

WW1 Supplement  
2019



# THE IRON DUKE

## The Great War

### Centenary Articles

A compilation of Iron Duke Articles about the Great War that appeared in Journals 272 (Spring 2012) and 275 (Autumn 2013) to 285 (Autumn 2018).



The spires of Ypres, overlooked throughout almost all of the war from the German held high ground to the East”.



A wreath of white roses on the grave of 27 years old 241293 Private Arthur Smith, 1st/5th Battalion The Duke of Wellington's Regiment (West Riding) at Mill Road Cemetery, Thiepval. He died on Sunday 3rd September 1916. He was the son of George and Ellen Smith of Moldgreen, Huddersfield and the husband of Clarice Lois Smith of Hartlepool, Co Durham.



A map of the northern sectors of the Western Front in which most of the Regiment's fighting in France and Belgium took place.

## INTRODUCTION

“What a noise! I thought it was an earthquake the way the ground trembled and swayed like a rough sea. This was the signal for the artillery to open up. Red, green, blue and white lights, in thousands, were going up as the different signals were given to the advancing infantry, and the noise of the guns firing and shells bursting was ear-splitting”. CSM Miles, 8th (Service) Battalion DWR on 8th June 1917, when the mines were detonated and the attack was launched at Messines.



**“The author looking puzzled on a stretch of the Hindenburg Line”**

This Iron Duke supplement is a compilation of the articles written about the actions of the Duke of Wellington’s Regiment’s Battalions in the Great War on the Western Front. Our battalions fought from Gallipoli to Italy, but most of the action took place in France and Belgium, in a surprisingly small area in the northern half of the Western Front. The 2nd battalion was engaged from the first, in August 1914, at Mons, and all our in-theatre battalions were part of the great offensives of late 1918 which pushed back the German Army and forced

it to surrender. The cost to this nation, and all nations on both sides of the conflict, was appalling.

The majority of these articles were written using regimental histories and sources from our archives, as well as on line and written texts. It should be understood that this in no way aspires to record every detail and every action from four long years of warfare, and cannot replace our excellent histories. I was helped by many people generous with their time and expertise and especially by Scott Flaving, author of several articles, whose skill at producing useful rabbits out of our archival hat was of great value.

*Tim Nicholson*

*Lieutenant Colonel (retired)*

*Editor, The Iron Duke Journal 2006 – 2018.*

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## THE DUKES IN THE GREAT WAR

As readers would expect, articles about the Dukes in WW1 will appear as the events they describe are commemorated between 2014 and 2018. The Editor would gratefully receive relevant articles, with illustrations if possible. The small details of life in the line, and the experiences of individuals and small parties of men are of equal, often greater, interest to events on a larger scale. A number of Dukes veterans visit the battlefields every year, and a few notes about where you have been and what you have seen could be part of our WW1 presentation. As a backdrop to future articles Scott Flaving has kindly produced a summary of the Dukes’ battalions.

In August 1914, the Duke of Wellington’s Regiment consisted of two Regular, one Special Reserve and four Territorial Force (TF) battalions. By the end of the war it had raised a further 8 TF battalions, by doubling, then tripling the original units, four Service (Kitchener’s Army) battalions, 2 Garrison battalions, a Labour battalion and one Young Soldiers’ battalion. Of these, 14 saw active service on various Fronts.

It has been estimated that between 60,000 and 100,000 soldiers saw service in these battalions during and just after the conflict, when some of them were engaged in clearing up the battlefields and the 2nd line TF Battalions marched triumphantly into Germany as part of the 62nd (Pelican) Division, which had been specially selected to form a component of the British Army of Occupation. Some 8,000 ‘Dukes’ died during the conflict and are commemorated on the War Memorials to be found in every community in the country. Records held at RHQ

<b>Home station</b>	<b>Formed</b>	<b>Theatres</b>
<b>Regular Battalions</b>		
1st Bn (33rd) India	1702	Lahore Cantonment – 3 (Lahore) Div
2nd Bn (76th) Dublin	1878	W Front – 4 Div
<b>Militia Battalions</b>		
3rd Bn Halifax	1908	UK, Earsdon (Training and drafting)
<b>Territorial Force Battalions</b>		
1/4th Bn Halifax	1908	W Front – 49 (West Riding) Div
2/4th Bn	1914	W Front – 62 (Pelican) Div
3/4th Bn	1914	UK, Clipstone (Training and drafting)
1/5th Bn Huddersfield	1908	W Front – 49 (West Riding) Div
2/5th Bn	1914	W Front – 62 (Pelican) Div
3/5th Bn	1914	UK, Clipstone (Training and drafting)
5th Bn	1918	W Front – from Jan 1918
1/6th Bn Skipton	1908	W Front – 49 (West Riding) Div
2/6th Bn	1914	W Front– 62 (Pelican) Div
3/6th Bn	1914	UK, Clipstone (Training and drafting)
1/7th Bn Milnsbridge	1908	W Front – 49 (West Riding) Div
2/7th Bn	1914	W Front – 62 (Pelican) Div
3/7th Bn	1914	UK, Clipstone (Training and drafting)
<b>Service Battalions</b>		
8th Bn Halifax/Otley	1914	Gallipoli & W Front – 11 Div
9th Bn Wimborne	1914	W Front – 17 (Northern) Div
10th Bn Halifax/Frenchem	1914	W Front & Italy – 23 Div
11th Bn Halifax	1914	UK, Lichfield
<b>Labour Battalion</b>		
12th Bn Halifax/Lichfield	not known	W Front
<b>Garrison Battalions</b>		
13th Bn Halifax	1918	W Front
14th Bn Clacton	1918	UK, Clacton from 1918
<b>Young Soldiers Battalion</b>		
53 YS Bn	1917	UK – 1917-1919

show that six VCs, 296 MCs, 64 DSOs, 233 DCMs and 1,151 MMs were awarded for gallantry, amongst many other decorations and Mentions that were well earned by our forebears. As further background, readers may wish to return to all or some of the following : ID Spring 2012, where they will find the story of 1/4th DWR; to the late Major General Donald Isles' book "History of the Service Battalions of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment (West Riding) in the Great War"; and of course to our various histories.

## 1914 MONS AND LE CATEAU

There is a great deal of information and comment about WW1 in the media at present, with the BBC in particular offering many programmes about the origins, events and consequences of this first truly global war. In this and subsequent 100th anniversary articles we look back at the contribution of the Dukes throughout the Great War, and at the places where battles were fought.

The 2nd Battalion the Duke of Wellington's Regiment was in 13 Brigade, along with 2 KOYLI, 1 RWK, and 2

KOSB, all based in Dublin, Ireland. They sailed to war together in the SS Gloucestershire, a ship of the Bibby Line, from Dublin; "the ladies of Dublin presented every man with a packet of refreshments, an attention that was very much appreciated", wrote Major CV Moloney of the 1st Battalion the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment (1 RWK, 50th Foot), whose personal account of the actions at Mons and Le Cateau has been of considerable help in preparing this article. The Dukes and the West Kents fought these early battles practically in each other's pockets.

Prior to embarkation the Dukes received 345 reservists to bring them up to war strength. There was very little time to train them – a few days only, though of course what time there was, was fully used - or for them to get to know their new comrades. Their destination, other than being somewhere in France, was a secret. The battalion had seen extensive service in the Boer War, which ended in 1902, so the senior officers and WO/SNCO element had some active experience.

They landed at Le Havre on 16 August. Great Britain had declared war on Germany on 4 August, a mere 12

days earlier, but already the French army had launched an assault along its frontier with Germany, determined to recapture Alsace and Lorraine, lost to Germany in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, and was being repulsed with heavy casualties. Seeking to protect the exposed French northern flank the BEF headed for the area of Charleroi, but events dictated a change of plan and they ended up on a 40 kilometre front around Mons, facing north.

The French did not think that the German Army



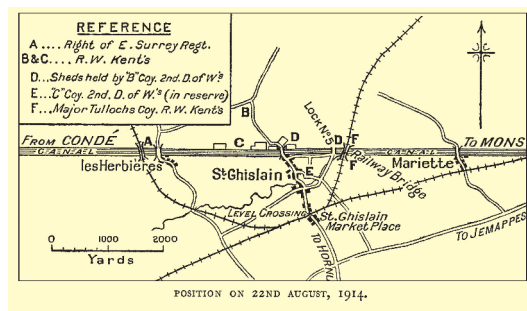
**This map shows the dates and locations of 2 DWR in the battle for, then the retreat from, Mons in August 1914.**

would ignore Belgium's neutrality and come that way, and when they did they were too wrapped up in their own plans to respond. It was a parlous situation; the German right (northern) flank formations planned to storm through Belgium, hook either side of Brussels, and advance south, directly threatening Paris and the French left (northern) flank, and unless stopped would have been behind the five French Armies that were deployed all along the Franco-German border. In practice getting behind Paris was too much for the German lines of communication, but by just coming round Brussels it posed a huge threat to the French flank.

The courage and tenacity of the Belgian Army gave the BEF time to get into position. Facing hugely superior numbers, they held up the German advance from 5 – 23 August; in particular the siege of Liege, from 6 - 16 August showed the scale of their resistance. As the BEF came through Belgium it was greeted with wild acclaim by the civilian population, and offered

flowers, food, drinks and billet accommodation. Despite the uncertainty of their own situation, their conduct in treating our wounded, helping many not just to live but also in many cases to escape, was exemplary.

By 22 August, 13, 14 and 15 Brigades (5 Division,



**Diagram of the initial deployment of 2 DWR companies and surrounding units on the evening of 22 August 1914. The remainder of the battalion at that stage were a mile in rear.**

in 2nd Army Corps, under command of Major General Smith-Dorrien) were all deployed to hold a part of that line, and in particular the bridges over the canal near St Ghislaine. Ahead of the Dukes 1 RWK were placed to defend six of the bridges and crossings, with one, A, company forward in and around Terre, to provide protection for the Divisional Cavalry (9th Hussars) and cyclist recon troops when they withdrew.

2 DWR found itself facing north just under the Mons-



**Grande Place, St Ghislaine. The centre of activity for 2 DWR on 22 and early 23 August, with over half the battalion, stores carts, guns on limbers passing through, and crowds of cheering civilians.**

Condé Canal, to the west of Mons. This was an industrial mining area, described in the official war history a “a wilderness of deep ditches, straggling buildings, casual roads, streams and minor waterways, tracks and high slag heaps”. Very difficult terrain to fight in, get good fields of view and fire, and find your way about.



**A stretch of the Mons-Condé Canal, north of St Ghislaine, along the line defended by 1 RWK and forward elements of 2 DWR**



**The old railway bridge, defended by a company of 1 RWK and the machine gun section of 2 DWR**

B and C companies were up on the canal in support of 1 RWK, where the fields of fire were better; most of the remainder were in reserve back in St Ghislaine. Lt RJA Henniker, commanding 2 Pl A Coy 2 DWR then in St Ghislaine, told of the company's "baptism of fire". He wrote; "our many reservists had not had practice in loading the comparatively new rifle and also they had forgotten the drill...suddenly, as the coy was ordered to load, there was quite an intense fusillade as our men completed the loading of their rifles; shots rang out here there and everywhere, and the crowds of Belgians hanging out of their windows cheering us on hastily withdrew and took cover". He himself decided at this point to discard his sword and scabbard into the care of an inn-keeper, as it seemed unlikely it would be useful and tripped him up when he ran.

They were hardly in position when the German shelling began, followed by assault by infantry across the entire front. Cpl John Lucy of the Royal Irish Rifles, just along the line, later wrote of the moment the enemy advanced into view - "a great roar of musketry rent the

air .... our rapid fire was appalling, even to us ... the worst marksman could not miss as he had only to fire into the brown of the masses of unfortunate enemy...". The British battalions knew their business; despite their numeric and artillery superiority, the Germans were held.



**Recently erected memorial to A Company 1 RWK at Tertre, sitting in the centre of their company position..**

A Coy 1 RWK had come into contact first, certainly in 13 Brigade and possibly in the BEF as a whole other than recon troops, and their positions in Tertre came under some heavy shelling. In front of them, on the northern outskirts of Tertre were the 13th Brandenburg Grenadiers, supported by a machine gun company and a battery of artillery. There had been sporadic contact with German recon troops, but when the British positions were discovered – originally the Brandenburgers had been told the front was clear for 50 miles – they at once assaulted with bayonets fixed in mass. A Coy held its position until the enemy were right in front of it. To quote a Panzer Grenadier officer "the enemy seems to have waited for the moment of general assault...they enticed us to close range ...(when) a hellish fire broke loose and in thick swathes the deadly leaden fire was pumped on our heads, breasts and knees. Wherever I looked to left and right nothing but dead and blood-streaming, sobbing, writhing wounded. The unfortunate remainder is glued to the ground". This first assault was beaten back, but RWK casualties were heavy. And more assaults from fresh troops came over the next few hours. Eventually what was left of A Coy slowly withdrew in contact along prepared and recced routes which would not mask the fire of the men on the canal, through our troops on the bridges. We had little or no artillery that could impact on the battle, although a few guns were

brought into action to good effect.

It was never intended that this line should be held for long; its job was to hold long enough for a defensive position to be prepared further back. Not all parts of this forward line along this extended front were as successful as 13 Brigade had been in repulsing the enemy's assaults, and the forward battalions were in danger of being outflanked, as indeed some were. German infantry had crossed the canal in places in the small hours. Meantime, the French 5th Army, whose northern flank the BEF was trying to protect, were in disarray and pulling back fast.

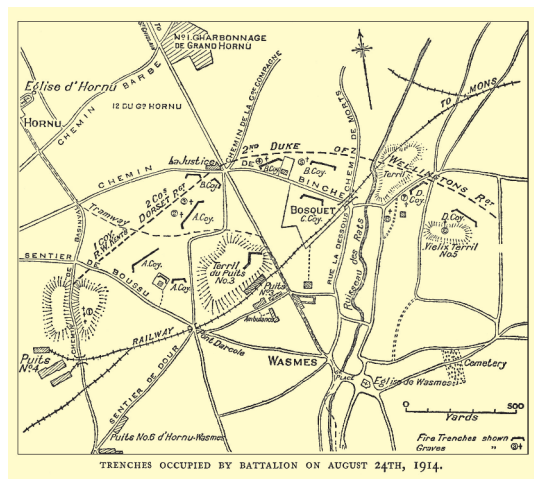
But 13 Brigade stuck to its bridges through the day, moving a further company from 2 DWR up to support the forward line. The two Dukes' machine guns were just 50 metres west of the railway bridge over the canal and took a direct hit from a shell; Lt Ozanne, the MG Officer was severely wounded. Eventually, early in the morning of 24 August, the bridges along the line were blown, and the forward battalions pulled back, 1 RWK passing through 2 DWR, which was occupying trenches in the northern fringes of Wasmès. Sub units of the West Kents paused to fight alongside the Dukes, and men of many units found themselves fighting alongside each other, any available officer taking command of those around him. As the Germans advanced through the narrow streets they were met with withering fire from rifles and machine guns from the British positions, suffering heavy casualties. Fresh German units were brought up and the attacks continued.



**Plaque attached to the front of the old town hall in St Ghislaine, in memory of Major Holland of the Field Artillery.**

At 1130 a battery sited with 2 DWR came under heavy artillery fire, and shortly afterwards, at 1300, "the Germans debouched in thick skirmishing formation

followed by dense masses ..... on the left front, but were greeted by such a rain of bullets from rifles and machine guns at 800 yards and such a salute from the battery, that they stopped dead. Under cover of this final stroke, the guns limbered up and the battalion withdrew ..... "The Dukes suffered heavily, their casualties reaching nearly 400 of all ranks, but they had driven back six battalions" (extract from the official war history). The order to withdraw had been given at 1300 hours, just as the attacks came in, but somehow the Dukes, probably too busy with the action in front of them, did not get the message. Having held the enemy and finding themselves alone, they eventually pulled back. The actual casualties were 36 killed, 43 wounded, but a massive 244 were missing and subsequently reported either killed or taken prisoner. A third of the battalion, including the badly wounded CO (who sent a somewhat laconic message to his Second in Command; "tell MacLeod to carry on"! ) was gone.



**The CO's diagram of the defensive positions of 2 DWR 24 August 1914.**

Next, almost without pause 13 Brigade marched 14 miles to St Vaast La Vallée, was there were neither water nor other supplies.

The retreat was closely followed by the advancing German army. The British formations were exhausted, had had little sleep and no food for 36 hours, the same or better than the French who had been fighting for 2 weeks and were also retreating at best speed, but along lines of their own devising, which often crossed those of their allies: communications between allies, and indeed amongst our own formations, were poor. By nightfall on 25 August the order to turn at bay and stand and fight was given to II Corps by General Smith-Dorrien, as more time had to be won to reassemble to formation and the men were exhausted. 13 Brigade, with 2 KOSB and 2 KOYLI forward and 2 DWR and 1 RWK in support,

by daybreak on 26 August was in position to the west of the old Roman road (now the D932) running south west from Le Cateau, with 14 Brigade ahead of them nearer the town. They dug in. They did not have long to wait. This is wide open country.

Shell fire on the Dukes' position was extremely heavy. By 1600 contact was made with advancing Germans. Captain O'Kelly, commanding a half company of men from several units, saw an enemy party of twelve horses dragging a big gun. They engaged with their only machine gun and shot most of the horses. A second party arrived and got the same treatment, but suddenly shells burst in in the middle of the small position, killing several men. Bloodied, confused and exhausted, they pulled back, to try to find the rest of their unit, and the retreat continued. Or, to put it the official way, "the brigade retired by extended lines of half battalions".

The first leg was a 25 kilometre march along the line of the Roman road to Estrées, "there was a hopeless block of transport, guns and infantry extending for miles. It rained... and everyone was nearly dead with fatigue, lack of sleep and want of food. ... Every wagon was full of wounded men who could not march." They stopped at 2200 and rested for a few hours, then marched again at 0100. Contact with the enemy was broken and over the next few days the retreat continued. The BEF crossed the Aisne on 30 August, by which time general good order and communications between units and formations had been restored.

The Germans got a severe shock at Le Cateau. Their plan was to attack in such strength that nothing could withstand them, and both at Mons and again at Le Cateau

they found determined troops that held their ground long enough to inflict appalling casualties, though a great cost to themselves. By 6 September the British and French were south of the river Marne, faced about and advanced in counter attack, forcing the Germans to retreat to a strong position overlooking the river Aisne. Here the allied advance stopped. The stage was set for the next major action in which 2 DWR was engaged, the first battle of Ypres in November 1914, and something about that will appear in the next edition of the Iron Duke.

### 15 Year Old Boy in 2 DWR

Cyril Ford came across this cutting from the Huddersfield Examiner of 22 May 1915. Private Jack Gibson was serving with C Company in its machine gun section. In his letter from the Casino Hospital at Le Havre he wrote:

"I am sorry to say that I am not well at present. I am in hospital suffering from gas poisoning. I wish I was better and out of it. It is terrible out here, you cannot explain what it is to see your comrades killed by your side and have to tread over them. It is more like murder than anything else. God knows when it will finish, the sooner the better. I pray that I may live to see the finish. I think I am the youngest boy out here. It is an honour to you to have a son of fifteen years in such a war as this".

It seems unlikely that his parents would have agreed with that sentiment. Young Gibson was with the battalion at Hill 60. The 2 DWR Old Comrades register lists a J Gibson, so it is presumed that is he and that he survived the war.

The headstones of the graves at Hautrage WGC Cemetery of Captain CO Denman-Jubb and Lieutenant LE "Boy" Russell. Jubb was the Adjutant; on 24 August he was sent by the CO to assist B and D Companies to pull back from the canal into a new defensive position. He was killed by artillery watching the Dukes machine gunners in action. Russell was a platoon commander in C Company 2DWR, whose platoon was overwhelmed by the German advance on 24 August. Corporal Williams of that Company wrote "..... Mr Russell's platoon was on the extreme right. I could not see any British troops further to the right..... I came quite close to Mr Russell; he had only 9 men left with him. He was not properly entrenched as he had only just previously been moved further to the right in order to try to get in touch with the brigade on our right. The Germans were all around his front, right and rear, and at very close quarters. More Germans were advancing across the cornfield in which the platoon was situated, carrying stacks of corn as shields in front of them. Mr Russell and his platoon were firing the 'mad minute' with their bayonets fixed. I saw the Germans charge the platoon, who fought to the last, and were all either killed or wounded.





## **“FIRST SHOTS” – CASTEAU (MONS) 21 AUGUST 1914 LLOYDS AND CITY OF LONDON BRANCH RBL CHARITY BIKE RIDE**

**By Lt Col (retd) Tim Nicholson  
“We Will Remember Them”**

The start of World War 1 has been marked and commemorated in many ways, all extensively covered by the media. For example their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge attended a moving service at St Symphorien War Graves site, just east of Mons, recently, and the BBC has presented a full range of fact and fiction on the topic. There have been many services, parades, and events of all kinds, in the UK and in France and Belgium, at which those present remembered the courage and steadfastness of the men of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), and thought of those, some 850,000 British and Commonwealth men, who lost their lives in the conflict.

A somewhat different approach was taken by members of the Lloyds and City of London Branch of the Royal British Legion and their friends, under the leadership of Chris Holt MBE, formerly RE (EOD). Eleven cyclists backed by a support team of four decided to cycle from Haig House, 111 Borough High Street, London SE1 1AA, to Mons, in time to be present, exactly 100 years later, at the monument which marks the spot where the first shots were exchanged between British and German troops at Casteau, a few miles north of Mons.

### **A Remarkable Team**

The majority of the party were retired servicemen, many RE, but there was also a Green Howard, a Duke of Wellington’s (the author), a REME, an ex ATO, and an Intelligence Corps, a senior met police officer, two serving officers and three with no military experience.



**The First Shots Memorial at Casteau. We were not then only people to be there; a motorbike tour party had also done their research and turned up at 0630, and indeed were encountered at a number of other battlefield sites and monuments later in the day**

Together they made a remarkable and cheerful team, bringing together high levels of experience and expertise and an abundance of good humour.

This was no light undertaking. Whilst several riders were experienced cyclists, others were by no means used to pedalling for long distances, being, put kindly, more Labrador than Greyhound. All had taken their commitment seriously, training hard and acquiring some excellent machinery. Everyone that started, finished: no-one had any need to hitch a lift for any part of the route in the always available minibus, nor indeed, such was the level of determination on show, was there any desire for it. It was a great achievement.



**Ready for the off at the RBL HQ car park in  
Borough High Street**

### **Fund Raising and Publicity**

In addition at least £10,000 was raised for the RBL, as well as attracting a mass of publicity and interest. Technologically savvy team members ensured that Facebook, Twitter and a number of web sites were kept up to date throughout.

### **The Route and Places Visited**

As well as simply covering the ground from London to Mons, the routes chosen each day ensured that many large and small monuments and war grave sites were visited, from just two WW1 graves at Quevaucamps Communal cemetery (one of them fittingly of Private Mitchell of the Army Cyclist Corps) to the Menen Gate Memorial in Ypres to the 54,000 British and Commonwealth soldiers who have no known grave and died in the Ypres Salient, and, at Tyne Cot, a further 35,000 with no known grave, and well as 12,000 headstones.

In London the group posed outside the front door of No 10 Downing Street (the occupant did not appear), looked at the poppies in the Moat of the Tower of London, had coffee at Lloyds, and visited Canada Square in Docklands, before setting off for the first night stopover in the splendid Officers’ Mess at RSME Chatham. It would be fair to say that subsequent nights were spent in slightly less salubrious (but perfectly adequate) hotel accommodation.



**First stop, Downing Street at 0830**



**Dinner at the RSME mess; the tie worn copies the medal ribbon of the WW1 British War Medal. Round the table from left front: Nigel Basham Met Police; Caz Albery ex RAMC, Gareth Lloyd ex RE, Phil Lloyd ex REME, Bob Williams ex Green Howards, Iain Church RE, Damo Walker ex RE, Pete Bull, John Harris, Marc Finch ex RE, Andy Green ex RAOC (ATO), Forbes McKenzie ex Int Corps, Chris Holt ex RE, Sam Stuthridge RE, Tim Nicholson ex DWR**



The “peloton” on the road

## Historical Context

It was the author’s job to provide the historical context: background to the war; military activity before the BEF got onto the ground; an overview of the whole conflict to have some grasp of the significance of the dates on the headstones, which range from 1914 to 1919; and a more detailed presentation of the events of 23 and 24 August 1914, in and around Mons.

On the final day (21 August), after a short service



The memorial plaque to Lt Dease VC, Pte Godley VC, under the Nimy Railway Bridge, on the south bank

at Casteau at 0630 to mark the “first shots”, the group took part in some battlefield visits and explanations of actions that took place two days later, on 23 August, the date of the first major battles – Lt Dease VC and Private Godley VC, of 4th Bn The Royal Fusiliers, at Nimy railway bridge; Lcpl Jarvis VC and Captain Wright VC, both of 57 Field Company RE and Private Heron DCM, 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers at No 2 Lock bridge at Jemappes; 1st Bn The Queens Own Royal West Kents (in particular A Company at Tertre, where there is a new monument) and elements of 2nd Bn The Duke of Wellington’s Regiment, who were right on the front line and withstood, at great cost, the early assaults of enemy in overwhelmingly superior numbers. St Symphorien and Hautrage Commonwealth War Grave Cemeteries were also visited, the former under the guidance of a member of the CWGC staff.

## Personnel

The support group was led with great skill and dedication by Andy Green, a former ATO, assisted by Phil Lloyd (ex REME, all things mechanical), John Harris (insurance market practitioner, media), and the author (Dukes and “The Historian”). In the peloton were Gareth Lloyd (ex RE - lead on all things cycling), Caz Albrey (ex RAMC and chief navigator and lead on medical matters), Chris Holt (ex RE, project leader), Lt Colonels Sam Stutheridge and Iain Church (both RE), Nigel Basham (Met Police and safety lead), Forbes McKenzie (ex Int Corps), Marc Finch and Damo Walker, (both ex RE), Peter Bull, Bob Williams (ex Green Howards and Facebook feed).



**The Memorial at Menin Gate, as a crowd gathers for the evening ceremony**

## **In Conclusion**

Was it worth the effort? Of course it was! It raised substantial funds for the RBL and made a lot of people sit up and take notice of this important anniversary. Due homage was paid to our brave men who lost their lives in that dreadful conflict 100 years ago; they were not, and surely will never be, forgotten. And, for the fifteen who

took part, it provided memories that will always remain.

The cemeteries and monuments we visited: Oye Plage, Dunkirk Town, Rexpoede, Poperinge (old), Ypres Menin Gate, Tyne Cot, Menem Communal, Esquelmes, Quevaucamps, First Shots monument Casteau, St Symphorien, Hautrage.

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## **TF FIRTH AND SONS – RETREAT TO THE MARNE – RACE TO THE SEA, MISSY AND THE AISNE – 1ST YPRES – 2nd YPRES, HILL 60**

The Territorial Force later to be renamed the Territorial Army and more recently designated the Army Reserve, was originally created for Home Defence in 1908. C Company based at the Wakefield Road Drill Hall in Brighouse attracted many employees of T F Firth and Sons Ltd, later better known as Firth Carpets, to become volunteer part time soldiers prior to WW1.

One employee who served with 1/4 DWR was Hammond H Aykroyd, (to become Colonel HH Aykroyd, OBE MC TD) who won his MC with the battalion for daring and skilful patrolling in the Ancre Valley in 1916 as Intelligence Officer. He continued to serve as a territorial after the war with 4 DWR, eventually rising to become the CO in 1928 succeeding another T F Firth

employee, RH Goldthorpe DSO. Colonel Harold, as he was known to his employees, was the Chairmen of T F Firth & Sons at the time the Aykroyd family lost control of Firth Carpets in 1968, due to a hostile bid from the Guthrie Corporation, which forced them to look for a “friendly” takeover from Readicut International. The author remembers him to have been a firm leader, a good listener and a perfect gentleman.

On the 15th September 1914 at Riby Camp the 4th DWR TF Battalion divided into a first line battalion, 1/4th whilst a second line battalion, 2/4th was formed at Halifax of those who did not volunteer for and were found unfit for overseas service. 1/4th DWR TF served with the BEF in France and the Ypres Salient (Belgium)

from 14 April 1915 to the armistice and through to 8 June 1919. They took part in the battle of the Somme, July / September 1916, where on just one day, Monday 3rd July 1916, the unit's casualties totalled 101 dead, 463 wounded and 155 missing.

Four of those killed in action that day, were certainly original pre-war T F Firth & Sons volunteers, were Herbert ASPINALL, Frank ATAK, Austin Arthur HITCHEN and Horace S SHAW. Austin Arthur HITCHEN's Army number 1487 denotes he was the 1487th volunteer to join the 4th Bn DWR TF since its

formation in 1908. In 1917 original TF numbers were replaced by "Regimental Numbers". A A HITCHEN then classed as missing was also renumbered.

Horace S SHAW, Army number 683 joined the 4th DWR TF aged 17 on the 22nd Feb 1909 however he did not extend his service in the Territorial Force beyond Feb 1913 the end of his four year commitment. There were at least three other original volunteer T F Firth employees serving with this unit in 1914 who died in WW1, Willie FIELDING, Norman HIRST and David Gray McKEAND.

#### 1/4th DWR TF (West Riding Regiment), T F Firth Employees who died

##### **ASPINALL Herbert**

200506 L/Cpl, A Company. Died 3 September 1916, age 27

Buried at MILL ROAD CEMETERY THIEPVAL, Grave 1.C.21

Son of Arthur & Elizabeth ASPINALL 55 East Street Lightcliffe

##### **ATAK Frank**

200509 Pte Died 3 September 1916 age 29  
(1901 census born Keighley c1887)

No known grave he is commemorated on the THIEPVAL MEMORIAL Pier & Face 6A 6B

##### **HITCHEN Austin Arthur**

200214 Sgt Died, 3 September 1916 age 26

Buried at MILL ROAD CEMETERY THIEPVAL Grave 1.F.7

Son of Edmund and Dinah HITCHEN of 9 Ashfield Terrace Wilson Road Wyke Dinah was not his mother as in the 1901 census his father's wife was Mary. They lived at Junction House Norwood Green. His father was a Railway Station Master

##### **SHAW Horace S**

200569 Sergeant Died 3 September 1916 age 24

Buried at MILL ROAD CEMETERY THIEPVAL Grave reference I F 2

A native of Bailiffe Bridge Yorkshire, a carpet creeler at TF Firth and Sons living with his mother Ruth Ann SHAW at 86 Ripley Street Buildings Bailiffe Bridge.

##### **FIELDING Willie**

201135 L/Cpl 2nd/4th Died 3 May 1917, age 22

No known grave he is commemorated on the ARRAS MEMORIAL Bay 6

Son of Gaythorn & Alice FIELDING, 55 Smithy Carr Lane Brighouse. 1901 Census a Cotton Spinner living at 15 Croft Place Brighouse.

##### **HIRST Norman**

4/1166 Cpl Died 14 August 1915, age 21

Buried COLNE VALLEY CEMETERY Grave C.9

Son of James Brearley HIRST & Fanny HIRST of 2 Forester's Terrace Clifton. Norman HIRST was a pupil of Rastrick Grammar School, his service records reveal he joined the Territorial Force, 4th DWR TF committing to 4 years UK service. He was 18 years old, 5' 7" a Colourist's Apprentice living at 2 Forresters Terrace, Clifton

##### **McKEAND David Gray**

Capt 11th Bn West Yorkshire Regiment

(Prince of Wales's Own) Died 23 March 1919 age 34

Buried at ELLAND CEMETERY, Grave U. A. 545  
(Born 8th Jan 1885)

He is buried in what may be a shared family grave.

FARNELLS and TURNERS

Son of William & Jane Gray McKEAND of Burnbank Mauchline Ayrshire

1901 Census Living at 111 Elizabeth Street Elland a Commercial Clerk

Five other Firth's employees served with the Battalion and survived. A memorial to the fallen is now in the Brighouse Library, having been saved from the Firth Carpets factory. Unfortunately there is so little space in front of it that a meaningful photograph cannot be taken. In 1920 Sir Algernon and Lady Firth built a Memorial Garden and Cenotaph in Bailiff Bridge to commemorate the 300 men Firth's men who died in WW1, which still exists. Firth Carpets has existed for over 200 years and is still very much in business.

**Recalled reservists march out of the Halifax Depot to join 2 DWR in Dublin on 8 August 1914. They would fight through Mons and Le Cateau, and survivors would take part in the events described below**



## Retreat to the Marne

The ID's attempt to keep in step 100 years on, with the WW1 timetable, brings us to some tough fighting for 2 DWR, and the arrival in theatre, in April 1915, of four more Dukes' Battalions formed as 147 Brigade, which, with two others, made up the West Riding Division – all Territorial Force units. In the last issue we went from Mons in August 1914, via Le Cateau in early September and back to the Marne, by which time the advancing Germans had run out of steam and the British and French allies – the former having 20,000 men less than when they stood on the Mons-Condé Canal a month or so earlier (although some 5000 “missing” managed to re-join over the next few weeks) - found time to reorganise, take in reinforcements, and think what should be done. The allied L of C, especially for the French, had shrunk: the Germans were a long way from home and exhausted.

On 6 September – due to a muddle the French had set off the day before – the BEF began its advance north, roughly back the way it had come, with a view to getting across the Marne. The Dukes, still 13 Brigade and 5 Division in II Corps, were not at the front of the advance, and met little or no opposition. However, the German unwillingness to stand on the Marne was in contrast to their strong defence of their next position on the Aisne, on and after 14 September. The terrain lent itself to defence – a winding, wide river, running through steep sided valleys, mostly closely wooded but with little cover at valley floor level to assist any crossing.

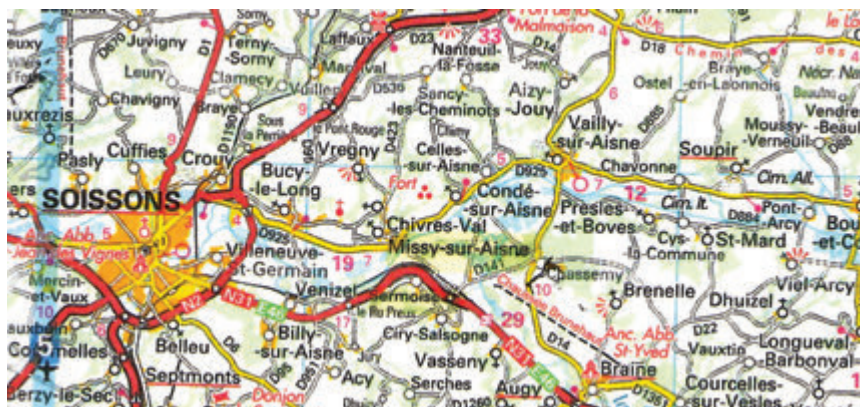


**Map showing the regions of France and Belgium in which 2 DWR fought in 1914/15**

## Missy and the Aisne

At 0600 on the 13th the lead elements of 13 Brigade were repulsed from the bridge at Missy, but that night crossed the Aisne on rafts bound together with barbed wire for want of rope (2 Sappers, Captain Johnson and Lt Flint, were awarded the VC and DSO respectively for their gallantry during the rafting). 1 RWK and 2 KOSB crossed, but the remaining battalions, 2 DWR and

2 KOYLI, stayed on the south bank, the Dukes around Sermoise. The position was precarious and attempts to advance further met furious opposition. Eventually the



The River Aisne region east of Soissons

Dukes crossed at Missy (east of Soissons) on rafts, reinforcing new assaults by other brigades on the German positions. There they stayed until the 24th, digging in under heavy shell-fire, both HE and shrapnel bursting above their heads. Many villagers remained in their houses, deep in their cellars, and such things as fresh bread and meat were available throughout. "We were always well fed in Missy" wrote an RE officer with the battalion.



Captain Johnson RE winning his VC on the Aisne at Missy.

On 25 September 2 DWR was taken out of the front line, re-crossed the Aisne and went into reserve back near Sermoise. During this time more than 400 officers and men arrived to reinforce the battalion. Whilst these articles have necessarily taken a narrow view of the actions to date, the bigger picture, of not only the movements of the BEF but also of the French formations, must be held in mind. A French attempt to outflank the German right (1st Battle of Arras, 1-4 October 1914) failed, but the allies inexorably pushed their defensive line north. By mid October the battle line was extended from the Aisne west and north to a line some 30 kilometres from Dunkirk and the sea. The war of movement was over; from here on it was trench warfare.

## East of Bethune

13 Brigade were taken north, by a series of marches and some lorried sections, to a position west of Bethune where it went into Corps Reserve. By 19 October 2 DWR was on the extreme right of the British position, with French troops on its right, who had been trying to take the bridge on the La Bassée Canal. The situation was far from clear for the CO, Major EG Harrison CB DSO, from his position as a reserve battalion, but within a few hundred yards of the front line, so receiving plenty of incoming artillery fire. On the 23rd they made a three company unsuccessful attack on Violaines, and withdrew. Counter-attacks and heavy artillery, from which there was no respite, took their toll. Casualties were relatively few, but continuous, from just a handful in one day to 20 or more on the next. On October 24th heavy HE shells were used on the battalion position at a rate of 200 a day.



East of Bethune the Battalion encountered heavy fighting

Harrison described one day, 31st October. "In trenches in support of the Sikhs. Unfortunately our rations could not get up last night, so everyone down on their luck. Lost Elrington and 8 men killed taking a trench in front of the Sikhs. Also Whittaker wounded by a sniper on returning in early morning. A very anxious day, although we were chiefly in support trenches, but I had a distinct feeling that everything was in a very critical state. At one point there was only about 15 yards between our trenches and the Germans. They could be seen and heard continually sapping, and at night I quite expected them to blow up a mine. This I heard afterwards was done some days afterwards when we had gone to Ypres".

### Ypres – November 2014.

The Dukes were then again moved further north, from place to place then on again, until on November 5th the battalion entered Ypres. From October 19th to November 22nd is officially described as the first Battle of Ypres. It was as severe fighting, often hand to hand, as any in the whole course of the war. On the 8th two Dukes companies were sent to assist the (French) Zouave Regiment regain its trenches, it having been driven out. At a cost of 90 killed, wounded and missing, including all the officers, they succeeded. The battle line fluctuated a little from day to day, but the men kept finding themselves, in reduced numbers, back in their old positions.

November 11th was a terrible day: with both flanks exposed as French troops withdrew and communications to Brigade HQ impossible, the Dukes took over 300 casualties for no worthwhile gain. Reinforcements came from many sources; 100 cavalrymen, pushed straight into the trenches; a platoon of Irish Guards; a mixed force of Royal Sussex and Royal Scots. The only remaining available officers were Lt Thackeray, pulled in as Adjutant, and 2Lt Edwards, a commissioned drill

sergeant from the Coldstream. The position was so criss-crossed by enemy machine gun fire that the CO was unable to deploy a new batch of one officer and 75 recruits, but sent them back 2 miles until they could safely be put into the line. In danger of being outflanked again, the battalion pulled back on the 13th, taking all night to withdraw, and moving just a few men at a time.

On 16 November, behind the front line, the battalion reorganised into two companies, total about 300. In 9 days it had lost 15 officers and 387 men, killed, wounded and missing. Most of the time it had been pouring with rain, and trenches were ankle deep in mud. Although no longer in the front line, daily casualties from shelling were the norm. They moved in and out of trenches, filling gaps in the line, but saw little action and managed a few days here and there of real rest in billets. On the 21st they were back in Ypres, the town now somewhat knocked about but still largely intact. Marching straight through it they went to positions four miles due east of the town.

2 DWR were now largely out of the action but often still in reach of the enemy's guns and snipers, for the next few weeks. Reinforcements brought it back to 14 officers and 850 men; "most of the new draft are special reserves, and it will be difficult keeping the Battalion up to something like Regimental form", wrote Colonel Harrison. On 13 December the Dukes moved up to take over trenches from the West Kents, which were awful, up to the knees in mud and water and up to the waist in some places.

Over winter, fighting never actually ceased, though the British Army was in winter quarters and no significant initiatives were undertaken. This situation held until March 2015, which found 2 DWR in the area of Zillebeke, east of Ypres where they remained until going into reserve in Ypres itself. They remained there until April 17th, dug in and fairly comfortable.



Stretcher party bringing a wounded man through the mud





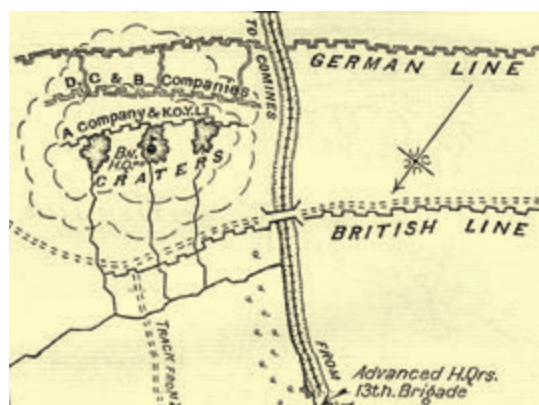
Hill 60

## Hill 60

Hill 60 is a small, man-made (from earth excavated from a nearby railway cutting) mound to the south east of Ypres, described as “a commanding hill which afforded the enemy excellent artillery observation towards the west and north-west”, and lay opposite the northern extremity of the line held by II Corps. The BEF commander, Sir John French, decided that it must be captured. At 7 pm on the 17th, after 3 sapped mines were exploded under it, 5th Brigade attacked the hill, 1 RWK and 2 KOSB leading. Overnight, in desperate hand to hand fighting, most of the position was occupied. On the 18th 2 DWR moved up to relieve both the forward battalions in their trenches, with A Company forward in an area called craters, and under severe counter-assault by all means, including hand grenades. B Company moved up to reinforce A Company, which by now was almost wiped out.

At 6.00 pm the rest of the battalion fixed bayonets and moved forward, to entirely dislodge the Germans from the feature, with the immediate objective of the mine craters. In heavy fighting, in which the CO was twice wounded and the second in command received wounds from which he subsequently died, the objectives were taken and held, despite bombardment of unprecedented severity. The brigade fought over a space only some 250 yards in length and 200 in depth for 5 days. On the 19th April the battalion was relieved and moved into dug-outs near Zillbeke. The casualty list was appalling: 79 killed or missing believed killed and 342 wounded.

The Battalion was back on Hill 60 on 4 May temporarily attached to another brigade, to relieve the Devonshire Regiment,. The Germans had not given up



**Battalion position in and around the Craters at dusk on 18 April 1915.**

on the feature and had regained part of it, but not the crest. At 8.00 am on 5 May the Germans attacked again: Lt Ince, who had been with the Battalion since Mons, wrote “aided by a favourable wind, the Germans sent over asphyxiating gas (chlorine) with disastrous results ..... fully effective counter-measures had not yet been established..... On came this terrible stream of death, and before anything could be done, all those occupying the front line were overcome, the majority dying at their posts...” On 6 May the Battalion was relieved and withdrawn to billets south of Ypres. An acting CO (Captain Barton), an acting Adjutant (Lt Ince), three other officers and about 150 men were all that remained. Hill 60 would trouble the allies again later in the war.

It is almost impossible to imagine the intensity and sheer awfulness of the fighting on Hill 60. A contemporary newspaper cutting in our archives, written

by a correspondent who was there, cannot say enough about the courage, determination and endurance of the 13th Brigade; the Royal West Kent, Kings Own Scottish Borderers, Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and Duke of Wellington's Battalions, and indeed others who a various times were sent up to capture, or re-capture, part of that terrible feature. Of the gas attack, he writes "It (the assaults on Hill 60) is a story illuminated by innumerable feats of deathless heroism, a story of splendid tenacity and grim determination, beginning with a fine feat of arms and ending with the asphyxiation of gallant men taken unawares, a crime so foul that no man who saw the railway cutting by Hill 60 after the Dorsets and the Dukes had been gassed will ever take the hand of a German again". Well, we have moved on from there, but the action showed savagery and disregard for any form of humanity at its worst: and, as is not uncommon, some men at their best.

The same correspondent, somewhat later in the year, wrote "The other morning I stood by the gate of a field of a country road in these parts and watched a brigade march past the saluting point under the eye of the General Officer Commanding the Second Army. There was a fine swing about the battalions as they went by..... These were the men of the 13th Brigade that had won Hill 60, had then gone off and played a very gallant part in the second battle of Ypres, and had afterwards returned to the ill-omened hill to find that

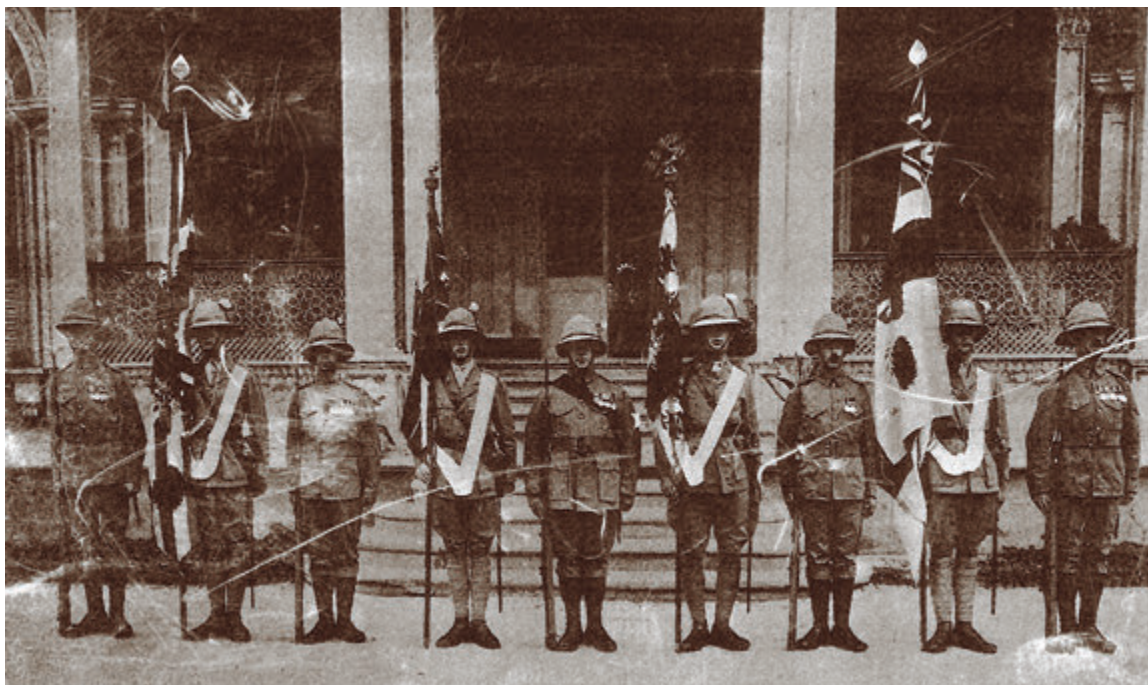
one of its bravest battalions had been overwhelmed by asphyxiating gas....."

We will catch up with the British attack the south west end of Aubers Ridge, and 1/4th, 1/5th, 1/6th and 1/7th DWR who were part of the attacking force, their first action in France, and with 2 DWR, in the next issue of the Iron Duke, in Spring 2015.

## 2 DWR Ten Years On

Only 8 years after the events described above, 2 DWR embarked at Southampton for Egypt. Arriving at Gibraltar on 5 December there was a unique meeting of the 1st and 2nd Battalions, the former being stationed on the Rock at the time. After a year in a camp on the Suez Canal (with a detached company in Jerusalem), the Battalion moved to Cairo, to "a very pleasant camp on the banks of the Nile, splendidly equipped for recreation and sport."

The Battalion did well in "musketry", winning the Championship Shield and Cup; they won the Command cricket, football and rugby cups at various times. They were well regarded by higher command, and it was no doubt with mixed feelings that they completed their tour in February 1926 and embarked for Singapore. The photograph below shows the Colour Party on parade on St George's Day 1924, almost exactly ten years after the fighting on Hill 60. The Escort to the Colours can be seen to be wearing WW1 medals.



The 2 DWR Colour Party on St George's Day 1924

## BRIGADIER-GENERAL RE SUGDEN CB CMG DSO and Bar, DWR



By Professor Peter J Simkins MBE FRHistS, Visiting Lecturer Department of History, Birmingham University  
*Last December Professor Peter Simkins presented a paper to the Western Front Association, in which he discussed how operational command and control in the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) actually worked. Whilst over-centralisation remained all too prevalent, he showed how the degree*

*of local initiative being exercised was markedly higher at brigade level during the defensive and offensive battles of 1918. As an example of leaders who took the opportunities for initiative offered he told the story of Brigadier-General Richard Sugden, a Duke. That story is reproduced here by kind permission of the author, through the helpful offices of Major General Sir Evelyn Webb-Carter KCVO OBE DL.*

One of the men ‘on the spot’ who demonstrably rose to the challenges of 1918 was Brigadier-General Richard Edgar Sugden. Like many of his fellow commanders of divisions and brigades in the BEF by the summer of that year, he did not fit the popular stereotype of the British First World War general, but he had already seen considerable front-line service at battalion level.

The adjective ‘rugged’ could have been specially coined to describe RE Sugden, both as a sportsman and a soldier. He was born in August 1871, the grandson of Thomas Sugden – who founded the family flour mill business in Brighouse, Yorkshire – and the son of Richard Sugden, a director of the firm. He spent three years at Marlborough College, where he began playing rugby and gained a place in the First XV, before leaving, at the age of seventeen, to complete his education in Germany.

On his return to England he joined the Brighouse Rangers rugby club, scoring three tries on his first appearance for the second team. He made his debut in the senior side, as a forward, against Wigan on 11 December 1891 and maintained his position as a leading figure in the team for over a decade – helping the club to achieve victory in the Yorkshire Challenge Cup 1894-1895 season and, as captain, leading it to success in the Yorkshire Senior Challenge Shield in 1897. Sugden also represented the county.

By this time he weighed over 14 stone and was 6ft. 1in. in height. When, in 1895, Brighouse Rangers became one of the clubs that split from the Rugby Union to form the Northern Union (later the Northern League and eventually the Rugby League), Sugden

loyally stayed with the club. Even though his club was now involved in a professional sport, Sugden played as an amateur. However, later in his career, he was prevented from returning to the all-amateur code despite presenting his case to the Rugby Union authorities on a number of occasions. He seems to have played the game vigorously and, following a match against Runcorn in the 1897-1898 season, he was ordered to appear before the Northern Union Committee and was suspended for his remarks about the referee.<sup>1</sup> Sugden is possibly the only British general of the Great War to have played rugby league.

Sugden volunteered for the Imperial Yeomanry towards the end of 1899 and subsequently served in the South African War, during which he was commissioned from the ranks. He maintained his ‘amateur’ military connections after the South African War and became an officer in the 4th Bn The Duke of Wellington’s Regiment in the Territorial Force. Characteristically, in 1913, he personally attempted to break a strike of the United Carters’ and Motormen’s Association by driving a flour cart to the local station, an action which led to violent scenes and the drafting of additional police into the town.

When his battalion was mobilised at the outbreak of the First World War, Sugden, now a captain, led a special Service Section of 100 other ranks which was detached to guard an Admiralty wireless station. In January 1915, the battalion was organised on a four company, rather than an eight company, basis and Sugden, with the rank of major, was given command of ‘A’ Company. The battalion history of the 1/4th DWR notes that he went with his unit to the Western Front in April 1915 and was Second-in-Command of the battalion May to September and in November and December of that year. On 12 December 1915, while crossing a bridge over the Ypres-Comines Canal, he was severely wounded in the arm by a bullet and was sent home, having, up to that time, served continuously with 1/4th Dukes since mobilisation.<sup>2</sup>

After some nine months in England – and even though he had still not regained the full use of his injured hand and arm – he rejoined his battalion, as its commanding officer, on the Somme on 4 September 1916, the day after 49th (West Riding) Division had made an unsuccessful attack in the Thiepval sector. Sugden was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel a few days later. He would serve as a battalion commander on the Western Front for the best part of twenty months, leading the 1/4th Dukes in the operations at Bellevue Spur on 9 October 1917, during the Battle of Poelcappelle, and in actions near Erquinem, Nieppe, Bailleul and Kemmel in April 1918, during Lys offensive. Sugden went home on leave at the end of May 1918, but had scarcely arrived in England before he was recalled to France to take command of the 151st Brigade in the 50th (Northumbrian) Division of 7 June, with the rank of Brigadier-General.

The 50th Division had been badly mauled in the German spring offensives of 1918, suffering the highest casualties of any British formation, and had only just been relieved after its disastrous experiences on the Aisne



**At Fleurbaix in 1915  
whilst in command of A  
Company 1/4th DWR**

in late May. Here its losses had been so great that it proved impossible to refill the ranks of its original battalions. The division was therefore reconstituted but lost its original identity. Sugden himself was a Territorial in a nominally Territorial division – and indeed was one of only eleven Territorials holding general officer rank on 29 September 1918 – but none of the battalions in his reconstituted brigade was a Territorial Force unit.<sup>3</sup>

Several weeks of intense training helped the division to get into fighting trim and, from the beginning of October until the Armistice, it was able to play an important role in the BEF's final offensive, capturing Gouy and Le Catelet in the Battle of the Beurevoir Line, and taking part in the Battle of Cambrai before seeing further action in the pursuit of the Germans to the Selle and the Sambre. In the Battle of the Selle on 17 October, Sugden's 151st Brigade led the division across that river near Souplet, south of Le Cateau, by means of duckboard bridges and reached the line of the railway on the far bank only 45 minutes after zero hour. However, German resistance then became more stubborn and the brigade found it difficult to make much progress over the spur on the western side of the L'Arbre Guernon – St Benin valley. Such was the nature of the subsequent fighting that the battalions of the 50th Division's three brigades had become mixed up by the afternoon, forcing the divisional commander, Major-General HC Jackson, to divide the front into three sectors under his various brigade commanders. Sugden was given the centre section, which extended as far as the brickworks, just south of Le Cateau station.

The battalions under his command included the 1st King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (from his own brigade), the 2nd Royal Munster Fusiliers (from 150th Brigade), and the 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers (from 149th Brigade). It says much for the tactical flexibility of the BEF and the adaptability of its "middle management" commanders at this stage of the war, that by 10.45am the next morning reorganised brigades of the Division had taken all their objectives.<sup>4</sup> Sugden, as a Territorial brigade commander, had been able to draw on all his experience of combat and leadership at battalion level and to display the same blend of pragmatism and professionalism that underpinned the command style of many of his Regular counterparts in the BEF by the latter part of 1918. Having won the DSO and Bar, Sugden was made a CMG in 1919 and awarded a CB

in 1926. He remained in the Territorial Army after the war, commanding the 147th (2nd West Riding) Brigade for some years before he retired from the TA in 1929. He was also closely involved in the family business and became a prominent figure in his home town and in the West Riding, serving as a JP and Deputy Lieutenant, spending two years as President of the Brighouse Chamber of Commerce and being granted the Freedom of the Borough of Brighouse in 1943. Unhappily his elder son, Lieutenant PG Sugden, was killed in action in 1943. After a distinguished and active life, RE Sugden himself died, aged 79, in 1943. His other son, George Highley Sugden (known as "Hickey") – who bore a striking resemblance to his father – won the MC and Bar in North Africa while serving with the Royal Tank Regiment in the Second World War and died in September 2006, aged 94.<sup>5</sup>

The family business was sold to Associated British Foods in 1962.

Notes –

<sup>1</sup> David Adams, *The Rise and Fall of Rugby League: Brighouse Rangers, 1879-1906*, pp. 11, 12, 19, 21, 29-30, 35.

<sup>2</sup> For details of Sugden's battalion service, see Captain PG Bales, *The History of the 1/4th Battalion Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment, 1914 – 1919*, Edward Mortimer, Halifax, 1920.

<sup>3</sup> Everard Wyrall, *The Fiftieth Division, 1914 – 1919*, Lund, 1939 (reprinted in Naval and Military Press edition), pp 348-353: see also Bourne, "The BEF's Generals on 29 September 1918", op cit, p. 102.

<sup>4</sup> Brigadier-General Sir James Edmonds and Lieutenant-Colonel R Maxwell-Hyslop (eds.) *Military Operations in France and Belgium 1918* HMSO, 1947, pp. 295-321.

<sup>5</sup> Daily Telegraph, 3 October 2006.

The author is most grateful to John Bourne, Derek Smith and Albert Jarman for their help in the preparation of this article.

*Peter Simkins began his working life in 1962 as Archivist and Research Assistant to Captain Sir Basil Liddell Hart before embarking upon a long and distinguished career at the Imperial War Museum from 1963 to 1999, latterly as its Senior Historian and Head of the Research and Information Office. During that time he played a central role in the reorganisation and modernisation of the Museum and in the development of its out-stations at Duxford airfield, HMS Belfast and the Cabinet War Rooms (now the Churchill Museum). He also established himself as a leading authority in 20th Century British military history, especially that of the British Army in the Great War. He was Historical Editor of the Imperial War Museum Review, 1986-1998. After his retirement from the Museum in 1999 he was awarded an MBE for his services to that institution. The same year he was elected to an honorary chair in Modern History at the University of Birmingham, a post which he held until 2010, when he became Visiting Lecturer.*

## Sugden Family Memories

Richard Sugden was David Sugden's great uncle. David served in the Dukes as a National Service officer 1956/57, and then in the West Riding Bn DWR (TA) 1958 to 1965. He last met "RE" when he was about twelve. He writes....

"RE lived at Newlands, Brighouse, just up the Huddersfield Rd on the right hand side going south. Crippled in old age, he was a one-time captain of the (now defunct) Brighouse Rangers RUFC. He was made a Freeman of the Borough of Brighouse on 25th September 1943 along with my grandfather George (brother of RE). RE was at the ceremony of DWR being granted the Freedom of Halifax on 18th June 1945, on the 130th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo.

He was a director of the family flourmill in Brighouse, Thos Sugden & Son Ltd, founded in 1829. After WW1 he became head of sales in the company. The other 2 directors were George i/c administration and Bert, being the miller - and peacekeeper between two strong willed characters.

One anecdote involved a meeting of all the mill's

employees during the 1926 General Strike. In those days they would number around 100. A couple of people at the back rather unwisely started to barrack RE. He got up from the managerial table, started to walk towards them whereupon they fled. Another story of the same General Strike tells of the time when striking millworkers picketed the main gate. In those days flour was delivered either by steam "sentinels" or horse drawn wagons. RE mounted one of the wagons & drove straight at them thereby clearing the way and so by such demonstration ensuring that normal service was resumed.

I have to wonder at the appalling conditions all ranks had to deal with. I came across 3 hand written notes by RE in letters home during 1902/3 from the Boer War when as a young other rank with the Imperial Yeomanry he spent most time in the saddle, complaining about lack of decent boots, food & ammunition (shades of modern days!?).

He had one daughter & two sons. One son, Peter, was killed in WWII. I last knew RE when I was about 12 years old. These stories above were told to me by some of the old employees, moons ago."

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## The 1/4th Dukes in the Great War

By Lt Col Tim Nicholson

As this issue of the Iron Duke reaches subscribers it will be 97 years almost to the day when the 1st/4th Battalion The Duke of Wellington's Regiment, a territorial unit (see notes below on how it was formed) landed in France. On 14 April 1915, after a train journey from Doncaster to Folkestone and a Channel crossing, it landed at Boulogne, the men wearing newly issued boots which nearly crippled them as they marched off

towards their first deployment in blazing hot sun.

Captain PG Bales MC, a former Adjutant of the battalion, wrote its history. Shortly after arrival in France he noted that "From the GOC to the latest-joined private, every man in the 49th Division was new to trench warfare, and practically no one in the Infantry had had any instruction in field engineering, or in looking after his own comfort." For the next four years



**Men of the  
1/4th Bn  
take a break**



**Lt Col AL Mowatt MC, who assumed command when Lt Col Sugden was promoted. “Another source of great satisfaction to everyone was that Major AL Mowatt MC was appointed to command the Battalion; few had seen more service with it, and none had done more for its good than he”**

that was just about all the battalion did, either occupy front line trenches and fight from them, or, both there and in reserve, take on never ending construction tasks.

After a fairly “soft” start in the Fleurbaix area, the 1st/4th were moved to the Ypres Salient, where, in appalling conditions with mud that came over the top of the issued thigh boots, they encountered gas and “conventional” attacks in 1915. It fought in the Battle of the Somme, going “over the top” on 3 Sep 1916 (Sugden was away recovering from wounds, returning the day after the attack quoted below, or he would almost certainly have died here) – “The Battalion stood to and bayonets were quietly fixed. At 5.10 am. one great gun spoke, and then the whole sky seemed to light up suddenly. The hour had come. Up rose the three companies like one man. There was no hesitation. Over the parapet they swarmed. The attack had begun.” The total casualties of the day were 11 officers and 336 other ranks (at least 160 were killed).

For 1st/4th DWR the war never stood still; they were always on the go. Starting in Halifax on 4 August 1914 and ending at Ripon Dispersal Camp on 19 June 1919, the battalion moved an astonishing 286 times, including in and out of the line. Their area of operations was really quite small: a box, 60 kms North to South, 40 kms East to West, although the majority of its fighting was done in three small areas – West of Armentieres, East of Ypres and North of Albert. They spend years at war in these tiny fragments of ground.

Between April 1915 to October 1918 37 officers and 471 other ranks were killed, 60 officers and 1998 other ranks were wounded, and 1 officer and 264 other ranks were missing, most of the last having been taken prisoners of war. 1/4th Dukes prided themselves on being a “working battalion”. In the line if it had no



**The Cadre (all that remained after the bulk had been demobilised from France) at Halifax on June 18th 1919**



**A group of 1/4th Sergeants wearing WW1 medals with 4 ex officers, including Brigadier Sugden**

operations on hand it improved its living conditions and its defences, and it trained whenever it could (the outflow of casualties and inflow of replacements meant they had their work cut out just to stand still). It stuck to its task, whatever that was, and never lost the will to win. Occasionally there was some sport, or a concert party arrived, and men took leave, and then returned to the war.

Men serving with the battalion won one Victoria Cross (Pte Poulter), two Distinguished Service Orders and one bar (one DSO and the bar were Brig Sugden's), 27 Military Crosses and 2 bars, 28 Distinguished Conduct Medals, and 132 Military Medals and 5 bars,

4 Meritorious Service Medals, one Italian Bronze medal for Military Valour, one Medaille Militaire, one Belgian Croix de Guerre, and 39 Mentions in Despatches. When it arrived in France there were 28 officers in the battalion. Over the years 141 more officers were needed to replace those killed, wounded or posted away for whatever reason, including promotion to another battalion. To a modern military mind the sheer scale of everything that had to be dealt with, compounded by the constant awfulness of the conditions and the daily casualties, is barely comprehensible. The soldiers of 1/4th were good men.

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## The Territorial Force from 1908

In 1908 a new Territorial Force was formed with an establishment of 314,000. The Force included fourteen infantry divisions, each of twelve battalions in three brigades with supporting artillery and other services. One of these divisions was the West Riding Division TF, consisting of the 1st West Riding Brigade with four battalions of the West Yorkshire Regiment TF, the 2nd West Riding Brigade with four battalions of Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment, and the 3rd West Riding Brigade with two battalions of the York and Lancaster Regiment and two battalions of King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

The 1st Volunteer Battalion The Duke of Wellington's Regiment was re-designated the 4th TF Bn DWR, in succession to the numbering of the regular battalions, based in Halifax. Our 2nd Volunteer Battalion was divided to form the 5th and 7th Bns TF DWR with HQs in Huddersfield and Milnbridge respectively and companies with their HQs and in the surrounding towns, and the 3rd Volunteer Bn in Skipton became the 6th TF Bn. The "TF" seems to have been dropped and on the outbreak of war these battalions were expanded by two more, so the 4th Bn became the 1/4th, and a 2/4th and 3/4th were created, as well as a 1/5th, 2/5th and so on.

## Reinforcements – On the Western Front – Gallipoli – Captain Tunstill’s Men Reinforcement of the British Expeditionary Force.

In this narrative we can pass over the early numbering and designations of new divisions and brigades, and use the titles with which they eventually went to war.

The first call for reinforcement for the BEF was Kitchener’s New Army, sometimes referred to as “K1”, a call for 100,000 men, (“Your Country Needs You”), was initiated in August 1914, perhaps as an understanding of the scale of casualties being met by the BEF in France became apparent, and met an immediate response, some of it motivated by the “pals” idea, where men from one place, factory or other sphere of employment all volunteered together, as often as not taking the hierarchical structure of their work-place into their unformed activities. The target number was achieved in just a few days. Barnsley, for example, produced two Pals Battalions, officially 13th and 14th (Service) Battalions the York and Lancaster Regiment, mostly miners. Later initiatives were labelled “K2”. By the middle of September 1914, 500,000 men had enlisted.

But there were considerable difficulties to overcome. Allan Mallinson, in his excellent book – “1914: Fight the good fight”, (Bantam books, 2013), writes “So successful was the call to arms that there was not only a shortage of trainers but also a chronic shortage of uniforms, rifles, ammunition and accommodation. Men drilled with broom handles in the clothes in which they had enlisted; they slept under canvas or in seaside lodging houses. Only boundless good spirits and forbearance seemed in plentiful supply.”

The Dukes had the 8th (Service) Battalion, a K1 unit, into Gallipoli by April 1915, and the 9th (K2) and 10th (K3) (Service) Battalions into France by September 1915. The 11th to 14th Service Battalions would follow, making, in the end, seven in all. (They were called Service Battalions because they signed up for service for the duration of the war. They were classed as regulars.) As will be obvious to Dukes readers, the numbers started at 8, because 4, 5, 6 and 7 were TF battalion numbers, 1 and 2 were regular battalions and 3 seems to have been kept “for spare”. The exploits of our service battalions will be recorded as the ID advances through the war.

In parallel was a focus on the existing Territorial Force (TF). After a slow start they mustered and volunteered for overseas service, with the benefit of in place structure and some experienced officers and NCOs. It will be remembered that reservists had been called up on the outbreak of war, to fill the BEF’s order of battle, so were available, at least in large numbers, neither to the service battalions, nor the TF units. Still, although the existing TF battalions were expanded and split to form extra units, there was generally enough resources to get them trained, equipped and on their way. The 49th (West

Riding) Division, comprised three brigades of volunteer Yorkshire soldiers, including 147 Brigade, with 1/4, 1/5, 1/6 and 1/7 Battalions, The Duke of Wellington’s Regiment. 49 Division was on the edge of action at Aubers Ridge in France in May, just a few days after 2 DWR’s awful second battle on Hill 60, when they were all but wiped out by chlorine gas.

Forming up also was a new TF West Riding Division, numbered 62nd, a mirror of 49 Division, in that it comprised 3 brigades of Yorkshiremen, including, in 186 Brigade, 2/4, 2/5, 2/6, and 2/7 TF Battalions of the Dukes. In terms of resources it was, for them, a rather different story. 62 Division HQ formed up in Doncaster in February 1915, which at the time was also the HQ of 49 Division. The units formed up and stayed in their home locations, to aid recruiting and because at first there was nowhere else for them to go, although in March everyone decamped over the Pennines to Derbyshire, with the Divisional HQ at Matlock and units billeted in the surrounding town and villages. “It was now possible to take stock of the Division. It was found to consist of a mass of men, partly clothed in uniform, untrained, unarmed, having for instruction purposes a few d.p. rifles, without equipment, horses or wagons, with practically no officers or NCOs competent to train and discipline, and without many of the small customs and traditions which influence the regular recruit from the moment of his enlistment. At the time, it should be noted, the Territorials were competing with the units of the Kitchener Divisions, and these latter having found favour with those in high places swept into their own ranks all the training ability of this country.” Everard Wyrall, *The Story of the 62nd (West Riding) Division*, (Naval and Military Press, in two volumes). Indeed, 62 Division became a feeder formation for 49, losing some of the already inadequate human and materiel resources it had to the priority division.

When 49 Division embarked for France, 62 was ordered back to Yorkshire, setting up in the space left by its sister formation, with one brigade at Strensall Camp. Gradually equipment arrived, and the formation settled into some kind of shape, at which point the entire Division decamped to Nottinghamshire, with HQ in Edwinstowe, and the units scattered about the Dukeries and the Thoresby Estate.

By early 1916, after several moves around the country, 62 (West Riding) Division was declared to be organised, equipped and trained out of all resemblance to its former state in 1914, and presented an excellent appearance on parade. It had been a slow and difficult business, but they got there in the end.

Has ever an army been assembled in such a short time,



and against such an array of difficulties? All our men, service and TF, fought well – although in some cases their inexperience showed at times – and we will follow their story as the Iron Duke marches on.

## 2 DWR: 1915 after Ypres and Hill 60

Only nine battalions were awarded the Battle Honour “Hill 60”: After the dreadful carnage – 700 casualties in the actions in April and May 1915 - of Hill 60, 2 DWR were withdrawn into rest billets, and over the next few weeks receive large drafts of reinforcements. From mid-May through June and July the Battalion, now commanded by Lt Col RN Bray, (the first of three generations of Brays in the Regiment; he was later promoted to command a brigade, but his HQ was hit in a gas attack and he died of his wounds), occupied muddy, wet and generally unpleasant trenches near St Eloi. On July 21st the Battalion was relieved and marched out of the battle area to Steenworde. On 21st August it received a visit from General Herbert Plumer: as Brigadier General CD Bruce CBE drily observes in his “History of the Duke of Wellington’s Regiment (1st and 2nd Battalions)” “Visits from high commanders were already reckoned as presaging some unexpected and not altogether bloodless change in the daily life of battalions and brigades”. The 5th Division were to relocate to the Somme, relieving French troops.

We might note in passing the fate of Ypres around the time that 2 DWR were fighting on Hill 60. In their “History of the Fifth Division in the Great War”, Brigadier General Hussey and Major Inman wrote “Foiled in their attempts to capture Ypres, the Germans, with characteristic, childish spite, were engaged in the systematic destruction of that unhappy town. The use of incendiary shells caused fires to break out in several places and for three or four days the town was in flames. By night it formed an unforgettable scene; the shattered tower of the Cloth Hall standing out against the crimson background of the conflagration.” And again... “Within a month or six weeks Ypres was reduced to a mass of smouldering ruins. Houses had disappeared and only in the case of a few of the stronger buildings, such as the Cathedral, the Cloth Hall the Barracks and the Prison, could the original be recognised.”

Although on the Front, 2 DWR saw little large scale action; some aggressive patrolling, sniper activity, and a great deal of training to settle the battalion down. By November it was fully up to strength with 26 officers and 950 other ranks. Elsewhere, Dukes’ soldiers had been in action. In May ’15 49th (West Riding) Division, which included 147 Brigade, comprising 1/4th, 1/5th, 1/6th and 1/7th Battalions DWR, played a small part in the unsuccessful assault on Aubers Ridge. The Division took just 94 casualties in a largely reserve role on the “northern pincer”. Arriving in theatre in July and August

were 9 DWR in 17 (Northern) Division, and 10 DWR in 23 Division. In August, 8 DWR faced a determined enemy in Gallipoli (see next article in this issue).

The original BEF, shattered beyond recognition by the first 9 or so months of war, was no more. The formations and units that were now on the front were Kitchener’s new army, supplemented by territorial divisions, 23 of them by the end of September 1915. In September 1915 the British attacked Loos, at the urging of the French who were under extreme pressure at Verdun. Our battalions were not involved, for which they were no doubt thankful. Loos was an expensive failure; British losses amounted to 60,000 men. Sir John French was replaced as C in C by Sir Douglas Haig.

The Dukes were to have a comparatively quiet period though much of the latter part of 1915, after Ypres, but that would come to a bloody end in 1916.

## 1/4th Dukes at Aubers Ridge

Much of this short account is taken from the 1/4th battalion’s history. Just before the opening of hostilities, 4 DWR (TF) – whose history went back to 1859, when the 4th West Yorks Rifle Volunteers was formed in Halifax – consisted of 8 officers and 365 other ranks. It was brought up to strength and joined 49 West Riding Division, along with 3 other Dukes battalions. To quote the battalion’s history “in early 1915 the order came to prepare for imminent embarkation, there was a last minute deluge of badly needed equipment, which caused almost as many problems as it solved”.

On 22 April the battalion suffered its first casualties, arising from a 24 hours familiarisation visit to the front line; one man killed and two wounded. It moved into position at Fleurbaix, which lies in an open low lying plain, with the nearest noteworthy geographical feature, Aubers Ridge. 1/4th DWR was predominantly equipped with rifles, having only two maxim guns in addition. Sniping became a fine art practiced by both sides, and the battalion took many casualties in 1915 from snipers.

In the first week of May 1915 preparations for a big attack were becoming evident, and the battalion began to speculate on its role in what was to be the Battle for Aubers Ridge. The Division was to be on the extreme left flank of the battle area, to play a passive support role until leading elements broke through the enemy positions. On the night of 8 May they moved up 2000 yards behind the front line.

By night fall it was clear that the attack had failed as wounded were streaming back through the battalion lines. Eventually 1/4th was moved back to its old position near Fleurbaix, having suffered only two casualties, both from “friendly” artillery. In the days following three more men were killed and four wounded by enemy artillery and snipers.

## GALLIPOLI

### 8th Battalion The Duke of Wellington's Regiment goes to war.



For what follows I am much indebted to the late General Donald Isles, whose *History of the Service Battalions* is of great interest and value to those wishing to know more about 8 DWR and the other Service battalions.

The story of the Gallipoli campaign has been somewhat distorted over time. What is agreed by all is that it was a disaster, probably should not have been attempted, or, if it had to be, it was set about the wrong way. On ANZAC day (25 April) Australians and New Zealanders remember all of their citizens who died in all wars, but the date is that of the ANZAC Corps landings on the Gallipoli Peninsula on that day in 1915. Many believe that the ANZAC forces were misled and pressed to inevitable failure by the British High Command, whilst some modern Australian historians say that their eyes were wide open to the risk and challenge of the operation. This article takes no sides in the controversy.

There are those who put it all down to the recklessness of Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, whilst his supporters insist he only wanted a naval engagement to secure the Dardanelles, take Istanbul (which was still called Constantinople at the time) and thus take the Turks – and their threat to Suez and Egypt – out of the war, but the Navy's inability to achieve that aim prompted a land forces action. It will all be wrangled over again and again every time the campaign swings back into the limelight.

Whatever the political and strategic manoeuvres at

the time, they meant little to the men of 8 DWR, a service battalion formed in the rush to answer Kitchener's appeal for 100,000 men in response to the imminent war in Europe in 1914. Formed up at the Regimental Depot in Halifax in August 1914, the Battalion was assigned to 32 Brigade in 11th (Northern) Division. The Brigade consisted of four battalions. As well as the 8th Dukes, there were the 9th West Yorkshires, the 6th Yorkshires (as the Green Howards were often called), and the 6th York and Lancasters, all service battalions, as were the other eight battalions in the two remaining brigades of the division.

### Embarkation and Landing

The GOC, General Sir Ian Hamilton, had first landed troops at the southern end of the peninsula in April 1915, but the Turkish defence held firm despite renewed allied assaults, and by July the action was at stalemate. Reinforcements were called up, all of them New Army formations with little or no war experience. Among them was 11th (Northern) Division.

After intensive training in Surrey, 8 DWR, commanded by Lt Col HJ Johnston DSO, a veteran of the Boer war, moved by train to Liverpool and embarked on SS *Aquitania*, destination unknown although the Mediterranean was suspected by the clothes and equipment issued. They staged through Lemnos and Imnos Islands, then were moved to the northern end of the peninsula, to Suvla Bay. The plan was to cut off the Turkish forces facing the allies in the South from Istanbul. The map shows the general dispositions, with 11th Division landing at the northernmost end of the assault. The landing, on 6th August, was not unopposed, but the troops made progress inland.

### The fight for the high ground

However, the next day as they pushed inland to seize the high ground ahead of them, they met fierce resistance in the area of Hill 10 (which is a little north east of Chocolate Hill on the map). With great dash and courage the initial objectives were mostly secured, despite heavy casualties and under shell fire. On the 8th and 9th of August the allies attempted to move forward to the Anafarta ridge, but senior commanders failed to take concerted action to hold and use the momentum gained and the advance halted in confusion. Turkish counterattacks were driven back, but casualties were heavy.

Some men, despite the intensity of the battle around them, still find time to keep a diary or make notes on what is happening around them. 8 DWR had the good fortune to have with it CSM Miles, then a sergeant, whose diaries record the action the battalion faced over the years of its active service in WW1. Of the landing at Suvla Bay and subsequent events, he writes...



**The War Grave site at Greenhill**

“We eventually reached the shore and doubled up under cover of the hill. Mr Turk was retiring. Here we fixed bayonets and spreading out into a single line charged up the hill. My word! We knew all about warfare then; bullets were whizzing by, finding their billet in some poor fellow; land mines were exploding everywhere, blowing the unfortunate ones who trod on them sky high. The Turks were throwing bombs at us and, altogether, we were having a very uncomfortable time. We were suffering heavy casualties, one of my chums receiving a bullet in the chest, another in the forehead, killing him outright.”

Of the next day, 7 August, he wrote, “After running up and down ditches and running across fields of stubble for a matter of six miles, daylight came and found me in a ditch with some 50 men (no officers). We surveyed the ground in front and saw dozens of Turks lying about, some dead and others wounded and, looking behind, we saw the same for our own poor fellows. I find also that the regiments have got a bit mixed up. There are Yorks, West Yorks, York and Lancasters and ourselves.”



## **The battle for the ridge**

Battle continued through 9 and 10 August; some 9000 men attacking (as was learned later) some 90,000 Turks up on the ridge. The 53rd Division was brought forward to press the assault, with support from 8 DWR and 6 Y&L. There was no allied artillery at this time, so no response to the Turkish shell fire. The CO, Lt Col Johnston, was wounded (as were many officers) and ordered the stretcher bearers who came forward to take him back for medical attention to leave him and look after the wounded around him. His body was found later and is in the Hill 10 cemetery.

On 10 August 11 Division was relieved and withdrew back, initially to the beaches and then, after two days, to trenches facing Turkish positions on Chocolate Hill. There they remained until 21 August when they took part in a major assault on the heavily defended ridge positions. It was not a success.

## **The final major assault.**

By night fall on 21 August it was clear that the attack could not succeed, nor could the rate of casualties be sustained. CSM Miles wrote, at dawn on 22 August..... As soon as dawn broke we called the roll. What a lot of specimens we looked. There was roughly 250 of us out of a total of about 900. In my company alone we had lost seven killed, 43 wounded, the majority of whom died of wounds I expect, and 23 missing out of a total pf 134. We had one officer left in the battalion out of a total of 29.” Second Lieutenant RE Edwards duly became temporary Commanding Officer. 32 Brigade had suffered so heavily it was obliged to form a single battalion out of its survivors.

The operation cost the allies 188,000 casualties, including 57,000 killed. Of the last category 34,000 were British. French casualties (killed, wounded and missing) were 27,000, ANZAC 36,000, Indian 5000, Canadian 140 and Turkish 175,000.

## **The end of a dismal story.**

8 DWR did not take part in much further action, although cold, shell fire and snipers caused further casualties. They dug in and endured. Great gallantry had been shown by the British, ANZAC, French and Indian troops who took part in the operation, but to no avail. Evacuation was authorised by the Cabinet on 7 December and 8 DWR embarked ten days later. It eventually arrived in Egypt. Whilst accurate casualty figures are not available, 19 officers and 607 men were drafted in to bring it up to strength.

## CAPTAIN TUNSTILL'S MEN

By Lt Col Toby Lehmann

Just over one hundred years ago, on Friday 4th September 1914, a letter was published in the weekly edition of the Craven Herald and Wensleydale Standard; the letter ran to just 432 words but it was to change the lives of hundreds of local residents. The message of the letter was simple; it was an appeal by local businessman Harry Gilbert Tunstill to the people of the Craven District of North Yorkshire, "to raise 99 men from this district and so form, together with my own enlistment, one whole company of 100 strong ... rallying to the Country's call for soldiers in the desperate struggle now confronting the Nation, and upon which depends our very existence as an Empire". Tunstill's appeal struck a chord with the local population and in little more than two weeks he had raised his company. On Monday 21st September Tunstill, with his fellow recruits, departed to begin their military training. En route to Halifax they were joined by other contingents from the wider area to form a whole company, 240-strong, who were to become 'A' Company in the newly-formed 10th (Service) Battalion, Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment. To the locals they were, and would remain throughout the war, 'Captain Tunstill's Men'.



**Captain  
Tunstill in  
December  
1914**

Harry Gilbert Tunstill (known to all as Gilbert) was 33 years old in September 1914. His great-grandfather had established a cotton spinning business in the Burnley area in 1834 and the company had prospered over the last 80 years, leaving the Tunstills wealthy and well-known. Gilbert himself had been educated at Charterhouse School and then worked as a land agent. In 1906 he had married Geraldine Margaret Parker, who was to take a prominent role in Gilbert's raising and equipping of his volunteers. Following their marriage, Gilbert and Geraldine set up home at Otterburn House, in the hamlet of Otterburn, By 1914 Gilbert Tunstill



**Captain Tunstill seated, with other officers, believed to Have been taken in 1917**

had become a well-known and respected figure in the Craven community; in December 1913 he was elected, unopposed, as the Settle representative on the West Riding County Council, following the death of the previous incumbent.

So it was that when Tunstill made his appeal in September 1914, with the endorsement of a wide range of local dignitaries, notably the renowned Walter Morrison of Malham Tarn, it attracted great attention not only in the local press but also among the wider community. More than the one hundred he had requested came forward but, with some failing their initial medical examinations, the final number of recruits who assembled in Settle on Saturday 19th September came to 87 (including Tunstill himself). On the following Monday (21st) the men departed by train via Skipton to Silsden and Steeton and then marched on to Keighley. By the time they were ready to move on by train that same evening to the Regimental Depot at Halifax the Company numbered some 240. Tunstill's men had been joined by volunteers from Keighley (50); Grassington (18); Cowling (18); Ilkley (16); Bingley (11); Skipton

(10); Burley (10); Earby (8); Menston (8); Addingham (2); and Silsden and Otley (1 each).

Tunstill's Company, along with the rest of the Battalion, spent the next year in training, at a variety of locations across the south of England, before finally in August 1915, embarking for France. The Battalion remained on active service for the remainder of the war. Their first engagement came within weeks of their arrival in France, on the fringes of the British attack at the Battle of Loos in September 1915. There followed a very trying winter and spring spent in harsh conditions at a variety of locations on the Western Front. Although not involved on the infamous first day of the Somme offensive in July 1916, they were in action on the Somme between July and October, suffering heavy casualties. In September 1916, Tunstill himself was invalided home and served out the remainder of the war in England. The winter of 1916-17 and the following spring were spent largely in the Ypres Salient, with regular turns in the front line. In June 1917 they attacked on the first day of the Battle of Messines and in September were engaged in the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele). In November 1917 the Battalion was sent to the Italian Front where they would serve out the remainder of the war. The Italian campaigns may not, in the popular imagination, have the same resonance as the Western Front, but weather conditions could be brutal and the fighting, on occasion, fierce. The Battalion was in the forefront of the final allied advance across the River Piave in October 1918. It was not until April 1919 that the Battalion, including the survivors of Tunstill's original recruits, finally returned to England.

The impact of the war on the men of Tunstill's Company, on their families and on the wider community

cannot be reduced to mere statistics, but the numbers are startling. Of the original 87 volunteers from Tunstill's personal campaign, one-in-four (22 men) were killed and many others discharged from the Army on grounds of wounds or ill health incurred during service. We can only speculate on the lasting impact of the war on Gilbert Tunstill himself. What is known is that on 8th July 1931, 15 years after leading his men into action on the Somme, Gilbert Tunstill took his own life.

To mark the centenary of these momentous events, the staff and students of The Skipton Academy (formerly Aireville School), with the generous support of a host of local individuals and organisations, and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Craven and the First World War group presented a series of special performances of their acclaimed production "Tunstill's Men", which attracted sell-out audiences at the Grassington International Festival in 2013 and 2014. There were performances in Settle on Sunday 14th, in Grassington on Tuesday 16th, and in Skipton on Friday 19th and Saturday 20th September. Finally, on Sunday 21st September, one hundred years to the day from the departure of the volunteers, there was a special performance for an audience of invited guests, including relatives of Gilbert Tunstill and other of his volunteers. Among those present were Mr. Dennis Maunders, whose father, Bob, was one of Tunstill's original recruits and also Mr. Henry Bolton, whose great-uncle, Dick Bolton, was one of Tunstill's fellow Company officers.

The progress of Tunstill's recruitment campaign and the story of the Company from 1914 to 1919 can now be followed, day-by-day, via an online diary. The account, which can be seen at <http://tunstillsmen.blogspot.co.uk>, is updated daily, 100 years after the original events.



**A Company in August 1914, at Bramshott Camp, Hampshire**

## 100 YEARS ON THE STORY SO FAR

This series of articles on the Dukes in the First World War (WW1), has attempted to describe the activities of the DWR Battalions, as we progress through the stages of the war in chronological step with the way it was 100 years ago. So far the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, with its 1914 actions at Mons, Le Cateau, the Marne and the Aisne, and then the first and, into 1915, second battle of Ypres and Hill 60, has featured. The last edition described the campaign of the 8<sup>th</sup> battalion at Gallipoli in Spring 1915, and saw the arrival in France of the first of our territorial battalions, 1/4<sup>th</sup>, 1/5<sup>th</sup>, 1/6<sup>th</sup> and 1/7<sup>th</sup>, comprising 147 Brigade; that formation saw a little action on the fringe of the unsuccessful Aubers Ridge operation in May 1915. In the summer of 1915 our 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Service Battalions arrived in theatre. Through late 1915 and 1916 the BEF underwent rapid reinforcement.

The professional soldiers of the original BEF were largely gone from the order of battle by late 1915. Of course there were many individuals that survived the first 12 months or so, but they were now spread thin in the ranks of Kitchener recruits and territorials. By now new formations had arrived from the old Empire; from Australia, New Zealand, India and Africa. Lack of both experience and equipment caused serious difficulties, but through the latter half of 1915 these challenges were met and, largely, overcome.

Following the failure in the Dardanelles (Gallipoli) and of Russia in Poland, and of French attacks in the Artois region in May, renewed offensives on the Western Front were called for in the autumn of 1915. It was resolved that the British, with some French support, would attack at Loos in Artois with 6 divisions, and the French, with 35 divisions, would launch a much larger offensive in

Champagne, both offensives starting in September. After some initial success, these assaults petered out, with terrible casualties. The Dukes battalions in-theatre were not involved in the Loos battle, so we will move on, noting just that 6000 British soldiers were killed in the first two days of Loos, and by mid-October around 50,000 casualties had been taken.

But the first really big test for this new BEF would come in July 1916, by which time it was roughly equal in numbers to the French forces. We will come to that, and the part that the Dukes' battalions and formations played. But first it would be good to remind ourselves that the BEF, much expanded though it was by now, was not the "senior partner" on the allied side. France, in whose support Britain had joined the war in 1914, was often the initiator of strategic developments (for good or for ill), and our high command deferred to French ideas many times, and to French requests for action to relieve its own hard pressed forces.

As the Commonwealth troops focus shifted from Ypres towards the Somme through the latter part of 1915 and the beginning of 1916, the alignment was largely dictated by the way that France chose to deploy its own formations. To say that British in the north and French in the south is perhaps a bit simplistic, as they routinely overlapped and supported each other in the various sectors, but it is a fair overview position. The Americans are not here yet.

In this edition of the Iron Duke, therefore, we review the French situation at the start of 1916, and set the scene for the great Somme offensive, which will be the main WW1 focus for the spring 2016 edition of our Journal.

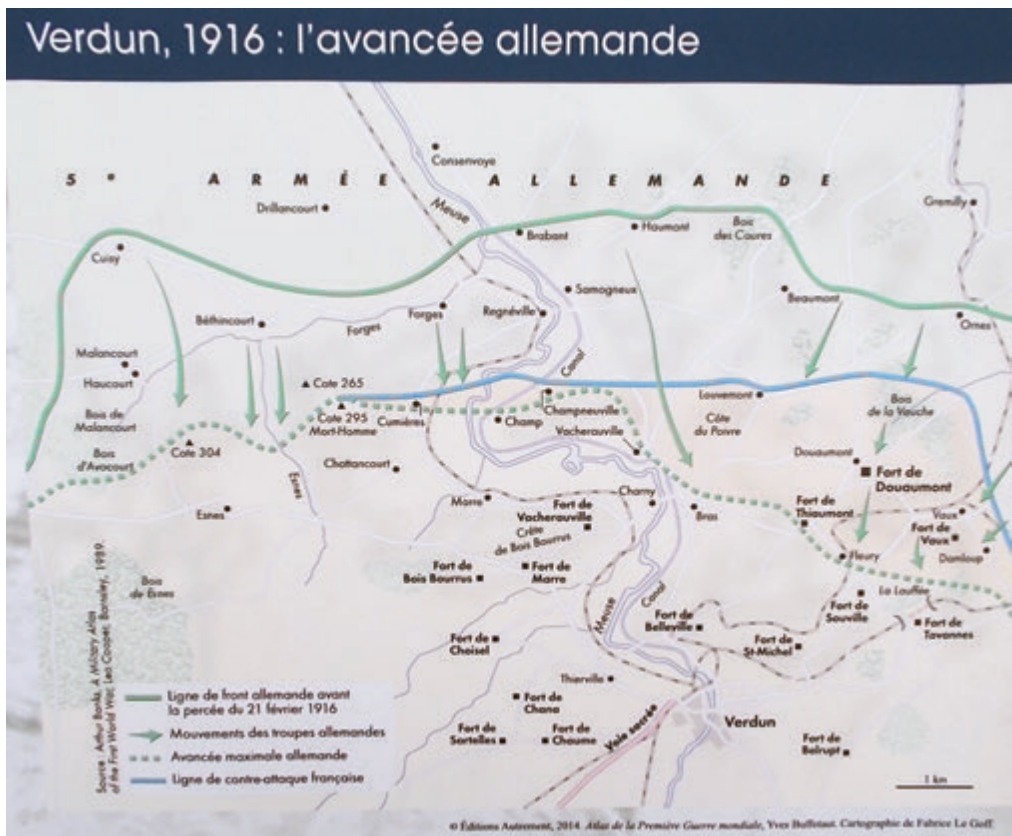
## VERDUN – A WOUND THAT WILL NEVER HEAL

Readers will know that the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) entered WW1 in support of a very much larger French Army. Whilst the BEF in August 1914 faced the German advance on a quite narrow front at Mons, the French, with five armies in the field, were spread from around Charleroi in the north to the Swiss Border in the south. After the next 15 months or so the balance between British and Commonwealth on the one hand, and French and its colonial troops on the other, roughly equated.

### **Franco-Prussian War 1870 – a humiliation for France.**

The outcome of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 was defeat for France, and most of Alsace and much of Lorraine was lost. Verdun found itself in the new front line. The frontier between France and the German states to its east was originally set as far back as the division of Charlemagne's empire amongst his grandsons in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century, and Lorraine and Alsace changed hands several times over the next millennium. In 1870 the Prussian

Map of the fortified area, and lines of initial German advance



Army reached Paris, and France capitulated. As a result of their loss, France decided to construct a series of 38 forts, centred on a 40 km frontage around Verdun, to prevent any future incursion. Some were very large indeed, notably those at Douaumont, Vaux and Souville; others were smaller, or simply fortified lines of defence in the hilly forests of the Ardennes.

### Determination to regain lost territory.

France never recovered from the defeat and humiliation of the Franco-Prussian War. On the outbreak of WW1, the French first objective was to recapture its lost territories in Alsace and Lorraine. That French assault was quickly repulsed, and after some heavy fighting with many casualties on both sides through 1914 and the first half of 1915, the opposing armies realigned on a north/south axis. Verdun remained in French hands, but none of the lost territories had been regained.

### The Battle for Verdun.

In the stalemate of early 1916 the German high command determined to draw the French into an engagement which would suck their forces into a counter-attack battle on a massive scale, where they could be

destroyed, primarily by forcing them to attack under massive artillery bombardment. The Germans would take territory, forcing the French to attempt to regain it. The aim was more an attack on French manpower, than on territory, and the region chosen for the execution of this strategy was the defended area around Verdun in eastern France, which now formed a salient into German held positions across the 1915 front. An attack on Verdun would do more than capture a few miles of land, in itself of little value. It would plunge a dagger into French pride – France, the German High Command believed, could not accept any further loss in that region. It would do whatever had to be done to resist.

How right that was. The French High Command had initially declared that fortified positions had no place in the French strategy, and where the Verdun forts and defended localities were manned at all, it was with small garrisons. When the German Army attacked in February 1916, preceded by an artillery bombardment on unprecedented scale, several of the major forts were quickly overrun and captured, including the biggest of them all, Douaumont, which was taken by a German sergeant and a small party, capturing the garrison of 57 (most of whom were attending a lecture deep in the bowels of the fort), without a shot being fired. German

forces moved up close to the town itself within a few days. At this point, the French reversed their attitude, and declared that the City of Verdun must be held at all costs. The French Prime Minister, Aristide Briand, is quoted as saying to Joffre and his staff “If you surrender Verdun you will be cowards, cowards! And you needn’t wait ‘til then to hand in your resignation, I (will) sack you all on the spot!”

Five French divisions were hastily assembled to start the counter-assault on the German’s newly captured positions. Over the next nine months, the French pulled into the defence and then counter-attack of Verdun 259 of its 330 infantry regiments, and enormous numbers of guns and supporting arms and services. Amongst the many serious obstacles was the lack of supply routes; the Germans could use multiple rail and road routes, the French had just one, the road in from west of the City, later named the “Voie Sacré”. As it enters the city now the road is lined by statues of French Marshalls and Generals, rather spooky if you arrive in the twilight, huge white stone figures glaring down..



**The final stretch of the “Voie Sacré” and some of the 30 or so statues**

Over a period of months, the lost front line forts were counter attacked and retaken, some by both sides, several times, at immense cost. Verdun town held out, but was all but destroyed. To continue their defence France had to withdraw formations from elsewhere on the Western Front, which meant that the BEF had to take a much greater share of the front on the Somme. Joffre implored Haig to open up a new offensive, to force the Germans to pull men out of their Verdun assaults. The Germans found that their strategy was as costly to themselves as it was to the French, as their prestige was now at stake, and were as committed to taking Verdun (not their initial goal) as the French were to defend it, so had also deployed far more resources, men and materiel, than originally intended. Both sides were being bled at an unsustainable rate. There has been considerable argument about the number of casualties; we can take



**The City after constant bombardment.**

a figure of 380,000 dead for France and 350,000 for Germany as in the right area.

### Aftermath

Whilst for the British and Commonwealth armies the names that primarily recall the terrible slaughter of WW1 1916/1917 are Somme and Passchendaele (3rd Ypres), for the French it was, and is, Verdun. Tales of almost supernatural heroism and achievement abound. Those who were there and did well came to public attention and several notables moved up – Charles de Gaulle was a captain at Verdun; Petain later succeeded Joffre, for rescuing French prestige by saving Verdun



**French infantry in trenches shattered by shellfire**



(and dealing with mutiny in the French Army in 1917); the largely unknown General Nivelle, to whom great credit and high command was given at the time, later lost both in the defeats along the Chemin des Dames; Andre Maginot, whose concept of a fortified defence line in WW2 proved to be such a failure, fought at Verdun as a sergeant, though he had held ministerial rank in a previous administration.



**Memorial to Andre Maginot, who fought at Verdun as a sergeant in an infantry battalion**

The Ossuaire du Hougaumont, (an ossuary is a place for keeping bones), is an enormous sugar loaf shaped construction with a tall central tower, and the lower tiers are packed with the bones of men of both sides



**The Ossuaire du Hougaumont**



**Looking east from the top of Fort Douaumont**

who fell. These heaps of remains, estimated of 130,000 men of both sides (and some women, for there were many civilian casualties from the estimated 26,000,000 artillery shells fired in this campaign) can be seen by peering through the darkened glass of the ground level windows at the rear of the monument. It was impossible to identify many individuals, so this practical solution became a major memorial, on a scale similar to, or perhaps greater than, Thiepval or Tyne Cot.

The interior has a chapel of remembrance and, at one end, a “flame of memory”, and the names of the areas of the battlefield and the regiments that took part adorn the walls. For six euros one can climb the tower to get



**The interior of the Ossuaire**

fantastic views all around, and then watch a good film in the basement, before exiting through the inevitable shop, with all manner of souvenir goods. In the grounds of the Ossuaire are some 16,000 graves of identified dead (including six from WW2). On one side is an area for Jewish casualties, and on the other one for Arabic casualties. There are many such cemeteries in the area, though not on this scale.

Beside the “Flame of Memory” are photographs of President Sarkozy and representatives of the other WW1 participants, attending a day of memorial in 2008. This turned out to be highly controversial as Chancellor Merkel declined to attend, because Sarkozy had switched the venue from Paris to Verdun, and she did not wish to be present in a place so closely associated with German aggression.



**One of the exterior faces of the Fort**



**French soldier carved from wood**

Nine villages were totally destroyed and never rebuilt. Some of these can be visited, and plaques recall what stood there – the school, the baker, the blacksmith and so on. At Fleury, one of them, many small monuments can be seen; one, carved from a tree trunk, a French soldier; another, a memorial to two men of the village who were shot (presumably for cowardice or desertion) showing that they were later pardoned, and whose bodies were exhumed and given a new grave within the Ossuaire cemetery. Some writers have claimed that the birds do not sing – not so. But the air is full of a heavy resonance of an appalling history of slaughter and death, although this is surely all in the mind of the informed visitor. Why should nature care for the follies of mankind?

In the area around the battlefields are many plaques and monuments, commemorating statements for peace in Europe, and one, at the destroyed village of Fleury, carries a quotation from Robert Schumann, the architect of the European Union project, showing how the slaughter at Verdun was a key stepping stone to, and justification for, unification, and all those 800,000 lives, far from being lost in vain, were lost in the cause of a united Europe. It struck the writer as a dubious argument.



**Memorial to two soldiers executed, and later pardoned, and re-interred at the Ossuaire Cemetery**

### **Effect of the Somme Offensive**

Haig launched his Somme offensive on 1 July 1916. There can be little doubt that however unsuccessful and costly this turned out to be for the British and Commonwealth forces, it saved Verdun. By the end of 1916 the French had recaptured all the ground it had lost the previous spring: a modest salient some 10 kilometres wide by 8 deep, of dubious real value. This was only achieved because the German high command was unable to defeat the Somme attacks without taking men from Verdun, and at the same time faced renewed offensives on their eastern front.

### **A Moving Experience**

The visitor cannot help but be moved by what can be seen at Verdun. A large new visitor centre, near Hougaimont, is under construction, but information at all sites large and small is quite well displayed, and the various forts and other places to visit are sign-posted. Verdun is only some 90 minutes down the auto-route from the Somme, and is well worth a visit.

## THE SOMME BATTLEFIELDS – A GENERAL VIEW

Many readers of this Journal will have visited the Somme battlefields, some several times. I visited the area in September this year, directly after my journey to Verdun. The Somme offensive began as and when it did to force the Germans to take some pressure off the French, who were unable to withstand the attacks in the Verdun sector, and over the months from February to July 1916 had pulled more and more of their formations out of the French sector of the Somme position and elsewhere to throw them into the shrinking defence line around the town of Verdun.

So, there is a clear link. Another, is the shocking scale of casualties of both campaigns. Armies were hurled at each other in attack and counter-attack; enormous numbers of artillery and mortar shells were fired, pulverising the ground, flattening the villages, and making heavy going for men and equipment.

A month or so ago, the weather was fine, with bright sunshine across the open, rolling fields, brisk breezes on the ridges and shelter in the valleys. I could see for miles, although with plenty of dead ground along my line of sight. In 1916, once you were out of your trench and moving forward, there would have been little cover, but plenty of opportunities for defenders to spring a nasty defilade position surprise, or for enemy artillery observers to acquire good targets.

A visit to the Somme between Albert and Bapaume shows you how developed WW1 tourism is now. All the major cemeteries and memorials have visitors in good numbers, whether coming by coach in organised parties or independently, and from many European countries. Some of the memorials are very big indeed, like Thiepval; some distinctive in design and purpose – the Canadian and Newfoundland Park at Beaumont-Hamel or the Ulster Tower. But there are hundreds of smaller cemeteries and memorials, and these seem to me to tell the story of those months and years of war in that region more clearly.

From Hawthorn Ridge Number 1 you can see five other cemeteries, all but one small. Number 1 has just 82 headstones, and is accessible only down a much used farm track, with deep ruts which require some careful driving to avoid bellying your car on. This demonstrates one of the very British characteristics of the Somme (and elsewhere); our men were buried as close as possible to where they fell. There are hundreds of small cemeteries. Sometimes two headstones stand side by side, touching, to show that although we know who they are, they could not separate the remains. Indeed, there are groups of 5 or 6 headstones all arranged as a group, to show the same thing. Occasionally two names share a single headstone.

In some cemeteries the dates on the headstones show



**Albert  
Town  
Hall**



**A typical medium size Commonwealth War Grave site**

major action over a few days or weeks, but in most there is a wide spread of both dates and cap-badges. I regret that I cannot recall which location I was in (although it was somewhere in the Pozieres area) where I found two Dukes, lying almost side by side, one killed in 1915, and the other in 1918. I once plotted on a map the locations that 1/4<sup>th</sup> DWR moved to in 1916/17. The earliest is 4 March 1916, the last February the next year. There are twenty separate places, and some were occupied more than once.

Now imagine all the other units doing the same thing: going into the line, and coming out again, and moving a few miles up, down, left or right, and then you can see why it is rare (but there are some, of course), for any one cemetery to have headstones with a big majority of just one cap-badge and just one group of close dates. 1 July 1916 is something of an exception along the cemetery line of that first, fateful offensive. But otherwise, give or take a mile or so (and rarely so much), the front lines did not really go anywhere.



**The Newfoundland Memorial at Beaumont Hamel**



**July 1916; two Dukes, side by side**



**The Thiepval Memorial**

If you wander, perhaps not entirely erratically but willing to stop on your route and explore anything that catches your eye, you are well rewarded. 2Lt Donald Bell VC's memorial stands beside a dusty lane on the edge of Contalmaison, on the spot where he lost his life, just 5 days after winning his Victoria Cross. He was a teacher from Harrogate who played professional football to supplement his salary. His VC was originally held by the Green Howards Museum in Richmond, but was later bought by the Professional Footballers' Association.

A few hundred yards away is a memorial to 16<sup>th</sup> Bn Royal Scots, constructed of Moray stone, which states that contemporary observers considered it to be the "finest battalion in Kitchener's Army", which seems a bold claim. Many wreaths lie around it, including one from Scotland's First Minister, and another from Heart of Midlothian Football Club.

One of the most active memorials is the "Grande Mine", as the road signs say, or the Lochnagar Crater, near Ovillers. It has its own Friends' Association, a website, and a mobile shop, pulled into place behind a land rover. There were a large number of visitors on the day I went, so clearly the publicity it is given works. Essentially it is just a big hole in the ground, with a variety of memorials, a large cross, a semi-circular bench dedicated to nurses in WW1, and so on. 185 Tunnelling Company RE started work on this in 1915, and it was take over by 179 Company. The tunnel was over 1000 feet long, and it was loaded with 60,000 pounds of explosive. It was detonated at 0728 on 1 July 1916.



**The Ulster Tower**



**The Lochnagar Crater (The “Grande Mine”)**

If you have had enough of following your nose, you can easily, with a little research, pick on a particular action or line of march. 2DWR, who had been in France since August 1914 and had had a very hard time of it indeed for nearly two years when they went “over the top” on 1 July 1916, started their advance from trenches south of La Sucrierie, on the road between Mailly-Mailly and Serre (D919). They set off as left support battalion in 12 Brigade at 0855, heading roughly due east, but half an hour later received the order to halt. 4 Company did so; numbers 1 – 3 were out in the open under fire with no cover, so carried on reaching the first German line on the Redan Ridge. During this time all communication with Battalion HQ was lost. Eventually the Battalion reformed, less its casualties, back where it started, a sadly frequent outcome of the Somme assaults. My admiration for this battalion is considerable, so we might well come back to this action in a later edition.

There are a number of museums. One in Albert has an eclectic collection of WW1 memorabilia, and as you head down the last corridor (it is all underground), the lights flicker and the crump of artillery and chatter of machine guns hurry you along. In need of a cuppa? The

Blighty or Old Bill Tea Rooms will be pleased to supply you, and some of the major monuments, like the Ulster Tower, have a small cafe alongside.

The area of the 1 July 1916 offensive is surprisingly small; a front of maybe ten miles. Between 1 July and 19 November we advanced about 9 miles, between Albert and Bapaume. Some of the stories from the Dukes’ battalions that were involved in this will be set out in the next two issues of the Iron Duke.

## HILL 60 – THE BLUFF – LIEUTENANT PLUMB’S LETTER 1ST JULY 1916 - 1/6TH BATTALION WAR DIARY 1 – 15 JULY 1916

We are now into the third year of this conflict. There was only one of our battalions on the Western Front in 1914 (2nd Battalion); by April 1916 there were 13, and in January the following year, another 4, and one more, the last (13th Service Battalion), in July 1918. On 1 July 1916 all of those in the theatre were within a few miles of Albert, on the Somme.

An article in the last edition told the story of Verdun February to December 1916, where French and German pride compelled both sides to continue to fight to the death, with enormous casualties, over a strategically not very important piece of Lorraine. It was this conflict that brought about the British and Commonwealth attacks on the Somme, as the French, desperate to hang on at Verdun but recognising that a diversion had to be created if they were to have any chance at all of doing so, begged the Allies to open another front.

This Journal cannot, and indeed will not try to, tell the whole story of the Regiment’s activities in France and Belgium in 1916. What follows is a selection of narratives, first-hand accounts and formal records, which together should offer a vivid picture of what it was like to fight in the Ypres and Somme areas in 1916. The latter part of the Somme battles, and operations at Arras and in the Ypres area in early 1917 will be covered in the Autumn 2016 edition.

### *The story so far.*

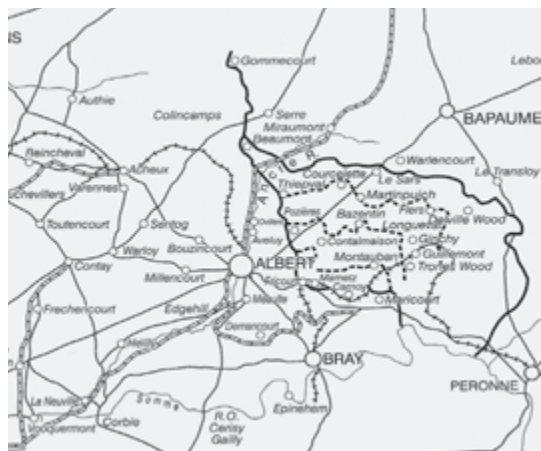
Articles in previous issues of this Journal have brought us to the beginning of 1916, and the last offered an overview of the Somme area following a recent visit. It might now be useful to summarise where all our battalions were, and what they were doing, up to June 30th 1916.

### **January 1st – June 30th 1916.**

The 1st battalion remained at Sialkot (India) during the whole of this period. On March 1st the 2nd Battalion were in trenches south of Hebuterne. Between then and June 30th the Battalion marched all around the Somme region, from trench to billets, and back to the trenches many times, until arriving on June 13th at Bertrancourt where they remained until the last day of the month when they moved up into assembly trenches east of La Sucrierie (referred to on page 28 of the last edition) arriving at 11.40 pm preparatory to the attack of July 1st.

The 3rd Battalion (Special Reserve) and the Depot continued to carry out their training and reinforcing duties, the former at North Shields, and the latter at Halifax.

During the whole of the period the 147th Brigade of 49th (West Riding) Division (1/4th, 1/5th, 1/6th and



**This map shows the general area of the Somme front line around Albert and Bapaume. The BEF, supported by Commonwealth troops as they arrived in theatre, remained in the Ypres area from late 1914 to 1918.**

***Somme map and the Ypres map support the articles that follow. These clear and excellent maps are taken from Maj Gen Donald Isles’ history of the Service Battalions.”***

1/7th DWR) remained in the same general area, their trench line being about Authuille. For a much of the time they were actually out of the trenches, spending their time in working parties, training and resting. A good part of June was spent in preparing for the coming offensive, and on the 30th of the month the Brigade were still concentrated in the area of Authuille, in readiness for July 1st.



The second line Territorial Units of the Regiment (186th Brigade of 62nd (West Riding) Division, namely 2/4th, 2/5th, 2/6th, and 2/7th DWR), were at camp at Larkhill on Salisbury Plain until the second week in June, when they moved to Suffolk. The third line Territorial Units, 3/4th, 3/5th, 3/6th, and 3/7th DWR, (The West Riding Brigade), were at Clipstone Park in Nottinghamshire, where they were training and furnishing drafts. They remained on home service throughout the war.

The 8th Battalion, its fight at Gallipoli over, was based in Egypt, and on June 25th embarked at Alexandria, and disembarked at Marseille on 1st July. By July 30th the Battalion was in its brigade, 52nd in 17th (Northern) Division concentration area at Bois des Tailles.

The 9th Battalion was in action on "the Bluff", in February and March to the east of St Eloi, where it held the position despite the most strenuous opposition (see following article). It was relieved by the 2nd Wellington Battalion (NZ) in May and started its move towards the Somme in June 1916, where it went into trenches near Fricourt, a little east of Albert, on 1st July, moving from their bivouacs at Bois des Tailles.

10 DWR was in and out of trenches for the first half of the year, towards the northern end of the allied line in the area of Amiens, arriving at Croisy, some miles west of Albert, on 30th June.

The 11th (Reserve) Battalion remained at Brockton Camp, Cannock Chase, training recruits and furnishing drafts. On March 10th a new battalion, 12 DWR, was raised at Morton Hall, near Middlesborough. It was disbanded on August 31st, owing to a change in the system of training and sending out of drafts of reinforcements. The 12th (Labour) Battalion was raised on 10th March 1916, and embarked at Southampton for Le Havre on April 1st. It was initially engaged on tasks on the Poperinghe-Bergues railway, and then moved to the Somme, working in the front line.

### **The Bluff – 9 DWR February/March 1916.**

Taken from an article by F.A.P in the Iron Duke No 10, 1928.

On February 5th 1916, 9 DWR were moved up from behind St Omer to the Ypres Salient again. They occupied a trench sector enclosing St Eloi, looking on to the mound with a crater in its side which formed a much coveted salient into the German lines. The land rose gently from the Allied front line to the Ypres-Dickebusch road and we could see a broad panorama including Wytschaet and the Messine Ridge to the right. Voermezele and its ruined church just behind us, Ypres in the far background, and, on our far left, only a mile or so away, a long, low embankment largely made

of clay thrown up when the Ypres-Commines canal was made.

This was the so called Bluff, a name given because it ended abruptly in a steep slope in front of the German lines, of which it gave an admirable view. It was covered in bushes and trees, many of them firs.

Our first days at St Eloi were uneventful but the presence of a Canadian mining company gave rise to grave apprehensions, by no means allayed by the grisly stories which they told us when we enjoyed their lavish hospitality, of hand to hand encounters with German miners, of the peculiar noises which would foretell the imminent explosion of a mine underneath us, and of the efforts the Germans were always making to seal up our saps'.

The German lines were so close that shell fire was almost negligible as a rule. On one occasion two Germans appeared at a listening post only 20 yards from our lines and treated us to several jocular speeches, which everybody was so amazed at that no attempt was made to interrupt. But after we had been in for a week and were expecting our first relief, early one fine



**2Lt EAW Wood is buried in Spoilbank CWGC. His headstone is getting rather worn.**



**Hill 60 1915, where 2 DWR received the first gas attack on the BEF and took appalling casualties (see ID No 277, Autumn 2014).**

heavy bombardment began, so far as we were concerned of such a scattered nature that practically no casualties were caused. When, after half an hour it ceased, great glee was caused by the news that General Pilcher<sup>2</sup> and his staff had been caught in the front line in it and had lain as flat as was humanly possible on the trench boards.

Some of us had leisure to observe that the bombardment was heaviest on the Bluff, where great fountains spouting earth and trees seemed to have opened. Later we learned that on the other side of the canal a German attack had been launched and part of the Bluff taken. In front of it a company of the Lancashire Fusiliers had been trapped in the International Trench and destroyed. That night, and every night for a week, we watched sudden bombardments on the Bluff itself, wreathed in white smoke clouds, revealed by orange flashes, while giant tea trays were banged all round. These heralded night attacks, made by various units of

our Division, and all we learned unsuccessful, highly coloured reasons for the failure of which Dame Rumour was always willing to supply.

Shortly after we were at last relieved ..... but after only one day's absence from the trenches orders to relieve the 165th Brigade ... were given out, and the dawn of a miserable February day found us endeavouring to find our positions in somewhat impromptu trenches (the old support trenches) on the Bluff and its neighbourhood.

The days that followed were full of excitement and casualties. The Germans in their newly-captured trenches were full of nerves and "wind". Our own artillery, we thought, was a great deal too prodigal with their 9in shells, which made the most horrible gaps in our defences. Snow fell and one night the German very lights surprised a working party on a dazzling background, and a machine gun accounted for Wood, who was in charge. Of the two months he had spent in

France, he had enjoyed it all with boyish ardour.

At last we left the Bluff, but only to sidestep a few hundred yards to the right, in front of one of the most famous spots of the war, Hill 60.

We were relieved by the Northumberland Fusiliers but we had hardly time to settle down in our new trenches before the most unpleasant preparations began to be made. Several 60-pound trench mortars made their appearance and began to register on the German lines. A new and most mysterious invention, afterwards known as the Stokes gun, was installed with great secrecy, and what seemed most wonderful for us, a section of 18-pounder guns was brought up within 100 yards of the front line.

When the Northumberlands and our Brigade headquarters callously vanished, relieved by the 165th Brigade, most uncomfortable feelings beset us all. That night the Brigade Major of the 165th Brigade came round to see that the stage was properly set for the performance for the next day. Some of us will remember the tall figure of Congreve, young in years but already practised and confident in the direction of war. He had that night explored No Man's Land and satisfied himself that the German wire had been cut by the activities of our trench mortars, now used for this purpose, we were told, for the first time.

At half past 3 all the witches in hell began to scream, and for more than half an hour every kind of thing was thrown at the Germans by us, and very little returned. When the din ceased we were left to speculate in quiet, and just as the eastern sky began to lighten we saw against it strings of men crossing No Man's Land on the right. A German counter attack? The 165th repulsed? No, German prisoners in scores. Our attack had been timed for a German trench relief. Into our trenches the grey gentlemen came, escorted by these strutting Gordons .... The greatest curiosity and excitement prevailed amongst us, for was this not the first attack we had seen? Alas, the curiosity was fatal to more than one man, standing on the fire-step, oblivious of the fact that many riflemen still existed in the trenches opposite.

Then the turn of the Germans began. All the well registered batteries in the Salient, it seemed, were turned on the Bluff and its neighbourhood. Trenches dissolved in dust, bomb stores went up in smoke, and forward guns were destroyed. One by one Cunningham's gallant bombers were killed as they manned the bombing post by the ravine. .... So the day wore on, our own shell-fire (as well as the Germans) being so heavy that no counter-attacks proved possible. Then when night fell we heard we were to be relieved. It was, however, many hours before the Borderers of the 51st Brigade came up and a long time before we got clear.

The Lewis gunners of the Battalion, who had perhaps the hardest time of all, were the last to go, and as they got out of the communication trench behind Battalion headquarters, a shell burst in the middle of them wounding many and one, Wilfred Rhodes, so badly that he could not be brought in, but lay there suffering terribly until he died.

..... And so the Battalion arrived back in camp, after a tour of practically 30 days in front line trenches, ending up with an attack which, though not made by us, caused us 200 casualties. In Haig's next despatch the 9th Battalion was cited as one of a select list of New Army battalions which had proved their worth. We supposed that this was a consolation for having endured a good deal of the beastliness of an attack without the glory of having made it ourselves.

Note <sup>1</sup> "Any trench excavated under defensive musket or artillery fire that was intended to advance a besieging army's position in relation to the works of an attacked fortification was referred to as a sap. Saps of approach were excavated by brigades of trained soldiers, often called sappers, because they dug the saps, or specifically instructed troops of the line."

Note <sup>2</sup> Major-General Thomas David Pilcher commanded the 17th (Northern) Division before being removed from command in disgrace. The 17th was engaged on 1st July 1916, where it supported the capture of Fricourt and lost 1,155 men killed or wounded. Then it was involved in the capture of Contalmaison and Mametz and had taken a total of 4,771 casualties by the time it was relieved on 11 July. Many of these casualties stemmed from an unsuccessful attack on the "Quadrangle Trench Support" on 7 July; the division had captured the main trench system on 5 July and Pilcher ordered it to pause and prepare for a subsequent assault. However, he was over-ruled by higher command, who forced an attack the next night – which failed – followed by a daylight attack on 7 July, which Pilcher strongly protested but eventually acquiesced in. He ordered an attack with the minimal amount of men necessary, assuming it would inevitably be doomed to failure and high casualties, which outraged his superiors. Pilcher later wrote that "It is very easy to sit a few miles in the rear and get credit for allowing men to be killed in an undertaking foredoomed to failure, but the part did not appeal to me and my protests against these useless attacks were not well received. Following the division's withdrawal, Pilcher was promptly sacked by his corps commander, Henry Horne, along with the commander of the neighbouring 38th (Welsh) Division; Horne considered him lacking in "initiative, drive, and readiness", while Haig simply dismissed him as "unequal to the task" of divisional

### Into Action with 2 DWR on 1 July 1916 - A Reminiscence of the Somme.

This map may be of assistance with the articles that follow.



*Lieutenant ES Plumb wrote the following letter to Captain HG Griffin, at the time Adjutant of 3 DWR based in North Shields. Mr Plumb was writing from the Royal Free Hospital in London on 10 July 1916, recovering from wounds he received whilst going “over the top” with 2 DWR on 1 July 1916. Mention of this operation was made in the last edition, on page 28. There is some abridgement, mainly of names which add little to the reader’s understanding of events. The letter was first published in an Iron Duke of 1935.*

“My dear Griffin,

Many thanks for your letter and enquiries. Pleased to say I am awfully fit except for this silly wound. I had a really lucky escape, as the bullet just missed the jaw and the ear, so I am rather bucked about it, and it’s healing awfully well. Hope to be well again soon, and to go out again soon. Had a great time while I was out there, so am looking forward to it again.

You exactly express the situation when you say they saved the dirty work for the Dukes – they did it with a vengeance. We never had a chance to do anything, were simply mown down before we ever got to our own front line. We were told previously by our Brigadier it was going to be a walkover, but the Staff, I’m afraid, made a sad mistake.

You see the Huns had huge subterranean dugouts and passages which no gun could harm, and when our bombardment began they simply took their machine guns and men with them, and then the moment the strafing was over they popped out again and met us as we came over with them, and Gee! They did some

damage with them too. We had the best German troops against us too. As is usual with the regular battalions out there – all the dirty work and no praise.

The men were simply great. To begin with our assembly trenches were at the Sucrerie (top centre of the Somme map, between Beaumont and Serre) about half a mile or more behind our front line. We were supporting the Kings Own (KOYLI), who were about 800 yards in front; on our right the Lancashire Fusiliers were supporting the Essex, all four being in the 12th Brigade. Our front practically extended from Serre to Beaumont Hamel (brigade front of course), and our objective was Pendant Copse, a distance of about 2000 yards.

Our artillery was supposed to have cleared everything in front, and we were expected to get out of our assembly trenches and advance in lines of sections etc etc. C Company was on the left and A Company on the right. B and (other) companies behind. I was Scouting Officer and went ahead of the Battalion with some scouts. Just before going over we heard that the Huns’ first and second lines had been taken, so anticipated that everything would go all right.

Well, we went over at 9 o’clock Saturday, the 1st, and had not gone above 100 yards when machine gun bullets began to fly all around us, rather uncomfortably so. However, we pushed on and got right into the open and then we got it. By this time we had advanced right into the enemy’s artillery barrage and with shells, shrapnel and a perfect hail of machine gun bullets dripping all around we got an awful bad time.

The sections were all disorganised in crossing our own trenches; meanwhile two leading sections of A Company

had caught me up... no sign of any other sections could be seen. We slid into a trench, a short halt having been seemingly proclaimed. After a bit (we) decided things were becoming so hot (we) decided the one thing was to push on, and so we hopped out of the trench again and went on until we were forced to get down again. I took cover in a shell hole with some men and was working over when several bullets ripped up the ground in front of me and one went through my face, just as a huge clod of earth also hit me and dazed me. After that I know nothing of what happened.

We had not even got as far as our front line trenches. What possessed anybody to make us advance over open ground swept by machine gun fire in broad daylight I don't know, except that they really thought we should have a walk-over. However, on our part of the front the offensive was a ghastly failure. I heard after that the Dukes were withdrawn entirely quite early in the day, so apparently they must have been badly cut up, and all this in merely advancing over our own trenches. I heard a rumour that our CO, Colonel Bray, was wounded, but it is not confirmed.

The 29th Division on our right also had a very bad

time in front of Beaumont-Hamel. The 31st, on our left, got into Serre, but had to retire again, so you see between Serre and Beaumont-Hamel no advance at all was made. I was rather staggered to see in your letter that 18 officers had been knocked out. We went in with 24 officers, of whom it seems 18 were bowled over. I don't think the wounds can be very serious, the Huns were firing very low and wounds were mostly in the foot, leg or arm.

Well I think this is just about all I can tell you, not much I am afraid. Give my love to Elliott and tell him I shall hope to see him out here soon. Meanwhile, Cheer Oh! And many thanks for the letter.

Yours etc .  
E.S.Plumb”.

*For someone who was wounded only 9 days earlier, Mr Plumb wrote an extraordinarily cheerful letter, being no doubt extremely relieved to have got off comparatively lightly. His account does not entirely tie in with more official narratives, but given his narrow role and brief, if uncomfortable, time on the field of battle on that fateful day, it is lucid and full.*

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## 1/6th BATTALION DUKE OF WELLINGTON'S REGIMENT WAR DIARY EXTRACTS 1 – 15 JULY 1916.

1st July. AVELUY WOOD, 2am. Battalion arrived at B Group assembly trenches in AVELUY WOOD and in conjunction with other units of 49 Division formed the reserve of the X Corps, which was to assume the offensive on this date. Throughout the night our artillery was very active, and at 6.30 am an intense bombardment opened on enemy defences.

7.30 am Zero hour at which time the assault was begun by the leading divisions, ie 32nd and 36th.

11.30 am Battalion moved to the east side of the ANCRE and occupied the northern half of CRUCIFIX dugouts. The day was spent here. Our artillery was very active all day, but the enemy did not retaliate at this point. A fine day with hot sun.

Casualties:

No 1663 Pte Barrett A., D Coy wounded in back and legs.

No 3109 Pte Smith F, D Coy wounded in back (remained on duty)

No. 2131 Pte Green T, D Coy wounded in back (remained on duty).

Editor's note – short casualty lists will be shown as above, to indicate the kind of wounds received; many could be just minor. Long lists will be reduced to statistics.

2nd July. CRUCIFIX DUGOUTS. Most of the day spent here, a few shells fell close to the Battalion but

little damage was done.

9.30 pm. The Battalion moved to BELFAST CITY in THIEPVAL WOOD with the idea that it was to support the 5th WRR who had been ordered to attack the enemy trenches opposite THIEPVAL. These orders were however cancelled. The Battalion had experienced the greatest difficulty in getting into position (2 am) which was caused by meeting numerous parties of troops coming down from the front line. The enemy shelled the wood very heavily and the Battalion was fortunate in suffering so few casualties.

11 am. The Battalion was withdrawn from THIEPVAL WOOD to AVELUY WOOD and occupied assembly trenches.

Casualties.

1 officers wounded, 11 ORs wounded, 1 OR killed.

3rd July. THIEPVAL WOOD.

Casualties:

12 ORs wounded, 1 OR missing, 1 OR killed.

4th July. AVELUY WOOD TRENCHES JUST SOUTH OF THIEPVAL WOOD.

A quiet day spent in wood. In the afternoon there was a very heavy thunderstorm, and rain fell for about four hours.

8.30 pm. The Battalion left the wood to relieve 8th South Lincs who were holding British Front Line

trenches just south of Thiepval Wood. Trenches were in a very bad state, and had suffered much during recent bombardments. Disposition of Battalion as follows:

HQ at Johnston's Post. A Coy on right, with two platoons in front line and two in support. B Coy in centre, two platoons in front line, two in support, and two platoons of C Coy in the front line. The remaining two platoons of C and the whole of D Coy were in trenches close to Johnston's Post. Enemy were quiet during relief and no casualties were sustained.

5th July. THIEPVAL AVENUE.

The trenches were very very heavily shelled at irregular intervals during the day and night, chiefly with light shrapnel and small HE. Rain fell during the day and trenches very wet. Many dead were buried.

Casualties:

1 Officer wounded (shell-shock), 44 ORs wounded (16 shell-shock, 1 gas), 5 ORs killed.

6th July. Trenches were again heavily shelled during the day. Many more dead were buried, and much cleaning up was done.

Casualties:

No 3231 Pte Foter A, B Coy wounded in back.

No 1740 Pte Clarke W, C Coy wounded in knee.

No 2514 Pte Benson A, C Coy missing.

Editor's note – in several cases wounded men were also noted as having been buried, but were clearly dug out alive. Some of those noted as "missing" might not have been so lucky.

7th July. In conjunction with other operations the Battalion made a smoke barrage from 7.25 am to 8.50 am. Owing to an unfavourable wind the smoke did not cross no man's land and was blown back over our own trenches. Enemy shelled our front during the time of the barrage and continued to shell throughout the whole of the day at irregular intervals.

9.00 pm. The Battalion extended its frontage to the left at HAMMERHEAD SAP. The Battalion on this day came under the orders of GOC 148th Infantry Brigade. The 147th Infantry Brigade less 6 WRR was withdrawn from the line.

Casualties: 23 ORs wounded, 1 OR killed.

8th July. A quiet day, enemy artillery much less active. Odd shells were fired throughout the day, but little damage was done. The 147th Brigade came back into the line and the Battalion again came under their command. The Battalion diminished its frontage to what it originally held, and its left now rested on BUCHANAN ST.

Casualties: Nil.

9th July. A quite day and much work done. It was fine and trenches began to dry up. Many more dead were buried. The Battalion was relieved by 1/7 WRR and went into Brigade Reserve at the NORTHERN BLUFF.

Casualties:

6 ORs wounded, 1 OR killed.

Editor's note. 1/7 WRR is of course 1/7 DWR, but battalions were also known as being of the West Riding Regiment.

10th July. NORTHERN BLUFF.

A fine day and fairly quiet. Enemy put over shrapnel and light HE at intervals throughout the day.

Casualties:

No 3371 Pte Thomas H, D Coy wounded in leg.

11th July. Another fine day, a few more shells than on the 10th. Battalion carried rations for the whole Brigade.

Casualties:

4 ORs wounded.

12th July. A fairly quiet day. Enemy sent odd shells throughout the day which caused some casualties. The weather was fine but cold for the time of year.

Casualties:

7 ORs wounded (one remaining on duty), 1 OR killed.

13th July. A quiet day. Enemy shelled ground west of the ANCRE. Our artillery active at intervals during day and night.

Casualties:

No 4166 Pte Tillotson J, D Coy shell-shock

No 2343 Pte Bamforth A, D Coy slightly wounded in hand.

14th July. Our artillery very active from 2am to 3am. Enemy did not retaliate on the BLUFF. Some rain during the morning but fine after 10am.

Casualties:

No 2223 Pte Thompson J, B Coy wounded in calf

No 2509 Pte Bower A, B Coy wounded

No 4164 Pte Garlick J, A Coy wounded in head

No 2112 Pte Hartley R, A Coy wounded in head.

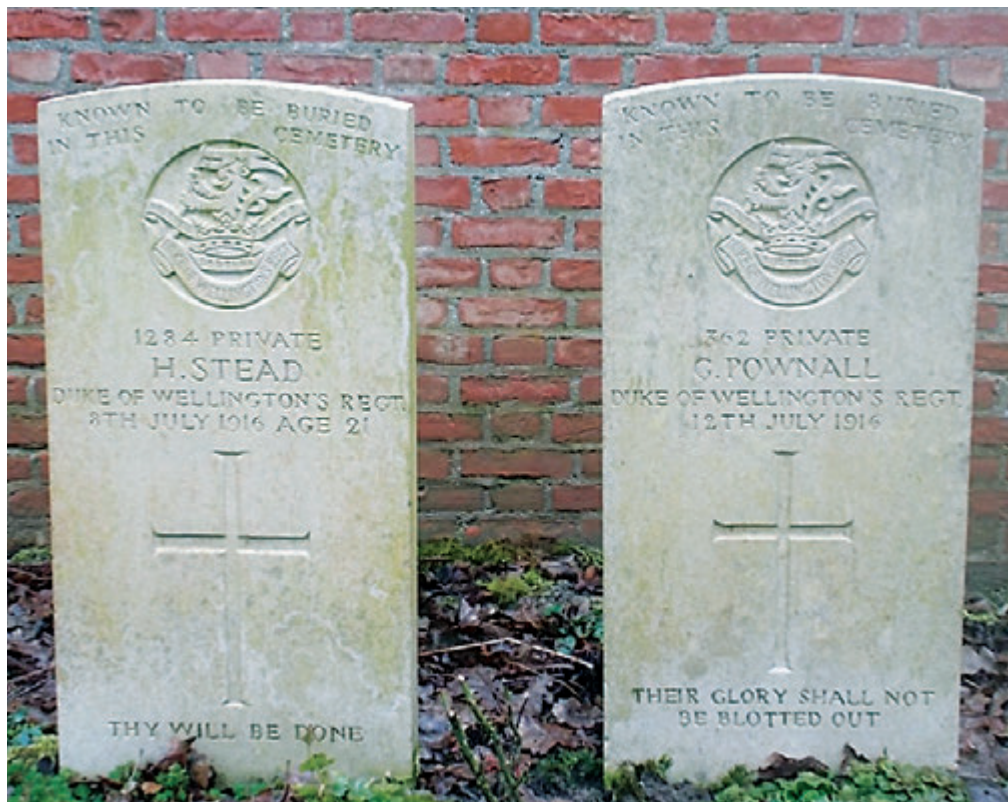
15th July. A quiet day except at McMAHON'S POST, which shelled during afternoon.

8.30 pm. The Battalion relieved 1/7 WRR in the right sub-sector. The relief was carried out without any casualties. The night was quiet. Trenches dry and much improved since the Battalion was in six days ago.

Casualties: Nil.

## SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 1916

The last issue of this Journal offered material to cover the period up to 1 July 1916, and then, through the medium of a letter written by Lt ES Plumb of 2 DWR and the War Diary of 1/6 DWR, went “over the top” in the first days of the Somme. We will start this time with a summary of where our Somme battalions were, and what, in outline, they were doing, after the first days of the Somme. From mid-September onwards, some real progress was being made in terms of pushing the front line eastwards.



**The graves of Privates Stead and Pownall, both killed in early July 1916.  
They lie in Aveluy Wood cemetery, about 5 miles north of Albert**

Although there was not another assault across the whole front, much narrower objectives were chosen, and formations ordered to take them on. The area of activity that most applied to our battalions was the approach to Thiepval.

2 DWR, after its unsuccessful 1st July assault from the sucricerie on the D919 south west of Serre, pulled back to its trenches for ten days, until it was withdrawn to a rest camp between Bertrancourt and Acheux. The Battalion entrained at Doullens on 21 July, arriving the same day at Cassels, back in the Ypres sector. The time there was mostly spent in absorbing intakes of new officers and men. On 16 September the battalion was sent back to

the Somme, for a period of intensive training, until mid-October, when it deployed forward.

After their exploits on 1 July, 147 Brigade (1/4, 1/5, 1/6 and 1/7 DWR) were in trenches in the Aveluy and Thiepval woods areas until the beginning of September, when they went into trenches at Authuille. Through a carefully researched article by Scott Flaving and extracts from the War Diary of 1/7 DWR, (also, and at the time probably better, known as 7th Battalion West Riding Regiment (WRR), rather as the Green Howards are often referred to as The Yorkshire Regiment (YR)), we can follow their fortunes through two major attacks in September.

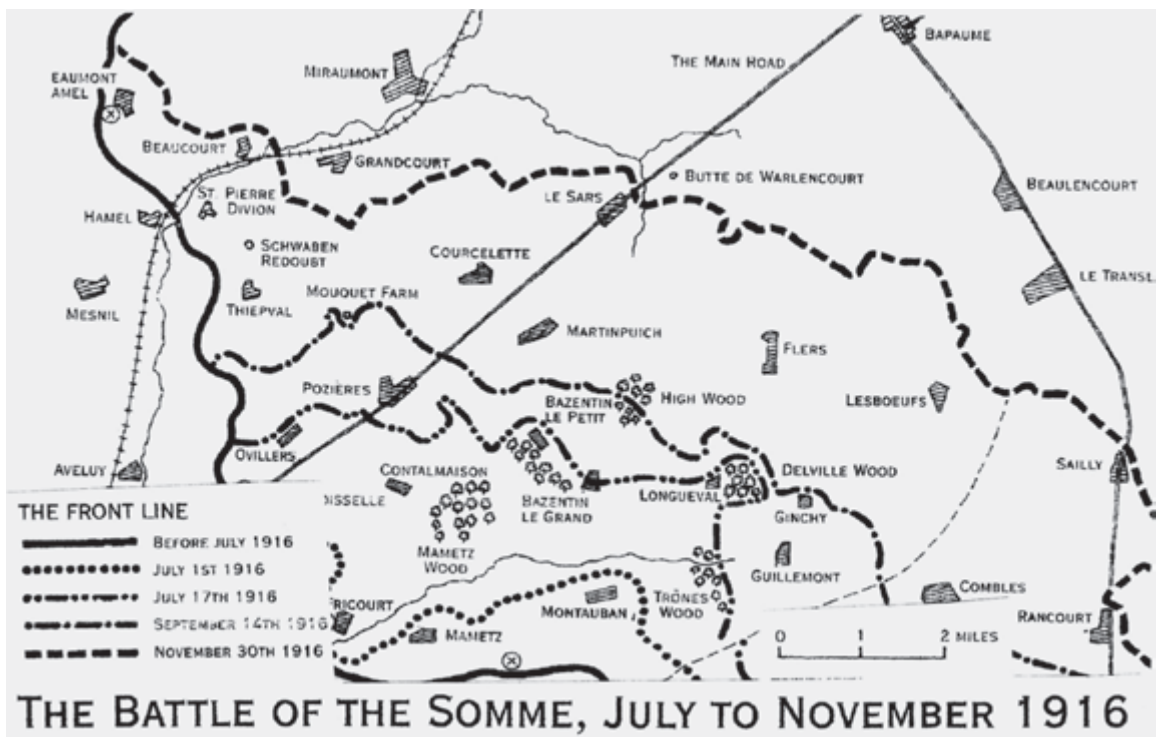


**1916 France 5DWR in trenches at Thiepval Wood**



An interesting memorial on the Somme, commemorating the 17th Middlesex Regiment, and especially men of Leyton Orient Football Club (then known as Clapton Orient), whose players and staff volunteered for service en masse





Our 8th, 9th and 10th Battalions moved with such frequency throughout the sector in the period from July to October, in and out of the front line trenches and with periods in reserve, that any description of their movements would be utterly confusing to say the least. 8 DWR, its Gallipoli action behind it, had arrived in the Somme sector on 6 July and stayed mostly in the eastern half of the Somme battle zone. It had stiff fighting ahead of it, as the extracts from WO2 Miles' diary (below) describing the assaults on the "Wunderwerk" and

a "revenge raid" near Thiepval show. 10 DWR, after heavy action on the Somme were sent to the Ypres sector, returning to the Somme in time for the attack on German positions at Le Sars, as described on Major General Webb-Carter's account of 2Lt Kelly's VC.

Thus our focus in the issue of the Journal is on actions in September, by both our territorial and regular (Service) battalions. We start with 147 Brigade (1/4, 1/5, 1/6, 17 DWR).

### 49th Division Attack; Sunday 3 September 1916

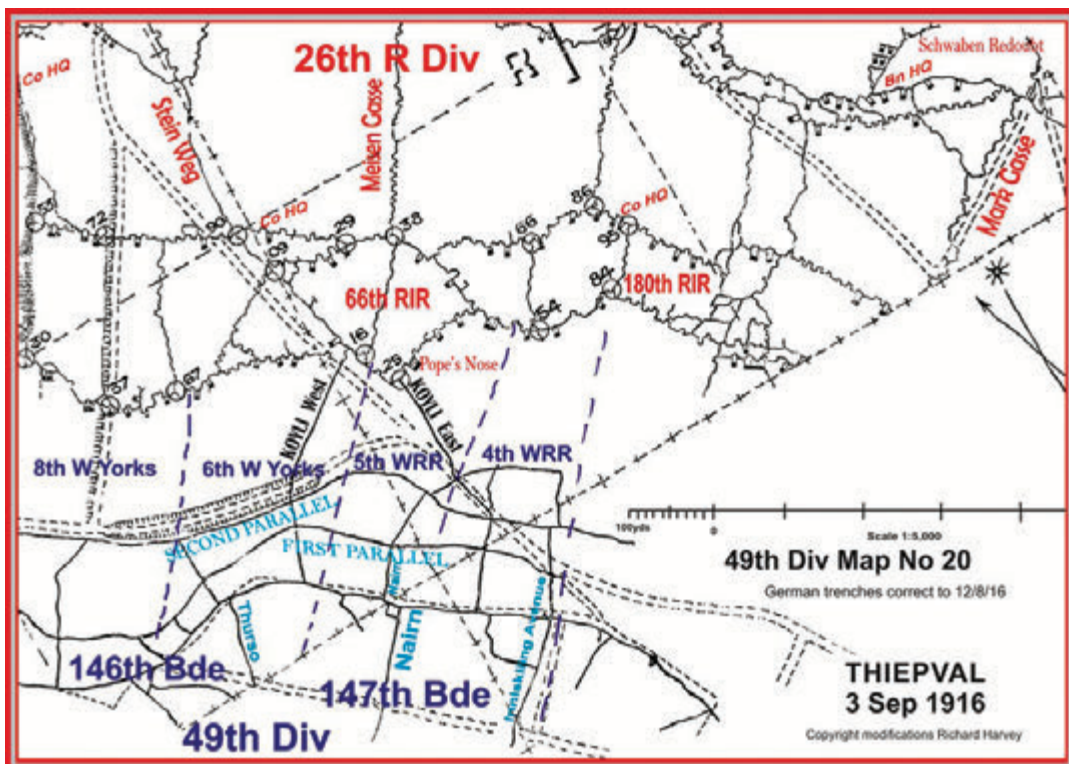
(73 F and windy)

The following article has been compiled by Scott Flaving from documents and maps held in the Regimental Archives and extracts from original German accounts supplied to Dave Cochrane, and translated (loosely) by the author, from the Imperial War Museum. Richard Harvey input to the maps and illustrations.

#### INTRODUCTION

Since the disastrous opening day of the Battle of the Somme, originally conceived as a joint Anglo French offensive but overtaken by events like the unexpected German offensive against Verdun, hardly a day had passed without some British or French units battering against the German defences. Some with success, such as at Fricourt and La Boisselle; others not so successful, Mametz Wood and Trones Wood. Larger attacks had been launched on 7th July, 23rd July and 18th August.

On 3rd September, 1916, another large effort was planned: 14th Corps, in the Guillemont area, 15th Corps, in the Delville Wood area, the ANZAC Corps in the Mouquet Farm area, the 2nd Corps, in the Thiepval area, and 5th Corps, on the north bank of the Ancre, were ordered to continue these attacks. 2nd Corps attacked with 25th Division on the right, towards the Wonder Work, and 49th Division on the left, towards a line between St Pierre Divion and the Schwaben Redoubt.



## GROUND

North of the River Somme, the River Ancre, flowing south east through the rolling chalk uplands of North Eastern France skirts the Thiepval Ridge. By early 1915 the German armies had firmly established lines of trenches on this high ground and fortified many of the farms and villages. By 1916, they had made full use of the natural features and the remains of farms to

create a series of strongpoints surrounding the village of Thiepval: the Schwaben Redoubt, Stuff Redoubt, Goat Redoubt, Mouquet Farm, Wonderwork and the Pope's Nose. The Ancre was the left boundary of 49th Division, the attack was made in a north easterly direction, with the right Boundary being an extension of Inniskilling Avenue running along the right edge of Thiepval Wood towards the German front line to the left of the Schwaben Redoubt.



The ground looking north towards the enemy lines from the edge of Thiepval Wood, with Mill Road cemetery on the skyline

## ENEMY FORCES

The 26th Reserve Infantry Division (Res Inf Div), comprising 51st Bde (119th, 121st and 180th Regts) had been reinforced by 66th Inf Regt from 52nd Res Inf Div. (A German Regiment was the equivalent of a British Brigade).

## OWN TROOPS

49th Division, 2nd Corps: Left, 146 Bde (8th & 6th Bns West Yorkshire (WY) Regt); Right, 147 Bde (4th Bn WRR Major J Walker & 5th Bn WRR Lt Col H A S Stanton supported by 57th Fd Coy RE with a working party of 150 men from 1/6th WRR & elements of 19 Lancs Fus (Pioneer Bn). Bn assault parties - no more than 13 officers per Bn & 137 men per Coy.

Formation: each Coy to form two lines, front line objective tps to wear white armband.

## OBJECTIVES

To capture and consolidate the German Front Line and Support Trenches – River Ancre to R.19.c.1.6, and subsequently German B Line R19.d.1.9 to R.19.c.3.8.

## THE PLAN

The barrage was an enfilade barrage of short duration, probably five minutes, about 3 minutes on front line, 2 minutes on support line. Zero Hour was at the hour the barrage commences. It was necessary for troops at Zero Hour to move forward in their allotted formations as close to the objectives as our artillery admits. To carry this out, it was necessary for rear lines to move out of their trenches to within the correct distance of the lines they follow and for the whole of them to move forward till the leading line halts prior to the barrage lifting. The Companies detailed to capture the Support Lines, after passing the Front Line, had to wait for the artillery barrage to lift off the Support Line.

Equipment: The men carried a heavy load. Every man in the attack carried: rifle and equipment (less pack and greatcoat), 170 rounds SAA, water bottle, iron rations, 1 days preserved rations and unexpended portion of the current day's ration, 4 sandbags in belt, 2 grenades, one in each pocket. In addition, 25% of men carried picks and shovels, 1 pick to every three shovels. Every man who carried wire cutters had a piece of white tape prominently fastened to shoulder strap on each shoulder, and wire cutters were to be taken from men who became casualties.

Arm bands: All ranks of companies detailed to capture German Front Line had to wear a white arm band on each arm. D Coy, 1/4th Bn, wore a distinguishing arm band of red: (D Coy formed the flank guard for the Division). A small number of black discs were issued to troops to carry to indicate position of troops, especially on the flanks.

Signals. Red flares will be carried by all officers

and full rank NCOs. These flares were primarily used in answer to Contact Aeroplane Calls. The calls are a succession of short blasts on the Aeroplane's Klaxon horn but if no attention to Klaxon, aeroplanes threw white lights. Contact aeroplanes are marked by one black band on one of the lower wings and a flag on one of the struts. Flares should be fired in groups of 3.

## WHAT HAPPENED?

German Accounts (extracts): "At the end of August, with the build-up of the English on the left flank of the Regiment and a large amount of material was gradually being amassed, the hour of decision at Strong Point Thiepval could not be far off. Even though Thiepval did not lie in the centre of the battle, it was so close to the flank that it felt as though it was. The number of dead, wounded and missing was increasing. Major Mejer, previously a field railway unit commander, took over 1st Battalion of 180th Regt. With great energy and enthusiasm he devoted himself to the improvement of the defences. He was increasingly active and so he was in the afternoon of 28th August when he went to inspect the work at the medical bunker when he was hit on the back of the head by shrapnel from a distant shell burst and severely wounded. He did not regain consciousness. Capt Schaal, 10th Coy Comd, took over command."

"Towards the end of August the left wing of the 26th Wurtemburger Reserve Division on the left flank, through the strength of the English opposite, became endangered. To strengthen this wing, held by 180th Regiment, which is now to concentrate nearer Thiepval, the vacated positions being occupied by the 66th Infantry Regiment [from 13 Bde, 52nd Div]. On the morning after a short bombardment the enemy attacked the newly arrived disorientated troops. At 5.15am the artillery opened up, at 5.45am English storm columns appeared on the left and right Battalions' flanks. The 9th Company, which had suffered heavy casualties during the relief were overrun by the enemy. 4 officers rallied all available men and threw themselves against the enemy. Those that did not flee were killed."

British Accounts: Attack by 49 Div, 3rd Sep 1916, Report on Causes of Failure by Maj Gen Perceval, GOC 49th Div (extract):

"Previous to and during the assembly the troops appeared eager and confident. There is no evidence that any men remained in the trenches, the advance to the enemy wire appears to have been steady enough. From that point onwards many appear to have failed their officers. The result was that those troops who did advance were sufficient only to occupy the German trenches at intervals. The most considerable gap was caused by the failure of the 6th West Yorks. Those men of the 4 WRR who reached the German Support Line appear to have maintained their positions with

determination as long as their bombs lasted. When they had no more bombs they retired across no-man's-land suffering very heavy casualties during the retirement. The reason why the right Brigade was not reinforced was that the situation was not appreciated at Bde and Bn level until the troops had retired.

I have received drafts amounting to 181 Officers and 4962 ORs since 25 June. From that date the time available for training has been very limited. 6 W Yorks went into action with a strength of 506 ORs. Of these 366 were recent drafts from no less than 26 different Regiments. The older soldiers appear to have followed their officers."

Sgt Frank Cocker, 1/4th DWR. Letter. 10 Sep 1916, Dear old Homefolks, You will have been anxiously awaiting further news from me, to supplement what you have already heard. I think I may now tell you that the Battalion has taken part in an attack of some consequence and has suffered rather badly. I myself was not in it, I was a reserve NCO which, in some lights, was a fortunate thing. Anyway, I am not feeling so fortunate when I think of poor Charlie. Where is he? God knows! Also Wilf. Both are missing and that is the sum total of information I can get of either. Frank Kear proved himself a hero and was rewarded with a nice 'blighty'.

So long, excuse short measure. Your loving son and brother, Frank.

Pte H Bailey's report. In a letter to his father, Pte H Bailey of Siddall, wrote, "I left him (Cpl Charles Wood) unconscious but dying on the Tuesday following the charge of 3rd September. I was lying with him until then. He had his leg off just below the knee. We should not have been more than 30 yards away from the German front line but, happily for us, they only came to their second line after we had retired....he could not have lived long after I left him. I was wounded and reached our lines more dead than alive. I was shot through the thigh, in the shoulder and in the chest, so could not help him."

## CASUALTIES

180th Regiment reported German casualties as 48 dead, 115 wounded and 16 missing. The number of dead and badly wounded English soldiers in and around their positions was in the region of 500. In addition they had captured 8 Lewis guns, 7 unwounded prisoners and 8 wounded prisoners.

The 147 Bde reported, "8 officers killed, 12 wounded, 4 missing; ORs: 81 killed, 359 wounded, 26 shell shock cases and 386 missing" many of whom were killed or died of wounds. The Thiepval Memorial lists 202 WRR



The headstones of 3 Dukes buried in Mill Road CWGC, who were killed in action on 3 September 1916. The beautiful wreath had been laid just moments before this photograph was taken by relatives of Private Smith. There are 91 Dukes graves here, of which 86 died on this day, and of course many more who were killed in the same operation are commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial.

soldiers, presumed killed on 3rd September 1916, with no known grave. 86 of the Dukes who were killed that day are buried in Mill Road Cemetery. Others, who died of their wounds on the long route back to hospitals in England, are buried in many other cemeteries.

### AFTERMATH

Among those killed on that day was CSM John Walker MM, 1/4th Bn WRR. In early 2000 his daughter, 3 months old when he died, contacted RHQ DWR to see if we could tell her what had happened to her father on the 3rd September, as the letter sent to the family by his Company Commander at the time did not give details. Incredibly, he was mentioned in a number of Regimental sources and a casualty reported that he was last seen leading a small party of men in the German trench holding off a German counter attack. This information was gratefully received by his daughter, along with a display case containing copies of his medals, put together and kindly donated by Bob Garside, a great friend of the Regiment.

The continuous attacks from 1st July, along with the introduction of tanks and rolling barrages, during the 141 days of the Battle of the Somme became a great drain on German resources, still embroiled in the struggle at Verdun. The Chief of the General Staff, General Falkenheyn, had been replaced by Generals Hindenburg and Ludendorf on 29 August, 1916. After experiencing the scope, along with the technological and tactical developments of the 'Big Push', they ordered the construction of the Hindenburg Line and a withdrawal from the battlefield, to be complete by March, 1917. The German Army never fully recovered from the Verdun

and Somme battles of 1916 and, by August 1918, it was impossible to continue to resist the victorious Allied armies approaching the German frontier.

The Somme has become ingrained in the nation's psyche, along with such as the Charge of the Light Brigade, Dunkirk and Arnhem, as a heroic failure, something the British seem to relish, along with favouring underdogs and loving animals. The patriotic fervour buoying up the morale of the troops and the country began to dissipate after the Somme, as the casualty lists became longer and the country's medical services in every district grew to accommodate the great numbers of injured and shell shocked soldiers returned from the front.

The introduction of conscription in early 1916 and food rationing in 1917 went further to sap war spirit. It is notable that, unlike Waterloo, the Crimean and Boer Wars, few, if any, roads were named after battles of the First World War and it was some time after the war that soldiers' memoirs were written and published in any number. However, there was a great interest in preserving the memory of the war and the Imperial War Museum, along with many other public and private collections were created towards the end of the war and in the immediate post war years, alongside the parish war memorials, to preserve the memory of those who had fought and died for King and Country. 100 years later, despite the revisionist views of the 60s and 70s, the nation has once again come together to commemorate those who served in the War to end all Wars through national and local museum services and the media. Lest We Forget.

M S Flaving, August 2016.



**The Thiepval Memorial at dusk**

## Assaults on the “Wunderwerk”, 14 September 1916, and Thiepval, from 24 September.



To the south east of the Thiepval Spur was a trench known as ‘Turk Street’, and a strong point named ‘The Wunderwerk’. The Wunderwerk had been constructed in the two years that the Germans had been in possession of the area, solidly built of reinforced concrete, it in turn was defended by deep fields of barbed wire and innumerable machine gun emplacements, each perfectly sited to form a deadly cross fire, a wicked killing field for anyone attempting to take the position.

An innovative feature of the Wunderwerk was a revolving platform of machine guns which had the ability to drop into protected space when the British artillery bombarded the position, to rise up again when the danger was over. Underground the position was a labyrinth of interlinked tunnels and bunkers, some thirty feet deep, which connected it to other positions nearby.

The Wunderwerk had to be captured to enable further eastward assaults to be carried out. The task was given to 11 Northern Division, who tasked 32nd Infantry Brigade, consisting of 9 West Yorks, 8 DWR and 6 YR – or Yorkshire Regiment as the Green Howards were often titled - with 6 Y&L in reserve. The assault was to commence on 14 September at 6.30 pm. The attacking companies were to go forward in two waves, Dukes on the right and West Yorkshires on the left, each with a full complement of bombers and four Lewis guns. Every man carried 220 rounds of ammunition, six bombs, extra rations and pick or shovel.

The artillery barrage crept forward, so close to the advancing infantry that some own casualties were caused. The operation was a success, but a costly one; 8 officers and 250 other ranks were killed or wounded. The battalion held its ground against counter-attacks, in which the enemy suffered heavy losses, until relieved by 1/6 DWR. From this newly captured line the assault on the Thiepval ridge was launched on 24 September.

There are many Dukes names on the Thiepval Memorial. All of 147 Infantry Brigade was involved, and 8 DWR again went into the assault on 30 September, near Mouquet Farm and the recently captured Stuff

Redoubt. This was all raw and bloody work, and more was to follow through the remainder of September and October.

## Extracts from the diary of WO2 Miles, 8 DWR (with some abridgement)

### The Wunderwerk

“Sept 13 1916 – Tomorrow we go into the line and the following evening we are going to take, or try to, Thiepval Wood. We have had encouraging news imparted to us that seven divisions have previously tried to take it. The sector we are responsible for is called “Wunder Works” by the Germans, so called because it consists of a revolving platform containing innumerable machine guns, which disappear when our artillery starts to bombard, but which quickly “pop up” again as our infantry commence to advance. Cheering news! Eh?”

Sept 17 – Phew. Those three days seemed like an hour’s nightmare. We went up on the night of the 14th with three days’ rations in our haversacks, and on our way up we passed field guns wheel to wheel from Crucifix Corner to Railway Alley (a trench leading up into the front line). There must have been thousands of guns there, and I think it was that that gave us victory. We lost about 200 (out of 500) killed and wounded, and unfortunately my chum was amongst the wounded, being hit in the elbow soon after we went over.

There was a tremendous amount of old iron thrown about, but I was lucky enough to be missed. The chief praise is due, I think, to one of our companies and a company of West Yorks who, as we came forward, came behind and dug a communication trench from “Jerry’s” front line to our own. How those poor devils worked while new held on was marvellous. The Brigadier General, as we came out of the line, shook hands with each of us (those that were left).”

### Thiepval

“We went into the line just to the right of Mouquet Farm immediately in front of Orvillers. I lost a lot of my chums here; one was killed next to me. I did not stop anything but had a very severe shaking up when a part of a trench I was in got blown up. I had a touch of shell shock, but was practically myself in an hour or two.

I must record this episode just to show that the Germans were not particular what dirty tricks they played. One of our companies was in a part of a trench which was quite close to the Germans, a matter of 80 yards apart, when one of the Germans stuck a white flag up. Of course, when our fellows saw it they immediately eased firing and watched for “Jerry’s” next move. Presently some stretcher bearers climbed over the parapet and ran out with stretchers. Naturally we thought they were going to pick up their wounded, so we sent our stretcher bearers

to do the same. No sooner were our fellows out of the trenches when the Germans dropped into shell holes, whipped off their machine guns which had been hidden on the stretchers, and commenced to mow our chaps down. – a dastardly trick.

You can guess we pasted them for that. Our Commanding Officer immediately notified Brigade Headquarters about the dirty trick they played on us, and the General at once ordered a concentration of artillery fire on the spot where the white flag went up. There was a noise while it lasted. That same night, after a good rum

issue, we went over on a bombing raid to again show our displeasure at their mode of fighting.

It was a mad half hour while it lasted. I know the rum must have got into my head; I went over with a steel helmet full of bombs, and I remember bombing the dugout where the Germans were hiding, but I can't recollect returning to the trench, until I found myself shaking hands with my chum, who had also got back safely. I was minus a puttee and had my trousers torn in several places, but that was when we tore our way through the barbed wire."

## WAR Diary 1/7 DWR, 17 – 19 September 1916. THIEPVAL LEIPZIG SALIENT

### 17 September.

Arrangements made for an attack on the German trenches in the evening. The operation was carried out as follows & was most successful. An objective 350 yards in advance of that ordered was gained & held on the Left.

1. The objective was the line R.31.a.9.1. - R.31.c.6.9.a-7.2. - R.31.c.4.7.

2. C D & B Coys (less 2 platoons) Coys were employed and in addition 4 Battalion Bomb Squads. 2 Platoons of B & 2 platoons of A were in support.

C Coy 1/5th WR Regt formed the reserve. A Coy less 2 platoons 1/7 WR Regt held the line PRINCE STREET. 23-91. two consolidating parties of R.E. & 4th WR Regt.

Three bomb carrying parties of 4th WR Regt

3. Troops assembled as follows:

C Coy & 1 Btn Bomb Squad, Trench 91-78-68

D Coy & 1 Btn Bomb Squad, Trench 68-R.31.c.4.7.

B Coy & 2 Btn Bomb Squad, Trench leading to 46 with head at 46.

Support (a) 2 platoons a Coy in TURCK ST  
1 Consolidating Party in TURCK ST.

(b) 2 Platoons B Coy in HINDENBURG.  
1 Consolidating party in HINDENBURG.

Bomb etc Dumps & Carrying parties at 91-76 & 45.

4. Fighting order. S.A.A. 120 rds. 2 sandbags per man.

5. C & D Coys were ordered to assault in 4 waves. Each wave of one Platoon per Coy. Distances 15x, 20x, & 15x. B Coy Det attacked with one platoon leading - half on each side of the OG line. Supported by a second platoon similarly. One Btn Bomb Squad proceeded along trench supported by

one Coy Bomb Squad to clear dugouts & followed by one Btn Bomb Squad in Reserve. The Btn Bomb Sgt led the Bombers.

The Battalion Bomb Officer was placed to assist in supply of bombs & to move up trench as a reserve officer if OC Det required him for the Bombers. Each half Coy of C & D had one Coy Bomb Squad.

Each Bomb Squad consisted of 1 NCO & 8 other ranks with Mills Caps & Mills Rifle Grenades. Reserve Coy (C 1/5th WR Regt) was placed in LEMBERG. BHQ at R.31.c.2.1.

6. Each man of the last two waves carried a tool (1/2 picks & 1/2 shovels)

When assault started the support moved from TURCK ST to Trench 91-68 and from HINDENBURG to Trench 68-46 respectively.

7. An advanced report centre was established at 76. HINDENBURG under the Scout Officer, two alternate lines of wire were laid by separate routes from here to BHQ & and party of runners was posted, in case both lines were cut.

The Btn Scouts (1 NCO & 10 men) were employed between this Report Centre and the troops engaged. A subsidiary Report Centre was similarly placed at point 91. (TURCK ST).

8. Special parties were told off to deal with the following enemy bomb stops. R.31.a.8.1. - R.31.c.6.9. - R.31.c.4.7. & R.31.c.6.7.

9. All troops were reported in position at 6pm.

10. When the Stokes Mortar bombardment started a number of rounds fell into the assembly trenches near 68 and 45 causing a number of casualties and blowing up the bulk of the Mills Bomb Store at 45. This caused confusion which was quickly rectified. The trench running W from 91 to a block 100x W of 91 had been cleared to avoid casualties

from the artillery and from any men who might lose direction on the right.

(a) C Coy assaulted from 91 to 69 in 4 waves. The Platoons were kept together in the assembly trench and not mixed up owing the narrowness of the trench and its shape. The first wave consisted of half of each of the flank platoons the second wave of half of each of the two centre platoons, and the third & fourth wave of the remaining halves similarly. The objective was captured with little loss, most of the enemy were killed or wounded by the barrage, the remainder were dealt with, and a party pushed up to 72 where a few enemy were dealt with and the position was consolidated.

(b) D Coy assaulted trench here was wider and the platoons were all distributed among each other, and each wave consisted of a separate platoon. Parties of the enemy were found in 76, 58, 59, 47, 68, 30 and the triangle at 69, and were dealt with. A number had suffered from the barrage. Only positions of the trench were found good & the Coy pushed on and occupied trench 66-75 & commenced to consolidate. A white trench in front appeared empty & it was proposed to occupy it, but before this could be done, it was manned by the enemy. Part of the Coy, including both Lewis guns & their detachments, inclined to the Right & have not been seen since. It is believed they advanced towards the line of APPLE TREE. They may have become prisoners or may have been wiped out by a machine gun which was firing from this direction. The irregular line of start & the ground which is much broken made keeping direction difficult.

(c) B Coy (less 2 platoons) with 2 Btn Bomb Squad suffered a number of casualties from Stokes Mortar bombs, in their position of assembly, and were thrown into confusion but Capt Lupton jumped on the parapet & rallied the party who advanced up in time. The Platoons advanced half on each side of the trench & 3 bomb Squads up the centre. After about 30 yds there was no trench left and it took some little time to find the direction & then the party advanced about 300x & waited for the barrage to lift. When it lifted, a further advance of 40 yds was made and then consolidation was begun. The front German Line was much battered but the portion where the dugouts are, was occupied. A number, estimated at 80, retreated but were shot down.

B & D Coys joined hands at point 66.

(d) General

About 7pm reports were received at BHQ that the objective had been captured. There was doubt as to where the Left Flank had reached.

B Coy asked for supports at 8pm. The 2 remaining platoons were sent up and ½ the Reserve Coy was

moved to point 45 and later the remainder of this coy was sent there and half sent up to join B Coy but these were sent back as being no longer required. One Coy 1/6 WR Regt, received as a new Reserve, was moved into HINDENBURG. The remains of the consolidating parties who had suffered from shell fire were sent up to work. Patrols were sent out who located the relative position of the enemy. The actual position was wrongly reported owing to our own exact position on the map not being established. The night was very dark & rainy.

Later a second Coy (A) of 1/5 WR Regt was received and as it was believed the advanced party were at 42, this Coy was sent to seize 66. But lost its way and returned at 5am. It was not again sent out as the light was too bright.

Two Vickers Guns were also ordered at 42 (66) but lost their way. There was a shortage of tools in the advanced party. The Artillery barrage was reported as excellent. The Coys got much mixed up during advance.

11. Casualties. Practically none during advance. Majority due to shell fire after the objectives had been reached. At point 66 a number were caused by snipers.

TOTAL 5 officers, 215 other ranks.

12. Lessons.

- (a) It is possible to get troops to advance in waves of Platoon from a single narrow trench.
- (b) To assist in keeping direction, the jumping off trench should be parallel to the objective.
- (c) Every man must carry a pick or shovel, fastened to his body by rope or tape.
- (d) The method of supply of bombs seemed satisfactory & worked well due to the excellent work of 1/4th WR Regt squads.
- (e) The consolidating parties require dugouts or should be kept further back till barrage stops.
- (f) The Stokes Mortars appear to be inclined to fire short. They should open well over & then reduce range if required.
- (g) The method indicated above para 7 of obtaining information appeared to work very well. Information received was accurate & reasonably quickly brought in.

### 18 September.

The Battalion was relieved on night of 18/19 & moved into Support in LEIPZIG & LEMBERG trenches, except B Coy which moved to AUTHUILLE.

### 19 September.

Early on 19th Sept Btn (less B Coy) moved to CRUCIFIX CORNER & SOUTH BLUFF AUTHUILLE (A Coy). Command handed over at 12 noon. Just before noon the Army Comdr, General Gough, arrived at BHQ and stated he was much pleased with the operations etc.



**‘DUKES’ VC on the SOMME.****By Major General Sir Evelyn Webb-Carter.**

This year we are commemorating the Battle of The Somme, always described with the definite article as if it were something quite exceptional, which indeed it was. At the time of writing, in August this year, I was transported back to 100 years before when the battle was still in progress (if that is right word) and remained so until 19th November, 141 days after the battle commenced on 1st July.



**Second Lieutenant Henry Kelly VC MC and Bar**

For us as ‘Dukes’ it is worth remembering that the Regiment won a VC in the Battle and the purpose of this article is to tell the story of Henry Kelly. He was born in Collyhurst in the NE outskirts of Manchester on July 10th, 1887, the eldest of 10 children, his father, from Dublin, had moved to Manchester where he married and raised a family. Young Henry was educated St Patrick’s School and the Xavieran Brothers’ College in Manchester. His father died when he was 17, by which time he was working as a sorting clerk at the Newton Street Post Office. In 1914 amidst the hysteria of the outbreak of war Henry enlisted into the Cameron Highlanders on 5th September but, shortly after, transferred to the Manchester Regiment and, by 1915, he had been promoted to Company Sergeant Major<sup>1</sup>. He was selected for officer training and, on 12 May, 1915, he was commissioned into the 10th Battalion of the West

Riding Regiment (Duke of Wellington’s) and joined them in France.

The 10th Service Battalion of the Regiment was formed in Halifax as part of Kitchener’s New Army. This army was raised outside the normal chain of command and was reliant on the administration of local councils and businessmen. There were some 400,000 men who joined the New Armies and they were described as K1, the first 100,000 volunteers, K2 the second and K3 the third, of which the 10th Battalion was part. The Battalion assembled in September, 1914, at Frensham in Surrey, where the men were issued with blue serge uniforms and old Lee-Metford rifles. Their artillery pieces were 90mm French guns and the Commanding Officer was 44 years old. Fortunately perhaps it was going to be some time before they would be deployed to France. Interestingly, J B Priestley had joined the Battalion as a 20 year old Private soldier and was evacuated in June as a casualty from The Somme<sup>2</sup>.

Having been inspected on Hankley Common by the King, Queen and Princess Mary (of Christmas box, 1914, fame), the Battalion embarked for France in August, 1915, as part of 69 Brigade, 23 Division. They were not involved in the first few days of the battle but were in action around Contalmaison on 6th July and, later in the month, at Becourt. Their casualties were substantial. In that month alone they lost 21 Officers and 419 other ranks killed, wounded, missing or suffering from “shell shock”. As a result the Division was moved to the Ypres Sector, where it was reinforced and re-equipped. But they re-appeared on The Somme in September and one wonders what they thought about returning to the maelstrom.

On 30th September the Battalion, back in the Contalmaison area, moved forward to assembly areas North of Fricourt, called Shelter Wood; the irony of the name would not have been lost! There they were warned for a two divisional (23 and 47 Divisions) attack on Le Sars and, on the 2nd October, they moved forward in daylight along concealed trenches just North of the Bapaume Road to take over the new line from 8th KOYLI in front the village. Each of the four Companies were equipped with 200 bombs and every man carried 170 rounds of ammunition and 2 sandbags. 2Lt Kelly was in D Company, which was initially placed in reserve just south of the road. The purpose of the attack was to take the village as a prelude to another Division taking the Butte de Warlencourt, a very prominent landmark which was described as “a dome of gleaming white chalk from which all vegetation had been blown away by shellfire, it was the most conspicuous object in the landscape by daylight or moonlight” and one which gave the Germans good observation over the whole sector.

The front line for the Battalion was the Old German Line 1 (OG1) and the enemy were defending Old German Line 2 (OG2) less than 100 yards apart. OG 2 was strongly held and the trenches were deep. The wire was intact and would have to be cut by hand. The approach to OG 2 was slightly uphill and was pock marked with shell holes. All sounds pretty discouraging. On the 4th October orders were given for an attack at 6pm and A and D Companies were designated for the attack which could only be supported by 18 pounder guns as the distance to the objective was too close for the mediums. This little detail, which meant that OG2 was largely untouched by artillery, was not good for morale!

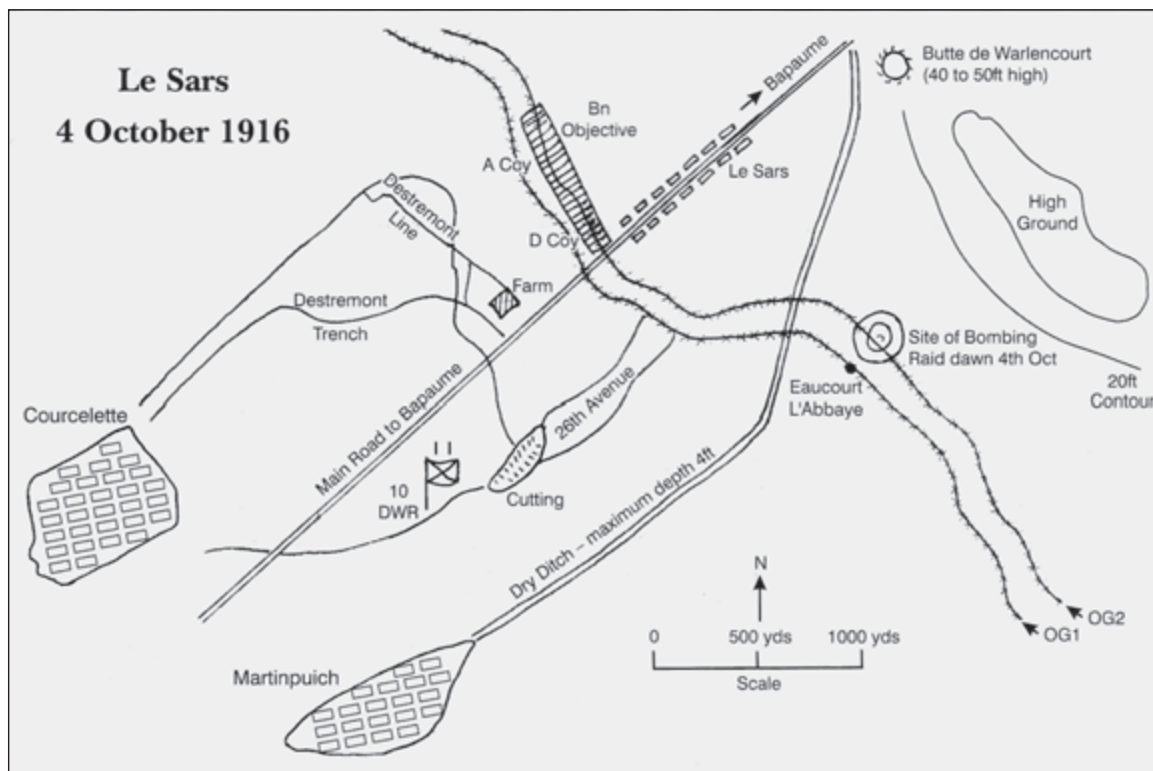
The attack was a complete failure with all officers except Kelly either killed or wounded. Lieutenants Harris, Stafford and Graham were killed. However Kelly with CSM O'Shea and 3 or 4 men managed to get into OG2, which was a remarkable feat. This small group managed to hold off the Germans for two hours in the failing light. CSM O'Shea and two men were wounded. Kelly concluded the 'game was up' and withdrew to the OG1 line, carrying CSM O'Shea back. Then, under cover of darkness he went back and picked up three more men and brought them back too. During the night A and D Companies were withdrawn to Martinpuich. On the 6th October the Battalion returned, by the same route. This time 11 West Yorks, supported by just one Company of 'Dukes' (there was not much more left)

succeeded in taking Le Sars. The surviving 'Dukes' were relieved by 6th Camerons and returned to Ypres. It was from there that the 10th Battalion embarked for the Italian Front in December, 1917.

Temporary 2/Lt Henry Kelly was awarded the Victoria Cross on 25th November, 1916, and his citation reads as follows: *"For most conspicuous bravery in attack. He twice rallied his company under the heaviest fire, and finally led the only three available men into the enemy trench, and there remained bombing until two of them had become casualties and enemy reinforcement had arrived. He then carried his Company Sergeant Major, who had been wounded, back to our trenches, a distance of 70 yards and subsequently three other soldiers. He set a fine example of gallantry and endurance."*

Henry Kelly went on to serve to the end of the war and, in 1918, whilst serving in Italy on the Asiago Plateau (some may remember the Dukes Battlefield tour there in September 2011) he was awarded an MC and a Bar, but that is another story.

He was described as an outstanding fighting soldier of whom the Regiment was justly proud. After the war he served briefly 1922-23 in the Irish National Army during the Civil War. There is some thought that Kelly later fought in The Spanish Civil War, in 1936, and received the Grand Laurelled Cross of San Fernando (nothing to do with the last train!). However this phase of his life is veiled in mystery and several contradictions. Such a



conspicuous personality involved in either side would have been documented and yet it is not. What is clearer is that he and his brothers opened grocery shops on Rochdale Road and Upper Chorlton Road, Manchester. At some stage he became a landlord in Beeston, Leeds, and later in Bradford where he ran the Rawson Arms and it was not long before 10th Battalion reunions were held there. J B Priestley vividly describes a Battalion reunion after the war in his book, *English Journey*, maybe in the Rawson Arms.

During World War II he served briefly as a Lieutenant in the Cheshire Regiment, but by then he would have been in his early 50s. There is some question of a Court Martial in relation to a false claim for £2.10s. Facts on this are understandably hard to find. He left the Army and returned to the Post Office. He died after a long illness (since 1955) on January 18th, 1960, aged 73. He is buried in Manchester Southern Cemetery. His medals are on display as part of the Regimental Collection at Bankfield Museum in Halifax (see photo at bottom of cover page).

<sup>1</sup>This was a new rank as, up to 1915, there was just the RSM and the eight companies were administered by Colour Sergeants.

<sup>2</sup> For a full account of his experiences readers should refer to 'Margin Released' published in 1962.

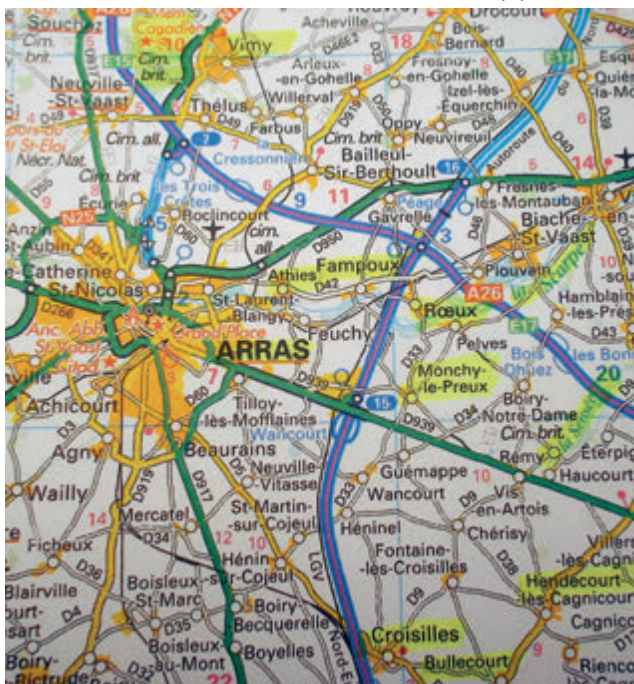
<sup>3</sup>Lieutenant Harris is commemorated on Spec

Memorial B4, Adanac Cemetery; Lieutenants Stafford and Graham are commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial.

Evelyn Webb-Carter 31 August 2016



## THE BATTLE OF ARRAS – FAMPOUX – RIVER SCARPE – BULLECOURT – MAJOR TOM GOODALL (1)



The Arras front on a modern map, with some of the places named in the narrative below highlighted

On November 13 1916 the Battle of the Ancre began, the last major engagement of the Somme before winter closed down all but routine operations, although that battle was resumed in February '17, not concluding until mid-March. For the loss of 415,000 allied casualties up to seven miles of front had been gained, and the Germans were prevented from reinforcing their formations at Verdun. Had the French been overwhelmed there – and they would not have abandoned their defence until they had thrown even more men into that dreadful mincer, drawing them away from the Somme and other areas – who can say that this would not have decisively increased the likelihood of a quick German victory?

By November 1916 the Germans could begin to see that ultimate victory on the Western Front was slipping out of their grasp, and the morale of their troops in that sector had taken a serious knock. However, on the Eastern Front Germany had done much better, with a successful campaign which regained most of Romania, and the ensuing six months would see large reinforcements for the Western Front German armies coming in from the east.

Over the winter of 1916/1917 the enemy was busy 15-20 miles further east. The Germans were preparing a new defensive line, using the lessons they had gained; sitting on reverse slopes, providing strong protection against artillery, favouring a deep, strongpoint defence strategy over linear lines of defensive trenches, each point protected by triple lines of wire, on a plan that would be seen fully developed later in the year at the 3rd Battle of Ypres. This was the Hindenburg Line. The Germans began their withdrawal to it in February 1917. Between their old and new positions they blew up bridges, blocked roads, poisoned wells, set booby traps and generally made the sector uninhabitable and caused maximum devastation to hinder any allied advance.

The Dukes' Territorial 186 Brigade, which had only arrived in France on 10 January 1917, had to advance through the devastation. This is what the 62 (West Riding) Division's history records about the advance to the new enemy positions east of Arras:

"The 62nd Division ... had not a more difficult task than in following up the enemy's retirement during those hard days of March 1917. For as the troops advanced the roads had to be rebuilt, which necessitated the accommodation of large numbers of working parties close up to the front line. At night time it was impossible to find shelters for them, and many had perforce to sleep in hastily erected shelters, which in many places consisted of tarpaulins stretched above excavations in the muddy ground

or over piles of stones: some men were in tents. The weather was abominable – sometimes cold and frosty and at other times wet and muddy, which impeded progress and called for superhuman efforts in moving up guns and stores and all the impedimenta of a division on the advance."

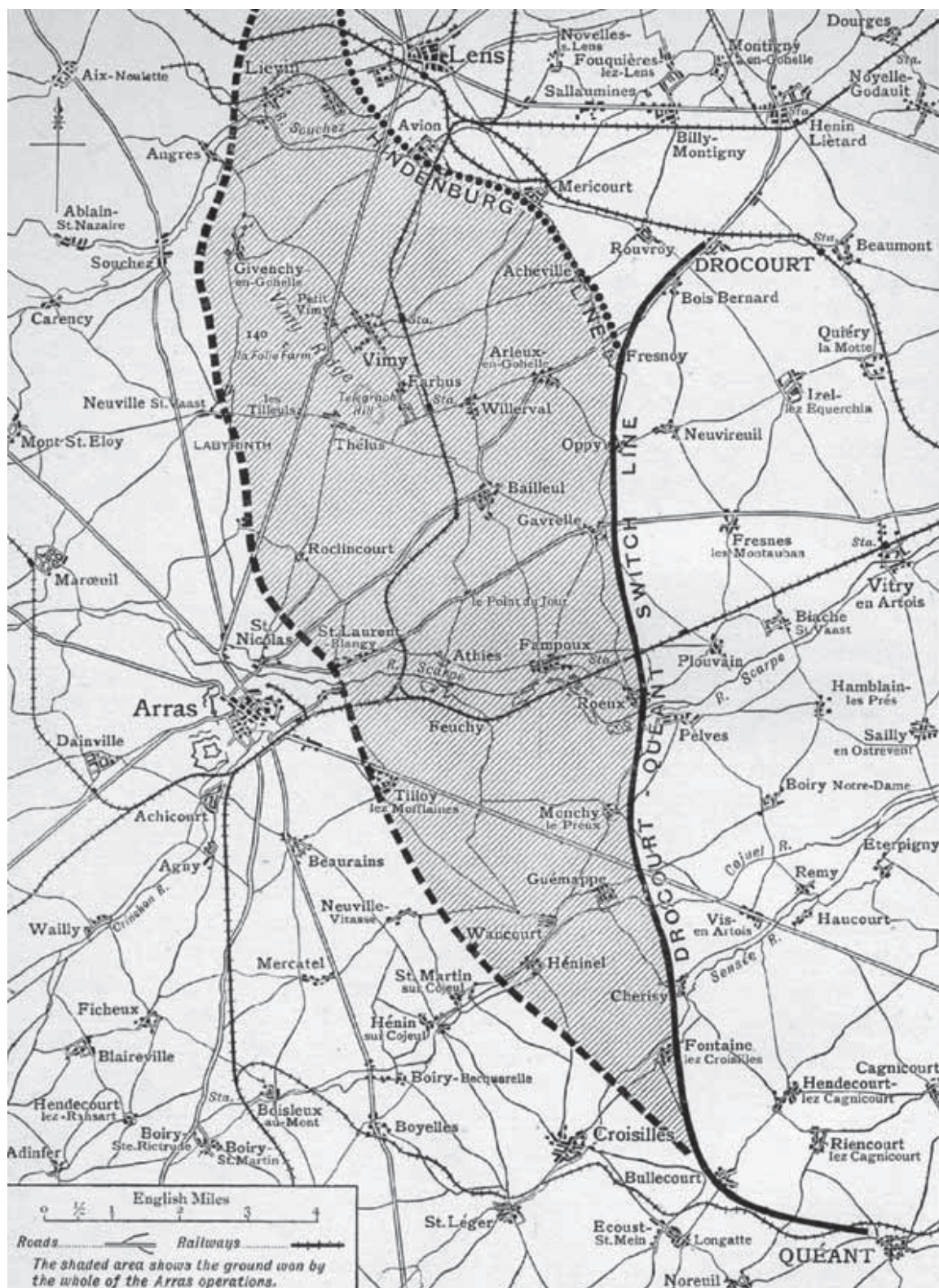
Elsewhere the narrative continues. "There were many fires burning when we occupied the village (Gomiecourt) and as they were still burning we tried to put them out. The junction of every road in the village had been mined and blown up and everything of value had been destroyed. All fruit trees had either been pulled down or an incision made round the barks so that the sap could not rise. All wells had been blown in and one had been poisoned with arsenic, so the RE officer told me."

So it was that by April 1917 the Germans were dug into strongly fortified positions along a broad frontage on the eastern side of Arras. Perhaps unsurprisingly – the area is, after all, only just "up the road" from the Somme – the two battle areas have much in common, apart from the coal mining areas in the extreme north below Lens. Few major towns, but many small villages, almost entirely occupied with agriculture. Mostly rolling hills, with long fields of view and fire, and yet with many folds, spurs and little valleys in which men can hide. Some sharp inclines, too – the Canadians attacking Vimy Ridge had a slog up a long, steep hillside under intense fire.

The ground favours the defender; he can see far out and bring down accurate artillery fire, and his machine gunners can cover long, overlapping beaten zones from the flanks. Conversely, attacking troops must leave the shelter of their positions and traverse open slopes. Modern soldiers know the difficulties encountered by operations in darkness, despite night vision and overlook technology – how much harder 100 years ago when the Mark One Eyeball and a pair of binoculars were all that were available.



THE GERMAN RETREAT TO THE HINDENBURG LINE.  
TREES WERE FELLED BY THE ENEMY AND PLACED ACROSS THE ROAD TO OBSTRUCT THE ADVANCE OF THE BRITISH.



The Arras battle zone, east of the City. The shaded area is the ground that was fought over".



**The Arras CWG cemetery and memorial. The names of those killed at Arras having no known grave are inscribed on the walls of the buildings on the left. There are 726 Dukes names on those walls, and six named headstones in the cemetery**

The River Scarpe runs east from the city, then turns north east. Its marshy valley, with lakes and ponds, together with an elevated railway embankment along much of its length towards Douai, offers a serious obstacle. The 4<sup>th</sup> Division's line of advance extended either side of these obstacles. Elsewhere, the ground is mostly open, although there are other, smaller rivers, notably the Cojeul, the Sensée and the Hironnelle.

Meantime the French, under the new leadership in the field of General Nivelle (whose promotion was founded on his perceived success at Verdun) had embarked on a new offensive in the hills and forests of eastern Champagne, a line known as the Chemin des Dames. It failed with many casualties, costing Nivelle his job and



elevating Petain to command. Once more the French High Command insisted that Britain and its allies should open a new offensive further north, against the Hindenburg Line, to relieve the pressure.

Surely there must have been a feeling of “here we go again”, pulling French irons out of the fire. But there was a war to fight so they probably thought that they had better get on with it, whether here and now, or somewhere else a bit later.

Arras had an extraordinary network of tunnels, which enabled thousands of men to stay safe underground, and to get east of the town on their way up to the front.

The broad assault on 11 April quite quickly became a series of actions, at best loosely linked, but reflecting the strength of the opposition in each locality, and the determination of and level of support given to, the attackers. After some initial success the action bogged down into another attritional struggle. One of the difficulties was that when a formation made some progress but the formations on either side did not, the forward attackers were exposed to heavy MG fire from one or both flanks. Tanks were deployed in some numbers to support assaulting infantry, but were very slow and unreliable, often not even getting as far as the start line.

The Iron Duke's coverage of these times, as the centenary of each of the major Great War engagements passes, reminds us what it was like for our predecessors in those days. Six of our battalions were engaged at Arras: 2 DWR, 9 DWR, and 2/4, 2/5, 2/6, and 2/7 DWR, those last named four battalions formed as 186 Brigade in 62 (West Riding) Division. This issue of your Journal carries an account, largely using his own words, by Lieutenant Colonel Horsfall, commanding 2 DWR, 12



Brigade in the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, of the action at Fampoux. We then have 9 DWR, 17 (Northern) Division, 52 Brigade, in the two Battles near the Scarfe River and beyond Monchy Le Preux. And finally the story of 186 Brigade, 62 (West Riding) Division, in the advance to and the attack on Bullecourt. All went bravely forward, but with little sustained success and heavy casualties. 844 of our men lost their lives between 1 April and 19 May 1917 and lie in the region's cemeteries or are names on memorial walls. Our coverage concludes with the memoirs of Major Tom Goodall, who served in

## 2 DWR at Fampoux.

The account of Lieutenant Colonel AG Horsfall, Commanding Officer 2 DWR.

*Editor's note. The author was killed by a bullet through the heart leading his companies into position near Langemarck on 9 October 1917, during the Passchendaele action. He came to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion from the 1<sup>st</sup> in India to get into the war, and was CO through 10 months of almost continuous action on the Somme and here at Arras. A remarkable man and a true hero.*



LIEUT-COLONEL A. G. HORSFALL, D.S.O.

See also Sandhurst Chapel article on page 30

*The 4<sup>th</sup> Division had been in reserve to the west of Arras, then came forward and passed through the 9<sup>th</sup> Division which had captured the ground as far as the Brown Line.* “We took part in the big show on April 9<sup>th</sup>. It

was, I think, the most spectacular battle ever fought. Another Division was to take the first three German systems (Black, Blue and Brown lines), then our Division was to go through and capture Fampoux, and dig in about 300 yards beyond it.

“We marched at 5.15 am in a snowstorm to the assembly area about 5 miles away, where we had a hot meal and a rum ration, and picks and shovels were drawn. The last mile or so up to this place we were passing through continuous heavy guns and howitzers, all firing hard; you never heard such a row. We passed streams of wounded, and dense columns of prisoners kept coming in. During our halt we had one man hit by a stray bullet – Lord knows where it came from. We heard the Black line was captured before we moved off; we then went up the Athies/Plouvain Road, gangs of sappers were already hard at work on it.

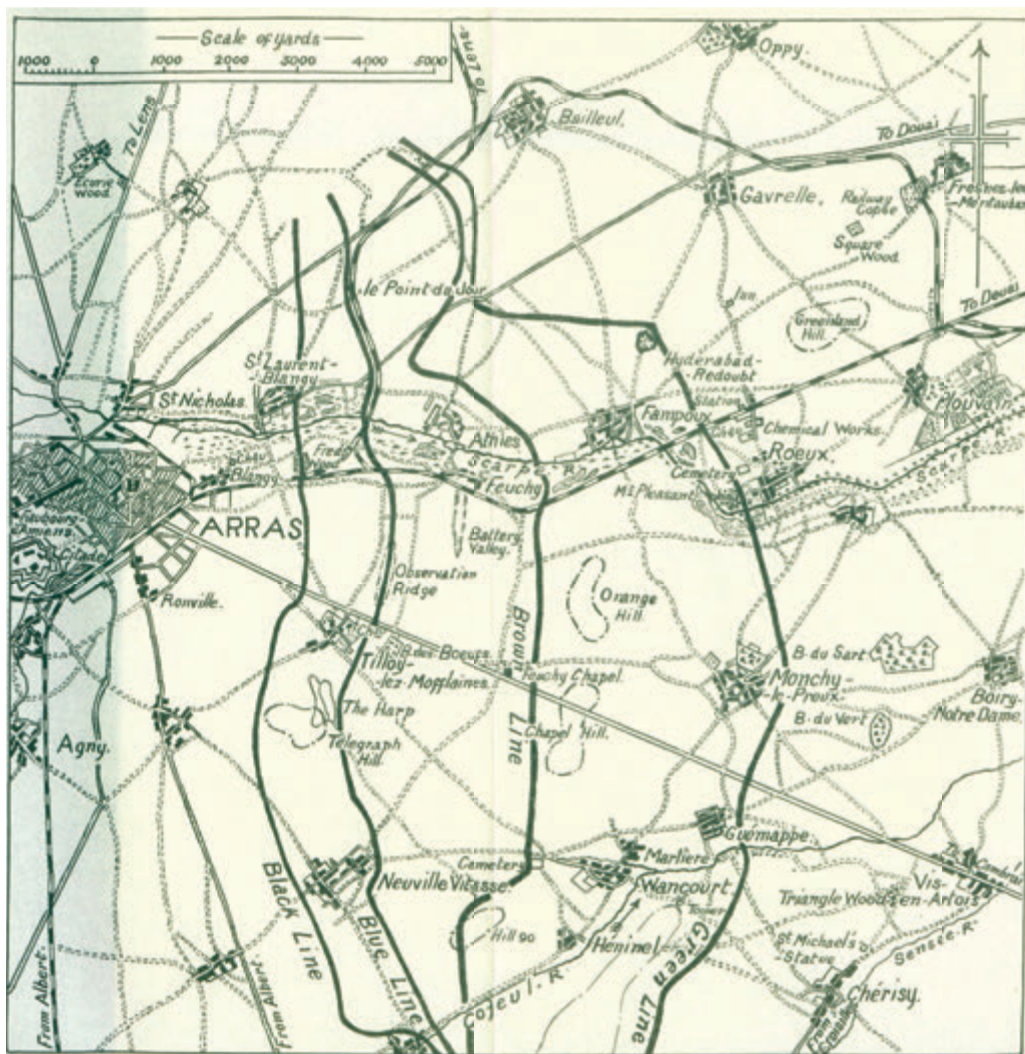
“The enemy barraged the road and the 1<sup>st</sup> KOs (King's Own Royal Lancasters) ahead of us lost heavily, but we kept a bit to the south and got to the Blue line (which had been captured in the meantime) with only one other man hit.

“The Blue line here was an enormous railway embankment, we sat on it and watched our heavies strafe Athies and the Highlanders take the place – just like a cinematograph – then moved on and got into our positions of readiness while our guns hammered the fourth German system. The advance from here was in artillery formation of section columns and was done just like a drill movement, every section in its proper position moving steadily on.

“The German position was just over a ridge, and we did not know we were so close to it when suddenly a hare got up and came dodging in and out of the columns. All the men cheered and watched it while the Boche with his



**The rather splendid Mairie at Fampoux. Unlike some of the Arras villages today there are no obvious memorabilia of the war 100 years ago.**



**Note the lines with names of colours that were the progressive objectives, from black, through blue and brown, to green, the envisaged initial limit. On 2 DWR's line of advance the coloured map lines were mostly crests on the ground.**

hands up came streaming out to us; but no one cared a damn for them compared to the hare. It was lucky the Boche had the wind up, as their wire was hardly touched and their trenches intact.

"From here we pushed on to Fampoux. On the right, south of the (River) Scarpe, our attack had not got forward so well and the Boche MGs kept going hard at us but I don't think anyone was hit, thanks to the very long range they were firing at. We had to wait for some time for our heavies to paste the place; (as a matter of fact they did very little damage, but the Boche guns during the next few days practically flattened the place out).

"During this halt a few Boche guns got onto us and a subaltern was killed close to me and several men wounded. We fairly rushed the village, which was a very big one; luckily for us the enemy was a bit on the run and it was not until we got near the far end that we had any real fighting; here we had to bomb them out of one or two houses.

"The Boche made a stand beyond the village, holding a railway embankment on our right, several trenches, and a line of houses beyond, with MGs. Trying to advance to the Green line we lost about 80 men and 6 officers in two or three minutes; the survivors had to lie flat, any man showing himself the slightest bit being shot to pieces. I decided that without artillery support we could not push





**The river runs broadly north to south where it goes under the railway line, and the Dukes were over it, but the assault on their right flank was not, hence the incoming MG fire from elevated positions.**

further, so we dug in along the forward edge of the village.

“It was a rather anxious time for a bit as south of the river on our right a heavy Boche counter-attack had gone clean past and about three-quarters of a mile behind us; and on our left, where we were warned an attack was expected, the rest of the Brigade had not come up into line. So we were just holding the forward edge of the village and a bit either side of it with both flanks in the air. However I managed to get a company of the LFs (Lancashire Fusiliers) to join up on our left, and the rest of the Brigade came up into line – or rather part of them did during the early hours of next day, and I got the KOs who were in support to hold a bridge over the river for us (in our rear).

“The next day we were warned to attack the buildings in front of us without a barrage. Fortunately I told our Brigadier that it would be simply murder to take men out to do so, and they then said the cavalry would charge the trenches between us and the buildings and we would go

in support. However the cavalry jibbed, and nothing happened.

“Luckily our GSO1(I) came up to see the situation and I took him round as much of the front line as it was prudent to get to; by an especial mercy the Hun was barraging every street with MGs and really pasting the village with HE, and it rather impressed the GSO1(I) who even told me he thought it foolhardy to move about the village, but I rubbed it in that the infantry had no choice.

“The next day we and the KOs went over the top, but instead of attacking the buildings in front were to do a right incline, crossing the railway embankment diagonally and attacking buildings well south of it. The ground beyond the village was deep mud and swamp, and the barrage very thin and far too quick and the men could not keep up. They captured some German trenches held by Prussians of a fresh division, and then, while they were climbing up a high embankment the barrage got a long way ahead.

“Only about 50 men of the two battalions got across, with most of the officers; then had to get under cover and lie there all day; the enemy holding a strongly fortified point beyond. Another brigade was to have been on our left but must have misread its orders, and only one platoon of it ever came south of the Athies/Plouvain road (now the D42). The result of this was that a great part of the railway embankment, a lot of the Boche trenches and all the buildings between the railway and the Athies/Plouvain road were never attacked, and all were stiff with MGs.

“Seeing the attack held up I went up into the line. We tried to turn the strongpoint along the river but were held up by swamps and lack of cover. The CO of the KOs and I had a consultation. He thought the brigade on our left had gone through, and wanted to attack the buildings north of the railway. I went forward a bit and did a reconnaissance and also got reports from one platoon of ours that had gone well forward and had to fall back, and from the platoon of the brigade on our left, and thought we would have no earthly hope of getting in; and so I said I would take my Battalion forward if he ordered it but was against doing so.

“He then asked what I suggested, so I said we must hold the captured trenches. They were not continuous and we had a lot of digging to do, but finally got a continuous line. It was now snowing like blazes. We held from the road to the railway, and then back along the railway to a point where we joined the corps south of the river. The LFs had come into the line by now. Just then the enemy made a counter-attack and got clean round on our left flank, which merely rested on the road and was actually within bombing distance.



**Brown's Copse Cemetery lies at the heart of the 9 DWR battlezone, taking the ground of both assaults, on Fampoux (9 April) and the Chemical Works (3 May, see below), together. The ground between there and the village, and then from there to the chemical works, is shown on the next two photos.**



**Between Fampoux and Brown's Copse.**

“We held the left and the KOs the embankment. The men were beat to the world and their rifles all clogged with clay and snow, and for some time a Company Sergeant Major with a Lewis gun and myself with a rifle held the line. I forgot to say we were counter-attacked twice the previous night, and since 5.15 am on the 9<sup>th</sup> our men had practically no rest and no sleep, had taken part in two attacks, had dug in twice and been heavily shelled and fired at by MGs all the time. Finally the men got going and we beat the Boche off. (The General was very good to me about it and I got the DSO and the CSM the MC).

“I set out to look for the brigade on our left and finally found they had taken a real knock and were back in our jumping-off trenches a long way behind us. I finally got one company of them into some trenches north of the road which the enemy had abandoned, and soon after dark the rest came into line and the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion of our Brigade filled up the gap between us.

“The next day the Higher Command put in a fresh brigade of another division to attack the buildings north of the railway. They put in a whole brigade and told them they had a soft job and gave them a really good barrage. Poor devils, they were absolutely wiped out, about 100 men surviving. The next night we were relieved and went into reserve for a week or more, and were told we would go over the top again but were suddenly taken out for a rest. Our casualties were I think, 1 officer killed, 10 wounded, and about 185 other ranks killed and wounded. Our rest consisted of marching and counter-marching with 4 days' halt in one village. During those 4 days one had to train Lewis gun teams, bombers, grenadiers etc, besides generally reorganising. Luckily we got some top-hole drafts.”

Colonel Horsfall's direct account finishes there, but the Battalion was by no means finished with fighting. On the night of April 30<sup>th</sup>/May 1<sup>st</sup> 2 DWR came back again into much the same area; during the interval two divisions had



**Forward from Brown's Copse to the Chemical Works. The visible building are, of course, not those of the 1917 Works.**

been practically wiped out trying to take those buildings. After two days in the trenches the Battalion went over the top again on 3<sup>rd</sup> May. This time the line of the assault was just south of the railway and the final objective was a line about 2 miles beyond the buildings. The Battalion did magnificently, but at ruinous cost. They went through together with some men of another brigade and reached the second objective about 2000 yards away. There all the surviving officers were casualties and the remnants of the Battalion fell back to the Black line, about 1000 yards ahead of the jumping-off trench.

At this point the Battalion was heavily swept by machine-gun fire, both frontal and enfilade. The remnants, in company with the remnants of different units of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Brigades, about 100 men in all, dug in. Meanwhile the attack on the left had also failed completely, and even lost some of the front line trench, and though some men of the Brigade on the right had gone on they never mopped the chateau and other buildings near it. Consequently 2 DWR moved into the Chemical Works with orders not to go beyond it, but to hold firm on the buildings. They held all day but under constant enemy MG fire from buildings on either side. Reinforcement was too slow in coming and later that evening a heavy German counter-attack pushed everyone back behind the Black line.

That night, exclusive of signallers and HQ staff, the Battalion total was 16 effectives, rising to just over 50 as

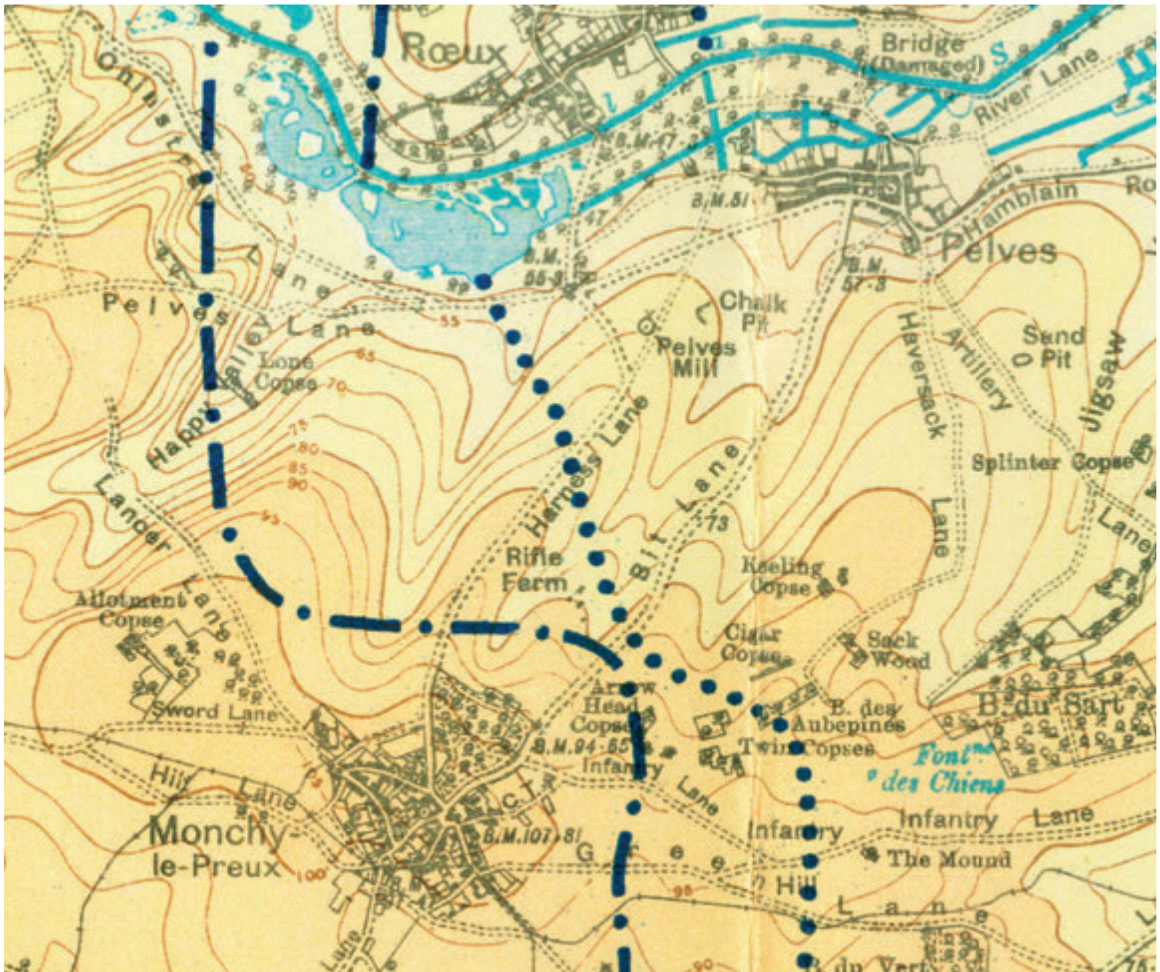
men trickled in from around the battlefield. After a short period in support what was left formed up as two platoons attached to the LF and were in close support when the other two battalions in the Brigade assaulted again. Another 1 officer was killed and 11 other ranks were either wounded or missing, or both. The remnant came out of the line for rest and reinforcement.

The Battalion's Roll of Honour shows that 306 men were killed in the early part of 1917, the great majority in April and early May.

### **9 DWR and the Battles of the River Scarpe.**

17 (Northern) Division was in reserve when the offensive started. It became part of the thrust (known as the first and second battles of the Scarpe), to capture the ground between the Cambrai road and the River Scarpe, with the principle objective being Monchy Le Preux. It spent 11 to 19 April in cold and wet trenches roughly along the line of the Monchy to Fampoux road, shown as Lancer Lane on the map below, whilst other divisions fought to take this heavily defended fortified stronghold. It returned to billets at Arras until called for, then went forward again on the 24<sup>th</sup> to assault along the line (see map) from west of Rifle Farm towards Keeling Copse.

The first task was to take a defensive line called Rifle Trench, which they attempted with A and D Companies, commencing on 25<sup>th</sup> April at 0320 hours, advancing from Orange Hill behind a barrage, but under artillery fire



from enemy guns. The men walked steadily forward until they were about 100 yards from the enemy trench when they were hit by massed machine gun and rifle fire.

They fell back to their start line, where they reorganised and were strengthened by two platoons from C Company, and advanced again. On the right of their line a few men got into the enemy trench, and held out all day, even though the rest of the attacking force had again been driven back, although they made a third attempt. After a fourth attempt to gain their objectives, with all companies in the assault by now, but with the same bloody outcome, it was called off. Those who made the German lines and survived withdrew under cover of night, having been there, under fire, all day. The Battalion was pulled out and returned to Arras.

Amongst the wounded was Lt Huxtable, the Father of General Sir Charles Huxtable. One might imagine that he felt lucky; there are 724 Dukes named on the Arras Memorial, 80 of them from 9 DWR killed in April 1917,

and many more in the small, scattered cemeteries in the countryside east of Arras.

### 186 Brigade and the Fight for Bullecourt

The Brigade's difficult advance from its positions on the Somme, last near Beaumont-Hamel, has been mentioned earlier in this article. Casualties had been incurred on the march, from artillery, snipers and booby-traps. Elements of enemy remained along the march long enough to engage the advance, but rarely stayed to take on determined opposition. Nevertheless the 62<sup>nd</sup> Division lost 35 officers and 300 other ranks killed, wounded and missing: for example there are 44 Dukes interred at Achiet Le Grand, west of Arras.

As their history says "following a retreating enemy is not always a bloodless victory". The Division arrived in the front line, somewhat west of Bullecourt, by 5<sup>th</sup> April 1917. It had the 4<sup>th</sup> Australian Division on its right, and 21<sup>st</sup> Division on its left. It was, therefore, the southernmost British formation alongside the

northernmost allied formation, with all the potential for mis-communication that that situation holds.

Each Brigade had attached to it a Machine Company, comprising 16 guns and around 100 men to fire, control and support them. The MG companies doubled the machine gun firepower of the divisions they supported. Also about this time the machine gun sections of battalions were taken away for extra training and some re-equipping. At last there was an effective response to the German MG power on the battlefield, although the guns were of course most potent when carefully sited in defence, whilst the allies were almost always in the assault, or hastily fending off counter-attacks.

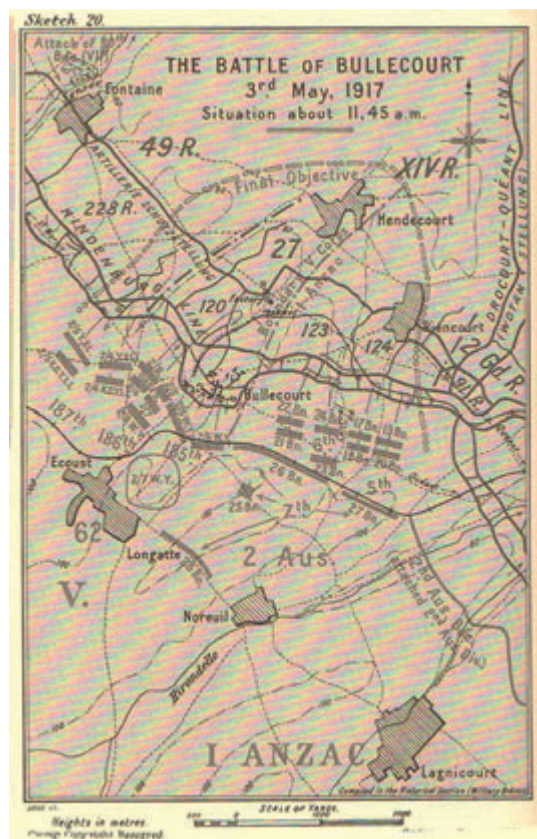
The village of Bullecourt formed a strong salient in the Hindenburg Line, at its southern end. There was a well-constructed trench on the west, south and east sides of the village, protected by three formidable belts of wire, each 10 to 15 yards wide. MG emplacements were sited to provide enfilade fire along its whole length. A second trench line ran through the middle of the village itself, and a third line, heavily wired, lay along the northern outskirts.



**Achiet Le Grand CWGC Cemetery.**

Faced with a warning order to prepare to attack the village – which as yet had been little affected by gunfire, with the wire all intact – there was some understandable consternation amongst commanders. A barrage was laid down when darkness fell on 5<sup>th</sup> April, and 185<sup>th</sup> Brigade, comprising four battalions of West Yorks, advanced. There was some success, and with the guns continuing to pound the enemy's trenches this was taken to be a promising start. On 9<sup>th</sup> April a general attack along the Arras front began (see 2 DWR above), and Vimy Ridge was taken by the Canadians with British support, a remarkable feat as anyone who has approached that feature from the back (west side) will vouch.

However the 62 Division attack on 9 April was cancelled, although the next day strong, battalion sized, patrols were ordered to push forward, supported by tanks



**Bullecourt, showing the main wire and other obstacles in and around the village. The position of the Dukes' Battalions was to the left front of the village, between the tank routes marked along the steep sided east/west track. The ANZAC troops were to the right of the village. A larger version of this map will be found inside the back cover**

and Australian units on their right. German MGs opened up a murderous fire, neither tanks nor Australians appeared, and a costly withdrawal of the patrols was ordered (2/7 West Yorks alone took over 100 casualties). It transpired that the 10 April attack had been cancelled, but not before 185 Brigade's troops (the West Yorks battalions) had crossed their start lines. At 4.30 am the next day the attack was again mounted, this time with all concerned apparently ready for the advance. Gas had been discharged in the village the previous night.

Once again no sign of the Australians was seen, though it transpired that they had attacked, and been counter-attacked, and withdrawn and most of the tanks had been immobilised. This time it was 2/6 West Yorks who bore the brunt.

The Division held its ground in the face of counter-attacks until 3<sup>rd</sup> May, when the assault on Bullecourt was

renewed. By this time some progress had been made along the Arras front, in, amongst others, the battles of the Scarpe and Monchy-Le-Preux. The final battle for Bullecourt was the last major allied offensive in the spring of 1917. The village had been continuously shelled from early April through into May and was by then practically flat, although the German trenches and obstacles stubbornly remained both usable and formidable.

The three West Riding Brigades were ready to advance on 3 May, with 185 Bde (West Yorks) to take Bullecourt; 186 Bde (Dukes) to overwhelm the enemy forward positions on its front, and then push on to take Hendecourt, the next village along the line of advance. Then 187 Bde (Y&L and KOYLI) would come forward. They crossed the start line at 0345 hours. It did not go well; most battalions got into the first line of enemy trenches but found that much of the wire was uncut, and enemy shell and MG fire made further advance impossible. Furthermore it was a very dark night with all the dust and dirt of the shells, and battalions lost their direction. By midday most of the men were back on the railway line, with small forward parties unable to go forward or back and taking cover in shell holes.



**Believed to be the pre assault position of 2/5 DWR, with the village of Hendecourt, the second phase objective, in the far distance, and the village of Bullecourt on the right. 185 Brigade (West Yorks) faced the village itself.**

One reason for this failure was that there was no effective coordination on the right flank, and the British and Australian assaults did not take place together. Thus 185 Bde on the right was under intolerable enfilade fire from heavily defended positions that were not engaged until the ANZAC troops came up, by which time it was too late. As it could not get forward, so the troops to their left were also exposed. The Division was relieved in the line, and pulled back a few miles to recover and reorganise.

On 7 May a further assault on Bullecourt was mounted by 7 Division (who relieved the 62<sup>nd</sup>) and the Australians; a footing in the village was gained, which counter-attack

failed to dislodge. On 13 May 2/7 DWR was sent forward to support 7 Division units in an attack on a strongpoint called the Crucifix, which had beaten off many an assault over the previous few days.

Bullecourt did not fall until 17 May, by which time a third division (58<sup>th</sup>) had come up and taken the lead role, although West Riding units, now often amalgamated to cover for their heavy casualties, were still involved in the fighting. They were all pulled out and back to positions south west of Arras. It should not be thought that it was the infantry alone that bore the brunt. The gunners maintained fire throughout, and counter-battery fire took its toll, with both HE and gas shells raining down. The Division as a whole had over 3000 casualties.

Bullecourt changed hands 19 times during 1917 and 1918. There are a number of memorials to be seen, as shown below.



**Flagpoles and memorials outside the church.**



**Memorial tablets showing the divisions engaged in the Bullecourt battles**

### **Messines Ridge and the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele)**

The Dukes contribution to these bloody actions in the second half of 1917 will be the topic of our Great War 1000 years on commemorative coverage in the Autumn edition.

## Major Tom Goodall DSO MC

Compiled by Scott Flaving

### 2/5 DWR – World War One: Home Guard – World War Two

*Major Tom's story will appear in three instalments. This first one covers the period up to May 1917 and the attack on Bullecourt, as described above.*

Tom Goodall was born in Slaithwaite on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1882, the son of Dick and Elizabeth Goodall. His father was a commercial traveller and by 1891 the family resided at 6 Providence Terrace, Mirfield. Tom was the sixth child of seven and his younger brother had been born in Mirfield in 1889. At the age of 18 Tom is recorded as working as a solicitor's clerk and in 1909 Tom was admitted as a Managing Clerk at E B Wilson & Topham. By 1929 the firm was known as E B Wilson, Topham & Goodall.

Tom was commissioned into the local Territorial Force (TF) unit on 10<sup>th</sup> December, 1914, not long after the outbreak of war. Mirfield, was home to a Company of the Huddersfield-based 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, and he was posted to H Company of the recently formed Second Line TF Battalion, the 2/5<sup>th</sup> Battalion (this was later amalgamated into D Coy).

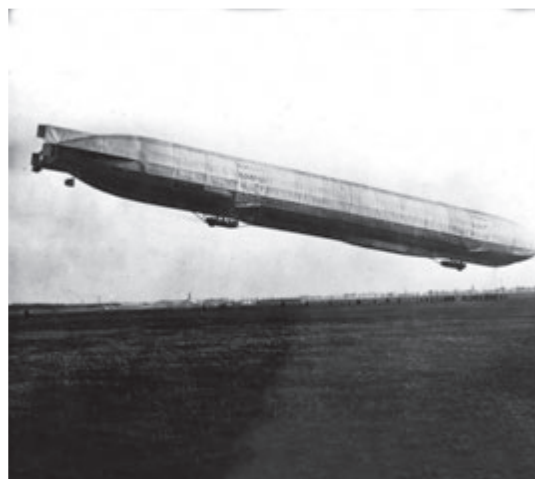
The second line units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> West Riding Division were to be disappointed at not being embarked for France until 1917. Kitchener's New Army units took priority over the 2<sup>nd</sup> Line Territorials for uniform and equipment, despite there being very few officers or men with any experience in their ranks. The second line TF units of 2<sup>nd</sup> West Riding Division were moved round England for coastal defence and training for 17 long months.

On 13<sup>th</sup> September, 1915, Tom is recorded as being on leave in Mirfield, and was a witness to the marriage of his brother John, 35 and Annie Greenwood. John was also a commercial traveller.

After training in Yorkshire and Derbyshire, the Bn was sent to Newcastle on coastal defence duties. Following further intensive training at Larkhill, near Salisbury, Tom records the excitement of their time on coastal defence, near Southdown in Suffolk:

“During the months of July, August, September and October 1916, particularly the two latter months, the Bn had several very exciting times during German air raids, as many of the Zeppelins came inland over the bay at Southwold and appeared to follow the course of the River Blyth there. The Zeppelins also returned by the same route, leaving the coast at Southwold. This was noticed

and remarked upon many times during the Zeppelin raids. One bit of good work could be seen from our Camp. The searchlights located a Zeppelin coming inland and the anti-aircraft guns shelled it. Several shells burst very near the Zepp and the following day a Gondola was found which had been shot off the Zepp.” Eventually, the Battalion moved into billets at Bedford, from whence they entrained for Southampton on 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1917, bound for Le Havre, France, disembarking there in the early morning of 12<sup>th</sup> January.



**A German zeppelin of c. 1915.**

On arrival behind the front line in January, a programme of trench warfare instruction was conducted for all members of the Battalion, now part of 186 Brigade, 62<sup>nd</sup> (West Riding) Division, in the Hebuterne area. They then took over a section of the line in the Beaumont Hamel area. On 27<sup>th</sup> February the Battalion attacked and captured Orchard Alley, which compelled the enemy to withdraw from the village of Puisieux. After successful actions at Achiet le Petit on 17<sup>th</sup> March, and Gommecourt on 18<sup>th</sup> March, the Bn was occupied in training and working parties, at which time Tom was wounded on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1917.

By May, he had rejoined the Bn and they were holding the front line on the flank of the newly constructed Hindenburg Line.

The first major action of the Battalion was on 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1917, at Bullecourt. On 11<sup>th</sup> April, 1917, an attack by 4<sup>th</sup> Australian Division against the Hindenburg Line to the East of Bullecourt had made some small gains, which were reversed by a major German counter attack by four Divisions on 15<sup>th</sup> April. It had been planned for the 62<sup>nd</sup>

Division to take part in the original attack to support the Australians, supported by the Tank Corps who were to mount a flanking attack against Bullecourt from the east. The flank attack did not materialise, but the British High Command was committed to keeping up pressure against the Germans to prevent them from taking advantage of the precarious state of the French Army at this time. After the disastrous Nivelle Offensive along the Chemin des Dames many units of the French Army had mutinied.

The 62<sup>nd</sup> Division was ordered to attack to the West of Bullecourt early on 3<sup>rd</sup> May. The attack was repulsed, with 170 dead and missing, with many more wounded. Captain Goodall recorded the action:

“Zero was at 3.45 am and the barrage opened promptly then. It was something never to be forgotten. Shells of all sizes screamed through the air and bullets from our machine guns sped towards the enemy lines. The noise was deafening and appalling. Then the tanks went forward to do their part in the attack. I went to the top of the railway embankment but could see nothing but a dense cloud of smoke and dust, lighted here and there by bursting shells. Hundreds of ‘verey’ lights and coloured signals were sent up by the enemy all along his line. Watched the timing of the barrage carefully and noted that after the Company should have been in the enemy second line trench, enemy lights were still being sent up from that direction. Got no news or reports from any Company Commanders or other Officers all day.

Took out six posts at night. The enemy machine gun fire and shelling continued throughout the night.”

## **1917 – PASSCHENDAEL – MAJOR TOM GOODALL (2) – THE TUNNELERS – LOOSEMORE VC – YPRES, THEN AND NOW**

By Autumn 2017 100 years ago the war had been waging for over 3 years, and had another 1½ years to go. The small cadre of BEF professional soldiers who were hurried out to France in 1914, and who fought at Mons, Le Cateau, on the Aisne and the Marne, returning to the Ypres area at the end of 1914 to engage in the First Battle of Ypres into the beginning of 1915 are, those that then survived such as Loos, the Somme and Arras, by now very thinly spread through the old BEF’s units, mostly manned with new men, alongside the Service Battalions and Territorials, some of which are still arriving on the Front and experiencing their first taste of the war.

1917 was a momentous year for many reasons not directly connected with the Western Front. In the first months of the year Germany had resumed unrestricted submarine warfare. 500,000 tons of shipping were

Only six of the 24 Stretcher Bearers who went over the top with the Battalion that day returned.

During the Summer months the Battalion was in the front line, support or at rest. The London Gazette of 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1917, shows Lt T Goodall was promoted to be A/Capt whilst commanding a Company, from 29<sup>th</sup> June, 1917.

### **Italy 1917**

In the next Journal, as we deal with the events of the second half of 1917, we will come across the deployment of 10 DWR to Italy. Here is a taster.

“A brass band had been started only a very short time before (we entrained for the journey to Italy) and, indeed, half the instruments arrived only arrived two days before we left France. One of the officers went to London on one day’s leave. He hid him to Hawkes & Sons, one of whose partners had served in the 10<sup>th</sup>, and, guided by their advice, brought back large and fearsome brazen forms. He was a Scotchman, one of the persistent sort. Surely none other could have got these great packing cases passed the RTO at Victoria (station, in London) on to and off the ship and into a motor “wangled” for the occasion. Anyhow, the band practised in the train, and when the left half Battalion caught up with the right half at Les Arcs all the Frenchmen in the station were ecstatic at its rendering of the ‘Marseillaise’. Puffed up by this, it essayed the Italian National Anthem a day or two later at Parma, and had to run after the train which was leaving without it. Possibly the railway people did not recognise the air.”

sunk in both February and March: 600,000 in May and 700,000 in June. Against his will Admiral Jellicoe was forced to change his strategy and organise shipping into convoys, which quite quickly reduced the losses.

In Ireland Sinn Fein began to win bye-elections and disturbances on the streets of Dublin and elsewhere led up to the Easter Rising and subsequent consequences. Around 230,000 Irishmen were serving with the Allies in the Great War, and the news from home must have been of great concern, not least as the north/south protestant/catholic divide was becoming more and more prominent, and many regiments and thousands of men came from both sides of this divide.

In Russia the Tsar had been forced to abdicate in March, and the new rulers had little interest in continuing



the war against Germany. By November 1916 Russia is believed to have lost 1.6 million men, killed, and 5 million wounded, and these appalling casualties were one of the main causes of the revolution. A government of moderate socialists ruled after a fashion until October, when the revolution put Lenin into the Kremlin. His “Decree of Peace” that same month effectively ended Russian engagement, although this was not formally resolved until the Treat of Brest Litovsk in March 18. The upshot, of course, was the release of huge reinforcements for the war in the west.

All the manpower resources of the Allies are now incountry, and reinforcements would become harder to come by, although conscription produced a steady flow onto the battlefield. In April 1917 the United States declared war on Germany, although it would be some considerable time before American soldiers would engage the enemy. It was, nevertheless, an important boost to the Allies – and an equal blow to German morale – that they were coming, and would inject new energy into the conflict.

This Iron Duke covers a few aspects of the fortunes of our battalions through the second half of 1917 and into the very beginning of 1918. No attempt is made to give a full picture of the entirety of our Regiment’s considerable involvement. It might, though, help readers to have an overview of where the battalions were in this period. I apologise in advance for the variable spelling of some of these place names. In general I have used the modern names, but where that would simply confuse us (Mesen for Messines, Ieper for Ypres) I have stuck to the familiar option.

### **Summary of Dukes’ Battalions locations and activities June to November 1917.**

#### **Regular Battalion, 2 DWR.**

2 DWR, after Arras and the Scarpe battles around Fampoux in May, came out of the line. On 20 September it moved into the Ypres sector, exchanging comfortable and relatively safe billets for awful conditions and a dangerous environment. On 9 October the Battalion took part in the offensive on Poelcappelle. In that fight the Commanding Officer, Lt Col Horsfall (see last issue) was killed.

#### **Service Battalions, 8, 9 and 10 DWR**

8 DWR was engaged in the successful attack on the Messines Ridge near Wijtschate, in June. The next major action was in August crossing the Yser Canal. It was pushed back to the Canal, and here Private Loosemore won his Victoria Cross, covering the withdrawal. Later in the Passchendaele battle 8 DWR fought at Langemarck, St Julien, Polygon Wood, Broodseinde and Poelcapelle.

9 DWR remained in the Arras sector until 12 October, then was moved up to take part in the Ypres Salient battles. It was in action in the 1st and 2nd Passchendaele battles in October and November.

10 DWR played a part in the attack on Messines Ridge in June. From September to October the battalion fought for the Menin Road Bridge, Polygon Wood and Passchendaele. In November it was pulled out of that battle and was part of a five division reinforcement of Italian forces under attack from Austro-German in the Dolomite’s, in the north east of the country.

#### **The Territorials**

49 (West Riding) Division, including 147 Brigade (1/4, 1/5, 1/6 and 1/7 DWR) went into action on 9 October in an assault on Belle Vue Spur getting to just over a mile from Passchendaele, and remained in the Ypres sector until 2nd November, when the Brigade took part in the Cambrai offensive.

62 (West Riding) Division, including 186 Brigade (2/4, 2/5, 2/6, 2/7 DWR) remained in the Arras sector. After the unsuccessful attacks on Bullecourt in April and May, described at some length in the last Iron Duke, it faced several months of trench warfare. It was then very involved in the Cambrai offensive from November, taking on objectives just a little further east of those it strove for, at such heavy cost, in May. The second account of Major Goodall’s service, including the death in action of the Commanding Officer, Lt Col TAD Best, at Havringcourt tells the story.

Some 10,000 Dukes in 13 Battalions were in action in this phase of the war. Seeing that number, we might want to recall that 7422 members of our Regiment, killed in action or died of wounds in France and Belgium in the Great War, lie in Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemeteries in those countries (out of a total of 8392 in CWGC sites in all WW1 cemeteries worldwide).

# Passchendaele

The Third Battle of Ypres lasted from 31 July to 10 November 1917, with the assaults on Passchendaele, the name mostly used now to embrace the whole campaign, starting on 9 October. The timing was partly dictated by French lack of success along the Chemin des Dames further south (again a plea for some relief from pressure by opening a new offensive front was acceded to) and also because our Second Army (General Plumer) had been overlooked from the high ground around the Salient since early 1915, and here was an opportunity, at last, to take the initiative and push them off the ridges. In May and June large parts of the French Army were in revolt, putting yet more responsibility for the conduct of the war onto the British Allies.

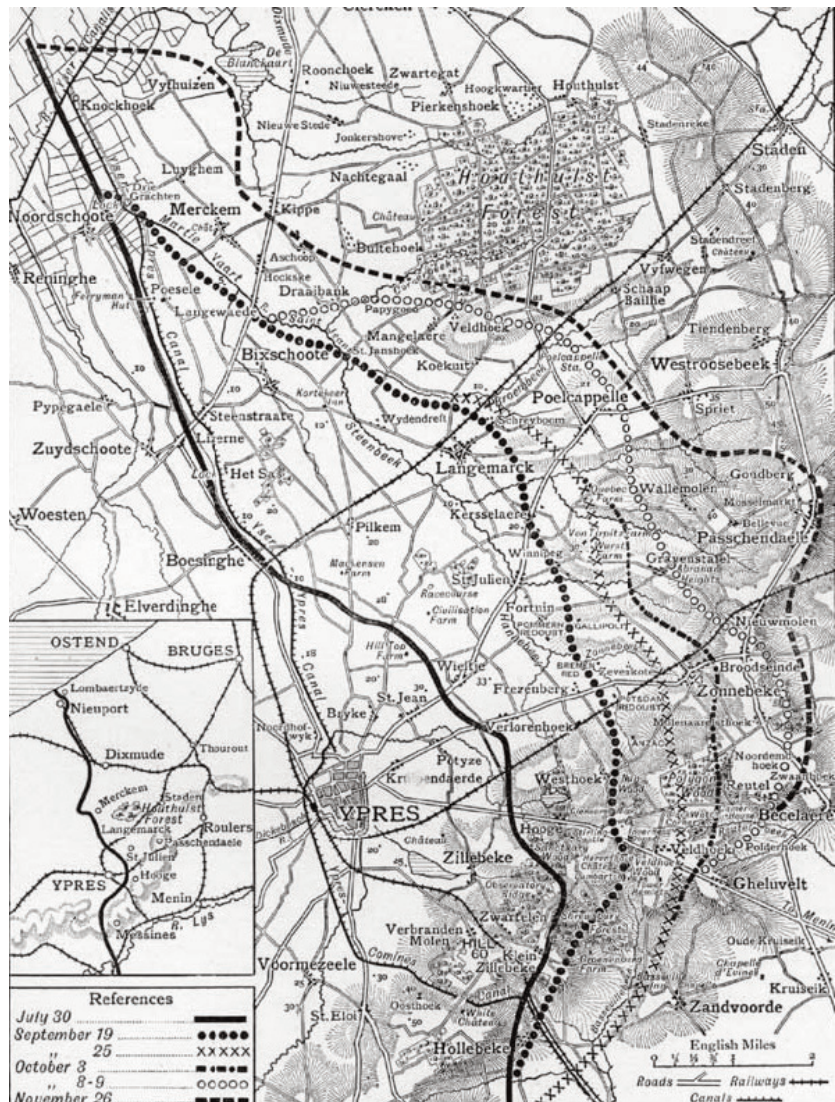
It was Plumer's initiative to attack along the Messines Ridge on 7 June, as a preliminary action which would make further success much more likely. It took another six weeks for everything to be ready, then on 31 July the main offensive started. It needs to be borne in mind that the village of Passchendaele itself was the furthest point of the advance, not reached until November, by stages. The map below shows what progress was made, and when.

(There used to be a wonderful painting in the old Yorkshire Brigade Mess at Strensall of 1st Bn The York and Lancaster Regiment in long lines of men in red tunics advancing with bayonets fixed against Zulu Impis. At the back was a small figure with sword drawn, blade pointing forward, as though to say "That way chaps". It purported to be the Adjutant, Captain Herbert Plumer. It was used as a Christmas card by the Battalion once: very festive. Lest disrespect is detected, the author considers Plumer to be one of the best

British generals in the Great War).

## On the Yser Canal

The Canal had been fought over by both British and French forces in 1914. By August 1917 allied troops were back on the line of the Canal. 8 DWR carried out some preliminary raids towards Langemark. CSM Miles describes one: "(We are...) back on the canal bank after one of the prettiest little stunts you can imagine. We advanced from the farm in extended order, but went too far ahead and had to retire to keep in touch with our companies on our left and right. It was then that a Lewis



gunner of ours, named Loosemore, committed a very brave act; he certainly saved a very awkward situation. He stayed in a shell hole and covered our retirement with a Lewis gun. Well, this gun got put out of action but Loosemore hung on and kept the advancing Germans at bay with his revolver. When that gave out, he threw his disabled gun at the remaining German and fled back to where we had consolidated. I reported the incident to the Company Office, as did a number of other men, and he will get the DCM, if not the VC". The citation for Loosemore's VC says that he also brought back a wounded comrade under fire.



**Private Arnold Loosemore VC DCM. He served in both the Y & L (in Gallipoli) and DWR in the Great War, survived and is buried in All Saints Churchyard, Ecclesall, Sheffield. David Harrap's article on Arnold Loosemore is at the end of this Great War section**

On 9 October the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion took part in the attack on Poelcappelle. CSM Miles again. "Well, we captured Poelcappelle alright, at least what remained of it (a heap of bricks and innumerable shell holes). There was once a church but all that remains now is a bit of a cellar in which we make our Battalion headquarters. What a desolate spot this is. I shan't be sorry when we get relieved. We have lost plenty of good lads on this last stunt and we have not had any reinforcement since we got up here. There are not many of us left –15 of us in my company, including one officer, Captain Durrant."

The Battalion was in action several more time between October 1917 and January 1918. In February orders were received that it was to be disbanded; brigades were to reduce to three battalions only. 34 officers and 700 other ranks were transferred, all to other Dukes battalions, 200 to the regular 2<sup>nd</sup>, 250 to another service battalion, the 9<sup>th</sup>, and 250 spread amongst the territorial battalions of 147 Brigade in 49 (West Riding) Division. The String Band was sent to 2 DWR, by special request! As CSM Miles wrote "What an inglorious ending!"

#### **Veldhoek.**

10 DWR took part in the attack on Messines Ridge in June, and in July on Hill 60 (long since regained by the Germans, see ID 277, Autumn 2014). Both were great successes, although casualties were heavy. Lieutenant Colonel Lethbridge, a veteran of Gallipoli where he commanded a company of the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion with great gallantry, took command.

This Commanding Officer's account of an attack from Railway Dugouts towards Veldhoek gives a good idea of the kind of action taking place at this time. "The four companies of this battalion which had to go through Inverness Copse had a pretty heavy barrage put onto them and suffered considerable casualties and arrived at the jumping off point at about 9.10 a.m. with B Company having lost all its officers except Lieutenant Anderson who, with his platoon, had lost direction somewhat and got to the right of A Company, and who arrived in a somewhat disorganised state. But this was pulled together by Captain Payne and the whole line advanced punctually at about 9.53 am. .... when our men disappeared through the smoke and dust of the shells (which) made it difficult to see details but it was obvious all was going well. Northampton Farm on the left proved no obstacle to speak of but, just beyond, a line of over a dozen concrete dugouts and pill boxes were heavily armed with machine guns which, together with the enemy shells, caused a great many casualties to our B and D Companies.

These dugouts were eventually cleared by our Battalion Companies, whilst others to the left were dealt

with by the 8<sup>th</sup> Yorkshires and these companies took up a line in the dug outs with posts 75 to 100 yards in front which were well dug in within an hour. .... Meanwhile there was some stiff fighting for some of the concrete dug outs in the village of Veldhoek but these were cleared by some fine manoeuvring....As A and C Companies attacked the last line of concrete dug outs on the Green Line CSM Parker, observing that the dug outs on the left front of the 13<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry were holding them up, attacked from the flank and rear and captured them.”

### ITALY

The 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion were sent to Italy in November. The long journey was taken at a leisurely pace, or at least the trains used appeared to only move at a few miles per hour, scarcely quicker than was achieved in the inevitable marches that became necessary between trains along the way. Almost everywhere the troops were greeted with huge enthusiasm by the Italian population. “On the second day we marched through the streets of historic Mantua, the home of Virgil, one of the fortresses of the Austrian Quadrilateral, with its two lakes and encircling the River Minzio. We were received as if we had won the war rather than just arrived. Chrysanthemums, postcards, cigarettes etc were showered on us; the Italian flag was waved in the faces of restive horses; Vivas resounded, and the stimulus to Italian morale, which was no doubt one of the reasons for our march, was manifest.”

The Battalion moved into the front line. “The Italian papers at this time had headings such as “Eighth day of Piave battle – British still holding on with great gallantry”. In reality we were undergoing a rest cure.” There was some patrol action, and a great deal of shelling by Austrian gunners, but few casualties.”

Transferred in March 1918 to another front, at Asiago, the pace of action picked up somewhat. Reconnaissance and fighting patrols were stepped up, a few casualties were taken and medals gained. In June a major assault by fifty divisions of Austrian troops on a 75 mile front was repulsed, on the Battalion’s front, “with great slaughter”. The offensive was initially successful with risk of a break out in to the plains, but Italian reinforcements and the destruction by floods of the bridges over the Piave upon which the Austrians relied, resulted in those Austrian divisions forward of the Piave being cut off, and those behind unable to come to their aid. Italian estimates of Austrians’ casualties were 56,000 killed, 240,000 wounded and 24,000 prisoners taken.

In subsequent actions the 10<sup>th</sup> were signally successful in large scale raids and assaults on the enemy positions

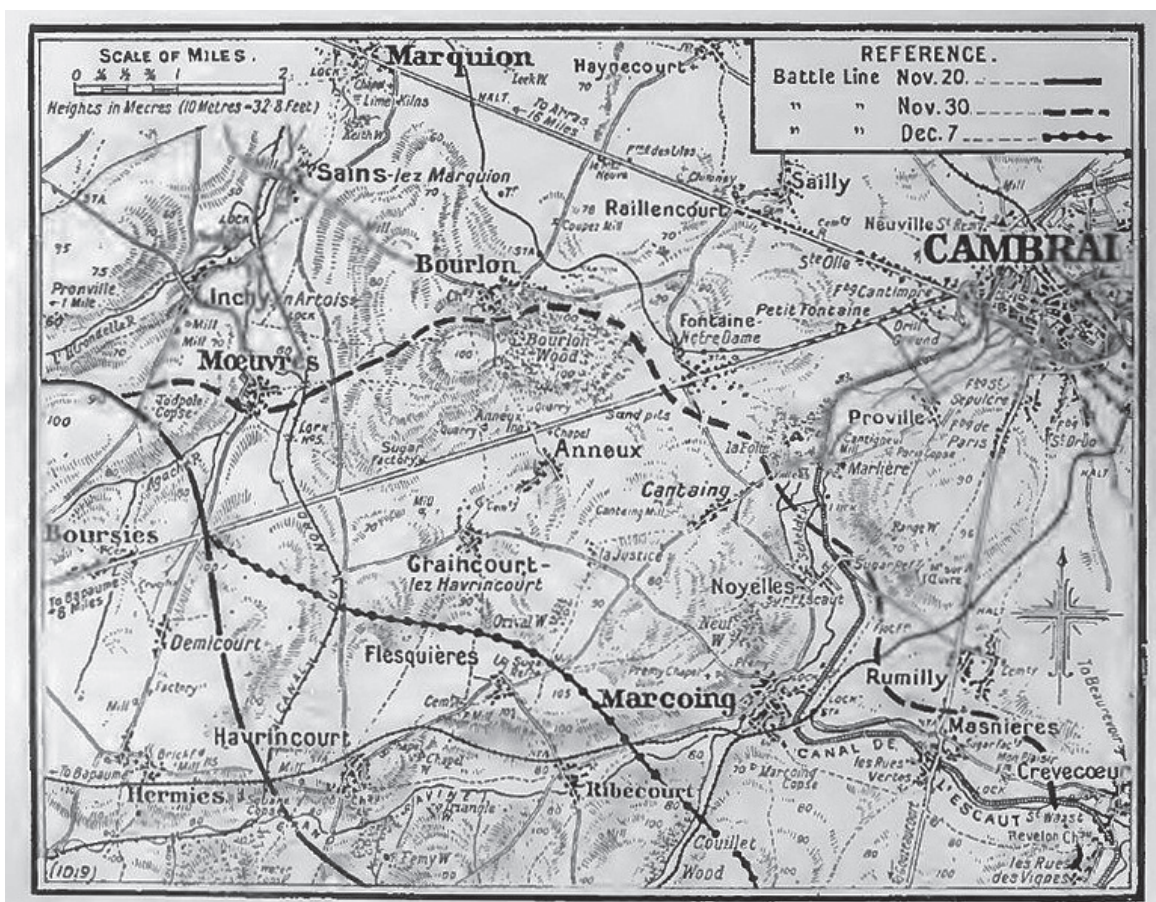


in front of them. Prominent was Captain Kelly VC, who earned himself a bar to his MC. Colonel Lethbridge was awarded the Italian Silver Medal for Valour, see photo above.

This Journal will return to 10 DWR in Italy, as they fought in that theatre until the end of the war.

## Major Tom Goodall DSO MC (part 2)

Compiled by Scott Flaving.



### Cambrai

In the first extract from Scott Flaving's account of Major Goodall's service in 2/5 DWR in the last Journal, the fight for Bullecourt was described. The next major effort was at the Battle of Cambrai from November, 1917.

On November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1917, the Battalion attacked Kangaroo Alley at Havringcourt. Sadly the Commanding Officer, Lt Col T D Best DSO, was killed as the lead companies approached the village, being met with a storm of machine gun fire. (The Brigade Commander, Brigadier General Roland Boys Bradford, was also killed at about this time. See note at the end of Scott Flaving's account of Major Goodall's service).

Captain and Adjutant H S Jackson took command of the Battalion. Captain T Goodall, Officer Commanding D Company, entered Havringcourt Wood to locate the point from which the casualties were being inflicted and,

having done this, signalled to Lieutenant D Black to advance with his other Platoon. The strongpoint was rushed and one Officer, 58 Other Ranks and two machine guns were captured and a British Officer and NCO were rescued. A considerable number of the enemy were killed and, by the end of the day, the Battalion had captured 353 prisoners, 15 machine guns and one trench mortar. The Battalion's total casualties were three Officers killed, one wounded; and 10 Other Ranks killed, 55 wounded and four missing. This attack was, at that time, a record for penetrating the enemy trench system in depth in one day. The 2/5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, with the 2/7<sup>th</sup> and 2/4<sup>th</sup> Battalions on their right, advanced 7,000 yards from the original British front line.

Captain Goodall was cited in September 1917, for a gallantry award for his action during this attack and a Military Cross was awarded in the New Year's Honours list in January, 1918, the citation reads:

“Consistent good work as a Company Commander from January, 1917, to present date. This Officer has invariably shown a fine example of coolness and resource and devotion to duty at all times. On 17 3 1917 he carried out an excellent night march from ACHIET le PETIT and seized and consolidated GOMIECOURT, driving off two hostile machine guns holding the village.”

On 6<sup>th</sup> December, 1917, the Battalion was reorganised on a three platoons per Company system and as part of the reorganisation Captain Goodall was promoted Temp Major and appointed Battalion 2i/c.

On 4<sup>th</sup> February, 1918, the award of his DSO was announced in the London Gazette, the citation being published on 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1918:

“For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. When an attack was held up by heavy machine gun and rifle fire, the Commanding Officer being killed, and heavy casualties being sustained and there was grave danger of disorganisation he went forward amid a hail of bullets to locate the enemy and signal back to a platoon of his Company to attack. With one man, he dashed into a strong point killing several of the enemy and thus enabling the platoon to capture an officer and 58 other ranks and two machine guns and to rescue an officer and an NCO who were prisoners in the hands of the enemy. He showed magnificent courage and determination.”

Further reorganisations of the Army reduced Brigades from four to three Battalions in January, 1918. The 147<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 49<sup>th</sup> (West Riding) Division lost the 1/5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Duke of Wellington’s Regiment, and the majority of the officers and men from that unit were sent to reinforce the 2/5<sup>th</sup> Battalion in 62<sup>nd</sup> (Pelican) Division, which became the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion. In the 186<sup>th</sup> Brigade, the 2/6<sup>th</sup> WRR was disbanded. The Brigade now consisted of 2/4<sup>th</sup>, 2/5<sup>th</sup> and 2/7<sup>th</sup> Battalions of the Regiment. However, in June, 1918, the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Bn was turned into a training cadre battalion, being replaced in the Brigade by the 2/4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment.

In the meantime, the German troops who had been suddenly released by the collapse of Russia following the Revolution of October, 1917, had been redeployed to the Western Front and trained in Shock Troop tactics for a final push against the Allies before the American forces could take to the field in strength.

On the night of 24<sup>th</sup> March, the 62<sup>nd</sup> Division was engaged at Achiet le Petit and was in action until the end of the month in the area between Bucquoy and Puisieux. They were withdrawn into rest on 1<sup>st</sup> April, having suffered some 215 casualties, of whom 9 were officers.

Tom was wounded again on 29<sup>th</sup> Mar 1918 and also mentioned in General Haig’s Despatches of 7<sup>th</sup> April, published in the London Gazette of 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1918, as deserving of special mention.

There will be one further instalment of Major Goodall’s story in the next edition.

#### **Brigadier “Boy” Bradford VC MC.**



Bradford was, at 25, the youngest Brigadier General in the Army. Age 24 he had commanded 9 DLI, winning his VC by showing great courage and determination taking command of a second battalion that was on his flank which had got into trouble, and bring both through the action at Eaucourt L’Abbaye in October 1916.

He was promoted to command 186 Brigade on 13 November 1917, and was killed in action by a stray shell just ten days later. He was one of four brothers. Three died in the war; one of them, Lieutenant Commander George Bradford, was killed in the Zeebrugge Blockade in April 1918, being posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross (they were only brothers to receive the highest award for courage), and the third who lost his life in action was James, who died of wounds in May 1917, having been awarded the MC. A fourth brother served throughout the war, earning a DSO, and survived.

Roland Bradford is buried at Hermies CWGC Cemetery; 12 Dukes also lie there.

### The Tunnellers.

Several of the articles and illustrations in our coverage of the Dukes in the Great War have referred to mining and the war beneath the surface of the battlefield. For example, the detonation of three huge mines beneath enemy positions as a preliminary to bombardment and assault was a particular feature of the attack on Hill 60 in 1916, and again at Messines Ridge. Many of those craters are still there.

The effect of mining operations on the infantry was significant. Considering that some defensive lines and positions were held for many months, sometimes years, subjected to frequent assaults from the air and on the ground, it is hardly surprising that thought turned to ways to, quite literally, undermine the strength of these positions from below. This applied equally to both sides.

Infantry in long held trenches lived in and with the fear of explosion from beneath, which sapped morale and the will to fight. In the early days units with men from mining areas devised listening devices to help them detect activity below them, to provide assurance to their colleagues alongside in the line and, if mining was detected, to get something done to countermand the threat.

A fair number of books and articles have been written on the subject, and one that deserves recommendation is “Beneath Flanders Fields” by Peter Barton (who presented a BBC TV series on the subject two or so years ago) and Peter Doyle with photographs by Johan Vandewalle, printed by Spellmount Ltd in 2004. The Iron Duke is not the medium for more detailed coverage, but it is important that we keep in mind this constant, unseen, insidious threat to men in their trenches.

As listening devices grew more efficient, and those who used them more proficient, the war underground expanded beyond simply putting explosives under enemy positions, though that remained the major task. Underground listening posts gathered information about enemy build ups and movements much need by commanders; German shafts were intercepted and destroyed, with great care being taken to ensure that maximum casualties were caused (and little or none to our side – it was a dangerous business and could be a two-edged sword); and the allies gradually achieved dominance underground added to the eventual victory.

The successful allied assault on Messines Ridge on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1917, referred to elsewhere in this issue, is a classic example of what mines could achieve. 19 mines were exploded beneath the enemy positions, causing huge damage and thousands of casualties. Although the mines were supposed to be detonated at the same time, this did



not happen giving unexpected benefits, as the German soldiers in their trenches could see these vast explosions going off on either side, not knowing when it would be their turn, but certain that their turn would come. According to prisoners taken in the battle, this reduced many men to a state of abject fear. Once the mines had all gone up the German defences simply ceased to exist. It is estimated that 20,000 Germans died.

We should also be aware that the infantry played a very large part in the tunnelling operations themselves. The Royal Engineers led these operations and the men who did the digging were trained for the job, but a very large unskilled labour force was required to bring up timber, explosives and other stores, and to cart away the huge amount of spoil that came out of the workings, to dispose of it in shell holes or wherever it would not be seen. It could not just be thrown to one side on site; surprise would be lost as enemy spotters would see it and bring down a bombardment which could destroy the work in hand as well as cause casualties.

The tunnellers were brave men, operating in cramped, often wet, and horrible conditions, doing a job which was dangerous enough without the added risks and pressures of warfare. Their contribution to the war effort was essential and without a doubt many Dukes soldiers came through the war and returned to their families who would not otherwise have done so without it.



**Sir John Norton-Griffiths.** Norton-Griffiths was an entrepreneur, MP, and millionaire businessman, who had the nickname of “Empire Jack”. He ran away from school to start a life of adventure in Africa initially as a trooper in the Royal Horse Guards, seeing action in the Matabele Wars, then the second

Boer War, became a gold prospector, and finally turned into an engineer with construction activities in many countries.

He was a man of enormous energy and drive; nothing could stand in his way and if he thought it should be done it was done, regardless of obstacles. His achievements were many but the one that concerns us here is that he almost single-handedly persuaded “the authorities” to take tunnelling seriously. Once he had support he recruited miners and engineers (he called them his “moles”), trained, equipped and organised them, and laid down the strategy and tactics for use of this new asset.

It is fair to say that without him the allies would at least have taken longer to achieve victory and would have taken many more casualties.

#### A Tunnellers’ Memorial

At a memorial to 177<sup>th</sup> Tunnelling Company Royal Engineers in Railway Wood, pupils of Darton College, Barnsley had left a memorial card for a former member of their school, not one from the Great War, but a territorial volunteer Yorkshire Regiment soldier killed in Afghanistan.



**This card was left at the base of the Memorial, commemorating the death of Private Matthew Thornton of 4 YORKS, serving with 1 YORKS in November 2011. He was killed by an IED during a fire fight whilst on foot patrol in the Lashkar Gah District**

#### Sheffield City Council Lays Paving Stone to Honour Arnold Loosemore VC DCM Report by Major David Harrap

On 11<sup>th</sup> August 2017, the centenary of the action for which Arnold Loosemore was awarded the VC while serving with the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Regiment, a paving stone was laid in his honour front of Sheffield’s Cenotaph. Arnold was one of only three people from Sheffield to have been awarded the VC and one of only

two to have both been born and died in Sheffield the other being Sergeant James Firth. James Firth was also a “Duke” serving with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion and was awarded his VC in 1900 for his actions in the Boer War.

The Ceremony was led by the Lord Mayor of Sheffield, Councillor Anne Murphy. The Yorkshire Regiment was represented by Colonel George Kilburn, ex “Dukes” in his capacity as Deputy Colonel of the Yorkshire Regiment and the paving stone was unveiled by the Lord Lieutenant for South Yorkshire, Andrew Coombe. The Regimental Association Standard was carried by Dave Woolley. Fifteen members of the Loosemore family attended the unveiling.

Arnold Loosemore was born on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1896 in Ecclesall, Sheffield. He was the 6<sup>th</sup> of 7 children. He left school at 14 to work first as a farm labourer tending cows. He enlisted in the Army on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1915 aged 19 years and 7 months. He was a man of slight build, his army papers show him as being only 5 feet 4½ inches tall with a chest measurement of 32 inches.

He initially joined the York and Lancaster Regiment, on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1915 and served first in the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign. He survived this and on return to the UK trained to operate the newly issued Lewis machine gun and in July 1916 he was drafted to the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Duke of Wellington’s (West Riding) Regiment then embroiled in the Battle of the Somme.

On 11<sup>th</sup> August 1917 the battalion was fighting in the battle for Langemarck, near Ypres, itself part of the wider Passchendaele Battle. During an attack on a strongly held enemy position, his platoon having been held up by heavy machine-gun fire, Arnold crawled through partially cut wire, dragging his Lewis machine-gun with him and single-handed dealt with a strong party of the enemy, killing about 20 of them. Immediately afterwards his Lewis gun was destroyed and three of the enemy rushed at him, but he shot them with his revolver. Later he shot several enemy snipers, and on returning to their original post he brought back a wounded comrade under heavy fire. He was awarded the VC for his exceptional bravery.

On 17<sup>th</sup> August he was promoted to corporal by his Commanding Officer for his gallantry in the field. He was presented with his V.C. by King George V at Buckingham Palace on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1918. He was given a public welcome the following day at Sheffield Town Hall by the Lord Mayor in front of 2000 cheering citizens.

In May the next year, 1918, Arnold was promoted to sergeant. Shortly afterwards, on the 19<sup>th</sup> June, at Zillebeke in Belgium, when out with a fighting patrol, he



again displayed exceptional bravery and powers of leadership after his officer was wounded and his platoon scattered by hostile bombs. He rallied the platoon and brought them all, together with their wounded, back to their own lines. On a subsequent occasion he once again led the platoon with great leadership and skill, and with a complete disregard of his own danger under heavy machine gun fire, to capture an enemy post which they were attacking. His conspicuous gallantry was recognised with the award of the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM).

On 13th October 1918, just 23 days before the Armistice, Arnold was badly wounded by machine gun fire at Villers-en-Cauchies in France. His injuries led to the amputation of his left leg and the loss of the calf muscles of his right leg. The casualty clearing station he was taken to undoubtedly saved his life.

On 13th May 1920, having been treated for his extensive injuries, he was discharged from the army and returned to Sheffield for further treatment there. It was in Sheffield that his DCM was then presented to him by King George V in the Sanctuary of the Victoria Hall.

On 26th June 1920 he attended a garden party at Buckingham Palace given by the King for all V.C. holders. For this he marched on crutches from Wellington Barracks to the Palace together with 309 other V.C. holders and with them was presented to the King that afternoon.

On 24th August 1920 he married his childhood sweetheart, Amy Morton, at St. Andrews Church, Sharrow, Sheffield and the following year they had a son named Arnold after his father.

Disabled and increasingly unwell he tried poultry farming but this was too exhausting and he found the stairs of his tiny house increasingly difficult to climb. Hearing this, in 1923 the Rotary Club of Sheffield provided Arnold with a large wooden hut which was built onto the back of his house. After Arnold's death the hut was moved to the Derbyshire village of Shatton. Later still the bungalow was dismantled and erected again at the Rotary Centre in Castleton, Derbyshire, where it stands today still providing holiday accommodation for disadvantaged children.

Unfortunately Arnold was not able to use his bungalow much. With his health undermined by war wounds, Arnold died the following year, on 10th April 1924 at home from tuberculosis aged 27. His military cortege, with his coffin mounted on a gun carriage drawn by six horses, was watched by thousands who were lining the route to the graveyard. This military grandness though concealed deep poverty. His destitute wife was refused a

War Widow's pension on the grounds that the marriage took place after his discharge from the Army and that she knew of her husband's ill-health before she married him. This was the harsh national practice of the day with a financially overextended government trying to repair its finances after the war. More heartless though was that, shortly after the funeral, Amy, his widow received a bill from the City Council requiring her to pay for the funeral costs.

To save money in the family's straightened circumstances Arnold was buried in a shared grave of three. A fund for public subscription though, was initiated by the Lord Mayor of Sheffield to help Amy's finances. £1,000 was raised and this generated an income of £25 per year for which she was always grateful.

She died on 10 February 1956 still living in the home she shared with Arnold 36 years before. On 15 February 1956 she was buried alongside Arnold in the same, already shared, grave with the words "awaiting reveille" beneath their names.

#### **Arnold Loosemore's Victoria Cross citation:**

"For most conspicuous bravery and initiative during the attack on a strongly held enemy position south of Langemarck, Flanders, on 11<sup>th</sup> August. 1917. His platoon having been checked by heavy machine-gun fire, he crawled through partially cut wire, dragging his Lewis gun with him, and single handed dealt with a strong part of the enemy killing about twenty of them, and thus covering the consolidation of the position taken up by his platoon. Immediately afterwards his Lewis gun was blown up by a bomb. And three of the enemy rushed for him, but he shot them all with his revolver. Later he shot several enemy snipers, exposing himself to heavy fire each time. On returning to the original post he also brought back a wounded comrade under heavy fire at the risk of his life. He displayed throughout an utter disregard of danger. (London Gazette, 14 September, 1917)

#### **YPRES**

Ypres (Ieper to the people who live there now) is an interesting Belgian town. It was culturally and economically well established by the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, its location being a hub for trade routes from Roman times. By 1260 the population had grown to 40,000, making it an important place.

In British minds the name is synonymous with war, especially the First World War, during which it was all but totally destroyed. In the Iron Duke of Autumn 2011, number 271, General Sir Charles Huxtable told the story of his Father saving the key to the famous Cloth Hall as the building was burning in December 1915, when he was serving with our 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion. The key was formally



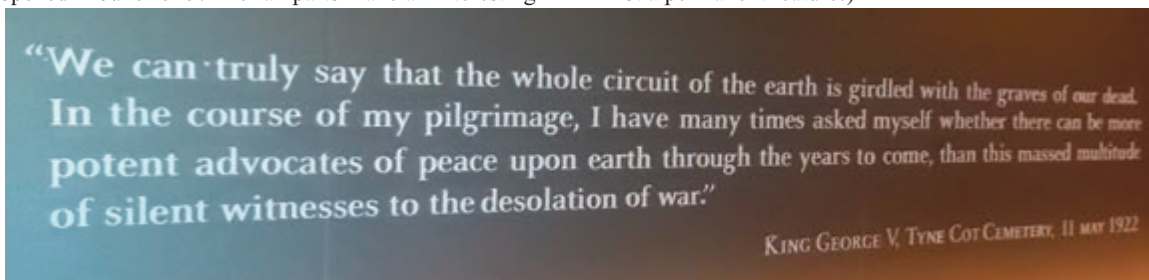
**Ypres is visible for miles from the higher ground in the Salient, which created a permanent hazard for the Allied Forces that held the town and its surrounding area from 1915 until the end of Passchendaele**

returned to the Mayor of Ypres on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2011.

The town is well worth a visit. Every evening at 8.00 pm there is a ceremony of remembrance at the Menin Gate, a War Memorial to 55,000 missing allied soldiers who were killed in battle in the Ypres Salient prior to 15 August 1917 but have no known grave (after which their names were recorded a mile or two out of the town at Tyne Cot). The Cloth Hall contains an interesting museum, and a few hundred yards away is the St George's Memorial Church, built to commemorate the 500,000 allied soldiers who died in the three Ypres Battles between 1914 and the end of the war. The Church opened in June 1929. The ramparts make an interesting

and unusual walk, and there is a CWGC Cemetery up there as well. There are plenty of places to eat, drink and stay.

Given its history of conflict and loss, it is a town that seems comfortable with itself and its past; indeed tourism, especially WW1 tourism, must be a significant contributor to its financial well-being. There is a practical blend of respect for the past and provision for citizens and visitors today. This short collage of Ypres photographs may whet the appetite for any reader who has not been, or indeed those who might be considering going back again. (Gentlemen, the ladies' volleyball is not a permanent feature!)



**A wall plaque inside the Tyne Cot Visitors Centre – which stands on the site of a German WW1 bunker – from the speech of King George V when he visited in 1922. And see photo inside the Back cover**



A ceremony of remembrance is held here every evening at 8.00pm. It is on every British and Commonwealth visitor's schedule and there are many from Germany and other nations who attend as well. It gets incredibly crowded almost every day, but especially so from Spring to Autumn.



The Grote Markt (Grande Place, Main Square) from the top of the Museum. The Menin Gate is at the furthest end, in the centre, and the volley ball courts below



The interior of St George's Memorial Church. The Dukes' panel is hard to find; it is tucked away at the bottom to the right of the altar, and to see it one often has to undo a rope preventing visitors from encroaching too near the altar

LIEUTENANT	AINLEY H. MCA	HODGKIN
DE WEND D. F.	ARCHARD F. J.	HOLLIS
OWEN R. H.	ARMSTRONG J.	HORN
THACKERAY F. M. C.	ASHURST	HORN
WATTHEWS H.	ASHWORTH T. R.	HORN
WHITAKER C. F.	BARLOW A.	HOYLE
	BATES W.	HORN
	BEAUMONT F.	HORN
SECOND LIEUT.	BEBEE H.	HORN
ANDERTON W. L.	BELL H. M.	HORN
CARSON T. W.	BENTLEY L.	HORN
GUNN A.	BERNSTEIN J.	HORN
MAITLAND J. D.	BICKERDIKE J.	HORN
SIMPSON A. B. J.	BINNS J.	HORN
SUGDEN J. P.	BIRKS A.	HORN
	BISHOP S.	HORN
COY S/PT MAJOR	BLADES R. H.	HORN
DEACON G.	BLAND J.	HORN
SWAINSTON W.	BOLTON J.	HORN
	BOUCCOCK J. H.	HORN
SERJEANT	BOOTH G.	HORN
BOTTOMLEY J. L.	BOWEN L.	HORN
CLARKE P.	BOYLE T.	HORN
SERVED AS	BRADLEY W.	HORN
CARRINGTON F. D. CM.	BRENNAN J.	HORN
CONWAY J. W.	BRENNAN J. W.	HORN
FARRAR N.	BROOK A.	HORN
HAIGH C.	BROOK G.	HORN
	BROOKS W.	HORN

The names are recorded by regiments; this is part of the Dukes' panel.



The CWGC Cemetery above the Lille Gate on the Ypres Ramparts. Three of our men lie there, all from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, one from March 1915 and two from April 1915.



Something to entertain visitors with a little time on their hands

### The Ypres Museum – The Posters War

Posters were an important communications tool in the Great War, and were also used for propaganda. A few interesting examples from the Ypres Museum, are shown here.



A French soldier strangles the neck of a German eagle



One of several posters featuring Lord Kitchener



These appeals to young men in Britain were answered by tens of thousands of volunteers



The French portrayed German soldiers as strutting bullies and cowards



German soldiers using women and children as shields. The caption asserts this was a typical German tactic.



A photo that caught the author's eye; what signal platoon commander would not be envious of having such transport? It contained not just pigeons, but flags, wire and field telephones, lights, a bicycle and all manner of communication tools.

**1917, LOCATION OF BATTALIONS – CAMBRAI – 1918 THE GERMAN OFFENSIVES – HERMIES – BUCQUOY – BATTLE OF THE LYS – 1/7TH WAR DIARY – MAJOR TOM GOODALL (3)**



## Location of Battalions

1917 would see three major battles, all described or touched on in previous issues of this Journal: Arras, May to June; Passchendaele, June to November; and Cambrai, November. The Dukes played a part in all of these. In late summer and autumn the 49<sup>th</sup> Division, including our territorial battalions 1/4, 1/5, 1/6, 1/7 DWR, were fighting their way up the slopes of the ridges that surrounded Ypres to west, north and south. 2, 8, 9 and 10 DWR were also engaged in the battles of the third Ypres, or Passchendaele. The 62<sup>nd</sup> Division, with our second line territorial battalions in 146 Brigade, 2/4, 2/5, 2/6 and 2/7 DWR were licking the wounds sustained at Bullecourt in May, and in November would be deployed in the assault on Cambrai, initially an astonishing success, and although it proved costly and its gains could not be sustained, it would teach many useful lessons for the future conduct of the war.

12<sup>th</sup> (Labour) Bn (the 11<sup>th</sup> Bn never left UK) had been in the rear areas of the Western Front since April 1916, and in 1917 served in both the Ypres and Somme sectors. Their tasks, often under RE direction, included such things as working to keep railway lines open, manhandling ammunition, and on construction of various infrastructure projects. 13 DWR was one of a number of France based garrison units converted into service battalions to reinforce the much depleted divisions that had been in action during the 1918 German offensives. It was initially engaged in construction of defences, but got into the line in mid-August, and in September was part of the general advance.

## Outline of Events November 1917 to November 1918

It is useful to have in mind an outline of the shape of events from the end of 1917 to victory in 1918. The November '17 gains of Cambrai did not last long. In March '18, reinforced from the east, a German counter-attack took back all that was gained and more, at great cost to both sides. General Van der Marwitz's order to the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Army, on November 29<sup>th</sup> said; "The English, by throwing into the fight countless tanks, gained a victory near Cambrai. Their intention was to break through but they did not succeed thanks to the brilliant resistance of our troops. We are now going to turn their embryonic victory into a defeat by an encircling counter-attack. The Fatherland is watching you, and expects every man to do his duty".

Thus in March 1918 the first of the great German offences began with Operation Michael; 65 divisions attacking the British 3<sup>rd</sup> (to the north) and 5<sup>th</sup> (south) Armies, a broad westerly thrust from Arras to Noyon, taking in such as St Quentin, Albert, Bapaume, Peronne with a central target of Amiens. The 5<sup>th</sup> was almost



**The position on 21st March 1918, the day Operation Michael was launched and on succeeding days.**

destroyed but the 3<sup>rd</sup> rolled back and hung on, enough to deny the German High Command's objectives of taking Arras and Amiens, and thence wrap up the British and Commonwealth forces from south to north. Once surrounded and cut off from supplies they might well have had to sue for terms. This was probably the closest to defeat that we had been.

In April the second offensive, Georgette, sent 45 divisions against our 2<sup>nd</sup> Army around Ypres. Driven back off the northern heights of the Salient, so bloodily won, back past Messines and Passchendaele and up to the outskirts of Ypres itself, but the aim to cut us off from the Channel ports was not achieved. Together Michael and Georgette cost Germany 330,000 casualties.

Then in May the Blucher-Yorck offensive deployed 41 divisions which strove to destroy the French 6<sup>th</sup> Army on a 25 mile front east of the river Aisne. It got to within 60 miles of Paris, but halted, like the others, through sheer exhaustion. In this month US troops were in action for the first time, and proved fairly effective, no doubt helped by their freshness and long preparation for the battles to come in France. (In a recent presentation by respected military historian Gordon Corrigan, the USA's contribution to eventual victory by the Allies was described as tactically and militarily insignificant, but diplomatically and for morale, immense and war-changing. There are many others!)

## The Tide Turns

In July a final German offensive foundered in front of 3 French Armies and 5 US divisions, who were ready and waiting for them. In August the British put their last reserves into the battle and found more men to send across the Channel to take up the fight. The 4<sup>th</sup> Army advanced 7 miles east of Amiens, only stopped by deployment of the last German reserves. The same month our recovered 3<sup>rd</sup> Army attacked on a 20 mile front south of Arras. In September our 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies, with Australian and US support, broke through the Hindenburg line between Cambrai and St Quentin. The ANZAC and Canadian divisions, impressive at all times, were immense in these final stages.

Back in the Ypres sector British and Belgian troops pushed back the German line, re-taking Messines and Dixmude, and then, in October, the allies swept over the remainder of the Hindenburg Line. In October the German Armies retreated from all their positions along the Channel coast. After re-grouping the Allies continued to advance and could not be stopped. The British closed in on Ghent and Mons, and US forces took the line of the Meuse in southern Belgium. On November 11<sup>th</sup>, at Compiègne in France, the Germans surrendered. It was over. We will look at the Dukes' units contributions at various times in this fateful year.

We begin by going back a few months, with further details of the Cambrai offensive.

## A Narrative of the Battle of Cambrai 1917.

This article takes as its core story extracts from "HJT"'s articles in the Iron Dukes of 1931 – 1932. The action described here is of the second phase of the Battle of Cambrai, commencing on 24 November 1917. Many then, and now, regarded Cambrai as a hastily thought through "harum scarum" plan that somehow evolved from an idea for a heavy raid into a ground capturing and holding six division assault. Others regard it as the greatest success in the war so far. The attack was strongly promoted by Tank Corps commander Brigadier Hugh Elles and his Chief of Staff, Lieutenant Colonel John Fuller, who wanted their "big beasts" to operate en masse, to force a break through, rather than being dribbled out piece-meal along the front in support of plodding infantry.

HJT served in the Gordon Highlanders from 1915 until May 1917. He was selected for officer training and in due course arrived in France in 2/7 DWR (186 (WR) Brigade) near Achiet le Petit, between Arras and Albert, part of a large draft of new officers and men brought in in October 1917. The Battalion was immediately suspicious that strong reinforcement meant that it was about to be sent somewhere hazardous! They were not wrong.

Orders were received that the Battalion was to take part in operations at Havrincourt, a well-known strong

German position where "you could see the Jerrys walking about the bloody streets!" This would be a major attack on the Hindenburg Line, with the 62nd West Riding Division spearheading the assault on the village, with the 36th Ulster and 51st Highland Divisions to left and right respectively, with their own objectives.

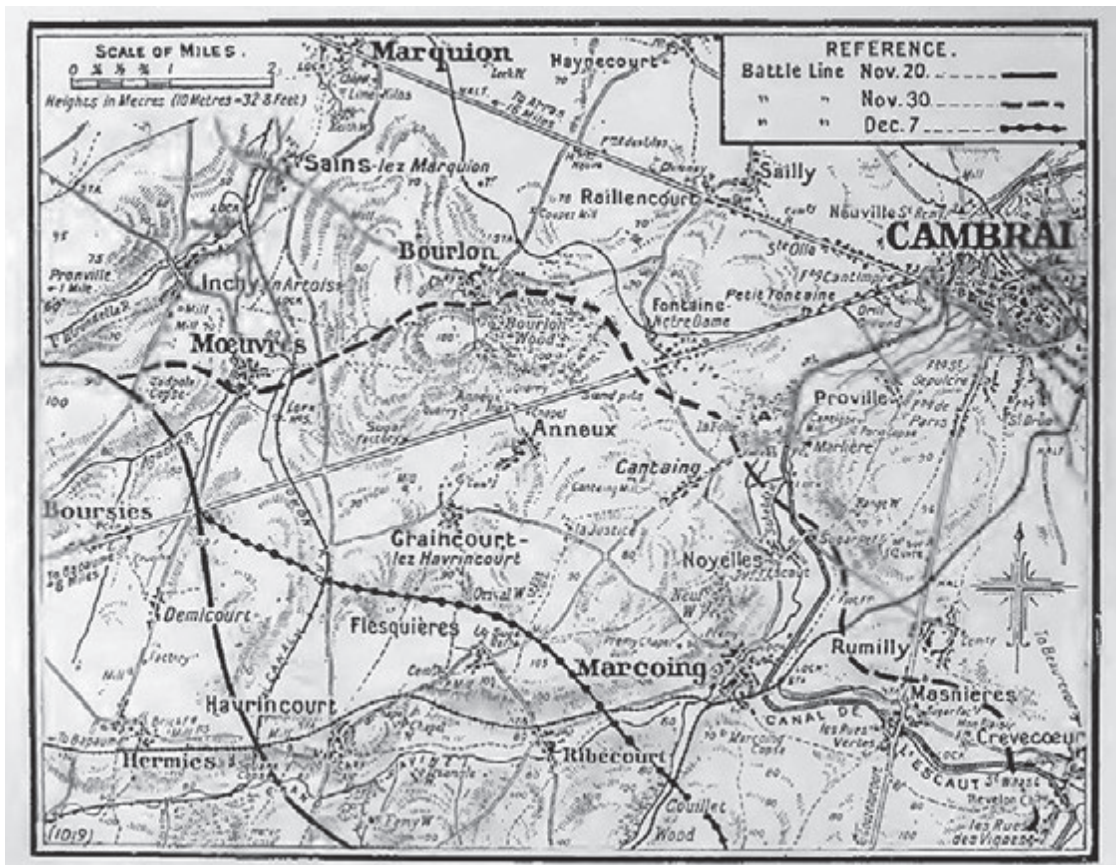
The assault was to be preceded by tanks in mass – 186 Brigade had been allocated 20 - these noisy machines having been secretly brought up under cover of darkness, to defeat observation by German aircraft, seemingly successfully. Memories of the disasters at Bullecourt earlier in the year were still fresh in 2/7 DWR, where the enemy were fully aware of impending assault. Secrecy was key to success, although many were sceptical that it would be achieved.

The Battalion moved up to Bertincourt, a devastated village (like all in the vicinity). They were in the area totally wrecked by the Germans when they withdrew from their Somme positions to the Hindenburg Line. In his billet HJT spent time chopping up fallen beams to feed the fire in their ruined former inn.

The attack went in at 0620 hours on 20 November. Major Goodall's tale in the last Iron Duke tells part of the story. Technological advances meant that the guns could fire with adequate accuracy without being registered, a huge bonus for tanks which had been unable to cross ground mashed up in the preliminary barrages at Ypres a couple of months earlier. Whilst the tanks were still unwieldy, slow (on average 100 Yards in 5 minutes in the assault) and unreliable, there, too, useful progress had been made, not least in infantry/tank cooperation and understanding.

HJT did not go in with the first wave but was held back in reserve; it was quite normal to leave a few officers behind, so that there was someone to take up command when all those who had gone up with the first wave became casualties, which was frequently the case. He writes: "The massed tanks took the Germans completely by surprise, making avenues through the wire. Our infantry was on them before they were able to get up from their over-deep dugouts. They were literally captured in hundreds before they could get up to fight. The German SOS rockets outdid any firework display, and what with them, and our own troops' flares, it was pandemonium. The artillery weighed in and soon the air was thick with contact aeroplanes going backwards and forwards with messages as to our progress. We soon got to know that Havrincourt had been carried by storm, and our boys gained their first objective in the Hindenburg Line with negligible casualties, and, later in the day, were pushing on towards Bourlon Wood itself."

Prisoners later revealed that many of the German units were fresh from the Russian front. On the right the Highlanders were stuck on Flesquieres, "a proper strong point", which would expose the flanks of divisions to either side (as happened in the Scarpe battles earlier). The Battalion was pulled back and re-grouped in



The main places mentioned in the following narratives are on these maps, one roughly contemporary to the action and one modern. The main road running west from Cambrai goes to Bapaume.



Bertincourt. On 25 November, JHT's birthday, orders to move forward were received and acted upon. As it approached Bourlon Wood it came under a barrage of enemy artillery, "shook out into artillery formation", and took shelter in shell holes where available. Short rushes took them clear of the barrage belt. The next task was to cross the Bapaume-Cambrai road. "Naturally the enemy had its range; shells fell with monotonous regularity at even distances upon it. We travelled along parallel with the road at about 40 yards from it, and crossed it in rushes to about 40 yards parallel on the other side." They captured Graincourt and Anneux, and were stopped on the edge of Bourlon Wood.

On 21st November 186 Brigade began its assault on Bourlon Wood. Now almost without tank support it was unable to make further progress. The Division was pulled out of the line after its splendid achievements, and replaced by 40th Division, but was back in the line on the 23rd. Some gains made by 40 Division had been reversed by German counter-attack. 62 Division must attack Bourlon Wood - again. On the 26th, after a very cold night with blizzards and unsupported by artillery as 3 companies of the Highland Light Infantry were lost somewhere on the line of assault, the advance began. It made little progress; the enemy had been pushed back but was far from defeated. As troops emerged from the protection of the wood they came under intense machine gun fire. Despite this the brigade achieved most of its immediate objectives.

HJT had found a German rifle, which he declared to be superior to his own, and used it for sniping. He also

commandeered a German spade which he again declared to be of a superior type. The fighting was by now very local, taking trenches at bayonet point and clearing out dug-outs. JHT and his men were exhausted, and increasingly subjected to counter-attack. The Division ground to a halt

The 62nd was relieved by 47 Division, and pulled back. "We heard that dismounted cavalry were going to take over from us. Sure enough the Somerset Yeomanry appeared behind the line. They amused us rather by attempting to do the relief in parade ground style. They wanted to be all standing in line behind and wait for the word before we got out and they got in. They made far too much row. Consequently we had no sooner clambered out of our holes when a terrific machine gun and rifle fire swept the position. We flopped like lightning and lay there pressing ourselves down onto the earth for dear life."

HJT led his men back to the edge of the wood, where they had entered, and were told they were in reserve. There was now continuous shelling and stray bullets passing through and many new casualties, on top of the many already taken in the preceding action, were taken. After a series of misadventures, and one piece of luck when he wandered into a position held by the 1st Surrey Rifles where he met his brother, he got back to his Battalion.

The Cambrai offensive ended on 4 December, with the formations that took part largely back where they started. For most it was a comparatively quiet few winter months.



The west side of Bourlon Wood in November 2017.



The main road junction in Bourlon in November 1917 and in November 2017. The black and white photograph was copied from one in the café opposite the church.





*(Top Left)* The gates of Havringcourt Chateau, where Lt Col Best, CO2/5 DWR (see last issue page 15) was killed on 20 November 1917.

*(Top Right)* Hermies Hill Cemetery, containing the graves of 40 Dukes, some from November 2017, and others from September 1918. There are a good number of CWGC sites with our men from different months and years, as the war rolled back and forth over the same ground.

*(Middle Left and Right)* The memorial to the 62<sup>nd</sup> (West Riding) Division is just outside the village of Havringcourt. An unknown hand had put flowers at its base.

*(Bottom)* There are 233 Dukes men named on the Cambrai Louverval Memorial on the road between Cambrai and Bapaume, almost all from November 1917.

# 100th VC ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS IN UK AND FRANCE

This edition of the Iron Duke is, not surprisingly, dominated by articles about the Great War. Some news items are in this section, and descriptions of the actions of our battalions appear, as usual, under the general heading of “The Dukes in the Great War”.

## UNVEILING OF COMMEMORATIVE PAVING STONES TO HONOUR MEMBERS OF THE REGIMENT AWARDED THE VICTORIA CROSS IN WORLD WAR 1

As part of the National programme to mark the centenary of the 1st World War, commemorative paving stones are being laid in the place of birth of all those awarded the Victoria Cross. Three stones have been laid since the last issue of the Iron Duke each of which was unveiled on the centenary of the action for which they were awarded the VC.

### Pte Arthur Poulter VC - 10th April at East Witton, North Yorkshire

Arthur Poulter was born in East Witton in December 1893. Arthur was one of 11 children, 7 brothers and 4 sisters. He left school at 14 to work as a farm labourer like his father. In 1912 the whole family left East Witton for Leeds probably for the better employment opportunities to be found in a large city. There Arthur found work as a drayman for Timothy Taylors Breweries in Keighley.



**Arthur Poulter**

War broke out in 1914 and Arthur first applied to join the Royal Navy. However a minor dental issue proved a problem and in March 1916 he enlisted instead into his local regiment, the Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment. Notably his six brothers also joined the Army

and all survived the war. It was in 1916 that he married Ada Briggs from Hunsley in Leeds. The prospect of him going to fight would surely have lent urgency to their decision to marry.

After completing his basic training Arthur joined the 1st/4th Battalion of the Dukes. The 1st/4th were the Regiment's TA Battalion for Halifax and Keighley. It was with them that he took part in some of the heaviest fighting of the war including the Somme in September 1916, and Passchendaele in 1917 serving as a regimental stretcher bearer - a singularly dangerous job. It was the stretcher bearers who braved the machine gun and shell fire to go out and rescue injured colleagues and carry them to dressing stations at the rear where they would receive medical attention. Carrying wounded colleagues they were slower moving and often exposed making them easy targets on the battlefield. They needed to be especially brave, strong men. After the war he credited the time he had spent as a Timothy Taylor's drayman for building in him that physical strength.

In the spring of 1918 the German Army launched its last great offensive of the war seeking to seize the brief window of opportunity that lay between the capitulation of the Russians and with this the release of the German forces from the eastern front and the imminent arrival of forces from the United States who had just joined the war.

As part of the spring offensive, an assault was launched on the 10th of April in the Lys valley an area held by an under strength Portuguese division. Against overwhelming odds the Portuguese division quickly collapsed. The 1st/4th Battalion were rushed in to plug a serious breach in the line at Erquinghem Lys. The 144 men of C Company, Arthur's company, were ordered to hold the outskirts of the village. It was flat open countryside raked by machine gun fire.

They arrived just in time to secure their position. But as the day wore on, heavily outnumbered and with the units on either side moving back, they too started to withdraw but this time in an orderly way. It was all achieved at a great cost but one that would have been much greater had it not been for Arthur Poulter's actions, to quote the Battalion history:

“... The rest of the company was suffering appalling casualties. The number of casualties were soon far greater than the company stretcher bearers could deal with. It was then that Private Poulter earned the highest decoration that a soldier can be awarded – the Victoria Cross. Hour after hour he toiled, in the greatest danger, tending to the wounded and carrying them to safety.”

His Company Sergeant Major later wrote “Poulter

automatically took charge of the stretcher bearers both regular and temporary and attended to a considerable number of wounded out in the open and brought several of them in to cover, and returned under fire and in full view of the enemy many times to bring in the wounded, carrying some and leading others who could walk; he was splendid and must have had a charmed life for most of the day. I think the culminating point was when he attended Lt Mackie who had his eye shot away; Unfortunately Poulter did it once too often and was himself seriously wounded.”



**Katy Harrison, great-granddaughter of Arthur Poulter together with the Lord Lieutenant of North Yorkshire, Chairlady of Richmond District Council, Commander Catterick Garrison and Regimental Branch Standards in front of the East Witton War Memorial and the commemorative Paving Stone**

Company that day went in with five officers and 139 men and came out with just one officer and nine other ranks all the remainder having been killed or wounded one of whom was Arthur.

Recovering in hospital afterwards Arthur in a letter to his wife made little of his injuries writing in the understated style of a true Yorkshireman:

Dear wife,

I expect you will know I am wounded by now but you will be wondering where I am hit. Well I am blind of my left eye but it will be all right in a week or so. I have had three stitches put in neck and three in cheek. When you write home you can tell mother to write and tell Rhoda and give her my address as I don't feel like writing myself at present. Well I do not think I shall get back to England, but I shall not get back to fighting in a month or two. Well I hope you are all keeping well and as for myself I am just middling but hope to be all right soon. Well I am not in much writing form, so now I will close.

From your husband,  
Arthur

Arthur was discharged from the Army as a result of his wounds. He finally arrived home in October that year and on 13th December 1918 he was invested with the Victoria Cross by King George V at Buckingham Palace.

After the war he worked first for a tailoring company in Leeds and then on the trams. He and Ada had a large family of 13 though sadly 3 children died in their infancy. Tragically Arthur was seriously injured in an accident when he was hit by a speeding car and spent the last of his days confined to the back room of his house as he was unable to get up the stairs. Arthur died aged 62 in September 1956 and was buried alongside his eldest son Arthur. Arthur, his son, had been deployed at the beginning of WW2 with the British Expeditionary Force. His entire battalion was captured while providing a rear-guard for the evacuation at Dunkirk. He died in 1947 as a direct result of the privations he had suffered through 5 years as a prisoner of war.

### **Lt James Huffam VC – 31st August at Dunblane, Scotland**

(In the next article in the Journal “France Remembers” a report on the French version of this commemorative event will be found - Editor.)

James Huffam was born in Dunblane on 31 March 1897. He was the fourth son of the six children of Edward and Dorothy Huffam of Spittal, Berwick-on-Tweed. Edward was an Army Pensioner (Royal Highlanders) and High Bailiff. James was educated at Spittal Council School near Berwick-on-Tweed.



**2LT James Huffam VC**

On 21st February 1915, just short of his 18th birthday, he joined the 1/7th Northumberland Fusiliers as a volunteer and served with them in France for two years rising to the rank of Sergeant. He was then selected for commissioning. After going through the Officer Training Corps he was commissioned in January 1918 into the 5th Battalion the Duke of Wellington's Regiment. He was then attached to the Regiment's 2nd Battalion serving in France.

In the spring of 1918 the German Army launched its last major offensive of WW1 pushing back the Allies deep into France. By July 1918, the offensive had been contained. In August 1918 the Allies, bolstered by the arrival of the United States forces into the war, counterattacked. The counterattack, later to become known as 'the last hundred days', recaptured all the ground lost in the offensive and broke the German defensive Hindenburg line. This in turn led to the collapse of the German Army and the final Armistice in November 1918.



**Robert Huffam by the Paving Stone placed in Dunblane to commemorate his Father James Huffam VC. He is with the Provost of Stirling Council and his granddaughter Olivia, daughter Louise, grandson James and his wife Nancy. Robert served as an officer in the Regiment in the 1950s.**

The 2nd Battalion was part of the forces in the Allies' counter-attack. The 'Dukes' were in the 4th British Division attached to the Canadian Corps at the centre of the counterattack. The battalion, advancing with its right flank on the Arras-Cambrai road and in heavy fighting, captured Haucourt on 29th August. The Battalion then continued its advance while the Germans withdrew eastwards to establish a line running through St. Servin's Farm. From there the German forces brought the 'Dukes' to a halt with sweeping machine gun fire which severely depleted their ranks as they attempted to cross the flat crest line approaching the farm. It was during this fierce fighting that Lt Huffam, with three men, rushed a machine gun post and put it out of action before having to withdraw back to his own lines carrying a wounded

comrade. That night, under the cover of darkness, the attack was renewed. Taken by surprise the German forward posts were quickly captured. The 'Dukes' could now move on to assault the main positions. This was done in confused, hectic fighting in pitch darkness guided mainly by the flashes of machine gun and rifle fire. It was during this fighting that Lt Huffam once more seized the initiative, by rushing forward with two men to capture a key machine gun post together with eight enemy soldiers. With the machine gun post disabled the 'Dukes' quickly moved forward to infiltrate the German position, capture the remaining posts and secure the line of St. Servin's Farm.

For his actions in the fighting at St. Servin's Farm Lt Huffam was awarded the Victoria Cross. The Victoria Cross is the highest award in the British Armed Forces for gallantry "in the face of the enemy".

After the war he served for a brief period in India. On returning to England he was seconded to the RAF for four years, becoming a pilot. Following this he rejoined the 1st Battalion before being seconded to the West African Frontier Force, with whom he served for six years.

In October 1933 he returned to the 1st Battalion serving with them in Aldershot and Malta. It was while he was in Malta that he married Constance Marion Huffam. In October 1936, he was posted to the 2nd Battalion in India, with whom he served until 1938 when he returned to England to retire and take up the appointment as Civilian Adjutant at RAF Dishforth.

When the second war broke out he was recalled to the Army and went with the British Expeditionary Force to France as Deputy Assistant Provost Marshal to a HQ Med Base Sub Area. He was evacuated to England with the BEF. He spent the remainder of the war in England in the Provost Corps, finishing as Assistant Provost Marshal, HQ 55 Division. After his retirement he was employed as an Army Recruiting Officer at St Albans.

He retired for the second time in 1945 and died at Burnt Oak in Middlesex on 16th February 1968.



**Robert Huffam with Dukes Dave Wooley, Derek Parkinson, Brian Searson, Andrew Drake and John Hogg**

### **Pte Henry Tandey VC DCM MM – 23rd September at Leamington Spa, Warwickshire**

Henry Tandey was born in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire in August 1891. Just before his 19th birthday, in 1910, he enlisted into the Green Howards, and served in Guernsey and South Africa. Soon after the outbreak of war, he fought at Ypres and is featured in a painting well known in Green Howards history depicting the Menin Crossroads. In 1916 he was wounded during the Battle of the Somme. He was wounded again the following year at Passchendaele. On recovery he was posted back to France in March 1918 to join the 12th Battalion the Green Howards. But they were to be soon disbanded, alongside the rest of its division, to provide reinforcements for other units and in July 1918 he was transferred to the 5th Battalion the Duke of Wellington's Regiment.

July 1918 was a critical moment of the war when the tide of battle was turning. In the spring of 1918 the German Army had launched its last major offensive of WW1 pushing back the Allies deep into France. By July the offensive had been contained. That August the Allies, bolstered by the arrival of the United States forces into the war, counterattacked. The counterattack, later to become known as 'the last hundred days', recaptured all the ground that had been lost and drove on to break the German defensive Hindenburg line. This in turn led to the collapse of the German Army and the final Armistice in November 1918.

It was in those heady months of that final offensive that Henry Tandey, in the space of just five weeks, was to earn the Distinguished Conduct Medal, the Military Medal and finally the Victoria Cross to make him the British Army's most highly decorated private soldier of the war.



**A Regimental contingent at the ceremony in Leamington Spa to unveil the Paving Stone to commemorate Private Henry Tandey's award of the VC. The Paving Stone was unveiled by Mr Chris Gordon, Henry's great nephew, centre of picture immediately beside the paving stone. Brigadier Andrew Meek, President of the Association, is fourth from left**

The 5th Battalion of the Dukes was part of 62nd (West Riding) Division who were an integral part of that final 'hundred days'. When he arrived with the 5th Battalion Tandey had been through almost four years of hard combat. He brought with him two invaluable qualities - the experience to read intense fighting at close quarters and to recognise those slivers of opportunity which could turn the tide of battle and, more importantly, the immense courage, initiative and daring to seize those opportunities. You can see this in the stories of the three actions for which he earned his medals.

On 25th August 1918 during an attack on a German trench system the leading bombing parties, teams of about 9 men tasked with using hand grenades to attack trench systems, had ground to a halt. Tandey, in a reserve bombing party, took the initiative and taking two others with him they crawled round the flank to get behind the enemy machine gun that was holding them up and attack it from the rear. They destroyed the machine gun post and captured alongside this 20 prisoners. This allowed the whole trench system to then be taken. For this he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

Ten days later in the battle for the village of Havringcourt he went out into 'no man's land', the gap between the opposing forces, under heavy shell fire to bring back a wounded soldier before immediately returning to help three more wounded soldiers. The following day as the attack continued he volunteered to lead a bombing party to attack and capture a machine gun post. Once the post had been secured his small party beat off a vigorous counter attack to hold the position. For this he was awarded the Military Medal.

Finally on the 28th September when the battalion was tasked with capturing the village of Marcoing and securing a crossing over the canal that lay beyond the village Henry Tandey once again played a critical part. It is perhaps best told in the words of a fellow private soldier who fought alongside him:



**Private  
Henry  
Tandey VC  
DCM MM**



*The photograph is reproduced by courtesy of The Times*

**E. Tandy (left) and Major J. P. Huffam (right) seen with two other holders of the V.C., Brigadier Roupell and Captain White, at St. Martin-in-the-Fields for a service of Remembrance and Rededication for members of the Victoria Cross and George Cross Association**

“During the taking of the crossing over the canal at Marcoing, I was No 1 of the Lewis gun team of my platoon. I witnessed the whole gallantry of Private Tandy throughout the day. Under intensely heavy fire he crawled forward in the village where we were being held up by the enemy machine gun and found where it was. He then led myself and comrades with our gun into a house from where we were able to bring our Lewis gun fire onto the enemy machine gun and knock it out of action. Later when we got to the canal crossings and the bridge was down, Private Tandy, under the fiercest aimed machine gun fire, went forward and replaced planks over the bad part of the bridge to enable us all to cross without delay. On the same evening when we made another attack we were completely surrounded by a huge number of Germans and we thought the position might be lost. Private Tandy, though he was twice wounded very nastily, took the leading part in our bayonet charge on the enemy to get clear. Though completely faint he refused to leave us until we had completely finished our job, collected our prisoners and restored the line”.

That bayonet charge consisted of just eight men and resulted in the capture of 37 prisoners. He later led a further bombing party to capture another 20 prisoners.

For his actions on that day Henry was awarded the Victoria Cross. He received his medal from King George V at Buckingham Palace on 17th December 1919.

After the war he continued to serve with the Dukes initially with the 3rd Battalion in the Regiment's Home Depot in Halifax employed on recruiting duties and where he was promoted to Lance Corporal. In 1921 he was posted to the 2nd Battalion, an operational battalion. By this time he had clearly decided promotion was not for him and on arrival in the battalion immediately asked to revert to the ranks. With the battalion he served in Gibraltar, Turkey and Egypt until he was finally discharged in 1925. He then returned to his home town Leamington Spa where he remained for the rest of his life working for 38 years as Commissionaire with the Standard Motor Company.

He died in December 1977 aged 86. His funeral and cremation were in Coventry and his ashes were taken by his nephew Harry Gordon and old friend Cecil Beacon to be interred at Masnieres British Cemetery in Marcoing near where he had won his Victoria Cross, to lie alongside those of his comrades who had lost their lives in the fighting there almost 60 years earlier.



## PAS DE CALAIS REMEMBERS

A report by the Editor

I was fortunate enough to be asked to be the Regimental Representative to attend a ceremony in Haucourt – a middle sized village just off the main road (D939) from Arras to Cambrai – to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the action of Second Lieutenant Huffam, whose courage earned him the Victoria Cross. It was one of several such ceremonies to be held that day.

The commune of half a dozen villages had got together, beginning their planning two or three years ago, to organise events in each. A Canadian Corps captured these villages, and 2 DWR was under their command at the time. The individuals honoured had received the VC, or in one case the MC, in action on this day 100 years ago. Plaques, with an explanatory accompanying board, were unveiled, and flowers in great profusion were laid beside them.

To understand the depth and sincerity of the commitment by the French to these ceremonies, we should note that the D939, a very busy road, was closed for several hours on both Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> and Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> September; the Prefets (the French State's chief representative in a Department or Region, reporting to the Minister of the Interior) of two Departments attended, with seven or eight local mayors and representatives of various regional organisations, and, on the Sunday, of the Canadian and German Embassies; a good turnout of local people followed the progression from one village to another, along with a small detachment from the French Army, a dozen or more people in various uniforms – police, fire brigade, local service units - standard bearers from the French equivalent of the Royal British Legion, and trade organisations. In addition, a piper and several members of the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa were very much engaged in the day.

The day began with the naming of the main road (a section of the D939) into Vis en Artois “Voie Sacrée du Canada”, or “Canada’s Highway of Heroes”. Next, in that village at the war memorial we remembered Private Claude Nunney VC DCM MM, the last two decorations earned at Vimy Ridge, of the Canadian Army but born in Hastings, Kent.

His Mother died in London and the family scattered and Nunney, with three of his siblings, was sent to Canada under the care of the Catholic Church. At the time of the action that won him the VC he was nominally under arrest for some major disciplinary breach but in the middle of a battle a soldier of such proven courage is hardly likely to have been locked away, and during the battle whilst under heavy fire he was well to the fore and



**On the D939 outside Vis en Artois the crowd assembles, and the sign is unveiled**



went amongst his colleagues, leading by example and encouraging all near him. He died of his wounds 16 days later.

Then on to the Vis en Artois/Haucourt CWGC, a large cemetery containing 2369 burials and listed names; there are 55 Dukes buried there, and another 150 named on the stone walls. Here I was invited to give a short speech, (in what was generously described as “very good French” by our hosts!) about the Dukes in the Great War and lay a wreath to all those who fell 1914 – 1918.

Very much part of this was Julian Morely whose grandfather, Private Frank White, was with Huffam in these attacks on that day 100 years ago. Julian, in his address, also named Second Lieutenant Harris Anson and the other men who were killed here in the action. In his speech Julian described the events of that day, in both French and English.

We then went to Haucourt, a mile or so away only, to honour Second Lieutenant James Huffam of 2 DWR who captured St Sevrin’s Farm, just outside the village, demonstrating extraordinary courage and tenacity on two occasions. He lived to the age of 83, and as we celebrated his gallantry in France, as reported earlier, his home town

of Dunblane did the same in Scotland. Huffam's son, wearing his Father's medals, attended the Dunblane ceremony, and grandson Mark, wearing the miniatures, was in France, along with his son.

From there to Eterpigny, which has such a beautiful, small CWGC cemetery, to commemorate the bravery of Captain Bowen MC, of the XX Lancashire Fusiliers. His wreath was laid by his nephew, Rupert Bowen, who turned out to have been in the same company at Sandhurst as the writer, although a couple of intakes behind. And then representatives of the Fusiliers laid a wreath to the fallen of the Lancashire Fusiliers in the cemetery itself.

The photographs and their captions complete the story of Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> September.



**Marching from the "Voie Sacrée" ceremony up to the village of Vis en Artois, and the Nunney Memorial**



The following day, taking a cross-country route from Arras to avoid the "route barrée" signs, we arrived at a field designated as a car park, and embussed to take the short drive to a large roundabout in the middle of the D939, about to be named the "7 Victoria Crosses" roundabout, after the seven Canadians who won that decoration all on or about 2 September 1918 in that vicinity.

As the photographs show, flagpoles had been erected, and are destined to remain with both the French and Canadian flags, and seven maple trees had been planted, at the foot of each was placed a photograph of one of the men. I gave a lift from Arras to a Canadian couple, Elizabeth and Bruce Robinson, who had come over especially as her great Uncle, Sergeant Metcalfe, who also survived the war, was one of those honoured. See photos on page 14.

The whole weekend had been very well conceived, excellently organised down to the last detail, and all of us who were guests from one country or another, were kindly and generously looked after. The war effort, and very large sacrifice, of Britain and her Empire is remembered with sincere gratitude.



**The writer and Julian Morley lay wreaths to the men of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment who lost their lives on the Western Front and are buried in CWGC Cemeteries, and those Dukes who lost their lives at St Sevrin's Farm**



**The wreath to the men of our Regiment**



the writer with Phillippe Dubus, the Mayor of Haucourt, and, on the right, Jean-Marie Dez, French Army major and local historian who did most of the research for all the events of the day



Mark Huffam and Phillippe Dubus after unveiling the memorial”



The Huffam VC Memorial in the village of Haucourt



Julian Morely, whose grandfather, Private Frank White, fought in the St Sevrin’s action with James Huffam



The Plaque close up



*The village already had a memorial to a Second World War RAF Blenheim bomber crew of three, who were shot down near there in the Battle of Arras, 22 May 1940*



**The Memorial plaque for Captain Geoffrey Bowen MC in Eterpigny". 1857, Caption "A bandsmen's sheet music for the National Anthem, as the French soldiers salute**



**Eterpigny CWGC Cemetery**



**The 7 Victoria Crosses title for the roundabout on the D939**



**The Prefet addresses the audience, with the senior visitors on the stage behind him**



**Senior officials gather behind the floral tributes, laid around the maple trees, one tree each for the seven Canadian VCs**

## 1918 - POLITICS AND COMMAND – THE 100 DAYS – BLIGNY – ADVANCE TO VICTORY – CROSSING THE SELLE – ITALY – ARMISTICE



David Lloyd George, Prime Minister 1916 – 1922

### Political Background

Before following our battalions through the final months of the war, we might note that the allies' improved fortune on the battlefields of the Western Front after Germany's spring offensives had failed was by no means seen by all, if indeed by any with total conviction, as the beginning of the end. For many that end – victory – was as distant as ever, and a quite widely held pessimistic view was that all the advance by the Allies was doing was to push to German armies back into more favourable, that is narrower and harder to overcome, positions.

After the German attacks had been stemmed in 1918, 500,000 individual reinforcements and new units for the BEF were found, most of them from Britain but some from Palestine where they were no longer needed, and were shipped over to France and Belgium. Under Lloyd George's personal supervision the flow of men was stepped up from 8000 to 30,000 a day, an astonishing figure. Until then commanders on the ground were still worrying about their own situations and were thinking along lines of their own and national interest.

As the French and British armies tumbled backwards in April and May under the weight of the German onslaught, Haig was preoccupied by the threat to his supply lines from the Channel ports, whilst Foch's priority was to cover the threat to Paris. The latter, now enjoying the title though in reality little of the implied authority, "Commander in Chief of the Allied Armies", was required to present his strategies for consideration and comment to each government, and to national C in Cs on the ground, who all looked for solutions that, if they did not greatly benefit them at least did them no harm.

The times were not without amusement. Germany was supposed to have in its possession a "Black Book", containing the names of 47,000 British perverts. It is likely that high-placed individuals' consternation at this piece of intelligence was more against the possibility that they might be in it, with the consequent gossip and speculation on the nature of their particular peccadillos that would follow disclosure, rather than any serious consideration of how this would, if true, assist the German war effort.



**Marshall Ferdinand Foch, Commander in Chief  
Allied Forces**

FM Sir Henry Wilson, CIGS in 1918, said in July that the decisive battles would be fought in July 1919; whilst Jan Smuts, a member of the Imperial War Cabinet in his capacity as Prime Minister of South Africa, told the Cabinet that the war would go on until 1920. Lord Northcliffe, appointed Minister for Information, was quoted as saying “none of us will see the end of this war”. However, it fairly soon became clear that “Marshall Foch’s perpetual cry of “attack, attack”, and FM Haig’s unceasing belief that a German collapse was just around the corner, might just about, and at last, turn out to be right”, wrote AJP Taylor.

The allied commanders began to feel that the time had come to take the war to the Germans, even if there was plenty of disagreement about how it should be done, and how long it might take.

### The Dukes’ war on the ground, July – November 1918.

At one stage or another every Dukes’ unit on the Western front was involved in the “100 days”. Thus the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion and the 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 13<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalions, were engaged; and our (now six) territorial battalions in 49 and 62 (WR) Divisions were very active in their sectors. The map should help readers to locate each of



The bold red line shows the position in March 1918, the red dotted line the limit that the Allied forces were pushed back in April and May, and the red dash line where the Allies got to before the signing of the Armistice.

the described actions, designed to give an impression of the fighting in this period.

49 Division, with our three TF battalions in 147 Brigade, was very active in holding back the German assaults in the battles of the Lys through April 1918, although with very heavy casualties. In this it was finally successful but the Division needed time to rest and recuperate, as well as take in large numbers of battle



**Map of the final weeks of the Advance to Victory.  
2 DWR, 9 DWR and units of 49 WR Division  
were on much the same line at the end**

casualty replacements. Nevertheless throughout this time it remained in or just behind the front line as events proceeded further south, and was eventually switched to a new line of advance running north east from Cambrai, and thus joined in the final advance in late September, receiving particular notice for actions at Villers-en-Cauchie and Saulzoir in October along the D119. It was again in action near Valenciennes on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> November, crossing the Rhonelle River and capturing the villages of Présau and Maresches.

Meantime 62 Division, largely recovered from its defence of Bucquoy, was placed under French command and moved to the Valley of the Ardres, south of Rheims, to take part in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of the Marne. The country was difficult, heavily wooded, with high crests and deep valleys, sunken roads and steep slopes. This is champagne country. There was hard fighting here, with 5 DWR excelling in the battle for the Bois de Petit Champ, where the men had to fight a determined enemy face to face. Two German officers, and 256 other ranks



**Typical countryside between Reims and Epernay, covered in the chardonnay grapes of champagne**

were captured, along with 41 machine guns, and Captain Cockhill MC was particularly noted for his courage and tactical skill.

In his book on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of the Marne, author Michael S Neiberg wrote;

On “22<sup>nd</sup> July the British attacked again using a rolling barrage that advanced at the same slow rate as the day before, 100 meters per ten minutes. The advance also received the support of five French tanks and numerous gas shells. ... (they) soon learned that they had been lured into a trap. Approximately 200 yards inside the Bois du Petit Champ the British hit a line of German machine gun nests, intentionally kept off the front line in order to protect them from the rolling barrage. They discovered two more machine gun lines within the next 100 yards.

Through bloody lessons acquired in places like the Bois du Petit Champ the British developed methods for advancing through such positions. (They) learned to attack machine gun nests by encircling them, using the woods to conceal their own movements. ... On July 23<sup>rd</sup> the 62<sup>nd</sup> Division cleared the Bois du Petit Champ and entered Marfaux, although the Germans were able to keep up a steady artillery fire on the town.”

On the 22 July 5<sup>th</sup> Dukes had taken 208 prisoners and captured 41 machine guns\*. On the 28<sup>th</sup> 186 Brigade made an assault on the Montagne de Bligny, with West Yorks 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion earning the admiration of British and



*Map of the Bligny/Marfaux area. Reims is about ten miles off to the north east. The whole of this area is covered in either vines (for Champagne) or, where the soil is not good enough, maize for cattle feed*



*Photo version of the map above*





**The Montagne de Bligny. The village is just visible in the bottom right corner of the picture.**

French alike, and the award of the Croix de Guerre. Scott Flaving's detailed article, somewhat abbreviated for space reasons, on this action follows this article. (The full article can be made available to those interested).

In these actions the 62 Division and 51 Highland Division, with which it worked in very close cooperation throughout, took 1200 prisoners from 7 different German Divisions, and completed an advance of over four miles. The cost was considerable; 3000 wounded and 520 killed, and 400 missing\*. On 30 July the XXII British Corps, which included 62 Division, was ordered to leave the command of the 5<sup>th</sup> French Army; the French Army Commander concluded his letter of appreciation with the words "Your French comrades will always remember with emotion your splendid valour and perfect fellowship as fighters".

\* (Editor's note, there is some disagreement on these numbers amongst the various sources)

These were bloody battles against a determined enemy. The Germans, in this sector at least, may have been in retreat but were far from beaten.



**Looking down from Bligny to Chaumercy; Marfaux is the next town along**

## The Battle of Bligny, 27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> July 1918.

By Scott Flaving

On 27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> July, 1918, the 62<sup>nd</sup> (Pelican) Division was ordered to attack the German positions at Bligny and the high ground to the west of the village. This it did, with the 8<sup>th</sup> West Yorkshire Regiment (Leeds Rifles) being singled out for the award of the Croix de Guerre by the French authorities for their determination and gallantry in pushing the Germans off the heights.

In 1918 the Division, as a result of the restructuring of the British Army in January of that year, comprised: 185<sup>th</sup> Brigade, with the 2/5<sup>th</sup> West Yorkshires, 8<sup>th</sup> West Yorkshires and 1/5<sup>th</sup> Devonshires; 186<sup>th</sup> Brigade, made up of 1/4<sup>th</sup> DWR, 5<sup>th</sup> DWR and 2/4<sup>th</sup> Hampshires and 187<sup>th</sup> Brigade with two battalions of KOYLI (2/4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>) and the 2/4<sup>th</sup> York and Lancaster Regt.

Lieutenant Colonel P P Wilson was in action at Bligny on that day and wrote an account of the battle, quoted in Major Tony Podmore's History of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment Volunteer and Territorial Battalions, page 96:

"A Corps conference was held on the 25<sup>th</sup> July which addressed the fact that no further advance should be made up the valley of the Ardre without first capturing the German positions on the high ground from which they commanded the whole area. The Corps Commander wished immediately to attack but his Divisional Commanders strongly advised that a day's rest and reorganisation was essential if any attack was to succeed. This was agreed and the date was set for the 27<sup>th</sup> July when the 51<sup>st</sup> and 62<sup>nd</sup> Divisions were to make a combined assault. To the south of the River Ardre the 51<sup>st</sup> Division and one brigade of 62<sup>nd</sup> Division were to advance on a three Brigade front; this plan placed the Highlanders' 153<sup>rd</sup> and 152<sup>nd</sup> Brigades on its left and right flanks with the Yorkshiremen of 187<sup>th</sup> Brigade between them. North of the river the front was held by the Dukes 186<sup>th</sup> Brigade whose attack orders simply instructed that it should throw forward its line in keeping with the southern advance. The start-line was crossed at 6am on 27<sup>th</sup> July after which the Hallamshires, 187<sup>th</sup> Brigade, were met by a weak enemy barrage and intermittent machine gun fire as they advanced.

Unknown to them, Ludendorff had instructed a general withdrawal of German forces along the whole front and this had taken place on the previous night. The 'insisted on' day of rest and reorganisation had unintentionally saved numerous British lives. The Dukes and Hampshires of 186<sup>th</sup> Brigade similarly advanced north of the river with 185<sup>th</sup> Brigade moving close behind in support. They also met sporadic enemy fire but this was

methodically dealt with and did not slow their steady advance forward. Indeed the advance went so well that the unheard of happened and the Corps cavalry was passed through the infantry. However the cavalrymen soon encountered stiff resistance when they arrived at the Montaigne de Bligny (Bligny Ridge) which was heavily defended and where they were joined by the Dukes who consolidated the new line.

At 10.30pm, Headquarters 62<sup>nd</sup> Division issued orders for the advance to be continued on the next day, 28<sup>th</sup> July. 186<sup>th</sup> Brigade was to clear the village of Bligny whilst the 185<sup>th</sup> Brigade captured Bligny Ridge, a high piece of ground on the other side of the river, which commanded the valley of the Ardre. If a further advance was necessary 187<sup>th</sup> Brigade was to pass through and continue the attack. The 186<sup>th</sup> Brigade's orders placed the 2/4<sup>th</sup> Hampshires on the left, the 2/4 DWR right and 5 DWR in support; zero hour was set for 4.30am. Twelve hours later, at 4pm, the Hampshires had captured their objectives by the method of discarding all surplus equipment and crawling forward using all possible cover so keeping up under the line of intense enemy fire, enabling the whole battalion to get forward relatively unscathed. Lieutenant Colonel P P Wilson's 2/4 DWR had a more trying experience:

"Meanwhile the 2/4<sup>th</sup> Duke of Wellington's, dead tired from their previous day's operations, had, at 4am, taken up their assembly position between the Bois de Dix Hommes and the Bligny – Chaumuzu Road. In this position they were much exposed and suffered heavily from an intense bombardment and from machine gun fire coming from the Bois de Dix Hommes, Arbre de Villers and the high ground north of the old French line. 'The men were suffering from extreme exhaustion and the advance became most difficult. But no one thought of giving in. The men forced themselves onward by sheer perseverance and dogged determination. One platoon, having marched round by the Bois de Dix Hommes, managed to reach the objective. At this period touch was not established with the French on the right but the position gained was held. Another platoon, by creeping forward first round the eastern and then the northern exits of Bligny, reached its objectives also. No further movement was possible until dusk, when the 2/4<sup>th</sup> Dukes as a whole advanced and consolidated the old French line – their objective."

To their left the 8<sup>th</sup> (Leeds Rifles) Battalion, West Yorkshires' attack was led by their Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel N A England who was formerly a Dukes' officer. Their role was to capture the strategic Bligny Ridge from which a determined enemy could dominate the whole area with fire and view. The battalion soon became involved in very stiff fighting and,

due to its recent heavy losses of officers, a large part of its battle was most effectively conducted under the leadership of sergeants and corporals. The efforts of this West Yorkshire battalion were especially recognised by the French who subsequently decorated the Leeds Rifles with the Croix de Guerre avec Palme en Bronze, the medal ribbon of which has been worn with great pride by its Territorial Army successors to the present day.

During the night of 28<sup>th</sup>/29<sup>th</sup> July 186<sup>th</sup> Brigade moved into Divisional Reserve when its positions in Bligny village were handed over to the 187<sup>th</sup> Brigade. At 4pm on the afternoon of 29<sup>th</sup> July Headquarters 62<sup>nd</sup> Division received a warning order from 22<sup>nd</sup> Corps Headquarters advising that the Corps was to be withdrawn and moved by train to another area.

### **62 Division's Further Operations.**

Released from French command on 30 July, the Division moved north to more familiar territory for rest and re-organisation, before coming under command of VI Corps. It was back on the front on 24th August near Achiet Le Grand, advancing slightly north of east in the general direction of the northern side of Cambrai. On 29 August 5 DWR was detailed to attack German held trenches that would defile a separate part of the general advance, an attack by 2/4<sup>th</sup> Hampshires on Vaulx-Vraucourt. The tactical plan for capturing these trenches is of interest, quoting from the 62 Division history.

“Two bombing platoons worked down each trench towards the trench junction, the first party to reach it firing three red very lights, in order to prevent one party bombing the other. On each side of each trench a Lewis gun team kept pace with the bombing platoons, forcing the Germans by their fire to keep their heads down and shooting Germans who attempted to get out of the trench. Two platoons, at a distance of 150 yards in rear of the bombing parties, followed for the purpose of establishing section posts about every 100 yards to protect the flanks as the attack advanced. Two more Lewis gun sections (4 guns) of the Support Company were distributed 50 yards north and south of each trench and 100 yards in rear of the leading company.”

The Division fought its way slowly forward, brigades passing through brigades and battalions through battalions, against strongly defended positions. By 1<sup>st</sup> September the Vaulx-Vraucourt positions and village was captured. The advance continued; by 10 September the Division was ordered to attack Havringcourt, which was last captured on 20 November 1917 in the Battle of Cambrai. The battle was concluded by 14 September and at last the Hindenburg Line was penetrated.

The next objective was Marcoing, on the canal, much

of which had been incorporated into the Hindenburg Line. The story of Private Tandey VC DCM MM of 5 DWR was addressed in the last edition of this Journal, in a review by General Sir Evelyn Webb-Carter of a book “One soldier and Hitler 1918”, and in this issue in the context of a memorial stone being laid in Leamington Spa, and it was in this action on 28 September that Tandey earned his VC. The 5<sup>th</sup> Dukes crossed the canal and came under heavy fire and their position became precarious as they now had their backs to the canal.

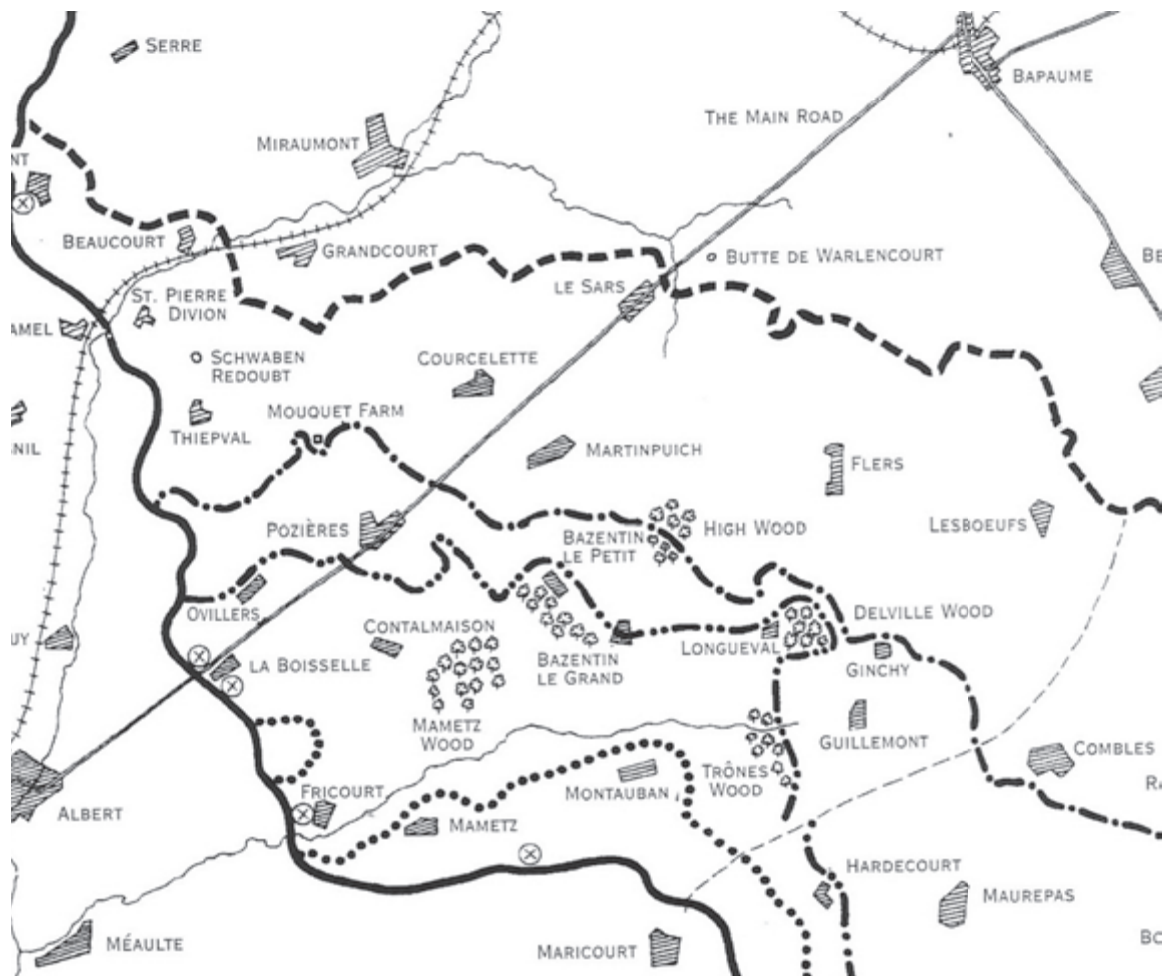
The battalion was ordered to attack forward, and all available artillery pounded the enemy positions. All four companies advanced on a one platoon frontage, to ensure depth to the attack, and took on the enemy bayonet to bayonet. It was confused fighting; a platoon was cut off and had to charge through a stronger force of enemy to find support: Germans who had surrendered found themselves unguarded, and picked up their rifles and fired into the leading British troops. The Division's historian wryly says that “the treacherous prisoners were adequately dealt with” by the reserve platoons”.

By any standards, 62 Division had “a good war”. It had been in some extremely difficult actions – at Bullecourt, at Bucquoy, and throughout the advance to victory. As the Cinderella formation at the start of the war, last in line for weapons, equipment and experienced instructors to train these keen territorial volunteers, it had endured frustration and disappointment. When chances came, they were taken with both hands.

### **9 DWR and the Advance to Maubeuge.**

9 DWR, 52 Brigade, 17<sup>th</sup> Northern Division (as it had been throughout the war) was not on the move until 24 August, after which it made steady progress through the end of the month and into September. From a start point North West of Albert, it fought through the old Somme battlefields, with a stern fight for Courcellette, through Gueudecourt and Flers, on through Le Transloy to Rocquigny and Ytres, and towards Gouzeaucourt. This last position was strongly held by the Germans, and several divisions were engaged in its capture. 200 gas cylinders were thrown into the village to try to reduce the enormous firepower of multiple machine gun positions. Despite being almost encircled the enemy continued to hold the village, and was to prove a considerable nuisance, firing into the flanks of units by-passing to other objectives.

The Division's casualties were heavy, but large drafts were arriving. The scene was set for the final stages. As the author of the 17<sup>th</sup> Division's history wrote “The greatest battle of the war had begun. On the Alsace-Lorraine front the German and French armies, in comparatively small force, still faced each other in



### The Somme battle area, only too familiar to those of our men who had fought here in July 1916

positions they had held for years. But westwards then northwards to the sea the Allied line was beginning to advance. The movement opened on the right where the new American armies were pressing forward on both sides of the Argonne and amongst its rocks and woods towards the Belgian border.

“Next the main mass of the French armies moved, on both sides of Reims and up the valley of the Oise, their left curving round to link up with the main British advance against the Hindenburg Line. Then still further north British, French and Belgians pushed on from the old Yser line into the Belgian plain. It was a long curving line lapping round the great enemy salient on a front of nearly 250 miles. Four days after the first move of the Americans all that tremendous front was ablaze from the woods and hills north of Verdun to the level lands by the sea” wrote A. Hilliard Atteridge, author of the History of the 17<sup>th</sup> (Northern) Division.

As is noted elsewhere in this Journal, the French at Reims included 62 (WR) Division.

Having started the war in France and Belgium in May 1915, when each of the three brigades had four battalions and each battalion four companies, 17 Division had seen action in most of the major campaigns. Towards the end of the “100 Days” it would find fighting as hard as any it had hitherto experienced during the crossing of the Selle. After Gouzeaucourt the Division expected a fierce fight to get over the Canal du Nord and into the Hindenburg Line. It was fortunate that on the line of advance for most of the Division the Canal ducked under ground for a stretch of several miles. Never the less there was stiff fighting, followed by a pause as commanders contemplated, and prepared for, what was thought to be the biggest test, the Hindenburg Line itself. Tanks and munitions in huge quantities had to be brought forward, the men given time to train and rest.



**An old Hindenburg Line map, showing BEF progression towards the main German defensive position**

On 9 September began a three division assault on a strong enemy defensive position in front of the Line itself, supported by a considerable force of artillery of various calibres and bombing aircraft. 52 Brigade, 10<sup>th</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers on the right and 12<sup>th</sup> Manchesters on the left, and 9<sup>th</sup> Dukes following up in support, went forward at 0400 hours. The NZ Division was to the north, and 21 Division south of the 17<sup>th</sup>. By 1830 the Brigade was on the enemy position, with all three battalions in line and the 9<sup>th</sup> Dukes on the left. Counter-attacks were repulsed. The weather deteriorated into hurricane force wind and driving rain, and the ground turned to mud. The territory gained was held.

During the night of the 11<sup>th</sup> September the 17<sup>th</sup> was relieved by the 38<sup>th</sup> Division and passed into Corps reserve. From the crossing of the Ancre on 21 August to 11 September the Division had suffered 479 killed and 2386 wounded, with 194 missing.

Eight days later the Division was back in the front for a set piece attack on Gouzeaucourt. In this intense battle gas was used by both sides, and one brigade commander was caught in machine gun fire and killed on the spot. Again the 17<sup>th</sup> was withdrawn on the 25<sup>th</sup> to recuperate.

On 28 September the Germans evacuated Gouzeaucourt, after holding off repeated assaults and being almost encircled, and began to fall back to the St

Quentin Canal. 52 Brigade remained in reserve as other divisions went forward into the Hindenburg Line, only to find, to their surprise, that in this sector it had been abandoned. The forward troops picked their way through the wire and other obstacles unopposed on 5 October. From here on there would be "the unfamiliar sight of towns and villages showing no trace of shell fire; woods not reduced to mere branchless stumps of trees". The population came out as the British advanced, old men and women and children for the most part as the young men had long since been sucked into the war. It became policy that so far as possible communities occupied by civilians would not be shelled; this proved difficult later when some villages were held as strongpoints, and were not shelled until it was clear that the population had gone.

Forward of the Line there were no more long prepared defensive positions. The retreating enemy still resisted, but had to use natural cover from fire and view. The allies began to swing north east towards Maubeuge, passing under Valenciennes. En route they would cross the line of the retreat from Mons in 1914. The somewhat flat countryside was deceptive; it was crossed by many streams, and some significant rivers, notably the Selle, L'Ecaillon, the Rhonelle, and, on the far side of the Forêt de Mormal, the Sambre, mostly too deep to be forded, and often with steep banks. Crossing these obstacles was only by ferry or bridge.

Once clear of the St Quentin Canal the 17<sup>th</sup> encountered only modest opposition, a few rear-guard positions to delay the advance. By now the movement was brisk, and fraternisation with villagers as they passed along was common. The next objective was Neuville and the high ground east of the Selle, which would be a tough task if it was strongly defended. From the higher ground gunner officers could watch trains pulling away east, sadly out of range of their 18 pounders, and long columns of marching men on every road going east. Those within



**The River Selle; steep banks either side of a fast flowing river**



Map of the Selle and surrounding area

range were engaged by the field artillery, and they scattered into the countryside.

There remained a serious fight to cross the Selle, the last strong line between the BEF and Maubeuge.

52 Brigade crossed half a mile south of Neuville, at the dam of a watermill, where the water was fordable, and trees felled by gunfire offered some support to the wading men. Once on the far side a screen could be made to protect Royal Engineers who completed four light bridges, all under fire. As they crossed 9 DWR was caught in a German counter barrage, and losses in the rear company, who were on the bridges, were heavy.

They tried to push on through wire and machine gun fire, but were held up and pinned between the river and the railway, a little to the east, with enemy on the railway line itself.

Sunday 20 October was fixed for an all-out assault on the German positions, the Sappers assisted by the York and Lancaster Pioneer Battalion, having meanwhile constructed bridges strong enough for the guns to cross. The plan involved formations from both the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies, and the engagement is known as the Battle of the Selle, but for 17 Division all the action concentrated on Neuville. It was to be a night attack, with four lines

of objective, from west to east, blue, red, green and brown. The attack would be supported by huge artillery barrages and some bombing from the air. Timed to begin at 2.00 am, to catch the enemy by surprise (which it did). By the 22<sup>nd</sup> October the objectives were secured.

By the 26<sup>th</sup> 52 Brigade and 9 DWR reached Englefontaine, on the western edge of the Mormal Forest.



**The headstone of Private Satchwell, 9 DWR, at Englefontaine CWGC Cemetery, who died on 4 November 1918**

By now the Division was at best one third short of its full strength, casualties from the long contact during the advance with the enemy combining with an onrushing flu epidemic. On 4 November three Armies, 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> combined in the assault on a 20 mile front. 17 Division would go through the heart of the Mormal Forest, initial objective Locquinol, on the main west/east road, with 52 Brigade leading, all three battalions in line, the Dukes in the middle, each on a two company front. 51 Brigade would follow up and pass through, and then the 50<sup>th</sup>.

Fighting in thick forest was a novelty, and not a welcome one, with the gunners particularly challenged by very tall trees that could cause early ignition of their H.E. shells. A machine gun battalion was added to 52 Brigade's order of battle. The tactic was to try to move forward along the tracks and rides, getting in behind enemy tucked into deep forest. Opposition was fierce;

the battalion started with 15 company officers and 584 men; of these 13 officers and 226 men became casualties. After this effective strength in the front line was only about 200 all ranks, but the objective was reached, and 51 Brigade passed through. The forest started to thin, and the guns moved up. The 21<sup>st</sup> Division took the lead as the advance to the Sambre began.

There was only a brief delay on the Sambre. Crossing the Selle had cost many lives and taken up a great deal of time. By 5 November the Sappers had a bridge over the river and a bridgehead was secured. By dawn on 7 November the enemy had abandoned its positions on the high ground east of the Sambre and was in full retreat, although once again delaying parties had been left behind and put up stern resistance. 52 Brigade crossed the main road running south from Valenciennes to Avesnes on 8 November, and went forward, at last encountering no opposition. At Obrechies the river Solre would have to be crossed, but as they approached the village tri-colours could be seen flying from the roof tops.

On 11 November 9 DWR was ordered to march back across the Sambre, to the eastern edge of the Mormal Forest. The war was over.

### **10 DWR in Italy 1917 and 1918.**

The 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion have been rather left out of the recent Great War narratives, mostly because they left the Western Front and were sent to Italy where there was fierce fighting against Austrian invaders, allied to Germany. Britain and France could ill afford for Italy to be overcome and knocked out of the war, so sent assistance. Along the rugged, mountainous, 350 mile frontier between Italy and Austria, the two countries grappled for supremacy. With arrival of the British and the French to reinforce the Italians the layout was as shown on the map, which has been taken from General Donald Isles' "History of the Service Battalions", as is much of the information in this article.

On eleven separate occasions the Italian Army took the offensive, and was defeated and pushed back, taking 500,000 casualties, 166,000 in the last and eleventh attack alone.

10 DWR had taken part in the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) and were very glad to be out of that region going, somewhat erratically by train, somewhere new. They were met with great enthusiasm by the Italian population of all the towns and villages they marched through, but there was a great deal of marching, and as Major WN Town wrote "We marched for seven consecutive days and the long railway journey was no good preparation. Loaded too as the men were with steel helmet, box respirator and one blanket."



Italy, October 1917 - January 1918

After several moves without much action, by late February 1918 the Battalion found itself in the Il Montello sector (see map), between the French and the Italian Third Army. The task was mainly patrolling, and again there was little contact with the enemy. In March 1918 the Battalion was transferred to the Asiago front, hopping over the French to take up position on the other side of them, and again had little action.

On 15<sup>th</sup> June the Austrians attacked all along the front. Major Townend wrote "the enemy were repulsed with great slaughter. They followed 40 minutes after their barrage and penetrated the front of the Division on our left to a distance of 1500 yards. However they quite failed to take advantage of this and their attack was a complete failure." Beyond the Dukes' area the scale of this latest offensive was very large, and it was in part successful. However the Italian Army brought up reserves and the Piave river flooded and swept away many of the bridges over which the Austrians had attacked, cutting them off from their rear areas. Enemy casualties were estimated as 56,000 killed, 240,000 wounded and 24,000 prisoners.

Later that month Captain Kelly VC (won at Le Sars, Somme, 4 October 1916) led a raid on the enemy trenches. Major Townend again "The raiding party was thoroughly imbued with the 'spirit of the bayonet' and the greater part of the garrison was wiped out with cold steel after a slight resistance. All the dugouts were thoroughly bombed.....With some difficulty the officers of the party were able to ensure that 31 of the enemy were brought back alive for identification purposes."

In August a large raiding party was formed, comprising 14 officers and 350 other ranks for a raid on the Vaister Spur. This was a complicated operation, planned down to the last detail, with artillery support. Once through the wire platoons each went for their individual objectives – a railway cutting, a collection of dugouts, particular trenches. According to the report it was a very quick in and out assault in strength against an enemy that was well prepared and fought hard. 5 officers and 60 other ranks, along with two machine guns, were captured, and at least 80 killed, at a cost of two men killed, five missing and 48 wounded, including five officers. A more detailed account of this action, extracted from an article prepared by Scott Flaving, follows.



## The Vaister Spur Raid

On the night 26/27<sup>th</sup> August 1918, the Battalion, commanded by Lt Col Lethbridge, mounted a raid on the Austrian front line, as outlined in the following extracts from the Unit War Diary:

**SECRET** "A"

**MINOR OPERATION**

**ORDER NO. FIFTY TWO**

BY LT COL F W LETHBRIDGE DSO

COMMANDING 10th BTN DUKE OF

WELLINGTON'S REGT Ref Map CAMPOROVERE,  
1.10.000

1. **INTENTION** The Battalion simultaneously with a Battalion of the Forty Eight Div on the right, will carry out a raid on MANCHESTER and MIDDLESEX TRENCHES, the RAILWAY CUTTING, the QUARRY and all the dugouts, trenches, etc. in the area.

2. **COMPOSITION OF PARTIES** The raid will be carried out by three parties under the command of Capt R Bolton MC, Capt J E Payne MC and 2Lt W J Simpson respectively. The parties will be made up as follows - "A" Party 2Lt Simpson and 2Lt W F J Thomson with two platoons (seventy other ranks) of B Coy "B" Party - Capt R Bolton, MC, Lt A Neill, Lt A A Jackson, 2Lt G C Sugden & 2Lt E E Ison with three platoons (ninety other ranks) of A Coy and one platoon (thirty other ranks) of C Coy "C" Party - Capt Payne, MC, Lt V Edwards MC, 2Lt E K Waite MC, 2Lt M A S Wood and 2Lt B Garside with three platoons (ninety other ranks) of D Coy and one platoon (thirty other ranks) of C Coy. The report on the raid was as follows.

### REPORT ON RAID CARRIED OUT BY 10th DUKE OF WELLINGTON'S REGIMENT ON THE NIGHT 26-27 AUG, 1918

1. The 3 raiding Coys formed up without incident about 300 yds from the enemy's front line.

2. At 10.40pm the barrage commenced and the raiding party advanced to the attack.

3. The movements of the various parties were as follows: (a) Left Company - after some difficulty with the wire which was insufficiently out, this Coy broke into the enemy front line at H.465.550. After mopping up an enemy post in the front line the Coy broke up into platoons with separate objectives. One platoon advanced and captured the railway cutting at H.460.583 and the proceeded to the road at H.462.586. About 12 large dugouts and shelters were cleared by this platoon, many enemy being killed and captured. One platoon mopped up the enemy front line as far as LITTLE SPUR, dealing with several enemy posts and a defensive flank was



The forming up point for the Vaister Spur raid



The position of Battalion HQ during the raid



Henry Bolton, great nephew of Captain Bolton MC who led the B Party, with Dr Bill Smith, who accompanied Scott Flaving on his visit to Italy and the Piave battlefields

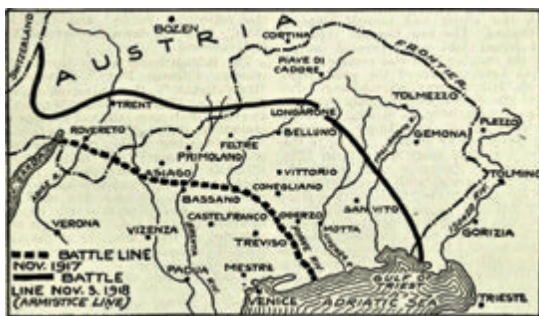
established at LITTLE SPUR. Subsequently the enemy attempted a bombing attack from CANOVE, but was repulsed with loss by Lewis Gun fire from this post. One platoon attached the railway at H.470.580 but was met with very strong machine gun fire and only a few men succeeded in reaching the objective. One platoon remained in support.

(b) Centre Coy - One platoon attacked and captured railway at H.47.580 and to road at H.490.590. This platoon cleared many dugouts, getting many prisoners and killing many more. One platoon took Quarry at H.485.576 in which only a few enemy remained alive. Two platoons attacked the railway cutting at H.493.573. This was very strongly held by riflemen and four machine guns. The first attack failed, both officers being wounded. The CSM then organised a second attack, which although pushed through with great gallantry did not succeed, the CSM himself being badly wounded. Eventually the two platoons took up a position in shell holes facing the enemy, and by rifle and Lewis Gun fire kept this position engaged.

(c) Right Company - All four platoons succeeded in reaching the trench and railway on POST SPUR. Several strong enemy posts were mopped up, and prisoners taken, but the main body of the enemy retired towards GAIGA N. From here and from CODA SPUR a most intense machine gun fire was opened on POST SPUR and this suffered considerably.

### The end of the Italian Campaign.

The front was quiet until the end of the month, when the allies mounted a major offensive to force passage of the River Piave. The river itself was deeper than expected and men were swept away and drowned, and considerable resistance was encountered, and the whole operation was carried out under artillery fire. . But the men pressed on, taking one objective after another, and capturing 1400 prisoners, two field guns, three infantry guns, 38 machine guns and quantities of stores. Three officers and 22 other ranks were killed, and 71 wounded. The advance continued with the enemy withdrawing before them, but still fighting, until 3<sup>rd</sup> November when an armistice was signed, stipulating a complete Austrian and German withdrawal from Italy, and free movement along Austrian roads towards Germany.



Map showing the ground gained from November 17 to November 18



**This photograph shows the sprawling nature of the River Piave, which covers a wide area in a series of streams, and can flood quickly as water rushed down the high ground nearby. It was deeper and faster flowing during the crossings in October, 1918, where Capt Henry Kelly VC MC was awarded his second MC**

### The Armistice

Marshal Foch, Commander in Chief of Allied Armies, summoned representatives of the German government to his railway carriage in the Compiègne forest to lay down the conditions for peace. On the allied side only the British, First Sea Lord Admiral Weymss with his Deputy; and the French, Foch himself and General Weygand, his Chief of Staff with a small staff were present. For Germany two politicians Erzbergereger and Von Oberndorff and General Von Winterfeld of the German Army.



**Marshal Foch's train in which the Armistice was signed. The British were represented by the First Sea Lord, Admiral Rosslyn Weymss. None of the other allies were present, and the German delegation was relatively unknown. The Germans had some ideas of a negotiation but were firmly slapped down by Foch, who laid down terms and demanded that they be accepted.**

This is not the place to set out the terms of the German surrender, but they were comprehensive, detailed and demanded total surrender. Quickly dispelling any ideas the German delegation had of any form of negotiation, Foch laid down his conditions. It was signed at 5.00 am on 11 November, to come into effect at 11.00 am.



**The Armistice representatives, with Foch and  
Weymss centre foreground**

## CONCLUSION

Most of the readers of this Journal are former soldiers of the Regiment. It should not be difficult for them to put themselves in the boots of their predecessors, using their own greatly less challenging years in uniform compared with the men of 1914 to 1918. To imagine something of what it was like for them. And not just for them, but for family and friends, back in the West Riding and elsewhere.

The Regiment lost nearly 8000 men killed in the Great War, including Gallipoli and Italy. Many more came back home with mental and physical wounds and scars. At least once each year, on Remembrance Sunday, we promise to remember those who made the sacrifice, and judging by the widespread continuance of the traditional church services and parades on and around that day, and the incredibly generous giving to the annual Poppy Fund Appeal (£50 million last year) and other service charities, we have not forgotten. I hope we never will.

We might also remember with some justifiable pride that under various titles the Regiment has been fighting for Crown and Country since 1702. Rare indeed especially are the conflicts anywhere in Europe in which we have not taken part. In our own times our West Riding soldiers have found themselves at risk and not all of them made it home. Our relationships with the countries on the other side of that blessed channel have never been straightforward, not then, not now, nor will be.

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## THE VICTORIA CROSS WINNERS



**Second Lieutenant Henry Kelly, 10th Battalion.**

For most conspicuous bravery in attack at Le Sars on 4th October 1916. VC, MC and Bar.



**Private Arnold Loosemore, 8th Battalion.**

For most conspicuous bravery and initiative during the attack on a strongly held enemy position south of Langemarck, Flanders on 11th August 1917. VC, DCM.



**Private Arthur Poulter, 4th Battalion.**

For most conspicuous bravery when acting as a stretcher bearer at Erquinem-Lys on 10th April 1918. VC.



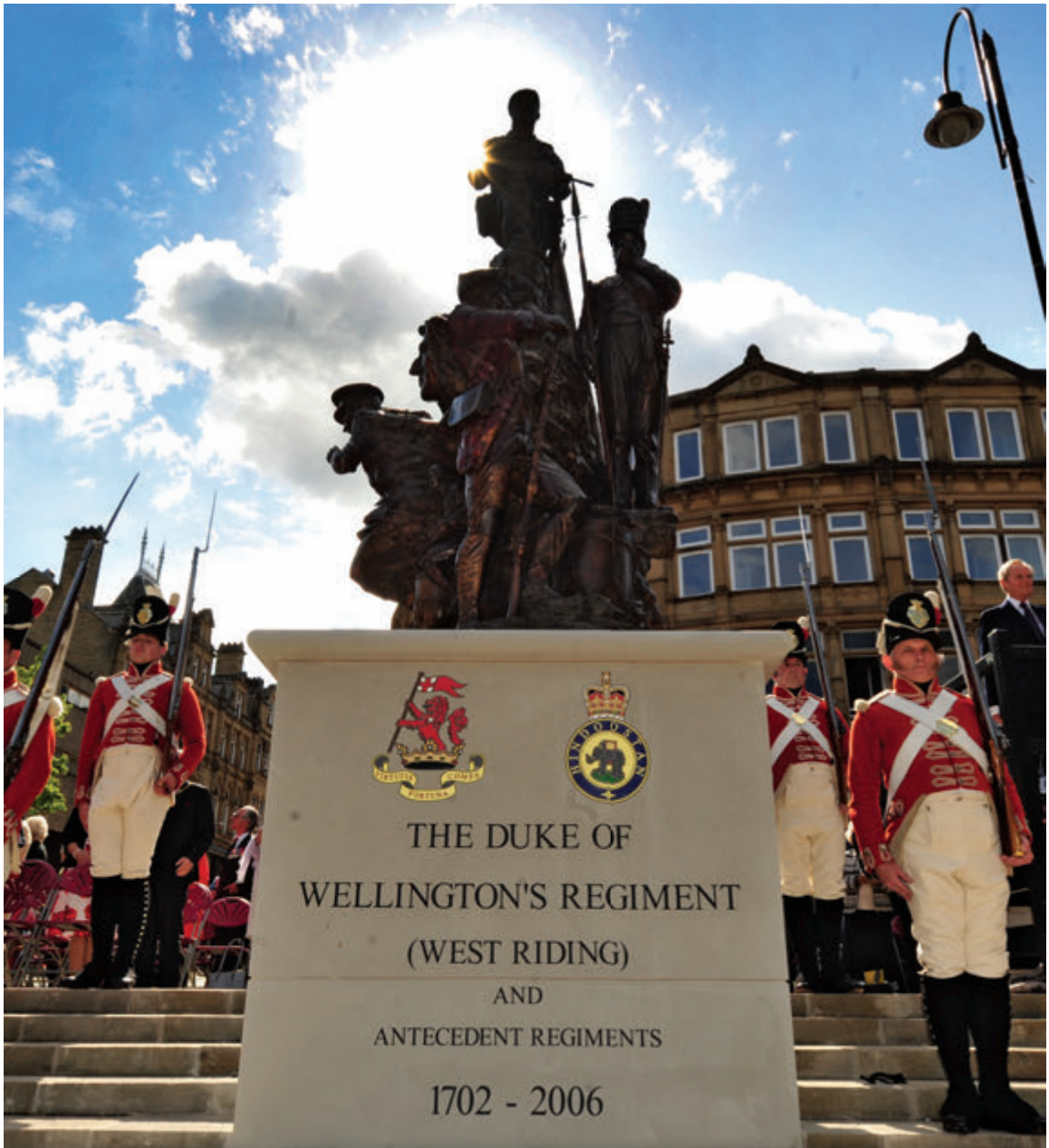
**Second Lieutenant James Palmer Huffam, 5th Battalion.**

On 31st August 1918 with three men he rushed an enemy machine gun post and put it out of action. Later the same day with two men he rushed another enemy machine gun post and put it out of action. VC.



**Private Henry Tandey, 5th Battalion.**

For most conspicuous bravery and initiative during the capture of the village and the crossings at Marcoing and subsequent counter attack on 28th September 1918. VC DCM MM.



17th May 2019 -The Dukes Memorial that now proudly stands in the very heart of their home town.



**Poppy tributes at the Tower of London, “Blood swept lands and seas of red”. 888,246 in total, one for every British and Colonial soldier killed.**