1917-2017
PASSCHENDAELE REMEMBERED

STAND TO!

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STAND TO!

The Journal of the Western Front Association

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A composite of two famous images captured at the time of the Third Battle of Ypres by Australian official photographers and which were later obtained by the Imperial War Museum in London. The main image – a favourite of the editor – shows a group of Australian infantryman listening with rapt attention to a yarn spinning comrade in a dugout somewhere in Ypres on 2 November 1917. In a wonderfully composed and evocative image the storyteller is caught in silhouette against the firelight which reflects the grinning faces of his mates. Below, in another skilfully composed shot using the silhouette technique, a column of Australian troops make their way along a low ridge on their way to relieve the front line near Hooge on 5 October 1917, the day after the successful Battle of Broodseinde. Courtesy IWM E(AUS) 1223 (main image) and E(AUS)833

Editor's Introduction

Another summer, another centenary. The last day of July marks the 100th anniversary of the Third Battle of Ypres, a battle popularly – and with heavy irony – dubbed Passchendaele by those who fought in it and survived. To mark the occasion, and consistent with its aim of delivering more value for members during the centenary years, the WFA's Executive Committee have approved another special edition. In the following pages readers will find several articles related to aspects of 'Third Ypres' but, as it is the only special planned for 2017, the net of featured articles has been cast much wider and includes contributions on events prior to and after the Passchendaele campaign. And so there is an item on a little known British trench raid in early 1917 in addition to others focusing on actions towards the end of that year. Some articles, such as the specially commissioned piece by Peter Barton, speak of events which have their origins in 1916 but are included precisely because of their impact during the months and years which followed. There are pieces on the air war over Ypres, on the courage and tenacity of nurses under fire, on gallant gunners, on the slogging infantry and on Australians, Canadians and Germans. I sincerely hope that readers will find the selection of interest.

This issue is 'special' too in another way; special for me as editor and indeed all who are, or have been members of the WFA, as it marks the 'retirement' from official WFA business of one whose voice we have all come to know and respect in the pages of *Stand To!* for at least 30 years. It has been said that 'old soldiers never die, they simply fade away' and several old WFA 'soldiers' have faded in recent months. David and Judith Cohen retired from contributing last year – although readers will see that I have badgered a War Art special out of them for this issue – and now Bob Wyatt has decided to hand over the reins of reviews editor.

For members who care to dust off their past issues of *Stand To!* Bob was introduced to readers in *ST* 19, along with 'new' editor Bob Butcher. The two Bobs came as a 'double act'; Bob B as 'Hon. Editor' and Bob W as 'Deputy Hon. Editor'. Incidentally the same issue carried a, shall we say 'mixed', review for a new book on his local Kitchener Pals battalions by a young hopeful from Barnsley who had never written anything more challenging than an undergraduate dissertation! Issue 19 also featured an article by Bob Wyatt entitled 'Books about Books', a learned exposition on bibliographies of Great War volumes. There was no official post of reviews editor for *ST* then but Bob Wyatt was already reviewing extensively for the magazine and it was inevitable, given his deep well of existing knowledge on the subject, his extensive personal library and his innate and insatiable curiosity, that this avowed and passionate bibliophile would assume the mantle of chief reviewer. Indeed by *ST* 23 Garrison Library was being printed with an 'advisory' – 'NOTE: all reviews by Bob Wyatt unless otherwise stated.' The post of reviews editor was formalised a little later and he has held it ever since. Until now.

Our President Professor Peter Simkins has already paid tribute to Bob and his matchless work for the WFA in the *Bulletin* and I cannot better it. When I began editing *ST* with issue 80, I relied heavily on a hard–core of staples: War Art, Bob Grundy and Steve Wall's Camera Returns and Garrison Library. Suffice to say that Bob was a constant pillar of support to me in my new role in coordinating what continues to be, for many readers, a key feature of *ST* – a feature that they turn to before anything else – and one which Bob built into what it is today. I cannot begin to tell how much I appreciated knowing that Garrison Library was always – always – 'in the bag', in order and in good time. I am deeply grateful for all you have done for the WFA Bob and for me personally. Thank you very much indeed.

We now have a new reviews editor – David Filsell – but his is a name which will be familiar to most readers as David has already reviewed hundreds of books in *ST* under Bob's aegis for many years and has a long WFA pedigree himself. David was the WFA's press and publicity officer when Bob took over as deputy editor of the magazine in spring 1987.

In issue 19 Bob Wyatt stated that his aim for *ST* could be 'surely stated' in a few words: 'To keep up the good work.' David Filsell and I will aspire to do just that with Garrison Library.

Jon Cooksey

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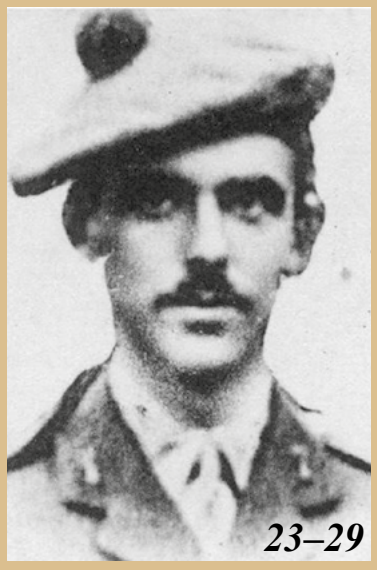

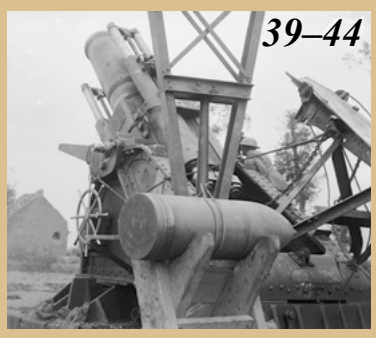

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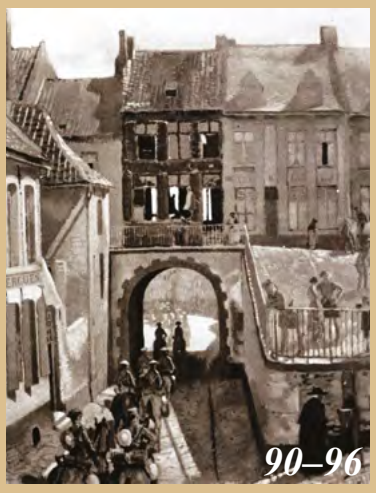


Communication Lines

Fire! Fire!

Colin Taylor's article in *ST* 108 about the fire in the ramparts in December 1917 immediately caught my eye and I read it with gusto but oh dear, his piece arrived just a few weeks too late!

Colin mentions the Australian Electrical and Mechanical Company – well, Britain had Electrical and Mechanical Companies (five in fact, one for every Army), but Australia had the Australian Electrical and Mechanical Mining and Boring Company. Abbreviated to AE&MM&B Company – it is no surprise to learn it was called the 'Alphabet' or 'Alphabetical Company'. A book on the subject – *The Lightning Keepers* – had literally just finished typesetting and was at the indexing stage. As the author, I do mention the fire but I would have loved to have known about the human toll and included the information in my book. It was more tragic than I understood. It destroyed 80kW of generating power installed by the company to power a lighting system that was distributed throughout Ypres and the Canal Bank (a map of the system is in my book). Fortunately, 200 gallons of petrol for the motors that ran the generators, was saved and stopped a terrible fire becoming an even greater inferno. Colin mentioned Sergeant Henry McDonald Wilson. The sergeant and his little team of 'Alphabeticals' had, by 6:00pm, a replacement engine room with a 6kW generator up and running from another dugout just down the ramparts from the fire (which was still burning).

I could do little about the pagination of my book but with Colin Taylor's and the editor's kind permission I managed to squeeze in a post script at the end of the chapter about the work the unit did in the Ypres Salient in a spare half page – just enough to drop the words and names of the men who died – without changing pagination. Unfortunately, however, it meant that I couldn't add names to the index or the bibliography or add an acknowledgement for Colin's work but I'll make sure I acknowledge Colin and *Stand To!* in an article about the Alphabet Company I have promised for a future edition of *ST* in return – an interesting story and *Stand To!* readers will be familiar with all the places the company saw action. If I get the chance in a next iteration of the book, I hope to include information on the men who died in the fire along with appropriate acknowledgements. My grateful thanks then to Colin Taylor. His super research has added to my understanding of events at the ramparts and I hope I can add to his (and readers') knowledge in return in due course.

I continue to love reading *Stand To!* and consume the articles every time a new edition appears. I'm sure I can speak for the silent majority when I say *Stand To!* (and the *Bulletin*) is such an eagerly awaited journal to receive and read. Most of us know bits and pieces of the history about events and places on the Western Front but the articles supplied by contributors always reveals that higher level of detail and knowledge that is very satisfying to add to our own knowledge base. Hence why it is a publication I look forward to seeing appear in my post office box every few months.

Damien Finlayson, Victoria, Australia

Generating interest

Having contributed to the Australian 'Tunnellers of World War 1 Research Website', I was fascinated to read Colin Taylor's account of the devastating fire in the Ypres Rampart dugout ('Death in the Ramparts' *ST108*). The mention of 1259 Sergeant H M Wilson of the Australian Electrical & Mechanical Mining & Boring Company (AEMMBC) prompted me to send an abstract to webmaster John Reading.

Although the website had a biography of Wilson, the information about the fire was news and prompted further research. John Reading forwarded additional information about the AEMMBC's generator and photographs from his collection of the papers of Major R V Morse DSO MiD (2), Officer Commanding AEMMBC.

The photograph of the generator is in the Ypres Rampart's brick arched building but, in a changing configuration, may not have been Sergeant Wilson's generator as destroyed in the fire.

Major Morse's personal records show that the AEMMBC were installing generators in the Ramparts between July 1916 and October 1918. In August 1916 a 20hp generator was placed in the Ramparts; in April 1917 – 20hp; August 1917 – 20hp; December 1917 – 2 x 10hp, 3 x 15hp and 1 x 30hp. The Rampart plan (opposite) shows one Hornsby [Akroyd] stationary engine driving a four–foot diameter generator.

The AEMMBC's war diary of January 1918 records '*A line from YPRES carrying 15 KW supplies CANAL BANK 2500 yards distant at 440 volts.'*

Morse's plan of Ypres shows that from the Rampart generator an electricity cable web was generally available to strategic points across Ypres and the number of light bulbs it fed.

On 17 June 1917, Morse recorded:

> *'Ramparts [Supplying] 500 lights*
> *This plant supplied light to the dressing station at Lille Gate which was used very extensively during the attack. Great difficulty was experienced in keeping the supply during the last few weeks owing to the constant outing of wires by shell fire. (up to 40 cuts a day).'*

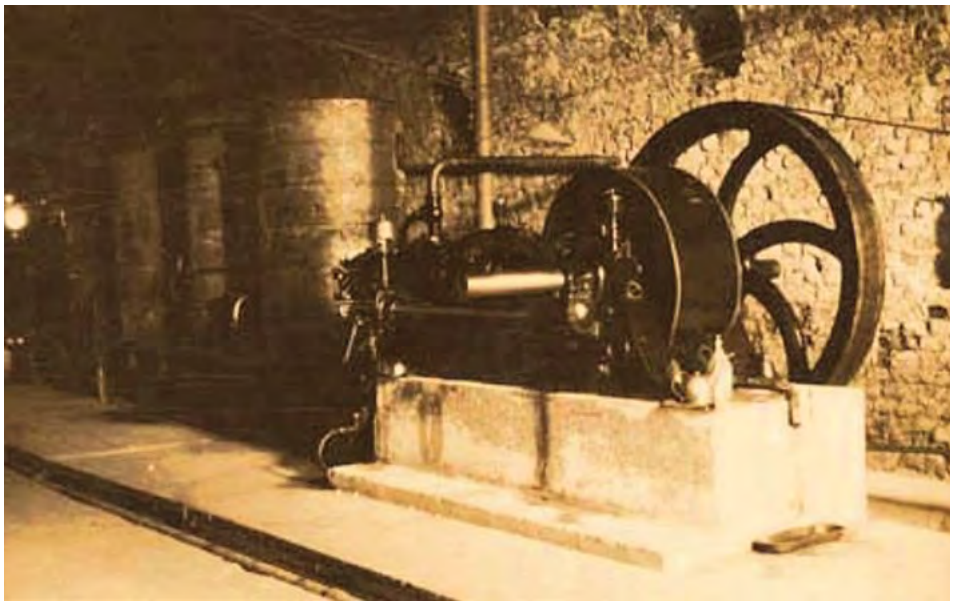
The Rampart dugout alone contained 134 light bulbs. However, the largest Rampart dugout in the south west wall, which safely accommodated 1,500 men and 30 officers in 260 metres of galleries, had, according to Morse, no electricity at that time.

On 8 January 1917, 1259 Sergeant Henry McDonald Wilson, in charge of the AEMMBC Rampart generator, gave evidence to the Court of Enquiry investigating the fatal fire.

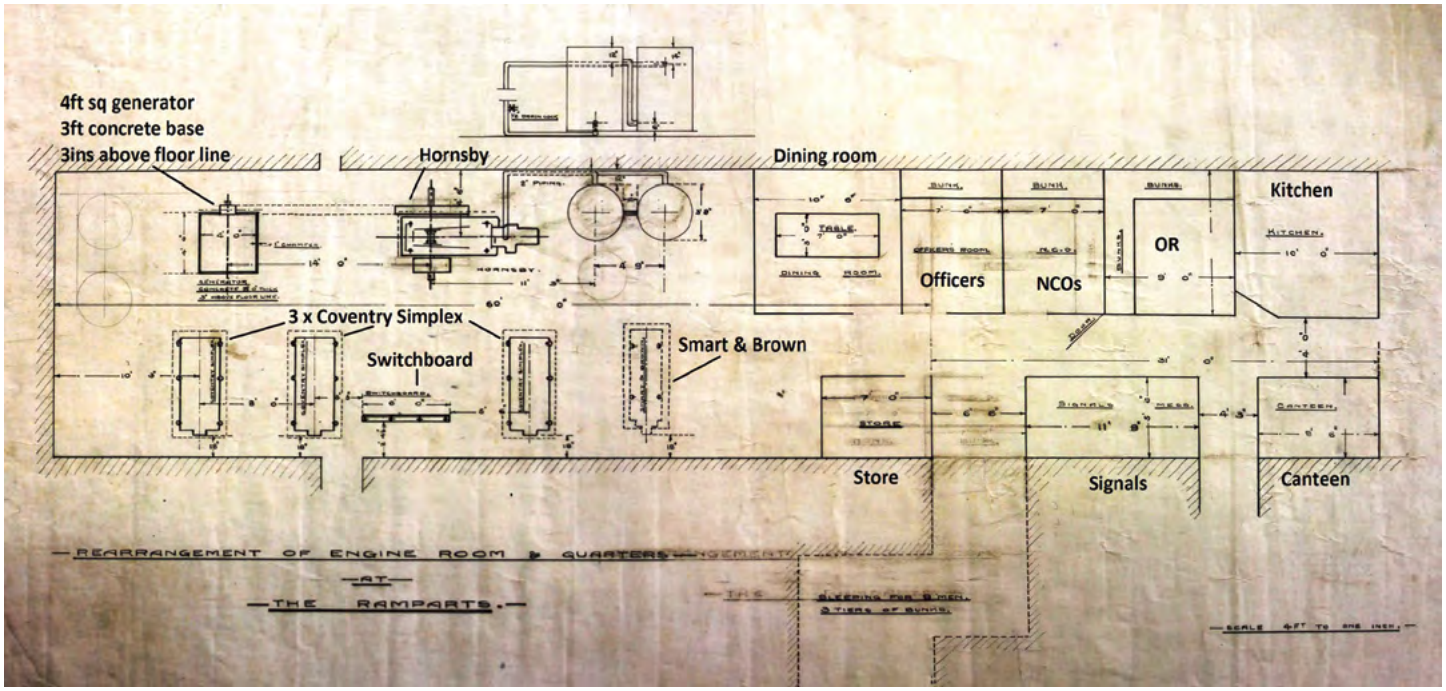
'Tunnellers of World War 1 Research Website' records that apart from the Ramparts fire, Wilson, had an unspectacular war. He was born in Canterbury, New Zealand about 1872, before moving to Sydney, where he married Mary Shanahan. Henry's Attestation Papers', completed on 12 February 1916, stated he was 44½ years of age when he embarked on 20 February 1916 on board HMAT *A38 Ulysses* with 392 members of No.3 Company of the Australian Mining Corps. Arriving at Marseilles on 5 May, the men entrained for Hazebrouck where they arrived to set up their first camp on 8 May 1916.

Henry became a member of the 3rd Australian Tunnelling Company but transferred to the AEMMBC on 7 October 1916. With a strength of little more than 300 men, the AEMMBC and Wilson would have been employed along the entire Western Front providing lighting and ventilation to dugouts and boring for water supplies where needed. However, a civilian electrician by trade, his skills gained him promotion to lance corporal on 24 October 1916, to corporal on 25 October 1916 and sergeant on 2 January 1917.

Henry reported sick on 20 November 1918 and was admitted to the 4th Stationary Hospital at Longuenesse with influenza, which extended



Ypres Ramparts, Belgium. 1917. An engine room operated by the AEMMBC'.
Courtesy John Reading and Ian Morse: Morse collection



Plan of Ypres Rampart generator room of unknown date. Courtesy John Reading and Ian Morse: Morse collection

to him being seriously ill with broncho–pneumonia and eventually being admitted to the Paddington Military Hospital, Harrow Road. On 22 February 1919, he was convalescent at Dartford.

Henry was discharged to furlough on 29 March 1919 before sailing on 27 April 1919 on board HMAT *A54 Runic.* He disembarked in Melbourne on 10 June 1919 and was discharged from the AIF on 19 September 1919, being entitled to wear the British War and Victory Medals.

The 1930 Electoral Roll records Henry, a farmer on the New South Wales Soldier Settlement Scheme, and Mary at Clonmel Tin Mines, Ardlethan, NSW. It is believed that Henry McDonald Wilson died in NSW in 1932.
Richard Crompton, Witney, Oxfordshire

First tank?

Despite claims in David Fletcher's interesting article 'The First Tank Action in History' (*ST* 107), I believe that from the content it remains unclear and open to debate about which tank was first to 'attack'. The 56th Division had the support of three tanks to clear Bouleaux Wood, forming a protective flank to cover all the lines of advance from Combles and the valley running northeast of Combles. During the night 13/14 September 1916 the three tanks arrived for attachment from their base near Billon Copse, reaching Chimpanzee Trench at 2.48am but were unable to proceed because of engine trouble and the bad ground conditions. At 7.00pm on the 14th, as darkness fell, the tanks moved to their points of deployment behind the front line trenches. Sun rise on 15 September was at 5.40am and at 5.50am, in the cool mist and slight ground haze, tank C16 from Heavy Section C Company moved forward to the southern end of Leuze Wood before pausing for zero–hour at 6.20am. It arrived ahead of the infantry at the junction of the German Loop and Combles Trenches and dealt with enemy machine–gun fire. Then, facing Combles, the tank suffered from friendly fire when the right–hand track was hit by a British 18–pdr shell. Stranded, C16's crew fought for five hours while being attacked by the enemy at very close range until reached by 2/London Regiment. Having run out of ammunition they abandoned the tank having set it on fire under standing orders. The 2/London Regiment war diary commented that although unable to move, the tank 'rendered very valuable assistance' for five hours. The crew fired every shot they had and 'thoroughly frightened the foe' before the crew set fire and abandoned it. I feel sure other actions would have similar stories.

The above is sourced from the 2/London Regiment war diary, WO 95/2960; *2nd City of London Regiment (Royal Fusiliers) in the Great War 1914–19* (Major W E Grey, 1929); *The Fifty Sixth Division 1914–1918* (Major C H Dudley Ward, c.1921); *Band of Brigands: The First Men in Tanks* (Christy Campbell, Harper Press: 2007) and *The First Tank Crews* (Stephen Pope, 2013 at www.firsttankcrews.com/tankcrewsc13toc18.htm).
Paul McKenzie, Woodford Green

Macpherson myth – more

I would like, if I may, to reply to Mr Colin Hardy's letter in *ST* 108 concerning the George Macpherson controversy. I have no new information to add to the debate as to whether or not Macpherson took his own life, but Mr Hardy's comments about 'blots on the escutcheon of… Winchester College' run the risk of starting a hare in its tracks, precisely the offence of which Mr Hardy accuses others. It is not entirely clear from Mr Hardy's letter what these 'blots' are supposed to be, but I can only surmise from the context that he considers Winchester College in some way blameworthy for accepting Trevor Pidgeon's published version of Macpherson's death, which has not been disproven but about which Mr Hardy has since opened some doubt.

I would like to address the factual errors in Mr Hardy's letter, lest by their repetition they become an unstoppable hare of the sort which he professes to deplore:

1. The researchers for *Who Do You Think You Are* did not discover that Macpherson's death was a possible suicide from the archives of Winchester College: they read Mr Pidgeon's book and then contacted the College. They wondered if the College knew anything of the story and were referred to me (see below as to why). I told them that we had no information other than that which was in the public domain; they then chose to continue on the basis of Mr Pidgeon's research.
2. The College did not put a 'reference to the alleged suicide' into their archives 'at the behest of a junior history teacher'. I can only suppose that I am the 'junior history teacher' referred to, though at the time I arrived at Winchester College in 2002 I had had over a decade of experience as a teacher of Latin and Ancient History, and had been a Head of Classics at another independent school. When I arrived, the College Archives contained no research on the College's war dead other than the books of remembrance published after the two world wars. I made it my mission to find out more about all of them – some 800 individuals – and by the time that I left in 2008 was probably the greatest authority on Winchester's war dead. I am still invited to lecture and to advise on commemorative events, and my research continues. Thanks to this research three missing names from the First World War have been added to the Winchester College War Cloister, perhaps the finest private memorial in the country. My research provided a major underpinning of the recent Winchester College at War project (http://www.winchestercollegeatwar.com). So Mr Hardy's somewhat contemptuous reference to the source of Winchester College's information would seem in need of some revision.
3. Once I had completed my first wave of research on the war dead, I had given Suzanne Foster, the outstanding College

Archivist, my database of their basic details to help her to deal with the frequent queries about them – with a College archive stretching back to the 1380s she has a very broad remit. In that database, on the basis of Trevor Pidgeon's then unchallenged research, I had listed Macpherson's cause of death as suicide. It was my spreadsheet which was shown to Sir Matthew Pinsent. Mr Hardy states in his letter that 'no mention was made of the alternative possibility of shell–fire', as though this was a deliberate act of omission by Winchester College. That is an unfair implication, for which I feel that Mr Hardy should apologise.

4. The College's subsequent change to its copy of my database to delete the reference to suicide was not a result of Mr Hardy's *Stand To!* article (which I had read with interest), but as the result of a request from the Pinsent family. The removal of the word did not signify a verdict one way or the other on Mr Hardy's research – I was asked if I minded the alteration to the copy of my document in the College's possession, and I said that if it would make the family happy then I had no objection since all the sources were in the public domain and future researchers could come to their own conclusions. In my own copy of my database, Macpherson's entry now reads 'suicide?', which is where, looking at all the evidence, the matter stands (the 'agnostic' position to which Mr Hardy refers in his letter). Mr Hardy's letter refers to 'the myth of the alleged suicide' as though it is now proven to be a 'myth', which it is not. The evidence is equivocal and the truth will probably never be ascertained. I would love to be sure one way or another whether Macpherson committed suicide, because establishing the truth, unclouded by emotion, is the most important job of an historian.
5. As a Catholic and once nearly a suicide myself, I am well aware that suicide is an emotive subject. But Macpherson was not unique, if he did kill himself. The 800 names in Winchester College's War Cloister include one undisputed suicide from the First World War, and from the Second World War there are two known suicides: one who killed himself whilst in Japanese captivity to avoid further torture, and another of whose manner of death I and the College were unaware until his relatives told me in 2014. All are equally victims of war and equally held in honour by the College. My research suggests that the name of another is missing from the First World War panels of the memorial, who may also have committed suicide, but the reason for his omission was not the cause of death but a question as to whether or not he died on active service. It is my ambition to see him added to the memorial one day.

Second Lieutenant George Macpherson in the uniform of his first regiment, The Buffs (East Kent Regiment)

I am sorry to have had to write in this fashion and I have no wish to begin an acrimonious exchange. I think that Mr Hardy's letter would have been far better had it ended after its first paragraph, before Mr Hardy strayed from an examination of the facts into ill–founded criticisms which can only call into question his own objectivity as a researcher.

Shaun Hullis MA (Oxon), Head of Classics, St Benedict's School, Ealing

Kipling Bond

Congratulations on another excellent article on John Kipling in *ST* 108 in reply to Colonel Parker and Mrs Legg in *ST* 105. In the 'Bond of Sacrifice – First World War Portraits Collection' in the Imperial War Museum (IWM) there is a portrait of John Kipling showing his rank of second lieutenant, which includes his date of death as 27 September 1915. The entry also states 'wounded and missing at Loos beyond the Chalk Pit Wood'. If his father gave the portrait and wording to the IWM, when was it given I wonder; in late 1915 or after the Armistice? I would like now to hear the CWGC's response to both articles and to see why they still think that the grave at St Mary's ADS is that of John Kipling.

Alan W Gregson, via email

Cowans & Co.

I greatly enjoyed Terry Dean's article in *ST* 108 on General Sir John Steven Cowans, the British Quartermaster General. Readers may be interested in the following anecdote regarding Cowans' relations with his American counterpart, Brigadier General Charles G Dawes.

In August 1917 General Pershing appointed his old friend Dawes – lawyer, banker, and Ohio politician – to head the General Purchasing Board of the America Expeditionary Force (AEF). As American forces started to reach France, a crisis was brewing. French ports and railways had nowhere near the capacity to offload and transport the men and supplies for what would become a two–million–man army, and the Americans' shipping effort itself was in disarray. Available tonnage was only two–fifths of what was needed and a complete lack of experience in modern military logistics led to wasted supplies and cargo space. It was clear that the AEF would never be able to meet its supply needs from home. Pershing charged Dawes with making up the gap by buying the needed goods in Europe – which, of course, had been depleted by almost four years of war.

Dawes quickly found that the American Army's various purchasing branches were competing among themselves and with the British and French for the same commodities, driving up prices and creating local shortages and surpluses. Dawes used the Board to coordinate procurement so that all the AEF's needs were met with a minimum of duplicated effort and internal competition. He then resolved to extend the system to all three Allies. In April 1918 General Foch was appointed Commander–in–Chief, and Dawes saw an opening; he proposed to Pershing that the Allies pool their facilities and supplies under a senior French officer. Pershing approached Prime Minister Clemenceau, who agreed and wondered why it hadn't been suggested earlier.

The British were harder to convince; they were afraid they would lose control of their elaborate supply chain. Dawes didn't make things better by applying his trademark negotiating style. His method, when he anticipated serious disagreement at a meeting, was to force a confrontation right away, on the theory that raising the central issues early could lead to agreement by meeting's end. Being diplomatic at the outset, however, would simply leave the parties at odds with each other by the close. Dawes would start the meeting by dispensing with military etiquette, puffing on a big cigar and swearing occasionally for emphasis. In early May Dawes met with Cowans in Paris to urge on him his plan for coordinating the purchase of supplies; but Cowans avoided the issue, saying the War Office had more important priorities and they might consider Dawes's proposal in a month. At that Dawes got up, pounded on the table, and said, 'No, by God, you won't put this over for a month. You've been fighting this war for three years. Where have you got? Now we're here and we're going to tell you how to run this war. It's time for you British to learn that, if you're going to win, you've got to give up the methods of an effete monarchy.' Cowans, livid, stalked out of the room. Not for several weeks was the contretemps patched up. Lloyd Griscom, an American diplomat serving as a major in the Adjutant General's office, had been at the May meeting and observed the 'blowup'. Griscom visited Cowans, who was on leave in his Sussex cottage, and explained

that Dawes's style was a deliberate theatrical performance, not meant personally, and that such antics were customary among Americans. Cowans allowed that 'I was never more insulted in my life, but you tell Dawes to come back, and I'll try to get on with him.' In late May Dawes and Cowans met again, this time in London. Cowans was accompanied by General Sir Alban Crofton Atkins, the Director General of Transportation, and several other officers. Things went smoothly – Dawes apparently restrained himself and Cowans forgave, if not forgot. The British agreed to cooperate with a Military Board of Allied Supply; but not until September did they become full members. Dawes and Cowans – according to Griscom – ended the war as good friends.

Gene Fax, Newton, Massachusetts. USA

Brigadier General Charles G Dawes, General Purchasing Agent for the AEF. Courtesy Gene Fax

Burial … rights?

Scotland (North) Branch of the WFA has been running a project to commemorate the men actually buried within the borders of the modern county of Moray by visiting and placing a poppy cross on the grave of a man on the centenary of that man's death. We visited a total of 44 graves in 2015/16 and have another 24 to visit this year, but the question has been posed as to why not all of those who died within the UK (be it of wounds, accident or illness) were returned to their home towns for burial? It seems to us that if the Government was willing to pay for – in these cases the repatriation of the deceased – why wouldn't almost every family have agreed to do so? Was there a question of payment of some or all of the costs by the family, hence the reason why so many were buried near where they died?

I have found a copy of the 1912 (amended to 1 August, 1914) King's Regulations online and looking through I found various procedures for reporting and recording the death of a soldier, but nothing regarding funeral arrangements etc. Perhaps there was an Army Council Instruction that covered the subject, but if so I have not been able to find one. So, the question is, does any member or reader have knowledge of the rules laid down for repatriation of those who died in the UK to their home towns for burial, and whether the family had to contribute to the costs involved?

Derek Bird, Chairman, Scotland (North) Branch WFA

Burial … right

My thanks to Tom Tulloch Marshall for a very interesting and enjoyable article with illustrative photographs in *ST* 108 on the subject, 'Big Cross Little Cross – Why?' It is the very question that I have asked of myself and others when walking through the cemeteries of the Western Front.

Hopefully I can provide a small correction to ensure accuracy and to prevent any confusion on the part of readers.

I am currently involved, with others, in taking photos of the Yorkshire Regiment graves which appear on the excellent website created by Edward Nicholl at http://www.ww1–yorkshires.org.uk/html–files/introduction.htm, so I was especially interested in photograph 'e' on p.37 – the grave of David Hamblin (Yorkshire Regiment) who served as Sergeant David John Thomas – and wondered if I had seen this myself during my travels. However, at the time of writing (February 2017), I have not seen this grave because, it is in a cemetery that I have not yet visited but intend to in April 2017, namely Henin Communal Cemetery Extension, not Heninel Communal Cemetery Extension. I am already very familiar with the latter cemetery as it contains the grave of my great uncle who also served in the Yorkshire Regiment, so I was aware that David Hamblin was not buried there.

Chris Weekes, via email

Number crunch

I hate to criticise what is in all other respects an excellent piece but in the interests of accuracy feel I must point out a mathematical error in Bob Butcher's article 'The Home Base – Part One' on p.10 of *ST* 108. In the addition of enlistments the total is shown as '4,970,902' the addition should in fact read '3,970,902'. I would not like to think of anyone being misled by the 'accounting error' of 1,000,000.

Graham Chadwick, via email

Nobel effort

Unfortunately an error crept into William Van der Kloot's article on 'Great Scientists and Gunnery' in *ST* 108. On p.45 it was stated that 'William Bragg is still the youngest Nobel laureate and they are the only father and son team to share the prize.' The last part of this is indeed correct as the Braggs remain the only father and son to have done so. However the claim of William Lawrence Bragg to be the youngest recipient of a Nobel Prize came to an end in 2014 when Malala Yousafzai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and she became the youngest Nobel laureate. William Lawrence Bragg of course remains the youngest Nobel Laureate for Physics. This small error should not detract from Mr Van der Koot's article which brought a great deal of enlightenment to the subject of sound ranging by the gunners.

Phil Smith, Chislehurst, Kent

Review … x 2

I don't read every single word of every issue of *Stand To!* but I do read, amongst other elements, a selection of the book reviews. I don't know whether anyone else has already pointed it out but both *ST* 107 (October 2016, p.58) and 108 (January/February 2017, also p.58) have reviews of Jack Sheldon's latest book by Niall Ferguson and David Filsell respectively. Good for Jack! Can I look forward to reviews of my forthcoming book *'An Army of Brigadiers'* in successive issues too?

Dr Trevor Harvey, via email

The Editor replies: My thanks to Graham Chadwick, Phil Smith and Dr Trevor Harvey for their keen eyes and attention to detail which serves to keep editors on their mettle. I am a little disappointed, however, that Dr Harvey admits to not reading every word of ST. I can nevertheless assure him that his book – if selected – will only be reviewed once.

1st Essex Memorial

Recognition of the deeds of the Essex Regiment is sparse on the Western Front with only two known, privately funded memorials at Beaumont Hamel on the Somme (May 2014) and Monchy–le–Preux near Arras (May 2016). To address this lack of recognition an appeal has been launched to erect a Memorial Plaque to the 1st Battalion Essex Regiment (1/Essex) at Gueudecourt on the Somme.

On 12 October 1916 1/Essex – part of 88 Brigade, 29th Division – attacked at Gueudecourt and lost 88 men. The aim of the appeal is to honour those fallen Essex men with a memorial plaque which it is hoped will be unveiled on 12 October 2017, the 101st anniversary of the battle. The Mayor of Gueudecourt has agreed to create a Garden of Remembrance and the Essex plaque will be placed within the garden with the intention that it becomes a focal point for villagers and visitors. The appeal hopes to raise £1,675 to fund the plaque and the unveiling ceremony.

Interested parties can, in the first instance, contact the appeal organiser, Anthony Allam – see email address below – who will be pleased to provide further details.

Anthony Allam, via email
anthony@allam.go–plus.net

CHESHIRE VILLAGES GREAT WAR SOCIETY next commemorative exhibition will be held at the Salvation Hall, Roe Street, Macclesfield, SK11 6XD, on SATURDAY 5th AUGUST 2017.

This exhibition will cover the lives of those men of Macclesfield and of the surrounding villages in North East Cheshire who died during the Third Ypres battle, July 31st – November 10th 1917, commonly known as the battle of Passchendaele.

The hall will open at 10 am and close at 5.00 pm, admission is free and there will be light refreshments available.

Tolerating Mystery and Challenging History

by Peter Barton

'The most important thing a map shows, if we pause to look at it long enough, if we travel upon it widely enough, if we think about it long enough, is all the things we still do not know.'
Stephen Hall

Despite countless books, papers, articles, documentaries and films, author and broadcaster Peter Barton believes that for almost one hundred years the British have been offered a truncated history of a conflict that affected, transformed, disfigured and of course claimed so many lives during one of the 20th century's darkest eras. He feels that the present knowledge map of the First World War is similar to man's earliest chartings of the ancient world: incomplete, flawed and containing so much guesswork that it may require a further century of exploration and study before we are able to adequately fill the continents of ignorance about the conflict. In this piece, specially written for this 1917–2017 commemorative edition, he re–surveys significant features of that knowledge map and tells how the lessons learned by the Germans on the Somme in 1916 had serious repercussions for the Allies for the rest of the war.

Shared experience

The 'truth' about the Great War which we British presently accept has been largely constructed upon a diet of jingoism floating in a warm sauce of romantic glorification served with a crust of triumphal adjectives. Millions of column inches have been devoted to prejudiced, uncontrasted and uncorroborated partisan accounts, which for the most part we happily accept.

And yet we are all aware that every moment of every war must by definition be, like the rest of life, a *shared* experience. Indeed, everything we do takes place within the context of 'others'. During conflict that condition is enhanced because many of those 'others' are on our extermination list (and we on theirs of course). German primary sources tell us what the 'others' were doing, how, when and for what reasons they did it, and illuminate the results and the legacies of their discussions and decisions. When woven into the fabric of our own established narratives they frequently reveal half–truths, omissions and even fabrications that we never knew existed. In short, they can irrevocably change perception and understanding – and transform orthodox British history.

Of the many thousands of accounts published since 1914, how many have been validated and dignified by the corresponding narrative from the other side of no man's land? Barely a handful. And yet without balanced research, can we hope for accuracy? Of course not. With a few notable exceptions, the 'enemy' (no matter what their nationality) have been routinely anonymised, which means the history we consume, and more importantly, the history we *teach*, is unsound.

It is not politics, grand strategy or colourful character portraiture that we lack – these can be researched at leisure in hosts of publications in English – what is needed is a comprehensive examination of German *operational history* to set beside the multitudes of minutely researched but prejudiced British studies.

'British branding' – facing the challenge

Germany's First World War primary sources are (despite the tokens of affection delivered by allied bombers during the Second World War) monumental in scale. They have long been accessible and contain material that in quality, objectivity and self–critical honesty routinely outstrip their British archival counterpart, a great deal of which was itself long ago damaged or destroyed by official 'weeders' seeking to meet the military, political and personal agendas of the time, and to protect reputations. The cavities are plain to see: gaps in war diaries, absent reports and missing appendices.

This is important. To understand the nature of our own archival resources, we need to recognise that empires are neither assembled nor maintained through gentle persuasion. It is a brutal business, and at the outbreak of the war Britain's imperial power was at its peak.

In order to produce the traditional, and in 1914, already long–established brand of colonial history that had for so long fertilised the nation's good opinion of themselves, throughout the empire's evolution key evidence was routinely erased or abridged. Undesirable facts melted away, and Britons carefully and constantly nourished with a past – and to a certain degree an identity – they did not actually possess. Britain became a brand. What we frequently look upon as honourable colonial conquests were more akin to muggings; the public, however, could only view events through a prism of prejudice that diverted unwanted colour from the spectrum of truth.

British 'branding' was a pragmatic tool. It helped retain public confidence and trust in the decisions and actions of political and military leaders, and allayed liberalist concerns about the way the empire may have been created, expanded and governed. It served not only to protect personal and collective reputations, but of course the colossal vested financial interests of the empire builders themselves. In other words, in order to further British imperial designs and fortunes history was routinely abused and manufactured.

And it is here that we find one of the reasons why certain official files are closed to public view: to provide time for the powers–that–be to examine the record, assess the potential fallout, and if necessary lose in the cleansing flames of the official furnace inconvenient facts, either in part or in whole, that may prove troublesome.

Although lacking the hazards posed by today's mobile technologies and social media sharing, the construction of an agenda–driven official narrative in the century before the Great War was nevertheless a highly skilled undertaking. By August 1914 the pattern was long established; indeed, a profoundly envious Germany quietly applauded Britain's exceptional talents for virtuoso propaganda and self–aggrandisement.

The result of giving people what their peers decide they should hear, of course, produces unhelpful and unhealthy history for future generations to study. To a considerable degree, today's canon of First World War writings is composed of just that stuff. Along their marathon journey of exploration, therefore, the greatest ally for future generations of historians will be scepticism, liberally applied.

Lost legions

The colossal scale and largely static nature of more than four years of conflict forced all belligerent nations to compile more meticulous records than ever before. Digitisation of German First World War files has only recently commenced, so unlike many of our own collections we cannot yet study them at the kitchen table. Researching archives written in a foreign language permeated with military terminology is of course a time–consuming and expensive process often requiring specialist translating skills, and this is partly why so little effort has been made by British (or rather English–speaking) historians to investigate German (or indeed French) resources. I say 'partly why' because the primary reason is much more mundane: sheer laziness. The choice to pursue half the story is an entirely conscious one.

Although the task of research is initially daunting, it requires just a few days in Munich or Stuttgart, Freiburg or Karlsruhe to understand that exploring such collections is like starting one's study of the war afresh, for here lies virgin history of inestimable value and fascination.

These 'alternative' narratives are often radically diverse, controversial and sometimes profoundly shocking, so anxiety frequently rears its head: dare I repeat some of this stuff? One must. Whether we like what we find really should be neither here nor there, for history is not Facebook; it is not there to be 'liked', but learned from. Archives *explain*, and it is not the historian's job to censor, for that simply perpetuates the old imperial affliction!

Only a handful of English–speaking authors employ German primary sources, but one may readily identify occasions where a shrinking from provocative alleyways has taken place. Omission rings like a church bell.

The first book to approach First World War operational history in a contextualised and unprejudiced way was my own *Fromelles – The Lost Legions,* the story of an Anglo–Australian–German action fought in mid–July 1916. It took far longer to complete than I had envisaged because despite the 14–hour brevity of the encounter, at every turn the huge mass of German primary sources presented new and unexpected evidence that collided with long–accepted accounts, especially those of the celebrated Australian historian, Charles

Bean. Bean adjusted (or frequently ignored) inconvenient but critically important material supplied by his German researcher in Potsdam because it did not meet the needs of the Anzac legend he himself had helped create. 'Pragmatic modifications' are readily discerned – ironically they show themselves because of the meticulous records Bean himself kept at the time. They can be found in the National Archives at Kew. Without the corresponding German operational accounts the documents are merely interesting; with them the artifice is apparent. And they also reveal how very little German material Bean actually perused.

I approached the Australian book launch with trepidation, but was delighted to find my 'alternative history' well received, even by the staunchest Aussie traditionalist. That better truth was appreciated because it finally explained the root causes for the appalling loss of Australian life on 19/20 July 1916.

Much more importantly, however, the book's publication did not close the Fromelles story, for subsequent research is providing new data to further enhance our understanding – and long after I am gone others will continue to add to the story. The point is that there is always more to learn. A question I frequently contemplate is whether anyone actually lives long enough to gather sufficient knowledge to be justly called an 'expert'. I'm inclined to think not: there is so very much about that conflict that we do not know, for after all, are we not dealing with a *World* war?

Thought provoking

To produce a balanced narrative of an offensive such as the Somme would, I believe, require a lifetime of concentrated study, but my work during the last decade or so allows me to here present a small selection of what I hope are thought–provoking findings to illustrate the challenge. Certain elements appeared in last year's BBC Somme centenary television series, but many were left either undeveloped or on the cutting room floor, partly because the producers grew to feel that the controversial nature of some of the findings would be out of place within the ambience of reverence and respect that the Corporation understandably chose for their commemorative programming, and partly because certain content was looked upon as simply too sensational to broadcast and may have detracted from the series by drawing unwelcome press focus.

Harrowing – but important – files describing British war crimes, for example, were summarily discounted; unless, I was told, I was able to 'balance' the story with similar cases from the opposing camp…an unfeasible request, for whilst German evidence of British crimes was extensive and detailed, comparable testimony from tens of thousands of repatriated Tommies was almost impossible to find – despite being deliberately sought by the British authorities. In this they failed, and that was precisely the point that I wished to make: in the *First* World War the war crime boot appears to have been on the other foot.

My aspiration had been simple: report what I had uncovered, place it in context, and leave the viewer to decide what he or she wished to accept. Nothing I wished to say was either my opinion or indeed that of anyone at the Corporation, but it was fresh, illuminating, often counter–intuitive, and always perception–changing. Nevertheless, apprehension prevailed and the original concept was deposed by the same deep–rooted influence of British imperial history, and the discomfort that all radical military revisionism engenders. The fact that we were dealing with the most iconic battle in British history injected maximum anxiety.

As a result, the original proposal, accepted with singular alacrity in November 2013, was quelled to the point where shortly before broadcast individual words were being excised.

Objectivity

German chronicles record the afternoon of 23 June 1916 as the start of the Battle of the Somme. It's a sensible approach, for throughout the offensive, artillery was to exert by far the greatest influence on events. We tend to skate over the initial contribution of the guns except in statistical form, instead favouring 1 July 1916 and the ground assault: infantry are evidently (to employ the media term) 'sexier' than gunners.... and yet it was the guns' failure to annihilate or at least anaesthetise the Germans during those seven days of shelling that set the agenda for the *months* of combat that followed. This was a fact of which the Germans were acutely aware. They meticulously scrutinised the events of 1st July. Brigadier General Theodore von Wundt of 51st Reserve Infantry Brigade, whose troops crushed British northern attacks between Serre and the River Ancre, reported:

> *'We have now succeeded in obtaining a picture of our enemies' plans, based on papers taken from British dead and prisoners, and from the interrogation of prisoners … The British offensive was brilliantly prepared. It is apparent from captured documents that everything the British could possibly do to ensure success in the prevailing circumstances had been done. Gigantic quantities of ammunition were stockpiled, artillery far superior to its German counterpart was assembled, and technical equipment of the most sophisticated kind was made ready. For a long time, the British had been practising far behind the front. Troops were brought in from wherever they were available, and the claim made by a captured officer that the ratio of divisions in favour of the British was 9:1 cannot be much of an exaggeration.*
>
> *British officers did everything they could to raise the morale of their men. They told them that the preparatory bombardment of the German positions would almost certainly devastate the first two lines of trenches, leaving only corpses, and that they would not have to fight until they reached the third line, which would be weakly manned.*
>
> *The precision of the preparations must certainly have encouraged the troops. Operation orders drawn up by British commanders are amazing in their exhaustive and meticulous detail. They did not confine themselves to organising the assault and designating initial objectives, but issued precise orders governing the progress of the attack far beyond the German front line. Every battalion knew precisely to the minute at what time it was to leave its own trenches, when the enemy front line had to be taken, when the British artillery would engage the secondary and subsequent objectives, and at what time every action should have been successfully completed. Every company commander had his pre–determined role set out on paper in his pocket.*
>
> *Whether this entrapment of subordinate commanders in a veritable*

Theodore von Wundt (seated left) commander of 51 Reserve Infanterie Brigade with the first Tommy to be captured in the Beaumont sector after the British arrival on the Somme. 22 year–old Corporal Gwynne Stevenson of 1/Royal Irish Fusiliers stands with his captors at brigade HQ in Petit Miraumont. It is the night of 13/14 August 1915. The painter is one of von Wundt's troops, Albert Heim, a professional artist from Stuttgart. He recorded a wide range of scenes and events on behalf of his commander. Peter Barton

labyrinth of orders was seen as the lesser evil in view of the inexperience of large parts of the army remains to be ascertained. The Operation Orders that have come into our possession demonstrate an absolutely firm conviction that the great offensive would succeed.'

Von Wundt was not alone in heaping praise upon his enemy, for he knew how much his comrades had learned from earlier allied endeavours that had pushed so hard upon the door of success that the hinges creaked. Far more importantly, however, like every German commander he also knew that in the largely defensive war his comrades were presently waging on the Western Front, the honest analysis of *failure* was infinitely more profitable than the triumphal chronicling of success. Forget the back–slapping; no matter how minor the action, the German maxim was that the more objective and self–critical a report could be, the greater the chance of retaining position, control, and indeed one's mortal existence. No triumphal adjectives here, then. And this is the primary reason why we are able to invest trust in German primary sources. Exactitude facilitated survival….and thus underwrote a potential victory.

Objectivity and self–criticism is, however, worthless unless *shared*: reports of hard lessons learned were widely distributed for others to learn from.

In that defensive mindset, knowing every aspect of the enemy's character, procedures and movements was integral to maintaining an unbroken and unbreakable bastion in France and Flanders. It was on 4 July 1916 that the Germans distributed their first reports outlining British prisoners' responses to the opening of the Somme offensive:

'*The younger men, especially those who had not yet had a great deal of experience in the field, were often keen to get into battle, while older soldiers who had already survived a number of attacks, were anything but enthusiastic.*

Despite these differences, both old and new troops were firmly convinced that the attack would conclude successfully. Their optimism was shared by the younger officers; the older ones however, and especially those required to lead, did not share this confidence.

General de Lisle, the commander of the 29th Division which had already suffered heavy loss at Gallipoli, is supposed to have said, "I am afraid after this affair I may have to take my division back to England in a taxicab."

In marked contrast, the officers encouraged their troops to believe that the task they were asked to carry out was an easy one. This unshakeable confidence among British commanders, of whom only a handful foresaw the true gravity, was shared by officers and men alike. They believed the imminent mighty onslaught would carry the shattered German lines, and hoped with one mammoth blow to bring about the end of the war.

The devastating effect of German shelling, machine–gun and rifle fire, and the failure of the attack, has obviously made a deep impression on the prisoners. They openly admire the courage of the German infantry, who had been exposed to the heaviest artillery fire for many days. They had expected to find severely shaken enemy troops offering no resistance. Instead they found a defence – soldiers and officers often standing openly on the parapets – delivering a truly deadly barrage.

What they most frequently experienced was sheer bewilderment. This applied especially to those battalions which had managed to advance quite deeply into the German positions. For reasons they could not fathom, either the battalions which were meant to succeed them did not turn up, or their leaders were unable to exploit the initial success by giving appropriate follow–up orders.

The prisoners acknowledge without reservation the bravery of their commanders. What they say they have realised, however, is that a leader's courage must be united with ability. The latter, they state with great regret, was not often in evidence.

The arrangement and strength of the German rear positions which they had had the opportunity to traverse after their capture, impressed them greatly. They did not believe that they could ever be taken except with dreadful sacrifice.

The prisoners are discouraged not only because of the failure of their attack but also because of the wasted effort. However, given the English character, it is to be expected that new assaults will be carried out to reach their prearranged goals, perhaps with an increased deployment of artillery and ammunition. This opinion was actually voiced by the more educated of the prisoners: success is a political necessity that has to be achieved at all costs. Too many hopes were built on the attack to abandon it after the first failed attempt!'

British prisoners – several senior NCOs in the foreground – captured during the first few days of the Somme offensive. The image reveals the profound shock, disbelief and despondency at the nature and scale of the British failure in their sectors. All images appearing in this article are previously unpublished and supplied by Peter Barton

Operation orders

Being the most secret of military documents, it was strictly forbidden to carry operation orders into battle. Every British officer knew this, and yet by nightfall on 1 July 1916 the 'many [orders] to hand' had provided the Germans with a detailed portrayal of Sir Douglas Haig's intentions, plans, tactics, timings, and of course expectations. I am inclined to believe that some British officers ignored the regulations not only because they were convinced they would triumph (which is indeed what they tell their captors), but because this very special document provided tangible evidence of their own *personal* role in the greatest military victory the British army would ever win. Why would one not wish to retain such a significant memento?

But the problem was by no means new. Streams of similarly fundamental paper intelligence had been falling into German hands since long before the Somme, and that flow was to continue throughout the offensive and beyond. Indeed, it was in this way that months before July 1916 the Germans were alerted to the very latest British tactics.

Near Carnoy on 15 April 1916, German raiders captured a 13–man wiring party of 12/ Middlesex Regiment. The men provided a mass of useful verbal data, but in the pockets of the sergeant in charge of the party was found the printed schedule of a three–week training course he had recently attended. It was designed to instruct officers and senior NCOs in the tactics to be employed in the coming offensive. During the next few weeks, entries in the pocketbooks of at least a further two captured British officers confirmed they had attended the same course. Then in mid–May, on

the body of a dead NCO German raiders found the repoprt of 1/Dorsets pre–battle exercise, its analysis, and the detailed timetable for infantry/artillery cooperation: it was a template for the rest of the British army.

Why men would take such hyper–sensitive documents into and indeed *beyond* their front line is a question that may remain forever unanswered, but for the Germans it meant two things: they could see in black and white the lessons the British had learned from the Battle of Loos the previous year, and that Sir Douglas Haig's tactical foundation for the Somme was in their hands weeks before the fighting commenced.

I have so far found no evidence that any of these discoveries were broadcast to German troops; logic suggests that it was seen as essential that, for fear the British might adjust their plans, no one should be captured in possession of such critical intelligence. The most effective approach, therefore, was to keep the men in the dark and simply issue order after order for the urgent enhancement of defences. Efforts to follow those orders are reflected in the outcomes of 1 July and indeed many subsequent actions.

In December 1916 a German analysis of the past six months of combat stated that had all their defences on the Somme been of the same state of development as those installed in the northern half of the battlefront (defended by 26th and 28th Reserve Infantry Divisions), it is unlikely that the British would have enjoyed more than minimal and temporary success on 1 July.

Evolution and embellishment

During the months of fighting that followed the first day, British operation order after operation order fell into enemy hands. That steady flow of top–secret intelligence allowed the Germans to study the development of British tactical thinking in real time as it evolved, thus helping them to devise ever more effective measures to withstand the storm and thereby thwart Sir Douglas Haig's repeated exhortations for a decisive victory.

Why was this cardinal military rule so often broken? Again, German records provide clues. During questioning captured British officers confirmed von Wundt's suspicions, telling interrogators that their orders were often too long and too complicated to commit to memory or note form. It was, said one, 'impossible for one man alone even to read all that stuff.' In a line that might have been written for Hugh Laurie's character – Lieutenant The Honourable George Colthurst St Barleigh MC – in *Blackadder Goes Forth,* the same officer declared, '…. an Englishman needs to be given something of a 'sporting chance', even in war; it would make the business more bearable for officers and troops alike.'

German records also reveal embellishment and fabrication of British reports, and all that that entailed. There is space here to cite a single (severely pruned) example:

We killed and wounded at least 50 of the enemy, says a report by 15/Royal Welch Fusiliers (15/RWF) after a trench raid at Aubers in May 1916. In describing the same action the Germans (Bavarian) list three men slightly wounded, stating that the Welsh were driven away whilst trying to cut the wire. Casualties cannot be lied about; the loss of 50 men – a third of a regiment's front line rifle strength – would have been a catastrophic German failure; the inquest would have been epic! Their losses were in fact just three men with slight wounds.

The British First Army called the raid the second best of the year, and eight fusiliers were decorated. George Gladden, a wounded Welshman brought in from no man's land, provided the Germans with chapter and verse on the raid's planning and objectives.

The case is by no means unique. It can therefore require but a handful of German reports to irrevocably change our perceptions of even 'minor' events, and force fresh scrutiny and analysis.

To put the Royal Welch raid into its proper context, however, we should also appreciate how the behaviour of the surviving raiders was understandable, for it is entirely consistent with human nature. All raiding parties were aware of the purpose of such enterprises (in this case the 'blooding' of troops in preparation for the Somme), and the grave and unquantifiable risks to life and limb that accompanied such undertakings. Why should those lucky enough to return unscathed not extract their own pound of flesh from the military? Who could possibly disprove their report? So what was there to lose? At the same time, though, we should also consider how British commanders might have been given distorted perceptions of the unit's capabilities…

Surely, you may say, an action like this is just a disconnected moment of the war, having little effect on wider outcomes? Not so. The greatest offensives were themselves composed of small events such as this. In combat, the outcomes of individual *moments* accumulate and become game–changing; only comparative study can show which were pivotal to final outcomes, and why. And it is of course solely the Germans who are able to tell us how close their British or French enemy came to success, and how, why and at what point the endeavours fell apart.

Evaluation

At the end of July 1916 the first 'Evaluation of British troops' was issued by German IV Army Corps:

'The British infantry has undoubtedly learnt a great deal since the autumn offensive. It opens its attacks with dash and spirit, born no doubt of great confidence in the overwhelming use of artillery. The British soldier can rely on his physical prowess and his sporting traditions.

However, in difficult situations during an attack, the infantry lacks endurance and tenacity. The men easily become unsure of themselves, lose their head and soon surrender when they believe they have been cut off. British soldiers evidently do not have much confidence in their own military capabilities, or in their commanders.

In defence, on the other hand, the enemy has shown great tenacity in infantry fighting, but has often been badly affected by heavy artillery fire.

Small detachments of men with machine guns emplaced in the corners of woods or groups of buildings have held out doggedly and fought extremely well.

On many occasions, the enemy has assembled or brought up large numbers of men in close formation within range of our guns, dispersing and deploying them too late, resulting in heavy casualties from our artillery fire. Specially–formed working parties have been used to great effect to link up captured trenches with existing positions at astonishing speed.

Training seems to be more of a sporting nature than a military one. The British still lack discipline, tactical awareness and ability to act independently to exploit their enemy's weaknesses. Prisoners often exhibit an astonishing lack of awareness of the tactical situation. No significant difference has been observed between the troops that form the vanguard of an attack and those who follow on as reinforcements. Our troops have a very strong perception of their own superiority over the British infantry.

A group of British prisoners taken during the first week of the Somme fighting pictured with General von Soden, commander of 26 (Württemberg) Reserve Infantry Division. Hauptstaatsarchiv *Stuttgart. Peter Barton*

The British officer, as ever, is gallant and handles his men well. But he lacks tactical awareness and therefore the ability to exploit opportunities in combat situations. He too is often poorly informed about the wider situation or does not know how to respond to its demands.

Until January 1916, IV Army Corps was opposed by French troops. By comparison with experience up to that time, the quality of the British troops is considerably lower than that of the French. The French soldier is superior to his British counterpart in terms of skill, tactical awareness and military proficiency. The same applies to the officers.'

As the offensive intensified and British infantry tactics became increasingly dependent upon complex artillery barrages, landscape features became less and less defined. In turn, operation orders – always listing 'Intention', 'Objective' and 'Plan' beneath that most critical word 'Secret' – became unavoidably more complex. It created prodigious challenges for commanders in the field.

Operation Orders also provided the Germans with an attractive additional benefit: they could be used to encourage British prisoners to talk. More often than not orders were captured on the day the venture they defined actually took place. This permitted interrogators to flourish them *as if they had been in their hands for some time*, ie implanting in a prisoner's mind the profoundly – and indeed uniquely –corrosive notion that *betrayal* had been involved: a time–honoured ruse perhaps, but possibly the most powerful and effective weapon in an intelligence officer's armoury; it manifests itself in a great many cases. My Fromelles research shows how easy it was to maintain the deception and the discomfiting sensation it engendered not only for days or weeks, but for months and even years after an event.

Very occasionally, captured *German* documents provided the British with evidence of bean–spilling by their own Tommies. Written directives were regularly issued by GHQ warning those who fell into enemy hands to provide only name and rank; it was an officer's duty to read such caveats to their men (the Germans captured examples of these too). One may see the stark difference between the almost polite pre–battle 'reminders' of May and June 1916, and the gravity–laden missives of November which recognizing the problem but certainly not its scale, state that those who offered *any* information were not only 'traitors' but 'perhaps the murderers of their own comrades'. Unsurprisingly, German archives reveal instances where captured British officers, who had probably been responsible for delivering these very warnings, themselves took no heed of GHQ's appeals to their honour. And so the German intelligence jigsaw continued to grow.

After care, data and desertion

A prisoner might be questioned several times whilst in a frightened and traumatised post–action state, but the extraction of intelligence did not cease upon his despatch from the battle zone towards prisoner of war camp.

Another group of British prisoners captured during the first few days of the Somme fighting are inspected by divisional commander General der Infanterie *Franz von Soden (hands on hips, right) at 26 (Württemberg) Reserve Division HQ at Biefvillers near Bapaume. Their body language evinces shock and uncertainty, but not fear. Note the four men sitting on the grass bank in the centre being served coffee. This image and others is from von Soden's collection of private albums in the* Hauptstaatsarchiv *Stuttgart. Peter Barton*

A close up of the four soldiers in the accompanying image. They also have thick slices of bread. The men appear to have carried their Lewis guns from the battlefield, which indicates how soon after capture the pictures were taken. Having just been fed, their faces betray shock and uncertainty but not fear. German archives contain their collective and individual interrogations. Hauptstaatsarchiv *Stuttgart. Peter Barton*

Having reached the transit station and been fed, watered and safely reunited with comrades, interrogation was superseded by informal 'conversation'. Men (often in groups), were now bathed in a sense of relief not only at having survived but at being, contrary to the grim warnings of their commanders, well treated; they were quite naturally forthcoming, and amongst the tactical jewels on offer during these chats were views and opinions they would have been fearful to utter in their own trenches. The jigsaw expanded.

Beneath the interrogations and conversations, however, lies a deeper stratum of intelligence gathering. The moment an enemy soldier was captured German HQ staff were immediately informed by telegram. These (usually) provided name, location and nature of capture, indication of British order of battle, plus other important data relating to the enemy's tactics or future plans. The sooner this data reached senior German ears, the more quickly a situation could be assessed and the more effective the tactical response could be.

The Somme–related telegrams of the German Second Army, of which there exist tens of thousands (in glorious chronological sequence), frequently provide details that do not appear to exist elsewhere. For example, they inform us that the first two Australian soldiers to desert on the Western Front absconded on 4 and 7 August 1916 during the fighting for the Pozières Ridge – a fact unknown for 100 years. And here lies one of those uncomfortable dilemmas for the historian: the German archives reveal the *names* of men whose families to this day will not know that their antecedents had traitorously absconded, or that in some cases their actions negatively influenced critical outcomes.

Through these same records causes of desertion may be appreciated, and rates plotted. Before the Somme and during the first few weeks of fighting, for example, the problem was almost non–existent for the British; the longer the battle went on the more prevalent it became. The coming of winter saw a sharp rise.

One of the more extraordinary cases to emerge is that of Royal Canadian Regiment soldier who informed his interrogators that being a relatively recent German immigrant to Canada he had volunteered for service under an assumed name with the explicit intention of deserting at the first opportunity. The moment arrived during a relief near Neuville St Vaast in mid–February 1917. He presented the Germans with a carefully–gathered package of intelligence, describing in detail British preparations for the upcoming battles at Vimy and Arras. At the other end of the scale is a 16 year–old soldier of the Kings Own Royal Lancaster Regiment who absconded with an older comrade in the Hébuterne sector on 17 November 1916. He had few beans to spill – simply because he knew so little. Another curious case involved a man of 8/York and Lancs:

> *'The prisoner, a deserter, was found lying in front of the German trenches in a drunken state by an Unteroffizier. He says that he had an argument with his sergeant and then got drunk on rum. He was also fed up of army life in general. He left his trench to go for a walk and suddenly found himself, unintentionally, in front of the German trenches, where he stumbled over a wire barricade. He had been shot at by both the British and the Germans.'*

This is one of very few cases noted in a *British* war diary, for it took place in daylight and was thus observed. The diarist calls it a 'regrettable occurrence'. Drunkenness amongst attacking Tommies is also frequently mentioned in German records; some reports note counter–attack troops being able to smell the British before seeing them….

Profitable intelligence

The broader point is of course that few British prisoners failed to offer profitable intelligence in either verbal or written form, or indeed both. But if they had repeatedly and unambiguously been made aware of the gravity of the offence, why were they so talkative? Again, German archives provide clues.

Tommies received frequent reminders that if captured they were likely to be brutally interrogated and then killed – a traditional military ploy designed to encourage men to fight on in sticky situations. Evidence of such 'engineered inducement' frequently appears in German records, such as this example involving eight South African officers captured on 18 July 1916 in Delville Wood:

> *'The officers and men taken prisoner yesterday evening are all that remains of the four battalions of the South African Brigade. Asked whether they believed that the British would achieve a breakthrough, they were almost all of the same opinion, namely that a successful breakthrough would never be achieved in this sector.*
>
> *They spoke very appreciatively of the way they had been treated. Although stories had been put about on a number of occasions that the Germans mistreated their prisoners, or even killed them, no–one had really believed that.*
>
> *The officers are all extremely war–weary and say that the same applies to their men. They are glad to be out of the dreadful fighting in the wood, and whilst they are not exactly pleased to have been taken prisoner, they feel, all things considered, that it is better than the life they have been leading in recent weeks. That life was not something that men could endure for long.*
>
> *There were a number of older, long–serving, regular officers among them, who spoke admiringly of the discipline of the German soldiers and expressed the view that if their own men had one–tenth of the discipline of the German troops, they would be in a very different position today. These more senior men also remarked ruefully that the British army today has too many young officers with absolutely no military experience, who are utterly incapable of leading their men, and who have no authority over their men, or no idea how to exercise it.'*

Another image from the private albums of General der Infanterie *Fritz von Soden, showing the divisional commander and his entourage of senior officers and medical staff visiting the crash site of a downed British aircraft. The as yet unidentified pilot – apparently unhurt – stands shocked but defiant, hand and fist on hips making himself as large as possible as he peers into the camera lens. In one interrogation of a British pilot discovered by the author the prisoner revealed he was furious with himself because he forgot to take to the air with a box of matches and so could not set his aircraft alight when forced to land behind German lines!* Hauptstaatsarchiv *Stuttgart. Peter Barton*

In fact, flying in the face of our deep–seated Second World War–derived perceptions, during the Great War the Germans employed an extraordinarily benevolent approach to enemy prisoners – and by order of their own High Command. Time and again experience confirmed that treating vulnerable and frightened men with dignity and kindness usually made them remarkably – and of course, profitably – forthcoming. Research suggests that rough treatment was unusual during and after capture or in transit, but appears later in prison camps, where the cause of distress was more often privation, hunger and sickness rather than violence. And this is why British evidence of German war crimes on and near the battlefield is almost impossible to find.

Spleen–venting

Six weeks later 'Devil's Wood' was still being fought over, and by this time a new form of Tommy was present. 'Derby' recruits were men who had been encouraged to enlist as volunteers before the introduction of conscription, thus avoiding the stigma of 'the must', as the Germans called it. Instruction for 'Derby men' was often brief, and like all training could not prepare a man for the trials of the trenches in the midst of battle, as shown by the following excerpt taken from the interrogation of 85 prisoners of 1/South Staffordshire Regiment captured on the evening of 31 August 1916 on the north–eastern edge of the wood:

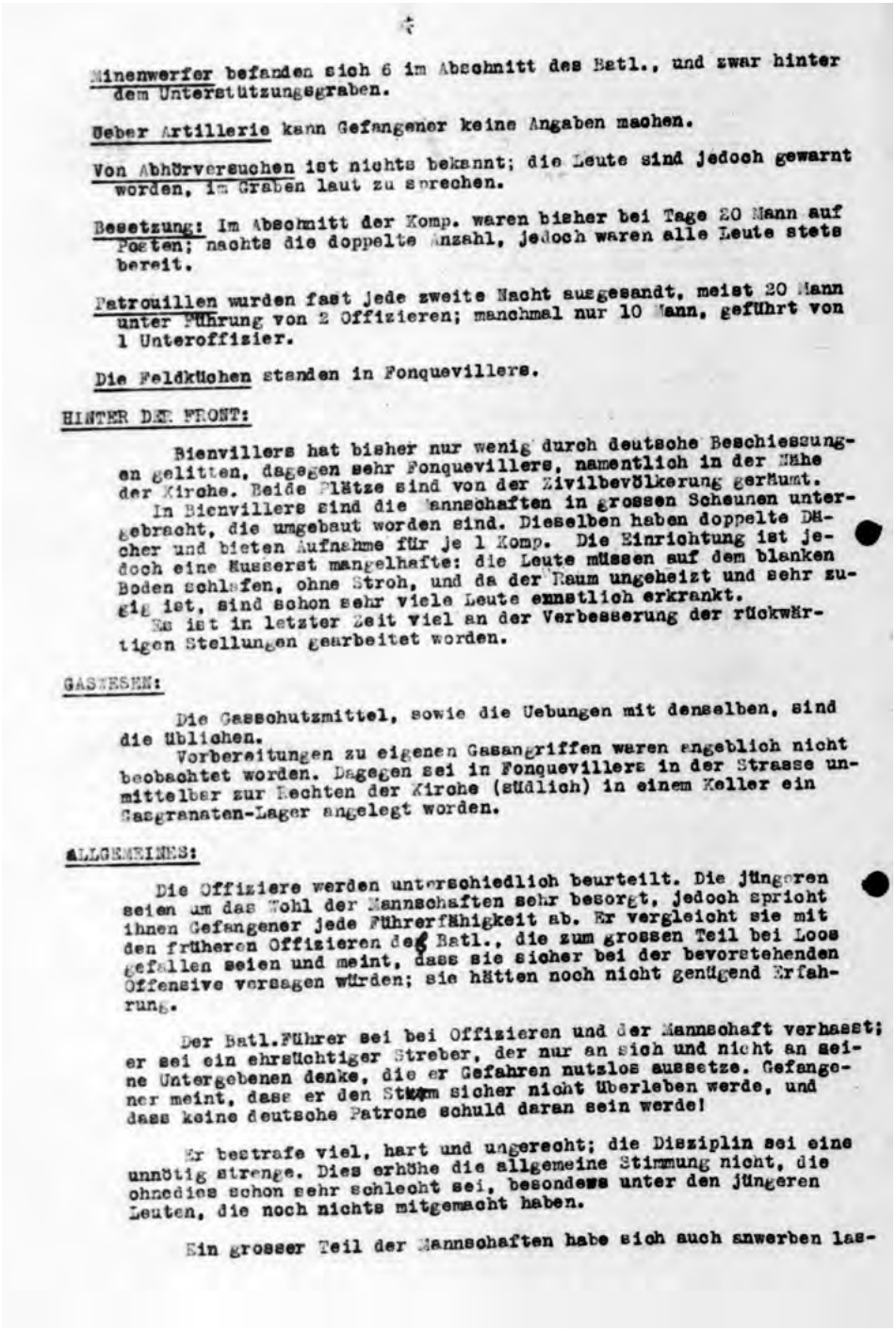
> *'They are all glad to be still alive, even if it is at the cost of becoming prisoners. The Derby men who had never been in the trenches before, could barely comprehend their first experience of combat. They knew only that they had been led into the trenches, then they*

had been shelled and sometimes buried, and then they had been taken prisoner.

Some of the prisoners complain about the conduct of young officers, some of whom skulked in their dugouts and did not show their face at their posts. They made bitter remarks about how easy it was for officers to report themselves sick and develop 'shell shock' at any moment in order to get away from the trenches.'

The Germans had learned much about the Derby Scheme through documents found on Private Thomas Rutherford of 1/9 Royal Scots, captured on 5 January 1916. Rutherford's father was a Derby commissioner, and his letters, a bundle of which the prisoner was carrying when captured, explained the system, how men were 'persuaded' to enrol, and more. As an extra bonus, Rutherford was also carrying the complete paper trail of a failed attempt to gain a commission.

German records also frequently reveal British prisoners' concern at the human cost of persistently meagre allied results, profound distress triggered by speaking of earlier experiences, and, as in the excerpt above, resentment at the conduct and capabilities of their commanders. Victor Wheat, a Staffordshire soldier captured in the early morning of 24 June 1916, the day the artillery bombardment for the Somme commenced, was particularly forthright:



Minenwerfer befanden sich 6 im Abschnitt des Batl., und zwar hinter dem Unterstützungsgraben.

Ueber Artillerie kann Gefangener keine Angaben machen.

Von Abhörversuchen ist nichts bekannt; die Leute sind jedoch gewarnt worden, im Graben laut zu sprechen.

Besetzung: Im Abschnitt der Komp. waren bisher bei Tage 20 Mann auf Posten; nachts die doppelte Anzahl, jedoch waren alle Leute stets bereit.

Patrouillen wurden fast jede zweite Nacht ausgesandt, meist 20 Mann unter Führung von 2 Offizieren; manchmal nur 10 Mann, geführt von 1 Unteroffizier.

Die Feldküchen standen in Fonquevillers.

HINTER DER FRONT:

Bienvillers hat bisher nur wenig durch deutsche Beschiessungen gelitten, dagegen sehr Fonquevillers, namentlich in der Nähe der Kirche. Beide Plätze sind von der Zivilbevölkerung geräumt.
In Bienvillers sind die Mannschaften in grossen Scheunen untergebracht, die umgebaut worden sind. Dieselben haben doppelte Dächer und bieten Aufnahme für je 1 Komp. Die Einrichtung ist jedoch eine äusserst mangelhafte: die Leute müssen auf dem blanken Boden schlafen, ohne Stroh, und da der Raum ungeheizt und sehr zugig ist, sind schon sehr viele Leute ernstlich erkrankt.
Es ist in letzter Zeit viel an der Verbesserung der rückwärtigen Stellungen gearbeitet worden.

GASFRAGEN:

Die Gasschutzmittel, sowie die Uebungen mit denselben, sind die üblichen.
Vorbereitungen zu eigenen Gasangriffen waren angeblich nicht beobachtet worden. Dagegen sei in Fonquevillers in der Strasse unmittelbar zur Rechten der Kirche (südlich) in einem Keller ein Gasgranaten-Lager angelegt worden.

ALLGEMEINES:

Die Offiziere werden unterschiedlich beurteilt. Die jüngeren seien um das Wohl der Mannschaften sehr besorgt, jedoch spricht ihnen Gefangener jede Führerfähigkeit ab. Er vergleicht sie mit den früheren Offizieren des Batl., die zum grossen Teil bei Loos gefallen seien und meint, dass sie sicher bei der bevorstehenden Offensive versagen würden; sie hätten noch nicht genügend Erfahrung.

Der Batl.Führer sei bei Offizieren und der Mannschaft verhasst; er sei ein ehrsüchtiger Streber, der nur an sich und nicht an seine Untergebenen denke, die er Gefahren nutzlos aussetze. Gefangener meint, dass er den Sturm sicher nicht überleben werde, und dass keine deutsche Patrone schuld daran sein werde!

Er bestrafe viel, hart und ungerecht; die Disziplin sei eine unnötig strenge. Dies erhöhe die allgemeine Stimmung nicht, die ohnedies schon sehr schlecht sei, besonders unter den jüngeren Leuten, die noch nichts mitgemacht haben.

Ein grosser Teil der Mannschaften habe sich auch anwerben las-

The final sheet of Victor Wheat's six–page interrogation report. Under the heading allgemeines *(general information) Wheat offers his appreciation of conditions in the British lines, the quality of leadership within his unit – 5/North Staffs – and the fate of his CO who would not, he thought, be accounted for by a 'deutsche Patrone' in the coming Somme offensive. Peter Barton*

'Opinion of the officers varies. The young ones are very concerned about the welfare of the men, but the prisoner says that they are completely lacking in leadership ability. He compares them with the battalion's original officers, most of whom fell at Loos, and says that these ones will almost certainly fail in the coming offensive; they do not yet have enough experience.

The battalion commander is apparently hated by officers and men alike. He is an ambitious careerist who thinks only of himself and not of his subordinates, who he needlessly exposes to danger. The prisoner says he is certain that he will not survive the offensive, and that it will not be a German bullet that accounts for him!

He frequently imposes harsh and unjust punishments; discipline is unnecessarily strict. This does nothing to raise the general level of morale, which is already very low anyway, especially among the younger men who have not yet seen action.'

'Spleen–venters' like Wheat were readily recognizable, and they made especially attractive cases. Indignation was carefully fostered, for when emotions were inflamed unrestrained disclosure could often follow. Alongside much other valuable intelligence, Wheat informed his captors that the battle was imminent, that the allied attacking front would be 48 kilometres broad, and that the British preliminary bombardment would last five days. His testimony was not taken at face value, of course, but added to other intelligence, assessed, and transmitted to commanders throughout the battlefront.

Spleen–venting was commonplace, and by no means restricted to disgruntled private soldiers. In early June 1916, Brigadier General Victor Williams of 8 Canadian Infantry Brigade, wounded and captured at the Battle of Mount Sorrel, 'took the opportunity to give voice to his open dislike of the British, saying, "If the Germans want to punish me, all they have to do is to put me together with English officers. I would sooner stay with my privates than get mixed up with the English."' In the original document the passage is cited in English.

Williams was particularly disparaging about the merits of the British General Staff, whom he described as, 'amateurs' (again, cited in English), adding, 'they would do better to hand over supreme command of their forces to French High Command. In this war, there was not a single man in the British General Staff with strategic talent.'

In another interrogation a voluble Australian prisoner described the Anzacs as the 'white slaves of the Somme'.

Communications security

Sir Douglas Haig and his intelligence department could have little idea of the scope and magnitude of the troops' bean–spilling – nor the monumental scale and extraordinary complexity of enemy intelligence gathering. In Britain, German spies scoured regional and local newspapers seeking innocently–disclosed but potentially significant information. The

occasion of a unit's posting to the front could be unwittingly given away by a local journalist reporting the imminent departure of a well–known worthy of the parish, now in khaki.

For example, in their 'Information about the British Army' bulletin of 19 April 1916, the Germans note:

> *'According to newspaper items, the 57th Division appears to be still at its base in Kent, at least for the time being. However, sporting events are now being cancelled with increasing frequency due to large–scale military exercises. The 63rd Infantry Division remains in its home district and has not yet moved to a military training ground. The 66th Infantry Division is evidently now being brought together.*
>
> *A member of 2/5th Royal Warwickshire Regt (61st Infantry Division) writes from No. 5 Camp, Perham Down, Andover, Hants (belongs to Salisbury district, see 10.):*
>
> *"We will go overseas as soon as we have completed our musketry training with the new rifle. We have received about 400 new recruits, hence the delay."*

This kind of intelligence plus prisoners' testimonies and masses of captured documents (which include diaries, letters from home, and even last letters from the trenches that were never posted) provided the Germans with an ever–growing and ever–more accurate picture of their enemy's movements, capabilities and intentions. The scale and scope is remarkable. Documents exist, for example, that list both the fighting and ration strengths of individual British infantry *companies* on a day–to–day basis. A regularly updated list of imperial and colonial divisions was issued, giving the quality of each unit according to their performance in past actions; the 'exquisite' New Zealand Division commanded the greatest respect. British casualty figures were refined by taking the lists published in *The Times* and adjusting them according to extractions from prisoners and captured documents.

Moritz

There existed a yet deeper intelligence problem that Sir Douglas Haig and his colleagues would have been equally unaware of: the parlous state of British communication security. Along the Western Front in underground chambers beneath the trenches, scores of *'Moritz'* stations containing an *Ahrendt* listening machine and six–man crew intercepted allied telephone calls.

Working around the clock, they gathered a huge range of information. Lists of British officers were drawn up, with names arranged by division, brigade, battalion and company. Amongst the *Moritz* records of the 26th Reserve Infantry Division, for example, one finds several pages of names and units, amongst them two celebrated British soldier–authors, Charles Carrington and Charles Douie. How different, one wonders, would their memoirs have been had they known their conversations may have been recorded by the enemy?

What useful application did such intelligence possess? Consider a British prisoner (officer or not) being confronted by a German interrogator who was able to reel off the names and ranks of his comrades. He may well be understandably lulled into a sense of, 'They must know everything, so how could anything I have to say be remotely perfidious?'

But *Moritz* was designed not as a provider of benign or entertaining data, but as a deadly weapon. Through it the assembly of troops at certain places at certain times was betrayed, allowing the location to be targetted by German artillery and mortars. A key application was in imparting early warning of British trench raids. In one case at La Boisselle the Germans received ample time to evacuate their line and plant anti–personnel contact mines to welcome the unsuspecting troops of 1/Dorsets. Subsequent interceptions gave the Germans the casualty figures for the fruitless endeavour.

Through *Moritz,* codes were disclosed, orders of battle confirmed, the strengths, qualities, experience and comings and goings of enemy units assessed and recorded, and of course the build–up to the Somme offensive plotted. Indeed, it was two *Moritz* interceptions that indicated the approaching imminence of zero in the early morning of 1 July. The second was recorded as an, 'order from the 34th Division, which appears to be an addendum to an order from the British Fourth Army'.

German translators logged the chatter as it happened, in writing, *and usually in English.* Again, all potentially useful material was immediately telegrammed to headquarters, copied and disseminated to other German units along the relevant battlefront, and often throughout the Western Front itself.

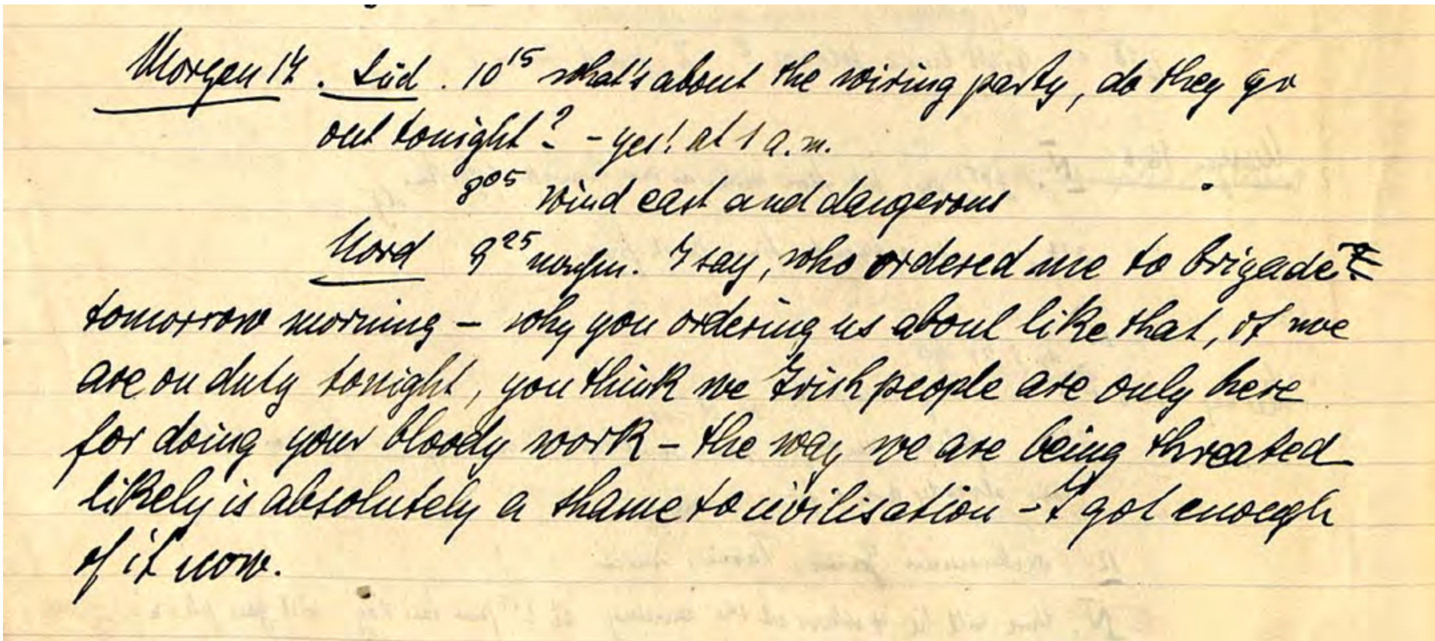
Through *Moritz* we may also observe increasing internecine difficulties, especially in the wake of the Easter uprising between the English and the Irish:

> *'I say, who ordered me to brigade tomorrow morning? Why are you ordering us about like that if we are on duty tonight? You think we Irish people are here for only doing your bloody work? The way we are being treated is likely a shame to civilisation – I got enough of it now.'* (9.25am, 17 June 1916)

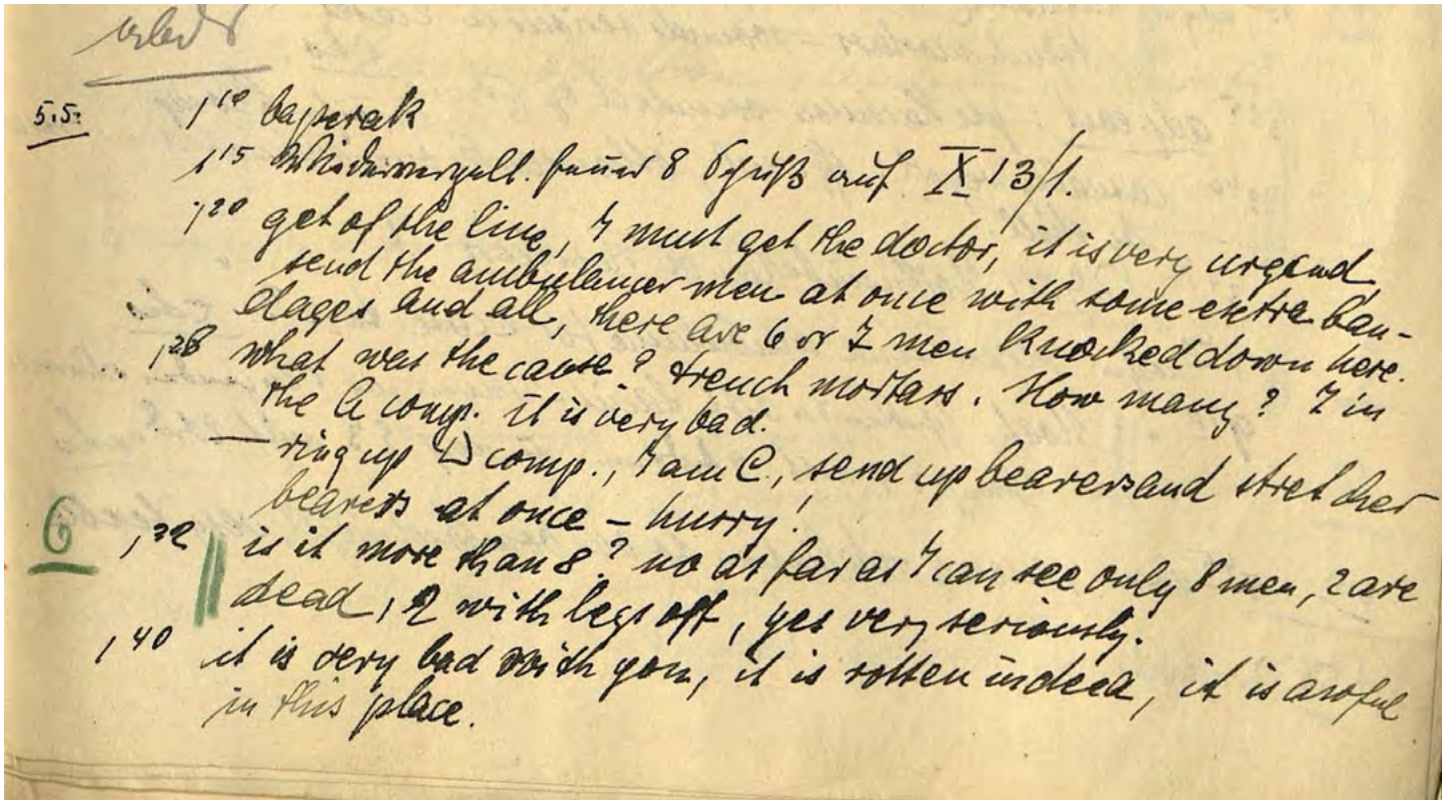
That deteriorating relationship was carefully monitored, recorded and employed in interrogations, the Germans according the Irish a regularly updated document dealing with mood and morale.

And in a ghastly real–time form, through *Moritz* one may also follow individual tragedies as they unfold: *'Get off the line…I must get the doctor…it is very urgent…send the ambulancemen at once with some extra bandages and all…there are 6 or 7 men knocked down here…two are dead, two with legs off… send up stretcher bearers at once – Hurry!'*

Urgency leaps from the page. The (abridged) exchange above commenced at 1.50 am on the morning of 5 May 1916.


Morgen 14. Lid. 10[15] what's about the wiring party, do they go out tonight? - yes! at 1 a.m.
8[05] wind east and dangerous
Lord 9[25] morgen. I say, who ordered me to brigade tomorrow morning - why you ordering us about like that, if we are on duty tonight, you think we Irish people are only here for doing your bloody work - the way we are being threated likely is absolutely a shame to civilisation - I got enough of it now.

Extract of a 28 Reserve Infanterie Division Moritz interception for 17 June 1916 illustrating Anglo–Irish discord in the La Boisselle sector, and also (top line) giving prior warning of the time a British wiring party were due to commence work. As the Somme progressed, the Germans were to produce dedicated assessments of Irish mood and morale. Peter Barton



Part of a 28 Reserve Infanterie Division *Moritz interception transcript for 5 May 1916 illustrating the chaotic and bloody results of a German trench mortar attack. The urgency of the events unfolding in the British positions in real time – recorded verbatim – is clear from the time log. Peter Barton*

Thus we are provided with that rarest of jewels: a timed *verbatim* record of Great War conversation to set within the operational narrative as compiled by both sides. In some cases it helps provide as complete a history of an event as one could ever hope to produce.

Moritz continued to gather intelligence throughout the Somme offensive. On the morning of 14 July 1916, for example, when British and Indian cavalry were finally ordered into action for the first time, an interception confirmed they were on their way some *10 hours before the 'attack' actually took place*. A subsequent interception indicated the sectors where British commanders now realised that mounted assault was no longer feasible because of uncut barbed wire or unachieved early objectives. And it was through *Moritz* that the Germans came to know the 'adjusted' principal target for the cavalry on 14 July: High Wood – again, long before any horsemen arrived in the sector.

Ironically, later in the offensive an interception reported the arrival in the British trenches of a party of three *Russian* prisoners who had escaped, found their way to the front and somehow crossed no man's land. 'You can imagine how happy they were', it states… What these men had been doing behind German lines was of vital importance to the outcome of the battle and indeed future allied prospects.

Radio messages were also intercepted. The majority were mundane, but amongst the requests for candles, rations and relief one may readily isolate slips–of–the–tongue that almost certainly cost lives and damaged morale: 8 October 1916, 13.34. *'Concentrate all available infantry Contalmaison midnight'*.

The Germans too suffered from loose tongues. On 15 August 1916 their armies on the Somme were circulated with a report from the 12 August edition of the daily newspaper the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* quoting a letter from the front containing the following observation about a recent British action: "The attack, which was anticipated, and also forewarned of by our Moritz (listening) stations, was launched at 5.00am."

A serious disclosure, yes, but of course by the time the article had appeared the damage to British prospects had already been done.

In his volume *The Signal Service in the European War of 1914–1918 (France)*, Major R E Priestley noted:

> *'As late as October 1916 the main obstacle in the path of the men who were endeavouring to overhear German conversation was the never–ceasing conversation on our own lines. Officers could not be made to understand that their own worries and a considerable proportion of the casualties suffered by their units were due to their own indiscreet use of forward telephones.*
>
> *Order after order was issued; precaution after precaution was insisted upon; still the leakage continued in slightly less degree only.*
>
> *It was not until disciplinary action was taken and carelessness made the subject of a court–martial charge, that forward telephones were used with any degree of care.*
>
> *Probably more was given away in 1916 than even in 1915.'*

The *Moritz* transcripts – which of course Priestley himself never saw – provide us with the word–perfect evidence.

Alternative narratives

Another fascinating avenue of research exists in reports secretly smuggled out of PoW camps *in Britain* that eventually found their way to Germany via routine prisoner exchanges. At enormous personal risk, German officers, often doctors, secreted reports and carried them to internment camps in Switzerland, upon arrival slipping them to diplomatic intermediaries. These documents today provide unique 'alternative' narratives of events that greatly illuminate British accounts by providing detailed observations that simply cannot exist in any other form of record.

Likewise the experiences of German prisoners (usually illegally) employed on roads and railways behind the battlefront who managed to escape British and French captivity and return to their own lines – where they were themselves 'interrogated' by their own comrades. The following excerpt forms part of the statement of three men (of Ernst Junger's unit) captured near Guillemont on 3 September. Emerging uninjured from the fighting (German wounded, they state, were robbed and then killed), they were forced to carry British wounded from the battlefield before being employed in various labouring roles in and around Albert, where of course they were at liberty to watch, listen and learn.

> *'January 1st [1917] appeared favourable for our plan. After roll–call we left with the parcel collectors at about 5.15pm. Whilst the parcels were being sorted we surreptitiously slipped out behind the office and climbed over the wire fence. We had noticed that those men collecting parcels were not counted back in again after roll–call. In this way our escape would only be noticed the next morning.'*

Having departed Albert, negotiated British camps, artillery positions and sentry posts, they eventually found themselves in the forward zone.

'....We then moved through a deep ravine and at its end reached the road Beaumont–Hamel Station, which was badly damaged. We crossed the road to its north side and climbed a steep incline.

Soon afterwards we encountered an English guard in a collapsed trench; he stopped us. We shouted "Alright" and "Fucking bon", jumped across the trench and carried on unhindered. After this we reached an undamaged two–metre wide wire entanglement. We clambered over and 50 metres further reached some blown–in positions. These were situated along a small 2–metre high slope. Here we found German tunnel timbers....

Reports of all escapees come with plan showing key features in and around their places of work.

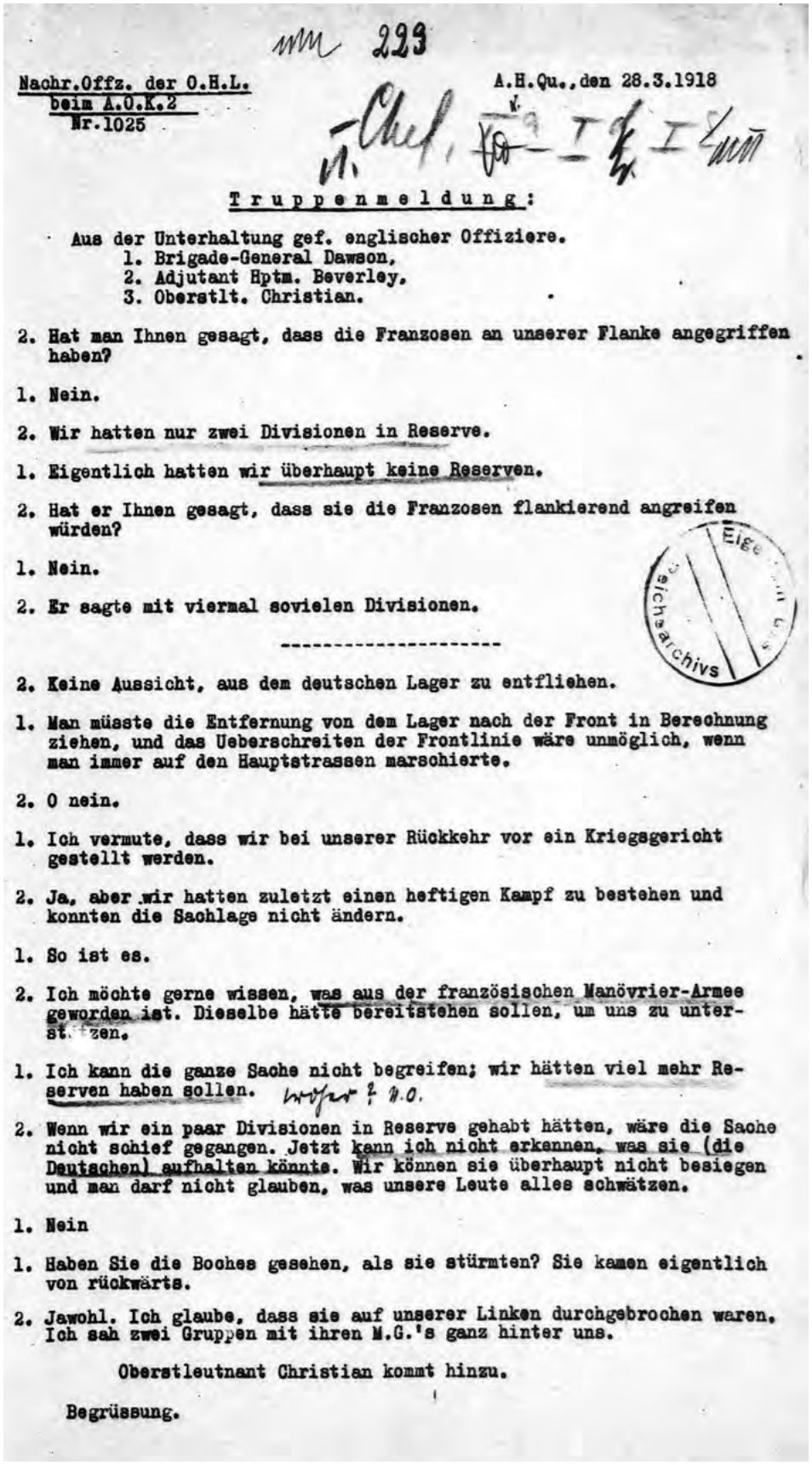
And finally, there are the verbatim transcripts of secretly–recorded conversations between prisoners, usually officers. The following excerpt – see right – relates to the South African Brigade:

28 March 1918. From conversations of British Officers:

1. *Brigadier General Dawson*
2. *Adjutant Captain Beverley*
3. *Lieutenant Colonel Christian*

---

2. *Did they tell you that the French attacked on our flank?*
1. *No.*
2. *We had only two divisions in reserve.*
1. *In actual fact, we had no reserves at all.*
2. *Did he tell you that they were going to launch a flanking attack against the French?*
1. *No.*
2. *He said with four times as many divisions.*
2. *No prospect of escaping from the German camp.*
1. *You would have to take into account the distance from the camp to the front, and crossing the front line would be impossible if you stuck to the main roads.*
2. *Oh no.*
3. *I expect that when we get back, we shall have to face a court–martial.*
2. *Yes, but we did have a heavy fight on our hands, after all, and there was nothing we could do to change the outcome.*
1. *That's right.*
2. *I'd like to know what became of the French 'masse de manoeuvre'. It was meant to be standing by to support us.*
1. *I can't understand the whole thing; we should have had a lot more reserves.*
2. *If we'd had a couple of divisions in reserve, it wouldn't have all gone wrong. Now, I can't see what can stop them (the Germans). We certainly can't beat them and you can't believe what our people say.*



Nachr.Offz. der O.H.L.
beim A.O.K.2
Nr.1025

A.H.Qu., den 28.3.1918

Truppenmeldung:

Aus der Unterhaltung gef. englischer Offiziere.
1. Brigade-General Dawson,
2. Adjutant Hptm. Beverley,
3. Oberstlt. Christian.

2. Hat man Ihnen gesagt, dass die Franzosen an unserer Flanke angegriffen haben?

1. Nein.

2. Wir hatten nur zwei Divisionen in Reserve.

1. Eigentlich hatten wir überhaupt keine Reserven.

2. Hat er Ihnen gesagt, dass sie die Franzosen flankierend angreifen würden?

1. Nein.

2. Er sagte mit viermal sovielen Divisionen.

---

2. Keine Aussicht, aus dem deutschen Lager zu entfliehen.

1. Man müsste die Entfernung von dem Lager nach der Front in Berechnung ziehen, und das Ueberschreiten der Frontlinie wäre unmöglich, wenn man immer auf den Hauptstrassen marschierte.

2. O nein.

1. Ich vermute, dass wir bei unserer Rückkehr vor ein Kriegsgericht gestellt werden.

2. Ja, aber wir hatten zuletzt einen heftigen Kampf zu bestehen und konnten die Sachlage nicht ändern.

1. So ist es.

2. Ich möchte gerne wissen, was aus der französischen Manövrier-Armee geworden ist. Dieselbe hätte bereitstehen sollen, um uns zu unterst[illegible]zen.

1. Ich kann die ganze Sache nicht begreifen; wir hätten viel mehr Reserven haben sollen.

2. Wenn wir ein paar Divisionen in Reserve gehabt hätten, wäre die Sache nicht schief gegangen. Jetzt kann ich nicht erkennen, was sie (die Deutschen) aufhalten könnte. Wir können sie überhaupt nicht besiegen und man darf nicht glauben, was unsere Leute alles schwätzen.

1. Nein

1. Haben Sie die Boches gesehen, als sie stürmten? Sie kamen eigentlich von rückwärts.

2. Jawohl. Ich glaube, dass sie auf unserer Linken durchgebrochen waren. Ich sah zwei Gruppen mit ihren M.G.'s ganz hinter uns.

Oberstleutnant Christian kommt hinzu.

Begrüssung.

By these several means a wide range of top secret British intelligence tumbled into German hands.

Some material was of such sensitivity and secrecy that it is difficult to comprehend any officer being so reckless as to carry it into battle. A document outlining proposed improved methods of attack written by Brigadier General H C Rees of 11 Infantry Brigade, for example, was unambiguously headed, *'Secret'... 'Not to be taken into the front line'... 'Copies to be destroyed after reading'*. Another 'gift' was a top secret tactical communiqué from General Sir Hubert Gough himself, commander of the British Fifth Army.

In this way the Germans came to know through operation orders what their enemy expected to achieve *during* an action, but were sometimes supplied with *advance warning* of future enemy intentions based upon appreciations of what had gone wrong during recent enterprises. The testimony of deserters enhanced the problem. Nothing could be more valuable to the Germans, or more damaging to British prospects....

Forewarned and fore–armed

The capture of *German* documents and the

testimonies of German prisoners naturally provided British and French intelligence services with a great deal of material too, for German troops could be just as talkative as Tommies and *Poilus*. For a number of reasons, however, this material was of far less practical utility than that derived by the Germans from their enemy.

The primary reason was that the British (and French) were perpetually on the offensive. This meant that they had no choice but to draw up and distribute detailed tactical arrangements which, because almost every assault was coordinated with artillery barrage plans, were by necessity inflexible. Most importantly, in order to carry out their orders British troops had no choice but leave the cover of their trenches and traverse the most dangerous strip of territory on the planet: the ultimate killing zone known as no man's land.

The defending Germans were not bound by the same imperatives. First, they resisted always from some form of *cover*. And second, the more knowledge of British tactics they possessed, the more powerful – and lethal – their defensive hand. That knowledge came from direct observation, from prisoners and deserters, from *Moritz*, and from the unending sequence of secret documents that dropped into their hands. In short, they were all too frequently forewarned and could thus fore–arm.

But there was more. As a result of allied enterprises being almost universally based upon artillery firepower, throughout the Somme offensive German defensive tactics grew ever more supple, independent and organic. Unlike the rigid British approach, both in training and at the front German troops were *encouraged* to adapt to local circumstances as actions developed: it was a self–determination that applied to all ranks.

Because of its fluid and immediate nature, none of this could be written down except in the form of post–action reports, which were of course unavailable to British eyes. And because no *universal* defensive formula existed, German prisoners were unable to provide their captors with verbal or documented intelligence that could effectively assist British fortunes – for they simply did not possess it.

In a nutshell, the defensive tactics employed in one sector in the morning may not be mirrored in the neighbouring sector in the afternoon. As a result the British seldom knew precisely where the enemy lay, nor what resistance they may encounter.

It was, however, as a result of the Somme that during the winter of 1916/17 the Germans designed 'corporate' defensive principles, but by the time copies fell into British hands in the spring of 1917 they had already been superceded by radical 'upgrades'.

Through shared intelligence, immense human effort, quick implementation of fresh tactics, and it must be said, an improbable resilience, time after time the Germans on the Somme never allowed their enemy to create the conditions for the decisive outcomes that allied commanders so fervently desired, and so frequently urged and indeed expected of their troops.

Vague notions

By the autumn of 1916 attrition was exacting a ghastly toll. Based upon interviews with prisoners, on the 10 October the Germans circulated their monthly assessment of the quality of British troops. It described a different force to that which they had faced in July, and highlighted the problems Sir Douglas Haig now faced in keeping depleted units up to strength.

> *'The men themselves appear to have no judgement at all. Meeting them one occasionally feels confronted by a sample of a typical London street mob. They look like what they are: an odd mixture of people who have been picked up anywhere and at random, thrown together from all walks of life and mixed with a considerable number of completely uneducated casual labourers and long–term unemployed. Amongst the English prisoners of the preceding 18 months we had only seen very few of this type of man. It is evident that the quality of the new English recruits has fallen considerably. The majority of prisoners now at Cambrai admit openly and with some satisfaction that they relish the feeling of their current secure situation, even though most did not spend more than eight days at the front. Their concern is not for the future of England. What is of far greater importance to them is the fact that they are – contrary to expectation – being treated well. They have no idea how this war is going to end for their country. In this respect they do not differ markedly from the officers, whose notions of an outcome are also very vague.'*

No prisoner taken during the coming winter was able to tell the Germans whether or not the fighting was over, for if weather conditions allowed, hostility was always renewed. On 8 December a German 2nd Army report noted: *The nature of British attacks in the past two months seems to have remained essentially the same as it has been since the beginning of the offensive. They have always been very carefully prepared, as captured orders have shown.*

British prisoners' reasons for the lack of success were listed as:

- *Performance of the enemy: German infantry appear to act upon independent initiative without the need for officers.*
- *Inadequate preparation of attacks.*
- *Ground conditions. Men have died an awful death in the mud.*
- *Pedantic operation orders: too complicated, leading to confusion.*
- *Insufficient reserves to clear and hold captured positions.*
- *Deficient quality of ammunition, especially of American manufacture*

On 16 December the latest appreciation of British morale report stated:

> *'.... one can recognise men who have completed several tours of duty on the Somme. Those who have taken part in two or three attacks are glad that, as prisoners–of–war, they will not have to go through that experience again.*
>
> ***Outward impression:***
> *In stark contrast to their French comrades, their unmilitary bearing conveys a most unfavourable impression. In the POW camps, as in the fighting units, the long–serving 'regulars' form the backbone of the contingent. They are the only ones who are accustomed to strict military discipline, and their experience of service in the Boer War, in India and Egypt earns them the respect and trust of their comrades and their officers. Many of these veteran soldiers, of whom there were large numbers among the prisoners taken on 13 and 18.11, are also exceptional in regretting that they have been taken prisoner, as otherwise officers and men alike make no secret of their war–weariness. The bad weather at the end of October and in November, the approach of winter and the never–ending mud on the Somme have done nothing to raise morale.*
>
> ***Continuation of the Somme battle:***
> *Although they recognise that halting the offensive would deprive the Allies of the advantages they have gained in the last 5 months, the men do not agree with the continuation of the attacks through the winter. They do not expect any success to come of it, and fear the terrible privations that would necessarily accompany large–scale offensive operations during the winter, of which they had already had a foretaste between 5 and 25.11.*
>
> ***The course of the war:***
> *In general, the British are very confident about the eventual outcome of the war, although, having come through terrible bombardments on the Somme and the experience of being taken prisoner, some of them do now say that the war may have to be settled by negotiation. In their heart of hearts, though, they all think that, sooner or later, the Central Powers will be compelled to bow to the might of Great Britain. There are even some officers who still think that marching into Berlin is a realistic possibility.*
>
> *The British have lost faith in a breakthrough on the Somme this year and excuse their lack of success with the now familiar catchphrase "We were not quite ready yet, but next year…"'*

On New Years Day 1917 another 'Conversations' report commenced:

> *'There were no major engagements on the Somme during the month of December, so only small numbers of prisoners were taken. They were either members of patrols, runners and ration carriers who lost their way, or deserters. They represent no less than 15 different divisions, so their statements offer a broad insight into the current state of morale.'*

January and February 1917 – both bitterly cold but dry months – saw renewed offensive activity and thus a renewed influx of British prisoners. All believed they were still fighting the same battle.

Outcomes

The repercussions of the Somme were long–lasting. 1917 was the year of Arras, Champagne, Passchendaele and Cambrai, clashes that generated loss, misery and frustration that far outstripped the expectations of even the gloomiest allied pessimist. Many catalysts can be found in German lessons–learned on the battlefields of Picardy in 1916.

Most people understandably favour history that supports, or better still enhances, their good opinion of themselves, their 'tribe' or their nation. Because war involves not only loss of life but long–term physical and mental damage that families and friends are left to deal with, this trait is especially applicable to military matters. To the frustration of historians and the detriment of readers seeking accuracy and candour (which, one discovers, is not everyone), this happens also to be the form most attractive to the unwelcome attention of the powers–that–be: seekers of the better truth have lost unquantifiable riches to those ravenous official furnaces. But with the passing of time comes perspective, and we are now finally beginning to realise that some of our vanished or invisible history may be found in Germany, and how vital it is to accurate understanding.

The obvious question is whether Sir Douglas Haig was aware of the sheer scale of intelligence handed to his enemy. German records make it impossible to deny that there were numerous critical influences about which the Commander–in–Chief and his staff had at best only the sketchiest knowledge, and others of which they were *entirely ignorant*. The malfunction of British heavy–calibre shells, for example. In a post–action report from early September 1916, Major Glette of 16th Infantry Division – firmly under the British cosh – described his troops' experience thus:

> *'The enemy's artillery was superior not only due to its aerial support but also due to the heavy calibre of its guns. These 20–30cm shells have a powerfully depressing effect on morale. They move great masses of earth, levelling our fieldworks and burying entire squads of men. The only relief came from the very large number of shells that failed to explode, which amounted to 50–90%.'*

Could Haig rectify this potentially ruinous disability in a way that would immediately assist British prospects? He could not, because the ordnance for future actions was already manufactured and stockpiled. One cannot 'test' artillery shells: gunners fire them in expectation of an accurate and successful outcome – the neutralisation of the enemy. How much control over the other problems listed in this article did Haig have? Again, little or none.

I have been unable to approach the construction of the labyrinthine German defensive positions on the Somme known as the *Riegel Stellung* (which those three escaped Russians mentioned earlier were probably working on), or the evolution of the stifling tactics that allowed the Germans not only to survive the allied onslaught but construct the *Riegel Stellung* and *at the same time* the Hindenburg Line (both unreported to Haig). So based upon my research in Germany to date, what conclusions can presently be drawn about the Somme? They may be summed–up in a paragraph:

During the lead–up to the battle and at its every stage Sir Douglas Haig's plans, hopes and expectations were undermined and sometimes terminally wrecked not only by the obstinate resistance of his German foe, but the consistently foolhardy and all–too–frequently traitorous behaviour of his own troops. The Germans were not clairvoyant – they were informed. Risk may be managed but never eliminated; German records suggest that Sir Douglas Haig, who could only plan with the data at his disposal, floundered in a kind of intelligence half–light. One cannot call him an informed commander.

In too many vital respects the British General Staff were not just unapprised but lethally unaware, which served to propagate that most toxic of military diseases: underestimation of one's enemy.

The French were in an equally parlous situation. They laboured under many of the same impediments as their ally, but with the added complication of a catastrophic casualty list and a desertion rate around fourteen times greater.

It is only through the study of *German* archives that we are able to shine a light upon factors which allied commanders were *unable to effectively act upon*. Because it must be scrutinised moment by moment, how this condition affected the course and nature of the war will only be revealed by decades of future research.

There are no comprehensive German histories of the Somme, or indeed any of the major offensives. Archivists and curators in Germany agree upon the reason: the First World War has been terminally overshadowed by the ghastly events and legacy of its 1939–1945 progeny. That international human catastrophe is exhaustively studied and taught as a form of national therapy.

Ironically perhaps, we are now realising that those long–overlooked records can expose just how much more we have to learn in order not to feed our own children and grandchildren a defective history of an era that contributed so much, not only to their own social and family chronicle, but to the character of their village, town, city, region, nation, continent, and indeed the planet they today inhabit. In Britain the war brought about the crumbling of the systematic denial of social and human rights and opportunities. It gave slow birth to enfranchisement, the League of Nations and its successors, social security, freedom of speech and so many other things that we in this country today (shamefully) take for granted. In short, the Great War is pivotal to *who we are*.

Without German operational accounts, our history is impoverished, sometimes terminally. But we do have a magnificent collection of super–detailed British–oriented works to use as bases and in some cases benchmarks for comparative study.

The question is, are we doomed to endure another century of partiality, or accept past faults for what they are and make the effort to provide a finer, more honest narrative based upon comprehensive bilateral research and analysis?

For the sake of those future generations, and indeed all who served, who although they have now departed this world would surely have wished to know the fuller story that lay behind their sufferings and sacrifices, the seeking and providing of better truths – warts and all – is a duty we surely must not shirk.

Acknowledgements

With many thanks to Mick Forsyth and Dr Claudia Condry.

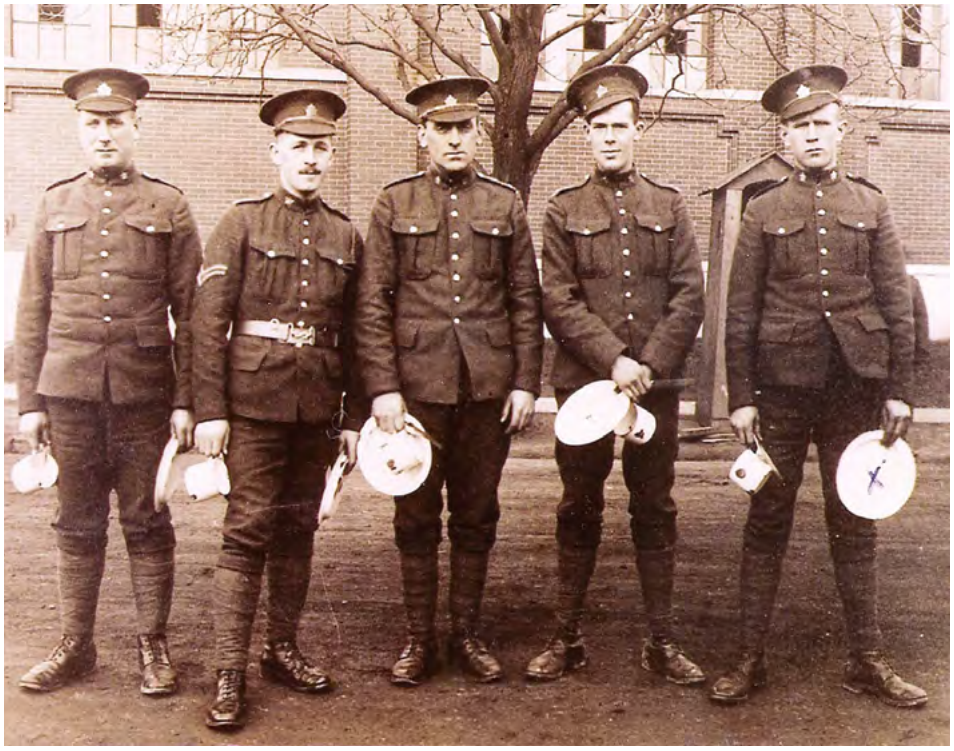
Through the pages of his books, in film and on the battlefield, Peter Barton has for many years been known for pushing the Great War's historical and archaeological boundaries. His excavations in Flanders and on the Somme have brought to international attention many hidden and unknown aspects of the conflict. The ultimate goal is to unite archaeology on the ground with research into primary sources from archives around the world to produce the most complete, accurate and unbiased narrative from both sides of no man's land, and to share that process globally via all forms of media.

'Our German Friends Were Quite Friendly'

Christmas with the Canadians on Vimy Ridge – December 1916

by Gordon MacKinnon

The Christmas Truce of 1914 has been the subject of several books and documentaries. Neither the British nor German high commands approved of this truce, fearing that, if repeated, these stoppages could reduce the fighting spirit of their troops. The following Christmas, British Headquarters ordered that any German who attempted to fraternise by leaving his trench should be shot on sight and German HQ ordered that any German or British soldiers attempting to fraternise should be fired on. On Christmas Day 1915 two officers of the Scots Guards agreed with the German commander opposite to a 45 minute truce to allow for the removal of the dead in no man's land; the officers were subsequently court martialled for the offence. In 2017 the centenary of the Canadian action in capturing Vimy Ridge during the opening days of the Battle of Arras in April 1917 has rightly been commemorated but the Canadians had been up on the ridge for several months before that achievement. And in late 1916 a Christmas Truce occurred on Vimy Ridge which resulted in a sharp dismissive comment in the war diary of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI). Two letters from a soldier of the PPCLI to his father and sister in Canada, and which remained in the family unknown to historians until recently, are evidence that a truce did take place. Gordon MacKinnon points to an overlooked story with the aid of his uncle's letters.



Private Ronald MacKinnon (far right) and other 81st Battalion CEF soldiers at Exhibition Park, Toronto, 1915. Note the Canadian militia uniform. Author's collection

'Tray bon'

157629 Private Ronald MacKinnon, 3 Company, PPCLI was in the Canadian front line trench in the La Folie left sub–sector on Vimy Ridge in December, 1916. This is the section of trench preserved today in concrete resembling sandbags behind the new visitor centre in the Memorial Park. He was on sentry duty on Christmas Day and witnessed a very unusual celebration taking place in no man's land. Later, he described it in a letter to his sister Jeanie in Toronto: 'I had quite a good Xmas considering I was in the front line. Xmas eve was pretty stiff, sentry–go up to the hips in mud of course. I had long rubber boots or waders. We had a truce on Xmas Day and our German friends were quite friendly. They came over to see us and we traded bully beef for cigars. Xmas was 'tray bon' which means very good.'[1] He had just arrived at the First Army School of Mortars at Steenbecque, 80km from Vimy Ridge, when he wrote the letter on 30 December, 1916, apparently free of censorship.

The 1916 truce in the Canadian sector is not well known. The adjutant of PPCLI feigned ignorance when he wrote up the battalion war diary for Christmas Day: 'Situation quiet throughout the day. Numbers of the enemy showed signs of wishing to fraternise and appeared in No Man's Land. They were not fired on – every opportunity was given that some of them might come in to our lines – None of them did so, however.' Most military historians have ignored the truce or accepted the war diary version.

Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry

As was the case with almost all the other Great War Canadian infantry battalions, PPCLI was created during the war: August 1914 in the case of this particular battalion. It was unique in that it was raised by a private individual, Hamilton Gault, a Canadian multi–millionaire who had fought in the South African War and was a strong supporter of the British Empire and all things British. It was the last regiment in the British Empire/Dominions to be founded this way. With the backing of Sam Hughes, the Canadian Minister of Militia and Defence, and Lieutenant Colonel Francis Farquhar, the Military Secretary of the Governor General, the concept of creating an 'instant' regiment was formed. The soldiers would come from the thousands of British immigrants in Canada who had previous military experience and would not need much training. Over 90 per cent of the 'Originals', (as the first 1,094 Patricias were known) were British born and most had had previous military service. Since the war with Germany was expected to be short, and with the backing of the Governor General, Field Marshal HRH Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught, who was delighted that the regiment was to bear the name of his daughter, the PPCLI was ready to sail for Britain by the end of September 1914. Here it joined 80 Brigade of the 27th British Division of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). [2] By early January 1915, it was in the trenches at Ypres.

The PPCLI which came from the Somme battlefield to relieve the 2/18 London Irish Regiment in the trenches on Vimy Ridge in late October, 1916, had changed considerably since January 1915. The battalion had ceased to be a unit in the BEF; when the 3rd Canadian Division was created in December, 1915, the PPCLI was transferred to its 7 Infantry Brigade. Casualties had reduced the percentage of British–born men who were replaced by Canadian–born men who had volunteered to serve in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). Ronald MacKinnon, the author's uncle, was one of the replacements.

Joining the CEF

Ronald's father had immigrated from Scotland and his mother from County Armagh, Northern Ireland. Born in Toronto in 1893, Ronald joined Toronto's 48th Highlanders militia in 1909 and served until 1912. In September, 1915, a married man with two children, he attested in the 81st (Overseas) Battalion, CEF in Toronto.

After training at Niagara–on–the–Lake he was sent to England in May, 1916, where the 81st was broken up to reinforce Canadian battalions already in France. He was posted to the Royal Canadian Regiment and on June 26, 1916, during the Battle of Sanctuary Wood near Ypres, was wounded and sent to England to recuperate. After convalescence he was placed in the PPCLI and returned to the trenches in late November, 1916. He had only been a Patricia for three weeks when he witnessed the truce.

'I am enclosing a postcard taken outside our hut here. The blue band on the left arm means convalescent. The gold stripe means wounded in action. One man in the photo has 5 stripes up: that means wounded 5 different times.' Letter from Ronald – Marked with an X – to his father, 4 September 1916, from Hut 14, 2nd Canadian Command Depot, Shoreham–by–the–Sea, Sussex. Around the same time he sent a letter to his sister containing the same photo: 'We have nice comfortable huts here (you can see by enclosed). We have two wee trestles four inches high and three bed boards. We put down the trestles, lay the boards on and then a bag filled with straw for a mattress. Also a straw filled pillow and three blankets. They are very comfortable around Reveille! We have to scrub trestles, boards, forms (seats) and the hut every week. Everything is kept spotless and our stove is just shining.' Author's collection

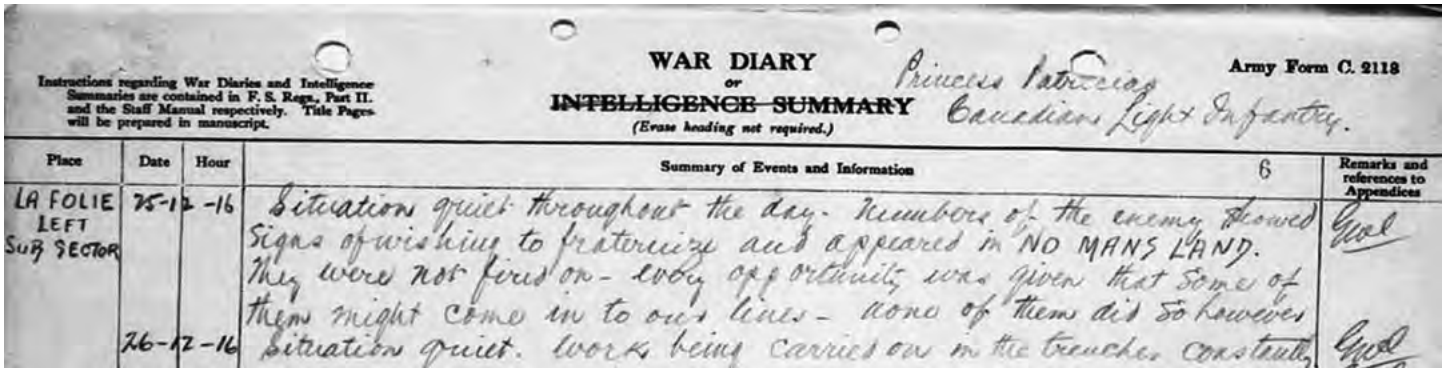
A rare picture of the 81st Battalion Colours. Author's collection

In a subsequent letter, dated 2 February, 1917, to his father, who farmed near Dundalk, Ontario, Ronald wrote more about Christmas in the trenches: 'I have just got a parcel from Jeanie: a box of cigars. She wishes me a Merry Xmas. I am sorry I did not get them in time only so that those at home could know I had them on Xmas. Xmas Day was very wet and cold and we had a truce on our part of the line. I had bacon and tea for breakfast. For dinner, the best Xmas dinner I ever had, at least I enjoyed it more – a dixie full of good fresh meat and Mulligan with lots of beans in it. I would not have traded it for all your turkey and cranberry sauce but my thoughts were home with the turkey just the same. I could picture you all filling up and wondering what I was eating. I was on sentry–go not a hundred yards from old Fritz about the time that Gordon [his 14–year–old brother] would be looking for a new jack–knife. I was a little cold and wet and my rubber boots were heavy with mud but looking out into No Man's Land I could see Gordon looking for that knife in his stocking. Yes, I thought of you all at home.'

White flag

The PPCLI was the only unit of 7 Canadian Infantry Brigade to mention the truce in its war diary except denials by some battalions that fraternisation had taken place on their own section of the line. The 3rd Canadian Division war diary Summary of Intelligence from

The trenches of the la Folie left sub–sector on Vimy Ridge. The PPCLI war diary for December 1916 mentions patrols and activity around the Duffield, Grange, Tidsa and Birkin groups of craters. The Duffield and Grange group are an integral part of the preserved trench systems on Vimy Ridge today. IWM/WFA Mapping the Front Project image ref M_019404



Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs., Part II. and the Staff Manual respectively. Title Pages will be prepared in manuscript.

WAR DIARY or ~~**INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY**~~ *(Erase heading not required.)*

Princess Patricias Canadian Light Infantry.

Army Form C. 2118

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
LA FOLIE LEFT SUB SECTOR	25-12-16		Situation quiet throughout the day. Numbers of the enemy showed signs of wishing to fraternize and appeared in NO MANS LAND. They were not fired on - every opportunity was given that some of them might come in to our lines - none of them did so however	Nil
	26-12-16		Situation quiet. Work being carried on in the trenches. Constant	Nil

Extract from PPCLI war diary for 25 December 1916

5.00am on 25 December 1916 to 5.00am on the 26th records that 'An attempt was made in the La FOLIE SECTION to fraternize and several Germans were seen to leave their parapet under cover of a white flag and come out in front of their wire. They were shouted at in their own language that if they did not wish to surrender unconditionally they would be fired upon. None of them seemed desirous of surrendering and they were accordingly fired on, one of them being hit. The remainder at once returned to their trenches. [signed] P L ARMSTRONG, Major, for Lieut.–Col. General Staff 3rd Canadian Division.' [3]

Historians of the battle have been equally taciturn. The first history of the PPCLI, Ralph Hodder–Williams' *Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry 1914–1919,* (Hodder and Stoughton: 1923), gives the war diary version of the events of 25 December, 1916 and David Bercuson's 2001 history of the PPCLI does not mention it at all. Relying on memoirs and memories of those veterans who fought there Canadian writer Pierre Berton in his book *Vimy*, does write about the lack of hostility on the ridge on Christmas Day 1916.[4] In a recent book on Hitler's service in the First World War, Professor Thomas Weber relies on Berton and his own research in German military sources to show that there was a truce.[5] The German version alleges that the Canadians initiated it!

Private Ronald MacKinnon left Vimy Ridge on Christmas night for a few weeks at First Army School to train as a rifle grenadier. He returned in mid–January and then in mid–February the battalion moved to Bruay for intensive training for the great Canadian assault on Vimy Ridge planned for 9–10 April 1917. He was a rifle grenadier in the first wave on that historic morning and was killed in action. His remains were temporarily buried on the battlefield. Exhumed a few days later, they lie today in Bois Carré British Military Cemetery in Thélus.

References

(1) The original letters are in the Library and Archives Canada Fonds E5462–0–0 E. Online typescript copies can be found at www.canadianletters.ca

(2) David J Bercuson, *The Patricias: The Proud History of A Fighting Regiment*, (Stoddart Publishing Co. Ltd: 2001), p.31.

(3) 3rd Division war diary, Appendix 415, p.2 (online).

(4) Pierre Berton,*Vimy,* (Penguin Canada: 1987), pp.79–80.

(5) Thomas Weber, *Hitler's First War: Adolph Hitler, The Men of the List Regiment, and The First World War,* (Oxford University Press: 2010), pp.170–171. Hitler was recovering from a wound and not on the ridge at Christmas 1916 but his regiment was. Professor Weber has located a reference to the events in the war diary of another Bavarian unit which was there. 'Attempts at initiating fraternization by the enemy (calling out, raising of hands, etc.) are immediately quashed by the snipers and artillery men who had been ordered in and had stood ready to fire.'

Raiders Lost – Now Found

The Tyneside Scottish at Armentières – February 1917

by David Tattersfield

During the Great War trench raids were perceived as an operational necessity in order to dominate no man's land, to take prisoners and to ensure British Empire and dominions troops retained an offensive spirit. These raids frequently came at a heavy cost in lives and, if care was not taken, could result in unit identification being seized by the Germans – exactly the opposite of what was intended. For this reason, raiders invariably stripped themselves of identification tags, regimental badges and pay books. The result of such procedures meant that any British troops who were killed on these raids would stand virtually no chance of being identified if their bodies were not immediately recovered by their comrades. In this article David Tattersfield shares his research into a group of soldiers who were originally buried by the Germans, research which has enabled the identification of several men who failed to return from a large–scale trench raid in early 1917.

Coincidence?

Rue–Petillon Military Cemetery situated near the village of Fleurbaix, midway between the villages of Neuve–Chapelle and Armentières, is one of the many cemeteries dotted around the 'flat–lands' of Flanders. Being a little to the north of the new cemetery at Fromelles, it is still slightly off the beaten track for most visitors to this part of northern France. The cemetery was started as early as December 1914 and was in use until the German Spring offensive rolled through the fields of this area in April 1918.

After the war the then Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) – now the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) selected Rue–Petillon to be one of the permanent post–war concentration cemeteries; consequently the number of burials grew as smaller cemeteries in the area were cleared and re–interments took place. As a result of this expansion, the cemetery today contains the graves of over 880 identified soldiers with a further 600 burials of men whose identities could not be established.

Several years ago I had reason to visit this cemetery and, wandering along the rows, was slowly making my way back towards the gates when my eye was caught by a group of headstones which bore the same inscription: 'A Soldier of the Great War, 11 February 1917'. I initially counted eight with this detail in adjoining graves, but soon added others to this number (one of the headstones read 'Unknown Officer'). I eventually came to the conclusion that the number of men with this date in this row amounted to 11.[1]

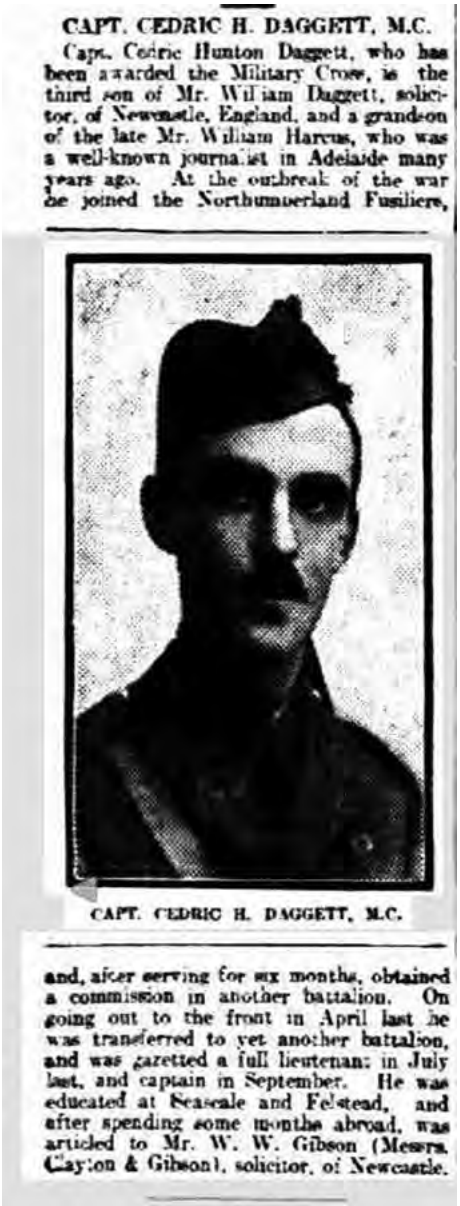
Curiosity aroused, I photographed the headstones for future investigation. As I took the photos I noted one headstone of an identified soldier of the Tyneside Scottish – these battalions were allowed their own unique headstone rather than bearing the 'regimental' badge of the Northumberland Fusiliers – was adjacent to the unknown officer. This was Private R Thomas who had died just three days later – on 14 February. Was Reginald Thomas of significance as his date of death was so close

Rue–Petillon Military Cemetery. Author

to the eleven who had died on 11 February, or was this just a coincidence?

Cedric Daggett

The winter months of early 1917 were said to have been the coldest of the war. This may or may not be true, although any winter 'up to your waist in water' – as the lyrics of that year's song 'Oh It's a Lovely War' would have us believe – must have been a miserable experience. Although conditions were trying for the men of 4/Tyneside Scottish (23/Northumberland Fusiliers) and Captain Cedric Daggett – officer commanding A Company – in the flat, featureless moonscape of the Armentières sector, they could have been worse. This was, after all, a relatively quiet sector and, having been heavily involved in the opening day of the Battle of the Somme the previous summer, the mud perhaps could be endured. The battalion, part of the 34th Division, had been formed as part of Kitchener's recruiting drive of 1914.



CAPT. CEDRIC H. DAGGETT, M.C.

Capt. Cedric Hunton Daggett, who has been awarded the Military Cross, is the third son of Mr. William Daggett, solicitor, of Newcastle, England, and a grandson of the late Mr. William Harcus, who was a well-known journalist in Adelaide many years ago. At the outbreak of the war he joined the Northumberland Fusiliers,

CAPT. CEDRIC H. DAGGETT, M.C.

and, after serving for six months, obtained a commission in another battalion. On going out to the front in April last he was transferred to yet another battalion, and was gazetted a full lieutenant in July last, and captain in September. He was educated at Seascale and Felstead, and after spending some months abroad, was articled to Mr. W. W. Gibson (Messrs. Clayton & Gibson), solicitor, of Newcastle.

Cedric Daggett. Source: The Register*, Adelaide, via www.trove.nla.gov.au*

The 23–year–old Cedric Daggett was sufficiently stirred by the outbreak of war to be an early volunteer and he enlisted on 5 September 1914. Despite his lack of height – his enlistment papers tell us that he stood just 5' 4" tall and weighed 104lbs (7 ½ stones)– it is likely he would have stood out as being very 'middle class'. He informed the recruiting sergeant that he was a solicitor.

Felsted School. Sourced www.recordinguttlesfordhistory.org.uk

Cedric Hunton Daggett was born on 3 December 1890. The family home at the time was 20, Victoria Square, Jesmond where his parents William and Evangeline were recorded as living, along with Cedric, his older brother William and two servants, in the census of 1891. A third son – Harry – was born in 1898.

The 1901 census puts the family (less Cedric who was at prep school) at Hollin Hill Terrace, in the village of Riding Mill, some 20 miles west of Newcastle, but on a direct train route for Cedric's father who practised as a solicitor in Newcastle city centre.

After prep school at Seascale, Cedric was sent south to be educated at Felsted, an independent school in Essex.

Cedric followed in his father's footsteps and trained to be a solicitor and, having qualified in 1913, worked for the firm of Clayton and Gibson on Grey Street, Newcastle. William Daggett's firm was situated only a few seconds walk away, just round the corner on Mosley Street.

Saturday, 5 September 1914 was the day on which the *London Opinion* magazine published the now famous portrait of Kitchener informing its readers that 'Your Country Needs You'. It can't be known if Cedric was influenced by this publication, but he turned up at a recruiting office that day and, giving his religion as Roman Catholic, signed up for 'three years or duration'. He was allotted to 9/Northumberland Fusiliers – a K2 formation which was ultimately to form part of the 17th (Northern) Division – and commenced training under the usual Kitchener battalion difficulties of shortages of everything from boots to NCOs.

Inevitably, 'officer material' such as that offered by Cedric was something that the army would not overlook. Within six months – after being examined and passed 'physically fit' – he was discharged on 13 March 1915 in order to learn the ropes as a subaltern. It is likely he received a week's home leave, as the date of his appointment to the rank of second lieutenant was 20 March 1915.

Daggett, wearing his Tyneside Scottish tam o'shanter, as he appeared in his entry in Bond of Sacrifice*. Courtesy IWM HU 120881*

Tyneside Scottish

Months of training followed, so it was not until April 1916 that Second Lieutenant Cedric Daggett joined 23/Northumberland Fusiliers – 4/Tyneside Scottish. The battalion formed part of the 34th Division, which was led by the famous Major General Edward Ingouville–Williams, known to his men as 'Inky Bill'.

The battalion's war diary records that on Easter Sunday, 23 April 1916 ('a fine and sunny day') the men were engaged in the semi–finals of a platoon football competition in and around the village of Bayenghem, about 8 miles northwest of St Omer. The diary goes on to record that '2/Lt C H Daggett joined from home, and is posted to 'A' Coy.'

Cedric joined a battalion led by Lieutenant Colonel William Lyle, which had been in France since the beginning of the year. It was not long before 4/Tyneside Scottish and the rest of the 34th Division, was to start its journey to the Somme.

Major General Edward 'Inky Bill' Williams, GOC 34th Division

1 July 1916

The attack by the 34th Division on 1 July 1916 is well known. The Tyneside Scottish brigade attacked astride the main Albert to Bapaume road either side of la Boisselle and in the process lost over 800 officers and men killed, with wounded and missing taking the casualties even higher.

Leading by example, Lieutenant Colonel Lyle was, according to the 4/Tyneside Scottish war diary, 'last seen alive with walking stick in hand, amongst his men about 200 yards from the German Trenches'.[2]

The battalion's second in command, Major Montague Burge was also killed, 'before he had gone many yards from our lines'. In Daggett's own company, the commander Captain Joseph Cubey 'was killed before he had gone 100 yards'.

The war diary reports that on on 2 July 'The only two officers who turned up for Roll Call were Lt G S Shelson and 2/Lt C Daggett who were exhausted and had had a most harrowing time, from them it was learned of the gallant and unflinching way in which all our officers, NCOs and men went over in this great attack without the slightest hesitation.'

4/Tyneside Scottish incurred the third highest casualties of all the infantry battalions which attacked on 1 July 1916. Besides the 10 officers and 230 men from the battalion who were killed that day, substantial numbers of missing and wounded took the battalion's total casualties to an eye–watering 629.[3]


HEROES IN BATTLE.

Shieldsmen Among the Missing.

CAPT. JOSEPH B. CUBEY,
SOUTH SHIELDS.
"Missing, believed killed."

Captain Joseph Cubey. North East War Memorials Project website, source www.newmp.org.uk

Recovery and rebuilding

On 7 July 1916 Major Cecil Porch – who was the second–in–command of the 34th Division's pioneer battalion, 18/Northumberland Fusiliers – took command of 4/Tyneside Scottish. The following day the battalion's war diary recorded the fact that Cedric Daggett was appointed to command A Coy and was gazetted full lieutenant. He was made up to acting captain just two months later in September 1916.

Absorbing and training replacements for the losses incurred would have been the highest priority for the new CO. This took place to the north of Arras – well away from the fighting on the Somme. Over the course of three days at the end of July 1916, 4/Tyneside Scottish received drafts totalling 329 men. It seems that many of these men came from the Duke of Wellington's (West Riding Regiment), and a good proportion of the new intake hailed from Huddersfield, Bradford and Leeds. Among these new drafts were John Collett, Henry Clarke and Walter Guffick. Others from this regiment included John Stamper – who had briefly enlisted into the Duke of Wellington's Regiment in January 1914 – Albert Waite, David Walling and Reginald Thomas.

Others in this draft were no doubt men who had recovered from wounds, such as Albert Robinson whose regimental number 19/1682 tells us he was originally with 19/Northumberland Fusiliers (2nd Tyneside Pioneers, part of the 35th Division).

Another large group of draftees appears to have come from the regiment's 1/4 (Territorial) Battalion – this group included Frederick Hammand, Robert Banks, Edward Jenkins and probably one of the oldest soldiers of the new draft, the 39–year–old Joseph Robson (whose real surname was Storey).

Although the Geordie character of the battalion was eroded by these arrivals, no doubt the drafts of reinforcements soon settled into their new surroundings. Slowly coming back up to strength in terms of numbers and experience, 4/Tyneside Scottish continued the training of its new draftees and fatalities were relatively light: less than 30 men from the battalion being killed in the four months from October 1916 to January 1917. This time was spent in the

Private John Collett. Courtesy Janet Rainford

Private David Walling from Craven's Part in the Great War, *1919 via www.findmypast.co.uk*

Sergeant Albert Robinson, from The Hexham Herald *via Thomas Temple*

Armentières/Bois Grenier area which was, for long periods in the war, a relatively quiet sector and was used in order to bring shattered units – such as those of the 34th Division – back up to full fighting efficiency. The 4/Tyneside Scottish took part in the usual rotation of battalions from reserve, to support, to front line duties in this period. A modest trench raid by 2 officers and 31 other ranks (OR) took place on 12/13 November. This was on the German 'Incision Trench', at La Chapelle–d'Armentières. Although some wounds were incurred amongst the raiders, no fatalities were reported.

Cedric Daggett was no doubt delighted to be awarded the Military Cross (MC) in the New Year's Honours list of January 1917.

Raid – 11 February 1917

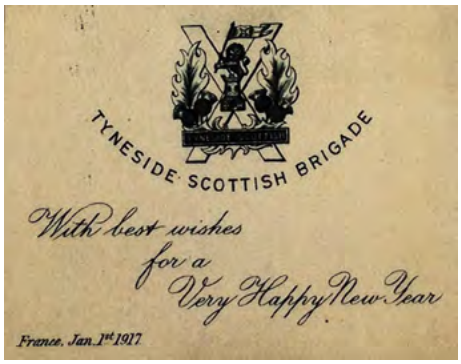
The 4/Tyneside Scottish was withdrawn from the front line at the end of January 1917 and moved back to Erquinghem where training was carried out over the next 10 days. The battalion's war diary entry for 7 February records that 'The special party at Erquinghem are very busy in their training and from reports are very fit and confident...' It is likely that those in the 'special party' would have been under no illusions that they were going to be used in an operation, even if they were not told the full details. The attack was to take place on the evening of 11 February 1917.

John Collett, who was in B Company, wrote home on the eve of the attack. His letter, dated 10 February to his wife Florence and daughter – who lived at Tulip Crescent in Hunslet, a suburb of Leeds – bears no hint of forthcoming action, even though he must have known he was about to take part in a trench raid the following night.

Jack, as he signed himself, had told Florence in a letter a few days earlier that he was 'out of the trenches, and it's a good job too because it's that cold. I think I've never seen a winter like this, they are starving to death in the trenches'.[4]

He goes on to describe how 300 of the men from the 4th Battalion [ie Tyneside Scottish] had a football match on the [obviously frozen] river '...just as you was kicking the ball you would go on your back.'

John's last letter goes on to refer to a parcel he had just received and enclosed a 'Brigade Card' saying 'you will think it's late to send New Year cards but we have only got them today.'



New Year Card of the Tyneside Scottish. Courtesy Janet Rainford

The coming raid was to be delivered on the German 'Inclement' and 'Incision' trenches. This was a much larger affair than the November raid, and would take place at exactly the same point on the front line as the earlier enterprise.

The brigade war diary records that the raiding party was to consist of 13 officers and 257 OR, including a dozen other ranks from the 209/Field Company, RE.

The objective was to obtain prisoners and identification, as well as capturing machine guns, destroying dugouts and doing as much damage to the enemy's trenches as possible. Zero hour was fixed for 10.30pm. It was intended that the raiders would withdraw after less than 50 minutes. All four companies of the battalion were to be involved, each led by two or three officers and comprising around 65 OR. Despite his not leading the raid, Lieutenant Colonel Porch was to take part, and duly attached himself to C Company.

It is possible to glean the events of the raid from the battalion and brigade war diaries and from other sources. We know that the four companies were deployed from left to right A, D, C and B. The attack of A Company was led by Captain Cedric Daggett, with Second Lieutenant John Common and Second Lieutenant Stewart Milloy also taking part; that these men 'met with great resistance and suffered very heavy casualties'.

It appears, from the war diaries that Second Lieutenant Common, who reached the enemy trenches, was severely wounded. He was brought out by his orderly. Second Lieutenant Milloy managed to get into the enemy trenches and bombed two dugouts, killing three Germans. He later shot another with his revolver. A German machine gun caused a number of casualties and prevented the rear of A Company getting to the German line. Milloy returned to the point of entry and reported to Captain Daggett who was on the parapet. Hearing the sound of Germans approaching, Milloy re–entered the German trench and killed a German soldier with his revolver. After further action Milloy and Daggett probably realised the situation was untenable – a party of about 50 Germans was seen – so the two officers rushed back to the German wire where Daggett had ordered everyone to fall back. At this point Milloy realised Daggett and a private who had been with him were nowhere to be seen. Pursued across no man's land by Germans, the remains of A Company returned to the British trenches. When the survivors regained the British lines, they discovered that Captain Daggett was missing. A party under Company Sergeant Major (CSM) Watson went out and brought back a number of wounded men, but no trace of Captain Daggett could be found.

To A Company's right was D Company, which was also 'met with a very strong resistance' and suffered casualties in attempting to get into the enemy trenches. Second Lieutenant John Freeman was mortally wounded, and Sergeant Alsop – later awarded a Military Medal – took over command of the advance party. Owing to the wire being badly cut and the number of casualties to be evacuated, this party did not attempt to enter the enemy trenches again.

Further to the right was C Company which met with resistance at the entrance to the gap in the wire where Second Lieutenant J Watson – who was in command of the advance party – was wounded. Lieutenant Colonel Porch reinforced this advanced party and together with Second Lieutenant William Algie rushed into the first line of enemy trenches. The records state that 'This party did most excellent work both in the German first and support trenches. Second Lieutenant Algie assumed command of the support line party and led his men straight into that line. Shooting seven Germans with his revolver, he also bombed many of the enemy....'

Specifically mentioned in the war diary was CSM Moore and Lance Corporal Mitchell, who were awarded a DCM and MM respectively. It seems that men of the 209/Field Company RE accompanied Algie's party and '...did good work in connection with blowing up the ammunition store and Company HQ.' Algie withdrew, bringing back five German soldiers and two German officers with him, one of whom Algie shot. The war diary records 'Lieutenant T E Heron also did very good work in the German front line'.

No mention is made of B Company in this narrative although an after action report

View of Tulip Crescent, John Collett's home in Hunslet, taken in July 1961. See www.leodis.net

suggests that this party – on the right of the raid – had trouble getting through the German wire. Nevertheless, it was claimed that the enemy trenches were entered and damage done to dugouts.

A summary of the action strongly suggests that the Germans were ready and waiting for the attackers, that the German artillery promptly fell on the German front line once the raiders had entered it, and that the British barrage was insufficient to prevent the Germans reinforcing their front line.

Major Brewin's diary

A personal account of this raid can be found in The National Archives. This was written by an officer who is almost certainly Major Bertram Robert Brewin. Major Brewin was second–in–command of the 34th Division's 16/Royal Scots from February to April 1917 and subsequently became commanding officer of 24/Northumberland Fusiliers. Interestingly, Brewin was charged with impertinence and reverted to captain in June 1917.

Brewin's account describes Lieutenant Colonel Porch, who 'could neither talk nor think anything but 'shop' all day long...one got bored stiff with shop, we used to flee out and leave him...'. His diary also gives some detail of the raid itself, of which he says the main objective was a position – according to a sketch map in Brewin's account – located in the support line which '...looked, from aeroplane photos, like a company Head Quarters with dug outs.'

Brewin's account continues...

> 'A Company ran up against heavy resistance (there was no doubt the Bosch knew of the projected raid) and MG fire. [The company] ... only got as far as the parapet, exchanging bombs. Daggett, commanding A Company was lost there: he was wounded and never found. B Company never even got to the parapet (they had the worst company commander) and the men apparently never attempted anything. D met strong opposition, and had a bombing combat but got in, and pushed towards B, but as B never came they got pushed back and out. C got in and the party went straight for [the German HQ] consisting of Lieut Algie and six men. The support party ... had to go and assist the block as the Bosch were pressing in, and they had to keep the bridge head clear for Algie to get back to. Algie got [to the German HQ] blew up one dug out when they refused to emerge, and captured two prisoners in another and then dashed back again: all got back with two wounded. Daggett of A killed, Freeman of D died of wounds. Heron and Common of C, Watson of D, Young of A wounded. The decorations were ridiculous. 1 DSO for Algie and four MCs !!!'

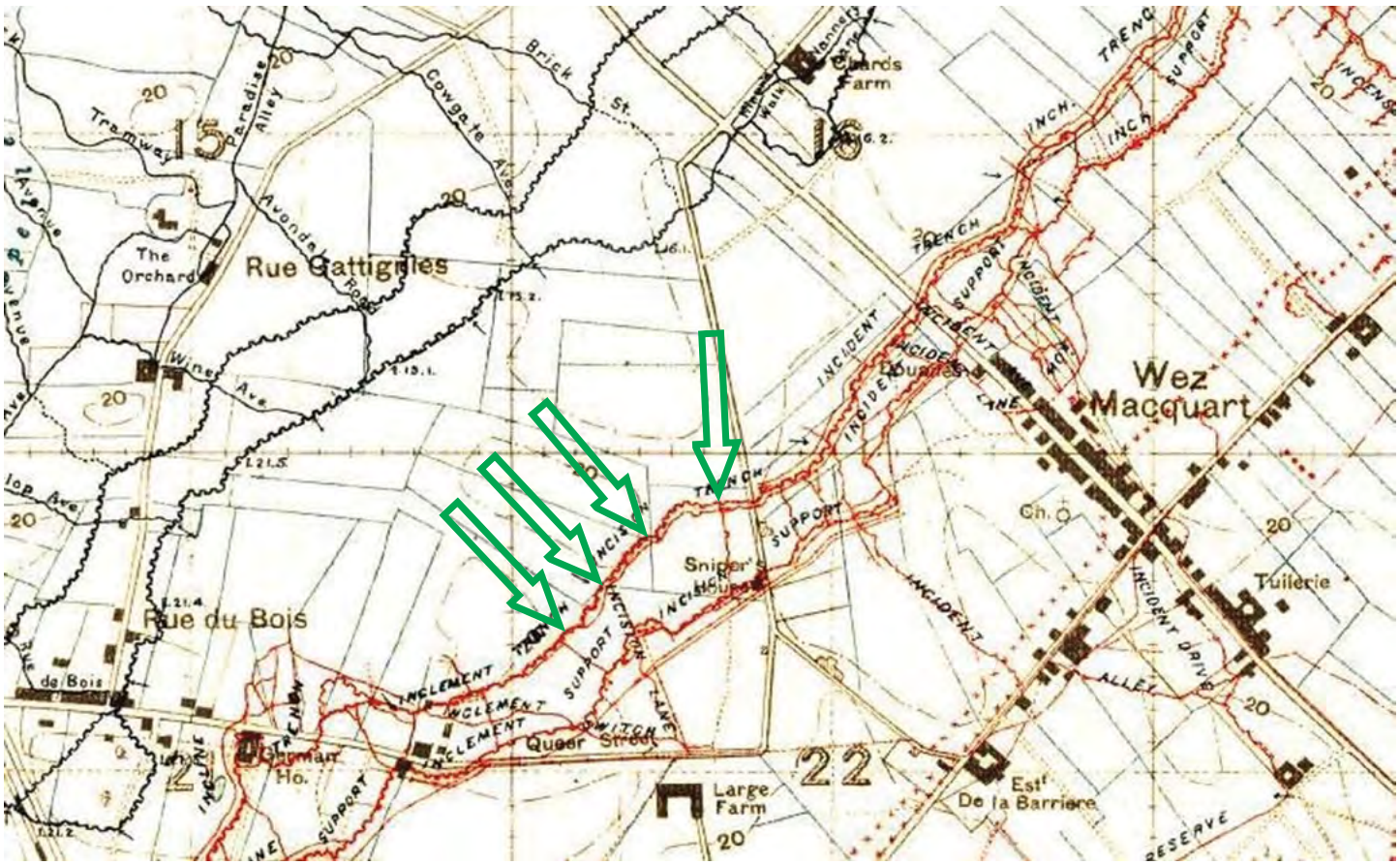
Major Bertram Brewin from Bond of Sacrifice. *Courtesy IWM HU 114321*

The war diary later records a second DSO, awarded to Lieutenant Colonel Porch, and five – rather than four –MCs. In addition to the MCs, four men were awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, eleven men were awarded the Military Medal and one man the *Medaille Militaire*.

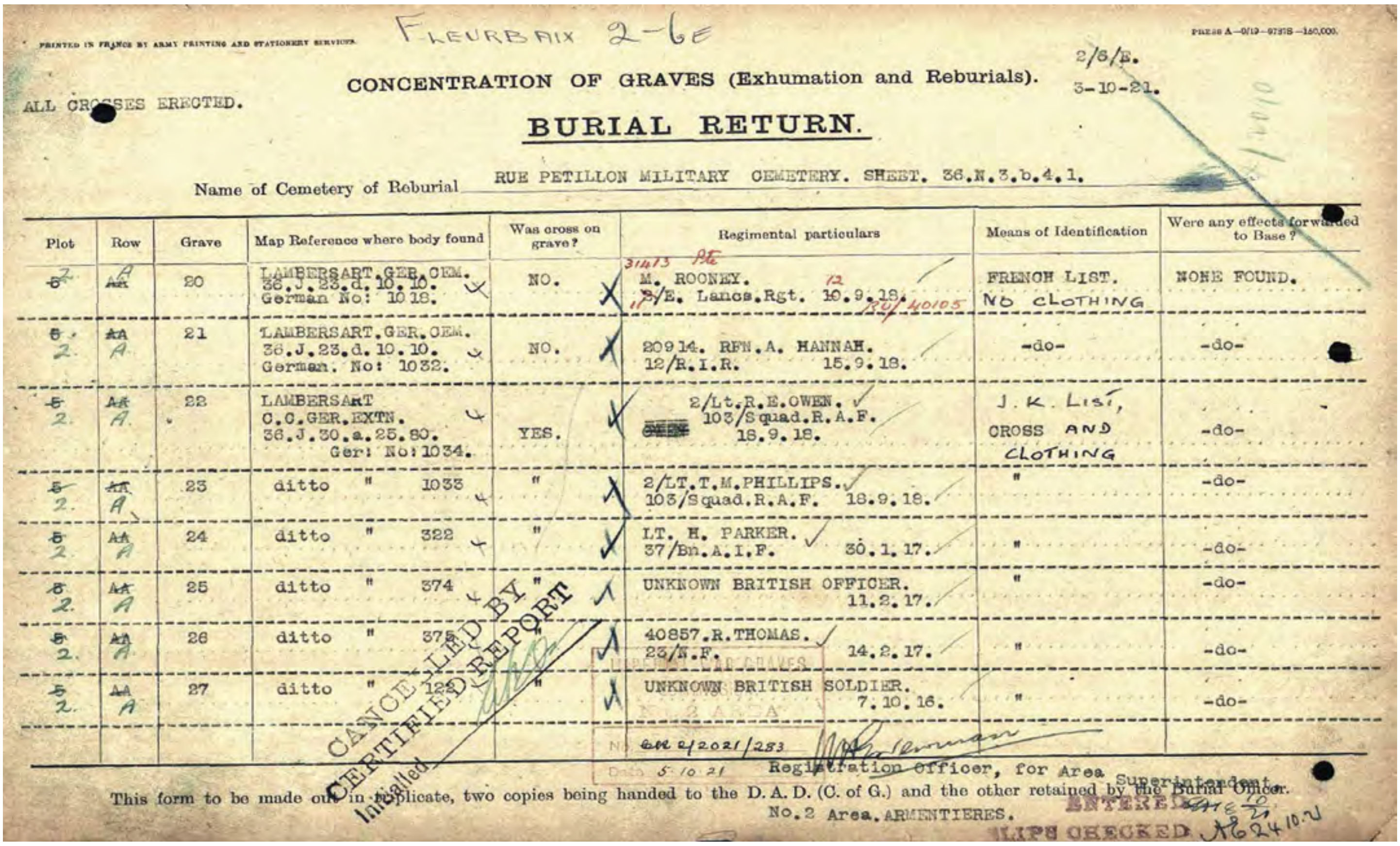
Casualties

Brewin's account – significantly – states 'Some 12 men missing'. Looking at the CWGC's records, it seems that, as a result of the raid, there were 2 officers and 23 men who are recorded by the CWGC as fatalities from the battalion. Another man – a sapper from 209/Field Company RE – was also killed.

Of these 25 individuals from 4/Tyneside Scottish, 22 are recorded as being killed on 11 (17 men) and 12 (5 men) February 1917. The



Trench map of the area selected for the raid on the Rue du Bois/Wez Macquart sector. Note the entry points for the raiders just a few hundred metres south west of the road traversing no man's land from the British line southwest of Chard's Farm to the German held village of Wez Macquart along which British and German troops mingled during the Christmas Truce of 1914



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FLEURBAIX 2-6E

2/6/E.
3-10-21.

ALL CROSSES ERECTED.

CONCENTRATION OF GRAVES (Exhumation and Reburials).

BURIAL RETURN.

Name of Cemetery of Reburial RUE PETILLON MILITARY CEMETERY. SHEET. 36.N.3.b.4.1.

Plot	Row	Grave	Map Reference where body found	Was cross on grave?	Regimental particulars	Means of Identification	Were any effects forwarded to Base?
5 2	AA A	20	LAMBERSART.GER.CEM. 36.J.23.d.10.10. German No: 1018.	NO.	31413 Pte M. ROONEY. 11/E. Lancs.Rgt. 10.9.18.	FRENCH LIST. NO CLOTHING	NONE FOUND.
5 2	AA A	21	LAMBERSART.GER.CEM. 36.J.23.d.10.10. German. No: 1032.	NO.	20914. RFN.A. HANNAH. 12/R.I.R. 15.9.18.	-do-	-do-
5 2	AA A	22	LAMBERSART C.C.GER.EXTN. 36.J.30.a.25.80. Ger: No:1034.	YES.	2/Lt.R.E.OWEN. 103/Squad.R.A.F. 18.9.18.	J. K. LIST, CROSS AND CLOTHING	-do-
5 2	AA A	23	ditto " 1033	"	2/LT.T.M.PHILLIPS. 103/Squad.R.A.F. 18.9.18.	"	-do-
5 2	AA A	24	ditto " 322	"	LT. H. PARKER. 37/Bn.A.I.F. 30.1.17.	"	-do-
5 2	AA A	25	ditto " 374	"	UNKNOWN BRITISH OFFICER. 11.2.17.	"	-do-
5 2	AA A	26	ditto " 375	"	40857.R.THOMAS. 23/N.F. 14.2.17.	"	-do-
5 2	AA A	27	ditto " 122	"	UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER. 7.10.16.	"	-do-

CANCELLED BY CERTIFIED REPORT
Initialled

No. 2/2021/283
Date 5.10.21

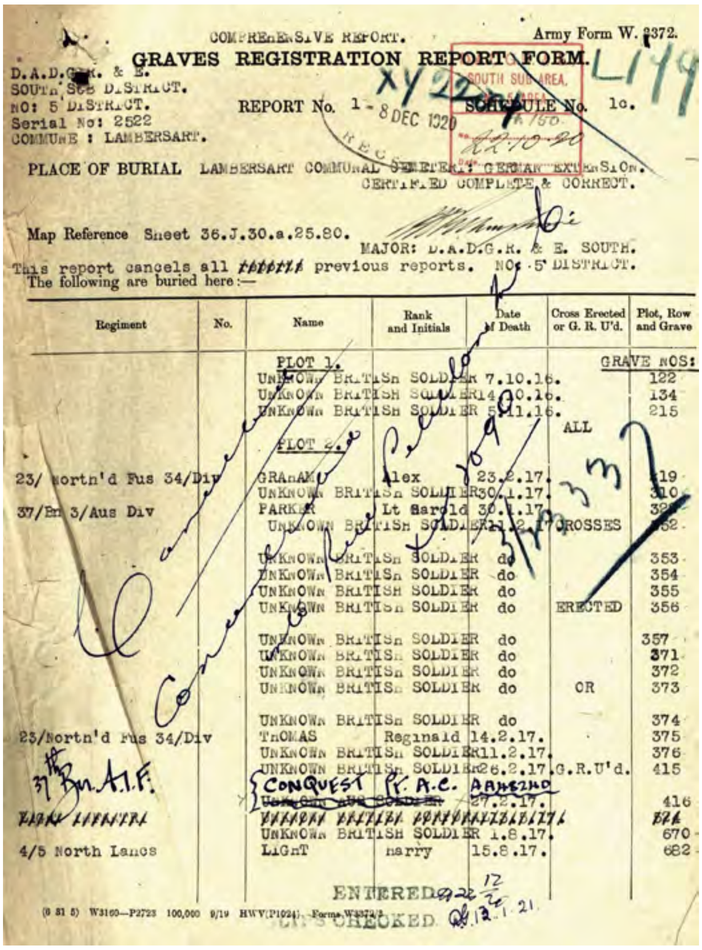
Registration Officer, for Area Superintendent.

This form to be made out in triplicate, two copies being handed to the D. A. D. (C. of G.) and the other retained by the Burial Officer.

No.2 Area. ARMENTIERES.

ENTERED
SLIPS CHECKED

Graves registration document from the CWGC showing grave 374 to be that of an unknown British officer at what was Lambersart Communal Cemetery German Extension. This became grave 25 at Rue Petillon. Courtesy CWGC



COMPREHENSIVE REPORT. Army Form W. 3372.

GRAVES REGISTRATION REPORT FORM.

D.A.D.G.R. & E.
SOUTH SUB DISTRICT.
NO: 5 DISTRICT.
Serial No: 2522
COMMUNE : LAMBERSART.

REPORT No. 1 SCHEDULE No. 1c.

8 DEC 1920

PLACE OF BURIAL LAMBERSART COMMUNAL CEMETERY GERMAN EXTENSION.
CERTIFIED COMPLETE & CORRECT.

Map Reference Sheet 36.J.30.a.25.80.

MAJOR: D.A.D.G.R. & E. SOUTH.
NO: 5 DISTRICT.

This report cancels all previous reports.

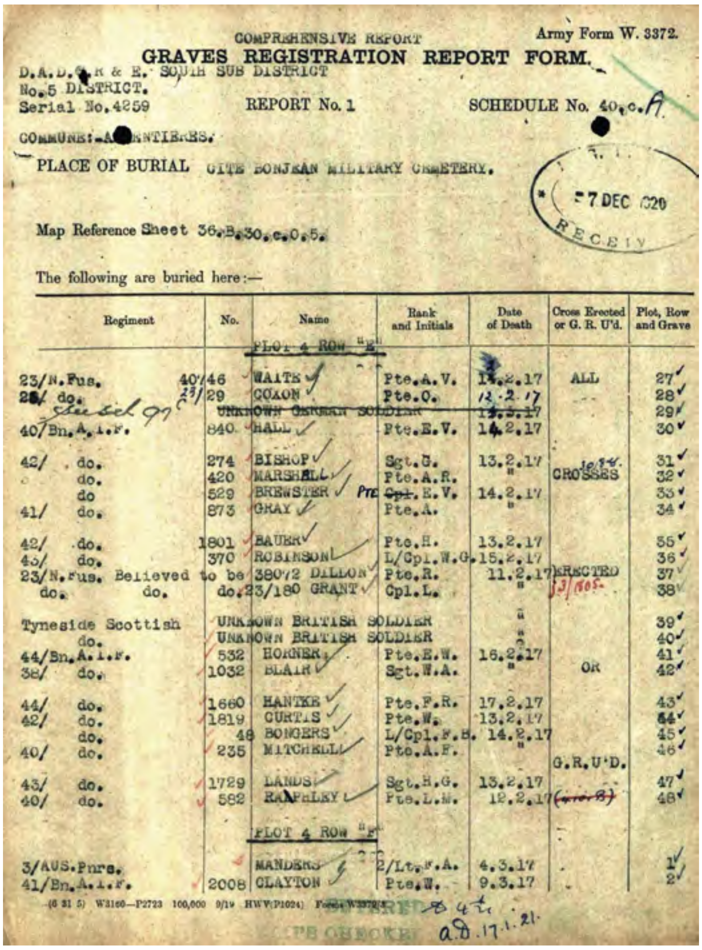
The following are buried here:—

Regiment	No.	Name	Rank and Initials	Date of Death	Cross Erected or G. R. U'd.	Plot, Row and Grave
		PLOT 1.				GRAVE NOS:
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		7.10.16.		122
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		14.10.16.		134
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		5.11.16.	ALL	215
		PLOT 2.				
23/ North'd Fus 34/Div		GRAHAM	Alex	23.2.17.		319
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		30.1.17.		310
37/Bn 3/Aus Div		PARKER	Lt Harold	30.1.17.		322
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		11.2.17	CROSSES	352
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		do		353
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		do		354
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		do		355
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		do	ERECTED	356
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		do		357
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		do		371
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		do		372
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		do	OR	373
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		do		374
23/North'd Fus 34/Div		THOMAS	Reginald	14.2.17.		375
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		11.2.17.		376
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		26.2.17.	G.R.U'd.	415
37th Bn.A.I.F.		CONQUEST	Pt. A.C.	27.2.17.		416
		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		1.8.17.		670
4/5 North Lancs		LIGHT	Harry	15.8.17.		682

ENTERED
SLIPS CHECKED

(6 31 5) W3160—P2723 100,000 9/19 HWV(P1024) Forms W3372/3

CWGC document showing the sequence of graves from No. 352 to 357 and from No. 371 to 376 at Lambersart. All of these graves – with the exception of Reginald Thomas buried in grave 375 – are of 'unknown' soldiers and record dates of death as 11 February 1917. Courtesy CWGC



COMPREHENSIVE REPORT Army Form W. 3372.

GRAVES REGISTRATION REPORT FORM.

D.A.D.G.R & E. SOUTH SUB DISTRICT
No. 5 DISTRICT.
Serial No. 4259

REPORT No. 1 SCHEDULE No. 40.c.A.

COMMUNE: ARMENTIERES.

PLACE OF BURIAL CITE BONJEAN MILITARY CEMETERY.

7 DEC 1920 RECEIVED

Map Reference Sheet 36.B.30.c.0.5.

The following are buried here:—

Regiment	No.	Name	Rank and Initials	Date of Death	Cross Erected or G. R. U'd.	Plot, Row and Grave
		PLOT 4 ROW "E"				
23/N.Fus.	40/46	WAITE	Pte.A.V.	14.2.17	ALL	27
23/ do.	23/29	COXON	Pte.O.	12.2.17		28
		UNKNOWN GERMAN SOLDIER		13.2.17		29
40/Bn.A.I.F.	840	HALL	Pte.E.V.	14.2.17		30
42/ do.	274	BISHOP	Sgt.G.	13.2.17		31
do.	420	MARSHALL	Pte.A.R.	"	CROSSES	32
do	529	BREWSTER	Pte E.V.	14.2.17		33
41/ do.	873	GRAY	Pte.A.	"		34
42/ do.	1801	BAUER	Pte.H.	13.2.17		35
43/ do.	370	ROBINSON	L/Cpl.W.G.	15.2.17		36
23/N.Fus. Believed to be	38072	DILLON	Pte.R.	11.2.17	ERECTED	37
do. do.	do. 23/180	GRANT	Cpl.L.	"		38
Tyneside Scottish		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		"		39
do.		UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER		"		40
44/Bn.A.I.F.	532	HORNER	Pte.E.W.	16.2.17		41
38/ do.	1032	BLAIR	Sgt.W.A.	"	OR	42
44/ do.	1660	HANTKE	Pte.F.R.	17.2.17		43
42/ do.	1819	CURTIS	Pte.W.	13.2.17		44
do.	48	BONGERS	L/Cpl.F.B.	14.2.17		45
40/ do.	235	MITCHELL	Pte.A.F.	"	G.R.U'D.	46
43/ do.	1729	LANDS	Sgt.H.G.	13.2.17		47
40/ do.	582	RAPHLEY	Pte.L.M.	12.2.17		48
		PLOT 4 ROW "F"				
3/AUS.Pnrs.		MANDERS	2/Lt.F.A.	4.3.17		1
41/Bn.A.I.F.	2008	CLAYTON	Pte.W.	9.3.17		2

(6 31 5) W3160—P2723 100,000 9/19 HWV(P1024) Forms W3372/3

ENTERED
SLIPS CHECKED

CWGC document showing the various burials at Cite Bonjean, including two unknown Tyneside Scottish fatalities recorded as killed on 11 February 1917. Courtesy CWGC

other three died of wounds some days later: Private Thomas succumbed to his injuries on the 14th, Private Faulkner (real name – William Carter) then died of wounds on 17 February (he is buried at Boulogne Eastern Cemetery, which strongly suggests he died at a base hospital on the coast). Finally, Alexander Graham succumbed to his injuries on 23 February.[5]

Taking the 22 who died on 11 and 12 February, there are eight men plus one officer who have **known** graves. Of these, three are buried at Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension – including Second Lieutenant John Freeman mentioned in Brewin's account – and six are buried close together in Row E of Plot IV of Cite Bonjean Military Cemetery.

This leaves one officer and twelve men with no known graves, which ties in with Brewin's reference to the number of men missing. These twelve men plus Captain Daggett are today commemorated by the CWGC on the Ploegsteert Memorial to the Missing.

Under normal circumstance, we would expect these 13 individuals to be totally untraceable and to have been – at best – buried in anonymous graves in the area around Armentières. Due to some remarkable luck, this is not the case.

CWGC records

The following is an extract from the CWGC records pertaining to Rue–Petillon Military Cemetery, detailing the locations of original burials which were later concentrated into Rue–Petillon.

Lambersart Communal Cemetery German Extension...contained the graves of 1,016 German soldiers, 32 soldiers and airmen from the United Kingdom and two soldiers from Australia.[6]

According to the CWGC's records, all British and Empire graves were removed from Lambersart Communal Cemetery German Extension and re–buried at Rue–Petillon in October 1921. By tracking the original burial numbers from the German extension which were recorded on the CWGC's *'Concentration of Graves (Exhumation and Reburials)'* forms, it is clear that the 34 soldiers and airmen were all buried in Plot II, Row A of Rue–Petillon. Whilst the reburials are not in the same sequence as the original burials, by using the CWGC's burial returns, it can be seen that, with a small number of 'insertions', the re–interred Lambersart burials are all now in graves 20 to 57 of Row A at Rue–Petillon.

From the original grave numbers allocated by the Germans, it can be deduced that twelve bodies from the 11 February raid were originally buried at Lambersart in two groups of six, in graves numbered 352 to 357 and 371 to 376. All of these twelve, apart from one, were detailed as 'Unknown British Soldier, 11 February 1917', the exception being Private Reginald Thomas, of 23/Northumberland Fusiliers who died on 14 February 1917 (originally buried in Lambersart grave 375).

When the IWGC came to remove the British and Australian dead from the German cemetery at Lambersart in order to re–inter them at Rue–Petillon, it is apparent that one of the '11 February' bodies was identified as an officer, and as a result was provided with a headstone which identified him as an 'unknown officer with a date of death as 11 February 1917.

If it can be assumed that these men are from the 4/Tyneside Scottish raiding party, this would be remarkable enough. But there's more. Mentioned above is the fact that six of the raiding party are buried at Cite Bonjean Military Cemetery, Armentières. Also buried here is the Royal Engineer who was killed in the raid. All seven are buried quite close together in Row E.

First of all there is John Sale who is buried in grave 17, next is Sapper George Abbs, of 209/Field Company RE, who is buried in grave 20. Then, in grave 22 is Watson Guffick. Just four graves separate Watson Guffick and two men who are in adjoining graves – Albert Waite and Oswald Coxon (graves 27 and 28). Just a few paces along are buried Richard Dillon and Thomas Grant who are also buried side–by–side in graves numbered 37 and 38; their headstones are both inscribed with the words 'Believed to be'. Quite remarkably in graves 39 and 40 are two 'unknown' soldiers, which, in both cases, the CWGC record in their Graves Registration Report Form (date stamped 7 December 1920) as 'Unknown British Soldier, Tyneside Scottish, 11 February 1917'. These two are, without doubt, the last two lost soldiers of the raiding party.

Room for doubt?

Could the men in Rue–Petillon be from another unit? This is of course a possibility, but given the 'definite' date on the headstones, and investigating the CWGC database, it is evident that apart from a number of men named on the Thiepval Memorial, many miles to the south, there are only three individuals (two NCOs and a lieutenant) named on memorials to the missing in the northern sector of the British Army's front who were killed on 11 February 1917. All three of these men are named on the Loos Memorial to the Missing, and were part of 1/North Staffs. In mid–February 1917 that battalion was in the Hulluch/Noeux–Les–Mines sector, 16 miles south of the location of the Tyneside Scottish raid. There are therefore no candidates other than the missing of 4/Tyneside Scottish for the '11 February unknowns' buried at Rue–Petillon.

Can there be any doubt about the identity of the 'unknown officer' being Cedric Daggett? Again, using the 'definite' date provided by the CWGC, there are just nine officers who were killed on 11 February 1917. Seven of these have known graves. Of the two who have no known grave, one is the lieutenant from 1/North Staffs killed at Hulluch, mentioned above. The other is Captain Cedric Daggett.

Conclusion

The 4/Tyneside Scottish raid was probably not a success although much praise – and many medals – came to the battalion. The 26 men killed, including the RE sapper, was a high price to pay for minimal results. The raid, however, showed the battalion had recovered from its mauling on the opening day of the Battle of the Somme.

Families of the men with identified graves no doubt visited the cemeteries after the war, but would any relatives of the missing have visited Rue–Petillon and noticed the 'coincidence' of the graves in Plot II, Row A? We may never know for sure, but it is unlikely.

Can the 13 graves at Rue–Petillon and Cite Bonjean be marked with named headstones? This would seem to be impossible for the 'other ranks' as we cannot assign names to the graves. However, the case of the 'unknown officer' being the last resting place of Cedric Daggett would appear to be overwhelming. A submission to the CWGC/MoD will be made. In the meantime, the search for relatives of the missing men continues.

The Missing of 23/Northumberland Fusiliers (4/Tyneside Scottish)

- Captain Cedric Daggett (Newcastle)
- Private Robert Banks (Patrington, East Yorkshire)
- Private Robert Charlton (Monkseaston, Northumberland)
- Private Henry Clarke (Kirkby Lonsdale, Cumbria)
- Private John Collett (Leeds)
- Private John Dockerty (Bedlington, Northumberland)
- Private Frederick Hammand (Hollow Meadows, South Yorkshire)
- Private John Hart (Hull)
- Private Edward Jenkins (Leominster)
- Sergeant Albert Robinson (Durham)
- Private John Stamper (Huddersfield)
- Private Joseph Storey [served as Robson] (Gateshead)
- Private David Walling (Barnoldswick, Yorkshire)

Acknowledgements

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102 Infantry Brigade (Tyneside Scottish Brigade) War Diary, TNA WO95/2459.

Brewin's account, TNA WO95/2385/6 (File name: 'A personal account, dated 8 December 1916 to 5 June [1917?] by an un–named soldier originally attached to the 23rd Northumberland Fusiliers/4th Tyneside Scottish.')

Newcastle Journal, Monday, 3 July 1916**,** www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk

The Register, Adelaide, South Australia, Monday, 26 February 1917, www.trove.nla.gov.au

References

(1) Plot II, Row A: being grave 25 (unknown officer), graves 30–37 inclusive, plus graves 39 and 56.

(2) All four battalion commanders of the Tyneside Scottish brigade were killed. Lieutenant Colonel Lyle is buried in Bapaume Post Military Cemetery along with two other battalion commanders from the brigade.

(3) Martin Middlebrook, *The First Day on the Somme,* (Allen Lane: 1971), p.330.

(4) In this context, 'starving' is a local colloquialism meaning 'very cold' or freezing.

(5) Alexander Graham died in German hands and was buried by his captors in grave 219 at Lambersart Communal Cemetery German Extension.

(6) Lambersart Communal Cemetery German Extension is on the north–western outskirts of Lille, just 5 miles due east of where the trench raid took place.

47th Battalion, Australian Imperial Force Casualties at the Battle of Messines

7–12 June 1917

by Paul Sutton

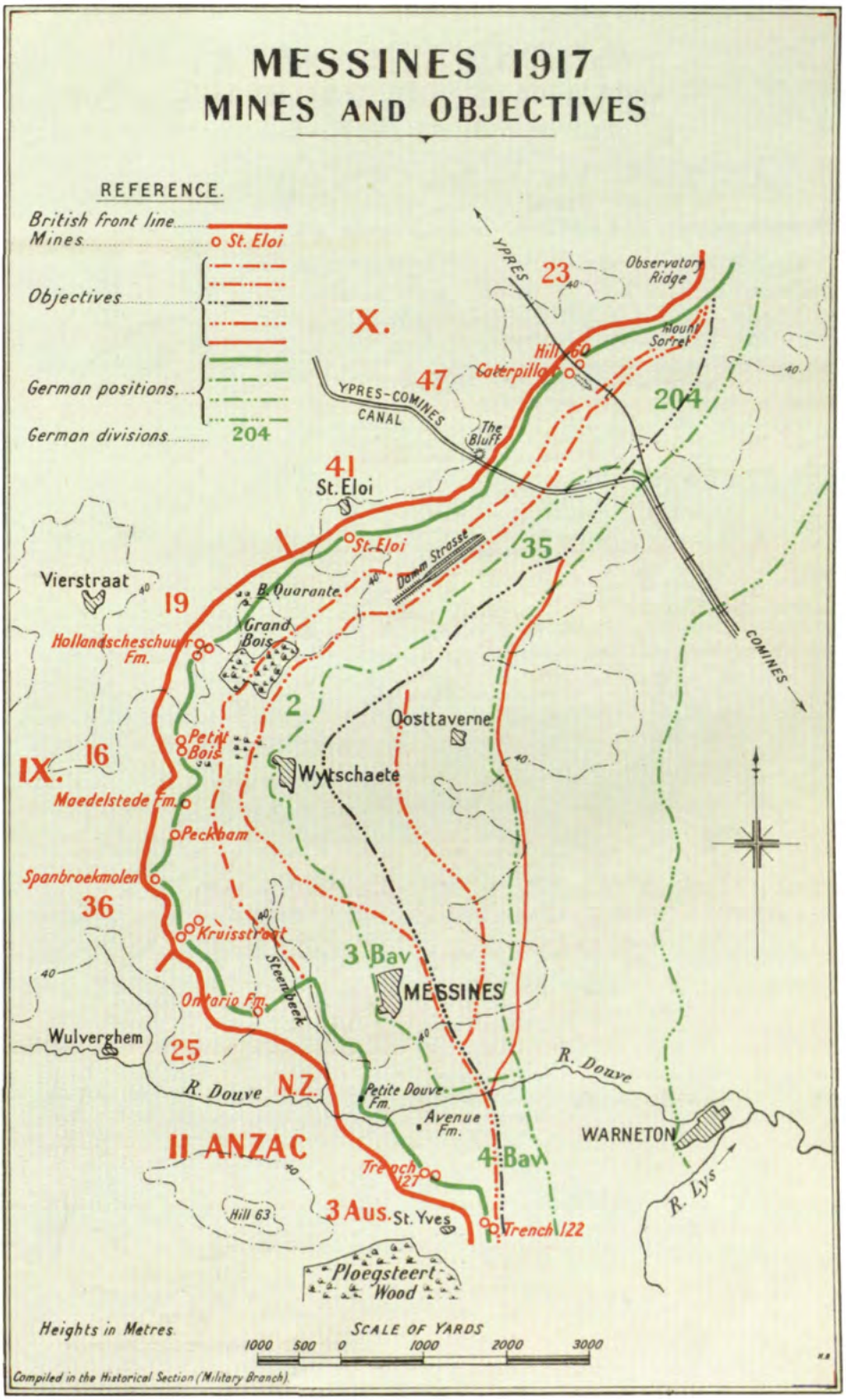
The 4th Australian Division was temporarily attached to II ANZAC Corps for the duration of the Messines offensive from 6 to 12 June 1917.[1] [2] *In the southernmost sector of the planned attack the New Zealand and British 32nd Divisions of II ANZAC Corps were to attack at zero hour (3.10am 7 June) and capture their first objective – known as the Black Line. After a pause the 4th Australian Division was to pass through to take up a position along the Black Dotted Line from where they hoped to attack and capture the Green Line (the Oosttaverne Line) where it crossed the road from Messines to Gappard (known to the British as 'Huns Walk') which was the final objective of the offensive. This attack was timed to commence at Zero plus 10 hours (1.10pm on 7 June). The 12th and 13th Australian Brigades were handed this task, both brigades attacking with two battalions.*[3]

To the Green Line

In the 12th Brigade area the 47th and 45th Battalions would be the two battalions selected to lead the attack (the former on the right and the latter on the left of the brigade front).[4] Battalion Operation Orders 136 and 137 for the 47th Battalion were issued on 29 May. Order 136 instructed the bulk of the 47th Battalion – 22 Officers and 809 Other Ranks (OR) – to proceed to Bulford Camp the following day in preparation for their role in the forthcoming battle. Order 137 instructed Major Ford to lead the balance of 17 other officers and 293 OR to proceed to the Corps Camp at Morbecque the same day. Major Ford's detachment formed the nucleus of the battalion, to be held back during the initial attack; a pool from which reinforcements could be sent as required to the front line.[5]

The attack commenced at 3.10am on 7 June as planned. The New Zealanders and the British captured the Black Line but Lieutenant General Godley, GOC II ANZAC Corps, decided to delay the attack on the Green Line by two hours (3.10pm). However, this order was received at 11.10am by 47th Battalion only after it had taken up position in the hastily constructed jumping off trenches in front of the newly–won Black Line. This meant the battalion spent the next four hours in the open in full view of the Germans who were holding the Oosttaverne Line.

At 3.10pm the battalion attacked and soon captured the Green Line. During the afternoon they repulsed numerous German counter–attacks and even sent out fighting patrols into no man's land. The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Imlay, soon lost contact with his forward units and was unable to ascertain their exact whereabouts. During one of the German counter–attacks the British inadvertently shelled the, by now, disorganised pockets of troops which were all that remained



Map showing the British objectives at the Battle of Messines. 47th Battalion AIF was to attack from a starting line just to the east of the village of Messines. Source: British Official History, Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1917, Volume II: Messines and Third Ypres (Passchendaele), Brigadier General Sir James E Edmonds, 1948, Sketch 3

Map showing 47th Battalion area of attack on 7 June 1917. The objective was the Oosttavarne Line system that consisted of Oxygen and Owl Trenches plus Owl Support Trench (light blue line on right). Note the location of Hun's Walk along which they attacked. WFA/IWM Mapping the Front Project, Ypres. Image M_5_000252

of the 47th Battalion along the Green Line. With many of its officers and NCOs killed or wounded the battalion was effectively leaderless. In an attempt to save themselves from the British shelling the survivors retreated in disorder – some to the Black Line and some even further back to the original front–line. Had the Germans known they could have easily retaken the Green Line and the 47th Battalion's attack would have been rendered a failure. However, the Germans did not move up and seep into the Green Line and on the early morning of 8 June the remnants of the 47th Battalion, at least now partially re–organised, were able to advance and regain possession of it without opposition. Here the battalion remained, consolidating and fighting off the ineffectual German counter–attacks until 12 June when they were relieved by the 46th Battalion.[6]

Casualty analysis

The 47th Battalion war diary entry on 13 June gives their casualties from 7–12 June as 8 officers and 68 OR killed; 7 officers and 319 OR Wounded; 2 OR gassed and 37 OR missing: a total of 15 officers and 426 OR.[7]

The war diary also contains a separate, undated document, that provides a 'list' of officers and OR who became casualties between 7 and 11 June.[8] Whilst undated internal evidence suggests it was compiled on or shortly after 13 June 1917, this document is referenced in the war diary entry dated 13 June (quoted above). However, the numbers of casualties listed (224) do not tally with the numbers given in the war diary entry itself (441). Even though the 'list' covers one day less than the war diary entry it is unrealistic to suppose the difference (208) was incurred on 12 June (the war diary gives no indication that it incurred anything like this amount of casualties on its last day in the front line). Even though this 'list' was included in the war diary as evidence to support the recorded numbers of casualties it was obviously inaccurate and incomplete.

The 'list' contains the names of some 224 casualties – dead, wounded and missing. A review of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) database of deaths from 7–12 June adds a further 13 dead not on the 'list'– giving a total of 237 identified casualties. [9] These 237 men will be used for the basis of the analysis hereafter.[10] Certainly there were more casualties but so far they remain unidentified. Of these 237 casualties at Messines the average age was just over 26 years old. Nine were just 19 and the oldest was 46. Only 11 were married at the time they enlisted whilst one was a described as a widower. 129 (54 per cent) were born in Queensland, 37 (15 per cent) in New South Wales, 23 (9 per cent) were born in England, 15 (6 per cent) in Victoria, ten (4 per cent) in Scotland, ten (4 per cent) in South Australia, eight (3 per cent) in Ireland, eight (3 per cent) in Tasmania, two (0.8 per cent) in Russia, two in New Zealand (0.8 per cent), one each in Denmark, Norway and Fiji (0.4 per cent each).

The officers of the 47th Battalion, a photograph reputedly taken on 6 June 1917. From left to right: Lieutenant Dudley Salmon, Captain John Millar, unidentified, Lieutenant George Goode and Lieutenant Benjamin Dixon. All four named officers were killed during the battle. Courtesy AWM H03712

Two hundred–and–six (86 per cent) enlisted in Queensland, 17 (7 per cent) enlisted in New South Wales (NSW), nine (3 per cent) in Tasmania, two (0.8 per cent) in South Australia, one in Darwin, one at sea (0.4 per cent) and one (0.4 per cent) in Western Australia. Of those who enlisted in Queensland 105 enlisted in Brisbane, 25 in Townsville, 21 in Rockhampton, 17 in Toowoomba, ten in Charters Towers, nine in Cairns, five in Mackay, three in Longreach, two each from Bunderberg, Maryborough and Warwick, one each in Charleville, Cloncurry, Emerald, Ipswich, Normanton.

Of the 237 in this sample 61 (25 per cent) stated their occupations as some form of agrarian employment (farmer, dairyman, stock–man) whilst 65 (27 per cent) classified themselves as labourers. Sixty–four (27 per cent) were tradesmen of varying types. 26 (10 per cent) were classified as 'professional' (mainly clerks but including a solicitor, a journalist and a reporter). Seven (3 per cent) were miners. There were five (2 per cent) teachers and five service workers (barman, undertaker and cook). Three (1 per cent) were seamen and only one person (0.4 per cent) described himself as unemployed.

Anomalies

By analysing first the deaths, a review of the CWGC database for members of 47th Battalion between 7 and 12 June 1917 further illustrates the inaccuracy of both sets of casualty numbers. Whilst the database records seven officers killed (the same as both the war diary and the 'list') it records the deaths of 107 OR compared to 73 on the 'list' and 68 in the war diary. A comparison of the names on the 'list' stated as missing and wounded with their personal service records held in the National Archives of Australia, Canberra show that nineteen of those stated as missing were actually killed in

action. [11] Six were noted as missing in action at the time of the battle but were later recorded as killed in action. A further two recorded on the 'list' as wounded were actually listed as missing in action in their file and later officially declared killed in action. In total the 'list' provides the names of 101 soldiers killed at Messines. Assuming that the CWGC database is accurate (or perhaps just 'more accurate') this demonstrates how inaccurate the returns provided by the battalion at the time actually were. Given the general confusion when in action it is not surprising how difficult accurate record keeping could be. In conclusion 115 officers and OR can be positively identified as being killed as a result of their participation in the battle up to 12 June 1917.

The CWGC database also provides the basis for an interesting analysis of where these 115 were buried and may indicate where they died. [12] Nine were buried in the Messines Ridge British Cemetery and one at Wytschaete Military Cemetery: both are within the areas captured by the British in the attack. It is reasonable to suppose that all were buried close to where they died. One more was buried at Kandahar Farm Cemetery and another at Strand Military Cemetery. Both cemeteries are behind the original British front line and both are close to the site of an advanced dressing station (ADS). Presumably these soldiers would have been taken there for treatment and succumbed to their wounds whilst there. A further soldier (1674 Private George Jackson) is buried at Sanctuary Wood Cemetery which is some way from the II ANZAC Corps area and far removed from the official corps evacuation chain. It remains a mystery as to how he became buried so far away from his unit.[13]

Eight more men were buried at Bailleul Communal Cemetery. The dead from the four casualty clearing stations (CCS) in the town of Bailleul were buried there. It is a reasonable assumption that they were evacuated from the battlefield along the medevac chain – regimental aid post (RAP), ADS and main dressing station (MDS) – only for their lives to end at one of the CCS in Bailleul. The same could also apply to the single soldiers buried at cemeteries in Steenwerck and Hazebrouck and while the latter was the site of a CCS it was not one that formed a part of the official evacuation scheme.

The remaining 92 soldiers recorded on the CWGC database as being killed at Messines have no known grave and are commemorated on the Menin Gate Memorial in Ypres. For the most part the British Army was good at keeping track of its dead once they were away from the front line. As such it is perhaps realistic to assume that most of these men died where they fell in the attack, rather than dying further back behind the front line, and that their bodies were buried nearby but subsequently lost, they were unable to be identified or they were simply obliterated, either then, or later in the war.

Evacuation

Those who were killed or died before 12 June 1917 had each spent an average of 545 days in the army since their enlistment. Lieutenant Scott (killed), from Ipswich had served for the longest period – 1,020 days since his enlistment on 22 August 1914. He was followed closely by Lieutenant Goode (wounded) and Private Gilbert (killed), each with 1,019 days. Private Tembey, a clerk from Brisbane, (killed) served for the shortest period with only 259. Of the 115 killed only 11 had served for less than one year.[14]

Of these 237 casualties, 122 (51 per cent) can be correctly identified as being wounded in action and subsequently entered the evacuation chain at a field ambulance (FA). Of these, two (0.8 per cent) died of their injuries whilst in the Army area, 13 (5 per cent) remained within the Army area during their treatment/ recuperation and were discharged directly back to their units. One hundred–and–three (43 per cent) were evacuated to the base hospitals. Of these 23 (9 per cent) were discharged from there back to their units after recovery via various convalescence depots (CD). Eighty–one (34 per cent) were evacuated to England for further treatment. Of these, 32 (13 per cent) were eventually returned to Australia and discharged as unfit for service; one (0.4 per cent) chose to be medically discharged in England and not repatriated to Australia, two (0.8 per cent) were deemed unfit for active service but remained in England attached to the various AIF bases whilst the remaining 46 (19 per cent) were ultimately discharged back to their units via the command depots in England and the AIF divisional bases in France.

Lieutenant C D Scott acted as a forward observation officer at Messines and was killed in the Oosttavarne system around 5.00pm on 7 June 1917. Source: Owen Wildman, Queenslanders who fought in the Great War 1914–1918, *p.235*

The original grave site of Private Auburn Gilbert, killed 7 June 1917 and buried in the Messines Ridge British Cemetery. Courtesy the Gilbert family collection

One hundred–and–five (44 per cent) of the wounded were classified as suffering gunshot wounds (GSW). Five of them (2 per cent) had wounds of the abdomen and the rest with wounds to limbs or head. Three (1 per cent) suffered shrapnel wounds, three (1 per cent) were 'sick', two (0.8 per cent) suffered from shell shock, two (0.8 per cent) from the effects of gas, one (0.4 per cent) with a fractured arm and one (0.4 per cent) from 'exhaustion' with one (0.4 per cent) with 'unspecified but slight' wounds.

Those that were discharged from the Army area directly to their units each spent an average of 11 ½ days away from their units (the shortest being three days and the longest 25). Of those that were evacuated to base hospitals and then discharged back to their units via the CDs they spent an average of 66 days away from their units (the shortest being 12 days and the longest being 139 days). Those who were evacuated to England spent on average 11 days at a hospital in the base prior to being transported to England (the shortest being just a single day and the longest 152 days).

The 103 evacuated to the base area passed through 28 different general or stationary hospitals situated in Abbeville (2), Arques (3), Boulogne (42), Calais (2), Etaples (11), Le Havre (1), Le Touquet (3), Le Treport (2), Rouen (25), St Omer (11) and one unknown.

Of the 81 evacuated to England from base hospitals, 79 were admitted into 34 separate 'central' hospitals with two being transferred immediately to No.2 Command Depot in Weymouth for return to active service. Whilst most of the hospitals were in southern England some were farther afield: No.1 Southern General Hospital, Birmingham received six casualties, No.2 Western Hospital, Manchester one, East Suffolk & Ipswich Hospital one, the King George Hospital, Dublin one and the Northampton War Hospital four. Each man spent an average of 48 days in their designated 'central' hospital before discharge. The shortest spent only six days and the longest 270. A total of 30 men spent up to 31 days hospitalised, 28 spent up to 60 days, 12 up to 90, eight up to 100 days and three over one hundred (133, 138 and 270). A grand total of 4,016 bed days were spent in the various hospitals for the men evacuated to England.

Forty–six of those evacuated to England were able to return to their units for active service eventually and they each spent an average of 119 days at the Command and Base Depots after discharge from hospital and before re–joining their units in the field on the Western Front. In total these men averaged 166 days from being wounded to being returned to unit; the shortest period being just 17 days and the longest a mammoth 540 days. A total of 26 spent more than 100 days away from their unit.

Of the 32 (13 per cent) who were returned to Australia for discharge they each spent an average of 154 days from arrival in England up to their departure from England for Australia; the shortest period being 37 days and the longest being 404 days. Each man spent an average of 300 days from the date of their wounding to the date of discharge from the army in Australia – the shortest period being 146 days and the longest 543 days.

In all of the 237 casualties in this sample 117 died (49 per cent), 33 (13 per cent) were ultimately discharged due to the severity of their injuries, one remained in service in England and 86 (36 per cent) were returned to active service.

Whilst this is a very small sample it does illustrate the amount of time the 'average' soldier spent at the various stages of the evacuation chain. Not only did soldiers spend an average of five–and–a–half months away from active service if they were evacuated to England it also provides a glimpse of the resources – both material and human – and the enormous monetary cost to the British Army in caring for these casualties once they were removed from the battlefield at Messines.

Bean's figures

Establishing the total number of casualties incurred by the 47th Battalion from 7 to 12 June 1917 is, of course, difficult and no precise figure may ever be known. According to the battalion war diary on 28 May 1917 the battalion consisted of 39 officers and 1,102 OR. On 1 June it was recorded as 39 officers and 1,097 OR of which 16 officers and 127 OR were detached to the Corps Camp at Morbecque and so did not participate in the attack. So one week before the attack, 23 officers and 970 OR of the battalion were preparing themselves for battle. (15)

Not all of these men would have taken part in the attack, however. The HQ Company would have remained at the battalion HQ and this could have amounted to around 50 men. Also details would have been detached for stretcher bearers, messengers and possibly a local reserve. Charles Bean, the official Australian war correspondent and later official historian, recorded in his note book for June 1917 that the 47th Battalion 'Went in [at a strength of] 783. incl[uding] carrying p[ar]ties, details at dump Etc'. Of these he noted that the fighting strength was 'ab[ou]t 680'. Perhaps between 700 and 850 men actually took part in the attack. (16)

Once out of the front line after the attack the battalion was able to reorganise. On 13 June five officers from Morbecque rejoined the battalion. The following day 100 OR also arrived from Morbecque. The war diary further states that the strength of the battalion on 14 June, including the arrival of this 100, as 24 officers and 659 OR.(17)

These figures imply that only four officers had become casualties and were not present on 14 June as well as 411 OR. From analysis of both the 'list', CGWC database and individual service records up to 14 June, eight officers had been killed and six had been wounded and these six were certainly not present with the battalion that day. For the OR, 107 were definitely dead and 120 are noted as wounded and identified on the 'list'. Of these three returned to their unit between 10–13 June and a further three returned on 14 June. Therefore the number of OR definitely wounded and NOT included in this 14 June tally is at least 133 and as low as 130 (depending on whether those returning on 14 June arrived before or after the roll call). As such we can positively identify 12 officers and at least 240 OR as being casualties. The war diary notes there were 15 officers and 426 OR casualties. Bean, in his notebook believed there were around 460 and in his Official History he states 16 officers and 447 OR.(18)

More research is needed to establish an accurate number of the casualties incurred between 7–12 June. Most likely, given the confusion at the time and the inaccurate record keeping before and afterwards it may never be possible to know with any certainty.

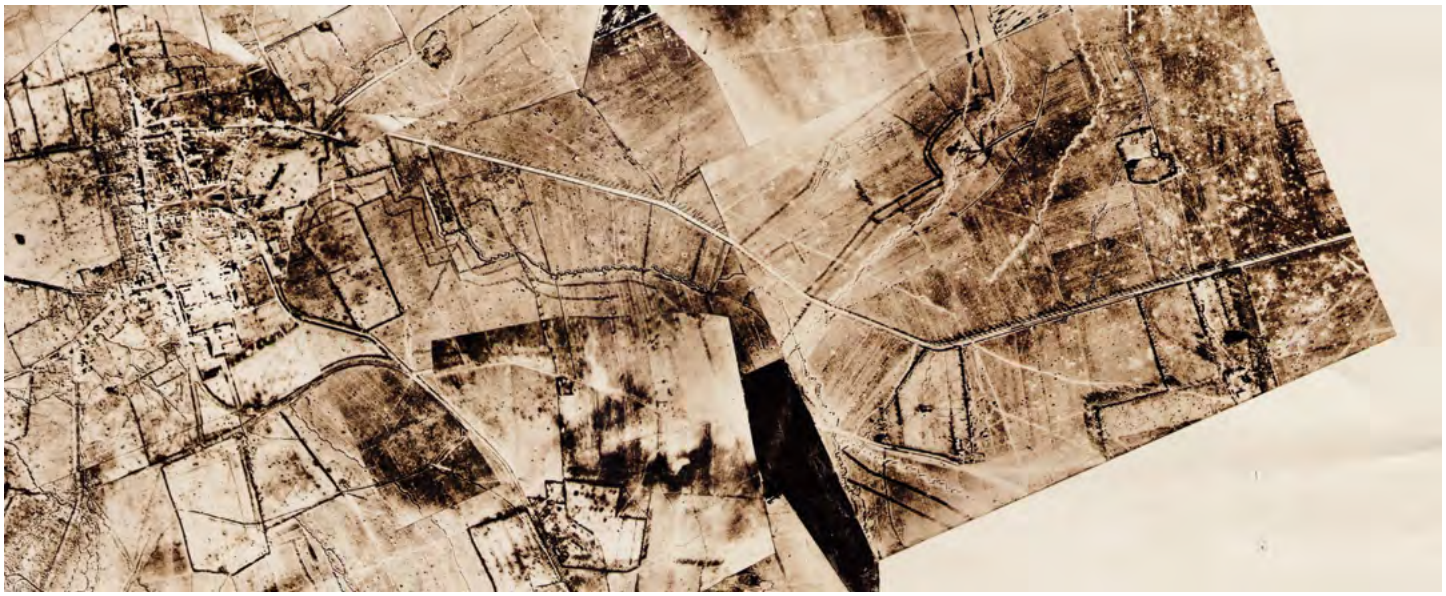
The men

So who then were these men?

Some of the first casualties were incurred just as the battalion arrived at their jumping off position in front of the Black Line. The much respected Captain Francis Davy (D Company) from Tasmania was one of the first to be killed by a shell before the company even reached the Black Line.(19) Shortly afterwards Lieutenant Frederick Campbell (D Company), born in England but enlisted at Claremont, Tasmania, was also killed.

After a delay of fours the attack began at 3.10pm. As the Australians advanced across the few hundred yards of no man's land they started incurring casualties. Private Martin Hanley (D Company), a bag–maker from Brisbane, almost made it to the German front line but he was struck by a machine–gun bullet

Informal portrait of (probably) Captain John William Millar of the 47th Battalion, killed in Action 7 June 1917 and last seen chasing a group of Germans along Unbearable Trench. Courtesy AWM H03715



Aerial view of 47th Battalion objectives at Messines taken on 5 April 1917. Note: Messines village is to the left and Hun's Walk is the road exiting the village through the centre of the image. The 47th Battalion's objective was the distinctive double trench system that crosses Hun's Walk just as it veers slightly to the right after its lowest point. Unbearable Trench where Captain Millar was last seen is the trench running along is parallel to and just below Huns Walk. WFA/IWM Mapping the Front Project, Ypres. Image P_005466

in a shell–hole. His dying words were 'What will my dear mother say?'.[20] Captain William Millar (B Company) was last seen alive chasing some Germans along Unbearable Trench leading towards the Green Line. Shortly after this Lieutenant Dixon, also B Company, was mortally wounded whilst Lieutenant Goode (B Company) was shot in the face and skull 'practically destroying both eyes'. Goode was evacuated to No.2 Casualty Clearing Station and from there to No.10 Stationary Hospital, St Omer on 8 June. He died at 10.15am on 12 June. Private George Jackson (B Company), a farmer from Queensland, 'was smiling and cheering', his 'happy face aglow' as he advanced but was soon killed in a shell–hole near Owl Trench (part of the Green Line objective).[21]

The Green Line objective was soon taken. Lieutenant Charles Scott, previously a reporter from Ipswich, was acting as a forward observer and was sending messages back to battalion HQ. He was killed about 5.00pm in the vicinity of the newly–captured front line. Lieutenant Mendoza (B Company) was wounded around this time also. He survived but was evacuated to England where he remained in the army until the end of the war but never saw further active service.[22]

In the hard fighting that took place that evening in the vicinity of the new front line more deaths occurred. Company Sergeant Major Grainger was killed inside a German pill–box. Private James Cecini, a miner from Townsville, Queensland, was acting as a stretcher bearer when he disappeared. Three weeks later his wallet was found on the battlefield. Inside it was a photograph of his sister. His body was later recovered and he is buried in Messines Ridge British Cemetery along with some of his comrades. Privates Condrain, Randall and Mars and Lieutenant Salmon were all killed by a single shell. None of their bodies were ever found. Lieutenant Schultz was shot in the jaw and eventually evacuated to England. He was only able to return to active duty in February 1918. Private Fallick, from Charleville, Queensland was in a shell–hole with Corporal Gray who was later to write, 'he stammered badly and had a way of raising his head to get words out, he raised his head and was hit in the head and killed'. This was around 5.00pm.[23]

During the night Private Idrice Beckman (A Company), originally from Gympie, Queensland was captured by the Germans and spent the rest of the war as a prisoner in Germany.[24] The following day the casualties were significantly less. Only five soldiers are recorded as being wounded that day. Privates Christie, Fitzgerald, McEwen and Woodburn each received gun–shot wounds. All survived and returned to active service except Fitzgerald. He was repatriated to Australia where he arrived 3 January 1918 but was only discharged from the army in September of that year. Private Chattin was sent to the rear suffering from shell–shock. He soon returned but was captured by the Germans in 1918. Lieutenant Dudley (A Company) and five others, including Corporal Francis Viles, were killed when a shell landed amongst them. Viles' brother, Keith, also of 47th Battalion was also killed at Messines.

On 9 June 1917 Lieutenant Walker (A Company) was killed during an attack. Lance Corporal Victor Negus, a school teacher from Maryborough, Queensland was shot in the eye and soon died. His body was never recovered. Over the next few days only a handful of casualties were incurred and on 12 June the battalion was relieved and left the front line.

Corporal Francis Viles killed by a shell on 7 June 1917. His brother, Keith, also served in 47th Battalion and was also killed on the same day. Source: The Queenslander Pictorial *(Supplement), 1 July 1916*

Suffering

Corporal Alfred Barton received a GSW to his chest on 8 June. The bullet entered above the sternum, which was fractured, and exited through his right shoulder. This led to a build–up of pus inside his chest. He was evacuated first to 77 FA and then to No.11 CCS the same day. On 12 June he was transported by Ambulance Train to Boulogne where he was admitted into No.32 Stationary Hospital. The following day a partial resection of his 7th rib was performed to relieve the pleural effusion around his lungs. A further operation was performed a few days later for the same reason. He was stable enough to be transferred to England on 19 July when he was admitted to the Manor House, Folkestone where he was noted as 'emaciated and weak' with tetanus infected pus discharging from both entry and exit wounds. His right lung was retracted which led to difficulty in breathing. He remained there for three months before being transferred to the 3rd Australian Auxiliary Hospital, Dartford. On 24 October a Medical Board convened and decided he was permanently unfit for active service and ought to be returned to Australia. This was approved on 7 November. On the same day he was still suffering the pleural effusion when another operation was performed. This time the intercostal artery was cut and ligatured and a tube inserted to help drain the liquid. Even though he was still very ill he was put on board a hospital ship to take him back to Australia on 24 November 1917. Throughout the two month journey he was beset with high temperatures and continued pus discharge. Once in Australia he was admitted to No.6 Australian General Hospital, Brisbane. There he remained until 13 July 1918 when he was finally deemed fit enough to be discharged from the army even though the Medical Board believed he would be totally incapacitated for a further six months. For the rest of his life Corporal Barton continued to suffer from the effects of the wound he received at Messines. After 1933 he started to have regular bouts of emphysema. Throughout the 1950s and 60s he was in and out of hospital with emphysema related complaints. He died in 1968 aged 73.[25]

Limb

Another to suffer for many years after the war was Private John McAllister from Charters Towers, Queensland. He was shot in the leg on 7 June 1917 and the limb was amputated later the same day at a casualty clearing station. Evacuated to England, an additional part of his leg was amputated in September. He was returned to Australia and discharged on 23 March 1918. Some two–and–a–half years later he was notified by the Repatriation Department that his artificial limb was ready for 'fitting'. In February 1921 he was notified the limb could not be completed due to a lack of 'rawhide calf' at the factory. This shortage was soon overcome and he had received the limb by the end of the month. In 1923 the Repatriation Department wrote asking if he had any problems with the leg, to which he replied 'My limb is in need of repairs now. (1) The leg is split from the top of the Bucket down. Also the foot movements are worn & the foot is in need of servicing. The shoulder straps are in need of replacing….' The limb was repaired but needed further repairs in 1926 and 1929. In 1933 he applied for and was given a walking stick. Throughout his life he continually suffered from a chest condition that he claimed was due to an infection he incurred whilst being transported to England for training in 1916. He died in 1942 aged only 51. His wife was to claim his early death was a result of this chest condition.[26]

Private William Wyatte, from Ipswich, Queensland, was shot in the neck and later also suffered from neurosis (shell–shock). He was discharged, in Australia, on 24 November 1917. Throughout the 1920s he complained of general weakness and stiffness in his neck. In 1937 it was recorded that he was 'becoming gradually weaker … After a heavy day's work [he] feels done particularly [the] left side of body which has always been affected since the wounding. Neck feels stiff when he bends forwards. Headaches in frontal region and behind ears on and off since service'. These symptoms got worse as he aged. By 1956 he was described as a 'Thin old man, wearing [a] felt collar to relieve [the pain in his] neck' and that there was 'always weakness in neck & left leg' since his wounding. Despite all his pain and discomfort he lived to the age of 78 and died in 1974.[27]

Legacy of Messines

On 20 December 1952 Messines caused a further death. Seventy–three year old ex–private John McMullen, originally from Ireland, fell down the stairs of his home in a Brisbane suburb and died of his injuries. His widow claimed his death was as a result of his war–related injury. He had been shot in the right hand on 7 June 1917 and consequently the hand had been weak ever since. She claimed 'that [his] disabled hand could not take his weight and that the fall occurred as the result of his hold on the banister being released'. After investigating, the Repatriation Department agreed that the

fall was attributable to the weakness in his hand as a result of his war wound and so his widow was entitled to continue to receive his disability pension.[28]

Private James Reid was shot in the right arm/wrist. The wound was considered incapacitating enough to have him sent back to Australia where he was discharged from the army in June 1918. He was unable to flex his fingers properly or grip easily. On his return he resumed working as a teamster in the Esk region of Queensland but he soon encountered difficulties. In 1919 he was required to have one of his fingers amputated. As a consequence of this he became less able to work continuously due to ongoing pain in his hand and arm. Throughout the 1920s and 30s he made repeated claims for an increase in his pension as he claimed he was unable to work as much as he needed to. His disability pension gradually increased over the years but he needed to make constant claims and appeal when his claims were initially denied. Nonetheless he was able to continue to work at physically demanding jobs such as being a teamster, a carpenter and working on the docks in Brisbane as well as running his own dairy for a while. During the 1950s he started to get arthritis, beginning in his wounded hand and gradually spreading throughout his body. The Repatriation Department declined to acknowledge this was a result of his war wound and refused him further benefits. Ironically, when he died in 1985 due to carcinoma of the bladder (a form of cancer), the Repatriation Department accepted that his smoking habit was a contributing factor in his death. As there was a 'causal link between war service and smoking' the department agreed that his death was 'war–caused' and was required to continue to pay his pension to his widow.[29]

Private Thomas Craig was another who would spend the rest of his life suffering the consequences of the wound he received at Messines in 1917. A machine–gun bullet penetrated his left femur during the attack. He was discharged in Australia in March 1918. Although the wound was healed it 'had a moist discharge which required constant daily dressing. This was done at home not under any medical supervision'. Once healed his left leg had become 1½ inches shorter than his right. Consequently he was forced to limp. Over time his back became deformed due to his enforced stoop whilst some muscles wasted and others over compensated leading to further complications. The effect on his stature and physical activity was significant and his ability to work impaired. He constantly battled with the Repatriation Department for increases in his pension. At various times he threatened legal action whilst in 1929 he wrote '[I] played the game [30] in the army but find out that I don't get square deal from Repatriation Officer. Can't get fair play unless one is a mason, but I intend to have a big try to do so'. In 1956 after a further rejection of a claim for an increase in his pension he wrote 'I demand British Justice'. Over the years he had many examinations as his body deteriorated due to the effects of his war injury which were not helped in 1951 when an accident tore the tendons on his left leg. For all his pain and suffering he continued to work his cattle station until his dying day in 1970 when his body finally gave up and he died 'while mustering' aged 76.[31]

Important

The role played by the 47th Battalion in the Battle of Messines was small but important. The 237 casualties analysed in this paper appear insignificant when compared to the 25,000 plus incurred by the British Army for the battle but it should never be forgotten that each of these 237 were people with mothers and fathers, some with siblings, a few had wives and some had wives and children. Before the war they all would have had aspirations and dreams but for many these were curtailed by death or injury. They all had a name – for they were all people and not just a statistic or a name on a casualty list. For those that died the grief of their families did not diminish quickly. For those that survived many suffered from the effects of their wounds for the rest of their lives. The battle officially ended on 12 June 1917 but for many of the participants, and their loved ones of course, the battle never really ended.

Originally from England, Paul Sutton now lives in Queensland, Australia with his wife and two children. He was written many articles on the Great War and English Civil War as well as a book entitled Cromwell's Jamaica Campaign: The Attack on the West Indies, 1654–55*, Partizan Press, 1990. He has recently participated in a research project to identify and document the Great War soldiers from the Sunshine Coast region of Australia (www.adoptadigger.org) as well as leading a team to identify the 600 plus returned soldiers who were connected with the Beerburrum Soldier Settlement after the war. He currently administers various Facebook pages dedicated to history including one about the Battle of Messines (www.facebook.com/Messines100) through which he can be contacted.*

References

(1) This article is not intended to provide a detailed narrative of the battle of Messines nor 47th Battalion's part in it. For a comprehensive description see: Charles Edwin Woodrow Bean, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918, Volume IV: The Australian Imperial Force in France, 1917* (11th edition, 1941) pp.546–682; Craig Dayton, *Battle Scarred: The 47th Battalion in the First World War* (1st edition 2011) pp.113–154; Wilfred Denver Gallwey, *Letter from Wilfred Denver Galley to his parents, 2 August 1917*, AWM collection RCDIG0001200.

(2) Australian War Memorial (AWM), Canberra, 4th Australian Division War Diary, May 1917. AWM4 1/48/14.

(3) AWM, 4th Australian Division War Diary, May 1917 Preliminary Instruction No. 1 28 May 1917. AWM4 1/48/14.

(4) AWM, 14 Brigade War Diary, May 1917. AWM4 23/12/15.

(5) AWM, 47th Battalion War Diary, May 1917, 47th Battalion Operational Order No. 136 & No.137. AWM4 23/64/12.

(6) AWM, 47th Battalion War Diary, June 1917, Operation Report, 13 June 1917. AWM4 23/64/13.

(7) AWM, 47th Battalion War Diary, June 1917, entry for 13 June 1917. AWM4 23/64/13.

(8) AWM, 47th Battalion War Diary, June 1917, Appendix 6. AWM4 23/64/13.

(9) http://www.cwgc.org/find–war–dead.aspx

(10) All percentages hereafter quoted are of this figure (237).

(11) National Archives of Australia (NAA), Canberra, First Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers, 1914–1920: Series B2455.

(12) Whilst the following analysis is speculative it is plausible. It is noted that at later stages of the war and afterwards there was some consolidation of small cemeteries into larger ones that led to the movement of bodies which can of course skew these assumptions but for the main part these assumptions are credible in the opinion of the author.

(13) This was perhaps a result of later consolidations of burials. Nonetheless it is still far from the site Jackson fought at. If consolidation did take place there were many other major cemeteries closer to Messines than Sanctuary Wood he could been buried in.

(14) The following analysis of the fate of the casualties is based entirely on details extracted from the service records of the 237 men held in the NAA: First Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers, 1914–1920: Series B2455.

(15) AWM, 47th Battalion War Diary, June 1917.

(16) AWM, Records of Charles Edwin Woodrow Bean, Official Historian. Notebooks, June 1917. AWM38 3DRL 606/160/1.

(17) AWM, 47th Battalion War Diary, June 1917. The inference from the war diary is that these numbers excluded the balance of 11 Officers and 27 OR which (presumably) remained at Morbecque. No further diary indicates when these 38 men returned to the battalion.

(18) Charles Edwin Woodrow Bean, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918, Volume IV: The Australian Imperial Force in France, 1917* (11th edition, 1941) p.682; AWM, 47th Battalion War Diary, June 1917; Records of Charles Edwin Woodrow Bean, Official Historian. Notebooks, June 1917 AWM38 3DRL 606/160/1.

(19) AWM, Red Cross Wounded and Missing 1DRL/0428 Captain Francis Lempriere Davy – File 891101.

(20) AWM, Red Cross Wounded and Missing 1DRL/0428 Private Martin Hanley – File 1260306I.

(21) AWM, 47th Battalion War Diary, June 1917; AWM, Red Cross Wounded and Missing 1DRL/0428 Captain John William Millar – File 1770406P; 1 DRL/0428 Lieutenant George Goode – File 1180604K; 1 DRL/0428 Private Jackson – File 1411014C.

(22) AWM, 47th Battalion War Diary, June 1917; NAA, B2455, Clifford Leslie Mendoza, File 8013460.

(23) AWM, Red Cross Wounded and Missing 1 DRL/0428 CSM William Grainger – File 12005109; Private James Cecini – File 0710612H; Private Condran – File 0780607S; Private Fallick – File 1030911F.

(24) NAA, B2455, Beckman – File 3066286 – Beckman is not included in the 237 casualty sample.

(25) NAA (Brisbane) Repatriation Department File 32254061. His brother, Frank, also served in the Great War and was killed in 1918.

(26) NAA (Brisbane), Repatriation Department File 32281602/32302361/32540827.

(27) NAA (Brisbane), Repatriation Department File 32543000 & 32456739.

(28) NAA (Brisbane), Repatriation Department File 32378432.

(29) NAA (Brisbane), Repatriation Department File 32257323 & 32257324.

(30) Here he is echoing the words of Sir Henry Newbolt's 1892 poem *Vitaï Lampada* 'Play up! play up! And play the game!' The poem became popular throughout the Great War.

(31) NAA (Brisbane), Repatriation Department File 32379817.

The Camera Returns (91)

by Bob Grundy and Steve Wall

Courtesy IWM Q5824

Courtesy IWM Q5823

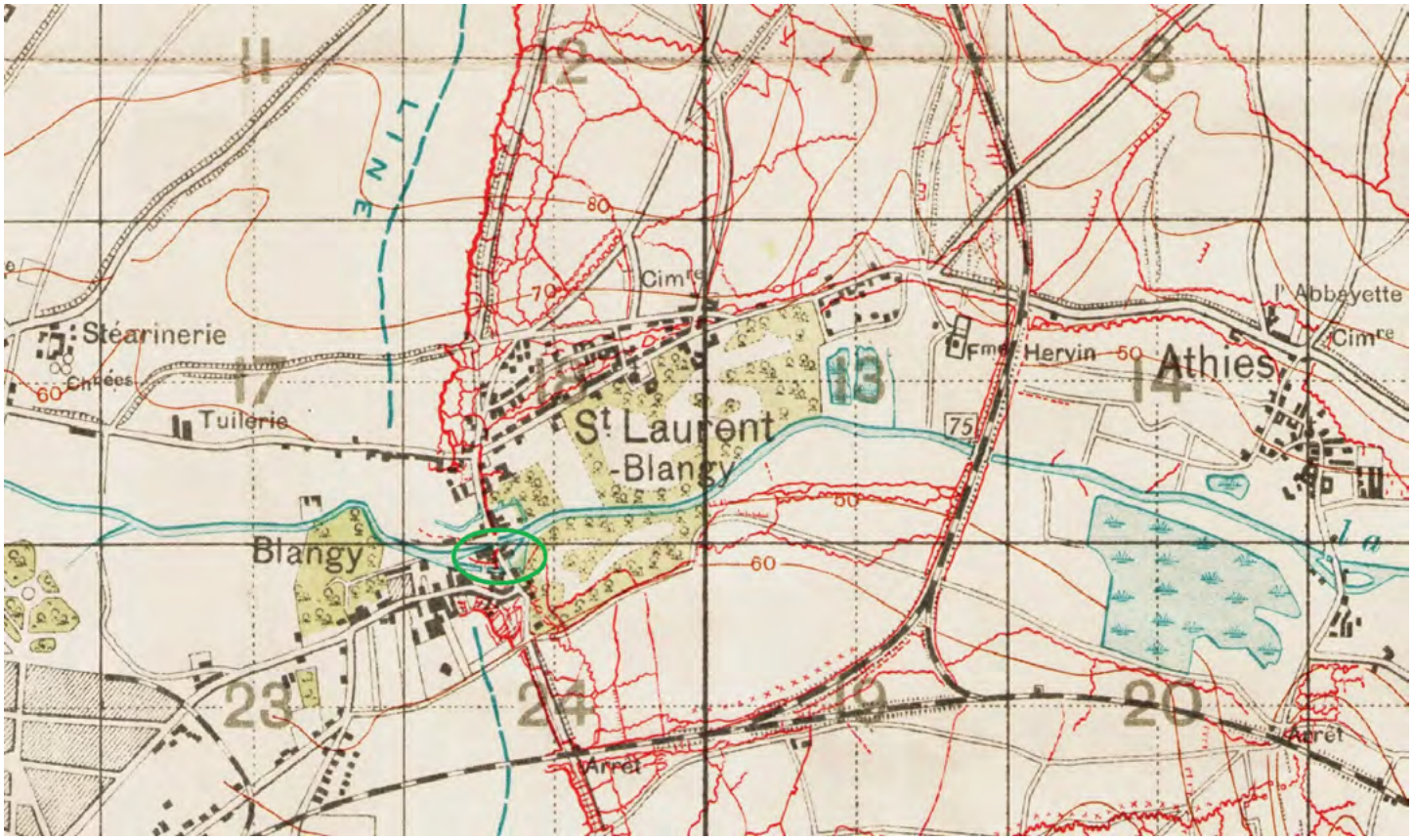
Further images in the series taken at the same location by John Warwick Brooke. Courtesy IWM Q5826 (left) and Q5827

The Camera Returns team first visited this now very modern and functional area more than 20 years ago – see 'The Camera Returns' (23) in ST 41 of 1994. Our subject on this occasion being the D60 road as it crosses the now canalised River Scarpe at St–Laurent–Blangy, east of Arras.

The two 'then' photographs – IWM Q5823 and Q5824 – were taken on 22 April 1917 by Lieutenant John Warwick Brooke and appear here in *Stand To!* just over 100 years since they were taken. They show sappers, probably from an unidentified Royal Engineers (RE) Field Company, but possibly RE Inland Waterways and Dock Company. The authors believe they are of the former. They are refurbishing the ruined lock/bridge on the canal at Blangy. During the war the Scarpe separated the village of Blangy was from its twin – St Laurent Blangy – to the north.

Both photographs were taken looking south from the northern bank of the canal. The narrow gauge railway line in the foreground of Q5824 being the same line as that in Q5858 featured in 'The Camera Returns' 23. The road crossing the canal and separating these two photographs – note the two officers with walking sticks supervising proceedings – was the location of the German front line when the attack commenced on the morning of 9 April 1917 – the First Battle of the Scarpe. What is particular about this attack by the 15th (Scottish) Division is that it was preceded by a bombardment of gas by over 2,000 Livens Projectors. The actual village of Blangy was captured by 13/Royal Scots.

In the foreground of Q5824 kilted Scottish troops are dragging a cable laying device along the railway line although the wheels do not appear to be on the actual rails. An oblique aerial view of this area can be found on p.135 of the excellent panoramas book *Arras* by Peter Barton (2010).



British trench map of Blangy and environs showing the crossings of the Scarp. IWM/WFA Mapping the Front Project Arras on CD image ref M_015187

Ypres of Trouble

The Royal Flying Corps and the Third Battle of Ypres

by Peter Hart

The Royal Flying Corps (RFC) had suffered a severe trauma during the 'Bloody April' aerial operations in support of the Arras offensive in 1917. By this stage in the war, the RFC had well–defined roles in the plan of any major battle. First, they conducted an extensive photographic reconnaissance exercise which provided thousands of high definition photographs, forming a detailed mosaic map of the entire contested area. Employing the new skills of photographic interpretation, experienced personnel could then accurately locate gun batteries, machine–gun posts, barbed wire, dugouts and command centres – indeed, almost everything done on the ground could be observed from the air. Secondly, using a wireless, artillery observation aircraft could transmit corrections to artillery shell fire with a simple clock code. Taken together, this enabled the Royal Artillery to identify, destroy, or subdue German targets on the ground. These were the prime functions of the RFC, crucial to determining the success, or failure, of any planned infantry attack. Additional roles were also developing fast. Thus, bombing and ground strafing of German troops on the ground was becoming increasingly important. When the infantry went over the top, contact patrols were used to report infantry progress and could deploy 'Zone Calls' to allow huge concentration of artillery fire on a specific map 'square' where a hitherto untargeted German battery, or perhaps a threatening counter–attack, had been discovered. Long range recce flights also allowed generals to judge the German provision of reinforcements in key strategic areas, by monitoring rail traffic and troop movements, while the interdiction bombing of railway installations such as railyards and bridges to partially isolate the battlefield, offered promise for the future. Increasingly, German airfields were being bombed at night to try and destroy their aircraft on the ground rather than in dangerous combat in the air. These were the main roles of the RFC aircraft, but there was one more aspect of the air war which has come to dominate many post–war histories. This was the role of the scout aircraft, which had the specific task of shooting down opposing aircraft busily engaged in all the equivalent tasks noted above – and also shooting down the German scouts intent on preying on British aeroplanes. Peter Hart here examines the struggle for the skies of Flanders during the Third Battle of Ypres.

Bloody April

During the Battle of Arras, the RFC had been caught out with obsolescent machines at a time when the Germans had developed a string of new scout aircraft, of which the Albatros variants were the best known. These outclassed the British scouts such as the DH2 and FE8, the multi–purpose aircraft such as the Sopwith 1½ Stutter, or the FE2b, and the basic 'corps' aircraft, the BE2c, which dated back to 1914. Even the latest scout, the Sopwith Pup, was underpowered and out–gunned by the German scouts. New aircraft were on their way, but they would not be ready in time. The British Arras offensive commenced on 9 April 1917 and was intended as a 'pinning' diversionary attack, with the main assault to be by the French Army – the Nivelle Offensive – on 16 April in the Champagne area. The RFC therefore could not 'wait' until new aircraft came on stream. The pilots and observers had to grit their teeth to carry out their vital duties, accepting high rates of casualties, to carry out the work required by the army – without which infantry casualties would have ballooned to unacceptable levels as attacks came up against intact defences. The Germans aviators were outnumbered, but their technological superiority made 'Bloody April' a sad reality for the 208 air crew killed that month.

As the fighting began to die down around Arras, British attention switched north to Flanders which, following the failure of the Nivelle Offensive and the consequent slow–burning mutinies within the French Army, was perforce to be the scene of the main Allied offensive in the second half of 1917. The preamble to the Third Battle of Ypres was the Battle of Messines which began on 7 June when the combination of nineteen huge mines and a pulverising artillery bombardment enabled the British to seize and hold the Messines Ridge. The main battle commencing on 31 July, was intended to breakout from the Ypres Salient, take the crucial rail centre of Roulers and clear the Belgian coast of vital German submarine bases – while relieving German pressure on the struggling French Army.

Hard fighting

The RFC was established as crucial to the success of any offensive, but their activities naturally provoked a strong German aerial response. As a result, there was a great deal of hard fighting in the air above Flanders. Fortunately, a new generation of British scouts had arrived to help contest the skies, one of which, the Sopwith Camel, made a virtue out of its main defect. Armed with two synchronised Vickers machine guns housed, it was inherently unstable, with all its weight packed into the first 7 feet of the fuselage. It was a real pilot–killer as accidents were frequent, but its hyper–manoeuvrability at speeds of up to about 110mph made it a dangerous proposition in action.

Pilot killer: A Sopwith Camel – totally wrecked – of 24 Wing, RFC. Courtesy IWM Q63864

Major William Sholto Douglas – who became 1st Baron Douglas of Kirtleside, MC, DFC – pictured here in his role as commanding officer of 84 Squadron RAF at Bertangles, France, Summer 1918. Courtesy IWM Q 69150

The more prosaically named SE5a was a sturdy aeroplane with a top speed of about 120 mph. It was armed with one fuselage–mounted Vickers machine gun and a Lewis gun on the top wing. Subsequently, Major Sholto Douglas of 84 Squadron RFC, would be convinced that the SE5 was the foremost British single–seater scout of the war.

> 'That will cause howls of anguish from the pilots who flew the Sopwith Camel; but it was a fact that the SE5 retained in a large measure its performance at high altitudes, which the Camel did not. And since the SE5 was very steady in a fast dive – which nine times out of ten was our way of making attacks – this was an additional advantage over the Camel. The faster we dived in the SE5, the steadier the aircraft became as a gun platform. The Camel, on the other hand, being an unstable machine, would vary in its angle of dive at high speed in spite of all the pilot's efforts to keep it steady; and because of its rotary engine there was also a good deal of vibration when diving fast, which made good shooting difficult.'(1)

In short, the SE5 was better at diving down to riddle a German aircraft, before zooming back up to regain altitude. These characteristics made it ideally suited to the cautious stalking tactics of many of the great aces. The Camel was a more dangerous opponent only if the pilot was caught up in a dogfight, due to its incredibly tight turning circle and overall manoeuvrability. Both aircraft had a small measure of superiority over the Albatros III. A third arrival was the multi–purpose two–seater Bristol Fighters capable of up to 110mph, armed with a fixed Vickers machine gun and the observer's additional Lewis guns. It was a powerful machine that could be flung about the sky like a single–seater and with the added advantage of an observer watching the tail. Finally, the RE8 had taken over the role as the main corps aircraft. However, the RFC still had shortages of the latest aircraft and deep into 1917 many pilots continued to fly near–obsolescent aircraft.

Tactical development

The Germans were outnumbered in the skies over Belgium. The Allies could muster the RFC squadrons, augmented by the Royal Naval Air Service, plus French and Belgian aircraft. In all they could deploy some 750 aircraft of which 330 were scouts. They were facing about 600 German aircraft including 200 scouts. One new German tactical development to counter this overall numerical inferiority was to increase the size of their formations in the air to secure local superiority where it really mattered. Earlier experiments were formalised when the Nos. 4, 6, 10 and 11 *Jagdstaffeln* were combined into an elite scout wing under the command of *Rittmeister* Manfred von Richthofen as *Jagdgeschwader* No. 1. Richthofen himself had been wounded, but would return to action on 16 August. The *Jagdgeschwader* pilots followed his example of his all–red aircraft, by painting their own aircraft a bewildering variety of garish colours, and hence this formation became known as, 'The Flying Circus', as it moved up and down the front to where it was most needed. This was all well and good, but the disadvantage of such elite forces was soon apparent: the concentration of the best pilots had a negative impact on the quality of the 'ordinary' *Jagdstaffeln*. In contrast, the RFC still preferred to fly in smaller flights at layered altitudes, but, when contact was made with large German formations, the various flights would join in the battle as required – combining, separating and recombining as the situation developed.

The SE5a – 'steady in a fast dive'. Courtesy IWM Q63820

The RE8 of 1917. Courtesy IWM Q55991

Manfred von Richtofen with the officers of the Jagdstaffel *11. From left to fight – unknown, unknown, Kurt Wolff, Ernst Udet, Werner Voss (mentioned below), unknown, Friedrich Noltenius, Karl Emil Schafer, unknown, Karl Allmenroder. Courtesy IWM Q111872*

This could easily fall apart under the pressure of combat, but the RFC tactics were becoming increasingly sophisticated. There was also experimentation with complex ambushes, using the lure of seemingly unprotected flights of aircraft ripe for the plucking. Nevertheless, the underlying ethos of the RFC was to push across the German lines, pressing back the German aircraft and clearing the important areas above the battlefields. The German approach, with the exception of *Jagdgeschwader* No. 1, was far more passive and based on defensive patrolling behind their lines.

Flying low

The Third Battle of Ypres would be a tremendous clash in the air. It was axiomatic that the RFC corps squadrons would be crucial to the effective conduct of the preliminary barrage and all counter–battery work. Indeed, the air offensive had begun three weeks earlier on 8 July, intended to sweep the skies to allow the corps aircraft to operate without hostile interference, but also to deprive the Germans of their own 'eyes in the sky'.

The infantry went over the top on the morning of 31 July 1917. The attack coincided with the start of weeks of rain and the low clouds made flying very difficult, wrecking many of the plans for air cooperation. However, needs must, so the contact patrols took off, forced to fly low, under the clouds, and using klaxons to try and get the infantry to light coloured flares to track progress on the ground. For Lieutenant Jack Walthew of 4 Squadron RFC, flying an RE8, 31 July was a tough day.

> 'There was, so experts tell me, the worst barrage that has ever been known, and I had to fly through it! I could hear, and occasionally see, the shells and every minute I was expecting to see one of my wings vanish. However, nothing hit us until we got over the line – which had been pushed forward considerably – and here in 8 minutes we got thirty holes through the machine from machine guns. Ten of them passed within a few inches of Woodstock; the wireless transmitter valued at £200 disappeared; three spars on the wing were broken; and lastly a bullet went through the petrol tank. I smelt a smell of petrol and in a few minutes, it all came rushing over my feet and legs. How we got back I don't know, it seemed the longest journey I have ever made; but eventually we landed safely. I had to write out a report on the flight and then had a shave, and was just going in to have some breakfast when I got orders to take up another machine to try and find the 30th Division who had got lost. So, off I went again and tootled over our lines for an hour. The first thing that happened was that the wireless transmitter again disappeared, leaving only a big hole in the fuselage. After this we weren't hit quite so much as before. Meanwhile we called to the infantry to light flares for us; but as they wouldn't do this, we had to draw the fire of the Huns into ourselves so as to discover where the enemy line was, and deduct ours from it. We managed to do this fairly successfully and came back unhurt.' [2]

Working wonders

The bad weather persisted, flying often had to be suspended with the result that the guns were blinded and counter–battery firing rendered ineffective. It also forced a temporary suspension of ground operations, as the morass of liquid mud stymied the men on the ground. When it resumed in mid–August, the Germans had moved up their reserves and the campaign degenerated into an attritional crawl forwards to the Passchendaele Ridge. The German system of defence in depth was based on a series of concrete pillboxes and blockhouses, which had to be identified and targeted by accurate shelling – often requiring aerial observation, especially with those located on the rear slopes of ridges.

When the next big thrust forward came with the Battle of the Menin Road on 20 September, the RFC performed wonders, providing everything the artillery needed, not just to locate the German batteries, but also using the Zone Calls to warn of the build–up of German counter–attacking forces, which the Royal Artillery could then smash up before they had the opportunity to really get going. A series of bombing raids on the main German airfields had also helped reduce any interference from their scouts. All told it was another great step forward.

The primacy of the land battle can be judged by the fact that, after successful experiments at the Battles of Arras and Messines, an increasingly important role for the fast and agile scout aircraft was low–level ground strafing to provide direct assistance to the infantry. Lieutenant Norman Macmillan of 45 Squadron RFC, was one of those required to carry out this dangerous mission in a Sopwith Camel:

> 'Our task was to fly into that tunnel below the flight of the field–gun shells, look for any target we could see – any Germans in trenches, enemy machine–gun posts – anything at all – shoot it up. Instantly we were in an inferno. The air was boiling with the turmoil of the shells flying through it. We were thrown about in the aircraft, rocking from side to side, being thrown up and down. Below was mud, filth, smashed trenches, broken wire, limbers, rubbish, wreckage of aeroplanes, bits of men – and then in the midst of it all when we were flying at 400 feet I spotted a German machine–gun post and went down. My companion came behind me and as we dived we fired four machine guns straight into the post. We saw the Germans throw themselves on the ground. We dived at them and sprayed them – whether we hit them we didn't know, there was no time to see – only time to dive and fire, climb and zoom on to the next target.' [3]

The scouts would also often carry four 25–lb Cooper bombs on simple racks to try and hit targets of opportunity beneath them. Anything to harry and torment the Germans and to distract them from the main threats – the British infantry and artillery.

Lieutenant Norman MacMillan MC. Courtesy IWM HU 128881

The high explosive 25lb Cooper bomb Mk1. Initially classified as 20lb due to the weight of the case, it contained between 4lb and 4lb 9oz of explosive and so was later reclassified at 25lb. Courtesy IWM MUN 3256

Classic dogfight

Yet the main purpose of the scouts was to attain a mastery of the skies over Flanders – to allow the corps aircraft to carry out their vital tasks. This was amusingly summarised by Second Lieutenant Arthur Rhys Davids of 56 Squadron RFC.

> 'Our job is to see that the Bosche does not get a chance to do any work in the air at all – I mean useful work like bombing and observation. What advantage do we gain? We just gain the supremacy of the air, bless you, that's all: we'll 'ave a notice board put up to the effect.
>
> **AERIAL PARK.**
>
> **PRIVATE.**
>
> **HUN TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED.**
>
> And we keep our own machines safe.' [4]

A portrait of Arthur Rhys Davids – in full uniform, overcoat, gloves and flying helmet – painted by William – later Sir William – Orpen in 1917. Courtesy IWM ART 3004

Each scout squadron flew several patrols a day depending on the operational requirements. Every patrol leader sought to gain as much height as possible, which not only granted speed and surprise in attack, but also the flexibility to escape if things went wrong. They would gradually climb on the Allied side of the lines, before crossing the trenches into German territory. The first point of resistance would be the German anti–aircraft batteries – known as 'Archie' – which would bespatter the sky with black puffs of exploding shells. As the patrol pressed deep over German territory, then every member of the flight would have to exert absolute vigilance if they were not to be 'jumped' with fatal consequences. An experienced pilot like Lieutenant Norman Macmillan knew the dangers.

> 'We were continually on the alert against the enemy whom we had to fight. We had to look in front of us, above us, around us, behind us and below us. We had to develop an entirely new sense of sight, of vision, the enemy might be anywhere. On the ground the enemy was ahead, in the air he might be anywhere. We had to live a life within a sphere instead of a life that was horizontal on the ground.' [5]

The increased number of aircraft, meant that quick clean kills, began to be replaced by amorphous dogfights, as nearby flights of aircraft joined in the battles. Macmillan tried to describe the nature of one of these frenetic encounters.

> 'In combat we flew like goldfish in a bowl swimming around the sky in all directions sometimes standing on our tails, sometimes with our heads right down, sometimes over on our backs, sometimes at right–angles to the ground – any attitude which enables the nose of the aircraft to point where we wanted it to point – in the direction of the enemy so that the guns could register hits. It was a fantastic type of flying and our machines could turn in such tiny circles that we simply swerved round in an amazingly small space of air, missing each other sometimes by inches. Missing enemy aircraft, missing our own aircraft, dodging in and out amongst the others in the sky, weaving the most fantastic patterns.' [6]

One 'classic' dogfight occurred on the early evening of 23 September 1917, when Captain James McCudden of 56 Squadron RFC, led his B Flight flying SE5as in an offensive patrol over the German lines. Suddenly he saw a SE5a from 60 Squadron which was being attacked by a Fokker Dr1Triplane, which it later transpired was being flown by *Leutnant* Werner Voss of Jasta 10.

> 'Down we dived at a colossal speed. I went to the right, Rhys Davids to the left, and we got behind the triplane together. The German pilot saw us and turned in the most disconcertingly quick manner, not a climbing nor Immelmann turn, but a sort of flat half–spin. By now the German triplane was in the middle of our formation, and its handling was wonderful to behold. The pilot seemed to be firing at all of us simultaneously, and although I got behind him a second time, I could hardly stay there for a second. His movements were so quick and uncertain that none of us could hold him in sight at all for any decisive time. I now got a good opportunity as he was coming towards me nose–on, and slightly underneath, and had apparently not seen me. I dropped my nose, got him well in my sight, and pressed both triggers. As soon as I fired up came his nose at me, and I heard clack–clack–clack–clack, as his bullets passed close to me and through my wings. I distinctly noticed the red–yellow flashes from his parallel Spandau guns. As he flashed by me I caught a glimpse of a black head in the triplane.' [7]

Voss had claimed some 49 victories since his first success a year before and was second only to Richthofen amongst the German aces. McCudden and the SE5s tried their best to shoot down their elusive opponent. They had less trouble in shooting down an Albatros V flown by *Leutnant* Karl Menckhoff of Jasta 3 which briefly joined the fight.

> 'At one time, I noted the Triplane in the apex of a cone of tracer bullets from at least five machines simultaneously, and each machine had two guns. By now the fighting was very low, and the red–nosed Albatros had gone down and out, but the Triplane still remained. I had temporarily lost sight of the Triplane while changing a drum of my Lewis gun, and when I next saw him he was very low.' [8]

The accurate fire by Voss had already forced two SE5s to retire damaged. Perhaps Voss should have escaped, but he chose to fight on. At last, Lieutenant Arthur Rhys Davids managed to get on to the Fokker's tail.

> 'Eventually I got east and slightly above the Triplane and made for it, getting in a whole Lewis drum and a corresponding number of Vickers into him. He made no attempt to turn, until I was so close to him I was certain we would collide. He passed my right–hand wing by inches and went down. I zoomed. I saw him next with his engine apparently off, gliding west. I dived again and got one shot out of my Vickers; however, I reloaded and kept in the dive. I got in another good burst and the Triplane did a slight right–hand turn, still going down. I had now overshot him (this was at 1,000 feet), zoomed, but never saw him again.' [9]

However, McCudden saw the end of their brave opponent.

> 'I noticed that the Triplane's movements were very erratic, and then I saw him go into a fairly steep dive and so I continued to watch, and then saw the Triplane hit the ground and disappear into a thousand fragments, for it seemed to me that it literally went to a powder.' [10]

A very youthful looking James McCudden pictured while serving as an air mechanic with 3 Squadron, RFC in December 1914. Courtesy IWM HU 71314

Harsh juxtaposition

These life or death dogfights were fought at a horrendous cost to the nervous system. Not everyone could cope with the coruscating pressure. Voss had riddled the SE5a flown by Lieutenant Verschoyle Cronyn in this last fight. With his controls almost useless, Cronyn came perilously close to a crash landing.

> 'I got out of the machine, and the relief of being on the ground was so great that I practically collapsed. For a minute or two everything went black. It seemed pitch dark, and I could hear somebody asking where I had been hit. Then the Major arrived, and someone took me by the arm and sat me down on a bench. I seemed to have no strength in my knees. My head was buzzing, and everything seemed disconnected and out of reach. I wanted to laugh because I had managed to get down without crashing, but instead of laughing I started to cry. This does me little credit, but nerves play uncontrollable tricks. Why, I don't know, but when I managed to pull myself together I felt a thousand times better: as though a very tight steel belt had been released from about my chest, the singing left my head, and my sight became reasonably clear.' [11]

Having once been exposed to this sort of mental trauma, it could take a long while to regain any semblance of normal composure. Some pilots never recovered and had to be sent home.

Many of the aircraft shot down on both sides were the result of the harsh juxtaposition of raw novices and experienced 'aces' like Voss and McCudden who made fewer mistakes in combat and exploited every opportunity offered with consummate skill. Every time a pilot survived a patrol or dogfight, it gave him more experience and confidence. As such he became an asset to his squadron rather than a lame duck who needed special attention. Yet even the successful pilots had a brief shelf–life. Thus, on 27 October, young Arthur Rhys Davids was killed – just four weeks after his triumph over Werner Voss.

Grinding on

The air war ground on, mirroring the intense battles on the ground. Amidst all the glamour associated with the scout aircraft and the aces, the Germans never lost sight of the fact that the horrendous power of the Royal Artillery guns was directed to deadly effect by the humble corps aircraft. At every opportunity, the German scouts sought to dash them from the sky. On 5 November, Sergeant George Eddington and Second Lieutenant F A Dormer of 6 Squadron RFC, were up in their RE8 carrying out an artillery observation shoot, a traumatic experience which Eddington recalled years late in an oral history interview with the IWM Sound Archive.

> 'It was quite an interesting shoot – to watch the shell bursts as they corrected their range to as near as they could to the centre. All of a sudden, I heard a burst of gunfire. Eight Albatros had crept up on me. I looked round and there was Mr Dormer lying flat out on the floor – they'd got him with the first burst. I thought, "That's it!" I tried to avoid combat by making a series of wide flat circles which deprived the enemy of any chance of getting a straight line on me. All the time I was losing height because I knew that in the end they'd get me. Then I glanced round to see an aircraft diving down – out to make a proper job of it! I had to do something pretty quickly! I decided to do an Immelmann Turn: nobody had ever heard of anyone doing that in a RE8, but it was the only way out! I stood her up on her tail – pulled the stick right back, kicked the left rudder just as she was coming up and she started spinning! I was quite cool and even at that stage one doesn't think of death. Down she went and the firing stopped. They could see me spinning down and I suspect they were just waiting to see the shower of sparks. I centralised everything and, just as I was coming out of the dive into the straight, I heard two sharp bangs. Both the wing extensions had broken off against the struts and been carried right away. That left me with no lateral control at all. I was going down quite fast and there was nothing I could do about it. I looked round and shouted to Dormer, "We're going to crash!" but of course he was still out. I switched off the engine because they always caught fire. I waited until we got to about 30 foot of the ground and then – very heavy on the controls – I pulled back with both hands on the stick into my stomach. It pulled her back a bit, but she dived into the ground with one colossal bang. I remembered no more – I'd landed in Sanctuary Wood and an artillery officer dragged me out – they'd already got the observer out.' [12]

Awesome power: A 15–inch Mark II howitzer of the Royal Garrison Artillery elevated and ready to fire, near Ypres, 27 September 1917, during the Battle of Polygon Wood. Courtesy IWM Q2907

Almost helpless in the air, the humble RE8 flown by the likes of George Eddington was far more lethal than the spluttering machine guns of any ace, for it harnessed the awesome power of the guns. This was the real purpose of the fighting in the air. The RFC, assisted by the RNAS, more than played their part in the long grim torment that was the Third Battle of Ypres. It was a lot of trouble – but it was worth it.

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(4) A Rhys Davids quoted by A Revell, *High in the Empty Blue* (Flying Machines Press: 1995), pp.138–139.

(5) IWM Sound Archive: N Macmillan, AC 4173, Reel 1.

(6) *Ibid*.

(7) J McCudden, *Five Years in the Royal Flying Corps* (Aeroplane and General: 1918), p.194.

(8) *Ibid*, p.195.

(9) A Rhys Davids quoted by H A Jones, *War in the Air, Vol. IV* (The Clarendon Press: 1922–1937), p.189.

(10) J McCudden, op.cit., p.195. *Leutnant* Werner Voss scored the first of his 48 victories on 27 November 1916 and was awarded the *Pour le Mérite* on 8 April 1917. Voss was only 20–years–old when he was finally downed by Rhys–Davids and crashed near Plum Farm, north of Frezenberg on 23 September 1917. His remains today lie in the *Kameradengräb* at Langemarck German cemetery along with those of more than 44,000 of his countrymen. His name is commemorated on memorial panel 63.

(11) V Cronyn quoted by A Revell, *op.cit.,* p.166.

(12) IWM Sound Archive: G Eddington, AC 00013, Reel 5.

The First Day of Third Ypres

The 1st Battalion The Prince of Wales's (North Staffordshire) Regiment

by Jim Tanner

There was nothing particularly remarkable about the part played by the 1st Battalion, The Prince of Wales's (North Staffordshire) Regiment (1/N Staffords) on the first day of the Third Battle of Ypres. The battalion gained its first and second objectives and some men pressed on beyond but things ground to a halt as both flanks floundered and casualties mounted. By the end of the day the line was consolidated on the first objective and that was that.

Battalions from every British infantry regiment fought at some time or other at Ypres. Staffordshire's two infantry regiments, the South and the North, were there, as were many others, from First Ypres and beyond. Of their 35 battalions which were active during the war, 11 took part in Third Ypres; a record undoubtedly shared or exceeded by other regiments. Yet after the war – in recognition of the gallantry of the men in a very hard–fought battle that so epitomised the British infantry in the attack – the North Staffords chose 31 July as their main regimental day. The commemoration was continued by their successors, the Staffordshire Regiment, following amalgamation with the South Staffords in 1959.[1]

A close study of the 1/North Staffords on the first day of Third Ypres affords a good insight into a British battalion in the attack that day. This, of course, may also seem unremarkable but because the main features of the ground today resemble very closely the ground of July 1917 and because the very axis of 1/N Staffords attack can be walked from the British to the German front line, the progress of the battalion can be demonstrated clearly. Jim Tanner takes us on that journey.

1st North Staffords

In August 1914 the battalion had mobilised at Buttevant in County Cork, forming part of 17 Brigade of the 6th Division, and arrived in France in mid–September. Its life on the Western Front, where it was to remain throughout the war, was typical, the most notable engagements for the battalion being at Neuve Chapelle in March 1915 and at Delville Wood at the end of August 1916. The 1/North Staffords transferred formations just once when, in October 1915, they moved across to 72 Brigade in the 24th Division, a New Army Division which had been badly mauled at Loos.[2]

The battalion had last been in the line following the great success of the Battle of Messines. At this time the 24th Division was in X Corps, Second Army. Although the battalion did not play a major part at Messines it had occupied trenches in the Mount Sorrel/ Observatory Ridge area from 9 to 17 June and in the Battle Wood area in late June. That the Ypres Salient was never silent was shown by the casualty state for the battalion in June, a 'quiet' period leading up to Third Ypres. In that month 1/North Staffords suffered 7 officers and 35 other ranks killed and 3 officers and 135 other ranks wounded. The officers killed had included the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel W F B R Dugmore DSO, and his second–in–command, Captain G H Robinson, when shells fell on battalion headquarters on 12 June; and then Major Arthur Conway DSO, who had succeeded in command, was killed a few days later – again by shellfire falling on battalion headquarters. The intelligence officer and medical officer were both wounded on 12 June, and the new intelligence officer wounded on 23 June. The adjutant, Captain P D Harris, had escaped untouched throughout but, it

The Officers of the 1st Battalion The Prince of Wales's (North Staffordshire) Regiment at Cambridge in August 1914. Second Lieutenant Vyvyan Pope is in the back row, third from left. There are no other known photographs of the battalion in the Great War. Two group photographs in the IWM purporting to show 1/North Staffords at rest at Cassel in September 1917 actually show 1/South Staffords. Author's Collection

was remarked, by the eve of Third Ypres he was losing his nerve. The new commanding officer was Captain (acting Lieutenant Colonel) Vyvyan Pope DSO MC, a 25–year old Regular officer of startling ability.[3]

Second Lieutenant Vyvyan Vavasour Pope in full dress, aged 21 in 1912 and a year after he received his commission in the North Staffords. Courtesy Staffordshire Regiment Museum

24th Division plan

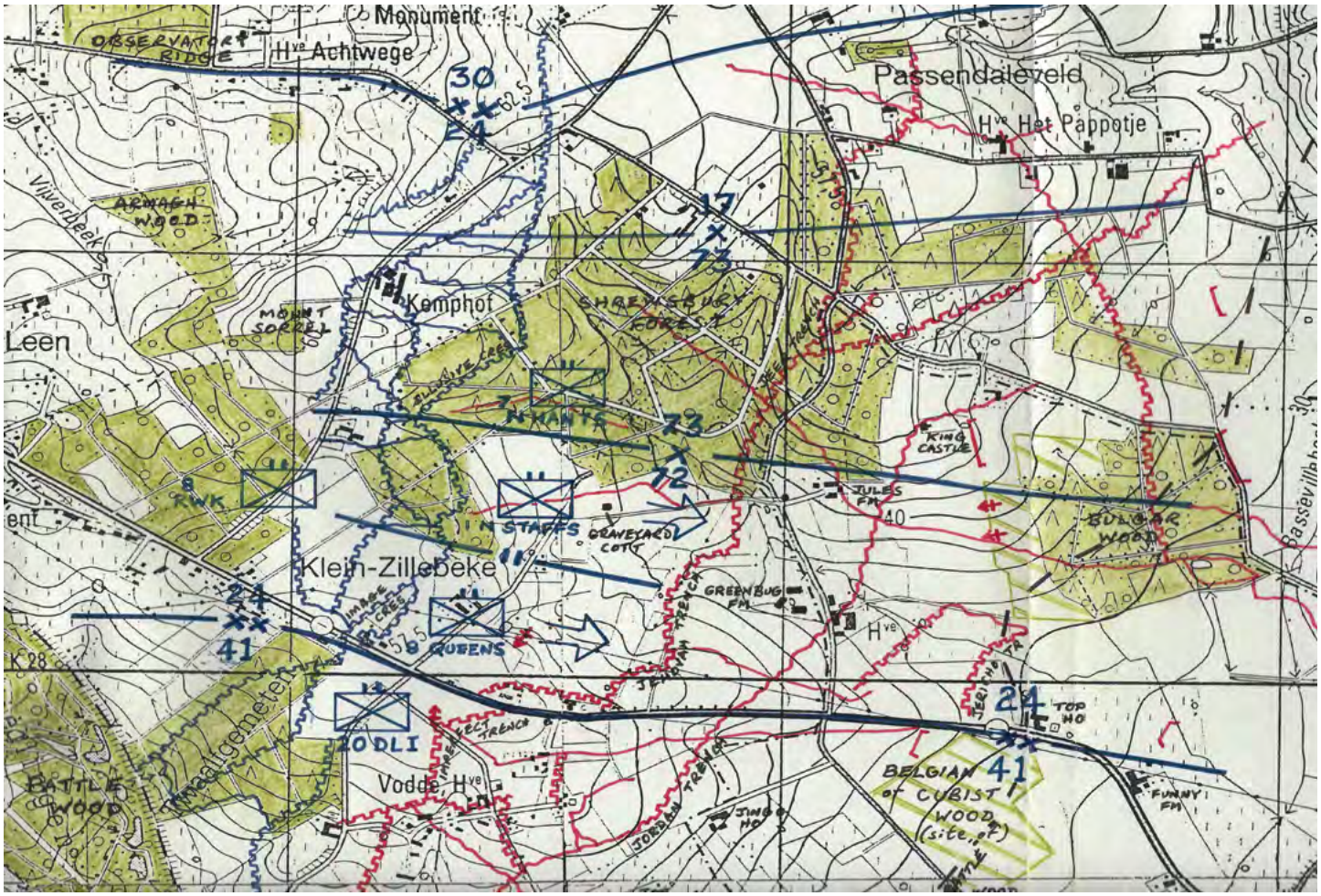
For 31 July 1917 the plan for II Corps' southern–most divisions, the 24th being the most southern, was to attack to secure a protective flank for Fifth Army in co–ordination with Second Army on its right. II Corps had a most difficult task to say the least, attacking into the tangle of smashed woods east of Zillebeke, which included Sanctuary Wood and Shrewsbury Forest. With the aim of capturing the whole of the Gheluvelt Plateau, the British Official History (OH) observed that 'it was generally recognized, [that II Corps had] the hardest task of the day.' [4]

Map 1 (below) shows the dispositions of the 24th Division overlaid on a modern map. The road from Klein–Zillebeke to Zandvoorde marked the division's southern boundary with the 41st Division, whose northern most unit was 20/Durham Light Infantry. In fact the road also marked the boundary between II Corps, Fifth Army and X Corps, Second Army, with all of the difficulties this confluence of boundaries can impose. 24th Division's northern boundary with 30th Division ran east from Observatory Ridge and it might be noted that 24th Division occupied a frontage of little more than one kilometre. In the intervening ground the three assaulting brigades of the division were to attack side–by–side: 17 Brigade on the left, 73 Brigade in the centre and 72 Brigade on the right. This laydown is readily apparent from contemporary documents but the OH, incorrectly, placed 17 Brigade on the right and 72 Brigade on the left. [5] 72 Brigade had 1/North Staffords attacking on the left and the 8/Queen's on the right, with each battalion having an attack frontage of about 300m. 8/Royal West Kents were in support and the fourth battalion of the brigade, 9/East Surreys, were the divisional Reserve. On the left of 1/North Staffords was the right–hand battalion of 73 Brigade, 7/Northamptons.

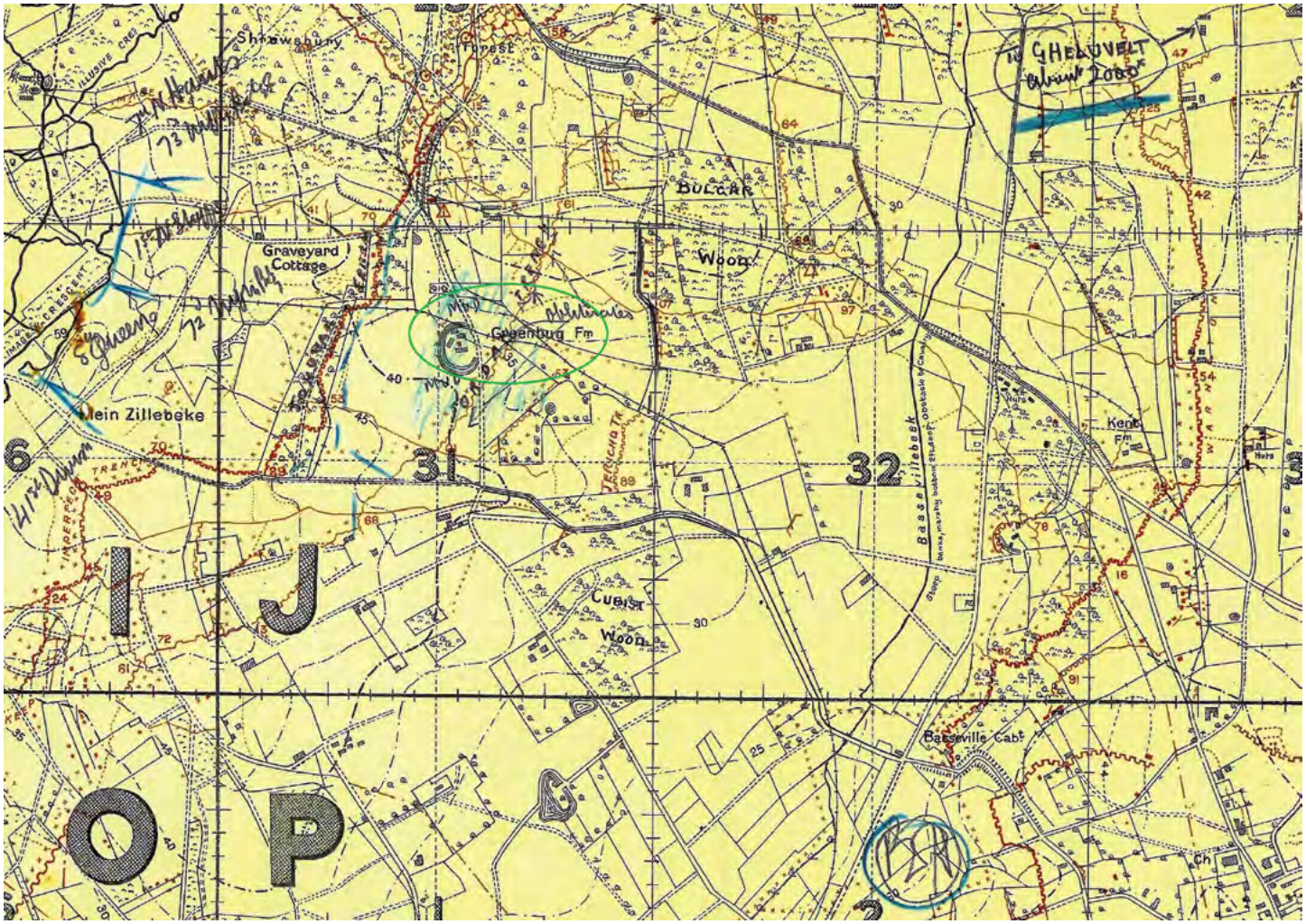
The ground and the enemy

On the ground today one can readily identify features from the 1917 trench map and Map 2 seen opposite – taken from 1/North Staffords war diary – can be compared with Map 1 for its marked similarities. The diarist had annotated the map with the various battalion boundaries, albeit roughly, along the line of Image Crescent and highlighted too the German trench names – Jordan and Jehovah – and the dominant feature of Bulgar Wood. [6] The wood today does not stretch quite as far west as it once did and Belgian Wood (as named on some trench maps), or Cubist Wood as it appeared on others, no longer exists. Their trees were barely in evidence in July 1917 but Bulgar Wood in particular still presented a serious obstacle. As 1/North Staffords' history commented:

> 'Aeroplane photographs revealed the presence of concrete 'pill–boxes' in [Bulgar] wood, and it was obvious that the consolidation of Jordan trench would be far from easy if the Germans still held the western edge of the wood, and arrangements were eventually made for strong fighting patrols to move forward to Bulgar Wood immediately Jordan trench had been occupied to cover the consolidation.[7]



Map 1. The Third Battle of Ypres, showing the attack of 72 Brigade and the laydown of its battalions and flanking units. This is a relatively modern map with the detail for 31 July 1917 overlaid. Note in particular Graveyard Cottage and Greenbug Farm, Shrewsbury Forest and Bulgar Wood, all mentioned in the text. Author's Collection



Map 2. Contemporary trench map for July 1917 taken from 1/North Staffords' war diary. Note the annotations in blue pencil. The moat around Greenbug Farm is clearly shown

72 Brigade's immediate objective was Jehovah Trench, also called the Blue Line, and was apparently easily identifiable by a row of shattered trees marking the line of a long–vanished road. Jordan Trench – the Black Line – was another 400m beyond and represented the second objective. Towards these 1/North's advance ran through a valley noted as 'always liable to floods' and which would account for the blue scribble and 'MUD' annotated on Map 2. It was further noted that the ground on the right was open but the line of the Germans' Imperfect Trench enfiladed any move across the valley and a German machine gun was positioned well forward. On the battalion's left Shrewsbury Forest overlooked its line of advance and though 'many bombardments had lopped the branches off the trees and had destroyed any undergrowth there may once have been, ... the forest, shattered as it was, still constituted a formidable obstacle, which the enemy had not neglected to utilise as cover for numerous 'pill–boxes' and machine guns.'[8] The battalion recognised that the clearance of the forest by 7/Northamptons and 2/Leinsters was vital to its own success and had attached a liaison officer to the Northamptons to help keep in touch with progress.

Between Jehovah and Jordan Trenches were the ruins of Groenenburg (known to the British as Greenbug) Farm, which was considered a potential source of danger as it was surrounded on three sides by a moat and therefore accessible to attackers only from the rear. Special arrangements were made with the barrage to pause on the farm while an assault group worked around to attack it from the rear. Greenbug Farm was rebuilt after the war a little to the east of its original position but one can still see the unmistakable signs of the original moat from the air.

Although German defences were not as complete as the Germans had hoped, they still posed a huge challenge, incorporating, as stated in the OH, 'two and a half years of German experience in defensive warfare.' [9] German defensive preparations were certainly well advanced, with successive defence lines codenamed *Albrecht*, *Wilhelm* and the *Flandern Stellungen I, II and III*, ready to execute the new tactical doctrine of flexible defence. In front of the 24th Division the original German first line had been removed by the advance at Messines, but there were still abundant pill–boxes. Facing the 24th Division, in the area between the northern edge of Shrewsbury Forest and Klein Zillebeke, the Germans had placed the Prussian 82nd Reserve Infantry Regiment of the 22nd Reserve Division of *Gruppe Wytschaete*. The *Gruppe* contained five front divisions in all, with a further three reserve divisions assembled behind.

Preparations

1/North Staffords spent the first half of July in rest and training at Seninghem in preparation for its part in Third Ypres, a period commonly known as 'fattening' by the soldiers. On 19 July the 24th Division was transferred to II Corps, Fifth Army. That day the battalion began its march back towards Ypres and on 29 July moved into reserve trenches preparatory to taking up their assembly positions. Yet another officer was killed at this time: Captain Mapplebeck, who was commanding C Company. On the night of 30 July A Company, which was to be in battalion reserve, moved into the front line and relieved 9/East Surreys, who passed to the rear for their divisional reserve role. C Company then moved into Image Crescent and on the right of the battalion, and D Company moved onto a taped line in no man's land on the left. B Company was in close support. This all took place for the battalion without serious incident but it was not a straightforward affair.

Although the main German line here was around 700m distant the Germans had numerous strongly held posts in their Outpost Zone, in accordance with the new doctrine, well in advance of their forward trench and, in places, only about 100m in front of Image Crescent. It was for this reason that C Company was unable to assemble in advance of the trench. However, D Company was able to get well out onto its taped line. This had been laid out the night before the attack by the new intelligence officer, now Second Lieutenant Westlake, and the burden of responsibility on this young officer can only be imagined. To achieve this he had patrolled several times into no man's land before the arrival of the battalion and was to receive an immediate MC for his efforts.

Bernard Martin was a second lieutenant in D Company and remembered helping to lay out the tape with 'Watson' (it was in fact Westlake):

> 'Watson and I waited till the moon was down before putting out the direction tape in no man's land, an easier job than we had expected. Unluckily I tripped and fell full length into a disused sap full of stinking stagnant water. When I got back to Image Crescent soaked to the skin and shivering, my splendid old–soldier batman Tidmarsh looked at me with reproach, rather as my mother used to when I came home with muddy clothes from fishing in a burn … but he said nothing.'(10)

Martin did not record in his memoir that he had a terrific argument with a fellow platoon commander as they were sorting out their platoons. Captain 'Ginger' Thomson MC, commanding A Company, while some way back in reserve, certainly heard about it and recalled later that:

> 'Martin and Toft … were deadly rivals and had a terrific argument on the starting line, which almost came to blows, as to the exact line of demarcation between their platoons. A few minutes later [see below] Martin had one cheek and part of his jaw shot away and Toft lost most of his nose.'(11)

Second Lieutenant Bernard Martin pictured standing alongside a fellow North Stafford officer at an unknown location but somewhere near Ypres sometime in 1916. Author's Collection

Supporting artillery

These preparations were carried out during the last hours of the massive artillery preparation then taking place. While the effects on the Germans helped conceal preparation in part, the North Staffords' history felt that 'the element of surprise was entirely neglected. For this oversight many units were to pay heavily in casualties and the 1/North Staffords not the least among them.'(12) The Germans were certainly very well aware that a major offensive was looming.

The co–operation established between infantry and artillery was now, in 1917, considerable and the instructions given to both for an attack were extensive. The orders issued to the artillery supporting 72 Brigade on 31 July give an idea of this:

> 'At zero hour the Artillery barrage will be brought down on a line two hundred yards in advance of the Infantry, and will remain stationary on this line for five minutes. During this five minutes the Infantry will form up close under the barrage. At zero plus five minutes the barrage will advance at the rate of a hundred yards every four minutes and will pile up on the line Jehovah trench. The barrage will lift off this line at zero plus thirty–three minutes and the Infantry will assault.
>
> A protective barrage will now rest two hundred yards in front of above line until zero plus seventy–five minutes.
>
> At zero plus seventy–five minutes the barrage will again advance at the rate of a hundred yards every four minutes to the line Jordan trench, where it will pile up. The barrage will lift off this line at zero plus one hour thirty–nine minutes and the Infantry will assault and capture their objectives.
>
> The barrage will remain stationary about five hundred yards in front of this line until a time to be notified later.'(13)

The 24th Division had issued preliminary instructions on the subject of these 'creeping' and 'protective' barrages to get the best out of them for the infantry:

> 'A barrage of 18 pounder Artillery, once it has opened, rolls forward with great regularity and each lift causes the shells to burst at the increased range decided upon. When a barrage opens, however, all guns in the barrage will not fire with exactness on to a given line, owing to errors of the day and other causes affecting different guns to a different extent. The variations between one gun and another will remain practically constant throughout each lift. Thus, if a barrage is irregular when it opens, it will remain irregular throughout. This variation has the following results when deciding the jumping–off places of Infantry. It is not as a rule safe for guns to open less than one hundred and eighty yards in front of the line held by the Infantry, but once the barrage has opened, Infantry can and must approach close up to it, knowing that each lift will maintain the same variations.'(14)

The 24th Division wore a system of battle patches on the upper right arm comprising a series of coloured cloth shapes. Soldiers of 1/North Staffords wore a 2–inch green square, the green denoting 72 Brigade and the square the fourth battalion in regimental seniority in the brigade. Above the square each company of the 1st North had a coloured star (a silhouette of the divisional sign): A Company blue, B Company green, C Company red and D Company (shown here) yellow. The battalion also wore on the right side of their helmets a regimental crimson/ black/white tricolour flash. IWM Collection courtesy of Andrew Clyro

The theory was very sound but the North Staffords' history concluded:

> 'For this reason all details of the Infantry attack had been rigidly settled beforehand and there was no possibility of control once the attack had been launched. Unfortunately ... the Artillery fire did not absolutely pulverize the German positions, and unforeseen contingencies arose which had not been allowed for in the orders issued.'(15)

As dawn was breaking early on 31 July 1/North Staffords were ready to go, notwithstanding squabbling subalterns. From midnight the Germans had kept up a fairly active bombardment on the British trenches but the battalion war diary reported that it 'was erratic and caused the battalion few casualties.' The axis of the battalion's attack ran along what had been a track heading eastwards towards Graveyard Cottage, which can also be identified on the maps. The cottage has long disappeared but its original location is easy to find today and the remainder of the ground, including the restored track and the southern boundary of Shrewsbury Forest, are identical to the appearance shown on the 1917 trench maps. But we might imagine the going: a moonscape of shell holes, mud and water, of stumps of trees at a time of the year when there should have been luscious foliage, and barbed wire in deep and vicious belts. The ground proved hopeless for the tanks of II Tank Brigade tasked to support II Corps. Of its 48 tanks just 19 reached the front line but too late for zero hour and none reached 24th Division. When the tanks did get going, all but one became casualties.(16)

Jumping off

Zero Hour across the front was set for 3.50am. The 1/North Staffords' war diary takes up the story:

> 'At Zero our barrage descended and the attacking troops went forward close under it. In a few minutes the enemy dropped a barrage with 77mm guns on our front line and a barrage of 5.9" and 4.2" on our support and reserve lines.'(17)

Bernard Martin recalled that:

> 'An immense number of guns of all sizes [opened fire], the greatest volume of gunfire ever heard. The daylight was still feeble at 3.05 a.m. … The light would grow stronger while we got up, scrambling from Image Crescent to walk across No–Man's–Land ... The vast noise filled me with awe ... reminding me of what someone called 'the blind fury of Creation'. The earth reeled and rocked as when God threw up ranges of high Alps and shifted Continents hither and thither.'(18)

As with all memoirs produced long after the event we must be circumspect in accepting Martin's at face value, as will be shown. He reckoned that Zero Hour was at 3.10am and for some reason recorded that the last two minutes before Zero passed in 'total silence'.(19) Nevertheless, it is an important and interesting account. As a young officer in D Company he would have taken his platoon forward on the left of the battalion. He wrote:

> 'I spaced my men along the tape evenly, one metre or so apart. Shells from our barrage screeched just over our heads. The enemy artillery, taken by surprise, had not yet opened fire. I set a steady walking pace, everything going to plan. But after a few steps I found myself in a huddle on the ground, gasping for breath, bewildered. The blast of a shell had thrown me down violently. As I struggled to get up, to regain balance, still confused, I realised that what seemed to be an unrecognisable heap on the ground alongside me was, in fact, a man … Undoubtedly a Goner... When I regained my balance and my composure, I saw several gaps in our line: casualties. Could only be from a 'short–fall', one of our own shells, what the Artillery called 'short rounds'. … it was bad luck to have one at the very start of our walk–over attack. Almost at once we had another – shrapnel – bursting low. Notwithstanding the solid noise of the barrage, I could pick out the zip–zip of metal fragments whizzing past my ears. A third 'short–fall' killed my sergeant and two men.'(20)

The war diary recorded that the German counter–barrage was fairly immediate and within 'a few minutes' but D Company in fact got clear of this before it fell so Bernard Martin's recollection of casualties may well have been due to a number of 'short–falls'. However, he might have been exaggerating when he went on to say that, 'We were about halfway to Jehovah and a third of our strength already casualties'(21) as the war diary made it clear that 'The attacking line got clear of the enemy's barrage with few casualties'. It was C Company on the right that suffered the most and the battalion history concluded that, although D Company avoided the enemy's 'very intense barrage ... C Company suffered casualties, and B Company had to pass right through it after the two leading Companies had gained their distance.'(22)

Our understanding of the battalion's attack is also not helped by Bernard Martin's criticism of Pope. Martin had noted that he was 'a good chap, who'd been in India since the war began so didn't know much of trench warfare', which was clearly not the case for an officer, young as Pope was, who had been out since 1914 and already had a DSO and an MC on his chest. (23) Pope had been wounded (for the second time) at Messines and had recovered just in time to take command of the battalion for Third Ypres. Although very disparaging in his writing, Martin was semi–correct in recollecting that some days before the attack the CO told his officers that they were 'not to charge at the double across No–Man's–Land as in the old tactics but to walk at a steady pace towards Jehovah', and that there were expressions of astonishment from the company commanders. (24) According to Martin, only when the barrage had lifted from Jordan Trench were they to 'charge', and this is corroborated in the battalion history. As we have seen already, the men were to 'walk' towards the first objective in order to stay behind the protection of their creeping barrage.

The North Staffords' history did reflect rather critically that 'The Battalion's plan of attack had been somewhat rigidly laid down and had been approved by Higher Authority' and it must be realised that a battalion clearly could not do its own thing. Its progress, or lack of it, could have a major effect on the outcome of an attack; a battalion not being able to get forward causing a problem to a flank and an entire attack by a brigade or even a division or corps failing as a consequence, and we shall see some of this below.

We know from the history that the two lead companies (C and D) were to 'attack side–by–side, leap–frogging by platoons through to the

second objective Jordan Trench. B Company was to follow in support and occupy Jehovah Trench, when the lead companies advanced to Jordan Trench.'[25] This method was modelled on the latest instructions and each company would have its four platoons arranged with two forward and two back. Some units used the two forward platoons to fire and move as a pair, with the rear platoons ready to support. Others, like 1/North Staffords, leap–frogged a forward platoon and rear platoon as a pair. Each platoon was no solid line of riflemen but a self–contained sub–unit of a headquarters and four mutually supporting sections, each with its own speciality. Platoons would normally attack in two lines, the first containing a section of riflemen and a section of bomb (grenade) throwers and the second, 15 to 25 yards behind, a section of rifle grenadiers and a Lewis Gun section. Upon contact with the enemy and if held up, the second line would move up to suppress the position by fire from the front while the manoeuvre sections of riflemen and bombers broke in from a flank.

Trouble on the flanks

The attacking companies made 'steady progress', though the forward German posts in front of C Company put up a stout resistance and the company suffered considerable casualties, especially among the officers and senior NCOs. But the main problem now was that on the left 7/Northamptons could not get through Shrewsbury Forest, due partly to the difficulties

A studio portrait of young Drummer William Dimmelow taken some time before the momentous events of 31 July 1917. Courtesy Andrew Clayton

Drummer Dimmelow's battered bugle. Courtesy Staffordshire Regiment Museum

of the ground but largely to the determined resistance of the Germans. The North Staffords also thought that the Northamptons had not formed up on the correct line before Zero Hour. Whatever the reason it was clear that the attack on the left was failing and allowing the enemy to concentrate on D Company, which now began to push to its right and bunch up. Somewhere close to Graveyard Cottage Bernard Martin's war came to an abrupt end:

> '... the light was now strong enough to see what damage our gunners had done to Jehovah. I glanced at my watch. In a few moments we must make our charge at the double. My reflections were cut short. From the battered parapet of Jehovah, a little to my left, I saw the flash of a rifle: so we could expect some resistance. Another rifle flash, this one straight in front ... a knock–out blow ... legs sagging ... collapse; and as I crossed the hazy limits of consciousness into the non–world, I knew I had been shot through the head.'[26]

Another interesting aspect of this attack is that Pope had ordered that each company was to have buglers sound the charge when the barrage lifted off Jehovah Trench so that the men would know to get forward as rapidly as possible. Martin was particularly scathing about this idea in his memoir and related that it was his job to find eight trained buglers in the battalion and organise bugle and revolver practice for them. In the end all of the buglers bar one were wounded in the advance and when the lone survivor, Drummer William Dimmelow of D Company, did get to blow the charge he was shot in the mouth.[27]

The Northamptons had indeed run into serious trouble and the assumption of 1/North Staffords that the Northamptons had had problems with direction from the start was correct. The battalion's report declared:

> 'Owing to the darkness the assaulting Companies were unable to keep a correct line, and also the men were inclined to 'bunch' which it was difficult to prevent until daylight. However owing to the same cause, ie the darkness, direction was undoubtedly lost from the beginning of the advance.'[28]

The Northamptons made no secret of their difficulties but it is also clear that the men fought against an almost impregnable enemy position and, despite the difficulties, did gain their first objective of Jeer Trench, which was on the same line as Jehovah. Even as they set out at Zero Hour the Northamptons ran into German machine guns which had escaped the final barrage by the expedient of going forward from Jeer Trench into shell–holes while the British barrage piled up shells on the German front line. As a result 'Our assaulting troops being held up were unable to keep up with the barrage, lost direction, and became disorganised.'[29] Even more serious trouble now developed as the Northamptons lost connection with their left and found themselves enfiladed by a German strongpoint at Lower Star Post in Shrewsbury Forest. This strongpoint lay more or less on the battalion's boundary with 17 Brigade and 7/Northamptons had gone past it before they realised the situation they were in. With the assaulting companies now 'highly disorganised' and with no officers left, the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Edgar Mobbs DSO, went forward to try and sort things out and was to die of the wounds he received when charging a machine gun southeast of Lower Star Post.[30]

Consolidation

Oblivious at the time to these details, C and D Companies of 1/North Staffords eventually got into Jehovah Trench after a stiff fight and the German garrison was either killed or captured. In accordance with the plan and the details of the barrage an attempt was now made to reach the second objective of Jordan Trench but, with the failure of the Northamptons on the left, enfilading fire from machine guns in Shrewsbury Forest steadily increased and fire from machine guns in Bulgar Wood, to the battalion's front, began to take effect. Then matters worsened on the right as 20/Durham Light Infantry became held up and 8/Queen's, as a result, began to push onto the right of the North Staffords. The war diary of 8/Queen's agreed with all of the accounts so far detailed and this battalion, with its own right flank now in trouble due to the problems of the Durhams, had to form a defensive right flank between Jehovah and Jordan Trenches.[31] The North Staffords had already reached Greenbug Farm, which was found to be a morass and unable to be occupied, and then came onto the line of Jordan Trench, and that was found to be largely a 'spitlocked line full of water'.

B Company had been committed in support of the forward line around this time and one of its sergeants, E A Austin, with men of C Company captured a machine gun. Private Walklate had got into what there was of the trench and used his Lewis gun, firing from the hip, while D Company's Acting Company Sergeant Major, T Averill, led the remnants of D Company to consolidate the line after all of the company officers, including Bernard Martin, had become casualties. Averill and Austin were both awarded immediate Distinguished Conduct Medals (DCM).

It will be recalled that the battalion plan had recognised the need to get on to Bulgar Wood if it was to consolidate successfully on its objective, and indeed a platoon of C Company under Second Lieutenant Pierson did achieve this. But they could find no cover and, with both flanks in the air, were forced to return. By 5.30am it was really all over. Only two officers

The P08 Luger pistol captured by Captain 'Ginger' Thomson, commanding A Company 1/North Staffords, as he went forward to take command of the men occupying the new front line on 31 July 1917. Courtesy Staffordshire Regiment Museum

were left standing out of the 11 who had gone forward with the three attacking companies: Pierson, and Lieutenant Arthur Allen, who was commanding C Company and was awarded another immediate MC. At 6.00am orders were received from 72 Brigade that, owing to the situation on both of its flanks, no further advance was to be attempted and the line now reached was therefore to be consolidated.

At 7.00am Lieutenant Colonel Pope ordered up Captain Thomson, still in reserve in command of A Company, to take command of the forward line where he found the remnants of B, C and D Companies with men of 8/Queen's and 7/Northamptons all very much mixed up together. Pope, as was usual for COs in 1917, had been ordered to stay in the British front line during the attack. Movement above ground was now extremely difficult as any sign of it was met by German artillery and machine–gun fire, which raked the area between Image Crescent and Jehovah Trench. With his left flank exposed Thomson managed to get across to the Northants to speak with Edgar Mobbs before the latter, against orders, led the attack in which he was killed. While moving around, Thomson poked his head inside one of the German bunkers 'and immediately wished I hadn't, as in it was a German Officer and three men. However, they were even more alarmed than I was and immediately put their hands up.'[32]

A Company remained holding Image Crescent and the battalion stretcher–bearers were now busy trying to bring in the wounded. Lance Corporal E Smith was recommended for the Victoria Cross for his constant devotion to attending and evacuating the wounded. Although the recommendation was not successful he also received an immediate DCM.[33] The line of Jordan Trench proved impossible to consolidate due to the appalling nature of the ground and the continuing effects of German fire from flank and front, so consolidation was established on or just a little forward of Jehovah. By nightfall it had started to rain and the misery of the mud that so characterised Third Ypres had begun.

Aftermath

72 Brigade had suffered serious casualties and had met with but partial success, although the brigade had helped to secure the right defensive flank of the main attack. 1/North Staffords had started the day with a fighting strength of about 550 and their losses at the end of that day were over 50 per cent: 4 officers killed and 7 wounded, 38 other ranks killed and 210 wounded and 10 missing, presumed killed. They had captured 50 Germans and one machine gun. 8/Queen's had 3 officers killed and 9 wounded, 32 other ranks killed, 156 wounded and 105 missing. Both these battalions spent that night and the following day in the front line and under continuous bombardment in the rain, being relieved on the night of 1/2 August by 9/East Surreys. The 7/Northamptons had been equally devastated. Their losses were 2 officers killed, including their CO, 8 wounded and 2 missing, and 37 other ranks killed, 162 wounded and 47 missing.

There was to be no further movement forward in this sector until the first day of the Menin Road battle on 20 September. On that day, coincidentally, the 8th (Service) Battalion North Staffords, in 57 Brigade, 19th Division, jumped off from Jehovah Trench. Shrewsbury Forest on their left was again the main problem for the advance but was taken by 16/Sherwood Foresters, allowing the North Staffords to capture Belgian and Bulgar Woods at last. [34]

Acknowledgement

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Jim Tanner was commissioned in the Staffordshire Regiment in 1976 and retired from the Army in the rank of brigadier in 2011. With a lifelong interest in military history and the British Army he now divides his time between battlefield studies and writing projects, on the one hand, and business interests in the Middle East on the other. He lives in Suffolk.

References

(1) In 2007 the Staffordshire Regiment (The Prince of Wales's) was amalgamated with the 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment and the Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment to form the Mercian Regiment.

(2) References for the battalion are drawn from two principal sources: *History of The 1st & 2nd Battalions The North Staffordshire Regiment 1914–1923* (Longton:1933) and 1/North Staffords' *War Diary* (Staffordshire Regiment Museum). These are referred to in the references as, respectively, 1/2 NS History and 1/NS Diary. The diary includes an Appendix – *Description of the Battalion Action in 3rd Battle of Ypres* – written up on the night of 31 July.

(3) Vyvyan Vavasour Pope had been the junior subaltern in August 1914 and had won an immediate MC as a company commander at Neuve Chappelle and an immediate DSO as adjutant in the Ypres Salient in April 1916. During the course of the war he was also Mentioned in Despatches five times and lost his right arm on the first day of the German March 1918 offensive. He transferred to the Royal Tank Corps in 1923. In October 1941, as a lieutenant general, he was on his way to command the new XXX Corps in the Western Desert ahead of Operation Crusader when he was killed in an air crash. See Ronald Lewin, *Man of Armour – A Study of Lieut. General Vyvyan Pope* (Leo Cooper: 1976).

(4) Brigadier General Sir James Edmonds, *History of the Great War – Military Operations France and Belgium 1917, Volume II* (HMSO; 1948) p.152.

(5) Edmonds, *ibid*, p.153.

(6) The diary was written up by the adjutant, Captain Philip Harris, who had survived the day, and included a hand–written account by Temporary Lieutenant Arthur Allen, commanding C Company. Philip Harris' nerves held out and he appears to have stayed with the battalion until he was attached to Headquarters 72 Brigade some months later to give him a rest. He was killed defending HQ 72 Brigade on 21 March 1918.

(7) 1/NS Diary, p.58.

(8) 1/2 NS History, p.57.

(9) Edmonds, *op.cit*., p.142.

(10) Bernard Martin wrote down his memories shortly before his death in 1986. See Bernard Martin, *Poor Bloody Infantry – A Subaltern on the Western Front 1916–1917* (John Murray: 1987), p.156.

(11) G G Thomson, 'Some Memories of "Ypres Day"' (*The China Dragon*, Volume XXVII No. 9, December 1958) p.318.

(12) 1/2 NS History, p.57.

(13) *Ibid,* p.56.

(14) *Ibid*, pp.56–57.

(15) *Ibid*, p.57.

(16) Edmonds, *op.cit*., p.157.

(17) 1/NS Diary.

(18) Martin, p.160.

(19) *Ibid*, p.159.

(20) *Ibid*, pp.160–161.

(21) *Ibid*, p.161.

(22) 1/2 NS History, *op.cit*., p.59.

(23) Martin, *op.cit.,* p.150.

(24) *Ibid*, p.151.

(25) 1/2 NS History, *op.cit.,* p 58.

(26) Martin, *op.cit.,*, p.161.

(27) William Dimmelow survived his wound and the war, living on to 1976. Sincere thanks to Andrew Clayton, his grandson, for providing this and other information.

(28) *7th Service Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment Narrative of Operations in Shrewsbury Forest 31st July 1917,* (Northamptonshire Regiment Museum), p.2.

(29) *Ibid*, p.2.

(30) The death of Edgar Mobbs was very sorely felt. Before the war he had captained Northampton and England at rugby and had helped raise the 7th Battalion in 1914.

(31) War Diary, 8th Battalion 'The Queen's' Royal West Surrey Regiment, 31 July 1917.

(32) Thomson, *op.cit.,* , pp.317–318.

(33) There were also five Military Medals awarded to a lance corporal and four privates and one bar to the MM for Lance Corporal W C Gibson.

(34) The success of the 16th Battalion The Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire) Regiment – the Chatsworth Rifles – owed much to the gallantry of Corporal Ernest Egerton. Under covering fire from a party of North Staffords, Egerton went forward and cleared out a number of German dugouts and was awarded the VC for his tremendous efforts. Egerton was originally a North Stafford and served with 1/North on the Somme in 1916 before transferring to the Sherwood Foresters.

The Fifth *Grenadiere* at Poelkapelle
20 September 1917
by Sebastian Laudan

As late as 1938 – just before the outbreak of another devastating world war – Hauptmann a D *(retired) Dr Kurt Hesse published a book called* Mein Hauptmann – Bildnis eines Soldaten (My Captain – A Soldier's Portrait).[1] *The memoirs were dedicated to his late wartime battalion CO,* Hauptmann *Faure, with whom he had served from the outbreak of the war until Faure's death in spring 1918. To coincide with the centenary of the epic 1917 Battle of Ypres (or the* Flandernschlacht 1917 *as the Germans called it), Sebastian Laudan here focuses on* Hauptmann *Faure and his men of the West Prussian* Grenadier–Regiment Nr. 5 *during the Battle of the Menin Road Ridge* (the Großkampf zwischen Langemarck und Hollebeke) *on 20 September 1917.* [2]

Please note that all time designations are 1917 German time – that is GMT+1– and all place names are in accordance with contemporary location names used by the Germans at the time, eg Poelkapelle.

Hauptmann *Raoul Auguste Marie Faure from Kurt Hesse,* Mein Hauptmann – Bildnis eines Soldaten

Early career

Raoul Auguste Marie Faure was born on 16 March 1876 in Berlin as the son of a Prussian officer of French Huguenot descent. Young Raoul grew up at home until, at the age of eleven, he was sent to Prussia's cadre factories for career officers, namely the *Kadettenanstalt Potsdam* and later on the *Hauptkadettenanstalt Berlin–Lichterfelde.* In February 1895 Faure passed A–level and subsequently became assigned to *Infanterie–Regiment Nr. 47* as *Fähnrich* (ensign). On 27 January 1896 – the Kaiser's birthday – he was appointed active *Leutnant*. In 1899 the young lieutenant was commandeered as instructor at the *Kadettenanstalt Oranienstein* but obviously found no satisfaction in this calling as he volunteered for a position as a junior officer with the colonial forces. Faure went to China with *4. Ostasiatisches Infanterie–Regiment* and served in the Far East until autumn 1903.

Following his return to Germany*, Leutnant* Faure, already an experienced junior officer at the age of 27, was posted to the venerable *Grenadier–Regiment 'König Friedrich I.' Nr. 5* (GR 5). Garrisoned in Danzig (West Prussia), GR 5 was one of the oldest regiments in the Prussian Army, its origins dating back as far as 1689. Faure was never to leave his new unit. In the years which followed, the *Leutnant* became an *Oberleutnant* (1904), was certified as interpreter in both English and Russian, promoted to *Hauptmann* in 1911 and was given a company (7/GR 5) which he finally led to war. From November 1914 onward he took command of a *Bataillon*, namely II/GR 5, and participated in the 1914/15 battles on the Eastern Front as well as serving on the Somme, at Arras, in Flanders and finally in the Kaiser's Battle of 1918. He was wounded three times and received both classes of the Iron Cross. Fatally wounded in the neck by a shell splinter on 21 March 1918 at Essigny–le–Grand near St Quentin *Hauptmann* Faure received a promotion to *Major* on his deathbed and a recommendation for the *Pour le Mérite*, yet he would not live to savour either token of appreciation. He died on 5 April 1918 in a military hospital in Charleville (Ardennes). Today *Major* Faure rests in Noyers–Pont–Maugis (near Sedan) *Kriegsgräberstätte*, block B, grave 4161.

Epitome of a Prussian officer

When the recently appointed *Leutnant* Hesse met *Hauptmann* Faure, his new company CO, for the first time in 1913 he was not impressed. Not only was Faure rather short and stocky in physique, he already had greying hair at the temples, although not yet 40. This, in the eyes of the 20–year old subaltern, made him look 'old'. However, the young platoon leader quickly learned to respect his *Hauptmann,* who wielded authority not just because of his military rank but in the strict yet caring way he approached and commanded his men, be they junior officers, old sweat NCOs or plain *Grenadiere*. Faure – physically fit, a very good rider and gymnast – more often than not outstripped younger men. While on duty he was very correct and never shirked from critical remarks when necessary. Although these could appear rather sharp they were never patronising. Hesse described his *Hauptmann* as being the epitome of the Prussian officer at best and worst. Sometimes stiff and formal and at all times demanding impeccable standards of performance from everyone under his command, Faure nonetheless cared for his subordinates, whom he knew individually by name, origin, profession and family status. Always willing to share a sociable word with his men he treated everyone with appropriate respect. Faure was not the type of superior officer one idolises easily merely for his affability but for being competent, reliable and brave.

In his work *Leutnant* Hesse describes the sudden outbreak of war, the chaos of mobilisation, the talent of improvisation shown by the shrewd NCOs and the completely overwhelmed officers swamped with obligations. Although everybody had been talking of the imminent menace of war during the four weeks following the assassination of the Austro–Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, curiously no–one had envisaged war coming quite so quickly and of such dynamics and dimensions. The *Danziger Grenadiere* received their baptism of fire during the small yet disastrous encounter with the Russians at Gumbinnen (East Prussia), a depressing defeat with terrible losses, only to join the victorious German Army during the weeks following the victorious battles of Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes. In September 1915 the 36th Division (36. ID) was sent to the Western Front, where it took over a relatively calm sector in front of Roye and south of the River Somme. The West Prussians remained in this vicinity, hardly involved in any major action even when the Battle of the Somme broke on 1 July 1916 and the French advanced with force. It was not until the late autumn of that year, when the French extended their zone of attack further south, that the *Grenadiere* were deployed to make a stand around Chaulnes, Vermandovillers and Pressoire, where they suffered heavy losses.

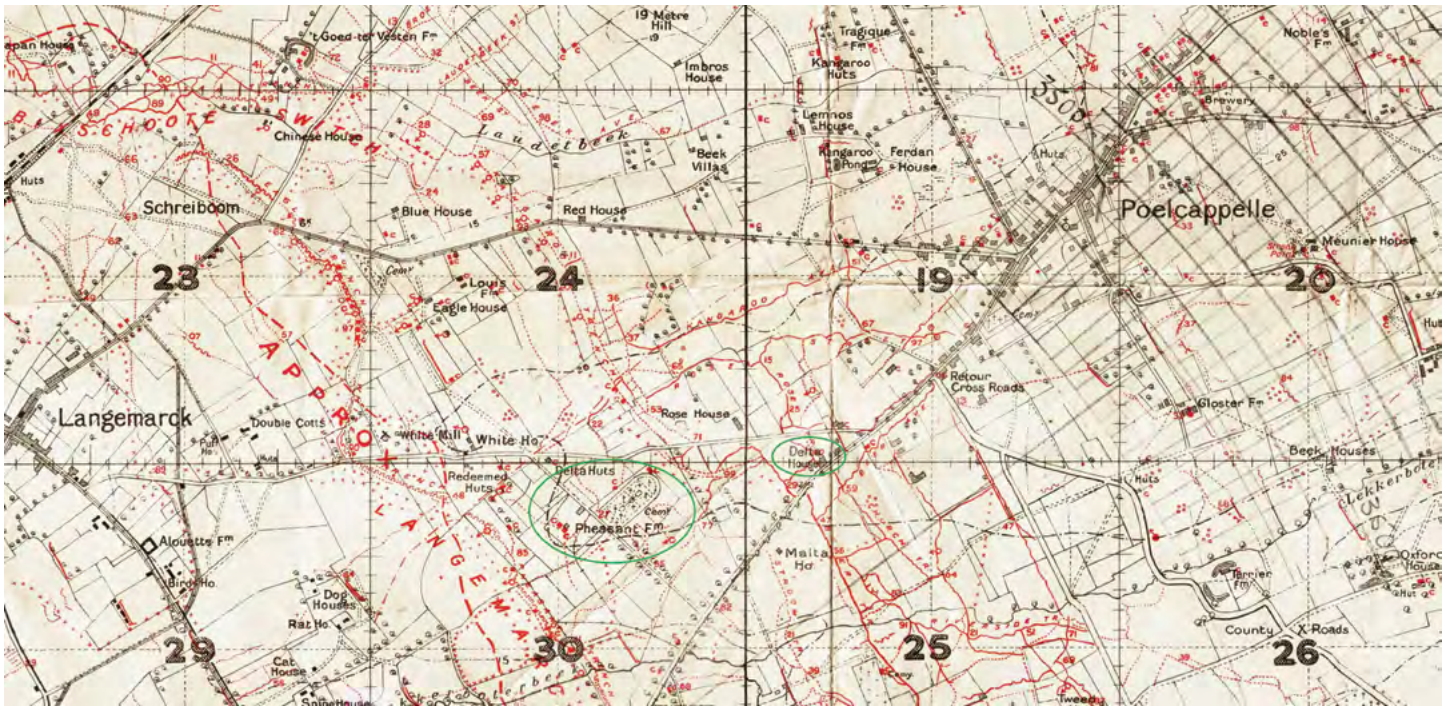
A year earlier, when the *Danziger Grenadiere* had just about familiarised themselves with the chalk soil of French Picardy, *Leutnant* Hesse had become *Bataillonsadjutant* (aide–de–camp/ADC) to *Hauptmann* Faure. For more than two years both men served well together, although, according to Hesse's own words, he never really worked out his CO during the war and it took him years and the wisdom of hindsight to fully understand and appreciate Faure's complex personality. The *Hauptmann* often discussed daily matters and topics of general interest with his ADC in trust, but rebuffed him on several occasions when matters got too personal. As brilliant a leader as he was in action, *Hauptmann* Faure tended to withdraw from socialising with his fellow officers and often sat on his own for hours on end bent over a book in his dugout when his daily duties were done. Nevertheless, his subordinates always came first: Faure always took his time to find the appropriate words when writing compassionate letters to the next–of–kin of fallen soldiers. Moreover, every man of his *Bataillon* who was either due to be married or fathered a new–born received a *20–Mark* note from Faure's own pocket.

Destination Flanders

The year 1917 had seen the 36. ID withdrawing towards the *Siegfried Stellung* (Hindenburg Line) near St Quentin in March and then further deployment towards Arras, where it served as a sector holding unit during a period of comparative calm, first near Guémappe, later on at Gavrelle and Oppy, once the British offensive in this area had come to a halt. Hesse described how many times the 5th *Grenadiere* had changed their billets during the spring and summer months of 1917 and that the officers still had time to hunt and ride regularly far behind the front line as combat and artillery activity were of a remarkably slow tempo.

This surreal period of rest had to come to an end and the West Prussians presumed that

The Wilhelm Stellung *in September 1917. Source: IR 413 regimental history*



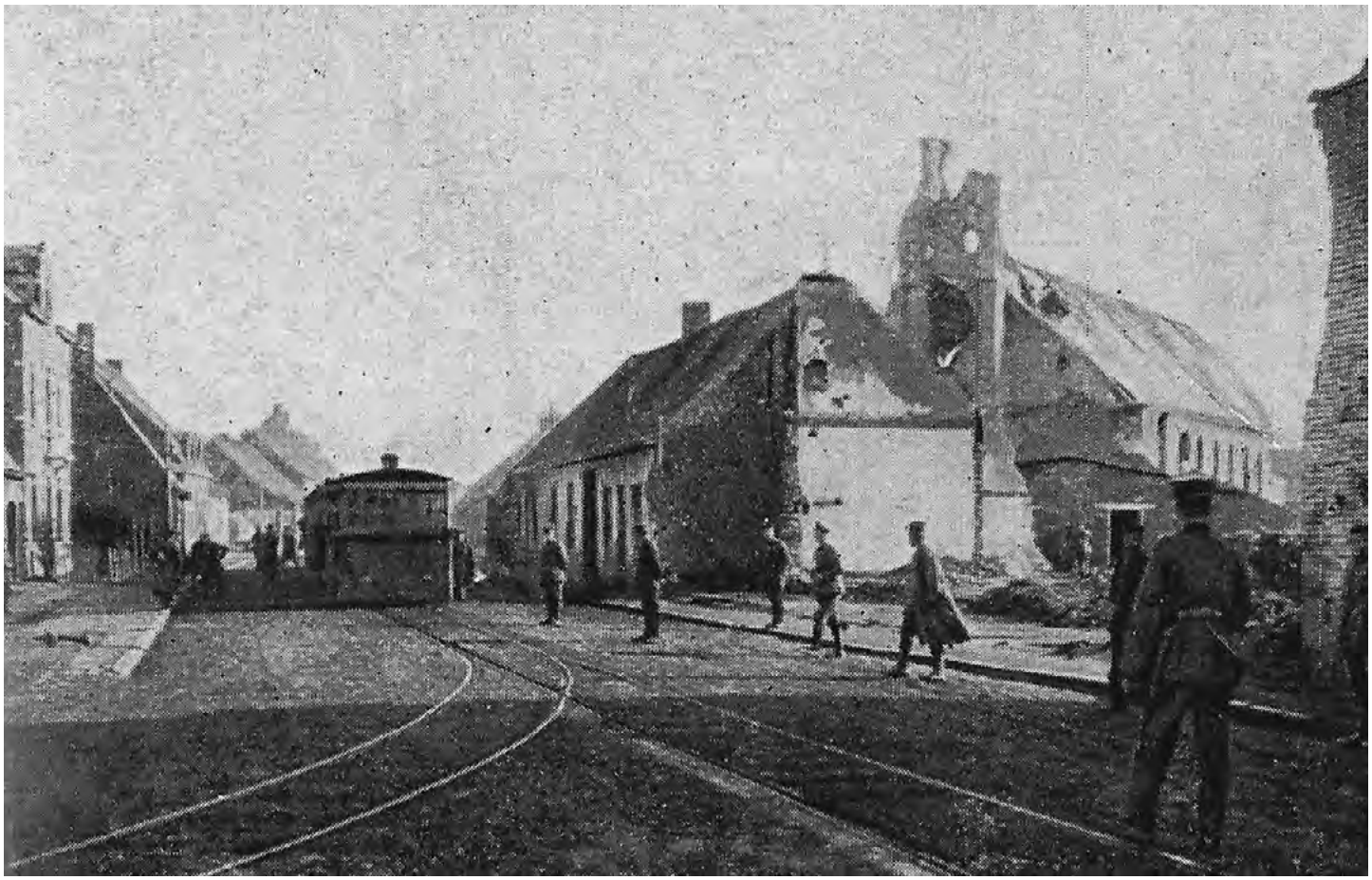
British trench map corrected to 14 September 1917 showing the battlefield of 20 September 1917 southwest of Poelkapelle. The approximate British front line is indicated by the broken red line. Eagle Trench, White Trench and Pheasant Trench are marked as are the twin concrete pill–boxes of the Jungburg – Pheasant Farm – position, clearly shown as red squares left of the 'P' of 'Pheasant' inside the green oval. IWM/WFA Mapping the Front Project image ref MA_000620

The twin 'Jungburg' bunkers seen here in April 1918 during the German offensive of that year after having received much attention from artillery. Source: IR 106 history

their next destination might be Flanders, where the 'Engländer' [3] had started another major battle at the end of July. So it wasn't entirely unexpected when 36. ID was ordered to pack up and clear space for a worn–out *'Flandern–Division'* on 24 August. In that first attack the British had taken the German front line in a rush but could not withstand the German counter attacks from depth and had been thrown back onto the Steenbeek line, facing the former German second main line – the *Wilhelm Stellung*. The sector of the *Wilhelm Stellung* in front of Poelkapelle consisted of – on British maps at least – Eagle Trench, White Trench and Pheasant Trench which had now become the main line of defence.

According to the 1921 history of the British 20th (Light) Division, attacking to the left of the 51st (Highland) Division on 20 September 1917, '[Eagle Trench] was a curiously constructed work in which the actual trench ran between two solid embankments about 8 feet high. These details were not known at the time of the attack…' *The* GR 5 history describes the *Wilhelm Stellung* between Langemarck and Poelkapelle as being no more than 'a string of shell craters linked to each other by some kind of trench with a parapet, no parados though.

Each company was furnished with a couple of *Betonblockhäuser* (concrete pill–boxes) which could provide some shelter for a maximum of ten men lying on the floor.' The profile of these extended above the skyline and therefore they had become the targets of constant shelling by British artillery. Soon the un–nerved *Grenadiere* asked for, and were



Poelkapelle in June 1917. Note the effects of war in addition to the many apparently untouched houses and the impressive tram. Source: IR 75 regimental history

given, permission to move several dozen metres in advance of these death–traps to evade the shelling. Prior to 20 September the British front line was located about 600m from the German front. Remarkable as a focal point in the Poelkapelle sector, was the '*Jungburg*' (Pheasant Farm on British maps), on a flattened mound near the site of a former windmill, encircled by a latticework of trenches and barbed wire entanglements and undermined by comparatively deep shafts. The concrete hulks of twin pill–boxes stood on this site, plainly visible from afar on a clear day.

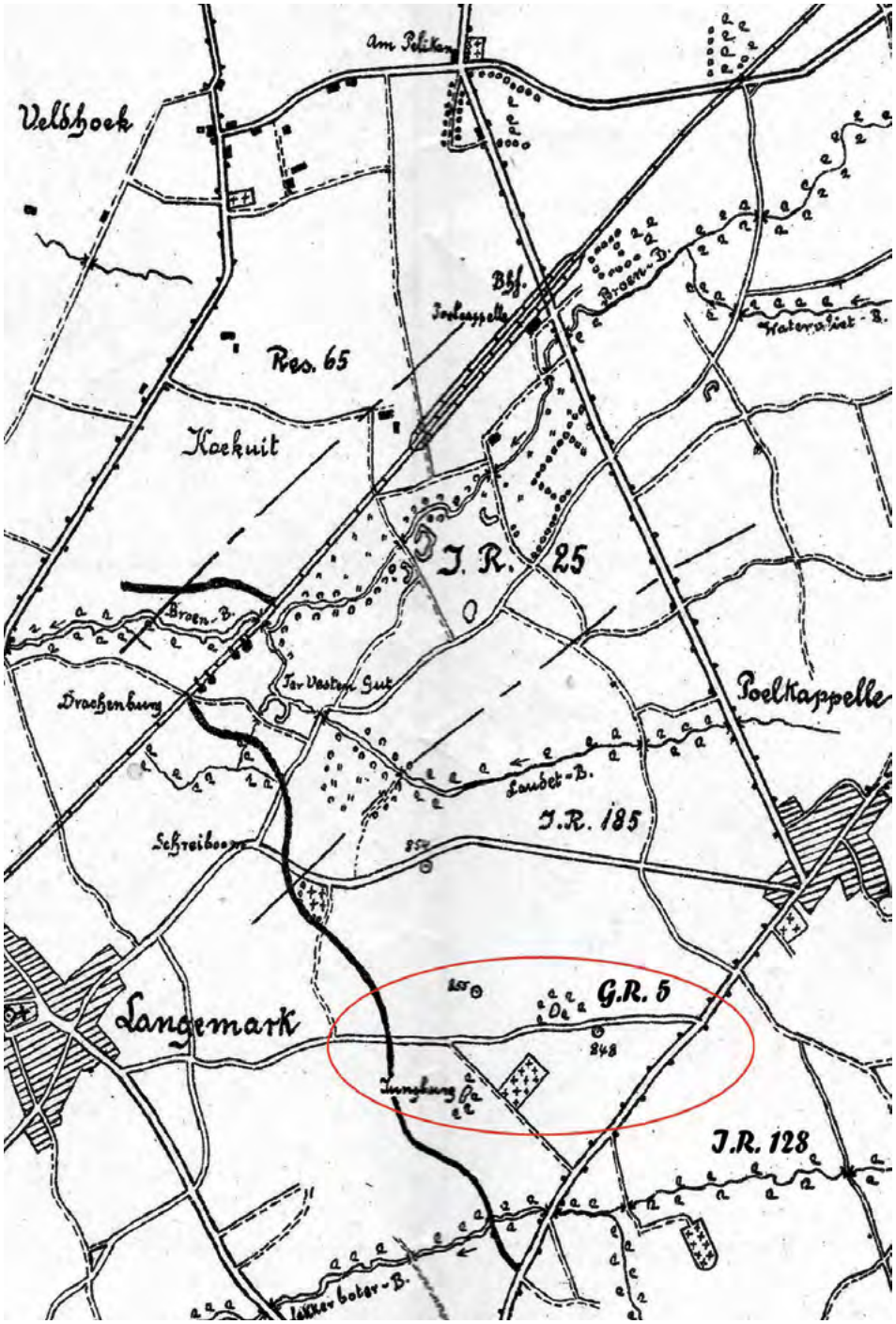
Poelkapelle

By mid–September 1917 the Germans were well aware of the fact that the British were to attack again with force. The task to carry out the main attack against the Poelkapelle spur and the village proper was given to the renowned 51st (Highland) Division. The British attack was supposed to take the dominating Menin Road Ridge between Langemarck and Hollebeke with the spearhead thrusting for the German position between Passchendaele and Gheluvelt. The German 36. ID and 208. ID in the upper *Wilhelm Stellung* were ready for them, as the British had allowed their adversaries enough time to deploy fresh forces behind their lines.

Acting primarily as *Eingreifdivision* (counter–attack division) around Westroosebeke, by 8 September the 36. ID was ordered forward to relieve the tired *Württemberger* 204. ID south of the main Poelkapelle – Langemarck road. *GR 5* was to take over the *Abschnitt Nord* (sector north) from RIR 120, situated on the right flank of the division. This sector was about 800m wide stretching from south of the upper Langemarck – Poelkapelle road to a point where the Poelkapelle – St Julien road crossed the Lekkerboter stream. To *GR5's* immediate right stood IR 185 (Grand Duchy of Baden, 208. ID), while to the left was IR 128, the sister regiment from the Danzig garrison. The patchy *Wilhelm Stellung* was supported by a semi–circular trench line called *Winter Stellung*, running approximately 500m to the rear from the Ypres – Staden railway towards the Lekkerboter stream, and the rather better fortified *Flandern I* position, crossing the Poelkapelle – Westroosebeke road at Spriet. The West Prussians and their famous and flinty opponents from the Scottish Highlands were facing each other almost exactly, although riflemen of the 20th (Light) Division, in addition to the *Musketiere* of the 208. ID, were to join the fight for Poelkapelle in the heat of battle when many units on both sides became intermingled in any case.

Hesse, by then a newly–promoted *Oberleutnant*, described his first impression of the sector:

'It is a quiet September morning and fog is hovering over the shallow depression of the Lekkerboter stream. One can't make out the pitched roofs of Poelkapelle yet, only the tree–lined road running to our right from Westroosebeke via Spriet towards the village. The foreground is flat and descends slightly, and there are several isolated Bunker [*pill–boxes*] *visible all over the area. Everything is calm, only now and then an artillery shot or an impact can be heard. Aeroplanes are circling somewhere above but are not detectable. The* Hauptmann [*Faure*] *and I are exchanging a look, meaning that there are worse things in life than this peaceful scenery.'*



German sketch of the battlefield of 20 September 1917 from the regimental history of IR 25. The Jungburg *position (Pheasant Farm) circled in red*

But this fleeting and imagined impression was soon forgotten when the *Grenadiere* were sent forward, heavily burdened with rifles, ammunition and hand grenades, haversacks, digging equipment, signal pistols, wire cutters, flashlights and provisions meant to last for at least 48 hours. It took them until 12 September under ceaseless shell fire before the battered morass called their 'position' could be finally manned in the usual way – one battalion manning the line, one battalion just behind in reserve and one battalion technically at 'rest', although still within range of the British artillery.

Hesse noted that:

'Our predecessors haven't instilled us with confidence that we are taking over a well–built position. Nothing was left up front, no trenches, no obstacles, no material, nothing. No food could be brought forward as the English used to lay a wall of fire between our foremost and reserve lines. All means of communication were interrupted, the signal devices useless among the fog and gun smoke, even carrier pigeons and dogs failed to get through. It was the single man on whose shoulders lay the full burden of defence. Our Hauptmann *seemed to carry this load many times as if there was nothing else in the world than the will to hold this line against the expected attack. He personally inspected the entire position, asking for the exact location of shell strikes at various times during daylight hours, thus working out the best time for movements and supply. Faure took great care in establishing a minimum of communication between the front and rear of his sector. Every*

officer and NCO was clear regarding the exact task he had to fulfil.'

The fortified village of Poelkapelle was the northernmost key to the elevated German position along the Passchendaele ridge. Situated on a smooth descending slope it had been ferociously fought over in mid–August 1917, and had even been taken by the British but lost again in a German counter–attack. In the aftermath the British had pounded the already ruined village relentlessly and had turned the few remains of human settlement into a moonscape–like desert consisting of nothing but flooded shell craters, scattered German bunkers and vestiges of what had been brick walls or facades of houses. The surrounding farms had been obliterated and the many dispersed German cemeteries of 1914/15 had been churned; the mutilated corpses of the fallen from 1914–1917 lay strewn across the area. The Germans, usually holding the high ground, were completely exposed to enemy artillery in the forward *Wilhelm Stellung*, cowering in shell craters scattered on the sloping ground. There was no shelter except in the conspicuous bunkers, built above ground level as ground water prevented any deeper digging. The most distinctive shelters in the *Grenadier* sector held either the staffs of the KTK *(Kampf Truppen Kommandeur),* the local front line commanding officer, or the BTK *(Bereitschafts Truppen Kommandeur)*, the support CO, as well as many 'guests' like runners and bandsmen seeking temporary protection, given that there was any space left within the cramped and filthy spaces.

The German front line was thinly manned. In 1917 the average German front line company numbered no more than 120 officers, NCOs and men, which was half its peacetime strength. The actual *Grabenstärke* (combat strength) was much lower and on average totalled no more than 2 officers, 10 NCOs and about 60 men. The rest were either on leave, sick or commandeered to act as runners, to fetch provisions or to fulfil other duties at the discretion of company commanders. The *Grabenstärke* became further reduced due to mounting losses prior to an attack.

On 18 September, after eight days of exposure to artillery fire, II/GR 5 handed over the front line, the KTK south of the village and the prominent *Jungburg* position to their comrades of the *Füsilierbataillon* (traditionally the III. Battalion in *Grenadier* or *Füsilier* regiments) under *Hauptmann* Matthaei and went in *Bereitschaft* (readiness) at the BTK near Spriet within the *Flandern Stellung I*. The BTK bunker was spacious but of very low profile with an even lower entrance.

Like a ship in heavy seas

The situation was tense as British patrols had already groped their way towards the exposed *Jungburg*. Enemy prisoners had been taken: men of the Gordon Highlanders belonging to the 51st (Highland) Division who were regarded as '*Elitetruppen*' (elite troops) by the Germans. *Oberleutnant* Künzer of the *Füsilierbataillon*, who was to fall wounded into the hands of the enemy two days later, told the author of the GR 5 regimental history after the war that he had spoken with a '*Hochländer'* (Highlander) officer, who provided him with information on the preparations of his 'regiment' prior to the attack. Künzer saw many British soldiers marching in columns to the front completely unmolested by German artillery. The British artillery stood in dense clusters offering excellent targets but obviously unnoticed by German planes or spotters. Further to the rear a cluster of tanks could be seen, ready to go forward.

Faure's exhausted *Grenadiere* spent most of the day cleaning their equipment. The rifles and machine guns especially were in need of a complete overhaul as Flanders mud had clogged the mechanisms. To clean the weaponry and keep it functioning, cold coffee donated from the men's canteens – their urine too – was used as there was no unsoiled water available at all in the line. Generally the men suffered terribly from hunger and even more from thirst. Bottled mineral water was abundant behind the lines but couldn't be moved forward regularly. Rum, hardly a thirst–quencher in any case, was kept behind by the *Kompaniefeldwebel* (company sergeant major) for better days. Often the men had to fall back on the dirty, brackish water from the shell craters, which caused diarrhoea and left the soldiers, trapped in their 'foxholes' all day, in distress.

During the night 18/19 September artillery activity increased. *Hauptmann* Faure and his staff tried to sleep but were disturbed twice by a call from the acting regimental CO, *Major* von Kummer, back in Westroosebeke. Kummer had doubts whether the *Füsilierbataillon* in the front line would be able to hold the position alone. He wanted the support battalion ready to advance closer to the front line. Around 5.00am, as II/GR 5 was preparing to move up, the British artillery fire increased in volume. Regardless of the falling shells *Hauptmann* Faure left the BTK bunker to observe the situation but to no avail. The dense fog and clouds of dust and smoke made any observation impossible: even Very lights could not be seen let alone whether any troops were on the move. Poelkapelle has vanished in the fog and no communication existed with the battalion in the front line. *Oberleutnant* Hesse noted what happened next:

'*Suddenly a runner from the advanced machine guns (MG) approaches out of the fog. He passes the news from the* KTK *that an attack is imminent while the forward companies had already suffered remarkable losses from shellfire. Very lights are useless, so* KTK *asks for random artillery fire to cover no man's land. The message is passed immediately. Half an hour later we hear MG fire from the front as well as [the blast of] hand grenades; the sound of combat is carried on the light easterly wind. The* Hauptmann *gives orders to send out runners, who come back to report that two companies were already advancing without waiting for the remainder of the battalion. Somehow the two companies managed to pass through the intense fire and arrived in the front line. To their surprise the* KTK *(*Hauptmann *Matthaei) told them personally that all the probing advances of the enemy had been repulsed so far and gave [the companies] orders to turn around [and go back] at once. Thus the* Grenadiere *had to move back again under the same heavy shelling which caused several casualties. But this had been just the prelude of what was expected the next day.'*

Leutnant der Reserve Liebsch of the 3rd MG *Kompanie*, holding the *Jungburg* redoubt, recorded that it was pitch dark and raining:

'I try to contact Zug *[platoon] Kern but can't get as far as 100m. Ahead of the* KTK *a heavy barrage prevents any [progress]. I try several times, but in vain, instead I pick up a confused man of* Zug *Kern who states that a direct hit had extinguished his entire platoon, he being the sole survivor. The fire never ceases all night and makes the whole ground swing and move like on a ship in heavy seas.'*

All night the British shelled not only the

The BTK (Bereitschafts Truppen Kommandeur) *bunker at Spriet taken in August 1918 Source: Bavarian IR 16 regimental history*

forward positions – paying particular attention to the bunkers – but the *Flandern I* and *II* positions as well as the approach routes to the front. *Hauptmann* Faure and his staff – about 30 men all told – had already spent most of the day crouched in the BTK bunker. It was a horrendous experience, the ground wet, filthy and slippery from mud and involuntary excrement, the ceiling covered so thickly with blow flies that the concrete was obscured. Carbide lamps and candles were blown out repeatedly by the concussion of impacts nearby. At least the massive concrete structures held firm, even when hit by heavy calibre shells but everybody had heard stories of bunkers completely undermined by continual explosions and being turned over.

Time was ticking away: messages arrived and were sent, the shelling did not cease all day. In the afternoon *Hauptmann* Faure ventured out to visit his 7th Company and later on received a call from his regimental CO, telling him of the precarious situation the *Füsilierbataillon* was in: a mere 200 men now holding a line of about 800m. Of the original dozen *Minenwerfer* and the initial 32 light and 35 heavy MG, less than the half were still in operation, the other weaponry being destroyed by shell strikes or malfunctioning due to the ubiquitous muck. *Major* von Kummer ordered Faure to counter–attack without further notice as soon as green flares could be detected or khaki–clad soldiers were seen.

Following a long and nerve–wracking day by nightfall on 19 September 1917 *Major* von Kummer sent a status report to the brigade: *'I and II battalions are in full combat readiness. F/5* (Füsilierbataillon) *– in line since 18/9 – has suffered, but can still be used in major action. Losses: one officer, ten NCO and troops killed, two officers, 44 NCO and men wounded, three missing.'*

Großkampftag – 20 September 1917

'Darkness lay over the long slope from Flandern I *towards the* Jungburg *redoubt and further on to the Poelkapelle – St Julien road',* noted *Oberleutnant* Hesse. *'The foremost line of our* Regiment *is held by* Oberleutnant *Horn and his 11th Company,* Leutnant *Krumreich and his 9th,* Oberleutnant *Künzer in charge of the 10th and the very young* Leutnants *Wagner and Böttcher leading 12th Company. Veteran* Leutnant der Reserve *Liebsch and his 3rd* MGK *are in support. The night is marked by constant shelling from both sides. Very lights are visible but to no benefit, as the fog swallows everything from here to Poelkapelle, of which nothing is to be seen. Communication is interrupted in all directions, at least the cable towards the regiment can be fixed again. From 5.00am onward* Hauptmann *Faure is watching the foggy lowland in front of him, expecting the attack anytime. The morning air is fresh and a fine drizzle is soaking everything outdoors.* "At least they can't gas us now"*, Faure remarks. By 6.00am the shelling increases and we make sure the regiment knows this. By daybreak all our efforts to make out the Poelkapelle road and the forward position are futile. Like any other morning a wall of haze is slowly wandering from the Lekkerboter stream towards Poelkapelle, the artillery observer is anxious as he can't correct his own fire, [which he is] supposed to be laying along the enemy front line.'*

A collapsed German bunker near Poelkapelle. Image taken in April 1918, during the German offensive. Source: IR 107 regimental history

The *Trommelfeuer* (drum fire) became even more intense between 4.00 and 6.00am, the men were crouching in whatever shelter was available. The noise made every conversation impossible, the wounded were screaming or wailing with pain, the scene was dominated by the dreadful aspect of the dead, '*…no more than lumps of meat, limbs being torn apart and legs, arms and heads strewn all over the place. Blood was running in rivulets into the shell holes where it became mixed with the muddy water at the bottom.'*

Finally, at 5.45am, green lights were seen rising in the sky: the British advance was in full swing against IR 128 on the left and five minutes later the *Füsiliere* themselves came under attack. Finally the pent–up tension was released and in seconds a murderous fire was directed towards the foe from every gun barrel available to the defenders. Alerted by the sudden increase in the volume of rifle and MG fire *Major* von Kummer and his orderly tried to observe from near their command post at Westroosebeke, but could see nothing through the mist, although dawn had by now broken. Returning to their bunker a heavy calibre shell struck the ground exactly where both men had been standing seconds previously.

Hesse: *'Just before 6.00am a call comes from our bunker: "Incoming message from the regiment, there are green Very lights in the (left–hand) sector of IR 128!" Our artillery begins to answer the English [guns], while 5th and 6th/GR 5 get ready to counter–attack, 7th and 8th companies remain on stand–by. The* Hauptmann *looks at his watch – 5.50am. Shall we move the reserve again, perhaps for nothing like we did yesterday? We wait until 7.00am, no messages coming in, no flares visible, only dull rifle and MG fire can be heard from the front, yet the English artillery seems to advance slowly in a rolling barrage, the impacts getting closer but we count no casualties so far. Suddenly MG fire can be heard very close up ahead. Have the English broken through?*

The Hauptmann *orders '*Antreten*' (muster!) and everybody gets ready, while I take care of the field telephone in order to notify the regiment of our movement. Along the road from Poelkapelle to Spriet runs a ditch along which two wounded men approach. "We are the last survivors of 11th Company, everybody is dead, the English are all around…"'*

'Magnificent performance'

Around 6.45am the BTK at Spriet reported that the British had broken through, this alarming message being confirmed by a runner coming in from the KTK half–an–hour later. Actually 11 and 12/GR 5 had been overrun and the British were already facing the approaching reserve companies, namely 5 and 6/GR 5. Survivors of the *Füsilierbataillon* later stated that Scottish infantry wearing 'skirts' had attacked twice in waves of six to seven lines. While the first wave was repulsed and had to return to its trenches again, the second line of Scotsmen got very close but couldn't penetrate the German line. Suddenly the defenders received fire from the flanks and even from the rear as the British had broken through on the right at the junction with IR 185 and on the left where IR 128 was defending the line.[4] This 'pincer' movement became effective very quickly, spelling doom to the *Füsiliere* who did not have the time to withdraw in accordance with the 1917 defence doctrine. However, the almost completely surrounded battalion had made a remarkable stand: the 51st Division history (p.224) states that *'Pheasant Trench on both battalion fronts [4th Seaforth Highlanders and 9th Royal Scots] was in some parts literally choked with dead. In one stretch of about 200 yards in the left sector alone 150 German bodies were counted. Many dead were also found amongst the garrisons of the enemy's shell–hole posts, the artillery barrage having been most effective in this respect. When one remembers the amount of shells which had been deluged on the Germans in the Pheasant Trench position, one cannot but admire the resolute manner in which they resisted our attack. It was indeed the strength of their resistance which made the capture of this line by the 4th Seaforths and the 9th Royal*

Scots such a magnificent performance.'

The *Füsiliere* were only able to hold on to their positions for a few hours until all officers, NCOs and men, about 280 all ranks, had either been killed or fallen, wounded, into enemy hands. Only two dozen survivors, mostly MG gunners of 3rd MGK, managed to get back. In one case a pill–box had actually been overturned burying the garrison beneath its concrete hulk. No relief could be provided as neither 5th nor 6th companies of GR 5 were able to negotiate the British artillery barrage designed for exactly this reason – to prevent reserves reaching the front line. By noon *Füsilierbataillon (III) GR 5* had ceased to exist.

'*The* Hauptmann *asks for the whereabouts of his 5th and 6th companies',* recalled Oberleutnant Hesse '*but neither* [of the two men in the ditch] *had seen them, telling us that the English had entered the first line from the left and the right.* [They say] *to my utter disbelief, that* Oberleutnant *Horn was killed trying to retreat after all his men were slain. Horn, good old fellow Horn, one of the best, I can't keep myself from imagining him right now at Borzymow, the Narew river, at Chaulnes….*

'Hauptmann *Faure fears that the English might appear from out of the fog at any time. Our visibility is limited to about 300 or 400m, nothing can be made out. Shells burst all around us; sometimes we have to take cover before advancing further. Our companies are so far ahead by now that we have lost touch completely. The* Jungburg *appears to our left, a MG is firing from there with the typical dull bark, not the high pitched rattling of an English Lewis–MG. Hand–grenades can be heard and a single despatch runner is discernible moving forward by hopping from shell crater to shell crater.*

'To our right we watch movements from the edge of what used to be Poelkapelle. Is it our 7th Company or I Battalion? The Hauptmann *orders me to write a status report to be sent to the rear: "English seem to have broken through 11th Company frontline;* Jungburg *still in the hands of our MG company; heavy fire on Poelkapelle and the Lekkerboter stream; urgently ask for support from reserves; II/GR 5 alone can't re–take front line; I am approaching Poelkapelle and shall establish my forward PC at the* Pumpenstation *(pumping station)." The* Pumpenstation *or* Wasserwerk *(waterworks) had been built in previous years to drain our trenches, however, it had been almost completely destroyed weeks ago.*

Approaching Poelkapelle we can clearly hear rifle and MG fire and even hear the whistling sound of stray bullets nearby. Enemy artillery fire can be seen as two large barrages behind and ahead of us, obviously trying to block the counter–attack by our reserves which the enemy was surely expecting. Most heavy shelling was aimed at the western entrance of Poelkapelle, exactly where our 5th and 6th companies must be holding out. "Poor comrades, they won't get out of this alive", remarks the Hauptmann*. The spectacle is stunning: looking back, the* Flandern–Stellung *and our* BTK *are completely covered in dust and fog, so is the* KTK *to our left. A runner hops into our crater, telling us that the enemy has broken through the lines of IR 128 astride the valley of the Lekkerboter stream and is advancing. Two companies of I Bataillon have been put under the command of* Herrn Hauptmann *and would be on the way to the eastern exit of Poelkapelle.*

Suddenly two Sanitäter *(bandsmen/stretcher bearers) can be seen coming from the village, both belonging to our battalion. They confirm that 5th and 6th companies are still covering the western approaches of Poelkapelle. Despite heavy losses due to shelling they hold the line even though the English infantry was no more than 30 or 40m away. Another group of men comes by, this time a handful of survivors of 3rd MGK and one* Grenadier *of 9th Company, carrying with them six Englishmen. Not much is left up front, so they say, and the enemy tries hard to outflank our position west of Poelkapelle by coming in from the south. The sound of heavy fighting is heard to our left from the area of the Lekkerboter stream.*

'The Hauptmann *turns towards the prisoners and talks to them in fluent English. It becomes apparent that they belong to the English 36th Division, actually to the 'Irish Rifle' (sic) regiment.* [5] *Their faces are grey and their cheeks hollow although they have been provided with everything we only can dream of: white bread, tinned meat, cigarettes and fine tobacco. The* Hauptmann *says goodbye to the exhausted men, one of them wearing a blood–soaked head bandage, and gives each one a pat on the shoulder, which even makes them smile for an instant.*

'We reach the Pumpenstation at the eastern exit of the village*: barely more than a heap of rubble, even the cellar has collapsed. Finally we fasten our* Bataillonswimpel *(battalion pennant) on a rafter and climb up a ladder leaning against a shell–beaten gable wall which miraculously still stands, while the rest of the building is gone. There is no need for the* Scherenfernrohr *(scissor scope), the battlefield opens out in front of us. The panoramic scenery seems unreal: a few hundred metres ahead we can make out German soldiers in scattered shell craters, their English opponents just 30 metres away in odd numbers, but not daring to advance further. The mighty hulks of the two* Jungburg *bunkers can be seen behind the English line, now a gathering point for the enemy.*

'The weather has cleared up, the sun is shining. One can see the English jumping–off trenches clearly in the distance and the bustling clusters of men in khaki. Groups of wounded men are moving for the rear. Along the next ridge line English cavalry can be seen silhouetted against the horizon.

'What is the situation? North of Poelkapelle the German line still seems to protrude. Around the Jungburg *enemy soldiers try to advance but are held off by German soldiers. Further southwest towards St Julien the area seems to be in English hands; brown steel helmets and bayonets, blinking in the sun, can be seen everywhere. A view through the scope reveals German soldiers holding the line before Poelkapelle, among them veteran* Feldwebel *Rompca, at this moment carrying a light MG and advancing towards the enemy line with a group of comrades. The English welcome him with heavy rifle fire, while the enemy artillery shoots far behind us, obviously to prevent their own losses in the confused situation.'*

Many times in the aftermath of battle Faure and Hesse talked with fascination of the extraordinary situation they observed from Poelkapelle *Pumpenstation* during those morning hours of 20 September 1917. It was to their deep regret that neither telephone nor signal communication was available to them to direct their own artillery that day, which might have saved the lives of hundreds of

German oblique aerial photograph of tank D44 Dracula *on the St Julien–Poelkapelle road just before it stopped some 200m short of Delta House. Courtesy* Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv *Munich with grateful thanks to Peter Barton*

British soldiers.

'*We tried everything to establish communication with the rear, but to no avail. And where is the* I Bataillon*? The next English attack might come at any time. We didn't expect support before noon anyway, so it was up to us to re–establish a coherent and coordinated command structure and build up a solid line of defence. I vividly recall my* Hauptmann *with his determined coolness, giving orders here and there, observing and acting as a real leader. Everybody around carried out our COs instructions in full confidence of his abilities.'*

Dracula

Hauptmann Faure could not know that I *Bataillon* was already *en route* from Westroosebeke to Poelkapelle, carrying with it 300,000 rounds of ammunition, nine barrows filled with hand grenades, 1,500 *Wurfminen* (mines for *Minenwerfer*), 600 signal cartridges and various provisions. All this had been brought forward to Spriet and from there carried by the men. However, the advancing reserve was suffering badly as the road from Westroosebeke to Spriet – and Spriet itself – were pounded relentlessly by heavy artillery.

What Faure *could* see were two large contingents of British soldiers forming to attack the old KTK and the village itself. By 8.45am the two groups began to advance and began crossing the Poelkapelle – St Julien road. The few *Grenadiere* and their last remaining machine guns began to fire into the bulk of the British troops. Near the old KTK stood a well–concealed, single anti–tank gun, a 1917 invention called a *Schweigegeschütz* (sleeper gun) as it was exclusively designed for fighting tanks at close quarters. Beside the gun, 60 *Hartkerngranaten* (armour–piercing shells) were stockpiled ready for use but the gun crew was missing. *Leutnant* von Homeyer, a small and lively young subaltern, immediately took control of the gun and with the help of two *Grenadiere* opened fire against a single tank (later to be identified as D44 *'Dracula'*) creeping along the main road towards Poelkapelle. All sixty rounds were fired at the tank and the machine was seen to stop a little way southwest of Delta House at the 8km–stone on the St Julien road.

By 9.00am the fog had lifted and British soldiers were now clearly visible fighting for the remainder of the *Wilhelm Stellung*, having secured the *Jungburg* mound. Then the enemy began to gather in a small depression in front of the village. *Leutnant* Liebsch ordered both of his remaining MG to be mounted on the rim of their crater positions to fire down on them at a steep angle. One of the exposed MG crews was killed instantly by a direct hit, while the other discharged its ammunition into the British cowering in the slightly lower ground. The attack seemed to waver although nothing more than a single MG and no *Minenwerfer* were still operational on the German side. Curiously the British were no longer advancing between the Lekkerboter stream and Poelkapelle, instead they began to organise a defence, supported by Lewis and Vickers MG, obviously expecting a fierce German counter–attack. It appeared to be a new tactic, utilising lessons learned from the abortive August attacks at Langemarck, but in this case, and without any knowledge of the precarious situation on the German side, this led to a strange stalemate with both sides waiting for their adversary to make a first move. It was the Germans who did so, attacking nearby British positions with hand grenades and bayonets, tactics which appeared to have been destined to the battlefields of 1915 and 1916.

The task given to *Hauptmann* Faure as the new KTK went beyond simply holding a line of defence: he was to assault the enemy in several places and hold him in check while the overarching counter–attack was taking place.

'And the Hauptmann *is right'* recalled *Hesse, 'we can see the English gathering in our old front line, the* Wilhelm Stellung*, and around the* Jungburg *mound, getting stronger by the minute. Our* 'Logenplatz' *(box seat) becomes too precarious as the English artillery have finally identified this as a target and one shell goes right through the brick wall below us, covering us with red dust. We all believe we are doomed and throw every staff member capable of holding a gun forward. At this critical moment relief is granted by our first battalion, coming in from Westroosebeke, followed by groups of IR 452* [234. ID] *and a battery of* Feldartillerie Regiment Nr. 4 [FAR 4] *too. The guns position themselves in an open field a mere 1,000m behind the village and open up. A counter–thrust is ordered to begin at 4.00pm and our own artillery begins to pound the English positions. We learned later that the renewed English attack and our counter–attack met each other head on and we have seen with our own eyes men of both sides shooting at each other and throwing hand grenades from a distance of 10 to 15 metres. Just in time the German field guns managed to diffuse English concentrations around the* Jungburg*.'*

Nests of defence

For the counter–thrust Faure was given I and II Battalions/GR 5 (minus the 4th and 8th Companies held behind at Westroosebeke as regimental reserve), 1st and 2nd MGK and the remainder of the *Minenwerfer–Kompanie*. The 'fresh' companies amounted to no more than the usual 10 NCOs and some 50 or 60 men in each, altogether approximately 350 rifles and a handful of MG, to attack a front line 800m in length against an enemy far superior in numbers. Faure recognised the *Jungburg* as the key feature to the entire position: it had to be retaken. He asked for, and was granted, two companies of IR 185 (208. ID) holding the northern part of Poelkapelle. Due to heavy enfilading fire IR 185 couldn't take part in the actual counter move but prevented the British from mopping up the village from the north. Later in the day the 208.ID provided more support to its left–flank neighbour as the attack of the 20th (Light) Division against the lines north of Poelkapelle had been repulsed very early and was never seriously re–attempted. Faure made arrangements for 2nd, 3rd and 1st companies/GR 5 to advance along the southern rim of the village towards the *Jungburg*. The battered 6th and 7th/GR 5 were to hold their nests of defence on their own.

It was good news to the Germans that the British artillery still couldn't pound the 'current' front line as friend and foe lay too close to each other. The problem was how to reach the combat zone from the rear, as the artillery barrage was merciless and impenetrable.

Another serious issue arose when *Hauptmann* Matthaei – CO of the recently annihilated *Füsilierbataillon* and technically still the KTK – became aware of the reinforcements slowly approaching from Spriet. As he had demanded support shortly after the initial attack and had received neither a promise nor denial of support from the regiment, the *Hauptmann* thought the fresh units would come under his command. He was unaware that *Hauptmann* Faure had set up his HQ in Poelkapelle and was operating as KTK too and, what's more, was now in command of a respectable force, unlike Matthaei. Matthaei now sent runners to order the incoming 2/GR 5 to veer south in order to strengthen his weak line south of the *Jungburg* and up to the Lekkerboter stream. This was much further south than Faure desired or intended. In the confusion 2nd and 3rd Companies lost touch and left their prime objective, the *Jungburg*, unattended for some time. When *Hauptmann* Faure learned of the misdirection of 2/GR 5 it was too late to correct the move. Two acting *Kommandeure* was a gross violation of the iron rule '*Führung ist unteilbar* (leadership is indivisible)', however, both *Hauptleute* were taking action in accordance with their respective position and orders. The confusion had been caused by their superiors in the regiment, which should have established a clear chain of command in the first instance, a chain that had not been possible to forge due to both

British tank D44 – 'Dracula' *– damaged and captured by GR 5 on 20 September 1917 on the Poelkapelle – St Julien road. Source: GR 5 regimental history*

the physical and metaphorical 'fog of war'.[6]

The German counter–thrust struggled to cope with poor visibility because of billowing clouds of smoke and fumes but slowly and painfully crater by crater was taken in close–quarter combat. The Germans received heavy flanking fire from beyond the Lekkerboter stream and were facing an enemy regaining their strength, especially astride the St Julien – Poelkapelle road. The German counter–attack south of Poelkapelle finally ground to a halt around 1.30pm within reach of the lone British tank *Dracula* – albeit still firing – and about 100m from the British positions. An eerie silence descended on the battlefield as both sides – utterly exhausted – took stock of the situation and tried to gain a little rest. Even the artillery seemed to pause for a while. By 2.30pm *Hauptmann* Faure ordered a complete cessation of fire and asked the regiment for artillery fire all along the British first line until the promised 234. ID was able to intervene.

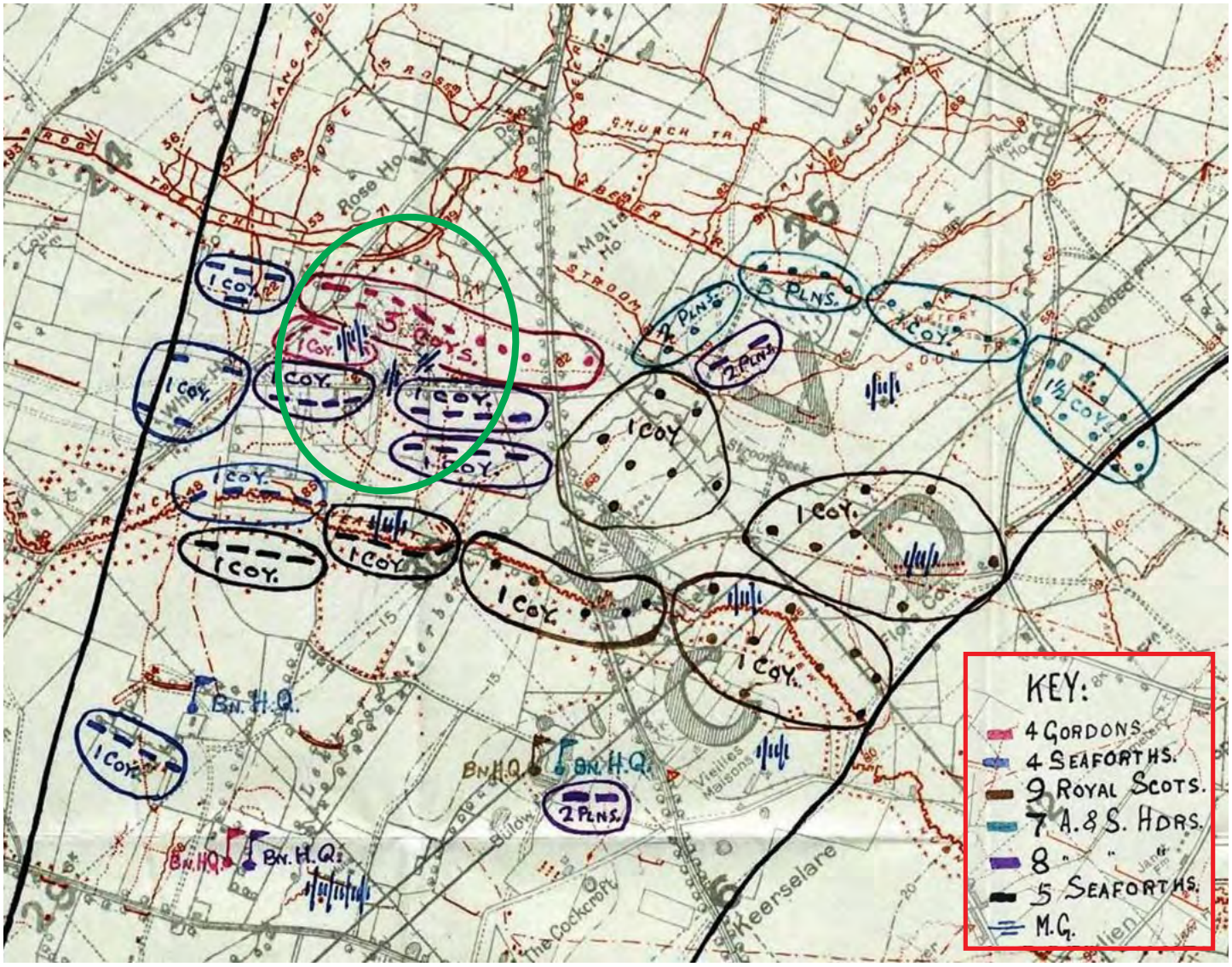
Support was, in fact, on the way. Around noon two battalions of IR 452 (234.ID) were approaching Poelkapelle, its CO having been given the order to *'leave the village to our right, head for the* Wilhelm–Stellung *and carry along what was left of GR 5.'* The reality on the ground looked quite different: as soon as the reinforcements left the *Flandern–Stellung* they were caught by the British *Riegelfeuer* (barrage) with the result that one battalion became utterly scattered and was essentially out of contention for the rest of the day. The other battalion somehow managed to avoid the barrage but was pushed away from its destination and appeared on the left flank of the *Grenadier* position. The men fought well on the left that day but *Hauptmann* Faure was disappointed; he had desperately needed their support for his counter–thrust against the *Jungburg*.

When, finally, the German artillery fire crashed down at 4.00pm, the scattered enemy nests south of the village, clearly identified as kilted Scottish soldiery, withdrew. Following hard on their heels was a motley crew of German soldiers of various units. Once again there was close–quarters combat, the Scotsmen putting up a good fight but lacking an organised defence and artillery support, they were eventually killed or captured. The German accounts record that they bypassed a wrecked British tank – a broken track and half sunk in a ditch off the St Julien road – yet still firing with all available weapons. A couple of hand grenades thrown at the hulk brought an end to the firing. A hatch opened and the crew surrendered to the *Grenadiere*. Until their withdrawal in October, the wrecked tank *Dracula* not only served the Germans well as shelter but proved a serious obstacle to other British tanks heading for Poelkapelle along the main road.

'*It was of no avail to the English', Oberleutnant* Hesse observed, *'that he had brought up one of his heavily armed tanks and moved it toward the battered hamlet. A* Schweigegeschütz *hidden in a shell crater had brought the tank to a halt until it was finished by hand grenades. By nightfall the monstrosity stood with a torn caterpillar track several hundred metres behind the German lines …* 'Dracula' *was its name, but we weren't afraid of this 'dragon'.'*[7]

Stossbatterie

The situation was far more hazardous just west of Poelkapelle where groups of Scottish infantry held on tenaciously. Leapfrogging from crater to crater the Germans advanced with the help of hand grenades, bayonets, spades and even rifle butts. In one case a Lewis gun – being reloaded with a new pan – was wrested away from the surprised team, turned around and used against the retreating foe. The men, one officer and six other ranks, were taken prisoner unscathed. But the deathblow to the brave Scotsmen was provided by a *Stossbatterie*, an advanced battery of field guns standing in the ruins of Poelkapelle with their fire guided in by forward artillery observation. This battery extinguished



Trench map showing the dispositions of battalions of the 51st Highland Division after the battle on 21 September 1917. Pheasant Farm, Jungberg position circled in green. 51st Highland Division war diary WO95/2846

one nest of resistance after another.

The British soon began to react, however, and now it was their turn to shell the advancing Germans, who already were approaching the lost *Wilhelm Stellung* and the *Jungburg,* getting as close as 300m from their former front line. Even down in the boggy low ground near the Lekkerboter stream, IR 128 was making good progress. However, large groups of British infantry could be seen forming up again west of the *Jungburg* and further to the south. At 5.55pm the British launched their last attack of the day with vigour. *Hauptmann* Faure immediately wired an agitated message back to the regiment: *'We are in the middle of a major enemy attack. The English are twenty times superior in numbers!'* The German artillery began to fire, too, and hit the British columns hard. Both adversaries came to a momentary standstill, paralysed by the situation and uncertain whether to advance or not under the murderous fire, when the Germans suddenly received unexpected support from II/IR 25 (208.ID). These men from the Rhine country had been ordered to attack the British west and north of the Poelkapelle – *Jungburg* – Langemarck road but had become lost in the smoke and veered to their left, mingling with III/IR 185 and the remainder of the *Grenadiere* as they did so and hitting the Scots left flank west of Poelkapelle and around the *Jungburg* with full force. The momentum of the unexpected German flanking attack left the Scots with little option but to turn and fall back, leaving many dead and wounded comrades behind.

That settled the matter for the day. Only the *Jungburg* and a stretch of about 300m of the *Wilhelm Stellung* remained in British hands. By 9.00pm *Hauptmann* Faure sent his final status report to the regiment. The Germans regarded themselves as the victors of the day, but the defence of Poelkapelle had been achieved at a terrible cost: the 5th *Grenadiere* had lost its entire *Füsilierbataillon* (III/GR 5), while *Kampfgruppe* (combat group) Faure numbered no more than 4 officers, 17 NCOs and 61 men still standing at Poelkapelle. GR 5 (with the 4th and 8th Companies still untouched) amounted to no more than about 250 men in total, the strength of *one* company during mobilisation.

'Losses on both sides were heavy on that battle day, the combat area around Poelkapelle was strewn with wounded and corpses, which couldn't be brought in during the night despite the restless activities of Sanitäter *and English stretcher bearers and had to be left untended.' (Hesse)*

Fallen comrades

To the Germans' surprise no action took place until next morning; both sides were licking their wounds and were physically and mentally drained. Officers and NCOs were counting the losses and began to reposition their units in expectation of another heavy fight the next day. The men talked to each other, smoked pipes, ate what was left of their rations and salvaged the belongings and private papers of fallen comrades for their next–of–kin. *Hauptmann* Faure was left in command of a mixed bag of troops of all the committed companies of his own regiment as well as those of IR 452, IR 25 and IR 185. These were joined at nightfall by the regiment's remaining two reserve companies which moved up in support. Faure gathered the handful of remaining *Leutnants* and *Feldwebel* and gave them concise orders to collect their respective troops, take care of their proper provisioning and form them into groups for immediate combat, support and reserve. Although no more than three MG and two *Minenwerfer* were still working, nests of resistance had to be rebuilt and equipped and the front line divided into sectors. Faure had given orders to clear the pumping station's cellar of debris. He and his staff worked all night in order to establish communications with the regiment and the artillery, develop a fire plan for the *Minenwerfer*, organise the evacuation of the wounded and order provisions and ammunition. While reconnoitring the fragmentary front line in the dark, Faure and Hesse almost ran into a highly–anxious Scottish sentry who addressed them first in English before shooting, thus giving the German officers the opportunity to withdraw just in time.

Dawn broke the next morning and brought with it the same weather conditions as the previous day: a heavy ground fog which prevented any view of the enemy and absorbed any sounds he was making, until the sun broke through to reveal another mild autumn day.

Hesse noted his hope that they would be relieved by nightfall: '*usually a message making our day, but oddly enough we feel somehow*

Hauptmann Faure (centre shaving), Oberleutnant Hesse and two unknown orderlies at Poelkapelle pumping station on 21 September 1917, the day after the battle. Source: GR5 regimental history

connected to this desolate site. It is as if we don't want to get away from our fallen comrades, as if 20 September will be burned into our minds and souls forever. Hauptmann *Faure is even more austere than usual. He has his batman offer him a bowl filled with muddy water from a shell crater, undresses his upper body and begins to wash and shave.*[8] *His only concern is to get his men out of this place and behind the* Flandern–Stellung *in good order and without further loss.*

'The English artillery begins to fire again. Fighter planes of both sides begin to mark the enemy's respective position. The Grenadiere *are waving to the planes bearing the Iron Cross beneath the wing and remain completely motionless when they notice the cockade. We have to sit and wait all day as no–one can leave or even move without provoking an English MG. But to our surprise there is no attack, only the exchange of rifle and MG fire when a target can be made out. The enemy artillery shoots far behind the village as our respective front lines, actually no more than a wasteland of water–filled craters, are too close together to distinguish friend from foe. During the night of 22 September the relief begins. By dawn* Hauptmann *Faure is the last of the* Danziger Grenadiere *to leave Poelkapelle for good.'*

Withdrawn from the front the depleted *Grenadiere* were held close behind the *Flandernfront* for four more days before this shadow of a regiment was transferred to St Quentin for rest, recovery and re–equipment. The battle for Poelkapelle on 20 September 1917 remains the regiment's most costly day of the entire war.

Acknowledgement

The author is indebted to the editor for his support in editing the final version of this work.

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(1) Kurt Hesse, born in 1894, received an officer's commission with the *Danziger Grenadier–Regiment Nr. 5* in 1913 and was appointed active *Leutnant* just at the outbreak of the war. He served under *Hauptmann* Faure in peace and war, from late 1915 as his *Bataillonsadjutant* (aide–de–camp). Hesse distinguished himself during the war, received several decorations and remained as a *Hauptmann* with the post–war *Reichswehr* until 1928. He became the author of several intellectual yet rather conservative memorandums on military leadership, which made him attractive to nationalist movements including the Nazis. Hesse never joined the Nazi Party but has to be regarded as one of the main spiritual protagonists of Germany's re–armament in the 1930s. At the outbreak of the Second World War Hesse, by rank still a *Major aD* (retired), consequently became appointed head of the section *Heerespropaganda* (army propaganda) and was given the difficult task of keeping *military* propaganda independent from the domain of Nazi *state* propaganda defined by the ubiquitous Ministry of Propaganda. This task unavoidably led to conflict with Joseph Goebbels, who managed to neutralise Hesse from 1941 onwards. Although suffering from a severe eye disorder Hesse was made an active *Oberst* (colonel) and even sent to the Ardennes front in 1944 to command a *Kampfgruppe* (mixed combat formation) where he fell into American captivity. The early end of his career in the Nazi system was to Hesse's advantage after the war, when he was reactivated by the West German government and became the mastermind of another re–armament – this time the creation of the *Bundeswehr*. Until his death in 1976 Hesse remained one of Germany's leading voices on questions of military leadership.

(2) The author is well aware that there are contradictions within the British and German sources with regard to the order of events and the outcome of this significant day of battle. Although this work centres on the German point of view it in no way seeks to dismiss the divergence of the accounts if any exist.

(3) Even after 1945 the Germans usually referred to the people of the United Kingdom as '*English*', regardless of their proper ethnic or geographical origin. Prior to and during the Great War this was meant deliberately in a scoffing way as, according to public opinion, the *'Englischen Krämer'* (English merchants) were held responsible for having turned a European war into a global conflict in order to protect and expand their worldwide interest, at the same time using the different peoples and races of the British Empire as their willing tools.

(4) In more than 30 years of researching German regimental histories, and with all due respect to the abundance of specific and accurate information these sources provide to the gentle reader, the author has observed that at least *one* phenomenon occurs in almost all accounts in that it was always the *neighbouring* unit that gave way, thus leaving the flanks of the unit portrayed in the volume in question unprotected and alas forced to withdraw.

(5) Hesse describes this event with the exact words '*Er (Faure) stellt fest, dass wir es mit einem Regiment der* ***36. Division*** *zu tun haben,* ***irischen Schützen****.'* Oddly enough there is no source attesting that this British division or elements of it (eg Irish Rifles) were involved in the attack on 20 September 1917 at Poelkapelle.

(6) In the late afternoon *Hauptmann* Matthaei had somehow managed to appear at the new KTK at Poelkapelle pumping station and, finally realising the impossible situation of having two *Kampftruppen Kommandeure* on the ground, asked the regiment if he could be removed. By 6.00pm he was given permission to go back to Westroosebeke, having done his duty, albeit being rendered redundant by the sequence of events.

(7) This is but one of the account contradictions to which the author alluded earlier. Tank D44 *'Dracula'* was under the command of Lieutenant Charles Leonard Symonds and on that day it went into action with several other machines, namely D42 '*Daphne'*, D43 '*Delysia'* and D54 '*Diadem'. Diadem* was knocked out in St Julian early on when a shell fragment pierced its radiator and of the others that went on to cross the Lekkerboterbeek, *Daphne* slipped a track negotiating a tree trunk which had fallen across the road and in doing so blocked the path for *Delysia* which could not get past. The only tank of the group to make any progress then was *Dracula* which, after ditching six times, crawled along the road towards Poelkapelle and alcame within some 200m of a German position called Delta House. There, according to British sources, its engine failed and in spite of their best efforts the crew were unable to start it again. Undaunted, Symonds and his men continued the fight until he was forced to abandon *Dracula*, having the presence of mind to hand over his machine guns to nearby infantry and having his crew instruct them in the use of the tank's 6–pdr gun. According to the 51st Highland Division narrative of events (WO95/2846) one gun was sent forward to Delta House, two were sent to Beer Trench and one was left in the tank. 300 rounds of ammunition were distributed to the 40 or so Highlanders holding Beer Trench. By 5.00pm all but six of the 6–pdr rounds had been fired. Symonds and his crew returned to base after being in action for some seven hours and were not captured so perhaps the men who were captured were British infantry. It may well be that Hesse, writing his book in the 1930s, had confused several abandoned machines as it is clear from the German photograph seen in this article that *Dracula* had not shed a track, was by no means ditched and was relatively undamaged, despite German claims that some 60 armour–piercing rounds had been fired at it. For his actions that day Lieutenant Symonds was awarded the Military Cross. On 9 October 1917 – the start of the Battle of Poelcappelle – the abandoned *Dracula* proved an obstacle to tanks moving up the road – to avoid negotiating the crater fields to either side – which had been tasked to capture the village. *Dracula* could not be salvaged by the Germans and it was finally blown up on 23 October by 183 Tunnelling Company which had been ordered to clear the road to Poelcappelle once and for all.

(8) This remarkable scene of 21 September 1917 has been captured on camera: *Hauptmann* Faure in his white vest, impeccably dressed *Oberleutnant* Hesse sitting beside and two attentive orderlies, all amid the ruins of Poelkapelle *Pumpstation*.

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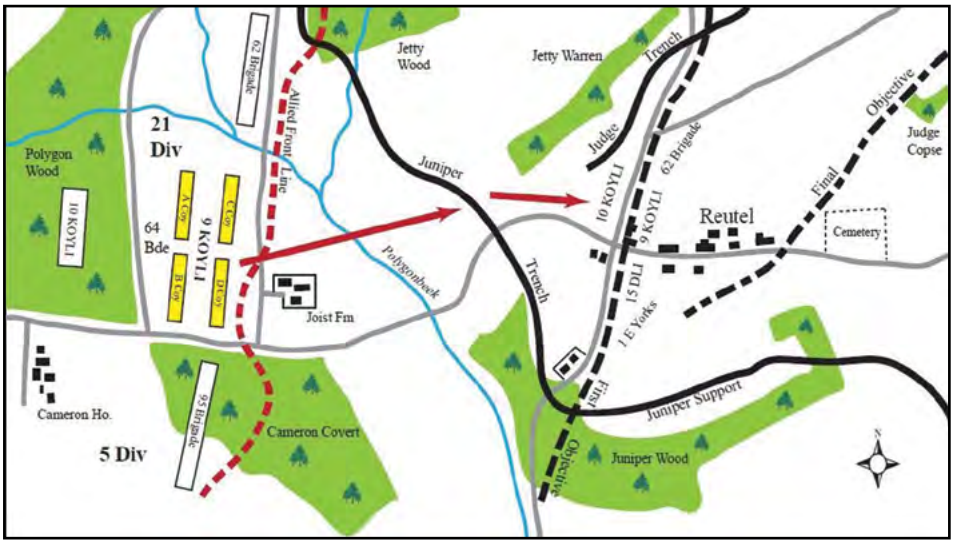
9th KOYLI in the Battle of Broodseinde
4 October 1917

by Dr Derek Clayton

The Battle of Broodseinde is remembered mostly as an ANZAC operation. The third in a series of limited, set–piece, 'bite and hold' offensives, it was planned and executed by General Sir Herbert Plumer's Second Army. Fifth Army's efforts along the Gheluvelt Plateau under General Sir Hubert Gough had ground to a halt towards the end of August; the rain had set in and the salient had been reduced to a swamp. Gough believed that, under the prevailing conditions, the campaign should be abandoned. Douglas Haig, however, was of the opinion that German morale was deteriorating and that the battle should continue, but with his confidence in Gough at a low ebb, he invited Plumer to take over the role of main protagonist. Dr Derek Clayton examines the part played by one British infantry battalion – part of 64 Brigade – during the Broodseinde operation.



The battle for Reutel showing objectives and the positions of British units before and after the attack

Limited offensives

General Plumer submitted his plans for a series of limited offensives, each requiring an advance of about 1,500 yards, on 29 August 1917. This approach meant that troops would enjoy the protection of an artillery barrage for the entire advance and would be able to consolidate their newly–won positions against counter attack, there being no expectation of a 'breakthrough'. The tactic also negated, to some extent, the efficacy of the German 'defence in depth' system: Ludendorff was forced to place more defenders in the front line systems and suffered increasing losses under the concentrated British artillery barrages as a result. The 4 October 1917 was to become one of Ludendorff's 'black days' of the German Army.(1) The first attack in the series, the Battle of the Menin Road Ridge, was launched on 20 September and most objectives were taken by midday. Six days later, the assault which became known as the Battle of Polygon Wood went in: by the end of the day, victory of a sort could be claimed, nine German counter attacks having been repulsed. Contrary to the common misconception, this attack was made in very dry conditions: several days' good weather saw the preliminary artillery barrage raising clouds of dust.(2) Continuing favourable weather conditions saw Haig bring the next stage of the campaign forward by two days to 4 October. The main assault would be by four divisions of the Anzac Corps and required the capture of Broodseinde Ridge. To the left, Fifth Army would attack towards the village of Poelcapelle. On the right, X Corps, using the 7th and 21st Divisions, were to take and hold the In de Ster and Reutel areas in order to prevent the Germans being able to observe and dominate the flank of the main attack.

Plans for the accompanying artillery barrage were designed with surprise in mind. The 20 September attack had been preceded by a seven–day bombardment. The Battle of Polygon Wood had enjoyed a 24–hour overture. Other than normal counter–battery work, the Battle of Broodseinde was to have no preliminary bombardment: the barrage would fall on the unsuspecting German positions at Zero Hour.

64 Brigade, (21st Division), was to attack eastwards on a one–battalion frontage from the eastern boundary of Polygon Wood and capture the village of Reutel. The 9th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (9/KOYLI) would spearhead the assault and take the crossroads on the western edge of Reutel. 10/KOYLI would then leapfrog and occupy the rest of the village. 1/East Yorks were in support, with 15/Durham Light Infantry (15/DLI) in reserve.

Moving up

9/KOYLI had received orders to move up earlier than most: the battalion reached Clapham Junction on the Menin Road, about a mile–and–a–half west of the British front line, at around 11.00pm on 1 October. Battalion HQ was established, and the KOYLI commenced the relief of 9/Leicesters (110 Bde) at 8.00pm the following evening. Fears that the good weather might break were heightened by the presence of a strong south–westerly wind with its accompanying rain showers, which had sprung up around dusk. As the men marched up, most used the duckboards to avoid ground made greasy by the evening precipitation. The battalion held the front line for the next 24–hours under almost continuous shelling. About 50 casualties were reported, many of them designated as 'shell shock'. Four were fatal.

In front of the 9/KOYLI troops, directly across their line of advance, was the shallow valley of the Polygonbeek. The ground sloped gently down to this streambed for some 500 yards. The far bank rose more steeply for a further 300 yards, the village of Reutel lying just out of sight over the crest, behind the crossroads that marked the battalion objective. The nature of the ground over which they were to advance weighed heavily on the minds of those who would lead the attack. Would it be dry or not? On 1 October, Captain Harold Yeo wrote a letter home, noting that 'Thousands of flies and tons of dust are the chief features of the

Contemporary photograph of the Reutelbeek area. Courtesy IWM Q56248

situation'.[3] A report from 21st Division on this issue reads very optimistically: 'The ground presents no formidable natural obstacles. Going should be extremely good on the high ground, and though the low ground is rather wet in places, and the Reutelbeek and Polygonbeek are broken up by shell fire, it ought not to be difficult to make headway.' [4] The reality would turn out to be rather different.

Zero Hour was 6.00am but at about 5.20am the British front line was hit by a German artillery barrage: what the British did not know was that the enemy was planning to attack that same morning. The Anzacs caught it more than most, suffering almost 15 per cent casualties before the attack even began.

The British barrage crashed down at six o'clock on the whole depth of the German positions, pre–empting their assault by catching many of their men in relatively open assembly positions. The British forces left their trenches along the whole 14,000 yard frontage. The 9/KOYLI had lined up with C and D Companies in front, left and right respectively, A and B Companies likewise behind them. The 3/4 Queen's (62 Brigade) were on the battalion's left, with 2/Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (DCLI), (95 Brigade 5th Division), on the right. Waiting for the off, two sources of annoyance were evident: twice they had been shelled by the German artillery, once at midnight and again at 5.30am; probably equally galling was the fact that the rations and the rum were late. Enemy shelling of the rear areas between Polygon Wood and Clapham Junction meant that the attacking troops were effectively cut off, a situation that persisted for most of the day.

Into the 'muddy valley'

The KOYLI's leading companies set off: Captains John Harland Frank and Alfred Edward Day MC wrote an account of the attack which was penned six days later: they had found the valley of the Polygonbeek far from dry.

> 'This sector was broken by the Polygonbeek and the Reutelbeek… Normally a few feet wide and a few inches deep, the bed of these brooks, broken by shell craters, had become belts of oozing mud of uncertain depth … they formed a muddy valley of well over half a mile wide.' [5]

The two captains continue the narrative. (The grammar is their own!)

> 'At zero the barrage opened with a fearsome noise and we leapt from our shell holes and went forward in snake formation. It was the darkness that precedes the dawn and one could recognise nobody. [We] were immediately subjected to a withering machine–gun fire, men were falling right and left but, who cared?, our one care was to get forward.' [6]

Looking back across the valley of the Polygonbeek towards Polygon Wood and Joist Farm. Author

The first stumbling block was Joist Farm: this was found to be very strongly held, with wire entanglements to the front, and D Company needed the help of B Company and 10/KOYLI troops coming up in support, along with one of the four tanks attached to the division in order to take it. The German garrison had consisted of one officer, twelve men and four machine guns.

Hand–to–hand

C Company on the left had been able to advance 'meeting only slight opposition'.[7] As they approached the stream, however, resistance stiffened. 'Just west of the Polygone Beek (sic) Germans were met with in some force and hand to hand fighting took place'.[8]

Our two captains resume their narrative:

> 'The swamp proved a veritable death trap we were up to our knees in slush and at the same time subjected to enfilade machine–gun fire from the right. A small strongpoint not concreted and immediately on the west bank of the swamp we took by surprise and the garrison surrendered without firing a shot. On the same bank were a considerable number of German bivouacs constructed of 'elephants' and filled with Germans, most of these had been blown in by our bombardment. The remainder containing Germans were bombed by our men and the Germans shot as they ran out. On the east side the ground rose rapidly and contained a number of concreted strongpoints…These fired at us until we were within 50 yards. The garrisons then surrendered, the majority of them being bombed and shot. The left strongpoint turned out to be battalion HQ and was an elaborate concern'.[9]

Quite a number of the KOYLI men had seen sense and, finding the stream almost impassable, had veered to the right and crossed by the road bridge.[10]

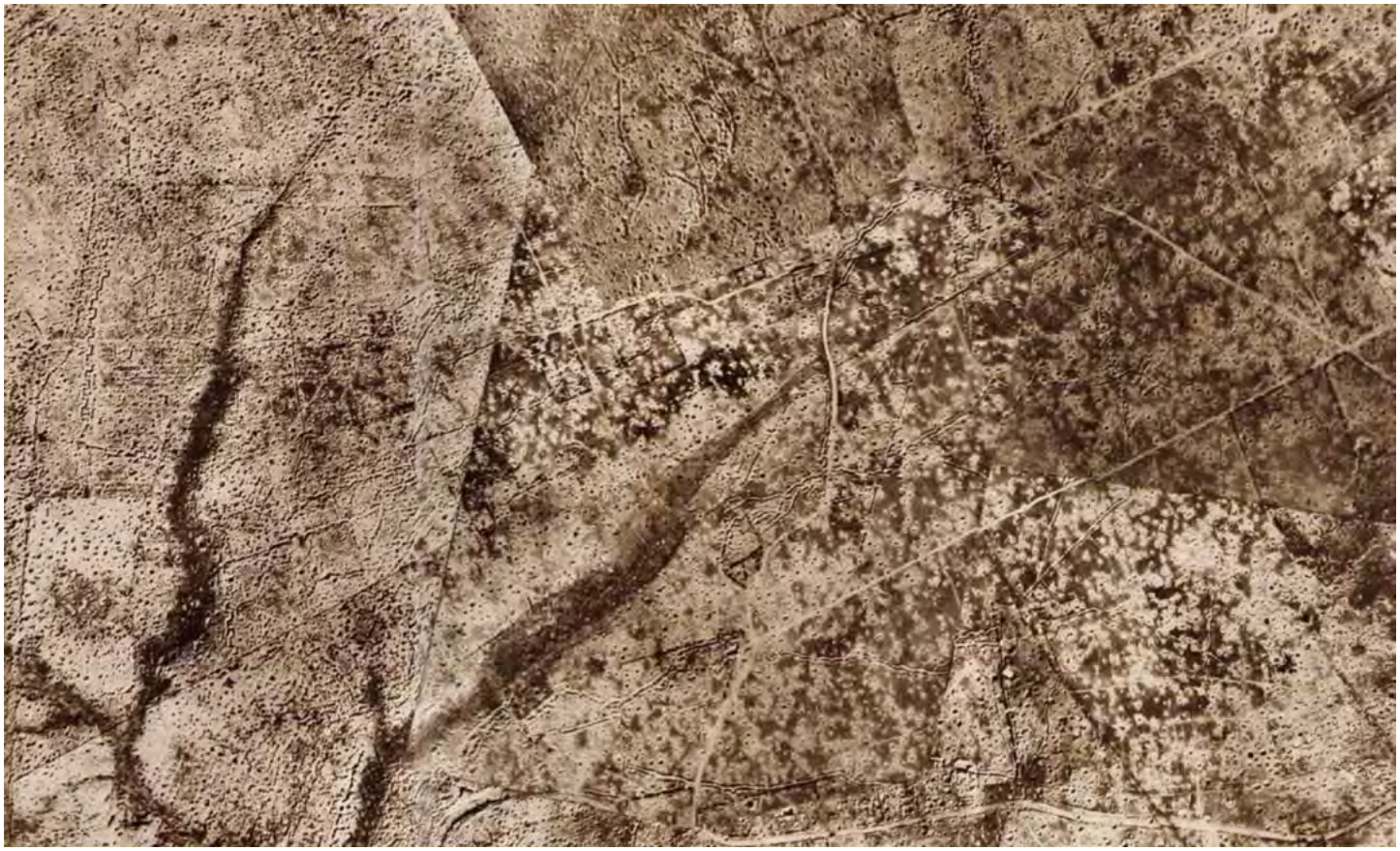
Juniper Trench should have been a daunting obstacle, but the garrison preferred to retreat rather than fight, and a number of them were captured by a flanking manoeuvre led by Second Lieutenant Leonard Baker Spicer. The Germans on the KOYLI's right were made of sterner stuff, however, and attempted a counter attack at around midday. It was beaten off by an artillery response and small arms fire from D Company. In the meantime, the, by now, thoroughly mixed up units had crested the rise, had taken the first objective line and were digging in short of the village, but 100 or so yards beyond the crossroads. It was just after 9.00am.

Communications with the rear were proving difficult. It was not until 10:40am that the first report from 9/KOYLI was received by the 21st Division, to the effect that the battalion had secured its objective. Captains Frank and Day continue the story:

> 'It was at this time that we realised that our right flank was absolutely in the air. At the allotted time, the 10th [KOYLI] and NF's [Northumberland Fusiliers from 62 Brigade] attempted to go forward to the eastern extremity of the village, they were not successful and we dug in slightly in advance of our first objective'.[11]

A strongpoint to the east of Reutel had proven particularly troublesome, but this had been knocked out by a tank which had proceeded along the road through the village as far as the cemetery, some 64 Brigade men tagging along. The tank was then hit and retired: machine and men returning whence they had come. It was decided to consolidate the gains that had already been made, and arriving units from 15/DLI and 1/East Yorks were sent out to the right to form a defensive flank.

Looking towards Reutel village from the KOYLI jumping off positions. Author

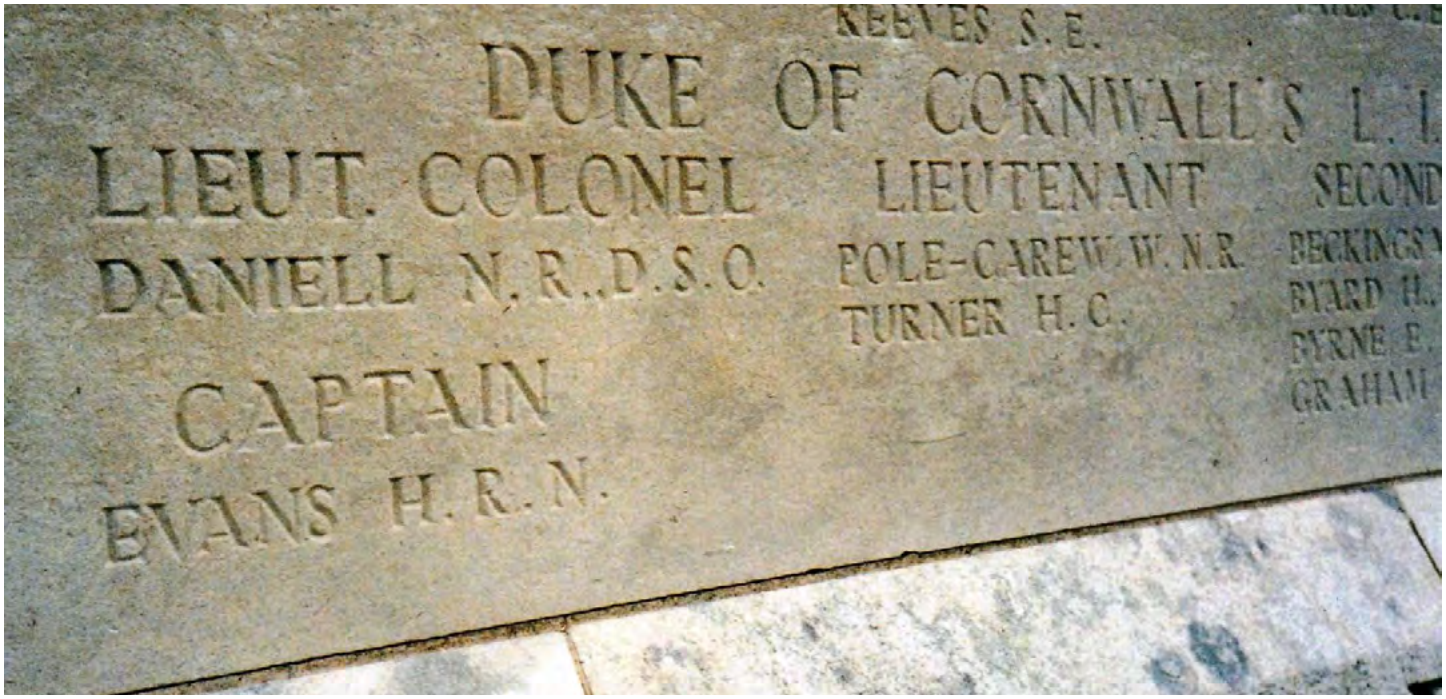


Several contemporary aerial photographs stitched together to show the area in the vicinity of the village of Reutel, the ruins of which can be seen north of the road centre right towards the bottom of the image. Compare with the map. Author

Disappeared

The action had not finished for the day, however. During the afternoon, around three battalions of German troops left Gheluvelt (just over a mile–and–a–half to the south–south–west of Reutel) and attempted to advance up the valley towards the 64 Brigade positions. The afore–mentioned Second Lieutenant Spicer was sent out with a party including two Lewis Guns and one Vickers to try to enfilade the advancing enemy. Later in the day the party disappeared and despite search parties being sent out, no trace of them was ever found. Spicer's death was later confirmed, but he has no known grave and is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial.

The Germans had managed to get a machine gun set up near Polderhoek Chateau and were able to fire into the rear of the 64 Brigade positions. Fearing another counter attack, the front line troops in their precarious positions on the outskirts of Reutel sent up an SOS signal at 9:30pm and the British artillery opened up accordingly. No counter attack developed, but the German artillery reply once more raked Polygon Wood and Clapham Junction. During this bombardment, at around 10.30pm, a German shell exploded at the entrance of 9/KOYLI Battalion Headquarters. The signalling corporal was killed outright and both the signalling officer and intelligence officer were wounded. Lieutenant Colonel Neville Reay Daniell was hit in the stomach and right thigh. The wounds proved fatal.



Lieutenant Colonel Neville Reay Daniell's name is inscribed on the Tyne Cot Memorial to the Missing. Author

9/KOYLI graves in Hooge Crater Cemetery. Author

Inexplicably, the 28–year–old colonel has no known grave and is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial. [12]

During the night, the 64 Brigade men improved their positions and prepared to meet whatever the next day might bring. On the morning of 5 October 1917, it became evident that there were still a number of Germans in Reutel, but the fight, it seemed, had gone out of them. Lewis Gun and rifle fire from the KOYLI trenches throughout the day effectively discouraged any thoughts of an enemy counter attack. 64 Brigade was relieved by troops of 110 Brigade during the night of 5/6 October and were soon in the relative safety of Railway Dugouts to the south of Ypres. By the evening of the 7th they were in bivouacks in Scottish Wood, where Major Harry Greenwood took command of what was left of 9/KOYLI. The *Official History* puts 64 Brigade casualties at 61 Officers and 1,293 Other Ranks. Between 3 and 6 October 9/KOYLI had suffered 103 fatalities, eight of them officers. Commonwealth War Graves Commission records indicate that 96 men of 9/KOYLI died on 4 October 1917, although of course some of that number may have died of wounds received earlier. The majority of those men have no known grave and are remembered on the Tyne Cot Memorial. 64 Brigade had suffered heavily, but their efforts had 'completed the security of the southern flank of the main Broodseinde battlefront'. [13]

It was raining heavily as Douglas Haig took a walk on the afternoon of 4 October. In his diary entry for that day, he celebrated a 'very important success' and his thoughts turned to the next attack. It would take place in appalling conditions as the rains set in once more and turned the landscape into a quagmire. [14]

Yorkshire born Derek Clayton attended Batley Grammar School before beginning a long association with the University of Birmingham. He graduated in 1979 with a BA in French and German and went on to teach Modern Languages in Birmingham schools before retiring in 2015. His fascination with military history began in childhood, but the discovery of photographs of his great–uncle in his KOYLI uniform and his grandfather in the RFC focussed his interest squarely on the Great War. He returned to the university in 2004, following the publication of his battalion history: From Pontefract to Picardy: the 9th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry in the First World War *(Tempus, 2004), and completed his MA in British First World War Studies in 2006, having produced a dissertation on the 49th (West Riding) Division. He was awarded his PhD in 2016: his doctoral thesis 'The Battle of the Sambre: 4 November 1918' being a subject suggested by WFA President Professor Peter Simkins. A forthcoming book on the Battle of the Sambre* – Decisive Victory – *is in preparation and will be published by Helion & Company in early 2018.*

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(2) J E Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1917, Vol. II* (HMSO: 1948), p.284.

(3) The First World War Letters of Colonel H E Yeo MBE, MC, 1915–19. Imperial War Museum.

(4) TNA, WO95/2132 War Diary 21st Division GHQ.

(5) Edmonds, *Military Operations,* p.313. 'Over half a mile wide' has to be an exaggeration.

(6) TNA, WO95/2162 War Diary 9/King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

(7) TNA, WO95/2161 War Diary 64 Infantry Brigade.

(8) *Ibid.*

(9) TNA, WO95/2162 War Diary 9/King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

(10) TNA, WO95/2161 War Diary 64 Infantry Brigade.

(11) TNA, WO95/2162 War Diary 9/King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. The announcement of MCs to Captains Frank and Day for the Broodseinde operations was announced in the *London Gazette* of 26 November 1917. In Day's case it was a bar to the MC.

(12) The name of Lieutenant Colonel Neville Reay Daniel DSO appears on the panel of the memorial dedicated to his original regiment, the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry.

(13) Edmonds, *Military Operations,* p.313.

(14) G Sheffield & J M Bourne, (eds.), *Douglas Haig. War Diaries and Letters 1914–18* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson: 2005), pp.332–333.

Nurses on the Front Line

The Work of Nurses at the Brandhoek Advanced Abdominal Centre July–November 1917

by Christine E Hallett

During research for her book Nurses of Passchendaele, *Christine Hallett discovered details of the work of nurses along the lines of evacuation behind the Ypres front during the Great War. Here she relates the experiences of some of the women who served in one particular cluster of casualty clearing stations (CCS) at Brandhoek, just east of Poperinge; namely Nos. 32 and 44 British CCSs, and No. 3 Australian CCS. No. 32 CCS was one of the earliest specialist abdominal centres and it has achieved a certain amount of fame as it was the unit in which Captain Noel Chavasse, the celebrated Great War medical officer who was awarded two Victoria Crosses, was treated and subsequently died on 4 August, 1917. Christine Hallett's article offers an insight into what was happening in that hospital and its partner units throughout the summer of the Third Ypres campaign of 1917. The text of this paper is quoted directly from her book.*

Moving forward

In preparation for the assault that was to be known as the Third Battle of Ypres, the bed capacities of CCSs close to the Ypres Salient were increased. New CCSs were established and patients not requiring immediate surgery were evacuated to base hospitals in France. It was already quite common for individual CCSs to specialise in particular types of wounds: abdominal or chest wounds, limb fractures or head injuries. There were even special units for cases of shell–shock and for patients with self–inflicted wounds.

Medical science had been struggling to keep pace with advances in industrial weaponry. The experiences of the previous two–and–a–half years had taught senior medical officers and nurses that speed was a key element in the treatment of traumatised casualties. If wounded men could be stabilised quickly they were less likely to be overwhelmed by wound–shock. Haemorrhage must be stemmed, fluid must be pumped through wide–bore needles into the soft tissues beneath the skin of the axillae and groins and morphine, anti–tetanus serum and stimulants must be injected into the muscles. Some of this work could be done in a regimental aid post, but most of it had to wait until the patient reached a CCS. The work was intricate, demanding immediate one–to–one attention, yet everyone knew that during the assault, patients would arrive in rushes several hundred at a time – unloaded from convoys of ambulances until the floors of reception huts were thickly covered with narrow stretchers.

The Salient had been one of the quieter parts of the Western Front during the spring of 1917. Many British troops had been relocated to the Arras region to launch an assault in support of the Nivelle Offensive. Now they were returned to the Ypres sector. In July 1917, No. 32 British CCS – where Kate Luard, a highly experienced Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Reserve (QAIMNSR) sister was in charge – was moved to Brandhoek, about three miles from the front lines. Luard had enlisted in August 1914, and, because of her extensive previous experience – including a 'tour of duty' in South Africa during the Second Anglo–Boer War (1899–1902), had been transferred almost immediately to France. By the time she was appointed sister–in–charge of No. 32 CCS, she had worked in numerous postings, including a long stint on No. 10 Ambulance Train.

Sister Kate Luard. Courtesy Caroline Stevens

No. 44 British CCS was also moved forward; one of its sisters, Yorkshire nurse, Minnie Wood, had just been promoted to sister–in–charge. Minnie had joined the QA Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNSR) in 1912 and had been in France since 17 August 1914. She had clearly impressed Maud McCarthy, the matron–in–chief in France and Flanders, by her skill and coolness under pressure. One of her nurses was fellow Yorkshirewoman, Nellie Spindler from Wakefield, who had enlisted with the QAIMNSR in October, 1915, and had served at No. 2 British General Hospital, Le Havre, No. 42 Stationary Hospital, and then No. 44 CCS.

Nos. 32 and 44 British CCSs were to be joined in late July by No. 3 Australian CCS to form an enormous 'Advanced Abdominal Centre'. During large rushes, each unit would admit patients until full, when it would close its doors, and concentrate on the care and treatment of existing patients, handing over to one of its 'partners'. By admitting patients in rotation, CCSs were much less likely to be overwhelmed by rushes of casualties than they had been during the early years of the war. By 1917, professional cooperation was becoming more sophisticated. So–called 'surgical teams', each consisting of a surgeon, a nurse, an anaesthetist and an orderly were formed at base hospitals, and were then moved as a group to, or between, CCSs.

Portrait of Nurse Nellie Spindler.
Courtesy Lijssenthoek Cemetery Visitor Centre

Australian nurse, May Tilton, had already amassed a range of trauma–care experiences by the time she arrived on the continent. After serving with the Nos. 1 and 3 Australian General Hospitals in Cairo and Suez, caring for severely ill, shell–shocked and wounded patients from

Australian nurse May Tilton. From *May Tilton,* The Grey Battalion, *Sydney, Angus & Robertson Ltd., 1933*

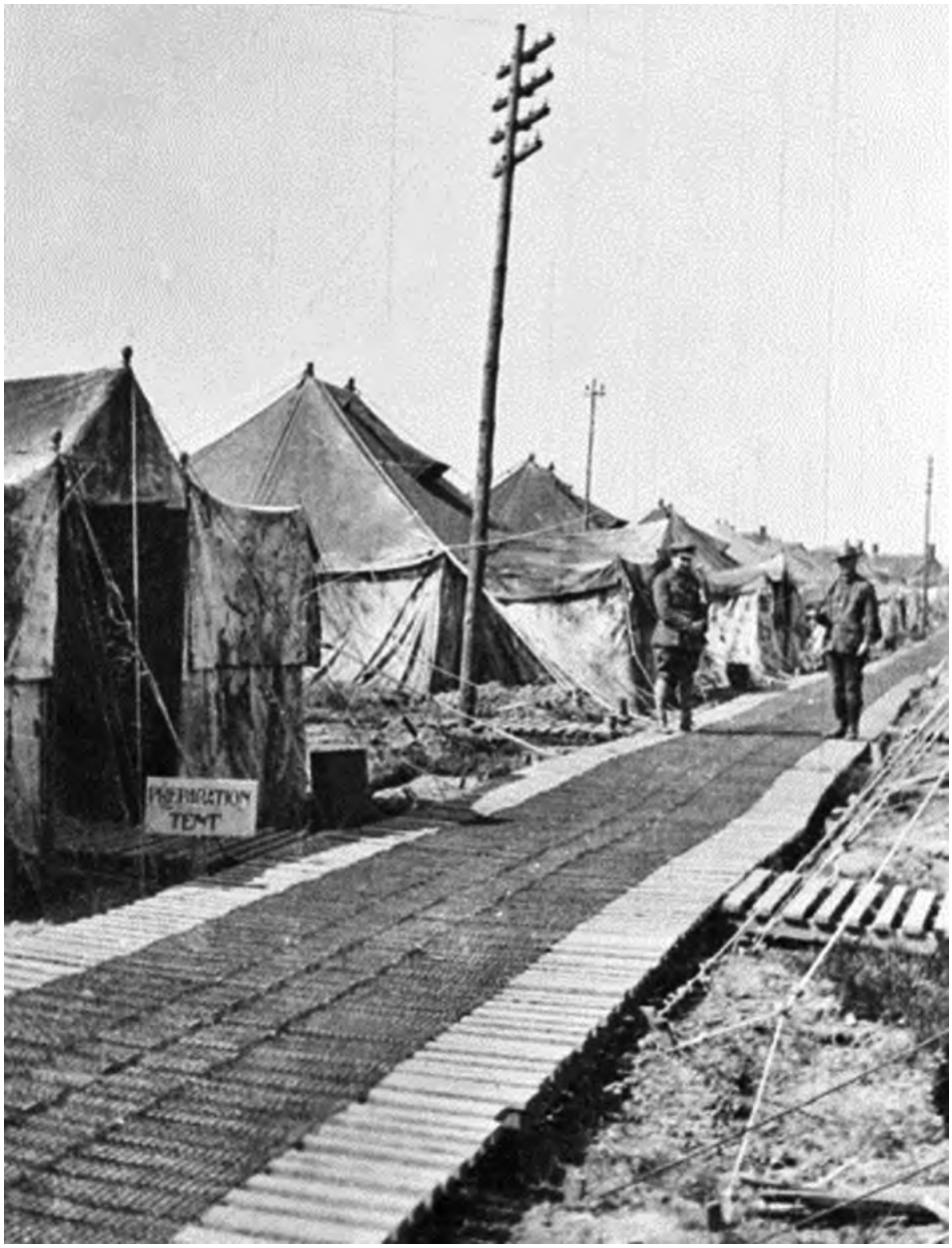
the Gallipoli campaign, she had been posted to the hospital ship, *Essequibo*, bringing damaged patients back to Britain for convalescence. In England, she served at military hospitals in Rubery, Dartford and Brighton, before being transferred to France, to the No. 4 British General Hospital at Camiers, where she arrived in May 1917. She was transferred to No. 3 Australian CCS in July.

Messines

As June 1917 opened, the Allies were finalising their plans for the Third Ypres campaign. The opening battle secured the Messines Ridge, a semi–circular ridge of high ground to the southeast of the city. Just before 3.10am on 7 June, 19 mines dug in at 11 sites beneath the ridge and nearby lower–lying hills were detonated, creating a series of explosions so immense that they were felt and heard for many miles around. In their bell tents in CCSs within ten miles of the lines, sleeping nurses woke in shock as the ground shook beneath them. They knew they could soon expect to receive enormous numbers of casualties.

In reception huts and resuscitation wards, fully trained nurses moved from patient to patient prioritising the work, stabilising waiting men by warming them with blankets and gas heaters, and pushing fluid into their bodies. Patients were rehydrated as rapidly as possible, using sterile saline solution or colloid preparations made from 'gum Arabic', a natural compound produced from the sap of the acacia tree. Some of the earliest techniques for blood transfusion were also adopted.

The Battle of Messines was only the prelude to the Third Battle of Ypres, which was scheduled to begin in late–July, but which was delayed until the 31st. Kate Luard, head sister at No. 32 CCS, arrived in Brandhoek on 25 July with a small contingent of nurses, anticipating that her complement of staff would rise to 30 before the commencement of the 'big push'. 'We are for abdomens and chests,' she wrote in her journal – with evident satisfaction, knowing that theirs would be among the most vital work of the war. Nos. 32 and 44 were soon to be joined by No. 3 Australian CCS, creating a formidable unit of three hospitals which could rotate their 'take–in' – each admitting in turn, permitting the other two to focus on resuscitation, treatment and recovery of existing casualties.



Two unidentified soldiers standing on a walkway outside the tents of No. 3 Australian CCS at Brandhoek. A sign reading 'Preparation Tent' is outside the first tent on the left. Courtesy AWM A02292

Kate soon found that one of the problems associated with her new posting was the almost incessant noise from the bombardment. The commanding officer was quick to explain to the nurses 'which noise means a burst beyond you, which means a burst on your right or left, and … the one that does you in you don't hear!'[1] The entire hospital was under canvas, apart from the operating theatre, which was a long wooden hut. Wide duckboards ran between the tents.

'Front row dress circle'

On Sunday 29 July May Tilton and eleven other Australian nurses began the slow journey from Abbeville to Brandhoek to help establish and staff the No. 3 Australian CCS which was to work in tandem with Nos. 32 and 44. From the safety of a base almost 80 miles behind the front, the Australian nurses were to find themselves within three miles of the reserve trenches. After much confusion, caused by the secrecy of their orders and the shelling of various points on their route, they began the last leg of their journey – a 'thrilling drive' to Brandhoek. 'Fritz was shelling Poperinghe' and the guns were 'pounding away at a terrific rate'.[2] Unable to reach their destination that night, they retreated to No. 62 British CCS at Proven, where they met their matron, Miss O'Dwyer. The thunder of the nearby bombardment and the constant, unwanted attentions of the local mosquitos made sleep impossible, and they were anxious to reach their posting. Finally, on 31 July, the day of the attack, they arrived at No. 3 Australian CCS. Here, they, along with British CCSs Nos. 44 and 32, were to care for many of the wounded being transferred 'down the lines' from the Third Battle of Ypres – not just abdominal cases, but 'chests' and 'fractured femurs' as well. Such cases were the most urgent of the war, requiring treatment within two or three hours to prevent the galloping infections that were now known to kill with such rapidity. Most CCSs could be reached within six hours (provided all went smoothly with the transport of wounded to regimental aid posts and advanced dressing stations, and then their transfer by motor ambulance), but this cluster of forward field hospitals – so close to the lines that they were right up against the local field ambulances – could be reached in half that time: surgeons could begin operating within just three hours. Proximity to the battlefield saved lives. As long as patients could be found and removed from no man's land by stretcher–bearers, treated rapidly in regimental aid posts, and transferred almost immediately by motor ambulance, they had a good chance of survival. Kate Luard had included a wry comment in a letter to her family. On 26 July, soon after her own unit's arrival at Brandhoek, Sir Anthony Bowlby, consulting surgeon to the BEF, had called to see her, declaring: 'How d'you like the site this time? Front pew what? Front row dress circle.' 'It is his pet scheme,' she remarked, 'getting the operations done up here within an hour or two of getting hit.'[3]

'Stupefying'

Nurses arriving at CCSs found their first experiences of being under shellfire both

fascinating and terrifying. Shell after shell flew overhead towards Allied artillery emplacements. The bombardment seemed to form a peculiar pattern: first came the faint boom, and the suspense of waiting, knowing that a shell had been fired; this was followed by a distant whine as it began to approach; then the whine became a scream, which amplified and intensified as the shell drew nearer; next came the deafening crash and the shaking of the earth beneath one's feet, as it landed; finally, the zip and whizz of splinters, as shrapnel or shell fragments of many sizes tore through the air in all directions.

May Tilton described her first night at Brandhoek, watching the bombardment that preceded the Third Battle of Ypres:

> 'The flashes from the guns and the marvellous illuminations in the sky [were] more dazzling than any lightning. A continuous rumble and roar, as of an immense factory of vibrating machinery, filled the night. The pulsings and vibration worked into our bodies and brains; the screech of big shells, and the awful crash when they burst at no great distance, kept our nerves on edge; but even to this terrific noise we became accustomed.' [(4)]

Close to the hospital was an emplacement of 'Big Bobs (15–inch guns)', which 'split the air with terrific force and made the earth rock and tremble'. In the sky almost directly above them were 18 observation balloons. May and her companions felt they were almost on the battlefield.

On 30 July, Kate Luard recorded in her journal that No. 32 CCS was nearly ready for the 'big push'. 'By the time you get this,' she commented to her family, 'it will be history for better or worse.' The hospital was ready to perform huge numbers of operations, with 15 theatre sisters, and a complement of 33 fully trained nurses in all. They had experienced their first gas drill that evening, finding that most of them were unable to get their masks on within the required six seconds. With her usual sense of dry humour, Kate commented: 'We take about six minutes!' The 'roar' from the bombardment that night was 'stupefying'.[(5)]

The first infantry assault of the Third Ypres campaign came on 31 July 1917 with the battle for Pilckem Ridge. Assaults on Langemarck and a number of smaller objectives – including the Canadian attack on Hill 70 near Loos to prevent German reinforcements being sent north to Ypres – would follow in August.

May Tilton described the desolation of No. 32 British CCS, as the first rush of casualties arrived. Men were carried in completely covered with mud from head to foot, and the CCS itself was like a swamp of mud. Her own unit, No. 3 Australian CCS, was still not ready to open, but ten of its nurses had been loaned to No. 32. Kate Luard commented that they were 'a handsome crowd and very nice'. The staff of No. 44 CCS were also working hard to get their hospital ready.

Horrifying

Nurses were becoming adept at the work of triage: assessing their patient's needs. Those most in need of life–saving surgery – including those with smashed limbs from which large vessels were still leaking blood, torn abdominal and chest walls, and heads in need of trepanning to relieve pressure on damaged brains – were sent straight to theatre, until the floors outside operating rooms became as crowded as those of reception huts. Surgeons worked steadily through multiple operations, supported by theatre nurses, anaesthetists and orderlies.

One of the most horrifying elements of the Third Battle of Ypres was the use, for the first time, of dichlorethyl sulphide, the terrifying 'new gas' that was to become so familiar to staff throughout the lines of evacuation – mustard gas. Stealthy in its action and terrifying in its effects, mustard gas burned any piece of skin or mucous membrane it touched – including the tissues of the airways and lungs and the walls of the gut. Soldiers sheltering in shell holes on the battlefield beyond the Salient saw and heard strange shells, which landed close by but did not burst. They seemed to 'plop' into the ground, half burying themselves in the mud, and then they opened to release a substance – half–oily, half–liquid – which mushroomed into a gaseous cloud as it met the atmosphere. Its action was delayed, and even as the man was wondering what was happening, the sulphur mustard was burning his skin and lungs. After a short time, he would begin to sneeze, then choke and retch. Then burns would begin to appear on the vesicular parts of the body – areas where there was a concentration of lymph glands, such as the armpits, groin and neck. His eyes would sting, then swell and close as the gas burned their delicate tissues. The blindness that followed would last at least ten days. Men were given morphine to relieve their agony, and oxygen was administered through masks to ease their laboured breathing – but many pushed the masks away in desperate attempts to gain more fresh air. Persuading them to take the oxygen required a skill and tact that was difficult to muster after a sleepless night, when one was so exhausted that it was difficult to talk at all. Many patients were on the edge of collapse; they were prescribed stimulants, which nurses injected into their muscles through carefully sterilised and sharpened needles. All gas–damaged eyes were protected by pads soaked in bicarbonate of soda; nurses circled the wards constantly, removing these and bathing the gluey and inflamed eyes beneath. They tried to reach each patient every two hours – but found themselves racing against time. May Tilton described how dangerous this work could be for nurses themselves: 'We were unable to work for any length of time in these gassed wards. Stooping over the patients, we soon became affected by inhaling the gas. Our throats became sore and set us coughing, while our eyes smarted and became weak and watery. The odour of the ward was in our nostrils for weeks.' [(6)] Nurses were also living with the fear that they could be seriously poisoned. There was a risk that gas from attacks in the front lines might reach personnel in rest areas or that gas shells might be fired beyond the second line trenches. All medical workers in the zone of the armies were given new gas masks, with extensions containing 'lime permanganate' to neutralise the mustard gas.

Nurse Minnie Hough wearing a French 'Adrian' helmet and her gas mask at Mobile Surgical No. 1. Courtesy AWM PO1790–019

'Mud, floods and bursting shells'

On 1 August 1917 all three of the CCSs at Brandhoek became one enormous flooded morass. 'Everything is a swamp and a pond,' commented Kate Luard. In all three hospitals tents were leaking and floors were saturated. In some wards, the water reached halfway up the legs of the beds and nurses found themselves wading from patient to patient. The Australian nurses had an added problem: their luggage had been lost somewhere on the journey between Abbeville, Proven and Brandhoek. Their clothes soon became sodden with rain and mud, and the only coats they had were lent to them by their orderlies. They were instructed to wear 'heavy and headachey' steel helmets at all times,[7] and were given gas masks, but they had to wait several days before any changes of uniform arrived.

Kate Luard was writing of how men were being brought in 'with mud over their eyes and mouths, and 126 have died in three and a half days'.[8] On 3 August, a 'special order was issued by the Director of Medical Services'. He wished to 'place on record his high appreciation of the work done by [No. 32] Casualty Clearing Station, and [to thank] all Ranks for excellent work done under very trying circumstances'. Kate Luard commented wryly that by 'trying circumstances' he must have meant 'the simultaneous inundation of hundreds of abdominals, mud, floods, and bursting shells'.[9]

One of the ways in which the German high command chose to respond to the terrible battle of attrition taking place east of Ypres, was to find ways to fight and destroy its enemies behind their own lines. In the so–called rest areas there was an intensification of aerial bombardment. As bombing raids increased, CCSs became more vulnerable. By 1917 specially designed Gotha bombers, each of which could carry over 500kg of bombs, were being used.

They came over singly, in pairs, or, sometimes in large squadrons. On a clear night, the light humming of their engines could be heard in the distance, carried on the still summer air, becoming gradually louder. At times, aircraft flew so low that during daytime raids, watching nurses joked that they could see the pilots' moustaches.

Perhaps one of the reasons that bombs were being dropped so close to the CCSs at Brandhoek was the proximity of the light railway that carried ammunition and ran directly through the compound of No. 32 CCS. Kate Luard commented on the apparent 'cheeriness' of the 'baby trains' carrying their deadly loads, and how one often had to wait until they had passed before it was possible to cross from one side of the hospital to the other. On 5 August, German Gothas flew over Brandhoek in larger numbers, bombing the railhead and narrowly missing the CCSs. May Tilton commented that the experience was:

> 'More terrifying than anything we had yet known. The explosion was terrific in its unexpectedness, like a frightful peal of thunder, and was followed by a rain of shots from our archies [anti–aircraft guns]. Hardly had we recovered from the shock, than there was another ear–splitting explosion nearer. They came again at 10pm, and all through the night peppered us with bombs, though none fell directly on our camp … It was terrifying lying in bed, expecting every minute to be blown to pieces … I could not control the violent trembling of my legs. My knees positively knocked together. I could laugh at myself, but I could not stop the trembling.'[10]

The commanding officer of the CCS wanted to send the nurses westwards to safety, and ordered them to pack. But the road back towards Proven and Vlamertinghe was being steadily bombed, and was, in fact, the most dangerous place in the zone around Poperinge that night. It was not until the following day that the nurses were driven back to No. 63 British CCS, where they slept for ten hours. Even this far behind the lines, the entire district had been severely bombarded.

'Moaning groaning wrecks'

No. 32 British CCS remained at Brandhoek – all that was left of the 'Advanced Abdominal Centre' for the time being. It may have been that the British commanding officer was less anxious about the safety of his staff than his Australian counterpart, but it is more likely that No. 32 remained where it was because it was fully operational and completely full of patients. The cost in soldiers' lives of evacuating the nurses seemed too great. Kate Luard was beginning to worry; she was experiencing 'brain–fag' brought on by 16–hour shifts, and constant wakefulness, and was beginning to feel that she was losing her decision–making abilities. It was around this time that Captain Noel Chavasse, a medical officer who had already been awarded the Victoria Cross, was brought into No. 32. He was nursed at the CCS for 48 hours, but died in the early hours of the morning of 4 August. His night nurse, Ida Leedam, later wrote to his fiancée, recounting how he had asked her to say: 'give her my love. Tell her Duty called and called me to obey'. For his actions in going forward to treat the wounded and saving the lives of the men of 10/King's Liverpool Regiment (Liverpool Scottish) between 31 July and his fatal wounding on 2 August when a German shell pitched into the dugout he was using as an aid station, Noel Chavasse was awarded a second Victoria Cross.

The original grave marker of Captain Noel Godfrey Chavasse VC and bar, MC, Royal Army Medical Corps, attached to 1/10 Battalion of the King's (Liverpool Regiment) photographed in Brandhoek New Military Cemetery by Leonard Holmes in 1920. This cross is now in the chapel of St Peter's College, Oxford which was founded by Chavasse's father and twin brother Christopher. Courtesy AWMP00735.008

No. 44 CCS re–opened on 9 August, and the work of No. 32 began to ease. Nurses, orderlies and doctors were able to work more normal shifts – and one might have expected the sisters to take advantage of their off–duty time to sleep and recuperate. Yet one of the most astonishing features of the work done by Kate and her team of nurses was their morale–boosting 'social' work. Every Sunday they held 'At Home' parties in the sisters' mess. Off–duty sisters served tea and cake, as if they were at a garden party in the Hampshire Hills rather than at a CCS close the front lines of a destructive military campaign. Kate commented on the amazement of visiting officers:

> 'The tea–tables and the party–tea, our uniforms, our work, our hospitality, our tin–hats, roaring guns and our other noises moved [one officer] to such soulful speeches I nearly laughed. "And to think of all the beastly women at home selling flags," he said in a pained voice.' (11)

On 14 August No. 3 Australian CCS reopened at Brandhoek amid a thunderstorm. At first the hospital had four surgical teams, but the number of staff was gradually increased as other teams were transferred in from base hospitals. Eventually, Maud McCarthy the matron–in–chief of the British Expeditionary Force in France and Flanders, was to comment that the site on which the three CCSs were operating was more like an enormous stationary hospital than a forward field hospital. Kate Luard – the most experienced nurse on the site – wrote in her journal, that it was more 'like a battlefield'. May Tilton was put on night duty in charge of the resuscitation ward, with two orderlies. She described later how terrifying it was to hold such a responsible role with so few resources. Although her orderlies were 'splendid', it was impossible for them to save every patient, many of whom were slipping away even as they were being brought into the ward:

> 'Torrents of rain were falling, and poor fellows were carried in, saturated and covered with mud, stone cold and pulseless. Three primus stoves provided our hot water supply. Many of our patients died as we lifted them from the stretchers. By midnight, the ward was full of moaning, groaning wrecks. I was appalled by the immensity and hopelessness of the task before us. At the faintest sign of a pulse beat, we were injecting salines, and working like mad to restore life sufficiently to get the patient to the operating table.(12)

'Corpse–like child'

On 16 August 1917, a day when as many as twenty aircraft could be seen in the sky above Brandhoek, the site was inspected by two of the most senior matrons on the Western Front when Maud McCarthy arrived accompanied by Evelyn Conyers, matron–in–chief of the Australian Army Nursing Service. They were horrified that nurses had been posted so close to the front line, and to an area that was clearly a target for both long–range artillery and aerial bombardment. Reluctantly, they permitted their staff to remain, knowing that the CCSs could not operate without expert nurses. That night a bombing raid killed a medical officer and two orderlies. The sisters' canvas bell tents were protected by high external walls of sandbags, but their tents were still riddled with holes.

The military cemetery next to the CCSs was rapidly filling, as bodies were buried 'twenty deep in one large pit'. Kate Luard commented that 'dreaming in those cornfields and woods at St Pol in June, I used to think a lot about this offensive, but I didn't think it would be as stiff as this'.(13) Casualties were returning from the Salient with stories of how the bodies of dead and wounded were piling up on parts of the battlefield, of how stretcher–bearers were unable to reach them through the flooded quagmire, and how, even if one could drag oneself to safety, it was difficult to see any landmarks in the wasteland of the Salient. Many simply died slowly of haemorrhage or infection, lost in that wilderness; countless others lay helpless in shell holes as the rain–water rose slowly until it drowned them. Some managed to reach the safety of a regimental aid post and were taken to a CCS where they died of wounds. Nurses were glad that they had at least eased the final hours of these men they saw as heroes.

Kate Luard recounted the story of a 'corpse–like child' who had been taken to the moribund ward:

> 'We got to work on resuscitation, with some success. He had been bleeding from his subclavian artery and heard them leave him for dead in a shell hole. But he crawled out and was eventually tended in a dugout by "a lad what said prayers with me", and later the hole in his chest was plugged and he reached us – what was left of him. When, after two days, he belonged to this world again, I got Capt. B to see him, and he got Major C. to operate and tied the twisted artery which I had re–plugged – he couldn't be touched before – and covered with muscle the hole through which he was breathing, and he is now a great hero known as 'the Prince of Wales'. "There's only me and Mother," he says, so she will be pleased. But he is not out of the wood yet.' (14)

Dying for one's country

Patients often expressed their surprise that nurses were stationed so close to the battlefield. Many were indignant that women should be put in such danger, seeing it as 'man's job' to go off to war – to protect the women and children who, naturally, should remain at home. But nurses were proud to be in the 'zone of the armies'. Even those who were not overt campaigners for women's suffrage saw that their work was making an important political point. They recognised that 'active service' of the type that took them within range of enemy fire robbed patriarchal male politicians of their primary argument for denying women the vote: that it was only men who made the supreme sacrifice, by dying for their country.

On the morning of Tuesday 21 August 1917 that outdated claim – that only men could die for their country – was decisively overturned when the random destructiveness of industrial warfare took the life of Nellie Spindler, a young staff nurse from Wakefield who had been posted to No. 44 British CCS under the command of her fellow Yorkshirewoman, Minnie Wood. The overnight raids had been particularly bad. It seemed as though the CCSs really were being targeted. At No. 3 Australian CCS, a shell had landed on the quartermaster stores, completely destroying it. That morning the night staff came off duty exhausted by the heavy work of caring for acutely ill men in the middle of almost constant bombing raids. They had been severely short–staffed. The three CCS head sisters were unwilling to put more than a skeleton staff on night duty, knowing that the wards were much more likely to be bombed at night than during the day, and wanting to keep as many of their staff safe as was possible. One sister had already been sent to the base the day before, apparently suffering from nervous exhaustion and shell–shock. Nellie had been sharing a bell tent with her – but on this morning she walked the short distance from her ward to her tent alone, and settled down for a much–needed sleep. Another nurse, whose tent was next to Nellie's, had decided to spend some time 'unwinding' to relieve the stress of the night. Kate Luard's journal recorded that she had gone out 'for a walk'.

May Tilton, and her friend, Emma Slater, came off night duty 'almost dropping with fatigue'. Around 10.00am a squadron of Gothas came over Brandhoek. Two bombs exploded close to the hospital compound; the third landed within it, exploding between the sisters' quarters at No. 44 CCS and an acute surgical ward at No. 32, where staff nurse Elizabeth Jane Eckett, who was in charge of the ward, was doing her morning round. An empty ward next to Elizabeth's was 'blown to bits', so was the absent sister's sleeping tent. Pieces of shell casing flew in all directions, some landing at the feet of head sisters Kate Luard and Minnie Wood as they ran to the scene. A shell fragment just missed a night sister getting into bed, and several shards ripped through the canvas walls of Elizabeth Eckett's ward. Fearing the worst, Kate

Nellie Spindler's grave at Lijssenthoek Cemetery in 2016. Author

rushed into the tent to see Elizabeth 'as white as paper but smiling happily and comforting the terrified patients'. For her courage that day Elizabeth Eckett was awarded the Military Medal. Her citation described how: 'although the ward was twice riddled by enemy aircraft, she continued attending the patients, and by her example prevented many of them from injuring themselves'.[15] In No. 3 Australian CCS Alice Kelly ran to her ward sluice, grabbed a supply of enamel washbasins, placed one over the head of each patient to protect them from flying fragments and then stood in the middle of the ward encouraging and reassuring them. She, too, was awarded the Military Medal, along with the Royal Red Cross.

Minnie Wood ran to her own sisters' bell tents, to find Nellie Spindler still lying where she had fallen asleep an hour earlier – now awake, shocked and bleeding profusely. Several medical officers arrived, but even as matron and doctors struggled to stem Nellie's bleeding, they knew she had no chance of survival. A piece of shell casing had ripped through her body from back to front, just below the level of her heart, tearing at least one major blood vessel, and releasing a catastrophic haemorrhage. All Minnie could do was hold Nellie in her arms as the young nurse lost consciousness. Twenty minutes later the 26–year–old staff nurse, who had struggled all night to save the lives of her patients only to become, herself, a target for enemy shellfire, was dead. Her body was taken to Lijssenthoek, near Remy Siding, where it was later interred.

Closure

May Tilton and Emma Slater woke suddenly in their bell tent as the first shell exploded. May described what happened next:

> 'A very agitated MO pushed his head into our tent and said: "Come on, you girls. Put on your coats and slippers. The CO says you have to get into a dugout at once. They are shelling us." We were incensed because he would not allow us to wait long enough to get into our clothes. We wanted to go to the wards, not into a burrow in the ground. "Good God! That first shell killed a night sister in 44 in bed asleep. Come on!" he said… we scuttled across no man's land to some trenches occupied by Scotch Canadians who were out of the line resting. Before I reached them, another long–drawn–out crescendo followed me closely. "I'm gone," flashed through my mind. The men shouted, "Run!" Others called, "Drop quickly!" My slipper tripped me, and I fell just as the shell fell in the cemetery behind. I looked back to see a huge mass of black smoke and debris flying in all directions; felt myself lifted and dragged into a huge dugout where all the day staff had gathered. Every one of them was upset at the CO's orders and distressed to leave the patients.' [16]

Kate Luard offered accommodation in her own sisters' bell tents to the night staff of No. 44. Noticing that three of them were severely shell–shocked, she had them taken immediately by ambulance to a base hospital in Boulogne. The bombing continued until the cemetery, the church hut and a nearby field ambulance had all been destroyed. Arriving to assess the situation, the Director of Medical Services and the Quarter Master General met with the matrons and commanding officers of Nos. 32 and 44 CCSs. At first they wanted to close No. 44 British and No. 3 Australian CCSs, but keep No. 32 open. Kate was later to describe, in her usual sardonic way, how, just as the decision had been taken, 'Fritz tactfully landed one of his best long–drawn crescendoing scream and crash, just on the railway'. There was now nothing for it but to close all three hospitals. The evacuation was achieved with a speed born out of desperation. All three were packed up and on the road for St Omer within a few hours. The 'Prince of Wales', the patient who had been 'one of the pets' of No. 32, died en route.

Minnie Wood achieved the evacuation of her nurses with great rapidity. She was later awarded the Military Medal, her citation describing how 'this lady never lost her nerve for a moment and during the whole of a most trying day, carried out her duties with the greatest steadiness and coolness. By her work and example she greatly assisted in the speedy evacuation of the patients and the transfer of the sisters'.[17] Just after the nurses had been driven away, a shell landed in a partially evacuated ward tent, injuring two orderlies, one of whom lost an arm and a leg.

Sister Minnie Wood MM RRC, Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service, a portrait taken on 1 July 1918. Courtesy IWM WWCD4–1–2

No. 3 Australian CCS was similarly evacuated by a calm and apparently unruffled Ida O'Dwyer. Once all patients had been moved out, the nurses sheltered behind a brick wall, waiting for the ambulance that was to take them west, to safety. Just as their transport pulled away, the wall was 'blown to atoms' by a shell. As they moved across the devastated zone, the nurses were shocked by what they saw. The war had truly overtaken them. The railway station at Abeele, at which they had arrived only weeks previously, had completely disappeared and Hazebrouck was a ruin. 'We were nearly dropping with weariness, want of sleep and hunger,' wrote May later. 'Some of the girls were vomiting all the way down.'

Minnie Wood wrote later to Nellie Spindler's parents:

> 'Before you receive this letter I expect you have heard of your great loss. I don't know what to say to you, for I cannot express my feelings in writing, and no words of mine can soften the blow. There is one consolation for you; your daughter became unconscious immediately after she was hit, and she passed away perfectly peacefully at 11.20am – just twenty minutes afterwards. I was with her at the time, but [after] the first minute or two she did not know me. It was a great mercy she was oblivious to her surroundings, for the shells continued to fall in for the rest of the day.' [18]

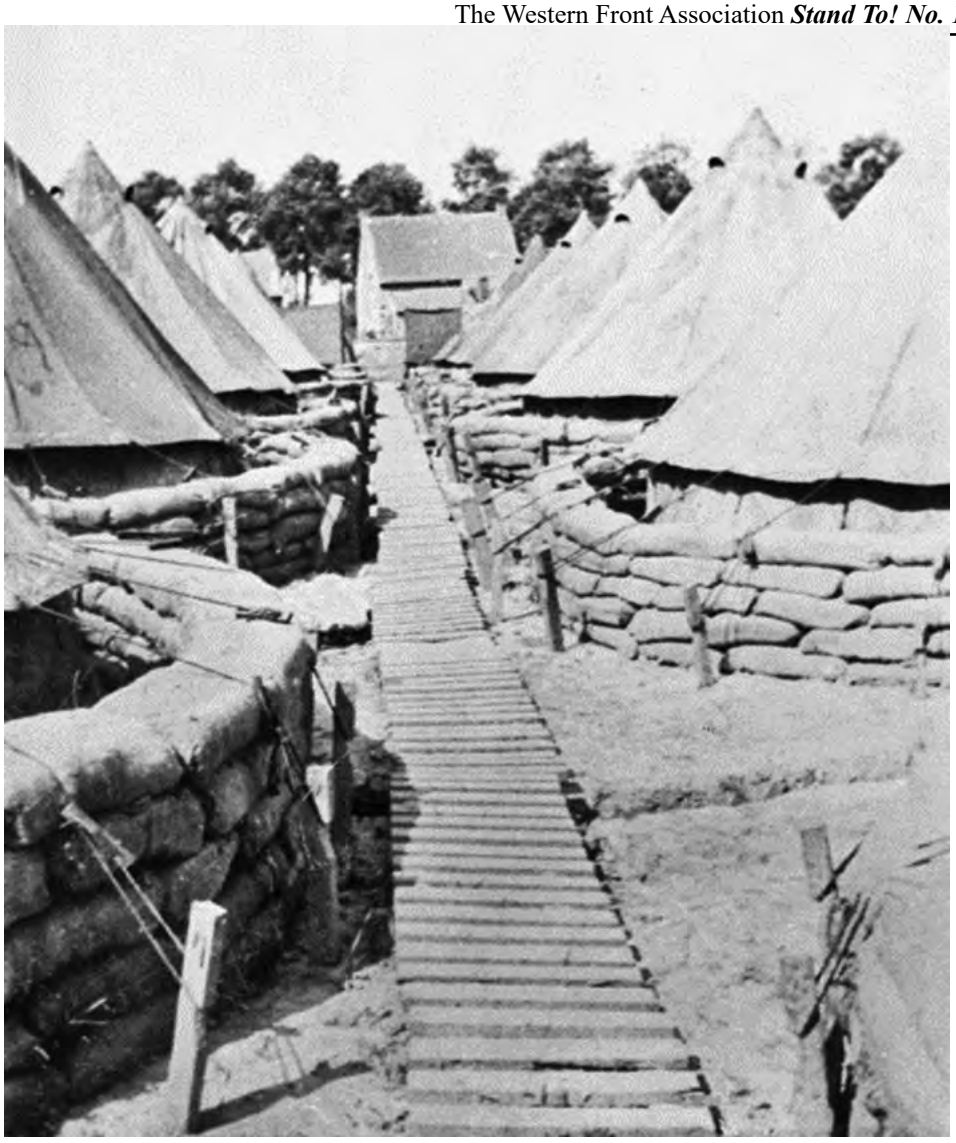
A better and more peaceful world

On that day – 21 August – about a hundred personnel were evacuated from the Brandhoek and other sites. They had to be accommodated in CCSs and billets around St Omer. But St Omer was no safe haven. One night in late August, the sleeping tents of the Australian nurses were, again, riddled with shrapnel holes. One in the wall of May's tent was big enough to push a fist through; she found a large, jagged piece of shell on the floor next to her stretcher and took it home as a souvenir. After that the nurses were ordered to sleep in the château overlooking the CCS. Although the feather beds seemed luxurious after hard stretchers, it took time – and a long period of backache – before they got used to them.

On Saturday 25 August, just four days after their evacuation, the sisters of No. 32 British CCS returned to their site at Brandhoek. Significant improvements had been made to their accommodation. Their bell tents were lined to waist height with sandbags, and they had been provided with low mattress–covered stretchers – to ensure that their bodies would be close to the ground – well below the protective barricade – while they slept. A concrete dugout, known as the 'Elephant' had been built for shelter during the worst raids – and this, too, was to be covered with sandbags. The work, in late August was 'slack', and the staff were able to work normal shifts and sleep well, in spite of continuing raids. A piano had been salvaged from the deserted No. 44 CCS and Kate allowed nurses to stay up until 10.30pm – way beyond their normal hours – for sing–songs with medical officers. 'One mustn't be too much of a Dragon,' she wrote in her letter–journal. The singing provided 'good and cheery cover for some rather nasty shelling'. On 27 August, she wrote again:

> 'I am writing this in my extraordinarily cosy stretcher–and–mattress bed at 9.30pm, with the comfortable knowledge of two feet of sandbags between me and anything that may burst outside. Anything that may burst on top of you, whether armour–piercing 9.2s like Tuesday's or bombs from above – you would know nothing about, as you'd merely wake to a better and more peaceful world.'[19]

Even as she was settling into her newly sandbagged bell tent, the rain was falling once more, and men waiting to go 'over the top' for a series of subsidiary assaults to support



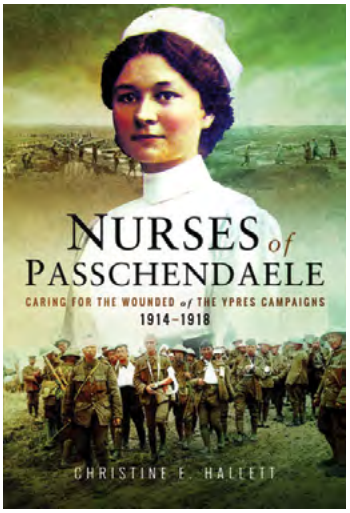
The nursing sisters' quarters of No. 3 Australian CCS at Brandhoek in August 1917. Note the duckboard pathway between the tents which are surrounded by sand bags. Two days after this photograph was taken every tent was riddled by shell fire. Courtesy AWM A02275

the gains of the battles for Pilckem Ridge, Westhoek Ridge and Langemarck were unable to lie down for fear of drowning. The work began to increase again, as these debilitated men were brought back to Brandhoek in collapsed states, many with fatal injuries.

The Third Ypres Campaign continued until 10 November1917, with a series of 'pushes' which culminated in the capture of Passchendaele village and most of the ridge beyond. It was, undoubtedly, one of the most horrific events in the history of Western Europe. The campaign itself, and the so–called 'Battle of Passchendaele' confound our modern understandings of warfare. The 'known facts' – that British and Dominion forces sustained approximately 275,000 casualties (including over 70,000 dead);[20] that civilised societies knowingly sent young men to their doom in the hell of the Flanders mud; that both sides employed weapons of mass destruction; that governments stood by and watched as the slaughter continued – defy imagination.

Nurses in CCSs and field hospitals close to the front lines were among the few who saw and understood what was happening. They had a sense of Passchendaele's relentless inevitability: to embark on such a campaign was easy to end it almost impossible. They also understood its true cost: the destruction of tens of thousands of hopeful, young lives. In the face of such despair, they focused on what they could achieve. They could save some men – knowing that these saved lives would once more be returned to the conflict. They could ease the pain and suffering of those who reached the safety of a CCS. But for those who died on the battlefield they could do nothing, and the knowledge of those forsaken men – some of whom were their own loved ones – haunted them for the rest of their lives.

Professor Christine Hallett is Director of the UK Centre for the History of Nursing, Chair of the UK Association for the History of Nursing and President of the European Association for the History of Nursing. Christine trained as a nurse and health visitor in the 1980s and holds first degrees and PhDs in both Nursing and History. She practised as a community nurse before becoming a lecturer at the University of Manchester in 1993. During her career at Manchester, she has published in the fields of nursing education, clinical practice, and history. She is a co–editor for the academic book series, Nursing History and Humanities *at Manchester University Press and holds Fellowships of both the Royal Society of Medicine and the Royal Society for the Arts.*



The Ypres Salient saw some of the bitterest fighting of the First World War. In casualty clearing stations, on ambulance trains and barges, and at base hospitals near the French and Belgian coasts, nurses of many nations cared for these traumatised and damaged men. Drawing on letters, diaries and personal accounts from archives all over the world, Christine Hallett's latest book, recounts their experiences behind the Ypres Salient in one of the most intense and prolonged casualty evacuation processes in the history of modern warfare.

Nurses of Passchendaele: Caring for the Wounded of the Ypres Campaigns, 1914–1918, *was published on 30 June 2017 by Pen and Sword Books to coincide with the centenary of the Third Battle of Ypres – £12.99.*

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(2) May Tilton, *The Grey Battalion,*(Sydney, Angus & Robertson Ltd., 1933), p.214.

(3) Luard, *Unknown Warriors*, p.194.

(4) Tilton, *The Grey Battalion*: p.217.

(5) Luard, *Unknown Warriors*: pp.196–8.

(6) Tilton, *The Grey Battalion*: p.255.

(7) *Ibid*, p.219.

(8) Luard, *Unknown Warriors*: p.203.

(9) *Ibid*, p.211.

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(12) Tilton, *The Grey Battalion*: pp.227.

(13) Luard, *Unknown Warriors* : pp.226.

(14) *Ibid*, pp.228–9.

(15) *London Gazette*, 17 October, 1917.

(16) May Tilton, *The Grey Battalion*: p.235.

(17) *London Gazette*, 17 October, 1917.

(18) This text is taken from a Yorkshire newspaper cutting, a copy of which is available in: Nelle Rote, *Nurse Helen Fairchild*: p.50.

(19) Kate Luard, *Unknown Warriors*: p 236.

(20) Figures are quoted from: Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Passchendaele: The Untold Story,* Third Edition, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2016 [first published 1996]): p.195.

A New Circular Tour of the Passchendaele Battlefields

by Jerry Murland

Route information: A circular tour of the Passchendaele battlefields starting at:
The Passchendaele Memorial Museum in Zonnebeke
Coordinates: 50°52 13.91 N – 2°59 15.29 E
Distance: 12.3km/7.7 miles
Suitable for: 🚲 🚶
Grade: Moderate
Toilets: Memorial Museum and Tyne Cot Cemetery
Maps: NGI 1:20 000 Zonnebeke–Moorslede 28/3–4

General description and context

The Allies' objective in the Third Battle of Ypres was to break through the German defences, seize the high ground of the Passchendaele ridge and from there capture the German–occupied Belgian channel ports. These ports were important to the German strategy, as many of their deadly submarines menacing Allied shipping operated from them. Somehow over the years – and it had certainly taken root in the imagination of veterans of the battle by the 1960s – the series of battles fought between 31 July and 10 November 1917 which constituted Third Ypres became distilled into just one word: 'Passchendaele'. This is misleading as the battle for the village (Passendale today) only occupied a few weeks of the four–month long campaign. Today, well–used images depicting acres of featureless, shell–churned quagmire and flooded shell holes seamed with narrow duckboard tracks are closely associated with that battle and have been appropriated by popular history as being typical of the entire war. This is of course incorrect. The Third Battle of Ypres began in the warmth of a dry July in 1917, although it began to rain heavily as the attack progressed on the first day and even in September there was another exceptionally dry period when water shortages became an issue for the attacking troops. This route is punctuated with numerous information panels, particularly along the line of what was the old Ypres – Roulers (now Roeselare) railway line, and starts at Zonnebeke. For the most part it follows the advance of the Australians and Canadians to Passendale village on traffic free pathways and minor roads. Superb views can be had across the battlefields from the Wieltje road before the route cuts back across the Ravebeek valley to Tyne Cot cemetery and returns via the old railway to Zonnebeke.

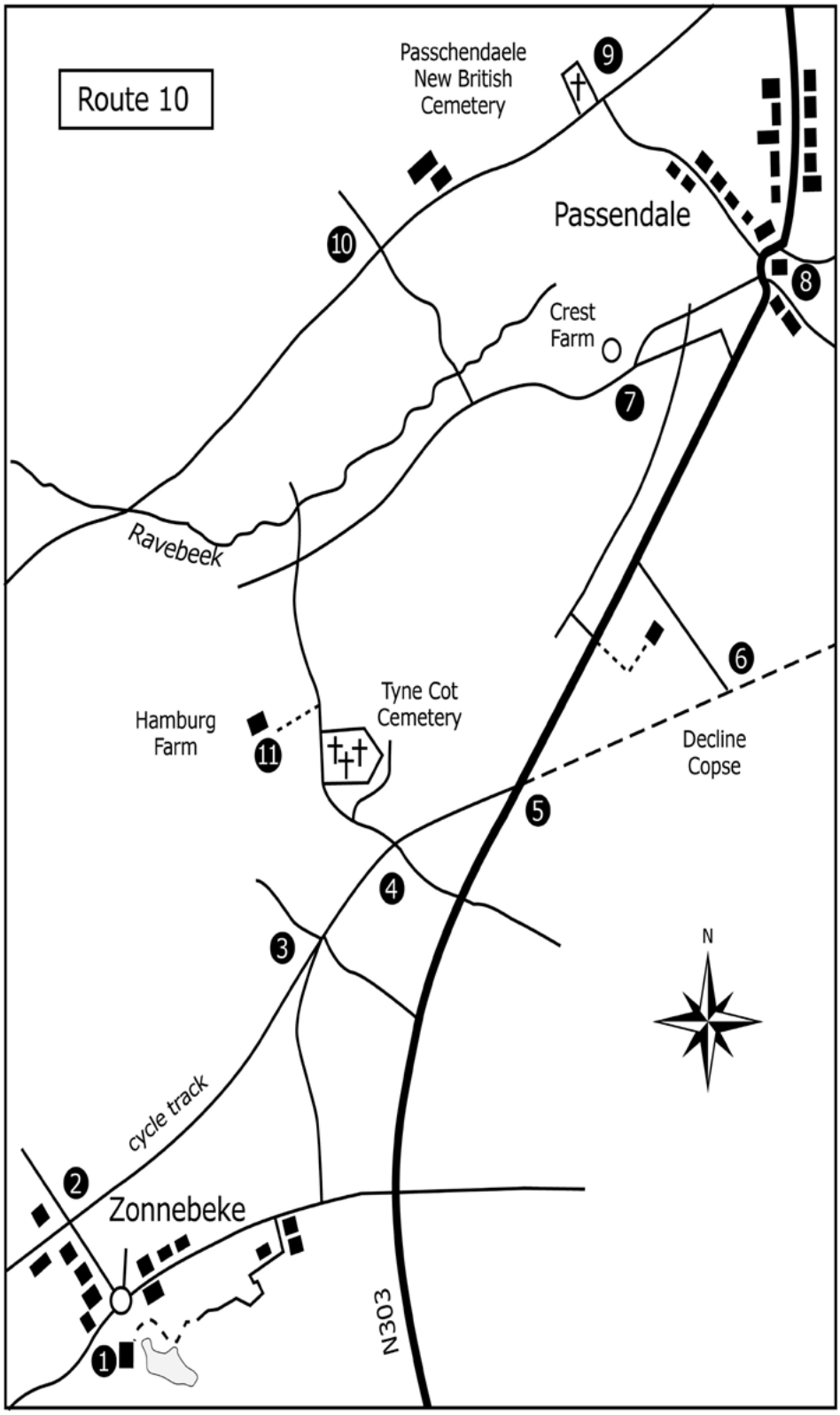
Directions to start

Zonnebeke is best approached using the N332 from Ypres (now Ieper). In Zonnebeke turn right before reaching the church on to the Berten Pilstraat. The museum is signposted on the right. There is ample parking in the large car park of the museum.

Route description

From the car park ❶ return along Berten Pilstraat and turn right. At the roundabout turn left onto Ieperstraat. Continue straight ahead to meet the cycle and pedestrian path immediately after the old brick station building ❷ on the right. The station was built in 1898 and suffered under the artillery pummelling Zonnebeke received during the war. Only a small part of the re–built red brick complex remains today amid a rash of new housing which has sprung up in recent years on what was the original siding and goods yard to the north.

Turn right to take the obvious cycle track and pass the old station building on your right. The high ground of the West Flanders – Passchendaele – ridge soon comes into view after a short distance. It was this ground the Allied forces hoped to seize in 1917.



The view along the Ypres–Roulers railway line from Zonnebeke Station on 10 October 1918 photographed after a week of intensive engineering work. The early stages of the tour follow the line of the track as it ascends the Passchendaele Ridge in the distance. Courtesy IWM Q46667

The Thames Farm bunker alongside the line of the old Ypres–Roulers railway today. Author

Continue along the cycle track, passing the **Thames Farm bunker** – a three–room, German aid post incorporated into the trench system – on the right, until it crosses a metalled road – Schipstraat.

This is **Daring Crossing** ❸ where the Ypres–Roulers railway crossed the road. On British trench maps the level crossings in this area all began with the letter 'D'. Captured by the Australian 44th Battalion, the crossing was fortified at the time by three bunkers, each of which had to be overcome. On 4 October 1917 the Australians launched their attack which became known as the Battle of Broodseinde, and although casualties on both sides were very high it was a day which is regarded as the most successful of the entire Third Ypres campaign. The four ANZAC Divisions suffered more than 8,000 men killed wounded or missing. The Australian 10 Brigade alone lost 25 officers and almost 900 men in a battle that exacted a heavy price on both sides. Of the many German dead killed that day, one man – **Otto Beiber** – is buried in the original battlefield cemetery in rear of the Cross of Sacrifice at Tyne Cot Cemetery, just 500m away to the north, along with three other unidentified German soldiers. At this point you would be pushing through the German front line system which ran, left to right to your front, between you and the site of what was the next level crossing up ahead.

Continue to the second crossing ❹ with Tynecotstraat. This was **Dash Crossing**, the point at which the railway sliced through the West Flanders Ridge in a deep cutting with steep banks to either side. That cutting is now directly ahead of you. There is an information board 150m further along the cycle track. Stop here. German dugouts, shelters and machine–gun positions were situated in the bank to your left whilst the German cemetery of Keerselaarhoek – clearly visible on British trench maps of the time – was on the elevated ground just beyond. In the 1950s the German soldiers buried there were moved into the large German concentration cemetery at Langemarck. This spot marks the furthest point reached by the Australians of the 44th Battalion on 4 October 1917

Stretcher bearers of the 9th Australian Field Ambulance, utterly exhausted, sleep in the mud at their relay post on the railway embankment in front of Thames Farm on 10 October. Left to right: unidentified; Private S J Watson; Private Jim Campbell of O'Brien Street, Bondi, New South Wales (NSW); Private R 'Bob' Mowbray; Private R Jamieson, Railway Street, Petersham, Victoria; Private Robert Barker, Abbotsford Road, Homebush, NSW; Private J o'C Arkins, Murray River, NSW; Private Alfred W Moss, Hampstead Road, Petersham, Victoria; unidentified. Courtesy AWM E00941

A less well known – and admittedly poorer quality – version of a very famous image showing Australian soldiers sheltering in funk holes amongst dead comrades and dead Germans in the railway cutting just north of Dash Crossing taken on 12 October 1917. The camera has panned to show more of the cutting towards Zonnebeke, revealing two more bodies furthest from the camera which are not on the more famous version. The soldier in steel helmet to the right has been identified as Private Austin Garnet Henderson of the 38th Battalion of the AIF is on the extreme right. Courtesy AWM E04673A

The capture of the Broodseinde Ridge was not the end of the story; this section of railway witnessed some of the most vicious fighting of the entire campaign. On 9 October, four Territorial battalions of Lancashire Fusiliers of the 66th Division lost 307 dead of whom 247 were listed as missing. During excavations of the railway on 27 May 2005 the original rails and sleepers were uncovered along with the remains of one of those Lancashire Fusiliers – a young man, possibly an officer, of between 18 and 24 years of age – who was found in a shell hole between two sleepers. Artefacts found with the remains included a wristwatch, fountain pen, engraved cigarette case and wallet bearing the words 'The Central Bank, Santa Barbara, Cal.'. A Dutch Bible had been placed on his skull and he had been wrapped in a canvas groundsheet. Sadly it was impossible to identify the body and he was re–interred in Tyne Cot Cemetery over two years later on 4 July 2007. This was also the 'start line' – it stretched from the eastern boundary of the old German cemetery where it overlooked this cutting, northwest to Augustus Wood – for the next Australian attack on 12 October 1917.

Continue on to where the track meets the Broodseinde–Passendale road. This was **Defy Crossing** ❺ and if you look along the road to your left you will see Passendale church up the rise and – vegetation permitting – the rather squat memorial to the 85th Canadian Infantry Battalion standing alone on the skyline. Take care when crossing as this can be a very busy road. Stay on the cycle track. The going is good initially but the ground becomes uneven and in wet weather can be quite heavy going. Just before reaching the road ahead you will pass through the former site of **Decline Copse** which straddled the railway line in 1917. The 3rd Australian Division attacked across this ground on 12 October during the First Battle of Passchendaele. It was here that the Australians were held up by machine–gun fire from a pill box beyond the road ahead. **Captain Clarence Smith Jeffries** of the 34th Battalion, who had already organised the capture of 35 men and four machine guns from two pillboxes north of Augustus Wood and near Heine House earlier that day, organised another attack on the strong point holding the Australians up.

Captain Clarence Jeffries VC

The pill box was captured along with 40 prisoners and two machine guns guns but Jeffries was killed in the attempt, an action for which he received a posthumous VC. Jeffries is buried in Tyne Cot Cemetery, ironically very close to a pillbox similar to the ones he attacked that day.

Confusion as to who had – or had not – cleared Decline Copse of enemy troops led to a German counter–attack a little over two weeks later on 28 October just as the Canadian 85th Battalion was relieving the hard–pressed 44th Battalion. It was here that **Private Lawrence** held off the attack on the eastern edge of the copse with a single Lewis Gun and two pans of ammunition to allow more men to come forward and re–establish the line.

The Crest Farm Memorial with Passchendaele Church in the distance. Author

At the junction with the road ahead, turn left ❻ on to Nieuwemolenstraat and continue uphill towards the N303.

At the junction with the N303 – Passchendaelestraat – turn left to the access track which leads to the 85th Battalion memorial containing the names of the 13 officers and 113 other ranks who fell during their attack. After visiting the memorial, return to the main road and cross straight over into Rozestraat, following the road to the junction. Turn right and continue parallel to the N303 until you reach the junction with Martinegatstraat. Turn left to reach the Canadian Memorial at **Crest Farm** ❼ which was taken by the 72nd Canadian Infantry Battalion on 30 October. The Farm held a dominating position over the two spurs of ground that ran southwest from the main Passchendaele ridge. If you stand next to the memorial and look around, you can get some idea of the fields of fire the defending Germans had over their attackers.

Looking north over the Ravebeek valley you can see Passchendaele New British Cemetery on the Bellevue Ridge. The sheer determination of the Canadians in continuing their advance and keeping very close behind the artillery barrage still ranks as one of the finest infantry attacks by a single unit of the entire campaign. The survivors held the farm until they were relieved in the early hours of 2 November 1917. It was from a jumping off line some 300m towards Passchendale itself that the 2nd Canadian Division began the final assault on the village in this sector four days later on 6 November.

Retrace your route and just before the first turn left on to Canadalaan note the buildings on the right. The land behind these was the spot noted as the first burial place of Joseph Arthur Chislett who was hit by shrapnel and killed on 6 November whilst acting as a carrier with the 6th Canadian Machine Gun Company. Chislett, born in Deddington near Banbury in Oxfordshire, was the youngest of nine children of Deddington draper James Chislett and had emigrated to Canada in 1912, one of many British–born men serving with the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Killed just four days before the official end of the Third Ypres campaign, Joseph's death and that of an older brother Norman 'bookended', the battle almost exactly: Norman being killed on the opening day – 31 July – at Hollebeke serving with the 18/Battalion (Arts and Crafts) King's Royal Rifle Corps. Today the brothers are remembered together once more on the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing

Turn onto Canadalaan. As the road bears right the church comes into view dead ahead. Continue uphill to the village centre. Although this road was not in existence in 1917, it was the route the Canadian 27th Battalion took when they entered the village on 6 November and it was somewhere in the vicinity of this road that **Private James Robertson** of the 27th won his Victoria Cross by rushing a German machine–gun position.

Private James Robertson VC

He is the only one of the nine Canadian VCs killed in the campaign who has a known grave. You will find him at Tyne Cot. It is difficult to believe that Passendale village was almost completely obliterated due to the intensity of the British shelling. What was, in 1916, a village with houses, shops, roads and lanes shaded by avenues of trees had, by early November 1917, become a slough of closely overlapping shell craters filled with foetid water. There were no identifying features and even the site of the church – a point of identification today – had to be marked by a board erected by the defending Germans.

The church of Sint–Audomarus ❽ now dominates the village square and inside you will find the memorial window to the British 66th Division featuring the names of Lancashire towns with their coats of arms around the central figure of St George. Across the road on the front of the *Stadhuis* are several plaques commemorating Belgian regiments of both world wars and the Western Front Association Passchendaele Memorial while in the square itself is a relief map by Australian sculptor Ross Bastiaan.

Leave the square with the *Stadhuis* on your left and continue up Vierde Regiment Karabinierstraat until you meet the main road.❾ Opposite is **Passchendaele New British Cemetery** where you will find an Albertina Marker to the right of the entrance.

The entrance to Passchendaele New British Cemetery. Author

Look over the back wall of the cemetery into the fields beyond. Even after the closure of the Third Ypres campaign on 10 November 1917 some very heavy fighting took place in the weeks which followed as the Allies tried to gain overall command of the ridge northeast of Passchendaele for the winter. At 1.55 am on the bright moonlit night of 2 December 1917, battalions of the 8th and 32nd Divisions – including the regular 2/Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry – launched an attack on the German trenches from positions some 500m off into the fields, moving diagonally away from you to the right. It was the only large–scale night attack of the entire campaign. 2/KOYLI had set off from Irish Farm almost seven hours earlier. The march of 8km along

wooden duckboard tracks on a winter's night through what was by then a cratered, featureless wasteland of cloying mud can only be imagined. The men were seen as soon as they rose to the attack and were cut down by heavy machine–gun fire as they struggled forward in the direction of Venison Farm trying to cross the Passchendaele–Westroozebeke road. Almost all the officers and senior NCOs became casualties. The attack failed and losses were very heavy. Six officers and 23 men were killed with 120 men wounded and 41 missing. Later revisions put the total number of killed at 52. Amongst the missing was pre–war regular soldier **Private Albert Cooksey**, great uncle of the *Stand To!* editor. Albert Cooksey has no known grave and is remembered at Tyne Cot on Panel 108 of the Memorial to the Missing along with many of his comrades who also went missing that night.

Passchendaele New British Cemetery was begun when graves were brought in from the battlefields of Passchendaele and Langemarck after the Armistice. Of the 2,101 burials most are from are from 1917, tragically 1,600 are unidentified. As you would expect there are a large number of Canadian troops buried here along with their ANZAC comrades. Amongst the identified Canadians are ten officers and men of the Princess Partricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI), probably all casualties from the 30 October fighting up the Ravebeek valley. **Lieutenant Harold Agar** (X.E.22) was another native born 'Brit' – originally from Hull – before he emigrated to teach in Canada. A former territorial soldier he was killed on 30 October serving in A Company PPCLI. Another PPCLI officer who was the nephew of Sir Rider Haggard the author was **Captain Rider Lancelot Haggard** (VII.A.19) He worked as a bank clerk in Ottowa before enlisting as a private in August 1914 and was commissioned a year later. He saw action at the Battle of Mount Sorrel and on the Somme before being wounded in September 1916. After returning from leave in October 1917, he was killed by shell fire on 30 October 1917. He was 24–years–old. **Private William Barclay** (VIII.B.17) was killed on 26 October serving with A Company of the Canadian 58th Battalion. William enlisted in February 1916 at Stratford, Ontario, where he was working as a labourer. Originally from Aberdeenshire, his death left his wife Mary a widow and she remembered him with the inscription *'A silent thought, a secret tear, keep his memory ever dear'*. **Second Lieutenant Stanley Lorne Crowther** (VII.E.30) from Toronto was killed flying a Nieuport Scout with 29 Squadron on 20 September 1917. The inscription on his headstone reads, *'He died at his post of duty, a soldier of the air'*. His brother William, serving as a major with the Canadian 3rd Battalion was killed on 3 May 1917 at Fresnoy. On the rear wall of the cemetery are seven special memorials, one of which commemorates the **Rev 4th Class Harry Dickinson** from Hall Green in Birmingham who was attached to the Artist's Rifles and was killed on 30 September 1917. Five more of the Artist's Rifles lie in the cemetery. Before you leave pay your respects to **Rifleman Percy Milburn** (XII.B.5) of 16/King's Royal Rifle Corps, who lies in a row with of ten of his comrades, of which only three are identified.

Lieutenant Hugh McKenzie VC (left) and Sergeant George Mullin VC

After leaving the cemetery turn right. This short section of road (0.89 km) has no dedicated foot or cycle path and pedestrians should walk on the left facing towards the oncoming traffic. If desired this section can be avoided altogether by retracing your route to Crest Farm and following Canadalaan to the junction with Tynecotstraat.

You are now heading down the West Flanders Ridge, this section known also as the Bellevue Spur, in the direction of Ypres. As you begin to descend, the views over to the right open out and there are superb views over the 1917 battlefield. On a clear day you can see the high ground of the Kemmelberg in the distance. In 1917 British and Commonwealth forces slogged their way up the ground you see stretching out below you. It took them almost exactly100 days to get from a line some 8km away down the slope up to Passchendaele village which you have just left. Across to your left is Crest Farm and if you follow the ridge round to its right, the Cross of Sacrifice at Tyne Cot Cemetery can be seen. This is our next port of call.

At the next crossroads, ❿ named **Mallard Crossroads** on trench maps, turn left into Bornstraat, the road now descends down into the Ravebeek valley. The first farm you pass on the right is the approximate position of **Snipe Hall** and on the opposite side of the road about 200m to the east was **Duck Lodge**, which no longer exists. The strongly defended Snipe Hall had held up the advance in this area since 26 October and was finally overcome by the PPCLI in a night attack. Overall progress was severely handicapped by the already boggy nature of the valley which had been made worse by the shellfire of both sides destroying the banks of the *beek* and forcing water up from sub–surface layers of sand. The result was that the valley quickly became a quagmire and, in places, impassable for attacking troops. On 30 October the PPCLI were again attacking up the valley and were held up by machine–gun fire from Duck Lodge and from a bunker on the ridge just south of the present position of Passchendaele New British Cemetery. The subsequent action resulted in two Canadian VCs: **Sergeant George Mullin**, PPCLI, and **Lieutenant Hugh McKenzie**, Canadian Machine Gun Corps. George Mullin survived the war and died in 1963 but Hugh McKenzie was killed and is commemorated on the Menin Gate.

The cost of progress had been high; that evening the battalion had been reduced to a mere 180 fighting men.

After crossing the *beek* turn right at the junction into Canadalaan, ignore the first turning on the left and continue to the cross roads with Tynecotstraat. This is the area known as **Waterfields**. Turn left at the cross roads and climb gently uphill, go past the first farm and just before you reach the cemetery stop by the farm track on the right which leads down to farm buildings. This was known as Hamburg Farm ⓫ where there were two pillboxes, one of which still stands on private land behind the farm buildings obscured by the trees and the other – now gone – which stood just to the north of the drive in the field in front of you. Another stood off in the fields some 30m behind you. Up ahead, along the road to your left, you can see the front wall and entrance of Tyne Cot Cemetery. It was from a position about 1,500m across the fields over to your left front that the men of the Australian 40th Battalion began their advance on the morning of 4 October 1917 at the start of the Battle of Broodseinde. Their objective was to take the pill–boxes and trenches of the German *Flandern I* positions around Tyne Cot but as the Tasmanians pushed through 39th Battalion onto the ridge, machine–gun fire from the Hamburg bunkers pinned them down. Under murderous fire **Captain William Ruddock** managed to work his company from shell hole to shell hole around the side of the pill–box to lay down covering fire. Sergeant Lewis McGee, pistol in hand, jumped up and charged across 50m of open ground straight towards the pillbox, shot the machine–gun crew and captured the rest of the garrison. The entire 'Hamburg' position was then stormed at a rush – imagine wild–eyed Tasmanians racing across the field towards you. Casualties included 22–years–old **Lieutenant Norman Meagher** who was killed at the head of the charge. All the final objectives, including the Tyne Cot system of five pill boxes which were part of the German

Flandern I defences in this area – three of which you can still see today – were taken. A fourth still lies beneath the surface at the end of the incomplete Row G in Plot 45 while the fifth no longer exists lying roughly beneath the northerly apse of the Memorial to the Missing.

For his actions at Hamburg Farm, **Lewis McGee** was awarded the Victoria Cross.

Sergeant Lewis McGee VC

Eight days later he was killed attacking another pill box in similar daring fashion near a position named Augustus, just 700m to the northeast of the cemetery.

Walk on to the lower entrance gate where there is an information board. You can either enter the cemetery at this point or continue past the entrance and turn left to find the visitor's centre and toilets. Cyclists will find bike racks in the car park. With regard to the cemetery's name, for years the generally accepted version was always that the term 'cot' was derived from 'cottage', so called by men of the 50th Northumbrian Division as the outline of German pillboxes of the *Flandern 1 Stellung* on the horizon reminded them of 'cottages beside the Tyne'. The name, however, appears on maps from mid–1916 – on earlier maps it is marked as 'cott' – before the arrival of the 50th Division and also in the immediate vicinity are other farmhouses named after French and English rivers; Marne, Seine, Thames. There is also a local legend that the name is an Anglicised corruption of the Flemish word for chicken coop – t'hinnekot. In truth the origins of the name will probably never be known for sure.

Tyne Cot contains nearly 12,000 graves, over 8,000 of which are unidentified.

Apart from being the largest British military cemetery in the world it is probably one of the most visited, attracting school parties and battlefield tours from far and wide. The rows and rows of pale headstones are almost overwhelming, particularly when the setting sun casts a glorious pink hue over the stonework. What does become clear is that a single visit to this cemetery is never enough. If you stand at the Cross of Sacrifice and look southwest towards Ypres you can see how the high ground you are standing on – the Broodseinde Ridge – dominated the 3rd Australian Division's attack of October 1917. From here on a clear day the spires of Ypres can be seen in the middle–distance and you can clearly see the Kemmelberg beyond. The cemetery is organised into 67 plots which can be identified from the plan in the cemetery register to be found in the entrance gatehouse. Remains were brought here after the Armistice from all over the battlefield, hence the size. There are three VC holders buried here, **Captain Clarence Jeffries** (XL.E.1), **Sergeant Lewis McGee** (XX.D.1) and **Private James Robertson** (LVIII.D.26.). It is interesting to note that Lewis McGee earned his VC, was killed and is buried all within an area not much larger than 500m^2. Three other VC holders have their names on the Tyne Cot Memorial which stands at the rear of the cemetery, **Lieutenant Colonel Phillip Bent** (Panel 50), **Lance Corporal Ernest Seaman** (Panel 70) and **Corporal William Clamp** (Panel 52). The register for the memorial is kept in the left hand pavilion. The New Zealand Memorial is to be found in the central apse. Altogether there are some 35,000 names of the missing on the 150m long memorial wall.

The most senior officer buried here is **Brigadier General James Riddell** (XXXIV.H.14) who was killed whilst in command of 149 Infantry Brigade on 26 April 1915, having arrived in Belgium only a few days previously. Riddell was a native of the Northumberland coastal village of Warkworth and is also commemorated on the village war memorial. On the same village memorial is **Second Lieutenant Robert Thompson,** a Military Cross holder who was killed on 26 October 1917 serving in 7/Northumberland Fusiliers. Thompson's name is commemorated

Dusk falls over Tyne Cot Cemetery in high summer. Author

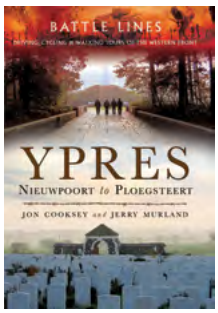
Otto Bieber's grave behind the Cross of Sacrifice (left) and a profound epitaph for Second Lieutenant Arthur Young (grave IV.G.21) in Tyne Cot Cemetery. Author

on Panel 19. The memorial wall holds the names of at least ten pairs of brothers and one family of three New Zealand soldiers who were all killed within a week of each other. **Privates Edwin** and **Leslie Newlove** (Panel 2) died while serving with 2/Canterbury Regiment on 12 October 1917 while their brother **Leonard Newlove (**Panel 1) serving with 3/Auckland Regiment, was killed eight days earlier. **Edward** (Panel 112) and **Robert Hannah** (Panel 138) from Barrow–in–Furness were both serving as second lieutenants and both were killed on 16 August 1917; Robert with 7/Royal Irish Rifles and Edward, who had been awarded the Military Cross in May 1916, with 1/King's Shropshire Light Infantry. Father and son, **Lieutenant Colonel Harry Moorhouse** (Panel 108) and **Captain Ronald Moorhouse** MC (Panel 113) were serving together in the same unit of 4/King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry when they were killed on 9 October in the Ravebeek valley. On Panel 10 is **Sergeant William Johnston** who was serving with 3/Coldstream Guards when he was killed on 9 October 1917. From Coldstream in Berwickshire, the 25–year–old was serving as a Metropolitan policeman when he was called up in 1914.

Of the seventeen RFC aviators buried here **Captain Vivian Wadham** (LXII.C.5) is perhaps the most distinguished. A brilliant pilot, he was killed on 17 January 1916 flying a BE2c with 15 Squadron, his observer, Sergeant N V Piper, was taken prisoner. The 24–year–old Wadham was one of the original aviators who flew to France in August 1914 and flew some of the first ever air reconnaissance patrols before the Battle of Mons. **Second Lieutenant Charles Moody** (LVIII.A.28) was only 18–years–old when he was shot down near Houthulst flying a Nieuport Scout with 1 Squadron, he had been with the squadron for only ten days. Another 18–year–old pilot was **Second Lieutenant George Cowie** (I.AA.21) who was shot down on 22 October 1917 in his Sopwith Pup flying with 54 Squadron. **Lieutenant Guy Drummond** (LIX.B.28), serving with the 13th Canadian Infantry Battalion, was the son of the Montreal banker, Sir George Drummond. He was killed on 22 April 1915 during the Second Battle of Ypres. You will find the gallant **Lieutenant Norman Meagher** (XVI.A.7) from Hobart, who took part in the charge on Hamburg Farm just a few hundred metres away, buried close to the Cross of Sacrifice.

Exit the cemetery via the gate at the rear which will take you to the visitor's centre and toilets. After leaving the car park, turn right then left, and, after 200m you will arrive back at **Dash Crossing** ❹ where you were earlier.

Turn right onto the cycle track continuing to **Daring Crossing**. ❸ At this point ignore the cycle track and take the road called Groenstraat which runs parallel to the track on the left. The road bears left, away from the cycle track and eventually reaches the main N332 Zonnebeke – Broodseinde road. At the T junction turn right on to Roeselarestraat and cross the road. Take the next road on the left – Wolvestraat – which takes you into a small estate of private houses. Take the next turn right – De Patine – and in 250m you will come to a T junction. Turn left and keep bearing right until you see a metal gate leading into the chateau grounds which are ahead of you. Pass through the gate and follow the track past the lake to the museum and your vehicle.



Extracted from Battle Lines Ypres – Nieuwpoort to Ploegsteert – *a walking, cycling and driving guide to the battlefields of Belgium from the North Sea coast to the French border by Jon Cooksey and Jerry Murland. Published by Pen and Sword Books.*

War Art

by David and Judith Cohen

dcfa@dircon.co.uk Tel: 020 8455 0863

Having contributed what we thought was our 'swan song' to *Stand To!* 107, Jon Cooksey has persuaded us to put together a small collection of our favourite works reflecting the Third Battle of Ypres for this special 1917–2017 edition.

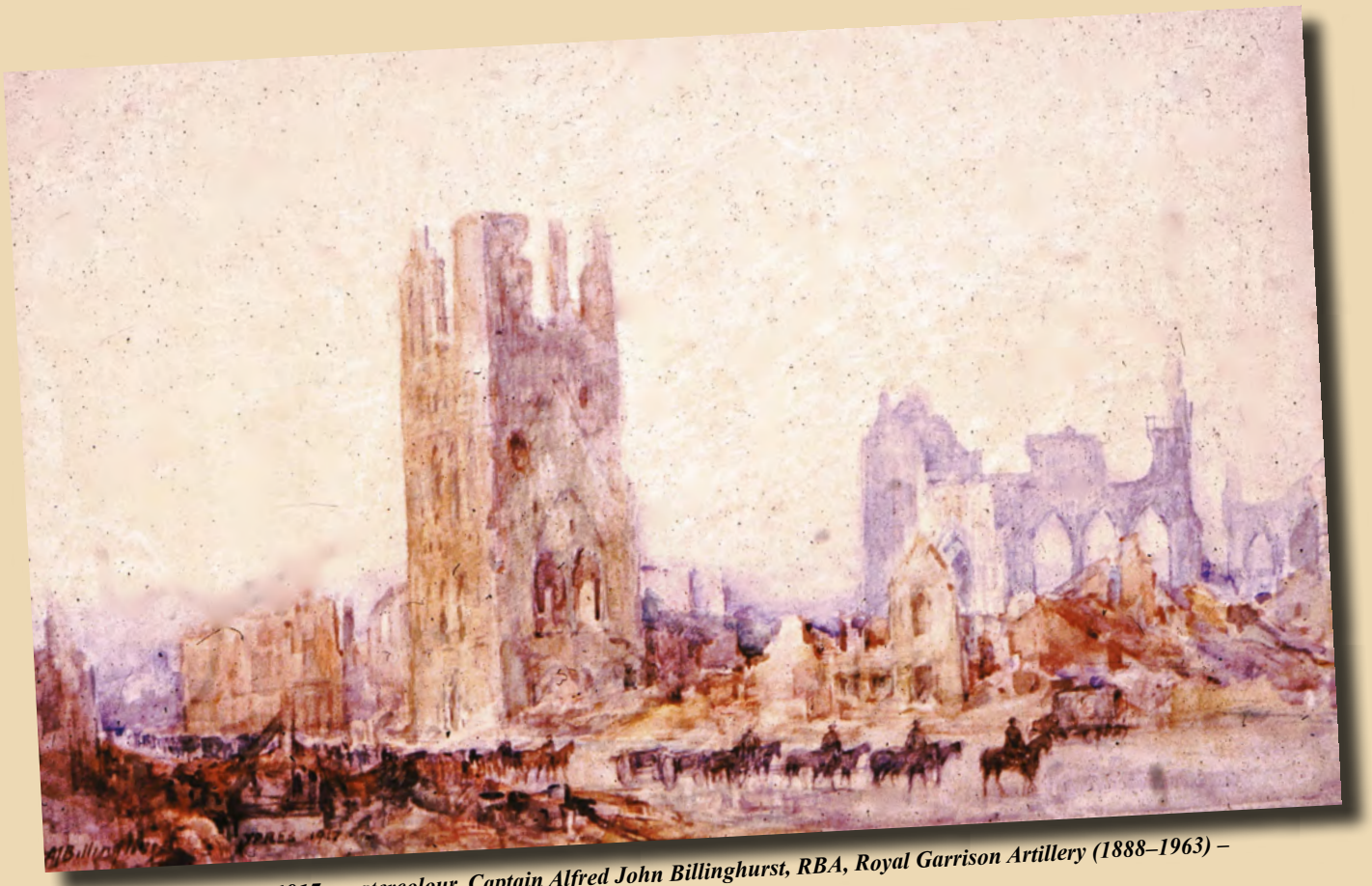
We hope members will enjoy looking through these paintings and drawings, all of which have hung on our walls over the years and have gone on to give pleasure to private clients and museums all over the world.

Pond Farm, St Julien – 1917 – watercolour. Owned in 1914 by farmer Arsène Marant, Pond Farm, just southeast of the village of St Julien became a German strongpoint* –Kazerne Haeseler. *The farm gained prominence for itself during the Second Battle of Ypres in 1915 and the bruising Passchendaele campaign of 1917. Lieutenant David S Neave, Exhib. 1903–1936

Pond Farm and bunker– **Kazerne Graf Haeseler** *2 – in the 1980s photographed by the late Tony Spagnoly*

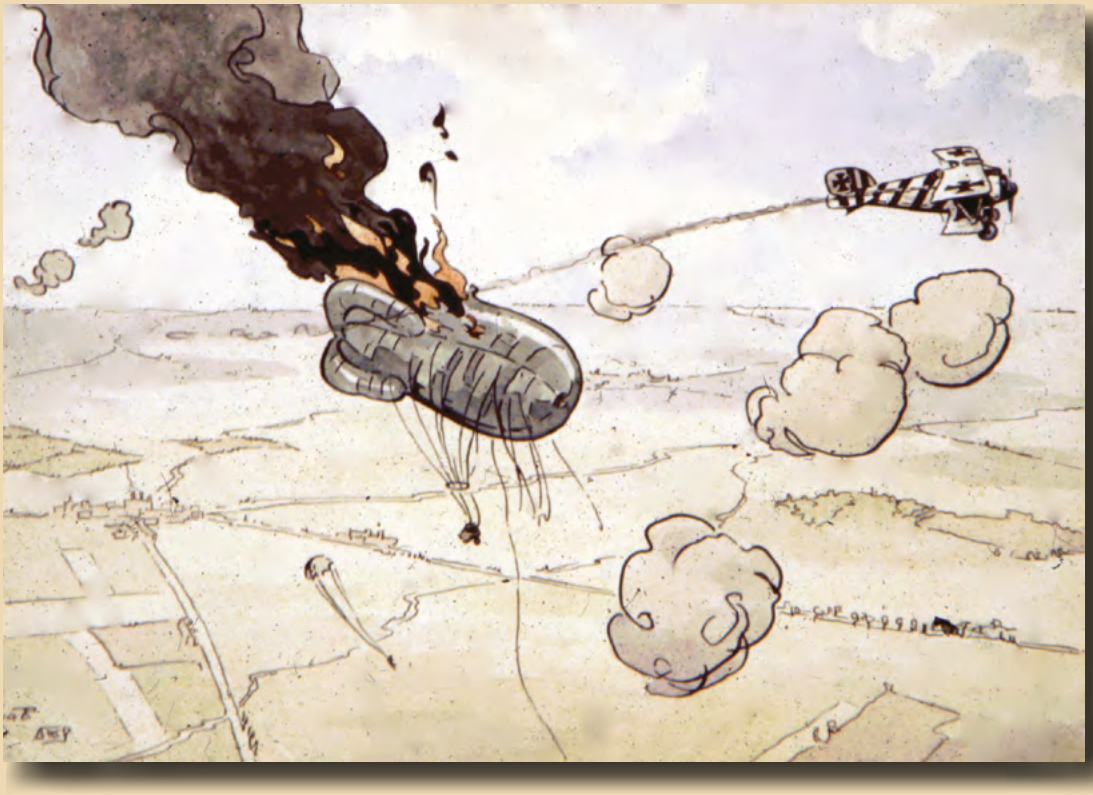
Ruins of the Cloth Hall and St Martin's Cathedral – oil. Sir Walter Russell, CVO RA RWS NEAC NPS IS (1867–1949)

Ypres – The Cloth Hall, Winter, 1917 – watercolour. Douglas Snowdon



Ypres – The Cloth Hall 1917 – watercolour. Captain Alfred John Billinghurst, RBA, Royal Garrison Artillery (1888–1963) – Commissioned 5 February 1916

Ypres, August 1917 – watercolour. Panoramic view of a duckboard track across the battlefield leading toward the high ground of Passchendaele. This was probably Richard Talbot Kelly's last recollection of this area – he was blown up on 5 August during a bombardment and invalided home. His diary reads 'Sunday 5th – fine day. Pioneers start work on new track. Go down to wagon line in afternoon via new position. 8 hours of gas shelling by Hun. Thompson gassed! Feel rotten about mid–day and go to bed?' In his memoirs, he recounts how he was talking to the captain from a neighbouring battery, when a German shell burst beside them. It was so close that he found himself at the bottom of the crater it had made, and as he crawled up the side, slightly dazed, he saw some men running up with shovels either to dig him out or cover up his remains. For some hours he was alright, but the force of the explosion had severely concussed all his 'insides' which then began to swell and cause pain. Next morning he was evacuated to the base hospital at Le Tréport, a converted hotel where Dr Crippen had spent his last nights in Europe before bolting to America. He was, for the first time in his life, an interesting medical case, and because no piece of shell had cut his skin and drawn blood he was officially unwounded. Yet he was on the danger list for some ten days before they dared ship him to England. The final paragraph in his memoirs – **A Subaltern's Odyssey** *says 'One does not hear the shell that gets one. If the ground had not been a bog and as soft as it is, it is absolutely certain that I would have been blown to bits.' Lieutenant Richard Barrett Talbot Kelly, MBE MC RI, 52nd Brigade, Royal Field Artillery (1896–1971)*



Messines, June 1917 – watercolour. A British observation balloons shot down by a German Albatros fighter plane – the observer has bailed out on his parachute. The German machine belonged to a local 'circus' whose planes were all striped. Talbot Kelly's diary of 23June 1917 states 'Fine morning. Had dinner in Poperinghe. 3 of our balloons shot down in flames, one after another, by Fritz aeroplane.' In a talk that David Cohen gave some time ago in Bodmin, Tony Grange–Bennett gave him a complete breakdown of the happenings in this drawing including the names of the officers involved, both British and German. He said that it was probably 23 June 1917 that squadron **Jasta** *4 shot down three British balloons over Wytschaete on the Messines Ridge around 1.15pm.The successful German pilots were* **Leutnant** *Hans Klein,* **Vizefeldwebel** *Kurt Wusthoff and* **Vizefeldwebel** *Ernst Clausnitzer. You will not be surprised to learn that the black and white bands were a recognised decoration for the Albatros and Pfalz machines of Jasta 4 which was one of four squadrons making up* **Jagdgeschwader Eins** *(Fighter Group 1) which was Richthofen's Flying Circus. The three British balloons were No. 38–7–2 commanded by Lieutenant A Rowbottom, 2–5–2 commanded by Lieutenant O L Vetter and 32–6–2 commanded by Second Lieutenant W F Forest, together with Lieutenant H Browne as observer. All four British balloon officers apparently escaped by using their parachutes. From this example, one can see how one small pen and ink and watercolour drawing can produce such incredible historical information. Lieutenant Richard Barrett Talbot Kelly*

The first tank, dead in Langemarck – 16 August 1917 – oil on canvas on board. A British Mark IV tank in the area of the heavy fighting around Maison du Hibou & Hillock Farm. Captain Louis Ginnett, Royal Garrison Artillery (1875–1946) – Commissioned 20 December 1916

The Passchendaele and Poelcapelle Ridge from the Triangle. Knocked–out tanks from actions around Mount Hibou Farm, August 1917 – oil on board. Captain Alfred John Billinghurst

Near Passchendaele, 1917 – gouache.Captain Richard Tennant Cooper, Royal Engineers (1885–1957) Commissioned 5 August 1916

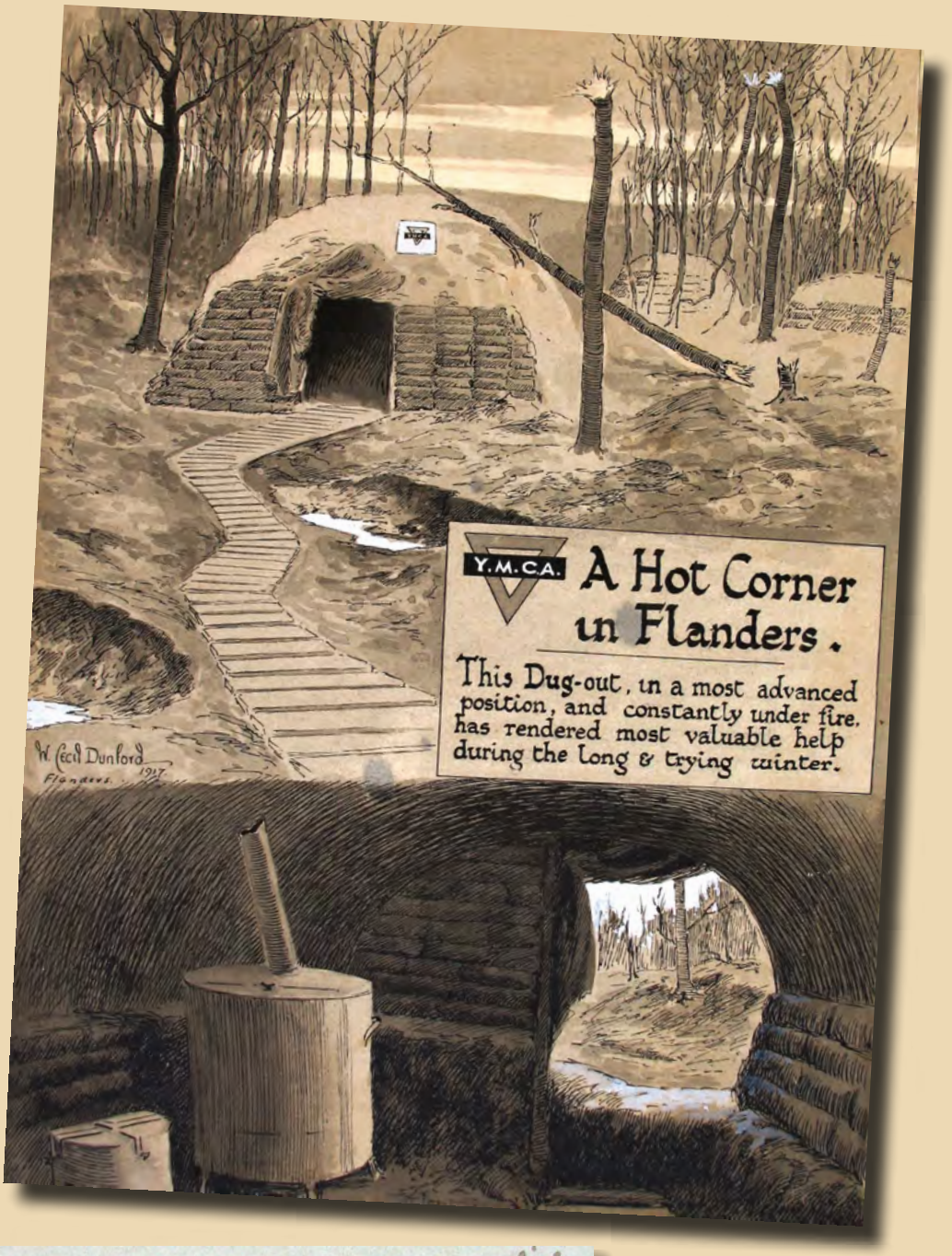
Canadians passing though Ypres, 1917 – charcoal & watercolour. Lieutenant Philip Dalton Hepworth, FRIBA FRS, Royal Engineers, b.1888

Ypres Salient. A group of six soldiers, in full kit and wearing gas masks 'moving up, passing a group of rats 'moving down – watercolour. Gunner F J Mears, Royal Garrison Artillery, died 1929

Stretcher party crossing the Menin Road at Ghulevelt. Ypres Salient – watercolour. Gunner F J Mears

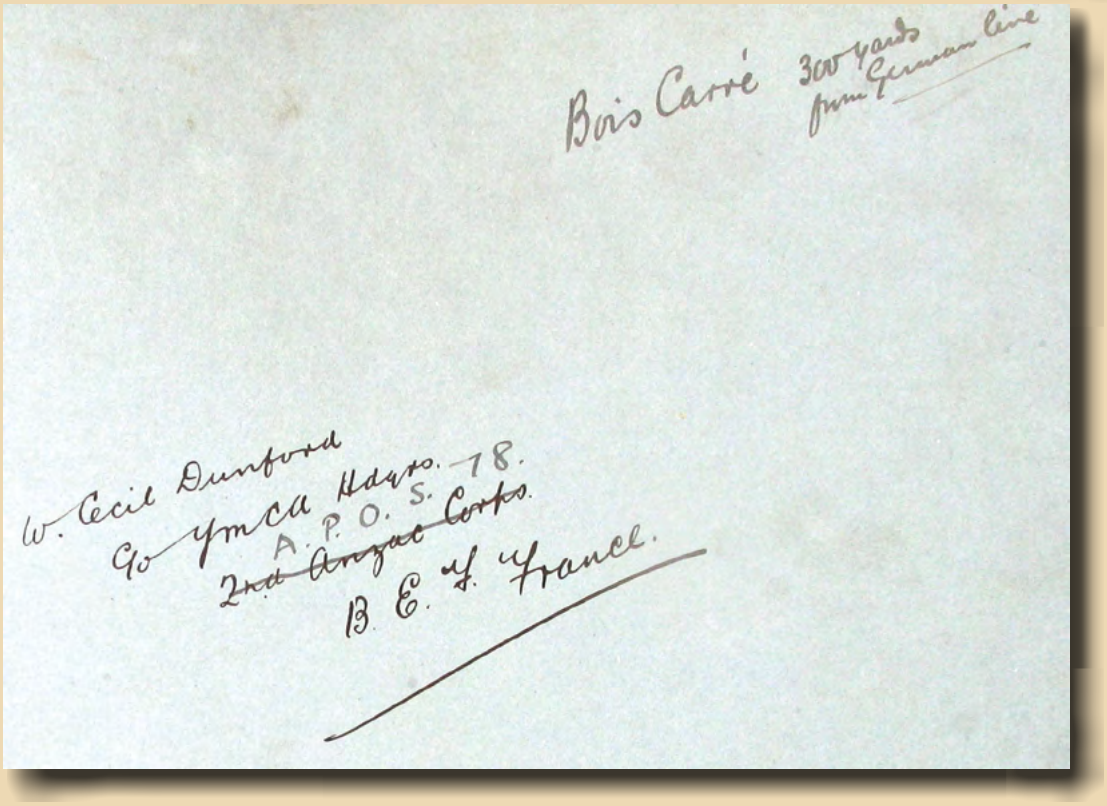
Ammunition going up for a show at 4.30am – Admiral's Road, Ypres, 1917 – pen & ink. Lieutenant R Graham Dixon, Royal Garrison Artillery – Commissioned 31 July 1917

Fires burning at Ypres, June 1917 – watercolour. Many a Town Major was killed directing traffic on this spot (quote from Tony Spagnoly). Lieutenant Ernest Stafford Carlos, (1881–1917) 8/Royal East Kents. Carlos was killed by shellfire in Battle Wood, Zillebeke, on the evening of 14 June 1917 while leading his platoon in an attack. His body now lies in Chester Farm Cemetery, Zillebeke



'Y.M.C.A. – A Hot Corner in Flanders. This dug–out, in a most advanced position, and constantly under fire, has rendered most valuable help during the long and trying Winter.' Inscribed verso 'Bois Carré – 300 yards from German line. W Cecil Dunford, c/o YMCA Headquarters, APOS. 78, BEF France.' Pen & ink & wash. W Cecil Dunford, FRSA RDS (1885–1969) – Dunford spent 1916–1918 spent with the YMCA and worked with the Australian Forces' Historical Record Department.

See reverse side below



Rewarding Sites around the Ypres Salient

by Tonie and Valmai Holt

In this year of the centenary of the 1917 Passchendaele Offensive, attention has moved from the Somme to the Ypres Salient. The authors have spent the last two years revisiting and researching this familiar battlefield for the major update of their Ypres/Passchendaele guide. This led to them discovering new sites of interest and looking again at established ones in the light of new discoveries. In setting out some of these sites in the following article Tonie and Valmai Holt hope to encourage readers – many of whom will already be well–acquainted with the area – to have another look too and in so doing perhaps trigger more research. The recommendations below very loosely follow the order of the authors' suggested itineraries but can just as easily be found without reference to the book as they are all located by GPS.

Approaching the Salient

Approach One: the most direct route to Ypres

1. Abeele Aerodrome Military Cemetery.
(GPS: 50.81489 2.65585)

Just off the D948/N38 before Poperinge, this is often by–passed. For anyone interested in Great War aviation this area is a mine of interest. From the airfield here 4 and 6 Squadrons of the RFC flew prior to the Second Battle of Ypres in April 1915. During that month **Lieutenant William Barnard Rhodes–Moorhouse** won the VC during a raid over nearby Courtrai (now Kortrijk), the first airman to perform an action of gallantry subsequently notified posthumously. Unusually, although he died in a Casualty Clearing Station, he was buried in his family home, Parnham House, Dorset. His son, Flying Officer William Henry Rhodes–Moorhouse, killed in the Battle of Britain aged 25, is also buried there.

Another great pilot, **Major Lanoe George Hawker,** was based here, as Commander of 6 Squadron. In July 1915 he attacked three enemy aircraft over the Menin Road single–handed, driving off one and downing the two others. For this act he, too, was awarded the VC. After shooting down a total of seven aircraft, he moved on to the Somme and, commanding 24 Squadron at Bertangles, he was involved in an epic hour–long duel with 'the Red Baron' – Manfred von Richtofen. Hawker was eventually brought down by him at Ligny–Tilloy in November 1916. His famous mantra was 'Attack everything'.

It has been reported that Hawker's original VC was stolen in 1940 and that a replacement was issued to Hawker's brother on 3 February 1960 which is now held by the Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon. In 1967 a stained glass window was erected to him in the family church of St Nicholas, Longparish and on 11 November 2011 a memorial to him was inaugurated in Ligny–Tilloy.

Begun in 1918, the cemetery was used by the French and British and also by the Americans. The French removed their graves after the Armistice and the Americans removed their 84 graves to In Flanders Field National Cemetery in the early 1920s.

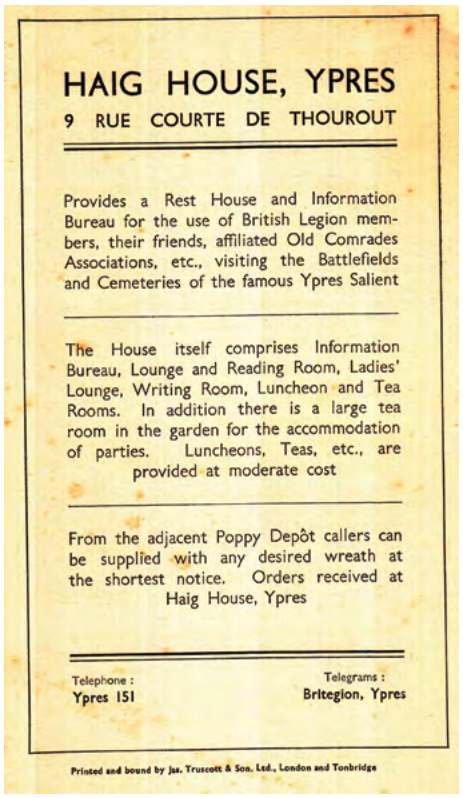
See also *Cameos of the Front: Salient Points Two* by Tony Spagnoly and Ted Smith (Pen and Sword).

Continuing towards Ieper, pass the impactful '**Agony' sculpture** of horses in war, continue to the junction with N308 and take it to:

2. Advert for Earl Haig House
(GPS: 50.8494 2.87083)
at No. 65 Poperingseweg

In early 2013, during the renovation on the house, the sign, covered (and therefore protected) since the late 1940s by tiles, was exposed and therefore became vulnerable to the elements. It advertises the British Legion

Abeele Aerodrome CWGC Cemetery



Advert for Haig House in 'Pillboxes of Flanders'

Advert for Earl Haig House, Ieper

(before it gained the word 'Royal') Earl Haig House at Korte Tourhoutstraat 9 – round the corner from the Grote Markt, Ypres – which opened on 28 April 1932.

The major ceremony, attended by VIPs, Legion Members with standards, pilgrims and crowds, was filmed and can be seen on Youtube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVqrXXMyXkA&feature=youtu.be Who can you spot?

It was a haven for pilgrims, where Poppy wreaths, luncheons and teas were available. The advert gives basic details, including the telephone and telegram numbers. The Military Upkeep Preservation Society (Committee Members – Genevra Charnsley & Jacques Ryckebosch, Chris Lock & Milena Kolorikova

and Iain McHenry) mounted a campaign to preserve it. Ieper Town Council, the Province and Flemish Heritage (by Minister for Heritage Geert Bourgeois) funded 40 per cent of the cost. Contact: Genevra on e–mail: info@ypres–fgt.com

Approach Two: a diversion through St Omer, Cassel and the Flanders Hills to Ieper

3. Longuenesse Souvenir CWGC Cemetery (GPS: 50.73119 2.2501)

On our last visit here we allowed ourselves the rare indulgence of making more time to examine this fascinating cemetery in detail and would strongly recommend that you do the same, preferably in June/July when the shrubs and flowers are at their most exuberant.

Designed by Sir Herbert Baker, the layout is interestingly irregular. It varies from long double lines of headstones, 'shoulder to shoulder', many with more than one name inscribed, to a Chinese plot close to the Stone of Remembrance and elegant shelters at the top, behind which is a plot of German graves.

The inscription on the Chinese headstones is very interesting. The central vertical column of Chinese characters represents the name of the casualty. To its right is inscribed the region of China from which he came. The epitaph at the top (repeated in English below) is one of six standard inscriptions: 'Faithful Unto Death', 'Endures Forever', 'Though Dead He Still Liveth','Bravely Done', 'True Till Death' and 'A Good Reputation Endures Forever'.

To the left as one enters there are semicircles of Second World War graves, many of them from a variety of regiments from May 1940 and of RAF from 1941, among them Poles and Australians and IWGC/CWGC Headstones from 1923 onwards.

Buried here is 19–year–old Private Charles Nicholson of the York and Lancs, shot for desertion on 27 October 1917. Seventeen days earlier, his twin brother John, of the 2nd Battalion Essex Regiment, was killed in action and is buried at Poelcapelle. Was the fact that his brother had been killed taken into account before Charles Nicholson was executed? The CWGC records show that some 20 pairs of twins in the UK Forces died in the war.

To the right of the entrance – which has magnificent wrought iron gates – is an information board describing the hospitals and the aerial activity in the area.

The French Plot is to the left as one enters, with a row of Muslim headstones at the front.

Continue to Cassel via the D942/D933.

The Porte d'Aire, Cassel

Orpen's Household Brigade passing to the Ypres Salient, via the Porte de Bergues, Cassel

4. Mont Cassel and Sir William Orpen and other Great War Notables (GPS: 50.79946 2.48685)

Cassel makes an ideal lunch stop, with a variety of restaurants and fast fooderies around the Place Général de Gaulle. It also makes for a fascinating visit, starting with Mont Cassel Park, with its panoramic view across to Ypres, statue of Foch etc.

Here in October 1918 **Sir William Orpen,** RA, whose career as a war artist was to culminate with his often satirical portrayal of the Versailles Peace Treaty of 1920, painted Plumer in the 'little château' that was his HQ. 'A strange man with a small head, and a large, though not fat, body, and a great brain full of humour.' Today there is a numbered 'Orpen Walking Route', each stop illustrated with an Orpen picture painted in Cassel. The **Tourist Office** in the Square once carried a leaflet describing all the spots on the route – out of stock on our last visit – so scope for some detective work to discover all the stops.

As you drive down the hill and into the cobbled Place Général de Gaulle you will pass on your right the narrow road leading to the picturesque Porte d'Aire. Just before you leave the square, to follow the sign to the A25, you may glimpse at the left hand corner the winged town memorial. Immediately below it is the companion Porte de Bergues, immortalised by Orpen.

Many other famous names are linked to the picturesque town, staying in the Hotels Sauvage and de Schoebecque – both still active today on the rue Maréchal Foch which leads out of the square, each having plaques and photos of the period – **King George V; the Prince of Wales; King Albert of the Belgians; General Sir Douglas Haig; General Plumer**; **Lieutenant Colonel Maxime Weygand** (Foch's Staff Officer); correspondents **Beach Thomas** of the *Daily Mail* and **Philip Gibbs** and the poet **Edmund Blunden** (who described the town in *Undertones of War*).

Orpen described Cassel and the Hotel Sauvage in June/July 1917 as: 'being to the Ypres Salient what Amiens was to the Somme, and the little 'Hotel Sauvage' stood for the 'Godbert', the 'Cathedral' and 'Charlie's Bar' [favourite haunts in Amiens] all in one. The dining room, with its long row of windows showing the wonderful view, like the Rubens landscape in the National Gallery, was packed every night – for the most part with fighting boys from the Salient, who had come in for a couple of hours to eat, drink, play the piano and sing, forgetting their misery and discomfort for the moment.'

The hotel was managed by Madame Loorius and her two daughters, Suzanne (also remembered with affection for her smile by **Lieutenant Colonel Graham Seton–Hutchison**) and Blanche, who were known as 'The Peaches'. The entertainment at the Sauvage was often boisterous and noisy, with Orpen's batman Green step–dancing and his chauffeur Howlett playing the mouth–organ.

Continuing down the cobbled D33 (easy to imagine the thumping of army boots marching down the hill towards the Salient) brings you to:

Longuenesse Souvenir CWGC Cemetery

5. Cassel Local Cemetery and Memorials (GPS: 50.79904 2.49172)

Outside the cemetery is a **French Memorial**, marking the centenary of the halting of the Germans by the Gendarmerie, erected in 2014.

Here too is **Point 11 on the Orpen Route with a replica portrait.**

In the cemetery are **memorials to French soldier Lucien Devriendt and to the 2nd and 5th Glosters** who fell fighting at Cassel to protect the west wall of the Dunkirk corridor during the Retreat to Dunkirk on 29 May 1940, plus a CWGC plot containing some of those soldiers.

One can now take an interesting route to Ypres through some of the Flanders Hills.

Itinerary one

6. Knowledge Centre/Archives/Research Facility, Cloth Hall (GPS: 50.85128 2.88683)

The newly renovated and completely redesigned Cloth Hall incorporates these facilities which moved into spacious accommodation here from their cramped HQ in the Stedelijke Museum, facilitating easy access to its enormous and important collections and archives. The dedicated and enthusiastic team of Museum Co–ordinator Piet Chielens, Curator Jan Dewilde, Scientific Research Assistant Dominiek Dendooven (who took a sabbatical in 2016 to gain his Doctorate), joined by Historical Aerial Photography expert Dr Birger Stichelbut of Ghent University (for the duration of the centenary years) have taken the centre to the very cutting edge of technology with the latest equipment.

The extensive library comprises some 15,000 books, including the extraordinary collection of Dr Canapeel. The 3,300 outstanding images of the photographer, Anthony of Ypres, many of them reproduced as prints, are now available at the centre, the royalties for reproduction going to his family.

Perhaps the most impressive research continues to be undertaken on the aerial photography of the Great War and the centre has built the most comprehensive collection of aerial photographs from museums and other sources around the world. Piet Chielens and Dr Stichelbut have produced a fascinating book *De Oorlog vanuit de Lucht 1914–1918: het Front in Belgie* on the subject.

A significant project was to make cemetery registers for the Belgian, French, German and Missing of the Belgian Front available to the public for research (currently without appointment). There is also ongoing work on British casualties, which can be searched for by town or village.

Museum Co–ordinator, Piet Chielens with Dr Stichelbut in the Knowledge Centre

This really is a must for the serious Great War researcher. Contact: Tel: +(0)57 23 94 50. E–mail: kenniscentrum@ieper.be. Open: 1 April–15 Nov – Mon–Fri from 1300–1800; Sat/Sun 1000–1800. 15 Nov–31 March – Mon–Fri 0900–1700; Sat/Sun – 1000–1700. Closed: 26 Dec–8 Jan.

7. Café de Dreve Museum, Wood of Peace, Brothers in Arms Memorial (GPS: 50.85401 2.7870)

Opposite Polygon Wood is the handy café of Johan Vandewalle, well–known battlefield archaeologist (see *Beneath Flanders Fields* etc). Above the café Johan has created a fascinating museum, with video presentation and artefacts from his many digs, plus gifts from visitors (often Australian).

Among them is the story of **Captain Oliver H Woodward**, 1st Australian Tunnelling Coy, written by his family and based on his personal diary. Woodward, who trained as a mining engineer and metallurgist, enlisted in August 1915 and arriving in Flanders worked with the 1st Australian Tunnelling Coy. He was awarded the MC on 9–11 June 1916 for blowing up a sniper's post. Created acting captain on 23 October, he moved on to the Salient to work under Hill 60. He was responsible for maintaining 2 of the 19 massive mines laid below the Messines Ridge which had already been charged by 3rd Canadian Tunnelling Company until the signal came to blow them.

On 7 June 1917 on the opening of the Battle of Messines he personally detonated the 53,000lb of explosive in the mine under Hill 60, and the 70,000lb under what is now the Caterpillar Crater that the Australians had been protecting using listening posts and counter mines.

Woodward went on to win two Bars to his MC (at Bony on 29 September 1918 and near le Cateau on 4 November 1918). After the war he had a distinguished career in civil mining and metallurgy, becoming President of the Australian Mining and Metal Association 1952–1954. He died on 24 August 1966.

In 2010 an Australian film entitled *Below Hill 60* was released. It is based on Woodward's own account and is an extremely accurate, well–acted and moving story of the perilous existence of the underground miners.

Across the road (on a site which contains the remains of German trenches and beside which he is restoring a farm building as a b&b) Johan is constructing a Memorial Park, dedicated to his '**Brothers in Arms'** project. This was inspired by the discovery of six Australian bodies in Westhoek in 2006 when Johan felt that the head of one of them was still so intact that the eyes seemed almost alive. Profoundly moved, he pursued research which led to the fact that it was John Hunter, who had died in his brother's arms. For the further story and how Johan decided to erect a statue dedicated to all 'brothers in arms' who had fought in the war – see www.brothersinarmsmemorial.org

Leading up to the statue will be an avenue of trees, **'The Wood of Peace'**, each tree representing one of the 523 soldiers buried in the Polygon Wood Cemeteries and each nation involved in the war. They will be planted on 12 October 2017, preferably by a relative. See http://www.2014–18.be/en/news/wood–peace–%E2%80%93–polygon–wood

Brothers in Arms Memorial Medal, upon which the statue will be based

8. The Palingbeek Provincial Domain: Entry Point – South from Hill 60, Caterpillar Crater, The Bluff, Canal and Lock No 6. (GPS: 50.82468 2.9275/50.82242 2.92879/50.81465 2.92210/50.81339 2.93584)

The Palingbeek Estate is now mainly publicised as a wooded paradise for hikers, strollers and cyclists, for picnics and café meals.

During the war it included the German third line, was heavily defended by the Allies and sustained much heavy mining activity. Today it contains the vestiges of the aborted Ypres–Comines Canal, abandoned in 1913 after the collapse of the St Eloi Bridge, and is also riddled with trench lines, craters and massive bunkers. In it are three CWGC Cemeteries: **Hedge Row Trench** (98 burials), **1st DCLI Cemetery** (76 burials) and **Woods Cemetery** (326 burials).

It now contains the walking route known as '**Entry Point – 'South**'. There are three such, the others being 'North' at Klein Zwaanhof near Boesinge and 'East' by the Hooge Crater Museum. Detailed leaflets with maps of all are obtainable from the Cloth Hall Tourist Office. They have unmanned information centres with audio–visual presentations and **Remembrance Trees** (a new hardy form of elm, once common in the Salient) along the route. They mark points on the German line (marked in red) and the Allied Line (blue) and bear informative speaking points (accessible on smart phones and tablets etc).

The park can be entered from the end of the **Hill 60** site taking you into the domain via **Caterpillar Crater**. Alternatively you can enter from the car park near the Restaurant de Palingbeek, close to the entry point information point). The recommended route then takes you through the old battlefield area to the **Canal from Lock No. 6** and **The Bluff,** where Somme VC Billy Congreve wrote to this father, (General Walter Congreve, VC, commanding XIII Corps) of the mine blown by the Germans on 27 January 1916, killing 70 men:

> 'The mine destroyed the pride of my heart: the Bluff defences which we had just completed. It's the hugest thing in the mine line I have ever seen – about four Hooge's rolled into one. It blew up 3,500 tons of earth. The crater is 60 feet deep (from the top of the Bluff) and 50 yards by 40 yards across. The actual depth from ground level is about

Entry Point – South Information Point, Palingbeek Domain

The authors put their backs into creating two of the CWRM figures

30 feet, and it blew off the end of the Bluff.'

Another feature in the Palingbeek will be an installation to house the 600,000 clay figures made in the Ramparts between 2014 and 2018 for **'Coming World Remember Me'** (CWRM), being one for each victim of the Great War in Belgium. See: www.cwrm.be

This whole area is full of interesting Great War remains, all with stories to be researched. Googling brings up many sites which throw more light on many aspects. Non–walkers can 'cherry pick' points of particular interest from car parks at Hill 60, Entry Point–South Information Point or Lock No. 6.

Itinerary two

9. Hagebos, Private Whitham VC, Gournier Farm, Hedd Wyn Memorials, Welsh National Memorial, Artillery Wood CWGC Cemetery

In walking distance for the hikers and an easy drive for the rest, an extremely interesting circuit can be taken from Hagebos, known to the British as **Iron Cross, (GPS: 50.90328 2.90097)**. Appropriately in this Passchendaele centenary year the area was in the centre of the attack on Pilckem Ridge.

By taking Groenestraat to the north of Hagebos a **new Information Plaque to Private Thomas Whitham VC,** 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards (action of 31 July 1917 on the Pilkem Ridge) may be found at **GPS: 50.907222 2.899444**. It is situated on a track which was part of the interesting network of railways.

Valmai Holt being Welsh, the authors cannot resist spending a great deal of time studying the Welsh participation around here in some detail. So returning from Whitham to Hagebos and going straight over on Groenestraat you will find a large **bunker** at **GPS: 50.89140 290427.** This is on the land of **Gournier Farm** and the farmer should be asked for permission to visit it. It rewards the effort. Firstly, on the bunker is a **Plaque to the 38th Welsh Division**, probably for their part in the attack on the Pilkem Ridge of 31 July, but we discovered during filming the area with BBC Welsh TV, that there are three chambers in it (mostly used by the farmer for storage), which can be explored with care.

Incidentally, for those interested in the Second World War, the site of a crash of a **B17 Flying Fortress** on 3 February 1945 can be seen nearby at **GPS: 50.90062 2.90859**. Miraculously all the crew survived the crash which is marked by a **memorial** unveiled on 4 September 2001, attended by the navigator, Rudy Haumann. It is sadly now in need of much TLC.

Returning to Iron Cross and turning left the Sportsman Pub is on the right and on the left are a series of **plaques** to the humble Welsh shepherd, **Private Ellis Humphrey Evans**, whose claim to fame is that he was posthumously declared winner of the Bardic Chair at the 6 September 1917 Eisteddfod at Birkenhead. His bardic name was 'Hedd Wyn' (White Peace) and he is known as 'the Black Bard' as his chair was blackened in mourning for him. Evans was wounded on 31 July, serving with the 15th Battalion, London Welsh, Royal Welsh Fusiliers.

The tributes were instigated by Sportsman owner, Marc Decaester and his brother–in–law, Mario Liva, supported by local historian Erwin Ureel. They also hold a Last Post Ceremony here on the first Monday of each month.

Together with many active Welsh supporters, headed by Peter Carter, they managed to fulfil

Interior of Bunker at Gournier Farm

Unveiling of Memorial to crash site of B17. Navigator Rudy Haumann second from right

the monumental project of erecting a **Welsh National Memorial** further along the road at **GPS: 50.9029 2.90000.** The wondrously fierce bronze **Welsh Dragon**, on a cromlech of Pontypridd stone, was sculpted by Lee Odishaw. Do try to visit it on St David's Day or in spring when the **Memorial Garden** is a host of golden daffodils, one for every ten Welsh soldiers killed in the Great War. It is stunning.

Finally in this Welsh tribute section, we continue along the road towards Artillery Wood CWGC Cemetery **(GPS**: **50.89967 2.87256)**. Here is buried 'Hedd Wyn', and a bonus is that another Celtic poet lies here, the Irishman Francis Ledwidge – killed on the same day – and whose memorial is passed en route.

10. Hop Store CWGC Cemetery (GPS: 50.85410 2.80890)

We found this to be one of the most involving and moving experiences of our last few visits to the Salient.

The Hop Store (on the main road, the cemetery is up a small track with a CWGC sign) was owned by a Mr Veys whose family, it is said, had enough boys to make up a football team. The building you see today is largely original (the area was just beyond the range of medium artillery fire) but was extensively restored in recent years.

Many Dressing Stations were set up in the vicinity (including 18/Field Ambulance) in 1915 and here a much–loved padre worked tirelessly – the 44 year old **Rev Charles Edmund Doudney**. Mortally wounded on 13 October, he died two days later. He is buried in Lijssenthoek Cemetery and his successor was the Rev Philip Byard Clayton – but that's another story…

Around the corner were a number of Rest Camps (Red Rose Camp was just to the right of the track). Here the poet **R E Vernède** wrote his somewhat embittered poem, *Before the Assault* on 1 March 1916, including the lines

'Not in our time, not now, Lord,
we beseech Thee
To grant us peace.
The sword has bit too deep.'

He was killed on 9 April 1917 leading his men in an advance on Havrincourt Wood near Cambrai.

To the right of the track the **Hop Store Cemetery** is deserving of a quiet, reflective visit. It was designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield, was opened in May 1915 and contains some 251 burials.

Before you walk around the cemetery, please read the Cemetery Report and Visitors' Book carefully. What will hit you are the number of soldiers lying here whose family lost other sons in the war and the visitors' comments often record their reasons for visiting a particular grave.

For instance there is the case of **Driver Robert Lynn**, RFA, killed on 6 August 1915. Three of his brothers were also killed – one other in Belgium, one in France and one in Israel. A couple from Northern Ireland report that they were 'Remembering the 4 Lynn brothers killed in WW1'.

Here too are **Private D L A Berry**, 14 October 1915, whose widow Leah's second husband, Robert Herring, also fell, and **Gunner Norman Sydney James**, RGA, 1 July 1917, who had two brothers killed. One can only imagine the grief of the remaining families.

Such is the currency of war.

The Belgian instigators of the Welsh Dragon Memorial pictured with the authors

Memorial to Irish poet, Francis Ledwidge

Hop Store CWGC Cemetery with Hop Store behind

Itinerary three

11. Following the Americans: The American Bridge (GPS: 50.80792 2.83379)

Most readers with be familiar with the story of the American 27th and 30th Divisions that served with the British forces around Ypres, but how many have walked the attack of the 27th – its first major action? Here is a suggested walk which should take about 1.5 hours.

The action takes place in rectangles L & M of the authors' Ypres map and can be found by following the directions and/or using the GPS, just to the west of the village of Vierstraat. Ideally you should go to that village first (down the N365 from the Lille gate towards Messines and take the right fork at Shrapnel Corner by the railway crossing, to Vierstraat) and turn right at the village crossroads past the Goudezeune buildings. (Incidentally the memorial to the two divisions is just ¼ mile further on the left before you turn). Continue downhill, passing a Demarcation Stone and various cemeteries until you reach the bottom of the slope where there is a small bridge over a stream (the Grote Kemmelbeek). This is the 'American Bridge' so called because local research has established that it was built by the Americans using British building materials. At what point it was built is hard to determine but the odds are that it was here in some form or other when the attack went in.

Park on the far side of the bridge and then stand looking back uphill. Stretch out the arms as if about to fly. You are standing on the 27th's side of the bridge. The Germans are on the

The 'American Bridge'

Headstone of 1st Lieutenant William Bradford Turner, MoH, Bony American Cemetery

Vierstraat side. Your arms indicate the lines of the forward trenches which were in effect bordered by the Beek. The 105th Infantry were to your left and the 106th Infantry to your right. The road you came down is the centre line of the two and the attack went from here back towards Vierstraat. The two regiments were part of 53 Brigade, itself part of 27th Division commanded by Major General J F O'Ryan, the division sometimes being called 'Ryan's Roughnecks'.

We are in August 1918. The Germans had taken Kemmel Hill (normally visible from here and away to your right) in April, but it was Ludendorff's last throw of the Kaiser's Battle and now the Germans were progressively moving back, and on 31 August the British 34th Division took the hill. In concert with that the American 27th attacked at 11.30am that same day uphill towards Vierstraat in what they called 'The Battle of Vierstraat Ridge' with the more distant target of 'Whitesheet' just over 2 miles straight ahead of you.

For some reason the attack was ordered to go in without a preparatory or supporting barrage, using only fighting patrols to spearhead the advance, and they were immediately met by savage machine–gun and sniper fire. Despite that, on the left the 105th made good progress and by that afternoon had reached the line of Vierstraat Road (also called 'Cheapside') the dead–end road opposite Kemmel No. 1 French CWGC Cemetery ahead. The 106th moved quickly too and by early evening both regiments were consolidating a trench line just short of the N331 (known as York Road) and had occupied the remains of Vierstraat.

From Vierstraat the fighting becomes more complicated and there is not room here to discuss it, but it went on as the 27th advanced, until the night of 2 September when the Americans were relieved by the British 41st Division (which had also played a part in the action at Kemmel). Amongst those commended for their bravery in the action was Lieutenant William Bradford Turner who was later killed

Sketch of General O'Ryan by John Singer Sargent

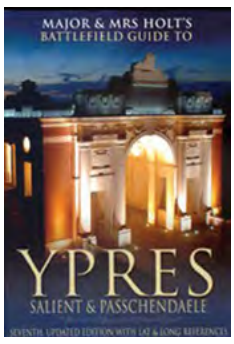
in the Hindenberg Line action and was awarded the Medal of Honor (MoH). He is buried in Bony American Cemetery.

Two 'human' incidents are related by General O'Ryan, whose *Story of the 27th* is the source of much of the material here (highly recommended for those who need more detail).

One concerns the compassion of German soldiers who, during a short counter–attack, captured a trench where there were two wounded Americans who felt sure that they would be killed. 'We are Saxons' the Germans assured them (shades of the 1914 Christmas Truce at Frelinghien) and then patched them up and left them for the Americans to pick up. Which they did.

The second concerns the general himself. During the battle he was visited by the famous American portrait artist John Singer Sargent (remembered in particular for his painting of a line of soldiers blinded by gas) who made a sketch there and then. Above is that very sketch.

Further details of all the sites mentioned and many more are to be found in **Major & Mrs Holt's Definitive Battlefield Guide to Ypres & Passchendaele: 100th Anniversary Edition** *See: www.guide–books.co.uk*



Turnover Amongst Brigade Commanders, 1917
The Real Reasons?

by Dr Trevor Harvey

Most members of the general public would be surprised to learn that the number of British and Dominion generals who served on the Western Front during the Great War was 1,257.[1] *Amongst Great War historians, the names of the British Expeditionary Force's (BEF) two Commanders–in–Chief, those of the commanders of its five Armies, those of many of the commanders of the 19 Corps, and, no doubt, many of the commanders of the 71 British and Dominion cavalry and infantry divisions, who served on the Western Front will be familiar.*[2] *Many would be less familiar, however, with the overwhelming majority of the 686 officers appointed, usually temporarily with the rank of brigadier general (BG), to the command of either a cavalry or an infantry brigade who served on the Western Front.*[3] *Yet, as has been argued elsewhere, the role of those appointed to this first rung of the British Army's hierarchy of generals during the Great War played a part that was more extensive and more important than the 'training and administration' function that, at best, some historians have ascribed to them.*[4] *Trevor Harvey here examines the fate of some of those at this level of command during 1917 in more detail.*

The genesis of the 'six month rest rule'

Tim Travers has analysed the operation of the British Army's systems over promotion and dismissal during the Great War.[5] Travers refers at one point to the claim made by Brigadier General Sir James Edmonds (1861–1956) that Sir Douglas Haig had told him that he had sent home more than a hundred BGs, in contrast to having been 'forced to leave certain corps and divisional commanders in their appointments because he could not be sure of securing better ones'.[6] The first purpose of this article, therefore, is to explore the extent to which this claim attributed to Haig was likely to be true by looking at the fate of those cavalry and infantry BGs who held appointments on the Western Front on 1 January 1917 and who ceased to hold those appointments during 1917. Given that Haig was Commander–in–Chief of the British Expeditionary Force for 35 months, it seems reasonable that, on average, it might be expected that Haig would, therefore, have sent home three BGs per month, or something approaching 36 during the year as a whole.

An obvious difficulty is whether 'dismissal' is an accurate way to describe a BG who was 'sent home' by Haig. Travers clearly thought this was the case. He equates the description 'sent home' as being synonymous with the term 'degummed' which he in turn defines as 'the practice of removing senior officers and sending them home'.[7] An interesting yet unanswerable question, therefore, is whether Haig would have agreed with Travers' interchangeable use of the terms 'sent home' and 'degummed'? The particular circumstances of 1917 add to the complication of coming to a clear cut view about whether it is accurate to refer to an individual BG as having been 'dismissed' or 'sent home', and if the latter, whether this was indeed synonymous with having been dismissed. This complication was the introduction of what has become known as the 'six month rest rule' in the middle of 1917.[8] The genesis of this policy and its introduction is not altogether clear.

The Army Council noted, in June 1917, that there was a practice prior to this time of allowing some staff officers to return to the UK to recuperate. As the Army Council recorded:

> 'Cases have occurred in which officers have been sent home from staff appointments to the Expeditionary Forces for recuperation and subsequent employment at home, but without any medical certificates certifying that they are in need of sick leave, their places in the Expeditionary Forces being filled up. It is, therefore, notified that sick leave with continuance of staff pay can only be given on the certificate of a competent medical authority that the officer is not fit for duty and is in need of sick leave. In the absence of such certificates, officers who return home from staff appointments can only be regarded as relinquishing their appointments, and accordingly they cease to draw staff pay with effect from the date of disembarkation at home.'[9]

The fact that this Army Council Instruction was issued in late June 1917 suggests that this practice had been going on for some time before it came to the attention of the War Office. Given that there is no mention of officers going home for a set period of six months, this also suggests this was an ad hoc policy implemented by well–intentioned and sympathetic senior officers based on their individual judgements, not necessarily on the basis of decisions by Medical Officers.

Topical matter

Sending staff officers home was a topical matter at the time as evidenced by an extract from the Adjutant General's War Diary:

> 27.6.17 AG proceeded to WO to attend a conference on:
> I The disposal of officers who have passed through Staff Courses at Cambridge and Aldershot.
> II The interchange of Staff Officers between England and France.
> III Training Questions relative to the delay of reinforcements at Base.[10]

These pieces of evidence from the Army Council and the Adjutant General both relate to staff officers. A few days later, however, the basis for discussion had been broadened:

> 'A proposal was made to send home tired Regimental officers for a tour of duty, their appointments being filled by fresh officers from England. The armies were asked for their remarks stating that officers thus selected were not to be limited in number but sent home as they were recommended; they will if possible return to their former units in France and care should be taken that only war–worn officers are selected.'[11]

Research so far has not revealed explicit evidence when this proposal was formally approved. Its evident implementation, however, represented a significant change in War Office thinking. The need for a medical officer to issue a certificate was no longer required. The proposal set out the criteria for selection for the respite of the 'six month rest rule' was one of being 'tired' or 'war–worn' as judged by senior officers, not as being diagnosed as 'sick' by a Medical Officer. Officers to be selected were to be judged to be 'tired' or 'war–worn'; this did not mean that they were regarded as incompetent. Further evidence that this proposal had been approved is that a similar request, on this occasion based on length of service in France, was subsequently made some four months later:

> 'Suggestion made to War Office that Signal officers who have done 2 years or more service in this country could be sent for 3 months duty at home.'[12]

The issues about rest for both officers and other ranks generally were topical in mid–1917, no doubt influenced in part by what was going on in the French Army at the time. On 1 July the Adjutant General asked the War Office if the number of men who were to proceed on leave could be increased from the then current 3,000 per day to 5,000 per day.[13] Furthermore, on 24 October 1917 a circular letter was distributed announcing that the normal period of leave was to be increased from 10 days to 14 days during the winter months.[14]

Further illumination of the development of the 'six month rest rule' is to be found in the records of the War Office. At the end of the war each department of the War Office was required to create a record of its work since the outbreak of the war. The following extract is taken from the records of the War Office's Directorate of Organisation:

> **'Para. 483 Exchange of Personnel Between Forces in France and at Hom**e
> A scheme had already in the summer of 1917 been inaugurated for the exchange of Infantry Warrant officers and NCO's between France and the Forces at home. It was subsequently proposed to enlarge this, and in January 1918, after considerable discussion with the heads of personnel branches outside the A G Department, their consent was at length obtained, and it was decided to extend the scheme to all branches

> of the service and to the rank and file. A certain number of men in France were to be sent for a tour of duty with the Home Forces of some six months in exchange for a similar number of Category 'A' men from the Forces at Home. The selection of men from France was to be from those who had served continuously in that Country for two years, and who either on account of the strain they had undergone, or in view of the exigencies of their private affairs, were recommended for a period of home employment.[15]

The second purpose of this article, therefore, is to explore the impact during 1917 of the introduction of the 'six month rest rule' as it was applied to BGs. By doing so, it should be possible to come to a view about the degree to which the claim ascribed to Haig, that he 'sent home' proportionately during 1917 more than 100 BGs, that is more than 36, is accurate or not.

Brigadier generals 1917 – Reasons for Changes

The analysis that follows is based on the changes in the appointment of BGs during 1917 recorded in the *Order of Battle of Divisions, Parts 1 to 5A* complied by A F Becke and F W Perry. Those instances where officers, typically lieutenant colonels, were appointed as acting brigade commanders are not included. This is because the duration of their appointments was usually a matter of a few days and their appointments were intended to be for limited periods only. Their inclusion would distort the analysis. Table 1 provides data, therefore, of the 157 instances during 1917 where a cavalry or infantry brigade commander's appointment was terminated. The data is divided between the first and second half of the year to acknowledge the introduction of the 'six month rest rule' in July 1917.

In those instances where the termination is not attributable to death, promotion or dismissal, terminations are distinguished between those BGs who were subsequently re–appointed to commands on the Western Front and those who were not. Those who vacated their appointments due to wounds, gas or sickness and who subsequently recovered to be re–appointed to the command of a brigade are also included for a second time, provided their brigade was serving on the Western Front.

In considering this data, regard has also to be taken of the number of divisions serving on the Western Front during 1917. In January there were 5 cavalry and 56 infantry divisions serving in France and Flanders. In December 1917 the corresponding numbers of formations were 5 cavalry and 57 infantry divisions, an increase of a single infantry division. This masks, however, the arrival of 42nd Division from Egypt and the arrivals of 57th, 58th, 59th, 62nd and 66th Divisions from the UK in the early months of the year, as well as the departures of 5th, 7th, 23rd, 41st and 48th Divisions for Italy in the closing months of the year.

The constraints on this article preclude consideration of the circumstances of the termination of each appointment. In constructing Table 1 there are some areas where there is no room for misinterpretation of the reasons involved. In other instances, however, there is room for debate because either the reasons involved are open to interpretation, or there is circumstantial evidence that points to particular reasons for terminations, or there is insufficient surviving evidence to justify more than mere speculation.

Brigadier generals – January to June 1917

In the cases of those BGs who died, who were wounded or who were promoted the reasons can be accepted as genuine and self–evident. In cases of those who were regarded as 'sick', the question arises of whether this was a label of convenience to mask circumstances where 'dismissal' was a more accurate label. In the first half of 1917 nine BGs vacated their appointments because they were 'sick'. In five of these instances, the individuals concerned recovered and were re–appointed to the command of a brigade on the Western Front. In other words, they were tried and tested commanders who were valued as such. The four exceptions were BGs John Macquarie Antill (1866–1937), John William Vincent Carroll (1869–1927) James Bruce Jardine (1870–1955) and Arundel Martyn (1868–1945). Antill had gained notoriety as a result of his refusal to call off the tragic third charge of 10/Light Horse Regiment at The Nek on Gallipoli on 7 August 1915.[17] He contracted bronchitis in November 1916 and was evacuated to England. He recovered his health sufficiently to command 16 Australian Brigade that had been formed in England. Antill failed, however, to convince a medical review board that he was fit enough for active service in France. As a result he was sent back to Australia in September 1917 and discharged from the Australian Imperial Force in December 1917.[18]

Carroll had been commissioned into the Norfolk Regiment in 1891. In August 1914 he had been appointed the CO of 7/Norfolks, a command he held until promoted GOC 17 Brigade in September 1915. Becke records that the reason for Carroll relinquishing his command in January 1917 was that he was 'sick'[19] Carroll had been awarded a CMG in 1916 and the second of his mentions in despatches appeared in the 1917 New Year's Honours List. At the age of 47 Carroll was valued. Seemingly he was not valued enough, however, to retain his command. He was replaced by BG Percy Vere Powys Stone (1883–1959), aged 33, who had been promoted from CO 1/Norfolks. Carroll returned to duty the following month. He in turn replaced Stone as CO 1/Norfolks which he commanded until October 1917 when he undoubtedly was wounded by shell fire in his left foot and evacuated.[20] Neither the relevant brigade nor divisional diaries mention Carroll's departure let alone the reason for it. Whether his 'sickness' was genuine or not, Carroll certainly was demoted in what may have been a unique BG and battalion commander job swap.

Jardine was attached to the Japanese Army in 1903. He applied what he had learnt about infantry and artillery cooperation during the operations in Manchuria in 1904–05 to his brigade's tactics in its attack against the Leipzig Redoubt southwest of Thiepval on 1 July 1916.[21] Conferred with the CMG in June 1916, Jardine was evacuated to hospital in February 1917 due to 'sickness brought on by his own arduous efforts'.[22] Although he recovered sufficiently to command a brigade at home from June 1917 until the Armistice, he did not return to the Western Front.

Martyn also had a history of illness. He had served in Macedonia as GOC 67 Brigade, 22nd Division from late October 1915 until he was replaced in mid–December 1915 because of illness. It took a year for him to recover to the point where he could be re–employed. He was appointed GOC 170 Brigade, 57th (2nd West Lancashire) Division in December 1916 before its deployment to France in February 1917. He was not to last long. He was evacuated due to 'strain' on 10 May 1917 and never returned to the Western Front.[23]

Table 1: Termination of Appointments of Brigadier Generals, Western Front, 1917

Reasons[16]	1 Jan–30 Jun 1917	1 Jul–31 Dec 1917	1917
Killed in Action or Died of Wounds	5	7	12
Wounded or Gassed	1	7	8
Sick	9	3	12
Promoted	6	12	18
Dismissed	7	2	9
Rested & Re–appointed to the Western Front	26	37	63
Relieved & Not Re–appointed to the Western Front	15	20	35
Totals	69	88	157

Dismissal

There are seven instances amongst those whose appointments ended in the first half of 1917 who can accurately be referred to as having been dismissed. BG James Dayrolle Crosbie (1865–1947) had resigned his commission in 1893 and had volunteered in 1914 at the age of 49. He was CO 11/Lancashire Fusiliers from February 1915 until promoted GOC 12 Brigade in June 1916. It seems that Crosbie had been promoted beyond his capabilities and experience. At the age of 51 he was removed in January 1917 to be replaced by an officer 15 years his junior, BG Adrian Carton de Wiart, VC (1880–1963).

The instance of BG Hanway Robert Cumming (1867–1921) provides an illustration of the limitations of any analysis that places individuals in neat discrete boxes. Cumming was commissioned from the Militia into the Durham Light Infantry (DLI) in 1889. He passed staff college in 1902, had risen during the war through a number of staff posts to become GSO1 of 48th (South Midland) Division in April 1916 before becoming CO 2/DLI in August 1916. In November 1916 Cumming was promoted GOC 91 Brigade. He made an impact. 'Endowed with both physical and moral courage, Cumming tended to question orders that he deemed unwise.' [24] In the spring of 1917 he crossed swords first with General Sir Hubert Gough, GOC Fifth Army and subsequently on two occasions with his divisional commander, Major General (later General Sir) George de Symon Barrow (1864–1959). In May 1917 Cumming again questioned orders received from Barrow's successor, Major General (Thomas) Herbert Shoubridge (1871–1923). It proved to be an objection too many. Shoubridge told Cumming that he 'was too tired to cope with the situation, that his judgement was therefore warped and that he considered it advisable that he should relinquish his command', which he was compelled, fairly or otherwise, to do.[25] This places Cumming clearly in the 'dismissed' category. He was sent home subsequently to be appointed Commandant of the Machine Gun Training Centre at Grantham in August 1917. In March 1918, however, Cumming returned to the Western Front as GOC 110 Brigade in 21st Division, commanded by Major General (later General Sir) David Graham Muschet 'Soarer' Campbell (1869–1936). Cumming held his new command until the end of the war serving with distinction. In contrast to the impressions gained by Barrow and Shoubridge, Campbell described Cumming as having 'proved himself to be not only a magnificent leader of men, but also a soldier of the very highest class'. [26] For the purposes of this analysis, however, Cumming still finds himself categorised as amongst those BGs who were dismissed.

Brigadier General Hanway Robert Cumming and his nemesis, Major General Thomas Herbert Shoubridge

Whiff of injustice

BG Hamilton Walter Edward Finch (1868–1935), commanded 190 Brigade, 63rd (Royal Naval) Division. He was dismissed in June 1917. His personal file contains a letter signed by Sir Douglas Haig stating that he considered Finch 'unfit for command in the field'.[27] Finch's 'offence' was that he fell foul of his corps commander, Sir Walter Congreve, who considered there was evidence that Finch had not inspected the area held by his brigade with sufficient diligence resulting in shortcomings in relation to burial of the dead, salvage and the state of the rifles of some of his troops. Finch protested that he had been damned by an 'unjust and unjustifiable' report.[28] His letter to the Military Secretary was to no avail. Finch had been commissioned into the Middlesex Regiment and had spent almost his entire career with his regiment. Perhaps tellingly for the command of a brigade in the Royal Naval Division, he was replaced by BG Alexander Richard Hamilton Hutchison (1871–1930), a Royal Marine.[29] Finch's case has the whiff of injustice about it.

Major General Sir Sam Hughes (left centre, facing the camera) with his son Garnet Burk (second right) and his brother William St Pierre Hughes (holding a coat over his left arm) in the autumn of 1916

BG William St Pierre Hughes (1864–1940), the younger brother of Major General Sir Sam Hughes (1853–1921), the arrogant and interfering Canadian Minister of Militia and Defence, was GOC 10 Canadian Brigade, 4th Canadian Division. Hughes' performance during his brigade's role in the latter stages of the Somme campaign was criticised by his GOC, Major General (later Sir) David Watson (1869–1922). The dismissal from government of Sir Sam Hughes in November 1916, however, served to presage his brother's own removal two months later. Whatever his military talents, Hughes was a victim of his elder brother's political demise. Similarly, Sir Sam Hughes' own son, BG (later Major General) Garnet Burk Hughes (1880–1937), GOC 1 Canadian Brigade, was removed from his command, although in his case it was by promotion at the exceptionally young age of 36 to GOC 5th Canadian Division on its formation in England in February 1917. Hughes' division was, however, deliberately left in the UK for the rest of the war.[30]

Character

The remaining three BGs dismissed in the first half of 1917 subsequently had very different future career paths. BG Gerald Ponsonby Sneyd Hunt (1877–1918) was dismissed as GOC 173 Brigade in April 1917 as part of a culling of a number of senior officers within 58th Division.[31] Hunt had been promoted BG in January 1916 at the relatively young age of 38. Having previously commanded 2/ Royal Berkshire Regiment, Hunt reverted to his acting rank of lieutenant colonel and was almost immediately given command of 1/ Royal Berkshire Regiment which he led until he was killed in action on 23 March 1918. The character of the man was captured in the way in which his death was recorded in his brigade's war diary: 'Lieut–Col. HUNT was killed as he would have chosen to die, fighting a desperate rearguard action and rallying his own men again and again for a further effort'.[32]

The last two BGs to be dismissed during the first half of 1917 served in the same division, 59th (2nd North Midland) Division. This division was the first Territorial division to serve in Ireland. It deployed there in April 1916 where it remained until January 1917 when it returned to England. The following month the division was sent to France. It was evident, however, that 'the division's lack of training and uncertain leadership' called for changes.[33]

Major General Garnet Burk Hughes (fifth from left, front row) with his staff of the 5th Canadian Division at Witley, UK in July 1917

The changes proved to be extensive. The first of the two to be sent home was BG Ernest William Stuart King Maconchy (1860–1945), GOC 178 Brigade, on 6 April 1917. Three days earlier Maconchy had removed one of his own battalion commanders, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Rayner, CO 2/7 Sherwood Foresters.[34] Two days after Maconchy's own removal, General Sir Henry Rawlinson, GOC Fourth Army, visited the division's GOC, Major General Arthur Edmund Sandbach (1859–1928). Rawlinson was shocked at what he saw. Sandbach was replaced the next day by Major General (later General Sir) Cecil Francis Romer (1869–1962). Ironically, all three – Rayner, Maconchy and Sandbach – found themselves crossing the Channel back to England on the same boat.[35]

Brigadier General Ernest William Stuart King Maconchy

Romer was quick to evaluate for himself the state of his new division. BG Charles Vesey Humphrys (1862–1944), GOC 176 Brigade, had only been in his post since 5 February 1917. His tenure proved short lived. Romer had him replaced on 20 April 1917. There were 41 changes of divisional commanders on the Western Front during 1917. In addition to Romer's actions, there were only three other similar instances during the year where BGs were dismissed or transferred within a month of the appointment of a new divisional commander.[36] Maconchy spent the rest of the war at home as an Inspector of Munitions. Humphrys returned home to spend the remainder of the war as the commander of training brigades.

Age concern

Apart from issues about the performance of these officers, their age was a matter of concern in their instances. As regards age generally, it needs to be borne in mind that life expectations were very different then than now. For example, the life expectancy of a male born in England and Wales in 1871 was 41.4 years. Forty years later this had risen to 51.5 years.[37] Rayner was aged 50, Maconchy was 58, Humphrys was 54 and Sandbach was 60.[38] Evidently and understandably, age did weary them. The point is emphasised by the ages of the officers appointed as their respective successors – Lieutenant Colonel Michael Cleve Martyn (1888–19??) was 29, BG Thomas Wolryche Stansfeld (1877–1935) was 39, BG Ryves Alexander Mark Currie (1875–1920) was 41 and Romer was 47. Care needs to be taken, however, when considering the matter of age. It was but one of the factors to be taken into account when appointments were made. The Official Historian put it as succinctly as anyone. 'Age is biological and should not be reckoned by the calendar. Each case should be judged for itself.'[39] Evidence that this was so is provided, for example, by the appointment in January 1917 of BG (later Major General) Edward Hilliam (1865–1949), as GOC 10 Canadian Brigade at the age of 51 and that of BG Charles Cunliffe–Owen (1863–1932) at the age of 53 as GOC 54 Brigade in April 1917.[40]

Explanations remain to be established for those BGs where the reason for their replacement is less well defined. Table 1 divides these between those who were subsequently re–appointed to commands on the Western Front and those who were not. In the case of those who were, this was a clear indication that they had either been transferred to another brigade or they had been posted home for a period of rest. An example of the former was BG (later Sir) Godfrey Davenport Goodman (1868–1957), a Territorial officer who had previously been CO 6/Sherwood Foresters from October 1914 until he was promoted GOC 52 Brigade in November 1916, an appointment he held until 20 March 1917. On that date Goodman transferred to become GOC 21 Brigade, a formation that he then commanded until the Armistice. Although Goodman had unbroken service in France since his battalion arrived in February 1915, much to his credit he was never considered to be sufficiently 'tired' or 'war–worn' to merit a period at home under the 'six month rest rule'.

Home

There are a number of instances of BGs who did go home during the first half of 1917 for six months having served at least two years in France before the formal introduction of the 'six months rest rule' and who were re–appointed to commands on the Western Front. To cite but a single instance, BG (later Major General) Francis John Duncan (1870–1960), had been CO 2/Royal Scots serving in France with 8 Brigade 3rd Division from August 1914. Promoted GOC 165 Brigade in January 1916, he served in that post until April 1917 when he returned to England to command 214 Brigade. After six months he returned to the Western Front in October 1917 as GOC 60 Brigade, a post he held until promoted major general when he took command of 61st Division in June 1918 until the Armistice. Although rare, Duncan's experience also demonstrates that having the benefit of a period of rest at home was no absolute bar to further promotion. The date of an individual's return to France could, however, be prolonged beyond six months. BG (later Major General Sir) Charles Edward Corkran (1872–1939), for example, initially deployed to France in August 1914 as brigade major with 1 Brigade. He subsequently left his post as GOC 3 Guards Brigade in May 1917, served in the UK for six months before being appointed Head of the British Military Mission to the Royal Serbian Army in October 1917, a post he held until he subsequently returned to the Western Front as GOC 173 Brigade in July 1918.[41]

There are other instances where there was a stated intention that a posting home should be for a limited period which was, for whatever reason, extended. An example of such flexibility was BG (later Major General) Richard Deare Furley Oldman (1877–1943). He had served initially from September 1914 as a staff officer at the BEF's GHQ before becoming CO 1/Cheshire in September 1915. In April 1916 Oldman was promoted to the command of 117 Brigade and, as the brigade's war diary recorded, he was posted home temporarily in March 1917: 'Brigadier General R D F Oldman DSO left to command a Training Brigade in England for three months.'[42] In the event it was eight months before Oldman went back to France as GOC 15 Brigade in November 1917, a formation he commanded until the end of the war.[43] BG William Maunder Withycombe (1869–1951) GOC 107 Brigade, was similarly posted home and rested for three months from March to June 1917 during which period he commanded 218 Brigade before he returned to the command of 107 Brigade. The stated intention to post Oldman home for a period of three months and Withycombe's actual three month period of rest are indicators suggesting that a standard approach to six month appointments at home was not established until July 1917.

Dugouts

There remain, therefore, the residue; the 15 BGs whose appointments were terminated in the first half of 1917 and who were never re–appointed to commands on the Western Front. Are these officers amongst 'Haig's hundred'? It is noticeable and significant, that 12 of these officers were aged between 50 and 57. Of these 12, five were dugouts. These BGs are to be distinguished from those dugouts re–employed in 1914 and who held their commands until either shortly before or shortly after their brigades were deployed to the Western Front. In their cases they had been regarded from the outset as being unable to withstand the rigours of a field appointment. In contrast, the 12 BGs who served until the first half of 1917, dugouts or otherwise, can be regarded as having done their bit and who very much had earned their remission. Two examples serve to make the point. First, BG Douglas Campbell (later Douglas of Main) (1864–1927) was aged 52 when he returned to the UK in May 1917 having served continuously as GOC 151 Brigade for 27 months. Campbell continued to serve in the UK. Within six weeks, he had been appointed GOC 217 Brigade and served as a brigade commander until his retirement in October 1919. Second, BG Trevor Patrick Breffney Ternan (1860–1949) had retired as a BG in 1907.[44] He re–joined the army in August 1914, was appointed GOC 102 Brigade

in December 1914 and went with 34th Division to France in January 1916. By April 1917 he was aged 57 and gripped by sciatica. He had, in his own words, 'come to the end of my tether, and reluctantly had to acknowledge that there comes a time when one must step aside for a younger man'.[45] Ternan returned to the UK, retired from the army on 1 June 1917 and was appointed a CB in recognition of his service.[46] These 12 BGs had faced their challenges. Yet, despite their years, with few exceptions, they continued to serve at home until the end of the war.

Fate

The fate of the remaining three BGs in this group had little in common. BG Edward Roden Hill (1868–1925), GOC 63 Brigade, had successively commanded two battalions of the Highland Light Infantry for relatively brief periods during 1915 before being appointed to his only brigade command in October 1915. The brigade's war diary starkly records that Hill 'handed over' the command of his brigade on 16 March 1917.[47] Although Hill was subsequently gazetted with a DSO, he ended the war in his temporary rank of lieutenant colonel commanding his regiment's home depot. It seems that, at the age of 48, he had effectively been dismissed.[48] The second BG of this trio was BG Reginald Gauntlett Shuter (1875–1957) GOC 109 Brigade. Shuter had been commissioned in 1895 and at the outbreak of war had already been a captain for more than 12 years. In October 1914 he was promoted major, served from November 1915 for three months as a brigade major before being promoted CO 1/Royal Irish Fusiliers, an appointment he held for four months before he was promoted in May 1916 to his brigade command at the age of 41. From captain to BG in a little over 18 months was, on any scale, rapid promotion. To command a brigade of the 36th (Ulster) Division through the Battle of the Somme as a newly–appointed BG would have been a challenge. The fact that the brigade's war diary crisply records that his successor 'took over command' of the brigade hints that his removal may have been unexpected. This suspicion is reinforced by the elapse of year before his next appointment in January 1918, and then only as an Instructor at the Senior Officers' School, Aldershot. It may have been that Shuter's removal was for health related reasons.

The final member of this trio was BG Gerald Frederic Trotter (1871–1945), a remarkable officer. Trotter was commissioned from the Militia into the Grenadier Guards in 1892, served in South Africa where he was wounded in March 1900. As a result his right arm was amputated. Yet he continued to serve, retiring as a major in 1912 at the age of 41. On the outbreak of war Trotter re–joined his regiment, deployed to France in October 1914, was wounded at Neuve Chapelle, became CO 1/Grenadier Guards in July 1915 and was promoted GOC 27 Brigade in March 1916. His period in command was cut short in May 1916 when he fell from his horse breaking his left arm.[49] Recovered, Trotter was appointed GOC 51 Brigade in July 1916, a post he held until June 1917. Trotter's service had been marked by being mentioned in despatches, twice in 1916 and twice in 1917, in addition to having been awarded a CMG in 1916 and a CB in 1917. After a period of leave, Trotter was appointed as head of the British Military Mission (Training) in the USA in October 1917, a post he held until December 1918. He was subsequently awarded the American Distinguished Service Medal and a CBE in 1919. Trotter's career demonstrated his personal courage and tenacity. His departure from the Western Front was merited; his honours acknowledge his service confirming his standing as a valued officer. After the war Trotter served both as a Groom–in–Waiting to the Prince of Wales and as a Gentleman Usher to King George V in recognition of which he was promoted from MVO to CVO in 1926. The fact that Trotter finds himself amongst those not re–appointed to a command on the Western Front is capable of being misinterpreted to his distinct disadvantage.

The future Brigadier General Gerald Frederic Trotter (second right, in the uniform of a lieutenant) photographed in a family group probably in 1902 shortly after he returned from South Africa. Note his missing right arm which he lost in 1900. From left to right, Major General Sir Henry Trotter (died 1905), Captain R B Trotter (killed in action 1915), Colonel E H Trotter (killed in action 1916), Gerald Trotter, Colonel A R Trotter

It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that of those 15 BGs who left the command of a brigade in the first half of 1917 and who were not subsequently re–appointed to a brigade command on the Western Front, only two – Hill and Shuter – can be considered as possibly having been dismissed on the grounds of shortcomings in their performance.

Brigadier generals – July to December 1917

The figures in Table 1 illustrate the impact of the introduction of the 'six month rest rule' in July 1917. The increase in the number of changes of BGs during the last six months of the year (20) compared to the first six months is largely attributable to the increase in the number of BGs (16) who were rested, whether they were re–appointed to the Western Front or not. The numbers who were killed, died of wounds, wounded, gassed or sent home due to sickness were little changed (15 compared with 17). Amongst this group, the three who were judged to be 'sick' are the only ones where there is possible room for doubt over the real reason for their departure.

Sick

BG James Francis Erskine (1862–1936) had been appointed GOC 155 Brigade in May 1911. He commanded his brigade in Gallipoli until he had to be replaced in August 1915 because of sickness. Recovered, he returned to Gallipoli when appointed GOC 33 Brigade in December 1915 serving in Egypt and France until he 'left the brigade to command a brigade in ENGLAND for three months'.[50] Perhaps influenced by the contemporaneous debate over the 'six month rest rule', Erskine's rest period was extended until October 1917 when he returned to France as GOC 141 Brigade. His appointment proved to be short lived as he was 'admitted to Hospital sick' in mid–December 1917.[51] It was no great surprise then that at the age of 55, having served during the war in Gallipoli, Egypt and the Western Front, having received the CMG in 1916 and the CB in 1917 in addition to four mentions in despatches, when Erskine had recovered, he served the last 11 months of the war at home.

The second was BG Vigant William de Falbe (1867–1940), the son of a Danish Navy captain who had been appointed CO 1/North Staffordshire in March 1913. De Falbe's battalion had landed at St Nazaire in September 1914 as part of 72 Brigade. He remained in command of this battalion until he was promoted GOC 185 Brigade in January 1916. By the time de Falbe, a substantive colonel, had to relinquish his command in August 1917 'owing to illness', as the brigade's war diary records, he had served on the Western Front for almost three years.[52] After his recovery, de Falbe returned to duty in England in his temporary rank of BG as GOC Home Counties Reserve Brigade, an appointment he held until February 1919.

The third was BG Rudolf George Jelf (1873–1958). Becke records that Jelf was 'invalided' from his appointment as GOC 86 Brigade on 16 August 1917.[53] The 29th Division's history records that Jelf was 'evacuated sick'.[54] The brigade's war diary states that Jelf 'leaves the Brigade owing to illness'.[55] Jelf indeed had a history of illness having lost the command of 73 Brigade in November 1916 when he 'was admitted to hospital'.[56] Although Jelf was only 43, his health prevented him from being re–appointed to a command on the Western Front. He continued to serve at home and was awarded the CMG in 1919 for his services.[57] With Jelf's departure, however, the leadership of 86 Brigade was in a greater state of flux, if not upheaval, than such a departure would typically have created. Three days before, on 13 August, the brigade had lost its staff captain, Captain Robert Gee (1876–1960), due to a wound. Gee was a former ranker who had already won a MC and would go on to win a VC.[58]

Captain Robert Gee VC

On the following day, 14 August, the brigade also lost its brigade major, Captain (later Major) John Huntley Muir (1888–1918), on him being transferred within 29th Division to 1/King's Own Scottish Borders of 87 Brigade.[59] Subsequently promoted major, Muir died on 4 November 1918, a week before the war ended.[60] Jelf's departure, therefore, presented his successor, BG George Ronald Hamilton Cheape (1881–1957) with both the necessity and an opportunity to rebuild 86 Brigade's HQ team of staff officers. Like Erskine's departure, there is nothing to suggest that the reason for Jelf's departure was other than completely genuine.

The second half of 1917 saw a significant increase in the number of BGs promoted to the command of a division – 12 compared with only 6 in the first half of the year. These appointments again demonstrated, with exceptions, the implementation of the policy of the replacement of older field commanders by those who were younger. The average age of these 12 was 47; that of those they replaced was 52, nine of whom were over 50. On the other hand, of the 11 promoted to divisions, only 4 were 50 or over. The oldest was 54 year old BG E Feetham (1863–1918); the youngest BG, (later General Sir) George Darell Jeffreys (1st Baron Jeffreys) (1878–1960), aged 39. The twelfth of this cohort promoted was BG (later Major General Sir) Hon. Charles John Sackville–West (4th Baron Sackville) (1870–1962). Sackville–West had previously commanded successively 21 and 190 Brigades. In both instances his command had ended as a result of him being wounded. In contrast, when his subsequent command of 182 Brigade ended, it was because he was promoted major general on the General Staff in September 1917.[61] In February 1918 Sackville–West succeeded General (later Field Marshal) Sir Henry Wilson (1864–1922) as the British Permanent Military Representative on the Supreme War Council. He was knighted in 1919.

Adverse report

There were only two BGs overtly dismissed in the second half of 1917. The first was BG Ernest Craig–Brown (1871–1966) GOC 56 Brigade who had passed staff college in 1905. Despite having been given the brevet of lieutenant colonel as recently as June 1917, he was sent home in September as the result of an adverse report by his divisional commander, Major General (later Lieutenant General Sir) George Tom Molesworth Bridges (1871–1939), GOC 19th Division.[62] Craig–Brown served the rest of the war in Salonika, initially as Commandant and Chief Instructor of the Infantry Training School and subsequently as Base Commandant, HQ British Salonika Force.[63]

The second dismissal was that of an Australian officer who in civilian life was an accountant and an actuary. BG Alexander Jobson (1875–1933), GOC 9 Australian Brigade, was described by Charles Bean, the Australian Official Historian, as 'a man of many fine and endearing qualities, of marked ability and absolute probity, but constitutionally incapable of facing battle conditions'.[64] When offered the opportunity to resign by his divisional commander, Major General (later General Sir) John Monash (1865–1931) GOC 3rd Australian Division, Jobson took it. On 25 August he relinquished command of his brigade and on 9 December 1917 his Australia Imperial Force appointment was terminated.

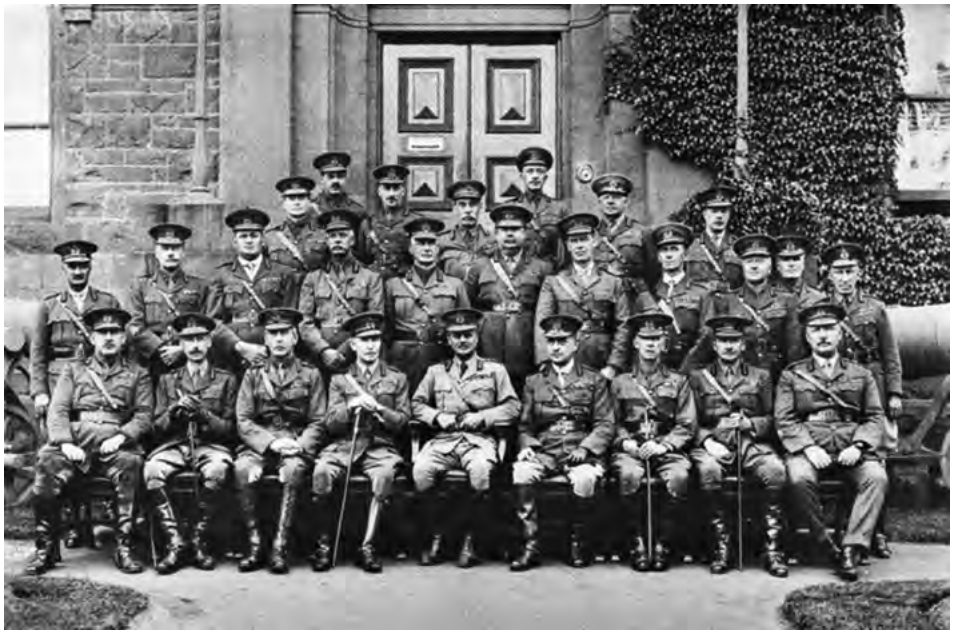
The impact of the replacement of the previous ad hoc practice by the introduction of the 'six month rest rule' in July 1917 is evident in Table 1. Sixty–three per cent (37 of 59) of those BGs who had not vacated their appointments for enforced reasons subsequently returned to the command of a brigade on the Western Front. As might be expected, the majority of these officers (21) were aged between 40 and 49 and, although in need of a rest, they were in the prime of their military careers. The acceleration in career paths produced by the war is reflected in the ages of the remaining 16 BGs, ten of whom were in their 30s and one in his 20s.

The youngest BG to relinquish his appointment during this period and subsequently to be re–appointed was BG (later Lieutenant General Sir) Bernard Cyril Freyberg VC, (Baron Freyberg of Wellington in New Zealand and of Munstead in the County of Surrey) (1889–1963). He was 28. Freyberg had to relinquish the command of 173 Brigade on 20 September 1917 as a result of wounds. This was the eighth of the nine times he was wounded during the war, on this occasion by shell fire resulting in him being hit in his chest and thigh.[65] Within four months, however, Freyberg had recovered and recuperated. He was appointed GOC 88 Brigade in January 1918, a post he held for the remainder of the war.

The oldest of those BGs who were rested and subsequently re–appointed was a 52 year old dugout, BG George Edward Pereira (1865–1923) elder brother of Major General Sir Cecil Edward 'Pinto' Pereira (1869–1942), GOC 2nd Division.[66] Pereira commanded 47 Brigade from January 1916 until November 1917. His period of rest lasted for more than nine months before he was appointed GOC 43 Brigade in September 1918, a post he too held for the remainder of the war.

Explanations

Having the benefit of a 'six month rule rest' absence from the Western Front seems to have dented the prospects of those individuals concerned subsequently being considered for further promotion before the end of the war.



Group portrait of senior officers of the Australian Imperial Force at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne in January1920. Brigadier General Alexander Jobson is seventh from left, centre row. Courtesy AWM AO3083

Of the 63 BGs who vacated their posts during 1917 and who were re–appointed to a brigade command on the Western Front, only four were subsequently promoted to the command of a division – Major Generals F J Duncan 61st Division, John Hill (1866–1935) GOC 52nd Division, (later Sir) John Gellibrand (1872–1945), 3rd Australian Division and (later Sir) Frederick Oscar Warren Loomis (1870–1937), 3rd Canadian Division.[67]

Amongst the remaining 20 BGs who vacated their commands during the second half of 1917 and who were not re–appointed to command a brigade on the Western Front again, eight were aged 50 or more. The policy of resting the over 50s and promoting younger officers to field commands continued. Nowhere is this better illustrated than the departure from 186 Brigade of BG Felix Frederic Hill (1860–1940), 'who retires on account of age restrictions' at the age of 57.[68] Hill was replaced by the British Army's youngest brigade commander, BG Roland Boys Bradford VC (1892–1917) aged 25. Despite the recognition of his talent at such a young age, Bradford was reluctant to leave his battalion, 9/DLI, doing so with 'more regret than pleasure'.[69]

The grave of Brigadier General Roland Boys Bradford VC in Hermies British Cemetery near Cambrai

The same question arises in relation to the remaining 12 BGs – how many of this group can be considered to have been dismissed? They did all have one thing in common – all had served in France for more than two years. As such, all would have been eligible for a 'six month rest rule' home posting, if they had been regarded to have been 'war–worn' or under 'strain'. In some cases there are evident explanations.

Rank

BG (later Sir) Robert Chaine Alexander McCalmont (1881–1953) relinquished the command of 3 Brigade in November 1917 'owing to an accident' although the details of his accident remain unknown.[70] BG Moreton Foley Gage (1873–1953) GOC Lucknow (8th) Cavalry Brigade, relinquished his command in December 1917 when 4th Cavalry Division, of which it formed an element, was dispersed to Egypt. He was, however, re–appointed to a brigade command in March 1918.[71] Two of this group – BGs Lewis Francis 'Chico' Philips (1870–1935), GOC 189 Brigade, and Robert Emile Shepherd Prentice (1872–1953), GOC 188 Brigade – relinquished their brigade commands and continued to serve in France when they were subsequently appointed to staff positions. They both retained their temporary rank of brigadier general. BG John Henry Lloyd (1872–1941) GOC 90 Brigade, similarly retained his temporary rank of BG when he was appointed to the staff of the War Office as Assistant Controller of Salvage. BG Cranley Charlton Onslow (1869–1940) GOC 7 Brigade, had been wounded at the Aisne in 1914 and at Loos in 1915; received the CMG in 1915 and the DSO in 1917. He had commanded his brigade for a year when, aged 47, he returned to England in August 1917 and took command later that month, it is understood, of a training brigade. In this post he held his temporary rank of BG until April 1919 and was rewarded with a CBE in the 1919 Birthday Honours List. On his retirement in 1923 he was awarded a CB. This is the enviable record of a valued officer rather than that of an officer who was dismissed only to retire prematurely.

Brigadier General Cranley Charlton Onslow

The only Dominion officer amongst this group, BG (later Major General) Archibald Hayes Macdonell (1868–1939), GOC 5 Canadian Brigade, not only retained his temporary rank of BG when he returned home as GOC New Brunswick Military District, but was also subsequently promoted major general in 1921.

The indications are that the remaining five BGs of this group, however, can be regarded as having been dismissed. BG Lionel Forbes Ashburner (1874–1923), GOC 96 Brigade, had commanded his formation for less than nine months when he lost his command. It was the practice of the officer completing this brigade's war diary to record when there were changes amongst the brigade's battalion commanders. It was also common practice for changes of brigade commanders to be recorded in brigades' war diaries. Tellingly, this was not so with Ashburner's departure. He was subsequently appointed an Inspector of the Territorial Force in October 1917 retaining his temporary rank of BG suggesting he had been effectively dismissed although not demoted. The fate of BG R A Berners, GOC 11 Brigade, seems to involve both dismissal and demotion. As recently as May 1917, Berners had been regarded by Haig as having done well for the part his brigade had played in the capture of Roeux.[72] He had commanded his brigade for more than two years when in mid–October 1917 he left for England.[73] Three months later Berners had reverted to his substantive rank of lieutenant colonel and was appointed to the command of 1/Royal Newfoundland Regiment in January 1918.[74] Berners was, nevertheless, subsequently appointed to the command of a brigade in October 1918, not on the Western Front but in India.[75]

Rarity

BG Robert Clayton Browne–Clayton (1870–1939), GOC 59 Brigade, was a rarity – a British officer commissioned into, and who served with, a cavalry regiment, in his case 5/Lancers, who subsequently commanded an infantry brigade during the war.[76] Browne–Clayton was also a dugout having retired as a major in 1909. Although he had commanded 16/Cheshire for a year prior to his appointment as a brigade commander in October 1916, aged 47, Browne–Clayton seems to have reached the peak of his career. Ominously Lieutenant General the Earl of Cavan, GOC XIV Corps, visited Browne–Clayton and his battalion commanders on 24 August 1917.[77] Browne–Clayton was replaced two days later. He was not appointed to another operational command, was not promoted to the substantive rank of lieutenant colonel until April 1919 and retired in 1920. The evidence suggests Browne–Clayton had been dismissed.

The final two brigadiers of this group were both dismissed for performance reasons. BG John George Harry Hamilton (1869–1945), GOC 154 Brigade, had commanded his brigade for a year when on 25 September 1917 he 'gave up his command, and returned home for a period of rest'.[78] Days before, his brigade had made an attack on the Poelcappelle Spur that had cost Hamilton's brigade 950 casualties.[79] Unusually for an officer of his rank and service, other than four mentions in despatches, Hamilton received no honours or awards as a result of his service during the war.[80] Hamilton's period of rest was extended until, in December 1918, he was appointed Commandant of the base depot of his regiment, The Black Watch (Royal Highlanders). He retired in 1921.

The final BG in this group, BG Arthur Wyndham Tufnell (1872–1920), was a rarity; he may even have been unique. In addition to being in that minority of officers who had

passed staff college (in 1904), Tufnell's rarity arose from him having been commissioned into an infantry regiment, never commanded a battalion and yet he was appointed to command a brigade.[81] The fact that he may have been unique is attributable to his career path. From the outbreak of the war until January 1916, Tufnell had served as GSO1 of 42nd Division. He was then promoted within this division to GOC 126 Brigade. The relevant war diaries provide a telling sequence of events in the Ypres Salient. On 11 September 1917 Tufnell's commander, Major General Bertram Reveley Mitford (1863–1936) attended a conference called by GOC V Corps, Lieutenant General (later General Sir) (James) Aylmer Lowthorpe Haldane (1862–1950) to discuss operations. That day the order was issued for an attack on a particular dugout to be undertaken by Tufnell's brigade.[82] The attack by C Company, 1/9 Manchester Regiment on the night of 11/12 September failed. Both the battalion's and brigade's war diaries record that the attackers were forced to withdraw because of the strength of opposing rifle and machine–gun fire.[83] The division's diary, on the other hand, records that, after the planned artillery preparation, 'owing to the lateness of one attacking platoon in assembling and the company commander's late alteration of zero hour, this attack was unsuccessful'.[84] Tufnell was evidently held responsible for the following day he found himself 'on three months leave to England'.[85] Tufnell's leave was cut short five weeks later when, perhaps uniquely, he was re–appointed the GSO1 of 68th Division serving at home, in his brevet rank of lieutenant colonel. Tufnell never returned to France.[86]

Conclusions

There are a number of conclusions the data presented in Table 1 supports. The number of BGs who were killed, who died of their wounds, who were wounded or gassed, or who were promoted was not in doubt. It is justifiable to conclude that to this number can be added those who have been recorded as having lost their commands through sickness.

The number of BGs who are accounted for as having been dismissed (nine), however, is understated. That said, to regard those 20 BGs who were aged 50 or more when they were relieved of or, perhaps more sympathetically expressed, released from their commands as having been dismissed would be to mislead. Rather, they were the beneficiaries of a policy that reflected an understanding of the strain generated by attritional, industrialised warfare and the reasonable limits that should be placed on the demands on human endurance. There were also six other BGs (Lloyd, Macdonell, Onslow, Philips, Prentice and Trotter) who were released from the pressure of their field commands in order that they could continue to serve in the rank of BG in one of a variety of roles either in France, or at home in the UK or Canada, or in the United States. To include them in the same category as those dismissed for perceived shortcomings in their operational performance could be misguided. To the nine dismissed can arguably, however, be added a further seven BGs (E R Hill, Shuter, Ashburner, Berners, Browne–Clayton, Hamilton and Tufnell) who are included in Table 1 amongst those not re–appointed to a brigade command on the Western Front.

This analysis cannot provide a firm basis for concluding whether it was likely that Haig did send home more than 100 BGs. It has only considered one year, it has only considered cavalry and infantry brigade commanders and it relies on an interpretation which is sympathetic to the position of BGs born before 1868. Yet on this basis, there are grounds to suspect there are justifiable doubts about Haig's claim. There is certainly room for further investigation.

In the scheme of things it seems that the introduction of the 'six month rest rule' did more to regularise a practice which was already in existence than it did to introduce a new policy. Its introduction indicated that the British Army as an organisation recognised that it needed to act in its own longer term interests on the basis of an explicit rather than a somewhat ad hoc policy. The policy established criteria to be judged by senior commanders who shared an understanding of the pressures to which brigade commanders could be subject, rather than waiting for individuals to break down in ways which would satisfy perhaps stricter medical criteria. Given the demands of the sustained Battle of Third Ypres and at Cambrai, the numbers involved suggest that it was a policy applied judiciously.

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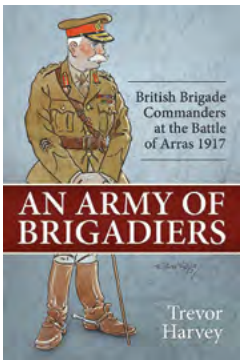

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(1) http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/warstudies/research/projects/lionsdonkeys/index.aspx. Accessed 22 September 2016.

(2) Of the 22 British Corps formed during the Great War and which served outside the UK, only XVI, XX and XXI Corps did not serve on the Western Front. XII Corps did serve briefly on the Western Front in September and October 1915 before it was transferred to Salonika. See A F Becke, *Order of Battle, Part 4, The Army Council, GHQs, Armies and Corps 1914–1918,* (HMSO:1945).

(3) This figure is the result of the author's analysis of A F Becke, *Order of Battle, Parts 1, 2A, 2B, 3A and 3B*, (HMSO: 1935, 1936, 1937 & 1938 respectively) and F W Perry, *Order of Battle of Divisions Parts 5a and 5B* (Ray Westlake – Military Books: 1992 & 1993 respectively). For the purpose of this analysis service in Italy is included.

(4) Trevor Harvey, *An Army of Brigadiers: British Brigade Commanders at the Battle of Arras 1917,* (Helion & Co. Ltd: 2017).

(5) Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900–1918,* (Allen & Unwin: 1987), pp.3–36.

(6) Edmonds to Brigadier C N Barclay, 7 April 1950, Edmonds Papers, LHCMA.

(7) Travers, *The Killing Ground,* p.13.

(8) For a reference to the '6 months rest rule', see J M Bourne, 'Major General WCG Heneker: A Divisional Commander of the Great War', in M Hughes & M Seligmann, (eds.), *Leadership in Conflict 1914–1918,* (Leo Cooper: 2000), p.62.

(9) TNA WO 293/6 Army Council Instructions, 29 June 1917, 1025 Staff Officers returning from Expeditionary Forces for recuperation and employment at home.

(10) TNA WO 95/26 Adjutant General, 27 June 1917.

(11) *Ibid*. 30 June 1917 (28252).

(12) *Ibid.* 8 November 1917.

(13) *Ibid*. 1 July 1917.

(14) *Ibid.* 24 October 1917.

(15) TNA WO 162/6 – Directorate of Organisation, Record of AG1 Organisation and Establishments, Section III Historical, p.98.

(16) Where appropriate, Becke and Perry attribute the termination of an appointment to one of the following reasons – captured, died, died of wounds, evacuated, evacuated sick, gassed, incapacitated, injured, interned in Holland, invalided, killed, sick, wounded or wounded and captured.

(17) For an informed account of the circumstances surrounding Antill's role on 7 August 1915, see Peter Burgess, *The Nek: The Tragic Charge of the Light Horse at Gallipoli,* (Kangaroo Press Pty. Ltd: 1996)

(18) http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Gallery151/dist/JGalleryViewer.aspx?B=1935216&S=3&N =27&R=0#/SearchNRetrieve/NAAMedia/ShowImage.aspx?B=1935216&T=P&S=26. Accessed 18 December 2016.

(19) Becke, *Order of Battle, Part 3*, p.128.

(20) TNA WO 95/1573 1/Norfolks, 5 October 1917.

(21) Major A F Becke, 'The Coming of the Creeping Barrage' 1931, *Journal of the Royal Artillery*, 58:1 (January 1932).

(22) TNA WO 95/2399 32nd Division, 97 Brigade – 'Report on Operations of 97th Inf. Bde. Feby 10th and 11th', 25 February 1917.

(23) http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/warstudies/research/projects/lionsdonkeys/j.aspx. Accessed 18 December 2016.

(24) *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Peter Simkins, 'Cumming, Hanway Robert (1867–1921)', first published Oct 2008; online edn, Sept 2013. Accessed 1 January 2017.

(25) Hanway R Cumming, *A Brigadier in France 1917–1918,* (Jonathan Cape:1922), p.84.

(26) *Ibid.* p.13.

(27) TNA WO 374/24223 – Finch, Brigadier General H W E, Haig to Military Secretary, 10 June 1917.

(28) *Ibid*. Finch to Military Secretary, 12 June 1917.

(29) For the rest of the war Finch was CO 4/ Middlesex, a training battalion. In addition to the DSO gazetted to him six days before he was dismissed and his two mentions in despatches, Finch was subsequently awarded a CBE in the 1919 Birthday Honours List. He retired in 1920.

(30) William Stewart (2015) 'Frustrated Belligerence: The Unhappy History of the 5th Canadian Division in the First World War,' *Canadian Military History*: Vol. 22: 2, Article 4. http://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh/vol22/iss2/4 – accessed 21 December 2016.

(31) Harvey, '*An Army of Brigadiers'*, p.207, note 119.

(32) TNA WO 95/1370 2nd Division, 99 Brigade, 23 March 1918.

(33) http://www.nam.ac.uk/microsites/ww1/stories/brigadier–general–ernest–maconchy/#.WFv–qPmLQ2w. Accessed 22 December 2016.

(34) Each of the Division's other two brigades also experienced a change in COs. Lieutenant Colonel John Stuart–Wortley (1880–1918), CO 2/6 South Staffordshire, 176 Brigade, was wounded and had to be replaced temporarily on 11 April 1917 whilst Lieutenant Colonel Herbert James Ferryman Wallis (b.1881) CO 2/4 Leicestershire, 177 Brigade was replaced on 20 April 1917.

(35) Simon Robbins, *British Generalship on the Western Front 1914–18: Defeat into Victory,* (Frank Cass: 2005), p.57.

(36) They were the dismissals of Brigadier General H R Cumming – see above – and Brigadier General Ralph Abercrombie Berners (1871–1949) – see below. The third instance was the removal of Brigadier General Rodolph Ladeveze Adlercron (1873–1966), GOC 148 Brigade to a position of a base commandant, three days after the appointment on 20 October 1917 of Major General N J.G Cameron, GOC 49th Division.

(37) http://visual.ons.gov.uk/how–has–life–expectancy–changed–over–time/. Accessed 27 December 2016.

(38) The average age of battalion commanders in post on 9 April 1917 was 38 years 5 months – see Peter Hodgkinson, *British Infantry Battalion Commanders in the First World War,* (Ashgate: 2015). p.63, Table 3.3. The average age of British brigadier generals whose formations played some part in the Battle of Arras was 44.1 years – see Harvey, '*An Army of Brigadiers'*, p.66.

(39) J E Edmonds and R Maxwell–Hyslop, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1918, Vol. V,* (London: Imperial War Museum, 1993 (1947)), p. 612.

(40) Hilliam served as a brigade commander on the Western Front until the Armistice. Having served with the RFA of 1st Division in France since August 1914, with the ANZAC artillery in Gallipoli during 1915 and as a brigade commander on the Western Front since August 1916, Cunliffe–Owen was posted home as GOC 206 Brigade, 69th (2nd East Anglian) Division in November 1917, an appointment which he held until the Armistice.

(41) http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/warstudies/research/projects/lionsdonkeys/c.aspx. Accessed 26 December 2016.

(42) TNA WO 95/2585 39th Division, 117 Brigade, 5 March 1917. Oldman commanded Sheppey Infantry Brigade, Home Forces from 20 March 1917 to 2 November 1917.

(43) Oldman had three short enforced periods of absence during this command as a result of wounds and having been gassed. See Frank Davies & Graham Maddocks, *Bloody Red Tabs: General Officer Casualties of the Great War 1914–1918,* (Leo Cooper,:1995), pp.175–6.

(44) Ternan was not the longest retired brigadier general of this group. That distinction belongs to Brigadier General Ambrose St Quintin Ricardo (1866–1923) who retired as a captain on 13 January 1904. Brigadier General Vere Staunton Smyth (1864–19??) had retired as a major on 27 January 1904.

(45) J Shakespear, *The Thirty Fourth Division 1915–1919,* (Naval & Military Press: 1998 (1921)), p.110.

(46) *London Gazette,* Supplement 3011, 4 June 1917, p.5454.

(47) TNA WO 95/2528 37th Division, 63 Brigade, 16 March 1917.

(48) *London Gazette,* Supplement 3011, 4 June 1917, p.5471.

(49) TNA WO 95/1769 9th Division, 27 Brigade, 2 May 1916.

(50) TNA WO 95/1810 11th Division, 33 Brigade, 1–21 March 1917.

(51) TNA WO 95/1810 47th Division, 141 Brigade, 16 December 1917.

(52) TNA WO 95/3079 62nd Division, 185 Brigade, 21 August 1917.

(53) Becke, *Order of Battle, Parts 1,* p.118.

(54) S Gillon, *The Story of the 29th Division: A Record of Gallant Deeds,* (Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd; 1925), p.133.

(55) TNA WO 95/2298 29th Division, 86 Brigade, 16 August 1917.

(56) TNA WO 95/2216 24th Division, 73 Brigade, 9 November 1916.

(57) *London Gazette*, 3 June 1919.

(58) TNA WO 95/2298 29th Division, 86 Brigade, 13 August 1917. For an account of Gee's VC action on 30 November 1917 and his remarkable life after the war, see G Gliddon, *VCs of the First World War: Cambrai 1917,* (Sutton Publishing: 2004), pp.182–196.

(59) TNA WO 95/2298 29th Division, 86 Brigade, 14 August 1917 and TNA WO 95/2304, 87 Brigade, 1/KOSB, 20 August 1917.

(60) http://www.cwgc.org/find–war–dead/casualty/1642772/MUIR,%20JOHN%20HUNTLY. Accessed 9 January 2017.

(61) TNA WO 95/3054 61st Division, 182 Brigade, 14 September 1917.

(62) http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/warstudies/research/projects/lionsdonkeys/c.aspx. Accessed 10 January 2017.

(63) Imperial War Museum, Private papers of Brigadier General E Craig–Brown DSO, Documents 1862.

(64) http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/jobson–alexander–6847. Accessed 10 January 2017.

(65) P Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg, VC: Soldier of Two Nations,* (Hodder & Stoughton:1991), pp.111–113.

(66) Pereira had been commissioned into the Grenadier Guards in 1882. He retired in the rank of major in 1909 having been awarded the CMG and DSO.

(67) The number of cavalry and infantry GOCs appointed to command divisions serving on the Western Front during 1918 was 55.

(68) TNA WO 95/3084 62ndDivision, 186 Brigade, 10 November 1917.

(69) Anonymous, *Brigadier General R B Bradford, VC, MC and His Brothers,* (Ray Westlake – Military Books, n.d.), p.111.

(70) TNA WO 95/1276 1st Division, 3 Brigade, Appendix V, An account of an attack on 10/11/17. The brigade's war diary entry for 6 November 1917 states 'Lt–Col AW Pagan DSO assumed command of the 3rd Bde vice Brig–Gen R McCalmont DSO accidentally damaged'.

(71) *London Gazette*, 6 September 1918, No. 30890, p.10635.

(72) TNA WO 95/256/18 Haig's Diary, 15 May 1917.

(73) TNA WO 95/1492 4th Division, 11 Brigade, 15 October 1917.

(74) *London Gazette*, 22 February 1918, No. 30541, p. 2451.

(75) *London Gazette*, 1 October 1918, No. 30930, p.11640.

(76) See Harvey, '*An Army of Brigadiers'*, Chapter 2, p.54–5, note 121.

(77) TNA WO 95/2113 20th Division, 59 Brigade, 24 August 1917.

(78) F.W. Bewsher, *The History of the Fifty First (Highland) Division 1914–1918,* (Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, n.d.), p. 234.

(79) TNA WO 95/2884 51st Division, 154 Brigade, Casualties 20 – 30 September 1917.

(80) As a captain Hamilton had been awarded the DSO for his services during the South African War – *London Gazette*, 27 September 1901, No. 27359, p.6316.

(81) See Harvey, '*An Army of Brigadiers'*, Chapter 7, p.282–3, note 12.

(82) TNA WO 95/2645 42nd Division, Order No. 34, 11 September 1917.

(83) TNA WO 95/2658 126 Brigade, 1/9 Manchester Regiment, 12 September 1917 and TNA WO 95/2656 42nd Division 126 Brigade, 11 September 1917.

(84) TNA WO 95/2645 42nd Division, 12 September 1917.

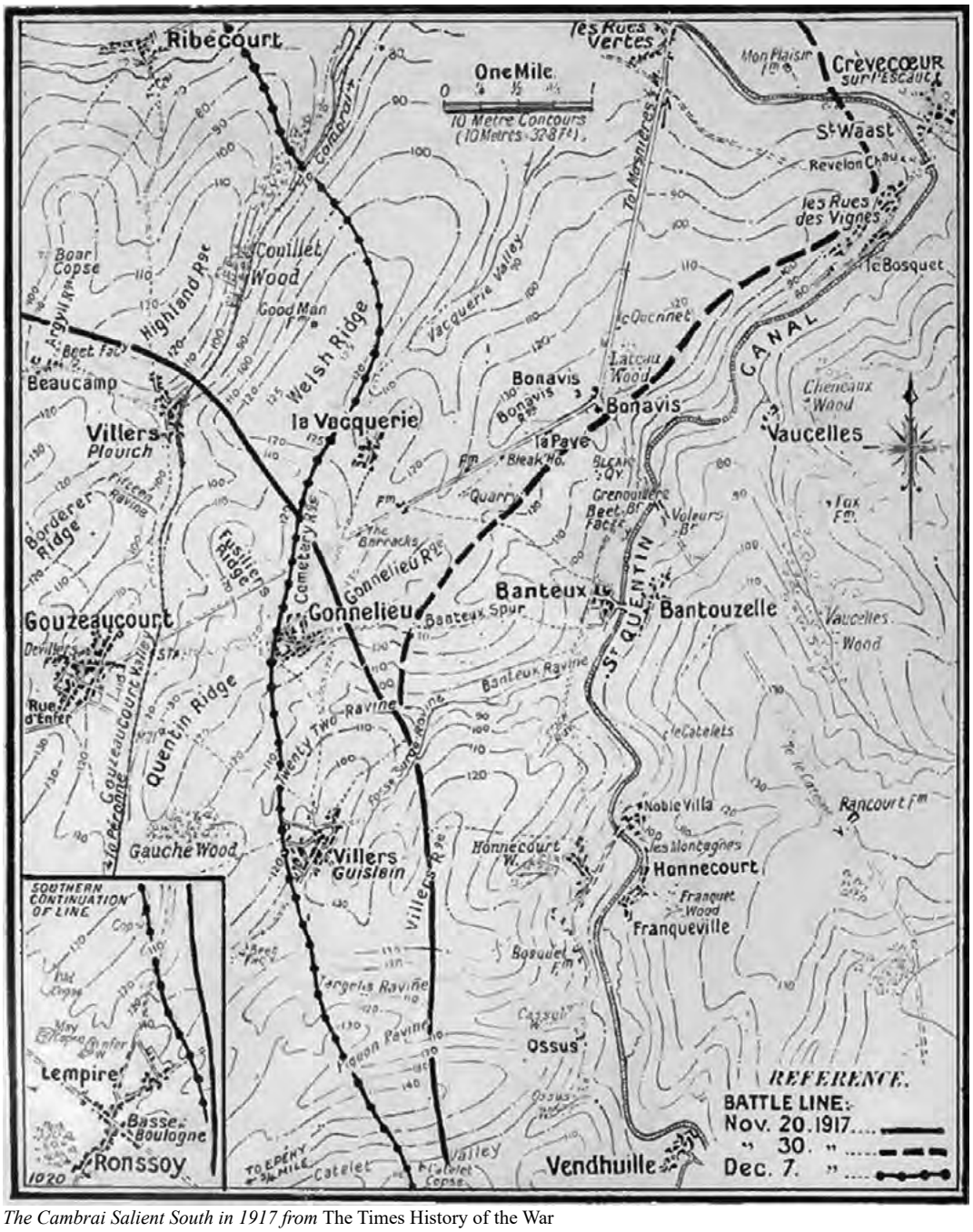
(85) TNA WO 95/2656 42nd Division 126 Brigade, 13 September 1917. The CO of 1/9 Manchester Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Evan Colclough Lloyd (1877–1945), retained his command until he was wounded on 6 April 1918.

(86) Although granted the brevet rank of colonel in 1919, Tufnell remained a substantive major. He was murdered in 1920 whilst travelling on a train in India while GSO1 8th (Lucknow) Division.

Gallant Gunners of Cambrai

by Steve Thornley

When Steve Thornley inherited his grandfather's Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) in 2004 he knew little of the full story behind it, save for the fact that Sergeant Edward Thornley, of the Royal Artillery, had been awarded his DCM at Cambrai in 1917 for his part in the same action as that for which Sergeant Cyril Gourley MM had received the Victoria Cross (VC). His eyes were opened on 11 November 2014 when he attended the dedication of a new war memorial to the students of Calday Grange Grammar School in the Wirral who had fallen in both world wars. Steve Thornley was able to see Sergeant Gourley's VC – taken to the event from the Royal Artillery's 'Firepower' Museum – and met the daughter and son–in–law of another soldier who had been awarded a Military Medal (MM) for the same action. So began a 12 month odyssey to tell the story of an action for which a total of twelve gallantry awards were issued and to trace the descendants of the soldiers involved.



The Cambrai Salient South in 1917 from The Times History of the War

Penetration

In late 1917 Cambrai, in Northern France, was a key supply hub serving the German Hindenburg Line. For the Allies the capture of the town, along with the Bourlon Ridge to the west, would threaten the rear of the German line to the north.

The Battle of Cambrai began on 20 November 1917, just ten days after the official closure of the Third Ypres campaign, and with considerable British success. As the battle progressed, however, the advance began to slow and at 7.00am on 30 November the Germans mounted a massive counter–attack: the advance of the German infantry in the south being unexpectedly swift, spreading across some 13km and coming within a few kilometres of the vital village of Metz and its link to Bourlon.

At the extreme southern end of their attack, the Germans threw their weight between the villages of Lempire and Ronssoy, at a point where the British line consisted of detached posts dug in in patches of rough quarried ground about 100yds apart. Coming on in dense and successive waves after first drenching the British posts with gas, the Germans penetrated almost as far as Ronssoy. Here the British fought valiantly and, although it was impossible to prevent the Germans from breaking through, some advanced positions were held and a defensive flank was formed which was later maintained throughout the day. (1)

Eight hundred and twenty–eight British Army officers and men died on 30 November 1917 as British units displayed reckless determination in an attempt to halt the advance, none more so than the men of D Battery, 276 Brigade of the 55th West Lancashire Division. Sergeant Cyril Edward Gourley MM was awarded the VC for his gallantry on that day and his story has been comprehensively researched and documented by his family, friends and historians. His VC and supporting documentation is held by the 'Firepower' Museum. Eleven other soldiers of the battery were awarded gallantry medals for the same action that day. Their stories are told here.

The action

The action was brought vividly to life in the after action report made on the battlefield by D Battery's commander, Major John Hudson MC.

'From D /276 Battery RFA to 276 Brigade RFA

The following is the narrative of operations carried out by the section of this Battery in the neighbourhood of Priel Cutting yesterday, 30th November 1917.

At 7.10am in accordance with instructions from here the section opened fire on SOS Guillemont. After firing at rates laid down for seven

minutes, fire was still carried on, as the position appeared serious, at a reduced rate until SOS Birdcage was received at about 7.30am. Fire had just been switched into this when the enemy barrage dropped right on the guns. Sergeant Thornley went to find Lieutenant Ridealgh for instructions as to whether to continue firing or to move out to a flank temporarily. He found Lieutenant Ridealgh wounded, arranged for his removal, and cleared the detachments out to a flank. He then saw a T[rench]M[ortar] Officer (name unknown) who told him the enemy was 'practically on top of them'. Sergeant Thornley went to Lieutenant Ridealgh whose wound was serious, for instructions. Lieutenant Ridealgh told him to do what he could and hang on as long as possible.

The enemy was then observed advancing along Holts Bank. No. 114983 Gunner Clough Hartley, a member of the detachment, proposed going back to the guns and firing point blank at the enemy instead of trying to continue firing on Birdcage. Sergeant Thornley consulted OC 6th King's (L'pool) Battalion who agreed. The original detachment, consisting of a total of ten men, was now scattered, some carrying away Lieutenant Ridealgh, and some in dugouts in Priel Cutting. Sergeant Thornley hastily collected the following available men – Corporal Howard, 681791 Gunner Fred Backhouse (Signaller), 167717 Gunner Thomas Arthur Jevons (Signaller).

114983 Gunner Clough Hartley – switched one gun round and fired into the enemy with open sights. They had fired about twenty rounds with 106 fuse, when the enemy opened on them with a machine gun from a flank at close range. This made the position untenable. They removed the dial sights, dismantled the guns by removing the breech mechanisms, and got back to Battery HQ dugouts.

Meanwhile communications with the battery had been absolutely destroyed by the barrage put down and mentioned above.

I got rather sketchy information through by a runner, No. 681787 Bombardier Joseph Austin Pinnington, who told me Lieutenant Ridealgh was badly wounded, the guns temporarily abandoned, and the enemy close up.

I had no officer available, so sent down an NCO in whom I had the fullest confidence. Later events will show he fully justified it – No. 681886 Sergeant Cyril Edward Gourley. I gave him instructions to collect what men were available, proceed to the section, take charge, get information through to me as soon as ever possible, and meanwhile do all he could to keep the guns going up to the last minute.

On the way down, half way there, he detailed one signaller, No. 656259 Gunner Alfred George Oram, to work forward on the line, and on arriving there about 10.30am started the two signallers mentioned above, Gunners Jevons and Backhouse, working back. These three signallers did exceptionally brave and efficient work on the line under very heavy shell fire.

Sergeant Gourley then collected all the men he could get hold of and held them in readiness to man the guns. From 10.30am to 11.00am there was a heavy barrage of 4.2s both in front and behind them, and it was not possible to put them in action.

About 11.00am the barrage moved a little south, though shells were still falling fairly heavily round the guns. The main part of the barrage moved down south along the Lempire Road where the three men mentioned above, Oram, Backhouse and Jevons, were endeavouring to repair the wire.

At 11.00am Sergeant Gourley reported to the CO 6th Battalion asking for information, and said he was prepared to carry out any firing the CO desired. He asked for a slow rate of fire on Birdcage. This was carried out until 12 noon, one gun being used at a time and detachments changed about.

At 12 noon, Captain Blackledge, of the same Battalion, saw Sergeant Gourley, told him he had information that the enemy was coming down Holts Bank and Cottesmore Road, and asked if the guns could do anything. One gun had meanwhile been put out of action by the breech mechanism lever, which had at one time been removed, being buried.

Sergeant Gourley collected the following men: Sergeant Thornley, 114983 Gunner Clough Hartley, 681770 Bombardier Thomas Edge, 72339 Gunner Charles Oliver [and] 199319 Gunner Reginald Charles Evans [and] pulled the sound gun out of the pit to about twenty yards away and opened fire on the enemy who were then in full view. First round well over, second direct hit on party–firing first charge, open sights 106 fuse. About twenty rounds were fired. Three enemy aeroplanes were above, flying very low indeed and shooting at the guns with MG, and they were subjected to much rifle fire from the left flank. Enemy planes evidently sent back information, as a 4·2–ins battery put over a sudden burst of about 100 rounds. The guns had to be left again. Sergeant Gourley again reported to CO 6th Battalion, who asked him to stand by and be ready, but had no further information and did not require more shooting.

About a quarter–of–an–hour later Sergeant Gourley, thinking he might do some good, went out to the gun again with Gunner Hartley only with him. The two of them fired about eight rounds before they were again driven off.

Meanwhile, another officer having been sent to me to replace Lieutenant Ridealgh, I sent Lieutenant Biggart forward to this section to take charge.

He arrived there about 2.00pm and reported to CO 6th Battalion. About 2.30pm more enemy being observed on Holts Bank and in front of it, he collected the following party and went out to man the guns [with] Sergeant Gourley, Sergeant Thornley, Bombardier Edge, Gunner Hartley [and] Gunner Oliver.

The enemy was firing heavily with rifle and MG. Each of them picked up two shells with 106 fuse and doubled out to the guns. Sergeant Gourley was No. 1, Bombardier Edge laid and fired, Lieutenant Biggart loaded, Sergeant Thornley prepared the charges, and the other two carried up the ammunition.

After they had fired twenty rounds, the enemy opened on them with two MG, from the left flank at close range. They all took cover in the pit twenty yards away, except Bombardier Edge, who remained alone with the gun. He fired another round and then had to drop down to escape the two MGs. When they died down he jumped up again, fired another round by himself. This he did three times and then he had to retire to the gun pit. From there the party crawled out one by one back to Battalion HQ, having first taken the dial sights off the guns. CO 6th Battalion was consulted but did not desire any more firing at the moment.

At 4.00pm, enemy were seen running over the Villers Ridge from Holts Bank. Battalion HQ expected an attack through Priel Cutting. All the detachments set to work with the Infantry to build a barricade and carry SAA and bombs.

By the time this had finished, darkness had set in. I had by then a fair knowledge of the situation and sent off a party from the Battery position with instructions that guns were to be man–handled along the Lempire Road past Battalion HQ, where limbers would be sent out to meet them. These instructions were successfully carried out without casualties, and the guns put in action in the main battery position.

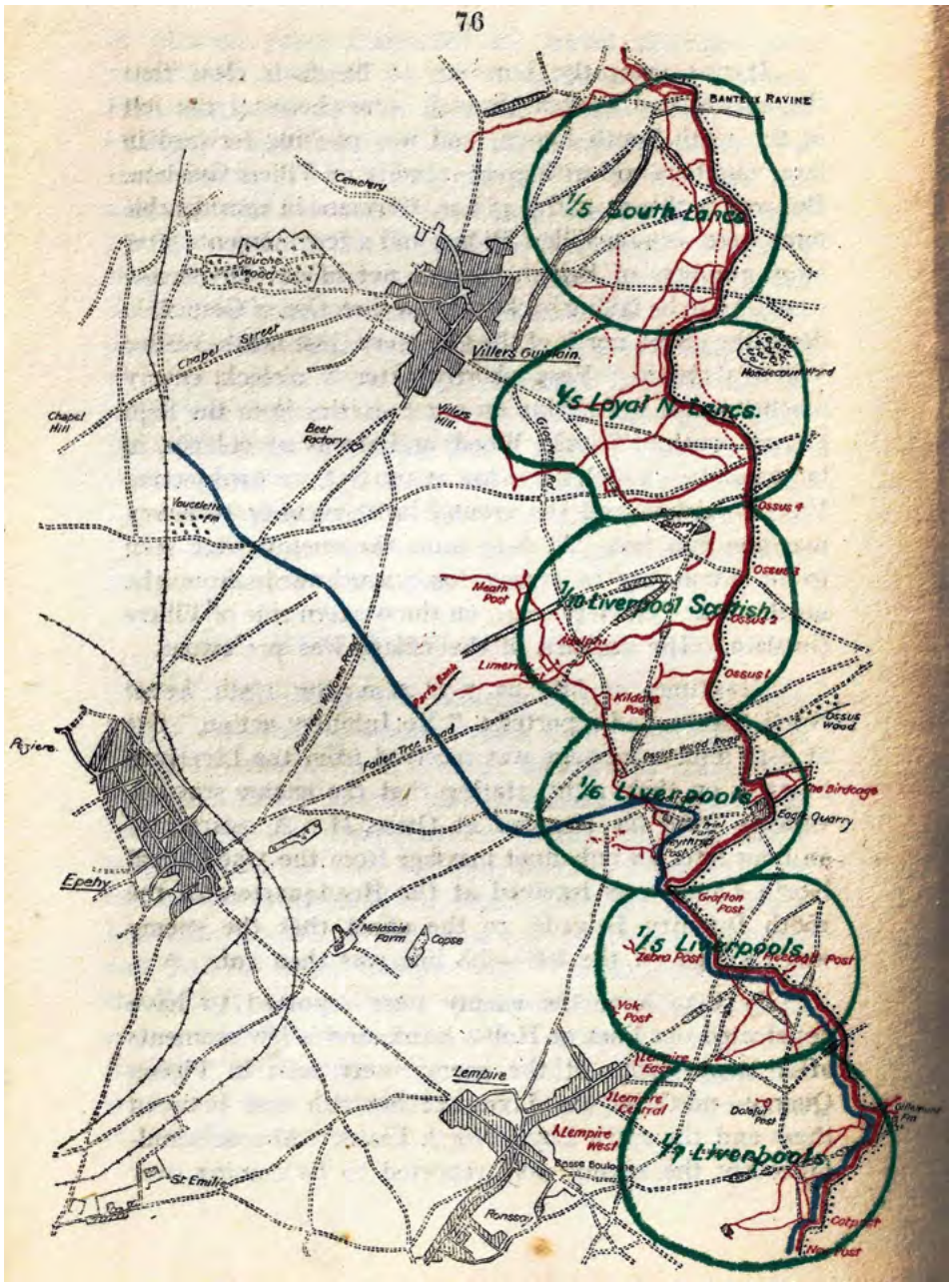
This great exploit was duly recognised by the award of the VC to Sergeant Gourley, the MC to Lieutenant Biggart, the DCM to Sergeant Thornley and Bombardier Edge and the MM to Gunner Backhouse, Gunner Evans, Gunner Hartley, Corporal Howard, Gunner Jevons, Gunner Oliver, Gunner Oram and Bombardier Pinnington.' [2] [3]

Priel crossroads

Army Forms W3121 for Sergeant Thornley DCM and Corporal Howard MM completed on the day of the action state that the guns were situated at Priel Crossroads (Trench maps reference X.28.d.10.02) which positions them 2.5km due north of Lempire, alongside the current A26 Autoroute des Anglais.[4]

It is interesting to see the mini salient created at Little Priel Farm in the centre of the 1/6 King's Liverpool positions and where D/276 Battery was situated. The movement in the front line illustrates the strength of the

The location of the guns at Priel Crossroads. Courtesy The National Library of Scotland, maps 62C NE, 57C SE, 57B SW & 62B NE



The front line on 20 November after the British offensive – marked in red – and after the German counter attack on 30 November – in blue from the Rev. J O Coop, DSO, TD, MA, The Story of the 55th (West Lancashire) Division 1916–1919

counter attack; the regiments to the north were almost annihilated with not one man of 1/5 South Lancashire Regiment returning from the fighting.

The men

Several of those involved in the action were pre–war Territorial gunners from Liverpool based at The Grange. Gore's directory of 1900 has a listing for the '4th LVA (Position Artillery). Headquarters, The Grange, Edge Lane'. The old Grange was taken into use in 1900; the original building was an old sandstone farmhouse to which was added a large covered drill shed. A 1908 OS map shows the Drill Hall detached behind The Grange.

In 1914 the unit was known as the '4th West Lancashire Howitzer Brigade, RFA, TF', becoming 276 Brigade RFA later in the war when many units were renumbered.

Gunner Frederick Backhouse MM was born in 1894 in West Derby, Liverpool to Alfred and Alice Backhouse. He worked as an apprentice ironmonger and later joined the Merchant Navy. He was a pre–war Territorial gunner based at The Grange, Edge Lane. In 1914 he

Gunner Frederick Backhouse (centre, smiling)

was returning from a voyage to Canada when war was declared. He landed in France on 29 September 1915 and as a member of D Battery 276 Brigade saw action at Ypres, Arras, The Somme, Cambrai and Givenchy.

Backhouse's MM recommendation on Army Form W3121, dated 3 December 1917, reads as follows:

> 'For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty near RONSSOY on 30.11.17 when an attack was made by the enemy on the 55th Division. Gunner Backhouse was a signaller and formed part of the original detachment of the forward section of D/276 Battery RFA which was in action in PRIEL CUTTING on 30.11.17. About 8.00am, his telephone lines being cut, he helped to man one of the guns which was firing on the enemy who were then only 600/700 yards away and although fire was opened on the detachment with a Machine Gun from a flank at close range, he maintained his position until the position became untenable. On the arrival of Sergt. GOURLEY to take command of the Section, he was detailed to endeavour to maintain communication and in spite of continuous shell and rifle fire he did his utmost to maintain the line, working with untiring energy throughout the day displaying great determination and disregard for his personal safety.'

Backhouse married in 1923 and lived in Liverpool. He died in 1980.

Lieutenant William Mitchell Biggart MC was born in 1890 at Bailie House, Glasgow to Mary Ann Biggart and Beith–born mechanical engineer Andrew Stevenson Biggart who played a prominent role in the construction of the Forth Rail Bridge.

The *London Gazette* of 27 August 1915 shows that Biggart had joined the army as a private in the Lowland (Howitzer) Brigade, Lanarkshire Yeomanry but on 28 August 1915 he received his commission as a second lieutenant in the RFA. He rose to the rank of captain and three days before the end of the war he became an acting major.

In his report Major Hudson states that after taking over from Sergeant Gourley, Biggart ran the operation with the greatest coolness and capability, showing an absolute disregard for a very great danger, and having only one desire – to kill the enemy.

Biggart married in 1919 and died in 1948 after a successful career in engineering. At his memorial service the Church Minister said: 'He was a good man, gracious, kindly and friendly. There was something in his personality irresistibly attractive which derived from a nature, radiant and unassuming and of great singleness, simplicity and sincerity.'

Bombardier Thomas Edge DCM was born in October 1897 to William Hingeley and Elizabeth Jane Edge in Liverpool. He was employed as a cable making machinist and was a pre–war Territorial gunner based at The Grange, Edge Lane. He landed in France with Frederick Backhouse on 29 September 1915 and like Backhouse saw action at Ypres, Arras, The Somme, Cambrai and Givenchy.

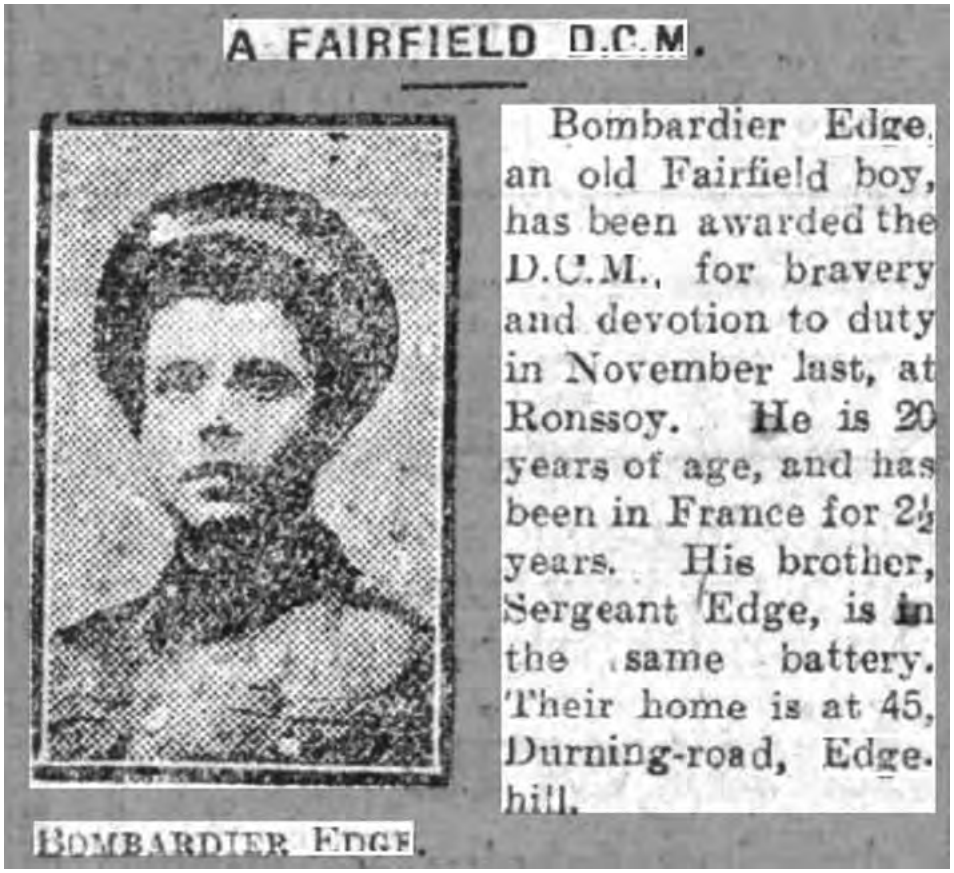
In his report Major Hudson states that 'Edge returned to the Battery position once to give information and went back with Sergeant Gourley, was with every special detachment … for very dangerous work and for some time kept one gun in action by himself.' Edge's award of the DCM was recorded in the *Liverpool Echo* of 18 March 1918.

Edge married in 1924 and was employed as a school caretaker. He died in Liverpool in 1976.

Gunner Reginald Charles Evans MM was born in 1898 to Charles William and Louisa Amy Evans in Cheltenham. Evans was employed as a telegraph messenger before the war.

Gunner Reginald Charles Evans

Lieutenant William Biggart



A FAIRFIELD D.C.M.

Bombardier Edge, an old Fairfield boy, has been awarded the D.C.M., for bravery and devotion to duty in November last, at Ronssoy. He is 20 years of age, and has been in France for 2½ years. His brother, Sergeant Edge, is in the same battery. Their home is at 45, Durning-road, Edge-hill.

BOMBARDIER EDGE.

The announcement of the DCM for Bombardier Edge in the Liverpool Echo

The Gloucestershire Echo of 25 March 1918 recorded Evans being awarded the MM.

After hostilities ceased in 1918 he went on to Germany as a member of the Army of Occupation.

Evans married in 1921. During the Second World War he acted as a stretcher bearer in the Home Guard in Cheltenham, and received the Civil Defence Medal.

Evans worked as a postman and received the Imperial Service Medal for 46 years' service in the Post Office, meaning he received medals showing the heads of three different monarchs. He died in Cheltenham in 1992.

Gunner Clough Hartley MM was born to Tom and Emily Hartley in Morley, Yorkshire, in 1894. He was employed as a cotton warp twister at a woollen mill prior to 1914.

Hartley enlisted in October 1915 and, after training for five months in Ireland, went to France in April 1916. Hartley's award of the MM was recorded in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* which featured his account of the action: '…it happened that the Boches came over the top and broke through our lines. At the time we had two guns just behind the trenches. The Boches came along, and at last we saw them coming down a small hill in front of us, so we opened fire at the range of about 500 yards, and by sticking to our guns we were able to keep the Boches there until reinforcements arrived.'

In his report Major Hudson stated that Hartley was always to the front in the most dangerous places.

Gunner Clough Hartley

Hartley married in 1920 and was employed as a prison officer. He lived in Wakefield and died there in 1984.

Corporal Frank Sutton Howard MM was born in Ainsdale, near Liverpool in 1894 to Frank and Hannah Howard. He was employed as an apprentice in the timber trade.

In his report Major Hudson stated that:

> 'Howard was acting as No. 1 with Sergeant Thornley. After Lieutenant Ridealgh was wounded he went back to the guns and formed part of the detachment with Sergeant Thornley, firing with open sights on the enemy in Holts Bank. He was wounded in the knee but still carried on until the guns had to be left again. Then he helped to carry Lieutenant Ridealgh to the Dressing Station, had his own wound dressed and returned at once to duty, reporting to me for further instructions and giving me information as to how the situation stood. I ordered him not to go back to his gun but to get pits ready for the guns when they were pulled back here. He was with the forward guns only in the earlier part of the day, but showed the greatest courage and ability during one of the most difficult parts of the day, when the only officer was knocked out and no other was detailed to take charge.'

Victory Medal rolls show that Howard served as a sergeant at some point, while the *London Gazette* of 24 April 1919 shows he was promoted to second lieutenant in April 1919.

Howard was a good footballer and received a silver cup for captaining a team in France.

Corporal Frank Howard

After the War Howard married and resumed his pre–war calling in the timber trade, becoming a senior manager with a North Liverpool timber company. He died in Liverpool in 1961.

Gunner Thomas Arthur Jevons MM was born in 1891 to Thomas and Fanny Laura Jevons at Moxley, Bilston, Wolverhampton. His father died when he was young and he spent four years living in The Royal Orphanage, Wolverhampton.

When he enlisted in 1916 he was employed as a clerk (short hand typist). He joined D Battery, 276 Brigade in June 1917. After the war Jevons did not marry. He was employed as a clerical officer in the Civil Service and died in 1965.

Gunner Charles Oliver MM was born to Jane Oliver in 1896 at The Banks, Whitburn on Wearside. By 1901 his mother was called Jane Bropley and Charles was living with her in Sunderland. Ten years later his mother had married John William Richardson and Charles was living with them in Horden. By the time he enlisted Oliver was employed as a pit pony driver.

Gunner Charles Oliver

Gunner Thomas Jevons

Oliver's great–nephew recalls that when Charles returned from the war the villagers of Horden organised a collection amongst themselves and bought Charles a gold watch in recognition of his bravery in being awarded the MM. For the villagers of a poor mining community this must have been a huge expense in 1919. Oliver did not marry and died in in Sunderland in 1940.

Oliver's great nephew recalls that his 'Uncle Charlie', as he was known, was hugely respected within the family for the brave man that he was and that even in 2016, 76 years after his death, his memory was still being recalled by several older members of the family.

Gunner Alfred Samuel George Oram MM was born in 1893 to George Edmund and Eliza Maria Oram in Plymouth. Oram attested in 1915 by which time he was living in Glasgow. He went to France in October 1916 when he was posted to C Battery 276 Brigade. In January 1917 he was posted to D Battery.

Oram was demobilised in February 1919. He married and died in 1955 in Glasgow.

Gunner Alfred Oram

Bombardier Joseph Austin Pinnington MM. Major Hudson's report states that, 'this NCO acted as runner between the forward section and the Battery position when the wire was down … all day [I] relied on him for information and passage of orders, and he carried out his task admirably. He was continually travelling between the two places, always passing through heavy M G fire.'

Bombardier Joseph Pinnington photographed on 30 August 1915

Sergeant Edward James Thornley DCM was born in Liverpool in 1893. He worked as a fish shop assistant and was a pre–war Territorial gunner based at The Grange, Edge Lane. He landed in France on 29 September 1915, the same day as Frederick Backhouse and Thomas Edge, and as a member of D Battery, 276 Brigade saw action with them at Ypres, Arras, The Somme, Cambrai and Givenchy.

Thornley's DCM recommendation on Army Form W3121, dated 30 November 1917, reads as follows:

Sergeant Edward Thornley

'This NCO was acting as No. 1 to a gun at the detached section of D/276 Battery RFA which, under the command of 2/Lieut. H R Ridealgh, was in position at Priel Cross Roads (X.28.d.10.02.). The enemy, on 30.11.17 capturing the BIRDCAGE system of trenches, had advanced and captured Little Priel Farm 400 yards in front of the gun. Sergt. Thornley kept his detachment together and continued firing on BIRDCAGE. Owing to a bank in front he could not fire point blank on the enemy in view at Little Priel Farm. Afterwards the detachment was driven away by Machine Gun Fire and 2/Lieut. H R Ridealgh was wounded. Sergt. Thornley assisted by No. 681788 Corporal Frank Sutton Howard placed himself under the orders of the nearest Senior Officer, OC 6th Battn. Kings Liverpool Regt, and continued shooting in accordance with his requirements whenever it was possible. Throughout the whole day this NCO's devotion to duty and determination kept his guns in action at a most critical period.'

Thornley returned to England on 27 December 1918 when he was admitted to hospital for three months with rheumatoid arthritis. He resumed his civilian career as a manager of a fish shop, marrying in 1924.

After the war Thornley became one of the early members of the DCM League which in later years became the Gallantry Medallists' League.

Sergeant Thornley's DCM League Badge

A note written by Thornley towards the end of his life gives an interesting insight into life during the final stages of the war:

'About 6 weeks before the armistice I was left in charge of a battery, moving warfare had now commenced, something we had never experienced before. Finding deficiencies everywhere including horses and keeping in touch with supplies undermined my health to such an extent that sleep was impossible. My service in France was unbroken from Sep 1915 except for a leave in 1917 and being in a division always in the fighting I was one of the many in the artillery who experienced a plastering by German gas shells.'

Thornley died in 1955 after suffering from the effects of German gas throughout his life.

The injured

Two other men are mentioned in Major Hudson's report. Of one Major Hudson wrote: 'GNR. WILLIAM FAUX was originally a member of the detachment and showed great bravery and behaved admirably. He was wounded by shell fire early in the day.'

The other was Lieutenant Harry Reginald Ridealgh who was seriously wounded early

Ribands being awarded to nine recipients at Gorre Chateau on 20 February 1918. Missing are gunners Reginald Evans MM, Frederick Backhouse MM and Alfred Oram MM. This photograph is kindly made available courtesy of Corporal Pinnington's daughter, Pat Metcalfe, on condition that it will not be reused in any way without her express permission

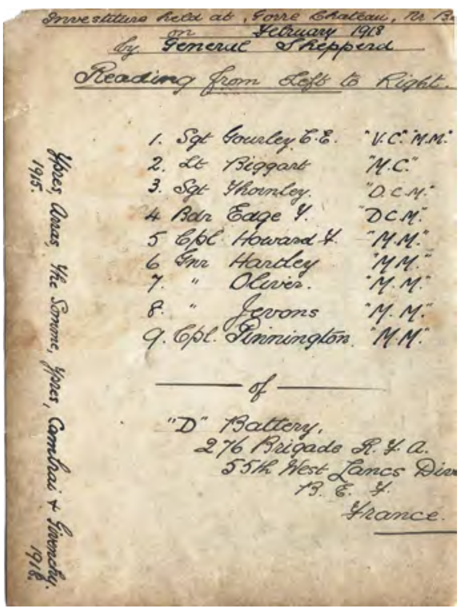
Gunner William Faux (above) and Lieutenant Harry Ridealgh (below)

in the day. Sergeant Thornley organised his evacuation to safety but it proved to be the end of Ridealgh's war.

We know from their descendants that both Faux and Ridealgh recovered from their injuries, living until 1950 and 1944 respectively.

Ceremony

The award of many of the decorations occurred at an investiture held at 12 noon on Wednesday 20 February 1918 when ribands were presented to nine of the twelve soldiers at Gorre Chateau, 2.5km north of Beuvry and 4km east of Bethune. The event was captured by an army photographer. The original hand–written list of attendees is held in Liverpool Library and shows all twelve names. [3] Three are crossed out without any explanation. Descendants of two of the men – Pat Metcalfe and Tracy Hartley–Gidley – hold original prints of several of the photographs. The details of the event were hand written by Pat's father, Corporal Pinnington, on the reverse of one of the photographs – reproduced opposite.



Investiture held at Gorre Chateau, Nr B
on February 1918
by General Sheppard
Reading from Left to Right.

1. Sgt Gourley C.E. "V.C." "M.M."
2. Lt Biggart "M.C."
3. Sgt Thornley "D.C.M."
4. Bdr Edge Y. "D.C.M."
5. Cpl Howard H. "M.M."
6. Gnr Hardley "M.M."
7. " Oliver. "M.M."
8. " Jevons "M.M."
9. Cpl Pinnington "M.M."

— of —

"D" Battery,
276 Brigade R.F.A.
55th West Lancs Div
B.E.F.
France.

Ypres, Arras, the Somme, Ypres, Cambrai + Givenchy.
1915. 1918.

Note written by Corporal Pinnington on reverse of the photograph of the Awards Ceremony. Courtesy and copyright Mrs Pat Metcalfe

Acknowledgements

The research for his article would not have happened without the interest, support and generosity of the descendants of these gallant soldiers. Wayne Finch has been a pillar of support throughout while Pat and Jim Metcalfe, Les Backhouse, Marjorie Clough and Andy Backhouse have each played a huge part as direct descendants of the men involved. The contribution of many others has been invaluable too. My thanks then to Paul Evans from the Royal Artillery 'Firepower' Museum, retired Royal Artillery officers Fred Doyle and Chris Vere, John Balding from the Gallantry Medallists League and contributors to the Great War Forum and British Medals Forum. Special mention must be made of David Jones from Wolverhampton. David saw Wayne's appeal in the Wolverhampton Express & Star *for help in finding Gunner Jevons and kindly offered to assist. David's skills in tracing people are truly remarkable and there is no doubt that several of the descendants would not have been found without the tremendous amount of time and effort he so kindly gave. It has been such a pleasure and privilege for the author to have met, talked with and exchanged e–mails with so many generous people who shared precious photographs, artefacts and above all memories.*

References

(1) *The Times History of the War Vol XVII*, (London: 1914–1921).

(2) Liverpool Record Office 356/FIF/6/6/1/8 to 356/FIF/6/6/1/11.

(3) *History of the 359 (4th West Lancs) Medium Regiment RA (TA) 1859–1959*, privately published, (Liverpool: 1959).

(4) The official record of the action indicates that the guns involved were 4.5–inch howitzers. However, both Sergeant Thornley and Gunner Backhouse always maintained to their sons, quite independently of each other, that the guns were 18–pdrs. Both Thornley and Backhouse had been pre–war Territorial gunners who had been in France since September 1915 so by November 1917 they would have known the difference between a 4.5–inch howitzer and an 18–pdr! Both men felt so strongly on this subject that they repeated their assertions many times after the war.

German Ground Strafing in the Cambrai Counter–Attack
Some PoW Accounts

by A D Harvey

Just as the massed use of tanks was a novel feature of the British offensive at Cambrai in November 1917 so too was the massed use of ground–strafing aircraft during the German counter–attack on the last day of that month.[1] *One British brigade commander reported, 'The massing of low flying aeroplanes going immediately in front of the enemy's infantry caused many casualties and proved very demoralising.'* [2] *A court of enquiry held weeks which followed concluded that: 'The moral effect of these [ground–strafing aircraft] was very great and no doubt tended to facilitate the enemy's success. Our men did not seem to know what to do to minimise the moral effect of these low flying machines. Witnesses stated that fire on them produced no results.'* [3] *Writing shortly after the war, J C Nerney of the Air Historical Branch also emphasised the psychological impact of ground strafing: 'That the attacks by low flying aeroplanes were contributing in this respect cannot be definitely established, but there is ample evidence that the moral effect of these tactics on our troops was a serious factor.'* [4] *Later however the Official History, produced under the direction of Brigadier General J E Edmonds, was only willing to admit that the air attacks caused 'distraction at the critical moment.* [5] *Thereafter it became more or less received wisdom that attacks on infantry from the air, however disconcerting, inflicted relatively little loss in terms of dead and wounded.*[6] *This 'fact' is not, however, confirmed by some of the testimony of men who had actually been shot at by low–flying aircraft on 30 November 1917. The officers most affected, and who became prisoners of war (PoW), frequently referred to attacks from the air in the statements regarding the circumstances of their capture submitted to the War Office after the war and which were, of course, not available to the court of enquiry or to the Air Historical Branch.*[7] *In some cases it is clear that casualties from machine–gunning by aircraft were a decisive factor in the dissolution of front line units. Arnold Harvey examines some of the accounts.*

'Aeroplanes were upon us'

Not all the captured officers mentioned German aeroplanes in their statements and some officers of the Royal Garrison Artillery, operating large–calibre guns positioned in carefully camouflaged gun–pits, gave the impression that the low–flying aircraft they saw were firing at other targets.[8] Second Lieutenant Thomas Carey Fillery of 6/East Kent Regiment (The Buffs) noted that 'The enemy attacked without a barrage but with low flying aeroplanes' but was hit by a bullet in the side soon after witnessing this as a result of which he fainted and saw little more.[9] Second Lieutenant Nigel Octavius Weighill of 1/5 Loyal North Lancashire Regiment recorded in his statement to the War Office that he saw '…between 20 & 30 enemy aeroplanes emerging in the distance from the sky line.' He also saw German infantry outflanking his position on both sides and that by this time '… the aeroplanes were upon us flying very low, & had their M. Guns trained on us.' Deciding that he was hopelessly surrounded, Weighill gathered as many men as he could find and tried to pull back. Hit three times in the legs in the space of a few minutes and unable to walk, he told what was left of the men to 'make a dash for it' but they did not get very far 'owing to fire from the aircraft and Maxim Guns.' Nevertheless the overall impression given by his account was that the Germans owed their success to sheer weight of numbers ('I saw the Boche absolutely pouring in on the extreme left') and the fact that 'Right from 7am our Artillery never fired a single shot.'[10]

One behind the other

Captain Albert Andrew Andrews of 7/Somerset Light Infantry was actually wounded by fire from a German aeroplane while trying to rally retreating troops and organise a defensive line: 'Before we were able to do so, six enemy aeroplanes, flying at very low altitude and one behind another came along the road towards us, and opened fire. I was hit in the arm. I remember getting to a shelter and asking one of my men to bandage my arm; before he had started to do so, the enemy came up to us and made us go towards his rear.'[11]

The German Halberstadt CLII two–seat, ground attack biplane which was used to strafe British infantry on 30 November 1917. Courtesy IWM Q71441

Captain Francis Geoffrey Fison of 10/King's Royal Rifle Corps had deployed his company in abandoned German gun–pits but reported that, 'For a time we inflicted heavy casualties [on German infantry] but several very low flying enemy aeroplanes appeared and kept a continuous stream of machine–gun fire on our position causing us serious losses, disorganising our fire, and enabling the enemy to advance right up to our position.'[12]

Captain Archibald Tutton Salvidge of 1/10 King's (Liverpool) Regiment (Liverpool Scottish) had to wait until the initial German artillery barrage in his sector had lifted before sending two of his platoons forward to reinforce the front line and leading the other two to occupy the support line. He never reached that position and he recalled that 'before we could breast the Bank alongside the road, a very large number of enemy 'planes flew over at low altitude, firing their MGs, & causing many casualties. My men were temporarily scattered by this.' [13]

During the 1930s one Royal Air Force officer who had never had the experience of being strafed by low–flying aircraft claimed that 'the air machine gun, though alarming, is actually a surprisingly innocuous weapon. It will become even more so as the increase of the speed of the aeroplane increases further the interval between the strike of the bullets.'[14] There is something in this, but it misses the point about machine guns and bombs. Even though they usually miss, they do occasionally hit what they are aimed at and as at least some of the officers of units attacked from the air on 30 November 1917 could testify, the results could have a decisive influence on events.

References

(1) For ground–strafing before 30 November 1917 see A D Harvey, 'The Royal Air Force and Close Support, 1918 – 1940,' in *War in History* Vol.15 (2008), pp. 463 – 465.

(2) *The Battle of Cambrai,1917*, The National Archives, Kew (TNA), AIR 1/678/21/13/1642, p.45, quoting Henry Hugh Gordon Hyslop DSO, GOC 59 Brigade. Whether this quotation is from the evidence submitted to the earlier court of enquiry(referred to in next note) is unclear as the file at WO 158/53 does not contain the evidence.

(3) TNA, WO 158/53, *Court of Enquiry on the Action Fought South of Cambrai on November 30th, 1917*, p.11 paragraph 7.

(4) TNA, Air 1/678/21/13/1642,p.45.

(5) Captain Wilfrid Miles, *Military Operations: France and Belgium,1917*, Vol.3, *The Battle of Cambrai, 1917,* (Macmillan & Co. 1948), p.177.

(6) Major General J F C Fuller, *Report on a Visit to Spain, April 1938*, written at the request of the CIGS Lord Gort, 27 April 1938, TNA, WO 106/1585 and WO 233/60, *Draft Report on Air Support for the Army, 1945*, item 20, extract from report on Operations in Norway, 1940, by Lieutenant General Claude Auchinleck.

(7) For a fuller discussion of PoW officers' statements see A D Harvey, 'Letters from the Trenches,' in *British Army Review* No.152 (2011), pp.117 – 123.

(8) Major Harold Whittingham and Lieutenant Algernon Horace Flint of 71/Heavy Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery, both mention low–flying aircraft apparently shooting at other targets.(TNA, WO 339/11310 and WO 374/24730) Second Lieutenant George William Henry Potter, also of the Royal Garrison Artillery, Lieutenant Hugh James Winder of the Royal Field Artillery and Arthur Victor Edwards of 9/Royal Fusiliers, although taken prisoner, do not mention aircraft. (WO 374/54805, WO 339/16972 and WO 339/31989).

(9) TNA, WO 339/89464.

(10) TNA, WO 339/97525.

(11) TNA, WO 339/37121.

(12) TNA, WO 339/48034.

(13) TNA, WO 374/60157.

(14) J C Slessor (later Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Slessor), *Air Power and Armies,* (Oxford University Press: 1936), p.95.

The 'Tank Corpse' of Cambrai
A Century–Old Mystery Solved
by John Taylor and Rob Kirk

Towards the end of October 1917, on one of the quietest sectors of the Western Front, the Germans made a discovery which threw them into turmoil. One night in no man's land, a German patrol came across the body of an English soldier, which they dragged back to their own lines in order to identify his unit. The man had evidently been shot and killed during a night patrol a few days earlier, but it was an item in his wallet which caused consternation: a badge of the Tank Corps, suggesting he either belonged to a tank crew, or had met one while it was reconnoitring for an attack.

The sector remained as quiet as ever, and the Germans eventually dismissed the incident, confident in the strength of their defensive positions – known as the Siegfriedstellung*, or the Hindenburg Line to the British – and in the lack of any obvious preparations for an offensive. Just three weeks later, on 20 November, their complacency was shattered when the British launched one of the most extraordinary operations of the Great War – the Battle of Cambrai, in which 378 fighting tanks, supported by six divisions of infantry and 1,000 field guns, attacked with virtually no preparatory bombardment, and punched their way through the enemy positions along a 6–mile front.*

The Germans were caught almost completely by surprise, and looking back on the discovery of what they called the 'tank corpse', they assumed they had missed a vital clue which should have given them some advance warning. However, the incident has always been unexplained because no–one has managed to identify the dead man, or to establish the nature of his involvement with the tanks.

Now the mystery has been solved by John Taylor and Rob Kirk thanks to a document found in a German military archive, and the full tragic story of the 'tank corpse' can finally be told.

The start of the Battle of Cambrai on 20 November 1917 – an artist's impression from the history of the German Reserve Infantry Regiment 27, the unit which discovered the 'tank corpse'

English corpse

The best account of the Germans' discovery comes in the history of Reserve Infantry Regiment 27 (RIR 27), which was holding the line with other units from the 54th Infantry Division:

> 'On 28 October, *Unteroffizier* Knoop found an English corpse in front of 12th Company's sector on the metalled road from Ribécourt to Trescault. According to medical opinion it could have been two days old. It must have been connected with an English patrol which was fired on by 12th Company a few days before. The discovery caused great sensation at the highest level, because the collar badge of an English tank unit was discovered in the dead man's wallet. It was presumed that this had been exchanged with a member of a tank crew, who must have been reconnoitring for a later attack on the *Bilhemmulde* [a nearby area of open ground], which was highly suitable for a tank attack. But as there was no further evidence of a major offensive, it was ultimately believed that the growing concerns could be put on hold, especially with the Flanders battle still in progress.' (1)

The discovery of the body was also recorded by the neighbouring Reserve Infantry Regiment 90, although the story had grown in the telling: 'It was found that the man wore the uniform of the English Tank Corps. This was alarming; but we soon calmed down, and in the end no further significance was attached to the discovery.' (2)

It even became something of a joke for Infantry Regiment 84, the other unit in the 54th Division. *Leutnant* Carl Beuck recalled that their battalion commander, *Hauptmann* Harro Soltau, often warned about the risk of attack, and even mentioned the threat of tanks:

> 'In particular, a while ago a 'tank corpse' had been found not far from us in no man's land, in other words the body of an English officer wearing a uniform of the kind worn by tank crews. Personally I was very sceptical about these predictions, and not so convinced about a large–scale attack; indeed Saucke [another company commander] and I sometimes had a laugh about Soltau's repeated references to the 'tank corpse'. But events were to show that Soltau's concerns were only too justified!' (3)

The question was raised again in 1932 by *Major* Lorenzen, whose *Landwehr* unit had been on the receiving end of the attack, when he was contacted by Major Thomas Crouch, formerly in B Battalion of the Tank Corps. Major Crouch had found an Iron Cross during the battle and wished to return it, resulting in a cordial exchange of correspondence. [4]

In one letter, *Major* Lorenzen wrote: 'I remembered that about 2 months previously we had found between the lines when on patrol duty before Villers Plouich the body of an English soldier who belonged to a Tank formation. Perhaps you were reconnoitring the ground already then with a view to an attack with Tanks?' Major Crouch was equally puzzled: 'I do not remember any member of the Tank Corps being lost in No–Man's Land some two months before the battle, but I believe one or two men were missing only a few days before.' And there, in the absence of any further evidence, the matter had to rest.

'One man missing'

The authors came across the mystery while researching *Deborah and the War of the Tanks*, a book about D51 Deborah, one of the tanks involved in the attack against Flesquières on 20 November 1917. The tank's remains were buried during the post–war battlefield clearance, and discovered and excavated in 1998 by the Cambrai historian Philippe Gorczynski. The book tells the story of Deborah and her crew, and of a predecessor with the number D51 which took part in the Battle of Passchendaele. [5]

The identity of the 'tank corpse' was intriguing but seemed impossible to solve. The records of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) confirmed there were no deaths of Tank Corps men in the area at this time, and the details provided by the Germans were so vague that it was impossible to identify the dead man or his unit.

The breakthrough came on a visit to the *Hauptstaatsarchiv* in Stuttgart, where many documents relating to the battle are preserved. These include an intelligence report listing British units in the area, which noted that 'the... 20th Division was confirmed by a dead man from 12th Rifle Brigade (in 60th Brigade) brought in from the Trescault–Ribécourt road on 29 October.' [6]

At last there was some definite information, but the CWGC did not record any fatalities from 12th Battalion Rifle Brigade (12/RB) in the expected timeframe of 26–28 October. However, the battalion's war diary contains this entry on 20 October: 'Whilst in Brigade reserve orders had been received that unless a prisoner was obtained during this tour in the line, a raid would have to be made on the enemies (sic) trenches. Major Breckon had accordingly organised a strong Fighting Patrol with this end in view... Casualties – one man missing.' [7]

The war diary contains an unusually full set of casualty returns, including one showing a single missing man on 21 October: Rifleman S/15380 S Walker. According to *Soldiers Died in the Great War* this was Rifleman Samuel Walker from Wrangle in Lincolnshire, so at last we had a full name, along with a further clue: the record showed he was formerly in the Machine Gun Corps.

This was potentially significant because the Tank Corps had previously been known as the Heavy Branch of the Machine Gun Corps to disguise its true purpose. So it seemed that Rifleman Walker might have had some connection with the Tank Corps, but this would have been impossible to prove were it not for a stroke of luck: his service record has survived among the so–called 'burnt records' at the National Archives. [8]

Unexpected turn

The file shows he enlisted aged 26 on 11 December 1915, in Woolwich in South London where he was working as a labourer, though his family were from Lincolnshire. He travelled to France and joined 3/RB in the line in May 1916, but just seven weeks later he was hit in the arm by shrapnel and evacuated home with a 'Blighty one'.

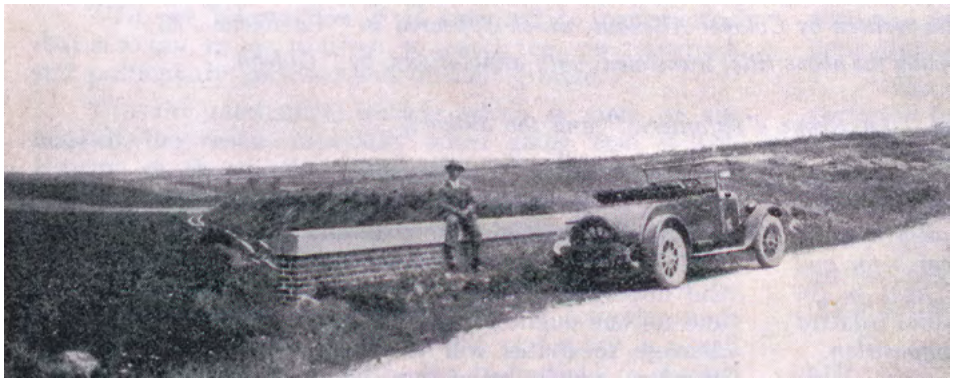
Samuel returned to France in November 1916 and was posted to 12/RB, but at this point his career took an unexpected turn, and two days before Christmas he joined D Battalion of the Machine Gun Corps Heavy Branch – in other words, the forerunner of the Tank Corps, and the very same unit as D51 Deborah and her crew. At this time the tankmen had just completed their first actions in the Battle of the Somme, and were regrouping and recruiting ready for their next trial of strength with the Germans during the Battles of Arras and Bullecourt in April–May 1917.

There is no record of what part Samuel played in these operations, which resulted in heavy losses with little gain for the tanks, but an entry in his service record on 23 June 1917 suggests he did not thrive in his new unit: 'Awarded 7 days FP [Field Punishment] No. 2 for (1). Being improperly dressed (2). Not complying with an order.'

Three months later, with the Tank Corps bogged down – often literally – in a fruitless campaign in the Ypres Salient, Samuel evidently decided to cut his losses and returned to his old regiment. The service record suggests it was a sideways move, and he retained the same rate of pay and resumed his former number. On 5 October 1917, he was back with 12/RB in the trenches before Cambrai – a sector so sleepy that the Germans called it 'the silent front', and no doubt a blessed respite from the horrors of Passchendaele.

However, it was not entirely quiet, since the commanders on both sides mounted frequent patrols and raids to probe the enemy's defences and maintain their men's fighting spirit. As he prepared to take part in just such a night patrol on 20 October, Rifleman Walker still carried a badge in his wallet as a souvenir of his brief service in the Tank Corps – probably a cloth arm badge bearing the profile of a tank, rather than a metal cap or collar badge as these had not yet been widely issued.

As he set out on the raid Rifleman Walker had no idea that his former comrades would



Near the spot where the 'tank corpse' was found – the road from Trescault to Ribécourt, on the site of the foremost German outpost in no man's land. From the Royal Tank Corps Journal, *1928*

The same view today

Arm badge worn by tank crewmen. Courtesy the collection of Philippe Gorczynski

soon be fighting for their lives on this very spot, and he had no reason to give the badge a second thought.

Prisoner

The raid on which Rifleman Walker went missing ended in failure, since its aim had been to capture a prisoner and find out his unit. Fortunately this problem resolved itself without further losses a few days later, when on 24 October the battalion war diary noted: '10pm. A Boch (sic) prisoner at last. One of the enemy … was found walking along our trench on D Coys front. Evidently he had meant to give himself up having come out into No Man's Land with a strong enemy patrol & deserted.' (9)

The German soldier belonged to RIR 27, the same unit that had discovered Rifleman Walker's body, and he proved to be a rich source of information. He was a member of the *Jagdkommando*, a specialist squad whose purpose was to carry out fighting patrols and bring back prisoners. An interrogation report in the war diary of 20th Division Headquarters shows he provided full details of the German order of battle, troop movements and dispositions, and even the location of their field kitchens.(10)

It was ironic that this intelligence breakthrough stemmed from the failure of an enemy patrol, rather than the success of a British one. The soldier had been part of a raiding party led by *Leutnant* Gustav Poppendieck, as described by another member, *Musketier* Bode:

> 'Shortly after we had left our trenches, we spotted an English patrol. *Leutnant* Poppendieck's immediate plan was to capture them. We drew apart to right and left in order to surround the English patrol, while *Leutnant* Poppendieck went forward with a few men. The right–hand group was led by a *Gefreiter* whose first name was Ignatz … I have forgotten his surname. [He] had followed the direction given by *Leutnant* Poppendieck, when suddenly four men appeared in front of us. With a shout of 'Die, Tommy!', Ignatz hurled his hand grenade, which was all ready to throw, at the people who suddenly popped up in front of us. Our leader [Poppendieck] must have made a mistake in the darkness, because they immediately threw themselves down as well. A hand grenade also flew towards us, but without injuring anyone. It could have been a real disaster, if someone hadn't immediately shouted out, and so the misunderstanding became clear. Unfortunately our *Leutnant* Poppendieck … was killed by this hand grenade thrown in the darkness. Who was guilty? I believe, in the position we were in at the time, that the question of blame could never be decided'.(11)

Misplaced trust

A report into the incident prepared on behalf of the divisional commander, *Generalleutnant Freiherr* von Watter, suggests that *Leutnant* Poppendieck was the architect of his own misfortune: 'He set off with five men towards the English trenches, but without explaining his further intentions, or leaving sentries posted, or arranging a password for his return.'(12)

The grave of Leutnant *Gustav Poppendieck in the German War Cemetery in Rue de Solesmes, Cambrai*

The report says the grenade blast caused 'confusion and agitation' among the waiting squad. A number of men ran off, and *Musketier* Cornelsen had not been seen since. The records of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) show this was Erich Cornelsen, who had just turned 20 years old, and was born in the town of Prökuls (now Priekulė) in what was then the province of East Prussia, now Lithuania.(13)

The Germans were baffled by *Musketier* Cornelsen's disappearance, and the report says: 'It is presumed that he got lost and either strayed into the English trenches, or was captured or killed by an English patrol, perhaps sent there after the detonation of the hand grenade. Based on the knowledge of his character and his previous behaviour, there is not the slightest reason to suspect that Cornelsen deserted to the enemy.'(14)

In fact, their trust was misplaced, as *Musketier* Cornelsen revealed in the British interrogation report: 'The morale in prisoners Coy. (sic) is only moderate. Prisoner had arranged with one of his friends to desert at the earliest opportunity. He stated that men were only kept from deserting by the fact that anyone suspected of trying to desert was immediately shot.'(15)

Wrangle

It was time to leave behind the confusion and uncertainty of the Western Front, and to go in search of Rifleman Walker's family in Lincolnshire. This led the authors to the village churchyard in Wrangle, where the gravestone of Samuel Walker's parents bears his name, along with the statement 'Missing in France 21 Oct. 1917, aged 28' and an epitaph: 'With Christ which is far better'.

Samuel Walker is commemorated on his parents' gravestone in the churchyard at Wrangle, Lincolnshire

The graves of Walter and Charles Walker and their parents

The village war memorial at Wrangle bearing the three brothers' names

There was another sad discovery, for nearby were two CWGC headstones. One commemorates Private Charles Walker of 1/6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, who died on 27 August 1918, while the other bears the name of Lance Corporal Walter Walker of 2nd Battalion London Regiment, who had won the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) and died on 9 November 1918. These were Samuel's brothers, and their mother had also died in 1918, so it was clear the final year of war brought many tragedies for the family.

The records indicate that Samuel's brothers were both victims of disease. Charles was discharged in May 1918 aged 27 suffering from diabetes, described as 'attributable to service during present war', and was awarded the Silver War Badge for men who had left the army due to illness or injury.[16] Walter had won the DCM the previous November for bringing in wounded men under heavy fire.[17] He died just two days before the Armistice at the age of 23, possibly as a result of the influenza epidemic then sweeping Europe. All three brothers' names are inscribed on the village war memorial nearby.

To find the family all together it is necessary to go back to 1901, when the census shows Alfred Walker, a farm labourer, and his wife Eliza sharing a three–roomed house in Wrangle with six children aged from 5 to 13 – the three boys plus their sisters Harriet, Sarah Ann and Betsy. It must have been a hard life, and by 1911 the family was scattered with the boys working on farms and the girls mostly in service.[18]

Since the boys were all unmarried, the search for descendants necessarily focused on Samuel's sisters. Another key member of the research team, the gifted genealogist Alan Hawkins, now began a painstaking investigation of their family tree using census returns and birth, marriage and death records. In this way he was able to establish that Samuel's sister Sarah Ann had two great–granddaughters, one of whom, Sharon Oliver, had married a man called Royce Atkinson at Boston in 1993. This was a crucial discovery, because his name was so distinctive, and because the location showed the family had stayed close to their roots in the Lincolnshire fens.

From left to right, Emma Gowshall, Sally Tebbs, Pat Tebbs and Carroll Rushby by the graves of Walter and Charles Walker

Samuel Walker in his Rifle Brigade uniform

Charles (left) and Walter (right) Walker with their three sisters

It was relatively easy to track down Royce, who turned out to be a senior officer in Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue, and his wife Sharon – who is Samuel's great–great–niece. Sharon was hugely helpful in fleshing out the family tree, and confirmed that all three of Samuel's sisters married and had children. This raised the possibility that someone, somewhere, had the artefacts that would bring the brothers' story to life.

Treasure trove

Sharon told us that Samuel's oldest sibling, Harriet, had a grandson called Carroll Rushby, while the youngest sister Betsy had married a soldier called Thomas Tebbs in 1919, and their grandson Malcolm was married to Pat Tebbs. We traced other members of the extended family, all of whom were fascinated to hear of the research, but it was Carroll Rushby and his daughters Amanda and Emma, and Betsy's grandson's wife Pat Tebbs, who brought together the evidence and shared it with us at a meeting in Pat's house in the Lincolnshire village of Old Leake.

And so, one Sunday morning, the Rushbys and Tebbs produced a treasure trove of family memorabilia including the most precious items of all – two studio photographs showing Samuel in his Rifle Brigade uniform.

They also had medals, including Walter's DCM, newspaper cuttings, family photographs and army records which breathed life into the brothers' tragic story.

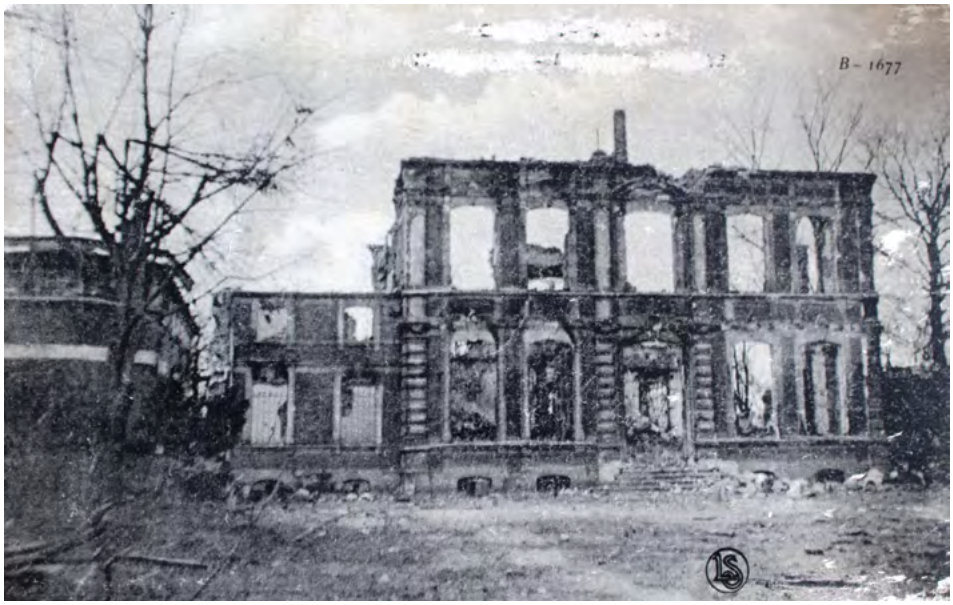
Thankfully Samuel was a keen writer of postcards, and even more thankfully these were kept by his sister Betsy and handed down through the generations. Their cheery messages contain reassurances to his family, greetings to his brothers Walter and Charles, and occasional brief mentions of his movements and activities. Two cards celebrating the Rifle Brigade were sent around the time he went to France, and there are several of the silk cards so popular with soldiers, bearing poignant messages: 'To My Sister', 'A Kiss From France', 'England for Ever'.

One of the most moving postcards shows the ruined château of Vermelles and was sent on 21 September 1917 around the time Samuel left the Tank Corps and returned to the Rifle Brigade. On the back he wrote: 'At present I have shifted away from the Batt[alion] a week ago so don't write while [until?] you here (sic) from me again as soon as I get shifted.'[19] His family may never have heard from him again, for exactly a month later he was shot dead in no man's land.

Fate unknown

From this rich archive of material, it was clear that Samuel's fate had remained unknown to the family for many months after he was posted missing on 21 October 1917. An undated newspaper article shows his family wrote to the army seeking information, and some time in 1918 an officer replied: 'He was missing after a raid on the German lines, and we can only hope that news will eventually come through that he is a prisoner in Germany. We have no information to show that he was killed or wounded on that occasion, so it is quite possible he is a prisoner. I am sorry you were not informed before.'[20]

This is strange, because the CWGC records



Samuel Walker's last postcard home, showing the château of Vermelles

show that Rifleman Walker had been buried by the Germans in Marcoing – one of the villages seized by the Tank Corps at the start of the Battle of Cambrai, and lost again soon afterwards. After the war a German cross bearing his name was found in the cemetery, although it incorrectly stated that he had belonged to 14th Battalion Rifle Brigade and had died on 30 October.[21]

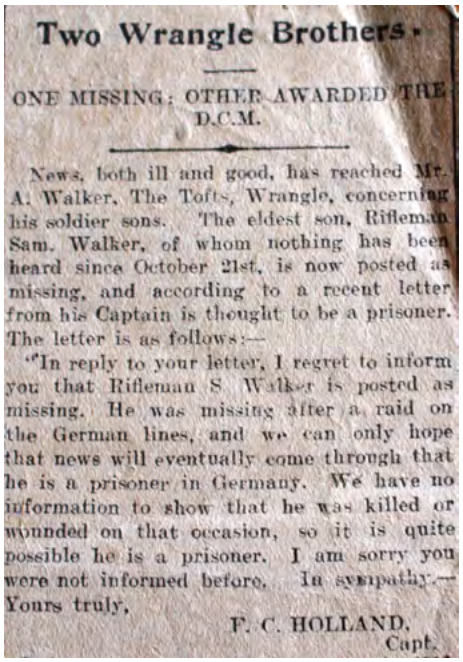
The Germans would normally have reported an incident of this kind, and the records of the ICRC show that they were indeed notified of the death of S Walker on 25 January 1918. However, there was one crucial error: the Germans stated that he belonged to the Heavy Branch of the Machine Gun Corps. [22] The information must have been passed from the Red Cross to the Tank Corps, who would have been unable to match the name with any known casualty, and took the matter no further.

It was fortunate that the tank badge carried by Samuel Walker did not have any dire consequences for his former comrades, but it must have brought months of worry to his family, only for their hopes that he had been taken prisoner to be ultimately dashed.

A document in his service record confirms that since nothing had been heard about him, Samuel was officially presumed dead in August 1918.

The family finally learned the truth in a letter from the Imperial War Graves Commission, probably sent in 1924, which confirmed that Samuel's burial place had been identified. It explained that 'it was found necessary to remove the bodies of the British soldiers who were buried in Marcoing Communal Cemetery, in order to secure the reverent maintenance of the graves in perpetuity.'[23] A cross was found bearing the name of Walker and giving his unit as the Rifle Brigade, and his correct identity had now been established.

Today Rifleman Samuel Walker lies in St Souplet Cemetery near Le Cateau along with nearly 750 other men, many of whom were also brought in from smaller outlying cemeteries. Samuel never knew the consternation his death would cause to the Germans, the uncertainty it would bring for his family or the mystery it would create for decades to come. But at last that mystery has been solved, and the so–called 'tank corpse' can rest in peace alongside his comrades.



Two Wrangle Brothers.

ONE MISSING: OTHER AWARDED THE D.C.M.

News, both ill and good, has reached Mr. A. Walker, The Tofts, Wrangle, concerning his soldier sons. The eldest son, Rifleman Sam. Walker, of whom nothing has been heard since October 21st, is now posted as missing, and according to a recent letter from his Captain is thought to be a prisoner. The letter is as follows:—

"In reply to your letter, I regret to inform you that Rifleman S. Walker is posted as missing. He was missing after a raid on the German lines, and we can only hope that news will eventually come through that he is a prisoner in Germany. We have no information to show that he was killed or wounded on that occasion, so it is quite possible he is a prisoner. I am sorry you were not informed before. In sympathy.—Yours truly,

F. C. HOLLAND, Capt.

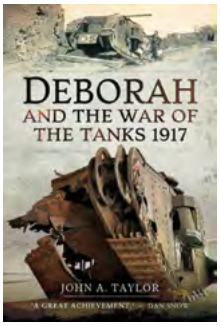
Newspaper article, probably from early 1918, saying it was 'quite possible' Samuel Walker had been captured

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Philippe Gorczynski for access to his collection of German unit histories, and to the other members of the Deborah research team, Alan Hawkins and Vince McGarry, for their support. Special thanks go to the relatives of Samuel Walker, without whom this article could not have been written.

John Taylor holds an MA in history from Cambridge University and has a lifelong interest in the Great War. He worked for many years as a journalist on national newspapers, TV and radio, before moving into public relations, initially specialising in issues and crisis management. After this he spent 10 years as a communications director for an international healthcare firm based in Switzerland. Deborah and the War of the Tanks *is his first book and represents the culmination of an 8–year research project by a team based in Britain and France. The book uncovers many previously unknown aspects of the tank battles at Passchendaele and Cambrai, drawing on unpublished accounts and photographs, documents from British and German archives, and material provided by the families of around 100 men from D and E Battalions of the Tank Corps.*

Rob Kirk was a senior news journalist in newspapers, radio and TV, including the BBC, ITV and Sky News, until he retired in 2012. He has a history degree from York University and a Masters from the School of Oriental and African Studies. He has been responsible for producing many historical documentaries on TV. Indeed, he first worked with John on a First World War story in 1991, when they covered the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme together for Thames News, where Rob was Editor.



Deborah and the War of the Tanks by John Taylor was published by Pen & Sword in 2016

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(8) National Archives WO 363.
(9) National Archives WO 95/2121.
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(13) International Committee of the Red Cross records.
(14) *Hauptstaatsarchiv*, Stuttgart M 33/2 Bü 262.
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(16) National Archives WO 363; Silver War Badge register.
(17) *London Gazette*, 28 March 1918.
(18) 1901 and 1911 Censuses.
(19) Postcard in possession of family. The location was obliterated by the censor, but identified with help from the Great War Forum.
(20) Unidentified newspaper article in possession of family.
(21) CWGC records.
(22) International Committee of the Red Cross records.
(23) Letter in possession of family.

A small group of British graves remain in Marcoing Communal Cemetery, where Rifleman Walker was originally buried by the Germans

The final resting place of Rifleman Samuel Walker (foreground, second from right) in St Souplet Cemetery, France

Samuel Walker's headstone

The Home Base - The UK 1914-1918
Part Two - Government and Control

by Bob Butcher

*The British Expeditionary Force (BEF) could not have existed without a sound, secure and well–organised base. In this, the second part of a short series, ex–*Stand To! *editor Bob Butcher examines various aspects of the functioning of that Home Base.*

On 4 August 1914 the British Government declared war on Germany—the next day it held a Council of War to decide what to do.

At first the conduct of the war was largely in the hands of the Prime Minister (Asquith), the First Lord of the Admiralty (Churchill) and the Secretary of State for War (Kitchener). In January 1915, however government control was strengthened by the appointment of a body known successively as the War Council, the Dardanelles Committee and the War Committee. Finally it was replaced by a smaller and more effective War Cabinet of leading politicians without departmental responsibility and therefore able to concentrate full–time on the conduct of the war.

Britain's entry into the war was broadly approved both in Parliament and the country at large—indeed incredibly it was actually welcomed by some. By May 1915 however, discontent over the conduct of the war by Asquith's Liberal government forced him to form a coalition administration. This failed to still the criticism and in December 1916 Lloyd George became Prime Minister pledged to prosecute the war more efficiently.

In November 1917 an Allied War Council consisting of permanent political and military representatives of Britain, France, Italy and the USA was established. Intended to co–ordinate the military operations of those countries, it in fact had little effect on the conduct of the war.

On the outbreak of war the Government declared a moratorium to protect the country's finances and sooner or later had to assume control either directly or through agents of *inter alia* the railways, merchant shipping, ship building, fuel supplies, procuring supplies of raw materials, denying raw materials to the enemy, food production, food rationing, propaganda and certain forms of censorship.

In considering Britain's war effort it must not be forgotten that considerable material and financial aid was provided for its allies and that it was still necessary to earn foreign currency to pay for the war as there was a limit to what taxation could provide.

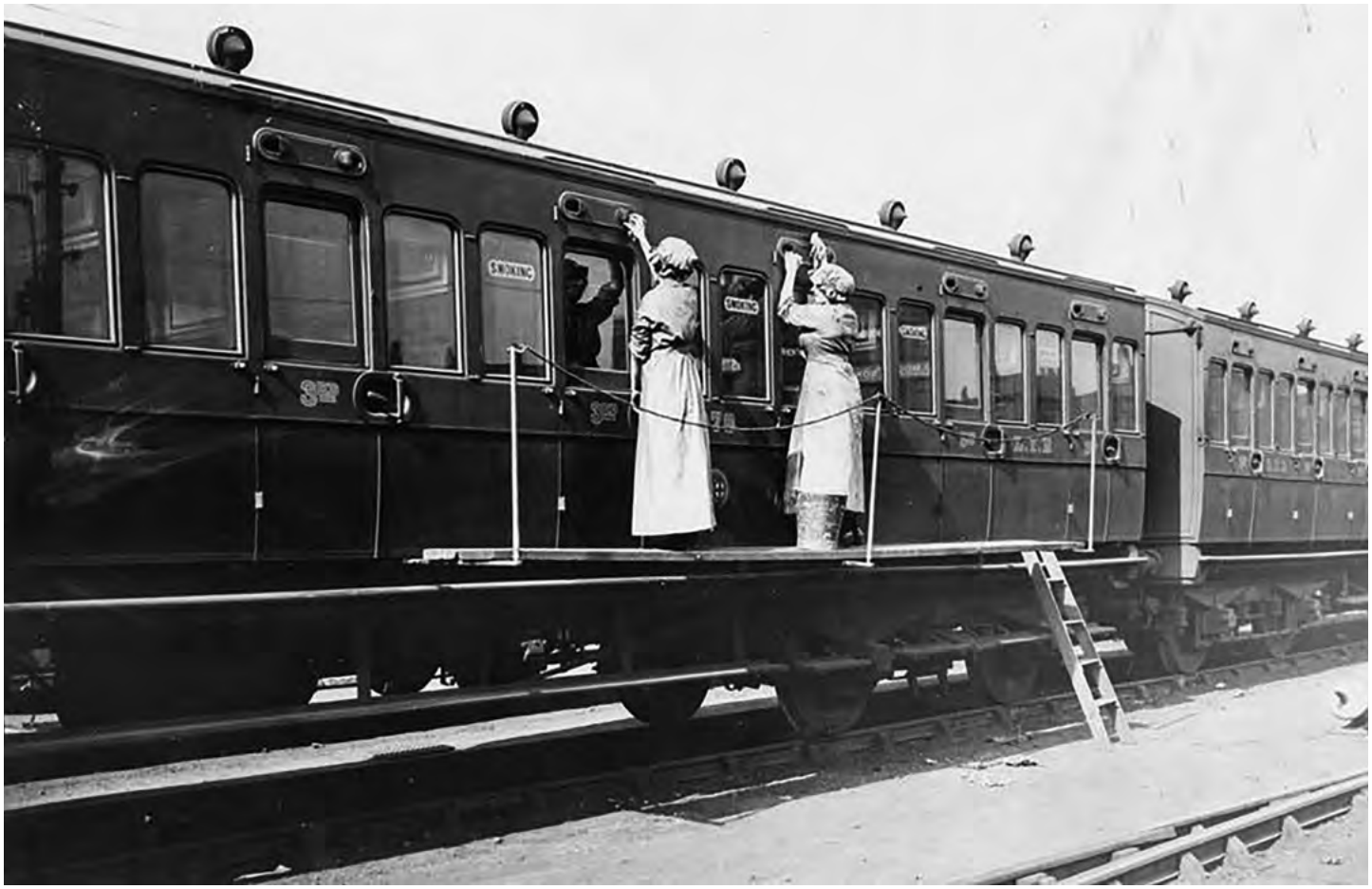
The railways

There were some 120 separate railway companies although only about twenty were regarded as 'major'. When the government took control of them, they remained in private hands and carried on operating as before; it was just that the government could tell them what to do. The situation was succinctly set out by one general manager when, in a circular, he announced that the government had taken control for the time being and added: 'The Management of the Railway and the existing conditions of employment of the Staff will remain unaltered and all instructions will be issued through the same channels as heretofore.'

Government control was exercised by the Railway Executive Committee consisting of a number of the general managers of major railways and a Board of Trade representative. The committee advised the government and gave effect to its instructions. The government order to give priority to its traffic often resulted in the disruption of normal services, especially when the BEF was being transported to France in the early days. Some idea of the scale of this movement may be gained from the fact that between 2 August and 30 September 1914 just one company alone ran 2,465 'special' passenger trains in addition to trains of empty stock to entraining stations or returned empties from detraining stations and ordinary passenger services.

Thousands of railwaymen were reservists or Territorials and as many thousands more answered Kitchener's call this left the railways critically short of staff just when they were most needed to meet the challenges of war. So severe was this shortage that the government ordered recruiting officers not to accept any railwayman not in possession of a certificate from his company authorising his release. In this way the railways were able to hold on to many of their key workers. To help make good staff deficiencies considerable numbers of women were employed in practically every job on the railway except on the footplate. Industry

A London General Omnibus Company bus conductor pictured saboard her vehicle in 1918. She is wearing the summer uniform of pale coat and hat. Courtesy IWM Q109768



Female railway workers of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway cleaning the outsides of railway carriages in the sidings at Manchester. Courtesy IWM Q109859

was similarly affected which hampered war production until similar restrictions were imposed.

Staff shortages led to the closure of many little–used stations and in 1916 many branch lines had to be closed to meet government instructions to provide locomotives, rolling stock and track for France. Few, if any, re–opened after the war.

Throughout the war the railways carried enormous quantities of war traffic as well as that necessary to maintain the life of the country. The commitment to maintain the Grand Fleet at Scapa (over 120 vessels) is usually overlooked but throughout the war one company, the Great Western Railway, ran 13,631 coal specials carrying an estimated total of 5,425,400 tons of best steam coal from the South Wales coalfields to Scotland to feed the voracious appetite of the fleet. These trains were operated under express conditions and were known as 'Jellicoes' after the commander of the Grand Fleet. At the other end of the scale 1,600 tons of ration books were distributed throughout the country by goods trains.

Special financial arrangements were made for the payment for the carriage of government traffic based on the difference between pre–war and war–time receipts. Predictably, after the war the railways asserted that they had been short–changed.

Food Rationing

After some initial food shortages caused by food hoarding by those who could afford it, the main concern was about the price of such staples as bread and potatoes. During 1916 the effects of the U–boat campaign started to cause concern and various efforts were made to stimulate home food production and to urge economy. At the end of the year a Food Controller was appointed who limited the number of food courses that could be served at meals in restaurants and hotels. Shortly after a Director–General of Food Production was appointed followed by a Controller of Potatoes (how does one control potatoes?) By the spring of 1917 there were grave shortages of potatoes, wheat and sugar; the prospect of the country being starved into submission started to become real but fortunately the introduction of the convoy system later that year, government measures to increase the building of merchant ships, the setting up of the Women's Land Army to help increase food production, and the introduction of allotments helped to avert a crisis.

Then however, the French and Italian harvests failed and Britain had to divert considerable supplies to those countries. Although rationing was obviously necessary, the government preferred to make appeals for voluntary rationing, order a meatless day in hotels and restaurants and generally to urge economies. By the end of 1917 shortages were so great and the distribution and retailing so uncontrolled that it was common for housewives to spend hours in long queues at shops believed to have supplies of scarce commodities such as butter or margarine.

Local food committees started to organise local rationing and fix maximum prices. Sugar rationing was introduced nationally by the Government in January 1918, meat, bacon/ham and butter were rationed in London and the Home Counties in February and nationally in July. Jam (previously rationed locally) was rationed nationally in November just a week before the Armistice. Cheese and tea remained rationed locally.

Manpower/Womenpower

Quite early in the war there were acute manpower problems. With so many men in the forces resulting from the need to recruit large armies and the length of the war, both of which were largely unforeseen, public services could not have continued to function unless women stepped into the breach. There were few jobs that they did not undertake, postwomen, bus conductresses, tram drivers—you name it. I have seen a photo of a woman delivering coal!

Women also came forward not only to replace pre–war factory workers but also to provide the additional labour required to expand the production of munitions. Some believe that the war on the Western Front was won by who could throw the most shells at the other side (rather a simplification) and that as women were crucial in producing the shells, they won the war. Like all simplifications, not the whole truth but containing more than a grain of it.

Towards the end of 1916 the War Cabinet allocated the available manpower between the services, mining, industry and agriculture. Early the following year the Ministry of National Service was established to administer those allocations. It was also responsible for directing civilian volunteers for National Service to important war work. The first Minister was the future Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain (Lloyd George did not think much of him!)

Principal Source

Lloyd George: *War Memoirs*

Garrison Library

Edited by David Filsell (davidfilsell@btinternet.com)

SOMME SUCCESS

JONATHAN PORTER

Zero Hour Z Day 1st July 1916: XIII Corps Operations between Maricourt and Mametz

Self–published, £30.00 hardback, £25.00 soft back, 500pp, ills, photographs and maps in monochrome and colour throughout, 1 Appendix, index.

ISBN: 978–099–569–110–0

Starting a book review with superlatives is bad practice. It either indicates the work of an over impressed reviewer or, perhaps, one on a promotional mission for the author. That said it is impossible to write anything other than 'outstanding' in commenting on Jonathan Porter's unique 500 page long *Zero Hour Z Day,* a singular analysis of Congreve's XIII Corps (9th, 18th and 30th Divisions) on the first day of the Somme. (To balance my hyperbole I can add little other than that this is not a book sufficiently manageable to read in bed without assistance. It weighs in at six–and–a–half pounds and measures 12 x 8 x 1 ¾ inches).

Author and publisher Jonathan Porter brings a clear soldier's eye, perceptions and long study of the battle and the ground of the Somme to his work. He served for 20 years with the Royal Marines, first with 42 and 45 Commando and then with the SBS. Since leaving the military in 2005 he has co–owned a business in France allowing him to spend long periods on the Somme studying the battle and those who fought it. His authorial approach is comprehensive, thorough, clear and logical. In seven discrete sections he analyses the formulation of the XIII Corps offensive plan and the ground from Maricourt to Mametz. He evaluates the opposing forces, offers a highly detailed analysis of the preparation and build up to 1 July and evaluates the actions of the 30th and 18th Divisions and the effort to consolidate by days–end. He concludes with the 'butcher's bill' – removing the wounded, clearing the dead, and closes with a sound and sharp analysis of XIII Corps performance.

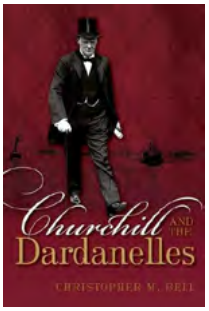
Like the late Trevor Pidgeon, author of the renowned *Tanks at Flers*, Jonathan Porter decided on self–publishing to avoid the dictates and the inevitable penny pinching profit imperative of most publishers. His personal approach also allows the author space to analyse and judge people, places and events in the detail that others writing on the Somme are generally denied due to publishing costs and budgetary constraints. His freedom enables the deployment of many colour illustrations – photographs, contemporary and modern maps and line drawings – and many monochrome illustrations. It must be added that the printing, design, typography and paper of *Zero Hour Z Day 1st July* are of an uncommonly high quality. It is a serious bibliophile's delight.

The book's final analysis is outstanding. It briskly underlines and defines the success of Congreve's XIII Corps and the contribution of his divisional commanders – Maxse (18th Division) and Shea (30th Division) – and notes that 'Their achievements were at the polar opposite of what British folklore would have us believe regarding the supposedly futile and blundering events of 1 July.' Why? Because of a highly complex combination of sound command, planning, training and rehearsals, thorough, effective preparation, artillery superiority, special weapons, the effective use of mines and, not least, exceptional battle leadership.

Zero Hour Z Day is not simply a cogent analysis of XIII Corps' leadership, planning, all–round expertise and achievements. Whatever happened elsewhere on 1 July, Porter claims that in the planning by and performance of XIII Corps that day there is clear evidence of the birth of genuine improvement in the BEF's capabilities – perhaps the first real indication of the long, often wavering and always brutal 'learning curve' which followed.

Not, at the time of reviewing, available on Amazon, the book is available from Porter's own website – *zerohourzday.com* – with courier delivery at £4.50 subsidised by the author. Take note: buy the hardback, for like Pidgeon's *Tanks at Flers,* Porter's book will become a jealously collected work judged essential by anyone with a serious interest in the Battle of the Somme. It is also the first in the author's projected series of works on BEF Army Corps on the Somme on 1 July 1916 and I can barely wait for Jonathan Porter's analysis of Hunter 'Bunter' Weston's VIII Corps.

David Filsell



NOT HIS FINEST HOUR

CHRISTOPHER M BELL

Churchill and the Dardanelles

Oxford University Press, £25.00 hardback, 439pp + xviii, 20 ills, 4 maps, index, notes and refs.

ISBN: 978–019–870–254–2

For years after the First World War, Winston Churchill's reputation was dogged by his role in the Dardanelles/Gallipoli operations of 1915. As First Lord of the Admiralty, he played a leading role in initiating the campaign, and its failure seemed to confirm the opinion of those who saw him as lacking in judgement. Twenty–five years later, the tide of opinion had largely changed. By the eve of the Second World War, the Dardanelles was widely seen as a brilliant strategic move, which only failed because of poor execution.

In this impressive and readable book, based on meticulous archival research, Canadian historian Christopher M Bell examines Churchill's role in some detail, both in the inception of the campaign and in reshaping its (and his) reputation. The author makes a powerful case that Churchill was not as influential in making strategy in 1915 as he would have liked – and some historians have believed. Others, not least the Prime Minister, H H Asquith, and the Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, also shared in the responsibility (or blame, depending on your point of view) for Gallipoli. Bell argues that the British employed a haphazard 'dysfunctional system' for making strategy in 1915, and Churchill 'contributed to its defects'. The creation of the campaign shows Churchill at his best – and his worst: coming up with a truly imaginative scheme, but failing to face up to the practical obstacles in the way of it achieving its objectives. Churchill was far from alone in the latter failing. From the beginning, the working assumption was that the Ottomans would not put up much of a fight. That fact explains, but does not excuse, the slapdash planning and inadequate resourcing of the maritime and land campaigns.

After weighing up the evidence Professor Bell concludes that while the 'ships alone' assault on 18 March 1915 probably would not have worked, under the right conditions a joint sea–land attack could have forced the Straits. I agree with him on both points. But for the expedition to have succeeded there would have had to have been a massive commitment of resources unavailable in spring 1915, and a land force would have had to occupy the Asiatic bank of the Dardanelles – something that Sir Ian Hamilton was specifically forbidden to do by Kitchener. Moreover, as Bell argues, there was no guarantee that once the Allied fleet had pushed through the Straits that the Ottomans would have dropped out of the war. Churchill, and most of the rest of the British strategic decision–makers, was guilty of wishful thinking. This was not his, or their, finest hour.

Gallipoli did not, of course, finish Churchill's career. Bell makes the important point that Churchill continued to believe that the Dardanelles could have been successful; he was not simply conducting a damage limitation exercise. Bell details how Churchill worked to change public perceptions of the campaign, by his own voluminous writings, through influencing the Dardanelles Commission (which let him off fairly lightly), and through

sympathetic writers. One of these was the British official historian, Cecil Aspinall–Oglander, but Charles Bean, his Australian counterpart proved immovable. His volumes included some trenchant criticism of Churchill. Nonetheless, opinion gradually shifted in Churchill's favour. At the very least, during the crisis in May 1940, the millstone of Gallipoli did not prevent him becoming Prime Minister. We might go further; as Robin Prior has recently argued, the idea of Gallipoli being a brilliant strategic stroke was so firmly embedded by 1940 that the memory of the campaign actually played to Churchill's advantage.

Churchill and the Dardanelles is an important and balanced book. Bell gives credit where it is due, while recognising Churchill's mistakes, such as the reappointment of the erratic Jacky Fisher as First Sea Lord. For anyone interested in Gallipoli, or Winston Churchill, it is essential reading.

Gary Sheffield

EXCISED FROM HISTORY?

RONAN McGREEVY

Wherever the Firing Line Extends

The History Press, £18.00 364pp, 8 maps, notes and refs, bibliog., index

ISBN: 978–1–84588–873–2

Pleasingly, the three past years have done much to correct what has been described by one Irish writer recently as the 'cultural amnesia' which developed after the Great War in that country, particularly the south, despite the service of some 210,000 men from north and south of whom 58,000 were pre–war volunteers in the British military.

Justly, Rory McGreevy's excellent work is themed around the significance of 22 memorials to Irishmen in France and Flanders and the story of the men whose service they mark. Included in the total is the Island of Ireland Peace Park in Messines whose restoration in 1998 did much to reinvigorate awareness of Ireland's contribution to the Great War, particularly in the Republic.

The very best of the flood of books about the Great War since 2014 have been those in which depth of research and hard earned expertise have been brought to bear on the work. Here McGreevy offers both and adds skilled authorship to the known, and the little known, facts. He deploys a keen eye for a story, its truths, the significance of 'memorialisation' of men, and the formations in which they served, with an understanding of the complications – political and religious – in the Ireland of 1914 –1918 and after the south's independence.

Here, in what are essentially cogent essays – the book's 22 chapters range the Western Front, sweeping from Nimy near Mons to the majestic Ulster Tower at Thiepval, via the grave of William Redmond at Locre and the still disputed location of John Kipling's remains near Loos. Each component underlines the particular significance of memorial – its meaning, construction, restoration and its story representing the author's metaphorical extension of the line.

The best books may well be those which you never wish to finish or put down. Perhaps even better are those which, upon finishing, you know you will return to for the magic of their authorship and content: this is one such.

David Filsell

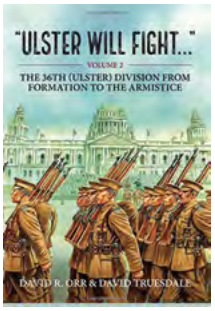
ULSTERMEN ALL?

DAVID R ORR AND DAVID TRUESDALE

Ulster Will Fight Vol. 1, Home Rule and the Ulster Volunteer Force 1886 –1922

Helion & Co., £29.95, 423pp, ills throughout, bibliog., indices.

ISBN: 978–191–077–762–6



Ulster Will Fight Vol. 2: The* 36th *(Ulster) Division from Formation to the Armistice

Helion & Co., £29.95, 502pp, ills throughout, 8 appendices, bibliog, indices.

ISBN: 978–190–177–763–3

The 36th Infantry Division's posthumous reputation needs little polishing – much has been written of its service. Nevertheless the publication of David Orr and David Truesdale's two works – the first on the closely related Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) from 1862 – 1922 – the second a history of the 36th (Ulster) Division – comprising 925 words of text and a huge variety of illustrations – provide a 'new and improved' history of great value.

Written at the request of the Northern Ireland based Somme Association and Somme Museum by two established military historians, in terms of research and photographic illustration the books are impressive. I suspect, the separately available volume 2, *The 36th (Ulster) Division from Formation to the Armistice,* is likely to prove the more popular with aficionados of the Great War and of divisional histories. Nevertheless volume 1 is an invaluable, fascinating account of the UVF's 36 year history from 1886 to 1922 and the complex political and religious politics which was the backdrop to the 36th Division's formation.

Soldier, historian and author Cyril Falls, who served on 36th Division's staff, authored a detailed work which was published in 1922. A considerable number of books of widely varying quality – in research and literary terms – have followed. So too have acceptance of a body of myths and legends. The research by Orr and Truesdale allows little time for such follies. And they get it in early. Their introduction puts paid to some myths readily accepted by historians, loyalists and home rulers alike. Here the 'factoids' that the 36th was all Irish, totally protestant, that all wore the orange sash in their assaults on 1 July 1916 are totally dismissed.

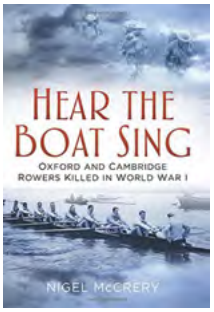
Underlined by the authors is the degree to which – like the Irish 10th and 16th Divisions, other 'K' Divisions and indeed the British Army at almost every level – was far from 'fit for purpose' when committed to battle on the Somme. That initially the 36th Division achieved so much in the Battle of Albert bears witness to its reckless disregard for the realities which it confronted on 1 July 1916.

Few commanded a division as long as Oliver Nugent with the 36th. Judged a tough if fair man (and one unappreciated by Haig) his strong attachment to his division is made clear. Although, he must have been aware it would be of little comfort to either the survivors or families who had lost loved ones, he wrote to his wife on 3 July, 'The more one hears, the more sublime seems to have been the courage, and devotion shown by the men. They simply marched straight over every obstacle, cheering each other on. Nothing could stop them.'

Yet, the division's performance on the Somme was not unique. There were other achievements, not least of which the rebuilt 36th performing with 'spectacular success' at Messines and Ypres in 1917 and in 1918 when, in March, it was virtually destroyed.

The book's format follows the accepted formula – formation, training, 'learning the ropes' in France, the battles, their impact and finally the division's return home after its disestablishment in April 1919. The eight appendices which follow detail, inter alia, PoW, casualties, honours and awards, and order of battle. Like the recent two volume history of the Scots Guards, Orr's and Truesdale's work is an important addition to the history of the Great War. It is a work standing head and shoulders above many lesser books which have undeservedly reaped sales benefits during the last three plus years of the Great War publishing fest.

David Filsell



OARSMEN

NIGEL McCRERY

Hear the Boat Sing: Oxford and Cambridge Rowers Killed In World War 1

The History Press, 2017, £20.00, 255pp, 6 appendices and index.

ISBN: 978–075–096–771–6

Hear the Boat Sing is a worthy, if formulaic, addition to the series of books that Nigel McCrery has produced chronicling the lives of sportsmen who died as a result of their involvement in the Great War. Unfortunately, for this reviewer the numerous errors in this volume provided a significant distraction from the stories the author was seeking to tell. Starting in 2014, McCrery has focussed on the fallen from the sports of: football, rugby and cricket. Last year, as the world's attention switched to the Rio Olympics the writer of the TV series *Silent Witness* added Olympians to that list. This year, as the title suggests, McCrery has switched his attention to the sport of rowing.

Many British rowing clubs throughout the country have plaques honouring their members who died during the Great War. On Trent Bridge is a striking memorial to the Nottingham oarsmen who fell. Amongst the 55 names is Albert Ball, the Royal Flying Corps ace. The Nottingham Rowing Club man, credited with over 40 'kills', was awarded a posthumous VC in June 1917. But rather than delve into Ball's story and the tales of hundreds of other oarsmen who died in the Great War, McCrery has perhaps wisely chosen to limit his focus. Instead his gaze has come to rest on the 42 rowers who featured in the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race and who died between 1914 and 1919.

Even this undertaking has clearly involved a good deal of research, in addition to trawling the web for material initially researched and published by others, and the author is to be congratulated at least on his work in assembling the stories of these oarsmen. *Hear the Boat Sing* comes to life when McCrery includes letters and accounts, from the life and death of men such as Arthur Hales, the Radley school teacher, who enlisted in August 1914, rather than wait for a commission. He won 'Blues' in both the 1905 and 1905 Boat Races. A sniper on the Somme killed the Dark Blue in 1916 – while he was trying to save others. The Light Blue doctor, Hugh Shields was also killed in the open while tending wounded men, this time near Ypres in October 1914. McCrery's moving accounts of these two men's lives not only include letters from the front and obituaries but also a detailed account of the Boat Races that these men and the 40 others featured in the book participated in.

McCrery's research has brought to light some interesting details. Unsurprisingly, the campaigns of Ypres and the Battle of the Somme account for over half of the deaths in *Hear the Boat Sing.* Thirteen of the Blues lost their lives in the Ypres Salient between 1914 and 1918, while nine of the oarsmen were killed during the Battle of the Somme in 1916. Another seven died fighting in theatres such as Gallipoli, or Mesopotamia. Somewhat surprisingly, six Blues were buried in the UK, including the 1905 Blue Bernard Winthrop–Smith. In November 1914, his parents had travelled back from the hospital in Boulogne with the body of their son, who had died without regaining consciousness. Out of the 42 men, 14 – some 33 per cent – have no known grave.

But where McCrery's book disappoints is in the quality of his research. For example, his entry on the 1908 Olympic rowing champion, Frederick Kelly, who died on the Somme in November 1916, is littered with errors which were entirely avoidable if he had really read some of the works he lists in his bibliography, works such as Australian academic Therese Radic's *Race Against Time* (2004), her collection of Kelly's earlier diary entries. Some of these errors, such as the assertion that Kelly beat the famous British Olympian Jack Beresford at Henley in 1904, might be explained away by the author having mistaken the five time Olympic medallist for his father Julius – who did race Kelly, when Jack was just five years old.

Others are not so easily excused. Kelly's friend, the war poet Rupert Brooke is listed as having died on 28 February 1915. In fact Brooke and the rest of the Hood Battalion of the Royal Naval Division, in which both he and Kelly were officers, had not even set sail from England on that day. McCrery asserts that as Brooke lay dying in the next room on board ship in late April 1915 Kelly began to compose his famous Elegy in Memoriam to his friend. Kelly's own diary entries confirm this as a McCrery fantasy; the inspiration for the Elegy being the later burial of Brooke on Skyros – one can hear the wind in the olive tree which bowed over Brooke's grave and which made such an impact on Kelly that he included the motif in his final score. Further, McCrery states that after being wounded once on Gallipoli – and McCrery gets the dates of the battles of 2nd and 3rd Krithia wrong – Kelly was 'wounded again' on 29 June 1915, when in fact the Australian–born pianist and composer was recovering in Alexandria's Hotel Majestic and adding to his Elegy in Memoriam to Brooke. Furthermore, Kelly was killed during the assault on Beacourt–sur–Ancre (as it appeared on British trench maps), not 'Beaumont–sur–l'Ancre', as the author informs us – a compound village that doesn't actually exist formed from the conflation of the real neighbouring villages of Beaumont Hamel and Beacourt–sur–l'Ancre. The mistakes don't end there. At the present count there seem to be at least ten significant errors in McCrery's account of Kelly's life, his war service and death. The errors in Kelly's war service could perhaps have been avoided had the author cared to glance at *Kelly's War*: his edited diaries, first published in 2015 – nearly two years before *Hear the Boat Sing.*

Elsewhere there are other seemingly minor, but still irritating, mistakes or typos – Alexandria becomes 'Alexander' for example – which reveals an alarming absence of high quality copy editing, fact checking and final proofreading. And all this appears in the section on just one oarsman out of the 42. Although seemingly inconsequential these things matter and hardly fill the reader with confidence.

There are other 'quirks', which the reader may find irritating, or formulaic. Rather than include accounts of the relevant Boat Races in a separate section – thus avoiding repetition – the author has included them in the chapters on each individual oarsman. Thus there are seven similar accounts of the 1910 Boat Race throughout the book.

However, if one can get past the errors and quirks contained in *Hear the Boat Sing,* there is still much that will both inform and delight dedicated readers but those same readers should also be aware that in some cases they may have to re–learn some of the 'alternative facts' purveyed here by referring to other, more deeply researched and thoroughly fact–checked works.

Martin Cross

SPORTSMEN

MIKE REES

Men who Played the Game – Sportsmen who Gave their Life in the Great War

Seren Books, £17.99, 268pp, 18 ills.

ISBN: 978–178–172–286–2

From Edward Poulton's 1919 tear–stained hagiography of his beloved son, the England pre–war Rugby Union captain Ronald Poulton Palmer, books about sport and the men who 'played the game' before going to war have always been of interest. In more recent years there have been several excellent books published covering aspects of sport and sportsmen in the Great War. Andrew Riddoch and John Kemp tackled football in *When the Whistle Blows*, Stephen Cooper used Rosslyn Park as a case study for Rugby Union in *The Final Whistle* and individual biographies include Phil Vasili's detailed study of Walter Tull. Mike Rees has taken on the ambitious task of looking at sport in general rather than focusing on one institution, sport or individual in his book *Men Who Played the Game.*

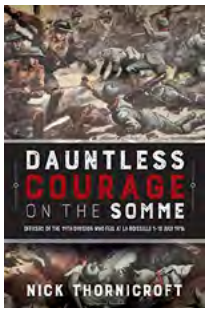
This is quite an undertaking. Rees rightly points out that by 1918 a 'sizeable minority' of the era's top sportsmen had fought in the Great War with many of them losing their lives and there are hundreds of stories from which to choose. Clive Harris and Julian Whippy's excellent *The Greater Game* – frequently referenced by Rees – took a similarly broad approach in terms of the sports covered, but they at least narrowed the focus on a handful of individuals.

Some of the men featured already have entire books written about them, men such as the aforementioned Ronald Poulton Palmer and cricketers Percy Jeeves and Colin Blythe. Others too really deserve biographies of their own. And the breadth of what Rees is attempting to achieve can be the book's downfall. Characters drift in and out of the narrative like rolling–substitutes in a game of five–a–side football and the reader is left wanting to learn more about personalities as colourful as Sandy Turnbull, Tony Wilding and David Bedell–Sivright. However laudable it is to try to cover so many stories and thus commemorate so many men, this, at times, comes at the expense of accuracy. Here Edgar Mobbs is playing for Toulouse rather than against them as he did; Frederick Kelly is hit and wounded by a shell fragment when his diary clearly records a stray bullet to the foot: and most jarringly of all Northampton RFC's home ground is 'Franklyn Gardens'. While this may seem pedantic such basic factual errors undermine one's confidence in the text as a whole.

At other times instead of providing the reader with new insights based on fresh research, some of the same old myths are regurgitated. As many have before him, Rees has Mobbs addressing a rugby crowd in September 1914, at a time when all matches had already been scratched. And poor Blair Swannell (admittedly a favourite of mine) once again has his character assassinated well over a century later by the poisonous pen of Australian rugby contemporary Herbert Moran, a man with whom he doubtless shared a grudge but whose brief yet vituperative paragraphs on Swannell are far too often trotted out and treated as gospel. This is unfortunate as there was so much more written about this intriguing and endlessly fascinating character.

The strength of the book undoubtedly lies in the early chapters which place sport, society and war in context. Rees writes with clarity and pace and is never dull. The sheer scale of the undertaking means that this book will suit the general reader looking for a snapshot of these sporting stars and of the battles in which they fought. But for those unsatisfied and wanting to know more there are, thankfully, books which go into the lives of these remarkable men in much greater depth.

Graham McKechnie



GLORY HOLE?

NICK THORNICROFT

Dauntless Courage on the Somme: Officers of the 19th Division who fell at La Boisselle 1–10 July 1916

Helion and Co., £25.00, 224pp, ills throughout, maps, notes, bibliog, sources, indices.

ISBN: 978–191–077–784–4

This work is sadly mistitled. Whilst *Dauntless Courage on the Somme* is most suitable, the additional post colon words *Officers of the 19th Division who fell at La Boisselle 1–10 July 1916,* provides a misleading indication of content. Although I am sure unintentional, the title seems dismissive of the efforts of the rank and file who participated in the 19th Division's efforts at La Boisselle from 2–12 July 1916.

In reality *Dauntless Courage* offers but a brief biography of each officer who fell – the often unrewarding slog of researching those in the ranks is much more complex – nevertheless this book is still a worthwhile addition to the by now massed ranks of Somme bibliography.

Nick Thornicroft knows his stuff. He offers a valuable outline of the early, generally ignored non–British events at La Boisselle, those of the British in the line from July 1915 until 1 July 1916 and the preparation of the offensive against the village on the famous day. This is followed with accounts of 19th Infantry Division's (56, 57 and 58 Infantry Brigades) attempts to take fortress La Boisselle, an analysis of casualties, events after the attacks and remembrance of the event. Valuably, the author supplements his tight copy with satisfactory, if schematic, maps, and some 120 or so illustrations, many of them from his own collection and others, offering the by now accepted imperfect portraits garnered, from newspapers. Forget my class–warrior–like cavils about the title, *Dauntless Courage on the Somme* will be the La Boisselle book for battlefield guides – the good and the bad. It is a work of detailed research which should accompany any visit to that tormented village as well as those who enjoy Great War history from the comfort of an armchair. Highly recommend.

David Filsell

WARWICKSHIRE'S DIARY

GERALD W BUXTON

Time to Remember: The Journal of Lance Sergeant William Webb, October 14 – January 16, 2nd Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment, Seventh Division 1914–1918

Helion and Co., £25.00, 184pp, 28 ills, 14 maps.

ISBN: 978–191–077–734–3

William Webb was 16 when he joined the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Warwicks in 1894. He served in Ceylon, the Boer War and Bermuda – guarding Boer prisoners –and in Malta where he was promoted to band sergeant. In 1914, his was one of the regular battalions ordered home to join the 7th Division (22 Brigade). Only his diaries from 1914 to mid–January 1915 appear to exist – it remains unclear if he continued his writing or if he returned to the battalion after illness and retention at Le Havre. Usefully, editor/author, Gerald Buxton, outlines the story of the battalion's later service with 7th Division on the Somme, on the Hindenburg line, at Ypres and in Italy.

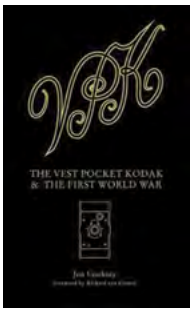
Soldier's diaries are the curate's eggs of Great War history. As I have frequently said, those based on short, pocket book entries are too often inadequately supported by the hard graft of worthwhile editorial input – the 'what', 'where', 'why' and 'when' of events. Frequently the lack of real historical perspective makes one inclined to judge that their value is largely confined to family interest or the attention of those with a particular affiliation with a formation.

Time to Remember is more worthwhile than most. Not least the writing is that of a literate and loving, man and – as far as I am aware – the rare work of a diarist who commanded stretcher bearers. Webb's description of his work is that is of a literate and observant diarist capable of highlighting the significant detail of a life lived at war. Equally he is one of the very few rankers who survived of the 7th Division after its virtual destruction in 1914 at Ypres and the battles of 1915 which followed.

Typically Lance Sergeant Webb's daily entries are 300 words long. They note location, weather, battle, injury and death and events out of the line. Touchingly each ends with unsent words to his wife and children – 'God bless you my loved ones XXXX' or a similar sentiment.

Happily, Lance Sergeant 4361 William Webb survived the war, retiring on an April Fools' Day. With its 28 photographs and 14 maps this is certainly amongst the more worthwhile of the books of its type published during the anniversary years and a little joy to those interested in the doings of 'The Immortal Seventh.'

David Filsell



SNAPPY

JON COOKSEY

The Vest Pocket Kodak & the First World War

Ammonite Press, £7.99, hardback, 96pp, ills throughout, index.

ISBN: 978–178–145–279–0

Jon Cooksey's evaluation of the, almost, iPhone sized Vest Pocket Kodak (VPK) is as handsome in its presentation, graphic design and simplicity (and price) as the influential camera it celebrates. The reference to the iPhone is not entirely unwarranted. In its day the VPK was a low cost, technologically advanced camera – employing simple roll film – convenient for the masses; and the masses bought them by the thousand.

Whilst other cameras offered similar qualities, following the introduction of the VPK in 1912 Kodak's 'relentless marketing' ensured that it dominated the growing 'amateur' photography market. By 1914 annual sales reached 5,500. The VPK was also the camera that soldiers – mostly officers due to its 30 shilling price tag – took to war. It is estimated that one officer in five took a Kodak to war with the BEF. In Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand it was actually marketed as 'The Soldier's Camera': in France 'Le Kodak du soldat'.

VPK photographs taken during the retreat from Mons, on the Marne or on the Aisne and which appeared in the press triggered such concern that prior to Christmas 1914 the British Army employed a General Routine Order which prohibited possession of a camera on active service. Fortunately for history, it was an order frequently ignored, often with the collusion of senior regimental officers including many COs.

The very best of the many reproductions of aged photographs selected by Cooksey indicate the quality of the VPK images and the skill of the photographers. Others offer simply an image of war which triggered an everyman's interest or enthusiasm in recording it. A few are simply chilling: two British officers apparently captured in the act of summarily executing a blindfolded 'civilian' – dressed in overcoat and hat – with their service revolvers, has never been seen before by this reviewer and, I would

wager, by anyone else. Such images – the existence of which British audiences are often loath to acknowledge, even today – are as rare as hen's teeth.

Stand To! Editor Jon Cooksey's *The Vest Pocket Kodak & the First World War* is a clear, concise, informative and affectionate book. It also opens a window on an ambiguous and fascinating sideline of the Great War and the men who served in it. Highly recommended.
David Filsell

AT GHQ

ELIZABETH GREENHALGH
(editor and translator)
Liaison: General Pierre des Vallières at British General Headquarters, 1916– 1917
Army Records Society, 282pp, 7 ills, list of abbreviation, notes and refs, bibliog., Index.
ISBN: 978–075–096–784–6
I have reviewed a number of the excellent books published by The History Press for The Army Records Society – the not for profit membership of which costs £25 a year and includes an annual volume dedicated to an aspect of British Army history. Recent valuable publications have centred upon the Great War: *Major General Nugent and the Ulster Division; The First World War Letters of Lord Horne; The Military Papers of Lieutenant General F D Maude* and those of Colonel Sir Cuthbert Headlam and *Military Intelligence from Germany 1906–1914.*

The 2016 volume is a fascinating French commentary on British General Headquarters written by General Pierre Des Vallières, Head the French Military Mission to the British Army from December 1915 until May 1917. After a clear, concise, introduction, editor and translator Elizabeth Greenhalgh offers the reader Des Vallières' written views of GHQ, its senior personnel, their thinking and actions in reports to Joffre, Nivelle and others and Des Vallières diary entries and letters. These are bolstered by reports written by other French liaison officers and the writings of the irrepressible Edward Spears (Des Vallières British liaison counterpart with Fifth and, later, Tenth French Armies, and ultimately liaison officer between the French Ministry of War and the War Office).

Unsurprisingly, as a perceptive officer of the French Army, the picture which emerges from his writing during the period of the Somme and its build–up illustrates a British Army inferior to that of France which had faced the brunt of war. His views of British staff officers are frequently critical, his vignettes of them fascinating. He judges Haig's Army in 1916 as – unsurprisingly – ill–fitted for war, in terms of its artillery deployment and tasking, its tactical nous, generalship and planning and yet, he proclaims, still unwilling to learn from French experience or guidance. The picture of Haig is fascinating. He is shown as a hostage to British political ineptitude and the shortcomings of the army he commanded and yet still determined go his own way, in his own time, rather than bow to what he considered were the dictates of French high command. Equally Des Vallières judges Joffre, Petain and the over promoted Nivelle frequently equally inept in their dealings with the British.

As far as I am aware Bill Philpott's study of the Somme is the only British book on the battle which offers more than the conventional proposal that the battles were British battles. Equally, Des Vallières opinions incline strongly toward the modern view of the flawed British Army of 1916. As 1917 develops, recognising the huge losses in the French Army, Des Vallières view of the ever improving British Army – being taught 'on the job' through bitter experiences – softens and becomes less critical. He recognises its growing importance and competence. And, while never quite overcoming his frequent bouts of irritation with the British, he shows his frustration with his own high command and its generals, particularly Nivelle. Through Des Vallières eyes we are offered valuable insights into GHQ and Haig's leadership which deserve to be read, taken seriously and weighed against much that has been written and read by British authors and audiences.
David Filsell

FRENCH LETTERS

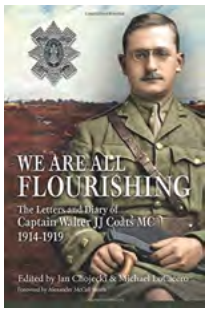
CATHERINE LABAUME–HOWARD (editor)
From the Western Front to Salonika: A French Soldier Writes Home
Helion & Co., £19.95 (£19.75 direct from publisher), soft back, 182pp, ills in page throughout, 6 appendices, indices.
ISBN: 978–191–109–628–3
It is impossible to know why, that since the Great War, so few translations of French accounts of war – fact or fiction – have been offered by British publishers. As *War Books,* the redacted translation of Jean Norton Cru's important critique of French writing on the conflict *Temoins (Witnesses)* underlines, those who cannot read French have missed many works of value.

Whilst *From the Western Front to Salonika* could hardly be judged a work of great literary merit, as far as this reviewer is concerned its English publication was a welcome change from the welter of similar British works. The view of war and the letters home about his service on the Western Front, in the oft forgotten Salonika campaign and with tanks are different in tone to most of those by Tommies in English language works: seemingly warmer, more confident, more vibrant.

As a 17–year–old volunteer in 1914 – and one of the few recruits capable of driving – he served first in a transport squadron in Flanders, then in a similar role in Salonika until early 1917 before teaching tank driving and instructing and entering action in late 1918. On 15 October that year he was wounded, losing an eye whilst gaining a *Médaille Militaire* and the *Croix de Guerre*. In each of his letters he reveals much of interest about a French soldier's view of war. While generally seeking positivity, yet often incapable of sustaining it, Pierre Subervielle's highly affectionate, loving, letters home reveal that war behind the front lines had its very own harsh tests.

This is no story of front line daring do, the letters reveal the appalling conditions and the incompetence of Salonika, the intense cold, the heat and disease and the daily irritations of war. Frequently amusing are the writer's regular pleas home for cash – regularly '100 Francs please' here, '200 Francs please' there – the consequence of the theft of his money, financial incompetence or women and his ludicrous attempts to disguise his financial ineptitude.

First published in France in 2011 this translation is a worthwhile addition to the short list of works on the French at war…written in English.
David Filsell



FLOURISHING

JAN CHOJECKI and MICHAEL LoCICERO (Eds.)
We are all Flourishing: The Letters and Diary of Captain Walter J J Coats MC 1914–1919
Helion & Co., Solihull, £25.00, 360pp, many ills, maps, Coats' service record, index.
ISBN: 978–191–109–639–9
This history of Walter Coats' service with 1/9 Highland Light Infantry (Glasgow Highlanders), is told in his own words, partly through letters home and partly through diary entries written up from his notes after the war. His letters – sent almost daily – describing his life and duties in and out of the line, reassured his family of his safety and requesting essentials. His language, 'we are having a very cheery time of it', or 'the humour of this life increases daily' invariably meant the opposite, and described with admirable insouciance the danger (of shelling – 'I shall never get fond of it') the mud, the discomfort, and the death of friends which he faced with stoicism and courage. Disappointments over postponement of leave, the promotion of less experienced officers, bouts of illness, are also faced robustly and glossed over.

The war diaries tell a starker tale. After initial training in Scotland, Coats arrived in France in November 1914 and fought throughout the war in some of its most perilous battles; Festubert, Neuve Chapelle, Loos, High Wood – where the Highlanders sustained over 800 casualties – Polygon Wood, Arras and Third Ypres. For

most of the war he was battalion machine–gun officer but in 1917 he joined the staff and earned an MC.

Anyone reading this very well–edited book, with its excellent footnotes, will gain a very clear idea of what fighting in a major battle was like, the day to day duties and life of a soldier and staff officer – and would also admire the postal service, which could get a loaf of bread sent from Scotland and still arrive fresh in France in a couple of days.

Elizabeth Balmer

KEEPING THEM FLYING

PETER DYE

The Bridge to Air Power: Logistics Support for Royal Flying Corps Operations on the Western Front, 1914–18

US Naval Institute Press, £34.00 hardback £32.30 e–book, 304pp, hardback, 15 b/w photographs, 20 b/w figures, 1 map.

ISBN**:** 978–161–251–839–8

Although it was US Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest who, allegedly, said that the essence of military success was to 'Get there fustest with the mostest', it is only fairly recently that historians of the Great War have realised that a serious study of logistics is as relevant to the 1914–18 period as to any other war.

Peter Dye, former Air Vice–Marshal and Director of the RAF Museum, had personal experience of organising air power logistics during the First Gulf War. He does an excellent job of describing the massive increase in the logistical organisation needed to supply a Great War air arm in which the strength of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) grew from some 270 aircraft and 2,073 personnel in 1914 to 22,171 aircraft and nearly 275,000 personnel by the time of the Armistice.

The RFC supply services faced, arguably, the most rapidly and continuous period of change in technology coupled with extremely short component life expectancy – aero engines needed replacement after, at best, 30 hours running, and airframes were 'struck off' after around 130 hours flying. If one considers the enormous losses during training quoted here, that over twice as many aircrew and aircraft were lost in accidents than to enemy action, then the work done by the supply arm of the RFC in maintaining an operational efficiency level of between 85–98 per cent between June 1916 and the Armistice, despite attrition and equipment obsolescence is a staggering feat.

Rapid technological development dictated that standardisation (the usual means of increasing serviceability) was not possible. In consequence an enormous stock of replacement parts had to be maintained at the Aircraft Parks in France which relied on a vast array of ledgers and card indexes. Having described how the RFC arranged the supply of both airframes and aero–engines (in many respects a greater problem than airframes), Dyer devotes a chapter to each of the final years of the war and the major battles that took place.

Based on primary research, and presented with an expert grasp of both the sources and issues, Peter Dye's work shows how the RFC and, later, the RAF maintained an effective supply chain during four years of conflict despite its total immersion in the 'white heat of war'.

Niall Ferguson

A FINE EXAMPLE

TIM BENNETT

Overstrand in the Great War

Poppyland Publishing, Cromer NR27 9AN, 2016, £9.95 plus post, A4 soft covers, 207pp, many ills.

ISBN: 978–190–979–628–7

The book is sub–titled: *In Remembrance of the Impact on the Village of Overstrand and the Lives of those who made the Ultimate Sacrifice*, and tells their story in an exemplary manner. Overstrand, on the North Norfolk coast near Cromer, has 40 names on its memorial; their lives are recorded here in great detail in this informative and most attractive record. It describes life in the village for its 1,000 or so residents, many from houses which still exist and are shown in recent photographs with locations marked on an aerial photograph. Each of the memorials and gravestones connected with the war are reproduced, followed by biographies of the fallen, in great detail with photographs of the individuals, their homes, copies of original documents – an important feature of this work – and extracts from local newspapers, a source now being widely consulted. Following entries offer details of 23 men who served and returned home. They contain a wealth of service and other records to offer a valuable survey of that which has survived from primary sources which go to make up the biographies. There are descriptions of the local hospitals, the VAD and other women's' forces, particularly The Women Signallers' Territorial Corps – I had not heard of them before and Tim has whetted my appetite to know more about them! If there were to be prizes for Great War memorial volumes, this would rate amongst the very best. It is informative far beyond its purely local appeal. I have only one criticism of this great work: the content on page 2 does not tie up with the text page numbers – a minor niggle.

Bob Wyatt

SIXPENCE

SARAH REAY

The Half Shilling Curate: A Personal Account of War and Faith 1914–1918

(Foreword by Hugh Pym)

Helion & Co., £25.00, 194pp, many ills, 2 maps, short biographies of war–time colleagues, tributes, bibliog., index.

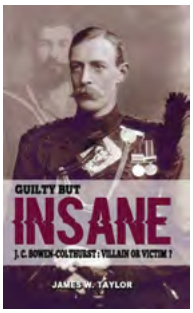
ISBN: 978–191–109–646–7

Sarah Reay's story of her grandfather, the Reverend Herbert Butler Cowl MC, is well researched and includes many excerpts from his letters. Born into a staunchly Wesleyan family, and following his father into the ministry, Cowl was no sooner ordained than war broke out and was commissioned as a captain into

the 13th Battalion, Durham Light Infantry. Initially, he found the transition to ministry in the army difficult. Although his sermons were occasionally jeered at by unwilling participants in compulsory Church Parades, his faith sustained him. In Flanders, he refused to live safely behind the lines, instead to joining the men in the trenches.

While with the 71st Field Ambulance at Gris Pot, he was wounded in the jaw, a piece of shrapnel lodging in his throat. Following an operation to remove it, he was stretchered aboard the hospital ship *Anglia* for further treatment in England. When the ship hit a mine Cowl, although himself washed out of his bed and despite having sustained further wounds, helped others to escape. Cowl's actions earned the award of the Military Cross. Recovery followed and the repair of his throat with a silver tube endowed him with a remarkably mellifluous voice.

Post–war Cowl returned to civilian ministry. In 1939, he was in Acton and soon to suffer the Blitz with his parishioners. His wartime experiences did not turn him to the pacifism many Methodists believed in; indeed, he described himself as an 'ultra–non–pacifist', and the author's title refers to Cowl's own self–deprecating (and clearly inaccurate!) description of himself as 'not the full shilling'.
Elizabeth Balmer



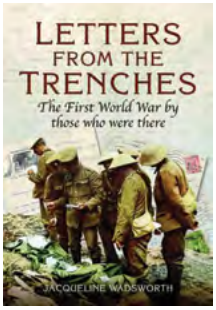
CONTROVERSIAL?

JAMES W TAYLOR
Guilty but Insane: JC Bowen–Colthurst: Villain or Victim?
Mercier Press, 16.99, paperback, 288pp, 23 b/w photos, maps, notes and appendices.
ISBN: 978–178–117–421–0
In this well–researched book, James Taylor examines the conviction of Captain John C Bowen Colthurst of the murder of at least six people at the time of the Easter Rising in 1916. Colthurst was found 'guilty but insane' resulting in his incarceration in Broadmoor rather than facing the death sentence. As one of the people killed was Francis Sheehy Skeffington, a prominent, nationalist, pacifist and journalist, the idea that there had been a deliberate cover up by the British Army was well publicised and became, what Taylor calls, 'one of the myths surrounding the Easter rebellion'. The notion was reinforced by the fact that Colthurst was released after 18 months.

The author has researched the matter from both sides, with contact with the families of Skeffington and Colthurst. He presents his evidence not as proof of Colhurst's innocence, but as a re–examination of the incident 'which allows the reader to come to his or her informed conclusions'. Colthurst's life is examined from childhood, with primary sources and maps to explain events of his army career in South Africa, Tibet and during the Great War. The evidence creates a picture of a man, always erratic, who was dangerously unbalanced by 1916 and suffering from Post–Traumatic Shock Syndrome after being badly wounded in 1914.

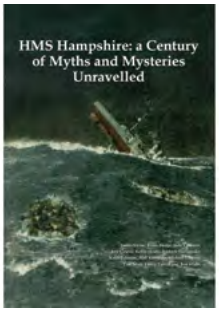
Ample strong evidence is provided about the murders of Sheehy Skeffington and the other civilians to indicate that Colthurst was guilty. However, Taylor points out that if his superior officers had been more proactive and aware, Colthurst would not have found himself in a position in which he could order the killing of innocent civilians. Colthurst was the only person charged in connection with the murders and his release from Broadmoor was the result of a campaign organised by influential people and enlisting the support of *The Spectator* magazine. But, in the face of continued resentment in the Irish Nationalist community and attacks of Colthurst family property in Ireland Colthurst and his family emigrated to Canada.

This is a well–argued presentation of the career of a controversial figure, explaining the effects of upbringing, war, shell shock and personality disorder on his character and actions, and the results of those actions on the narrative of Irish/ British relations in this era. Taylor balances the evidence adroitly, leaving the reader to draw his or her own conclusions.
Linda Parker



JACQUELINE WADSWORTH
Letters from the Trenches – The First World War by Those Who Were There
Pen & Sword, £ 19.99p, 174pp
ISBN: 978–178–159–284–7
In the trenches much of the soldiers' spare time was spent writing letters to loved ones at home. Many of these have been preserved and now offer deeply personal insights into the conditions and emotional impact on the men in service and the family and friends they had left behind. Through collections of privately owned letters the author offers moving and insightful first–hand accounts of the various stages of the war and the personal impressions and hardships of wives, mothers and daughters who had to bidden farewell to their loved ones – some of them for good.

Jacqueline Wadsworth appealed for letters through newspapers and the media and, understandably, most of are from soldiers fighting the Allied cause. However, this does give the collection a degree of 'one–sidedness' and I longed to read accounts of Germans, Russians and other nationalities. Nonetheless, Wadsworth's contribution to the effort of understanding the influence of war on the minds of soldiers and their families is a heart–rending yet hopeful and, at times, even warm read and worthwhile if you wish to learn more about the lives of those who lived through the Great War.
Louise Gaede



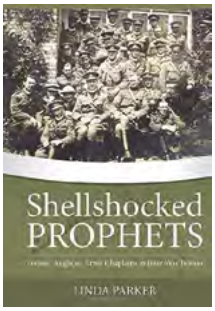
HMS HAMPSHIRE

JAMES IRVINE (Ed.)
HMS Hampshire: a Century of Myths and Mysteries Unravelled
Orkney Heritage Society, £25.00 120pp, photographs, maps,
Available only from The Orcadian Bookshop, 50, Albert Street, Kirkwall, Scotland, KW15 1HQ. www.orcadian.co.uk/shop/index.php
ISBN: 978–095–359–457–3
Standing tall on Marwick Head on the western coast of the Orkney mainland is a prominent square tower some 48–feet high. Unveiled in July 1926 the Aberdonian granite plaque tells of the death of Field Marshal Earl Kitchener, his staff and nearly all the officers and men of HMS *Hampshire* which sank offshore on 5 June 1916. In this book, published to mark the centenary of the ship's loss last year, editor James Irvine has brilliantly combined the contributions of no fewer than eleven authors, who bring their particular skills and knowledge to bear in telling what exactly took place, both from contemporary records and what has been learned since. Kitchener and his mission were on their way to Russia, both as a boost to that country's morale and to seek a means of supplying both the materials and money to finance arms deals between the two countries. The fourteen strong mission included both military officers and civil servants, the youngest member, Second Lieutenant R D Macpherson, was just 19 but having been born in Petrograd was a fluent Russian speaker. Kitchener and his party reached the huge naval base at Scapa Flow in Orkney and immediately went on board the cruiser HMS *Hampshire* which departed into the teeth of a most unseasonably cold June gale. In heavy seas and making little more than 13 knots the *Hampshire* had reached a point about 2 miles off Marwick Head when she hit a mine laid just a few days before by the German submarine U–75 and sank barely ten minutes later. Conditions were such that launching the ship's boats was almost impossible. At least 500 men perished, probably within an hour of the sinking such was the violence of the wave surges and the bitter cold of the sea. The rescue efforts were not well co–ordinated, a fact that left a deep sense of indignation and outrage in Orkney that lingers to this day. Even if the shortcomings had been avoided the authors consider that less than two dozen additional lives could have been saved. As it was just three rafts drifted ashore during the night, they carried twelve survivors. The book, with its wealth of new information and copiously illustrated, is a fitting tribute to those who sailed that evening on HMS *Hampshire* and never returned. The proceeds from sales, including the authors'

royalties, are being donated to the Orkney Heritage Society for the Kitchener Memorial Refurbishment Project.
David Saunders

GOD BOTHERERS

Frederick George Scott: The Great War as I Saw It
£16.99 (Amazon price), 327pp, Glossary, 1 map.
ISBN: 978–077–354–425–3



LINDA PARKER
Shell Shocked Prophets: Former Anglican Army Chaplains in Inter–War Years
Helion, £25.00, 272pp, 10 ills, appendix, bibliog., index.
ISBN: 978–190–998–225–3
First published in 1922, when F G Scott's memories of war were fresh, his diaries and letters to hand, *The Great War as I Saw It* offers an impressive and frequently moving account of a padre who served with the Canadian 1st Division from before its embarkation for Europe in 1915 until virtually the end of the war when he was wounded. Despite being reprinted in 1934, the book has been almost forgotten. Even copies of the reprint are scarce.

The Reverend Scott was 53, and judged too old to serve, when he travelled by ship to Britain with his division. He was 57 when war ended. His first action on arrival was to evade a soft posting in England by a manufactured 'misunderstanding'. He simply got on a ship to France to be with his 'boys'. Clearly he was never a man who found compromise easy.

Because of his High Church beliefs Scott had faced doctrinal problems with the Anglican Church full on. He was to face them again in France and Belgium with the Army. His sense of humour is as clear in this book as his acute observations of war, of men and of civilians in war. His picture of events – whether serious, light hearted, humorous or religious – is clear, well–judged and compelling throughout. Considered a 'minor poet' in his homeland – with, I think, justification – he regularly 'entertained' all ranks of his flock with both his sermons as well as his extraordinarily long recitations of his poems – often using the threat of a performance to get his own way on behalf of those in his 'parish'. His ministry was clear, understanding, and understandable, to those of all strands of Christian belief. Scott was a 'gather round' man, one whose regular trips to the front line were accompanied by cigarettes to hand out and spare tins of bully to share as well as hastily called services and confessions.

Like the best, the most genuinely respected and loved of padres, it seems clear that Scott was a man with no side. He was at home with the lads in the line as he was with their officers. He was equally competent in dealing with the brass, winning staff over to help in his work and administration as 'winning' a horse or two and a dog or two. And his habit of hitchhiking to be amongst his 'parish' proved 'God would provide' was true. He generally found a ride – on transport ranging from ASC trucks to chauffeured generals' staff cars. Later a motorcycle combination and 'driver' was 'won' to get Scott around 'his' flock.

Three of Scott's sons also served with the Canadian Army. One survived the war relatively safely, another lost an eye, and a third was killed in action. His love of his children was marked by locating the body and marking it no man's land in sight of the German trenches. Broadly, the new introduction to *The Great War as I Saw It* by Mark McGowan to Scott's work is valuable. However it is also, in part, sadly mealy mouthed in averring to and seeking to justify – and soften – some of Scott's contemporary views, opinions and statements. These McGowan clearly considers can now be judged inappropriate; be dubbed politically incorrect. His apologia is misguided, unnecessary and inelegant. Scott was by birth and upbringing a Victorian. Like most Canadians he felt a loyalty, a sense of duty, to Mother England. In judging some heathens he did so in an age when people did, felt and said things differently – even Christian ministers. Neither this book nor the words of Reverend Frederick need, much less deserve, any such nannying. As the man said 'The past is a foreign country'. Those in the ranks, 'the heroes' of the Great War as we now dub all in the military, were blunter, harder men. This text and Reverend Frederick George Scott needs no excuses. Without doubt this is a welcome reprint of a sharp, moving and important account of war by an impressive man who lived through much of it. It deserves a wide readership.

Shell–shocked Prophets seems something of a 'left field' publication in the Wolverhampton Military Series. Its topic is not Army Chaplains at war, but the effects, influences and experiences it had upon them and how it influenced their religious and social convictions in resolving industrial tension and remembrance in a rapidly changing society when the war was over. Although, like me, I suspect many *Stand To!* readers will know little of these men, apart from P T B 'Tubby' Clayton – founder of the TocH movement – and 'Dick' Sheppard – founder of the post Great War Peace Pledge Union. Nevertheless Linda Parker offers a considerable weight of evidence to show the effects of war service on the post war actions and thinking of these men.
David Filsell

RE–PUBLISHED

RONALD GURNER
Pass Guard at Ypres.
Casemate, £8.99, 214 pp.
ISBN: 978–161–200–411–2
First published in 1930, the well regarded *Pass Guard at Ypres* is a book I had not read until receipt of a review copy from Casemate's interesting new paperback series of Great War 'classic' books. Copies of the original 1930 edition, published by Dent, are reported as being 'very rare', and cost, if they can be located, up to £100. The style of this work changes considerably as its story proceeds; it becomes more compelling, moving from fairly leaden Edwardian prose, overburdened with the subordinate clauses and the complex sentences most writers now seek avoid. Yet, in places it offers highly effective, almost stream of consciousness, reportage based on Gurner's own bitter experiences of war.

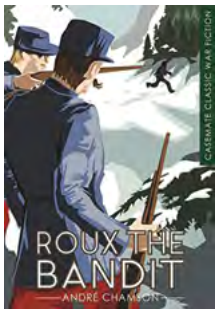
The impact of Ypres on the author is clear and is skilfully deployed as he, or his surrogate character Freddy Mann, evolves from young, green subaltern into an officer mentally and physically scarred by events, disillusioned and debilitated by stress who accepts, almost welcomes, his inevitable death. While presented as linear narrative, the deeply introspective *Pass Guard at Ypres* effectively comprises a series of linked essays which enjoy the clear bright ring of experiences. Here, one feels Gurner's own experience of war, his service in stench–ridden trenches, the everyday loss of comrades and the unbridgeable gap between a soldier returning to home and his family.

A classic? Certainly this is a highly rewarding work and a valuable addition to any collection of worthwhile Great War 'fiction'. Highly recommended.
David Filsell

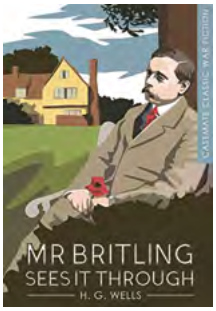
W F MORRIS MC
Behind the Lines
Casemate, £8.99 392pp. Introduction by David Morris (grandson of W F Morris).
ISBN: 978–161–200–413–6
Major Walter Frederick Morris served with the 8th Battalion, Norfolk Regiment, and was awarded the Military Cross. In addition to *Behind the Lines* in 1930, he authored

Bretherton, Khaki or Field Grey in 1929 (also republished in the Casemate Classics series).
Behind the Lines is, initially a Buchanesque war time mystery novel which, in its detailed picture of a gunner at war feels real. Yet despite skilled authorship, the book's preposterous plot, reminiscent of a W E Johns *Biggles* adventure, finally disappoints hugely, despite the great Eric Ambler naming it one of his top five spy stories and another critic of the day praising its plot as 'ingenious and leak–proof'.

After a sharp, effective, start, the book had the same effect on me as the author's absurd *Bretherton.* Yet, Morris is an efficient writer, one with knowledge of the Great War through his own experience of the realities of conflict on the Western Front. His picture of a young gunner subaltern, his fellow officers and his battery is well turned. Nevertheless after the effective early pages the tale lurches into an unbelievable breathless 'Bigglesesque' adventure more suitable for boys of a certain age who can accept unlikely events and climaxes. Certainly no classic in the crowded field of worthwhile Great War novels.
David Filsell



ANDRÉ CHAMSON
Roux the Bandit
Casemate, £7.99, 128pp.
ISBN: 978–161–200–417–4
Although first published in English translation by Golancz in 1925 and anthologised in 1938 by Odhams in 1913 – in a volume including *Under Fire* (Henri Barbusse), *Bretherton* (W F Morris) and *Patrol*, Philip Macdonald) – *Roux le Bandit* was first published in France in 1925 It is – deservedly – a highly regarded, if little known, work. Elected to the ancient Académie française in 1956, the multi–talented Chamson based most of his works as a writer in the tough Cevennes area where he was born.
Translated by the once eminent American author and literary critic Van Wick Brooks, the slender and lyrical *Roux the Bandit* is one of the very few books which can be truly judged anti–war. Roux's tale is that of a deeply Christian young man who took 'though shalt not kill' as his credo, who evaded his responsibilities as a reservist in August 1914 and, instead, took to the mountains. In Brooks' translation, this is a work of genuine literary merit in construction, eye for detail and compassion. While *Roux the Bandit* is a slender work, in its writing, its simplicity of construction and the exposition of the simple philosophy of a conscientious objector and the growing acceptance of his personal philosophy by his fellow villagers is a gem.
David Filsell



HG WELLS
Mr Britling Sees it Through
Casemate £9.98.
ISBN: 978–148–370–283–4
Although *Mr Britling Sees it Through* proved hugely popular on publication in 1918, and remains a well–regarded novel, its inclusion in series of classic works on the Great War is debateable. In offering the author's view of the effects of the conflict on a certain select, 'Anyone for tea and hockey' British class, it clearly seems to mirror Wells' own privileged circle. It reveals little of the shattering effect of the war on Britain or the majority of its population. In conclusion this reader felt that *Britling* offers little more than an evaluation of Wells own privileged discomfiture at war, his philosophy 'lite' and comfortable, constrained largely by class. Whilst I am unqualified to judge the book's true literary credit, if a classic of any kind, it is one whose frequently bizarre punctuation and sentence construction – as well as Britling's incessantly sententious, meretricious, and mannered reflections – require considerable effort to finish.

A Classic? Maybe. But of Great War Fiction? Not for this reviewer.
David Filsell

RE–ISSUE

NORMAN MACMILLAN OBE, MC, AFC
Into the Blue
Grub Street, £16.00, 236pp, illustrations, index.
ISBN: 978–191–069–001–7
Into the Blue is a re–release of Norman Macmillan's autobiographical account of his experiences as a pilot beginning with his training at Netheravon in Wiltshire following infantry service with the Highland Light Infantry. (See Peter Hart's article on pp 39 to 44) Joining No. 45 Squadron he first flew two–seater army cooperation aircraft (Sopwith 1½ strutters) and later single–seat scouts (Sopwith Camels). Following an accident in January 1918 he returned to England as an instructor and finished the war commanding the Fighting Flight Group at Chattis Hill.

First published during the rush of memoirs in the late 1920s Macmillan revised his text in 1969 to reflect personal research he had conducted, particularly in reviewing military records of both the RAF and German Air Force – apparently in an effort to corroborate the fate of downed airmen with his own perceptions and recollections of where specific actions had taken place. In consequence, his accounts of sorties, aerial exploits and casualties interweaves the names of German and British airmen and provides some tally of who shot down whom, when, and where: aces and unknowns are cited as equals. This dimension alone results in the account being of more historical value than the average flying memoir. Macmillan's eloquent descriptions of different aircraft handling characteristics and his sometimes poetic portrayal of the world of the pioneer air fighters results in a rich book which could have been a useful reference work had it included an effective bibliography of his official sources. Even so, for those interested in the development of flying tactics, daily life and management of a flying unit, the pendulum swing of air superiority as aircraft technology developed, and a frank opinion of RFC/RAF training, tactics and strategy from someone at the sharp end, *Into the Blue* is well worth reading.
Kevin Dyer

WELSH SAPPER

RHYS DAVID
Tell Mum Not To Worry: A Welsh Soldier's war in the Near East
Deffro, £11.99, 304pp, illustrations, index.
ISBN: 978–099-309-820–8
The service life of Sapper Dewi David comes vividly to life in Rhys David's account of his father's time predominantly spent with the 53rd (Welsh) Division. Dewi's military career does not take him to the Western Front but to Gallipoli with the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force (MEF) and subsequently with the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) for garrison duties and the eventual push up through Gaza which ultimately brought about the downfall of the Ottoman Empire at Megiddo.

NOTICE TO BATTLEFIELD VISITORS

Wartime relics, such as shells, grenades etc are usually in a highly dangerous condition and still cause death and injury. Any such object found during visits to the battlefields should be left strictly alone. Also, most of the land is private property and must be respected as such. Strict laws (which are being enforced) apply in respect of the collection and export of battlefield detritus.

This story is unashamedly Welsh. It commences on St David's Day on 1 March 1898 when Dewi was born to proud Welsh speaking parents. They spoke the native tongue at home and the letters would have been written accordingly if the military had not banned its usage. It was not until late 1917 that a Welsh censor was appointed to review letters.

The story is told through the narrative of letters sent home to his parents and younger sister. The editor places the content of these letters into a chronological order. In doing this he provides a comprehensive overview of the wider military campaign. Recurrent themes within the letters are used effectively to provide an invaluable insight into not only the changes which transformed one family, but also clearly indicate the wider changes taking place within society, essentially breaking away from the Victorian past.

Recruited into the Welsh Divisional Telegraph Service (Territorial Force) Royal Engineers, Dewi was attached to the 53rd (Welsh) Division. After a period of training he went to Gallipoli, arriving in October 1915, and left with the division in December. He subsequently, after a short stay in Salonika, went on to join the EEF in Egypt. Here he found himself in numerous locations, often isolated in a signals outpost in the middle of a desert. The roles he performed whilst apart from his sappers were varied, from that of a mess servant to being a camel and horse groom. The physical efforts involved in laying cables over very extreme environments are keenly brought to life in his writing.

This is also a story about technology as Dewi was employed in communications; he worked for the Post Office as a telegraph boy. Telegraphs in the pre–war era were the quickest form of individual communication. The static war on the Western Front with frequent artillery barrages often led to breaks in the cables and there many heroic endeavours took place to re–establish communication. In the EEF the scenario was different. In Egypt where garrisons and headquarters were established the communication team were quiet and often used on other duties. During the war phase and the push through Palestine the logistical and communications elements were hard pressed in keeping pace with the advancing troops.

More than anything the book is about soldiering; the forging of an underage recruit of 17 years in 1915 into a hardened soldier by the time of his demobilisation in 1919. His letters reflect this transformation, the excitement, boredom, travel, separation and a desire to come home in one piece and the multi-tasking of roles - regardless of cap badge - to keep the army proficient.

Using letters as a narrative, it is often the topics not discussed or just hinted at that prove equally insightful. Dewi's letters are to his parents but he also corresponded with other individuals including women, whose identities he chose not to reveal. Future relationships and ambitions after the war are not openly discussed. There is a strong inclination that this young, intelligent soldier had his eyes opened to the world on his travels and that his transition to manhood, though shaped by the war, was comparable to the thousands of men who found themselves in a similar situation.

'Tell mum not to worry' is a good account of the soldier's lot in one of the forgotten campaigns in the Near East, not 'action packed', invariably unglamorous, often hungry but proving instrumental in the war's final conclusion.

Eric Hunter

SHORT NOTICES

Published by Uniform Press in 2015 *Poppyganda* (£14.99p, ISBN: 978–191–050–016–3) written by Matthew Leonard explores the historical evolution as well as the social and political impact of the poppy in a 128 pages long, thought provoking book. The poppy has for more than a century been associated with John McCrae's poem In Flanders Fields and the grief and loss that the Great War wrought. But since the war ended the poppy symbol has seen an increasingly commercial use alongside the goodwill and commemorative purposes that were originally intended. Has the poppy become a representation for the wrong things? Does its symbol invite a narrow–mindedness that excludes important aspects of remembrance? The poppy has indeed come to be used as a tool for propaganda and political communication, but will the power of this fragile flower increase or fade after the centenary of the armistice in 2018? These questions are all debated in Leonard's well–written book that should be on the shelves of anyone wearing a poppy on 11 November.

For Valour: Canadians and the Victoria Cross in the Great War. Gerald Gliddon, series ed. Dundurn Group, Toronto,: £24.50, paperback, 454pp with a further 26pp of sources, appendices and index. (ISBN: 978–145–972–848–6). Also available as a Kindle edition. This book follows the same pattern as the VCs of the First World War series edited by Gerald Gliddon that we are all familiar with. Indeed, this has simply been a 'cut and paste' exercise. Having examined my own books and compared the obviously same VC recipients, they are for the most part carbon copies of the original books. The text has been added to where more information has become available, but many of the photographs of graves and memorials for example have been omitted, although the photo of the recipient is still there. The sources are still listed and a comparison showed me that service files have now been accessed. This Canadian version is printed on poor quality paper compared to the original books. Unless you are only interested in the Canadian recipients and haven't got the far more attractive year by year and campaign specific versions, I cannot see the attraction of this volume. If one really needed/wanted the extra information, you could probably find it on the internet.

World War One Fact Book. William Van der Kloot. Amberley Publishing, Stroud, £12.99, paperback: 192 pp including sources (ISBN: 978–144–565–206–1). Also available as Kindle and e–editions. This book is concerned with the facts and figures of the Great War and they are displayed visually in graphic form; rather like a Powerpoint presentation might appear. The author is an American academic, who while not an historian *per se*, has spent a long time studying the war and has previously written about it. They say that a 'picture is worth a thousand words' and certainly to see comparisons of those who died of disease versus died of wounds for example, always has more impact that just printed figures. All aspects and theatres of war are covered; from the impact of the Industrial Revolution and the European arms race, through comparisons of weaponry held and used by all sides, to the causes of casualties and the conclusion and repercussions of the war. I cannot list all categories examined here, but be assured that there are some many of us would not necessarily have thought of. A useful volume that would be a good companion to Philip Haythornthwaite's *World War One Source Book*.

Barbara Taylor

Also Received

BILL AITKEN, ***Blackest of Lies***. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, £10.00 Paperback, 297pp. Also available on Kindle. ISBN: 978–151–149–813–5.

MARTYN THATCHER and ANTHONY QUINN, ***Kitchener Wants You: The Man, the Poster and the Legacy.*** Uniform Press, £14.99, 168pp. ISBN: 978–191–050–036–1.

MAJOR A H MURE (Foreword by Richard Van Emden)**, *This Bloody Place – With the Incomparable 29th*.** Pen & Sword, £16.58, 208pp. ISBN: 978–147–385–792–6.

GEOFF BRIDGER (Ed.), ***For King and Empire: Sailors Died in The Great War,*** Naval and Military Press DVD–CDROM, £45.00 plus VAT. ISBN: 978–184–574–909–5.

JOHN DILLON, '***Allies are a Tiresome Lot': The British Army in the First World War***, Helion & Co., £29.95, 221pp., 15 ills,4 maps bibliog., notes and refs, index. ISBN: 978–191–077–732–9.

GARETH RUSSELL, ***The Emperors: How Europe's Rulers were Destroyed by the First World War***, Amberley Publishing, £9.99, soft covers, 227pp., illustrated plus notes, bibliography and index. ISBN: 978–144–565–020–0

HUGH HARKINS, ***Light Battle Cruisers and The Second Battle of Heligoland Bight: Lord Fisher's Oddities,*** Centurion, £10.95, soft covers, 72pp., ISBN: 978–190–363–052–5.

MELANIE KING, ***Secrets in a Dead Fish***, Bodleian Library, £8.99, 102 pp., inc glossary and notes. ISBN: 978–185–124–260–3.

JOHN BISHOP, ***Refuse to Forget***, Matador, £ 8.99p, 247pp.
ISBN: 978– 178–306–313–0.

HYWEL LEWIS, ***Wait for the Whistle***, Matador, £7.99, Paperback, 448pp. ISBN: 978– 178–462–260–2.

PHILIPPE BIELER, ***Onward, Dear Boys: A Family Memoir of the Great War,***
McGill–Queen's University Press, £23.99, 280pp. ISBN: 978–077–354–468–0.

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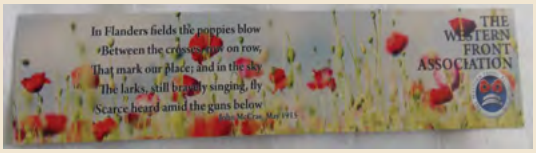

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To order the above (non clothing items) go to the E-shop on the Website or:
Contact: Sarah Gunn, Office Administrator, BM Box 1914, London, WC1N 3XX
Tel: 020 7118 1914 Email: office@westernfrontassociation.com www.westernfrontassociation.com

UNIVERSITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON

1918 - 2018

An International Conference

'The End of the War & The Reshaping of a Century'

6th - 8th September 2018

Hosted by the Centre for Historical Research at the University of Wolverhampton in collaboration with the Western Front Association and the First World War Network for Early Career & Postgraduate Researchers

Keynote Contributions will include:

Professor Alison Fell (University of Leeds)

Dr Peter Frankopan (University of Oxford)

Professor John Horne (Trinity College Dublin)

Professor Sir Hew Strachan (University of St Andrews)

Professor Jay Winter (Yale University)

2018 represents a major milestone in the history of the First World War, not least because it marks the centenary anniversary of the end of the conflict. This encompassing conference seeks to spotlight the latest research on the events of 1918 as well as the global significances, consequences, and legacy of this watershed year. It encourages international perspectives and seeks to encompass a wide range of historical approaches as well as cross-disciplinary insights.

The event will feature keynote addresses from some of the leading academic authorities on the First World War and what came afterwards, along with panel sessions from established and emerging academic researchers. Moreover, the event is being developed in collaboration with heritage agencies, museums, art galleries, funders, schools and community groups involved in First World War research, remembrance and events.

We ask you to 'Save the Date' and we invite expressions of interest from scholars (including early career and postgraduate researchers), independent researchers, organisations, groups and individuals interested in participating (as either contributor or attendee) in the conference. A formal call for papers will follow in summer 2017.

SAVE THE DATE

To register your interest or for any further enquires please contact:
Dr Oliver Wilkinson (O.Wilkinson@wlv.ac.uk)

Keep up-to-date with all the latest event news at our website (www.wlv.ac.uk/1918to2018) or by following us on twitter (@1918to2018)

Founded by John Giles. Inaugurated 11th November 1980
Registered Charity No. 298365

www.westernfrontassociation.com

The Western Front Association was formed with the aim of furthering interest in the period 1914-1918, to perpetuate the memory, courage and comradeship of those of all sides who served their countries in France and Flanders and their own countries during the Great War.
It does not seek to justify or glorify war. It is not a re-enactment Society, nor is it commercially motivated. It is entirely non-political. The object of the Association is to educate the public in the history of the Great War with particular reference to the Western Front. Applications for membership are welcomed from anyone with like mind.

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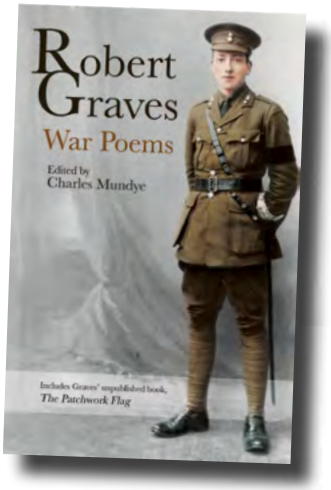
Poetry by Robert Graves and stunning photography by Aled Rhys Hughes:

two new Seren titles exploring the Great War



Robert Graves: War Poems is the first book to draw together all of Graves' war poetry, including the previously unpublished 1918 manuscript, *The Patchwork Flag*. *War Poems* also includes a substantial introduction from Charles Mundye, President of the Robert Graves Society. An officer of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, Graves was a poet, novelist, critic and classicist who served alongside fellow poets Siegfried Sassoon and David Jones at the Battle of Mametz Wood. Capturing the intensity and horror of life in the trenches, *War Poems* is a vital addition to First World War poetry.

Aled Rhys Hughes' *Mametz* is a collection of contemporary photographs exploring the battleground where 4,000 soldiers lost their lives. Its combination of atmospheric images of fields, hills, woodland and war detritus, *Mametz* is a poignant and inventive act of commemoration. Hughes' photographs are accompanied by a period map and an essay by poet Jeremy Hooker on the relationship between the photographs, the landscape and the men who saw action.

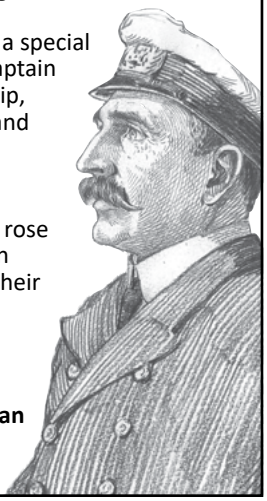
***Robert Graves: War Poems* and *Mametz* are available direct from Seren.**
Order your copies now: www.serenbooks.com or call 01656 663018

Captain Fryatt 'The Martyr of Bruges' EXHIBITION

at the Masonic Hall, Albion Place,
SOUTHAMPTON, SO14 2DD
2nd & 3rd September, 10am to 5pm, both days

The stories of Edith Cavell and of the Unknown Warrior have come to be well known, but the merchant seaman who sailed between England and Holland with cargo and civilians while the sea was alive with enemy submarines and who gained fame across the World has long since been forgotten.

'Captain Fryatt - The Martyr of Bruges' is a special exhibition that will tell the story of the captain who, to save his passengers, crew and ship, attempted to ram a German submarine and how, for this gallant act, was later to be captured and executed in Bruges.
The exhibition will tell how, from Southampton, he moved to Harwich and rose up through the ranks of the Great Eastern Railway Company to become captain of their steamer S.S. Brussels.



Admission is £3 for adults and £1 for accompanied children under 16, and tickets will be available on the door or can be booked in advance online at www.historico.c0/tickets.

BATTLE OF HILL 70

CENTENNIAL COMMEMORATION
22 AUGUST 2017
LOOS-EN-GOHELLE, FRANCE

The Hill 70 Memorial will commemorate the centennial of the Battle of Hill 70 on 22 August, beginning at 3.00 p.m. The ceremony is open to the public. Those wishing to attend are asked to be seated in the amphitheatre by 2.45 p.m.

Presiding Officer
Lieutenant-General Paul Wynnyk, C.M.M., M.S.M., C.D.
Commander, Canadian Army

If you plan to attend please inform us at:
hill70mp@gmail.com

www.hill70.ca

Founded by John Giles. Inaugurated 11 November 1980

Published by The Western Front Association
BM Box 1914, London, WC1N 3XX United Kingdom
Telephone: 020 7118 1914 office@westernfrontassociation.com www.westernfrontassociation.com

REMEMBERING

The Western Front Association was formed with the aim of furthering interest in the period 1914-1918, to perpetuate the memory, courage and comradeship of those of all sides who served their countries in France and Flanders and their own countries during the Great War.

Editor: Jon Cooksey

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Book Production Specialists