. Adjustments are again made (up/down/left/right) until a round lands on the target. Obviously this was a most exasperating, repetitive process and even if they did hit the target and set the rest of the battery accordingly, there was no guarantee that shells from the other guns – or in indeed the same gun – if it was re-set for another target but later brought back to the first coordinates - would land similarly as

by this stage in the war guns were being mass produced and exact replication from gun to gun was difficult to achieve.

The crucial thing about artillery is that often you were not aware, in battle conditions, if you had hit the target but if the guns were properly registered then the probability of the rounds landing in the prescribed area i.e. 20 yards long by 30 to 40 yards wide. This setting of the gun(s) is known as calibration and later in the war was used extensively when `firing off the map` became widely adopted.

Peter then quoted from a signaller who had worked with the Royal Garrison Artillery – the RGA was responsible for the heavy howitzers or siege guns – as an observer and how they tried to find suitable locations in ruined buildings to spot the fall of shot and report back to the guns.

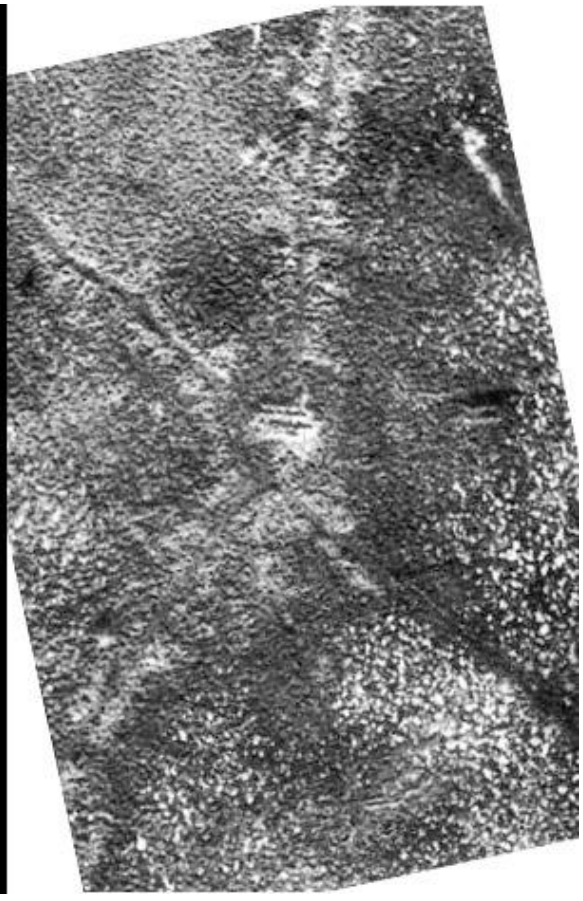
"the *forward observation post was often just a large shellhole with sandbags around the lip and duckboards to keep you a little out of the wet. Using binoculars you could peer through a*

gap in the sandbags but sometimes there was nothing else for it but to look over the edge, of course inviting German rifle fire. Observing was difficult as the Germans held the dominating high ground or ridges. I very rarely saw any Germans they were very careful at not exposing themselves"

Peter then commented about the so called `ridges` which when you are actually on the ground in and around Ypres are more like gentle raised undulations in the land, not conforming to our perspective as to what a `ridge` should look like – quoting a trip to Pilckem Ridge as an example.

Moving on, Peter said that from the air you can pretty well see everything, particularly if you photograph what you see – and photograph it in a grid pattern into which the developed pictures can be placed. Subsequently, using the developing art of photographic interpretation, targets can be pinpointed and using the photos related to the scale on the map, target coordinates can be identified.

The following pictures show Passchendaele village before from the air before and after the battle showing the resultant devastation.



From the air gun batteries could be identified, very hard to hide – even using camouflage as there would be tell-tale tracks where they had brought up the guns and manoeuvred them into position, and of course shell dumps and resupply routes.

The second part of aerial observation for targeting was by using wireless. Great War era radios were heavy units so planes that took these up and over the enemy lines could only carry a transmitter and sent the coordinates, using a `clock code`, of the targets by simple Morse code back to receivers close by the gun batteries.

"Well, there was a clock code. Imagine a clock placed on the target with the centre of the clock as the target and 12 o clock pointing due north. A direct hit on the target would be sent down as okay. Twenty five yards from the target would be sent as Y. Fifty yards as A. A 100 yards as B. Two hundred yards as C and so on. Similarly the direction would be in terms of clock code. Three o clock would be due east. Six o clock would be due south. So that if the aircraft reported shall we say A3. You would know that the round had fallen 50 yards to the east of the target and from that you could correct."

Accordingly, batteries could adjust the calibration of the gun based upon this information received from the air in real time – not having to wait until the aircraft returned, the glass film plates developed, prints made and analysed. A simple system – but it worked!

Following the disastrous Nivelle offensives of April 1917, of which the BEF`s assault on Arras could be considered as a `diversionary` attack, Haig got his way (finally) to launch an offensive from the Ypres Salient. There are several reasons why Haig chose this area – firstly the casualty attrition rate was appalling in a salient which could be assailed day and night from three sides by German artillery situated on the reverse slopes of the `ridges` that dominated it. Secondly, the channel ports of Ostend and Zeebrugge from which German U –Boats could emerge to harry Allied shipping in the channel and further afield. Then there was the important railway yards at Roulers whose loss would be a big blow to the Germans supply of war materiel to the front. So it can be seen that there was potentially three good reasons why a breakout from The Salient *could* bring great dividends. Also by attacking where Haig suggested he was also helping the French whose armies – fortunately unbeknown to the Germans - were being rendered ineffectual – except defensively – by a series of mutinies or more precisely by going on strike.

Planning began for Third Ypres – indeed planning had been going on for some time - but now planning began to accelerate. Peter then said that for the purpose of this talk he was going to ignore the Battle of Messines, the purpose of which had been to seize Messines Ridge which overlooked part of the Ypres salient battlefields. The battle of course, was a success, the Germans were blown of the ridge by a combination of mines and an artillery barrage, the techniques of which would subsequently become important in Third Ypres, and would form the basis for the remainder of the talk. He also said he would avoid the Plumer – Gough controversy and stick to `the gunners`. The first problem was moving the guns, but at least by that time in the war each army had sufficient guns, unlike previous offensives, when, to have sufficient firepower, guns were brought in from other armies, often from significant distances away. The original bombardment was to last for 9 days but was eventually extended to 15 days as the French has been unable to get their guns moved into position in time. The scale of the subsequent bombardment was quite large,

What artillery was available ?- 2092 18pdr & 4.5 ins – these have a range of about 6-7000 yards, then we had 718 `medium` guns, normally 60pdrs with 10000 yards range and finally 281 `heavy` guns, basically a mix of high calibre weapons, including railway based guns of extended range. This made a total of 3091 guns.

By comparison the Germans had 1556 guns available to oppose this assault, but of course, excepting Messines the Germans occupy the ridges so they have much better natural observation, a significant advantage.

The 15 day bombardment, which ran to the end of July, was in fact quite clever, using a significant quantity of gas shells although sadly at that time the BEF did not have mustard gas shells compared with the Germans who were just starting to use this type of shell. Mustard gas is an awful material, limited as an asphyxiant, but it occupies *an area* for several days after

being dispersed from the shells. It is a gassy liquid which attacks the skin and if soldiers got it ingested via their lymph nodes into their lungs they were in trouble. Many soldiers were blinded by mustard gas but with the correct treatment, most had their sight restored, unless of course they got the liquid directly into their eyes. In most respects the Germans were ahead of the Allies in gas warfare, indeed the BEF`s first use of mustard gas did not happen until September 29th 1918 at the Battle of the Bellicourt Line. The BEF`s principal gas at Third Ypres was phosgene and these gas shells were primarily aimed at the German batteries – at last the BEF have grasped the concept of *suppression*. Why did the BEF fire gas shells at the German artillery – it made the gun crews put gas masks on – and keep them on for an extended period. As Peter said anyone who has to wear gas protection equipment for any length of time rapidly reduces in working efficiency. In a 1917 gas mask you cannot *breathe* properly, you cannot *see* properly and you cannot *hear* properly. So by constantly deluging with asphyxiant gas a gun battery is eventually put out of action as gas masks of that period were not totally effective and over time the wearers became ill.

The barbed wire is to be cut with mortars and howitzers firing shrapnel shells with the 106 contact or graze fuse which sets off the explosive in the shell as soon as it touches something – the wire – and has the additional advantage of not cratering the ground. The advance will be preceded with a creeping barrage of high explosive and shrapnel shells, followed by a protective barrage once the first line had been taken and the troops were consolidating. Using the words of poet Edmund Blunden, Peter described the bombardment builds up to a crescendo on the early hours of July31st and other contemporary accounts also say this was the biggest barrage ever – but was the same not said of the barrage just prior to July 1st 1916 on the Somme?

So, what happens, well essentially we do well in the north, we get over Pilckem Ridge and into the Steenbeek valley but Peter, using the map above pointed to the area around Gheluvelt – the Gheluvelt `plateau` where things went wrong. Not enough guns, tanks, indeed there had been lack of concentration on this `high`ground – a mistake – a serious mistake? Everyone's? Haig? – but mainly it was Gough who was responsible because he should have spotted the flaw in the plan. Because of this, when the Germans inevitably counter-attack, the BEF is pushed back a considerable way. However, concentrating on the Royal artillery, this all degenerates into one of the worst campaigns they ever have to fight. They are completely visible to the Germans observing from the `higher` ground. The batteries just stay in position, immovable, in an awful position. Now, we all read or hear from historians that it *always* rains in Belgium in August but it doesn`t usually rain *every b***** day!* But, in fact, that is what happened – sheer bad luck!

Peter then quoted from the memoirs of Reginald Dixon of the Royal Artillery – *" it became one vast mud swamp stretching for miles and miles…the salient became a waking nightmare…"*

The ground was *appalling* to move guns around, indeed as policy the artillery had not shelled German roads *behind* the lines because it was known that these would be needed once the German line had fallen. Peter then quoted from a Major William Stone, of the Royal Field Artillery who said that he was instructed by a staff officer to move his battery to a new location based upon a map reference, which upon consulting the map was the village of Westhoek . When he got there, there was *no* village – no buildings, no walls standing, even the roads had been obliterated. The staff officer pointed to a position about 40 yards from the `corduroy `road (A corduroy road is a type of road made by placing logs, perpendicular to the direction of the road over a low or swampy area. The result is an improvement over impassable mud or dirt roads) and instructed Major Stone to place his guns there – then the staff officer promptly left leaving stone to figure out how to move his battery across 40 yards of shell holes, all full of water *and anything that had fallen in !* However, orders are orders and Stone had to bring up more men and slowly fill up the shell holes with anything they could lay their hands on to create

the position for his guns. Stone brought up the first gun, a heavy 6 inch howitzer and after some time and not inconsiderable struggle set up the battery in the location as instructed by the staff officer. This situation was repeated across the front whenever there was a requirement to move any guns. Guns were difficult to camouflage in this terrain, indeed the land was so devastated that using camouflage netting may just give away the location of the gun. The artillerymen found the best way was to make the surrounding area look as untidy as possible, sacking, boxes – even rum jars scattered about in a totally random manner. The men were instructed never to approach the guns in the same direction as tracks could give away a gun`s location.

Peter quoted from Major Stone again "…..once we were sitting in a dug out being shelled and we learned from our telephonist that a German aeroplane was directing fire onto our battery (the telephonist could hear from the radio induction in his wires). We worked out from this that it took 17 seconds from the message from the German plane until a shell landed in our vicinity….." It was circumstances like this that gave people combat stress.

The pill boxes dotted around the slopes up towards Passchendaele fulfilled a variety of functions – for the Germans `death dealers` for the attacking infantry then shelters, gun headquarters, churches and medical posts for the British infantry once they had been overrun. Of course before they could be made `habitable`, the remnants of the dead defenders had to be `disposed` of.

Putting his years of experience as an Oral Historian to good effect Peter went on to quote from several other RA officers and men about their experiences and the conditions they had to live and fight in – these tales often interlaced with stoical good humour.

One of the big problems was bringing up shells and without roads to enable the munitions to be brought forward the guns were helpless. Roads had to be constructed across the morass of the battlefield and this involved bringing up hundreds of thousands of tonnes of material along which ultimately *millions* of shells would have to be passed up at night to the guns often using horses – or better – mules with packs over their saddles each animal bringing eight shells for trip

– and remember there were *millions* of shells. Originally there was a man for two horses but this was found to be unmanageable and soon it became one man for each horse, each horse carrying eight shells – the amount of horses and men required was staggering, as it was normal for each man / horse to make two journeys each night. Decauville light railways were laid to improve the flow of munitions but it was still a fantastic amount of work that had to be done.

With the advance stalled by the issues with the Gheluvelt plateau, Gough is replaced by Plumer who adopts the `bite and hold` tactic. In Peter`s opinion, there is so much nonsense talked about `bite and hold` being the answer to all the problems of advancing in the Great War. `Bite and Hold` is only a temporary or interim measure until the ultimate answer – the `All Arms Battle` comes along in 1918. With `bite and hold` you could only advance about a mile at a time. Deluge the German front line with shells, then covered by a creeping barrage advance and take that line. Then, in anticipation of the German counter attack to attempt to re-take that lost section of line, fire a barrage into the area between that first and second line, hoping to catch the Germans either in the open or forming up to make that attack in the communications trenches. `Bite and Hold` is not the answer – why not – you have to take that first or go line. If you don`t take that line at first attempt you have to try again – and again if that proves unsuccessful too. All of the time you are suffering casualties as the `bill` for each assault is not `cheap`.

By the time the Battle of Menin Road Ridge took place on 20th September, there was one gun for every five yards of front – the first time that this had been achieved since Neuve Chappelle in 1915! There was one field gun/howitzer for each heavy gun – a one to one ratio. 3.5 million shells for the primary barrage, similar for the creeping barrage – a creeping barrage of five belts of fire. In addition millions of machine gun bullets were fired in support and again Peter graphically explained the effect by quoting from Reginald Dixon`s (14th Battery RGA) account.

So, basically, that is what is now done, Menin Road being followed by Polygon Wood and on 6th October by the Battle of Broodseinde. The Germans reacted by cramming more troops into the front line before the assault as by this time they knew that they would not be able to bring up more troops in support from the rear as the front line would be cut off by a massive curtain of artillery fire as the creeping barrage lifted beyond the front line.

By this time, the assaults are running out of time as the weather starts to really deteriorate – as we know it had been extremely wet even up until then – the wettest late summer / early autumn in that part of Belgium for years – but in reality it was making it impossible for the artillery to function. Illness and death/injury was taking its toll on the gunners who were struggling to keep going in a sea of liquid mud. One `benefit ` of these conditions was that many enemy shells buried themselves so deep in the mud before exploding, that the mud nullified to a certain extent the effect of the blast.

Again, Peter quoted extensively from personal accounts of those who manned the guns, some telling of the all-consuming tiredness that made them too tired to duck or take cover when a shell exploded nearby.

As he drew his talk to a conclusion, Peter pointed out that amongst many thee is a popular misconception that it was the machine guns which caused the most casualties in the The Great War - wrong – it was the artillery – an estimated 58% of all battlefield casualties were caused by shellfire, as opposed to 39% by rifle or machine gun bullets. Artillery can kill you any time. It can kill you when you are advancing to your own lines, it can kill you when you are massing for an attack, it can kill you when you are advancing across no man’s land, it can kill you when you

are in the German trench, it can kill you when you are being relieved, it can kill you when you are 2 to three miles out of the line walking back to your billet. Artillery can kill you at any time.

The role of the Royal Artillery is often forgotten and does not get sufficient attention paid to it although through the efforts of the likes of Gary Sheffield and Rob Thomson, to name but two, that perception is changing and there is a much more mature acceptance that the gunners were absolutely crucial to the ultimate victory.

This concluded Peter`s talk and unfortunately, due to the lateness of the hour question time – a welcome and interesting part of recent Branch meetings had to be curtailed just as the questions were `heating up`.

The evening concluded with Branch Chairman proposing a vote of thanks to Peter for his efforts to which all attendees responded enthusiastically.

Jacking up a field gun at Passchendaele in an attempt to move it forward. *(1999-929, Kippenberger Military Archive and Research Library, Army Museum, Waiouru,*

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As many of you know our own Branch Vice Chair, Mark Macartney is running a Project Photographing WW1 War Graves. This Project is to locate and photograph all WW1 War Graves located in the UK that are recorded by CWGC, This includes CWGC and Family Headstones.

Presently he has 2082 likes on the Facebook Page, please have a look at the link under, he has so far visited **265 Cemeteries and photographed 1959 Headstones.**

CWGC Records state WW1 War Dead Graves total 130892 in 9429 Cemeteries in the UK

The link is as under

https://www.facebook.com/pg/greatwarproject

WFA BRANDED GOODS

Polo Shirt £17

Gents (code 569M) Russell Classic Cotton Pique Polo Shirt (100% ringspun cotton) (all sizes)

Ladies (code 569F) Russell Ladies Cotton Pique Polo Shirt (100% ringspun cotton pique.) (sizes 8 - 18)

Sweatshirt £18

Gents (code 762M) Russell Jerzees Raglan Sweatshirt (50% polyester/50% combed ringspun cotton)

Ladies (code SS180) Fruit Of The Loom Lady Fit Lightweight Raglan Sweatshirt (80% cotton Belcoro® yarn/20% polyester) (sizes 8 - 18)

T-Shirt £15

Gents (code 215M) Russell Classic Heavyweight Combed Cotton T-Shirt (100% combed ringspun cotton) (all sizes)

Ladies (code 155F) Russell Ladies Lightweight Slim T-Shirt (100% ringspun cotton)(sizes 10 - 16)

Fleece £25

Gents (code RG122) Regatta Thor III Fleece Jacket (100% polyester anti pill fleece) (all sizes)

Ladies (code RG123) Regatta Ladies Thor III Fleece Jacket (100% polyester anti pill fleece) (sizes 10 - 20)

Rugby Shirt £26

Gents (code FR100) Front Row Classic Rugby Shirt (100% cotton) (All Sizes Available

Ladies (code FR101) Front Row Ladies Classic Rugby Shirt (100% cotton) (all sizes)

Breathable Jacket £42

Gents (code 510M) Russell Hydro 2000 Jacket (Nylon taslon with PU Coating) (all sizes)

Ladies (code 510F) Russell Hydro 2000 Jacket (Nylon taslon with PU Coating) (all sizes)

Kustom Kit Short Sleeve Corporate Oxford Shirt £25

Gents (code K109) Easy iron fabric. Button down collar. Left chest pocket. Back yoke with centre pleat and hanging loop. Curved hem. Available in long sleeve K105.
Collars 14-14.5-15-15.5-16-16.5-17-17.5-18-18.5-19-19.5-20-21-22-23

Ladies (code K701) Easy iron fabric. Tailored fit. Button down collar. Back yoke. Curved hem. Available in long sleeve K702 and 3/4 sleeve K710. 85% cotton/15% polyester. Weight: 125 gsm

Gents sizes:	XS	S	M	L	XL	XXL	3XL	4XL
Chest (to fit):	34/36	36/38	38/40	40/42	42/44	44/46	46/48	48/50

Ladies sizes:	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28
Chest (to fit):	28	30	32	34	36	38	40	42	44	46	48	50

Order all the above clothing (Polo/Sweaters/T-Shirts/Oxford Shirts/Fleeces/Rugby Shirts & Breathable Jackets) direct from the supplier stating that you are member of the Western Front Association to:
Unit 95a, Tulketh Street, Southport PR8 1AW
Telephone 0800 169 2228 or 01704 873301 Email: sales@westcoast-embroidery.co.uk

Payment is by Credit Card, Bank Transfer or cheque only.
Note: an order form and cheque payable to West Coast Embroidery must accompany orders by post

Mug £10

Lapel Badge £2.50

The Official WFA Tie £9

Official WFA Baseball Cap £8

Messenger Bag £27

Shoulder Bag £25

Bookmark £1.60

To order the above (non clothing items) go to the E-shop on the Website or:
Contact: Sarah Gunn, Office Administrator, BM Box 1914, London, WC1N 3XX
Tel: 020 7118 1914 Email: office@westernfrontassociation.com www.westernfrontassociation.com

The Western Front Association

Founded by John Giles. Inaugurated 11th November 1980.

Patron: Sir Hew Strachan FRSE FRHistS
President: Professor Peter Simkins MBE FRHistS

www.westernfrontassociation.com

Notification of Annual General Meeting

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the thirty sixth Annual General Meeting of The Western Front Association will be held at 14:45 on Saturday, 6th May 2017 at The School of Business & Law Lecture Theatre 002, City Campus East, University of Northumbria, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. NE2 1XE

Mr Steve Oram, Honorary Secretary
1st February 2017

AGENDA

Apologies for absence

Chairman's Opening Remarks

To receive brief remarks from the President

To confirm the Minutes of the Annual Meeting held on the 7th May 2016

To receive the report of the Committee from the Chairman

To approve the audited accounts for the financial year ended 31.10.16

To reappoint Martin & Co as auditors

To decide upon proposed change to the Constitution as detailed in the Bulletin No 107

To decide on Executive Committee recommendation that Major-General (rt'd) Mungo Melvin CB OBE be elected a WFA Vice President

Election of Trustees

Any other business

PLEASE NOTE: we request that items for 'Any Other Business' (to be raised by WFA members only) are notified in writing to the Honorary Secretary at least seven days beforehand to guarantee an answer at the AGM. Items later than this or written in the Attendance Book at the registration desk at the museum conference room may not be answered on the day but instead the response will be published in the subsequent issue of Bulletin.

ADVERT FOR BULLETIN (107) MARCH/APRIL EDITION

MAY
6
Newcastle upon Tyne

2017 Spring Conference and AGM

University of Northumbria, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 1XE

Programme for the day

9.30am	Doors open. Teas/coffees
10.15am	Welcome by the Chairman
10.20am	**British casualty evacuation from the Somme, July 1916: success or failure?** by Jeremy Higgins
11.20am	**Winning With Laughter: Cartoonists at War** by Luci Gosling
12.20pm	buffet lunch
1.20pm	**Politics and Command: Conflict and Crisis 1917** by John Derry
2.20pm	Teas/coffees
2.45pm	AGM
4.30pm	Finish of proceedings

FREE EVENT / BUFFET LUNCH £15
See loose leaf insert with this Bulletin (107) giving full details.

JUNE
3
Birmingham

6th WFA President's Conference

Saturday 3rd June 2017
Doors 09.00
Start 09.45 until 16.30

Tally Ho! Sports and Social Club, Birmingham B5 7RN

- **An Army of Brigadiers: British Brigade Commanders at the Battle of Arras 1917:** Trevor Harvey
- **Arras 1917 - The lost opportunity:** Jim Smithson
- **Messines 1917 - The Zenith of Siege Warfare:** Lt. Col. Alex Turner
- **Fritz von Lossberg and German flexible defence 1917:** Jack Sheldon
- Panel Discussion including Prof. Peter Simkins and Prof. John Bourne

JULY
8
York

WFA York Conference

Saturday 8th July 2017
Doors 09.00
Start 09.45 until 16.15

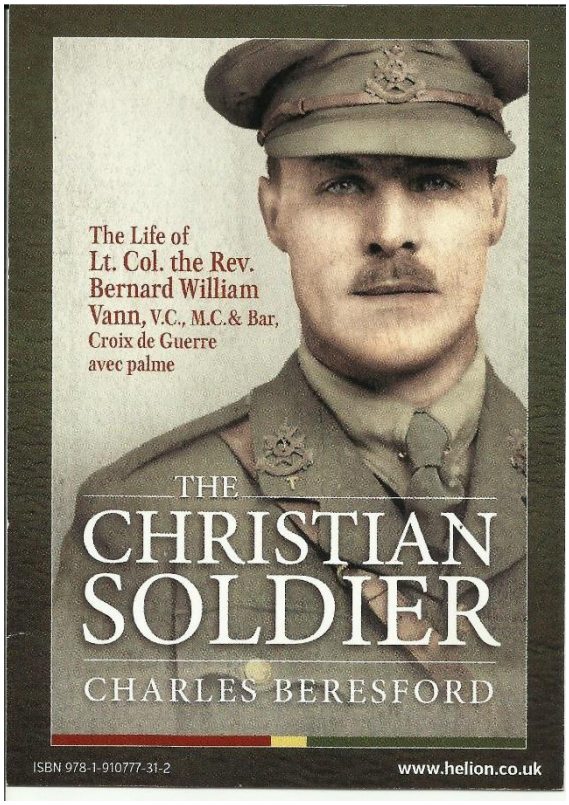
Manor Academy, Millfield Lane, Nether Poppleton, York YO26 6AP

- **The Wider War in 1917:** Prof Sir Hew Strachan
- **British Propaganda and The Third Battle of Ypres:** Prof. Stephen Badsey
- **The Vest Pocket Kodak Camera and the First World War:** Jon Cooksey
- **If we do this, we do it properly: The Canadian Corps at Passchendaele 1917:** Rob Thompson
- **An equal and opposite reaction: The BEF's response to the German counter-attack and the final days of the Battle of Cambrai 1917:** Dr. Bryn Hammond

BOOKING DETAILS: £30 for each conference which includes buffet lunch plus tea/coffee.
£50 combined fee for both conferences. Book via website or by contacting WFA Office - **020 7118 1914**

www.westernfrontassociation.com

Branch Stalwart, Charles Beresford, had his latest book published by Helion in January. Very much a labour of love, meticulously researched on a unique soldier in the annals of the British Army of World War One. The `official` book launch was at Nottingham Castle on March 24th



Lieutenant Colonel the Rev Bernard William Vann, VC, MC & Bar, Croix de Guerre avec palme, was one of only three Anglican clergymen to command an infantry battalion on the Western Front in the Great War and he was the only Church of England cleric to win the Victoria Cross as a combatant. His gallantry awards of the Victoria Cross together with the Military Cross and Bar were the highest recorded by any individual in The War List of Cambridge University. He excelled as a soldier setting a high standard for his men and his fearlessness was legendary in his Sherwood Forester Territorial Brigade and beyond. The accounts vary but he was wounded between eight and thirteen times but would only wear five wound stripes on his uniform. His strong personality left a lasting impression on those who came across him whether at university, in the church or in the army. The Bishop of Southwell described him as "...bright, happy, determined - a true leader of men." General Allenby had great respect for him and asked him back for dinner after they had had an altercation in a front line trench. A muscular Christian from a relatively humble background in Northamptonshire, Bernard Vann was greatly influenced by his father's Victorian values of duty, self-help and mens sana in corpore sano. He became a talented sportsman. By the age of 19 he had played centre forward as an amateur for Northampton Town, Burton United and Derby County. He scored a goal against Wolverhampton Wanderers and led the attack against such sides as Chelsea, Burnley, Aston Villa and Notts County. During the week he would sometimes also be playing hockey for Leicestershire. He became a hockey blue at Cambridge and reached the rank of sergeant in the University's OTC. He was also captain of football at Jesus College where he was the co-founder of a debating club, the Roosters, which is still in existence. Following ordination, Bernard was appointed as an assistant curate at St Barnabas in New Humberstone, Leicester before moving to Wellingborough School as chaplain and assistant master. With his brother

Harry he volunteered for the army in August 1914. Until his death on 3rd October 1918, four days after the crossing of the Hohenzollern Line, for which action he received a posthumous Victoria Cross, he remained a committed Christian at the front, holding services and communion when the Brigade chaplain was unavailable. On at least one occasion he went out alone into no man's land to read the burial service over fallen comrades. His young widow did not pass on his papers to the family and this has led to speculation and assumptions about his life which are not borne out by the facts.

In this overdue assessment of this many faceted and extraordinary man, the author has enjoyed the co-operation of Bernard Vann's family and conducted extensive research including tracing papers and diaries of his fellow officers, colleagues and acquaintances. One chapter is devoted to an assessment of the other five hundred ordained Anglican clergymen who volunteered for service in the British and Imperial armies other than as chaplains. Forty-three are known to have been killed or died in the conflict, including thirty-six in the infantry. The details are based on the author's original research and have never been published previously.

Charles Beresford's realisation at an early age that his Uncle, Private Jack Marlow of 6 the Northamptonshire Regiment had been killed at the Battle of Loos a few days short of his seventeenth birthday led to a lifelong interest in the Great War. He is an authority on British and Imperial combatant clergymen and ministers of all denominations in the Great War. His extensive and original researches have shed new light on this neglected aspect of the conflict and he has given talks on the subject across the country. His first book, The Bath at War - A Derbyshire Community and the Great War set new standards for local studies of the conflict and resulted in television and radio appearances. The local territorial battalion was the 6th Sherwood Foresters and it was Bernard Vann's leadership of this unit in the latter stages of the war that prompted the writing of this book. He lives in Derbyshire with his wife Margaret.

The official book launch was held at the Museum of the Mercian Regiment (Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Collection) on 24th March. For Charles it was gratifying to see the room filled to capacity, with over 60 people, including the Lord Mayor of Nottingham, Councillor Mohammed Saghir, attending. Good also to see several WFA Chesterfield Branch members lending Charles their support.

Brigadier Edward Wilkinson, a Museum Trustee and ex Sherwood Forester chaired the proceedings and after welcoming all present began by introducing the `top table`

From left to right – Charles Beresford; Michael Vann (Grandson of Rev. Bernard William Vann VC); Brigadier Edward Wilkinson; Michael Maxton (Curator of the Lord Ashcroft Collection of VCs at the Imperial War Museum); Professor Michael Snape (Inaugural Michael Ramsey Professor of Anglican Studies at Durham University) .

Brigadier Wilkinson then introduced Charles who proceeded to tell of his work in writing this book, paying tribute to Michael Vann and his family for their cooperation. He spoke of his research to fill in the many gaps as Bernard Vann`s widow did not leave any of his personal papers for posterity.

Charles`s brief presentation was well received and he sat down to warm applause from all in recognition of his hard work in producing this fine biography.

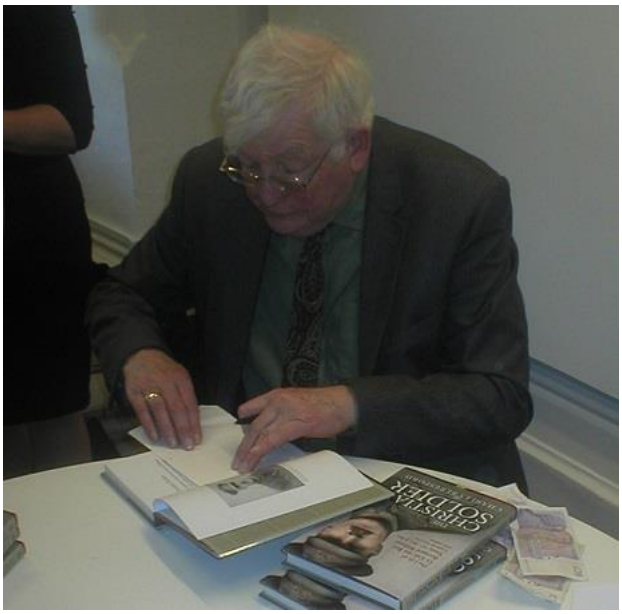
Brig. Wilkinson then introduced Michael Maxton who as curator of the Ashcroft VC collection at the IWM had obtained permission from the Trustees to bring the Rev Bernard William Vann`s VC to this meeting and temporarily reunite it with his other medals which are on display at the Mercian Regiment Museum here at Nottingham Castle. These were on open display for all to see.

From left to right – Victoria Cross, Military Medal and Bar, 1914-1918 Campaign Medals; Croix de Guerre *avec palmes*.

Mr Maxton explained the criteria for the award of the VC and said that early awards, from the Crimean War would today be considered `soft`, when compared with the heroism displayed by Bernard Vann which led to his posthumous award in 1918.

The final presentation was by Professor Michael Snape of Durham University who explained about the Vann Fellowship, which is to be a living memorial to Christians in the Military. Professor Snape concluded by making an interesting comment - `what if` Bernard Vann had survived the war, how far could he have risen in the Anglican Church – to the top perhaps ? Who knows? But a combatant from the Second World War – a tank commander in the Royal Scots – Robert Runcie – who also won the Military Medal – was Archbishop of Canterbury 1980 – 1991.

The presentations being over there was a brief Q & A session before Brigadier Wilkinson invited Michael Vann to read a passage from Scripture from his Grandfather`s Trench Bible, a very moving experience for all present and a truly fitting way to bring the proceedings to a close. This left Charles to take command of a book signing session for those who made the purchase of `The Christian Soldier`.



In association with the Western Front Association

British Commission for Military History Spring Conference

"The Armies in 1917"

Date and time: *Saturday, 1 April 2017 09.30-17.00*

Venue: *Institute of Historical Research, Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU*

Tickets: *£35 (WFA members), £30 (students)*

To register: click here

Link: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-armies-of-1917-tickets-31526327093

09.30-10.00: registration and coffee

10.00-11.30 Parallel Panel I: *Morale and motivation in 1917*

- Tom Thorpe: *Between mutiny and the mission: the paradox of unit cohesion in the BEF's 56th Division during 1917*
- Dr Tony Cowan: *A Picture of German Unity? Federal Contingents in the German Army*
- Michael Orr: *Bunny & his artillery company. Command and Morale in 2nd Battalion, Honourable Artillery Company in 1917*

10.00-11.30 Parallel Panel II: *The British and the Arab armies in the Middle East*

- Dr John Peaty: *Lawrence and the Arab Revolt*
- John Alexander: *Sideshow of a Sideshow: British Strategic Culture and the Northern Arab Army of 1917*
- Dr Paul Knight: *The Second Battle of Ramadi, Mesopotamia, 1917. Evidence of the Manoeuverist Approach to Warfare?*

11.40-12.30: First keynote

- Dr David Zabecki: *General Fritz von Lossberg, Germany's "Lion of the Defensive" at Third Ypres*

12.30-13.30: Lunch

13.30-14.30 Panel III: The evolving British army

- Dr Paul Harris: *The British Army Staff System in 1917*
- Philip Pratley: *Irish Soldiers One Year On: The Changes of 1917*

14.30-15.30: Panel IV: The emergence of armoured warfare

- Dr Tim Gale: *The development of French armoured warfare doctrine in 1917*
- Robert Robinson: *Learning the Logistics of Armour in the British Army*

15.30-16.00: Afternoon tea

16.00-16.45: Second keynote

- Prof William Philpott: *Underperforming or overachieving? The French army in 1917.*

17.00 Conference closes

To register: click here

Queries? Contact: Andy Grainger at secgen@bcmh.org.uk

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Proposed Yorkshire branch tour to the Somme - September 2017.

Tuesday 26 Sept - Catch afternoon ferry at Hull (6.30pm)

Wednesday 27 Sept - Arrive Zeebrugge 8.45am - head to the Somme, arrive early afternoon. Spend afternoon on Somme battlefield, probably visiting Bouzincourt Ridge (which has superb views of the northern part of the battlefield) and Thiepval.

Thursday 28 Sept, morning:

Walk 1 – Touvent Farm to Beaumont Hamel - July 1916 - This walk begins at Touvent Farm, the scene of bitter fighting when the French held this sector. It is also the same location that Roland Leighton, fiancée of Vera Brittain was killed in December 1915 after the British had taken over the line. From here we walk through Serre Memorial Park, looking at the story of the famous 'Pals' units and their involvement on the day. We cross no-man's-land and ascend the Redan Ridge, visiting numerous secluded Battlefield Cemeteries before dropping down the infamous Sunken Lane to end our walk.

Distance 4/5KM – on tracks through woodland, over slightly rising ground.

Thursday 28 Sept, afternoon:

Walk 2 - Trones Wood – July 1916 - Here we study how 'Shooting from the hip' the 18th Eastern Division tour up the manual and captured the previously impregnable Trones Wood in the nick of time for the Dawn Attack to proceed. Starting at Maltz Horn Farm we circum-navigate the wood and here of Neil Chavasse's work, discuss Sgt Boulter's Victoria Cross action before ending at the site of Camp 24, made famous by Sidney Roberson's magnificent memoir "Twelve Days" & Bernafay Wood Cemetery.

Distance 4/5KM – on tracks through woodland, over mainly flat ground

Friday 29 Sept, morning:

Walk 3 - Peake Wood to Pozieres – August 1916 - starting on the outskirts of Contalmaison passing private memorials, through the village and onto the sunken lane, used by so many Canadians in the September of 1916. After passing the remote cemeteries that mark the old approach route we emerge into Pozieres and study the Australian battle over this ground in the late summer of 1916.

We then visit the Tank Corps Memorial to study their introduction and impact on the battle before ending on the site of Pozieres Windmill and its impressive views to the north and east of the battlefield.

Distance 4/5KM - on roads, tracks and through some woodland, over mainly flat ground

Friday 29 Sept, afternoon:

Walk 4 – High Wood – September 1916 - Starting in the cemetery at Bazentin, we visit memorials to the 82 Field Coy Royal Engineers and Captain Wallace of the Worcester's before walking the sunken lane that leads to the northern edge of High Wood, we walk around the wood visiting its numerous memorials and take in the views and actions at Martinpuich, the Butte de Warlencourt before ending in the Shadow of High Wood on the Starfish Line.

Distance 4/5KM – along tracks and around woodland, over mainly flat ground

Saturday 30 Sept - morning:

Walk 5 – Ligny to Lesboufs – October 1916 - starting at the memorial to Lanoe Hawker VC we walk to Gueudecourt to study I Anzac Corps actions in the village in October of 1916. We end by walking to Lesboeufs and the Guards Cemetery on the outskirt of the village.

Distance 4/5KM – along roads across open ground, following field tracks and slightly rising ground

Saturday 30 Sept - afternoon:

Walk 6 - Regina Trench to Boom Ravine – February 1917 - The afternoon shifts focus to the efforts of the Canadian Corps and the struggle for Courcellete and Regina Trench, starting at Courcelette British Cemetery we walk through the village and rise to the site of Regina Trench, a major German supply system for Thiepval that by September had switched to become an imposing barrier to the Canadian Corps. We walk across this shell torn land to the seldom visited Regina Trench Cemetery, often inaccessible to vehicles except in the driest of weather it contains over 2000 burials. We end the walk by traversing and discovering the story of Boom Ravine, a last operational effort on the Somme before the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line. This impressive geographical feature was the scene for a bloody attack by the 18th Eastern Division in February 1917 as the Royal Naval Division advanced on Miramount, we end in Ancre Valley close to the entrance to the village.

Distance - 4/5KM - on roads, tracks and through some woodland, over mainly flat ground.

Sunday 1 October - Head back to Zeebrugge - (with visit(s) en route - these to be decided/confirmed) in order to catch the evening ferry to Hull (7.00pm).

Monday 2 October - Arrive Hull 9.00am

As will be seen, this will be a 'walking' tour which will involve following a number of actions on foot. Although these walks are not strenuous, a degree of mobility is important to gain maximum benefit from this tour.

The tour is facilitated by the Yorkshire Branch of The Western Front Association, but all bookings will be made with Battle Honours Ltd. The above itinerary is what we hope to carry out, but may be subject to change(s).

Anyone interested in going on this trip should email David Tattersfield at the address below and you will go on an 'expressions of interest' list. Experience from previous branch tours suggests these are very popular, so please don't delay if you wish to go on this list!

wfa.yorkshire@gmail.com

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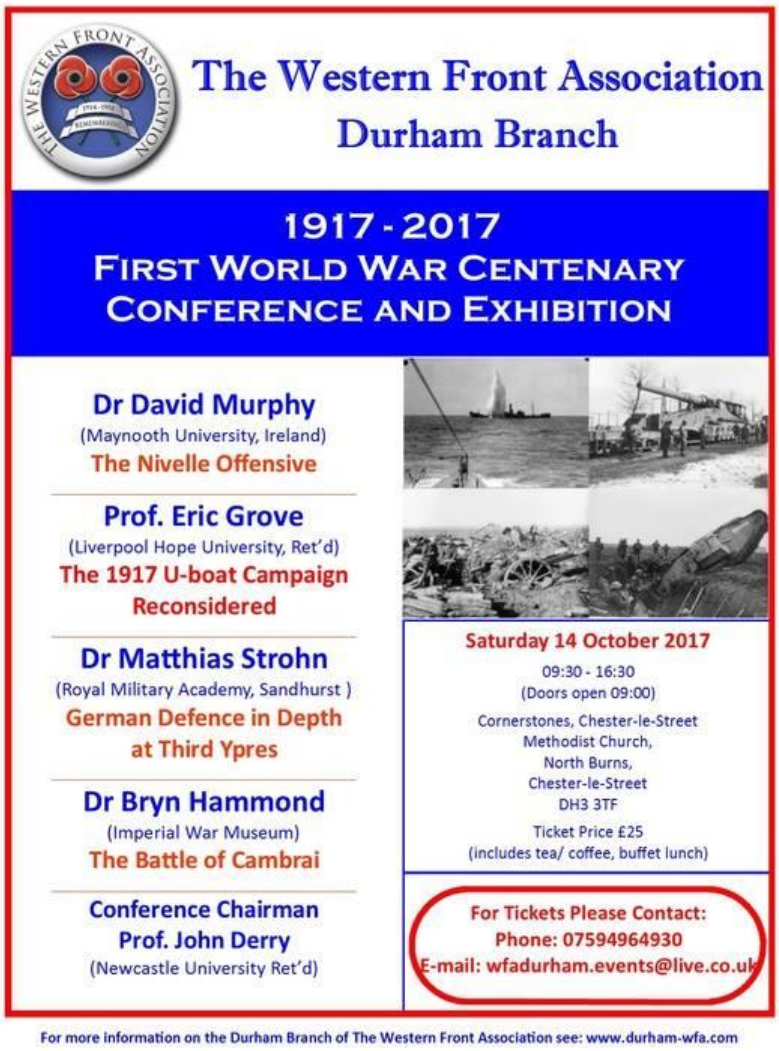

From Martin Middlebrook to Western Front Association Members

First, I must thank your Chairman for allowing these notes to be distributed through your Branch Group Email system.

I have always enjoyed selling my books directly to readers, particularly at Western Front Association meetings but, after a good speaking programme in 2016, this must now come to an end.

At the age of 85, I find travelling tiresome and sometimes dangerous. Last summer, for example, my car was written off in a serious accident on the way to the Northampton Branch. Fortunately, my seat belt saved me from serious injury, but I now feel that I should finally retire from the sometimes arduous and stressful practice of travelling long distances to give talks unless it is a particularly attractive and interesting invitation.

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I have, however, decided not to give up my private bookselling activities completely. These notes explain how I am setting up, instead, a postal sales outlet.

My sixteen titles, all originally published by the Penguin Group, starting with *The First Day on the Somme* in 1971 and going on through a further fifteen titles to 2003, are still in print, though mostly in attractive paperbacks (glossy card actually). The publishing rights of the paperback are still retained by Penguins but the hardback *First Day* and all my other titles are handsomely published by the specialist military history firm of Pen & Sword.

I have the admittedly over-ambitious desire to reach a total of one million copies sold by all outlets – including the new e-books and a few foreign translations; Dutch, German, Polish, Japanese and Serbo-Croat come to mind, and I was surprised last summer to sign a contract for 3,000 copies of *The First Day on the Somme* to be published in Hungarian – forty-five years after it was first published in London!

It may surprise a Western Front member to know that my five First World War books are exceeded in number by nine Second World War and two 1982 Falklands Conflict books that have also come off my pen, but it is always what happened on the Somme in 1916 and 1918 has been my greatest interest since my first, life changing, visit exactly to the battlefields there fifty years ago.

I realise that, in the absence of something completely unexpected happening, I am unlikely to reach the million copies sales figure during my lifetime. So far I have reached an overall total of 926,782 copies up to the end of the 2016 royalty period**.** The best seller, with over 165,000 copies, is that old favourite, *The First Day on the Somme*.

The following pages list my books and the prices at which I am selling. Many calculations have gone into these prices. For example, the costs of postage and packing are heavy burdens compared to selling at WFA meetings, but, when I finished the process, I compared my price for each title with the price that Amazon was charging for new copies sent by post. In every case, my asking price was lower than Amazon's.

I hope you may take the time to study the notes. Thank you.

My First World War Books

A few notes first:

All copies are already autographed on the title page; a personal inscription can be added if requested.

The prices shown in blue type on pages 2 and 3 are all you have to pay. They are 'post free'; I pay all the packaging and postal costs.

The letters 'SP' in black type after my price shows the current normal shop prices for comparison purposes.

'How to order and pay' details will be provided on page 5.

THE FIRST DAY ON THE SOMME. The disastrous opening attack of the Battle of the Somme in 1916, when approximately 20,000 British soldiers were killed and 40,000 were wounded – the worst day in the history of the British Army.

This was my first book. Despite my having no historical or literary qualifications, it was published in 1971 by the first publisher who read some sample chapters

New Pen & Sword hardback £18 (SP £25). **New** Penguin paperback £8 (SP £9.99).

(Both versions of THE FIRST DAY ON THE SOMME are being marketed as 'Revised Editions' by the publishers, which is why I describe them above as 'New'. There are no new additions or major alterations to the text of the books, but both Pen & Sword and Penguin agreed to my suggestion that some inaccurate and clumsy text settings to the original text used nearly fifty years ago should be corrected and replaced by more modern usage. This has resulted in a more suitable typescript in both 'New' *editions.)*

THE MIDDLEBROOK SOMME BATTLEFIELDS GUIDE. (Written in collaboration with my late wife.) Describes every military cemetery, memorial or other significant site of the two World Wars we could find in the Somme *département.* This book is an invaluable 'on tour' aid – there are 31 maps and 90 photographs – but it is just as useful to the 'armchair tourist. Price £12 (SP £14.99).

THE KAISER'S BATTLE. The first day of the massive German offensive in March 1918 – the greatest attack in its frontage and strength on the Western Front during the 1915-1918 years. 500 British and 120 Germans contributed memoirs that were incorporated into my text. Pen and Sword paperback but with full size pages and text.

Price – £10 (SP £16.99). I consider this to be the best written of my FWW books.

Please see next page for my Second World War and Falkland Conflict books.

Second World War Books – in date order of the events.

THE BOMBER COMMAND WAR DIARIES, 1939 to 1945

A major 800-page reference book, with basic details of every raid plus detailed material from the civic records from the targets of the heavier raids, mainly in Germany, but also from targets in Italy and the occupied countries. Also numerous Appendices, including summaries of the service of every squadron that flew in Bomber Command.

Large format paperback £19.50. (SP £25.)

THE SINKING OF THE PRINCE OF WALES AND THE REPULSE

Japanese torpedo bombers sink two fine ships off Malaya in December 1941, after the senior naval commander, on the *Prince of Wales,* failed to call for the fighter squadron allocated for their defence if attacked. I view this as the end of the 'Battleship Era'. Paperback £9. (SP £16.99)

FIRESTORM HAMBURG Three Bomber Command raids set fire to Hamburg city in July 1943; the Americans joined in with two B-17 Flying Fortress daylight raids on industrial targets. Lots of interesting points, including the introduction of the Window device which blinded the German Flak and night-fighter radars. Lots of interviews in Germany, USA and the UK. Hardback £10. (SP £25)

THE PEENEMUNDE RAID On the night of 17th August 1943, Bomber Command attacks the V-2 rocket research and production works on the Baltic coast in dangerous moonlight conditions. 40 bombers were lost but the raid successfully set back the planned V-2 rocket campaign against London by several months. Large print paperback £11 (SP £14.99).

THE BERLIN RAIDS The RAF's attempt to destroy Berlin and force a German collapse with nineteen raids in the winter of 1943-44 and force a German collapse. But bad winter weather, together with the difficulty of navigating to this distant target and frequently the presence of thick cloud over Berlin mostly resulted in scattered bombing. Meanwhile, improving German night-fighter tactics caused the loss of 625 of Bomber Command's heavy bombers. Hardback £16 (SP £25)

THE NUREMBERG RAID In the last night of March 1944. Bomber Command lost 95 bombers – its heaviest loss of the war, mostly to German night fighters in the half moonlight on the route to Nuremberg. The forecast that there might be thick cloud over the target had been ignored, resulting in the bombing being scattered over a large area and causing little damage. This disaster marked the end of the RAF's hope of defeating Germany by bombing before D-Day. Hardback £11 (SP £25)

ARNHEM 1944 The gallant attempt by British and Polish airborne troops to capture the 'bridge too far' over the River Rhine at Arnhem. Hardback £17 (SP £25)

The South Atlantic Conflict in 1982

THE FALKLANDS WAR Written after many interviews with commanders and men from the Task Force, then flying to the Falklands to talk to the islanders about their experiences during the Argentine occupation and to study the scenes of the fighting. Paperback £10. (SP £14.99)

THE ARGENTINE FIGHT FOR THE FALKLANDS I had to wait a further five years before I could obtain a visa to fly to Argentina and interview their commanders and the servicemen who took part in the conflict. Large print paperback £11. (SP £17.99)

The Bargain Section,

after large 'Stock Reduction Discounts' by Pen and Sword Publishers.

CONVOY Forty-two U-boats, the largest numbers ever assembled by Doenitz in the Battle of the Atlantic, attack two convoys loaded with war supplies sailing from New York to Britain in March 1943. Both convoys had depleted escorts due to being damaged in recent storms.. Twenty-one merchant ships were sunk in the mid-Atlantic 'Air Gap', where no air escort cover could reach the convoys. Only one U-boat was sunk, caught when returning to port, by a Sunderland flying boat from Northern Ireland after the main battle was over.

This convoy action was the climax of the Battle of the Atlantic. Lots of interviews with all of the elements involved - even with Admiral Doenitz! *The normal shop price is £14.99.*

THE SCHWEINFURT-REGENSBURG MISSION The American attempt, in August 1943, to test their doctrine of precision daylight bombing of distant targets with so-called 'self-defending' formations of heavy bombers before long-range fighter escorts became available. This double raid on one day cost 60 B-17 Flying Fortresses lost, with poor bombing results**.** Again, lots of interviews, including a six-week visit to the United States, with eighty interviews, to the U.S, as well as the usual interviews with the Luftwaffe fighter pilots and the civilians at the two targets.

The normal shop price is £15.99.

My prices - £8 each, or the pair for £15.

And Finally

Many of you will have read *A Sergeant-Major's War,* published in *1987,* mostly based on a diary kept by Ernest Shephard, a soldier in the Dorsetshire Regiment, on the Western Front from January 1915 until his death in January 1917.

After re-reading my copy in 2011, eight years after the publication of my own supposedly 'last' book, I became interested in researching more detail in Shephard's Western Front experiences, particularly the action in which he was killed in a minor attack, and how his remains and those of some of the men killed with him were not discovered until 1925.

This led into the unusual history of the cemetery in which they were buried – the A.I.F. Burial Ground near Gueudecourt, which is more than ten miles away from the location of their deaths at Beaucourt-sur Ancre, despite there being several other 'concentration' cemeteries much closer to Beaucourt.

The result was a slim self-published book, full of the results of that research. I gave it the title ***A Sergeant-Major's Death.*** For good measure, I added a long Appendix - ***'Why were the Dorsets in a Northern Division?'***

A friendly local printer produced a paperback book, with a most attractive cover, identical to that of the earlier 1987 publication. A modest print run was marketed by myself, the Dorsets' Museum at Dorchester and the local WFA Branch. My friendly printer has recently printed a further 20 copies and can produce more if required.

Are you interested in buying a copy at £5 post free?

MY POSTAL BOOK SALE – Ordering, Paying and Delivery

If you live in the UK and wish to buy any of my books, the preferred method is for you to write to me at 1B Rosebery Avenue, BOSTON, Lincs, PE21 7QF. *(Please be careful with the 1B; some of my mail finishes up at Number 18.).* Please list the book(s) you wish to buy and enclose a cheque made out to 'Martin Middlebrook' to cover the price(s) shown on pages 2, 3 and 4.

I am sorry that I do not do 'payment by card' or any form of internet banking.

If you cannot make chequebook payments, there is an alternative that I can accept. You can pay by 'cash' – sending bank notes to the next value above the full cost of your order. I

will refund any overpayment by sending the appropriate repayment in Second Class or other low value unused British postage stamps.

Please ensure that I have your full postal address, telephone number and/or email address, so that I can contact you if necessary. My email address is martin.middlebrook1@gmail.com **(**The '1' is because there are two Martin Middlebrooks in the system; the other one is a nephew.)

If you have any queries, you can phone me on 01205 839906 before posting your order.

On receipt of your order, I will post your books as soon as I am able, using Royal Mail's Second Class. It is on that lowest scale of its postage that my prices are based. I must warn you, however, that there will sometimes be a delay in posting due to such factors as my being away on holiday or being out of stock of some titles and awaiting replenishments from the publishers. If I know that a serious delay is likely, I will contact you and explain the reason for it.

****

If you are an overseas resident or would like the book(s) to be sent to a relative or friend overseas, please contact me first. I will be able to send you a quotation for such recipients after recalculation of the postal rates, by either Air Mail or Surface Mail.

US or Canadian Dollar cheques can be banked by my daughter who lives in Canada. She can also accept cash payments in US or Canadian currency, and Euros are always useful for me.

Restoration of Forest Town War Memorial – seeking to trace relatives of those Commemorated

We have had a request from Tim Priestley (former Chesterfield WFA Branch Chairman) to see if the Chesterfield WFA would be able to assist in this appeal.

The local BL branch want to trace relatives to invite them to the unveiling of the Forest Town restored memorial.

A photo of the War Memorial inscription of WW1 Casualties as it presently stands.

The Forest Town War Memorial in St Albans Church is going to be refurbished and letters missing from the Memorial will be replaced. It is anticipated that this will be completed by July/August of this year. The Clipstone & Forest Town Branch of the Royal British Legion who are arranging the refurbishment are in the process of organising a service and blessing of the Memorial at a date to be arranged in September, and are asking the community if they are or they know of any relatives of any of the men named on the Memorial to contact them. They want to include relatives of the fallen in the service.

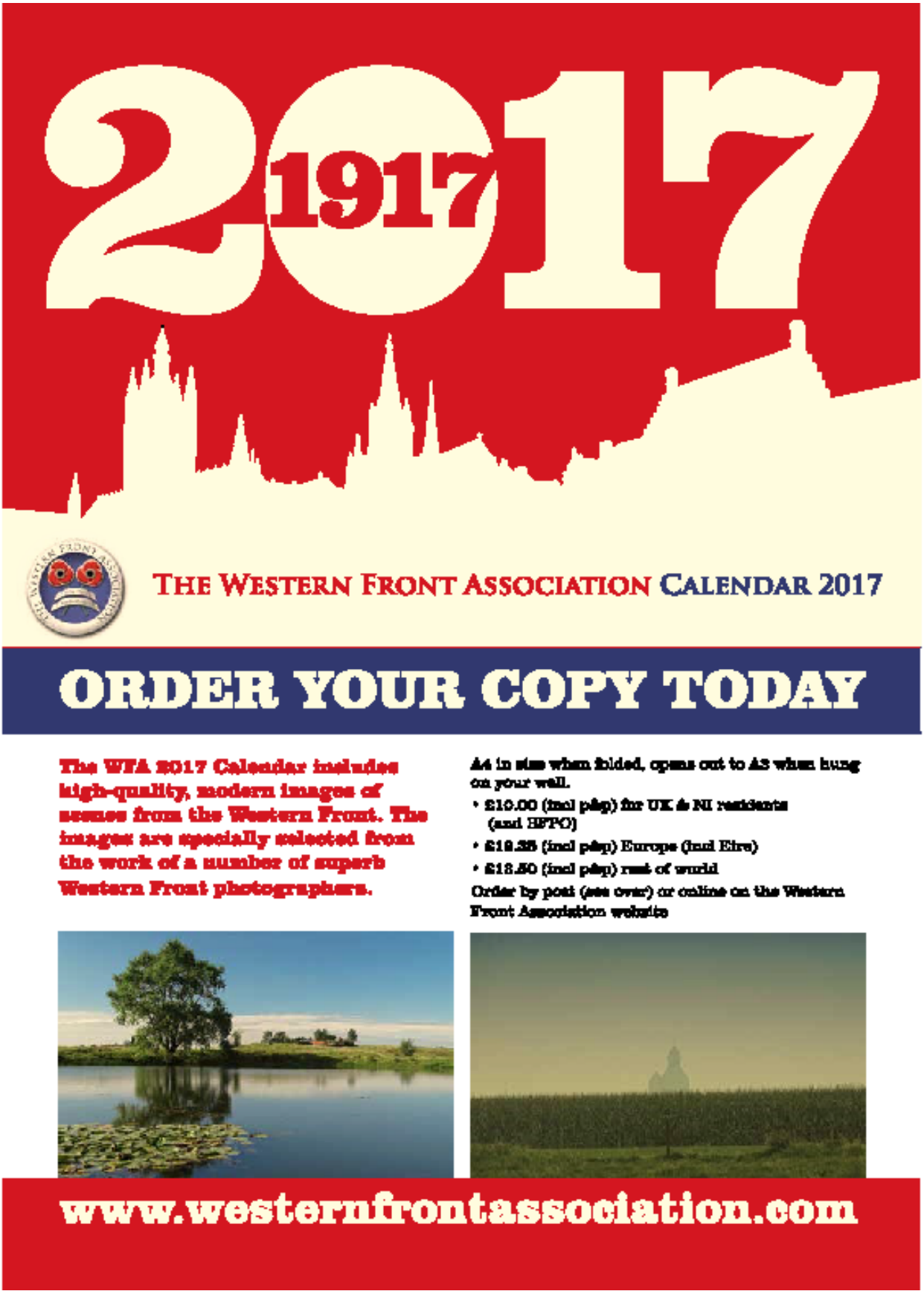
The names of the Fallen Commemorated on the Memorial
1914-18

G. Baldwin - T. Billock - J.E. Burton - F. Carter - N. Chadbourne - W. Garton - W. Heald - J. Kelk - S. Lancashire - A. Lee - F. Monks - W. Moxon - F.J. Munnings - J.T. Murden - A. Peatman - S.F. Pickering - E. Richardson - W. Sheldon - I. Taylor - F. Thompson - J. Thorpe - F.H. Wilkinson - H. Wilson.

1939-45
A. Archer - J.W. Bailey - C.M. Barber - C. Bonser - CYL. Bonser - M. Brooks - H. Bugg - J. Butler - S. Clarke - F. Elliott - K. Oates - F. Moxon - R.E. Naylor - W.K. Pacey - E.(TED) Powell - B. Shaw - H. Skilling - J. Skilling - D. Smith - F. Stanley.

If you are a relative or know of a relative of one of the above men please contact - Neil Davidson, Chairman of Clipstone & Forest Town RBL - Tel 07557 649095 or email neil4529@gmail.com.

Still available…….final call



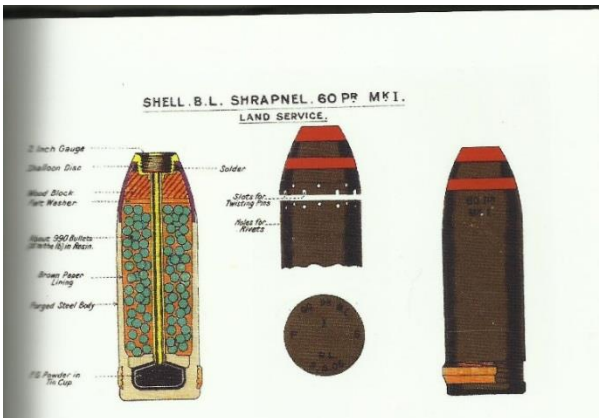
The Munitions Crisis – Part 7

Before proceeding further with this series of articles it would be beneficial to look at what was involved in the primary `munitions` which precipitated this crisis – shells and the components that made up the finished product.

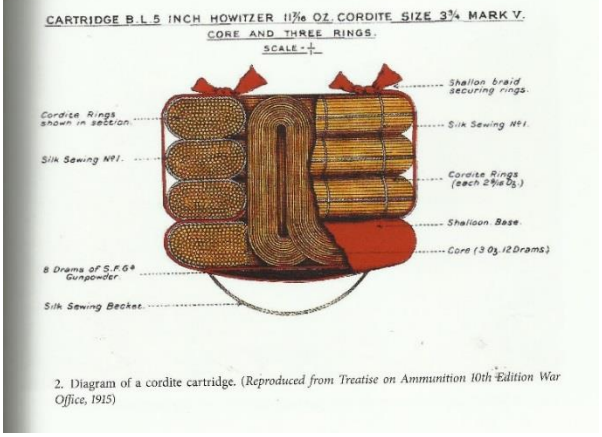
Shell Construction

Artillery is a class of weapon designed to launch projectiles beyond the range of small arms fire and with higher destructive power. During the First World War, artillery pieces were broadly divided into two types, field guns and howitzers. A field gun was intended for direct fire, with the fire frequently visible to the gunner. The howitzer, conversely, was intended to fire the projectile at a high angle at a target that was not in sight of the gunner. For example, a 9.2inch howitzer shell could have an apex up to 8000ft.

The shells fired by the lighter field guns used an innovation called `quick firing` or QF. The projectile was contained within a single cartridge, both the shell and its propellant in one unit, in many respects like a large bullet cartridge. The design enabled a much greater rate of fire but was only suitable for the lighter gun. The brass cartridge contained within its base a primer that upon being struck by the firing pin exploded sending a jet of flame into the cartridge case. Inside the cartridge case, the propellant was ignited and as the pressure built up, the shell was forced out the neck of the cartridge and along the barrel out towards the target. The brass cartridge `case` would be expelled to be returned to the shell factory for repair and re-use. The heavier breech loading guns and howitzers required a separate shell which would be loaded first into the breech followed by the propellant in silk or shalloon (a light wool twill) bags; the cloth contained the explosive propellant and reduced the chance of the cordite being ignited from the heat of the previous charge.



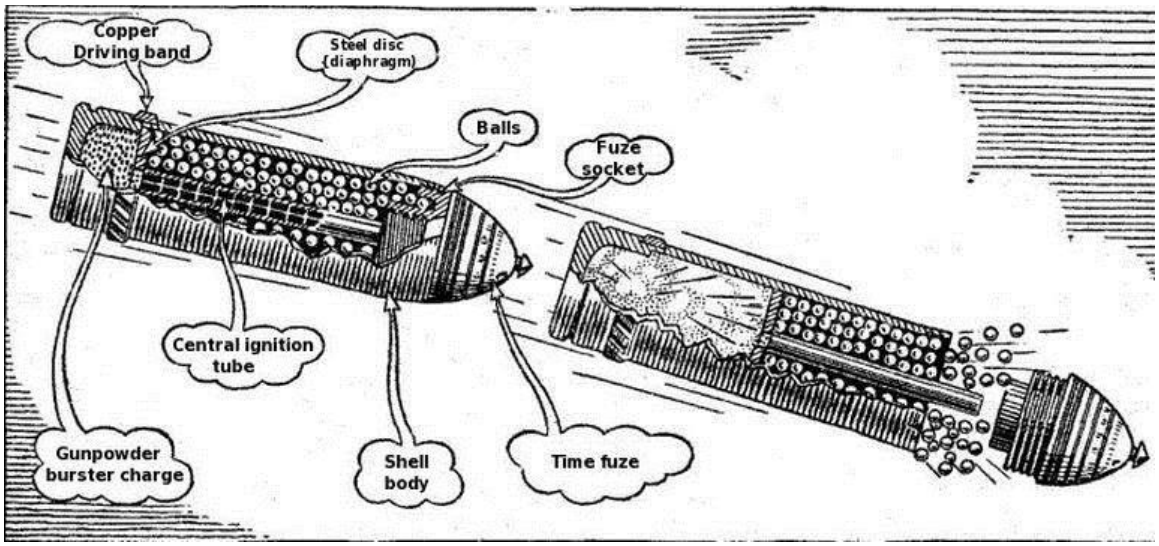
1. Diagram of a 60-pdr breech-loaded shrapnel shell. (*Reproduced from Treatise on Ammunition 10th Edition War Office, 1915*)



2. Diagram of a cordite cartridge. (*Reproduced from Treatise on Ammunition 10th Edition War Office, 1915*)

3. Diagram of a quick firing 12/14-pdr high-explosive shell. (*Reproduced from Treatise on Ammunition 10th Edition War Office, 1915*)

How a Shrapnel shell works!



Sectioned Shrapnel Shell

The shell is the aggressive part of the weapon and designed to that was fired from the barrel and designed to inflict damage to the enemy or its defences. The two basic types of shell that are detailed here are those containing high-explosives, which detonated on contact or at a pre-set distance, and those containing shrapnel bullets which were designed to explode above the heads of troops, scything them with their destructive lead balls. It was against these that the `tin` or `shrapnel` helmets were designed and issued in 1916 with an angled lip to protect the head from projectiles falling from above. Previous to this British troops wore cloth caps and the Germans wore leather *picklehelms,* each providing very limited protection from modern weapons.

The making of shells was very technical, just the fuse had over fifty parts that had to fit and work as accurately as a clock. The overall construction of shells involved the following:

……the metal trades, blast furnaces, steel works, iron and steel foundries, forges, stamps, drops and dies, rolling mills, drawn rod and wireworks, and behind them, the colliery and iron ore quarry. It required factories and these in turn required machinery – covered electrical plant, factory equipment and machine tools, engines, pumps, road and rail transport, boiler making and constructional engineering works.

The 18-pdr field gun was the most common piece of artillery in the British Army and therefore the majority of shells manufactured were made for these guns. The following is taken from a document provided by the government to the Crittall Manufacturing Company Ltd, describing the various parts of the shell:

Cartridge Case This was made of brass and on the 18pdr is ten inches long, approximately doubling the length of the projectile. Fitted to the shell by being pressed into a groove on the band. Its use is to contain and mechanically preserve the propelling charge.

Shell Body This is the aggressive portion of the projectile. It is designed to convey its contents of either shrapnel or high explosive to its target. Made of steel

Fuse This is the final part of the projectile, forming the nose of the shell and is a contrivance for exploding the bursting charge either upon impact or at any given period after leaving the gun.

Copper Band The copper band, otherwise known as the driving band has two functions (a)to act with the rifling of the gun to spin the shell, and: (b) to seal the pressure from the exploding propelling charge the shell, thereby obtaining the maximum power to propel the shell from the gun. It should be positioned as near as possible

to the base of the projectile, as this allows for more accurate shooting, whereas in fixed or quick-firing ordnance, it should be as far forward so that the shell is firmly secured in its case.

Base Plate This is a small piece of bar steel set in the bottom of the shell with its grain running opposite to the shell base. This prevents the expanding gas from the propelling charge entering the shell and thereby causing the bursting charge to ignite, destroying the gun and most likely killing or seriously wounding the gun crew.

Without explosives, the guns could not fire the shell and the shell could not explode. These explosives were created by combining various chemicals to react with each other to produce an expanding gas of different properties. The most common explosive compounds were gunpowder, cordite, guncotton, lyddite, picric powder and fulminate of mercury. The most common propellants were gunpowder and cordite. These act much slower than the other two classes, as it is essential that the inertia of the projectile is overcome gradually, preventing damage to either shell or gun.

High explosives included guncotton, dynamite, lyddite and are intended to detonate. Because of the speed of detonation such materials are unsuitable as propellants. Detonation is a different process to the action of explosion. The latter combustion is confined to the surface and takes place layer by layer, whereas detonation takes place instantaneously throughout the whole mas, thereby greatly increasing the power of the explosion and creating a shockwave. Different disruptives produce waves of different speeds but on average they travel at 4 miles per second. The damage caused to the human body by such a wave is truly devastating. Fulminate of mercury is the most common detonator. Its action is even faster than that of disruptives, and as a result it lasts a much shorter time and has no incendiary effect. This class is used to initiate the explosion or detonation of other explosives, via a detonating wave.

Shell Content. The contents of the shell form the aggressive element of the projectile. The shell could contain various components, but they would be primarily be shrapnel and high explosive. Shells containing shrapnel were known as carrier shells and would be fitted with a fuse that was designed to detonate the bursting charge after a predetermined period of time had elapsed, the time period equated to the distance the shell would have travelled based upon the weight, calibre and size of the propellant. Those containing high explosive would have a fuse that would be detonated on impact or one designed to explode after a pre-calculated period of time , much in the same manner as a shell containing shrapnel.

The ***high explosive*** shells were used to destroy the enemy`s breastworks and trench systems and were necessary for cutting barbed-wire entanglements although their use in this application became a point of disagreement as the war progressed. In the late eighteenth century, Lieutenant Henry Shrapnel of the Royal Engineers adapted the principle of the cased-shot – similar to that of a shot gun cartridge, which burst as it left the barrel, to a shell casing that had a long range use***. Shrapnel*** was used extensively in the colonial wars that Britain fought in the nineteenth century and was especially effective against native warriors in the open. In the First World War it was not particularly effective against barbed wire entanglement and unless it could explode directly over a manned trench it had limited effect against trench systems.

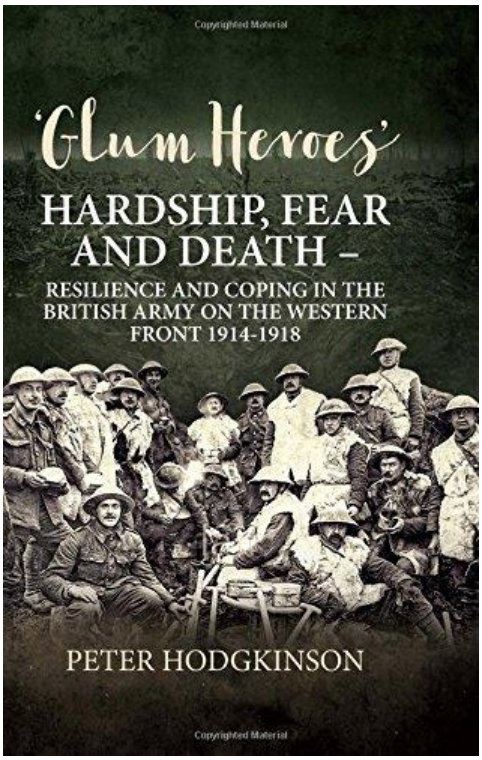
Fuses The fuse is the timing mechanism of the shell determining where and when the shell will explode, or as explained in the *Treatise on Ammunition*

> *`The bursting charge of a shell is ignited by means of a fuse designed so as to act at any particular moment during its flight or upon or after impact`*

Fuses may be divided into three classes; percussion fuses, time fuses and time & percussion fuses, Percussion fuses or direct action fuses require a heavy impact to make them act and are fitted with a copper disc fitted with a needle over a detonator that is requited to be crushed into the detonator to explode. Time fuses are designed to act at the end of a predetermined time by the burning of a slow burning compound. The compound is set in a ring which is moveable, the moving of which makes the length of the compound shorter or longer and thereby lengthens or shortens the burn time before it explodes the shell. Time and percussion fuses provide a timed fuse that has the added benefit of detonation should the shell hit or graze something before the time fuse is activated.

Book Review

Glum Heroes - Hardship, fear and death - Resilience and Coping in the British Army on the Western Front 1914-1918 (Wolverhampton Military Studies) Hardcover – published 9th Sep 2016



By Peter Hodgkinson Peter of course was a founder member of WFA Chesterfield Branch and held the posts of Chairman and Secretary. He has a BA in Psychology from Durham University and an MPhil in Clinical Psychology from the University of London. His career as a clinical psychologist in both the NHS and private spheres has largely been involved with trauma and sudden, violent death. He is the author of many psychology articles and Coping with Catastrophe - A Handbook of Post-Disaster Psychological Aftercare (Routledge, 1998). His MA in British First World War Studies and PhD were obtained in the Department of War Studies at the University of Birmingham. He contributed a chapter on battalion commanders to Stemming the Tide Officers and Leadership in the British Expeditionary Force 1914 (Helion, 2013), and his book British Battalion Commanders in the First World War was published in 2015 by Ashgate. He has also written articles on the varied topics of the battlefield clearances of human remains, soldiers` letters, Senior Officer School, and homeless WW1 veterans.

Our vision of the soldier of the Great War is often clouded by sentimentality. Glum Heroes is a portrayal of how the soldiers of 1914-1918 coped with their experiences. Using their own words, the book considers coping from both the standpoint of psychological theory that has stood the test of time, but more importantly, in the context of the cultural norms of those born into the Victorian era. The external coping resources available to soldiers encompassed family and friends. The first was a resource limited by distance, and the central role of correspondence in sustaining contact is explored. The second is often misunderstood. The nature of the comradeship enjoyed on active service mirrored that of the workplace of the early 20th century. The use of modern notions of friendship distorts our understanding of how within its limitations such comradeship was supportive. The two kingpins of the internal resources that facilitated coping on active service include the code of manliness and the stoic emphasis on endurance and management of emotion. The role of these is greatly diminished in the modern world. Similarly, spirituality wove its way into soldiers coping in ways unfamiliar in the present day. Fear and courage are examined in the light of these coping mechanisms, as is the experience of loss and death on the battlefield. Stripped of sentimentality and viewed without the distorting prism of 21st century preoccupations, the coping mechanisms of Great War soldiers, although very different from our own, were robust and largely effective."

Peter, is perhaps better known amongst us Great War aficionados as a researcher, writer and speaker on the Battalion Commanders of the BEF, has put his skills at his day job to good effect in this study of how the men - officers and other ranks - coped with their experiences which to us from the distance of 100 years find it hard to comprehend. How they mentally prepared themselves, dealt with the never ending stress in an age when the `stiff upper lip` was the order of the day and it was not the `done thing` to show fear to ones comrades. Peter draws copiously from the post war memoirs of those who lived through the experience - and makes good use of correspondence to home from those who did not. These references - some like those of Frank Richards and John Lucy - are well known - are shown as footnotes on each page, as well as grouping them at the back of the book.

It is not an easy read – but in my opinion an essential read, one which takes the reader back in time and places the reader in the context of the late Victorian / Edwardian times and the attitudes and behavioural mores of those days prevalent in The Great War. Some parts of the later chapters are not for the squeamish but are an essential building block part of the overall picture being created.

A quality book from Helion who are maintaining their trend by making such academic studies available at affordable prices, which is sure to become a standard work on the coping mechanisms of the soldier of the BEF in the Great War. Not a book to rush through, take time, digest and contemplate – and understand.

Where does the title `Glum Heroes` come from? – Ah…..need to buy the book to find that out.

RRP £29.95 – available on Amazon for £19.99 – I got mine from Dagwoods Books at £12.50 plus £2.80 postage

For more details see Peter`s website - http://www.peterhodgkinson.co.uk/

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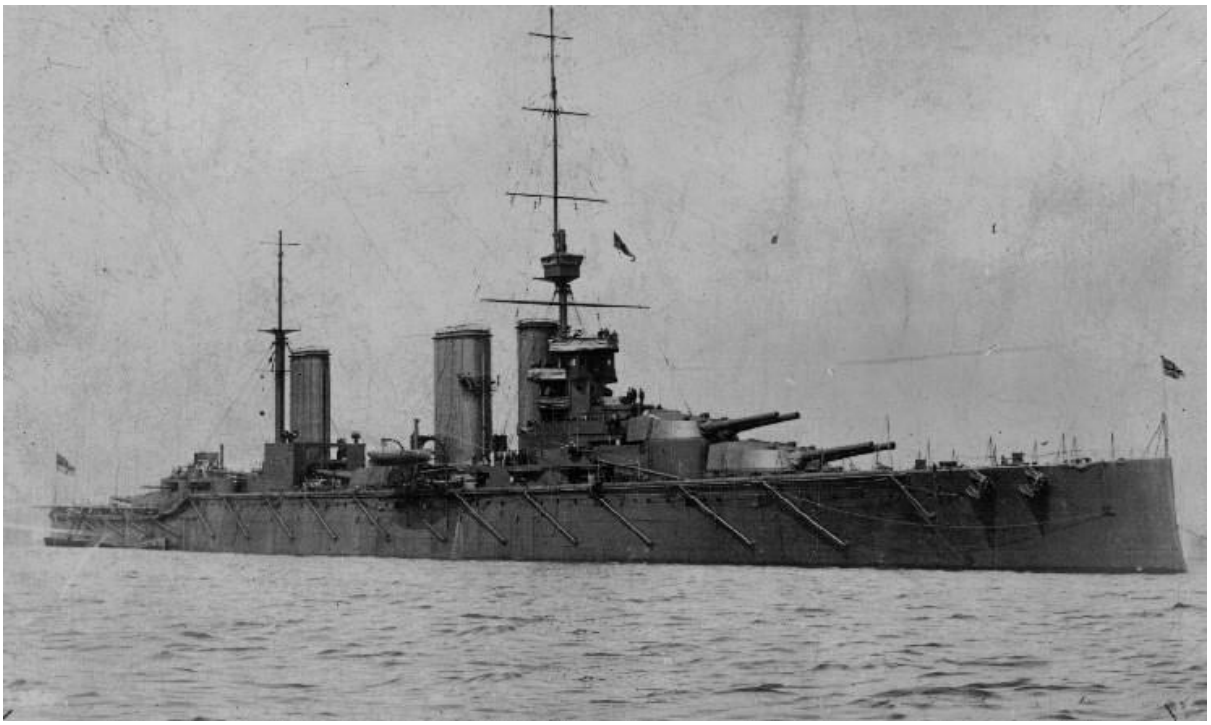
SURGICAL EXPERIENCES IN THE BATTLE OF JUTLAND

The Journal of the Royal Naval Medical Service contains four papers dealing with the treatment of wounded in the battle of Jutland, in its issue dated October, 1916. Fleet Surgeon Alexander MacLean and Surgeon Horace, E. R. Stephens, both of H.M.S. Lion, describe their experiences in the hope that these may prove interesting to others, since the conditions under which naval medical officers have to work in action differ so widely from any that they may have encountered in other practice. Staff Surgeon J. McA. Holmes gives an account of the treatment and disposal of the wounded in a light cruiser during action. Mr. L. Fraser discusses the treatment of wounds received in naval action, and Fleet Surgeon John R. Muir, attached to H.M.S. Tiger, writes: "Hints for the use of Medical Officers in Action," based on his experiences in the battles of Jutland and the Dogger Bank.



HMS Lion

The medical organisation on H.M.S. Lion possessed two distributing stations for the shelter of the medical staff, stretcher parties, instruments, and medical stores. These were divided as

equally as possible between the two stations. The forward station was small, though well protected. As it would accommodate not more than a dozen wounded, only walking patients proceeded to it.' The after station was too small for the accommodation of wounded, so that stores and instruments were kept in it. During action the mess-deck, which was behind armour, received all the stretcher cases which were placed in bathrooms or on mess tables. The wounded were not carried further than necessary. Those wounded in turrets and isolated compartments were only moved out of the way, and were not brought to the mess deck until a lull occurred in the action. Elaborate precautions and preparations were taken, but ought to be avoided. The part of the mess deck which had been thoroughly 'prepared for the reception of wounded could not be used at all, as it was rendered untenable by fumes and smoke at the outset of the action.

Most benefit was derived from canvas bags containing antiseptic and picric acid dressings, a tourniquet and bandages. These were placed in turrets, engine-rooms, boiler-rooms and other compartments as well as on the mess deck itself. These bags were replenished as needed from the stations. Well-trained first-aid parties, made up of writers, cooks, stewards, and canteen hands, did most valuable work, as the rest of the ship's company shrank from dressing Wounds, although they would tend fallen shipmates with brotherly affection. Ventilating fans were run on the mess deck until the action started, when they were switched off. On the lower decks they were kept running during the action. The delivery openings for fresh air were filled with shavings medicated in the same way as the tubular respirators. Respirators and anti-gas goggles were issued to each turret compartment, and to the mess deck. Although there was much trouble on the mess deck from smoke, burning debris, and T.N.T. fumes, no cases of gassing occurred. The simple respirator of gauze and waste proved so efficient that the tubular respirators were not called into employment.

Nearly all the casualties on this ship occurred within the first half hour. A few patients found their way to the fore station, but the majority remained on the mess-deck. During the first lull the medical officers made a tour of inspection of the ship. The scenes that greeted them beggared description. Most of the wounded had already been dressed. Tourniquets had been applied in one or two, instances, though haemorrhage was less than might have been expected from the extensive lacerated wounds. As there was much water about the wounded were kept dry and warm on tables. Morphine in 0.04 gm. doses was given hypodermically by the medical officers alone to all the wounded. The Wildey syringes were excellent, though the needles might have been stouter. The medical officers state that these maximal doses of morphine relieved pain and controlled haemorrhage instantly. Such large doses caused symptoms of overdose when administered soon after the receipt of the injury and before the reserve of stamina of the healthy men had been lowered by pain. The battle was thrice renewed in the evening, but the wounded were all carried in lulls to the mess-deck. No splints were applied since the Neil Robertson stretcher answered the purpose admirably. After the action was over the injured were kept warm throughout the night with blankets and hot bottles, while they were fed occasionally with Bovril and medical comforts. During the evening ten of the desperately wounded and burned died. It was impossible to move any of the wounded during the night owing to the probability of a renewal of the action at dawn. Many of the wounded slept undisturbed.

At 7.30 o'clock the next morning the medical officers were informed that it would be safe to bring up the wounded from below. The Vice-Admiral's and captain's cabins, which were full of smoke and water, were cleaned, dried, and thoroughly ventilated. A start was made at 8.45 a.m. with the treatment of the wounded, the captain's bathroom serving as an operating theatre. Fifty-one patients were dealt with, and a general anaesthetic was administered to twenty-eight. Two officers gave much assistance by administering anaesthetics. After operation the patients were placed on bedding on the decks of the Vice-Admiral's and captain's quarters. No mishaps occurred, and all the wounded were discharged without a further death. Urgent

operations only were performed. Full exploration of large wounds was impossible for lack of time. Two amputations were postponed for a similar reason. Three amputations of the lower limb were carried out. Five compound comminuted fractures of the leg were treated with splints. The surgical toilet of wounds consisted of swilling them out with eusol, draining, trimming and suturing when needful. Abdominal injuries were absent. Although the wounds remained with first-aid dressings from sixteen to thirty hours sepsis was much less frequent than the conditions warranted the medical officers to expect. Eusol was the only antiseptic applied to the wounds. General burns, invariably due to cordite fires, were severe and fatal. Almost 50% of the wounded suffered from burns of the face and hands alone. These burns were caused by the flash of high explosives in a confined space. The flame was so momentary that clothing completely protected the rest of the body. The ankles were scorched in a few cases, but this did not occur when the trousers were tucked inside the socks. The eyes being closed in time escaped injury. Masks and gauntlets would probably prevent many casualties among repair and fire parties on the lower decks. The picric acid dressing was most satisfactory as a first-aid dressing to burns. This dressing was, however, liable to become dry if left on too long, despite the covering of mostig batiste. The dressings were difficult to remove when dried. As a second dressing eucalyptus and olive oils were applied, and covered with fomentations. Notes on every case were taken in shorthand at the time. These notes included the name, age, rating, nature of injuries and treatment. They were found most valuable later. Prior to leaving the theatre each patient was labelled with the notes. The last case was finished at 12.15 o'clock on the morning of the next day, when the medical staff went to a much-needed rest. On arriving at the base on the same day forty-six wounded were transferred to the hospital ship "Plassy," while five cases of slightly wounded were retained on board. Nine days later a report was received from the medical officers on the hospital ship "Plassy," giving an account of fourteen of the extensively wounded patients. These were cases not of burns but mostly of multiple injuries, including the five compound comminuted fractures. Nine wounded had no septic wounds, while five patients had septic wounds. In all the septic wounds portions of clothing had not been removed at operation. The medical officers record with gratification the work of their staff, which was sadly depleted during the action, as many as 44% of the sick berth staff coming into the casualty list.

The light cruiser in which Staff Surgeon J. McA. Holmes served, came into contact with the enemy on the evening of May 31, 1916. The ship was engaged on and off at intervals throughout the night. A severe engagement occurred with three enemy cruisers about 9.45 p.m., when all the casualties were received. Forty-one wounded were noted, of whom twelve died almost instantaneously. The wounded were sent to two dressing stations, one forward and the other aft. These dressing stations were on the lower or main deck, and were close to galleys, so that a supply of hot water was always available. Open hatches were conveniently situated to the dressing stations, and patients who could walk descended by them. As the crew had been previously trained in man-handling wounded and passing them down canvas chutes in the hatches, stretchers were not used. The effect of the previous training was noted in the speed with which the wounded were brought to the stations. All of the wounded were received within five minutes of any lull in the severity of the engagement. The crew put on clean clothing one hour before the action started, and as many as possible took a bath with water containing izal. Twenty-six patients required treatment. Eleven of these had slight wounds, while fifteen suffered from severe injuries. As soon as the injured reached the dressing station they received an hypodermic injection of morphine if they had not been given a dose of anodyne mixture. The wound was washed with corrosive sublimate solution, and covered with cyanide gauze wrung out from 1 in 40 carbolic acid. Any patients who had been dressed on deck were examined, and a

fresh dressing applied. At 1-0.45 p.m. all the wounded had received first aid. As it appeared that thirty-six hours would elapse before the patients could be transferred to a hospital ship it seemed desirable to give more active treatment. The operating theatre was brought into use, and by 9 o'clock next morning all the wounded had been dealt with. As the ship was engaged during the night much difficulty was experienced in this work. The sick-birth steward gave the anaesthetics until 5 a.m., when the surgeon in the forward station was able to come to the aft station. The operations consisted of one amputation of the forearm, several amputations of fingers and toes, removal of splinters from wounds, trimming and suturing of lacerated parts. Among the more severe wounds, all described in detail, was a compound comminuted fracture of the frontal eminence on the left side. The left eye was disorganized. Ten splinters of bone were taken away under chloroform, and a portion of disintegrated bone shaved away. The wound was drawn together with catgut and a drainage tube inserted. No burns were caused on this light cruiser. Fifteen severe cases were transferred to the hospital ship "China," on June 2, 1916. No record was received of their progress. Of the eleven kept on board all had recovered by the fifth day with one exception. This patient had a perforating wound of the wrist, with some loss of skin at the entrance and exit wounds.

Mr. Lachlan Fraser describes forty-three casualties from the battle of Jutland, admitted into the Tynemouth Jubilee Infirmary. Sixteen cases from H.M.S. "A" were received upon June 2, 1916, and twenty-seven cases on June 3 from H.M.S. "B." The first batch of cases had been dressed by Surgeon Probationer Bell, R.N.V.R. The dressings consisted of antiseptic paste and gauze. Some of the men had had serum administered. In the case of H.M.S. "B" almost the first shell had struck the sick bay, killing the surgeon probationer, wounding the sick bay steward, and destroying most of the dressings. The sick-bay steward was admitted with the other wounded. He said that the only dressings left by the shell were 1 lb. boric lint, 2 Ibs. white lint, 1 bottle of san cresol, 4 oz. tinct. iodine, some picric acid and some bandages. The steward carried the dressings aft, where the wounded were collected. The wounded were dressed by him and given a dose of morphine. The dressings were changed three times on the way to the base. As the dressings gave out he used pieces of clean sheeting. The burns were dressed with picric acid. Four patients died on board soon after being injured, but the remaining twenty-seven did well.

On admission to hospital the patients were placed in bed between hot blankets. They were then labelled "ward" or "theatre." Those not requiring an anaesthetic were treated in the wards. Three surgeons worked at once in the theatre, so that the whole of the wounded were treated rapidly. Sixteen cases required three hours, and twenty seven cases five hours. The cases which were most collapsed on admission were left to the last. The routine treatment of the wounds was as follows: The surrounding parts were scrubbed and thoroughly cleaned. The wound was washed with normal salt solution, all pockets freely opened, and any visible foreign bodies removed. These foreign bodies consisted of pieces of clothing and fragments of shell. No attempt was made to find hidden pieces of shell. If the wound was not clean it was washed out with 1 in 40 carbolic acid, and afterwards with normal salt solution. When deep cavities existed gauze wrung out from hypertonic salt solution was applied, and continuous irrigation with the salt solution kept up. During the first week in hospital radiographs were taken of all patients. Fragments of shell found in this and were removed.

Among the severe cases was that of R. B., aged 21 years. The left foot had been blown off by a shell. The surgeon probationer had trimmed and dressed the stump. There was a fearful shell wound of the left calf just below the knee, the bruising extending up the lower third of the thigh. The patient had lost much blood, was blanched and almost pulseless. He was given saline

solution and brandy per rectum. The stump was dressed and treated with hypertonic salt solution. Four days later, as the patient had rallied, the stump, which was offensive, was amputated through the middle of the thigh. The stump became septic, and consequently one month later it was opened up and thoroughly cleansed. The flaps were dried and covered with bismuth and iodoform paste. Two days later there were signs of poisoning with iodoform. A severe secondary haemorrhage occurred, which necessitated the further opening of the wound. The bleeding was found-to be derived from one of the perforating arteries, which was ligated. The patient slowly rallied, and six weeks later was able to get about on crutches. Mr... Fraser says that the wounds received in the naval actions were similar to severe machinery accidents in which much laceration and contusion of the soft parts, splintering of bone, haemorrhage and shock took place. Except when haemorrhage was profuse shock did not occur among the picked able-bodied men of the naval ratings. Reaction was also slight after operation. A man whose arm was amputated upon admission wrote a letter with his left hand the following day, and strummed on the piano in a week. He did not progress so quickly after the formal "flap operation" done "in cold blood" some days later. A man with a trephined ski-ill consequent to a fracture played the mandolin while the sister was absent from the ward three days later with no ill effects.

Fleet Surgeon Muir gives much information of the experiences in action as illustrations of the usefulness of his hints for the guidance of naval medical officers in action. He points out that contrary to the pre-war conception casualties arrived in numbers from the time that the first casualty occurred. Instead of the patients drifting in slowly, so that they could be treated as they arrived, there was nothing to do until twenty seriously wounded men, representing sixty extensive wounds, were brought in for treatment. The Admiralty instructions directed that two distributing stations should be manned, one forward and one aft. In the "Tiger" these stations were supplied in the design of the ship, and their positions could not be altered. As the aft dressing station did not appear to be well protected from plunging shell fire, the surgeon in charge of the station in the first battle was directed to withdraw his parties into the ammunition passages on the disengaged side. The experience in this first battle at the Dogger Bank led to the aft dressing station being rigged in compliance with the Admiralty instructions, but with the consent of the Captain the party in charge proceeded to the forward dressing station on the order "Man the after dressing station." If this had not been done in the battle of Jutland, the whole of the party in the aft dressing station would have been annihilated.

When the bugle sounded "Action stations," the medical staff received their full complement of assistance. In addition to the regular medical party, six stretcher parties were provided. Each party consisted of three persons. These had special training and were most expert in finding their way to the forward station from any part of the ship by the quickest route. As soon as the ratings had assembled, the roll was called by the principal medical officer. Life-saving waistcoats and respirators were served out.

Each stretcher party received a stretcher and a first-aid bag. The senior rating examined the bag and reported any deficiencies. The latest authentic information was given, and the parties are told to do some simple thing. It was found necessary to occupy the time with some work while waiting for the special duties. In one action two hours passed before the first casualty arrived. This waiting was most trying. The noise of the guns was deafening, and the concussion and vibration was so severe that it seemed as if the body was held by the shoulders and violently shaken every half minute, the smell of cordite was sickening in its intensity and penetration. The rumours running along the deck were alarming, and the stampede of fire

parties made the heart beat more quickly. The inaction tried the nerves. On receipt of information that stretcher- bearers were needed, the parties set out from the station. Having sighted the wounded, they covered the more obvious wounds and placed the wounded in the Neil Robertson stretcher. The patient was borne to the station, removed from the stretcher and placed on a couch. Two cooks, under the supervision of an officer, stripped the patient by means of large scissors. When unclothed, the injured man was wrapped in a blanket. The medical officer overhauled the patient and applied dressings. The Chief Writer took down the patient's name and added notes at the medical officer's dictation. The Chief Writer searched the clothing stripped from the patient, and reported to the principal medical officer any valuables found. One man had £19 upon him. The clothes are tied up and labelled with the patient's name. The patient was placed in a cot or upon a table, and served with a half-pint of hot bovril.

After the action the work of the medical-ratings was heavier. On the bugle sounding "Secure," all the supernumerary workers, cooks, stewards, writers, and others placed at the disposal of the surgeons, were called to other duties. As the principal part of the medical department's duty can be attempted only when the action is over, this depletion of the staff is quickly felt.

Wounded from the ships were transported to the hospital ships at Rosyth in smaller boats and then winched onboard. These sailors are being taken onto HMHS Plassy.