



The Spire Sentinel



**The Newsletter
of The
Branch of The
Front**



**& Magazine
Chesterfield
Western
Association**

Branch Newsletter 127 - September 2026

Our aims are 'Remembrance and Sharing the History of the
Great War'.



Western Front Association Chesterfield Branch – Meetings 2026

Meetings start at 7.30pm and take place at the Labour Club, Unity House, Saltergate, Chesterfield S40 1NF

January	6th	. AGM + Tim Lynch - “Huns on the Run” Tim explores the often overlooked experiences of German POWs held in Britain during and immediately after the First World War
February	3rd	Ross Beadle - Sarajevo 1914 This talk examines the sequence of chance events of the preceding 36 years and, even, on the day of the killing.
March	3rd	Andy Rawson - Malta...Nurse of the Mediterranean against the Germans and Italians during WWII. However, over 125,000 casualties from the 1915 Gallipoli and 1916 Salonika campaigns were cared for on the island during WWI.
April	7th	Mick Byrne - Shot at Dawn Between 1914 and 1920, more than 3,000 British soldiers were sentenced to death by courts martial arms, However, only 346 were executed with 37 of these having committed capital crimes such as murder. The remainder become the centrepiece of our talk.
May	5th	Christina Holstein - Verdun. What was the plan behind the German offensive of February 1916? A thundering opening bombardment brought early success but the German advance soon slowed and the French refused to give up.
June	2nd	Scott Lindgren The Admiralty dispatched two dreadnought battlecruisers to the South Atlantic to eliminate the threat of the German East Asia cruiser squadron. This talk explains the events and consequences of the Falklands battle, along with some of the strategic and tactical lessons.
July	7th	John Wilson The action at Sheikh Sa'id November 1914. The opposed landing that nobody has ever heard about! .
August	4th	Ian Castle - Gotha Raids. The talk traces the sequence of raids made by the deadly Gotha and massive 'Giant' bombers, and the development of the world's first in depth, integrated aerial defence system. Based on his book London 1917-18: The Bomber Blitz
September	1st	Roy Larkin - Where the Money Went. Following the success of the original 'Where the Money Went', the Sequel explores the financial costs of the Great War. Fully illustrated
October	6th	Peter Hart Welsh Warrior at Ypres, 1914: The thrilling memories of Captain Hubert Rees who ended up in command of the 2nd Welsh Regiment during the fighting at Gheluvelt.
November	3rd	John Horner 'In the care of St Dunstons : Private Richard Horner's story'
December	1st	Neil Taylor...."Winston`s Little Army...Aspects of the Royal Naval Division"

Issue 127 list of contents

- 2 Branch Meetings Calendar 2026
- 3 Contents - issue 127 + Chairman`s Notes
- 4 September Meeting - Roy Larkin and Secretary`s Scribbles.
- 5 Secretary`s Scribbles and help wanted .
- 6 Help Wanted + Steve and Jill Brunt report
- 7 -11 Steve and Jill Brunt report
- 12 - 25 August Meeting
- 25-27 Private John Hunter
- 27 - 29 Branded Goods WFA Shop
- 30 Not The Western Front Conference

Chairman`s Ramblings



The months are flying by, and the September meeting is soon upon us, so we are looking forward to one of our regular speakers, Roy Larkin. We are anticipating another well researched and informative talk on where the money went, the financial cost of WW1.

Last month's talk by Ian Castle was an in-depth talk on the Gotha Raids and the first Blitz in WW1 Great research and some great photos and a well presented talk I think everyone who attended found it informative and interesting.

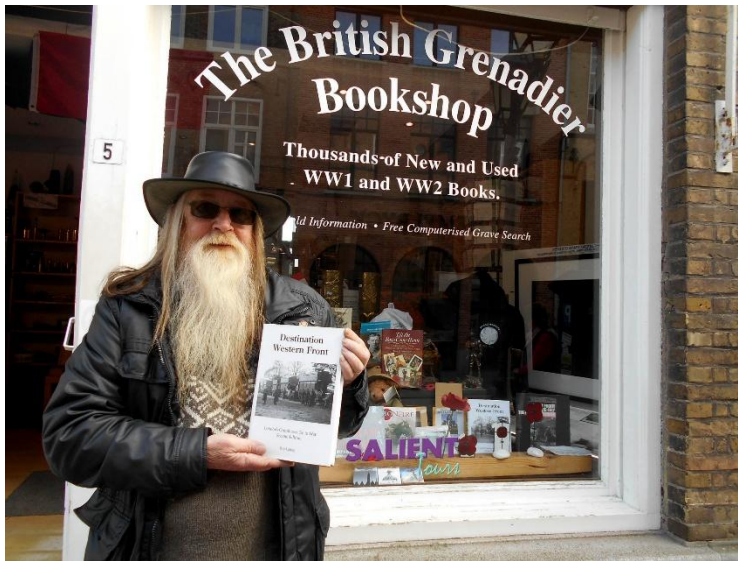
I hope this year some may consider traveling to London in November for Remembrance Day at the Cenotaph. I will be attending on behalf of the branch and laying a wreath as in previous years, if anyone is interested just let me know.

If anybody has been to the battlefields or been anywhere of interest to do with the Great War or any research on relatives or battles, please do a small article and let Grant have it so he can add it to the newsletter, I am sure everyone would be interested to hear about it. Hope everyone is well and looking forward to seeing everyone in September. And thank you again to the committee for all the hard work they do behind the scenes to keep this fantastic branch going.

Looking forward to seeing everyone next week

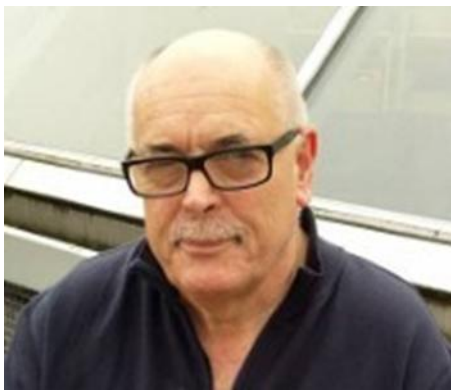
Jon-Paul Harding

September Presentation - Roy Larkin



Where the Money Went. A follow up to his original 'Where the Money Went', this sequel explores the financial costs of the Great War and as always with Roy is well illustrated.

Secretary`s Scribbles.....



Dear Members and Friends,

Welcome to the September 2026 edition of the Branch Newsletter and magazine - number 127

I`m going to start this scribble with thanks to quite a few people - firstly Mark and Jean Macartney for the journey of Remembrance they made in July in Scotland following the events before, during and after the Quintinshill disaster 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1915. Know this is very close to Mark`s heart as he was born and brought up less than two miles from where the tragedy occurred . Such was the quality and content of their report I felt it justified a Special Edition of the Newsletter. Whilst on the subject of Mr Macartney...Mark has been putting in the hours helping me set up the Calendar of Speakers for next year, he`s really taken a load off me and I thank him for his invaluable help. Once Mark gets all the Speaker`s details, he puts it on the national WFA website...of course that`s all on top of the work he does on behalf of the WFA itself organising the sales of WFA Branded Goods. In addition to all of this Mark is responsible for all the organising of the WFA

Calendars, including posting these out, not just to Branches but to individuals all over the world.

Thanks due to Jill and Steve Brunt for their report on their recent visit to the battlefields of Northern France and Belgium, the highlight of course being the laying of a wreath at the Menin Gate in Ypres

You will see there is a letter of request from a WFA member in Colchester asking if someone could go along and obtain a photograph of a memorial in a church in the village of King's Langley in the Amber Valley. I really hope that we can help Douglas in his quest.

Tuesday night sees regular visiting speaker Roy Larkin return for another presentation - see details of Roy and his presentation elsewhere in this newsletter.

Looking forward to October we have our annual visitation by Peter Hart... with his talk entitled "Welsh Warrior at Ypres, 1914: The thrilling memories of Captain Hubert Rees who ended up in command of the 2nd Welsh Regiment during the fighting at Gheluvelt."

As always I'm looking forward to seeing as many of you as possible on Tuesday. For those not been before to a meeting, we have free, off street parking, access to the Chesterfield Labour Club bar, before and after the meeting. There is a stair lift up to our first floor meeting room for anyone with mobility issues. We ask for a modest donation (suggested £3) from everyone who attends to cover the cost of the room hire and any fees or expenses requested by our speakers - some - like Roy Larkin on Tuesday come a long way to entertain and educate us. Roy, as always will be accompanied by his good lady. Once again this newsletter gives me - and the Branch a chance to thank the speaker at our August meeting, Ian Castle, for supplying details of his talk for inclusion in this newsletter.

Best wishes, Grant grantcullen@hotmail.com / 07824628638

Please see below an e mail I received from a WFA Member, Douglas Rowe, he's seeking a photograph of a memorial in St. Michael's Church, Kirk Langley
Hopefully one - or more of our members / attendees can help him, his contact details are below.



Hi Grant - as one fellow WFA Member to another may I ask if you can help me with my research. I have, unsuccessfully so far, been trying to obtain a photograph of a Brass War Memorial Plaque in St Michael's Church in the village of Kirk Langley in the Amber Valley. The BWMP hangs in the Meynell Chapel inside the church and is dedicated to Major RAYMOND ENGLAND RFA from his widow. Raymond was KiA 26th August 1914 at Le Cateau.

I already know the dedication on the Plaque and am simply trying to obtain a photo of the Plaque itself to add to me write-up and not the details of the dedication on it.

Does anyone who attends your meetings in Chesterfield live near Kirk Langley, or anyone be prepared to travel to take a photo for me? I would be prepared to reimburse any expenses met by the photographer. Copy of photo could be e'mailed or sent as hard copy to DOUGLAS ROWE, 14 WHITTAKER WAY, WEST MERSEA, COLCHESTER, ESSEX, CO5 8LB E mail rowed14@talktalk.net

Fingers crossed you know someone who can help me. Regards - Doug

XX

Wreath Laying at the Menin Gate Remembrance Ceremony for the Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Referees Association, 15/08/2026, and former Chesterfield footballers remembered.

Report by Steve and Jill Brunt

My wife Jill and I were absolutely delighted and honoured to lay a wreath for Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Referees Association (CNDRA), at the Ceremony of Remembrance under the Menin Gate in Ypres, Belgium, on the Saturday evening of

the 15th August. As former Great War Tutors and amateur military historians, Jill and I are regular visitors to the former battlefields of the Western Front on the Somme and in Flanders. We are also members of The Last Post Association, who deliver the Remembrance Ceremony at the Menin Gate each evening at 8.00pm and have done so since 1928, with a break for the war when Ypres was occupied in WW11. I am also a volunteer speaker for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), who are responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the memorials and CWGC cemeteries across the Western Front and Worldwide.

The Remembrance Ceremony

I estimated there to be around 500 members of the public in attendance at the ceremony this evening. The Last Post Association buglers start the ceremony with a rendition of the Last Post. The exhortation is then read: "They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old, age shall not weary them nor the years condemn: at the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we will remember them". A minute's silence is then observed. The Ellesborough Silver band then started to play and the wreath laying commenced with ourselves, representatives from the Ellesborough Band and David Mercer laying wreaths. The Reveill is then played by the Last Post Associations Buglers to end the service.

Incidentally, the magnificent Menin Gate Memorial has the inscribed names of over 54,000 British and Commonwealth soldiers with no known grave, who fell in an around the Ypres sector in the Great War.



Jill and Steve prior to the Service of Remembrance under the Menin Gate.

The wreath is laid on behalf of Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Referees Association.



Steve and Jill with the Last Post Association Buglers after the service.

Jill and I also took the opportunity during our visit to the Somme to visit the final resting place of two former footballers who played professional football prior to the commencement of hostilities in WW1. The first being Company Sergeant Major Joe Smith who played for Birmingham FC and Chesterfield Town and who lies in the Serre Road CWGC No 1. He served in the Middlesex Regiment (the football

battalion)) and died of his wounds on November 13th, 1916, at the age of 27. He couldn't have picked a finer resting place than Serre Road CWGC No 1.



The Headstone and grave of Company Sergeant Major Joe Smith.



The entrance to the magnificent CWGC cemetery, Serre Road, No 1.

The second former footballer we visited was Charles Niel Newcombe. Charles initially enlisted as a private soldier in the Sherwood Foresters regiment in 1914, and a series of promotions followed swiftly. He then served in the 7th Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry as a Lieutenant in 1915 and was killed in action at Fleurbaix in Northern France. He played professional football for a number of clubs, including Chesterfield Town, Glossop Town, Manchester United and Rotherham. Charles also made one first class appearance for Derbyshire CCC against Yorkshire in 1910. He was educated in Chesterfield and was Head Boy at Chesterfield Grammar School. He is buried at Y Farm CWGC cemetery, just outside Bois Grenier in Northern France.



The grave of Lieutenant C.N. Newcombe in Serre Road CWGC cemetery, No 1.



From the Local Paper, possibly the Derbyshire Times.

Our trip to the former battlefields wouldn't have been complete without visiting the memorial to the 17th and 23rd Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment, just outside Longueval on the Somme. Funds for the memorial were raised by players and staff from the English and Welsh Clubs of the Football League, working under a campaign led by former Notts County striker, Phil Stan. Phil was himself a veteran of the Falkland's War.

The 1st Footballers battalion, the 17th (Service) Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment was raised on the 15th of December 1914 during a meeting at Fulham Town Hall. More than 300 professional players, from around 50 clubs, were to enlist in the footballer's battalion over the next few months. They were joined by amateur players, referees, club officials and supporters. By May of 1915 a decision was taken to raise a second Footballers Battalion named the 23rd (Service) Middlesex Regiment. (For information, a battalion in WW1 was made up of around 1,000 men in uniform)



The 17th and 23rd (Service) Battalions of the Middlesex Regiments Memorial.

Our final visit on trip was to one of the most celebrated former footballers who lost their lives on the Somme during the Great War. The magnificent memorial at Bells Redoubt is dedicated to Second Lieutenant Donald Simpson Bell, V.C., of the 9th battalion Yorkshire Regiment. Donald was killed in action aged 25 on the 10th July 1916. An extract from his citation reads” During an attack and enfilade fire from a hostile machine gun, Bell on his own initiative rushed the open ground under heavy fire and attacked and destroyed the machine gun and personnel with bombs. This very brave act saved many lives and ensured the success of the attack. Five days later this gallant officer lost his life performing a very similar act of bravery”. Donald played for Bradford Park Avenue prior to the war and is buried in Gordon Dump CWGC cemetery on the Somme.



Bells Redoubt just outside Contalmaison on the Somme

Steve is currently a football referee on the Chesterfield Sunday League and a member of the Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Referees Association. He laid the wreath on their behalf in his capacity as Alderman Steve Brunt alongside his wife Jill Mannion Brunt: Ends...

August Meeting - Ian Castle



Here we have speaker Ian Castle and Branch Chair, Jon-Paul Harding making the raffle draw at the end of Ian`s presentation.



The subject of this talk is Operation Türkenkreuz, the German bomber campaign against London in the First World War.

After mounting Zeppelin losses in the autumn of 1916, the German High Command began plotting a new wave of terror aimed at striking against the pulsing heart of the British Empire and the seat of its government. To this end the German Army embraced developments in aircraft design, abandoned airships, and focused on launching bomber aeroplane raids on the city.

By Spring 1917, aeroplane technology had made dramatic progress and the German Army now possessed a weapon capable of carrying the war to London – the G-type, more commonly known as the Gotha bomber.

Powered by two Mercedes engines, the Gotha could maintain a speed of 80mph in favourable conditions with a maximum ceiling of about 17,000 feet and could carry a bomb load of 300 to 400kgs, with two or three machine guns for defence. Its engines, however, could be unreliable and the aircraft itself became dangerously unstable when landing without the ballast provided by bombs and fuel. London, however, was the extent of its range.

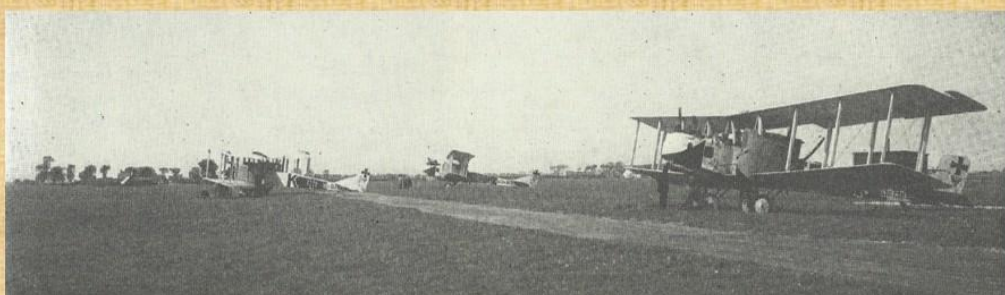
The new squadron, *Kampfgeschwader Drei der Obersten Heeresleitung*, commanded by Hauptmann Ernst Brandenburg, was generally abbreviated to Kagohl 3 and flew under the unofficial title *Der Englandgeschwader* - the England Squadron.

In May 1917 the squadron was finally ready to go to war. For London the timing could not have been worse. When no Zeppelin raids on the capital materialised through the final months of 1916 and early months of 1917, the fear of aerial raids largely evaporated. And as the perceived threat diminished, so London's defences were reduced, with numbers of Home Defence pilots posted to the Western Front and anti-aircraft guns transferred to the Navy.

Against this scaled-down defence Germany launched *Türkenkreuz* - Turk's Cross - the codename for the bomber campaign against England.



Kagohl 3 preparing for take off



After two failed attempts due to bad weather, the Englandgeschader finally reached London on the morning of Wednesday 13 June 1917. Over Britain the noise created by the 14 aircraft destined to reach the city was immense, but many of those watching from the ground that summer's morning presumed them to be British, cheering enthusiastically as the Germans passed in formation.

The first anti-aircraft opened fire at 11.30am but the gunfire did not distract the crews from their mission.

Over London, more than a hundred bombs rained down in just a couple of minutes, with falling within a one-mile radius of Liverpool Street Station. At the station three bombs caused havoc, killing 16 and injuring another 15. Siegfried Sassoon, the famed war poet, was at the station that day while on leave and considered,

In a trench one was acclimatized to the notion of being exterminated and there was a sense of organized retaliation. But here one was helpless; an invisible enemy sent destruction spinning down from a fine weather sky; poor old men bought a railway ticket and were trundled away again dead on a barrow.

Casualties rapidly mounted across the City, in shops, offices and in the streets. Numerous dramatic and tragic stories emerged from those few minutes of horror that descended on London, but there was one above all others that left an indelible mark on the city.

Those aircraft still carrying bombs as they departed unloaded them on east London. One fell on the Upper North Street School in Poplar. The bomb smashed down through the building before exploding on the ground floor, in a classroom crammed with 64 infants. Once the dust and debris had settled 18 children were dead and 28 more bore cruel injuries.

The raid caused material damage estimated at £126,000 and claimed the lives of 162 Londoners while injuring another 426 - the highest casualty total in the war for a single raid on the city.

The Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service flew 94 sorties but all the Gothas escaped unharmed, leaving the Home Defence organisation appearing exposed and impotent in their wake and leaving the population angry and outraged. Despite the casualties, the government continued to oppose the introduction of public air raid warnings in the capital. People had rushed into the streets to watch the bombers, the government feared that many more might do so if they knew a raid was

imminent, thus hindering the work of the emergency services and further risking their own safety.

When news of the success of the mission was announced in Germany, Brandenburg flew home to receive the *Pour le Mérite*, Germany's highest military order. But on the return journey his aircraft crashed. Although dragged alive from the wreckage, Brandenburg lost a leg.

In London the War Cabinet considered this new threat and approved an increase in the strength of the Royal Flying Corps, but in the short-term two front-line squadrons were temporarily withdrawn from the Western Front to assist with Home Defence, but with orders to return in three weeks to support the opening of the Battle of Passchendaele. New high-performance aircraft began to join the squadrons too but there were no new anti-aircraft guns. Demands for public air raid warnings, however, continued to be blocked with the government concerned that munitions workers alerted to air raids, would not return to work after the threat had passed.

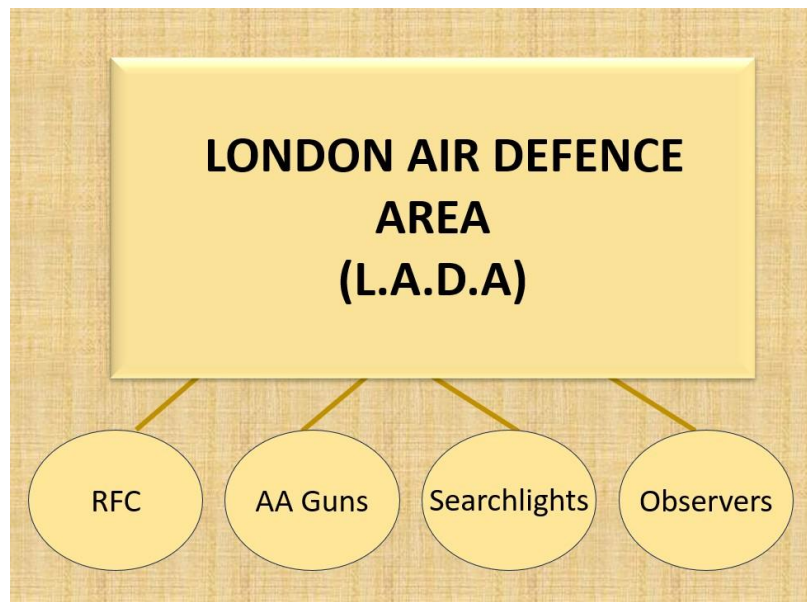
In Belgium, Brandenburg's replacement, *Hauptmann* Rudolph Kleine, waited for a break in the weather, which finally came on 7 July. On the previous day the last of the aircraft temporarily detached to assist with Home Defence had returned to duties on the Western Front. On a bright and sunny Saturday morning, Kleine led a formation of 21 Gothas to England. At 10.20am the calm of that peaceful morning was shattered when the first anti-aircraft guns opened fire. The last bomb fell 20 minutes later.

The first casualties occurred in Stoke Newington in north London. Other bombs fell around St. Barts Hospital, Aldersgate Street, Barbican, Fenchurch Street and Leadenhall Street. One bomb, exploding outside offices close to the Tower of London where about 80 people were sheltering did so with a deafening crash followed by a blinding flash, then a chaos of breaking glass, and clouds of soot, dust and fumes. It left 8 dead and 15 injured.

And despite a hundred aircraft taking to the skies to intercept the bombers, only one was successfully engaged, crashing into the North Sea, with four others wrecked when landing back in Belgium. British aircrew suffered as well with two aircraft shot down.

Public reactions to the raid were significant.

Anti-German riots and looting broke out across London, and the people now hated the name Gotha. In response, the King diplomatically issued a proclamation changing the name of the Royal House of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to the Royal House of Windsor.



As a reaction to the raids the War Cabinet formed a committee to consider aerial defence. The committee really revolved around just one man, Lieutenant-General Jan Christian Smuts, a South African delegate to the War Cabinet. In just eight days he produced a detailed report which resulted in the formation of a new 'London Air Defence Area', bringing all elements of London's aerial defences under a united command for the first time.

The man chosen to lead it was Brigadier-General Edward Ashmore, a former senior Flying Corps officer and at the time an artillery commander in Flanders. He took up his new position on 5 August 1917.

And finally, the government relented and introduced public air raid warnings for London, in the form of alerts given by policemen touring the streets, supported during daylight hours by the firing of marine distress maroons from fire station roofs.

Consistently bad weather in the summer of 1917 limited the German raids and gave time to improve the aerial defences. Ashmore introduced his 'Green Line' plan - a theoretical line drawn around the capital with separate areas of operation for AA guns and aircraft. Beyond this 'Green Line' the guns had priority, meaning any aircraft flying over this zone could be considered hostile.

Another element of Smuts report made a strong recommendation for combining the Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service into a single independent air service. It marked the birth of the RAF, which finally came into being on 1 April 1918.

However, all these plans introduced by Ashmore and designed to counter daylight raids were about to become redundant. Between 22 July and 22 August, while bad weather prevented him striking London, Kleine raided south-eastern coastal towns, sustaining heavy losses against Britain's improving defences. In response, Kleine switched to night-bombing.

The first of these raids took place on the night of 4 September, with five volunteer crews attacking the capital, their bombs killing 16 and injuring 56.

This unanticipated change of tactics marked the beginning of a regular nightly exodus to the safety of the Underground stations for many of London's population. By the end of September 1917, it is estimated that 300,000 were seeking safety on the transport network, far more than ever did so in the Second World War.

To consider this new night-time threat, the War Cabinet called again on Smuts, and two days later he produced another report. Amongst his recommendations he supported the proposal for a balloon apron, a wire screen suspended from balloons, which it was hoped might ensnare enemy aircraft at night and also force them up to fly at a more predictable height.

Another innovation saw the anti-aircraft guns adopt a new system of barrage fire, which directed the guns to give 'curtains' of shell fire in the path of incoming aircraft at varying heights on pre-set map co-ordinates.



And during this time a new squadron prepared to join the attacks on London - *Riesenflugzeugabteilung 501* – or Rfa 501 – with the latest R-type bomber - the *Riesenflugzeug* - literally, Giant aeroplane. Commanded by *Hauptmann* Richard von Bentivegni, these extraordinary aircraft could carry a very large bomb load of up to

1,000kgs, but they were most remarkable for their size. With a wingspan of 138ft they dwarfed by over 30ft the iconic Avro Lancaster of WW2.

However, not all the Giants were operational when favourable weather, on 24 September, heralded the start of an unparalleled intensive period of bombing - later known as the Harvest Moon offensive - when five raids hit the capital in the space of eight days. These raids met with mixed success, but those watching from the ground were impressed by the deterrent effect of the new 'curtain' barrage' around the capital.

This concentration of raids ended on the night of 1 October, the guns falling silent again at last. On one night alone 276 anti-aircraft shells fell on London, adding to the casualties and damage caused by the German bombs. And the guns and men crewing them were suffering too.

On the night of 30 September, it was reported that some of the guns fired over 500 rounds each. By the following day the guns were experiencing serious problems and ammunition was running low. Fortunately, a change in the weather kept the raiders at bay for four weeks, giving the gun defences a chance to recover.

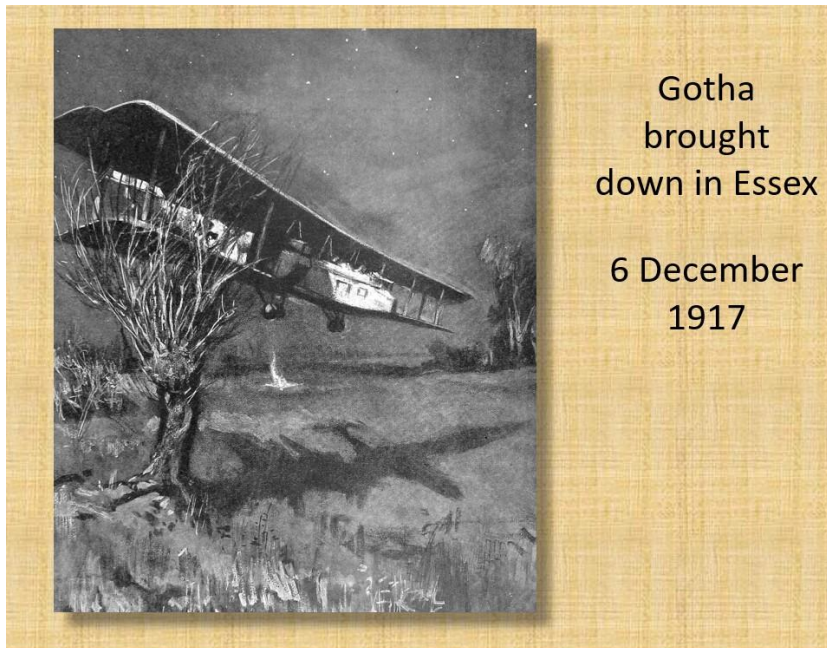
From a German point of view, the results of those five raids were disappointing, with a total of only 20 Gothas and one Giant reaching London. They dropped 94 explosive and 57 incendiary bombs, inflicting material damage estimated at £114,000: casualties were confirmed at 49 killed and 230 injured. However, the raids *were* producing some of their intended effects. Production of munitions at Woolwich Arsenal fell significantly during the raids, and many Londoners, a vast number of who now regularly slept in the Underground stations, were suffering from stress, anxiety and shattered nerves.

During this latest lull, buildings with suitable cellars began to be requisitioned as air-raid shelters, and the first two of the balloon aprons were raised in Essex .

With a change in the weather, the *Englandgeschwader* returned on the night of 31 October, carrying an increased proportion of incendiary bombs. Kleine planned to start big fires burning all over the city, but strong winds disrupted the attack resulting in damage calculated at just £9,500.

And it got worse for Kleine and his crews as fog shrouded their home airfields. With fuel supplies almost exhausted the fatigued crews were forced to take their chances and land through the fog. Five were wrecked. Continuing bad weather meant it would be over a month before they could try for London again.

On the night of 5/6 December 1917, Kleine ordered the majority of bombs loaded to be incendiaries. And for only the second time, two Giants joined the raid. But again, the raiders were foiled. Only six Gothas reached the city, dropping 260 incendiary and 13 explosive bombs, but started only three serious fires. Estimates show total material damage at £92,000, but half of that was caused by a single bomb which burnt out a factory just north of Liverpool Street Station.



But that night British morale received a boost when the over-worked guns brought down two of the raiders. One, with a propellor shot away, made an emergency landing on a golf course north of Southend-on-Sea. But the valuable coup of capturing an intact Gotha was lost when a British officer accidentally fired a pistol flare into the petrol-soaked aircraft.

Despite Germany's hope to set London ablaze, the incendiary bombs deployed were later declared by the official German historian as not fit for purpose. But technicians were working on a new lightweight incendiary - the Elektron bomb - but it would not be ready for deployment until the final months of the war. *Hauptmann* Rudolph Kleine, however, would not see it developed. Six days after that last incendiary raid, Kleine was shot down and killed near Ypres. Temporary command of Kagohl 3 passed to the squadron's senior flight commander, *Oberleutnant* Richard Walter.

On 18 December, less than a week after taking command, Walter led his first raid on London, on the same day that Kagohl 3 changed its designation to *Bombengeschwader Drei der Obersten Heeresleitung* - or *Bogohl 3*.

Six Gothas and a single Giant reached the city that night. Raids normally took place in good moonlight but this night was extremely dark and it caught the warning system off guard. No warnings could be issued before the first bombs dropped in Westminster. Others fell across a wide area of the city, with one inflicting extensive damage south of the Thames in Bermondsey, striking buildings owned by the Salvation Army used as a shelter during raids.

The Gotha that dropped those, however, paid the price. Attacked by a Sopwith Camel and with its starboard engine damaged, the Gotha lost height, eventually ditching in the sea. It was the first time a British night-fighter had brought down a German bomber.

The bombs dropped that night caused material damage estimated at £225,000, the largest single total since a Zeppelin raid in September 1915. They also killed 13 and injured 79. But again, *Bogohl 3* sustained heavy losses. In addition to the Gotha shot down, the mournful toll continued in Belgium: seven more were damaged or wrecked on landing. The return home had become the most dangerous part of a mission.

But this raid on 18 December, coming on a dark night, had caught the defences off-guard, preventing the issue of an effective warning to the public. Angry scenes followed, and in response, whereas the warning maroons had previously only alerted people to daylight raids, now they would be used, in conjunction with the police alerts, to warn of night raids too.

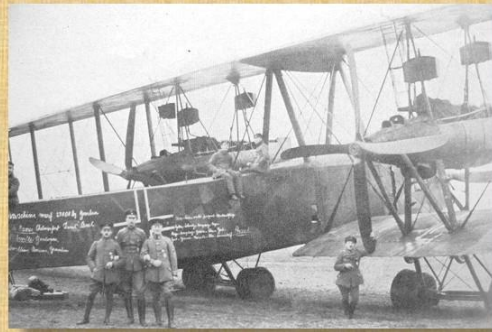
While *Bogohl 3* and *Rfa 501* waited for another chance to strike at London, heavy winter fog throughout January 1918 kept them grounded. However, a brief weather window opened on Monday 28 January allowing three Gothas to battle their way through to London, followed by a Giant. But even before they arrived the mere threat of the raid had claimed lives.

For the very first time warning maroons exploded in the night sky. In Shoreditch, these sudden aerial explosions caused a panic and rush for a public shelter. When order was restored, 14 lifeless bodies were recovered from the bottom of the stairs.

Those Gothas that reached London dropped bombs on East London, Vauxhall, Holborn and around the stations at Euston, King's Cross and St. Pancras. One, however, was intercepted near Romford by two Sopwith Camels of No. 44 Squadron. A tremendous running battle developed as the Camels repeatedly swooped in to attack. A final pass by one sent the Gotha down in flames to crash on farmland at Wickford in Essex.



300kg
High-Explosive
Bomb



Giant R.12

However, London's ordeal was not yet over. That same night a single 300kg explosive bomb dropped by Giant R.12, destroyed a four-storey printing works in Covent Garden — designated an official air raid shelter. The bomb smashed through the pavement lights and exploded in one of the basement rooms, shaking the foundations as fire quickly spread through huge rolls of newsprint stored there. Then, as rescuers got to work, one of the outer walls collapsed, forcing the massive printing presses to crash down through to the basement. The devastation was immense and it was not until some six weeks later that the last bodies were recovered. The final toll recorded 38 killed and 85 injured, the most casualties in London caused by a single bomb during the war. *Bogohl 3* suffered too. As well as the Gotha shot down in Essex, another four aircraft were lost when landing back in Belgium.

The following night, Tuesday 29 January, two Giants reached London. For one it proved a sobering experience. Having brushed off five separate aeroplane attacks and avoided a near collision with the balloon apron, when the crew of R.25 landed back in Belgium, they discovered 88 bullet holes in their aircraft.

In February 1918, after seven months convalescence, Ernst Brandenburg resumed command of *Bogohl 3*. Now, walking with difficulty on an artificial leg, he found his command much demoralized by their constant losses. He immediately suspended further action until his squadron returned to full strength.

Therefore, on the evening of 16 February, *Rfa 501* attacked London alone, but only two Giants were able to battle through against the fierce headwinds. One of them, R.39, carried a single bomb, weighing an immense 1,000 kgs; measuring 13 feet in

length it was the heaviest type dropped from the air during the war. It fell in Chelsea, on the north-east wing of the Royal Hospital, home of the Chelsea Pensioners, killing an officer of the hospital staff and four of his family.

The following night, despite having only one aircraft available, von Bentivegni ordered R.25 to raid London alone. The attack ended with a devastating salvo on St. Pancras Station and the adjoining Midland Hotel, leaving 20 dead and 22 injured.

The Giants of Rfa 501 appeared next on the night of 7 March. R.39 again carried a single 1,000 kg bomb. The recipient of this metric ton of destruction was a quiet residential street in Maida Vale, about a mile north of Paddington Station. The bomb destroyed two pairs of four-storey houses in Warrington Crescent, with other damage extending across a vast area. The final tally reached 12 killed and 33 injured. And hidden in these bare statistics lay the body of one Lena Ford. In 1914, it was she who penned the lyrics for the hugely popular, wartime song, 'Keep The Home Fires Burning'.

As the rubble was cleared away, London readied itself for the next raid. However, the skies remained empty. On 21 March 1918 the German Army had launched a massive spring offensive on the Western Front. All aircraft were needed to support the attack. It was not until May that attention turned back to London.

On Sunday 19 May 1918 the population of the capital was enjoying a pleasant Bank Holiday weekend. Good weather and an absence of German raiders in the skies over the city for 10 weeks had promoted a relaxed atmosphere. Into this peaceful night Germany launched its largest aerial armada of the war - 38 Gothas and three Giants.

As the raiders appeared, reports from all over the south-east flooded London's Air Defence headquarters. For the first time, aircraft of the recently amalgamated Royal Air Force took off to oppose the raiders and soon the skies over Kent and Essex buzzed like a hornet's nest.

Over Kent, Major Quinton Brand, flying a Sopwith Camel, intercepted and successfully attacked one of the raiders. It burst into flames and crashed on the Isle of Sheppey at 11.26pm - Brand had only been in the air for 11 minutes.

The guns along the Thames Estuary were pounding the skies too, and it appears only 18 of the 41 attacking aircraft battled their way through the storm of shot and shell, the rest repulsed by this onslaught or forced to turn back through mechanical problems. Records show that 72 explosive bombs fell over a wide area of London, with just a handful striking the central area. - 22 -

Total casualties that night amounted to 48 killed and 172 injured. But the bombers then faced a hazardous return journey as all the searchlights, anti-aircraft guns and pilots between London and the coast were on the alert. Eleven months earlier, during the first daylight Gotha raid, the guns had fired just 360 rounds. But on this night the guns blasted over 30,000 rounds skywards.

Also swarming in the skies, the pilots of the RAF shot down another Gotha over Kent and one over Essex, and another made an emergency landing, as anti-aircraft guns brought down two more off the coast, and one crashed on landing in Belgium.

Quiet now returned to the skies over London. The city's population, reassured by the very visible response to this latest attack, steeled themselves in preparation for the next alarm, while the RAF confidently awaited its next test. A week passed, then a month, two months and then three, but the raiders didn't return, they never came again.

Brandenburg and Von Bentivegni intended trying again, but the Army's increasing demands in the second half of 1918 as the war turned against Germany, meant their aircraft were constantly needed elsewhere. However, by August, the long-awaited Elektron incendiary bomb, weighing just a kilo and capable of being dropped in vast numbers, was ready. In September 1918 plans were approved to unleash a fearsome firestorm on London. Aircraft were loaded, then, at the very last minute an order arrived cancelling the raid. British aircraft were now regularly bombing targets in Germany and, recognising the end of the war was near, and fearing greater reprisals against the German civilian population, the Army High Command cancelled the order. Unknown to London's civilian population, their war was over.

The bomber raids on the London area resulted in almost 500 deaths and 1400 other casualties. Across the rest of south-eastern England, mainly in coastal towns, another 350 died with over 500 injured in aeroplane attacks.

Casualties inflicted during
Gotha/Giant raids 1917-18

	Killed	Injured
London	487	1434
South East England	350	557
Total	837	1991

Germany's plan to crush the morale of London's population by aerial bombardment had failed. Rather than push the civilian population to demand peace, instead, Operation Türkenkreuz led to demands for reprisals. But the raids did have an impact, forcing the deployment of high-performance aircraft away from the front line and, at times, affected munitions production. And despite urgent demands for their redeployment, guns, searchlights, aeroplanes and the manpower required to complete the defence system, remained in place until the end of the war. Yet this came at a price for the crews of *Bogohl 3*, with 24 Gothas shot down or missing and another 36 destroyed or seriously damaged in landing accidents.

The air raids, however, made one final contribution of inestimable value. They made the British government acutely aware of the need for an in-depth aerial defence system. It forced the RFC and RNAS to realign their divergent paths with the creation of the Royal Air Force in April 1918, independent of both the Army and Navy, and a sophisticated central operations room in central London was now in operation. Here sat the hub of an exclusive military telephone network that relayed information from 25 sub-control centres, each in direct contact with the defence elements within its own area.

In the Central Operations Room, plotters received information via telephone headsets and moved symbols, representing enemy aircraft, over a large map table. Looking down from a gallery was Ashmore, commander of the London Air Defence Area, and alongside him were Lt. Col. Higgins, commanding the Home Defence squadrons of the RAF, and a senior police representative. Ashmore was able to speak directly to the sub-commanders and Higgins to the RAF Wing HQs, while the police

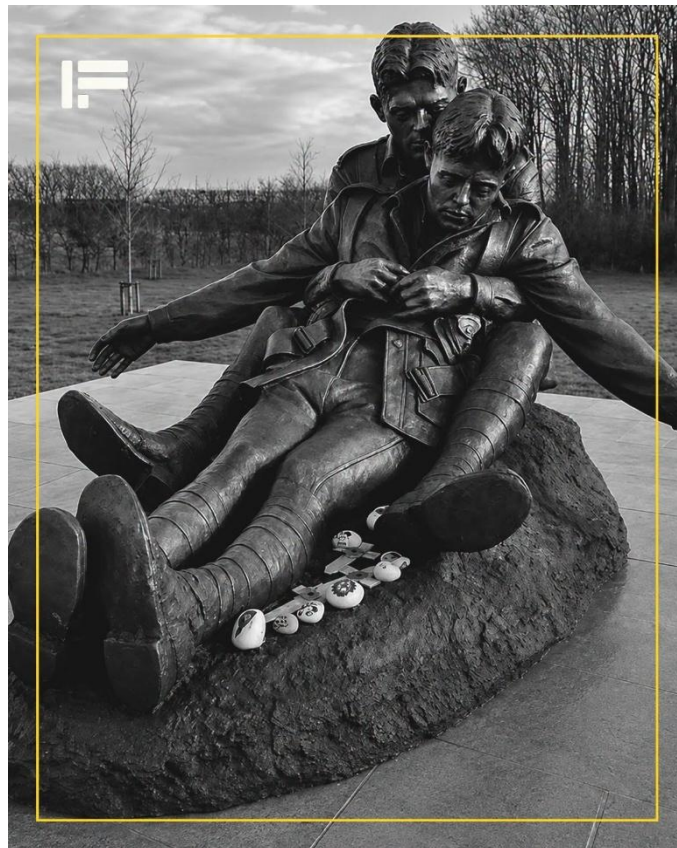
representative had direct lines to the emergency services. According to Brigadier-General Ashmore, the system worked very well. He later commented:

From the time the observer at one of the stations in the country saw an [aeroplane] over him, to the time when the counter representing it appeared on my map, was not, as a rule, more than half a minute.

Born in adversity, it was, in essence, the same system that, with the addition of Radar, provided this country with its defence against the *Luftwaffe* when German aircraft appeared again in the skies over London in the summer of 1940.

XX

Private John Hunter — of the 49th Battalion, Australian Infantry



In 2006, workers digging a road in Belgium unearthed the body of a soldier who had lain hidden for nearly ninety years.

Most of the battlefield dead were buried in haste, tumbled into shell holes with no time for ceremony. But not this one.

This young man had been laid to rest with unmistakable care — and when they learned who had done it, and why, it broke their hearts...

The place was Polygon Wood, near Zonnebeke, in Belgium's Flanders Fields — ground soaked in the blood of the First World War. A construction crew, breaking earth for roadworks, struck something their machines were never meant to find. Not rock. Not clay. Bones.

In this corner of Belgium, that is not as rare as you might think. More than a century after the guns fell silent, the soil around Ypres is still giving up its dead. The workers stopped at once and called the man who is summoned for exactly this: Johan Vandewalle, a Belgian battlefield archaeologist who has spent his life recovering the fallen of the Great War, and who runs a little café and museum nearby.

Over the following days, Vandewalle and his team carefully uncovered not one soldier but five, all young Australians, buried together where they fell. They would come to be known as the "Zonnebeke Five." Four of the bodies had suffered badly in the earth. But the fifth was different.

The fifth soldier had been wrapped, with great care, in a canvas groundsheet — the standard-issue sheet a soldier used for shelter. The wrapping had protected him so well that his remains, even his boots, were remarkably intact after ninety years. And there was one detail that stopped the excavators in their tracks.

His arms had been folded gently across his chest.

No one does that in the frenzy of battle unless they love the man they are burying. This was not a body dumped in a crater. This was someone laid to rest, tenderly, by a hand that grieved. Someone had knelt in that hell and taken the time to do it right.

The question was: who was he, and who had buried him with such love?

In time, several of the Zonnebeke Five were identified through DNA, matched to living relatives back in Australia. The soldier in the groundsheet was Private John Hunter — known to his family as Jack — of the 49th Battalion, Australian Infantry, a young man from the town of Nanango in Queensland. And when his family's story was traced, through the memories passed down by his niece, the truth of that tender grave finally emerged.

Jack Hunter had not gone to war alone. He had a brother.

His name was James Hunter — Jim — and he was Jack's younger brother. The two of them, boys from the same Queensland home, had enlisted and ended up serving side by side in the very same battalion, in one of the most terrible battles of the most terrible war the world had ever known.

To understand what Jim did, you have to understand where he did it.

The fighting around Polygon Wood in September of 1917 was part of the wider campaign history remembers as Passchendaele — a byword for horror even by the standards of the First World War. The land had been shelled into oblivion. Trees were reduced to blackened splinters. The earth itself had been churned into a bottomless soup of mud and water, so deep that wounded men sometimes drowned in it before anyone could reach them.

It was into this that the Hunter brothers advanced, on the 26th of September, 1917. Somewhere in that chaos of shellfire and machine guns, Jack was hit. And his younger brother Jim reached him.

Jack died there, in Jim's arms.

What Jim did next is the reason we tell this story at all. He was in the middle of an active battlefield. Shells were still falling. Another attack could come at any moment. Every instinct of survival screamed at him to move, to take cover, to save himself. Instead, Jim stayed with his brother's body — and he buried him.

He wrapped Jack in his groundsheet. He folded Jack's arms across his chest, the way you would lay out a loved one for a proper funeral. He dug a grave as best he could in that waterlogged ground, and he laid his brother in it, and he did his utmost to mark the spot so that he could one day come back and find him.

But Passchendaele did not let anything stay marked. The next barrage reshaped the ground. The rains filled the craters. The mud closed over everything. And by the time the battle had moved on, the little grave was gone, swallowed by the churned and ruined earth.

Jim Hunter survived the war. He went back, afterward, and searched for the place where he had buried his brother — but it had vanished, erased along with the whole shattered landscape. In time, he returned home to Australia. He carried Jack with him for the rest of his life, always believing, always hoping, that one day the two of them would somehow be reunited.

He died without ever finding his brother's grave. He never knew that anyone ever would.

And then, decades after Jim was gone, a road crew broke ground near Polygon Wood — and Jack came back into the light at last, still wrapped in the groundsheet his brother had folded around him, his arms still crossed where his brother's hands had placed them.

In 2007, Private John "Jack" Hunter was reburied with full military honours at the Buttes New British Cemetery, only a short distance from where he had fallen. He has a proper headstone now, carved with his name. It reads: "Beloved son of Harry and Emily Hunter, Nanango, QLD. At rest after being lost for 90 years." And his name was removed from the great Menin Gate memorial to the missing — because he was no longer missing. He had been found.

Johan Vandewalle could not let the story rest there. So moved was he by what one brother had done for another that he set out to build a permanent memorial to it — and to all the brothers who fought and suffered and died side by side in that war. In the years that followed, an Australian sculptor named Louis Laumen created the centrepiece: a life-size bronze of Jim cradling his dying brother Jack in his arms. That memorial stands in Zonnebeke today, and people travel from Australia and around the world to see it. They stand before the two bronze brothers, and they read the story, and very often they weep — because the loss of seventeen million souls in that war is a number too vast for the human heart to hold, but one brother refusing to leave another is something we understand completely.

Jack and Jim Hunter were not statistics. They were two boys from a Queensland town who grew up together, and went to war together, and in the end lay only a groundsheet apart across ninety years.

One brother would not leave the other behind. And in the end, neither did history.

XX



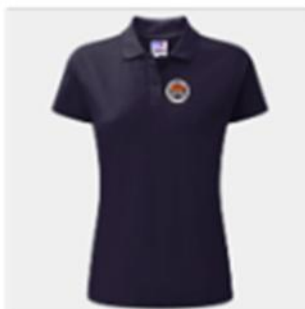
**When was the last time that you
had a look at The WFA shop?
There are some wonderful items
to purchase and the profits help
support the Association.**

**Go to the home page of the website and click on the 'About
the WFA' menu and you will see the 'Branded Goods' option**



UNISEX POLO SHIRT WITH LOGO 569M

PRICE: 40.00/20.00



LADIES POLO SHIRT WITH LOGO 539F

PRICE: 40.00/20.00



UNISEX SHORT SLEEVE OXFORD SHIRT WITH LOGO 8309



LADIES SHORT SLEEVE OXFORD SHIRT 8701

PRICE: 40.00/20.00



UNISEX SWEATSHIRT WITH LOGO 762M



LADIES SWEATSHIRT WITH LOGO 34030F



UNISEX T-SHIRT WITH LOGO 180M



LADIES T-SHIRT WITH LOGO 180F



UNISEX RUGBY SHIRT WITH LOGO FR100



LADIES RUGBY SHIRT WITH LOGO FR101



UNISEX BREATHABLE JACKET WITH LOGO 510M



LADIES WATERPROOF INSULATED JACKET 81043



UNISEX FLEECE WITH LOGO 81022



LADIES FLEECE WITH LOGO 81023



Record Bag



Shoulder Bag



Messenger Bag



Cap



Coffee Mug



Mousemat



Classic Tie



Fridge Tile Magnet



WFA Fridge Magnet



WFA Bookmark



Lapel Badge



Despatch Bag



NOT THE WESTERN FRONT CONFERENCE

Saturday 31st October 2026
Cluntergate Centre, Horbury, WF4 5DA



Peter Hart - "The French at Gallipoli"



Tom Isitt - "The Vertical War"



Alan Wakefield - "Salonika"



Nigel Atter - "Tigers on the Tigris"

£29 including lunch (earlybird until 31st May £25)

<https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FPHV>