



On 9th April 1918 the Germans launched their offensive codename “Georgette” with the objective of taking the Channel ports and the key rail junction at Hazebrouck. Peter Hart, last month, thought it should have been the priority offensive for the Germans in 1918.

The offensive extended over some 12 miles from the la Bassee Canal to Armentieres. The southern part of the line was defended by the 55th West Lancashire Division. North of the West Lancs was the Portugese Corps. After a heavy bombardment the assault was delivered at 8.45 am. Large numbers of Portugese retired before the attack was

launched and by 10.00am they were routed.

Nevertheless the 55th Division held its position north of the Canal and captured a very substantial number of prisoners. Posthumous VCs were won by Lt Collin of the 1/4th Kings Own Royal Lancaster and Lt Schofield of the 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers. Amongst the British dead was Pte J Oddie of 1/4th Loyal North Lancs, Emmie’s uncle.

The memorial (across) was erected in Givenchy to commemorate the actions of the 55th Division and last month a ceremony was held on the 90th anniversary of the battle there. The ceremony was on Saturday 12th April and earlier that week I was able to lay a wreath on behalf of the Lancashire and Merseyside Branches of the WFA. Our wreath can be seen looking rather lonely as I left Givenchy. However more arrived on the Saturday to keep it company. (Photo c/o Great War Forum website)



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THE WESTERN FRONT
ASSOCIATION

Despatch

Issue 1: May 2008



In May 1918 the War Illustrated carried this front page photo of the 55th (West Lancashire) Division after their gallant defence of Givenchy. 90 years later it fittingly marks our first issue of the Despatch and the anniversary commemoration is reported on the back page.

Chairman Stan's Spot

I would just like to say a few words welcoming the first issue of our Branch Newsletter - The Despatch. This publication, in its infancy as yet, is reliant upon members to contribute whenever possible news from battlefield trips, information on relatives, and any kindred related items or other interesting information about the Great War.

Just as our Branch has grown from strength to strength, the Despatch is another arm which we can embrace and in so doing further our contribution to remembering.

Our Editor is eager for your contributions and ideas no matter how big or small.

Editor's Musing

Last November, after agreeing to do a Branch Newsletter, I acquired the set of WW1 War Illustrated I had admired in the second-hand bookshop in Preston. I part-exchanged my WW2 collection of same thinking my new acquisition might be useful when preparing the Despatch. Little did I realise how they would provide such an appropriate front page for this first edition.

The defence of Givenchy in April 1918 provided my first short talk to the Branch in December 2004. Now, by coincidence, it provides the front page for my first Despatch and a duty on my recent visit to France, see back page.

Many thanks to those who have contributed. I hope you enjoy reading and would welcome your comments. Material, articles for next Despatch by **1st October 2008** please, see our website.

Lathom Park Remount Depot, near Ormskirk, Lancashire

Considering the immense literature available about the First World War, the reliance of all sides on horse transport, and the British Government's published spending of £67.5 million (about £2500m at 2008 prices) on purchasing, training, and delivering horses and mules to the theatres of war, there has been surprisingly little written about this topic, and still less specifically about Remount Depots. The Army Remount Service, a branch of the Quartermaster General's Department, possessed a peak of nearly 900,000 horses and 20,000 staff in November 1917. On the allied side, at least half a million animals died during the conflict - perhaps as many as eight million from all belligerents taken together.

For the last few years, the Lathom Park Trust has been researching the history of the Lathom Park Remount Depot, in West Lancashire. Documentation for the 'tin city' has been frustratingly scarce. Local newspapers have proved quite fruitful, but there seems to be little in The National Archives at Kew, or in other repositories (the Army Medical Services Museum, the Imperial War Museum, and others have been visited). The Lathom Park Trust would welcome information from Western Front Association readers about correspondence, photographs, and memorabilia in private hands, relating to the Lathom Park Remount Depot between the years 1914 to its closure after the war.

If you can help, please contact me:
Nigel Neil by Tel: 01524 844728 or
nigelrjneil@googlemail.com

conditions into account, these factors enabling the Artillery to contribute to the eventual victory.

As with so many speakers, John's enthusiasm for his subject shone out. The talk was highly absorbing throughout and, for this Branch member at least, proved highly informative. (Barrie Bertram)

"Not Again - The German attack on the Aisne, May 1918": April 2008



Peter Hart from the Imperial War Museum gave the premiere presentation of this talk. Starting by recalling the dramatic, awful year of 1918 when it looked that initially we may lose, he spoke of our ultimate victory as bigger than Trafalgar or Waterloo with the British then the dominant military force in the world.

He then went on to tell of the experiences of the 50th Division who took punishment in the 1918 German offensives in March and April only to be transferred afterwards to a "quiet" sector on the Aisne and suffered the same again. Of the three offensives he considered the April offensive on the Lys had the most realistic chance of bringing the war to a conclusion beneficial to the Germans. A thoroughly entertaining evening made more amusing by Peter's lack of rehearsals elsewhere! (TD)

THEY WIN OR DIE WHO WEAR THE ROSE OF LANCASTER - 55th Div Motto

PROGRAMME OF FUTURE MEETINGS

2nd June: *"From the Prairies to the Trenches via Oxford. A Yank in the Grenadier Guards."*

- Michael O'Brien

7th July: *"Off Duty in Salonika"*
- Katherine Wills

4th August: *"Gallipoli"*
- Mary Davison

1st Sept: *"41 Letters of a private in the KOYLI"*

- Malcolm Johnson

6th October: *"PoWs of the Great War"*
- Oliver (BA Hons) & Stanley (one O-level) Wilkinson, WFA North Lancashire Branch

3rd Nov: *"10th (Service) Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment at Fricourt 1st July 1916"*

- Leslie McHugh

1st Dec: *Christmas Social and Annual General Meeting*

"Talbot House - a Home from Home"

A play about the Club in Poperinge where soldiers could renew a sense of normality.

Stockport Garrick, 20th June

Beyond Eternity Promotions
Tel: 01242 587776
www.beyondeternitypromotions.com

(+S) More details on our website

November 1915, soon moving in front line trenches at Dernacourt. He remained in the Somme sector until 1st July when he was wounded. After recovering at Etaples, Ernest moved to 11Bn B Coy MG section part of 23rd Div'n, joining them at Mametz on 5th August before moving north to Armentieres.

What was to be his last letter was written on 30th August. The following day the war diary records a gas attack and trench raid from the British lines during which Ernest was killed. His family first notification came them a comrade, also ex 16th NF, informing them of his death from shrapnel wounds.

Stanley's battalion were of 34th Div'n involved in clearing roads between the front line at La Boisselle and the casualty clearing station. He too was wounded on 1st July, then being moved to Vimy before returning to the Somme.

He was unaware of Ernest's death until he was receiving a letter from a pal on 27th September. He had not had any letters from home due to location changes; a five week backlog arriving later.

Ernest was buried not far from where he fell at the London Rifle Brigade Cemetery at Comines-Warneton.

A hearty vote of thanks was given to Andrew not least for his efforts in using the multi-media projector for the first time. (Peter Bamford)

Guns, Gunners and Gunnery - the Artillery of the BEF in August and September 1914: March 2008

At the outset of March's Branch Meeting, I was very much reminded of an old Royal Artillery boast that their presence on the battlefield was to bring class to what would be an otherwise unruly brawl! And so it proved with **John Aspinall** who, dapper down to his regimental tie, gave the Branch members a master class on the Artillery of 1914. Setting out by explaining the differences between muzzle loading, quick firing and breech loading weaponry, he thereupon embarked on a fire plan that included corrections for wind!

Very soon, the Branch members were shell-shocked as he demonstrated his own quick firing skills in delivering a never-ending barrage of facts and figures that whizzed through the air like shrapnel! In his talk, John combined a judicious mix into the technical aspects of gunnery with an account of the actions at Le Cateau, Nery and Mons where the Artillerymen of those days so gallantly distinguished themselves against the advancing Germans. In this he related the events to the lessons that had been dearly learnt during the Boer War some 12-15 years previously.

Of course, a European war would be different to that experienced on the African veldt, and there would be a need to adopt new tactics and methods. John highlighted many of the changes that would come about over the next four years, aerial spotting, improved maps, predicted fire and taking meteorological

A SILVER KETTLE - REFLECTING THE LIFE OF CAPTAIN COUTART DE BUTTS TAYLOR, MM: Barrie Bertram (+S)



A silver kettle appears to be the only tangible reminder today of Coutart de Butts Taylor, other than his grave in Brighton, Sussex. Even then, the inscription on the kettle is clear that it was presented to his wife and not to him!

*"Presented To
Mrs C de B Taylor
By
St John's Company,
1st West Regiment
August 1st 1906."*

However, other records exist for Coutart, including the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) database which somewhat mysteriously tells us that he had also served as Sergeant C Collins with the 17th Battalion, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, and that he was the holder of a Military Medal (MM). Checking records in "Officers Died in the Great War" (ODGW) and "Soldiers Died in the Great War" (SDGW) compounds the mystery where there is no Taylor in the former, yet there is a Collins in the latter!

Thanks to the CWGC records we know that Mrs Taylor's full name was Lilian Florence Blunden Taylor, while the 1901

Census records that a 15 year-old Lilian F Blunden lived in Brighton. In all probability the kettle was a wedding gift from the men in the Company, which was part of the 1st (West) Battalion of the Royal Militia Island of Jersey (RMIJ) to the newly-married Mrs Taylor then 21 years old..

The CWGC tells us a little of Coutart de Butts Taylor's background. His late father, the Reverend Haydon Aldersey Taylor, had formerly been an Army Chaplain. He had served in the Boer War.

In 1902 he was commissioned as a Lieutenant with 1st (West) Battalion, RMIJ when the Battalion received into its ranks a number of men with first-hand experience of the harsh soldiering conditions on the African veldt. Coutart remained with the RMIJ for the best part of thirteen years, and be promoted Captain on 1st July, 1906, a month before his marriage to Lilian, a girl 16 years his junior.

The outbreak of the Great War would find Coutart still serving with the 1st (West) Battalion, and much of his time would be spent seeing that guards and picquets were furnished at the various key facilities and places where an enemy landing might take place. On 3rd October, 1915 he was gazetted a Temporary Captain in the Royal Irish Rifles (RIR) and assigned their 6th (Service) Battalion then serving in Salonika. In six weeks he appears to have suffered from one of the endemic maladies which resulted in death rates from sickness being three times that of enemy action. 27th April 1916 he was evacuated from Salonika and struck off the Battalion strength. It is

at this point Coutart's trail becomes a little hazy.

According to a London Gazette entry he relinquished his Temporary Commission with the RIR on 16th August 1916 and another entry on 2nd September 1916 removed him as a Captain from the Jersey Militia. The same day the Jersey Evening Post reported Coutart as having been cashiered for being absent without leave.

At some time in late-August or early-September 1916, Coutart de Butts Taylor became Charles Edward Collins and re-enlisted as a private soldier in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, with the regimental number 59747. Coutart served out the remainder of the Great War under his assumed name, and with his undoubted military skills he was quickly promoted to Sergeant. His death on 24th December, 1918 in his 49th year was, according to SDGW, as a result of wounds

However, that is not quite the end of the story since he was restored to the rank of Temporary Captain with the RIR. An entry in the London Gazette of 10th January 1919 had him reinstated on 8th January 1919, to be followed a fortnight later by another London Gazette adjusting the date of reinstatement to 23rd December, the day that preceded his death! This implied that the War Office had been impressed by his patriotism, his character, and his courage, the latter being recognised by the announcement of his Military Medal award. This must have resulted from an action in the final throes of the Great War and which, most likely, caused the wounds from which he

died. It is clear that the CWGC records recognised these *post mortem* decisions.

Having regard to the above, Coutart appears to have been a remarkable character. Some ninety years on, this account of Captain Coutart de Butts Taylor, MM can only be a combination of fact and hypothesis. There are still a number of facts still be researched, not least through a visit at some stage to the National Archive after the building work there is complete. It would be good to turn my theories of what occurred in his life into facts, and it is hoped that this summary and the full article may prompt a reader to come forward with some information. (+S)

MORE OF 'WHAT THE POSTMAN SAW': Andrew Brooks (+S)

Twenty-five years ago Reflections of a Bygone Age published 'What the Postman Saw' and I had a part in the authorship of the book. Over the years the follow-up items have always provided interest and amusement. The following 4 cards are from a selection I sent to celebrate the book and the many Picture Postcard Monthly (PPM) readers who have contributed to the on-going feature. The full selection of cards from 1915, which I sent to PPM for the November 2007 edition, is in the supplement to Despatch on our website. The cards were written at a time when the country was just beginning to realise that the war might last longer than was first thought! Apart from a few obvious spelling mistakes the text and punctuation remain as written by the writer.

posthumously, to my Uncle - Bombardier Henry Matthews MM (RGA), who was killed at Arras in September 1917. The medals had passed to another branch of the family, and their whereabouts had not been known to me for many years. The person who purchased them on eBay was a Battery Sergeant Major serving in Germany. On being contacted he kindly agreed to return them to the family. Need-less-to-say they are now proudly displayed. Unfortunately the fate of the military Medal is unknown.

BRANCH AFFAIRS



Armistice Prize

The Brief inviting entries in the form of a newspaper article from High School pupils in year 10 on the subject "The Major Events of 1918" was circulated to all High Schools in Lancashire in February. A further reminder giving details of the prizes has been sent out in the last few days. The closing date for entries is 1st October.

The first prize is £100 plus book and there are 3 area prizes of £25 plus book. The Lancashire and Cheshire Branch has kindly agreed to contribute £100 towards the prizes.

All members are asked to use their contacts/influence with friends, schools, etc to publicise the competition and encourage entries which should be sent to competition@wfanlancs.co.uk. See our website for more information.

Occasional Day

Gaynor is currently pursuing the organisation of an occasional day to be held in October or March. Venue and date to be decided and notified shortly.

Report of Meetings

Privates Ernest & Stanley Watson - Northumberland Fusiliers: January 2008

The Branch's speaking programme for 2008 got off to a cracking start with a talk by one of its founder members - **Andrew Brooks**.

The talk was based on a series of family letters to and from two brothers which Andrew had bought at auction, not for their content but for the postmarks!

The Watson brothers lived with their parents above a sweet shop on Whitley Bay; though they commuted to Newcastle daily. The earliest letter dated from August 1914 with no mention of war; this was soon to change.

At the outset of war Ernest volunteered and joined the 16th Bn Northumberland Fusiliers which was nicknamed the "1st Newcastle Commercial's": Stanley joined some weeks later and was allocated to the "2nd Commercial's" - the 18th NF, a pioneer battalion.

They were to meet only once during their overseas service, just before 1st July 1916, though they did communicate regularly via the Army cross post system.

After training at Alnwick and Codford St Marys camps, Ernest's Bn was posted to the Somme sector, arriving in late

An index to the volume, compiled whilst the letters were held by the family, is available in hard copy in the Local Studies search room and also on the Local Studies website. The index lists all the men, who were all from Dukinfield, and includes names, regiment details, the date of the letter along with any other details available from Mike Pavasovic's *Men of Dukinfield* (1997) and from the War Memorial. See <http://www.tameside.gov.uk/localstudies/kenyonletters> for the index.

REMINISCENCES OF A R.S.M. (+S)

In researching the story of the Lancashire Contemptibles I came across an account in the QLR Museum written by Regimental Sergeant Major Harrison of his experiences at Mons with the 2nd Battalion South Lancashire Regiment. It was written in May 1928 and submitted to his commanding officer, perhaps to help commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Armistice.

It was an interesting read describing his experiences as sergeant in the Battalion's Machine Gun Section. His account is on our website and a paragraph extract is below:

"I set double sentries for the night but no one could sleep that night for the enemy had set fire to everything. We could see the sky all lit up, a couple of Church Towers were blazing. It was very fascinating and ought to have told us what to expect." (+S)

WANTED: Volunteers to write meeting reports

Tranquillity Personified, no less than you deserve. R.I.P. – Zouave Valley Visitor Book

SOLDIER'S KIT PRICES: 1915

Niall Cherry has supplied me with information giving prices for the various elements of a soldier's kit in 1915. Space restrictions prohibit giving full information but prices range from a pair of laces at 1/2d to a rifle at £3 12s. A complete breakdown of the information is on our website. For comparison a pint of beer in 1914 was 3d (c/o N. Cherry) whilst a new bicycle averaged £9 (c/o P. Bamford). (+S)

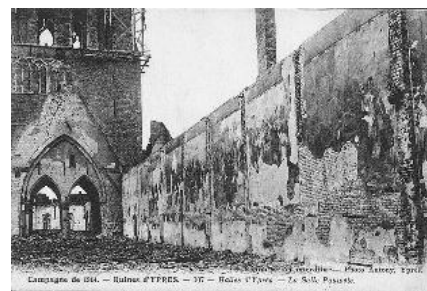
BOB'S CORNER: Bob Matthews - Chairman, Cumbria Branch WFA

Cumbria Branch's talk on 10 April should be of interest to all Biggles enthusiasts. The speaker was Stuart Bufton, Vice-Chairman of the WFA and he spoke about W.E. Johns - Bomber Pilot to an appreciative audience.

This was a fascinating talk and gave insights into a man who enjoyed a full and exciting life. Of particular interest were details of his bombing trips into Germany, the fateful last trip, capture and several unsuccessful escape attempts before repatriation.

North Lancashire Branch Members might like to note in their diaries that we are going to repeat last year's successful lunch and talks at the King's Head, Ravenstonedale. The date is Sunday, 22 June and the speakers will be Jack Cavanagh (Tyneside Brigades on 1 July 1916) and Clive Harris (Sportsmen of the Great War).

On a more personal note, I have recently recovered, via eBay, War and Victory Medals, which were awarded,



Above is a black and white postcard showing French war damage, captioned *Campagne de 1914- Ruines d'Ypres-107- Halles d'Ypres- La Salle Pauwels*. It was postmarked F.P.O.81 which is the Field postmark for the 81st Brigade of 27th Division. Censor CM3 No. 683 is for the 1/1 Wessex Field Company of the Royal Engineers. It is dated 16th. April 1915.

The card is addressed to Mrs A.H.Brown, Mayfield, Mayfield Road, Walton on Thames, England.

Dear mother, 16.4.15.

Hope you are all well. Have had three rather lively nights. Last night we were a little farther away from the German trenches - which sounds funny when I tell you our trench is only 60 yards from theirs. I crawled out over the parapet towards their trench and got about back about 90 yards further on. It's quite a common thing amongst our fellows to crawl out over the trenches to the parapet almost of the Germans. In fact one fellow went out and pulled the bayonet off a German rifle as he was about to fire. This chap got the D.S.O.

Best love to all
Yours affectionately
Cyril

P.S. A good homemade cake out here would do well.

Comment; I don't think that Cyril's escapades would have gone down well with his mother! Usually messages were sent to assure loved ones at home that they were quite safe even though they were being shot at and shelled all the time.

However he did survive the war.

Next is a French b/w postcard captioned - *Rouen Statue de Jeanne d'Arc Place de la Pucelle*. On the reverse, Army Post Office S.15 is for Bruyeres Camp in Rouen. The Censor mark, CM3 No. 1222 is for the No. 1 Territorial Base Depot. The card is dated 20th June 1915.



The card is addressed to Miss Edith Olsen, c/o Seaton, 4 Beaufort Rd., Edinburgh, Scotland.

Dear Edith, No.1 Terrier Base Rouen.
Base Camp.

I am spending the last few days of my convalescence in the Camp here along with hundreds of other 'cripples' all waiting their turn to return to the trenches for revenge. We are having a gay time here what with a Y.M.C.A. Tent, where we have concerts every night. Cinema Tent, etc. Tonight we had a fine talk from Annie S. Swan and it was grand - she brought us a fine inspiring message from the women at home. Glad to say my wound is completely healed up now although my left knee sometimes takes it into its head to give way beneath me It isn't a 'kneesy' job I can tell you (sorry). Do write soon and give me all the news. Hope Lena and the others are well.
Yours Willie

Comment; We will never know if 'Willie' survived the war.



Above a French b/w postcard, captioned *Guerre 1914-15- Compiègne- Artillerie Anglaise traversant la ville*. 1914-15 War - English artillery going through the town. L'H Paris. F.P.O. T.L.2 is for the 47th. (2nd London) Divisional Train. Censor CM3 No. 303 has not been identified. It is dated 6th. July 1915.

The card is addressed to R.V. Dunsham Esq. 32 Finchley Rd., London, N.W.

Dear Reg, 6-7-15

Just a card from ----- . We are in action once more & giving them beans. Hope you are keeping busy and still inventing things. By the way can you invent something to keep flies away for we are infested with them. Love to all Len.
Dr. Dunsham 530.

Comment; Driver Dunsham survived the war.

Next a French b/w postcard with a pink background. A humorous card showing the Kaiser as a pig, captioned *Le premier de ces messieurs! Il est necessaire d'abattre 20 millions de cochons en Allemagne*. On the back is F.P.O. 153 which is the Field postmark for 153 Brigade of 51st (Highland) Division. Censor CM3 is for 84th Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery in 51st Division. The card is dated 22nd. August 1915.



The card is addressed to Mrs R. B. Byass, Old Malton, Malton, York, England

Tameside Archives. The letters are written from places as far apart as Holland and the Mediterranean and give an interesting insight into life abroad. The letters are all very polite and deferential to the mayor and this is particularly interesting when it is considered that they were written in the difficult circumstances of World War I. The gratitude expressed in the letters is very moving because it illustrates the comfort that new, clean clothes could provide to men living in unimaginable conditions. The writers also express immense pleasure at being remembered by those at home as this was another great comfort to them at a difficult time.

One such letter was written by Sergeant Harry Metcalf who was later awarded the Military Medal. He wrote the following to Mrs Kenyon on 21 March 1917:

"I received the parcel containing the shirt and socks yesterday and I would like to thank you very much for same. As you are probably aware the 1/9 are now somewhere in France and the great change from the climate of Egypt to this country has been very trying and so the parcel was doubly welcome. I am sure all the lads who are serving in the army from dear old Dukinfield greatly appreciate your efforts to make their lot more comfortable, and I felt that I must add my humble tribute to your good work. Wishing you all the best of health and luck to carry on your good work."

Another letter writer was Walter Ralphs, brother of Dr Ralphs who later became county coroner. Their father was Joel Ralphs, a school master at St Marks School. Before the war, Walter had a career as a banker which began with the

Manchester and County Bank in Ashton. He later moved to London and was recommended for a post in the Chartered Bank, Shanghai, by Lord George Hamilton. Whilst in Shanghai he became a lieutenant in the Shanghai Light Horse and commanded a squadron in the Chinese Revolution of 1912. During the Great War he served with the Royal Field Artillery and died of wounds on the Somme on 15 July 1916.

He may have been a friend of the Kenyons as the tone of his letter is quite intimate and he signs himself Walter. He writes that "the tommies are suffering from much irritation caused by the recent issue of grey rough woollen shirts which makes them resort to thin cotton undervests as a means of protection. The numerous complaints I have had have made me wonder if any of your 'soldiers comfort' friends could send me out a small lot to distribute among them. It is needless for me to say how much appreciated they would be." He also comments on the men's morale - "Have had some interesting if not enjoyable days up at the Batteries and in the trenches. Tommies now are fight (sic) ... for the honour of the British Army. Strikers and slackers no longer worry them - they have long since given up such as incorrigible."

Mrs Kenyon was rewarded for her active involvement in the war effort by becoming one of the first three people to receive the freedom of the borough of Dukinfield on 24 May 1919. In June 1918, she also received the Medaille de la Reine from the King of the Belgians in recognition of her work with Belgian refugees.

My overnight plan for the route back to CDG was to cycle back due west to the Mairie at St Saveur, south on the retreat route of 5th Division via Nanteuil and Dammartin then skirt round the north of CDG to my hotel. This plan had to be rapidly revised when I awoke to find gale force westerly winds. Finding Sgt Nevin was second priority to getting to Roissy in one piece.

Having checked out the location of the artillery and Kings near Pisseleux, south west of Villers Cotterets, my objective was the shortest and least exposed route to CDG. It was necessary to walk some of the sections of the route since the wind was so severe. Villers-St-Genest, where the 2nd South Lancs halted on 1st September 1914, was reached at midday. Late afternoon coffee was taken in Dammartin perhaps even in the same café where Sir John French told Henry Wilson of the "dressing down" he had been given in Paris by Lord Kitchener for even thinking of retreating behind the Seine.

Eventually I reached my hotel at 6 pm and the following morning succeeded in travelling via minibus and plane back to John Lennon airport. I may not have succeeded in finding Sgt Nevin but at least I knew my bike could fly.

A SOLDIER'S COMFORT:

Larysa Bolton - Archivist

Tameside Local Studies & Archives Centre

Although the main collection for research into the First World War held at Tameside Local Studies and Archives

Centre is the Manchester Regiment Archive, our collection of deposited material occasionally throws up gems for research. One such source was recently deposited on loan by Christopher Kenyon of William Kenyon and Sons Limited of Dukinfield. The Kenyon family have a long association with Dukinfield and have served the town as councillors, aldermen and mayors. The firm, founded in 1866, remains a family concern to this day.

The recent deposit is a book of letters sent to Elizabeth Hannah Kenyon by soldiers serving in the First World War. Mrs Kenyon was quick to react to the news of the outbreak of war, mobilising some 200 women of Dukinfield to help the distress fund. She played an active part in community life in Dukinfield during the entire war, not least because her husband, George Harry Kenyon, served as Mayor of the town between 1912 and 1917. In fact, when he died suddenly in April 1917, Mrs Kenyon was elected as Mayor in his place and held the post until November 1917.

At the time of her mayorship, Mrs Kenyon was also chair of the Dukinfield branch of Queen Mary's Needlework Guild. The Guild was established to make and distribute clothes and other items to servicemen. The Dukinfield branch sent such items to the men of their town who were away in service. The items were sent to all men, regardless of which regiment they were with.

Many of the men receiving the items wrote back to Mrs Kenyon to express their gratitude. Mrs Kenyon appears to have kept all the letters, compiling them into the volume now in possession of

My Darling,

I got back to my friends yesterday & am feeling quite fit and well again now. I find things just as dull as usual here. With love to all your loving Husband Bob.

Comment; Peter Hart the Oral Historian at the Imperial War Museum illustrated in a lecture how the same soldier sent back home to his mother and a close friend two completely different accounts of the same day. To his mother he wrote that the day had been uneventful and that he was well away from the front line and to the friend that he was in the thick of the action and he did not know how much more he could stand. The soldier was killed in action a few days later. Hart was quite rightly pointing out that one could not always believe the written word and I wonder if the comments in this card were deliberately sent to comfort his wife.

(+S)

GREAT-UNCLE ROBERT: Gaynor Greenwood



My great-uncle, Robert Bennett, a miner from Shotton Colliery, County Durham, enlisted on 1 September 1914. He served in the 11th Battalion Durham Light Infantry, a pioneer battalion.. Over a

hundred of his letters survive and contain some interesting details about his war. A few extracts are below, reproduced exactly as written.

The excitement of his change of life can be felt in his first letters. However the training as a pioneer was a bit of a disappointment to Robert. He wrote "As pioneers its bridge building and making shit houses and the champion job of cleaning them out I said many a time I would not have a shit cleaners job for a pension but that's what we will have to do. its all labourers and scavengers jobs we have to do anyway its 2d a day extra". He was billeted at one time with a gamekeeper in the grounds of a country house at Shillinglee on the Surrey/Sussex border and was shocked to see "his [Lord Douro's] wife yesterday and she was riding in a motorcar she got out and she had mens riding breeches on".

Once Robert was serving on the Western Front, the content of his letters changed, with many discussions about what to put in parcels and reassurances to his mother that he was well and not in any real danger. Robert was known to his family as a nice, gentle lad and his letters often reflect his wish to be home - "I would have liked to have been home"and "I wish it was all over and done with and coming home again for good". He occasionally mentions lads from home, like Danny Lister from Wingate, near Shotton Colliery "There was a lad killed in no.2 section ... it was his own fault he was getting pears about 100 yards behind the first line trench a sniper fired 10 rounds at him and he come away. he went back and was hit in the head with 11th ... he only lived a few minutes".

SPECTAMUR AGENDO – By our deeds we are known

In a letter dated 6 August 1916, Robert described how he had met a neighbour, Thomas Lonsdale, from Shotton Colliery "Will you tell Mrs Lonsdale that I say [sic] their lad him whats in the Coldstreams and I thought he looked champion and I had long talk with him in the trenches, he was walking past and I thought it was him and I asked him if he was Lonsdale and he said yes and we had a long talk together, it is champion when you meet someone out who you know". Robert's mother wrote to him in late September/early October 1916 to tell him that Thomas Lonsdale had been killed on 26 September. The letter was returned to her with KILLED written across the envelope. This was the only notification the family received, apart from condolence letters from an officer and sergeant, that Robert was dead. He had been killed by a shell on 20 September when returning with a working party from digging trenches.

A book is being written about the 11th Battalion Durham Light Infantry by Martin Bashforth, a WFA member from Yorkshire, which will include extracts from Robert's letters. Martin would be pleased to hear from anyone with information about men who served with the battalion and he can be contacted at martinbashforth@gofast.co.uk or phone me on 01524 410750.

WANTED: Page Footnotes

FINDING SERGEANT NEVIN: Terry Dean

At the end of February I was despairing of the weather and dreaming of sunny

climes with my bike. Would our bikes fly to Cyprus? Emmie would not risk hers so I determined to put mine to the test. Easyjet return to Paris with bike at £102 seemed a good experiment. A secondary objective was site visits in connection with my investigation into the Lancashire Contemptibles.

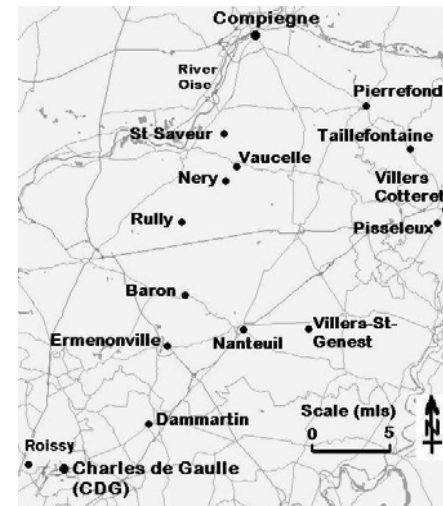
10th to 13th March were my chosen dates and when I booked, the week before, the bad weather in that period was not on the horizon. On 10th March I reluctantly drove to John Lennon with bike and self safely dry in car. I arrived at the long-stay car park one hour before start of check-in but was trapped in car with a continuous downpour. After an hour I was forced to saddle-up and arrived the terminal wet through. I successfully dismantled and packed my bike in monster heavy duty plastic bag (£15 from Information Kiosk) and boarded flight 7045 to Charles de Gaulle (CDG).

After a white knuckle landing in high winds I successfully retrieved and assembled bike then had to face exit roads of bewildering complexity in the dark. "Il y a une navette" (there is a shuttle bus) I was told. So approaching midnight a minibus deposited yours truly and bike at hotel in Roissy near CDG.

The following morning I left hotel, survived 2 miles on the N17, and then headed NNE towards St Saveur. "Spectamur Agendo" by Capt Hopkinson tells the experiences of the 1st East Lancs during the retreat from Mons. They had a "brush" with von Kluck's right flank north of Nery on 1st September 1914 whilst the BEF's 1st Cavalry Brigade and L Battery RHA fought their famous

action 2 miles to the south. Page 39 tells of Sgt Nevin, one of the most promising of the younger N.C.Os of the Battalion, being killed and buried in the churchyard at St Saveur. The CWGC have him on the Ferte-sous-Jouarre Memorial to the missing.

Tom Hanks went "Saving Private Ryan" in glorious sunshine; I went with the forlorn hope of finding Sergeant Nevin in wind and rain. Through Ermenonville, Baron and Rully I traced, in reverse, the retreat of 4th Division. Towards lunchtime Nery was a blurr as I passed through in heavy rain and paused for coffee in Vaucelle. Luckily St Saveur graveyard had some shelter but, not surprisingly, no trace of Sgt Nevin's grave. In the shelter I ate some of the cheese sandwiches which Emmie had provided and hoped for the rain to ease. I spoke with two locals who had braved the weather to place flowers on graves but neither knew of Sgt Nevin. They advised I should visit the local Mairie (Council Building).



With my hotel booked in Villers Cotterets I could not wait for the rain to stop. I found the Mairie to be closed all-day (I should have remembered the significance of Tuesdays in France) and decided to pursue the plan I had formulated in the graveyard. This was to cycle to Compiègne via the forest through which von Kluck's troops had passed then use the cycle track parallel to the river Oise.

My objective was to call and say hello to Privates Anderton and Cave of the Kings Liverpool who are buried in the Royallieu National Cemetery in Compiègne. They were also killed on 1st September 1914 but south-west of Villers Cotterets as they helped the Guards and artillery extricate themselves from von Kluck's III Corps. The cemetery gate was locked when I arrived but I persuaded the concierge of the adjacent civilian cemetery to venture into the rain and unlock the gate. There was no visitor's book to bear testimony to my passing and only the concierge, his accomplice, and, now you know of my visit.

I then had to make best speed in pouring rain to Villers Cotterets. The shortest route was 20 miles with threatening contours at Pierrefonds and Taillefontaine. I paused in Pierrefonds within sight of the grand chateau for a cheese sandwich, chocolate and plenty of water. Adjacent to its walls the East Lancs bivouacked on 30th August 1914 since there was smallpox in the village. The rain stopped for the last 10 miles. The heated towel rail and radiator in my room at the hotel le Regent had my gear dry by the following morning.