

# **To Ypres and Beyond:**

## **Tracing Father's footsteps**



[image from author's collection]  
Edward Albert Jeffery  
(1894 – 1972)  
Royal Engineer  
Sapper No.536247

By Peter Jeffery

I was born in 1933 and by the start of the Second World War, I was old enough to know that my father was deaf, and that his deafness had been caused by a shell exploding near by when he was a serving soldier the First World War. He had a hearing aid, but it was a very cumbersome thing. The microphone, about the size of a boot polish tin, was mounted on top of a battery case which could just be squeezed into a jacket breast pocket; there was then a conspicuous lead to an equally cumbersome ear piece. It was not much use as it picked up a lot of background sound, which drowned the voices that he was trying to listen to, and therefore it was seldom used.

We lived in Hollingdean Terrace, Brighton. It was a fairly typical Brighton house being built on a hillside, two stories at the front and three at the back. The lowest story being a cellar, which was reached by a flight of outside steps, down from the kitchen. At the start of the second World War father obtained some large sections of timber to shore up the floor over the cellar, and also obtained sandbags which he built up to protect the outside of the exposed cellar wall, thus creating our own air raid shelter. In due course he also cut a trap door through the kitchen floor, and made a flight of steps so that the cellar could be accessed without going outdoors. At the age of six I did not question how a Gents Outfitter **(which was father's occupation) would have learnt the skills to complete this work, I just tried to help! But was frequently asked, "Who's doing this job, you or me", and the answer was always "You are"** so I would fade away into the background for a little while.

In later years I have visited various Museums and battlefield sites where underground dugouts, with there flights of steps, and supporting timbers have been recreated, illustrating where his skills had originated.

During the war Mother and I spent many nights in our cellar during the air raids, but father seldom left his bed. I could not understand this, and put it down to his deafness, not hearing the sirens, and all the banging going on outside. As the years passed I gradually gained inkling as to the conditions that father would have experienced during his time in the trenches, and came to understand his rather fatalistic attitude, if the bomb has my name on it, it will find me!

The Second World War ended, and time went by and like most young boys I asked father questions about his time in the army during the First World War, but got little response. Over the years I did learn that when he went to enlist the recruiting officer only wanted to know if he could trim a **hedge, and that when father replied "yes" the officer responded with "then it's the Royal Engineers for you"**. On another occasion I discovered that he had been involved in wiring parties, which required either the erection or dismantling of barbed wire defences in no mans land. This was of course always done at night, and should the Germans hear any suspicious sounds they would immediately send up flares to illuminate the scene, and then open fire on anything that moved. The only hope for men caught in this way was to freeze as though they were already dead and remain motionless until the flare burnt out and darkness returned. On one

occasion father was trapped in no mans land for several days without food **or water, and he told that he was just about at death's door when he was** found by a stretcher party. (See Appendix 2 & 2a) The first thing they did was to give him a tot of rum, which he reckoned saved his life. During my lifetime there was always a bottle of rum in the sideboard cupboard, for medicinal purposes you understand, and whenever father was feeling poorly a tot would be added to a cup of coffee, or tea, it did not seem to matter which. The only other story that I gleaned concerned a unit of Scottish soldiers that were in the trenches next to his unit during the winter months. The temperature was below freezing and the trenches being very wet, caused the bottoms of their kilts to freeze and rubbed their legs raw. They were apparently given the opportunity to change to **trews but this offer was refused, much to father's admiration.**

There were two places in my childhood home that I was banned from, the first was my fathers toolbox in the cellar, the second was his drawer. Our spare bedroom was just big enough to take a single bed and an old chest of drawers. This chest of drawers had three full sized drawers, and two smaller ones in the top row. It was one of these smaller drawers that was fathers. I was occasionally allowed to look in, but only under his watchful eye, the contents were very orderly arranged in neat piles and little boxes. There were two spare cut throat razors, and a stone for sharpening them. A cube of a waxy substance that looked like an ice cube, to rub on a cut should he nick himself whilst shaving. A khaki roll tied with a tape, that when undone revealed a number of pockets containing cotton and darning wool, brass buttons and sewing needles, this roll he described as his housewife, a pile of handkerchiefs, a little box of collar studs, stiffeners and cuff links. At the back there was a neat stack of various small packs of photos, papers, and two books of picture postcards showing soldiers in war scenes, but the captions were all in a foreign language that I could not understand. The best bit however was a small leather purse, which when opened revealed medals, badges, and some old coins, although again there was no explanation of their significance. Then behind everything else there were a pair of drum sticks, **and I can clearly remember asking "can you play the drums Dad"? The** answer was a disappointing no, they belonged to - - - . I have tried **many times to remember who, but it won't come, all that I do know is** that it was some relation that I did not know and had never heard of! Unfortunately, for some reason fathers family did not socialise, they were quite happy to meet in the street and have a chat, for all five of his brothers and sisters lived in Brighton, but they never met for a family gathering.

**Time passed, my parents died, and their home was emptied. Father's** tool box found a home in my garage, and the contents of his drawer were transferred to a cardboard box, and stored in my roof, where they remained for many years. One wet day when I had retired and could not work on my project outside, I decided to have a tidy up in the roof space and found fathers box of treasures. The tidying stopped and I spent the **next two hours exploring father's possessions. They seemed to fall into** three general categories, personal items like his pocket watch, razor and strop; one or two papers and medals plus the odd photo from the First

World War; and then there were some photos bearing the date 1927 and having titles like Menin Gate and Messines on the back.

On further examination I found that I had: -

- A letter from the War Office addressed to my grandmother, saying that father had been injured on the 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1919, and **continued "It has not yet been reported into what hospital he has been admitted, nor are other particulars yet known, but directly any further information is received it will be at once communicated to you. I am to express to you the sympathy and regret of the Army Council". (Father apparently cut his thumb on some barbed wire)**
- There was also a Soldiers Demobilisation Account dated 25<sup>th</sup> April 1919, showing that he was due to receive £42-16s-2d, less £1. payable on return of the military great-coat (see Army Book 472)
- A Pension Certificate showing that father was entitled to payment of a 20% disablement pension of eight shillings per week. The first payment being dated 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1919.
- A note from the Ministry of Pensions dated 27<sup>th</sup> February 1920. **saying "I am directed by the Ministry of Pensions to inform you that he has reviewed your case and has issued instructions to the Pension Issue Office for payment of the following amended award."** 8 shillings from 3.9.19 to 10.2.20.

interim award. £5.0.0. Final in line of former

3.9.19. Former award cancelled from

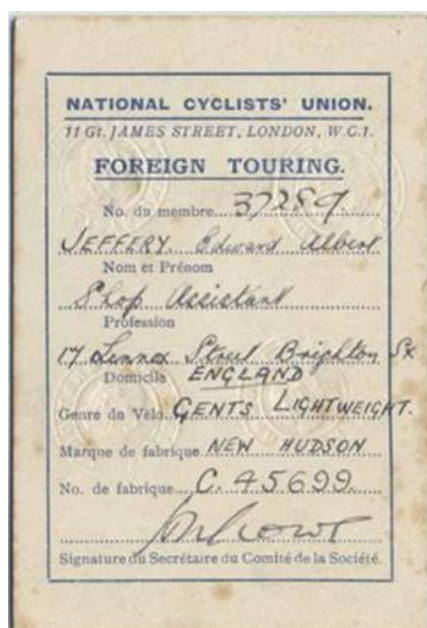
- A British War Medal, and a Victory Medal, both inscribed with fathers name were also with his treasures.
- **And then in father's handwriting there was a list of place names, headed "Advance from Ypres 28.9.18" and ending at Benrath after having past through Cologne on the way. A footnote to this list reads "Total miles marched from Ceurne 230, in 32 days". The list also records that 20 bridges were built during the course of the journey.**

Also a set of photos dated 1927 were of war ravaged countryside, various street scenes and war memorials, all of which had titles that I could associate with the First World War. Also included were two untitled pictures showing a cemetery and a gravestone on which could just be read the inscription T H Gawen, and more clearly could be seen the badge of the Royal Artillery. Included with these photos was a piece of headed **notepaper for the National Cyclists' Union, Sussex Centre**. On this was a list of place names, most unknown to me, but including Ostend, Ypres, Hell Fire Corner, Hill 60, and many more. In addition there was also an identity card issued by the National Cyclists Union, for Foreign Touring, again dated 1927. Now I know that Dad was a keen cyclist who rode with



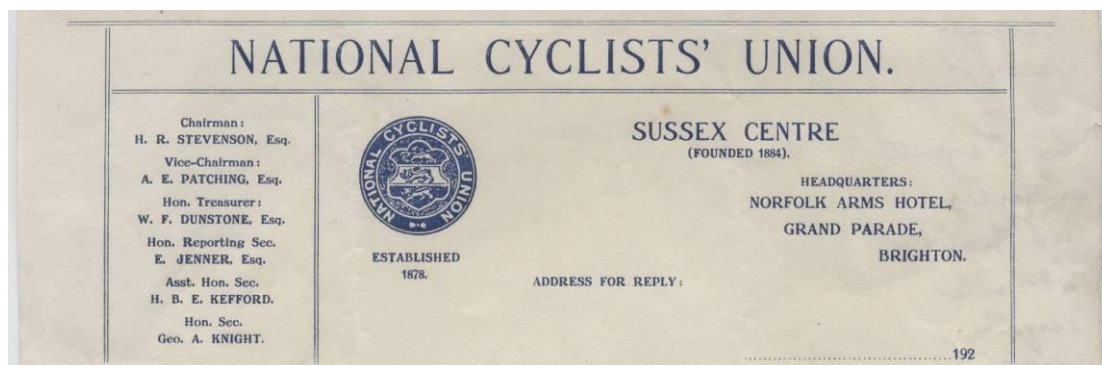
the Brighton Mitre Cycling Club, so I assume that he made a pilgrimage to the 1914/18 war zone in 1927 by cycle.

## The 1927 Tour



[Images from author's collection]

## A list of places visited



Ostend	Messines	Montaulan
Middlekerke	Ploegsteert	St. Omer
Nieuport	Telques	Langauval
	Rizet	Guillemont
	Moulle	
Oust Dunkerke	Armentieres	Combles
	Nordausques	
Coxide	Flaurbaix	Maurepas
Ardres		
Furnes	Fauquiscart	Clery
	Pont de Ardres	
Pervyse	Neuve Chappelle	Peronne
Les Attaques		
Dixmude	La Bassie	Haut
	Allaines Calais	
Clerchen	Haisnes	Manancourt
Houthulst	Hullock	Eqincourt
Veldhoeke	Hill 70	Fins
Langemarke	Lens	Metz
Pilkern	Avion	Friscault
Ypres	Vimey	Ribecourt
Vlamertinghe	Thelus	Marcoing
Poperinghe	St. Catherin	Nayelles
Lissenthoeke	Arras	Cambrai
Reninghelst	St. Laurent Blaugy	Radiencourt
La Clyte	Athies	Marquinn
Kemmel	Fampoux	Haucourt
Wyteshaete	Monchy	Arras
Oostavirne	Gueriappe	La Targette
Hollebeke	Chirisy	Sachez
Hill 60	Croisilles	Aix Noulette
Zillebeke	Bullecourt	Noeuxlles
Hell Fire Corner	Buegnote	Verquin
Ypres	Bapaume	Bethune
Westhoke	Avisnes	Checquea
Zonnebeke	Miramont	Lillers
Passchendaille	Beaucourt	Ham Artois

St. Julien  
Wietoze  
St. Jean  
Ypers  
Racquinghem  
St. Eloi

Beaucourt Hamel  
Aviluy  
Albert  
Dernacourt

Molinghen  
Aire  
Wittes

Wytshaete

Meaulte

Wardricques

Becordal

Arques

## **The search begins**

All of these little snippets of information raised my curiosity, what exactly did Dad do during the war and where did he serve? I wondered what information there was to be found, and where one could find it. The first thing that I did was to buy two detailed maps, one of the French-Belgium border, and the other of Belgium itself. I then very laboriously located all the places recorded, first on the NCU list for his cycle tour of 1927, and then for the one headed Advance from Ypres. Although these lists were very detailed a number of the towns and villages had changed their names, for instance Dixmude is now Diksmuide, and Clenchen has become Klerken. Fortunately all the places mentioned were only a few miles apart so I feel fairly confident that I have identified the exact route taken on both of these journeys, and have marked them clearly on the two maps. However I do not know if the cycle tour was a forerunner of the Battlefield Tours that are now being offered, or whether it reflects the areas in which he served.

I decided to try and find out more about fathers movements during the First World War and started with a visit the Imperial War Museum. Although this was very interesting and had many fascinating exhibits, **there was nothing to help me trace father's movements. However tucked away in the corner of one of the rooms there was a computer claiming to have details of all the soldiers who lost their lives during both World Wars. Now one of Dad's photos was of a gravestone in an unidentified cemetery.** I had been able to read the inscription on the stone, T.H.Gawan Royal Field Artillery, and fortunately I had these details with me. I filled in as many of the blanks on the screen as I could and pressed enter, and the following appeared: -

Thomas Henry Gawan  
901605 Gunner  
3<sup>rd</sup> (1<sup>st</sup> Sussex) Battery  
Royal Field Artillery  
Died 29<sup>th</sup> September 1917. Aged 30  
Cause of Death unknown.

Son of Thomas and Sarah Gawan.  
Wife, L.C.Gawan formerly Pollard  
Of Lower Bevendean, Brighton.

Lijssenthoek Cemetery

3Km South West of Poperinge, Belgium.  
Grave reference XXV.B.7.

I was delighted with all of this information, although it was not what I had set out to find. On returning home I checked the tour route and sure **enough there was "Poperinghe and Liscenthoek" so that tied in nicely.** Whilst at the museum I enquired **how I could trace my father's** movements during the war. It was suggested that I should try the **Public Records Office at Kew, but I was warned that many of the soldier's** records were lost during WW2 when the building that they were stored in was badly damaged by fire during the London blitz.

My first visit to Kew was not very successful, I registered as a reader and was taken on a guided tour to be shown the basic layout of the building and how to obtain documents for examination. The disappointment came when I learnt that all soldiers records were being transferred onto film and that it would be another eleven months before **the surnames beginning with "J" were likely to be available. The second** visit was much more fruitful. The appropriate spool of film was located and loaded onto a reader. The search then began in earnest, first to locate the Jeffery section, and then to find Edward A. To my surprise there were several soldiers with this name combination and I had to use his regiment and home address to identify his personal records. There were about 18 pages recorded, some more legible than others, and from the images on the screen a number of the pages appeared to be scorched and were tatty around the edges as though they only just survived the fire. I did not spend too much time studying the details, but transferred the film to a copyier and printed out the relevant pages to take home with me.

On examining these papers at home I found that I was not much further forward than before. There were a number of papers relating to the day that he joined the army including an Attestation, and medical report.



1451 W/9432-1076 300ml 9/13 MGA & W Ltd (Sch. 141) Gen. No. 2598 Army Form E. 501.

## TERRITORIAL FORCE.

4 years' Service in the United Kingdom.

### ATTESTATION OF

*3rd Hb. Co.*  
Name Edward Albert Jeffery Corps Royal Engineers

Questions to be put to the Recruit before Enlistment.

1. Edward Albert Jeffery  
17 Leamore Street  
Brighton

2. Yes

3. Yes

4. No

5. Yes

I, Edward Albert Jeffery do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and that I am willing to fulfil the engagements made.

E. A. Jeffery SIGNATURE OF RECRUIT.

G. Stanley Thorne 2nd Lt. R.E. Signature of Witness.

### OATH TO BE TAKEN BY RECRUIT ON ATTESTATION.

I, Edward Albert Jeffery swear by Almighty God, that I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His Heirs, and Successors, and that I will, as in duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs, and Successors, in Person, Crown, and Dignity against all enemies, according to the conditions of my service.

### CERTIFICATE OF MAGISTRATE OR ATTESTING OFFICER.

I, George Stanley Thorne do hereby certify, that, in my presence, all the foregoing Questions were put to the Recruit above named, that the Answers written opposite to them are those which he gave to me, and that he has made and signed the Declaration, and taken the oath at Brighton on this 24th day of October 19 14.

G. Stanley Thorne Signature of Justice of the Peace, Officer, or other person authorized to attest Recruits.

If any alteration is required on this page of the Attestation, a Justice of the Peace should be requested to make it and initial the alteration under Section 80 (g), Army Act.  
The Recruit should, if he require it, receive a copy of the Declaration on Army Form E. 501a.  
\* Here insert County. † Here insert Corps.



**MEDICAL INSPECTION REPORT.**  
(Applicable to all Ranks.)

Name Edward Albert Jeffery  
Apparent age Twenty one years \_\_\_\_\_ months.  
Height 5 feet 9 1/2 inches.  
\*Chest measurement | Girth when fully expanded 37 1/2 inches.  
| Range of expansion 1 1/2 inches.  
Vision \_\_\_\_\_  
Physical development \_\_\_\_\_

\* Chest measurement will be obtained by adjusting the tape so that its posterior upper edge touches the inferior angles of the shoulder blades, and its anterior lower edge the upper part of the nipples, while the arms hang loosely by the side.

*Certificate of Medical Examination.*

I have examined the above-named Recruit and find that he does not present any of the causes of rejection specified in the Regulations. He can see at the required distance with either eye; his heart and lungs are healthy; he has the free use of his joints and limbs; he does not suffer from hernia; and declares that he is not subject to fits of any description.

I consider him\* fit for the Territorial Force.

Date Oct 24 1915. Leant R A M C  
Place Brighton Medical Officer  
\* Insert here "fit" or "unfit."

NOTE.—Should the Medical Officer consider the Recruit unfit, he will fill in the foregoing certificate only in the case of those who have been attested and will briefly state below the cause of unfitness.

*Certificate of Primary Military Examination.*

I hereby certify that the above-named Recruit was inspected by me, and I consider him\* fit for service in the 2nd Bn. R. A. M. C. and that due care has been exercised in his enlistment.

Date October 24 1915. G. Stanley Smith  
Place Brighton Recruiting Officer.  
\* Insert here "fit" or "unfit." † Insert the "Regiment" or "Corps."

*\* Certificate of Approving Officer.*

I certify that this Attestation of the above-named Recruit is correct, and properly filled up, and that the required forms appear to have been complied with. I accordingly approve, and appoint him to the 2nd Bn. Home Counties Field Company Royal Engineers

If enlisted by special authority, Army Form B. 203 (or other authority for the enlistment) will be attached to the original attestation.

Date October 24 1915. G. Stanley Smith  
Place Brighton Approving Officer.  
\* The signature of the Approving Officer is to be affixed in the presence of the Recruit.  
† Here insert the "Corps" for which the Recruit has been enlisted.

Then I got a little excited for I found a page headed, Military History Sheet, but it only recorder the date that father joined, and an accidental injury dated 2.1.19, which I already new about from the letter notifying my Grandmother.

Then there was a Charge sheet that showed that father was in Marlow on 20<sup>th</sup> **February 1917. He is shown as being in "C" section of the 499<sup>th</sup> H.C.** Field Company Royal Engineers. He was charged for smoking without permission, and was duly admonished.



Army Form B. 252.  
(See King's Regulations.)

499<sup>th</sup> H.C. Field Comp<sup>y</sup> R.E.

**CHARGE.**  
**"C" Section.** ~~BATTERY SQUADRON TROOP OR COMPANY~~

**CHARGE against No.** 4262. Sapper Jeffery. E.

Place.	Date of offence.	Offence.	Names of witnesses.	Punishment awarded.	By whom awarded.
Marlow.	1917. 20-2.	The accused No 4262 Sapper Jeffery. E. A Soldier of the Territorial Force whilst on Active Service is charged with "Conduct to the Prejudice of Good Order and Military Discipline in that he was Smoking without permission while on Parade (Marching back from Bovington Green).	Corpl. Wallis.	Admonished.	W. G. Banks. Capt. a. J. H. C. A. E. R. O. F. L. H.

Commanding Battery,  
Squadron, Troop or Company.

This then tied in quite nicely with a picture from father's collection showing soldiers relaxing, having apparently completed the construction of a wooden bridge. The photo is in postcard form and was produced by Frank Colville, High street, Marlow.



[author's image]

Therefore I can be fairly certain that father was still in England at this time. The other papers that I acquired from Kew dealt with his pension and discharge, so I had made little progress in tracing his army career from this source.

When at Kew I had picked up one of their many leaflets, this one was titled First World War, Army War Diaries. From this I gathered that a war diary was a record of operations, reports and other events that was kept for each battalion. One copy was sent to the War Office, and is now at Kew; other copies were kept by the unit and may now be with regimental records. So back I went to the Records Office, full of hope that this might **be a more rewarding sauce to find Dad's movements during his military service.** The index for War Diaries was located and the search began, but there was no sign of Royal Engineers, 499<sup>th</sup> Home Counties Field Company, no matter which way round I put the various components of the title. I sought the help of one of the attendants on duty, but he was also unable to trace any records for me. The next step was a visit to the Royal Engineers Museum at Gillingham, Kent. Here I was put in contact with the librarian, but regrettably she was unable to trace any records from her computer, but she promised to look through the paper records for any details of the 499<sup>th</sup> Field Company. A few weeks later I received a letter from the Librarian, saying that the only information that they had was that the 3/1,3/2 and 2/3 Home Counties and 2/1,2/2 and 2/3 Kent Field Companies became the 499 (Home Counties) Reserve Company in January 1917. Enclosed with this letter was a copy document headed History of 499<sup>th</sup> Field Company R.E., during the war. But the only information that it contained was the date of formation, 1/1/17, and a list of the officers Commanding. There were three officers listed: - Capt. W.G.Hawke, Capt. C.H. Julisden? and Major A.C. Ticehurst. M.C.

**History of 499<sup>th</sup> Field Company, R.E., during the War.**

I.	II.	III.	IV.	V.		VI.
Title of Unit.	War Establishment Officers Commanding Officers Men	Date of formation.	Where raised.	Dates of Movements.		Remarks
				To or from R.E.F.	To or from Field.	
499 <sup>th</sup> (Home Counties) Reserve Field Coy R.E.	Capt W.G. Hawke. " C.H. Julisden. Major A.C. Ticehurst. M.C.	1/1/17.		Nil.		Draft finding by amalgam 3 <sup>rd</sup> line Home and three 3 <sup>rd</sup> line Coy. R.E.

J. Julisden

My next thought was; perhaps the Officers Personal records may be **more detailed than that of a private soldier's, if I can find out where the Officers served there unit would have been with them.** So back to the Records Office, for more searching and more disappointments, for the Officers seem to have been a sickly bunch, all that was recorded were

various visits to the Medical Officer, and periods of leave spent in Hospital!  
No help to me at all!

## **A coach tour**

In 1999 our local coach company ran a four day trip to the First World War battlefields, based at Ypres which I was pleased to go on. It included a professionally guided tour of a number of the more notable spots in the Ypres area including

Passendale (now a completely rebuilt town as every building had been **razed to the ground in the fighting**), Hill'62 (Sanctuary Wood) and the remains of a British trench system, Tyne Cot Commonwealth Cemetery, the largest Commonwealth War Cemetery in the World and contains 11956 graves. It was so named because the German block houses on the site reminded the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers of home and cottages on the Tyne. Also included was a stop at the German Cemetery of Langmark, a dark and foreboding place.



Passendale. A rebuilt town  
[author's image]





A section of the British front line, at Hill 62  
 [author's image]



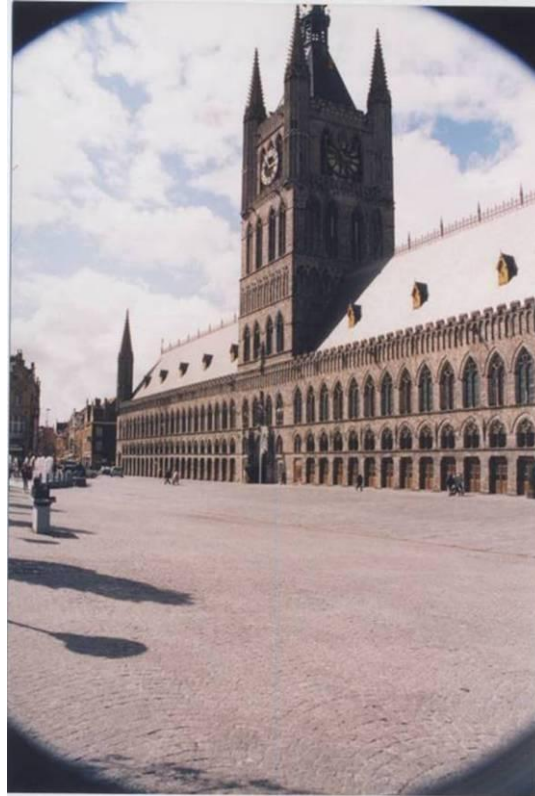
A corner of Tyne Cot Cemetery  
 [author's image]



The German Cemetery at Langmark  
 [author's image]

There was also plenty of free time to explore Ypres which I was very glad of, for I new from the scanty details that I had found that father was in the town in September 1918, and again in 1927. I wondered around the town, recalling memories of some of the photos that I had seen, there

was the Cloth Hall and Cathedral, their size enhanced by the large central square that was adjacent to them. A short walk away across the square was the Menin gate, still being built in the 1927 photo, and to-day a very imposing and sobering monument to the thousands of men who died in **the area during the First World War. At eight o'clock every evening The Last Post is sounded at the Menin Gate, a very moving ceremony that I and many other visitors were eager to attend.**

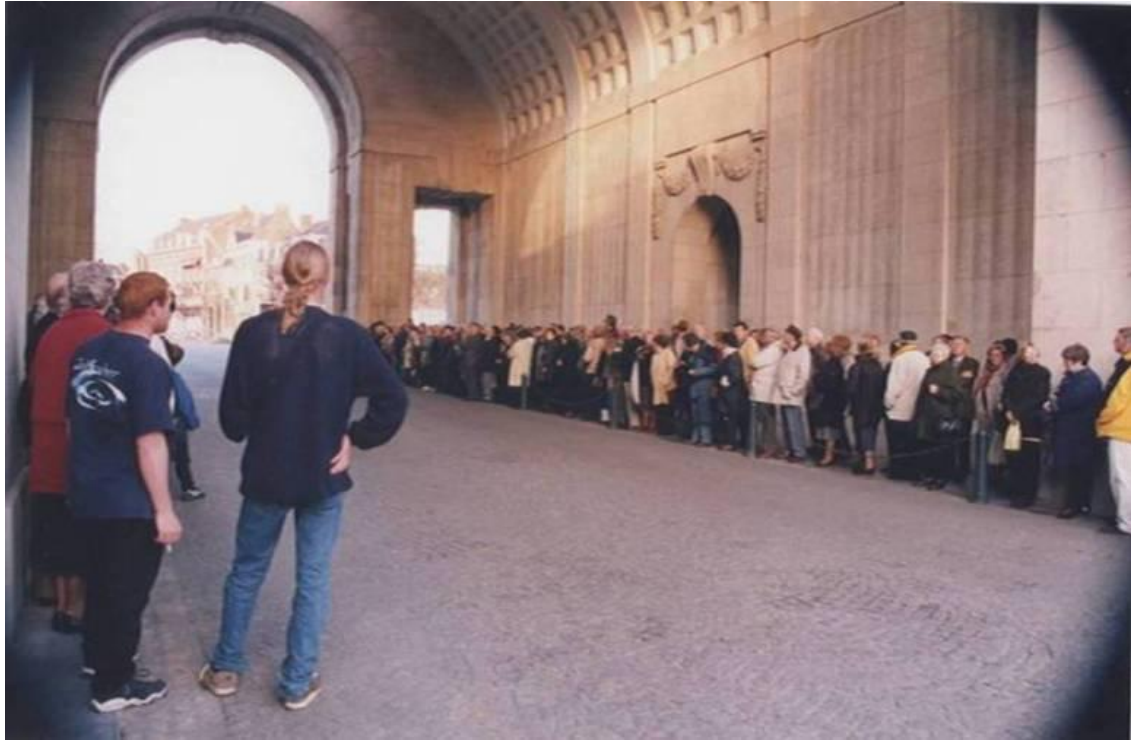


The Cloth Hall, Ypres  
[author's image]

The Cloth Hall contains a First World War museum with some very effective and realistic tableaux, as well as many artefacts from that period.



[author's image]  
The Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres



[author's image]

People gathering inside the Menin Gate for The Last Post

On the coach journey home I started thinking about the possibility of **returning to the area under my own steam and perhaps follow father's tour route.**



## **My tour of discovery**

Now I had not got a clue how to go about organising a trip to the continent, I had been on a number of coach trips but had neither travelled nor driven abroad under my own steam. So to start with I made contact with the French and Belgium Tourist Offices in London (thankfully they spoke English as that is all I know) and asked for accommodation brochures, for it seemed logical to me to start with accommodation, and then arrange a tour around that fixed point. Studying the map I decided that by staying four nights at Poperinge in Belgium, and three nights at **Bapaume in France, father's tour route could be covered in a series of day trips**, but how to book the hotels and ferries? The respective Tourist Offices did not offer a booking service so off to the travel agents I went. The local shop tried to be helpful but they could only assist if the hotels that I had chosen were used by one of the major travel firms, with which they dealt – no luck there, so on to the National agencies, but they were even less interested as it appears they only deal with package tours.

**The only option seemed to be a "do it yourself" job. One of the hotels** had its own web site, so I sent an E-mail in English, and to my surprise and relief a reply came back in English, success for step one! Now for the second hotel in France, this would have to be a phone call, so fingers **crossed I dialled, and responding to my opening greeting of "Good morning" I was greatly relieved by the response in English, and the second hotel was booked.** Now for the ferry, chose a company, find the phone number, answer the questions, day and time out and back, what vehicle and the like and that was booked as well. Next travel insurance, car insurance for the continent, continental breakdown cover, and of course money. Now what have I forgotten?

I then set about planning an itinerary for each day of my trip, and **tried to pinpoint father's photos. It was my intention to repeat as many as possible to produce a series of "Then and now" pictures. A visit to the Ostend website provided a map of the town centre showing the Kursall, (One of the photos was titled "Kursall Ostend") so that was pinpointed.** A picture titled Battlefield at Nieuport was more difficult; it showed a flat open landscape with one twisted tree trunk standing on a bend in a river. Nieuwpoort was located near the coast and just west of Ostend, there was a canal marked on the map, flanked by a secondary road, and at one point they both made a sharp bend, could this be the point for the picture, it was certainly on the route! Not all of the pictures could be identified in this way, some would need to be located as I travelled through the area, **for instance "Near Dixmude" showed of a pillbox by the roadside. That** could be before or after the town; my Michelin map was showing cemeteries and monuments but not pillboxes.

So in May 2004 I set off for Dover and the ferry to Calais with my wife beside me as navigator. A card propped up on the dashboard had a large arrow pointing to the right, and a speed comparison chart showing the MPH equivalents to speed limits that appeared to be most frequently used on the continent. Not knowing what to expect I arrived early at the port,

and was ushered straight through to the ferry controller, who promptly sent me forward to board an earlier ferry than had been booked. So far so good, I seem to have done all the right things up to now. I was very apprehensive on leaving the ferry, but I just followed the car in front for the first few miles, with my wife anxiously studying, and getting used to the new style of road signs. For simplicity I had planned to stick to the main roads for my first days drive on the Continent. The traffic thinned as we made our way along the A16 towards Dunkerque, and the right turn onto the A25 for Steenvoord was achieved without incident. Our first stop was made at a motorway service area near St. Laurent, which was a bit like a Little Chef. We assessed our progress and found that we had plenty of time in hand to reach our hotel in Poperinge. By following the signs to **"Le centre-ville"** we arrived in the market square without difficulty, parked, and there was our hotel, but our hearts sank as the building looked dead. There were no lights on, tables and chairs were stacked up against the front windows, and all the doors were shut tight. The closer we got, the greater our concern, it was definitely closed! However there was a notice on the door bearing my name and written in English, requesting that we go to another hotel nearby to collect our key. By now it was a very nervous Peter that approached the reception desk in the second hotel. Using my best proper English I explained my needs, and a key was produced. The receptionist then phoned the proprietor of our chosen hotel to report our arrival, and escorted us back along the road to open our hotel for us. At this point our host arrived and showed us to our room, explaining that he closed the restaurant all day on Mondays, but guests were always welcome. The room was very comfortable, and the following day we were pleased to discover that there was even an English version of the menu, we felt very comfortable throughout our four day stay in Belgium.



[author's image]



The Grote Markt, Poperinge.



Our Hotel, now open.  
[author's image]



[author's image]  
Market day, Poperinge.  
From our hotel window.

For our first full day in Belgium I had planned to go direct to Ostend, where father's tour started, and trace his route back to Poperinge. I was hoping to identify four of his photos that day.

*Holland 1927.**Knecht's Island 1927.*

[author's images]



*near Dismude 1927.*



*Beathurst at Newport 1927.*

The journey to Ostend was uneventful, and from the map I had worked out that we could go straight in on the main road and there would be a car park on our right near the sea front. However there were road works and we were diverted to the right, oh horror, where now! We came to a crossroads and logic said turn left and we should be running parallel to our original route, car park signs appeared, that will do, lets park.

Leaving the car park and armed with a town plan, we managed to locate ourselves fairly near to the town centre. The town was a very clean and open place, with a definite buzz, from our car park we had to cross a bridge over a marina which gave a very favourable impression, before we reached the shopping centre. A café was located and our first purchase, a coffee, was successfully completed. Armed with the map again we made our way through the shops to the promenade, and the spot that was marked Casino/Kursaal. On arrival I was a little disappointed to find a very modern building bearing none of the features in the photo of 1927, but it was obviously in the same location by the curve of the seafront. Moving around the building to photograph it from the same direction as father I was dismayed to find scaffolding and awnings obscuring the view, so I had to do the best I could from another standpoint. The whole of the morning was spent exploring Ostend and looking out for the photo titled Holland, without any success. I was at one point very fascinated watching the Belgium system for delivering furniture to a block of flats. At home each item would have been laboriously navigated up the stairs, not here,

they had a vehicle mounted elevator and the furniture was simply whisked up to the balcony and in the window.



[author's image]  
 The Marina Ostend The Kursaal Ostend



[author's image]  
 Furniture delivery, Belgium style.

After lunch we left Ostend heading west along the coast to find the next photo at Nieuwpoort. I hoped that I had located the spot as there was only one bend in the canal near Nieuwpoort. The canal was reached and it had, very conveniently a secondary road running alongside. Looking north across the canal by the side of some farm buildings there was a cluster of block houses and pillboxes, not what I was looking for, but interesting just the same. A little further along both the road and the canal took a sharp bend, most probably the spot that I was seeking. A



Marina now occupied the left bank where the skeleton tree once stood, but I had no doubt that this was the right place.



Nieuwpoort battlefield today  
 [author's images]



Fortifications north of the canal

We left Nieuwpoort and continued west to reach the outskirts of Veurne, it was mid afternoon by now and the children were leaving school. They were riding along a cycle path parallel to the road, and being escorted by three motor cycle police, blue lights flashing, and when necessary they stopped the traffic to allow the convoy of cyclists to cross the road. It was at this point that we deviated from the planned route, not so much intentionally, more the effects of the heavy traffic combined with a nervous driver and unsure navigator. However leaving the town behind we made some directional corrections and rejoined the intended route for Diksmuide where I hoped to see a pillbox. Marked on the map just before **we reached Diksmuide was the symbol for a ruin and the phrase "Boyau de la Mort"**. Thinking that this might be of interest we headed for the spot. There we found the remnants of a church, the surviving section now a memorial to Belgium soldiers, whilst part of the remainder had been incorporated into a pillbox. Just down the road there was a museum, and a substantial section of preserved German trenches. Here I enquired if they could identify my picture, but they were not able to help. Passing through Diksmuide we continued our journey around the lanes heading for Ypres and Poperinge. A mile or so outside of Diksmuide I spied a pillbox to my right, we had just passed a narrow side turning that was heading for the pillbox, so I stopped with the idea off turning back, as we were travelling along a fairly wide and straight road. It did not occur to me that I would be an obstruction to traffic, for the road ahead was straight for the next half mile or so, and plenty wide enough for cars to pass. Having decided that it was probably my pillbox I glanced in my mirror and was surprised to see two cars behind, patiently waiting for me to move, so I drove on promising a return visit sometime in the future.





[author's image]

The remains of the church at Kaaskerke, near Diksmuide, incorporating a pillbox.  
 Now a memorial to Belgium Soldiers.

It has taken a second visit to Belgium, and the held of local knowledge **to identify the photo titled "Holland"**. It has turned out to be on the northern outskirts of Ypres at the southern end of Oostkaal.



[author's images]

**The pillbox titled "near Dixmude" is still to be found, but I am told that the large majority of the military strong points have now been removed, so it may no longer exist.**

Day three of our travels started with a visit to Lijssenthoek Cemetery. The sun was shining and the walls were draped with wisteria when we arrived. Inside gardeners were at work, but everywhere was so tidy I wondered what there was to do! It was here that I hoped to find the grave of T.H.Gawen, father's cousin, I had discovered details of its location when

visiting the Imperial War Museum. One of the gardeners was very helpful, on being shown the references for the grave he took us back to the entrance where he produced a plan of the cemetery and quickly pinpointed the spot.



[author's images]

The approach to and the main entrance for Lijssenthoek Cemetery.



The grave of T.H. Gawen, in Lijssenthoek Cemetery.  
In 1927 and 2004 [author's images]



[author's images]

Two views of Lijssenthoek Cemetery taken from about the same spot  
 But 78 years apart.

After spending some time in the cemetery, we said our goodbyes to the gardeners and continued our journey, first south and then east passing through Riningeist, Kemmel, and Wijtschate to arrive at Hill 60. The hilltop has remained undisturbed since 1918 and is pock marked with the remains of shell holes and trenches which are gradually filling with silt. The visitor can roam freely around the site, inspect the surviving pillbox and imagine the conditions under shellfire all those years ago. There was a small museum across the road, but it was not open when we were there.





[author's images]



A general view of Hill 60 and the memorial plaque.

Running close by Hill 60 there is a railway line to Ypres, which is about 4 Km away. Beside the bridge over the line there is another plaque referring to an incident in WW2 involving members of the Resistance fighters who lost their lives beside the line. In the picture below taken from Hill 60 the spires of Ypres can just be seen on the horizon. The intervening land being very flat it is easy to understand the importance of any high ground to an army wishing to dominate and control the surrounding area.



[author's image] Ypres from Hill 60.

Leaving Hill 60 behind we headed north east through the lanes to Passendale, another hilltop, this time with a small town that was totally destroyed in the fighting. We were expecting to get a belated snack lunch here in a small restraint that we had frequented a few years earlier when on a coach trip. Unfortunately for us the restaurant had closed down and the remaining Café was only serving cooked meals, so we bought sandwiches from a very nice patisserie opposite and ate them in the car. From Passendale we continued along the route to St. Juliaan where the Canadian Memorial, The Brooding Soldier stands, and then on to Ypres.



[author's images] 1927 & 2004



The Brooding Soldier, A Canadian Memorial near St. Juliaan.

Ypres is a very busy town which happily combines the requirements of the local population with that of a thriving tourist industry focused around the First World War. The town itself has a large paved market square as its hub, which is fringed with very elegant buildings, including the massive Cloth Hall, which was almost entirely rebuilt after 1918. The main shopping streets, which were thronged with people when we visited, radiate from this central square.



[author's image]  
 A corner of the market square Ypres.

The main reasons for this visit to Ypres was to try and repeat the photos that father had taken, it was quite an emotional feeling when lining up the various landmarks to recreate his pictures, thinking that father must have stood on the exact same spot back in 1927.



1927 & 2004 The Cloth Hall with the Cathedral behind. [author's images]



The Menin Gate under construction in 1927 and the finished memorial. [author's images]



From Ypres we made our way along the main road back to Poperinge for another night in our hotel.

Day four was to take us due south through Armentieres and on to Lens, most of the way we would be running along or very close to the battlefield. The first stop of the day was at the small village of Wijtschote. The village was built around its green at a crossroads on a ridge, just north of Mesen. We were by now becoming a bit more confident in entering cafes etc; and it was in this village that we bought our first postage stamps!



The village of Wijtschate [author's image]

Continuing through the village and along the ridge we soon arrived at Mesen, the site of another of the photos that I was seeking. It was immediately clear that this was a village with one main street, and that street was the location of the photo, so we parked up and had a walk.

**Father's photo was showing a cobbled street with a row of houses on the left, two buildings on the right and then ruins into the distance.** One building stood out from the rest as it jutted out into the road in the mid distance. Studying our surroundings we were amazed to see what appeared to be the same building there in front of us. Wondering down the street we saw that it was now a Café, and that the proprietor was outside cleaning windows. Hesitantly I approached the gentleman and with gestures indicated the building that I thought was his, unfortunately neither of us could speak the others language, but he was obviously interested for he first called his wife, and then two older men that were sitting nearby. They all spent several minutes first looking at the photo, and then pointing to buildings nearby. There was sufficient interest that **when we arrived home I sent a copy of the original photo to "The Café, Mesen", I have heard no more, but I hope that it arrived.**





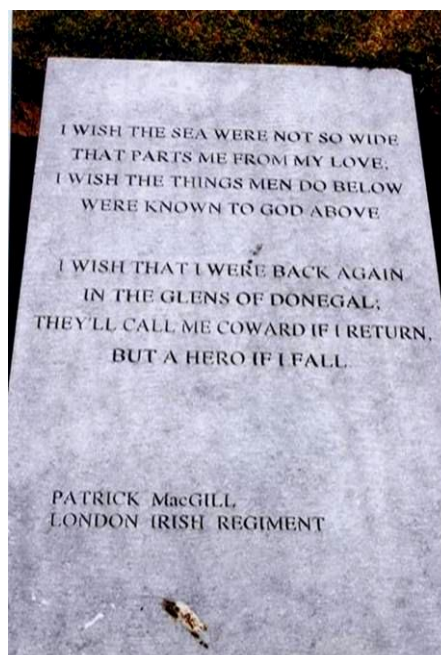
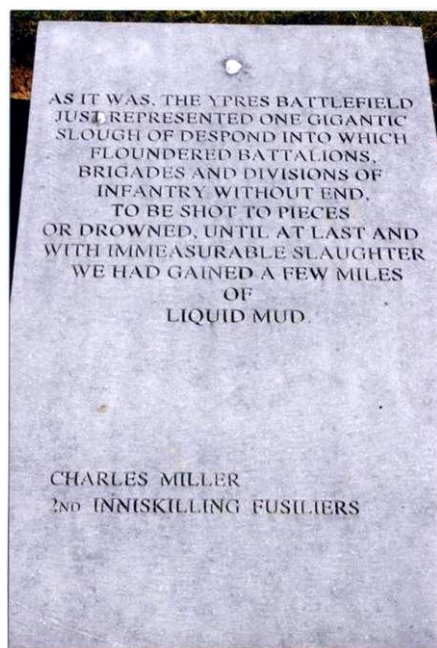
The main street of Mesen [author's image]

Continuing south we left the village and as we cleared the houses the ground dropped away gently in front of us, but to my surprise on the right there was a tall thin tower that immediately made me think of Ireland and a holiday of a few years previous. Conveniently there was a lay by to hand which I shot into, again we got out of the car, and went exploring. It would appear that during the First World War soldiers from both north and south of the Irish border fought alongside each other, and the commonwealth troops against a common enemy.



The Irish Peace Tower Mesen. [author's images]

The path from the gate to the tower was flanked by a series of plaques, two of which I show below.



[author's images]

This was a very peaceful place to wonder around, both for the tranquillity and the extended views, again one could appreciate how a comparatively small hill dominated the surrounding land.



Another view of the Peace Park with Mesen behind. A pill box is just visible left of centre, in the middle distance. [author's images]



Today the 6<sup>th</sup> November 2005, the above picture was published in our Sunday newspaper. I think that it is a perfect illustration of the sentiments expressed in one of the plaques in the Peace Park. It has been calculated that every square yard of the battlefield had been struck by six high explosive shells, no wonder the low lying ground became so treacherous.

Continuing our journey south we next came to Ploegsteert, and the location of another photo.



Ploegsteert then and now. [author's images]



From Ploegsteert we continued through Le Bizet, to enter France and Armentieres. Armentieres was a large and very busy town, we had no reason to stop here, but it proved to be one of those places that once you were in, it was very difficult to get out again. It was more luck, than our navigational skills that brought us to the railway station, and the minor road that I wanted to take as we headed for Lens.

Approaching Neuve-Chapelle we pulled off the road to eat our sandwiches and to my surprise there was laying in the corner of the field a corkscrew style support for barbed wire, and then a little further away there were two more, this time supporting a barbed wire fence.



[author's images]

Passing the Indian Memorial at Neuve-Chapelle we continued for Lens, where I hoped to visit Hill 70 on the northern outskirts of the town. As I interpreted the map we should pass the airport, turn left, and Hill 70 should be on our right. No such luck, after the right turn we were in a busy out of town shopping area, there was high ground to our right as I had expected, but there was no right turn, nor a signpost to Hill 70. My planned route was to continue ahead along this road and then turn north and return to Poperinge, reluctantly I abandoned my quest for Hill 70, as further investigation would take us nearer to the town centre and onto a



network of main roads, which was not a good idea not knowing where you were going and wanting to travel slowly to locate an unidentified turning that may not even exist!

I do not like just retracing my steps when I am on an out and back journey, so I had planned an alternative route home. This went well until we reached the village of Loker, about eight kilometres from our destination at Poperinge. Here the road ahead was closed for repair so we parked up, checked the map, found a detour, and off we went on our way. Our new route took us to the village of Rodeberg which is on top of a ridge, and straddles the French/Belgium border. As we approached the top of the ridge we were confronted by two large block houses, one of which was unique in my experience as it was surmounted by a steel tank like turret. From here the Germans would have had unrestricted views back into France. Rodeberg was little more than a main street lined with gift shops, cafes and amusement arcades. The whole place seemed to be geared up for coach parties, and day trippers. It all seemed to be very incongruous, as we had seen nothing but agricultural land since leaving Lens.



One of the block houses at Rodeberg View north east from Rodeberg [author's images]

Day five of our travels was to be a leisurely drive south to Bapaume in France. Our trip started by retracing our steps back to Rodeberg for coffee and another look around. From here we travelled west for about 12 kilometres before turning south, through Lillers, and St. Pol then turning south east through the lanes to Bapaume. Being that bit further west we did not pass by any cemeteries or other monuments to war after we left Rodeberg. Travelling around the area under our own steam it was much more apparent just how narrow a strip of land was involved in the conflict, compared with the impression I had obtained from my previous coach

tour. During our trip south we crossed the **Canal d'Aire near the village of Busnes**, I was very impressed with the width of the canal, having seen it marked on the map I was expecting something like our inland waterways, just wide enough to take a long boat, how wrong I was, it looked plenty wide enough to take an ocean going vessel.



The Canal d'Aire, near Busnes. [author's image]

Arriving in Bapaume we had little difficulty in locating Hotel La Paix where we had booked three nights dinner bed and breakfast. I was not sure how I was supposed to interpret my greeting from the gentleman at **the reception desk, although it was in good English, "I've been waiting for you" did not seem** to be very welcoming. We were shown to our room and advised the time of dinner, and that was the last of the English speaking staff that we encountered for the remainder of our stay. In the dining room we were shown to a table on the far side of an empty room, a few minutes later we were joined by another couple who were seated on the opposite side. It was immediately apparent that they were also English and like ourselves far from fluent in French. The waitress presented us with the menu, all written in French, and pointing to the starter she managed the word fish, and for the main course chicken, both of which we ordered. The started turned out to be two sugar lump size pieces of salmon with a little garnish, and the main course, if nothing else was a bit of a mystery. In the centre of the plate there was a rissole like item, but it was a grey-green colour, several slices of unidentified meat, definitely not chicken, and a sparse selection of vegetables. The grey-green substance was I think some form of potato, and with hindsight I suspect that the meat may have been ostrich! Though I have never knowingly eaten it. The other couple were also having similar problems with the menu and I think that they made the same choice as us. When it came to the sweet we played it safe and chose ice cream, we did not think that we could go far wrong with that. As this meal had not been to our palate we decided that at breakfast next morning we would say that we did not want another evening meal, however we were beaten to the post as the waitress **managed to convey to us "No restaurant to-night", no explanation was** given but that suited us!

We have now reached day six of our adventure, and I am hoping to find the 9<sup>th</sup> **Division Memorial, Dad's photo only gave the location as**

**"Douai Arras Road" two towns about 22 kilometres apart, but there was a monument marked on the map near Fampoux, which was one of the places on the route, and then with a bit of luck I intended to go on to Vimy Ridge.**

So from Bapaume we headed north through the lanes until we reached the Douai, Arras road which is now a dual carriageway, and headed for Arras as the map shows the monument as being on the right of the carriageway when travelling in that direction. My map proved to be inaccurate, the memorial is in fact on the central reservation between the two carriageways, and is only accessible from the fast lane when heading east! [Note; This memorial has now been moved to the south of the main road, and is now accessed from the D37 via Athies.]



The 9<sup>th</sup> Division Memorial on the N50 6 kilometres east of Arras. [author's images]



Details on the memorial. [author's images]



The stones flanking the memorial  
Commemorate Units within the Division.  
Memorial.



A line of trenches is still clearly visible  
By the





Fathers Unit of the Royal Engineers

The South Africans, whose badge I have found amongst Fathers treasures.

Having achieved the first objective of the day we continued eastwards along the N50 heading for the first exit at Gavrelle. As we left the main road to enter Gavrelle I brought the car to a quick stop for on my left there was the ruined walls of a house, in the centre of which there was a large anchor! Ruined houses and anchors far from the sea, what is that all about? My curiosity got the better of me again, so out I got to have a look around. It transpires that it was a Royal Naval Division Memorial, and displayed plaques to various naval units.



[author's images] The Royal Naval Division Memorial at Gavrelle.

From Gavrelle we made our way through the lanes (you will have noticed that I prefer the byways to the highways whenever possible, the highways are for going places in a hurry) to Vimy about six kilometres away. Interesting though Vimy might be, my objective was Vimy Ridge and the Canadian National Memorial, so we made our way uphill to the main road, where signposts pointed us in the right direction. The road to the memorial wound its way through woods, the ground under the trees is all lumps and dips and the road is flanked by a series on red notices, all **carrying the message "DANGER no entry, undetonated explosives"**. Finding the parking area, we left the car and had a walk along the surfaced paths, first to the Canadian National Memorial, which was undergoing maintenance at the time of our visit, and then followed the path through the trench lines and craters of this part of the battlefield. This area has been left for nature to take its course, and the ground is very gradually levelling off, though sheep are allowed to roam and do their job as lawnmowers.



[author's images] Part of the woods on Vimy Ridge      The Canadian National Memorial



Trench lines and craters on Vimy Ridge.  
 Note the commanding view to the horizon.

Vista to the Canadian Memorial across  
 Vimy Ridge [author's images]

Returning to the car we retraced our steps through the wood to the junction where I had spotted a sign "Visitors Centre and Preserved Trenches". Another stop, and this time there was a large area of both Allied and German trenches preserved for posterity, together with a number of large depressions that were once mine craters. At one point the opposing trenches are so close the soldiers could almost stretch out there arms and shake hands with each other. Everything at this site is so clean and orderly it belies the conditions that really existed.

I have been reading a book;

True World War One Stories.  
 Gripping eyewitness accounts  
 From the days of conflict and pain

Sixty personal narratives  
 Published by Robinsons, London.  
 ISBNI-84119-095-0

This book recounts the stories told by individual soldiers of their experiences during the war. In almost every case the incident recorded covers a very short period of time, usually no more than two or three days. These stories give a much more vivid, and I would think authentic account of the conditions, stress, and fear that the individual soldier had to endure, than you get in the traditional history books. For instance it is only in these pages that I have found reference to units spraying No-mans Land with disinfectant to reduce the stench and disease from decaying bodies! Without this sort of background knowledge it is almost impossible to envisage the scene between 1914 and 1918, when you look upon the tranquil landscape to-day.

Leaving Vimy behind we made our way through Givenchy and skirting the southern edge of Lens we joined the D937 south for Arras and Bapaume. Soon after joining the D937 we came to the French National Military Cemetery, The Notre Dame de Lorette.



The Notre Dame de Lorette.



Stele marking the site of the Original Church. [author's

images]

The cemetery contains 20,000 individual graves, plus the bones of 22,970 unknown soldiers buried in the base of the Lantern Tower. The original church on this hilltop site was destroyed in fighting during the first year of conflict, in WW1. The site of which is marked with a Stele **behind the present building. Every day members of the "Association of Notre Dame de Lorette Monument" patrol and maintain the cemetery. To me these people felt a bit menacing with their black jackets and berets, plus tricolour armbands. They stood around in little groups of three or four, bringing thoughts of the French Resistance to my mind, however**



they were very friendly inviting us to enter the Chapel and inspect the monuments.

From here we made our way back to Bapaume, had a burger, from the burger bar in the car park next to our hotel (much more to my palate) and retired to bed. As we passed through the Hotel it was very obvious that the restaurant had been functioning that evening, but for some reason we were not welcome.

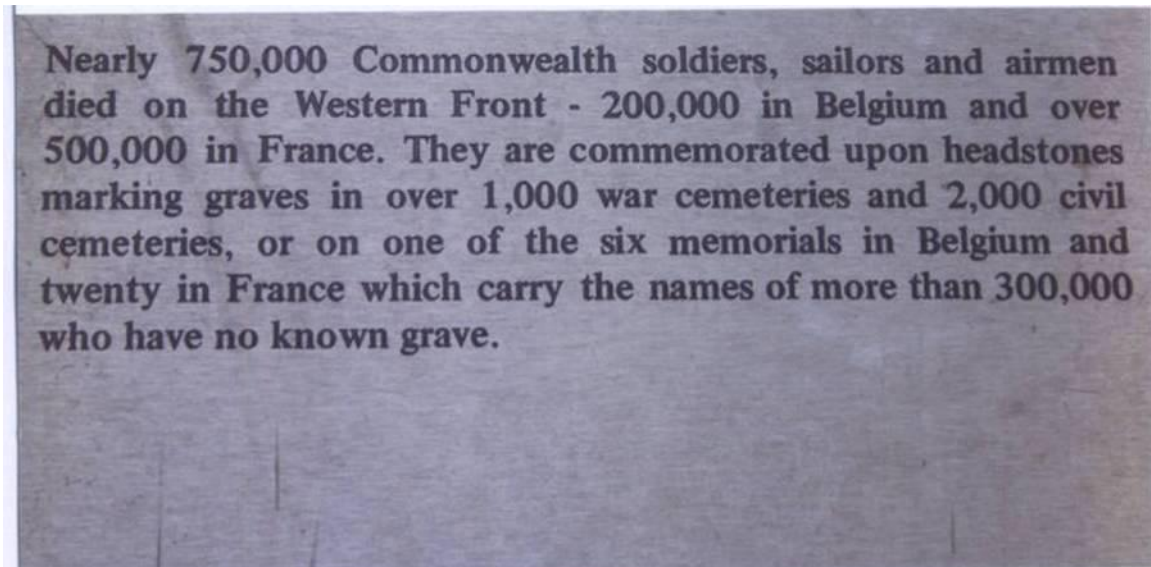
Day seven, entering the restaurant for breakfast, all the tables bar one are littered with dirty glasses, empty bottles, and a general assortment of discarded crockery. We are served by an older lady, who does at least smile; but the teapot arrives without a lid, the cups were minus saucers, and the plates were minus knives, we were really being a nuisance! Again we were made to understand that there would be no service in the restaurant that evening, so our first job of the day was to scout around Bapaume for an alternative eating place.

We then left Bapaume heading west along the banks of the river Ancre, passing through Beaucourt, Hamel and Albert, to arrive at Dernancourt Cemetery. We had already passed five war cemeteries by the roadside that morning in our 20 kilometre journey, and passed the signposts for others. Every cemetery is clearly indicated, and every board a reminder of the horror and sacrifice of war.



Signs erected by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, these illustrated are at Montauban-de-Picardie and Grevillers. [author's images]

Somewhere on my travels I spotted the plaque illustrated below, for me this sums up the pervading atmosphere of the area in which we are travelling.



[author's image]

I did not, and I still do not know why father made a point of visiting this cemetery, at Dernancourt, but he made his way here and then retraced his steps for about a mile before continuing on his way.



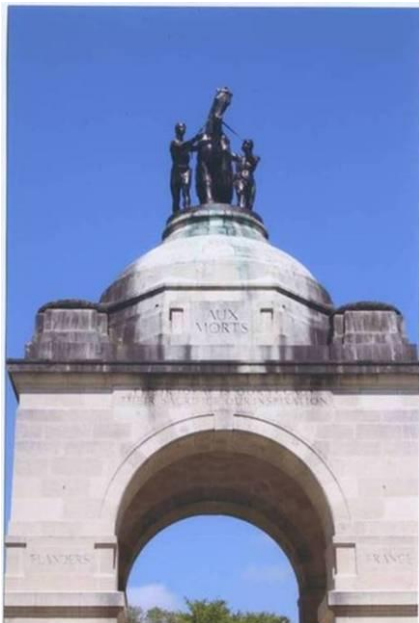
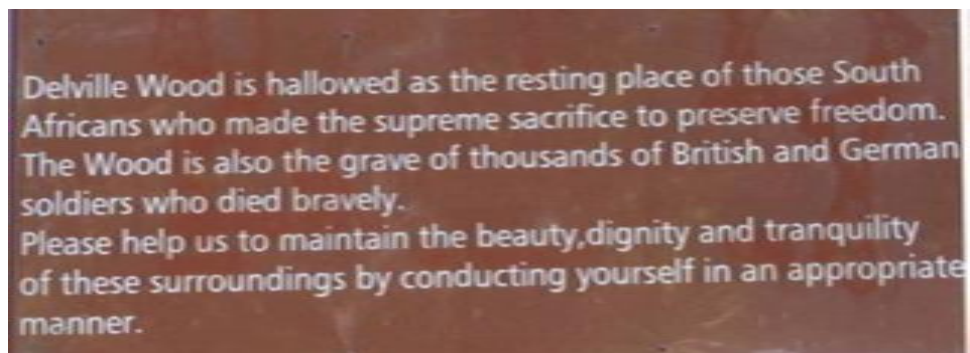
Two views of Dernancourt Cemetery [author's images]

I had a curious feeling as I entered this particular cemetery, I could almost hear the **Commanding Officer calling the parade to "Attention", and reporting "We have visitors"**. There was a feeling of welcome; the sun was shining, the birds singing, and undisturbed dew on the grass. We spent some time here, it was not at all depressing, in the way most cemeteries are.

Like father we retraced our steps and continued east through Montauban-de-Picardie to Longueval and Delville Wood.



The South African Memorial, Delville Wood, as seen in 1927 and to-day. [author's images]



Detail of figures on top of the  
Main structure  
images]

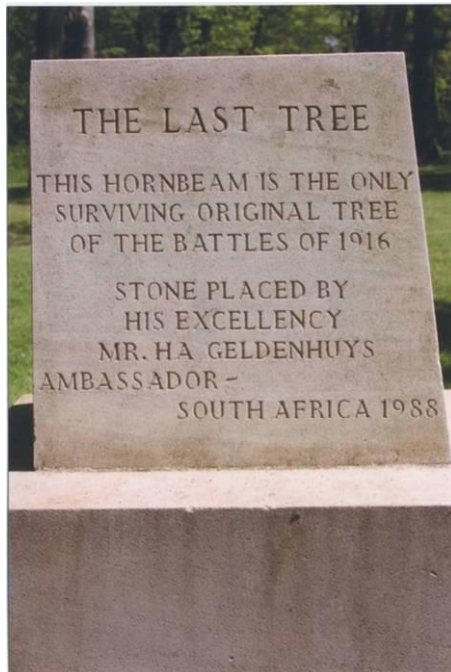


A recent addition behind the original  
memorial. [author's

There is a large area of wood to be explored here, with a new generation of trees growing around the trench lines and shell holes. If you look carefully at the 1927 picture, two tree trunks can just be seen standing on the extreme right of the memorial. To-day there is only one



of the original trees surviving, a hornbeam which can be found in a clearing to the rear of the new building. For convenience of identification during the conflict each trench line was given its own name. To-day for safety reasons and ease of management some of the central lines have been levelled to make wide rides through the woods, but it is these rides that have now been given permanent bollards bearing the street names given to them by the troops.

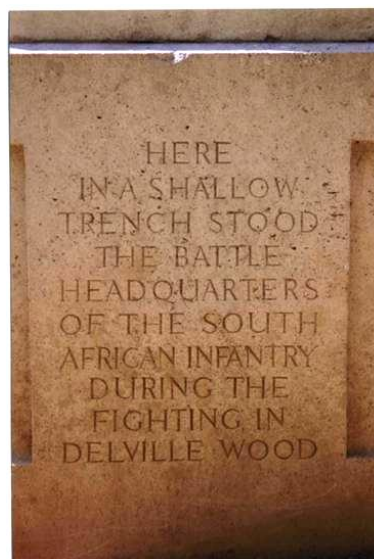






Trench lines in Delville Wood. [author's images]

It had been a dry spring in 2004, but when we visited in May of that year there were areas of the wood that were decidedly squelchy underfoot and even these shallow trenches had water laying in them. Elsewhere in the wood there was a stone marking the site of the South African headquarters.



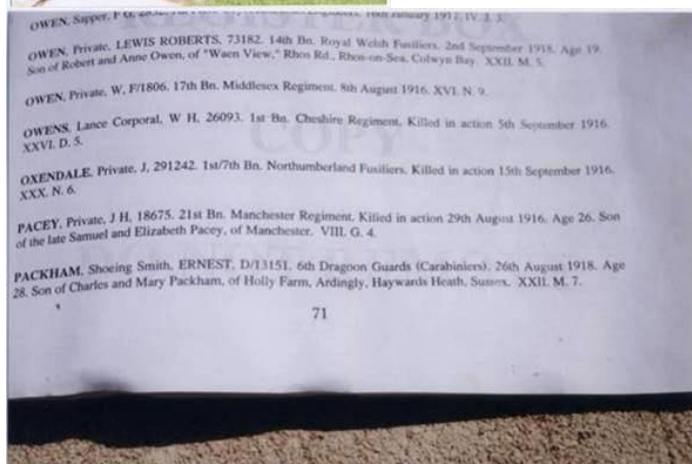
Names for trench lines in Delville Wood [author's images]



The view from the end of Princes Street, Delville Wood. [author's image]

From the above photo it can be seen that the wood offered cover and a commanding field of fire over the agricultural land on all sides.

As previously mentioned each cemetery has its own record book that is kept in a wall safe, and is available for all to see. The book contains an alphabetical list of all the servicemen that are buried within that cemetery, a few scant details to identify that man, and a reference to the location of the grave. Whilst waiting for me, my wife was having a casual look through the book at the adjacent cemetery, which fell open at the beginning of the Ps. The second entry was for Ernest Packham, **Holly Farm, Ardingly, Haywards Heath, Sussex. Now one of my wife's close** friends was a Packham, and was at the time living close to Ardingly, could this be a relation? It turned out to be a different branch of the family, but it just goes to show that everybody at home was affected by the war.



The wall safe containing the record book for the cemetery at Delville Wood  
 [author's images]

By now it was afternoon and time to press on; we were heading south east to Peronne, passing through Clery sur Somme on the way, where I **was hoping to locate another of father's photos, though there was little detail to identify the exact spot.** We paused in the village of Maurepas and were attracted by the colourful and elaborate displays in the village cemetery, entering the hollowed ground we were surprised to see a row of war graves all down one side.





Maurepas village cemetery. [author's image]

I did all the driving whilst we were on the continent, relying on my navigator for instructions to turn left or right etc; I did not always know precisely where I was. This occurred when we came to a crossroads, and I spotted a memorial in front of us. I stopped to take a photograph and then continued on our way to arrive at Clery sur Somme. Here, I assumed **that the open flat ground in father's photo would be somewhere in the** river valley, so we cruised around all the local roads near the river, without success. However I did achieve some nice photos of the river Somme.



The river Somme at Clery sur Somme. [author's image]

It was a month or more after we arrived home when I was identifying and putting my pictures in order, and using the map to do so, that I realised the photo at the crossroads, was in fact taken from almost the **same position as fathers titled "Clery sur Somme"**



1927



Clery sur Somme.

2005 [author's images]



This picture taken in 2007 more accurately replicates the original of 1927

It is taken at the junction of the D64 with the D20 just south of Ginchy.

Leaving Clery behind we continued on our journey to Peronne. It was market day when we arrived, the town centre was very busy, but a place was found to park, and the rest I will leave to your imagination! Ladies, shops, markets, clothes, need I say more! Anyway, from Peronne we set off north east for Cambrai, running parallel to the Canal du Nord for some ten kilometres or so. Near the village of Moisiains I spotted a lock with a convenient parking place, there had been a fair bit of traffic on the canal and I thought that I would like to have a look. We watched the barges passing through the lock, and were fascinated to see that each vessel carried a car, which appeared to be for personal transport wherever the barges moored up. I could not help admiring the skill of the captain of the largest vessel to pass through the lock whilst we were watching, for without any assistance he manoeuvred the craft from its mooring spot into mid stream and then into the lock with barely an inch to spare on either side.





Views of the Canal du Nord near Moislains. [author's images]

Continuing on our way we passed through Etricourt, Equancourt, and Ribecourt to reach Cambrai. Cambrai appears to have been the end of **father's nostalgic tour**, for from here he took a direct route to Arras, Bethune, St. Omer, and on to Calais. The chances are that on arrival in Dover, he continued on to his home in Brighton without any further stops. Our adventures were however not quite over, we returned to Bapaume and the restaurant that we had located earlier in the day. Here we were made most welcome, had a lovely meal and chatting with the proprietor gathered that he often had customers seeking an alternative to the Hotel La Paix. Returning to the hotel we had another shock, the place was in complete darkness and the front door was locked. What now, we only had our room key, but as luck would have it our room key also fitted the main door. We let ourselves in and had a look around by the light coming in from the street, the dining room tables had been re-arranged and were again littered with the remains of another party. We wandered behind the bar and into the kitchen where there was one light burning, but as far as we could tell we were the only people in the hotel. We felt our way up the stairs, went into our room and locked the door behind us. Later in the evening we heard two other room doors shut, we then relaxed a little, for **perhaps we weren't on our own after all! Next morning we were about** to leave our room in search of breakfast when there was a knock on the door, breakfast arrived on a tray, we were obviously not wanted downstairs, but the waitress could only gesture. In due course we paid our bill and left without another word being spoken in English.

This was to be our last day in France as we were taking a direct route back to Calais. I did however want to break our journey in Bethune to try and re-**create father's last picture**. **Entering the town we found a parking** space and set off for the centre, it was very busy as it was again market day. Arriving at the market square I was a little disappointed to see that the centre of the square was cordoned off for re-surfacing, but it did allow me to line up the buildings and produce an almost exact replica of the original photo, the only real difference being a large church erected in what was originally a space. Here again I felt that I was standing in the exact spot that father stood all those years ago. We had a look around the town centre, found a nice café for coffee, and continued on our way.





Bethune market square. [author's images]

Leaving Bethune we joined the French motorway system, and had our first encounter with a toll road, which after our first hesitation at the ticket booth, seemed to work smoothly. There was hardly any traffic about, at one time there was nothing in view either front or rear. We paid our dues at the toll booth, arrived safely at Calais, passed through all the customs both here and at Dover and we were home!

I felt very pleased with myself; I had not encountered any real problem driving on the continent. We had managed to find our way **around and located most of father's pictures. I had not really understood** the scale or terrain of the area of conflict in World War One until I toured the area under my own steam. I am now looking forward to returning and endeavouring to find the pictures that we missed this year.

## **Still searching**

At this time I still do not know my fathers movements during the war. I wrote to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to see if they could help. I thought that if they could locate graves of soldiers belonging the 499<sup>th</sup> Home Counties Field Company, Royal Engineers, then I might safely assume that the Company was serving in that area. The Commission very kindly responded, but all the graves located were in England! As shown below.

### **Casualty Report - 499th Field Coy. Royal Engineers**

#### **BEXHILL CEMETERY - Sussex - United Kingdom**

**PARSONS**, Driver, GEORGE, 534058. 499th Reserve Field Coy. Royal Engineers. 24th September 1917. Age 28. Husband of Ellen Kate Parsons, of Oakville, Ontario, Canada. E. F. P18.

#### **COLCHESTER CEMETERY - Essex - United Kingdom**

**COOK**, Sapper, N, 534613. 499th Field Coy. Royal Engineers. 20th January 1918. Age 44. Son of Mrs. Jane Cook; husband of Lillie F. Cook, of 160, Old London Rd., Ore, Hastings, Sussex. Born at Robertsbridge, Sussex. E. 12. 14.

#### **MAIDENHEAD CEMETERY - Berkshire - United Kingdom**

**HALL**, Driver, WILLIAM JOHN THOMAS, 534402. 499th Field Coy. Royal Engineers. 11th November 1917. Age 44. Son of Mrs. Ruth Hall; husband of the late A. E. Hall. Born at St. Leonards-on-Sea. D. G. 23.

Of these three soldiers, I was only able to find the papers for N. Cook, at the Public Records Office. These show that he had several periods in hospital with chest problems and finally died from bronchitis in Gillingham hospital, so no clues to the movements of the 499<sup>th</sup> Home Counties Field Company, Royal Engineers here.

### **Soldiers of the 499<sup>th</sup> Home Counties Field Company Royal Engineers.**

Whilst at Kew I used their computer to check the W.W.1. Campaign Medals List, by entering 499<sup>th</sup> Home Counties Field Company, Royal Engineers, the following names appeared, along with their rank and a reference number: -

Cowper Alick	Sergeant
WO372/5	
Taylor Ernest F	Sapper
WO372/19	
Precious Frederick	Sapper
WO372/16	
Morris James	Warrant officer class 2
WO372/14	
Jones J	Sapper
WO372/11	

Hughes Samuel E	
WO372/10	
Clouston John	Sapper
WO372/4	
Harvey Joseph E	Sapper
WO372/9	
Cashmore Joseph E	Sapper
WO372/4	
Gittings Walter E	Sapper
WO372/8	
Armstrong J	Sapper
WO372/1	

I also have a letter addressed to father from a Robert O Cochran, dated 18<sup>th</sup> May 1919. It details events that occurred in the two weeks that elapsed between father leaving his unit to be demobilised and Mr **Cochran's own return to England. In this letter there are references to:-**

Sergeant Bounds  
Sergeant Lords  
Tonny Herbert  
Bert Gray  
H Jackson  
Addisone  
Keene  
Fanne

Presumably all members of the 499<sup>th</sup> Royal Engineers.

**Here is a transcript of Mr. Cochran's letter to father.**

4. India Street,  
Partick  
Glasgow  
Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> May 1919

My Dear Pal,

Many thanks for PC. Which I received at the beginning of last week.

Yes, Jeff, I am having a right royal time of it just now, nothing to do and plenty of time to do it in. I hope you are having a good time also, but I expect you'll have started work by now.

I didn't leave the company until the 1st May, about a fortnight after you, and I can tell you "Jeff" it seemed to me to be months for it was very lonely after you boys left, for there were only Addison and H Jackson left, but at the same time we had quite a good night or two up at the "Fisherhous".

The week after you left they sent 9 drivers away, on demob, so they put the sappers on the picket lines, and I tell you, there was some grousing. Jackson had a row with Bounds and got chucked out of the mess, and then got a job to look after a couple of mules, "his long eared friends", he called them.

Bert Gray and myself were the only sappers that left on the lot, but there were five drivers and two Sergeants, Bounds and Lords with us. I **didn't go down the Rhine, as I expected, but the south of England men** went that way. I went by train to Dunkirk, and then to Dover, and then from Dover to Ripon, for that is now the dispersing camp for Scotland, all the ones in Scotland are closed. I was exactly a week in getting home after leaving the 63<sup>rd</sup>.

I haven't heard from Keene or Fenne yet, but I will drop then a line to night.

Well Jeff, how goes it now? Give us the wire when you are going to get married, for I guess it will be pretty near that now. When you have a minute to spare, you might write and let we know how things are down Brighton way. I believe "two forty" will be on leave just now at any rate he was sweating when I left. Tonny Herbert hadn't put in an appearance then perhaps he managed to work "it".

I don't think I have any more news at present, so I will close, hoping this finds you in the best of health, and spirits.

I remain,  
Yours aye  
Robert . Cochran.

(Continued on the next page)

P.S. By the way "Jeff", address my letters R. Cochran not Jack, for my fathers' and eldest brothers' name is Jack.

"Willon zie spatzingang mit mir to neaht acht uhr, Droystein"

"Cheerio"

R.O.C.

"Write Soon"

"Why not re-enlist"

"Wiring Parties AS Detailed"



Query?

I wonder what the "63<sup>rd</sup>" is, that is referred to in the letter. Was it the 63<sup>rd</sup> Battalion or Division, or something that the 499<sup>th</sup> Field Company, Royal Engineers was attached to??

See **Appendix 5.** for details of the Cochran Family.

### **Birmingham University**

Trawling through the internet looking for references to the 499<sup>th</sup> Home Counties Field Company Royal Engineers, I came across a reference to Birmingham University, where they have a department with special interest in the First World War. There was an E-mail address and a suggestion that they would welcome enquiries, so I sent an E-mail to Birmingham with the few details that I do have, and waited, not very hopefully, for a response!. Several weeks later I received a reply which I show below: -

Dear Peter

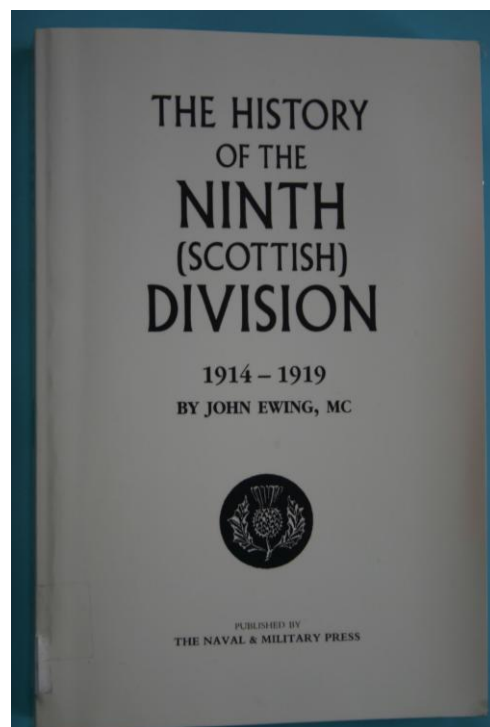
If your father served abroad he certainly did not do so in 499 Field Company, which was a British based reserve formation. The reference to 63rd logically suggest 63 Field Company RE. This unit was part of 9th (Scottish) Division, which served with the British Army of the Rhine in 1919. This tends to fit with your father's narrative. The Division also took part in the Advance in Flanders, which would fit 'Advance from Ypres, 28 9 18'. There is a pulished history of 9th (Scottish) Division, which you can find on the Centre's website by clicking on Books About the Great War, Formation Histories, Formation Histories British. You should also see if 63 Field Company has a War Diary, which it should have. War Diaries are explained on our webpage How do I Trace a Soldier?

John Bourne  
Director of the Centre for First World War Studies

This gave me an entirely different lead to follow; I have written again to the librarian at the Royal Engineers Museum, to see if they have any personal records for the 63<sup>rd</sup> Field Company Royal Engineers, and I have **also obtained a copy of "The History of the 9<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division"** from the library.

## **Details from The History of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division**

I was quite excited when I first saw the cover of this book for on the front there was a thistle emblem, which was an exact match for one of my **Father's badges**. Up to then I had thought that this was a keepsake that he had acquired from one of the Scottish soldiers that he had talked about. Then looking on the internet I came across a site referring to the uniform of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Field Company Royal Engineers, and this contained the line **"The 9<sup>th</sup> Division thistle emblem is on his left shoulder"**. For me this confirmed that Father had transferred to the 63<sup>rd</sup> Field Company Royal Engineers, and had become part of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division serving on the Western Front. I have not been able to establish when this transfer took place, but I suspect that it may have been in March or April 1917. (Until I know differently I am assuming this to be the case)



Father's badge and the book cover

I hope that I will not be causing any offence, but I intend to quote passages from this book, which refer to the Royal Engineers, to illustrate the likely places visited, and the likely events that father would have been involved with during his service in Europe. I can now tie in a number of the events recorded there with Fathers cycle tour of 1927. I will show extracts from the book in italics, and the relevant sections of the tour map which suggests to me that there is a connection between the two events.

<p>6 COMPOSITION OF THE NINTH DIVISION [August of the war. After selection the "First Hundred Thousand," the salt of their race, were sent to the various battalion depots, and then on to the training camps near Salisbury Plain.</p> <p>One of the first divisions formed from the New Armies was the Ninth (Scottish) Division, and its composition was as follows :—</p> <p>G.O.C.—Major-General C. J. Mackenzie, C.B. G.S.O.I.—Lieut.-Colonel C. H. de Rougemont, M.V.O. A.A. &amp; Q.M.G.—Colonel A. V. Payne.</p> <p><b>26TH (HIGHLAND) BRIGADE.</b> Brig.-General—H. R. Kelham, C.B. B.M.—Capt. H. W. B. Thorp.</p> <p>8th Bn. The Black Watch (Royal High-landers) . . . . . Commanded by Lieut.-Col. Lord Sempill. 7th Bn. Seaforth Highlanders (Ross-shire Buffs, The Duke of Albany's) } Lieut.-Col. W. T. Gaisford. 8th Bn. The Gordon Highlanders . . . . . Lieut.-Col. G. Staunton. 5th Bn. The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders . . . . . (Lieut.-Col. D. W. Cameron of Lochiel.</p> <p><b>27TH INFANTRY BRIGADE.</b> Brig.-General—W. Scott Moncrieff. B.M.—Capt. A. I. R. Glasford.</p> <p>11th Bn. The Royal Scots . . . . . Lieut.-Col. H. H. B. Dyson. 12th Bn. The Royal Scots . . . . . Lieut.-Col. G. G. Loch. 6th Bn. The Royal Scots Fusiliers . . . . . Lieut.-Col. H. H. Northey. 10th Bn. Princess Louise's (Argyll &amp; Sutherland Highlanders) . . . . . (Lieut.-Col. A. F. Mackenzie, M.V.O.</p> <p><b>28TH INFANTRY BRIGADE.</b> Brig.-General—S. W. Scrase-Dickins. B.M.—Captain C. J. B. Hay.</p> <p>6th Bn. The King's Own Scottish Borderers . . . . . (Lieut.-Col. H. D. N. Maclean, D.S.O. 9th Bn. The Scottish Rifles (Cameronians) . . . . . Lieut.-Col. A. C. Northey. 10th Bn. The Highland Light Infantry . . . . . (Lieut.-Col. J. C. Grahame, D.S.O. 11th Bn. The Highland Light Infantry . . . . . Lieut.-Col. H. C. Fergusson.</p>	<p>1914] COMPOSITION OF THE NINTH DIVISION 7</p> <p><b>ROYAL FIELD ARTILLERY.</b> C.R.A.—Brig.-General E. H. Armitage, C.B. B.M.—Captain K. P. Fergusson.</p> <p>50th Brigade, R.F.A. . . . . Commanded by Lieut.-Col. A. C. Bailward. 51st Brigade, R.F.A. . . . . Lieut.-Col. A. H. Carter. 52nd Brigade, R.F.A. . . . . Lieut.-Col. F. W. Boteler. 53rd Brigade, R.F.A. . . . . Lieut.-Col. C. N. Simpson.</p> <p>The first three brigades had four 18-pounder guns and the 53rd Brigade four 4.5 howitzers, and each brigade had a B.A.C.</p> <p><b>THE ROYAL ENGINEERS.</b> C.R.E.—Lieut.-Colonel H. A. Livingstone, C.M.G.</p> <p>63rd Field Company . . . . . Capt. C. Doucet. 64th Field Company . . . . . Capt. W. E. Francis. 90th Field Company . . . . . Major C. S. Montefiore.</p> <p><b>PIONEERS.</b> The 9th Bn. Seaforth Highlanders (Ross-shire Buffs, The Duke of Albany's)—Lieut.-Col. T. Fetherstonhaugh.</p> <p><b>THE ROYAL ARMY MEDICAL CORPS.</b> A.D.M.S.—Colonel C. Cree.</p> <p>27th Field Ambulance . . . . . Lieut.-Col. O. W. A. Elaner. 28th Field Ambulance . . . . . Lieut.-Col. W. E. Hardy. 29th Field Ambulance . . . . . Lieut.-Col. F. R. Buswell.</p> <p><b>ARMY SERVICE CORPS.<sup>1</sup></b> 9th Divisional Train—Major R. P. Crawley, M.V.O.</p> <p>9th Divisional Supply Column, Motor Transport . . . . . Major Dugmore. 104th Company . . . . . Major H. MacDougall. 105th Company . . . . . Capt. J. R. King. 106th Company . . . . . Capt. F. K. Norman. 107th Company . . . . . Capt. C. de M. Hutcheson.</p> <p><sup>1</sup> An A.S.C. Company was attached to each brigade: the 104th to the divisional troops, the 105th to the 26th, the 106th to the 27th, and the 107th to the 28th Brigade.</p> <p>The divisional train was responsible for arranging matters of supply between the Division and the Corps concerned. The task of the supply column was to work between the railhead and the divisional A.S.C. and it</p>
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Composition of the Ninth Division





Overall Map of Dad's Tour. From the coast, all the way south to Peronne.  
His route is shown by a black line.

The route has been constructed from a detailed list of all the places visited by Father in his tour of 1927.



## **11<sup>th</sup> April to 5<sup>th</sup> June 1917**

Ninth Division in action east of Arras. There are references to Athies and Fampoux, both places visited on the tour route.

*"Day was just breaking, wrote Colonel David Rorie, and the dawn was illuminated with the long line of bursting shells, to which the golden rain and coloured SOS rockets of the enemy lent a strangely picturesque variety of colour. The noise was terrific with the continuous whistling scream – like a furious gale of wind – of the thousands of heavy missiles going over us to the enemy's lines, and the thunderous drumming of their arrival. At 06.00 hours the barrage ceased and the men of the 51<sup>st</sup> Division crossed the Lille Road and over the first ridge". (From Britain at War)*

*"Success had been gained without a check and at very small cost, and the uniform excellence of the work performed by the several arms of the Division was one of the noticeable features of the battle" – "The Sappers, Pioneers, and RAMC toiled steadily and efficiently"*



*The Battle of Arras was, by previous standards, considered a success. Despite the unseasonal sleet, snow and severe cold the Canadian Corps captured the greater part of Vimy Ridge and British achievements to the south were equally impressive. An advance of over three and a half miles was achieved by the 9<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division. (From Britain at War)*



One of the few photographs of the actual moment of attack during the First World War, this image shows an officer of the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the Cameronians ( Scottish Rifles), part of the 9<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division, leading the way out of a sap during the fighting on the 11<sup>th</sup> April 1917.



Stretcher bearers bringing in a wounded man over muddy ground during the Arras offensive.

Note; -

The two photographs above appeared in the December 2012 issue of the magazine, Britain at War.

### **25<sup>th</sup> July to 30<sup>th</sup> August 1917**

Ninth Division in the line East of Bapume, near the Canal de Nord, a comparatively quiet sector.





### **20<sup>th</sup> September to 12<sup>th</sup> October 1917**

The Ninth Division in action East of Ypres near Zonnebeke.

*"So battered and ravaged was the country by continuous shell-fire that no trace of the road could be discerned. – The ordinary landmarks indicated by a map did not exist; the only one remaining that the eye could pick up without much effort was the Ypres-Roulers Railway, even the Hanebeek brook had ceased to flow. Its banks had been blown in by months of relentless gun-fire and a zigzag trail of shell holes, rather deeper and more full of water than the others, alone gave evidence of its former existence. A bleaker and more repellent battlefield it is impossible to imagine".*

All the objectives were reached on the 20<sup>th</sup>, the Division then left the line for a camp near Ypres.

*"No camps in the whole British line were more dismal than those around Ypres, Sloppy with mud and persistently bombed by the enemy's aeroplanes"*



The 12<sup>th</sup> October saw the Division in action East of St. Julien, with little success.

*"Since the horses could not leave the roads, it was only by means of light railways that field guns could be brought into action off the roads and supplied with ammunition. The sappers, under Lieut-Colonel Hearn, always a strong advocate of the light railway, gave the greatest possible assistance to the gunners by constructing a very useful railway system east of Springfield."*

*"Possibly heroism on a grander scale has never been shown than in the brutal fighting on the foul quagmires of Flanders. Often neck-deep in mud, the men floundered forward until their overtaxed limbs could no longer support them, and to wrest victory under such appalling conditions was a task beyond the power of man."*

*"Few people at Passchendaele had a more thankless and trying time than the Sappers, who were constantly engaged in maintaining the shelled duckboard tracks, and making plank roads, repairing paths and constructing shelters and tramways"*



### **October 1917 to March 1918**



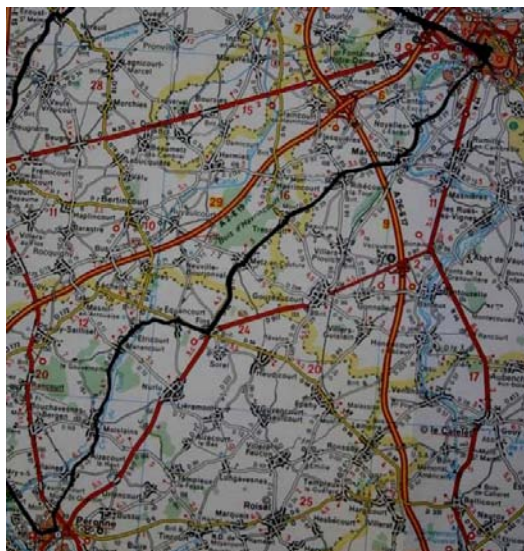
## From the coast to the Somme

*"On 26<sup>th</sup> October the Division moved to Nieuport – after the stress and turmoil of the Salient the Belgian coast was a veritable haven of rest. Behind the lines the broad firm expanse of sand fringing the coast offered ample scope not merely for the manoeuvring of troops but for such forms of recreation as polo and football".*



Then on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1917 the whole Division was moved south by train to Peronne, and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December entered the line near Gouzeaucourt, midway between Peronne and Cambrai.

*"From the 17<sup>th</sup> December there were heavy falls of snow – Fine cold weather prevailed during the opening days of 1918, but in the middle of January a thaw set in and our parapets melted away in liquid snow and mud".*



The Division left the line on 1<sup>st</sup> February for six weeks, time being spent on training and in work on the railways and rear defences

**21<sup>st</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> March 1918**

## Action on the Somme

The Divisions next sphere of action was the Somme. During March the Germans applied maximum force to the British line north of the Somme, with the attention of finally breaking through to reach Paris. Although there was some very serious fighting and a lot of ground was lost, the enemy failed to break through, although they forced the British to retreat as far West as Albert.

*"The flames of burning huts fired by the Sappers, with the dark silhouettes of retiring troops, formed an awesome and romantic spectacle. From Nurlu ascended clouds of brick-dust, like the genie from the brass bottle, and shell dumps belched forth volumes of thick black smoke and glowing flames, while every now and then a heavy shell exploded with a deafening crash, and green, red white and blue rockets soared through the air like fairy fountains".*

*"That night, a child might understand,  
The Devil had business on his hand."*

*"It must be borne in mind that throughout the retreat the men suffered constantly from want of sleep, and supplies being inevitably irregular, they had to endure frequently the pangs of hunger and thirst."*

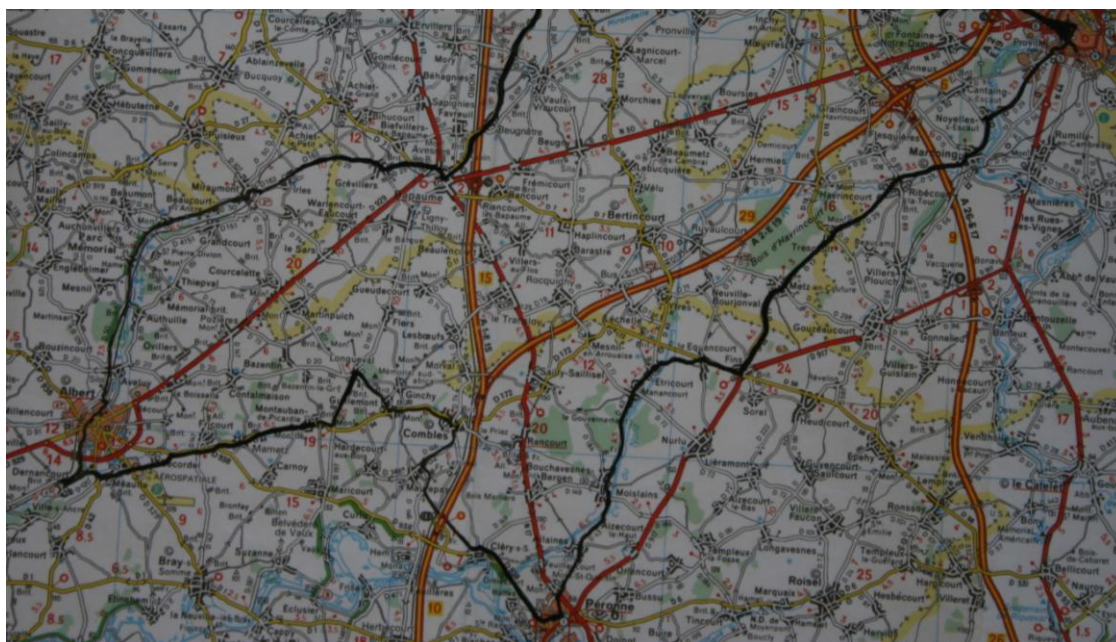
*"The retreat had to take place in broad daylight under strong pressure and without the support of the guns, which had to be conveyed across the Canal du Nord, but it was slowly and skilfully carried out, and appalling losses were inflicted on the pursuers. The men behaved like veterans, and the Sappers took their place with the infantry."*

*"There were no reserves except the details of the Divisional R.E., and our front measured 9500 yards."*

*"At the commencement of the 26<sup>th</sup> March, the fighting strength of the Division was approximately as follows: Highland Brigade 300, Lowland Brigade 800, South African Battalion 320, Sappers 120, two Machine-gun groups with 10 guns each, a total of 1340 rifles and 20 machine-guns."*

*"Never perhaps did the Ninth render such vital service to the Empire as during the Somme retreat. – In the arduous and critical fighting till the 24<sup>th</sup> March, its success in blunting the deadly German thrust. – Ably led, the men had brilliantly performed the most difficult operation in war; a withdrawal in face of the enemy. Men who after rough buffetings can at the end of a retreat turn round and confront the foe with unshaken nerve and steadfast courage have proved their manhood indeed, and this, the acid test of the true soldier, had been accomplished by the men of the Ninth."*





Part of the Tour from Bapume to Albert, across to Perone and up to Cambrai  
 All the area of the Somme retreat.

### **April 1918**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> April the Ninth Division entrained for the north and joined the line south east of Ypers at Hollebeke.

*"Very large drafts, consisting chiefly of youths of eighteen and nineteen years of age, were received almost daily."*

The Germans attacked on 11<sup>th</sup> April.

*"At 5.30pm. the situation was believed to be as follows: .....while the 9<sup>th</sup> Seaforths and a detachment of Sappers were in the Dammstresse."*

*"From the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> there was a lull in the fighting on the front of the Ninth.....All our defences were strengthened and the Sappers and 9<sup>th</sup> Seaforths laboured steadily on the Vierstraat line."*

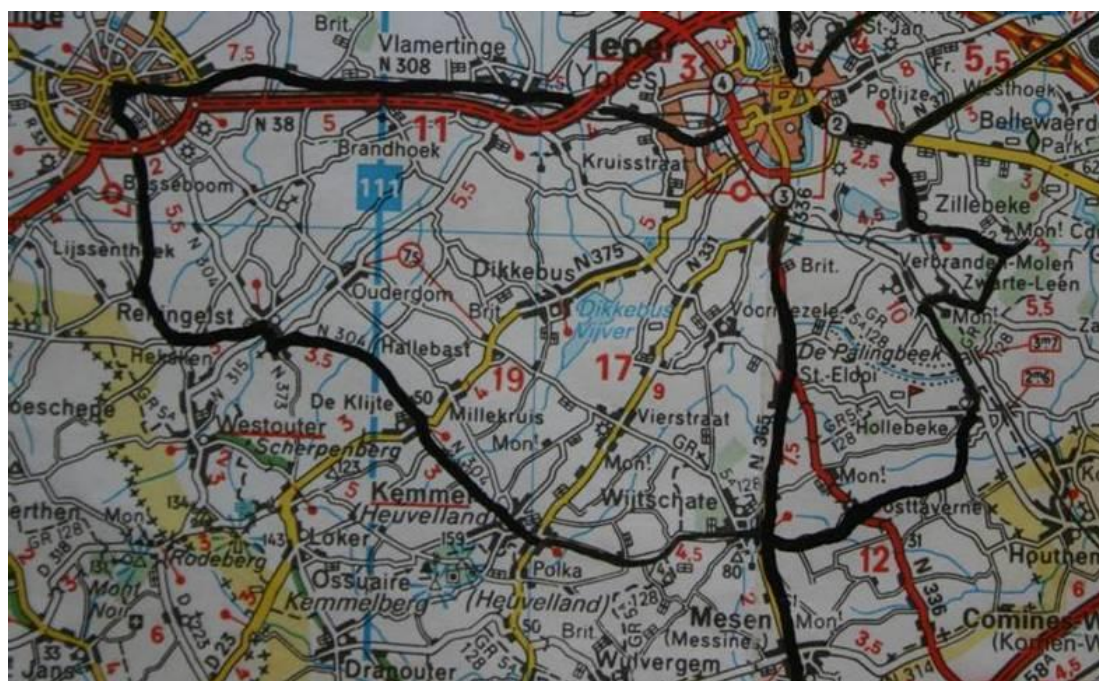
*"On the 16<sup>th</sup> a huge enemy effort was directed against Wytschaete.....From the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> no infantry attacks took place, but relentless artillery fire persistently swept our trench system and back areas."*

*"The German advance, which had given the enemy possession of Wytschaete, Wulverghem, Neuve, Eglise, Bailleul, and Meteren, had now brought him close to the Kemmel-Mont des Cats Ridge, the retention of which was vital to the security of our grip on Ypres and Poperinghe. A weighty blow had been dealt against the British forces".*

On the 25<sup>th</sup> April there was a strong German attack with heavy fighting and many casualties.

*"After darkness fell, a line in rear of the Highlanders having been established and manned by fresh troops of the Twenty-first Division, the Camerons and Seaforths with the other detachments extracted themselves and were drawn back to a camp. The stone wall defence of the Highlanders had put a final stop to the enemy's northern onrush, which had threatened our hold on Ypres."*

*"Considering how sadly the Ninth had been depleted as a result of the Somme retreat, the unwavering resistance it offered in April is little short of marvellous. Since the 21<sup>st</sup> March it had enjoyed virtually no rest, and yet it had retained all its high fighting qualities unimpaired. The Ninth's protracted defence of Wytschaete had not merely added another glorious record to its lengthy list, but had helped to set a limit to the German gains in Flanders."*



The area of battle in April 1918

### **May to September 1918**

For most of May the Ninth was resting and reorganising near St. Omer, then on the 25<sup>th</sup> the Division returned to the line at Meteren, south west of Ypres near Bailleul.

*"The position held by the Ninth was essential for the safety of the important railway centres of Hazebrouck and St.Omer..... In the early summer the initiative still remained with the enemy, who was known to have large forces in reserve and the Mont des Cats and Hazebrouck seemed to offer tempting prizes. Throughout May and June our vigilance was never suffered to relax, and not until the end of June was it clear that the projected offensive had been given up. On the whole, the Ninth found*



*the sector a very pleasant one to hold and our casualties from the enemy's artillery fire were not very height. The attitude of the Division was one of active defence, patrolling was assiduous, small parties left our lines every day to examine the enemy's positions."*

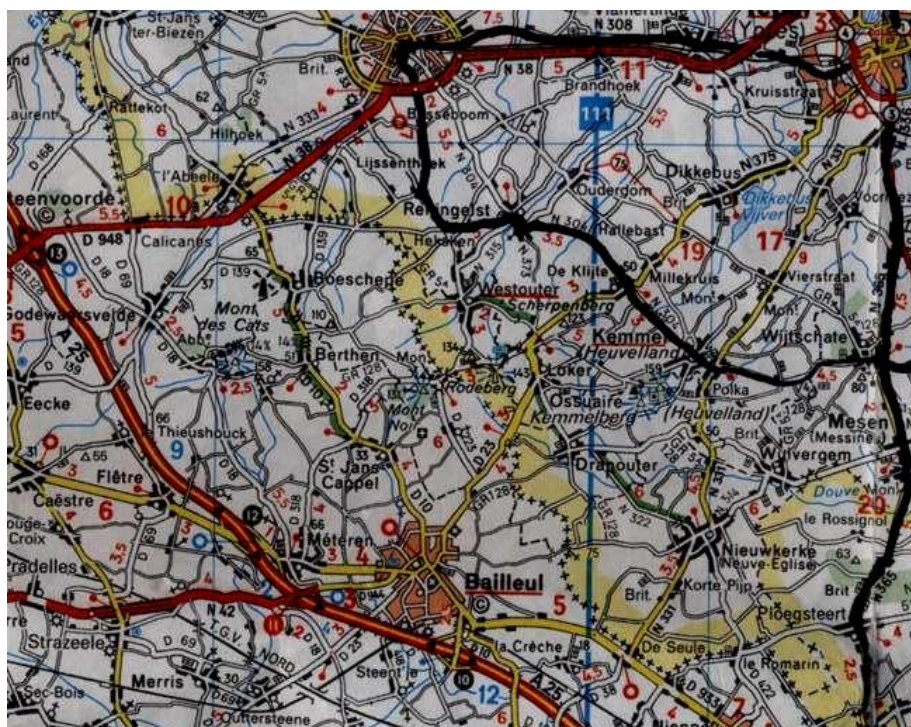
On 19<sup>th</sup> July the Division attacked Meteren with great success and gained ground establishing a new line south east of the village. Between 26<sup>th</sup> July and 18<sup>th</sup> August there were raids and counter raids.

*"Since the fear of a hostile offensive was fading away battalions out of the line enjoyed quite a comfortable time. Training, especially of officers, carried on diligently and uninterruptedly, produced a marked improvement in efficiency and discipline".*

The Ninth Division remained in the line until the 24<sup>th</sup> August.

*"Thus the general situation towards the end of September was full of promise for the Allies, and Marshal Foch and Sir Douglas Haig, realising that a continuation of our pressure was bound to overwhelm the armies of the adversary, arranged for four simultaneous and convergent attacks against his sagging line."*

*"The Ninth was to take part in the Flanders campaign. In billets, first near Wardrecques and later in the neighbourhood of Esquelbec, the men for over three weeks were resting and training, but the elation caused by their triumphs near Metern and the daily reports of fresh victories made them burn to join in the final onset."*



Meteren is a little west of Bailleul.

**28<sup>th</sup> September to 14<sup>th</sup> October 1918.**

East of Ypres

*"On the 20<sup>th</sup> September the Division took over the front between the Ypres-Menin and Ypres-Zonnebeke roads."*

The Ninth Division was to take part in a general advance pressing east from Ypres, commencing at 5.25 A. M on the 28<sup>th</sup> September.

*"The whole operation went like clockwork, although at the start progress was somewhat impeded by the darkness and the churned-up soil, now rendered more unstable by the continuous rain."*

*"The Sappers and Pioneers, who had bridged the stream at Potijze during the night of the 27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup>, followed immediately behind the infantry, and set to work without delay on the Ypres-Zonnebeke and Hell-fire Corner-Zonnebeke roads. Their rapid improvements rewarded all the forethought and labour which had been expended in the accumulation of suitable materials, and enabled the forward movement of the divisional artillery to begin at 8 A.M."*

*"Our greatest trouble was the opening up of decent roads from Ypres to the ridge. The one route of any consequence-the Ypres Zonnebeke road, was ready by 1 P.M., and by dusk all three artillery brigades were in action behind the Broodseinde Ridge."*

*"The steady downpour under which the attack had begun was still falling at 9 A.M. on the 29<sup>th</sup>. The autumn night had been not only wet but very cold. And as practically no shelter was available great discomfort was endured by the men."*

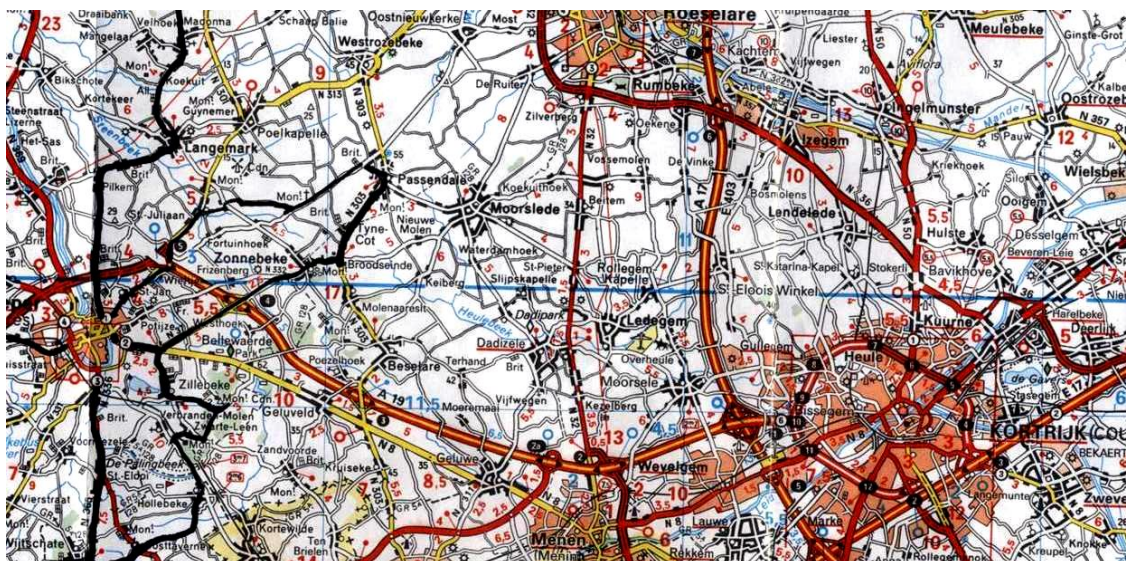
*"After a dry spell, rain commenced again at 6 P.M. on the 29<sup>th</sup>, and continued to fall throughout the night added enormously to the difficulties of keeping open the Ypres-Zonnebeke road, where traffic was constantly blocked by huge Belgian drays, slowly hauled along by one or two miserable horses."*

More ground was gained on 1<sup>st</sup> October *"The Division had crossed the tragic Passchendaele Ridge, left behind it the blighted wilderness created by more than four years of grisly strife, and established itself on the fringe of a landscape yet unscarred by war. In all, ten miles had been traversed since the beginning of the battle."*

*"As our advance had outstripped our facilities for sending forward stores and supplies, and roads and routes had to be constructed through the trackless jungle of the desolated region before heavy guns and ammunition could be brought up. Fortunately the line held by us was so well furnished with Pill-boxes that during the lull our troops were more comfortably housed and protected than could have been anticipated."*

By the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> October the Ninth Division had reached the river Lys between Cuerne and Harleboke.





The area of battle between Ypres and Cuernet

### **14<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> October 1918**

Pressing eastwards

*"On the 16<sup>th</sup> Brig.-General Croft drew up his plans for forcing the passage of the Lys. Arrangements were made for the construction of bridges. The plan arranged that the river, about 70 feet wide, should be crossed at two places simultaneously; on the left, the 11<sup>th</sup> Royal Scots with the aid of the 90<sup>th</sup> Field Coy. R.E. were to throw a bridge over the ruins of the Hoogbrug Bridge on the Harlebeke-Stokerij road and attack the village of Harlebeke; on the right, the K.O.S.B. were to pass over by boats and improvised bridges in the loop of the river south-east of Cuernet, Secure the Courtrai-Harlebeke Railway with the high ground east of it."*

*"The attempt was made at 8P.M. that same day. On the left, it was completely repulsed in spite of the gallant and costly efforts of the Royal Scots and the sappers of the 90<sup>th</sup> Field Company, who were swept away by machine gun fire at close range. On the right, Lieut.-Colonel Ker sent three companies across a boat bridge erected by the sappers of the 64<sup>th</sup> Field Company."*

*"Before dawn the Sappers had constructed a relief bridge close to the first, and by these two bridges, two sections of the 9<sup>th</sup> Machine gun Battalion and two platoons of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hampshire Regiment crossed."*

*"The troops of the Ninth on the East bank of the Lys were relieved after dusk on the 19<sup>th</sup> by means of boats and bridges constructed by the Sappers of the **63<sup>rd</sup> Field Company**."*

*"Preparations were made for crossing the Lys on a large scale – the Sappers reconnoitred all possible crossings. The Sappers of the **63<sup>rd</sup>** and 64<sup>th</sup> Field Companies, assisted by two companies of the Pioneers, were responsible for the bridging and ferrying arrangements on the front of the Ninth. Each field company was to throw two single duckboard barrel*

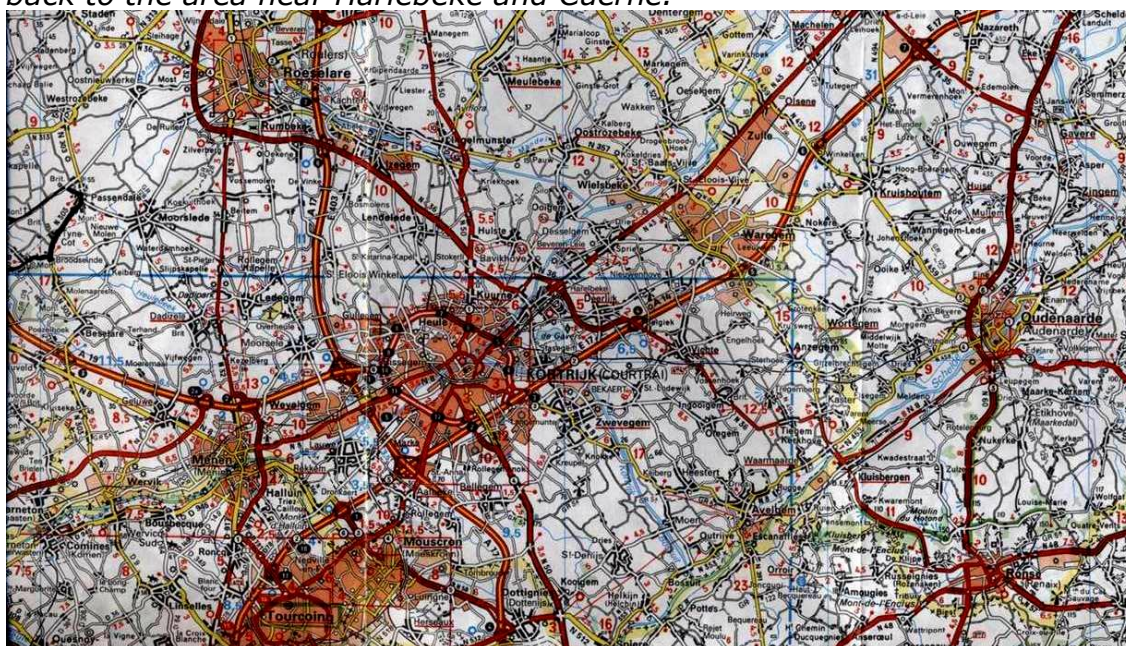


*bridges sufficiently strong to take infantry in file, and to launch and navigate two half pontoons and three rafts, each capable of taking eight men. Lieut.-Colonel Hickling's task was far from enviable; all the pontoons of the Division were at the bottom of the Lys and all the material to make bridges had to be collected without delay. Since on our front the left bank of the river was exposed for a distance of several hundreds of yards, it was impossible to place the bridging materials in position before dark. As it was calculated that our preparations would not be complete till 11 P.M. this was the hour arranged for the launching of the pontoons and rafts. The first troops were to be ferried over, and it was hoped that the light bridges would be ready by 11.15 P.M.*

*"By 9.30 A.M. the following morning the Sappers had completed a pontoon bridge south east of Bavichove and this was crossed, first by one battery of the 50<sup>th</sup> Brigade R.F.A., followed by the mobile medium trench mortars and later the rest of the divisional artillery had crossed the Lys"*

By the 25<sup>th</sup> October the Ninth Division had advanced its line to the Ooteghem-Ingoyghem Ridge, the last commanding position in the Ninth's area of operation.

*"The men were keen to follow up their victory, but they had now reached the limit of physical endurance. Our losses, though insignificant compared with the results achieved, had been serious, for practically no reinforcements had arrived to fill up gaps. There had been no contraction of front to balance our diminishing numbers and consequently each successive advance entailed increasing effort. Hence the weakness of the units and the exhaustion of the men rendered it desirable, if not necessary, to withdraw the whole Division for a rest; and it's relief took place on the nights of the 26<sup>th</sup>/27<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> October, when it went back to the area near Harlebeke and Cuerne."*



*"This was the last operation of the Division in the war. Since the 28<sup>th</sup> September it had covered over twenty six miles of ground and advanced*

*from Ypres to the banks of the Scheldt. It had captured over 2600 prisoners and many guns, but the trophies gained were more numerous than were recorded; the advance was so rapid that there was no opportunity for making a proper search of the battlefield. And our losses suffered during this amazing march, involving constant fighting, amounted to only 188 officers and 3604 other ranks, just 1000 more than number of prisoners captured. It was certainly the most spectacular of the Ninth's many successes. Throughout the advance the admirable co-operation of all branches of the Division had been the principal factor in contributing to this glorious result..... The leading of the infantry had been daring and skilful, while the men responded to every demand of their officers with unflinching cheerfulness and determination. As had always been the case in the Ninth, infantry and gunners worked splendidly together; and the former will never forget the intrepid dash of the latter who assisted them with such admirable and dexterous promptitude. Nor must the assiduous though less showy efforts of the Sappers, the Pioneers, the R.A.M.C., and A.S.C. go unmentioned; its very best work was freely given by each branch and was necessary for the common success."*

### **28<sup>th</sup> October to 15<sup>th</sup> March 1919**

#### Occupation

*"The Allied forces were rapidly converging on the hostile lines of communication, and after the great British victory of the 4<sup>th</sup> November, when the Sambre was crossed and large numbers of prisoners were captured, the retreat developed into a rout. Though the pursuit was retarded by difficulties of transport owing to roads and railways having been mined by the enemy, it was beyond doubt that but for the Armistice on the 11<sup>th</sup> November the German forces would have been compelled ignominiously to lay down their arms. The Armistice was in fact a capitulation.*

*During these fateful days the Ninth was reorganising near Harlebeke. After a short spell of rest the troops recovered their wonted vigour and the drawn, haggard look disappeared from the faces of officers and men.*

*During the following days camp gossip was chiefly concerned with the question as to which British divisions would have the honour of marching through Germany to the bridgehead, which in accordance with the terms of the Armistice was to be formed across the Rhine. There was great jubilation when it became known that the Ninth had been chosen as the left division of the Army of Occupation.*

*The march began on the 14<sup>th</sup> November. On the 4<sup>th</sup> December the Ninth left the friendly soil of Belgium and entered the unravaged territory of the enemy, most of the battalions passing the boundary post to the tune of 'A' the Blue Bonnets are over the Border'.*

*On the 13<sup>th</sup> December the Ninth crossed the Rhine by the boat bridge at Mulheim, and by the 15<sup>th</sup> the Division had taken up its position on the perimeter of the bridgehead, its D.H.Q. being established at Ohligs. Thirty two days had been spent in proceeding from Harlebeke to the perimeter.*



*On fifteen of them no advance was made in order to allow the Supply Services to bring up rations and stores. During the other days an average of 11.5 miles per day was covered; the total distance was 193 miles."*

*"The history of the Ninth Division ends with the formal disappearance of its title on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 1919. In the chronicle of its achievements attention is inevitably focussed mainly on the doings of the infantry and the gunners. But just as a good Quartermaster is a blessing to his battalion, though his name rarely occurs in the story of its battles, a Division cannot expect to be successful without efficient 'Q' and administration work. The Ninth had good reason to be proud of its special branches, the Sappers, Pioneers, R.A.M.C., A.S.C., and Ordnance; their skilled help, generously given, was a factor of first rate importance in giving the Division its prominent name among the British forces in France. Their work was assiduous and unremitting and was often carried on under conditions of great strain and extreme peril, particularly in the case of the Sappers, Pioneers, and R.A.M.C. A more trying ordeal can scarcely be imagined than that of digging under a heavy bombardment. The preparations for every battle involved an enormous amount of toil on the part of the Pioneers and the Sappers."*





Map showing Father's cycle tour route in black  
Also dates and areas where the Ninth Division were in action.

### **Conclusion**

- The route taken by Father in 1927 visited the sites of all the major battles in which the Ninth Division was involved, between April 1917 and October 1918.
- In the History of The Ninth Division, there are references to Ypres of the 28<sup>th</sup> September 1918; Bridge building at Cuerne, and then the March of Occupation starting from Cuerne on 14<sup>th</sup> November **1918, They all tally with details on Father's list "Advance from Ypres. (see appendix 1)**
- Also the number of days marched, and the final destination also match. \*
- The Division was disbanded on the 15<sup>th</sup> March, and Father was demobilised on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1919 at Chatham.
- **Father's tour also included a visit to Delville Wood, the site of fierce fighting by the Division in July 1916, before he joined.**
- December 1917, near Gouzeaucourt :-

*"From the 17<sup>th</sup> December there were heavy falls of snow..... Fine cold weather prevailed during the opening days of 1918, but in the middle of January a thaw set in and our parapets melted away in liquid snow and mud".*

Was this Father's reference to frozen kilts?

- March 1918 :-

*"The flames of burning huts fired by the Sappers, with the dark silhouettes of retiring troops, formed an awesome and romantic spectacle. From Nurlu ascended clouds of brick-dust, like the genie from the brass bottle, and shell dumps belched forth volumes of thick black smoke and glowing flames, while every now and then a heavy shell exploded with a deafening crash, and green, red white and blue rockets soared through the air like fairy fountains".*

Was this when Father lost his hearing?

- There are so many matching points of reference that I think that I am fairly safe in saying that Father was in the 63<sup>rd</sup> Field Company, Royal Engineers, from April 1917 until it was disbanded in March 1919.
- See appendix 1.

***"The countless graves that strew the battle-line of France and Flanders contain the flower of the British race, and furnish silent but eloquent evidence of the robust qualities and manly faith without which the British Empire and all that it stands for must have passed away".***

### **The last puzzle**

I am now left with one badge from Father's treasures, which has no apparent significance. The thistle has turned out to be the emblem of the Ninth (Scottish) Division of the British Army, but the other illustrated below has remained unknown to me up until now!



The answer I have found on the website for the Cape Town Highlanders, who it would appear have been referred to as 'The South Africans' in all the reports of their activities during the War. It was probably men from the Cape Town Highlanders that father was referring to when he spoke about the frozen kilts of the Scottish soldiers.

I have included an extract from the Cape Town Highlanders website which gives a detailed description of this collar badge: -

**Cape Town Highlanders have various custom and usages that set them apart from other Scottish and non-Scottish regiments. Many of them relate to dress, such as the following:**

## **UNIFORM AND CUSTOMS**

### **1. Background**

The Cape Town Highlanders and its members are marked out from the rest of the SANDF by the traditional regimental dress and the use of certain customs, words, phrases, mottos and toasts, which distinguish them from the soldiers of all other units.

Almost every custom and item of uniform has a long and honourable history. Members of the Cape Town Highlanders, by the mere act of using or associating themselves with the regiment's customs or wearing elements of the uniform, inherit and honour a fighting tradition extending over many centuries.

### **2. The Scottish Connection**

It is not strange that there should be a Scottish regiment in Cape Town. Virtually all countries that were once colonies of the British Empire have Scottish regiments, just as elements of uniform of regiments of the British army show their involvement in the countries they colonised. Furthermore, thousands of people who live in Cape Town are of direct or indirect Scottish descent. The historical link between Cape Town and Scotland; however, dates the existence of the Cape Town Highlanders.

The Mother City has its own link with the Clan Gordon, whose regimental tartan this regiment wears. The last commander of the Dutch East India Company's garrison at the Cape of Good Hope was of Scottish descent - Colonel Robert Jacob Gordon, whose family had served the Princes of Orange for three generations.

Colonel Gordon's grandfather left Scotland to take service in the Dutch Navy at the beginning of the 18th Century, and never returned to his native land. His son, Colonel Gordon's father, spent his entire military career as an officer of the "Scots Brigade" - an elite Scottish unit which for two centuries was the personal bodyguard of the Dutch royal family - and retired as a major-general. In turn, Colonel Gordon also served in the "Scots Brigade" till joining the Dutch East India Company's army.

In addition to being a first-rate soldier he was also a naturalist and geographer. Shortly before his death in 1795, just after the first British invasion of the Cape, he made several pioneering journeys and was the man who gave the Orange River its name.

The Cape Town Highlanders were formed in 1885 by 166 Capetonians of Scottish descent. Around the beginning of the 20th Century they formed a bond of friendship with the Gordon Highlanders, which in 1932 was cemented by a formal alliance. The old alliance has endured ever since, and was carried over when the Gordons were amalgamated with the Queen's Own Highlanders in 1994, to form a new regiment, called simply "The Highlanders".

A group of Cape Town Highlanders attended the amalgamation ceremony in 1994 and undertook always to keep the spirit of the Gordons alive. This is why we do our best to retain as much of the traditional Gordons and CTH uniform as possible, and why the last toast drunk at every formal dinner of the officers' mess is "The Gordon Highlanders".

### **3. The CTH - Not Merely A Carbon Copy**

The CTH is not merely a carbon copy of the Gordons or any other Scottish regiment. While honouring the memory of our founding fathers and valuing our alliance with the Gordons and The Highlanders, the CTH is very much a South African regiment, and proud of it. That is why many Capetonians of non-Scottish ancestry have served happily and well in the CTH in the past, and are doing so today.

Volunteers who join the CTH are not expected to give up their identity or their culture.



However, they are expected to accept the regiment's customs and usages, and honour its traditions and its uniform. This is insisted on, because the CTH tradition is a living thing; if it is not honoured in everything that is done, it will be lost and in the process the Regiment will lose its identity as well.

#### **4. The Uniform: Its Origins And Meaning**

##### **a. Badges**

A soldier's badge is what really sets him apart from the rest of the Army. It tells the world who he is and what regiment he belongs to, and also something about where his regiment comes from and what its philosophy is.

The Cape Town Highlanders does have not one but a number of different badges. Generally speaking, which have not changed since 1902, the last time there was a revision of regimental insignia.

##### **b. The Headdress Badges**

###### **i. The Balmoral Badge.**

Between 1885 and 1902 the CTH wore a large badge or "plate" on the white helmet then issued. Some were made of silver-coloured "white metal", and consisted of three parts stapled together, while others were stamped out in one piece.

This large and beautiful badge consisted of an eight-pointed star surmounted by a queen's crown, on which was superimposed the star of the Order of the Thistle and the regimental title, on which in turn was superimposed a circlet with a thistle device.

In 1902 this badge was replaced by a smaller one in brass and white metal. When the Balmoral bonnet replaced the pith helmet and hat as a working headdress around World War I, this badge was transferred to it and has remained unchanged ever since.

There is only one known variation: When the Regiment arrived in Egypt in late 1941, an Egyptian craftsman turned out a number of rather crude Balmoral badges cast in brass. These were never issued, but were bought as souvenirs and are a collector's item.

###### **ii. The Glengarry Badge.**

Between 1885 and 1902 the CTH wore a glengarry badge almost identical to that of the Scots Guards, except that it bore the name "Cape Town Highlanders". Presumably this similarity was due to the fact that the Scots Guards was the original regiment of Lieutenant-Colonel John Scott, first OC Cape Town Highlanders.

In 1902 the CTH adopted a new bi-metal glengarry badge which was a smaller version of the new helmet or Balmoral badge described above, and it has been worn ever since by all ranks, with only one exception - Lieutenant-Colonel (later Brigadier) W D Hearn DSO always wore the pre-1902 badge during his tenure as commanding officer between 1928 and 1937.

Through the years there have been certain variations on this badge. At some time (presumably during World War II) the Defence Force made a large number of glengarry badges in blackened brass, but these were never issued; during the 1950s or 1960s a certain number of these blackened badges were chromed and issued as an economy measure, but these are now very scarce.

###### **iii. The Springbok Badge.**

In its first campaign of World War I, the South West Africa campaign, the CTH wore its Balmoral and glengarry badges, but in 1916 it combined with the Transvaal Scottish to form the immortal 4 SA Infantry (the SA Scottish), which fought at Delville Wood and all the other great battles of World War I.

In accordance with the custom at that time, the SA Scottish wore the then universal South African overseas service badge, depicting a springbok's head in a round strap bearing the words "Union Is Strength"/"Eendracht Maakt Macht", but the new unit wore a variation of the CTH's collar badge (see "Collar Badges").

The SA Scottish was disbanded after World War I, although it had won such renown that many people felt it should become a Permanent Force unit. So the "bokkie" badge disappeared from our headdress - but the one worn at Delville Wood by a renowned Cape Town Highlander, Lieutenant-Colonel Sam Sumner MC IEI (OC CTH from 1937 to 1941) is displayed in a place of honour in the officers' mess.

#### iv. The FC/CTH Hackle.

During its service in the Western Desert in 1941 and 1942 the CTH wore its normal glengarry and Balmoral badges, but between 1944 and 1945 the CTH was "married up" with the First City Regiment in a composite regiment called the First City/Cape Town Highlanders for service in the Italian Campaign.

At the time of the marrying up, these two proud regiments decided that rather than adopt a new headdress badge, they would wear a simple feather hackle, yellow above and green below - the colours of 6th Armoured Division, their parent formation.

#### c. The Collar Badges.

Prior to 1902 the CTH wore a collar badge depicting a thistle; some were made in silver wire to wear in full dress uniform, and others were stamped out of white metal or tin.

In 1902, however, the CTH adopted the "collar dogs" it wears to this day, consisting of a mailed fist holding an arrow, over the lion of Scotland in its shield, both in brass, and superimposed on the St Andrew's Cross; with a scroll at the bottom containing the words CAPE TOWN HIGHLANDERS.

These badges have a greater significance than might be thought. Firstly, they echo the heraldic device on the Regimental Colour; secondly (as noted under "The Springbok badge" above), they have a direct link to the famed 4 SAI (SAScotic) of World War I.

When the SA Scottish was formed from the CTH and Transvaal Scottish in 1916, it adopted the CTH collar badge, unchanged except that the words "Cape Town Highlanders" were replaced by "Mors Mihi Lucrum" (Death is my Reward), the family motto of the first OC SA Scottish, Lieutenant-Colonel F A Jones O50.

**Note:** The St Andrew's Cross and the thistle are constantly recurring themes in CTH badges, and for good reason.

#### d. The St Andrew's Cross

## **Appendix 1**

Fathers list, **Advance from Ypres 28.9.18**

Ypres 28.9.18			Doaysopp
Baceleare			Tourneppe
Westkoek			Divarp
Waterdamkock			Allsenberg
Rollingham Capelle			Waterloo
Wenkle-St-Elio			Gauze Ohain
Kathreine Capelle			La Houlpe
<b>B</b>			
Hulste			Genval
Harleboke			Rosieres
Hulste			Wavre
Heule			Mont de Dion
Moorsule			Cunourne-le-
Grand <b>B</b>			
Cuerne <b>B</b>			Chaumont
Ghistowse			
			Threlembais-
le-Froud			
			Pierwcitz
			Engagee
Cuerne 14.11.18			Noville
Hansbeke			Taviers
Derlyak			Beneffe
Vitche			Wassignies
Ingoyhiam <b>B</b>			Beouchion
			<b>B</b>
Kherhove			Mufe
River Scheldt			Accosse
Bercheim			Benedine
Quatremont			Lamertz
Renaix <b>B</b>			Huccioigne
			<b>B</b>
Quatre Yarts			Moka
La Hauppe			Ampsil
Mont de Rhodes			Anaha
Lupein			Flonde-Mt-
Grand			
Mott			Engies
			<b>B</b>
Kremieastraat			Chokerie
Sarlardinge <b>B</b>			Flemalle Mt.
Grand			
Grammont			Jimappe
Viane Moerbeke			River Meuse
Hernelriyck			Seraing
Reece			Ogree
St. Paul <b>B</b>			Angluw
Grimnages			Geuze
Gadbaton			Henne



Herne

Chadfontaine

**B**

Frop

Prayart

Hierkruis

Trooz

Berth

Fraipont

Hal

**B**

Geoffontaine

Buysingham

Flire

Massau

Purgatoire

Hodiston

Ensival

Verviers

**B**

Surdents

Bellevaux

Hamelaux

Limboursy

Forges

Ballen

Belge / German Frontier

Eupen

Raecten

**B**

Baviere

Gheizenway

Wagnez

Bremlinbury

Vicht

**B**

Mansback

Gressenich

Weniv

Langeweile

Glurgenich

Duren

**B**

Goltz Leim

Blatz Leim

Bergenhäusen

Kerpen

Greifath

**B**

Berzelrath

Feitham

Marsporp

Lindenthal (Cologne)

Nippes

**B**

Cologne

River Rhine

Mulkeim

Weisdorp

**B**

Kupperstag

Rackrath Reus

Melsbath

Benrath

**B**

-----  
 230,

Total miles marched from Ceurne,

**FINIS** 16.12.1918

in 32 Days

Hildin  
Ohligs**B** indicates, Bridge built here.

## **Appendix 2**

### Extract from "Forgotten Voices of the Great War"

#### *Private S.T. Sherwood*

As I slipped to the bottom of the shell-hole I took my torch out, flashed it around and to my horror found I had a German companion – that was **where the terrific stink came from. I thought, "Heavens, am I going to spend the night with you!" I knew that without help it was impossible to get out, so I shouted, screamed and did everything possible to make someone hear me. I shone my torch up in the air in the hope that someone would see the light, but nothing happened.**

**I wasn't one to panic, I was always one to keep cool if possible, but for the next half-hour I struggled as hard as I could to climb up the side, and in the process my trench boots were left at the bottom. But every time I would get within a yard of the top and then slide back into this terrible filth again. I reviewed my position and realised I'd have to keep myself going until morning. First I decided to sing, and sang all the songs I could possibly think of. I sang, I cursed, I raved and eventually I prayed. I prayed that help would come before morning.**

I was sweating from head to foot with all the exertion. Then as I lay back in the trench I remembered my old pipe and tobacco and smoked pipe after pipe. Gradually I found I was sinking further and further into this mire – the water had gone above my waist, and no matter how I struggled it was impossible to get out. I knew that struggling further **wasn't going to help me so I continued smoking and singing and shouting as best as I could until my voice had almost gone.**

I took my rifle and jammed it into the side of the shell-hole as far as I could to give me some support, putting my right arm through the sling. **Then I either dozed off or became unconscious, I don't know which,** because when I woke the bottom of my body was completely paralysed by the coldness of the water, which I could feel creeping further and further up. During this period the Germans commenced shelling the area. The vibrations made the shell-hole shake from one side to the other. I was rather pleased because it gave me something to interest myself in – it kept me awake and alive. I was still sinking into the mire. I filled my pipe again then put my hand into my tunic pocket for my matches and found they were wet through.

**It was then I began to despair. I thought, 'I'd sooner be killed with a shell or a bullet than die in a bloody filthy shell-hole'. From then on I can remember no more until I thought "Can I be dreaming – there are footsteps somewhere". Feebly, I tried to shout until I heard a voice say, "Where are you" I shouted 'I'm here, in a shell-hole'. The footsteps went round again for a few minutes then looking up I saw a head appear over the top. "Oh, my God" he said, "hang on, hang on, chum". I remember no more from that 'hang on' until I found myself in hospital between clean white sheets.**

## **Appendix 2a**

July 2010

Extract from Britain at War magazine

They had hardly gone fifty yards when Matthews was hit in the thigh by a bullet and collapsed in a heap on the ground. Up front Cable had no inkling of what had happened to his comrade and he continued on to the British positions. However, an officer who was nearby in an old disused trench with a few soldiers saw Matthews fall and dragged him into cover. He bound up Matthews wound as best he could and then moved on forward with his men.

**Matthews was left alone. " Shells were bursting all round me, and it was only the shelter of the trench I was lying in which saved me from being blown to atoms, but it had the disadvantage of hiding me from anybody passing by. After a few hours, things quietened down a little and I began to get impatient and tried to crawl but it was futile, I might as well have been chained to the ground for all the movement I could make."**

Private Matthews knew nothing of the events taking place around him. **He had lain in No Man's Land all day, expecting that if the British attack succeeded the place where he was stranded would shortly become Allied-occupied territory once again. Therefore he hoped, he would soon be found. But there was no sign of any British or French troops and he began to worry.**

**"Night came on and I began to view things rather gravely. I shouted at intervals, but all to no purpose, for no one came to my aid."**

Morning broke on 2<sup>nd</sup> July with Matthews still stranded in the trench. Shells continued to fall all around and pieces of shrapnel often missed him by inches. He still had his haversack with him and so he had his iron rations (consisting of five hard biscuits and a twelve-ounce tin of bully beef) to help sustain him – but he wisely ate and drank sparingly. He had already reached the conclusion that he might be there for a long time before he was discovered. Matthews still called out at intervals but still no-one came.

By day three he was still stranded in the trench in what had been No Man's Land. **He had also reached the end of his food.**

**At last on the forth night he heard footsteps; "...so I shouted again and again, and I was rewarded by seeing the forms of men coming towards me. When they approached near enough, I told them what had occurred and my sorry plight**  
**, but although they were very sympathetic, they could not help me as they were all wounded themselves and had been lying out since July 1<sup>st</sup>."**

**These men as well as a man called Wrighton from Matthews' own company, had been feeding on the iron rations they found on the dead men lying around them. Halting only momentarily, they gave Matthews a**



stock of their scavenged supplies before moving on. As they did so, they **promised to inform someone of Matthews' position when they got back to the British lines.**

An hour or so later Matthews heard footsteps again but it turned out to be the same party which had failed to find the British trenches. This time the group made off in the opposite direction.

They did not come back again that night and Matthews was hopeful that the group had finally made it back to their lines. But all day long on the 5<sup>th</sup> Matthews remained alone in the battered trench and saw no-one. That night, as Matthews was crying out for help a number of men came into view – incredibly it was the same sorry group still wandering around **in No Man's Land.**

**"They were now in a terrible state, one (Private Wrighton) was actually crawling on his hands and knees as he was wounded in the leg and hand."** Yet again they departed leaving Matthews with some more water in a tin, a few biscuits, and a little rum in a bottle. What happened to this pitiful little group is not known, as Matthews never saw or heard of them again.

When he woke up the following morning he found that a shell burst had blown in a part of the trench and had almost buried him. He managed to clear away the worst of the earth but found, to his dismay, that the biscuits were completely buried and that a piece of shrapnel had pierced his water can. Once again Matthews was left with nothing to eat or drink.

**"For two days I was without any, means of sustenance."** Continued Matthews, **"and then it rained heavily and I caught some of it in my steel helmet... When that had gone I drank from the filthy pools of water I was able to reach in the trench.**

**"The time dragged on, and days and nights passed and I was listening, ever listening, for any sign of approaching help. Occasionally I would shout, but that was very exhausting as I was becoming by this time very weak, and this went on for about ten days. I must have lapsed into unconsciousness, for I had a very clear vision of some of my own palls finding me and carrying me off on a stretcher to safety. Several times this happened, and when I recovered my senses and found that I was still lying in the trench I nearly went mad with frenzy...the agony of the suspense was unbearable.**

**"Then I began to feel that I was dying and would read again and again letters I had received from dear friends at home, whom it seemed destined I was never to see again."**

**Matthews had now been lying helpless in No Man's Land for fourteen days. Badly wounded and without food or water, he was close to death.**

**"I had lost all count of time when, in the darkness, I was awakened by the shuffle of feet and I managed to call out. Someone came towards me, nearly treading on me, and it proved to be an officer on patrol with a**

party of NCOs of the London Scottish. The officer questioned me and as briefly as possible I told him my story.

**"He went straight away for the stretcher-bearers and soon returned with them carrying a stretcher and a shovel between them. I was stuck so fast to the ground that they had literally to dig me out, and it proved very painful to me, you may be sure. Then, as gently as possible they lifted me on to the stretcher and commenced their perilous journey across No Man's Land to our trenches.**

**"Arriving there I was taken to the S.M.'s dug-out, given a good meal and had my wound dressed. It was ion a very bad state, but wonderful to relate, not septic. I was nearly delirious with joy at having been rescued from such an awful fate."**

### **Appendix 3**

These additional photos were taken on my tour of 2004, and which I can now relate to events occurring at the time of Fathers active service.



The Canal due Nord  
(July to August 1917 & March 1918)



Pill-boxes near Nieuport (October 1917 to March 1918)



Wytschaete (April 1918)





*"Traffic was constantly blocked by huge Belgian drays, slowly hauled along by one or two miserable horses" (September-October 1918)  
Photo taken in Poperinge. 2005.*

## **Appendix 4** **Souvenirs**



Father's medals and cap badge.



Cushion cover embroidered by Father.



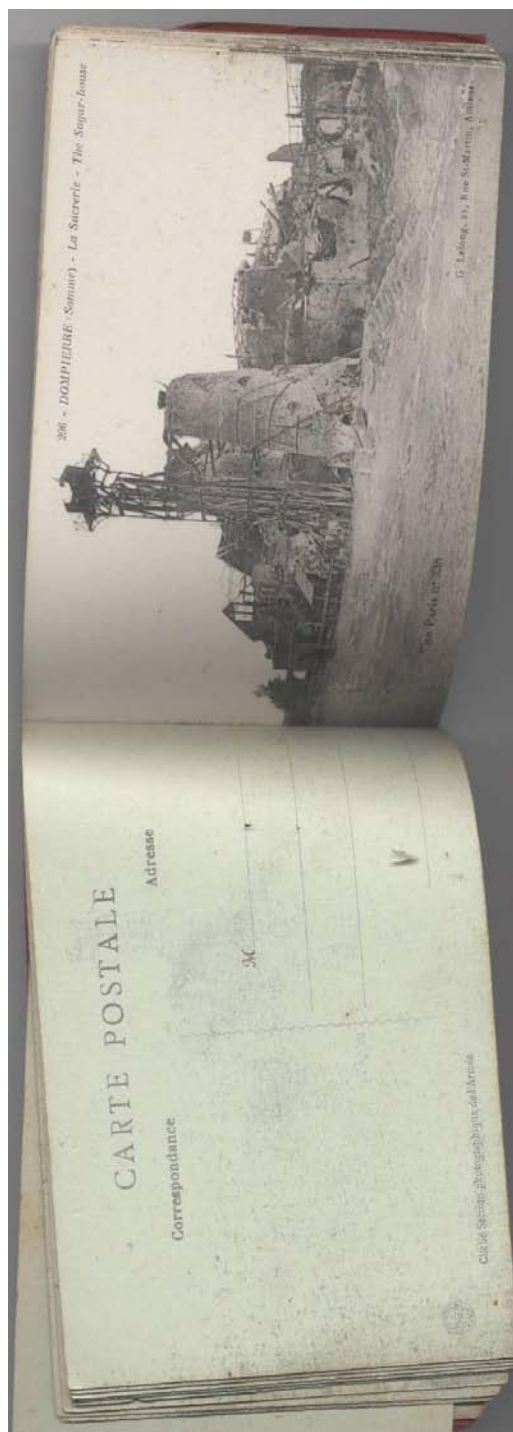
Ashtray from Arras



A pipe from Belgium

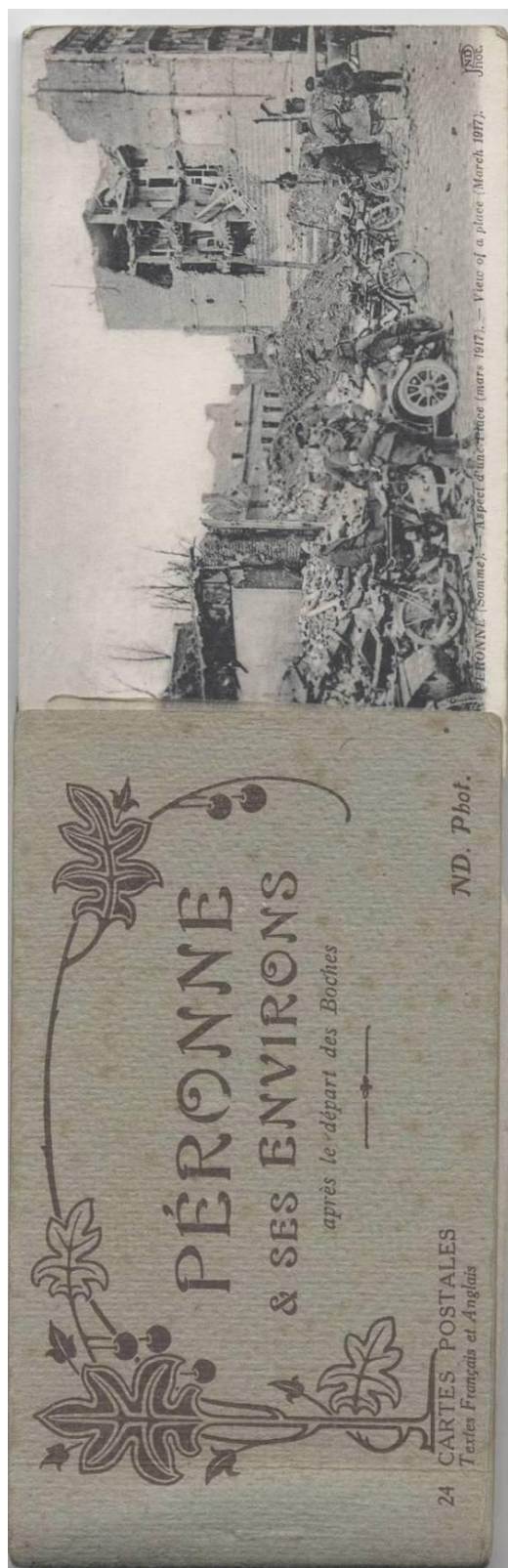




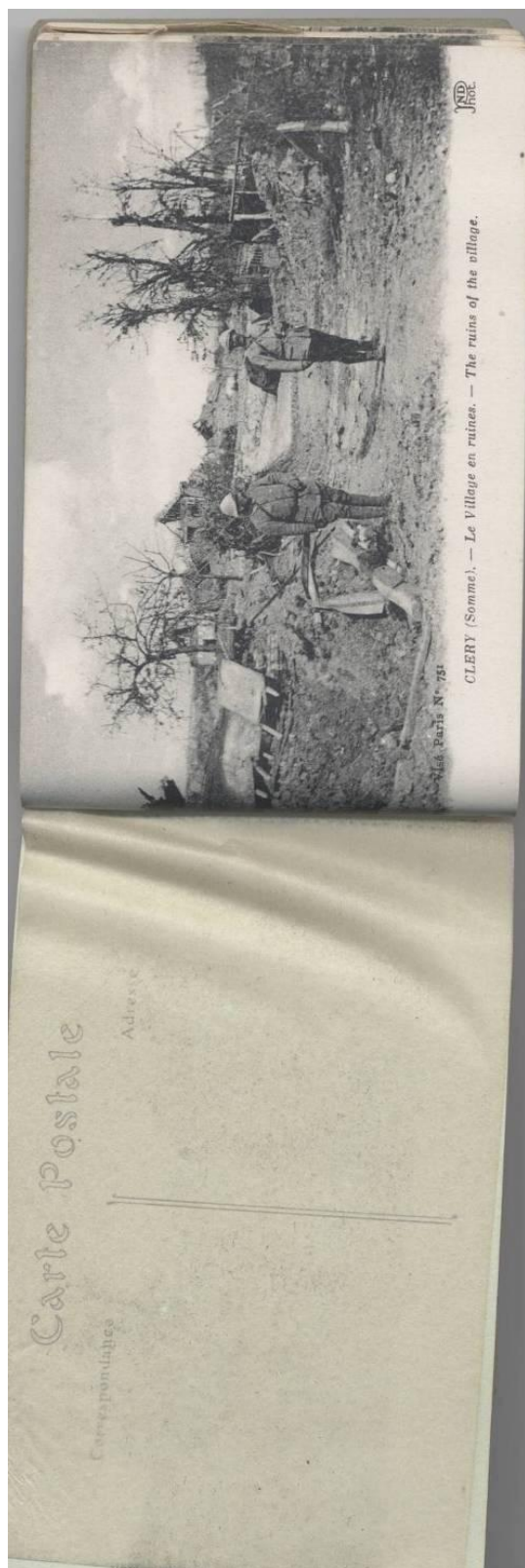


A book of postcards showing devastation around the Somme

The History of the Ninth Division refers to heavy fighting to occupy the Sugar Factory







Another book of postcards, this one based on Peronne  
Clery Sue Somme featured in fathers photos

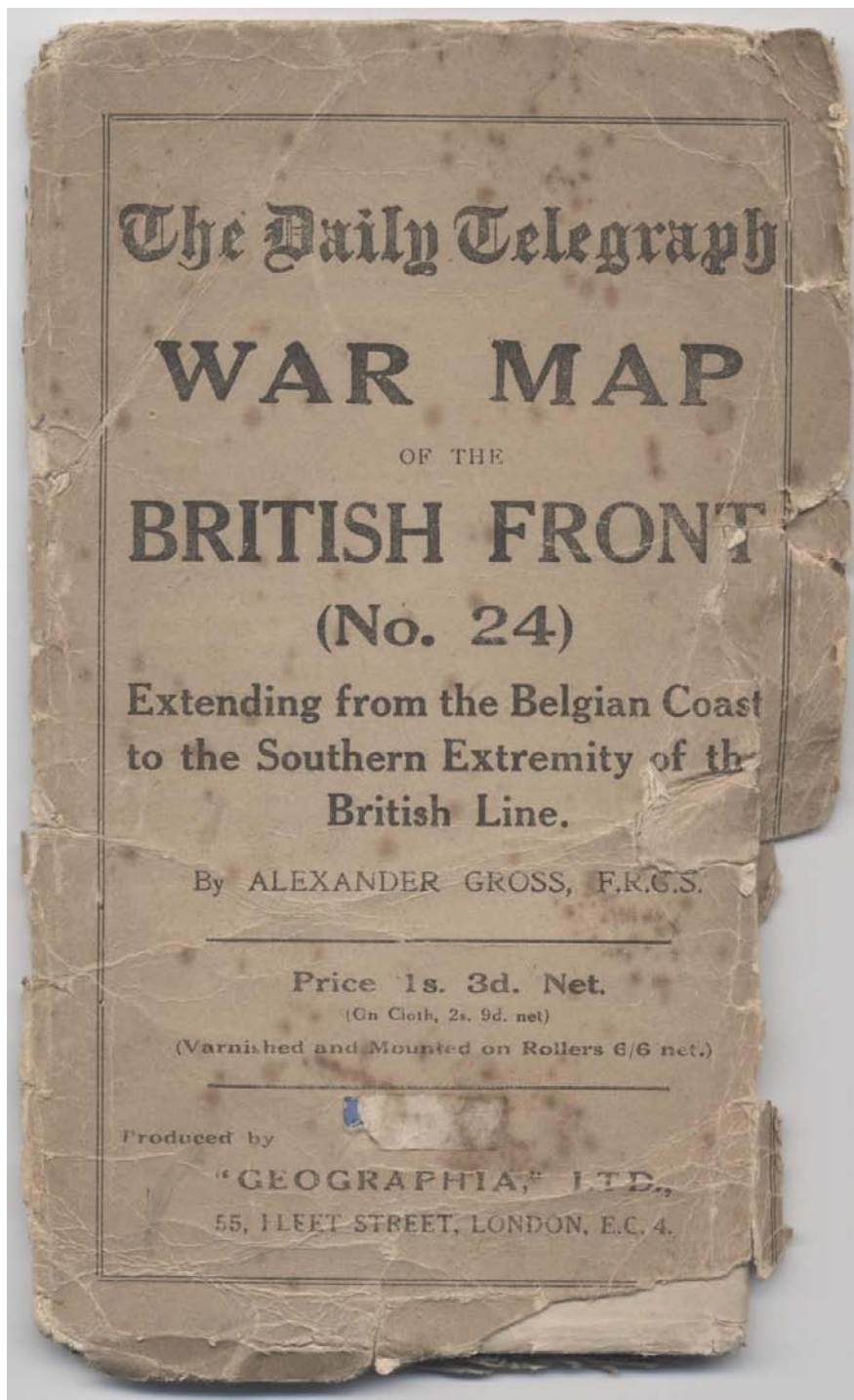


Picture postcards of Düsseldorf, and a pull out card of Ohligs

Where the Ninth Division was stationed from December 1918 to March 1919

Note:-

These pictures and cards held little significances for me until I read the History of the Ninth Division. I now realise that they are all relate to areas of the battlefield in which father served.



Another of Father's treasures.





*Original*

(29181) \ 8321 sub 1232 11/14 J F W 27  
Gen. No. 2340

Army

**ORIGINAL. SHORT SERVICE. 1914-15 Star.**  
(For the Duration of the War). British War Medal  
Victory Medal.

**ATTESTATION OF**

No. 76442 Name John Cochran Corps Signal Co R.E.

Questions to be put to the Recruit before enlistment.

1. What is your name?.....	1. <u>John Cochran</u>
2. What is your full Address?.....	2. <u>4 India St. Pottuck</u>
3. Are you a British Subject?.....	3. <u>yes</u>
4. What is your Age?.....	4. <u>22</u> Years <u>5</u> Months
5. What is your Trade or Calling?.....	5. <u>Plumber</u>
6. Are you Married?.....	6. <u>No</u>
7. Have you ever served in any branch of His Majesty's Forces, naval or military, if so, which?	7. <u>1st High Field Co R.E. (S)</u>
8. Are you willing to be vaccinated or re-vaccinated?.....	8. <u>yes</u>
9. Are you willing to be enlisted for General Service?.....	9. <u>yes</u>
10. Did you receive a Notice, and do you understand its meaning, and who gave it to you?.....	10. <u>yes</u> { Name <u>W. Chisholm</u> Corps <u>Signal Co R.E.</u>
11. Are you willing to serve upon the following conditions provided His Majesty should so long require your services?.....	11. <u>yes</u>

For the duration of the War, at the end of which you will be discharged with all convenient speed. If employed with Hospitals, depots of Mounted Units, and as Clerks, etc., you may be retained after the termination of hostilities until your services can be spared, but such retention shall in no case exceed six months.

John Cochran do solemnly declare that the above answers are true, and that I am willing to fulfil the engagements made.

John Cochran SIGNATURE OF RECRUIT.  
W. Chisholm Signature of Witness.

OATH TO BE TAKEN BY RECRUIT ON ATTESTATION.

I, John Cochran swear by Almighty God, that I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His Heirs and Successors, and that I will, as in duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, in Person, Crown, and dignity against all enemies, and will obey all orders of His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, and of the Generals and Officers set over me. So help me God.

CERTIFICATE OF MAGISTRATE OR ATTESTING OFFICER.

The Recruit above named was cautioned by me that if he made any false answer to any of the above questions he would be liable to be punished as provided in the Army Act.  
The above questions were then read to the Recruit in my presence.  
I have taken care that he understands each question, and that his answer to each question has been duly entered as replied to, and the said Recruit has made and signed the declaration and taken the oath before me at Glasgow  
on this 16 day of February 1915  
Signature of the Justice A. B. L. Laidlaw  
S. S. S.  
Certificate of Approving Officer.

I certify that this Attestation of the above-named Recruit is correct, and properly filled up, and that the required forms appear to have been complied with. I accordingly approve, and appoint him to the : Signal Co R.E.  
If enlisted by special authority, Army Form B. 203 (or other authority for the enlistment) will be attached to the original attestation.  
Date 16 Feb 1915  
Place Pottuck  
Signature William G. Davis Major, R.E.  
Lieut. Col. Commanding

Signal Service Training Centre

† The signature of the Approving Officer must be written in the presence of the Recruit.  
Here insert the "Corps" for which the Recruit has been enlisted.





A Soldier of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Field Company Royal Engineers.  
Served with the Ninth (Scottish) Division. 1914 – 1919.