



DESPATCHES

the magazine of the International Guild of Battlefield Guides



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Later

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FIELDguides

Cover image: The Guild Cold War Recce - Participants in front of the Soviet War Memorial in the Tiergarten, Berlin, a great stand to study the Battle of the Reichstag in 1945, the difference in narratives between the Soviet 'liberators from Fascism' and the German view of the Soviet occupiers.



The Guild Christmas Lunch at the Union Jack Club 2023 - Tim Pritchard Barret hasn't started throwing food at everyone yet! Still sober at this stage are Tim, Sue, Renfrey, Rhydian, Tim, Bob, Paul and Simon.

Even the RAF made it to the Christmas lunch, but only as there was a five star hotel room involved. Andy and Jo, Sue with Paul and Bob pondering on the newly named road in Salisbury near the Cathedral called Novichok Square.

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Material for publication in the Spring edition of 'Despatches' must be with the Editor no later than 15 March 2024. 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

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EDITOR'S*guidelines*:

Welcome to the Annual Conference edition of 'Despatches', I hope you all had a fantastic holiday season and New Year. This year 'Despatches' is no different from last being printed as a hard copy. I hope that this isn't delayed in getting to members as I did see on the news that Royal Mail expect that we might still be receiving Christmas Cards in February! The Christmas period can be quieter for guides and I am sure we are all looking forward to the increased workload as the weather improves and the guiding season returns.

There are a lot of expectations of work in East Anglia once the new Tom Hanks/Steven Spielberg mini-series is launched on the 26th January called 'Masters of the Air', which is based on the book of the 100th Bombardment Group at Thorpe Abbotts Airfield by Dom Miller (well worth a read). I saw a preview of episode 9 in December and the realism and attention to detail is second to none, so well worth a watch when you get the chance, no matter what your interest period of military history is. Once the workload increases, please don't forget to send in photo's of your guiding in addition to any articles you might think are interesting or helpful to the Battlefield Guiding fraternity. A big thank you again, to all those that have contributed so far and please remember that this is your magazine, so any suggestions on future

content or composition are always welcome. We have another year of events organised for those guides that wish to improve their knowledge of a particular geographic area, specific period of military history or battle, so do sign up if they are of interest to you, no matter how much we think we know, we can always learn something new from each other and as guides I know many of try to continue the unrelenting pursuit of excellence. It's good to take pride in what we do, and to have an unrelenting desire to raise our individual standard of guiding, but with this goes humility, which is the opposite to the sort of pride that is focused on self; that aggrandises the individual, puffs up the ego and makes a guide inflexible and unable to listen and engage with other guides ideas or to disregard the clients requirements. Some guides recognise that most organisations ensure that members never sit on their laurels by having a regular professional development programme and constant learning. Of course, it's not all about the organisation, there is a responsibility on the guide to constantly seek knowledge as well. One phrase I hear a lot from the other guides on tours is "every day is a school day" and its very true but also shows, most guides are receptive to new information.



Bob Shaw
Editor

OPENINGshot:

A VIEW FROM THE CHAIR



Dear fellow members and Guild Partners, welcome to this issue of *'Despatches'*. First, a very happy New Year and I wish 2024 will be a great success for you and yours in all aspects of your career and life.

Welcome to those of you attending the annual conference and AGM in Lincoln. We prepared a varied programme, with visits to the Lincoln Tank and BBMH topping and tailing our formal weekend. The AGM itself has a lot to cover as we draw to a close the events of 2023 and set out our plans for the way forward for the Guild.

We will build on what we have learned, both from the Review Group, and from the MB's own insights to the events of 2023, so that we can plan for what we need to do to bring the Guild to where it could be. Those documents will be available to all members by the time of the annual conference, and I hope to you have time to consider them. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Review Group, Anthony Rich, Sue King and James Davies. I would also like to thank everyone involved in the procedures dealing with the complaint which has brought us to the Review Group's report. Namely, the first investigating committee, Alison Hine, Steve Bird and Jon Williams; the second investigating committee of Ian Langworthy, Tom Dormer and Mark Evans; Steve Abbott for hearing the Appeal; Dudley Giles and John Hammill and the 'whistle blowers' for want of a better name, who drew attention to the tweets that led to the complaint in the first place. Again, I draw attention to the fact that everyone is a volunteer giving their time on behalf of the Guild and many, did so in the face of unjustified attacks, criticism and inappropriate moral pressure. Naturally, this last observation applies to the members, and former members, of the MB other than myself who had to put up with a lot of

unpleasant confrontational interaction.

With the report of the Review Group complete, a plan for the way ahead and the evidence of excellent members of the Guild ready to give their time for the membership, I look forward to 2024 with a renewed excitement about the Guild and its members. Many have become good friends over the years since my first weekend in Lichfield. I have been privileged to take part in numerous events with the Guild – dinners, lunches at Christmas, talks and conferences at fantastic locations. I have enjoyed learning from members on weekends events. I have been lucky enough to see lots of Assignment 1s, in which I have also learned a great deal – both subject matter and technique. We have just enjoyed the Richard Holmes Lecture in London with an excellent talk about Richard given by Mungo Melvin and Mike St Maur Sheil at which I think the Guild made up the largest contingent of guests – though I am of course biased. We hold the 2024 talk so I hope to see many members represented when we have a location set for this year's lecture. And I look forward to seeing many of you at this year's programme of events much of which is already in place. So, I hope you all have a good guiding season. I hope to see you on the battlefields – often at the Menin Gate where we blend into the crowd only briefly before spotting each other. Happy travels.

And I hope you will support the MB as we lead the membership into 2024.

Mike Scott
Chairman



MONTE BATTAGLIA

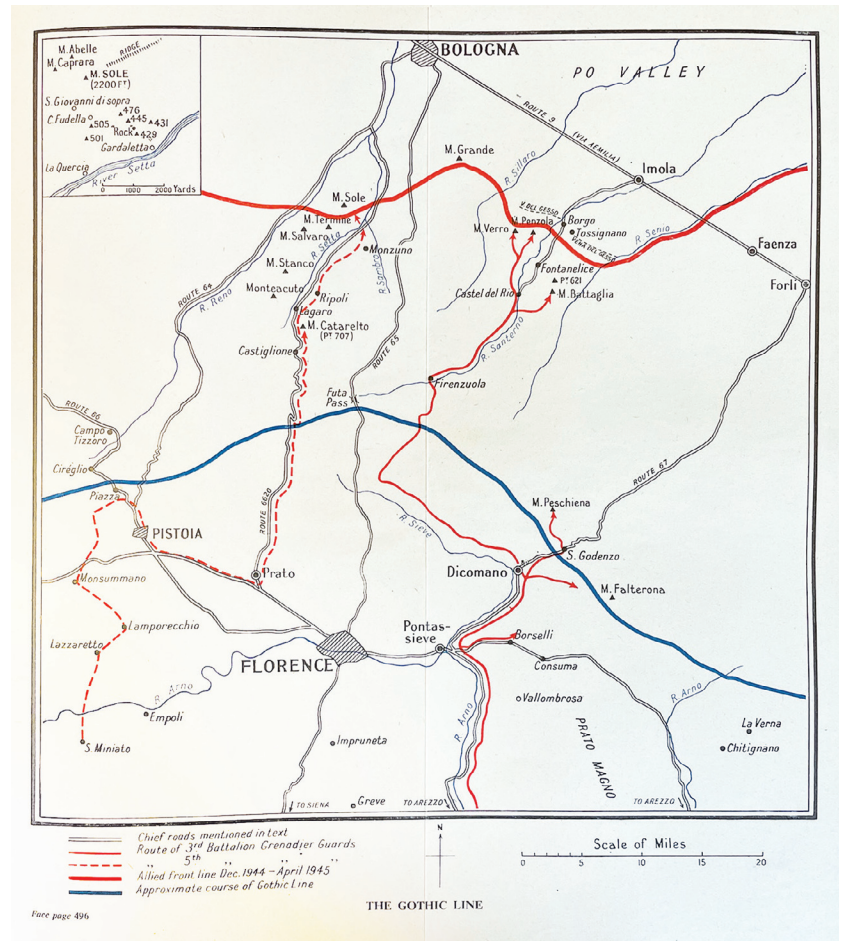
David Harrison

A tour guide's way to overcome problems of access caused by flooding, whilst ensuring tour 'balance' is maintained for the customer.

Monte Battaglia ('Battle Mountain') lies 715m above sea level and approximately 50kms south-east of Bologna. Standing between the Santerno and Senio river valleys it has played an important role over time, as the name suggests, in the military domination of the region. It was therefore no surprise that the German Army sought to retain control of the castle on its summit in 1944 as the Allies attempted to reach the Po Valley before winter set in. Explanation of the battle to capture and hold the feature was to form an important element of a battlefield tour last autumn for members of the Grenadier Guards whose fathers had taken part in the Italian Campaign, some of whom had served with the 3rd Battalion on Monte Battaglia. It was never envisaged that the Monte Battaglia element of the 6 day tour would take so much planning to achieve!

Following the success in May 1944 of Operation DIADEM in breaching the Gustav Line and liberating Rome a month later, the US 5th Army (Lieutenant General Mark Clark) and the 8th Army (Lieutenant General Sir Oliver Leese) had been advancing towards the Gothic Line in parallel west of the Apennines. Leese was reluctant to fight through the Apennines towards Bologna alongside Clark and persuaded General Alexander in early August 1944 to agree his plan for Operation OLIVE, which moved the 8th Army's axis of advance to the Adriatic coast. Meanwhile, 5th Army were told to remain on the defensive until Operation OLIVE was launched at the end August and then be ready to advance towards Bologna as conditions allowed. The British XIII Corps had remained with 5th Army to compensate for Clark's significant loss of forces to Operation DRAGOON - the invasion of the south of France.

Having broken the Gothic Line, 5th Army employed the 88th Division ('the Blue Devils') to advance towards the Po Valley along the high ground between the Santerno and Senio rivers. Appreciating this drive on Imola was a dangerous threat, the Germans reinforced the in-place forces with the 44



Reichsgrenadier Division. With the weather deteriorating 88th Division's advance became a series of small unit actions contesting each mountain top and ridge line. The 2/350 Battalion, with the aid of Italian partisans, had reached the summit of Monte Battaglia unopposed on 27 September, however the enemy immediately shelled the battalion's position and then mounted repeated attacks to capture the mountain. During this fighting OC G Company (Captain Roeder) was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor. 2/350 held on to the feature until 5 October when 3rd Battalion Grenadier Guards as part of 1st Guards Brigade, which had been placed under command 88 Division, relieved them.

Five miles from Monte Battaglia in the Santerno Valley the troops dismounted and moved forward on foot with mules. Weather had made the approaches dreadful. Number 1 and 4 Companies took over



Rocca di Monte Battaglia

from what was left of the 2/350 Battalion. There was only room in the castle for one Platoon and so 2 x Companies occupied rain-soaked open trenches either side of the mountain. The Germans were on Point 621 immediately opposite only 400m away and maintained a constant barrage of indirect fire, resulting in an average of 10 casualties a day. The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Nelson, ensured the Companies rotated every 72 hours.

During night 9/10 October the house in which Battalion HQ was located came under attack from mortar fire killing the Intelligence Officer (Lieutenant Berry). This was followed by an attack by a German patrol which killed the sentries. Grenades were thrown into the house and fortunately the one that arrived under the CO's table failed to detonate.

In the early hours of 11 October, No 1 Company holding the western approach to the feature was attacked by approximately 100 Germans who got caught amongst beehive mines that had been laid. During this action Sergeant Sibbald won a DCM. The citation reads as follows:

'During the counterattack on MONTE BATTAGLIA, on the morning of 11th October, Sergeant SIBBALD was in command of the Left forward Platoon of No. 1 Company, 3rd Battalion GRENADIER GUARDS, holding the Western slope of the hill. His Platoon was

strongly attacked before light by a company of enemy, a platoon of which managed to work its way into Sergeant SIBBALD's position. By his control and skill, he was able to throw the enemy back down the hill with heavy losses, causing several casualties himself; both with close range tommy-gun fire when his slit trench was rushed by four Germans, and by hurling grenades at the retreating Germans. During this desperate battle, Sergeant SIBBALD was throughout, giving an accurate account of it over his Platoon wireless set to his Company Commander. He also calmly reported yet another German company forming up on his left flank. This information was as accurate as it was vital and passed over the wireless in the heat of a hand-to-hand struggle. The result of it was that an artillery concentration was at once put down on this German company, breaking up their attack and causing them to run for safety to a position from which the entire company was taken prisoner when daylight came.'

Elements of the German force got through however, and Battalion HQ was again attacked but the German soldiers were fought off by a mortar detachment. At dawn it was realised that a significant part of the German force was sheltering in a house below the causeway and all weapons were brought to bear on the building. A short truce was requested by the Germans to remove their wounded after which the firefight was resumed. Eventually more than 70 Germans surrendered.

Some days later the Germans abandoned their positions and the 3rd Battalion sent forward patrols to occupy Point 621. On 26 October the Grenadiers returned to the Santerno Valley for limited respite before taking up positions on the other side of the road. On 9 November the first snow arrived and shortly afterwards Lieutenant General Clark halted the offensive.

Len Bozeat MM had served with 6th Battalion in North Africa before being wounded at Salerno. He recovered to serve with the 3rd Battalion and revisited Monte Battaglia in 1995.

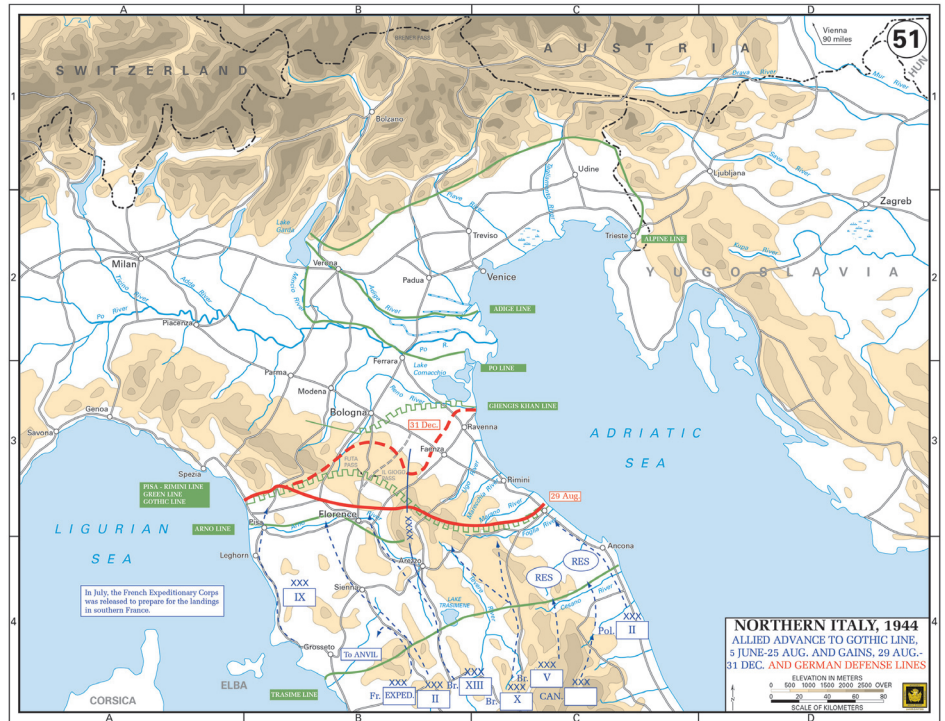


Commonwealth War Graves Commission - Santerno Valley

Afterwards he wrote:

‘On an early morning patrol forward of Battaglia in low heavy cloud, I came across a German soldier sitting in a slit trench and apparently asleep. When I pushed my Tommy Gun into his back with orders for him to put his hands up, there was no response, and he slumped forward, an examination showed a large hole in the right side of his head and a pistol in his right hand. He had doubtless been in previous attacks on the hill and could not face another. On looking up through the thinning cloud to the Castle at the top of 400 feet of steep bare rock where heavily armed defenders would have been waiting, one could understand and perhaps sympathise. There was only one thing to do, I prised the pistol from his hand (with difficulty due to rigor mortis and frost) and threw it as far away as possible in the hope that when he was eventually recovered, he would be recorded as Killed in Action.’

Monte Battaglia was a significant action for 3rd Battalion Grenadier Guards and needed to be included in a Regimental battlefield tour that had to achieve a balance between the achievements of the three battalions who took part in the Italian Campaign. The 5th Battalion had been present at Anzio during the dark days of Operation SHINGLE and the 6th Battalion had landed at Salerno and fought at Monte Camino. Access to the summit of



Monte Battaglia for groups, and especially those not in the first flush of youth, would always have been a challenge but a recce in May revealed that the asphalt route had been washed away and had been subject to multiple landslides during the floods that cancelled last year's Imola Grand Prix. Further recce on foot in July showed that no repairs had taken place and inquiries locally indicated that there no plans for making the route passable in the near future. Other approaches were investigated but none were viable for a 20-seater coach and no 'stand-off' viewing points were either accessible or suitable.

During the recce process, the Gothic Line Museum at Castel del Rio was discovered to have an excellent diorama and a film using largely black and white photographs from the period. The minor difficulty of an Italian only dialogue was rapidly overcome by the offer of an English translation to the Director from a willing helper (my wife)! The description of the battle around the model with photographs of the summit taken during the recce by foot was the next best thing to standing at the castle itself. The Director kindly arranged for an excellent lunch to be provided in the castle cantina and afterwards a trip to the lovely CWGC Santerno River Cemetery to visit the graves of members of the Battalion who had not survived seemed to satisfy the customer. Hopefully other members of the Guild will be able to use the information gathered during the preparation of this element of the tour.



Diorama at the Gothic Line Museum at Castel del Rio: <https://www.museoguerralineagoticacasteldelrio.it/>

Battlefield Guides and the Union Jack Club

The Union Jack Club has a long and distinguished history of supporting military personnel in giving them a place to stay in London. Part of that support to its members is a programme of military related talks and tours.

The talks are a mix of historical and contemporary military topics that cover all domains, land, sea, air, cyber and space. They have been everything from a set time period, to a campaign and down to specific battles. The Guild has provided speakers for these events and the Club has provided accommodation and a meal for the speaker to say 'thank you'.

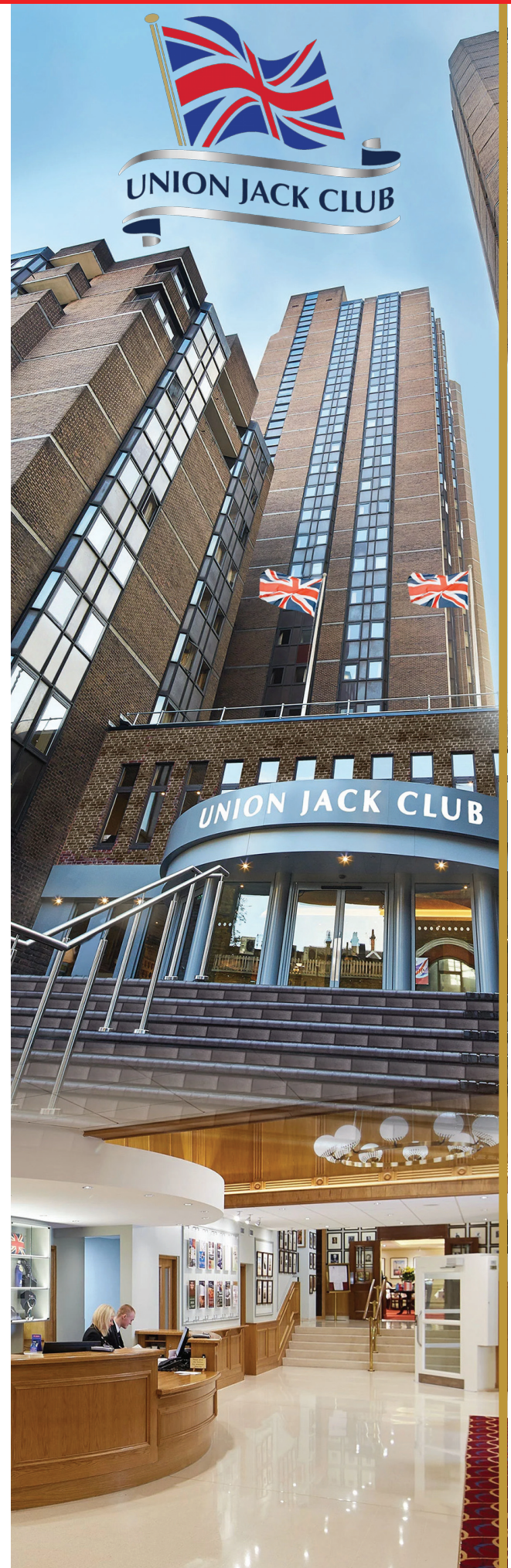
In appreciation of the Guild's support to the Club, they have offered a PRIZE of accommodation and a meal for two at the Club for the BEST ARTICLE written for 'Despatches'.

The qualifying period for submission will be from the 25th of January to the 25th of March and the articles will be judged by the events Manager of the UJC and the Guild POC for talks Robert Shaw.

If you are interested in entering this competition and do have an article you have been bursting to write for 'Despatches' please do send it to me at rtshaw@hotmail.com by the 25th of March and tell me you wish to be entered into the competition.

Equally if you have a presentation that you are keen to give to represent the Guild at the Union Jack Club, please do drop me a line stating what you propose to talk on.

The talk programme is already set for 2024 so any talk selected would be presented in 2025. Do check the club website for information on the talks this year to give yourself familiarity of the wide range of entertaining and informative talks that the Guild provide and to get ideas flowing.



NORGE FEMTI ÅR ETTER – NORWAY FIFTY YEARS LATER

By Graeme Cooper

Fifty years ago as a young Green Howard officer, I had the privilege to lead soldiers from my Regiment to Norway on a 'Homage on skis' along the Gubransdahlen to Andalsnes. The expedition was called 'Tretti tre år etter' and we came to remember those Green Howards who fell in the 1940 Battle of Otta.



*Left: Choir Practice
Above & Right: Training in the Hartz Mountains*

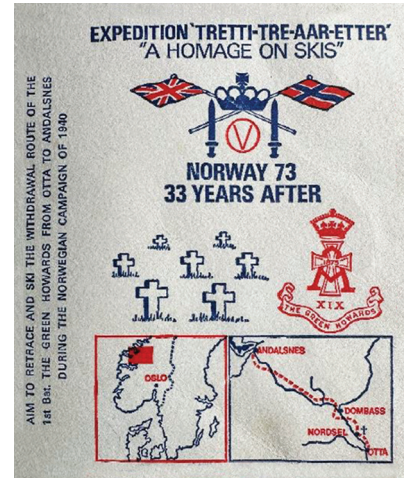
Hartz Mountains - The expedition members trained hard for two weeks in the Hartz Mountains and learned to sing the Norwegian National Anthem. On arrival in Norway, we were guests of His Majesty's Kongen's Garde (King's Guard - HMKG) based at their Huseby barracks in Oslo.

Lillehammer - Prior to the start of the expedition 2Lt Jostein Belbo HMKG trained us for two weeks in Lillehammer to ski and pull pulks, which was to be vital to our success in the 100 miles that lay ahead.



Otta – Greeted by Ole Dahl the Mayor of Otta (left), our expedition started with a tour of the battlefield and a torch light

procession through Otta to which many local residents came to bid us farewell.





Nord Sel - We skied north to Nord Sel where we visited the Green Howard graves in the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery.

'Lesjaverk - Where is John?' - Over the next few days we skied over the Hardanger plateau to Lesjaverk where we were well received by the Mayor and local inhabitants. At the reception a lady came up to me and through our interpreter asked me if 'John was with us'. She had thought that we were the original troops from 1940.



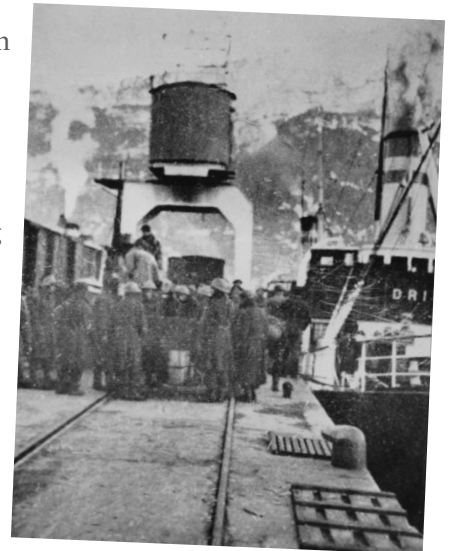
Shelter at Verma - A day later we stopped at Verma where in 1940 the Regiment took shelter in the Verma Tunnel from the constant Luftwaffe Stuka attacks.

Emotion at Andalsnes - We arrived at Andalsnes on the very quayside from which the Green Howards had embarked for Scarpa Flow following the six days of combat and retreat.



This was an emotional moment for us all especially when we recognised that we were standing under the same crane as our forefathers had done 33 years earlier.

Right: Green Howards in 1940
Left: Green Howards in 1973



Oslo - On arrival back at the Huseby we learned that King Olav, as our Regiment's Colonel-in-Chief, had invited us all to The Royal Palace for a reception on the morning of our departure home. A memorable occasion it was. The King took time to speak to each of the expedition members.

Expedition Team Members

A Coy

2Lt Santa-Ollala
Pte Burr
Pte Stevenson
LCpl Darby
Pte Cunningham
Pte Walker

B Coy

Cpl Chapman
LCpl Murphy
Pte Gilmartin
Pte Wagstaff
Pte Grant
Pte Wallis
Pte Welford

C Coy

Lt Cooper
Pte Ward
Pte Wilson
Pte Glennon
Pte Foley
Pte Crossland
Pte Hammond

HQ Coy

LCpl Ward - Int
LCpl Shields - Drums
Dmr Clark - Drums
Pte Brodigan - MT
Pte Readman - MT
Dmr McWilliams - Drums

Sp Coy

LCpl Aspery
LCpl Brooks
Pte Atkinson



An Emotional Return - In October 2022 I returned to Norway as an invited guest of the Yorkshire Regiment which was hosted by HM Majesty's Garde. They took me back to the Otta battlefield and I revisited the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery at Nord Sel. HM Majesty's Garde had managed to trace 2Lt Jostein Belbo, which was an emotional surprise reunion for us both fifty years on.

(Right: above the Otta battlefield)



We were entertained magnificently, and I am especially thankful to **Knut Hargen** who guided us around the Kvam and Otta battlefields and to **Major Olaf Røgeberg** who orchestrated the programme for the Yorkshire Regiment's visit.

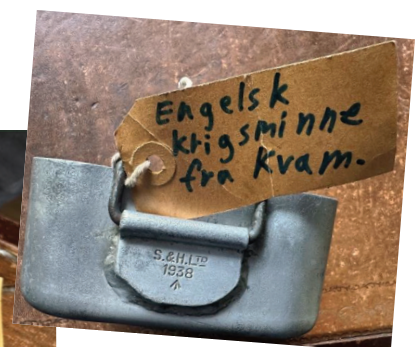


L-R: Jan Magnus Brekkhus, Graeme Cooper, Knut Hargen, Olaf Røgeberg, Stein Aasland

Otta The location of Otta was historically just a farm area that was known as Aamot (or Åmot) which means 'rivers against' signifying that this place was the meeting place of two rivers.

The Battle of Otta - Stein Aasland writes - A brief history: On 24th May 1940, Norwegian voluntary soldier **Arne Kjelstrup** and other Norwegian soldiers made a surprising attack on the advancing German Forces with success! Kjelstrup had been fighting from Oslo and continued now with a small group of idealistic fighters and made hit and run actions. They picked up weapons they found on the battlefield, among them a Bren LMG. They started firing against the German logistic column with horses. The Germans went into panic! On the left side it was mountain and on the right side it was the river. The Germans had no way to escape, and many were killed here! The German **General Pellengar** became very angry about this attack and a few days later the Germans put up leaflets on walls on buildings in the valley to threaten Norwegians about consequences of further such attacks!

A Green Howard's Mess Tin - Lt Col (Retd) Stein Aasland presented to me a Green Howard's Mess Tin manufactured in 1938 that was recovered from B Company's position on the 1940 Kvam battlefield. The Mess Tin will be displayed in the Green Howards Regimental Museum in Richmond, North Yorkshire.



Arne Kjestrup became a war hero. After the Norwegian surrender on 10th June, he escaped to UK and became a member of the famous Norwegian Independent Company No 1 (Company Linge). This unit was the beginning of the Norwegian Special Forces who trained at Glenmore in Scotland. Kjelstrup was handpicked for a special operation in Norway as he was born in Rjukan and together with other Norwegians from Rjukan area he was

parachuted into the mountains near Rjukan in November 1942. At Rjukan the Germans produced heavy water for a possible nuclear bomb. Kjelstrup's advanced party were to prepare landings zones for the British Engineer Paras that would fly in by two Halifax and two Horsa gliders as part of Operation Freshman. This glider operation ended in disaster, but Kjestrup took part in the later Operation Gunnerside which was successful on 28th February 1943.



Oberstløytnant Jan Magnus Brekkhus, a former HMKG Commanding Officer very kindly escorted and entertained me throughout the week. He arranged for me to meet Jostein Belbo who I had not met since 1973 and also escorted us all on a visit to the Holmenkollen. He later took me to the Oscarsbourg Fortress Island where Lt Cdr Per Egil Grimstad gave us an enlightening tour of the Gun Battery. **Corporal Sigve Følstad** was our staff car driver who served us well with good humour.

A visit to the unique and spectacular world renown Military Tattoo (below) wound up an experience that will never be forgotten. His Majesty's Garde hospitality was superb and much paved the ways for continued and stronger links with the Yorkshire Regiment.

The event was packed with humour, comradery and regimental history.

The present day King's Garde members were tremendous hosts and very keen to establish a strong link between the Regiments.



IWM DUXFORD



Bob Shaw

Duxford is one of the five branches of the Imperial War Museum, located on the junction of the A505 and the M11 in Cambridgeshire. It has quite a history, having been a military airfield during WW1 and was one of the earliest RAF stations (back in those days, they didn't have hotel accommodation for the RAF).



It was kept operational during the interwar years as a training school and from 1924 as a fighter station (a role lasting 37 years). The Squadron at Duxford was the first to be equipped with the Spitfire in 1938 and, during the Battle of Britain, was part of 12 Group and hosted the famous ace Douglas Bader. The airfield was subsequently a test and trials unit before being transferred to the US Army Air Force in 1943, when the 78th Fighter Group escorted the Bombardment Groups on daylight raids. In the Cold War it had the Gloster Meteor, Javelin and the Hawker Hunter standing ready to intercept Soviet long range bombers. By 1961 it was no longer required as a military airfield and it saw its last operational flight before being taken over by the IWM some 15 years later.

Just like its counterpart in Lambeth, London, Duxford has a mix of permanent and temporary exhibitions. The permanent exhibitions include 'Airspace' which includes iconic British aircraft, 'Conservation in action' which includes work on two newly acquired cockpits of the 'V' fleet and 'Flying Aircraft' which includes the last remaining airworthy B17 in Europe. Other exhibitions include 'Battle of Britain' which shows the operations block, the 'Historic Duxford' which provides information on Douglas Bader and 'Land Warfare' which includes information on the campaign in the Far East during WW2, various armoured vehicles and two regimental museums - one for the Royal Anglian Regiment and the other the Cambridgeshire Regiment. Duxford also has airshows and a programme of talks and tours including the Avro Lancaster, the Spitfire and the Vulcan. One of the temporary exhibitions currently

on until 25th February is 'Spies in the Skies', which is about WW2 Aerial Reconnaissance and the aircraft used by the Photographic Reconnaissance Unit (PRU). It goes into considerable detail during close up views of various aircraft including the Lockheed Electra, a civilian aircraft, modified by the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and operated over Germany on covert aerial recce missions, flown by Sidney Cotton (a leading figure in the founding of the PRU). This aircraft was the last British civilian aircraft to leave Berlin before WW2 broke out. Another aircraft is the Westland Lysander, built in 1940 and then used as a reconnaissance aircraft with 255 Squadron. This type of aircraft is more famous for being used to insert and exfiltrate men and women of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) and the Office for Strategic Services (OSS) into occupied Europe. One of the Spitfires studied on this exhibition flew over 40 reconnaissance missions (which included Berlin on Target Damage Assessments) and is still one of the rare airworthy Spitfires. This is a fantastic exhibition and tour but please do bear in mind that tickets for this exhibition must be purchased in advance and do not include general admission to IWM Duxford. The 'jewel in the crown' of Duxford is surely the museum to the Airborne Forces, which covers not only the weapons, uniform and equipment of the Airborne Forces from 1940 to the present day, but lists the airborne forces many hard won battle honours and how, despite being relatively new to the British Army in terms of Regimental histories, they have rapidly become the UK's premier fighting force and truly 'Ready for Anything'.

FIELDguides

...more from the Christmas lunch



The Guild Xmas lunch and bushy beard growing contest-this years winner was Chris Scott (front right). On the left was David Harvey who turned up without a bushy beard and his wife Ann.



Jo Johnson showing Paul Oldfield how to make an improvised shaped charge out of a wine bottle and everyone else looking shocked including (L-R) Marc Yates, Andy Johnson, Graeme Cooper, John Hamil and Brian Rogers.

TOUR *research*

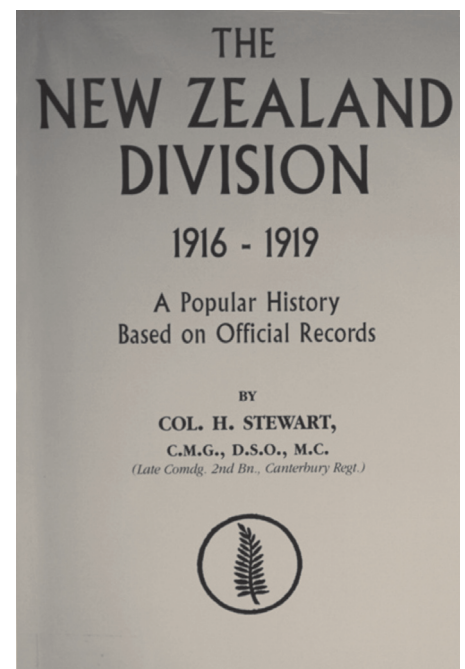
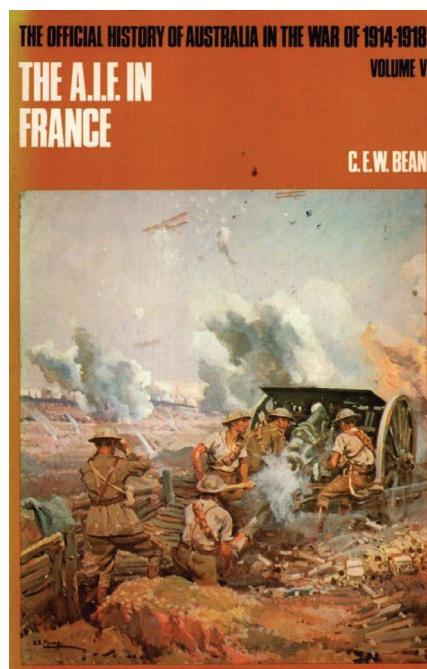
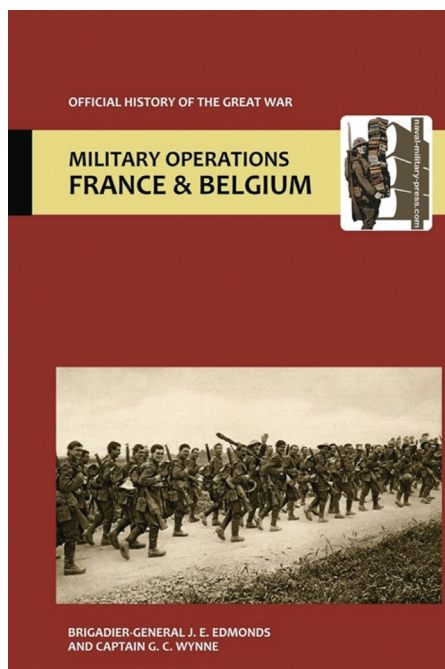
THE FRENCH POLISH APPROACH

Paul Oldfield

Some time ago I was asked how to approach research prior to a tour. This is obviously subject to personal preferences. However, I guess that many guides use a similar method - building up the information like layers of French polish....and hoping that the result has a similar lustre. Starting with the more general sources and gradually cranking the focus downwards, research for a Great War Western Front tour (not exhaustive) may look something like this.

The Official Histories provide a good overview of why the battle was fought, where and when, what happened, who was involved, the outcome etc. At the opening of a new phase there is also a summary of the political situation and significant events elsewhere. Most of us struggle to find accounts in English of 'other side of the hill'. The Official Histories have

summaries of German accounts at the end of each chapter. Obviously official histories are 'official' and sometimes gloss over negative or embarrassing issues. Do not forget the Commonwealth - Australia, Canada and New Zealand all produced their own official histories and they are available online. Some of the maps are excellent.



Three volumes of official histories – British, Australian and New Zealand.

General histories, such as Martin Gilbert's *First World War*, are worth flipping through before delving deeper. Bibliographies in such publications often point to other sources.

War Diaries are available from the National Archives (TNA) at Kew. Create an online account and download for free from WO 95, although there are limits on the number of documents per day and month. They vary in quantity and quality of material. Brigade level diaries tend to have the most

information and usually include marked maps, operation orders and post operation reports, in addition to the usual diary of events. Battalion, division and above war diaries are also useful, depending on what the tour aims to deliver. It is possible to create minute by minute comparisons of what was happening (or what they thought was happening) in various formations and units at the same time. Some war diaries include air photos. Most Commonwealth war diaries are available online and



The entrance to the National Archives at Kew. It is easily accessed by rail, tube and road.

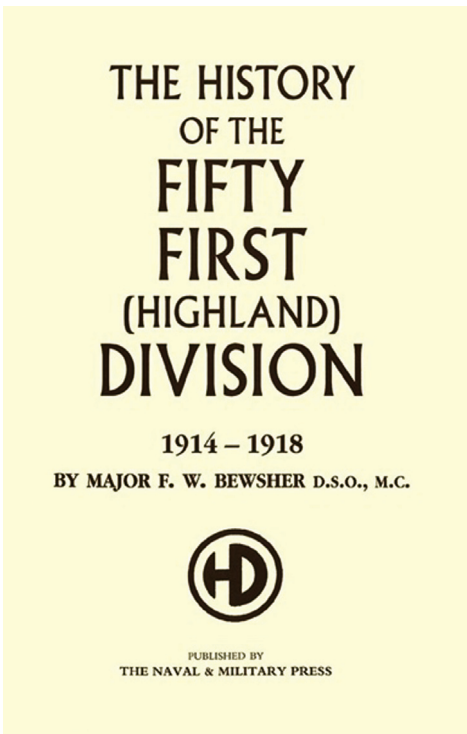
Divisional and brigade histories – there are many of the former and only a few of the latter. Some modern facsimile copies are available from The Naval & Military Press. Prince Consort’s Library, Aldershot has an excellent collection (and regimental histories, including Commonwealth). Ring ahead to arrange admission. There are other libraries at TNA, IWM & NAM. Second-hand copies of divisional and other histories often appear on websites such as Abebooks.

Regimental and battalion histories – as below but you must be alert to who wrote them, when and for what audience. ‘The battalion retired in haste’ probably means it ran away but the regimental family don’t want to hear that!



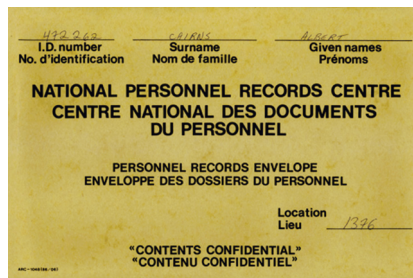
Prince Consort's Library

can also be viewed at TNA. If visiting, take a digital camera (or phone) and book one of the camera stands near the windows (no flash allowed). If you are well organised and use the ordering system to the maximum, it is possible to return with 6-800 pictures of pages to view at leisure later. This saves a huge amount of time and travel effort.

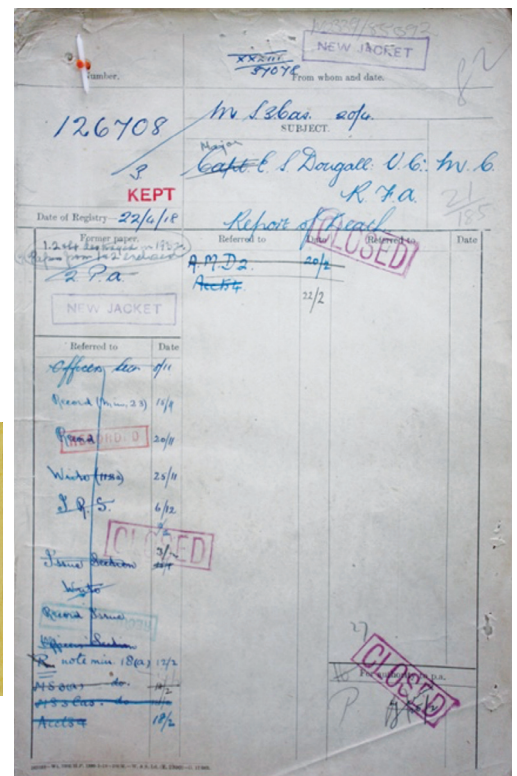


A reprinted divisional history

Regimental museums have archives but the regimes that they operate under vary. All are under financial pressure. There may be charges involved and travel distance may be an issue. Make contact before visiting.



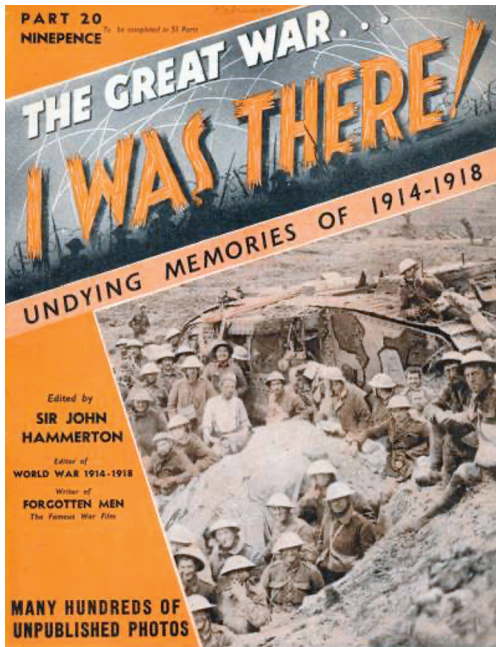
Canadian service record



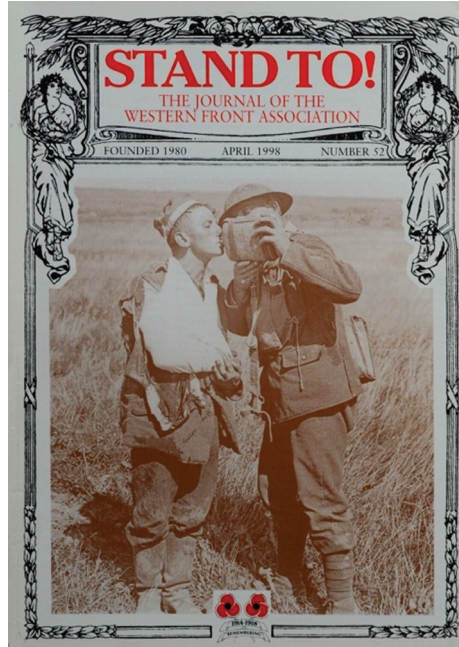
Officer's service record in TNA

Personal accounts help to illustrate events and these are available from numerous sources, including being woven into general accounts or in series such as *I Was There*. Beware localised experience and individuals waxing lyrical about events they could

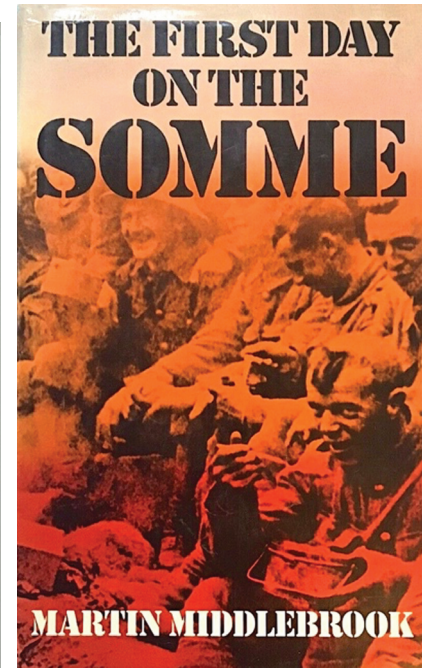
not possibly have seen. Personal diaries written at the time have more immediacy than memoirs written many years later. Conversely the events may not have been sufficiently clear to be recorded accurately at the time. Triangulate the information.



The Hammerton 'I Was There' series



The WFA magazine, 'Stand To!'



Packed with personal accounts

Newspapers often ran personal accounts almost as they happened, subject to censorship of course. Local newspapers are full of casualty reports and hometown stories etc.

Secondary source books are not necessarily less reliable and accurate. A well-researched secondary account, with a full list of sources, can save you much time.

Well-researched articles on a broad spectrum of subjects appear in the Western Front Association magazine, *Stand To!*

Service records are a gold mine of information on individuals – but be warned, they are warts and all! Officers' files are hard copy and can only be seen at TNA. Soldiers' records are available through Ancestry (for a price – don't get me started on that issue!) or visit TNA and see them for free. The Luftwaffe hit the Army Records Office in the Blitz and it is estimated that only 40% of soldiers' records survived. However, in searches I have conducted over the years the find rate has been more like 15%. For officers who completed service by 1921 the find rate is over 95%. The records for officers and soldiers who served beyond 1921 are still held by the respective service record office. Only close family are likely to be allowed access to them and that costs £30 per record. Australian, Canadian and New Zealand service records are available to download online for free and very good they are too. For officers there is

often a great deal of information in the respective service lists. TNA has a fairly complete set of Navy, Army, Air Force and Indian Army Lists.

The CWGC website can be searched for individuals, units, particular dates or cemeteries and memorials.

Maps - *Linesman* for the Western Front, although expensive, is invaluable and accurate. Trench maps are also available in hard copy format from a number of sources. Mapping in the early stages of the war and towards the end is often hit and miss. Maps at those times are rarely more detailed than 1:40,000 scale. However, the period from 1915 until mid-1918 is extremely well mapped, with regular updates of each sheet. The 1:10,000 and 1:20,000 scale map series show the minutest details of trench lines etc. Modern maps from the Belgian and French IGNs are available online at 'Mapsworldwide' and 'Stanfords'.

Pictures – the cost of using IWM photographs is prohibitive but some copyrighted photos in UK can be downloaded for free from Canadian and Australian sources with no restrictions.

Satellite imagery online is useful to plan routes and select stands if you are not familiar with an area. Streetview is useful to check routes and to avoid that embarrassing 2m underpass in a 3.7m high coach!

How you go about your research is up to the individual but hopefully these thoughts will be useful and provide some pointers.

THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS IN ITALY

John Cotterill

When I look back at what first inspired my interest in military history I realise that it was, in large part, the history of my own Regiment. As a Worcestershire and Sherwood Forester it was natural to get to know the exploits of the 29th, 36th and 45th Regiments in the Peninsula War, the 95th Derbyshire in the Crimea and the 2nd Worcesters at Gheluvelt.



I stood on parade on many occasions over the years to hear the citations for these battles read out, before commemorating them by means of Officers versus Sergeants sports, raising a scarlet coatee up a flagpole or watching the Regiment's youngest soldier troop the Regimental Colour. The battlefields that seized my interest the most were those on the Italian peninsula. It was here that the 11th Foresters (*The Men from the Greenwood*) fought in the Great War and here where the vast majority of the 1150 Foresters killed in the Second War fell.

In some ways the Sherwood Foresters were a most unfortunate Regiment in the Second World War. Of the two regular battalions; the 1st were lost outside Tobruk in 1942. Of the four territorial battalions; the 5th were lost in Singapore in 1942, the 6th and 7th (The Robin Hood Rifles) were converted to Anti Aircraft units before the war and the 8th were lost in Norway in 1940. Only one of the war-raised service battalions; the 14th, saw action. One regular, one territorial and one service battalion were left to uphold the reputation of the Sherwood Foresters, which they did in full, in the Italian campaign. In Italy the 2nd Foresters fought in the 1st Infantry Division, the 2/5th Foresters fought in 46th (North Midland) Infantry Division and the 14th Foresters fought in 1st Armoured Division. Between them they fought from Salerno to Trieste between September 1943 and May 1945. After the destruction of the 5th Foresters in Singapore, the 2/5th Foresters became the 5th Foresters.

I have been lucky enough to meet many of the 'D Day Dodger' Sherwood Forester veterans. Some were spoken to in pubs, clubs, homes and hospitals in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. Some were taken by me to Anzio for the 60th anniversary in early 2004 and to the Gothic Line for the same reason

later that year. They were fine men whose banter soon took them back to 1944, one of whom climbed on the luggage conveyor at the Stansted airport check-in with his suitcase and all of whom could drink rum till the early hours and be on parade the next day bright and early with shining medals and shoes. Visiting their battlefields, the only problem for me was their extreme and universal modesty

Rather than give a potted history of the Italian campaign, with which I know many Guild members are familiar, I have decided to choose my favourite ten Sherwood Forester battlefields in Italy as battlefields are what we are all about. In chronological order they are:

1. The 11th Foresters in the Battle of Asiago in June 1918

This is a tremendous battlefield to visit, as the trenches dug in granite by the Men from the Greenwood are still clearly visible on in the edge of the pine forest on the south side of the beautiful Asiago plateau in the Dolomites. The whole area is snow covered from November to April. The Austro-Hungarians mounted a major attack here on 15 -16



Shrine used as Regimental Aid Post and Battalion Tactical HQ by 11th Foresters during the Battle of Asiago in June 1918

June which took the 11th Foresters front line. Lt Col Charles Hudson led the counter-attack that ejected the enemy and led to him being awarded the Victoria Cross. Edward Brittain, who was commanding A Company, was killed in this action. His sister Vera, later the mother of Baroness Shirley Williams, said Hudson was a pompous old man. In fact he was 25 years old and a poet.

2. The 5th Foresters in the Salerno landings in September 1944.

Green Beach where this Derby Territorial Battalion became the first Foresters to land in Italy in WW2 is still much as it was on 9 September. The initial landing itself was largely unopposed as the Italians had surrendered as the allied fleet approached but mobile German armoured forces, initially held inland, and soon made their presence felt. 5th Foresters were in the third brigade of 46th Division to land and did not do so until 2000 hrs on 9 September and, by that time the three Hampshire battalions in the first wave had suffered very heavily and the beach was under tank and artillery fire. The 5th Foresters marched north towards Salerno town at 1700 hrs on 10 September but ran into 129 Panzer Grenadier regiment supported by armour at Ponte Fratte. Here they were held up and scrappy fighting ensued until 13 September. After a further two days stalemate the Germans withdrew and 5th Foresters were moved north of Salerno to try to force the Molina defile that provided access to the main Naples road. They attacked there on 21-22 September as part of the breakout from the Salerno bridgehead. In 19 days fighting the battalion lost 50 killed 175 wounded and 42 prisoners. The area inland of Green Beach is swampy and scrubby and the town of Salerno has now surrounded Ponte Fratte. The Molina defile is still a steep and craggy route bypassed by the modern autopista.

3. The 5th Foresters crossing the River Volturno in October 1943

This was the first time the battalion had carried out an assault river crossing. The River Volturno was 2-300 feet wide and 6-10 feet deep. It was defended by 15 Panzer Division. It was to be crossed on the night of 12-13 October on a wide front with the British on the left and Americans on the right. 5th Foresters were to cross the river 8 miles from the coast. The plan was for them to cross in 8 man collapsible assault boats, supported by rafts and pontoons. They would then protect the right flank of their brigade (139) and send companies left (downstream) to seize the village of Cancelli where it was planned that the Royal Engineers would build a 30 ton bridge for the main crossing of 139 Brigade. Several recces of likely crossing points were made during preceding days.

These, and the crossing itself, were rendered more difficult that the land for miles around was flat and featureless. At 2100 hrs on 12 October 5th Foresters, began to cross. Surprise was achieved and by 2359 hrs Lt Col Hefford and three companies were across but coming under increasingly heavy mortar fire. As two companies made their way toward Cancelli they were counter-attacked by tanks. The only anti-tank weapons that could be carried across in the assault boats were PIATs and many of the new draft that had replaced Salerno casualties had not been trained in this new weapon. The one company left at the crossing boat was forced back over the river by 1500 hrs on 13 October with the loss of 42 men. The other two companies and battalion tactical headquarters fought on for 15 hours, protecting the flank of their brigade. Eventually they were over-run, very few men making it back to the home bank as many could not swim. In all, the Volturno crossing cost 5th Foresters 47 dead, 57 wounded and 112 prisoners. The casualties included the CO, Battalion 2IC, Adjutant and all but one of the company commanders. This is still an undeveloped area and the ruined house that was the Forester's Regimental Aid Post still stands.

4. The 5th Foresters on the River Garigliano in the Gustav Line in January 1944

Between the Rivers Volturno and Garigliano the 5th Foresters saw heavy fighting in cold, snowy conditions on the Monte Camino massif. By the time they reached the Garigliano, which formed part of the main German Gustav Line defences and flowed from the junction of the Rivers Liri and Rapido down to the sea, the battalion had lost 560 men since landing at Salerno 3 months previously. Less than 30% were by now pre-war Derby terriers. General Mark Clarke's plan was to send 36 Texas Division over the Rapido followed by the 1st US Armoured Division on 20 January, 2 days before the Anzio landings, 60 miles behind the enemy's lines in order to unhinge the Gustav Line. In order to protect the Texan's left flank he ordered the British X Corps to cross the River Garigliano on 19 January on a wide front between the Rapido and the sea. The X Corps formation to cross closest to the Americans was to be 46 Division. They sent two battalions of the Hampshires to cross by boat that night, of whom only one company got across. At the same time 5th Foresters were sent to clear the one remaining German foothold on the home bank; the hamlet of Vandra held by a company of 115 Recce Battalion of 15 Panzer Division. The Battalion, now led by 35 year old Lt Col Roger Welchman, mounted a night time converging attack which succeeded with only 17 casualties, most of them caused by the minefield that surrounded Vandra. They cleared the church, house and riverside caves and captured the whole German

garrison. Although the 46 Division crossing had failed, 5 Division and 56 Division had crossed further downstream. The ruins of Vandra still stand alongside the Garigliano, below the mountains and form the closest Forester battlefield to Monte Cassino, which has an understandably magnetic attraction for WW2 Italy battlefield tourists.

5. The 2nd Foresters at Campoleone Station at Anzio in January-February 1944

This was the Foresters bloodiest battle in Italy. A Corps of one British and one US division had landed in the Anzio-Nettuno area on 22 January. They were only 30 miles from Rome and as Churchill put it succinctly *“I had hoped we had hurled a wild cat on the shore only to find we had a beached whale”*. The force at Anzio, rather than unhinging the Gustav Line, was rapidly surrounded by German units, reacting to a contingency plan, arriving from France, Yugoslavia, Germany and elsewhere. The allies were to be trapped for 4 months in conditions of Great War trench warfare until units breaking out from Monte Cassino rescued them. The 2nd Foresters and the US Rangers were the two spearheads that led the attempted break out on 30-31 January, the former at Campoleone Station and the latter towards Cisterna. The Foresters advanced at 1030 hrs towards their objective GOLD FLAKE, at the road – rail junction at Campoleone 12 miles inland from Anzio. They were met by tanks of 103 Panzer Battalion from inside the houses of Campoleone and the machine gun and mortar fire of other 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division units from the railway station and a line of railway freight wagons. The Foresters were unable to get beyond the rail embankment and pulled back at 1200 hrs to allow an artillery strike on the German defenders. The battalion then attacked again, with some support from tanks and tank destroyers, which were stopped by mud, wadis on the flanks and anti-tank fire. By the time the Foresters were ordered to withdraw at last light they had been reduced from 750 to 250 men. A Company was reduced from 116 to 16 men led by a sergeant. The CO, Adjutant and 3 out of 4 company commanders were casualties. Of the 2nd Foresters 10x gallantry awards in 4 months at Anzio, 9 of them were won on this day. For the battlefield guide Anzio is problematical, the whole area is now a dormitory suburb of Rome and has seen heavy post-war development. Campoleone Station is an exception. The station buildings, railway tracks and embankments are all as they were in 1944 and the open land over which the Foresters advanced can best be seen from the railway platform. After Campoleone the 2nd Foresters were stranded at the tip of a 7000 yard salient called the Thumb, surrounded on three sides. They tried to release prisoners from the Guards Brigade, being escorted by Germans almost straight

through their positions, shouting for them to drop flat as they engaged their escorts. By the time they extricated themselves from the Thumb the Foresters numbered only 100 unwounded men. They continued to man their trenches and became known as ‘the last fighting hundred’.

6. The 14th Foresters in ‘the wadis’ at Anzio in February-May 1944

The 14th were raised in Markeaton Park in Derby in 1940. Their officers and SNCOs were a mix of regulars and territorials and their soldiers a mix of volunteers and conscripts. They fought at El Alamein in 1942, as lorried infantry in 9th Armoured Brigade in support of 2nd New Zealand Division. They landed at Anzio on 24 February. The west side of the Via Anziate is seamed by a network of what the British referred to as wadis. They are wet, sandy gullies up to 60 feet deep which form a maze-like network. British and German positions in the wadis were often only 50 yards apart, less in some places. No movement was possible by day and the conditions led to trench foot and other maladies resulting from extended periods spent static and soaking wet. Trench reliefs and resupply were a dangerous business. 14th Foresters routine from March to May 1944 was 9 days in the front line, 6 days in reserve in the Padiglione Woods one mile south of the front line and 3 days at Echelon on the outskirts of Anzio town. The whole Anzio beach head was under German artillery fire throughout and troops refused to report sick even when wounded as tented field hospitals were more dangerous than slit trenches. The battalion’s front line positions were in areas of the wadis known as the Boot, the Lobster Claw and the Starfish where the streams still wash up ammunition and defence stores every year. Gaining access has become more difficult year by year as more houses and a huge area of solar panels have been built all around the wadis. The broken nature of the ground encouraged extensive



Cpl Reg Johnson MM from Congleton in Cheshire and Sgt Ted Newbury from Melbourne in Derbyshire, both 14th Foresters in Factory at Anzio in May 1944

patrolling by both sides to identify enemy units, snatch prisoners and occasionally over-run isolated defence posts. Most casualties were caused by accurate mortar fire. Fratricide was not unknown. The 14th Foresters arrived at Anzio 853 strong and received one draft of 77 reinforcements. This total of 930 men lost 103 dead, 240 wounded and 2 prisoners in their 3 months in the beach head.

7. The 5th Foresters at Monte Vecchia on the Gothic Line in August-September 1944

In this action the 5th were the first unit to break into the German outpost line of the main Gothic Line. They did this by breaching a minefield on the River Foglia and then assaulting up the steep slopes on the north bank to seize the walled village of Montevecchia, which is now called Belvedere Fogliense between 30 August and 2 September. In A Company, which spearheaded the attack; of the three platoon commanders, one was killed, one wounded and one awarded the Military Cross. Two of the platoon sergeants were awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal including Len Stevenson, a 20 year old Sergeant who remained in the Regiment after the war, serving with it in Malaya and outside it, in a capacity which he would never reveal to me, in Palestine. This attack, which cost the 5th Foresters 24 dead and 51 wounded, allowed 46 Division to boast the they had 'bust open' the Gothic Line as they had 'bust open' the Hindenburg Line 26 years before. This remains a completely unspoiled battlefield, the



Sgt Len Stevenson DCM. 5th Foresters



5th Foresters and an M10 Tank Destroyer approach the Gothic Line in August 1944

village of Monte Fabbri, where the recoil of the Foresters mortars broke through the piazza into the sewers, and their objective village of Montevecchia, do not seem to have changed at all for hundreds of years.

8. The 14th Foresters at San Savino on the Gothic Line in September 1944

As part of 18th Brigade in 1st Armoured Division, the battalion tried a quick attack on the village of San Savino on the Coriano Ridge on the night of 5-6th September. After a hard night and day of fighting within the village, they were repulsed by German infantry and tanks with the loss 26 dead and 82 wounded from the 250 men who actually got into the village. The 14th mounted a more deliberate second attack on San Savino in the early hours of 13 September. Clearing the village systematically, using a plan with all building numbered, the Foresters took their objective and over 600 prisoners, for the loss of 9 dead and 31 wounded. As the BBC, accurate as ever, falsely attributed the capture of San Savino to the Gurkhas, the 14th Foresters referred to themselves thereafter as 'the White Gurkhas'. The old village remains much as it was, although bullet holes that were clearly visible 20 years ago have now gone. I was instrumental in the construction and unveiling of a memorial to the 14th Foresters in San Savino on the 60th anniversary. I also placed a framed account of the battle, in English and Italian, in the Fattoria Del Piccione, which was the final German redoubt in 1944 and is now an agro-turismo business with excellent local food, wine and hazelnut liqueur.

9. The 2nd Foresters at Monte Ceco on the Gothic Line in October 1944

Whilst 5th and 14th Foresters were part of British led 8th Army and therefore fighting on the slopes above Rimini at the eastern end of the Gothic Line, the 2nd Foresters were part of the US led 5th Army and their axis lay through the centre of the Gothic Line around the main road from Florence to Bologna. 2nd Foresters had been slogging through the Apennines for 20 days. They and the rest of 1st Infantry Division were delayed mainly by road and bridge demolitions, mines and artillery fire. A popular saying was "*the good news is that there is only one more mountain but the bad news is that the Germans are taking it with them*". Monte Ceco was 2200 feet high and needed to be taken as it dominated the only road up which supplies and guns could be brought. It was held by about 350 men of the German 715th Infantry Division under a Captain, supported by 12 artillery pieces. 3rd Infantry Brigade, comprising 2nd Foresters, 1st KSLI and 1st Duke of Wellingtons, were to take it. The mud was thick on the heavily forested slopes and it was raining hard. Jimmy Hackett was still commanding 2nd Foresters. He had taken over as Adjutant when his predecessor fell on the Messines Ridge in 1940 and as CO when his

predecessor fell at Anzio. I soldiered with all three of his sons in the Regiment. 2nd Foresters advanced from the south up a knife edge ridge, leap-frogging companies on 3 October. Sgt Buck Harvey reported that his platoon had reached the summit and were digging in. At 0200 hrs on 4 October they were pushed off Monte Ceco by a German counter-attack. On 5 October 1 KSLI re-took the summit but were over-run losing 35 casualties and 50 prisoners. On 6 October 1st Dukes attacked supported by the whole of the divisional artillery and machine guns who had man-packed 100,000 rounds forward. They gained a position just below the crest and hung on. On 8 October the Dukes attacked again losing 72 casualties including their CO. Pte Richard Burton of the Dukes won the VC, clearing three enemy machine posts from the summit. The capture of Monte Ceco took 6 days in all and cost 3 Infantry Brigade 175 men. Prisoners taken include Siberians, Poles and Slovenes. Monte Ceco rewards those who undertake the steep ascent with collapsed slit trenches and plentiful empty cases.

10. The 2nd Foresters at Monte Grande on the Gothic Line in November 1944

Monte Grande is one of the northern high points of the Apennines and from its summit one has a clear view of Bologna down in the plains to the north. The allies capture of Monte Grande would allow them to take Bologna and thus cut off the Germans still clinging on to the eastern half of the Gothic Line. The obstacles to achieving this were high peaks, deep snow, deeper ravines and German 4th Parachute Regiment. On the night of 28-29 November the German paras seized Monte Castellaro from a 66 Infantry Brigade unit. 2nd Foresters, who were the Divisional counter-attack battalion, held 5 miles behind the lines, were warned to retake Castellaro and, in preparation, moved up onto Monte Grande. They were equipped for winter warfare with snow suits, boots in straw sandbags, sledges, denim wind suits and jerseys. The 2nd Foresters attacked on the night of 29-30 November. The attack failed completely with the two attacking companies losing direction in deep ravines and the Germans employing bren guns and mortars captured from 2 Royal Scots 24 hours previously. Luckily much of the mortar fire was ineffectual in the deep snow, the blast just bowling men over without causing serious injury. This battlefield is in a remote and scenic spot where locals chicken coops are still constructed of 3 inch mortar ammo boxes and the problems of mountain warfare can be profitably discussed.

There was one Sherwood Forester Victoria Cross in the WW2 Italian campaign; 22 year old Captain John Brunt. He was awarded a posthumous VC, as he was killed, by mortar fire, whilst having a cup of tea, the day after his VC action. At the time he was serving as

carrier platoon commander with 6th Lincolns. The action for which he was awarded the VC took place outside Faenza, on 9 December 1944, during a counter-attack by the capable 90th 'Afrika' Panzer Grenadier Division. He covered the withdrawal of his men by personally killing 14 Germans with a bren gun and then firing a PIAT and then a 2 inch mortar. Later he stood on the back decks of a tank to direct its fire before jumping down with another bren gun to stalk the enemy and organise the evacuation of all of his wounded men. He is buried in Faenza CWGC Cemetery. Brunt's VC action took place on rolling farm and park land just outside Faenza.

557 Foresters killed in WW2 now lie in Italy. The largest numbers are in the two Anzio cemeteries (230), the nine Gothic Line cemeteries (147) and Salerno cemetery (30). There are 54 Foresters commemorated on the Memorial to all those without a known grave for the whole campaign at Monte Cassino. It never fails to personalise the battlefields of the "*underbelly that turned out to be a tough old gut*" when I guide soldiers from my Regiment or people from Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire to Sherwood Forester graves. Whilst about half of the men who fell under the Maltese Cross and White Hart cap-badge came from outside the regimental counties, many of the CWGC cemetery lists contain parents or wives from Bolsover to Belper and from Mansfield to Matlock.



Top: 2nd Foresters Memorial at Anzio

Bottom: 14th Foresters Memorial at San Savino



GUILDmerchandise

With the winter guiding season fast approaching now is the time to get your orders in for your Guild clothing! All items are available with either the GBG logo or Accredited member badges. The range includes:



Polo shirts:



Sweatshirts:



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The easiest way to order is online via the Guild website – go to:
www.gbg-international.com/shop/
and pick what you want in the sizes you want.

If you don't want to pay online you can still send a cheque for the required amount to the Secretary at: 8, Pidsley Crescent, Exeter, Devon EX2 7NQ

THE FAULD EXPLOSION - 27TH NOVEMBER 1944 BRITAIN'S LARGEST EVER TERRESTRIAL EXPLOSION

Christopher John



Have a look at the picture on the left. What is this? Possibly the surface of the moon or Mars taken by a space probe! No vegetation, a huge central crater with multiple other craters surrounding it. But what's the scale? Well look at the bottom left where a rectangular cluster of buildings can be made out. These are the shattered remains of a farm. No other recognisable buildings can be seen. Another farm, Upper Castle Hayes Farm located directly above the centre of the explosion, has vanished completely.

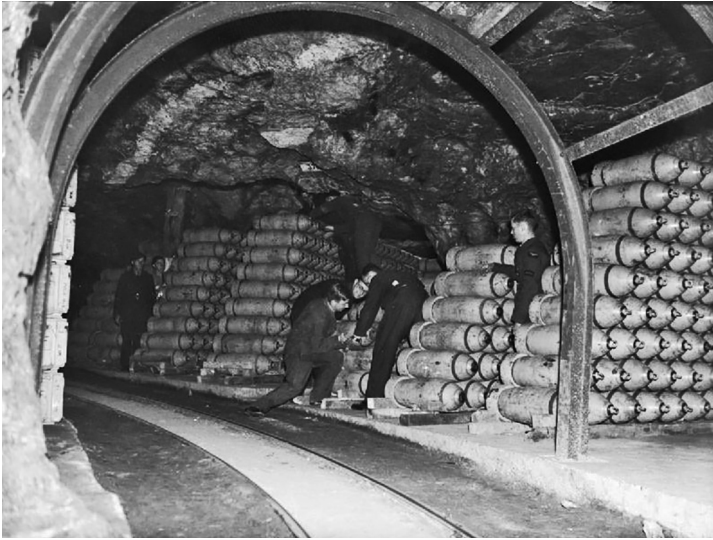
The Fauld explosion site and surrounding crater field

Buildings in the local village of Hanbury have been badly damaged, especially the Cock Inn. A reservoir supplying the mine and gypsum works has been breached causing a huge flood wiping out the works of Ford and son gypsum miners.

The devastation has been caused by the detonation of 3-4000 tonnes of RAF bombs and artillery ordnance out of a probable 20,000 tonnes, stored underground, in requisitioned gypsum mine workings, by 21 Maintenance Unit of the Royal Air Force, causing Britain's largest recorded terrestrial explosion. The design of the tunnels with blast wall constructions probably prevented an even larger disaster.



The gypsum works destroyed by the explosion and flood from the reservoir.



Above: Bomb storage within the galleries

Below: Artillery shell storage prior to D-Day



Tragically, even though in a very rural area and isolated of south Staffordshire, an estimated 70 people lost their lives in this disaster. These include RAF personnel, six Italian prisoners of war working within the storage area, workers at Ford and Son, swept away and drowned in the flood and the entire family and farm workers of Upper Castle Hayes Farm, which has been totally obliterated.

So where are we? The area of Fauld lies in South Staffordshire about halfway between the towns of Uttoxeter and Burton-on-Trent. As mentioned the area was totally agricultural, slightly hilly and far from any large centre of population. Mining for gypsum had been carried out here for nearly a century. The works of Ford and Son extracted the mineral bearing rock, crushed it and the white mineral gypsum was extracted being used as plaster, plaster board and such items as plaster bandages which when wet were applied as plaster casts to broken limbs. As a result of this activity large underground galleries were left in stable rock that needed little support.

Prior to World War 2 Britain had only three depots for ammunition storage for the RAF. As

the war progressed and the RAF, particularly Bomber Command, expanded it became obvious that a far greater tonnage of bombs would be required and there would be a need to store them prior to use. It was decided to seek suitable quarry or mining sites and the empty galleries at Fauld were purchased by 1942, with £635,000 being spent to modify the galleries to a suitable standard and provide surface offices and installations. These included unloading areas and a narrow gauge railway with small diesel locomotives for moving ordnance to and from the storage bays. From here loads of bombs would be extracted and forwarded to Air Ammunition Parks each serving a number of bases and their squadrons.

By 1944 the role of the underground storage depots had changed. The increase in bomb sizes carried by the Lancaster meant a surplus of smaller original bombs, 250-500lbs now existed and these went into long term storage at depots such as at Fauld. Increasingly the larger bombs were going direct from the factories to the Air Ammunition Parks. But there were other items that needed to be stockpiled, not air carried bombs but artillery ammunition for the forthcoming invasion of Europe. As a result the underground galleries at Fauld now stored surplus RAF bombs and a large tonnage of artillery shells, mortar rounds, grenades, even machine gun and rifle ammunition all awaiting D Day and the invasion of France.

What happened to cause the explosion? The subsequent enquiry considered several possibilities. Firstly sabotage, why were Italian ex prisoners of war employed in the depot? Because they were no longer enemy aliens. By September 1943 the Italian Government had deposed the dictator Benito Mussolini, and agreed an armistice with the Allies. Many Italian PoWs remained in the UK, now re-labelled as co-operators, providing manual labour on



Roof collapsed onto aerial bombs

farms and in other areas replacing manpower conscripted to the services. The enquiry found there was no evidence to suggest any hint of sabotage. The Italian workers were not known to be politically motivated against the Allies and appeared good and conscientious workers. In total 189 PoWs were working in the storage depot. The enquiry, however, found them to be inexperienced in the handling and movement of munitions.

The enquiry then looked at the chain of command within the depot and found it to be unclear and lacking in clarity. Nominally under the control of the RAF various other agencies were involved, there were some civilian contractors, the PoWs, and increasingly the Army was responsible for the artillery and other ammunition there. It appeared that regulations were laxly enforced. Although the enquiry did not come up with a clear cause a re examination in 1974 found workers were known to remove detonators from returned bombs with brass chisels rather than copper tools, an act strictly forbidden due to the possibility of this causing sparks in the detonator that could trigger an explosion. This remains the most likely cause of the explosion.

Surprisingly the depot continued to function after the explosion. Once water levels had subsided debris was cleared away, extra roof strengthening was installed and ammunition was distributed as requested. Even more surprisingly the depot continued to function into the late 1950s before being finally cleared and released from service. Today the crater site remains fenced off with notices



Graves of the six Italian co-operators, Burton-on-Trent

forbidding entry due to the uncleared nature of the crater with ordnance likely still to be on or just under the surface.

Burials of those killed took place in a several cemeteries. The six Italian ‘co-operators’ killed are buried in Burton-on-Trent. Some civilian casualties are buried in Tutbury churchyard. An estimated 18 bodies were not recovered. Memorials to the Explosion stand at both a local site and at the National Memorial Arboretum. Sad reminders that the victims of battle are not always those directly involved in conflict itself.

The author hopes to hold a Guild recce day in 2025 to involve the sites of RAF training airfields, Fradley, Tatenhill and Church Broughton with a visit to the Explosion site.

FIELDguides



The Cold War Recce at Zossen - a study in the Soviet Command System, the ‘Vertical Stroke’ and Permanently Restricted Areas in East Germany.

FUTURE CONFLICT

Bob Shaw

As guides, we are sometimes asked not only for our knowledge on history but also to extrapolate information and provide our opinions on current and future conflict and any connections between them. We currently see armed conflict in Ukraine and in Gaza which have aspects of Medieval Siege, WW1 attrition, WW2 manoeuvre, mines and subterranean warfare, operations in urban areas, the use of unmanned reconnaissance and weapon systems, precision long range strike, cyber-attacks, and blockades. So, do all these things seem familiar from history? I will let you explore the connections, this is how the UK government see the future.

On a positive note, more people will escape poverty and have access to education and health care. Populations will increase due to advances in medical care although obesity is on the rise. People have more access to information, the means to travel abroad, and the choice to choose their gender and sexuality. Individualism is rising but this also causes populism and fragmented societies. Financial inequality is growing and so is nationalism, religious intolerance, and authoritarian governments.

The balance of power is changing as the economic power of Asia increases, especially China and India. Non-compliance and subversion of international laws will increase. Multinational corporations will become bigger and will use their power to gain concessions from the state thereby eroding the sovereignty of the state.

Information volume and processing will grow and cyberspace will become more central to humanity. It will increasingly be used to conduct cyber-attacks and spread disinformation, which will increase polarisation of populations, fuel grievances, and erode trust in government and institutions.

The increasing rate of technological development will cause societal upheaval, grievance and violent protest by the disadvantaged.

Environmental stress on the climate system will increase causing transport and trade disruption, the floods, droughts, heatwaves and heavy rainfall will become more intense and frequent and the demand for water and food will increase. All of this will lead to an increase in migration.

Populations will become unbalanced. Developing countries will be more youthful while Europe and East Asia will have more than 25% over 65. Elderly are more peaceful but stifle change, the young will

want to migrate and unless integrated well will cause tension with populations increasingly living in cities.

The line between war and peace has blurred and given the continuous use of unattributable attacks and cyber-attacks means we are already at war, we just aren't at war in the more historical and conventional sense.

Our adversaries and enemies are both state and non-state actors that will persistently threaten the rules based international order.

Given the range, geographic spread and capabilities of potential adversaries the contest of domains will be both at home and abroad (any distinction between the two is now obsolete).

The operating environment will have complexity, instability and uncertainty. There will be contest for access and control of all domains, land, sea, air, cyber and space.

The contest for access and control of domains is underpinned by pervasive information. There is a requirement to influence global audiences, actors, adversaries and enemies and only a clear focus on audiences and effects by integrating kinetic and non-kinetic activities will be central to success.

The information thread connects audiences to conflicts globally and in real time-this means that strategy is sensitive to tactics and the opinions of those audiences. Therefore strategy needs to be effective and with a supporting narrative that gives meaning to tactical actions.

As populations rise and urbanisation increases cities will be more connected and physically, culturally and institutionally complex, with shifting allegiances. Forces will increasingly have to operate in urban areas conducting operations from kinetic to stabilisation and humanitarian all within a smaller space.



National and international human rights or 'lawfare' will constrain force's freedom of action and they will be under increasing domestic and international scrutiny - which might not be the case for their adversaries. This will impact any influence campaign.

The proliferation of dual purpose technology and weapons will enable a wider range of adversaries to contest access to and freedom of movement within the Area of Operations. This may involve political and economic exclusion such as refusal for basing, port facilities or overflights through to long range weapons.

In Ukraine we have seen an initial phase using armoured thrusts and airborne forces to capture the south, the dombas and Kyiv. This then settled down into a war of attrition in fixed defensive lines with massive artillery strikes and firepower to gain ground. There was then an artillery duel with the Ukrainians getting HIMMARS and conducting counter battery fire, destroying ammunition stores and logistic infrastructure such as bridges. The current phase has seen Ukrainian counter attacks along with the campaign of the resistance forces to Russian occupation. The Russians failed to win air supremacy and due to effective SAMs on both sides, this led to air operations at low level and losses to HMG and MANPADs. The Russian navy has lost or had damaged expensive capital platforms and is being struck in Port by air and sea unmanned systems.

So what will future forces look like? One with a combat ethos and fighting culture within a manoeuvrist approach using mission command with a first class training system. A force that has continuous organisational learning that underpins adaption, innovation and agility. That learning will be a mix of academic and physical training across all domains, in all environments and with partners. It will require people with appropriate skills knowledge and experience (which given the competitive labour market will be increasingly difficult) and requires a collaborative approach with other government departments, industry and academia. The personnel will require novel employment models and flexible working practices. Command of these higher educated individuals will require flatter command structures and a different management style-certainly greater delegation of authority-within commanders intent-and an inclusive approach. There will have to be a drive of cultural and behavioural change that enable learning that is inclusive and promotes collaboration, understanding, trust and respect, a willingness to experiment, to take measured risk without fear of failure and accept setbacks and mistakes.

Future operations are more likely to be Joint Interagency and Multinational and have to deploy at short notice to anywhere in the globe. Given that,

there will also be a requirement to have time to fully understand the history and culture of the region to be operated in and train with the host nation and multinational forces. The force will require credibility for deterrence and technology will remain essential to advantage but the tempo of change will increase and there will be a rise in the use of AI and remote and automated systems. Better sensors will give better data collection but the analysis will need to keep pace. Technology can give new training techniques that save money, guarantee availability and enable a rapid change of complex scenarios that develop agility. There is only so much the physical training on the same training areas can teach.

There is a requirement for mass to overcome sophisticated defences and give resilience, hence large numbers of cheap robotic platforms. Platforms need the ability to disperse and concentrate at speed and defeat multi spectral sensors using camouflage, concealment and deception-sacrificial unmanned platforms. If deterrence fails then forces will need to be robust, credible and confident to fight and be sustained. The health of any force will require constant monitoring with reviews of catering, body fat tests and access to physical training facilities. Despite the increased technology there is the enduring requirement to close with and kill the enemy with potentially limited connectivity and air support. Armoured and assault engineer vehicles will become unmanned, small drones will conduct ISR and resupply and small jet engine technology which will allow more rapid vertical manoeuvre. This means troops with jet packs!

Air defence will become more difficult with the use of hypersonic, ballistic and cruise missiles, stealth, swarming and large salvo attacks. Ballistic trajectories also run the risk of being mistaken for nuclear so strategic messaging is vital.

The defence system will be human supervised but AI controlled to a range of defences including jamming, directed energy weapons, counter rocket/shell/mortar systems and swarms of UAS, yet advances in cam, concealment, deception and mobility of key enemy systems will challenge effective targeting.

There will be expansion in the global use of seas and maritime capable actors above and below the surface. There will be increasing challenge of freedom of navigation and threats to global chokepoints. Naval platforms will be augmented by directed energy weapons (laser and microwave), directed acoustic weapons, rail guns, hypersonic missiles and remote and automated systems, that will use intelligent projectiles to allow long range precision strike. Future Naval deterrence is based on Carrier Enabled Power Projection, to deliver a globally

operating joint sea based military force. This requires a maritime task group configured for amphibious forces to secure land points of entry. Highly capable unmanned submarines will become more accessible, operating in shallow waters; but there will still be larger platforms required for operations to the ocean floor-deep diving submersibles will be used to disrupt global communications.

Offensive cyber capability will be used to disrupt networks and systems whilst defensive capabilities will defend against attacks. Cyber-attacks will grow in scope, frequency and impact. Cyber specialists will be a balance of regulars, reserves, civilians and contractors that understand the protocols of the cyber world which lack the legal, behavioural and moral norms that underpin the rules based approach of the maritime, land and air domain. Anti-satellite systems will disrupt reliance on space capabilities including navigation, C2, weather, missile warning,

and ISR sensors. Satellites are getting smaller and cheaper with increasing capabilities which means deploying disposable tactical satellites in a low earth orbit just for the duration of an operation above a specific geographic region.

So where will conflict occur? The conflict in Ukraine increases the chance of conflict in Europe and there is potential conflict in the Arctic over mineral extraction. In the Pacific China tries to push its defensive boundaries out and could potentially clash with India and the countries applying rule based order. Conflict could also occur over Taiwan.

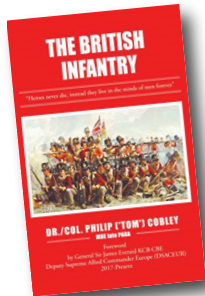
If history has taught us anything, it's that it's not always essential to have the best equipment, forces must master what is good enough and update it and their tactics frequently. People are at the heart of organisational ability and studying the history of battles will enable the learning of lessons so that forces don't have to repeat them!

FIELDguides



The Cold War Recce at Finow - Chris Finn talking NATO attack plans for East German and Soviet Airfields.

GUIDEbooks:



THE BRITISH INFANTRY

By Dr/Col. Philip ('Tom') Cobley MBE

The infantry is 'The Arm that wins battles,' to quote Field Marshal Earl Wavell. That assertion is as true today as it was in the 1930's and it is therefore essential to read the first part of *The British Infantry* as Dr./Col. Philip ('Tom') Cobley brings to

life a selection of the campaigns, operations, and battles in which British infantrymen have taken a pivotal role. The author also highlights the essential personal attributes required of an infantry soldier, which include leadership, initiative and tenacity, as well as the tactical and capability attributes required of an effective infantry Arm, as it develops through the ages.

The author's vivid accounts of infantry combat bring home the point that combat in the front-line is a challenging human dynamic. The challenge being to train infantry soldiers to strike a balance between discipline, based upon self-discipline, while preserving individual initiative and independence, which is so essential in winning wars. A second and more contemporary challenge is how to better prepare infantry soldiers for the dramatic range of emotional responses that a combat environment stimulates. As a result, in the second part of *The British Infantry* the author explores various initiatives, such as selection and screening, stress management training, combat simulation, and leadership, which he recommends as being the essential elements in lessening the effects of combat stress on individual infantry soldiers.

In conclusion, I encapsulate the ethos of the British infantry as "having an unquenchable will to prevail – whatever the odds." I consider that a combination of that ethos, when reinforced with individual and collective resilience, mental strength, combat focus, flexibility, adaptability, hardiness, battle-craft and tactical expertise, as being the elements that will create the steel core to an effective warfighting British Army. If this is true, and I believe that it is, then Dr./Col. Philip ('Tom') Cobley has added many reinforcing, challenging, and inspiring, perspectives for the present, and future generations of infantry soldiers to assimilate.

Reviewed by Lt Gen Andrew Graham CB CBE

Published by London Press Ltd
RRP £43.00
hardback, pp592

HAWKER'S SECRET PROJECTS

Cold War Aircraft That Never Flew

By Christopher Budgen



Written by an acknowledged expert on Hawker Aircraft Ltd at Kingston, the company was arguably the longest and most successful manufacturer of military aircraft in Great Britain and Europe. In its various evolved manifestations – Hawker Aircraft, Hawker Siddeley Aviation, British Aerospace – its output of war winning aircraft, mainly fighters, was unsurpassed. From the Hart and Hurricane through the Hunter, Harrier and Hawk, the company consistently produced aircraft that the UK fighting services wanted. But some designs, for whatever reason, failed to reach flight or were declined. With their sometimes advanced aerodynamics and technology, these aircraft could have had successful service careers but instead were abandoned, their stories failing to reach mainstream consciousness. Having not received their just dues, the present book seeks to redress this omission. The reasons for failure are many and varied, often financial or political, but the reasons behind the failure of the design are examined. In a wide-ranging investigation that documents the origins of Hawker Aircraft Ltd and its famous Project Office, this work, the third in Christopher Budgen's investigation of the inner workings of Hawker Aircraft, is a fitting tribute to the many who made the company the success it was.

Published by Pen & Sword Books Ltd
RRP £25.00
hardback, pp256

BRITISH BATTLES AND MEDALS

By John Haywood, Diana Birch and Richard Bishop

This book should be in every guides collection! As well as detailing every campaign that Britain has issued a medal for, there is a summary of each individual action for which a clasp was awarded. These not only detail the battle but typically record the number of individuals in the regiments that were present at each. There are also 18 appendices which list amongst other things the names of those members of the Light Brigade that took part in the famous charge, those who defended the Legations during the 1900 Boxer Rebellion and those Officers, Petty Officers and ratings on HMS Amethyst in 1949. Fully illustrated, the level of research that has gone into this weighty tome is impressive and, as such, it is an extremely useful reference book.

Reviewed by Tony Smith

Published by Spink & Son Ltd
RRP £85.00
hardback, pp798



in MEMORIAM - John Greene



Nathaniel Greene who fought in the Revolutionary wars. Brigadier General George Sears Greene of the Union Army who played a critical role at Gettysburg when he defended Culp's Hill was John's great grandfather. George Greene's son and John's great uncle - Lieutenant Samuel Greene was a USN officer who served as XO of the USS Monitor during the famous Battle of Hampton Roads and took command for most of the battle

It is with great sadness that we inform members that a long serving member of the Guild has passed away to the 'last stand'. John Greene was a long serving member of the Guild who was known by many for his loyalty, kindness and especially for his knowledge of the Waterloo campaign which he shared so generously with so many guides. It is worth noting that John's work in conducting battlefield tours of Waterloo Campaign for NATO staff at SHAPE was formally recognised by the US Army and NATO.

He came from a very distinguished service family in the USA. John's ancestors include Major General

when her captain was WIA. Another son and great uncle Francis Greene commanded a brigade at the Battle of Manila in 1898. John was a USAR Lt Colonel and I believe his father and grandfather served in the army. John is survived by his son Ian, who is a retired Regular Army Lt Colonel USA who now lives in Kaneohe on Oahu in Hawaiian islands. A sad time for the Guild, but I can surmise that he is now joyfully debating and discussing the Battle of Waterloo with other past experts of the Guild including the late Prof Richard Holmes and indeed General Wellington himself!

EVENTguide 2024

- 11-15 Mar **GBG Ypres Recce.** - Interested members please contact John Cotterill:
john.cotterill@btinternet.com
- 5-7 Apr **Paras in Normandy** - Interested members please contact Bob Shaw
rtnshaw@hotmail.com
- 23 May **'The Battlefield that never was'** - Interested members please contact Tony Scott
tscottbattlehonours@gmail.com,
- 14 Aug **Golf Championships** - Interested members please contact James Davis
james@jamesdavisphysio.co.uk
- 16 Aug **Badge Guides Dinner** - Interested members please contact Graeme Cooper
graeme@corporatebattlefields.com
- 9 Oct **Larkhill Royal Artillery Garrison, Wiltshire** - Interested members please contact Roger Grafton
roger.grafton@gmail.com
- 31 Oct - 4 Nov **Operation Market Garden, Netherlands Recce** - Interested members please contact Joris Nieuwint
joris@thebattlefieldexplorer.com
- 1 Dec **Christmas Lunch** - Interested members please contact Bob Shaw
rtnshaw@hotmail.com

Whilst there is a full programme of events planned for the next year, we are still encouraging members to organise localised events. Help in planning any event is available from David Harvey events@gbg-international.com

GUILD *awards* 2024



The Old Bill Award - _____

Award Ethos - The Old Bill Award goes to the Guild Member who habitually displays, to the benefit of the Guild, Old Bill's qualities of steadfastness and good humour, both in adversity and in times of good fortune. The trophy was donated by Tonie and Valmai Holt; the Award winner is chosen by the membership.



The Nathaniel Wade Award - _____

The Nathaniel Wade Award allows the Guild to publicly recognise the contribution of an individual, group or organisation associated with the Guild, who through their efforts has made a significant contribution to the craft of battlefield guiding and the wider Military History community. The Award winner is chosen by the Management Board.



The Richard Holmes Award - _____

The Award is given to Guild members who deserve recognition for their personal contribution to the improvement and further development of the Guild. The Award winner is chosen by the Chair of the Guild.



The Will Townend Award - _____

The award honours the memory of the late Will Townend, and his willingness to share his extensive technical knowledge of Artillery and his wider knowledge of battlefields in general with his fellow Battlefield Guides. Those nominated for the award are recognised as selfless members of the Guild who share their knowledge with their peers. The Award winner is chosen by the members of the Guild.



The David Chandler Award - _____

The award honours the memory of the late David Chandler the historian – in particular his research into military history and his academic contribution to a wider understanding of Napoleonic warfare. The Award winner is chosen by the Accreditation Director.



The Last Stand - _____

This is not a trophy, but forms part of the Guild's traditions: at the Annual Dinner, we remember, in silence those former members who are no longer with us, and are gathered 'at the Last Stand;' the tablepiece reflects this.



Honorary Membership - *Dr Scott's Decanter* - _____

The award of Honorary membership of the Guild entitles the recipient to life-long membership of the Guild at no cost to the individual. This level of membership is recognised in the Guild's Constitution.

NEW *members*:

New members who have been welcomed to the Guild between Autumn/Winter 2023 edition and the date of publication.

Rasul Ali
Andrew Bryant

Chin-Chin Chi
Nick Fox

David Grainger
Terry Long

Francois Pienaar
Medwyn Williams