



# The Spire Sentinel



**The Newsletter & Magazine of The  
Chesterfield Branch of The Western Front  
Association**



***ISSUE 70 - December 2021***

Our aims are 'Remembrance and Sharing the History of the  
Great War'.

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### **CHRISTMAS GOODIES FROM THE WFA**

Dear all,

Please see here the details of future WFA webinars and the December Virtual Tour with members. With winter currently 'biting' here in the UK, it is hoped the following will be a welcome distraction for members to look forward to. The webinars are all on Monday evenings at 8pm UK time.

On 6 December we have Geoffrey Vesey Holt giving a presentation entitled '*Tank Corps operations during the German Spring Offensive of 1918*'. Some 204 tired Mark IV tanks and the 36 new Medium 'A' Whippet tanks, manned by just converted crews, would, given their number alone, not be able to make a decisive contribution to the defences during this German offensive. Nevertheless, as this talk will show, and thanks to the surprisingly good Tank Corps records, they did play a useful role.

To register for this event please click here: [Tank Corps operations](#)

On 13 December the popular Gordon Corrigan makes a return visit. Appropriately enough he will be talking about '*The Christmas Day Truce of 1914*'. On Christmas Day all along the Western Front there were sporadic instances of carol singing by both sides, leading to meetings in no-man's-land, fraternisation, exchange of gifts and even at least one football match. This talk explains what **really** happened and not only what its affects were, but what they were thought to be.

To register for this event please click here: [The Christmas Day Truce](#)

Chronologically, the next event is not a webinar but the second of the Virtual Tours. This is on Thursday 16 December and will start at **7.30pm**. This is available only to WFA members and you will need to use your password to view this on the WFA's website (no registration is necessary, but please ensure you can access the page well before hand).

This virtual tour is entitled '**Aubers 1915: Deadlock, Disappointment and Disaster in Flanders**'

Focusing more on the southern attack that took place in 1915, Tour Guide and Historian Julian Whippy will use Drone footage and other methods to take you across the flat battlefields and explain some of the reasons for the disappointment and certain disaster.

To view the countdown for this and to see it 'live' on the night please click here: [Aubers 1915: Deadlock, Disappointment and Disaster in Flanders](#)

There is also, immediately after the tour at 8.30pm (UK time), the chance to talk to Julian Whippy about the tour. This live meeting is a 'zoom' event and will enable questions about the tour will be answered live and in person.

For those who experienced buffering during the first of these virtual tours, this issue has now been fixed and should not re-occur. The First Virtual Tour (and all of the six in the first series) remains available on the 'Virtual Tours' area of the WFA's website - as detailed above, just log in using your password.

Further details are on a web page (which is accessible without using your password) here: [Latest News: The WFA's Virtual Tour #2](#)

This virtual tour will remain available after the 'live' event so even if you can't make it for the 'premiere' it will remain viewable for the foreseeable future.

The third of December's webinars is on Monday 20 December and is entitled '*Big Hands, Little Maps*': *Operational Art and its genesis on the Western Front*. This presentation sees the return of Lt Col Simon Shepard who will be exploring the development of the Operational Level of War and in particular the term now known as Operational Art.

Simon will trace its development on the Western Front via the BEF and latterly via the combined conduct of the Allied Armies during later stages of 1918.

To register for this event please click here: [Big Hands, Little Maps](#)

Finally, a mention for the first webinar of 2022. This is on Monday 3 January. This webinar will see Clive Harris talking about one of his favourite characters: Eric 'Kipper' Robinson who was awarded a Victoria Cross during the Gallipoli campaign, and - frankly - could have earned another one very easily.

Robinson appears on the fringes of seemingly endless moments of history from the Boxer Rebellion, through the Battle of Heligoland Bight and the Zeebrugge Raid to the 1940 Battle of the Atlantic, this will be a chance to hear his amazing story.

To register for this event please click here: [From Gallipoli to the Caspian Sea, the Life of Eric Gascoigne 'Kipper' Robinson VC](#)

As ever, those who wish to register early (some of January's webinars are already available for registrations) just visit the WFA's website and look at the forthcoming 'national events' section.

*Any opinions expressed in this Newsletter / Magazine are not necessarily those of the Western Front Association, Chesterfield Branch, in particular, or the Western Front Association in general*



## *Secretary's Scribbles*

Dear Members and Friends,

Welcome to the December issue - and last for 2021 - of the Branch newsletter and magazine. I have to apologise for missing the November issue but as many of you know, in addition to what I do for the WFA branch, I am also RBL Branch Secretary and Poppy Appeal Organiser for the Worksop area and in truth the months of October and November are not my own - distributing Poppy Appeal cans and merchandise in October - running round topping up supplies, organising supermarket teams during the 2 weeks of Remembrancetide, then, after Remembrance Sunday, gathering in all the pots and boxes. While most supermarkets count the cash raised in their stores, it is up to me as PAO, along with my Deputy PAO to count all the other cash. Fortunately we have a machine which counts coins into the appropriate quantities before we fill the bank bags - then lug it to the bank - in my case 4 `runs` - each with over £2000 in cash - mostly coins. I can tell you that is *heavy* !.

For similar reasons, I haven't managed to complete the normal meeting `write ups` for our last two meetings but am on with these now and will include them in subsequent issues of this newsletter / magazine

Whilst we didn't manage to be able to organise transport to London on November 11<sup>th</sup> to attend the Western Front Association's ceremony at the Cenotaph in Whitehall, the event on the day proved an outstanding success and indeed there was coverage in many of the national newspapers. Provided we can be freed by these accursed covid rules and regulations, we must try to organise a trip in 2022.

Our meeting on Tuesday has a first time visiting speaker to our Branch, **John Taylor**, who will present a talk entitled '**A Prelude to War**' (**An Archduke's Visit**) - a classic and true tale of `what if ?`

John is a professional historian, researcher, lecturer and guide specializing in military and arts history from The Norman period up to the Nineteenth Century but he has also ventured into much wider fields as and when required. He has appeared on TV and radio and acted in a research capacity on numerous occasions for various media sources. Part of the talk will be about the visit of Archduke Franz Ferdinand to Worksop and Welbeck Abbey in November 1913 .....and an incident which could have changed world history . I have spoken to John on a number of occasions arranging his visit and talk and I am sure we will be in for an interesting and informative evening.

As you all know our January meeting is our AGM and we propose to follow the business part of the evening (can we beat the record for the shortest ever AGM ?) with several presentations by members. Jon-Paul Harding will explain how he `found` his great grandad. This will be followed by Andy Rawson comparing things we think were new in the Great War yet were done in the American Civil War... a short look ... Trenches, wire entanglements, tunnelling... etc. Then I will conclude with a presentation on

Worksop`s only VC winner in WW1 - William Henry Johnson VC. If anyone else would like to give a short talk then we can still accommodate them.

Now that 2021 is almost over and the January 2022 meeting has things in place I am looking to prepare a list of presentations for next year...any suggestions from members on subjects or speakers themselves would be most welcome.

**In addition to our normal raffle at the end of the meeting, I will be having a book sale table. No fixed prices...take your pick...all we ask is a modest donation to Branch funds .**

Look forward to seeing as many of you as possible on Tuesday

Take care

Grant Cullen.....Branch Secretary.....07824628638

Just to recap, here`s the Covid conditions which we agreed with our hosts the Chesterfield Labour Club.

1. Hand sanitizer is provided at the entrance and must be used. It will also be provided in the meeting room.
2. Masks must be worn while at the bar, otherwise discretionary.
3. No leaning on, or touching the bar.
4. Windows of the meeting room to be open to provide ventilation.
5. As far as practicable, seating to be distanced.

## Remembrance 2021



WFA wreaths laid at the Cenotaph, London, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2021



Branch Committee Member Jon-Paul Harding lays a wreath on behalf of the Branch, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2021 at Chesterfield War Memorial

The following are a series of pictures, a small selection from over 200, courtesy of David Tattersfield ,of the WFA parade and wreath laying at the Cenotaph in London on November 11<sup>th</sup>.







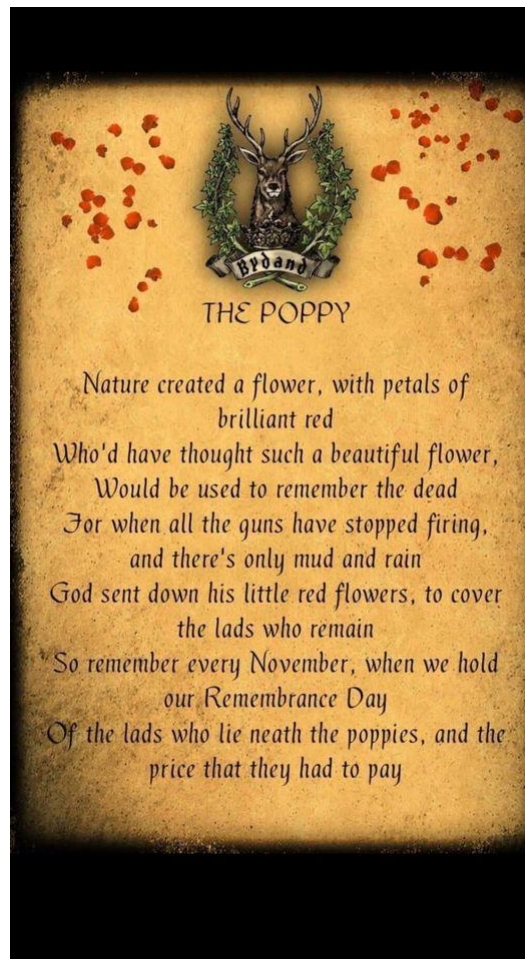






Actor Nick Bailey read 'In Flanders Fields' at the Cenotaph on Armistice Day and to remember one of the first Black British officers of The Great War. Nick said a few words at the Cenotaph about Walter Tull, one of the first Black British Army officers of The Great War who lost his life at the Second Battle of The Somme in 1918.

Tull, who was also this country's second Black professional footballer, has no known grave but is remembered at the Arras Memorial.



Nature created a flower, with petals of  
brilliant red  
Who'd have thought such a beautiful flower,  
Would be used to remember the dead  
For when all the guns have stopped firing,  
and there's only mud and rain  
God sent down his little red flowers, to cover  
the lads who remain  
So remember every November, when we hold  
our Remembrance Day  
Of the lads who lie neath the poppies, and the  
price that they had to pay



# BRANDED GOODS AVAILABILITY

New items are always being considered, so please check the Branded goods part of the shop for all items available.

Prices are inclusive of postage within UK (Branded Items Nos 1-11)

[www.westernfrontassociation.com/shop/wfa-branded-items/?p=2](http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/shop/wfa-branded-items/?p=2)  
or call Head Office (Sarah Gunn or Maya Shapland) on 020 7118 1914

And the (Branded Clothing, Nos 12- 18) note new prices (under) effective from 1st July.

Order direct from supplier (West Coast Workwear) [www.westernfrontassociation.com/shop/branded-clothing/](http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/shop/branded-clothing/)  
or ring (0800 169 2228 or 01704 873301)



1	Fridge Magnet	(£5)	59mm dia, front metal plate, high strength neodymium magnetic backplate, and plastic mylar front cover
2	Anniv' Coaster	(£8.50)	4" in diameter hand crafted slate. Individually polished, screen printed by hand and backed by a baize
3	Mousemats	(£6)	196 x 235mm fabric surface and are of high quality. They have a rubberised base layer
4	Bookmarks	(£2)	(dims 55 x 175mm) rich UV High Gloss Coating provides protection against stains and damage
5	Baseball Caps	(£8)	Lightweight 5 Panel cotton cap, adjustable with velcro rip-strip, one size fits all
6	Ties	(£11)	Length 142cm, width 9cm (at widest part), 100% Polyester
7	Lapel Badges	(£2.50)	25mm Dia. Die struck + imitation hard enamel, Silver Nickel Plating, Butterfly clutch pin
8	Mug	(£10)	11oz ceramic mug (95mm high x 85mm diameter) features the bold official WFA logo design (two sides)
9	Messenger Bag	(£27)	37 x 29 x 11cm, 100% Cotton. Full cotton lining. Zippered organiser section, Capacity:13 litres
10	Despatch Bag	(£30)	40 x 30 x 12 cm, (10) Washed Canvas, dual rear pouch pockets. Multiple zippered pockets. Capacity: 14 litres
11	Shoulder Bag	(£25)	40 x 28 x 18 cm, (10) (11) Polyester. Internal valuables pocket. Zippered front pocket. Capacity: 14 litres
12	Oxford Shirt	(£27)	Kustom Kit Short Sleeve Corporate Oxford Shirt. Easy iron button down collar, 85% cotton, 15% polyester
13	Breathable Jacket	(£71)	Russell Hydro Plus 2000 Jacket. Nylon taslon with PU Coating
14	Rugby Shirt	(£25)	Front Row Classic Rugby Shirt, 100% Cotton
15	Fleece	(£24)	Regatta Thor 111 Fleece Jacket, 100% polyester anti pill
16	T-shirt	(£17)	Russell Classic Cotton T-Shirt. 100% ringspun cotton
17	Sweat Shirt	(£22.50)	Gents Russell Jerzees Raglan / Ladies Fruit Of The Loom Raglan
18	Polo Shirt	(£20.50)	Russell Cotton Pique Polo Shirt. 100% cotton

I received the following reports from WFA member Steve Brunt who has been visiting the Ypres Salient



Hi Grant, I was honoured last Friday evening (26<sup>th</sup> November) in my capacity as Alderman of Chesterfield to read the exhortation at the last post ceremony and my wife Jill and I also laid a wreath for Vincent Walker of the Lincolnshire regiment from Chesterfield, KIA 02/03/1916 and of course all the men of Chesterfield and beyond.

Vincent's name is on the gate on panel 21 which is ironically just above the wreath laying platform

My wife Jill and I laid a wreath this morning (November 28<sup>th</sup>) at the Soldatenfriedhof German Cemetery in Langemark out of respect for the fallen from Germany who perished in the Great War, in and around the Ypres salient.

I contacted the VDK (German equivalent to the CWGC) for permission and am in e mail contact with Erik Demumck from that organisation who kindly directed me.

We laid the wreath at the head of the Comrades grave which houses the remains of over 24,000 German soldiers in the cemetery. The cemetery as a whole contains the remains of over 44,000 German soldiers.

Our epitaph reads,

*"From Chesterfield UK with respect to the fallen.  
Peace, Love and Understanding, laid by Alderman Steve Brunt and Councillor Jill Mannion Brunt 28/11/2021. "*







**Soldiers bear the flag-draped coffin of Lance Corporal Robert Cook, who served with 2nd Battalion The Essex Regiment**

A British soldier who died during the [First World War](#) has been laid to rest in Belgium after a DNA sample from his nephew helped detectives to identify him. Lance Corporal Robert Cook received full military honours, including a gun salute, at a ceremony in Belgium on Wednesday, after his identity was confirmed by experts known as the "War Detectives".

The decorated soldier died aged 38 on May 2 1915, two days after arriving on the front line near Ypres, on the Western Front.

Born in Bishop Wilton, in the East Riding area of Yorkshire, L/Cpl Cook was one of seven children and served with 2nd Battalion The Essex Regiment.

He was buried at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's New Irish Farm Cemetery, near Ypres, after being identified by the Ministry of Defence's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre.

His great-nephew and great-niece attended the service to pay their respects, laying wreaths beside his white headstone.



Sally Cooper and Arthur Cook, great niece and nephew of Lance Corporal Robert Cook, laid wreaths at the service

Also present were members of C Essex Company of 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment, the modern equivalent of L/Cpl Cook's regiment.

Draped in a Union flag, L/Cpl Cook's coffin was carried to its final resting place by soldiers in full military dress.



Soldiers carried Lance Corporal Robert Cook's, coffin, which was draped in the Union flag





November. British Fourth Army's commander, General Sir Henry Rawlinson, wrote that 'no factor did more to bring about success than the skilful co-operation with the infantry, of the various arms - cavalry, artillery, machine-gunners, engineers, the Air Force, and last but not least the tanks'. General Erich Ludendorff (Field Marshal Hindenburg's chief of staff) later referred to 8 August 1918 as 'the black day of the German Army in the war' because of its moral collapse that day, including for the first time massed surrenders, which in part were caused by low-level air attack.

Yet the British use of air power at Amiens remains controversial because, notwithstanding numerical superiority, it had little impact after that first day. As future Chief of the Air Staff John Slessor argued in his seminal *Air Power and Armies*, the Royal Air Force's (RAF's) attempt to trap retreating German divisions by destroying the Somme bridges failed, with heavy losses of aircraft, diverted British aircraft from vital control of the air and air interdiction roles, and exposed a failure in land/air command and control, and operational planning.

## **Preparation**

By mid-July 1918, the tide had turned on the Western Front. Preparations for the last of Ludendorff's 1918 offensives had been detected by French long-range aerial reconnaissance and subsequently defeated by Allied *Generalissimo* Marshal Ferdinand Foch's counter-offensive at the Second Battle of the Marne in the Champagne region by an Allied force which included the British XXII Corps and the RAF's reserve, IX Brigade. From 12 July, Foch and Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, commanding the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), began planning for British Fourth Army to clear the German threat to the railway hub of Amiens once reserves could be redeployed from Champagne. On 25 July, Haig issued orders for the attack. Led by the elite Canadian and Australian Corps, supported by British III

Corps and the French First Army, it was intended to employ the combined arms tactics first used at Cambrai in November 1917 and used by the 4th Australian Division at Hamel on 4 July 1918, in which air power had been integrated to an unprecedented extent. As German weakness at Amiens became apparent, at a conference on 5 August, Foch convinced Haig to expand Rawlinson's objectives from a ten kilometre limited operation to a deeper advance of twenty-four kilometres.

Slessor highlights the failure to integrate 'Air' in Fourth Army's planning. Major General John Salmond, commanding 'the RAF in the Field', as the BEF's air component had been called since the formation of the RAF on 1 April 1918, attended the penultimate planning conference, though did not discuss the precise role of the RAF. Brigadier General Lionel Charlton, commanding Fourth Army's V Brigade RAF, attended the early planning conferences only, and neither Salmond nor Charlton attended the final conference.

Consequently, Charlton issued orders to his brigade on 5 August for Rawlinson's original one-day only operation, though he issued clarification the following day concerning raiding by cavalry and armoured cars once the German line had been penetrated. Although on 7 August Salmond wished Charlton's brigade well 'for tomorrow and the next few days', it seems there was no clear land or air plan for day two and after.

Salmond split his command, and made Charlton responsible for close co-operation with the attacking corps, while Salmond himself retained responsibility for the deeper battle. Both, therefore, had to co-ordinate with Rawlinson's Fourth Army HQ. Salmond reinforced Charlton's 'corps wing' to comprise six squadrons assigned to tactical reconnaissance work, including: Major Trafford Leigh Mallory's No 8 Squadron RAF, which, at the Tank Corps'

request, was to warn of anti-tank guns and obstacles; and No 9 Squadron, which was to air drop small arms ammunition for advancing infantry and machine guns, both innovations first used at Hamel. Salmond also reinforced Charlton's 'army wing', normally used for deep operations, to give it eight fighter squadrons dedicated to low-level 'ground- Strafing', an innovation at Cambrai. For control of the air and interdiction, Salmond reinforced his reserve, IX Brigade, with squadrons from other RAF brigades giving him six fighter, four day bomber, two night bomber and two fighter reconnaissance squadrons, and another nine squadrons available from other brigades.

The RAF also helped enable the surprise essential to the attack's initial success. To support the deception of a Canadian attack in Flanders, on 27 July, Salmond issued orders for increased activity on the British Second Army front. Salmond also ordered increased activity on the British First and Fifth Army fronts for the two-days before the attack, delayed redeploying the reinforcement squadrons until 5 and 6 August, and night bombers were used to drown the noise of assembling British tanks. Meanwhile the RAF continued to fly offensive air patrols up to the enemy observation balloon line, fifteen kilometres beyond the front line, and prevented German air observation or air attack of the British preparations. Furthermore, Charlton's reconnaissance aircraft took 37,825 whole plate photographs from 1-6 August, which combined with sound ranging and flash spotting allowed the British to detect ninety-five per cent of German artillery before the battle began. Salmond's plan for the battle was for his day-bombers to attack German airfields on Fourth Army's front at daybreak on 8 August, escorted by fighters. Fighters were to fly relentless offensive patrols over the German line and, in the evening, day bombers were to interdict expected German reinforcements at Peronne and Chaulnes railway stations, followed by night bomber raids. The RAF concentrated 800 aircraft for the battle, almost half of which were

fighters, representing forty-seven per cent of the RAF's front-line strength in France. In addition, on 7 August, the French Commander-in-Chief, General Phillipe Petain, redeployed his French air reserve, the *Division Aérienne*, of 627 fighters and day bombers from Champagne, which together with the French First Army's aircraft meant a total of 1,104 French aircraft were available for the battle. Against this, the German Air Service had 369 aircraft, inclusive of 140 fighters, on the German Second and Eighteenth Army fronts, whilst the bulk of the German aircraft remained in Champagne.

The effectiveness of British air power on the Western Front had improved steadily throughout 1918. The British government's huge investment in air power meant that in addition to replacing the estimated average monthly losses of 2,200 aircraft and 800-900 pilots, the 'RAF in the Field' had received thirteen additional squadrons, including two American (Nos 17 and 148), since the RAF's formation. Furthermore, fighter squadron strength was increased from eighteen to twenty-four aircraft to enable two-squadron wing formations to match the German *Jagdgeschwaders* of fifty aircraft sometimes encountered. Other enhancements included a night fighter squadron (No 151), deployed from London's defence, to protect British rear areas and the conduct of experiments in bombing railways which highlighted bombing inaccuracy and limited destructive effect of such operations.

There were also significant improvements in command and control practices when Bristol Fighters, which were able to carry heavy two-way radio/telephone sets, were increasingly used for longer range aerial reconnaissance and also to guide single-seat fighter formations that had previously lacked wireless communications. Moreover, Artillery Liaison Officers were permanently established with each tactical reconnaissance squadron to improve co-operation with the BEF's corps.

## The Battle

Air power played a key part in the first day of the battle, once the fog cleared. The first day- bombers to attack St Christ airfield were unable to find it in the mist and when No 98 and No 43 Squadron attacked it later in the day, the Germans had dispersed the aircraft and little damage was done. Due to fog, Captain Freddie West, a No 8 Squadron RAF flight commander, was unable to see any tanks to co-operate with and on returning from the sortie he flew his aircraft into a hangar at his airfield. He and his observer survived and West was awarded the VC for a subsequent action on 10 August. Even when the fog cleared after 0900, 8 Squadron's anti-tank gun patrols were ineffective as the tank crews were unable to make out the aircrafts' visual signals and had no wireless communications due to the technical difficulty of fitting antennae to tanks. No 8 Squadron, therefore, sent wireless messages to the Tank Battalion HQs and directly attacked enemy positions or dropped phosphorous bombs to create smoke screens, losing two aircraft to ground fire.

In 1918 the only way corps and division commanders had of tracking their advancing infantry was from contact patrols flown by corps aircraft. The infantry were often loath to give away their position if control of the air was in doubt, but at Amiens, such was Allied superiority and speed of advance, they happily did so, as this report from No 3 Squadron Australian Flying Corps, flying RE8s, indicates:

***Lt R Armstrong pilot, Lt F. Hart observer. Contact patrol, airborne 10.30 landed at 11.30. Flares called for [using a Klaxon to sound A in Morse to ask 'where are you'] at 10.50 am and 11.30. Our line apparently runs [series of map references given]. Message and map dropped at 5th Australian Division, Australian Corps and 4th Army report centre.***

***Height 1,000 feet. Tanks and infantry moving forward without opposition.***

Many German accounts tell of the moral effect on retreating troops of ground strafing by British, one saying the 'airmen worked over us like madmen'. Each squadron sent two aircraft over the line at less than 100 feet in thirty-minute shuttles to use their two machine guns and four twenty-five pound bombs on retreating Germans. At 1030 two Sopwith Camels from No 201 Squadron RAF attacked three trains, succeeding in immobilising one containing German soldiers returning from leave who promptly surrendered to the aircraft! Another two Camels captured a 240mm railway gun. Losses were heavy though, with Nos 24, 65 and 201 Squadrons each losing at least six aircraft.

British fighters were at first unopposed. Lieutenant Paul Winslow, US Air Corps, flying an SE 5A with No 56 Squadron RAF, noted a dawn patrol on 8 August:

*We took off while it was still dark and got to 12,000 feet. All that could be seen were hundreds of our machines and thousands of gun flashes, denoting the top of the barrage. It was a wonderful sight to watch, and we were not bothered by Archie [anti-aircraft fire] so we could enjoy it. Landed at 7:00 am.*

German Second Army had sent for reinforcements the moment the barrage opened at 0420 and from midday over 300 additional aircraft arrived at a speed that surprised the British. While German fighter opposition over the battlefield increased on the afternoon of 8 August the German Air Service's main effort would be to protect the Somme bridges.

### The Somme Bridges

In response to fighter reconnaissance reports from midday, which stated the Somme bridges were crowded with retreating German troops and transport, Salmond, according to the official history 'presumably on instructions from GHQ', ordered all IX Brigade RAF's fighter and day bombers to cancel existing missions

and instead bomb the bridges, which were technically challenging targets for the time. This report from a Bristol Fighter of Major Keith Park's fighter reconnaissance No 48 Squadron is typical:

*Corbie - Bray Road, from [map ref] to Bray congested with mixed traffic moving East. From [map ref] to Proyart road full of horsed transport moving East. Amiens - St Quentin Road between Proyart and Estrees seen to be congested with mixed traffic, general trend easterly...".*

On 8 August the British attacked the bridges with 205 sorties and dropped twelve tons of bombs. The Camel fighters had no bomb sight, their four small bombs were ineffectual and also prevented them from protecting the bombers. Furthermore, the German airfields were adjacent to the bridges and they fought hard to protect the vital bridges. As the RAF official history notes 'the German pilots, for the first time in the war, stayed to fight without calculation'. In the fierce fighting, Hermann Göring's elite Richthofen *Jagdgeschwader* was soon reduced from fifty to eleven aircraft.<sup>21</sup> Two thirds of the 97 RAF aircraft lost or damaged beyond repair on 8 August 1918 were at the Somme crossings, and seventy of these aircraft were engaged in low-flying attacks on the Somme bridges or ground strafing when damaged.

Nevertheless, attacks against the bridges continued on 9 August, when British fighters were ordered to escort the bombers rather than bomb themselves. Salmond then ordered all available aircraft to attack the bridges at 1700 when thirty bombers were escorted by fifty fighters and another seventy-four aircraft flying sweep. RAF losses were fewer on 9 August at forty-five aircraft overall. Seventy-five per cent of those were when attacking the bridges as the fighters, unpractised in escorting bombers, flew too high to be effective. The underpowered DH9 aircraft were particularly vulnerable; No 107 Squadron lost five of twelve aircraft in one

attack, whereas No 205 Squadron's DH4s attacked the bridges on nine occasions over three days without loss, claiming to have shot down three German aircraft. Nonetheless, not one bridge had been destroyed though the raids added significantly to the confusion. On 10 August the bombers were switched to the interdiction of rail centres, too late to disrupt the arrival of German reinforcement divisions.

### **After the Battle**

After Amiens, the RAF continued to adapt and innovate rapidly, incorporating lessons learned in order to improve efficiency. These included assigning No 73 Squadron's fighters to ground strafe anti-tank guns in future attacks and establishing a radio-equipped Central Information Bureau to collect information on ground targets from corps aircraft to direct ground- Strafing fighters using voice radio messages and also to use signals intelligence to detect and then ground-control fighters to intercept German aircraft. Another lesson highlighted by Slessor was to use intelligence and long-range air reconnaissance to plan second and third day objectives to isolate the battlefield. At Megiddo in Palestine in September 1918, General Sir Edmund Allenby and John Salmond's brother, Geoffrey, had identified before the attack likely Turkish escape routes and instigated planned 'shuttle' attacks to destroy a retreating Turkish Army at Wadi Fara.

The longer-term lessons for the RAF were that interdiction was more effective than costly close air support and that air power should be centrally controlled to enable concentration of force. These lessons, used by Slessor and others, eventually led to the formation of the tactical air forces of the Second World War, and this is perhaps the main legacy of the RAF's contribution to the Battle of Amiens.



