

WFA FOUNDED 1980



SOMME 110

SPECIAL DIGITAL EDITION 1 JULY 2026



*Including the stories of
highly regarded and
well-remembered WFA
veterans who were there*



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CONTENT

- WFA veterans remembered
pp.4, 16, 22, 34, 50
- The Accrington Pals on Day 1
pp.5-9
- Chance encounter with piper
pp.10-11
- Death in the air: A flyer's tale
pp.12-15
- Joe Murrery's memories of the Ancre with the RND
pp.17-20
- Cpt Nevill and his footballs
pp.23-25
- The influence of Martin Middlebrook's book
pp.26-29
- The death of two senior officers and their photo story
pp.30-33
- Moving the wounded: The story of the ambulance trains
pp.35-37
- The appalling conditions in winter from the German side
pp.38-39
- Battlefield clearance: A rebellion by Chinese workers
pp.40-43
- The Wallace Memorial at Bazentin: history and repair
pp.44-47
- Lost and found in Albert
pp.48-49
- 'The boys' at Thiepval
pp.51-52
- Thiepval: The memorial meant for St Quentin
pp.53-55
- Life on the Somme: A newly discovered memoir
pp.56-58



- Men of the 29th Division used this communication trench at Auchonvillers to get to the front lines facing Beaumont Hamel on 1 July. Many then came back along the same trench as wounded and were supported in an outbuilding at the now popular stop-off site known as 'Ocean Villas'.

Introduction by the editor



I CAN still vividly remember the first time that I visited the Somme in the 1990s, and whilst the expedition had been organised more in the spirit of 'war tourism' than 'historical pilgrimage', it would still prove life-changing to me. The topographical legacies, the mine craters and trench lines, and the post-war architecture, such as the patchwork of war cemeteries and imposing memorials, had a visceral impact. In subsequent years I would visit the Western Front at least twice a year, guidebooks, memoirs, war diaries, trench maps in hand. It never ceased to move me and continues to do so. I have questioned why this is the case and think it may be to do with scale: the Somme provides a more condensed, and perhaps more emotionally relatable, version of the oft incomprehensible levels of human sacrifice associated with the Great War. The fact that so much of the story of the first day of the battle in 1916 is associated with 'Pals' battalions and specific communities also plays into this theme of human relatability. And that is the theme that stands at the heart of this publication: a combination of items from the WFA archive and new articles from respected members of the Association. From the images and recollections of some of our late veteran members to original research, the focus is on humanity and the personalisation of sacrifice. I hope that you find the content as interesting and poignant to read as I have, and I would like to thank our publications trustee Colin Wagstaff for the central role he has played in helping to source such suitable and stimulating material.

Dr Martin Purdy

Somme 110: Copywrite 2026
Editor: Dr Martin Purdy



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The Western Front Association

**Founded by
John Giles**

**Inaugurated 11th
November 1980**



The Western Front Association was founded with the aim of furthering interest in the period 1914-1918, to perpetuate the memory, courage and comradeship of those on all sides who served their countries in France and Flanders and their own countries during the Great War. It does not seek to justify or glorify war. It is not a re-enactment society, nor is it commercially motivated. It is entirely non-political. The object of the Association is to educate the public in the history of the Great War. Applications for membership are welcomed from anyone with like mind.

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● Veteran **ROY BEALING** pictured on 1 July 1980 at the Lochnagar Crater Memorial on the Somme. Early WFA member Richard Dunning recalled: “Roy Bealing was another veteran who regularly went over [on return trips to the Western Front], and I remember how I used to often stand with him at the crater whilst he recounted how his young friend Alf Moxham was cut down on the lip of Lochnagar because he hesitated, frozen in fear. Tears would well up as he recalled those traumatic events of 70 years before. It is believed that Alfred is still buried in the crater and a wreath, on Roy’s behalf, is laid each year for him during the annual ceremony.”



Veterans remembered

by **Darryl Porrino**

ON THE EVE of the Battle the 11th Battalion East Lancashire Regiment (The Accrington Pals) moved up to their trenches from Warnimont Wood. They covered the line from Mark Copse to Matthew Copse: their ultimate objective to capture the village of Serre.

The British barrage lifted at 7.20am but it was not until 10 minutes later before the Accrington Pals were due to go "over the top" - giving the Germans ample time to come up out of their deep, concrete-built dugouts and set up their machine guns. The first casualty was Private Tom Coady, who was hit in the head by a German machine gun bullet whilst waiting in the trench.

Private Bewsher later recalled: "As we were waiting CSM Hey walked along the trench with his revolver in hand, checking the dugouts to see if anyone was skiving. He had no need [...] all the lads were ready to go."

At 7.20am Captain Tough shook hands with those around him and wished them good luck. He blew his whistle and the men climbed the ladders into no man's land where Captain Tough was immediately wounded. The captain continued to urge his men on, leading them to a position 100-yards in front of the trench.

The men waited in no man's land until 7.30am. At that time Captain Tough and the men got up and advanced into a hail of machine gun fire. The captain was wounded for a second time but continued to lead until shot in the head and killed.

Accrington Pals at Serre

The chairman of the North Wales branch of the WFA uses first-hand accounts to tell the tragic story of the East Lancashire battalion which infamously suffered a terrible fate on the opening day of the battle



● **Lieutenant Thomas Rawcliffe**

Private Clarke recalled: "At 7.20 with a prayer commending my soul to Heavenly Father's keeping, we sprang up and climbed out of the trench and doubled forward to be met with murderous fire. How gently my comrades fell to earth. What was left of us got down in position. I looked round and to my utter surprise I saw moving human beings."

This was the second wave of the attack moving up to take their positions. They were led by Captain Livesey, and the third and fourth waves were waiting close behind. At 7.30am the whistles sounded and all four waves rose and advanced up the grassy slope towards the enemy positions.

Lieutenant Thomas Rawcliffe later recalled: "I saw many men fall back into the trench as they attempted to climb out of it. Those of us who managed had to walk two yards apart and walk very slowly. Machine gun bullets were sweeping backwards and forwards at our feet. Shells were bursting everywhere. There was no going back, we had to go

"There was no going back, we had to go forward until wounded or killed."



● The memorial to the 11th East Lancs at Serre, famously created used the renowned red bricks associated with the town of Accrington

the German trench, cleared part of it and held it until he was hit in the face by a rifle grenade and died.”

Reports of the progress getting back to HQ were often sketchy and false. The command had no real idea of the situation.

Will Clarke, a 28-year-old Co-Op grocer who survived the war, wrote to his sister: “Blinded almost with blood from my wound, I rolled back to our own lines, but my equipment prevented me. In spite of the machine guns that were still playing on us, I got up, and God only knows how I managed to throw off my equipment, but I did it, and crawling, pulling and stumbling over barbed wire, I managed to get back to our lines.”

Throughout the assault Privates Sayer, Pickering and Rountree waited to issue bomb reserves that nobody came for.

Sayer said: “Suddenly a piece of shrapnel hit Joe Rountree on the leg. His clothing set alight. I knocked the shrapnel away and smothered the flames. I asked Private Pickering to go for the stretcher bearers. I made Joe as

forward until wounded or killed. Captain Riley fell after 30 yards.”

Despite the murderous fire, some men got into the first German trench. Captain Livesey, together with his orderly Private Glover, amongst them. What happened next is best told by those who were there...

Private Glover, a war survivor who died in 1966, recalled: “Five Germans came from nowhere, the first of whom hurled a bomb which grazed Captain Livesey’s face but didn’t explode. Captain Livesey shot at the group with his revolver. More Germans came so we made for a shell hole just as a shell

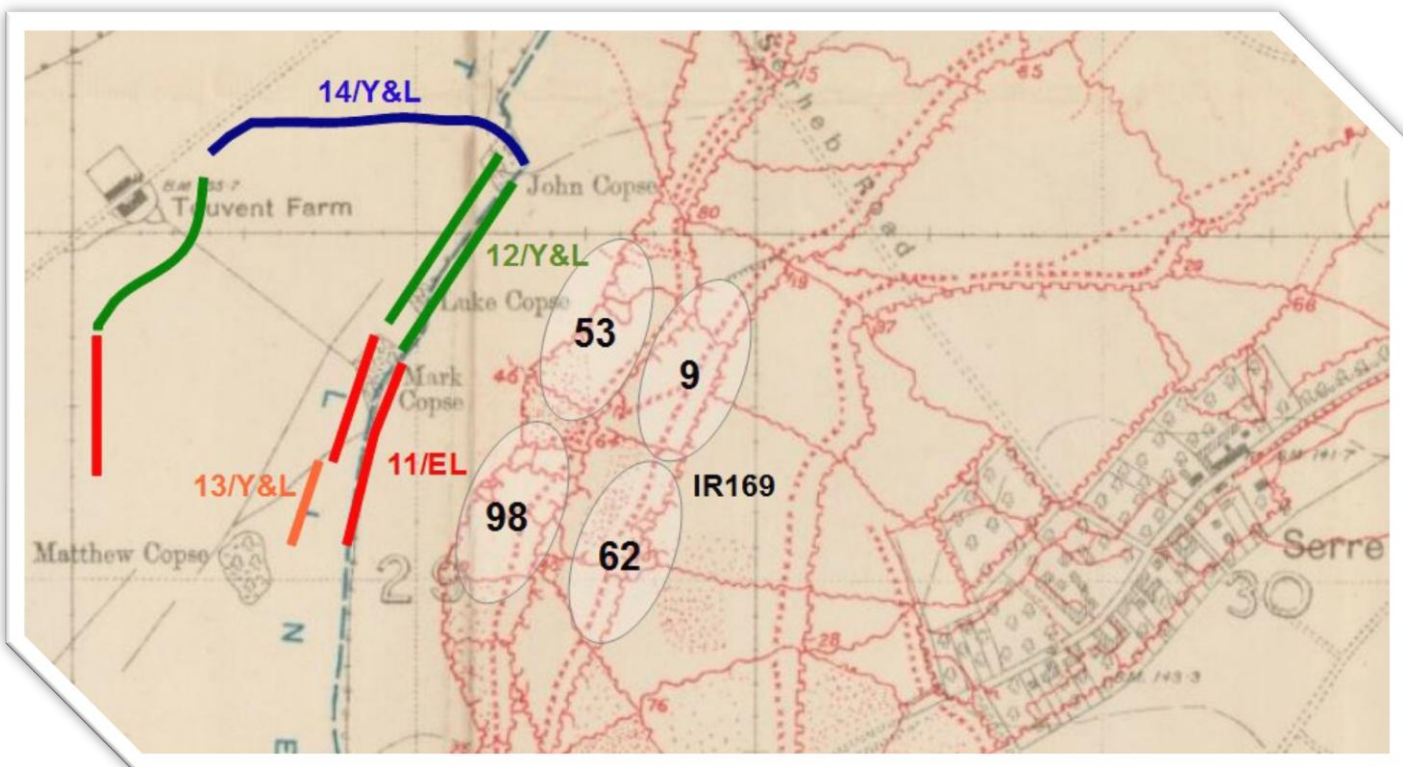
burst nearby. I must have been knocked out. When I came round, I couldn’t find Captain Livesey. I was wounded but felt lucky to be alive. My cigarette case had turned a bullet and my gas helmet stopped another from doing much damage.”

Lt Gerry Gorst recounted the fate of Captain Livesey: “We drew every German gun for miles on us. We did our job and did it well. Every officer who went into the attack is in hospital or in his grave. Livesey, who commanded my company, will I believe be recommended for the VC. He was hit in the arm getting over the parapet, hit in the chest halfway across, hit in the head on the German wire, and as he got into



● Captain Livesey

“Robert (Bob) Bullen was wounded and lay out in no man’s land for two days.”



comfortable as possible as I could with splints made from box lids. He was in agonising pain, his leg smashed. A runner on his way to Brigade came into the dugout. He obviously knew me but I didn't know him. 'Hallo Fred, how's things,' he said. I told him: 'It's a wasted effort to come here to issue bombs, nobody wants them.' He replied, 'Bugger t'bombs, everybody's gone, it's been a washout.' Sometime later the stretcher bearers came for Joe."

Robert (Bob) Bullen from Padiham was wounded and lay out in no man's land for two days before he was brought in. Having suffered bullet wounds to his right arm and leg he was evacuated to England and admitted to Huddersfield

***"Bugger t'bombs,
everybody's gone,
it's been a
washout."***

- The trenches and advanced positions of 'the pals' at Serre on the opening day of the Battle of the Somme.
- Facing page, left, Private Herbert Charles Rawcliffe and, right, Robert 'Bob' Bullen.

Military Hospital where his leg was amputated. Bob died on 10 July, just hours after his parents had visited him. He is buried in St John's Cemetery, Padiham - the same cemetery in which my dad is buried.

Private Herbert Charles Rawcliffe (17936) was killed on the opening day, and his body never recovered. Commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial, he was one of four brothers who served - two of whom died. These men are my wife Lynn's great uncles. One of the brothers, Felix, survived the Somme but was left suffering from the effects of gas.

As the Accrington's wounded started to make their way back to their lines, others remarkably kept advancing. Those painfully inching their way back with

wounds had a torrid time.

Lance Corporal Marshall was one such case: "The shell blast must have knocked me unconscious. I don't know how long I was out. I had to get back although there was as much danger going back as there was going forward. I could hear machine gun fire all around. I was knocked over again by a shell burst.

"Another few yards and I got into one of our dugouts. Someone put a piece of rag over my arm so I went forward into our trenches for it to be properly attended to. That was as bad. It was unbelievable. Someone at the Regimental Aid Post inoculated me against lockjaw but ignored my wounds. I couldn't get near to get bandaged. I met sergeant Ernie Kay. He was also wounded.



He suggested we went back to Colincamps on our own. We walked and rested, walked and rested. Somehow we got to Colincamps and I collapsed through loss of blood. There were hundreds and hundreds out in the open."

Lt Thomas Rawcliffe and his Stokes mortar teams, sited in Rob Roy Trench, explained: "We watched from behind the lines. We could see the men being simply slaughtered, then there seemed to be nobody there. The trench mortars never got a chance to help, our range was too limited. During the morning I decided to go down to the front line. I met a staff captain who said, 'You can't go down there, there's been a wash-out.' I was so upset I said, 'I'm not taking orders from you sir', brushed past him and carried on down.

"Things down there were unbelievable. Shells were continuously exploding all over

the place. I came to a sergeant screaming and crying like a child, obviously shell-shocked. I was trying to calm him when a whizz-bang burst at our side. The blast caught my steel helmet under the rim, blew it back and the strap nearly choked me. I almost blacked out. When I got up the sergeant was nowhere to be seen. He had been blown to pieces. At nightfall I went into no man's land, with my orderly and two volunteers, looking for wounded. We crept along and listened but didn't hear a soul. Later, however, we helped about thirty into the trenches who had somehow dragged themselves back. That night I will never forget. We continued without rest the following day."

For four days and nights men laboured to bring wounded to the overburdened regimental aid posts and advanced dressing stations at Colincamps.

In a period of black horror there was however one incident that gave Lieutenant Rawcliffe some relief: "I was making my way along a communication trench when I saw some feet sticking out from under a groundsheet. I turned it over and thought 'Poor old Gurney' (Captain 13th York and Lancasters) and prepared myself to move the body. At this he woke up and ticked me off for disturbing the first rest he'd had in days. I was overjoyed to get that ticking off."

Rawcliffe later came out of the line and went to Louvencourt, where, as one of the few officers unwounded, he got the job of going through the belongings of the officers and men killed.

He stated: "It was heart-breaking. I'd lost so many of my friends. My own brother-in-law Sergeant Harry Chapman was amongst them..."

AUTHOR'S NOTE: With grateful thanks to Andrew Jackson for generously allowing me access to his archive material, his book and website listed below. I thoroughly recommend both.

Sources:

Accrington Pals by William Turner.

Accrington's Pals by Andrew Jackson.

An Accrington Pal by Steve Corbett

www.pals.org.uk
by Andrew Jackson

ACCRINGTON REMEMBERS



THE story of the Accrington Pals remains central to the identity of the small northern town from which the battalion took its name. In September 2024 a steel sculpture depicting two soldiers, one wounded, was unveiled to honour the hundreds of men from across East Lancashire who formed the battalion and were killed on the Somme in 1916. Designed by landscape gardener John Everiss, it was part of a larger project to revitalise the Accrington Pals Memorial Garden in the town.



Chance meeting with a piper

by Rob Kirk

OF ALL the many stories of heroism on 1 July 1916, one that has always stood out for me is the role of the pipers who led men over-the-top armed with nothing more than their bagpipes.

There are many examples of the heroism of the pipers and, of course, a battlefield memorial was unveiled to them at Longueval in 2002.

I stumbled on one such story by accident, when my wife and I called in at a wonderfully idiosyncratic bookshop called Barter Books at Alnwick in Northumberland. It's inside a disused railway station and packed from floor to ceiling with a rich collection of volumes; there's even a model railway skirting the rooms.

The café is in the old booking office, and as we sat for our morning coffee I found myself looking at a portrait of a kilted highlander on the wall.

I could just make out the handwritten caption: 'Garner Wolsely Fyfe, 1880-1916. Fyfe was one of the pipers of the Tyneside



Scottish who died leading the advance into no-mans-land on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, July 1st, 1916. On that day, the Regiment lost 1,750 men. No ground was gained.'

I took a picture of the portrait and left Barter Books with more than I

bargained for: a wish to find out more about one of the many Tyneside Scottish - men billed as 'Harder than Hammers' on the recruiting posters.

David and Julie Thomson at No 56 in La Boisselle directed me to a book called *Somme 90*, written



by Duncan Youel and David Edgell to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the battle in 2006, and it contained an eye-witness account of Corporal Fyfe's death from Private J Elliott, also of the Tyneside Scottish:

"A bomber shouted, 'I've been hit in the arse!', Billy Grant called back, 'Haven't we all!' I did see poor Aggy Fife. He was riddled with bullets, writhing and screaming."

Corporal Piper Fyfe was one the 2,522 Tyneside Scottish listed as killed, wounded or missing after they walked towards the German machine gun nests by La Boisselle and Ovillers.

Aged 36 when he fell, he is buried at Ovillers military cemetery, overlooking the killing fields of Mash Valley.

A website called the North East War Memorials Project (www.newmp.org.uk) confirmed that Fyfe was in the Northumberland Fusiliers. Armed with his pipes and no rifle, he died within minutes of going 'over the top'.

Garnet Wolsely Fyfe's name is on a memorial at Shiremoor in North Tyneside. (This too seemed remarkable, as my wife spent her childhood in nearby Forest Hall and her parents lived their final years in Palmersville, next door to Shiremoor.)

The granite memorial column is on a sandstone base on land given by the Duke of Northumberland. Unveiled in 1924, it cost about £495 and the money was raised by public subscription and fundraising. It was Grade II listed in 1986.

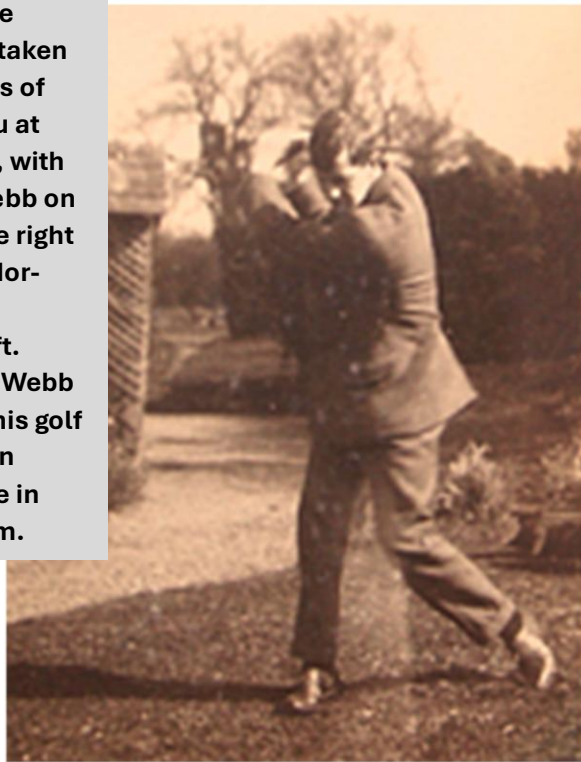
● **Pictured: Corporal Piper Fyfe (facing page) and (above, clockwise) a Tyneside Scottish poster, Fyfe's grave, the memorial at Shiremoor and the drone at Bamburgh recovered from the Somme.**

Corporal G.W.Fyfe is at the front, among a hundred other names.

Part of a piper's drone, said to have been recovered from the battlefield near La Boisselle, is now displayed in the museum at Bamburgh Castle in Northumberland. Did it belong to Garnet Wolsely Fyfe? Many pipers died that day, so we will probably never know.



● The image above was taken on the steps of the chateau at Bertangles, with Captain Webb on the extreme right and Lt. Tudor-Hart on the extreme left. Inset right: Webb practising his golf swing and in formal pose in RFC uniform.



by Nigel Newell

GILBERT Watson Webb was born into a linen manufacturing family on 1 March 1890 in County Down, Ireland. The son of Richard and Blanche Webb, his father owned the Ards Weaving Co in Newtownards and his brother a weaving mill at Randalstown, County Antrim.

The family residence was at Rath House, Shandon Park, Belfast, and Gilbert was educated at the nearby Campbell College before heading to Queens University Belfast. As well as being a member of the OTC at Queens, Gilbert played rugby for the North of Ireland Rugby Football Club and was an enthusiastic golfer. On graduation he departed to work for a period in Canada.

At the outbreak of the Great War, Ireland was on the brink of Civil War. The British Government's proposed Home Rule Bill had Unionists and Nationalists at loggerheads and preparing for armed conflict. On 28 September 1912 almost 500,000 Unionists signed the Ulster Covenant pledging opposition and resistance by whatever means necessary to the Bill. Amongst the signatories that day were the Webb family, including Gilbert, his brothers and his mother Blanche (a woman of German descent whose maiden name was Stromeyer).

The entire family were staunch Unionists who regarded loyalty to King and country more than a duty. Gilbert's cousin Oswald Brooke Webb, of Randalstown, Co Antrim, was a local Company Commander with the Ulster Volunteer Force who fought in the Irish Rifles in the Great War.

Death in the air on the opening day

This is the story of Captain Gilbert Watson Webb, an airman who died on the opening day of the Battle of the Somme. One of the many who has since slipped into obscurity, his and his family's story is one of honour, loyalty and dedication

With the arrival of the Great War, civil war in Ireland was averted, and the leaders of both factions decided, for differing reasons, to urge their volunteers to support the war against Germany.

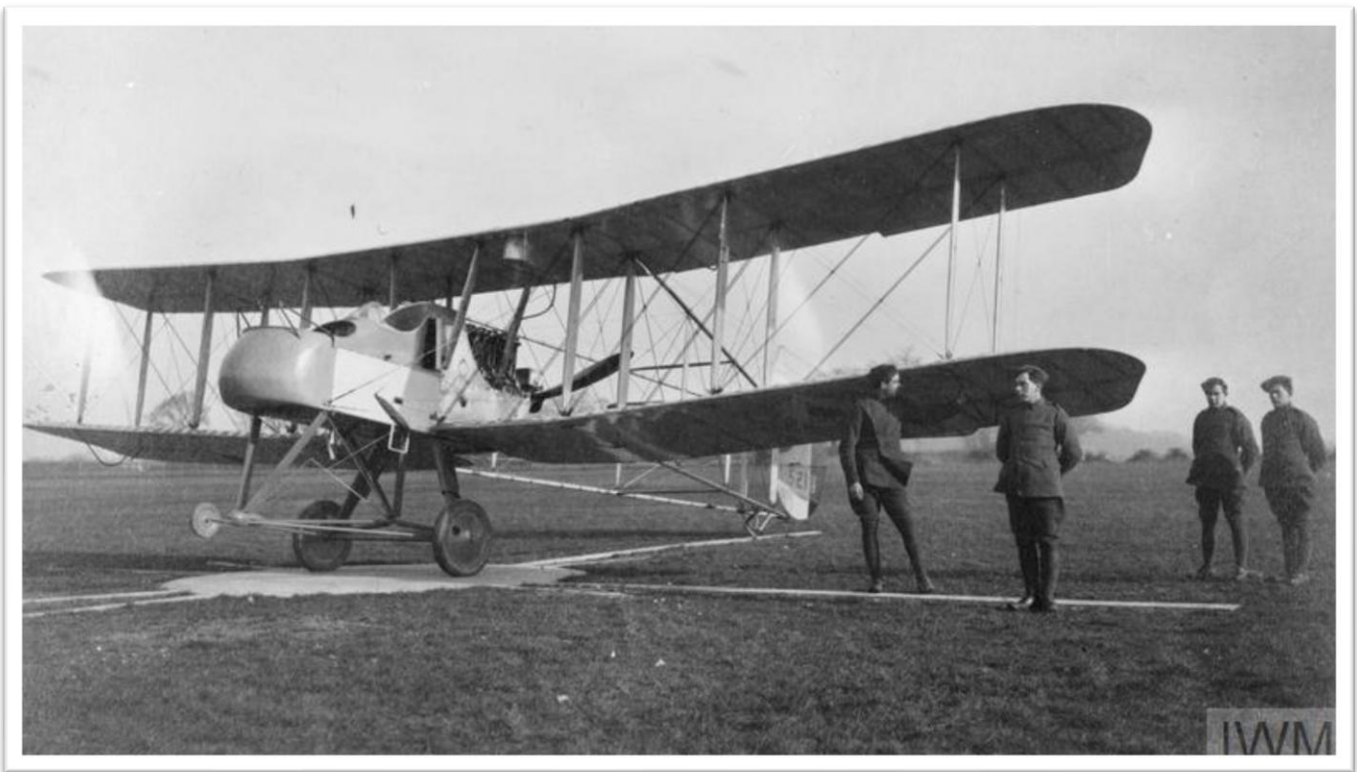
Within days, Gilbert Watson Webb applied for a commission and was duly accepted by the 3rd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles in August 1914, before transferring to the 2nd Battalion on 28 February 1915.

The 2nd Rifles had been involved in heavy fighting at the end of 1914 at Neuve Chapelle and Aubers Ridge before moving north to Belgium to fight in the forthcoming battles around Ypres.

Many will be familiar with the eloquent and poignant memoir of Corporal John Lucy, 'There's a Devil in the Drum', which describes the travails the battalion faced during this period and his wonder at the *"half-hidden corpses of men and youths"*.

When 2nd Lieutenant Webb joined the battalion they remained at Ypres, regularly going in and out of the line, and on 8 May 1915 Gilbert became a casualty.

At 2.50am D Company had been involved in an attack on Trench 46 near Hill 60. The attack failed and resulted in the deaths of nine men with 16 more wounded.



During retaliatory German shell and mortar fire 2nd Lieutenant Webb was wounded in the head by shrapnel and admitted to No 1 British Red Cross Hospital at Le Touquet. Suffering from a scalp wound, anaemia and general poor health, he was shipped home on 15 May from Boulogne.

Webb was not however easily deterred from the fight, and after a very short period of recuperation he was declared fit for general service on 16 July and returned to the 3rd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles. By 27 November 1915 he had risen to the rank of Captain.

On 14 February 1916 Captain Webb said goodbye to the

“He died in a few seconds I think, but his last thought was to save his machine.”

● **A picture, courtesy of the Imperial War Museum, of the craft that Webb was flying on the day that he was killed.**

infantry and transferred to the Royal Flying Corps at Reading. Initially attached to the 9th Reserve Squadron at Norwich, he was involved in flight training at the Military School where he obtained his Royal Aero Club Aviators Certificate No.2610 on 14 March 1916 in a Maurice Farman Biplane.

The timescale of these things never fails to amaze, as within a few weeks of obtaining his licence Captain Webb flew his aircraft across the English Channel to France to join the 22 Sqn Royal Flying Corps. (The first 22-mile flight across the channel by French aviator Louis Blériot had only occurred back in 1909, but whilst flight was still in its infancy men like Webb were expected to quickly conquer the art whilst also developing aerial combat skills. It is easy to see why there was such a high rate of

attrition amongst young and inexperienced pilots.)

Based at Chateau de Bertangles, near Amiens, 22 Squadron were equipped with Royal Aircraft Factory FE2b pushers. This was a general-purpose squadron mainly used for bombing and reconnaissance, although they were about to be used as fighter escort for the Army during the Somme offensive.

On 1 July 1916, Captain Webb and his observer Lieutenant William Owen Tudor-Hart departed the airfield at Bertangles at 10.02am flying FE2b No. 6928. The following is an extract from the RFC Communiqué 60 penned by Lt Tudor-Hart...

“I was with Captain Webb and we went about 4 or 5

miles over the German lines in his machine on the 1st July at 11am. We saw 8 German machines approaching from the south-west: they were higher than us, and we flew towards them to attack. Two passed over our heads about 300 yards or so apart, and I opened fire on one. They both replied together. I gave the signal to Webb to turn so I could fire at the other machine behind us, but he pointed the machine head down. I turned to see what was the matter and he pointed to his abdomen and collapsed over the joystick. He died in a few seconds I think, but his last thought was to save his machine.

"The machine at once started to turn towards the German side and I had to get back to my machine gun to fire at a machine diving at us. This happened again and again, but my fire would always prevent them finishing the dive. Other machines fired from above all the time. I had only time to get the machine pointing towards our lines when I had to get back to the gun. I never got a chance to pull Webb out of the pilot's seat, so had to steer with my hand over the windscreen.

"I didn't expect to get off alive but tried to put up as good a fight as possible and tried to keep her towards our lines. Having to man the guns often made it impossible to make progress, but the erratic course the machine flew probably saved it. At last, still being fired at, I got right down near the ground and proceeded to make a landing, as it was all I could do.

"I saw a lot of men with rifles and realised I might get shot

before I could set fire to the machine, so I at the last minute put her nose down in order to crash. One wing tip hit first, the whole machine was destroyed, I was hurled out and escaped with a bruised and paralysed side and broken ankle and rib. All right now, but the ankle, I was kindly treated, and the German pilots acted like sportsmen and gentlemen."

It is miraculous that Tudor-Hart managed to get the aircraft to the ground at all: having been forced to steer from the observer's cockpit whilst still returning fire, with a dead pilot slumped over the joystick and without any rudder control. An amazing feat and more than understandable when he said: "I didn't expect to get off alive." Tudor-Hart recovered from his injuries whilst held as a PoW in Germany, where he remained until the end of the conflict.

When Captain Gilbert Watson Webb's war ended on 1 July 1916 he was 26 years old. Whilst he had been fighting in the sky over the Somme, his cousin Oswald had been fighting below him with the 11th Royal Irish Rifles at Thiepval. Oswald was wounded on the same day and would die of those wounds a few days later on 4 July.

Gilbert's final resting place is at Achiet-le-Grand Communal Cemetery Extension and Oswald is buried at Warloy-Baillon Communal Cemetery Extension. The epitaph on Oswald's grave is also an appropriate tribute to his cousin Gilbert. It reads...

DIED OF WOUNDS RECEIVED
AT THIEPVAL ON JULY 1st

MALO MORI QUAM FOEDARI

"I would rather die than be dishonoured"



● The grave of Captain Gilbert Watson Webb (top) and an image of his cousin Oswald who was wounded fighting with the infantry on the opening day of the battle and died days later.

Veterans remembered



● Veteran **CORPORAL JAMES EUSTACE GUY, DCM, MM** landed at Le Havre in September 1915 with 'B' Battery 110th Brigade, 25th Division. Presented with a DCM for operations at Vimy in May 1916, in early August of the same year he was on the Somme with two guns facing La Boisselle - on a platform built by the REs just below the lip of the Lochnagar Crater. They were firing on Mouquet Farm, and the battery HQ was in a dugout in the side of the crater. Jim gained his MM for keeping the telephone line open all night under enemy shell fire between the HQ, across Mash Valley and on to the forward OP at Ovillers.

WFA member and friend Keith Quibell recalled: "When he was 90 and re-visiting Aveluy, Jim stripped off and splashed around in the local ponds for old times' sake. He had his guns in Aveluy Wood on and off for nearly a month and some of his pals are buried in Aveluy Cemetery (pictured). After a period of firing the guns non-stop for a week his battery team were sent on rest to the vaults of Aveluy Church. The gunners were lousy from head to foot - on reaching the church they all dumped their gear, ran down to Aveluy ponds and swam naked all night on a beautiful moonlit night. Jim said just to feel clean was one of the best feelings of his life."



Joe Murray on the Ancre

Ordinary Seaman Joe Murray was perhaps the finest Great War oral history interview that I ever recorded for the Imperial War Museum. The quotes on the Battle of the Ancre that follow are all edited from that interview (Accession Number 8202). The level of detail he remembered, his knack for the pithy phrase, and his trenchant 'everyman' attitude are quite remarkable...

by Peter Hart



THE SOMME offensive had stalled, stymied by the determined resistance of the Germans and the inclement late-autumn weather. Finally, the clouds cleared a little, and an attack was planned for 05.45 on 13 November 1916.

Joe Murray, serving with the Hood Battalion, Royal Naval Division, was fresh to the Western Front, having hitherto served at Gallipoli. But this was no sideshow, and the German defences and the power of the massed guns on both sides dwarfed anything these men had experienced. They were under the command of Major General Cameron Shute, an excellent career soldier who chafed against the distinctly slap-dash naval traditions of the Royal Naval Division. Murray recalled his speech to the Hoods.

It was still raining, raining like hell, wet through. The whole battalion were on parade, all

there, and Major General Shute inspected us. He starts off, the usual stunt, you know, "Blah, Blah, Blah!" He says that the place we were going to attack now was one of the most formidable parts of the firing line of the whole of the Western Front, the Germans had been there umpteen months. He said, "I'm going to tell you this much, you know what you have got to do, the more prisoners you take, the less food you'll get, because we have to feed them out of your rations!" Now that's honest God's truth!

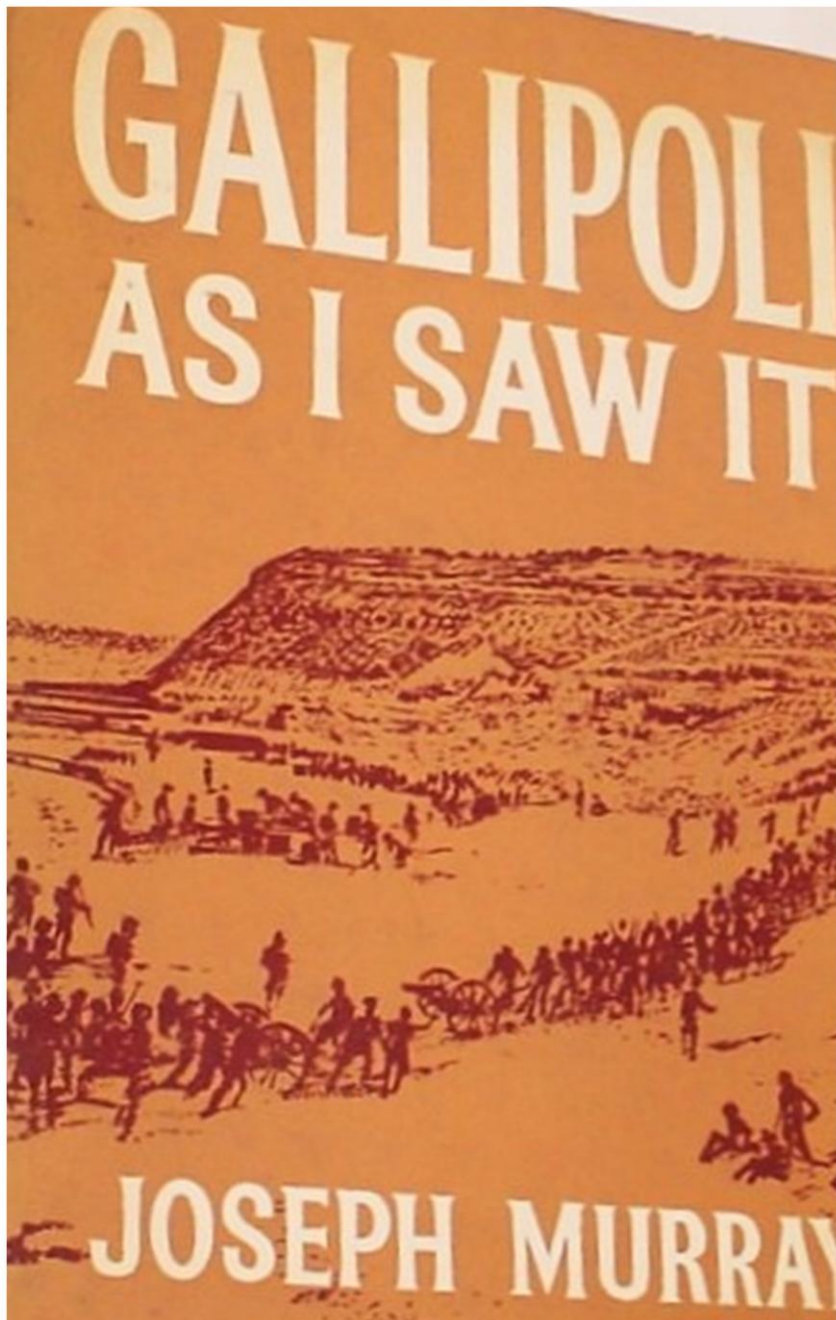
Men like Murray may not have grasped all the tactical details,

but they knew enough to get the idea of what they were facing.

We've got in mind what we got to do. We know we're for the slaughterhouse. We know that the 29th Division, the Newfoundlanders, the Essex and everybody else got slaughtered. We know that! We knew that since then there'd been five attempts all beaten back - five!

Now it was their turn. They moved up on the 12 November. Murray was not a man to hide his opinions of the preparations.

We were issued with two 'P' bombs. Phosphorous bombs,



they were new things to us, we'd never seen them before. They were like an elongated jam tin. We had a couple of Mills bombs. Then we got two sacks per section of bombs. Bless my heart and soul if they didn't come along with the rations. We were given a tin of jam each and a glass jar of piccalilli, never seen the dammed stuff before! Cups hanging here, a mug hanging here, entrenching tool at the

back beating a tattoo on the backside, you've got your haversack on this side, you've got a sack of bombs round your neck, like a blinking Christmas tree. We hid in these trenches just outside Hamel. We opened and ate the tin of jam - and we ate the piccalilli! Well, whether the piccalilli didn't agree the jam, or the jam didn't agree with the piccalilli, I don't know, but we knew the results afterwards!

● An original 1965 edition of Joe's book that has been reproduced with numerous different covers over the years.

THE FACT that they went forward into at least partially sketched out assembly trenches was largely down to the much maligned General Shute who was well aware that the trenches they were moving up into for the assault were not suitable as jumping off trenches - and he had ordered an entire new system dug.

We had to line up in four waves, so we had to have four jumping off trenches near enough. We were the first ones, behind us was the Drake, and behind them was the Honourable Artillery Company. They were only about 2 feet deep in places. We got to our assembly point at seven o'clock, official records say nine - but that was when it was complete, we were the first ones. The attack was due at 5.45 the next morning. We'd got hours to wait. In the open! In the mist it was, and the rain. We didn't know where the Germans were, but we knew they were in front. If they knew that 200 yards from them, there was thousands of troops lying out in the open for 14 hours, goodness knows what would have happened. We knew that; we knew the danger we were in! We were getting a bit shaky, no doubt about it. We ceased to have any conversation; we weren't quite sure what each man was thinking.

It was a long time to wait on a cold wet November night.

It was dark, misty, there was a slight drizzle; it may have been

the mist. I was lying in this hole, the next man to me was about 5 or 6 feet away. I've got a sack of blinking bombs for my head; that was my pillow. It must have been about midnight, but I saw someone come along. I thought to myself, "Ooooh blimey, who's that walking about in front here?" I heard this fellow talking and I find out its Colonel (Bernard) Freyberg. He'd come along to inspect his troops before the attack. The generals do it 10 miles away, quite safely, but Freyberg he was coming along. He went past me eventually and went on to see his old pal (Frederick) Kelly of 'B' Company. (Arthur) Asquith, Freyberg and Kelly were the only three officers left out of the whole crowd, of nearly a 100 that left Avonmouth on the *Grantully Castle* in February 1915. Freyberg said to me, "Oh you here!" He was quite cheerful, wondering how we were getting on. "Do try and get some sleep!" I suppose we did sleep; exhausted sleep I suppose.

What sleep they were able to get was fitful, broken by the sounds of battle and a penetrating cold.

In the early hours of the morning, round about five o'clock, we were all woken, perishing cold. There was a Very light up there and this shell hole in front of me, the edges were frozen and every time a gun went off, you'd see the quivering of the water. The official record says that someone brought round some tea at five o'clock, quarter past five. I never saw any tea. I'm not saying they didn't have it, but I didn't have any! About 05.30, most of us started getting warmed up a bit, dancing about, quietly! Then we had to fix bayonets. There's

always a noise with fixing bayonets, a clink, a metallic noise, so you put your tunic round it to deaden it. At 5.45 - all the watches were synchronised - "Bang! Bang! Bang!" All of sudden, behind us, the whole sky was red, it reminded me of home a couple of miles across the valley from Conset Iron Company, when they used to draw the furnaces there, it was the same thing. Immediately afterwards you could hear the shells going over your head and really and truly you could almost feel the

**"They say run, but
you stumble, there's
shell holes, you
can't go direct,
you go this way
and that way..."**

shells. Then you heard the sound, the light was first, the shell was next and then the sound! There was a lot of them falling short. We expected to be shelled by Jerry, we didn't expect to be shelled by our own men, but you knew by the thrust which way they were coming. But at the same time, you know, were it not for the artillery barrage then we'd all have been slaughtered - we wouldn't have advanced at all. So it was the lesser of the two evils. We accepted they were doing a brilliant job. We knew we had 7 or 8 minutes, then the Germans would retaliate, they would bombard beyond the front line to the reserves coming up - which they knew would be there. The quicker we got out of our positions towards the barrage, in a way the safer

we were. When the attack opened at 5.45, we were up, we'd got our gun at what you call the 'high port'.

The Hood Battalion went forward in fine style attacking towards Didders Green Lane Line which they achieved without much difficulty, but on their left the Hawke and the Howe Battalions ran into far more severe resistance from the Whaleback Redoubt located between the German First and Second lines.

It was at this moment that Colonel Bernard Freyburg, showed evidence of the decisiveness and the charmed life that would take him to the highest echelons. He personally took control of the situation and led the Hoods off in a pell-mell attack on the shattered ruins of the Beaucourt Railway Station which was their objective.

Freyberg decided the Drakes can't go by themselves, so we'll have to go. We arrive on the river bed and off we go. The barrage lifted and off we go again. There was firing going on all over the place: our own shells falling short, the Jerries firing from left and right, our left flank was vacant. They say run, but you stumble, there's shell holes, you can't go direct, you go this way and that way, picking your way round the shell holes. Sometimes there's two or three of you together, sometimes there was nobody. They'd got behind - or blown up - you don't know. All the time there was these fumes and the shelling going on. We get to this point on the other side of the sunken road and we capture it. I was almost near the station. We had to go down this road and up the side. There was a lot of dugouts there, well we got our 'P' bombs out and chucked them down there. As you went

along you could smell these phosphorous bombs - a rotten lousy smell. I saw some crowd over here, I thought they were our men, but they were really prisoners. We started talking to these fellows, they couldn't understand, we couldn't hear there was so much bloody noise, but a soldier knows what the point of a bayonet means, "Quick, quick, quick! Get back!" Some of them wouldn't behave themselves and we shot them. No doubt about it. You'd tell a bloke, some of them wouldn't behave themselves, wouldn't take any notice, or making threatening gestures - "BANG" - you had no time to fool around with them.

MURRAY had fought his way all the way through the gullies of Gallipoli without a scratch and had earned himself the sobriquet, 'Lucky Durham'. In that total confusion he finally ran out of luck.

We'd got to still go forward. We go onto this Green Line and there seems to be more prisoners giving themselves up than what there was fighting men. We the Hood were at least 3 or 4 hours ahead of our time, we shouldn't have been there until the Drakes had captured it and we'd reorganised. In the afternoon our artillery was firing on the Yellow Line. That was wrong to us. We'd been told that at that time it would move forward onto the village of Beaucourt. We move up and then somebody realised, "Look the barrage hasn't lifted!" It was there or thereabouts that I got blown up. There was a shell burst very near, it hit me crouched down and I got a wounded in the abdomen, little bits of shrapnel in here and a

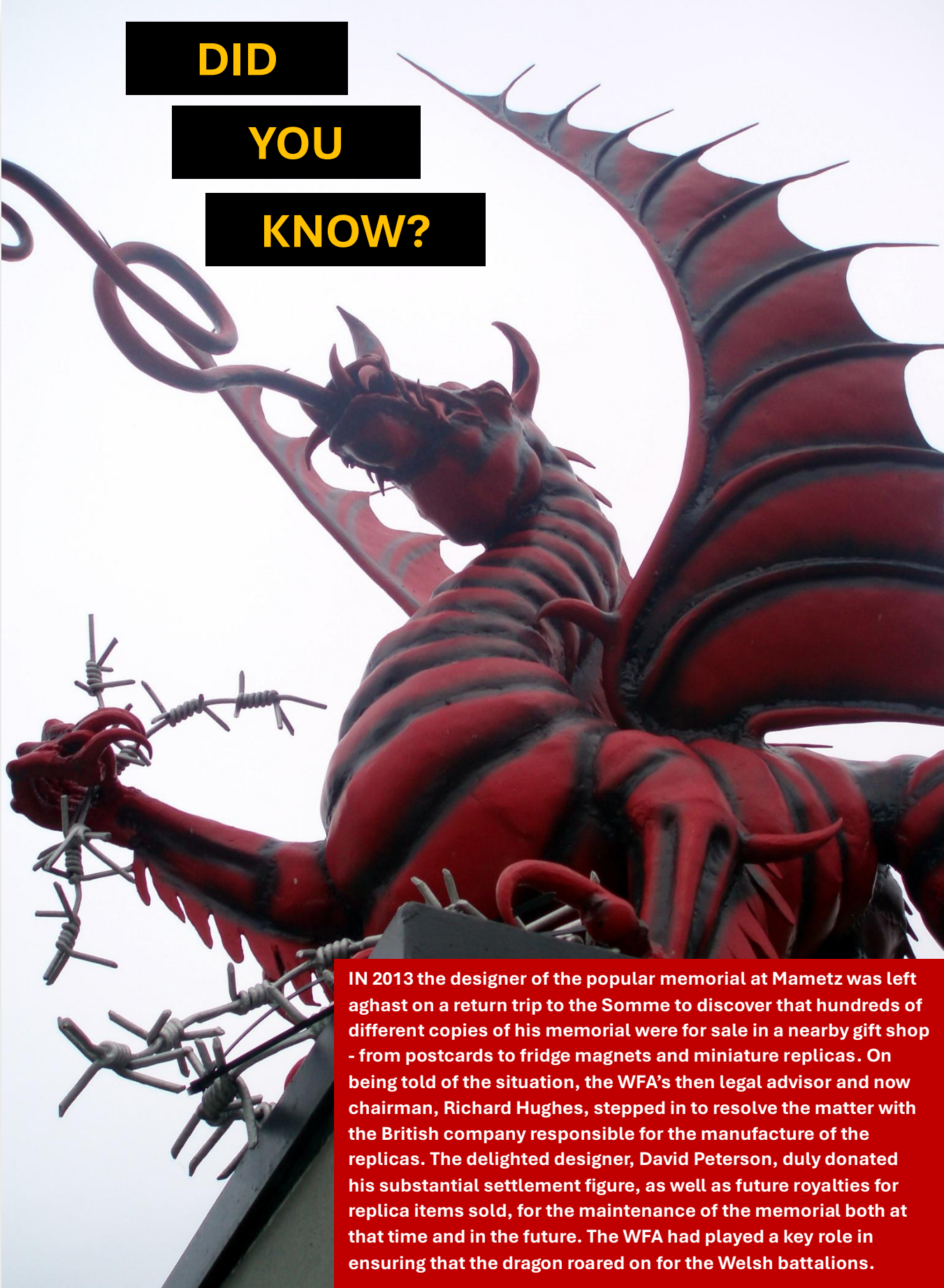
● Joe pictured below as an older man with yet another reprint of his memoir. The son of a miner, he was born in County Durham in 1897 and left school at the age of 12 to go down the pit himself. At the age of 18 he found himself at Gallipoli with the Royal Naval Division's Hood Battalion. 'Gallipoli 1915' was first published in 1965. Joe, who married and had a son, died aged 97 in 1994.



bit of a shell took off the skin and pubic hair, nasty. The abrasion was worse than the wound. I can remember thinking what to do and - "BANG!" - something else, I don't know what. The next I knew I was in Mesnil, lying on a stretcher and somebody washing the mud off my face

Although they had been held up just short of Beaucourt, the

matelots of the Royal Naval Division had achieved a notable breakthrough just north of the Ancre. The combination of the inspirational leadership of Colonel Bernard Freyberg and the hard-headed pragmatism of their despised commanding officer, Major General Cameron Shute, had proved surprisingly effective.

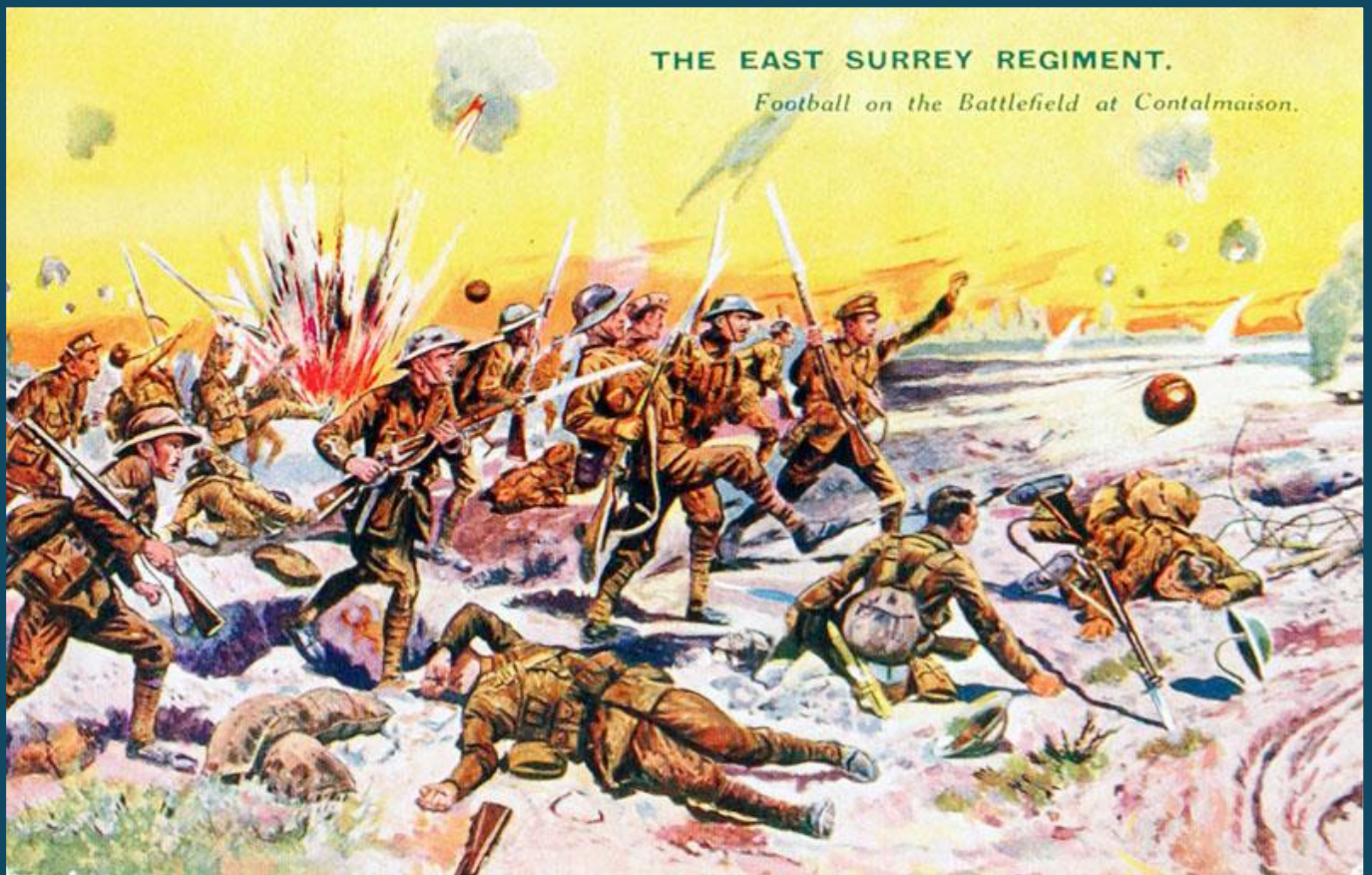
**DID****YOU****KNOW?**

IN 2013 the designer of the popular memorial at Mametz was left aghast on a return trip to the Somme to discover that hundreds of different copies of his memorial were for sale in a nearby gift shop - from postcards to fridge magnets and miniature replicas. On being told of the situation, the WFA's then legal advisor and now chairman, Richard Hughes, stepped in to resolve the matter with the British company responsible for the manufacture of the replicas. The delighted designer, David Peterson, duly donated his substantial settlement figure, as well as future royalties for replica items sold, for the maintenance of the memorial both at that time and in the future. The WFA had played a key role in ensuring that the dragon roared on for the Welsh battalions.

Veterans remembered

● Veteran **HARRY FELLOWS** is pictured on a return to visit comrades in Norfolk Cemetery in 1984. Richard Dunning, who was with him, recalled: "I will never forget going back to France with Harry Fellows, the wonderfully gifted dialect poet from Nottingham, along with his devoted son Mick. Harry was totally blind but in Mametz Wood he guided Mick and I unerringly to the exact shell-hole where he had lain, along with a dead young Welshman, almost seven decades earlier. One can never underestimate the trauma that many of that generation suffered, yet sadly were never encouraged to express, constrained by those strict Edwardian values."





They dribbled footballs out into the smoke of the bombardment

Captain Wilfred 'Billy' Nevill

by Clive Harris

WILFRED 'Billy' Nevill was born in Canonbury Park, London 14 July 1894, his father was a coal merchant of some means and Billy grew up, one of seven children, between the two-family homes in Westgate-on-Sea and Twickenham. It was at Dover College that he began to excel at sport, notably captaining the school cricket and hockey teams, whilst also making the rugby XV and long-distance running team.

Whilst at Jesus College, Cambridge, he continued to play hockey, with his sporting strengths recorded in the college

magazine in 1913: *'...his tackling is brilliant, but he does not help his forwards too cleverly. Probably would be better at back, as he can deal the ball a shrewd blow.'*

Within a year, the war had interrupted both his classical studies and sporting progress. As a member of the Cambridge University Officer Training Corps, he was on summer camp when war was declared and by November 1914 held a regular commission in the East Yorkshire Regiment. Rapidly promoted to Captain, Nevill transferred to the 8th East Surrey Regiment, part of the 18th Eastern Division, with whom he was to take part in the opening day of the Battle of the Somme.

Commanding 'B' Company he was chosen to lead the left flank assault of the battalion as they left their trenches towards Montauban on 1 July 1916, famously dribbling footballs before them.

It is worth noting that they were not the first troops to do this: an honour that lies with the London Irish Regiment on the opening day of the Battle of Loos the previous September. Still, it is the story of Captain Billy Nevill's men on the Somme that has been remembered - and often misinterpreted - ever since.

As recently as 2014 Jeremy Paxman re-quoted from Peter Parkers *'The Old Lie: The Great War and Public-School Ethos'* the following assessment...

On 1 July 1916, at the start of the battle of the Somme,

which was to claim 420,000 British casualties, Captain W P Nevill, a company commander in the 8/East Surreys, presented his four platoons with a football apiece. One was inscribed 'The: Great European Cup - Tie Finals, East Surreys v Bavarians. Kick-off at zero'. Another said, 'no referee'. He offered a prize for the first platoon to dribble and pass



● **Nevill's dog tags are in the possession of the Imperial War Museum.**

the ball as far as the German front-line. He was dead before he could present it. Captain Nevill was clearly mad. What the Game had taught these men was the importance of 'manliness' and self-control and obedience to orders.

Nevill had acquired the footballs when on leave in May, but the number is disputed between

two and four, and far from being 'clearly mad' his intention was to use the footballs as both a directional aid and reassurance for his men - giving them a clear focus during the advance.

Standing on the ground today, it is possible to visualise their advance, and also the raking enfilade fire they endured from the higher ground around Casino Point on their left. The war diary for the battalion records the following...

At 7-27 am "B" Company started to move out to their wire, Captain Nevill strolling quietly ahead of them, giving an occasional order to keep the dressing square onto the line of advance. This company took footballs out with them which they were seen to dribble forward into the smoke of our intense bombardment on the Hun front line. The first part of the advance was made with very few casualties, but when the barrage lifted onto the second Hun trench, a very heavy rifle fire and machine gun fire started from our front and left, the latter coming apparently from the craters and the high ground immediately behind them. At 7-50 a.m. the adjutant reported that the Battalion was in the German trenches. Hand to hand fighting went on for a long time in the German Trenches and news received was that Captains Flatau and Pearce had been killed and later it was known that Captain Nevill, Lieuts Soames, Musgrove, and

*2/Lieuts Kelley and Evans
are also killed.*

Billy was buried, alongside his fellow officers in Carnoy Valley Cemetery on 3rd July in a burial service *'attended by 6 representatives of each company, as although the whole of the Battalion wished to be present, it was thought inadvisable to have any large number of men together as the enemy was still occasionally shelling the Valley'*.

Within a week the following appendix (no6) was added to the battalion war diary:

*From Colonel Treeby, Officer Commanding Depot, East Surrey Regiment, Kingston on Thames - 21/7/1916
Historic football arrived and received full honours on parade today. Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and men at Depot, whilst deploring the heavy losses of the 8th rejoice in their devotion and heroism.*

Shortly after the battle, 2/Lt Alcock wrote to Nevill's sister: *"...five minutes before 'zero' hour (7.30 am) your brother strolled up in his usual calm way and we shared a last joke before going over. The Company went over the top very well, with Soames and your brother kicking off with the Company footballs. The surviving men of B Coy (now, alas, a mere handful) had the greatest admiration for Nevill's qualities as a soldier and a Company Commander; but in addition to this, his personal charm and never-failing good humour and courage, the interest he took in every individual under*



● Captain Nevill.

his command, made him loved by everyone."

Major Irwin, who was at the burial of Nevill and his fellow officers, recorded: *"He was one of the bravest men I have ever met and was loved and trusted by his men to such a degree they would have followed him anywhere."*

Nevill's grave is today regularly visited by football fans from around the globe, who help keep the story of his actions alive.

THE FIRST DAY ON THE SOMME



The book that continues to inspire new generations

Bring together a group of Great War historians and ask them which book on the conflict first captured their imagination, and **Martin Middlebrook's** groundbreaking title 'The First Day on the Somme' will be sure to feature. Here two long-standing and respected servants of The Western Front Association share their thoughts on the book's enduring appeal and their memories of the author...

THE middle day of the middle year in the war to "end all wars". A day when the casualty figures beat all the other days of appalling casualties. Everybody interested in the Great War and military history in general knows that this was the worst day in the history of the British Army.

Martin Middlebrook went on a tour to the Somme in 1967, the year after the 50th anniversary. He was so moved by what he had seen and learned (as I think most



***The First Day on the Somme*
– an appreciation by Barbara
Taylor (chairman of the Thames
Valley Branch of the WFA)**

of us are on a first trip to the Somme)

that once back, he decided that he should write a book about that 'First Day' as a set piece battle that can be separated from the other 140 days. He was surprised that nobody had done so before.

This Lincolnshire poultry farmer, with no experience of undertaking such a project, decided to write it using firsthand

accounts, as well as with reference to records and histories. At this time, there were plenty of veterans left to interview. This was a new approach and one pooh-poohed by some 'proper' historians. Martin chose the stories of ten men to follow, whether they survived or not. These men were from all ranks and all the constituent parts of the army that

fought (and won) that war: Regulars, Territorials and New Army. And it was going to be a 'one book' project! Well, we all know how that ended. (As an aside, he told me once that he wished he had started earlier to give Mons and the Gallipoli landings a similar treatment.)

The result was first published for 1 July 1971, having interviewed all the men (including some German veterans) himself. This book is still in print and has been updated and re-published several times. Martin's statistical appendices, compiled in those pre-internet days, have been shown to be incredibly accurate.

It isn't perfect, but few things are. More recent research has shown that some of those iconic stories are not quite as we thought. The Devonshires at Mansel Copse springs to mind.

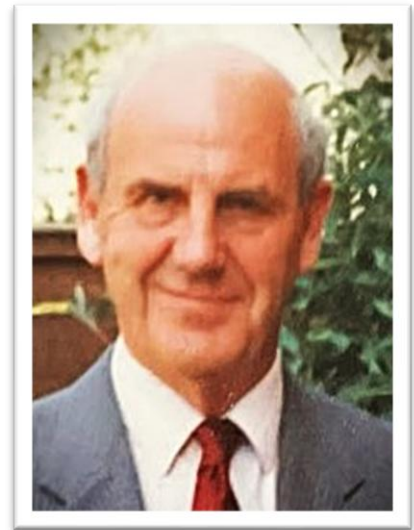
I am pretty certain that I bought my copy in the CWGC office in Arras on my very first trip to the Western Front in 1981. I also learned about the WFA there and resolved to join, which I did on 11 November that year – the first anniversary of the formation of the association.

It wasn't the first book that I read on the war, but it remains the most moving. I also think that it is one of the most important and iconic; ordinary men, writ large, as by the Somme many were volunteers - men who under normal circumstances would not have been in the Army. This is why the impact of that first day was such a disaster, particularly in the industrial north, which produced most of the famed 'Pals' battalions.

I was lucky enough to have Martin come to speak to our branch (Thames Valley) for the last time on the eve of the

centenary. I ran a straw poll and asked the members present if the book had inspired their interest in the Great War. Most hands went up. Along with the WFA, the book's existence has undoubtedly had a big part to play in driving up the visitor numbers to the Western Front over the last 40 years or so.

It is no exaggeration to say that this book has inspired not only 'amateurs', but many leading historians to follow a career in military history. It was the first of a kind, so well-done Martin.



● Martin Middlebrook



An appreciation of Martin and his tours by David Tattersfield (WFA Vice Chairman and Development Trustee and chairman of the Yorkshire Branch)

LIKE SO many of us, my interest in the Great War was sparked by Martin Middlebrook and his iconic book *First Day on the Somme*. It was 1990 and a colleague with whom I worked recommended I read it, lending me his copy.

The next step was to visit the battlefields, which I did – with my brother – in 1990. We went to Normandy and then navigated ourselves over to the Somme. I guess for many people that may have been 'enough' but it must have been shortly after returning home that a piece in *The Daily Telegraph* caught my eye (or perhaps my dad pointed

it out to me). It listed those companies which were running tours to the battlefields. I don't recall now which were featured, but Middlebrook was on the list. I made contact and booked myself on one of his tours. It turned out that 1991 was the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, and Martin took the small group (probably no more than 30 of us) on his well-rehearsed tour.

Over the following years I got to know Martin well. I guess that I was among his younger customers. I once asked him – when he said that the original concept for the book was to have a chapter on at least one man from each division that

- A new lease of life for trench whistles on the tours.



took part on 1 July – what had happened to the unused material. He said that some of it ended up as footnotes. I guess we'll never know what that 'larger' book would have looked like.

Martin's tours:

It's fair to say that Martin was keen to have the tours run on time, and to that end I recall – possibly on my first trip – one of the guests presented him with a WW1 officer's whistle. He used this to corral those on the tour back onto the bus. Some folk were a bit put out to be whistled at, but it made sense to me.

Tours to Normandy, Ypres and even Gallipoli were on his itinerary, and I became a frequent traveller, but I suspect Martin was most comfortable 'on the Somme'. His tours invariably started from Boston in Lincolnshire (where he lived) and the pick-up always seemed at an ungodly hour in the morning. I distinctly recall one group of travellers standing around – probably a bit awkwardly as we would not have known each other - waiting for Martin to arrive with the bus, and one of our fellow travellers saying 'It will be okay once we get to Ypres'. The

“One of the guests presented him with a WW1 officer's whistle. He used this to corral those on the tour back onto the bus.”

group gently pointed out that the tour was heading for the Somme. One of the customers on one tour was a vegetarian. I guess back in the mid-1990s this was more of a problem for catering purposes at the hotels (I think we were heading for the Basilique in Albert). Martin tried to persuade the customer to 'not' be a vegetarian for the week. I don't think this succeeded, but it was a nice try.

It was a feature of these tours that he'd carefully lay out his plans to everyone, but they tended to evaporate on the first day. At least that's my recollection. But Martin's knowledge of the subject was such that this did not matter.

Martin was qualified to drive the buses that were used and

occasionally took the wheel from the regular driver (which usefully enabled us to press on without having to halt for the statutory break). He later went into partnership with Mike Hodgson (who sadly died a few years ago) and Mike subsequently took over the business when Martin retired from touring.

Never truly retiring from writing, Martin's first book was followed by two more on the First World War (*The Kaiser's Battle* and the *Guide to the Somme Battlefields*) and eight on the Second World War. He then wrote two about the Falklands' conflict.

On finally 'retiring' he wrote a 'last' book – returning again to the First World War (*Captain Staniland's Journey*) and another 'last' book: *Your Country Needs You*. I understand he was still writing when he passed in January 2024.

Although Martin Middlebrook's *First Day on the Somme* is the book he is now most remembered for, he frequently said that he thought his book on the first day of the German Spring Offensive (*The Kaiser's Battle*) was a much better book. That may be so, and 'each to their own', but for me *First Day on the Somme* was the spark.



**‘TELL THE REGIMENT I
HOPE THEY DID WELL’**

by Rob Kirk

TWO officers pictured at ease behind the lines in the spring of 1916. Three months later both would be dead – two names among the 19,240 British servicemen listed as killed on the first day of the Battle of the Somme.

Every death tells a story, but these two are particularly noteworthy; not least because of their senior rank and their ages. Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Addison (on the left) was 49 and Major Harry Lewis (right) was 54.

The photograph itself is also of interest: Lieutenant Colonel Addison, Commanding Officer of the 9th Battalion York and Lancaster Regiment, and his second-in-command, Major Lewis, were among hundreds of Allied soldiers photographed by a French couple who produced a collection which remains a stunning testament to those who fought in the war.

However, perhaps the most poignant aspect of the story is that even though Lieutenant Colonel Addison's death is included in the casualties for 1 July, there is evidence that he survived in no-mans land for two or three days and kept a diary whilst dying.

The picture was taken in March 1916, when the two officers had already been on the Western Front for 18 months, having led their men through the Battle of Loos. Now they were at Vignacourt, a village between Abbeville and Amiens, where farmer Louis Thuillier and his wife had set up a temporary studio in their farmyard and, using glass prints, had started taking thousands of pictures of those who came through.

The Thuilliers' extraordinary collection of glass plates lay hidden and forgotten for around 100 years until discovered in an attic. Many are now displayed in a small museum at the farm where the pair worked, and where much is still recognisable.

Many of the photographs – of stunning quality – are included in a book called *Lost Tommies* by Ross Coulthart, published in 2016. It carries details of how the two officers in our picture met their deaths.

The book draws heavily on an account from a friend of Addison and Lewis, Philip Brocklesby, who was a Lieutenant in the 13th York and Lancasters. In 1970,

The remarkable story behind a photograph taken prior to day one on the Somme

Brocklesby, then a very old man, sent a faded print of the Thuillier image and a story about the officers to the regimental journal *The Tiger and Rose*. He held both men in high regard and felt that neither had received due recognition in the official regimental history, describing Lt Col Addison as “pleasant and quiet [...] *not a dynamic man, but a responsible soldier, with right principles about training troops*”.

He added that Major Lewis was a “striking character” – the best “schoolmaster” he ever had, with the “loudest word of command that I ever heard”...

“Major Lewis impressed on me and my friends one lesson at least: that young officers have no privileges and no rights, but only duties. Woe betides any subaltern who ever so much as enquired after his dinner until he had seen his men fed and made comfortable; or who kept them standing at ‘attention’ when they might have been ‘standing at ease.’”

Both men were tough disciplinarians but well-liked. So what happened to them on 1 July? We know that the 9th

Battalion of the York and Lancaster Regiment was part of the 70th Infantry Brigade in the La Boisselle-Thiepval sector, tasked with assaulting the formidable German defence system known as the Nordwerk, between Thiepval and Ovillers.

The first wave – the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and the 8th Battalion York and Lancs – moved out of trenches near the eastern end of Authuille Wood, near a position known as The Nab, at 07:30am. An account in the Brigade diary suggests the troops reached the German second line but faced murderous machine gun fire on both flanks.

The 9th went over-the top in a secondary wave at 08:40am. By this time, the Germans were putting down an intense artillery barrage, and the Brigade diary says one company in the 9th lost half its men before leaving its assembly position. Those uninjured

The Brigade diary suggests the troops reached the German second line but faced murderous machine gun fire on both flanks

were hampered by the dead lying in the trenches and the streams of returning wounded. If they managed to reach no-mans land, they took severe casualties from machine gun fire on both flanks.

According to the rules, Lewis – as second-in command – should have stayed behind, but Brocklesby records that he insisted on “going in with the lads he had trained”. Within minutes, both officers were cut down.

A Lance Corporal in the 9th, John Cook, later described what he could hear in no mans-land: “...it sounded like enormous wet fingers screeching across an enormous pane of glass. Some of the wounded screamed, some muttered, some wept with fear, some called for help, others shouted in delirium or groaned with pain.”

Addison and Lewis were among 23 officers and 517 other ranks from the 9th Battalion recorded among the dead. But it's clear that Lieutenant Colonel Addison didn't die on that morning.

In his seminal book *The First Day on the Somme*, published in 1971, Martin Middlebrook reported that the officer's body wasn't discovered until September. This information came from another officer, Lieutenant Colonel Harold Watson, of the 11th Sherwood Foresters, who was himself wounded on the opening day and lay out in no-man's land until the early hours of 2 July.

In 1930, Watson told Brigadier-General Sir James Edmonds, compiler of the British Army's official

*Upon his body was found
his pocketbook and in
it he had written 'Tell
the Regiment I hope
they did well'.*

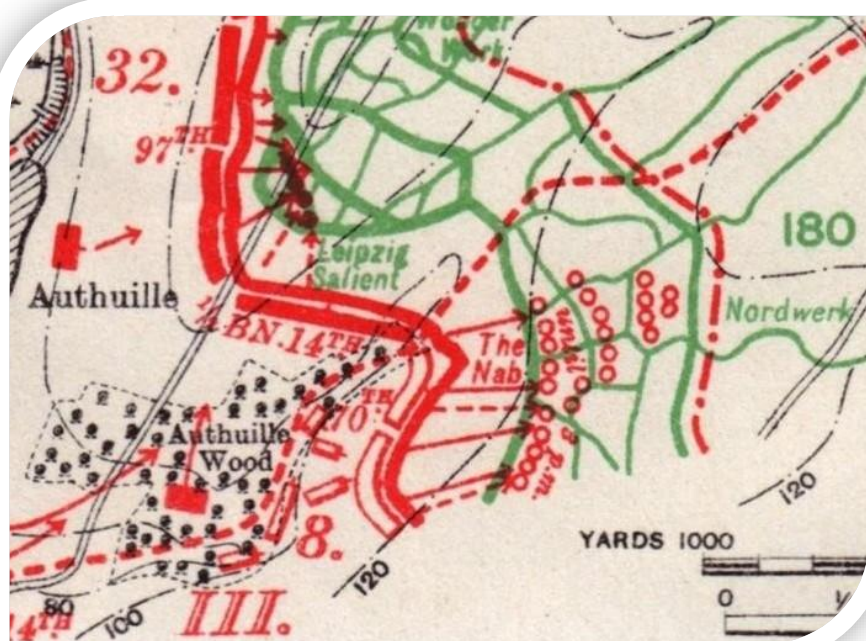
history of the war, *Military Operations*, that he returned to the Somme two months after being injured. Of Addison, Watson said: “His body was not found till the battlefield was searched in September, when his body was found with a short diary showing that he must have lived at least two if not three days before he died.” (CAB 45/191)

This story of the diary is in the history of the 9th Battalion, compiled by J.B.Montague, which appeared in 1934, four years after Watson's comments to Edmonds. It goes into more detail, and states that Lt Col Addison's body was found on 22 September, and he was buried on 25 September at Becourt Wood “with due honour”. The report goes on to say: “Upon his body was found his pocketbook and in it he had written 'Tell the Regiment I hope they did well.'”

Montague added words provided by officers who served under Lt Col Addison: “His last message shows that his thoughts were for the Regiment he so loved and to which he entirely devoted himself since its formation. A fine example of esprit de corps for us all to remember and to live up to.”

Major Harry Lewis died on 1 July. Eight months afterwards, a notice appeared in the *Luton News and Bedfordshire Chronicle*, quoting an account of his death by a soldier who was with him, as told to the Major's widow:

“About 8:15 I had been wounded twice, and was about fifty yards from the German first line when I saw Major Lewis. He was entirely alone, and I saw him put his hand to his left chest. I suggested getting some cover, but he said 'I cannot', and fell. I pulled him to cover behind a slight rise in the ground but still 25 yards behind the German front line. I improved the cover with my entrenching tool, and put my haversack under the Major's head. He was quite comfortable, conscious and cool. I believe he suffered no pain. I





● Glass panels that have remarkably survived from the Thuilliers' collection, as well as the camera they used at the farm where the couple were based and the collection resides.

bandaged a wound in his hand, but could not touch his chest. I then got hit again in the ankle, which made it impossible for me to get the Major any further, but stayed with him until after he died. He was so quiet for such a long time that I cannot say exactly how long he lived, but he had certainly passed away by eight in the evening when I commenced to crawl towards our lines. I am certain Major Lewis had not suffered much pain and was perfectly peaceful."



Lewis had been born at Shrivenham in Berkshire in 1867 and spent 21 years in the Grenadier Guards before WWI. He reached the ranks of Colour Sergeant, Sergeant Instructor and Drill Sergeant, and was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (D.C.M.) for action during the Battle of Omdurman in Africa. He left the service in 1905 and worked as Lodge Keeper on the Duke of Bedford's estate at Woburn. He also ran the Woburn Boy Scout Troop. In 1914, he signed up again, with the York and Lancaster Regiment.

Major Lewis' body was never recovered, and his name is marked on the Memorial to the Missing at Thiepval. He left behind his wife Charlotte and five children.

Lieutenant Colonel Addison had come into the world in 1866 at Cork in Ireland, the son of General Thomas Addison, C.B. and Ellen (Gillespie). Educated at Haileybury College near Hertford from 1880 to 1882, he followed the family's military tradition by going on

to Sandhurst, before joining the Royal Irish Rifles, with whom he served from 1886 until he retired in 1906. In 1914, he rejoined the Army, with the York and Lancaster Regiment, and became Commanding Officer of the 9th Battalion. He was mentioned in despatches twice.

Married to Mildred Jeanne de Gilbert in 1901 at Fort William in Calcutta, their sole child – Marie - married Henry Somerset Parnell Hopkinson, a Lieutenant in the Rifle Brigade in 1928. Lt Col Addison is buried in the military cemetery at Becourt, near Albert.

Author acknowledgements

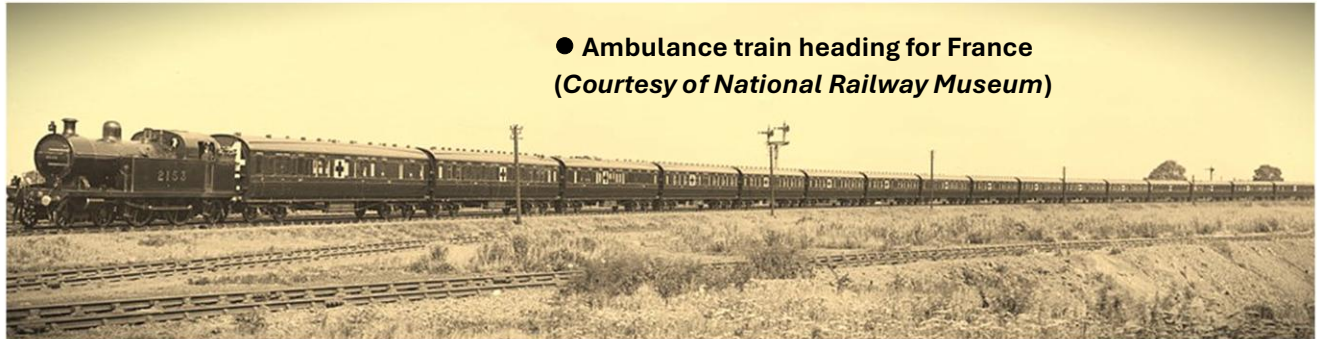
The Vignacourt 14-18 Interpretive Centre (www.vignacourt14-18.com); *The Lost Tommies*, Ross Coulthard, William Collins, 2016; the National Archives (CAB 45/191); Dr Alan Hawkins, historian and genealogist; Paul Humphriss (www.frontlinesandtrenches.org) for Nordwerk trench map; Dr Samuel Koon of Haileybury College; Laura Gardiner at Rotherham Archives; Woburn Heritage Centre, and www.hertsatwar.com for details about Major Lewis.

Veterans remembered



● Veteran **PRIVATE CLARENCE 'Clarrie' JARMAN** seen on a return trip to the Western Front. Clarrie served with the 7th Queen's Royal West Surrey's and fellow Surrey WFA branch member and early WFA champion Kate Pegler recalled: "Clarrie had gone over the top at Montauban on 1 July 1916 and been hit almost immediately in the leg and crawled into a shell hole. He was there, slipping in and out of consciousness all day, until stretcher bearers found him in the evening. The dressing station did not consider his wounds to be urgent given the huge number of more severe casualties, so he was shipped back to the UK. Nine days later, in Scotland, he was treated, but by then gangrene had set in, so his leg had to be amputated. Despite his life-changing injury, the thing that most impressed everyone about Clarrie was his positive attitude to life. He had a great sense of humour and would happily share his experiences." She also remembered him regularly producing his harmonica at the end of WFA branch meetings to play First World War favourites.

MOVING THE WOUNDED



● Ambulance train heading for France
(Courtesy of National Railway Museum)

by Jeremy Higgins

WHY is the history of ambulance trains important? A shortage of manpower was a major strategic disadvantage and therefore the ability to re-cycle the sick and injured crucial. Something of the importance can be gained from knowing that for each of the years of the war between 63 per cent and 124 per cent of the average unit ration strength on the Western Front was hospitalised.

Some 80 per cent of the 6.2 million sick and wounded across the Western Front were evacuated by ambulance trains. Yet the war began with no ambulance trains. (By the start of the Battle of the Somme there were 29 in service.)

Each train was commanded by an RAMC Captain or Major, who was usually a reservist. The crew, of around 40, would include nursing sisters, medical orderlies and administrative staff such as cooks. Locomotion was provided

Ambulance trains and casualty evacuations

by French engines and crews along with a French rail guard.

Ambulance trains (ATs) were the responsibility of GHQ of the BEF. However, provision was demand led as the Director of Medical Services (DMS) at Army level would have the best knowledge of the need for medical evacuation.

In March 1916, in what must have been strategic planning for the Somme offensive, GHQ medical staff assessed the evacuation capacity of ambulance trains. They suggested that as long as it was possible to evacuate 13,000 wounded per day across the whole of the Western Front then they would be able to “keep the situation during severe fighting well in hand”, although they did not define this phrase.

Taking into consideration the GHQ analysis of the number likely to be killed in battle, this calculation meant that so long as there were less than 20,000

casualties in a day then the ambulance train service would be able to cope.

The Director of Medical Services of Fourth Army, Surgeon-General O’Keefe, had the responsibility to plan for the medical evacuation for the Somme battle. Based on the number of Casualty Clearing Stations (CCSs) he calculated that he could evacuate 10,000 on the first day of battle and thereafter 5,000-6,000 per day and that 40,000 could be evacuated in a week.

A railway official told O’Keefe on 20 April 1916 that 14 ambulance trains and eight improvised ambulance trains (IATs) per day could be guaranteed at the start of battle. It is unclear how this official could give such an assurance when ambulance train allocations were made by GHQ. However, O’Keefe built his evacuation plan accordingly, stating in his submission to GHQ that there were sufficient

ambulance trains to “evacuate the estimated casualties”.

Yet on 9 June, some seven weeks after the DMS believed ambulance trains had been “guaranteed”, and some three weeks before battle commenced, it was discovered that the number of trains was considered insufficient. In response to a letter written by General Rawlinson of Fourth Army demanding 12 ATs and six IATs, General Maxwell, the Quartermaster General at GHQ replied that GHQ did not allocate ATs until they were needed, but that there would be no difficulty in providing for the needs of Fourth Army. Maxwell’s response must have settled the DMS, as he recorded on 19 June “all preparations are now completed for active operations all CCSs are practically completed and are taking in patients”.

By 11 am on the 1 July 1916 the first wounded were arriving at the CCSs some 10 to 25 miles to the rear, where surgical facilities were available. By the end of the day there had been 57,470 casualties of which some 35,493 were wounded. Of the 31,246 Fourth Army casualties 14,672 had arrived in Field Ambulance facilities and 7,764 into the CCSs. Yet only five ambulance trains had arrived evacuating 2,317 from the CCSs.

Martin Middlebrook in *The First Day of the Somme* was unequivocal, stating that the response by ambulance trains on 1 July was “disastrous”. This is clearly a reference to only five trains evacuating from Fourth Army when Rawlinson had demanded 12 ATs and six IATs. Middlebrook’s assessment has been reinforced by Mayhew who makes a substantial claim that within a week “the whole system of transit simply broke down”,



● Inside an ambulance train (*National Railway Museum*)

which has been repeated by Andrew Roberts.

A different perspective emerges, however, if we consider that ambulance trains were not required in any one day, but regularly from the time of the initial assault. As the assault did not commence before 07.30, that left only 61 per cent of the day remaining, taking a pro-rata requirement for ambulance trains that would equate to only 8.28 being required.

It would take some hours to evacuate the casualties to the CCSs. So even those injured in the opening minutes of battle would not be available to be evacuated before say 1030am. That would leave 56 per cent of the day, and a pro-rata requirement for 6.72 trains, not significantly different from the five that were supplied.

By looking at evacuation in this manner, over the first 24 hours

from 10.30am, ten ambulance trains and two temporary ambulance trains evacuated 7,147 casualties. This was 83 per cent and 25 per cent of what Rawlinson originally demanded - certainly not a disaster.

Even by this 24-hour approach it is however still clear that insufficient ambulance trains were provided. The question is, though, could more ambulance trains have been supplied?

An analysis of the war diaries shows that 18-29 ambulance trains were active evacuating on 1 July, and this number leapt to 24-29 on 2 July.

Theoretically it would have been possible to have provided additional ATs. Seven ambulance trains could have been brought forward and used on 1 July or early on 2 July. For example, AT6 was not despatched until 4pm, arriving on the Somme for loading at 11pm, having been

static all day. The OC spent the day training crew on “evacuating the contents and systems of abdomen”.

AT1 and AT27, which were utilised on ‘normal’ evacuation from First and Second Army areas on 2 July, were parked up and could have been used on 1 July. The penalty would have been a build-up of patients within the CCSs of Armies not engaged in offensive operations.

GHQ, however, did not commit additional resources to the Somme. Suggesting, perhaps, that they did not consider that there was a need to provide more immediate evacuation capacity.

It is possible that those trains that were idle were intentionally pre-positioned for follow-on support over the next days. A striking example is AT16 which arrived at Doullens at 10.58 on 1 July where, incredibly, the crew were given leave until 5pm, and did not leave until 20.45 when it was despatched to Warlincourt, just up the road, for loading with Third Army casualties.

In three days, 35,368 casualties arrived at the 16 CCS of the Fourth Army. There was a definite build-up of casualties in CCSs in the first three days of July.

What is remarkable though is the rate with which the backlog of casualties cleared. Indeed, by 11am on 3 July the DMS reported that congestion in CCSs was relaxing and that ATs were coming up more satisfactorily. By the 5 July occupancy of CCSs was below the design capacity of 6,000.

Over the first five days of battle there were 55 ambulance trains evacuating, sixteen on 3 July

alone. Furthermore, the DMS got his planning right, evacuation of 41,946 after six days versus a projection of 40,000 injured, almost precisely what was planned, is not indicative of a system of transit that had broken down.

The real issue was not so much the evacuation of the casualties, nor even the scale of the casualties, but the apparent failure of the Fourth Army medical staff to predict the possible number of casualties and to prepare accordingly.

There is no evidence that either Fourth Army or GHQ predicted the likely casualty rate for the Somme battle. Casualty statistics were compiled daily and returned to GHQ so there is

This is an edited version of a paper given to the AGM/Spring Conference of May 2017. If you would like to read the item in full, it can be found in the *Bulletin* magazine archive on the website in issue 108 (pp53-55)

no reason to believe that such information was not readily available. Had they compared the casualty figures for 40 infantry battalions in action on the first day of the Battle of Loos on 25 September 1915 with the number of battalions to be engaged at the Somme it would have become apparent that Fourth Army had considerably



● **An ambulance train at Huddersfield station, 1916**
(*National Railway Museum*)

underestimated their likely number of wounded.

At Loos the losses of the 40 battalions in action were, initially, 322 per battalion. In estimating a loss rate of 10,000 wounded on day one O’Keefe was projecting a loss of 100 per battalion for the 125 who were involved in the first day. If the same casualty rate had been assumed from the Loos battle then the loss rate would not have been 10,000 but more like 21,200 to 26,600 depending upon the number of battalions.

You might be pondering why they did not use the historic information. Was it because the Generals generally did not believe that the Somme attack could be so costly?

The official history recorded that “no thought of failure had entered anyone’s heads”. The fundamental problem was therefore that a far greater number of casualties were incurred on the first day than had been anticipated.

Dr Jack Sheldon

on the appalling conditions from the perspective of the Germans

THE SOMME area in 2026 is the battlefield of the 1918 victors. Aside from the cemeteries, there are almost no German traces left. That said, attached to the door of the chapel at the north end of Redan Ridge is a small plaque (pictured right), placed in 1964 by a party of veterans of Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment 1 of 1st Bavarian Reserve Division. We shall return to the reason for it shortly.

Even at the height of summer, on 1 July 1916, the ground around Thiepval was described as 'unbelievably muddy'. Three and a half months and millions of shells later, the battlefield was already a quagmire, then it began to rain seriously. It rained on 15, 17 and 18 October then, on 19, there was heavy rain. A brief pause was followed by more rain on 23, 25, 26 and 27 October and three exceedingly wet days on 28 – 30 October. The quagmire became a complete swamp, movement of any description was almost impossible and the fighting degenerated into local small-scale actions which were not going to alter the course of the battle in any significant way.

The result of all of this was that fighting for places such as the Butte de Warlencourt and, subsequently, Redan Ridge from mid-November, during the so-



Martyrdom in the winter

called Battle of the Ancre, took place in the most appalling conditions imaginable, driving men to the point of utter exhaustion and despair. The sea of mud in which men struggled for survival provided a

dismal backdrop for a winter of unrelieved misery for both sides until the German Army pulled back to the *Siegfried Stellung* [Hindenburg Line] the following March. Naturally, the official ending of the main battle did not

mean that everything fell silent: there were small scale attacks on Redan Ridge from time to time and constant artillery fire to add to the utter misery of life in the water-filled shell holes. This brings us back to the BRIR1 plaque mentioned at the start.

“The position the regiment occupied on the Ancre”, wrote the regimental historian, “was the most desolate the regiment experienced in the entire war [...] During the Battle of the Somme the riverbed of the Ancre was totally destroyed, so the entire area was now flooded. Heavy rainfall in late December and the constant bad weather throughout the deployment turned the whole place into a sea of mud. Whilst in Flanders at the end of 1917 it was always possible to find some solid ground, here it was simply not possible. It was necessary to test the going with every step in order to avoid falling chest deep into a crater and all movement without a stick was quite impossible. The trenches had all collapsed and were only recognisable here and there. The sentries stood up to their knees in mud. Only some of the dugouts were usable and they were partly flooded. The mud that kept flowing into them had to be bailed out all the time [...] movement and orientation was extraordinarily difficult; all buildings had been totally smashed and the only signposts by day were occasional tree stumps. By night the difficulties were beyond description [...]

“The enemy fire was intended to destroy us completely. Through the use of almost exclusively heavy calibre shells, the British brought down continuous destructive fire, rising to drum fire at times on the positions, the supports and the rear areas [...] Sentries who lacked all



protection from the fire were buried alive several times some days, but the most dangerous was fire directed at our dugouts and observed by enemy airmen. In two days, twelve 2nd Battalion dugouts were wrecked, forcing the occupants to crowd into the remaining seven [...] This led to the worst disaster and greatest loss of life in a single incident. The two entrances to a dug out which held most of 8th Company were collapsed by accurate gunfire. Hearing cries for help, neighbouring sections ran to the rescue but the British, having spotted them, drove them back with shrapnel fire. Despite a night long search it proved impossible to locate the dugout and, when dawn broke, the sea of mud had engulfed the entire place. Two officers and 48 men succumbed in an appalling manner to the ingress of liquid mud.”

This was, perhaps, an extreme example, but as a description of the sheer, unadulterated, misery of frontline life that winter, this report by Reserve Leutnant Schröder of Fusilier Regiment 35 could hardly be bettered...

“It was a constant tough battle against rain, snow, mud and more mud. The battle line was dug along the line of shell craters, which filled up with water. All day long the men stood in the morass, their roof nothing more than tent halves. Their rifles, caked with filth and

unusable, served as tent poles. The elements were a stronger force than discipline or the will of the commanders. The boots of many men were simply sucked off their feet and remained lost and beyond recovery in the mud. Many wore a look of total despair. Each platoon had to stick this out for forty-eight hours at a time: an eternity. I arranged for cognac, as much as I could get my hands on, to be brought forward for the troops. I took a bottle and went from man to man, talking to them and consoling them with thoughts of relief. Was it any wonder, however, that one morning a sentry post was empty, that all that was left were two rifles and knapsacks? We commanders were content if we could just get our men to stick it out. Effective defence of the position was simply out of the question. It was fortunate that it was hardly better for those opposite. When the rain was simply too awful to bear, then peace reigned for a few hours in the two lines and friend and foe climbed out of their holes, at least to have a good stretch.”

Small wonder that cases of desertion multiplied, that doctors were forced to warn that continuing exposure of men to such conditions would lead to their health being totally wrecked, but somehow the majority did manage to endure, leaving us to marvel in awe...

Original Item: Tony Spagnoly

“PRIVATE Smith, one of the ordnance men in our team, was killed tampering with a 106 fuse. Chinese now totally frightened of job and there is every possibility of their refusing to carry on until an inquiry is carried out.”

The above is a diary entry dated November 21, 1919, from Lt Frank Coxon (formerly of the 7th Royal Fusiliers) who was spending an inhospitable winter out on a lonely outpost on the site of the old Hindenburg Line at Bellicourt, close to the St Quentin Canal.

In an article researched by WFA member Tony Spagnoly (first printed in the *Bulletin* in June 2000) we were informed that Coxon was in command of a small section of NCOs and 26 Chinese coolies engaged in the dangerous task of salvaging and defusing explosives from the former battlefields. We also learned that the death of ordnance team member Private Smith resulted in the Chinese members of the unit downing tools and refusing to work.

The fighting had been intense in the area that Coxon and his men were based and the amount of ordnance they were tasked with handling a shock: after just four days on the job he recorded: “Total defusing now up to 301 and we added a further 220 today by utilising the elevating gear of an old German minenwerfer we found in a nearby trench to act as a vice.”

Equally disturbing was his description of the Heath Robinson-style methods involved in making safe a live 4.5 high explosive shell (of which he says there

were “lots”): “1. Two benches of six men each. 2. Hammer and chisel operator for removing punch dabs. 3. His assistant to hold shell. 4. Hammer key operator to start the fuse. 5. Another assistant to hold the shell. 6. Another man to place same in basket... carefully!”

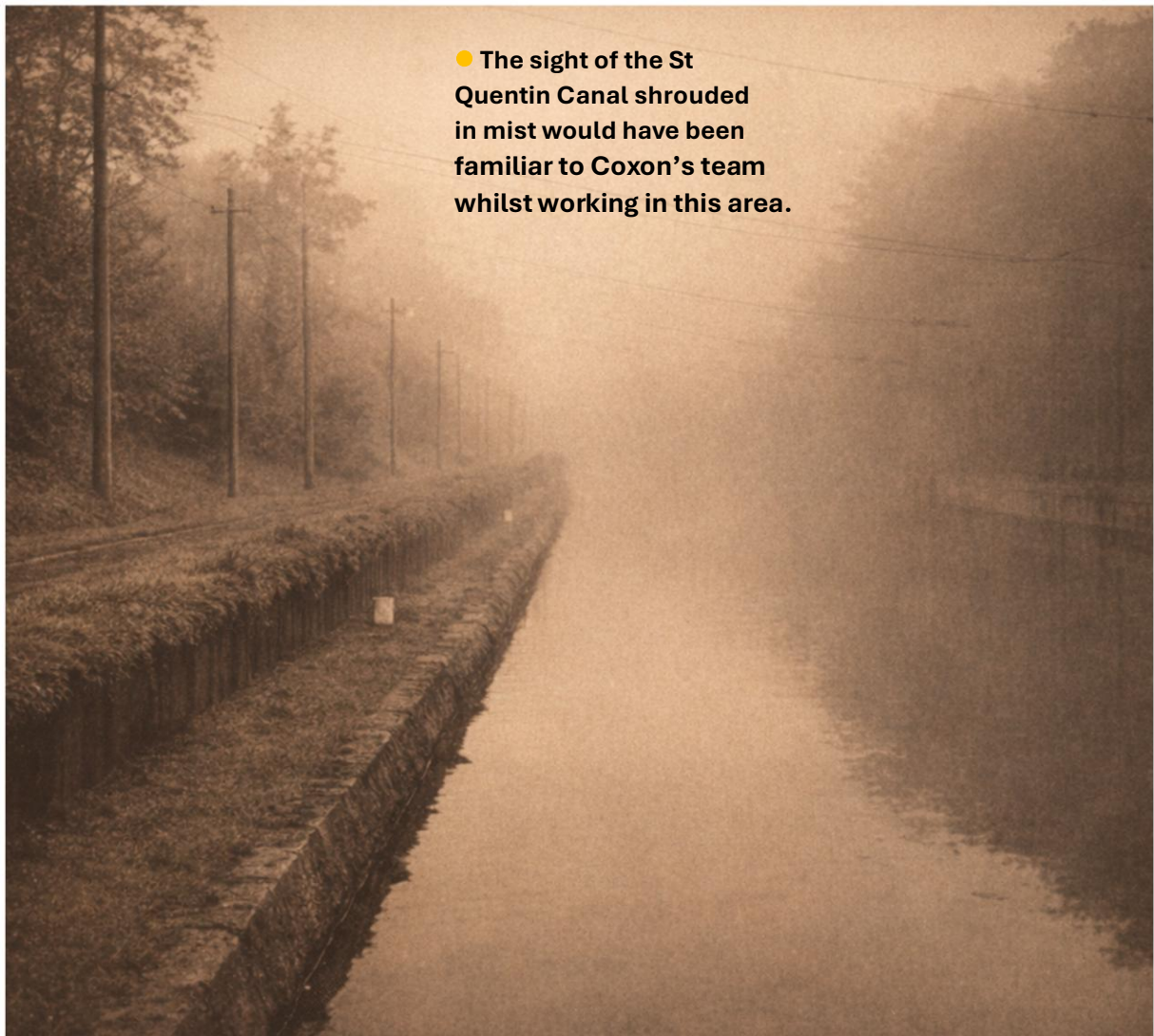
IN a letter to his mother three days after the death of Private Smith, Coxon wrote: “I am sorry to have kept you all for so long without a letter but I have had big trouble here recently. Well, last Friday (21 November) I had a man killed on the job – not through the process of defusing, which is quite a safe procedure, but because he tried to take a 106 fuse to pieces and it went off in his hand.

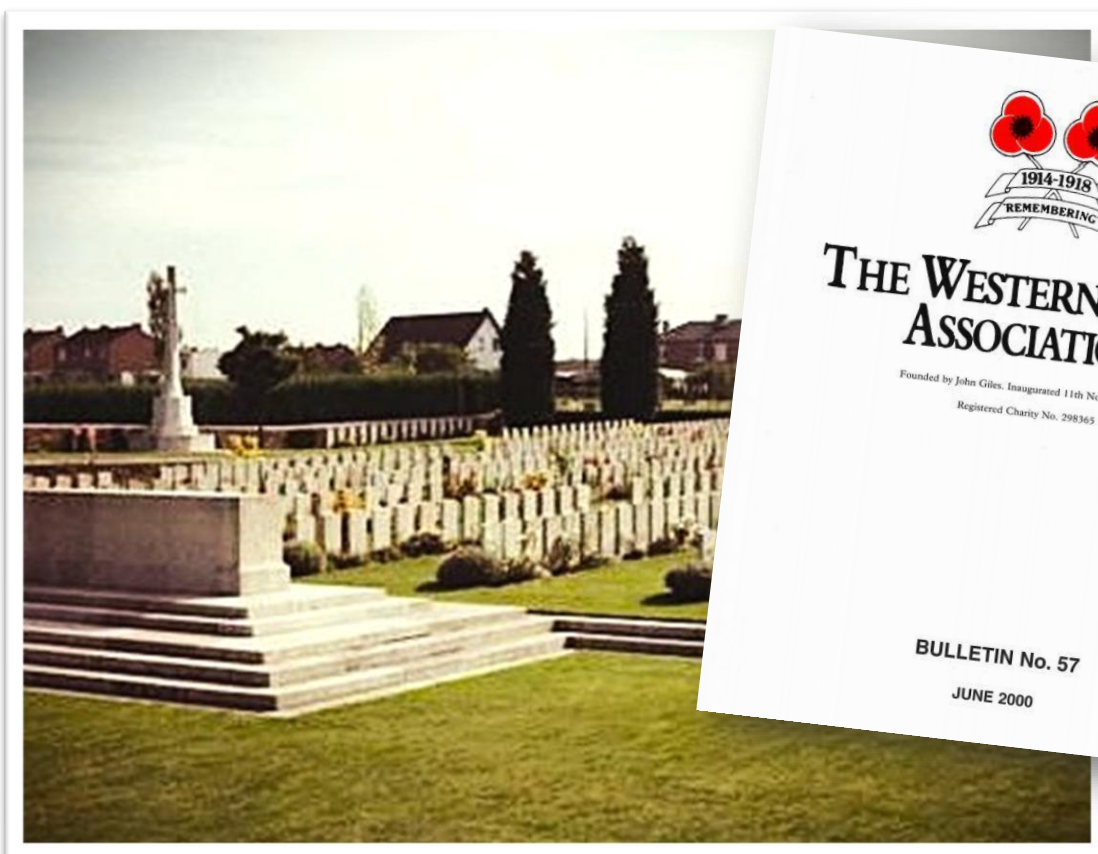
“No need to go into details mother but his injuries were terrible and as there is no medical assistance nearer than Roisel - 15 kilometres away - the poor man died in half an hour. No wonder the Chinese were terrified and work has stopped

● Frank Coxon pictured in 1916 and, below, members of a Chinese labour team working on the Western Front in 1919.



Chinese down tools after death of 'Private Smith'





● The Roisel Communal Cemetery Extension, above, is where Private 'Smith' (presumed to be a pseudonym) was said to have been buried by Coxon. Inset is the cover of the edition of the *Bulletin* in which the story was first carried and, left, unexploded ordnance remains a common site for modern day pilgrims to the area.

immediately prior to the death that his Chinese crew were becoming "very discontented".

Heavy snowstorms had added to pre-existing delays to the arrival of warm rations, which was resulting in "growling", and on November 19 Coxon penned: "Chinese very insubordinate owing to shortage of food and I sense trouble. I notice all fresh water for the Chinese Labour Corps, Battlefield Salvage and Graves teams brought to us by an officer as the one driver available became a casualty on the old battlefield."

Deaths were clearly not uncommon, but the fatality among a member of their own team resulted in the Chinese downing tools and leaving Coxon with no choice but to suspend all work. In a bid to try and head-off a full-scale revolt, he made a report out



I could only bandage the poor man and exhausted every means trying to get an ambulance along these awful roads but failed. The nearest decent telephone was several miles away. We could do nothing to save him. The ambulance finally got here at 10pm to take poor Smith away. He will be buried at Roisel tomorrow. So you see, the Great War still claims its victims."

The timing of the tragedy could not have been worse for Coxon, who had recorded in his diary in the days

Honouring the unsung

● ONE of the key roles the WFA has played over the years has been its research into lesser-known aspects of the First World War - shining a light into the shadows to illuminate the oft-unsung heroes and heroines. The work of the salvage teams and Chinese labourers is no exception and was highlighted at the annual Armistice Day event at Whitehall, London, in 2017, when previously unseen levels of media coverage from China and the East came courtesy of the decision to honour the work of the Chinese Labour Corps.

Members of London's Chinese cultural community were invited to lay wreaths (above) and Karen Soo, the granddaughter of one of the corps, described how grateful she was: "I am sure my grandfather and all 140,000 men of the Chinese Labour Corps are very pleased, as well as all their officers. I feel very privileged to have been a part of it."



to Captain Wicks, the Deputy Assistant Director of Ordnance Supply at La Chapelle, and asked him to come and address his team "at once".

Wicks arrived on November 23 and Coxon got an assurance that no more work would be done by his team until the No. 58 Casualty Clearing Station could be organised to offer proper medical arrangements in the case of any further accidents. In a bid to close the chapter, Private Smith was "buried very quickly" (the next day) in the temporary British cemetery at Roisel.

Coxon claimed that the accident had been Smith's own fault for tampering with a fuse, but he added in his diary that the Chinese were "having none of it and refused to proceed". He continued: "Owing to this, I learnt from Colonel Turner of 57 Labour Company that white personnel might be provided. Chinese now employed around the camp in general tidying

operations. Military Police employed at night to secure the camp."

A full-scale revolt does appear to have been avoided and Coxon, who had seen action during the conflict itself, would finally be demobbed in January 1920 and live for a further 55 years.

It would be several years after Coxon and the Chinese coolies had left before restrictions were lifted in many of the worst hit areas of the Western Front and the civilian populations allowed to return.

● *There are no records of a Private Smith in Roisel Cemetery or of a man with this name having died in November 1919. It is assumed that Coxon created the pseudonym 'Smith' to protect the man's identity – not least as he was accusing him of having been responsible for his own death.*

HOUSTON Stewart Hamilton Wallace was born in Birkenhead in 1893. The only child of William Hamilton, a Justice of the Peace, and Emily Constance, the daughter of wealthy businessman Joshua Heap, he grew up at the Nook, Shrewsbury Road, Birkenhead, and was educated at Fettes College, Edinburgh, before attending Merton College, Oxford.

Both Houston's parents had died by the outbreak of war, his father in a tragic accident in 1912 after slipping and impaling his arm and severing an artery on railings at the entrance to their home, and his mother following a short illness in April 1914.

Houston gained a commission into the 10th battalion Worcestershire Regiment on 2 October 1914 and embarked for France on 1 August 1915. He was killed in action on the Somme less than 12 months later on 22 July 1916 during an attempt to capture an elusive German machine gun post on the road between the village of Bazentin-le-Petit and High Wood.

As both of Captain Wallace's parents had passed away, his Aunt Beatrice was listed as his next of kin. Just two days after the Armistice, on 13 November 1918, she began her search for the location of Houston's burial site with a letter to the Imperial War Registration Commission:

Sirs,
I should be much obliged if you could furnish me with particulars regarding the grave of the late Captain Houston Stewart Hamilton Wallace, 10th Battalion Worcestershire Regiment who was killed in action on July 22, 1916, at Bazentin-le-Petit. ***** from his commanding officer

Birkenhead to Bazentin

*In July last year, a rededication service was held in the village of Bazentin at the Houston Wallace Memorial. **Steve Benson** of the Cheshire Roll of Honour provides the backstory to the man and memorial*

Colonel Sole that he was buried together with two brother officer's (One I believe named Fish) at a point slightly west of Bazentin-le-Petit and that a cross has been placed over his grave. Any particulars will be received with gratitude, Yours faithfully (Miss) Beatrice Heap.

Sadly, she was informed that the location of the grave had been lost. Her letter from Colonel Sole had however stated that Houston had been buried near to a calvary at Bazentin. Beatrice then set about identifying the location of where the calvary had been and, on successfully doing so, had a replacement made which she had dedicated to Houston. In subsequent years she kept pressing the IWGC to support and maintain the Calvary and in November 1925 paid £122 for its upkeep for 20 years.

Beatrice passed away in 1940 and after WW2 the IWGC tried to find other family members, but none were discovered. In 1991 the Western Front Association recorded the memorial, though only its dilapidated cairn remained. Over the next three years work was done to restore it - the original cross having been discovered by historian Paul Reed. Unfortunately, over the ensuing 30 years the memorial again fell into a poor state.

So it was that in the autumn of 2023 the Cheshire Roll of Honour, with support from Terry Berry and Rick Smith of Western Front Services Ltd, started a project to restore the memorial and improve access to the site. After two years of fundraising, including generous donations from the WFA and Michèl Admiraal RA MA. (WFA European Officer), agreements were



- Beatrice pictured at the memorial she had researched and financially supported and (inset above) an example of the poor condition of the memorial in the 1990s and more recent work to restore it.

reached with the Mayor of Bazentin and work on the memorial site completed.

The calvary itself had been delivered to the Grosvenor Estate in Chester and His Grace the Duke of Westminster donated the oak for its restoration. On the 22 July 2025 a rededication service was held in the village hosted by the mayor of Bazentin and the Cheshire Roll of Honour.

The memorial now has a dedicated webpage to help fund the continued maintenance of the site.
<https://houston-memorial.cheshireroll.co.uk>

The Cheshire Roll of Honour lists over 33,000 individuals from the county who have served in conflict.
<https://cheshireroll.co.uk>

Turn overleaf for details of Houston's movements on the Somme in July 1916

Houston Stewart Hamilton Wallace's attack with the 10th Worcestershire Regiment



● Houston sitting on the ground, first on the right on front row, with his fellow officers.
(Picture courtesy of Worcestershire Regimental Museum)

ON 20 July 1916, the 10th battalion Worcestershire Regiment rested all day and at 8pm proceeded to the line just north of Bazentin-le-Petit to relieve the 98th Brigade. On arriving at the Brigade HQ, everything had altered due to attacks being repulsed out of High Wood and great confusion resulting from guides not knowing their way and the village being heavily shelled.

The following morning the battalion took up a line before dawn (see map on facing page) where they were joined by the 2nd Worcestershire Regiment. The Staffordshire Regiment were

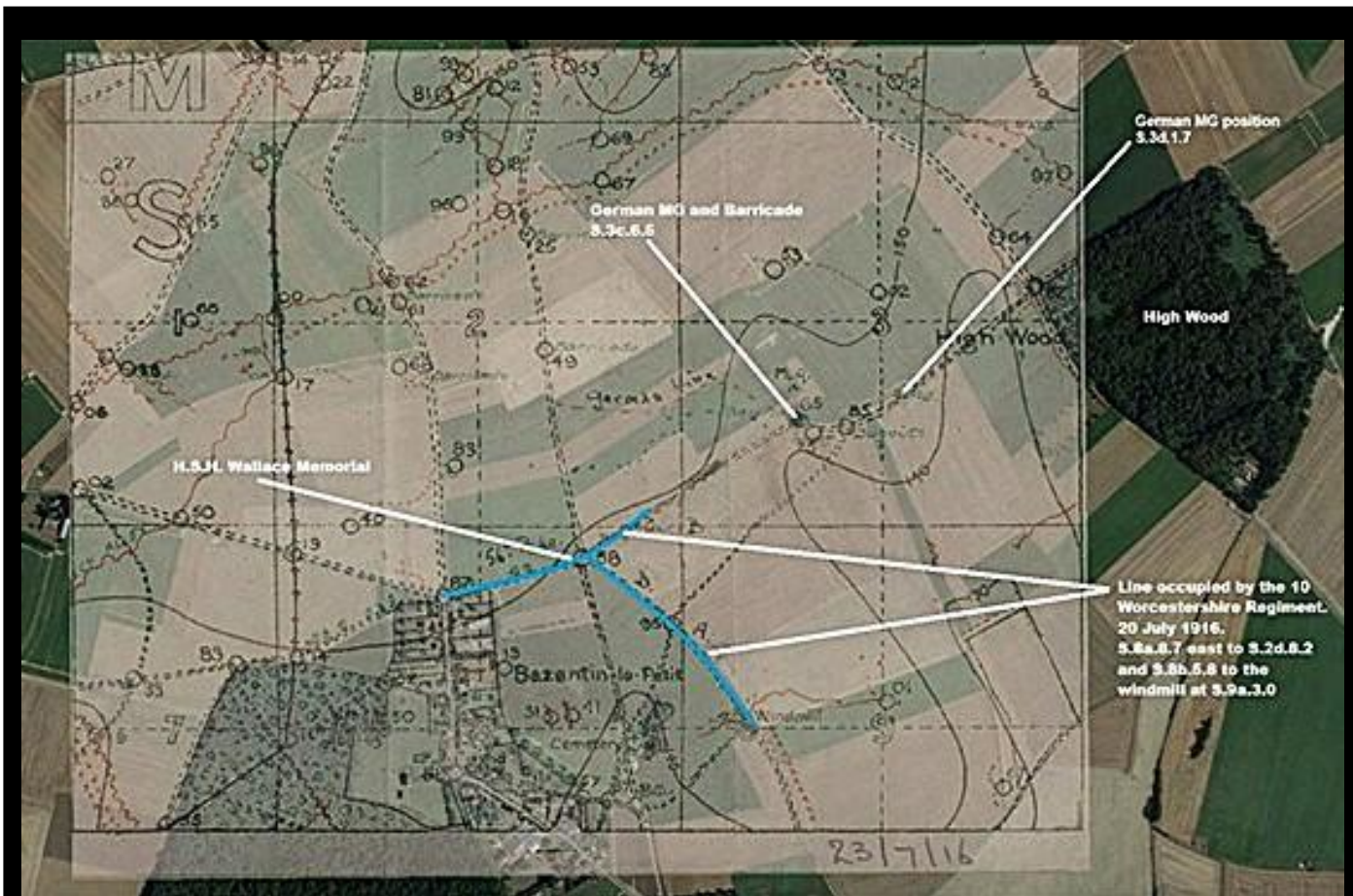
by Steve Benson

in support. During the morning WINDMILL - used as an Observation Post - was shelled causing about 15 casualties. An attempt to capture a German machine gun at 3pm failed and another attack made on it after dark was repulsed by heavy fire.

At 1am on the 22 July another attack was made on the machine gun. The attack was a failure and the greater part of two platoons of 'C' Coy missing. (It was afterwards reported by a Sergeant leading one of the platoons that the machine gun

was firing from the barricade at S.3.c.6.5.)

By 11.30am Germans were observed on the road at High Wood and fired upon by Lewis guns. During the morning another plan was put together for the capture of their elusive machine gun: The Corps 'Heavies' would bombard for an hour and at zero hour an attack would be launched. The plan was a failure, no zero hour was notified and none of the 'Heavies' fired. 'D' Coy, having mistaken the orders, advanced to the attack but were driven back by heavy machine gun fire and shrapnel. They had considerable casualties -



● Map overlay showing the position of the key points of action. (Courtesy of the Cheshire Roll of Honour)

including Captain Houston Stewart Hamilton Wallace.

In an extract from Stack (pp183-184) it is stated: "Mistaking their orders, D Company of the 10th Worcestershire advanced unsupported, only to be driven back by a storm of fire. That evening orders were received that the battalion and the 8th Gloucestershire would attack a trench which the enemy had newly dug from the machine-gun position on the 'intermediate spur' to the northward to link up with the Switch-Line. Preparations were in progress when counter-orders came that the 10th Royal Warwickshire

would replace the 10th Worcestershire for the attack. That change was made at the last minute ('Zero' was midnight. The message arrived 11.20pm) and inevitably caused confusion: the Royal Warwickshire were unable to arrive in time and the attack, made disjointedly, failed with heavy loss. The platoons of the 10th Worcestershire made their way back through heavy shellfire to a position in reserve in the valley just north of Flatiron Copse. There the battalion rested throughout July 23rd [...] after dark the 10th Worcestershire marched back into bivouac in Becourt Wood."

The full list of casualties for the 10th Worcestershire, July 20th-23rd: Killed - 3 officers (Capt. W. F. Tree, Capt. H. S. H. Wallace, 2/Lt. J. Fish (all on 22nd) and 18 men wounded - 5 officers (2/Lt. W. M. Hartland and 2/Lt. O. A. Hicks (on the 21st), Lt. L. N. Mason, Lt. W. S. Scammell, 2/Lt. C. G. Weld (on 22nd) and 71 other ranks. Missing - 64 N.C.O.s and men.

by Dr Martin Purdy

THE church situated at the heart of Albert, the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Brebieres, is best known to war pilgrims for the story of 'The Leaning Virgin'. A gilded golden sculpture of the Virgin Mary holding her child to heaven, it was installed in 1897 and became a target of German shellfire as a suspected look-out post. Perilously suspended at a ninety-degree angle throughout the Battle of the Somme, a superstition grew around it – the war would end when it fell and whichever side was responsible for it would lose. Ironically, it was British artillery that finally toppled it in 1918.

The statue, covered in 40,000 sheets of gold leaf, subsequently went missing and whilst a replacement statue was recast and lifted into place in 1929, most of the other items from within the ruins of the church were lost to be never replaced.

However, in an edition of the *Bulletin* of October 1992 a short item appeared under the heading 'Returned to Albert', accompanied by an image of a damaged work of religious art.

The painting is one of the fourteen Stations of the Cross, and the damage caused by shrapnel during the Great War. Like most of the other artefacts in the church, it is unlikely it would have survived if it had not been for the actions of a lowly British infantryman; Private Cecil Harry Buckingham of the Bedfordshire Regiment (no.30046).

Cecil had come across the painting inside the church in 1917 after the Battle of the Somme had subsided. A man of great faith, who would become a clergyman after the war and serve as a military chaplain throughout the duration of the Second World War, he clearly felt compelled to act.

Lost and found in Albert



Cecil rolled the painting up, inserted into a tube and posted it home. It was then only by an act of chance on his death that its existence came to light...

IN the early 1990s WFA member Roger Negus, a former police officer, met an elderly woman called Nellie Buckingham in Peterborough, and during their conversation the topic of the Great War arose. Nellie was impressed by Roger's clear enthusiasm for the subject and told him that he must come to her home and see a painting that had been saved from the war by her recently deceased husband, a clergyman called Cecil.

Nellie was keen for Roger to take custodianship of the painting, and he, in-turn, felt it only right that it should be returned as quickly as possible to its rightful home back on the Somme.

With the help of local museum curator Martin Howe and fellow WFA member David Grey, in February 1992 Roger and David were able to travel to France where they were welcomed at Albert Town Hall by the Mayor.

A ceremony took place at which the painting was formally handed back to the people of the town from which it had come.



● The shrapnel damaged painting pictured in a past edition of the *Bulletin* following its return to Albert. Apart from a chandelier, it is believed that the painting is the only item from inside the original church to have survived the war. On the facing page is a modern picture of the church and statue.

Veterans remembered



● Veteran TOM EASTON MBE is pictured with Richard Dunning of the WFA at Lochnagar in 1980. Richard recalled: "I got to know Tom during his regular trips over to the Somme with dear friend George Harwood of Newcastle in the 1970s. One abiding memory is a tradition that we had of walking up to Bécourt Wood Cemetery in the late evening following our 1 July dinner at the Hotel de la Paix. Tom had lost several of his friends just prior to the attack when a shell landed amongst them - and Tom had been sent away on an errand. This affected Tom greatly and, as George and I sat and waited, Tom would slowly walk along the gravestones in the darkness and - with his cigarette lighter illuminating his path - update each of his pals with news from their village and their families. Tears would roll down his cheeks, and you realised that the trauma of that battle stayed with many of them all their lives; even someone as tough as a lifelong pitman like Tom."

The boys of the Somme

Early WFA member, historian and tour guide Paul Foster has completed the second volume of his research into boy soldiers on the Thiepval Memorial. Here he talks about his inspirations and work...



MY GRANDFATHER, Frank Heesom, served in the Royal Field Artillery during the First World War. Growing up he recounted stories of his experiences and taught me the songs he sang. Strangely, he never did the same with his children when they were growing up.

I spent most of my childhood, when not at school, in Europe with my parents who took me to the battlefields of both World Wars. I got to know the Ypres Salient well as we were befriended by a Flemish family who lived an hour to the north of Ypres.

I have always had a passion for history and was an early member of the WFA - becoming, with Shaun Caveney, the first tour organisers. During the first few years we had the pleasure of the company of a large number of veterans whose contribution was incredible.

I became the Hon Secretary of the WFA and, under John Giles, started the *Bulletin* and helped

expand the Branch system throughout the UK and abroad.

I have visited the battlefields of the First World War for many years. Every grave or name carved on a memorial records the supreme sacrifice made by an individual. The *raison d'être* for producing the books I have has been to pay tribute to all who served, and particularly those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

From 2006 I started writing a series entitled *In Continuing & Grateful Memory*, based on a selection of cemeteries and those buried in them or on the memorials where the names of the missing are commemorated. The first task was to select who should be included: I decided that those lost from the major public schools was a good start as each school had good records and photographs of their pupils who had died. The selection moved on to include all underage soldiers, senior officers of Lieutenant Colonel and above, VC, AM, DCM holders, and those 'shot at dawn'.

For each individual I include in my books I write a cameo that

includes information relating to their family background, education, employment and interests, followed by their war service. This allows the reader to follow the movement of an individual, and that of their Battalion, in detail.

An extensive range of source material has been used to compile the publications from contemporary books and family records to the Internet. For some individuals the information was relatively easy to access, for others it was a case of following clues and putting the pieces together like a jigsaw.

I was inspired to write the two-volume set *The Boys On Thiepval Memorial* because of the popularity of a set I wrote on *The Boys Killed In Belgium*.

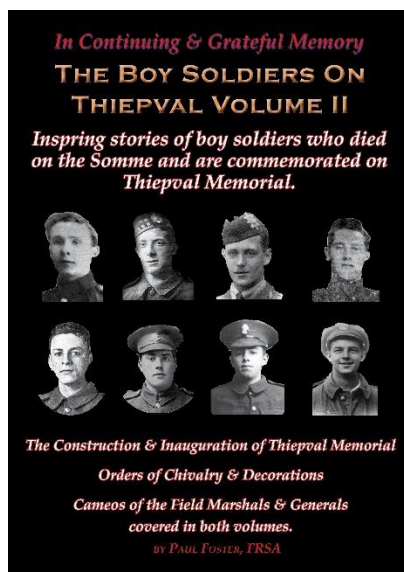
One of the biggest challenges for the Thiepval books was that not everyone listed by the CWGC as being underage is correctly recorded. In addition, there are many whose ages are not recorded on the database. I have included in the books all 15, 16 and 17-year-old other ranks who are known to me and all known

18-year-old officers with birth dates established before inclusion on the databases.

The length of each boys' service at the front varies considerably. Some had served for two years or more before falling on the Somme and others were killed on their first visit to the front line.

The books are illustrated with contemporary illustrations coupled with original photographs and postcards.

In *Volume II*, following the cameos on those commemorated, there is an extensive illustrated section on the construction and opening of the Thiepval Memorial in August 1932 and an illustrated biographical section on the various Field Marshals and Generals mentioned in the narrative.



Find out more about Paul's books and his commitment to Great War research via www.remembering1418.com

31173 PRIVATE JOHN HENRY BROWN

12th Battalion Manchester Regiment

Died on Friday 4th August 1916, aged 16

Commemorated on Pier and Face 14 C.

John Henry Brown

John was born in Openshaw,

Manchester, son of James and Margaret Brown, of 10 Chapman Grove, Hulme, Manchester. He had elder siblings James, George, Sidney, William, Alice Mary and Lily.



He volunteered on Monday 17th January 1916 when John claimed to be 19 years 3 months old, working as a lift attendant in the Constitutional Club in Manchester. John was

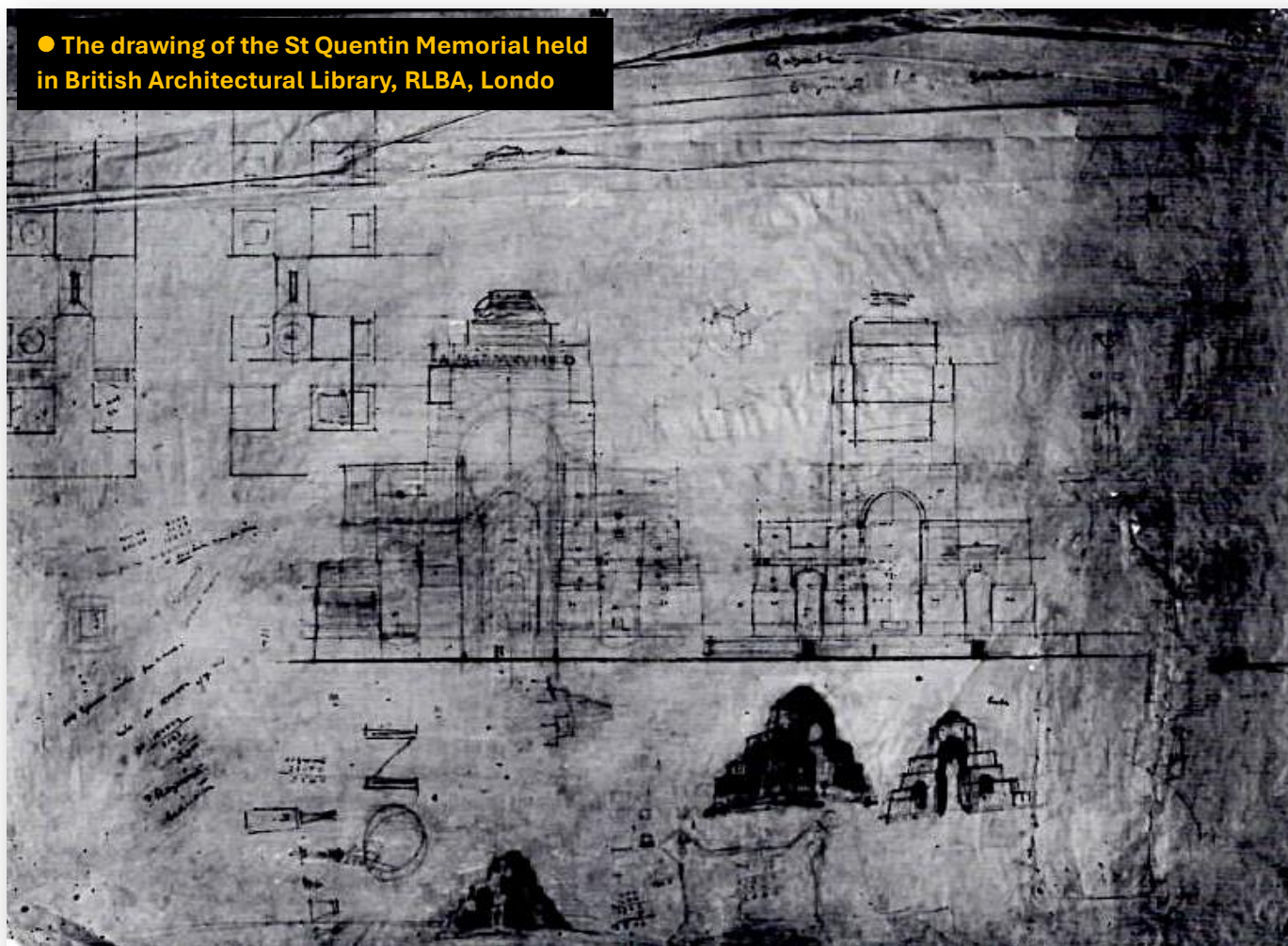
5ft 2in tall, with a reddish complexion, a 33in chest, hazel eyes, red brown hair, a large scar on his chest, a mole on his thigh, a mark on his left buttock and of a fair physical development. He was sent for training where on Tuesday 30th May John was given 10 days confined to barracks and forfeited 10 days pay for disobeying Brigade orders, including being in Manchester. With training complete John left for France on Monday 10th July and joined the Battalion with a draft.

310 men arrived in Oissy between Friday 14th and Thursday 20th who were assimilated into the Battalion. The reinforced Battalion marched to bivouac about 2 miles southwest of Albert on Sunday 23rd.

They went into trenches between Longueval and Bazentin-le-Petit to relieve the 16th Warwicks at 7.30pm on Tuesday 1st August. A vigorous bombardment lasted for an hour at 1.00am that included gas shells. The Battalion was ordered to attack the enemy position at 'Orchard Trench' in conjunction with the 9th Northumberland Fusiliers. The men went over the top at 12.50am on Friday 4th led by 'A' and 'C' Companies, with 'D' in support and 'B' in reserve. The attack failed but 21 men lay dead on the battlefield, one being 16 year-old Private John Henry Brown, the youngest to die from the Battalion that day. He and 16 of his comrades are commemorated on the Memorial. 2nd Lieutenant William Ralph Osborne Moulton died who is buried in Bernafay Wood British Cemetery, Montauban, C.1.

CASE STUDY...

● The drawing of the St Quentin Memorial held in British Architectural Library, RLBA, Londo



IN 1926, the French government raised serious concerns about the number of free-standing memorials being proposed by the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) to honour the missing – and among those to be sacrificed would be the one planned for St Quentin.

Reproduced above is a 1923 pencil and crayon sketch by Edwin Lutyens of the proposed St Quentin memorial, and the similarities are clearly striking between this memorial and what would go on to appear as the memorial to the missing of the Somme at Thiepval: complete with its complex and distinctive interlocking arches.

The memorial to the missing – for St Quentin

by Dr Martin Purdy

The architectural similarities were not lost on *Bulletin* editor James Brazier when he came across the drawing in the British Architectural Library in London in 1999, and it enabled him to

provide another layer of insight into what had been a complex issue.

Debate about the history of free-standing memorials to the missing had come to the fore

among the WFA membership in 1999; this after a letter had been reproduced in the *Bulletin* that had originally been sent in 1929 by the IWGC to the father of a Private Archibald Payne (18912) – a soldier killed in action on 1 July 1916 whilst serving with the 1st Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment on the Redan Ridge.

The letter said that Private Payne's name had been listed to be inscribed on the St Quentin Memorial to the Missing, but that his name was now going to be inscribed instead on what was to be known officially as the 'Thiepval Memorial'.

Putting the content of this letter together with the Lutyens' sketch, the evidence was now clear that one of the most striking commemorative landmarks of the war had originally been designed for St Quentin – albeit with some minor adaptations, such as the loss of the domed top depicted on the St Quentin sketch on the facing page.

This in itself was not wholly surprising, as it had long been known that a number of additional memorials to the missing had been planned for the whole of the Western Front. Indeed, some researchers had previously suggested that the Thiepval Memorial had originally been designed to straddle the Albert-Bapaume Road at Pozieres. The St Quentin sketch showed otherwise.

LUTYENS' design for the St Quentin Memorial had been approved "with acclamation" by the IWGC in early December 1924. However, it had been decided at a meeting of the Anglo-French Mixed Committee in Paris in June 1926 that this memorial, along with four others,



● It was a challenge for Lutyens to create the necessary kind of dramatic space (above) to carry the seemingly endless names of the missing of the Somme (left)

should be abandoned. Lutyens was then commissioned to design the Thiepval Memorial and clearly decided to adapt his previously acclaimed design for St Quentin to

meet the requirements of the new geographic remit.

The Thiepval Memorial would be formally unveiled by the Prince of Wales on 1 August 1932 and became the fourth free-



● The Thiepval Memorial that replaced the St Quentin scheme was clearly forged from the same architectural template. The main arch, originally designed to straddle a main road, was converted into a stepped access to view the memorial panels

standing memorial to the missing in France, with the others at Soissons, La Ferte-sous-Jouarre and Neuve-Chapelle.

● According to extensive research by Major and Mrs Holt, plans for other free-standing memorials at Lille, Cambrai, Pozieres and Bethune had also been dropped alongside the St Quentin scheme, and the names of the missing they were to hold allocated to memorial walls in IWGC cemeteries instead.

Extra land had been obtained at Ploegsteert to take the names that had been destined for Lille, Louverval took the Cambrai names, Loos the Bethune names, while Pozieres, Le Touret and Visen-Artois were redesigned to accommodate the others which were also to be shared with the

St Quentin names on the new Thiepval Memorial. It was also decided at the same time that the memorial proposed in the Faubourg d'Amiens cemetery in Arras should be changed to take the names of the missing of the Royal Flying Corp/ Royal Air Force.

Further north in Flanders, the Menin Gate proved unable to cope with all of the names of the missing and a memorial wall had to be built at Tyne Cot to accommodate those that had been lost after 15 August 1917. Even that was to prove insufficient and further names would be recorded at Ploegsteert, while the names of many of the Dominion forces would be commemorated at their own memorials.

DID YOU KNOW?

THE official opening of the Thiepval Memorial had to be postponed after the French President was assassinated by a White Russian émigré called Paul Gorguloff.

Described as a 'mentally unstable anti-communist', Gorguloff was infuriated by France's decision to enter into friendly relations with the Soviet regime and also wanted to highlight what he saw as the poor treatment of White Russians who had fled to France for safety.

On 6 May 1932, the 75-year-old President, Paul Doumer, was attending a book fair in Paris when Gorguloff shot him three times at close range with a 75mm pistol.

Doumer had been due to unveil the Thiepval Memorial on 16 May, but the ceremony was rescheduled for 1 August – allowing time for a new President, Albert Lebrun, to be sworn in. Lebrun and the Prince of Wales duly opened the memorial together on the revised date: a combined event in recognition of the fact that 'The Battle of the Somme' had been an Anglo-French offensive.

In further acknowledgement of the shared suffering, a small cemetery containing the graves of Commonwealth and French servicemen who died in the area in 1916 was created at the foot of the memorial, which carries the names of more than 72,000 officers and men who died fighting in the region with UK or South African forces and have no known grave. The deaths recorded go up to March 1918 but the vast majority – over 90 per cent – died between July and November 1916.

Respected historian and tour guide **Clive Harris** recently came into the possession of the unpublished memoirs of William Ralph Peel. Written by hand in 1974, a year before Ralph passed away, they had remained in an attic for many years. Beautifully written, the memoirs recall in superb detail his experiences in training, at Gallipoli, on the Somme, Messines, Ypres and throughout 1918 to his discharge. Clive intends to publish the memoirs and here shares a section from Ralph's time on the Somme...

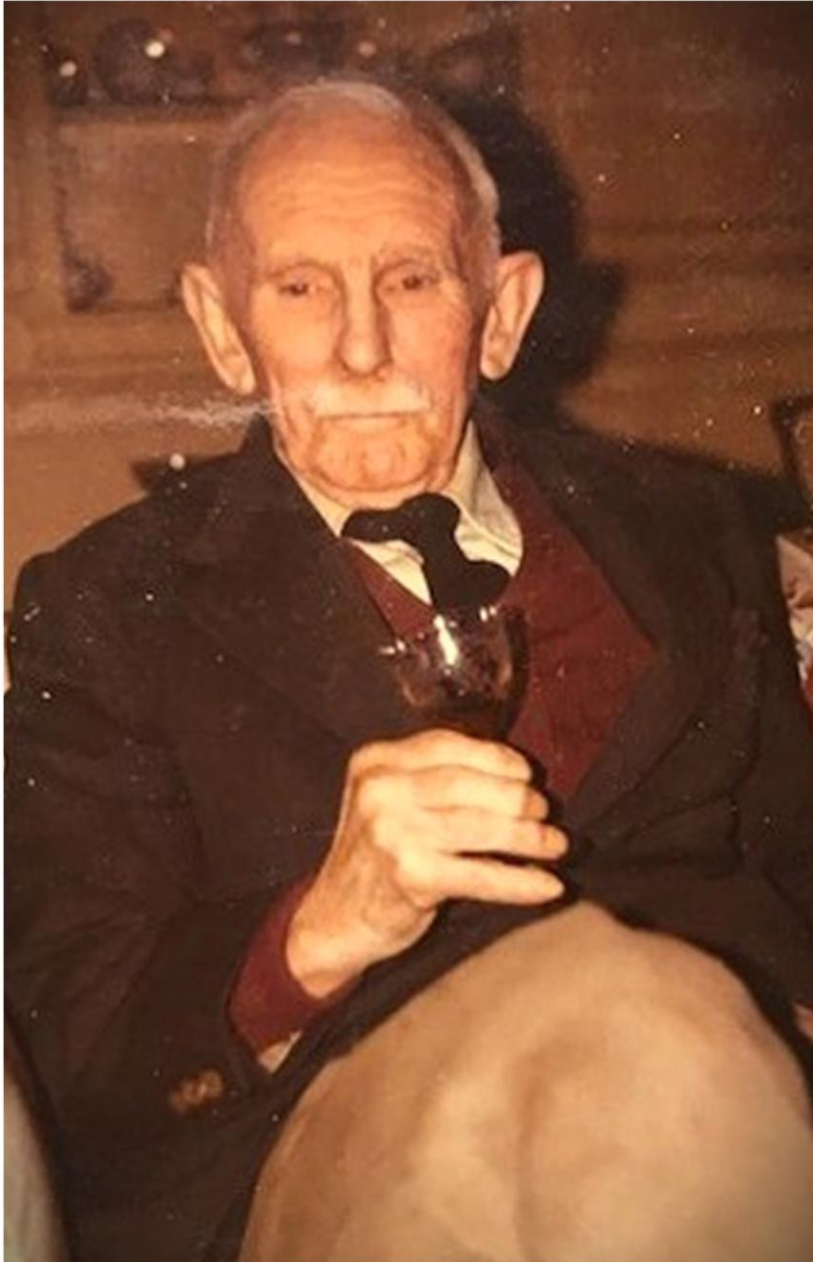
‘Life on the Somme was a record of untold human endurance’

WILLIAM Ralph (pronounced ‘Rafe’) Peel had a fascinating war. A newly qualified agricultural ground agent, unlike his father – who had been an honorary colonel in the local territorials - and older brother Laurence – who held a regular commission in the Green Howards - Ralph held no military experience. Before the Summer of 1914 he had seen his future as the manager of the family estate near Clitheroe in Lancashire. All of that was about to change.

During his five years in khaki, Ralph would rise from subaltern in the 6th Yorkshires to Lt Colonel commanding the 10th Manchester's, he would be wounded three times, mentioned in despatches twice and be awarded the DSO and Two Bars.

By 1916 and his arrival on the Somme he was serving as Adjutant in the 6th Yorkshires. Having arrived on the Western Front in July, they transferred to the Somme in September, where his memoirs record that they entered the line in the Thiepval Sector:

‘It was at the end of August or early in September that we entered the battle. The first day that we were in the zone was in Brigade Support and, in the evening, we were sent in to relieve the 9th West Yorkshires. After we had done this Col Forsyth said to me, ‘we’ll go round the trenches’ and, accompanied by our Intelligence Officer, we visited most of the line, in doing so we went down a ‘sap’ and at the end was a block. On the other side we found there were Germans in occupation. Col Forsythe said: ‘You and Bout (the Intelligence Officer) hold this



German trench from the trench we had been holding. He and I went to another trench to watch how the attack went.

"I was looking over the trench, and he was standing just behind and slightly to the side of me. As soon as our men attacked, the Germans opened up with machine gun fire and a bullet which must have gone over my head hit Colonel Forsyth in the middle of the forehead just below the rim of his steel helmet. He dropped down dead.

"The Platoon captured the trench which they held onto. I sent a message back to the transport line where Major White (the 2nd in command) had been left, to notify him of the C.O.'s death and at once he came up, arriving just before dawn.

"Colonel Forsyth's death was a great blow to me, his Adjutant. He was a great man and a first-rate Commanding Officer.

"We remained in these trenches for some days and then we were removed to another part of the line where there was some fierce fighting in progress and we lost very heavily, but the Battalion did well in getting our objective which we managed to hold against some fierce German counter attacks. During this battle one of our Company Commanders, Captain White, showed extreme bravery for which he was awarded the V.C. Lt. Bout, our Intelligence Officer, had gone out to ascertain the German position and did not return. We thought he had been killed but later heard he was a prisoner. After, I suppose, a week of pretty hard fighting we were relieved. We had gone into the

● William pictured in his later years, when he started to think about recording a record of his experiences in the Great War.

sap while I go and fetch up a Platoon.' He then walked away a few yards and came back and said: 'Peel, if you lose this trench before I come back with a Platoon, I'll never forgive you.'

"In the meantime, Bout had got hold of a box of Mills bombs. At first the Germans didn't know we

were at the other side of the sap block. When they did, they began to throw bombs at us without doing us any damage. We replied vigorously with our bombs. I suppose it must have been 20 minutes or more before Col Forsyth came back with a Platoon from 'C' Company. He then organised an attack on the

battle with 21 Officers and about 700 men. We came out with 5 Officers and 130 men. This I think shows the sort of battle the Battle of the Somme was."

Ralph had now experienced being stood by two of his battalion commanders, Lt Col Forsyth on the Somme and Lt Col Chapman at Lala Baba in Gallipoli, at the very moment they fell. Both inspired his own leadership style when later commanding in action.

Given leave in October 1916, his first since the war began, Ralph was clearly in the mood to celebrate life - and finding his bank account in a healthy state following over two years of overseas service, he stayed in the best suite the Ritz had to offer, dined on the finest food and drank champagne. He even rented a Daimler to drive around visiting relatives and was delighted when the Ritz charged him just £1 a night because he was a serving officer. On returning to France, he summarises his Somme experience as follows...

"Life on the Somme was a record of untold human endurance and of devotion to duty. A soldier going into battle had quite a weight to carry, his haversack with his iron ration in it, his water bottle, his entrenching tool, his box respirator, his rifle and bayonet, 2 or 3 Mills bombs and 220 rounds of ammunition. I have often thought how good the organisation behind the lines must have been. The supply of ammunition for the infantry, the shells for the battalions, medical stores for the Ambulances, sound rations and water for the



● William on horseback whilst on active service.

troops not to mention those required by the mules and horses of battalions but also for those of the field batteries. During the whole time I was in France the Battalion I happened to be with never ran short of food or water and I feel that credit is due to all those in the back areas through their efficiency kept us in the line supplied with what we required."

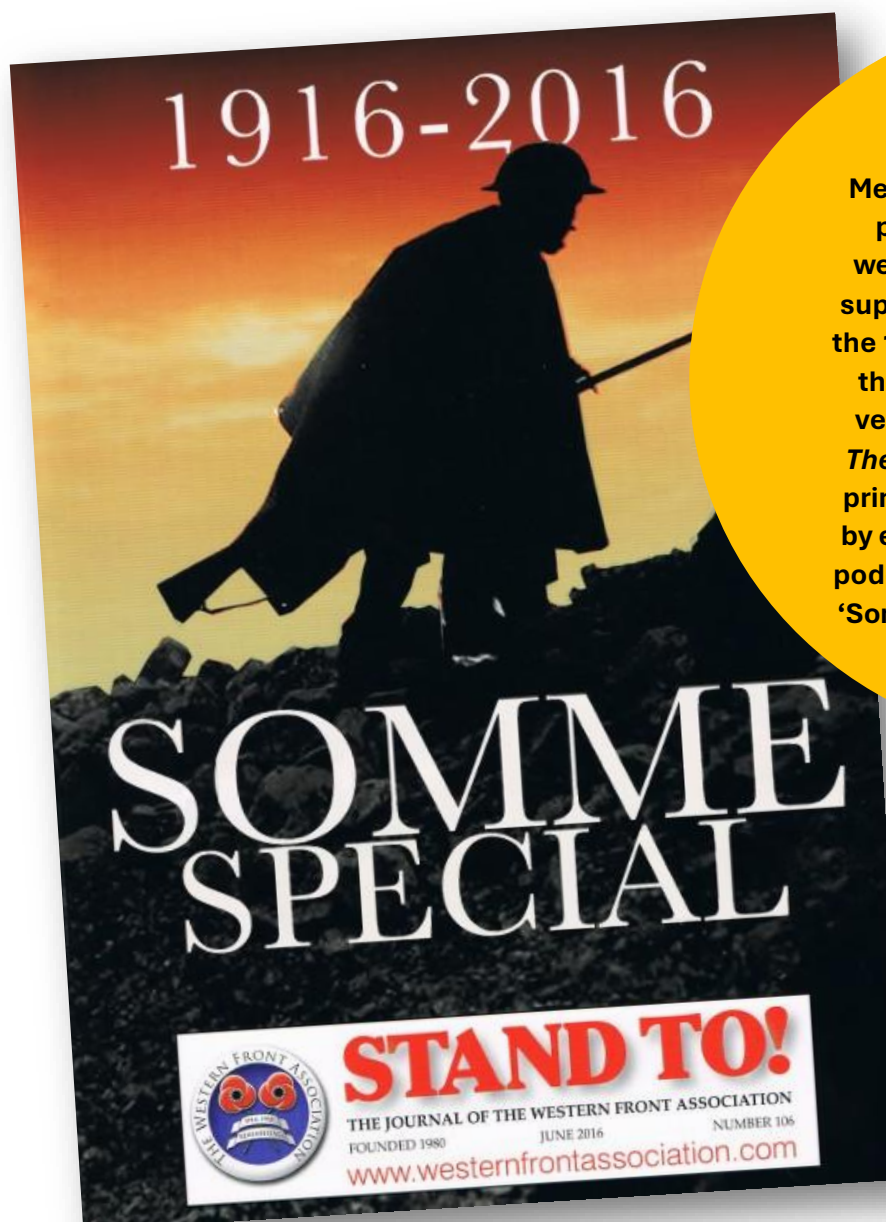
● Lt Col Cusack Grant Forsyth DSO, killed on the 14 September 1916, today lies in Blighty Valley CWGC. Whether Ralph ever visited his grave we don't know, but at the end of his memoirs he mentions him again as one of the most influential figures he met during the war.



Fascinated by the First World War? So are we!

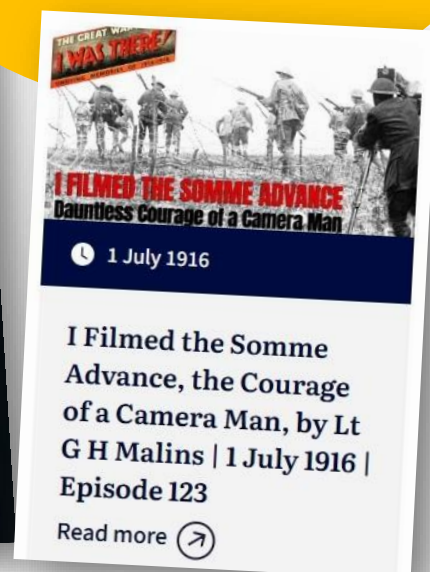
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www.westernfrontassociation.com/membership



MORE ON THE SOMME...

Members can access features and past magazine specials on our website, including the fascinating supplement (left) produced to mark the 100th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme. There are also audio versions (see below) of the *'I Was There!'* recollections committed to print in the 1920s by veterans, talks by experts on our YouTube channel, podcasts and more. Search the word 'Somme' and just see what appears!



“There was firing going on all over the place: our own shells falling short, the Jerries firing from left and right, our left flank was vacant. They say run, but you stumble, there’s shell holes, you can’t go direct, you go this way and that way, picking your way round the shell holes. Sometimes two or three of you together, sometimes there was nobody. They’d got behind - or blown up - you don’t know. All the time there was these fumes and the shelling going on...”

(Joe Murray, RND)