



*In memory of the forty-three
Clapham Old Xaverians
who gave their lives on*

The Somme



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World War 1 28th July 1914 - 11th November 1918

In the early part of the twentieth century the world was dominated by the two economic and industrial superpowers, Great Britain and Germany. This led to fear, Germany felt threatened by Russia and France, France by Germany, Russia by Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. On 28th June 1914 Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife were assassinated by a Bosnian seeking independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Emperor immediately declared war and invaded Serbia on 28th July 1914. Russia mobilised in support of Serbia. Germany declared war on Russia and France and invaded Belgium and Luxembourg, before moving towards France, leaving Britain to declare war on Germany in support of Belgium. Germany went to war in an attempt to guarantee the acquisition of colonies around the world. If they fought their neighbours, they could gain colonies in post war peace treaties. By the time Germany was created as a country in 1871 the globe had been carved up by the older European powers. Germany wanted the sources of cheap raw materials and the captive markets that their European rivals possessed. It was therefore an economic war, one that was to have such colossal and tragic consequences.

Nine million combatants (956,703 British) and seven million civilians died.

Germany had been preparing for war long before 1914. In fact, Germany had started drawing up a plan for war - the Schlieffen Plan - in 1897. It took nine years to finalise and was based on the theory that Germany would be at war with France and Russia at the same time and would need to defeat France within six weeks, before Russia mobilised her troops. It was created by the German Chief of Staff, Alfred von Schlieffen at the request of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

The Western Front

At the outbreak of war, the German plan was to bypass the French armies concentrated on the Franco-German border, defeat the French forces closer to Luxembourg and Belgium and move south to Paris.

People living in this path became victims of war. The Germans wanting a quick victory and fearful of attacks by local people, massacred over 6,000 Belgian and French civilians. The world was appalled that Germany, once admired as a nation of great culture, could commit such brutality.

Initially the German advance was successful, but by 12 September 1914 the French, with assistance from the British Expeditionary Force, halted the advance east of Paris at the First Battle of the Marne and pushed the German forces back some 31 miles.

This meant Germany failed to achieve its objective of avoiding a long, two-front war. However, the German army had fought its way into a good defensive position inside France and had effectively halved France's supply of coal. It had also killed or permanently crippled 230,000 more French and British troops than it itself had lost. Despite this, communications problems and questionable command decisions, cost Germany the chance of a more decisive outcome.

Following the Battle of Marne, Allied forces and German forces repeatedly attempted manoeuvring to the north in an effort to outflank each other: this series of manoeuvres became known as the "Race to the Sea". When these outflanking efforts failed, the opposing forces soon found themselves facing an uninterrupted line of entrenched positions from Switzerland to the Belgium coast. Britain and France sought to take the offensive, while Germany defended the occupied territories. Consequently, German trenches were much better constructed than those of their enemy; Anglo-French trenches were only intended to be "temporary" before their forces broke through the German defences.

Neither side proved able to deliver a decisive blow for the next two years. Throughout 1915–17, the British Empire and France suffered more casualties than Germany because of both the strategic and tactical stances chosen by the sides. Strategically, while the Germans only mounted one major offensive, the Allies made several attempts to break through the German lines.

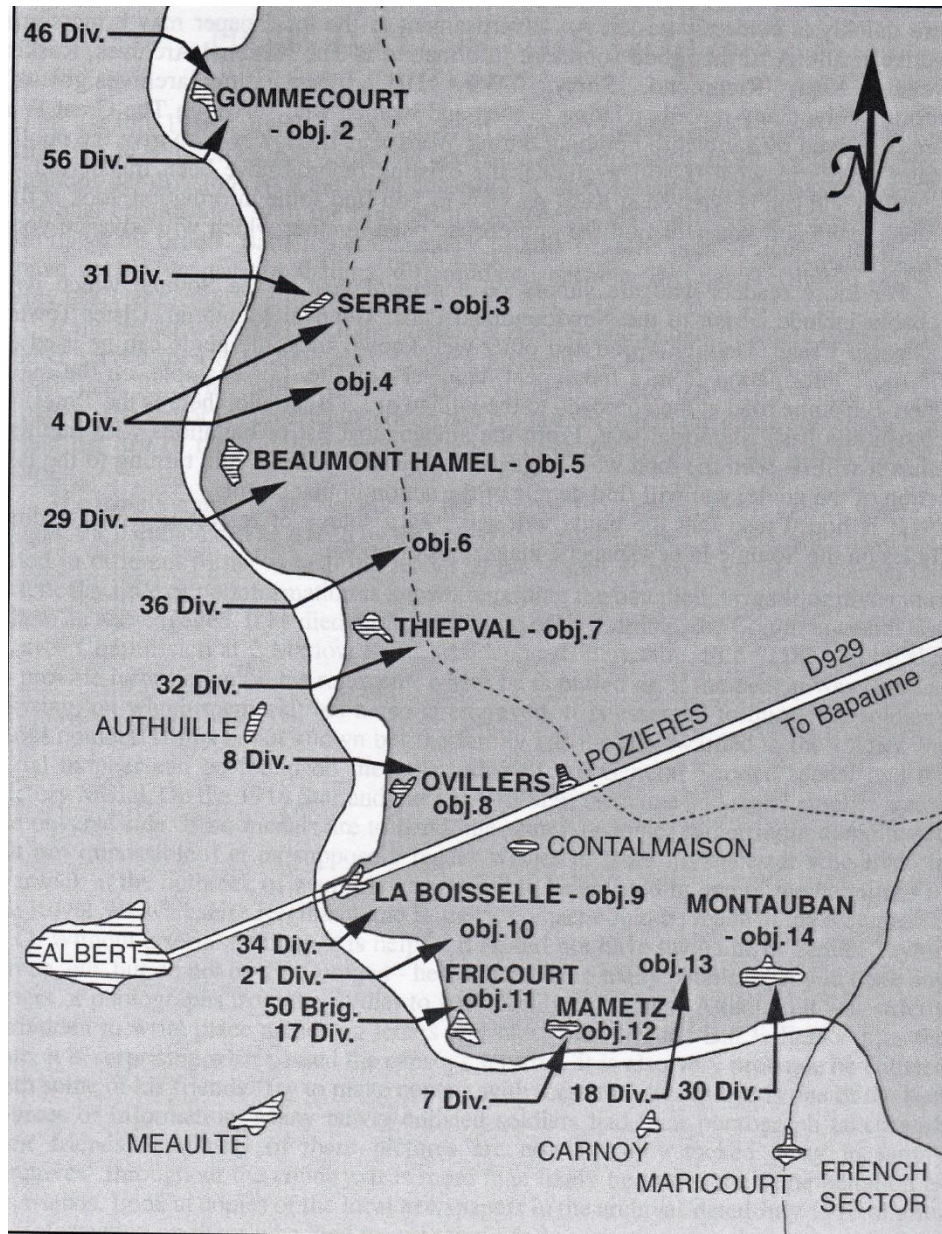
In February 1916, the Germans attacked the French defensive positions at Verdun (30 miles from Belgium/Luxembourg border). Lasting until December 1916, the battle saw initial German gains, before French counter-attacks returned matters to near their starting point. Casualties were greater for the French, but the Germans bled heavily as well, with anywhere from 700,000 to 975,000 casualties suffered between the two combatants. Verdun became a symbol of French determination and self-sacrifice.

With the French army committed at Verdun it was now for the British Army to lead the July 1916 offensive.

Battle of the Somme 1st July 1916 - 18th November 1916 (141 Days)

The Objectives

There were 13 objectives numbered 2 - 14



The British positions are on the left., the Germans on the right. The clear zone is 'No Man's Land'. This is the position at 7:30am on 1st July 1916.

1 – (not used)

2 - The Gommecourt Diversion

The diversionary attack on the Gommecourt Salient was conceived to detract the German artillery fire from the left wing of the Fourth Army's attack on Serre.

3 – Serre

The aim was to take Serre and protect the British Divisions to the south and then turn and roll up the German lines from the high ridges north of Beaumont Hamel

4 – South of Serre and North of Beaumont Hamel. The Serre Grandcourt Ridge. This attack was planned to help the assault on Serre by taking the Quadrilateral on the left and securing the ridges – helping the attack on Beaumont Hamel

5 – Beaumont Hamel – Y Ravine and Hawthorne Ridge

An attack where the Germans had excellent artillery vision with the obstacles of Hawthorne Ridge and Y Ravine to be taken before the assault on the village.

6 – The Schwaben Redoubt – St Pierre Divion and Beaumont Station

To take the high ground of Thiepval Ridge. The small village of St Pierre Divion and Beaumont station needed to be taken to ensure success of objectives 5 & 6

7 - Thiepval – the Leipzig Redoubt and Mouquet Farm

The taking of the high ground at Thiepval was key. The Leipzig Redoubt protected Thiepval and the fortress at Mouquet Farm guarded the approach to Pozieres and Ovillers

8 – Ovillers

The capture of the village would open the way to Pozieres

9 – La Boisselle and Contalmaison

The taking of these would open the way to the high ground at Fricourt Ridge and offered access to Mametz Wood and the Bazentin Ridge

10 – Attack from South West towards Fricourt

To break the communications and perform pincer movement to isolate Fricourt

11 – Attack from West on Fricourt village

Fricourt formed a dangerous salient and needed to be neutralised

12 – Mametz and Pommiers Redoubt

Essential that the village of Mametz and redoubt taken to isolate Fricourt

13 – Attack East of Mametz and West of Montauban

Strong German positions to be taken to assist the taking of Montauban

14 – Montauban

An important village, right of the British front line with the French army

The Battles

Battle of Albert (1-13 July)

On 1 July, there were catastrophic losses in the north of the British line with attacks near Serre, Beaumont-Hamel, Thiepval and La Boisselle, all ending in failure. In the south, however, British and French forces made better progress. During the following days, British efforts were focused on exploiting this success. Pushing north, the British drove back the Germans, capturing the villages of La Boisselle and Contalmaison, while much of the strongly defended Mametz Wood fell to the 38th (Welsh) Division and Trones Wood to the 18th (Eastern) Division.

Battle of Bazentin Ridge (14-17 July)

After two weeks of piecemeal attacks, British forces were in position to launch their second major assault of the offensive. This would be against part of the German second line of defences located on the Bazentin Ridge. Moving into position overnight, British divisions attacked at dawn following a five-minute 'hurricane' bombardment and captured most of the German positions between Bazentin-le-Petit Wood and the village of Longueval. On the afternoon of 14 July, cavalry of the 2nd Indian Cavalry Division charged across the battlefield near High Wood, while the men of the 9th (Scottish) Division fought for control of Longueval and Delville Wood.

Battle of Delville Wood (15 July – 3 September)

After the success of the Bazentin Ridge dawn attack, a fierce struggle for control of Delville Wood and High Wood raged for several weeks, during which both sides attacked and counter-attacked. The initial capture of most of Delville Wood was carried out by the South African Brigade of the 9th (Scottish) Division which suffered heavy losses. A similar struggle was fought for nearby High Wood by the 1st and 7th Divisions until it was finally captured by 47th (2nd London) Division on 15 September.

Battle of Pozieres Ridge (23 July – 3 September)

Situated on high ground, the village of Pozieres formed a strategically vital position in the strongly fortified German second line of defences. The village fell to the 1st Australian Division on 23 July, but the battle for control of the surrounding high ground continued for weeks. The plateau to the north and east of the village was secured by 3 September, but German defenders at Mouquet Farm held out against a determined assault by Australian and Canadian troops. The eventual capture of Mouquet Farm on 26 September opened the way for further attacks towards Bapaume and Thiepval.

Battle of Guillemont (3-6 September) and Ginchy (9 September)

After the capture of Trones Wood on 14 July, the next objective to the east of the British line was the fortified village of Guillemont. Several unsuccessful attempts were made to take the village and the battlefield had been transformed into a shell-blasted wasteland. On 3 September, the remains of the village were taken by the 20th (Light) Division and elements of the 16th (Irish) Division. On 9 September, the nearby village of Ginchy fell with the 16th (Irish) Division again playing a central role.

Battle of Flers-Coucelette (15-22 September)

Throughout July, August and September, British forces had fought bitter and costly attritional battles for woods and villages, facing strong German defences and counter-attacks. On 15 September the British launched a major attack across a wide front, while the French Sixth Army advanced to the east of Combles. In significant advances, Flers fell to the 41st Division, the 15th (Scottish) Division took Martinpuich and Canadian forces overcame the German defences around Courcellette. The battle marked the first use of tanks and the first major actions on the Somme of the New Zealand Division and the Canadian Corps.

Battle of Morval (25-28 September) and Thiepval Ridge (26-30 September)

In the autumn rain, a joint Franco-British advance continued at Combles, Morval, Lesboeufs and Gueudecourt while the British Army launched an attack at Thiepval to secure the ridge that dominated the battlefield from Courcellette to the Schwaben Redoubt. Thiepval was eventually captured by the 18th (Eastern) Division with the formidable Schwaben Redoubt falling on 28 September.

Battles of Le Transloy (1-20 October) and The Ancre Heights (1 October-12 November)

As the weather deteriorated, the battlefield became muddy and waterlogged. The British Army continued to push north-east towards the next area of high ground, suffering heavy casualties while attacking the German defences around the Butte de Warlencourt. Meanwhile, British and Canadian forces sought to drive the remaining German troops from their defences north of Thiepval to secure the heights overlooking the valley of the River Ancre.

Battle of The Ancre (12-18 November)

On 13 November, in freezing sleet and snow, British forces attacked north of the River Ancre across the ground where they had suffered severe losses on 1 July. The 51st (Highland) Division captured Beaumont-Hamel. The 63rd (Royal Naval) Division captured Beaucourt while south of the Ancre, the 39th Division advanced past the remains of St Pierre Divion. On 18 November – the final day of the offensive – there was one final flurry of action. ***With the weather making the ground all but impassable, the offensive was halted and the Battle of the Somme had ended***

Aftermath

An estimated 3.5 million men took part in the Battle of the Somme. By its end, well over one million had become casualties. Precise figures are almost impossible to calculate. The British official history concluded that the forces of the British Empire had suffered some 420,000 killed, wounded or missing, although the total was almost certainly higher.

The French Army sustained more than 204,000 casualties. German records documented a total of nearly 430,000 killed, wounded or missing, but other estimates suggest a far greater number.

The battle had significant military, political, industrial and domestic consequences for all the countries involved. Many men returned home with physical or psychological wounds that never healed. Even those who survived unscathed would carry their experiences for the rest of their lives.

There were 9 fortified villages in German occupation, along the 18-mile front line. Their names were to become part of the history of the British Army. - Gommencourt, Serre, Beuumont Hamel, Thiepval, Ovillers, La Boisselle, Fricourt, Mametz, Montauban.

British troops would have to attack uphill, very often across open land and into German defensive positions where artillery and machine gun emplacements had been sited to the Germans most deadly advantage.

Where there was open ground and no villages, the Germans built heavily armed Redoubts - as big as Piccadilly circus – miniature forts in concrete, passages underneath and triangular in shape.

The British artillery bombardment started on the 24th June. They fired 1.7million shells on to the German lines from 1,600 pieces of artillery. The bombardment did not destroy the enemy position or the barbed wire defences, so the boast by General Rawlinson that there would be no need to rush, just walk across, was far from accurate. The 18 pounders were using shrapnel shells, if the fuse was set too early the balls missed the wire, if too late the shell exploded harmlessly in the ground. One third were duds. On average, the guns fired from a range of 2000 yards.

Eighteen divisions of 13 Battalions each, meant 519, 324 troops were available on the first day, large in size but short on experience. Superiority over the Germans was 7-1. The majority of battalions in action on the first day, consisted of 29 Yorkshire battalions, 22 Lancashire, 20 Irish, 17 Tyneside, 14 Midland and 13 London battalions.

In the first hour 84 battalions had attacked; 66,000 men. Of these 30,000 were killed or wounded. Only one third achieved their objective

Five of the key villages were targeted in the first hour and none were taken.

At the end of the **first day** of the Battle of the Somme **19,240** soldiers of Great Britain, Ireland and Newfoundland died, **35,493** were wounded and **600** were taken prisoner.

The goal was to advance from Albert to Bapaume a distance of 12 miles – In the 141 days the battle lasted, the furthest advance of any allied force was to Warlencourt, a distance of only 7 miles.

In total 1¼ million were killed or wounded on the Somme, making it one of the bloodiest battles in human history – over 200,000 British and Commonwealth soldiers died.

The plan drawn up by the Generals was seriously flawed.

General Sir Douglas Haig, Commander in Chief, wished for a breakthrough of the German lines. - Joffre (the French Commander in Chief) and General Sir Henry Rawlinson, Commander of the Battle, hoped to win by fighting a battle of attrition. Rawlinson paid only superficial regard to Haig's wishes and his plan of attack, with all the troops attacking in equal strength all along the Line, indicates that he intended a different strategy. Haig favoured a quick dash across No-Man's Land to gain some element of surprise and then bring in the cavalry. Rawlinson ordered an almost parade-like advance towards the German line, believing the artillery bombardment would have been successful.

Legacy

Below the level of colonel, the Somme was largely fought - on the British side - by amateurs. This explains why the battle has so scarred the national memory. It also helps to explain the catastrophe of the first day - not because the soldiers were incompetent but because the British general directly in charge, Sir Henry Rawlinson, assumed that they were.

The battles of 1914 and 1915 destroyed the small British regular Army and decimated the territorials, or part-time soldiers. The Somme, or "Big Push", awaited in Britain with enormous confidence, was to be the victorious success of Lord Kitchener's New Army, the battalions created from the patriotic rush of volunteers in 1914 and early 1915.

Many of them were formed - or formed themselves - into Pals or Chums battalions in which friends, neighbours, workmates, entire amateur football teams, served together.

The greatest historian of the New Army was Martin Middlebrook. In his book *The First Day on the Somme*, published in 1971, he recounts events through the eyes of vast numbers of ordinary soldiers, rather than senior officers. Middlebrook was the first historian to go and interview these ordinary soldiers, both British and German.

Middlebrook pointed out that, pre-1914, soldiering in Britain had been an occupation for toffs and toughs: for the sons of the aristocracy and the unemployed, especially from Scotland and Ireland. The Battle of the Somme changed that. "On the Somme," he said, "it is not stretching a point to say that the British middle and middling classes - the clerks, the solicitors, the skilled artisans - went to war for the first time in our history."

The Pals battalions, even their officers, were regarded by General Rawlinson as enthusiastic, unskilled civilians in uniform. He laid down a battle plan that denied them any right of initiative. A vast bombardment of more than a million and a half shells would crush the German front line. The heavily encumbered British soldiers (carrying pigeons, boxes of ammunition, shovels and rolls of telegraph wire) would leave their trenches at 7.30am, in broad daylight. They would walk, not run. They would not attempt to creep up to the German lines while their own bombardment was in progress.

All German defenders would have been killed or would surrender. The British would therefore merely walk forward and occupy the German lines.

Rawlinson, unlike his commander-in-chief Gen Sir Douglas Haig, had little belief in a breakthrough into open ground beyond the mesh of German defences several miles deep. He foresaw the battle as a series of artillery bombardments, followed by a grab at sections of German line: a battle of attrition, but mostly attrition of Germans.

In reality, the British bombardment - though the largest in British military history to that date - was inadequate. One in three shells was a dud. The German barbed wire remained intact in many places. When the Pals battalions and others rose from their trenches, they were mown down by German machine guns that could strike targets a mile away. Some British battalions were destroyed as they left their support trenches, before they even reached their own front line. After almost two years of training and high expectations, the war for many Pals and Chums lasted just seconds.

The areas where the British did capture German lines proved that Rawlinson was wrong. The "unskilled" Manchester and Liverpool Pals had great success at Montauban and Mametz, just east of the 10th West Yorkshire calamity at Fricourt. This was largely because assistance from the French artillery proved efficient; in part because they ignored Rawlinson's "walk don't run" instructions. The French, further south, also gained some ground.

Elsewhere, the attack was a catastrophe. The British suffered over 57,000 casualties on the first day, including 19,240 deaths. Many of those who died were friends, workmates, brothers. The first day of the Somme was largely fought by soldiers from Scotland, northern England, Northern Ireland, London and the north Midlands. When the telegrams arrived a few days later, entire districts of northern towns were plunged into mourning. There were 9,000 casualties from Yorkshire and 6,000 from Lancashire. Others - the Welsh, the Canadians, the Australians - gave blood later.

There were some locally successful attacks later in July, August and September as the British Army assaulted a series of fortified woodlands - Mametz Wood, Delville Wood, High Wood. Tanks were used by the British in September for the first time.

In the autumn of 1916, the battlefield became a desolate landscape of smashed villages, broken tree-stumps, shell-holes, rotting bodies and mud.

In mid-November the British and French ceased their advance, several miles short of their objectives, and declared a victory.

Some recent British historians have tried to revive the idea of the Somme as a victory. They argue that the strength of the German army was "broken" at the Somme. They also argue that the British Army - even its generals - went through a learning process on the Somme and emerged stronger at the end of the battle. Martin Middlebrook disagrees. He highlights the fact that the Germany army held back the British advance at Arras in 1917, almost drove the French to mutiny at Chemin Des Dames and nearly broke through and won the war in 1918. "So much for a victory on the Somme," says Middlebrook. "In truth, little was learnt."

He continues: "Although the calamity of the first day was not repeated, the generals continued to switch aimlessly between attacks on a broad front or a narrow front, without much expectation of a break out... It was not before 1918 that different approaches were finally adopted."

The truth is that the war was still enormously popular in Britain in the summer of 1916. In France - despite its many losses - the possibility of an armistice, while the German army stood on French soil, was inconceivable. Germany was putting out vague peace proposals but only if it could keep all of the territory it had captured.

The tragedies, and lessons, of the 1914 war go beyond blaming the generals (however stupid) and praising the soldiers (however inconceivably brave).

The 1914 war was a war fought with murderous inventions, such as machine guns, high-powered artillery, poison gas, tanks and warplanes.

It was a war fought by educated men - one of the first generations to be universally educated and on the Allied side, largely by men who, by then, had the vote.

So why did enfranchised, educated men seemingly blindly accept this way of war?

Some historians believe the answer, in part, is that one of our first uses of mass literacy and mass education was to teach an unthinking patriotism and nationalism. The innocence and confidence of the young men who queued to join Pals battalions was born from a conviction that British-is-best, as much as from a belief in freedom and democracy.

Visitors to the battlefield today believe that the war was a great patriotic and democratic crusade and yet at the same time, also believe that it was a criminal waste of life.

Army Ranks and Structure

Ordinary men joined up as private soldiers. They were given a uniform, equipment and dog tags, which had their name, army number and religion. As well as county regiments, there were also regiments of guards, such as Coldstream and Grenadier, Cavalry regiments such as Dragoons and Lancers, specialist regiments such as gunners, sappers (engineers), medical corps and later tank and flying corps. Soldiers had a badge of rank and a regimental badge.

Approx. No. of Men	Name	Officer in Command
200,000	Army	Field Marshall - General
50,000	Corps	Lieutenant General
16-18,000	Division	Major General
3-4,000	Brigade	Brigadier General
2,000	Regiment	Colonel
800-1,000	Battalion	Lieutenant Colonel
160-200	Company	Major - Captain
40-50	Platoon	Lieutenant
15	Section	2 nd lieutenant

Corporals and sergeants were non-commissioned officers (NCO) as were warrant officers and company and regimental sergeant majors. The commissioned officers were almost all from the public-school system.

Military Terms

salient	is a narrow area where an army has pushed its front-line forward into enemy territory
redoubt	heavily fortified - typically square or polygonal
front	or battlefield is a contested armed frontier between opposing forces.
creeping barrage	artillery fire moving forward in stages just ahead of its advancing infantry.
communication trenches	were dug at an angle to the frontline trench and was used to transport men, equipment and food supplies.
quadrilateral	heavily fortified deep trench system resembling a polygon in shape
heavy barrage	sixty to seventy shells a minute
battery	a group of six guns or howitzers.
shrapnel	steel balls ejected from a shell upon detonation

Miscellany

The British Army in August 1914 consisted of a volunteer force of some 400,000 officers and men. It was well trained and equipped, with around half its number devoted to maintaining stability around the British Empire. By 1915, 2 million had joined up, 500,000 in one 3-week period, but this dried up and conscription was introduced for the 1917/18 army.

In Britain at the time the average weekly wage was £1.2s.0d (£97 equivalent today). Life expectancy for men was 50 but if you lived in deprived areas like the East End of London it fell to 30 years of age. – 1% of the population controlled 70% of the wealth of the nation.

The Somme soldiers were mainly volunteers who answered the call of Lord Kitchener “Your Country Needs You”. Kitchener did not live to see the battle of the Somme, having drowned when the cruiser Hampshire sank on the way to Russia a few days before the big push.

The minimum age to join up was 19 and the oldest 45. Many 16-year-olds joined and the Territorials were not too fussy what age.

Most Regiments had 2 Battalions – Territorial Regiments were prefixed with a 1,2, or 3/. e.g. 1/16th Battalion Queen's Westminster Rifles.

The minimum height requirement for a soldier was 5ft 3 inches, but this was reduced to 5ft

War time daily pay for a Captain was 12/6 (£68 at today's value). For a Lance Corporal 1/3p (£7 today) and for a private 1/- (£5 today).

The English rifle was the 303 Enfield which could attach a sword like bayonet – good for chopping wood and accurate up to 1000yards. The Lewis machine gun took 6 men to operate. Officers had hand guns which were only accurate at close quarters and only made them more conspicuous to the German marksmen.

Fallen soldiers could not be repatriated and would have to be buried where they fell - 3 types of cemeteries, (a) those near Base Hospitals and (b) Casualty Clearing Stations - where graves were laid in neat order. (c) Those buried on the battlefield where the graves were somewhat haphazard.

British cemeteries had an English garden effect and were of Portland Stone (the same as Buckingham Palace and St Pauls Cathedral) - relatives for the cost of 1 guinea could have an inscription on the stone and decide if they wanted the symbol of the cross on the stone or not. - US cemeteries had grass and a concrete cross and the French a simple wooden cross. UK spends £60 million a year on war graves - there are 120 cemeteries maintained by the GWGC on the Somme.

The Australian Memorial is at Pozieres.

The New Zealand Memorial and the South African Memorial is in Longaeval.
Rancourt Cemetery is the largest French cemetery in the Somme.

During the Battle of the Somme, 51 Victoria Crosses were awarded – 17 of them awarded posthumously.

The battle is notable for the first use of air power and the first use of the tank.

The terrain of the Somme battlefields - rolling chalk uplands, with farmhouses and villages clustered around a central church. Villages and a sprinkling of big farms offered many advantages to the defender. The German first position, itself containing a number of fighting trenches linked by communication trenches and protected by belts of barbed wire, was carefully sited to dominate the slopes. Numerous deep dugouts, resistant to hits by most Allied guns, had been mined deep into the chalk. A second position had been prepared just behind the first, and a third, further back, was in process of construction.

The week-long pre-battle bombardment in which over 1,700,000 shells were fired, was spectacular, but it failed to destroy many deep dugouts and left sections of wire inadequately cut. The majority of shells fired were shrapnel shells rather than high-explosive. Shrapnel munitions were better suited to the anti-personnel role than they were to cutting the thick German wire or destroying dugouts and trenches. This proved to be a major problem as was the fact that one third of the shells failed to explode, mainly the fuses were faulty or were not armed correctly by the gunners.

When soldiers advanced on enemy lines the majority of casualties (90%) were inflicted by the German machine guns. These advances had no artillery cover, yet experienced artillery officers could have destroyed these machine guns or at least driven them back with shrapnel shells, if they had been ordered. They were never ordered.

Eight large and eleven small explosive-filled mines were dug beneath German trenches. The most important of them were beneath Hawthorn Ridge Redoubt at Beaumont Hamel, just south of La Boisselle (now Lochnagar Crater), and three in the 'Triple Tambour' near Fricourt. However, despite the impressive spectacle they generated, the explosions provided little practical advantage. Their effect was too localised, with German machine guns and artillery in the surrounding areas being moved in quickly to fill the defensive gaps.

The Battle of the Somme was initially meant to be led by the French, but the German army's attack on the French at Verdun made this impossible. The British then led the offensive to divert the Germans from the onslaught at Verdun.

Anne Frank's father Otto, Adolf Hitler, Harold Macmillan, Clement Atlee, Wilfred Owen and JRR Tolkien all took part in the Battle of the Somme.

There were certainly days of great violence during the four years of WW1 – such as the first day of the Battle of the Somme. But nearly 9 out of every 10 soldiers in the British Army, who went into the trenches, survived.

The creation and destruction of pals' battalions was witnessed. Pals were specially constituted battalions of the British Army comprising men who had enlisted together in local recruiting drives, with the promise that they would be able to serve alongside their friends, neighbours and colleagues ("pals"), rather than being arbitrarily allocated to battalions across the country. Battalions like Bradford pals, Barnsley pals, Grimsby chums, Hull commercials, Accrington pals, Leeds lads were nearly all wiped out. Battalions of pals, as an idea, was never to be used again.

The average British infantryman had to carry 30kg of equipment along with him during the initial advance to the German lines.

The oldest British soldier to die during the battle was Lt Henry Webber, 7th South Lancashire Regiment. He was 68 when he died on 27th July 1916.

Officers below the rank of Major died at a much higher rate on the Somme than private soldiers did, with 60% of British officers who were involved on the first day, losing their lives.

The Battle of the Somme has become a byword for the cruel, relentless flinging of men across shell-torn and blasted mud against impregnable defences.

In 1815 Napoleon had contemptuously dismissed his English opponents as a 'nation of shopkeepers' but now the descendants of those 'shopkeepers' along with bank clerks, miners, railwaymen, builders, university graduates were to fight to defend the soil of France. - all had willingly answered Kitchener's call to arms, eager to do their duty for King and Country.

The symbolism of the poppy as a flower of remembrance originates from the poem 'In Flanders Fields' by Lieutenant John McCrae a Canadian military doctor.

After the War, in 1919, Haig was created an earl and given, from public funds, a grant of £100,000 (£5.2 million today). Rawlinson was made a baron and received £30,000. (£1.5 million today).

The words that appear on the gravestones of unidentified soldiers:

"A soldier of the Great War known unto God", were written by the writer and Nobel Prize-winner, Rudyard Kipling. Kipling's own son John, was killed by a German shell in 1915 at the battle of Loos. His body was never found, so he too became, in his father's words, "a soldier of the Great War known unto God".



Clapham College

Clapham College was founded by the Xaverian Brothers or Congregation of St. Francis Xavier in 1897. For virtually the whole of its life until its closure in 1989, Clapham College occupied a site in Nightingale Lane on the edge of Clapham Common. For half a century it was a private school, for three decades it was a publicly supported grammar school, and then for more than a decade it was a comprehensive school.

Between 1897 and 1917 about 1,200 boys were educated at the college, approximately 50% of them as boarders, who mainly returned home (many from overseas) when war was declared or when their education had finished. Of the remaining 600, half would have been too young to fight, leaving about 300 eligible to join the forces. In fact, 176 did join the forces and of these young men, 55 lost their lives - 43 on the Somme.

Sir Frederick Barthorpe spoke of the great legacy left by the 55 heroes in a speech he gave at an Old Xaverian dinner, at the Wheatsheaf Hotel in 1929.

Clapham's most celebrated war hero was Lieutenant Commander Rowland Bourke. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) for his daring action in rescuing 38 sailors in Zeebrugge Harbour in 1918. Three weeks later he was awarded the Victoria Cross (VC) for daring action in a raid and rescue operation in Ostend Harbour. He died and was buried with full military honours, in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada in 1958.

Military Drill was included in the school timetable. It was led by an ex-army sergeant who had fought in the Boer War. The upper forms were given rifle drill with Martine-Henrys, a rifle used by the British Army in 1871. This would have been their first experience of handling a rifle – the next would be in the Great War, only a few years after this picture was taken in the College playground.



Clapham	Old	Xaverians	who fell on the Somme	
Name Date at College.	Age	Rank Service No.	Place of burial or remembrance. Regiment in which served.	Plot no. Date of death.
Walter Atherton 1907-1909	22	Gnr 52078	Bucquay Road CEM. Ficheux. Royal Fld Artly A Baty 147 th BDE	111.D.5 3/6/17
Robert Axtell 1909-1911	23	LCpl G/23747	St Sever CEM Ext Rouen The Buffs East Kent Regiment	P. VII. H. 9B 28/3/18
Gerald Wolstan Baillon 1898-1899	24	2 nd Lieut	Cambrin Military CEM. Nth Arras The Kings Liverpool Regt	D. 16. A 25/9/15
Gaston Leon Behaeghe 1909-1910	19	Pte	Douaumont Verdun French Army	9/61917
Ernst James Ballard	29	RFLM	Arras Memorial London Regiment Irish Rifles	Bay 10 25/3/18
Alec Scott Barthorpe 1905-1906	21	Lieut.	Dainville British Cemetery London Regiment (Lon-Scottish)	Plot1 A14 25/4/18
Gerald Francis Brady 1900-1903	27	Pte 14981	Thiepval Memorial 5 th Bn Dorsetshire Regiment	7B 26/9/16
Leonard Gloyn Brett 1905-1906	27	RFLM 4056	Thiepval Memorial Lnd Reg Queen's Westm'ter Rfls	13C 1/7/16
Albert Patrick Palmer 1908-1910	20	Pte 3698	Thiepval Memorial 1 st /20 th Battalion London Regt	9D 9C 13C 15/9/16
Harry George Brewer 1903-1904	27	LSgt C/6276	Thiepval Memorial 8th Bat Kings Royal Rifle Corps	13A 13B 15/9/16
Francis James Brooks 1902-1903	29	RFLM s/28880	Tyne Cot Memorial Rifle Brigade 2 nd Battalion	Panel 145/147 19/11/17
Clifford William Buchanan 1901-907	26	Sgt 14345	Lapugnoy Military CEM. Royal Flying Corps	11. G. 11 16/3/17
Henry Edmund Bulbeck 1905-1908	22	Lieut.	Thiepval Memorial Royal Fusiliers	8C 9A 16A 16/11/16
John Raiman Bunting 1911-1914	29	Sapper 157269	Dunkirk Town Cemetery Royal Engineers Water Transp'rt	11.A.3. 4/9/17
Bernard. A. Carroll 1898-1903	28	Pte 84595	St Nicolas Brit CEM Pas De Calais 12 th Com Machine Gun Corps Inf.	1.H 21 4/5/17
Oliver de Goruette d'Argoeuves 1912-1913	20	Pte	Jonchery sur Vesle, Marne, Champagne-Ardenne	15/9/15
Bernard Davey 1907-1909	19	Pte 43546	Thiepval Memorial Essex Regiment 9 th Battalion	D10 18/10/16
Clifford Wilfred Elliott 1906-1908	23	Flt Lt Adm89/357	Arras Fly Servs Mem. Arras Mem Royal Naval Air Service	B/2 12/8/17
AB August Enright 1900-1901	21	2 nd Lieut G/32625	Etaples Military Cemetery D Batt 17 th Bde Ry Field Artillery	xv11.A.16 11/5/17
Albert Fisher 1906-1907	25	Pte G/32625	Feuchy British CEM. Feuchy. East Surrey Regiment 7 th Batt	11. A. 12 30/4/17
Harold Cecil Gardiner 1899-1907	30	Cpl 40312	Aix Noulette Community CEM Royal F'ld Artillery. 24 th Trench Mortar Battalion	1 .D. 12 29/3/17
William Arthur Hill 1909-1912	20	Pte 11086	Lille Southern Cemetery East Surrey Regiment	111 C 6 9/4/18
Francis William Jackson	35	Gnr.	Arras Mem. Faubourg d'Amiens Ryl Garrison Artil135 HeavyBty	Bay 1 21/3/18
Arthur Herbert Johnson 1898-1903	32	Pte 365063	Vis-en-Artois Memorial London Regiment 7 th Battalion	Panel 10 9/8/18

Percy Liddington 1903-1904	21	Pte 9864	Bethune Town Cemetery. Northamptonshire Reg't 1 st Batt	111. C. 18 10/5/15
Patrick McCullagh DSO 1909-1910	21	Pte 29981	Templeux Le Guerard Brit CEM 7&8 Bat Ry Inniskilling Fusiliers	11 A 16 21/3/18
Edmund Coldiegate McLaughlin 1898-1903	26	Lieut.	Browns Road CEM. Festubert City of London Rifles 6 th Batt	1.A.6 18/5/15
William Reginald McLaughlin 1898-1900	31	Pte	Loos Memorial. Loos-en-Gohelle 7 th Bat Royal Scots. Fusiliers.	46-49 26/9/15
Randal McSweeney 1907-1912	20	2 nd Lieut	Etaples Military CEM. Boulogne Highland Light Infantry 4 th Batt	XVL1.E.2 10/3/17
Frederick O 'Donnell 1900-1904	27	LCpl 21400	Cambri Memorial Louverval 7 th Batt Somerset Light Infantry	Panel 4 & 5 20/11/17
Charles Paul Mentioned In Despatches 1902-1903	29	Lieut.	Terlingthun British Cemetery. Wimille 31 st Balloon Sect Royal Air Force	X1.B.19 8/11/18
Helio Pereira 1906-1907	20	RFLM	Gorre British Indian CEM. Gorre. Rifle Brigade 16 th Battalion	1.C.17 5/6/16
John Rice 1902-1903	19	LCpl	Thiepval Memorial East Surrey Regiment	6B.6C 1/3/17
Thomas Russell 1907-1909	19	Pte 12167	Boulogne Easton Cemetery. Highland Light Infantry 2 nd Batt	111.A.18 28/10/14
Charles Jesram Salmon 1911-1912	18	Pte 245436	Chauny Communal Brit Ext CEM 2 nd Bn London Reg Royal Fusillir	2.E.13 23/3/18
George Edward Stevens 1897-1899	27	LCpl G/5493	Thiepval Memorial Royal Sussex Regiment	7C 20/8/17
Walter Sydney John Stevens 1898-1908	21	2 nd Lieut	Thiepval Memorial Loyal North Lancashire Reg 11 th attached 9 th Battalion	11A 7/7/16
Charles Tolman 1904-1906	23	Pte	Boulogne Eastern Cemetery. East Surrey Regiment 8 th Bn	V111.C.105 7/7/16
Aonguo (Anthony) Walsh 1909-1917	19	Pte 146844	St Sever CEM Ext. Rouen Machine Gun Corps (Inf)	111 E8 14/9/18
Alan Brook Walton Military Medal 1907-1908	23	2 nd Lieut	Grevillers Brit Cemetery 13 th Bat. Kings Royal Rifle Corps	X111 C 9 16/9/18
Cecil Alberic Hardy Warre 1897-1900	36	2 nd Lieut	Feuchy Chapel Brit Cemetery 88 th Batt Machine Gun Corps Inf	1.C.39 24/4/17
Ambrose Joseph Wilkinson 1899-1908	25	Lieut.	Thiepval Memorial Middlesex Reg 6 th att to 12 th Batt	12D 13B 26/9/16
Joseph Charles Young 1909-1913	20	Pte 266798	Tyne Cot Memorial 1 st Bucks Battalion Oxford & Bucks Light Infantry	Panel 96-98 6/8/14





.....Leonard Gloyn Brett:

Leonard was born in Stockwell on the 5th August 1889. His first home was 38 Guildford Road, Vauxhall, Lambeth. His parents William and Elizabeth shared the house with William's mother, also called Elizabeth and William's elder brother Uriah. They had a female housekeeper and two female servants and took in lodgers.

By 1911 Leonard had moved to 56 Rodenhurst Road, Clapham, just a 15-minute walk from his school, Clapham College in Nightingale Lane. His Grandmother and Uncle no longer lived with them but by now Leonard had a younger sister, Ethelreda Gloyn. Also living in the house was Rebecca, a 27-year-old servant, and a boarder, Bernard Edge, a 47-year-old commercial traveller.

Leonard's father William worked in London as 2nd Class Clerk in the Royal Courts of Justice. Leonard - after leaving Clapham College in 1906 at the age of 17 - became an insurance clerk in the City.

Lord Kitchener's call to arms was answered by Leonard and he volunteered to join the Army in 1914, joining the 16th (County of London) Battalion, The London Regiment (Queen's Westminster's), based in Buckingham Gate, Westminster. At the outbreak of the war this was the largest volunteer rifle corps battalion in London.

After initial training in Hemel Hempstead, Leonard left for France arriving in Le Havre on 3rd November 1914. The battalion first saw action in Ypres and by early 1916 Leonard was in Hebuterne in the Pas de Calais, ready for the 'big push'. To signify a territorial unit, it was now known as 1/16th (County of London) Battalion (Queen's Westminster Rifles). It was part of the 169th Brigade of the 56th Division V11Corps, General Sir Edmund Allenby's Third Army.

There were 14 objectives set for the Battle of the Somme. The objective set for the 56th Division was the diversionary attack on the Gommecourt Salient at the extreme north of the British front line. Its purpose was to detract the German artillery fire from the left wing of the Fourth Army's attack on Serre, 2½ miles to the south east. This meant that having no British units immediately to the north, both flanks would be exposed with no possibility of reinforcement.

At 7:30am on 1st July 1916 the whistles blew and the 169th Brigade left their trenches to cross the 820 yards of no man's land. Their aim was to meet up with the 46th division east of the village of Gommecourt. They were to head straight towards the Gommecourt cemetery, then swing left to take the Quadrilateral and then link with the 46th Division. Under cover of a smoke screen they dashed forward, passed through the wire, which was reasonably cut and were in the front-line German trench before the Germans had time to react. They continued and took the second and third trenches. However, they were not successful in taking the Quadrilateral and despite a valiant attempt great numbers were killed or wounded. The Germans counter attacks further thinned the line of the 169th. The position quickly became impossible and by 2 pm they were forced back from the third line. By nightfall, the last of their bullets gone, they retired to their

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starting point. A German offer of a ceasefire to recover the bodies was broken by British Artillery and meant bodies remained on the battlefield. The Germans retreated from this position 7 months later and the delay possibly explains why in the battlefield cemetery, there are 682 unidentified graves.

It could be said that the Diversion had achieved its aim in that German troops and artillery had been transferred to the area thus diverting fire from the Fourth Army to the south – but at what cost – there were 6769 casualties that day and our Leonard was never seen again. He was officially reported to be killed in action and is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial and the Roll of Honour in the St Francis Xavier College Chapel. His sister Ethelreda died in 1977 not knowing how and possibly why, her brother died.



.....Charles Tolman

Charles was born in Hendon in 1893 to Charles T and Lizzie Tolman of Chandos Cottage, Great Stanmore in Middlesex. He had 5 sisters. Charles father ran a tailoring business from his home. Charles attended Clapham College between 1904 and 1906.

On day one of the battle of The Somme at 7:30am 1st July 1916 Charles was in the front-line trenches, facing the enemy, less than 200 yards away across no man's land. He was in the 8th Battalion East Surrey Regiment, part of the 55th Brigade of the 18th Division of the 4th Army. Their objective was to take the village of Montauban (obj. 14) in order to link with the French army to the east.

At 7:28am two mines were successfully fired under the enemy at the salient Casino Point,

destroying flanking machine guns firing eastward along the no man's land. Not all machine guns however were destroyed and as a result the 7th Queen's battalion attack to the left of the 8th East Surrey, was delayed. At 8:37 the East Surrey did cross the enemy front line, but was unable to reach the enemy

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support line, because of strong enemy machine gun fire from the German trenches in the Warren area. With support from the 7th Royal West Kent and 7th Buffs, the enemy weakened and the 8th East Surrey was able to get bombers forward and take the enemy trench, in the area known as Train Alley. But the three leading companies had by now lost all their officers and it was difficult to organise any further advance.

In taking Train Alley, they found a grey haired elderly German machine gunner with a pile of empty cartridges cases nearly as high as the gun. He was dead still holding on to its handle.

By 3pm the 8th East Surrey did advance and the Montauban to Mametz road was taken. The objective of the attack now been accomplished.

In all the 18th Division suffered a total of 3115 killed or wounded. Charles Tolman was badly wounded, most likely by machine gun fire and within 24 hours he had been carried from the battlefield to a field hospital and because of the severity of his wounds, from there to one of the chief hospitals in the Boulogne and Wimereux area. Charles died on the 7th July 1916 aged 23 and was buried in Boulogne Eastern Cemetery.

Scotty and I visited his grave in the 100th year of his anniversary.

In a few short years Charles Tolman senior, the tailor in Stanmore, had lost his wife a daughter and now his only son.

He elected to have no inscription or cross on his son's gravestone.



..... Walter Sydney John Stevens

Walter was born in London in 1895 and baptised into the Church of England in 1897. He lived at 164 Lancaster Road, Notting Hill, North Kensington with his father John Henry Stevens and his mother Sarah Agnes. He had 3 sisters and an elder brother Thomas, who until his death in 1955, was vicar at St Pauls Church in Augusta Road, Wimbledon. His father was born in India and was an accountant for the French Bank in London. Like many of the Clapham College pupils at this time the family had a live-in servant girl.

On leaving Clapham College Walter worked for a short time as a commercial clerk in the City. He enlisted in 1914 and joined the 11th Battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment.

On the 7th July 1916 Walter now attached to the 9th Battalion and a second lieutenant, was in the front-line trenches waiting to lead his 15-man section towards the German front line. He was part of the 75th Brigade, 12th Division of X Corps. With clear views of the Basilica at Albert to his left and the Albert to Bapaume road to his right, Walter took off across the head of the Mash Valley. His objective was the village of Orvillers, an objective he was not to reach. Extremely heavy machine gun fire, halted the advance close to the German front line, and it is here that Walter would have fallen.

Walters body was never recovered and is most likely to be one of the 2300 graves in the battlefield cemetery in Orvillers, marked 'Known Only to God' He is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial and the Roll of Honour in the St Francis Xavier College Chapel. Walter was 21 years old.

The Trenches

As the huge opposing armies became entrenched during the autumn 1914 it was usually the Germans who were able to select the highest or best ground, with the Allies having to dig in where they could.

Ideally the choice of location should be one where you have a clear range for firing yet are hidden from approaching soldiers. On the opposite side of a slope might be best so that the enemy only saw you as they came over the ridge, which also meant it was harder for enemy artillery to aim at you. Front lines could be between 50 and 300 yards apart.

The main problem of rapid construction was poor drainage. Fields that appeared dry, quickly turned into a muddy quagmire after heavy rain, flooding the trenches making them difficult to walk through and caused serious health problems i.e. trench foot. Most of the trenches along the Western Front were dug by hand. The army expected 270 yards of front line trench to be dug by around 450 men in a 6-hour night time session. Trenches were preferably 10ft deep and wide enough for two soldiers to pass each other. Every 10 metres fingers of earth called traverses were built across the trench. This broke the line into short sections called bays, so if there was an explosion or gunfire the damage would be confined to a small area.

Although trenches may have formed a single barrier when first built, they were quickly expanded to create a complex of parallel defensive lines. This allowed soldiers to fall back to another trench if the first was lost and to use them as an area where stores and troops could stay out of harm's way during enemy artillery fire. The British usually had three lines of trenches: the front or firing line closest to the enemy the support or travel trench a further 100 yards or so behind this, and the reserve trench a further 220 yards at the rear. This was where the reserve troops could be stationed so they could counter attack if the front line was taken. These were linked by communication trenches, smaller ditches, through which soldiers and supplies could be moved.

Disillusionment by the soldiers against their Generals grew as they remained in the trenches, but the real feeling was against the strikes by workers that were happening in the factories back in England.



Caudron Biplane flown by Flt Lieutenant Clifford Elliott RNAS (COXA)

Places of Interest:

Vimy Ridge

N50°22'18.1" - E02°46'10.9"

Vimy Ridge is an escarpment just over 4 miles in length 476 ft. above sea level, but more importantly 200 feet above Douai Plains, 5 miles NE of Arras. Vimy was lost to the Germans in October 1914 during the Race to the Sea as the Franco-British and German forces continually attempted to outflank each other through north-eastern France.

On the 12th April 1917, the Canadian Corps eventually took the ridge after 3 days fierce fighting. Supported by a creeping barrage, that moved forward 100 yards every 3 minutes and could wheel or comb backwards to catch defenders re-emerging. 10% of own troops were expected to be killed or wounded. The Canadian Corps captured most of the ridge during the first day of the attack. The village of Thelus fell during the second day of the attack, as did the crest of the ridge, once the Canadian Corps overcame considerable German resistance. The final objective, a fortified knoll located outside the village of Givenchy-en-Gohelle, fell to the Canadian Corps on 12 April. The German forces then retreated to the Oppy-Mericourt line. Historians attribute the success in capturing the ridge to a mixture of technical and tactical innovation, meticulous planning, powerful artillery support and extensive training. The Canadians who lost 3598 men in the battle were commanded by Lieutenant General Julian Byng.

The Canadian National Memorial (on Hill 145) was designed by Walter Seymour Allward. It took 11 years to build and was unveiled in 1936. The stone was from Croatia (seget limestone) and depicts -20 human figures - the breaking of the sword, the defeat of militarism and desire for peace - one standing and three crouching figures represents Canada's sympathy for the weak and oppressed. - the twin pylons symbolise unity and sacrifice of both countries - other statues represent the mourning of the dead.

In the second world war Hitler visited the monument and out of respect to the fallen Canadian troops, left the memorial untouched.

The site is set on 250 acres and has been largely reforested to prevent erosion, but the ground is still pockmarked with shell-holes and mine graters; testimony to the intensity of the fighting that took place here. You can walk to the Grange crater and through some of the forward trenches (80 yards from German front line) and outpost positions, which have been preserved with concrete sandbags. The tunnels built to provide shelter for the troops as they joined the front line – these can be visited but only with a guide. The road from Vimy to the Memorial is lined with Elm trees brought from Canada and the whole area has sheep grazing to keep the grass down as it is too dangerous to mow - 2 sheep were blown up in recent years. The grounds and museum opened in 2017 and are manned by Canadian students on 3 monthly stints.

Carrier Wellington

N50°16'48.8" - E02°17'30.8"

Twenty metres under the paving stones of Arras is Wellington Quarry. It was built mainly by New Zealanders and 41 died during its construction. From November 1916 the British prepared for the spring offensive of 1917 - the idea was to connect the chalk quarries of the City to create a network of ground stations, capable of accommodating up to 24,000 soldiers. The tunnels (galleries) which stretched for 12 miles, had electric lighting, kitchens, sanitary facilities and a hospital. The British troops left the galleries at 5:30am on 9th April 1917, in a surprise attack on German lines, who unbelievably had no knowledge of the existence of the complex. It should have resulted in a major victory, but unfortunately, they emerged in front of enemy machine gun fire and although there are no records to show the casualty figures, losses are believed to have been enormous.

Bucquay

N50°08'25.6" - E02°42'35.6"

Is situated 3 miles W of Gommercourt and 3 miles NE of Serre, two of the 14 objectives of day one, of the Battle of The Somme. Casualties in excess of 10,000 men and the near wipe out of the pals' regiments. The last cavalry charge was North of this area when horses and men were finally proven to be of no match to the machine gun. As a result, cavalry was only then used for lightening commando type raids - swords and lances given up for rifles. In fact, 90% of all British casualties were caused by the German machine gun. Horses were mainly used for carrying equipment. Mules (donkey father, horse mother) were used for the artillery. 500,000 horses came from USA, mainly the Tennessee walking horse. In total 480,000 horses/mules died in the war. After the war 900,000 horses returned to UK for sale, mainly for food.

Serre Road No1 Cemetery

N50°06'01.57 - E 02°39'24.61

Horace Iles (gravestone - top left Plot1-E-39)

At 16, Horace was the youngest person to die on 1st July 1916. The first day of the battle saw over 500 other boy soldiers die this day. When Horace was 14 he was very big for his age - he worked as a blacksmith's assistant. One evening in September 1914 while travelling home on a tram in Leeds, a girl gave him a white feather, the traditional symbol of cowardice. He was mortified and the next day signed up to join the army, lying about his age.

The youngest soldier to survive the battle of the Somme was Sidney George Lewis who enlisted in the East Surrey Regiment in August 1915 at the age of twelve. He fought in the Battle of the Somme in 1916, then aged thirteen, in the 106th Machine Gun Co. Lewis fought in the Battle of Delville Wood which saw some of the worst casualties on the Somme. He was sent home after his mother sent his birth certificate to the War Office and demanded his return. In later life Lewis became a policeman and finally owned a pub, before his death in 1969.

In close proximity to this cemetery can be found the cemeteries of Serre Road 2 (the largest on the Somme with 7127 burials), Serre Road 3, Queens Cemetery, Railway Hollow Cemetery and Luke Copse Cemetery.

Redan Ridge

N50°05'26.9" - E02°39'17.7"

The area between the British and German front line trenches and the scene of fierce fighting between 1st July and November 1916.

The site of three battlefield cemeteries: Redan Ridge 1,2 and 3 and the well photographed Sunken Road - A Royal Naval Division fresh from Gallipoli fought for the first time on the Somme and eventually took the position

The cemeteries were made by the V Corps in the spring of 1917, when these battlefields were eventually cleared. Redan ridge No 1 is on the top of the ridge, midway between the old front lines. There are 150 war casualties on this site and of these nearly half are unidentified - most belonged to the 4th division which attacked between Beaumont and Serre on the 1st July 1916. It is in the attack on Serre that the 11th Battalion East Lancashire Regiment, known as the Accrington Pals fought and died. The battalion reached full strength of 1100 men in just two weeks. They attacked on 1st July 1916 and by the end of the day, 584 men lay dead of the 720 "Pals" who went into battle.

Albert

N50°01'06.8" - E02°41'25.9"

The town experienced fierce fighting and was held at various times by both the British and the Germans. On 15th January 1915, the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Brebieres was hit by a German shell. The famous statue by Albert Roze of Mary and the infant Jesus slumped to a near horizontal position, where it remained until further shelling in 1918. The British said that whoever caused the statue to fall would lose the war, the Germans thought the opposite. Many legends grow amongst the thousands of British, French and German troops who passed through Albert, which was 3 miles from the front line.

During the battle of the Somme it was a centre for intense military activity, staff offices, billets, munitions and hospitals. After its capture in March 1918 and its final liberation in August 1918, by the East Surreys at bayonet point, nothing remained of the town but a vast expanse of ruins and no trace of the statue could be found. The Basilica was faithfully restored after the war by the son of the original architect, Edmond Duthoit. The townspeople strongly resisted the suggestion to remount the statue in its wartime leaning position.

The Musee Somme 1916 adjoins the Basilica, in the centre of Albert. The museum recounts the lives of soldiers during the First World War in a tunnel that is 32-foot-deep and 275 yards long and dates back to the 13th century. An air-raid shelter in the Second World War, the museum has a large collection of objects, equipment, weapons, and soldier's personal effects.

Preserved battlefield and memorial site. The infantry assault on 1st July 1916 commenced ten minutes after Hawthorn mine exploded (40,000lb bomb) destroying the German redoubt. The Germans were therefore ready and emerged from deep, well protected trenches. The experienced German troops had been in position for 20 months prior to the battle - at 7:30am the 29th British Division attacked and were unable to capture the crater - further assaults by the 86th and 87th Brigade (4,000 men) and the 29th British Division were quickly stopped.

Newfoundlanders who arrived on the battlefield at 2am after a seven-mile march from their billets in Louvencourt advanced at 8:45am. The first wave could not use communication trenches, as they were congested with the dead and wounded and instead attacked in formation across open ground, navigating and funnelling through British barbed wire defences. Most died, reaching no further than the Danger Tree, a skeleton tree mid-way in no man's land. Of the 22 officers and 758 men who went forward, only 110 men survived, but no officers. There was much confusion on the battlefield, especially regarding communication. White smoke to the British meant that the position had been taken, to the Germans it meant Artillery fire was falling short. In total 5000 British and French died here – in this area there are eight Battle field cemeteries.

It was said of the battle:

"It was a magnificent display of trained and disciplined valour, and its assault only failed of success because dead men can advance no further".

Beaumont (objective 5) finally fell to a successful attack on 13th November 1916 by the 51st Highland Division.

Memorial to the men of 36th Ulster Division and is a copy of Helens Tower in Northern Ireland. On 1st July 1916 they attacked the Schwaben Redoubt (objective 6) where today the Tower stands. It had commanding views and was a triangle of trenches with a 300-yard frontage. The 109th Brigade (4,000 men) came up from the woods and crossed 400 yards of no-man's land, entered the Schwaben Redoubt and advanced on towards Stuff Redoubt. They suffered 5000 casualties and gained in all about one mile. They held out for a day, but with little support, dwindling supply of bombs and ammunition, they retreated when the Germans mounted a counter-attack. They were the only men to break through enemy lines on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. Four men of the Division won the Victoria Cross that day. In total 9 men won the VC on the Somme and just inside the gates, is a stone in their honour. Rifleman Robert Quigg was also awarded the Medal of Order of St George, the highest honour of the Russian Empire.

Thiepval

N50°03'09.5" - E02°41'18.2"

Memorial to the missing - 72,195 with no known grave – includes the names of 7 holders of the Victoria Cross and 10 Clapham Old Xaverians'. Many bodies are found to this day and if identified, their name is removed from the memorial and their remains buried in a battlefield cemetery.

The memorial was designed by Edwin Lutyens in 1928 - 16 brick piers faced with Portland stone - 140 feet high - it needed 20-foot foundations due to extensive tunnelling in the area.

The memorial stands on what was one of the strongest parts of the German front line. The front line was attacked by 32nd Division on 1 July 1916 and held by 99th Reserve Infantry Regiment. Thiepval was eventually taken by the 18th Division on 26th September 1916. The first tank used in warfare, the British Mark 1, first appeared on the Somme, near Thiepval, on 15th September 1916. The Thiepval museum is linked with the Historical Museum at Peronne which includes, 'life of a civilian population under German occupation'.

Lochnager Crater

N50°00'58.9" - E02°41'49.7"

The mine was dug by 179th Tunnelling Company Royal Engineers under the German Redoubt known as Schwabenhohe. The tunnel was 4½ feet by 2½ feet and excavated at a rate of about 18 inches per day until about it was 1030 feet long. Three years later when the 60,000 lbs of ammonal was ignited the explosion was heard in London – the earth went 4,000 feet into the air - left a crater 300 foot in diameter and 70-foot-deep.

As recently as 1992 the body of a hitherto missing British soldier was found on the edge of the crater.

The crater was exploded at 7:28am on 1st July 1916.

At 7:30 am The Tyneside Irish Battalion (family member -Pte Matthew Alexander Bonner's Battalion) were amongst 3000 men who advanced from the Tara/Usna line across the Avoca valley towards La Boisselle and the crater and on to Contalmaison. The detonation of the mine meant that the German machine guns were ready and waiting to pick them off. The advancing soldiers were not allowed to run, fire from a standing position, or stop to help the wounded. They carried 30 kilos of equipment and marched to the sound of a distant drum. Wave after wave of Geordies were cut down. After 20 minutes they got some cover when they reached their own front line, but more or less immediately had to advance towards Sausage Valley. Only 50 men survived to march to Contalmaison.

The crater area and village was eventually captured by the Worcesters on the 3rd July, after the Tyneside Scottish and Irish were reduced to small parties of survivors. The battalion lost a third of its fighting strength and its Commanding officer was killed. Pte Turrall of the 10th Battalion Worcesters won the VC, for remaining with a wounded officer for three hours under continuous and heavy fire from machine-guns and bombs and eventually carrying the officer to safety.

Contalmaison Chateau Cemetery

N50°01'25.1" - E02°43'46.6"

The village was reached on the 1st July 1916, by small parties of the 34th Division (12,000 men). It was stormed by the 23rd Division (12,000 men) on the 7th July 1916, and some men of the Northumberland Fusiliers, who were taken four days earlier, were released; but it was lost the same afternoon. It was not finally captured until 9th.

However, it was lost again in March, 1918 and recaptured by the 38th Division 5 months later on the 24th August. The underground fortifications made by the enemy before 1916, played an important part in the defence of the village.

Buried in the cemetery is Private William Henry Short who won the VC whilst serving in the 8th battalion Yorkshire Regiment, Green Howards – he fought with great gallantry, although mortally wounded, throwing and priming hand grenades.

Five hundred metres from the cemetery is Bells Redoubt, which commemorates another Green Howard and VC holder, Second Lieutenant Donald Simpson Bell.

Gordon's Dump Cemetery

N50°01'22.2" - E02°42'17.8"

1st July 1916 - 8th Division (12,000 men) attacked Orvilliers and 34th Division (12,000 men) attacked La Boisselle - the original cemetery contained 95 men and after the war a further 1500 soldiers were buried here including VC winner Second Lieutenant Donald Simpson Bell, 9th Battalion, The Green Howards. He charged and destroyed an enemy machine gun with a hand pistol and grenades, and died whilst doing it for a second time. He was a professional footballer with Wolverhampton and Bradford and his medal was purchased by the Professional Footballers Association, at auction, for £250,000 in 2010.

Poizieres

N50°02'19.1" - E02°43'46.6"

Important German defensive position, the fortified village was part of the second defensive trench system and was mainly fought by Australian Divisions. There were many casualties - 48th Division lost 5,285 on its first tour - 1st Australian Division lost 7,700 men - 2nd Australian Division 8,100 and the 4th Australian lost 7,100 men. Home of Tommie's bar (museum and refreshment).

Fricourt Cemetery

N50° 00'15.7" – E02° 42' 54.5"

The German military cemetery at Fricourt is the resting place for 17,027 German soldiers. They died on the Somme battlefields over the four years of the Great War, from late September 1914, when the German Second Army established a defensive front line in this sector, to the spring and summer Battles of the Somme in 1918. The famous German Pilot Baron Manfred von Richthofen, (credited with 80 kills) known as the Red Baron, was shot down and died on 21st April 1918. Initially buried here, his body was exhumed by his brother and taken to Wiesbaden for reburial after the war.

Arras Memorial

N50°17'13.9" - 02°45'38.3"

Faubourg d' Amiens Cemetery, Boulevard Du General de Gaulle, 6200 Arras

The memorial commemorates nearly 35,000 soldiers of the British, South African and New Zealand forces with no known grave. Most were killed in the Battle of Arras, which was fought between 9 April and 16 May 1917.

Two COXA old boys Clifford Elliott and Francis Jackson are remembered here. Also remembered in memorial bay 2 & 3 is a family relation Pte. Matthew Alexander Bonner. He died from shellfire on the Fremicourt to Beugny road 21st March 1918 aged 28 - with Northumberland Fusiliers, 26th Battalion (Tyneside Irish).

Auchonvillers

N50°04'48.3" - E02°37'51.1"

Avril Williams Museum, trenches and tea rooms, 10 rue Delattre. Auchonvillers was Army H/Q and a major medical centre. British and New Zealand troops billeted in this village before advancing to the front line. Troop rotation was mainly 2 weeks front line, 1-week support line, 2 weeks in reserve and 1-week rest. Actual fighting was experienced 3 or 4 days a year.

Amiens

N49°53'31.3" - E02°17'30.8"

City of culture. The Notre- Dame d'Amiens Cathedral built 800 years ago. Its size makes it one of the biggest Gothic buildings ever built - 475ft long x 150ft high. Considered to be in the top 10 cathedrals to visit in the world. Notre Dame of Paris would fit inside this Cathedral twice. The river Somme flows through the city. Home of Jules Verne. The City was extensively damaged and occupied by various forces in two World Wars, but both sides agreed not to damage the cathedral.

Dantzig Alley British Cemetery, Mametz

N49°59'58.2" - E02°44'38.9"

The village of Mametz was objective 12 of the 14 objectives set for day one of the battle. As planned it was taken by the 7th Division on the first day after very hard fighting at Dantzig Alley (a German trench) and at other points.

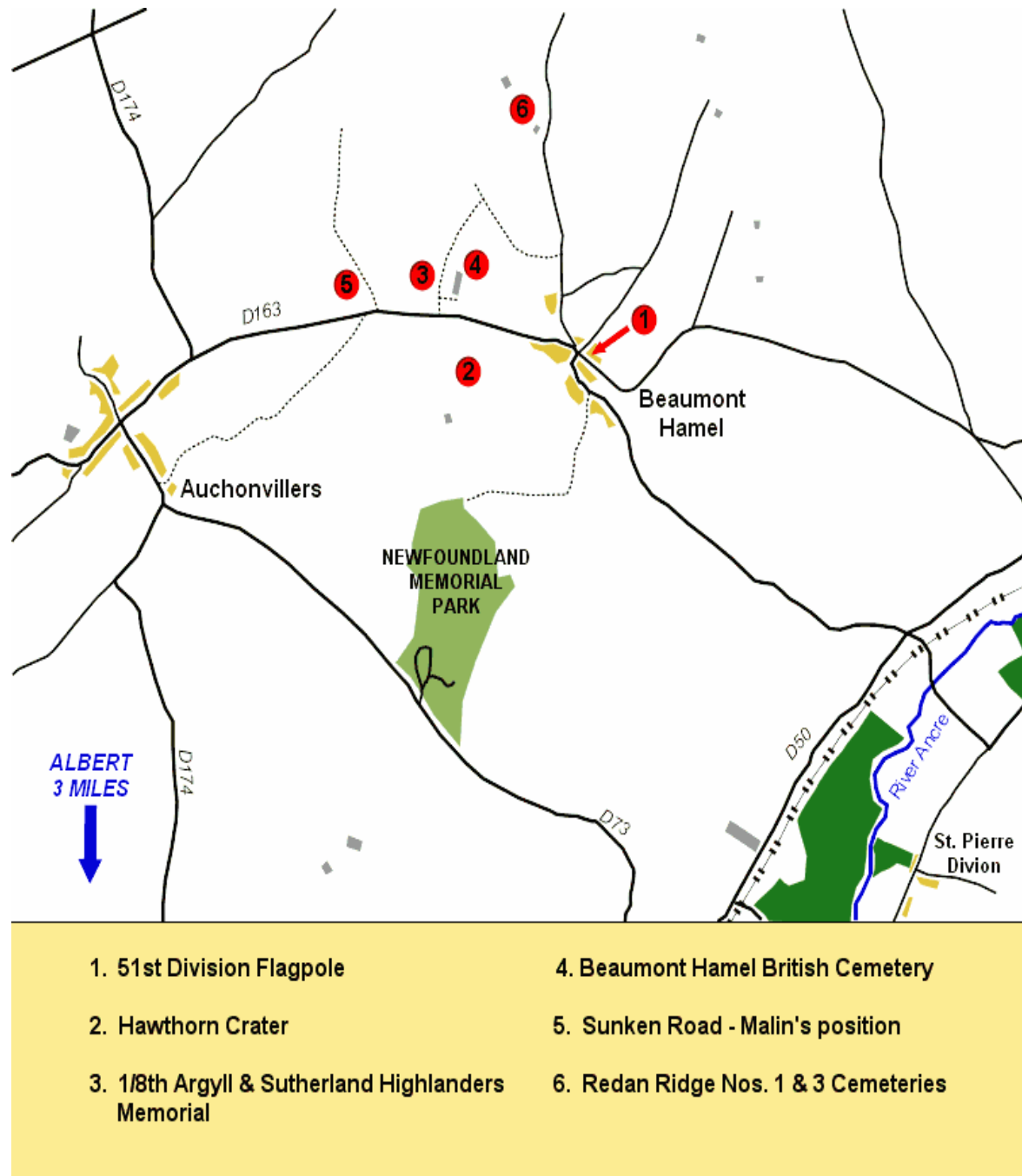
Captain Charlie May of 22nd Battalion Manchester Pals is featured in the 100-minute film "The Somme (Channel Four) 2005" available on You Tube.

He is buried in plot 11. B.3.

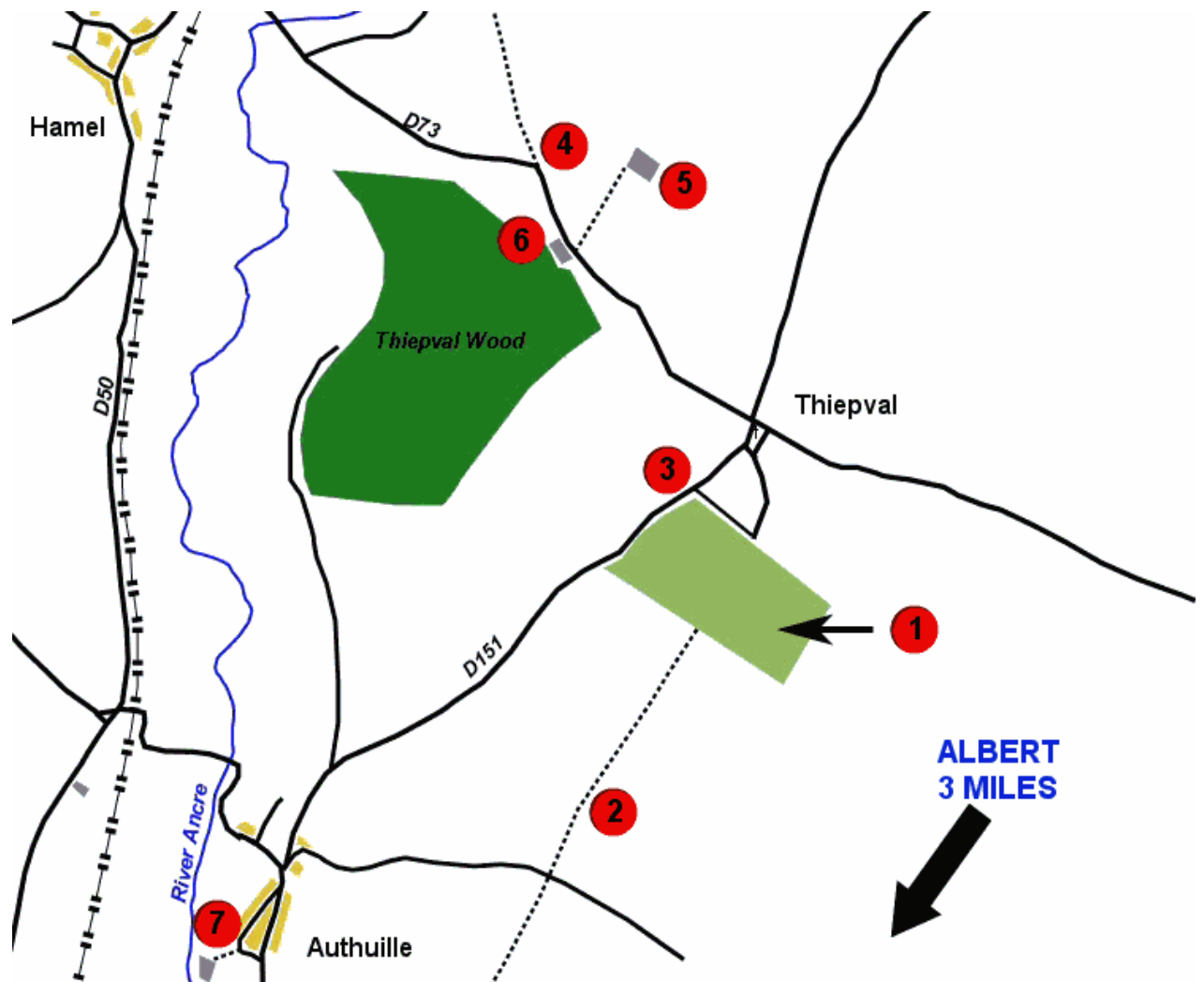
The cemetery was begun in late July 1916 and was used by field ambulances and fighting units until the following November. The ground was lost during the great German advance in March 1918, but regained five months later.

Maps

The Beaumont Hamel Battlefield



Thiepval Memorial



1. Thiepval Memorial, Cemetery & Visitors Centre

2. Leipzig Redoubt

3. 18th Division Memorial

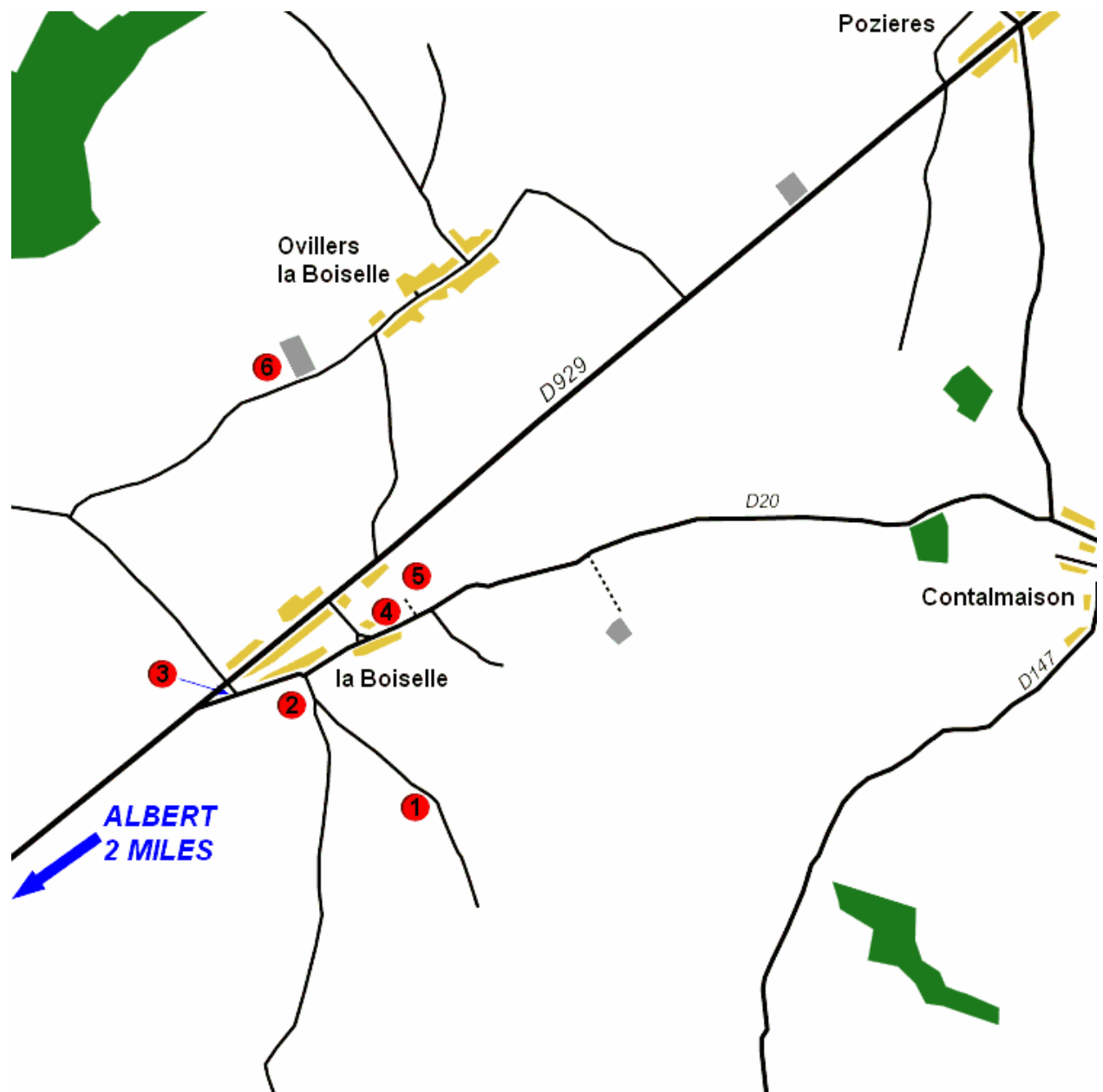
4. Ulster Tower & machine-gun post

5. Mill Road Cemetery

6. Connaught Cemetery

7. Authuille Military Cemetery

Orvillers – Military Cemetery and Lochnagar Crater



1. Lochnagar Crater
2. Glory Hole
3. Tyneside Memorial Seat

4. 19th Division Memorial
5. 34th Division Memorial
6. Orvillers Military Cemetery

Photos from the Somme



Whenever possible, the army tried to get hot food to its men, as the powerful impact that a bowl of decent hot stew had on morale, was well known.





Third Light

A superstition that it was bad luck to light a third cigarette from the same match, was actually based on sound experience: it took a German sniper about five seconds at night to see, aim and fire at a light source. A flaring match was clearly visible on a dark night from well over 500 yards. Five seconds is what it took to light a third cigarette



Camouflaged British Sniper

Prior to the First World War, armies had specialist marksmen known as 'sharpshooters', the Germans fielded thousands of highly trained riflemen, usually equipped with telescopic-sighted rifles. British officers referred to them as 'snipers', which harked back to the army in India in the late 18th century when officers would go bird hunting in the hills – the tiny Snipe being one of the hardest of targets to hit.

Francis Pegahmagabow a Canadian, shot 378 Germans – the highest number killed by a sniper in the war.





4th Battalion Worcesters - wire cutters attached to rifle



How the tank was named

The first modern armoured fighting vehicles were produced in great secrecy by Fosters of Lincoln. To prevent any hint of their purpose being discovered by German spies, workers were told they were mobile water tanks. Some were even clearly marked in Cyrillic 'Water tanks for Russia'. The ruse certainly worked, because their first use on the Somme on 15 September 1916 was a complete surprise to the Germans.



The majority of casualties (90%) were inflicted by the German machine guns.





British 5th Division marching through Bethune







"For your tomorrow, we gave our today"



“Lest we forget”

Michael Stedman was a schoolteacher who took scores of school trips to Flanders and Picardy before he became a historian. He said the 1914-18 war raises questions that go to the core of mankind's existence. "Is it right to fight for what you believe in, even if you know that warfare, with modern weaponry, leads to unimaginable indignity and suffering? At what point do you stand up to evil? How can you distinguish good and evil from nationalistic ranting and posturing?"

"All those questions remain. All are unresolved and perhaps will never be resolved... But I know from the experience of taking school parties to the Somme, that just going to the battlefields forces young people to grow up, to face these questions for the first time. For that reason alone, we should never bury the Somme."





*Facts and photos obtained from various publications and D. McDonald's (Scotty's) COXA records.
Compiled by Aidan Coletta (Charterhouse, Clapham College 1957–1963)
January 2018.*

Intended for field trip use only.

