



THE DUGOUT

Branch Patron: *The Lord Lieutenant of Dorset - Angus Campbell*

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESSEX BRANCH OF THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION

Your Local WW1 Historical Society

(Registered Charity : 1142787)

www.wessexwfa.org.uk

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MEETINGS 2020

At Pimperne Village Hall, Newfield Road, Pimperne Nr Blandford Forum. DT11 8UZ- 2pm for 2.30pm start

FUTURE MEETINGS

Check Branch Website as above for updates and look out for meeting notices from Branch Secretary

FIELD TRIPS:

TBC

BATTLE FIELD TOURS:

TBC

ISSUE 20

MAY 2020

Chairman's Chat

You will all hopefully have seen the Branch Accounts and Chairman's Report 2019 if not they will be available on the branch website www.wessexwfa.org as a pdf.

Overall Wessex WFA had yet another successful year in 2019. It is to be regretted that we were unable to conclude 2019 with a physical AGM but on behalf of the trustees may I thank you all for continued support of the branch. The branch was heading for yet another terrific year in 2020 when it was stopped in its tracks by the pandemic. At the time of writing it is uncertain as to when branch meetings can re-start, but I hope the time is not too far away when we can all meet again at PVH for our usual range of exceptional talks.

Meanwhile there are many articles of interest on the branch website including past issues of *The Dugout* and there are a multitude of other online items to keep your interest in the Great War going for the foreseeable future.

Behind the scenes the branch has been busy and the trustees have approved grants to Talbot House,

Keep Military Museum, all organisations in dire need of support. Talbot House was on the verge of closure but I am pleased to report that its fund raising appeal was a success and it is now open.

Please keep checking the branch website as this is where updates regarding future branch meetings will be posted.

All that remains is for me to wish you all well, stay safe and **Illegitimi non carborundum!**

Martin Willoughby
Branch Chairman



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IMPERIAL GERMANY ~ WOUND BADGE

The Iron Cross was a Prussian decoration awarded to military personnel for gallantry in action and also to non-combatants. Civilians could also receive the Iron Cross for exceptional work performed on the home front which benefited the German pursuit to victory. At the beginning of the war the decoration was highly valued and worn with pride by its recipients.



As the course of the war progressed the soldiers of front-line battalions who had endured the rigours of trench warfare and offensive operations gradually became disillusioned at the indiscriminate way in which the Iron Cross was being awarded. For the German Army, 1917 was a difficult and costly year in materials and manpower. In the closing months of that year the attitude of combat troops hardened against those recipients of the Iron Cross who had no and probably would never have experience of battle. They considered that the Iron Cross was being devalued.

As a consequence there emerged a demand from the front line troops for a recognition which would clearly indicate that they had fought the enemy in battle and to prove to the general populace that they had sustained injuries. The result of this pressure was that the Kaiser on the 3rd March, 1918 instituted the award of the Wound Badge. Issued in three classes: black for one or two wounds, silver as in the example shown for 3 or 4 wounds, and gold for five or more wounds. It was produced in pressed steel, brass or zinc and also of a pierced cut-out pattern during the First World War. The obverse of the badge has a laurel wreath border surrounding a helmet on crossed swords with a stippled background. A pin and clip is fitted on the plain reverse for purposes of wear. The wound badge was worn on the left breast below the Iron Cross 1st Class or other pinned decorations. Although relatively plain and simple the badge, for a front line soldier who had sustained wounds it was highly valued and distinguished the recipient as a combatant. It helped to boost the morale of the front line fighting soldiers and counter-acted the negative attitudes towards the Iron Cross.

R G Coleman

Territorial Soldiers in the First World War

Please reader, would you be kind enough to try and take your mind and thoughts back to the early start of the 1900's. Imagine, you have a job and you work on a farm or some similar trade or job. Life is relatively simple, you get up early each day, 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning and you work for at least 12 hours for 6 days, Sunday is not a free day, livestock still have to be fed.

You earn on average 12 shillings and 6 pence (old money) (see Hansard discussion 12 April 1914) you might be lucky and perhaps earn a little more.

16 shillings (old money) or thereabouts will be a good rate.

12 shilling and 6 pence is 62.5 pence (our present day pence) a week. = £32.50 a year.



16 shillings is 80 pence (our present day pence) a week = £41.60 a year

From this you had expenses e.g. rent, food, clothes and all the norms of daily life.

The army pay for a private was a shilling a day 7 shillings a week (35p in present day pence) = £18.20 a year. In addition you were fed and housed. You were issued with a uniform including boots.

Getting 3 meals a day would have been a luxury for many of the men, in many cases they were not used to such 'luxury' and it was not unusual for some men to put on a stone in weight and grow up to two inches in height.

So joining the territorials had some very basic advantages. In peace time there were very basic reasons for joining, 'it was somewhere to go' 'the local drill kept you fit and it was good fun', 'you were with your mates', 'you got a paid for holiday'.

There was the annual summer camp to look forward to, the chance to get away with your mates and get paid was a great attraction. This is a time when there was no telly, no so called social media, no package holidays as we know today, work was physically hard and relentless. Working at what were basically outside jobs. You didn't go inside when it rained and then wait till the rain had stopped but you carried on and got cold and wet.

I am not suggesting trench life was any kind of 'fun' but in some ways for dad and his mates standing in the rain and cold would not have been so different to what they had been used to at work. By the nature of their normal work they were tough men who were used to hardships and very hard conditions, they might have needed fighting training but they already had their built in toughness and resilience.

My dad, Mark Huntington Private number 2172, and later number 240425 was born in July 1891, he grew up in Leicestershire near Burton on the Wolds. His dad was a farm worker and Mark followed the same route. He also joined the local territorials, the 5th Battalion of the Leicester Regiment.

Just for some clarity of history, in May 1900, locally a meeting was held at St Peter's School in Mountsorrel, Leicestershire "for the purpose of discussing the formation of a company of Volunteers in the Soar Valley villages". The chairman of the meeting was Mr R E Martin, Director of the Mountsorrel Granite Company and a serving officer with the Volunteers. By 1914 Major Martin became the C.O. of the 4ths and 5ths. So for the Mountsorrel quarry men the boss became their Commanding Officer. The majority of the quarry workers were already in the 5ths.

In many cases the officers were also local men, many from the middle classes, the solicitor, teacher, undertaker, manager or similar.

In many cases their officer was their boss in peacetime or at least somebody they were expected to look up to and take notice off.

The U.K. in 1914 was a very class based society you were expected to not only to know your place but stay there as well.

The Territorial and Reserve Forces Act of 1907 led to the reshaping of the regular army for expeditionary force operations overseas and the change of the Volunteer and Yeomanry forces into a new Territorial Force of fourteen infantry divisions, fourteen cavalry brigades, and a large number of support units. In Leicestershire this led in 1908 to the 1st Volunteer Battalion being split into 4th and 5th Battalions (Territorial Force). 4th Battalion was based and recruited within Leicester City and 5th Battalion, with a headquarters at the Drill Hall, Granby Street in Loughborough, recruiting across the county.

With a battalion HQ in Loughborough the 5th Battalion had eight companies based across Leicestershire as follows:

A Company - The Armoury, Rifle Range Road, Ashby-de-la-Zouch

B Company - Angel Inn, Oakham, Rutland

C Company - the Corn Exchange in Melton Mowbray

D Company - New Buildings in Hinckley

E Company - the Drill Hall, Coventry Road, Market Harborough

F Company - Mountsorrel G Company - Shepshed

H Company - Drill Hall, Granby Street, Loughborough

In the summer of 1914 the 5th Battalion planned to go to Annual Camp at Bridlington. Therefore on the first weekend in August 1914, the 5th battalion had travelled by train to Manor Farm, Bridlington for their camp. They arrived so that on the Saturday 1st August 1914 they were settling in and looking forward to good weather and a good time. Summer 1914 was a lovely summer. Mark and his mates were going to have a great holiday. Unfortunately it was to be short-lived.

N.B. Manor Farm Holiday Cottages and Camp Site still exists today. Not far from Bempton Cliffs Seabird Centre and Flamborough Head.

On Monday 3rd August they received orders by telegram to strike camp and return to Loughborough but 'not to disband'.

On the 4th August War Great Britain Declared War on Germany and my dad had just turned 23. On the 5th August 1914 the 4th and 5th Battalions travelled back to Loughborough and for the next few days were basically sorting themselves out.

Mark and his mates never went back to work, they carried on training and at the end of February 1915 set sail from Southampton to Le Havre and became one of the early Territorial Battalions to see service on the Western Front. The battalion saw the war through, they might have started as part time soldiers but if you read any of their accounts you very quickly realise that they were totally committed.



On the 17th August the question was put 'who would be prepared to volunteer for foreign service'. About 90% of the 5ths volunteered. Some would have been too old, some too young and some in jobs that were seen as essential. Please be aware that Territorials were originally intended for homeland defence. It was the job of the regular army for any expeditionary force operations overseas.

During this last year 2019, I managed to get a copy of the record of my dad's 1915 Star Medal list, Sheet 285, reading it was quite shocking. On the list there are 12 names, dad included, all were members of the Leicester Territorial Battalion. Alphabetically, 7 Hunts, 1 Hunter, 1 Huntingdon (a common typing mistake which we all have to get used to), 1 Huntley, 2 Hurds. The medal was issued on 30/09/1919.

Of the 12 men listed;

4 were listed as Killed in Action, in either 16 or 17.

3 were listed as died, in either 15 or 16

2 were listed as discharged, not sure why, except I (A. Hunt) name has red writing in the margin, my research questions, came back with the suggestion, gone mad.

2 were listed as trans. In 19. I think they became part of the 'clean up' soldiers who remained.

1 Huntington (my dad) was listed as disembodied 23/02/19, the official term for demobbed.

Using simple statistics taking the 12 names from the sheet that went to the War in 1915, 59% did not survive to 1919. 17% had been medically discharged and 25% lived to tell the tale. I think those stark records show the commitment of the Territorials. For many of them, what started as a bit of fun and a reason to get a holiday became something very different, those that survived had spent five years of their lives seeing and experiencing things that I do not think we today can truly comprehend.

In the past two years I have been lucky enough to meet Malcolm the son of George Smith, number 1896 and a later number 240303, Private in the 5ths, George and Mark would have been in the Loughborough H Company. They must have known each other but we do not know how well they got on with each other, they never spoke about it.

Malcolm and I have become friends mainly through email. We have come to similar conclusions, both our dads were at some time injured George in the arm and upper body and Mark in the leg. Neither of us really knows any details because neither ever really spoke about their experiences. Both would occasionally say about their wounds 'it is giving me gip today' nothing more. We think that not talking about 'it' was the way they dealt with the horrors they had seen. Dad only mentioned some things which as a kid I thought were basically funny or unusual, just stories. In later life when I started to realise the magnitude and scale of the First World War and to develop an interest in it, I found that these funny stories were true, it started my researches and very slowly I have started to put the story together.

Not speaking or talking about 'it' was their defence mechanism, when they returned to civilian life after 1919 they both just got on with their lives, it was a very common approach of so many of the survivors.

Amateur or part time soldiers do not in any way describe the Territorials of the First World War.

Mark Huntington
Private 2172 5th
Leicesters Medals



N.B. you had to serve on the Western Front before the end of 1915 to be able to be issued with the 1915 Star.

NB. I have sent the above to Malcolm Smith, George's son; he basically approves the text, but added the following text. Another point you may like to make is that whilst the lads from rural areas like our dads were basically fit and healthy the lads from industrial areas like Lancashire and London's east end were weak and sickly and struggled to make the grade. While training near Luton the 5ths always won any competition to do with a night exercise, the dark was normal to them, no street lights in the country.



Mike Huntingdon



GEORGE ALBERT RAVENHILL V.C. [FORFEITED]

Last summer I was invited to speak at Bournemouth Central Library in their Aspects of History series about the two Bournemouth born Victoria Cross winners from the Great War. Some years ago, fellow Branch Member Roger W. Coleman made a presentation to the branch on this topic and there is an excellent article by him about the Capstone Road VCs on the Branch website. Roger kindly allowed me to use some of his material, including the slides from his presentation.

I decided to begin my talk with background information about the Victoria Cross - a sort of "not many people know this" approach. In my preparation I discovered that between 1881 and 1908, eight recipients were required to forfeit their medal for post-award "disreputable conduct." Examples of their offences included desertion on active service, assault and theft of a comrade's medals, embezzlement, various thefts - including stealing a cow, and bigamy.

I had no intention of describing the cases in my talk, but I did decide to research the story of one of the men when I discovered that I had been born just a couple of streets away from him, albeit 75 years later. Prior to the redevelopment of the area, I had walked along the streets he must have walked along, and I had passed the houses where he was born and spent much of his life. My maternal grandparents are buried close to him in a local cemetery.

George Albert Ravenhill was born in Aston on 21st February 1872. Aston was then a separate entity from Birmingham. At the time of the Domesday Book, it was larger than Birmingham. Much of the industrialization associated with the latter took place within the boundaries of Aston, which reached almost to the centre of today's city. Nowadays the name Aston only applies to a small district, but until the early years of the Twentieth Century, the civil parish of Aston covered most of what are now the north-eastern suburbs of the city.

George's father, Thomas Ravenhill, came from Whaddon, near Gloucester. He worked as a wood turner or "spade tree maker". Thomas married Mary Jane Newman in Birmingham in 1861. Mary had been born in Aston, but her father came from Gloucestershire. Mary's parents lived in Long Acre, a road that later features prominently in the story of George Ravenhill. Thomas and Mary were married for over 50 years, and according to the 1911 Census had had 15 children, 13 of whom were still alive at the time.



George Albert Ravenhill was born on 21st February 1872 in Thimble Mill Lane. By 1881 the family were living in Church Road, which had junctions with Thimble Mill Lane and the road of my own birth. Later that year George's elder brother John married Louisa Langford. Louisa had a younger sister who became George's bride in 1898.

The Ravenhill family had already moved to Long Acre, another road having a junction with Thimble Mill Lane, when George enlisted in the Royal Scots Fusiliers [RSF] in 1889. His attestation papers describe him as 5' 10" tall, 135 lbs, fresh complexion, with blue eyes and light brown hair. He had tattoos on both forearms.

After a period of Home service, Private 2655 Ravenhill was sent out to India to join the 2nd Bn. RSF [2RSF] in November 1891. George was obviously not the "ideal" soldier – his statement of services includes reference to being "deprived of lance corporal's stripe", loss of pay and imprisonment! He returned to the UK on expiration of his period of service "with the colours" and was transferred to the Army Reserve in December 1896.

George married his sister-in-law Florence Langford at Birmingham Register Office on 12th December 1898.

With the political situation rapidly deteriorating in South Africa, George was recalled to Army Service under a Special Army Order of 7th October 1899. War broke out between the Boer Republics and Great Britain a few days later.

George was sent to rejoin his old battalion which had moved to South Africa direct from India. He left behind a pregnant Florence – their first child Lily May was born in February 1900 and was christened at nearby St. Clement's Church the following month. Florence gave the family home as back of 120 Long Acre.

2RSF initially were part of the Fusilier Brigade. In December 1899, they were part of General Redvers Buller's force that marched north to attempt the relief of Ladysmith. On 15th December, Buller attempted a frontal assault on strong Boer positions overlooking the River Tugela at Colenso. Withering Boer fire forced Buller to withdraw with over 1,100 casualties. The Boers lost less than 50.



At the outset of the action, two field artillery batteries had been pushed too far ahead of the infantry and came under heavy and accurate fire from Boer Mausers. The gun crews all became casualties or were driven back to seek cover 500 yards behind the guns. When he decided to retreat, Buller went forward (and was wounded) to call for volunteers to retrieve the guns. George Ravenhill was one six men to be awarded the Victoria Cross for attempting to do this. Two guns were saved but ten had to be abandoned. George received a shoulder wound.

The citation for his award appeared in the London Gazette on 4th June 1901:

“At Colenso on the 15th December, 1899, Private Ravenhill went several times under a heavy fire from his sheltered position as one of the escort to the guns to assist the officers and drivers who were trying to withdraw the guns of the 14th and 66th Field Batteries, when the detachments serving them had all been killed, wounded or driven from them by infantry fire at close range, and helped to limber up one of the guns that were saved.”

Another of the six VCs went to Lt. Frederick Roberts, the son of Field Marshal Frederick Roberts, a VC winner from the Indian Mutiny, who was shortly to replace Buller as commander-in-chief in South Africa. The Battle of Colenso ended what became known as Black Week, the British also suffering defeats at Stormberg (10th), and Magersfontein (11th).

In January and February 1900, 2RSF took part in operations at Vaal Krantz, Hlangwane and Green Hill which helped force the Tugela and Ladysmith was relieved on 28th February.

The battalion was involved in various tasks during the later stages of the war and was instrumental in the successful defence of the Frederikstad area against a raid by Christiann de Wet in October 1900. Some sources state that George Ravenhill also distinguished himself in this action and was recommended for the Distinguished Conduct Medal, but this was not progressed when it became known that he was to receive the VC.



George Ravenhill received his medal from the Duke of York on 4th June 1901 at Pietermaritzburg. He was discharged on 14th May 1902 on "on termination of period of engagement" and returned to Aston. He was also awarded the Queen's and the King's South African Medals with the Relief of Ladysmith, Transvaal and Cape Colony clasps.

Life for the family was difficult. George was soon the father of three other children: George Albert (born 1903), Raymond (born 1904) and Florence (born 1907). A fifth child died as an infant. He was a general labourer and frequent unemployment forced him to seek the support of the workhouse from time to time. Some months before the incident that was to lead to the forfeiture of his VC, George



appeared before the local courts on a charge of refusing to perform his allotted task at Aston Union Workhouse (sited in Erdington).

On 13th May 1908, the family's situation was raised in the House of Commons by a local MP:

"I beg to ask the Secretary of State for War if he is now in a position to say what action, if any, is proposed to be taken by the War Office to relieve George Ravenhill V.C., who is, or was recently an inmate of Erdington Workhouse, of the necessity of taking advantage of public charity."

The Secretary of State (Richard Haldane) replied that the case was still under investigation, but shortly afterwards, George Ravenhill again fell foul of the law.

I used to pass Aston Police Court when I walked to and from school, and on 24th August 1908 George appeared at the court with two other men charged with the theft of "3cwt of iron valued at 6 shillings." George was described as a labourer with no fixed residence.



Giving evidence, Detective Inspector Jackson said that he had offered to help George find work if he would avoid bad company, but George had failed to do so. One of George's co-defendants was able to convince the court that he was not aware that the iron had been stolen and was discharged; the other was sentenced to three months hard labour. George attempted to excuse his conduct by claiming that he was entitled to an annual pension of £50 (presumably from the Army) but had heard nothing from the authorities about his claim. If he had had the pension he would not have been mixed up in this affair. The Bench said they had no other course but to send him to gaol for one month, people "had tried to help him but he would not help himself."



George Ravenhill forfeited his Victoria Cross as a result

The Times subsequently reported a sale at Sotheby's on 15th December 1908 of "a group of three medals awarded to Private George Ravenhill, the Victoria Cross...and two Africa medals." The lot was purchased by Messrs. Spinks for £42.

A sixth child (Alfred) was born to George and Florence towards the end of 1910. The following year found the family again "taking advantage of public charity." George, Florence and their two youngest surviving children (Florence and Alfred) were all inmates of the Aston Union Workhouse in Mason Road, Erdington.

The three elder children (Lily M. (10), George Albert (8), and Raymond (7) Ravenhill) were all in the care of the Children's Emigration Homes. This was an organization founded in 1872 by John Throgmorton Middlemore. He felt that poor children

he saw on Birmingham's streets should be sent abroad for a healthier life away from their pauper roots. This would not only give poor British children a new start in life but also was a way of supplying much-needed labour in developing countries.

Canada was a frequent destination for "Middlemore's Children" and the three Ravenhill youngsters were passengers on the Carthaginian when it docked at Halifax, Nova Scotia on 2nd June 1911. Under the scheme in Canada, children were taught the skills they would need for work such as labouring (boys) or domestic service (girls). Some, as we shall see later, must have been offered for adoption.

Meanwhile back in Aston, it appears that George and Florence had a seventh child. Nellie Ravenhill was born early in 1912, but she died within a year.

Perhaps George was given an opportunity to improve the lot of his remaining family, because by 1914 they had moved to Chipping Norton in Oxfordshire and George had become a painter and decorator.

In September 1914, George Ravenhill re-enlisted aged 42 years and 7 months. He was initially posted to the 3rd (Reserve) Bn Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry at Oxford. Here he again demonstrated his fallibilities – promoted lance corporal in December 1914, he was “deprived of stripe” just 8 weeks later.

George became a father for the eighth time when a son Arthur was born at Chipping Norton early in 1915.

In June 1915, George was transferred to 3rd (Reserve) Bn Hampshire Regiment [3Hants]; the battalion was at Gosport as part of the Portsmouth Garrison. He was posted on to 2Hants on 30th June. The battalion was serving on Gallipoli and George is listed as entering “**in theatre**” on 12th July 1915.

The Gallipoli Campaign is notorious for high sickness levels, and it may be that George was unable to withstand the rigours of active campaigning in that climate. He was posted back to 3Hants in the UK in September 1915.

January 1916 was clearly a bad month for George. His service record shows three separate acts of indiscipline ending up with a sentence of 20 days detention in Parkhurst for “**refusing to obey an order whilst undergoing field punishment.**”

In June George was transferred to 3rd (Reserve) Bn Duke of Cornwall’s Light Infantry, which was at Freshwater on the Isle of Wight, and part of the Portsmouth Garrison. He was discharged on 27th July 1916 as “**no longer physically fit for War Service**”.

The first incidence of indiscipline involved absence. Perhaps he had overstayed home leave – another son (William) was born at Chipping Norton towards the end of the year.

At some stage after George’s Army discharge, the family returned to Aston.

It seems that George may have subsequently served in the RAF. UK RAF Records show a George Albert Ravenhill, with the same birthdate, entered service date on 30th July 1918. His next of kin was named as Florence Ravenhill. This man was born in Nechells – the sub-district of Aston that covers Long Acre and Thimble Mill Lane. He was discharged from the RAF at the end of November 1918 with a disability pension.

George was awarded the 1915 Star, the British War Medal and Victory Medal and a Silver War Badge.

A tenth child (Laura) was born to George and Florence in 1919. Just over 18 months later George was dead. He died of a heart attack on 14th April 1921 aged 49. He left a wife and five children in “**deplorable housing conditions**” at 13 back of 120 Long Acre.

George's widow was destitute and the Lord Mayor of Birmingham, a member of the Cadbury family, undertook to pay for the funeral and various old comrades' organizations became involved.

The local branch of the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers [NFDDSS], the Comrades of the Great War and the Officers' Association pressed the Secretary of State for War to authorize a full military funeral and this was granted. They also provided help to his destitute family.

The family's situation was again raised in the House of Commons, a local MP asking the Lord Privy Seal:

"...whether he is aware that this soldier occupied a one-room tenement, with his wife and five children, whose ages ranged from 2½ to 14 years; that they were practically destitute, and living under conditions detrimental to their health; and whether he would take steps to provide adequate maintenance and decent housing accommodation for the family".

The reply included presumably a reference to the forfeiture of the VC in 1908:

"... while it was true that this soldier was awarded the V.C. in 1901, there were special features connected with this case as to which he was communicating with the hon. member".

The funeral took place on Saturday 23rd April 1921.

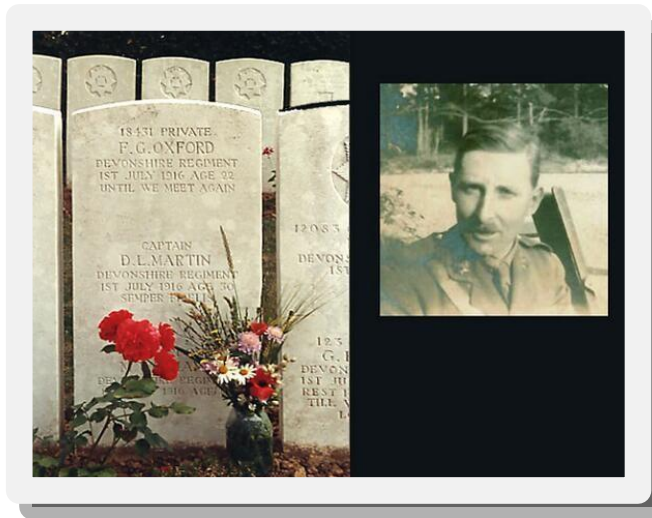
George's old regiment, the RSF was in Ayr, aiding the civil powers in some industrial dispute and could not be represented, but the Royal Warwickshire Regiment provided an honour guard and firing party.

A large crowd watched the departure from Long Acre of the horse-drawn gun carriage bearing the coffin draped in the Union Flag. The NFDDSS band accompanied the procession, playing the Dead March from 'Saul' and Chopin's Funeral March as they passed through streets in Aston and Nechells lined with hundreds of people to Witton Cemetery. Here the 'Last Post' was sounded and a salute fired over the grave.

Floral tributes included an emblem in the form of a Victoria Cross in red, white and blue flowers from the depot of the RSF - "In memory of a very gallant 'Scots Fusilier". There were wreaths from the Corps of Commissionaires (Birmingham Division), the Birmingham Ex-Serviceman's Joint Committee, the neighbours and the Unemployed Ex-Service men in Birmingham. On the return journey, the band played 'Sword and Lance' and 'Belphegor'.

Rod Arnold





Star Buy!

At an auction sale held by Lockdales of Ipswich in January 2020, a 1914-15 Star was sold for £2,300. The recipient of the medal was Captain Duncan Lennox Martin of the 9th Battalion, Devonshire Regiment who was killed in action on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, 1st July, 1916. He was 30 years of age.

The 8th and 9th Battalions of the Devonshire Regiment were part of the 20th Brigade, 7th Division who were tasked to attack from the south-west side of the Albert-Mericourt Road towards Mansel Copse. Leading the attack the 9th Battalion were subjected to murderous enemy machine-gun fire from the Copse and suffered very heavy casualties. Following them were two companies of the 8th Battalion who were also decimated. Later in the day another company of the 8th Battalion, managed to occupy a part of the enemies trench in Mansel Copse. They held it the following day against a determined counter-attack and later were able to continue their advance.

On the 4th July, the Padre of the 8th Battalions buried 159 men of both battalions, including Captain Martin in a section of the former German trench. A plaque was placed over the burial site and inscribed with the words 'The Devonshires Held This Trench, The Devonshires Hold It Still'. These words are inscribed in stone on the entrance into the Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery, Devonshire Trench Mametz. Captain Martin's Grave Location: Row A, Grave 1. The cemetery contains 163 burials, 10 of which are unidentified. The Wessex Branch WFA visited this cemetery during the 2012 Battle Field Tour.

R.G. Coleman

M CLASS SUBMARINES

“What became of K18 to K21?” The question was asked by one eagle-eyed ‘Dugout’ reader after my articles on the K Class Submarines and the Battle of May Island appeared in our Branch newsletter [Dugout issues 18 and 19].



They had picked up that the seventeen boats of the original K Class had been numbered K1 to K17 inclusive. One boat, K13, had sunk on builders trials and after salvage had entered service renumbered as K22. That fact alone suggested that four other boats must have reached some stage in the naval construction process.

After the war a further six boats were projected based on an improved design (K23 to K28), but only K26 was completed.

All of the K Class boats had disappeared from the Royal Navy by 1931.

Four boats designated K18 to K21 were indeed planned and three of them entered service, but not as K Class submarines. They were to become another project sponsored by Admiral Jacky Fisher – the “submarine dreadnought”.



From early in the war submarines began to carry guns for use in surface action. Most British boats fitted with guns carried a 3”

weapon which fired a 12 pound shell. This was suitable for stopping merchant ships for examination under the naval blockade and for sinking them where appropriate under the prize rules. The calibre of gun mounted gradually increased. One submarine the E20 carried an Army 6” howitzer fitted temporarily at the Dardanelles and had achieved some good results, particularly in bombarding land targets.

Fisher had left office as First Sea Lord in May 1915, but this did not stop him supporting his idea. In August 1915 he proposed building a submarine with a 12” battleship gun capable of hurling a 850 pound shell over 32,500 yards. Fisher even offered to return to duty at a lower rank to supervise the project.

The precise role of such a vessel was difficult to define. A 12” shell was certainly cheaper, and more reliable than a torpedo. If a torpedo missed or misfired the boat could surface and fire her gun at point blank range; one shell would be sufficient to devastate any merchant ship or disable any warship up to a light cruiser.

Shore bombardment was another possible role, but the suggestion that the gun might be used as a long range anti-submarine weapon seemed to ignore the question as to how the target submarine would be detected in the days before radar and sonar!

Arthur Balfour had by now succeeded Winston Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty. Balfour was not enthusiastic about the idea, but Fisher still had contacts and supporters in influential positions. In the autumn of 1915 it was rumoured that the Germans were planning to build some giant submarines and this forced the Admiralty's hand.



Early in 1916 plans were drawn up based on the steam powered K Class submarine. The shipbuilders Vickers were already collecting material for the submarine *K18* on which they expected to begin work in the near future. The Admiralty authorised the utilisation of this material for the new project.

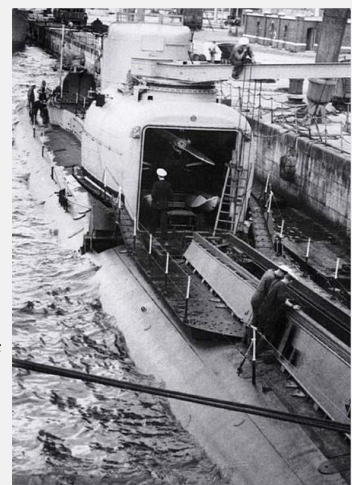
It appears that from this time the last four K Class boats which would have become *K18* to *K21* were cancelled.



Meanwhile development work had begun on the successors to the highly successful E Class submarine to be known as the L Class. The new submarine monitors – another term used – would therefore become the M Class. Vickers who were contracted to build the *K18* and *K19* were to construct *M1* and *M2* at Barrow-in-Furness, and Armstrong-Whitworth were to build *M3* and *M4* instead of *K20* and *K21* in their Elswick Yard at Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

As a security measure it was decided that the M Class boats should still be referred to by K Class numbers whilst under construction. They were referred to by the numbers *K18* to *K21* in official correspondence until 1920!

The M Class were smaller than the K Class and reverted to the proven combination of diesel engines and electric motors for propulsion rather than steam engines. The incorporation of a 12" gun of course presented a totally different set of design issues!



The gun and breech mechanism would have to be positioned outside the pressure hull and the weapons dimensions and weight could affect the boat's stability either on or below the surface.

The Admiralty now had second thoughts. Rather than being a response to German plans, the building of the M Class might actually provoke the Germans into retaliation. The idea of a force of German submarine monitors lying off Scapa Flow to bombard the Grand Fleet or attacking British coastal towns led to work on the new boats being stopped.

The suspension lasted a year, but construction was then resumed. On 18th March 1918 the M1 sailed for gunnery trials off Walney Island. The boat was captained by Commander Max Horton a submarine officer with a very high reputation. M1 was fully operational by June 1918 and was sent to the Mediterranean. It was intended to use the boat to bombard Constantinople but concerns about the unpredictable currents and minefields in the Narrows leading to the Sea of Marmara were considered too risky for such a large submarine.

She saw no action but visited Constantinople, Yalta and Venice after the Armistice.

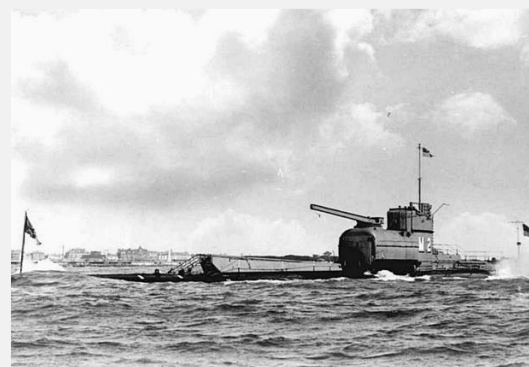
The M2 and M3 were both completed after the war, but the M4 was cancelled and her hull scrapped.

The M Class were nicknamed "Mutton Boats" partly because the gun and conning tower looked like a leg of lamb perched on top of the hull and partly because "M for Mutton" was commonly used for spelling out signals.

The M boats practised the "dip chick" manoeuvre – breaking the surface, opening the gun muzzle door, firing the 12" gun, closing the muzzle and diving again. This was normally accomplished in 75 seconds, but the fastest time recorded was 35. Three minutes was usually allowed from the moment when the order to surface was given a periscope depth until the boat returned to stability at that level. Practice coastal bombardments were undertaken from 10 miles offshore. It was found possible to fire the gun with the boat submerged with only 6 feet of the muzzle exposed above the surface. Reloading had to take place on the surface.

Mirroring the experiences with the K Class boats, the M2 took a heavy sea through an open hatch when diving off Lerwick in 1923. The boat went down out of control to the seabed at 239 feet, but was brought back to the surface.

During 1924 all three boats were given experimental paint schemes to find out which colour was least noticeable from the air when submerged. M1 was painted grey-green, M2 dark grey and M3 dark blue.



For some time British Naval Intelligence had been gathering information about foreign submarine designs capable of operating aircraft. In 1925 it was decided to covert M2 to this role. About the same time it was suggested that the M's might be useful as minelayers in the Far East for blocking the harbours of Japan, Korea and Formosa.

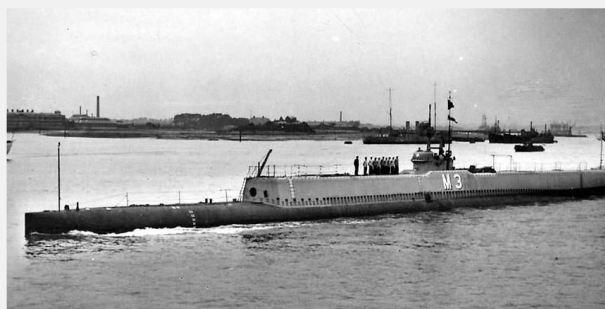
In November 1925 the M1 and M3 took part in a series of exercises off the south coast of Devon. A simulated surface attack on a convoy was planned for 12th November, with the M1 and M3 taking part in the defence. A number of foreign steamers were in the area when the two submarines dived. The M1 failed to surface after the exercises. It was later discovered that the submarine was probably struck by a Swedish merchant ship *Vidar*. The Swedish crew had taken the shock of the collision to be something to do with the naval exercises they had observed passing through the area – the ship's captain thought underwater weapons were being exploded. When docked in Sweden, grey-green paint – the M1's colour scheme – was found on the *Vidar*'s bow. Sixty-two men went down with the M1.

During the 1926 General Strike the M3 (together with the submarines K26 and L23) was moored in the Thames to supply electric power to the London docks. The following year M3 was taken in hand for fitting out as a minelayer.

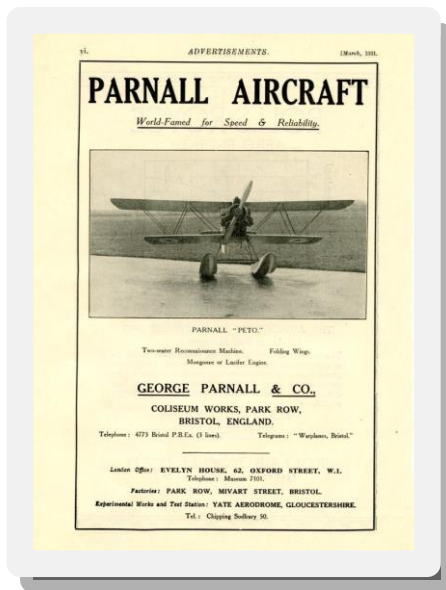


In 1927 the M2 emerged from her conversion to submarine aircraft carrier. She was now fitted with in a watertight hanger and catapult to launch a specially designed seaplane – the Parnall Peto - when weather permitted. The seaplane could land alongside the submarine for recovery on board by a crane.

Naval officers and ratings were trained as pilots by the Royal Air Force to fly the Peto, and after acceptance trials at Felixstowe seaplane station, the first aircraft was delivered to M2 at Portland on 7th July 1928. The M2 was intended to evaluate the use of seaplanes to extend a submarine's operational visibility.



Meanwhile the M3 had re-commissioned for service in her new role capable of carrying 100 mines, but within four years the M Class had disappeared from the Royal Navy.



In January 1932 the M2 was exercising off Portland. Just after 10:00am on 26th she signalled that she was diving in West Bay. That afternoon the coaster Tynesider put in to Portland where the captain told a man at the coaling wharf that he had seen a submarine dive stern first that morning. Later he had seen a surfaced submarine enter Portland and assumed it must have been the same boat. The Tynesider then sailed on to Gravelines and it was not until the evening that the M2 was reported overdue and a search began.

The M2 was found on 3rd February 1932 in 108 feet of water. Divers found the hanger door and the access hatch from the pressure hull into the hanger were both open. It was suggested that in attempting a speedy surface and aircraft launch evolution the order to open

the hanger door was given – or anticipated – as soon as the conning tower was above the surface but before the hanger was clear of the water. Alternatively the vent valves to the after tanks may have been open when M2 surfaced. This would have initiated the “diving stern first” observed by the Tynesider’s captain, a situation aggravated by the open hanger hatches as the boat settled. The M2 still rests in West Bay.

The M3 was sold for scrap in 1932.

Rod Arnold

Acknowledgements

M Class Submarines – Martin H. Brice

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Royal Navy Submarines 1901-1982 – M.P. Cocker

Warships of World War 1 : Submarines – H.M. LeFleming



Lieutenant-General Sir W.R. Birdwood, General-Officer-Commanding the Australian & New Zealand Army Corps, had submitted in May a plan to General Hamilton to break out of the Anzac sector to get round behind the Turkish position and occupy the heights of Sari Bair. This breakthrough would allow the Allies to advance across the peninsula, occupy Midos (now Ecebat) and ultimately control the narrows of the Dardanelles. The author makes use of Lieutenant John Mellsop's papers which give detailed descriptions of the 4th Battalion, South Wales Borders at Gallipoli.

General Hamilton's depleted force was augmented by the arrival of three divisions which landed at Suvla Bay on the 6th August and were to advance quickly and secure the heights dominating the plain and bay to assist the breakout from Anzac. The 29th Division was tasked to launch a diversionary attack from the Cape Helles sector to draw Turkish forces away from Anzac and Suvla. The 4th Battalion, South Wales Borderers were part of the 'Left Covering Force' successfully achieved their objective, Damakjelik Bair. However, the Allies goal of capturing Sari Bair ridge was not accomplished and the campaign stagnated into a virtual stalemate, though the fighting continued as each side fought to take or regain lost ground.

The rising concern about the Gallipoli campaign in London led to the replacement of General Hamilton in October by General Sir Charles Monroe as commander of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force who wasted no time in assessing the situation and recommended to Lord Kitchener and the War Cabinet evacuation of the peninsula. This did not mean the troops could relax as each side continued to launch attacks against each other. As summer faded into autumn, the conditions for the troops on the ground rapidly deteriorated. Dysentery was rife, unburied bodies, sniper fire, shelling, poor food, lack of water and clothing affected their efficiency and health. In December, one of the worst recorded storms, struck the peninsula and caused many deaths.

The War Office gave their consent to evacuate Suvla and Anzac which was successfully achieved between the 18th and 20th December. At the end of the month approval was given for the evacuation of Helles and by the 9th January 1916, the last Allied troops left the peninsula.

Towards the end of the book the author explains to the reader about the history of the Regimental lineage since 1689. There are four appendices, listing the Officers of the 2nd and 4th Battalions, So the Staff of the 40th Brigade, Officers and Soldiers of both battalions who were killed or died of wounds and their place of burial or commemoration.

The authors in depth research and the supporting material he make use of in this book gives a fascinating account of the day-to-day lives of the troops at Gallipoli, and is a memorable tribute to those men of the 2nd and 4th Battalions, South Wales Borders, whose sacrifice was a 'Duty Nobly Done'.

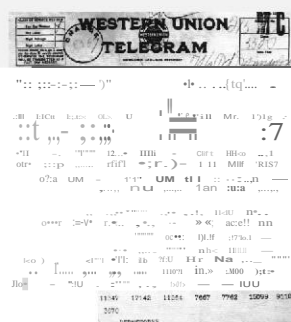
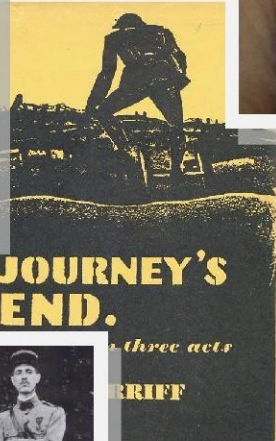
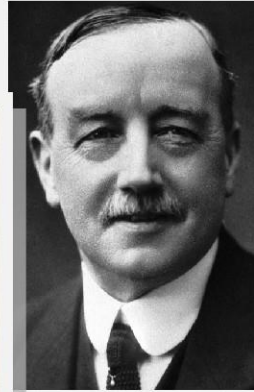
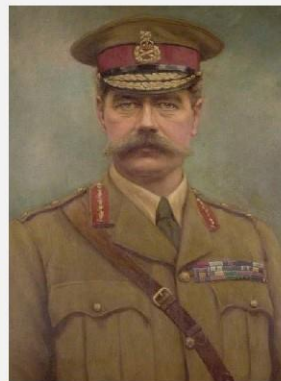
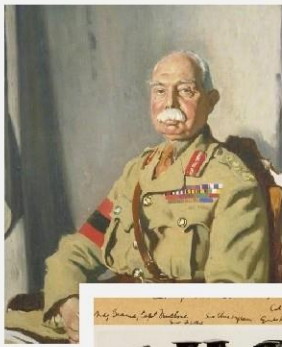
R.G. Coleman



Great War Quiz

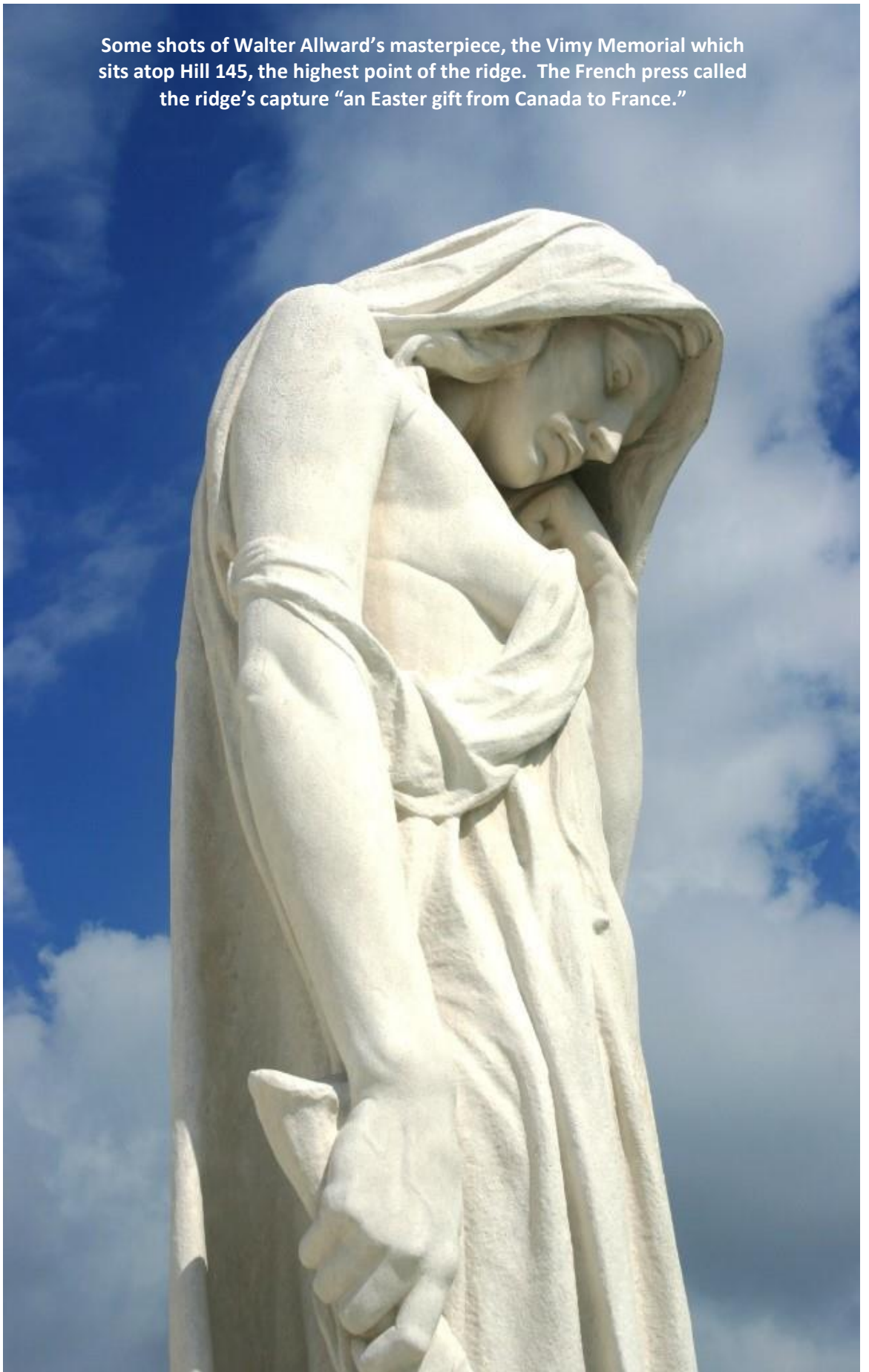
1. Which future French general was awarded a posthumous Legion d'Honneur for bravery at Verdun in March 1916, but was later found to be alive and a prisoner of war in Germany?
2. Name the unit that future Hollywood stars Ronald Coleman, Basil Rathbone, Herbert Marshall and Claude Rains all served in during the First World War.
3. French General Philippe Petain is often wrongly credited with saying at Verdun in 1916, "*Ils ne passeront pas!*" (They shall not pass!). Who did say it?
4. *Providence is on the side of the British Empire after all.* To what event in 1916 was Lord Northcliffe referring?
5. At the inauguration of the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing in July 1927, who said "*He is not missing; he is here.*"?
6. Which play opened at the Savoy Theatre in January 1929, ran for 593 performances and attracted a total audience of 500,000?
7. Who, on his own initiative, began registering the location of British graves on the Western Front?
8. What began patrols in the Mediterranean on 24th May 1917?
9. What was published in the United States on 1st March 1917?
10. Raymond Asquith, son of the British Prime Minister was killed in action on 15th September 1916. Name the trade union leader and member of Asquith's Cabinet who lost his son on the same day.





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Some shots of Walter Allward's masterpiece, the Vimy Memorial which sits atop Hill 145, the highest point of the ridge. The French press called the ridge's capture "an Easter gift from Canada to France."





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Courtesy of [Jeremy Banning](#)

Important Information

Meetings are held at:

**Pimperne Village
Hall, Newfield
Road, Pimperne
Blandford Forum
Dorset
DT11 8UZ**



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And finally.... (Quiz Answers)

[1] Charles Gaulle; [2] Lon n Scottish; [3] eral Robert N velle; [4] Death Lord Kitchene ; [5] Lord Plumer; [6] R. Sherriff's Jou ney's End'; [7] Fabian Ware; [8] Japanese royers; [9] Te of the Zimme - man Telegram; [10] Arthur derson