

A visit in the Plugstreet sector



Ploegsteert Sector Battlefield Experience

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Patrick Degryse K U Leuven 2 juni 2012

The British Army at Ploegsteert

How and why?

The British Army's presence at Ploegsteert in late 1914 was a direct result of the « Race to the sea », a series of battles following the turnabout and counter-attacks of the British Expeditionary Force following their retreat to the outskirts of Paris after the battle of Mons in August 1914.

Major battles were to be fought before the two armies were to comfort each other in Belgian Flanders. The German intent to outflank the British army to the North looked achievable, if not inevitable with the fall of Antwerp on 8 October. Their forces, released from their siege of the town, attempted to break through the Belgian line between Diksmuide and the sea, but were effectively stopped by the Belgians' decision to flood the countryside.

Both sides were attempting to reach the Channel ports, which, for the British, meant the protection of the British mainland, the continuance of its supply of men and materials to support its army on the continent and its means of a way back to Britain should the need arise. For the Germans it meant, controlling all the movements between Britain and mainland Europe, the severing of the British Expeditionary force's supply line and its eventual capitulation in Belgium and Northern France. As it was the Germans only managed to secure Zeebrugge and Oostende, with the British maintaining a hold on Nieuwpoort, Dunkerque and Calais.

With their outflanking movement along the coastline blocked, the German forces turned their attention to securing the town of Ypres, the position of which was now the key to opening the way to the all important ports.

Taking Ypres, or holding it, was paramount to both high commands. The German's final attempt on 11 November to drive through Ieper and thence to Calais and Dunkerque was thwarted. Similarly the allied plan to drive through the enemy line, turn his right wing and drive his army back through Belgium was repulsed.

The "race to the sea" was over, resulting in stalemate, with the front establishing itself in a line that would remain, with little or no successful forward movement for either side, until the German offensive in the April 1918.

Who and where?

The months of October and November 1914 could be said to be those that were to determine the change in the 1914-1918 conflict on the Western Front from a war of movement to one of entrenchment.

On 17 October units of the 6th Division formed the line Rouge de Bout-Bois Grenier-Chapelle d'Armentières and the 4th Division entered Armentières taking a line Armentières-Houplines and then extended it northward to le Gheer.

On the 18th Cavalry Brigade entered la Touquet and moved within 300 yards of Pont Rouge. The Germans attacked the British line on the 20th taking le Gheer. The British repelled the attack in the Ploegsteert sector and retook le Gheer the next morning. The German line consolidated roughly 300 to 500 yards away from that of the British.

By the 24th the 4th Division had taken over the 6th Division's line as far as Rue de Bois and now manned a front of 8 miles.

The 30 October saw a German onslaught from le Gheer to the river Douve. The 4th Division extended its line from St. Yves to Messines, its front now 12 miles long. German infantry broke through at St. Yves but the situation was saved by a counter-attack of the 1st Battalion Somerset Light Infantry under the command of Major C B Prowse.

On 1 November the British lost Messines and an attempt by the Germans to break through was thwarted by the 2nd Battalion Inniskilling Fusiliers, but the German army continued its relentless pressure.

On 7 November 2 Jäger and 6 infantry Battalions attacked Ploegsteert Wood and the 3rd Worcesters were driven from its trenches to the shelter of the wood. The Germans entered the wood but a counter-attack cleared them from it, but did not regain any ground.

By now le Gheer, le Pelerin and St. Yves were in ruins. Minor attacks and bombardments continued along this part of the line. With the closing down of the fighting in late November, frequent raiding by both sides continued until the Christmas period, the most significant of these being the abortive raid on German House resulting in the death of Captain, the Hon. Morgan Grenville of the Rifle Brigade.

Christmas saw the truce in the fields skirting Ploegsteert Wood.

There was no official military action called "Battle of Ploegsteert", the fighting in the area was in effect part of the Battles of Armentières, the 1914 Battle of Messines and the 1st Battle of Ypres.

Had the German broken the line here, not only would they have opened the way to Northern France and an encirclement of the British forces to the South, they would also have had the opportunity to sweep up behind the British Army fighting to the North, taking Mont Kemmel and all the high ground behind Ypres - and would no doubt have moved on their ultimate goal- the Channel ports.

Had that happened then the expectation of the British troops that the war would over by Christmas would have been realised, but not as they expected.

The memorial

The Memorial was designed by the architect H C Bradshaw and was inaugurated by the Duke of Brabant who would become King Leopold the 3rd, the 7th of June 1931. The lions that guard the entrance are the work of G Ledward. One looks serenely towards the future and the other looks in direction of the enemy. This memorial commemorates the names of 11447 fallen soldiers in the sector between the Douve and Fournes who have no known grave. The names of the battles of this sector are engraved on the exterior side of the memorial.



Inauguration of the Mémorial in 1931

The Memorial honours the name of 3 Victoria Cross holders.

Sapper William Hackett *VC Royal Engineers* killed 27th June 1916.

He was taken in the rubble after the collapsing of one of the galleries. After 20 hours of effort his comrades opened a passage to extricate the injured. William Hackett helps his friends to escape but refuses to leave alone a comrade who is seriously injured. The gallery continues to collapse but he stays with his friend. Four days later, the tunnel was freed but it was too late. Hackett knew the territory and knew the risks that he ran and still deliberately offered up his life for his comrade.



Every 1st Friday of each month there is a Last Post ceremony at the Memorial

Captain Thomas Pryce *VC 4th Grenadier Guards* Killed 13 April 1918.

With approximately forty men he faced off an enemy battalion for more than ten hours in Vieux Berquin. Finally, short of ammunition and determined to fight until the end, he asked his men to make one last stand, where he would lose his life.

Private James Mackenzie *VC 2nd Scots Guards* killed the 19th December 1914.

In the sector called Rouge Bancs, he went out in full enemy fire to rescue a soldier, seriously wounded near the German trenches. He was killed later the same day trying to do the same for a second time.



The Memorial also holds the names of three men who were executed.

Archibald Browne deserted and was taken in civilian clothes near Hazebrouck and was shot on 19th December 1914

Arnold Pitts was shot at dawn for desertion on 12 April 1918

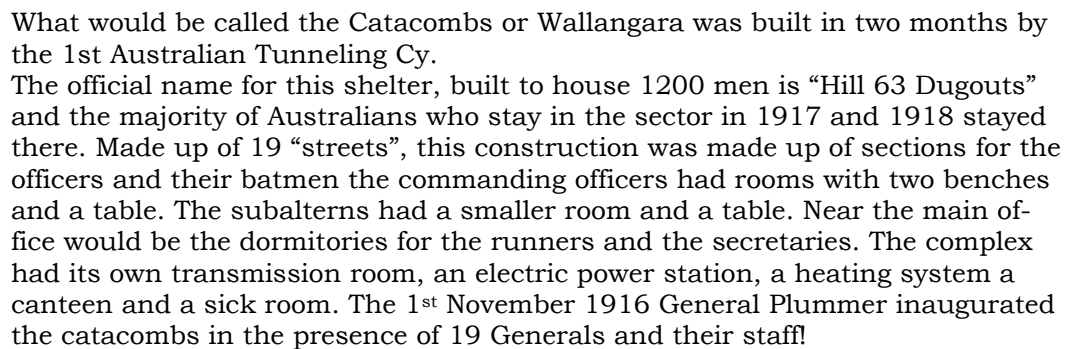
Thomas Hope disappeared for six weeks, was taken near Armentieres and was shot on the 2nd of March 1915

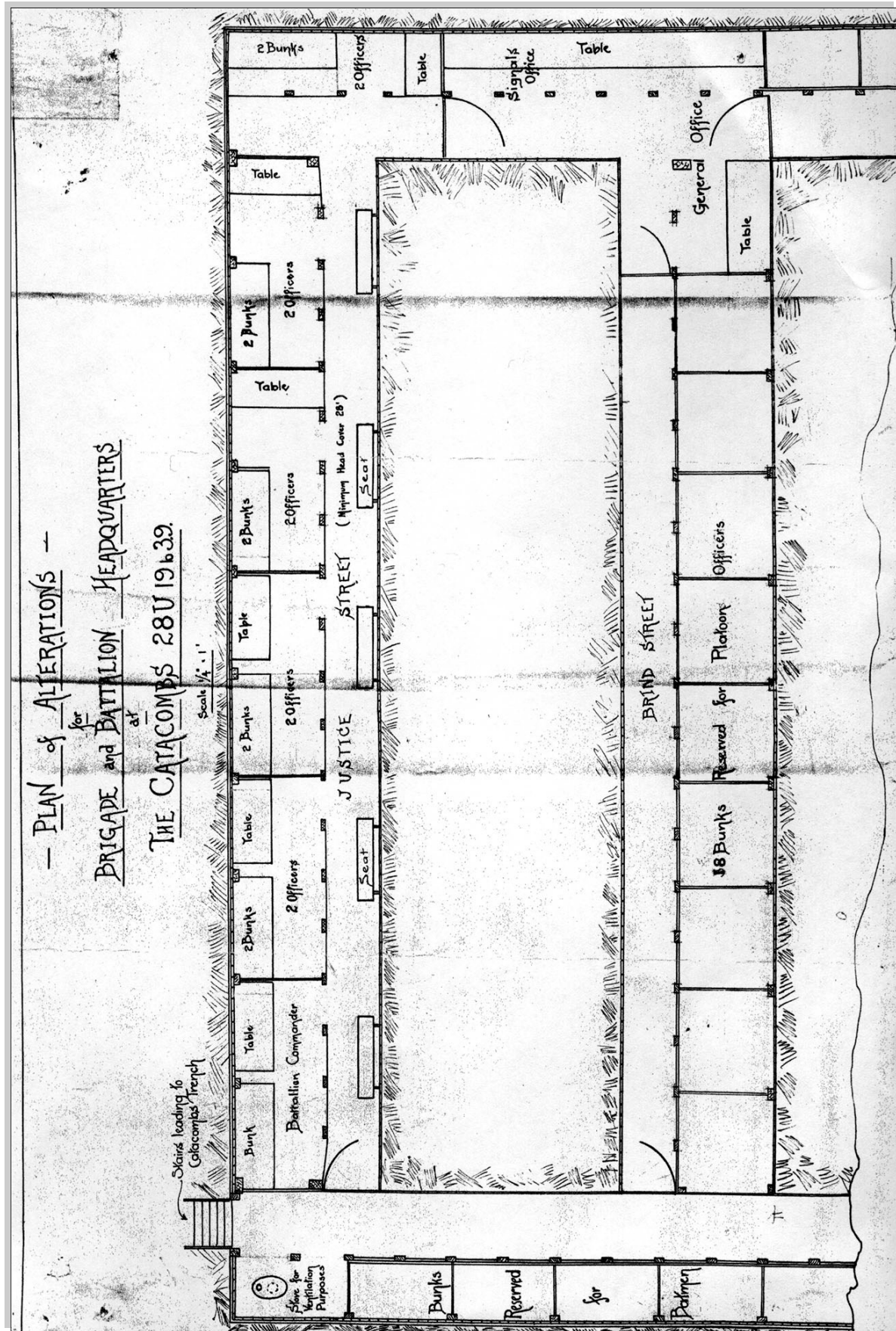
The graves situated south of the memorial are the graves of three small cemetery's which used to be near Rosenberg Chateau. In 1931 each soldier was exhumed and reburied with full military honors at the foot of the hill south of the memorial.



Royal Berks Cemetery Extension in the early 20's

Patrick Degryse K U Leuven 2 juni 2012





Two of the 19 « streets »



Sketch by G. M. Sheldon published in the
War Illustrated the 8th June 1918

The catacombs are the most important underground construction in the region, but shelters are dug wherever the terrain allows.

The objective was to shelter the men as much as possible and as close as possible from the assault points.

The evening of 6 and 7 June 1917 the men of the 3rd Australian division leave their camps near Romarin close to midnight.

After three hours of marching under a rain of fire and gas they arrive at St Yvon to go over the top but their losses already amount to 500 killed or injured. Which shows the need of having shelters close to the frontline.



One of the entries in the early Twenties



Australian officers in the Catacombs, winter 1917.



New Zealand bivouacs rue de Messines

Artist views

George Edmund Butler, born in 1872 in Southampton which he would leave with his parents in 1883 for Wellington in New Zealand. He would become a painter, specializing in landscapes and later became the official painter for New Zealand of the battlefields of the Great War. Most of the time he penciled his drawings during the fights. The drawings served as a first draft for the paintings he would make later. He would also return several months after the hostilities to finish his work.



The Ploegsteert road towards Hill 63



Hyde Park Corner 1918



The Catacombs 1918



Dugout Hyde Park Corner

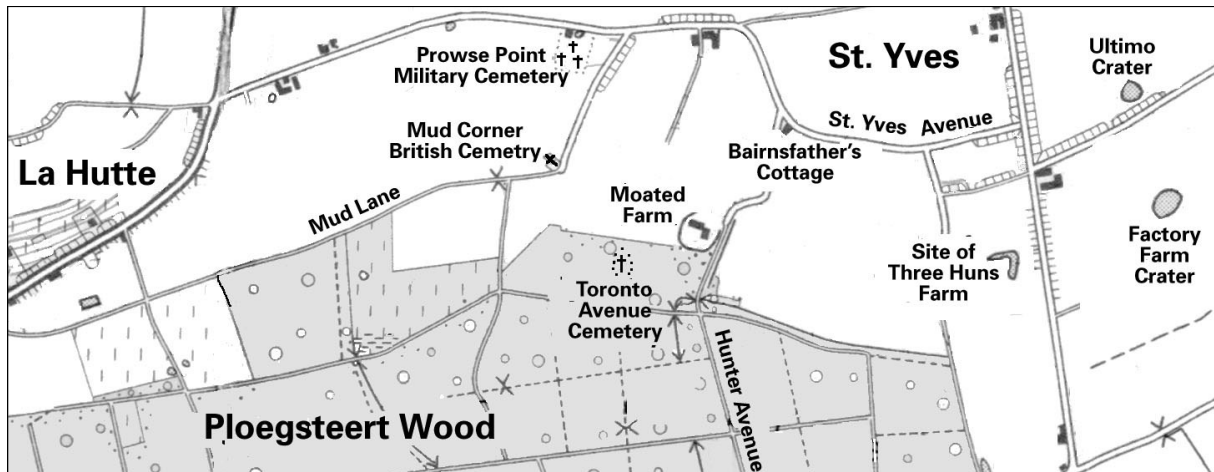


Rue du Petit Pont also named Red Lodge street

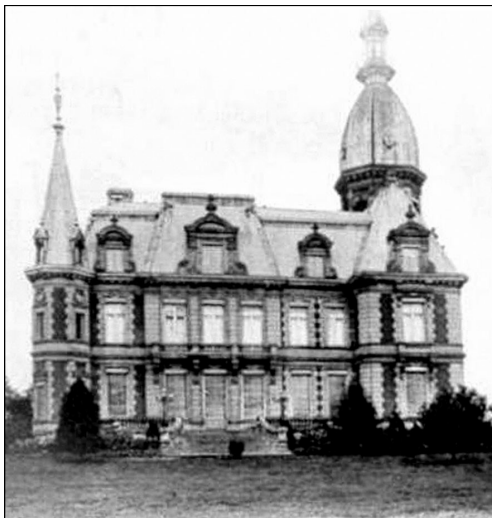


Red Lodge Hill and Red Lodge

From Hill 63 to St Yves



Lieutenant R B Talbot Kelly served here in 1917 as a Forward Observation Officer recalls:
« My section has a forward gun on the edge of the wood near Mud Lane. The pit lay in a verdant thicket of little willows and blackberry bushes. Ten yards away, a wooden cross marked the grave of Ronnie Poulton (*sic*), Prince of Rugby players, whom, as a boy at school, I had often seen run through a complete team to score a dazzling try. I felt here was a strange reunion of Rugbeians, dead and living in a glade in Arcady.



Château de la Hutte

The château de la Hutte served as an observatory for the artillery but was quickly destroyed by German artillery. Its cellars would serve as shelters during a large part of the war.

The place was christened « Hennessy chateau » by the Canadians who used its cellars



The ruins today



Château de la Hutte in 1915



HQ of the London Rifle Brigade in 1914



Rifle House HQ of the Rifle Brigade



A parapet in 1914



Another parapet at the edge of the wood



In the famous « Plug Street » wood by Fortunino Matania



The first cemetery that we find in the wood is Toronto Avenue.

It owes its name to the communication trench near to where it is situated.

The 78 men buried there were all from the 9th Brigade 3rd Australian Division and were killed during the Battle of Messines from the 7th to 10th June 1917.



British and German graves in the wood

Ploegsteert Wood Military Cemetery is the second cemetery we will find in the wood, it houses 163 graves dating from 1914 to 1917.

The first graves are from the 1st Battalion Somerset Light Infantry and date from the attack on the Birdcage in December 1914.



Five Officer's graves killed during the attack on the *Birdcage* the 19th December 1914



These graves today



Rifle House Cemetery is a clearing shaded by tall trees. There are 230 British graves and one Canadian. The reason for this solitary Canadian grave remains a mystery. The graves in the first plot dates from the 19 December 1914 attack on the Birdcage.

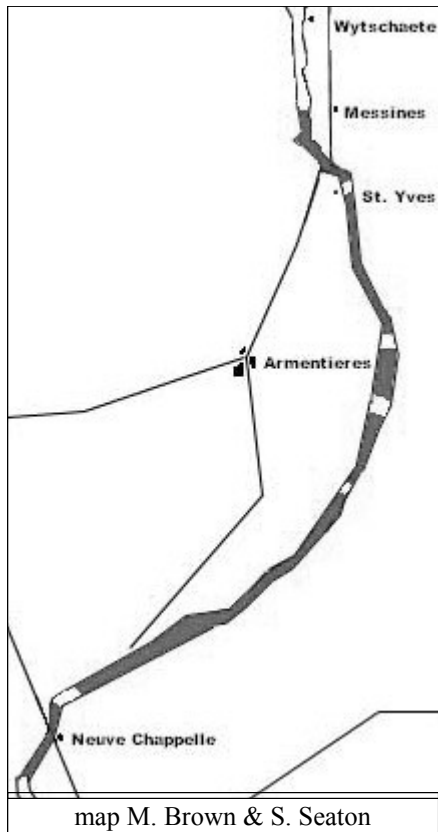
Rifleman Barnett, the youngest soldier killed in the Ploegsteert sector, is buried here next to the Captain the Hon. Morgan Grenville and the Captain the Hon. Prittie.

The cemetery was started in 1914 and takes its name from a log cabin which served as the headquarters for the Rifle Brigade.



Rifle House Cemetery graves of the Capt. the Hon. Morgan Grenville and the Capt. the Hon Prittie

Bruce Bairnsfather and the Christmas Truce



In grey, the places where there was a truce at Christmas 1914.

After the mobile warfare which had lasted since August, the front is fixed and the belligerents dig themselves in. This does not signify the end of the hostilities. The war rages in this sector until end of December.

At this stage, many still believe that the war will be over for Christmas. Several days before Christmas, preparations are made for the festivities. The men of the London Rifle Brigade rent a room in pub in Ploegsteert to celebrate Christmas.

On the 24th December around 23:00 (German time) Henry Williamson hears a barytone voice from the enemy trenches singing Silent Night. The ground is frozen and the night is clear. Williamson returns to the shelter of the wood when one of his men tells him that the Germans are leaving their trenches. He returns to the frontline and finds himself face to face with the Germans in their grey uniforms and leather boots with a smile on their faces.

Bruce Bairnsfather was in Ploegsteert at Christmas 1914, in his book *Bullets and Billets* he wrote:

« I remember at the time being very down on my luck about this, as anything in the nature of Christmas Day festivities was obviously knocked on the head. Now, however, looking back on it all, I wouldn't have missed that unique and weird Christmas Day for anything. Fancy all this hate, war and discomfort on a day like this! I thought to myself. The whole spirit of Christmas seemed to be there, so much so that I remember thinking, This indescribable something in the air, the Peace and Goodwill feeling, surely will have some effect on the situation here to-day! And I wasn't far wrong; it did around us, anyway, and I have always been so glad to think of my luck in, firstly, being actually in the trenches on Christmas Day, and secondly, being on the spot where quite a unique little episode took place. »



Bruce Bairnsfather

Captain Hamilton wrote in his diary :

« November 21st, our trenches near the famous Plusgtreet Wood- bread for the troops was regularly provided by the Belgian baker with is dogs and cart in the Plusgstreet area in November and December 1914. »



Captain Hamilton recounts :« We set off for the trenches at 6.30 p.m. a little sad at spending Xmas Day in them. Crossing the well worn danger zone to our consternation not a shot was fired at us. The Dubs told us as we relieved them that the Germans wanted to talk to us. When we were settled down, we heard them shouting, « Are you the Warwickcs? » To which our men replied, « Come and see !» They said « You come half way, and we will come half way, and bring you some cigars. » This went on for some time, when, Private Gregory, Double Ginger, my late servant came and asked if he might go out half way. I said « Yes, at your own risk. »

Private Gregory stepped over the parapet, and got half way, and was heard saying, « Well here I am, where are you? » « Come half way » they said , so on went Gregory, until he came upon two unarmed Germans, and one fully armed, lying down just behind, with his rifle pointed at him, typically German. Gregory was unarmed and alone, typically British. He got his cigar and spun them some magnificent yarns about the strenght of his Company, which amused us all very much when he told us later. They wanted me to meet their Officer, and after a great deal of shouting across, I said I would meet him at dawn unarmed.

On the German side Lieutenant Karl Zehmisch, from the 11th Infantry Regiment, gave the order not to fire on that evening or on Christmas Day.

Not all the Regiments fratenised with the ennemy, the commanding Officer of The SeafortH Highlanders gave the order to send the Germans to their trenches and not to fire if they did not come out again.





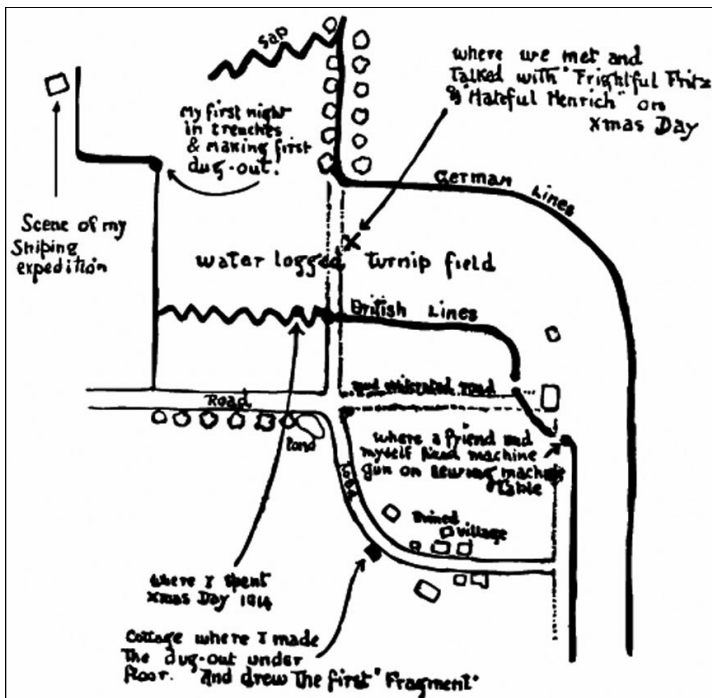
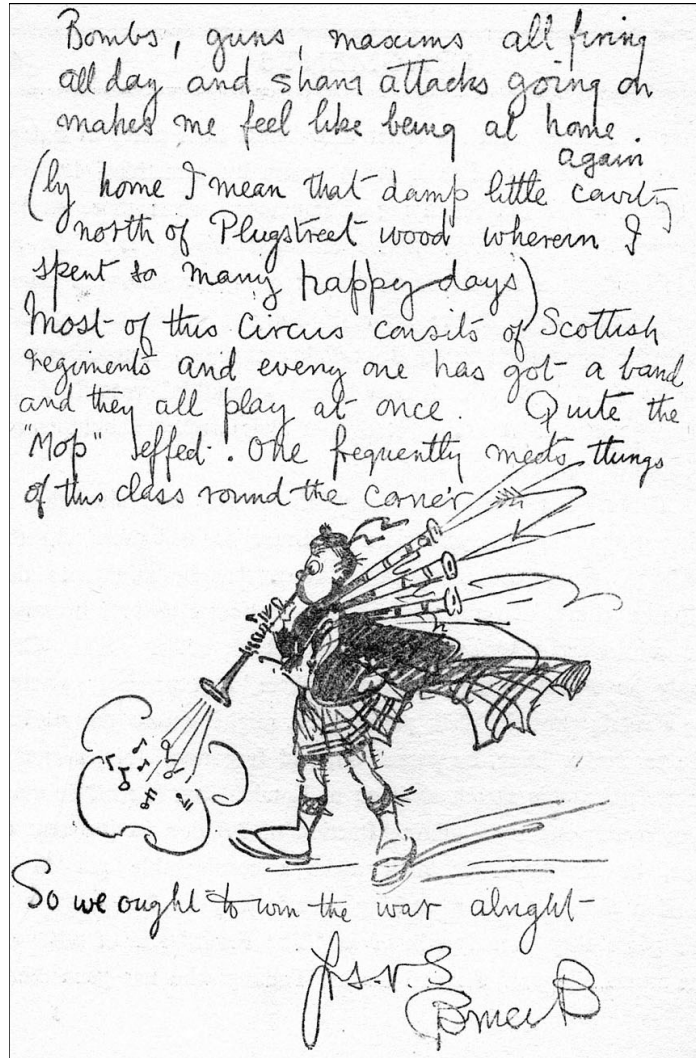
In January 1915 another character appeared in Ploegsteert, Old Bill, a caricature of an English soldier. Bruce Bairnsfather himself described Old Bill in the following way :

First discovered in the alluvial deposits of Southern Flanders.

Feeds almost exclusively on jam and water biscuits.

Hobby: Filling sandbags, on dark and rainy nights

One Officer friend of Bairnsfather was Bernard Law Montgomery whose lung was wounded by a sniper on 13 October 1914 in Meteren, he returned in to the region in 1940 to fight near the canal Ypres-Comines during the retreat on Dunkirk.



One of his first drawings was sent by one of his friends to England in the hope of being published. Imagine their surprise when a few weeks later, a letter arrived with the wording, « we like it » along with a cheque of £ 2.00 sent by the Bystander.

Bairnsfather and his Regiment moved towards the North and were involved in the 2nd Battle of Ypres.

Old Bill's father was injured between Sint Juliaan and Moustrap Farm, was evacuated to England to recover and never returned to the Flanders Fields

Prowse Point



One of the particularities of this location is that it is named after Major CB Prowse. No other cemetery bears the name of a person.

At the end of October 1914 the Germans attacked furiously the lines held by the Somersets in this sector. Their Headquarters were situated in an estaminet near Hyde Park Corner. The 30th of October all seemed calm at the north of the wood. At 07:00 the Germans advanced towards the defenses around Ploegsteert. The Somersets are on the way to the back after being relieved by the Hampshire Regiment who are in the same Brigade. A breakthrough in the line at this point would have disastrous effects, the way would be open to take the wood and continue straight on to Armentières. The Hampshires who were not yet properly installed were on the point of losing the position. At 16:45 Lieutenant Braithewaite waited desperately for reinforcements. At HQ at Hyde Park Corner messages to sound the alarm were arriving one after the other. At 17.30 at night fall, Major Prowse makes a reconnaissance visit and notes that not only the trenches have been taken but also the surrounding buildings. He decides to launch a counter attack with his two companies at the same time leaving back a reserve. He leads the assault himself, without artillery cover, only lightly armed and with the bayonets on the rifles. They clean out the trenches and push back the enemy. The speed and ferocity of the maneuver was a complete success. The Somersets suffered no losses. Later Major Prowse was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and was awarded the DSO.



Harry Wilkinson

Fusillier Harry Wilkinson *2nd Lancashire Fusiliers* killed in action 10th November 1914.

His remains were found in January 2000 and he was buried with full military honors in Prowse Point Cemetery on 31st October 2001.



Private Alan Mather



The wooden cross indicates the spot wher Harry Wilkinson was found.

August 2008 the archaeologists of No Man's Land found the skeleton of of an Australian soldier north of the Ultimo Crater.

After a lengthy inquiry led by Bradford, Leuven, Cranfield and Oxford Universities, it was identified and buried on 23rd July 2010.

Alan Mather had been killed and reported missing on the 8th of June 1917 and was one of the 6 178 Australian soldiers reported missing in the Ypres salient.

On the 4th July 2007 Private Lancaster and two unidentified soldiers were buried in the same cemetery



Private Lancaster and his son.

The mines of June 1917

24 mines were dug for the Battle of Messines in June 1917. From the North, Hill 60 to the South at le Gheer, their alignment forms a semi-circle around Messines.

19 of them were triggered on the 7th of June at 03:10, the explosions could be heard as far as London

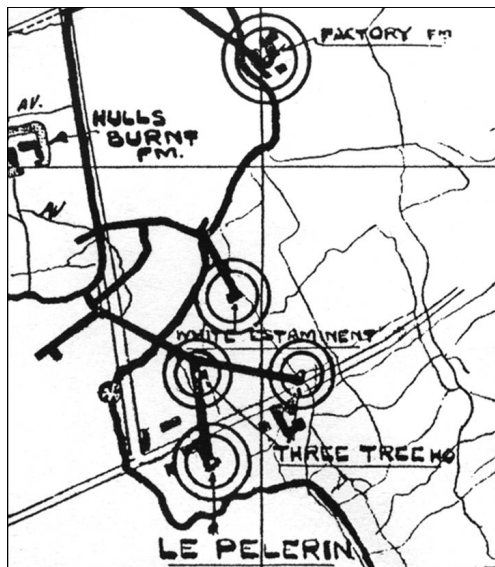
The mine under Petite Douve Farm was discovered by the Germans who dug a counter saps and finally after several underground fights it was decided to flood it.



Factory Farm crater in 1919

Edward Lynch, an Australian soldier was in Neuve Eglise on the Morning of 7 June, this is how he describes the events.

« We look at a watch. It is nine minutes past three. « The cat is about to jump » laughs someone. Hardly are the words out of his mouth when, like the slamming of the door of Doom, a terrific roar goes up as hundreds of great guns let go right along our front. A dancing glow lights the whole countryside and on every side for miles we see darting pin pricks of flame as our guns roar into action. Our heavies are into it hard and solid. « Look! » And to the north on the crown of the great black dome we know is Messines hill, we see a movement as of an enormous black tin hat slowly rising out of the hill. Suddenly the great rising mass is shattered into a black cloud of whirling dust as a huge rosette of flames lick, dancing and flickering. High up in the sky above the explosion we see a bank of dark clouds turn red from the reflection of the terrible burst below. A minute or so later, we get the appalling roar, drowning even our guns' firing, as the sound of the nineteen great mines going up bursts in our ears. The ground rumbles, shivers, and vibrates under us. The vibration passes on and months of minig and tunneling work has reached its object. The mines have been fired! »

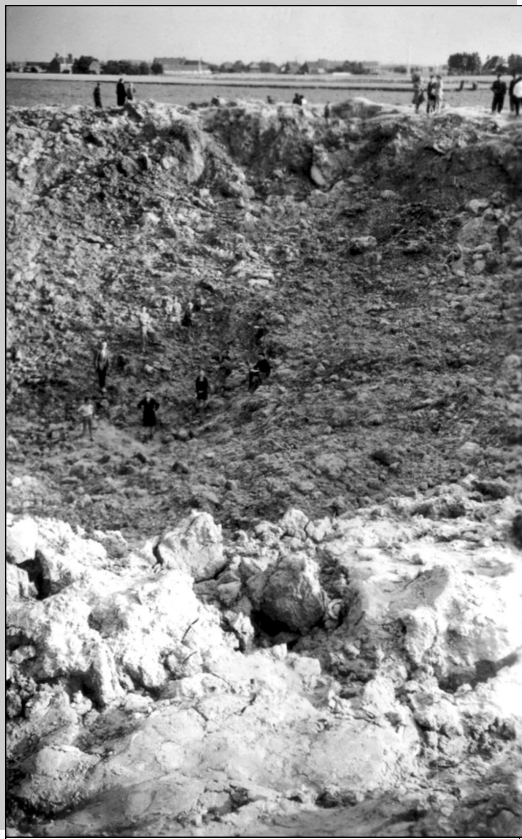


The 4 most southern mines

The four most southern mines were not triggered after the headquarters noticed that the German reinforcements were dangerously close to these mines.

They are still there today except one which exploded in July 1955.





Mine crater July 1955

Imagine the surprise of the inhabitants of the region when one day of July 1955 a bolt of lightning detonated one of the 1917 forgotten mines.

Fortunately no one was injured, the remaining mines being situated in a relatively unpopulated area

The Belgian army filled in the hole.



When it rains it is possible to locate the place of the explosion.

Le Gheer



Drummer Bent rescuing a wounded soldier

His citation in the London Gazette, 9th December 1914 reads:

Spencer John Bent, No 8581, Drummer, 1st Battalion, The East Lancashire Regt. Date of act of bravery: 1-2 Nov. 1914. For conspicuous gallantry near le Gheir (sic) on the night of 1-2 Nov. , when after his officer, platoon sergeant and section commander has been struck down, he took command, and with great presence of mind and coolness succeeded to hold the position. Drummer Bent had previously distinguished himself on two occasions, 22 and 24 Oct., by bringing up ammunition, under heavy shell and rifle fire, and again on 3rd Nov., when he brought into cover some wounded men who were lying exposed in the open.



Drummer Bent VC

At daybreak on 3rd November the East Lancashire trenches, under heavy bombardment, were being systematically destroyed. In No Man's Land several men were lying wounded in the open and Drummer Bent, ignoring the shelling, crawled-out in an effort to bring them back to the safety of the British line. One of them Private J McNulty lay about thirty yards from the trench line and the gallant Bent slipping and sliding about, fell over in his effort to lift the wounded man onto his back. Shells and bullets helped him to decide to stay down, so he hooked his feet under McNulty's armpits and back-crawled to the British trenches dragging the wounded man with him. Bent suffered wounds to his legs, arms, hands and head and was sent back to England to recover.

He was awarded the Victoria Cross in December 1914, receiving it from the King George V at Buckingham Palace on 13th January 1915.



Le Gheer convent



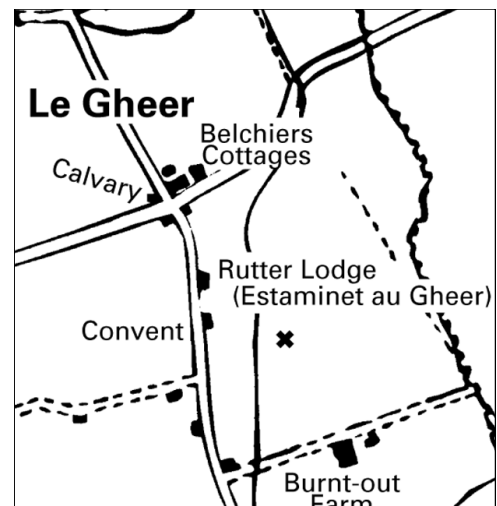
Le Gheer crossroads January 1915



Lance Sergeant Belcher VC

Opposite the calvary is a group of dwellings named at the time Belchier Cottages, a miss-spelling of Belcher. Lance Sergeant Douglas Walter Belcher, 1st Battalion London Rifle Brigade had used these cottages as a matériels dump for pioneering workers of the Battalion in the winter of 1914.

He made a name for himself worthy of more than a group of cottages when he was awarded the Battalion's first Victoria Cross while holding firm against continuous German attacks on Mousetrap Farm during the second Battle of Ypres.



The X indicates the spot from where Drummer Bent back-crawled McNulty to safety on 3rd November 1915.

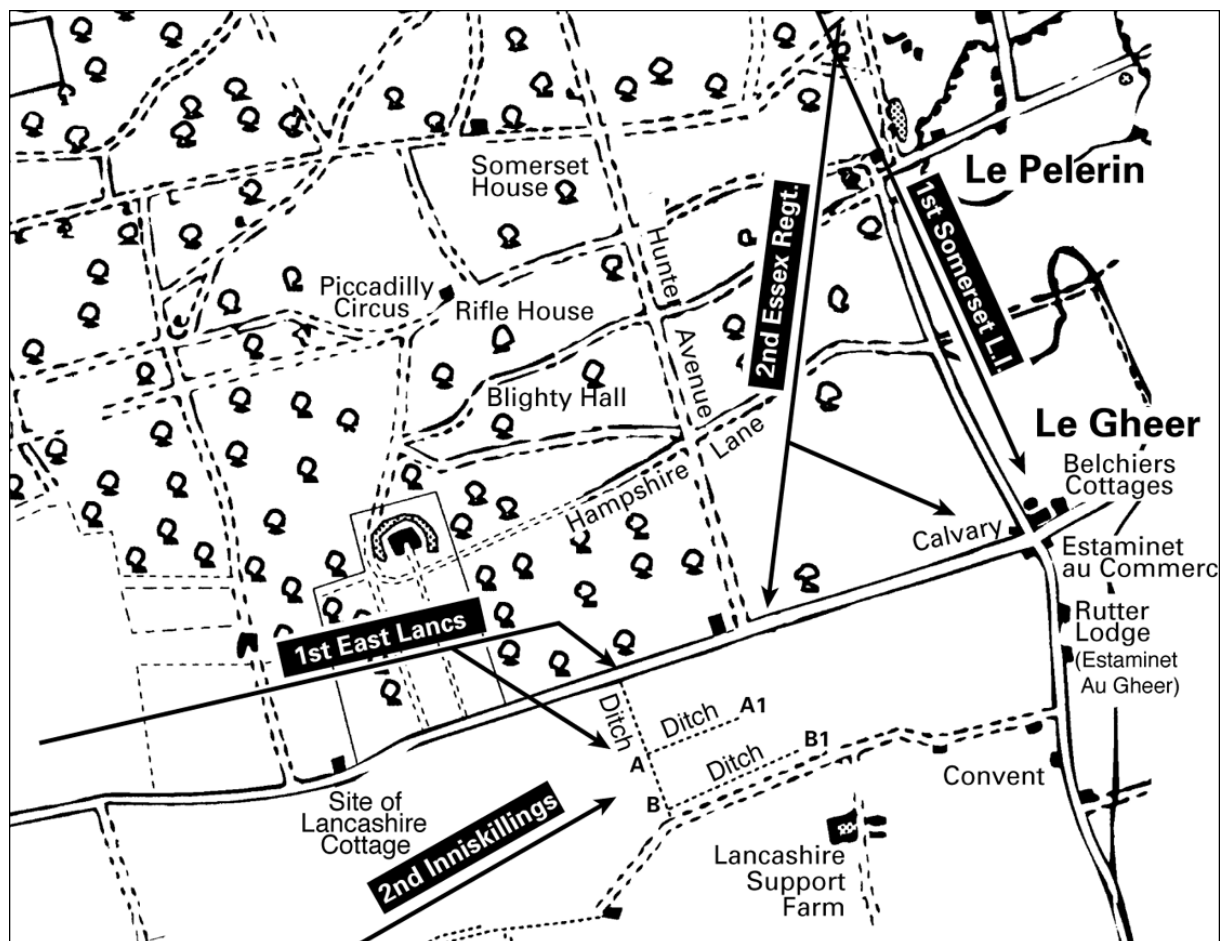


*Deutscher Kolonnen vor der Le Gheer - Winter
an Ploegsteert - Malt.*

German picture of le Gheer



Estaminet « au Gheer »



The attack on the German lines on 21 October 1914

The 20th of October the Germans attack and take the hamlet of le Gheer. The British Counter-attack and retake the hamlet the following day. The Germans consolidate their lines at approximately 300 to 500 yards to the east of the hamlet.



Hunter Avenue 16 February 1918

On taking the road towards Ploegsteert we pass a charming house at the edge of the wood, the forrest path which cuts through the north of the wood to the south is called Hunter Avenue.



Australian troops at Lancashire Support Farm

Lancashire Support Farm, situated opposite to Hunter Avenue owes its name to the 1st Battalion East Lancashire Regiment because its men used it to house their rations, ammunitions and trench material.

Personalities

Winston Churchill was fervent supporter for the opening of a second Eastern front. After the disaster at Gallipoli Churchill was sent to the front to head the 6th Royal Scots. He spent several months from January to May 1916 in Ploegsteert.

In his book « Thoughts and adventures » he recounts an incident, where he thought he had lost documents relating to the deployment of tanks against the German trenches. This story happened at the ouvroir, rue d'Armentières now number 121.

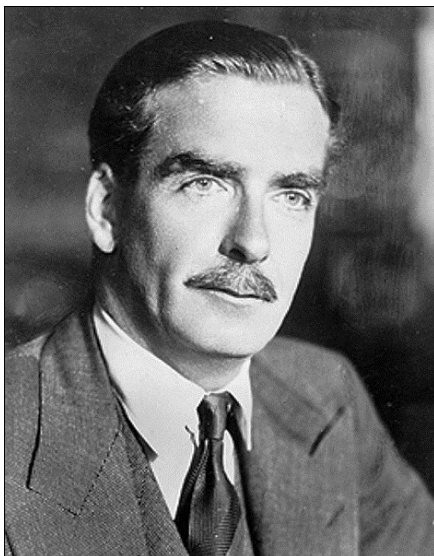
A plaque on the front of the town hall commemorates his stay in Ploegsteert.



Winston Churchill





Ploegsteert by Winston Churchill



Sir Anthony Eden 1st Earl of Avon

Anthony Eden served in the Royal Rifle Corps during the war, he was awarded the Military Cross on June 3rd 1917. He became Foreign Secretary in 1935, in 1939 Secretary of State of War, Foreign Affairs Minister in 1951 and Prime Minister in 1955. He retired from political life in 1957 for health reasons and dedicated himself to his writing.

Roland Leighton, poet Vera Britains Lover, served in the 7th Battalion Worcester Regiment. Amongst others he wrote the poem « Villanelle »



VILLANELLE
*By Roland A Leighton
Ploegsteert Wood, April 1915*


Violets from Plug Street Wood
Sweet, I send you oversea.
(It is strange they should be blue,
Blue, when his soaked blood was red,
For they grew around his head;
It is strange they should be blue.)

...

Violets from Plug Street Wood -
Think what they have meant to me -
Life and Hope and Love and You
(And you did not see them grow
Where his mangled body lay,
Hiding horror from the day;
Sweetest, it was better so.)

...

Violets from oversea,
To your dear, far, forgetting land
These I send in memory,
Knowing You will understand.



Ronald Poulton Palmer 1st/4th Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment was killed by a sniper at Anton's Farm on 5th May 1915 whilst supervising reparation works. He was a famous rugby player, having played for the Harlequins and the Barbarians. He had been captain of the English Rugby Team. He played his last international match at the Parc des Princes in Paris in July 1914 where he scored four tries.



Ronald Poulton Palmer



The wooden gravemarker in Hyde Park Corner Cemetery

R.B. Talbot Kelly, author and illustrator, he specialised in drawing birds.

This young Lieutenant served here in 1917 as artillery observer and wrote:

« The pit lay in a verdant thicket of little willows and blackberry bushes. Ten yards away, a wooden cross marked the grave of Ronnie Ploulton (*sic*), Prince of Rugby players, whom, as a boy at school, I had often seen run through a complete team to score a dazzling try. I felt here was a strange re-union of Rugbeians, dead and living in a glade in Arcady. »



Albert French's grave

The 15th June 1916 a young boy of 16 is killed. He dies instantly struck by 4 bullets from a machine gun.

Albert was born 22nd June 1889 in New Bradwell, Milton Keynes.

In August 1914 lots of youngsters from Wolverton, where Albert lived and worked, left the train construction factories to sign up. At this time, everyone believed that the war would be over for Christmas and the youngsters didn't want to miss the opportunity. Later, they would know the real horror of war but despite that, young men would still sign up.

Albert enlisted on the 4th July 1915.



R.B. Talbot Kelly



Albert French

The 1st of May 1916 his Battalion leave Aldershot for Southampton and Le Havre.

They are billeted at le Steentje where they train intensively.

The 28th May they arrive in Ploegsteert. During this time, Albert wrote several letters to his sister May. These letters were published by « The Living Archive » in Wolverton.

In 2007 the twinning of Ploegsteert and Wolverton was signed in homage to the young boy who came and died in our little village.



Henry Williamson

Henry Williamson, journalist and author was strongly marked by the Christmas Truce in 1914. He recounts his experiences of the war in « Wet Flanders Plain » in 1929, « The Patriots Progress » 1930, and in several books from the « A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight » series in 1951-1969. The book which made him famous was « Tarka the Otter ». In 1979 a film starring Peter Ustinov as the narrator told the tale of the otter to the whole world.



To the glory of God and in loving memory of Richard George Grenville Morgan GRENVILLE, Master of Kinloss, Captain Rifle Brigade, killed in action in Ploegsteert Wood Armentieres, 19 Decmber 1914 aged 27.



The Hon. Morgan-Grenville

This window was erected by a sorrowfull mother.



Window inside Stowe parish church

Captain The Honourable Richard George Grenville Morgan-Grenville.

Descendant of William the Conqueror, Lord of Kinloss and eldest son of the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos and the eighth Baroness of Kinloss. He studied at Eton, was promoted Lieutenant on 22 Januari 1910 and Captain in 1914.

On 19 December 1914 at 14:30 he led on an assault on German Houses and was killed almost imediatly by a shot from German House 3.



Capt. The Hon. F.R.D. Prittie

An experienced Officer arrived in France on 19th August 1914. He distinguished himself during the retreat towards the Marne.

Captain The Hon. Prittie received the Cross of the Légion d'Honneur from the hands of Général Joffre for being the last man to leave a trench under enemy fire and having thus saved the lives of numerous French Soldiers.



Hitler during WW1

Whilst he never came to Ploegsteert, it is important to indicate the presence of Hitler in Messines and in the region. He served in the 16th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment, also called the List Regiment. In the autumn 1914 he was 25 and Regimental runner. His Regiment had its Headquarters in Bethlehem Farm for a while.



Bethlehem Farm end 1914



Messines Church by Hitler

Opération Georgette



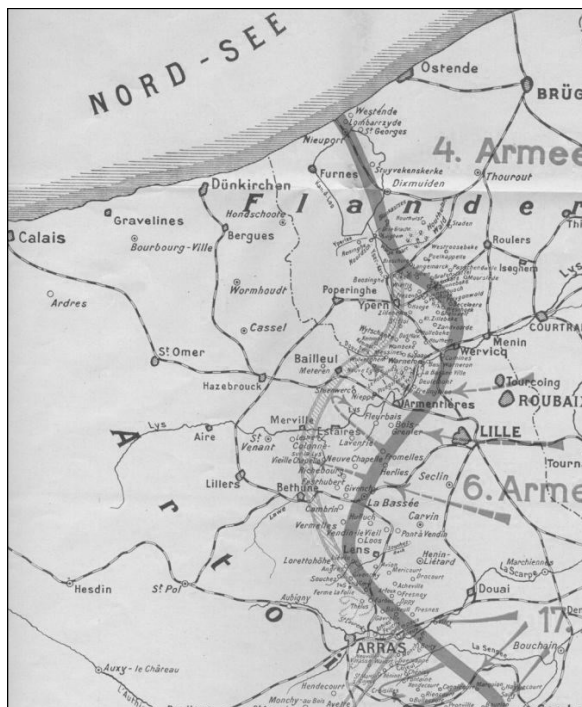
Gén. Magnus Von Eberhardt

The 10th of April 1918 after the Von Quast Division had swept the British and the Portuguese south of Armentières, the 4th Army led by General Sixt Von Armin attacked the north of Armentières. 148 batteries opened fire on the sector Ploegsteert—Hollebeke to open the way for the 8 Divisions to attack.

That evening General Magnus Von Eberhart reached Ploegsteert Wood. The following day the wood was in German hands whilst the left wing of the 4th Army joined the left wing of the 6th leaving Armentières in Flames.

3 000 men and 40 guns were captured.

On 29th April the German assaults petered out and the High Command decided to stop the offensive. The earlier objectives, to take Ypres and the Channel ports were abandoned . Ploegsteert will be retaken by the allies in September.



Ground gained by the Germans during Operation Georgette



General Sixt Von Armin

Messines

In September 1914, French troops arrive in Messines to maintain order. The inhabitants were suspected of having sympathy for the enemy. On Saturday 15th September, Michel Beudart was arrested by the French for saying they had shed much blood in 1870, but this time it would be worse.

On Saturday 3th October about 300 Belgians volunteers arrive in town, some have no uniforms and are unarmed. Around midnight their commanding Officer is ordered to withdraw to Bailleul, Germans are reported on the road to Messines.

On Sunday 4th October 400 German riders go through Messines towards Nieuwkerke.

Wednesday 7th October 200 Uhlans arrive at Messines, they go to the post office to destroy the telegraph, take all correspondence and empty the safe.

On the 9th a German column passes through the small town direction Kruissteen and then Nieuwkerke.

11th October, in the morning the guns are heard from Hazebrouck, more artillery is heard the 12th and tapers off on Tuesday 13. The British are pushing the Germans straight to Warneton.

19th October, the British arrive at Messines installing artillery at the north and west close to the strongest houses and fire on the Pont Rouge. Before night they withdraw.

On Tuesday 20th October the British Army returns in force. The German artillery rams the town and panic reigns. Most of the population flees towards the west. The German artillery is ramming hard until 30th October who will be the worst day.

Saturday 31st the Germans are storming the town from 3 different sides. The British and Indian troops defend the ground until the ultimate sacrifice, but on the 1st November the Germans reach the square.



31 octobre-1 novembre 1914
The London Scottish at Messines

On the 31st October 1914, the London Scottish are digging trenches at Sint Eloo.

At 8 a.m. that morning an order arrives sending them to support the 4th Cavalry Brigade of General Bingam. When they arrive at Messines the situation is critical and they must clog a breach in the lines.

Despite an open ground, an ennemy higher in number and faulty weapons they push the Germans twice back. During the 3rd assault the Germans bore a breach in their left flank. For the London Scottish this is the most critical moment. The losses are enormous, they are isolated from their command and must act on their own initiative. Captain MacNab, the doctor, is killed while he looks after one of his men. They withdraw towards Wulvergem to avoid a massacre, the Germans do not take benefit from the situation because they are to exhausted.

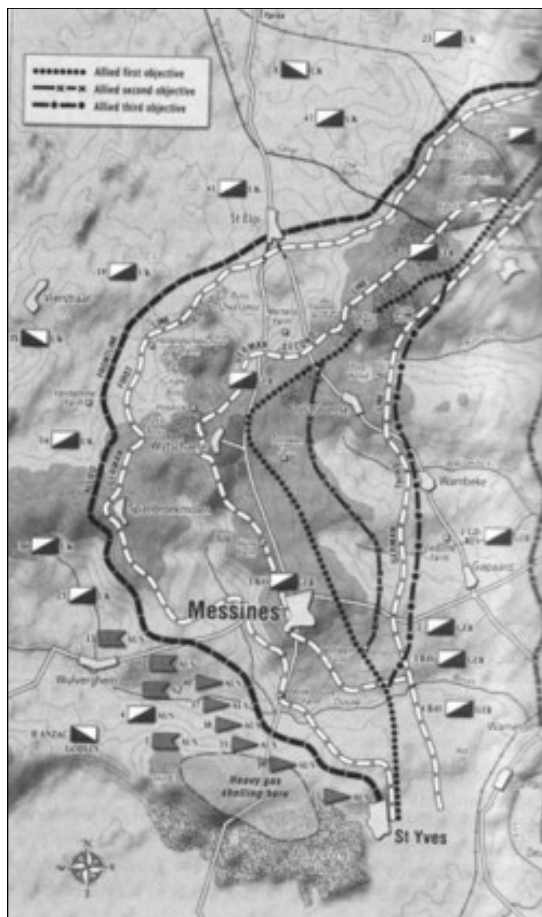
A Company does not recieve the order because it is completely isolated, later they will gather in De Klijte.

Finally the Germans will take Messines but do not manage to break the front-line.

The regiment will lose in this action 394 men out of 700.

Magnus Opus

7 - 14 June 1917



The best prepared operation of WW1. The plans of the attack are fixed in August 1915. The digging of the tunnels starts in January 1916. On the 7th June 1917 at 03:10 the 19 mines are triggered what represents a total of 480 000 kilos explosive.

The 41st, 47th, and 23rd British Divisions attack on the north with the 24 Division as reserve.

The 19th, 16th Irish and 36th Ulster Divisions are attacking the western side of the hill, with the 11th Division as reserve.

The 2nd ANZAC made up of the 25th New Zealand and the 3rd Australian Divisions attack the south with the 4th Australian Division as reserve..

This assault will be supported by 72 tanks, 2 266 guns and 480 machine guns. For the first time the attacker will have less losses than the defendant.

25 000 Germans for 17 000 allied.

The Unknown Soldier

“Who is the Unknown Soldier?”

He is the one that led the way
so the general could make it home;
She is the one who saved the child and was left to die alone.

His dreams were cut off
by his untimely death;
Her innocence shattered
by her last shallow breath.

He is the voice
that echoes our pride;
She is the eyes, that
for our freedom, cried.

He is the rain
that waters our souls;
She is the river
holding secrets untold.

He's in the wave
crashing Normandy's shore;
She's on the wind
over Dieppe once more.

He's in the song
that Passchendaele sang;
She's in the bell
from which freedom rang.

His death was a pledge
prayers cannot suffice;
Her life, a gift,
At the ultimate price.

**Leah McDonald
Elrose, Saskatchewan**

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Notes