



# The Spire Sentinel



**The Newsletter  
of The  
Branch of The  
Front**



**& Magazine  
Chesterfield  
Western  
Association**

**ISSUE 97 - March 2024**

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



## Western Front Association Chesterfield Branch – Meetings 2024

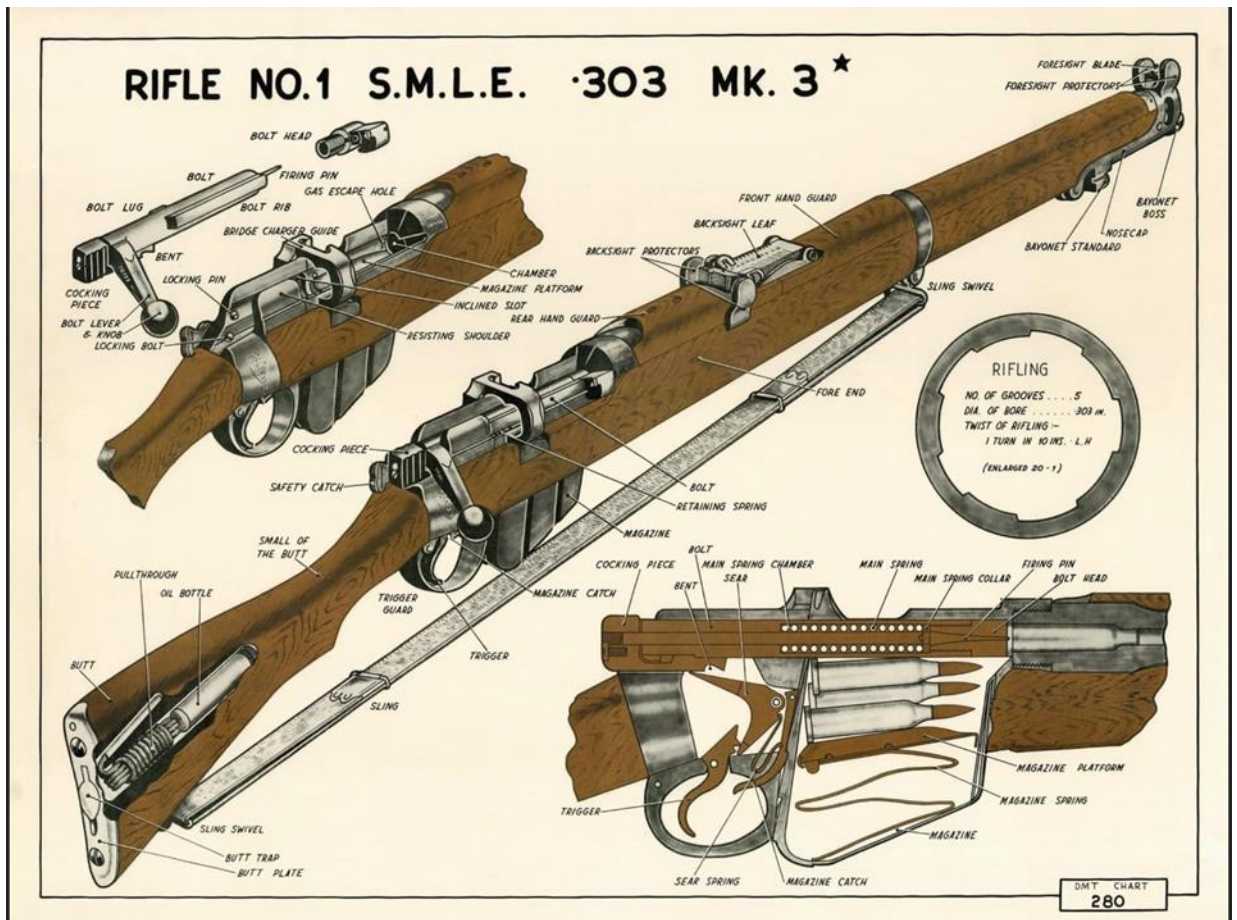
Meetings start at 7.30pm and take place at the Labour Club, Unity House, Saltergate, Chesterfield S40 1NF

January	9th	. AGM + `Finding My Roots` Jon-Paul Harding. ..tracing his Great Grandfathers in The Great War
February	6th	<b>Nobody Of Any Importance: A Foot Soldier's Memoir Of World War 1</b> by Phil Sutcliffe -“How his dad, Sam Sutcliffe, survived his frontline WW1 - in his own Memoir’s words”.
March	5th	<b>Murphy's Law on the Somme</b> by Andy Rawson. The talk covers the details of the learning process during the campaign and how what could go wrong, did go wrong. We look at the problems encountered and the solutions which were used to try and solve them.
April	2nd	'From Gaza to Jerusalem: the southern Palestine campaigns of 1917" by Stuart Haddaway
May	7th	"Audregnies Flank Guard Action 1914 " by Phil Watson
June	4th	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Battalion the Wiltshire Regiment in WW1</b> by Edwin Astill
July	2nd	<b>Legend of the Pilgrimages - Wilfred Pointon, Sherwood Foresters</b> By Bill Bryan
August	6th	Roy Larkin - <b>The Invisible Corps</b> takes a brief look at the Army Service Corps during WW1 through the use of mechanical transport. A story of growth, evolution, inter-service rivalry and meddling civilians.
September	3rd	Kevin Jepson ' <b>Project Fast Dog</b> ' - from Mark IV to Whippet'
October	1st	Paul Burkitt - Barlborough and Clowne - Villages at War
November	5th	<b>Peter Hart</b> topic to be advised
December	3rd	Hedley Malloch <b>Left Behind</b> - the fate of British soldiers trapped behind German lines in Belgium and France after the Retreat of 1914

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*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*





Dear Members and Friends,

Welcome to the issue 97 of our Branch Newsletter. It seems ages since we have had a meeting...what with February being in 2024 a Leap Year.

Next Tuesday we welcome Andy Rawson. *Murphy's Law on the Somme* The talk covers the details of the learning process during the campaign and how what could go wrong, did go wrong. Andy will look at the problems encountered and the solutions

which were used to try and solve them. Andy`s research is always meticulous so I am sure we will all learn something on the night.

Some news about regulars to our meetings. Terry Jackson and his wife Ann have attended branch meetings for as long as I can remember. Both are members of the Lancs and Cheshire Branch WFA and often made the journey in all weathers across the Pennines to attend. Terry, now over 75 has had to give up his driving licence and Ann, understandably doesn`t like travelling in the dark - I`m getting that way as well, if I`m honest - particularly with so many cars having these dazzling LED headlights.

Roger Avill another fixture in our front row is quite ill and I am sure you will all join with me in sending Roger our good wishes.

Trig Ellis and his wife Pat have been coming for years - they live just along the road from our venue. Sadly Pat passed away just before our February meeting after a long illness bravely borne and lovingly supported by Trig. She loved coming to meetings having a wee drink in the bar before and after the proceedings. She will be missed but we hope, in time to see Trig back amongst us.

Some better news now, the proposed Branch outing to Cannock is on - and we have enough numbers registered as wanting to go to enable Jane (Branch Treasurer) to book the minibus. Bookings are closed for now...but please let us know if you want to be contacted should anyone drop out. I will be contacting directly those who said they wanted to go to confirm, get mobile numbers etc.

Nest month we have Stuart Haddaway coming to give us this talk...'**From Gaza to Jerusalem: the southern Palestine campaigns of 1917**'. Stuart will be visiting Chesterfield branch for the first time but is not an unknown to us as he delivered an on line talk (jointly with Lincoln Branch) during the lockdowns when meetings in person were banned. I don`t recall us ever having a talk on this theatre of the war before at our Branch so it`s something new for all of us to look forward to.

On the same theme I picked up on Facebook a wonderful poem `The Anzac on the Wall` by JM Brown and have included it in this newsletter...quite a moving piece about a soldier who died during the charge of the Australian Light Horse at Beersheba in 1917...something Stuart Haddaway will no doubt touch on, on Tuesday

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at Chesterfield Labour Club on Tuesday - don`t forget for anyone with mobility problems and worried about attending we have a stair lift to whisk you up to our meeting room

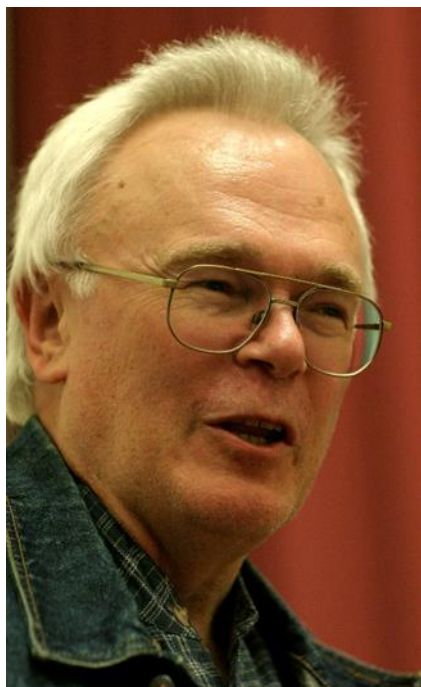
Best wishes to you all,

Grant

Grant Cullen Branch Secretary Chesterfield Branch - Western Front Association

07824628638

## February Meeting



Our February meeting speaker - Phil Sutcliffe - was a first time visitor to Chesterfield Branch and was accompanied by his wife and two friends who live in Sheffield. This talk was the first of a `double header` - he was due to give another talk on his father`s wartime experiences - this time his sojourn on Gallipoli in 1915 to John Beech`s East Midlands (Ruddington) Branch.

For our talk we asked Phil to give us the `full monty` .... Foot Soldier Sam`s war: Gallipoli, the Somme, the Spring Offensive, the POW months and beyond

Phil is a Londoner, born north, lives south. The span of years from his father Sam`s birth in 1898 to Phil`s reading at the February meeting, aged 76, is... quite a while! Phil is a retired freelance journalist who spent most of 40-odd years interviewing and writing about

rock and pop stars - Bruce Springsteen, Paul McCartney, Joni Mitchell, Kate Bush, the lamented Sinead and Shane etc.

Editing and self-publishing Sam`s WW1 Memoir for the centenary became his retirement project - all proceeds to the British Red Cross, more than £10,000 raised so far, see [www.footsoldiersam.co.uk](http://www.footsoldiersam.co.uk). Phil brought quite a few copies of his book and I`m pleased to say it was a `sell out`, indeed he took some orders to be posted on when he got back home.

Branch Chair, Jon Paul Harding introduced Phil to the attendees - a good number considering it was a wet, miserable night.

Phil related that there was even a blog dedicated to the World War One memoir written by Sam Sutcliffe an ordinary soldier who fought at Gallipoli, the Somme and Arras. He wrote `Nobody of Any Importance`...the title given by Sam himself - when in his 70s from his remarkable near total recall memory.

Sam served - mostly underage - first as private, then lance corporal, corporal then slipped back to private. Sam served on Gallipoli, the Somme, the in 1918 at Arras where he was captured seeing out the last 8 months of the war as a POW before being released at The Armistice arriving home in 1919.

Phil explained how he and his mother persuaded Sam to put everything that he remembered down on paper or on some occasions, recorded on reel to reel tapes. Subsequently Phil pulled all this together and published it in book form, copies of which were available for members to purchase on the night.



The first sentence in the book Sam says.... `May I say straight away...I became Nobody of any Importance` which became the title of the book.

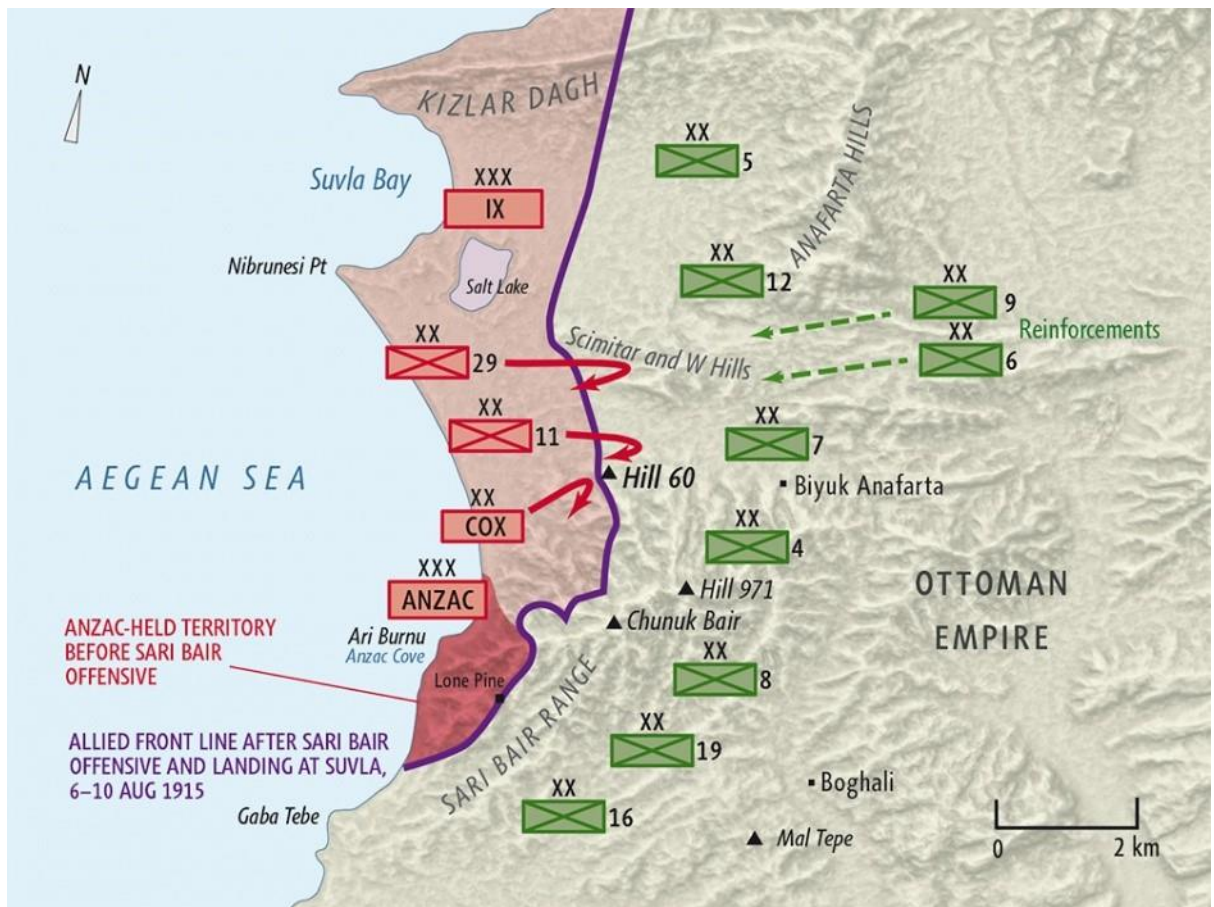
Sam was born in Salford in 1898 to a well to do family who ran an ornamental tile business. The company went bankrupt when Sam was three and the family moved to London where they lived in poverty during Sam`s childhood, finally settling in Edmonton. Sam, his three brothers and older sister grew up hungry. He liked school and had many friends around the tin church Mission Hall. When he was 11 or 12 he joined the then brand new Boy Scouts and also discovered a lifelong love of music and learned to play the piano

## Sam Sutcliffe

Despite being a bright lad, he had like his older brother Ted, to leave school at 14 as his parents could not afford to have him move to the next stage, becoming employed as a junior office boy at tin mining company near Liverpool Street. /he worked hard and watched a lot of the rich man`s high life around him and after two years often felt he was condemned to a life of hopelessness and frustration. Then 1914, Sam and brother Ted got `war fever`. On September 10<sup>th</sup> that feeling carries Sam, Ted and two pals to the London Regiment - Royal Fusiliers recruitment office. Sam was 16, Ted 18...and the enlistment age was 19. Inside he was given a rather cursory medical examination by a doctor which Sam recalled `he put his stethoscope to my chest , grabbed my scrotum and told me to cough`...followed by -

you`ll do! To the clerk, Sam`s well prepared lie came into play - age? - 19 - Date of Birth? - July 6<sup>th</sup> 1895. Then the clerk said `sign here` - and that was it, Sam was in. No proof of anything was required.

From September to January he did a lot of `square bashing` in London, then learned how to dig trenches, by way of building the capital`s defences south of Tonbridge. Sam didn`t train as a signaller or even get a rifle in his hands until that spring when they shipped out to Malta where they stayed for seven months during which time Sam became a signaller Lance Corporal and a first class shot. In August the battalion moved to Egypt where Sam visited the pyramids. After a month they left Egypt for the Greek island of Lemnos then on September 25<sup>th</sup> 1915 they boarded a lighter which put them ashore at Suvla Bay, Gallipoli.



Sam went on to graphically describe his first time under enemy fire, the noise, the smells and how, in pairs they followed their leader on to the beach, with Sam struggling with his 90lbs pack and signalling gear. Also described how he saw his first comrade killed - even when lying down to take cover - shot through the top of his head. For the next few days Signaller Sam and his mates were kept busy laying the wires linking company to company and on to Battalion HQ whilst under fire from the Anafarta hills above them, Sam soon concluded that their mission was doomed. Meanwhile he got to know more about his comrades - both officers and other

ranks...including Lt. Chowk, the battalion `dandy` whom Sam found one morning sitting behind some bushes in a hip bath! Suvla battlefield sanitation was another matter - sometimes of hilarity for the battlefield `Tommyes`. Latrines were screened with canvas..as Sam reported `their excretory movements accelerated by bullet and shell`.

From early November Sam ran a two man hill top signals post 24 hours a day, week after week and this wore him right down and he reported that fatigue and poor diet was reducing them to mere shadows of themselves. Then a sudden blizzard swept in from Siberia - out of the sauna....into the freezer.

With no food and no cover Sam and his signaller mate thought they would die of starvation and cold so Sam set off for Battalion HQ...when he arrived the whole area was flooded and men were standing about cold and wet in the biting wind. The men stood huddled together covered in groundsheets for warmth. The Quarter Master gave Sam two biscuits and some tea and when Sam got back to his post he found his mate, Harry about to be stretchered away with frostbite. Phil then quoted from Sam`s book about - remember he was only 17 - he tried to save another soldier shot through the lung - the first wounded man he had had to deal with.

In the end the Turks plus dysentery reduced his battalion from 1000 men to less than 200. His time on Gallipoli ended with evacuation on December 8<sup>th</sup> 1915 sailing back to Lemnos on the good ship `Redbreast`

One of his colleagues took up position near the bridge and sung a parody of the song `Moonlight Bay` ....

*We were sailing away from Suvla Bay*

*We can hear the Turks a singing*

*Please don`t go away*

*You are breakin` our hearts so please do stay*

*Not bloody likely boys...goodbye Suvla Bay*

Phil actually sang this parody and was rewarded with warm applause when he finished.

When they docked at Mudros, Sam said he felt weak and utterly wretched - a reaction to all they had endured...but then he got the best of surprises...some men were approaching...one of them was his brother Ted and they shared a very happy reunion. Then it was Christmas and they spent the day stuffing themselves with goodies from the parcels their families had sent.

Then in the early hours of Boxing Day came the unwelcome roar of a sergeant who woke us all from deep, beery sleep...soon they were on a small ship headed back to Gallipoli - V beach...where the old tramp steamer had been used as a landing ship



back in April 1915. The battalion was to be used in the final phase of the Gallipoli evacuation and they spent much of the next 12 days either under Turkish gunfire or, as on one occasion, being bombed by an aircraft. They weren't short of food this time as they feasted on abandoned officers stores. Finally, on the night of 6<sup>th</sup> / 7<sup>th</sup> January 1916 they left that dreaded peninsula, sailing first to Mudros and then back to Egypt this time for rest and recuperation and some light training at a tented encampment on the banks of the Nile.

April saw them take ship for Marseilles followed by a slow train north to a big base just outside Rouen. The battalion now numbered only 250 after Gallipoli but they looked upon themselves as a true 'Band of Brothers' and wanted the battalion brought back to full strength...but that didn't suit the army and the men were dispersed to other battalions and in May Sam was posted to the front not even having time to say goodbye to brother Ted. Sam was posted to the London Regiment - The Kensingtons - still bitter about the break up of his original battalion. In late May the Kensingtons went into the line relieving the Middlesex Regiment near Hebeuterne, Sam describing in his memoir his vivid memory of going up the line passing a massive concentration of British guns shelling the German lines. At first in the reserve trench, Sam felt the return of the old fearful trapped feeling. Although neither side made any attacks each night saw the men involved in advance trench digging which, with the noise they were making eventually brought down fire upon them from the German lines. Soon such unwanted exploits led to promotion to corporal and Sam appreciated the luxuries they never had on Gallipoli.

The Kensingtons then trained for 'The Great Day' as Sam 'The Piss Taker' described it and on June 30<sup>th</sup> moved south east reaching Hebeuterne at five past midnight on July 1<sup>st</sup> and the German bombardment began two hours later. Sam's company moved up to the handsomely revetted front line but some platoons had to creep out into the recently constructed advance trenches.

Phil then quoted from his dad's account stressing it was not a history book, rather events seen through one pair of eyes.

"..the whole area became an inferno of explosions and bullets when the kilted lads of the London Scottish advanced from the support trenches through our lines their numbers decreased alarmingly...at the same time our own advance position was being blown apart...pockets of survivors lost touch with their leadership. Some small groups did forge ahead until they too were dead, wounded or captured. Some dedicated officers achieved marvels within limits set by the powerful enemy but in the end this massively prepared attack failed with nothing gained in our sector, many good men were lost and many more strong men were reduced to shivering, old looking men"

The war diary reported that at 1pm, Sam's company commander Major Cedric Dickens, grandson of the great author, sent a runner to Battalion HQ....his message read...

“...shelling fearful trench practically untenable...full of dead and wounded, very few men left indeed request instructions and assistance...”

Eventually at 3am Dickens was ordered to withdraw and brought out the remaining 12 men - out of his company of 100 - that he could find.

This number did not include Phil`s father or other men who had become separated and not received orders had stayed out there in the advance trenches. The attack petered out towards dusk and this was what Sam saw...

“Our beautiful front line had become an uneven shallow ditch, I saw a Scot who, though unwounded just sat there and shook, his head nodded, his arms flailed feebly...one of our most physically strong men was crying non stop...possibly nervous shock but this afflicted everyone there to a greater or lesser degree. Under cover of darkness we searched for and found many wounded men...the joy with which they greeted their rescuers was reward indeed ”

Every night they continued the expeditions into no man`s land, first recovering the wounded, then just the dead.

That was Sam`s July 1<sup>st</sup> 1916....the Kensingtons suffered 59% casualties on the day...just about average across the front . The Somme battle raged until November 18<sup>th</sup> but Sam was moved out in late September although he did get a week`s home leave in August - after his father wrote to Lloyd George telling him his son hadn`t had home leave since January 1915. In September he was called in by his Sergeant-Major who told him that it had come to the army`s attention that he was under-age (he was 18 in July) and that he had to return to England until he turned 19. The RSM said he could fix it so that Sam could stay with his mates but by this time - as Sam said in the memoir - the war had `got right up his nose`

Back in `Blighty` he was posted to Harrogate in December 1916 although he did spend time in Sheffield hospitals fighting off the ravages of his time in the trenches. He did spend time in training at Clipstone in Nottinghamshire. In late 1917 he had to return to France , telling his parents he was convinced he would survive. Just before the German Spring Offensive of March 1918 he was with the Essex 2/7. According to the battalion war diary the battalion marched to Fampoux about 8km due east of Arras where they felt the brunt of the German attacks which Sam described vividly in his memoir . For the most part battalion discipline held but on one occasion during a bombardment it did not when one in five German shells were gas shells which resulted in Sam inhaling the toxic vapours before he could put his gas mask in place...thereafter as Sam recalled...`everything I ate or drank had a chemical foulness...`. At midnight 27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> March Signaller Sam took a one word coded order....`George` which sealed the 2/7ths fate...it meant resist the German attack to the last man..last bullet and that is exactly what they did....Sam...from his previous years` experience became a rifle firing automaton...a man killed or crippled for life...all caused by one man`s automatic action. Phil read from Sam`s

memoir of shooting German running across his line of fire...and the comrade to who stopped to help him.

The 2/7<sup>th</sup> Essex did indeed fight to last bullet...anda Battalion scroll - which Sam never saw..said the battalion fought one of the most heroic fights in its history and the 2/7<sup>th</sup> rearguard action did succeed in its objective by delaying the German advance whilst their comrades retreated.

Two nights later only 80 men remained fit to be counted at roll call, from the battalion, the rest dead, wounded...or like Phil`s father ...missing. That he wasn`t dead was down to the mercy of his enemy...utterly drained he climbed out of the trench and walked towards the advancing Germans. This what happened...

“...a line of Germans was charging in my direction, bayonets fixed...as they came closer I could see their faces..most of the boys like me. I just stood there and waited for it to happen...the clean thrust and goodbye....but the two Germans - young lads - smiled and swung past me...bless those lovely lads. In that moment Sam became a prisoner of war. See the record below.

He spent the next eight months as part of a travelling band of starving , dysentery ridden POWs shuttled around norther France and parts of Germany. They built a railway, unloaded barges, picked grapes, tended horses. From some guards they suffered brutalities but on occasions, unexpected kindnesses. Some prisoners forged friendships, others fought for food scraps but every day they grew weaker and filthier.

a)	202861	A Kie.	West Front.	20
b)	75. SUTCLIFFE	Gen. Essex.	Gavrelle. 28/3/1918.	1.7.98. Manchester.
c)	Charles	Regt.	Nicht Verw.	London.
	202867	G Kie.	West Front.	20

Form, No. 1972. Nebenblatt.  
Druck und Verlag G. Hainke & Co. Berlin S.W. 7, Neue Wilhelmstr. 13-14

At one camp, Sam often spent time at the wire hoping to talk to some front line German fighters, men who normally showed respect for Tommies. Once such kindly soul gave Sam a field card which said `I am well` ... `I am in hospital` etc to fill in. Sam scored out those parts which didn`t apply and handed it back to the kind young German - said thanks...but never expected it to be received.

On to November 11<sup>th</sup> 1918, armistice Day, Sam and his fellow POWs were in a village in Lorraine watching masses of German soldiers rushing east many wearing red communist armbands. Over the next 24 hours most of the camp guards disappeared

so Sam and his ragged comrades began the long trek westwards. Sam, physically weaker than most, he soon fell behind and walked alone for 4 or 5 days... 'I felt like the last man on earth' he said. Eventually he found his way to French trenches, tottering the last few hundred yards through a minefield. French and American soldiers moved him up to Nancy and at first nearly killed him by giving him big meals.

It was then he suffered a breakdown - in a French hospital 'squat' toilet...he said... 'I began to tremble violently, couldn't stop shaking...to complete the display of weakness I began to blubber like a kid...I was in a right mess but was brought back to bed by a kindly French soldier'

After that thanks to French, American and British medics he recovered sufficiently in that on December 10<sup>th</sup> 1918 he was allowed to return to England.

Almost his entire military career is annotated on this pension form.

Report		Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, etc. during active service, as reported on Army Form B.211, Army Form A.38, or in other official documents. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place of Casualty	Date of Casualty	Remarks Taken from Army Form B.211, Army Form A.38, or other official documents
Date	From whom received				
1.4.18	O. & G. French Regt	Missing	Hampshire, Wessex	29.9.18	R.213
13.9.18	War Office	Prisoner of War at Panzhuin	Gumany		P. M. 512. 01810 - 84
		Base 1.10.18			Captain TOP
	Genl Dept. War	Reinstated to rank of Captain	G.H.C. 3rd ECH. 1001		WARLEY
15.2.19.	sepr.	2nd home command Patch 100th Coy R.C.			Asst. Officer No 2 Records WARLEY
	3rd ECH. R.C.	Wrote Lt A524 & 27.1.19 Placed to Defob. under	Warley	15.2.19	
ambodies on Demobilization		GC 1209/14 W/R for 30/5/19			
Date	6.1.19	Hampshire		01/10/19	01/19
Signature		Home: 10.9.14 - 9.1.15. 14.4			
		Home: 10.9.15 - 24.2.15. 2.3			
		Home: 25.2.15 - 16.6.16. 2.35			
		Home: 22.7.16. 16.6.16. 1.86			
		Home: 20.10.16 - 19.2.18. 1.75			
		Home: 20.2.18 - 27.3.18. 3.6			
		Home: 28.3.18 - 9.12.19. 2.87			
		Home: 10.12.18 - 6.5.19. 1.68			
Home Address		21, 7, 4, me St			
		2, 4, 21, 23/506. Pension Service			
		2 yrs. 239			
Certified all casualties duly entered from all records in my possession					
17.9.19					
1/0 No 2 Records, WARLEY.					

So, home to Edmonton, at last, pausing in front of the front door...ringing the bell...to be greeted by his mother. Over that first Marmite cuppa we discussed everything that came to mind. One thing she told him was that the family had been given hope he was still alive despite having heard nothing for months for back in

September the postman had delivered that card given to him by that kindly German soldier.

When Sam got home brother Ted was still stationed in Flanders with a Royal Engineers observer group but in January 1919 he was allowed a weeks` special home leave.



The brothers yarned away for hours - but all was not well with Ted..his breathing was laboured and he had a dry cough. The war was over, but he would be killed by the delayed effect of poison gas. Ted died of TB in January 1922 he was only 25.

Phil went on to say that he was named after `Ted` ...his real name was Phillip - `Ted` being a family nickname.13

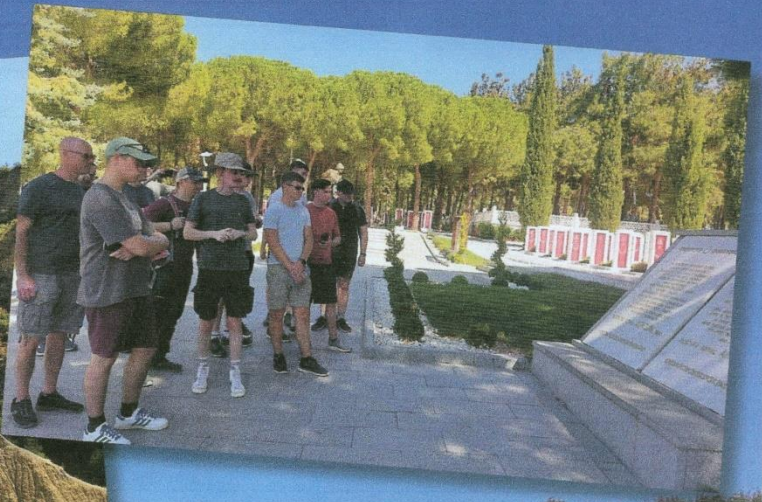
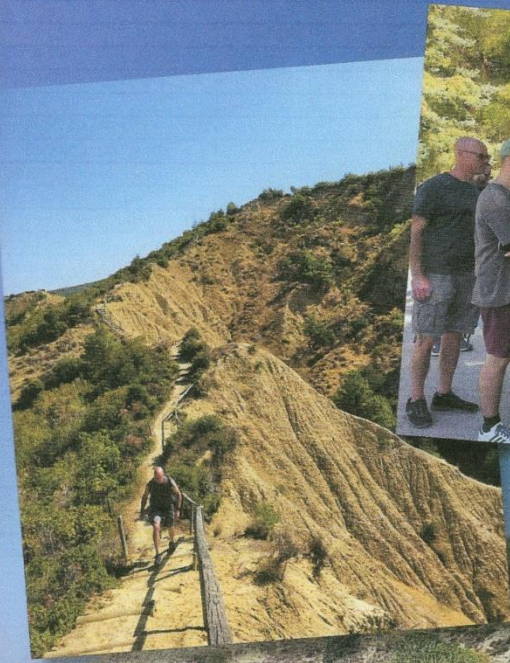
On May 6<sup>th</sup> Sam was demobbed - no more war - no more uniforms.

And so Phil`s presentation ended. After the obligatory Q & A session - almost as interesting as the talk itself...Phil concluded being warmly thanked not only by the Branch Chair Jon Paul but the assembled members.

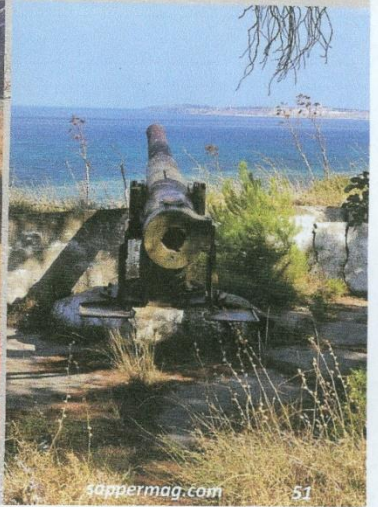
XX

We are delighted to announce the winners and runners up of The Western Front Association PhD Grant Scheme 2024. The judging panel would like to thank all of those who took the time to enter the scheme. The majority of submissions were extremely high quality and the results were decided only by the finest of margins. The winners and runners up cover a vast range of topics and themes, showing how diverse the study of the Great War is. As part of their award, the recipients will write a piece for The WFA based on their research, something which all members can look forward to. **Winners (And Recipients Of £2,000)**Beth Wyatt (University of Northumbria) 'Cultures of Care in Britain's Country House Hospitals, 1914-1919' Srijita Pal (University of Southern California) 'The War within the War: The 1918 Influenza Pandemic on the Western Front of the First World War'

**Runners Up (And Recipients Of £1,000)**Nicole Chicarelli (University of Birmingham) 'Photographic Technology and the Transformation of the British Army in the First World War, 1914-1918', Patrick Taylor (Anglia Ruskin University) 'The Reintegration of shell-shocked men throughout Australia and Britain after the First World War' Christopher Batten (University College London) 'Class and Civilian Internment in Britain and the Empire, 1914-1928'



# Dhow Reflect



**E**x Dhow Reflect, a Battlefield Study organised by 13 Geographic Squadron of 42 Engineer Regiment (Geographic), to learn and understand the overarching campaign in Gallipoli amidst the First World War. The study was led by a true expert in the field; Mr Peter Hart, the author of many military history books detailing British involvement in the war, including Gallipoli. Bulent was a local guide who assisted Peter and their impressive combination of expertise and delivery made learning about the campaign thoroughly enjoyable and easy to understand for all attendees.

Travelling to the heart of the campaign itself, we explored the Gallipoli peninsula, visiting various sites that were touched by the war as well as the memorials and monuments erected by both the Allies and Turkish government. Though the First World War ended in a victory for the Allies, the Gallipoli campaign was a decisive defeat and remains a massive symbol for Turkish national pride.

The study was broken down into several case studies covering key locations of the campaign. At each stand, Peter and Bulent took us through events with a focus on terrain and the critical importance of accurate mapping. Peter had interviewed numerous survivors who had been at the forefront of the disastrous campaign during his research, and hearing their words while retracing their steps allowed us to reflect and better appreciate the horrific conditions and situations they were faced with.

Firstly, to witness the severity of the war we were taken to the Helles Memorial on the southernmost point of the peninsula. The site overlooked V Beach as well as a fort used by the Ottoman Empire which still stands to this day. The Memorial commemorates the 20,885 Commonwealth Forces that lost their lives in the campaign. We explored W Beach which the British forces used as a local Corps Headquarters. We also travelled to the French memorial commemorating the lost lives of the two French Divisions who had joined the British excursion, as well as the Helles Turkish memorial, both of which were striking and hauntingly beautiful.

On our second day of Helles, we hiked up Gully Ravine which acted as a gigantic communication trench up to the front lines of the campaign. It was one of the major evacuation points for the wounded, and there is still evidence of human occupation at that stage of the war with rusted ration tins and old ammunition.

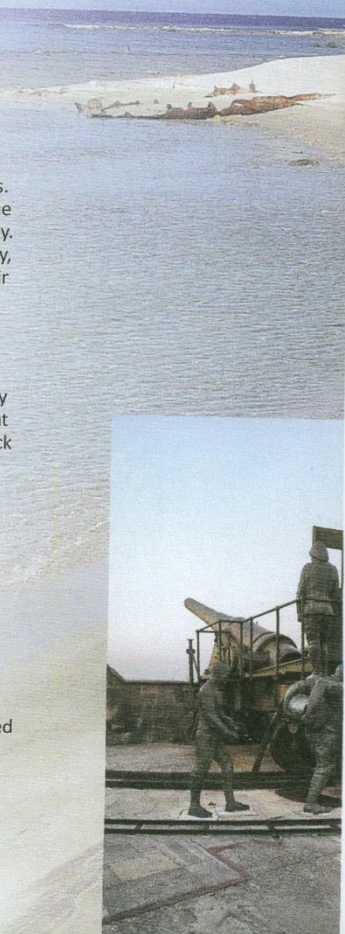
Anzac Cove was the landing site for the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC), and the destination for the following two days where we traced the routes taken by the Anzacs in their disastrous attempt to capture and control Mal Tepe. These days had us hike up the hills visiting various memorials dedicated to the Anzacs starting at Beach Cemetery, described by Peter Hart as one of the most beautiful cemeteries he had seen. His description did not disappoint, and what lay before us was a secluded cemetery that looked over the beach and ultimately the sea. From here we climbed up, taking in the views that the high ground gifted us. We saw the Anzac posts of interlocking posts, culminating in the legendary Quinn's Post and the opposing trenches of the Turkish Chessboard, that lay above the fittingly named Shrapnel Valley. We continued retracing the route, walking through trenches that still scar the terrain to this day, before arriving at the lone Turkish memorial commemorating the 57th Regiment who held their own against the Anzacs.

Our second day at Anzac featured further memorials dotted about the region where the Anzacs and Turkish forces fought, as well as visiting the communications trenches which stretched 17km across the landscape and hiking along the Rhododendron Ridge. We learned from our Turkish guide, that at Conkbayiri, the future founder of Turkey Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had his life saved by his pocket watch, stopping a piece of shrapnel. In the high afternoon heat we crossed a ravine that emphasized the true torment that the individuals over 100 years ago must have faced in their thick clothing, carrying kit, moving at pace and under fire in utter chaos.

The penultimate day was spent at Kumkale, focusing on the failed naval invasions through the straights and two forts that were built centuries ago by Mehmet II, the Ottoman Emperor. These forts were later incorporated into the Ottoman modern naval defences either side of the Hellespont. Kale-i Sultaniye, the fortress on the Asian side, is now a museum that holds many historical finds of the Gallipoli campaign, with a dedication to Piri Reis, a famous admiral and cartographer during the Renaissance, who paved the way for us as Geographic Technicians. This small region alone saw a vast number of casualties sustained on both sides and remains an area of huge importance for the Turkish people to this day. Much of their local infrastructure, hospitals and schools are named after this day, and on the European side there is a large carving in the hills warning invaders not to step onto the land.

Our final day led us to the Salt Lake at Suvla, and included a trip to a fresh water well, engineered by our forebears in the Corps. We paid our respects at the Lala Baba memorial cemetery and visited the Canadian memorial to the Newfoundlanders who lost their lives in the campaign. Later, up on the renowned Green, Chocolate, Scimitar and W Hills, we took advantage of the brilliant vantage points over the peninsula to bring the whole week of learning and reflection together. *Sapper Turner, 13 Geographic Squadron, 42 Engineer Regiment (Geographic)*

**'Peter had interviewed numerous survivors who had been at the forefront of the disastrous campaign during his research, and hearing their words while retracing their steps allowed us to reflect and better appreciate the horrific conditions and situations they were faced with.'**



# ROD OF STEEL

## THE RAILWAY OPERATING DIVISION

The steel in the headline above could refer to trains, rails... or courage. **Hugh Heaton** and **Rex Carver** trace the history of the Railway Operating Division of the Royal Engineers and the locomotives it used.



**T**HE Railway Operating Division of the Royal Engineers was created in 1915 to build and run railways to and from the battlefields of northern France. In the early months of the war, it had naturally been assumed by the British that the French and Belgian railway administrations would operate the lines on their own territory and no thought was given to sending British locomotives or rolling stock across the Channel.

However, as the Great War dragged on, it became clear that the French were losing heart at the amount of stock being lost to enemy action and they began to insist that the British army provide more rail transport to serve the Western Front, part of their justification for that appearing to be that most of the soldiers fighting on it were from the British Empire!

The other reason for the creation of the ROD was the fact that thousands of British railwaymen were volunteering to

join the army and so were serving (and dying) as infantrymen in the trenches when it would have made more sense for their professional skills to be put to good use by the army in a railway context.

At home in Britain, a start was being made on tackling the problem of lost railway skills by

with technical knowledge of railway operations or construction to the Royal Engineers – a tactic that became easier after introduction of conscription in 1916.

The task of the ROD was to operate and maintain routes to support the 120-mile Western Front that separated the Allied and

routes from the Channel ports to the railheads was one part of the division's job. The other was to run the intricate network of 60cm gauge lines that linked the railheads to the front itself and which were crucial in the conveyance of men and supplies to the trenches (see separate article on page 28). The sappers also worked on civil engineering duties and rolling stock maintenance.

Documents released after the war seem to indicate that the French and Belgians, while claiming motive power shortages, were actually keeping many of their best locomotives in store well away from the battle zones, which was exacerbating the situation. So the UK Government was forced to buy, hire, borrow or requisition engines and rolling stock from British main line railway companies in the short term while manufacturers worked flat-out to build new locos and vehicles.

Unsurprisingly, many of the wagons supplied by the railway

**“A Midland Railway 0-6-0 was captured by the Germans and used against the British before being returned to Derby after the war.”**

classifying many such jobs as reserved occupations and giving the men who did such work badges stating ‘On Railway Service’ to prevent ill-informed civilians presenting them with white feathers implying cowardice.

The formation of the Railway Operating Division enabled army recruiting sergeants to send men

German troops. They handled southbound trains of munitions and materials from Britain, troop trains of soldiers heading or returning to the battle zone, plus leave and ambulance trains taking troops away from the ‘crimson fields’.

Operation of the standard gauge lines to provide arterial





**ABOVE:** Replacement of bridges wrecked by shelling or mined by retreating enemy troops was one of the tasks of the Royal Engineers. Gingerly crossing a temporary structure at Velu while the Battle of Cambrai rages nearby in November 1917 is ROD No. 3412, an LNWR 'Coal Engine'. Built at Crewe in 1878, it has gained a stovepipe chimney and a 2,500-gallon tender to increase its operating range. IWM



**LEFT:** Royal Engineers pose proudly in front of No. 1983, one of the many Robinson-designed 2-8-0s operated by the ROD in the First World War.

**FAR LEFT:** The fact that an overseas war engine built in 1917 to a 1911 design survived long enough in service to find its way to the relative sanctuary of Dai Woodham's Barry scrapyard was indeed a fortuitous piece of fate. Now owned by the Great Western Society and nearing its own centenary, No. 5322 can be seen in steam at the Bodmin & Wenford Railway this summer, albeit in BR black livery. S BURDETT

companies were old and of small capacity, equipped with grease-filled axleboxes and devoid of continuous brakes. It is likely that they were chosen because they could be spared.

The same comment could just as easily apply to some of the engines offered to the military, including the very low power SECR Wainwright 'P' class 0-6-0 tanks used for shunting at ports, and the LNWR 17-inch goods engines despatched (like the LSWR 395 class) to Palestine, where they were to prove woefully inadequate.

Sources disagree on the exact numbers of standard gauge locos transhipped, but the total was well in excess of 500, sent by 13 British railway companies. They were (with the approximate total of engines in brackets): LNWR (111), GWR (73), MR (78), LSWR (50), NER (50), GER (43), GCR (33), GNR (26), LYR (32), NBR (25), CR (25), LBSCR (12) and SECR (11).

Among the classes sent were:

- GCR 9J 0-6-0s (LNER J11)
- GCR 8A 0-8-0s (LNER Q4)
- GER Y14 0-6-0s (LNER J15)
- GNR J4 0-6-0s (LNER J3)
- GWR 388 class 0-6-0s
- GWR 23XX class 0-6-0s
- GWR 4300 class 2-6-0s
- LNWR 0-6-0 17" Goods Engines
- LNWR 0-8-0 class G
- LBSCR E4 0-6-2Ts
- LCDR 'T' 0-6-0Ts
- MR Kirtley double-frame 0-6-0s
- NBR C class 0-6-0s (LNER J36)
- NER 'T' class 0-8-0s (LNER Q5)
- SECR 'P' class 0-6-0Ts
- LSWR 395 class 0-6-0
- LYR Class 27 0-6-0
- CR Class 294 "Jumbo" 0-6-0

The ROD itself owned a further 1,025 standard gauge locomotives acquired from various sources. With the fleet totals in brackets, these were: Robinson 2-8-0 (521), Baldwin 2-8-0 (150), Baldwin 2-6-2T (100), Baldwin 4-6-0 (70), Baldwin 0-4-0T (70), Baldwin 0-6-0T (50), Canadian Loco Co 2-8-0 (40), Dutch State Railways 4-6-4T (14) and New

South Wales Railways 2-8-0 (10).

Perhaps the cheekiest purchase by the British Government was the last named... of 10 D50 class 2-8-0s that had just been built by Beyer, Peacock & Co for the New South Wales Government Railways of Australia. They were commandeered by the War Office for the ROD, used intensively with very little maintenance, then offered to New South Wales at a price higher than that originally negotiated for the new engines! Unsurprisingly, the Australians rejected the offer and the orphan D50s were sold for operation in Belgium.

A large proportion of engines used by the ROD were former Belgian State Railways machines, of various classes, but chiefly of the 0-6-0 freight type. Some had unusual Belgian-style square chimneys.

Altogether, 1,534 locomotives were used by the Railway Operating Division at one time or another. In fact, so large was its operation and network that no

fewer than 50 engine sheds or maintenance points were established or requisitioned for ROD use on the continental mainland.

The division even had its own locomotive works – a large plant at St Etienne-du-Rouvray, which repaired ROD locos and in the later stages of the war was heavily involved in erecting new American-built 2-8-0s that had been constructed by Baldwin and other US manufacturers and shipped over in kit form.

To begin with, the 600 or so locos requisitioned from the 13 British railway companies were sufficient for the purposes of the ROD and the British Expeditionary Force it was supporting, but as the war dragged on, it became clear that a powerful type of standard locomotive was required, hence the adoption of the Great Central Railway Class 8K.

These John Robinson-designed 'Consolidations' were ordered by the Ministry of Munitions (MM) ▶



# RAILWAYS AT WAR 1914-18

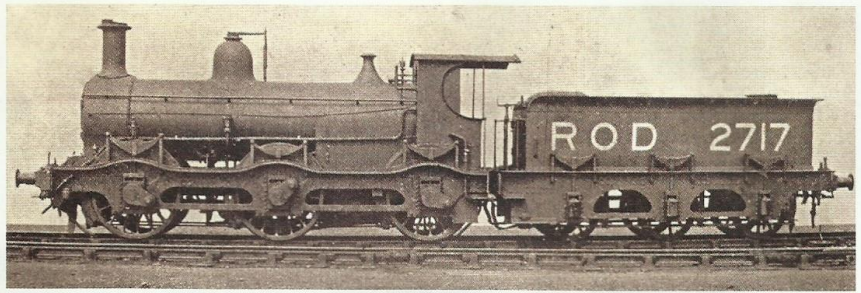
for service in France and apart from steel fireboxes were externally almost identical to their GCR cousins, the fitting of a couple of jacks at the front (for re-railing purposes) often being the only way to tell them apart at a distance.

The first orders for all-new additions to the class for exclusive ROD use were placed by the Government relatively late in the war – February 1917. Further orders continued to be placed until more than 500 engines had been built, the final ones being turned out after the war to compensate for the end of munitions manufacture.

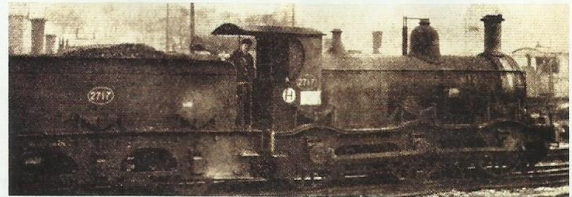
They were nicknamed “MMs” or “Military Marys” by some locomen) and 521 were built by five manufacturers – North British (369), Robert Stephenson & Co (82), Kitson (32), Nasmyth Wilson (32) and the GCR’s own Gorton Works (six, three of which the GC retained for its own use). Of the total fleet, 311 saw service overseas.

After the war, the Government had difficulty disposing of so many locomotives (a few were sold but most railways were only interested in taking them on loan in view of the forthcoming Grouping). By 1923, there were more than 450 standing at dumps in various parts of the country, the largest being Queensferry, Scotland, with 198 engines, but the locos were eventually sold to the LNER, the LMS, the GWR and a handful of private customers in China and Australia.

Locomotives built in the USA and Canada to the order of the British Government included Baldwin-built 0-4-0 and 2-6-2



**ABOVE and RIGHT: Prisoner of war: Midland Railway 0-6-0 No. 2717 was captured by the Germans and used behind enemy lines until being found by liberating forces in 1918. The rare picture on the right is believed to show it in use in Germany in 1917. P MARSH COLLECTION**



saddle tanks, Baldwin 4-6-0s and 2-8-0s and Canadian Loco Co 2-8-0s. Most were sold to Belgian and French railways after the war, as were a greater number of North American-built engines that belonged to the American Expeditionary Force rather than to the British army.

The work of locomotives during the war is patchily recorded, but they were basically used to haul trains of troops and horses, food and equipment, railway construction materials, ambulance trains and, under cover of darkness, tanks and rail-mounted guns.

Midland Railway 0-6-0 No. 2717 made a unique form of history by being captured by the Germans during the Battle of

Cambrai in November 1917. For the next five months, it was used by the enemy as a machine gun post in ‘No Man’s Land’.

When the enemy retreated, they rather surprisingly took the British engine with them and put it through a repair programme, patching up the frames, boiler cladding, safety valve casing and dome cover. In addition, it received steel boiler tubes, ash sprays for the smokebox and ashpan, a new side-hinged firehole door and cast iron spectacle frames in place of the original brass ones. It was then put to work on military railway duties in occupied Belgium.

In November 1918, during the great allied advance that brought an end to the war, No. 2717 was

found by two British army colonels, one of whom had by a curious coincidence been an engineering pupil with the Midland Railway at Derby. They ensured that the 1871-built ‘prisoner of war’ was returned to the care of the ROD, which then used it to haul the first troop train between Mons and the German frontier.

After the hostilities, it was returned to Britain, where its new-found celebrity status ensured that it became the last of its class in service with the LMS, amassing a remarkable 1,223,630 miles before its withdrawal in December 1932. Today, such a celebrity engine would almost certainly be preserved, but sadly the war veteran was unceremoniously



**LEFT: This unusual photograph shows one of the few non-steam examples of ROD motive power.**

The shattered trees on the embankment bear witness to the fact that this area near Bazentin was won from the Germans in fierce fighting on the Somme battlefield only three months earlier and the petrol-powered locomotive is coupled to a track-relaying train. Twenty of these small petrol engines had been ordered by the War Office for service close to the trenches in the hope that their lack of exhaust would make them less noticeable to the enemy, but they proved problematical and unreliable.

The photograph is additionally interesting in that its location is recorded; many pictures taken during the First and Second World Wars were simply captioned ‘somewhere in France’ or even ‘somewhere in England’ and not all were elaborated upon once the hostilities were over.

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM



Mishaps on the Western Front were frequent, caused by direct artillery hits or by damaged track. Robinson 2-8-0 No. 1859 is passed by Baldwin 1328 at an unrecorded location. IWM

scrapped. Its shrapnel-damaged dome cover is said to have been displayed at Derby for a while.

The North Eastern and North British railways had a greater sense of occasion and decorated their returning heroes. The NER painted its 'T' class 0-8-0s with sergeants' chevrons, while the NBR painted Great War names on the splashers of its 'C' class 0-6-0s. Those humble goods engines thus bore the names of generals such as Maude, Joffre and Haig, and the names of battles like Mons and Ypres, well into British Railways days.

Locomotives seconded from British railway companies weren't restricted to the Western Front. Some were sent to the Eastern theatres of war (which included Mesopotamia, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq and the Salonika-Serbian lines). Among them were Adams 0-6-0s of the London & South Western Railway, but so far as is known, none of this LSWR batch ever returned to the UK; indeed, four Middle East-bound engines were at first reported as lost at sea when the ship carrying them, the *Arabic*, was torpedoed, but all but one of the locos was later noted in use overseas, so historians believe the reports concerning these

engines to be a myth. Perhaps the best-known form of First World War locomotive is the 'Dean Goods' 0-6-0 of the Great Western Railway. A total of 62 of these Class 23XX engines were sent to France in 1917 and at first were largely deployed in handling ammunition trains from Boulogne to Zenehem and Audruicq, duties that required a loco at each end of the train. They were later dispersed more widely and in 1918 a batch of 16 were shipped to Salonika,

two later being sold to the Ottoman Railway. Those and six others never returned to Britain.

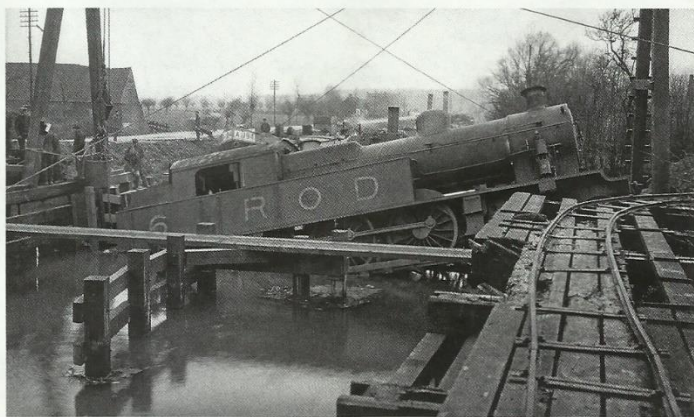
Less well-known is the fact that the GWR also sent members of its Class 388 'Armstrong Goods' 0-6-0 tender engines overseas. Half a dozen went to Serbia in 1916 and 16 were shipped to Salonika the following year, although eight were lost at sea en route. The Ottoman Railway took four into stock after the war.

The Great Western also sent to

France, in 1917, 11 brand new 53XX 2-6-0 Moguls, which arrived at the ROD's main depot in Audruicq without ever having turned a wheel in traffic in England. For many months they put in excellent service on supply trains weighing up to 1,000 tons between Les Fontinettes marshalling yard in Calais, and the railheads around Hazebrouck.

One, No. 5322, has survived in preservation, having been rescued from Barry scrapyard after its

**Among new locos requisitioned by the ROD were some big 4-6-4Ts being built for the Dutch State Railways by Beyer, Peacock of Manchester. ROD No. 6 has fallen into a canal in Flanders and is pictured in the process of recovery. After the war, it worked in France, lasting until 1952.**  
RAIL ARCHIVE  
STEPHENSON





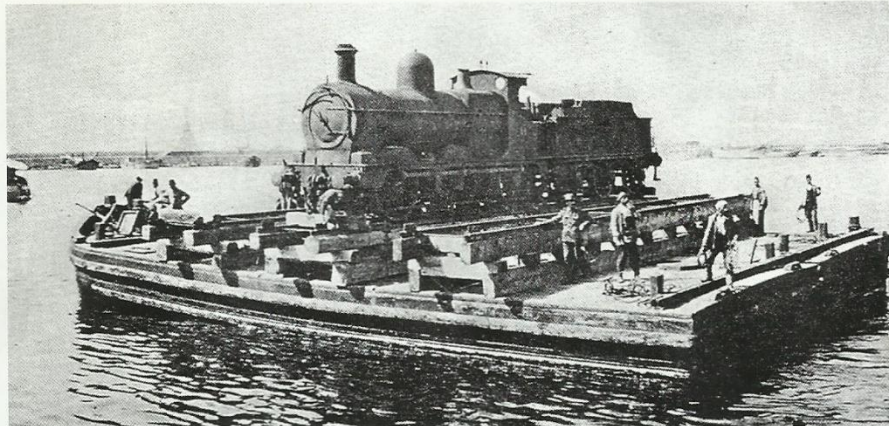
# RAILWAYS AT WAR 1914-18

withdrawal from BR in the 1960s, and until a few months ago was sporting khaki livery and WD lettering at the Great Western Society's Didcot Railway Centre.

Also suited well to the heaviest trains were the eight-coupled 'G' class locomotives sent by the London & North Western Railway. Those 0-8-0 tender engines were employed mainly in the Hazebrouck-Calais area and did sterling work on heavy ammunition and supply trains before being shipped back to Crewe at the end of the war via the Calais-Richborough train ferry.

Other LNWR engines despatched for service in northern France and other overseas locations included Webb 0-6-0 'Coal Engines', some of which found their way to Egypt. Those were mainly restricted to shunting duties, however, as their small tenders necessitated frequent calls for water.

The Midland Railway lent 78 of its Class 700 double-framed goods engines, including the aforementioned No. 2717 of German notoriety, and some of this batch found their way as far south as Italy. William Willox, editor of *The Railway Magazine* from 1932 to 1942, rode in a troop train that was double-headed out of Taranto by two such engines in 1918, but it is not known whether they were war loan engines or members of a batch of 50 such locos that had been sold to the Italian State Railway eight years before the war began.



Strange but true: In order to get Great Western Railway 'Dean Goods' 0-6-0s to Macedonia for use by the British Salonika Force, the locomotives had to be ferried across the Bosphorus on makeshift barges from Sirkedji, the terminus on the European side, to Haider Pacha on the Asiatic side. Once safely on terra firma, they were taken to Constantinople for use by the British Army on the Ottoman Railway. H F PRYTHORCH / GREAT WESTERN TRUST COLLECTION

Considering the dreadful treatment the war locos received in terms of minimal maintenance, rough track and frequent derailments (not to mention the constant risk of battering from exploding shells), the number of locomotives damaged beyond repair was remarkably small, although one Midland Class 700 had to be scrapped at Derby in 1920 as a result of suffering broken frames during its war service.

The Caledonian Railway and the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway sent 25 and 32 engines respectively, all of the 0-6-0 tender type. At least one of the CR

contingent is known to have found its way into Germany after the war, for it was reported at Cologne Hauptbahnhof in July 1919.

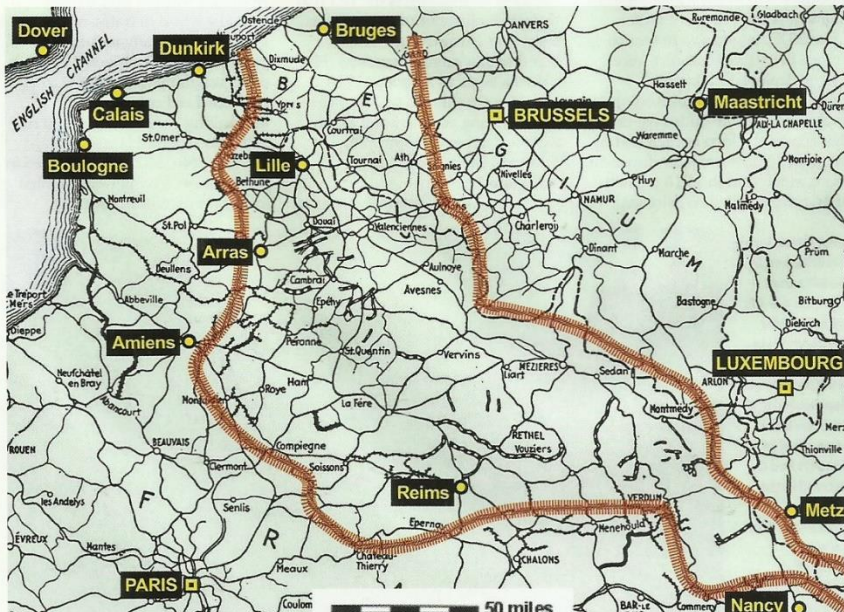
Among the railways that later became part of the LNER group, the North Eastern and the Great Central sent the largest batches of locomotives to France. Unlike the Midland and LNWR, which had only felt able to spare old-timers built in the 1880s, the GCR sent 50 'T' class 0-8-0s built between 1901 and 1912.

Because of their reliability, good adhesion qualities and large tenders, these engines were popular with the ROD crews and were

largely employed on heavy stone trains from the Marquise quarries, between Calais and Boulogne.

The Great Central locomotives consisted of two types; 15 Class 8A 0-8-0s and 18 of the famous "Pom Pom" 0-6-0s.

The Great Northern Railway's contribution of six-coupled tender engines was relatively small but powerful, and some were coupled to larger tenders than they had worked with in England. They were mainly engaged on shunting duties at the various large yards in northern France, such as Vendroux-Les Attaques, where their excellent braking power proved useful.



This map of the railways in the main First World War battlefield area in northern France shows how the war stagnated into one of attrition. The two broad lines mark the widest points of the front lines between 1914 and 1918.

## Condenser

Some of the GNR engines were also fitted with apparatus enabling their exhaust to either be passed into the tender tank for condensation or emitted low down behind the tender, both of which had the benefit of making them less conspicuous to the enemy when engaged on runs close to the front line. The condenser apparatus also allowed the locos to remain out in the field for far longer than would normally be the case.

Although the risk of invasion of the British mainland in the First World War was slight, two Ivatt Class N1 0-6-2Ts (Nos. 1587 and 1590) were bought from the Great Northern Railway by the War Office for incorporation into armoured trains (see panel on page 53 for details of these and Second World War armoured trains).

The Great Eastern Railway sent 43 of its lightweight, but sturdy, Y14 class 0-6-0s (later LNER J15s), which proved particularly useful on poorly laid tracks. Among the duties they



A Midland Railway 0-6-0, ROD No. 2723, crosses a substantial wooden trestle bridge built by the Royal Engineers to re-connect the docks and marshalling yard at Dunkirk, WWI

undertook were haulage of stock from the train ferry at Calais East Quay to the various local depots.

Six-coupled tank engines were clearly the type of locomotive the ROD preferred in the early days.

Of the companies that would later become part of the Southern group, the LSWR was by far the most supportive, supplying 50

locomotives compared with the LBSCR's 14 and the SECR's 10.

Two of the South Eastern & Chatham Railway diminutive 'P' class 0-6-0Ts were sent to France, arriving in May 1915, but their small size and low strength rendered them unsuitable even for shunting the docks at Boulogne and they were returned to the UK

in October 1916 to be replaced by the SECR 'T' class.

Finally, there were the 14 E4 class 0-6-2 tender engines lent by the London Brighton & South Coast. Apart from dock shunters, these were the only British tank engines sent to France. The War Office had asked for tender locos, but the LBSCR needed those to

fulfil its other war duties moving military traffic on the south coast of England.

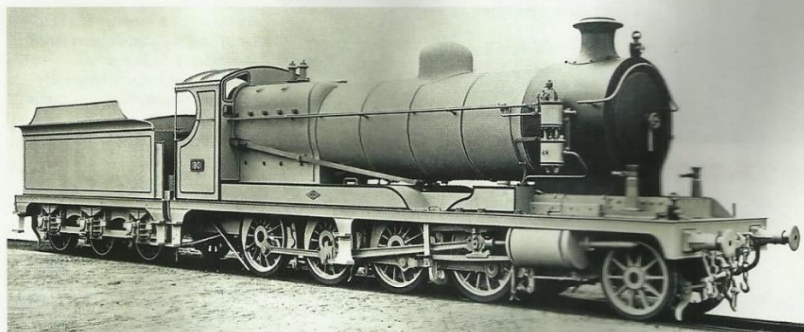
After the war, some of the E4s were used to work Nord Railway passenger train for several months before finally being shipped home.

Records of which British ports all these various companies' locos were shipped from are sketchy, but it appears that the majority were sent from docks such as Liverpool, Avonmouth and Cardiff rather than on the more vulnerable cross-Channel train ferries... although the Calais-Richborough ferry was used for bringing many of the engines back once the war was over – the purpose-built military port of Richborough, in Kent, having opened in 1917/18.

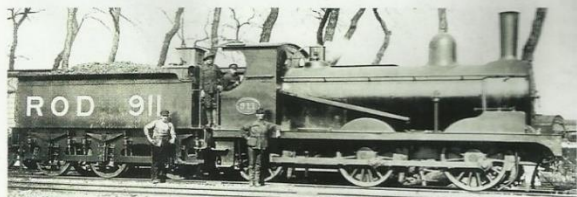
Of the pre-Grouping engines used by the ROD in France, four survive today on heritage railways. They are GWR 2-6-0 No. 5322 at Didcot, NBR 0-6-0 No. 673 *Maudie* (Bo'ness) and SECR 'P' class 0-6-0Ts Nos. 27 (Bluebell) and 753 (Kent & East Sussex).

There are also four Robinson 2-8-0s in existence, one on the Great Central Railway and three in non-operational condition in Australia.

Their survival is a fitting tribute in this First World War centenary year and a lasting memorial to the many railwaymen who fell during the conflict.



**ABOVE:** An official North British Loco Co photo of the first GCR-style 2-8-0 built new for the ROD, No. 1801, in August 1917. Note the re-railing jacks above the bufferbeam.



**LEFT:** GER Y14 No. 911 in France in 1919. It later became BR No. 65405 and ran for 40 more years.

## THE ANZAC ON THE WALL - By JM Brown



*I wandered through a country town, 'cos I had some time to spare,  
And went into an antique shop to see what was in there.  
Old Bikes and pumps and kero lamps, but hidden by it all,  
A photo of a soldier boy - an Anzac on the Wall.  
'The Anzac have a name?' I asked. The old man answered 'No'.  
The ones who could have told me mate, have passed on long ago.  
The old man kept on talking and, according to his tale,  
The photo was unwanted junk bought, from a clearance sale.  
'I asked around', the old man said, 'but no-one knows his face,  
He's been on that wall fifty years... Deserves a better place.  
For some-one must have loved him, so it seems a shame somehow.'  
I nodded in agreement and then said, 'I'll take him now.'  
My nameless digger's photo, well it was a sorry sight  
A cracked glass pane and a broken frame - I had to make it right  
To prise the photo from its frame I took care just in case,  
Cause only sticky paper held the cardboard back in place.  
I peeled away the faded screed and much to my surprise,  
Two letters and a telegram appeared before my eyes  
The first reveals my Anzac's name, and regiment of course  
John Mathew Francis Stuart - of Australia's own Light Horse.  
This letter written from the front... My interest now was keen  
This note was dated August seventh 1917*

'Dear Mum, I'm at Khalasa Springs not far from the Red Sea  
They say it's in the Bible - looks like a Billabong to me.  
'My Kathy wrote I'm in her prayers... she's still my bride to be  
I just can't wait to see you both, you're all the world to me.  
And Mum you'll soon meet Bluey, last month they shipped him out  
I told him to call on you when he's up and about.'  
'That bluey is a larrikin, and we all thought it funny  
He lobbed a Turkish hand grenade into the CO's dunny.  
I told you how he dragged me wounded, in from no man's land  
He stopped the bleeding, closed the wound, with only his bare hand.'  
'Then he copped it at the front from some stray shrapnel blast  
It was my turn to drag him in and I thought he wouldn't last.  
He woke up in hospital, and nearly lost his mind  
Cause out there on the battlefield he'd left one leg behind.'  
'He's been in a bad way Mum, he knows he'll ride no more  
Like me he loves a horse's back, he was a champ before.  
So Please Mum can you take him in, he's been like my own brother  
Raised in a Queensland orphanage he's never known a mother.'  
But Struth, I miss Australia Mum, and in my mind each day  
I am a mountain cattleman on high plains far away.  
I'm mustering white-faced cattle, with no camel's hump in sight  
And I waltz my Matilda by a campfire every night  
I wonder who rides Billy, I heard the pub burnt down  
I'll always love you and please say hooroo to all in town'.  
The second letter I could see, was in a lady's hand  
An answer to her soldier son there in a foreign land.  
Her copperplate was perfect, the pages neat and clean  
It bore the date, November 3rd 1917.  
'T'was hard enough to lose your Dad, without you at the war  
I'd hoped you would be home by now - each day I miss you more'  
'Your Kathy calls around a lot since you have been away  
To share with me her hopes and dreams about your wedding day.  
And Bluey has arrived - and what a godsend he has been  
We talked and laughed for days about the things you've done and seen'  
'He really is a comfort, and works hard around the farm,  
I read the same hope in his eyes that you won't come to harm.  
McConnell's kids rode Billy, but suddenly that changed.  
We had a violent lightning storm, and it was really strange.'  
'Last Wednesday, just on midnight, not a single cloud in sight,  
It raged for several minutes, it gave us all a fright.  
It really spooked your Billy - and he screamed and bucked and reared  
And then he rushed the sliprail fence, which by a foot he cleared'  
'They brought him back next afternoon, but something's changed I fear  
It's like the day you brought him home, for no one can get near.  
Remember when you caught him with his black and flowing mane?  
Now Horse breakers fear the beast that only you can tame,'  
'That's why we need you home son' - then the flow of ink went dry-

This letter was unfinished, and I couldn't work out why.  
Until I started reading, the letter number three  
A yellow telegram delivered news of tragedy,  
Her son killed in action - oh - what pain that must have been  
The same date as her letter - 3rd November 1917  
This letter which was never sent, became then one of three  
She sealed behind the photo's face - the face she longed to see.  
And John's home town's old timers - children when he went to war  
Would say no greater cattleman had left the town before.  
They knew his widowed mother well - and with respect did tell  
How when she lost her only boy she lost her mind as well.  
She could not face the awful truth, to strangers she would speak  
'My Johnny's at the war you know, he's coming home next week.'  
They all remembered Bluey he stayed on to the end.  
A younger man with wooden leg became her closest friend.  
And he would go and find her when she wandered old and weak  
And always softly say 'yes dear - John will be home next week.'  
Then when she died Bluey moved on, to Queensland some did say.  
I tried to find out where he went, but don't know to this day.  
And Kathy never wed - a lonely spinster some found odd.  
She wouldn't set foot in a church - she'd turned her back on God.  
John's mother left no Will I learned on my detective trail.  
This explains my photo's journey, of that clearance sale.  
So I continued digging, cause I wanted to know more.  
I found John's name with thousands, in the records of the war.  
His last ride proved his courage - a ride you will acclaim  
The Light Horse Charge at Beersheba of everlasting fame.  
That last day in October, back in 1917  
At 4pm our brave boys fell - that sad fact I did glean.  
That's when John's life was sacrificed, the record's crystal clear  
But 4pm in Beersheba is midnight over here.....  
So as John's gallant spirit rose to cross the great divide,  
Were lightning bolts back home, a signal from the other side?  
Is that why Billy bolted and went racing as in pain?  
Because he'd never feel his master on his back again?  
Was it coincidental? same time - same day - same date?  
Some proof of numerology, or just a quirk of fate?  
I think it's more than that you know, as I've heard wiser men,  
Acknowledge there are many things that go beyond our ken  
Where craggy peaks guard secrets 'neath dark skies torn asunder,  
Where hoof-beats are companions to the rolling waves of thunder  
Where lightning cracks like 303's and ricochets again  
Where howling moaning gusts of wind sound just like dying men.  
Some Mountain cattlemen have sworn on lonely alpine track,  
They've glimpsed a huge black stallion - Light Horseman on his back.  
Yes Sceptics say, it's swirling clouds just forming apparitions  
Oh no, my friend you can't dismiss all this as superstition.



*The desert of Beersheba - or windswept Aussie range,  
John Stuart rides on forever there - Now I don't find that strange.  
Now some gaze upon this photo, and they often question me  
And I tell them a small white lie, and say he's family.  
'You must be proud of him.' they say - I tell them, one and all,  
That's why he takes - the pride of place - my Anzac on the Wall.*

*By Jim Brown*