



The Spire Sentinel



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



**& Magazine
Chesterfield
Western
Association**

ISSUE 111 - May 2025

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



Western Front Association Chesterfield Branch – Meetings 2025

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

January	7th	. AGM + <i>'Quintinshill 22nd May 1915 - Britain`s Worst Railway Disaster'</i> Grant Cullen. Meeting Cancelled
February	4th	<i>AGM + Villages at War - Clowne and Barlborough in World War 1</i> by Paul Burkitt.
March	4th	Andrea Heatherington - <i>"Scamps in Khaki" - criminal deserters'</i> Deserters sometimes turned to crime to support themselves whilst on the run.
April	1 st	Grant Cullen Britain`s Worst Railway Disaster - Quintinshill - 22 nd May 1915
May	6th	<i>"Combat motivation and morale in British Empire armies in the two world wars' "</i> by Prof. Gary Sheffield
June	3rd	'The Forgotten Blitz and the Defeat of the Zeppelins'. by Ian Castle
July	1st	<i>Jutland - Clash of Titans</i> by Scott Lindgren
August	5th	Roy Larkin - Follow a Supply Column and others through mobilisation and the total chaos of the opening weeks of the Great War
September	2nd	<i>'Motorcycle Despatch Riders In 1914'</i> by Nick Shelley.Nick describes the motorcyclists' contribution to the 1914 campaign, using their own words and their own previously unpublished photographs.
October	7th	<i>After Kut - What ?.</i> Tony Bolton
November	4th	Peter Hart topic to be confirmed
December	2nd	<i>An Historians Wrongful Assumption ?</i> - a short look at Sniping and how it developed in World War One. By Morris Charlton

Issue 111 list of contents

- 2 Branch Meetings Calendar 2025
- 3 Chairman`s Notes
- 4 Chairman`s Notes (continued); May Meeting - Gary Sheffield
- 5 Secretary`s Scribbles
- 6 - 25 Ambulance Trains by Grant Cullen.
- 26 – 29 Mark V* Tank
- 30-32 The Anzac on the Wall
- 33 The story of Myrle, who reburied her missing father 78 years after his death

Chairman`s Notes....



I would like to start with saying `Thank you` to Grant for giving last month`s talk, very interesting and well researched. He has also been out and about doing talks to different groups, so well-done Grant.

There was some sad news about a member of the branch David Mellors who has passed away, our thoughts are with the family at this time.

May`s talk is by WFA President Prof. Gary Sheffield which I think will be a landmark meeting and talk. Unfortunately, I will be out in France visiting the Battlefields of Verdun so will miss the meeting I hope it all goes well. I will post some pictures from my trip on the branch Facebook page and will follow up with a report in a future edition of the newsletter.

I will be attending a Branch Chairs` conference in Leeds in October so if anybody has anything that wants bringing up let me know by email jonpaul.harding@gmail.com it should be an interesting and informative event. Other events happening is the Staveley armed forces days, I will be standing over the two days so if anyone has

anything that they might be interested in displaying have a chat with me at in June's meeting. The armed forces days are the 12th and 13th of July.

Just another reminder if anyone has any ideas for future talks or trips or anything else, please let us know it's your branch so any suggestions would be very welcome.

Jon-Paul Harding

Chesterfield branch Chairman

May Meeting



Guest Speaker - Prof. Gary Sheffield

“Combat motivation and morale in British Empire armies in the two world wars”

Was there such a thing as a universal British Empire soldier in the era of total war, 1914-45? This talk by Professor Sheffield looks at the factors that affected morale and cohesion, examining if there were differences between armies and conflicts. He will use case studies of Gallipoli 1915 and Normandy 1944.

Professor Gary Sheffield is the Honorary President of the WFA. Currently Visiting Professor in the Defence Studies Department of King's College London, he has published widely on the history of British and Dominion armies in the First World War. He is finishing a book entitled 'Civilian Armies: The Experience of British and Dominion Soldiers in the Two World Wars', to be published by Yale University Press.



Secretary`s Scribbles

Dear Members and Friends,

Welcome to the May 2025 issue of our Branch newsletter.

As Branch Chair Jon-Paul Harding has intimated in this notes, we recently received news of the passing of another member, Dave Mellor, the third such loss in a year. Dave hadn't managed to attend meetings recently

- age and infirmity - he was an ex-serviceman - Parachute Regiment - who took part in the airborne landings during the Sue Crisis in 1956. Our numbers have never got back to pre covid levels but it was great to see two members back among us at the April meeting - Stuart Wilson and Alan Atkinson - welcome back! Great to see Peter Harris, accompanied by his wife Caroline, at the meeting. Peter has been battling a serious health issue requiring several operations, but as we saw, he's making great strides in his fight back to full health.

Tuesday`s meeting sees us welcome one of the best known figures in the Western Front Association - Prof. Gary Sheffield - Hon. President of the WFA. Please do come along and hear Gary`s talk....which I am sure will be of great interest...something out of the ordinary..... ***“Combat motivation and morale in British Empire armies in the two world wars”***.

Jon-Paul mentioned that I`ve been out and about giving talks / presentations - indeed this Thursday I`m off to Northampton WFA to deliver that talk on the Quintinshll Disaster, 22nd May 1915, then the next night it`s off to John Beech`s East Midlands ranch at Ruddington - again it`s the Quintinshill talk. I`m always on the lookout for further information to add to these talks, and I`ve managed to find a picture of the survivor of the crash, Rachel Buchannan laying a wreath on the day of the unveiling of the memorial at Gretna, 21st May 1995. She was on one of the trains involved - she was only three. The accident claimed the lives of her mum and baby brother. It`s one part of that talk where I cannot hide my emotions.

Please do come along and give the Branch your support.

Next month we have a first time visitor to the Branch, Ian Castle, with what should prove to be an interesting presentation **'The Forgotten Blitz and the Defeat of the Zeppelins'**.

Best wishes,

Grant.

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April Meeting.

Branch Secretary, Grant Cullen, gave his well-researched presentation on the Quintinshill Railway Disaster of 22nd May 1915, which he should have made at the January meeting which was cancelled due to the prevailing weather at the time.

Grant`s paper on this subject was published in the February issue of this newsletter and rather than repeat it we have another of Grant`s papers - this time on Ambulance trains in WW1

The Caledonian Railway in the Great War 1914-1919 ¹

By Grant Cullen

Part 5

Ambulance Trains

`The main desiderata of an ambulance train are smoothness of running and the possibility of travelling anywhere on any company`s system. The former point is gained by the use of long `bogey` coaches while the latter is obtained by limiting the length of those bogeys. The two points are somewhat antagonistic and must be met by compromise. Needless to add, the train should be on the corridor plan throughout, including the brake vans at each end, so that the guard can be communicated with while the train is in motion. Another important factor is that the train, once equipped, should be made as independent of outside assistance as possible. In other words, it should be self-supporting by means of adequate supplies of all requisites for the journey - foodstuffs, medical supplies, dressings, water gas, linen, bedding etc. Thus cases can be conveyed to their destination comfortably and quickly. On return to base the stocks are renewed while the train is being cleaned in readiness for another run`

Surgeon A Vavasour Elder R.N.V.R.

Journal of Royal Naval Medical Services ²

The origins of the British Ambulance trains go back to the Boer War of 1899-1902. The Birmingham Railway Carriage and Wagon Company sent out to South Africa the first ever ambulance train and seven others were adapted from existing local stock. The London and South Western Railway fitted out the coaches. By 1914 plans were in existence for the construction of ambulance trains in the event of war. Following mobilisation in August 1914, 12 ambulance trains were ordered for use within the UK being two from the Great Central, one from the Great Eastern, two from the Great Western, one from the Lancashire and Yorkshire, three from the London and North Western, one from the London and South Western and one from the Midland. The centre of operations was at Southampton. In January 1915 it was

decided to order four more ambulance trains and these were supplied from the Great Central, Great Western, Lancashire and Yorkshire and, again, the London and North Western. In addition it was decided to form five emergency ambulance trains comprising ordinary stock for the "walking wounded" supplemented in each case by the dining car. Whilst Southampton remained the headquarters for the operation, four ambulance trains and two emergency ambulance trains were allocated to Dover docks. In May 1915, following investigation by the Railway Executive Committee, a specification was drawn up for a standard ambulance train. Four of these were ordered to supplement the existing sixteen and, in addition, four more emergency trains were formed. These first four standard ambulance trains brought the total number of trains to 20 with 9 in the emergency ambulance train class. The standard ambulance train comprised ten 8-wheel coaches being guard / medical officer and nurses / dining and sleeping / 3 ward cars / 1 pharmacy car / 3 ward cars / guard plus orderlies plus stores. Red Crosses were applied to each vehicle and to the roof of each vehicle. The total length of the train was 350 feet coming in at an unladen weight of 250 tons. The London and North Western, Great Western, Great Eastern and London and South Western Different arrangements were put in place overseas, on the continent. In September 1914 the Railway Executive Committee was requested to provide one ambulance train and this was done by adapting stock of the London and North Western Railway. Subsequently in the UK an 'ambulance trains for the continent sub-committee' was formed under REC jurisdiction and this sub-committee included William Pickersgill of the Caledonian. Whilst the sub-committee produced a design of the standard 16 car ambulance train to work on the continent there was also formed an ambulance train committee which governed the operation of these trains in France and Belgium. These sets were supplemented by a further eleven trains improvised from converted French rolling stock, again primarily for the use of "walking wounded". In April 1915 a further eight standard ambulance trains for use on the continent were requested by the War Office and it was one of these which was provided by the Caledonian Railway.

Ambulance trains also featured briefly in the speech by the Rt. Hon. H J Tennant, the Under Secretary for War in introducing the Army Estimates for 1915. *With respect to the following comments the Royal Navy below, Colonel Yorke brought to the House's attention the No. 1 Ambulance Flotilla consisting of four barges (each taking 50 casualties) operated as a hospital.* These barges went between the rear lines and the seaports of Belgium and Northern France.

In addition to all these provisions, entirely separate arrangements were made within the UK by the Royal Navy before looking after their wounded personnel. Due to the nature of war at sea far fewer wounded men survived either on board or on life rafts. Naval Ambulance Train No. 4 ran primarily within Scotland and was again constructed by the London and North Western Railway. The number of ambulance trains run over the Caledonian Railway in the period September 1914 to November 1918 was 962. 763 ambulance trains left from Southampton, together with 199 from Dover bound for Scotland and these trains went to the following destinations:

Aberdeen 184 trains
Dundee 86 trains
Glasgow 522 trains
Edinburgh 97 trains
Perth 73 trains.

The first train was handed over the CR at Carlisle Citadel station on 20th September 1914, its final destination being a newly created general hospital in Aberdeen. By mid-October many more ambulance trains passed through Carlisle, crews and train staff of the LNWR handing over to their Caledonian counterparts, this being coincident with four Scottish military hospitals being declared ready to accept casualties by mid-September.

These hospitals were:

- No. 1 Scottish General Hospital in Aberdeen. This was spread across three sites; Oldmill Poor Law Infirmary, having been released for use by the military authorities; Aberdeen Girls High School and Aberdeen Central School.
- No. 2 General Hospital in Edinburgh. This was spread across two sites; Craigleith Poor House and Flora Stevenson Primary School, Comely Bank, Edinburgh
- Nos 3 and 4 Scottish General Hospitals, Stobhill, Glasgow (Glasgow Parish Poor Law Hospital, was split into two large Territorial hospitals temporary platforms within its grounds off the Hamiltonhill branch.) At this date the Poor Law hospital was not completely cleared as some 120 children and 500 adults remained to be cared for.
- All four hospitals had satellite Auxiliary Hospitals, geographically spread through southern, central and norther Scotland.

On October 30th a hospital train carrying 100 wounded Belgian soldiers was transferred to Caledonian metals bound for Stobhill Hospital.

All ambulance trains were required to complete their round trips to all destinations in Britain in under 48 hours, this including the most remote destination of Strathpeffer at 625 miles from Southampton which was timetabled to take 20 hours 33 minutes in each direction, including breaks for medical care, refreshments and locomotive exchanges but not for unloading at the destination.

Assistance in the transport of wounded from trains to hospital was rendered by squads from the Caledonian Railway ambulance Brigade at a number of stations. At places where this transfer work was undertaken by the Red Cross society, Caledonian men joined that body and assisted as required. Several members of the

Brigade also acted as orderlies in military hospitals in their own time. When the St. Andrew's Ambulance association organised squads for emergency use in the event of enemy air raids, the various ambulance sections on the Caledonian submitted names of members willing to help if called upon. Lists were kept in the various district police offices so that those personnel could be called out at the shortest notice whenever an air raid might occur.

A large number of Caledonian Railway ambulance men served in the Royal Army Medical Corps, both at home and abroad. Some of them joined the first foreign service units organised by the St. Andrew's Ambulance Association in October 1914.

During the early stages of the war when it was then realised that Kitchener was correct in his assumption that it would not be 'all over by Christmas' plans were put in motion for ambulance trains using ordinary French rolling stock to transport British casualties from battle fronts to the Channel ports, but with casualties rising to such unpredictable levels and the high losses of French rolling stock to the advancing Germans, it was decided that the War Office should take control of the building of ambulance trains for the British forces.

Initially freight vans, or even cattle trucks were hastily converted to carry casualties away from front line dressing stations to base hospitals, these often, for stretcher cases consisting of cots suspended from the roof of the vehicle. In collaboration with the Army medical departments extensive plans were drawn up for these trains to be built in the various workshops of British Railway Companies.



Suspended cots in converted freight car (Authors collection)

Ambulance Train No. 23

The following is a description of train No. 23, built by the Caledonian Railway Company at its St. Rollox workshops in 1915. A contemporary report stated....

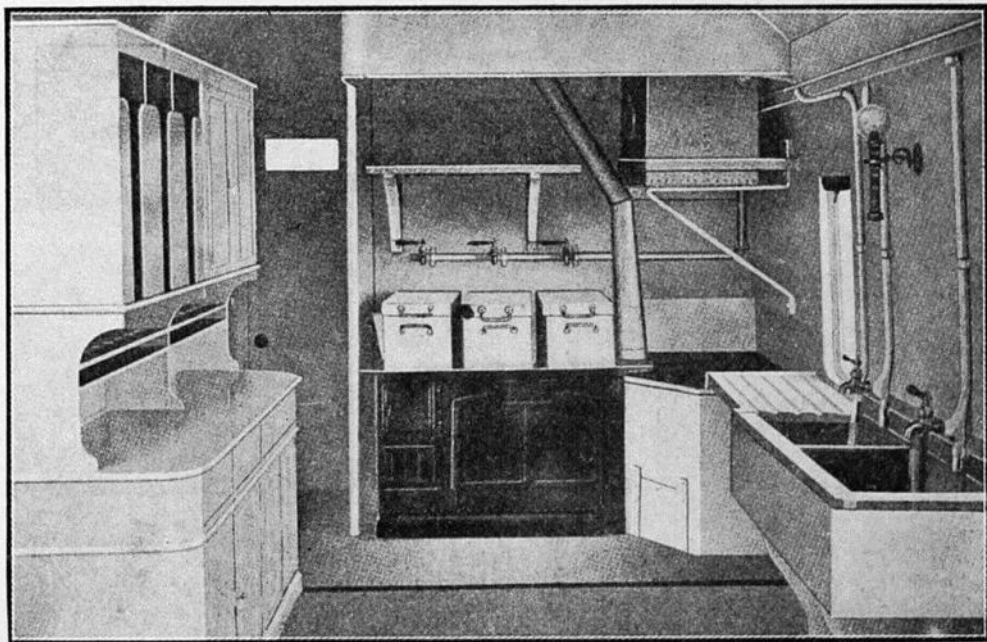
"The Caledonian Railway Company have constructed, at their workshops at St. Rollox, Glasgow, to the order of the War Office, in accordance with arrangements made through the Railway Executive Committee and under the supervision of the Locomotive Superintendent, Mr W. Pickersgill, a complete ambulance train, for the use of the British soldiers on the lines of communication in France."

The ambulance train was made up of 16 centre corridor carriages connected together by flexible gangways and was arranged in the following order:

No. of Cars; letters; and description

- 1 T; Brake and Stores Car (Front)
- 1 A; Kitchen and Stores Car
- 4 B,C,D,E; Wards for Lying-down Patients
- 1 F; Pharmacy Car
- 1 G; Staff Car
- 5 L,M,N,O,P; Wards for Sitting-up Patients
- 1 H; Kitchen and Mess Room
- 1 R; Personnel Car
- 1 S; Infectious Ward and Brake Car (Rear)

The front car (T) contained the guards brake and living compartments, partitioned off, while the remainder of the space was set apart for food and other stores. The two Kitchen Cars each had the usual culinary equipment, including an Army service coke cooking and heating range, sinks, dressers, cupboards, tables, hot and cold water tanks, etc. and a cook's living room with three folding cots. In the front Kitchen Car (A) there was a Steward's store, and a soldier's pack apartment, and the corresponding space in the other car (H) was used as a mess room with folding tables and a store for Officer's kits. Each car had two 150 gallon water tanks and 1 50 gallon hot water tank. The walls of the kitchen section were partially zinc lined, and the floor was lead covered. An electrical fan was used to help keep the cooking apartment cool.

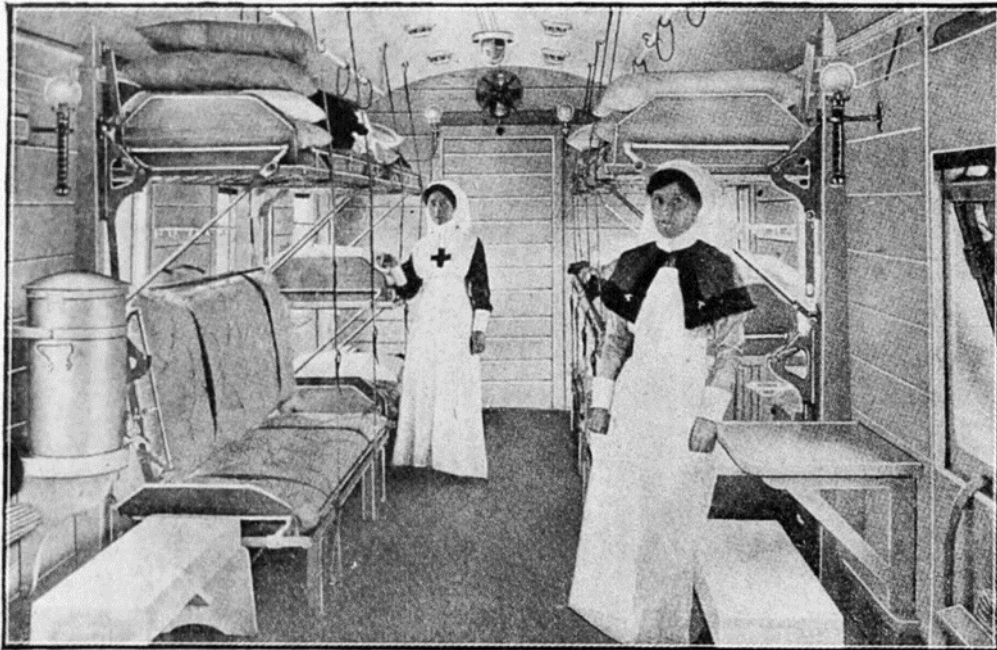


INTERIOR OF KITCHEN.

Railway Gazette September 1915

The four ward cars (B,C,D,E) for lying down patients each accommodated thirty six men in the cots, which were fixed lengthwise in three tiers at either side, and could be folded against the sides of the cars to facilitate cleaning or to permit the lowest berths being used as seats, stools were provided for reaching the higher cots. To facilitate loading, these cars were provided on both sides with double width doors for the easy admission of stretchers, and when considered desirable a patient could be deposited in a cot withdrawing the stretcher.

A constant current of fresh air was ensured by means of both fixed and portable electrical fans, the latter being available when required for playing on the faces of fevered or 'gassed' patients. Each car had a latrine and a 150 gallon water tank.

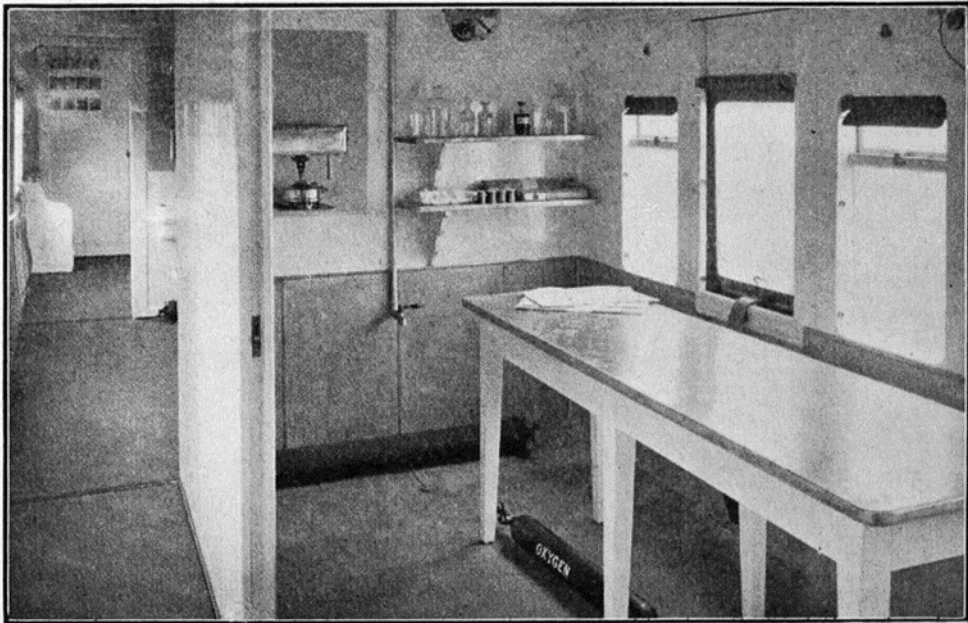


WARD CAR, SHOWING TWO BEDS CONVERTED INTO COUCH.

Railway Gazette September 1915

Three (L,M,N) of the five ward cars for sitting up patients were constructed with saloon compartments while two (O,P) had side corridors and ordinary compartments, and afforded seating accommodation for 292 patients. Four of the cars were upholstered in hygienic blue leather cloth, the remaining one having three-ply sycamore seats and backs, with the view of minimising the risk of infection in the case of doubtful cases.

Fixed and portable electrical fans are also part of the equipment of these cars, each of which had a small pantry and a 150 gallon water tank, a latrine, and heaters in each compartment.

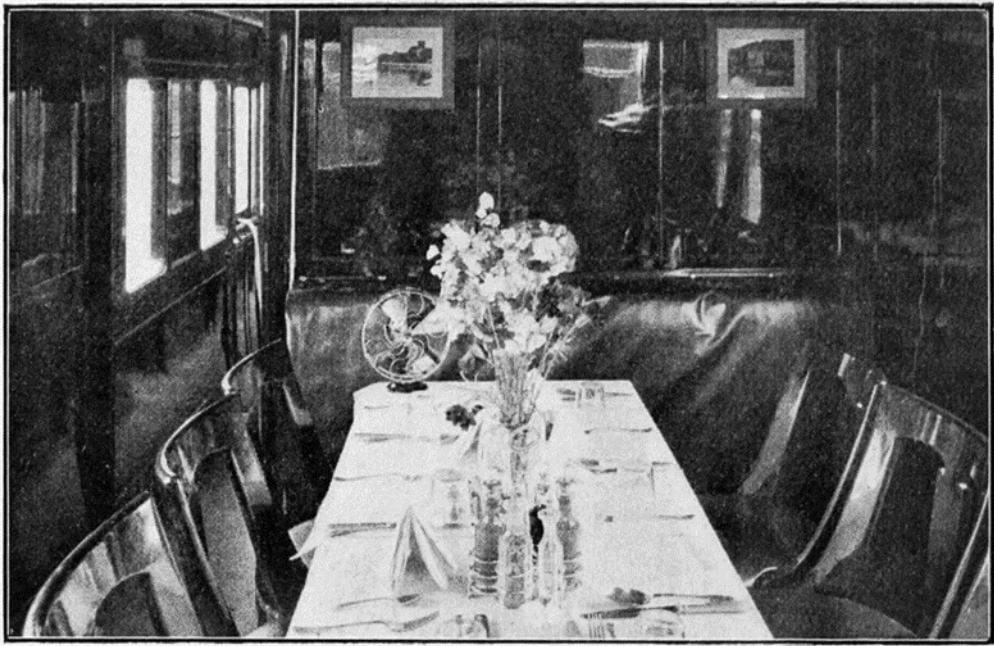


TREATMENT ROOM, PHARMACY CAR.

Railway Gazette September 1915

The Pharmacy car (F) had ample accommodation for dispensary commodities, and all necessary medicinal, surgical and nursing appliances, including a water heater and a steriliser, as well as a treatment compartment with operating table. There was also an office for the doctors, containing a table, chair and a safe, and several storage compartments for bandages, linen, splints, etc. The walls of the treatment compartment (as in the case of the kitchens) were partially zinc-lined, and the floor is lead covered. For the convenient handling of patients requiring special attention on the journey, the corridor of this car was made of sufficient width (2ft. 6in.) to readily admit a stretcher without discomfort to the patients. The treatment room was provided with a large sliding door with a clear opening of 8ft. A 75 gallon water tank was located in the dispensary section which also had two sliding doors across the corridor.

The Staff car (G) with side corridor compartments gave accommodation for the medical officers and nurses. It had three state rooms for the officers, each containing a bed, a seat, a folding table, and two state rooms for the nurses, in each of which there was two folding beds, a seat, and a folding table. Each compartment was provided with a heater. At either end of the car was the mess rooms for the doctors and nurses, and in the doctor's mess room there was an emergency folding bed.



Doctors Dining Saloon Railway Gazette September 1915

The Personnel Car (R) consisted of seven compartments with side corridor from end to end, and was for the use of twenty eight orderlies. Each compartment had two beds, one placed directly above the other on either side - the top berth, when folded down during the day was used as a seat.

There were two shelves in each compartment for the use of the patients. A heater in each compartment was also provided.

The rear car (S) was the infectious ward, having two separate compartments, one with twelve and the other with six folding cots, and adjoining but completely isolated by a partition from the infectious ward, was the guard's brake and living compartments.

The train throughout was provided with abundant sanitary and lavatory conveniences, including drinking water, which, in the case of the ward cars, was contained in padlocked tanks, so that its use may be controlled. The total water tank capacity available for all purposes on the train amounted to 1,600 gallons. The ventilation of the cars was effected by the usual roof air extractors, in addition to the electrical fans already referred to. They were also steam heated, and in addition, there was a self-contained coke furnace installation in the staff and personnel cars. The lighting was by electricity generated by a dynamo driven off one of the axles of each car, and in addition to this there was special candle brackets fitted throughout the train for use in cases of emergency.

Floors were covered in thick inlaid linoleum. The interiors of the vehicles generally were done up in white enamel and the exteriors were painted khaki colour with a prominent red cross on each side, in the centre of each coach. Each car bore the train number (*in this case No. 23*) on its sides (*located in each end waist panel*)

and ends (top right hand corner near the roof gutter), together with a distinctive letter for identification (the train was kept in the same lettered formation; with the two brake compartments there was no need for the remarshalling of stock). A number of the cars were provided with two small windows (above waist panel level) at either end of the carriage, one on each side of the corridor connection.

To ensure smooth and comfortable running, the springs were of the most approved description and all the cars were carried on four-wheeled bogies. The brake installation was Westinghouse automatic air type, and all couplings were suitable for attachment to French locomotives. The train was 300 yards in length, 442 tons in weight and provided accommodation for 454 patients (162 lying down, 292 sitting up) and forty four officials, i.e. two guards, 6 cooks, 4 medical officers, 4 nurses and 28 orderlies, a total of 498 persons.

Cars T, A, F and H

These were converted from four of the 50'0" x 9'0" Bogie Brake Vans, with Gangways, Electric Light and Steam Heat, built in 1915. These vehicles certainly did not return to the CR after the war, and were probably officially replaced by some of the 8 Corridor Vans built in 1917 and 1919 to Orders H.335(6) and H.341(2).

Cars L, M, N, O, P and R

These were converted from 6 of the corridor thirds built in 1911-2 to Order H.202. The H order list shows 6 built in all, three centre-corridor open-type (D.54) and three side corridor (D.55). Evidently L, M and N were the opens and O, P and R the side-corridors. The numbers of the D.54 opens (97617/8) were taken up by a 57'0" coach built in 1916 and two down-graded 31'0" composites dating from the 1870s. However, three side-corridor D.55 vehicles (979/80/2) passed into LMS ownership. Either these three carriages were repatriated, or H.202 should have indicated 6 side-corridors and not 3. It may be significant that 983/4/5 at the time of grouping were a down-graded composite and two down-graded firsts.

Cars B, C, D, E, G and S

These were converted from the batch of 57'0" x 8'8" bogie stock built in 1911/12/13. It is known that the four Brake Thirds of H.303 (D.85), numbered 656, 663, 958 and 964 were converted and were replaced by four 57'0" noncorridor thirds in 1916 (D.93). Of the 4 Brake-Thirds of D.81 built to H29517, only three got LMS numbers, so the fourth is another probable conversion. The other probability is that one of the D.82 composite brakes built to H296/9 and H304/6, totalling 10 vehicles, of which only 9 got LMS numbers. This would make up the 6 cars. As a guess, the four Brakes of D.85 made cars B, C, D and E, the Composite to D.82 made car G and the Brake of D.81 made car S.

A preliminary inspection was arranged on 26th August 1915 at St. Rollox Works and the public exhibition at various centres at various centres commenced on Thursday 2nd September and were very well patronised.

The Caledonian train was exhibited during September 1915 with the following programme:

GLASGOW (CENTRAL) (Platform No. 1). - Thursday, September 2nd, 3 p.m. till 10 p.m.; Friday, September 3rd, 8 a.m. till 10 p.m.; Saturday, September 4th, 8 a.m. till 10 p.m.

EDINBURGH (PRINCES STREET) (Platform No. 1). Monday, September 6th, 3 p.m. till 10 p.m.; Tuesday, September 7th, 8 a.m. till 10 p.m.; Wednesday, September 8th, 8 a.m. till 10 p.m.

DUNDEE (WEST) (Platform No. 4). Friday, September 10th, 3 p.m. till 10 p.m.; Saturday, September 11th, 8 a.m. till 10 p.m.

ABERDEEN. - Monday, September 13th, 3 p.m. till 10 p.m.; Tuesday, September 14th, 8 a.m. till 10 p.m.

STIRLING (East Platform). - Wednesday, September 15th, 3 p.m. till 10 p.m.; Thursday, September 16th, 8 a.m. till 10 p.m.

PERTH (GENERAL) (Crieff Branch Dock). Friday, September 17th, 3 p.m. till 10 p.m.; Saturday, September 18th, 8 a.m. till 10 p.m.

GREENOCK (CENTRAL) (Up Dock). Monday, September 20th, 3 p.m. till 10 p.m.; Tuesday, September 21st, 8 a.m. till 9 p.m.

Carlisle (Citadel) (Silloth Dock Platform) 22-23 Sept 3pm til 10pm

Glasgow (Central) Platform 1 27-28 Sept 3pm til 10pm

Paisley (Gilmour Street) 1-2 Oct 8 am til 10pm

A charge of one shilling (5p) was made for each person inspecting the vehicles, the money collected going to the funds of the Scottish Branch of the Red Cross Society.

The Duchess of Montrose formally opened the Exhibition at Glasgow Central station on Thursday, September 2nd. Her Grace was introduced by Sir Charles Bine Renshaw, Chairman of the Company. Among those present were the Marchioness of Bute, Lord and Lady Newlands, Lady Stirling Maxwell, Sir Charles and Lady Bine Renshaw, Lady Patten MacDougall, the Lord Provost and Mrs. Dunlop, Sir George T. Beatson, Lieut. Col. R. D. M'Ewan.

The station was gaily decked with bunting, and it was early evident that Glasgow citizens were deeply interested in the train, and long before 3 p.m. hundreds of people had collected in the station. By the opening hour there must have been fully 2,000 who had provided themselves with tickets of admission, and this number was augmented continuously during the remainder of the afternoon. Just before the formal opening ceremony a draft of the 3/2nd Lowland Field Ambulance was inspected by the Duchess of Montrose.

The whole expense of exhibiting the ambulance train was borne by the Caledonian Railway Company who also provided a large staff of officials to travel with the train.

Only a selection of the coaching stock was exhibited at Carlisle as the Silloth dock platform was too short to hold the complete train. From Carlisle Citadel station the train was taken to Motherwell during the night of the 24th September, stored there over to Sunday 26th September and exhibited as a complete train at Glasgow Central on the 27th - 28th September and finally at Paisley on 1st- 2nd October.

Wherever the train was exhibited it was drawn up in areas where it could be inspected without the ordinary business of the station being interfered with. Station buildings inside as well as outside being gaily decorated with flags, streamers and bunting. Fresh flowers were provided for the interior of the train by a local florist, who also provided palms and foliage plants for the station platforms. Bedding for the train was usually provided by one of the leading hotels in the area. Official opening ceremonies were performed at all the stations visited, by the local gentry, with especially invited guests, professional persons, and senior officers of the Caledonian Railway and the other Scottish Companies.

Music for the occasion was provided by local and regimental bands. An added interest at Aberdeen and Dundee, was the appearance of Sgt. John Ripley VC, 1st Black Watch, a recent winner of the coveted honour, who travelled with the train from Edinburgh and supplied his autograph to scores of persons in exchange for contributions to Red Cross funds.



Ripley was 47 years old, then a corporal in the 1st Battalion, The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) with the British Army at the battle of Aubers Ridge when the following deed took place for which he was awarded the VC: The citation read,

“On 9 May 1915 at Rue du Bois, France, Corporal Ripley led his section on the right of the platoon in the assault and was the first man of the battalion to climb the enemy's parapet. From there he directed those following him to the gaps in the German wire entanglements. He then led his section through a breach in the parapet to a second line of trench. With seven or eight men he established himself, blocking other flanks, and continued to hold the position until all his men had fallen and he himself was badly wounded in the head.

Picture Courtesy of British Newspaper Archive

The VC was presented to him by King George V at Buckingham Palace on 12 July 1915. At 47, Ripley was the oldest recipient to win the VC during the First World War. He died in 1933 aged 65 in a work accident.

Altogether no fewer than 260,000 persons inspected this train during the month on tour, a record upon which the Caledonian Railway Company had reason to congratulate itself.



Interior of No. 23 British Ambulance Train which entered service in France on 3rd March, 1916 showing one of the Ward Cars of the Ambulance Train, constructed by The Caledonian Railway Company, on the order of the War Office, for conveyance of Wounded British Soldiers in France from the Front to the Sea-board. The wounded were transported to Calais for transfer to a Hospital Ship bound for England.

Converted from 8 wheel 57 ft Corridor Brake Third Diagram 110A
CRA7/1/1/1 Collection Ref C453 Index No. 142

Casualty Evacuation - The Chain

Casualty evacuation in an organised manner really began in earnest in 1915 with solidification of the lines as the Western Front settled into trench warfare. The First World War created many problems for the Army's medical services. A man's chances of survival depended on how quickly his wound was treated. In a conflict involving mass casualties, rapid evacuation of the wounded and early surgery was vital. The stages in the evacuation of wounded men from the front line are outlined.

Regimental Aid Post

The Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) chain of evacuation began at a rudimentary care point within 200-300 yards of the front line. Regimental Aid Posts were set up in small spaces such as communications trenches, ruined buildings, dug outs or even a deep shell hole. The walking wounded struggled to make their way to these whilst more serious cases were carried by comrades or if available stretcher bearers. A Regimental Aid Post had no holding capacity and here, often in appalling conditions,

wounds could be cleaned and dressed, pain relief administered and basic first aid given.

A Canadian medic wrote after the war....

"...then the wounded began to pour in...a never ending stream that lasted seven days and seven nights without cessation...in all over 5200 cases passed through our hands ..wounds here..wounds there ...legs, feet, hands...missing limbs ..bleeding stumps controlled by rough field tourniquets.... abdominal walls shot way... faces horribly mutilated...bones shattered... holes you could put your fist into...filled with mud...bits of clothing and equipment...until it became a hideous nightmare...." ³

Advanced Dressing Station

These were set up and run as part of the Field Ambulances and would be sited about quarter of a mile behind the Regimental aid Posts in ruined buildings, indeed anywhere that offered some protection from shellfire and air attack. The Advanced Dressing stations did not have holding capacity but were better equipped than Regimental Aid Posts and could still only provide limited medical care. Here the wounded and the sick were further treated so that they could be returned to their units in the line or removed by horse drawn or motor transport to a Field Ambulance Unit.

Field Ambulance

These were mobile front line medical units for treating the wounded before they were transferred to a Casualty Clearing Station. Each Army Division would have three Field ambulances comprising up to 10 officers and 224 men and were divided into three sections each of which comprised stretcher bearers, an operating tent, tented wards, cookhouse, washrooms, nursing orderlies and access to horse drawn or motor ambulances. Later in the war fully trained surgical teams were attached to Field ambulance Units and by the autumn of 1915 some Field Ambulance units had trained nurses posted to them. Many of the wounded were beyond help and morphia and other forms of pain relief was the only treatment.

The author of these series of articles had a Great Aunt , Mary Etchells (nee Dallow), who had nursed at Guy`s Hospital , London, pre-war, She served for a time at a Casualty Clearing Station and on Ambulance Trains until she had to be evacuated herself having contracted rheumatic fever. When recovered she worked at the Hill-Walker Hospital for Officers in London. The undernoted is an extract from an album she kept with a cartoon drawn by one of her patients. She lived out her final years in Girvan, passing away in 1972. She is buried in Old Monkland Cemetery in Coatbridge.

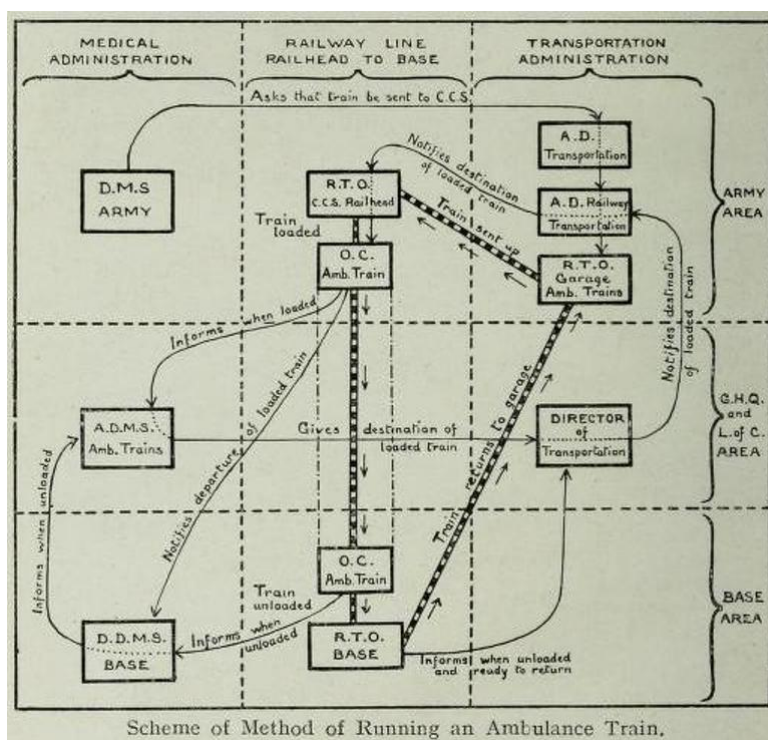


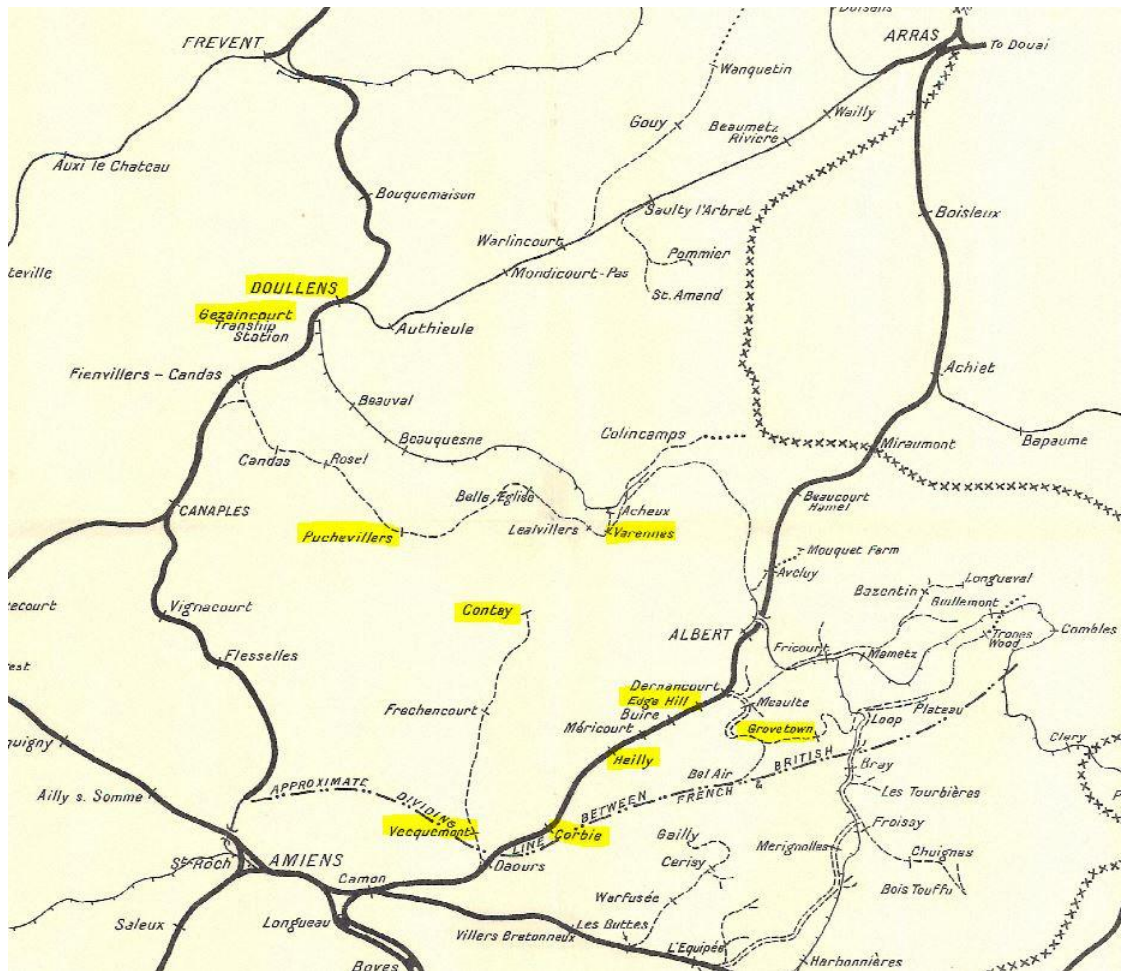
Casualty Clearing Stations

These were the next step in the evacuation chain situated several miles behind the front line near railway lines or navigable waterways so that the wounded could be removed to base hospitals. Facilities included medical and surgical wards, operating theatres, dispensary, stores, kitchens, accommodation for nurses, officers and soldiers of the unit. They could cater for around 200 cases at any one time but that could be ramped up to 1000 cases if there was a major offensive - for example Battle of the Somme, July to November 1916.

It was from these Casualty Clearing Stations that the Caledonian Railway's Ambulance Train was employed, as the following describes.

Continental Ambulance Train (A.T.) No.23 was commissioned at Etaples, the main Base Medical Centre for the British Forces in France. Ambulance Train No.23's first commanding officer was Capt. S. D. Large R.A.M.C. who had been transferred to Scottish Command from Aldershot in June 1914. Large, having taken on his staff and stores, telegraphed the Department of the Assistant Director of Medical Services on 2nd March that his ambulance train was ready to carry patients. The next day, Friday 3rd March 1916, A.T. No. 23 loaded its first patients (7 Officers. Lying; 7 Officers, Sitting; 15 Other Ranks, Lying, 1 Other Ranks, Sitting) and set off for Calais, where it off-loaded them onto the Hospital Ship Dieppe, which transported them to England. That set the pattern for duties for the next couple of months during which, based at the Field Ambulance Garage at Blendecques, the train ran a shuttle service between the ports of Boulogne and Calais. and the forward hospitals and Casualty Clearing Stations at Ballieul, Hazebrouk, Remy, St Orner, and Arques. It seems that this "shake-down.. period revealed some inadequacies in the nursing staff, some of whom possibly thought they had a "cushy number". As a result, in early May, Capt. Large arranged for a number of his staff to be transferred to units at the front. Their replacements coming from base hospitals. It was used extensively throughout the remainder of WWI until the end of hostilities. An ambulance train depot and supply store was established at Abbeville on 1 April 1917. It was responsible for all British ambulance trains in France and provided them with medical stores, general stores and other equipment. It also dealt with train personnel questions and liaised with the French railway authorities for repairs to the rolling stock. Prior to this a luggage van, which contained a reserve of medical and surgical supplies, stretchers and blankets, had been attached to each train.





Ambulance trains collection points from Somme battlefields. Map courtesy of The Long Long Trail

Ambulance train no.23 was heavily involved in evacuating casualties from the Somme battlefields after the attack on the German lines on 1st July 1916, it being recorded as picking up wounded troops at Doullens (8th July, 16th July and 29th October) Gouzinecourt (7th August); Heilly (16th July & 29th July); Puchevillers (4th August & 12th August) and Varennes on 28th October.

Only one death was reported on board no.23 during the evacuation of the wounded from the Somme battlefields. 4 July, 23 Ambulance Train: L/Cpl 2544 W. Moore, B Company 7th Middlesex Regiment .

Captain Large was subsequently awarded the Military Cross for his service.



From the Somme to Base Hospitals to ports. Map courtesy of The Long Long Trail

There were approximately forty military ambulance trains operating in France by 1918, under the control of Army medical units. Very few ever returned to the UK at the end of the war, indeed there is no record of No. 23 or indeed any of the coaching stock ever returning. Some of the Ambulance train rolling stock continued to be of service to the troops in France after the war. During the post armistice period an improvised 'Cologne Express' was put into service to carry troops from Boulogne to Cologne for the Rhine Occupation Force. All such trains received girl's names and no.23 received the name 'Gertrude'. Being made up of ex-ambulance train carriages which provided ready-made sleeping accommodation on a journey of nearly 320 miles which in those days took about 19 hours. Later a number of similar trains were used as leave trains for the troops. This possibly happened to No. 23. This then was the first ambulance train to be built by a Scottish Railway Company for overseas use.

Towards the end of the war, in 1918, the CR had under construction at St. Rollox an Ambulance Train for the American forces in France. Construction was overtaken by the Armistice, after which the vehicles were converted into 57ft. Brake Vans and 50'0" x 9'0" semi corridor. The CR was not involved in construction for UK operation and the bulk of those run on CR metals had been provided by the LNWR from their Wolverton Works.

Notes and Sources.

Note ¹ The armistice on November 11th 1918 brought an end to hostilities but the war did not officially end until the Signing of the Treaty of Versailles on 28th June 1919. The Caledonian, in common with the rest of Britain`s railways was still on `active service` well into 1919.

Note ² *Journal of Royal Naval Medical Services*. Clinical and Practical Notes p68

Note ³ *A Time to Die and a Time to Live*. Tom Scotland. Helion & Company 2019 ISBN976-1-911628-74-3

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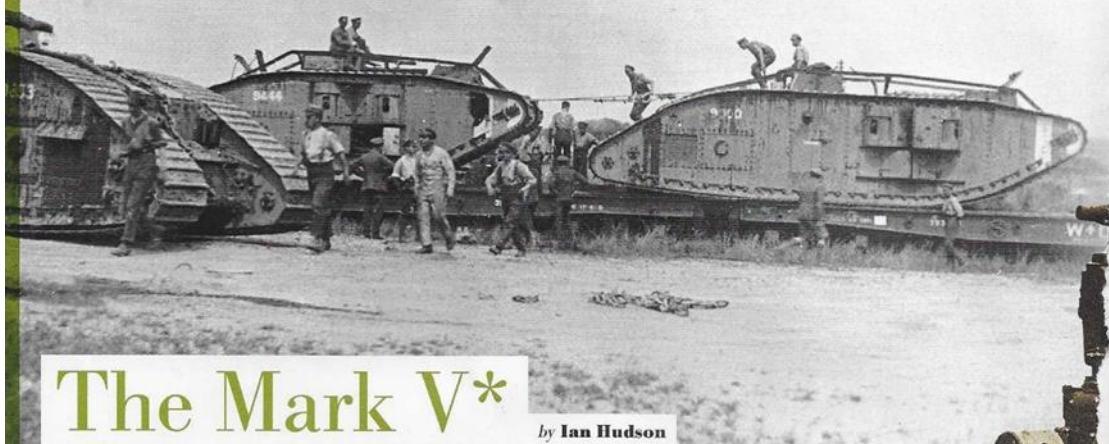
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Journal of The Royal Army Medical Corps 1914 vol. 22

The extra length of the Mark V* over the Mark V can be seen here. These are both Female tanks.



The Mark V*

by Ian Hudson

The 'star' illuminated by this month's Tank Spotlight is an important but underappreciated part of the story of the tank in the First World War. The Mark V* built on the significant mechanical advances introduced on the Mark V and incorporated developments based on combat experience. Ultimately it was produced in greater numbers than the original version. Together they were the backbone of the Tank Corps during the 'Hundred Days' of the advance to victory in 1918.

Crossing Trenches

The Mark V was designed in late 1917 to replace the Mark IV, which had been the mainstay of the Tank Corps through the battles of that year and was mechanically only a minor development of the original Mark I of 1916.

From the outside there was little to distinguish a Mark V from its predecessors, although it was 1mph faster at 4.6mph and had a range of 45 miles rather than 35 miles, it still weighed around 29 tons, had a crew of eight and the same armour and armament. Also unchanged was the tank's length, 26 feet 5 inches or 8.06m, allowing it to cross a

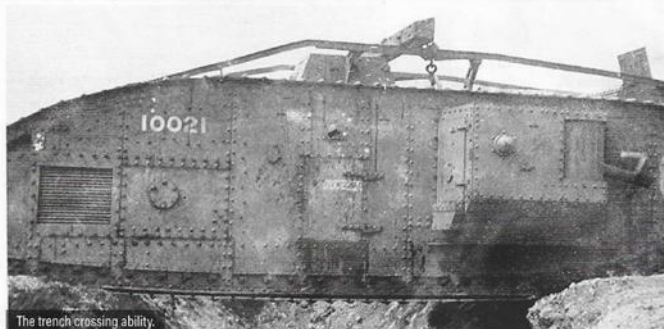
10ft (3m) trench. The Germans had soon worked this out and began building wider trenches to restrict the tank's movements or trap any that tried to cross.

This was clearly a problem the Tank Corps needed to solve. An early solution was the fascine, a large bundle of wood that crews could drop into a trench and use as a bridge. Downsides were that they required a huge amount of work to prepare and fit to the tank, each vehicle could only carry one, they weren't reusable and they weighed 1 ½ tons, which strained the tank's drivetrain and further reduced reliability. They were used at Cambrai in November 1917, but not again. The crib, a similar but lighter timber and steel frame

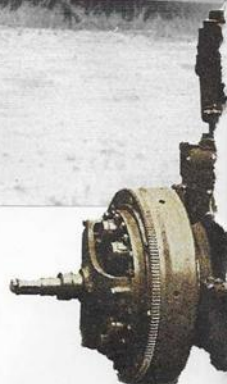
was used during 1918, but something else was needed, ideally something integral to the tank.

In mid-1917 the Tank Corps began looking into the possibility of building a longer tank. The first solution was the Tadpole Tail, an add-on extension to the tracks of the standard Mark IV. This made the tank 9ft (2.74m) longer, but it turned out to be unsuitable as the tail wasn't rigid enough for hard use. A better if more complicated solution was to extend the tank from the middle. As an experiment a Mark IV was cut in half and fitted with a 6ft (1.82m) extension. This proved successful, so the design of the Mark V was modified in a similar way.

The result was the Mark V* (Pronounced 'star,' the asterisk denotes a modification to an existing design). It was now 32 feet 5 inches (9.89m) long, allowing it to cross a 13ft (4m) trench. Crew, armour and armament remained the same. However as it still had the same engine as the Mark V but was 4 tons heavier (at 33) its power to weight ratio was reduced, affecting its mobility. In addition the extra length made it harder to steer. Wider 26 ½ inch (673mm) track plates were fitted in order to reduce ground pressure over the previous 20 ½ inch (520mm) plates, which seems to have helped a little.

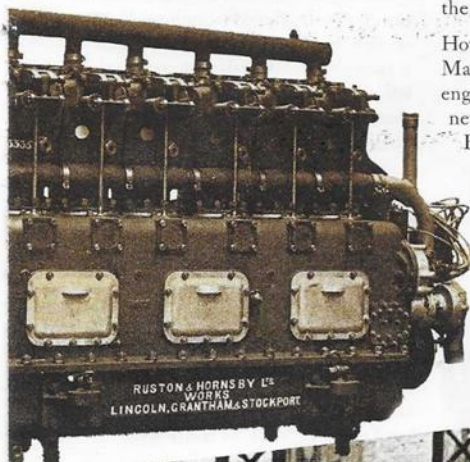


The trench crossing ability.



A Steering Revolution

The most significant changes between the Mark V and V* and earlier tanks concerned the engine and transmission. The Marks I-IV were powered by a 105hp engine manufactured by Daimler. It had always been acknowledged as underpowered, but the firm weren't able to spare any resources to upgrade it as they were committed to building aircraft engines.



For the Mark V the decision was made to incorporate a more powerful replacement. In October 1916 engineer Harry Ricardo was contracted to design one. It had to be more powerful, but still fit the same footprint inside the tank. It could not use scarce materials such as aluminium or create large, visible clouds of smoke. It also had to be capable of rapid, large scale production. Ricardo succeeded. His engine produced 150hp. He got around the size constraints by making it taller.

However, the real step forward on the Mark V and Mark V* was what this engine was connected to – an entirely new transmission and steering system.

Earlier tanks had used a system which needed four men to operate and generally required one of the tracks to be entirely stopped, meaning the tank could not be steered on the move.

The Mark V and V* instead used epicyclic gears to accelerate and brake the tracks. On a human level, all that was necessary to steer it was for the single driver to pull back on one or other steering lever. Doing this operated reaction brakes on the gears connected to that track. This disconnected the drive on that side and slowed, rather than stopped, the track. The practical effect of this was that the Mark V and V* could be steered whilst moving. This made the new tanks far more manoeuvrable, and therefore useful, on the battlefield.

On 18th January 1918 the first Mark V was driven out of the Metropolitan Carriage, Wagon and Finance Company factory in Birmingham. After 400 (200 Male, 200 Female) had been built production switched to the Mark V*. 700 of these were ordered (500 Male, 200 Female), with 645 completed by the Armistice.

Harry Ricardo's new 150hp engine.



Mark V's under construction at Metropolitan Carriage, Wagon and Finance Company in Birmingham.

Internal Changes

Inside the tank the new steering system removed the need for a massive differential housing at the back of the fighting compartment. This made the rear bulkhead of the tank accessible, so it was fitted with large hatches, a door and a Hotchkiss machine gun mounting. The crew could now fire in all directions, although blind spots still existed.

Mark V and V* tanks still had the eight man crew, but as only one was needed to drive they could be much more versatile, acting as signallers, gunners or mechanics as needed. In particular, the commander (previously also one of the four drivers) was freed up to focus on observing the battlefield, leadership and at least attempting to communicate, which he could now do from the large, raised cab in the middle of the tank's roof.

The extra length of the Mark V* allowed for more enhancements. A door was added on each side just behind the sponsons, with a Hotchkiss mounting above it. These were in addition to the existing doors either below or on the rear of the sponson, depending on gender. The front and rear plates in the roof cab were now sloped instead of vertical and each had a Hotchkiss mounting fitted.

The new doors and the internal space created by the extra length allowed for the possibility of using the Mark V* to carry Vickers Machine Gun crews forward. Riding in the tanks meant they could keep up with the first wave of the attack despite the weight of their guns and ammunition, and they would be in position to help resist any German counter attack. Experiments suggested that up to fifteen men and four machine

guns could be carried. The reality was that whilst they would physically fit, conditions inside the tank meant they were near enough incapacitated when they got out.

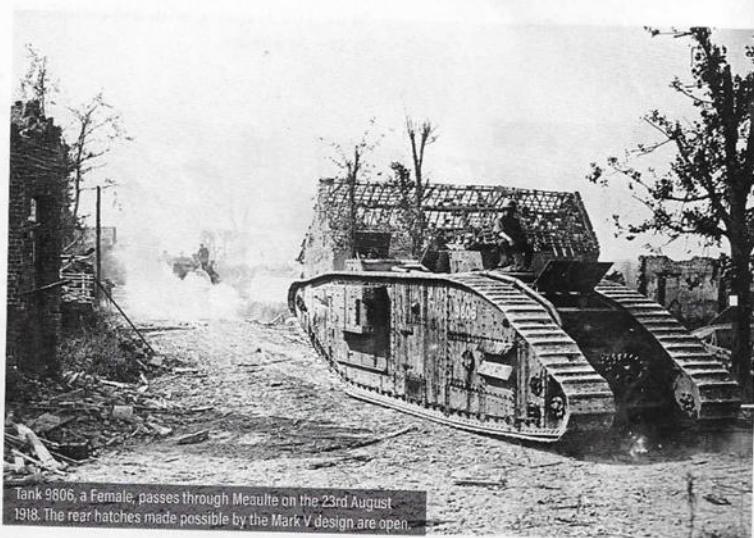
Unfortunately conditions for the crew was an area where the Mark V and V* took a step backwards. Previously cooling air for the radiator had been drawn in through the fighting compartment, helping somewhat to clear the exhaust fumes and carbon monoxide the crew were forced to endure. Now though, it was drawn in from outside through the rectangular louvres on the left of the tank, fed through ducting to the engine, then expelled to the right, giving the crew little relief.

In Combat

The Mark V was first used in combat at Hamel on the 4th July 1918, and the Mark V* at Amiens on the 8th August. Most Tank Corps War Diaries suggest that from then on Battalions used a mix of Mark Vs and V*s (as far as administration and logistics were concerned they were effectively identical). Tactically the improved mobility of the new tanks was welcomed and valuable. There were accounts of crews zig-zagging to avoid German fire as they advanced and of them spotting German positions at close range and driving over them, manoeuvres undreamt of in the Mark IV.

However, the relentless advance of the Hundred Days limited the role the Tank Corps was able to play in it. The sheer pace meant that although tanks were welcome where they were used, they often couldn't keep up. Crews needed time to recover and to repair their tanks, then move them up to a front line that was constantly moving further away. It was generally only large scale attacks taking place after a period of preparation (for example the attack on the Hindenburg Line on 29th September) that saw the use of large numbers.

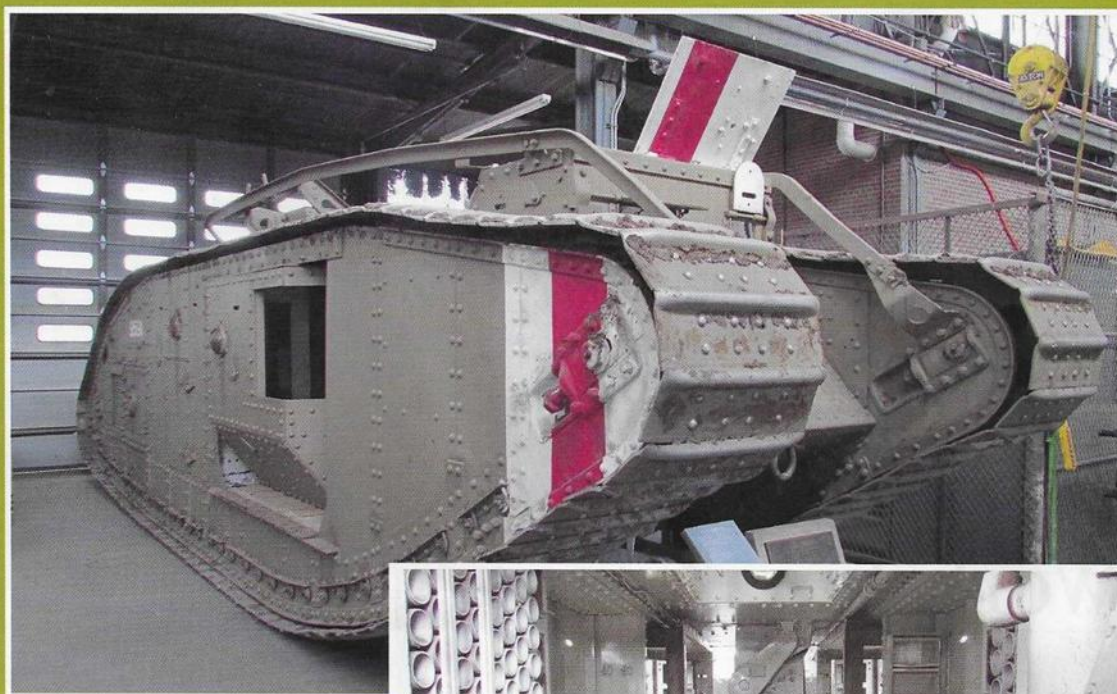
Amongst First World War tanks the Mark V* is perhaps unfairly overlooked, overshadowed by the more common Mark IV and dismissed as a derivative of the mechanically innovative Mark V. One reason could be that only one has survived, as opposed to seven Mark Vs. However, it was designed for a specific battlefield need and it met that need well.



Tank 9806, a Female, passes through Meaulte on the 23rd August 1918. The rear hatches made possible by the Mark V design are open.



Soldiers of 20th Battalion The Manchester Regiment shelter under tank 9891, of the American 301st Tank Battalion, near Premont on the 8th October.



Tank 9591

As well as the British Tank Corps the American 301st Tank Battalion used the Mark V* during the Hundred Days. They trained alongside the British at Bovington between April and August 1918, then moved to France. They first saw combat on the 29th September, as part of the Allied attempt to break through the Hindenburg Line at the St Quentin Canal.

The sole surviving Mark V* is tank number 9591. It is currently preserved in the US Army Armor and Cavalry Collection at Fort Benning, Georgia. However on the 29th September it belonged to A Company of the 301st and took part in the attack under the command of Lieutenant Hobbs.

After destroying seventeen German machine gun positions, 9591 was struck by anti-tank fire. Of the eleven-man crew, two (Sergeant Martin Doyle and Private Walter Wiegand) were killed. Seven others were wounded. The two non-injured members, Corporal Albert Neil and Private Robert Wisher, immediately evacuated the wounded from the knocked out tank while under heavy fire.



Looking forwards inside 9591. Each of the 72 cylinders held a round for the two six pounder guns.

Neil and Wisher then returned to the tank and removed machine guns and ammunition. With the machine guns, the two tankers established a firing position while the wounded withdrew to safety. Though they could have fallen back with their crew, Corporal Neil and Private Wisher were determined to continue their mission. First linking up with U.S. and then Australian troops, Neil and Wisher continued into the German lines on foot with whatever weapons they could find on the way and fought for several hours. For their actions that day, both were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

The only other crewmember from 9591 to return to combat at the end of the day was Corporal Cameron Campbell. Despite receiving multiple shrapnel wounds, Campbell assisted in the evacuation of the crew. After the wounded were safe, Campbell moved back to Allied lines alone to get aid, while only armed

with a pistol. Campbell then refused to be evacuated himself. Because of this, Corporal Campbell was never given credit for his wounds which would have earned him the Purple Heart. However, he was given a memorandum by his battalion commander, Major Ralph Sasse, which testified that he had been wounded in combat. In 2018, nearly 100 years after he was wounded, Corporal Campbell's family received his Purple Heart.

The tank was recovered and brought back to the U.S. by the 301st as a memorial to those early American Tankers who did not return from "Over There". Today, 9591 is the oldest known surviving tank used by American soldiers in combat.

Photos and text by kind permission of Robert Cogan, Curator of the US Army Armor and Cavalry Collection. Support them on Facebook: @ArmorandCavalryCollection

THE ANZAC ON THE WALL



*I wandered thru a country town, 'cos I had some time to spare,
And went into an antique shop to see what was in there.
Old Bikes and pumps and kero lamps, but hidden by it all,
A photo of a soldier boy - an Anzac on the Wall.*

*'The Anzac have a name?' I asked. The old man answered 'No'.
The ones who could have told me mate, have passed on long ago.*

*The old man kept on talking and, according to his tale,
The photo was unwanted junk bought from a clearance sale.
'I asked around', the old man said, 'but no-one knows his face,
He's been on that wall twenty years... Deserves a better place.
For some-one must have loved him, so it seems a shame somehow.'*

*I nodded in agreement and then said, 'I'll take him now.'
My nameless digger's photo, well it was a sorry sight
A cracked glass pane and a broken frame - I had to make it right
To prise the photo from its frame I took care just in case,
Cause only sticky paper held the cardboard back in place.
I peeled away the faded screed and much to my surprise,
Two letters and a telegram appeared before my eyes*

*The first reveals my Anzac's name, and regiment of course
John Mathew Francis Stuart - of Australia's own Light Horse.*

*This letter written from the front... My interest now was keen
This note was dated August seventh 1917*

*'Dear Mum, I'm at Khalasa Springs not far from the Red Sea
They say it's in the Bible - looks like a Billabong to me.*

*'My Kathy wrote I'm in her prayers... she's still my bride to be
I just can't wait to see you both, you're all the world to me.*

*And Mum you'll soon meet Bluey, last month they shipped him out
I told him to call on you when he's up and about.'*

*'That bluey is a larrikin, and we all thought it funny
He lobbed a Turkish hand grenade into the CO's dunny.*

*I told you how he dragged me wounded, in from no man's land
He stopped the bleeding, closed the wound, with only his bare hand.'*

*'Then he copped it at the front from some stray shrapnel blast
It was my turn to drag him in and I thought he wouldn't last.*

*He woke up in hospital, and nearly lost his mind
Cause out there on the battlefield he'd left one leg behind.'*

*'He's been in a bad way Mum, he knows he'll ride no more
Like me he loves a horse's back, he was a champ before.*

*So Please Mum can you take him in, he's been like my own brother
Raised in a Queensland orphanage he's never known a mother.'*

*But 'struth, I miss Australia Mum, and in my mind each day
I am a mountain cattleman on high plains far away.*

I'm mustering white-faced cattle, with no camel's hump in sight

And I waltz my Matilda by a campfire every night
I wonder who rides Billy, I heard the pub burnt down
I'll always love you and please say hooroo to all in town'.
The second letter I could see, was in a lady's hand
An answer to her soldier son there in a foreign land.
Her copperplate was perfect, the pages neat and clean
It bore the date, November 3rd 1917.
'T'was hard enough to lose your Dad, without you at the war
I'd hoped you would be home by now - each day I miss you more'
'Your Kathy calls around a lot since you have been away
To share with me her hopes and dreams about your wedding day.
And Bluey has arrived - and what a godsend he has been
We talked and laughed for days about the things you've done and seen'
'He really is a comfort, and works hard around the farm,
I read the same hope in his eyes that you won't come to harm.
McConnell's kids rode Billy, but suddenly that changed.
We had a violent lightning storm, and it was really strange.'
'Last Wednesday, just on midnight, not a single cloud in sight,
It raged for several minutes, it gave us all a fright.
It really spooked your Billy - and he screamed and bucked and reared
And then he rushed the sliprail fence, which by a foot he cleared'
'They brought him back next afternoon, but something's changed I fear
It's like the day you brought him home, for no one can get near.
Remember when you caught him with his black and flowing mane?
Now Horse breakers fear the beast that only you can tame,'
'That's why we need you home son' - then the flow of ink went dry-
This letter was unfinished, and I couldn't work out why.
Until I started reading, the letter number three
A yellow telegram delivered news of tragedy,
Her son killed in action - oh - what pain that must have been
The same date as her letter - 3rd November 1917
This letter which was never sent, became then one of three
She sealed behind the photo's face - the face she longed to see.
And John's home town's old timers - children when he went to war
Would say no greater cattleman had left the town before.
They knew his widowed mother well - and with respect did tell
How when she lost her only boy she lost her mind as well.
She could not face the awful truth, to strangers she would speak
'My Johnny's at the war you know, he's coming home next week.'
They all remembered Bluey he stayed on to the end.
A younger man with wooden leg became her closest friend.
And he would go and find her when she wandered old and weak
And always softly say 'yes dear - John will be home next week.'
Then when she died Bluey moved on, to Queensland some did say.
I tried to find out where he went, but don't know to this day.
And Kathy never wed - a lonely spinster some found odd.
She wouldn't set foot in a church - she'd turned her back on God.
John's mother left no Will I learned on my detective trail.
This explains my photo's journey, of that clearance sale.

*So I continued digging, cause I wanted to know more.
I found John's name with thousands, in the records of the war.
His last ride proved his courage - a ride you will acclaim*

*The Light Horse Charge at Beersheba of everlasting fame.
That last day in October, back in 1917*



*At 4pm our brave boys fell - that sad fact I did glean.
That's when John's life was sacrificed, the record's crystal clear
But 4pm in Beersheba is midnight over here.....
So as John's gallant spirit rose to cross the great divide,
Were lightning bolts back home, a signal from the other side?
Is that why Billy bolted and went racing as in pain?
Because he'd never feel his master on his back again?
Was it coincidental? same time - same day - same date?
Some proof of numerology, or just a quirk of fate?
I think it's more than that you know, as I've heard wiser men,
Acknowledge there are many things that go beyond our ken
Where craggy peaks guard secrets 'neath dark skies torn asunder,
Where hoof-beats are companions to the rolling waves of thunder
Where lightning cracks like 303's and ricochets again
Where howling moaning gusts of wind sound just like dying men.
Some Mountain cattlemen have sworn on lonely alpine track,
They've glimpsed a huge black stallion - Light Horseman on his back.
Yes Sceptics say, it's swirling clouds just forming apparitions
Oh no, my friend you can't dismiss all this as superstition.
The desert of Beersheba - or windswept Aussie range,
John Stuart rides on forever there - Now I don't find that strange.
Now some gaze upon this photo, and they often question me
And I tell them a small white lie, and say he's family.
'You must be proud of him.' they say - I tell them, one and all,
That's why he takes - the pride of place - my Anzac on the Wall.*

By Jim Brown.



The story of Myrle, who reburied her missing father 78 years after his death.

A proud Sergeant Jack White flashes a smile while resting a reassuring hand on his wife Lillian's shoulder, and standing protectively over his son Colin and infant daughter Myrle.

While Jack beams, Lillian carries a more apprehensive expression. No doubt, she felt uneasy about Jack's pending departure. Perhaps that's why she gave him a lock of her own hair. It was near Bullecourt in 1917 that Australian troops attacked the heavily fortified Hindenburg Line, and where Jack, a 28-year-old blacksmith from Briagolong, was killed on 3 May 1917.

Jack's remains were never recovered.

A few personal items, such as Jack's Bible, were returned to Lillian which she was 'perpetually thankful for.' Beyond that she continually fretted about Jack's missing remains.

Over time shattered lives were rebuilt. Lillian remarried and shifted away from Briagolong; while for Colin and Myrle, their father became a hazy memory. Then 77 years on, in 1994, a Bullecourt farmer, while ploughing his field, uncovered human remains.

An identity disc was found on the body, as well as the intimate possessions of a lock of hair, and a faded photograph of a baby.

The soldier was identified as Jack White.

The news came as a great shock to the only surviving member of Jack's immediate family - Myrle, who was now aged 80.

Myrle made the only overseas trip of her life, travelling to France for her father's funeral. With full military honours Jack was finally laid to rest on 11 October 1995. Jack was buried with the lock of hair that Lillian had presented him.

Despite the recovery of Jack's remains, there are still thousands of soldiers buried in unmarked mass graves in Bullecourt's fields.