

Summer 2018

[www.gbg-international.com](http://www.gbg-international.com)



# DESPATCHES

the magazine of the International Guild of Battlefield Guides



## IN THIS ISSUE:

Guides For Heroes

CWGC 100 - A New Centenary

Education Guide - Mars or Venus?

Nautical Guides - Sink or Swim  
on Tour

## PLUS

The First Bridge Too Far?

Coral Sea 1942 - Carriers at War

## AND

A Murderous Primary Source -  
Kill the Kaiser!

## FIELDguides

Cover image: Scanning the past, protecting the future. The CWGC team digitally scan the Mombasa Askari memorial.

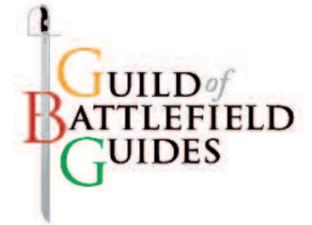


Mike Peters and Luuk Buist road testing their new Guild jackets, where else but Arnhem?



Sideshow Guides, Gareth Davies and Julian Whippy getting away from the well trodden paths of the Western Front with the Battle Honours Tour of the Palestine Campaign.

# Contents



- |        |  |        |  |
|--------|--|--------|--|
| P2     | FIELDguides  | P19-20 | KILL THE KAISER<br><i>A century old mystery</i>        |
| P5-7   | THE COMMONWEALTH<br>WAR GRAVES<br>COMMISSION <i>Update</i>       | P21-22 | THE FIRST BRIDGE<br>TOO FAR <i>Ponte Primasole</i>     |
| P8     | EVENTguide 2018-19   | P23    | FIELDguides  |
| P9-11  | GUIDES FROM MARS<br>TEACHERS FROM VENUS                          | P24-25 | COMMEMORATIVE TOUR<br>TO BURE <i>Major Jack Watson</i> |
| P12-13 | TOUR ON THE OCEAN<br>WAVE  | P26-29 | BATTLE OF THE CORAL<br>SEA <i>May 1942</i>             |
| P14-16 | THE BIG BIKE RIDE<br><i>Help for Heroes - Advance to Victory</i> | P30-31 | GUIDEbooks   |
| P17-18 | ENCOUNTER AT<br>TINCOURT <i>Sir Herbert Baker</i>                |        |  |

## STUDENTguide

Lorena De Cinque  
(student of Casoli  
High School)  
handing over to  
Mr. Sergio Mattarella,  
President of the Italian  
Republic, a copy of  
the IGBG Despatches  
Magazine in which is  
given the experience  
of her class during the  
youth apprenticeship  
programme set up  
by History & Geo  
Tours.



# OPENINGshot:

## THE CHAIRMAN'S VIEW

Welcome fellow members and Guild Partners to the Summer 2018 edition of Despatches, this is the first ever electronic version of House Magazine of the Guild. Our intent is that you will all take the opportunity to look through your contact list, identify friends who might enjoy reading about the Guild and its activities and share your Despatches with them. You will also find Despatches on our Facebook page and on the new website – those members still trying the old website it has been dormant since Christmas.

As we go to print the FWW Centenary continues to dominate the activities of most members. The Amiens 100 commemorations involved many of our number as did GP90, Help for Heroes Battlefield Bike Ride and the opening of the shiny new Sir John Monash Visitor Centre on the Somme. Less positive has been the furore surrounding the controversial Animals in War Memorial on the Pozieres Windmill site. The end of the FWW Centenary is on the horizon and we can only speculate as to what kind of legacy it will leave.

Whatever your views on the content and conduct of the centenary, the commemorations have stimulated increased media attention and a significant rise in battlefield visitors. Whether this newly stimulated interest will be maintained remains to be seen, I personally think that many of those exposed to the Great War battlefields for the first time will return in coming years. That said, the political and media focus will inevitably shift to the imminent 75th anniversaries of the Normandy landings, Arnhem and other WW2 operations. This will hopefully stimulate similar levels of interest and visitor numbers as the FWW Centenary Programme.

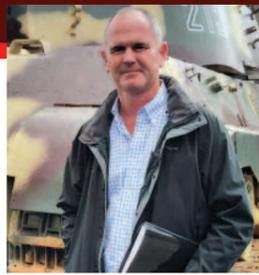
We have a good mix of subject matter that once again highlights the diverse interests and of our membership and the wealth of guiding experience. Please keep the articles and pictures coming! We could do with a few less pictures

of John Cotterill in the next issue, the man is almost everywhere! We do have a lot of cemetery and headstone shots this time around too... Associate Member (and Director of the CWGC), Victoria Wallace is allowed over the quota in our lead article. We have an advance picture from the Salamanca Recce led by Graeme Cooper, we look forward to a full report on that and the Accredited Guides Dinner in London. Thank you to Graeme for running both events. Speaking of events, I welcome David Harvey onto the Board as our Events Director. I am sure that David will be communicating with everybody about future events in the coming weeks.

Validation sits alongside Events as a core activity of our Guild, they are both at the heart of what the Guild is essentially about. Please take the opportunities presented by the Validation Team, support the validation sessions and if you haven't started validating, make this the year you go for it. Every single Accredited Guide I have met has told me that their experience of validation was overwhelmingly positive and that the process has made them a better guide. It is an unrivalled programme in the guiding world and available free to all members. If you have questions about validation, contact our Validation Secretary, Tim Stoneman, he will happily advise you on the entire process.

Finally, let's all look forward to a busy Autumn season. Wherever you all are, I hope you are all enjoying your guiding, whichever battlefields that you tread and that if you meet a fellow member take the time to say hello and share your knowledge and experience – That is after all, what our Guild is all about! Good luck and above all, enjoy your guiding.

Mike Peters



# THE COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION - A New Century of Commemoration & Care

Victoria Wallace, Director General

I am sure no battlefield guide needs much of an introduction to the work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Almost everywhere you go, your groups will encounter our neat plots, and our dedicated team. It has been my privilege to lead this extraordinary global organisation since 2014, throughout the commemoration of the centenary of the First World War, which has stimulated an unprecedented interest in our work, and in the lives of those 1.7 million men and women we commemorate around the world. So far I've visited over 40 countries, covering considerable mileage; but we have also been on something of a journey in the way we approach our tasks.



Delivering a stand.



Remembering and recording.



In 2017 the CWGC marked its centenary; perhaps without the multiple fanfares and fly pasts of the current RAF celebrations, but true to form, with a garden (at the RHS's Chelsea Flower Show), an inspiring service at Westminster Abbey, and a range of new initiatives aimed at engaging the public in our mission. It was an important milestone for our staff, but also a clear signal to the world. The strong, silent face of the CWGC was changing. The Commissioners – including representatives from all six of our member nations – took the opportunity to draw breath, and consider afresh the mission set out in our Royal Charter, considering whether after a hundred years our core purpose remained constant.

Their first conclusion was that whilst our mission remained as right as ever, over the passage of a century, we had steadily morphed from an organisation which built and designed, to one which had to care for a huge estate, now as much part of the battlefield landscape as the vestige of trenches and bomb craters. We now have to conserve these extraordinary places. So we have to learn a new way of working, moving away from five year rotations of patching and painting, and towards a more considered and in depth understanding of the

## FIRSTcontact:

Guild Chairman  
Mike Peters

Ascot House  
Norwich Road  
Little Stonham  
Ipswich  
Suffolk IP14 5DL  
United Kingdom

chairman@gbg-  
international.com

Guild Secretary  
Tony Smith

Trenanton  
Shutta Road  
Looe  
Cornwall PL13 1HP  
United Kingdom

+44 (0) 1503 269301  
secretary@gbg-  
international.com

Guild Membership  
Secretary - John Harris

15 Broadhurst Drive  
Kennington  
Ashford, Kent  
TN24 9RQ  
United Kingdom

mbr.sec@gbg-  
international.com

[www.facebook.com/battleguide](https://www.facebook.com/battleguide)  
[twitter.com/GuildofBG](https://twitter.com/GuildofBG)  
[www.instagram.com/guild\\_bg](https://www.instagram.com/guild_bg)

Material for publication in the Summer edition of Despatches must be with the Editor no later than 1 July 2018.

This is a deadline and submissions should be sent as far in advance as possible.

All material should be sent via Guild Secretary Tony Smith at: [secretary@gbg-international.com](mailto:secretary@gbg-international.com)



Visitors to Tyne Cot

vulnerabilities of the structures. Unlike the headstones, we cannot simply replace the buildings as they age. They have become part of the local and national cultural hinterland, and inadvertently, we have become a heritage body. We do not want to erase entirely the effects of time. But we must ensure that every name remains visible, legible and the structures remain safe and beautiful, so that they can be seen for centuries to come. We have spent much of the last three years surveying our structures, and quantifying the cost of that work, and we now have a comprehensive plan for how to sustain and conserve every wall and every item of art. From digitally mapping our Askari monuments in East Africa to finally fixing the drainage from the Thiepval roof, our technical teams will ensure that just as Churchill imagined, these monuments will be seen centuries into the future.

The second conclusion Commissioners reached was that we could no longer sit back and care for the cemeteries, allowing commemoration or interpretation to be the role of other people. The context is changing. The generations which knew the dead are passing. There is growing public interest in the collective and individual history of those within the Commission's care, stimulated by the centenary of the First World War and by the realisation that the coming Second World War anniversaries may be the last occasions attended by veterans. And there is a growing demand to engage with the Commission, its records and its work. We must ensure that people around the world



The Centenary Interns who will be at Thiepval and Tyne Cot

can contribute to and participate in commemoration, through visiting our sites, understanding and sharing the stories of those who fell, and supporting the organisation, in the same spirit of common citizenship that our founders wished to see.

We need to offer sufficient information about the purpose and context of the sites so that they are readily understood by visitors without first-hand knowledge of the people buried or commemorated, so that they leave with a genuine sense of having made a pilgrimage of remembrance. We'd love your help in understanding what you think that information might look like, and we are planning some focus group events in the coming months to learn from your experience. New technology

will of course increasingly offer us innovative ways to do this, before and after the visit, as much as on the sites itself. So we have started a charitable wing, the **Commonwealth War Grave Foundation**, which aims to raise money to help us tell those stories and engage with new generations.

We've already started to open our doors. I hope many of you will have met our Centenary Interns, based at Thiepval and Tyne Cot over the summer months, or popped into our new information centre in Ieper, just steps from the Menin Gate. From next Spring, visitors to the Western Front will be able to visit our workshops at Beaurains, just south of Arras, to see our workshops where replacement headstones are produced and where the skilled craftsmen of the Commission do their work. We hope it will be a fantastic addition to any visit to the battlefields – telling the CWGC story, 100 years on - and we very much hope to see you there.



Lots to do to get ready for visitors

### RHS Chelsea 2017 Press Day



### The War Graves Foundation Launch





As we went to print another Guild Recce was well underway, what a great picture of the Peninsular War Recce Group outside Ciudad Rodrigo after a classic Graeme Cooper battlefield walk after breakfast! (Picture John Harris)

## EVENTguide 2018-19

- 7-9 Sept - SW Regional Event in Amesbury - Paul Oldfield
- 22 Sept - Validation Event at Museum of Army Flying, Middle Wallop  
- Chris Finn
- 7 Dec - AM Validation Event at the UJC London - Chris Finn
- 7 Dec - Guild Christmas Lunch at the UJC London - Andy Thompson
- 18-20 Jan 2019 - Guild Annual Conference at Leicester (Bosworth)  
- John Harris & Tony Smith
- Oct 2019 (TBC) - Berlin Recce - Chris Finn

## NEWmembers:

New members who have been welcomed to the Guild between December 2017 and the date of publication.

Richard Akhurst  
Mervyn Albon  
Chris Bailey  
Alison Biegel  
Nick Burch  
Simon Burgess  
John Burton

Nick Clarke  
Mark Every  
David Hammond  
Richard Harradine  
David Harrison  
Willem Kiggen  
Paul Knight

Martin Lambert  
Bryan Lightbody  
Peter Longley  
Joris Nieuwint  
Andrew Rice  
Brian Rogers  
Larry Ross

Simon Shephard  
Peter Storer  
Dirk Vernou  
Peter Wynne Davies

# GUIDES ARE FROM MARS, TEACHERS ARE FROM VENUS

Christopher Finn MPhil, FRAeS, FHEA – Director of Validation

In the three and a half years I have been the Chief Validator, and then the Director of Validation, I have been struck by the diversity of guiding backgrounds of the Candidates for Accreditation. But what has also emerged is a difference in opinion of the two camps referred to in the title as to what are the essential skills of a good ‘Guide.’ These could be summed up as ‘teachers don’t understand warfighting, and hence can’t explain battles’ and ‘traditional guides have no idea how to teach, they just tell stories.’ As an Accredited Guide who has spent ten years as a University lecturer, and has a pedagogic qualification, I have a foot in each camp and thus thought it would be worth exploring the validity of these two perspectives.

It is perhaps worth first examining what, in the context of the Guild, we mean by a Guide and I repeat here the definition in Para 1 of the 2017 Accreditation Handbook:

**The terms Battlefield Guide and Battlefield Guiding should not only be seen in their traditional senses. A Battlefield Guide is anyone who uses historical locations and their attached histories to educate, teach or train their respective audiences.**

This definition was the subject of a lengthy correspondence between the first Director of Validation, Chris Scott, and myself and seeks to encapsulate the breadth and depth of guiding that the Guild has always sought to champion. This definition was specifically introduced to recognise the increasing diversity of guiding backgrounds and the increasing emphasis on educational battlefield touring within the sector. It is also worth reminding ourselves of the Guild’s Objects which are to:

**Analyse, develop and raise the understanding and practice of battlefield guiding.**

**Promote the education of battlefield visitors and students in military heritage.**

But let’s examine the first definition in more detail. By a ‘traditional’ Guide, people perhaps see an individual who takes groups to a physical battlefield, brings the ground to life and is an entertaining and

engaging story-teller. Anyone who was at John Cotterill’s stand at Poplar Ridge, in September 2016, would have seen a master-class in just those skills.

But it was far more than that, the context and consequences of this particular engagement, the tactical details and the realities of war were, amongst other things, all woven into the story.

What about ‘historical locations and their attached histories?’ The first reason for this is to differentiate between someone who just gives historical talks to interest groups and someone who uses the actual historical locations. This part of the definition could also give rise to debate. As an example, if you go to Warsaw and talk about Nazi ethnic-cleansing then this is not battlefield guiding; if you talk about how the Polish resistance organizations fought the German occupiers then it is. The key here is the Battle, and this is amplified in the Advice to Assignment 1 thus:

**Battles take place on land, on the sea or in the air, or a combination of them. Thus ‘ground’ can be taken literally or to mean ‘the environment in which the battle took place.’**

A historical location for a land battle is obvious, but what about maritime or air battles. The Uxbridge and Digby Bunkers or overlooking the sea-front at Dieppe are all excellent locations for ‘air’ stands. Where better to cover the air battle of 18 August



Accredited Guide John Cotterill's stand at Poplar Ridge - September 2016

1940 than looking over the Channel at Capel-le-Ferne? Then there are the Zeebrugge Mole, the Ops Room at Southwick Park, the Narvik Fjords or the deck of HMS Belfast as maritime examples. The point is that all can be directly linked to the history of a specific battle.

Which brings us to 'their respective audiences.' Now, without giving too much away for Assignment 3A, how do we categorise our various audiences? A look at the Guild Twitter Feed gives an interesting overview. There are some small-group family history tours, some 'traditional' general public ones, a number of military tours (staff-rides or battlefield studies<sup>1</sup>) but the preponderance are schools tours. However, if one looks at the desired outcomes for these apparently disparate groups a different picture emerges. For example, in this way of looking at it, Battlefield Studies sit far better with schools tours than they do with the traditional military or general public battlefield tours.

Turning to the final part of the definition, 'to educate, teach or train.' 'The simplest of the outcomes is 'to train.' Training is generally understood as equipping someone with a 'repeatable and testable skill' such as stripping a rifle or map reading. Staff Rides and Battlefield Studies are used to develop specific skills such as appreciating ground and the correct use of planning and orders processes. So, these are developing analytical skills as well as

process ones. A good Staff Ride question will have the deliverer analysing the question, researching the subject and then analysing their findings to answer it in depth. This is no different from a good seminar question at a University.

At the other end of the scale 'education' can be defined as 'a process which brings about intellectual or attitudinal change' – put simply it aims to make the participant or student re-evaluate how they think about something. In the battlefield guiding context this is usually done through introducing new (to the participant) facts or analysis. How many times has someone said to you at the end of a tour "I hadn't thought of it that way?"

So what about 'teaching?' Modern educational literature sees Teaching and Learning as being inseparable activities, with the object of teaching being to enable the student to learn. In his book "Conditions of Learning," Robert Gagne proposed five categories of learning:

**Verbal Skills = factual learning.**

**Intellectual Skills = building on factual learning to understand how rather than what.**

**Cognitive Strategies = learning how to learn.**

**Attitudes = how something is viewed.**

**Motor Skills = the physical skills needed to help learning, such as IT skills today.**

These categories are all appropriate to battlefield guiding, but the balance between them is dependent on the audience. In basic terms all Battlefield Tours are forms of experiential learning. This means that the participants have some kind of concrete experience upon which to base their learning (as opposed to being lectured to or reading about the subject). This experience can vary between just seeing the actual battlefield to a set task such as reading the works of a war poet to the group or delivering a detailed Staff Ride stand.

A linked idea is that of Deep vs Superficial Learning. The latter is associated with rote learning, usually for an exam, which is subsequently forgotten – often called 'learn and dump.' Deep Learning is learning that sticks and the best Deep Learning occurs when the subject actively participates in the learning process. The proof of this is to ask yourself how much did you learn when researching and preparing a new tour, stand or talk? The good 'teacher' is one who enables Deep Learning and the key to this is motivating the student or participant to learn.

It is easy to see how Gagne's five categories can be applied in the formal educational context but what about more traditional battlefield guiding? Verbal Skills and Intellectual Skills are clearly the basis of any Stand. A quick look through the Knowledge and Presentation Skills required for Accredited status shows this. Guides also spend a lot of effort on changing attitudes, particularly ingrained prejudices such as 'Lions Led by Donkeys.' Those who deliver Staff rides also get involved in Cognitive Strategies, and a bit in Motor Skills. But the clearest example of the total overlap between guiding and teaching is the First World War National Centenary Education Programme where

Accredited Guides have spent five years very successfully delivering what could be seen as 'teaching.'

But where does this lead us in terms of the two 'camps' I outlined at the start of the article? In terms of achieving learning outcomes, as summarised in Gagne's five categories, I suggest that 'guiding' and 'teaching' are but two sides of the same coin. The difference of approach lies in the very different starting points. Good teachers will generally start with their students and decide what their desired learning outcomes are – in other words what they need to be taught. They will then construct the tour, and use the most appropriate teaching methods, to achieve those outcomes. The traditional guide will generally start with the Tour and then construct the stands according to the group. The Staff Ride guide sits somewhere in the middle of this. If there is a difference it lies in how each motivates their respective audiences. Teachers tend to motivate their students by getting them involved in their own learning process; interactive and experiential learning if you like. Guides tend to do this by engaging and enthusing their audiences. I would add that in my experience a good guide uses audience involvement and a good teacher engages and enthuses. But the end result should be the same.

The key point is that we all use 'historical locations and their attached histories to educate, teach or train.' So, I would ask anyone from the educational side of the guiding community to have a look at the Accreditation Manual (on the Guild website), see how relevant the required skills actually are to them, and have a go at gaining 'The Badge.'



Accredited Member, Allan Wood, ex Soldier, ex Teacher and Guide with the FWW National Centenary Education Programme.

<sup>1</sup> The emerging difference between the two seems to be that for a Staff Ride the participants research and answer set questions which the Guide or SME then debriefs and builds upon. A Battlefield Study is, however, SME-led.

# A LIFE TOUR ON THE OCEAN WAVE?

Tim Stoneman

As I sat, on Saint George's Day<sup>1</sup>, in the former bomb store of a Great War Royal Naval Air Service flying boat base looking out over the sea, I realised that, on that date exactly a hundred years ago<sup>2</sup>, a maritime battle had taken place only a couple of hours' steaming from the shores of the UK. Those familiar with naval history will have realised that I was thinking about Operation Z-O, the amphibious raid on the German-occupied Belgian ports of Zeebrugge and Ostend – subsequently titled 'Tweaking the Dragon's Tail'.

## All At Sea – or Not At Sea?

With that in mind, I decided to put pen to paper<sup>3</sup>, not to repeat the story of the action, which is written about in various histories, but to put down some thoughts about 'battlefield' tours of sea battles. It's been said that one wave looks very much like any other wave, so what can looking at the sea tell us about what happened there all those years ago?

A fair question, but it overlooks two aspects which mean that, with a little preparation, it's possible for a guide to give a client (or him/herself) a fair idea of what it would have been like to be involved in a sea battle.

First, not all maritime combat took place on the deep blue ocean far from land; there are plenty of examples where fighting took place closer inshore. Zeebrugge, where this article began, is one such, but there are plenty more - Norwegian fjords (Battles of Narvik, attacks on German battleships), Abu Qir Bay (Battle of the Nile) and Pearl Harbor, to choose just three.

Whilst I've not been near the site of the Battle of the Nile, I've visited the other sites I've mentioned, and all provide good viewpoints from which the

site(s) of the actions can be seen, and the fighting described 'in situ'. That's not to mention amphibious actions like Dunkirk evacuation, or the invasions of Sicily or Normandy!

Secondly, some of the ships which fought in various campaigns still exist, and, with a bit of forethought, can be considered, and used, as extensions of the 'battlefield' of those campaigns. In many ways, since it's where the sailors fought, a ship like HMS VICTORY can be considered as the equivalent of a battlefield in her own right. What better way of describing what a sailor went through in a Napoleonic War sea-battle than to talk about it on the gundeck of VICTORY – a ship which was actually 'there'? You may not be able to smell the cordite<sup>4</sup>, but you can smell the salt air, and a good guide should be able to conjure up the smells of blood, sweat and gunpowder (not to mention the oft-quoted "rum, bum and baccy" – no, I was told not to mention them!).

Other examples include HMS BELFAST in London, HMS CAVALIER at Chatham, USS TEXAS at Galveston in the USA (and you can't get a much bigger battlefield artefact than 30,000 tons of



HMS PICKLE (replica) and HMS VICTORY

dreadnought battleship!), HQS WELLINGTON<sup>5</sup>, also in London, U-boat U534 at Birkenhead ... (the list goes on)<sup>6</sup>.

## Some Case Studies

Some years ago I had the pleasure of helping to lay on a nautical pilgrimage for a very sprightly 97-year-old lady and her family to visit the site where her first husband had been killed – thirty miles out in the Atlantic. In 1943, he had been lost off the coast of north-west Spain, as one of the ship's company of an anti-submarine sloop which had been the first ship to be sunk by an air-to-surface missile, and his widow wanted to visit the spot. In conjunction with a tour operator which she had asked to set up a trip to the 'grave' of her husband (sunken ships should be considered as war graves), a trip was planned, taking her to the nearest town with suitable accommodation (Vigo) and hiring a local boat big enough for the party (and seaworthy enough to take on the Atlantic swells). Through the good offices of the British Defence Attaché in Madrid (conveniently, a former shipmate of mine!), one of his staff joined the trip, as did a reporter from the Daily Telegraph, and a very successful pilgrimage was the result. Casting into the ocean a bouquet of roses and dahlias (a replica of the one she carried on her wedding day) completed closure for the lady concerned after 69 years – to the day.

What about Zeebrugge? Well, you can't get to the spot where the raiders landed on the mole by sea these days – reclaimed land, forming a huge container terminal, fills the area where the assault ship steamed in and landed her sailors and marines. However, the seaward end of the old

mole still exists and, with permission from the company which owns the land, can be visited, and can form the first part of a very worthwhile battlefield tour<sup>7</sup>. Follow that by standing at a spot overlooking the sites where the blockships were scuttled in the nearby canal (thus sealing the canal to prevent Bruges-based U-Boats from getting to the North Sea<sup>8</sup>), a visit to the cemetery of the nearby church, where some of the raiders still lie in a CWGC plot, and a short journey to the memorial, where an explosive-filled obsolete submarine blew herself up to isolate the mole. Finish up with a trip down the coast (perhaps on a local tram) to Ostend (via a meal in a seafront restaurant?), where the bows of the assault ship, HMS VINDICTIVE, are preserved as a memorial.

A good half-day (or longer) Great War tour – and a change from mud and trenches in Flanders and the Somme. Job done!

And finally – that bomb store on the flying boat base? Well, it's now a holiday timeshare, but there's still a slipway where the aircraft would have been launched, and recovered after their U-Boat hunting missions. Describing what naval aviators (later they became RAF ones!) went through in their stick and string machines whilst sitting in a (much-altered) building which was there at the time, watching a gale blowing across the waters from which they flew, can be quite effective!

## So What?

In summary, it's perfectly feasible to tour a nautical 'battlefield' without getting your feet wet – although it does help if you can 'smell the cordite salt spray'!



The bows of HMS VINDICTIVE, preserved on the sea wall at Ostend  
Photo courtesy of Mrs Pam Johns

<sup>1</sup> Lest a reader not be aware of England's patron saint's 'day' it's on 23 April. <sup>2</sup> Well, a hundred years and eighteen hours ago, if you're being pedantic – the bullets started flying just after midnight! <sup>3</sup> Or rather, finger(s) to keyboard! <sup>4</sup> Because cordite hadn't been invented in 1805! <sup>5</sup> Venue for a 'battlefield tour' led by the author as part of the Badged Guides Dinner in 2017. <sup>6</sup> BELFAST fought on the Russian convoys, at Normandy and in Korea, CAVALIER fought on the Russian convoys, TEXAS bombarded Normandy on D-Day and many actions in the Pacific, HQS (yes, HQS – 'Headquarters Ship') WELLINGTON took part in the Battle of the Atlantic, as did U534.

<sup>7</sup> Longer-standing Guild members with good memories may recall the Guild weekend at Woolwich in 2009 when I passed Assignment 1 (after joining the Referred Club) describing the mole and this part of the raid. <sup>8</sup> At least that was the aim, but by dredging and cutting away obstructions on the bank, the German navy managed to get smaller U-Boats around the blockships within a few days.

<sup>9</sup> RNAS Tresco, in the Isles of Scilly.

# HELP FOR HEROES THE BIG BATTLEFIELD BIKE RIDE JUNE 2018

Paul Oldfield

This year's Big Battlefield Bike Ride returned to its traditional slot in early June. Starting in Compiègne it was advertised as the 'Advance to Victory'. In reality, due to route and admin constraints, it did anything but.



It started at the Armistice clearing and on the last day visited the site of the first shot at Casteau!

The route covered aspects of the German spring offensives, air warfare, logistics and how the various nations approached the commemoration of their war dead. Other stands covered actions in 1914, 1915, 1916, 1917 and one as far back as 11th May 1745.

The whole of the last three days had nothing to do with the Advance to Victory, except for the last fatality, George Price. The finale was at St Symphorien Cemetery, which provided some resonance with the

end of the war. All that said, the riders were very pleased with what they saw and heard.

They were the best bunch that this year's guides have encountered, being extremely receptive and asking numerous questions. From that aspect the BBBR is still a very rewarding experience for Guild guides, albeit with historical frustrations. Sadly the number of riders taking part has dwindled from the peak of about 300 to 130. It will be interesting to see if a new approach by H4H has any impact on the future of the BBBR.



The start of Day 1 at the Armistice clearing.

John Cotterill gets the ball rolling before the wheels start turning, "So here we are starting from where we should finish...!" A perennial problem on Big Battlefield Bike Rides – making the route and admin fit with the history. They rarely do.



Terry Webb being briefed by the riders at his stand on logistics at Dompierre-Becquincourt.



Andy Johnson points out where the Red Baron was at Cappy.



Terry at Villers-Bretonneux. He's either leading them in prayer or it's the end of a long hard day in the saddle. On the right, the only Australian to ride this year and he was self funded, a sign of the changing times. There used to be whole teams from Australia, Canada and the USA.



Guides in their natural habitat at the post-op debrief at Mons. The setting will be familiar to those who attended the AGM this year. Paul was particularly pleased to have delivered the Billy Congreve VC stand five times and not once referred to him as Billy Connelly....well at least not this year.



Changing of the guard. Paul Oldfield completes his final BBR and John Cotterill takes over.



# ENCOUNTER AT TINCOURT

Andy Thompson

Given that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission commemorates 1.7 million casualties in 23,000 locations in over 150 countries I suspect that most Guild members encounter their work on a regular basis. If so, even as the following story won't be known to you and is worth adding to your repertoire.

The origins of the Commission began with the Imperial War Conference in 1917 where it was suggested that an imperial organisation be constituted and on 21 May 1917 the Imperial War Graves Commission was established by Royal Charter. Sir Fabian Ware was the man with the vision and the initial committee included the architects Edwin Lutyens, Herbert Baker & Reginald Blomfield with Rudyard Kipling acting as the wordsmith.

In October 2017 I was asked to organise a tour for 28 members of Sir Herbert Baker's family which would take in all his major sites on the Western Front. Sir Herbert's grandson, Michael, asked me to include Tincourt New British Cemetery besides Tyne Cot, the Neuve-Chapelle Indian Memorial and the South African Memorial at Delville Wood – the great memorials designed by Baker.

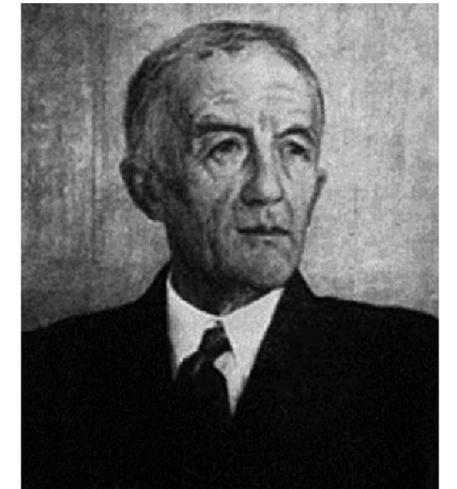
In 1920 Herbert (he was knighted in 1926) and his wife Florence toured the Western Front so that he could observe the initial progress being made on the sites under his jurisdiction. The Bakers arrived at Tincourt late one morning in a driving rain storm. Those who know the site will be aware that there is no cover as the cemetery is built on a windswept hill side and as they approached what was a building site they

saw a woman kneeling in front of a temporary wooden cross grave marker about two thirds of the way up the rows of graves.

The Bakers respected the woman's obvious grief and didn't intrude on her thoughts but sometime later she stood and walked towards them. Florence Baker asked why she was there and was told that she was the mother of Private Alfred Warren who had died of wounds on 18th March 1918 whilst serving with The Hertfordshire Regiment. Mrs Warren, a widow, had spent the two years since her son's death saving as much as she could afford, determined, at the first opportunity, to visit her son's grave. She explained she was staying in Amiens and that the journey had cost her all her savings and it had been her intention to spend the day with her only son. She was sad that the driving rain had cut short her vigil – she was soaked to the skin, very cold and was thus returning to her hotel earlier than she intended.

The Bakers offered their sympathy and took photographs. Florence Baker gave Kate Warren her card and when she returned to the UK sent the photographs, taken on the day, to Alfred's mother and the two women wrote to each other regularly for many years.

Shortly after the meeting at Tincourt, Herbert Baker met with the other architects and recounted the story of the grieving mother kneeling at the grave of her loved one in the driving rain. He recommended that at the larger cemeteries a structure should be built so that those visiting (doubtless including hard working guides!) could shelter from inclement weather. This recommendation was accepted by the commission and the design of the larger cemeteries were duly amended.



28 members of the family of Sir Herbert Baker, one of the original architects with the Imperial War Graves Commission, visit the sites he was involved with.



Private Warren's memorial at Tincourt

The Baker family at Tincourt New Military Cemetery



Tincourt under construction



The Shelter at Tincourt

# KILL THE KAISER! A CENTURY OLD MYSTERY ANOTHER PRIMARY SOURCE

John Hughes-Wilson

Past President of the International Guild of Battlefield Guides

I read the article about primary sources in the last 'Despatches' with great interest: a fascinating piece. As battlefield guides, we are also military historians and sometimes primary sources appear in unexpected places. I, not so long ago stumbled across an amazing story from 1918 that led to a whole new line of enquiry and uncovered a long hidden secret.

After a battlefield tour to the Western Front in 2002, one of the grateful travellers sent me a CD as a souvenir. It turned out to be an historical treasure trove, containing downloaded details of his great uncle's Royal Flying Corps log book and photographs of his service with 25 Squadron of the newly-formed RAF.

To my amazement, included among the effects of Lt A.R. Watts MC, RFC, was the breathtaking claim that he had taken part in a secret British mission to kill the Kaiser. There were maps, aerial photographs and even a detailed flight plan.

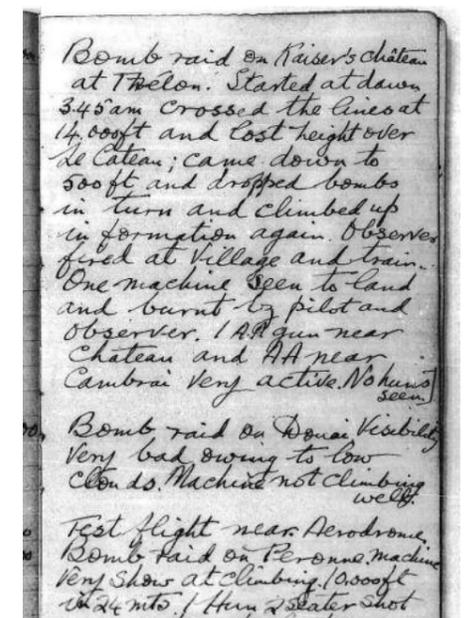
At first I could hardly believe my eyes; but this extraordinary secret was confirmed by further research at the RAF museum and the RAF Historical Branch. It turned out from detailed comparison of the aircrew log books that the story was true. On 2nd June 1918, at the height of the final German attack of WW1, the newly formed RAF flew a 'Most Secret' mission to assassinate Kaiser Wilhelm II, when he was visiting a château near the front to present medals to his victorious troops.

The facts are borne out in never-before-published notebooks, maps and pilots' flying records, kept secret for 100 years. Careful reading of 25 Squadron's records proves without doubt the bombing mission by DH-4s (the Mosquito of its day) took place. For the military historian and battlefield guide, the Eureka! moment and smoking gun was the discovery of an indiscreet pilot's entry that recorded details of the secret attack. But the fact of this secret raid raises many new questions.

The Official History makes no mention of any such attack, and public records say nothing. Even the RAF Museum has no official record of a raid to kill the Kaiser: but the attack really did take place, of that there is no doubt. The several entries in the aircrew log books prove it. So someone did approve a secret attempt to assassinate Germany's war lord. But who? Exactly who in Britain gave the order to try and kill Germany's Kaiser?



Lt A.R. Watts MC, RFC



Log entry 25th Squadron

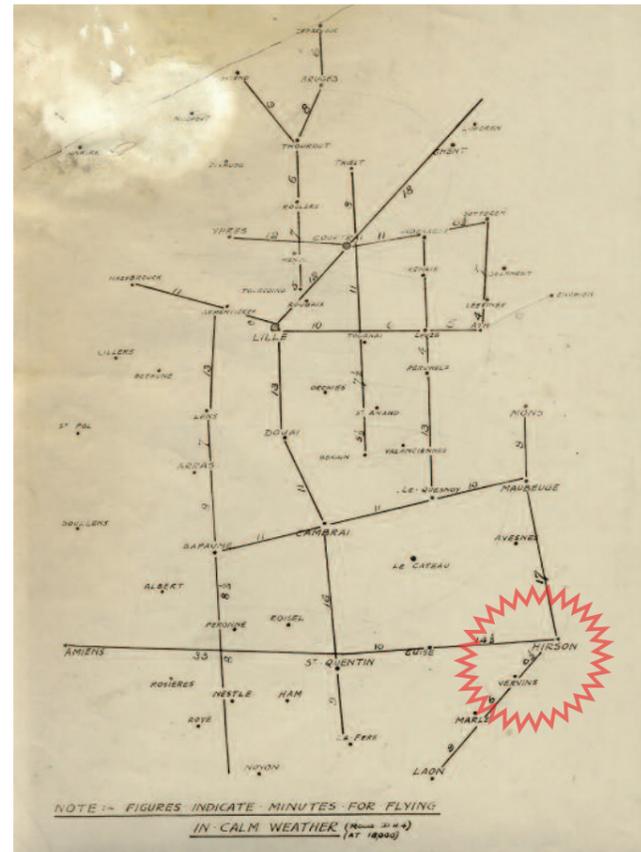
Any attempt to kill the Kaiser could only have been approved at the highest levels. The BEF's 9 Wing RAF appear to have no record. Responsibility for such an attack was way above Sir Douglas Haig, Commander of the BEF's pay grade. By the War Office? Was the King informed that his 'cousin Willie' was a prime target for assassination? Was Lloyd George, the Prime Minister asked? Did he and his War Cabinet secretly approve? All very curious. Who approved the mission?



Map of Imperial train attack objectives

That's the real secret behind the bombing raid on Château Trélon at Hirson by 25 Squadron at dawn on 2 June 1918. It's a classic 'whodunit' – who really ordered that politically explosive hit?

And it shows, without doubt, that unknown primary source material is still buried somewhere in the multitudinous archives and memoirs of the period. Keep digging!



Flight times to Hirson and other selected 25 Sqn targets



Aerial shot of Hirson



25 Sqn DH4s, 1918

# THE FIRST BRIDGE TOO FAR?

Mark Saliger

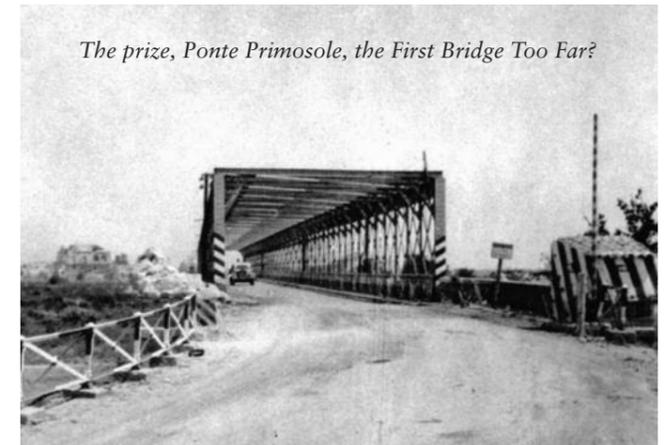
After visiting many of the battlefields of my old regiment, The Parachute Regiment, one battle site that I always wanted to visit was the Primosole Bridge in Sicily. It is one of the Regiment's hardest-fought and yet least well-known battle honours, fought by the same men who were to be involved in the 'bridge too far' only a year later. The Primosole Bridge is a story of courage against the odds, a story of Regimental legends, a story of determination by elite paratroopers to capture their prize at all costs. It is this story that needs to be told. And that's what I have done with my first book *'The First Bridge Too Far: The Battle of Primosole Bridge'*. So it was off to Sicily to find out more about the battle and see the ground for myself.

The sun is rising in the blue sky of yet another long, hot and dusty Sicilian summer's day, replacing the cold, damp air of the previous night. The distant southern slope of the towering volcano of Mount Etna still looms up above these sun-parched fields in Sicilian countryside. The Simeto river winds its way eastward along the reed-covered banks towards the nearby Ionian Sea, only a mile away. Here the Simeto river is crossed by a bridge, the Primosole Bridge. A new motorway now carries road traffic a mile further to the west and has turned this once-busy river-crossing into a quiet backwater.

This is a peaceful corner of Sicily but yet it witnessed one of the most brutal battles of the European theatre of operations. 75 years ago, the elite German paratroopers, known as the 'Green Devils', fought for control of the bridge against their British paratrooper adversaries, the 'Red Devils'. These two sets of devils fought each other in Hellish conditions around these fields for control of this bridge.

As the British Paras waited for the green light to parachute into Sicily, the Germans had also recognised the strategic importance of the Primosole bridge and swiftly flew in the elite Fallschirmjaeger, Germany's battle-hardened paratroopers, only hours before their British counterparts were due to parachute to capture the exact same prize. It would be the first time in history that two opposing enemies had parachuted into battle to face each other.

As the Paras approached the Sicilian coastline they came under friendly-fire which scattered the air armada and their cargo of paratroopers over a vast area, including as far north as the slopes of Mount Etna. Today's fields around the bridge were covered in discarded parachutes, weapons containers and broken aircraft after the chaotic airborne incursion.



On the ground, in the darkness, small groups of Paras now formed up into their own ad hoc patrols in the fields and ditches which still criss-cross the area and made their way to the objective, whilst the supporting gliders began to land with their artillery.

As they made their way through the Mediterranean night, the Paras managed to overcome the Italian garrisons at the bridge and on the supporting hilltops in only a matter of a few short sharp minutes of 'airborne aggression'. The wartime bridge has been replaced by a 1970s structure and the hilltops to the south, code-named Johnny I, II and III, which were once ringed with barbed wire defences, are now fenced off by local quarrying companies. The industrial sprawl from Catania has now also spread down to the north bank of the Simeto all the way from the International Airport in Catania to the north but the battlefield is still easily recognisable. The geography on the ground has not changed and the key features which dictated the battle can be recognised when seen through the lens of a soldier's-eye view.

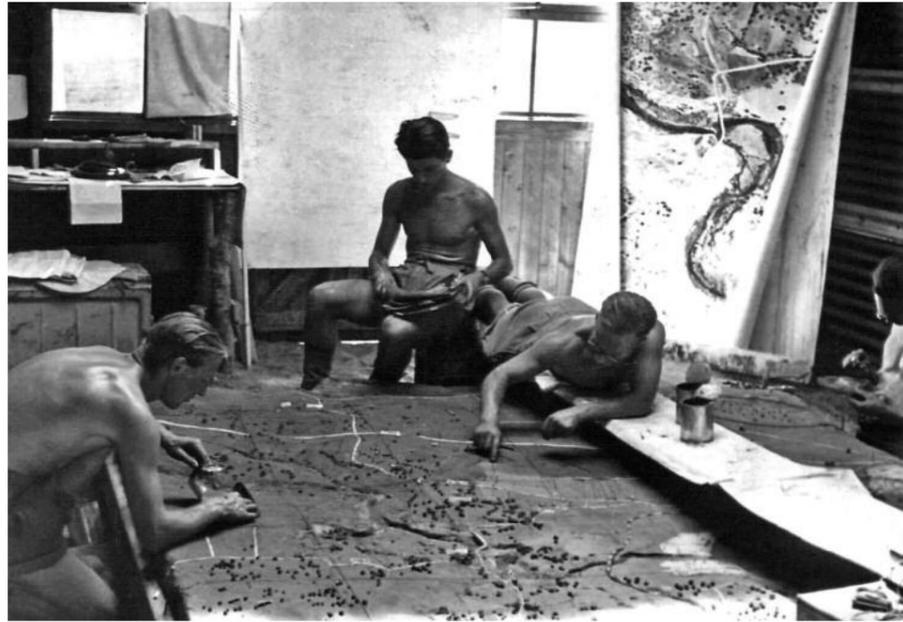
With the break of dawn, the main thrust from the Fallschirmjaeger was initially directed at John Frost's

2 Para situated atop the Johnny Hills. After beating back numerous infantry assaults, the Germans then attempted to bottle the Paras up on the hill with heavy artillery and machine gun fire before switching their attention to the bridge itself.

At high noon, when ground forces were due to relieve the Paras, the Fallschirmjaeger struck. Driving southwards from Catania on the road which still brings traffic towards the bridge today, a convoy of German Fallschirmjaeger debussed from lorries and began to spread out into the fields to form up for an advance to contact the bridge defenders. The Paras had seen them coming though. With the few support weapons that had arrived at the bridgehead, they waited for the Germans to advance towards them in the fields to the north of the bridge and then let loose with a lethal barrage of lead towards the enemy, sending them hurrying back to Catania for reinforcements.

The Germans returned mid-afternoon after press-ganging all available men, including chefs and drivers, into the fight. The Paras were now out-gunned and out-numbered but refused to be out-fought.

Each German attack slowly made ground though, using the dips and ridges in the ground to creep forward to different firing positions. The defenders were now on the back foot. Spent brass bullet casings lay all around them, the air was thick with cordite and a haze from burning grass and buildings. The non-stop whistle of bullets of different calibres flying overhead, sometimes distant but sometimes all too close for comfort, seemed to be competing with each other for airspace. Dashing enemy silhouettes would appear and then just as quickly disappear once again, trying as hard as possible to get a better firing position from which they could get a clearer shot at the paras. Constant shouting alerted each other to the ever-moving positions of the enemy. Target indications were called out, bringing each other's attention to enemy threats and to allow a co-ordination of fire. Puffs of dust were continually being kicked up from closely missing sniper rounds. Some men were pinned down in their trenches and couldn't move an inch without a sniper reminding them that they were in his cross-hairs, somewhere out there, unseen. Longer bursts of machine gun fire tore through the air and the reeds where some men



*Pre Op Husky, a terrain model under construction for mission briefings.*

were taking cover. Mortar rounds were exploding and adding orange dust to the grey smoke of the burning vegetation.

Nearly out of ammunition, 1 Para's Commanding Officer, the legendary Alastair Pearson, made the decision to tactically withdraw to the south end of the bridge in order to continue to deny the bridge to the Germans. As more and more fresh German troops poured into the fight, together with more artillery and tanks in support, they slowly began to blast the Paras from across the river. The decision was made by Brigadier Lathbury to withdraw from the bridgehead towards the Johnny hills as night fell to deny use of the bridge to the Germans through covering fire.

The bridge was finally taken the following day by ground forces supported by tanks and artillery. However, the delay in securing Primosole bridge had led to the bulk of the Axis forces escaping Sicily and living to fight another day in Italy, most noticeably the Fallschirmjaeger at Monte Cassino only weeks later.

For the Red Devils, they would next take to the battlefield at Arnhem only a year later, fighting again in a scaled-up version of the battle for the Primosole Bridge.

Life around the Primosole bridge soon returned to normal after the battle. The wave of destruction soon passed over Sicily and moved onto the Italian mainland, leaving the farmers to regain their fields and continue their way of life.

It's difficult today to picture that such a bloody battle occurred in such tranquil surroundings between two elite sets of airborne warriors. For both the Red and the Green Devils, the Primosole Bridge had proved to be the first bridge too far.

## FIELDguides



The new outdoor exhibit at the Passchendaele Museum is a British 8 inch Howitzer, this image provoked some debate on the Guild Twitter Feed, is it right to expose such an iconic piece of archeological evidence to the elements? (Photo MP)



Newly Accredited Member, Des Fitzgerald orientating a member of the British Commando Helicopter Force during a Battlefield Study around Monte Cassino. (Photo Staff Ride Ltd)

# COMMEMORATIVE TOUR TO BURE 6TH AIRBORNE HONOURS MAJOR JACK WATSON

Ralph Bennett

An annual 6th Airborne tour to the Ardennes had added poignancy this year, as Tours International – a group travel tour operator specialising in military tours – helped commemorate the bravery of Major Jack Watson, commander of ‘A’ Company of the 13th (Lancashire) Parachute Battalion, during the Battle of the Bulge to take Bure in January 1945.

On March 24th 2018 the Tours International tour group gathered in Bure to remember Major Watson’s valour. During a special ceremony they witnessed the renaming of one of the village’s squares to Place du Major Jack Watson and the unveiling of a beautiful plaque highlighting Major Watson’s actions during the battle, which reads: *‘In the release of the German offensive on the Ardennes, the 6th Airborne Division is sent as a matter of urgency to the Belgian Ardennes, in support of the American troops. On January 3rd, 1945, the 13th (Lancashire) Parachute Battalion attacks the village of Bure. Major Watson will show an amazing courage there by grouping his company, scattered and decimated by the enemy fire from the starting line, reorganizing the men, not hesitating to attract to him the fire of a machine gun to allow his men to protect themselves.’*

Major Watson sadly died in 2011 but 19 members of his family attended the ceremony, including his four daughters who thanked the local community and his grandchildren who laid special wreaths. Also attending the ceremony were the Belgian Regional Minister, the Burgermeister of Bure, townspeople and re-enactors. Major Watson’s citation stated: *‘His conduct, energy and gallantry throughout were beyond praise and without him the attack might well have failed.’* He was a holder of the Military Cross, the Légion of Honor and also an honorary citizen of Bure, Tellin and Ranville in Normandy.

In December 1944 the Nazis launched a counter-attack through the forests of the Ardennes. Their

plan was to cross the River Meuse and head towards Antwerp, splitting the Allied armies and their lines of communication. The 6th Airborne Division, including the 13th Battalion, was ordered over Christmas to take up defensive positions between Dinant and Namur and defend the River Meuse. Bure was strongly held by the Germans and on January 3rd 1945, 13th Parachute Battalion was ordered to attack the village. Major Watson recalled, *‘There were six inches of snow and it was cold, below freezing, with ice on the roads, but the men were in good heart. We marched to a wood which overlooked Bure, our first objective. This was the furthest point in the German offensive to which the German tanks had advanced. Our task was to evict them from Bure.’*

He continues, *‘Once I had got into the village it was difficult finding out just what was going on...It was eerie. We would be in one house, myself on the ground floor and my signaller telling me that there were Germans upstairs and at other times they would be downstairs and we upstairs. It was a most unusual battle’.* Very heavy hand-to-hand fighting took place but the battalion forced the Germans to withdraw, although at the cost of heavy casualties. *‘By about nine o’clock on the evening of the 5th January we had the whole village in our hands with my company eliminating the last enemy post.’*

Major Jack Watson’s actions during the battle



13th Parachute stone in front of Bure church

*launched...He led the Company several hundred yards down a slope and stormed into the village in spite of fire from enemy machine guns from the nearest houses.’*

As well as the Watson family the Tours International tour group included two veterans and family members of other deceased Airborne veterans. The group stayed at the beautiful, 4-star Castle de Pont à Lesse Hotel, located in an idyllic valley in the heart of the Belgian Ardennes, not far from Dinant. As part of the four day tour the group traced the path

secured the village of Bure for the Allies, as noted in his citation: *‘Major Watson, completely disregarding the enemy fire, ran up and down the line, re-organising the forming up, and by his personal leadership and example enabled the attack to be*

taken by the paras from Tellin, stopping where they left the road and headed into the woods. In Bure the group was welcomed by the Burgermeister and town council, who hosted lunch at the local Salle de Fetes.

Led by Michel Bourland, local member of the GBG and instigator of the project to rename the square after Major Jack Watson, the group walked the battlefield where Major Watson led his company and won his Military Cross. Michel organises an annual re-enactment of the Bure battle, which takes place on 3rd January every year.

The group further enjoyed an aperitif with the Tellin and Bure Burgermeisters as well as a special vin d’honneur in Bande, after attending a ceremony at Bande Memorial. The following day they visited the Commonwealth Ceremony in Hotton, where many of the paras who lost their lives in Bure are buried, where they took part in a commemorative wreath-laying ceremony. *‘The battalion lost about 68 men killed and about half of them were from my company. They were buried in a field in Bure by our padre...a few days later,’* remembered Major Watson.

The group then also stopped at the Musée de la Bataille des Ardennes before paying their respects at the private cemeteries in Marloie, Om, Rochefort and Beauraing.

Ralph Bennett, Managing Director of Tours International, who has over 40 years’ experience in the travel industry and an extensive military tour background, said *‘Major Watson travelled with us for many years and so we were honoured to be able to help organise this tribute to him and be present at this very moving ceremony with his family.’* Tours International ([www.tours-international.com](http://www.tours-international.com)) specialises

in military commemorative tours for veterans, their families and war enthusiasts and offers both bespoke group tours and scheduled tours for individuals. Their wide experience of battlefields and campaigns guarantees a truly amazing and imaginative insight into all aspects of World War II. Tours International works closely with Philippe Marée and his team at the Belgian/Wallonia Tourist Board in London, who help with itinerary suggestions, promotion and logistics as well as supporting members of the GBG.



Ceremony at Hotton

Photo - © Mike Collins

# THE BATTLE OF THE CORAL SEA May 1942

Peter Sweeney

The Battle of the Coral Sea, 4-8 May 1942, was fought between combined United States and Australian naval forces and the Imperial Japanese Navy. It was the world's first sea battle between aircraft carriers – literally 'fought in the air.' It was also the first naval battle in which opposing ships neither saw nor fired on each other. It resulted in the Japanese Port Moresby invasion fleet being turned back to Rabaul.

The Battle of the Coral Sea was the first joint Australian/ American military operation after John Curtin's article 'The Task Ahead' was published in 'The Herald' (Melbourne) on 27 December 1941. In that article, Curtin wrote: "The Australian Government, therefore, regards the Pacific struggle as primarily one in which the United States and Australia must have the fullest say in the direction of the democracies' fighting plan.

Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom.

We know the problems that the United Kingdom faces. We know the constant threat of invasion. We know the dangers of dispersal of strength, but we know too, that Australia can go and Britain can still hold on."

This changed forever Australia's relationship with the United Kingdom, which could no longer be relied upon to defend Australia. The surrender of Singapore on 15 February 1942 was evidence of that. Curtin saw that Australia's survival in the war against Japan could only be achieved in concert with the United States, with the United States being the dominant ally.

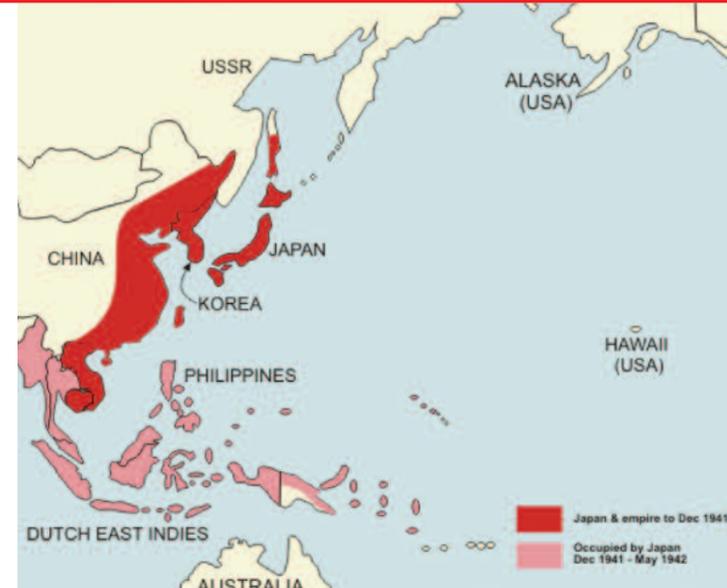


Map 1 - Japanese Advances into the SWPA

## The Japanese Strategic Plan

- Japanese strategic intentions in the Pacific were to:
- destroy the United States Navy aircraft carrier fleet at Pearl Harbour;
  - invade Southeast Asia and Java, securing oil fields and other precious natural resources;
  - then turn towards Burma and India.

Two important factors, however, changed this plan. Firstly, the Japanese were emboldened by their unexpectedly rapid string of military successes in Southeast Asia (what we now call 'mission creep'); and secondly, their plans were thrown into confusion by USAAF Lieutenant-Colonel Jimmy Doolittle's surprise bombing raid on Japan on 18 April 1942.



Map 2 - Area Occupied by Japan

Doolittle's daring raid, besides raising American morale so soon after Pearl Harbour, caused great consternation for Japan's senior military leaders. As a result, instead of invading India as planned, they decided to first expand eastward across the Pacific towards Midway and southward towards Australia so as to provide a buffer around Japan, preventing another such raid on their homeland.

## The Japanese Advances

In the event, whilst the Imperial Japanese Navy inflicted considerable damage on the United States Navy's battleships at Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941, crucially, they failed to engage the United States Navy's aircraft carriers which were at sea on the day of the attack.

Despite this failure, the Japanese rapidly advanced through South-East Asia and Micronesia to New Britain and the northern Solomon Islands. Map 1 shows the Japanese advances into the South-West Pacific and Map 2 shows the area they had occupied by May 1942.

## Operation MO

Having established a strong base at Rabaul on the north coast of New Britain, the Japanese now planned to isolate Australia and New Zealand from their ally the United States and to take Australia out of the war, possibly with a view to eventually invading Australia. The first step, Operation MO (Moresby Operation), was the Japanese plan to capture Port Moresby from the sea and to take control of Papua.

The commander of the Japanese 4th Fleet was Vice-Admiral Shigeyoshi Inoue. For Operation MO, Inoue divided his forces into four groups: a Port Moresby Invasion Group; a Carrier Striking Force; a

Tulagi Invasion Group; and a Covering Force.

Inoue appreciated that he needed a forward base on Tulagi Island in the Solomons to protect the southern flank of the invasion force. On the island, he planned to setup a sea-plane base from which sea-planes would fly south and east on reconnaissance patrols and also protect the flank of the Carrier Striking Force entering the Coral Sea from the Solomon Islands.

The United States Navy's signals intelligence unit at Corregidor Island in the Philippines had been transferred to Melbourne before the Philippines fell. It was now a combined United States Navy/Royal Australian Navy unit known as Fleet Radio Unit Melbourne (FRUMEL). On 28 March 1942, FRUMEL decoded a message: "... the objective of MO will be first to restrict the enemy fleet movements and will be accomplished by means of attacks on the north coast of Australia".

## Opposing Forces

The United States and Australia could not allow Japan to capture Port Moresby and assembled a fleet to prevent this. The opposing fleets assembled for the inevitable battle in the Coral Sea were the Japanese 4th Fleet and the 11th and 17th Allied Task Forces. In capital ships, the two fleets were nearly equal, with the Japanese 4th Fleet having one more carrier, the fleet carrier Shoho, and two more destroyers, than the 17th Allied Task Force. As well, the Japanese 4th Fleet had a dozen additional small ships more than the Allied fleet. Ship numbers by type in the opposing fleets are tabulated below:

Japan	Allies
2 x fleet carriers	2 x fleet carriers
1 x light carrier	
9 x cruisers	9 x cruisers incl. RAN cruisers
15 x destroyers	13 x destroyers 2 x oilers
5 x minesweepers	
2 x minelayers	
2 x submarine chasers	
3 x gunboats	
1 x oil tanker	
1 x seaplane tender	1 x seaplane tender
12 x transports	
127 x carrier aircraft	128 x carrier aircraft

The forces were equal in aircraft, both in numbers and capability, although the Allies had the advantage of land-based bombers from the United States Army Air Force 19th Heavy Bombardment Group based at Townsville. This bomber group was tasked with making long-range bombing attacks on Japanese naval forces gathering north of the Louisiade Archipelago.

The respective aircraft types are tabulated below:

Type	Japan	Allies
Fighters	Mitsubishi A6M 'Zero'	Grumman F4F 'Wildcat'
Torpedo Bombers	Nakajima B5N 'Kate'	Douglas TBD 'Devastator'
Dive Bombers	Aichi D3A 'Val'	Douglas SBD 'Dauntless'
Land-based Bombers		B-17 Flying Fortress

The commander of the Japanese 4th Fleet, Vice-Admiral Shigeyoshi Inoue, in 1940, had been commander of the Imperial Japanese Navy Aviation Bureau. He had been highly critical of the navy's shipbuilding programme, with its emphasis on battleships over aircraft carriers.

Admiral Chester Nimitz, commander-in-chief of the United States Pacific Fleet, deployed his two available carrier groups for this operation. Task Force 11, commanded by Rear-Admiral Aubrey Fitch USN, was centred on the carrier USS Lexington; and Task Force 17, commanded by Vice-Admiral Frank Fletcher USN, was centred on the carrier USS Yorktown.

Fletcher assumed command of Task Force 17 at the start of 1942. He learned air operations at sea while co-operating with Vice-Admiral Frank Halsey's Task Force 8 in mounting raids against the Marshall and Gilbert Islands in February 1942. Task Force 17 was organized into two groups:

- **Attack Group** – Rear-Admiral Thomas Kinkaid USN, consisting of 5 cruisers and 5 destroyers; and
- **Support Group** – Rear-Admiral John Crace RN<sup>1</sup>, consisting of 3 cruisers and 2 destroyers.

Lying directly in the path of the first Japanese task force was the RAAF Advanced Operating Base (AOB) at Tulagi, manned by a combined force of No 11 Squadron, RAAF, operating Catalina flying-boats, and army commandos of the Australian 2/1 Independent Company.

## The Battle

Operation MO commenced on 3 May 1942 and the inevitable resulting battle in the Coral Sea lasted for 6 days. Map 3 illustrates the fleet movements. The major subsidiary actions are described briefly below.

### 1 May 1942

- Despite heavy Japanese air raids from land-based bombers operating from Rabaul, No 11 Squadron continued to operate until the Japanese invasion force was within 35 miles of the island. These operations included the first offensive action taken by the Allies in the lead-up to the Coral Sea battle – a daring attack on the Japanese landings ships, carried out on 1 May by Flying Officer Bob Hirst and the crew of Catalina A24-14.

### 2 May 1942

- Australian aircraft and personnel safely evacuated from Tulagi.

### 3 May 1942

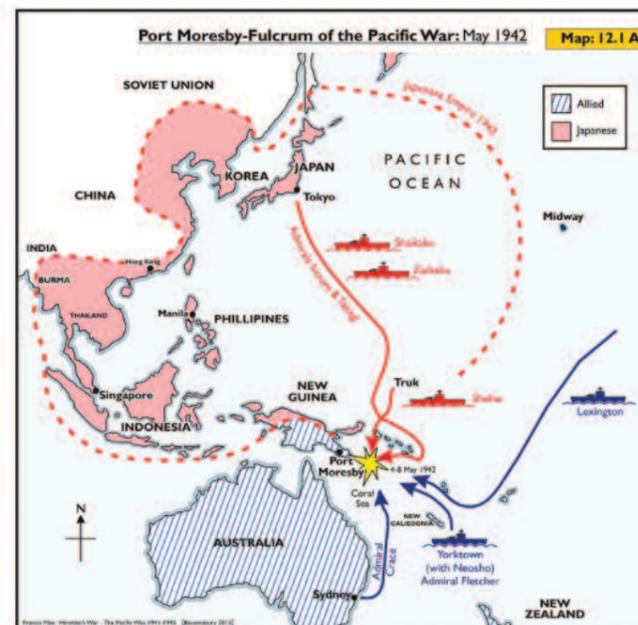
- Japanese landing forces, supported by a small task force led by the light carrier Shoho, invade the tiny island of Tulagi to set up a seaplane base.
- Aircraft from USS Yorktown, alerted to the Japanese presence by RAAF surveillance and Australian coast watchers, launched air raids which destroyed or damaged several of the Japanese surface vessels. More importantly, five of the six Japanese F1M2 'Pete' reconnaissance floatplanes which had arrived at Tulagi immediately after its seizure were also destroyed.
- The loss of these aircraft greatly diminished the later ability of the Japanese to locate and track the American aircraft carriers.

### 4 May 1942

- The USS Yorktown moves south of Guadalcanal and launches four air raids on the Tulagi landing force, sinking a destroyer and a transport ship. The transport ships retreat, leaving the landing force on the island.
- The Japanese carrier strike force arrives.
- Task Force 17 Support Group arrives.

### 5-6 May 1942

- United States Task Force 11 and Task Force 17 Attack Group join with the Task Force 17 Support Group.
- The oiler USS Neosho and the destroyer USS Sims move away from the fleet.
- The Japanese carrier strike force moves south-east of Guadalcanal.
- Both fleets search for each other with reconnaissance flights.
- Three B-17s from 19th Heavy Bombardment Group bombed and missed the Shoho.



Map 3 - Initial Fleet Movements

### 7 May 1942

- Moresby Invasion Fleet continues a south-east course.
- Task Force 17 Support Group blocks the channel to Port Moresby.
- A United States navy pilot spots the Shoho; and the Yorktown and the Lexington launch attacks on the Shoho. United States carrier-based planes bomb and torpedo the Shoho. A United States navy pilot radios back “scratch one flat top”.
- A Japanese pilot spots the Neosho and the Sims and reports them as the main Allied task force. Both Japanese carriers launch a massive air strike, sinking the Sims and severely damaging Neosho, leaving her dead in the water.
- Rear-Admiral Crace manoeuvres his Support Group to cut off the Japanese troop ships from passing through the Louisiade Archipelago into the Coral Sea. Lacking any air cover, he moves his ships into a diamond formation to concentrate their fire. Eleven Japanese bombers attack the Support Group; five bombers are destroyed. A second, high-level bombing attack by the Japanese fail to sink any Allied ships.
- The Support Group is mistakenly attacked by three B-17s from the 19th Heavy Bombardment Group. The attack, at 1519 hours, immediately follows the unsuccessful Japanese air attacks. *(The attack came from the south-west at about 25,000 feet. A salvo of bombs struck the water some 800 yards ahead of the cruiser, HMAS Australia. Apart from that near miss, no damage was done to the ships in the TF 17 Spt Gp. Ironically, HMAS Australia shortly after picked up a radio intercept from the American bombers reporting to their Townsville base that “considerable damage had been inflicted on a Japanese naval squadron”.)*

### 8 May 1942

- Early in the morning both fleets are spotted and launch simultaneous attacks on each other. The Americans severely damage the Shokaku. The Japanese severely damage the Yorktown and the Lexington.
- Damage crews on the Lexington succeed in restoring the carrier to operational condition. Sparks from an electric motor, however, ignite a fire which leads to a series of fuel-related explosions. In a short time, the resulting fires become uncontrollable. Captain F. C. Sherman orders Lexington abandoned. Lexington sinks.
- In the USS Yorktown, damage crews are able to prevent the ship sinking. The Yorktown later sails to Hawaii under its own steam for repairs.
- The Moresby Invasion Fleet and the remnants of the Shoho Task Force break off the engagements, turn around and return to Rabaul.

## The Result

As a result of the Battle of the Coral Sea, the planned seaborne invasion of Port Moresby by Japanese amphibious forces had been thwarted and the Japanese

Empire's advance through the Pacific had been stopped.

The Imperial Japanese Navy had lost a light carrier and a destroyer, whereas the United States Navy had lost a fleet carrier, a destroyer and an oiler. The Japanese Navy also had lost 72 per cent of its carrier-borne aircraft compared to the United States Navy's loss of 54 per cent its carrier-borne aircraft.

More fundamentally, for the first time, the Japanese had been stopped at sea. The American-Australian alliance now had the measure of the Imperial Japanese Navy and had smashed its aura of invincibility.

Neither of the Japanese fleet carriers, Shokaku and Zuikaku, would fight at the coming battle of Midway, whereas the Yorktown would be hastily repaired at Pearl Harbour and would take part in the battle where it would be sunk.

On 8 May 1942, Australia's prime minister, John Curtin, in a national address reporting the Battle of the Coral Sea, urged the nation “... to make a sober and realistic estimate of their duty to the nation... Men are fighting for Australia today. Those who are not fighting have no excuse for not working”.

## The Aftermath

The Battle of Coral Sea had a major influence on the decisive Battle of Midway on 4-7 June 1942. Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, commander-in-chief of the Japanese combined fleet, erroneously thought that two United States aircraft carriers had been sunk during the Battle of the Coral Sea. Unbeknown to Yamamoto, the carrier USS Yorktown had only been damaged in the battle, and it would be repaired and would be fully operational before the Battle of Midway. In the event, it joined the carriers USS Enterprise and USS Hornet in the defence of Midway.

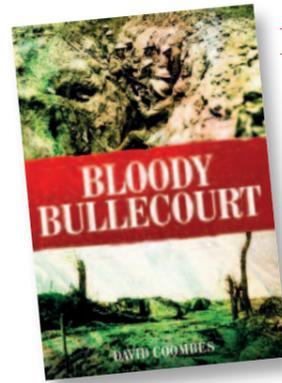
Taking into account Japan's greater aircraft losses in the Coral Sea and America's additional land-based aircraft at Midway, Yamamoto no longer enjoyed the numerical superiority in aircraft over the Americans on which he had based his planning for the Battle of Midway.

## Conclusion

The Battle of the Coral Sea had a direct influence on the defence of Australia in 1942. With the Port Moresby invasion fleet repelled, in order to capture Port Moresby the Japanese were forced to land on the north coast of Papua and then launch a land offensive over the Owen Stanley Range along the Kokoda Track. That offensive was very difficult to re-supply, although it was initially successful, with Japanese troops forcing the Australian Militia back across the Owen Stanley Range to Imitia Ridge, 40km from Port Moresby. But the Japanese could advance no further. At the end of a long supply line, and with Guadalcanal now the priority for Japanese re-supply, the Japanese were forced back to their landing points on Papua's north coast. By the end of 1942, the direct threat to Australia had been averted.

<sup>1</sup> Rear-Admiral Crace, a Royal naval officer, was Australian-born.

# GUIDEbooks:



## BLOODY BULLECOURT

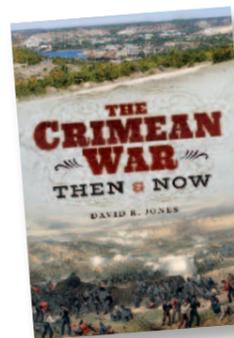
By David Coombes

A fairly well balanced account of both 1st and 2nd Battles of Bullecourt from an Australian author. Refreshingly, it includes detailed analysis of the parts played by the 62nd 7th and 28th British Divisions in both attacks. As entire accounts for

this battle are fairly limited I would add it to my Bullecourt book shelf. His conclusion lays the blame squarely on Gough but also calls into question the poor staff work of 1 ANZAC and his approach is, on the whole, unbiased. A useful secondary source for my dissertation. Well referenced descriptive read with plenty of pictures and good detailed maps.

Review by Jo Hook

Published by Casemate  
RRP £30.00  
paperback, pp192



## THE CRIMEAN WAR Then & Now

By David R Jones

This has been billed by the publisher as the definitive source on the subject of the Crimean battlefields, I have to agree it is pretty special and is certainly worth its relatively hefty price tag.

Each of the well-constructed chapters is lavishly illustrated with contemporary paintings, maps, aerial imagery and recent photographs. It is an almost faultless production, It is not advertised or titled as a Guide so I can't really mark it down for the omission of any detailed information on how the reader travels to, and between the battlefields that are highlighted. That said, things are a little fluid in the region at the moment and reading this excellent book may be the safest option for some time.

Published by Frontline Books  
RRP £35.00  
hardback, pp390

## ALLENBY'S GUNNERS

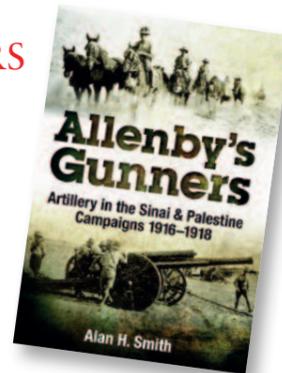
Artillery in the  
Sinai & Palestine

Campaigns 1916-1918

By Alan H Smith

I have been lucky enough to visit the battlefields of Allenby's successful campaigns in what was Palestine on more than one occasion. The next time I go I will be taking this book with me. The author has broken the campaigns into chronological narratives that are an ideal thread for an associated tour itinerary, each supported with excellent maps. The content is as digestible as the format is clear and logical. While focussed on the Guns and the Gunners of both sides, the other Arms that they supported are not excluded. The result is an excellent overview of a dramatic and hard fought campaign.

Published by Pen & Sword Ltd  
RRP £25.00  
hardback, pp376



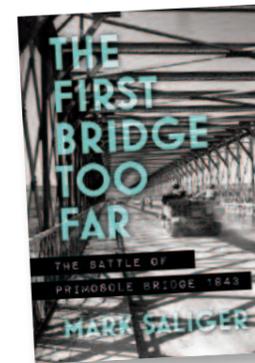
## EAGLES OVER HUSKY

the Allied Air Forces in the  
Sicilian Campaign, 14 May  
to 17 August 1943

By Alexander Fitzgerald-Black

Op Husky is generally glossed over in histories of the Italian campaign, the air component of the campaign rarely attracts more than a few paragraphs and has been long overdue academic scrutiny for many years. This new history has rectified the historical shortfall and, in some style, covering the fierce air battle over Sicily from strategic down to tactical level and back up again. The narrative is well-balanced, viewing the fighting from both sides and importantly from a guide's perspective, linking the battle to events on the ground and at sea. The chapters on Tactical Air Support during Operation Hardgate and the failure to interdict against Operation Lehrgang are particularly informative. 5/5

Published by Helion  
RRP £25.00  
hardback, pp192



## THE FIRST BRIDGE TOO FAR

The Battle of Primosole  
Bridge 1943

By Mark Saliger

A short summary of this battle is featured in this issue of 'Despatches' so I won't focus too much on the battle itself; suffice to say it is an unusual and

neglected episode in an overlooked campaign. The book itself is rich in detail especially at the tactical level; the narrative is an easy and engaging read featuring ample contemporary photographs. There are just enough maps but it does lack any current photographs or modern map coverage to aid the would-be visitor. I do however think that overall this is a worthwhile purchase from a guide's perspective. It certainly brings the battle to life for the reader - Recommended.

Published by Casemate Books  
RRP £25.00  
hardback, pp248



## Echi nel Silenzio Landscapes of the Great War from Garda to Pasubio

By Andrea Contrini

Echi Nel Silenzio - Echoes in the Silence - is a beautiful and impressive book. The photographs, the heart of the book, are mesmerising; their silent beauty is deeply unsettling, forcing reflection on the fighting that these mountains witnessed. The human contribution to the landscape, the trenches, dugouts, regimental inscriptions carved and blown into the rock, the barbed wire remnants, all bear silent testimony to what happened here. Accompanied by descriptive text in Italian and English, with quotations from Italian and Austro-Hungarian soldiers, this photographic anthology is for everyone interested in the Great War on the Italian front. Outstanding.

Review by Rob Deere

Published by Publistampa Edizioni, Italy  
ISBN: 978 88 960 14 974  
RRP £29 + £7 postage. Purchased through Pamela Holland at pammyholl@hotmail.com  
hardback, pp239

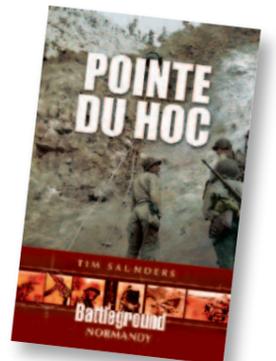
## POINTE DU HOC

Battleground Series –  
Normandy Guide

By Tim Saunders

Pointe Du Hoc is undoubtedly one of the most heavily visited sites in Normandy. This newly released guidebook written by our own Tim Saunders gives the visitor a comprehensive account of the dramatic US Ranger operation to neutralise the guns that threatened OMAHA and UTAH beaches. Packed with useful maps, photographs and historical narrative it really is a comprehensive guide. Tim does have the unusual distinction of having made the climb to the Battery himself during an exchange with the US Army Rangers – he knows the ground!

Published by Pen & Sword Ltd  
RRP £14.99  
paperback, pp234



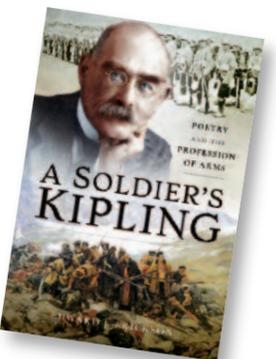
## A SOLDIER'S KIPLING

Poetry and the  
Profession of Arms

By Edward J Erickson

This is not a conventional analysis or run of the mill history of the work of the revered poet of the British Empire. The Author is a retired US Marine Corps officer and Academic well known for his authoritative studies of the Ottoman Army and its campaigns in Gallipoli and Palestine. He takes the reader inside the poetry and looks outward. I thoroughly enjoyed reading what is a thought provoking study of Kipling's works that sets out to link the poetry to the experiences of the modern soldier. The unintended benefit is that this perceptive narrative is a collection of ideal research material and background reading for the Battlefield Guide. The pick of the titles reviewed so far this year

Published by Pen & Sword  
RRP £25.00  
hardback, pp204



# 10 Questions:

Name: Steve Hunnisett

Age: 59

Nationality: British

Home Location: Greenwich,  
SE London

Tour Company: Sole Trader

Validating: Certainly, on the agenda for the future!



In each edition of Despatches, we will be introducing a member of the Guild. In this edition, it is Steve Hunnisett.

- 1. How long have you been interested in battlefields and what was it that initially attracted your interest?** I've been interested in military history for as long as I can remember. Like many of my generation, I was brought up on the classic British war movies of the 50s and 60s and one of those that really struck a chord was "Battle of Britain" which I think still stands up well to this day. I'm also a very proud Londoner and love the history of our capital, so in many ways the history of the Zeppelin and Gotha raids of 1914-18 and the subsequent Blitz and V-Weapons onslaught of 1939-45 seem to fit naturally with anyone interested in both military and London history.
- 2. Have any experiences stood out?** In 2015 on Battle of Britain Sunday, I was guiding a group and paused to do a stand at Sir Keith Park's statue in Waterloo Place. Park is someone whom I greatly admire and whose tactics during the Battle of Britain cannot really be faulted. Whilst I was talking, an elderly couple tagged on to the group and were listening intently. When I finished talking the chap came over to me and said in a Kiwi accent "Thanks so much for saying such nice things about my great uncle!" In an instant, I went from being vaguely irritated that this couple had tagged on unpaid to my group to being absolutely speechless and quite humbled. As soon as he spoke, I realised he did look very much like Keith Park and it transpired that they had just come from the 75th anniversary service at Westminster Abbey and hadn't visited the statue previously.
- 3. What do you enjoy the most about battlefield guiding?** Keeping the history alive and being able to share my knowledge is really satisfying. It's an ongoing learning experience for me too as I am always striving to discover more information.
- 4. What is your favourite stand, location or battlefield and why?** It has to be the General Wolfe statue in Greenwich Park. The plinth of the statue is liberally peppered with shrapnel scars. My father took a photograph of me as a 9-10 year old boy sitting there and I clearly remember asking him what the marks in the stone were all about, so it is definitely one of the places where my interest in history started. I still use the photograph that Dad took when I do a stand at that location, so in a way, he comes on that particular walk with me every time!
- 5. Which battlefield would you like to visit in the future?** El Alamein – my Dad served in North Africa and was at Alamein, so would love to pay a visit sometime. Not strictly a battlefield but I also want to visit the Western Approaches HQ in Liverpool in the near future.
- 6. What have you enjoyed the most about being a member of the Guild?** I was nervous at first because I'm not ex-forces and wondered whether I might be treated as an outsider. I needn't have worried as I've met some great people who have all been prepared to offer advice and encouragement. The knowledge base within the Guild is incredible and I'm proud to be a small part of it
- 7. If there was a fire and you could only save one battlefield-related book or prop, what would you save and why?** This is a really hard question – I've got over 400 military history books but my copy of "The Lost Treasures of London" by William Kent is probably the one I'd rescue first. It was written in 1947 and in it, he describes seven Blitz Walks in different parts of London. The Blitz was a recent memory at this time and although the writing style is of the time, the information he provides is still valid and of interest. I still frequently refer to it when I'm planning a new walk. I picked up my copy for 50 pence at a boot sale!
- 8. What type of group do you think is the most challenging to lead on a tour?** School groups in London can be a challenge as there is always a mixture of those that are genuinely interested in the subject and those that simply don't want to be there. You have to keep the length of the walk down to match their attention span, whilst at the same time keeping it lively and without anything too gruesome. For some reason though, young children always find information about toilets in shelters fascinating and how people 'managed' in that respect. For that reason, I'm always prepared for lavatorial questions and have suitable answers ready!
- 9. What's the best tip, story or nugget of information you have been given by a fellow battlefield guide?** Be yourself, keep it simple and show interest and respect towards the people in your group – no matter what their age or background.
- 10. What is the funniest or most dramatic thing you have seen on tour?** This is a recent one - last Christmas, I was guiding an evening walk of the City and we had reached the Firefighters' Memorial opposite St Paul's Cathedral. Whilst I was doing my stand, we were suddenly surrounded by literally hundreds of people dressed as Santa Claus who appeared from seemingly all directions! It turned out that it was a charity running event and they were heading along the footpath towards the Millennium Bridge, fortunately going in a different direction to my group. The Santas streamed past us, wishing everyone a Merry Christmas as they went. They disappeared as quickly as they had arrived but for a few moments, it was utter chaos - I always try to find out in advance if there are events scheduled for my route on walk days but this one had passed me by – you never quite know what to expect in London!