



THE WESTERN FRONT  
ASSOCIATION

Lancashire North Branch

# Despatch

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In early April 1918 Ludendorff launched his “Georgette” offensive and the soldier in the above grave died countering the German attack. His story, together with that of Lieut. Col. Egerton Fairclough and the motto on the grave is the first article in this Despatch. Separate, there is a tale written by Brigadier General Kentish about an incident during Georgette. Also read inside about the Zeebrugge raid on 23 April 1918 and the Lancashire volunteers who died; a report about the 10<sup>th</sup> Commanding Officer’s conference; the WFA President’s conference; seven Lancashire VCs; France’s Monument to their Marne Victory; a soldier’s poem and more.

## Editor's Musing

When travelling through France in late September I was very pleased to learn that the frustration and anguish of suffering regular traffic congestion near home caused by construction work for the new local bypass was shortly to be ended. But the big surprise was that on opening the Broughton Bypass, for which I had been responsible when working as a County Council officer,



was henceforth to be named James Towers Way after a local Victoria Cross hero who was unknown to me. This links my travails in the past with my interests of today. The story of James Towers and his VC is at page 21.

Following completion of Linesman's site inspections reported at page 27, a visit to Tyne Cot Cemetery was an imperative en route to our Bruges hotel to see the renovations so magnificently displayed by the BBC in their coverage of the centenary commemorations (see back page). Car parking space was hard to find on the Saturday afternoon and people aplenty were seemingly intent on paying homage to the fallen. However on entering the cemetery through the access in the Memorial Wall my attention was distracted from the War Stone by "prancing" individuals on the Cross of Sacrifice, some with selfie sticks. What can be done to reduce disrespect displayed by some individuals whilst recognising the value the Cross plinth provides as a viewing point across the battlefield? Thoughts welcomed.

(+P) or (+S) after article title indicates more photos in Photo Gallery or Supplementary Report on our website [www.wfanlancs.co.uk](http://www.wfanlancs.co.uk)

Articles are by Editor unless stated otherwise.

TO SEE DESPATCH WITH LARGER TYPE AND PHOTOS IN COLOUR VIEW ON OUR WEBSITE



THEY WIN OR DIE  
WHO WEAR THE  
ROSE OF  
LANCASTER:

Lieutenant Colonel  
Egerton Fairclough  
1/4 Battalion South  
Lancashire Regiment  
and Private James Oddie 1/4 Battalion Loyal  
North Lancashire Regiment

The photo (across) shows the officers of the 1/4<sup>th</sup> (Territorial) Battalion South Lancashire Regiment (1/4SL) shortly after they were mobilized on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914. It includes three members of the Fairclough family. Lieutenant-Colonel Brereton Fairclough (seated 5<sup>th</sup> from left on front row) who was the subject of a report in Despatch of May 2010; Lieutenant Eric Fairclough (standing 2<sup>nd</sup> from left on back row) and Captain Egerton Fairclough (standing 6<sup>th</sup> from left on middle row) who is a subject of this report.

Egerton was born at Moore, near Warrington in early 1885. His father John was the head of Mersey Mill, Warrington and after attending Harrow School he was Secretary and later Director of Moore & Co., Chemical Manufacturers, Lymm. He joined 1/4SL in 1905 and was promoted Captain in 1912.

1/4SL was part of the South Lancashire Infantry Brigade in the West Lancashire (Territorial) Division. After a period training at Dunfermline, where it was available to defend the coast line, the Battalion moved to Kent in October 1914 for "strenuous training" before it crossed to France on 12 February 1915. Reinforcements were urgently required for the Regular Army, and so from October, 1914, to May, 1915, a steady flow of battalions, R.E. companies, and Field Ambulances from the Division proceeded overseas where they were attached to units of the Regular Army and served with them



during the operations of 1915. 1/4SL was attached to 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division which included the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of their Regiment.

After a period of training 1/4SL independently occupied trenches in the Kemmel sector then opposite St Eloi and they also supplied large working parties for digging support and communication trenches. On 1 May the Battalion experienced gas for the first time without suffering casualties but they suffered heavy casualties in mid June when they took part in the assault of Bellewarde Ridge and Egerton performed distinguished service in the action but was severely wounded in the jaw and did not rejoin 1/4SL until April 1916.

At the beginning of 1916 the units of the original West Lancashire Division were concentrated and the formation was reconstituted as the 55<sup>th</sup> Division, retaining its county designation as a sub-title, under Major-General H S Jeurwine. 1/4SL rejoined as the Divisional Pioneer Battalion, retaining the role it had performed since July 1915, instead of as an infantry battalion in the 166<sup>th</sup> (South Lancashire) Brigade.

#### January to August 1916

55<sup>th</sup> Division assembled in and around Hallencourt, near Abbeville, from the

beginning of January and in mid February took over trenches from the French South of Arras from Wailly to Wallencourt. 1/4SL had a home at Beaumetz-le-Loges and from there expended considerable labour on the Corps reserve line and on communication

trenches in the forward areas. On 20<sup>th</sup> July the Battalion trekked southward to the Somme into a camp south of Fricourt.

Companies went nightly to the forward zones south of Longueval and opposite Guillemont. Casualties mounted, particularly among officers and on 1 August Egerton was wounded again and shell-shocked. 3 days later Lieutenant Colonel Brereton Fairclough was invalided home with Captain Eric Fairclough becoming Second-in-Command of the Battalion under Major M. Woods.

On 8<sup>th</sup> August **Lieutenant G C Coury** of 1/4SL had the task of leading half of "D" Company to support an attack on Guillemont by digging a communication trench from the newly-captured positions back to the original British line. Lieut Coury famously won a VC for rescuing the wounded commanding officer of the attacking Battalion, Lieut. Col. J. L. Swainson of the 1/4<sup>th</sup> Kings Own Royal Lancaster Regiment in the 164<sup>th</sup> (North Lancashire) Brigade.



Coincidentally, the day before, Private James Oddie, Emmie's uncle arrived in France to join the 1/4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Loyal North

Lancashire Regiment (1/4LNL) also in 164<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

**James Oddie Pte  
202826, 1/4LNL  
Regiment**

James was born at Loveclough, Rossendale on 2 October 1894. He attested at Rawtenstall on 9 December 1915 giving his occupation as a grocer. On 25 January 1916 he was mobilised and appointed to the 3/5<sup>th</sup> Battalion East Lancashire Regiment for training. On 7 August 1916 he crossed to France and on 17 August 1916 he joined 1/4LNL west of Abbeville whose War Diary indicates reinforcements of 1 officer and 119 other ranks arrived from 1/5 Battalion East Lancashire Regiment on that day. James was appointed to 'B' Company.

Following rest and training the battalion moved back to the Somme and on 9 September B and C companies successfully attacked a German trench between Delville Wood and Ginchy but the supporting battalion could not capture the final objective and all troops fell back to the original line. In his first "taste" of fighting James' battalion lost 24 killed, 125 wounded and 79 missing. 1/4LNL was involved in other actions prior to moving towards the Ypres Salient on 1 October.

James did two spells as observer for 164 Brigade in October and November and the early months of 1917 were "quiet" for 55 Division. In mid May James was suffering from scabies and suffered a recurrence in July not returning to 1/4LNL until September. It is probable James saw little action in 3<sup>rd</sup> Ypres but the same could not be said for Egerton who rejoined 1/4SL on 22 July 1917 as Second-in-Command and would have a key role in ensuring the Pioneers completed their own particular and dangerous tasks in



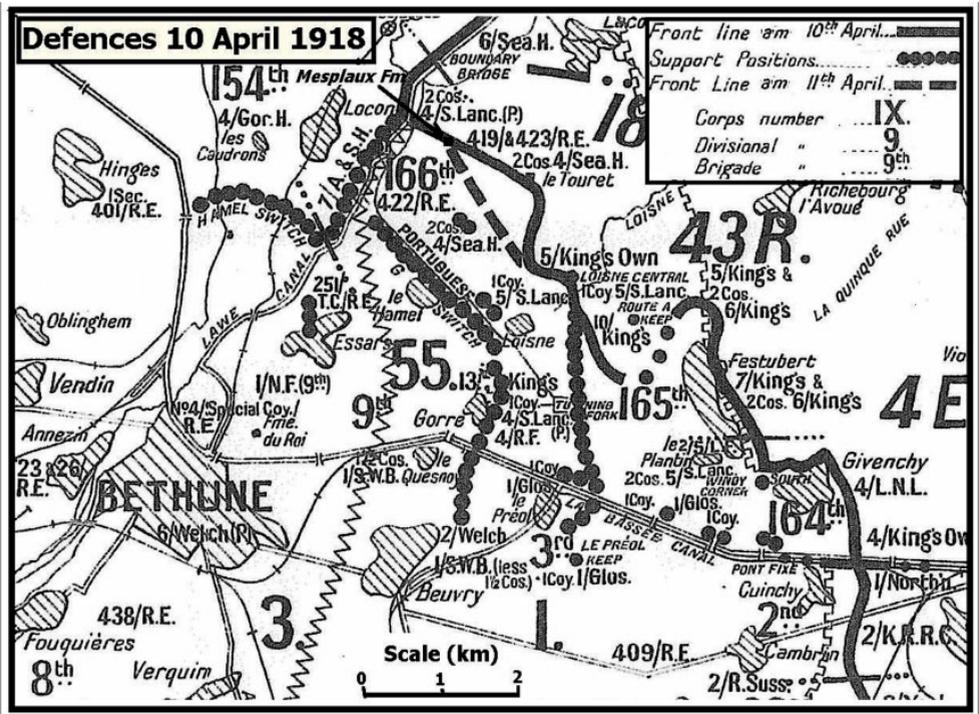
supporting their fighting comrades. 55 Division moved to positions south of Cambrai at the beginning of October and **Lieut. Col. Egerton Fairclough** took command of the Battalion on 9 October from Brereton with Eric Fairclough becoming 2-in-C.



Last May's Despatch (Issue 19, pages 17 & 18) reported on the German's counter-attack at Cambrai on 30 November and how 1/4LNL checked the German's advance after they had broken through 55 Division's positions.

In early 1918 the Division moved to positions east of Bethune. Over the period to early April the line was generally quiet and the Division made preparations for countering the anticipated German attack. Elaborate defence schemes were prepared depending on whether an attack fell on their front or that of the Portuguese to their north. Infantry had one of two tasks either as garrison troops - whose duty was to hold their positions to the last even if surrounded, or as counter-attack troops for immediate local counter-attack. and in the afternoon of 8 April the Division's line extended from the La Basse Canal to the north-east of Festubert with 164 and 165 Brigades in the line and 166 Brigade in and south-east of Locon prior to relieving the Portuguese Brigade to the north.

At 4.15 a.m. on the 9<sup>th</sup> Ludendorff launched his offensive named "Georgette" with a heavy bombardment of the British and Portuguese positions. The bombardment slackened at 6.30 a.m. but recommenced at 8.00 a.m. and the Portuguese evacuated their positions leaving 55 Division's left flank exposed. By 9.00 a.m. the Germans had also broken into the positions of 164 and 165 Brigades. There was severe fighting for the



remainder of 9 April but the line held and elsewhere the Germans who had broken into the Division's positions were successfully counter-attacked and a substantial haul of prisoners taken. However one of the 1/4LNL to be killed in the action at Givency was Pte James Oddie.

As part of Major-General Jeurwine's re-dispositions to meet the threat caused by the Portuguese withdrawal 166 Brigade formed a defensive flank near Gorre facing northwards supplemented by 1/4SL and other units. Quoting from the 1/4SL Regimental History, "everywhere the men of Lancashire held firm and the waves of attack beat vainly against the isolated islands of determined infantry." On 10 April 55<sup>th</sup> Division held back the Germans but hostile shelling of 1/4SL's HQ at Mesplaux Farm increased and Lt. Col. Egerton Fairclough was killed. His cousin Eric then took command of the Battalion.

Subsequently an officer of the German General Staff stated: "the stand made by the

(55<sup>th</sup>) Division on April 9<sup>th</sup> and the days which followed marked the final ruination of the supreme German effort of 1918."

The Despatch frontispiece is a photo of James' initial grave in the King's Liverpool Graveyard, Cunchy carrying the 55<sup>th</sup> Division badge and motto. Subsequently it was

relocated to the CWGC Cemetery at Vieille Chapelle. **Lieut. Col. Egerton Fairclough's grave** in Bethune Town Cemetery was also similarly marked before it was replaced by a CWGC headstone.



## 55 Division Badge & Motto

Despatch of May 2010 reported that in 1915 all lettering on vehicles was abolished and replaced by unit badges with 1/4SL choosing the Red Rose of Lancaster. This suggestion was made by Lt. Col. Brereton Fairclough, with his sister Helen designing the badge. When the West Lancashire Division was re-formed, Major-General Jeurwine, was so impressed with the territorial significance of the Red Rose used by 1/4SL he directed it should be used, with modifications, as the distinguishing badge for the whole Division. Later all ranks wore a cloth replica of the emblem on their service dress jackets.



On 9 June 1917  
**Lieutenant Leonard  
Comer Wall** of 275  
Brigade R.F.A. was  
killed by shellfire at  
Ypres and  
subsequently a 55<sup>th</sup>

Division staff officer saw the announcement of his death in a newspaper which also carried the words "We win or die who wear the Rose of Lancaster." He mentioned the quotation to Major-General Jeurwine who was so impressed by it that he gave orders forthwith that the motto should henceforth encircle the divisional sign.

It was initially thought the words were from Shakespeare or others and it was not until December 1917 that it was discovered Wall had written some verses in his dug-out and sent them home. Here are the verses as originally written:

*When Princes fought for England's Crown,  
The House that won the most renown,  
And trod the sullen Yorkist down,  
Was Lancaster.*

*Her blood-red emblem, stricken sore,  
Yet steeped her pallid foe in gore,  
Still stands for England evermore—  
And Lancashire.*

*Now England's blood like water flows;  
Full many a lusty German knows,  
We win or die—who wear the Rose  
Of Lancaster.*

It will be noticed the concluding lines of the verses differ in one particular from the words of the motto. Wall wrote "We win or die" whilst the motto reads "They win or die." The mistake was not discovered until spring 1916 and it was too late to make an alteration. By that time it was in common use on Christmas cards, notice-boards and had been stamped in concrete in many dug-outs.

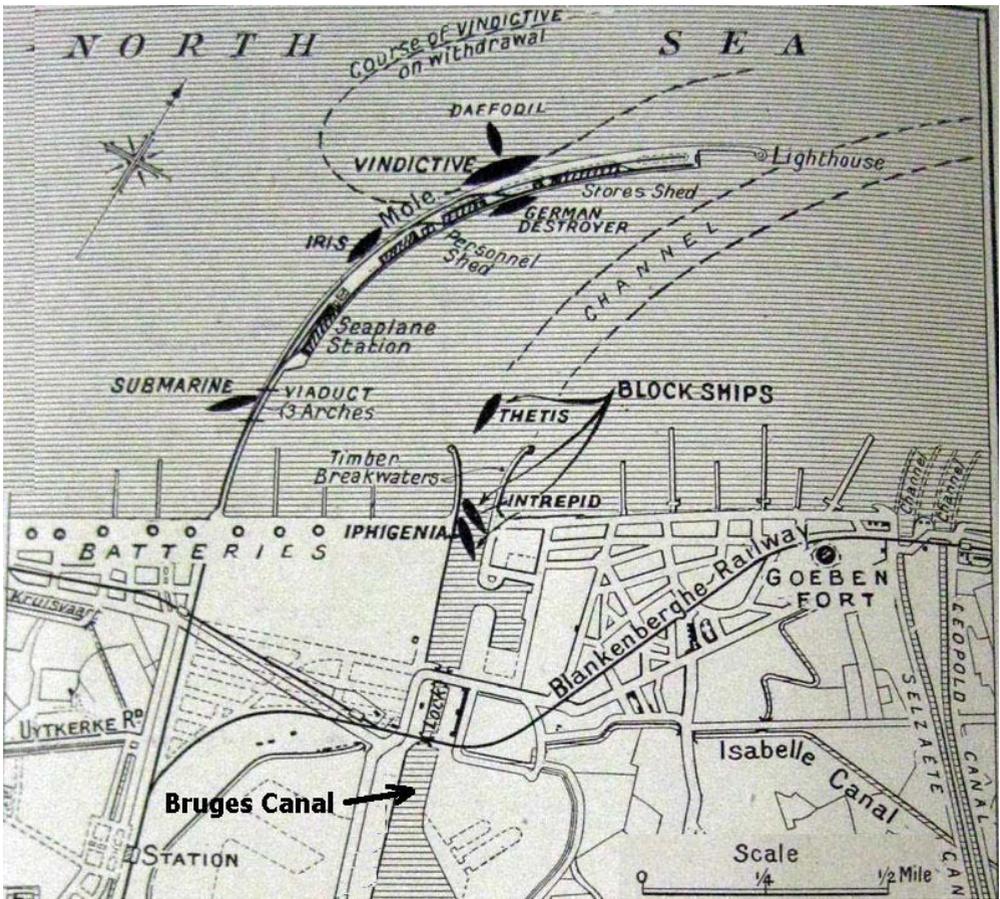
HE FELL IN THE DIN OF BATTLE WE  
TRUST HE RESTS IN PEACE  
- Corporal L R Whitlam Lincolnshire  
Regiment

## LANCASHIRE VOLUNTEERS AT ZEEBRUGGE

When it became clear that the 1917 offensive in Flanders had failed to deny German U-boats based at Bruges access to the North Sea, operations to block use of Zeebrugge and Ostend to U-boats were given the go ahead. In early 1918 **Vice Admiral Sir Roger Keyes** devised his plan to block the Bruges Canal by sinking the outdated cruisers HMS *Intrepid*, *Iphigenia* and *Thetis* in the canal mouth at Zeebrugge. To facilitate this, a diversionary attack would be made on the Zeebrugge mole.



Volunteers were readily secured for the landing force on the mole and the old armoured cruiser HMS *Vindictive* was chosen as the lead storm-ship supported by two shallow draft Merseyside ferry-boats the *Daffodil* and *Iris*. Modifications were made to



the ships to enable the storming force to gain access to the parapet of the mole which was high above sea level.

About 75 vessels (cruisers, monitors, destroyers, submarines and motor launches) and over 1700 volunteers were involved in the night-time operation in which a high tide, calm weather, favourable wind for the smoke screen and absence of fog were crucial to the plan.

The following is a summarised account of what happened when the raid was made on 23 April after two earlier attempts were aborted due to unfavourable weather:

### 1. Attack on the Mole

The diversionary attack on the mile-long mole commenced one minute after midnight

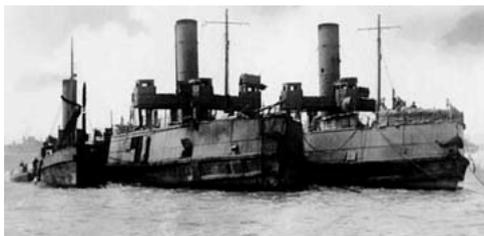
on 23 April. The landing force of Royal Marines was to storm and demolish the German gun batteries, seaplane station and defences on it. Unfortunately a change in wind direction affected the smoke screen



HMS Vindictive before Zeebrugge raid

resulting in *Vindictive* coming under heavy fire on approaching mole causing many

casualties, killing most of the officers in charge of the Marine landing parties and a large number of gangways, which were important for the attackers to get onto the mole, were badly damaged. Also *Vindictive* was 3 ship lengths from the planned contact



Iris and Daffodil

point with the mole and water conditions meant *Daffodil* had to hold *Vindictive* against the mole which meant Marines on *Daffodil* and *Iris* had difficulties getting onto the mole. All the time *Vindictive* was alongside the mole she received "terrible punishment" from German gunfire but thereby achieved the objective of the diversionary attack.

### 2. Demolition of Railway Viaduct

At 12.15 a.m. the railway viaduct connecting the mole to the shore was blown up. The crew of the obsolete submarine HMS *C3* wedged it between the iron pillars of the viaduct, fuses were set for the explosives on board, the crew taken off and the resultant explosion blew away 100 feet of the viaduct.



Breach in viaduct created by HMS *C3*

This prevented German reinforcements getting onto the mole as the three block-ships were steaming into the harbour.

### 3. Sinking of Block-Ships

The block-ships passed through the battery fire and steamed on towards the channel and canal beyond it. *Thesis* had by this time sustained heavy damage and was taking on tons of water causing her to list heavily. She was brought to a halt 500 meters from her objective but had cleared the way through the nets and obstructions, allowing *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia* to pass through unimpeded as they made their way up the canal. *Intrepid* entered the channel and once inside, her wheel was put hard over and the ship scuttled. *Iphigenia* was not far behind and she made for a gap on the eastern side of the channel where she too was successfully scuttled.



Aerial view of sunken Blockships

### 4. Withdrawal

The crew of submarine *C3* made their escape in a small skiff whilst the crews of the block-ships escaped in boats before being picked up by fast motor launches. When the recall was sounded on the mole the shore parties withdrew to their battered ships carrying their wounded with them. Twenty five minutes later *Vindictive*, *Daffodil* and *Iris* made for open water but before she could escape *Iris* was riddled with German shells. When *Iris* got out of the gunfire half her bridge was blown away, she was blazing and

her main deck was choked with dying and wounded.

Represented at the time as a tremendous British victory by Allied propaganda the Zeebrugge raid did not in reality hinder German operations for more than a few days. The total British casualties in the Zeebrugge raid were 170 killed or mortally wounded, 400 wounded and 16 captured. Commonwealth War Graves Commission records indicates that 10 of those who died on 23 April 1918 were born in Lancashire of whom 7 were from what are now the conurbations of Merseyside and Greater Manchester. Unless otherwise stated the men were Royal Marine Light Infantry in the 4<sup>th</sup> Royal Marine Battalion (4RMB).

#### Liverpool

Able Seaman H Best, Royal Navy, HMS *North Star*

Able Seaman J A Bingley, Royal Navy, HMS *Vindictive*

Private J Colligan

Gunner R W Russell, Royal Marine Artillery,

Able Seaman B P Trees, Royal Navy, HMS *Vindictive*

#### Manchester

Lieutenant J Jackson, Chorlton-on-Medlock

Private G A Wood

More information on the 3 from Lancashire is as follows:

#### **Private Tom Herbert**

**Jackson** was born 3 July 1897 the youngest son of Mr Thomas and Mrs Ellen Jackson of the Village Smithy, Singleton. He was the first volunteer for service in the Army out of Singleton, but owing to



not being old enough he enlisted in the Marines on 17 September 1914. Initially at Deal Depot he joined Plymouth Division on 4 February 1915 and embarked on the

battleship HMS *Marlborough* on 5 June 1915. Seeing action at the Battle of Jutland he remained with the battleship until volunteering for the Zeebrugge raid and joining 4RMB in February 1918. He is buried in Immingham (St Andrew) Churchyard, Lincolnshire.

#### **Private Harold**

**Mercer** was born 27 September 1897 the eldest of seven children living in Whittaker Street, Burnley. Prior to his enlistment in the Marines on 2 January 1917 he worked for



Burnley Munitions Co. After a service at the Wesley Chapel he was interred with military honours in Burnley cemetery with the firing party provided by the 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Volunteers Regt. (For more information re Pte Mercer see [www.burnleyinthegreatwar.info](http://www.burnleyinthegreatwar.info))

#### **Private Albert Victor**

**Loxley** was born 11 March 1898 in Oswaldtwistle, the only son of Mr A. Loxley of Spring Hill, Accrington. Prior to enlistment on 27 December 1916 he worked as a spindle setter at Bullough's.



When his funeral took place in Accrington a party of 20 soldiers from Preston walked with reversed arms from his home to Immanuel Church, Oswaldtwistle for the burial service and the soldiers fired a volley over the open grave followed by the Last Post.

THEY SHINE AS THE STARS FOR EVER -  
2nd Lieut D F Turner East Yorkshire Regt

## **BRIGADIER GENERAL REGINALD JOHN KENTISH (RJK) & HIS 7<sup>th</sup> TALE - "THANKS VERY MUCH but I'M OFF TO ITALY!"**



In November 2013's Despatch I told of my visit to the Imperial War Museum to view the papers of RJK and my discovery of stories (tales) he had drafted around 1940. They described amusing incidents he

experienced in WW1 and this is the seventh tale.

"THANKS VERY MUCH but I'M OFF TO ITALY!"

SCENE: TIME: PLACE: The Battle of Givenchy', commencing 9th April 1918: Von Ludendorff's great attack on the British and Portuguese line.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE: Brig. General (now Major General) L. A. E. Price-Davies commanding the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, 3rd Division. Brig. General (now Lieut. General) B. D. Fisher. Major Russell, commanding two Field Companies R.E. (55<sup>th</sup> Division). A young officer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Scots Fusiliers (8<sup>th</sup> Inf. Brigade) - and myself commanding the 166<sup>th</sup> Inf. Brigade, 55<sup>th</sup> (West Lancashire) Division.

The Battle of the Lys, which is the official title given to the attack which the Germans, under Marshal Ludendorff, launched against the British and the Portuguese on the 9th April, 1918, was in full blast, and the Portuguese, having been forced back by greatly superior numbers, had exposed my left flank to the enemy, I was hard - very hard - put to it, to prevent him breaking my line, which meant the taking of Bethune and obtaining possession of the rich coal area to the south of it. (See map on Page 5)

My Brigade (166<sup>th</sup>) had been much increased, both in units and numbers, for my

Divisional Commander, Major General (now Lieut. General Sir Hugh S.) Jeudwine appreciating that on my Brigade holding its line and especially that part of it which faced north, the fate of the 164<sup>th</sup> and 165<sup>th</sup> Brigades and of much of the Divisional Heavy Artillery very largely depended, as the battle went on, had sent me in succession the 1/4<sup>th</sup> Seaforth Highlanders, loaned to him by the 51st (Highland) Division, the 1/4<sup>th</sup> South Lancashire Regiment, the Divisional Pioneer Battalion, and finally, the last troops he had in hand, namely, the two Divisional Field Companies, R.E. under a very gallant leader by name Russell - Major Russell D.S.O.

At the time of the incident, which forms the subject of my story, there was a lull in the fighting and I was standing on the top of the Culvert, under which I had established my Headquarters - incidentally this was my sixth Headquarters in thirty-six hours, having been shelled out no less than five times during that period - looking towards my front line, and with me were my Brigade Major, a young officer in the 'learner' stage, having come to me from the First Army only a few days before the battle, and Bennett my Signal Officer, a very gallant young officer.

And whilst we stood there with our glasses to our eyes, looking both north and east - for I had two fronts to hold - I suddenly heard - very heavy machine-gun and rifle fire coming from the direction of the Farm, a mile due north of where we were, and which was just on the east side of the Lawe Canal, and held by Major Russell and his two Field Companies; very shortly afterwards, I saw men coming back along the bank, some running and others walking. They were on the opposite side of the canal to the farm and, as I had no men on that side, I knew at once that they were not my men.

At the same moment Bennett, called to me to say that Major Russell wanted me very urgently. I went at once to the telephone and picking up the receiver, I said:

"The Brigadier speaking Russell; what's the trouble?"

"We are being very heavily attacked sir, and the Scots Fusiliers on the other side of the canal are retiring and exposing my left flank. Shall I conform to their movement and withdraw with them, sir?"

"Certainly not," I said, "On no account retire! You must refuse your left, and fight to a finish! I'll see about the Scots Fusiliers," and saying this I dashed up from the Culvert and calling across to the Reserve Company of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, which was just on the other side of the river I said: "Send your officer here at once!"

Directly I said this a young officer jumped up, from where he had been lying quite close to the river bank, and saluting, he said:

"I am commanding the Company sir."<sup>1</sup>

"Right!" I said, "Do you see those men coming back on your side of the river?"

"Yes sir," he said.

"Well, they're your men, not mine, and they're exposing my left flank and if that's turned, the whole line will go and the Bosches'll get La Bassee! Do you understand?"

"Yes sir," he said.

"Well then, take your Company up, as hard as you can go, stop those men retiring and get them back into the line and hold on for all you're worth! Quick! Off you go! There's not a minute to spare!"

"Right sir," said the young officer, and to give him his due, he got his men up in a second, and then putting himself at their head, and shouting "Follow me!" off he went with his men in splendid order, right up to the line, stopping and taking back with him the men of his Regiment who were retiring, and there he remained fighting the battle with Russell to the end.

A few minutes later Russell rang me up again:

"The Scots Fusiliers are back again on my left, sir, and I'm quite happy!" And so was I!!

*[For the excellent and gallant leading of his men and restoring his line at a very critical moment, I sent in this young officer's name with a strong recommendation for an immediate reward, and I am pleased to say he received the Military Cross and Indeed he richly deserved it. R.J.K.]*

I then thought I'd better ring up Price-Davies, under whose command the Royal Scots Fusiliers were, to tell him what I had done, and also to suggest that he should move his Headquarters up near mine and fight the battle with and alongside me, and so I told Bennett to get him to the telephone.



L.A.E. Price-Davies

This he did, and after telling him what I had done, I was just going to ask him if he would move his Headquarters up, near mine, when much to my surprise and astonishment he said:

"Oh, thank you very much for ringing me up, but I'm off to Italy!"

"You're off to where?" I said.

"To Italy," he repeated, and then, "I'm very sorry, but I'm afraid I must ring off now, as my successor has just arrived to take over!" and saying "Good-bye and good luck" he rang off and that was the last I saw or heard of Price-Davies, so far as the Battle of the Lys was concerned, for within a quarter of an hour or so, he had handed over his Brigade and was off on his way to Italy!!

Half an hour later, I was again rung up, and on picking up the receiver, a voice said:

"Is that you Kentish?"

"Yes," I said, "Who are you?"

"Oh, I'm Fisher, Bertie Fisher. I've just taken over this Brigade from Price Davies, who barely had time to hand over, when a car arrived from Divisional Headquarters and whisked



B. D. Fisher

him off and I understand he's now on his way to Italy! He'd no time to tell me anything about the battle. All he said was 'Ring up Kentish: he's up there and I'll tell you everything!!!'"

"Well," I said, "I think the best thing you can do is to come up here, and you can then see exactly what is going on, and if you'll stay up all the better and we can then fight the battle together," and, I added, "If you can get hold of a bottle of 'pop'<sup>1</sup>, for

Heaven's sake bring it up with you, for it's a real b —  
-y battle, and a glass of 'bubbly' would go down jolly  
well!"

A couple of hours later Bertie Fisher arrived - and  
also a bottle of 'pop' - and what is more he brought  
his Headquarters up on my left and we fought the  
battle together and saved La Bassee and all the  
coal fields to the south of it and what is more the  
Huns never broke our line!

In my report on the Battle, I wrote:- "At a most  
tense and critical moment, I found it necessary to  
order some men of another Brigade to reinforce  
some of their own men, who were retiring, thereby  
exposing my left flank and indeed the whole  
position to extreme danger. Having given the  
necessary orders I deemed it advisable to inform  
their Brigadier of the action I had taken.

"I therefore rang him up and told him what I had  
done, when, to my astonishment, he said:

'Oh, thanks very much, but I'm off to Italy!'

"And with that he rang off and within a quarter of  
an hour, I am credibly informed, he had left for Italy!

"I venture to suggest, and with all respect, that, if  
in the course of the present war, or of any other war  
in which our Army is involved, the Higher  
Command should find it necessary to move officers  
of high rank whose troops, at the time, are actually  
engaged in difficult and critical operations, from one  
theatre of war to another, the move shall not take  
place until the troops of the Officer or Officers  
concerned are stationary and certainly facing in the  
right direction!!"

Whether my Divisional Commander ever sent  
my report on or not, I do not know. I feel, however,  
quite sure that there are not many Officers who will  
disagree with what I wrote.

Incidentally I subsequently discovered that the  
reason why Price Davies (who was a brother-in-law  
of the late Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, who was  
then Chief of the Imperial General Staff) had been  
ordered to Italy was to take command of a Division  
with the rank of Major General.

But this, I feel, in no way justified his being taken  
away from his Brigade in the middle of a battle; in  
any case I don't suppose that the Allied Armies in  
Italy would have suffered any grave disaster, had

his departure been delayed until such time as the  
critical period of the Battle of the Lys, in which his  
Brigade was engaged, had passed, or at any rate  
as I put in my report, until his troops were stationary  
and facing in the right direction!!

Certainly this Battle was very nearly being lost  
through his being taken away in such unseemly  
haste, and at such a critical moment!!!

A MAN'S IMMORTALITY LIES IN THE  
HEARTS OF HIS FRIENDS  
- Capt F J Hannam, Gloucestershire Regt

### 10<sup>TH</sup> COMMANDING OFFICER'S CONFERENCE, 4<sup>TH</sup> ARMY SCHOOL, 27 JANUARY- 2 FEBRUARY 1918 (+S)

When preparing the report about the  
photograph of attendees at the 9<sup>th</sup>  
Commanding Officer's Conference for last  
November's Despatch (Issue 18) I was  
unable to locate a report/programme for that  
conference. However the Australian War  
Memorial Library (AWML) kindly provided me  
with a document produced by 4<sup>th</sup> Army Staff  
with the programme for the 10<sup>th</sup> Conference  
held in early 1918 (page 1) and the  
subsequent 15 pages listed questions from  
Commanding Officers together with the  
answers given. As  
for the 9<sup>th</sup>  
Conference, **Major  
General A A  
Montgomery**, Chief of  
Staff 4<sup>th</sup> Army  
oversaw the 10<sup>th</sup>  
Conference.



Readers could be  
interested to see the  
document from the AWML setting out the  
conference programme and  
questions/answers as the crucial months of  
Spring/Summer 1918 drew near;  
consequently a copy is on our website as a  
supplement to this Despatch.

I have also summarised a few of the issues raised and the answers given, as follows:

### German Machine Guns

Is sufficient instruction being given to our troops in the use of German machine guns since many are captured during an advance?

Answer: Captured guns are issued to Schools and Divisions for instruction (numbers given) and additional approval was announced for an additional pool of German MGs to be issued to Armies to be allotted temporarily to Divisions and units for training.

### Flights by Infantry Officers

It would be valuable if more Infantry officers were taken up in aeroplanes to get an idea of what can be seen from the air.

Answer: A Flying Corps Squadron has been placed at the disposal of Armies for this purpose.

### Sanitation

In a line of shell-holes the fouling of ground is a grave danger to the health of troops in hot weather.

Answer: This is largely a question of discipline. Receptacles could be provided and emptied at night.

### P.H. Helmets

It is suggested that the P.H. Helmet be done away with.

Answer: The present policy is they should be abolished with two minor exceptions:

- i) Field Ambulances and C.C.S.s should maintain a small stock to equip wounded troops who arrive without Box Respirators and require an emergency appliance.
- ii) Alien and coloured Labour Units are never employed within 10 kilometres of the line thus it would be a waste of money to issue Box respirators. Moreover it is very difficult to fit



**PH Helmet**

many of the coloured races with a respirator on account of the shape of their nose.

### Officers Cashiered or Dismissed

Such an officer should be returned to the firing line as a private soldier with a week of sentence.

Answer: For such rapid action such ex-officers would have to be posted to their late units or to a unit in the neighbourhood; there are obvious objections to this. Also an ex-officer may require re-training if sent to another arm of the Service.

### Duck Board Tracks

As such tracks are heavily straffed during an attack an emergency track well camouflaged should be laid in every Battalion Sector, to be used only by order from Brigade Headquarters.

Answer: This is a sound suggestion, and is already carried out in certain cases.

In addition to the above 6 questions/answers there are 70 more in the document from the AWML.

## **GREAT WAR MEDALS - THE MILITARY MEDAL: Bill Myers (+S)**

The Military Medal is a circular silver medal of 36mm diameter, featuring an effigy of the reigning monarch.



The reverse has the inscription in four lines "For Bravery in the Field" and surrounded by a laurel wreath. The ribbon is dark blue with five equal centre stripes of white, red, white, red, and white. The medals bear details of the winner, except in the case of those issued unnamed to foreign recipient.

The Military Medal was established on 25 March 1916 for other ranks and was the equivalent to the Military Cross which was for officers. The new bravery award was ranked below the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM), which was also awarded to non-commissioned members of the Army. Unlike the DCM, it came without a £20 grant or any additions to an Army pension. Recipients of the Military Medal were entitled to put the letters MM after their name.

A total of 115,600 awards were made for actions during the First World War, plus more than 5,796 bars for a second award and 180 second bars for a third award. There was just one soldier to get a third bar for his fourth act of bravery worthy of the Military Medal. This was Private Ernest Albert Corey, a stretcher bearer in the Australian 55<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion.

In the Second World War, more than 15,000 awards of the Military Medal were made. It has been awarded to non-British or Commonwealth subjects and to some civilians. In 1993, the Military Medal was discontinued and since then, the Military Cross has been awarded to all ranks.

**Lady Dorothea Mary Evelyn Feilding-Moorem,** who lived from October 1889 to October 1935, was a volunteer nurse and ambulance driver on the Western Front. She was the first woman to be awarded the Military Medal and it was personally presented by King George V.



Many Lancashire soldiers were awarded the Military Medal for gallantry during the First World War but we rarely know what they did to earn it. The winner's name would appear in a list in The London Gazette - but unlike other bravery awards such as the Distinguished Service Order and Victoria

Cross - very rarely was a citation published with details of the deed. Sometimes local newspapers obtained information (notably from the soldier or his family) about why he had been selected for the MM, see supplement to this report.

YOUR GUARDIAN ANGEL'S WORK IS DONE  
FAREWELL OUR BRAVE OUR NOBLE SON  
-Pte Harry Begg, Arg. & Suth'd Highrs

**A FAVOURITE POSTCARD: Andrew Brooks**

During the Great War the French Army published many postcards titled 'Correspondance des Armees de la Republique Francaise'. One series have the flags of the nations fighting on the allied side at the time the card was published. The card illustrated shows the flags of France, Great Britain, Belgium, Russia, Italy, Serbia, Montenegro and Japan. Later cards would include the flag of the USA.



The above card comes from a collection sent to various members of the Gauthier family by George Gauthier and they follow his progress from joining up in 1915 to his death in 1916.

The message on this card reads '...for two days we are in the front line and the bombardment is day & night. We are in a shelter and have installed places to eat & sleep...I am very tired and nery from the

bombardment...' The card was posted on the 25 July 1916 and a month later he was killed in action.

George was in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment and a native of Molinges in the Jura. He was born on the 10 September 1885 and married to Celestine. The information came from the French equivalent of the CWGC - 'Memoire des hommes'.

The Battle of the Somme began for the British and French on the 1 July 1916, with the French attacking in the southern sector from Maricourt to the region of Chaulnes. George died near the village of Hem on the north bank of the River Somme on the 25 August 1916.

## WESTERN FRONT AND OTHER STRATEGIC EVENTS TIMELINE - 1<sup>st</sup> DECEMBER 1917 TO 31<sup>st</sup> MAY 1918 (largely based on [www.greatwar.co.uk](http://www.greatwar.co.uk))

Some of the centenary events to the next Despatch are as follows:-

<b>Dec-17</b>			twds Moscow against Bolsheviks
1	Permanent Allied Supreme War Council inaugurated	5	British SS Tuscania sunk off Ireland whilst carrying US troops
2	Suspension of hostilities between Russian & German Armies begins	11	President Wilson lays down 4 additional points
3	Battle of Cambrai ends	13	Bolsheviks defeat Gen. Alexeiev
7	USA declares war on Austria-Hungary	15	3 <sup>rd</sup> German destroyer raid in Straits of Dover
9	Jerusalem surrenders to British	16	Dover shelled by German sub.
10	Hostilities between Rumania & Central Powers cease	18	Gen Sir W Robertson, Chief of Imperial General Staff resigns
15	Armistice signed between Russia and Central Powers, Bulgaria & Turkey		Germany resumes hostilities against Russia
	"Second Offensive Battle" of Verdun ends (started 20 Aug 17)	19	Gen Sir Henry Wilson appointed Chief of Imperial General Staff
26	12 <sup>th</sup> Battle of Isonzo ends (started 24 Oct 17)	21	Jericho taken by British Forces
	Sir R Wemyss succeeds Sir J Jellicoe as First Sea Lord	26	British hospital ship (Glenart Castle) sunk by sub in Bristol Chn.
<b>Jan-18</b>		<b>Mar-18</b>	
4	British hospital ship "Rewa" sunk by submarine in Bristol Channel	3	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed between Russia and Central Powers. Huge territorial land gains by Germany.
8	President Wilson's "Fourteen Point" speech	7	First German aeroplane raid on England on moonless night
10	British Govt assure Russian Bolshevik Govt of support re independent Poland		Final Allied note to Netherlands Govt re surrender of Dutch ships in Allied ports
14	German destroyers bombard Yarmouth	9	Hit (on Euphrates) occupied by British forces
20	German cruiser "Breslau" & British monitor "Raglan" sunk in action outside Dardanelles	18	Dutch Govt accept with reservations terms re their ships
<b>Feb-18</b>		21	Battles of Somme 1918 commence (German Operation Michael)
4	Gen. Alexeiev & Cossacks move		

	Passage of Jordan by British forces
	Destroyer action in North Sea
	Dutch ships in Allied ports requisitioned
24/25	Bapaume & Peronne taken by Germans
26	Albert, Chaulnes & Roye taken by Germans. "Doullens Agreement", General Foch to coordinate actions of British & French Armies
28	First Battle of Arras 1918
	Ana, Mesopotamia occupied by British
<b>Apr-18</b>	
1	Royal Flying Corps & Royal Naval Air Service amalgamated as RAF
3	German forces land in South Finland
4	Battle of the Avre
5	Japanese & British marines land at Vladivostock
8	Kharkov (S Russia) taken by German forces
9	German Lys offensive begins, Germans take Neuve Chapelle
10	Messines taken by Germans
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Military Service Act passed. Military Age raised to 50 & conscription extends to Ireland
11	Armentieres taken by Germans
12	Battle of Hazebouck begins. FM Haig issues "Backs to Wall" order
13	Battle of Bailleul begins
	Baltic Provinces to form separate State within German Empire
14	Gen Foch appointed C-in-C of Allied armies in France
15	Battles of Hazebouck & Bailleul end. Germans occupy Bailleul.
16	Germans retake Passchendaele
17	First Battle of Kemmel Ridge begins
18	Battle of Bethune begins
19	First Battle of Kemmel Ridge ends
	German forces enter Crimea
20	Lord Derby resigns as SoS for War. Replaced by Viscount Milner
23	Blocking raid by naval forces on Ostend & Zeebrugge

24	Actions of Villers Bretonneux
25	Second Battle of Kemmel Ridge
29	Battle of Scherpenberg brings to end Battles of Lys
30	Viborg (Finland) captured by Germans & Finnish White Guards
	2 <sup>nd</sup> action of Es Salt (Palestine) begins
<b>May-18</b>	
1	Sevastopol taken by Germans
	Part of Russian Black Sea Fleet seized by Germans
4	2 <sup>nd</sup> action at Es Salt ends
7	British take Kirkuk (Mesopotamia)
	End of Finnish Civil War
	Final Peace Treaty signed between Rumania and Bulgaria, Central Powers and Turkey
8	Germans capture Rostov
	Blocking attack on Ostend. HMS Vindictive sunk to block harbour see 23 April 1918
9	
11	Peace signed in Berlin between Finland & Turkey
18	First British retaliatory air raid on German towns. Cologne bombed
	Last German night air raid on London in which casualties inflicted. 49 killed, 177 wounded
19	
	German air raid on camps & hospitals at Etaples. Heavy casualties
24	Kirkuk (Mesopotamia) evacuated by British forces
	Gen Poole lands at Murmansk to organise North Russia Expeditionary force.
25	British Govt publish accounts of Irish-German plots
27	Battle of Aisne 1918 (German Operation Blucher-Yorck) begins
	Craonne again taken by German forces
	Soissons again taken by Germans
29	
30	Germans take Fere-en-Tardenois
	German forces reach the Marne. Chateau Thierry & Dormans captured
31	

AGE CANNOT MAKE THY GLORY DIM

Capt Joseph Ross, 72 Bn Canadian Inf

## MUSEUM REPORTS

### Liverpool Scottish Regimental Museum Trust - Captain Noel Chavasse VC and Bar, MC, Commemoration 2017: Ian Riley

4 August 2017 was the exact centenary of the death of Captain Noel Chavasse VC and Bar, MC, medical officer of the Liverpool Scottish. I was privileged to speak at a prestigious seminar at Brandhoek Church near Ypres on the centenary day, just yards from the cemetery where he is buried. Other speakers included the Belgian Armed Forces' Surgeon-General, Captain Pete Starling, lately of the RAMC Museum, local historians and a member of the Chavasse family. A graveside tribute followed with the Last Post buglers. Members of the Chavasse family toured the battlefield in the morning with your correspondent giving his evidenced opinions on various issues such as the location of the fatal dressing station where Chavasse was wounded and on some of the peripheral legend that has accumulated around the very genuine, cool and dutiful heroism displayed by 'The Doc' as he was known..

A small simultaneous commemoration took place in Liverpool at Abercromby Square by the Chavasse statue but the main event was Friday, 29 August, when the Lord Lieutenant, the Lord Mayor, the Bishop of Liverpool and sixty-five members of the Chavasse family walked from the old Bishop's Palace, Chavasse's home with his father, the Bishop, into the gardens of Abercromby Square where the VC paving stone was unveiled.



Nearly four hundred people attended including members of Liverpool's RAMC Reserve Army unit and many Liverpool Scottish veterans with their Pipes and Drums.

Later, a very well attended service of commemoration took place at St Nicholas' Church on the Pier Head led by the Rector at which the Bishop preached. At last light, in Abercromby Square, 208 Field Hospital RAMC led a Last Post ceremony by the newly unveiled stone.



Alter at St Nicholas Church with Chavasse statue, sword, medals & 55<sup>th</sup> Division banner

The Liverpool Scottish Museum Trust provided material for the unveiling ceremony and the service of commemoration as well as mounting an exhibition over eight display boards at the back of St Nick's Church that ran for two months. Additionally we provided material for an exhibition at Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral, 'Celebrating the Chavasse Family', that looked at the lives of Bishop and Mrs Chavasse and all of their seven children.



Chavasse's medals, the 'Double VC Group', are presently on display at the Museum of Liverpool on the Pier Head, courtesy of Lord Ashcroft and the Imperial War Museum, until 5<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

# Fusiliers Museum - Sergeant Joseph Lister VC Lancashire Fusiliers, Commemoration 2017: Mike Glover (Curator) and Regimental Secretary

## Introduction

On Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2017, a ceremony took place at "Olga House," Poelkapelle, Belgium to unveil a memorial cairn. The cairn with suitable interpretation boards was built to commemorate the action of **Sergeant Joseph Lister** of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of Lancashire Fusiliers whose actions on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 1917 resulted in his award of the Victoria Cross. The event was well attended and those taking part included the Ceremonial mayor of Salford, the Mayor of Stockport, the Burgemeester of Langemark-Poelkapelle and the Governor of West Flanders. It was supported by the Shorncliffe Military Wives Choir whose rendition of "in Flanders Fields" by John Macrae was deeply moving. The event was the brain-child of Michael Handley, a retired British businessman, who now lives in Belgium and is related to Joseph Lister. The Fusilier Museum assisted with fundraising and the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers provided uniformed support on the day.



## The Three Poelkapelle Victoria Crosses.

There were three Victoria Crosses awarded for heroic acts in that area on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 1917. In addition to Joseph Lister, the Victoria Cross was also awarded to Private Hancock of the 4<sup>th</sup> Worcesters and Sergeant Molyneux of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Fusiliers. Stood at the site of the German pill boxes taken by Joseph Lister it was possible to see the locations of the other two actions and

illustrated just how compact the area was. On a peaceful Saturday in September they appeared to be only a few fields away. On a less than peaceful 9<sup>th</sup> October 1917 they could have been a thousand miles away. Both Hancock's and Lister's actions are now marked by cairns and interpretation boards; only the site of the Molyneux VC action is not marked.

## Overview of Third Ypres

As explained during the ceremony, in 1917, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, the Commander in Chief of the British and Empire Forces argued that Flanders was the best site to launch a major British offensive. Success would distract the Germans from problems caused by mutinies in the French Army, ease pressure on the main British cross-channel routes and enable British Forces to capture the strategically important Roulers rail junction. Seizing the Passchendaele Ridge was crucial to the plan as it would not only open-up the route to Roulers but also take the pressure off the hard-pressed British Army defending Ypres, whose trenches were overlooked by the Germans dug in on the ridge.

The Campaign was in two phases, the first in June 1917 successfully cleared the Messines Ridge, south of Ypres. Followed between July and November by the battle to clear the Passchendaele Ridge.

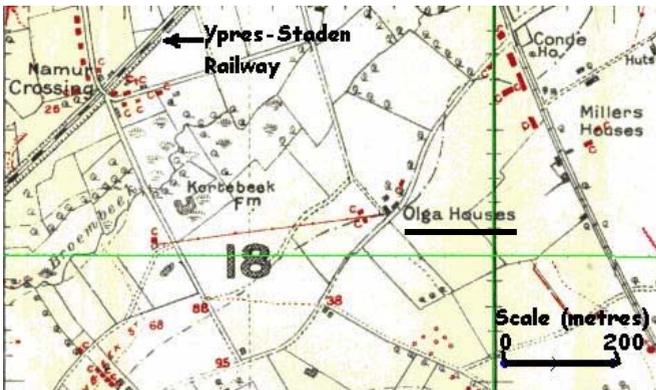
## Lancashire Fusiliers in the Campaign

On the 9<sup>th</sup> October 1917, the small village of Poelkapelle was the objective for the two regular battalions of the Lancashire Fusiliers, who for the first and only time in the history of the Regiment would fight side by side.

Also taking part were four Territorial Battalions of the Lancashire Fusiliers including the 3/5<sup>th</sup> from Bury, 2/6<sup>th</sup> from Rochdale and 2/7<sup>th</sup> and 2/8<sup>th</sup> from Salford. A "New Army" Service Battalion (19<sup>th</sup> Salford) also worked close behind the lines.

## Passchendaele

During the night of the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> October, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion marched about 10 miles up to the start line and despite a number of platoons getting lost, the battalion was in position at 0510hrs for a Zero Hour of 0520hrs. The weather was appalling with record levels of torrential rain which when combined with broken drainage systems, produced extremely difficult going. Just as dawn was breaking, the barrage opened and the attacking waves moved forward. Seven minutes later a German counter-barrage came down. However, the major opposition came from German machine guns operating from pill-boxes in strong-points situated on a reverse slope to the south and east of a position known as Olga Houses (approx 1.25 km north-west of Poelkapelle).



What followed is best described in the citation for the Joseph Lister's Victoria Cross:

*"When advancing to the first objective, his company came under machine gun fire from the direction of two "pill -boxes". Seeing that the galling fire would hold up our advance and prevent our troops keeping up with the barrage, Sergeant Lister dashed ahead of his men and found a machine-gun firing from a shell-hole in front of the pill-box. He shot two of the enemy gunners and the remainder surrendered to him. He then went on to the pill-box and shouted to the occupants to*

*surrender. They did so with the exception of*



*one man, whom Sergeant Lister shot dead, whereupon about a hundred of the enemy emerged from a shell hole further to the rear and surrendered."*

By about 1000hrs the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had accomplished its task, but with the loss of all but five of the battalion's officers and about half of the total of other ranks.

For their actions on the day, the seven battalions of the Lancashire Fusiliers were awarded a Victoria Cross, two Distinguished Service Orders, two bars to the Military Cross, 13 Military Crosses, one bar to the Distinguished Conduct Medal, 13 Distinguished Conduct Medals, one bar to the Military Medal and 113 Military Medals. The casualties included 67 officers and 1,539 other ranks killed, wounded and missing.

## Further Memorials

There were two further commemorations of Joseph Lister in the North West. On Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> October at Broughton Hub in Salford the Victoria Cross Memorial Stone was dedicated in a ceremony organized by Salford Council and on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> November the Friends of Willow Grove Cemetery (where he is buried) hosted an event. Finally, to me Joseph Lister epitomized the typical Lancashire Fusilier of

the Great War. Born in the back streets of Salford, spent his working life in Stockport, when the time came he was willing to put his life on the line not for King and Country but for his friends and comrades in his regiment.

SACRED ARE THE REGIONS WHERE  
YOUR FEET HAVE TROD  
- Pte R Bailey Highland Light Infantry

### Lancashire Infantry Museum - "Operation Michael" VCs

In the early hours of 21 March 1918 a German's artillery barrage of previously unseen complexity and ferocity rained down on British units in the line between Arras and La Fère. The barrage heralded the start of the German's "Operation Michael" offensive, Ludendorff's desperate attempt to break the British before arrival of American troops could influence the war. After the five-hour barrage, specially trained German storm troops assaulted British positions.

After losses in the 1917 offensives Lloyd George had severely limited the number of replacements sent to Haig. The manpower restrictions caused Haig to reduce the number of infantry brigades in divisions from 4 to 3 and to disband battalions. The changes affected the performance of divisions and morale.

General Byng's Third Army to the north managed to limit the German gains thanks to their deeper line of defences. However General Gough's Army to the south collapsed having poorer defences recently taken over from the French that were thinly held with troops.

However the Germans could not exploit initial success. In their advance they steadily lost their best storm troops, their supply lines became longer and more vulnerable while their supporting artillery struggled to get forward.

As the Germans approached Albert the Supreme War Council met in emergency session at Doullens on 26 March. With Haig's support the Supreme War Council authorized Foch to coordinate the action of the Allied armies.

Ludendorff ended "Michael" on 5 April. His troops had advanced up to 40 miles but there had been no decisive victory and the British had not been broken. Many acts of individual gallantry help stem the German attacks.

**Corporal John  
Thomas Davies**  
11<sup>th</sup> Battalion South  
Lancashire

Regiment was  
awarded the  
Victoria Cross for  
the greatest  
courage and  
devotion to duty

under heavy rifle  
and machine-gun fire on March 24th, 1918,  
near Eppeville (2 km west of Ham).



*"When his company, on being outflanked on both sides, received orders to withdraw, this N.C.O. knew that the only line of withdrawal lay through a deep stream lined with a belt of barbed wire, and that it was imperative to hold up the enemy as long as possible. He mounted the parapet, fully exposing himself, in order to get a more effective field of fire, and kept his Lewis gun in action to the last, causing the enemy many casualties and checking their advance.*

*"By his very great devotion to duty he enabled almost all of his company to get across the river which otherwise they would have been unable to do, thus undoubtedly saving the lives of many of his comrades."*

When last seen, this brave N.C.O. was still firing his gun, and it was thought at the time that he had been killed, as the enemy were

almost on top of him, but in May 1918 it was discovered he had been taken prisoner unhurt.



**Second  
Lieutenant Basil  
Arthur Horsfall**  
1<sup>st</sup> Battalion  
(attached 11<sup>th</sup>  
Battalion) East  
Lancashire  
Regiment was  
killed in action  
27<sup>th</sup> March 1918  
near Ayette

(south of Arras) resisting the German advance. He was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross. The citation for his VC states:

*"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Horsfall was in command of the centre platoon during an attack on our positions. When the enemy first attacked, his three forward sections were driven back and he was wounded in the head. Nevertheless, he immediately organised the remainder of his men and made a counter-attack, which recovered his original positions. On hearing that out of the remaining three officers of his company two were killed and one wounded, he refused to go to the dressing room, although his wound was severe. Later his platoon had to be withdrawn to escape very heavy shell fire, but immediately the shelling lifted he made a second counter-attack and again recovered his positions. When the order to withdraw was given, he was the last to leave his position, and, although exhausted, said he could have held on if it had been necessary. His conduct was a splendid example to his men, and he showed throughout the utmost disregard of danger. This very gallant officer was killed when retiring to the positions in the rear."*

(Horsfall's VC & Plaque held by Museum)

## PRIVATE JAMES TOWERS VC

**James (Jim)**

**Towers** was born 9 September 1897. A native of Broughton near Preston he worked on his father's farm before attempting to enlist in July 1915. When the fact that he was underage was



discovered, he was sent home. He tried again in August 1916, originally enlisting in the 5th Dragoon Guards, but he soon transferred to the 2nd Battalion, The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles).

Towers was awarded the VC for action at Méricourt, near Lens, France on 6 October 1918. The 2nd Cameronians were holding the village when orders were given to withdraw. Unfortunately, the orders failed to reach a group from B Company. When HQ realized that the unit was about to be surrounded and cut off by the German advance, a volunteer was called for to get the retreat order through. Five men had tried and been killed in the attempt when Towers volunteered to be number six. From his citation: *"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty at Méricourt on 6 Oct. 1918, when, under heavy fire, five runners having failed to deliver an important message, Private Towers, well aware of the fate of the runners who had already attempted the task, volunteered for the duty. In spite of heavy fire opened on him as soon as he moved, he went straight through from cover to cover and eventually delivered the message. His valour, determination and utter disregard of danger were an inspiring example to all."* Towers stayed with the unit throughout the night and led them back the next day shortly before dawn, recovering the bodies of the five other runners as they returned.

## BANKS' POEM: Chris Payne

The poem below, which made me smile, is extracted from a page of the Autograph book lent to me by Carol Wade, believed to be originally from her Grandfather Harry Naylor, 24585, Grenadier Guards who survived the war, though wounded (He is standing middle in the back row on the photograph). Harry's war records do not appear to have survived.



The poem itself was probably penned by one of Harry's chums in hospital in London in August 1918 i.e. Private Thomas Banks 27509, Grenadier Guards, whose WW1 pension records have survived. In these records Thomas' home address is given as 13 Russell Street, Middletown, Skipton, Yorkshire. Born c 1892, he was enlisted on 26 October 1916 at which time he was a Dyer's Labourer. He was posted to the

1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Grenadier Guards, and was wounded in France on 23 July 1917 and returned to the UK for medical treatment. He returned to France on 1 April 1918 rejoining the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Grenadier Guards. He was wounded for the second time (Gunshot Wound in his Right Leg) on 4 May 1918, and returned once more to England.

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### "Je ne Pense Pas"

*Who every morning rouses me  
At eight o'clock, and waits to see  
I get my early cup of tea?  
My Sergeant.*

*Who, when I'm absent from parade,  
Says: "Doubtless Private Banks has stayed,  
In bed; he's sleepy, I'm afraid"?  
My Company Sergeant Major.*

*Who, when I have a corn that shoots,  
Takes me all through his stock of boots,  
Until we find a pair that suits?  
My Company QuarterMaster Sergeant.*

*Who does not pitch it hot and strong,  
But smiles to see my hair so long,  
And says, "It suits you though it's wrong"?  
My Officer.*

*Who, when I'm talking in the ranks,  
Says: "Just a moment, Private Banks;  
I want to give an order - Thanks"?  
My Captain.*

*Who, when I ask for leave to see  
My wife. Says "Leave? Why certainly!  
And give my love to Mrs. B."?  
My Colonel.*

*Who never fails to do his best  
To please his sergeant and the rest?  
It is - in case you haven't guessed -  
Myself.*

Pte Thos Banks, CB (7 days), DCM  
(acquitted) &c, &c.

A MAN'S IMMORTALITY LIES IN THE  
HEARTS OF HIS FRIENDS

- Capt F J Hannam, Gloucestershire Regt

## Arras 1917 - The Lost Opportunity: Jim Smithson

Jim gave an overview of the battle and the major players on both sides. The opportunity lost was the one to learn from the battle. This battle was not submitted to an in-depth review as that undertaken during and after the Battle of the Somme. The first day was a great success with some very ambitious objectives achieved and one notable first; a complete division was passed through another. Subsequent days were notable for lack of action and poor staff work. The Hindenberg line could have been outflanked, instead frontal attacks continued.

It appears that the lessons learned and incorporated into SS135 and SS143 following the Battle of the Somme were forgotten or ignored in the heat/stress of battle. There were plenty of instances when the instructions from the training manual SS135 were ignored and no disciplinary actions were taken after the battle. (PC)

## Fritz von Lossberg and German flexible defence 1917: Jack Sheldon

Jack reported how Oberst von Lossberg was the most influential officer in the German Army. His father had been a Prussian General. In 1914, as Deputy Head of OHL, he had personally briefed the Kaiser. According to Jack he was the "Go to person to sort things" and held Chief of Staff positions on the Somme, Aisne, Arras and elsewhere with power to issue orders in his superior's name. Jack gave examples of how Lossberg was an expert in organising defensive tactics. (TD)

## Messines 1917 - The Zenith of Siege Warfare: Lieut-Col Alex Turner

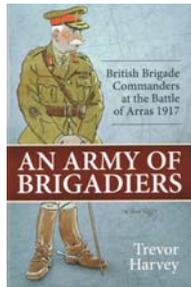
Lt-Col Turner set the battle into the context of the momentous events of 1917 whilst also looking back to the lessons learned by both sides on the Somme.

## WFA'S 2017 PRESIDENT'S CONFERENCE

On 3<sup>rd</sup> June Paul Conlon chauffeured me down to the above conference at the Tally Ho centre, Birmingham. There were four presentations during the day and we have shared the responsibility for briefly reporting on them.

### An Army of Brigadiers - British Brigade Commanders at the Battle of Arras 1917: Trevor Harvey

Trevor reported that 733 Brigadier Generals (BGs) had served on the Western Front during WW1 of whom 116 had served at the Battle of Arras in May 1917. No studies had been undertaken of the roles, responsibilities or backgrounds of BGs so he had selected a BG from each of the five corps that participated at Arras and subjected each to a case study using a methodology he had developed. He concluded that the biggest factor which contributed to their performance was whether or not the BG had attended Staff College. I purchased a copy of his book which reports on his study and with one of my talks being devoted to Brigadier General James Walter Sandilands I subjected him to Trevor's methodology against which he scored well. Sandilands attended Staff College when Henry Wilson was Commandant and Field Marshall Montgomery regarded Sandilands as "first class officer from whom he learnt a great deal." I would be happy to loan my book to any interested branch member. (TD)



The development of the 'The Tunneller' and strategic use of mines in the battle was covered before moving onto a clear account of the battle. He emphasised that the methods and expertise developed would be familiar to servicemen today. Artillery structure is the same, counter battery work was just as accurate as today and air power unlocked the artillery to hit unseen targets exactly as happens today.

"The Great War was the crucible which forged the modern Army" (PC)

### **BOOTLE WAR MEMORIAL: Peter Denby**

Paul Conlon and myself are members and supporters of War Memorials Trust (WMT - [www.warmemorials.org](http://www.warmemorials.org)), which works for the protection and conservation of the Nation's war memorials. The Trust provides advice and information, as well as running grant schemes for the repair and conservation of war memorials. Although a small charity, the Trust punches above its weight in lobbying the custodians - who are often, but not always, local authorities - of the UK's estimated 100,000+ war memorials to ensure they are maintained in good order.

WMT works with several partner organisations including Historic England ([www.historicengland.org.uk/warmemorials](http://www.historicengland.org.uk/warmemorials)), Civic Voice and the Imperial War Museum.

Some of you will have seen the Trust's newsletter, *The Bulletin*, which Paul and I put on the coffee table at our WFA meetings.

Normally the Trust awards grants up to say two or three thousand pounds. Exceptionally a grant of £80,000 - one of the largest made by WMT- was given towards the repair and renovation of Bootle War Memorial.

This striking memorial was built and unveiled in 1922, in what was then a rather prosperous area. The Council contributed £2000, with the remaining funding raised by public subscription. It bears the inscription

*"In grateful memory of over 1000 men from Bootle who made the Supreme Sacrifice in the Great Wars 1914-1918 and 1939-1945".*

Relatives of those who had lost their lives in the Great War suggested that all three services should be represented, with names of the fallen recorded on the memorial. Thus two circular steps support a 12-sided stone body, the sides bearing bronze panels with the names of those remembered. Above this is a triangular obelisk on which are four bronze statues:- a soldier, a sailor, and an airman guard a mother and her child - symbols of new life and hope.

Air warfare was of course new, and so the inclusion of an airman is quite unusual for a First World War memorial.



The bronze sculptures were by Joseph Hermon Cawthra (1886-1971) and indeed this memorial made his name as a sculptor. When unveiled the memorial attracted much admiration - the realism of the *"fine colossal bronzes"* was praised, as was the *"virility"* of the airman, a critic writing *"it is indeed a tonic to see these rugged warriors in place of the usual classical nymphs"*. Later Cawthra described the airman figure as one of his best works.

In 1948, Second World War names and a tablet commemorating the Liverpool Escort Force (convoy protection) were added.

With the approach of the WW1 centenary, it was found that quite extensive (and expensive) repair work was needed to

restore the memorial - a Grade II listed heritage asset which now found itself in a relatively deprived area. Although well sculpted, the bronzes had not been well cast leading to corrosion and cracking of the bronze elements; weathering and frost damage had caused the stonework to decay; there was water ingress into the core of the memorial; and ground settlement, heave and root damage had led to uneven paving and subsidence of the boundary wall. Even the hedge was in a sorry state. A bayonet and rifle strap had been stolen from the figures.

All of this deterioration had been compounded by previous well-intentioned but inappropriate attempts at cleaning and repair - for example aggressive sandblasting, use of cement instead of lime mortar and black painting of the bronze plaques.

So it was that the custodian of the memorial, Sefton Council, applied to WMT for grant funding for the conservation work, which was undertaken in 2016.

The restored memorial, which is in King's Gardens, Stanley Road, Bootle, was unveiled and rededicated in September 2016.

In April 2017 Paul and I accepted an invitation to attend a site visit at the memorial led by Historic England. The event was a best practice case study for the conservation, repair and maintenance of war memorials. Representatives from all interested parties - the Custodian (Alan Lake of Sefton Council); WMT; project architect (Ian Bright Architects Ltd); and project team (Bryn Lisle of Maysand Ltd and Rupert Harris Conservation Ltd) - attended and gave presentations at the



memorial to show the conservation work they had undertaken.

An overview was given of the planning and practical complexities, procedures and work required on a project such as this. Listed Building Consent was needed; no original plans or specifications for the memorial survive, but historic references were found in contemporary newspaper reports and in some archived Council committee minutes; the memorial's sandstone came from the Forest of Dean and could still be sourced; exploratory work determined the memorial's inner design, and identified some original design, construction and foundation deficiencies, which helped inform the repairs; expert - and conflicting - opinions on the state of the bronzes was sought; even the original hedge of 1922 was preserved by taking cuttings from it to a local nursery to be regrown and replanted at the memorial.

Work addressed structural repairs and the water ingress to the masonry and paving; conserved the inscriptions; and repaired and reinstated the original surface treatment of the bronze statues and plaques.

Good conservation and repair practice was followed at all times. Sometimes this was at odds with public expectations, but current philosophy is that only minimum required intervention should be carried out. The restoration will safeguard the memorial for many years to come and has made its maintenance cost effective.

The local community and schools were engaged, so that a sense of local ownership was developed; it was gratifying to learn that there has been no vandalism since the restored memorial was unveiled.

Paul and I were struck by the commitment, dedication and teamwork shown by all who worked on the restoration project.

As a postscript to our memorial visit, before returning home Paul and I called into a nearby pub - The Merton Inn - for a coffee.

At the door was a brass plaque explaining that during WW2 the building - which was then the Merton Hotel - had been used as a hospital for US servicemen. Inside the pub was a display board commemorating the famous U-Boat hunter Captain F J 'Johnny' Walker, who sailed his ship HMS *Starling* out of Bootle.

SPLendid YOU PASSED THE GREAT SURRENDER MADE INTO THE LIGHT THAT NEVERMORE SHALL FADE - Pte G Daw King's Shropshire LI

**NATIONAL MONUMENT TO THE VICTORIES OF THE MARNE, MONDEMENT: Paul Conlon**

On my last trip to France in July this year I visited the National Monument to the Victories of the Marne, Mondement. I had wanted to visit this monument since I saw its photograph and description in Major and Mrs Holt's Battlefield Guide. This a huge impressive structure standing 33m(108ft) tall located on a ridge overlooking the marshes of St-Gond. The site was the location of a crucial action during the First Battle of the Marne.

I was there on a very clear day and the field of view looking North, East and West over the battlefield is extensive. However I felt that on a lovely day in July I should have been fighting my way through crowds of French visitors to this monument rather than being the lone visitor.



I wonder if the Battle of Verdun looms so large in the French collective memory of the Great War that the earlier battles and successes have largely been forgotten.



Figures on the base of monument

**The Action at Mondement**

Early on the morning of 9 September 1914 a German Hanoverian unit, Infanterie Regiment Nr 164, managed to seize the fortress-like chateau on top of the escarpment above the St-Gond marshes. This was a potentially fatal disaster for the French. If the Germans reinforced and then expanded the foothold at Mondement they could conquer the rest of the high ground and bring up guns to pound the open plain below

to both east and south. This could have resulted in the complete collapse of Foch's position. The French narrowly averted this catastrophic outcome. After isolating the German incursion, mainly by artillery fire, they launched a series of costly counter attacks to try to recapture the chateau. In the evening, after an epic defence, the Germans finally abandoned Mondement and retreated.

### The Monument

The design was inspired by the standing stones erected by the ancient Celts. It stands at the high-water mark of the German advance and is dedicated to "to all those who, since the most ancient times, have raised a boundary stone on our land against the invader". Begun in 1931 the monument was finally finished in 1939. The inauguration was delayed by the Second World War and finally held in 1951.

If anyone is interested in finding out more about this action and monument have a look at Andrew Uffindell's "The Marne 1914" - A Battlefield Guide. (I have a copy - Ed.)

### LINESMAN IN FRANCE AND BELGIUM AGAIN (+S)

The main WW1 related task on our northward travels through France after our September holiday in Spain was for my Linesman mapping system to aid site visits in connection with my presentation *Territorial Gunners at War* to be delivered next July, see programme at page 35.

Not previously having studied artillery I viewed Guillemont, Ginchy, Flers and other Somme locations from the gunner's perspective. From Albert we travelled northwards to a section of front line I had not previously visited between Bellacourt and Wailly roughly 8 km south-west of Arras. Here "my" gunners took over a section of line from the French in early 1916.



After pausing briefly at Bellacourt Military Cemetery we called to say "hello" at nearby Wailly Orchard and Le Fermont cemeteries, where Lancashire burials constitute 35% of the total, and collected four notable epitaphs which follow in this Despatch. A coincidence is that Pte Kenney's on Page 30 very closely resembles Pte Crompton's in last November's Despatch (Page 9).

Travelling north we were attracted by a traffic sign and paused briefly at the Monument to Fraternalism established at Neuville Saint Vaast in late 2015. See Supplement.

On arrival at Givenchy, north of the La Basse Canal, Linesman aided our reconnoitring of the strong points which were key to 55 Division's defensive actions in April 1918 (see map on Page 5) then we visited Emmie's uncle's grave at Vieille Chappelle before retiring to our hotel in Bethune.

Next day was Linesman's last working day. At Kemmel we viewed the positions held by the gunners in their baptism of fire on the Western Front under Canadian command in September 1915. Here they spent two months targeting German positions towards Wyttschaete. From there we found a parking space in Tourhoutstraat, Ypres from where we walked the positions held by them in 1917 near the prison and ramparts and on leaving Ypres we viewed the positions they held at St Jean before visiting Tyne Cot cemetery.



## Westfield War Memorial Village, Lancaster - A Story of Survival: May 2017 (10 attended)

### 2017 ARMISTICE PRIZE

This year three schools submitted a total of 20 entries. Most of the entries were typed or handwritten text relating to WW1 with others being models or artwork. As in 2016 the entries were marked by Fiona Bishop, Paul Conlon and Peter Denby and I collated the scores.

The winner was Holly Hindley of St Cecilia's High School, Longridge (see back page for her photograph with trophy). Her winning entry was a booklet entitled "WW1" which described some of the war's main events and features. Holly was presented with the trophy, a cheque for £50 and a book (Ian Westwell's "*The Complete Illustrated History of World War 1*") at her school on 16 October.

Also the entry by Hannah Stevens of Ribblesdale High School in the form of a trench model was recognised by the prize of Westwell's book.

A Press Release describing the results of this year's competition accompanied by photographs of the two prize winners and their entries was issued on 1 November so that the media could consider using the information in advance of Remembrance Sunday. Photos of the prize winners and their entries can be seen on the Armistice Prize pages of our website.

GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN  
 THIS THAT A MAN LAY DOWN HIS LIFE  
 FOR HIS FRIENDS

Pte W Carter Loyal North Lancs Regt

Westfield Memorial Village is both a public memorial and a lived-in community and our speaker, **Martin Purdy** BA, MA, was well qualified to give a talk on it. A WFA member, Martin has a long interest in World War 1, researching his own family's war history, studying Lancashire's involvement at Gallipoli, and the role of the clergy and religion in the war. He has led battlefield tours, and acted as a freelance advisor for the BBCs *Who Do You Think You Are?* Latterly he has focused on the social history of the war, and is coming towards the end of a four year Doctoral research project, a collaboration between Lancaster University and Westfield Memorial Village funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.



[www.westfieldmemorialvillage.co.uk](http://www.westfieldmemorialvillage.co.uk) gives further information.

Martin's talk began with the two key figures in the origins of the Village.

i) By the outbreak of WW1, the Lancaster landscape architect Thomas H Mawson was at the height of his fame, and had carried out work for many well-known - and wealthy - clients. Mawson was interested in the Garden City movement, which championed natural surroundings as contributing to physical well-being.

All three of Mawson's sons served in the war. The youngest, James Radcliffe Mawson, joined the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the King's Own (Royal Lancaster Regiment), and was killed in 1915. His last letter home had implored his father to "*Do what you can for the wounded...*"; and so it was that this became Mawson's focus, he writing a book *An Imperial Obligation* which proposed the

construction of self-contained villages to provide housing and employment for returning disabled veterans and their families.

ii) The second key figure in relation to Westfield was Herbert L Storey, a well-connected Lancaster businessman and head of a rather militaristic and philanthropic family.

A National Committee of the great and the good, including figures known to Mawson and Storey such as Rowntree and Selfridge, was set up to oversee the ambitious plans for these proposed villages, but difficulties soon arose when the Government - committed to the War Disablement Pensions scheme - made it clear it would not provide funding. So plans and projects were scaled back; for example in the south, Preston Hall in Kent was set up as an agricultural settlement, but soon closed, becoming The Royal British Legion Village.

In Lancaster the proposed Westfield Village found itself competing for funds with other charities and civic memorial projects, and indeed the notion that the building of Westfield was funded by public money is wrong. It was Storey who donated the land for the project, and using his connections he solicited private funding.

Joseph Bibby was one such early donor. Known to both Storey and Mawson - before the war Mawson had designed his garden - he was a local wealthy businessman. He paid for the first two cottages (£500 each), naming them in memory of two of his sons who had been killed in the war. Storey himself paid for Herbert Storey Cottage, as thanks for the safe return of his eldest son Kenneth.

Even so, this first phase of building - funded largely from Storey's contact book - could only fund 12 dwellings, including six bungalows.

At this stage Mawson, who was instrumental in the design of Westfield, was

accused of putting aesthetics over disabled-friendly, practical, design. For example many of the properties had steps and narrow doorways, making access difficult for amputees and wheelchairs.

In the early 1920s fundraising in general became a more professional activity, and Westfield even opened a charity shop. But a lady called Hilda Leyer - a former suffragist - was a game changer. She began raising charitable funds for the proposed veterans' villages by means of a 'Golden Ballot' - a forerunner of today's National Lottery. Her second Golden Ballot, in 1922, raised funds specifically for Westfield, and so funded its second phase of development of 20 dwellings.

On completion of the second phase, the Village was officially opened in 1924 by Earl Haig, Lord Derby also attending.



Jennifer Delahunt's memorial at the centre of the Village

The next project was to place a war memorial on the turning circle at the centre of the village. Paid for by Storey and sculptured by the local sculptress Jennifer Delahunt, it was unveiled in 1926. This figurative monument was controversial at the time, featuring a wounded British Officer being comforted by a Private soldier; the notion of the able helping the wounded is the concept of Westfield.

Both Mawson and Storey died in 1933 and the third phase of development in the 1930s

was funded by money borrowed from the local council.

In the Second World War residents who had fought in 'the war to end all wars' now watched their own children go off to fight, and eight men associated with Westfield made the ultimate sacrifice; one family, the Hodkinsons, lost two sons.

After WW2, an extension to the Village was funded by Lieutenant Colonel Austin Townsend Porritt, a veteran of the First World War and a well-known Lancashire industrialist and philanthropist. His donation was made in memory of his son, the Member of Parliament Captain Richard Whitaker Porritt who had been killed in action in May 1940 during the retreat to Dunkirk.

The wider Storey family also continued to provide funding, allowing modernisation of the housing stock in the 1960s, but by the 1970s the Storey family's business interests were on the decline and their philanthropic support for the Village necessarily had to be curtailed. Even so the Storey family's commitment to the Village is still solid 100 years on, and it is that support which has been instrumental in Westfield surviving to its approaching centenary.

In recent years a partnership has been made with a Housing Association - Guinness Northern Counties - which has secured the future of the Village. Some flats were built in the 1980s and again in 2013 - named as per the custom after Battles, for example 'Korea' and 'Aden'. Twenty two of the 113 properties have been sold under the Right-to-Buy scheme and so are now privately owned.

In the past the Village had a military ethos, with, for example, the village secretaries being former commissioned officers, and with strict social control and vetting of prospective residents. There have been some celebrated residents including Albert Halton a WW2 VC holder.

Nowadays the Village is less militaristic, but the commitment to providing

accommodation for former servicemen and women, especially those disabled through their service, is still there and Westfield remains very popular with ex service personnel and has a very strong sense of community. (Peter Denby)

OH FOR THE TOUCH OF A VANISHED  
HAND OH FOR THE SOUND OF A VOICE  
THAT IS STILLED -  
Rifleman T J Kenney Kings Liverpool Regt

### **The British Army in Mesopotamia 1914-1918: June 2017 (15 attended)**

**Major Paul Knight** set the scene for his talk by telling of his impressions of Iraq when serving there with the British Army and some of the personalities who served there in WW1.



General Townshend's reputation was destroyed from the siege of Kut whilst General Maude's star rose, building on him being the last General to be evacuated from Gallipoli by him retaking Kut then advancing to take Baghdad before dying from cholera. Also serving in Mesopotamia were Clement Attlee and future WW2 commanders Slim and Auchinleck.

British and Indian forces were sent to protect Persia Gulf oil installations after war commenced and they responded to Turkey's entry into the war on German's side by capturing Basra. Turkish attempts to recapture Basra were foiled at the battle of Shaiba and forces under Townshend then moved, in what Paul described as "mission creep", northwards from Basra towards Amara, supported by the arrival of aircraft. The terrain imposed key restraints on campaigning; low, flat sand or mud with

marshes at intervals. The rivers or railways, where they existed, were essential for movement of men, equipment and supplies.

After capturing Amara, Townshend advanced taking Kut in late September 1915 but his further move towards Baghdad was stopped by the Turks at Ctesiphon in November. Townshend returned to Kut where he was besieged. Attempts to break the siege were repulsed by the Turks and Townshend eventually surrendered on 29 April 1916 together with some 10,000 troops, many of whom would not survive captivity.

Following the appointment of General Maude he eventually led his Anglo-Indian force back north up the Tigris in December 1916 making use of the river and improved railways. He outflanked the Ottoman army by moving west of Kut forcing them to withdraw northwards towards Baghdad. Following action involving the 6<sup>th</sup> Loyal North Lancashire's crossing the Diyala River, Maude entered Baghdad in March 1917. Maude continued to advance until his death in November 1917 but the campaign in Palestine aided by the Arab Revolt limited operations by the new commander General Marshall whose advance up the Tigris eventually reached Mosul in November 1918.

### **India's Great War: July 2017 (23 attended)**

**Adam Prime** gave a brief account of the Indian Army prior to the Great War, mentioning the 1857 rebellion in Bengal and the need to defend the North-West Frontier in Afghanistan. These were the main reasons for having 75,000 British troops in India at any one time, although after the defeat of Russia in the war with Japan in 1905 the threat in Afghanistan diminished. He explained that the martial races were the Nepalese, Punjabis and those tribes in the North-West Frontier, whereas the Southern Indians were not so inclined.

British soldiers in India had better pay and allowances and were able to follow many sporting pursuits such as polo and big game hunting. Those officers attending Sandhurst were advised to spend their first year in the British Army before joining the Indian Army so they could understand the different customs and not make any mistakes.

Three men were responsible for reforming the Indian Army, namely Kitchener, Curzon and Haig and with the European war on the horizon, Haig wanted the Indian Army to play a part. During the Great War 1.3 million served, 60,000 were killed in action and 9,200 were decorated (18 received the Victoria Cross).

They arrived in Marseilles on 30 September 1914 and fought at Neuve Chapelle in 1915 where they formed half of the attacking force. They also fought at Second Ypres and Loos.

Over 2,300 wounded were treated at Brighton Pavilion (chosen partly because of its Indian architecture) where they had nine kitchens to cater for the different castes.

Away from the Western Front the Indian Army fought in East Africa, Mesopotamia, Suez Canal Zone and even in Burma where they refused to kill fellow Muslims. 5,000 Indians served in the Gallipoli campaign although recent research suggests that their number could have been as high as 16,000. At the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle of Krithia they suffered heavy losses.

Adam also commented on a mutiny in Singapore when some of the garrison troops, the 5<sup>th</sup> Native Light Infantry, shot Europeans on sight and attempted to release the prisoners from the German raider, Emden. It lasted for ten days and eventually 210 men were found guilty and 40 were executed.

This was an extremely interesting talk and well presented by Adam. (Andrew Brooks)

FOR HONOUR LIBERTY AND TRUTH HE  
SACRIFICED HIS GLORIOUS YOUTH  
- Pte H V Stafford Kings Liverpool Regt



David Hewitt was looking in the Lancashire Archives in Preston at military service records for the county when he came across documentation relating to a Joseph

Blackburn, a market gardener, from Thornton, Lancs. And so begins this fascinating talk.

Joseph was born in 1886, left school in approximately 1900 and went to work at the family market garden. In 1908 he married Jessie Bennett and they had 2 children - Joseph and Elizabeth.

On Friday 10 December 1915 Joseph entered British Army voluntary enlistment under the Derby scheme which was introduced as 130,000 were needed every month for the war effort and according to the August 1915 census there were fewer than 3 million men available for war. The scheme applied to men aged 18 to 41 years in essential occupation and they were visited at home by a canvasser. Some men joined straight away whereas others deferred and were put into 40+ groups according to status.

Attested married men i.e. those who had signed up and were married would not be called until all single men had been mobilised. Joseph attested in Poulton-le-Fylde and although the Derby scheme was supposed to close on 11 December it was extended by a few days. Joseph was placed in group 35 and awaited

call up to the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment.

On 18 November 1915, Joseph's mother died.

The group scheme was deemed a failure and reopened from 10 January to 1 March 1916.

On 20 January 1916 the first group of single men was called up and on 7 April 1916 the first group of married men was called up. Joseph was called up on Monday 29 May 1916. On 2 March 1916 conscription was introduced.

In May 1916 Joseph made a claim to the Military Service Tribunal which was sitting in Thornton. There were around 2000 tribunals in the UK from October 1915 until the end of the war and beyond. They were created by the local council and members were usually local councillors with limited powers, but they could make a man exempt from service - both temporarily and permanently. They heard 15 to 30 cases per session so only a few minutes were allotted to each hearing. The Thornton tribunal heard 400+ cases whilst they existed and more men were given exemptions than were reinforced. Exemptions included ill health or infirmity, domestic or financial hardship, conscientious objectors or if was deemed essential that a man carried on his trade.

As Joseph was a market gardener it was therefore essential that he remained in his trade. But why had Joseph sought an exemption now? In January 1916 his father had died and he was now left to look after the market garden on his own. On 25 May 1916 he appeared at the tribunal and was granted a temporary exemption from service until 30 September 1916. By mid September he had made a separate claim.

On 9 January 1917, Joseph appeared before the tribunal again and was given a further exemption until 31 March 1917. The evidence given was that the market garden plot was about half the size of a football pitch



and that he worked 4 days on the land and 2 days selling the produce.

The second decision by the tribunal was appealed and considered by the Lancashire Appeal Tribunal, which heard approx. 80 cases, and was a level up from the local tribunal.

In February 1917 the Appeal Tribunal confirmed Joseph's exemption. However, the military were still not happy and appealed to the Central Tribunal which was based in Westminster and chaired by 4<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Salisbury until October 1917. The Marquess had served in the Boer war and chaired almost 600 of these cases.

On 17 May 1917 Joseph's case was considered but he was not present as he couldn't afford to get to London. The outcome was that the tribunal took away his exemption by ruling that he was not a market gardener but a hawkler of fruit and vegetables instead. Did the military have other evidence against Joseph to come to this conclusion? All the evidence about a man was supposed to be shared with the man himself to ensure fairness.

On 6 June 1917 Joseph was mobilised for military service.

The response of the Thornton tribunal on 26 June 1917 was that they had received the decision but they were not at all happy about it and they would go on strike until Joseph was brought back to Thornton. They were persuaded to return to work after several weeks.

On 7 August 1917 the local government board despatched an inspector to Thornton whereby minutes of the tribunal were discussed and a vote of thanks was given to the inspector.

On 13 August 1917 they resumed hearing cases but never sent another man to fight as only exemptions were granted.

Joseph transferred to the Royal West Kent Regiment on 6 June 1917 and on 30 October 1917 he transferred again to the 10<sup>th</sup>

Battalion, Queens Own Royal West Kent Regiment in Maidstone, Kent and from there went to the Somme in France. Here he contracted trench fever. On 29 May 1918 he was at the base depot at Etaples and on 23 July 1918 he was transferred to the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal West Kent Regiment. On 24 August 1918 Joseph was involved in heavy fighting in the town of Albert and was killed. (Fiona Bishop)

**They Shoot Spies: September 2017** (23 attended)

**Dr Viv Newman**

presented an excellent talk based on her research on the role of women in espionage during the Great War. While giving a passing mention to Edith Cavell and Mata Hari,



she concentrated on four lesser-known individuals who in their various ways had had

a considerable impact on the course of the war. Her first example was Dr **Elisabeth Schragmüller**, a German national and a woman of formidable intellect. Awarded the highest



Bachelor's Degree of her contemporaries, shortly before the war in 1913 she also obtained a Doctorate with Distinction. As war started she made it clear that she wanted to play an active role. When Belgium was invaded by the Germans she insisted on being given a pass to Brussels and based herself at the Hotel Astoria, used as the German Headquarters in Belgium. Demanding a military function, she played a

role in Intelligence information-analysis from captured Belgian soldiers. After further training in Lille, she went on to lead anti-French intelligence, playing a key role in recruiting, training and debriefing spies. A ruthless individual, Schragmüller may well have been responsible for “hanging Mata Hari out to dry”. She survived the war.

Dr Newman’s three other examples were of women who had spied for the Allies. After the invasion of Belgium, **Marthe Cnockaert**, a young Flemish Belgian citizen decided to become a nurse. Her deeply



humanitarian instincts extended not only to her Belgian compatriots, but also to wounded Germans. Indeed, she was awarded the Iron Cross by the Germans for her nursing work. In order to survive, her family also ran a café for German soldiers. This provided her with access to sources of information and, in her espionage role, she passed information to the Allies on German troop movements and helped facilitate the escape of Allied soldiers. Ultimately arrested and tried, she was sentenced to death but the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. She survived her imprisonment in Ghent and received French and Belgian recognition in the form of



Croix d’Honneur, and was also mentioned in Despatches by Field Marshall Haig.

**Louise de Bettignies**, referred to as “The Joan of Arc of the North”, and the “Queen of

Spies” was born near Mons. She spoke

several languages fluently and attended Girton College, Cambridge. When war started she was in Lille but escaped to the UK in a hazardous journey via occupied Belgium and The Netherlands. After attending a spy school at Folkestone, she returned to France under a pseudonym. She ‘ran’ many agents, operated across national borders and provided routes for escaped Allied prisoners. As the result of information that she provided, the British learnt when the Kaiser was due to visit Belgium. His train was bombed as a consequence but his carriage was not struck. Her luck ran out in October 1915 and she was arrested by the Germans and questioned over a 6 month period. Tried in March 1916, she was sentenced to death. Imprisoned in Cologne, her sentence was commuted but she died in prison in September

1918. She was posthumously awarded the OBE and various French distinctions.



Dr Newman’s final example was **Gabrielle Petit** who, in contrast to the

other women mentioned, was socially unprivileged. A Belgian shop assistant, she was strongly anti-German and took a conscious decision to spy for Britain. After receiving Intelligence training in the UK she was based in Brussels from where she provided information on troop movements and distributed an ‘underground’ newspaper. She was eventually arrested, tried, and sentenced to death by firing squad. Refusing to beg for clemency she was executed in Brussels on 1 April 1916. Venerated by the Belgians once the War had ended, a statue of Gabrielle Petit was erected in Brussels in 1921.

The audience appreciation of Dr Newman's talk was shown by vigorous applause, followed by a battery of questions. (Chris Payne)

A BRAVE TRUE HEART THAT KNEW NO  
FEAR HE LIKE A SOLDIER FELL AT REST  
- Pte W Postlethwaite Royal Lancaster Regt

He concluded the changes attacked the foundation of defensive principles, training and tactics in the BEF and the ability of units to deploy in depth.

## 2018 PROGRAMME

(ALL MEETINGS ON FIRST MONDAY IN MONTH AT 7.30 PM EXCEPT WHERE STATED OTHERWISE)

**Dec 4<sup>th</sup>:** *A.G.M and Christmas Social* - An invitation to members to speak for 10 minutes on any WW1 topic

**Jan 2<sup>nd</sup> TUESDAY:** *The Battle of Cambrai* - Niall Cherry

**Feb 5<sup>th</sup>:** *Austro-Hungarian War 1914-18: The Great Debacle* - Graham Kemp

**March 5<sup>th</sup>:** *Comparing The Somme 1916 and Arras 1917* - Mike Coyle

**April 3<sup>rd</sup> TUESDAY:** *Hungarian Memorabilia* - Andrew Brooks

**May 8<sup>th</sup> TUESDAY:** *Americans on the Meuse-Argonne* - Peter Hart

**June 4<sup>th</sup>:** *From Brandhoek to Camp Bastion* - Jonathan Bell

**July 2<sup>nd</sup>:** *Territorial Gunners at War* - Terry Dean

**Aug 6<sup>th</sup>:** *A Moonlight Massacre: The Night Operation on the Passchendaele Ridge, 2 December 1917* - Dr Michael LoCicero

**Sept 3<sup>rd</sup>:** *The Aisne Again: May 1918 - the essence of blitzkrieg* - David Blanchard

**Oct 1<sup>st</sup>:** *A Trip to Switzerland - a little known aspect of WW1* - Tony Foster

**Nov 5<sup>th</sup>:** *Verdun, 1916, the battle that changed the 20th century* - Philip Stevens

**Dec 3<sup>rd</sup>:** *A.G.M and Christmas Social* - An invitation to members to speak for 10 minutes on any WW1 topic

## Organisation of Defeat - British Army 1918: October 2017 (20 attended)



**Simon Justice** explained the challenges experienced by the British Armies in France opposing the Germans in early 1918 having taken over sections of front from the

French, with reduced numbers of infantry and no General Reserve. He believed Haig was at the mercy of the organiser of defeat, Prime Minister Lloyd George. The Army Council was not against reducing the manpower of divisions and he explained how Lloyd George's decision to reduce divisions from 12 to 9 infantry battalions was implemented.

Using a scoring index he assessed two thirds of divisions as suffering moderate to severe dislocation with John Terraine believing the reorganisation of divisions threw the Army into confusion with esprit de corps being thrown away. Gough's 5th Army, which performed poorly against the German's attack on 21 March, had been subject to a large number of severe dislocations which probably was the cause of their failing. Simon speculated whether the Germans targeted the British divisions which had been subject to most changes.



Watching the BBC's excellent coverage of the Passchendaele commemorative events on 31 July last I was struck by the near perfect symmetry of their Tyne Cot cemetery image and I captured a screenshot for this back page. A scene representing respect to the fallen by all involved (CWGC staff, ceremony organisers, participating military, attendees & others). I looked forward to a visit on our coming holiday across the Channel; to see the renovations and reconnect with the feelings I felt watching the ceremony. However the exact opposite occurred walking towards the War Stone on seeing the Cross of Sacrifice (below left). See my Musing on Page 2. For more about the 2017 Armistice Prize competition see Page 28.



Tyne Cot Cemetery, 30 September 2017



Holly Hindley, Armistice Prize Winner

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