

Summer 2020

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DESPATCHES

the magazine of the International Guild of Battlefield Guides



IN THIS ISSUE:

Guiding Through Quarantine
Lone Star Guide
Tracking a Lancaster
Picture Guide

PLUS

Photojournalist Guide

AND

Wotjek the Bear

FIELDguides

Cover image: Rainbow over the Messines © Mike Sheils
(See article page 29)

Battle Honours have been looking closer to home - Defence of the Realm Weekend

Often fleetingly glimpsed from the deck of a cross channel ferry, Dover offers a rich military heritage making it the ideal location for a short military history break.



Led by badged guides Tony Scott and Clive Harris, the weekend includes a walk around the town of Dover, taking in memorials and historic sites to tell the story of Dover at War, this is followed by a walk along the eastern cliffs discovering wartime defences, cross channel guns sites and the Chain Home early warning system before ending at the Dover Patrol Memorial and a seaside pub.

The following day includes a walk along the western cliffs pausing at sound ranging equipment and numerous pill boxes overlooking the English Channel. We complete the day with visits to the Capel-Le-Ferne Battle of Britain Memorial, the historic Royal Military Canal and Shorncliffe Military Cemetery. We are currently costing the tour and as GBG Partners, we will of course offer members a discount on the package. Details will follow soon.



Photos: Battle Honours Battlefield Tours Ltd

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Material for publication in the Autumn edition of 'Despatches' must be with the Editor no later than 30 August 2020. This is a deadline and submissions should be sent as far in advance as possible.

All material should be sent via Guild Secretary Tim Stoneman at: secretary@gbg-international.com

Contents



- | | | | |
|--------|--|--------|--|
| P2 | FIELDguides | P21-28 | PICTURES THAT PAINT A THOUSAND WORDS |
| P5-7 | BATTLEFIELD GUIDING and the COVID-19 CRISIS
<i>The experience of a fulltime guide</i> | P29-34 | PHOTOJOURNALIST GUIDE
<i>Part One</i> |
| P8-12 | 'DON'T MESS WITH TEXAS'
<i>Texan war of Independence 1835-36</i> | P35-36 | A BATTLEFIELD STUDY
<i>Virtually</i> |
| P13-16 | INVESTIGATING THE LOSS OF PB 812
<i>Using good sources</i> | P37-38 | WOTJEK THE POLISH MILITARY BEAR
<i>An unusual soldier</i> |
| P17-20 | LOCAL LOCKDOWN MONUMENT TOUR
<i>Close to home and Dover</i> | P39-40 | PB 812 SOURCE GUIDE |
| | | P41-43 | GUIDEbooks |
| | | P43 | EVENTguide 2020/21 |

Lancaster LM363 *postscript* Tony Smith

Back in Spring 2014 I wrote an article for 'Despatches' in which I told the story of the crew of Lancaster LM363 which failed to return from a raid on Berlin on the 2nd December 1943. The aircraft was piloted by Flight Lieutenant George Frazer-Hollins, an experienced 31-year-old pilot with 24 missions under his belt.

As the article mentions, my interest in the Lancaster and its crew had come about after I purchased George's DFC medal group from a dealer some years ago. I had researched each of the lives of the crew members and with the help of Guild member, Willem Kleijn, had pieced together the story of their last fateful raid. What I did not know at the time was where that article would lead.

It was over two years later when, out of the blue, I received an e-mail from fellow member Iain Standen. He had been contacted by a member of George Frazer-Hollins' family who had seen the 'Despatches' article on the internet. The family was very keen to buy the medals back from me if I would be willing to sell them.

After some thought I agreed and it was decided that the family would 'swap' the group for a similar set which, as luck would have it, was up

for sale on eBay. This they duly purchased and on a cold January day I met with the family at a hotel just off the A303.

At that meeting I met with George's son, only a baby at the time that his father was killed, and he showed me letters and documents about George including photographs of him. Up until then I had never been able to find a photograph of George. They also did not know the full details of the final mission which between myself and Willem we had been able to fill in.

It was quite an emotional meeting. It was explained that George's widow had been forced to sell the medals in the '50s when times were hard. The family however had always kept George's memory alive and that it was by chance that they had seen my article. Now they were to be reunited with George's medals. They told me that they were now going to draw up a legal contract to ensure that the medals would never leave the family again.

Having heard the family's story, I was glad that I had I had been able to reunite them with the medals and that between us - myself, Willem and Iain had been able to contribute a little more to their family history.

OPENINGshot:

THE CHAIRMAN'S VIEW

Hello Fellow Guild Members and Guild Partners, I hope that this bumper issue of *'Despatches'* finds you all in good health. I also hope that you like our amazing cover picture, generously provided by long time GBG member, Mike Sheil. As Editor, I am grateful to Mike and to all of the other members who responded to my appeal for content a few weeks ago. It is testament to the depth and variety of knowledge within our unique organisation that we have been able to compile another excellent issue. Looking ahead, the Autumn *'Despatches'* is already looking very healthy. Thank you to everyone who contributed articles, I will use them all.

Given current events, the cover image of a rainbow over Messines seemed appropriate...as we go to print, all of the talk is of a return to the new 'normality' that we all crave. The Travel Industry has of course suffered terribly, and we all face an array of new practical challenges related to the nitty, gritty detail of planning and delivering even the most basic battlefield tours. The biggest challenge will no doubt be costing a tour. The associated costs of administering a tour have changed beyond recognition. European members will already have scoped the hike in cross-channel prices by ferry or train. All of these variables will hopefully begin to settle in the next few months, most of the major battlefield tour operators in Australia, the USA, the UK and Canada have abandoned touring until next year. Let us all hope for a vaccine soon.

One thing is certain, our industry has already become a far more competitive arena. The inevitable decline in the volume and diversity of our client base, additional costs and constantly changing regulation of travel make for a much more complex market. Quality will be the key to survival, it will I feel be even more a buyers' market than before. This is why GBG membership and what it implies will be even more important than ever in the coming months. Those of you who have used your time in lockdown to gain accreditation have certainly done your prospects and your guiding profile no harm. The same can be said for those members who have adapted innovative methods to maintain a market foothold should be commended. I am thinking of Steve Hunnisett's virtual blitz walks and Dan Hill's history from home projects in particular. Most of us are aware that in the 21st century that the search engine is all powerful, along with Trust Pilot and TripAdvisor the discerning client and is well equipped to research and select the guide most appropriate to their requirements. Any slip in professional standards

or inappropriate behaviour on social media will undoubtedly come home to roost.

This new reality has focused the minds of the GBG Management Board, we have been working behind the scenes to futureproof your guild. You can see evidence of the output in the form of detailed weekly bulletins, ongoing changes to the website, virtual validation sessions and many other proactive measures and programmes of work. We are alive to the threats posed by COVID-19, Brexit and the prospect of economic downturn. As a board we are working hard to ensure that membership is worthwhile in personal terms, as well as good value for money. The process is ongoing, please take the time to review the changes that you can see in the areas of Accreditation, Governance and Events. If you have not registered on the website already, please do it now – it is a great shared portal for us all. Those who are accredited members, please review your bio and refresh it if you think that is required.

In line with our efforts to sustain the GBG through the current crisis we have made a number of changes in some of the guild's key posts. As previously announced, Tim Stoneman has moved from his post as the Validation Secretary, he has recently been appointed as our new Guild Secretary. Tim has been replaced as Validation Secretary by Andy Johnson; I am sure that you all wish them both well as they settle into their respective new seats. The board also thanks John Harris for all of his previous hard work as Guild Secretary. I also wish to publicly thank Tony Smith for his contribution as the continuity link for the board during the transition period.

I think that you have heard enough from me, I hope that you will enjoy this latest copy of *'Despatches'*. There is still some space left in the next issue should you wish to share your knowledge and experience, that is after all what the Guild is all about. Now more than ever, we all need to support each other, maintain our bonds of friendship, and help each other when we can. Don't forget, when meet back out on the battlefields, give each other a socially distant wave, and say hello to each other.

I hope that you enjoy your magazine.

Mike Peters
Chairman



BATTLEFIELD GUIDING AND THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The personal experience from a fulltime battlefield guide

Edwin Popken MA

It was Tuesday morning, 16 June 2020 around 8.30. The computer sounded a 'you have new mail' signal and I routinely checked it. I had woken up earlier that morning around 7am, expecting it to be just another day in this now dreary COVID-19 crisis that had violently swept my diary clean of all tours and talks I had planned until the end of July. Some twelve weeks into the lockdown - or had it already been more? - I had kept up a regular daily routine from the beginning and keeping myself busy with different activities and projects.

The Dutch government and their European counterparts had started planning to ease lockdown and reopening their countries again. That was good news, but with several travel restrictions still in place and consumers probably hesitant because of all the vagaries, I could not see battlefield touring restarting just yet. I opened the email and read it ... and read it again, making sure I was reading it correctly: lockdown was easing off, a group of Dutch friends was re-planning a trip to the Ardennes which they had to postpone earlier due to COVID-19. They were now planning to be there during the last weekend of June and asked me whether I was available to do a battlefield tour for them. Yes, of course I was!

This year had started very well for me. My diary for this year was filled with quite a few tours and other WW2 history activities. Like last year, I would be fully concentrating on my WW2 history business. As from mid-April and I had made contractual arrangements with clients in my other line of business which I focus on during the winter period. This year was promising to be another very good and busy guiding season. I was particularly looking forward to this season, given the diversity of tours and activities planned between the end of February and the end of October. I had quite a nice mix of activities lined up this Spring, including four eight-day Easy Company Tours with the US National World War Two Museum, several private tours, several 'open' tours for Dutch clients and six training/excursion days for several general guide companies. Apart from these tours, I was also involved in a project bringing 150 Canadians over for the 75th anniversary of the end of WW2 in The Netherlands. The project involved the Canadians walking some of the routes followed by several Canadian divisions in The Netherlands in April/May 1945. I was providing the historical background and landmarks for these hikes. I was to instruct the group

leaders on the narrative and would be giving several talks as well as two battlefield tours on non-walking days. To get these tours organised, I had enlisted the assistance of several other GBG members. And then there was my Viking Cruises project on top of all this. Having worked for several months with a Destination Management Company (DMC) which provides shore-based activities and excursions for Viking, Viking had asked us to give presentations for their Rhine cruises while moored at Arnhem or Nijmegen. Around 38 talks had been planned until the end of August and more yet during Autumn. To get these presentations organised, I again enlisted the help of several other guides. As I said, I was looking at a very busy and exciting Spring and Summer season.

Then COVID-19 came! As countries closed their borders and imposed lockdowns, several Viking cruises and tours were cancelled. The more time progressed and lockdowns extended, more cancellations followed. The US National World War Two Museum cancelled all their Spring tours globally, Viking discontinued their Rhine cruises at least until 1st of September, the Canadian project had to pull the plug as well a few weeks later. Private tours were also cancelled as guests were either afraid to travel or simply could not get into Europe anymore. Within two or three weeks my entire diary went from being very well filled to completely empty. lockdown restrictions also prevented sourcing alternative markets. The crisis affected the economy in general, I was also not able to extend my contract on a project in my other line of business. I could not get work elsewhere: projects at clients in that line of business were put on hold or downsized, effectively meaning that services of external consultants such as myself were discontinued. By mid-April, my only project was completed and now neither line of business was producing any income. I found myself thinking, what next?

Initially, I took some time to get a few things done that had been waiting to be done for a while. I guess we all have a few things we keep putting off for one reason or another. This seemed to be a good moment to get at least some of these of my list. Apart from this, the lockdown presented me with time to finally catch up on my reading and my large pile of books-still-to-read. There was also my new website, which had been in the making for a while now. I had not been able to get around to work on it for a while, but lockdown offered me time and space for that. I took some time to rethink how I wanted to restructure my website, what it's overall theme should be, how to set up different content pages, how to implement the multi-lingual part of the website, etcetera. And then there were some final changes I wanted to see implemented by my website designer. Slowly and gradually this little project started to come along and recently, early June, I was finally able to put the new website online.

But these activities, though useful and necessary, did not really make up for the tours and talks that were cancelled. At least not for me. Being a military historian and guide, I missed being able to share stories about World War Two and take people to these locations. So, I started thinking about other ways to share my knowledge and passion for these battlefields. One of the key things I had in mind is that I wanted to engage prospective clients in a way that would work during the lockdown. In essence, ways that could be done online.

Joël Stoppels' initiative to organise several Zoom presentations in The Netherlands – also broadcasted on Facebook – proved to be a first opportunity to do so. Joel invited me to give a talk on 'Operation Market Garden'. I decided to move off the beaten path and discuss the participation of British VIII and XII Corps, the problems before and during the operation these corps were faced with and how that affected the overall operation. A part of Operation Market Garden mostly overlooked but so important to understanding the operation.

My inspiration came, however, when an acquaintance of mine contacted me early May for local television. And I do mean local, as this is basically our county television. Not a particularly

large audience but my acquaintance working for this organisation, came with an interesting idea. She was preparing a news special on the 75th commemoration of the end of the war in The Netherlands – May 5th – in our village and wanted to include a mini-documentary on several things that happened here during the war. With little time left before May 5th, we went to a village nearby to film me talking about a family which was bombed well after the area had been liberated, and the front having moved on. To also commemorate our liberators, we filmed at Mierlo GWGC Cemetery where two tank crewmen are buried who died while fighting in our village.

The small documentary got me thinking that this was actually a nice and creative way to keep engaged with former and potential clients. I decided to explore this idea and contacted my mate and fellow GBG member Joris Nieuwint, who sometimes does Easy Company tours with me. I suggested we would make a taster movie for a closed Facebook page run by the US National World War Two Museum called 'Travel at NWW2M'. The page basically functions as a place where staff, guides and former travellers can share WW2 travel content and is part of the museum's ongoing activities to engage with their travellers. Our plan was to do a video, taking the viewers to the places we normally visit during the tour and give a little preview of what we do at these sites. After two days of filming on different locations, a lot of takes – we sometimes had to do more than ten takes to get a good one – a lot of goof-ups, and tons of laughter and fun we finally had the basic material. The next thing was editing and creating a 10-minute movie. This step took many hours of selecting, cutting, pasting, selecting soundtracks and supporting photos in the video, etcetera. But finally, the video was ready and after reviewing it with Joris, I uploaded it onto the facebook page. Within a few hours the post had numerous likes and positive comments, both from staff, people who had already been on the tour and from future travellers on this tour. It was a huge success.

Having been through the entire process once and having learned much, I decided to continue. Me and Joris decided to do another video for the museum's

facebook page, because we had not been able not include a stop we normally do in The Netherlands: the Waal Crossing. We opted to take a different approach for this video and talk in more detail about what happened, using film footage from both sides of the river. Saturday 20 June, we went to Nijmegen and filmed there all day, again with the unavoidable number of takes, out takes, laughs, etc. The video is currently being edited and I hope to have it ready early July.

Another 'spin-off' from this filming was that I decided to start making a series of short movies for my own website to keep clients engaged. Small stories from the battlefield that take about five minutes to watch and have an informative and entertaining character. My first short video is planned to be ready early July, covering an 'off the beaten track' Market Garden story. The film focuses on an action involving the 15/19 Hussars near to where I live. I am certainly not the first one to use video this way: several initiatives exist on the internet nowadays: some of these as a means to earn money – f.i., Bunker Boys –, others to entertain people and/or raise your profile via Zoom or YouTube – f.i., History Happy Hour or Joris' Battlefield Explorer videos on YouTube. I believe online video is creative way of being out on the battlefield and share knowledge with people who cannot go on a tour at current, though I regard it as a marketing tool and not as a viable business model on its own. I am curious how this new activity of mine will develop over time.

As June was progressing, it became clear that restrictions would lift more and more nationally and internationally come July. I felt I needed to prepare and start thinking about how to set up some tours in Summer to at least try and make good on some of the revenue I lost earlier, and how to conduct tours in a way that complied with COVID-19 health and safety regulations. How to deal with the 1.5-meter distancing rule? How to set up a viable tour when no more than 15 people are allowed on a coach bus? How to deal with limitations on number of people in a museum or restaurant? What if different part in The Netherlands interpret certain regulations differently and stricter than others? It happened already. What provisions am I required to make as a business? These

and many more questions needed to be addressed and policies needed to be put in place for tours. I started to contact local governments to check whether touring with a group of people was allowed in their area and if there were any specific restrictions in place. Based on this information and after talking with the director of the Wings of Liberation Museum, a friend of mine, we decided to market a series hiking and bike tours throughout this Summer. We approach it as a test, as it already has become clear after several weeks his museum and similar museums – a/o Hartensteijn and Overloon – were reopened, that the number of visitors is still dramatically low. Consumers apparently are still wary to go out and time will be needed to get back up to healthy levels of numbers of visitors per day. I expect the same thing will apply for these tours. But we will have to start somewhere and get business going again.

Saturday 27 June: I went back on the battlefield, to talk to clients about WW2 and show them where these events happened. Leaving home early – I had a two-hour drive down there – I met the group outside the house they had rented in Schoppen in the Ardennes. After meeting and introducing ourselves – no hand shaking –, covering COVID-19 essentials – check for symptoms, using hand gel, explaining necessary general rules and guidelines, reiterating I would drive in my car and they in theirs – and giving them the tour handouts, I immediately jumped into my role, saying: 'Did you know this road in front of your rental house was used by Kampfgruppe Peiper to roll west, an hour or so before they committed the now infamous Malmedy Massacre?' I saw I immediately had caught their full attention and they were eager to hear what I would say next. It promised this would be a highly informative tour day in the Ardennes. Undoubtedly, there will be many more hurdles to take, cancellations and disappointments to deal with, and I am sure that the road ahead back to 'normal levels' of business will prove to be a long and difficult one. But all of that could not take away my feeling when I stood in front of the group that morning in Schoppen: I was back where I belong: on the battlefield ... guiding!



Sharing a personal story on the landing beach at Waal Crossing site

Filming my Weatherby movie

Me and Joris crossing the new bridge at Nijmegen at Waal Crossing site

Making a bit of fun of Joris' seriousness

Take 1 - lost count - went wrong also

Problems on filming - people cutting through your take

Editing a movie

DON'T MESS WITH TEXAS! A TOUR OF THE TEXAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE 1835-1836

Jim Tanner

The Battle of the Alamo remains a legend to this day. Most people, certainly of a certain age, have some knowledge of the defence of the Alamo by a ragged band of Americans against a far greater-sized Mexican army if only through watching the 1960 Hollywood movie with John Wayne to the fore; unmissable. All the many depictions on film perpetuate the many myths but there is something about *The Duke* that is so honestly American, and Texan. The old church at the Alamo – what served as something of a citadel during the siege – survives to this day, if somewhat consumed by the modern city of San Antonio.



The church at the Mission San Antonio de Valero, the most recognisable structure of the Alamo. The whole site is currently undergoing extensive transformation to aid better interpretation and restore dignity. See: www.culturalinnovations.com/the-alamo

The myths abound but the undoubted bravery of the defenders and the execution of some of the survivors caused “Remember the Alamo” to become a battle-cry for the ‘Texians’ in the revolution against the Mexican government. The Mexican commander might have written off the battle as ‘a small affair’ but its impact and the legend created were akin to

Thermopylae. The eventual victory of the Texians – the name the American settlers gave themselves – and the creation of the Republic of Texas is worthy of study. The battles were all on a relatively small scale and there is not a great deal to glean on the matter of tactics. But amid some staggering military ineptitude on both sides, as a demonstration of superior morale

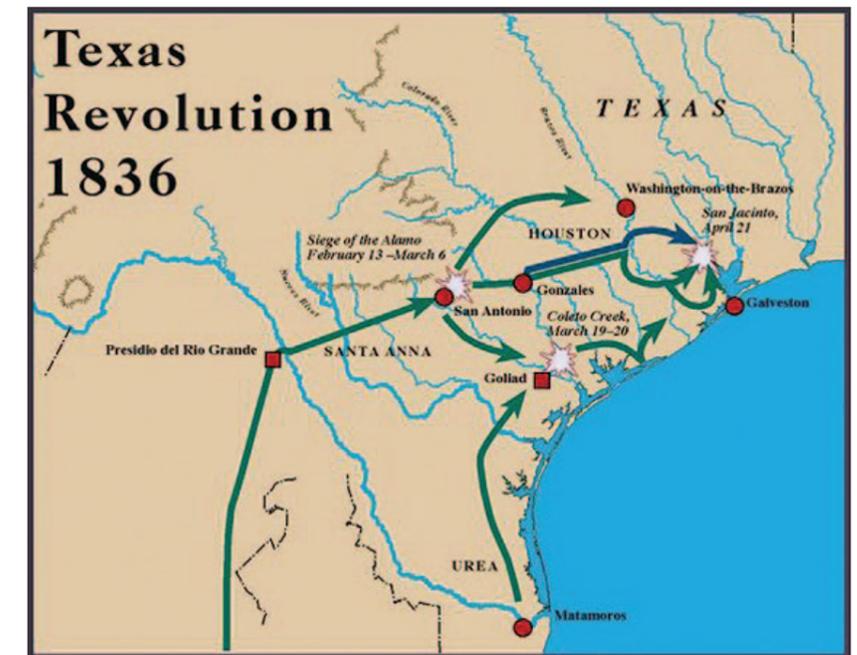
and initiative as critical factors on the battlefield, the war shines a bright light.

There is no space here but for a few details. H W Brands’ ‘*Lone Star Nation*’ is particularly good on the emergence of Texas from the time of Mexico’s independence from Spain in 1821, and before, to the Republic’s admission to the United States in 1845. The creation of the state was wrapped up in the turmoil that afflicted Mexico and interwoven with stories of major characters, some good and some less, the fate of the American Indian and the future greater struggle over states’ independence.

The Alamo is the best-known of all those sites that saw fighting during the war but there is plenty more to see to understand the war, if not that many opportunities for erstwhile battlefield guides to wave their arms about! The Lone Star State is a vast place, more than two and a half times the size of the UK, but a tour of the war can be achieved comfortably in five days, including a slow first day in Austin to take in the Texas State History Museum. As elsewhere in the United States, history is handled with often plentiful resources and great pride. A visit too to the State Capitol helps put the still independently minded Texans in perspective, if their great friendliness to visitors can be a little distracted by the common sight of openly carried guns.

While not in chronological order it makes sense to follow a logical route, given the distances to be covered, and go from Austin to San Antonio (in 1836 San Antonio de Béxar) and the Alamo; stay the night. While only a part of the original buildings has survived it is still an impressive site and, despite the hordes of visitors, the place retains quite an effect, especially inside the church. The reverence displayed, here and elsewhere, can seem too much to a Brit but, as one historian has put it, “*here brave men fought and died*”. The site is now being improved further as additional space is clawed back from the adjacent urban sprawl.

The Spanish were first to turn the original mission into a military post. The town was the largest in the territory and the most strategic point, controlling one of just two roads that ran from Mexico through to Florida. The Texian garrison, commanded at short notice by Colonel William Travis after the unreliable Jim Bowie was struck down by illness, numbered fewer than 300 and stood no chance of standing against the Mexican Army of Operations, some 5,000 or so men commanded by General Antonio



Lopez de Santa Anna Pérez de Lebrón, the Mexican dictator. The siege lasted from 23 February until 6 March, when Santa Anna launched an assault that was unnecessary. Those of the garrison who had not been killed, which included the legendary David Crockett, were then executed.

The war had begun for the Texians the previous year as almost a fallout from a simmering civil war in Mexico. On 2 October at Gonzalez, 75 miles east of San Antonio, about 100 Mexican ‘centralist’ cavalry attempted to seize a small cannon from 18 American colonists allied to the ‘federalist’ cause. They cried out “*Come and take it*” and saw them off and the fuse of the revolution was lit. The original cannon, little more than a 4 pounder, can be seen in the Gonzales Memorial Museum and the fight is significantly memorialised outside the impressive building. It was shortly after this that General Perfecto de Cós began, under Santa Anna’s orders, to fortify the Alamo. He had around 1400 men occupying the town but in an unlikely turn of events, an armed mob – it was little more than that – of somewhere between 300 and 500 Texians under Stephen Austin ground down the Mexicans in a series of defeats. On 28 October Bowie, with 90 men, defeated 400 Mexican troops at Concepción, just south of San Antonio. The Texians then lay siege to San Antonio and over the four days of 5 to 9 December stormed the town and the Alamo itself. This resounding Mexican defeat led directly to Santa Anna’s campaign.

65 miles south of Gonzalez lies the town of Goliad on the San Antonio River. Santa Anna’s plan had been to lead his main force to San Antonio while General José Urrea took 500 infantry and cavalry up

the second of the two roads, the hoped-for pincer movement ensnaring the rebels. Urrea was a far better leader than his chief and by early March had swept aside a couple of Texian attempts to stop him. It must be said that, while Santa Anna, who liked to call himself the ‘Napoleon in the West’, was an arrogant and negligent commander, Texian leadership was lamentable. General Sam Houston, more politician than soldier and supposedly in overall command, proved largely weak and indecisive. He reached Gonzales with a relief force for the Alamo five days after the latter fell and then decided to retreat, abandoning the Texians holding out at Goliad. There, 350 men or more were commanded by Colonel James Fannin who, in his own words, had appealed to the newly-found Texan government: “I feel, I know, if you and the Council do not, that I am incompetent ... if I am qualified to command an Army, I have not found it out.” He had appealed consistently to be relieved and demonstrated his failings by setting off for the relief



The stone obelisk that marks the Battle of Coleto Creek on what is now called the Fannin Battleground. The embedded gin screw, referred to in the text, is nearby.



A life-size diorama in the Texas History Museum in Austin depicting the defiance of ‘The Old Eighteen’ and their cannon at Gonzales, an act which lit the fuse of the Texas revolution.



The Gonzales cannon, the object of the call to “Come and take it,” on its reproduction carriage in the Gonzales Museum.

of the Alamo far too late. He had held a relatively strong position at Goliad. The Presidio La Bahia there – Fort Defiance to the Texians – was a solid fortress and visitors today are well rewarded by having the opportunity to see the best preserved presidio in the West.



The Presidio La Bahia at Goliad, abandoned by Colonel Fannin and to which he and his men were returned after their surrender, to be murdered on its plaza on Santa Anna’s orders.

After so much vacillation on his part Fannin was eventually ordered to fall back to the east. On 19-20 March he was caught in the open by Urrea at Coleto Creek. Fannin and his men formed square and fought for a while but after a long night the wounded Fannin surrendered. They were marched back to the fort and there, on 27 March, 342 of them – about 28 men managed to escape – were murdered on Santa Anna’s orders. The Coleto Creek battlefield, named the Fannin Battleground State Historic Site, is much as it was in 1836. It is somewhat neglected, which is a little surprising but at the same time more atmospheric than the over-memorialization on so many American battlefields. There is a stone monument but in 1894 a local farmer embedded an old gin screw in the ground on the acknowledged site of Fannin’s square.

Gonzalez and Goliad occupy a full day but it is worth then driving the 160 miles or so to Houston for a further overnight stop. Houston puts you within 20 miles of the San Jacinto battleground and the finale of the war.

Sam Houston’s retreat – derisively called the ‘Runaway Scrape’ by his men – was pretty purposeless. The disasters at the Alamo and Goliad had fired up much-needed enthusiasm for the cause but Houston frittered this away as confidence in him drained. By the time of the final act he had about

1,000 men and at least a good half had had the opportunity to train in the rudiments of field manoeuvre while Houston dithered at Groce. He was determined to avoid any further confrontation and it was only the democratic nature of his men that forced him to follow, and to act. Santa Anna thought he had the revolutionaries on the run, that the campaign was all but over and, fatally, divided his forces. Houston, who knew that Santa Anna was aiming to reunite his forces and needed to take the Harrisburg Road at Lynch’s Ferry on the San Jacinto River, acted decisively for once.

On 20 April Houston won the race for the crossing and when Santa Anna pitched up the following day it was clear the Texians well-outnumbered the Mexicans, about 900 to 700. But the moment was lost despite, again, Houston’s subordinates ignoring him and attacking anyway. By the next morning Santa Anna had been reinforced by Cós to the tune of a further 540 troops. Fortunately for Houston, Santa Anna’s ineptitude proved the greater and his soldiers the least motivated. The Texian attack late afternoon of 21 April achieved complete surprise and was over in 18 minutes. Nine Texians were killed and 30 wounded but 650 Mexicans died in the slaughter, most of them given no quarter or murdered outright having already surrendered. While Santa Anna, who

survived to bring further distress to his country, had set the conditions for such acts, Sam Houston and his Texians shed the honour they should have secured for what was a complete victory. Texas had been won.

The San Jacinto battlefield requires some imagination. The ground overall has altered considerably in the intervening years through the clearing of much of the swamp and the construction of the Houston Ship Canal. A myriad of battlefield markers provide plentiful guidance but the Texian advances and much of the fighting are obscured by a car park and a reflecting pool. The Mexican positions are obliterated by a 600 foot stone monument whose observation platform can be reached by a lift, and there is another excellent museum. And all visitors with a military interest will be drawn to the floating immensity of the USS Texas, sitting now on the very edge of the Texian camp. It is the only surviving battleship to have fought in both World Wars and the one surviving Dreadnought.

The Texas Independence Trail is fascinating. There is, of course, much, much more to see in this huge state and I would pick out Fort Davis, a beautifully preserved fort of the era of the Indian Wars and the outstanding Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, the home town of Admiral Chester Nimitz. American battlefields may have been 'memorialised beyond recognition' as one (American) historian has put it, but that they are preserved is a fine achievement in itself and that they do so much to educate and inform is creditable. In Texas, as elsewhere, the lives and deaths of many brave men are remembered.



The San Jacinto battlefield viewed from the east at Marker 17, showing the swampy terrain and the huge monument beyond. The Texians attacked from the west and Marker 17 is situated where the greatest slaughter of the surrendering Mexicans took place.

Further reading: Brands' 'Lone Star Nation' is mentioned above and is good for context, as is T R Fehrenbach's 'Lone Star'. For wider context see Robert Goodwin's 'América - The Epic Story of Spanish North America, 1493-1898', which is an astonishing tale, and S C Gwynne's 'Empire of the Summer Moon', a gripping and often uncomfortable book about the Comanche and 'war to the knife' in Texas. For a purely military history there is Stephen Hardin's 'Texas Iliad'. He writes particularly well and is also the author of 'Osprey's The Alamo 1836 - Santa Anna's Texas Campaign'. The maps and diagrams in the latter serve well as a battlefield guide. There are some very good websites, a good pick being www.texasindependencetrail.com, www.thealamo.org and www.sanjacinto-museum.org.

And don't mess with Texas! The state began an effective campaign 30 years ago to tidy up the place and stop littering. One of its ads went like this: www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIFD0Zyl_f0



The USS Texas. Launched in 1912. She saw action in both World Wars, in the latter supporting landings in North Africa and Normandy and fighting in the Pacific.

INVESTIGATING THE LOSS OF LANCASTER PB 812

Christopher Finn, MPhil, FRAeS, FHEA, Accreditation Director

Assignment 6 requires the candidate to: Gather copies of a selection of sources for a battle (or part thereof) to demonstrate your understanding of sources and their uses. However, all too frequently we are presented with multiple examples of the same type of source (war diaries in particular) and/or there is no explanation of the pros and cons of the selected sources. I wrote this article recently for a historical society's publication and thought it would make a useful example of the value of different sources, and of comparison between them. If you are considering doing Assignment 6, or just for a bit of fun, having read the article go through it again noting down the different sources, what type you consider them to be, what their uses are, and what their pros and cons are. At the back of this issue there is a table of my analysis of them for you to compare your results with. The subsequent assessment of the relative merits of the sources is in the article itself.



At 1545hrs (local time)¹ on Saturday the 10th of February 1945 Avro Lancaster PB 812, AR-Y of 460 Squadron RAAF, crashed just west of the railway station at Caythorpe, in Lincolnshire. Caythorpe is 5 miles directly west of RAF Cranwell and the station 400 yds east of the village, in open farm-land. Five RAAF and one RAF aircrew were killed. This article examines the events leading to the loss of PB 812 from the perspective of historical research and analysis. Flight Sergeant 'Dick' Miller and his crew are silent witnesses. But I found sufficient evidence, much of it contradictory, to arrive at an informed conclusion as to the probable course of events.

I live in Caythorpe and a few years ago my neighbour John, an ex-RAF 'rigger' from the 1960s,

asked me if I knew anything about the Lancaster that crashed by the railway station in 1945. I didn't and he proceeded to give me my first two pieces of evidence. He knew a neighbour, now dead, who as a boy had been cycling from the village towards the railway station when he heard a roar, looked up and saw a Lancaster coming vertically down at high speed. An engine exploded and then the aircraft hit the ground and he was blown off his bike and over a hedge by the force of the second explosion. John then

showed me an intact engine valve and spring assembly with the, bent, valve seat still attached. It had been found, some years later, at a distance from the crash site. A BBMF colleague of mine, who was a very experienced RAF engine fitter, confirmed it could only have been in this condition if the engine had exploded prior to impact, most probably as a result of the engine over-speeding to destruction.

I then searched the Aircrew Remembered database of Bomber Command losses (now hosted and maintained by the International Bomber Command Centre) and soon found the details of the crash. A check of the CWGC website showed them all to be buried in the Bomber Command section of Cambridge City Cemetery, in a collective grave.

¹ British Summer Time, GMT +1 hr, was in force from 25 Feb 40 to 7 Oct 45. "Double" Summer Time had ended on 17 Aug 44. Guide to decoding Met Form 2003, Met Office, undated.

CWGC cemeteries are sources of information for guides, but in this case there is an anomaly – the headstones are not in the usual, close, placement expected of a collective grave.

I initially thought weather, particularly icing, was a possible cause. Having used them before, and found them incredibly helpful, I emailed the Meteorological Office at Taunton and asked for copies of the weather records and synoptic charts for the UK for 9 to 11 February 1945. I had a zip file with everything I had asked for, including the detailed observations for Cranwell, within an hour of asking.² The 1500 hrs GMT (15 mins after the crash) the records for RAF Cranwell give us: 3/10 of large cumulus clouds, with no anvil, between 2000 and 8000 ft; a single layer of alto-cumulus covering half the sky between 8000 and 17000 ft; the surface visibility was 5 miles in haze. As the Lancaster would have been flying at between 18000 and 20000 ft in clear air I discounted weather as a possible cause.

A few weeks later an acquaintance who was a Parish counsellor also asked me if I knew anything

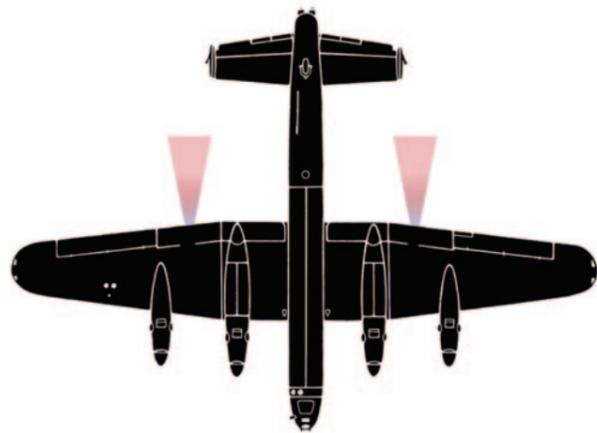


Cambridge City Cemetery.

aimer (Arnold Kloeden) not aboard as he had been in hospital for a few days previously. It was on the last leg of the exercise, from Luton to Scunthorpe flying at around 20,000 ft and 180 MPH indicated airspeed. A medium sized town with steelworks, Scunthorpe would have been the simulated target for the navigator to home on to (and take a photograph of his radar at his bomb release point) and he would have to be there within 1 minute of his nominated time-on-target. The aircraft crashed at Caythorpe at 1545 hrs, showing it had been on track and on time up to that point. Apart from the boy on the bicycle, there were two other eye-witnesses to the crash.

The first was George Plant. In 2016 he gave an interview to Linda Pope, which was recorded. He was a lucid and, to Linda, believable witness. He and two friends were in the village High Street, waiting for a bus to Grantham when “we saw this Lancaster bomber, high up in the sky, and all of a sudden it went into a dive but never got out of it. As it got nearer the ground you could hear the engines going full bore and then it crashed at the rear of the railway station.” The cloud and visibility reported at Cranwell just 15 minutes later are such that the chances of him “seeing it go into a dive” (from 18 to 20,000 ft) are next to nothing. It also implies a catastrophic failure of some kind. Fortunately, we have another, far more plausible, eye-witness.

This is Warrant Officer Stanley Moore, the pilot of an Airspeed Oxford of No 1 Radio School who states⁴: “At 1545 hrs I took off from the NORTH AERODROME CRANWELL, and climbed ahead on a course of 265 deg T. When I was between 500’ and 600’ I was flying beneath a Cumulus cloud the base of which I estimated to be 2000’ – 2500’. I saw a four engine bomber suddenly appear ahead of me diving almost vertically in a direction slightly away from me. This would be in a westerly direction. The aircraft was on fire, flames and smoke coming from the mid section of both port and starboard wings. The flames appeared to be



about the crash. He was helping to organise a visit from Linda Pope, the niece of the wireless operator, who wanted to raise a memorial to the crew close to the crash site. She was trying to find out more about the crash and he gave me a couple of pieces of paper and asked if they meant anything to me. They were key extracts from the findings of the Court of Enquiry into the crash and from the squadron’s Operational Record Book (ORB)!

The ORB³ states that the weather that day was “Rain and strong winds and there were no operations. There was an aircraft crash. Flt Sgt Miller and 5 crew were killed on a Cross Country Run.” The Court of Enquiry record gives a short outline of the sortie. So what happened to PB 81 ?

The aircraft took-off at 1124 hrs with the bomb-



Funeral of Graeme Dockery, Cambridge, England.

This photo, from an un-named Cambridge paper shows Nesbit-Bell’s parents and wife (all from Bristol) and Graeme Dockery’s parents (travelling through England enroute to south Africa) and the single coffin.

confined to the wings and appeared to stretch to halfway between the mainplane trailing edge and the tailplane. I saw a flash as the aircraft hit the ground near CAYTHORPE railway station. I returned to base and reported the accident I had just witnessed to Flying Control.”

As a Warrant Officer, Moore would have been an experienced pilot, probably on a ‘rest’ tour after an operational one. A trained observer, he was able in a couple of seconds to see the aircraft, and assess its relative range, aspect and velocity – an essential skill if you are to survive in air combat. This is how PB 812 would have appeared to him:

The fuselage is slightly foreshortened, which is how he was able to assess it being not quite in a vertical dive, but with wings level and on a westerly heading. Moore would have written his report before the end of the day. So, the event would be clear in his mind and the report contemporaneous. But he did make one incorrect assumption, which we will come to later.

The final piece of evidence about the crash itself is a letter from either the Officer Commanding No 460 Sqn, or Flt Sgt Dockery’s Flight Commander to his father – the single page extract from the Australian Archives does not show whom⁵. In it the writer says “As a result of the severe injuries sustained by the crew it was found impossible to provide separate coffins. This being the case a communal coffin was prepared for all six members for burial at the RAF Regional Cemetery, Cambridge.” To have so few remains from six aircrew, and none identifiable, testifies to the high speed and dive angle of PB 812 in its final few seconds.

Flt Sgt Miller and his crew were not yet ‘operational’ so they didn’t have their ‘own’ aircraft. PB 812 was usually flown by Fg Off Luhrs who gave this evidence to the Court of Enquiry:

“I was usually captain and pilot of LANCASTER

PB 812. After operations on January 2nd 1945 I complained that the automatic pilot fitted to this aircraft caused the aircraft to go into a sudden dive. This was attended to and since then there has been no further sign of this trouble (on four subsequent operations).” WO Moore was the 16th witness and Fg Off Luhrs the 32nd. The other evidence submitted to the Court would have concerned the maintenance history of PB 812, evidence of identity of the crew, evidence from the crash site and of the weather at the time.

The Court of Enquiry concluded⁶: “As the aircraft was so extensively damaged, the court have not found it possible to come to any definite conclusions to the cause of the crash.”

It also gave its opinion that the violent automatic pilot disengagement may have recurred and, given that the pilot was “known to have been inexperienced in the practical operation of the automatic pilot” this may have been the initial cause of the accident.

The Air Officer Commanding No 1 Group agreed with the primary conclusion of the Court. However, he then made the following additional remarks:

“I consider there is insufficient evidence to assign the cause of the dive to an unserviceable automatic pilot. The pilot should have been able to disengage the automatic pilot, should a defect have occurred as previous pilots had done so. I consider the vertical dive on fire is consistent with the aircraft having been in an inverted attitude, possibly due to entering a cumulus type cloud, sufficiently long for the petrol system to have been disturbed, resulting in fire.”

Air Vice Marshal ‘Bob’ Blucke⁷ was a very experienced pilot. He had commanded the Blind Approach Training and Development Unit at the start of the war. Then, as a Group Captain, RAF Ludford Magna where he had been awarded a DSO for his piloting of a stricken Lancaster during a raid on Mannheim. He then, as an Air Commodore, commanded No 14 Base (a group of 1 Gp airfields with their HQ at Ludford Magna) before taking command of No 1 Gp on the 5th of February 1945.

His comments on the ‘disturbed petrol system’ are crucial to our understanding of the possible final flightpath of PB 812. The diagram above right shows the No 2 fuel tank, one in each wing between the two engines. To enable air to replace fuel as it is used a vent with a pipe is fitted to the top of each fuel tank. The long pipe is to prevent fuel from leaking from the tank if the aircraft is at high angles of bank or dive. But if the aircraft is inverted, with air passing at high speed over the outlet of the vent pipe, it becomes a syphon and fuel

² The synoptic charts and UK observation summaries are now available on the Met Office website for free download.

³ AIR 27/1910/3 – No 460 Sqn RAAF, RAF Binbrook, March 1944. ⁴ Written testimony to Court of Enquiry – HQ No 1 Gp, 27 February 1945

⁵ 460S/461/206/P1 dated 22 February 1945. ⁶ Extract from the Court of Enquiry into accident to Lancaster PB 812, HQ No 1 Gp, 27 February 1945.

⁷ As Sqn Ldr Blucke he had piloted the Heyford Bomber which participated

is now sucked out of the tank. What AVM Blucke, with his extensive Lancaster experience, immediately saw was that the flames coming from the rear of the centre section of the wing were not, as WO Moore had assumed, from a burning aircraft. They were the fuel coming from the centre tank vents vaporising and being ignited by hot engine exhaust gases.

Having already eliminated weather as a cause we can also eliminate catastrophic structural or engine failure – WO Moore would have recognised that immediately and, in the case of structural failure, the aircraft would have been tumbling, out of control. AVM Blucke does, however, give some credence to an automatic pilot malfunction being a step in the chain of events that led to the fatal crash. In a further remark he says *“I recommend that the training in automatic pilots at Heavy Conversion Units should be encouraged to the maximum degree.”* So the most likely sequence of events is that the pilot, and the flight engineer, were distracted by an automatic pilot malfunction to the point that the pilot allowed the aircraft to become inverted in cloud, culminating in a vertical dive.

To end up on a westerly heading, from a northerly one, and be fully inverted for some time the aircraft would have had to roll over to the right with the nose pitching down. In other words, an inadvertent ‘barrel roll’, a manoeuvre in which by pitching down whilst inverted the crew are under positive ‘g’ and don’t sense that they are inverted. Had he detected this earlier the pilot would have rolled the right way up and escaped on an easterly heading. The navigator would not have seen this as he would have been behind his curtain, screening out the light, whilst he concentrated on his final radar fix. The wireless operator was equally unsighted. Why either of the two gunners did not raise the alarm is unknown. The aircraft was only just above the half-cover of cloud, up possibly to 17,000 ft, so it could have slipped very quickly into cloud denying them a visual horizon to refer to. However, had the bomb aimer been in his position looking forward through the plexiglass nose he might have seen the initial roll developing and raised the alarm – just the word SKIPPER ! over the intercom would have snapped the pilot out of his focus on the automatic pilot problem and returned him to flying the aeroplane.

By the time he did realise the problem it was far too late. Designed, amongst other things, as a dive bomber the Manchester, and hence the Lancaster had a maximum permitted indicated air speed of 360 MPH, twice its operational cruise speed. The Pilots’ Notes say *“the aircraft becomes increasingly nose-heavy in a high-speed dive, nose up trim should be used and the flight engineer should be ready to assist the pilot as required.”*

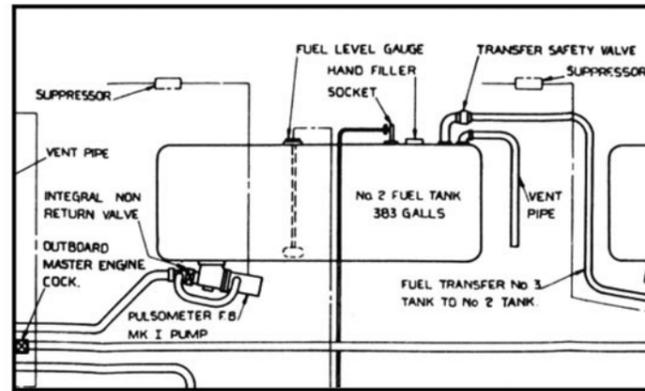


Diagram of No 2 fuel tank.

There are a number of instances of a Lancaster exceeding 400 MPH in a dive and pulling out from it, with the flight engineer standing behind the pilot’s seat and pulling on the control column as well. An early flight test report showed that to recover from just a 30 degree dive at 350 MPH required 150 lbs of stick force which had to be *“held for many seconds to regain normal flying speed and altitude.”*

We know the aircraft was well over the maximum cleared speed because one engine over-spiced to destruction in the last couple of seconds of the flight. At 400 MPH it would have been travelling at about 600 ft/second, or 36,000 ft/min. From 18,000 ft the whole episode would not have lasted much more than a minute. When PB 812 came out of cloud over Caythorpe at 1545 hrs on Saturday 10 March 1945 it was under control. Its wings were level and it was starting to recover from the dive. But Flt Sgt Miller and his crew had simply run out of altitude, and luck.

Analysis

See pages 26-27 for source material



The memorial to Linda Pope’s uncle and his crew-mates was dedicated on the afternoon of Saturday 10 September 2016.

LOCAL LOCKDOWN LOOKS AT SOME MONUMENTS CLOSE TO HOME AND DOVER

(if you get delayed there when we are able to visit the Continent once more)

Tonie and Valmai Holt

CLOSE TO HOME

1. WW2 Border Marker Stone, now situated at the top of a bank in our garden, is one of many that marked the border between Holland and Germany in September 1944. It was originally at the edge of the Reichswald Forest and by the US Landing Zone LZN. It was presented to us by our old friend, Frans Ammerlaan of Oosterbeek. Frans is one of the most knowledgeable experts on the Market-Garden campaign and has done years of dedicated support for returning veterans, notably with the London Taxis who regularly transport veterans to Market-Garden and Normandy see www.taxicharity.org/post/taxi-charity-to-escort-veterans-to-the-netherlands-for-airborne-wandeltocht-2019. He has also done amazing work to get the Polish veterans recognised. See also marketgarden.com/2010/UK/foundation.html

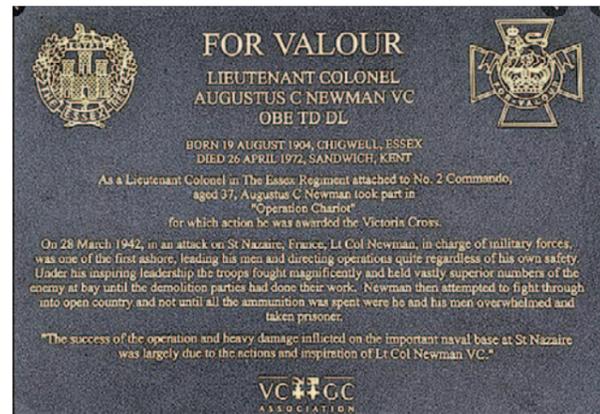


2. Here we are with Frans at the informal unveiling in front of a handful of local battlefield enthusiasts on 27 February 2016.



3. Close to home is the Sandwich War Memorial, first inaugurated in 1922. The interesting brick screen wall protects a fine bronze statue of St George killing the dragon sculpted by Charles Leonard Hartwell. To either side are bronze panels, on which are inscribed the names of 87 WW1 casualties, including several pairs of brothers and cousins and the 21 WW2 1939-45 names. Smaller panels list the three 1951 Korean casualties and the one Falklands names from 1982.

4. Around the corner is a Memorial Plaque under a fine old brick frame, to Lt Col Augustus Charles Newman, VC, OBE, TD, DI, Croix de Guerre, Légion d'Honneur, attd No 3 Commando, who on 28 March 1942, led the Military Forces attack (known as 'Operation Chariot') on the Dry Dock at St Nazaire. After fierce fighting, in which he had inspired his men, and out of ammunition, he and what was left of his men, were captured and taken prisoner. His VC was one of five awarded that day. The Plaque was unveiled on 26 April 2018 at a well-attended ceremony of local dignitaries.



5. Still in Sandwich is USN P22 American Patrol Boat, which has been moored, near the historic Toll Bridge, in the River Stour since 2017. It is the only existing one of 23 built by a German ship builder to patrol the River Rhine in the Cold War. P22 featured in the 1917 film of 'Dunkirk'. Incidentally, beside the Toll House is the historic St Crispin Inn where, it is said, the SBS (then the Special Boat Section) was planned in July 1940. In December 1942 (then known as the Special Boat Service) it earned fame as two of its boats, known as 'The Cockleshell Heroes', raided cargo ships in Bordeaux.

6. Nearby Knowlton is one of the country's 'Thankful Villages' who didn't lose one single parishioner during WW1, thirty two of which were identified by Arthur Mee in the 1930s in his 'The King's England'. More recent research by members of Hellfire Corner (www.hellfirecorner.co.uk/thankful) have discovered some fifty four. From this tiny village – rather a hamlet – with its population of thirty nine, twelve men went to war and twelve returned. The 17ft high memorial was unveiled on 8 September 1919. Knowlton itself merits a visit with its Lutyens-designed Lodge House and tiny Church of St Clements.



DOVER

If your car or coach is delayed by cyclonic winds or strikes in Calais etc there is a range of WW1 and WW2 memorials along the attractive seafront, from the ferry port towards the Hythe Bay Restaurant at the end are:

7. Memorial to the Merchant Navy. This fine figure was sculpted by Vivien Mallock, who also sculpted the moving soldier outside the D-Day Memorial, Portsmouth, the fine sculpture of Gen Montgomery at Colleville-Montgomery, the busts of John Howard at Pegasus Bridge and Gen Sir Richard Gale at Ranville. The memorial brims with information - on all four sides - about the 45,329 Merchant Navy casualties, the Battle of the Atlantic and Operation Neptune, supporting the Normandy invasion, which all deserve reading. It was founded by Donald Hunter, Légion d'Honneur and funded by local donations.



8. Royal Norwegian Navy Memorial, erected 23 May 1998. Norwegian ships operated from Dover, supporting the Royal Navy throughout WW2, with the loss of 320 lives. The Norwegian Merchant Navy lost 400 ships and 2,200 lives. There is another Norwegian Navy memorial at Villon-les-Buissons in Normandy, where their destroyer Svenner was lost.



9. Memorial to 'Operation Fuller', directed by Vice-Admiral Ramsay from the War Rooms in the White Cliffs to stem the German naval activities of 1941, when the German Battle Cruiser Scharnhorst sank over 115,000 tons of British Merchant Shipping. At one stage during the widespread Operation, the battle in the Channel involved the Coastal Artillery at North Foreland. The long pursuit also involved sea mines and the Submarine Service, and continued into 1942 until, finally, the Scharnhorst and her sister ship, Gneisenau were badly damaged and driven into Kiel Harbour on 13 February.

10. Front Line Britain 1939-1945 Plaque. This very early plaque, erected on 29 September 1945, only a month after WW2 was officially closed on VJ Day, 15 August 1945, commemorates all men and women, service and civilian who 'lived and served in East Kent'. It was unveiled by Countess Mountbatten of Burma.



11. Royal British Legion 'Soldier in a Box' Centenary Memorial. Many poppies are scattered round the base of the statue hence, perhaps, the rather unusual transparent box. It was designed by Mark Humphrey and thanks all those, of all nations, who 'served and sacrificed' during WW1. See www.rbl.org.uk/thankyou.



12. This Dover Bombardment Memorial was presented to Dover by the town of Calais in 1951. It is a section of armoured plating from a German long-range gun and lists the 84 recorded rounds of 2,226 shells directed at Dover Harbour and the Town, 1940-1944.

13. Dunkirk Memorial. This fine bas relief memorial shows a soldier being dragged onto one of the armada of 'Little Ships' which rescued men from the Dunkirk Beaches in 1940. It was erected by the Dunkirk Veterans Association on the 35th Anniversary and also thanks the people of Dover who received them.



PICTURES THAT PAINT A THOUSAND WORDS

Ian R Gumm

'The Night Before Battle', 'An Avalanche of Irishmen', and 'Private Thomas Hughes receiving the VC in Hyde Park'. In this article I recount the actions of the 20th (Light) Division and the 16th (Irish) Division at Guillemont on the Somme on 3 September 1916. I have based it on three pictures that I use to enhance the story and have presented it in the form of stands for a battlefield tour. As this is an article specifically produced for the GBG I have included some IWM photographs under their accepted use policy – *'Non-Commercial educational use for the purpose of teaching and instruction, including internal training'*.



Guillemont Road Cemetery GPS: 50.010965, 2.816413

Standing at the eastern boundary wall overlooking the ground towards Guillemont.

The first picture is *'The Night Before Battle'*, a depiction of the Catholic Chaplain surrounded by Irishmen on the night of 2-3 September 1916 published in Ireland by the Weekly Freeman, National Press & Irish Agriculturist Christmas 1916. For the 16th (Irish)

Division, the Battle of Guillemont was to be their first major action of the First World War. Their 47th Infantry Brigade had been attached to the 20th (Light) Division and they were to assault the northern end of the village that was held by the Infanterie-Regiment 76 of the German 111th Infantry Division.

Guillemont sits in a slight depression on the forward edge of a ridge of higher ground that is orientated in a north-west to south-east direction on the far side of the village. This ridge is an extension of

the Thiepval Ridge to the north-west and extends from Longueval and Delville Wood in the west to Leuze Wood in the east near Combles. The neighbouring village of Ginchy sits on the highest point in the area to the north of Guillemont. West of the village the ground falls away in a shallow valley that runs south of Longueval through Trones Wood and the northern tip of Bernafay Wood before entering Guillemont from the west. It is the head of this shallow valley that forms the depression in which the village sits. To the south and south-east of Guillemont from about 500 to 1000-yards out the ground falls away more sharply in an irregular landscape of spurs and re-entrants towards the River Somme.

The nearest two of these re-entrants are the most important in respect of the battle. The first is immediately south of Guillemont and rises from the area of Wedge Wood towards the high ground west of Leuze Wood. The second is further south and east and rises from the area to the north of Maurepas up towards Combles and the high ground beyond.

To the north-west of Guillemont is the infamous Delville Wood which sits to the north of the Longueval – Ginchy Road, and to the west are the two large woods, Trones Wood and Bernafay Wood. To the east are Leuze Wood and Bouleaux Wood. Approximately 400-yards south-west of Guillemont was a small triangular plantation that was known as Arrowhead Copse and about 1000-yards to the south-east of the village is Wedge Wood.

Running through the centre of Guillemont and out to the east is Mount Street and leading out to the west is the Montauban – Guillemont Road. To the rear of the village running in a north to south direction is the Ginchy – Wedge Wood Road and leading north-west out of the village is the Longueval – Guillemont Road. From the south-western corner of the village there were two sunken lanes that ran south from the Montauban – Guillemont Road. About 500-yards south-east of Wedge Wood, sitting on the forward slope of the spur between the two re-entrants, was Falfemont Farm. To the north-west of Guillemont close to the Longueval – Guillemont Road was the Station and further north-west is Waterlot Farm. To the south of the Station and the west of the village was an area known as The Quarries and to the south of The Quarries, adjacent the Montauban – Guillemont Road, was an area known as The Fortress.

The first attempt to take Guillemont was on 8 August 1916. The 2nd and 55th Divisions attacked but Generalleutnant von Moser's 27th (Württemberg) Infantry Division held them off. The 3rd and 24th Divisions then tried to seize the village on 18 August, but they too were unsuccessful. Guillemont was proving to be a hard nut to crack.

On 21 August 1916 the 5th Division and 20th

(Light) Division were the next to try to capture Guillemont. The 7th Division was to capture the village of Ginchy to the north and was to attack at the same time. The 27th (Württemberg) Infantry Division had, in the meantime, been replaced by the 111th Infantry Division and their Infanterie-Regiment 76 (IR 76) occupied the northern half of the ruined village and the Hanoverian Fusilier Regiment 73 (FR 73) occupied the southern end and the area immediately to the south. Whilst some gains were made to the north towards Ginchy the two villages remained firmly in German hands.

On 23 August 1916 the Germans counterattacked against the 20th (Light) Division and pushed them back. A planned attack was planned towards the end of August, but bad weather caused this to be postponed. As August turned into September the weather changed and conditions looked more favourable. The planned fourth attempt was now rescheduled for 3 September 1916. By now, however, the 20th (Light) Division was so worn out by the constant attrition that there was doubt as to whether they were fit enough to mount the assault. In preparation, therefore, Brigadier-General Cameron Shute's 59th Brigade was withdrawn from the line on 30 August to get some rest and Brigadier-General George Pereira's 47th Brigade, from the 16th (Irish) Division, was given orders to report to Major-General Douglas-Smith's headquarters and would be attached to the 20th (Light) Division for the assault.

On Saturday, 2 September 1916 the preliminary bombardment in preparation for the planned deliberate assault at Guillemont began. During that day, the 59th Brigade moved back into the frontline opposite Guillemont, received their orders for the attack to be launched the following day and the Battalions moved into their allotted assembly positions.

In his book *'The Irish at the Front'* Michael MacDonagh wrote about the night before the battle:

"September 3 was a Sunday. On the night before the battle the Irish troops selected for the attack on Guillemont bivouacked on the bare side of a hill. They were the Connaughts, the Royal Irish, the Munsters and the Leinsters. The rain had ceased, but the ground was everywhere deep in mud, the trenches were generally flooded and the shell holes full of water. It was a bleak and desolate scene, relieved only here and there by the sparkle of the little fires around which the platoons clustered. Just as the men of one of the battalions were preparing to wrap themselves in their greatcoats and lie down for the rest which they might be able to snatch in such a situation, the Catholic Chaplain came over the side of the hill and right to the centre of the camp. "In a moment he was surrounded by the men," writes Major Redmond. "They came to him

without orders they came gladly and willingly, and they hailed his visit with plain delight. He spoke to them in the simple, homely language which they liked. He spoke of the sacrifice which they had made in freely and promptly leaving their homes to fight for a cause which was the cause of religion, freedom and civilisation. He reminded them that in this struggle they were most certainly defending the homes and the relations and friends they had left behind them in Ireland.

It was a simple, yet most moving address, and deeply affected the soldiers. Major Redmond goes on to say: "When the Chaplain had finished his

address, he signed to the men to kneel, and administered to them the General Absolution given in times of emergency. The vast majority of the men present knelt, and those of other faith stood by in attitudes of reverent respect. The Chaplain then asked the men to recite with him the Rosary. It was most wonderful the effect produced as hundreds and hundreds of voices repeated the prayers and recited the words, ' Pray for us now and at the hour of our death. Amen.' At the dawn Masses were said by the Chaplains of all the battalions in the open, and most of the officers and men received Holy Communion."



An Avalanche of Irishmen overwhelming a German trench at Guillemont.

Overlooking The Quarries

GPS: 50.013246, 2.820272

Standing to the north of the track junction to the west of Guillemont, looking towards the village.

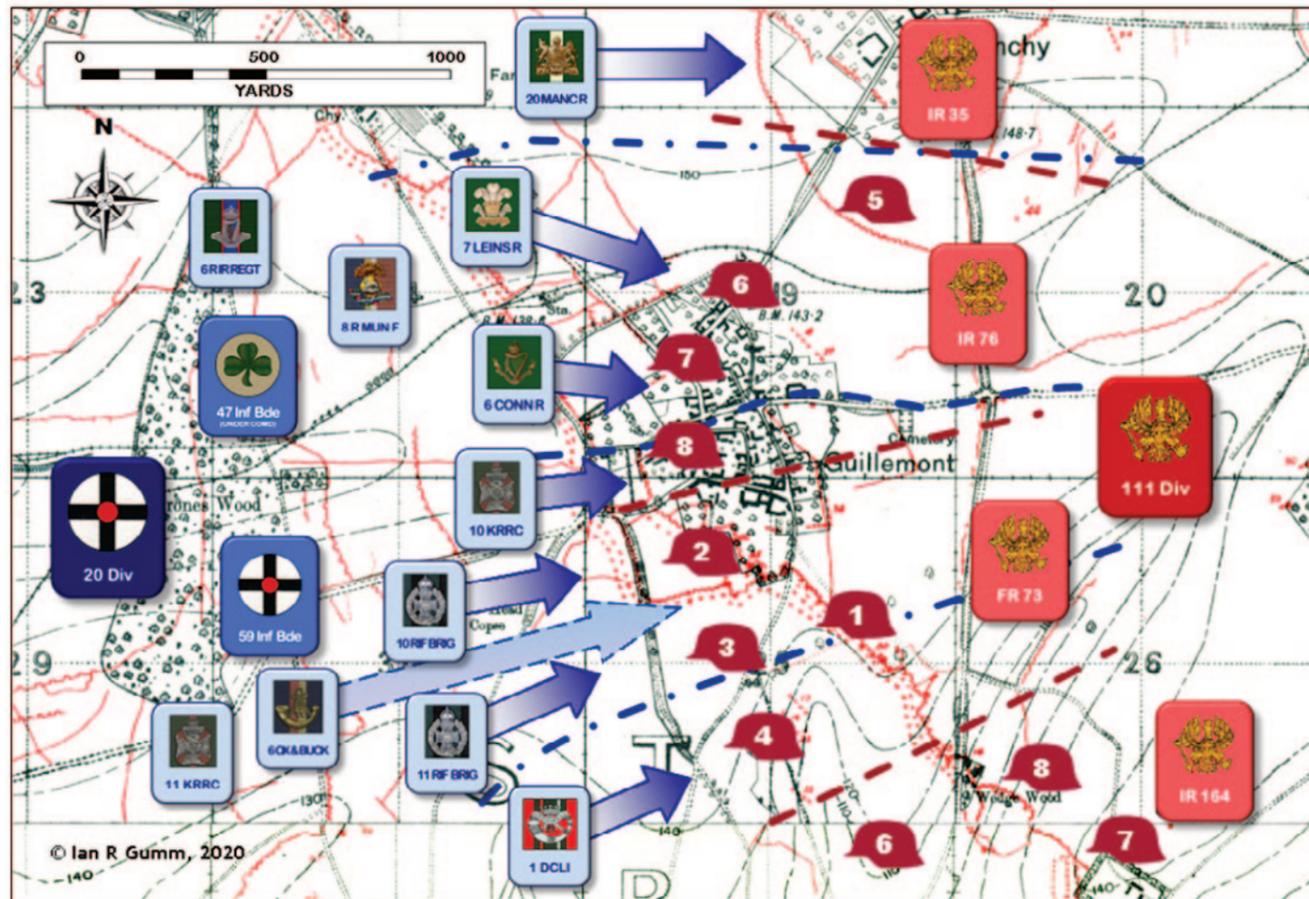
The second picture that paints a thousand words is *'An Avalanche of Irishmen'*, a depiction of the 6th Connaught Rangers charging The Quarries on 3 September 1916 published in The Illustrated London News on 7 October 1916.

Directly in front of you is the area that was known as The Quarries. To your south, where the track joins the Guillemont Road, is the area that was known as The Fortress and to your north, on the far side of the track joining from the Longueval Road, was the Station.

The morning of Sunday, 3 September 1916 was fine with the ground drying up considerably. At 06:00 hrs the artillery fire-plan for the attack commenced with a deliberate bombardment of key areas. At 08:15 hrs a 'Chinese attack' took place where all batteries fired with a burst of rapid fire simultaneously on the German lines.

At 08:30 hrs intense concentrated fire was directed against an area known as the 'TRAP' to the north-east of Guillemont. Throughout the morning the artillery fired similar fire missions.

As the artillery bombardment fell on Guillemont the riflemen of the 59th Brigade and Irishmen of the 47th Brigade waited in their jumping off positions to the west of the village. The 10th Battalion King's



The attack by the 20th (Light) Division, with 47th Brigade under command, to capture the village of Guillemont on 3 September 1916. © Ian R Gumm, 2020

Royal Rifle Corps was just a little closer than the position of Guillemont Road CWGC Cemetery today and they crouched low, keeping their heads down in their trenches as they waited for zero hour. About half-an-hour before the attack the Germans shelled the area to the left of the Montauban – Guillemont Road with Minenwerfer mortars.

The artillery fire-plan for the assault was to put down stationary fire on each objective and provide a creeping barrage that moved in front of the infantry at a pace of fifty yards per minute. The stationary barrage would lift to the next objective at set times or when the creeping barrage came up to it. At 12:00 noon a short hurricane bombardment took place with half of the guns firing the stationary barrage on the German main defensive line and the other half beginning the creeping barrage.

As this intense artillery fire came in, the British infantrymen of the two assaulting Divisions of XIV Corps rose from their assembly trenches and began to move forward.

In the 47th Brigade's area, the 6th Battalion the Connaught Rangers had one of their companies crawl forward prior to zero hour. At the appointed time the battalion rose from their assembly trenches as the guns lifted. They charged the enemy in the

vicinity of The Quarries and the western edge of the village. Entering the enemy positions, they were quick to push forward. At one point the Connaught Rangers reached the German main defensive line as the enemy was manning the parapet and mounting a machine gun. Hit by this avalanche of Irishmen and taken completely by surprise the enemy surrendered.

To their left the 7th Battalion, the Leinster Regiment rose from their assembly trenches and advanced towards The Station keeping tight behind the creeping barrage. Lieutenant John Vincent Holland of the Leinsters left The Gridiron and moved south-east toward the enemy positions in Guillemont with his group of twenty-six bombers. He led his group forward and they entered the German main defensive line. Here they set about clearing the enemy and seizing the German line before pressing on into the village. Once in the ruins of Guillemont Lieutenant Holland's group of bombers drove forward clearing the enemy from their dugouts as they went. In doing so they sustained heavy casualties and by the time that they reached the far side of the village they were reduced to just five unwounded. In their vigorous and ferocious assault Lieutenant Holland's group of bombers captured 50 enemy soldiers. Lieutenant Holland's group of bombers

were:

4962 Sergeant. Michael Kelly, DCM.
 5331 Corporal Patrick Colgan, MM.
 10533 Lance-Corporal Edward Dowling, MM.
 3398 Lance-Corporal Germiah Gueran, KIA.
 8533 Lance-Corporal Arthur Lee, DCM (wounded).
 4828 Lance-Corporal Daniel Synnott, MM (wounded).
 2894 Private Joseph Armstrong (wounded).
 5080 Pte Patrick Boylan (wounded).
 2863 Private Patrick Clarke (wounded).
 2129 Private Michael Clarkin, MM (wounded).
 3321 Private Timothy Coughlan, MM.
 4417 Pte John Dolan (wounded).
 3285 Private Joseph Elliott, KIA.
 2854 Pte John Ford (recommended for commission).
 3490 Private Michael Hogan, KIA.
 5153 Private Richard Holohan (wounded).
 3330 Pte Henry McCabe (wounded).
 2914 Private Ernest McClelland (wounded).
 2178 Private John McComisky, KIA.
 10334 Pte Michael McEvoy (wounded).
 3505 Pte Henry McGuire (wounded).
 3311 Private Bernard Moore, MM (wounded).
 2954 Private William Morgan, KIA.
 3234 Pte William Morton (wounded).
 5179 Private Patrick Murphy (wounded).
 10483 Private John O'Brien (wounded).

For his actions on 3 September 1916 Lieutenant John Holland was awarded the Victoria Cross. His citation in the London Gazette reads:

"For most conspicuous bravery during a heavy engagement, when, not content with bombing hostile dug-outs within the objective, he fearlessly led his bombers through our own artillery barrage and cleared a great part of the village in front. He started out with 26 bombers and finished up with only five after capturing, some fifty prisoners. By this very gallant action he undoubtedly broke the spirit of, the enemy, and thus saved us many casualties when the battalion made a further advance. He was far from well at the time, and later had to go to hospital."

The 6th Connaught Rangers did not properly clear The Quarries in their eagerness to enter the

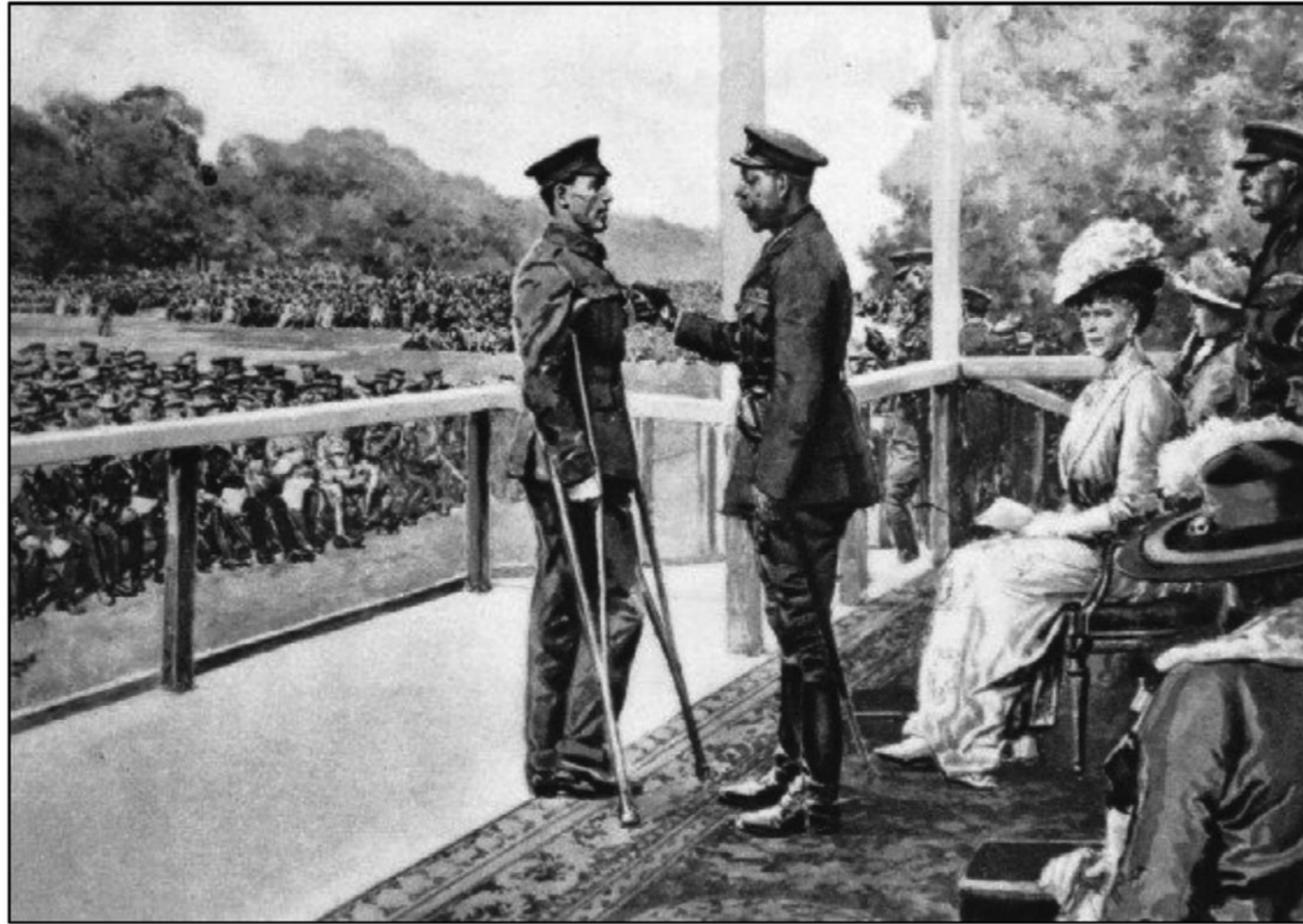
village and left behind small pockets of the enemy that threatened the left-flank of the 59th Brigade's 10th Battalion, the King's Royal Rifle Corps. Lieutenant Colonel Cyril A Blacklock, commanding the 10th King's Royal Rifle Corps, saw the danger and immediately sent in his reserve company and a platoon from one of his other companies to clear The Quarries position. His swift action avoided what could otherwise have been a serious threat to the success of the operation. Lieutenant Colonel Blacklock was awarded a bar to his DSO for his actions on 3 September 1916. His citation in the London Gazette reads:

"For conspicuous gallantry in action. When in command of the left attack of the brigade, considerable bodies of the enemy emerged from underground defences in rear of the brigade. He at once detached parties to deal with the situation, thereby enabling the attack to be successfully carried out. Later he captured and consolidated five consecutive objectives, displaying the greatest courage and initiative."

The Company that Lieutenant Colonel Blacklock sent to clear The Quarries was A Company and the platoon came from D Company. A Forward Observation Officer (FOO) from CVIII Battery RFA, neglecting his own duties, had gone forward with the D Company Platoon and taken part in the attack. Their platoon commander was by this time a casualty and the FOO led them into The Quarries. Unfortunately, I cannot find a record of his name but under his leadership the Platoon from D Company 10th King's Royal Rifle Corps set about mopping up the remaining Germans.



One of my Irish Groups at Guillemont. © Ian R Gumm, 2017



Private Thomas Hughes receiving the VC in Hyde Park from King George V on 2 June 1917.

16th (Irish) Division Memorial

GPS: 50.012853, 2.824386

Standing at the 16th (Irish) Division Memorial outside Guillemont Church.

The third picture that paints a thousand words is *'Private Thomas Hughes receiving the VC in Hyde Park'* from the Great War published in 1918.

Another to distinguish himself during the capture of Guillemont on 3 September 1916 was Private Thomas Hughes of the 6th Connaught Rangers. His actions led to him also being awarded the Victoria Cross. His London Gazette citation reads:

"For most conspicuous bravery and determination. He was wounded in an attack but returned at once to the firing line after having his wounds dressed.

Later, seeing a hostile machine-gun, he dashed out in front of his company, shot the gunner, and single-handed captured the gun.

Though again wounded, he brought back three or four prisoners."

Both brigades under the command of the 20th (Light) Division secured their initial objectives by 12:30 hrs. They had experienced some very fierce fighting in the

vicinity of the sunken lanes, The Quarries and The Station. On the right the 6th Battalion, the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and the 10th King's Royal Rifle Corps held the line of the second sunken lane and western edge of the village as far as Mount Street. The 10th and 11th Battalions, the Rifle Brigade were in the first of the sunken lanes to their rear. On the left of the 20th (Light) Division's area the 6th Connaught Rangers and 7th Leinsters held the rest of the western and northern edges of the village. They had the 8th Battalion, the Royal Munster Fusiliers in reserve and the 6th Battalion, the Royal Irish Rifles were moving forward from Trones Wood.

At 14:00 hrs the advance to the third objective began as the assaulting battalions pushed forward towards the Ginchy – Wedge Wood Road. The third objective was more easily gained, though the assaulting companies, who had now been reinforced by those in support, came under heavy machine gun fire from the right flank. In the 47th Brigade's area the 6th Royal Irish Rifles had passed through the 6th Connaught Rangers and 7th Leinsters to join the 8th Royal Munsters in the forefront of the attack. Together they pushed to within 70-yards of the road under heavy fire. Gathering themselves they made a



Guillemont after the attack in September 1916. (IWM Q 53153)



Mounted British ammunition carriers passing through Guillemont, 12 October 1916. (IWM Q 60620)

20th (Light) Division

GPS: 50.014344, 2.834419

Standing at the 20th (Light) Division Memorial to the east of Guillemont.

The 10th Rifle Brigade, 11th Rifle Brigade and one company of the 10th King's Royal Rifle Corps

made a mad dash the remainder of the way capturing an enemy machine gun post and taking more than 100 prisoners. To their right the 59th Brigade made short work of getting to the Ginchy – Wedge Wood Road without taking heavy casualties and clearing out numerous small parties of the enemy from their dugouts as they went.

Before moving to the 20th (light) Division Memorial visit the church to look at the memorials inside.

carried out the attack on the second objective in the 59th Brigade's area. On their left the 8th Royal Munsters took over the assault in the 47th Brigade's area. The advance was timed to start at 12:50 hrs and soon, thereafter, reports were coming in that they had reached their assigned positions. So close did the troops keep up to the barrage that the next objective,

the eastern edge of the village, was reached before the allotted time. There was a great deal of hand-to-hand fighting in the village and in the orchards on the south side, but by 13:30 hrs the 20th (Light) Division's second objective had been taken. There was still a great deal of fighting going on in the village as the supporting troops moved through it consolidating the gains made and mopping up the small pockets of enemy left behind by the assaulting troops.

One officer of the 10th King's Royal Rifle Corps that deserves a mention is Second Lieutenant David Guy Davies. For his actions during the attack at Guillemont he was awarded the Military Cross. His citation from the London Gazette reads:

"For conspicuous gallantry in action. On three occasions he went forward into our own barrage and brought back some of his men who had pushed too far forward. Later, he re-organised his company to complete their task."

By the 17 September 1916 Second Lieutenant Davies had been promoted to temporary Captain commanding A Company 10th King's Royal Rifle Corps and this promotion was confirmed on 22 September. On 4 April 1917 Captain David Guy Davies MC was Killed-in-Action at Metz-en-Couture and is buried in Gouzeaucourt New British Cemetery, grave VII F 3.

To the north of the 47th Brigade, Brigadier-General Steele's 22nd Brigade from the 7th Division assaulted with two battalions from their assembly

trenches in front of Delville Wood. The 1st Battalion the Royal Welsh Fusiliers were on the left and the 20th Battalion the Manchester Regiment were on the right; together they advanced towards Ginchy and the trenches to the north and east of the wood. Both battalions pushed into the village swiftly overcoming any resistance in their path, though the company of the 1st Royal Welsh Fusiliers on the left of the assault came under withering enfilade fire from the 'Brewery Trenches'. The right-hand company of the 1st Royal Welsh Fusiliers entered the village and were halted by enfilade fire just short of the orchards where they began to dig-in.

As the 20th Manchesters crossed the main north-south road, they too came under withering machine gun fire and were brought to a standstill. By 15:50 hrs they had reached their objective in the south-eastern end of the village, but by now most of their officers were either killed or wounded. They too began to dig-in to consolidate their gains.

By mid-afternoon, Guillemont had been captured up to the line of the Ginchy – Wedge Wood Road several hundred yards to the east of the village. To the north the 7th Division were in Ginchy, though their hold on the village was tenuous. At 18:00 hrs the Germans mounted a counterattack and pushed the 7th Division back out of the village to re-established control of Ginchy and by the end of 3 September Guillemont was in British hands while Ginchy was once again held by the Germans.

PHOTOJOURNALIST GUIDE PART ONE

Mike Sheil

When I first started working on my photographic project *'Fields of Battle, Lands of Peace'* in 2005 I was given two pieces of advice by Richard Holmes. The first was to ensure that every picture told a story about the location and secondly to avoid being 'an over-emotional Celt'. The latter was easy as I myself wanted to get away from the habit of so many books which either presented battlefields in sombre black and white or consisted of a preponderance of cemeteries.



Richard held that simply standing in a cemetery narrating the lives of the men interred there simply bent history out of shape as it ignored the men who had survived and anyhow, except on rare occasions, the cemetery itself did little to enable a better understanding of the events which had led to its sad occupancy. As we all recognise, Richard Holmes was a battlefield historian sans-pareil but he always described himself as 'a military historian who likes to tell stories'. A simple philosophy but the problem is where to find the stories. It is all very well trawling through official histories and narrating the bare facts but the devil is really in the detail - the personal detail, the detail known to the men on the ground. As a guide one obviously has to have a grasp of the historical facts but having spent time watching other guides and visiting parties it is clear that people relish anything which brings humanity to the forefront of any location. Inevitably cemeteries are about numbers and, as Stalin said, one death is a tragedy but a million dead are only a statistic, and the project required the photographs to reflect the experience of the men involved.



The Battle of Guillemont. 3 -5 September 1916. Dead German soldiers scattered in the wreck of a machine gun post near Guillemont. (IWM Q 4256)



Photo 1 *The sunken road at Gommecourt which Liveing managed to cross despite the enfilading machine-gun fire from Rossignol Wood on the horizon.*

Photo 1

By way of illustration, we all know that on 1 July 1916 there were 60,000 casualties. By the very nature of those losses there are very few personal front line accounts but one which stands out for me is that of Edward Liveing, serving with the 12th. London Regiment at Gommecourt, whose account, 'Attack on the Somme', combines revealing detail and subtle comment as he describes how:

"I started off at the prearranged walk. A continuous hissing noise all around one ... signified that the Germans machine gunners had become aware of our presence ... in front the ground was pitted by innumerable shell-holes... Here and there a few bodies lay about ... one man after another fell down in a seemingly natural manner and the wave melted away. ... I came up to the German wire ... and advanced to a gap in the German wire. There was a pile of our wounded here ... Suddenly I cursed. I had been scalded in the right hip ... I dropped forward full length on the ground".

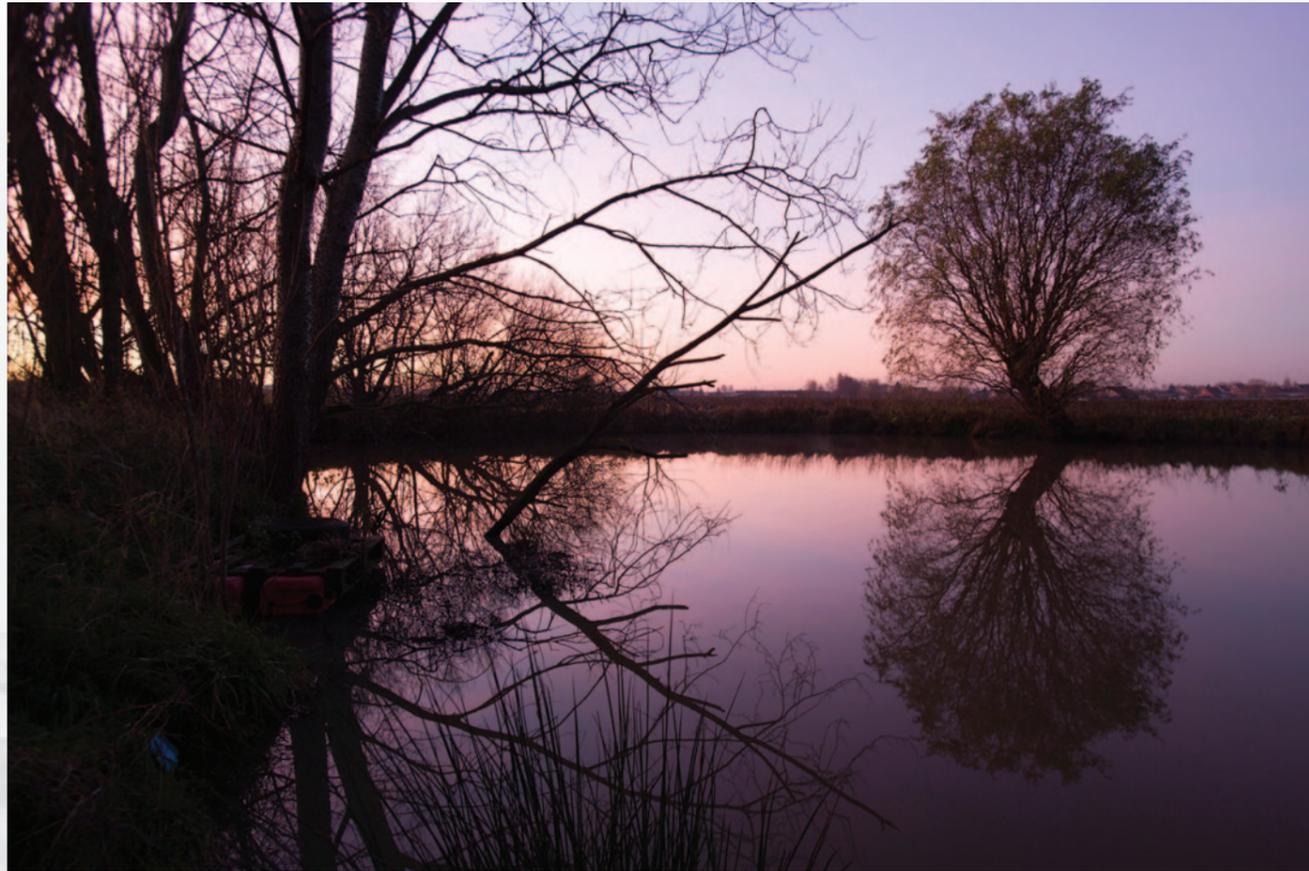
Liveing started to crawl back towards his own lines.

"Little holes opened in the ground on either side of me and I understood that I was under machine-gun fire. ... I fell down into a sunken road with several other wounded ... the Germans had a machine gun on that road and only a few of us got across."

Finally, he reached Hebuterne where:

".. the RAMC were bandaging the ever-increasing flow of wounded. Amongst them a captive German in green uniform with a Red Cross round his sleeve was hard at work. Everything seemed so different from the deadly strife a thousand yards away. There, foe was inflicting wounds to foe; here were our men attending to the German wounded and the Germans attending to ours ... Here were both sides united in a common attempt to repair the ravages of war. Humanity had at last asserted itself."

Photo 2 The site of 'Springfield' bunker where Vaughan spent the night listening to the sound of the wounded drowning in the shell-holes.

**Photo 2**

For many, the intensity of the words of Edwin Campion Vaughan in 'Some Desperate Glory' describing the terrible conditions at St Julien during

the battle of Passchendaele typify the feelings of despair of so many who survived that battle.

"From the darkness on all sides came the groans and wails of wounded men; faint, long sobbing

moans of agony, and despairing shrieks. It was too horribly obvious that dozens of men with serious wounds must have crawled for safety into new shell-holes, and now the water was rising about them and, powerless to move, they were slowly drowning...and we could do nothing to help them...

At about 9 am I dragged myself wearily out to

take a muster parade on which my worst fears were realised. It was a terrible list...Feeling sick and lonely I returned to my tent to write out my casualty report; but instead I sat on the floor and drank whisky after whisky as I gazed into a black and empty future."

Photo 3 The caves where a German shell killed the wounded who were lying in the foreground.

**Photo 3**

Sometimes a memoir provides a description of the ground which renders a guide as redundant. 'Devil in the Drum' by John Lucy has an inch perfect description of the ground where the Royal Irish Rifles fought on the Aisne in 1914.

Another company took our place in the front and we went underground into conveniently situated large caves, a little distance in rear of the line. The medical officer had opened up his dressing station at the mouth of one cave and was already busy attending the wounded and the dead. He went along the line of those who had been hit and his preliminary test for life in each lying figure seemed to be a pinch under the jaw.

We were ordered to fall in outside the caves and out we went shying a bit at the sight of blood-dripping stretchers propped against the wall of the cave mouth ... a hollow in the ground about 10 yards from the caves was filled with

bandaged wounded ... they did not seem very distressed... a rising tearing noise like that of an approaching train heralded the arrival of a heavy shell...we crouched down where we were...we closed our teeth to the shattering burst, which seemed right on top of us ... I raised my head to see that the shell had exploded precisely over the hollow and killed every one of the wounded.

... We fixed our bayonets, as the enemy were close, our task being to engage any enemy on our front...My brother's platoon suddenly got the order, unheard by me, and up went the men on the open grassland. Denis went ahead...He...presented a good picture of the young leader going into battle ... I shouted to him: "Take care of yourself" ... My brother steadied a moment in a stride which was beginning to break into a steady run forward and looking back over his shoulder winked re-assuringly at me. The beggar could wink.

Forward he went, and out of my sight for ever.

Photo 4 Richard Holmes told me that whenever he visited this cave, he was ‘deafened by the sound of silent voices singing La Marseillaise.’



Photo 4

Not far away is the remarkable *Chapelle de Père Doncoeur*, created by the French poilus in an underground limestone quarry. An anonymous soldier described it thus:

“.. a sergeant in my company, Theo Potel, is an amateur painter and at the end of the cave we have made, in a big oval niche, a cross with Christ around which he has painted the light of the rising sun in a superb red... On the two sides of the chapel Potel has painted flowers for us which has a beautiful effect.. for light there are two small candlesticks each with four candles on the altar:

two other big ones with six candles stand on either side of the altar. For decoration on either side there are two splendid fir trees.

Now comes the hour. The lights are glowing and the singers are near the altar...A huge crowd of men take their place in the corridor. Everyone gathers their thoughts and the mass begins.

The moment of the elevation comes: the piquet are carrying arms as the bugles have just sounded the call to arms...and then to finish the Mass we sing three verses of the Marseillaise. At that moment, it was so beautiful it brought tears to one’s eyes...”.

Photo 5 (cover photo)

Sometimes, quite literally, a sudden burst of light on the landscape brings the writer’s words to life. On 7 June 1917 Phillip Gibbs, the war correspondent for the Daily Telegraph, witnessed the awesome series of exploding mines along the Messines ridge and wrote that...

“great leaping streams of orange flame shot upwards, each a huge volcano...along the front of attack followed by terrific explosions and dense masses of smoke and dust which stood like pillars towering into the sky, all illuminated by the fires below”.

Photo 6 The French trenches where Junger found himself surrounded by French dead.



Photo 6

That most vivid of writers, Ernst Junger, also recounts an encounter with the dead in *‘Storm of Steel’*, surely one of the defining books of the conflict. Junger’s diaries reveal in great detail his exact position so in April 1915 one can place him to within fifty meters in woods near Les Épargnes when:

“Through a stuttering swathe of machine-gun fire. we plunged back into our communication trench, and moved to a position on the edge of the wood, previously held by the French. A sweetish smell and a bundle hanging in the wire caught my attention. In the rising mist, I leaped out of the trench and found a shrunken French corpse... all around were dozens more, rotted, dried, stiffened to mummies, frozen in an eerie dance of death.”

He then describes how he gets shot and he:

“... ran towards the trench we had come from...it was choked with seriously wounded and dying men... this was the home of the great god Pain, and for the first time I looked through a devilish chink in the depths of his realm. ... I lost my head completely. Ruthlessly I barged past everyone on my path ... Like a bolting horse, I rushed through the dense undergrowth, across paths and clearings, till I collapsed in a copse by the Grande Tranchee”.

I am aware that many people dislike Junger’s blunt descriptions of killing his enemies - surely that is what soldier are supposed to do in the course of their ‘work’? - but I think this confession of his panic, even cowardice, endows his work with a total honesty that one has to respect.

Photo 7 The marshes of the Ancre.

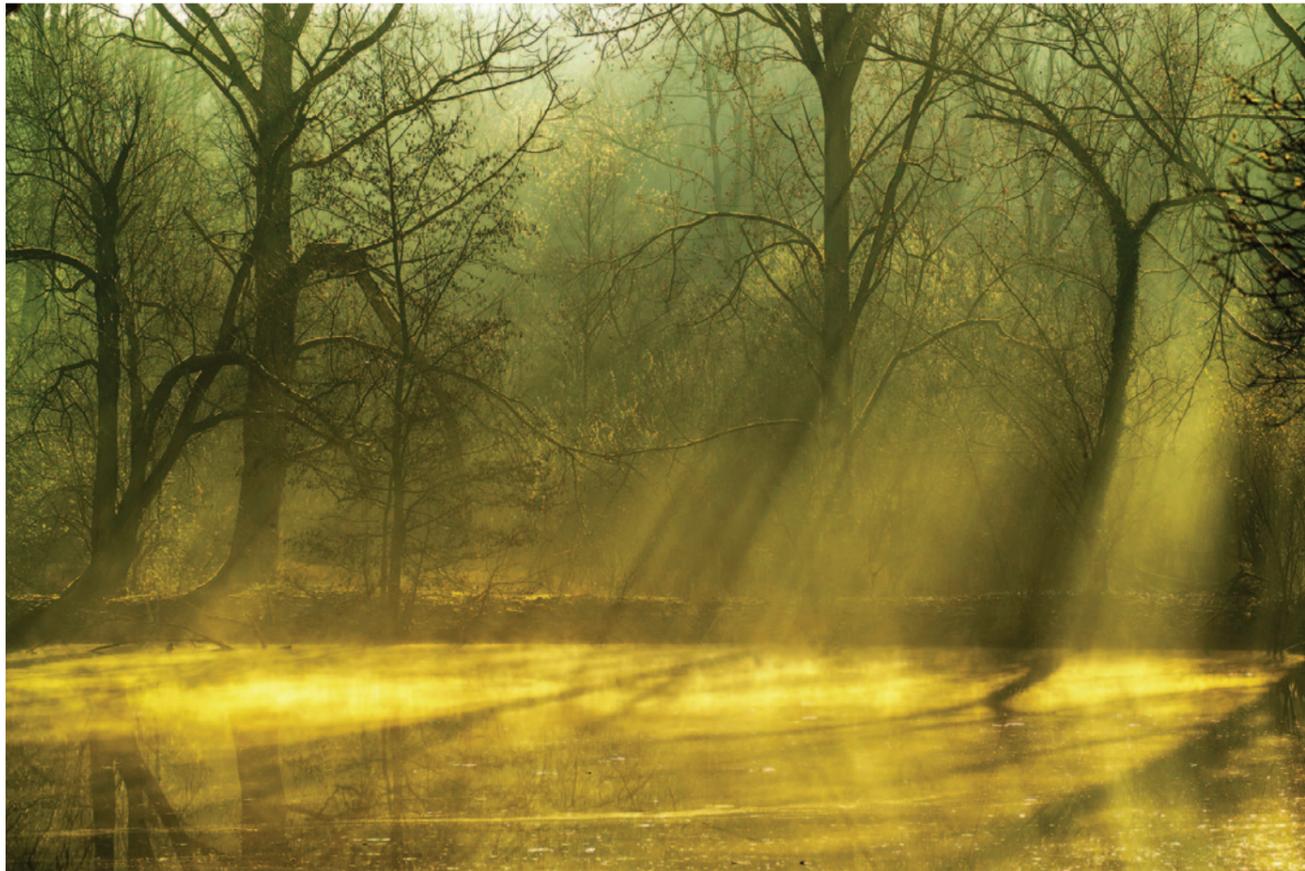


Photo 7

J R R Tolkien derived much imagery from his time serving with the Lancashire Fusiliers in the Ancre Valley and in The Two Towers he describes how:

“...cold clammy winter still held sway in this forsaken country. The only green was the scum of livid weed on the dark greasy surfaces of the sullen waters. Dead grasses and rotting reeds loomed up in the mists...Dead grasses and rotting reeds loomed up

in the mists...Sam tripped...for a moment the water below him looked like some window, glazed with grimy glass through which he was peering...“There are dead things, dead faces in the water,” he said with horror. “Dead Faces! at which point Gollum, their guide, explains: “There was great battle long ago... the Marshes have grown since then, swallowed up the graves... you cannot reach them, you cannot touch them...All dead.”

VIRTUALLY A BATTLEFIELD STUDY

John Greenacre

Towards the end of April, at the height of the COVID-19 induced lockdown, the Guild secretary circulated a request for a guide to run a ‘virtual’ battlefield tour. With time on my hands I responded and was lucky enough to be selected by the client who turned out to be 1st Battalion, Scots Guards.

I entered into remote discussions with the company commander delegated to run the event to talk through the themes and format. We decided on Operation MARKET GARDEN as the battle on which to base the study. The advance of XXX Corps provides strong themes that are relevant to the new British Army Strike capability that the Scots Guards are due to adopt in 2022 as does the isolated fight of British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem. On top of that, the involvement of the Guards Armoured Division provided a link to the Scots Guards’ wider heritage – in fact the battalion has recently readopted the Guards Armoured Division insignia.

We settled on a format for the event, which would be run over three days. I agreed to produce resources and the technical details of the delivery would be the

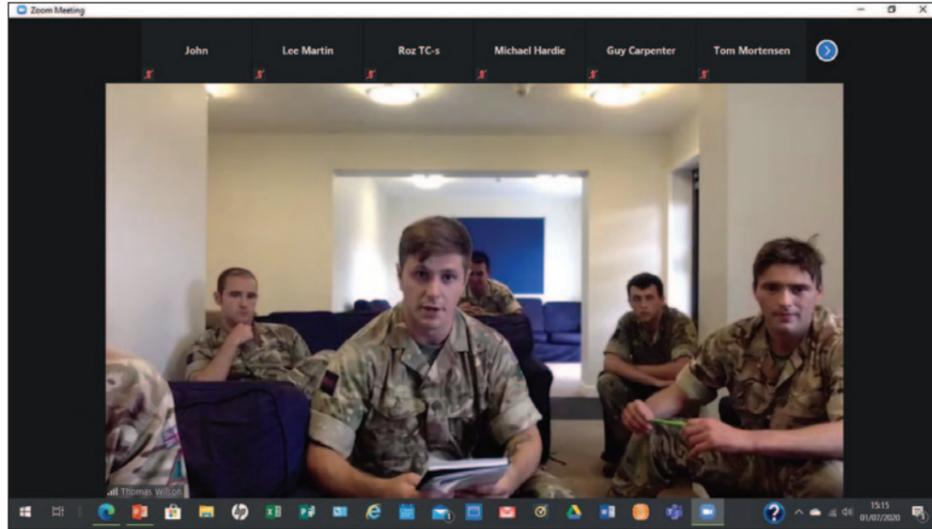
responsibility of the battalion. The entire event would be delivered over Zoom (you know, that platform none of us had heard of at the beginning of this year). Officers and soldiers from the battalion would be broken down by company and each company would host a group at various locations around the battalion’s barracks in Aldershot, taking social distancing guidelines into account. Each group would have IT connected to a projector and speakers ready to host Zoom. One company was still dispersed so its members would access the event individually on their own devices from their homes across Scotland and England. Each day began with a connectivity check and a short introduction from the commanding officer. I then took the lead and delivered a one hour presentation over Zoom from the comfort of my own study, appearing on several big screens around Aldershot like a budget basement Bond villain. Day 1 focused on the Guards Armoured Division’s advance, Day 2 on 1st Airborne Division’s battle around Arnhem and Day 3 on the British Army’s approach to leadership, discipline and morale during the Second World War. After a session for questions and answers the study leader allocated topics and questions to each company group that would shape the following discussion. Zoom then shut down and the companies went into (socially distanced) huddles to discuss the discussion questions they had been set. After lunch the Zoom session reconvened and the commanding officer took the lead in the group discussions with historical input from me where required. I then summed up some of the historical points before the session closed down for the day.

So, what did I learn from the experience?

1. The British Army’s connectivity is not as good as you might assume. Despite a technical rehearsal Day 1 was subject to problems with connectivity. Some groups struggled to conduct their discussions over a video link and even voice connections broke down at times. By Day 2 however, the battalion had reconfigured and moved some group locations and



Delivering virtually has advantages.



A group of Guardsmen back brief their discussion points.

everything ran far more smoothly. When companies back-briefed their discussion points they either used the 'share screen' function to talk over bullet points on Powerpoint or explained diagrams held up to camera on whiteboards or flip boards.

2. An audience will commit to a virtual event. Clearly it's more difficult to judge how well you are reaching your audience when you are presenting to them over the ether but the questions that followed each session were perceptive and clearly demonstrated that the audience had been paying attention and bought in to the material. The discussions were lively and well informed with all ranks delivering to a high standard. Everyone who took part agreed it was noticeable that the junior soldiers were more willing to step forward and contribute than they might have been during a 'traditional' battlefield study.

3. You can reach a wide audience remotely. Whereas on a physical battlefield study you might have an audience of thirty or forty in this case 120 members of the battalion were taking part simultaneously, spreading the knowledge and discussion to a far wider audience.

4. There are advantages to delivering virtually. There is a lot to be said for delivering an event like this from your own home. I was never far from the kettle or a toilet and could take advantage of both when not presenting on screen. My books were to hand so I could make a sneaky reference to them when asked the inevitable tricky question. And finally, as long as you look presentable from the chest up you can dress for comfort.

"But hold on" I hear you all cry, "this is not a battlefield tour!" And, of course, you

would be absolutely correct, it's not. It is absolutely no substitute for being on the battlefield, being able to explain the lie of the land to your audience face to face and doing what we do best. In fact I would not even rate it as a virtual battlefield study. Rather it was a remotely delivered study day based around a battlefield theme as a vehicle to promote discussion on current issues. That being accepted it was a highly successful event. It was being treated as a proof of concept

within the British Army and as such it was observed by members of other regiments and higher formation headquarters to validate its value. Clearly there are advantages to the remote approach for the Army and MOD over a 'traditional' battlefield study: It is a far cheaper option, it can be organised much more quickly, it can reach a wider audience and you can mix and match suitable stands from multiple battlefields in a single event.

As with many facets of life, with the advantages clear it is likely that the remote approach may persist beyond the length of the current crisis. It cannot however, and will not replace battlefield studies conducted on the battlefield itself. It is more likely to represent a new parallel strand of professional development and therefore a new opportunity for battlefield guides willing to compromise and adapt.



The author joining the discussion remotely - like a budget Bond villain.

WOTJEK THE POLISH MILITARY BEAR

David Harrison

A chance sighting of the statue of a Polish Second World War soldier and a bear in Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh led to the discovery of a fascinating story. Investigation revealed that both had served in 'Anders Army' during the Italian Campaign.

General Anders had become a Soviet prisoner of war in 1939 but, following the German invasion of USSR, had raised an Army of former Polish PoWs in Central Asia. Anders Army eventually fought as part of the British 8th Army in Italy.

Wojtek, a Syrian brown bear, spent 4 years of the war enlisted in 22nd Company, Polish Army Service Corps (Artillery), took part in the Battle for Monte Cassino and all the subsequent 2nd Polish Corps battles. 1946 found Wojtek and his guardian in a Polish Resettlement Centre in the Scottish Borders. With the majority of Polish soldiers feeling unable to return to post war Poland and settling in Britain, Wojtek was retired to Edinburgh Zoo.

Poland was simultaneously invaded by Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939. As a consequence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact the country was then divided between the two aggressors. The Polish Army had fought gallantly but its prisoners of war disappeared into German and Soviet labour camps. The majority of those who went east ended up in Central Asia. Whilst serving as the British Defence Attaché in Kazakhstan I recall seeing on the barren steppe at Spassk, near Karaganda, a subdued roadside memorial to those Polish soldiers who had died in the 'Karaganda Lager'. Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 and the latter's subsequent alignment with the Allies, those Polish soldiers who had survived the KARLAG were gathered together at Tashkent in Uzbekistan to cross the Caspian Sea. The British Army in Persia took responsibility for the training and equipping of what



A statue of Wojtek the Bear in Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh.

became known as 'Anders Army', after its Commander, Lieutenant General Wladyslaw Anders.

In April 1942 as the Polish soldiers were making their way in convoys across Iraq to Palestine, where their training camps were being prepared, roadside barter resulted in a group of soldiers acquired a bear cub. The soldiers now had a mascot whom they named 'Wojtek', Polish for happy warrior. By self-appointment one of the older members of the contingent, Peter Prendys, became the bear's guardian and Wojtek was adopted as the mascot of 22nd Company, Polish Army Service Corps (Artillery). He lived with the soldiers in their tented camp, sharing their rations and adopting a soldierly penchant for vodka, beer and cigarettes. In turn they enjoyed wrestling with him and would take him on their driving duties, allowing him to travel in the cab of their trucks. He was particularly keen on the chain operated showers that existed in the desert camps, learning to operate them in order to cool himself down! The military hierarchy recognised the positive effect he had on the morale of the soldiers and tolerated his occasional misdemeanours. 'Anders Army' was warned for service in Italy and in order to satisfy military bureaucratic procedures Wojtek was enlisted into the Polish Army in the rank of Corporal



Wojtek sits in front of a soldier.

prior to embarkation from Alexandria in Egypt to Taranto in Italy in February 1944.

Wojtek first saw action with 2nd Polish Corps at the 4th Battle of Monte Cassino when 22nd Company played an important role in the provision of Artillery support to successive attacks by Polish Corps units, which led to the ultimate capture of the Abbey by the Poles on 18 May 1944. Their sacrifice is poignantly commemorated by the Polish Cemetery beneath Hill 593. Wojtek had learnt to assist his colleagues with the unloading of 100-pound boxes of 25 pounder shells by standing upright and allowing the soldiers to load the boxes onto his outstretched paws, whereupon he would carry the shells to the artillery positions before returning to the transport for more. British Army Black Watch veteran, John Clarke testifies:

“I remember it clearly because it was my twentieth birthday. We were making our way through the deserted fields, looking for stray hens and eggs, when a nearby artillery unit opened fire. We went to look and found a battery of Polish gunners setting up for a barrage. The gun site was hidden in a clearing within a large wood. As we watched, suddenly out of the wood came a large bear,

walking on its hind legs. It seemed to be carrying something. Both Vincent and I shouted a warning to the gunners that a bear was going towards them, but nobody responded. The bear went up to the trail legs of the artillery gun and placed a shell on the ground. The bear then went back into the wood and reappeared with another shell. By this time, we had realised that the bear was tame and most likely a circus bear. We just went on our way.”

After the battle the 22nd Company was given permission to adopt the insignia of Wojtek carrying a shell on their uniform and their vehicles - his fame was assured!

Wojtek continued to serve with 2nd Polish Corps throughout the Italian Campaign. The formation remained with 8th Army, successfully liberating Italian towns on the Adriatic coast where many memorials commemorate the gratitude of the communities. Particularly in evidence are the memorials in the Polish language in the churches at the Madonna dell' Ambro, Cingoli and Loreto where Polish units wintered in 1944/45. Wojtek undoubtedly took part in Operation OLIVE to breach the Gothic Line in September 1944 and the final offensive, Operation GRAPESHOT, to liberate Bologna in April 1945. 'Anders Army' remained in Italy until 1946 before being moved to Britain. Significant parts of their country had been absorbed into Belorussia and Ukraine and the majority of the soldiers felt unable to return post war to communist Poland. The 22nd Company found itself at the Polish Resettlement Centre at Winfield Camp in the Scottish Borders. Many of the soldiers settled in Britain, including Wojtek who found himself housed in Edinburgh Zoo where he remained until his death in 1963. Through the endeavours of the Wojtek Memorial Trust, a bronze statue has stood on Polish granite in Princes Street Gardens since 2013 and honours the courage of Polish soldiers who fought in World War Two.



Wojtek doing 'bear things' in the cab of a lorry.

PB 812 ARTICLE – ANALYSIS OF SOURCES USED

SOURCE	TYPE	USE	PROS	CONS
Guide to decoding Met Form 2003.	Official document.	To decode individual station 3-hourly met records.	Essential to interpreting records.	Needs expertise to use.
Crew Photo.	Course photo from 1667 HCU.	Ideal intro photo at stand - links headstones to real people. Why is Nesbit-Bell shown as a Flt Eng ?	On close examination Nesbit-Bell is wearing pilot's wings, hidden under his mascot.	None.
'Boy on a bike'.	Eye-witness testimony.	Primary source description of event.	Entirely believable and corroborates other evidence.	Hearsay, so potential errors.
Valve and spring assembly.	Archaeological.	Technical evidence of speed and state of ac just prior to crash. Great 'stand' prop.	Corroborates 'boy on bike' and other evidence of speed and dive angle of ac.	Needs expert analysis.
Bomber Command losses database.	Secondary source database.	Identify ac, sqn and crew etc.	A good starting point.	Incomplete.
CWGC Website.	Secondary source database.	Confirm crew etc. Evidence of violence of crash – collective burial.	From primary sources.	Not always completed and can rely on other less accurate sources.
CWGC Headstones.	Archaeological.	A stand in itself.	Authoritative.	Miss-spaced ?
Daily synoptic charts and summaries.	Official document. Primary source.	Synoptic chart is a good authentic picture of general weather to show on a stand.	Authoritative.	Needs expert interpretation for group.
RAF Cranwell 3-hourly met records.	Official document. Primary source.	If shown as a 'cross section' is a clear presentation of the weather by time and height, ideal stand prop.	Authoritative.	Needs expert knowledge to interpret for group use, and to understand its limitations.
460 Sqn ORB.	Official document. Primary source.	Confirms ac and crew. Useful handout.	Authoritative.	Little detail.
Record of Court of Enquiry.	Official document. Primary source.	Useful to quote from.	Descriptions and statements of fact are authoritative.	Opinions are opinions – see later.
George Plant.	Video recording of description of crash. Primary source.	Interesting to show to group (on an iPad) but ...	A wholly plausible story but actually an outstanding example of how time distorts the memory.	Completely contradicted by met records and other witness.
WO Stanley Moore's evidence.	Written evidence to Court of Enquiry. Primary source.	Best description of final moments of ac and crew. Quote verbatim at stand.	Moore was a trained observer making a contemporaneous record.	Moore makes an understandable assumption.
Letter 460 Sqn to Flt Sgt Dockery's father.	Official document. Primary source.	Read at stand – very evocative.	Brings home the single coffin aspect.	Miss-titled.

PB 812 ARTICLE – ANALYSIS OF SOURCES USED - cont'd

SOURCE	TYPE	USE	PROS	CONS
Photo of funeral.	Primary source.	Show at stand.	Emphasises collective coffin.	Paper makes assumption that it was just Dockery – first name in alphabetical order? Or only family talked to ?
Fg Off Luhrs' evidence.	Written evidence to Court of Enquiry. Primary source.	Possibly read at stand.	Authoritative technical evidence.	None.
Conclusions of Court of Enquiry.	Official document. Based on primary sources, but a secondary source in itself.	A discussion point.	The basic verdict is accurate.	The opinion about the automatic pilot as an initial cause is speculative. There is always a bias of not wanting to find deceased fellow-aircrew at fault unless the evidence is absolute.
Conclusions of the AOC.	Official document. Secondary source?	The next discussion point.	A demonstrably expert opinion. His explanations show a commendable balance of fact and opinion.	None.
Diagram from Lancaster technical manual.	Official document.	To support conclusions.	Factual.	Needs some technical knowledge to interpret correctly.
Lancaster Pilots' Notes.	Official document.	Adds verisimilitude to discussion.	Factual.	Needs experience to interpret correctly.
Flight test report.	Official document.	To support author's conclusions.	Factual.	Needs experience to interpret correctly.
This article.	Secondary source.	The final four paragraphs are the conclusion of the story told at the stand.	An expert analysis from an experienced aircrew and staff officer. Based on a wide range of sources.	It is still, however, one author's personal analysis.

NEWmembers:

New members who have been welcomed to the Guild between Quarantine Special 2020 and the date of publication.

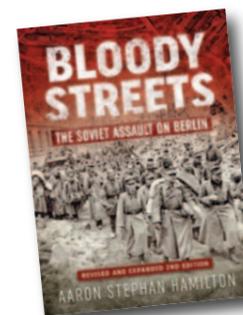
Jan Aerts
Paul Bingley
Paul Docking

Gary Dugmore
Angie Lorimer
Mark Proulx

Mark Rusby
Bryan Stafancyk

Mike Still
Merryn Walters

GUIDEbooks:



BLOODY STREETS
The Soviet Assault on Berlin
April 1945

By Aaron Stephan Hamilton

The titanic battle for Berlin began on 16 April 1945, the Red Army unleashed an onslaught of unimaginable power and ferocity on the desperate defenders of Hitler's, already ruined capital. The sixteen-day battle would cost the vengeful Soviets a horrific price in men and materiel. This new historical narrative is delivered in a chronological sequence that is exhaustive in its detail. The author is an acknowledged academic with extensive experience in the production of military history studies for the US Army. The Staff Ride foundation underpinning this volume is clearly evident throughout - aerial overviews, contemporary mapping, wartime photos and extensive reference to recently released Soviet War Diaries abound. All of this is augmented with a separate 60 page 'Reader' full of maps and photos. An outstanding Reference on Berlin.

Review by Mike Peters

Second Edition, Published by Helion & Company
RRP £59.95
hardback, pp511 plus pp64 Map Supplement



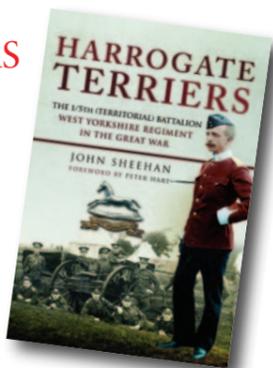
PEIPER'S WAR
The Wartime Years of SS
Leader Jochen Peiper 1941-44

By Danny S. Parker

Jochen Peiper, surely one of the most notorious and controversial of the commanders of Hitler's Waffen SS. My initial reaction to yet another book recounting the crimes and atrocities of Peiper was initially one of dismay. I must however assure those that may feel the same way, that this is a considered, and certainly, comprehensive work. The infamous episodes in the Ardennes are of course examined, more importantly, Peiper's conduct and that of his peers in Russia is also well documented. New photographs, good maps and well-written history combine to make an authoritative tome. Perhaps we do not need any more on Peiper after this one?

Review by Mike Peters

Published by Pen & Sword Ltd
RRP £35.00
hardback, pp620



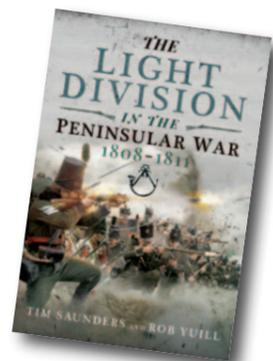
HARROGATE TERRIERS
The 1/5th (Territorial)
Battalion West Yorkshire
Regiment in the Great War

By John Sheehan

This book is not just another narrative of the Great War. Rather, it takes the reader on a journey with the 1/5th throughout the Great War. John Sheehan cleverly weaves what was happening in the greater scheme of things and then zooms in to this particular battalion. Throughout the narrative the reader gets to know this close knit set of characters that make up the battalion, their trials and tribulations and feelings for what is happening at the front and at home. A brilliant book interspersed with pictures and detailed maps. I unreservedly recommend this book to GBG members.

Review by Jo Hook

Published by Pen & Sword Ltd
RRP £25.00
hardback, 351pp

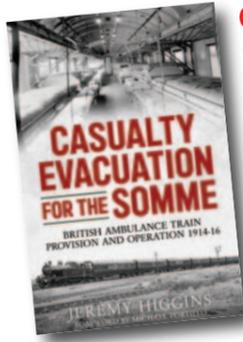


THE LIGHT DIVISION
IN THE PENINSULAR
WAR 1808-1811

By Tim Saunders and Rob Yuill

This is the first of two volumes pulling together the many disparate memoirs of service in the Light Division. The result is a thorough and entertaining history. The story of one of Wellington's most famous formations is presented in a coherent and accessible narrative. The book is lavishly illustrated by the publisher's standards – maps, photographs and contemporary art are all blended into each chapter. The use of re-enactor photographs to illustrate drill and tactics is subtly done. This is one of the most readable Napoleonic references to come out for some time. Well Done Tim & Rob, Good to see the GBG logos on the flyleaf! Recommended.

Published by Pen & Sword Ltd
RRP £25.00
hardback, pp301



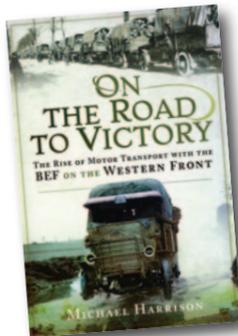
CASUALTY EVACUATION FOR THE SOMME

British Ambulance Train Provision and Operation 1914-16

By Jeremy Higgins

Written by a lifetime Railwayman and Army Reservist, this is a well-informed and meticulously researched account of British Army use of Ambulance Trains. The level of data and technical detail on what was previously considered an under-researched subject is unlikely to be surpassed. Casualty Evacuation on the Western Front took place on an unprecedented scale, there are many lessons to be learned from the experience of the campaign on the Somme. This book is absolutely packed with those lessons, certainly worth a read if your interests are Medical or Logistic in nature. Far more interesting than the title might suggest.

Published by Helion & Company Ltd
RRP £25.00
paperback, pp226



ON THE ROAD TO VICTORY

By Michael Harrison

This relatively slim volume by Michael Harrison covers the 'rise of motor transport with the BEF on the Western Front'. The book is generally organised chronologically covering 1914 to 1918 with brief sections on the state of motor transport (MT) in the UK before and after the war. There are also chapters covering related subjects such as the experience of MT drivers the building and maintenance of roads across the Western Front, vehicle maintenance and repair and MT's part in the supply system. The book is not overly technical or academic and is written in a straightforward style with a plethora of photographs and illustrations. Although a niche subject there is much useful background here and plenty of facts, figures and anecdotes for the guide to deploy during a tour of the Western Front.

Review by John Greenacre

Battleground Series Published by Pen & Sword Ltd
RRP £19.99
hardback, pp173

VICTORY AT GALLIPOLI 1915

The German-Ottoman Alliance in the First World War

By Klaus Wolf

Logic suggests that anyone wanting to understand military conflict at any level, whether it be a small skirmish, or an extensive campaign, must adopt a 360 degree view. In simple terms, we must view the battle from both sides of the hill. yet, this apparently obvious logic is frequently ignored. Our perception of military history is too often coloured by what is a one-sided version of events. This echo-chamber is to be guarded against, we must always seek as broad and diverse a spectrum of events as we can collate. Gallipoli is a case in point, the accepted history of the failed Anglo-French expedition to seize the Dardanelles is incredibly jaundiced - 'Anzackery' looms large over the popular narrative, overshadowing the British soldier's role, totally obscuring his French counterpart. The Ottoman, gallant Johnny Turk is mentioned, less so his German comrade. This new book goes a long way toward re-balancing the narrative. The source material is impressive, the level of map coverage, photographs and anecdotal accounts, equally so. This is a quality addition to the Gallipoli Reference library.

Published by Pen & Sword Ltd
RRP £24.00
hardback, pp384

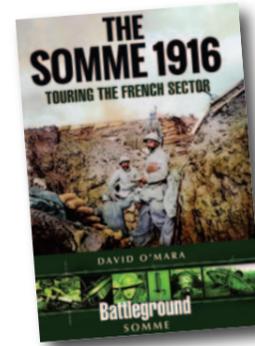
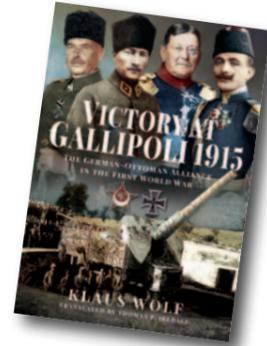
FIGHTING THROUGH TO HITLER'S GERMANY

Personal Accounts of the Men of 1 Suffolk 1944-45

By Mark Forsdike

This is an impressive debut book from a new young author. The style combines the classic post-war battalion history, with a modern template. The result is an intimate narrative, with an abundance of personal accounts, clear maps, and some great photographs. Ideal material for the Battlefield Guide planning to follow an individual battalion from Normandy onwards.

Published by Pen & Sword
RRP £25.00
hardback, pp294



THE SOMME 1916

Touring the French Sector

By David O'Mara

"Oh, No! Not another book on the Somme!" Not my words but those of the author – although he goes on to make it clear that his book intends to be different! Without doubt he succeeds as the book is an essential read to those who study

the Somme. Don't be put off by the title – this is a guide book NOT another book on the Somme.

The French sector on the Somme is one of the most neglected of the war – indeed the British army called the events of 1916 the Battle of the Ancre until 1928 as they were some distance from the Somme during the entire battle. Many will be surprised to read that between July – December 1916 the French, despite battling on the Verdun sector, committed roughly an equal number of men to those deployed by Haig in the British sector. The book divides into two distinct parts.

The first 100 pages cover the background to the French army, their role in the sector between 1914-16 and the successes and failures July – Dec 1916. A perspective of the French role in the battle is reflected in the rate of attrition with the daily casualty rate being just under 200 more than that at Verdun. The research supporting the

narrative is exemplary and the author's writing style makes understanding the events comprehensible and straight forward. The maps are plentiful and help the reader understand the events and there are dozens of well sourced images supporting the text.

The second and most substantive part is why the book is different. Whilst most Battleground books have tours outlined as an appendix, this book dedicates more than half its length in outlining 3 major routes that covers, chronologically both the northern and southern French sectors. The tours are well researched and include much of interest from the bigger picture through to the individual graves of Frenchmen killed during the fighting.

I suspect most GBG members will have extensive libraries covering the major battles of the Great War and, by default, their collections will include many of the standard texts on the Battle of the Somme. This highly readable and well written book adds greatly to a growing body of knowledge on a much-neglected aspect of one of the great battles of the war. The book will inspire many readers to venture further south than normal when they next travel to the Somme – with luck they may even get to see the river that gives its name to the battle!

Review by Andy Thompson

Published by Pen & Sword Books Barnsley
RRP £14.99
hardback, pp240 - 32 Maps & Illustrations throughout.

EVENTguide 2020-21

- 7 Aug - GBG Badged Guides Dinner - Graeme Cooper
- 14 Aug - Guild Annual Golf Championship - Graeme Cooper
- 15-18 Sep - Greek Recce, Battles of Artemisium & Thermopylae - David Harvey
- 16-18 Oct - Portsmouth Weekend with Validation - Tim Stoneman
- 1-5 Nov - Somme Recce, led by John Cotterill & Paul Oldfield - David Harvey
- 4 Dec - GBG Christmas Lunch, UJC London - Andy Thompson

2021

- 29-31 Jan - GBG Annual Conference - Tim Stoneman
- 15-18 Mar - Portugal Recce, Duke of Wellington's campaigns - Graeme Cooper
- 9-11 Apr - Malta Recce, Defence of Malta during WW2 - Bob Shaw
- 11-12 Sep - Guild Special Forces Recce, WW2 - the development of Special Forces capabilities - Bob Shaw - rtshaw@hotmail.com

The above events are planned to take place unless otherwise indicated.

Any Member wishing to plan a new GBG event should contact David Harvey for guidance and coordination of dates: events@gbg-international.com

10 Questions:

Name: Edwin Popken

Age: 49

Nationality: Dutch

Home Location: Nuenen,
The Netherlands

Tour Company: Battlefield
Discovery

Validating: Proud owner of Badge No. 93



In each edition of *'Despatches'*, we will be introducing a member of the Guild. In this edition, it is Edwin Popken.

- 1. How long have you been interested in battlefields and what was it that initially attracted your interest?** My interest started as a teenager reading WW2 history books and watching films and documentaries. The magnitude and impact of WW2 simply grabbed me. Soon, I wanted to see for myself where these events actually happened and what these locations actually looked like in order to better understand these events. .
- 2. Have any experiences stood out?** Quite a few. One of the most impressive ones was with a client from Canada. We were following in his uncle's footsteps who died of wounds in March 1945 during Operation Blockbuster. I had been able to find the location of the Clearing Station where he passed away. While there, my client showed me a picture of his uncle's field grave. He explained it was taken by another uncle who visited the grave and that the field grave was opposite the Clearing Station. We looked around but could not identify a reference building in the picture. Then, a German woman came out of the farmhouse and asked what we were doing. I explained and we showed her the picture. She immediately identified it as her dad's old smithery, which was demolished in the 70s. Joining Canadian, Dutch and German efforts we then pinpointed the precise location of the uncle's former field grave.
- 3. What do you enjoy the most about battlefield guiding?** The fact that battlefield guiding is not only about teaching people about history and showing where things happened, but that it also is a learning experience. Each tour, clients share their own family or personal war experiences with me. I always learn something new. Many times, these interactions have been the start of friendships and connections on social media I still enjoy today.
- 4. What is your favourite stand, location or battlefield and why?** Every location or battlefield has its own unique and special aspects, making this a hard question. However, I do like going to those places that are off the beaten path and tell lesser known but still poignant stories. Some examples: Hill 504 near Schönberg (Ardennes), US 4th ID's trail in the Hürtgen Forest, Yorkshire bridge (Rhineland) and Captain Weatherby's action near Son bridge (Market Garden).
- 5. Which battlefield would you like to visit in the future?** There are so many places I would still like to visit. My bucket list contains, among others: Sicily, Monte Cassino, Stalingrad, Seelöwe Heights, Marshall Islands, Okinawa, and several WW1 sites.
- 6. What have you enjoyed the most about being a member of the Guild?** I like the idea of being a part of a group of people who share my passion of history of warfare and guiding. I also enjoy meeting others at guild events and have made some good friends at these events.
- 7. If there was a fire and you could only save one battlefield-related book or prop, what would you save and why?** Ouch, preferably my entire library and computer! But pressed for time, I would say either my Macbook or my backup server, both containing all my documents, research, tour descriptions, etc. I would be shocked if I lost all of it. Though losing all my books ... a real nightmare too!
- 8. What type of group do you think is the most challenging to lead on a tour?** Every group has its challenges and points to consider. But in my experience and maybe somewhat ironically, a group of guides is the most challenging one. I experienced that guides are very poor at keeping schedule when they are guests themselves. I have to admit, that also includes myself.
- 9. What's the best tip, story or nugget of information you have been given by a fellow battlefield guide?** Best one was given by a tour manager I travelled with on several tours for the National World War Two Museum. She has been tour managing for decades and knows all the tricks in the book. One time, our regular toilet break location was unexpectedly closed. Knowing the area, I directed the coach to another location where I asked and got permission for our guests to use the restaurant's facilities. The restaurant staff explicitly told me they did not want to charge us for it, but Maggie nevertheless slipped them 10 euros. She explained to me later: "The next time they see this coach stop here, they will remember and welcome us, even if we only use their toilet facilities."
- 10. What is the funniest or most dramatic thing you have seen on tour?** On one of my Easy Company tours, we had one of the actual veterans, mr Bradford Freeman, travelling with us as our honoured guest. While staying in Eindhoven, well-known British veteran Joe Cattini (50th Northumbrian Division, artillery) was staying in the same hotel. Both veterans met and were posing for the guests to make pictures of the two of them. Joe started talking to Brad, asking if he had been in Eindhoven in 1944. Brad replied yes and went on to say that he had fought in Normandy, The Netherlands and in Bastogne. Whereupon Joe exclaimed: "I was in Bastogne too! We fired in support of you during the siege!" Brad kindly nodded in gratitude. Of course, Joe Cattini never was in Bastogne; the British were on the other side of the Bulge. We all just smiled and didn't mentioned it, because that conversation between these two veterans was not only funny but also very adoring.