



The Dugout

Newsletter of the Dorset and South Wiltshire Branch of the
Western Front Association

Parish Notes

Chairman:

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Diary Dates 2010

Meetings:

Saturday, 18 September

Andy Grainger - Colonel Bruchmuller - German Artillery Specialist

Saturday, 9 October

Peter Barton - The Records of the Red Cross

Saturday, 18 November

David Seymour - The Sopworth Aircraft

Saturday, 4 December - AGM

Julian Johnson - Great War Medals

At Pimperne Village Hall, Blandford -
2pm for 2.30pm start.

Further details on Branch website
www.wfa-dorsetswilts.org.uk

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## Chairman's Chat

May I extend a warm welcome to the "Dugout" Issue 6. Our branch journal continues to go from strength to strength bringing quality articles, news and information to our readership.

The first half of 2010 has been very busy and perhaps in terms of branch events and activities our busiest yet. The year began with two excellent talks by Andy Robertshaw (Ghosts on the Somme) and Victoria Burbidge (Aubers Ridge 9<sup>th</sup> May 1915). The visit to the AMS and RLC Museums on 6<sup>th</sup> March was well attended branch members were given a fine reception at both locations and I thank Pete Starling (Director AMS Museum) for his welcoming tea and biscuits and his undivided attention in looking after our party. We were greatly impressed with this well laid out and very informative museum. No less welcoming, Andy Robertshaw (Curator RLC Museum) provided a marvellous buffet lunch and a fascinating presentation on The Archaeology of the Battlefield. Our thanks to Pete and Andy for making the branch field trip an outstanding success. On April 10<sup>th</sup>, Guild of Battlefield Guides Member Verne Littlely gave a very interesting talk on the Basra War Memorial, and on May 8<sup>th</sup> Joanna Legg once again showed her mastery of "the other side of the wire" with an outstanding study of "The German Defence - Somme - 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916". During April and May branch members attended the WFA AGM at the Firepower Museum and the 95<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration of the Battle of

Aubers Ridge 9<sup>th</sup> May 1915 at Fromelles. Later in May (15<sup>th</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup>) an intrepid party journeyed again to the Gallipoli Peninsular. Roger G Coleman gives us his account of a varied but interesting tour with a focus on the Dorset Regiment and Dorset Yeomanry. A highlight was being able to walk the route of the 5<sup>th</sup> Bn Dorsets assault on Hetman Chair and the route of the approach march taken by the Dorset Yeomanry from Lala Baba to Scimitar Hill which they then attacked on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1915 accompanied by the Granddaughter of a Yeoman who was in the attack. Although not enough space to relate the full story here the Yeoman concerned and his Granddaughter have a direct connection to Wootton Fitzpaine which was the subject of a recent branch memorial restoration and research project. This is Remembering!

A new element to branch meetings is the introduction of a section titled the "First Five Minutes". Initiated by David and Katherine Seymour (War Memorials Trust Trustee and Regional Volunteer respectively) it is literally a 5 minute piece on a local war memorial or aspect of local WW1 history. This new event seems to be very popular and will continue with pieces relevant to branch activities.

June 12<sup>th</sup> saw the inaugural Branch Regional Seminar which was an outstanding success. Sandra Twyford chronicles the planning and implementation of the event and the day itself. The following weekend Diane Atkinson, noted author and historian gave a sparkling talk on her personal her-

oines Elsie Knocker and Mairi Chisholm - "The Angels of Pervyse". June ended with a stand at Tank Fest for two days, the annual Heavy Metal show at the Tank Museum, Bovington where it was noticed by our team that interest in the Great War was significantly greater than last year and not just limited to the "My Grandad....." enquiry. In July the branch secretary and I were fortunate enough to be able to attend the dedication of Pheasant Wood Cemetery which was an extremely moving and superbly organised event on one of the hottest days of the year. With no branch meeting in July, August saw Dale Hjort give a very lively talk on Italy and the Great War which members found of great interest, Dale showed marvellous command of the subject.

The branch is now in the countdown phase to the annual September battlefield tour which this year has a focus on the Northern Salient and Yser Front. Our speaker on the 18<sup>th</sup> September, Andy Grainger will talk about the German Artillery Specialist Bruchmuller and his influence on artillery tactics. Noted military historian, Peter Barton comes to us on October 9<sup>th</sup> to speak about the Red Cross Records, which will be a very interesting talk with a contemporary connection to Aubers Ridge/Fromelles and events leading to the dedication of Pheasant Wood Cemetery. Also in September (24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>) in association with the Dorset Family History Society (DFHS) there will be an "Ancestors in the Great War Workshop" to be held at "Treetops", the DFHS research centre, Stanley House, Fleets Lane, Poole, BH15 3AJ. For full details please visit the branch website [www.wfa-dorsetswilts.org.uk](http://www.wfa-dorsetswilts.org.uk) or the DFHS website [www.dorsetfhs.org.uk](http://www.dorsetfhs.org.uk). We end the year with branch members David Seymour presenting Sopwith Aircraft of the Great War on November 13<sup>th</sup> and Julian Johnson on Great War Medals and the Men Behind Them on December 4<sup>th</sup> at our AGM. Plans for 2011 are well underway and it promises to be as varied and interesting as 2010.

I finish this piece with the sad passing of Will Townend and Paul Wharton both active supporters of the branch. Will - the artillery expert '*par excellence*', whose subject knowledge knew no bounds, his support for the branch was superlative and his contribution to our battlefield tours invaluable. Paul Wharton - keen amateur whose research on those remembered on the Horningsham War Memorial exemplified the dedication needed to complete such a piece of work. Paul's research also opened up a new channel of research about Belgian military personnel buried in British cemeteries. Our sincere condolences go out to Helen Townend and family and Ivy Wharton and family.

My thanks to the committee for their hard work.

## Dorset and South Wilts Branch Inaugural Seminar – a great success!

I have to be honest and say that when we first talked about holding our own seminar some 18 months ago, I was filled with both excitement and trepidation. Were we going to be able to book the right calibre of speakers to attract enough ticket sales and could we secure a venue to match the occasion? Add to that all the 'invisible' and often forgotten organisational work and well, maybe, we had bitten off more than we could manage...

Nervously dipping our toe into the water, as far as seminars go, meant we had decided to keep things nice and simple: we planned to hold a one day seminar with four speakers, two before and two after lunch in a pleasing symmetrical pattern! But who do you ask to contribute and what ought the theme be? Once the date had been agreed, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2010, we set about booking our speakers on the broad theme 'Aspects of the Great War'.



We were absolutely delighted to secure four wonderful speakers and really importantly, because our usual meeting place at the village hall in Pimperne would not be able to take such large numbers, the Tank Museum at Bovington had agreed to be the venue for our seminar. Hence, when not in lectures everyone would be able to make their way around the remarkable exhibits and look in awe and wonder at the ingenuity of man when it comes to designing and developing the machinery of war. This museum is an absolute national treasure and you cannot help but enjoy your journey through the tank story, the trench experience, the discovery centre and the Tamiya Hall.

Phew, that was two major items ticked off our list of things to do! We then went about, with great industry, organising other essentials such as: advertising - posters / leaflets; designing and printing programmes; catering arrangements; speaker accom-

modation; timings, etc... This is when the strength of our committee came to the fore as we all played a role in getting the jobs done in readiness for the seminar. Never was it more so to say 'there is no I in team'.



David Fletcher

The afternoon before the big day Martin Willoughby (our Chairman), Judy Willoughby (our secretary) and I, met up with our speakers for a 'technical rehearsal'. This enabled us to ensure that everything was in order and there would be no surprises the following day. All went well and I drove away from the museum, as confident as anyone might be that we had all done as much as we could.

The day of the seminar dawned and I returned bright and early to join our fantastic committee members to welcome our speakers and guests, one of whom was Bruce Simpson (National Chairman of the WFA). There was a real sense of anticipation as the lecture room filled and the start time came ever closer. Fittingly it was to Martin Middlebrook we turned to get the seminar off to a cracking start. The renowned military historian and Fellow of the Royal Historical Society gave an excellent presentation entitled 'The Battle of the Somme and its origins'. A refreshment stop followed giving people the chance to reflect on what they had just heard and stretch their legs. The museum was now a hive of activity with Fiona selling WFA commodities, guests enjoying a specialist display of never seen before WWI POW photographs and the opportunity to purchase a range of books on sale including, most notably, signed copies of those written by our first speaker, Martin Middlebrook. Unsurprisingly, Martin's books were selling like hot cakes. So many people refer to his book 'The First Day of the Somme', as being the first book on The Great War they had read. It certainly was for me.

Next on was Professor Peter Simkins MBE, Honorary Vice-President of the Western Front Association and former Senior Historian at the Imperial War Museum. His talk on 'Haig and his Army Commanders' was

most fascinating and took us through very nicely up to a well deserved lunch.

David Fletcher, historian at the Tank Museum, got the afternoon off to an enthusiastic start. Quite simply, anything David does not know about tanks isn't worth knowing. His talk 'The learning curve - development of the tank' was very enlightening and could not have been delivered in a better setting.

Time ticked on and the seminar moved towards a close. Who better to finish off our inaugural seminar than Taff Gillingham with his usual mannequin 'Foz'. Taff really needs no introduction in WWI circles: a well known military historian, an historical advisor on many film and television projects and he is, of course, 'Chief Chum' of the Khaki Chums. As ever his demonstration of the development of the army uniform was outstanding as he led us through his presentation 'British Infantry Equipment of WWI'. His animated and engaging style never ceases to capture the attention of the audience.

The day concluded with our chairman, Martin Willoughby, thanking the speakers for their enlightening contributions. As the lecture room emptied, the buzz of anticipation was now replaced with a feeling of satisfaction (and some relief!) that the seminar had gone so very smoothly. The speakers had provided



Lcpl 'Foz'

a rich source of information and discussion points. Bovington Tank Museum had given us a unique venue. And the public who had so kindly supported our seminar provided us with very positive feedback. The most common question raised was 'when is the next one?'

And there you have it, the Dorset and South Wilts first seminar under our belts. Much to reflect on, many lessons learnt but a real team effort and all in all, a great success. We are already planning our second seminar in 2012. We hope to see you there!

**Sandra Twyford**  
**Event Organiser**

*Photographs by David Seymour*



## Gallipoli Tour May 2010

The tour members gathered at Wareham and left there for transportation by taxi for an overnight stay at Gatwick Travel Lodge. Rising very early on Saturday morning our party checked in at the airport for the 0630 flight to Sabiha Gokeen airport Istanbul. On arrival we were greeted by old friends and boarded a coach for the trip to the Pensiyon Helles Panorama at Sedd-ul-Bahr and welcomed by the proprietor and staff.

After a splendid Sunday morning breakfast we set off for a walking tour passing firstly through Sedd-ul-Bahr village to V Beach and then onto the Helles Memorial. The first stage of a five year plan to refurbish the memorial by the CWGC has begun on the eastern side which has been fenced off on both sides of the curtain wall. Our walk continued on around field boundaries towards W Beach where a packed lunch was enjoyed in the warm sun and a refreshing sea breeze. After lunch our walk took us across the top of X Beach and Bakery Beach and on towards



*Trenches at Pink Farm*

Pink Farm cemetery. Nearby were the remains an entrenched gun position which had a commanding view over the fields below. The objective for the day

was Twelve Tree Copse from where our coach picked us up for return to the Pensiyon.



*Lighter W Beach*

Monday morning we alighted from the coach at Beach Cemetery bright and early. After a short walk across the road to Shrapnel Valley Cemetery we ascended up to Plugge's Plateau from where the wonderful panoramic views of the Anzac topography can be observed. Descending from Plugge's Plateau and back along the road we walked upwards to Shell Green Cemetery and then continued on up to Lone Pine. It was a beautiful day enhanced by the lush and green undergrowth there but there was a distraction too - that of bagged rubbish and discarded litter lying in heaps around the memorial grounds! From Lone Pine we walked via Johnson's Jolly, Courtney's Post, and Quinn's Post towards the Turkish Memorial to 57 Regiment following the original frontline.

Tuesday's walk began at Gully Beach from where we gradually ascended up Gully Ravine. A number of artefacts were found including human remains of the fallen which brought into focus a reminder of why we were there and of those of both sides who still lie where they fell and were never recovered. Taking a short detour on to the lower slopes of Gully Spur we were able to see the remains of a trench system before continuing up the ravine and then branching away to cross the football field where some 'locals' were encountered - large tortoises - enjoying their lunch. At the top of Y Beach a short rest was taken before walking across Gurkha Bluff and Fusilier Bluff to the Nuri Zamit Memorial. Adjacent to the memorial the local authorities have completed an enclosure which was formerly an unmarked mass grave of Turkish soldiers. Rejoining the coach for a short journey we visited another recently completed memorial at Sari Tepe where over two thousand Turkish soldiers who were killed in the fighting at Gully Ravine lie buried. The remainder of the afternoon was spent at the museum in Alcitepe (Krithia) followed by afternoon tea and cake at Little Anafarta.

After breakfast on the Wednesday we were taken by coach to Suvla, firstly to A Beach and then began a walk from the Salt Lake to follow the advance taken by the Queen's Own Dorset Yeomanry to Scimitar Hill. We skirted around Chocolate Hill to Hetman's Chair and up past Green Hill to Scimitar Hill where lunch was taken. This was a particularly memorable walk as the Grandfather of one member of our group Phillipa Fortescue, had fought his way across the same fields in 1915. Our coach arrived shortly after lunch to take us back to the Pensiyon by mid-afternoon for a boat trip. On leaving the harbour at Sedd-ul-Bahr the sea was calm and the sky blue. The boat trip enabled us to observe a completely different aspect of the heights and undulating land-

render our passports and we were escorted to the building where the museum is located. Coincidentally a party of ex-nurses who had trained at St. Thomas's Hospital in London, known as 'Nightingales' were undertaking a pilgrimage tour and together we were taken through colonnaded corridors used as wards for those wounded in the Crimean War to the museum. The museum has three rooms of material and artefacts about Florence Nightingale and our party was invited to join in a short service of prayer in the room used by Florence Nightingale.

From the museum a short coach journey took us to the Haidar Pasha Cemetery where some 6,000 military personnel from the Crimean War lie buried. The majority are now unmarked and grassed over but the few surviving headstones record those who fell during the war and died in the Scutari hospital. Moving on through the cemetery is a civilian section and war graves section of WWI and WW2. Within the later is the Haidar Pasha Cremation Memorial commemorating those of the Indian Army who died in 1919 and 1920 who were originally commemorated in Mashiak and Osmanieh Cemeteries. The Haidar Pasha Memorial commemorates those who died in the South Russian Campaign whose graves could no longer be maintained by the CWGC. Haidar Pasha Cemetery is kept in impeccable condition by two CWGC workers and is a fitting tribute to all who lie and are commemorated there.



*'Walking the Walk' at Suvla Bay*

scape of Gallipoli from the sea. Somehow the beaches appeared to be smaller, cliffs steeper, the terrain more complex. Perhaps with some imagination we sensed the excitement and fear that the troops in 1915 initially experienced as they approached the shore before the horrors of war engulfed them and for many never to make the return trip. It was noticeable how quiet the party was as we passed Helles, V Beach, X Beach, Gully Beach and Y Beach before returning via the wreck site of HMS Goliath. Maybe thoughts of remembrance of those who had endured so much, was percolating through their minds.

Saturday morning was free for us to enjoy the attractions in Istanbul. After lunch the coach took us once more across the Bosphorus to the National Army Museum. A splendid museum but it posed a dilemma as a choice had to be made either to proceed through the museum to look at the displays and exhibits or watch the world famous Janissary Band - the latter won out. Anyone visiting this museum should take

The final day on the peninsula began at Skew Bridge from where we followed the advance of the RND during the Third Battle of Krithia to the final allied line at Helles. Friday was an early departure from the Pensiyon at 0500 hours for the return coach trip to Istanbul, arriving there at our hotel the Zeugina by 1100 hours. Leaving an hour later by coach, a kebab lunch was taken at a roadside café in Istanbul before crossing over the Bosphorus to Scutari. Our friends in Istanbul had arranged prior to our arrival a visit to the Florence Nightingale Museum which is located within the Turkish 1<sup>st</sup> Army's Headquarters Barracks. Turkish sensitivity about security required us to sur-



*The Janissary Band*

the opportunity to see this marvellous, colourful, enthralling and entertaining band, from which originate all modern military bands. For the last day of this

memorable tour the Janissary Band put the icing on the cake with a cherry.



Sunset over Imbros

The magnetic effect of Gallipoli worked its magic once again for all, who thoroughly enjoyed the trip and have expressed a desire to return. The experience of walking and visiting areas fought over some 95 years ago vividly brought it to mind the hardships endured by the troops, many of whom unlike us can never leave Gallipoli. Perhaps it is their invisible spirit that they left behind which draws so many back to ensure that their sacrifice is not forgotten.

**R.G. Coleman**

Photographs by Martin Willoughby



### Aubers Ridge 1915 to Fromelles Pheasant Wood 1916

My grandfather's older brother (Rifleman Charles Durrant, 2/Rifle Brigade) was killed on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1915 at Hill 60 on the Ypres Salient, or at least, that's what his family were told. With no reason to question the facts, Charlie remained "missing at Hill 60" for another eighty-five years, but a chance glimpse, in May 2000, of a memorial card to another missing 2/Rifle Brigade man highlighted the error of our ways. We had discovered Fromelles and the Battle of Aubers Ridge.



The research moved quite quickly from the men of 2/Rifle Brigade to all those serving with the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Divisions and then onto Fromelles 1916, the 61<sup>st</sup> (South Midland) Division and the 5<sup>th</sup> Division, Australian Imperial Force. The similarities between the 1915 battle and the 1916 attack (fought over the same ground and with the same devastating results) were enough to convince me that further and more in-depth research was required. Prior to the discovery of the mass graves at Pheasant Wood, Fromelles had been known only for being the place where the AIF had experienced its first, and disastrous, taste of action on the Western Front.

In February 2008 (and in an attempt to help raise the British profile in Fromelles), I became the British Historian and Representative for the Association Fromelles-Weppes Terre de Mémoire - 14/18, with Lambis Englezos becoming my Australian counterpart.

In June 2008, following GUARD's success in proving the existence of the mass graves, the research went into over-drive. By July, I had an accurate list of missing British and Australian men from the 1916



Martin Willoughby and Peter Last Chairmen of the Dorset and S Wilts and Southend Branches

action and in the August I received a telephone call from Peter Barton who had heard of my work and who wished to share his German research with me. Between us, we would attempt to put names to the men who would be recovered from Pheasant Wood.

Peter's first visit to the Red Cross Archives in Geneva in December 2008 netted something in the region of 160 lists of names, lists which included the names of some of our missing Australian and British men. Peter made a first sweep of the lists before sending them to me for further scrutiny. We eventually extracted the names of 185 Australian and 46 British men, men whose names had appeared on German lists of *English* dead.

Our research was made available to teams in both Australia and Britain (via the Australian Army and the British Ministry of Defence) and the search began for the families of these men as the first of the 250 British and Australian men were recovered from Pheasant Wood. Meetings at Whitehall followed in order to discuss and resolve omissions from the British Working List and in January this year, I was at Fromelles to see the first of “my boys” buried with full military honours.

other young men at that time, he emigrated to South Africa and then to Australia.

On 23 August 1915 he enlisted into the Australian Army where his enlistment papers give his employment as coachbuilder. On 20 December that year he embarked on board HMAT Aeneas from Sydney arriving in Egypt in February 1916. On 29 June he arrived in Marseilles and less than a month later he fought at Fromelles being reported missing on 21 July.

Looking through his service papers which are on line through the National Archives of Australia there are two items of interest. The first is a letter dated 2 August 1916 from the *Nachrichtenoffizier* in Berlin recording Edwin’s details and the fact that he had ‘*gefallen*’ at Fromelles; there is also a postcard in German giving similar details. Edwin’s records are further annotated, dated 13 March 1917, ‘*identification disc received from Germany. No particulars were afforded except that soldier is deceased*’.

Edwin Henry Dibben is buried in Plot 1, Row f, Grave 7 at Pheasant Wood Cemetery.

**Editor**



Victoria Burbidge (centre)

I could so easily say that my Fromelles-related research began with Uncle Charlie and ended on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> July 2010 at the new Pheasant Wood Military Cemetery, but hundreds of my men from both 1915 and 1916 (British and Australian) remain “missing” with no known grave and the search for them continues. Who knows? There may yet be more mass graves to find .....

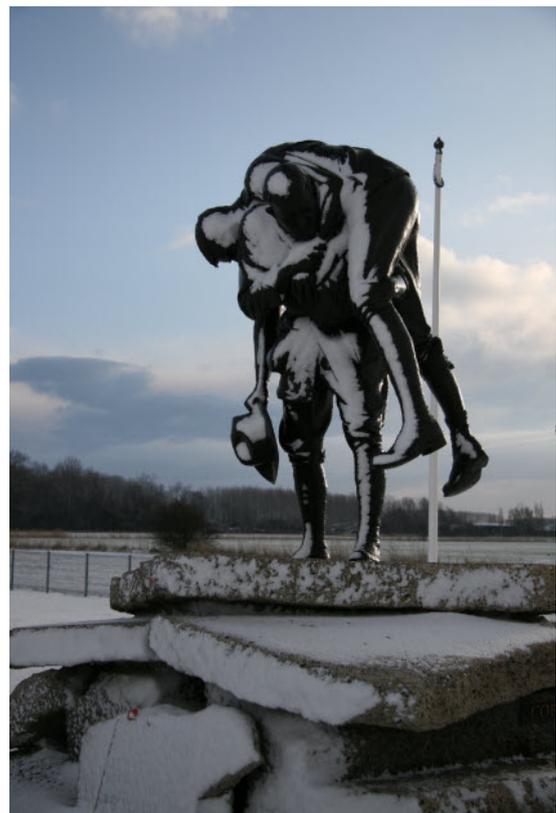
**Victoria Burbidge, British Historian and Representative for the Association Fromelles-Weppes Terre de Mémoire - 14/18**



**A Dorset Man at Fromelles**

Alan Marsh brought to my attention an article in a recent newsletter of the Royal British Legion (Dorset) concerning 4183A Pte Edwin Henry Dibben, 54<sup>th</sup> Bn, AIF whose body had been identified as one those found in the mass grave at Pheasant Wood.

A little investigation revealed that Edwin Dibben had been born in Buckland Newton, Dorset in 1883 to farmers Edwin and Annie Dibben. He became an apprentice motor mechanic but in 1912, like so many



The Australian Memorial at Fromelles taken on 20 January 2010 - the day of the first burial at the new cemetery. Photograph by Marc Thompson



## Harold Frank Moore - Drowned on Home Service

As part of my research for a book on Dorchester and the Great War I found a broken memorial cross in Weymouth Avenue Cemetery, Dorchester. Further research revealed the following story.

On Saturday the 28<sup>th</sup> of July, 1917, the 9.31 evening train arrived at the Great Western railway station, in Dorchester. There was nothing extraordinary in that, but what was special on this occasion was that it



carried a coffin, draped in the Union Jack and covered in wreaths. The body within it was that of Harold Frank Moore, a young Dunovarian who was making his last journey home. Harold's body had travelled from Howden in Yorkshire where he had been serving as an Air Mechanic with the Royal Naval Air Service.

Harold was the son of William, who was a Sergeant in the Dorset Regiment, and Annie Moore of 34 High West Street, Dorchester. Before joining the army his father had been employed as a corn merchant. Harold was born on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1897 and when the time came for his education he was sent to Dorchester Grammar School, where his name appears on the Roll of Honour. He regularly attended Holy Trinity Church, where he was one of the leading choir boys under the Reverend H Bowden Smith.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth Harold joined the Royal Navy as a Boy Sailor and commenced his training at HMS Impregnable, a 121 gun, former first rate ship of the line, and after serving in the armed cruiser HMS Endymion he transferred to the Royal Naval Air Service, although he retained his navy service number. With the rank of Air Mechanic 1<sup>st</sup> class Harold was sent to the RNAS station at Howden in Yorkshire, which had been established to counter German submarine attacks on British shipping on the north-west coast.

Those who knew the airship C/11A might have considered that it had a jinx on it. Built at Kingsnorth, on the Isle of Grain in Kent, it had previously lost a propeller on landing and then been wrecked and

rebuilt. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of July 1917 C/11a, under the command of Temporary Lieutenant William Hervey, took off from Howden with its crew of Harold, who with another man was acting as coxswains, and a telegraph operator named Harry Ward. Somewhere over the River Humber the airship burst into flames and plummeted into the river killing all on board. Harold's body was recovered and repatriated.

As a mark of respect the officers and men of Howden provided Harold's headstone, which consists of a splendid cross mounted on three plinths. The centre of the cross bears a ship's wheel and the letters RNAS. In addition, his commanding officer Wing Commander Boothby and his comrades sent numerous wreaths, which accompanied Harold's coffin on its journey south. His funeral took place in Weymouth Avenue Cemetery on the Monday following his arrival in the town. The Dorset County Chronicle reported that, "the remains of the young patriot were interred in their last resting place in the cemetery in the presence of many spectators."

As is often the case in death caused through war irony played a last card making grief harder to bear for those left behind. In this case, Harold had been hoping to arrive home on the Saturday, having previously postponed an earlier leave, so as coincide with his father's leave from the army. He did indeed arrive on the Saturday but not to exchange war stories with his father.

Harold's cross has broken away from its plinth and lies on the grass, but I am glad to report that I have managed to convince the Dorchester Heritage Committee of its importance to the town and they have agreed to pay the full cost of repairing it.

### **Brian Bates**



## Child Okeford Roll of Honour Service of Dedication

As reported in Issue 5 of the Dugout the Branch generously financially supported the production of the updated Roll of Honour for the village, after it was found that the original had errors and omissions.

The Roll has been completed and is on display in church. On Sunday, 12 September 2010 during the regular morning worship, starting at 10 am, a Service of Dedication will be held. Branch members are cordially invited to attend the service, which will be followed by refreshments and a chance to 'explore' the various First World War memorials in and around the church.

## Book Reviews

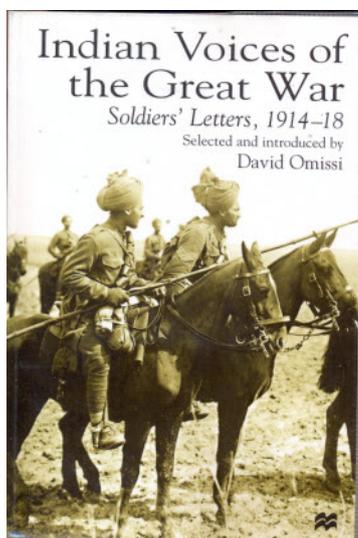


### Indian Voices of the Great War Soldiers Letters, 1914-1918

#### A Not So New Book Review

Browsing in my local library recently I came across a copy of *“Indian Voices of the Great War.”* This was a new book to me, but it was published in 1999.

Over the years a number of “Voices” books have appeared based, for the most part, on the recollections of veterans interviewed some years after the events they have described.



This book presents a selection of letters to and from Indian soldiers serving in France and Belgium or recovering from wounds in England between 1914 and 1918. It has only been possible to produce this collection because of the censoring

arrangements that existed at the time.

After censorship at their unit, soldiers' letters were routed through the Indian Base Post Office, first located at Rouen and later at Boulogne. Censorship was intended not only to maintain security and prevent subversion, but also to monitor troops' morale.

The Head Censor prepared a weekly report (fortnightly from June 1917) on the contents of the letters. Around 100 translated extracts from letters were attached to each report. The reports went to Government departments in London, the GOCs of the Indian Divisions in France and even Buckingham Palace! It is from these that David Omissi produced the book.

The letters describe the world of the Western Front as seen through Indian eyes, and evidence the soldiers' encounter with Europe and European culture.

Although the fighting is mentioned, for the most part the letters focus on more mundane matters - pay and

allowances, leave, promotion, the behaviour of officers and others, life behind the front line and family matters back home in India. There are some references to the use of drugs. One important grievance that emerged was the treatment of soldiers who were sent back to the trenches after recovering from wounds. It was felt quite strongly that such men had “done their bit” and should be sent back to India.

There are frequent references to the need to achieve and maintain “*izzat*” – honour, standing, reputation and prestige - and to do one's duty having “eaten the salt” (i.e. received pay) from the Government.

General Sir James Willcocks, who commanded the Indian Corps in France during the first year of the war, published his memoirs *‘With the Indians in France’* in 1920. This comprised his personal reminiscences based on his private papers and diaries. David Omissi's work has given a voice to the men who fought alongside the BEF on the Western Front in 1914 - 1915 and in the case of the Indian Cavalry through to the spring of 1918.

A fascinating read if you come across a copy!

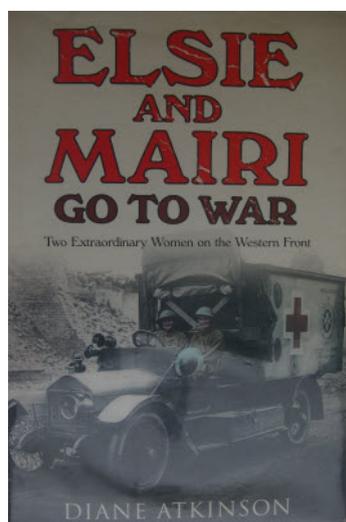
*Selected and introduced by David Omissi.*  
Macmillan Press Ltd (1999)  
ISBN 0-333-75144-2 (Hdbk) / 0-333-75145-2 (pprbk).

#### Rod Arnold



### Elsie And Mairi Go To War

At the June 2010 meeting, the author of **Elsie And Mairi Go To War** introduced the Branch to Elsie Knocker and Mairi Chisholm *“Two Extraordinary Women on the Western Front”*. Their fascinating story has been re-discovered, fully researched and entertainingly told by Diane Atkinson in her recent book.



Eighteen-year old Mairi and thirty-year old Elsie were extraordinary even before the First World War which made them famous. Passionate about motorbiking, they had become friends through this sport in 1913 when Elsie was living in Fordingbridge and Mairi's family home was

in Ferndown. At the beginning of the war they rode to London "to do their bit". They spent August as despatch riders in the capital but on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1914 they left for Belgium as part of the Munro Flying Ambulance Corps, a self-funding group of volunteers whose aim was to bring in wounded Belgian soldiers from the battlefields to hospitals.

Elsie and Mairi soon realized that men were dying from shock in the ambulances on their way to distant military hospitals and this led the women to set up a first aid post in a village near Ypres, just 100 yards from the Front. Known popularly as "The Angels of Pervyse" they remained in the village until the spring of 1918.



In Diane Atkinson's words, Elsie and Mairi became the "most famous" and "most photographed women of the First World War" awarded seventeen medals for bravery and visited by VIPs and royalty. She was able to illustrate her talk with some of the many photos taken of them at work in Belgium or on their hugely popular fund-raising tours around Britain by motorbike and sidecar.

After all the stresses and strains and intense experiences of life and death at the Front, Elsie and Mairi found adjusting to peacetime "more challenging ... than the war itself" and sadly their friendship did not survive.

Diane Atkinson's engrossing talk furthered Branch endeavours, through meetings and battlefield tours, to introduce members to the more unusual or little-known aspects of the First World War. Reading **Elsie and Mairi Go To War** makes an excellent follow-up for those who want to find out more.

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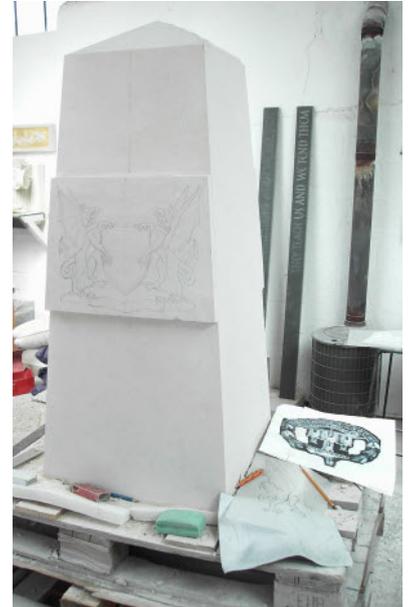
**Katherine Seymour**  
*Photographs by David Seymour*



## Dorset Regiment Great War Memorial - Update

The Portland stone is being carved by Alex and Zoe of Stoneform a local Dorset company.

The stone from Albion Quarry came already cut into its four main components, the obelisk, base, foundation base and surround and weighs just over a metric tonne. The photo shows the stage where the obelisk has been shaped by Alex and the areas where the cap badge of the Dorsetshire Regiment and the Dorset County Council crest will be carved marked out.



The photo of the base shows where one side is being cut into and where the battle honours will be placed.



Care has to be taken as the base is turned over ensuring the stone is not damaged. It is hoped that the memorial will be completed in the next three to four weeks.

Prior to its unveiling the memorial will be taken to France and fixed to a preformed concrete base close by Lonsdale CWGC cemetery, which is close to Thiepval Memorial.

The date for the unveiling has now been agreed as Saturday, 7 May 2011, time to be announced.

**Roger Coleman**



Members of the WFA are all too familiar with war cemeteries in France and elsewhere, and accustomed to see other British people paying their respects. Perhaps we do not give enough, if any, thought to the fact that the people of France also take an interest in British war dead and so I have written the following account of a ceremony I was privileged to attend in France in 2007. Although it relates to WW2, it is relevant to the idea of the French appreciating what our troops did for France. I must emphasise that although British people participate at this annual event, it is primarily a French occasion and would take place even without that British presence. I would also draw attention to my reference to the generous inscription concerning those of Operation Bulbasket whose graves have never been found.

### Remembrance, with a difference

On D-Day 1944 the 2<sup>nd</sup> SS Panzer Division, 'Das Reich', was based in the south of France and, being required to reinforce the defence of Normandy, was ordered to move to the north, a distance of 450 miles, as quickly as possible. Its progress northwards was hampered and delayed by the French Resistance, who ambushed convoys and obstructed the roads and railways. Damage to the rail network caused by the Resistance and by air strikes was so severe that the division was denied rail transport and had to move its tanks under their own power, with consequent frequent breakdowns because of damage to tracks. En route for Normandy the division was further delayed by being diverted to deal with the Resistance whose activities were so effective as to cause the furious and frustrated Das Reich to destroy the little town of Oradour-sur-Glane and massacre the inhabitants. They had already executed a number of people in Tulle as an example to the inhabitants of what they could expect if the Resistance were operating in the area.

To assist the Resistance, groups of SAS troops were parachuted into France. They helped train the recruits who were by then joining the Resistance in droves, took part in sabotage and also sent back important information to enable targets to be attacked by the RAF. An important example of this was the destruction by Mosquitoes of important stocks of fuel, at a time when lack of motor and aviation fuel was a serious threat to German operational effectiveness - including the onward movement of the "Das Reich"

That particular intelligence was supplied by a group of 40 SAS men operating in an area near Poitiers on "Operation Bulbasket". Sadly, the day came when their camp was attacked by the Germany Army and 30 were captured, together with an American pilot who had joined them after being shot down. Hitler had ordered that all captured troops of the commando

type be executed, and so the 31 men were taken into the forest, shot and buried in pits. It is noteworthy that the attack, capture and execution was by the Wehrmacht and not by the SS. It is said that, because in the German armed forces parachute troops were part of the Luftwaffe, the army tried, unsuccessfully, to get the Luftwaffe to do the job.

The three pits in which the bodies were buried in the forest are now marked by rugged pieces of granite and nearby, in a cleared area at the side of a track, stands a tall granite memorial bearing the inscription "En forêt Saint Sauvant le 7 juillet 1944 furent fusillées trente et un parachutistes alliés."

Every year a commemorative ceremony is held at the memorial, not on the 7<sup>th</sup> July but on Michaelmas Day, St Michael being the patron saint of parachutists. Although the dead were British, with one American, the occasion is primarily French as the victims "died for France" and it is the French tricolour that is paraded, the Marseillaise that is played and the proceedings are conducted entirely in French. Nevertheless, members of the South West France Branch of the Royal British Legion also take part and as I happened to be staying nearby at my brother's home at Michaelmas 2007 I was invited to attend with him. As *anciens combattants* we and other RBL members lined up mixed in with our French equivalents on one side of the memorial and opposite a contingent of officers and NCOs from a French parachute regiment. Each side of the memorial stood a French *ancien combattant* with a tricolour while spectators filled the fourth side of the square, with a colonel and the mayor of the nearby village in front.

The French army set up a very effective PA system through which were broadcast recorded trumpet calls, drum rolls and the Marseillaise. A preliminary trumpet call, probably the equivalent to "the still", started the proceedings, namely short addresses by the colonel and the mayor followed by a general salute. Then the story of the SAS operation was read out, the tricolours lowered and the names of the dead were read out followed by "Morts pour la France!" A drum roll, the Marseillaise, another general salute and the parade was dismissed.

From the forest clearing everyone drove about five miles to the village cemetery at Rom, where the gates were adorned with the flags of France, the United Kingdom and the USA. Among the village graves lie 28 of the 31 victims, with standard Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstones. For the other three, whose bodies, strangely, were never found, there is a large memorial stone inscribed in English to say that, although they have no known graves, somewhere "their bodies grace the soil of France" - a generous and moving expression.

In the cemetery we *anciens combattants* stood in line at the foot of the graves while the serving French soldiers faced us from behind the line of headstones. There was no priest present but an *ancien combattant* read out the prayer of the French paratroops, ending “*Mon Dieu, donnez moi le courage!*”

Drums and trumpets, la Marseillaise and a salute, and the official part was over, but we spent a few minutes reading the headstones and I found myself explaining British ranks to some French veterans, and the meaning of “MM” behind the names of two corporals.

The mayor had invited everyone, about 60 or 70 in all, to the “*salle des fêtes*” in Rom, a large modern village hall where on tables covered in white cloths were small wine tumblers set out in a zig-zag pattern. There were a few bottles of red wine in evidence and some jugs of orange juice, but the most obvious refreshment came in jugs brought round by villagers. The contents looked like lemon barley water and an Englishman said he thought it was a fruit juice. I tried it and although it was indeed fruity I found it had a definite alcoholic content and traces of small bubbles rising. Further questioning brought the answer that this was “*Bourru*”, the white wine equivalent of Beaujolais Nouveau, namely a very young white wine still fermenting. Indeed, the continuing fermentation is such that bottles on sale in the shops have a pinhole in the cap!

This drink is clearly to be recommended as a learning aid as, after three glasses, I found I was much more fluent in French than I had realised. This was a very friendly Anglo-French gathering, with both nationalities mingling, soldiers, ex-servicemen and villagers - among whom were several surviving members of the Resistance including an old man who had acted as interpreter when the alleged perpetrators of the atrocity were interrogated before trial by a war crimes tribunal. Several of the French paras were wearing British wings so had evidently been on exchange detachments.

Before leaving I spoke to the mayor. He was very affable and when I thanked him for his hospitality he simply replied “*C'est normale*”. So, long live normality!

**Fred Hoskins**



## German Prisoners of War Escape - nearly

*The following snippet was forwarded to me by Nick Saunders. It is taken from the Hampshire Chronicle:*

“Two other escapees, this time from a camp at Bishop’s Lydyard, Somerset, were caught and imprisoned in Dorchester. They were two officers spotted tramping through the rain by a Dorset Police Officer. Although they spoke good English, they were given away because they had overlooked a clue - one of them was carrying a large German sausage!”

**Editor**

