

# frontline.

The newsletter of MK WFA, October 2023.

## Milton Keynes WFA Seminar



## Don't Miss It!

### Milton Keynes WFA Seminar

Our seminar is taking place on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2023 at Bletchley Masonic Centre 9.30am - 4.00pm (please note slightly earlier finish time). We have five renowned expert speakers presenting four talks that cover an exciting variety of aspects of the Great War. They are - Alexandra Churchill: 'The Hejaz Railway', Peter Hart and Gary Bain: 'Laugh or Cry: Life or Death in the Trenches', Michael O'Brien: 'Gabriel D'Annunzio - The Pirate of Buccari' and Helen Frost: 'The Women's Land Army in WW1'. Buffet lunch included, plus tea, coffee and biscuits throughout the day. Added attractions are a second-hand book stall, militaria and branch displays, and a bottle raffle.

Tickets for the day are £30 and are still available online from Eventbrite

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/milton-keynes-wfa-seminar-2023-tickets-641303294417?aff=oddtcreator>

or on the door, but if you wish to use this option, please let us know that you are coming using the link below so that we can get the catering correct, (and bring cash as we

[Enquiries: wfa.miltonkeynes@gmail.com](mailto:wfa.miltonkeynes@gmail.com)

have no card facilities.) Please also bring some cash for the book stall and raffle, and if any members wish to bring a bottle with them to donate to the raffle that would be brilliant! We are looking forward very much to seeing you at our special day.



## October

**Lance corporal A A Matthews, Gloucestershire Regiment, died of wounds 23rd October 1917. Glyn's great uncle.**

On 23rd October 1917, Lance Corporal Arthur A. Matthews, 16431, 14th Battn. Gloucestershire Regiment, died of wounds at Dozinghem CCS, near Poperinge, Belgium, aged 23 years. He was the second son of Alfred and Lydia Matthews of White Hart Road, Cinderford Bridge, Ruspidge. Before joining up he was employed at Lightmore Colliery as a collier. Arthur enlisted in Cinderford in December, 1914, going on to serve with the 1st, 8<sup>th</sup> and 14th Battns, Gloucestershire Regiment, and had been on active service nearly 2 years when he was wounded on July 23rd, 1916. He returned to England and remained there convalescing for five months, before returning again to the front. At 5.35a.m. on 22nd October 1917, Arthur's 23rd birthday, the 14th Gloucesters, along with the French, 16th Cheshires and 15th Sherwood Foresters, took part in an attack on Houthulst Forest, during the Third Battle of Ypres. It was during this action that Arthur was mortally wounded. He is buried at Dozinghem Military Cemetery, Westvleteren, Poperinge, Belgium, and is also commemorated on his parents' gravestone in St. Johns churchyard, Cinderford, although the inscription incorrectly reads 'Fell in France'.

**Sergeant John Barker, known as Jack. Leicestershire Regiment, died of wounds 23<sup>rd</sup> Oct.1916. Kevin's Great Uncle.**

Joined the Leicestershire Regiment, 9th Battalion as a Private in 1915, service number 15042. Promoted to Sergeant in 1916, wounded at the Somme and died of his wounds on the 23rd October 1916. He is buried in Castle Donington Cemetery.





## Mentioned in Despatches

### Dr Anne Samson talk

Our September talk was 'Logistics of the East Africa Campaign' by Dr Anne Samson. Dr Samson is co-ordinator of the *Great War in Africa Association* and author of numerous articles and two books on the war in East, Central and Southern Africa. Her fascinating talk considered how this relatively unknown 'side-show' was kept provisioned over five years of fighting, with eight administrative bodies in control. Roads and rail links were few and animal diseases such as sleeping sickness resulted in manpower literally being the dominant means of transport. Anne, ex-teacher and publisher, who had written a thesis on the *Great War in Africa*, had worked for several years in Tanzania, and had experienced first-hand the eye-opening conditions of travelling through mountainous regions in the rainy season.

The whole of Tanzania was involved in WW1. Two ships that were transported overland for use on Lake Tanganyika are still operational today (Shades of 'African Queen' - C. S. Forrester was seven years old at this time.) Anne explained that although some big battles were fought on the Tanzania/Kenya border, there are a lot of conflicting views as to who fired the first shot, and where - East or West Africa. The Germans invaded the Belgium Congo to get control of Lake Tanganyika, but they obviously didn't inform their own services very well, in the first naval 'battle' the German warship was in dry dock and its commander, following naval etiquette, had gone aboard a British ship for a 'sundowner', as was the custom. He was offered a drink and then politely informed that he was now a prisoner! That was his first inkling that war had been declared.

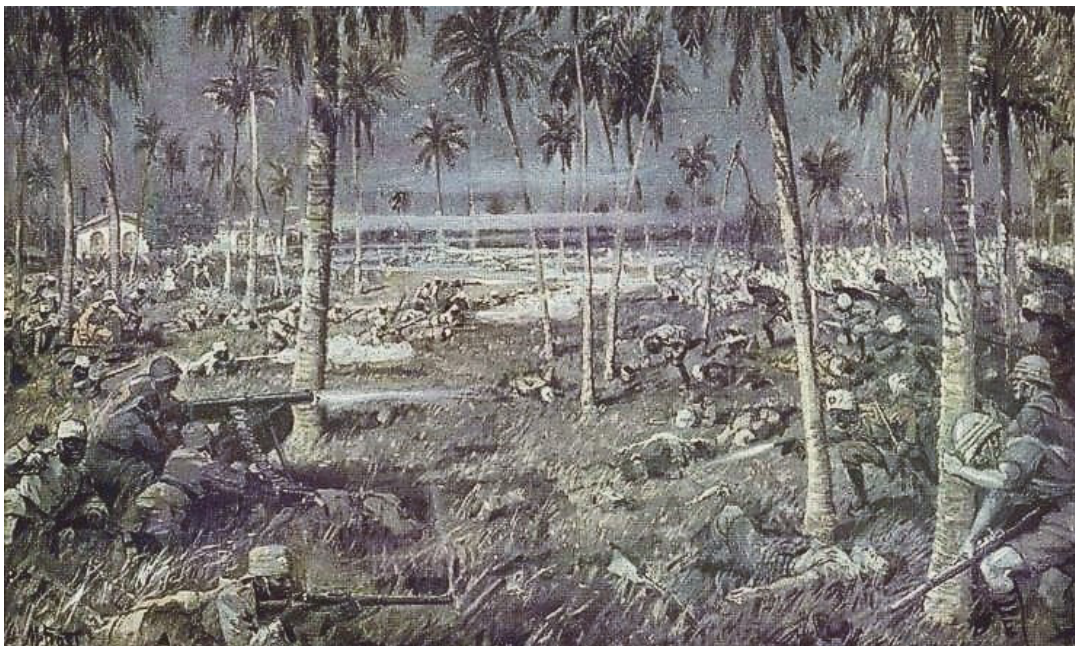


For the Allied officialdom in Africa, the declaration of war caused absolute chaos. Lack of overall command meant that each regional governor did their own 'thing'. The War Office was not in control

of the army in Africa, that was the responsibility of the Colonial Office, but the War Office controlled the officers. The Indian Office was involved, but most of the Indian troops earmarked for Africa were diverted to Europe and the Western Front. Add the British governors in British East Africa and Nyasaland, and the Governor General/High Commissioner of South Africa to the mix and you can see why things were going to get messy. Also involved was the Admiralty, who controlled the naval detachments on the lakes.

This huge disparity in command was exacerbated by the almost total lack of communication. The War Office was desperate to get on with the fight, but the Colonial Office, who had to fund it, were understandably far more cautious in their approach. Many other factors caused problems, for example, many important officers from African regiments were home on leave at the outbreak of war, and they were immediately sent to France, not back to Africa. Any rifle clubs, especially the British South African and Rhodesian police, were put on call.

The first big battle, 4<sup>th</sup> November, was the Battle of Tanga, sometimes also known as the Battle of the Bees, was the unsuccessful attack by the British Indian Expeditionary under Major General A.E. Aitken to capture German East Africa (mainly present-day Tanzania) in tandem with an invasion force near Longido on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. The Germans effectively used the railway network to get about and this resulted in the British being defeated by a significantly smaller force of German Askaris and colonial volunteers under Lieutenant Colonel Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck. This battle is considered one of the greatest victories of the German forces in Africa. The British retreat



"Battle of Tanga, 3rd-5th November, 1914" by Martin Frost (1875-1927) (Germans left, British on the right)

enabled them to salvage modern equipment, medical supplies, tents, blankets, food and a number of Maxim machine guns, which allowed them to successfully resist the allies for the rest of the war. After this disaster the War Office took over and issued the directive 'No fighting unless complete victory is assured'. The fighting spread. In February 1915 there was an uprising by Brack Missionaries about mistreatment in Nysaland and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rhodesia Regiment was sent to restore order and combat German influence in the area. Constant raids against the German held railways in Kenya took place. The 25<sup>th</sup> Royal Engineers and the Legion of Frontiersmen re-enforced the British in East Africa. The gunboats Mimi and Toutou were transported in an epic journey overland to get control of the lake, and Smith Dorian was sent over to unite the British and South African forces. He fell ill and was replaced by Jan Smuts who in turn was replaced by Hoskins then Van Deventers. The white troops on both sides couldn't cope with conditions so the burden of fighting and supply fell on the black troops.

The war started with three battalions of The Kings African Rifles. By the end of the war the KAR strength had risen to 22 Battalions. This included a 'new' 6 KAR formed from ex-German askari who changed sides. The total strength of the KAR was 35,500, of whom 11% were European. Casualties were 8225, including 22.6% of the officers. The total troops involved were 114,000, with casualties of 62,000. There were between 400,000 and 500,000 native porters - The Carrier Corps, of whom 40,000 were unaccounted for at the end of the campaign. This multi-cultural and diverse force brought its own problems with language, (275 different languages in the British Imperial Force) culture, religion, diet and service length. On the Western Front religions tended to be grouped, making supply easier. In Africa food was always short, troops often marching up to eighteen miles a day with weapons and equipment, over exacting terrain yet on quarter rations for long periods. There were four separate enquiries into the high number of non-combat deaths in Africa, and most of them were caused by lack of food. A lot of African troops and carriers ate maize, but if it wasn't properly cooked it could cause serious health problems. Troops were not allowed to hunt in case rifle shots gave away their positions. Keeping chickens was considered too noisy for the same reason. Beef was in short supply as tsetse fly killed most of the cattle, as well as being a problem, as were mosquitos, for the men. Trench foot was caused by the larvae of the jigger fly burrowing into the skin.

Medical assistance was often nine days walk away. The German forces had specialised doctors, but the British didn't. Iodine was often the only available medicine against tropical diseases, there was very little quinine available, no stretchers and no ambulances.

Anne concluded her talk by looking at travel logistics and communication. There were a handful of aeroplanes and seaplanes but they could only fly in the early mornings when the heat was not too great for them to be airbourne. The roads were often in a terrible condition and the Germans had destroyed most of the bridges which had to be rebuilt, using huge supplies of logs that had to be cut and transported. Pack animals were devastated by tsetse fly so it was down to manpower. Telegraphs were in short supply, heliographs or runners were the norm and letters to the troops often took six months to arrive. The carriers started by being volunteers, but when 'conscription' arrived it caused huge problems with morale, retention and payment. Anne finished her talk by looking at the huge numbers of these carriers involved - documents referring to their names and numbers, and what happened to them have been destroyed, so the full extent of their contribution and numbers will never be known. They are truly the unsung heroes of the Africa campaign in WW1.

Many thanks to Dr Samson for an excellent evening.

### **Remembrance 'Frontline'**

Thinking ahead to November, the edition of 'Frontline' will be our special 'Remembrance' issue. Last year we included a moving section on our relatives who were involved in the Great War, both those who fortunately survived, and those who sadly and tragically did not, so please, any new information on those relatives who were remembered last time, and especially any new 'entries' would be very much appreciated to be included in a very close to home Remembrance for MK WFA.

### **Heritage - MK WFA at MK Museum.**

Last month we attended three days at MK Museum where our display formed part of the MK Museum Heritage Open Days and Beer Festival. We set up a Great War exhibition including details of local men like Wolverton's Albert French, what life was like in the trenches and information about the creative heritage of the Great War - displays of War Artists both official and unofficial, and poets of the time, and about trench art- how ordinary soldiers turned the debris of war into beautiful objects, all documented superbly by Anne. Although not quite as busy as usual, we still had plenty of visitors, who took time to linger over the displays and ask questions, so we were really pleased with the outcome. (Running over an extra day also seemed to take the pressure of setting up and packing away.) Some of the interesting conversations we had included mention of a Grandad who had joined the RFA in 1912 and was with the Old Contemptibles at Mons and Le Chateau. After the war he would



wear a poppy, but he always took the Haig button off it. All his medals and documents were lost when his home was destroyed in the Blitz. Evidently, when he was asked if he had witnessed the 'Angel of Mons', he replied that he was far too busy 'shoving shells up the barrel' to gaze about at the sky! Another grandad started his war with the Beds and Herts Regiment, but ended it as a RFC tailor sewing tents at Wolverton. Another was gassed on the Somme, invalided out but did not live long after the war, he certainly would not have known that his son would be killed in the retreat to Dunkirk. Another visitor, now living in Gifford Park, was a schoolboy in Kent during WW2. When the war had just finished he found a 25lb bomb in a local quarry, so he took it to Sgt Milbourne at the local police station. The sergeant said, 'Where did you find that?' and on hearing the reply said, 'Well you shouldn't be playing there should you? Now you just take it back and put it back where you found it.' The lad and his mates took it back to the quarry and spent the rest of the day trying to set it off! Fortunately, they were unsuccessful. This chap's uncle was on the MV Rochester as a pom pom gunner, on the infamous convoy 'Pedestal' to relieve Malta, another person who was too busy shoving shells up barrels to worry about anything else. Another visitor's grandad was gassed on the Western Front and died in 1927. One lady visitor told us about her grandad who was the most senior officer captured by the Japanese on Java, and subsequently they gave him a very hard time. He was witness to the second atomic bomb strike, describing it as a beautiful, pink semi-circle on the horizon. One visitor was a relative of a Thomas Frazier who was in the West Riding Regiment and died on the first day of the Somme, aged sixteen. His grandmother never got over it. Another grandad had been a sapper with the RE and had been captured in Flanders ending up a POW in France. His diary is held by the Imperial War Museum, I think his name was George Weymark and he was mentioned in, or had written, a book called 'Bread and Barbed Wire.' Another discussed was a Sgt in the Welsh Fusiliers who joined up before the war, gaining the Mon's Star, and also the Coix de Guerre for going out and eliminating some German snipers who were picking off bicycle messengers. Add to those several ladies who were really taken with the embroidery on Anne's collection of WW1 postcards, others with general questions, and the ones Anne helped with research enquiries, and you can see we had a pretty busy and interesting time.



### **Cemetery tours during Heritage week.**

I asked Mike how his tours went, and he reports that all three tours were successful. The participants on three were relatives of casualties and he now has a photo of Lilian Saunders, the QMAAC 'worker' buried at Whaddon Road.

### **FOR SALE - Comprehensive Library of approx 500 World War I and II Books and maps**

(I received this email a few days ago)

'Dear Sir or Madam'

My wife and I have been touring the Western Front regularly since 1994, with occasional trips to Normandy and the D-Day Beaches. We have frequently taken friends and relatives on tours to visit the graves and memorials usually ending up at the Menin Gate ceremony.

Unfortunately, due to a progressive illness, I can no longer continue to walk the 'trenches'.

I have a small library of about 500 books, mostly covering the Western Front including many guides and IGN/Michelin Maps. I also have all the Bulletins and Stand To magazines to date.

This may be of interest to an enthusiastic visitor or the basis of a Battlefield Guide business.

I am asking £1,500 for the collection.

Would it be possible to circulate this to your membership as I would like the collection to stay with the WFA.

Many thanks, in anticipation.

David C Eades (great nephew of Cpl Bernard Vick killed in Loos 1915 with no known grave)

Anyone interested please contact David at <davideades60@yahoo.com>

### **November 11th Cenotaph**

At the moment I am intending to go down to the WFA wreath laying at the Cenotaph on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> November to place a wreath on behalf of our branch, and attend the ceremony at the Guards Chapel afterwards. I am not aware of any assistance with travel costs this year, but, as last year, if any members would like to join me, please send an email and I will be in contact later with plans etc.

### **Seminar.**

See you there!



## A Trip to Stow Maries, part 2

In last month's 'Frontline' we reported a visit to the iconic and unique Stow Maries airfield in Maldon, Essex, an operational base for the RFC/RAF against Zeppelin and Gotha raids on England during the First World War. Here is a return to have a quick look at some of the vehicles and aircraft that are based there, with a further section covering the remainder next month.



Sandwiched between the two hangars, the original open-fronted transport shed has been used to house several vintage vehicles. These include a Bergmann Electric Truck of 1910, made in Germany, though Theodor Bergmann had lived in the United States and worked with fellow innovator Thomas Edison. There is an example of an early ambulance, too. Unsurprisingly, these vehicles are frequently borrowed for use as film props nowadays, in fact I think we were told the Bergman truck, (the one in the photo on the right) which is extremely rare and has had top brass from Mercedes to visit it, was originally used in the film 'Oh What A Lovely War' before being abandoned and subsequently rescued from an Irish farm and restored at Stow Maries. Elsewhere on site is a model T Ford.

Moving on to the aircraft, The World War 1 Aviation Heritage Trust (WW1 AHT) has operated two Albatros from its base at the Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome near Maldon in Essex. The first was constructed in 2014 and is in the colours of Leutnant Paul Baeumer who was ninth in the all-time list off WW1 German Aces. He died during an aerobatic sequence at an airshow in Germany in 1927. Their second one, permanently based at Stow Maries, is shown below. The Albatross DV, and its successor, the DVa were amongst the most numerous German fighter planes built during the 'Great War'. Although the lightened and 'improved' DVa shared most of the wing failure problems that had plagued the D111 and turned in somewhat lacklustre performance figures, these aircraft formed the backbone of the German fighter units, the Jagdstaffeln, in the later months of 1917 and into early 1918. With modified and strengthened lower wing fittings, auxiliary bracing struts and beefed-up rigging cables, the DVa would prove itself a formidable opponent in the hands of an experienced pilot. It was to remain in service right up to the Armistice, even when outclassed by newer types such as the Fokker DV7 and Siemens Schuckert D111.





Albatross DVA (presently missing its propellor.)

The livery was the choice of Otto Kisselburg, a Bavarian, who commanded the Royal Bavarian Jasta 23B and scored 20 victories. He crashed flying a captured Sopwith Camel at the end of May 1918 and never flew again operationally. He died in a mountaineering accident a year later, perhaps searching for the edelweiss of Bavarian mythology. This Albatross DVA was constructed in 2016 by the Vintage Aviator Limited of Wellington New Zealand and is authentic in every detail to the original design - no brakes, bungie cord suspension, linen covered wings with the famous lozenge camouflage, and a wooden fuselage. (*Information board, Stow Maries*)



BE2

The Royal Aircraft Factories BE2 was the result of Edward Busk's exhaustive experiments in 1914 to achieve automatic stability. His aim to produce the steadiest possible platform for reconnaissance operations. At that time such qualities were considered desirable since the military had yet to fully acknowledge the aeroplane as a potential war weapon. In consequence BE types successfully fulfilled their intended roles in the early part of the war until the advent of superior German aircraft such as Eindeckers and early Albatross fighters, against which B2 crews had little hope of providing serious opposition. As a home defence fighter however the B2C proved ideal for nocturnal operations, three German airships falling victim to RFC BE pilots. The type enjoyed extensive use in most theatres of the war and was built in large numbers. BE2E A2767 is recorded as flying a total of three operational missions from Stowe Maries aerodrome in Essex as part of B flight, No 37 squadron. These sorties took place at night in September and October 1917, an average of just under two hours each by this stage in the war, A2767 was responding to Zeppelin attacks as well as bombing raids of massed formations of the German Gotha and ultimately Giant bombers. 82767 is a reproduction BE2E built in 2014 by TVAL (Vintage Aviator) who have amassed an extensive database of original RC drawings and reference material allowing their Craftsman to build these aircraft exactly as they were nearly 100 years ago but to modern engineering standards. The other BE2e, A2943, is in No 7 Squadron colours of WW1. The aircraft is recorded as being flown by Captain Horace Webb-Bowen RFC. It was used for bombing and reconnaissance including the Battle of the Somme before being eventually replaced in the same role by the RE8. (*Information board, Stow Maries*)

(Many thanks to Dave Hawkins for the photos.)

## World War one in Objects 17.

### Caltrops - 'The silent guardians'

An ancient and modern defence in war.

By Paul Salver



Picture 1 Caltrops in Ukraine war [<https://www.ancient-origins.net/news-history-archaeology/caltrop>]

The context: Development and use of Caltrops in War

Since 2022 Ukraine has been a focal point for modern technological warfare- demonstrating the features of 'a high-end fight'<sup>1</sup> [The future of warfare in 2030 - Rand corporation 2020] using 'sophisticated weapon systems.... to contest all three domains—air, space, and cyber'<sup>2</sup> [ IBID] The result is a major conflict of high intensity combat not seen since World War Two utilising an array of technology - tanks, massive use of artillery, hyper sonic missiles and above all the dominant use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and Drones which have revolutionized military operations.

However, in defensive warfare the Ukrainian - Russian war has also used ancient technology which has been used in the protection of approaches to cities with pre-modern but still very potent barricading technique- the caltrop.

There has been the 'mass production of caltrops'<sup>3</sup> which 'with proper use, .... will help stop [a] column of vehicles or at least delay them'.

Caltrops are a simple but very effective defensive weapon that has been used in warfare for centuries. They are small with four sharp spikes or points arranged in such a way that no matter how they land on the ground, one spike always points upward. To step on it was to risk a severe puncture wound- which was very painful sometimes resulting in infection and death.

Caltrop comes from the Latin word *calcitrata* -foot-trap. Much earlier the Romans called it a *Tribulus*.

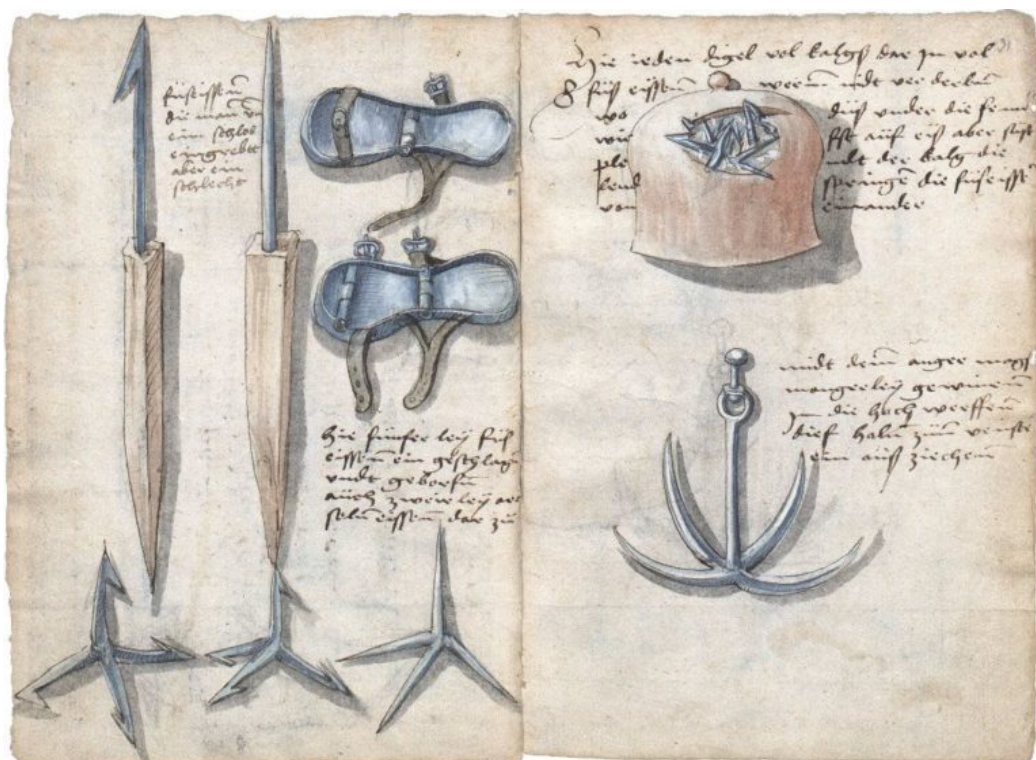


Picture 2 Roman caltrops from the 1st century BC, found at the battle site of Alesia in France. Showing they were used by Caesars Legions in the conquest of Gaul.

Source <https://ianjamesross.com/journal/2016/12/2>

A military maxim states "A well-placed obstacle is worth a thousand soldiers. Caltrops are the silent guardians of a well-defended position" Without question they were an effective defence especially against enemy cavalry and in the protection of fortified camps. The devastating impact is described by the Roman writer Vegetius, his work 'De re militari'. He wrote 'The armed chariots used in war ....[were] rendered useless chiefly by the following contrivance: at the instant the engagement began, they strewed the field of battle with caltrops, and the horses that drew the chariots, running full speed on them, were infallibly destroyed." 4 <https://byzantinemilitary.blogspot.com/2021>

During the Middle Ages armies made widespread use of caltrops. They were inexpensive and extremely effective. Training manuals demonstrated their use in defence and battles.



Picture 3 Military training manual 1505. Source -Medieval Weapons: Caltrops. Types of Caltrops, Facts and History (medievalbritain.com)

A drastic illustration of the tactical effect of caltrops on both cavalry and foot soldiers is shown in a 15th century illustrated manuscript "Kriegstechnik."



Picture 4 "Kriegstechnik" Source- <http://www.vikingsword.com/>

Excellent evidence for the use of caltrops can be seen in the huge painting in the chapel of Schönenbuchen, Germany in the Black Forest. [ Picture 5] They are being scattered from baskets inflicting damage to the horses and riders in the battle which resulted in a crushing defeat of the attacking forces. An unknow source make the point of the effectiveness- "In warfare, cunning always prevails over brute force. The strategist who uses obstacles like caltrops and pitfalls can turn the tide of battle without striking a single blow." — Unknown



Picture 5 <http://www.vikingsword.com/>A painting depicting a cruel historic battle in 1444 in Schönenbuchen

Caltrops continued to be used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to protect defensive positions. The Russians used 'crows feet' in the defence of Sevastopol and the Battle of Balaclava ,during the Crimean war. [1854 - 55] Crow's feet boards were studded with barbed spikes positioned on the ground to prevent the enemy from approaching the defences.



Picture 6 Crows feet from the Crimean War 1854 -55

Source Royal Engineers Museum, Kent.

## Caltrops on the Western Front 1914 -18



Picture 7 & 8, First World War Caltrop - Paul Salver Private collection

Caltrops were used in World War One on the Western Front as part of the protection of the Trench lines, though the barbed wire entanglements were more effective in blocking advances. In the first months of the war caltrops were used in their traditional role to impede the movement of horses during the cavalry campaigns of 1914 . "The fact that an area might have been compromised with caltrops could lead to a reconsideration of an advance by officers"<sup>5</sup>

Source Youtube video World War One.

The aim was to divert enemy 'cavalry' forces into a killing zone, or to break up a charge and slow up horse drawn transport.

Caltrops were not a standard feature of trench defences during World War I and evidence for their use is sparse in terms of written and photographic evidence. However, trench archaeology and farmers ploughs show that they were used by all sides in different sectors of the frontline and defensive fortifications. The caltrop in my own collection was found in the area around the Somme. [ picture 8]

The hole in the centre was to enable them to be threaded onto a piece of stiff wire. This allowed them to be carried more easily and probably to cluster them together or in a line on the ground. Some sources suggest that caltrops could be scattered in enemy trenches by raiding parties.

Similar iron caltrops have been found in the defensive positions at the Fort de Leveau in Maubeuge ,besieged by the German army between August - September 1914.



Picture 9 French caltrops defending a fortification. Source: [chasse.trappe.fortdeleveau.fr/museum/](http://chasse.trappe.fortdeleveau.fr/museum/)

Picture 10 Anti cavalry caltrop found at Messines

Source : <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection>

This caltrop was recovered at Avenue Farm near Messines on the Western Front from 1917. This is a different design with four armed pointed spikes. Australian Light Horse troops referred to them as "Horse Chestnuts".

Scattered caltrops were difficult to see. Picture 11 is a modern photograph illustrating how effectively hidden they could be - as they were in the movement war August - December 1914.



Picture 11 Scattered anti cavalry caltrops - almost invisible.

Source - [military-history.com](http://military-history.com)

An official report, albeit from 1966, gives an indication of the effects of caltrops on the battlefield. It states "Caltrops will penetrate footgear to inflict puncture injuries on all types and conditions of soil considered, except in areas where walking would be difficult because of the depth to which a foot would sink. In these areas, penetration will initiate, and the caltrop will remain in the footgear. Therefore, either injury will occur once firmer soil is reached, or delay will be caused because the caltrop will have to be removed from the footgear while personnel are walking through the unfavourable soil area." 6 DEFENSE TECHNICAL INFORMATION CENTER report 1966 Stanley, Arthur T. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/AD0802059>

Picture 11 Scattered anti cavalry caltrops - almost invisible.

Source - [military-history.com](http://military-history.com)

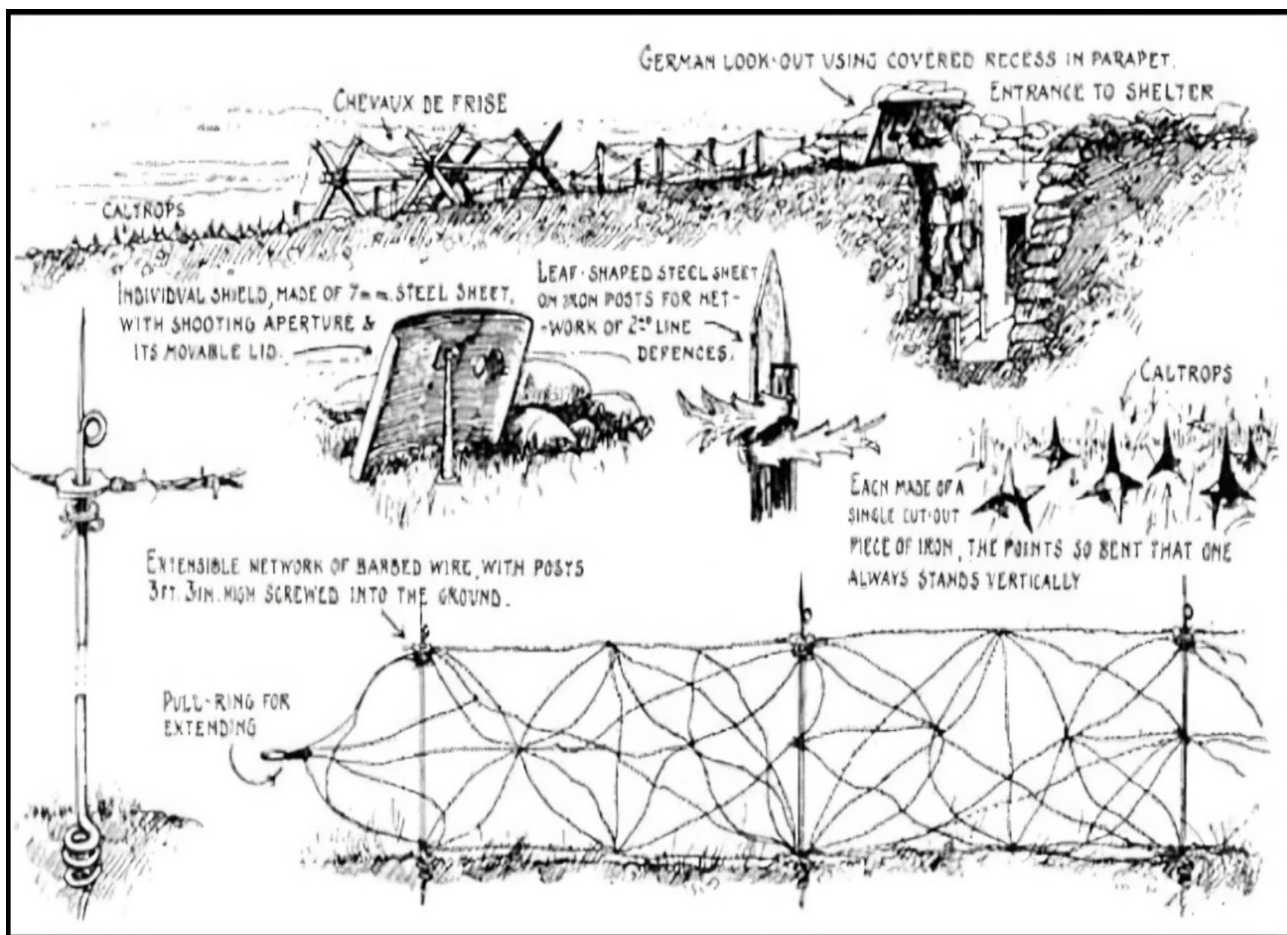
The report continues to explain "incapacitation, resulting from swelling and pain approximately 30 minutes after injury, makes caltrops highly effective for impeding travel..... distributed at low densities, will inflict serious injury upon anyone who attempts to hit the dirt." 7 DEFENSE

TECHNICAL INFORMATION CENTER report 1966 Stanley, Arthur T.

<https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/AD0802059>

In addition, on the Western Front, Trench defences relied on barbed wire, improvised obstacles were used to slow down or deter enemy infantry attacks. These obstacles included wooden stakes, concertina wire, sandbags, and even empty artillery shell casings. The primary purpose of these obstacles was to create a complex and difficult terrain for the enemy to traverse, making it challenging for them to advance or launch attacks. Caltrops formed a part of these defences.

In preparation for the Hindenburg Line the Germans utilised caltrops as a layer of defence.



Picture 12 Hindenburg Line defences

Caltrops were mounted on wooden boards. In case of retreat, these were dropped down so that any attacking soldiers jumping in would land on them. Others were put in shell holes around the trenches. See picture 13.

A German soldier's postcard from 1915 describes the use of caltrops-

"Tripwire: Between barbed wire and trench there are simple wires on a low level hidden in the grass ... storming French who passed the barbed wire ... trips ... for enhancement there are several caltrops around. These things are very cruel. You can throw them in any way but always on sharp top will be upside. They cut right through heavy boots and make soldiers unable to fight. Also storming soldiers may trip at the tripwire and fall with hands right on the caltrop. These barriers are in front of our trenches".

Source 8 German Field Postcard October 1915 <https://wwitoday.com>



Often soldiers in the frontlines improvised defences and both sides sought to improve and adapt the obstacles to protect against enemy attacks. This included improvised caltrops. For example, this one was discovered on the Somme battlefield- It does not fit with the smaller iron caltrops but was a series of sharp metal spikes radiating from a riveted base.



Picture 13 Canadian soldiers standing by boards with Caltrops set by the retreating German Army in 1917. [www.ar15.com/forums/general/ITT\\_WWI\\_PHOTOS](http://www.ar15.com/forums/general/ITT_WWI_PHOTOS)

Picture 14 Somme area improvised caltrop



[www.worthpoint.com/wwi-trench-german-caltrop-relic-487483098](http://www.worthpoint.com/wwi-trench-german-caltrop-relic-487483098)

Conclusion To conclude, various forms of caltrops were employed by armies on the Western Front. They were used primarily to hinder the movement of enemy cavalry, infantry, and vehicles. Caltrops were scattered on roads, paths, and fields to obstruct the advance of enemy forces causing damage and immobilization. Their very simplicity and effectiveness in creating obstacles made them a valuable tool for defence.



Picture 15 German barbed wire defences at Beaucourt 1916

Source: National Army Museum, Out of Copyright

However, the use of caltrops as a primary defence was superseded by barbed wire which was used several rows deep to protect the front-line trenches. A British manual stated it was the "most efficient obstacle and [one that is] universally used"<sup>9</sup>

Source 9 [https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-article/barbed\\_wire](https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-article/barbed_wire)



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

RELAWM10784.002

Picture 16 German razor wire <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C305516>

There were rapid innovations in wire technology during the war with the introduction and mass use of concertina wire, barbed tape or razor wire- mesh of metal strips with sharp edges.

In summary, both caltrops and barbed wire had their place in the defensive strategies of trench warfare but caltrops became used less in defence and the wire entanglements became the more formidable obstacle to infantry attacks. (Many thanks to Paul Salver for this article.)



Our next talk is 'He Didn't Talk About It - Analysing Veterans' Silence' by Julian Walker 'He was in the war, but he never spoke about it'. An unwillingness to talk about the war, expressed in this familiar sentence, sums up its horror, stoicism, and inexplicability. As the culture of the war then and since has been so much a verbal culture, this notable absence of words needs to be considered. Was the silence engendered by the soldiers themselves, was there pressure on them to remain silent, or was there a drift into leaving it all behind? Considering trauma, censorship and social convention, Julian Walker asks why many soldiers were unwilling or unable to talk about their experience of World War One. Julian is an artist, writer and educator, who works with the Learning Department at the British Library. His research-based art and writing practice explores language, social history, the nature of objects and engagement with the past. He is co-author of '*Trench Talk: Words of the First World War.*'

**October 14<sup>th</sup> - MK WFA seminar.** Bletchley Masonic Centre

**November 11<sup>th</sup> - WFA ceremony** at the Cenotaph.

**November 17<sup>th</sup> - 'He Didn't Talk About It - Analysing Veterans' Silence' - Julian Walker**

**December 2nd - Visit to Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum.**

**January 19<sup>th</sup> 'India's Great War' - Adam Prime**

**February 16<sup>th</sup> 'The Doughboys 1917-18' - Mike Sheil**

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

**Committee members are...**

Stuart Macfarlan - Chairman (macfarlan87@gmail.com)

Anne McIntyre - Secretary/historical events co-ordinator (annefmmcintyre@gmail.com)

Ian Wright - Talks organiser

Caroline Wright - Treasurer

Jim Barrett - Seminar and visits co-ordinator

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

Gary Short - Social Media co-ordinator.