



frontline.

The newsletter of the MK WFA, June 2023.

Remembering
our founder,
Dorothy Mann



The Daily Mirror

CERTIFIED CIRCULATION LARGER THAN THAT OF ANY OTHER DAILY PICTURE PAPER

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TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1918

One Penny.

HOW LONDON HAILED THE END OF WAR



Now the War is Over' - Dr Weinbren

How did Britain respond to the momentous events of 1919 and 1920 as it adjusted to peace after four years of war? What were the challenges the British people faced and how did they cope with the massive changes that confronted them? Dr Daniel Weinbren's talk, 'Now the War Is Over,' will answer these questions. He will explain what happened in every sphere of life and show that even today we are still dealing with the consequences of those years of transition. Across Europe were revolutions, a war for independence in Ireland, and widespread race riots in Britain. Most servicemen simply wanted to come home to a land fit for heroes, to their families and a secure job, but for most that didn't happen. There was no return to the old days, too much had been lost. Dr Weinbren will give us a fascinating insight into how the Great War changed the direction of the nation.



The Western Front
Association
Milton Keynes Branch

Albert French Commemoration



15th June 2023

This year MK WFA are organizing the commemoration for Albert French at the MK Rose, starting at 6.45. Readings, music, British Legion standard bearers, wreath laying, and a bugler sounding the last post should make this a fitting tribute to young Albert. All welcome.



June



Rifleman Albert French, Kings Royal Rifle Corps

Albert was born in New Bradwell, Buckinghamshire but the French family soon moved to Wolverton. Albert was aged 11 when the 1911 census was taken. At that time there were 6 members of the French household living at 60 Young Street, Wolverton, Buckinghamshire. His Service Record shows that he enlisted as a volunteer on 18th October 1915 at St. Pancras. Albert, along with many other underage lads, added enough years to his real age to become 19, so that he would be accepted by the Army, and serve in a theatre of war. He stated (truthfully) that he was living at 60 Young Street, Wolverton, Buckinghamshire but confirmed (untruthfully) that he was 19 years old, and his trade or calling was stated as "Labourer" (presumably to mask his real calling as a machinist at Wolverton Works, which he had 'left without notice'). Although he was only just under 5 feet 4ins and quite slight in build, his physical development was good and even though he looked so young he was accepted. Albert signed up with the Service Number C/7259 and posted to the 18th (Service) Battalion the Kings Royal Rifle Corps (K.R.R.C.). On 2nd May 1916 he was posted with his battalion to France. On 15th June 1916 he was reported killed in action at Ploegsteert Wood. He was on a routine working party, repairing and replacing sandbags on the parapet of the trench, when four bullets from a burst of machine gun fire caught him and he died instantaneously. Rifleman Albert E French is buried in Hyde Park Corner (Royal Berks) Cemetery, Grave Reference: Row B, Grave 2.





Mentioned in Despatches

Battle of Cambrai



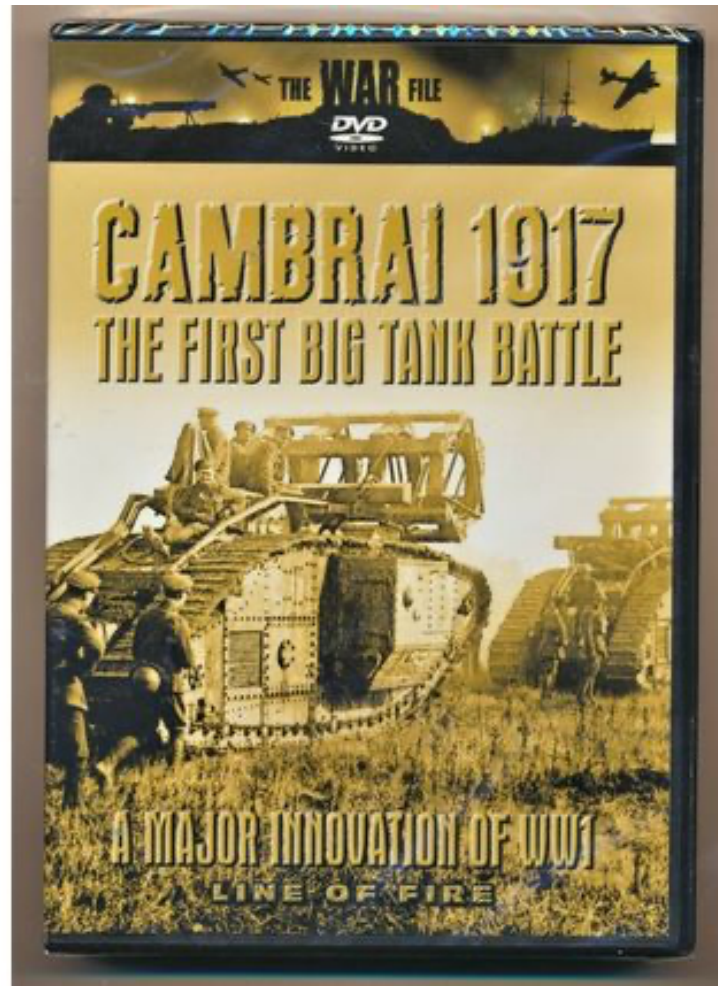
'Little Willie', the first tank. Originally called a tank for secrecy, and the name stuck, its personal name is a derogatory term for the Kaiser.



A mark IV tank. 'Female' tanks were armed with machine guns, 'Male' tanks had a big gun. Ho Hum!

Owing to the huge cost of a railway ticket from Cambridge to MK (via London) we had to unfortunately cancel Michael de Cicero's talk 'I shall hope to try an officer and at least one corporal for cowardice' even though Michael was presenting his talk without charge. Instead, we decided to use an excellent DVD I had kept hold of for a reserve for this sort of occasion. The photos in this article are from a PowerPoint I put together as an introduction about WW1 tanks in general, which we discussed before viewing the film. The DVD is now in our lending library, so if you missed the 'talk' it's well worth borrowing, see below. The tank, or 'landship' was originally a naval project headed by

Winston Churchill, then 1st Lord of the Admiralty, later to be taken over by the army and the newly formed Tank Corps.



Tanks had been used before Cambrai with limited success but the Battle of Cambrai, in November 1917, turned out to be ground-breaking for both Britain and Germany, ushering in a new type of warfare that would be capable of breaking the stalemate of the trenches that had so characterised the First World War up to that point. For the British, despite the initial successes, the battle failed to live up to their expectations, but valuable and far-reaching lessons were learned by both sides.



The Tank Corps working on new tactics.

The plan for the battle came from an idea by Lt-Col JFC Fuller, GSO1 of the Tank Corps who initially devised an Anglo-French attack supported by tanks, to capture St Quentin. This evolved into the operation at Cambrai. Haig was very keen to impress Lloyd George after his criticism of the huge losses of the Somme and Passchendaele, and the idea of a tank attack over the relatively unfought over and firm ground around Cambrai seemed to offer the perfect opportunity for him to achieve this.



Not much health and safety in those days, but there wasn't much about in WW1 anyway, or any other war for that matter. Note the exhaust fumes. Bad for the men in the photo, but far worse inside.



Tanks were brought up to the battlefield in great secrecy, mainly by rail. Aircraft were used to mask the noise of the tanks manoeuvring into position before the attack. Note the fascines, huge bundles of wood to be dropped into the German trenches to allow the tanks to cross. The Germans weren't expecting tanks to be used against them after earlier British armoured attacks had foundered in the mud, but nevertheless they had enlarged their trenches so they were too wide for a tank to cross. Hence the fascines, first used in the Middle Ages to cross moats, then in WW1, and then their famous use on D-Day, along with other 'Funnies', and still in use today, but now they are made of plastic pipes.

Independently of Fuller, Brig-Gen H Tudor, of the 9th (Scottish) Division had drawn up a plan for a trench raid, which would be launched without any preliminary bombardment, using tanks to cut the German barbed wire. Tudor envisaged the artillery shooting from the map - a technique that had never been tried before. Tudor's plan relied upon a predicted barrage. This was a technique whereby the known variables in a gun's shooting, such as atmospheric conditions and barrel wear, were taken into account therefore allowing an artillery piece to start its barrage without giving away its intentions by using ranging shots to first register on its target. The main idea was that the artillery would fire on the German artillery positions further back. There would be no bombardment of the German front line to give the game away, and the tank attack, relying on speed and surprise, and with close infantry support, was to punch a large hole in the German frontlines. The tanks, using specially designed grappling hooks, shown to be incredibly effective in the video, would drag the barbed wire to the left and right, creating large gaps through which the cavalry would pour into the German rear areas to create confusion, panic and a subsequent German retreat.

Surprise was achieved through there being no preliminary bombardment, and the fact that the Germans were totally unaware of the huge force of tanks, 476 in total, massed against them. This was successful due to advances made in sound ranging and flash spotting, and the predicted barrage already mentioned. The barrage fell on the German artillery batteries, the crushing of the wire was left to the tanks, which crossed easily over the firm and unpitted terrain and destroyed the German wire entanglements. They dropped their fascines and crossed over the wide trenches of the Hindenburg Line. What the video clearly showed was the innovative thinking that the Tank Corps had included in their planning. Some tanks had wireless sets to aid communication, and there were specialist tanks for certain tasks such as cable laying (although the British tanks in passing probably destroyed many more phone cables than they laid down!) Tanks pulling sledges loaded with equipment and supplies did the work of hundreds of men in bringing these supplies over in relative safety.

The Royal Flying Corps also co-operated in the attack. Once the battle commenced; the RFC, at great cost, undertook reconnaissance missions. The ground mist, which aided the advance of the tanks, made the task of spotting far harder for the air crews. Also, difficult and dangerous, were the tricky low-level attacks made on German batteries and machine gun emplacements. The RFC also ensured local air superiority, despite the Germans regaining some equality in the air with the arrival of Von Richthofen's 'circus'.

Despite the initial advances made at Cambrai, success was starting to slip away from the British for several reasons. Some of the tanks became separated from their supporting infantry which made them more vulnerable to attack by ground troops. Others were unlucky enough to run into a German battery that not only had survived the British barrage but had also been trained in the anti-tank role, despite the German belief that the British would not use tanks again after the earlier failures.

Not all the British division's commanders supported the use of tanks. Many historians think that Maj-Gen Harper, commanding the 51st (Highland) division, is to blame for the lack of success at Cambrai through his inability or unwillingness to work with tanks, leading to the Highlanders' failure to take Flesquieres, one of the main objectives, on the first day. This also affected the capture of Bourlon Ridge. Bourlon was to be taken by the 1st Cavalry Division, which had been detached from the Cavalry Corps, and was to pass through the positions taken by the Highlanders. Haig had identified the Bourlon position as the key ground in the entire operation. He believed that if captured, the whole of the German trench lines to the north would be compromised and the Germans would be forced to withdraw. Cavalry are the best troops for moving quickly but they were held too far back, and the large distances they had to cover left them exposed to attack. They failed, and with a lack of reserves, the British attack began to unravel



A British tank destroyed by German artillery trained in the anti-tank role.

The video also examined the use of bridging tanks (shades of D-Day again) Two tanks were tasked to carry rails and wooden planks in order to erect bridges to assist troops, and especially cavalry, to cross the St Quentin Canal, but they failed to get into position. The Germans were beginning to fight back, and the bridges were heavily defended, hence the need for the bridging tanks, although some cavalry did manage to get across, and survive! Undoubtedly the initial attack at Cambrai was a success; because of the choice of ground that suited tanks, the new ideas and tactics brought in by the British and partly because the Germans were over-confident in their defences. The line at Cambrai was held by tired or second-rate troops, few in number. The Germans were certain that the strength of the defences meant the British could only contemplate attacking after a lengthy preliminary bombardment, and this would give them ample time to bring the defending troops up to strength, and of course this did not happen. While it was necessary for attempts to take Bourlon to continue, it was this over-emphasis on Bourlon that led to the British being taken by surprise by the German breakthrough on 30 November, and the end of the British attack, which the video goes on to explain. (See link below for further information)



The last surviving Presentation tank., Ashford, Kent (once used as an electricity sub-station!)

A final note of interest was that the Germans, during their subsequent counterattack, captured enough lightly damaged or stranded British tanks. After repairs, around 40 were pressed into German service in 1918. In fact they would use more Mark IVs than their own A7V!

Bibliography; DVD, and article by David Tattersfield

<https://www.westernfrontassociation.com/world-war-i-articles/the-battle-of-cambrai-why-did-it-succeed-and-what-went-wrong-november-1917/>

Forthcoming Herts police tour. A trip is being organised by the Herts Police Great War Society on 8th, 9th, and 10th September, and will cover the German advance in the Somme in March 1918. Some of our members really enjoyed a similar trip 'Somme 1916'.

If you are interested in this tour, please contact hertsgreatwar@virginmedia.com

For details and booking forms, and to see if places are still available.

Gary's proposed Somme Tour for MK WFA.

Gary is willing to research a possible battlefield tour of our own so he would be very grateful if members would register an interest so that we know if it is worth proceeding with the planning. We can then confirm destination, cost and all the other details. Please email Gary at garyshort70@gmail.com to register an interest only, (not a commitment!).

Twinning Trip.

The Twinning visit from the Belgians is taking place on Saturday 1st July 2023. This is a very short visit as they will be returning home on Sunday 2nd July in the afternoon. A hog roast meal for them has been planned on the Saturday evening at the MK Museum where the Wolverton Town Band together with the Belgian Town Band will be performing (a mini concert of sorts). Those members who went on the twinning trip last year have received an invitation to this event at a subsidised cost of £10.00 per person for a very tasty sounding meal (vegetarian options available). The meal will start at 7pm, however the bar will be open from 6:15pm where you can purchase light beverages. The evening is due to finish at 10pm. Please contact Joe, before Friday 16th June, at Community@wolvertonandgreenleystowncouncil.gov.uk saying you are members of MK WFA to see if there are still places available.

Civic Service on Sunday 2nd July 2023

Joe and Wolverton Town Council would also like to invite us to attend their civic service on Sunday 2nd July at 10.00am on The Square, Wolverton where they will host a short service and we can pay our respects to those that have fallen. Our Belgian guests will be marching / performing from the town hall at 9.45am until they reach The Square. After the service, the Belgians will be performing for 20 minutes to those attending and local residents. After they have finished, there will be tea and cake at Foundation House on The Square. The Twinning committee hope that many members of MK WFA will be able to attend.

MK WFA Seminar

Our seminar is moving on apace, thanks to Jim's continued efforts, with only organisational details remaining for the committee to sort out. We have invited our neighbours from Northampton WFA and also the Herts Police group, and we are now concentrating on advertising the event. Tickets are available via EventBright, see the poster featured later. Please get your tickets and spread the word amongst family and friends. If anyone can print the poster off and display it, that would be brilliant.

Dorothy and John Mann - 1920 - 2023



We first encountered these two unique people many years ago when Dorothy, then into her late 70's, wrote to every WFA member with an MK postcode..... except us!

Her vision of a local branch stemmed from the photo on the family home wall of Edwin Jame, her uncle. He had served in the Duke of Wellington's 9th Battalion (West Riding regiment). Dorothy states that 'swayed by all the fervour, he went to Wrexham of the 22nd. November 1915 to enlist'. He became 29455 Royal Welch Fusiliers and was posted to the Bantams and on the 1.01.1916 he was transferred to the 19th Battalion (Bantams). Little is known of his service though he is known not to have wanted to return after his one leave. DM's comment is 'He must have regretted that trip to Wrexham'.

DM had thoroughly researched the War Diaries and gives a detailed description of their service. Please ask if you would like to read this in full.

Edwin was almost certainly in the action at Bourslon Wood. Consequently, the 19th RWF ceased to exist, as had the Bantams. Edwin was transferred to the West Riding Regiment and his army number is 26871. He had no ties with the Yorkshire regiment, it is not known how he felt! Nor whether any other RWF went too. There remains a gap in the information between these times. DM states ... 'So, the mystery remains' and 'We shall never know'. I find that very poignant knowing Dorothy and John as we did, they liked to be precise in everything. John always wrote cheques with a ruler. Her thoughts of a local branch came from this 'not knowing' - it wasn't her style.

Edwin E. Jame is listed KIA 21/09.1918., eight weeks before the fighting ceased. He does have a marked grave. Plot 2, Row A, Grave 19 in Villers Hill British Cemetery near the village of Villers Ghislaine. He was 22 years old.

She had embarked, in her inimitable fashion, of researching his journey from a small community in rural Wales to the battlefield and a headstone. She went to the battlefields in the summer of 1995, writing this in 1998, with Rona her sister, to follow in his footsteps. They laid poppies. No-one has been able to return. We are hoping to.

The family were fondly amused by her diligence in everything she undertook, including this. Vegetarianism was a cause she took seriously, in the early days of its popularity too, going on courses and joining the infant Vegetarian Society. Her soups were legendary! We have a copy of the booklet she wrote about Edwin - that point on a proper old-style typewriter upstairs in the little back bedroom. Of course!



Her interest sparked; she had then decided she needed a local group of fellow enthusiasts. Roy and I were, as you know, rather involved ourselves so when we received a request for dinner one Friday evening, we agreed. This was from old friends Teddy and Tony Noyes who were to be the branch's inaugural speakers. We knew them well and so tagged along too. Dorothy had written at her own expense to every member of the WFA with an MK postcode. Somehow we had not received such a letter. Another mystery. She was not amused.

On offering to help with the new branch DM asked if I'd make the tea.... Well - I'd certainly take my turn! But perhaps, perhaps.... I could do other things too.

The MK branch went from strength to strength under the active and far-sighted committee including Eric Webb and Don O'Connell. DM had to give up eventually succumbing to Parkinson's and stomach cancer and she died on November 21st 2006, having watched the Cenotaph services in the hospice. She left a great group of friends and comrades to carry the banner forward and to undertake some great events in the community to spread the word about the Lads. Still doing well today!

Strangely on Sunday the 16th April 2023 my Facebook feed showed a wonderful photo of Arthur Halestrap and Jacob Barker, some years ago when Arthur came to our branch. Part of DM's legacy. We all went to his funeral in 2004 with the late Peter Kent and his wife.



DM was a character. She had been a sparky teacher, Miss Roberts, and a great traveller and art lover. She met John and, although some years her junior, family knew after a while that they were truly suited. They married and continued their love of the Arts, literature, poetry, music, theatre and films, animals especially cats, gardening and travel. They had bought a life membership of the National Trust for £25 at least 40 years ago.... John and I visited Waddesdon, Ascott (where D had been a room guide) and many other places and he always loved to use his card, bypassing my mere annual one!

Their bookshelves have been awesome. He loved maps and had a complete collection of OS maps. He planned outings for the distinguished members of the Wing Ants... ie the Wing Antiquarian Society, completely by book, telephone, letter and of course maps. He took me to meet Eric Knowles and we managed the parking in the inimitable Newport Pagnell streets. We often had lunch there too, or at The Thrift on the way to Mursley, usually after a hospital trip. We were stopped by the police once for driving under the speed limit. When asked if we were lost the young officer was pained visibly when I said we were returning from urology and this was my friend's house.

We visited Grantchester amongst other places together after DM had died with him navigating from maps only. I followed instructions! DM however, embraced the modern technology and wrote endless emails and correspondence, often late into the night as her illness progressed and she couldn't ring you but still wanted to say something important. Their stories included travel and food, they loved food and cooking. DM had decided to become a vegetarian when it wasn't fashionable. She said she would only do so if she went on lots of courses and learned 'properly'. Her celery soup was renowned as well as totally delicious. On one adventure they were given spaghetti sandwiches because they wouldn't eat the local ham. They were both punctilious about everything, I remember asking what time I should arrive for our first poetry session... sharply I was told 'two thirty' and a table being required when John had been sent off to make the tea, and he had the audacity to ask what for.... In the best Lady Bracknell voice - 'to put things on, of course'. At committee meetings we all listened and behaved. Generally, these were held in the front room of Betty and Harry Canvin's home in Wolverton. We all looked forward to having our work marked! That red pen was legendary. Seeing the photo on my Facebook was a stark reminder of the times we had shared and the

far -reaching effects of those two. It was after all the day we left for Wales to add his ashes in at her grave with the family. I shared it with Stephen Barker who said he remembered DM and I together as a double act keeping the branch members and speakers in check. So many memories for us all of those early days. And I hope I took my turn at making the tea!

On Monday 17th April 2023 we gathered in Henryrd cemetery in Conwy. Eight of us as he wished.



As you can see there is even a CWGC headstone nearby, and DM is just in front of her sister Rona. John is now with his beloved wife as he requested. The wording is exactly what he asked for and he had the small quiet observance with his sister Beryl, her son Michael and his wife Karen and the nieces, always John's description to me, Karen and Debra and Richard Karen's husband. The caring undertaker was ex Welsh Guards and a local lad. Beryl said a few very poignant words, none of us had known that JM had been a scout! Their father had died when they were young and they had been evacuated to Parracombe in Devon. We have family too which always amused John. They had had a very happy life together and so 'Everyone Sang' (Siegfried Sassoon written in 1919) seemed fitting. We had beautiful family flowers, red roses and Brecon soil too. He certainly loved their huge garden and was often seen mowing or pruning. Deer often visited and helped with the windfalls. We enjoyed a number of summer garden parties there, with Dorothy's renowned summer punch. Her red pen is also remembered by us all who had our branch work 'marked'!

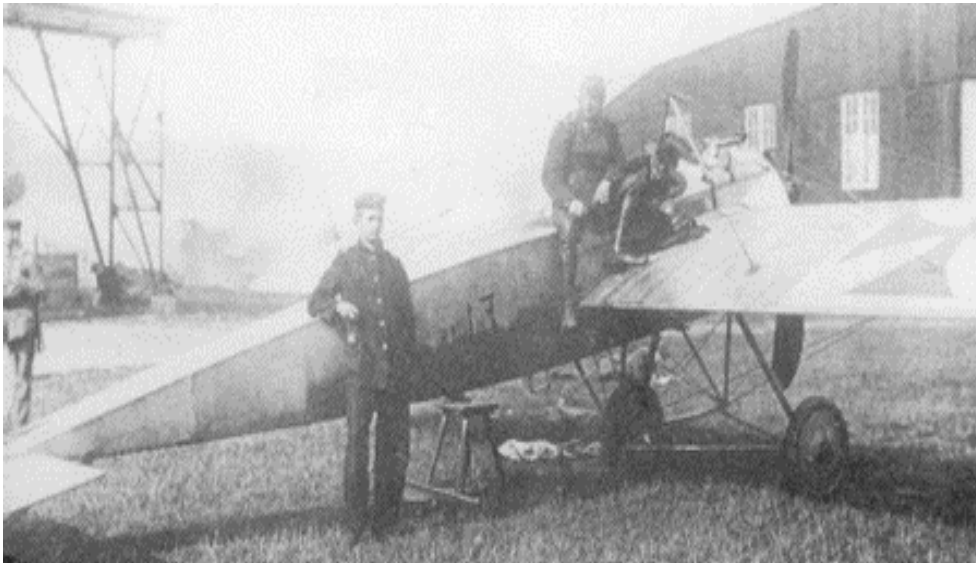
An RBL poppy was also laid in with the ashes and a tiny stone on the top of the headstone, as per the tradition.

Dorothy ran the MK branch for many years with a fantastic committee including Eric Webb, Don O'Connell, Betty Canvin and June Wildman. Harry Canvin gave the second branch talk and kept us all up to date with his extensive knowledge and connections. We often met at their home or at Eric's or Don's. The branch had good support from HO and a lively group of folks were hooked. Here we are ... so many years later.

Thank you, Dorothy and John. God speed.

Jane Backhouse, photos - Roy.

'Spads and Spandaus' - Biggles, W. E. Johns - Cultural Legacy and the Air War on the Western Front 1914-1918, Part 2.



33 Fokker M.5K/MG Eindecker - source https://wiki2.org/en/Fokker_Eindecker_fighters#



34 Improved Fokker - introduced January 1918 Source <https://www.fokker-history.com/>

In their training, young British pilots had to fly at least 15 hours' solo before being sent to the Front. In addition, the British also met the technological challenge by introducing the Sopwith biplane fighter - the famous Camel reaching the Front in 1917. W E Johns shows the importance of this development in his first stories in 'The Camels are Coming.'- Biggles and his comrades flying increasingly advanced aircraft as the war continues.



35 Sopwith Camel Source -<https://revivaler.com/sopwith-camel/>

The Camel had exceptional manoeuvrability and was one of the fastest fighters, with speeds up to 115mph. It was also armed with twin forward firing guns and had the ability to carry bombs for ground attack missions. The Camel had a unique feature- a metal cockpit surround that provided extra protection for the pilot in the event of a crash or enemy fire. It was, however, considered difficult to fly, especially for inexperienced pilots. W E Johns reflects this when Biggles states "The Camel's got a character all of its own. She's a bit temperamental, but when she's on your side, there's nothing like her," and "If you flew her well, she'd do things that other planes couldn't even dream of." - 36 Source W E Johns *The camels are coming*". Experienced pilots found the Sopwith Camel to be a formidable fighter, due to its excellent manoeuvrability and firepower. Records suggest it shot down more enemy aircraft than any other Allied fighter plane during the war.

Even so, mounting heavy losses led to an increasing demand for pilots at the front. This resulted in some arriving unprepared for air combat. In Spring 1917 deaths rose sharply. In 'bloody April', the British suffered four times more casualties than the Germans. One historian estimate puts life expectancy at 17.5 hours combat flying.

W E Johns makes this problem of inexperience clear when he describes Biggles meeting the new pilots-

'Sit down and let's talk,' said Biggles, when the drinks had been served. 'How much flying have you done?'

'Fourteen hours on Avros and ten on Camels.'

'Ten hours, eh?' mused Biggles; 'ten hours. So, they're sending 'em out here with ten hours now. My God! Now listen,' he went on, 'I want you to forget those ten hours. This is where you'll learn to fly—they can't teach you at home. If you live a week, you'll begin to know something about it. I don't want to discourage you, but most people that come out here live on an average twenty-four hours. If you survive a week, you're fairly safe. I can't teach you much, nobody can; you'll find things out for yourself. 37 *The Camels are coming* page 130

Along with the changing technology there was a rapid evolution of tactics - often worked out in the grim experience of pilots. There was constant innovation and experimentation as pilots tried to find

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new ways to down their opponents in the skies over the Western Front, including diving from higher altitudes, using the sun to blind their enemies, and employing tactics such as The Immelmann turn, involving a loop resulting in a quick reverse the direction of an aircraft while positioning it for an attack on an enemy aircraft. It was first used by Immelmann himself in 1915 and became a standard tactic used by many pilots during World War I. In the short story 'The White Fokker' Biggles is engaged in a dogfight in which the German fighter " Immelmanned" 38 -Source The Camels are Coming -page 16



38 A German Staffel Source <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk>

A further tactic was the "staffel" system, which involved grouping several aircraft that could work together to attack enemy planes. The staffel system was developed by the German Air Force, and it quickly proved to be an effective way to engage enemy aircraft. Eventually it became a standard part of aerial combat. Again, through Biggles, Johns gives us an understanding of the impact of the Staffel - Biggles says-'The Germans are a tough bunch, and their Staffels are among the best in the world. We need to be at the top of our game if we're going to take them on.....Flying against a German Staffel is no picnic. They're well-trained and well-equipped, and they'll be doing their best to shoot us out of the sky. But if you know their tactics and you're quick on your feet, you can beat them..... you can't afford to make any mistakes. They'll be looking for any opportunity to take you down, so you need to be sharp and focused at all times.'" 39 Source The Camels are coming - 1932

Biggles also explains the tactics that young pilots had to understand to try to survive: 'First of all, never cross the line alone under 10,000 feet— not yet anyway. Never go more than a couple of miles over unless you are with a formation. Never go down after a Hun. If you see a Hun looking like easy meat, make for home like hell, and if that Hun fires a Very light, kick out your foot and slam the stick over as if somebody was already shooting at you. Act first and think afterwards, otherwise you may not have time to act. Never leave your formation on any account — you'll never get back into it if you do, unless it's your lucky day; the sky is full of Huns waiting to pile up their scores and it's people like you that make it possible. Keep your eyes peeled and never stop looking " The Camels are Coming - page 130

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40 The Flying Circus Source - www.dutch-aviation.nl/index5/Military/index5-1_Dr1_Dreidecker.html

In the stories Johns also references many real-life Aces that Biggles faces - for example Manfred von Richthofen, the Red Baron - a German ace who is credited with 80 victories and the Jagdgeschwader 1 or Flying Circus. Biggles explains: "The Flying Circus was the most feared unit in the skies. They had some of the best pilots in the world and were led by the legendary Red Baron himself." and "The Flying Circus was like a well-oiled machine. They had a system and they executed it flawlessly. It was a formidable opponent."⁴¹ Johns also refers to other real Aces in the stories from both sides - Ernst Udet, Oswald Boelcke, Max Immelmann [German] and Edward "Mick" Mannock, Albert Ball, René Fonck, William Bishop. W E Johns credits Biggles with shooting down 49 planes and 5 balloons throughout the stories depicting him as a highly skilled pilot and a decorated World War I ace.

42 Von Richthofen 1917 Source



According to Ralph Barker, concluding his study of the RFC in World War 1, 'the leaders of the armies on both sides agreed..... certainly from 1916 on, that air support had become indispensable to all ground operations. More than that, in periods of crisis, air superiority had become decisive'⁴¹ Source - The Royal Flying Corps in World War I - Barker [2002] page 482 The Camels are Coming

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gives an accurate vivid description of air support for the troops in the trenches: Biggles is attacking and bombing German reinforcements and supply dumps -

"Squadron orders for the day had been to help them in every possible way by strafing back areas with machine-gun fire and 20-lb. Cooper bombs to prevent the enemy from bringing up reinforcements. He had been at it all morning, and as he climbed into the cockpit for the afternoon 'show', he anticipated another miserable two hours watching mud-coated men and lumbering tanks crossing no-man's-land, as he dodged to and fro through a venomous fire from small-arms, field guns and archie batteries." 42 Source *The Camels are Coming* page 82-83



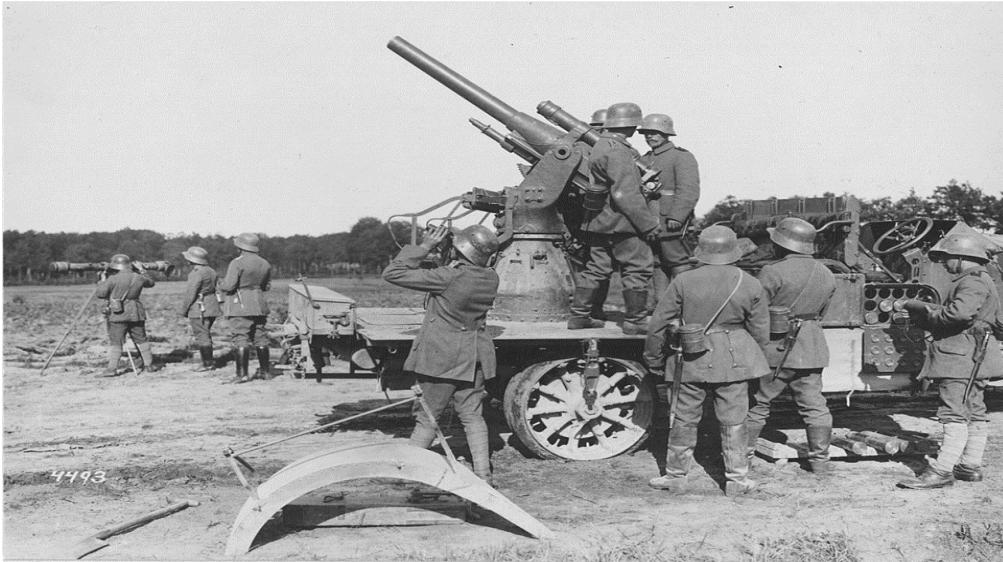
43 - Coopers bomb. Source - <https://www.invaluable.com/auction-lot/ww1-british-coopers-rfc-aerial-bomb>



44 Cooper bomb rack. Source - <https://microaces>.

In this new style of warfare anti-aircraft guns became essential. 'Archie' was the RFC slang for German anti-aircraft fire. One explanation is that it comes from a pilot named A E 'Biffy' Borton who sang the popular George Robey music-hall song 'Archibald, certainly not!' on surviving bursts of anti-aircraft fire early in the war. Another suggests that the term was already popular among pilots by September 1914, there are many references to Archie in the early Biggles stories. In the introduction to *Biggles*, Pioneer Air Fighter Johns writes: 'There was nothing friendly about Archie. On the contrary it often hit you when you were least expecting it...dodging it was part of the daily round' Source: Johns Introduction page [X] 45

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46 German anti-aircraft gun - ARCHIE. British shells burst with white smoke, German shells - black smoke Source: <https://www.quora.com/Did-the-Allies-try-bombing-Germany-in-WW1>

Aircraft played a primary role in observation and reconnaissance. It enabled commanders to gather information about enemy positions, movements, and strengths, which was critical for planning military operations, for example, artillery barrages and the assessment of enemy positions and strength prior to an offensive. The information was also used to produce detailed maps of the front lines. The Biggles stories clearly explain the process and importance of air observation and the way it was used to coordinate artillery fire. Johns describes Biggles:

".... flying a zig-zag course behind the British lines, keeping a watchful eye open for the movements of enemy troops, although the smoke of the barrage laid down to protect the advancing troops, made the ground difficult to see. " 47 Source: *The Camels are coming* Page 82

Johns gives an accurate, factual explanation of the role of the R E 8 [British two-seater biplane, designed for reconnaissance and artillery observation.] in coordinating Howitzer fire in a 'shoot' [An aircraft pin-pointing a target for the artillery below. The pilot would check how close the shells were falling to the target, then signal to the gunners below using morse code transmitted by a one-way radio.]. He writes that Biggles:

"Twenty minutes later, from a safe altitude, watched with marked approval salvo after salvo of shells, hurled by half a dozen batteries of howitzers, tearing the surface off the earth, and pounding the 'church' and its contents to mangled pulp. An R.E.8 circled above, doing the shoot, keeping the gunners on their mark".48 IBID page 82.

(To be continued)

Next month, observation balloons, the Aces, and Biggles in air combat)

Paul Salver

A Corner of a Friendly Field - CWGC Tour

Cranfield.

Not all those who fell in the Great War are buried in a corner of a foreign field that is forever England - to quote those famous and evocative lines from Rupert Brook's poem, 'The Soldier'. Many of the fallen, perishing in accidents or from disease, or succumbing to their injuries whilst at a military hospital at home, rest in quiet churchyards across the United Kingdom. Other reminders of the Great War and its impact also abound, memorials of many kinds, to one person or sadly to many, some old, some quite modern, often also in churches or in some central public place.

Mike Chapman held local cemetery tours (two at each location) during the recent CWGC's War Graves week at Manor Road Cemetery, Fenny, Wolverton Cemetery and St Peter & St Paul, Cranfield. Members of MK WFA had been to the Fenny and Wolverton tours in the past, but Cranfield was a new one and I was keen to go, firstly to check out how accurate my previous 'Corner of a Foreign Field' article on Cranfield had been, but mainly to find out about the number of RAF graves located in the churchyard. Cranfield airfield had been a training base and OTU amongst other things in WW2 and most of the graves there were the result, as Mike explained, of training accidents, not enemy action. No change from WW1 there then!

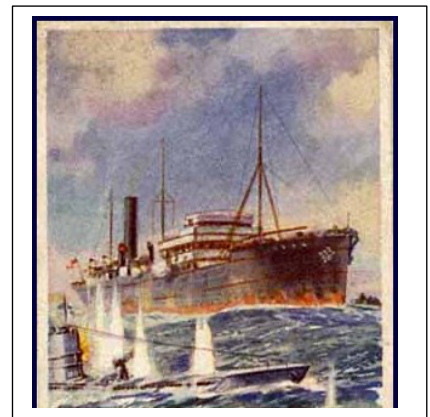


Shown above, Mike Chapman and the tour party. The one photo I omitted from my previous article (June 2021) although not the information, is the fourth soldier who lies at rest in the churchyard, Driver Alfred Kinns, 69th Division, Royal Engineers. His private headstone is pictured left. He died of illness 8th February 1919, aged 30. Alfred had enlisted in Bedford in 1915, joining the territorial force. He was probably working as a driver at Clipstone Camp in Nottinghamshire, a huge complex that housed over 20,000 troops. Alfred was tasked with looking after a sick officer with influenza. Alfred became ill himself, was admitted to the hospital and died of pneumonia and septicemia. His grave and headstone are behind the East wall of the churchyard. Thanks to Mike for an excellent tour, as always.



The Western Front
Association
Milton Keynes Branch

Milton Keynes WFA Seminar



14th October 2023 (9.30am - 4.30pm)

Renowned expert speakers introducing varied and exciting aspects of the Great War -

Alexandra Churchill: 'The Hejaz Railway'

Peter Hart, Gary Beale: 'Laughter or Cry: Life or Death in the Trenches'

Major Charlie Barrett: 'Q-Ships'

Helen Frost: 'The Women's Land Army'

Buffet lunch included, plus tea, coffee and biscuits throughout the day.

Militaria and branch displays, plus second-hand book stall (cash please).

Bletchley Masonic Centre 263 Queensway, Bletchley, MK2 2BZ

Tickets available online from Eventbrite - £30: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/milton-keynes-wfa-seminar-2023-tickets-641303294417>

Enquiries: wfa.miltonkeynes@gmail.com



'Britannia's unruly stepchildren', Americans in the British Armed Forces- Michael O'Brien

This talk is not about America's entry into the Great War in 1917, but instead looks at the lives and experiences of a variety of American citizens who took matters into their own hands well before America joined the war and crossed the Atlantic to join the British armed services. Michael is a retired history teacher and published author whose major research project was a study of American citizens who served under British colours in the Great War. He is an expert in this field, and his fascinating talk is not one to miss!

June 15th - Albert French Commemoration at the MK Rose

June 16th - 'Now the War is Over' - Dr Daniel Weinbren

July 1st/2nd Belgian visit plus Albert French wreath laying at Wolverton Town Square.

July 21st - 'Britannia's unruly stepchildren', Americans in the British Armed Forces- Michael O'Brien

August - Visit to Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum - TBC

September 15th - 'Logistics of the East Africa Campaign' Dr Anne Samson

September 15th, 16th, 17th - MK WFA at MK Museum Heritage event.

October 14th - MK WFA seminar. Bletchley Masonic Centre

November 11th - WFA ceremony at the Cenotaph.

November 17th - 'He Didn't Talk About It - Analysing Veterans' Silence' - Julian Walker

Meetings are 7.30 - 9.30 at Wolverton Working Men's Social Club, 49 - 50, Stratford Road MK12 5LS

Committee members are...

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Ian Wright - Talks organiser

Caroline Wright - Treasurer

Jim Barrett - Seminar and visits co-ordinator

George Maby - Wolverton Town Council liaison (Twining and Albert French commemoration)

Gary Short - Social Media co-ordinator.