CHESTERFIELD WFA

Newsletter and Magazine issue 23

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Welcome to Issue 23 the June 2017 Newsletter and Magazine of Chesterfield WFA.

The next Chesterfield Branch Meeting will be held on Tuesday 6th June with a 7.30 start

Making a welcome return visit to the branch as our speaker will be one of the top speakers on the circuit – Rob Thompson

"Messines 1917" This battle was the most successful local operation of the war – certainly of the Western Front. Rob will explain why – no doubt throwing in a bit about logistics for good measure !

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 (16)

Those of you who attended the May meeting would have noticed that I was not able to attend as I was on holiday. I was lucky enough to be in southern Africa for a while and one of the places I visited was the Victoria Falls on the Zambezi River, having got thoroughly soaked by the spray from the falls I was making my way back to the car when I saw a small sign pointing to the First World War monument. It seemed incongruous to find a monument to the fallen in such an out of the way place. Of course the Victoria Falls are close to the town of Livingstone which in 1918 was the Capital of Northern Rhodesia now Zambia. The 40 names on the plaque included the rank and regiment and I was surprised to see that alongside the North Rhodesian Police, North Rhodesian Rifles and Nyasaland Volunteers over half the names were serving with British Regiments. An unusually high number 5 of the 40 (12.5%)were Lt Colonels from the East Lancs, KOYLI, Wiltshire, KOSB and the Kings (Lancs). A further interesting name was that of a Nurse M G A Beaufort a VAD. I suppose many were reservists who returned home to do their duty but it is further evidence that the tentacles of the Great War spread to distant parts of the world.

Slightly nearer home I spent the last few days in Arras with my old University of Birmingham colleagues (no, I don't spend all my time on holiday). We visited the relatively new (opened 2014) Ring of Peace at the French shrine of Notre Dame de Lorette. The impressive monument lists the names of 580,000 British, French and German dead in the Pas de Calais and Nord Departments I recommend if you are in the Vimy area to pay a visit it is worth the effort.

Secretary`s Scribbles

Well, here we are, almost at the midpoint of the year and to this the third Chesterfield Branch Newsletter and Magazine of 2017. Apologies to anyone inconvenienced at the May meeting by it having to be held in the Labour Club bar, rather in our upstairs room. The local elections plus the upcoming General Election saw the room full of election paraphernalia but we expect all will be back to normal for our June meeting next week. Our speaker is one of the top men on the `circuit`, Rob Thompson, and we are privileged to have again secured his services to speak at one of our meetings. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Branch `regular` John Beech for his very generous donation of books to the branch. There a number of Western Front Association organised events coming up full details are found elsewhere in this Newsletter /Magazine.

I am now starting to think about the speakers` programme for 2018 and here I would like the input from members. Who would you like to hear – what topics ? I like to strike a balance between the `Big Guns` - Rob Thompson, Peter Hart etc with `new blood` like Richard Pullen and Malcolm Sime, whilst affording opportunities to our own `regulars` like John Beech, Charles Beresford and shortly Alan Atkinson and Arthur Lacey. Any ideas – or offers – then please let me know – give me a ring on 07824628638 or e mail grantcullen@hotmail.com

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

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. In this issue we have a contribution from WFA member Jon Boulton from Mansfield – something a friend of his in Canada directed him to. Jon has passed on another article which will be included in the next Magazine.

Looking forward into July for that meeting we will have a presentation by one of `Our Own`, Charles Beresford. Charles whose latest book is reviewed by Peter Hodgkinson in this magazine will give a talk on `The Forgotten Story of Derbyshire`s Major Role in the Nations Commemoration of the Great War`. I do not know *anything* on this subject so I am looking forward to Charles educating me – and the rest of us of course.

Tomorrow is the WFA President`s Conference at the Tally Ho Conference Centre, Birmingham – details elsewhere in the magazine. It is still not too late to book or indeed just turn up and pay at the door.

Grant Cullen – Branch Secretary

April Meeting

Branch Chairman Tony Bolton welcomed all present to the meeting before asking member Roger Avill to speak Binyon`s `Exhortation` - the traditional start to all Chesterfield Branch Meetings. Tony then said that he had been advised that local company, Brampton Brewery, were creating a real ale to commemorate their former Head Brewer, Captain Marsden MC, 2nd/6th Sherwood Foresters, who together with four other Brampton Brewery colleagues, had lost his life during the Great War.

Tony then introduced our speaker for the evening, Richard Pullen, making his second visit to our Branch, this time to make a presentation on the `Munitionettes` - the women who played such a massive part in the winning of the Great War. Richard began by saying he sometimes feels underqualified to speak on this subject as perhaps it should be delivered by a female historian but that perhaps would be the case if you felt that the role of women in The Great War as separate when in fact, in Richard`s opinion, they were not at all separate, but in fact two sides of the same coin.

We would not have won without the lads taking on the enemy, but equally victory would not have been achieved without the efforts of millions of women back here in the UK doing their bit as well. The popular image we have – at least up until relatively recently – of women in the Great War was waving off their menfolk as the marched off to engage the foe. But in fact looking after hearth and home while the men were away, important as it was, was only part of their contribution to the war effort. We know and recognise the other part, something new and completely different at the time, going into industry – indeed every other walk of life imaginable – which had hitherto been very much the preserve of men. They filled the massive employment and skills gap caused by so many men either being called up as reservists or answering the call to volunteer for the New Armies. Before going into detail about the contribution of women in the Great War, Richard spoke about women in society prior to the conflict. Women had few rights at that time, not allowed to vote and were actively seeking equality with men. What brought women of all classes together and galvanised the campaign for equal rights was the `Votes for Women` campaign.

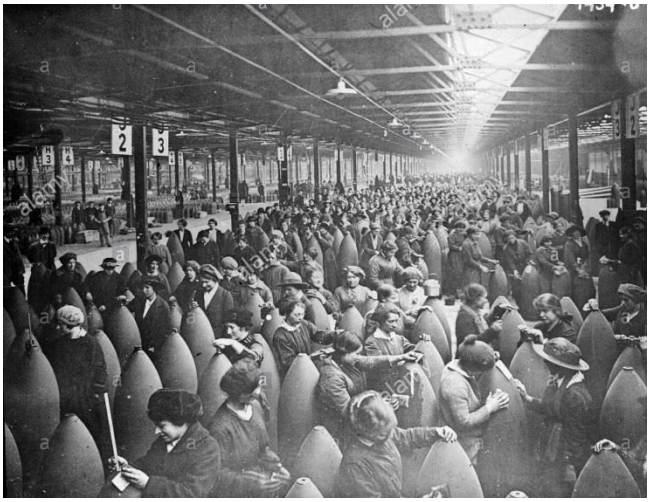
This (left) is a popular image of the Suffragettes, of them being manhandled by the authorities, imprisoned, force fed etc., and indeed that is all true. There was, however, another side to the Suffragettes and this was illustrated by a picture of a group of them holding up a banner which proclaimed them to be `Law Abiding Suffragettes` which contrasted of course with many in the movement who were anything but `Law Abiding` and were involved with what they called `direct action`. Having tried every legal action open to them, letters to the Prime Minister, protest marches through London, all to no avail, as all too often those in authority would not even speak to them. Some even tried to `post` themselves to the Prime Minister by concealing themselves in mail bags, but of course that ended in failure – indeed the law was changed to make it illegal to `post` oneself !. Some

became involved in violent acts – burning down the Tea House at Kew Gardens and setting fire to railway carriages including at Kings Norton in Birmingham.

To get themselves publicity in the newspapers of the day they needed high profile targets and the painting of `The Toilet of Venus` by Velazquez at the National Gallery was famously attacked and damaged by a Suffragette. Actions like this made the Suffragettes very unpopular with many but gained approval from other sections of society and it came to a point where the militants could not back down and to maintain momentum had to escalate their actions. Equally the government could not be seen to back down either. As this stalemate continued some Suffragettes even went as far as planting bombs in the houses of high profile personages, including that of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George.

Luckily in 1914 – and how often can you say that about anything concerning The Great War – that stalemate was broken by the outbreak of the war. Reservists were recalled to the colours and the appeal went out for volunteers - `Your Country Needs You` - which resulted in men taking the King`s Shilling in numbers which overwhelmed recruiting offices. All well and good for the military but the result was industry becoming denuded of men , many of whom were highly skilled, at a time when it became apparent that it was going to take a nationwide effort to create a munitions industry capable of supplying the troops which the quantities of guns, aircraft, ammunition of all types, ships, uniforms and all sorts of trench supplies that was going to be required to equip the soldiers sailors and airmen and enable them to face a well-equipped foe on an equal basis. Women saw this skills gap as an opportunity – not only to replace men who had gone to fight and produce much needed war *materiel* but to prove themselves as equals and `do their bit`. They lobbied government and perceptive politicians like David Lloyd George quickly realised that women would be indispensable in ramping up industry in a total war effort. It had to happen as so many factories, the docks, mines, railways and other forms of public transport were struggling on what in many cases was `skeleton` staff, as so many men had joined the armed forces. Women came in and, in the fullness of time, proved that they were more than equal to any task that was placed before them. They wanted equality with men now they had it – in the workplace!

Richard then showed some photographs of women working on early tanks at Fosters of Lincoln, drilling castings of track shoes and (above) a large group of `Munitionettes` posing in front of a tank which they had constructed. Skills to operate machine tools accurately had to be acquired quickly and this was achieved, indeed it has been calculated that, by the end of war, 85% of all munitions and other war materials had been produced, at least in part by female labour. An amazing figure of 18 MILLION women were engaged in some form of war work, either manufacturing war materials or replacing men in jobs which had been hitherto been exclusively male preserves.



The above picture shows women happily working away in a shell factory but the reality at the time was very different, factories were dark, dusty, noisy and dangerous.

This picture show The King and Viscount Chetwyn visiting Chilwell Shell Filling Factory in Nottingham on December 12th 1915.

Not only were the factories themselves dangerous but the substances from which the explosives were made were extremely poisonous and the women became known as `Canary Girls` ads there skin would become yellow from handling the chemical constituents of the explosives. Indeed some girls would use these mixtures as a blonde hair dye! Many of the women who handled these materials subsequently died prematurely in their 20s and 30s from bronchial diseases, cancers etc. Others found they were unable to conceive and bear children.

This view shows the filled shells being moved with their transit plugs, by overhead crane. Any slip and the whole lot would go up and tragically in July 1918 an accident did occur which did set off a massive explosion which cost the lives of 134 people of whom only 32 could be positively identified. A further 250 were injured in the blast. Investigations never proved beyond doubt why this explosion occurred but rumours persisted that the cause was sabotage. This obituary appeared in the local press regarding one of those who lost their life in the accident. She was a widow, her husband having been killed on active service the year previous.

MRS. NELLIE HALL, CANTEEN WORKER.

Killed, Chilwell, 1st July, 1918.

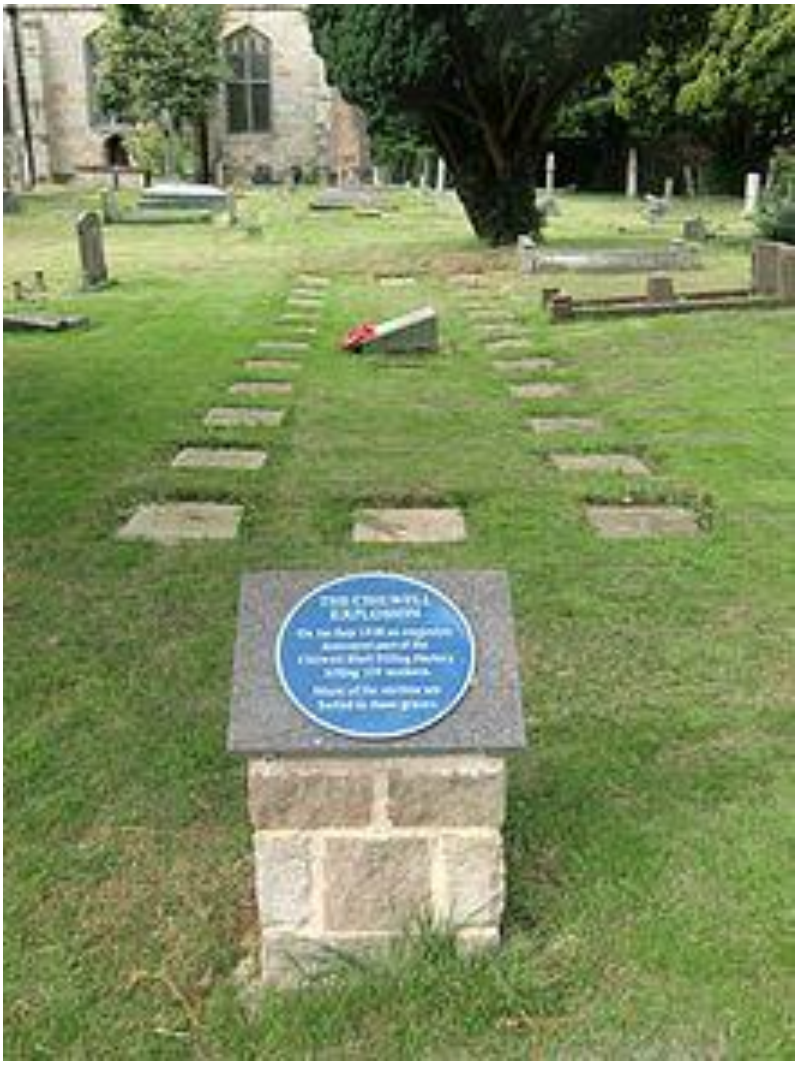
Mrs. Hall was the daughter of Mr. and Mr. and Mrs. Bardill, Bridge Street, Langley Mill. Shortly after the death of her husband, an Ilkeston soldier, who was killed on June 17th, 1917, she commenced duties in the Canteen at the Chilwell Factory, where she met her death as a result of the terrible explosion which occurred on the 1st July, 1918. Several other Canteen Workers were injured, but Mrs. Hall was the only one to be killed.

Deceased, who was a great Church worker, was married at Aldercar Church.

Fortunately she is the only woman to be included on our roll of dead which we place her upon, fully assured that her life was given in the service of her Country, equally with those who fell on the battlefield.

She was 27 years of age.

A memorial to those who had died in all explosions at the site was unveiled by the Duke of Portland on 13 March 1919. It takes the form of a small obelisk above a massive pyramidal base.



This picture shows the mass grave at St. Mary`s Church, Attenborough. It was reported at the time that the explosion could be heard 20 miles away.

It was far from an `easy` option working in the munitions industry, the threat of violent death never being far away.

There was also many `little` accidents which resulted in damage to eyes, loss of fingers or even complete limbs.

Of course the women and girls were not just working on munitions, across the country millions were working on *everything* possible imagined – uniforms, webbing, shoes and boots, tanks and aircraft. In every walk of life women came in and proved that they were up to the job. Jobs that had hitherto been closed to women had to open up – railways, buses, docks – even the police force (see below).

Women were also very active in rasing money for the war effort. But it wasn`t all work and no play, the women put on concerts, plays, dances even football matches – ladies football became incredibly popular during the First World War, so popular that the Football Association *banned* womens football immediately after the war as they were worried that no one would be interested in the mens` game post war – and they deemed that football could be harmful to womens` reproductive organs. Indeed professional womens` football was not reinstated until the 1970s – and at that to bring the UK into line with Europe.

It wasn`t always work in factories that women were involved with and Richard showed pictures of women shovelling crushed glass – and even sulphur – all without face masks or any protection against inhaling toxic dusts. Even schoolgirls got involved often working part time in factories – school in the morning, a shift in a factory in the afternoon. Not long into the war a culture evolved that everyone had to `join up` and men not in uniform, for whatever reason – even home on leave – would be approached by women in the street and given a white feather, indicating athat the women viewed them as cowrads for not being in uniform. Because of this `shaming`many factories were losing their best men and were struggling to fullfil their orders so they started to issue `On War Work` badges.

These were unofficial and did not really carry any weight or give a reason why one should not be in the forces. It was not until 1915 that the first official Admiralty War Badge was introduced

These badges were often accompanied by a certificate confirming that the holder was in a reserved occupation and did not have to go off to the trenches. So, what have these badges to do with women ?

Well, in 1916 this badge came out

A female war service badge. Why did they feel the need for women to have a badge? This is a bit of a mystery really as women were never accused of being shirkers or avoiding service. It seems that the issuing of these badges to women was more of a gesture of `thank you` from the Ministry of Munitions indicating that everyone was pulling together and showing the spirit that

would win the war. Oddly though, at the end of the war, men who had these badges were allowed to keep them but women were supposed to return theirs once their service was completed. Many women of course did not comply and return their badges – they were proud of their service and wanted some small emblem as recognition of what they had done during the conflict.

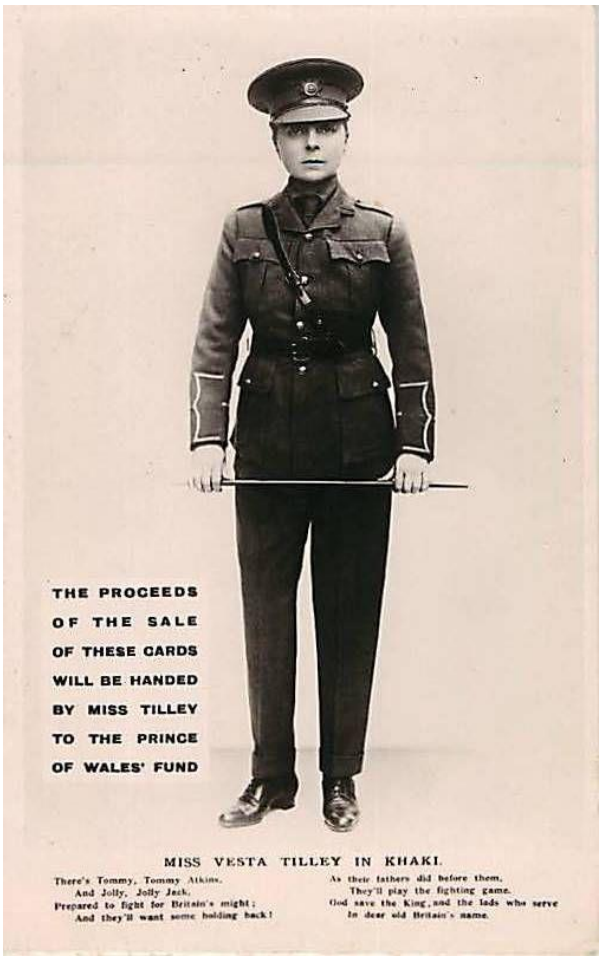
Left – a Munitionette proudly displays her `On War Service` badge.

Of course there were many women not in war work, but in roles like nursing, VADs, caring for the wounded – indeed some were in the forces themselves. We tend to hear of the WRNS in the Second World War but in 1917 there was an announcement - *"Women for the Navy – new shore service to be formed."* – by 1919 there were 7,000 Wrens including Cooks and Stewards, Dispatch Riders, Sail Makers and those in Intelligence. The motto was 'Never at Sea'.

In this picture we see a group of WRNS personnel visiting HMS Dolphin at Gosport and being shown over a captured German U Boat, with a British `E` class submarine behind

Richard then showed this picture which he said was one of his favourites – a female gas mask instructor shown a number of soldiers the correct way of wearing and using their respirator – good knowledge which one day may have saved these men`s lives.

When the decision was taken to merge the RFC and RNAS to form the Royal Air Force (RAF), concerns were raised about the loss of their specialised female workforce. This need for a separate women's air service led to the formation of the WRAF on 1 April 1918. The work of the WRAF was divided into four basic trades: Clerks and Storewomen, Household, Technical and Non-Technical. Initially little training was given with wages based on existing experience and skills. The majority of women were employed as clerks, with shorthand typists the most highly paid of all airwomen. Women allocated to the Household section worked the longest hours, doing back breaking work for the lowest pay. The Technical section covered a wide range of trades, most highly skilled, including tinsmiths, fitters and welders. It was not only the men of the war who got to ride around on these bad boys, though. The Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF) also made use of motorbikes. The initial aim of the WRAF was to provide female mechanics so that men could be free to serve in the armed forces. Thanks to the high number of women volunteers, many also filled driver positions as well. Women's love for the bicycle in this period makes it easy to see how they seamlessly graduated to motorbike. Before the stigma attached itself to motorbikes - occurring after WWII - they were seen as fun and adventurous, and, we're sorry to tell all you macho bikers, a perfectly fitting feminine vehicle.



Moving on, Richard mentioned that many women found roles in theatre and music hall entertainment, including Vesta Tilley, who was one of the most famous male impersonators of her era. She was a star in both Britain and the US for over thirty years. Tilley's popularity continued during the War, when she and her husband ran a military recruitment drive, as did a number of other music-hall stars. In the guise of characters like 'Tommy in the Trench' and 'Jack Tar Home from Sea', Tilley performed songs like "The Army of Today's All Right" and 'Jolly Good Luck to the Girl who Loves a Soldier'. This is how she got the nickname 'Britain's best recruiting sergeant' – young men were sometimes asked to join the army on stage during her show .She was prepared to be a little controversial. Famously, for example, she sang a song "I've Got a Bit of a Blighty One", about a soldier who was delighted to have been wounded because it allowed him to go back to England and get away from extremely deadly battlefields. Tilley performed in hospitals and sold War Bonds.

Richard then described a particular heroine of his – Dorothy Lawrence – a reporter who secretly disguised herself as a man to become a soldier in the war. Wanting to be a journalist, she had success in having some articles published in The Times at the outbreak of war she wrote to a number of the newspapers in the hope of reporting the war. Travelling to France in 1915, she volunteered as a civilian employee of the Voluntary Aid Detachment but was rejected. Deciding to enter the war zone via the French sector as a

freelance war correspondent, she was arrested by French Police in Senlis, 2 miles short of the front line, and ordered to leave. Spending the night sleeping on a haystack in a forest, she returned to Paris where she concluded that only in disguise could she get the story that she wanted to write. She befriended two British Army soldiers in a Parisian café, and persuaded them to smuggle her a khaki uniform, piece by piece, within their washing; ten men eventually shared in this exploit, later referred to in her book as the "Khaki accomplices". She then began practicing transforming herself into a male soldier, by: flattening her figure with a home-made corset; using sacking and cotton-wool to bulk out her shoulders; and persuaded two Scottish military policemen to cut her long, brown hair in a short military style. She darkened her complexion with Condy's Fluid and wearing a blanket coat and no underwear, lest soldiers discover her abandoned petticoats, she obtained forged identity papers as Private **Denis Smith** of the 1st Bn, Leicestershire Regiment, and headed for the front lines.

Targeting the British sector of the Somme, she set out by bicycle. On her way towards Albert, Somme, she met Lancashire coalminer turned tunnel-digging sapper Tom Dunn, who offered to assist her. Fearing for the safety of a lone woman amongst female-companionship starved soldiers, Dunn found Lawrence an abandoned cottage in Senlis to sleep in. During her time on the frontline, she returned there each night to sleep on a damp mattress, fed by any rations that Dunn and his colleagues could spare. The toll of the job, and of hiding her true identity, soon gave her constant chills and rheumatism, and latterly fainting fits. Concerned that if she needed medical attention her true gender would be discovered and the men who had befriended her would be in danger, after 10 days of service she presented herself to the commanding sergeant, who promptly placed her under military arrest.

Taken to the BEF headquarters and interrogated as a spy by a colonel, she was declared a prisoner of war. From there she was taken cross country by horse to Third Army headquarters in Calais where she was interrogated by six generals and approximately twenty other officers. She was ignorant of the term *camp follower* (prostitute) and she later recalled "We talked steadily at cross purposes. On my side I had not been informed what the term meant, and on their side they continued unaware that I remained ignorant! So I often appeared to be telling lies."

From Calais she was taken to Saint-Omer and further interrogated. The Army was embarrassed that a woman had breached security and was fearful of more women taking on male roles during the war if her story got out. On the orders of a suspicious judge, fearing she could release sensitive intelligence, he ordered that she remain in France until after the Battle of Loos. Held within the Convent de Bon Pasteur, she was also made to swear not to write about her experiences, and signed an affidavit to that effect, or she would be sent to jail. Sent back to London, she travelled across the channel on the same ferry as Emmeline Pankhurst, who asked her to speak at a suffragette meeting.

Once in London, she tried to write about her experiences for *The Wide World Magazine*, a London-based illustrated monthly, but had to scrap her first book on the instructions of the War Office which invoked the 1914 Defence of the Realm Act to silence her. In 1919, she moved to Canonbury, Islington, and published an account of her experiences: *Sapper Dorothy Lawrence: The Only English Woman Soldier*. Although well received in England, America and Australia, it was heavily censored by the War Office, and with a world wishing to move forward it did not become the commercial success that she wanted.

With no income and no credibility as a journalist, by 1925 her increasingly erratic behaviour was brought to the attention of the authorities. After confiding to a doctor that she had been raped in her teenage years by her church guardian, and with no family to look after her, she was taken into care and later deemed insane. Committed first to the London County Mental Hospital at Hanwell in March 1925, she was later institutionalised at the Colney Hatch Asylum in Friern Barnet, north London. Sadly she was never released and died at what was by then known as Friern Hospital in 1964. She was buried in a pauper's grave in New Southgate Cemetery, where today the site of her plot is no longer clear. So sad, but if you can ever get a hold of her book, do so, it is a fascinating read.

Richard went on to describe another notable woman – Flora Sandes. As a child she was educated by governesses. She enjoyed riding and shooting and said that she wished she had been born a boy. She learned to drive, and drove an old French racing car. She took a job as a secretary. In her spare time Sandes trained with the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY), founded in 1907, as an all-women mounted paramilitary organisation, learning first aid, horsemanship, signaling and drill. She left the FANY in 1910 joining another renegade FANY, Mabel St Clair Stobart, in the formation of the Women's Sick & Wounded Convoy. At the outbreak of the War in 1914 she volunteered to become a nurse, but was rejected due to a lack of qualifications. She joined as an officer of the Royal Serbian Army in The Great War. She was the only British woman officially to serve as a soldier in WWI. Initially a St. John Ambulance volunteer, she travelled to Serbia, where, in the confusion of war, she was formally enrolled in the Serbian army. She was subsequently promoted to the rank of Sergeant Major, and, after the war, to Captain. She was decorated with seven medals. Sandes was seriously wounded by a grenade in and she subsequently received the highest decoration of the Serbian Military, the Order of the Karadorde`s Star.

Here we see a picture of her in her eighties, having just renewed her passport with a view to travelling again.

Another woman whom most of us have heard of is Marie Curie, but are probably unaware of her contribution to the War.

Marie Skłodowska Curie 7 November 1867 – 4 July 1934), born **Maria Salomea Skłodowska**), was a Polish and naturalized – French physicist and chemist and who conducted pioneering research on radioactivity. She was the first woman to win a Nobel prize, the first person and only woman to win twice, the only person to win a Nobel Prize in two different

sciences, and was part of the Curie family legacy of five Nobel Prizes. She was also the first woman to become a professor at the University of Paris, and in 1995 became the first woman to be entombed on her own merits in the Pantheon in Paris.

During World War I, Marie Curie (see above) recognised that wounded soldiers were best served if operated upon as soon as possible. She saw a need for field radiological centres near the front lines to assist battlefield surgeons. After a quick study of radiology, anatomy, and automotive mechanics she procured X-ray equipment, vehicles, auxiliary generators, and developed mobile radiography units, which came to be popularly known as *petites Curies* ("Little Curies"). She became the director of the Red Cross Radiology Service and set up France's first military radiology centre, operational by late 1914. Assisted at first by a military doctor and by her 17-year-old daughter Irene, Curie directed the installation of 20 mobile radiological vehicles and another 200 radiological units at field hospitals in the first year of the war. Later, she began training other women as aides. What she insist upon, though, was that these units were not just to be used to treat French soldiers, their use was to be dependent solely on the need of the wounded men, irrespective of what army they were fighting for. No one will ever know how many soldiers` lives were saved but it must run to thousands.

Women found themselves doing all sorts of things during the war – things they would not even have dreamt of pre-war, but more importantly they had *freedom* to do things like learn to drive, something few women could do before 1914. Driving was now not limited to cars but lorries and buses as well. Women learned to become mechanics working in motor pools for the military and Richard recalled a story of a General, accompanied by all his staff came to collect his limousine. As he was about to climb aboard a trolley slides out from underneath it with an oily woman mechanic on it. The General immediately said I am not going in this one and indicated that he would take another vehicle – all because he had seen a woman mechanic servicing the vehicle. What he didn`t know was that the woman mechanic had worked on *every* car in the motor pool! This illustrated the prejudices that women still had to overcome to prove they were equal to men.

Although many working women enjoyed new-found financial independence and the opportunity to develop new skills, life was not always easy. Women often worked long shifts, in addition to caring for children and queuing for food rations. In many ways, the war had a dramatic effect on the lives of women. As well as increased financial independence, women also enjoyed a greater social freedom. For the first time, young single women could openly visit pubs, cinemas, and other public places unaccompanied by men. The war years also had a lasting effect on women's fashion. Clothes became looser and more practical, hair was worn shorter, and trousers became generally acceptable. However, some historians have said that the long-term effect of the war on women's lives has been over-emphasised. When men returned from the front, many women had to give up their wartime jobs often with no notice, and there was an increased emphasis on the virtues and duties of motherhood.

Although women over the age of 30 were granted the vote in 1918, it took a further 10 years before universal suffrage for everyone over the age of 21 was achieved. Why was this? Many in politics feared giving the vote to all quickly would lead to an increase in support for the rising Labour Party to the detriment of the Liberal Party who were traditionally seen as being the party at the forefront of social change.

Richard then wound up his presentation with a short poem

Behold the smart post lady
Who brings letters to our houses
Also the tram conductor
And the sweet things in trousers

Post war some were dismissive of the role of women in the war and their contribution, but to Richard, this contribution could be summed up in four words,

Women Won the War!

May Meeting

Because of the upcoming local and General Election our usual room at the Labour Club was not available but we were accommodated in the downstairs bar – the usual watering hole for some of our members before and after meetings.

The meeting was opened in our traditional manner by Vice Chairman Mark Macartney, deputising for Branch Chairman, Tony Bolton, who was on holiday.

Before introducing our speaker for the evening, Mark made a few announcements.

The new WFA website should be live by the end of this month, it will run in parallel with the `old` website for a number of months.

The WFA AGM is being held this Saturday (May 6th) in Newcastle. Mark will be attending in his dual roles as WFA Executive Committee Member and Vice Chairman of our Chesterfield Branch. Trustees will be elected for the forthcoming year and it is an opportunity for members to voice their opinions at National level.

Saturday the 3rd June is the WFA President`s Conference at the Tally Ho Conference Centre. Details in the next Branch Newsletter. There is generally a god turnout by Chesterfield Branch members but Mark said he would be missing this year as he, by personal invitation, would

attending a Commemorative Dinner held by 350 Field Squadron Royal Engineers. They are based at Chetwynd and Wallis Barracks in Nottingham. The dinner will commemorate the Battle of Messines and the vital played in it by the Tunnelling Companies of the Royal Engineers. As 350 Field Squadron`s recruiting areas include the former mining communities of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, the event will pay particular homage to those miners who served in the Tunnelling Companies – as well as the involvement of the Sherwood Foresters in the Battle of Messines. Mark said he felt honoured to have received an invitation.

At the April meeting it was drawn to our attention that local company Brampton Brewery was producing a Commemorative Real Ale in honour of the memory of Captain Marsden MC, former Head Brewer at Brampton who, whilst serving with the 2nd/6th Sherwood Foresters, lost his life in The Great War. Tonight his Great Nephew was in attendance and he presented the Committee with six bottles of this Commemorative Ale. Thank you sir. One of these will – via Charles Beresford find its way to Brigadier Edward Wilkinson himself a former Sherwood Forester and Trustee of the Mercian Regiment Museum at Nottingham Castle.

Mark then introduced our speaker for the evening Malcolm Sime making his first visit to Chesterfield Branch. Malcolm is a WFA Member and attends Surrey Branch.
Malcolm joined the British First World War Studies MA programme at the University of Birmingham in 2012 and graduated in 2014. He says the more he learns, the more he feels he has yet to learn about this complex and fascinating conflict which shaped the world in which we live today.

The title of Malcolm`s presentation was ***Kaiserschlacht! – 66th Division on the 21st and 22nd March 1918***.
Malcolm explained why he had chosen to focus on one particular Division and their actions in the first two days of the long anticipated German offensive – Operation Michael.
Erich Luddendorf described the offensive as **"The greatest battle ever fought in the history of the world"** and the British Fifth Army was forced into a retreat in some disarray. The question was how did the German offensive succeed where the allies had failed at every attempt since 1915?

Of course, as soon as the British army went into retreat, the `blame game` started. Malcolm broke down the reasons given into the undernoted.

- **Manpower Shortage**
- **The Defensive Scheme**
- **Morale**
- **Training**
- **Tactics**
- **The Fog**

What then did Malcolm use as his sources of information for his researches? These were listed as:-

- Archival Sources
  - War Diaries
  - Official Publications
  - Correspondence

- Secondary Sources
    - Official History
    - Unit Histories
    - General Histories
    - Tactical Analyses
    - Diaries and Memoirs
    - Autobiographies
    - Biographies
    - Journal Articles

Moving on Malcolm described the British system of defence – based as it was upon the German system – three zones – the forward zone, the battle zone and the rear zone.

At the Doullen Conference on 16th February 1918 all the Allied military commanders met and discussed the new system, particularly implementation problems, in which they were indeed, spot on. The issues raised were, the fact that this was a new system, the concept of defence in depth was barely understood and that every unit in the defensive system, right down to the individual platoon had to understand their specific role. The key was mutual support, the main difference between a system of holding a line and defence in depth. The conference also pointed out something which would prove crucial in the 66th Division sector – how do you get your reserves into battle position – assuming, of course, that there were reserves available, an issue when there was clearly manpower problems. Once the battle had started how do you bring your reserves forward, where do you position them? Malcolm said he would deal with this problem in this sector later in the presentation.

Why did Malcolm chose 66th (2nd East Lancashire) Division – he did so purely on account of their location on Fifth Army front. He wanted a Division that had held part of the battle zone, at least up until midday on March 22nd. He wanted to see what had worked and what had failed.

So what do we know about 66th Division?

- Second-line territorial division
- Good reputation – well commanded by General Malcolm Neill
- Battalions up to strength. Before the `scraping the barrel` phase of later 1918
- Well trained and experienced.
  "Patrols had undisputed possession of No-Man's-Land" – successful as trench raiders
- Morale high
  "Animated by a great spirit of comradeship, cheerfulness and esprit de corps", Gough, Commander of Fifth Army was reported to have said

Command and Control

Malcolm then discussed the key commanders of Fifth Army, XI corps and the 66th division.

Fifth Army was commanded by General Hubert Gough, A favourite of the British Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, he had experienced a meteoric rise through the ranks during the war.

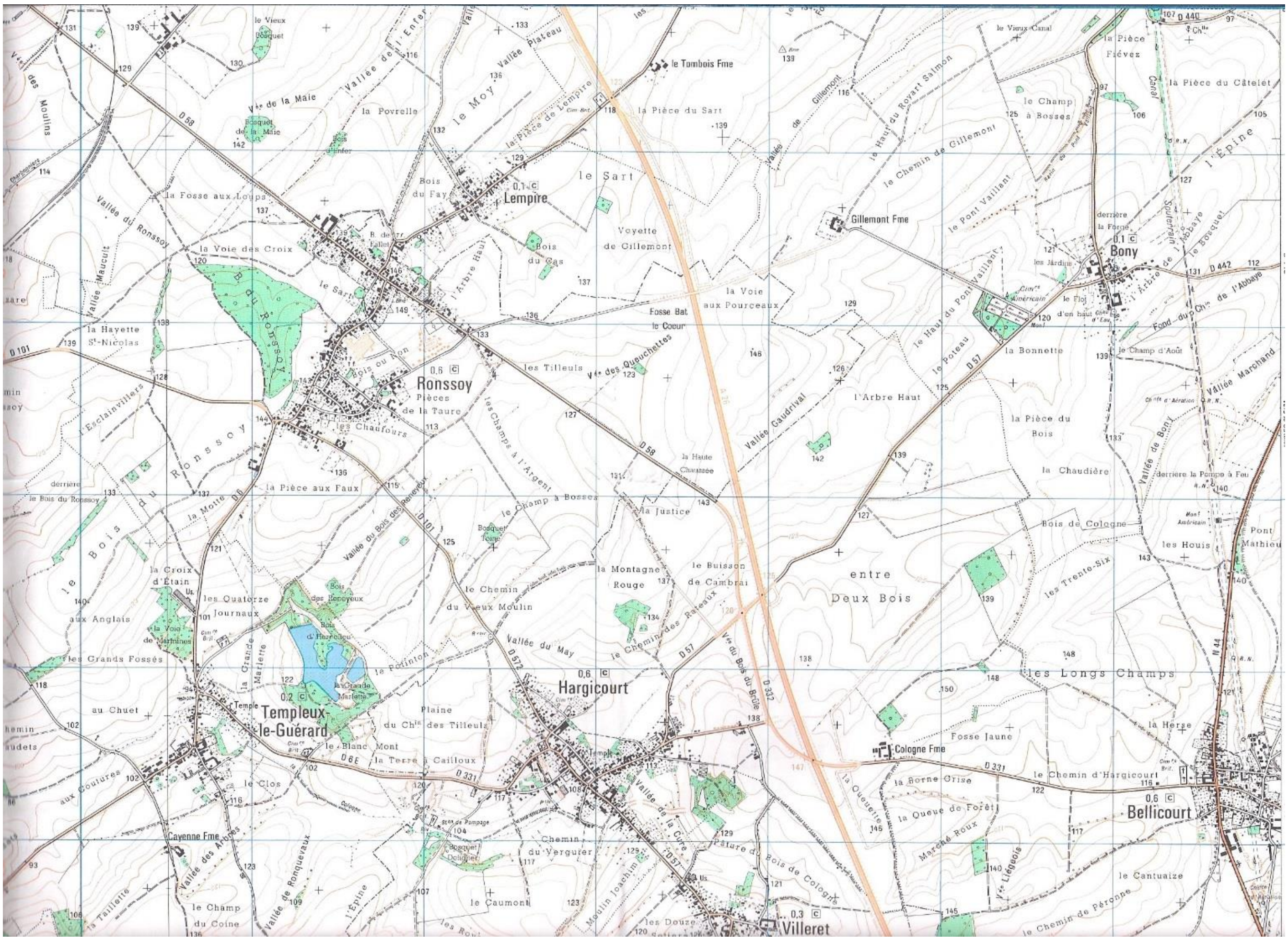
XIX Corps, of which 66th Division was part was commanded by Major General Herbert Watts. Watts was regarded by Haig as "a plucky hard little man", and "a fine leader", but also "a distinctly stupid man [who] lacks imagination"; while his courage and fighting spirit were well-regarded, planning and organisation were left to his divisional staff. Watts himself had never attended the Staff College, spending his earlier career entirely on regimental service. He had been retired in 1914 but was recalled on the outbreak of war

66th Division itself was commanded by General Neill Malcolm. He had served as a General Staff Officer initially with the BEF, with the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and then as Chief of Staff to Fifth army under Gough. After the war he was Chief of the British Military Mission to Berlin from 1919 and then General Officer Commanding the troops in the Straits Settlements in 1921 before retiring in 1924.

It has been suggested that Malcolm, while in Berlin, provided the origin of the `stab in the back` myth. In the autumn of 1919, when Erich Ludendorff was dining with Malcolm, Malcolm asked Ludendorff why he thought Germany lost the war. Ludendorff replied with a list of excuses, including that the home front failed the army. Malcolm asked him: "Do you mean, General, that you were stabbed in the back?" Ludendorff's eyes lit up and he leapt upon the phrase like a dog on a bone. "Stabbed in the back?" he repeated. "Yes, that's it, exactly, we were stabbed in the back." And thus was born a legend which has never entirely perished. He was in the Gough `mould`, very much `hands on` and a lot of his orders were about contingencies or `what if` scenarios.

The presentation moved on to the location of the 66th Division in the line,

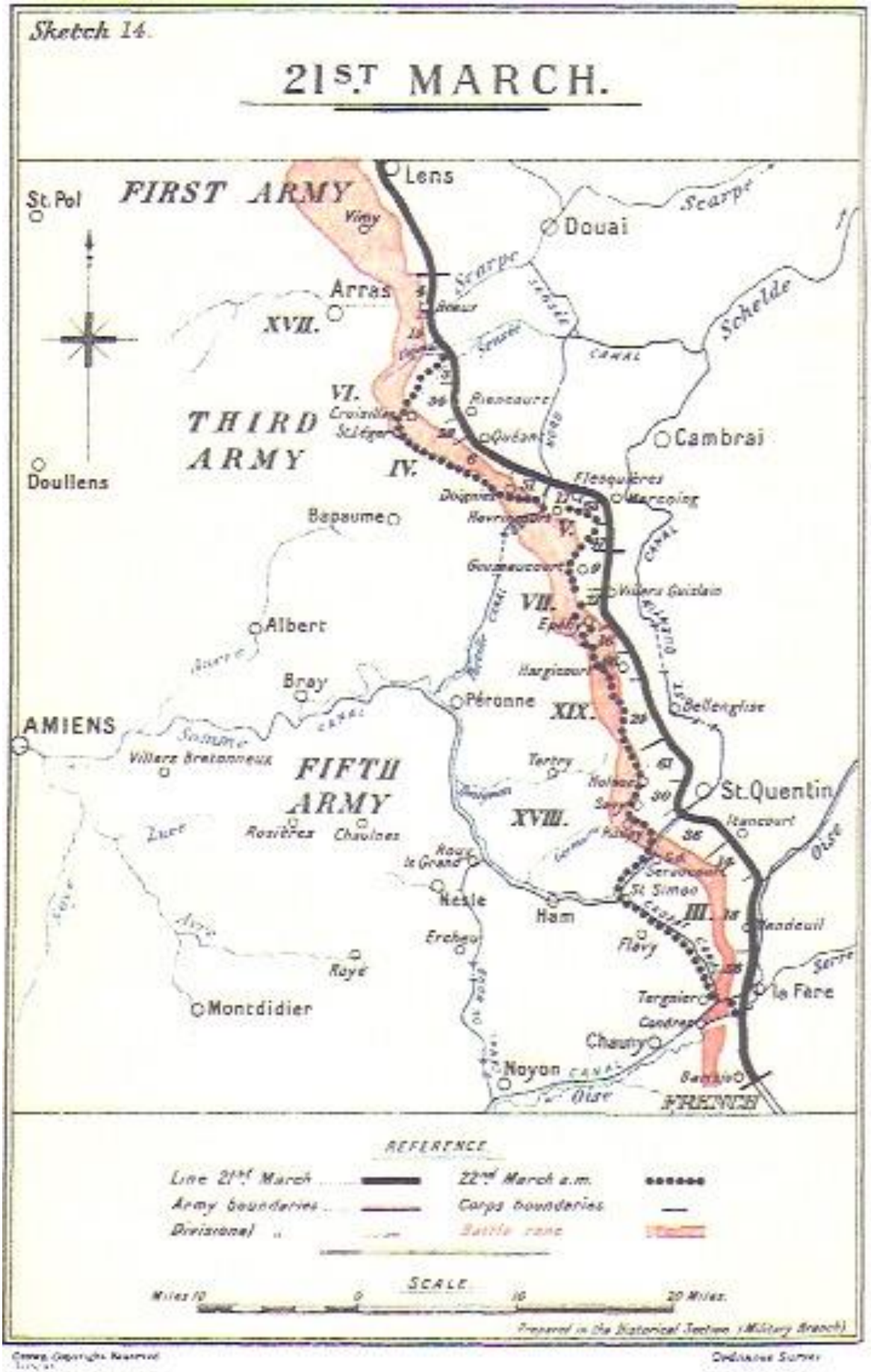
- **Between Omignon Brook and Cologne River.** Neither could be considered substantial watercourses
- **Left flank corps boundary - 16th Irish Division, VII Corps**
- **Overlooked by Ronssoy Ridge to the north**
- **Right flank 24th Division**
- **Bare plateau with long spurs stretching eastwards**
- **Spurs separated by deep valleys**
- **Backed by devastated zone.** - from the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line



This map shows where the actions of the 66th Division in 21st and 22nd March. Malcolm pointed out Ronssoy and Bony – where the Americans attacked later in 1918 and had to be rescued by the Australians, Bellicourt, Templeux-le-Gerard, and Hardicourt which was at the front of the Battle Zone, with the forward zone to east – the right hand side of the map, running roughly north south or top to bottom of the map.

The next map is from the Official History and Malcolm pointed out the location of 66th Division at the heart of XIX sector.

The Battle Zone is the pink coloured area on this map



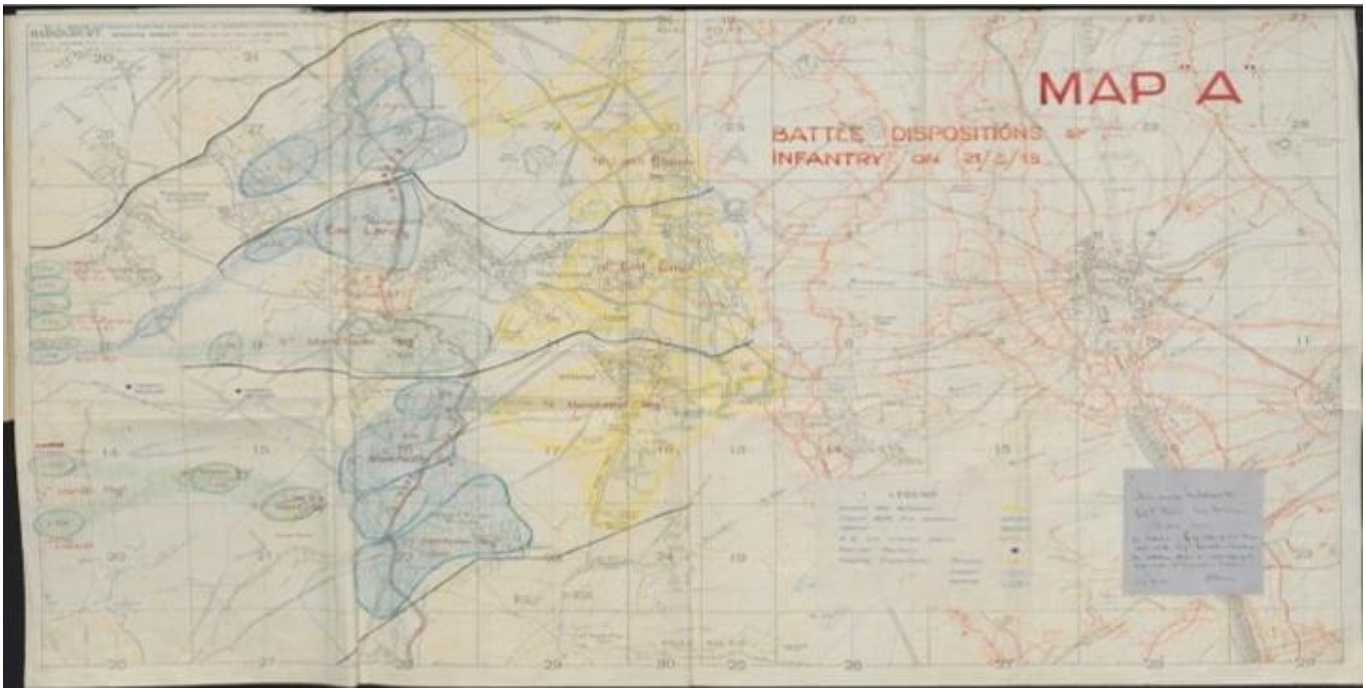
66th Division Local Defensive Plan – Map `A`

- **Forward Zone**
  - **Between existing front line and Red Line**
  - **4,500 yards long by 2,000 yards deep**

- **Battle Zone**
  - **Between Red Line (front) and Brown Line (rear)**
  - **6,000 yards long by 3,000 yards deep**

- **Rear Zone**
  - **Virtually non-existent**
  - **Green Line**
  - **linear feature**
  -

The following map is from the Divisional War Diary and shows the famous system of defensive `blobs` centred on defended localities rather than a continuous front line. The Forward Zone is shown as yellow coloured `blobs` on the map. The German position, to the east of the Forward Zone was to where they had retreated in early 1917 and was for them chosen ground. The Forward Zone varied in depth, as did No Man`s Land in front of them, something which would be significant on the day of the attacks. It was 4500 yards long and 2000 yards deep. It was very irregular and based upon existing front line defences



The Battle Zone is delineated on the map by the red line. The rear zone as a defensive line was virtually non-existent and in some areas only the turf had been removed and no positions dug. It was a linear feature marked out on the ground.
To sum up, we had a Forward Zone which was thinner than it ideally should be, it butts up to the front of the Battle Zone rather than having a gap in between, whilst the Battle zone itself was a main line of resistance but has nothing behind it except for a few keeps or redoubts.

How then were the men of 66th Division placed in the lines – the troop dispositions?

- **Area divided into three brigade sectors:**
  - **197th Brigade: Left**
  - **198th Brigade: Centre**
  - **199th Brigade: Right**
- **In each brigade sector:**
  - **Forward Zone, Battle Zone, Brigade Reserve: One battalion strength each**
  - **Divisional Reserve – 5th Border Regiment (Pioneers)**

All accounts of the battle comment upon how meagre were the reserves and how few troops were available for counter-attack. In the German system of defence in depth – from which the British system was developed – counter attack was critical – either on a small local scale or a larger scale after due time to arrange artillery support and bring up specially trained attack divisions. The troops here were Company size level, not even Battalion strength. The impact of this would be discussed later.

The Flanks– The 16th (Irish) Division was positioned on the left – the 24th Division on the right. Haig, in his diaries, accuses the 16th Division – and here Malcolm quoted directly – " …the 16th (Irish) Division which was on the right of VII Corps who lost Ronssoy village is said to be as full of fight as others, in fact certain Irish units performed very badly and gave way immediately the enemy showed"

However, there had been a lot of research into the performance of the Irish units during the ***Kaiserschlacht*** and that has proven that what Haig said was not the case, indeed recent research indicates that the 16th (Irish) Division considered that the 66th division had allowed the Germans to infiltrate and cause them to be outflanked. The 24th Division held their positions all through the 21st March and felt they could have done better had they been supported on both flanks.

Malcolm then moved to discuss the forces in direct opposition to 66th Division

`The Germans`

- **Well trained storm troop divisions**
  - **Second Army, XIV Corps**
    - **4th Guard Division**
      - **25th Division**
      - **18th Division**
      - **208th Division**
- **Poor quality support divisions**
- **Excellent artillery co-operation**
- **Aerial superiority**

The Germans had a practice of advancing in columns rather than waves and a policy of continuing to advance, irrespective of the situation on the flanks which was a major difference to the British approach at that time. The support divisions who were to eliminate strong points and redoubts bypassed by the storm troops, tended to attack in the style of – say – 1915 – and suffered accordingly. The advance was driven by the troops rather than by the artillery so once the attack had started the troops advanced on their own initiative rather than follow an artillery timetable. The troops took their own field artillery with them and set the pace. The Germans also had local air superiority in this area and through the 21st and 22nd contact planes were identifying centres of resistance, calling up artillery support etc.

The Battle opened at 04.40 with the artillery barrage.

- **Mixture of gas and high explosive**
- **Complex, phased and carefully planned**
- **Neutralisation**
- **09:40 Creeping barrage and infantry assault**

The barrage in this sector was not the carefully orchestrated *Bruchmuller Barrage* seen in the south, it was similar to the British barrage at Cambrai, in that it was a surprise barrage which did not accompany the troops but acted to neutralise and suppressing the British artillery. The Germans had observed the British preparations in the months before hand and there is an account in a Fifth Army unit`s memoirs, *" ….we spend all day digging our posts in full view of the Boche, then at four o` clock` we down tools and camouflage the work we have done…"*

So, when the barrage opened, many of the British positions were destroyed. Many of the mobile field guns, which had been moved about regularly survived, but those, particularly those of larger calibre in fixed positions which had been observed were targeted and destroyed. This included some of the strongpoints or redoubts, including that in 66th Division`s sector at Templeux- le- Guerard, which was heavily gassed, the exits being carefully targeted. The Germans were successfully firing `off the map` which effectively prevented the reinforcement of many of the positions.

- **XIX Corps attacked by nine German divisions**
- **Two phase plan of attack**
    - **Systematic assault**
    - **Decentralised small unit actions**
- **Supported by contact aircraft**
- **Centres of resistance enveloped and bypassed**
- **Communications**
    - **Messenger dogs, whistle and bugle signals**

When the assault came XIX Corps was attacked by nine Divisions using infiltration tactics, columns of men rather than the `traditional` waves. If they encountered any centres of resistance they ignored them. If they did come up against something which delayed they advance they deployed and awaited heavier weaponry coming up to subdue that centre of resistance.

The Fog!

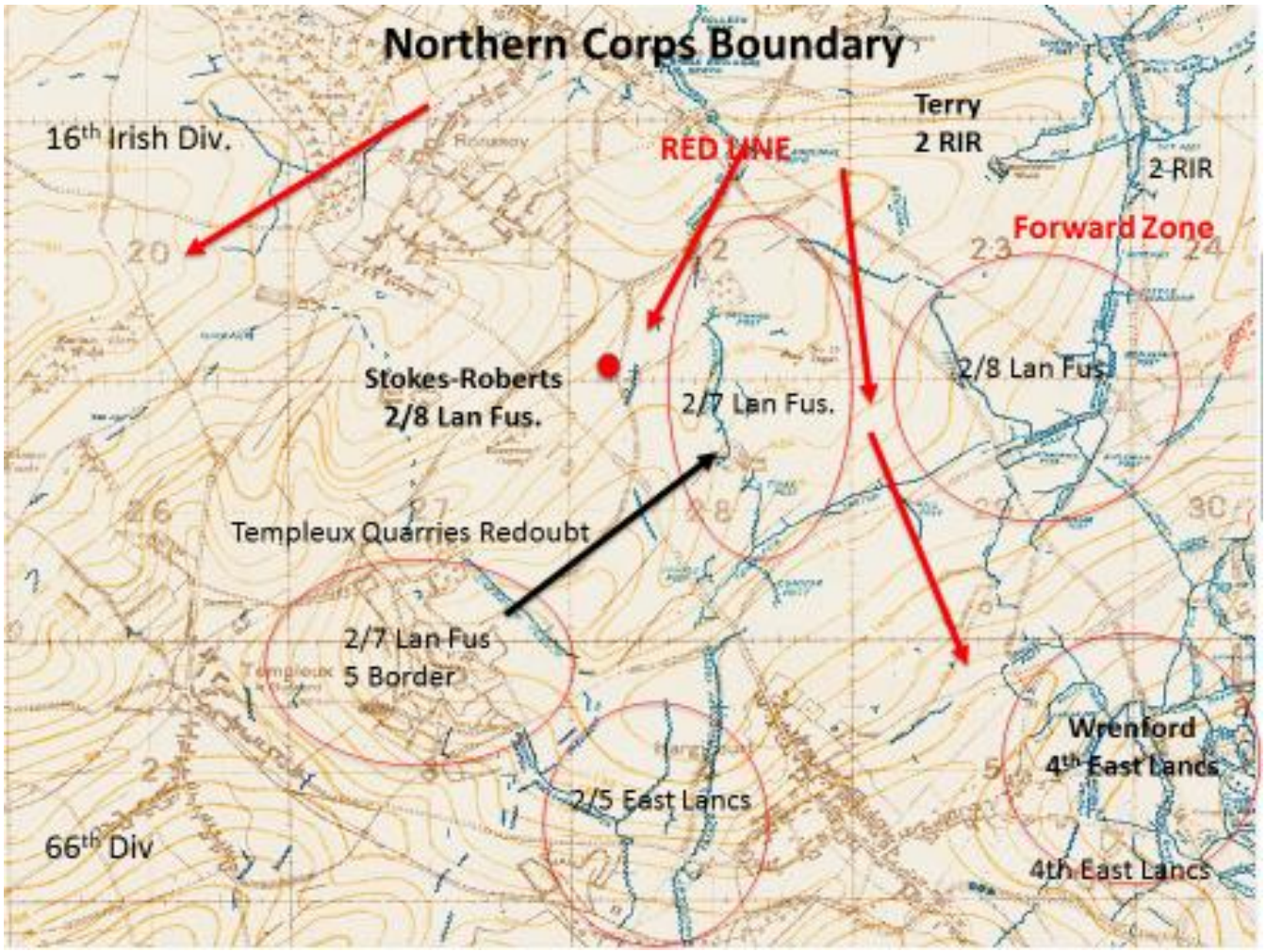
- **Visibility**
  - **Less than 100 yards at 09:30**
  - **Did not clear until approximately 14:00**
- **Completed the breakdown of communications**
- **Restricted the use of defensive artillery and MG schemes**
- **Hindered troop movements**
- **Enabled infiltration**

Older cabling for phones occasionally survived, but that which had been more recently laid – and its location observed by the Germans – was targeted and there are reports of German shells falling in lines corresponding to where the cables had been laid and buried, particularly at junctions. Hence most of the forward zone was out of communication with their commanders and even their local redoubts very early in the attack.

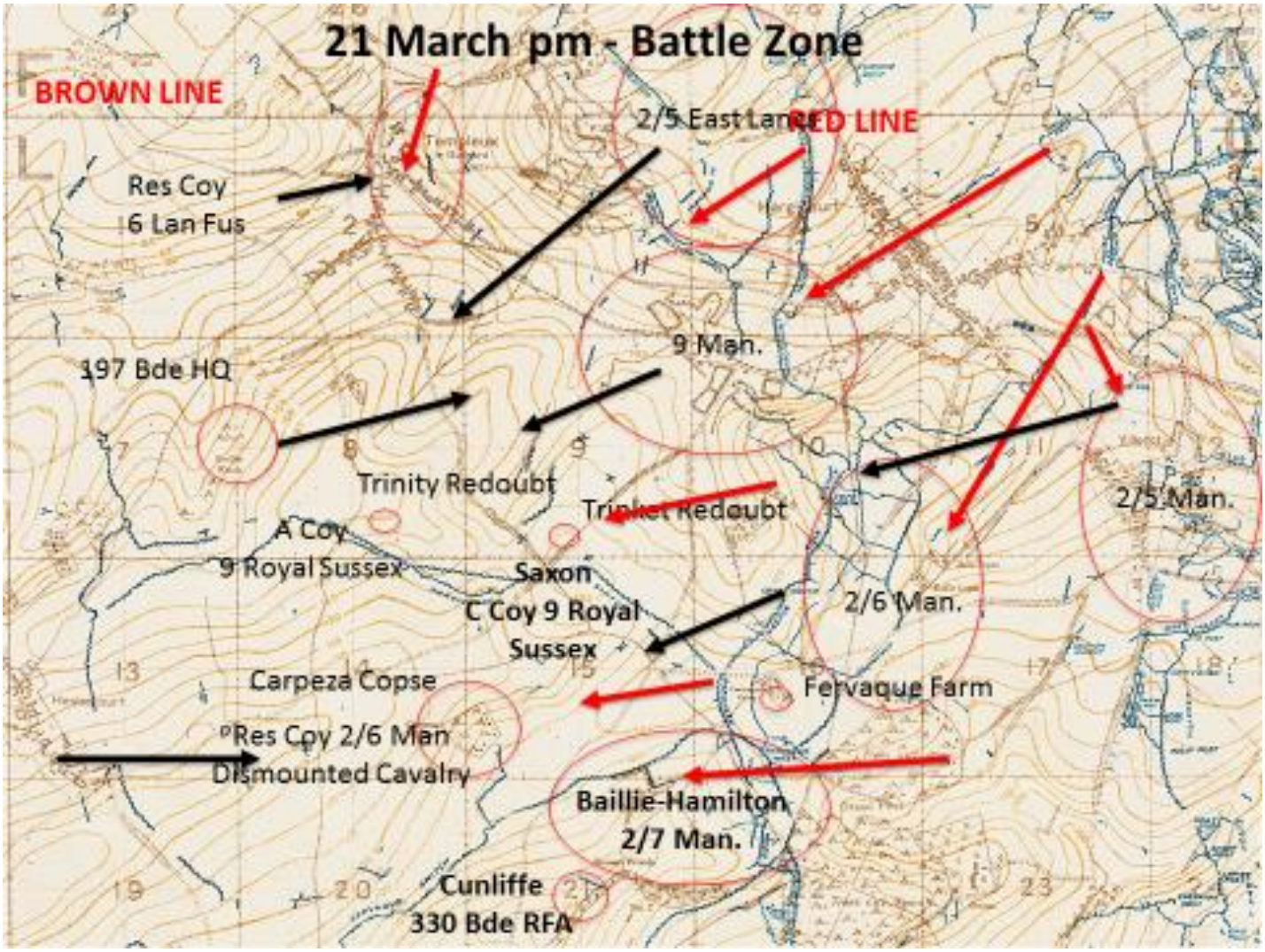
Because of the lack of telephone communications some isolated groups used flares to summon SOS barrages. The key factor here was the machine gun defence scheme where the idea was that the space between redoubts was covered by field artillery and machine gun barrages but this was rendered useless by the fog, without which it is unlikely that the Germans could have proceeded up the valleys unhindered, as they did.

So what, in fact, did happen, referring to the undernoted map, we have Lieutenant Colonel Stokes-Roberts, commanding the 2nd/8th Lancashire Fusiliers who were in the Forward Zone, with his HQ just behind the Red Line in the Battle Zone. Terry of the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles of the 16th (Irish) Division was across the corps boundary only a few yards from the front line. At 11 am, in dense fog, Terry sends out a combat patrol and captures four German medics whilst at the same time Germans appear *behind* the Red Line and capture Stokes-Roberts.

The Germans appeared from the north – not from the east where the front line was, clearly showing their depth of infiltration into the Battle Zone through the Ronssoy – Templeux valley. The 4th East Lancs further to the south had a similar experience and they too report that the Germans arrive from the north and attack them in the rear. Lieutenant Colonel Wrenford commanding the 4th East Lancs orders a fighting retreat but he was killed and his body was never recovered.



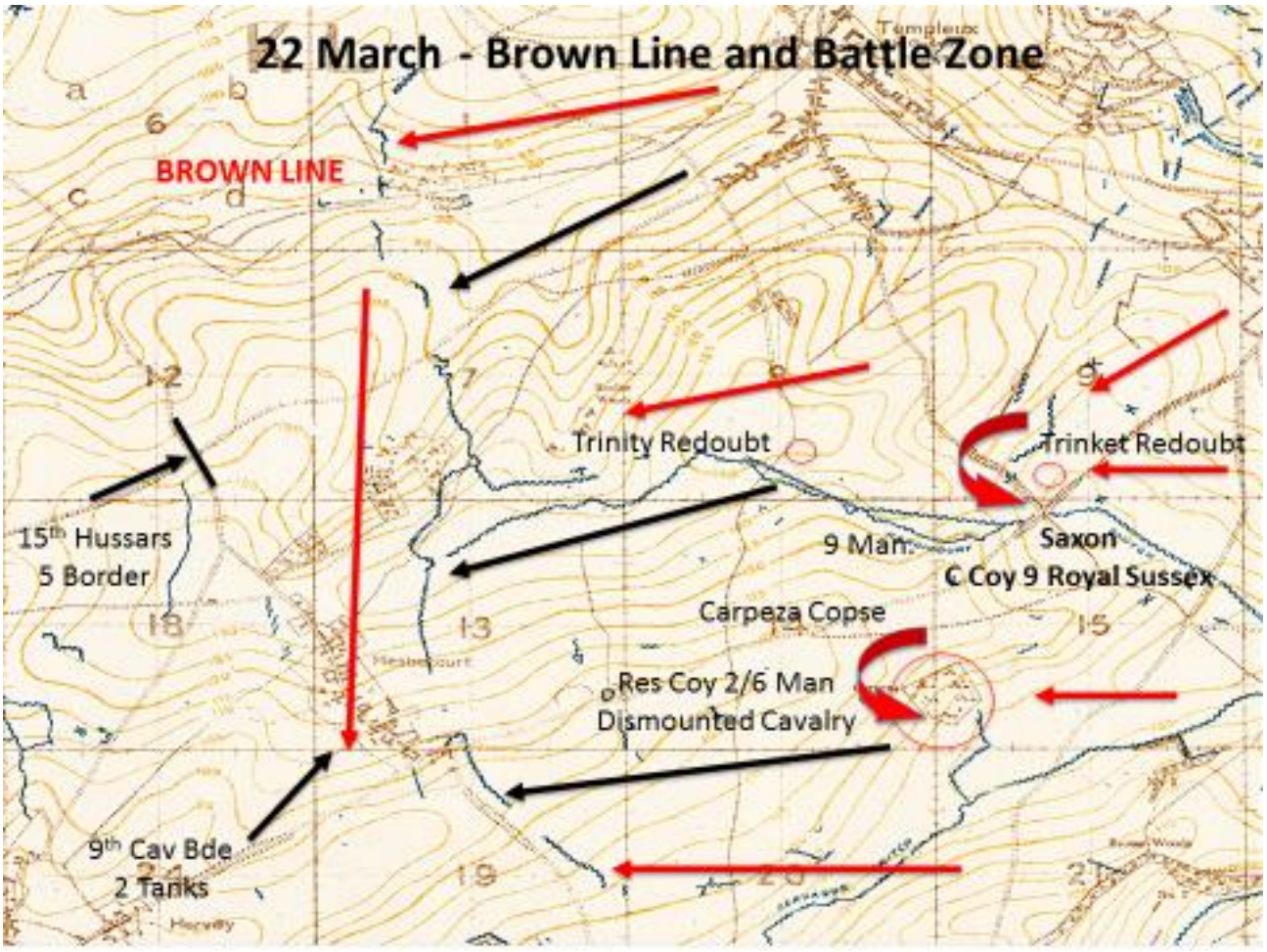
The 2/7 Lancashire Fusiliers were holding the front of the Battle Zone but because of the manpower the Red Line positions were held by a skeleton crew and were meant to be reinforced by the battalion reserves when the battle started but because of the German barrage they never got past Stokes-Roberts command post. So, the initial German attack on the Division comes from the north at approximately 11am. Before that there had been reports that things were quiet, indeed intelligence reports had suggested that the main German attack would fall on Third Army to the north with the fringes in Fifth Army area. Malcolm pointed out the Cologne Ridge on the map, this position had been captured in 1916 and afforded excellent views over the Hindenburg Line and Gough issued strong orders that this position must be held, hence it was held by a full battalion. By the afternoon the Germans were into Templeux quarries defences having previously taken Templeux village around midday.



The reserve Company, 6th Lancashire Fusiliers of about 120 men made a counter-attack and push the Germans back but by mid-afternoon the Germans bring up more men and field artillery and after desperate fighting recapture the village. The black arrows represent the British and as positions fall to the Germans they retreat to switch lines or other redoubts. The Germans bypass the troops in the front of the Battle Zone and are now attacking the redoubts (Trinity and Trinket) which were defended by A and C companies of the 9th Royal Sussex, the core reserve. Trinity was on a reverse slope and in places the `trenches` were little more than a yard deep. These companies dug in and held out until surrounded on the 22nd. One of the reasons they held out was men of the 9th Manchesters who had been pushed out of their positions joined them giving additional firepower. Carpeza Copse was another scratch position and was held by the 2/6 Manchesters, and 180 men of a dismounted cavalry unit. They held out for the remainder of the day. Baillie-Hamilton of the 2/7 Manchesters and his men held out until early evening mainly because of support from Major Cunliffe`s 330 Brigade, Royal field Artillery. With the assistance of this field battery they beat off at least four heavy German attacks until with 70% casualties and out of ammunition the men of the 2/7 were eventually surrounded and captured. To the north east the 2/6 Manchesters held out until the early afternoon at Fervaque Farm but were driven out when the Germans brought up flame throwers. The survivors managed to get back to Carpeza Copse.

22 March 1918

- **Enemy bombardment resumed at 07:00 in dense fog**
- **Strongpoints and Brown Line attacked**
- **Left flank exposed**
  - **"Crucial moment"**
  - **Majority of Brown Line still held at noon**
- **66th Division ordered to retire at 12:50**



After an overnight lull, the Germans restarted their offensive at dawn on the 22nd with a short barrage, again, coming from the north. The British were escaping from their positions and redoubts towards the Brown Line. There was some Fifth army reserves, dismounted cavalry, company strength, counterattacking including two tanks. The Germans capture the Brown Line, it is retaken but lost again with the British digging in just behind the Brown Line. Carpeza Copse is eventually surrounded but some of the surviving defenders managed to slip away and get back to the Brown Line. Trinket Redoubt refuses to surrender and the Germans bring up machine guns. Captain Saxon C Company 9th Royal Sussex was scathing about a group of 66th Division men who surrender to the Germans but he and his men refuses to capitulate and meet the Germans face on at the parapet. The Germans suffer losses from their own crossfire but in the ensuing pause and with few unwounded men left and almost out of ammunition he eventually surrenders.

Mid-morning was the crisis point and subsequently Neill Malcolm said that had he had 2 fresh battalions at that point he could have recaptured the Battle Zone. The Germans had been ordered to fight through the night but they were clearly exhausted and only resumed their push

at dawn. In summary, with both flanks exposed and still holding the Brown Line, the order came to fall back at 12.50.

Conclusions

- **Early loss of Ronssoy Ridge**
  - **Repeatedly outflanked defence**
- **The Fog**
  - **"Main cause"**
- **Manpower**
  - **Lack of counter-attack troops**
- **German tactics**
  - **Effective but costly**
- **British tactics**
  - **Limited success for mutually supporting positions**
  - **Lack of training in defence**

Malcolm then summarised by saying the early loss of the Ronssoy Ridge was key to the opening up the flanks of the defensive system , that and the fog which disabled the interlocking fields of fire by the machine guns plus the lack of available troops for counterattacking . The German infiltration tactic was very effective but very costly in terms of manpower losses and they simply could not keep this up. For the British, where there was mutual support between positions - and these were often just shallow trenches manned by a few Lewis guns supported by the odd field artillery piece – they held out against overwhelming odds for over 24 hours. They did their best under the circumstances.

Postscript – the 66th Division

- **Casualties**
  - **Nearly 7000 "apart from sick and spent."**
- **Strength 30 March evening**
  - **104 officers and 2376 other ranks**

- **Described by Haig as having shown "exceptional gallantry"**
  - **Held its sector until ordered to withdraw**
  - **Fought continuously from 21 to 31 March**
- **Reduced to cadre and reconstituted**
  - **Including South African Brigade**
  - **Fought through Hundred Days**

This concluded the presentation with Mark Macartney proposing a vote of thanks to speaker Malcolm Sime, to which all in attendance responded in an enthusiastic manner.

Western Front Association 36th Annual General Meeting and Conference

Mark Macartney (Branch Vice Chair and WFA Appointee) attended the WFA AGM and Conference 2017 at the University of Northumbria, Newcastle, on 6th May 2017
This well organised event was introduced by our President Peter Simkins MBE, Three speakers preceeded the AGM, talks and speakers were as follows: "British Casualty Evacuation from the Somme, July 1916: Success or Failure?'' by Jeremy Higgins, "Winning with Laughter: Cartoonists at War'' by Luci Gosling, and "Politics and Command: Conflict and Crisis 1917'' by John Derry.

Above photo (From Left) WFA Chairman Colin Wagstaff, Speaker Jeremy Higgins, Speaker Luci Gosling, WFA President Prof Peter Simkins and Speaker Prof John Derry.

"British Casualty Evacuation from the Somme, July 1916: Success or Failure?''

Jeremy Higgins spoke about the success of Ambulance Trains in clearing casualties in the first 3 days of the Somme.

The plans had been made in the light of experience at the Battle of Loos. The assumption that the Somme plan was unsuccessful was challenged by Jeremy using statistics to challenge this assumption. By counting 24 hour periods from the actual start time of the battle a different picture emerged where the evacuation plan was achieved in the first 3 days.

Jeremy Higgins is Presently Customer Service Director for Cross Country Trains, Responsible for leadership & development of all aspects of customer service strategy including the operational management of 1,000 employees (train managers, conductors, caterers, logistic suppliers, cleaners and customer relations teams). Also contractual responsibility for station access, British Transport Police, and property. Responsible for working with the RMT trade union in industrial matters. Jeremy previously held the role of Customer Service Director of Virgin's Cross Country operation. Jeremy's passion for excellent service matches Cross Country's values and he has provided important continuity for people in key frontline jobs transferring to the new Cross-country franchise. Presentation History includes the following Activities and Societies: Presentations to National Railway Museum - Great War Conference - September 2016. 14-18 Mission Centenaire, Les Batailles De 1916, June 2016, Universite Paris-Sorbonne. Globalising and Localising the Great War, Graduate Conference, University of Oxford, March 2016. Researching the effectiveness of British ambulance trains on the Western Front 1914-1918

"Winning with Laughter: Cartoonists at War''

Luci Gosling gave a well-illustrated talk based on the Mary Evans Picture Library archive on the theme of cartoonists in the Great War.

A rang of cartoonists were highlighted from William Heath Robinson to the remarkable Harold Earnshaw. While serving with the Artists' Rifles in 1918 Earnshaw lost his right arm in action. He taught himself to use his left arm for illustration with remarkable effect.

Born in Co. Durham, Luci studied Ancient & Medieval History at the University of Liverpool before a career in the picture library industry. Formerly manager of the Illustrated London News archive, she has been part of the team at historical specialist, Mary Evans Picture Library for the past eight years while also writing on a freelance basis, much of which is based on the inspiring and rich content in the archive at work.
With an interest in a number of historical areas, Luci specialises in the social history of the First World War, 19th and 20th century royalty, high society and illustration. She has contributed to a wide variety of publications including History Today, Majesty Magazine, Tatler, Illustration, Stand To!, and BBC News Online. She has been sole or lead author on a series of bookazines - 'Illustrated Royal Weddings', 'Illustrated Royal Coronations', 'Illustrated Anniversaries' and 'Illustrated First World War' and has contributed text on illustrators, magazine biographies and topics for a new lottery-funded website www.illustratedfirstworldwar.com. Luci also writes regularly for the Mary Evans Picture Library, 'Picturing the Great War', at blog.maryevans.com.

"Politics and Command: Conflict and Crisis 1917''

Professor John Derry gave an insightful overview of the issues of politics and command in 1917.

He began by looking at the bitter relationship between Lloyd George and Haig then took a wider overview of other combatant nations. Germany became effectively a military dictatorship and Russian autocracy did not survive the war. It was the 2 Parliamentary democracies of Britain and France that survived the war as victors.

Professor Derry, is Emeritus Professor of Modern British History at the University of Newcastle and author of numerous books and biographies. John is a widely admired speaker to The Western Front Association and local history groups, always know to speak without technology or notes.

Western Front Association Chairman Colin Wagstaff touched on several themes in his report of the committee for the last year.

Several new Trustees and Appointees have brought a good deal of energy and enthusiasm and their contributions have already enhanced the work of the committee and the smooth running of the Association.

The success of the Western Front Association is based on the voluntary contributions of many people. For example, the successful Branch network relies on key members giving freely of their time.

The magazines, Stand To! and Bulletin, produced over the last year have enhanced the offer to the members and have received excellent feedback.

- See more at: http://westernfrontassociation.com/all-about-the-wfa/wfa-news-events/wfa-latest-news-releases/6319-2017-agm.html#sthash.EXViGOpz.dpuf

WFA Trustees and Appointees

A productive AGM followed, a few points were covered but will be published later. Chairman Colin Wagstaff covered the Trustees and nominees and their roles, Both Colin and President Prof Peter Simkins were thrilled to have Sir Hew Strachan on board as our Patron.
Also During the course of the day Mark Macartney, assisted by his partner and member Jean Walker manned the Branded Goods stand.

Branded Goods Stand with Jean Walker in attendance and the leaders of the Organisation, Prof Peter Simkins (President), Sir Hew Strachan (Patron) and Colin Wagstaff (Chairman)

After the official AGM business had finished Digital Editor gave a Presentation on the New Website, which is scheduled to be launched at the end of May.

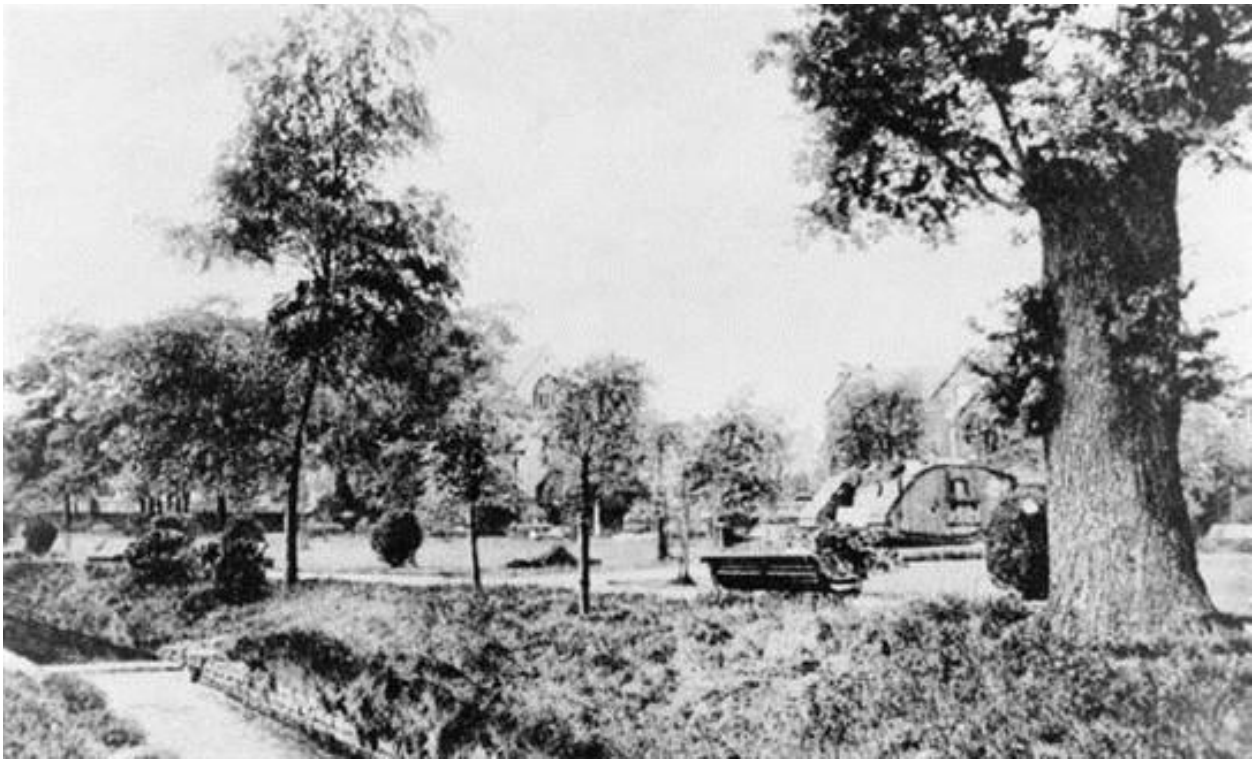
****

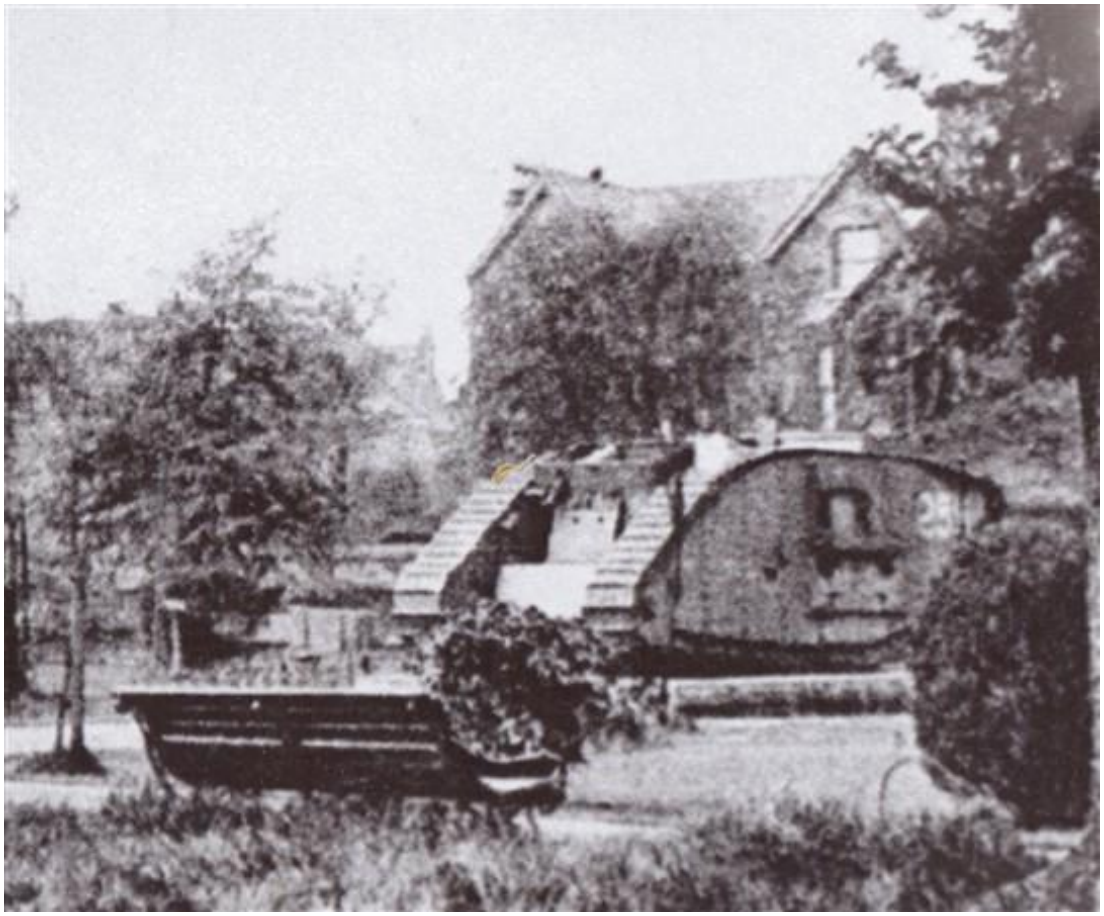
The Mansfield Tank

Titchfield Park

Tanks were first used at the **Battle of Flers-Courcelette** on September 15th 1916 after which they ceased to be a military secret. They immediately captured the public imagination. The government was keen to sell **War Bonds** (a short-term, low interest way of raising cash and involving the civil population with the army and navy) and someone had the bright idea of sending **'Tank Banks'** to towns where they could quickly draw a large, curious crowd. These tanks usually had attractive young women sitting in them, ready to sell War Bonds! When peace came some surplus tanks were presented to places which had bought particularly large quantities of the bonds, one of which was Mansfield.

'The Mansfield Tank' arrived on **21 May 1919** and was placed in **Titchfield Park** with due ceremony. It was a Mark I 'female', i.e. originally armed with machine guns, as opposed to the cannon-armed 'male' tanks. Photographs show that it had the number **255** painted on its sides, but it had only been a training tank, never in combat (unlike the Newark Mark IV which was a real veteran of battles). No. 255 then stood in the park throughout the 1920s and must have provided great climbing games for adventurous children. It may also have been of interest to the Chesterfield Road grocer William `Billy` Foster who had fought at Flers-Courcelette and was one of the first tank crewmen ever. The `Mansfield Tank` was taken away for scrap in the 1930s; in fact only one of those presented to British towns survived the emergency need for metal during the 1939 - '45 War. That tank is still on display in Ashford, Kent.





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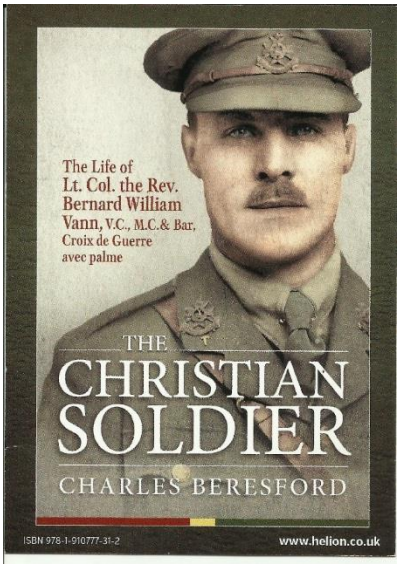
Book Review – 'The Christian Soldier' by Charles Beresford. A biography of Lieutenant-Colonel the Reverend Bernard Vann VC DSO MC and bar. (Helion 2017)

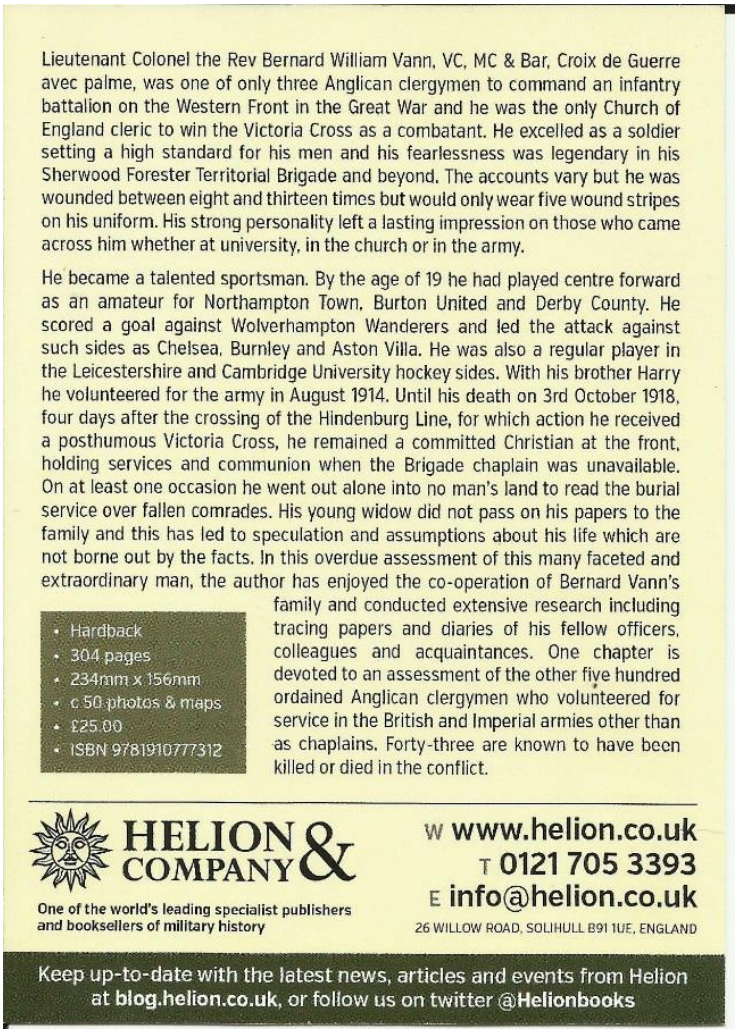
Review by Peter Hodgkinson

I must own to two things in writing this review. Firstly, I know Charles Beresford; and, secondly, as a historian of WW1 infantry COs, Lieutenant-Colonel Bernard Vann, CO 1/6th Sherwood Foresters, cannot escape being a hero of mine, and I have been particularly looking forward to this book. It did not disappoint. Charles is fine writer, which is always a good start.

The author was faced with one central problem – Vann's wife, Doris, destroyed all his papers. Charles could therefore not build his biography around a series of letters or diary entries. We thus see Vann through the eyes of others, and the biography is almost as much a story of the people *around* Vann, those who made up his world, civilian and military, as it is about Vann himself. We thus see Vann in context. For some less skillful, or diligent, the absence of Vann's voice could have been a problem. Charles manages to turn this into a virtue. We thus have an insight into many things – the middle-class professional Victorian family, the late 19th and early 20th century school system and the importance of sport in that world, to name but a few.

The narrative is carried along on a raft of facts. And facts abound. Charles has been exceptional in his diligence of his research – a work of years. As a bonus, the last chapter presents his research on clergy who served as soldiers, rather than purely as padres. Vann was the only such to be awarded the VC. As one finishes the penultimate chapter, however, it is impossible not to be overwhelmed by the towering figure that is Bernard Vann, sportsman, teacher, man of faith, leader, and fighter. The world today seems to possess so few such individuals. And therein – man of faith and fighter, who killed without being daunted – lies the riddle to modern eyes. It was not the author's purpose to enter into debate on the nature of the Christianity of the period that allowed this not to be a problem, even if Anglican Canon Law about the shedding of blood by the ordained; and the prescriptions of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, concerning the incompatability of clergy in combatant roles attempted to make it one. Vann may have thought 'God is on our side', but there is no evidence presented that he did. But what he certainly was, and it is not a point that Charles labours unduly, was a





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. 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.

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 and Aston Villa. He was also a regular player in the Leicestershire and Cambridge University hockey sides. 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 Hindenburg 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.

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shining example of the 'muscular Christianity' which had been touched by the militarism of the late Victorian period. Vann was not doing 'God's work' on the battlefield when he was in action, (although he certainly acted as a padre at times, and fostered the spiritual needs of his men), but he was a man of his time who had no difficulty in enforcing moral right with might. He transcended the bounds of his faith. His life is both to be admired, and a proof of L.P. Huntley's famous remark: 'The past is foreign country, they do things differently there'.

There are many good reasons to read this book.

"The Armies in 1917" *Saturday, 1 April 2017*

Dual Event In association with the Western Front Association and British Commission for Military History Spring Conference.

Branch Vice Chair Mark Macartney, along with other like minded people (Including Trustees and other WFA members) attended this well supported Event,

Following on from the successful conference on Armies in 1914, held to mark the centenary of the start of the First World War, The British Commission for Military History (BCMH), in partnership with the Sir Michael Howard Research Centre for the History of War, King's College London and the Western Front Association, organised this conference on the Armies of 1917 held at the Institute of Historical Research, London.

Keynote speakers were Dr David Zabecki, formerly Visiting Professor at the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis and Professor William Philpott, Dept of War Studies, King's College London.

Topic covered included:

Command, Morale and Motivation of the British Army in 1917.
British and Arab Armies in the Middle East.
British and French approaches to armoured warfare.

Programme for the Event, detailing speakers were as under:

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*

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?*

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

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*

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*

: Second keynote

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

As there were 12 speakers in total it is too much to record in detail about their talks here, just to note that due to ill health Robert Robinson's talk (still on same subject, with Robert's notes) was presented by Andy Granger (Secretary-General, British Commission for Military History)

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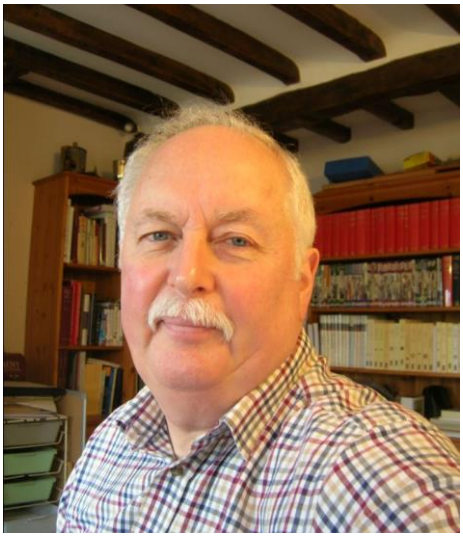
6th Western Front Association President's Conference at Tally Ho Conference Centre on 3rd June 2017

For this, the 6th annual President's conference, there is once again a super line up of subjects and speakers:

Trevor Harvey will give a presentation entitled 'An Army of Brigadiers: British Brigade Commanders at the Battle of Arras 1917'


Trevor Harvey

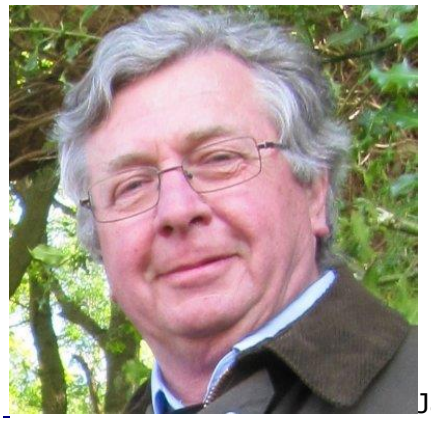
Jim Smithson will talk about 'Arras 1917 - The Lost Opportunity'


Jim Smithson

After a buffet lunch, Lt Col Alex Turner will look at the superb results achieved by General Plumer in a lecture entited 'Messines 1917 - The Zenith of Siege Warfare'


Lt Col Alex Turner

Finally, we will hear from an expert on the German Army, Jack Sheldon who will talk about Fritz von Lossberg and German flexible defence 1917


Jack Sheldon

At the end of the conference there will be a panel discussion including Prof. Peter Simkins and Prof. John Bourne.

The venue has a free car park.

The cost of this conference (which includes a buffet lunch) is just £30

A discount is available if you wish to attend both this conference and the conference on 8 July in York. (Individually attending these would cost £60, but booking both together entitles you to a discount which reduces the combined cost to just £50 for both conferences).

Members of The Western Front Association and non-members are equally welcome. Any new visitors will be assured of an welcoming and friendly atmosphere among a group of like-minded enthusiasts.

Booking Details

The easiest and quickest way to book for this conference is on-line.

To book on-line for this event only click here

If you wish to attend this **and** the conference in York, click here to book online.

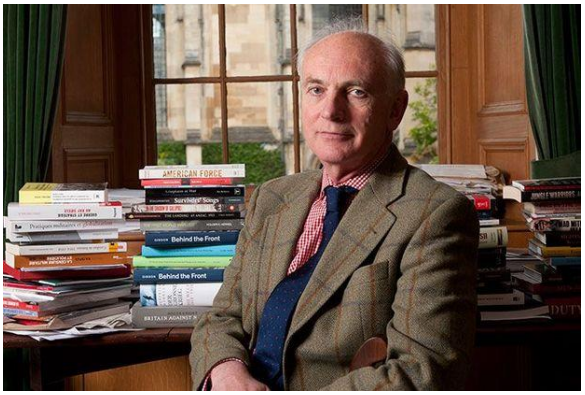
Alternatively, it is possible to book by telephone. To do to, contact Sarah Gunn in the WFA office on 0207 118 1914 however due to the high number of telephone calls being received in the WFA office, it would be helpful to use this method only as a last resort.

National Conference at York '1917' on 8 July 2017

A truly spectacular conference is being organised by The Western Front Association on 8 July 2017, which will look at various aspects of the pivotal year of 1917.

The all-day conference will have four key speakers who will address important aspects of the year 1917.

The first speaker will be new Patron of The Western Front Association, Prof Sir Hew Strachan who will talk on 'The Wider War in 1917'



Prof Sir Hew Strachan

The second speaker will be Prof Stephen Badsey, who will look at British Propaganda in the context of the Third Battle of Ypres.


Prof Stephen Badsey

After a buffet lunch (which is included within the price of the ticket) we will hear from Rob Thompson whose presentation is entitled 'If we do this, we do it properly: The Canadian Corps at Passchendaele 1917'.


Rob Thompson

The final speaker of the afternoon will be Dr Bryn Hammond, of the Imperial War Museum who will speak about the last major action of 1917, which is also a neglected aspect of the Battle of Cambrai. Bryn's presentation is entitled '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

As well as a buffet lunch, morning and afternoon refreshments are included within the price of £30. (A discount is available if you wish to attend both this and the 6th Presidents conference).

The venue has a large, free car park and is easily accessible from the motorway network .Members of The Western Front Association and non-members are equally welcome. Any new visitors will be assured of a welcoming and friendly atmosphere among a group of like-minded enthusiasts.

How to book: Booking on-line is the quickest and easiest method.

Alternatively, it is possible to book by telephone. To do to, contact Sarah Gunn in the WFA office on 0207 118 1914 however due to the high number of telephone calls being received in the WFA office, it would be helpful to use this method only as a last resort.

Member Jon Boulton of Mansfield sent the link to this article in CBC News, Canada

The Oaks of Vimy: One man's mission to restore a natural treasure to the battlefield

Tree-planting project traces roots back to Canadian soldier's handful of acorns in 1917

Unexploded shells, an outbreak of a tree-killing disease in Europe and even pesky Canadian squirrels have failed to defeat Monty McDonald. McDonald, 72, remains determined to fulfil his dream of building a living memorial of oak trees at Vimy Ridge to honour Canadians who fought there 100 years ago. “I have done half a billion dollars' worth of projects and this is the most frustrating," said McDonald, who used to work in the petrochemical industry. “More setbacks, more unknowns than any project I have had."

There have been so many issues that time has run out; the trees won't be planted in France for the centenary of the battle as first planned. "But we'll get it done," said McDonald firmly. No one who works with him has any doubts. McDonald and a group of volunteers have grown enough trees to fill a forest, more than 1,000 alone at a nursery in West Flamborough, Ont.

More than a 1,000 trees fill the nursery in West Flamborough, Ont.

Unfortunately, none of them can be shipped to France and planted near the famous Vimy Memorial, which was the original idea. So, in one of many "contingency plans" McDonald has been forced to develop, the special "Vimy Oaks" are being shipped to communities across Canada. Orders are coming in from across the country, with many of the trees expected to be planted near cenotaphs or legion halls. "The trees for Canada program is working out a lot better than the trees for Europe," McDonald said wryly.

The entire project traces its roots back to a handful of acorns picked up by a Canadian soldier back in 1917.

When the battle at Vimy ended, Leslie Miller surveyed the barren landscape and, with the instinct of a tree farmer, gathered some acorns from a fallen English oak. Miller sent them home to Ontario, where his family planted them.

Years later, they had grown into an impressive stand of trees and Miller named the farm "Vimy Oak." About that time, Miller hired Monty McDonald to work on the farm and when McDonald's father died became a mentor to the young man — "like a grandfather" — and one whose memory is still treasured.

The farm is long gone, but some of the trees still stand on a small woodlot next to a church in what is now a suburban area of Toronto. A trail offers visitors a chance to walk among the Vimy Oaks and remember the battle and the fallen.

But when McDonald toured the memorial at Vimy Ridge more than a dozen years ago he was disappointed. "I didn't see any oak trees there," he said. He immediately thought of the oaks from Vimy on the farm in Canada. “I thought… wouldn't it be cool to repatriate them," he said. "Plant two or three trees."

He set the idea aside but came back to it in a big way as the 100th anniversary of Vimy Ridge approached.

The oaks are to be planted within sight of the Canadian monument that stands atop the highest point of the Vimy Ridge area.

McDonald's dream developed. He envisioned 100 carefully planted trees, with a landscaped area were visitors could walk, sit and and contemplate the risks taken and sacrifices made by Leslie Miller's generation. The Vimy Foundation offered support and a team of volunteers came together. The project had momentum.

However, at a key moment, the trees in Canada refused to co-operate. When McDonald went to collect acorns from the trees in the fall two years ago, there were almost none to be found.McDonald built special traps to catch the acorns and protect them from hungry squirrels. He put up plastic owls and even built rubber snakes, hoping that might help.The harvest, however, was miniscule. "That year, ten acorns came off the trees," he said. "I ended up climbing up the trees looking for acorns and there weren't any."

With time running out, McDonald came up with a new plan. The oaks were scaled, and the cuttings — called scions — were taken and grafted to rootstock brought in from British Columbia. It worked, producing about 200 healthy oak trees, still connected genetically to the acorns Leslie Miller collected at Vimy in 1917 — and big enough to be shipped to France for planting.

"Unfortunately, along comes a new pathogen that is ravaging trees in Europe," said McDonald. There is fear that *Xylella fastidiosa* will do huge damage to trees in many countries. So late last year, McDonald was told that, despite all the testing and precautions he had been working on, the Vimy Oaks weren't going to be allowed into France.

"Here all these trees sitting in Canada and we can't get them over to France," said McDonald. "That was the silver bullet that killed us." Not quite. McDonald had quietly hatched another of his contingency plans. Last fall, when he was still hoping the grafted trees would be allowed into France, the Vimy Oaks produced huge quantities of acorns. They rained down faster than squirrels could grab them.

McDonald collected thousands and shipped a few hundred to a nursery near Paris, just in case. The acorns in France are now sprouting. They aren't big enough to put in the ground yet, but the ground isn't ready. A crew is still searching for unexploded ordnance in the area set aside for the trees — another last-minute complication.

Monty McDonald inspects one of the grafted trees, which has grown over two metres tall. He had hoped the trees would be planted by this spring. McDonald now hopes to get the landscaping work completed and trees planted by Remembrance Day 2018. "In the space of a 200-year of an oak tree, what's a year and a half?" he said. "We are going to stick with it."He has to, he said. Leslie Miller, the soldier who collected the original acorns and helped him through difficult times would expect him to finish the job. "You couldn't give up," he said. "He wouldn't let me."

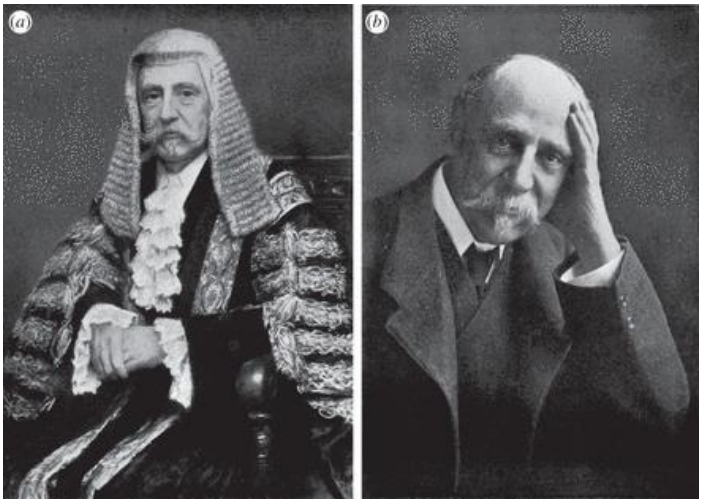
A sliver of hope as one of the acorns from Canada sprouts in a nursery in France.

The Munitions Crisis – Part 8

The lack of foresight on the part of the War Office, has been described and this was further shown by its failure to set up a programme authority to study the necessities, possibilities and probabilities of the future – as distinct from mere tabulation of quantities due on contracts placed. When certain munitions or components had to be manufactured, the Ordnance Department never undertook a careful survey of the reserves of manufacturing capacity available in the UK for that purpose and how that capacity could best be utilised for the provision of an adequate supply. If that survey had been done they would have discovered that in order to exploit these reserves in their full capacity it would be necessary to secure certain machine tools, gauges and other equipment , the manufacture of which would take a number of months. The fact that this had not been addressed at the very beginning of the War had not merely wasted the ten months that had already elapsed but the delays involved a further wait of several anxious and fateful months before the process of manufacturing guns, machine guns and rifles and even their ammunition on an adequate scale could even be started.

A further, and in many respects a more damaging failure was to investigate the explosives problem. They had taken no steps to enlarge their capacity for filling shells even to the limit of the orders which they themselves had already given for shell bodies. In fact they had not even considered the question of whether there was sufficient supply available of the explosive material with which these shells were charged to meet even the requirements of their own limited programmes.

The War Office had already warned by Lord Moulton (Director of Explosives at the War Office) that the available supplies would not be forthcoming in sufficient quantities and that the nature of the explosive would have to be changed.



The two pictures show (a) Lord Moulton in his robes as Lord Justice of Appeal and (b) as Director of Explosives.

At the end of November 1914 Lord Moulton (1844–1921) had become the director of explosives production in the War Office. A 70-year-old lawyer and jurist may seem an extraordinary choice, but he was an extraordinary man. He had been Senior Wrangler (top mathematics undergraduate) at Cambridge University, was elected to the Royal Society for research on electricity, and learned about chemistry as a barrister for dye and explosives manufacturers. He assembled an able team of administrators and chemists who designed and managed mammoth new national explosives factories. They could not make enough TNT and picric acid from obtainable precursors, so Moulton persuaded the reluctant armed services to adopt mixtures of TNT and ammonium nitrate, which enabled them to make even more than was needed. In 1915 he and his team moved to the new Ministry of Munitions, where they added responsibilities for fertilizers and poison gases. By 1917 they were producing explosives at a higher rate than was attained in World War II. (http://rsnr.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/68/2/171)

The Ordnance Department administered a prescribed system and it was passive, if not hostile where new expedients were concerned. This passivity was shown in the matter of Lord Moulton`s request for executive powers in regard to high explosives in December 1914; in the proposed extension of his remit to propellants in the spring of 1915; in the delay in the adoption of newer forms of high explosives and in the reluctance to approve the Stokes mortar.

Most of the steps taken after the formation of the Ministry of Munitions to stimulate production, could, in fact, have been taken in 1914. It was to those special steps that the greatly accelerated yield on account of War Office orders in the latter part of 1915, as well as the immense augmentation of output in 1916 on direct orders of the Ministry, was mainly due. In July 1915 the Ministry of Munitions took over from the War Office responsibility for the administration of outstanding contracts. Its work therefore had a dual character. It had, on the one hand, to speed up delivery on these existing contracts, consulting closely and co-operating actively with the existing armaments manufacturers in order to relieve their difficulties in regards to materials and labour, whilst on the other hand it was at the same time opening up new and additional sources of supply, both by organising outside firms for munition production, and by establishing new Government factories , and securing equipment, labour and materials for their use. At the outset there were few in the War Office, Government and elsewhere who could grasp just how much is covered by the phrase `Munitions of War` or the many interlinked industries concerned in their production. Scientific management or statistical process control was still some way off. In 1914 the making of a gun or even a shell case, required the supply of raw materials from iron ore, limestone and coal mines, transportation of these to the blast furnaces and steelworks. Then the bulk metals produced there were further processed in the iron and steel foundries,

rolling mills, forges, rod and wire mills etc. All of these manufacturing processes require factories and these in turn can only function with the requisite machinery, electrical power and distribution plant, machine tools, engines, pumps, turbines, further rail and road transport. Of course in most cases the new factories had to be built from scratch requiring civil engineers and all the various building trades. Once built of course all these plants had to be managed and staffed, more often than not, by people who needed training as all the processes were totally alien to anything they had done previously.

Shells loomed so large in the public eye at the time when the Ministry was formed that there was a danger of the fact being overlooked that the Department also became responsible for the production and supply, not only of guns and ammunition, but also of mechanical transport, trench warfare stores, optical munitions and glassware, metals and materials, tanks (albeit later in the war) poison gas, railway and roadmaking materials, machine tools, timber, electrical power, agricultural machinery, mineral oils, building materials and numerous other items which BEF required on an ongoing basis to enable it to function.

In place of the War Office method of contracting with a few experienced firms for supplies of finished articles – a method which had worked satisfactorily in peace time but had proved inadequate in time of this war - the Ministry of Munitions had to concern itself directly with the production of every raw material and intermediate stage of manufacture of each component in its munitions supplies. When the Ministry of Munitions Act was laid before Parliament at the beginning of June 1915, the existing bodies for the provision of munitions were three in number:-

1. Munitions Supply Organisation under the War Office, presided over by the Major General of Ordnance (von Donop), run almost exclusively by army officers, with the addition of one important civilian Lord Moulton who had been given a position as chairman of the Committee of High Explosives supply.
2. The Armaments Output Committee which Lord Kitchener had set up with Sir Percy Girouard and Mr GM Booth at its head, originally to take up the problem of labour supply though it had actually made an extremely useful but limited start on the question of area organisation
3. Munitions of War Committee. This was now virtually defunct as its Chairman had become the Minister of Munitions (designate)

In the course of the month of June most of the supply functions for General von Donop`s department had been responsible were transferred to the new Ministry which also amalgamated with itself the work of the Armaments Output Committee. By the beginning of July in place of the aforementioned three bodies there was now one Ministry in charge of output and supply, the exception being Woolwich Arsenal which remained under the auspices of the Ordnance Department until August 1915 and responsibility for design and invention until the end of the year. The Royal Arsenal, Woolwich carried out armaments manufacture, ammunition proofing, and explosives research for the British armed forces at a site on the south bank of the River Thames in Woolwich in south-east London. It was originally known as the Woolwich Warren, having begun on land previously used as a domestic warren in the grounds of a Tudor house, Tower Place. Much of the initial history of the site is linked with that of the Board of Ordnance, which purchased the Warren in the late 17th century in order to expand an earlier base at Gun Wharf in Woolwich Dockyard. Over the next two centuries, as operations grew and innovations were pursued, the site expanded massively; at the time of the First World War the Arsenal covered 1,285 acres and employed close to 80,000 people. Thereafter its operations were scaled down; it finally closed as a factory in 1967 and the Ministry of Defence moved out in 1994.

Four departments were at first set up: Sir Percy Girouard undertook munitions supply; Lord Moulton explosives supply; Brigadier-General L.C. Jackson the Engineers Munitions Department and Mr Richard Beveridge took charge of the Secretariat and the organisation of Labour. Supporting them was an array of the experienced business men and to use perhaps the best example Sir Percy Girouard , Director

General of Munitions Supply, had immediately under him nine men, each in charge of a particular job or group of jobs. One of these, Sir Eric Geddes, held the position of Deputy Director General of Munitions Supply and was set to supervise a group of sub departments – Moir (machine guns), Hopkinson (small arms ammunition), Brown (rifles), Major Symon (guns and equipment, ammunition wagons and optical supplies), Bain (horse drawn transport vehicles), As the war progressed several of these departments grew in importance and required the undivided attention of a Deputy Director General. Subsequently munitions supply was one of three supply departments (the others being explosives supply and trench warfare supply)and was divided into ten main sub departments, half of which were again sub divided into four or five sections and these various departments, sub departments and sections were being run by experienced professional business men on business lines. By April and May the Armaments Output Committee, under the direction of the Munitions of War Committee, made a beginning with the task of area organisation. District committees were set up to coordinate munition production and they undertook the establishment of national shell factories in their centres. The first of such schemes was the one adopted at Leeds, which received Government sanction on May 13th. The scheme adopted for area organisation was described by the Minister in a speech to the House of Commons on June 23rd.

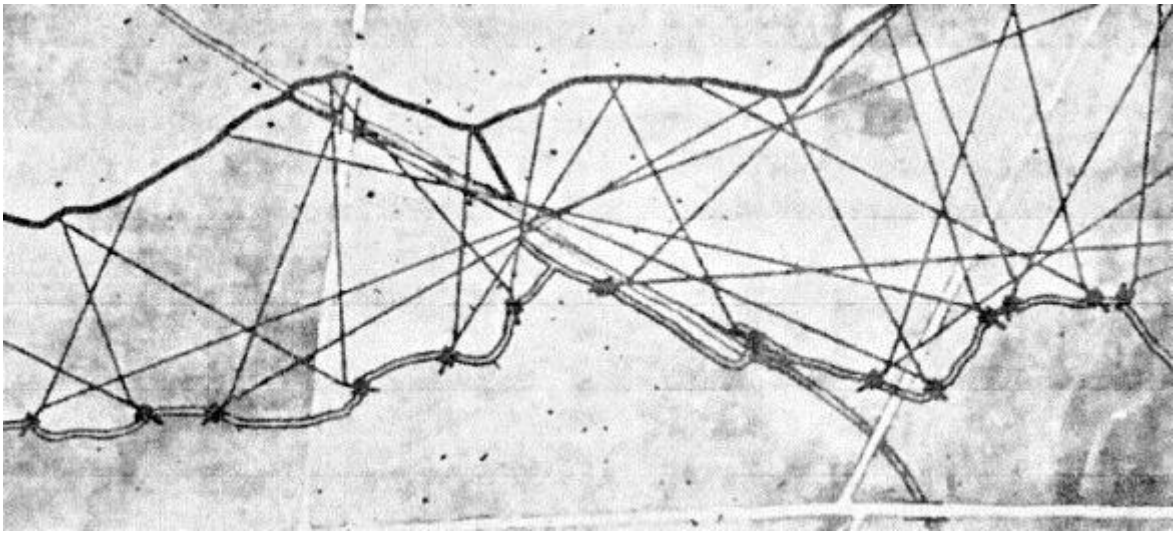
"No staff, however able, could adequately cope from the centre with the gigantic and novel character of the operations which must be put through during the next few weeks if the country is to be saved. We have, therefore, decided to organise the country in districts. I am relying very considerably upon the decentralisation which I have outlined. There is no time to organise a Central Department which would be sufficiently strong and which would be sufficiently well equipped to make the most of the resources of each district…..There is only one way of organising the resources of the country efficiently within the time at our disposal. That is that each district should undertake to do the work for itself, and that we should place at their disposal everything that a government can in the way of expert advice and in the way of material, because we have ourselves offered to supply the material wherever it is required "

Sir James Stevenson, Director of Area Organisation, described his method,

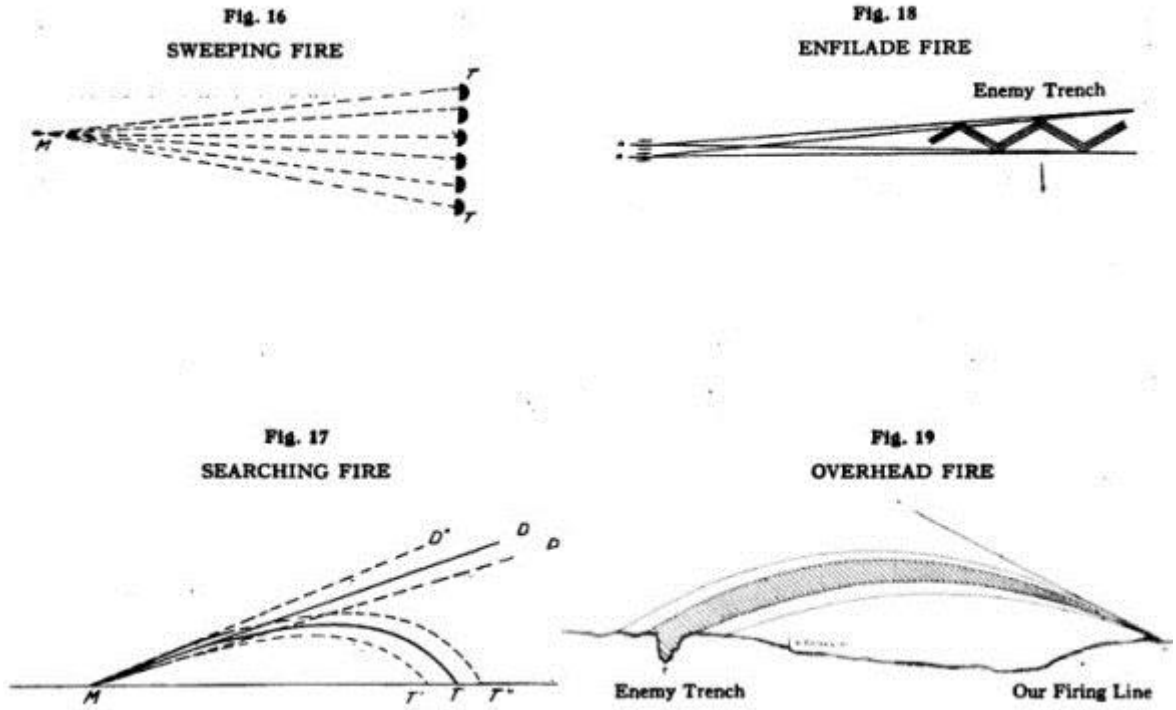
"The first thing I did was to call for a map. I might as well have called for the moon. But, nothing daunted, I went out and bought won – the price of which the government still owe me. I divided the map into ten areas, the limits of which (with a few exceptions) followed county boundaries and proceeded on the ordinary commercial decentralisation. This scheme was approved by the Minister and an area office was established in each (Newcastle, Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, Cardiff, Bristol, London, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dublin, Belfast) with the object of relieving the pressure at headquarters, securing local information and disposing of sectional difficulties. Curiously enough, one county was left out – Hereford – with the remark: `We will leave that to the Board of Agriculture!` But in that neglected county the greatest shell filling factory in the country was later built……"

To be continued

WWI Machine Gun Tactics Part 1



How machine guns can sweep No Man's Land. Seen from above … in a machine gun tactics book of the Allies, a dozen machine gun emplacements saturate the battlefield with deadly fire.



Machine gun tactics – like other killing methods – were evolving rapidly during the war. Human ingenuity.

Machine gun tactics developed from a base of almost nothing prior to 1900 to a situation in 1914 where the relatively small numbers of weapons available were often capable of an extreme and disproportionate influence in battle. As trench garrisons were thinned out and attacking formations were likewise made less dense and linear, machine guns continued to increase their importance. This was not to say that they were the prime killers of trench warfare – this dubious distinction fell to the artillery – nor that machine guns were equally useful in all circumstances. For whilst, as we have seen, machine guns were pushed well forward into German attacks on trench lines early in the war, for a long time they remained most potent in defence. This was partly a question of the evolution of suitable offensive tactics, but it was also a natural function of the attributes of the standard 'Model 08' machine gun,

which was heavy, water-cooled, and fired from 250-round cloth belts. The gun itself weighed 22kg, whilst the standard Schlitten or ‘sledge’ mount, a thoroughly stable adjustable platform, added a further 34kg. At least one propaganda picture showed a German soldier carrying the whole paraphernalia, mounted barrel and all, on his broad shoulders, but this was a work of Hercules. The Schlitten was designed with handles for relatively easy carriage by two men, stretcher style, at waist or shoulder height, and when the going got tough on longer distances four men could take a handle each. In the deepest mud the load could be broken down even more, dismounting the gun barrel and hauling this between another two men. Broad leather ‘dragging straps’ helped a little when the load became irksome, hot, or freezing cold.

By itself, however, the gun was useless, and a single filled ammunition belt weighed in at 7kg. Little surprise then that for road transport the guns were either on limbered horse-drawn wagons, or hauled in little hand carts. Since a belt was enough for only a minute or less at rapid fire, or perhaps a maximum of four minutes at the slowest rate of ammunition conservation, many metal boxes of ammunition were needed. The usual allotment on hand for each gun in a six-gun company was 12,000 rounds, or forty-eight belts for each gun – a heap of boxes and cartridges weighing in excess of 2000kg for the group. During a battle the whole lot might be shot away very easily, leaving exhausted gunners and supply troops to replenish the stock from ammunition columns to the rear. On a really bad day this process might have to be repeated more than once, by which time it was likely that casualties would have been incurred. Additional inconveniences included the provision of spare parts, and water to cool the barrel jackets, plus a seventh gun held in reserve in case of emergency or catastrophic failure. For defensive work there were also armoured barrel jackets and gun shields. The heaviest of these weighed about 27kg, but protection had to be balanced against the additional weight. In the event, many guns in the West were used without the large crew shield, but often armoured barrel jackets and abbreviated muzzle shields were retained. For highly accurate long-range work – anything up to 2000 metres – another common piece of kit was the Zielfernrohr 12 optic sight. Interestingly, the actual battle range of the heavy machine gun was limited far more by visibility, terrain, weather, presence of cover, and skill of the gun crew than by the range of the bullet, which was anything up to a theoretical maximum of 4000 metres. The manual Feld-Pioneer Dienst aller Waffen of 1911 illustrated basic designs for open-topped machine gun pits which were roughly the shape of a truncated letter ‘T’ with its base toward the enemy. These could be deep to accommodate standing gunners, or relatively shallow for a seated firer; they might either be dug straight into the ground, or could make use of sandbags. All these designs and variations were replicated on the battlefields of 1914.

The importance placed on machine guns was marked by huge efforts to put more of such weapons in the hands of the troops. Supplementary units were soon raised, and with production of MG 08 machine guns steadily increasing, a second machine gun company was added to regiments as soon as adequate numbers of weapons and trained men became available. Special ‘Marksman’ machine gun units were also raised and deployed to points on the front where there was particular need of their services. Almost 5,000 machine guns had been in the hands of the German army at the outbreak of war, but by 1916 a further 10,000 guns had been produced by the plant at Spandau, with several thousand more now coming from the DWM Berlin factory. Thereafter, production figures would rise ever more steeply until the total numbers of MG 08 guns made by November 1918 reached about 72,000 – roughly two thirds from DWM and the remainder from Spandau.

By 1916 experience had advanced to the point where fresh directives on the use of the MG 08 in trench warfare could be issued. One of the most important of these was the document Regulations for Machine Gun Officers and Non Commissioned Officers. This paper made clear that effective concealment was highly important: emplacements were to be so constructed as to avoid telltale heaps of earth as well as to ‘cover the whole of the proscribed field of fire’. Usually, there would be two alternative positions nearby having much the same field of fire. No less than sixteen full boxes of ammunition were to be kept by the gun (4000 rounds), and when a box was expended it was to be replaced immediately from the belt store. During the day the machine gun was to be kept in a dugout, but by the steps ready to move; at night it would stand loaded and ready to fire in its emplacement. Three spare barrels were also to be kept near each gun, as was plenty of water in buckets and a butt for each gun. Protection of the gun and

crew were critical, and for close defence six hand grenades were to be kept nearby. One armed sentry was to be posted by day, two by night, each having the use of a periscope.

In the event of ‘sighting a particularly favourable target’ or a surprise attack, the gun was to open fire immediately. Usually, the crew would check if friendly troops were out to the front before commencing fire, but this nicety would be dispensed with if the enemy attacked, not firing being more dangerous than the obvious risk to one’s own men. Where possible, an immediate situation report was to be made to both the platoon commander and the sector machine gun officer. To make rapid and accurate firing possible, likely targets within the zone would be registered, and a range card made for easy adjustment of fire. ‘Daily fire’ could also be organised by the company commander, indicating in advance the targets to be engaged and the number of rounds to be fired.

Machine guns were relied upon more and more as a cornerstone of the defensive battle alongside artillery, rifles and grenades. The crucial thing was that they should be able to survive artillery bombardment, preferably in dugouts, and then be quickly deployed to firing positions on the surface. As eye witness Matthaus Gerster would record of the first day on the Somme, in Die Schwaben an der Ancre (The Schwabians on the Ancre):

Looking towards the British trenches through the long trench periscopes held up out of the dugout entrances there could be seen a mass of steel helmets above the parapet showing that the storm troops were ready for the assault. At 7.30 am the hurricane of shells ceased as suddenly as it had begun. Our men at once clambered up the steep shafts leading from the dugouts to daylight and ran singly or in groups to the nearest shell craters. The machine guns were pulled out of the dugouts and hurriedly placed in position, their crews dragging the heavy ammunition boxes up the steps and out to the guns. A rough firing line was thus rapidly established. As soon as the men were in position, a series of extended lines of infantry were seen moving forward from the British trenches. The first line appeared to continue without without end to right and left. It was quickly followed by a second, then a third and fourth. They came on at a steady easy pace as if expecting to find nothing alive in our front trenches … The front line, preceded by a thin line of skirmishers and bombers, was now half way across No Man’s Land. ‘Get ready’ was passed along our front line from crater to crater, and heads appeared over the crater edges as final positions were taken up for the best view, and machine guns mounted firmly in place. A few minutes later, when the leading British line was within a hundred yards, the rattle of machine gun and rifle broke out along the whole line of shell holes. Some fired kneeling so as to get a better target over the broken ground, whilst others, in the excitement of the moment, stood up regardless of their own safety, to fire into the crowd of men in front of them. Red rockets sped up into the blue sky as a signal to the artillery, and immediately afterwards a mass of shells from the German batteries in rear tore through the air and burst among the advancing lines. Whole sections seemed to fall, and the rear formations moving in close order, quickly scattered. The advance rapidly crumbled under this hail of shells and bullets. All along the line men could be seen throwing up their arms and collapsing, never to move again. Badly wounded rolled about in their agony, and others, less severely injured, crawled to the nearest shell hole for shelter … the extended lines, though badly shaken and with many gaps, now came on all the faster. Instead of a leisurely walk they covered the ground in short rushes at the double. Within a few minutes the leading troops had advanced within a stone’s throw of our front trench, and while some of us continued to fire at point blank range, others threw hand grenades among them. The British bombers answered back, whilst the infantry rushed forward with fixed bayonets. The noise of the battle became indescribable. The shouting of orders and the shrill cheers as the British charged forward could be heard above the violent and intense fusillade of machine guns and rifles and bursting bombs, and above the deep thunderings of the artillery and shell explosions.

As orders of 6th Bavarian Division observed, the Somme showed the ‘decisive value’ of machine guns in defence, and the more the enemy bombarded the German trenches before attacking, ‘the greater the extent to which we must rely on the employment of machine guns.’ However, machine guns would only frustrate an attack if they could be kept in serviceable condition, and then ‘brought up into the firing position in time’. This could now only be achieved if the majority of the machine guns was kept out of the front two lines trenches, as otherwise there was no certainty that the enemy’s assault would be seen

in time. Locating the emplacements behind the second, or even the third, line of trenches also put them in places where they were considerably less effected by methodical barrages. The individual fire positions were to be such that they flanked the trench systems, or provided wide fields of fire. A proportion of weapons were best kept well behind the trenches altogether, in covered deep pits, platforms in trees, hedges, or even out in the open provided the enemy could not register them before making an advance.

It was well appreciated that the great weight of a machine gun and its ammunition was a serious impediment, making it difficult to get the pieces out of secure dugouts and hiding places and quickly into firing positions. Accordingly, there were experiments with, and production of, expedient 'trench mounts' during 1915. These were in widespread use by 1916. They might incorporate a pivot on a wooden board, or a small, pronged stand which could achieve some stability when pressed into the soil. They were not, however, more than a temporary answer, and not calculated to produce very accurate fire. Moreover, since the gun barrel and jacket were retained along with the trailing belt, neither were they a completely effective solution to the weight problem.

Though German machine guns were rightly feared, in one vital aspect the development of German weapons and tactics lagged well behind what the British had pioneered as early as the end of 1914: the true 'light' machine gun. The American-designed Lewis gun, at first designated as an 'automatic rifle' had been tested even before the outbreak of war. By November 1914 an experimental handful had made their way to the front, being seen initially as stop-gap supplements to the inadequate numbers of 'heavy', tripod-mounted Vickers and Maxim guns on hand. Yet it was quickly realised that a lighter version of the machine gun that was air cooled and had a magazine attached rather than using trailing belts, offered far greater tactical flexibility. It could be carried by one man, set up in seconds, and work its way into positions otherwise impractical with large tripods and water canisters. Whilst in simple terms its raw firepower, range and accuracy were all inferior to the MG 08 or Vickers – points all amply noted by contemporaries – it opened up new possibilities for infantry tactics and organisation that were scarcely dreamed of prior to the war. Initially, both 'heavy' and 'light' machine guns coexisted within the British infantry battalions, but by 1916, with large numbers of Lewis guns now issued to the infantry, heavier weapons were withdrawn and grouped into companies and battalions of the new Machine Gun Corps. Within an infantry platoon a light machine gun could now operate as a mobile firebase, and a variety of tactics using grenades, rifles, bayonets and rifle grenades as a complementary group of weapons with different characteristics could begin to develop.

Vickers Machine Gun in action during the Battle of the Somme July 1916 – the machine gunners are wearing gas helmets

The Silk Mill, Derby will host the iconic poppy sculpture between 9 Jun and 23 Jul as part of 14-18 NOW tour

The presentations by 14-18 NOW, the UK's arts programme for the First World War centenary, will give people across the UK the chance to experience the impact of the ceramic poppy sculpture in a range of places of particular First World War resonance. During the First World War, Derby Silk Mill was divided into two businesses one grinding corn and the other making medical supplies, both integral to the British war effort and scarce by 1916.

Derby as a whole played a vital part in production during the course of the First World War with Rolls-Royce developing the Eagle Engine at the request of the government to power allied aircraft. As Derby Silk Mill: Museum of Making the museum now holds a great number of industrial and social history objects which help to tell the stories of Derby's companies and its communities.

Weeping Window is from the installation 'Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red' – poppies and original concept by artist Paul Cummins and installation designed by Tom Piper – by Paul Cummins Ceramics Limited in conjunction with Historic Royal Palaces, originally at HM Tower of London 2014.

The 7th

STAVELEY ARMED FORCES

& VETERANS ASSOC.

EVENT

8th & 9th JULY 2017

AT POOLSBROOK COUNTRY PARK

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- WW1 displays
- Cadet Recruitment and Demonstrations
- Vintage Vehicles
- Rother Valley Newfoundland Dog Training Displays.
- Civil War Re-Enactors
- Live Entertainment, in Garrison Theatre.
- Trade & Charity Stalls
- Parade from Staveley, Saturday am led by Long Eaton Silver Prize Band
- Remembrance Service, Sunday am
- Sergeant Major Marmite (of Dad's Army fame)
- Fly Past (tbc)
- RAW Brewery Tours
- Parking at venue, for only £1
- Free Shuttle Bus From Staveley Healthy Living Centre & Speedwell Rooms
- Free Entry

For more details please contact any of the below
Chairman: Joe Roberts BEM. on 07731 955439, email:j.roberts732@outlook.com
Event Secretary: Marion Gerrard on 07960 317894, email:marionjohn19@hotmail.com
Treasurer: Graham Weighill on 07757 007169, email:graham.weighill@virginmedia.com

Staveley Armed Forces and Veterans