



THE WESTERN FRONT
ASSOCIATION

Lancashire North Branch

Despatch

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The above photo shows King Albert of Belgium arriving on his white charger to review the 55th West Lancashire Division on 3rd January 1919 and the article at Page 11 tells how men of the Division had earlier watched his return in triumph to Brussels on 22 November 1918. Read inside about the soldiers from the Lancashire regiments who were amongst the last to fall; the General who was Haig's Tower of Strength; how demobilisation proceeded; the Meritorious Service Medal; events in the final days of the war to the signing of the Peace Treaty; reports from museums; the 2018 Armistice Prize award; meeting reports; 2019 programme and more.

Following my viewing the premier performance of Peter Jackson's *They Shall Grow Not Old* I wondered whether any of the stalwarts who came together in 1980 to set up the Western Front Association with the motto *Remembering* could have dreamed that on the approach to the centenary of the Armistice the public would be helped to realistically remember the events of 100 years ago by such a stunning production. I look forward to seeing the application of the techniques developed by Jackson to invigorate other historic film footage.

The WFA stalwarts I refer to above could also not fail to be impressed by the wide range of initiatives and events linked to the centenary of the Armistice at national and local level. Concerts, theatre productions, festivals, talks, exhibitions, parades, new memorials, a Mayoral competition have all caught my eye and are testimony to the remembering efforts in Lancashire.

It has become my practice when preparing Despatch that writing "Editor's Musing" is my last task and for this last Despatch I produce it is appropriate my last words are to thank again all those who have contributed items and articles to the 22 Issues of Despatch from May 2008. Your contributions have been essential to the production of Despatch and have also helped me achieve a sense of satisfaction on completing each Issue. Hopefully someone will come forward and become the next Editor.

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

Articles are by Editor unless stated otherwise.

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

For this Issue of Despatch, which marks the Centenary of the Armistice, I thought it appropriate to report on the actions which resulted in the last soldiers to be killed in action in the seven Lancashire infantry regiments on the Western Front.

From the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) website, I downloaded spreadsheets for the casualty records for the 7 regiments. I then worked backwards from 11th November identifying those casualties which were categorised "Killed in action" (KIA) in the Soldiers Died records (i.e. not: Died of wounds; killed other than in action; or Died from natural causes etc). I was thus able to identify the names and dates of the last to fall, their battalion and therefore the relating action using information from unit histories and war diaries.

The map on page 4 showing the Advance to Victory has the approximate location of the actions marked numbered 1-7.

With regard to the King's (Liverpool) and East Lancashire regiments they each had "last KIAs" on the same date in two of their battalions.

The following paragraphs describe the actions in chronological order which resulted in the last to fall for each regiment and brief details given about a KIA (or two). The Supplementary Report gives summary information for all 43 men who have been identified as the last to fall in the 7 regiments.

1. 2nd November, South of Valenciennes: KING'S OWN ROYAL LANCASTER REGIMENT

On 29th October 1918 Sir Douglas Haig issued orders for a concerted attack by the Fourth, Third and First Armies in the general direction of Mauberge and Mons. At the beginning of November the capture of Valenciennes was a priority and the British Third and First Armies attacked on a six-mile

front to the south of the town. Early on 2nd November the 1st Battalion King's Own attacked towards Preseau and according to the Battalion's War Diary "*by 07.00 the objective was reached and the Battalion commenced to consolidate. During the attack very little hostile resistance was encountered, the enemy surrendering freely except in a few isolated instances. Hostile M.G. fire was opened from long range on our men whilst they were consolidating inflicting several casualties.*" About 07.30 the Battalion pushed forward but were eventually held up with hostile M.G. fire. The War Diary gives no detailed information on casualties but CWGC and Soldiers Died indicate two men in the Battalion were KIA.



Sergt. 12979

Harold Beaumont

was born near Huddersfield in October 1887 and in 1911 lived at Blackpool employed as an electrician. When war broke out he was working at

the Magic City in Paris and he experienced some difficulty getting away from the French capital but in September 1914 he enlisted in the Royal Lancasters. He quickly gained promotion and served in France from 17th July 1915, a date which coincides with the arrival of the 7th Battalion.

He was subsequently appointed Instructor at the Lewis Gun School in France and rejoined his regiment in October 1918 shortly before his death. Writing to his brother his Commanding Officer wrote: "Your brother was killed instantly by machine-gun fire whilst commanding a platoon, just after a most successful attack by the company. . . I was much struck by his coolness under fire and his good leadership."

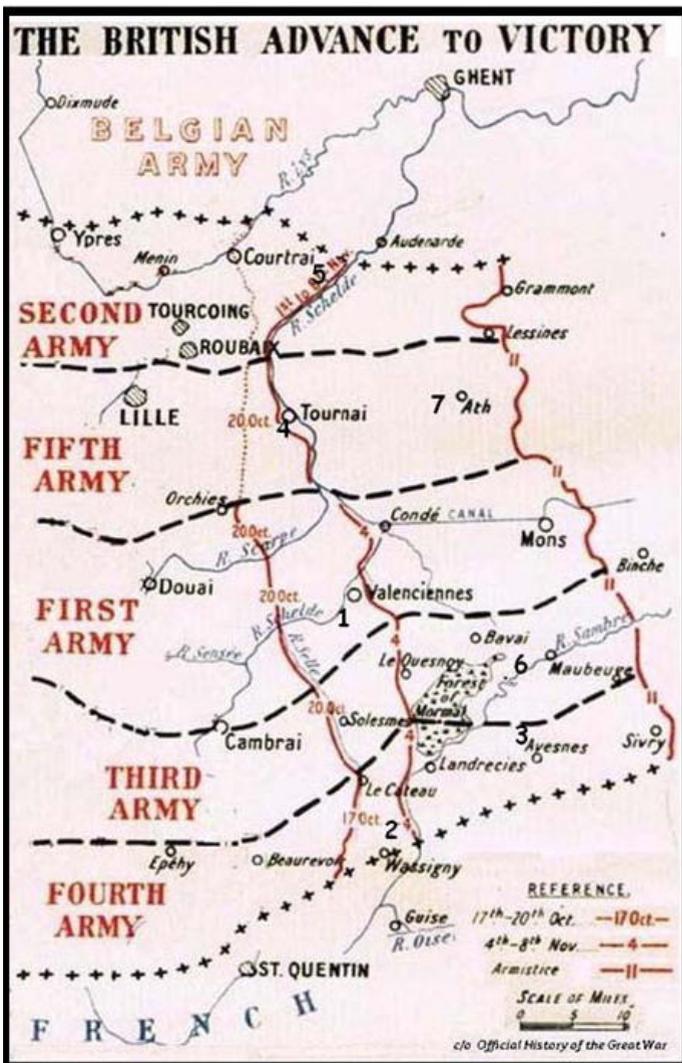
2. 4th November, Sambre Crossing east of Wassigny: LOYAL NORTH LANCASHIRE REGIMENT

On the morning of 4th November the British attack opened on the front between Valenciennes and the Sambre east of Wassigny, the Fourth Army on the right moving to cross the Sambre south of the Mormal Forest, the Third Army in the centre advancing to clear the forest, while the First Army was to pass the marshes north of Valenciennes and advance eastwards.

IX. Corps was on the right of the Fourth Army and 1st Division on the right of the Corps had the 1st Battalion Loyal North Lancashire in 1st Brigade. At 05.45 hrs on 4th the Loyals advanced under cover of a heavy barrage accompanied by a smoke screen carrying bridges up to the canal with them. Those used by the battalions in 1st Brigade being floating bridges carried on German steel floats of which many had recently been captured in German engineer parks.

On the barrage lifting off the east bank of the canal, four floating bridges were pushed across. The first party of the Battalion to cross was a Lewis Gun section intended to cover the crossing, and this came under short-range enemy machine-gun fire, but was able to silence the guns and capture the teams. A, B and C companies of the Loyals then crossed the canal with D Company remaining behind to help launch more bridges.

The Battalion only took fifteen minutes to pass over the canal, the whole operation being completed twenty minutes after zero. After a halt of forty minutes, during which large numbers of the enemy surrendered, the barrage lifted and the Battalion moved forward fighting a series of hand-to-hand combats. On reaching their objective the Black Watch took the place of the Battalion and later that night the 1st Brigade was relieved.



working as a rubber moulder. He enlisted in September 1914 and served in France from 31st July 1915, a date which coincides with the arrival of the 10th Battalion in France.

3. 8th November, Avesnes: KING'S (LIVERPOOL) REGIMENT

At 1950 hrs on 7th November General Rawlinson (Fourth Army) gave instructions for the 8th that a detachment of all arms should be sent forward to secure and hold the high ground north east of Avesnes. The 18th King's were at Marbaix 6mils east of Landrecies and patrols went forward during the night to locate enemy positions prior to the Battalion attacking at 0730 hrs on 8th November. The Battalion War diary indicates that despite very strong resistance and sharp close fighting they reached their objective NE

The Regimental History records the Battalion suffered a loss of 7 killed, 41 wounded and 4 missing in their final action. CWGC/Soldiers Died indicate twelve men in the Battalion were KIA.

Sergt. 15751 Thomas Barnes Cuttle was born Manchester in 1892. In 1911 he was married with a young daughter



of Avesnes at 1415 hrs then the 5th Connaughts passed through them to capture the final objective. One officer and 13 men of the Battalion were KIA.



Lieutenant Harry Leslie Baker MC was born late 1891 in Nottingham and employed as an accountant's clerk before joining the Sherwood Forester's in September 1914. He received a commission in the Kings

Liverpool Regiment in April 1917 and was awarded the Military Cross in March 1918.

Pte. 85178 George Jaffrey Margerison was born Walton-le-dale, Preston in 1898, a twin son. Prior to enlistment at Seaforth he lived at Port Roderick on the Isle of Man.



4. 8th November, Schelde Crossing at Tournai: KINGS (LIVERPOOL) AND SOUTH LANCASHIRE REGIMENTS, 55th Division

On 8th November patrols of 55th Division discovered that the enemy was still in position on the west side of the Schelde at 0200 hrs but an hour later his machine gun fire died down and it became abnormally quiet. At 0700 hrs strong patrols were able, against slight opposition, to work their way down to the river, but the west bank could not be occupied until after dark on account of fire from the other bank of the Schelde.

Between 2300 hrs and midnight (8th/9th) the 1/6th King's (165 Bgde) and 1/5th South Lincs (166 Bgde) had crossed the Schelde and by dawn had formed a bridgehead. Two pontoon bridges were laid and by 0825 hrs both brigades had their advanced-guard troops across the river and moving eastwards.

CWGC and Soldiers Died indicate the 1/6th King's lost one KIA and the 1/5th South Lincs lost two KIA.

Sergeant 242094

John Lowcock of 1/5th Battalion South Lancashire Regt. was born St Helens on 19 December 1877. The 1911 Census records he was employed as a "Coal Mines



Contractor or Roof Blower" living at Sutton

Oak, St Helens with his wife and six children. He enlisted at St Helens

5. 8th November, Schelde Crossing at Avelghem: EAST LANCASHIRE REGIMENT

On the night of 8/9th November 11th Battalion (in 31st Division) relieved the Norfolk Regiment on the west bank of the Schelde at Avelghem. The 31st Division was under orders to force the crossing of the river on the following morning. It seemed as if the battalion was faced with one of its most difficult tasks of the war. The east bank was strongly held, a fact proved by the great volume of hostile rifle and machine-gun fire however, the hostile fire had almost ceased at dawn and patrols on the 9th sent back information that the enemy had abandoned their positions on the east bank. CWGC and Soldiers Died indicate the 11th Battalion East Lincs lost two KIA.

Pte. 49267 Peter James Johnston

was born Carlisle in 1880 and the photo shows him at the turn of the century. Prior to enlisting at Carlisle into the Border regiment he was married with three sons and a daughter and in 1911 worked as a Dye House Labourer. He was subsequently transferred into the 11th East Lincs.



6. 8th November, River Sambre and Hautmont: EAST LANCASHIRE AND MANCHESTER REGIMENTS

On the evening of 7th November 126th Brigade in 42nd (East Lancashire) Division was given the task of taking the high ground east of the River Sambre and Hautmont next day with the final objective east of the Mauberge-Avesnes Road. Before daybreak on the 8th the Brigade, with 10th Manchesters in the centre, 5th East Lincs on the right and 8th Manchesters on the left, had seized the Bois d'Hautmont, a large wood west of the

Sambre and were in the western outskirts of Hautmont. By 1015 hrs the parts of the town on the western bank of the Sambre had been secured and the 10th Manchesters and 5th East Lancs were improvising a crossing of the Sambre since all the bridges had been destroyed.

Assisted by inhabitants of Hautmont parties of both battalions crossed the Sambre and street fighting continued until the Germans were finally driven out from the town. At dusk fighting patrols from 125th Brigade ejected the enemy from Fort Hautmont and Ferme de Forest and at 0440 hrs on 9th November the final objective was occupied on the entire front. The Division's history indicates the losses as being "comparatively slight". CWGC records and Soldiers Died indicate 1/5th East Lancs and 10th Manchesters each had one KIA.

L/Cpl. 241590 Ernest Baldwin MM

was born Burnley on 6 May 1897 and prior to joining 1/5 Battalion East Lancashire Regiment was a Carter and Butcher's Man. He served with the Egyptian Expeditionary Force from March 1916 then moved to France with his battalion in February 1917. He was awarded the Military Medal for conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty at Nieuport on 5 November 1917.



Pte. 377984 Thomas Fannon of the 10th Battalion, Manchester Regt. was born Liverpool in early 1897. In the 1911 Census he was assisting in a shop living in Atholl Road, Liverpool. When enlisting in Liverpool he is recorded as residing in St Albans, Herts.

7. 10th November, Ath: LANCASHIRE FUSILIERS

Shortly after midday on 10th November the 9th Cavalry Brigade, who were advanced

guard of 55th Division in Fifth Army, were held up on western outskirts of Ath by strong resistance on the Dendre River and its canal. The 2nd/5th Fusiliers were ordered to attack and capture the bridges leading into Ath from the south-west. On moving forward the Battalion was observed and subjected to heavy shelling. The attack was launched at 15.00 hrs and whilst encountering machine-gun and trench mortar fire they eventually succeeded in working from house to house and gained the western bank of the canal. They pressed the enemy all night and by 07.00 hrs on 11th the Germans were driven from a bridge before they were able to blow it up and the Fusiliers crossed into Ath.

The Germans withdrew all along the line and were hustled out of Ath leaving a bridge on the eastern outskirts also undestroyed which allowed patrols of the battalion to gain the high ground east of Ath soon after 0800 hrs on 11 November. The Battalion's War Diary indicates the casualties on 10th November were Officers - 2 wounded; Other Ranks - 8 killed, 19 wounded.

CWGC and Soldiers Died confirm the 2/5th Fusiliers lost eight KIA.

On the 10th when moving forward to attack, the eight soldiers were taking cover near Irchonwelz to shelter from the shellfire when all were fatally hit by a shell.

Pte. 205299 Walter Harrison

was born 1898 at Pendleton, Manchester and prior to joining the 2nd/5th Fusiliers he worked for Messrs. Grant and Alcrofts of Pendleton. His elder brother was killed in 1915.

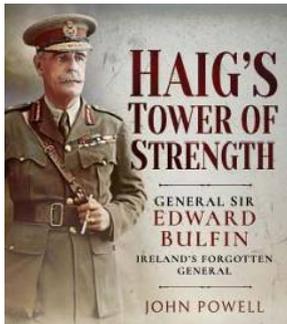


See back page about first & last to fall.

OUR BITTER GRIEF IS TINGED WITH
LOVING PRIDE
- Pte S A Jeffrey Royal Lancaster Regt

HAIG'S TOWER OF STRENGTH: General Sir Edward Bulfin - Ireland's Forgotten General

I mentioned when giving my presentation "*Territorial Gunners at War*" (see Page 27 of Despatch) that I was fortunate in finding descendants of Captain Walter William Wadsworth who authored the book about 275 Brigade Royal Field Artillery in WW1 which was the inspiration for my talk. Brigadier John Powell narrated his grandfather's words in my presentation and in one of our email exchanges he mentioned the chap he was writing about - General Sir Edward Bulfin. I told John that Bulfin had figured briefly in two of my earlier presentations but I did not know much about the man.



On sending John a video of my PowerPoint presentation about his grandfather's Brigade I mentioned that I was wondering about writing an article about Bulfin for this Despatch based on his book. John told me his book would be published in September and kindly provided me with a proof copy.

Edward Stanislaus Bulfin was a Roman Catholic born 6 November 1862 at Rathfarnham, near Dublin, Ireland and came from a wealthy family a close branch of which was strongly identified with the Irish nationalist cause. Young Edward attended Stonyhurst College spending two years in the preparatory school and one year in the College before moving in 1876 to Kensington Catholic Public school at Earls's Court. In 1881 he went to Trinity College, Dublin but did not sit for his degree, joining the Militia Battalion of the Royal Irish Fusiliers before gaining a regular commission in the

Yorkshire Regiment (the Green Howards) in 1884.

He spent six years in Ireland and England before sailing to India and in late 1892 moved to Burma where he commanded one of the mobile columns of mounted infantry sent to control the unruly northern parts of the country. Lieutenant Bulfin enjoyed the opportunity for independent command but in 1897 Captain Bulfin was back in England as Garrison Adjutant, South East Command where he came to the notice of General Sir William Butler, a fellow Irish Catholic. In 1898 Butler was chosen to be Commander-in-Chief South Africa and he took Bulfin with him as Aide-de-Camp and Assistant Military Secretary. In that post he would witness and experience the pressures of high command and politics in the year before the Boer War.

1898 was also significant in his personal life. On 11th January he married Frances (known as Fanny) Mary Lonegan from an Irish family now living in London and on 8th November their first child was born, Edward Francis Joseph, known as Eddie, a mere four days before Bulfin sailed with Butler to Cape Town.

Early in the conflict Bulfin served with distinction as brigade major in 1st Division and at the Modder River '*contributed more than any other staff officer to swinging the pendulum of battle.*' Later he was given his first substantial independent command leading a mobile column of 410 mounted infantry and two field guns. When the conflict ended he was an experienced thirty-nine-year-old major who had been at the forefront of the British Army's transition from the tactics of colonial fighting to the beginnings of modern warfare and technology. He had also qualified formally for staff employment, as a result of the appointments he held during the war.

He held number of staff positions on his return England in 1902 and was back in South Africa from autumn 1906. For his last

two years there General Lord Methuen was his Commander-in-Chief who would be pivotal in recommending him for brigade command and he became Brigadier-General in command of the Essex Infantry Brigade in June 1911 part of the newly created Territorial Force.

In June 1913 Bulfin's abilities earned him command of the elite 2nd Infantry Brigade at Aldershot. This was unusual for someone who had not attended Sandhurst, the Staff College nor held a command position in his own regiment. It would be a stimulating time for the fifty-year-old Bulfin to be at Aldershot where he was an integral member of the 'band of brothers' which would become the 'Contemptible Little Army' under Sir John French.

On 11th August 1914, seven days after declaration of war, Bulfin's brigade was ready to go to war and they arrived in France 2 days later. His brigade, which included the 1st Battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, was in 1st Division of I Corps under Sir Douglas Haig. I Corps was relatively unscathed during II Corps clash at Mons but in the subsequent fighting retreat, the most difficult phase of war, they had some "nerve-wracking" encounters. John felt Bulfin coped with the physical and mental strain better than other senior officers. In a gruelling test of stamina and nerves his priority was to keep his brigade intact and to steady his troops. Their retreat ended on 4th September.



In the subsequent advance to Aisne Bulfin's Brigade led the attack north of the Marne at Priez during which **Colonel Knight** of the Loyals was killed. It took

the BEF a week to cover the 70 miles giving the Germans time to reinforce and hold their positions on the high ground above the Aisne. The opportunity to push the Germans

back towards their start positions in August was missed.

As for Brigadier General Edward Bulfin, during the past three weeks of campaigning he had started to be noticed as a commander imbued with a fighting spirit, one who could be relied upon to keep his nerve. What lay ahead was to test him much further.

In their attacks on 14th September Bulfin's Brigade did their utmost to take the Chemin de Dames ridge with Bulfin well up with the leading troops doing his best to exert some grip on the fluid battle. They were unsuccessful however suffering heavy casualties in the process. In the following days Bulfin's men then beat off many German counterattacks. Writing in his diary for 20th September Haig wrote "*the Brigadier (General Bulfin) has been a tower of strength to the Divisional commander (Lomax) and myself during the retreat and subsequent fighting.*"

In mid-October the BEF moved north in the 'Race to the Sea' and Sir John French had to quickly temper his offensive thoughts when faced with the German onslaught. On 22nd October Bulfin's brigade was I Corps reserve on the BEF's left flank when Haig ordered him to counter-attack and retake Kortekker. Under his command were six infantry battalions and all the guns of 1st and 2nd Brigades. He planned and implemented a successful attack in which six-hundred German prisoners were taken, 1,500 Germans killed and he was promoted Major General in command of Bulfin Force. On 31st October he organised a counter-attack from Shrewsbury Forest which routed the Germans and was crucial to the survival of Ypres. Next day he was wounded by German shell-fire and Haig wrote in his diary: '*Bulfin reported wounded. A great loss to me as he was a tower of strength at all times.*'

Just six weeks after being badly wounded the pressure to find experienced officers was such that he was appointed to command the

newly formed 28th Division. Bulfin took the 28th to France in early 1915, which would be a miserable year for him. John describes the severe problems Bulfin faced in commanding the 28th in the new Second Army under Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien with the “inherently untenable position” of the Ypres Salient. In the battles of Second Ypres that followed the Germans use of chlorine gas on 22nd April, the 28th suffered 15,333 casualties in just over a month, by far the worst of the eleven divisions engaged. However a study concluded Bulfin “did not handle his troops any worse than any of the other commanders.” John notes that one man who must have been impressed with Bulfin was General Allenby commanding V Corps.

After a short rest the Bulfin’s battered division were in the relatively quiet St Eloi and Wytshaete sectors where the 28th regained its strength. On 22nd September the division moved into Second Army’s reserve near Bailleul but got little time to rest before returning to battle at Loos. Bulfin was to remember it as ‘*a sort of horrid nightmare*’.

Things started badly on the 26th with the promised transport not being available and the division having to march 17 miles to billets around Bethune. The following day they moved towards the Hohenzollern Redoubt coming under Gough’s command in I Corps of Haig’s First Army. At noon a strong German attack drove the British troops from Fosse 8 back to the Hohenzollern Redoubt and Haig told Gough to place Bulfin in command of the sector with orders to retake Fosse 8. Bulfin rashly assured Haig he would do so that night. In the event not only was the Fosse not retaken, the Redoubt was also lost. Unable to get on with Gough, not a rare occurrence, and still suffering from his wounds, he was sent home to rest on 9th October.

Before 1915 ended Bulfin was tasked with raising the 60th (London) Division, a territorial formation. Whilst this was a backward move

the new command was an opportunity to regain his health whilst building and training a fighting formation. He introduced the ‘Bee’ symbol to give the 60th divisional identity and foster *esprit de corps*. The King inspected the troops on 31st May 1916 prior their embarkation for France. Under Bulfin the 60th built a solid reputation occupying trenches at Arras whilst the Somme battles raged south of them and in November, being one of the strongest divisions on the Western Front, were selected to proceed to Salonika arriving there in December. Before leaving France he gained the companionship of his son Eddie as ADC.



Bulfin was put in command of a 10-mile section of front near Lake Doiran where the rocky hills were an excellent training ground for their future experience in the Judean Hills. In the attacks during April and May little headway was achieved against the Bulgarians in their lofty mountain positions. In late May with calls being made for men and animals in Egypt the 60th embarked for the Middle East with Bulfin arriving Alexandria on 19th June.

In spring 1917, after two attempts to breach the Turkish defences at Gaza were repulsed, Lloyd George appointed General Sir Edmund Allenby to reinvigorate the campaign. He reorganised his command into two corps, largely of infantry and a powerful mounted force. Knowing Bulfin as a staunch fighter from their time in France he appointed



him to command XXI Corps. Bulfin’s star had risen at last. Chetwode was the commander of XX Corps and **Lieut. Gen. Harry Chauvel** commanded the Desert Mounted Corps (DMC).

On 31st October, with Bulfin heavily bombarding Gaza as a diversion, Chetwode attacked Beersheba and Chauvel's DMC swept round to the east of Beersheba to capture its wells. Beersheba fell around dusk in part due to a dashing charge into the town by Australian cavalry and the wells were captured intact. After days of hard fighting on 19th November Bulfin's men entered the Judean Hills which did not make for easy progress, fighting or re-supply. Nevertheless, good progress was achieved at first despite heavy winter rain falling on troops in ragged tropical clothing. On 24th November Bulfin telegraphed Allenby to say he could advance no further and Chetwode's XX Corps assumed the lead to take Jerusalem. Bulfin's old command, 60th Division in XX Corps, had the honour of receiving the keys to the city.

Bulfin's contribution to the successes of 1917 was recognised by a knighthood and on 19th March 1918 he was dubbed by the Duke of Connaught in Jerusalem, the day Allenby's generals gathered on the **Mount of Olives**



(Bulfin 3rd from right). Accompanied by his son Eddie he had a month's leave in England in June. It was the first time he had seen Fanny and daughter Eileen for two years.

Whilst he was away Allenby planned his offensive known as the Battle of Megiddo which was subsequently lauded as one of the

finest masterstrokes in British military history. It utilised the formidable Desert Mounted Corps and the opening act on 19th September was given to Bulfin's XXI Corps which provided the "battering ram" that breached the Turkish defences on the coastal plain north of Jaffa. Damascus was captured on 1st October and Bulfin arrived in Beirut on the evening of 8th October where he established his headquarters. The final cavalry charge took place north of Aleppo on 26th October and the Turkish Armistice followed five days later.

After the war, Bulfin had the unpleasant task of putting down the 1919 disturbances in Egypt, often ruthlessly, before refusing Churchill's order in 1920 to command the police in Ireland during the War of Independence. He retired in 1926 and spent his later years taking a great interest in his regiment, succeeding in having it formally titled the Green Howards. He died in Bournemouth in August 1939.

With the exception of the previous paragraph from John's synopsis, all the preceding summarising Bulfin's military career I have abstracted from John's book appreciating en route ex-Brigadier John's descriptions and comments on the many military actions. Interestingly he also weaves into his text many vignettes relating to other participating officers. An excellent read.

ONE OF GOD'S JEWELS ETERNAL
REST GIVE UNTO HIM O LORD
- Pte J Cavanagh The King's
Liverpool Regt

BRIGADIER GENERAL REGINALD JOHN KENTISH (RJK) & HIS 9th TALE - "A KING RETURNS IN TRIUMPH!"



In November 2013's Despatch I told of my visit to the Imperial War Museum to view the papers of RJK and my discovery of stories (tales) he had drafted around 1940. They described amusing incidents he experienced in WW1. This is the ninth tale for Despatch.

SCENE: TIME: PLACE: Twelve noon 22nd November 1918, the gaily flagged Maison Vaxellaire, in the Grand Boulevard Anspach in Brussels — 'en fete'.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE: King Albert and his Queen and family; his victorious army; millions of his loyal subjects and thousands of French, British and American soldiers, Raymond Vaxellaire, some Belgian 'lovelies' — and myself and three Lieutenant Colonels!

Next to the announcement of the Armistice, which Marshal Foch had granted to the beaten 'Huns' just ten days previously, the most impressive moment of the War, certainly to me, and probably to all, who were privileged to witness it, was the return

Never before in history, had a King, after being driven from his Palace by an invading army, and after four long and terribly hard years of war, during the whole of which he had remained in the field at the head of and commanding his Army, returned victorious and in triumph at the head of it, the invader fleeing before him and the Armies of his Allies.

But this is exactly what happened to King Albert and it was not surprising that his people, who had been under the heel of the hated 'Hun' for four long years, just went mad with joy, when they saw their King, mounted on his charger, with his Queen also mounted at his side and followed by his victorious Army, come back to them with bands playing and with colours flying on that bright sunny November day!

At the time I was billeted with my Brigade, the 166th, 55th Division, in the little town of Ath, about forty miles to the south-west of Brussels, and I had been told by Division that the King was returning on the 22nd, and that all ranks not required for duty could go to Brussels and see the King's return, provided they could find their own way there!

With the help of 'friends at Court' I succeeded in obtaining eight lorries for my men and a car for myself and off we all started at daybreak, so as to arrive in time to get a good view, and it was just as well that we did, for, I've never seen such crowds of people as there were in Brussels on that great day!

The sun was shining brilliantly as we entered the City, most of us for the first time, and such a scene probably no one had ever seen before! The people, as I have already stated, had gone completely mad with joy and from every house and window hung the Belgian National flags, and from many the flags of the Allies too! Every man woman and child carried a flag but where they had got them from Heaven only knows!!

All were moving in the same direction, namely to the Royal Palace and to the streets along which the Royal Procession was to pass on its way to the Palace and it was with the greatest difficulty that I and my little party made our way to the Maison Vaxellaire situated in the Grand Boulevard Anspach.



of King Albert to his Capital, at the head of his victorious Army, and the day, with all its happenings, will surely go down to posterity as the most historic of the Great War.

This great store was in effect the 'Selfridges' of Brussels and belonged to the Vaxellaire family, who happened to be good friends of the Belgian I was billeted on in Ath, and it was he who had given me a letter of introduction to Raymond Vaxellaire, the head of the firm.

Arriving at last at the entrance I inquired for M. Vaxellaire and in a moment or two he arrived. I told him who I was, where I had come from and at the same time I handed him the letter of introduction.

This he opened and after reading it said at once: "Mon General, je suis enchante de vous voir et vos officiers ici chez ma maison! C'est un tres tres grand honneur de recevoir un general de la brave armee britannique" and then, when he had finished and I had presented my little party to him, he said in perfect English, for he knew England almost as well as he knew his own country, "Come, please, follow me," and he took us up to the first floor, where we found many members of the Vaxellaire family with many of their guests, and to us straight off the battlefield, it was a very big AND — a bevy of lovely girls, dressed in the Belgian National costume lined up and forming a kind of bodyguard on each side of us, as we entered the room! Every one of them a winner!

They were the 'Cochran's Young Ladies' of the Maison Vaxellaire, and their job that day was to look after the Vaxellaires' guests and how well they did it!! Champagne corks — where the champagne came from nobody had the slightest idea or cared — were already popping at that early hour, 10 a.m., and the King wasn't due to pass until 12 noon!

But there was no such thing as 'early hours' or time on that great day — for it was just one great 'fete nationale' when nobody cared what they drank, what time they drank, how much they drank or indeed how much they did anything, so great was the reaction after four terrible years under the heel of the greatest brutes the world had ever known!

To me it appeared that they just seemed to cry out: "We are free! Free to come and free to go, whenever and wherever we please! Free to do and free to say whatever we please without fear of arrest, a cell, and, more often than not, a bullet!"

And it was amongst this happy, laughing, joyous gathering of Belgians that we found ourselves, and how much we, who had also been through hell — absolute hell — since 1914, in an atmosphere of foulness e.g. gas, high explosive, mud, shells and all that goes to make modern warfare the foul thing it is — how much, I say, we appreciated it!

As the hour approached we all went to the open windows, which looked on to the Boulevard Anspach and the sight that met our eyes was almost unbelievable — just one vast sea of colour as far as the eye could see, whether one looked up or down the great street, with a dense crowd of people singing, shouting, embracing and crying — and there were many crying — at the very thought of being back in a world many of them thought they'd never see again!

And then, as we looked on in wonder and astonishment at the scenes below us, we suddenly heard the sound of music, a band — a military band — and at once there went up a great cry of "Les voila! Les voila! Vive le Roi! Vive le Roi! Vive l'armee beige! Vive les Allies!" and then all around us: "Vive l'armee britannique! Vive les Anglais! Vive le General!" — and then suddenly, whilst cries rent the air and with the music growing ever louder, there appeared coming from a side street into the Boulevard Anspach at the corner where stands the famous 'Palais d'Ete' first a steel helmeted band, behind which rode a Commander followed by a column of khaki-clad soldiers.

This was the American Division leading the



Royal Procession, and the crowd gave them a tumultuous reception, as they passed, fine upstanding men with 'Yankee' written all over them and their every action!

Following the Americans came the Fifteenth Scottish Division preceded by their pipers, nearly a hundred of them, and, as the Battalions of killed Highlanders following the pipers came in sight, first the Black Watch, then the Argyll and Sutherlands, followed by the Seaforths and Gordons, their kilts swinging, I was going to say almost from one side



of the street to the other, people just went mad!, and I wasn't surprised, for it was indeed a magnificent spectacle to see these splendid Highlanders, who had fought right through the War, come marching along! Personally I had never seen a finer sight, since I had joined my Regiment in Alexandria some twenty years ago!

Then followed a Division of French in their light blue uniforms, every man wearing round his left shoulder the yellow and green cord of the Croix de Guerre, showing that the whole Division had been specially decorated for gallantry in the field, and they too received a magnificent reception!

And then came a tremendous cheer, which might have been heard in Berlin, had the wind been blowing East at any strength, for there, riding on his horse with the Queen at his side and their children following, came their beloved and very gallant King Albert, leading his brave Army back to his Capital!

The scene as the King came in sight was quite unforgettable --- no words can describe it!

The people just fell on each others necks, one moment laughing, next crying --- and indeed there were very very few in that vast crowd, who were not affected by the wonderful scene --- and then again laughing as the King, with his Queen, to the cries of "Vive le Roi! Vive la Reine!" passed by with his gallant Army on his way to his Palace.

I have told this story of King Albert's return many a time since, but never without feeling

again some of the emotion that I felt as he passed by on that great and historic day, and along with, I am sure, thousands of others, I am devoutly thankful that that great man is not alive to-day to witness the terrible tragedy that has befallen his beloved Belgium to-day.

[Editor Note: King Albert was killed climbing in 1934 and Germany had occupied Belgium]

MY TASK ACCOMPLISHED THE
SUNDOWN SPLENDID AND SERENE
DEATH

- Pte T Taylor Lancashire Fusiliers

DEMOBILISATION (c/o John Keegan, History of the First World War, Volume 8)

In mid 1916 the Government set up a cabinet sub-committee under Edwin Montagu to study the solution to demobilisation. It laid down that the primary concern must be to avoid mass unemployment and proposed a scheme which would both stagger the discharge of soldiers (overwhelmingly the largest service) and progressively reconvert industry to peace production. The scheme demanded a fivefold categorisation of men into:

- 'demobilisers' themselves;
- 'pivotal men', whose skills were needed to reactivate the labour-intensive industries which would employ the demobilised;
- 'slip' men, so called from the slip of paper bearing the promise of a job that employers were solicited to issue; and
- two categories of less important workers.

The actual demobilisation terms were for paid leave of 28 days, clothing allowance, rail warrant, the promise of 20 weeks' unemployment benefit if needed and a war gratuity, the value of which varied on rank and length of service.

There was no objection to the terms when they were announced on 20 November 1918, but a swelling tide of objection to the category system soon made itself felt.

Dissatisfaction culminated in a series of soldiers demonstrations on 3rd to 7th January 1919: at Folkestone 10,000 soldiers refused to re-embark for France; 2,000 demonstrated in Dover and 8,000 at Brighton; and on 7th January there were two separate demonstrations in Whitehall by soldiers who had commandeered lorries and displayed placards reading: *'We won the war. Give us our ticket'*, *'We want civvie suits'* and *'Get a move on, Geddes'*. Geddes had been appointed director of demobilisation.

Lloyd George appealed for patience on the following day, with some effect. But he, and the new War Minister, Winston Churchill, were well aware that the gradualist scheme had failed and would have to be replaced with something which implemented the spirit of 'First in, first out', the soldiers' new popular cry.



Demobilised men handing in rifles

It was indeed foolish ever to have expected that a system which could demobilise short-service conscripts before long- service volunteers - and such an effect was inevitable - could ever command the soldiers' co-operation. On January 29, Churchill announced a far more equitable arrangement. The army was to be reduced from a strength of 3,000,000 to 900,000 forthwith, and was to consist of those who had enlisted after December 31, 1915 (a critical date, for after it conscription had been imposed), were under 37 and had fewer than three wound stripes, it was a system based,

in Churchill's words, on the principle that *'if anyone has to stay, it must be those who are not the oldest, nor those who came the earliest, not those who suffered the most'*. If a surplus remained after those excluded had been released, the age limit for service would be reduced until the required figure of 900,000 was reached.

There was some trouble in reconciling this system with the Coupon Election promise of abolishing conscription - indeed, it could not be reconciled - but there was little public concern that that should be so, since it was demobilisation that had become the overriding emotional issue.

The new scheme worked excellently. By mid-April, only two and a half months after the new plan had been formulated, 78% of soldiers and 55% of officers had been discharged. By February 1920 the target was achieved; the services once more consisted almost exclusively of long-service volunteers.

GREAT WAR MEDALS - THE MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL: Bill Myers



The Meritorious Service Medal is a Victorian award with long traditions which was given a new spin for the First World War.

The MSM was officially instituted on 19 December 1845 and was intended for warrant officers and sergeants of the British Army and Royal Marines in recognition of long and meritorious service.

In 1916 this eligibility was extended to all non-commissioned officers and men for valuable and meritorious service irrespective of length of service.

By January 1917 it could be awarded to cover acts of gallantry or meritorious conduct in the field, but not in the face of the enemy. These were termed "immediate awards" and during the First World War just over 26,000 were approved - including seven bars to denote a second award.

The bulk was for "Meritorious service" but 366 individuals received the MSM "For Gallantry". All the medals issued for acts of gallantry were notified in The London Gazette.

From June 1918, a version of the MSM for the Royal Air Force was introduced for meritorious service, not involving flight. And from January 1919 there was a Royal Navy version.

The MSM is cast from sterling silver and is 36mm in diameter. The recipient's name, rank and unit is inscribed on the rim.

Editor's Note

Whilst Bill has not provided a case study, fortunately the subject of my first WFA talk was awarded the MSM.

In February 1919 when completing the "Certificate of Employment during the War" for **Sergeant Sidney Barnes** the Commanding Officer of the 17th Battalion



Lancashire Fusiliers wrote that: *"Sgt Barnes has done excellent work for the Battalion. Under 4 different Adjutants he has carried on the complicated Orderly Room routine with zeal and devotion to duty without regard to personal danger or discomfort."* Sgt. Barnes was gazetted for MSM on 3 June 1919 and the basis for this would be the above words on his employment certificate.

Sgt. Barnes' Commanding Officer was **Lieutenant Colonel Gilbert Mackereth** and my article in the May 2010 Despatch about the problem with his grave in Spain resulted in worldwide publicity and the eventual movement of his cremated remains to the Lancashire Fusilier's Gallipoli Garden at Bury. Thanks to the absence of a case study from Bill this has resulted in the significance of the Mackereth story not being forgotten in my last Despatch.



OUR DEAR AND ONLY SON LOVED,
MISSED AND REMEMBERED
- Private James Henry Williams East
Lancashire Regiment

A FAVOURITE POSTCARD: Andrew Brooks (+S)



It is perhaps appropriate that I have chosen this postcard booklet, dated 1928, for this issue of 'Despatch'. The connection concerns Corporal John Mellanby 166075 of the 149th Siege Battery who died on Armistice Day, 11th November 1918. He is buried in Etaples Military Cemetery, Plot XL1V, Row F, Grave 12. His full story is recorded in an article I wrote for the WFA Bulletin No.85, November 2009.

France and Belgium produced many booklets in the aftermath of the war and the

proceeds went towards the reconstruction of the countless destroyed villages and towns along the Western Front. This particular booklet was produced specifically for the British Legion Pilgrimage in 1928 and the twenty postcards are listed on the inside page (below).

C. F. N° 1	Athies	C. F. N° 11	Fampoux
C. F. N° 2	Arleux en Gohelle	C. F. N° 12	Oppy
C. F. N° 3	Bailloul	C. F. N° 13	Point-du-Jour - Route de Douai
C. F. N° 4	Cabaret Rouge	C. F. N° 14	Roclaincourt
C. F. N° 5	Duisans	C. F. N° 15	La Targette
C. F. N° 6	Dury	C. F. N° 16	Thélus
C. F. N° 7	Ecoivres, Mont S' Eloi	C. F. N° 17	Thélus - Bois carré
C. F. N° 8	Feuchy Chapel à Tilloy-les-Mofflaines	C. F. N° 18	Villers Station
C. F. N° 9	Arras - Cimetière angl. du Faubourg d'Amiens	C. F. N° 19	Vimy
C. F. N° 10	Fampoux	C. F. N° 20	Wancourt

The Athies Communal British Military Cemetery postcard image (below) is typical of all the other cards, showing the flowers in full bloom.



Many postcards were sent in the immediate post-war period by visitors to the battlefields as 'battlefield tourism' commenced in 1919. There was a desire to see the grave of their loved one and an excellent account of the difficulties of an early visit can be read in WFA 'Stand To! No.19. Nellie Burrin found her brother's grave on the Somme and her description of the devastated area and the distances she had to walk to

find these remote cemeteries show how determined she was.

In the following years people travelled in groups, either with firms like Thomas Cook or with voluntary organisations such as the Church Army, Salvation Army and the YMCA. The booklet is part of the ephemera kept by John Mellanby's parents and bought by me some years ago.

The pilgrimage was organised along military lines and the leader on all the twenty plus trains held at least the Army rank of Captain. This would have been the first time that many people, such as Mr. & Mrs. Mellanby would have been able to afford to visit the battlefields. The trip took place between August 4th to the 9th and departed from many ports. They were in the North Eastern Party (K) and were based in Arras. Special trains from the three centres (Arras,

Amiens and Lille) collected them each day and took them to Beaucourt, Vimy and Ypres.

All the groups met at Ypres for a special ceremony at the Menin Gate. They were told it would be possible to make a personal visit to a cemetery provided it was within twenty-five miles from Arras or Vimy or five miles from Ypres. Whether or not

they visited their son's grave we may never know. He is buried at Etaples, about 50 miles from Arras and this was outside the mileage allowed, however I'm sure they managed to do so! I am also sure that John's wife was on the trip, although again, as she would have joined at West Hartlepool and not with his parents at Greatham, I am not absolutely sure. (Copies of the Bulletin & Stand To! articles referred to are on our website.)

WESTERN FRONT AND OTHER EVENTS TIMELINE - 5th NOVEMBER 1918 to 28th June 1919 (based on www.greatwar.co.uk and "Chronology of the Great War" by Greenhill Books)

Some of the centenary events to the Versailles Peace Treaty being signed and published are in the table below:-

Nov-18		6	Cologne entered by British troops
	President Wilson sends final note to German Government with Allies' armistice proposals	12	British troops cross Rhine
5		14	Armistice on Western Front prolonged to 17 January 1919
	Sedan taken by United States forces	15	Poland severs diplomatic relations with Germany
6		Jan-19	
	German armistice delegates arrive Allied HQ	11	British Ministers arrive Paris for Peace Conference
8		12	Supreme War Council sits re renewal of Armistice
	Mauberge taken by British forces	17	Germany signs new Armistice Terms. Armistice extended
	HMS Britannia sunk by submarine off Gibraltar	18	First Peace Conference Meeting. Clemenceau elected President
	Revolution breaks out in Berlin	25	League of Nations officially recognised as part of Treaty
	Kaiser decides to abdicate	Feb-19	
10		12	Renewal of Armistice conditions settled by Allies
	Ghent occupied by Belgian forces	14	League of Nations Covenant approved
	Kaiser crosses frontier to Holland	17	Extension of Armistice Terms signed
	British mine-sweeper "Ascot" sunk by submarine off N.E. coast of England	Mar-19	
11		10	Germany's Army to be limited to 100,000, voluntary engagements etc
	Mons retaken by British forces	13	Armistice negotiations renewed in Brussels
	Armistice concluded between Allied and Associated Powers and Germany. Hostilities cease 11 am	19	Germany's Navy to be limited to 36 ships
12		Apr-19	
	Emperor of Austria abdicates	15	General outline of Peace conditions complete
	German-Austrian Republic proclaimed	20	Allies refuse to receive German "messengers" & insist on plenipotentiaries
15			Allies to extend occupation zone to ports if Germans refuse to accept Peace Terms. Reparation Commission accepts Sub-Commission's report
	Germans arrive Firth of Forth in cruiser "Konigsberg" to arrange surrender of German fleet	24	Italian delegates refuse to modify Adriatic claims; Signor Orlando leaves Paris
16		28	Report of Commission on
	Allied Armies begin march into Germany		
	Polish Govt declare Poland an Independent & Sovereign state.		
	Hungary declares independence		
18			
	Last German troops recross French frontier		
	Brussels reoccupied by Belgian forces		
21			
	German fleet arrives Rosyth en route to internment in Scapa Flow		
24			
	British & USA troops reach German frontier		
26			
	French troops cross into Germany		
Dec-18			
1			
	British and USA troops cross into Germany		
4			
	Demobilisation of the British Army begins		

	Responsibility for War submitted to Peace Conference		troops in Baltic Provinces
	League of Nations comes into being	Jun-19	
	German delegates arrive in Paris, 28 & 29.	2	Terms of peace presented to Austrian delegates
		3	Austrian Peace Terms published
May-19		10	Austrian delegates protest against Peace Terms
4	Belgium decides to sign Treaty		Senator Knox's resolution (asking separation of League of Nations Covenant from Peace Treaty)
	Peace Treaty approved by private plenary session; Marshal Foch dissatisfied with security for France	16	Allies reply to German counter proposals presented and published
6	Italian delegates return to Paris	19	Allies ready to occupy German territory if Peace not signed
7	Disposal of German Colonies settled by Peace Conference	20	Signor Orlando resigns; Signor Nitti forms fresh Cabinet
	Peace Terms communicated to German delegates and published		German (Scheidemann) Cabinet decides against signing Peace Treaty, and falls
8	Germany protests against Peace Terms	21	Germans scuttle their Fleet at Scapa Flow
11	German delegates protest against Terms officially	22	Herr Bauer forms German Ministry
12	National Assembly meets in Berlin	23	Germany announces readiness to sign
14	Austrian delegates arrive in Paris	26	Fighting at Berlin and Hamburg
14	German protest Note against economic terms received	27	Turkey's case & Allied Reply published
20	Rhine Army ready to march into Germany in case of refusal of Peace Terms		President Wilson signs Treaty by which U.S.A. will assist France in case of unprovoked German attack
22	Allies stern reply to German protest	28	
27	Draft Treaty presented by Peace Conference to Poland	28	PEACE TREATY SIGNED AND PUBLISHED (at Versailles)
28	Counter proposals by German Government, published 15 June		
31	Allies present Note to Germany re		

MUSEUM REPORTS

Liverpool Scottish Regimental Museum Trust: Ian Riley

The Illustrated Diary of Private William Henry Campbell

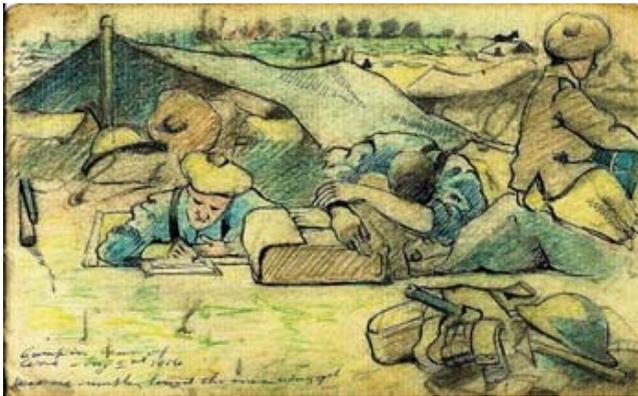
In the previous edition of *Despatch* we mentioned the projected exhibition at the Artists Club in Liverpool of some of the sketches from the diary of Private William Henry Campbell who served with the

Liverpool Scottish [1st/10th King's (Liverpool Regiment)] in France and Flanders from July 1916 until killed in action in the 55th (West Lancashire) Division attack from Wieltje towards St Julien in the Battle of Pilckem Ridge, the opening of the Passchendaele campaign, on 31st July 1917. It was in this battle that the Battalion's Medical Officer, the double VC winner Captain Noel Chavasse was mortally wounded.

Two examples of the sketches are on the opposite/next page.

The preparation has proved a very time-consuming but worthwhile exercise as this is the first time there has been any significant display of the sketches in the intervening century. We have, additionally, produced a forty-eight page booklet in A4 format carrying about seventy of Campbell's sketches in colour interwoven with 7,000 words extracted from an approximate total of 20,000 words that Campbell jammed into the one hundred pages of a pocket sketchpad rather smaller than an adult male hand.

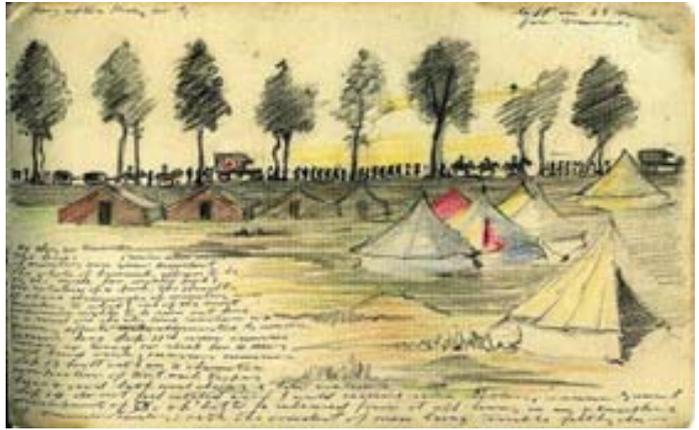
Choosing the sketches to reproduce and put on the wall was fraught with difficulty. An exercise that could probably be done in a



morning by one person seemed to stretch over four weeks when carried out by a committee! Captioning proved another difficulty as in the nature of this crammed diary, entries and associated sketches are often separated by several pages - Campbell drew where he could and then fitted more of his miniscule script around the pictures at a later date.

Even the choice of paper for printing proved contentious (Bockingford Archival

Watercolour for the technically minded) as did the image size (about A5) and frame (16 inches by 12 inches). Discussion with the printer about colour reproduction and image



trimming (dog-eared corners to show or not?) took time and extensive trials. The circumstances in which these drawings were done 100 years ago has also had an effect

on the images. Often sketching in the front line under shellfire or in a dugout he describes as dark and damp, the crayon off one image has frequently carried on to the facing page but this has helped us to work out the page order in what is a partially dis-bound and dis-ordered document. Choosing the words to publish was no less difficult.

Private William Henry Campbell was a volunteer aged 25 when he was killed. He was a 'house painter and decorator' by trade and had attended art school. Over a year, he recorded his thoughts and observations both in miniscule handwriting and vivid drawing using crayon or pencil, often actually in the front line. One was of Joe Sangster, a member of his draft, who he drew whilst he was sleeping a few days before he was killed by shellfire and whose last words before he was hit were 'I

hope Fritz lets me finish my dinner'. Others were of a man removing lice from his kilt; men around an ornate cast-iron stove in a rear area; different types of shell burst seen from 300 yards or simply the contrasting landscapes of war, either thronged or empty of men. All are subjects found in the book, often with haunting footnotes.

The diary is not an easy read: Campbell often seems highly depressed; suffering sharp mood swings and often has difficulty in coping with the range of personalities and social backgrounds he encounters amidst the stress of war. At other times he is highly positive. His account is one of contrasts. At one moment he says he can stand the war no longer and hints at self-harm; at the next he has volunteered (and been accepted) for the scout section and is describing a patrol as 'the most exciting yet'.

He does not get on well with others: often men are 'mal' (bad) or 'filthy dogs'. He takes some pleasure in having 'avoided fatigues' when the rest of the company have struggled up to the line with defence stores. He has little time for the 1/9th Battalion of the King's Regiment to whom he is temporarily attached ... 'All good fortune to the gallant 9th but ...[but he would rather go to war with someone else]'. Then, when posted back to the Liverpool Scottish, he is rather sorry to leave.

We feel that the diary is a means of coping, a mechanism of self-debate whilst he struggles to rationalise events about him. However, although his account is atypical in its intensity, he deserves to be heard and his art, often drawn in a dripping dugout by the light of a candle shaken by gunfire, deserves to be seen.

The Artists Club in Liverpool is private and viewing until 19th November will only be possible by an appointment (normally on a Wednesday daytime) made through the Museum Trust (contact below); the Artists Club should NOT be approached. Images are available framed, captioned and mounted at

£30 each. Subsequently they will be available unframed by post through the Trust's website www.liverpoolscottish.org.uk

The booklet, *Drawing on the Experiences of Comradeship and War*, professionally printed on high quality paper) is available by post cost £7.50 including postage through 01925 766157 or

ilirley@liverpoolscottish.org.uk

RAYMOND WHO HAS HELPED MANY TO
KNOW THAT DEATH IS NOT THE END
- Second Lieutenant Raymond Lodge
South Lancashire Regt.

Fusiliers Museum - 18 Victoria Crosses for 2018 Exhibition: Sarah Stevenson

The '18 Victoria Crosses for 2018' exhibition had a very successful opening at The Fusilier Museum in Bury on Friday 5th October and will run until Thursday 13th December. It aims to bring together all eighteen Victoria Crosses awarded to the Lancashire Fusiliers during The First World War, telling the extraordinary stories of the eighteen men that displayed the ultimate courage and self-sacrifice in the line of duty.

The exhibition has been made possible thanks to the loan of eight Victoria Crosses from the Lord Ashcroft collection at the Imperial War Museum, The Guards Museum and from private owners.

Unfortunately the Museum have not been able to locate the Victoria Cross which belonged to Lieutenant Colonel Bertram Best-Dunkley who served with the 2/5th Battalion, Lancashire Fusiliers. On the 31st July 1917 at Wieltje, Belgium, he was in command of his battalion when they came under attack with machine gun fire at close range. Best-Dunkley dashed forward, rallied his leading waves, and personally led them to the assault. He died of his wounds a few days later.

Best-Dunkley's VC was sold at auction in South Africa in 1982 and 1984, and at Spinks, London in 1986. It was also owned for a period by a Canadian medal collector but its current location is unknown. The museum has undertaken a media campaign in the hope that the owner will come forward, allowing all of the Victoria Crosses to be united over the centenary of the Armistice.

Also on 5th October the museum hosted a special talk by Michael Naxton who was Lord Ashcroft's private Curator of over 30 years. The former Head of Medals at Sotheby's gave a fascinating talk about his career acquiring the world's largest Victoria Cross collection.

Lancashire Infantry Museum - A Jubilant Peace? : Jane Davies, Curator

After 4 years of service in France and Flanders it was weary smiles rather than wild celebrations that greeted the news an Armistice between the Germans and Allies had been negotiated.

The telegram, announcing the cessation of hostilities, arrived at 1st Battalion, East Lancashire Regiment HQ south of Valenciennes at 08.45am on the 11th November 1918 stating:

"Hostilities will cease 11.00 hours to-day November 11th AAA Troops will stand fast at line reached at that hour which will be reported by wire to Corps HQ. AAA Defensive precautions will be maintained AAA. There will be no intercourse of any description with the enemy AAA Ends"

As the Commanding Officer read the telegram out on parade there were a few smiles but the Battalion remained largely impassive. Training carried on as normal in the form of a Battalion attack. Private **George Carter**, in a letter home to his sweetheart described the reaction.

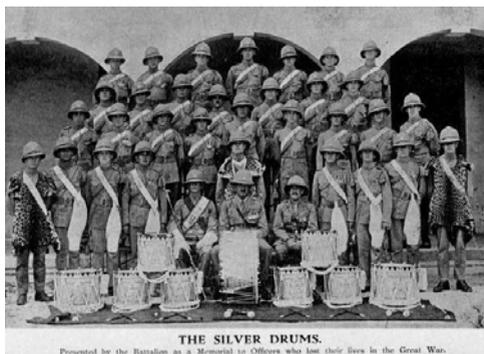


"How are you feeling now-a-days, a little jubilant, I guess we can hardly realise out here yet that there is no war on. When it was read out to us on the morning of the 11th we were just starting off practising a stunt, over the top, and we carried on, it was just the same as if nothing had happened."

Although the fighting had ceased, the 1st Battalion were still required to carry out duties. The Battalion found themselves employed on the lines of communication and escorting prisoners of war in the vicinity of Abbeville. In December, George Carter was still in France. He found himself "doing parades in the mornings and cleaning up the town (Cambrai) in our spare time".

From December 1918 onwards the Battalion was gradually demobilised until only a Cadre remained. George Carter returned to England in January 1919 and the Cadre returned to England in May. After handing in all the Government stores the personnel then proceeded on well-earned leave for two months.

During WW1 the 1st Battalion had suffered 52 Officers and 1,187 other ranks killed. In 1924, on the square at St Georges's Barracks, Malta, Field Marshal Lord Plumer acknowledged the debt the men of the



battalion had made. A set of Silver Drums were formally handed over to the current soldiers of the Battalion (these were presented by past and present officers and relatives of officers who were killed) to

complement the eight silver bugles (presented by the people of Accrington and Burnley in memory of all Warrant and Non-Commissioned Officers and men of the Battalion) that had been presented in 1921.

Private George Carter's letters can be viewed at the Lancashire Infantry Museum as can the Silver Drums and Memorial Album to the Officers.

Manchester Regiment Collection: Liam Hart, Assistant Archivist

Over the last few weeks, Tameside Local Studies and Archives has taken two unique artefacts into the Manchester Regiment collection. The first is a group of 17 pictures of men of the 2/6th Battalion Manchester Regiment. The photographs shed light into a relatively undocumented yet crucial time in the battalions training. The pictures depict the men of the 2/6th digging practice trenches, posing for pictures with their entrenching tools and eating their sandwiches while training in Southport C. February 1915.



Certain clues in the images help us narrow down the date for example, the service caps are not the trench caps which were issued in 1916. Further clues point to late winter as the trees are bare and the ground looks recently thawed from a particularly cold winter. Finally, some of the men appear in their dress uniform which is red and some men do not appear to have a uniform at all too. This is all again due to shortages experienced in this time as equipment and uniforms were all given as a priority to battalions which were overseas already.

While there are names which can be found on the back of some of the photographs, not much is known about whom the men are and what their fate was. What we do know is that in February 1917 the battalion was deployed to France and Belgium and would be involved in the Third Battle of Ypres in October 1917 and the First Battles of the Somme in 1918 which ultimately destroyed the battalion, as due to high casualties the 2/6th was reduced to cadre strength in April and eventually disbanded in July 1918.

The second artefact is the personal war diary of Private Charles R. Grimes of the 6th Battalion Manchester Regiment. Diaries of soldiers during the First World War can be rare as they were against army regulations to keep. However, this did not stop soldiers from keeping a written record of their experiences. This diary in particular gives a unique insight into the life of a Territorial Force soldier in Egypt and Gallipoli during the First World War, including the dramatic arrest of alleged spies in Alexandria.

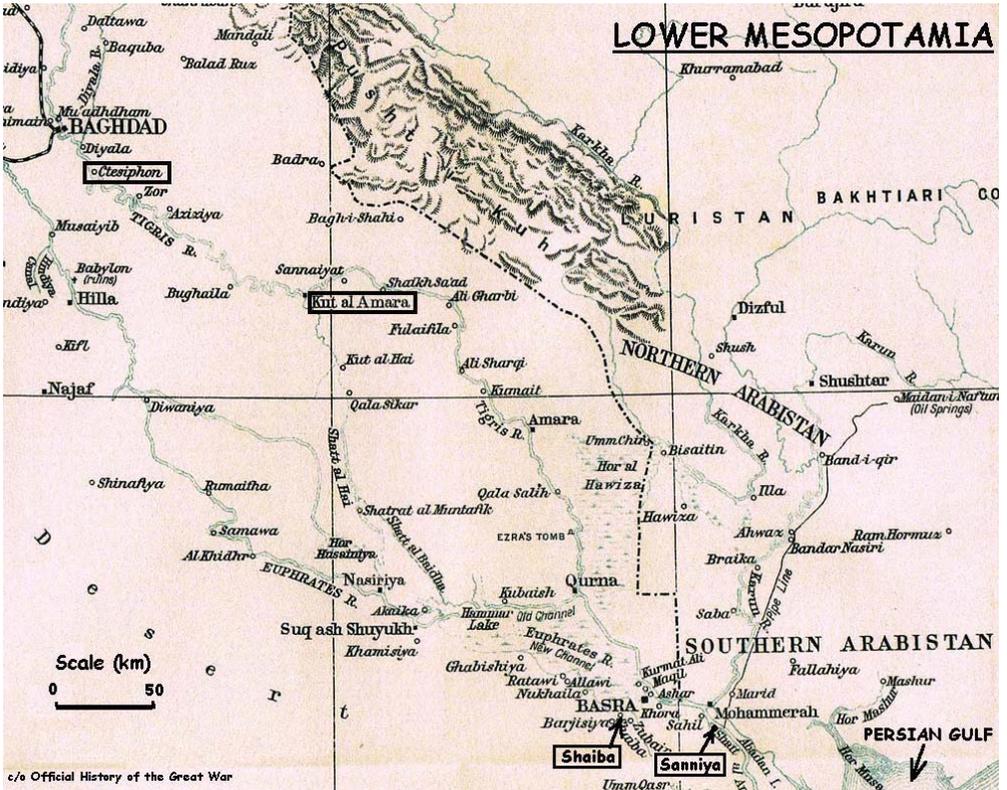
Charles chronicles his adventures to the Citadel in Alexandria, long marches in the desert, playing football with his friends in the sand and how he was trained to become a signaller in the battalion. Though he was no doubt exhausted due to the climate and training, Charles' writing conveys an idyllic scene of childhood exploration despite the foreboding war being fought in the background which gradually begins to impact his life and eventually ends his life one month after he landed in Gallipoli.

Both of these donations are invaluable resources to anyone wishing to understand more about not only the 6th Battalion Manchester Regiment, but also about how soldiers from the First World War were trained. We are deeply honoured to be entrusted with protecting the legacy of these men and will ensure that their history will be preserved for future generations.

HENRY (HARRY) LUKE GORDON SAGE, 1892-1943: Graham Kemp (+S)

Harry was cousin of my grandfather. He enlisted in the Regular Army (No/8027) on 30th December 1909, joining the 2nd Battalion

The Norfolks were involved in Battle of Shaiba in April 1915, where their commanding officer led a bayonet charge with his sword - this was the last recorded occasion of an officer to do so in the British Army. The Battalion sustained heavy



of the Norfolk Regiment. When the Great War broke out, the Battalion was stationed in Poona, as part of 18th Brigade of the 6th (Poona) Division. On the 6th November 1914, they embarked at Bombay arriving Sanniya, Mesopotamia on 15th November 1914.

However Harry was not with them since his Medal Index Card indicates he did not arrive in the Asiatic Theatre until 25th February 1915. In Harry's letter to my grandfather dated 10th April 1915 (referred to at the end of this report) he describes how he travelled to Marseilles before returning to the Persian Gulf. This explains his delayed entry to the Asiatic Theatre.

casualties in the attack, but Harry was not one of them.

An unknown member of the Battalion wrote of the Battle:

It was a real soldier's battle; the General said so, and the nearest thing to a disaster I ever want to be in... All's well that ends well, but it was near enough.

In September 1915, the 2nd Norfolk Battalion was involved in attacks at Kut and there is an account of Harry's company (D Company) in action on the 28th September.

About midday I (Major Lodge) was ordered to send a company to prolong the line of the 110th to the right - "D" Coy: went out. No sooner had they got out of their trenches to move forward when a battery (4 guns) Q.F. got on to them at once, luckily they were in column of platoons with a good distance between each, and, although the shooting was accurate nobody was touched.

After the capture of Kut, the British under General Townsend advanced towards Baghdad. However they were rebuffed at Ctesiphon and forced to retreat back to Kut, where from the 7th December 1915 to end of April 1916 the British including Harry's Norfolks were besieged. Starving and with no relief, Townsend was forced to surrender to the Turks.

The Turks treated the officers well, but not so the other ranks. They were forced marched across the desert - so called death marches (although wounded got transport). Harry was one of the wounded. He had been wounded on the 30th December 1915 and there is a record of him being awarded a 'wounded stripe' on that date.

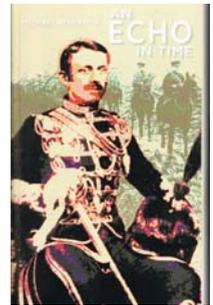
The Turkish POW camps that awaited the captured other ranks were death camps, and four out of every five died in the camps, most dying of intestinal disorders. Of the 258 other ranks of the 2nd Norfolks who were captured, Harry was one of the 67 (30%) that survived captivity to make it home. On his return to England he was discharged from the army in April 1919. This would be hard for a career soldier, but his discharge documents comment he was no longer fit for service due to ill health. His captivity took its toll, and may have contributed to his early death at the age of 51.

As well as the 1915 Asiatic Star and standard Victory Medal Harry was also given the Silver War Badge, a sign of him being a wounded veteran (replacing the 'wound stripe').

While serving in Mesopotamia, he received a letter from my grandfather, Walter Kemp. Walter was a machinist for Vickers Maxim, and was not allowed to sign up. I think he felt little guilty on this, and wrote to his relatives who had signed up, as means of supporting their efforts. In his April 1915 reply to my grandfather Harry comments that he is more valuable making the machine guns than as a fighting soldier. A copy of Harry's letter is on our website, and whilst some bits are missing, as it was written in pencil, and parts were unreadable, I do not think it detracts from the letter which describes very well what it was like in Mesopotamia in 1915.

THE LANCASHIRE CONTEMPTIBLES AND "AN ECHO IN TIME"

On 11th August I ventured across the Pennines, overcoming rail and taxi problems en route, to present my Lancashire Contemptibles talk to the Yorkshire Branch at the Manor Academy on the outskirts of York. My PowerPoint presentation went smoothly and afterwards one of my conversations was with Michael Atherton, a fellow Lancashire man but not the cricketer, who politely told me how much he had enjoyed my talk particularly what I had said about the 20th Hussars.



His great uncle, Charles Atherton, had served with them and Mike gave me a copy of the book "An Echo in Time" he had written dedicated to his memory. In the foreword Mike explains it is a book of fiction based on fact and is the story of one man's war from the beginning to his end.

My journey home passed quickly as I enjoyed reading Mike's story comparing it to my knowledge of the 20th Hussars actions

and I was nearly half-way through it on arrival at Preston. His mention of the German prisoner of war camp at Leigh also reminded me about my presentation about that at our Christmas 2012 meeting.

Once home, time for further reading had plenty of competition and I completed reading the book when in France (see back page) by which time I had learned about Charles' recovery from serious wounding at Wytshaete in early November 1914 and his death on 2nd May 1915 after being mortally wounded near Hooge.

Michael's concept of telling his great uncle's story as the result of very detailed and involved dreams he has had about his ancestor's war makes for an interesting read. I hope whoever wins "An Echo in Time" in this November's meeting raffle enjoys it as much as I have.

BRANCH AFFAIRS



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2018 ARMISTICE PRIZE

This year two schools submitted a total of 28 entries. The entries from Ribblesdale High School were trench models with one supplemented by a PowerPoint presentation containing facts about WW1 whilst the entries from All Hallows High School, Penwortham were text or artwork. The entries were marked by Fiona Bishop, Paul Conlon and Peter Denby and I collated the scores.

The winner was Bethany Holland of All Hallows (see back page for her photograph with trophy). Her winning entry was a booklet entitled "World War 1" which described some of the war's main events and features. Bethany was presented with the trophy, a cheque for £50 and a book (Ian Westwell's "The Complete Illustrated History of World War 1") at her school on 18th October.

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

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

BARRIE HAROLD BERTRAM (13th February 1943 to 4th August 2018)

On joining the WFA in 2004 and attending the Lancaster meetings I could not fail to notice the solid and knowledgeable gentleman who chose to sit in the same sector of the meeting room as myself. However it was not until early 2008, when I became Editor of Despatch that I commenced to properly appreciate Barrie. Starting with his article telling about Captain Coutart de Butts Taylor from Jersey in *Issue 1* to his thorough review of a book about infantry battalion commanders in *Issue 18* he has contributed to 16 Issues. Despatch owes a lot to Barrie and the timing of his sad loss to us has singled him out for a special mention in this last Despatch I will produce.

Barrie served as an aircraft engineer in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (R.E.M.E.) attached to the Army Air Corps. The photograph shows him proudly wearing on the left the 3 medals which recognise his service in:



Northern Ireland (3 tours) and Aden.
The Falklands.
United Nations (troubles in Cyprus).

Whilst the medal on the right is for Long Service and Good Conduct.

Following his military service Barrie became passionately interested in Jersey's First World War and shortly after his death the Jersey Evening Post published an Appreciation by a friend of Barrie. In summary the writer describes how Barrie was instrumental in establishing the Channel Island Great War Study Group which provides an information source and help for researchers and relatives. He mentions four words which spring to mind when thinking of Barrie: tenacious, co-ordinating, meticulous and generous. Barrie brought the same attributes to his participation in our Branch activities and I am particularly grateful for the way he applied them in his contributions to Despatch. "My" sector of our meeting room is not the same without him.

READY. AYE READY! NOW FOR GLORY
BOYS. SAFE AT LAST
- Pte George Edward Sawyer Loyal North
Lancs Regt.

MEETING REPORTS

The Americans on the Meuse-Argonne: May 2018 (21 attended)

On 8th May 2018, the Branch were pleased to welcome back the well-known Author and Oral Historian, **Peter Hart**. The subject for his talk was the contribution of USA forces to the latter stages of the Great War.

The political decision for America to enter the War in 1917 undoubtedly provided an important psychological boost for the French and British forces at a time of great uncertainty for the Allies when the Russian contribution was neutralised by internal strife and German military successes on the Eastern Front. However, the build-up of the American forces and essential infrastructure was inevitably slow, with few experienced

soldiers available amongst the rank and file or the Officer cadre. As a consequence, the Americans that started to arrive in France from May 1917 contained a majority of men with little experience and little equipment. The French and British military infrastructure had to commit major resources to help equip and train the new arrivals. At the same time, the US politicians and military were determined to maintain the independence of the USA military units. Thus, any significant integration of USA soldiers into French or British military units was politically unacceptable, an attitude that was reinforced by the Commander of the American Expeditionary Force, General Pershing.

With hindsight, it was inevitable that the new arrivals made many of the same mistakes that the British forces had done earlier in the War. Courage alone, offset by political constraints and naivety, was not the best way to overcome an enemy as experienced and determined as the Germans. It was not until May 1918, at Chateau Thierry that American units started to make a substantive tactical contribution. July 1918 also provided an opportunity for them to demonstrate greater effectiveness, when some American units were posted to help British and French forces during the Second Battle of the Marne. Under their own military leadership they also performed well in battle at St Mihiel on 1 September 1918. Unfortunately, the positive outcome of these moderately successful actions seemed to prompt the perception amongst the US forces that 'War was Easy'.

On 26th September 1918 the Americans were tasked with an attack in the Meuse-Argonne region, part of a big push by the Allies on much of the Western Front to hasten the German retreat that had started in August. The Americans attacked on a three Corps front, one of their targets being a railway line functioning as a strategic German supply line. In difficult terrain, with

inexperienced troops and unsophisticated leadership that had not fully grasped the importance of an 'All-Arms' approach, there were heavy casualties, with some units becoming isolated. One such battalion suffered 440 casualties out of 670 men. Some strategic targets were only secured about three weeks after the initial target date. However, one cannot fault the determination and courage of the Americans to continue to take the fight to the Germans, up to the last minutes of the hostilities on 11th November 1918.

As always, Peter Hart's talk prompted a substantial number of questions which Peter responded to with his usual combination of expertise and good humour. (Chris Payne)

From Brandhoek to Camp Bastion: June 1918 (17 attended)



At the outset **Jonathan Bell** indicated his medical credentials to talk on the subject holding posts in the NHS and having

experience from 4 tours of duty with the British Army, 2 in Iraq and 2 in Afghanistan. In his interesting and knowledgeable talk his approach was basically to compare the WW1 situation with today. With regard to casualty evacuation in WW1 it took 5 days to reach a UK hospital from France compared to today when a casualty from round the globe takes 2 days.

He spoke about how a soldier's "Buddy" is trained in basic aid and the life-saving benefits of tourniquets. All troops today carry one. Wounds should be treated as dirty, irrigated (washed) with salt water and the importance of "debridement" i.e. cutting away of dead tissue. He particularly mentioned the

value of Celox gauze which promotes clotting.

He mentioned notable individuals. Harold Gillies the "father" of reconstructive surgery and Archibald McIndoe who formed the Guinea Pig club. Robert Jones who championed the use of splints in WW1 to immobilise fracture of lower limbs thereby reducing mortality rates from 80% to 20%.

Speaking about the importance of blood transfusions Jon talked about Captain Oswald Ward Robertson who in WW1 proved transfusions to be safe and established the first blood bank permitting blood to be given quickly and safely in forward medical units. A massive advance in saving lives. He also spoke on the role of diagnostic imaging by early X-ray machines in WW1 and the importance of CT scanners at Camp Bastion.

Territorial Gunners at War: July 2018 (23 attended)

Terry Dean gave a very informative talk based on Captain Walter William Wadsworth's book about the 1st West Lancashire Brigade Royal Field Artillery in 55th West Lancashire Division.

To vary delivery he used two narrators, as well as himself, to tell the story of the 1st West Lancashire Brigade's experiences in the war. Brigadier John Powell spoke the words of his grand father Captain Wadsworth and Terry's friend Trevor spoke words from Reverend Coop's Story of the 55th Division.

When the war started the 1st West Lancashire Brigade moved to Kent to complete their training and protect the South-East coast. In late September 1915 they exchanged their 12 out-dated 15-pound field guns for 18 pounders and moved to France.

They gained experience providing artillery support to Canadians at Kemmel before the 55th Division was brought together in early 1916 and they served with the Division in the front line south west of Arras. In April 1916

the Brigade's firepower increased to 16 guns, 4 of which were 4.5 inch howitzers and they were renamed 275 Brigade.

In late July 1916 they moved with the 55th Division to take part in the Somme battles. In mid September 275 Brigade supported the New Zealand Division in the attack on Flers, the great feature of which was the first use of tanks. They then moved north to the Ypres salient where their firepower increased to 24 guns prior to 275 taking part in the Third Battle of Ypres.

Their war continued near Cambrai then at Givenchy where they helped stem the German's *Georgette* offensive. Terry told how Captain Wadsworth was seriously wounded in the German's bombardment of British positions on 9th April. He then went on to tell about 275's involvement in the Advance to Victory

Terry's talk contained plenty of well illustrated slides. There were also the oral recordings which further enhanced his talk. (Fiona Bishop)

A Moonlight Massacre: The Night Operation on the Passchendaele Ridge, 2 December 1917: August 2018 (19 attended)

This talk was based on **Michael LoCicero's** PhD thesis at Birmingham University and his similarly titled resulting book.

Michael explained that officially the 3rd Battle of Ypres ('Passchendaele')

ended - at least from the British point of view - on 10th November 1917. But during a casual 'shelf browse' Michael found a book describing a tail-piece to the battle, this being an attack by the British on the Passchendaele Ridge on the night of 1st/2nd

December 1917; indeed to the Germans this was the last British offensive of the battle.

Michael then began extensive research into the action, which he describes as an excellent case study of the formulaic British approach to operations in late 1917 and of Liddell Hart's view that "Darkness is a friend of the skilled infantryman". It also allows for a reinterpretation of the final stages of 3rd Ypres.

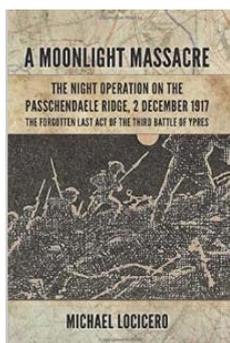
Michael gave us a brief overview of the operations during 3rd Ypres, describing a 'strategic phase' (31st July to 2nd October 1917) attempting to clear the Germans from Belgium, followed by a 'post strategic phase' (26th October to 10th November 1917) seeking to gain high ground on Passchendaele Ridge for the winter, with a view to resuming offensive action in 1918. (In the event, in Westminster Lloyd George and his Government were to veto any such further offensive action).

Thus it was that this further British attack was planned, the objective being to make a short advance from an exposed salient on a front of some 2,800 yards north and north-west of Passchendaele. On the right the 8th (regular) division, advancing south to north, would assault with one brigade; whilst the 32nd (new army) division was to advance on the left flank.

If successful this advance would secure important observation points, increase defensive security, and expand the salient for the mooted further offensive action mentioned above.

Objectives would include the high summit of Hill 52 and a position known as 'Teall Cottage' which was situated on the boundary between the proposed lines of advance of the 8th and 32nd divisions and which held German machine gun posts - truly a 'fox amongst the hens'.

Major General C D Shute was GoC 32nd division. An advocate of night attacks, he planned this assault as a set piece surprise



attack on a moonlit night. Indeed the original late November date for the action was put back to the night of 1st/2nd December 1917 to benefit from a waning gibbous (just past full) moon, which would afford just sufficient visibility to the attackers.

Shute's counterpart, Major General W C G Heneker, GoC 8th division had reservations about Shute's plan. He knew the German defence on Passchendaele Ridge was well organised and in depth, with artillery support, and he was particularly concerned about the proximity of the German machine guns on a moonlit night.

Higher command supported Shute, and zero hour was set for 01.55 on 2nd December 1917.

The initial assembly for the assault went undetected, but within 15 seconds of zero hour the German machine guns opened up and by zero hour plus seven minutes the machine guns were dominant, inflicting crippling losses, the gunners' moonlit visibility being enhanced by a light covering of snow on the ground.

Thus it was that within minutes of zero hour the attacking impetus was lost. Some positions, including Hill 52, were to be captured only to be later lost, and overall the story was one of limited advance, repulse or outright failure.

On the morning of 2nd December 1917 Shute unsuccessfully attempted to get his 32nd division advance going again. In the afternoon German counter attacks reclaimed ground which had been lost to 32nd division. Although on the 8th division front there was not much ground for the Germans to reclaim, what counter attack they did make was broken up by British artillery fire.

The following day GHQ decided against any further attacks. The date of this decision - 3rd December 1917 - is noteworthy: on that day in Parliament Lord Derby's request for more men to relieve the manpower shortage was refused by the Government; and

negotiations began at Brest-Litovsk to end the war on the eastern front. Haig decided on a defensive policy thenceforth.

British casualties of this action were over 1600 killed, wounded and missing and 80 prisoners of war; the German casualties were 800 killed, wounded and missing with 96 prisoners taken.

Michael showed us the summings-up of the main players. It seemed to us in the audience that Shute blamed the men for the failure; Heneker thought events had vindicated his reservations; and General Sir Henry Rawlinson acknowledged the action had been a failure.

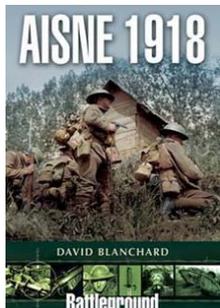
This was indeed an unusual failure for Shute. In an effort to gain high ground on Passchendaele Ridge it was perhaps the best plan in the circumstances, and it is the case that the Germans were unaware of the impending night assault of 2nd December 1917, but ultimately the plan was flawed, not least the decision to launch it in the combination of moonlight and ground snow which afforded the defenders too much visibility.

This was a fascinating talk, and the audience was poised with questions, but regrettably events had to be curtailed so that the speaker could catch the last train back to Birmingham. (Peter Denby)

SLEEP ON DEAR SON IN A FAR OFF
GRAVE WE MAY NEVER SEE
- Pte T Seddon Manchester Regiment

The Aisne Again: May 1918 - the essence of blitzkrieg: September 2018 (24 attended)

David Blanchard opened this interesting talk with the disclosure that two of his relatives,



a great uncle who died in the battle and a grandfather, that he never met, had both been present at the Aisne during the final phase of the series of battles that comprised the German Spring Offensive in 1918.

In this Third Battle of the Aisne which began on the 27th May, David commented that General Ludendorff was attempting to draw troops away from the Ypres area with this thrust towards Paris.

The German First and Seventh armies mounted the assault, code-named 'Blucher' against the French Sixth Army. British troops including the 50th Division (all under the command of the French) had arrived in the area in late April, they had been sent there for a rest after the fighting in the Ypres Salient. David's grandfather was in the 8th Durham Light Infantry, part of the 50th Division.

[During question time our past Branch Chairman, Stan Wilkinson, recounted that his grandfather had been captured and made a PoW in almost the exact same spot where David's grandfather had been with his regiment.]

David continued his account with a study of the ground over which the battle was fought, why it was initially such a success and also how it was not a typical Western Front type battle. He set the scene with a description of the formidable Chemin des Dames plateau and gave impressions of what the recently arrived British thought about the area. The Generals certainly did not like the position they occupied and neither did a Captain Spicer who felt 'they were living on the edge of a volcano'. However, a Lt. Witherington soon became sunburnt and felt he was in a peaceful place compared with Ypres or the Somme. It was deceptive and although the countryside was looking splendid and it was said later that the noise of the bullfrogs muffled the wheels on the German artillery as it was moved forward,

this was probably an exaggeration as the wheels were covered with leather!

The battle commenced with another typical Georg Bruchmuller artillery barrage. There was a slight difference in that 50% of the shells were gas as he did not want the terrain over which the German troops would advance to be churned up by too many high explosive shells. The barrage lasted for two hours and forty-five minutes and the infantry assault started at 3.40am. Stormtroopers penetrated through the early morning mist and gas and the allied forward positions fell within twenty minutes with many hundreds becoming PoWs.

The battle in the air was over by the end of the first day as the German air force (Fokker D7) operating from airfields near Laon destroyed most of the French and British planes whilst they were still on the ground. The German tanks (British Mark 4, captured at Cambrai) did not have a similar success as only one of the nineteen saw any action.

Although on the 28th May pockets of British troops held up the German advance for a short while and it was known that the 7th & 8th DLI found some easy targets with their machine guns, the German advance could not be stopped and they were across the Aisne by 9.30am and reached the Marne by the 30th May. This made a salient some 36 miles deep and 30 miles wide.

David mentioned two paintings. The first by the artist Terence Cuneo of an incident in the battle titled 'The Last Stand of the 5th (Gibraltar) Battery (above). The second by the artist W.B. Woller titled 'The Last Stand of the 2nd Devons at Bois-des-Buttes.

Finally, David poised the question 'Was the battle futile?'. He went on to surmise that this attack was probably the best of all the German attacks in the period March-May 1918 (Michael, Georgette etc.). However, it was not a prolonged fight and the vast majority of the French and British were not killed but made PoWs. This was because

those that were not captured or killed in the first few hours, retreated in an orderly fashion for over three weeks until the German attack ran out of steam. They had difficulty maintaining supplies as all the river, road and rail links were East to West and they were attacking North to South.

This was an excellent talk and David explained the battle clearly and concisely. (Andrew Brooks)

A Trip to Switzerland - a little known aspect of WW1: October 2018
(18 attended)

Tony Foster is a family historian rather than a military historian and encountered this story while researching another project in the local papers.



The exchange of British and German POWs saw over 6000 badly injured POWs being sent to Switzerland to convalesce at the British Government's expense. Many officers could afford to bring their families over to Switzerland and in response Lord Northcliffe started a fund to enable the wives of other ranks to visit them.

Tony's warm and well researched talk followed the story of one group of 17, 16 wives and 1 "sweetheart" from England to Switzerland via London and Paris before meeting their husbands at Chateaux D'Oex. Good photographs mostly from the IWM archives illustrated the talk.

A total of over 600 women visited Switzerland from Late September 1916 to November 1917. How the women were selected out of 6000 potential candidates is not known. The scheme was halted it seems because of the perceived increased risks of travelling to Switzerland in 1918.

From the group Tony followed the "sweetheart" Miss Spencer who stayed in Switzerland and got married.

Tony continued by presenting the stories of 4 local soldiers who were captured and ended up in Switzerland.

Finally Tony gave some good tips on researching POWs and some useful websites. (Paul Conlon)

SWEETEST THOUGHTS WILL ALWAYS
LINGER ROUND THE SPOT WHERE
YOU ARE LAID
- Serjt John Tester 20th Hussars

2019 PROGRAMME

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

Dec 3rd: *A.G.M.* followed by *Battle of Cambrai* - Niall Cherry

Jan 7th: *The French Army on the Somme 1916* - Dave O'Mara

Feb 4th: *Whippet Tanks in the Battle of Amiens* - Rob Langham

March 4th: *1919; Versailles and the Origins of WW2* - Simon People

April 1st: *Naval Disaster on the Broad Fourteens: Sinking of HMS Cressy & two sister ships* - Stan Grosvenor

May 13th (2nd MONDAY): *Britain's 1918 Intervention in Russia: Policy and Outcome* - Joe Corcoran

June 3rd: *When Tommy Came Limping Home: Caring for the British War Disabled after 1918* - Dr Jessica Meyer

July 1st: *Frightfulness - Britain and the Advent of Chemical Warfare on the Western Front 1915* - Nick Paul

Aug 5th: To be advised

Sept 2nd: *British Prisoners in the Great War* - Dr Oliver Wilkinson

CENTENARY COMMEMORATION AT SAINT SYMPHORIEN MILITARY CEMETERY

In late September, as our holiday in France and Switzerland neared its end, I browsed the internet and found that Mons would be remembering the first and last casualties of the war in their coming November centenary commemorations. Their graves are in the St Symphorien cemetery east of Mons and in view of the report I had prepared on Lancashire's last to fall (see Page 2) decided to visit there on our route home.

When we visited on 25th September it was necessary to dodge Commonwealth War Grave Commission (CWGC) grass cutting operations but there was no evidence of preparation for the November Commemoration. The CWGC information panels provided information about the first and last to fall who are buried there and we viewed their graves.

Private John Henry Parr, aged 17, (grave to right) was a reconnaissance cyclist of the 4th Battalion Middlesex Regiment who went missing on 21st August 1914. He is believed to be the first British soldier killed on the Western Front when encountering a German cavalry patrol at the village of Obourg just north east of Mons.

Pte. George Edwin Ellison, aged 40, of the 5th Royal Irish Lancers was the last British soldier to be killed in action at 9.30 am on 11th November while on patrol on the outskirts of Mons. He had served in the army from the start of the war.



Pte. George Lawrence Price, born 15 December 1892, arrived in France on 2 May 1918 and joined 28th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force on 1st June. On 11th November his patrol crossed the Canal du Centre into Ville-sur-Haine, 5 miles east of Mons. The patrol was pursuing a German machine gunner who had opposed their advance when George Price was shot by a German sniper and died at 10.58 am. He was the last soldier of the British Commonwealth to be killed in the war.



Bethany Holland
Armistice Prize Winner

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