

Edition 9, July 2011  
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A long trail  
a-winding



The Loos  
Football



Faugh an  
Ballach!



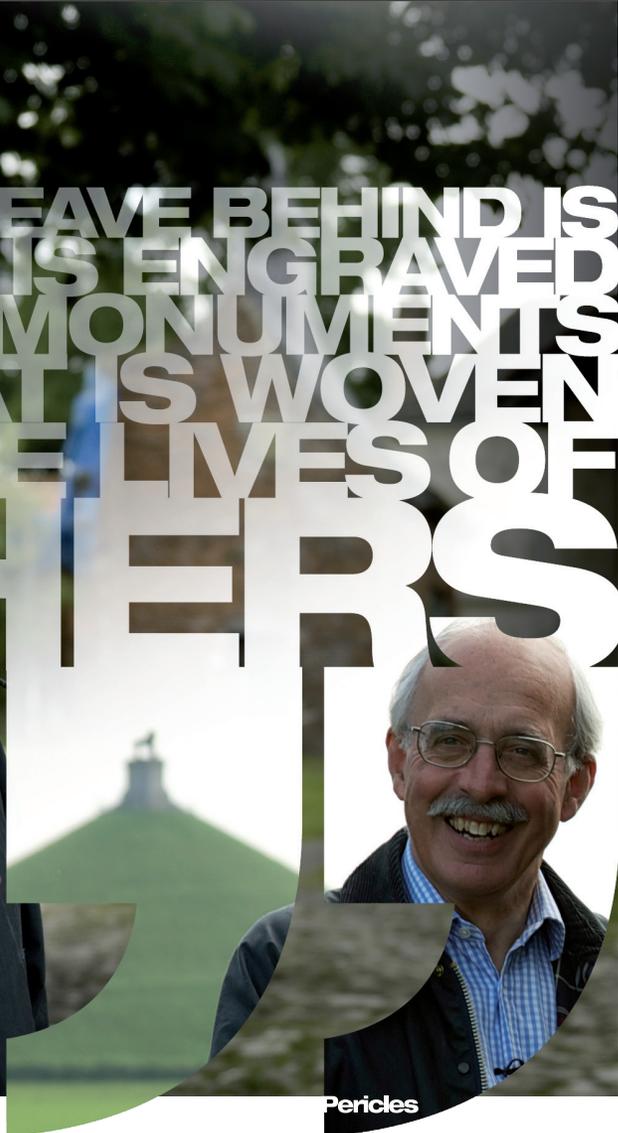
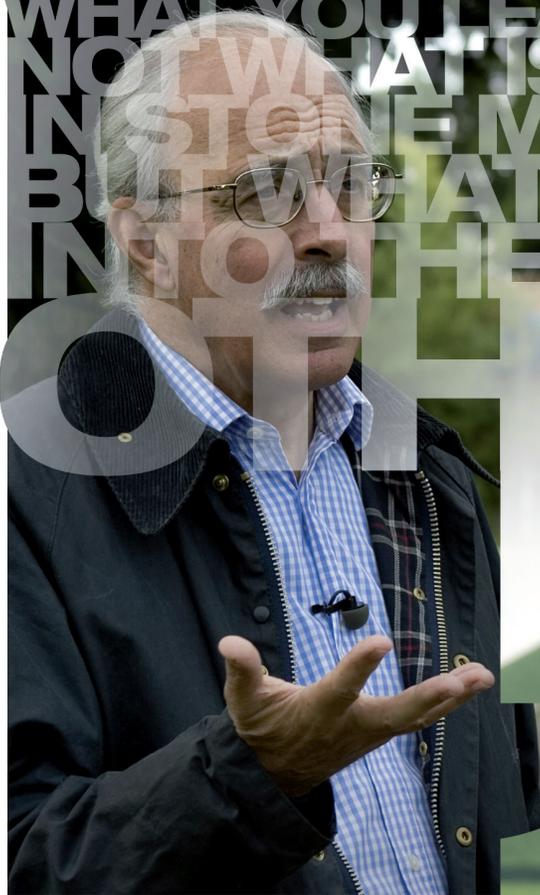
# BATTLEguide

The Journal of the International Guild of Battlefield Guides

Professor  
Richard Holmes  
CBETD JP

29 March 1946  
30 April 2011

WHAT YOU LEAVE BEHIND IS  
NOT WHAT IS ENGRAVED  
IN STONE MONUMENTS,  
BUT WHAT IS WOVEN  
INTO THE LIVES OF  
OTHERS



Pericles

TULLY T. H.  
TURNBULL J.  
TURNBULL N.  
TURNBULL J.  
TURNER F. 464  
TURNER J. 1163  
TURNER J. 1370  
TURNER J. 16930  
TURNER J. P.  
TURNER R.  
TWEDDLE J.  
TWEEDY E.

TWEEDY T.  
URWIN T. F.  
VALLANCE T. E.  
VASS H.  
VENUS J. N.  
VENUS W.  
VINCENT R.  
VOASE C.

WADE G. H.  
WAINWRIGHT A.  
WAITE C.  
WAKE H.  
WAKE J.  
WAKE T. W.

WALBURN J. H.  
WALDEN D.  
WALDEN G.

WILKINSON J.  
WILKINSON W.  
WILKINSON W. E.  
WILKINSON W. E.  
WILCOX S. A. J.  
WILLIAMS G.  
WILLIAMS H.  
WILLIAMS J.  
WILLIAMS W. A.

WILLIAMSON J.  
WILLIS F.  
WILLIS J.  
WILLISON J. T.  
WILLS J. G.  
WILLS T. R.  
WILSON A. H.  
WILSON E.  
WILSON F.  
WILSON G. 682  
WILSON G. 1463  
WILSON G. W.  
WILSON  
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WILSON

MA  
NEED  
NITT  
ODW  
ON  
PEAR  
POOLE  
PRICE  
PURCE  
RAINB  
ROBER  
ROGER  
ROSE  
ROWI  
SHUT

SIMP  
SMAR  
SME  
VIGO

Find every name  
where is a story.  
They just need  
to be told

*Once heard,  
never forgotten*

# BATTLEguide

## From the Editor

Recent weeks have been overshadowed by the death of our Patron, Professor Richard Holmes and our thoughts must be with his wife Lizzie and his daughters, Carina and Jessica.

We will all miss Richard Holmes but let us raise a good glass of “red infuriator” in his memory and rejoice that we were able to share his company on so many occasions.

He would surely have been delighted in a newcomer to these pages, Daniel Levy, the youngest member of the Guild, who gives us an especial insight into the role of Jewish service-men and women who have fought for the British Army in two World Wars.

And if the London Irish Rifles get a lot of attention in this issue I hope you will find their stories of interest. I’m not sure that Steve Smith, however hard he tries, will convince us that Graveney Marsh is right up there in the list of top ten battlefields but at least the London Irish Rifles had the good sense to end the day in the nearest pub which sounds like a good way to end any battlefield tour!

Why the London Irish? Well read about their exploits at Loos in 1915 and maybe you will understand why I am allowing personal interest to intrude. But then, if we read Mark Banning as he gives us his own reasons as to why he is a guide, that is what matters - our personal passion and interest combined with knowledge and understanding of our subject.

And that surely is something which Richard Holmes would have appreciated.

Mike St Maur Sheil  
gbg.journal@btconnect.com

## In our next Issue

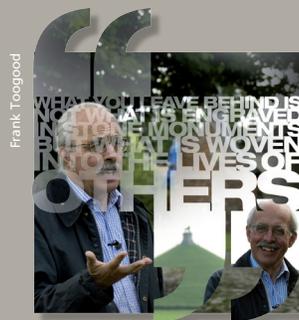
This is an especial issue examining the debate over the location of one of the most extraordinary single-handed actions of all time when Sgt. Alvin Yorke silenced at least five machine guns and took over 120 prisoners during the American offensive in the Argonne in September 1918.

As guides, such information is essential and we are honoured to be able to present both sides of the case to enable the facts and issues to be better understood so that we can all be better informed and hopefully, better guides.

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*The Journal's designer, Frank Toogood pays his own especial tribute to our Patron using the words of Pericles*

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*The BATTLEguide:  
Designed by Frank Toogood  
typonic.com*



**RICHARD HOLMES**  
**THE LATE PATRON OF THE GUILD**  
by Mike St Maur Sheil

*"I think that this is perhaps my favourite view of the Western Front... as one stands there one cannot but be humbled by the spirit and endurance required of the soldier in battle. You cannot really understand a battle without viewing the ground on which it was fought. Part of the process is intellectual: to see how ridges provided fields of fire and woods offered cover. But, part of it, too, is emotional. This landscape was once peopled by soldiers; embedded deep in the seams of the soil. All those elements are to be found in this landscape. When I look at it my throat tightens as I think of the brave spirits who died fighting on these slopes. Here is the story of war, the essence of which we are seeking to tell"*

Richard Holmes on this view of the Vallee de Foulon from the Chemin des Dames

And indeed I find my throat tightens as I write these words because like all members of the Guild I have lost a great friend. But in the midst of my sorrow I am happy to be able to pay tribute to a man who meant so much to so many.

And those words of Richard's about the ground where Nivelles's *poilus* fought and died in 1917, reveal so much about why he was the epitome of what a good guide should seek to bring to his craft. There is appreciation of the ground, the knowledge and understanding of

history, the respect for the men and their stories and spirit, all bound together by a willingness to express the emotion of the occasion.

Indeed it was this sense of discreetly veiled emotion which is perhaps what made him such a popular presenter who did so much to make people aware of the battlefields of western Europe. I once asked him if he ever found himself discomforted by the emotion of what he was describing; he looked at me rather oddly and quietly said, "*If I am not getting emotional, then*

### ***Richard at Waterloo***



*I am not thinking about where I am - there is no escaping the emotional impact of battlefields and as I grow older I grow more upset as my life has centred around men of an age group that are frozen for ever at the same age as my children”.*

This passion is perhaps no better to be seen than in “Dusty Warriors”, which he wrote whilst Colonel of the Princess of Wales Royal Regiment. The narrative describes their time in Iraq and for Richard it was a sobering experience as it was the first time he came under hostile fire. As one who had talked more than most about the impact of war upon the human mind, he had a concern about his own responses and *“an extra admiration for an enduring generation... I try to comport myself as if one day I was actually going to meet one of the men whose experiences I have just described”.*

His motives for writing the book were quite simple; in his own words *“Iraq - the plan was a bummer. Only look back to the First WW and you can see the problem of committing armed forces without actually having a strategic vision”.*



With the war deeply unpopular in this country he wrote it for the lads so that when they are grand-fathers and are asked "why did you fight in Iraq?" they can produce the book and say "here's the answer. ...It would be totally unjust to the boys if nobody gave a bugger. I have always wanted to do something for them ...maybe I felt that it was guilt money as I have made a good living out of the ordinary soldier so I owe them honesty and a deep personal obligation.

And that was not empty rhetoric - the proceeds of "Dusty Warriors" went to charity and in all he raised over £250,000 for the Army Benevolent Fund. Charity, duty and obligation were important virtues in his mind: old fashioned virtues they may have been but anyone witnessing him talking to the modern generation of school children would realise that he gave them every bit as much attention as one of his staff courses and they responded readily to his measured and courteous delivery.

Richard saw himself as a historian with a story to tell. He saw July 1st on the Somme as a seminal day in British history, "taking the long view it was a sort of Iron Gates separating the past from the present ... the last of the volunteers ... the end of innocence" and it was on the Somme that he first perceived the need to ensure that guides took an active role in telling the story.

*"It is all very well going to cemeteries "to remember" but they need to be visited in the context of the landscape. And cemeteries don't tell the truth about the Somme, they bend a battlefield out of shape ... there are as many stories as there are tombstones. A battle is best told from stands - like tesserae they make up a mosaic. People can simply go on a coach and visit the Thiepval Centre or they can go with a guide who will take them off the beaten track and offer them stories and insights which make for a battlefield tour of experience, not of facts."*

And it was as a story teller, with tales of the ordinary soldier, that he excelled. For him there was "no man better than the least unknown soldier" and he always loved to tell the story of the motley collection of cooks and grooms assembled by RQMS Fitzpatrick of the Royal Irish who held the cross-roads at Binchy during the retreat from Mons as an example as to how "in all branches of human affairs, small men can make a difference".

Likewise he was concerned about what he saw as an increasing trend towards the interpretation of battlefields and war "through the eyes of middle class poets... they offer an easy door to look through. What matters is whether you look through another door."

He saw the Guild as a vital means to raising standards and he valued the culture of shared expertise which he felt created a brotherhood of shared excellence. But as grievous a blow as it may be, Richard would be the first to object were we to regard his death as diminishing the Guild which he was so instrumental in creating. He would have expected us to get on with the job on the simple premise that doing ones duty and achieving one's objective is the best way of honouring those who have fallen in battle.

Obviously we tend to remember him for his role as a battlefield guide and the Patron of the GBG but the fact is that the Guild was but one small part of an extraordinarily crowded life. Richard was a born communicator and it was this skill which endeared him to so many and meant that he became a media celebrity. Almost inevitably it was his TV work which drew most comment in the obituary columns so we would do well to note the comment by Prof Hew Strachan that "more importantly in focusing on his television work they omit his intellectual influence on about 40 years' worth of British army officers".

Given his time as senior lecturer at Sandhurst and subsequently at RCMS Shrivenham there can be few senior officers in the British Armed Forces who had not met him and attended his lectures so we should remember that his influence extended far beyond the Guild and we were indeed fortunate that he gave us so much of his time and energy.

By the standards of Pericles who said "What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven into the lives of others" he was indeed a great man. A man who always sought to ensure that the stories of those who had fought in the wars of bygone years, whether or not they had been commemorated on some memorial, were indeed woven into the history that they had helped create.

As our Patron, his example helped define our role as guides. So the best way we can commemorate his remarkable life - apart from drinking a good glass of "red infuriator" - is by telling the story as he would have told it: well-researched facts, balanced presentation, all charged with heart and passion.

That way his spirit will still guide us as we walk his beloved fields of the Somme. ■

*Photography: Richard by Frank Toogood; Chemin des Dames and the Somme: westernfrontphotography.com*



# A LONG TRAIL A-WINDING

## MARK BANNING EXPLAINS WHY HE IS A BATTLEFIELD GUIDE

This is the story of how he became a Battlefield Guide



**'How long have you been doing this?' and 'Why are you interested?' are possibly the two most frequent questions that I am asked by guests during that initial 'getting to know you' phase that takes place on every tour. The first, I can answer straight away but my response to the second however, is best deferred at this stage – unfolding, as it will, with greater meaning and resonance during the trip itself and anyway, it would be imprudent to give any story away at its outset, wouldn't it?**

Compared to some of you, the answer to question one, in my case, is a mere three years, but what a three years that has been! My purpose in writing this article however, is to show that whatever your previous experience in life, when approached from the right perspective this fantastic job can make both a real and memorable difference to the lives of all those involved. As Guild members, we are privileged to be able to share this knowledge and enhance our guests' understanding, but we are guides first and foremost, not armchair generals, and our role is to explain and interpret sometimes complex things, in ways that are meaningful to our guests.

For my chosen area, the battlefields of the Western Front, we can only ever be 'second hand spectators', a phrase used by a very good battlefielding friend, and one whose judgements and knowledge have been freely shared over the years. I suppose we all need a little help in life to gain the knowledge that we need to do the role we have now opted for, but knowledge is only the beginning. There are some who may believe that to properly explain what went on, whichever battlefield you are visiting, a military background may be preferable, or even essential. I would argue that whilst it may enhance certain aspects of what you do, a background of military service is not a pre-requisite for guiding – indeed, in the vast majority of

instances none of us have thankfully experienced the specific crucible of active service, and certainly not in either of the two great World Wars, which comprise most of our visits. Some of the very best battlefield guides that it has been my privilege to spend time with over the years, have never seen the inside of a uniform but they have the passion, integrity and commitment to instil in others an ability to personally relate to, and deeply engage with, their subject and draw real meaning from it. This is immediately apparent when they begin to tell the story; engaging with and enthusing the audience so that at the end of the tale their guests are more fulfilled as individuals. Some of my best inspirations have derived from people such as this and I wouldn't be travelling the path I am today if it wasn't for their passion, affinity and colossal respect for this generation of men and their generosity in sharing it with me and others.

Of course, this is all a highly personal view, but I hope it may persuade those of you who feel you may want to guide, but consider you lack the necessary skills, to reconsider and find the confidence to do so. It is clear from talking to fellow members that there are many who would like to step forward and share your knowledge and passion but perhaps do not feel fully equipped to take that step. Let me affirm that we all possess knowledge to differing degrees

and do our best to constantly increase and improve upon this, but guiding is far more than merely the acquisition of knowledge: it is about how you apply and express it. Passion, integrity and commitment form the cornerstone upon which good battlefield guides are made. Again, I can only talk about my own personal experiences or the guests that I have had the pleasure of looking after, but here are some of my suggestions. They won't apply in all cases, but they work for me.

Do your homework first – if you know that someone is coming who especially wants to go to Pozieres because his uncle was wounded there, make sure you know which battalion he was with and in which direction the unit was advancing. I fully concede that this is not always possible, and that matters often arise spontaneously during the actual trip, but sometimes a quick check, perhaps somewhere like the Thiepval bookshop for example, can pay enormous dividends. No one knows everything but as anyone with a military background will know, time spent in reconnaissance is seldom time wasted. It also enhances your own integrity and honesty if you can admit to being unsure, but, at the same time, doing your very best to find out.

First name terms first - on any trip where a group have not met each other before, whether to the battlefields or indeed anywhere



**Private S H Banning 13th Bn  
Royal Highlanders of Canada**

else, it is always reassuring for everyone if you are able to address as many people as possible, by their Christian names. Generally speaking, the quicker this takes place, the quicker the group will gel. Hopefully you will have been given a passenger list and if you have a full coach of forty plus, this will certainly prove no easy task, so you will need to find a method of getting the names in your head as quickly as possible, and use them. This may prove especially arduous for some, in which case you will need to work extra hard to overcome such difficulty. Here I may well have an advantage over some of you; my maximum group size is only 16 people, and I fully accept that even remembering 16 names can be a massive challenge!

Firm but flexible - use an 'overview' approach when planning the trip content and ensure that your guests are fully informed on the plan for the day ahead and how it is likely to

broken up. Remember, you are in charge and if this is a position that you have been used to in the past, utilise your experience accordingly, structuring your day firmly and realistically. It doesn't have to be set in stone, and spontaneity is an important component of all successful trips, but if you say you're going to stop for lunch, then make sure you do.

Do as you would be done by - a simple enough phrase that I was taught when young and it sounds easy, but for some people in today's society it sometimes gets forgotten. Show your guests the respect they deserve, forgive their foibles, enjoy their company and learn from their knowledge. I have found that these things all help to meld a group that can soon be eating out of your hand.

Respect individual differences - battlefields are highly emotive places and different people will react in different ways. The most immediate reaction is always to the cemeteries, so lovingly maintained by our friends at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. But then the impact of the enormity of it begins to take hold. How many cemeteries are there? So, you answer, and maybe show your overprinted map. There may be a stunned silence. However, whilst you know that people need time to absorb these things, always ensure that you carry with you extra things to show them to try and make some sense of it. You will go to your favourite spots, (and I'm not telling you mine, well not all of them anyway!) and do your piece. How you do it is up to you. Maps, pictures, poetry, first hand testimony, letters, war diaries; there's no right or wrong way and for different groups, different perspectives and approaches will be needed. However, something

personal always seems the most effective way to make things truly come alive. Remember too that just because someone may not visibly display an outwardly emotional response doesn't necessarily mean that they are unaffected by content. An increased sensitivity to the different make-up of the specific group and its individuals is a very handy tool to have in your tool kit.

The Rule of 4 - whenever we are presenting people with information, the objective is to engage the listener with information that will be meaningful to them. There are 4 basic types of processes that people use to make sense of information, identify with it, and draw meaning from it. Thought stimulation through data and facts, a practical application of the information, physical input and 'doing' such as walks, and emotional engagement through personal connection and relevance cover all 4 basic types and any good mix between these should see everyone included.

This leads me on to now answering that second most-posed question.

No one leaves school saying 'I am going to be a battlefield guide' (or, at least, they didn't when I left!) but looking back, there was always that ever-present latent interest that has led me towards this, where I love my work so much. What's the secret? I'll tell you, but this is my story, and no one else can tell it, as we each have our own to tell.

As far back as I can remember, dad always made my brother and I wear a poppy in November. When we asked him why, as all good children should, he said it was to remember soldiers who had fought in the war, including his dad, my grandfather. To a youngster, this 'grandfather' was an unknown individual.

Yes, he featured in photographs and stories that dad would tell about, involving his young life and growing up in Trinidad in the 1930's and 40's, but sadly had passed away in July 1961, just a few weeks before I was born. As I got a bit older, I discovered that he had been a soldier and had been both gassed and captured by the Germans.

I think by then that I knew about the use of gas, mainly on account of studying Wilfred Owen at school.

them, so off they were sent, along with so many others, across the Atlantic for a new life. A relative in Canada was prepared to look after these two youngsters. The years went by and in 1914, my grandfather, now 21, could not ignore what was happening back in his home country. Of course, I now understand that he was not alone in this sentiment, and was definitely among Sam Hughes first 30,000 men to be sent from Canada in October 1914.

(Royal Highlanders of Canada) Battalion, the Canadian Black Watch. Again, as a child this seemed even stranger. I knew about Scots wearing kilts, but Canadians? Now, of course, I know what an honour it was to serve in a kilted battalion, and the Canadians had many.

So this was the limit of my information for some time, before one of life's lovely quirks came right in my direction. This almost seems like divine intervention, but I promise it is true. I had just come home from a trip to Europe with some friends and en route we had stopped at Arramanches, as you do. As we chatted, my dad said that he had something to show me which he had found on the road outside the house and duly returned with a battered, but intact, copy of *Before Endeavours Fade*. My parents live on a quiet country lane – to this day I can not understand how this book ever got there, but there it was, and what a revelation! Ariel photos of trenches, great memorials and lists of names and places that I seem to have heard of somewhere before: Ypres, Passchendaele, Arras and the villages of the Somme: Serre, Beaumont Hamel and Delville Wood. It was a seminal moment in my life, forging a realisation that all these places were still there and only across the Channel.

It now seemed like a visit was on, as in this book there was reference to the Canadian Defence at Ypres in April 1915, together with a small picture of a memorial. This seemed to be near where my grandfather had fought and been captured. The text made reference to gas. Looking back, as my dad and I ventured to travel over in the spring of 1984, we were woefully under prepared but did we have a good time? You bet we did.



**My Grandfather as a POW.**  
**Second row, third from the left - marked with a cross**

At the same time I was told that he had fought with the Canadians, but couldn't quite work that out, as we lived in England and as I knew he had been born in Pewsey in Wiltshire, I wondered what was he doing in another country's army, and why was Canada involved anyway? Then, remembering Canadian cousins coming to visit, it all started to fall into place. My grandfather and his sister had been sent to Montreal in 1909 as two young orphans. No one at home was prepared to look after

This is not an article on the formation of the 1st Canadian Division: suffice to say it was formed and in France by February 1915. I do like to think that at some point whilst he was training on a wet cold Salisbury Plain, he may have marched with his battalion through the village of Pewsey. Whether its significance would have hit home, I'm not sure, but I do hope it did.

For those who are interested in the full detail, he was a member of 13th

So, the years passed and through a whole avenue of connections (which are mine to know about), I found out more and more until I could pretty well put together a compulsive and accurate story, commencing with the big picture and focusing down to this one individual man who had been there in the midst of this hell. Even though I had never met him in person, I felt that no one else could ever do his story justice except me, and with the memorial at Vancouver Corner being one of the finest on the Western Front, and a 'required stop', it always seems that this is the appropriate place to tell people the story of my very personal connection to this place. I have, of course, varying versions of this story from a five minute quickie to a full on 25 minute presentation, dependent upon the group and circumstance involved. The greatest response thus far, was in 2010 when I accompanied a group of cadets from the Calgary Highlanders. When I brought out the glengarry that my grandfather wore at the time, together with the brass shoulder flashes from his uniform (how he kept these as a POW I have no idea), it provided a tangible link to past events for all concerned, and demonstrated that even with the smallest amount of knowledge, a personal connection like this can give everyone something of real substance with which they can truly engage.

Another Canadian guest was so enthralled when she heard this story that the next day, in Ypres, she made a special effort to buy and present me with the book that her late husband had written, detailing all the Canadian soldiers taken POW during the First World War.

Sure enough, on page 21 it states: Banning, Seymour Henry: 24222 Pte 13th Bn; POW Apr 24/15; Rel Jan 15/19 SOS Apr 25/19 moved BWI, died July 4/61

It seemed that he arrived back in Montreal four years, almost to the day, since he was captured and was subsequently passed A1 fit (I'll leave it up to you as to whether or not you agree with that!), though he was advised to spend time in a warmer climate as his lungs were still affected by the effects of the chlorine gas used by the Germans at Ypres in April 1915. Unsurprisingly, four years of manual work as a prisoner had not improved his health, and he took the advice, eventually settling in Trinidad with a successful career in the shipping industry, before retiring back to England in later life.

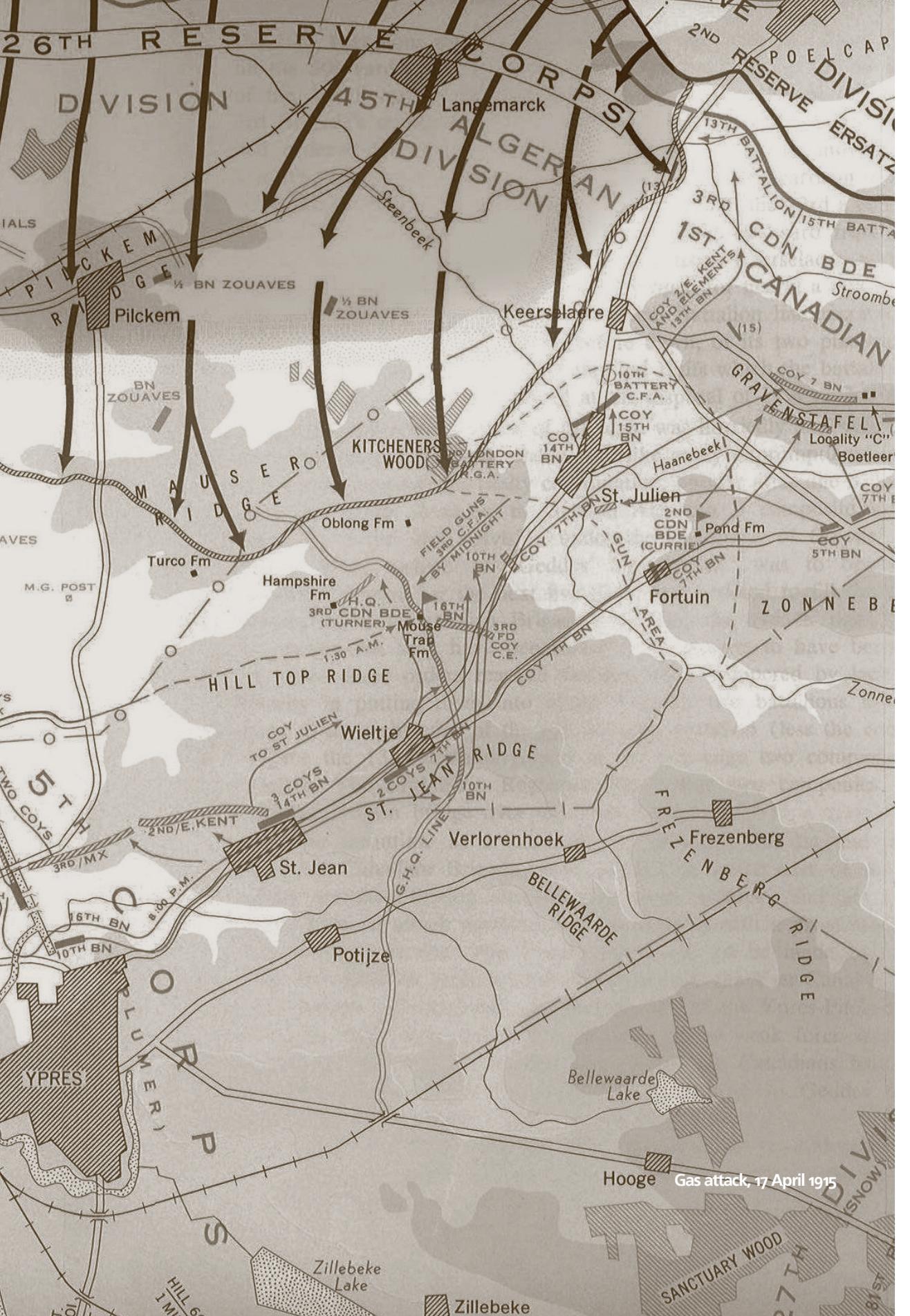
So, I am fortunate that my role as a guide lets me share this very personal story of mine and the reaction is always one of interest and understanding. Not everyone may have this privilege, but if you are going to tell stories about soldiers then I would recommend that you work hard to get the detail right and don't falsify and undermine your credibility by intimating that you have connections to veterans unless you truly did and they told you their story first hand.

First World War veterans have all passed away now, but some became minor celebrities in their advanced years and their words are well known in the circles of The Great War fraternity. Show the men the respect they deserve by quoting them through their own words, and attribute it correctly. It is their story to tell – through us, not from us.

What if the reason for a guest coming on a trip is to visit the grave of a loved one? To me this is the greatest singular honour – have no doubt about it; someone has chosen, possibly at great cost, to come halfway around the world to visit a battlefield grave and you are going to be both their guide and the conduit of connection for their quest. I feel there is no greater responsibility on our shoulders in these instances. I will share two stories to exemplify this, but in order to maintain the special privacy of the moment, will do so without divulging the identities concerned.

One hot September afternoon, I was quite overawed by the intensity of feeling shown by one solitary Australian lady. She had been researching family records at home and had all the details. Fate decreed that on the day in question that we were due to visit the cemetery, it was just she and I in attendance. Flowers had been bought ready to place upon the grave, which we easily located. Once due respect had been shown I was then able to witness the lady sing Schubert's Ave Maria over his grave. No one else was there; the sky was bright blue and the singing was beautiful. Her entire reason for travelling around the world had reached fruition, with mission duly fulfilled and I had helped make it possible. It gives me goosebumps just thinking about it – even now.

In May last year it was a similar story, but this time even more personal, with an entire group in attendance and welling up with emotion. Two hard working Canadians had made a vow when they were married in 1960 that one day they would visit the grave of her father, killed in Normandy



26TH RESERVE DIVISION

CORPS  
ALGERIAN DIVISION

2ND RESERVE DIVISION  
CANADIAN DIVISION

PILCKEM RIDGE

45TH DIVISION

1ST CDN BDE

MAUSEGROVE

KITCHENERS WOOD

GRAVENSTAFEL

PILCKEM

Langemarck

St. Julien

1/4 BN ZOUAVES

Steenbeek

Localities "C"

BN ZOUAVES

Keerslaere

Boetleer

1/4 BN ZOUAVES

Oblong Fm

ZONNEBEKE

TURCO FM

Hampshire Fm

Fortuin

M.G. POST

Mouse Trap Fm

Verlorenhoek

HILL TOP RIDGE

Wieltje

Frezenberg

1:30 A.M.

St. Jean

Bellewaarde Ridge

3RD CDN BDE (TURNER)

Potijze

Frezenberg Ridge

8:00 P.M.

Ypres

Hooge

5TH DIVISION

Zillebeke Lake

Sanctuary Wood

16TH BN

Zillebeke

HILL TOP RIDGE

10TH BN

Gas attack, 17 April 1915

27TH DIVISION

3RD/MX

10TH BN

15TH BATTALION

2ND/E. KENT

10TH BN

13TH BATTALION

16TH BN

10TH BN

15TH BATTALION

10TH BN

10TH BN

15TH BATTALION



in 1944. This was so important because, as those of you who are quick in the maths department will appreciate, she had never seen her father in person, although he had known of her.

He had been killed in August 1944 as the Canadians pushed south to help close the Falaise Gap, but it appeared that his ammunition lorry had been strafed by Allied aircraft by mistake. You can work out the sorry result of that. So on a cold but dry day in May last year, a 50 year old promise was honoured by a couple now in their later years, but obviously still very fond of each other and enthused with life in general. Emotions were high, tears were in abundance and duty was done. I visited the cemetery a month later: the potted plant that had been left by the couple had thrived under the continued personal care of the gardeners and I wondered if, perhaps, with the enclosed details having been left in French, [as the couple hailed from Quebec] an extra special effort to ensure its wellbeing had been made. Strangely, or perhaps not, I have since visited the grave on every subsequent available occasion – I feel I owe it to him, as his daughter is unlikely to make the journey again.

There is sometimes the opportunity to clear up any points that have become perhaps somewhat clouded in family history. I was gratified to be able to do just this when I looked after a couple from New Zealand who told me that great uncle Evander had been blown to pieces by a shell at Passchendaele – nothing left.

All perfectly plausible you may think, but when I checked with a quick phone call back home in

order to see which New Zealand Memorial in the Salient he might be commemorated, the answer was none – he is buried in Brookwood Military Cemetery and died in 1919. I suspect that he was badly injured by shell fire at Passchendaele but survived, no doubt in great pain, until the body and the medics could do no more. How fortunate that Brookwood is so close to where I live, which meant that a week or so later, on a clear autumn day, I was able to get some lovely pictures of Evander's grave, surrounded by his fellow fallen Kiwis. Downloaded and attached to an email, the pictures were duly waiting for my guests when they arrived home. It may not have quite the same impact as visiting in person, but perhaps the next available best.

Sometimes those close to me say something like, 'Don't you get bored going to the same places?' to which I honestly answer, 'No'. Why is this? Apart from the irresistible and understandable pull of the battlefields, (and this applies to any battlefield, from any era, depending on your personal choice) it is the level of engagement and interaction with people who are eager to know, to find out and to begin their own personal voyages of discovery, that is so fascinating. In addition, the friendship that you develop, even within a day, with previously complete strangers, all brought together for this deep and meaningful purpose, gives a special bond and connection that is, quite possibly, unique to battlefield pilgrims. In addition, it is the fact that they have chosen to travel with you to do this that is so satisfying. Nice comments, emails and letters back to the office are an additional bonus, but it is the fact that maybe somehow, somewhere, you have made a difference and allowed your

guests to see things through their own eyes and to draw meaning from their experience in their own way that is the most gratifying.

So, for those still waiting to take the plunge, take it. Everyone brings something different to the table of Remembrance and it is this very diversity in humans that we come here to celebrate and commemorate in honouring the memory of The Fallen. Let such diversity amongst us, as guides, reflect this. Every single contribution is both unique and individual – no one else will ever be able to 'tell it' like you. You won't always be right every time, but you will improve as you go. The detail can always be fine-tuned, but you have to have the passion and empathy first.

Remember, you are a story teller, but, greater than this, remember that you are telling the stories of men who were denied the chance to tell it for themselves and it should therefore be regarded as a singular privilege to be able to do so. To me, this has to be the most important element of it all and in such affirmation of our enduring acknowledgement, love and respect to those that went before us, let us see to it, each in our own unique way, that their names be not forgotten. ■

*Mark Banning is a battlefield guide with Backroads Touring Company. His passion and life long interest in battlefields from the human perspective allows him to guide in his own manner, resulting in many happy clients. Predominately concentrating on the Western Front, Mark also looks after Canadian visitors to Normandy and Dieppe.*

*Photographs and map from author's collection*

# MAPS FOR BATTLEFIELD GUIDES

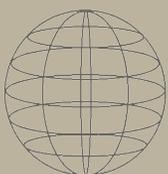
by Christopher Finn

**B**efore Christmas Mike StMaur Shiel asked how one plotted latitude and longitude on a French 25thou map. Foolishly, I answered this arcane question and was then asked to write an article for the Battleguide on the broader subject of maps and guiding. Guides use maps for three basic tasks: to get somewhere; to orientate themselves and their clients; and to illustrate an historic event. These tasks often overlap each other. But before looking at the uses of maps it is worth an explanation of their construction and properties.

When it was thought that the Earth was flat it was easy to translate ideas of geography, however fanciful, onto a sheet of papyrus or an elk hide etc. Pythagoras developed the first theoretical understanding of a spherical Earth in the 6th century BC. The first globe was produced in 1492 and confirmed by the great navigators of the 15th and 16th centuries. Defining a place's latitude, its number of degrees north or south of the equator was well understood. But it took until the late 18th century for accurate marine chronometers to enable the fixing of longitude by reference to the time of the observed local noon. In 1884 the International Meridian Conference fixed the Greenwich Meridian as the datum for calculation of longitude, and therefore of time, thus creating a problem with the French which haunts us today!

So we have a sphere on which position is defined using a series of circles. The first are drawn passing through the poles – the Meridians of longitude. The second a series parallel to the equator and climbing with decreasing radius to the poles – the Parallels of latitude. The meridians and the equator lie on the circumference of the globe and are Great Circles, defining the shortest distance between any two points. Each circle is divided into 360 equal parts, or Degrees, each degree into 60 equal Minutes and each minutes into 60 equal Seconds. A minute of arc on the equator or any meridian defines a distance on the earth's surface of 1 nautical mile (6076 ft). This set of meridians and parallels, usually drawn at the same intervals, is known in cartography as a Graticule.

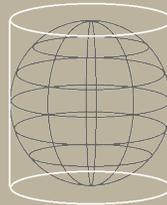
## DIAG 1 – SIMPLE GLOBE & GRATICULE



The problem then was how to transfer a 3-dimensional model of the world onto a 2-dimensional map. The first of what we would recognise

as a modern map was drawn in 1569 by Gerardus Mercator. His concept was to wrap the globe in a cylinder of paper, touching the globe at the equator and by placing a light at the centre of the globe project the graticule onto the cylinder.

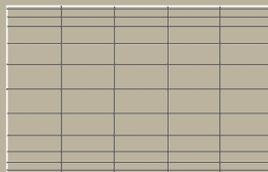
## DIAG 2 – DIAG 1 PLUS CYLINDER



Now, like the uniform from stores, the cylinder only “fits where it touches”. As can be seen from the diagram below parallels are of equal length so the poles are equal to the equator – scale is clearly not constant. Also, the parallels

get closer together as one goes north or south, so area is not constant. But, as meridians are parallel, bearings are constant, which is helpful in navigation.

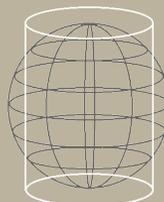
## DIAG 3 – SIMPLE MERCATOR



We can improve the accurate area by having the cylinder cut through the globe twice. But we still have the problem of

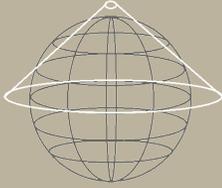
distorted areas the farther we get from the two points of contact.

## DIAG 4 – SECANT CYLINDER



If we fold our paper into a cone we can see that it more closely follows the shape of the Earth, but only in one hemisphere.

## DIAG 5 – SECANT CONE



By adjusting the spacing and alignment of the two lines of contact between the cone and the globe, the Standard Parallels of that projection, we can create a map

which has a particular property. That is one where shapes are constant, ie the map is “Conformal” (or orthomorphic). However, to achieve this, the meridians will converge as they do on the earth’s surface and hence bearing is not constant. But, by placing the standard parallels for the scale of the map, and hence its use, distance can within the accuracy of measurement also be constant. If you look at the text above the excellent IGN Serie Bleu 1:25 thou map you will see the words “projection conique conforme de Lambert” – Lambert’s conical orthomorphic projection. This is one of two most commonly used projection for large scale maps (the larger the scale, the smaller the area covered for a given size of map). The other, which the UK uses, is the transverse Mercator projection.

The next problem is the accuracy of the graticule – where exactly are places on the earth’s surface? In Kitchener’s era this was done by visual survey. In WWII photographic survey took over. With the advent of satellites it was possible to survey the earth far more accurately leading to the 1984 World Geodetic Survey (WGS 84). This updated the location of places on the latitude and longitude graticule. It also defined altitude on the earth’s surface by distance from its now correctly established centre. This became the basis for satellite navigation systems, and now specifically the American Global Positioning System (GPS). Even WGS 84 is not fixed, it was last updated in 2004, due to tectonic movement. We, and therefore Greenwich, are moving north-east at 2.5 cm per year.

Some other land-masses move in other directions at up to 1m per year. With an average accuracy of +/- 10m for a commercial hand-held

GPS this is not something to get hugely worried about. But it is one reason for the regular updating of digital maps in GPSs. The UK actually uses the European Terrestrial Reference System of 1989 (ETRS 89) which, for the level of accuracy we want, is in practice the same as WGS84.

If you look at the edge of an Ordnance Survey 1:50 thou map you will see a black border with latitude and longitude marked on it in degrees and minutes north and east/west. A minute of longitude is about .6 the distance on the ground of a minute of latitude and there is a very slight convergence of the meridians.

Consequently it is difficult to accurately plot position in lat & long on this type of map. To get over this problem metric grid systems were introduced such as the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain of 1936. This was used by Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain for ease of plotting raids and friendly formations across a common system.

The Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) system, where a mosaic of metric rectangular grids cover the earth, is now internationally used. Because meridians converge whilst a rectangular grid remains constant the system repeats itself every 6 degrees of longitude. However, the English and European grids change over in the intervening seas.

As two internationally agreed standard systems UTM and WGS84 can be superimposed on each other and the two-dimensional co-ordinates translated between them. Many commercial GPS navigational systems contain algorithms to make this conversion automatically. But if they don’t then we have to manually plot latitude and longitude. This is where French hubris kicks in. Not content with having their own system of latitude and longitude based on Paris, it is also in Grads of which there are 400 in a circle and which are also known internationally as Gons! They also have two different datums for their national metric grid system and show both on their maps.

The following shows the south-east corner of IGN 1:25 thou sheet 2407 E – Bapaume.

The horizontal and vertical “tram lines” marked **A** and **B** are the longitude and latitude graticules respectively. The inner graticule, marked in 0,01 Grad intervals, as shown between the red arrows and the 55,60 gr style numbers ringed in red show the French system – ignore them. The inner numbers, also ringed in red, and their associated small lines are the two French grid systems – ignore them as well !

The blue italicised numbers between the graticule and the outer border, ringed in green, are the UTM/WGS84 grid coordinates. They refer to the blue grid which is printed on the map itself and ARE GPS compatible.

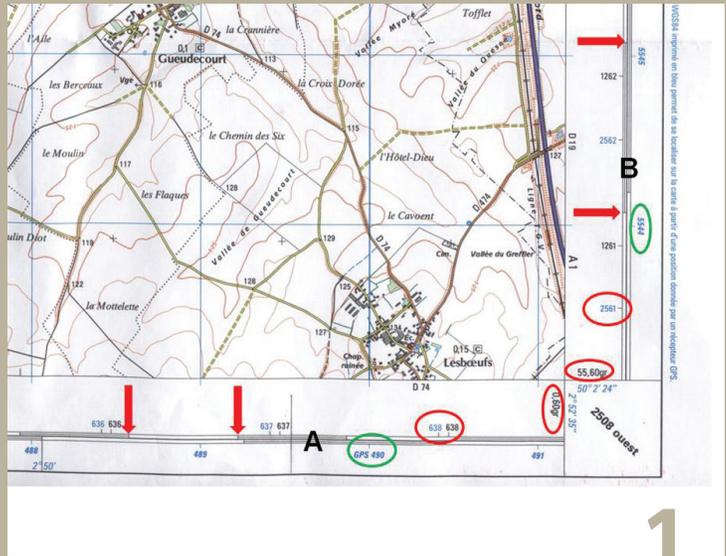
**MAP 1**

The outer graticule defines the WGS84 system. As shown on the example map:

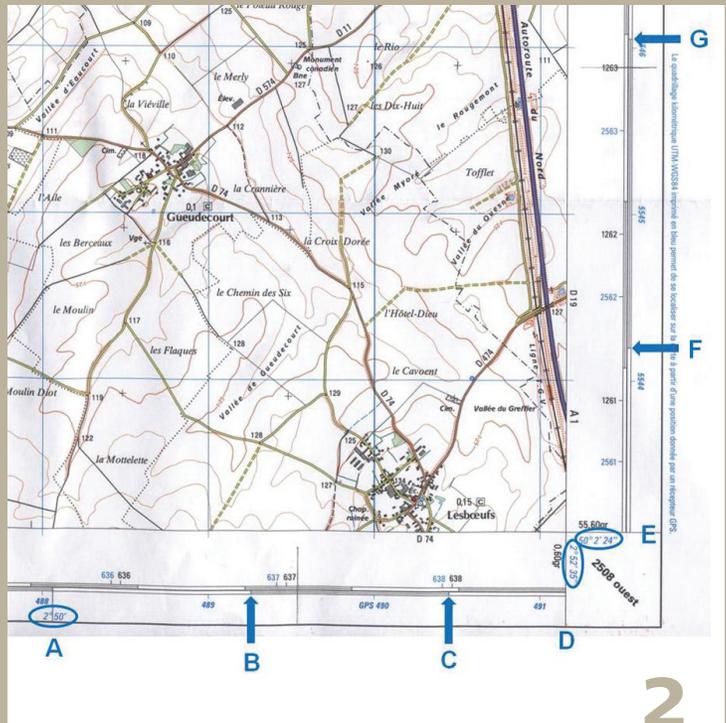
**MAP 2**

A is at 2 deg 50 mins East. Point B, where the graticule changes from an empty rectangle to one with a line in it, is at 2 deg 51 mins East. Point C at 2 deg 52 mins East and the right hand edge of the map, above D is shown as 2 deg 52 mins and 35 secs East.

The base of the map, from E is along 50 deg 2 min 24 secs North. F is 50 deg 3 mins North and G 50 deg 4 mins North. Apart from at the corners, latitude and



1

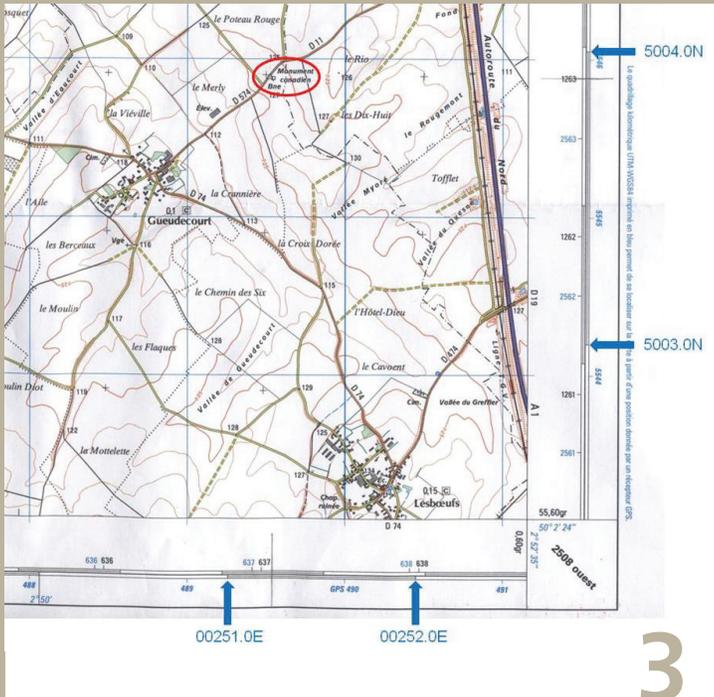


2

longitude is only marked every 5 mins north and east. Note that North and East are implied – the Galic cartographer getting his revenge for having to use an Anglo-Saxon graticule. You can also see that, because of the large scale and projection used, the UTM grid and the latitude

and longitude graticule are to all practical extents parallel.

As a practical example, what is the latitude and longitude of the Canadian Memorial 1km North East of Goudecourt (shown on the following picture inside the red ring)?



Answer: The road/track junction at spot height 117

This is all very well in a well mapped country but what if you are trying to locate a stand in, say, Italy? Fortunately, the Touring Club Italiano produces a series of up-to-date 1:200,000 maps, which is quite a large scale.

Road and cultural depiction, down to quite small tracks in rural areas is very good although topography is deliberately less so.

They are also now printed on a waterproof, non-tear, plastic paper. You then have GPS mapping such as tom-tom, Google Earth photography and whatever historic mapping you have obtained. Whilst GPS mapping is accurate in terms of the placement of any road, its depiction of the type of road is less so. A minor country road can be anything from a narrow but 2 car wide hard surface to a single lane, unsurfaced farm track.

Also, don't take maps in guide books as gospel truth – for example, I have come across one where the map doesn't even correspond to the accompanying photograph of the location. It is a case, therefore, of balancing sources and using the best bits from all of them.

Having looked at using maps and associated tools for navigation, and orientation on the ground, what about using them for interpretation and explanation? We are now more concerned with clarity and purpose than with strict navigational accuracy.

### MAP 3

The graticule is annotated with latitude and longitude but not in the traditional format. Instead it is the normal electronic format of degrees and decimalised minutes as one figure. IE 2 degrees 51 minutes and 0 seconds East is shown as 00251.0E.

There are three digits for the number of degrees east and west as they go to 180 degrees each way but two for degrees north and south as they only go from 0 to 90. Plus two digits for the minutes with the number of decimal places reflecting the accuracy of the system. N or S and E or W may also come before the numbers eg N5002.4 E00252.6, which is the south east corner of the map above.

By going to one place of decimals we are accepting an error of plus

or minus 100 yards in plotting. This is why we can ignore the maximum error on this map of 50 yards in assuming the meridians are parallel.

So, if we draw a pencil line, parallel to the grid, from the Memorial to the nearest graticule we can quickly interpolate it as being at 5003.9N. In the same way we arrive at 00251.2E. Both are close to the 100 yard plotting error, but as you are probably just doing it by eye and a 250 yard-wide finger (on that map) so what. In reversing this process you will get from a GPS position to where you can go from map to ground and quickly arrive at your desired destination.

As a quick test of understanding what feature are you closest to when your GPS shows you to be at: 5003.1N 00250.3E?

## MAP 4

This extract from a map in *Victory in the West Vol 1* (Ellis) shows Normandy in 1944. Whilst there is a scale of distance (not shown here) there is no graticule or grid. Hence it is not intended for navigational use. Culturally, only the main towns, railways and roads are shown.

Topographically only the major rivers and woods are shown, and terrain is depicted by just 4 layer tints at 100m intervals.

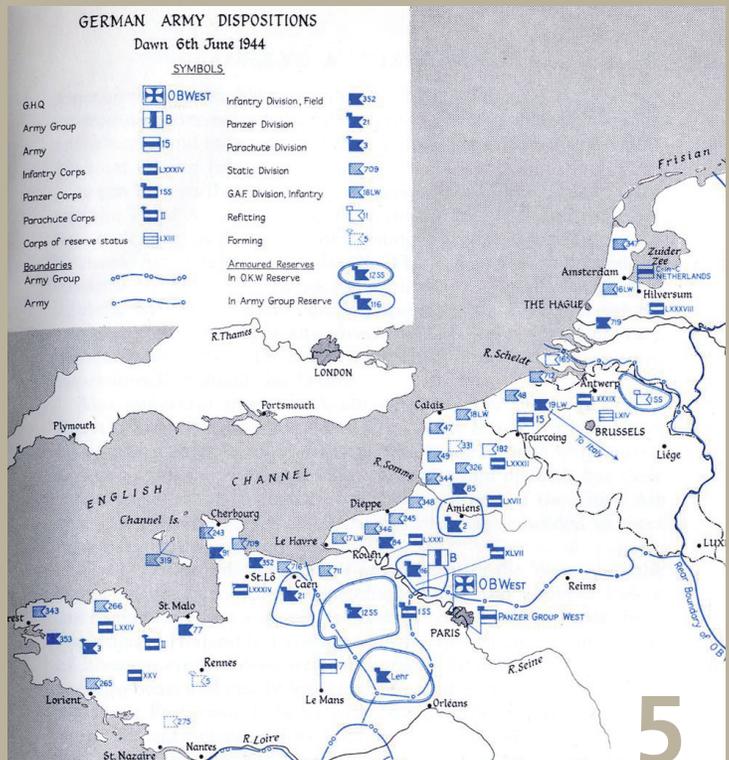
A beautifully simple and clear map it is ideal supporting material to an introduction to the topographical and environmental problems facing the D-Day commanders and planners.

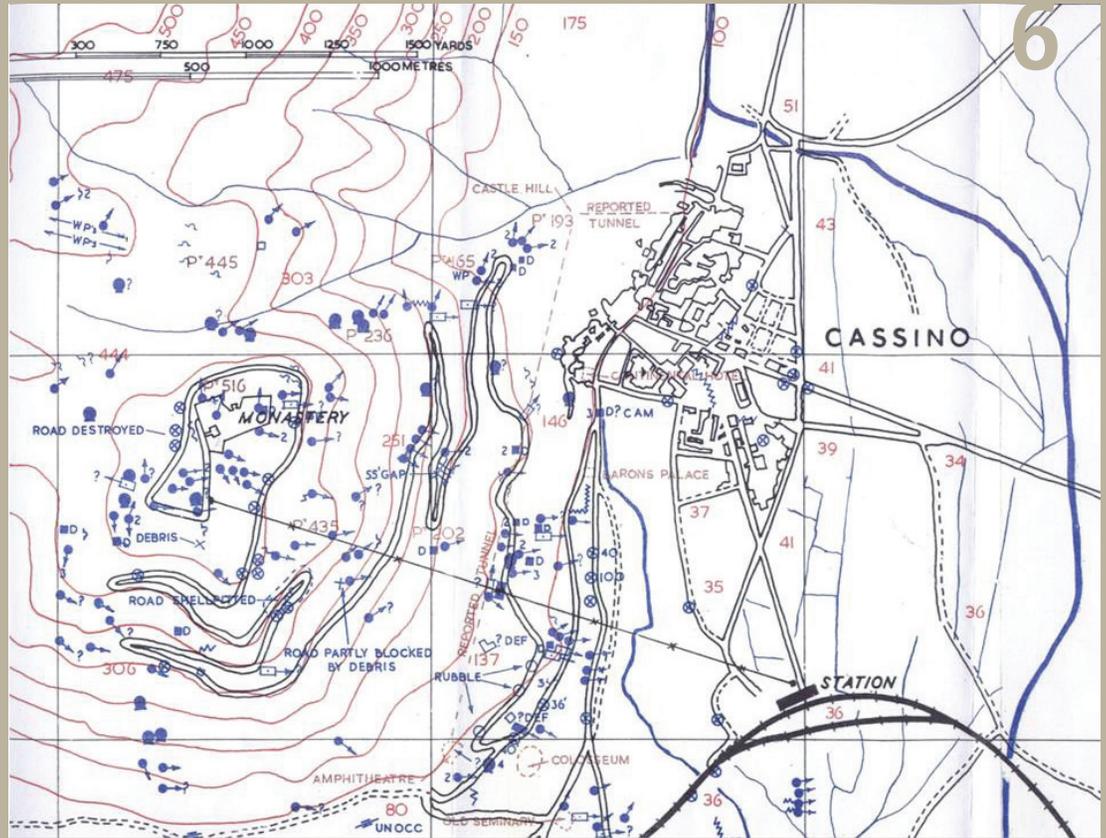


## MAP 5

This map is also taken from *Victory in the West*. Again, it has no scale and is limited to coastlines, major rivers, towns and international borders. With a good key, it provides a clear depiction of the location of German units down to Division on D-Day. It could be used for example to build on the previous map, or to inform a discussion on the Deception plan for OVERLORD.

What it does not show however (apart from refitting and forming divisions) is the state of those units. It is also retrospective in that 352 Inf Div is shown in place west of Bayeux





## MAP 6

The last map extract is from the Air Historical Branch Narrative of the 1944-45 Italian Campaign. Although not shown on the map, the scale is about 1:13000; a very large scale map. The blue symbology shows enemy positions and obstructions taken from aerial photography just 5 days before it was issued on 25 March 1944. The map is of enormous value to anyone guiding the battles for the town and monastery. This is not just because of the intelligence shown, but because of its accurate portrayal of topographical and cultural features at the time. It could form the basis for any number of stands on a tour of the Cassino battlefield. However, the base information (topography and cultural) could also provide

the starting point for material for assignments 1, 2A and 7.

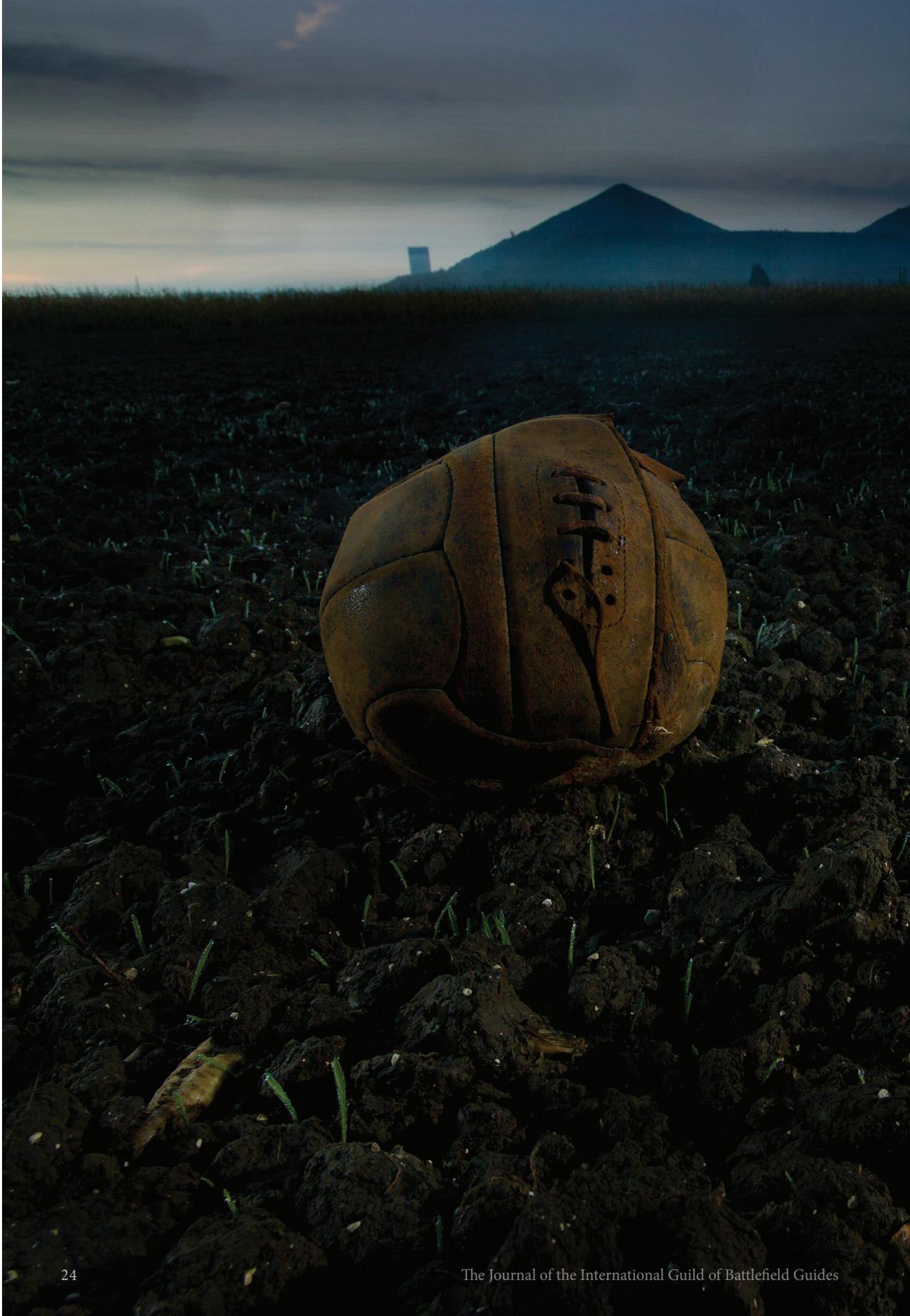
So, in summary, maps are the stock-in-trade of the battlefield guide. A basic understanding of their construction helps understand their limitations, particularly when using a mixture of datums and reference systems. Maps are incredibly flexible in terms of the scales that can be used, the level of detail and the different ways available for presenting the same information. The task facing the guide is to select what material is relevant to both the stand and the audience, and how it is to be presented.

The question is one of clarity and relevance: too much detail will swamp the audience, but too little will not achieve the objective.

There are, as always, no right or wrong answers but the examples above should provide food for thought. ■

*Christopher Finn, Badge 42, was a RAF navigator for 33 years. His last tour was in command of the Navigator and Airman Aircrew School. Chris became involved in Battlefield Tours as a member of the Directing Staff of the Joint Services' Command and Staff College, where he was instrumental in developing the use of the Staff Ride for Air Power education. On retiring from the RAF in 2005 he joined the new King's College London Air Power Studies Division, at the RAF College Cranwell.*

*Maps from author's collection.*





## LOOS By Mike St Maur Sheil

When I was a very small boy I recall being taken by my Father on what must have been one of my first trips to London to see a dusty football and was told the story of how the men of his regiment had fought in a battle when they kicked the football about.

**I had never really thought about it again until last autumn when reading a remarkable account entitled “The Big Push” by an Irish writer and poet, Patrick MacGill, telling of his time as a stretcher bearer at Loos that I came across the account of how his regiment, 18/ Batt London Regiment - “The London Irish Rifles” had kicked a football into the attack on the 25th Sept 1915, the first day of the battle of Loos.**

A quick google, a phone call and I was through to the Regimental Archivist: I told him of my 60 year old memories and asked could it be true or was this just a story my Father had told me.

“Indeed not, it is all true and in fact I am looking at the football right now”.

Quick pause whilst I went “Vroom! Vroom” and emerged a minute later in the cramped little store room which is now the LIR Museum in deepest, darkest Camberwell.

And there it was, a sadly battered and scuffed bit of leather - THE London Irish Loos Football!

We talked about it and we talked about my Father who served with 2/Batt LIR in 1939-44, whilst I skirted about the mad idea which had formed in my mind but which surely no sensible curator would ever consider in a month of Sundays.

“Would you let me take it back to Loos and photograph it on the battlefield?”

And damned if the curator, Nigel Wilkinson, lovely man that he is, didn't bat an eyelid as he could not “see any reason why not”.

And that is why a few weeks later I found myself sliding about in a muddy maize field just before “kick-off” time at sunrise, trying to keep the blessed object dry, my equipment clean and feeling the hairs on my neck prickle as I played “Killaloe” on my iPod.

Let MacGill set the scene.

*I peered over the top. The air blazed with star-shells, and Loos in front stood out like a splendid dawn. A row of impassive faces, sleep-heavy they looked, lined our parapet; bayonets, silver-spined, stood up*

*over the sandbags; the dark bays, the recessed dug-outs with their khaki-clad occupants dimly defined in the light of little candles took on fantastic shapes.*

*Many of our men were asleep, and maybe dreaming. What were their dreams? . . . I could hear faint, indescribable rustlings as the winds loitered across the levels in front; a light shrapnel shell burst, and its smoke quivered in the radiant light of the star-shells. Showers and sparks fell from high up and died away as they fell. Like lives of men, I thought, and again that feeling of proximity to the enemy surged through me.*

*A boy came along the trench carrying a football under his arm. “What are you going to do with that?” I asked.*

*“It's some idea, this,” he said with a laugh.*

*“We're going to kick it across into the German trench.”*

*“It is some idea,” I said. “What are our chances of victory in the game?”*

*“The playing will tell,” he answered.*

*... It was now grey day, hazy and moist, and the thick clouds of pale yellow smoke curled high in space and curtained the dawn off from the scene of war. The word was passed along. “London Irish lead on to assembly trench.” The assembly trench was in front, and there the scaling ladders were placed against the parapet, ready steps to death, as someone remarked. I had a view of the men swarming up the ladders when I got there, their bayonets held in steady hands, and at a little distance off a football swinging by its whang from a bayonet standard.*

*The company were soon out in the open marching forward. The enemy's guns were busy, and the rifle and maxim bullets ripped the sandbags. The infantry fire was wild but of slight intensity. The enemy could not see the attacking party. But, judging by the row, it was hard to think that men could weather the leaden storm in the open.*

*The big guns were not so vehement now, our artillery had no doubt played havoc with the hostile batteries. . . . I went to the foot of a ladder and got hold of a rung. A soldier in front was clambering*

*across. Suddenly he dropped backwards and bore me to the ground; the bullet caught him in the forehead. ....I flung my stretcher over the parapet, and, followed by my comrade stretcher-bearer, I clambered up the ladder and went over the top.*

*THE moment had come when it was unwise to think. The country round Loos was like a sponge; the god of war had stamped with his foot on it, and thousands of men, armed, ready to kill, were squirted out on to the level, barren fields of danger. ... The maxims went crackle like dry brushwood under the feet of a marching host. A bullet passed very close to my face like a sharp, sudden breath; a second hit the ground in front, flicked up a little shower of dust, and ricocheted to the left, hitting the earth many times before it found a resting place. The air was vicious. with bullets; a million invisible birds flicked their wings very close to my face. Ahead the clouds of smoke, sluggish low-lying fog, and fumes of bursting shells, thick in volume, receded towards the German trenches, and formed a striking background for the soldiers who were marching up a low slope towards the enemy's parapet, which the smoke still hid from view. There was no haste in the forward move, every step was taken with regimental precision, and twice on the way across the Irish boys halted for a moment to correct their alignment. Only at a point on the right there was some confusion and a little irregularity. Were the men wavering? No fear! The boys on the right were dribbling the elusive football towards the German trench.*

*By the German barbed wire entanglements were the shambles of war. Here our men were seen by the enemy for the first time that morning. Up till then the foe had fired erratically through the oncoming curtain of smoke; but when the cloud cleared away, the attackers were seen advancing, picking their way through the wires which had been cut to little pieces by our bombardment. The Irish were now met with harrying rifle fire, deadly petrol bombs and hand grenades. Here I came across dead, dying and sorely wounded; lives maimed and finished, and all the romance and roving that makes up the life of a soldier gone for ever. Here, too, I saw, bullet-riddled, against one of the spider webs known as chevaux de frise, a limp lump of pliable leather, the football which the boys had kicked across the field.*

The London Irish did very well on that day: they took their objectives which were basically what is

now the civilian cemetery on the west side of Loos and pressed on through the village and some even reached Hill 70 where they held on until relieved.

MacGill survived the day though he was later shot and invalided out in 1915. Born in 1889 he left school and was effectively bought, aged 12, at a "hiring fair" in Strabane to work on a farm. He taught himself to read and write whilst working as a labourer on the roads, hence his nick-name of "The Navy Poet". After the war he went and lived in America where he died in 1963.

The LIR kicked off about 400 yards south east of Dud Corner CWGC: drive back towards Loos and take the first turning on the right and after 250 yards turn right again immediately past a house and drive up the road for about 250 yards. You are now on the front line where MacGill stood with his "sleep heavy comrades": taking the road downhill as 12 o'clock they headed off at 11 o'clock.

So next time you visit Loos, go stand on that muddy field. Let MacGill set the scene and then set off to the beat of "Garryowen" along that crazy charge into history.

As the man said, "it was some idea" and the playing is worth the telling. ■



Mike St Maur Sheil

*I would like to express my gratitude to the Nigel Wilkinson, the Curator of the London Irish Regimental Museum for his trust and generosity in allowing me to take this amazing relic back to its home ground.*

*Also I would like to acknowledge the amazing work done by Ms Yvette Fletcher of the Leather Conservation Centre in Northampton who recently conserved the football without in any way altering its appearance.*

*Photograph: westernfrontphotography.com*

# THE BATTLE OF GRAVENEY MARSHES By Steve Smith

If I asked you where the last battle fought on British soil was I am sure that you would tell me that it was the Battle of Culloden fought on 16 April 1746 or the perhaps you would state it was the failed French attempt to land 1,200 troops at Fishguard on 23rd February 1797. But what if told you that 'technically' the final engagement was fought in WWII in Kent and during the Battle of Britain? This article is designed to provide you with a tale that, although it does not involve two massive armies clashing together, it does make for an interesting story and involves a little known engagement that took place on British soil in 1940

On Friday 27th September 1940 a number of German raids were launched against London, with one being flown by a large formation of JU88s of I and II/KG77. They had planned to meet up with a fighter escort but an error in timing meant that they went in unescorted. This enabled ten squadrons from Fighter Command to hit them unopposed and the raid lost twelve bombers before their escort finally joined them. Bombers came down in Cudham, South Holmwood, East Grinstead, Horsmonden, Peshurst and Sevenoaks with another five crashing into the Channel.

heading for home. However, the aircraft had been damaged by flak over Upnor as they flew up the River Medway. They were then mauled by Spitfires from 66 and 92 Squadrons who managed to deliver the final blow east of Faversham in Kent. Ruhlandt had no choice but to force land his aircraft which he did so very skilfully on Graveney Marshes near Seasalter.



JU88

The route taken by Ruhlandt's JU88 can be tracked by witnesses on the day so that we can get an exact position as to where it ended up. A farm labourer named Eddy Goodwin was working at Monks Hill Farm. He had heard the sound of gunfire and had seen the stricken bomber losing height over the village of Graveney. He states that the bomber was flying low in a south to north direction heading towards Whitstable Bay. It was seen to pass near to Graveney Church. As it passed near to Odding Path the crew were seen to jettison the cockpit canopy and this narrowly missed another farm worker called Jack Gurr. The bomber then flew low over Graveney Hill before coming to rest a few hundred yards WSW of the Sportsman Pub and centrally between the pub and Cleve Hill.

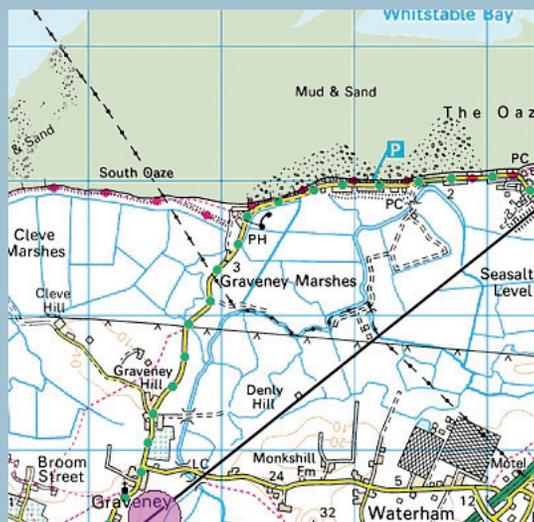
The 1st Battalion London Irish Rifles just



Left: Ruhlandt

Right: Richter

One other, JU88 3Z+EL, piloted by Unteroffizier Fritz Ruhlandt and crewed with Unteroffiziers Gotthardt Richter (Observer) and Erwin Richter (Wireless Operator) and Gefreiter Jakob Reiner (Air Gunner) were about to make history. Ruhlandt and his crew had managed to get to London and drop their payload of 4000Ibs before



happened to be billeted in this pub and led by their C.O., Lieutenant Colonel J R J Macnamara; they rushed out to capture the crew. The official British version is that as the men of the London Irish approached the aircraft they were fired at by the crew. A diary entry at the time, completed by Squadron Leader Laurence Irving, an RAF Intelligence Officer, states the following,

*'September 28th. Went off early to see the above JU88. At crash scene met Col Macnamara and Divisional Commander. The former told me that he happened to be near the sportsman Inn. The crew of E/A got out and opened fire with two machine guns and a sub machine gun on his platoon, who were preparing to take charge of the aircraft. Colonel Macnamara deployed his men and advanced across 300 yards of absolutely flat country, cut up with dykes. When they go to within 100 yards of the E/A the crew waved a white rag. As the troops approached, however, one of the Germans made a dart for the aircraft whereupon the Sergeant dashed in, loosing off his revolver. In this melee three of the crew were slightly wounded but the aircraft was not fired.'*

What is more, as the Germans were led away, one of them was overheard saying that the aircraft would 'go up' at any moment. Captain John Kelly Cantopher then dashed back to the aircraft and found an explosive charge which he threw into a dyke. This preserved the aircraft which had only been on the Luftwaffe's books since July 1940 and carried a new bombsight.

For this brave action Cantopher was awarded the George Medal which appeared in the London Gazette on 22nd January 1941.

However, there are various accounts that dispute that any battle took place and most importantly the crew itself dispute the fact. Ruhlandt wrote to Andy Saunders, an aviation archaeologist, in December 1987 stating, 'This was my first mission I had flown with this crew, apart from Erwin Richter. Personally I had flown missions in Poland, France and some reconnaissance flights over England. My captivity was spent with my comrades in Canada where I was eventually released on 6th December 1946.'

As you can see Ruhlandt makes no mention of any skirmish with British troops. Secondly Richter also wrote to Saunders in 1987 and stated,

*'During an anti-aircraft engagement over London one engine failed. As a result we were separated from our unit and immediately attacked by three fighters. Ruhlandt dived at once, and as he neared the ground the second engine failed as the result of fighter fire. There was no longer any opportunity to get out, as we were so near the ground, so we had to make an emergency landing. During the fighter attack I was wounded in both eyes by glass splinters. Uffz. Ruhlandt was wounded by a shot through the ankle on the ground. The other crew members remained unwounded. A detachment arrested us and took us into custody and we were well treated.'*

So other than mentioning that Ruhlandt was wounded on the ground there is no mention of any sort of action by the crew which is also backed up by a report made by the Air Intelligence Branch, known as an AII(K), which states,

*'The crew are also said to have fired at people trying to prevent them destroying their aircraft and coming to arrest them; this, however, cannot be confirmed, and is completely denied by the crew... During this engagement three of the crew were wounded.'*

However, there are also other witnesses who

also state that they did hear shots being fired. John Dann, who was 13 year old schoolboy in 1940, was fishing in a dyke with a friend and saw the plane dive into the fields. In a recent interview he stated,

*'It was all a bit of a surprise, and was quite exciting. The soldiers told us to lay on the ground and we heard the shots. I can see it all so clearly, and can even remember that two of the Germans had blonde hair. They were so arrogant. I wasn't scared more intrigued as to what was going on. Little did I know the significance of what was happening in front of me, that I was witnessing history unfold.'*

Also present were sisters Sheila Gillham and Brenda Hitches, who were aged 10 and 8 at the time. Their father Charles Walden stored the downed bomber in his garage until it could be looked at by air intelligence. Sheila states,

*'We lived half-a-mile away at Walden's Stores. We heard the machine guns making a terrible noise and got on our bikes to have a closer look. When the plane came down, the Germans started firing. We could see it across the marshes but couldn't get nearer because the Army blocked off the road.'*

We can argue that the machine gun fire was coming from overhead or from AA sites as there were plenty of these around the area during the battle. There is also the suggestion that the Germans were actually firing into their own aircraft in an attempt to destroy it. But we will never really know the truth.



*The Sportsman Pub*

On Sunday 26th September 2010, I attended a ceremony at the Sportsman Inn with my father Brian Smith and my youngest daughter Eden. Here we stood on an extremely windy and rainy



day with a large number of locals and members of London Irish Rifles Regimental Association led by Major General Corran Purdon as well as serving members of the armed forces and cadets. The ceremony was overseen the Lord Mayor of Canterbury Pat Todd and a short drumhead service was led by Rev. Donald Lugg. The service also remembered the fact that the London Irish had received their second battle honour the day before 95 years ago on 25th September 1915 at Loos. During this short but very moving service we stood and remembered the engagement and a two minute silence was held to remember all of those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice before a plaque to commemorate the battle was presented to the current landlord Phil Harris.

My most poignant memory of that day will be that it was mentioned that after the engagement the London Irish took their German PoWs to the pub and they had a pint together. Here the Germans gave the men of the London Irish some souvenirs which to me just highlights to me how futile war is when both friend and foe alike come face to face with each to see that in reality we are just the same. ■

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*Steve started guiding in his spare time in 2002 and qualified as a badged guide in April 2004. He conducts private and organised tours and has worked as a guide for Holts and Galina in the past. He also assists other people in tracing their relative's military history in both wars. He lives with his family in Norfolk where his day job is a police officer and he currently oversees the initial training and development of student officers.*

*Photography from author's collection.*



# THE BRITISH ARMY – THE JEWISH EXPERIENCE

by Daniel Levy

The modern Jewish Community in England has existed since the mid 1600s – the initial nucleus being Dutchmen of Spanish and Portuguese origin who settled in London. Since then, they have had a proud history within the country's armed services, and military operations. In 1805, a Jewish friend of Nelson's: Aaron Cardozo sailed from England to Gibraltar to help with the preparations for the Battle of Trafalgar by provisioning a number of garrisons for what we all know was one of the greatest naval battles that took place during the Napoleonic Wars.

In 1815, it is known that many Jews served with Wellington at Waterloo, and a thanksgiving service was held at Bevis Marks Synagogue in the East of London after the victory was announced. It is known that Jews fought in the Crimea, India and South Africa during the Boer Wars (in fact, George Edward Halford – a member of Lauderdale Road Synagogue and the City of London Imperial Volunteers was killed on 15th May 1900), but it was only really during and after the First World War that their involvement was properly documented for posterity.

When the First World War reached Britain at the beginning of August 1914, the country was swept by a wave of patriotism and the Jewish community was no different, with many of its members joining up. Over the course of the war, Jews served in all units with a total of 1596 honours were received by them. The breakdown is as follows:

- 5 Victoria Crosses
- 15 Orders of St Michael and St George
- 49 Distinguished Service Orders
- 26 Military Crosses
- 11 Distinguished Flying Crosses
- 14 Orders of the British Empire
- 85 Distinguished Conduct Medals
- 329 Military Medals
- 66 Meritorious Service Medals
- 336 Mentions in Despatches
- 138 Foreign Honours
- 155 Mentioned in Home Despatches

In total, it is estimated that 50,000 Jews served with Empire Forces during the First World War of which a sad 2425 never came home, and 6500 were wounded. A particularly large number of Jewish men served as officers at the time, a fact directly attributable to the existence of the Jewish Lads' Brigade. A Jewish youth club with origins in East London, the Lads' Brigade was similar to modern cadet units with members wearing uniforms that were inspected at meetings, drill and military-style activities such as shooting. When former members entered basic training, their skills were immediately recognised and they were soon promoted. An extraordinary 89% of Jewish officers were past members of the Jewish Lads' Brigade!

Under the Ottoman Empire, Palestine [ modern Israel ] was home to both Jews and Arabs but the Turks brutally oppressed any attempts by any peoples within their Empire to establish a national identity, and as a result Palestinian Jews aligned themselves with the British. They acted as spies and couriers in the Nili spy ring, feeding vital information to British military intelligence, but not without danger. A number of Nili members were executed on the beaches of Gaza City by the Turkish in reprisals throughout the war.

By 1915, a large enough number of Palestinian Jews had volunteered for their own unit to be formed:

the Zion Mule Corps. Initially, an auxiliary unit for transporting weapons and food, it first served at Gallipoli in 1915. Owing to a lack of fit-for-fighting troops, it was at the Dardanelles that where they fought with distinction, much to the surprise of their gentile commander: Lieutenant Colonel John Henry Patterson, DSO.



**A First World War Jewish Australian CWGC headstone**

In 1917, the 38th and 29th battalions of the Royal Fusiliers were created to become the Jewish Legion. Formed from a nucleus of the Zion Mule Corps and Russians émigrés, from June 1918, the Legion fought in the Jordan Valley, some 20 miles north of Jerusalem in Israel for the liberation of their national homeland from Turkish rule. Suffering some thirty deaths, they were present at the Battle of Megiddo in mid-September

1918 in what is considered to have been the decisive victory on the Ottoman Front.

On 3rd September 1939, England declared war on Germany. Under the rule of the Nazis, many Jews came to the United Kingdom as refugees, and soon seized the opportunity to fight against their former oppressors by enlisting in large numbers. Initially, whilst native British Jews were fully integrated into normal units, Austro-Germans were known as “The King’s Most Loyal Enemy Aliens” and served in special companies in an auxiliary role, most often within the Pioneer Corps. Initially not trusted to fight against Germans, they proved their worth after the retreat from Dunkirk when holding out in the face of the Nazi advance.

In September 1940, 15 Palestinian Jewish battalions were formed in the British Army and served in Greece the next year. The East Kent Regiment (Buffs) included a Jewish unit that was stationed in the Middle East, but mainly limited to sentry duties guarding airfields.

The Royal Army Service Corps also contained Palestinian Jewish elements. 462 General Transport Company was one of these. With British officers and senior NCOs and mainly Palestinian Jews in other ranks, they established a reputation for efficiency and getting the job done – whatever it may have been. A company with responsibilities for transporting water, and a workshop soon sprang up but they were only small units swamped by the mass of the organisation that they were under.

Their main desire was to fight under the Jewish flag was not being realised, and going against orders they painted Stars of David on

side of any vehicles that they were driving. Although frowned upon, this was largely ignored. The Jews serving with the RASC in certainly proved their worth – despite frequently disobeying orders. In any major city they passed through, they would go missing for up to several days at a time, and were later discovered to have been helping to rehabilitate an ancient Jewish community that had been shattered during a brief, but bitter Nazi occupation. Vandalised synagogues were repaired, and local children taught some basic Hebrew.

in the Western Desert Campaign.

One of their sub-units was the SIG: Special Interrogation Group. The idea of the SIG was the brainchild of Captain Herbert Cecil A. Buck, MC – an officer in the Punjabi Guards. An Oxford linguist, he was captured by the Afrika Korps in Egypt, but succeeded in escaping captivity by speaking German and wearing the appropriate uniform. He realised how useful was the ability to pass as a German behind enemy lines and soon after was commanding the newly formed



**Three members of the SIG, from left to right: Don Cohen, Philip Kogel and Dolph Zenter**

In 1940, No. 51 Commando was created. Raised from 300 Jewish volunteers mainly of Austro-German birth, No. 1 Company, Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps, they struck fear into the hearts of Italians during the East African Campaign in Ethiopia and Eritrea. In 1941 when the main threat in Africa came from Germans in the Northern deserts of Egypt and Libya, all Commando units in the region were amalgamated. The new Middle East Commando was the only British unit that achieved considerable success in the deadlock

SIG. Almost exclusively Jewish bar two men, their members were all fluent in German – many being born there and often having service with No 51. Commando under their belts. Other troops were directly recruited from shadowy anti-British resistance movements of Palestine, most notably the Palmach, Irgun and Haganah but also the French Foreign Legion and Free Czech Forces. The activities of the SIG were not well recorded, so there is some doubt over how many members they had, but best estimates are between 20 and 38.



**Jewish Brigade  
recruiting poster from Israel**

Once formed, the unit was taken to a remote desert base near Suez by Captain Buck, and spent weeks in complete isolation learning how to “become” Germans. Drill, weapons training and marching songs were all done in a totally Teutonic manner. For their missions, Afrika Korps uniforms, arms, pay books, cigarettes and even fictitious love letters from sweethearts in the Fatherland were supplied. The SIG was always accompanied by Walter Essner and Herbert Brueckner, two non-Jewish Germans who had been POWs, and subsequently recruited to be double agents with the objective of adding a touch of authenticity to the unit.

On 3rd June 1942 the SIG received their first orders: to assist the Special Air Service on Operation Agreement – a plan to blow up Luftwaffe airfields 100 miles west of Tobruk that were threatening the supply lines to the island of Malta. Driving captured German vehicles and wearing the uniforms of the Afrika Korps’ military police, they set up road blocks to gain intelligence from passing transports. The SIG achieved great

success until on one raid Herbert Brueckner ran away and betrayed the unit. Most of the members were captured and executed.

On 13th and 14th September, their final mission was to act in support of a raid on Tobruk itself, with the aim of destroying the port there that served as an artery pumping supplies to the Axis slogging it out against the Desert Rats and Monty. Wearing German uniforms, four SIG members along with Captain Buck (there was such a small number of men because Buck suspected that German intelligence was aware of the SIG and wanted to minimise potential casualties) drove three trucks loaded with members of various commando units masquerading as POWs. At 10:30pm, the RAF began bombing the city to soften-up various defensive positions prior to the commandos attacking them, and then all hell broke loose. Most of the original infiltrating Allied troops were killed, and out of 16 MTBs landing reinforcements, only 2 succeeded, and even then only partially. It was a massacre, with little sense of order. As the exact number of SIG men involved in the raid is unknown, it is impossible to verify casualties but at least two were killed. Afterwards, surviving members of the SIG were transferred to the Pioneer Corps afterwards. Jewish commandos next had a major appearance in the Battle for Normandy, starting on 6th June 1944 with D-Day. No.3 (X) Troop, No.10 Commando was made up of enemy aliens, including a large percentage of Austro-German Jews. Rarely fighting on its own, X Troop’s members were attached to other specialist units and acted as combat translators. A typical ruse would be to find a solitary

sentry who was coming to the end of long guard duty and call out in German, “Hey come here!” or “Help me, my leg is broken!”

More often than not, the sentry would investigate, and was then kidnapped and sent on to intelligence. Because of the dangerous nature of such missions, many Austro-German Jews recorded their religion as Christian, if anything with the army. A problem arising from this is that all too often, when killed in action they were wrongly buried under crosses. Currently, AJEX (The Association of Jewish Ex Servicemen and Women) is trying to have such stones re-engraved, but the CWGC refuses to allow this to happen without permission from the deceased’s family. And tragically, most of the time they were lost in the dark years of the Holocaust never to come out. X Troop suffered 21 men killed and a further 22 wounded out of its total 65, giving it the unhappy distinction of one the heaviest losses of any British military unit had in the war.

On July 3rd 1944, the Jewish Brigade Group was created. Part of the 8th Army, with 5000 men organised into the first three battalions of the Palestine Regiment and the 200th Field Regiment of the Royal Artillery as well as elements of the Royal Corps of Signals, Royal Engineers and Royal Army Service Corps, it was commanded by Brigadier Ernest Benjamin – a Canadian Jew. Most of the men of the Jewish Brigade had been waiting for years to exact revenge on the Nazis, especially those who had left Germany as refugees in the early days of tyranny there.

They had their chance in the Spring Offensive of 1945, when they were thrown into action against the elite 4th Parachute Division under the

command of Generalieutenant Trettner. They fought like lions, striking fear into the hearts of their enemy. Often, they would go on seemingly suicidal missions but complete them, despite heavy losses out of sheer ideological conviction. They suffered terrible casualties, and 32 are buried together in the same plots at Ravenna War Cemetery, not far from Bologna in Northern Italy. At the end of the war, when it came they were stationed close to the former Yugoslavian, Austrian and German borders. From there, until their disbanding in 1946 after the war had ended, many members formed squads that roamed towns,

Armed Forces, and after attachment to the Special Operations Executive (SOE) parachuted into occupied Europe between 1943 and 1945. Their mission: to organise local resistance against the Nazis. Of 250 original volunteers, 110 underwent training and 32 were eventually parachuted behind enemy lines. They were in France, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and Austria. 12 were eventually captured and 7 killed including Hannah Szenes (pronounced Senesh).

Hannah was born in 1921 in Budapest and moved to Palestine in 1939, working on the Kibbutzim

and was arrested by Hungarian gendarmes who found her radio transmitter. Taken to prison, she was tortured in an effort to find her radio codes she was tortured but she remained silent, even when her mother was taken into custody and threatened with a similar ordeal.

She was found guilty of treason on October 28th 1944, and shot by a firing squad on November 7th. In 1950 her remains were re-buried with full honours at the military cemetery on Mount Herzl in Israel.

The diary she kept has survived: often just brief entries:

*"The dice have rolled. I have lost"*

*"I loved the warm sunlight."*

And a simple poem in which, like so many other soldiers fighting for their country and beliefs, she displayed that extraordinary strength of the human spirit faced with certain death .

*My God, My God,  
I pray that these things never end,  
the sand and the sea,  
the rustle of the waters,  
lightning of the Heavens,  
the prayer of Man. ■*

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*Photographs and graphics from author's collection.*



**Hannah Senesh with Yoel Palgi**

looking for formed members of the SS, Gestapo and Wehrmacht and other units that were involved in atrocities against Jews. Once found, such men simply disappeared, having been tortured, "tried" by brigades and executed in revenge for past crimes. It is estimated that thousands died in this way. Although the military authorities knew what was happening, they turned a blind eye to it.

Less well known were the Jewish parachutists of Palestine. Zionists who had immigrated to Israel, they volunteered to join the British

(collective farms). In 1941 she joined the Haganah (paramilitary Jewish army seeking for an independent Israel) and in 1943, the Women's Auxiliary Air Force as an Aircraftwoman 2nd Class and went to Egypt for paratrooper training with the SOE.

In March 1944 she was parachuted in Yugoslavia with Yoel Palgi and Peretz Goldstein where they joined a partisan group. After landing, they learned that the Germans had occupied Hungary and decided not to go

For some reason Hannah persisted

# FAUGH AN BALLACH!

## Clearing the Way: 38th Irish Brigade, Sicily 1943 – The Assault on Centuripe

By Bob Darby



The history of Irish soldiery within the ranks of the British Army is as old as the army itself. Political considerations have not dampened the enthusiasm for many from Ireland to join the colours and fight with the old enemy!

My recent guiding of young recruits for the British Army on their 'Realities of War' programme has included young Irishmen not only from the North, but also from the Republic. They are carrying on a long tradition which goes back to Waterloo and beyond Proud to be Irish and proud to serve in the British Army. I spoke to one young soldier with the Irish Tricolour tattooed on his forearm and enquired as to whether that might not be appropriate to him joining the British Army. He looked at me quizzically and said 'my great grandfather fought at Ypres, my grandfather in Sicily and Italy my father in the Falklands and I am going to Afghanistan after training' The British Army is our home!' 'Oh! And my great Uncle was in the Irish Republican Army – he's the black sheep of the family!'

On asking where his grandfather had fought in Sicily he replied 'Cherry Ripe' with the Faughs'. I was intrigued as I had recently taken a tour to Sicily for Operation Husky and, as part of that tour had studied in some detail the capture of Centuripe or 'Cherry Ripe' as it was known to the soldiery, for the same reason Ypres was known as 'Wipers' by those who fought there.

The 38th (Irish) Brigade was created in January 1942 at the direction of Prime Minister Winston Churchill. It was inspired by earlier fighting units with the same name. Irish brigades had been formed by exiled Irish soldiers fighting in the armies of France in the 17th and 18th centuries. Thomas Meagher, who was convicted for his role in the failed Young Ireland rising of July 1848 and sentenced to transportation to Tasmania, escaped to the US and organised an Irish Brigade to fight for the Union

Army during the American Civil War (1861-65).

The creation of the Irish Brigade within the British Army was also a reminder of the time before the partition of the island of Ireland in 1922 when eight famous Irish regiments recruited mainly from the young men of Ireland. Following partition, five of these regiments were dissolved. The survivors were the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers (The Skins), the Royal Irish Fusiliers (The Faughs) and the Royal Ulster Rifles (RUR).

The new Brigade were fairly representative of a British Infantry Brigade of the period being composed of a Regular Army battalion the 1st Battalion Royal Irish Fusiliers, a Territorial battalion 2nd Battalion The London Irish Rifles, and war service battalion of war service only conscripted soldiers, the 6th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.

Following the outbreak of the 2nd World War in September 1939, the 1st Battalion Royal Irish Fusiliers joined the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). When the German Army attacked through the Ardennes in May 1940, the BEF was moved forward into Belgium to meet the oncoming German forces, but the German Army unexpectedly broke through the French defensive lines and the British Army was outflanked and had to make a fighting retreat to Dunkirk. The Faughs were allocated the unenviable task of mounting a fighting rearguard at the La Basse Canal, thereby helping facilitate the evacuation of the bulk of the British Army from Dunkirk.

The 1st Battalion was, nevertheless, severely mauled, and was rebuilt with new reinforcements. In 1942, the battalion joined the 38th (Irish) Brigade as it prepared for the invasion of North Africa and served with great distinction there, and in Sicily and Italy.

The first commander of the brigade was The O'Donovan, chief of the O'Donovan clan and a 1st World War veteran who had won a Military Cross (MC) for bravery. The O'Donovan was succeeded by Nelson Russell, previously commander of the 6th Royal Irish Rifles who had been born in Lisburn in Northern Ireland. Nelson had been awarded the MC during the 1st World War and was capped playing cricket for Ireland in the 1920s.

On its creation, the Irish Brigade was allocated to the 6th Armoured Division. The division was prepared to participate in the Allied invasion of French North

Narrow streets  
of Centuripe



Africa where American and British troops were to fight together for the first time since the US joined the war against Germany and its allies.

In March 1943 they became part of the 78th 'Battle Axe' Division after replacing a Guards Brigade and went on to fight with great distinction during the campaign in Tunisia with the British 1st Army. For Operation Husky the invasion of Sicily, the 78th Division were placed initially in the strategic reserve to reinforce Montgomery's 8th Army. They were not a 'Monty' Division. He always favoured his own 8th Army units when selecting troops for battle.

The 38th Irish Brigade were fairly representative of a British Infantry Brigade of the period being composed of a Regular Army battalion the 1st Battalion Royal Irish Fusiliers, a Territorial battalion 2nd Battalion The London Irish Rifles, and a war service only battalion of mainly conscripted soldiers, the 6th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.

The landings in Sicily took place on 9/10th July 1943 and initially made good ground with Patton's 7th US Army in the west part of Sicily and Montgomery's 8th Army in the east. Both armies were to meet at Messina on the straits overlooking the Italian mainland. However, axis troops in Sicily were

reinforced by German Fallschirmjager of the 3rd Parachute Regiment who parachuted en masse on to Catania airfield only 24 hours before a similar British airborne landing to seize the Primosole bridge ahead of the advancing 8th Army. This assault was a failure due to the quick reaction of German units in the Catania area who seized back the bridge and established a blocking line from Catania eastwards across the Catania Plain towards the mountain villages of Centuripi, Regalbuto, Assoro and Agira, and then north towards the coast. This became the Etna Line

In some places this defensive line was established on some of the few river lines in Sicily, the Diattano and Salso. They were not so much raging torrents as muddy streams and in some places, dry river beds. However, they provided a formidable obstacle to the passage of wheeled or tracked vehicles especially when defended by fire. However, it was the mountain top villages and towns that the Germans set about defending.

Sicilians, although a political part of the Italian state, were very much a law unto themselves. Over more than 2000 years they had seen numerous invading armies come and go and had sort protection in their mountainous terrain. Centuripe was one of many of these lofty hill top towns. Built on a 2,500'



steep sided feature the approaches to the town were limited to three possible routes.

At the height of the campaign the German General Hans Von Hube an Eastern Front veteran was sent to Sicily to take command of all axis forces, after



**Looking north from the heights of Centuripe over the valley of the Salso/Simeto to Adrano on the lower slopes of Mount Etna**

the surrender of the Italian state on the 24th July 1943. The Italian dictator 'Il Duce' Mussolini being deposed as head of state.

Against overwhelming allied superiority on land, sea and air, Hube sought to withdraw all German troops from Sicily. To do so he needed to delay the advancing Americans and British to allow an orderly withdrawal of axis forces to the Italian mainland across the Straits of Messina.

Hube established a linear defence based on the road routes and towns around the base of Mount Etna, The Etna Line, protected by a forward line or 'Hauptkampflinie' of defended mountain top villages.

The British 8th Army had stalling before Catania. Montgomery therefore moved his axis of advance westwards across the Catania plain with a view to outflanking the German defenders in front of him. He also realised he needed to break the Etna Line to stop the Germans using the lateral routes around Etna to re-enforce their mountain garrisons. The town of Adrano at the base of Mount Etna sat across the main German supply route and therefore became a key objective. However before Adrano could be taken the heights of Centuripe, the cornerstone of

the 'Hauptkampflinie' had to be taken. This task fell to General Eveleigh's 78th 'Battle Axe' Division of which the Irish Brigade formed part. Monty now called forward his strategic reserve.

On the 25th July 1943 the 78th Battle Axe Division landed in Sicily immediately and deployed forward to south side of the Dittaino river. In July the river was not a major obstacle to infantry on foot. However in order to cross with vehicles the town of Catenanuova on the northern side had to be taken before any further progress could be made towards their main objective of Centuripe. This was successfully accomplished by the 1st Canadian Brigade whilst the 36th Brigade of the 78th Division passed around the town to seize the high ground to the north and the foothills below Centuripe.

Much was known about the defence and defenders of Centuripe from documents and maps taken from a captured German officer. It is now known that at the time this was a cover story to protect Ultra, the code name for the deciphering of transmitted German messages. Ultra information was very rarely distributed below Army level in order to protect its existence. Montgomery and Alexander, the 18th Army Commander would have been made aware of the source but not General Eveleigh.



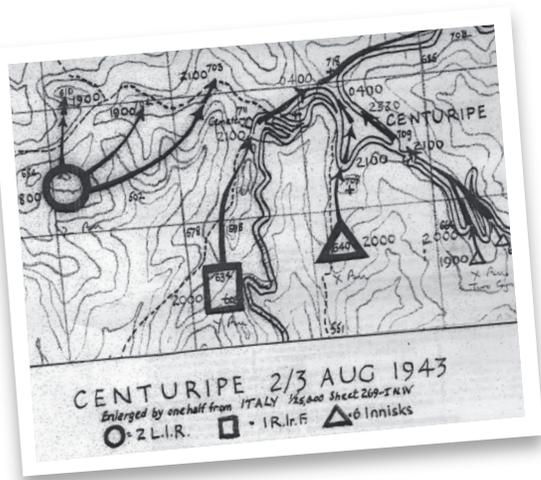
**The river Diattano crossed by the Irish Brigade on the way to their Assembly area below Centuripe**

The intercepted information confirmed the strategic importance of Centuripe and Adrano together with future German intentions was passed to Eveleigh. He selected his 36th Division initially to carry out the assault.

The defenders of Centuripe were also known to be elements of both the Herman Goering Division and paratroopers of the 3rd Fallschirmjager Regiment regarded as the best enemy troops in Sicily. They had been given time to prepare their defences well. The only hairpin road up the southern slopes of Centuripe had been cratered and mined. All likely approached routes were covered by automatic fire much of it on fixed lines. The village itself was to be defended from house to house with the narrow streets of this ancient village covered by fire.

All through the hot dusty day of the 1st August the advance continued at a slow rate and a further battalion from the 11th Brigade the Northhamptons, were brought into the attack. By mid afternoon yet another battalion joined the attack The East Surreys. That afternoon Evelegh came forward to assess the situation. He was determined that Centuripe must be taken that night before the Germans could bring up re-enforcements from the Salso valley behind Centuripe. He was in no doubt that the ferocity and speed of his attack had caught the Germans off balance.

As day gave way to night the Division gained a foothold on three route ways up to the village itself. On the western side the East Surreys ascended a mule track to occupy high ground overlooking the village cemetery. In the centre adjacent to the only road up the feature the Argylls hung on taking cover from view behind bushes and cactus – cover from view but not from fire. All through the night the attackers movements were lit up by flares fired from the heights above them. Centuripe was not to be entered that night.



Evelegh had originally scheduled his attack on Centuripe for the night of 1/2 August using his 36th Brigade but so successful and quick had been the move forward from Catenanuova that he decided to bring it forward the time for the 24 hours in order to pre-empt German reinforcements moving into the village.

On the night of the 31st July the 36th Brigade advanced towards a Start Line for the attack 3 miles north of Catenanuova. They were soon in trouble from German machine guns and mortars manned by German paratroopers who allowed them to pass before opening with fire. They had hidden in caves on the undulating ground between Catenanuova and Centuripe engaging from both close and long distances. The artillery supporting the attack was from 138 Field Regiment RA was quick and accurate. The CO of the Argylls the reserve battalion of 36 Brigade commented 'I asked my artillery Forward Observation Officer (FOO) if he could engage the target I pointed out to him and he replied he could. I was just turning away to my wireless when 24 rounds arrived on target followed by 240 rounds landing in the same place. This instantaneous response spelt the end for the German guns which had been holding up my advance'



**The mule track half way to the summit of the three hill tops which was the axis of attack by the London Irish**

Throughout the 2nd August steady pressure was maintained against the German defenders and the five attack battalions inched forward. Men were very tired some having been in action for almost 48 hours. The defenders were suffering even worse, having been in continuous action for 4 days because of their fighting withdrawal from Catenanuova to the heights of Centuripe. Although Evelegh's attack had not succeeded with its ultimate goal he had pressed the enemy to such an extent that he felt they were

close to breaking them. Enter the Irish Brigade.

Eveleigh now wanted to break in to Centuripe before last light on the 2nd August in order that his Division could have a base from which he could clear the town of the enemy. The London Irish passed through the East Surreys along the three hills to the west of Centuripe whilst the Royal Irish Fusiliers push on up to the cemetery gaining a foothold there. Lastly the Inniskillings had to scale a 100 foot cliff as they approached from the east.

mortars and shells. It has been described by many as one of the most brilliant assaults in the history of the British Army.

Winston Churchill quote *"I regard the seizure of Centuripe as one of the finest feats of arms in the history of Irish soldiery"*

On the morning of the 3rd August and after the capture of Centuripe the Irish Brigade pushed forward and made a fresh attack with the Faughs. In the afternoon of the 4th August they had crossed the shallow Salso river and then again under fire the River Simeto, running along the foot of Mount Etna. By the end of that day, the 5th August the Irish Brigade had advanced 25 miles and fought in three bloody engagements since the attack on Centuripe began. Over 140 men of the Irish Brigade were to fall in the Sicilian Campaign. Mainly on the slopes of Centuripe.



**Dominating heights of Centuripe overlooking the approach of the 6th Inniskilling Fusiliers who had to make their way across the terracing at night**

Through the night of the 2nd/3rd August the Irish fought their way up through the narrow streets, slowly pushing back the paratroopers of the 3rd Parachute Regiment. Fighting was at point blank range and from house to house. Tanks from the Herman Goering Division had arrived from Adrano to support the German defenders and occupied a commanding position in the town square. These were stalked by the Irish and forced to withdraw. Much use was made of captured enemy weapons particular the German MG42 machine gun whose rapid rates of fire echoed around the town sometimes making it difficult to identify who was friend or foe. By the earlier hours of the 3rd August the Irish started to consolidate their hold on the town and at first light they could look down on the valleys of the Salso and Simeto and their ultimate objective of their Division, the town of Adrano on the slopes of Mount Etna. The capture of Centuripe was in the face of determined opposition from amongst the enemy's finest soldiers. The Irish scaled the steep terraced southern face of the feature under machine gun fire,



**Further up the route up to Centuripe for the Royal Irish Fusiliers with the volcanic massif of Mount Etna in the far distance**

From Sicily the 78th 'Battle Axe' Division went on the invasion of the Italian mainland fighting their way up the spine of Italy as part of the British 8th Army eventually finishing their war as occupation troops in post war Austria. Although their Italian campaign was every bit as difficult as Sicily it will be the storming of the heights of Centuripe for which they will always be remembered in the annals of the British Army. ■

*Bob Darby, Badge 29*

*Maps and Photographs from author's collection*

# 'BEYOND THE BEACHES'

## CPD Tour, Normandy

10-14 October 2010

By Bob Darby

**I**n October 2010 a tour was undertaken by Guild Members to ascertain if there would be any benefit in running future tours with a view to giving Guiding Members the opportunity to practise their craft in front of their peers. Any future tours could form part of the Guild Council's initiative to launch a 'Continuous Professional Development' programme or CPD. In addition to researching and presenting, it was also an opportunity to add further touring itineraries to a guiding portfolio.

All those who were to attend were asked to prepare and present on the ground a brief outline on a number of British and Canadian operations during the Battle for Normandy, culminating in the Polish/Canadian actions closing the Falaise Pocket and the destruction of much of the equipment of the German Army in Normandy. This is considered as being the end of the Battle for Normandy.

With the one exception, D Day was not covered. The events of that day are well covered by the many commercial providers of battlefield tours in Normandy. This was to be something different, to go beyond the beaches, normally the remit of military battle study groups or staff rides. If you want to provide something different in Normandy for a more discerning client or military history buffs, this may be a way forward.

After canvassing the membership, eight Members decided they would travel to Normandy and each agreed to research and present at a number of battle stands on specific operations. Our travellers were a mix of full time professional guides, part time and occasional guides. Some were Badged Members with

considerable experience of guiding in Normandy, for others it would be their first time in Normandy. One Member who had been on many battlefield tours as a client but had never guided, was keen to come along and agreed to research and present. He may have thought it would be a daunting task amongst seasoned guides but at the end of the tour it was universally agreed he acquitted himself well!

Operational briefs with notes were sent out at least four weeks before the tour in order for each Member to prepare their presentation at their nominated stand. Presentations were to be no more than 20 minutes in keeping with the strictures set down in the Guild validation programme. They were also asked to prepare and distribute any material which they regarded as being appropriate to their presentation.

The cost of the tour was kept to a minimum with only the cost of such facilities as ferry fees, tolls, fuel and accommodation to be charged collectively. All other meals were an individual responsibility. The cost of 4 days and 3 nights in Normandy tour eventually worked out at £160.00 per person. The Team

Leader, and that's what we called the Member who organised the event, had his accommodation and ferry fees paid for by the group. This was agreed by all parties. All other costs were borne by him in the same way as for the others. It worked out at about an additional £25.00 per head and was included in the total cost to each individual. This 'award' was justified on the basis of the requirement to administer and organise the tour. After all it took him away from paid employment, perhaps guiding!

Members took their own vehicles. Two were considered sufficient to move the party around. Members proposing to carry out similar tours in the future using their own vehicles are advised to ensure their vehicle insurance covers them. No remuneration should be taken so as not to invalidate any existing insurance cover which normally only includes social and domestic use. If in any doubt, check with your insurance company.

Our journey to Normandy via the Dover – Calais ferry was followed by a 175 mile drive to Caen. You might wish to consider Brittany Ferries from Portsmouth – Ouisterham. This is a 6 hour ferry crossing and although it can be a more relaxing way of getting to Normandy, it is considerably more expensive even taking into account the extra cost of fuel and tolls.

### Day One

GBG Member Joe Hamon made the first presentation on the bridges over the Dives which were blown on D Day by Royal Engineers supported by the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion and 8 PARA of 6th Airborne Division. Although a D Day objective it was worth looking at the actions around the bridges

to stop any German counterattack across the flooded Dives valley. As a former Royal Engineers officer and having spent a good part of his service life in Western Germany planning to blow bridges, Joe was able to give the group an insight as to how such tasks were to be carried out. It is not just the blowing of a bridge which makes a river line an obstacle or barrier. It needs to be reinforced by cratering road approaches and the sowing of

## Day Two

The first of our non guiding Members took the stand for Villers Bocage and described **Operation Perch**, the envelopment of Caen by the 7th Armoured Division the famous Desert Rats. In particular we stood on the high ground above Villers Bocage Point 213 on the road to Caen. It was an opportunity for all to hear his presentation on the events of the 13th June 1944,

accounts were the same. Where and who had they researched? What records had they consulted? We arrived at our own conclusions after walking the ground in some detail. However, what was recognisable was the willingness of all to pool ideas and information and arrive at a joint conclusion. On to the next stand for **Operation Epsom** 26 – 30 June 1944, and a stand on the spur at Rauray overlooking part of the Epsom battlefield. Again after a presentation



Guild members on the ground in Normandy



mines amongst the debris to inhibit operations to replace the destroyed bridge. Although this was not the case in Normandy, it gave others a look at the military aspect of bridge demolition and creating obstacles.

The blowing of the Dives Bridges and the occupation of the high ground of the Bois De Avant also gave those Members who had a non-military background the opportunity to look at ground from a military perspective and to understand the military reasoning for such actions. This can only strengthen the knowledge and credibility of any guide.

to comment and pass constructive criticism but more importantly to learn of those little passages of information that can only come out of good research. We walked the ground together and, looking at contemporary photographs of the after battle debris, were able to jointly put together our interpretation of actually what happened on the ground. The most famous part of this action was the charge of the German Tank Ace Michael Wittmann. What did he destroy and where was he stopped? We had all read accounts of this action by many authors some very eminent. We deduced that no two

by the nominated Member it was maps on bonnets looking at ground and trying to ascertain how the action on the ground was influenced by the terrain. From Rauray we came down off the high ground, south across the Odon valley and up to the high ground at Hill 112.

Perhaps one of the bloodiest battle sites of the whole Normandy campaign. From here the views towards the Bourgebus Ridge and the high plain stretching south towards Falaise, gave observation on to some of the German defensive lines, which had been sited constructed in depth.

How were they able to resist the British and Canadian advance south from Caen? Caen was eventually occupied by the Canadians after the Germans had withdrawn. The small hamlets and villages below, on and above the ridges south of Caen were turned into strong points. They mutually supported each other with interlocking arcs of fire and defence in depth. Those guiding Members with military service on the North German Plain during the Cold War period readily understood what the Germans achieved here tactically because the British Army copied it in the years to follow to keep back the Soviet hordes, if they were ever to cross the Inner German border.

### Day Three

Operation Goodwood 18-20 July 1944. Was it the great break out battle as interpreted by some or, was it a holding action to fix the German armoured formations and stop them deploying against the Americans in the west or, was it a bit of both?

Military historians all have vary opinions on the matter. The debate rages on still today. What we got out of this was a lively debate and a good look at the ground over which O'Connor's divisions of 8 Corps had fought. The 3 day battle cost the British over 400 tanks, their largest loss in a single operation during the Second World War.

Stands were selected by the Team Leader based on his experience of having led there before. After a stand on the Start Line of Goodwood, now known in modern parlance as the Line of Departure, we followed the axis of the Goodwood advance as far as Cagny. At another stand along the former wood line just north of Cagny, we

discussed the action of the 88mm Flak battery ordered by Oberst Von Luck commanding Panzer Grenadier Regiment 125 to engage the enemy armour in front of them. The young officer commanding the Flak battery respectively reminded Von Luck that his task was to engage allied bombers who had just passed over. Von Luck on drawing his pistol and pointing it at the young man reminded him he could win a high award for bravery by engaging the tanks to his front, or die with a single pistol shot. The 88mm guns engaged the oncoming armour with some success!

Accounts from a variety sources including Von Luck talk in terms of dozens of tanks destroyed by this battery alone and indeed contemporary authors talk in such numbers. It was fortunate that Joe Hamon had brought with him a copy of a vertical air photograph taken the day after the engagement that shows only 4 tank hulks in front of the position. What happened to the others? It was suggested that the others might have only been slightly damaged and repairable and therefore recovered from the battlefield. That is indeed possible, but it is also possible that reports at the time exaggerated the number destroyed for personal aggrandizement. Again much debate on the matter.

Von Luck although a very brave and competent commander, was known to embellish a tale. He led a somewhat hectic lifestyle having the morning of Goodwood returned post haste from Paris where he had spent time with his girlfriend. On being summoned to return he went straight on to the field of battle to stabilise his front, which he did. After the war he was invited by the British Army Staff College to accompany them on their annual

Normandy Staff Ride a 'posh' term for battlefield tour! Now that must have been some discussion with both attackers and defenders trying to ascertain exactly what happened and why!

In the afternoon we walked up the Bourgebus Ridge towards the Caen – Falaise road and discussed the next two major operations Totalise and Tractable. Both involved the 1st Canadian Army including 1 British Corps.

Both also used massive airpower to blow a way through the German defences. The use of modified artillery self propelled guns as personnel carriers was probably the first time by troops under command of Montgomery's 21st Army Group of which the Canadians formed part of together with the British 2nd Army commanded by Miles Dempsey. The American 105mm guns being stripped out and additional armour plates being welded on to protect the troops. The Germans fought on doggedly causing the Canadians very heavy casualties.

The German were well dug in and worked in what we now call combat teams of mixed armour/infantry. They were heavily outnumbered. One German NCO is said to have remarked as the heavy bomber stream flew towards them. *'How kind of Mr Churchill, he has sent one for each of us!!'*

It was during Totalise that Michael Wittmann the victor at Villers Bocage met his end close to the Caen-Falaise road. Who killed Wittmann? The most likely destroyer was probably a Sherman Firefly Since of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry and its gunner Trooper Joe Ekins. It is believed he destroyed 2 other

Tigers in this engagement, perhaps more. Prior to opening fire on Wittman's tank, Ekins had only fired 6 rounds from the Sherman's 17 pounder and that was on a range at Lulworth Cove, before boarding a ship for France.

Claims since the war have been made by the Sherbrooke Fusiliers a Canadian armoured regiment who were indeed close at hand and also engaged Wittmann's counter attack. The Poles of the 1st Polish Armoured Division have also lodged a claim and not to be outdone, the Royal Air Force, although at the time of Wittmann's death there was no ground attack aircraft in the area. On the 8th August 1944 nobody was aware that Wittman was in Tiger 007. In 1984 the bodies of Wittmann and his crew were exhumed from a field grave and their identities confirmed. His notoriety solicited these claims

#### Day Four

This was our last day before returning home. It was the culmination of our tour and concentrated on the closing of the Falaise Pocket at Chambois where Poles, Canadians and Americans finally met up. However, although most of the German Army's armour and logistic support, mostly horse drawn, was destroyed by allied ground attack aircraft it was the story of Poles on which we focussed.

The stand site at the Polish Museum on Point 262 or as the Poles called it 'The Mace' It gave an excellent view across the valley of the Dives we were able to point out the crossings over Dives used by the Germans in order to escape before their escape route became cut off and the attempts of other German formations to keep open the neck of the Pocket to allow as many of their

troops to escape.

The Poles of the Polish 1st Armoured Division became isolated on Point 262 with German soldiers trying to escape fighting their way over Point 262 and SS troops from outside the Pocket trying to keep a route way open for others withdrawing. The Poles and SS fought to hand to hand with, in some cases, German troops climbing on to Polish tanks in a desperate attempt to destroy them but the Poles hung on being re-supplied from the air. Finally they meet up with elements of the Canadian 4th Armoured Division who relieved them on the battlefield.

As a mark of respect for the fighting qualities of the Polish soldiery, the Canadians erected a sign at the Mace which said simply 'This was a Polish battlefield'.

This was our last stand and at mid-day we drove for Calais and home.

What had we achieved?

For all, there was the camaraderie of a shared experience, but most importantly was the willingness to trade knowledge and experience of an itinerary known to so few.

The tour had allowed those who are considering taking the Badge the opportunity to research and present to their peers in much the same way as they will have to do in the validation process.

A useful and constructive critique was made of presentation styles and the use of aids. Even the most experienced amongst us learnt something from others. Not least, as you get older better to hang the map on the side of a vehicle rather than lay it on the bonnet of a car

or on the ground. Backs are not as supple n the horizontal as they are in the vertical!

All gave willingly of their time either in researching or organising. The result was a very successful first CPD tour at a very cost effective price for even the most monetary challenged member.

This sort of event is what some of our guiding Members appear to want. Currently you should be an active guide. It is not a training event for would be guides but an improver exercise. As I have already intimated it is an opportunity for guides to learn of each other.

It is very likely that such tours will now become part of a programme of 'Continuous Professional Development' to be sponsored by the Education Team.

Since this article was written similar tours have been adopted as part the programme of 'Continuous Professional Development' sponsored by the Education Team. For details of future tours please see the website. ■

*Bob Darby holds Badge 29. Bob formerly served with the Parachute Regiment on Op Corporate - the repossession of the Falkland Islands. Has returned to the Islands many times with touring parties. Has also carried out many battlefield tours dealing with the Mediterranean and NW Europe theatre of operations. Currently works with Poppy Travel delivering their 'Realities of War' tour for the British Army.*

# JOURNAL SUBMISSIONS

## By the Editor

The deadline for the next issue is Wednesday 31st August 2011 so your suggestions and contributions are invited. To avoid possible duplication and resultant disappointment, please discuss your idea first with the Editor before you put finger to keyboard.

Any battlefield description should enable readers to understand the topography so maps are of real importance: considerations should also be given to details useful to the visitor such as especial access and accommodation.

Personal memoirs are always welcome but please try and relate them to specific battlefields or significant events and illustrate wherever possible with visual material.

Photographs: hackneyed saying it may be, but “a good photograph is worth a thousand words”, so please, wherever possible, provide photographs and maps: the latter are essential in our work as guides and enable the reader to relate the article to specific ground.

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Please note that articles which have already been published in similar journals such as the WFA Bulletin are unlikely to be considered for publication unless of exceptional significance.

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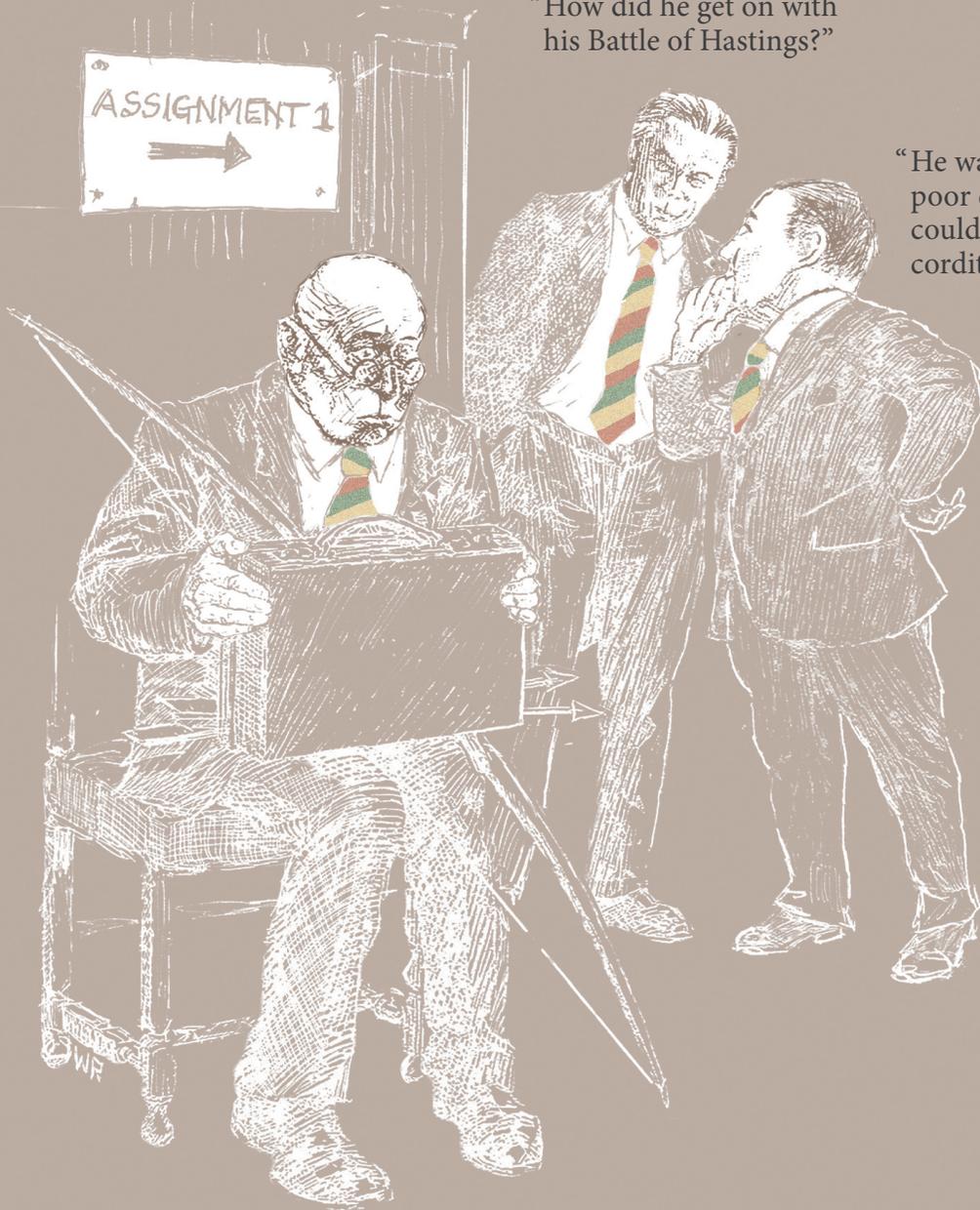
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# THE PERILS OF THE VALIDATOR'S CLICHÉ!

(With acknowledgement to Bernard Partidge of the London Carivari)

“How did he get on with his Battle of Hastings?”

“He was referred, poor chap - they couldn't ‘smell the cordite!’”



Submitted by Wade Russell

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