



Lancashire North Branch

Despatch – March 2023

Seventh Email edition.



Keeping communications open



Editor's Notes



Welcome to our seventh email edition of Despatch, the first of 2023. Spring is finally here and hopefully now that Covid is behind us we can resume our previous activities and interests associated with the Great War. I know that a few members, myself included, will be resuming our visits to the battlefields and sites along the Western Front.

It is a great pleasure to see increased contributions coming in from our members and I welcome all those who take the time to provide articles for inclusion in our branch journal. If you have a trip planned please think about a few lines to your fellow members describing your visit and any interesting stories.

Over the winter months we have had a series of excellent speakers including our own branch chairman and an ex-chairman. The subjects covered have been varied and diverse, which always leads me to delve deeper into the subject matter. In spite of my years of researching I am still prone, like Alice in Wonderland, to being drawn into 'rabbit holes' - those interesting items you come across that divert you from your original study. A couple of these have produced articles for this issue.

Tom Williams

(Unless otherwise indicated, articles are by the editor.)

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Private. 6346 Peter Lang. 1st Scots Guards



Rabbit Hole No 1

Paul Conlon and Tom Williams

Anyone who studies the Great War soon finds that no matter the subject, you soon come across ‘rabbit holes’ down which, like Alice, you plunge into, only find yourself heading away from your line of study into distracting areas of interesting material.

Paul Conlon was first approached by Bill Windle seeking help in finding information about his great uncle’s First World War service. Initially the only information available came from a copy of a Pension Record Card which showed that Private 6346 Peter Lang, 1st Scots Guards, had received Gunshot Wounds to his right leg and shoulder and such injuries were attributable to his war service.

There are no details of any pension awarded or the assessed level of disability. The last entry on the card is dated 1925. An address was recorded at Victoria Street, Preston. Family history recalled that Paul Lang had been wounded at Ypres in 1914. He was returned to England and hospitalised at Leeds War Hospital before being medically discharged in February 1916. Later a copy of a receipt was found. This was for an ‘Armlet’ delivered by Preston Police and signed for by Private Lang on 10 February 1916. Paul then asked if I would like to see if there was anything further we could add to this man’s service history: a challenge accepted.

Private Peter Lang was born 4 December 1887 at Preston. In 1891 the family was living in Sennet Street, Preston. His father Peter aged 26, mother Harriet 26, sister Catherine 7, Peter 4 and Harriet 2.

By 1901 the family had changed dramatically. His mother Harriet and his sister, also named Harriet, had died and his father had remarried a 23 year old named Margaret Burns that year. By this time his sister Catherine was a 17 year old Mill Worker and Peter was a 14 Year old biscuit maker at a bread works. The family were living at Atkinson Street, Preston.

Peter Lang enlisted in the 1st Scots Guards on 12 December 1905 at the age of 18 years. The 1st and 2nd Scots Guards embarked for Egypt in 1911, returning to England in 1913. In August 1914 the 1st Scots Guards was stationed at Aldershot as part of the 1st (Guards) Brigade of the 1st Division. The 1st Scots Guards embarked for France on 13 August 1914 landing at Le Havre on 14 August 1914. The battalion were involved at the Battle of the Mons 23-24 August, First Battle of Marne 6-9 September, First Battle of the Aisne 13-26 September and the First Battle of Ypres 19 October – 15 November 1914.

According to family accounts Private Lang was wounded during the fighting at the First Battle of Ypres during early November 1914. The unit war diary gives only a superficial account of this action. If, as stated, he was admitted to the 2nd Northern Military Hospital in Leeds on 10 November 1914, we have to assume that he was probably wounded in early November. The medical evacuation routes were still being established at this time. However, the Leeds Hospital received their first casualties on 17 September 1914.

Unfortunately the service records of Private Lang have not survived, so we cannot follow his medical history until he was discharged from the army in early 1916.

Extracts from the 1st Scots Guards War Diary for November 1914.

(National Archives ref: WO95/1263-2)

1 November 1914 – Trenches between Veldoek and Gheluvelt.

Gloucester on the right of the battalion. In the evening 200 men of Coldstream Guards took over from the Gloucesters, they held the barricade across the Menin Road with 2nd KRR on their right.

2 November – Very heavy shelling. Barricade destroyed, Coldstream Guards and KRR driven back. Enemy advanced down Menin Road and opened fire with machine gun at our rear. Enfiladed by artillery fire. ‘C’ Company drawn back to face the road. Line readjusted in the evening 300 yards to the rear.

3 November – Velthoek (sic). New line consisted of a battalion of Zouaves and Loyal North Lancs on Menin Road. Scots Guards, Camerons, Black Watch dig new trenches during the night.

4 November – Veldoek. Quiet day.

5 November – Veldoek. Heavy shelling

6 November – Veldoek. Fairly quiet day.

7 November – Veldoek. Heavy shelling.

8 November – Veldoek. Heavy shelling. Enemy break through trench and Loyal North Lancs, get into communication trenches. Loyal North Lancs and our supports counter attack and regain lost trenches. Germans remained in trenches on our right. Attempts made to turn them out with machine gun fire.

9 November – Veldoek. Fairly quiet day.

10 November – Veldoek. Heavy shelling.

11 November – Velthoek. Terrific shelling commencing 6.30 am and lasting for 3 hours. All trenches and dugouts knocked in. The Prussian Guards attacked through Velthoek and took the front trenches along the whole of 1st Brigade. Our Men in the orchard held on until trenches on either side were occupied by the enemy and did good execution. The point d'appae (sic) was shelled to pieces early in the morning and then attacked by infantry from the wood. Only 5 men from the fire trenches, 30 from the orchard, 4 from point d'appae and battalion HQ escaped and managed to re-join the rest of the battalion at dusk. Enemy got to within 200 yards of our guns, they were driven back losing very heavily.

The medical services attached to the 1st Division and operating in the immediate area was the 1st and 2nd Field Ambulance RAMC. Although we do not know where Private Lang was treated or evacuated from, the war diary of the 1st Field Ambulance for 16 November 1914 records;

....the 1st Brigade had been relieved from the trenches the previous night. The Scots Guards are reduced to 1 officer and 79 men, London Scottish around 350, Cameron Highlanders around 250 and the Black Watch to 400.

1st Scots Guards' Casualties for the period 1 – 16 November 1914

	Killed	Wounded	Missing
Officers	9	7	5
Other Ranks	105	151	430

There is minimal information on Private Peter Lang although he is listed on the 1914 Medal Roll – one of the ‘Old Contemptibles’ with a note - ‘Discharged 11 February 1916. no longer physically fit for military service. KR 392. XVi.’

One last piece of evidence was the receipt for an ‘Armlet’. This is made of Khaki cloth with a red crown stitched on it with an individual number printed on the reverse. The armlet and Army Form W 3214 was sent to the local police who were charged with ensuring its delivery to the named person.

Army Form W. 3214.

Receipt for Armlet.

To
The Chief of Police,

Will you please be good enough to have the accompanying Armlet and pamphlet delivered to:—
6346 Pte P. Lang
113 Victoria St
Preston, Lancs

and obtain and forward to me hereon his receipt for the same.

armlet number
57005

Officer i/c Records,
No. District.

RECEIPT.

Received the above-mentioned Armlet and Pamphlet.

Place Preston, Lancashire
Date Thursday Feb. 10th 1916. Peter Lang, Pte.

W 13493-4726 256,000 12/15 H W V (P.1348) Form W. 3214/1.

Previous references to an ‘Armlet’ I had seen had been to those presented to men who had attested under the ‘Derby Scheme’. (See Despatch October 2022) Those men who attested under the Derby Scheme and chose to defer their call up were placed in Class ‘A’. Those who agreed to immediate service were assigned to Class ‘B’. The Class ‘A’ men were given a day’s army pay for the

day they attested, and were also provided with an armlet bearing a red crown, as a symbol that they had volunteered.



In November 1915 the Secretary of State for War decided to issue khaki armlets to the further classes of men:

- (1) Men who enlist and are placed in groups awaiting a call to join the colours. (Derby scheme)
- (2) Men who offer themselves for enlistment and are found to be medically unfit.
- (3) Men who have been invalided out of the Service with good character or have been discharged as "not likely to become efficient" on medical grounds.

Private Lang obviously fell into the third category. No doubt the idea was to display that these men now in civilian dress, had either signed up for military service or had done their duty. We are also informed that at one time Private

Lang had been presented with a ‘King’s Certificate’. Soldiers who had been discharged with disabilities sustained on overseas war service, received a certificate from the King. This was an ornate printed scroll on which the number, name and unit of the discharged serviceman was recorded, stating that he had served with honour and was now disabled. There was a facsimile signature of King George V.

The King had sought some further recognition for the men who had been discharged injured, disabled or infirm and on 12 September 1916 under Army Order 316, the Silver War Badge was introduced. This small silver badge was designed to be worn on civilian clothes. They were retrospectively awarded to those already discharged since August 1914.



Private Lang is recorded on the ‘Roll of individuals as entitled to the ‘War Badge’. The commonly known ‘Silver War Badge Roll’ confirms that Private Lang had served overseas had been wounded and discharged on the 11 February 1916 under KR’s. 392. XVi.

The main purpose of the badge was to prevent men not in uniform and without apparent disability being thought of as shirkers; such was the pressure by civilians to push military age men into service. The sad thing was that by 1917 many of these men were to have their wounds downgraded and be recalled for

service. The Local Military Tribunals often intervened to protect these men from further military service.

What happened to Private Peter Lang in the post war years is unfortunately still much of a mystery. We know from his Pension Record Card that he was in receipt of an undisclosed disability pension that terminated in 1925. This date coincides with the UK's implementation of the 'Geddes' Axe'. This was the same Geddes who was the salvation of the transport system, particularly the railways of the Western Front.

In the previous years there had been a host of tax increases and economic cutbacks to the UK public sector from 1921 onwards. The War Pensions Act of 1921 brought in a period of restrictions to the Ministry's policy and procedures. Overall spending for the Pensions department was reduced by almost 50 per cent from £106,367,000 in 1921 to £54,066,000 in 1930. By 1925, almost half a million pensioners, with around 250,000 of them having an assessed disability of 20 per cent or less, were given a lump sum or gratuity, defined as a 'Final Award'. This relatively small 'lump sum' and the loss of a regular pension must have come as a blow during the economic slump of the post war years.

The 1939 Register shows Peter Lang to be single and living at Wensley Street, Blackburn. He was employed as a general labourer.

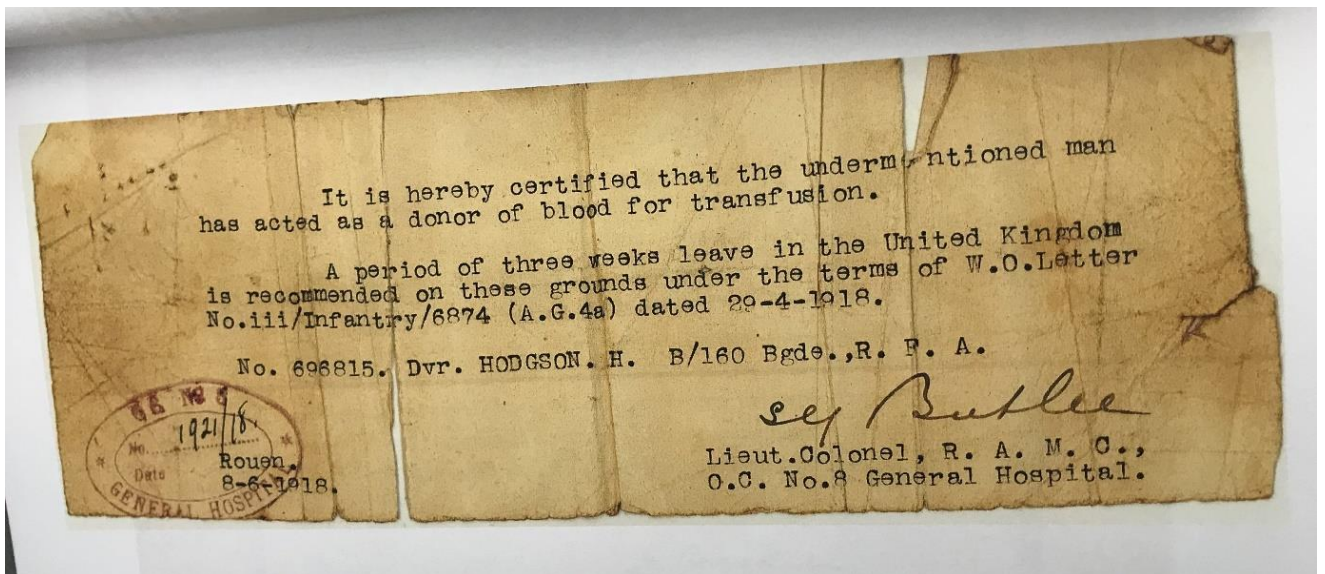
Private Lang's family tell us that he died in August 1965 at the age of 78. He had been living in a Salvation Army Hostel in Blackburn when he was admitted to Queen's Park Hospital, Blackburn where he died of acute bronchopneumonia caused by chronic bronchitis and emphysema.



Blood transfusion during the First World War

Rabbit Hole Number 2

Yet another rabbit hole appears. At the February branch meeting one of our members, David Hodgson, had brought with him a photograph and a number of interesting papers from his grandfather's service records. Among the papers was a slip I had never come across before.



This document shows that there was a process in place to grant three weeks leave in the United Kingdom to a man who had donated blood for transfusion. So another 'Rabbit Hole' appears and down I go – again.

Background history

Driver 3278/696815 Henry 'Harry' Dodgson enlisted on 1 November 1915 into the Territorials of the Royal Field Artillery. Unfortunately his Medal Index Card does not include the date on which he arrived in France but assuming the normal training periods at the time he would have arrived in France in late 1916. He was posted to the New Army 160th (Wearside) Howitzer Brigade,

Royal Field Artillery, 34th Division. The division had been active throughout the battle of the Somme.

In January 1917 the 160th Howitzer Brigade was in the Chapelle de Armentieres area just south of Armentieres. They moved briefly to Ploegsteert Wood before taking up positions for the Battle of Arras during 9-16 April 1917 and the Battle of Arleux 28-29 April. The 160th Brigade as part of 34th Division followed the retreating German forces to Hagricourt north-west of St Quintin.

The brigade moved east and remained within the Arras battle area until they made the journey to the Ypres Salient ready for the Third Battle of Ypres. During 13-23 October 1917 the 160th brigade supported the 34th Division attack as they advanced from the Broenbeek stream towards Poelcappelle. The appalling weather and ground conditions combined with an organised enemy defence brought this advance to a halt.

In March 1918 the 160th Brigade were in action at the Battle of St. Quentin and the later battles on the Somme and at the Battles of the Lys in April 1918. Following The Battle of Kemmel the 34th Division was withdrawn to Poperinghe to reform before the final phase of the war.

Grant of leave following a blood transfusion donation.

The certificate granting leave to Driver Hodgson is signed by the Officer Commanding No.8 General Hospital, Rouen on 8 June 1918. We can assume that the blood donation was probably made in May 1918. At this time the 160th Brigade RFA and the 34th Division were reforming at Poperinghe, near Ypres. Was Driver Hodgson therefore a patient at one of the hospitals in Rouen?

By the middle of 1918 blood transfusion had advanced considerably and had become an accepted emergency treatment in the front-line medical services. In order to transfuse blood, there had to be a supply of donors to provide the necessary volumes of blood. In many cases this was accomplished by comrades donating blood for their mates or by donations from the walking wounded. No doubt the prospect of three weeks leave being granted was also an incentive.

Blood transfusion prior to the First World War

Blood transfusion had been attempted over the previous centuries but had generally failed. This was due to a variety of factors, the first and major problem being the tendency for blood to clot, thus reducing its flow and clogging equipment used to transfer it.

Attempts at transfusions prior to the war typically involved surgically connecting the artery of a donor to the vein of the recipient using rubber tubing. These direct transfusion methods could take two to three hours and required the donor and recipient patient to lie quietly side-by-side. It was impossible to gauge how much blood actually passed from donor to patient, and clotting still remained a major problem.

In 1900 an Austrian physician, Karl Landsteiner, discovered human blood types. He classed them initially into groups A, B and O, later adding the AB group. By 1907 it was proposed that transfusion safety could be improved by ‘crossmatching’ blood between donors and patients. In New York that year, the first transfusion took place using blood that had first been typed and ‘crossmatched’ to exclude incompatible mixtures between the donor and recipient patient. Basically, this involved mixing donor red blood cells with the patient’s plasma and separately mixing the patient’s cells with the donor plasma

to observe for incompatibility. It was also recognised at this time that group O donors were ‘universal’ donors, their blood being acceptable to patients of all other blood groups.

Physically transferring the blood was still a problem and a multiple syringe method was devised in 1913 by Edward Lindemann of New York. A highly-choreographed team kept syringes in constant motion from donor to patient. Importantly, they used needles inserted through the skin directly into the veins, eliminating the need to surgically expose the blood vessels. Later modifications replaced the syringes with tubing and stopcock devices simplified the process, making it possible for a single physician to perform a transfusion.

When the First World War began, the few transfusions performed by French and British doctors used the older methods of direct donor to recipient. These methods were too complex for use in the field, they could only be safely performed at hospitals behind the lines.

British physicians, by contrast with their North American counterparts had shown little interest or expertise with blood transfusion. When Canadian surgeons arrived at the front, they were aware of the value of blood transfusion and some were actually experienced in the use of transfusions.

No 3 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) arrived in France in September 1915 before moving to Aire- sur la Lys, south-west of Bailleul in February 1916. No 3 CCS had been performing blood transfusions since their arrival in France. Among the Canadian Medical Officers was Major Lawrence Bruce Robertson. He was experienced in transfusion techniques and was able to persuade British surgeons to use the ‘indirect’ blood transfusion method, where blood was transferred using syringes and intravenous canulae to overcome the

problems of clotting – a technique he had successfully used at Toronto’s Hospital for Sick Children.

At this time blood donations had been taken from other patients considered healthy but unfit for front-line duties; mostly those with sprains, minor fractures and other simple medical conditions. Major Robertson’s success in using whole blood for treating injured soldiers with the syringe and cannula method of transfusion, quickly spread among other Canadian and British medical staff.

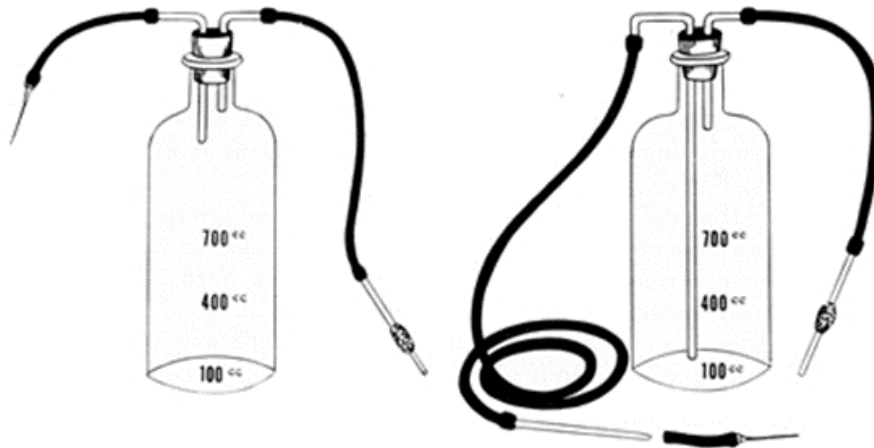


Reproduced with kind permission of the Hospital Archives, The Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto, Canada

Blood is transferred by syringe from the donor on the left to the recipient patient on the right.

During 1914-1915, the use of sodium citrate was introduced as an anticoagulant. This prevented the blood from clotting and allowed blood to be stored for a few days. This reduced the need for donor and recipient to be in the

same room. Later studies at the Rockefeller Institute in New York found that adding dextrose (sugar) to the sodium citrate extended the storage time up to four weeks.



First World War Blood Bottles. Typically, about 500ml was collected from a donor. The blood and anticoagulant were transferred through a gauze filter to remove any clots or debris.

The entry of America into the war in 1917 introduced additional medical staff who were familiar with transfusion methods. Among them was a British born doctor, Major Oswald Hope Robertson, who had grown up in America and had previously worked at the Rockefeller Institute in New York with some of the leading exponents of transfusion work.

Major Robertson was sent to the No 3 CCS to add his experience on blood transfusion. By this time Robertson, who was familiar with the use of citrated blood had started to collect blood ready for future use. The citrated blood could only be stored a short time, but it allowed blood to be collected in advance of need. He was ‘Banking’ the citrated blood in glass bottles, using converted ammunition boxes as shipping containers packed with sawdust and ice. The first ‘Blood Banks’ had been established on the Western Front.

To further simplify matters Robertson selected only the blood from Group O donors which was compatible with all other blood groups, with no ‘cross-matching’ required. Later dextrose was included with the anticoagulant to prolong the life of the ‘Banked’ blood supplies. This led to Allied medical forces being issued with standardized transfusion kits for use in the field. The British transfusion kit was designed by Major Geoffrey Keynes RAMC, brother of the distinguished economist, Lord Maynard Keynes. Major Keynes went on to found the London Transfusion Service.

Not all transfused blood was Group O. When time and facilities allowed, some donor blood was typed and ‘crossmatched’ prior to transfusion. Lists of blood groups of camp personnel were maintained, to be summoned as donors when needed. Convalescing troops often volunteered as donors for the more seriously wounded. The techniques developed by Robertson became the method of choice for most Allied medical forces and towards the end of the war he was conducting a school for blood transfusion.



Mobile blood transfusion equipment devised by Geoffrey Keynes. Reproduced with permission of Science Museum/Science & Society Picture Library

Personal note

Fifty years after the First World War I was working in a remote hospital in Canada which also ran a ‘blood bank’. In times of emergency or when bad weather prevented regular supplies of blood being flown in, we also had a register of donors, mostly hospital staff, who we could take blood from. These donations were still collected into Citrate-Dextrose solution, crossmatched and given the patient.



The King’s Cross war memorial...‘Gassed’

...and a question

Peter Denby

January’s branch talk - “*Gassed - a visual reportage*” - was of course given by our chairman Iain Adams, and discussed John Singer Sargent’s classic 1919 painting. I was very disappointed I could not attend the talk, but I am told it was

an excellent presentation (so Iain, please let me know if you have any plans to repeat the talk elsewhere).

In September 2022 I spent a weekend in London. Early afternoon on the Saturday found me in need of sustenance, and being near King's Cross railway station I thought I would call in there: its concourse has recently undergone a £multimillion refurbishment, so that sounded a good bet for a refreshment stop.

As Harry Potter enthusiasts will know, Platform 9³/₄ at King's Cross is where



students of Hogwarts School catch the Hogwarts Express, and so after the obligatory tourist photograph I fortified myself at a concourse café (cappuccino and cake: very nice), after which my internal war memorial detector came into play and led me on the way out to the station's war memorial, which is at the end of the railway just inside the main entrance.

Platform 9³/₄, King's Cross railway station

The original war memorial at King's Cross was first erected in 1920 some thirty yards west of the current location by the Great Northern Railway Company, and listed those employees who gave their lives in the Great War. After the Second World War, the memorial was also dedicated to the employees of the London North Eastern Railway who fell in that conflict. Relocated in 1973 by the British Railways Board, only the eleven original name panels remained, and in 2013 these original marble tablets were restored and reinstated by Network Rail

in the memorial's present location, being unveiled at a dedication service on Sunday 27th October 2013:



The King's Cross war memorial

To the immortal memory of the men of the Great Northern Railway who gave their lives in the Great War. To the immortal memory of the men of the London and North Eastern Railway who gave their lives in the Second World War.

And my question dear readers is: can you spot the connection between the memorial and Singer Sargent's painting 'Gassed'? (See page 66 for the answer)

BRIGADIER GENERAL REGINALD JOHN KENTISH (RJK) & HIS 16th TALE



‘Appreciation’

By Terry Dean

In the November 2013 issue of Despatch, Terry Dean first told of his visit to the Imperial War Museum to view the papers of RJK and his discovery of the tales he had drafted around 1940. The tales describe amusing incidents RJK had experienced during WW1. Terry has transcribed Tales 1 to 14 in earlier editions of Despatch, and as mentioned in the last edition, Terry has occupied his ‘spare’ time created by Covid, to transcribe the suitable remaining Kentish

SCENE: TIME: PLACE: The lecture hall of the Junior Staff College/Course Pembroke College Cambridge: a Sunday morning about 10 a.m. sometime in March 1917.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE: The Commandant, Brigadier General R.S. Hare, late Norfolk Regiment; a hundred and fifty young Captains going through the course and myself.

In March 1917 when Commandant of the Senior Officers’ School at Aldershot, I was asked by Brigadier General Hare, who, a week or two before, had given my fellows a talk on Staff duties, if I could spare a week-end to go to Cambridge and give his officers a couple of lectures on the regimental side of

soldiering, laying special stress on Leadership, Morale, Esprit-de-Corps and the Fighting Spirit, and, if so, would I arrange my visit at a week-end and give the first lecture on the Saturday afternoon and the other on the Sunday morning.

I rather kicked at the idea of having to lecture at the week-end, because at Aldershot, where I had three hundred Majors and Senior Captains going through a very strenuous three months course, we invariably closed down at noon on Saturdays until 9 a.m. Monday morning to give them all an ‘easy’ --- and indeed I found that we could all, staff as well as students, do with the rest.

However, at Cambridge apparently they worked seven days a week, all outside lectures being at the week-ends. I therefore had no option but to accept the hours offered me, and duly arriving on the Saturday arranged I delivered my first address in the afternoon, but it was to a very tired audience I spoke to, and I was not surprised --- in fact had the situation been reversed, I am sure I should have been as tired as they were!!

The following morning I went to a certain place we always go after breakfast, and whilst there, in came two young Captains, not to do what I was doing, but, as they say in France, ‘de faire pipi’ and standing just outside my door, and of course not knowing I was inside, one of them said to the other:

“Well, that fellow Kentish talked a ‘----- ‘ lot of ‘-----‘ last night didn’t he? I wonder what he is going to talk about this morning?!!”

I must confess I was rather taken aback; and for the moment, I was at a loss to know what to do or say! At first I thought I’d follow Mr Asquith and call out “Wait and see!”; then I thought I’d better say nothing and finally I decided to rustle a bit of the ‘papier de toilette’, just to let them know that there was someone inside --- and this I did! In the meantime, the other young Captain had replied “Oh, I suppose he’ll talk the same ----- ----- as he talked last night!!”

and saying this they both went off muttering and I suppose ‘adjusting their dress’ as the saying goes, to the lecture room.

Five minutes or so afterwards, I followed, and when I arrived, I found them all seated ready for my talk, and the Commandant, who, I might mention, was of a morose type without the slightest sense of humour ---- indeed no man, who worked his subordinates seven days a week, as he did, ever could have a sense of humour ---- already waiting for me.

Directly I had taken a chair on the platform, the Commandant got up and said “Gentlemen, you heard the very interesting lecture General Kentish gave you last night; I am sure you’ll listen with equal interest to what he is going to talk to you about this morning” and, saying this, he sat down. I at once got up, and placing my notes on the reading desk, I faced my audience, and this is what I said:

“Gentlemen, before I begin my second interesting --- very interesting” (with the emphasis on the ‘very) --- “talk to you this morning, I think I ought to tell you of a certain incident, which happened only a few moments ago in a certain place we --- or at any rate those of us, who are in a normal state of health --- always go to after breakfast,” and, having said this I repeated, word for word, the conversation I had just overheard!!!

Immediately there was an uproar! I’ve never heard such a noise, for they just shook with laughter, and they continued to laugh, until I thought they’d never stop!! After a bit, however, I managed to get some sort of order, and then I said:

“You know you fellows, it’s a bit thick, me, a real live and perfectly good General, coming all the way from Aldershot to talk to you, and incidentally giving up my week-end to do it, only to be told at the end of it by one of you that I talked a ----- lot of -----!!!”

More laughter, and then I went on:

“You know one of you must have said it,” and then pointing to one I said,
“Perhaps it was you? You’re blushing like a turkey cock! Or you,”
pointing to another, and still they laughed, and finally I said “As a matter
of fact, Lieutenants, Captains, Majors, and Colonels, they talk -----
certainly but Generals never!!”

This brought the house right down, but it also brought the Commandant to his
feet and, without showing the slightest sign of being amused, he said seriously:
“General Kentish, would you mind starting now please?!!!”

And this is the story of my first and last visit in the Great War, to the Junior
Staff College at Cambridge, but it was not the last of my story, for I told it to
my Officers ---- and much to their amusement ----- when I returned to
Aldershot, and I have told it far and wide since to many audiences, and it has
always got a real good laugh and, when I have told it at the commencement of a
lecture, a real good audience too!!



Brigadier General Reginald John Kentish

The author of the Kentish Tales



Reginald John Kentish (RJK) was born in London on 20 December 1876, the second of four sons of George William Percy Buckley and Caroline Kentish. Their father discovered that an eccentric gentleman by the name of Kentish had established an endowment at St. Albans Grammar School to provide free education for any boy bearing the name of Kentish. All four brothers benefitted from this benevolence.

From St. Albans Grammar School, RJK went on to Malvern College, Worcestershire where he established his sporting reputation as an all-round athlete, captain of the football team and the cross-country team and winner of the half mile swimming race held in the River Severn. He was a prefect and a member of the Officer Training Corps.

During his last term at Malvern the football team went to Canning Town in the east end of London to play against a team of 'Dockland boys'. The game was organised by a former Malvern man now a local Clergyman who was running a mission among the poor of the district. Following the match the team visited the

mission and some of the homes of these boys. RJK was shocked at the existence these boys led; he could not describe it as living, there was little to eat and absolutely no opportunity to enjoy the use of sports fields.

Initially destined to try for a Classics scholarship to Oxford, RJK suddenly decided that the army was his future. However, his sporting successes had come at the expense of his academic work and he failed the Sandhurst entrance examination. He was enrolled at a ‘crammer’ in London, which specialised in getting students through the Sandhurst examination. He was joined here by a fellow Malvernian, J F C Fuller, later to become a Major General. Although never really friends they had a great deal of respect for each other, and both entered Sandhurst.



Second Lieutenant Reginald John Kentish was commissioned into the 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers (1st RIF) on 3 August 1897. The Army at this time had changed little since the Cardwell reforms of 1881. The peacetime garrisons had a daily routine of drills and an annual musketry course. Most military duties were finished by 11.00 am. For officers there was always polo, hunting or shooting or billiards in the mess. The ordinary soldiers were mostly left to snoozing during the boring afternoons except for pay days when they would drink large quantities of beer at the wet canteen.

RJK finally joined his own battalion at Alexandria, Egypt. The battalion had returned from India and Burma and had now resumed the old army routines of

mornings of square bashing and afternoons of polo. After years of inactivity in unhealthy climates and the too frequent use of the ‘wet’ canteen the men were in a poor physical condition. In May 1899 RJK was promoted to Lieutenant, and with the outbreak of the Boer War in October 1899, the 1st RIF were sent to South Africa and deployed to the Ladysmith area. They now came up against forces somewhat different from the Dervishes and the Bantus.

On 29 October 1899 the Boers were approaching Ladysmith from the west, north and east. The 1st RIF were ordered to take up a position on Nicholson’s Nek to the north in order to cut off a Boer retreat. The Boers, having realised the troops were on the Nek attacked them the following afternoon. After a nine-hour musketry duel and low on ammunition, with no artillery and cut off, the battalion had no choice but to surrender.

RJK went into captivity where he survived typhoid fever before being freed on 6 June 1900, when peace talks were taking place. After sick leave in England, he returned to South Africa in February 1901, where he commanded a mounted infantry detachment until the end of the war in 1902.

The 1st RIF returned to Holywood Barracks in Belfast. RGK was appointed Adjutant from 1904 until 1907, when he became a Company commander. In 1908 the 1st RIF Joined the 6th Infantry Brigade at South Camp, Aldershot.

RJK was slowly revising the old idea that the ordinary soldier was an unthinking individual who was to be kept in line by harsh discipline. He had also recognised that the prevailing practice for the afternoons of ‘old soldiers to bed and recruits on the square’, was leaving the men with little to do other than to go into town to drink, chase women and cause fights. In RJK’s mind this was all to the detriment of the men’s morale and health. The current soldiers were short-service men who would rather work off their surplus energy on the sports

field instead of spending their afternoons on their bed. The absence of available sports grounds limited recreational sports to cross-country running, boxing and tug of war.

In early 1908 RJK was appointed to both the Army Football Association and the selection committee of the Aldershot Command Football Association. He now organised the various regimental and inter-company football competitions. With an absence of sports grounds, RJK took it upon himself to survey potential sites around the barrack areas and then submitted his proposal for the provision of sports grounds to higher authority; this was none other than the GOC in C, Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien. His request was approved and by 1 October 1908, a scheme of works to develop sports fields was started under the direction of RJK.

RJK was appointed ADC to the GOC 2nd Division in February 1910 but still found time to continue his work on the sports grounds and by 1911 there were sixteen football pitches and several cricket pitches at Aldershot. The scheme was then extended to other commands throughout the UK. Eventually RJK returned to his battalion on 13 March 1911 but was later seconded again in February 1913 as Brigade Major to the Territorials of 142nd (6th London) Infantry Brigade. His new military duties did not prevent him from continuing with the establishment of sports grounds at Aldershot and further afield.

The 1st RIF departed for France in August 1914 RJK however, remained with the Territorials back in London. The 1st RIF was involved in all the major actions following the retreat from Mons and by some means, not made clear in his biography or other records, RJK managed to get himself over to France to re-join his battalion on 10 September 1914.

When the 1st RIF were passing through Houplines on 17 October 1914, just east of Armentieres on their way to Frelinghien, they were held up by an enemy

strongpoint at a farm. With no artillery to assist them, the battalion suffered many casualties as they attempted to storm the position. Orders were then given to set fire to the buildings. Meanwhile, RJK who had obtained some explosives, firstly organised the recovery of the wounded from around the burning buildings before the charges were set and fired. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his actions in rescuing the wounded men and clearing the enemy position. On 18 December 1914 RJK was promoted to Major.

In May 1915 RJK received his first battalion command as temporary Commanding Officer of 1st East Lancashire Regiment, a period in which many of his ‘Kentish Tales’ are set. It was here that he encountered Lt. Colonel, the Honourable Charles Palk of the 1st Hampshire Regiment. A character that appears in a number of his tales as ‘Colonel Pork’. Between September and November 1915 RJK returned to take temporary command of his own battalion before he was appointed Commandant of the newly established 3rd Army School at Flixecourt. The school was the first of its kind and became the model for many that were soon to follow.

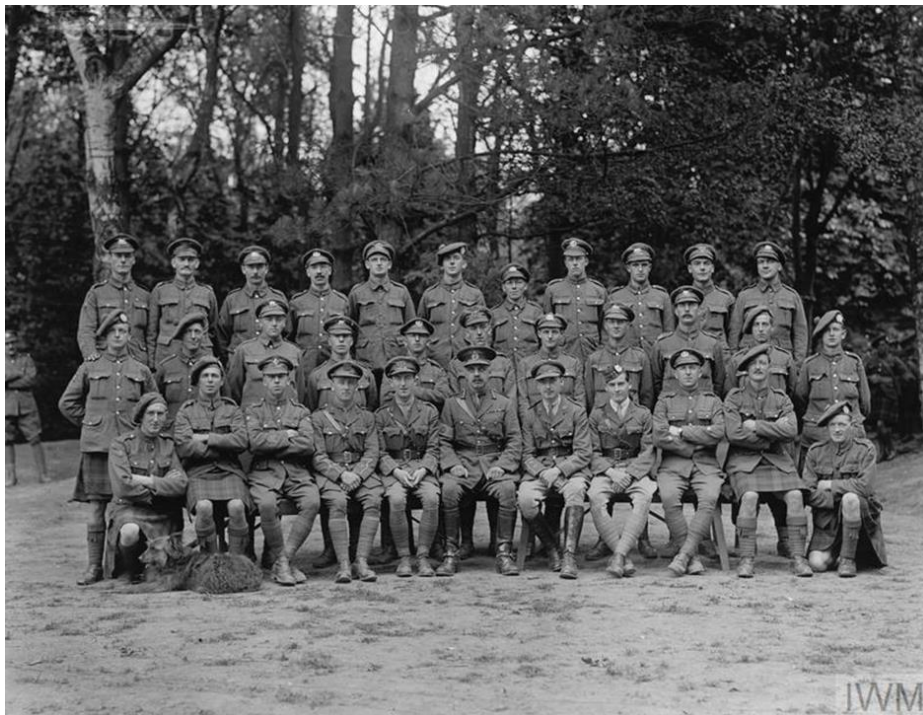
RJK’s old school friend from Malvern College, Major J F C Fuller had published a book entitled ‘Training Soldiers for War’, the basics of which convinced General A L Lyden-Bell, Commander of 3rd Army, to set up an Army School to instruct officers and NCOs. Fuller compiled the first syllabus and recommended RJK as the man to deliver it. The school opened in November 1915 before relocating to Auxi le Chateau, north of Amiens in March 1916.

Once the school was established and running successfully. Major Fuller took over the 3rd Army School. By this time conferences had now been extended to the highest levels of command and an Instructors School had been added in

October 1916 for the staff of the new training schools. RJK had meanwhile been sent to organise a Senior Officers School at Aldershot. All potential candidates for higher command henceforth had to successfully complete the Senior Officers course before taking command of a battalion.

Having established the senior officers' school, RJK was promoted to Brigadier General in March 1916, commanding 7th Infantry Brigade, 3rd Division which was later heavily involved during the Battle of the Somme.

In the aftermath of the Battle of the Somme, RJK submitted a sixteen-page report to the headquarters of 4th Army in which he was critical of certain aspects of the Staff work. His report resulted in an interview with none other than General Douglas Haig. The great man informed RJK that he was to be appointed Commandant of the Senior Officer School at Aldershot where he was to 'concentrate on leadership and leave the tactical side to the staff officers.'



Brigadier General Reginald John Kentish and staff of the 166th Brigade, 55th Division.

Near Bethune, 5 September 1918.

However, RJK's flair for organisation resulted in his return to France during the German spring offensive of March 1918, when he took command of 166th Infantry Brigade, 55th (West Lancashire) Division. The battalion was at Givenchy, where the 55th Division famously held their ground and denied the enemy from advancing on Bethune. At the end of hostilities RJK was put in command of the base camp at Antwerp. He returned to London in 1919 to take command of the 6th (London) Infantry Brigade TF. He established his future lifestyle by set up his living quarters in the Hyde Park Hotel. The Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir Charles Harrington, head of the Army Sports Control Board, now appointed RJK to chair a committee for the provision of garrison playing fields; the project that he was forced to abandon in 1914.

Brigadier General R J Kentish retired from the army in 1922. He was one of the earliest recipients of the Distinguished Service Order in 1914, was made an Officer of the Legion of Honour in 1917, and a Companion of St. Michael and St. George in 1918.

RJK's military career can best be summarised by one of the obituary notices published in The Times in 1956. Written by an unidentified officer 'T.E.L'

As a temporary officer I attended General Kentish's Third Army School at Flixecourt in 1916, later I attended his Senior Officers School at Aldershot. He was an inspired teacher and leader of men. No one who attended his lectures could fail to catch something of his enthusiasm for the Army or feel with him his trust and pride in the British soldier. To us young officers a General was a fearsome thing, but although his discipline was strict he was always kind and considerate, and he was

never pompous. He taught us the meaning of morale and how to delegate and trust our subordinates....

During the final years of his military career, he also managed to fit in a few other appointments;

- Member of the Army Sports Control Board 1919-25
- Honorary Secretary Army football Association 1919-22
- Vice President Army Fencing Union
- Founder of the British Modern Pentathlon Association
- Co-Founder of Boys Army Cup Football Competition
- Co-Founder of the Tri-Nations Football Tournament (Britain, France, Belgium). Later known as the ‘Kentish Cup’
- Council Member of Amateur Athletics Association
- Council Member of the Football Association
- Chairman of the Docklands Settlements Committee in Canning Town
- Honorary Secretary of the St. Moritz Toboggan Club (Cresta Run)

Having left the army in 1922 and settled into life among some of the best hotels in London, the organisational skills of RJK were soon in demand by the British Olympic Association (BOA). At the first post war Olympic Games at Antwerp in 1920, RJK was appointed Commandant of the British Olympic team. He was later elected as Honorary Secretary to the BOA followed by his election to the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

The BOA was reorganised under RJK’s guidance to include many influential people including his friends in high places and at court, notably His Majesty King George V with Lord Cadogan as the chief fundraiser. The 1924 Olympic Games were held in Paris and once more RJK acted as Commandant of the

British Olympic team. He resigned from the BOA after the games but remained an active member of the IOC until 1932

Having resigned from the BOC in 1924 and no longer involved in establishing military sporting facilities, RJK directed his attention to providing playing fields on a national level. The ‘National Playing Fields Association’ was inaugurated at the Albert Hall in 1925 with the aim; ‘*To provide and encourage the provision of adequate facilities for open air recreation in and around every city, town and village in the country*’. Once again RJK drew on his friends in high places. The Duke of York – later to become King George VI, was the first President and later, on accession to the throne, he was to become the Association’s Patron.

County Associations were formed with the assistance of the various Lord Lieutenants who were encouraged by a letter from the King, followed by a visit from RJK. However, in 1927 RJK resigned as Honorary Secretary of the Association, having found himself at odds with the Executive Committee. The National Playing Fields association was to be incorporated as a not-for-profit company under Royal Charter. The new constitution would have made RJK a paid employee of the Association that he had founded. For his services he was awarded an honorarium of £750 and made a life member.

By 1928 RJK’s financial situation was becoming a bit parlous. He had retired early and commuted half of his army pension. His positions within the BOA and the IOC had been honorary, which required him to donate both his time and cover his own expenses. The financial slump of 1929 did not help his position. It seems that his father was able to offer some assistance, but help did arrive in 1932 when he accepted a position with Dorchester and Gordon Hotels. It was

estimated that by 1938 his influence helped to attract around a half a million pounds of business to the hotel group.

During the Second World War RJK was back in uniform and between 1940-42 he toured Officer Cadet Training Units, static army units, garrisons and RAF stations delivering lectures on leadership. It was during an evening of reminiscences with Major General J F C Fuller and the journalist George Ward-Price that RJK was persuaded to commit his anecdotes to paper with a view to future publication. He eventually wrote up 'A Hundred Incidents in My Life' and that was as far as it went. His nephew kept the notes until 1956 when they were deposited at the Imperial War Museum where Terry Dean eventually found them.

RJK finally left the Army at the end of 1942 moving from London to the Swan Hotel in Hungerford where he remained for the duration of the war. During this time, he attempted to compile a volume of articles written by various well known contributors arguing that the Second World war could have been avoided. It was his opinion that certain individuals should be held to account for Britain's lack of preparation for war. The volume was to be called '*Salvation or Damnation*' However, it formed no real conclusions and fortunately never made it into print.

Brigadier General Reginald John Kentish died in 1956 aged 80. He never married – it was said no one could ever domesticate him. He spent his civilian life living in a succession of hotels, usually moving on when the hotel decreed 'General, enough is enough'. He was never afraid of higher authority, but his impetuosity and often outspoken manner allowed him to rise only so far in his military career. He did, however, spend a large proportion of his army life improving the conditions of the ordinary British soldier. His upbringing of

muscular Christianity made him both a socialist and a socialite. Nationally the growth in the number of playing fields between the wars is a fine tribute to this man.



Prisoner of War Diary of a Machine Gunner



124905 Pte. William Porter Nicholson M.G.C

By Bob Mathews

Dorothy Nicholson, the daughter of William Porter Nicholson, was a resident of Ashleigh Court, Arnside, Cumbria, who died in 2013. She was a very private lady and the former headmistress of a primary school in Southport. She had no known relatives. I visited her flat in Ashleigh Court on several occasions when she had problems with the settings on her immersion heater. On one such visit I noticed a photograph of a soldier in World War I uniform in the hall of the flat. She told me that it was her father, and that he had written a war diary.

After her death I met her friend and representative several times, and told her what Dorothy had mentioned to me about her father and the First World War: subsequently, and much to my delight and amazement, she presented me with two small boxes. They contained information and mementoes relating to the war service of Dorothy's father. Amongst these was a war diary covering approximately seven months when he was a prisoner of war.

William Porter Nicholson was born 27 May 1898 at Coniston, in the then Furness area of Lancashire (now part of Cumbria). He was the son of Joseph and Sarah Nicholson. Joseph was a District Railway Inspector,

who, in addition to William, had five other children, two boys and three girls. The family lived at Keppleway, Broughton-in-Furness. According to his soldier's pay book he attested on 29 August 1917. The Medal Index Card and the Silver War Badge roll record his enlistment as 12 May 1916. This would suggest that William P Nicholson had enlisted under the 'Derby' Scheme and subsequently had his call up deferred until 29 August 1917. His age on enlistment was nineteen. His occupation at the time was railway shunter, although previously he appears to have been a grocer's assistant.

His initial army service was with the King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment. Living at Broughton in Furness this would usually have been with the 1/4th King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment. As the battalion was already serving in France, he may have gone to the 4th Reserve Battalion. There is also the outside chance that he joined one of the six Kitchener New Army battalions of the regiment.

Interestingly, with the limited records available, the Medal Index Card and Medal Roll fail to show any previous units before the Machine Gun Corps. The medal roll for the Victory medal and British war medal clearly states;

In sequence Units and Corps previously served with by each individual and Regtl. Nos. therein.

There are no previous units entered for 124905 Pte. Nicholson, William. It may be that William Nicholson enlisted directly into the MGC when he was called up in August 1917.

Private Nicholson was sent to Clipstone Camp near Mansfield, Nottinghamshire. This was a huge hutted camp capable of housing 30,000

men, initially built to accommodate the recruits of Kitchener's New Armies. The other two camps mentioned in his diary; Parkeston, Harwich and Turnchapel, Plymouth were transit camps.

William Nicholson was initially sent to the 21st Company MGC. This unit had been attached to the 30th (New Army) Division since March 1916.

William Nicholson arrived in France on 29 March 1918 where he was posted to 50th Battalion MGC. This was made up of 149th, 150th and 151st Company, MGC formed on 1 March 1918 and attached to the 50th (Northumberland) Division.

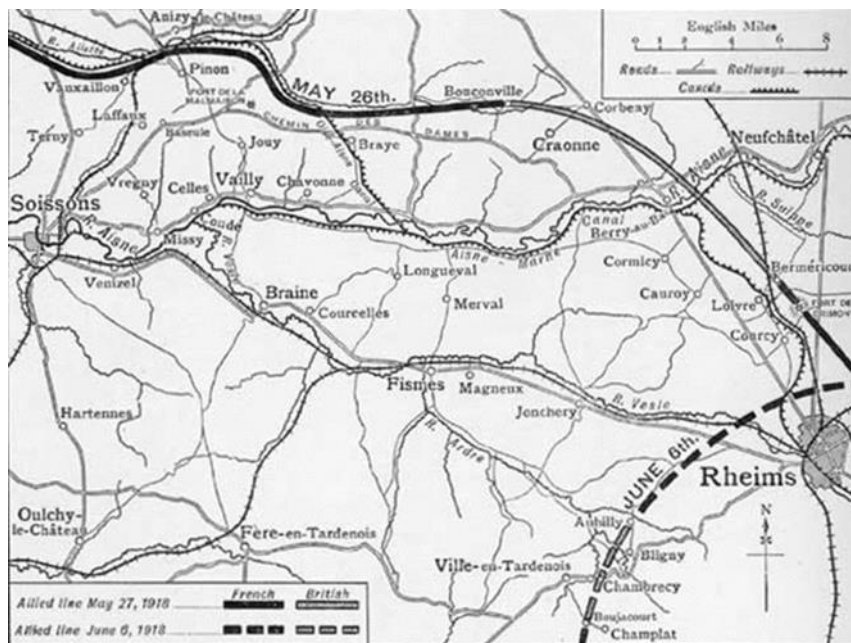
By the time the 50th Division had been through a very rough time when the German assault on the Somme area began on 22 March 1918 it pushed the British forces back across the river Somme. The 50th Division among other units spent the next nine days in a fighting withdrawal, until they reached the river Luce and the exhausted division was finally relieved on 1 April 1918.

The 50th Division then moved to Douriez, where it was reinforced with a mixture of new recruits, combed out veterans and reclassified men, such was the shortage of manpower. The 50th Division was now attached to XV Corps, First Army and on 7 April 1918 were expected to relieve the 2nd Portuguese Division at Merville.

The Germans however, attacked the Portuguese and drove them back across the river Lys along with elements of 50th Division. Small bridgeheads were defended, but by nightfall the entire division had fallen back across the river Lys. The exhausted and depleted 50th Division was relieved by the 5th Division on 13 April 1918.

The 50th Division then moved to the Roquetoire area to once again rebuild with new recruits and train them. On 23 April 1918, orders were received to move to a ‘quiet area’ on the Aisne where they were to replace French divisions who were moving up to Amiens. The division arrived over 27-28 April 1918 and moved into positions on the Chemin des Dames ridge on 5 May 1918.

The positions they occupied were concentrated on the ridge; there was no defence in depth. The 50th Division took the opportunity to rest and continue the training of their new recruits. By 26 May 1918 they were aware of an impending German attack. At 1.0 am on 27 May 1918 German artillery opened fire on a twenty-four mile front using HE and gas shells. This quickly neutralised the 50th Division artillery. Twenty-eight German divisions attacked and soon overran the British and French lines.

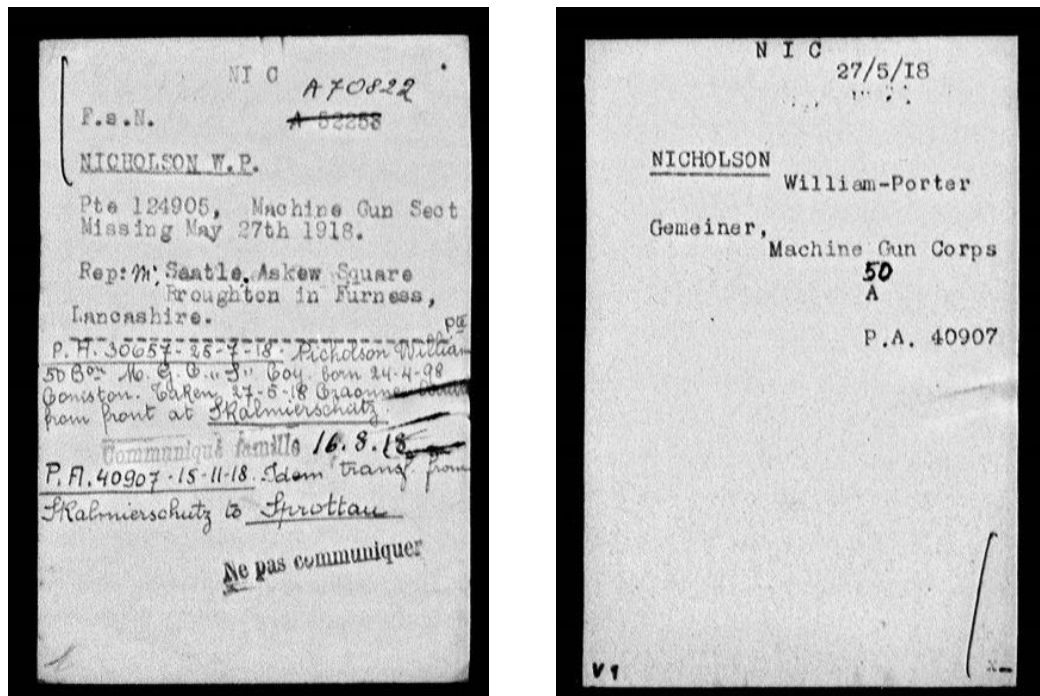


By the evening 5,106 officers and men of the 50th Division had been killed, wounded or were missing. Most of the missing had been taken

prisoner early that day. The division withdrew on 31 May 1918 with only 700 infantry men remaining. The 50th Division had lost 5,106 officers and men, killed, wounded and missing (mostly captured), including William Nicholson. Although wounded, he was lucky to have been taken prisoner, as the Germans did not take kindly to enemy machine gunners!

The first entry in his diary shows that he was captured at 12 noon on 27 May, and subsequently taken to a dressing station, where he was given a slice of bread and slept in a barn. The German prisoner of war records and the International Red Cross records show that 124905 Private William Porter Nicholson was captured at Craonne (north-west of Rheims) on 27 May 1918. He was taken from the front to Skalmierschutz on 25 July 1918, a camp five miles from Ostrovo on the Polish Frontier. It was a very large camp for Russians and Romanians, to which British prisoners were sent from March 1918. He was transferred on 15 November 1918 to the camp at Sprottau (now known as “Szprotawa”) in Lower Silesia, Poland. This was propaganda prisoner of war camp, which was to William’s benefit, because it was where prisoners allegedly got the best of things.

His date and place of birth are recorded in the German POW records along with the name and address of his representative; a Mr Seattle(sic) Askew, (The) Square, Broughton in Furness, Lancashire. The International Red Cross communicated his whereabouts to his family on 16 August 1918.



German POW records

It seems that some internees, as in William’s case, worked on local farms, with others employed in factories. A photographic album of the camp, which he brought home, shows some of the activities in the camp, including concerts, football matches and funerals. There was also an infirmary, disinfection unit and showers. Following the Armistice the atmosphere in the camp was more relaxed, with prisoners given freedom to travel.

As to the diary itself; not surprisingly, much of it is taken up with meals, which were far from appetising, the delivery of Red Cross parcels, the weather, work on farms and post cards and letters to and from family members. Mention is also made of trips to nearby towns and villages. A small sample of the entries reads as follows, and shows some contrast between food the prisoners were given on the way to Sprottau and that which they received afterwards:-

28 July - Weather rough - thunder and lightning, a big fire not 2 fields away. Rain awful Wet, Cold, Windy. More Russian Officers here.

Sun - Meals rotten, Breakfast - usual - Dinner- Pickled cabbage, Boiled Sago done in Soda. Could not eat it. Got spoonful of Apple Sauce. Made it as could get it down by Tea Time. Tea - usual. Supper - Bird Seed Crushed Rice, but not rice, nearly all water. The end of a perfect day.

27 Nov - Received parcels 139 -140-141; so of course had a smoke. Gave my pal 40. Had veal of course, boiled bones. Threshing all week. Refused to get up until 7am. Went on A1 too.

19 December - Passes stopped. Men drunk, Sickness in camp. 2 men died.

20 December - Went to funeral. Weather cold. Fleas still bad. Roll on that ship.

27 December - Match (football) Manchester v London 5-3.

Probably the highlight for the prisoners in camp was the receipt of Red Cross parcels; in William's case largely as a result of a "Care Committee" chaired by the Mayor of Barrow-in-Furness and comprising volunteers from that town and other surrounding towns and villages, tasked with sending out parcels to the "King's Own", of which William had formerly been a member. Amongst William's possession was a booklet giving details of the composition and work of the Care Committee, and included the name, regiment, rank and home address of the 311 soldiers who were POWs; six of whom were to die in captivity. The last four pages of the diary are a catalogue of his journey home via Germany and France. This

commenced on 4 January 1919 and ended on about 17 January 1919. The last entry states:-

Fri - Kits carried to Station. Walked down. Got train Canterbury to Crewe, then to Foxfield. Settling down.

Yours

Wanderer

Included with the things that came home with William was POW camp money and two pressed flowers, which he no doubt picked whilst working on the farm.

Following discharge from the army on 23 March 1919 he appears to have been employed by the Furness Railway Company. At some stage he was a member of St. John's Ambulance Association and in the Civil Defence Corps. During the Second World War he served in the Home Guard. An identity card dated 31 July 1942, records him with the rank of Lieutenant in the "47th West Riding Bn. H.G". The card is signed by the Secretary of the West Riding York T.A. and A.F. Association and gives William's address at the time as Station House, Reedness Junction, near Goole. For his services he was issued with the Defence Medal. He subsequently moved to Southport, where his daughter Dorothy was to teach.



“Everybody Razzle Dazzle”

(Sir Peter Blake, 2015)

Peter Denby

Dr Scott Lindgren’s talk to the branch in May 2022 touched on the dazzle painting of British naval vessels - war ships as well as requisitioned ships - during the First World War.

In 1915 the French Army pioneered the first dedicated camouflage unit, and the following year Britain followed suit. British naval dazzle camouflage was developed and led from 1917 onwards by the British artists Norman Wilkinson and Edward Wadsworth. This type of camouflage was not intended to hide the vessels but rather to baffle the eye making it difficult to estimate a target’s range, speed and direction. Realised in both monochrome and - often garish - colour, each ship’s dazzle pattern of contrasting stripes and curves broke up its shape, and was unique to each vessel in order to avoid making classes of ships instantly recognisable to enemy U-boats and aircraft. The spectacular abstract style was heavily indebted to the Vorticist art movement.



Norman Wilkinson with one of his dazzle ship models, c1916 (copied from Google Images)

The effectiveness of dazzle camouflage was never proven. Although ship losses did decrease around the time that dazzle was introduced, various other initiatives were phased in at a similar time, making it difficult to attribute success to a single factor.

Some crews reported feeling safer serving on a dazzled ship; others saw the designs as bad luck.

Liverpool's merchant shipping networks played a key role in the First World War, it being a premier strategic port for maintaining supplies of food and raw materials as well as transporting men and munitions.

German U-boats targeted merchant shipping, and Liverpool's merchant seafarers found themselves on the front line: not in the trenches of France and Belgium, but just a few miles away in Liverpool Bay.

Requisitioned merchant vessels played an important part in the conflict, and many were from Liverpool's huge port, being seized and dazzled for use as troopships and armed merchant cruisers.

Large Liverpool liners such as Aquitania, Mauretania and Britannic were used as hospital ships. The 1907 Hague Convention stipulated that hospital ships would be granted immunity from enemy attack and so rather than being dazzled, hospital ships were painted white with a green horizontal stripe and red crosses. In spite of this several hospital ships struck mines or, when Germany declared unrestricted warfare in 1917, were targeted and torpedoed. Although Britain stopped using dazzle techniques after the First World War, the US Navy continued to use it during the Second World War.

To commemorate the First World War centenary and pay homage to the artists who originally designed dazzle camouflage, Liverpool Biennial; 14-18 NOW: WW1 Centenary Art Commissions; and Tate Liverpool, in partnership with others including Merseytravel and National Museums Liverpool (with funding from Arts Council England; Heritage Lottery Fund; and Department of Culture, Media and Sport) co-commissioned three leading international artists to re-

imagine a series of three contemporary dazzle ships to be put on public view in Liverpool and London.

The well-known ‘pop’ artist Sir Peter Blake (whose numerous previous works include the famous design of The Beatles’ 1967 album cover of Sgt Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band) was commissioned to dazzle the Mersey Ferry *Snowdrop*, and his 2015 design entitled *Everybody Razzle Dazzle*, executed by painters from Cammel Laird shipbuilders in Birkenhead, covers the ferry with a striking pattern highly evocative of Sir Peter’s signature pop-art style based on his use of monochrome, colour and shape.



Mersey Ferry Snowdrop viewed from Woodside Ferry Terminal, showing Sir Peter Blake’s dazzle painting

In summer 2022 I took a trip on *Snowdrop* to look at the on board illustrated exhibition, curated by Merseyside Maritime Museum and Tate Liverpool, which tells the story of dazzle camouflage. In fact it took me a full round trip to read all the information panels, but no one seemed to mind me staying on board for a further two round trips, and so - after fortifying myself at the on board refreshment kiosk - I was then able to leisurely take in the sightseeing commentary.

Snowdrop is the only one of the three commissions to be a working vessel and moving artwork. *Snowdrop* will remain dazzled until she is taken out of service. The two other ships dazzled and exhibited in this public art project were:



The *Edmund Gardner*, a Liverpool Pilot Cutter which retired in 1982. Now part of the National Historic Fleet, and owned and conserved by Merseyside Maritime Museum, she is permanently sited in Canning Graving Dock, Liverpool Waterfront. This ship was dazzled by the Franco-Venezuelan artist Carlos Cruz-Diez, his 2014 design again being painted by Cammel Laird. I saw her when she was first dazzled in 2014 but on a recent (2022) visit I was

disappointed to see she has now been returned to her pre-dazzle appearance.

The Edmund Gardner, seen dazzled in 2014 (Carlos Cruz-Diez)

The third commission, by the German artist Tobias Rehberger and again dazzled in 2014, was HMS *President (1918)* located on Victoria Embankment between Temple and Blackfriars Bridge (note: the suffix '(1918)' was added to its name distinguish this ship from the HMS *President* training establishment just along the river near Tower Bridge).

This ship did actually serve during the First World War: built specifically for anti-submarine warfare she operated under her original name HMS *Saxifrage* as a dazzled ‘Q ship’, a submarine hunter shadowing Atlantic convoys with concealed guns. During the Second World War she was used to protect St Paul’s Cathedral from the Luftwaffe and as a base for the French resistance. Indeed HMS *President* (1918) is London’s last remaining First World War ship, and - I believe - one of only three surviving Royal Navy warships built during the First World War.

On a recent trip to London I had hoped to complete my portfolio of all three by photographing this ship too, but sadly I learned that after 92 years at her berth on the Thames, she was moved in 2016 to storage at Chatham Docks to await refurbishment of her hull. Refused Lottery funding (“too high risk”), at the time of writing her future is uncertain but it is hoped the HMS *President* Preservation Trust will raise funds for her to be repaired and reinstated at a new mooring adjacent to London Bridge, although I doubt she will remain dazzled.

The Mersey Ferries took part in the April 1918 (St George’s Day) raid on the harbour at Zeebrugge on the north Belgium coast, which was an outlet for German U-boats and destroyers based there. The plan was to block the end of the canal in order to stop German vessels getting through. The Mersey ferries *Iris* and *Daffodil* were chosen to carry the raiding force because of their double hulls and low draught; the ferries were quietly removed from their duties, painted grey and had armour plating added to their hulls. *Iris* and *Daffodil* came under heavy fire, with *Iris* in particular sustaining heavy losses (79 killed). Despite being badly damaged *Iris* made it back to Dover under her own steam; *Daffodil* had to be towed back. The two ferries returned in triumph to Liverpool on 17th May 1918, and were awarded the ‘Royal’ prefix in recognition of their

contribution. The raid is still commemorated annually on a Mersey Ferry on the Sunday nearest to St George's Day.

Further reading:

Branch talk: To Kill a Sub; the U-boat campaign and anti-submarine strategy, tactics and operations in the Great War, by Dr Scott Lindgren, Tuesday 3 May 2022

On-board exhibition, Mersey ferry *Snowdrop*, curated by Merseyside Maritime Museum and Tate Liverpool

Mersey Ferries Official Souvenir Guide, Mersey Ferries Limited

Website: www.biennial.com/dazzleferry-education



Officers of 1/5th King's Own Royal Lancaster

Captain Frank Miller Bingham MRCS LRCP



Captain Frank Miller Bingham is probably unique among the Territorial officers of the 1/5th King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment. As a Medical Practitioner he chose to serve as an infantry officer rather than as a Medical Officer in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

Frank Bingham was typical of many of the officer class within the Territorial Force. He came from a middle-class background, being the son of a doctor, and educated at a public school (St. Peter's College, York), followed by St. Thomas's Medical School, London.

He was a keen sportsman, playing cricket and rugby for St. Peter's where he was an opening batsman and a regular bowler. At Medical School he played as a forward for both St. Thomas's and Blackheath Rugby Club. His cricket skills enabled him to play regularly for the Medical School team and subsequently went on to be captain in 1897. The previous year he played his only first class cricket game when he represented Derbyshire against the MCC at Lords.

Dr Frank Bingham qualified in 1897 and joined his father's practice in Alfreton, Derbyshire, where he was born. All three sons followed into the medical profession. Dr Bingham's practice provided medical services to the Blackwell and Swanwick collieries. The keen sportsman still found time to play cricket for the Blackwell Colliery Cricket Club, and ultimately Derbyshire County.

Dr Bingham married Ruth Morley Fletcher at St. Margaret's Church, Westminster on 12 December 1900. Dr and Mrs Bingham lived at the Colliery Hospital and continued to live in Blackwell following the birth of their son and daughter.

The move to Lancashire came in 1906 when Dr Bingham joined the practice of Dr Stott in Hornby. The Bingham family took up residence at Brookhouse Hall, Caton and joined in the local village life. Dr Bingham joined the Caton Cricket Club becoming captain in 1907 when the team had an unbeaten season. To mark this successful year the team was treated to a banquet at the Ship Inn by Mr Frank Storey of Storey Brothers, Lancaster. Dr Bingham was also a member of the church choir and the choral union. Mrs Bingham was an accomplished tennis player who enjoyed success in local tennis competitions. In 1911 Dr Bingham moved to Lancaster to join the practice of Parker and Dean in Queen's Square. The family moved into Lindow Cottage, Lindow Street, Lancaster.

Dr Bingham joined the Territorial Royal Army Medical Corps in 1909 and was commissioned as Lieutenant in the on 24 March 1910. He soon changed direction and elected to become an Infantry Officer with the 5th King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment TF on 26 November 1910. Lt. Bingham appears on the battalion role in 1911 as the Machine Gun officer. When the battalion was mobilised for war in August 1914 Lt Bingham was a platoon commander in 'A' Company. On completion of their war training the battalion arrived in France on 15 February 1915. Lt Bingham was promoted to Captain on 2 May 1915, becoming second in command of 'A' Company.

For an account of the battalion's early activities in France and their part in the Second Battle of Ypres, see Despatch May 2020. By the time the battalion was withdrawn after the Second Battle of Ypres on 28 April 1915, the 1/5th King's Own Royal Lancaster had lost 380 of the original 1,020 men and reduced to a fighting strength of 540.

On 29 April 1915 the battalion went into huts at Vlamertinghe to rest and reorganise. Within twenty four-hours, games of football and rugby had been organised. The next day the battalion played rugby against a combined team of East Yorkshires and York and Lancaster regiments beating them 21–0.

Following a brief rest, they were back to the front line on 3 May 1915. They occupied basic trenches on the forward slope of the Frezenberg ridge. The battalion was to in covering the strategic withdrawal of units from the apex of the Ypres Salient as a new front line was formed. The battalion had an awful time in the poorly prepared trenches on the forward exposed slopes, overlooked by the German positions. For days they resisted German infantry attacks and then mounted counterattacks when the enemy had broken into the line. Finally, on 8 May 1915 the now much depleted battalion was pulled out of the line to rest and reorganise.

Captain Bingham was granted three days leave on 18 May 1915 to travel to England and see his family. He returned to the battalion who were bivouacked near Vlamertinghe on 21 May. It is interesting to note that the unit war diary unusually makes no mention of officers going on or returning from leave. The battalion received orders to move into trenches at Sanctuary Wood the following day. As was normal practice at this time, a group of officers made their way that night to reconnoitre the trenches their companies would occupy the next day.

Captains Eaves, Harris and Bingham spent most of the night in the trenches and had started to make their way back across open ground just as dawn was breaking when a single shot hit Captain Bingham in the chest killing him instantly. The unit war diary makes no mention of the death of this gallant and popular officer. The battalion history records the incident;

‘...a party of officers went to reconnoitre trenches in Sanctuary Wood. They remained in the trenches all night, and coming across the open in the early dawn of the 22nd Captain Bingham was killed by a sniper.’¹

The regimental history gives a similar brief account;

‘On May 21 Sir John French inspected 83rd Brigade and that afternoon some of the officers went up to reconnoitre the trenches they were to occupy the following day. The next morning, coming back across the open in the early dawn, Captain F M Bingham of the 5th Battalion was killed by a stray bullet.’²

¹ The King’s Own, 1/5th Battalion, TF in the European War 1914-15, A Hodgkinson. P.22

² The King’s Own. A story of a Royal Regiment. Vol. III 1914-1959, Col. J M Cowper, p.66

Captain Bingham was buried in Sanctuary Wood. The grave marked with a



Captain Bingham's grave in Sanctuary Wood
.Accession Number KO0592/02

small wooden cross. Unfortunately, the site of the grave was destroyed in the subsequent fighting. Captain Bingham's death is recorded among the many with no known grave, on the Menin Gate Memorial at Ypres.

The tragic news of the death of this popular officer within a day of his return from leave was finally transmitted to his family and the people of Lancaster. Local newspapers carried accounts of his death. The first appeared on 28 May 1915

when the Lancaster Observer published a notice of his loss and the circumstances of his death. It stated that;

'...he went to reconnoitre some new trenches it was intended the battalion should occupy the following day. As the officers were leaving the trenches about 2.30 on Saturday morning, and whilst it was still dark, Dr. Bingham was shot by the enemy, the bullet entering his chest.'

The account was followed by a detailed obituary of Captain Bingham.

The following day 29 May 1915, the Lancaster Guardian issued a very similar obituary and an account of the death of Captain Bingham.

'He left his wife and family in Lindow for the front on Wednesday, and landed back to the regiment on Friday morning. The same night he led a party of officers up to new trenches the 5th King's Own men had to enter next day. About 2.30 am on Saturday he was shot in the chest.'

As Captain Bingham was a native of Derbyshire, similar notices were published in the Derbyshire Times. On 30 May 1915 the Derbyshire Times published an article;

‘HOW CAPT. BINGHAM WAS KILLED – After a Chivalrous Act.’

‘Since writing the above, more precise information has come to hand concerning the manner in which Captain Bingham lost his life. The gallant officer was killed after performing a most chivalrous act. He and two other officers and two Subalterns were leaving the trenches before daybreak last Saturday morning, when they came across a man half buried by the side of a trench which had been blown in. Capt. Bingham insisted on stopping to dig him out, and the operation entailed sometime, while it was daylight, before they left the trench. The Germans in their trenches not far away spotted them and just caught Capt. Bingham. A tragic end indeed to a most heroic deed.’

This account now introduced the story of Captain Bingham helping to recover a man buried when a trench was blown in.

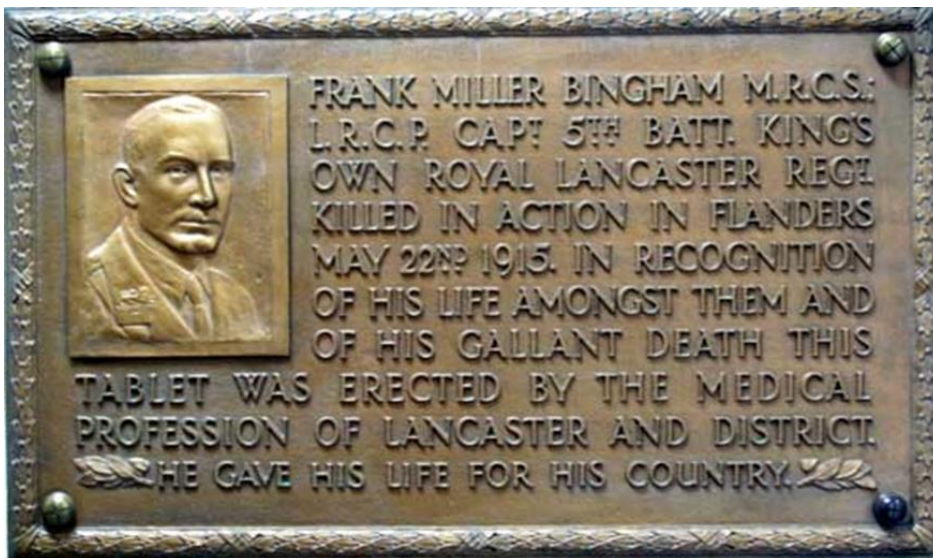
News of Captain Bingham’s death was carried in many of the national newspapers including the Daily Telegraph, Manchester Guardian, Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, Liverpool Post and numerous sporting periodicals. In all thirty-four obituary notices have been found. Many of which perpetuate the story of a buried man being rescued. The details of this supposed heroic act vary quite considerably. By the 4 June 1915, the Lancaster Observer was repeating the story of the buried man but now it had been somewhat elaborated:

‘It did not appear to be publicly known that he died as a result of trying to save another. It was nearly daylight when the order was given to evacuate the trench. The men were leaving when a shell fell, and one of

Captain Bingham's company was buried. He noticed the man and called out to his company to rescue the man. It was rapidly getting light, and every moment was adding to the risk of being shot by the Germans.

Captain Bingham shouted, "We must dig him out", and seizing a shovel he started digging. At last they got the man out; but, alas, it was so light that the enemy saw them and the shots came thick and fast.'

The story having circulated the country, reappeared at the unveiling of a memorial to Captain Bingham. A bronze tablet was erected in his memory by the medical profession of Lancaster and district. The memorial was unveiled on the 2 December 1915 by Dr G. R. Parker, senior member of the medical profession in Lancaster in the presence of a large crowd gathered outside the Infirmary.



The memorial on the outside wall of the Lancaster Royal Infirmary commemorates the life, work and gallant death of Captain Bingham. Present at the unveiling was his widow and their two older

children, fellow officers including Lt, Col E C Cadman, Captain Atkinson, Lt. R J H Preston, Lt. W A Wolfendale, Lt. R Bustard and Lt. J H Todd. The Vicar of Lancaster and representatives of the medical profession were also in attendance.

Dr Parker offered a sincere tribute stating: "Dr Bingham was a good man; he did his duty quietly and unostentatiously, and his memory was not only revered now, but it would remain fragrant for many years to come."

The Lancaster Daily Post of 3 December 1915 carried an account of the unveiling ceremony and included yet another version of the ‘buried man’ story. The edition of the Lancaster Observer on the same day made no mention of the ‘buried man’, merely repeating the account published by that newspaper on 28 May 1915.

The British Medical Journal of December 1915 included an article on the unveiling of the memorial at the Royal Lancaster Infirmary in which there was yet another version of the ‘buried man’ story. One hundred years later, the Morecombe Bay Medical Journal contained an article; ‘Dr Frank Miller Bingham, Caton cricket star and World War One hero.’ The article concentrated on Dr Bingham’s cricketing career with the final paragraph covering the military life and the death of Dr Bingham. It also continued to perpetuate the story of the ‘buried man’.



Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres



Charles Edward Winder

1882 – 1918



Photo Credit: Charlie Holl^[1]

By Philip Thornton

related to Charles Edward Winder

Charles Edward Winder was born in Lancaster on 6 May 1882. His parents lived in the Moorside area of Lancaster, and his father was a coach builder. Charles Edward was married to Sarah Jane Emms on 20 November 1900 at St Paul's church in Scotforth, Lancaster. In 1911 he worked as a Paint Works Labourer for an oil cloth manufacturer (presumably Williamsons') and lived at 30 Gerrard Street in Lancaster. His son Charles (the youngest of five children, including Lilian an adopted daughter) was born on 25 September 1915. He was living at 8 Denmark Street in Lancaster when he enlisted in 1917.



Charles Edward initially joined the 8 (Service) Battalion King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment (Service Number: 35330), before being transferring to the 10th (Service) Loyal North Lancashire Regiment (Service Number: 28745). This battalion was later absorbed into the

1st Loyal North Lancashire Regiment on 7 February 1918. He served at the rank of Private and was awarded the Victory Medal and the British War Medal.

Charles Edward arrived in France in October 1917 which would have been whilst the 10th Battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment were engaged in the final throes of the Third Battle of Ypres (Battle of Passchendaele which ended on 10th November 1917) ^[2].

In February 1918, the 1st Battalion were engaged in action around the north-west side of Ypres but in April 1918 they moved to billets in Nœux-les-Mines in the Hauts-de-France region of France. The fighting around Givenchy-lès-la-Bassée was intense. Whilst on the front line between 16 -23 April 1918 they sustained heavy casualties with 2 officers killed, 2 officers wounded, 2 officers missing, 46 other ranks killed, 105 other ranks wounded and 189 other ranks missing. The battalion continued to fight in this area until 1 September 1918, when they were deployed to Arras.

The war diary for the 1st Battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment ^[3] describes the action during September 1918 which helps to uncover where Charles Edward went missing. However, there are two other type-written reports that describe the action in detail. One report was compiled in the 1st Brigade Headquarters by the Officer Commanding 1st Battalion and covers the action between the 17-24 September 1918 ^[4]. The other report, which was classified Secret, was written in the 1st Division Headquarters ^[5] and it described the Plan of Attack for 18-19 September 1918.

The battalion left the Ronville Caves at Arras (also known as the Wellington Caves and by the modern name Carrière Wellington) in the early hours of 1 September 1918. They arrived at the assembly point southeast of Guemappe after a march of about 10 Km (approx. 6 miles). At 5.0 am an artillery barrage

commenced and at 10:45 the battalion moved forward in “artillery” formation towards the first objective, a ridge running north to south between the village of Dury and the main Arras-Cambrai road. The British Cemetery where Charles Edward is commemorated is along the Arras-Cambrai road on the outskirts of Vis-En-Artois.

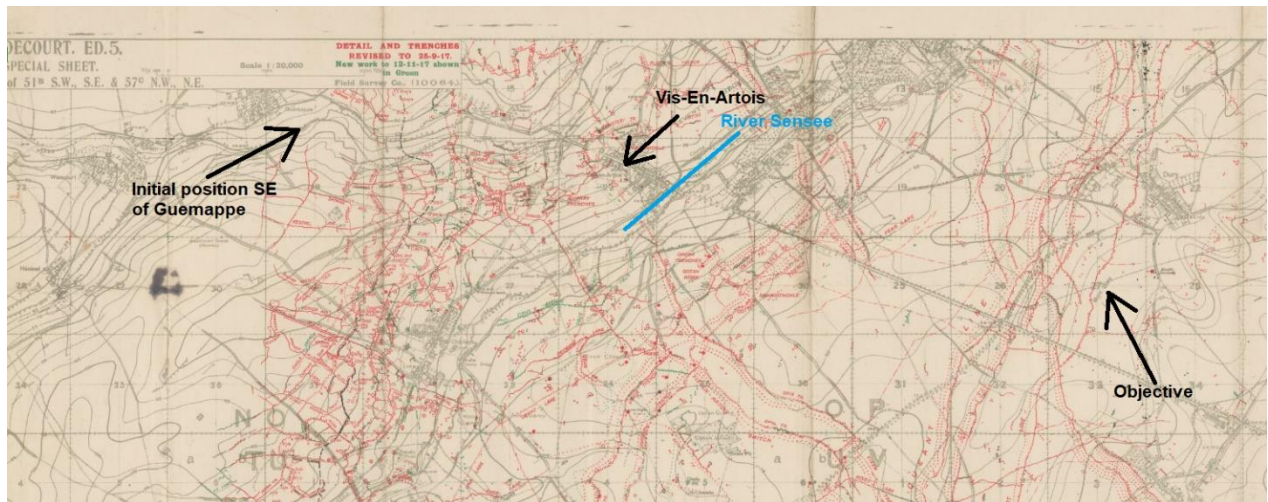


Figure 1. The Objective on 1 September

The objective (which appears to be identified as Mont Dury on the trench map from 1917^[6] which was on the German side of the Drocourt-Quéant Line) was reached at 1.0 pm.

The fighting continued through the afternoon until about 4.0 pm when the battalion was ordered to withdraw some 1700 yards. They held these positions throughout the night. The casualties sustained were very light and caused by bombing and strafing from low flying aircraft.

On the morning of the 2 September it was reported that the enemy had retired over the Sensee River and the Canal Du Nord. The Sensee River is a few hundred yards Southeast of Vis-En-Artois but the Canal Du Nord is some 10 kms (6 miles) further along the Arras- Cambrai road. On the 3 September the battalion went into reserve positions along the Drocourt-Quéant Line. This

action marked the end of the Battle of Drocourt-Quéant Line with the Germans retreating to the Hindenburg Line.

On the 8 September the battalion was relieved and moved to “Y” Huts west of Arras. During the period 1-8 September 1918 the war diary states there were 12 other ranks killed and 1 listed as missing.

The battalion prepared at Arras on 9 September 1918 before moving by train/bus/on-foot to Vermand, where the battalion relieved the 1st Gloucester Regiment and were involved in fighting on the front line from the 16 September 1918 until 26 September 1918.

The Battle of Épehy began on 18 September 1918 and involved the British Fourth Army under the command of General Henry Rawlinson. The objective was to clear German outpost positions on the high ground in front of the Hindenburg Line. Rawlinson’s plan relied on an element of surprise and consequently a preliminary artillery bombardment was not possible.

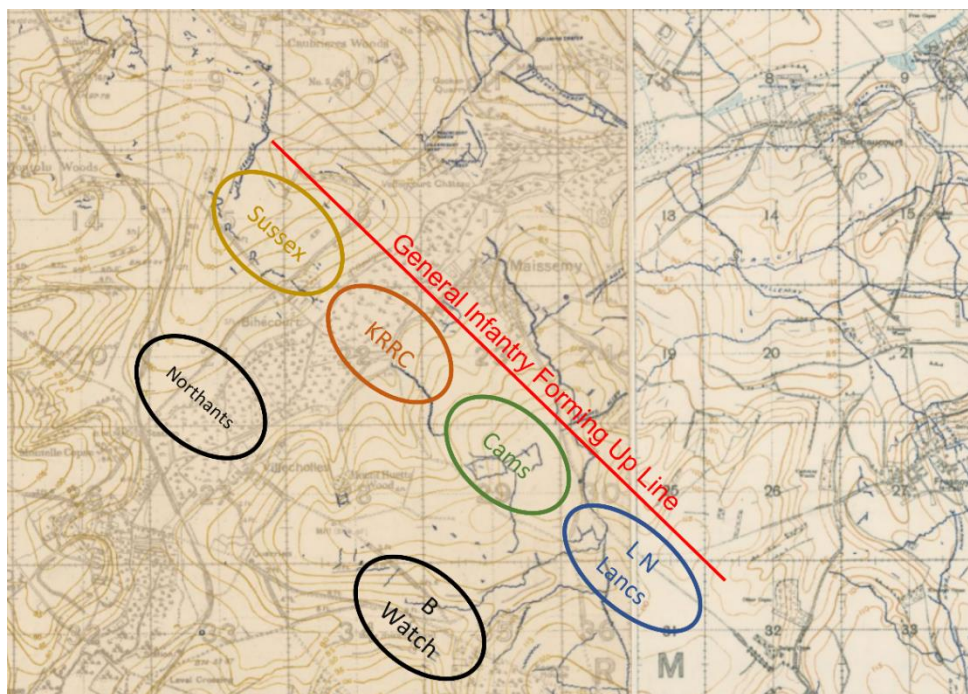


Figure 2. 1st Division forming up line outside Maissemy^[7,8]

Instead, a creeping barrage would begin at zero hour. The Plan of Attack for the 18 of September 1918 is published at the back of the Secret document

“Narrative of Operations of the 1st Division on September 18 and 19, 1918”.

The plan shows the 1st Division formations and identifies the jumping off point.

The 1st Battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment were on the right flank of 1st Brigade; with A Coy leading, B Coy in support and C and D Coy in reserve.

The 1st Battalion Queen’s Own Cameron Highlanders were on their left. The first objective was the Villemay Trench.

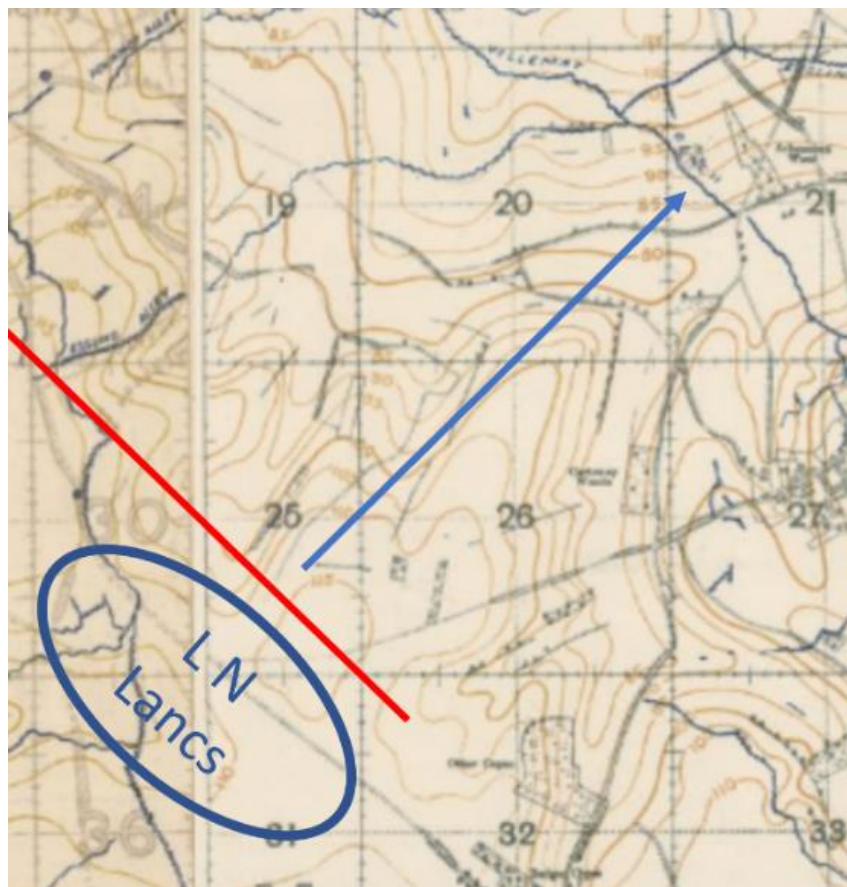


Figure 3. Villemay Trench Objective

Although the trench was taken, the battalion was forced back due to overwhelming machine gun fire and a counterattack from

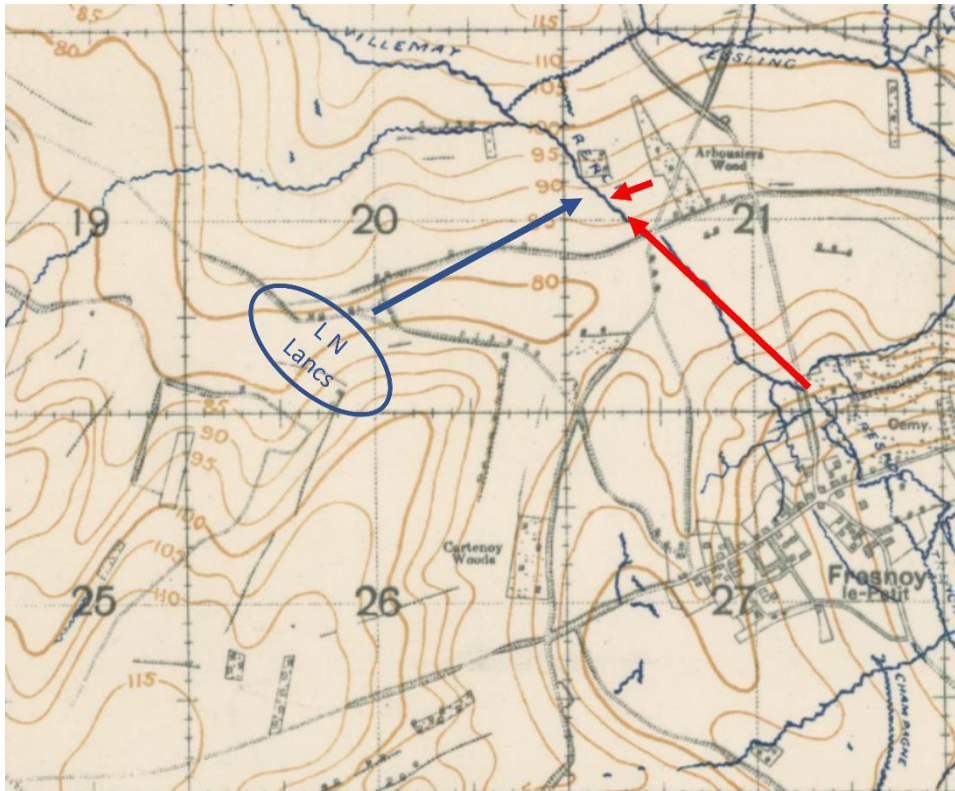


Figure 4. Crossfire from Arbousiers Wood and Fresnoy

Arbousiers Wood. In the night of 18-19 September 1918 the fighting continues but the battalion is forced back because the enemy positions in Arbousiers Wood and Fresnoy le-Petit held out. It would probably have been during the attack on the Villemay Trench or the traverse of the Vallee du Mont Tiloy, which was subject to crossfire from Arbousiers Wood and Fresnoy le Petit, that Charles Edward fell and was subsequently recorded as missing.

The war diary continues on 20 September with the action around the Gallichet Trench and Gallichet Alley which lies to the north of Essling Alley. Gallichet Trench was held by the 1/5 Sherwood Foresters. The enemy attempted to occupy part of the trench, but this was repulsed by A Coy (1st LNL) with the assistance of B Coy (1st LNL) who fired from the flank with rifles and Lewis Guns. By the end of the night of the 23-24 September 1918, the 1st Loyal North Lincs had withdrawn to bivouac in Caulaincourt Wood to the south-west of Vermand. On 27 September the battalion retired from the field but was involved

in action on the western bank of the St Quentin canal where they captured 250 prisoners and 35 machine guns.

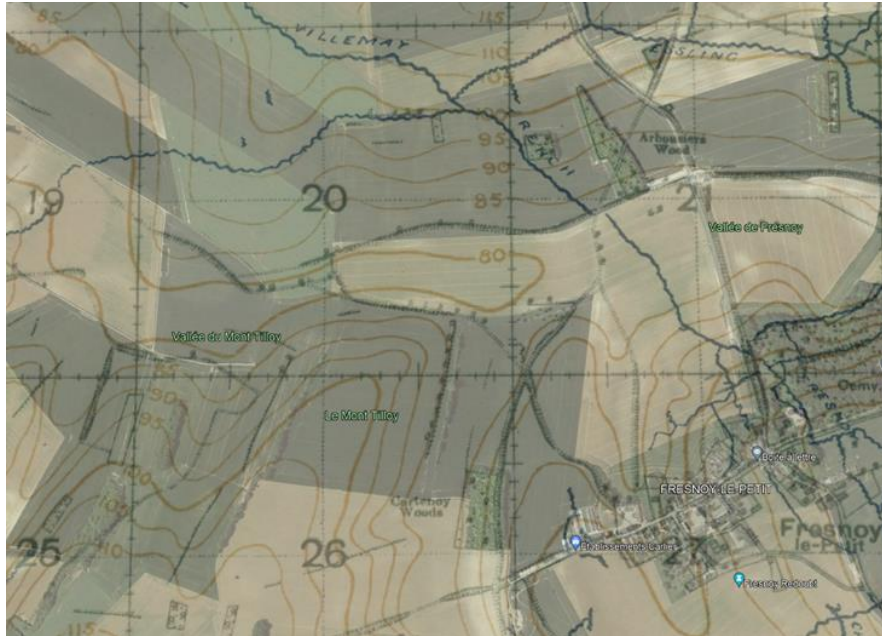


Figure 5. Trench map^[8] overlaid on Google Earth^[9]

The final entry in the War Diary for September 1918 lists the total casualties for the month which included 17 other ranks missing, one of these would have been Charles Edward Winder.

The operation on 18 September 1918 was the precursor to the Battle of the St Quentin Canal, which resulted in the first full breach of the Hindenburg Line which precipitated the end of the war.

The Vis-En-Artois Memorial bears the names of over 9,000 men who fell in the period from 8 August 1918 to the date of the Armistice during the Advance to Victory in Picardy and Artois, between the Somme and Loos, and who have no known grave.^[10]

Panel 7 is dedicated to the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment. Of the 158 men listed, 18 men of 1st Loyal North Lancashire died on 18 September 1918; among them is Charles Edward Winder.



Vis-En-Artois Memorial. CWGC

References:

1. Family photo published with kind permission of Charlie Holl (great grandson of Charles Edward Winder).
2. War Diary for 10th Battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, Aug 1915 - Feb 1918.
3. War Diary for 1st Battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, Feb-Dec 1918.
4. Headquarters 1st Brigade, Report on Operations 17/9/18 to 24/9/18.
5. Narrative of Operations of the 1st Division on September 18th and 19th 1918.
6. Trench Map 51b (1:20000), Trenches corrected to 25 September 1917, Published 1917.
7. Trench Map 62c SE (1:20000), Trenches corrected to 2 February 1918, Published 1918.
8. Trench Map 62b SW (1:20000), Trenches corrected to 3 February 1918, Published 1918.
9. Google Earth overlay for the Vallée du Mont Tiloy area.
10. Commonwealth War Graves Commission, The History of Vis-En-Artois British Cemetery.



The King's Cross war memorial... 'Gassed'

The answer

The spacing and heights of the name columns and their plinths echo the eleven soldiers in the foreground of John Singer Sargent's monumental painting *Gassed*, an outline of which is shown on an information panel adjacent to the memorial. PD



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