A Welsh Response to the Great War:

The 38th (Welsh) Division on the Western Front

1914 – 1919

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Abstract

The story of how 'Lloyd George's Army' became a well-respected Welsh Division is the starting point of this work. As the Great War progressed the division became better known for its military effectiveness rather than its political association. It should be seen as a Welsh Division, representing Wales, and its people, united with other small nations, in the fight for 'civilisation'. By the end of the war, it did represent the martial spirit of Welsh heroes of the past and not one man.

This thesis aims to explore the demands of modern trench warfare made on the men of the Welsh Division who rose to the challenges they were confronted with. This research will probe the role of the senior commanders as well as the middle and junior ranking officers concerned. Although the focus revolves around the battles which were a major feature of the war on the Western Front, it will also put into place the men who were present during these events. In nearly all cases, they were very much men of the New Armies, and in the Welsh case, they were very much part of the society they came from. Through their attestation forms the evidence reveals most of these men who came forward to join the Welsh Division as junior officers were, in the main, the products of the Welsh universities and grammar schools. The study of the profile of the Welsh Division will provide a comprehensive account of the events and experience which has for so long gone unrecognised. It will also fill in one of the gaps in Welsh historical writing which occurs between 1914 and 1918.

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Abbreviations

2nd Lieut. – Second Lieutenant

A.G. – Adjutant General

A.A. & Q.M.G. - Deputy Adjutant and Quartermaster General

A. & Q. – Adjutant and Quarter Master General

A.D.C. – Aide-de-camp

A.D.M.S. – Assistant Director of Medical Services

A.D.S. – Advance Dressing Station

A.D.V.S. – Assistant Director of Veterinary Services

A.M. – Albert Medal

A.S.C. – Army Service Corps

A.V.C. – Army Veterinary Corps

B.A.C. – Brigade Ammunition Dump

Bde – Brigade

B.E.F. – British Expeditionary Force

Bn. – Battalion

Brig. Gen. – Brigadier General

B.G.G.S. – Brigadier General, General Staff

B.G.R.A. – Brigadier General Royal Artillery

B.M. – Brigade Major

B.W.M. – British War Medal

C.A.B. - Cabinet

Capt. – Captain

C.B.E. – Companion of the Order of the British Empire

C.C.R.A. – Corps Commander Royal Artillery

C.C.S. – Casualty Clearing Station

C.D.S. – Corps Dressing Station

C.H.A. – Commander Heavy Artillery

C.I.D. – Committee of Imperial Defence

C.I.E. – Commander Order of the Indian Empire

C. in C - Commander in Chief

C.I.G.S. – Chief of the Imperial Staff

C.M.G. – Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George

C.M.G.O. – Commander Machine Gun Officer

C.O.S. - Chief of Staff

Corps – Army Corps

Cpl. – Corporal

C.R.A. – Commander Royal Artillery

C.R.E. – Commander Royal Engineers

C.S.M. – Company Sergeant Major

C.W.G.C. - Commonwealth War Graves Commission

D.A. – Divisional Artillery

D.A.A. & Q.M.G. - Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General

D.A.C. – Divisional Ammunition Column

D.A.D.M.S. - Deputy Assistant Director of Medical Services

D.A.G. – Deputy Adjutant General

D.C.M. – Distinguished Conduct Medal

D.C.O. - Divisional Claims Officer

D.D.M.S. – Deputy Director of Medical Services

D.H.Q. – Divisional Headquarters

D.M.O. – Director of Military Operations

D.M.S. – Director of Medical Services

Div. - Division

D.S.M. – Distinguished Service Medal

D.S.O. – Distinguished Service Order

Fd. Amb. – Field Ambulance

Fd. Hosp. – Field Hospital

F.D.S. – Field Dressing Station

F.G.C.M. - Field General Court Martial

Gen. Hosp. – General Hospital

G.H.Q. – General Headquarters, British Expeditionary Force, France

G.O.C. – General Officer Commanding

G.O.C. in Chief – General Officer Commander in Chief

G.S.O. 1 – General Staff Officer, First Grade (there are also 2^{nd} and 3^{rd} Grade officers)

G.S.W. - Gun Shot Wound

H.A. – Heavy Artillery

H.E. – High Explosives

H.M.S.O. – Her Majesty's Stationary Office

Hon. – Honorary

H.Q. – Headquarters

H.S. – Hospital Ship

H.T. – Horse Transport

H.V. High Velocity

Inf. – Infantry

Inf. Bde – Infantry Brigade

I.W.M. – Department of Documents, Imperial War Museum, London

L.G. – London Gazette

L.H.C. – Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Kings College, London

L.O. – Liaison Officer

L of C – Lines of Communication

Lieut. – Lieutenant

Maj. – Major

Maj. Gen. – Major General

M.C. – Military Cross

M.D.S. – Main Dressing Station

M.G.C. – Machine Gun Corps

M.G.G.S. - Major General, General Staff

M. in D. – Mention in Despatches

M.M. – Military Medal

M.O. - Medical Officer

M.S.M. – Military Service Medal

Mtd. - Mounted

N.A.M. - National Army Museum. Chelsea, London

N.C.O. – Non-commissioned Officer

N.Y.D.N. – Not Yet Diagnosed Nervous (Medical term for person suspected of shell shock)

O.B.E. – Order of the British Empire

O.C. – Officer Commanding

O.H. – British Official History of the Great War, Military Operations

O.P. – Observation Post

O.R. – Other Rank

O.T.C. – Officer Training Corps

P.B.I. – Poor Bloody Infantry (slang)

Pl. – Platoon.

P.O.W. – Prisoner of War

p.s.c. - Passed Staff College, Camberley or Quetta

Pte. – Private

Q.M.-Quarter master

Q.M.G. – Quartermaster General

R.A.F. – Royal Air Force

R.A.M.C. – Royal Army Medical Corps

R.A.P. – Regimental Aid Post

R.E. – Corps of Royal Engineers

Regt. – Regiment

R.F.A. – Royal Field Artillery

R.F.C. – Royal Flying Corps

R.G.A. – Royal Garrison Artillery

R.H.A. – Royal Horse Artillery

R.M.A. – Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, London

R.M.C. – Royal Military College, Sandhurst, Camberley, Surrey

R.M.O. – Regimental Medical Officer

R.S.M. – Regimental Sergeant Major

R.T.U. – Returned to Unit.

R.U.S.I. – Royal United Services Institute, Whitehall, London

R.W.F. – Royal Welsh Fusiliers

S.A.A. – Small Arms Ammunition

Sgt. - Sergeant

S.I.W. - Self-inflicted Wound

Sqn. - Squadron

Stn. Gen. Hosp. – Stationary General Hospital.

S.W.B. – South Wales Borderers

T.A. – Territorial Army.

T.F. – Territorial Force

T.M. – Trench Mortar

T.N.A. - The National Archives, Kew, London

T.O. – Transport Officer

V.C. – Victoria Cross

V.D. – Victorian Officers Decoration

V.O. – Veterinary Officer

W.A.C. – Welsh Army Corps

W.N.E.C. – Welsh National Executive Committee

W.O. – War Office

W.R. - Welsh Regiment

Introduction

The time is long overdue for a full and comprehensive assessment of the Welsh contribution towards winning the Great War, which puts into context the association Wales had against the Kaisers Army in Europe. The focus of this work will look at the experience of the largest concentration of Welshmen brought together under the banner of a Welsh Division. Never before or since has Wales, been so fully represented on any battlefield, and never before had Welsh society been so committed to such an enterprise. The forming of the Welsh Division, which fought its war on the Western Front, was unique within the bounds of Welsh society. That the Welsh made their mark is reflected in the gazetteer of trench names, which reveal such places as Cardiff Sap, Street, Trench as well as Cardigan Alley and Trench. There was Welsh Ridge, two Wales Trenches, one of which was at Bernafay Wood very close to Mametz Wood on the Somme, a place which has come to symbolise the Welsh sacrifice in the war. Further north, there are three Welsh Trenches, a Welsh Avenue, Welsh Farm, Welsh Harp and a Welsh Camp. All these are close to Pilckem Ridge, the site of another great battle of 1917, in which the Welsh Division fought at the start of what was to become known as the Battle of Passchendaele. Dragon Camp was close by at Elverdinghe, where there were three Dragon trenches, the last which was created in 1918 near Bouzincourt. Another symbol was the 'Red Dragon' emblem which was worn on the left shoulder of all officers and men who served in the 38th (Welsh) Division during the Great War.2 It was to the Somme region Welsh Division returned in 1918 and moved through on their advance to victory, where they left the national emblem in the name of a trench.

One Irish historian has described the Irish role in the Great War as being in 'an historical no man's land' and that urgent reassessment was needed.³ The Welsh role in the Great War generally has been omitted from the historiography of Wales, and it is time for this to be addressed. Only the 38th (Welsh) Division was entirely made up of Welsh battalions and served on the Western Front.⁴ Some of the story

¹ NAM Acquisition number 2009-10-7 Letter Number 1792 Lt Colonel H M Pryce Jones dated 30 May 1917. This was named Dragon Camp by the Welsh Division.

² See Appendices 2.

³ Keith Jeffrey, foreword in Terence Denman, *Ireland's Unknown Soldiers, The 16th (Irish) Division in the Great War, 1914-1918* (Dublin, 1992).

⁴ Before the Great War there was a 53rd (Welsh) Division was part of the T.F. Division and came under Western Command. It did have battalions of the R.W.F., and the Monmouthshire Regiment, but it was

of these Welsh Kitchener volunteers has been covered in recent books on the 'Pals Battalions' raised in Carmarthen and in Swansea.⁵ Although a short history of the Welsh Division was published in 1920, it gives a comprehensive account of the actions the division was involved in.⁶ The Welsh Division's performance on the Somme has been explored by Colin Hughes's ground breaking work on Mametz Wood. More recent scholarship has looked at the division in relation to the 'learning curve' theory, to assess its performance and development. 8 This method has been used to point to the 'combat effectiveness' of the Kitchener divisions on the Somme. 9 As no other British division had attacked a wood the size of Mametz Wood before the Welsh Division did so, any comparison of this nature would, be unscientific. Equally, by comparison with the attacks on High Wood and Delville Wood afterwards, this would suggest that the Welsh Division had done a great deal better than they were given credit for at the time.

The dominating theatre of the 'Great War' was the Western Front and it was here, in late 1915, that the Welsh Division began to make its contribution to winning the war. But by the spring of 1916 in agreement with the French, Field Marshal Douglas Haig, the new commander of the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.), extended the line south into Picardy. The preparations for a joint offensive with the French on the Somme were interrupted by the German attack at Verdun in early 1916. As a result, the Somme became the most heavily invested offensive the British Army in France had so far chosen to fight.

not made up of all Welsh Regiments, and served in the Middle East. There was also the Second Line 68th (Welsh) Division which was based in East Anglia.

⁵ Steven John, Carmarthen Pals (Barnsley, 2009) and Bernard Lewis Swansea Pals (Barnsley, 2004).

⁶ J.E. Munby, A History of the 38th (Welsh) Division (London, 1920).

⁷ Colin Hughes, Mametz – Lloyd George's 'Welsh Army' at the Battle of the Somme (Gliddon Books, 1982 reprinted 1990).

⁸ Mark Nicholas Cook, Evaluating the Learning Curve: The 38th (Welsh) Division on the Western Front (M.Phil. University of Birmingham, 2005).

⁹ Peter Simkins, From the Somme to Victory The British Army's Experience on the Western Front 1916-1918 (Barnsley, 2014).

The Somme was a campaign and not a single battle; it was a series of very violent struggles over several months from July to November 1916. Much emphasis has been placed on the first day owing to the horrendous casualties sustained. The length of the campaign and the type of fighting varied including mass assaults on defended woods, and these attacks included both regular and New Army infantry divisions.

Although the general historical landscape of the War is familiar, it is time to recognise and place the Welsh Division more firmly within this topography. This work will also challenge the existing historiography by introducing new evidence from more recent research. The compass of the work will steer a course which places the Welsh Division's actions in the context of both the tactical and strategic decisions made at the higher levels of command. Modern Welsh history should now embrace these war years to broaden the historical debate and the legacy the 'Great War' had for twentieth-century Wales.

This work will examine three key battles fought between 1915 and 1918. It will start with the Somme 1916, move onto Pilckem Ridge (Third Ypres) 1917, and then 'the hundred days', the closing phase of the war on the Western Front in 1918. This process will evaluate where and how the Welsh Division fought and the circumstances surrounding these actions, together with the existing historiography relating to the experience of the Welsh and more recent research

The first chapter will lay the foundation and explore the origins and formation of the Welsh Division and also look at the historiography as it relates to the war in general and the Welsh Division in particular. The significance of ensuring that the right men were chosen as both junior and senior officers in the formation of the division will be assessed. ¹⁰ In the speed to create this New Army division there was the political influence of Lloyd George right from its formation which cannot be overlooked. The selection of the commander of the Welsh Division was to have serious consequences. Therefore an important part of this study will be the implications surrounding the political selection of

¹⁰ I have used both WO 339 and WO 374 army personnel files which are housed at the TNA. These files give information regarding the careers of individual officers up until 1922. If an officer remained until after this date the file is retained by the Ministry of Defence.

senior officers and the consequences this had with the military hierarchy when the Welsh Division arrived in France. Recruitment of junior officers into the Welsh Division will also be explored as well as the question of national identity within the military setting.

The second chapter looks at the Division's early period in France as part of the British Expeditionary Force and the move south to the largest physical obstacle on the British sector of the Somme, Mametz Wood. Here they fought their first major battle, and it is important to see how it fitted into both the tactical and strategic plan. It was also to become a point of controversy, as it was suggested that the delay in its capture resulted in the larger strategic failure. For this reason the accepted historiography of the 'bigger picture' will be examined, in order to bring the debate up to date.

The third chapter will concentrate on the Welsh Division after it left the Somme and leading up to its assault and capture of Pilckem Ridge, during the battle of Third Ypres in 1917. By this stage of the war, the Welsh Guards were part of the Guards Division and would fight alongside the Welsh Division. Both were part of XIV Corps, and were on the northern edge of British forces at the start of this campaign. The style of fighting during at this time reflects more firmly the stereotypical image of the Great War, attacking from trenches over open ground across a sea of mud. The Welsh Division was better prepared, as by now a large number of both officers and other ranks had fighting experience.

The final chapter covers the period from August to November 1918, when the Welsh Division was at the forefront of the advance to victory and would be almost constantly on the move. The Welsh would retake Mametz Wood for a second time, and would cover over seventy miles across the 1916 battlefield of the Somme to the south of Mons. From Delville Wood and High Wood they pushed on through Les Boeufs and overran Sailly Saillisel before moving on the Canal Du Nord. From there they moved forward to attack the Hindenburg Line enduring some of the hardest fighting the division had undertaken during its time on the Western Front. The high casualty rates took a heavy toll on both officers and men during these months as did the move into open warfare which brought new challenges. It is quite fitting that the last major battle of the Welsh Division should be fought in the Forest du Mormal; the parallel with Mametz Wood could not be starker. Here the attack reflected the

growing professional capability which resulted in an overwhelming success. By following up their great enterprise they were able to help to secure of a bridge over the Sambre River. This was to allow V Corps to continue the pursuit of German Army, which was withdrawing rapidly. This last chapter reflects these tumultuous days which have been overlooked for far too long. Mametz Wood may now be seen as commemorating a national battle for Wales but it was only the beginning of a struggle which would last for another two years. The 1918 advance in general and the final attack and break-through of the Foret du Mormal which opened the way to cross the river Sambre, should now be seen and recognised as the finest hour of the Welsh Division during the Great War.

Chapter One: The Formation of the Welsh Division.

The Welsh Division was closely linked with Lloyd George as he actively supported its creation as part of a Welsh Army Corps (W.A.C.). He had called for its formation during one of his most famous speeches at the Queen's Hall in London on 19 September 1914. The audience was not disappointed by a man who rallied them with all his gifts as an orator, to put forward his argument for a truly Welsh commitment. He pointed out that, 'national honour is a reality, and any nation that disregards it is doomed'. He lectured his audience about the barbarism of the Germans and the malignancy that had corrupted the German peasant who was part of the 'military caste'. He blasted them as the 'road hog of Europe' and warned that, 'it will not be easy, it will be a long job, it will be a terrible war; but in the end we shall march through terror to triumph'. Above all, he called on Welshmen to enlist in the army, in order to join, 'a great movement for liberty'. This was not just one of his greatest speeches but also a turning point in his political career, as this was the first time he publicly showed his support for the war. Both his sons would join the 38th (Welsh) Division; Richard was with 15 (London Welsh) R.W.F., and Gwilym was appointed as was one of the A.D.C's to Major General Sir Ivor Philipps.

This linkage between Lloyd George and the formation of the Welsh Division implies there was political influence and patronage, which was at odds with the old army philosophy. The very fact that it became known as Lloyd George's 'Welsh Army' reinforces the political dimension. But did this constitute a political threat to the military command? At the start of the war there were disagreements between Lloyd George and Kitchener. One was over the use of non-conformist ministers as padres in the British Army. Another was over the use of the Welsh language. Here Lloyd George was not so successful, although it was never banned as such. The use of the Welsh language was to prove an advantage, as, 'a Division indeed with its own Welsh language was useful in the line for disguising telephoned orders from German listeners'.³

¹ David Woodward *Lloyd George and the Generals* (East Brunswick, 1983). Although Woodward explores the uneasy relationship between Lloyd George and the "soldier's party" at the strategic level, there is no evidence regarding his Lloyd George's relationship with the Welsh Division with which he was so closely associated with him.

² Toby Thacker, British Culture and the First World War (London, 2014), p. 68.

³ TNA C.A.B.45/190 Lt-.Colonel F.W. Smith letter to Edmonds dated 15 May 1930. Sir James Edmonds was the official historian of the Great War.

Of all the New Army divisions raised it has been suggested that only two could be considered to be 'political', the Welsh Division and the 36th (Ulster) Division.⁴ Both 'the Welsh, like the Irish, were quick-witted and lively and retained a sense of their own nationhood'.⁵ For the Welsh, the pride in their nation was not based on a political, religious or a sectarian standpoint, but rather saw it as a collective national commitment. To illustrate this point, the 36th (Ulster) Division was made up of Protestant men who supported the Unionist cause, whereas the two divisions recruited in the south were predominantly Catholic, and not overtly nationalist. For the Welsh, the question of the disestablishment of the Church of England was a far more pressing problem for the politicians of the principality. The 'Curragh Incident' in early 1914, was badly handled by both the military and politicians, and almost brought about the collapse of the Asquith government. Its aftermath left a bitter resentment between all concerned, especially General Paget whose move to Southern Command would have major repercussions for the Welsh Division.

Wales and War 1914

Lord Kitchener was one of the few people to comprehend that the war would last much longer than predicted. Prime Minister H.H. Asquith had appointed him to the War Office on 5 August 1914. His distrust of the Territorial Force resulted in the creation of the 'New Armies' made famous by the 'Pals Battalions'. The transition from a small peacetime army policing the Empire into a voluntary organisation large enough to match its continental rivals had an almost spontaneous birth. This, the largest voluntary mass militarisation of civilians, was without precedent, and was not achieved overnight. Although Wales as a nation was a very small part of this world-wide British Empire, both in geographic and population size, it was to make a significant contribution:

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⁴ Cyril Falls, *The History of 36th (Ulster) Division* (Belfast, 1922). See also Nick Perry, *Nugent* (Stroud, 2008) which gives a very good appreciation of the type of pressures under which the Divisional Commander was put, in particular the political influence that he was subjected to. See also Tim Bowman, *Irish Regiments in the Great War* (Manchester, 2003) for a broader view of the questions of discipline and morale during the war.

⁵ Christopher Duffy, *Through German Eyes: The British and the Somme 1916* (London, 2006), p. 86.

With a population of 4.3 million in 1914, Ireland did support proportionately many fewer battalions than did Britain, with just 96 in all. Scotland, with a population 10 per cent larger, raised 234 battalions, while Wales with a population 40 per cent smaller, raised 108 battalions.⁶

What these figures do not show, was the growing mobilisation of a war economy which required manpower to feed the furnaces of the new war industries. The question of balance between the manpower needs of industry and the army (and navy) with regard to recruits was highlighted in South Wales. In the pre-war years people moved to South Wales in large numbers to take advantage of its growing industrial capacity to find employment. As a result, recruitment into the armed forces could not compete against a vibrant expanding industrial economy which offered better wages. The British economy of 1914 was based on the power of coal to fuel its industries, and the pressure to supply would grow ever greater the longer the war lasted. ⁷ To illustrate this point, the demand of the Admiralty for coal grew from 1.5 million to 15 million tons and the commitment to the newly emerging munitions industries added to the demand. ⁸ While these enormous and increasing demands for coal were being made, there was pressure on the miners to join the Kitchener volunteers. Therefore, when assessing the contribution Wales made to the war effort by measuring it in simplistic mathematics of recruitment or battalions raised, is to overlook the significant contribution made by the men working in the Welsh industrial sector.

The clamour to join the colours was much easier in the larger cities such as London, Liverpool and Birmingham, where the military infrastructure was able to expand quickly to do so. However, the capacity to deal with the increase in recruitment took time to be established in Wales, and many men went to England to join up. In the rural heartland, especially during the harvest period of the summer

⁶ Nicholas Perry, 'Nationality in Irish Infantry Regiments in the First World War', *War & Society*, Volume 12, Number 1, May 1994, p. 74.

⁷ The Regular British Army (excluding reservists) in 1914 was 247,432 Officers and men, with about one third in India.

⁸ Chris Williams, Capitalism, Community and Conflict: The South Wales Coalfield, 1898-1947 (Cardiff, 1998), p. 19.

and early autumn when agricultural labour was most needed, military recruitment was poor. Many of the farms and small holdings were run as family concerns and as such the loss of labour at this time would have been a disaster. This was reflected in the low number of men employed in the agricultural sector joining the army during this period of the war, and not a lack of enthusiasm as has been suggested. Secondly, in order to join in these early months of the war they would have had to travel long distances to do so, which was both expensive and impractical. Even county towns were struggling to establish recruitment centres. In West Wales, Carmarthen and Pembroke were designated recruitment centres but this did not happen overnight as the process of mobilising all the reserves was the first priority of the Army, if not Lord Kitchener.

In Cardiff, the depot of the Welsh Regiment was busy with the mobilisation of both 2nd & 3rd Battalions, so there were very few men available to deal with the recruitment into the New Armies. ¹⁰ It was not until 11 August 1914, that a dozen officers and N.C.Os from 2 Bn Welsh started organising the new volunteers. With such a small staff, there was a high degree of pressure to deal with a large influx of volunteers; it appears to have led to certain recruits being sent off to join units in England. ¹¹ The story of Morgan Watcyn-Williams acts as a good example of this pressure, as he was recruited in Wales in the first weeks of the war. In order to join the Army he had to travel from Swansea to Cardiff to enlist in September 1914. As a college graduate he was attested into 4 U.P.S., (Universities and Public Schools), 21 Battalion Royal Fusiliers. ¹² At the same time, other men with similar qualifications were sent from Cardiff to London to join this battalion. ¹³ Watcyn-Williams went to France with this Regiment in 1915 as a private, and endured the harsh realities of trench warfare during, 'the terrible winter of 1915-16 in the line from Festubert to Loos taking their full share of all the trouble that was going.' ¹⁴ Early in 1916, he left France for an Officer Training School at Cambridge University, and

⁹ Catriona Pennell, A United Kingdom, (Oxford, 2012), p. 156.

 $^{^{\}rm 10}$ TNA W.O. 374/70491, personal file Major Charles Lewis Veal (1876-1929).

¹¹ Journal of the Welch Regiment, the Men of Harlech Volume XXV, No. 1 October 1924.

¹² University of Wales Roll of Service, University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire, Cardiff (Bangor, 1921), p. 46.

¹³ Clive Hughes, The New Armies in *A Nation at Arms* (ed) Beckett and Simpson (London, 1990), p.106.

¹⁴ The Reverend Morgan Watcyn-Williams, M.C., *From Khaki to Cloth* (Caernarvon, 1949), p. 61. TNA W.O. 339/57821 The personal file of Captain Morgan Watkin Williams.

after successfully completing the course was gazetted as a 2nd Lieutenant into the R.W.F. ¹⁵ His close friend from Swansea and college, Lionel Greaves, who was on the same course, was gazetted into the S.W.B. the experience of both these men was not isolated as there were many others. ¹⁶ The human machinery of recruitment was initially very slow trying to identify recruits as potential officer candidates. More importantly both these educated men wanted to serve in Welsh Regiments, but the infrastructure to do this was simply not there at the time of their recruitment. Finally, a realisation began to take hold in the opening weeks of the war that if Wales did not react faster there would be no body of men left to represent the country in the fight for 'civilisation'. As a result, a collective decision was made both in Wales and Westminster to create a Welsh Army Corps which would represent Wales as a fighting nation.

The Welsh Army Corps

The New Army divisions reinforced the concept of the 'people's war' as these battalions were recruited from across the social classes. The same process began in Wales, but with one major difference: the creation of the W.A.C., which would channel these men into Welsh 'pals' battalions' as part of a national response. If 'national identity is never more sharply defined than in times of conflict', then Wales was choosing this method to join the other nations involved to express its own identity among all the other fighting nations.¹⁷

Lord Kitchener's was opposed to raising national formations however Lloyd George believed the Secretary of State for War had underestimated the feeling in Wales. From the beginning of September 1914, he advocated the country should be represented by having at least a Welsh Division, if not a Welsh Army Corps. 18 He also demanded that a Welshman should be at its head and this appointment was to lead to serious problems later. He also advocated the creation of the Welsh National Executive Committee (W.N.E.C.) late in September 1914, to co-ordinate the response. The makeup of the

¹⁵ Ibid, From Khaki to Cloth, p. 68.

¹⁶ TNA W.O. 330/91089 Personal file of Lt. Lionel Bruce Greaves M.C., 7 S.W.B.

¹⁷ Pennell, A United Kingdom, p. 92.

¹⁸ Peter Simkins, Kitchener's Army The Raising of the New Armies, 1914-16 (Manchester, 1988), pp. 96-9. An Army Corps consisted of three or four divisions.

Committee contained the 'great and the good of Wales' and was chaired by Lord Plymouth. ¹⁹ There were thirty members, including Lloyd George and four other MPs. Lord Kenyon was the Treasurer, Owen William Owen, the Secretary and Sir David William Jones and William Brace who were sitting MPs. ²⁰ Also included were Major General Sir W.H. Mackinnon and Major General Ivor Herbert. ²¹ However, this was a completely new and untested way of organising recruiting of men into the Army.

The W.N.E.C., became the focal point of the Welsh organisation behind the drive to recruit directly into the W.A.C. Due to its late formation they had missed the first wave of recruitment, and men from Wales were already joined other regiments and corps. It would be the refusal to channel other established Welsh battalions into a W.A.C., by the War Office which was to end any expectation that it could achieve its original conception. It should be noted, that although the Irish had the 10th, 16th (Irish)

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Welsh National Executive Committee 1914-1921. He had served in the 2nd Boer War.

Who's Who 1920, p. 1428. .Lord Lloyd Tyrell-Kenyon, 4th Baron (1864-1927), educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford he was a Minister under Lord Salisbury and Lloyd George, a Lord Lieutenant for Flintshire and President of National Museum of Wales. He served in the Shropshire Yeomanry and commanded this regiment from 1907 – 12. He received a TD in 1909 and was ADC to King George V in 1912. He commanded 2/1st Welsh Horse Yeomanry from 1914-16.

Who's Who in Wales 1920, p.1428. William Brace (1865-1947) was a trade unionist who was elected as a Lib-Lab MP in 1906. He was also a President of the South Wales Miners Federation from 1912–1915. Both these men emphasise the diversity of the members of the W.N.E.C. and their unity in the common cause.

Who's Who 1930, p. 3130Major General Ivor John Caradoc Herbert, 1st Baron Treowen (1851-1933). Born in Llanarth, Monmouthshire, he joined the Grenadier Guards and was G.O.C. Commanding the Militia in Canada from 1890 to 1895 and then in the 2nd Boer War (1899-1902). After the Army he was the M.P. for South Monmouthshire 1906-1917, and became Baron Treowen in June 1917. He was extremely active in promoting recruitment in Wales during the voluntary period and in 1917 became the Welsh Director of recruiting at the Ministry of National Service.

¹⁹ Who's Who, 1920, p. 2602. Lord Plymouth (Robert George Windsor-Clive) was at this time Lord Lieutenant of Glamorgan (1857-1923). He was educated Eton and Cambridge, and was involved in the building of Penarth Docks. He had been Hon Colonel 3rd Welsh and his third son 2nd Lt Hon Archer Windsor-Clive was killed in action at Mons on 25 August 1914 while serving with Coldstream Guards. ²⁰ Owen William Owen C.B.E. was the Secretary of the Welsh Army Corps and kept the minutes of the

²¹ Who's Who 1920, p. 1659. Major General Sir William Henry Mackinnon (1852-1929). Educated Harrow he was commissioned into the Grenadier Guards in 1870, and served in the 2nd Boer War. He was General Officer Commander in Chief Western Command in 1910, and retired in 1916.

and 36th (Ulster) Divisions, and the Scots the 9th, and 15th Divisions they never became a corps in the British Army either.

The background historiography of the Great War

The Official Histories (O.H.) of the Great War came under the governance of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence (C.I.D.), which was established in 1902 after the end of the 2nd Boer War.²² By 1919 it was decided to appoint newly retired Br.-General J. E. Edmonds to the Military History Branch of the Historical Section. As a junior sapper he was intellectually gifted and nicknamed 'Archimedes' which stuck and followed him throughout his future career. He was chosen to produce the volumes covering all the military operations of the army during the war. As the Western Front was the principal theatre, this took up most of his time. At start of the war he had served briefly in France and Flanders and later at G.H.Q., as a middle ranking officer which allowed him an insider's view of the role higher command had played during the major decisions of the war.²³

These volumes provide some evidence regarding the Welsh Division, and should be seen in the context of the unfolding wider debate of the war and the timing of their publication. The two volumes concerning the Somme were not published until 1931 and 1932, whereas Passchendaele came out in 1948. This was a long time after the events and reflects how enormous the task was:

²² See Joseph Moretz, *Thinking Wisely, Planning Boldly The Higher Education and Training of Royal Naval Officers*, 1919-39 (Solihull, 2015), pp.31 -87. The Army was not alone in its debate of how the events of the Great War should be recorded and to what purpose it should be used.

²³ Brigadier General Sir James Edwards Edmonds C.B., C.M.G. (1861-1956). Educated at King's College School, London and R.M.A. Woolwich, he was commissioned into the R.E., in 1881. In 1896 he entered the Staff College at Camberley at the same time as Douglas Haig, later C in C, B.E.F, Edmund Allenby, leader of British Forces in Palestine 1917-18, and William Robertson C.I.G.S., in 1916, and passed out top of his class. He served in 2nd Boer War as an Intelligence Officer and at the outbreak of the Great War was chief of staff 4th Division. The strain of the fighting in September 1914 led to a breakdown after which he was re-assigned to G.H.Q., where he served until the end of the war. He was knighted in 1928.

Every historian found in practice that the history could not be compiled only from documents but it was essential to interview individuals who had taken a leading part. It is essential to carry this out in the lifetime of the individuals concerned, and they would give assistance to an official historian which they would give to no one else.²⁴

And at the time they were seen by the Committee as a response to:

the number of memoirs and other personal books written from a partisan point of view which were invariably inaccurate to the government. It was only fair to give to the public an authentic account of these recent historical events based on records which the government alone possessed.²⁵

These volumes set a benchmark for further research by presenting an archival record of how the military operations of the war were remembered. These publications were seen as 'indispensable to the education of our officers' and the 'original idea of a popular history had been departed from and that something more of a staff history was being produced'. Much of the work focuses on how officers evaluated their own effectiveness in command during the war. The slow pace of the work was partly the result of a mass of correspondence especially about the early years of the war, whereas the later period was marked by diminishing returns as officers grew older and many had passed away.

The method used was to prepare narratives and circulate them to the officers concerned, and to ask for their views of the events which had taken place. The result was the subject to an ongoing process of evaluation, examination, and judgement. The time gap between the events and the recollections was not an ideal scenario and was reflected in the balance between the quality of the evidence brought

²⁴ TNA, C.A.B. 27/182 Minutes of the Committee of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence, on 27th June 1922.

²⁵ TNA, C.A.B. 27/182, Minutes of the Committee of the Historical Section of the CID, pp.4 -7.

²⁷ Adrian Gilbert, *Challenge of Battle* (Oxford, 2014), p. 11.

forward and the changing perception of what had happened. It should not be forgotten that many officers questioned were still serving and had their careers to consider. However, some retired officers still had an axe to grind over their individual experience. As a means of training future officers about the decision making process it had a limited success as no two wars are ever the same. But officers of Field-Marshal Montgomery's generation did remember certain lessons of the Great War from first-hand experience.²⁸

The Personal Memoirs battle

Within the personal memoirs produced after the war there were many biographies which brought forward a more human picture of events through which they tried to rationalise their personal experiences. Recalling the stark reality of life-changing events was for some a cathartic experience revealing an honest endeavour to present a sincere picture of their war.²⁹ The number and range of these memoirs and the timing of their publication reflects a changing public mood which was ready and willing to revisit the events of the Great War.³⁰ However, it was not just in Britain that soldiers wrote about the war. In Germany, Remarque's work *All Quiet on the Western Front* was an instant success and was translated into 25 languages. By 1930 it was made into film which again proved highly popular.³¹ However, this should be balanced against Ernst Junger's earlier work, *Storm of Steel*, which presents a far more graphic and darker picture of life under shell fire, reaching deeper into the psyche of combat.³² This book had far-reaching consequences for the generation in Germany who had missed the war.³³ The difference between these two writers was reflected in how they presented the war. The former wrote about the futility of war, whereas the latter, wrote in praise of it. Indeed, it would be

²⁸ Nigel Hamilton, *The Full Monty Montgomery of Alamein 1887-1943 Volume I* (London, 2001).

²⁹ Wyn Griffith, *Up to Mametz* (London, 1931, republished by Gliddon Books, 1981).

³⁰ Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War* (1928), Robert Graves, *Goodbye to all that* (1929), Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930), Frederick Manning's *Her Privates We* (1930).

³¹ Erich Marie Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front.* (1929) see also, *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* (1954).

³² Ernst Junger. *Storm of Steel* (1919): It was Junger's Regiment of Fusiliers that was attacked by the Welsh Division at Pilckem Ridge on 31 July 1917.

³³ Martin Davidson, *The Perfect Nazi* (London, 2010), pp. 50-1.

difficult to find a writer in the English tradition of war memoirs to compare with Junger's work, although Brigadier General Crozier books are equally idiosyncratic in style.³⁴

At a higher level, the historical perspective really took on a different shape during this inter-war period as many of the senior military officers and politicians began the 'battle of the memoirs'. Boraston published *Haig's Despatches* in 1919, the same year as Field Marshal Viscount French of Ypres. In 1920 C.a. C. Repington, Ian Hamilton, Sir George Arthur, and Callwell followed with their views on the war and the generals. Winston Churchill's *World Crisis* began its journey in 1923, and two years later Smith Dorrien's memoirs were published. The following year, Sir William Robertson's ³⁵ two volumes appeared and one by Sir Frederick Maurice, *Governments and War*. In 1927, Callwell published Sir Henry Wilson diaries which caused a great deal of friction due to their forthright nature. Sir Frederick Maurice wrote in defence of Rawlinson the next year, and a biography, *Haig* was published by Arthur. In the same year Lord Beaverbrook entered the field. Between 1929 and 1939 Captain B.H. Liddell Hart published eight books, relating either directly or indirectly to the *British Way of Warfare*. In 1929, Brigadier General Sir John Charteris published his book on *Haig*, followed in 1932 with a book on his time at *GHQ*. Cyril Falls provided his *War Books* in 1930 and Sir Hubert Gough, who was sacked in 1918, published *The Fifth Army* in 1931.

The icy polarisation between the soldiers and the politicians came to its apex with the most controversial of all publications, the *War Memoirs* of David Lloyd George (published 1933-38). They brought into the open his view of the personal disagreement which lay at the heart of the British strategy. Sir Douglas Haig and Lloyd George did not enjoy a harmonious relationship and in some way this reflects their different backgrounds. Haig saw himself as an officer and a gentleman and disliked politicians. Conversely, they were both optimistic and looked at the bigger picture, and used intrigue for their own purposes. Both men appeared to have communicated very poorly with each other and relied on intermediaries to explain where the differences lay. Both Lord Derby and General Robertson

³⁴ Francis Percy Crozier, *A Brass Hat in No Man's Land* (Norwich, 1989). See also Charles Messenger's *Broken Sword. The Tumultuous Life of Frank Crozier* (Barnsley, 2013).

³⁵ Field Marshal Sir William Robertson (1860-1933).

protected Haig and this may be the reason that Lloyd George looked elsewhere for a solution to the stalemate on the Western Front. They were both driven by ambition and had made it to the top of their chosen professions. Grigg has suggested that Lloyd George was an amateur strategist, and Haig was an amateur politician. This premise fails to take into consideration what would happen when the war ended. Indeed, when Haig's task was completed, Lloyd George faced the greatest test of his career, as he now had to win the peace. Field-Marshal Robertson wrote, 'War draws into its vortex every element of the national life' however, when this whirlpool of destruction stops, and it is the politicians' work to rebuild from the ruins of such a disaster. This was the greatest difference between them.

Although Lloyd George had shown skilful political leadership during the war, his account of events published long after Haig's death, proved to be divisive:

Few books have done more to damage Haig's reputation than Lloyd George's War Memoirs, in which the index entries on Haig alone constitute a systematic assault on the Field Marshal's character and professional abilities.³⁸

The vast array of memoirs and biographies have, in a sense refought the events in order to determine the way in which the writers wanted to record them in their favour. Lloyd George's approach produced a biased view which distorts the pursuit of historical truth. In other cases, it could be said that the bitterness of old men trying to refight battles long since over in order to rescue their legacy, undermined the quality of their respective contributions. Recently, there has been a revisionist assessment of the way myths and confusion clouded these issues, both with regard to the Somme, and the war in general.³⁹ Other historians have also tried to understand the military dynamics, and have looked far more deeply into how the political landscape changed as the consequences of the military

³⁷ Field Marshal Sir William Robertson, From Private to Field Marshal (London, 1921), p. 385.

³⁶ John Grigg, *Lloyd George War Leader* (London, 2002), pp. 156 -7.

³⁸ *Douglas Haig, War Diaries and Letters 1914-1918*. Edited by Gary Sheffield and John Bourne (London, 2005), p. 505.

³⁹ Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory* (London, 2001).

actions were understood. ⁴⁰ Similarly, the interaction between the British and French allies both militarily and politically, has been the subject of rigorous and long overdue examination. ⁴¹ However small the story of the Welsh Division may seem within the maelstrom of the 'battle of the memoirs' and the publication of the O.Hs', they do provide a context in which the division can be seen within the bigger picture of the war.

Command of the 38th (Welsh) Division

The choice of a Major General to command the Welsh Division illustrates the high degree of political power of Lloyd George on Kitchener in early 1915, by ensuring it would be a Welshman. As a result of this meeting the sitting Liberal M.P. for Southampton, Ivor Philipps was chosen. 42 His family's county seat was at Picton Castle, Pembrokeshire, and their motto was 'Patriotism my Guide'. 43 He was born in 1861, educated at Felsted School, and had served with the Wiltshire Yeomanry from 1881 until 1883, before he joined the Manchester Regiment. During his regimental service in India he transferred to the Indian Army and was promoted to captain in 1894. He was a physically tall man at 6ft 4ins, and had seen action in the Indian Army with the 5th Gurkha Regiment during a number of campaigns. He received a D.S.O., for his services in 1900, and had also passed the prestigious Staff College Course. By 1901 he was a major, and his final appointment was on the staff of the Commander in Chief, India. Although he left to follow a political career, becoming a Liberal MP for Southampton, he kept up his involvement with the Army and commanded the Pembrokeshire Yeomanry from 1908 to 1912.

Ivor Philipps was Lloyd George's Parliamentary Private Secretary (Military) to the Ministry of Munitions in 1915.⁴⁴ The connection between Lloyd George and his elder brother, Lord St David's, has been addressed elsewhere, and there is some justification in the criticism of him being a political

⁴² Colin Hughes 'Philipps, Sir Ivor (1861-1949), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴⁰ R. Prior and T. Wilson, *The Somme* (Newhaven & London, 2001).

⁴¹ W. Philpott, *Bloody Victory* (London, 2009).

⁴³ Gerald Gliddon, *The Aristocracy and the Great War* (Norfolk, 2002), p. 523.

⁴⁴ A. Mee (ed.), Who's Who in Wales (Cardiff, 1921).

appointee. 45 Here lay the weakness in this appointment. Major General Ivor Philipps was an outsider as he had left the Indian Army as a middle ranking officer, and was now promoted over and above regular officers with recent experience of the Western Front. Of all thirty officers who were first appointed to command the Kitchener divisions, Philipps stands out as being very different. 46 He was a serving MP and the others were not. They were nearly all Major Generals before the war started, he was not. Most had fought in the Sudan and South Africa; Philipps had not. Although he had served in India, he was not there when Lord Kitchener was in command of the Indian Army. Philipps was also financially independent, as he was chairman and a board member of a number of companies, and a director of Schweppes. 47 The higher echelons of senior command structure of the army contained a band of officers who had earned their promotions through years of service. There can be little doubt that someone leapfrogging over the tried and tested system of seniority to such a high position would not have been looked upon without much sympathy. Secondly, the high command may have felt undermined by having an officer with such a well-placed political patron who might challenge their authority, whether implied or otherwise. There was also the question of the role of his elder brother, Lord St David's, who had heavily criticised the role of the army staff officer's competence over the failure to succeed at the Battle of Loos. 48

The Divisional Structure

The W.N.E.C's task of forming the Welsh Army Corps, involved the creation of two divisions, a massive task, which was extremely ambitious and never achieved. The scale of what was required was enormous, for example, and was reflected in the size of the divisional establishment in 1914:

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⁴⁵ Hughes, *Mametz*, pp. 29-30.

⁴⁶ See Appendices No. 1.

⁴⁷ Douglas A. Simmons, *Schweppes The First 200 Years* (London, 1983), pp.62-3. In 1912 he was chairman of seven companies as well as a director of each. He was elected a Director of Schweppes Company in February 1914 and continued in the post until July 1915 when Lloyd George appointed him his Under Secretary at the Ministry of Munitions. He would return to manage the Company's financial affairs in 1918 after the war ended. He was to spend the next twenty one years as Chairman of the Company before his death in August 1940. He was the Liberal M.P. for Southampton from 1906-1922.

⁴⁸ Paul Harris, *The Men Who Planned the War A study of the Staff of the British Army on the Western Front 1914-1918* (Unpublished PhD thesis, King's College London, 2013), p. 100.

nearly 20.000 officers and men; 5,000 horses; 72 field guns in four artillery brigades of 18 guns each; and all the supporting services- supply trains, engineers, ambulance brigades and so on – needed to make itself supporting. The infantry, about 12,000 strong, consisting of twelve battalions (usually from different regiments of the line) organised in three infantry brigades of four battalions each.⁴⁹

An Army Corps consisted of at least two divisions requiring a total of at least 40, 000 men, and the largest part of a division was the three infantry brigades (Inf. Bde). In the Welsh Division they would eventually be numbered 113th (North Wales), 114th (South Wales) and 115th (mixed units); each contained four battalions, containing at least 1,000 men. These came from the Royal Welch Fusiliers (R.W.F.), the South Wales Borderers (S.W.B.) and the Welsh Regiment (W.R.). 50 The 113th Inf. Bde was brought together at Llandudno and was known as the North Wales Brigade as it was recruited from the area and wholly made up of R.W.F, battalions. The 114th Inf. Bde was based at Rhyl, and was made up of W.R. battalions. The 115th Inf. Bde was made up of 17 R.W.F, 16 W.R, plus 10 and 11 S.W.B. battalions. There was also a Pioneer Battalion, 19 (P) W.R. which was made up of men who were trained in the use of 'pick and shovel'. These pioneers initially trained as infantry, and then worked under the supervision of the Royal Engineers. With combat reduced to trench warfare they became experts at entrenching, building dug outs, organising drainage and shoring and revetting trenches.⁵¹ The billeting of the Welsh Division in hotels and boarding houses along the North Wales coast was a great boost to the local economy and an unusual starting point with an unreal atmosphere in which to begin army life. However it did have a number of benefits: unlike the poor standards of cooking and hygiene prevalent in Victorian barracks, they were now billeted in better accommodation and had healthier food.⁵² With the assistance of a better diet and vigorous exercise along the 'North Wales Riviera' they

⁴⁹ Colin Hughes, *David Jones, The Man who was on the field. In Parenthesis as Straight Reporting.* (David Jones Society, 1979), p. 8.

⁵⁰ The Welsh Division was originally numbered the 43rd but was changed to the 38th Division later, as did the numbers of its Infantry Brigades.

⁵¹ K. W. Mitchinson, *Pioneer Battalions in the Great War* (London, 1997), p. Xvi.

⁵² William Troughton, *Aberystwyth and the Great War* (Stroud, 2015).

began to turn civilians into fitter recruits. Training at this stage involved marching, physical exercise, and above all drill, which combined team work with the discipline of reacting to commands and the taking of orders. Conversely, the lack of sufficient training with modern rifles and access to ranges was a serious drawback at this stage of their development into soldiers. Like so many of these nascent Kitchener units formed in this ad hoc way, with no previous combat experience, here was the start of their 'learning curve'.

An important priority for Major General Philipps was to attract officers with experience of the recent fighting who he could rely upon to bring the division up to the standard required by the War Office before they could be released for France. To achieve this, he needed both administrators (staff), and officers who had practical experience and understood the reality of modern warfare. By mid April 1915, Major Hubert Conway Rees of the Welsh Regiment arrived in Colwyn Bay, where the Headquarters of the division had been established. Educated at Charterhouse and Sandhurst he had joined the Army in 1903, and was a company commander with the 2 Bn when it went to France in August 1914. He was first involved at the Battle of the Aisne, and was in the trenches in the Ypres area at Langemarck when the Germans attacked, for which he was awarded a D.S.O. By October the battalion was once again engaged in the defence of Gheluveld where after severe fighting he found himself in command of what was left of his own battalion as well as the remnants of 1st Queens Bn. Having commanded the battalion for three months he had to relinquish command to Captain Hore, who was senior to him, but with less experience of the fighting. As a result he returned England and began teaching at the Staff College Camberley which had been converted into a school for officers of the New Armies, and found they 'were burning to be taught soldiering'. 53

Major Rees accepted the post of G.S.O. 2, and on arrival in North Wales he found General Philipps, 'running almost a complete Division as regards units, and overstretched as regards men entirely alone'. ⁵⁴ He wrote 'there were no staff officers to assist him on his arrival, nor were there any clerks with army training either'. He later described Philipps as a great administrator. On the day before his

⁵³IWM 77/179/1 Correspondence of Brigadier General H. C. Rees, p. 78.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

arrival, Major Henry Edward ap Rhys Pryce had taken up the post of A.A. & Q.M.G, Major Rees described him, 'as a born organiser. His ceaseless energy and decisions gradually produced order'. ⁵⁵ The third officer to arrive and become the driving force behind the staff work was Major Henry Morris Pryce Jones, from Newtown and a regular officer in the Coldstream Guards. Educated at Eton, he had served in the South African War 1899-1902, Nigeria (1904-5), and was serving with the B.E.F, on the Staff of the Adjutant General. Hearing of the founding of a Welsh Division he wrote to Lieut.-Colonel ap Rhys Price to join his staff in 1915. In his letter to Pryce Jones he wrote 'the division is a good one – far better than I had expected & the men are really excellent'. ⁵⁶ These three regular officers were fundamental in preparing the Welsh Division before it left to join the B.E.F.

On arrival they found the division, 'was almost entirely without arms, equipment, guns or transport', such was the poor state of affairs that existed at this time. The artillery was based at Pwllheli, Criccieth and Portmadoc, about 40 to 50 miles away by road from the D.H.Q., at Colwyn Bay.⁵⁷ With the artillery based on the Lleyn Peninsular it is difficult to see how it could function as a division in its early days. Although the men had plenty of exercise and enthusiasm, like the infantry, they had no uniforms to wear, and had two old 15 pounders, which were out of date at the time of the South African War. Suffice it to say, there was no ammunition for these relics of former conflicts. The RE contingent, were even further away at Abergavenny, in the border country of South Wales. The Pioneers 19 (2nd Glamorgan Pioneer) Bn, W.R., and was made up of men below the normal height to enlist and formed in Porthcawl before moving to North Wales. The Divisional Train (A.S.C.) was formed at Portmadoc and was then sent to train with horses and motor vehicles to Ruthin near Denbigh and like all the other elements of the division they were brought together at Winchester from July 1915 onwards for collective training.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 79.

⁵⁶ NAM, Acquisition Number 2009-10-7, Letter number 685 dated 23 June 1915 Colwyn Bay.

⁵⁷ Hughes, *Mametz*, p. 32.

⁵⁸ The Welsh Divisional Train consisted of 330, 331, 332 & 333 Companies of the A.S.C. which would later become the R.A.S.C.

Due to the lack of military uniforms, it was decided by the W.N.E.C., to clothe the troops in uniforms made of native homespun material called, 'Brethyn Llwyd'.⁵⁹ A balance sheet gives us a 'Statement of Clothing and Necessaries purchased and used from the date of formation to 30 June 1916'.⁶⁰ The whole process of outfitting a division was complicated by the clothing having to come from the 'Cardiff Store'. The final sum on the balance sheet was £313,021-3s-10d, a staggering amount of money in its time. ⁶¹

The Selection of Senior Commanders

The shortage of regular officers caused by the war resulted in the use of officers, who had retired, or those who were in reserve. Many of these older men had left the army after the South African War or even earlier, and were unkindly nicknamed 'dug-outs'. 62 The pre-war British Army with its county infantry regimental system was often a family affair where sons and grandsons of former officers of regiments followed the tradition of service. In the New Army the character of the junior officers brought together was entirely new, many were now being selected on the basis of their educational merit or occupation. However, there is little doubt that there was still an element of networking with senior officers or with those who ran the W.N.E.C. Their potential as junior officers was assessed by whether they had any previous military training either at their schools or at the University Officer Training Corps (O.T.C.). Possession of either a junior or senior certificate coupled with good references regarding 'moral character' and their 'standard of education' generally resulted in a temporary commission. 63 Service as a senior N.C.O., either in the Regular Army or the Territorial Forces and the desire to seek a commission was also an important factor in the selection of junior officers at the start of the war. Men like Joseph Otto Bell, who was older than his pre-war counterparts, nevertheless came forward to meet the challenge, and made a valuable contribution.

⁵⁹ Welsh Army Corps 1914-1919, Report of the Executive Committee (Cardiff, 1921), p. 18.

⁶⁰ IWM, Miscellaneous 83, item 1280, 'Kitchener Letter'. Statement Prepared by E. Parsons.

⁶¹ Even by a conservative estimate this would be equivalent of over £31 million by today's standards.

⁶² K. Simpson, The officers, in *A Nation at Arms* (eds) Beckett and Simpson (London, 1990).

⁶³ See Appendices 3.

⁶⁴ TNA W.O. 339/21852 personal file of Major Joseph Otto Bell

Many of the early colonels appointed took up positions as officers in battalions on the basis of their efforts as figureheads in raising and recruiting battalions. One of the unfortunate consequences of this situation was the unsuitability of many of these officers to take command in the field. This was clearly illustrated by the experiences of Major Rees, under whose orbit the training of the division fell. He found that the standard of knowledge of the Brigadiers and battalion commanders was, as a rule, so low, that 'any progress in field training was manifestly impossible'. There was also a question as to the physical fitness of many of these officers. As a result, he began a series of staff rides for senior officers; this was an exercise without troops where terrain, weather, timing and organisation of battle are assessed and was a means of testing officers about their duties in the field.⁶⁵ These staff rides soon convinced 'General, Pryce and myself that changes in command were absolutely essential'.⁶⁶

The final three brigade commanders chosen are of some interest: as they were clearly not *dug-outs*, as two of the three were recalled from France to take up their posts. ⁶⁷ Replacing Owen Thomas in command of 113th Inf. Bde was Brigadier General L. A. E. Price-Davies V.C, who came from a Montgomeryshire family and was educated at Marlborough, before he joined the Kings Royal Rifle Corps. ⁶⁸ As a young officer he had won his V.C., while serving in a mobile column under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Hubert Gough in the Second Boer War. ⁶⁹ He was married to the sister of the future Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, who would later become Chief of the General Staff. At 37, the youngest of the three Brigadiers, he had served as a Liaison Officer for the first two years of the war. He was the last of the brigadiers to join the division at Winnal Down Camp, Winchester on 25 November 1915. ⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Brian Bond, The Victorian Army and the Staff College (London, 1972), p. 175.

⁶⁶ IWM, Major H. C. Rees, Private papers, p. 54.

⁶⁷ The term dug-out has two meanings, the first is a covered position in the front line which offers a modicum of safety, and the second refers to older officers who were not serving at the time the war started and were brought back, in this sense it is used in a derogatory way.

⁶⁸ Price-Davies replaced Brigadier General Owen Thomas, D.L., M.P. (W.N.E.C., Member).

⁶⁹ Hubert de la Poer Gough (1870-1963) was the son and nephew of a V.C., holder and his brother John was also awarded a V.C. in the First World War. He is sometimes known as a 'thruster' and was in command during the Passchendaele Campaign.

⁷⁰ Robinson, Peter, (ed) *The Letters of Major-General Price-Davies* (Stroud, 2013).

Br.-General Thomas Owen Marden was chosen to command 114th Inf. Bde. He was a very experienced officer, born in 1866; he was educated at Berkhamsted School and he was commissioned into the Cheshire Regiment in 1886.⁷¹ He saw active service in both Burma and South Africa, and significantly had also passed the Staff Course in 1902 and served in the War Office as part of the Directorate of Training in 1904. In 1905 he was promoted to Major in the Northumberland Fusiliers. He joined the Welsh Regiment in 1908, and four years later took over command of the 1st Bn. In 1914 he brought the battalion back from India to serve in 84 Inf. Bde, 28th Division, B.E.F, in France at the outbreak of the war. He was wounded by shrapnel at 2nd Battle of Ypres.⁷²

The third Brigadier General was Horatio James Evans, who took over 115th Inf. Bde from General Philipps, when he took command of the division; at 55 years of age he was the oldest of the three.⁷³ Born into a Radnorshire family, he had served in Afghanistan and was on the Staff of 2nd Division during the Boer War. By 1906, he was Lieut.-Colonel in King's (Liverpool) Regiment, and the Colonel in command of 4th District, Western Command, and was on the point of retiring from the Army when war broke out.⁷⁴ He was the first to take up his post in Colwyn Bay and was involved with the making of decisions on the selection of junior officers at an early stage. All three were Staff College graduates and all had Regular Army backgrounds. However, nine of the original battalion commanding officers were replaced before the division sailed to France.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Major General T. O. Marden replaced Brigadier General R. H. W. Dunn in 1915.

⁷² Major General Sir Thomas Owen Marden, K.B.E, C.B, C.M.G. (1866-1951). He also served on the staff in India 1903-4; War Office 1904-09; Staff in South Africa 1910-11. He commanded 6th Division 1917-19; he served in Constantinople 1920-23 during the Chanak Crisis; Commanded Welsh Division 1923-27. He retired in 1927. Colonel Welch Regiment 1920. His younger brother Colonel Arthur William Marden had joined the Manchester Regiment in 1888 and was a contemporary of Major General Sir Ivor Philipps.

⁷³ Br-General Evans was the oldest Brigadier employed during the Somme battle after 1 July 1916.

⁷⁴ No 4 District, Western Command covered all the old Welsh Counties as well as Herefordshire, Shropshire and parts of Lancashire, and normally had a battalion from each of these areas.

⁷⁵ Lt Colonel Willes 13 R.W.F, was replaced by Lt. Colonel Oswald Swift Flower; Lt. Colonel William Augustus Fox-Pitt 15 (1st London Welsh) R.W.F, by Lt. Colonel Richard Carmichael Bell: Lt. Colonel Thomas Alured Wynne Edwards 16 R.W.F, by Lt. Colonel Ronald James Walter Carden: Lt Colonel Holloway 10 W.R, by Lt Colonel P.E. Ricketts; Colonel Sir W Watts 13 W.R, by Lt Colonel Gifford;

Recruitment into Welsh Regiments 1914-1915

Prior to 1914, the recruitment into the Regular Army in Wales was poor, and there were a number of reasons for this. During most of the previous century anyone from Wales joining the Army was recorded as English. Therefore any comparison between Celtic nationalities within the Army recruiting, in this context, becomes misleading. Nonconformity and radicalism in 19th and early 20th century Wales was not about revolution as in Russia, but religious revivalism. As a result, soldiering was seen as offending, 'the Protestant ethic, but this did not mean there was widespread support for pacifism'. When Lloyd George made the charge against the 2nd Boer War, he did so on the grounds that it was a wasteful and unnecessary sacrifice of men, money and goodwill. He was always able to play to the gallery, suggesting he was never a pacifist nor unpatriotic but a political realist who saw it as not just degrading but dishonourable for Britain.⁷⁷

At first Lloyd George appeared to be slow to support the challenge of war, but his position as Chancellor of the Exchequer suggests he was busy raising the capital which would be required to fight the war. His endorsement and appeal in September for an Army Corps of Welshmen added impetus to the cause. Other prominent Welshmen were also involved in recruitment in 1914, including David Davies, who was the sitting Liberal M.P, for Montgomeryshire. ⁷⁸ He was the grandson of David Davies, the self-made millionaire who had been instrumental in the development of the Ocean collieries, docks and railways in South Wales. His career in the Army began in the Territorial Forces in which he served with the 7 battalion R.W.F. Born in 1880 he served with this Montgomeryshire

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Lt Colonel H.W. Benson 14 W.R, by Lt. Colonel L.R. King; Lt Colonel Scobie 15 W.R, by T.W. Parkinson: Colonel H.R.H Lloyd-Mostyn 17 R.W.F, by Lt Colonel J.A. Ballad; Major J. Owen James 19th (Pioneer) W.R, by Lt Colonel D. Grant Dalton.

⁷⁶ Neil Evans, Loyalties: State, Nation, Community and military recruiting in Wales, 1840-1918, p. 57. In *Wales and War*, (eds) Matthew Cragoe and Chris Williams (Cardiff, 2007).

⁷⁷ John Grigg, *Lloyd George*, *The Young Lloyd George* (London, 1990).

⁷⁸ Who's Who in Wales 1933.

battalion from 1900 to 1914, with the rank of Captain. In November 1914 he raised and became a temporary Lieut- Colonel and commanded 14 R.W.F, until June 1916.⁷⁹

Another was David Watts Morgan (1867-1933), a miner's agent who was alleged to have recruited 14,000 men, and joined the ranks of the 10 W R, at the age of 46. In 1917 he was awarded a D.S.O., for his actions in command of a Labour Battalion at Cambrai; he would later become M.P, for Rhondda East. 80 Viscount St David's was another who played an active role in recruiting at the beginning of the war. These men and many others also supported and recommended young men who aspired to become potential army officers by acting as referees. One of the reasons Welshmen in prominent positions were influencing recruitment, was the belief it not only a patriotic duty to fight the Germans but to do so in Welsh Regiments.

From late August 1914 onwards, men from Wales were joining the army in greater numbers than had been seen before. There was a simple reason for this, as they generally joined locally, they were now collectively enlisting into Welsh regiments. Therefore, as the traditions of the county regiments reflected the areas from which they were recruited, they in turn were the representatives of both culture and tradition. This process of 'localisation' of regiments began with the Caldwell reforms, by placing regimental depots in county towns, thus enhancing the pride in community identity. Each of these regiments, after the reforms of 1881, had a common bond with their respective backgrounds. ⁸¹ This is reflected in the various uses of the spelling of the 'Welch' rather than Welsh, and the adoption of the Prince of Wales feathers which goes back to the medieval period. The Welsh Dragon was the cap badge of the Monmouthshire Regiment, and the three feathers that of the Welsh Regiment. All four had Regimental marches incorporating Welsh tunes, such as 'Men of Harlech.' As all soldiers were standard field service uniforms, the Welsh emblems on these tunics were the only outward expression

⁷⁹ TNA W.O. 339/19140 personal file of Lt. Colonel David Davies M.P.

⁸⁰ TNA WO 339/21978 personal file of Lt Colonel David Watts Morgan M.P.

⁸¹ A. Mallinson, *The Making of the British Army. From the English Civil War to the War on Terror* (London, 2009).

of what has been described as a 'cultural communicator'. What reinforces this signal in the Welsh instance was the 'commonality of religion, language, work and sense of place'. 82

Although Welshmen made up the majority, there were also many who served in these regiments who were not Welsh by birth. Therefore, being in a Welsh Regiment did not necessarily equate with being Welsh. Frank Richards reflecting on his time with the R.W.F, described his battalion as the 'Birmingham Fusiliers', as it had a high proportion of men who had enlisted from that area of England. Sollowing on from this, and a good example of the dilemma of recruitment, was the creation of the 'Carmarthen Pals', the 15 W.R. Its first commanding officer was Lieut.-Colonel Mackay John Graham Scobie, who had served in the Herefordshire Rifle Volunteer Corps 1871-1908, and in the Boer War. From 1911 onwards he was in the territorial Welsh Division, until November 1914 when he took command of the 15 W.R, until their embarkation to France in 1915. Like so many men of his generation he worked tirelessly at recruitment and in making soldiers from raw recruits. Much of the recruitment of this battalion took them to Bolton, in Lancashire, and the reason suggested was:

the cotton trade was in full swing, and so it was quite possible that Bolton had received a large influx of Welsh workers, whose resources could be tapped into to fill the gaps not just in the ranks of the 15th Welsh, but also of the other Kitchener battalions, especially the 10th Welsh.⁸⁴

Another possible reason may have been the fact that many cotton workers took their holidays in the resorts dotted along the North Wales coast.

The difficulty in determining the degree of Welshness within the Welsh Division, whether by birth, language, occupation, religion or residence is problematical at best. There is little doubt that many

⁸² Dai Smith, Wales. A Question of History (Bridgend, 1999), pp. 21-33.

⁸³ Frank Richards D.C.M, M.M, Old Soldiers Never Die (First Published in 1933, annotated copy by H.

J. Krinnen and D. E. Langly, 2004), p.21. See also his Old Soldier Sahib (London, 1936), p. 79.

⁸⁴ John, Carmarthen Pals, p. 24.

Welshmen who served in the Welsh Division during the war took great pride in it and identified themselves as part of it. During the previous century many families from North and Mid-Wales had migrated across the border, particularly going to Liverpool, to such an extent the city was called 'the metropolis of Wales'. One of these second generation children was John Saunders Lewis. Born in Wallasey in 1893, the son of a Welsh Presbyterian Minister, he finished his University studies and joined the Liverpool Regiment as a private on 4 September 1914. Whilst in training he applied for a commission in the infantry and joined 12 S.W.B, who was part of the W.A.C.⁸⁵ However, his battalion later became part of 119th Inf. Bde, which was made up of S.W.B, R.W.F, and W.R. battalions and was destined to join 40th Division. The formation became known as a 'Bantam Brigade' and was described as 'well knit hardy Welshmen'. As Saunders Lewis was measured at 5 foot 3th inches tall this may well have been the reason he was selected to join this battalion. ⁸⁶ There are many other instances of men like Saunders Lewis, who were born in England but who had strong Welsh connections choosing to enlist in Welsh Regiments. ⁸⁷

Set in the context of the Great War, the men joining the army underwent a mass military experience, which was without precedent. Enlisting in a battalion from the area in which they lived, worked, played or studied created a common bond, which was built upon. What makes the difference between a north country 'pals' battalion, and those in Wales, was the history, language and cultural heritage of a country, rather than of a locality. The Welsh in London, the Irish in Liverpool and the Scottish on Tyneside, are examples of the need for men to identify with their cultural roots within the military system. In this generalised sense, the military culture within the Welsh regiments was officially British in practical terms, but in reality, fiercely Welsh. Traditions were passed on through generations within the system, but the culture of a regiment remained tied to its place of origin. Therefore, if culture is defined as the acceptance of shared rules and standards, which creates accepted behaviour then it is essentially governed within the military institution by discipline. This for the purposes of this research, nationality and culture remained Welsh within the Welsh Division.

⁸⁵ TNA W.O. 339/33109 personal file of Lt. John Saunders Lewis.

⁸⁶ Major A.F. Becke, *History of the Great War, Order of Battle, Divisions, Part 3B. New Army Divisions* (HMSO, London 1945, pp. 101-8.

⁸⁷ TNA W.O. 339/30379 personal file of Captain Aled Owen Roberts (1889-1949).

The introduction of Army, Corps and Divisional signs from early 1916 onwards was a simplistic innovation, which made recognising units much easier for transport and personnel of any unit. Its primary purpose was to make it more difficult for the enemy to identify the forces opposing them. Suffice it to say the choice of signs led to great debate within the staffs concerned. It seemed obvious the signs would enhance the esprit de corps especially within the New Army divisions, where they inculcated pride and they became a proud distinguishing mark. Badges therefore tended to be both territorial, as in the 47th (West Riding) Division using the 'White Rose of Yorkshire', and national, as in the example of the 10th Scottish Division using the 'thistle' as a motif while the 16th (Irish) Division wore the 'shamrock'. The debate was no less intense within the Welsh Division where all agreed within the staff that the emblem should be the dragon. The argument however, was whether it should be the dragon rampant as in the case of the R.W.F, or the dragon found on the Welsh flag, which should be adopted. Major Pryce-Jones, the A.A. & Q.M.G, contacted the School of Heralds who judiciously ruled in favour of the dragon shown on the national flag of Wales. A contract was agreed with Gamages for a divisional patch of a red dragon set against a black square, which later became a sought after souvenir for soldiers, even after they had left the division. 88 It was also an outward sign of national identity and endeavour, and by early 1917 it marks the point where Welsh Division could no longer be seen as 'Lloyd Georges Army' but rather, a force representing a nation, rather than a man.

The London Welsh Battalion

On 16 September 1914, Welshmen in London raised the 15 R.W.F, which became known as the London Welsh. The pattern of migration to London has been a feature of Welsh society since the Tudor period. A recent attempt to determine numbers had to rely on those born in Wales. ⁸⁹ Therefore, establishing a first generation connection with Wales was possible, but to do so for the second or even third generations becomes an increasingly difficult task. However, in 1914 by establishing a Welsh battalion in the capital there was a focal point for those who were proud of their heritage to assemble

⁸⁸ Clive Hughes, 'Arm to save your Native Land' Army Recruiting in North-West Wales 1914-1916 (Conway, 2015), p. 183.

⁸⁹ Emrys Jones (ed.), *The Welsh in London 1500-2000* (Cardiff, 2001), p. 5.

together. The chairman of the London Welsh Bn, was Sir Evan Vincent Evans (1851-1934), he had left Nancaw, Merionethshire in the early 1870's and was a director of a company in the City of London by 1914. His son L.N.V Evans, who was a 27 years old solicitor at the Director of Public Prosecutions, joined the Inns of Court in October 1914. By December he was posted to 15 R.W.F, (London Welsh) and served with the Welsh Division until wounded in October 1918. Another of the London Welsh dignitaries was His Honour, Judge Ivor Bowen, who by October 1914 was also helping raise two battalions of London Welsh at Grays Inn. At 52 years of age, he was a barrister by profession, (K.C.), and Recorder for Merthyr Tydfil, with great influence both in Wales and London. His boundless energy and hard work from the inception made the battalion a practical reality.

Lt. Colonel William Augustus Lane Fox-Pitt, who was born in 1858 and served in both the Zulu War and in Sudan, was chosen as the first commanding officer of the London Welsh battalion and was another of the central forces behind its formation. His family connection to Wales goes back through his mother side of the family, as she belonged to the Stanley family of Penrhos, Anglesey. He was a great friend of Baden-Powell (of Boy Scouts fame) and Douglas Haig, but retired before the battalion embarked for France. This battalion joined the 113th Inf. Bde, which was recruited throughout North Wales, and despite their place of origin they became integrated into the Welsh Division which was seen as the 'principle vehicle of the nation's military culture'.92

One of the great writers after the war was David Jones, who joined this battalion of 'cockney Welshmen'. 93 He recorded his experiences 'In Parenthesis' which is a remarkably rich description of his Welsh cultural heritage. 94 His story of Welsh history, fable and mythology weaved together with the realities of the attack on Mametz Wood demands attention. We are equally fortunate that Llewellyn Wyn Griffith was an officer in the same battalion and wrote of his experiences with the 'Cockney-

⁹⁰ TNA W.O.339/17480 personal file, Major Lewis Noel Vincent Evans

⁹¹ TNA W.O. 339/16905 personal file, Major Ivor Bowen (1862-1934)

⁹² John Keegan, Regimental Ideology in *War, Economy and the Military Mind* (eds) Best and Wheatcroft (London, 1976), p. 16.

⁹³ Thomas Dilworth, *David Jones in the Great War* (London, 2012), pp. 41-2.

⁹⁴ Jones, In Parenthesis.

Welsh' at the same battle. ⁹⁵ A civil servant and Bar student, he originally joined the 7 R.W.F, in Newtown in September 1914 as an enlisted man before being nominated for a commission in the London Welsh battalion by Lieut.-Colonel Fox Pitt. In January 1916 he was promoted to temporary Captain and served on the staff of 115th Inf. Bde during the battle of the Somme. ⁹⁶

Curiously Ellis Humphrey Evans (1887) a shepherd from Trawsfynydd in North Wales also joined this battalion in 1917 as a private, although he appears to have no known connection with London. He arrived in France in June, and was killed on the first day of the attack on Pilckem Ridge at the end of July. His poetry transcends the modern Christian symbolism with ancient Greek mythology, and he had only just submitted his work under the Bardic name of 'Hedd Wyn' to the Eisteddfod the same year. In September 1917, at Birkenhead, he was awarded the chair for his *awdl*, ⁹⁷ and the news of his death sent to them from the Welsh Division, led to the chair being covered in black cloth. ⁹⁸ Before leaving Winchester the Welsh Division had their own eisteddfod and would keep in touch with the *Maes* throughout the war. ⁹⁹

Both of Lloyd George's sons served with the 38th (Welsh) Division, Richard went from the 6 (Caernarvon & Anglesey), R.W.F, to the 15 (London Welsh) R.W.F, as a 2nd Lieut. Later he was promoted to a Temporary Captain, and would serve with the 19 (P) W.R. until September 1916, when he transferred to the Royal Engineers. ¹⁰⁰ He saw action at Mametz Wood and later went on to be appointed Deputy Assistant Director of Roads. His brother Gwilym joined him in the same battalion initially en route to a staff position under the divisional Commander Sir Ivor Philipps. After Philipps was removed, he returned to London with him, and later joined a siege battery of artillery, was promoted to Major, and was Mentioned in Despatches.

⁹⁵ Griffith, Up to Mametz.

⁹⁶ TNA W.O. 339/24685 personal file of Captain Llewellyn Wyn Griffith.

⁹⁷ *Awdl* refers to a long poem in traditional metres. See also Alan Llwyd, *The Story of Hedd Wyn The Poet of the Black Chair* (Llandybie, 2015).

⁹⁸ Meic Stephens (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales* (Oxford, 1986), p. 187.

⁹⁹ NAM 2009- 10-7. Letters of Colonel H.M. Pryce-Jones D.S.O, M.C. (1878 – 1952).

Major Richard Lloyd George (1889-1968) Educated Porthmadog and Cambridge, he served in both World Wars. He was David Lloyd George's eldest son, and was the 2nd Earl Lloyd George of Dwyfor.

Another London Welsh writer was Edward Thomas. Like David Jones he was not born in Wales, but did have Welsh origins. He joined the Artists Rifles as a private before being commissioned into the Royal Garrison Artillery. However, like many men with Welsh connections he did not join battalions or units with direct connections to the principality. Therefore, it can be seen that the numbers of men of Welsh heritage who joined the Army in London becomes very hard to judge. Had the London Welsh battalion been available in August 1914, this may have had an influence on these patterns of recruitment. However, men like Captain Ralph Picton Daniel did choose to join this battalion in London in November 1914, before being commissioned into 17 R.W.F. 103

Recruitment to the Royal Army Medical Corps

The story of the recruitment into the R.A.M.C, brigades of the Welsh Division reveals a previous military commitment by the St. John's Ambulance Brigade at the time of the 2nd Boer War. The Brigade recruited 78 volunteers within seven days and sailed to South Africa as medical orderlies, aboard the *Princess of Wales* the first British Hospital ship to be sent to the conflict with 23 Brigade volunteers on board. Further officers and men continued to volunteer their services and worked in the field hospitals being set up to accommodate the high casualty rates and increasing numbers suffering from diseases, such as enteric fever. The setting up of three zones to evacuate the wounded and sick from the battlefield was the basis of the system that was used to great effect during the Great War. First there was the 'collecting zone', then the 'evacuating zone' and finally the 'distributing zone'. It was the creation of a 'single pipeline' for the efficient evacuation of casualties from the front line to Stationary Hospitals that was the lesson which would continue onto the Western Front. ¹⁰⁴ Another difference between the two wars was the introduction and use of motor transport to replace the horse drawn

¹⁰¹ Edward Thomas (1878-1917). Thomas was killed at Cambrai 1917. See R. George Thomas, *Edward Thomas*, *A Portrait* (Oxford, 1985).

¹⁰² There was an 18 Bn R.W.F., known as the 2nd London Welsh and acted as a Reserve battalion.

¹⁰³ TNA W.O. 339/26839 see personal file of Captain Ralph Picton Daniel.

 $^{^{104}}$ C.J. Parry The Story of the St. John in the Principality of Wales 1877 to 1945 Volume One (Newport, 1993), pp. 33-38.

carriages. ¹⁰⁵ Of the Welsh contingent who served in South Africa from 1899-1902, sixty-one lost their lives.

The connection between the St. John's Ambulance Brigade and the Army were created by the roles of men like J. Arnallt Jones, who was both a Surgeon Colonel and Commissioner of No. 11 District St John's. By combining the 1914 annual camp of the territorial forces in Wales with that of his St John's district at Capel Bangor near Aberystwyth, he was able to provide training with troops. Even before war was declared, he was able to recruit members of the brigade to join the R.A.M.C., and who then went off to fill roles in military hospitals where regular members had left to join the initial B.E.F.

Once the W.N.E.C., had been formed, it approached the Order of St John's to mobilise a Field Ambulance which eventually became the 130th (St. John) Field Ambulance. By December 1914, the unit was fully manned with nine medical officers, 17 Staff Sergeants and 213 other ranks, most of whom had 3 to 4 years experience of stretcher and nursing work. Many of the men had used their skills and experience as miners working in difficult conditions underground in the collieries of South Wales. Although these men may have changed one uniform for another in theory, in practice, due to the shortage of uniforms, they remained in their St John's uniform for quite some time. The other units of the R.A.M.C, attached to the Welsh Division were the 129th and 131st Field Ambulance and altogether this amounted to roughly 30 Officers and 670 other ranks. The men were broken down into sections of three or four officers and 73-77 other ranks.

Command of the R.A.M.C., contingent was undertaken by Colonel Frederick James Morgan who had seen active service in Egypt in 1888-1889 and South Africa 1899–1902. The command of 131st Field Ambulance was Lieut.-Colonel Robert Herbert Mills Roberts from Penmachno who played in goal for Aberystwyth University and Town, and for Wales. After qualifying as a Doctor in 1887, he took up a posting at the Dinorwic Slate Quarry, as well as being a Captain at the Llanberis detachment of 3

¹⁰⁵ Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps October 18, 2012. M. C. M. Bricknell, *The Evolution of Casualty Evacuation In the British Army 20th Century (Part 1) – Boer War to 1918.*

¹⁰⁶ Thacker, British Culture, p. 92.

R.W.F. He had served in the Welsh Hospital in the South African War and was promoted Major in 1904.

The New Army Soldier

The process of joining the Army in 1914 requires some elaboration in order to understand how the recruits who had volunteered in such profusion were treated. Initially they filled in an attestation form which could vary depending on the unit or regiment they were joining. Many of these forms are similar and like those related to the Territorial Forces (T.F.) would include the number of years the volunteer would serve with the Colours in the U.K. A further form was introduced for service overseas which was to be signed by the candidate on the same day, in which he agreed to be posted to a foreign theatre of War. 107 Most of these attestation forms included the parish in which the person was born, their apparent age, home address, place and type of work, whether married, and date and place where they joined. The unit the recruit was to join was written at the top right hand side, however this often changed depending on their skills or the preference of those who were doing the recruiting. The medical inspection report at this stage was purely descriptive giving height, weight, chest size, their hair and eye colour, and the person's religious faith was often recorded. On arrival at the 'station' of training, a further medical was carried out which was far more intensive, including eye tests, and noting vaccination marks and scars. If applying for a temporary commission, these forms were attached to each file and provide an instant snapshot of the type of men being recruited. When the W.A.C., started to recruit, their attestation forms were all stamped with the initials W.A.C. at the top of the page in large red letters. Those seeking commissions would have their applications stamped on page three, either '43 (Welsh) Division or later 38 (Welsh) Division' before they were sent to Chester a final approval.

One of the problems highlighted by the medical inspection reports was the poor dental condition of the volunteers. A good example of can be seen from the men recruited into the 14 (Swansea) bn Welsh Regiment, for which there is some evidence. A Dental Scheme was approved by Major O'Hara in the

¹⁰⁷ Army Form E.624 was 'an agreement by an officer or man of the TF to subject himself to serve in any place outside the UK in the event of a national emergency'. In most cases it was signed on the same day as the attestation forms were signed.

absence of Colonel Benson and was funded by Alfred Mond. Thirteen local dentists and dental surgeons agreed on a meeting at the Metropole Hotel in Swansea on Wednesday 11 November 1914, to implement the scheme. Between 12 and 30 November, before the battalion left for Rhyl the scheme was put into operation. A total of 1,509 teeth were extracted, 153 fillings made, and provision for 1,092 false teeth was issued. As the scheme was brought in so quickly on the advice of the recruiting doctors, money was put aside to enable the men waiting for the false teeth to have them issued in Rhyl. The normal rate of costs for such service was reduced and the total cost was just over £170 as opposed to the usual rate which would have exceeded £1,000. Each of the dental surgeons who were part of the scheme received a 'Testimonial' signed by Colonel Benson on behalf of the men for their generosity and kindness. This is a good example that the health of the men recruited to this battalion was a significant factor and was an attempt to ensure their future good health of the men by the introduction of this scheme.¹⁰⁸

The Recruitment of Junior Officers

The normal path of recruitment of young officers before the war into the Regular Army was either through R.M.C., Sandhurst or R.M.A., Woolwich or by the backdoor via the militia and the territorial forces. At the start of the war there were approximately 28,060 officers serving, out of which 12,738 were regular. By November 1918, there were 74,200 Regular and New Army officers, with 60,000 territorial, 28,000 Special Reserve and 2,000 in the Reserve of Officers. ¹⁰⁹ Clearly with an increase of these proportions the old method was never going to be able cope with the numbers required for the New Armies. As a result Officer Cadet Training Battalion Schools were set up across the country with a number being based at the Oxbridge Colleges. There appears to have been two at Kinmel, Rhyl (Nos. 16 and 17) in north Wales and one in south Wales in Tenby, Pembrokeshire, where the process of instruction of suitable candidates took about four and a half months. ¹¹⁰ In the early period of the war men with suitable and transferable skills such as barristers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, managers and

 $^{^{108}}$ TNA W.O. 95/2543 War Dairy, A.D.M.S. Welsh Division.

¹⁰⁹ Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War 1914-1920 (Reprinted by The Naval and Military Press, London, 1999 edn), p. 234.

¹¹⁰ The pre-war training course at these military establishments took eighteen months at Sandhurst and two years at Woolwich.

teachers were commissioned. A good example was John McMurtrie, a mining engineer who was working at the Penallta Colliery near Bargoed, when the war began. Born at Radstock near Bath in 1885, he joined the Inns of Court Regiment in February 1915 and on his attestation form applying for a Commission in the R.Es he clearly states he wishes to join 124th Field Company, which was part of the Welsh Division.¹¹¹ Another was William Setten Goff, born in Exeter, who was working in Cardiff, as a surveyor, and joined the R.W.F, in November 1915 at the age of 34 years, despite wearing glasses. 112 Many of these men had previous experience either at O.T.C, or in T.F, units before the war but had left to follow their careers elsewhere. It should be noted, some of these officers were much older and had experience of dealing with men either in industry or in the commercial world. 113 John Stanley Griffiths Jones was a 37 year old barrister, who joined the Inns of Court in November 1914, and was commissioned into 10 S.W.B, in December 1915.¹¹⁴ Another example was of men who had served in the T.F, before the war. Henry Robert Mills was a grocer in Dolgellau, who had six years of service in the R.W.., and was serving as Colour Sergeant in 1914. He was appointed Major on 1 December 1915 in 14 R.W.F. 115 There were also those who had served and retired and sought to return to the colours to answer the call for experienced men. 116 The 11 S.W.B, recruited Arthur James Dawes as R.S.M, a crucial post for the training of new recruits as he would set the standards required. He had served from 1889 to 1910 in the Grenadier Guards and gave his age as 44 years, and occupation as a 'Drill Instructor'. He joined the battalion in January 1915 and received a commission taken over the Adjutant's duties in May, until he was invalided home in early July 1916. 117

The process of applying for a temporary commission reveals a great deal about the type of person being recruited and their backgrounds. Depending on the recruit's personal history the form varied slightly, but the information required was similar. For example, previously those applying for the

¹¹¹ TNA W.O. 339/56927 personal file of Major John Mc Murtrie.

¹¹² TNA W.O. 374/27772 personal file of Lt. William Setten Goff.

¹¹³ Candidates at Sandhurst and Woolwich were normally between the ages of 16 and 19. Fees were abolished and the age limit was increased to 25 years.

¹¹⁴ TNA W.O. 339/29319 personal file of Lt. John Stanley Griffith Jones, (1877-1949).

¹¹⁵ TNA W.O. 339/18715 personal file of Major Robert Henry Mills.

¹¹⁶ TNA W.O. 339/87427 personal file of Major John Williams.

¹¹⁷ TNA W.O. 339/865 personal file of Major Arthur James Dawes.

military colleges either at R.M.C, Sandhurst or R.M.A, Woolwich would complete a white form. Those with previous military service, whether as an officer or otherwise, and those who had been in the O.T.C, at school or at university, would fill in a similar form but with slightly different questions. 118 All these forms came in different colours: pink, blue or buff, and numbers representing their backgrounds. Generally these forms provide all the information contained on the attestation forms plus exact dates of birth and any former military background. For example, Wynn Powel Wheldon was recruited by the Inns of Court on 15 October 1914, was born in December 1879 and had served in the R.G.A, whilst a student at Bangor University. 119 He was to spend only 53 days in this battalion before leaving to an appointment as a Temporary Commissioned Officer in the R.W.F. His application for Commission (M.T. /393 Blue) states he was a graduate in Law and had been working as a solicitor for the previous seven years. His recommendation to this position was signed by Lieut.-Colonel David Davies MP who was in the process of assembling the 14 R.W.F. Although, he was 35 years when he joined, he served with this battalion for the duration of the war and received the D.S.O. 120 Evan Stedman Davies from Ceithio, just outside Cardigan, was working as an insurance clerk in London when war broke out, and joined the City of London Yeomanry on 3 September 1914. He was appointed 'farrier' in January 1915 which reflected his farming background dealing with horses and his application (M.T. /392 Blue) for a commission was successful and he was gazetted to 11 S.W.B, in May 1915.¹²¹ Some older men joined the A.S.C., for example, Harry Fenton Lambert, who was an estate agent from Bridgend who had been educated in the local grammar school and had served in the Glamorgan Imperial Yeomanry. 122 Another was Wilfred John Stanley Taylor, a brick manufacturer from Neath who would served with the Welsh Divisional Train throughout the War. 123

¹¹⁸ University of Wales Roll of Service, p. 27.

¹¹⁹ The Inns of Court O.T.C, was set up to train officers for the London T.F. Regiments. It was very much for men of class from the City of London who were generally between the ages of 25 – 35 years. By the end of the war 13,800 men had passed through and an estimate of between 11,000 and 12,000 received commissions. See F. H. L. Errington, *Inns of Court Officer Training Corps. The Great War*. (Milton Keynes, 2010, reprint).

¹²⁰ TNA W.O. 339/16918 personal file of Major W.P. Wheldon D.S.O. (1879-1961).

¹²¹ TNA W.O. 339/4653 personal file of Captain Evan Stedman Davies.

¹²² TNA W.O. 339/48412 personal file of Captain Harry Fenton Lambert.

¹²³ TNA W.O. 339/27979 personal file of Captain Wilfred John Stanley Taylor.

The process of appointment was not always smooth, as each application had to be ratified first by Western Command in Chester, and then, if required by the Military Secretary at the War Office in London. In November 1914, 10 (1st Rhondda) W.R, wanted to appoint six men to temporary commissions and submitted the necessary paperwork. Only four were recommended however, the appointments of James Barnes O'Hare, who was over 50 years of age, and Owen Thomas Morgan, who was 42 years old, were questioned by Western Command because of their age. 124 The Director of Military Training informed General Mackinnon at Western Command that their appointments 'would receive consideration provided the Officer commanding 10 Welsh who was willing to accept them in this rank'. Although neither had any previous military service, O'Hara was endorsed by Lieut.-Colonel Holloway (10 W.R.) as he had been 'the means of bringing between 200 & 300 recruits and is desirous of serving as a 2nd Lieut. with them'. 125 However, the case of Major J. O. James, 19 (P) W.R, would show how determined the Military Secretary could be over appointments and promotions. This officer, 42 years of age and a mining engineer, had served with a pioneer unit in the South African War and was living in Wallasey, Cheshire in 1914. He had been appointed to a temporary Commission as Lieutenant in the Welsh Division in March 1915, and through his efforts not only did he raise his battalion, but also the 23 (P) Bn, W.R. Despite his application to be promoted to Lieut.-Colonel in order to command at least one these battalions, he was overlooked twice on the grounds 'he had already had rapid promotion to Major' and 'there was a great difference between raising a battalion and commanding in the Field'. It was also suggested that an officer who only held a 'temporary commission' being promoted over 'regular officers who have given years of study to their profession is giving cause for dissatisfaction and the interests of the service as a whole must be considered'. Despite both Major-General MacKinnon and Lieut.-General Pitcairn Campbell's attempt to change this situation Major James was never promoted beyond this rank. 126

¹²⁴ Both men would serve as temporary Captains in the Labour battalion of the Cheshire Regiment from June 1915 onwards until it was absorbed by the Labour Corps. O'Hara was recorded with the Welsh Regiment as O'Hare. I am grateful to Celia Green of the S.W.B, museum for this information.

¹²⁵ TNA W.O. 339/134706 personal file of Lt Arthur William Hartshorn.

¹²⁶ TNA W.O. 339/26847 personal file of Major James Owen James.

The year 1916 was significant as it marks the period in which the New Armies bore the brunt of the fighting it was also the year conscription was introduced. The templates of the volunteer, left by the Old and New Army, the reservist and the territorial, helped to build a new and in some ways a different type of soldier. In reality the old Army had, 'fought itself to almost complete destruction in France and Flanders while Kitchener raised his New Armies'. 127 Many of the new talented officers were more mature and brought with them experiences from a much wider range of occupations and in many ways challenged the status quo of the officer's mess. The old system of deference to rank was undermined as, 'in the New Army it was not wise to be dogmatic. You never knew what surprise might be in store for the unwary'. 128 A clear example of this broader spectrum of men can be seen from the 2,000 graduates, students and staff of the University of Wales who served in the war. The majority were born in Wales and Cardiff University had the largest contingent of 735 with the majority becoming officers in the Army on the Western Front. Of these, 139 served in the R.A.M.C, and various other medical services including the Friends Ambulance Unit. 129 The majority served on the Western Front and made up a completely different spectrum of officers: they were not the traditional Sandhurst product, and would not have previously followed a career in the military. 130

Morale and Religion

Morale plays a significant factor in the process of motivating soldiers in general however its importance to the Welsh was an example of an outward display of their nationality. Not only did they sing Welsh hymns while marching, they had choirs which sang in Welsh and gave concerts, and a highly successful concert party entitled 'Welsh Wails.' However, sport was an essential part of the division which hosted both soccer and rugby teams. The rugby team was a central element of the Welsh Division and when possible they continued to play rugby matches against various army teams, including the Australians, the New Zealanders and the French. Whether this is a romanticised view or

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¹²⁷Margaret Macmillan, *Peacemakers*, (London, 2001), p. 7.

¹²⁸ Watcyn-Williams, From Khaki to Cloth, p. 79.

¹²⁹ University of Wales Roll of Service 1914 -1918 (Bangor, 1921): A total of 313 were either killed either killed in action or died in service.

¹³⁰ National Library of Wales. There were over 1,000 applications for commissions made to the Welsh Army Corps during 1914-1915 alone. The vast majority were made by men from the Principality and reflects the enthusiasm to join the Welsh Division.

not, the Welsh Division was to carry this particular Welsh 'atmosphere' with it throughout the war. ¹³¹ Part of this ambience was reflected in the religious upbringing of the vast majority of the men, which was mainly non-conformist.

When the British Army went to war in 1914 there were only 117 Chaplains to administer to the religious needs of the soldiers. This was made up of 89 Church of England priests, 11 Presbyterians Ministers and 17 Roman Catholic priests. By the end of the war this figure had grown to 3,416 Chaplains, while the number of Church of England priests had increased to 1,941, Presbyterians 298, and 643 Roman Catholic priests. However, by that time there were also 256 Wesleyan, 248 United Board and 11 Welsh Calvinist ministers, as well as 14 Jewish Rabbis and 5 Officers of the Salvation Army. 132 With Lloyd George supporting the non-conformist in his bid to create the W.A.C, Kitchener agreed to a number of other religions being included within the strength of the Army Chaplains Department.¹³³ During the recruitment of young men in Wales, a friend of Lloyd George, the Calvinist Methodist Minister John Williams (Brynsciencyn 1853-1921), took every opportunity to preach the religious merits of enlistment. Whether men agreed with the 'pious rhetoric of the wars supporters' or the simplistic concept of 'good against evil and God versus the devil' is difficult to gauge. 134 What was important for the men who did enlist was to have access to their own religious representatives, who could provide spiritual guidance in time of war. Lloyd George's request led to a ten-fold increase in the number of Chaplains serving in the Army within a year, and those accepted, would be granted commissions, but would be employed on an annual contract. Their distribution and allocation grew as the war continued, and by 1916, the B.E.F, had at least 17 chaplains per division, with many more distributed at bases, and various hospitals.

Three Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Ministers were appointed by the end of 1914, five more in 1915 and one more by June 1916 reflecting how quickly they came forward to administer to their 'military

¹³¹ Hughes, *Mametz*, p. 39.

¹³² Statistics of the Military Effort, pp. 190-1.

¹³³ Lloyd George A Diary by Frances Stevenson Edited by A.J.P. Taylor (London, 1971), pp. 3-4.

¹³⁴ D. Densil Morgan, *The Span of the Cross. Christian Religion and Society in Wales 1914-2000* (Cardiff, 2011), pp. 43-4.

flock'. 135 The Rev. Gower Rees, who was a vicar in Bradford in 1915, was accepted and served as Senior Church of England Chaplain with the Welsh Division. 136 His renewal contract for 1916 was signed by the Deputy Chaplain General, Bishop Gwynne. In June 1917 while helping some men from a building which was being shelled, he slipped fracturing his right fibula and was invalided home. After a brief period of convalescence, he was posted to the R.F.C. School at Turnberry, from where he eventually returned to the Welsh Division. The Rev. Peris Williams from Wrexham was also a senior Congregational Minister with the Welsh Division until June 1918.¹³⁷ The Rev. W. Llewellyn Lloyd from the small village of Llangaffio, joined the Welsh Division in 1915 but was not physically capable of withstanding the rigours of active service and was invalided home very soon after arriving in France. 138 Another Chaplain who served with the Welsh Division for most of the War was Peter Jones Roberts, a Welsh speaking Wesleyan Methodist Minister, and worked at their Book Store, in Bangor. He took up his duties with the Welsh Division on 16 February 1915 at Colwyn Bay, and despite being overage, he served in La Havre, and then managed to get himself moved to the Welsh Division. 139 On his arrival at the battle of the Somme, he found out that his son, Lieut. C. G. Roberts, who was serving as Adjutant in the 9 R.W.F., had been killed on 3 July 1916. 140 This event was recorded by Wyn Griffiths, and their conversation made such an impression on him that he recorded 'if I come through this business I would like to go to that man's church'. 141 Another Welsh Minister, Rev. Jenkin Alban Davies, believed, 'if the boys cannot come to the church, the church will come to the boys'. 142 His ministering to the Welsh Division began in September 1915 at Winchester, however, he was invalided back to the U.K, in March 1917 with a severe attack of 'Quinsy' and had both his tonsils and appendix removed. His contract was renewed but he found himself stationed in Camp Fournier, Marseille, before being demobilised from Southern Command in 1920. 143 Of all the religious men who populate the story of the Welsh Division, only one appears to have died as a result of his service at the front. The Rev.

¹³⁵ *Monthly Army List July 1916.* Corrected to 30th June 1916.pp 1789 – 1798.

¹³⁶ TNA W.O. 339/119915 personal file of Rev. Albert Gower Rees.

¹³⁷ TNA W.O. 374/75050 personal file of Rev. Robert Peris Williams.

¹³⁸ TNA W.O. 339/55538 personal file of Rev. William Llewellyn Lloyd.

¹³⁹ TNA W.O. 374/58048 personal file of Rev. Peter Jones Roberts.

¹⁴⁰ TNA W.O. 339/190 personal file of Lt. Cadwaladr Glyn Roberts.

¹⁴¹ Griffith, *Up to Mametz*, pp. 212-13.

¹⁴² Bernard Lewis, Swansea Pals (Barnsley, 2004), pp. 76-7.

¹⁴³ TNA W.O. 339/106243 personal file of Rev Jenkin Alban Davies.

Thomas Glasfryn Jones, a graduate of Lampeter College, was a 32 year old Curate at Mostyn in North Wales, when he decided to become a Chaplain in May 1916. At the beginning of April 1917, while attached to the 11 S.W.B, he was severely wounded and taken first to 7th Stationary Hospital in Boulogne, and then transferred to the Empire Hospital in London where he died on 12 April 1917.¹⁴⁴ As the majority of the men who served in the Welsh Division were Christian, and the Chaplain's role, whatever denomination, whether at hospitals or at the forward field aid post or at the Main Dressing Stations, was one of comfort and spiritual support. Their function of administering to the dead and dying, as well as conducting burial services, was of far greater importance to the ordinary soldiers, and there officers and is often forgotten. However, their work in 'in base hospitals was difficult as they were ministering to a constantly changing congregations as men arrived and left regularly'. ¹⁴⁵ As the war progressed the maintenance of morale often became another aspect of their work and brought them into a 'closer fellowship' with the soldiers. Before the Welsh Division prepared to move to France it held a last religious service after which the leading battalions left Flower Down Camp on the 1 December 1915 en route by foot to the docks at Southampton.

¹⁴⁴ TNA W.O. 339/101684 personal file of the Rev. Captain Thomas Glasfryn Jones.

¹⁴⁵ Linda Parker, *The Whole Armour of God. Anglican Army Chaplains in the Great War* (Solihull, 2009), p. 40.

Chapter Two: The Road to Mametz Wood 1915 – 1916

Early Days in Flanders

When the New Armies arrived in France they began a process of integration and adjustment as each

division was brought up to the standard required to become competent in the dangerous new world of

trench warfare. Although they had come a long way, they still required a great deal of 'on the job

training', and the Welsh Division was no different. The 15 W.R, for example, had not received their

full quota of rifles until November 1915, and they were not alone in this respect. The lack of rifle

practice and time spent on ranges was one of the drawbacks of rushing the New Armies to France.²

Thus, through no fault of their own, all these New Army Divisions required a settling in process to

familiarise them with the front line, under the supervision of more experienced formations. When the

Welsh Division arrived in France, its infantry element, including the Pioneers, consisted of 411

Officers and 12,717 other ranks, not including the integral units like the R.Es, R.A.S.C, R.A.M.C, this

would rise to 520 officers and 15,194 other ranks.³ Transport was mainly horse drawn, although the

division did have 34 cars, 21 motor cycles and six lorrys. The Royal Artillery contingent arrived almost

a month later, and their figures took the number up to over 18,000 men. Just the billeting, supply and

training of so many men required massive endeavour and underlines the sheer scale of the enterprise.⁴

However, they now entered a largely immobile world of medieval siege warfare which embraced by

the brutal punch of new military technology, which had created a wasteland in which to fight a war in

trenches. This chapter will examine their journey, looking at how they went from being seen as 'Lloyd

George's Army' towards finding their compass bearing as an efficient military formation.

The Welsh Division's initial induction, orientation and training was with the Guards and 19th Division,

where they began to learn the new art and craft of modern warfare. During this period they were

introduced into the line by rotation, first at platoon level, then company, battalion, brigade, and finally

¹ John, Carmarthen Pals, p. 31.

² TNA W.O. 107/19 Notes made by Lord Kitchener covering the period August 1914 – 31 May 1915.

³ TNA W.O. 95/2541 War Diary, 38th (Welsh) Division A & Q Branch, November 1915.

⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2539 War Diary, 38th (Welsh) Division, December 1915, Appendix II: This included

648 horses for riding, 597 draught and 188 heavy draught horses, as well as 147 pack horses and 454

mules.

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as a division. These stages of front line service gave them a very short probationary period, and its effectiveness depended on their ability to adapt, learn and to condition their approach to the routine of a static war. However, early problems were identified with the Divisional Signals Company, which resulted in a visit by Lieut.-Colonel Godfrey-Faussett, the Deputy Director of Signals First Army, on 14 December 1915. The arrangements made by Captain Samson, were found to be 'unsatisfactory' and he 'does not possess sufficient technical knowledge to supervise the work of a Signal Company'. He was immediately removed from his post in France, and despite a number of written appeals from his home in Penarth he was required to relinquish his Commission in February 1916.⁵

Not everyone saw the positive side of sponsoring New Army units, as the disparaging remarks made by 2nd Lieut. Raymond Asquith, a very newly arrived Grenadier Guards officer, suggest. He described a platoon of the R.W.F, as 'little black spectacled dwarfs with no knowledge, no discipline, no experience, and a surplus of nerves and vocabulary'. Later in January, he referred to them as a collection of 'tiny little tots, utterly unfit for anything more strenuous than a children's ball'.⁶ An alternative view of this experience comes from an officer of 16 R.W.F, who was attached to the Irish Guards for instruction, '[T]he Guards are topping fellows and we feel honoured to be attached to them. The officers with whom I mess are very decent fellows indeed'.⁷

The Welsh Division had joined XI Corps, in the First Army, which was commanded by Lieut.-General Richard Haking, who after serving in South Africa, taught at the Staff College from 1901-4. He commanded 5th Inf. Bde in 1911, took them to France in 1914, and went on to command 1st Division in 1915, before becoming XI Corps Commander.

Major-General Feilding, G.O.C, Guards Division, inspected the front of 114th Inf. Bde on 16 January and 'was pleased with the work in progress' however, the 'lack of periscope rifles' was 'a pity' as the

⁵ TNA W.O. 339/16855 personnel file of Captain Samson Bowyer R.E.

⁶ Raymond Asquith, Raymond Asquith: Life and Letters John Jolliffe (Ed., (London, 1987), pp. 227-31.

'enemy are apt to get the better of the sniping'. Overall he 'formed a good impression of the Brigade' and 'if they continue to work as well as I found them working today I do not think that there should be any cause for complaint'.8 After their final inspection, the Welsh Division took over part of the line between Neuve Chapelle and Richebourg at the end of January and found it, 'very quiet and very muddy'. By now, Lieut-Colonel Pryce (G.S.O.1), had brought in 'Trench Standing Orders', a copy of which was issued to and had to be read by every officer and platoon sergeant, and which they were expected to be 'fully acquainted with'. The front line consisted of 'a series of isolated posts with garrisons of six or seven men each'. Major Rees (G.S.O. 2), also found the trenches in a, 'very bad state of repair and was knee deep in liquid mud'. By the time they handed these trenches over at the end of February, 'they had worked wonders'. At Festubert the drainage problem was so bad Lieut.-Col Pryce and Major Rees started an ambitious scheme 'digging a great ditch for about 3 miles to connect with the river'. 10 During this period, Lloyd George visited the Welsh Division. He 'watched one of the brigades marching up to the trenches & then had tea'. He also took time to visit Lieut. W.P. Hinds, 15 R.W.F, who was dying in hospital after being shot through the head. 11 Although he did a great deal to help the son of John Hinds, the Liberal M.P. for Carmarthen, this incident deeply troubled him and brought home the grim reality of war. 12

A feature of static warfare was the inventiveness of the developing technology being used, and the requirement to keep pace with these advances. Captured apparatus such as the German 'flammenwerfer' was demonstrated to officers in March 1916. Part of this new arsenal was gas, against which they only had rudimentary masks for protection. One doctor, Captain E.W. Lawrence R.A.M.C. (13 R.W.F.), described, 'a gas attack the most dreaded of things, and the most dangerous and

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Fielding G.O.C. Guards Division dated 13.1.16.

 $^{^8}$ TNA W.O. 95/2557 War Diary, $114^{\rm th}$ Inf.Bde, Report 647/G General Staff, Major General G.

⁹ TNA W.O. 985/2555/1 War Diary, 13 R.W.F. January 1916.

¹⁰ IWM, 77/179/1 Brigadier General Herbert Conway Rees, p.56: TNA W.O. 95/2548/2 War Diary 19th (P) Bn W.R.

¹¹ TNA W.O. 339/23674 personnel file of Lt. William John Hinds.

¹² Lloyd George. A Diary by Frances Stevenson, pp. 92-3.

¹³ TNA W.O. 95/2561/2 War Diary, 17 R.W.F., 9.3.1916: A 'flammenwerfer' was a form of flame thrower.

deadly of all German devices.'¹⁴ Training for gas attacks gave men confidence they could survive in these circumstances and defend themselves. Other new weapons included Bangalore torpedoes, trench mortars, and rifle grenades, combined with the increasing use of snipers. The growing professionalism of the B.E.F. was reflected in the various Schools of Instruction which were being introduced. Here all ranks from various regiments were taught sniping, bomb throwing techniques, signalling, musketry and many other aspects of the 'engines of war'. Training was based on the wider experience and techniques of others and how to profit from the new forms of industrial siege warfare.

For senior officers, there was a round of conferences and lectures to attend, which were based on the new cutting edge of the trench war technology. A good example was the experience of Major Harvey, Notts & Derby Regiment, 2nd in command, 10 S.W.B. He attended a conference on 14 January 1916, given by Major General Harington, a senior Corps staff officer. The following day, there was a lecture on Stokes Mortars, and a demonstration, as well as a lecture on aircraft photography. On 16 January at Wisques, he was lectured in the morning at the School of Musketry, and later took part in a war game. The next day he attended the Artillery School at Tirques, and later attended a conference again run by Major General Harington at Second Army H.Q. Afterwards there was a short lecture from the Intelligence Branch, and on 20 January he went to the Grenade School at Tendegham and found it 'very interesting'. 15

Brigadier General Price-Davies, 113th Inf. Bde, attended three conferences in January, and took part in a 'tactical exercise' run by Major General Bridges of 19th (Western) Division. On 16 February, he attended a French exercise near Abbeville, run by the French XXI Corps under General de Maltre, which reflects a degree of cooperation between the allies. ¹⁶ These lectures were part of a very intensive programme run for the purposes of bringing newly arrived officers up to date with the current methods

¹⁴ IWM 01/59/1 Captain Edward William Lawrence attached 13 R.W.F. Letter home dated 20 December 1915.

¹⁵ Lt. Colonel C.D Harvey D.S.O. Diary for 1916, the Museum of the Royal Regiment of Wales, Brecon.

¹⁶ NAM, Major General L.E.A. Price-Davies, Diary for 1916. See also Paul Harris, *The Men Who Planned the War* (Farnham, 2016), p. 114.

of operations on British and French sectors. Both accounts reflect how the lessons of the recent fighting were being inculcated to newly arriving units.

Life for the ordinary soldier in the front line was a question of learning a routine, but it was mainly during night that the war would be taken to the enemy. General Haking's policy of "cumulative aggression" was the watchword within his Corps. 17 Price-Davies held a weekly meeting called the 'strafe club', where 'methods of annoying the Huns were arranged'. 18 Part of this involved nightly patrols for intelligence purposes: to survey the enemy's positions, make notes of where the sentries were posted, listening to enemy conversations and identify newly constructed positions. As a result, patrols would then be sent out to catch prisoners and deal with hostile enemy working parties.

For young officers it was a challenging environment, where they were able to learn how to command men in action and gain experience. The battlefield was however, an unforgiving place to learn lessons and was not without costs. During its period of instruction, on 11 December, 'A' Company, 16 R.W.F, which was attached to the Grenadier Guards, lost their first casualty Pte W. Hughes. He was killed by a shell in a communication trench while two others were wounded. Two junior officers were also killed in December, Lieut. Wilfred Tait, 10 W.R. on 19 December: and Captain Percy Evans, the 114th Inf. Bde (M.G.O.), who died of wounds two days before Christmas. On 10 January 1916, 2nd Lieut Trevor Thomas, 16 R.W.F. the son of Brigadier Owen Thomas M.P., died of wounds after being hit by a sniper. However, not all casualties were the result of enemy action, as accidental deaths were not uncommon and often occurred during training. An example of this was, Lieut. Donald Henry

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¹⁷ TNA W.O. 95/881 War Diary, XI Corps. Notes on a Conference held at Corps H.Q., 13 February 1916.

¹⁸ IWM, Brigadier General H.C. Rees, p. 57.

¹⁹CWGC, Pte 18178 Willie Hughes was born in Llandegai, Caernarfon and enlisted in Bangor. He was probably the first enlisted man to be killed in action with the Welsh Division.

²⁰ TNA W.O. 339/21583 personal file of Lt. Wilfred Webster Tait.

²¹ TNA W.O. 339/1586 personal file of 2nd Lt Trevor Thomas.

²² TNA W.O. 339/34262 personal file of Lt. David Lyndsay Stranach Gaskell.

Devenish, a South African serving in 14 W.R, who was killed teaching a soldier how to throw hand a grenade.²³

As the rain-swept autumn of 1915 gave way to a bitterly cold New Year marked by heavy snowfalls, life in the trenches became more difficult. Fog was also a problem for both sides, and the first German prisoners were captured on 30 January as a result of losing their way and getting to within 20 yards of the Welsh trenches.²⁴ Once 14 R.W.F, realised the snow would remain, they displayed some innovation by making 'some white suits for patrols' which were 'sent up to the front lines'.²⁵ It was by such means that trench warfare was prosecuted, even in the worst weather. By March, Captain Edward Gill, 10 S.W.B. was awarded the Welsh Division's first M.C, for rescuing a wounded man despite being under enemy machine gun fire.²⁶ At the end of April, the Germans put up notice boards to inform their neighbours that Kut had fallen to the Turks, in an attempt to undermine the morale of the Welshmen.²⁷

The news of how the Germans had attacked Verdun led to changes in the way the battalions manned their front lines. The lesson of the German tactics used drew attention to the 'very heavy artillery fire which wiped out the French front line system'. The Corps Commander now introduced a system of groups of posts 'of special importance', rather than manning a complete trench line. Work began at once, covering 'from Lacouture and the group round Rue de Bois down to the Canal'. This new approach was implemented during March a tense month spent creating and understanding this system.²⁸

The raids were a severe test of the men but were primarily to 'increase the morale of our own men and lower the morale of the enemy'. The 'object in lowering the morale of the enemy and raising our own is to kill Germans, and in co-operation with these infantry attacks the more guns we can get to enfilade

²³ TNA W.O. 339/ 28828 personal file of Lt. Donald Henry Devenish.

²⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2552/2 War Diary, 14 R.W.F. 30/31 January 1916.

²⁵ Ibid, 22/23 March 1916.

²⁶ TNA W.O. 339/26225 personal file of Captain Edward Gill.

²⁷ NAM Lt. Colonel Pryce Jones, letter nos. 1063, April 1916.

²⁸ TNA W.O. 95/881 War Diary, XI Corps. Notes of a Conference held at Corps H.Q., 8 March 1916.

the enemy's trenches when full the better'. 29 During these raids any Germans caught, identity marks, or enemy material found would be retrieved, while the raiding party would destroy anything that could not be removed.³⁰ On 8 May, 15 R.W.F. carried out a very successful raid at Laventie, inflicting considerable casualties on the Germans, who were caught in the middle of a relief. Unfortunately the Welsh lost two officers and five men in the process. On 16 May, Lieut.-Colonel Gaskell, 16 W.R. was killed by a sniper whilst visiting sentries at 'Colvin crater' in moonlight. His loss was particularly hard felt by the battalion, as he had raised and brought it over to France. On 4 June, Captain Hugh Powell Williams 14 R.W.F. led a raiding party of sixty men into the German lines at Laventie. After finding the enemy front line deserted, they were subjected to heavy fire from the German support trenches. Despite this they continued on and bombed a large dugout containing Germans. After ten minutes the signal for retirement was given, but on their return they suffered heavy fire going back through the enemy lines. Later it was realised that Captain Williams had failed to return: he was last seen wounded trying to get his men back.³¹ In spite of a 'white handkerchief' being seen during daylight, no trace of him could be found that night. As a result Lieut. A.P. Symons, the battalion interpreter, wrote a message in German on a board asking if they had captured the officer. The Germans in return put up a board from their trenches to say 'Officer Todt'. 32

During May-June of 1916 they spent some time helping 61st (2nd South Midland) Division to acclimatise to life on the Western Front. One of its brigades was 184th Inf. Bde, which incorporated the 2/5 (Territorial) Bn, Gloucester Regiment in which Pte Ivor Gurney was serving. Despite his apprehensions about 'rough types' while moving up to receive instruction from a Welsh Battalion, he was pleasantly surprised.³³ On arrival he climbed into a signaller's dugout and had 'a most amazing evening'. Some he discovered had been to 'Welsh Universities' and 'they were absolutely first class',

²⁹ TNA W.O. 95/161 War Diary, First Army. Notes of a Conference held by General Sir Henry Rawlinson, of Corps Commanders at First Army H.Q., 4 January 1916, p.2.

³⁰ TNA W.O. 2555/2 War Diary, 14 R.W.F., 4 May 1916.

³¹ TNA W.O. 95/2552 War Diary, 14 R.W.F., 4/5 June 1916.

³² TNA W.O. 339/17006 personal file of Captain Hugh Powell Williams

³³ The unit in question was 15 (1st London Welsh) R.W.F. Battalion, 113th Inf. Bde, 38th (Welsh) Division.

he wrote, 'I had no sleep for 36 hours. We talked of books and music' and 'an exceptional lot'. ³⁴ None of these men could have been considered natural soldiers, and reflected the diversity of the men who were beginning to arrive in France and Flanders.

The Political Connection

By the spring of 1916, Lloyd George had set up the Ministry of Munitions, where he was able to show a great deal of expertise in dealing with industrial negotiations. However, this was not the case with his relationship with the military high command, which was to become more fractious as the war moved on. His rapport with the military leaders both at home and especially in France was dysfunctional. Whether it was Sir Douglas Haig's conservative views or Lloyd George's radical past or not the two men had nothing in common.³⁵ This stormy atmosphere was added to by the demands Lloyd George made on the M.Ps who had joined the Welsh Division and were now in France.

A reference to a 'secret report' by General Paget, G.O.C, Salisbury Training Centre, is very revealing as it pointed to 'certain deficiencies in the 38th'. He described the Welsh Division as being, 'a little behind other Divisions recently sent to France in the matter of efficiency'. And, 'practically all the Brigade Commanders and commanders of Battalions, as well as many of the Officers had to be changed. The original men were either civilians or aged dugouts'. Much of this process had already began, before the division arrived under Southern Command, and nine of the original battalion commanders were replaced before they sailed for France. Paget's contention cannot be seen as a true reflection of the commanders who left Winchester in late 1915. Adjustments like this were not uncommon in the New Armies and were in keeping with the method of introducing new divisions to

³⁴ Ivor Gurney, War Letters (London, 1984), Edited by R. K. R. Thornton. pp. 68-74.

³⁵ J.P. Harris, *Douglas Haig and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 275.

³⁶ See appendices 4. The Report was not dated but covered the period between the training of the division to December 191 5 and September 1916. Paget's Report was not traced but is referred to in this document

³⁷ IWM, H. C. Rees, papers, p. 54.

the front line. The malignant undertone of this report is underscored by the warning that 'the Welsh Division being the creation of Mr Lloyd George makes the situation difficult'.³⁸

Paget's report suggested there was a political problem within the command structure of the division. Apart from Major-General Ivor Philipps there were two other M.Ps serving in the Welsh Division. The first was Lieut.-Colonel Sir Hamar Greenwood Bt. M.P, who commanded 10 S.W.B. He was a Canadian by birth, and had studied at Toronto University and served as a Lieutenant in the Canadian Militia for eight years, and then a Captain in King Edwards Horse. By profession he was a barrister at law, and a Liberal M.P., first for York (1906-1910), and in 1916 he was the member for Sunderland. In 1915, he took the title of Baron of Llanbister, in the county of Radnor, mid Wales, and left the division in April 1916. Afterwards he took up the post of D.A.A.G. on Lord Derby's staff at the war office. He was replaced as battalion commander by Lieut.-Colonel S.J. Wilkinson, who had been educated at Wellington College and was commissioned into the West Yorkshire Regiment in 1900. He had served in the 2nd Boer War and transferred into the Welsh Regiment. He was the original the commander of 19 (P) W.R. and in January 1916 he was Mentioned in Despatches and awarded the D.S.O.⁴⁰

The second was Lieut.-Colonel David Davies MP, who commanded 14 R.W.F. and was a political ally of Lloyd George. During the initial stages in France he had spent very little time with his battalion, constantly being away on Parliamentary duties.⁴¹ By June of 1916 this problem had become acute. Price-Davies, his Brigade commander, had asked the Divisional Commander to grant Lieut.-Colonel

³⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2540 War Diary 38 Division, "Training of the 38th Division – December 1915 and September 1916".

³⁹ Alexander George Boteville Thynne D.S.O. (1873-1918), Conservative M.P. for Bath, and Godfrey Lampson Tennyson Locker-Lampson M.P, P.C. (1875-1946), Conservative M.P. for Salisbury. Both officers were attached to the Welsh Division at this time.

⁴⁰C. T. Atkinson, *The History of the South Wales Borderers 1914-1918* (London, 1931, Reprinted Newport, 1999), pp. 244-7.

⁴¹ NAM, Lt. Colonel Pryce Jones Letter nos. 1082, 10 May 1916. 'David Davies returned last night after 3 weeks leave for H of C duties!!'

Davies, 'four days leave to England on urgent private affairs'. ⁴² On 23 June, Price-Davies was informed by private letter that his leave had been extended by the War Office to the 27 June, but not at his (Col. Davies) request. This was the first and only intimation received that an extension of leave had been granted to this officer at this important time. In response, Price-Davies considered Colonel Davies should have made it his business to find out why the War Office granted him the extension. This was not the first time this officer's leave, which was considerable, had been extended without the Brigade Commander's knowledge or consent. As a result, Price-Davies formally requested Sir Ivor Philipps to ask Colonel Davies, to resign his command of the 14 R.W.F, 'as he appears to be too much occupied with other matters to attend to the serious business of war'. As the Welsh Division moved south to the Somme, the paper trail went through a number of different Corps. The XVII Corps commander report states:

I am inclined to the belief that Colonel Davies has so many important duties and responsibilities in civil life, many of them of a public nature, and of which he cannot wholly divest himself, that he may decide to ask permission to surrender his command in order to attend to them. As, however, I do not know the reasons which induced the War Office to give this officer an extension of leave, I am in some difficulty in making a recommendation on the subject except that I consider that Colonel Davies should be made quite clear and he should either devote himself entirely to his military duties or surrender his command.⁴³

On 29 June, information came through XVII Corps, which stated Lieut.-Colonel Davies 'was granted an extension of leave by the War Office on the grounds of Parliamentary Duties, to the 27 June'. ⁴⁴ The War Office had also granted, 'a further extension on the grounds of Parliamentary Duties, to 11 July, 1916'. This was at a time when active preparations for the Somme were taking place, and the leadership of a battalion was of the utmost importance. Clearly for Lieut.-Colonel Davies to have to

⁴² TNA W.O. 339/19140 personal file of Lt. Col. David Davies, Letter from Sir Ivor Philipps to XVII Corps Commander dated 26 June 1916.

⁴³ TNA W.O. 339/19140 personal file of Lt Col David Davies.

⁴⁴ Ibid, Letter from Major General Sir Ivor Philipps to Headquarters XVIIth Corps, dated 29 June 1916.

been away from his battalion before its first major action was totally unacceptable. Major-General Philipps recommended that despite his excellent work in raising and training the 14 R.W.F.:

I consider it essential that the battalion should not be deprived of its Commanding Officer at this important period. Colonel Davies had to decide between the urgency of his duties at home and his military duties. Under these circumstances I have no other course open to me. In the interests of military discipline generally and the 14th Battalion, the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in particular, but to strongly recommend that Colonel Davies be called upon to resign his command.⁴⁵

II Corps commander, sent a memo on 1 July to Fourth Army H.Q, which was terse and to the point, 'either rejoin at once, or be called upon to resign the command of the battalion'. ⁴⁶ General Rawlinson recommended to the Military Secretary at G.H.Q. that Lieut.-Colonel David Davies should be removed from the command of the Battalion:

as it is useless to have a commanding officer whose interests at home require frequent periods of leave. I should further point out that the officer went on leave on 16th June and his leave has been extended by the War Office till July 11th. It is very necessary that every Commanding officer shall be with his battalion at this time.⁴⁷

On 8 July, Haig, sent a memo to the Military Secretary at the War Office stating his position:

I am in entire agreement with the views and recommendations expressed by the General Officer Commanding 38th Division. Lieutenant Colonel Davies has been absent from his command during most important operations, and in the interests of the Battalion I consider it advisable that

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ TNA W.O. 339/19140 Memo dated 1 July 1916 from Lt. Gen, C in C, II Corps.

⁴⁷ Ibid, Memo dated 3 July 1916, from 4th Army to G.H.Q.

he should relinquish the command, and that an officer should be appointed who can devote all his energies to his military duties in the field.⁴⁸

By this stage Major-General Philipps was no longer in command of the Welsh Division, and was on his way back to London. The fact that Lieut.-Colonel Davies' dismissal had to go to the Army Council at the War Office, with the recommendation from Haig that, 'he should relinquish the commander', shows how sensitive this matter was. Curiously, it went to the very military secretary who presumably had sanctioned his absence in the first place.⁴⁹

The protracted correspondence over this matter was re-ignited many years later when the Official History's were being prepared by General Edmonds. An accusation was made by a Major Drake-Brockman about Lieut.-Colonel Davies in 1930. He described him as being a, 'politician pure and simple who knew nothing about soldiering before the war: his chief claim was that he had subscribed much money to Mr Lloyd George's Liberal party fund'. He alleged a short time before the 38th Division, went into action on July 6:

Mr Lloyd George sent a private wire to Major Gen. Sir Ivor Philips telling him to send home <u>at</u> once three officers in the 38th Div; they were in various infantry bns'. And one of them was Lt. Col. David Davies M.P. for Montgomeryshire.⁵⁰

Why Drake-Brockman suggested this is hard to understand, as Davies was no longer there when the 'wire' arrived, as he was one Lloyd George's P.P.S, at the Ministry of Munitions at the time. Lieut.-Colonel Hamar Greenwood had already left, so who was the third battalion commander? As for the 14

⁴⁸ Ibid. Memo dated 8 July 1916, From G.H.Q. to War Office.

⁴⁹ TNA W.O. 339/19140 Lt.-Colonel David Davies transfers to the T.F, on the 15 July 1916. The Army Council was the Army's most senior decision-making body at this time.

⁵⁰TNA C.A.B. 45/189 Letter to General Edmonds from Major G.P. Drake-Brockman M.C. dated 7 February 1930. He had been on the staff on 7th Division during their attack in July and had transferred to the Welsh Division.

R.W.F., the battalion had been effectively run by Major G. H. Gwyther for a long period of time. This whole episode regarding the political influence recurs with frequent regularity, as will be seen later. This inter-change of letters demonstrates how the senior commanders were trying to deal with the difficult process of an absent battalion commander who was not only an M.P, but also had the backing of David Lloyd George.

Command on the Western Front

When Douglas Haig took over from Sir John French he did so, 'with every confidence he had learned the business of modern soldiering from the success of his own judgements and the mistakes of others.'51 The campaign he was to launch would prove whether or not he had learned these lessons, while remaining the main proponent of the decisive battle.⁵²

On the Somme, Haig appointed General Sir Henry Rawlinson in command of Fourth Army on 1 March 1916. This Army would eventually consist of seven Corps. By 3 April, Rawlinson had submitted his plans to Haig for approval, based on an offensive with limited objectives. Prior to this meeting, he held a conference with his Corps commanders at his H.Q. at Querrieu, where he had asked them to outline their respective plans for the attack. Lieut.-General W.N. Congreve, XIII Corps, always a realist and a consummate soldier, had pointed to the difficulty of coordinating his attack with the French on his right. Secondly, unlike the others, he would have to deal with a large number of woods. He was concerned as the woods would present a serious hazard to plans, but his fears appear to have been brushed aside. The net result was the introduction of XV Corps under Horne.⁵³ Congreve's Corps was reduced from five to two divisions, and he lost part of his northern sector. The transfer took place on 29

⁵¹ A. Farrar-Hockley, *Somme* (London, 1966), p. 33.

⁵² Simon Robbins, *British Generalship on the Western Front 1914-1918, Defeat into Victory* (London, 2006), p. 123.

⁵³ Lt. General Sir Henry Horne (1861-1929). Educated at Harrow and R.M.A. Woolwich, he was commissioned into Royal Artillery 1880, and served in the Second Boer War 1899-1902. From August to December 1914 he was B.G., R.A, in Haig's I Corps. In 1915 he commanded 2nd Division and was promoted to command XV Corps. Later he was C in C, 1st Army 1917-18. He was created a Baron in 1918.

April, with the dividing line being, Caterpillar Wood which bordered both Corps boundaries.⁵⁴ The question of how to deal with the woods was ignored, as were the concerns of Major General Congreve.

Fighting in Woods

Although there was nothing new about fighting in woods, the development of modern artillery technology on a much larger battlefield was. The devastating firepower produced, which combined with the machine gun could create a concentration of debris within a wood. It also lengthened the range of the battlefield, with the implementation of 'indirect fire'. This required a number of changes, which the lessons of the Boer War had not predicted, as obstacles could now be engaged with the help of modern communication at far greater distances. In the case of woods, despite being a physical barrier, they reduced the observation of the enemy, and could used as cover to either attack or defence. Woods, therefore, remained an important natural defensive position. A wood allowed the defender multiple advantages without having to commit large numbers men. However, as Clausewitz points out, a distinction must be made between the 'dense, impenetrable, overgrown forests, and extensive, cultivated woods that have numerous clearings and traversed by a large number of paths'.55 Mametz Wood had been a cultivated wood prior to the war, but by 1916 it lay uncultivated and left to grow wild, except for the rides and clearings which the Germans used to reinforce their front line and to hide artillery.

The whole question of fighting in woods had been discussed at a three day conference at the R.M.C., Sandhurst in January 1916. Sir John French, as C.I.G.S. instigated a forum to render Staff Officers more competent commanders at time of war. Its purpose was to train officers to widen their own natural abilities by studying the military biographies of great soldiers. It would also seek to apply the principles of war from the lessons of history and use the knowledge from the training manuals to 'train

⁵⁴ TNA W.O. 95/921 War Diary, General Staff XV Corps 29 April 1916: The Corps H.Q. opened this day at Heilly.

⁵⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, 1989), Chapter 21, p. 452. Edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret.

our soldierly judgement and instinctively act correctly in war'. ⁵⁶ Each and every aspect of command in warfare was discussed and recommendations formed with the representatives of each of the services making up the army.

At the end of the conference, the topic 'Wood fighting and Village fighting' was introduced, noting 'in future, woods would be more used to secure concealment from aircraft'. It was recognised 'the training of large bodies of troops in operations in woods was insufficient'. It was conceded at that point fighting in woods 'would be more of an individual nature than in open country' and the 'real discipline was the chief factor in all such fighting'. Attention was drawn to the Franco-Prussian War, when the advantages and disadvantages of concealment in a tactical situation were discussed. In conclusion, it was agreed that in the future, fighting in woods would be more frequent than in the past, and the Army should be prepared for this. Although it was accepted that at that point in time there were 'difficulties in gaining practice in wood fighting' but 'we should try our hardest to overcome them'. 57

Communications were poor between the Corps concerned though the withdrawal was of a 'very high order'. ⁵⁸ The same could not be said of the staff work at G.H.Q, or the leadership, which was debateable. The two Corps took different paths, with I Corps under Lieut.-General Haig making for Landrecies, and II Corps to Le Cateau, under Lieut-General Smith-Dorrien. It was II Corps stand, after a disorganised withdrawal through the Wood, which took the sting out of the German advance.

During the September retreat, 2nd Division fought a determined battle near Villers-Cotterets, a small town almost surrounded by woods. This became a running fight through a forest and was in no way a conventional rear-guard action. Once again refugees caused problems, and gaps appeared in the defensive line, making retirement in such a thick wood difficult. The danger of encirclement was a

⁵⁶ TNA W.O. 107/64 Report of a Conference of Staff Officers held at the Royal Military College from 12 to 15 January 1916.

⁵⁷ Ibid, pp. 87-9.

⁵⁸ Richard Holmes, Army Battlefield Guide, Belgium and Northern France (London, 1995), p. 81.

constant threat, but the withdrawal continued despite the utter exhaustion of the troops.⁵⁹ Later in 1914 two further incidents of fighting in woods occurred: in September at Hill 189 near Montreuil and in October on the Ypres salient. As the war settled down into trench warfare, wood fighting receded into the background. However, the battles of the Somme offensive would bring the methods of fighting in woods back into question.

The Army and its Staff

The professional relationship between Haig and Rawlinson reveals a difference in their views on strategy. Haig believed in a strategic break-through and, 'wanted penetration by rapid exploitation.'60 Whereas Rawlinson, 'thought that no more was possible than a step by step advance, each step made from a secure footing and preceded by a thorough bombardment'.61 This difference of opinion resulted in a compromise, so much so that, instead of concentrating the heavy artillery, it was spread too thin.

This difference of approach at the top did filter down as to the question of how the Corps commanders were to tackle the battle and how they were to control its forward momentum. Therefore, it is important to understand the relationship between the Corps and Divisional commanders' to see how well they understood the Army Commanders concept of how command and control was to work. 62 This is because the chain of command forms the backbone by which the Army commander could exercise his influence over the way in which the respective links conform to the plans. The lack of a cohesive strategy from the top down was to undermine the tactical momentum, no more so than on the southern part of the front.

⁵⁹ Everard Wyrall, *The History of the Second Division* (Naval & Military Press reprint of 1921 edition), pp. 46-52.

⁶⁰ Official History of the War, France and Belgium, Military Operations, (1932) Vol 1, p. vii. Hereafter, referenced as O.H.

⁶¹ Ibid. O.H. Vol 1, p. vii.

⁶² See Ch.1, Command and Control on the Western Front, The British Army's Experience 1914-18 (Gloucestershire, 2007). G. Sheffield & D. Todman, (editors).

In 1916, the Army and Corps commanders were regular officers, as were the majority of their staffs. Within the New Army Divisions there was a broader mixture of officers from various backgrounds but essentially most of the key posts were held by regular officers. Lower down within the brigade spectrum the number of regular officers was smaller, and this was especially true of the staff positions as:

Trained staff officers to man formation headquarters – essential to the complex mass operations of modern war – were absolutely lacking. In France a tug of war began between the trenches and the various headquarters for a handful of good, trained officers available.⁶³

Many of the junior officers working on these staffs had no experienced in battle situations and were new to the real authority of command.⁶⁴ The result was that staff positions at division and brigade were often manned by a regular officer, in charge of junior officers who were fighting their first major battle.

The experience of these middle-ranking staff officers in the Welsh Division reflect the wider movement of officers which was going on within the B.E.F, at this time, as some of its key personnel were changed. On 16 May, the Welsh Division lost the services of its C.R.E, Lieut- Colonel Atkinson, and his replacement Lieut.-Colonel Knox went sick on 1 July. In June, 13 W.R. lost their Commanding officer Lieut.-Colonel Packe, who had been in place for only five months. Major Rees, a G.S.O. 2, who had done so much to transform the division and make it ready for battle, was transferred on 14 June, to take over a Bde. He recorded that it 'was very interesting to watch the gradual transformation of a large mass of civilians into a first class fighting unit sure of itself.' His loss would be hard to replace, but Captain Smith, M.C., of the Coldstream Guards, would eventually replace Rees. He wrote on 4 July, 'I set off in a car with my servant and all my belongings. On leaving the Corps (XI Corps) I was

⁶³ Correlli Barnett, *Britain and her Army* (London, 1970), p. 379.

⁶⁴ Prior and Wilson, Command on the Western Front (Oxford, 1992), p. 138.

⁶⁵ IWM, Brig. Gen. H.C. Rees, p.58: NAM, Lt. Colonel Pryce-Jones Letter nos. 1154. 'He must be the youngest Brigadier out here, only 34!'

presented with a 'Leek' addressed to Captain Arthur ap Smith.'66 These losses to the Welsh Division at this time were irreplaceable, especially in the challenging conditions they were to face.

The Battle of the Somme 1916

The Somme began as a joint venture with the French, using a timetable proposed to allow both armies to coordinate their respective attacks. Cooperation between the two Armies on the Western Front was to be the cornerstone of the forthcoming campaign. However, the German attack on the fortresses surrounding Verdun, on 21 February 1916 changed the whole strategic plan. This was, 'to have an immediate and drastic effect on the Somme offensive. The result was that Verdun sucked in more and more French reserves'.⁶⁷ The 'blood-letting' at Verdun changed the Somme from a French battle with British support into a British battle with French support'.⁶⁸ The leading role would 'involve the bulk of Britain's first ever mass citizen army'.⁶⁹

The opening of the Somme campaign challenged the British Generals' belief in how to command and control the ongoing battle at both strategic and tactical levels. This was not helped by the philosophy of success which was a prevalent and ongoing characteristic of the British at G.H.Q., at this time. In June Haig's spirit was uplifted by Brussilov's success in the East, and by news from Joffre that the French were to go on the offensive at Verdun. His mood was also brightened by the positive intelligence picture, which did more for morale at G.H.Q, than anything else. Brigadier General Charteris, Haig's senior Intelligence Officer (G.S.O. 1), presented a view of a German Army on the

⁶⁶ IWM Document, Temporary Lt.-Col. Arthur Francis Smith, D.S.O., M.C. (1890-1977). *Journals during the Great War* with notes compiled by Jackie Ingram 1999, p. 175. Letter dated 14-7-16.

⁶⁷ Robin Neillands, *The Great War Generals on the Western Front 1914-1918* (London, 1999), p. 229.

⁶⁸ LIAISON General Pierre Des Vallieres at British General Headquarters (Army Records Society, Gloucester, 2016) Edited and translated by Elizabeth Greenhalgh, p. 32.

⁶⁹ Chris McCarthy, *The Somme, The Day by Day Account* (London, 1993), p. 7.

⁷⁰ John Harris, *The Somme. Death of a Generation* (London, 1966), p. 30.

point of collapse.⁷¹ Haig's confidence appears to have been lifted by this over optimistic assessment of the enemy's real strength and fighting capabilities.

During the two years the Germans had occupied the Somme front, they had constructed a well-entrenched labyrinth of positions, with deep shelters built of thick concrete and wood throughout the length of their front. The villages had been turned into fortresses.⁷² Failure to destroy the thick high wire in front of them, combined with a lack of suppressive fire on the enemy trenches during the attack, added up to the tragic first day of the Somme.⁷³ However, for the vast majority of the troops moving into position, and those arriving during the build-up, their outlook was extremely optimistic.⁷⁴

Amidst the chaos in the northern sector on the first day there was great bravery, although there was also great slaughter. The only progress was in the south at the junction between the two allied forces. The French were very successful on their front. This helped Congreve's XIII Corps, which also made progress. Next to them was Horne's XV Corps, which also made advances until it was confronted by two major obstacles. The first was Contalmaison, just north of the village of Mametz, which had been identified during the planning process as a defended locality between the front system and the second line. Haig, in a letter to his Army Commander, had wished 'Sierre, Miraumont Spur, Pozieres, and Contalmaison to be attained during the first day's operations'. This optimism was marked as the 'Green Line' on the map. Not surprisingly, the paperwork makes no reference to Mametz Wood, which was Horne's second major obstacle, the largest wood on the British front.

⁷¹ Brig.-Gen. John Charteris, (1877-1946). He was a Captain in the Royal Engineers, who was brought from India by Haig in 1912 when he took over the Aldershot Command as his Assistant Military Secretary.

⁷² Ralph J. Whitehead, *The Other Side of the Wire*, *Volume 1* (Wiltshire, 2010).

⁷³ Middlebrook, Martin, *First day on the Somme*.

⁷⁴ NAM Lt Colonel Pryce-Jones, Letter nos. 1181, 'Bosche is in for a bad time of it & I have a feeling that in the next week we shall see a great change over the whole war'.

⁷⁵ TNA W.O. 158/321 War Diary, Fourth Army, Plan for the Offensive by 4th Army, p.8. III Corps was to have taken Contalmaison and Pozieres on the first day. This would mean an advance of over 2 miles.

⁷⁶ Ibid, H.Q March to June 1916. C.A.D. 876 sent on 16 May 1916.

The Welsh Division move to the Somme

The experience gained in Flanders had changed the Welsh Division into a capable and confident trench fighting formation. This had not been without costs. During this initial period the Welsh Division had almost 2,000 casualties, in what was considered routine trench warfare. When First Army released the Welsh Division, their Corps commander, Haking, reported to Haig 'that the Division were good but that he had no confidence in Major General Philipps as a Commander. Whatever the reason for Haking's comment, it was unlikely to help matters, and suggests that Philipps' position was already undermined before he left for the Somme. Outwardly, all appeared well and when they left XI Corps, a Special Order of the Day, 12 June 1916, contained the following comments from the Corps commander:

From the time of its first arrival the Division has done well, both as regards fighting and administrative work. It has carried out five successful raids into the enemy's trenches and it has proved itself to possess a fine offensive spirit.⁷⁹

The Welsh Division began its training for the Somme on 15 June, in the St Pol area, a location that had been chosen specifically as it was similar to the terrain of the Somme area. Here, strenuous training was carried out including 'trench to trench attack in all its varieties was practised'. ⁸⁰ By 24 June, they had a brigade exercise, followed by a divisional exercise the next day. On 26 June the route march south to the Somme restarted in earnest, and lasted for seven days. On average, each battalion marched 20 miles every evening, which led one commander to remark 'the division was whacked before it went into the fight'. ⁸¹ The 10 W.R. noted after a 21 mile march, starting at 5pm, 'the weather was extremely

⁷⁷ TNA W.O. 95/2540 War Diary, 38th (Welsh) Division 1916. Casualties returns of Infantry show 20 Officers killed, 76 wounded and 3 missing. Other ranks casualties 291 killed, 1590 wounded and 7 missing.

80 Munby, A History of the 38th (Welsh) Division. p, 16.

⁷⁸ Don Farr, *The Silent General Horne of First Army* (Solihull, 2006), p. 97.

⁷⁹ TNA W.O. 95/882 War Diary, XI Corps, June 1916.

⁸¹ TNA CAB 45/189 Letter to General Edmonds from Lt Colonel Grant-Dalton 19 (P) R.W.F, dated 6 March 1930.

wet & the roads hilly' and 'the men started physically tired'. 82 At Rubempre, 28 June, it joined II Corps, where they were 'to be prepared to follow the Cavalry in the event of a breakthrough and take over the Bapaume from them'. 83 Major Harvey recorded in his diary, on 30 June, 'at Gazaincourt took some NCO's in wood fighting.' This appears to be the only piece of evidence to show there was any form of training for fighting in woods prior to the attack on Mametz Wood. 84 The following day, the fateful Saturday 1 July, he left Toutencourt for Acheux, as the 'big push' had started that morning. Later at 2.am he noted ominously a 'very slow march of wounded arrived in camp'. 85

Captain Jeffery, a battery commander with the Welsh Division, recalled 'a tremendous bombardment in progress' and later 'learnt that the attack had been launched at 7.30am and was going well'. ⁸⁶ However, Brigadier General Price-Davies's impression was, 'we had good news of the attack but of course without details & without knowing what the programme is'. ⁸⁷ On 2 July, he recorded his anxiety regarding the lack of news about what was happening, he observed the 'French appear to have done very well but you cannot tell'. ⁸⁸ Ominously, the Welsh Division's medical units recorded that large numbers of casualties were arriving at 3rd C.C.S, in Punchevilliers. As a result the commander of 130th Field Ambulance and five Surgical Officers and 50 men went to assist, and found large numbers of men had suffered from machine gun wounds. This station treated 1,400 men in the first 24 hours,

⁸² TNA W.O. 95/2559 War Diary 10 W.R. On 26 June 1916, the march from Bethonsart to Neuvilette was about 21 miles and it was recorded as 'the most severe march the battalion had been called upon to perform'.

⁸³ Ibid, p.16. The Welsh Division was ordered to be prepared to move on 6 hours' notice.

⁸⁴ I am aware that a booklet about Fighting in Woods was distributed in early 1916 but whether it was used by Officers of the Welsh Division or not is hard to discover. I am grateful to Beth Griffiths for this information. M.A. Birmingham dissertation 2014, *Were the 16th RWF judged too hastily on 10 July 1916*.

⁸⁵ Lt.-Col. C.D. Harvey, 1 July 1916 Diary entry.

⁸⁶ Jeffery Eardley, *Servants of the Guns* (first published in 1917, reprint India, 2015), p. 78: The artillery contingent of the Welsh Division remained on the Somme battlefield until 19 July before they were pulled out.

⁸⁷ IWM, Price-Davies letter dated, 1 July 1916.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 2 July 1916.

including Germans. The following day 'large numbers of casualties were still waiting in convoys to be admitted'. It also noted, 'orderlies were directed to gives these men food and drink'. 89

At first the Welsh Division was put into G.H.Q. Reserve, but on 3 July they were released to Fourth Army, and then into XV Corps Reserve. ⁹⁰ On the same day they moved to Treux, and in the afternoon Price-Davies wrote:

motored over with Evans and Marden to XV Corps & on to 54th Bde (Shoubridge) & over our old front line & German line & support and walk up to Mametz.⁹¹ Everything very quiet on these fronts & we have got the upper hand but not so in the north I feel we are back in our old front line trenches a great disappointment.⁹²

The Progress of the Battle

At the higher levels of the Army command structure there was a failure to assess information from all assaulting forces correctly on the opening days of the battle. Receiving up-to-date communication of vital intelligence from the front line to Corps, Army, and G.H.Q, was a major flaw in the prosecution of the battle. This time lag was not new, but it was its scale this time that made the tactical battle more difficult. This had been recognised by XV Corps and had been part of the training of the staff before the opening of the offensive. 93 The result was that the planning process was unable to keep to its prearranged schedule as the battle's dynamics were constantly changing. This was further undermined by a serious shortage of reliable communications for 'contacting or controlling the infantry beyond the front line trench'. 94 Amongst the methods available were field telephone, flags, flares, runners either on

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⁸⁹ TNA W.O. 95/2549 War Diary 130th F.A., 38th (Welsh) Division. 2 – 3rd July 1916.

⁹⁰ TNA W.O. 158/332 War Diary, 4th Army, XV Corps H.Q. was situated at Heilly during this period.
38 Division were posted to XV at midnight on the 3 July 1916.

 ⁹¹ Brig.-General T.H. Shoubridge, 54th Inf. Bde, under Major.-General. F.I. Maxse 18th Div, XIII
 Corps. This Division had done extremely well and advanced as far as Caterpillar Wood on the first day.
 ⁹² IWM Price-Davies letter dated, 3 July 1916.

⁹³ TNA C.A.B. 45/132 Letter to General Edmunds from Philip Curry, K.R.R.C. dated 23 April 1930.

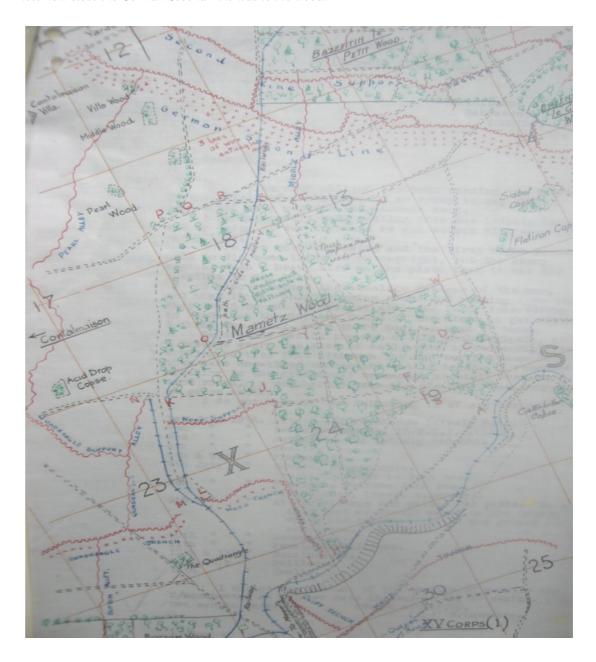
⁹⁴Neillands, *Attrition*, p. 239.

foot, bicycle or motorcycle, forward observation officers or observers either in balloons, or with the R.F.C, and finally carrier pigeons. As a result, the method of assessing intelligence gained through these various channels was not wholly satisfactory, and there was always a time delay. This would continue as divisions were brought forward with little up-to-date information which could be passed down to brigade and battalion. All the efforts of the ongoing planning process to impose rule and system were undermined by a tactical situation which made orders out-of-date, as they were being written. To keep rigidly to such orders, despite local knowledge of the fighting in progress severely limited the scope for officers to use their own initiative, as would be demonstrated at Mametz Wood. (see Map. 1) The wood was about a mile long, and almost a mile wide; its husbandry had been neglected since the start of the war. Amongst the assortment of trees there were fully grown oak and birch trees which were over 40 feet in height and which let in little light. Both it and Caterpillar Wood had been identified as positions which contained hostile batteries. As a result of this both woods had been shelled by heavy artillery right up to and during the start of the offensive. Consequently many trees had been shattered and blown across the ground, which was to make any progress on foot very difficult. This made an even more a formidable and foreboding obstacle, with every advantage lying with the enemy. If battles are shaped by the terrain over which they are fought, then it must have been much harder to do so, within the restricted confines of a wood. Captain B. Liddell Hart wrote about his view of Mametz Wood, and the ability of troops to take it, 'Nothing seemed more formidable than this wooded bulwark of German power, standing like an insuperable barrier a mile and a half to two miles inside their front. Such a wood would have been impossible to take by frontal assault save at a terrible cost.'95

⁹⁵ TNA, C.A.B. 45/135. Letter from Liddell Hart to General Edmonds 11 December 1935: Sir Basil Liddell Hart (1895-1970) was a young Captain serving in the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry during the Somme battle.

1. Original map of Mametz Wood (W.O. 95/2540)

Note how close the German Second Line was to the wood.



The wood was directly in the path of Fourth Army sphere of operations, and was the responsibility of XV Corps. However, the boundary between XIII Corps and XV Corps lay on the east side of Caterpillar Wood was to complicate the issue.

On 1 July at 2.31pm, 7th Division informed XV Corps that XIII Corps troops had entered Caterpillar Wood. Heavy artillery was therefore warned to stop firing pending verification. ⁹⁶ By 2.pm on 2 July, 91 Inf. Bde (7th Div.) was established in White Trench, on the high ground south of the wood. At the same time, 22 Inf. Bde (7th Div.) was ordered to consolidate a line on the southern edge of Mametz Wood from Strip Trench to Bottom Wood. Lieut.-Colonel Dugan, 2 R.I.R, began pushing scouts into the wood and organised a bombing attack up through Strip Trench towards the junction with Wood Trench. However, the Germans remained in strength in Quadrangle Trench and the scouts were forced back to their original position. ⁹⁷ On the same day, Haig visited Fourth Army H.Q, at 10.30am, and advised them to attack Thiepval if possible, otherwise concentrate on Mametz Wood and cooperate with the French. Strangely XV Corps sent contradictory orders on the same day which 'had come from a higher authority' for 7th Division not to become heavily engaged and for the battalions concerned to withdraw to Mansel Copse. ⁹⁸

On the first day of the battle XIII Corps had reached both Montauban and Bernafay Woods. However, making the decision about where to attack next took on a whole new dimension, as it became part of the inter-allied disagreement. General Joffre met Haig and Rawlinson on 3 July to discuss breaching the second line of German defences. Joffre wanted Haig to continue to attack Thiepval. Haig did not agree. Whether by instinct, or on advice, he had already decided to concentrate further south. By 9.45pm, Fourth Army began making preparations for an attack on the German second position, along the Longueval-Bazentin le Petit line. 99

During the period, 3 to 7 July XV Corps had been hammering away at Contalmaison, and despite some success had not been able to hold the position. Although the initial 'bite' that Rawlinson advocated was

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⁹⁶ TNA W.O. 95/921. War Diary XV Corps May-July 1916. There were units of 18th Division.

⁹⁷ C. T. Atkinson, *The Seventh Division 1914-1918* (1998 reprint by Naval & Military Press), pp. 270-274.

⁹⁸ TNA W.O. 158/327 War Diary, Fourth Army H.Q, 2 July 1916.

⁹⁹ O.H.1916, Vol 2, pp. 18-9.

good, moving forward and consolidating was much more difficult. ¹⁰⁰ On the east side of Mametz Wood, XIII Corps had taken Bernafay Wood on 3 July. However, Congreve was reluctant to move forward on Trones Wood, as this would create an eastern salient. He was waiting for his left flank to be secured by XV Corps. Haig returned to Rawlinson's H.Q., on the 4 July, and 'impressed on him the importance of getting Trones Wood to cover the right flank, and Mametz Wood and Contalmaison to cover left flank of the attack against the Longueval front'. On the same day, he visited XV Corps H.Q. at Heilly, where Lieut.-General Horne was dissatisfied with Major-General Pilcher, as he was trying to get 17th Division to advance more quickly. ¹⁰¹ However, 17th Divisions could only move on Contalmaison in tandem with 34th Division, III Corps. To do otherwise, would have left their flank exposed to the west. Equally important, 23rd Division were now about to relieve 34th Division on 17th Division flank during 3 and 4 July. Meanwhile 7th Division had been ordered to consolidate its position on the other flank. Major General Pilcher was therefore in a no win situation. Corps may have set the parameters within which the divisions operated, however the lack of cooperation between them in this case reveals the intense scrutiny divisional commanders were put under. ¹⁰²

On 4 July, the heat wave which had characterised the opening of the offensive came to an abrupt end, as during the evening a thunderstorm broke and torrential rain reduced the whole area to a sea of mud. Movement was now made even more difficult for divisions moving up and into position. The weather became a problem and made the journey of the Welsh Division up to Mametz Wood extremely difficult. Price-Davies wrote:

[S]uch a wet day & rather heavy rain for a short time. It came down in torrents & the whole country is swimming. Camps are under water & the mud roads were so slippery that the

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¹⁰⁰ Hughes, *Mametz* explores the arguments more fully. This failure to move forward was one the main criticisms put forward by Lt.-Col J.H. Boraston who blamed Philipps.

¹⁰¹ Sheffield and Bourne *Douglas Haig, War Diaries and Letters 1914-1918*, p. 199.

¹⁰² Simpson, *Directing Operations*, p, 70.

horses could hardly stand. Bell fell & so did Gwyther & we met Carden & others at a certain HQ & we had a look again at the battle. 103

The period between 3 and the 7 July was an opportunity, for coordinated attacks by all three Corps, III, XIII and XV Corps, on the German 2nd Line between Bazentin and Longueval. This failure allowed the Germans to consolidate their front and make the eventual attack more costly. ¹⁰⁴ However, Lieut.-General Horne's letters revealed his satisfaction with progress, and on 4 July he was visited by Haig:

C-in-C has just been here – very friendly & very pleased with us, and just at this moment I have had warning of a possible counter attack by the Germans, I have given all the orders and think that they will get it hot. Later the, counter attack by the Germans did develop. In fact we are giving them rather a bad time in the place where they appeared. Our guns are on them. ¹⁰⁵

This delay in getting to the jumping off point on time was caused by a combination of circumstances and was not down to any divisional commander. As Congreve recognised, the capture of Mametz Wood on its own, was a dangerous salient in the British lines, which would have been vulnerable to counter-attacks.

On 3 July, a message had been received at Fourth Army, via 4 Bde R.F.C., indicating Mametz Wood had been carefully inspected and appeared empty. ¹⁰⁶ A patrol of 2 R.I.R took place on the night of 3/4 July. They carried out a reconnaissance of the wood to see if there was any organised resistance. ¹⁰⁷

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¹⁰³ Lt.-Col. J.C. Bell, (Central Indian Horse, Indian Army). 15 R.W.F. wounded 11 July, awarded D.S.O., O.B.E. and M.I.D.

¹⁰⁴ TNA C.A.B. 45/132 Letter to Edmonds from R.H. Chell dated 13 December 1929.

¹⁰⁵ IWM, Horne, letter, 4 July 1916.

¹⁰⁶ TNA War Diary XV Corps, 8.01pm on 3 July 1916: See also WO 157/468 XV Corps Intelligence Summary 3 July: a prisoner captured in the early hours at the south west corner of Mametz Wood states that with the exception of patrols & guns there are no Germans in Mametz Wood.

¹⁰⁷ TNA W.O. 95/921 War Diary, General Staff XV Corps. p.2, Appendix X, point 7.

They stated the wood was very dense with thick undergrowth, and movement for the infantry was not easy, and identified:

four possible enemy machine gun positions, and are certain that, the machine guns in ACID DROP COPSE FIRE DIRECTLY DOWN THE VALLEY IN S.S.E. direction. 108

The O.H. states, on 4 July, 'a useful reconnaissance of Mametz Wood was made.' ¹⁰⁹ Although the patrol brought information from the west side of the wood, it does not represent a clear picture of defences throughout the wood, especially on the eastern side. Equally, it was clearly out of date by the time the wood was attacked. There is also the question about how much an air observer could see into such a big and dense wood. A contradictory intelligence report stated, 'the Germans were in force in and round Mametz Wood and that a really serious operation would be needed to dislodge them.' ¹¹⁰

Geographically, the northern side of the wood was close to the main German second line of defence, and to reinforce it was very straightforward. A surprise attack which was arranged for midnight of 4/5 by 7th Division, under Major General Watts, had to be called off due to the heavy rain as the muddy conditions made it impossible.¹¹¹ The attack was postponed until 5 July at 12.45am, when once again it was raining heavily. Despite some initial success, the troops were unable to hold on to the gains made. The pressure on Horne was building, 'I am racking my brains to see the best way to do my next job. I have to take Mametz Wood – a large very thick wood. A very difficult problem'.¹¹²

As the Welsh Division medical unit took over the A.D.S., at the Citadel and the M.D.S., at the Old Church in Morlancourt, a more forward dressing station was opened at Minden Post and began dealing with casualties suffering from machine gun injuries and 'shell shock'. An R.A. P. was also set up in

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¹¹⁰ C.T. Atkinson, p. 272.

 $^{^{108}}$ TNA W.O. 95/ 2544 War Diary, 2 R.I.R. July 1916

¹⁰⁹ O.H. 1916 Vol II, p.20.

¹¹¹ Major General Herbert Edward Watts, G.O.C. 7th Division in 1916

¹¹² Farr, Silent General, p. 96.

Caterpillar Trench.¹¹³ By this stage the men of the Welsh Division had been marching for several days and an element of fatigue was present by the time they reached their positions opposite Mametz Wood. The ground over which they were now marching was being shelled and now they had to move up through water logged communication trenches, which was exhausting. Although guides were provided for the final part of the journey, moving with heavy loads through the debris of material discarded while passing dead and wounded men and at the same time relieving a division was demanding.

At a conference in Fourth Army H.Q. on 5 July, Horne received his operational orders at 4.45pm for 7 July. At 9.30pm, he held a conference with both the divisional commanders, Pilcher (17th Division) and Philipps (38th Division), to plan the attack on Contalmaison and Mametz Wood. 114 The time required was a critical element, not just to complete these orders and brief the brigade and battalion commanders, but also to inform and brief the attacking battalions. 115 The rigidity of planning by both Army and Corps was adding to the problems facing 17th Division. They had to attack two German trenches lying between Mametz Wood and Contalmaison, and both objectives were to be taken on 7 July. However, Pilcher objected, as even if the trenches were captured they could not be held whilst there was cross-fire from machine-guns in Mametz Wood and Contalmaison. 116 He believed it was a "killing ground" and, 'if held by a determined enemy, this position was never going to be taken by a frontal assault. 117 The 17th Division was not, 'in a position to say how they intended to get to their objectives, but the framework within which they worked was the creation of Corps. Horne showed no discretion and kept Pilcher to his plan.

The original contour map of the area shows the difficulties the two divisional commanders had with the terrain. (see Map. 2) Pilcher's men had to attack uphill towards a spur on top, which was the heavily

¹¹³ TNA W.O. 95/2549 War Diary, 130th F.A., 5 – 6 July 1916.

¹¹⁷ Sheffield, Forgotten Victory, p. 170.

¹¹⁴ Major General Thomas David Pilcher (1858-1928).

¹¹⁵ M. Cook calculates that the times taken between the briefings and the attacks were variously from 12, 10, 5, 13, and 10 hours, he also makes the important point that there was "little time to prepare for the attack is evident in the quality of the briefings given to junior officers". M. Phil., p.72.

¹¹⁶ O.H.1916, Vol II, p. 29.

¹¹⁸ Simpson, *Directing Operations*, p. 33.

fortified village of Contalmaison. Whereas Philipps had to get his division into position either side of Mametz Wood. The 113th Inf. Bde moved from Mametz to the Strip Trench area and 115th Inf. Bde came across the hill and down from Montauban into position at Caterpillar Wood.

Although there were instructions between Corps and Division, the link between division and brigades who were moving into position was difficult.¹¹⁹ Furthermore the liaison between attacking brigades of different divisions was non-existent. To illustrate this point, an attack by 17th Division at 2am was observed by Price-Davies:

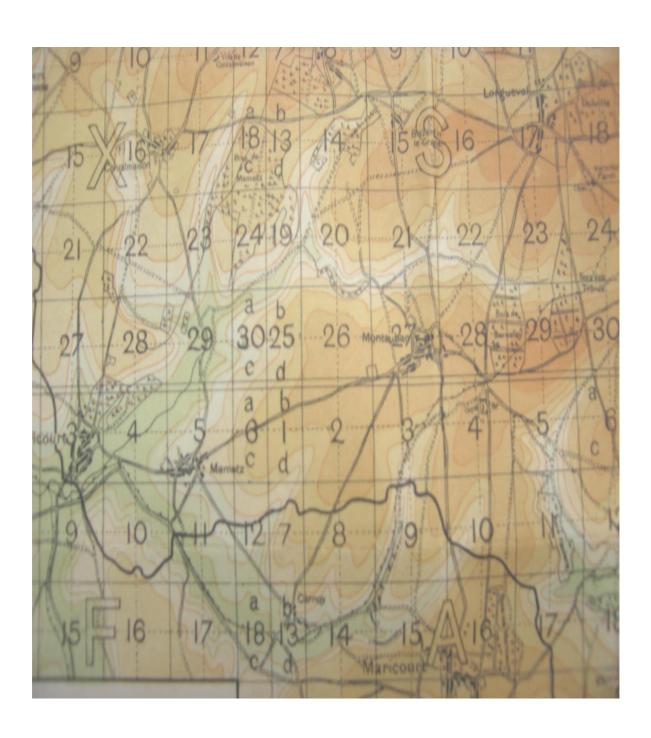
It must have been on 7th July when I was visiting my forward posts which look down on Mametz Wood at a few hundred yards range I was by a Lewis gun point when I became aware of an attack in progress by what I believe were the 6th Dorset's. They were creeping forward and using rifles grenades against the Strip Wood putting out towards us I had never heard about this attack & got covering fire to work as quickly as possible but the Lewis gun jammed and the attack fizzled out. It will be seen that we occupied a position from which heavy covering fire could have been brought to bear had this been arranged.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ See Prior and Wilson, *The Somme*, Ch.12 for a comparative view of this problem.

¹²⁰ TNA Price-Davies letter to General Edmonds dated 6 March 1930.

2. Original contour map of Mametz Wood (W.O. 95/912)

Contemporary map showing the contours of Mametz area, and show how difficult the terrain was during both first attack. It also shows that Mametz Wood is on the slopes of an ascending hill.



This was a company of 6 Dorsets' which had attempted to advance against the western face of Mametz Wood, and was caught by machine gun fire from Strip Trench, losing half its numbers. XV Corps ordered a renewed attack by 17th Division at 5.25 am, but great difficulty was experienced as telephone communications forward to brigade headquarters could not be relied on.¹²¹

Hughes suggests this was not helped by Price-Davies, because of his own inexperience, and that communication within his own brigade was practically non-existent, as was liaison between his own headquarters and other brigades. ¹²² As the brigade was rushed into position it is hardly surprising communication was poor and knowledge of neighbouring units fragmentary. However, he overlooks Price-Davies' previous service earlier in the war as a liaison officer, where he had far more experience than Hughes' comment suggests. ¹²³

The Welsh D.H.Q. took over the 7th Division H.Q. position at Treux and from there they moved to Grovetown near Meaulte on 6 July. This location, 'was about 7 miles away & communication by motor cyclist was very difficult owing to the mud.' 124 Although there was a metalled road from Treux to Mametz, and from there on to Mametz Wood there was no route for wheeled transport. This was not an advanced H.Q., and it took the signals unit of the Welsh Division nine hours to lay 5 miles of cable to 115th Inf. Bde, Advanced Report Centre. Unfortunately all attempts to lay a cable to Caterpillar Wood were 'shot away as soon as repaired'. 125

¹²¹ O.H. Military Operations France & Belgium 1916 Vol II, 1916, pp. 30-31.

¹²² Hughes, *Mametz*, p. 134.

¹²³ Price-Davies, K.R.R.C. served as G.S.O. 3, 2nd Div, B.E.F. in 1914 and G.S.O. 2, 4th Div until November 1915, before being promoted Brigadier 113th Inf. Bde, 38th Div, 25th Nov 1915.

¹²⁴ TNA C.A.B. 45/133 Price-Davies to Edmonds 6 March 1930. The Divisional HQ in fact does move from Treux to Grovetown, which is south of Meaulte, but the distance from HQ to Mametz Wood remains the same as stated by Price-Davies. Later in the war a system of an advanced Divisional H.Q., was used to greater effect.

¹²⁵ TNA W.O. 94/2548 War Dairy, 38th Divisional Signal Company 6/7 July1916.

The relief carried out by the Welsh brigades was a minor miracle. Apart from sporadic artillery fire and night time confusion, there was always the sheer physicality of movement along these routes. The trenches were 'knee deep, in some places waist deep, in clinging slime, and under shellfire, collapsed beyond recognition.' Movement became an, 'agony: men fainted from sheer exhaustion whilst struggling through deep mud,' and, 'under such handicaps the advance of reinforcements and the circulation of orders suffered grave delay.' During the relief the enemy shelled the line throughout the night, which delayed the timings. Plements of the Welsh Division moved into positions from the edge of Marlboro Wood on the eastern boundary, across the top of White Trench and down into western boundary at Bottom Wood. On the eastern boundary they were next to 18th Division, XIII Corps. On the west side was 17th Division, of their own Corps. At 8.30pm, written orders were issued for the attack on Mametz Wood the next day, verbal instructions having already been given. Essentially the 'general idea was that the 17th Division should capture the western portion of Mametz Wood and the 38th Division the Eastern portion'. 128

The First attack on Mametz Wood 7 July 1916

General Horne wrote to his wife on 6 July:

All goes well. Yesterday we consolidated after a little night success & tonight we push on to get a preparatory position for an attack on Mametz Wood tomorrow morning. It is a very difficult problem the attack of a big wood like that; our information is that it is very thick. However I have made my plan & I hope by a combination of artillery & gallant infantry to make our way through it.¹²⁹

The difficulties of putting 'the plan' into practice was illustrated by the approach march of 11 S.W.B. They left Carnoy at 8.pm on 6 July, and reached Caterpillar Wood at 2.30am the following morning.

¹²⁶ O.H 1916 Vol 2, p. 28.

¹²⁷ TNA W.O. 158/332 Summary of Operations IV Army, 6 July 1916.

¹²⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2539 War Diary, 38th (Welsh) Division, 6 July 1916.

¹²⁹ Robbins, First World War Letters, pp. 173-6.

On arrival, Lieut. Apps recorded, 'I got the men into shell holes. The enemy started shelling us with gas shells.' ¹³⁰ What little reconnaissance that could be accomplished was done during the night of 6/7 July. The commander of 16 W.R, the other attacking battalion, had difficulty in sending a message to 115th Inf. Bde to inform them a reconnoitring patrol was being sent to the south east corner of Mametz Wood at 1.am. The wood had been heavily bombarded, and once again telephonic communication was broken by the enemy's shelling. ¹³¹ This was confirmed by divisional signals, as the cable to Caterpillar Wood was shot away as soon as it was laid, and although repaired several times, the line was out action as soon as it was repaired. ¹³² Therefore, even at this early stage there was no effective communication between brigade, D.H.Q, and the artillery, and this did not improve.

The artillery in question came under the control of XV Corps; its liaison artillery officers were outsiders, they were not under the orders of Welsh Divisional commander, and at no stage did the Welsh Divisional artillery support its own troops. 133 Observation of the attack was only possible from across the valley and above Caterpillar Wood, and considering the weather conditions this was too far away to have been entirely accurate. Significantly, XIII Corps guns remained silent all day. (see Map. 3)

Brigadier General Evans now had to work with unknown artillery units. Evans wanted a dawn attack however he was made to wait until 8.am supposedly to coincide with the attack on Contalmaison, which was on the other side of the wood. 134 The attack began at 8.30am in the drizzle and without a smoke barrage. Immediately there was a loss of telephonic communication as the 'wires to the

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¹³⁰ IWM Docs 76/216/1, diary of Lt Apps 11 S.W.B.

¹³¹ TNA W.O. 95/2560 War Diary, 115th Inf. Bde.

¹³² TNA W.O. 95/2548, War Diary 38th Divisional Signals on 7 July 1916.

¹³³ The front was covered by the Artillery of 7th & 21st Divisions. Only the 121st Bde came into action under orders of the C.R.A. 7th Division, the rest of 38th Divisional R.F.A, 122nd came into action on the 8th under 7th Divisional command and the 120th on 9th July under command of the 21st Divisions C.R.A. ¹³⁴ The attack of 17th Division started at 2.am so it is difficult to see why Evans attack was held until later unless there was only enough Corps artillery to sustain one attack at a time.

battalions were cut by the enemy's reply to our fire.' 135 With no telephonic communication with the artillery, how did Corps know the wind at this location, at this precise time, was blowing in the wrong direction, which was confirmed by XIII Corps. 136 There was a half hour machine gun barrage leading up to the attack, although hostile shelling of these positions reduced their effectiveness. ¹³⁷

The attack frontage was 450 metres wide, uphill and then down across open ground between Caterpillar Wood and the east side of Mametz Wood, known from its shape as the 'Hammerhead'. Once the attack went over the crest of the hill it was subject to enfilading fire from both the front of the wood, and from Sabot and Flat Iron Copse, which were to the north, and looking down the valley on the attackers. 138 Later it was found that the Germans were able to reinforce the Hammerhead from a sunken road behind these positions. The 7.30am attack went 'well till we reached the crest of the ridge & then machine guns opened on us & snipers picked off the officers.'139 By 10.25am, the Brigadier General Evans was informed that another bombardment would take place at 11.10am however, 'some of our shells were stopping short of our front line'. 140

Despite reorganization and reinforcements going forward, no progress was made and casualties mounted. The reason for the second failure was due to the artillery bombardment being ineffective and inaccurate. At no point did Evans have any control of the artillery. The disposition of the units of his brigade had been laid down in divisional orders rather than by his own reconnaissance of the ground. 141 This, combined with the 'failure to place a smoke barrage, as directed in divisional orders effected

135 Llewellyn Wyn Griffith (Edited and Annotated by Jonathon Riley) Up to Mametz and Beyond (Barnsley, 2010), p. 102.

¹³⁶ TNA W.O. 158/332 Summary of Operations 4th Army, the War Diary records at 8.25 am XIII Corps states 'cannot put up smoke barrage, direction of the wind being the wrong way'.

¹³⁷ TNA W.O. 95/2556 War Diary, 113th Machine Gun Company July 7-8 July 1916.

¹³⁸ Only two batteries of 80th Bde R.F.A. were to shell Flat Iron and Sabot Copses while 35th Bde R.F.A. (except one battery) was used to target the Hammerhead. A great deal of the artillery was used to target the rides in the wood and was therefore wasted and did not support the attack of 115th Inf. Bde.

¹³⁹ Lt Apps diary, Friday 7 July 1916.

¹⁴⁰ TNA WO 95/2560 War Diary, 115 Inf. Bde.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 7 July 1916.

operations as it rendered it impracticable for the units detailed for the attack to carry out their instructions.' ¹⁴² Evans' appreciation of the artillery problem was succinct, for without the support of an accurate bombardment each attack failed. ¹⁴³ Although requests for bombardments took place, it made little difference. By 4.14pm, the 'rain and mist make observation impossible.' ¹⁴⁴ As it had been raining all day, this restricted both aerial and forward artillery observations, although it did not appear to hamper the German artillery, machine guns, or snipers.

Aftermath of the first battle

The consequence of this failed attack was swift and brutal, as was XV Corps' view of the performance of the brigade, and division. By 7.40am, on ascertaining that the Welsh Division was massing six battalions in Caterpillar Wood, they sent the following message:

The Corps commander considers that it is dangerous to collect more than 2 Bn's in the western edge of Caterpillar Wood and the valleys in the vicinity owing to the danger of hostile shellfire if the troops are overcrowded. Two Bn's are sufficient for the attack on the eastern projection of the Wood with a 3rd in support in Montauban Alley and the 4th further back. ¹⁴⁵

Farr states, 'for reasons that are still not clear, Evans took this to mean that he should attack on a two battalion front'. ¹⁴⁶ There is no evidence to suggest that Evans did this, or that he was not following his operation orders. The reality was that 10 S.W.B. lay in support in Montauban Alley. The 17 R.W.F. remained in reserve near the 'Loop'. ¹⁴⁷ The 11 S.W.B. had been in bivouac near Mametz that morning. They made their way forward in the rain and did not arrive at Caterpillar Wood until 2.30pm. Despite their late appearance, 11 S.W.B. sustained more casualties than her sister battalion who were in the first

¹⁴² Ibid. W.O. 95/2560.

¹⁴³ Brigadier Horatio James Evans (1850 – 1932). Brigadier General 115th Inf. Bde, 38 (Welsh) Division.

¹⁴⁴ TNA W.O. 158/332, War Diary, 4th Army.

¹⁴⁵ TNA W.O. 95/921, War Diary, General Staff XV Corps.

¹⁴⁶Farr, Silent General, p. 99.

¹⁴⁷ TNA W.O. 95/2560 War Diary, 115th Inf. Bde Operation Order 62.

wave of the attack. So who were these other battalions? There was always the possibility of troops bunching up before an attack, especially in darkness. However, it is difficult to see how six battalions could possibly have been in the same position, as Evans only had four directly under his command. This was a very tight valley so there would have been a complete lack of space to accommodate such a large number of troops. Major Harvey reveals how dangerous the position was: as his battalion moved forward 'at 1pm we came up to support the attack on the east side of Mametz Wood, at 1.30pm Lieut.-Colonel Wilkinson was killed whilst observing the Hun position'. ¹⁴⁸ The battalion 'withdrew at 11.pm I took over the Bn on that date'. ¹⁴⁹ So where did XV Corps receive their information from, although it shows how confused their picture was?

All Br.-General Evans' requests for bombardments that got through appear to have been passed from division to Corps rather than direct to the C.R.A, which highlights the degree of direct control from the higher command structure. Later it appears Lieut-General Horne had a change of heart, and a further half hour bombardment was laid on, ending at 11.15am. However, this attack and the one that followed at 3.15pm failed to improve the situation. As we have seen Evans now had to bring up his reserve battalion to make up for casualties already sustained. By this stage rain was 'making the ground sodden and the trenches many inches deep in mud – telephones were cut and progress was extremely difficult'. By 6.40pm, they were told to, 'withdraw and reorganize the battalions at the south east corner of Mametz Wood and to make adequate arrangements for holding the line tonight.' The evidence of the attack being seriously held up should have made the request from Evans far more urgent, and undermines the artillery's performance. With his casualties mounting, and the instruction to

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¹⁴⁸ Lt. Colonel Sydney John Wilkinson D.S.O. (born 1877). He took command of 19th (P) W.R. in November 1915. He later transferred to command 10 S.W.B.

¹⁴⁹ Lt. Colonel C.D.Harvey D.S.O., diary entry for 7 July 1916.

¹⁵⁰ TNA W.O. 339/30623 Personal file of Captain Arthur Galsworthy. Born 1889 and a schoolmaster by profession. He originally joined 13 R.W.F. on 11 November 1914, before being commissioned as temporary 2nd Lt, 10 S.W.B. He was the most senior officer of his battalion left and led the final attempt to take Mametz Wood. He was wounded by shrapnel a year later at Langemarck, which resulted in his Medical Discharge from the Army in May 1918.

¹⁵¹ Farr, Silent General, p. 100.

¹⁵² TNA W.O. 95/2539 War Diary, Welsh Division 7 July 1916.

¹⁵³ TNA WO 95/921 War Diary, XV Corps.

continue the attack, where would he find the extra men, other than from his reserve battalion? In reality Evans, was not helped by the attack of XIII Corps being postponed by 24hrs. ¹⁵⁴ As a result, the solitary attack by 115th Inf. Bde on XV Corps boundary was totally isolated, unsupported and uncoordinated.

The Official History suggests the three days from the 4 to 6 July were spent by the British and the left flanking French XX Corps in making their preparations to continue the attack. They were supposed to be preparing and improving their positions in readiness for the advance against Hardecourt, Trones Wood, Mametz Wood and Contalmaison, which had been fixed for 7 July. However, only the latter half of this plan was attempted. III Corps did attack and took Contalmaison in the morning, but were shelled out in the afternoon, which resulted in the Brigade Commander (Br.-General Oxley) being sent home. Neither the French nor XIII Corps attacked that day, so why did Horne insist on this attack, without the cooperation of these two Corps. The attack was thrown in piecemeal by the orders of the Corps Commander. The key to the failure was not just the artillery plan, or its accuracy, but the isolated nature of the attack.

The artillery appeared to have stopped their bombardment when the infantry attacked, so the attack was not covered by any form of barrage. It was not until 11.15am, the bombardment was renewed on the east side of Mametz Wood, and again at 3.15pm, for the last valiant attempt to capture the wood. It is difficult to understand therefore why Haig wrote, 'the artillery preparation in both cases reported as highly satisfactory.' 157

¹⁵⁴ TNA C.A.B. 45/190 Letter to Edmonds from Montgomery-Massingberd (M.G.G.S. Fourth Army) dated 5 November 1930.

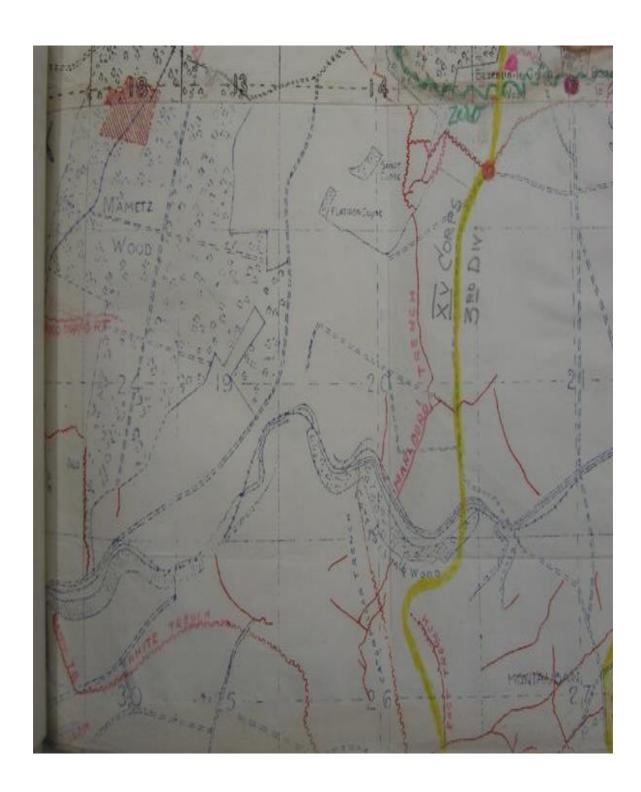
¹⁵⁵ O.H. 1916, Vol II, p.20.

¹⁵⁶ TNA C.A.B. 45/190 Letter to General Edmunds from Major General H.E. ap Rhys Pryce dated 24 March 1930.

¹⁵⁷ Farr, *The Silent General*, p. 102.

3. Original map showing boundary between XIII and XV Corps (W.O. 95/912)

Map showing the yellow marker boundary line between XV Corps and XIII Corps.



On the western side of the wood, the 113 Inf. Bde had been consolidating its position, and had sent out patrols to gather intelligence on enemy positions. By 3.30pm, on 7 July, they found Strip Trench strongly held. As a result, 15 R.W.F. organised an attack by a party of 30 bombers under Lieut. H.J. Cundle. His party was followed by two companies of 15 R.W.F. who were exposed to the enemy's view as they 'came down the hill and the leading bombing parties had several casualties, it being evident the enemy has a look out, the attack could only have succeeded as a result of surprise was abandoned'. 159

After their battle, 115th Inf. Bde was withdrawn to Mansel Copse and 113th Inf. Bde relieved it at Marlboro and Caterpillar Wood during the night. On the afternoon of 8 July, information was received at the Welsh D.H.Q. suggesting the enemy had evacuated the wood. As a result, patrols which were sent forward to establish whether this was correct and were heavily fired upon. XV Corps then instructed the Welsh Division to attack at 2.am on 9 July, using 113th Inf. Bde, on the southern portion of the wood. There seems to be some confusion as Price-Davies explains as in 'almost all cases orders were too late to admit to being carried out & troops got tired to no purpose'. ¹⁶⁰ As regards the attack in question, 'Lt Colonel Gwyther & I worked out the orders as quickly as we could on receiving the Divisional commander's instructions & we left at 5.pm. He had a great deal of preparations & movement before he could concentrate his battalion & issue orders'. ¹⁶¹

Later that night Price-Davies informed Lieut.-Colonel Gwyther, 14 R.W.F, that he had 'received entirely new orders from D.H.Q. to the effect that my attack must be undertaken with a much smaller force than was originally intended and which should amount to about the strength of a platoon

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¹⁵⁸TNA W.O. 95/2552 War Diary, 113th Inf. Bde, dated 7 July 1916: It should be noted that there are two different spellings of this name. One index spells the name Lt. Henry John Cundall, 15 R.W.F. He commanded 'A' Company, and was an acting Captain from April 1917 and temporary Lt. July of the same year. He served with the regiment until the end of hostilities.

¹⁵⁹ TNA W.O. 95/2552 War Diary of 113th Infantry Brigade, 7 July 1916.

¹⁶⁰ NAM Price-Davies, Diary 7 July 1916.

¹⁶¹ TNA C.A.B. 45/133 Price-Davies letter to Edmonds, he goes on to state that Major General Ivor Philipps 'did not cancel the operation'.

including bombers'. ¹⁶² Before this change of orders 14 R.W.F., had left its position at 1.am on 9 July to take part in the attack on the wood. ¹⁶³ The following day Lieut.-Colonel Gwyther met Price-Davies to explain why he had been unable to reach his jumping-off place. ¹⁶⁴ The communication trench was blocked by troops retiring, so they went over the top. However, the 'night was pitch-black & the ground cut up & covered with loose wire & progress was impossible'. ¹⁶⁵ Lieut.-Colonel Gwyther believed they should have been sent to the front line 24 hours previously to carry out their own reconnaissance. He believed with a better knowledge of their surroundings, he would have got a firm foothold in the wood and could have exploited the success later. ¹⁶⁶

The controversy surrounding this attack relates to the interpretation of what Corps required from the Welsh Division, and how it was passed on to Brigade Commanders. At 10.35am the Corps commander telephoned the Welsh Division stating he 'did not wish isolated attack by one battalion on point 'H' (Strip Trench) to be carried out today'. At 1.40pm, Lieut.-General Horne visited the Welsh Division to, 'give them instructions verbally'. This suggests he was now coordinating the attack himself. Later orders were sent to confirm this attack, and by 5.25pm, 113th Inf. Bde was told to push forward patrols into Mametz Wood and 'see if anyone was there'. However, it was already known that point 'H' was heavily defended from the reports of 15 R.W.F. Secondly, if the state of internal communication arrangements between division and brigade at this time was poor, those between brigade and battalion were non-existent. However, it was already known that point 'H' was heavily defended from the reports of 15 R.W.F. Secondly, if the state of internal communication were non-existent.

¹⁶² TNA C.A.B 45/134, Letter from Gwyther to General Edmonds.

¹⁶³ TNA W.O. 95/2555/2, War Dairy 14 R.W.F. 8/9 July 1916.

¹⁶⁴ Lt. Colonel Graham Howard Gwyther (1872-1934). He first joined Worcester Regiment before transferring to 2 RWF and saw active service in China and India. He was promoted Major and joined 14 RWF as second in command when they left for France. He was Mentioned in Despatches and awarded DSO. He was afterwards employed at War Office and retired from the Army in 1920.

¹⁶⁵ TNA C.A.B 45/133 Seventh Division was withdrawing at this stage.

¹⁶⁶ TNA C.A.B. 45/189 Letter to General Edmonds from Lt Colonel G. H. Gwyther D.S.O. dated 21 April 1930.

¹⁶⁷ TNA W.O. 95/921 War Diary XV Corps for 8 July 1916.

¹⁶⁸ TNA C.A.B. 45/133 Letter to General Edmonds from Price-Davies dated 6 March 1930.

The over-riding feature of this whole attack was a false optimism which pervaded both Fourth Army and XV Corps. For example, on 8 July, Fourth Army stated at 1.10am, 'All reports received show the enemy power of resistance is growing weaker'. It continues confidently, 'instructions for tonight have been issued separately to 38th Division who will continue tomorrow to exploit any success gained during the night towards reaching their objective namely Northern & Eastern sides of Mametz Wood'. It is hard to see how this report bears any resemblance to the situation which existed at this time. The information received on 8 July, that the Germans were evacuating the wood, was the cause of the problem. A heavy reliance had been placed on planes and observation balloons to supply up to date information. However, the weather during this period was poor, so intelligence was patchy and unreliable. One officer remarked 'HQ's were fighting a battle on maps'. This false optimism engendered at both Army and Corps headquarters, so far away from the reality of the fighting, was one of the reasons to find scapegoats later.

On 9 July, 113th Inf. Bde was told at 5.30am to prepare for an attack in the afternoon, and orders for the assembly of troops were issued. However, at 1.pm this order was cancelled, and they were to return to their previous positions. At 3.pm, they received confirmation the afternoon attack 'would be carried out tomorrow', and at 6.15pm, new preliminary orders for the attack were issued. At 11.pm, Operation Order 57 was published, and the new advanced reporting centre was opened at Danzig Alley, at 11.30pm. All this was brought together under a very tight schedule and despite some confusion over the timings the brigade was in position for the attack in a very short period of time.

¹⁶⁹ TNA W.O. 95/322 War Diary 4th Army, 8 July 1916.

¹⁷⁰ TNA W.O. 95/2552 War Diary 113 Inf. Bde, 8 July 1916. Information received at 3.30pm from 17 Division stating that a deserter had reported that the enemy were evacuating Contalmaison. The patrols from the brigade were sent to ascertain whether or not the Germans were also evacuating Mametz Wood.

¹⁷¹ TNA C.A.B. 45/134 Letter to General Edmonds from Lt. Colonel Charles Edward Hudson V.C, D.S.O., M.C. (1892-1959), dated 28 February 1936. Commissioned into 2 Bn Sherwood Foresters at outbreak of War, he won the M.C. in 1916, D.S.O. and bar 1917, and V.C. in 1918. He was Chief Instructor at R.M.C. Sandhurst 1933-36. He served in the 2nd World War commanding a Brigade during the Battle of France 1940.

Major General Philipps' removal 9 July 1916

General Horne's position on the morning of 9 July was very tenuous as he had yet to secure his objective. The failure of the first attack on the wood, and lack of progress, led to the dismissal of Philipps as divisional commander. ¹⁷² He was replaced by Major General Watts, who was the commander of 7th Division and knew the ground, and crucially had the support of his own artillery. ¹⁷³

There are a number of reasons given for Philipps' dismissal, including the point, that he was mistrusted as a 'political officer'.¹⁷⁴ As we have seen, he arrived on the Somme with a reputation tarnished by Lieut- General Haking. It was also suggested that Philipps' health broke down, which is very surprising as he was back in the chamber at the House of Commons within a month. Finally, his performance thus far had been disappointing, yet he appears to have obeyed all his orders. In fact he 'wished to employ two brigades originally, but was over-ruled by General Horne!! The original orders were put into operation'.¹⁷⁵ This clearly shows that General Horne was now in control of the division, and Philipps was obeying his commander. Both Lieut-Colonel H.M. Pryce-Jones and Major-General H.E. ap Rhys Pryce confirm later, in their respective letters to General Edmunds, that it was the Corps Commander's plan which had failed, yet General Philipps paid the price.¹⁷⁶

There is little doubt the attack from Caterpillar Wood was a failure. As Marden puts it, the 'weather was all against a successful attack on 7 July, and the attacking Battalions felt if they had their own

¹⁷² NAM Lt. Colonel Pryce-Jones Letter nos. 1207, He states, he thought that Philipps would be sent home and that he thought 'he has taken it splendidly'. His letter number 1207 states that 'I.P departure was not his fault in any way and that he was sorry to have let the division down'.

¹⁷³ I am aware that 121st Brigade, R.A. which was part of 38th (Welsh) Division's artillery compliment were acting under the orders of C.R.A. 7th Division.

¹⁷⁴ TNA CAB 45/189 Letters to Edmonds from Drake Brockman, he moved with Watts to the H.Q. 38 Division at this time. For Hughes' views on this see pp.137 to 141.

¹⁷⁵ TNA C.A.B. 45/190 Letter to General Edmonds from Colonel H.M. Pryce-Jones D.S.O., M.C., dated 3 March 1930.

¹⁷⁶ On 7 July 1916 Captain Rowland Erasmus Philipps M.C., 9 (s) (City of London) Bn Royal Fusiliers, was killed in the 12th Division's attack on Ovillers. We cannot be certain that Major General Ivor Philipps was given the news that the second of his older brother's sons had been killed. His older brother was Viscount St David.

Divisional Artillery, it would have been easier for them to insist on a more intense bombardment on Flat Iron and Sabot Copses'. 177 General Horne clearly did not accept the lack of coordination between Brigade, Division, Corps and the Artillery, leaving Evans and Philipps to take the blame. The twopronged piecemeal attacks of 7 July, at opposite sides of the wood, were hopelessly inadequate for the task assigned to them. It is hard to see where Haig received the information from when he wrote, 'although the wood was adequately bombarded the division never entered the wood and in the whole division the casualties for the 24 hours are under 150! A few bold men entered the wood and found little opposition'. 178 His casualty figures were simply wrong. Haig was either not aware of the way the division had been handled, or he chose to ignore it.

Lieut.-Colonel ap Pryce, (G.S.O. 1) Welsh Division sent out an instructions to all Bde H.Q's afterwards, underlining a few key points. He stressed the failure of 'communication to and from Brigades was inefficient and ineffective, and the difficulty of communication increased in some cases by the absence of the Brigadier from his Brigade H.Q.', and, 'if in special cases, he does leave his Headquarters, he must leave a responsible Officer to answer for him at B.H.Q'. It was of key importance to have an adequate number of wires laid for 'properly organised and adequate services of information between Brigades and Divisional H.Q'. Crucially it also points to what should be done between brigades and battalions 'by means of telegraphic and telephonic messages, and by runners and despatch riders'. Clearly this instruction indicates that communication had been poor and that direct communication with the divisional H.Q. was of 'great importance'. 179 By the end of the attack, all of Brigadier General Evans staff officers were casualties and he was suffering from a head wound but still at duty.

The problem with the signals communication system the 7th Division had in place was its unfamiliarity to the Welsh signals unit which had been using it, and as such, they found it complicated. Having to adjust to a new system at the start of battle was identified as one of the reasons for the breakdown and

¹⁷⁷ Major-General Sir Thomas O. Marden, *The History of the Welch Regiment 1914-1918* (Republished Naval & Military Press), p. 384.

¹⁷⁸Douglas Haig (Bourne and Sheffield), p. 201.

¹⁷⁹ TNA W.O. 95/2539 War Diary, 38th Division, 7 July 1916. Instruction No. G.6346M.

confusion, despite some of 7th Division signallers being present. When Major General Watts took over he was persuaded to take his own signal officers and some men with him. The result, after a short but a hectic period of work by both 7th and 38th Division's signallers, was that 'all the important points were again in communication before the attack commenced'.¹⁸⁰

The second attack 10 July 1916 (see Map. 4)

The bombardment of the southern portion of the wood commenced at 3.30am and at 3.50am a smoke barrage was laid on Strip Trench, which drifted to the north-east. Significantly, the second attack was to advance four hours earlier than the first, and had good initial coordination between the artillery and the infantry. The 45-minute bombardment was followed at 4.15am by the assault. It was a straightforward movement down the hill from White Trench, with the 13 & 14 W.R. (114th Inf. Bde) on the right, followed by the 10 & 15 W.R. On the left, 16 R.W.F., would lead down the face of steep hill supported by 14 RWF, who would cover Strip Trench, with 13 and 15 R.W.F. in support (113 Inf. Bde). Each Brigade was allotted one field company R.E's and elements of 19 (P) W.R. Their job was to build strong points at the first traverse or ride. The dividing point between the two brigades was a straight line running roughly north-east to south-west, with 113th Inf. Bde on the left and 114th Inf. Bde on the right.

The artillery began with a normal barrage on the enemy lines at the edge of the wood, then lifting back for the attack to commence. The bombardment then returned and moved forward to the front lines, using a 'creeping or drifting barrage' to cover the troops as they moved forward towards the wood. The initial barrage was supported by both the Stokes and Heavy Trench Mortar batteries of the attacking brigades.

4. Original map of Mametz Wood (W.O. 95/2540)

¹⁸⁰ TNA C.A.B 45/136 Letter to General Edmonds from Lieut.- Colonel Richard Nugent O'Connor (1889-1981) dated 15 April 1930.

Map of Mametz Wood clearly showing how close the main German Second Line was to its Northern Edge. It also indicates the letters used to identify various points in the wood.



The key issue was timing, and the accuracy of the artillery, with the barrage moving through the wood to the first objective at the Cross Ride to cover the Hammerhead, which was expected to be taken within two hours. They would then move on to the second objective at 7.15am and reach the edge of the wood by 8.15am. The problem of observation was acute, as once the troops entered the wood itself, their movement was concealed from observers. Equally, when the troops were in the wood it was very difficult for them to know their exact position. The overgrown nature of the wood and poor light made this much more difficult, especially during the early hours as dawn was breaking. Communication was difficult as the laying of cables for telephones was prone to a number of problems, as Price-Davies recalled, 'I had a telephone, but could not make myself heard, and so cooperation with the artillery was impossible'. ¹⁸¹

Both brigades had different starting points, the 114 Inf. Bde also had to come down the steep hill from White Trench and cover about 1,000 yards to the wood. To do this they moved forward 500 yards to the cliff, descend 35 feet and have another 450 yards to get to the wood. At the moment the 114th Inf. Bde moved down the cliff, it was time for 113th Inf. Bde to start its attack. Both 13 & 14 W.R. started their attacking lines at 4.15am, but 13 W.R. lost direction and veered to the left, so part of the eastern frontage of the wood near the Hammerhead was not attacked. As a result, when 10 W.R. came down to the wood later in support they received machine gun and rifle fire from this position, which was successfully attacked by Lieut. Cowie. 182

The problem for the left hand side of the attack was the enfilading fire from the west, and they had a much longer race to get to the wood. Although 17th Division was attacking the Quadrangle trenches, this still left the 16 R.W.F, with an open flank. The advance of 16 R.W.F, managed to reach within 200 yards of the wood when they were hit by heavy rifle and machine-gun fire, and suffered heavy casualties. Lieut.-Colonel Gwyther, 14 R.W.F, was severely wounded before getting into the wood, and recorded the Germans were using 'explosive bullets'. At some point, a cry of 'retire' was heard, and the attack faltered. It was at this point, Major R.H. Mills, 14 R.W.F, whose battalion was now level

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¹⁸¹ TNA C.A.B. 45/190 Letter to General Edmonds from Price-Davies dated 3 March 1930.

¹⁸² TNA W.O. 339/37438 personal file of Lt Henry Benedict Cowie

with 16 R.W.F., tried to rally these men but was killed in the process. With both officers' casualties, Captain J. Glynn Jones 14 R.W.F, now the senior officer and leading the rear wave, believing the lines further ahead had been wiped out, began to rally the troops who had turned back. Many of these men had simply lost direction, were confused, demoralised, and thoroughly disorganised. As a result he had to draw his revolver to restore order, and gather as many men as possible together in the cutting below White Trench. Shortly after this, there was a lull and about 40 Germans came out of the wood and surrendered, after which a patrol found the front of the wood unoccupied. Glynn-Jones then sent a runner with a report of events back to brigade with a request for reinforcements. 185

The advance along Strip Trench had been carried out by a special party of bombers from 'B' and 'D' companies 14 R.W.F, who had reached to the edge of the wood before being fired on. Reports from stragglers of 15 R.W.F, indicated progress could be made by moving in this direction, which was done. A search of the this side of the wood was carried out by 2nd Lieut. C.H. Stork, C.S.M. Thompson, Cpl. Pudner and revealed all was clear except Wood Support. Although Lieut-Colonel Bell, 15 R.W.F. wanted to push on, Lieut.-Colonel Hayes instructed his men dig in, and shortly afterwards a counterattack was launched by the enemy from Wood Support.

¹⁸³ TNA W.O. 339/18715 personal file of Major Robert Henry Mills, He was a married man and grocer from Maldwin House, Dolgellau, Merionethshire. He had previously served in 3rd Bn R.W.F, and attended annual camps 1908 – 1914. He was commissioned a 2nd Lt. 14 R.W.F, in November 1914. He was promoted Lt in January 1915 and by March was a Captain. He was made Acting Major just before embarking for France in December 1915. He was 35 years of age.

¹⁸⁴ Captain John Glynn Jones was a graduate of Aberystwyth University and had served in the O.T.C. Commissioned a 2nd Lt in February 1915, by April a Lt and June he was a Captain. In June 1916 he was awarded an M.C., and was M.I.D, for his gallantry during the attack on the Moated Grange. He was wounded in December 1916 and returned to France as a Staff Officer with 112th Inf. Bde, 37th Division.

¹⁸⁵ Corporal Emrys Jones was awarded a M.M, for his actions as a runner taking the report back. ¹⁸⁶ 2nd Lieut. Cecil Henry Stork was commissioned January 1916 into the Gloucester Regiment and seconded to 14 R.W.F. in France. His citation for the M.C. reads, 'although wounded, he volunteered and carries out in broad daylight a dangerous reconnaissance of a wood and brought back valuable information'. (LG. 25/8/16).

Some of the men had reached the wood successfully, and were on the eastern side of the Strip Trench and along the front towards the Hammerhead. Once inside the wood, 14 W.R, found two machine-guns were causing problems, at which point 2nd Lieut. Hawkins managed to overcome this threat but was dangerously wounded in the process.¹⁸⁷ Going past the defences on the edge of the wood they noticed there was little in the form of organised positions or any serious barbed wire.¹⁸⁸ Movement once inside the wood proved more difficult due to the dense undergrowth, and cohesion was lost. The method recommended was for men 'to move through the wood in file.'¹⁸⁹ However, this method was proving difficult as the fighting became very confused under the thick canopy of trees and overgrown bushes below, which had created a deep and tangled carpet of vegetation. The noise of the battle was deafening within the wood and attempts made to halt the men to reform, and then move forward in a line, was almost impossible.¹⁹⁰ It was especially difficult trying to inform the Brigade H.Q., what progress was being made. The first point to be reached was the 'central ride', and was to be 'marked by yellow flags placed along it'. Here the men were 'carefully instructed in the general direction of the advance after each objective was gained'.¹⁹¹

The timetable was optimistic, and called for the infantry to consolidate positions and then follow the barrage to the second objective from the central rides, before reaching the north edge of the wood. The trouble in some places was the advance had not been able to move through the undergrowth quickly and 'many of the casualties were caused by the men getting into their own barrage'. The confusion

make progress once the units had entered the wood.

¹⁸⁷ 2nd Lieut. Frank James Hawkins (1865-1960). Born in Somerset, and brought up in Pontypridd, for which he played rugby. He was capped for Wales twice in 1912 as a flanker. Formerly a police officer, at the outbreak of the War he was running the Tynewydd Hotel in Porth. Badly injured in the leg for his actions in this attack on the machine-gun post he was later awarded an M.C. for Gallantry for 'showing great bravery till severely wounded'.

¹⁸⁸ TNA C.A.B. 45/134 Letter to General Edmonds from T. Glynne-Jones 14 R.W.F. dated 28 April 1930. Educated at Aberystwyth University and their O.T.C, he joined 14 R.W.F, as 2nd Lt, 8 February 1915. He won an MC for the attack on the Moated Grange, Laventie 4 June 1916. Was wounded in December 1916 and eventually became a Staff Captain 112th Inf. Bde, 37th Inf. Division.

¹⁸⁹ TNA WO 95/2559 Operation Order 114th Infantry Brigade dated 9 July 1916.

 ¹⁹⁰ TNA C.A.B. 45/132. Letter to General Edmonds from Lt. Colonel R.C. Bell, had commanded 15
 R.W.F, dated 1 March 1930. He also maintained that his battalion was the first to enter the wood.
 ¹⁹¹ W.O. 95/2559 Operation Order, 9 July 1916: This suggests that a plan had been made about how to

within the wood was not helped by its claustrophobic nature and the close-quarter fighting, and 'any noise in the bush in front meant a hail of bullets'. There were two major problems in the wood: the first was on the west side, Wood Support, and the other one was at the Hammerhead on the east side.

On the west side, the enemy in Quadrangle Alley, Wood Trench and Wood Alley had stopped the attack of 16 R.W.F. 193 Despite the barrage, and 15 R.W.F, being brought forward to strengthen the attack, as well as the help of some bombers from 17th Division, they made slow progress. 194 In addition, Wood Support continued to cause problems. Part of the attack were higher up near the first cross ride, and was trying to link up with the attacking troops of 114th Inf. Bde. Lieut.-Colonel Ricketts, 10 W.R., was in support, and seeing the gap opening between the two brigades tried to close it, but was wounded twice in doing so. 195 During this period a low flying plane 'passed over the wood soon after the attack was made, but communication with it was not possible'. 196

Some of the troops in the wood were tired and began to suffer from heat exhaustion as the temperature rose and the lack of drinking water was to become a serious problem.¹⁹⁷ At 6.am, it was reported to D.H.Q., that all forces in the wood were collected about the first ride. The 10 W.R. began digging in at the first objective at 6.15am, with 14 W.R. on the right near the middle drive and 13 W.R, on the left. Shortly afterwards the artillery barrage was lifted onto the German second line, however it was reported 'the men were in advance of our own barrage'. By 6.55am a company of 15 W.R, were sent to reinforce 13 W.R., who were trying to clear the east side of the Hammerhead by bombing the

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¹⁹² TNA C.A.B. 45/189 Letter to General Edmonds from Captain T Glynne Jones.

¹⁹³ TNA W.O. 95/2539 War Diary 38th (Welsh) Division 10 July 1916. The diary records 'the 16 R.W.F, found the opposition very strong and wavered, Lt Colonel Carden commanding was killed while rallying them'.

¹⁹⁴ These were probably men of 6th Dorset's, 50th Inf. Bde, and 17th Division.

¹⁹⁵ TNA W.O. 95/2559 War Diary.10 W.R. Appendix 20, 10th Service Bn the Welsh Regt (1st Rhondda) attack on Mametz Wood 10-12 July 1916 compiled by Lt A. P. Figgins. This states that Lieut.-Colonel Ricketts was wounded on the slope running down towards the Wood at 4.45am.

¹⁹⁶ TNA C.A.B. 45/136 Letter to General Edmonds from Captain J.S. Strange 14 W.R. dated 10 May 1930. This may well have been a contact aeroplane.

¹⁹⁷ McCarthy, *The Somme*, pp, 43-45. On the 10 July it was 82F, 11 and 12 July, 68F.

¹⁹⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2539 War Diary 38th (Welsh) Division, 10 July, 6.26am.

Germans out of the wood. This was the second major problem area of the initial attack. Major Percy Anthony, who was commanding 15 W.R., led the party and was killed when they were attacked from a sunken road to the east, which the Germans had been using to reinforce the wood. ¹⁹⁹ Despite two companies of 15 W.R., under Major Phillips, they failed to hold the position at the corner of the wood, and were pushed back by the enemy. ²⁰⁰

Brigadier General Price-Davies wrote, 'about 7am we were told by a slightly wounded officer that we had captured the whole wood & prisoners I went off to see the captured wood.' He did so with permission from D.H.Q., and went forward with Lieut.-Colonel Cossart.²⁰¹ However, 'it became clear that we had not captured even half of the wood, also things were not going well.'²⁰² As Price-Davies was trying to consolidate the position, he became involved with parties who were retreating through the wood, and which he 'had great difficulty controlling'. As a result, the last two companies of 13 R.W.F. went forward and 'eventually got amalgamated with the remainder of the brigade'. Casualties continued to mount: Lt. Colonel Flower, 13 R.W.F, was killed, and his 2nd in command wounded near the central ride, 'by a shell that burst on impact with a tree, owing to the flat trajectory, and was fired by one of our batteries'.²⁰³

By 9.am, both 113th and 114th Inf. Bdes were at the Cross Rides of the first objective, although very few officers were left. During this consolidation period the central ride became the fall back position, where the engineers began digging a holding trench line. However, the enemy were still in Wood Support, which was outside the main wood, with machine-guns firing into the wood. On the east side, Major Lloyd George and a company of his pioneers, who were originally trying to dig a communications trench across to the middle of the south of the ride, were stopped, as it was considered to be suicidal. Instead they began to carry ammunition forward into the wood and continued throughout

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¹⁹⁹ TNA W.O. 339/23758 personal file of Major Percival Anthony.

²⁰⁰ TNA W.O. 339/26233 personal file of Major Thomas Baddoe Phillips.

²⁰¹ Lieut.- Colonel Arthur Raleigh Blandy Cossart D.S.O. (Born 1877) In the Welsh Division War Diary his name was incorrectly spelt as 'Gossart'.

²⁰² IWM Letter of Price-Davies, dated 16 July 1916.

²⁰³ TNA CAB 45/135 Lt. Col Gwyther to General Edmonds dated 30 April 1930.

the rest of the day and night. Later Major Brewis was instructed by Brigadier General Marden, 114th Inf. Bde, to enter the wood and found there was a shortage of water and ammunition.²⁰⁴ Arrangements were made to send up supplies to the men in the wood by pack animals, but they were heavily shelled and scattered so carrying parties of men were then used.²⁰⁵

Despite having well placed machine guns in Caterpillar Wood and Marlborough Copse, they were unable to fire on the enemy entering the Hammerhead. The reason was the Sunken Road behind Flat Iron and Sabot Copses, which connected the German second line with the wood. ²⁰⁶ This was the cause of aggravation throughout the attack on the Hammerhead, when Major G.D. Edwardes, 13 W.R, was killed organising a machine-gun in this area. ²⁰⁷ About the same time, Major C.E. Bond was also killed leading men forward by 'our own shell fire'. ²⁰⁸ Captain Johnson, a former mining engineer from Cardiff, took command of the battalion and on the instructions of Colonel Hayes (14 W.R.) they now 'dug in'. ²⁰⁹ Clearing the whole of the Hammerhead was difficult and at 5.50am Colonel Hayes decided to reorganise both his battalion and 13 W.R, into a defensive position.

At 8.40am, Fourth Army recorded, 'a large body of enemy troops were moving into the northern corner of Mametz Wood' and ten minutes later, 'they are coming from the North in parties of 40 to 50 at intervals of about 70 yards between each party. They appear on the skyline about 450 yards N.E. of

²⁰⁴ Major Geoffrey Sydney Brewis was commissioned from R.M.C. as a 2nd Lt in 1st Bn W.R. 5 October 1910. He was awarded D.S.O. and bar during the war and was Lt. Colonel commanding 7th Lancashire Fusilier at the time of the Armistice.

²⁰⁵ TNA W.O. 2548/2 War Diary, 19 (P) W.R, during the fighting for the wood various platoons of his battalion went into the wood to help in the consolidation and re-supply, and remained in the wood and took an active part in the fighting over the two days.

²⁰⁶ TNA WO157/172 see Captured German document dated 9 July 1916 which notes "That the German artillery has been shelling its own infantry".

²⁰⁷ TNA W.O. 339/6994 personal file of Lt. Colonel George D'Arcy Edwardes.

²⁰⁸ TNA W.O. 339/21699 personal file of Major Charles Edward Bond

²⁰⁹ TNA W.O. 339/21727 personal file of Captain Herbert Hammond Johnson.

Mametz Wood'. ²¹⁰ Clearly the German defenders were prepared at this stage to reinforce their positions in the wood.

Making progress through the wood was difficult. The 'old plan of advancing in small parallel lines did not work when you have no one to lead the columns & your men are not trained for such fighting. The only plan seems to be to have regular hordes of men so thick they can't lose touch'. An attempt was made to advance in a line, like beaters at a shoot. By trying to establish this approach and moving forward, officers and senior N.C.Os showed great courage and resolution getting the men forward. This partly explains the reason why such a high level of officers became casualties once the fighting in the wood began. Price-Davies identified the reason men were having great difficulty in getting the men to move, as the wood was 'fearfully thick & they kept on losing direction & cohesion & by that time a good many officers and Co's had been hit, one battalion for instance lost 14 out of 17 Officers who went into action'. The 14 W.R. had 17 officers and 693 other ranks going into action, and 11 officers and 386 other ranks became casualties. Casualty returns for the 115th Inf. Bde, reveal they lost 19 officers killed and 11 wounded, including Brigadier Evans. Hence, the officer losses were extreme, but their places were filled by senior N.C.Os, who valiantly continued their work.

At 9.45am reports confirmed the first objective had been consolidated and was firmly held. Despite the presence of almost two brigades in the wood it was proving difficult to overcome and the decision was made to reinforce both brigades. At noon 113th M.G.C, advanced forward into the wood. The 17 R.W.F. (115th Inf. Bde) was sent forward at 12.03am to assist 113th Inf. Bde, and 10 S.W.B. (115th Inf. Bde), would reinforce 114th Inf. Bde.²¹⁴ However, this was delayed as the officer commanding 17

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²¹⁰ TNA W.O. 158/322 Fourth Army Operations 10 July 1916.

²¹¹ TNA C.A.B. 45/137. Letter to Edmonds from Lt Colonel P.E .Ricketts, 10 W.R, 114th Inf. Bde, dated 27 February 1930. He was twice wounded in the fighting for the Wood.

²¹² TNA C.A.B 45/136 Figures from J.S. Strange D.S.O, M.C, letter. He records that 1 officer and 77 other ranks were killed. At one point late on the first day of the attack this officer was effectively in command of his battalion.

²¹³ TNA W.O. 95/2560. Appendix 'A' Casualties 5–12 July 1916, 115th Inf. Bde.

²¹⁴ At this point Lt. Colonel Hayes was in command of all troops 114th Inf. Bde in Mametz Wood.

R.W.F. became a casualty.²¹⁵ About 1.pm, 10 S.W.B. attacked the south-east edge of Mametz Wood by bombing and going round the enemy's flank, but they suffered heavy casualties. Although two junior officers were killed, they were able to hold a position on the far right.²¹⁶ Their position was in a trench in the wood where snipers were very active.²¹⁷ By 4.pm this battalion had captured the Hammerhead completely, and stopped the reinforcements coming into the wood from the Sunken Road.

On the other side of the wood, Colonel Pryce (G.S.O. 1) was at the crossroads at 2.pm and found 'troops in a rather confused state except for three companies of 17 R.W.F.'. These companies were pushed to the north, to the second ride, while 13 R.W.F. focused on the capture of Wood Support Trench 'which was soon completed'. They were reinforced by 2nd Lieut. Cullen (113th M.G.C.) and his two machine-guns, two more were placed just ahead of the central drive, and two with 15 R.W.F, and a further four under 2nd Lieut. Ogden went to reinforce 13 R.W.F.²¹⁸ During this time, the remainder of the troops in the wood were being reorganised. ²¹⁹ Arrangements made between Brigadiers Price-Davies, Marden and Colonel Pryce, was for both brigades to advance to the right and left of the central ride at 4.00pm. ²²⁰ To the west side of the wood the Germans retained a position in Pearl Alley, and this part of the wood became a no-man's-land, which continued to cause problems to the advancing troops within the wood. The front line was 10 S.W.B. and 11 S.W.B., working together on the extreme east of the wood, both 10 and 15 W.R. to the east of the central ride, with 17 R.W.F, next to them, and 13 R.W.F, on the western edge. The 13 W.R. were in support with 14 W.R, moving up in reserve on the

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²¹⁵ Lt. Colonel John Arthur Ballard, Ox & Bucks Regiment.

²¹⁶ TNA W.O. 339/43033 personal file of 2nd Lt. Maryon Jeffreys Everton. 2nd Lt. Ralph Paton Taylor aged 20 years originally joined the Northamptonshire Regiment.

²¹⁷ Lt.-Col. C.D. Harvey, diary entry Tuesday July 10, 1916.

²¹⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2556. 2nd Lieut. William Harold Cullen, 113th M.G.C. was cut off at some point when the infantry he was reinforcing retired too and became isolated. He may have been mistaken for the enemy and was killed when the Welsh infantry returned to that position. 2nd Lieut Cullen came from Nottinghamshire and was an unmarried 26 year old.

²¹⁹ Major C.H. Dudley Ward, *Regimental Records of the Royal Welch Fusiliers Volume III 1914-1918 France and Flanders* (Wrexham, 1995), p.208. It was believed at this stage there were eleven battalions in the wood. Brigadier General Price-Davies then tried to withdraw the remnants of 15 and 16 R.W.F.

²²⁰ Brigadier General Marden had received permission from Major General Watts to enter the Wood at 3pm. He originally asked for this permission at 10.30am.

central ride. The advance hinged like a door closing from the east to the west, moving across towards Pearl Alley.

Once again different battalions made varying degrees of progress. 17 R.W.F, made a considerable advance in the centre to within 30 yards of the northern boundary. However, 13 R.W.F's progress was slower and they lost touch with 17 R.W.F.²²¹ Price-Davies believed the reason was the trenches parallel to the wood on the left, possibly Pearl Alley Trench, where machine guns were firing into the wood. Although in some places the advance had reached close to the edge of the wood, to the west this was more like 200-300 yards. The 15 R.W.F, were now brought forward on the left of the line to reinforce the 13 R.W.F, who now were facing Acid Drop Copse and Pearl Alley Trench. Essentially both these R.W.F, battalions were holding the line of the railway from east to west to the north of the central ride. During the advance of 14 W.R, captured a heavy howitzer, which suggests the Germans had been using the wood recently.

A line of consolidation was now being established along the northern border of the wood, which was immediately counter-attacked. Preparations to clear the rest of the wood were underway for an attack at 8.30pm. However, a bombardment at 9.pm resulted in a certain degree of panic. Unfortunately this barrage by British artillery, which was shelling 'the northern portion of the wood inflicting many casualties on the men digging trenches 300 yards within the border'. ²²² This problem became particularly bad towards the evening, and as a result Price-Davies sent:

8 back to get telephone messages through from Queens Nullah to the artillery to lengthen, but none got through the heavy H.E. and shrapnel barrage the enemy had put down to the S of the wood. Before dusk Br.-Gen Pryce Davies asked me to try to get through, which I did, and found

²²¹ TNA W.O. 95/2561/2 War Diary, 17 R.W.F, 10 July 1916. The battalion took 70 prisoners of war during the course of the afternoon.

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²²² T.O. Marden, *The History of the Welsh Regiment, Part II, 1914-1918* (Cardiff, 1932, Naval and Military Press reprint), p.389.

Col ap Rhys Pryce at the telephone at Queens Nullah. He did not believe the message that I brought, but after considerable argument he did telephone the artillery.²²³

At 10.10pm, Colonel Pryce informed Welsh D.H.Q, 'the reported situation in the wood was not clear, but apparently the line was not broken'. Here was the link which was missing during the first attack on the wood. Clearly, knowing and trusting a fellow officer was sufficient for Pryce to have the artillery barrage stopped, and this saved many lives. This bombardment had caused a great deal of panic within the wood, which officers and senior N.C.O's struggled with, but eventually control was restored. The 10 W.R., recorded that 'shrapnel was causing numerous casualties throughout the night' and 'heavy losses' were incurred in the north west of the wood, so 'our men were withdrawn to the Railway Line'. 225

On 11 July, Lieut.-Colonel Harvey recorded his experience and the intensity of the action:

Bn took their portion of the wood by 10am, 114th Bde relieved 115th, we consolidated our portion of the wood, in the afternoon 2 companies went in support of 11 S.W.B. and 2 Companies held their ground. The Brigade attacked the northern portion of the wood. At night we held the same portion of the line as on previous night the shelling was terrific, the wood & vicinity being peppered with 5.9's The Battalion was relieved by the 10th West Yorks.²²⁶

During the night, the remainder of the 115th Inf. Bde under Brigadier General Evans tried to carry out a relief of the other two brigades in the wood.²²⁷ On arrival he found a 'great deal of confusion and the mixing of units of 113th and 114th Inf. Bdes'. The 'men were somewhat shaken by the heavy and

²²³ TNA CAB 45/135 Letter to General Edmonds from Major J.R. Kirkwood R.E. dated 30 April 1930.

²²⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2539 War Diary, 38 (Welsh) Division 10 July 1916.

²²⁵ THA W.O. 95/2559 War Diary 10 W.R. Report compiled by Lieut A P Figgins.

²²⁶ Lt.-Col. C.D Harvey, diary 11/12 July 1916.

²²⁷ IWM Price-Davies, Letter dated 28th July 1916.

continuous artillery fire' and that the 'line should be straightened and re-organised'. ²²⁸ Certainly 'the night was marked by a great deal of wild firing and false alarms' and although, the night was very noisy & men were inclined to panic the enemy made no attack'. ²²⁹ At 6.am, 11 July, Brigadier General Evans took over command of the wood up to the line established during the night.

This method of advance had been costly in manpower, and does reflect how difficult the task was. It may have been slow, but it was practical and successful. The system of defence was the occupation of the strong points, both within and along the boundaries of the wood. ²³⁰ By using Lewis Guns fully employed and men dug in within the edge of the wood, the situation was improved.

A reconnaissance carried out in the morning confirmed the enemy was still holding a portion of the northern part of the wood. Once again the attempt to attack the northern part at 2.45pm was hampered, and many men became casualties by the artillery falling short. However, by 3.30pm part of the advance had reached the edge of the wood on the eastern side. The west side was still a problem as both 16 W.R. on the left and 17 R.W.F, in the centre were held up by machine-gun fire. For the next hour, both these battalions and 11 S.W.B, on the right, were under heavy fire while attempting to gain the north edge of the wood. As time went on these men became more exhausted and would have struggled to maintain their position unless they were reinforced. At 6.30pm Brigadier General Evans was using 10 W.R, 15 W.R. and 16 R.W.F, to hold the main position. He instructed the officer commanding 11 SWB to hold and consolidate if possible and to use his own discretion to fall back to the old position if necessary. While 16 W.R. were digging in on the western edge of the wood at 9.20pm, 11 S.W.B, were compelled to retire. This to and fro of positions continued and at 10.50pm units to the west side of the wood fell back due to heavy machine-gun fire. During the night the line held. The line ran east to west roughly at various points up to 300 yards inside the wood and along the railway line. The top of the wood was only a partially relieved during the night and it was not until the morning of 12 July, at 5.am

²²⁸ TNA C.A.B. 45/134 Letter to General Edmonds from Brigadier General H.J. Evans dated 7 May 1930.

²²⁹ IWM, Price-Davies, Letter dated 13 July 1916.

²³⁰ TNA WO 95/2560 Operation Order No 64, 115th Infantry Brigade, 10 July 16.

that 62nd and 69th Brigades (21 Division) relieved the Welsh Division properly.²³¹ During the 48 hours of heavy fighting the Welsh Division had taken over 400 prisoners from five different regiments, which indicated how strongly the wood was defended.

The fighting which took place in the wood cannot be described as 'trench fighting' or 'open warfare', as the character of the conflict does not lend itself to either description. The fighting was through the thickest undergrowth 'where machine guns bothered us a great deal & snipers. Well tired as we were the Bosche was more tired & kept surrendering but it was a job to get hold of such a great wood with tired men. Well trained fresh regulars would have found it hard on manoeuvres even!!' ²³² The ferocity of the conflict was recorded by Captain Basil Liddell Hart, who moved through the wood on the 14 July. His battalion dug itself in along the northern edge of the wood, 'which was thickly lined with British dead', and 'indeed, in many places in the wood the dead were ten deep though they were mostly Germans'. Later moving along the railway he found 'there were signs of fierce fighting' and he described the wood as a 'miasma of death and decay'. ²³³ During all of the attacks on the wood, the Welsh Division had moved with an open flank on the west side of the wood, so it was hardly surprising casualties were high.

Aftermath of Battle

Although the battle for Mametz Wood was over as far as the Welsh Division was concerned, the battle for the woods on the Somme had a long way to run. The attacks on Trones Wood, Delville Wood, and High Wood, would be equally difficult and even more costly. The most important problem was the lack of communication between the fighting troops and the artillery. Evans' attack from Caterpillar Wood underlined the need to get this right. The control of the artillery should have been with the officer in charge of the attack rather than being, 'obtained after reference to higher (command) authority which meant delay & ineffectiveness in its employment.' The time delay was an aggravating factor.

²³¹ Interestingly this division had also supposedly earned a bad reputation after the Battle of Loos.

²³² IWM Price-Davies Letter dated July 1916.

²³³ TNA W.O. 95/2877 Captain B. Liddell Hart, 2 K.O.Y.L.I. dated 18 September 1916. *Impression of the Great British Offensive on the Somme*, pp. 46 - 49.

This combined with the problem of the units keeping formation once they entered the wood. When Evans entered the wood on 10 July he found, 'units of 113 & 114th Inf. Bde, very scattered and disorganised and there was no well defined order of defence established from which to push the attack'.²³⁴ One of the reasons was the blind firing of artillery onto the wood which caused considerable casualties and broke up order. The attack was 'very impeded, not only by the denseness of the undergrowth, but also by the want of assistance from the artillery'. For Evans it was:

essential that when an immediate operation is ordered the fullest possible information as to the action by the other arms which is likely to effect the operation projected should be given to the commander who has to carry out the task in order that he makes disposition accordingly.²³⁵

This was not the case on the day of the request: calls for support went from his brigade to division to XV Corps and then onto Fourth Army, where the decision was made. It would then go back to XV Corps, who would pass it on to the respective artillery batteries, bypassing both division and the brigades making the request. The time taken to implement these orders and to put them into effect accounts for the failure to secure the artillery support at the right moment, thus undermining the attacking forces chance to succeed. Equally important was the loss of XIII Corps artillery to support XV Corps during the initial attack on Mametz Wood. This is a good example of the lack of coordination between the two neighbouring Corps. The coordination between Corps was clearly the responsibility of Rawlinson, the Army Commander, but he appears to have taken no responsibility for this.

Another contributing factor in the first attack on Mametz Wood was the way General Rawlinson allowed his Corps commander to carry out small attacks on heavily defended obstacles. Lieut.-General Horne's behaviour over the attack on Strip Trench suggests he was eager to get the job done. What he was asking Major-General Philipps to attack was not impossible, but the plan was lacking purpose. He

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²³⁴ TNA WO 95/2560 War Diary, 115th Inf. Bde, 12 July 1916.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Prior and Wilson, Command on the Western Front, p. 188.

clearly ignored the strength of the position and like General Rawlinson was happy with, 'a succession of penny packet attacks launched with inadequate artillery preparation. A recurring problem during the Somme offensive was once an attack had failed another was immediately ordered'.²³⁷

The 17th and 38th Divisional attacks at Contalmaison and Mametz Wood are good examples of a command failure.²³⁸ The evidence suggests that XV Corps interfered too readily in work which should have been left to divisional commanders, and spent too little time coordinating their own efforts.²³⁹

General Rawlinson's poor supervision of his Corps commanders was also a failure in his control of the ongoing offensive in this respect.²⁴⁰ Rawlinson's umbrage was reflected in the draconian instructions Major General Watts received on his arrival on 9 July. The General Staff Officer telephoned XV Corps to instruct them of his appointment.²⁴¹ Watts was told 'he could dispose of the 38th Division as he wished, keeping any brigades he wanted, and using them as he required, but he was not to break up the brigades'.

At 10.35am on 9 July Major General Blackader arrived at XV Corps H.Q., and was there as a replacement commander. However it was the Corps commander's decision to place Watts in charge of the situation. At 11.10am on 9 July, Watts arrived at XV Corps H.Q., and was instructed to take over from Philipps, and to review the situation. He was to report what troops he wished to retain (if any) for the capture of the wood. He was to Grovetown, to make all the necessary arrangements

²³⁷ Ibid, p. 189.

²³⁸ The attacks on Contalmaison were carried out by both III Corps and XV Corps between 5-10 July attacks were uncoordinated and this lack of support from flanking formations was the reason for the failure to secure these objectives. Once again liaison between front line troops and those attacking Contalmaison was poor, if not non-existent.

²³⁹ Hughes, *Mametz*, p. 144.

²⁴⁰ See Cab 45/189 Drake –Brockman letter to Edmonds dated 7 Feb 1930.

²⁴¹ Major-General Montgomery-Massingbird, M.G.G.S. Fourth Army.

²⁴² There has been some speculation whether this was Haig's decision. If so the pressure came right from the top and makes both Rawlinson's, and Horne's positions far more tenuous.

²⁴³ TNA W.O. 95/921 War Diary of XV Corps dated 9 July 1916.

before zero hour at 4.15am on 10 July. The final plan, as Price-Davies commented, was the original plan slightly modified to assist the attacking troops with the 'creeping barrage'. This was one key change in the plan and, 'the outstanding tactical feature of 1916 was the introduction of the creeping barrage'. Major General Watts was well aware of the benefits of this new artillery innovation as his 7th Division had used it to good effect on the opening day of the Somme battle. The other key element was the timing of the attack: Evans was denied from having an attack at dawn, yet it was introduced for the assault commanded by Watts.

It has been suggested that the delay of the Welsh Division in capturing Mametz Wood on time led to a failure to achieve the breakthrough required. However, there is little evidence to suggest that Fourth Army plans were that advanced. As stated earlier, both Contalmaison and Mametz Wood were used as delaying positions by the Germans. The experience of 17th and 38th Divisions indicated that Lieut.-General Horne was struggling to control the battle. It was in his interest to remove those whom he believed had failed, rather than question his strategy. Philipps acted as a post box for Horne's orders, and was in many ways the victim of his own inexperience.

There was no evidence he questioned XV Corps' orders directly. The attack on Strip Trench failed, as explained, but the Welsh D.H.Q. was 'powerless to intervene.' It was a *fait accompli*, no division could have done any better, and Philipps failed for not, 'having demonstrated any grip of the situation, nor any great desire to impose himself and show some necessary leadership'. An officer who did show some 'grip' was Major General Pilcher, the commander of 17th Division. He disagreed with his orders but to no avail, and was also dismissed. Yet, unlike Philipps, we do have Pilcher's view of what happened behind the scenes. On 11 July, General Rawlinson wrote to Haig, after he had spoken to

²⁴⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2877 Report submitted by Captain B. Liddell Hart, see appendix, p. 67.

²⁴⁵ Hughes, *Mametz*, pp. 145-6.

²⁴⁶" Farr, *Silent General*, p. 107.

²⁴⁷ General Rawlinson had to be very careful in recommending dismissals to Haig after trying to get him to dismiss Major-General Francis John (Joey) Davies (8th Division) during the battle of Neuve Chappelle 1915. Rawlinson had been found to be at fault and had been warned by French via Haig that the next time he would lose his Corps. He quite understood: See, Sheffield and Bourne (Eds), *Douglas*

Horne, concerning the replacement of Pilcher, stating that in the interest of the service. 'I have known Major General Pilcher for many years and though I do not consider that he possesses the special characteristics for command of a division in action I know that he has many valuable qualifications'.²⁴⁸

As a result, Haig advised the War Office on 12 July, 'this officer has shown himself unequal to the task of commanding a division in the Field and I have relieved him of his command.' However, he suggested, 'his knowledge and experience of war should prove of value in some other capacity and I recommend him for further employment at home'.²⁴⁹ There is little doubt Haig surrounded himself with men who were loyal to him and he could trust. In Pilcher's letter to General Edmonds, he pulled no punches regarding how XV Corps handled the matter, stating it:

was terribly mismanaged, and I consider that of the 4,000 casualties incurred by 17th Division only 1,500 were what one may call unavoidable and that the remaining 2,500 were in direct result of orders issued by the corps which were in defiance of common sense and every rule of tactics.

Pilcher considered what had happened to 50th Inf. Bde as an, 'absolute useless massacre.' ²⁵⁰ The attacks on Quadrangle support were, 'absolutely unjustified' and if, 'I had obeyed the corps more literally, I should have lost another two to three thousand men and have achieved no more'. However, his most damning comment was:

Haig, War Diaries and Letters 1914-1918 (London, 2005). This suggests a more influential role played Horne in recommending the dismissals.

²⁴⁹ Major-General T.D. Pilcher, Some Lessons from the Boer War (London, 1903).

²⁴⁸ TNA WO 138/ personal file of Major General Pilcher.

²⁵⁰ In total the 21st Division sustained 4,771 casualties by the time it was relieved on 11 July 1916.

It is very easy to sit a few miles in rear, and get credit for allowing men to be killed in an undertaking foredoomed to failure, but the part does not appeal to me, my protests against these useless attacks were not well received.²⁵¹

The Enemy

Elements of the German XIV Reserve Corps first arrived at the wood on 28 September 1914 and came under heavy French shell and shrapnel fire. The tide of the German advance found its high water mark in front of Fricourt, but in an effort to straighten their line they met disaster at Becourt Wood, where men of different companies became separated from their units because of the dense wood. Many lost their bearings and crawled around the wood in circles until they had no idea which side was shooting at them.²⁵²

The art of wood fighting by the Germans in 1914 was not advanced a great deal by the British in 1916. During the period of German occupation, Mametz Wood was in the sector of 28th Reserve Division, who had completed a small gauge railway line through it in order to make it easier to supply forward positions. ²⁵³ The wood provided cover for these operations to take place, and there was also a suggestion from captured documents, of the same German Division, stating that the wood was to be used as a 'battle station'. The document referring to the position of artillery batteries and states on 7 May 1916:

- 1. Until the battle station in the Mametz Wood is finished a dug out at 'scharfer Ecke' (in La Boiselle) is to be occupied.
- 2. Contalmasion Battle Station is to be used until the new one is ready. 254

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²⁵¹ TNA C.A.B. 45/190 Letter to Edmonds from Pilcher dated 15 July 1926.

²⁵² Ralph J. Whitehead, *The Other Side of the Wire. Volume 1. With the German XIV Corps on the Somme, September 1914-1916* (Solihull, 2009), pp. 36-89.

²⁵³ Ibid, p. 343.

²⁵⁴ TNA WO 157/172 Captured German Document, re-28th Res.F.A.Bde.

As German artillery pieces were found in the wood, it was clearly being used as part of the overall defence plan for the area. It also confirms that Contalmaison, which was a first day objective for the British, was being used for the same purpose:

The Divisional Commander approved the request to move the battle headquarters of the R101 to Contalmaison on the evening of 30th June because all the telephones lines and telephone equipment in the former headquarters had been completely destroyed.²⁵⁵

The Welsh Division had captured the largest wood on the Somme, and in doing so had suffered 3,921 casualties.²⁵⁶ One reason, why the wood had been so difficult to capture was the quality of the German troops defending it. Its defence was in the hands of the Lehr Regiment of the Prussian Guard. The term Garde, Grenadier or Fusilier related to elite status and has historical origins.²⁵⁷ When they arrived from the eastern front in mid-April, and were part of the Third Guard Infantry Division. The Kaiser addressed them as, 'the prototype of my entire Army,' and, 'the bearing of this regiment in battle has been blameless'. ²⁵⁸ Before the war The Lehr Regiment was used as a training school for officers of the Guards. Significantly, they had not been to Verdun, and were therefore, fresh and fully manned.

Spread across the line of XV Corps was the 9th Grenadier Regiment south of Contalmaison and the Lehr Regiment south of Bazentin le Petit.²⁵⁹ Therefore the Germans had already prepared to make a stand and hold a position in front of their second line, and had selected an elite regiment for this purpose. Von Below made it clear, 'every commanding officer will be held responsible if the units

²⁵⁵ Whitehead, *The Other Side of the Wire*, p. 470.

²⁵⁶ TNA W.O. 95/2541. The full casualty list of 38th Division July 1916 this includes 46 Officers killed, 6 missing and 136 wounded.

²⁵⁷ Duffy, Germans on Somme, p. 24.

²⁵⁸ TNA W.O. 157/172 Refers to the Kaiser speech to 3rd Guard Infantry Division on 20 April 1916 at Champagne.

²⁵⁹ TNA W.O. 157/172 Move of the Division towards the battlefield.

under his command do not fight to the last man in the sector allotted to them'. ²⁶⁰ One German soldier summed up his time in Mametz Wood as being 'a perfect hell'. ²⁶¹

Repercussions

The capture of the wood should have been recognised as a tremendous success seen in the context of the quality and tenacity of the opposition. Price-Davies stated, 'Douglas Haig came in & congratulated me on our success at Mametz'. ²⁶² He then began to realise his, 'people did better than I thought at first many gallant actions have come to light'. ²⁶³ Three days later he wrote, 'I don't know what Douglas Haig had heard he merely said 'I hear you did great things' or something of the kind'. ²⁶⁴ By August, he wrote, 'I have been trying hard to find out if the Division is badly thought of or not'. ²⁶⁵ Why should Price-Davies have felt so suspicious? The answer lies in the secret report submitted in September 1916, mentioned earlier. General Plumer was now their Army Commander and 'says he is not satisfied with the 38th Division. There is a lack of enterprise and real discipline; an infusion of new blood is wanted'. ²⁶⁶ The last part of the report was telling:

G.H.Q. think it a pity to try to bolster up a Welsh Division with good officers and NCO's from English formations. No Divisions are so well placed as to be able to spare their best to make up the deficiencies in an inferior division. The A.G. is said to be dealing with Gen. Plumer's official report; the latter is not in the file.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁰ TNA WO 157/172, a captured German Order of General Von Below, Commanding the Second Army, dated July 1916 (after 3rd) and marked Secret.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, Letter dated 22 July 1916.

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²⁶¹ TNA, WO 157/172 Fourth Army summary dated 8 July 1916.

²⁶² NAM Diary entry dated 16 July 1916.

²⁶³ Ibid, Letter dated 19 July 1916.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, Letter dated 1 August 1916.

²⁶⁶ TNA WO 95/2540 The Training of the 38th Division between December 1915 and September 1916. ²⁶⁷ ibid.

The malign tone that runs through this report can hardly be compatible with the role the Welsh Division played in capturing Mametz Wood, and reflects poorly on the man who wrote it. When one considers the courage and bravery of those who fought for the wood, one has to question the objectivity of the report. Here men had fought in hand to hand combat within the confines of an enclosed space, the aftermath of which was described by one officer passing through later as 'like visiting a room in Madame Taussaud's Chamber of Horrors, for I could not imagine any of those bodies having been alive'. There is little doubt the Welsh Division's capture of the wood was down to the men who fought there, rather than those at Corps and Army who had planned it. As the Welsh Division did not come under General Plumer's command until September 1916, he appears to have relied on reports submitted to him. Any assessment of a division just after a battle would have to take into account the massive loss of officers and men. The Welsh Division had lost 113 Officers and 3,670 other ranks during the month of July. 269

The way the Welsh Division was moved forward illustrates a breakdown in their 'tactical deployment' by both Army and Corps. It was the pressure from Corps which influenced the battle at the divisional level, and Horne's plan which had created the situation. An advance dictated by timetable rather than by opportunity was flawed. He was optimistic without reason, misguided in his approach, and lacked an objective understanding of what was really expected of the troops. The crisis would continue on the Somme at Trones, Delville, and High Wood, which all became major stumbling blocks for the advance. The attack on High Wood by Horne on 14 July, once again showed up the difficulties involved. Despite a very successful opening phase using an overwhelming artillery bombardment, the second phase proved costly. The 7th Division had made rapid progress, and 'certainly opened up possibilities which if turned to account, might have been of the utmost importance'. ²⁷⁰ By 9.am, 'a rapid advance either by a fresh Division or all the reserves of the Seventh might have led to the capture of High Wood'. Yet the attack was, 'kept back by orders to let the cavalry advance'. The attempt to push the cavalry forward was not a success, as both the timing and the conditions were not suitable for their rapid movement forward. Whether or not 7th Division could have taken, and more importantly

²⁶⁸ Gerald Brenan, A Life of One's Own (London, 1965), pp. 205-6.

²⁶⁹ TNA W.O. 95/26 War Diary Adjutant General 'Statement of estimated casualties' 31 July 1916.

²⁷⁰ Atkinson, *The Seventh Division*, p. 287.

held, High Wood was open to question. However, it is another example of poor judgement, in failing to understand the terrain and the conditions. High Wood was yet another blocking position, which the Germans defended with great skill and tenacity, as they had done at Mametz Wood. This wood was also where Captain Robert Graves, 2 R.W.F., was injured, as was every officer of his battalion, reflecting the intensity of the struggle. It was to remain a thorn in the British advance until 15 September, when after bitter fighting which saw the first use of four tanks in a wood. It, was captured by 47th (2nd London) Division with extremely high casualties.

Unfortunately the attack on Delville Wood, like the first attack on High Wood, was a disaster, as the bombardment set it on fire, and its capture proved to be a prolonged business. During 3 September attack tanks were to be used, but only one arrived and the devastated wood and terrain proved too difficult a barrier for it. Once again a number of key features present themselves: poor staff work, no previous training to fight in woods, overwhelming use of artillery, poor use of tanks, and the need to keep to a time table.

Once again the explanation of events surrounding these battles underlines the failure of the high command to identify and prosecute the battle which was unfolding, rather than the one they wanted. The 'idea that incompetent commanders were left in place is yet another Great War myth'.²⁷¹ The failure of the higher command to accept their responsibility for their actions led them to commit further acts of incompetence. Major General Watts was a good example: in 1915 Sir Douglas Haig referred to him as a 'plucky little man, with no great brains'.²⁷² His tactics while in charge of the Welsh Division at Mametz Wood was to smash it straight into the wood.²⁷³ His delay in waiting for the cavalry at High Wood cost 7th Division dearly and it was clearly an opportunity lost.²⁷⁴ By February 1917, Watts was

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²⁷¹ Neillands, *Attrition*, p. 267.

²⁷² Sheffield and Bourne, *Douglas Haig, War Diaries*, p. 103.

²⁷³ Lieut- General Herbert Henry Watts (1858-1934). Commissioned into West Yorkshire Regiment in 1880 and served in the 2nd Boer War. He retired as a Colonel in 1914 and was called out of retirement, known as a 'Dug-out' at the outbreak of the Great War.

²⁷⁴ TNA C.A.B. 45/133 Letter to General Edmonds from Cyril John Deverell (1874-1947), dated 15 February 1930. At the time of the Somme offensive he was Brigadier-General commanding 20 Infantry

promoted to command XIX Corps. During the battle of Passchendaele his poor handling of both 16 (Irish) Division and 36 (Ulster) Divisions inflicted horrendous casualties on them.²⁷⁵ This was a good example of a Corps Commander bludgeoning his divisions to no useful purpose by carrying out orders with unquestioning loyalty to General Gough his commander. Both General Gough and Watts blamed the two Divisional Commanders, Hickie (16 Irish) and Nugent (36 Ulster), but Haig did not sack them.²⁷⁶ Not only did incompetent commanders continue to serve in the B.E.F, but they were promoted for their loyalty despite having failed to understand their mistakes. These commanders could hardly be seen as a positive aspect of the 'learning curve'.

To return to the first attack on Mametz Wood, Haig was apparently 'shocked' by the performance of the Welsh Division, and his comments were unworthy of the man. Part of the explanation revolves around the promotion and defence of certain senior officers who he was far too reluctant to sack, as their dismissal would reflect badly of his judgement in appointing them.²⁷⁷ Against this background, we should not underestimate the politics of the Western Front, which were just as secretive and devious as those which were taking place in the Palace of Westminster at the time.²⁷⁸

The Drake-Brockman Letter

Major Drake-Brockman's letter to Edmonds was written fourteen years after the action at Mametz Wood while he was at the Staff College. In his first paragraph about the Welsh Division he makes clear that:

Brigade, 7th Division and was clearly in a position to make this judgement. At the time he wrote the letter he was knighted and held the rank of Lt. General and in 1936 he was promoted F.M. and CIGS. ²⁷⁵ The 16th Irish Division sustained 4,200 and the 36th Ulster Division 3,600 casualties by mid August and was therefore taken out of the XIX Corps.

²⁷⁶ Sheffield and Bourne, *Douglas Haig. War Diaries and Letters 1914-1918*, pp. 317-18.

²⁷⁷ Quoted in David French, see Ch.3, Sir James Edmonds and the Official History: France and Belgium. *The First World War and British Military History* (Oxford, 1991). Edited by B. Bond. ²⁷⁸ Hew Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 116-17, points out 'that the

British Army entered the First World War deeply politicised and well versed in the arts of political

intrigue'.

if I have put them down at some length, it is because I wish to show that the disrepute into which the Div. fell as a result of the attack on MAMETZ WOOD was not primarily due to any fault of the fighting troops, who were really good material & did very well later in the war.²⁷⁹

He was amazed at the political atmosphere in the Welsh Division, which was apparent from the Divisional Commander downwards, he wrote, 'I never came across anything similar'. Yet as Watts was his divisional commander at this time, and had taken over the Welsh Division, it is hard to see how he could make this assumption, for he had no previous knowledge of Philipps. His only experience of staff duties was with 7th Division, and not with any New Army division, so it would have been very different in many ways. Captain Harvey, who joined the Welsh Division as a G.S.O. 2 just before him, makes no mention of any political atmosphere. Neither does Price-Jones, who had been with the division since it was founded, nor Price-Davies. Drake-Brockman had two years experience in the 7th Division with the 2 Border Regiment. He had witnessed the early success of this division on the opening day attacks on the Somme. However, he confirmed the delay in moving forward was caused by Corps:

After the fall of Mametz (by 6.pm on July 1st) the enemy's resistance had been well broken on the front of 10, 13, and 7 Divs. Certain localities outside the final objective could have been captured with very small loss, which subsequently were very costly to take.

The most notable of these were MAMETZ WOOD and CATERPILLAR WOOD. To my certain knowledge there were hardly any of the enemy in the former at this time: our infantry in BUNNY ALLEY and WHITE TRENCH were very keen to push on but right up till the time of the Div. relief on July 6 no concerted forward move was permitted from Corps, other than by patrols.

This delay allowed the Germans to use the wood as a blocking position for any advance. Therefore, its importance grew as the delay continued. However, he asserts the failure of Welsh Division to capture it

²⁷⁹ TNA C.A.B. 45/189, Letter from Major Drake-Brockman to Edmunds. The bold print was on the original document.

quickly undoubtedly prejudiced any forward move by units on the flanks. He conveniently forgets that 17th Division on the left flank had also failed to take Contalmaison on schedule, and that XIII Corps, on the right flank, delayed pushing forward until their flank was covered. He goes on to suggest that had 17th Division been employed on 2 July, Mametz Wood and Contalmaison could have been captured. He then points out:

Lastly when 17 Div. did attack the plan as devised by XV Corps lacked co-ordination in that fire from Arty. and M.Gs. from 7th Div. front could have been most effectively used to support the attack of the former unit but this was not done.

This was the situation that faced Br.-General Evans' attack on the Hammerhead; the lack of artillery coordination was instrumental in the failure of the first attack on Mametz Wood. 'Artillery in those days was registered almost entire by observation'. ²⁸⁰ Equally important, this was the first battle for many of the gunners involved and 'as such they were put to tasks that had never been contemplated'. ²⁸¹

Later Drake-Brockman made the following statement:

The 38th suffered from having a number of senior officers who owed their appointments to their political positions or being friends of Lloyd George I can quote two glaring examples – there were more but I can't remember their names.

The first senior officer was Major-General Sir Ivor Philipps, who he described as, 'a Divisional Comdr. it is hardly surprising that he was ignorant, lacked experience and failed to inspire confidence'. As

 $^{^{280}}$ TNA C.A.B. 45/132 Letter to General Edmonds from A.B. Clough dated 1 December 1936.

²⁸¹ TNA C.A.B 45/132 Letter to General Edmunds from Sir James Fredrick Noel Birch (1865-1939) dated 8 July 1932. He also noted that 'the artillery problem was really understood in 1918'. This officer was born in Denbighshire and had been commissioned into the R.H.A., in 1885. By May 1916 he was Sir Douglas Haig's Artillery advisor, a post he held to the end of the war.

Philipps had left before this officer arrived it is hard to see how he could speak from personal experience on such sensitive matters. Drake-Brockman's reliance on hearsay to make such damning comments undermines his whole argument. There is little doubt that Philipps was a political appointment by Lloyd George, and this was unusual especially when we compare him to other newly appointed divisional commanders at that time.

General Paget undermined Philipps in his 'secret report', and Lieut. General Haking dodged the issue and passed it on, so in many senses he was not sacked at the first opportunity. ²⁸² With regard to the question of his 'ignorance' and 'lack of experience' and 'failure to inspire confidence', there were a number of other commanders who had the same faults, but were given time to adjust to the situation they found themselves in.

In the accusation regarding Lieut-Colonel David Davies, he suggested that Lloyd George had requested two other officers should be sent home 'at once'. One of whom was supposed to be in command of 16 R.W.F. The command of this unit had devolved to Major R J Carden²⁸³ (17th Lancers) in December 1915.²⁸⁴ It had been commanded by Lieut.-Colonel T.A Wynne Edwards V.D, who had been seconded to the 21 Reserve Bn R.W.F., on 29 November 1915.²⁸⁵ Therefore at the time in question, this officer was not even in France. However, Lieut.-Colonel Carden had been in command of this battalion for over seven months. Major Drake-Brockman is further off the mark when he wrote:

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²⁸² See Appendix 3 for the full report made by Gen. Paget.

²⁸³ Lieut.-Colonel Ronald James Walter (1876 -1916). Appointed 2nd Lieut. 1896, and Capt. 1906. He was most likely to have met Haig during the South African War, where he served in the Cavalry from 1900-1902. (Army List 1906, p.158-8a). Haig joined the 7th Hussars and in South Africa was Staff Officer to Sir John French, who was in Command of the Cavalry Division.

²⁸⁴ Lieut- Colonel Carden had left the Army before the war on account of ill-health and this may well have been the reason for his request, either way this officer returned to France against advice and was not supposed to have gone forward with the attacking troops. He had been a Captain in the 17th Lancers when F.M. Haig had been its commanding officer.

²⁸⁵ Who's Who in Wales 1920, p. 539. Lieut.-Colonel. Thomas Alured Edwards V.D. (1855-1925) was an Engineer and Estates Agent and had a long and distinguish career not only with the R.W.F, but also as a local worthy of Denbighshire. Who's Who in Wales 1920, p.539: See also Eric Griffiths, Squire of Nantglyn (Wrexham, 2004).

A few days before the battle Major Carden had met the C-in-C, and had informed him as he was 2nd in command he was remaining behind with the transport and not going into action with his bn., since G.H.Q. orders proscribed this course of action at the time.

Colonel Haig had been his commanding officer when he was a Captain of 17th Lancers at Piershill Barracks in 1902. At that time Haig would take his officers on Staff rides in the border country south of Edinburgh, which he described as a 'little tactical tour', whereas Carden termed them as 'Our tactless tourist tour'. Prior to the action it was reported that 'to encourage his men, the Colonel had tied a coloured handkerchief to a stick and going forward had cried 'this will show you where I am'. ²⁸⁶ This does not appear to be the actions of a man who was prepared to remain with the transport but rather one who took great pride in leading his men into the their first major battle.

At this point Drake-Brockman suggested that it was the recall of Lieut.-Colonel Davies and two others on the 'eve of battle' which was the reason Major General Sir Ivor Philipps' 'command came to an end.' The fact that Davies had been absent from his battalion for some time does not seem to have been taken into consideration. The implied suggestion reflects a certain degree of political interference and dishonesty within the higher command of the Army in France. However, Drake-Brockman continued:

the stigma of Mametz Wood stuck to the Division and it was common talk in the B.E.F. that the 38th Div. had 'bolted' & the fact remains that 38th Div was never employed again on the Somme.

There is no evidence that supports the allegation that the whole Division had 'bolted'. Br.-.General. Price-Davies and a few other officers found that there was a breakdown in discipline and they did find men who were confused, disorientated, and who had lost their direction when their officers were killed. This whole argument has little real credible evidence to support it.

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²⁸⁶ Ruth de Pree 'Haig Fellow' Lecture on 29 January 2002.

When the Welsh Division left the Somme, it had captured a highly important objective, during which it had become physically exhausted. It also had a high casualty list, particularly, amongst the officers and as such effective command would have been difficult to maintain. The tragedy of Drake-Brockman's comments has been the reliance on them by many historians who have taken his view as objective, and have failed to establish the true facts, and continue to repeat his accusations. One of these accusations was that Phillips was a prime example of the sort of home-appointed general unsuitable for field command a fact which would be exposed on the Somme battlefield. Yet the evidence reveals that his sacking had more to do with who he was, and who he was connected to politically, as well as his failure in implementing Horne's plan.²⁸⁷

Drake-Brockman's legacy has misled and clouded the issue to such an extent his views have become accepted without question. Some historians, for whatever reasons, put forward his case and in doing so perpetuate the myth which has no basis in reality. Farr as an example writes, '38th Welsh Division were to retrieve their reputation, even in the eyes of their earlier detractors, on future battlefields of the War'.²⁸⁸ Yet he misses the point. It was the courage of all those who fought in the wood that should have been recognised at the time. Brigadier General T.O. Marden had no doubt that the capture of the wood 'reflects the greatest credit to all engaged' and to 'those officers and NCO's who assumed command of the battalion, companies and platoons, when their leaders fell'.²⁸⁹ It is those at the highest levels of command whose reputations need to be reassessed in light of the evidence provided, and it is time for the shadow to be lifted.²⁹⁰ As Lieut.-Colonel Pryce-Jones wrote 'we were given an impossible task to do with raw troops but by Jove they did it!'.²⁹¹

²⁸⁷ Philpott, *Bloody Victory*, pp. 234-5.

²⁸⁸ Farr, Silent General, p. 107.

²⁸⁹ W.O. 95/2559 War Diary, '114th Infantry Brigade Special Order of the Day by Bde Gen T.O.

Marden' issued 13 July 1916.

²⁹⁰ Hart, *The Somme*, p. 257.

²⁹¹ NAM, Lt. Colonel Pryce-Jones Letter nos. 1209, Dated 12 July 1916.

Chapter Three: Ypres Salient and Pilckem Ridge. 1917.

The Ypres salient was, 'at once a symbol of the heroic stubbornness of the British soldier and a thundering nuisance to his Generals'. On the northern edge of this 'nuisance' was where in 1917 the Welsh Division fought its second major battle.

Ypres was a province of West Flanders, also known as 'Wipers' to British soldiers. The name 'Flanders' means a 'flooded land', and the terrain was extensively engineered by using a complex system of canals, locks, dams, ditches and dikes which channelled the overflow into the river Yser.² The city had been a prosperous agricultural and commercial centre, dominated by its famous medieval Cloth Hall and Cathedral. However, by late 1916 one junior officer described the town as a terrible sight, and compared it to 'a modern Pompeii'. All that was left of the Cathedral was one side of the tower, and the Cloth Hall 'had practically vanished'. He wrote 'not a single house has escaped the bombardment several were knocked down to the ground and are now simply a pile of bricks'.³

The area around the city lay in a saucer-like basin with hills to the east and north. The arc of this high ground stretched for eight miles around to the east of the town, giving the German occupiers a panoramic view of the area. There were two railway lines running eastward into Ypres, one from Passchendaele, and the other further north from Langemarck. Both were built-up on two-metre embankments to keep them above the water table. The northern line of the railway would be the boundary between the Guards and the Welsh Division in the summer battle of 1917. The Yser canal ran north-west of Ypres and to the east of the railway was a major stream called the Steenbeek, which ran east to west and would become an important feature during the first day of the battle.

¹ J. A. Terraine, 'Passchendaele and Amiens I' *RUSI Journal, Vol CIV* (1959), pp. 173-183.

² Winston Groom, A Storm in Flanders, Ypres Salient 1914 -1918 (New York, 2002), p. 33.

³ IWM 12005 PP/MCR/92 Lt. H .J. Selby 121st Brigade R.F.A., Diary entry for Saturday 28 October 1916.

Rebuilding the Welsh Division on the Ypres Salient

Mametz Wood 'had reduced a strong division to a shadow'. The question many officers were asking after Mametz Wood was about the Division's future. Lieut.-Colonel Pryce-Jones summed up its prospects:

- (i) a long rest to refit (unlikely),
- (ii) move back under R.H. (likely),
- (iii) (put into) Amalgamate with another division that has had a bad time (most probably).⁵

It was in the north of the Ypres salient, among the lunar landscapes, that the Welsh Division made their new home. Although downgraded to line holding duties, it was here they began rebuilding. The position they held was next to the Belgian Army, and required both French and Belgian Interpreters and liaison officers. Directly behind their line was the small village of Boesinghe, which marked the northern boundary of the British front and was three kilometres west of Ypres. Elverdinghe, another small village, lay behind Boesinghe, and the Welsh Division would often use its chateau as its H.Q. during their stay on the salient.

The Yser canal area was a major obstacle, broader than most English canals and shut up on either side by raised embankments. Despite being shallow it had 'less water than slimy filth, strewn with empty bully beef and jam tins; it was no longer a canal but a drain in which rats alone thrived'. The problem with rats on the canal bank was highlighted by 15 R.W.F. who in February 1917 who caught 342 in traps in just three days. 8

⁵ NAM Letter number 1209, Lieut. - Colonel Pryce Jones to his wife dated 12 July 1916. 'R.H.' refers to Lieut.-General. Richard Haking, their previous Corps Commander.

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⁴ Griffith, Up to Mametz and Beyond, p. 124.

⁶ NAM Lieut.-Colonel Price-Jones letter to his wife 1254, August 4, 1916.

⁷ Griffith, *Up to Mametz*, p. 139.

⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2556/1 War Diary 15 R.W.F. February, 1917.

Any heavy downpour of rain filled the canal with water and made it more of a barrier. Artillery bombardments very quickly turned the whole trench system into a morass of liquid mud. As the drainage system had long since been destroyed, constant maintenance was required right from the moment they arrived. During November and December many of these trenches in the front line were 'waist deep in water' and on occasions companies were cut off from the rest of the battalion owing to a sea of water-logged trenches. The various war diaries during the following months recorded work undertaken to maintain the front line, and methods to keep the men dry. The Welsh Division began hiring nearby 'hops drying rooms' to 'facilitate the drying of gum-boots and socks during the winter season.'9 By October 1916, each of the Welsh infantry brigades was issued with 2,000 pairs of socks.¹⁰

The period after the battle for Mametz Wood was one of change in the composition of its senior officers. The Welsh Division had now joined VIII Corps under the command of Lieutenant-General Aylmer Hunter-Weston, a colourful character, who was also new to the salient. ¹¹ Major General Charles Guinard Blackader was appointed the new Divisional Commander on 12 July 1916. ¹² Brigadier General Price-Davies's first impression of him was that he was 'very nice', and qualified this later with 'he commands'. ¹³

⁹ TNA W.O. 95/2541 War Diary, A & Q Branch, 38th (Welsh) Division, 12 September 1916.

¹⁰ Ibid, 3 October 1916.

¹¹ Lieut.-General Sir Aylmer Hunter-Weston (1864-1940). Joined the R.E in 1884 and had extensive experience in the wars of Empire. He had served on the Staff of F.M., Kitchener during the Dongola Expedition of 1896. During the South African War 1899-1901 he commanded Mounted Engineers and later R.E. Cavalry Division. He had various staff appointments afterwards and was at the War Office 1911-1914. He joined the B.E.F. in charge of 11th Inf. Bde, 1914-1915, and was Commander of 29 Division during the landing at Cape Hellas, Dardenelles. He returned to France as VIII Corps Commander and suffered the highest number of casualties on 1st July 1916, while failing to achieve his objectives.

¹² Major-General Charles Guinard Blackader C.B, D.S.O, A.D.C. (1869 -1922). Commissioned 2nd Lt. Leicester Regiment 188, he saw service in the West Indies and the Niger (1897-98) and was at the siege of Ladysmith in the South African war, where he received a D.S.O. From 1904 until 1914 he served in India. He went to France in October 1914 with the Meerut Division. After their transfer to the middle-east he was posted to Dublin and served as President on eight of the major trials arising after the Easter Rising.

¹³ IWM Wilson Papers H.H.W. 2/83/90. Letter from Price-Davies, 28 July 1916.

Both Brigadier Generals Price-Davies and Marden remained with 113th Inf. Bde and 114th Inf. Bde respectively, but 115 Inf. Bde would have five changes in command during the following months. It was particularly unfortunate that Br.-General J. R. Minshull Ford, an extremely capable R.W.F. officer, was wounded by a shell at Elverdinghe Chateau on 3 June 1917. On 14 July, his replacement, Br.-General Arthur Hawtayne Cope, was found to have a temperature of 103 degrees, and was sent off to 57th C.C.S. ¹⁴ Br.-General Gwyn Gwyn Thomas, an Indian Army officer, took over on 20 July 1917.

The 113th Inf. Bde lost all its battalion commanders who had taken part in the attack at Mametz Wood. Lieut.-Colonel Robert Omus Campbell took over 13 R.W.F; Lieut.-Colonel Harry Vivian Robert Hodson 14 R.W.F; Lieut.-Colonel Compton Cardew Norman 15th R.W.F; and Lieut.-Colonel Archibald Nelson Gavin Jones (Indian Army) 16 RWF; Lieut.-Colonel Norman was the only RWF Officer; he had been commissioned in 1899, and went to France in June 1915 as a Captain, later Adjutant of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment (T.F.), before being wounded. He returned to serve with the 1st R.W.F., and was promoted Major in September 1915, before taking over command of 15 R.W.F. almost exactly a year later. Lieut.-Colonel Hodson was replaced in June 1917 by Lieut.-Colonel Evelyn William Pierpoint Uniacke D.S.O, 7/8th Royal Berkshire Regiment. 15 Educated at Charterhouse, he had served in the ranks before being promoted to Captain in the 2nd Boer War. He was serving in the 2nd King Edward's Horse in 1916, and was attached as a Major to 8 Royal Irish Fusiliers as second in command. He had won his D.S.O., for bravery at the battle of Hulloch. Lieut.-Colonel Henry Francis Newdigate Jourdain was another regular officer, commissioned into the Connaught Rangers in 1893 and he served in the South African War. At the start of the Great War he was a Major at the Regimental Depot in Galway, and was influential in the training of their Kitchener battalions. Before taking command of 16 R.W.F., he had been with his regiment for twenty-five years.16

¹⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2550 War Diary 131st Field Ambulance, July 1917.

¹⁵ TNA W.O. 95/2555/2 War Diary, 14 R.W.F. Lieut.-Colonel Hodson left the battalion to take up duties as instructor in the Senior Officers School, Aldershot.

¹⁶ NAM 1956-03-12 Diaries of Lieut.-Colonel H.R.N. Jourdain, Tuesday 26 June 1917.

The 114th Inf. Bde lost two of its battalion commanders. Lieut.-Colonel P. R. Ricketts, 10 W.R., had been seriously wounded and was replaced by Lieut.-Colonel George Frank Brooke D.S.O., of the Connaught Rangers. He was commissioned in 1897, and was badly wounded in the South African War. He returned to the army as a Major and was second in command of 6 Connaught Rangers during the battle of the Somme.¹⁷ Lieut.-Colonel James Kennedy D.S.O, M.C, D.C.M, took over command of 13 W.R. He was an experienced soldier in the Black Watch, and had been promoted from the ranks.

There were three new battalion commanders in 115th Inf. Bde. Lt. Col John Arthur Ballard, 17 R.W.F. was wounded on 7 July 1916 while making his way forward to Mametz Wood. He was replaced by Lieut.-Colonel John Brydges Cockburn, who had formerly seen service with the R.W.F, both in West Africa and in the 2nd Boer War. In 1914, while serving in the Cameroons, he was wounded. After being returned medically fit, he took over command on 26 July 1916. The 10 S.W.B., promoted their second in command, Major Charles Darley Harvey, a regular officer of the Sherwood Foresters who had served in the 2nd Boer War. In February 1917, Lieut.-Colonel John Robert Gaussen, 11 S.W.B., was unexpectedly recalled to the Indian Army. The battalion also lost its second-in-command, Major T. H. Morgan, who went off to be an Instructor at Second Army School. As a result, Lieut.-Colonel Alfred Hutton Radice of the Gloucester Regiment took command. The 19 W.R. (P) was still commanded by Lt. Col Duncan Grant Dalton.

There were also changes in officers in the ancillary posts which were so important to the functioning of the division. In September 1916, Lieut.-Colonel Brian Surtees Phillpotts joined the Welsh Division as Commander Royal Engineers. When the war broke out he had been at Fort Camden in County Cork, shortly afterwards promoted to Major. He then trained and commanded 97th Field Company R.E., and took them to France in September 1915 with the 21st Division, a 'Kitchener' unit. Like the Welsh Division it was part of XV Corps and was heavily engaged during the Somme fighting. He was slightly wounded during the offensive in front of Fricourt, and again at Bazentin-le-Petit Wood. He was

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¹⁷ He was awarded a D.S.O., LG, 4.6.1917 and a Bar to his D.S.O., L.G, 15. Feb1919.

¹⁸ C.T. Atkinson, *The History of the South Wales Borderers, The Great War 1914 -18* (South Wales, 1999), p. 290: The Indian Army was in the process of expanding its forces to meet the demands of the Mesopotamia Campaign.

awarded a D.S.O. for his bravery in January 1917. Other staff appointments were A.A. & Q.M.G. Major Pryce-Jones was promoted Lieut.-Colonel in October 1916. The Br.-General (C.R.A.) was still Lieut.-Colonel William Arthur Thompson, who had been with the Welsh Division since July 1915. He had left Woolwich as a Lieutenant in 1885, and had served in the 2nd Boer War, first as a Special Services Officer and then as a Staff Officer, later passing the Staff College Course.

Post-Somme Experience

Training was fundamentally important part in the rebuilding of the Welsh Division. This was underlined by the experience of Price-Davies, who was in no doubt about its urgency. He complained on 17 July that he had to 'send off 780 men to assist miners'. On 21 July he watched his trench mortars practice, but due to poor map reading skills and marksmanship, their only success was to 'cut about thirty VIII Corps telephone lines!!' This underlined the need to keep training skills up to the mark against a background of losing men to working parties. Fortunately it was a period of reasonably good weather, and the training culminated with a visit by King George V and the Prince of Wales on 12 August 1916. When the Welsh Division returned to the trenches, it was physically fitter, and its military skills and discipline were improving.

Immediately upon their return to the trenches, routine patrols were sent out at night to inspect, repair and maintain the wiring in front of the positions. Patrols also reconnoitred the forward positions in noman's-land and surveyed the layout of the German defences. These small patrols led by junior officers or senior N.C.Os, were sent out to observe and report back, rather than being raiding parties. One patrol sent out by 13 R.W.F. during the early days on the Canal Bank sector reported that 'the grass was at least two foot high and the ground was muddy with shell holes waterlogged'. Listening posts were also established at various points, to record and look for patterns of enemy activity and behaviour. The quest to 'maintain ascendancy in no-man's-land' went on. ²¹

¹⁹ NAM Price-Davies Diary 17 - 21 July 16.

²⁰ TNA W.O. 95/2555 War Diary 13th R.W.F., 5 September 1916.

²¹ David Jones, *In Parenthesis* (London, 1969), p. 71.

Their first spell in the trenches at Ypres was reasonably peaceful, but was not without problems of another kind. As Price-Davies commented after taking his new Divisional Commander round the trenches, 'if we did all he wants doing we would need a million men'.²² Afterwards he organised a conference of battalion commanders to outline the work which needed to be carried out. Frequent visits by senior officers, in particular their Corps Commander Lieut.-General Hunter-Weston, made life difficult. A description revealed his style of command:

To go round the trenches with Hunter-Weston was an ordeal, for he walked so fast and asked questions all the time, criticized everything and everybody, turned tired officers out of their dugouts to answer his questions. He was full of vigour and unexpended physical energy. No one respected him, everybody feared and better soldiers despised him for his showmanship.²³

A staff officer described him as he was, 'a tiresome fellow in more ways than one – and interferes a good deal, I gather, in details which ought to be too small for so great a man'.²⁴ His visits were not just restricted to the front line and his inspections caused a great deal of frustration:

The Corps Commander is an unreasonable man I was with him yesterday. He said only one battalion in the Corps had good arrangements in his Camps & he generalised the remainder as being higgardly & piggardly pigsty's. But only a few days before he had been around mine & complimented me on them I can't understand the man unless he has not recovered from the sunstroke I believe he had!²⁵

²² IWM Price-Davies, letter to his wife, dated 23 August 1916.

²³ Griffith, *Up to Mametz*, p. 136.

²⁴ Jim Beach, *The Military Papers of Lieutenant Colonel Sir Cuthbert Headlam 1910-1942* (Stroud, 2010), p. 146. Letter to his wife dated 4 November 1916.

²⁵ IWM, Price-Davies, letter to his wife, dated 16 August 1916.

One visit to a Welsh battalion reveals his fastidiousness as he 'inspected the general appearance and cleanliness of the men, fitting of the equipment, cookers, men's latrines, officers' latrines, officers' messes, and officers' bedrooms'.²⁶

Major-General Blackader, the new commander of the Welsh Division, was ordered to bring in a regime of physical fitness which every Brigadier had to oversee. This had to be built into a schedule which required men to be despatched daily to carry out various fatigue parties, and assist the 'sappers' in heavy manual work. There was always company drill and bayonet practice, and two senior drill sergeants from the Guards Division were brought into the Divisional School to improve these matters.²⁷

There were opportunities for specialist duties, which was the chance for men and officers to experience trench raiding at night. The longer the war went on, the bigger these raiding parties became and the more specialised, with a planning process which could take weeks. Much of the plan of action was based on information from patrols and listening posts. Aerial photography played an increasing part, as did the liaison with the divisional artillery, whose timing of barrages had to be precise. As a result, Forward Observation Officers (F.O.O.) and R.E, signallers were on hand in case of any variations that might occur at the last moment. Along with the artillery barrage, there were Stokes mortars, plus machine and Lewis Guns, which would open fire on fixed lines. The concept was to breach the enemy front line at one spot and then isolate it from the rest of the German trenches. Once into the lines, they would try to capture as many Germans as possible, retrieve any documents, destroy bunkers, and retrieve identifying uniforms. Movement across the canal during the winter period was restricted by the thin layer of ice not being heavy enough to take the weight of the soldiers.²⁸

During the autumn and winter months there was the battle to keep the trenches dry, of paramount importance not only to defence but to avoid 'trench foot', and other illness. The regular inspection of

²⁶ TNA W.O. 95/2561/2 War Diary, 17 R.W.F, 11 August 1916.

²⁷ NAM Lt. Colonel H.M. Pryce-Jones Letter 1323, dated 4 September 1916.

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²⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2561/3 War Diary, 16 W.R, 19 February 1917.

men's feet became a priority as the war progressed.²⁹ Preventing the trench walls from collapsing after several days of rain was a priority and could involve a whole battalion to rebuild the positions. 30 The collapse of a wall in one part of the line could mean large areas being deluged in muddy water, leaving men and kit in filthy condition. Drainage and sanitation were two of the vital areas of responsibility for officers, which if neglected, would have an adverse effect on the health and welfare of the men. 31 In some places, what had once been lush green water meadows before the war were now treacherous swamps and 'a desolate place, all the buildings level with the ground'. 32 The winter of 1916 was the coldest and most severe the Welsh Division had endured during their time on the Western Front. During these winter months the trenches were often frozen, making it extremely difficult for the soldiers to move around in the icy conditions, and frostbite became a serious problem. Due to the conditions and the weak strength of the battalions, the front line was now held by a number of posts, separated by between 70-100 yards and manned by an N.C.O, and five other ranks and a L.G.

On 13/14 October 15 R.W.F. carried out a successful raid and captured four prisoners one an 'Unter offizier of 1st Bn, 1st Guards Reserve Regiment'. 33 The Germans also carried out raids, which were not always a success, as on the early morning of 8 September a German party was caught on the wire, resulting in one dead German officer being brought in.34 However, at midnight 1/2 December 1916 they attacked the outpost line of 16 R.W.F. with over 80 men, and captured the acting company commander Lt. Roberts.35

During the period from August 1916 to May 1917, the Welsh Division sustained a growing list of casualties. In ten months, they lost 19 Officers killed, 95 wounded and three missing; and 328 O.Rs

²⁹ Kevin Brown, Fighting Fit. Health, Medicine and War in the Twentieth Century (Stroud, 2008), p.

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³⁰ TNA W.O. 95/2561/2 War Diary 17th R.W.F., 19 October 1916.

³¹ Mark Harrison, *The Medical War* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 128-36.

³² NAM 2002-06-50 WW1. Diary of Sergt, E. Gardner, 113th M.G.C, on 23August 1916.

³³ TNA W.O. 95/2556/1 War Diary, 15 R.W.F, 38th Division, No. G.S. 498, 'Report on raid carried out by 15th R.W.F., on night 13/14 October 1916 on German Line O.13.b.9.9'.

³⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2561/2War Diary, 17 R.W.F, 8 September 1916.

³⁵ TNA W.O. 339/30666 personal file of Lt. Peter Aubrey Roberts.

killed, 1,637 wounded and 51 missing. One of the worst months of their stay was October, when 2 officers were killed and 23 wounded, while 41 O.Rs, were killed, 236 wounded and five missing. Another bad month was February, with 4 officers killed, 19 wounded and one missing; O.Rs, lost 76 killed, 273 wounded and 17 missing. These figures represent a heavy price to pay for holding a trench line, and the tempo of operations began to increase from May onwards. This correlated with the improving weather conditions and the planning for Messines Ridge attack in June. Death was quite random and was no respecter of rank or privilege, as was the case of Captain John Chamberlain. As Colonel Hayes was on leave, he was commanding 14 W.R, when on 14 May 1917 he was killed by a stray shell. By June, the casualty numbers increased as preparations for the next major offensive began. June's casualties were five officers killed, 34 wounded, and one missing, while 100 ORs were killed, and 582 wounded or missing. In July, and leading up to their attack on the Pilckem Ridge, it increased to 12 officers killed, 41 wounded and two missing. There was also an increase in casualties among O.Rs, with 110 killed, 1,004 wounded and 92 missing. Time spent in the salient could be deadly and as these figures show, as the offensive came closer they increased steadily.

The Strategy behind Third Ypres

Field-Marshal Haig's initial plan proposed to break through the German lines and capture the ridges along the Gheluvelt plateau, and then swing towards Roulers and Thourout and on to the Belgium coast. Haig had to choose an army commander who could prosecute these ambitious plans. General Rawlinson, who had commanded on the Somme, was sent to Ypres for this purpose. General Plumer, the commander of Second Army, had intimate knowledge of the salient, and was already planning an attack on the Messines Plateau. However, he and Rawlinson failed to agree on how to divide the salient between them. Plumer's proposal was to launch an operation that would capture both Pilckem Ridge in the north, and Messines in the south, thus ensuring a small advance east onto the Gheluvelt Plateau. The major drawback arose over the amount of artillery required, as it was decided there was not enough available for two armies attacking at the same time. As a result, the attacks were to be staggered, beginning with Messines in the south.

³⁶ TNA W.O. 339/28175 personal file of Captain John Chamberlain. He was the son of Arthur Chamberlain, who was the brother of Joseph Chamberlain. He was posthumously awarded the M.C.

One of the lessons from the Somme, Arras and Vimy was to marry together the efforts of the infantry with those of the artillery. The message from operations at this stage of the war was that well trained and equipped infantry, combined with the support of massed artillery, could achieve striking success.³⁷ The role of the artillery was seen as the key to success and the scale of the bombardment required was staggering. For example, at Messines, the Second Army had 2,266 guns firing three and half million shells between 26 May and 6 June, and for the opening of Third Ypres this was increased. Altogether, 281 heavy, 718 medium and 2,098 field guns fired four and a half million shells between 16 and 31 July.³⁸ By 'unleashing this unprecedented firepower, artillery might sometimes succeed in breaching an obstacle, yet it almost always created another in the form of devastated terrain'.³⁹ Therefore, the destruction of the ground, combined with the deteriorating weather conditions even before the attack began, was a pointer towards a campaign fought largely in the 'mud'.

Haig had a complicated relationship with the French which made it impossible for him to withdraw British troops from the Somme area to act as a northern reserve. As a result, he accepted the offer of six French Divisions, whose part in the campaign was to prove limited. This was General Anthoine's First Army, which would occupy the north-western sector of the offensive at Ypres. Moreover, it was the French who asked for more time to complete their artillery preparations, which delayed the offensive by another five days. 40 Consequently, what help 'the French Army could bring did not outweigh the disadvantage of waiting for it to deploy'. 41 It has been suggested that Haig was aware of the French mutinies, as he had received information in early June 1917, and this resulted in the constrained use of his ally. Either way, the net result of all these delays, between the attack at Messines and the opening attack at Pilckem Ridge, amounted to six weeks.

³⁷ R. Prior and T. Wilson, *Passchendaele. The Untold Story* (London, 1996), p. 36.

³⁸ Richard Holmes, Army Battlefield Guide, Belgian and Northern France (London, 1995), pp. 122-37.

³⁹ J.B.A. Bailey, *Field Artillery and Firepower* (London, 2004), p. 129.

⁴⁰ General Sir Hubert Gough, Soldiering On (London, 1954), p. 141.

⁴¹ J. A. Terraine, RUSI Journal 1959, Volume CIV. 'Passchendaele and Amiens I', p. 179.

Haig's chose Lieut- General Sir Hubert De la P. Gough as his commander for the offensive. At 47 years old, he was commander of Fifth Army, but was untried and untested in an offensive of this size. General Gough was known as a 'thruster', a man who could get the job done no matter what the difficulty. Like Haig, he was a cavalryman, and was quite ready to oversee the bold nature of the offensive. However, General Gough wrote later:

Haig's instructions to me were very ambitious, considering that I had only four corps with none in reserve. The Fifth Army was to clear the main ridge which dominated Ypres. This stretched in a rough semi-circle of nearly eight miles back to Passchendaele.⁴²

Controversy over exactly how he interpreted his commander-in-chief's wishes followed after the war. Essentially it rested on 'the question of whether the objective of the 1917 offensive was to be a decisive breakthrough or a limited advance aimed at wearing down the enemy is important when measuring its success'. 43

On 2 June 1917, General Gough's Army H.Q, was at Lovie Chateau, just three miles north-west of Poperinghe. His command consisted of four Corps, II Corps (Lieut.-General Jacob), XIX Corps (Lieut.-General Watts), XVIII Corps (Lt. General Maxse) and XIV Corps (Lieut.-General Cavan).⁴⁴ The Welsh Division now transferred from VIII Corps to XIV Corps, joining the Guards Division on 10 June 1917. Lord Cavan was a complete contrast to Lieut.-General Hunter-Weston, and his manner was described by Br.-General Price-Davies, as 'really nice I have known him since the war began he is

⁴² Gough, Soldiering On, p. 140.

⁴³ Andrew Green, Writing the Great War (London, 2003), p. 172.

⁴⁴ Frederick Rudolph Lambert 10th Earl of Cavan, (1865-1946). He was educated Eton, and R.M.C, Sandhurst. He joined Grenadier Guards 1885. He served in the 2nd Boer War. Commanded 4th (Guards) Brigade 1914-15. He commanded the Guards Division from 1915 to January 1916, and was XIV Corps Commander 1916-18, C.I.G.S., 1922-26 and Field Marshal 1932.

always so friendly'. 45 Lieut.-Colonel Price-Jones wrote 'Hunter B departs! & we shall have Cavan which is splendid for us'. 46

The Welsh Division would remain physically in the same position in the line, but the Guards would take over their northern Boesinghe sector. Major General Feilding, G.O.C., the Guards Division, wrote a letter to G.O.C., Welsh Division after taking over these trenches. His remarks concerning the standard of maintenance of the trenches before they were handed over are revealing:

I want to tell you how very pleased we all are at the trenches we have just taken over from your Division. We have never taken over so good, so well kept and so clean. They are an absolute treat and I should be very much obliged if you would congratulate the Brigade from me at the work which the Brigade has done and the cleanliness of the trenches.⁴⁷

Battle Training

An important aspect of training concerned the conferences senior divisional officers attended, where lectures on, and demonstrations of, new methods and techniques of fighting were observed. These events were a good way for officers both in a formal and informal manner to exchange views and experiences. In April 1917, Br.-General Price-Davies recorded that he and the other brigadiers of the Welsh Division went to three such conferences, which were also attended by divisional and corps commanders. Certain officers were sent to Senior Officers Command Courses at Aldershot. These officers would then return to their battalions and take the post of second in command as a means of preparing them for higher command. From March onwards battalions in training were following the

⁴⁵ IWM, Price-Davies, letter to his wife, dated 22 June 1917.

⁴⁶ NAM Lieut.-Colonel Price-Jones Letter number 1785, dated 27 May 1917.

⁴⁷ TNA W.O. 95/2541 War Diary, A & Q Branches 38 (Welsh) Division, dated 30 June 1917.

⁴⁸ TNA W.O. 95/912 XIV Corps General Staff Diary, January to July 1917.

strictures of SS 143, an Official publication for the General Staff, which advocated a 'new organisation and formations in attack'.⁴⁹

In May, during a very hot spell of warm weather, the Welsh Division was informed, that they would take part in the new offensive as an 'assault division'. To be entrusted with such an important operation reveals how much better and more competent they were seen to be by both Corps and Army commanders. Several miles behind the front at St Hilaire, and situated between Enquin and Liettres, was their new training area, where they would carry out their dress rehearsal for the attack. Here a large model of Pilckem Ridge, the size of four tennis courts, had been built by the Welsh battalions who would be attacking this position. Its purpose was to display to officers, N.C.Os' and men the layout of the impending attack, as all the:

hills valleys, streams, houses, roads, woods, trenches etc., were accurately represented by models. Platforms were erected at intervals round it, from which officers could point out to their men the appearance of the area which they would have to traverse during operations.⁵⁰

All the objectives for the divisions were marked out, and each phase of the attack replicated on maps by clearly marked blue, black, green and red lines. The colours of these lines represented the distances to be covered by the advancing troops, with the enemy front line being marked in blue. Each attacking battalion traced out a replica over the ground they would be attacking, for example, 11 S.W.B. built theirs tracing out the area of the Lancashire Farm Sector. All officers and N.C.Os' also visited the sand model of the enemy trenches at St. Sixte; the 11 S.W.B. did so on the 21 July. Flights by observation aeroplanes continually photographed the enemy lines and this, combined with the intelligence gained from prisoners, ensured the replicas and models were kept up to date. The Welsh Guards recorded that

⁴⁹ TNA W.O. 95/2556/1 War Diary, 15 R.W.F, who began this new training on 28 March 1917 at Millam, near Ypres.

⁵⁰ Major F.M. Brewshire D.S.O., M.C., *The History of the Fifty First (Highland) Division 1914-1918* (East Sussex, 1920), p. 196.

⁵¹ TNA W.O. 95/2562 War Diary XI S.W.B., dated 21 July 1917.

these preparations 'had never been seen before by either officers or men, and they created the liveliest of interest':

[T]he large training ground was laid out with a scale representation of the assembly trenches and the enemy lines to be attacked and orders were issued like the real thing, the barrages were represented by flags, and the artillery and engineers took part. The brigade did the whole attack no less than six times.⁵²

Exercises attacking various strong points, on each brigade's own frontage were carried out in order to be familiar with the tasks expected. It was important for soldiers to practise how to, 'find their own objective according to the plan, without any officers taking part in the exercise. The men were also carefully trained in the manner in which each post was to dig itself in during consolidation and how to pile the earth as it was excavated, so that it at no time obscured their field of fire'. ⁵³

Training also allowed the machine-gunners to get used to firing barrages. The creation of a machine-gun barrage over the heads of the advancing men during the early stages of the attack was an important innovation. The machine-gun barrage was expected to work in conjunction with the gunners creeping barrage, and put down harassing fire on enemy positions. Both barrages were an integral part of the defensive screen for the advancing troops. These barrages were not capable of taking out 'Pill Boxes', which would have to be dealt with by the infantry. In the case of S.O.S. rockets being fired, it was the responsibility of the machine-gun teams to respond first. Here lies the beginning of the 'decentralisation of tactics to sergeants and corporals' which would play such an important part in 1918.⁵⁴

⁵² C. H. Dudley Ward D.S.O, M.C, *The History of the Welsh Guards* (London, 1920), p. 149.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 196.

⁵⁴ Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front. The British Army's Art of Attack 1916-18* (London, 1994), p. 22.

The men started training by working as platoons, rather than as companies, as had been the previous practice.⁵⁵ The infantry would now take on and destroy tactical problems such as pill boxes in small groups. As a result, 'the infantry was given as much practical teaching as was possible in the art of attacking established positions'.⁵⁶ Now there was more emphasis was placed on the platoon, the junior officers and senior N.C.O's:

Each platoon was taught that, if it came under the fire of a machine-gun or a pocket of riflemen, it was useless to lie halted in a zone of hostile fire, and that by engaging the point of resistance frontally by one or more sections the remainder under cover of their fire could work round to the flank and overcome it.⁵⁷

Officers and men were encouraged to use their own initiative and to become, 'independent of the need for guidance via the normal communications system for as long as possible, since it would inevitably cease to function reliably or sufficiently responsively for a while once the attack had begun'. ⁵⁸ The concept of fire and movement was fundamental to achieving success, and much relied on the role of the L.G. teams. No longer seen as a replacement for the machine-gun, it was now a specialist weapon in its own right. Great emphasis was laid on its mobility and the necessity of handling it boldly and aggressively. Every L.G. section could bring a heavy and concentrated fire to bear in any direction within a few seconds, and could keep pace with the rifle section during an advance. ⁵⁹ As a result, more training was required to ensure more men were familiar in the use of the L.G. if required, in case of casualties within these teams. However, the equipping of these teams, even as late as 30 July, was

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⁵⁵ This was in line with SS 143, *Instructions for Training of Platoons for Offensive Action*, issued February 1917. The Welsh Division had begun using this new system from the end of March and was quite conversant with the techniques required.

⁵⁶Cuthbert Headlam D.S.O., *The History of the Guards Division in the Great War 1915-1918* (Eastbourne, 1924, republished Naval & Military Press), p. 222.

⁵⁷ Bewsher, 51st (Highland) Division, p. 192.

⁵⁸ Simpson, *Directing Operations*, p. 91.

⁵⁹ Anon, RUSI Journal 1919 Vol. LXIV, 'Infantry Tactics, 1914-1919', p. 462.

deficient by some 340 revolvers, which were the personal arms carried by Lewis and Machinegunners.⁶⁰

Another weapon in the platoon arsenal, and one which required accurate training was the rifle-grenade.⁶¹ Each section of a platoon could now use the rifle-grenade for dealing with the enemy in defensive positions or strong points above ground. The rifle-grenade was sometimes described as the infantryman's 'howitzer'. In combination with the L.Gs, it made the sections and platoons self-contained units. Platoons also practiced using 'bombs' or 'bombers' to deal with 'pill-boxes', fortified farms, houses and any underground dug-outs, provided they could get close enough to throw the bombs in.⁶² These were so well constructed that even a direct hit by some artillery shells often failed to destroy them, so it was necessary for platoons to use these new innovative tactics to capture them. Although the platoon was a small unit in the battalion, it had to become the most important as its role and purpose grew. Peaple is quite right to recognise 'once the battle has begun, tactical control inevitably devolves down to company/section level'.⁶³

Equally important was the work of the Assistant Director Medical Services for the Welsh Division who checked on the health of the men before battle. ⁶⁴ Between 4/6 July, he went to all the infantry battalions of the division to examine men who were considered unfit. ⁶⁵ He was also responsible for the medical staff going forward with the attacking troops, including the provision of stretcher bearers. These men had to ensure a very high degree of fitness for the work, which was both dangerous and very physically demanding. He also had to determine where to set up R.A.Ps, in the newly captured front line. It was there where the first medical assessment was made, and depending on the severity of

⁶⁰ W.O. 95/2544 War Diary, D.A.D.O.S., dated 30 July 1917.

⁶¹ NAM Lt. Colonel Jourdain 3 July 1917. He recorded that while visiting his men on the training area four men of 13 R.W.F, were wounded by a premature burst of a rifle grenade.

⁶² The constructions were called 'pill-boxes' as they resembled the boxes pills were kept in.

⁶³ Simon Peaple, Mud, Blood and Determination The History of the 46th (North Midland) Division in the Great War (Solihull, 2015), p. 127.

⁶⁴ The A.D.M.S., Lt. Colonel Gill who had been posted to India in June 1917 was replaced by Lt. Colonel A. G. Thompson D.S.O, M.C.

⁶⁵ TNA W.O. 95/2543 War Diary, A.D.M.S., Welsh Division, 4-6 July 1917.

the wounds, a decision would be made about casualties who could be sent back to the A.D.S. There would be three A.D.S. allocated to the Welsh Division on or east of the canal bank. The Main Dressing Station was established at Canada Farm and would be the responsibility of 131st Field Ambulance (F.A.).⁶⁶ After their initial treatment the wounded would then be sent on to a Casualty Clearing Station (C.C.S.). Each C.C.S, had the capacity to house 1,000 casualties at any one time, and from there they could be sent to base hospitals in France, or possibly back to the U.K.

The Field Ambulance units of the Welsh Division had to deal with both casualties and sickness in the run up to the attack, as well as moving into their forward positions. They too visited the replicas of the terrain to see their route and the proposed positions of the R.A.Ps'. The 131st F.A., recorded that they had carried out training prior to the attack, but finding a training ground in the immediate vicinity was difficult to obtain, as all the land was under cultivation. However, they 'succeeded in ear-marking a good field – about ½ mile march. Training consisted of route marching, stretcher drills & lectures; 2½ hours close order drill, Company drill & box respirator drill'.67

On 4 July, the Corps Commander visited brigades on the replicas of the trenches, and the following day the divisional commanders attended a Conference at Corps H.Q. A statement of 'General Policy' was recorded, stating the Commander-in-chief was determined to continue an offensive policy and not to "sit and wait for America". Furthermore, as 'the enemy is on the defensive, nowhere has he attempted an offensive of his own, and this is a chance to hit and to hit hard'. Ominously, it stated 'the battle will not be one single operation, but a series, each with an effective preparation, and will continue till the weather renders a further advance impossible'.⁶⁸

The statement highlighted one of the problems experienced by brigades during the Battle of Arras, earlier in the year. During the fighting men 'could not find their battalions, and CO's did not know the

⁶⁶ TNA W.O. 95/2550 War Diary, 131st Field Ambulance, July 1917.

⁶⁷ TNA W.O. 95/2550, War Diary, 131st F.A., 3 July 1917.

⁶⁸ TNA W.O. 95/912, Corps Commander's Conference with Divisional Commanders, (Guards, 29th, 38th Division, G.O.C, H.A.).

positions of their companies'. As a result 'a plan of probable Headquarters should be published in advance, and new Headquarters <u>immediately</u> reported in action'. As a result all supporting and reserve troops were to carry both direction boards and notice boards bearing trench names into the old German lines. They were to be placed in position as soon as possible after the capture of the localities whose name they bear. The positioning of these was proved to be 'invaluable to ration parties and relieving troops'.⁶⁹

The role of liaison between the infantry brigades in the attack was important, and contact with both the Guards on their left and the lead elements of the neighbouring Corps, 51st (Highland) Division on their right, was underlined. This liaison was to be carried out by special parties who were instructed to keep in touch with troops attacking on the flanks.⁷⁰ This was an improvement in operational procedures since the experience of the Welsh Division on the Somme.

An important part of the preparations before a major battle was to recognise the morale of the troops, and to support them. Instructions acknowledged that there will be 'unlucky days', however, 'it is the duty of all to be cheerful'. Above all, 'we must all be out to end the war and to beat the enemy, and to that end we must fight hard and <u>feel</u> that we are winning. This will establish a healthy moral'. More importantly:

[A]ll ranks can rest assured that the most careful preparations for every action will be made. Troops will not be launched into unprepared country. The battle will be fought in stages with pauses to permit of effective preparations for the next advance.⁷¹

The training came to a climax when the whole Welsh Division practised in the field exactly what they had to do on the day of the attack. This took place over two very hot days at the Enquinegatte area (12-

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⁶⁹ TNA W.O. 95/912, Corps Commanders Conference, 5 July 1917, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 6.

13 July), so that any mishaps could be addressed and rectified and improvements made. On Thursday 13 July, zero hour was set at 9.am, and a description of this event gives us some idea of the nature of the training:

the ditches representing our own trenches, and the Creeping barrage of shells was represented by a line of men waving white flags. As this line of flags advanced, the first wave of attacking Infantry came on behind them into and over the German trenches. Behind them came the other waves, such as the Moppers-Up Wave, composed of men detailed to round up prisoners, and the supporting wave. The Infantry Signallers and ourselves laid out our respective telephone wires from Cable Head as we advanced to our forward stations. The stretcher-bearers rehearsed their part, certain men in attacking waves being told of from time to time as (supposed) casualties. The carrying parties brought up supplies of ammunition & water & so on. Here and there small groups of men were representing Banks. The Machine Gunners & Stokes Gunners carried their guns forward from place to place and engaged imaginary targets. Everything was done exactly to time. Pilckem village was captured and the Steenbeek River reached. Here the 115th Infantry Brigade passed through the 113th & 114th Brigades, who had carried the attack to this point. The new Brigade now continued the advance and capture Langemarck and the final objective.⁷²

On 13 July, Lieut.-General Lord Cavan visited the training area and was pleased with what he saw.⁷³ On 16 July, 'Operation Order 107' was issued for the attack on Pilckem Ridge, at which point the infantry brigades moved back to the Proven Area. This consisted of 'two days march of about 30 miles and then a ride in a convoy of lorries before they arrived'. The Welsh Division returned to the front line on the night of 19/20 July, taking over the Zwaanhof sector from the 29th Division. The Welsh D.H.Q., moved into Dragon Camp on 20 July.

⁷² IWM, Lt. H.J. Selby, dated 13 July 1917.

⁷³ IWM Price-Davies, letter to his wife, dated 13 July 1917.

Preliminary Work

There were an increasing number of raids carried out by the Welsh Division on the enemy front line prior to the opening of the offensive, some of which were noteworthy. One such was carried out during the night of 21/22 June. The northern part of the raid was to be carried out by the 15 R.W.F. and the southern part by 13 R.W.F. The northern raid consisted of one officer, 2nd Lieut. Griffith and 28 other ranks of 'D' Company. They were split up into various roles such as blocking parties, to the right and left and clearing parties. The plan was simple and effective, with the party moving out from the trenches prior to the bombardment commencing at 'zero'. The enemy's wire was to be cut by the artillery at the point of entry, and only the flanks and rear of the objective were to be bombarded. The preparation for the raid was sophisticated, and on the day of the raid the position of the enemy's dugouts was confirmed by 'air photographs'. The artillery 18 pounders used shrapnel and 4.5 howitzers laid down the heavy artillery elements. The parties were to enter the enemy's trenches at 'zero', withdraw at 'zero plus 5' and at 'zero plus 15' the bombardment would end. Reconnaissance for this raid was carried out by Lieut. Griffith during the week leading up to it, and observation of the enemy stepped up.⁷⁴

'Zero hour' was designated for 11.30pm and watches synchronised at 9.pm. The wire cutting was successful and the raiders were outside the enemy positions at 'zero.' The German trenches were found to be 'revetted with brushwood and 7 or 8 foot deep'. Knowledge from the aerial photographs allowed the party to go straight to the dugout in the 'supervision trench'. Despite calls to surrender by the party, a fire fight ensured during which the officer leading the party and the senior N.C.O, were wounded. Bombs were thrown in and the 'vicinity became dense with smoke' at which point the 'Shunters Horn' was heard for the men to withdraw. The after-action report stated that three Germans were seen running away, and another about 20 yards away was seen to send up 'Very lights'. The enemy appeared to have bombed his own wire 'well away to the right', and a 'dummy made of sacking was seen on the enemy parapet'. The significant feature was the construction of the enemy dugout as 'it had three layers of concrete slabs on top and had a wooden door.' Though sustaining three wounded, Major Edwards, the acting battalion commander, concluded his report by writing, 'though the men did not

⁷⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2553, Operation Order, No. 51, Appendix. III.

enter the dugout for a second time to obtain identification, there seems no doubt from the determined way in which they got through the enemy wire and the cool way in which they retired bringing with them their wounded, that a strong esprit de corps exists'.

Br.-General Price-Davies stated 'the most pleasing feature of the raid is that the men were taken from a Platoon and not picked from the Company and that they showed such determination'. While commending certain individual officers and N.C.Os' for their actions, he believed 'it was a mistake, for 2nd Lieut. Griffiths and Sergt Williams to become involved in the fight with the Germans in the dugout'.⁷⁵

Prior to the opening of the main offensive, a large number of assembly trenches were dug to accommodate troops just before zero hour. As a result, the line was advancing all along this front in some places to within 200–300 yards of the enemy front line. The 15 W.R. for example, began digging and wiring a new trench as part of the preparatory work as early as 25/26 May. It was within 50 yards of the German trench at 'Caesar's Nose'. Such preparatory work did not go unnoticed by the German artillery which used gas to cause casualties to all battalions engaged in such activity. A later narrative suggested 'the enemy's attention was drawn to these trenches but he did comparatively little firing upon them, and it was thought that he must have considered them as a ruse to try and draw attention from the attack upon Messines–Wytschaete Ridge'. ⁷⁶

From the time the Welsh Division returned to the front line, the noise of the bombardment was often 'very loud and head splitting'. ⁷⁷ Flash spotting by aerial reconnaissance, and the gathering of information from prisoners, failed to assess accurately that the Germans had twice the number artillery

⁷⁵ Ibid. Despite Price-Davies's comments, 2nd Lieut William Henry Griffiths was awarded an M.C. for both his careful reconnaissance before the raid, and his gallantry during the operation. This officer, from Fforestfach near Swansea, was wounded on the raid and died on 5 July 1917. He was 23 years of age and was buried at Mendighem Military Cemetery, Proven, Belgium.

⁷⁶ TNA W.O. 95/2540 War Diary, 38th (Welsh) Division, July 1917, Narrative of the Attack on Pilckem Ridge by the 38th (Welsh) Division.

⁷⁷ NAM Lt. Colonel Jourdain Diary dated, 21 July 1917.

batteries present than was realised. As a result, enemy artillery was not subdued by counter-battery fire in the run up to the assault. This failure was due more to the impossible conditions under which the field survey was carried out, rather than its organisation.⁷⁸

One of the new weapons developed by the Germans at this time was mustard gas. Brig. General Marden wrote 'the preparations for the battle entailed very heavy work in carrying trench mortar ammunition up to the front line, through the deep, narrow, and often slippery communication trenches, and the enemy did his best to interfere with our night activities by heavy bursts of shelling both with H.E., and with his mustard gas, the presence of which was difficult to detect'. Mustard gas was delivered by shells and caused a great deal of interference to the plans for the coming offensive. The British gas mask of the period was effective but gas vaporizing from shells could take many hours to disperse, making it difficult to work without the protection of the mask. So serious was the problem that Fifth Army suffered over fifteen thousand casualties in the three weeks preceding the offensive.

On 26 July, at a conference at Dragon Camp, Lord Cavan informed all senior officers of the Welsh Division that the offensive had been put off from 28 to 31 July. He stated that the Army Commander had yielded to a request from the French for a three day postponement, but that would be the last. Both the Guards and Welsh Division now had their suspicions confirmed from R.F.C, reports on 27 July, which indicated the Germans had evacuated their forward trenches. As a result, both the 15 R.W.F. and 15 W.R. were instructed to find two platoons for the task of carrying out a forward reconnaissance. Although some of the front line trenches were empty, both the support and reserve lines as well as the German second line trenches between Cactus Junction and Cactus Point were strongly held. On the Guards Division front they were more fortunate, as the enemy had retired,

⁷⁸ Peter Chasseaud, 'Field Survey in the Salient: Cartography and Artillery Survey in the Flanders Operations 1917', *Passchendaele in Perspective, The Third Battle of Ypres* (Barnsley, 1997), p. 123.

⁷⁹ Marden, Welch Regiment, p. 413.

⁸⁰ TNA W.O.95/2550, War Diary, 131st Field Ambulance, July 1917.

⁸¹OH, Military Operations, 1917, Volume 2, p. 137.

⁸² NAM Lt Colonel Jourdain, diary entry for 26 July 1917.

without orders, and as a result they were able to establish their front-line east of the Canal.⁸³ This gave them an unopposed crossing of the canal when the offensive was launched.

The final movement forward of the Welsh Division was by 113th and 114th Inf. Bdes, who were leading the attack. The 115th Inf. Bde was the follow-up brigade. Their movement forward was also done in three stages. First they moved to the Corps Staging Area, then on to the Concentration Area. For 11 S.W.B. the third move was from Dublin Camp marching to the Assembly Point, which took them 4½ hours, and by 2.30am on 31 July they were in position on the canal bank. ⁸⁴ Progress was slower than expected due to heavy rain, which had created a sea of mud, and a mist that had come down obscuring the route forward.

The Role of the Royal Engineers and Pioneers

The responsibility to provide the wooden bridges and pontoons to cross the Canal was that of the C.R.E., Lieut.-Colonel Phillpotts. Eleven were floating foot bridges which could be thrown across the obstacle in minutes. Eight were of a more permanent type which had to be planned, supervised and put into position during the attack. It was essential they were not moved forward or constructed too early, as the enemy artillery fire could destroy them. To illustrate how important these bridges were, a report from a patrol revealed 'a considerable increase in the depth of the water in the canal has been noticed. Whether this is due to rain or to some act of the enemy is not yet clear'. The problem created by an 'increased depth of water and the mud on the banks has made the crossing of the canal very difficult. In places water and mud were so deep that raiding parties on the night 19/20 were unable to cross'.85

One company of the 19 (P) W.R. began its training in early June for the construction of light railways, while another made 'bridging mats' to assist troops with water obstacles. From the 20 July until the

⁸³ Randall Nicol, *'Till the Trumpet Sounds: The Scots Guards 1914-1919 in Their Own Words Volume* 2 (Solihull, 2016), p. 168.

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⁸⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2562 War Diary XI S.W.B. 29 – 31 July 1917.

⁸⁵ TNA W.O. 95/912 XIV War Diary, Corps General Staff Summary, for week ending 20 July 1917, p.3.

offensive began, the battalion would be employed in the repair and maintenance of communication trenches. ⁸⁶ The 'Sappers' also carried out maintenance of the existing tramways system and its extension, and the creation of ammunition dumps. There were also dumps containing engineering equipment, as well as rations and water. During the attack the engineers managed to make two roads and a tramway to the captured enemy position, through two and half miles of Flanders mud which was waist deep in places. ⁸⁷ These tramways were extremely important to take men and materials forward, as well as evacuating the wounded. The tramways facilitated the removal of stretcher cases by wheeled trolleys, which reduced the number of stretcher bearers required while also making the journey more efficient and comfortable for the treatment of the seriously wounded. ⁸⁸

The emphasis was to keep the front as normal as possible for as long as possible, so that all the work of the engineers was hidden from the prying eyes of the Germans. ⁸⁹ There was also the question of providing accommodation for troops, which resulted in a great deal of ingenuity by the R.Es' who made a long tunnels with bunks, for several hundred yards inside the western bank of the canal, for the reserve troops. ⁹⁰ A different aspect of the engineer's role was the use of the 'Special Brigade', which was based at Helfaut, and provided the Corps with two 'Special Companies'. One was to supply the projectors and the other heavy mortars. Their task was to catapult the, 'forms of frightfulness' in the shape of barrels filled with inflammable liquid set on fire by thermite drums. Both were to be launched at the enemy position just prior to the assault. ⁹¹ On a map produced by XIV Corps for 11 July, the oil drums are shown targeted at several forward locations. The first area was from Pilckem Mill to Telegraph House, encompassing Candle Trench. The second area was to the east of Villa Gretchen, along the railway line, and a much smaller area on the boundary of the Welsh and Guards Division. The last area targeted was north of Bois Farm in a large square area encompassing Artillery Wood,

⁸⁶ TNA W.O. 95/2548/2 War Diary, 19 (P) W.R. July 1917.

⁸⁷ I.W.M 85/51/1 Lieut.-Colonel Phillpotts private papers; extract of a letter to the parents of Lt. Col Phillpotts from Major-General C.G. Blackader dated 15 September 1917.

⁸⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2549 War Diary, 129th Field Ambulance, July – August 1917.

⁸⁹ During the work 151st Field Company R.E., lost its commanding Officer Major John McMurtie, who was from Bath. For further information see W.O. 339/56927.

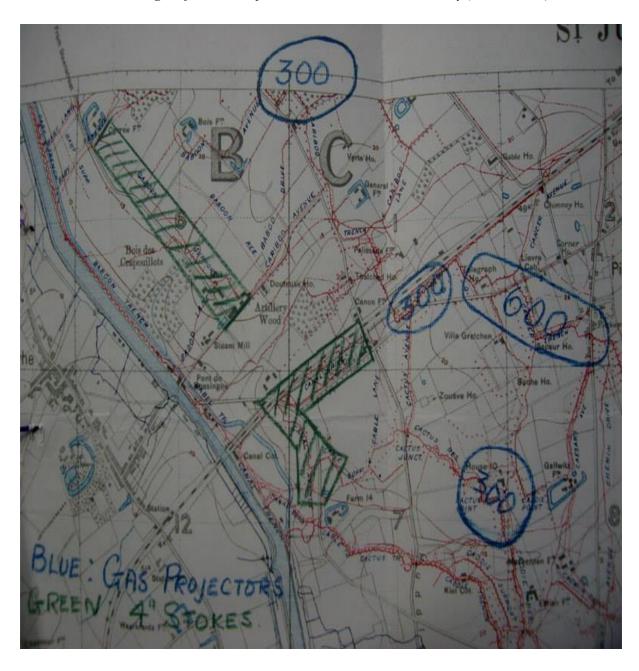
⁹⁰ Marden, Welch Regiment, p. 411.

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 4.

across the divisional boundary of the Ypres–Staden railway line between the Guards and the Welsh Division as far as Cable Lane. The Gas Projectors also roughly targeted the same areas with oil drums, including Cactus Point. The 4 inch stokes mortars were targeting on an 'L' shaped line, with its base running from Farm 14 west to the railway embankment, and then north as far as Canon Farm. This combined with the general bombardment conjures up a picture of medieval savagery. (see Map. 5)

5. Map showing the northern edge of the Welsh Divisional Front (W.O. 95/2540)

Note the intended targets of the Gas Projectors and Stokes Mortars on 'Z' Day (W.O. 95/2540)



The Divisional Artillery

The contribution of the Divisional Artillery was essential to the success of operations. From its arrival in the salient it had set up a number of forward observation posts where officers and men were employed watching the enemy. Each of these posts was in or near the front line and a great deal of time and energy was used to ensure that each of these posts was expertly camouflaged. However, the Germans had the advantage of higher ground, and very little could be seen behind their front lines without powerful binoculars. ⁹² At distance these observers could no longer identify targets, and the artillery bombardments had to use either 'sound ranging' or 'map based air photographs'. By May 1917, Lieut. Selby commented:

I have been firing a few shots at some screening near Pilckem Mill & have exposed some new concrete. It is very strange sitting in an O.P. like this all day & watching what appears at first sight to be a deserted stretch of country; one can hardly realise at times that there are whole battalions of Germans hidden in that innocent-looking slope & that whenever you walk about in the open; you are being watched by enemy observers.⁹³

Another aspect of preparation was the laying down of practice creeping-barrages over enemy lines and support areas. This was carried out at different times and on different days, and varied in the type of artillery used. With each of these barrages, there was a growing intensity in scale culminating in a practice barrage along the whole Army front on the 28 July 1917.⁹⁴ The oil or gas projectiles were not used in these practice barrages. The projectiles contained liquid gas and had a range of 1,200 yards, breaking on landing to create a 'gas cloud almost immediately.'95 The use of these projectiles in large numbers on the day of the attack on Pilckem Ridge was both effective and spectacular.

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⁹² IWM, Diary of Lt. Selby, diary dated 24 November, 1916.

⁹³ Ibid. dated 10 May, 1917.

⁹⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2540 War Diary, Welsh Division, dated 28 July 1917.

⁹⁵ IWM, Lt. Selby diary dated 8 June 1917.

'The Other Side of the Hill' - The German Position

The impact on the Germans of the capture of the Messines Ridge by General Plumer's 2nd Army was a psychological shock. Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, the commander of forces facing the British in Belgium, was convinced there would be follow-up attacks. As a result, and in consultation with General Erich Ludendorff, they appointed Colonel Fritz von Lossberg as 4th Army Chief of Staff, to report on the defences in the Ypres area. General Sixt von Armin, the Fourth Army commander, knew the Colonel from their time together on the Somme and allowed him a free hand. Lossberg had a 'tireless energy and his tremendous drive for getting things done were not diminished; and corps and divisional commanders who served with him state that few men could have inspired such confidence'. 96 Both men worked together to create their 'abwehrschlacht': a defensive battle area in which they could fight the British.

The Lossberg system of elastic or flexible methods of defence replaced defensive lines with zones. The concept was to concede ground when necessary, doing so in a measured way and falling back to a fighting zone. Support would consist of counter-attacking divisions known as 'Eingreif', who would then be brought forward to engage vulnerable points. Above all, Lossberg emphasised that front line commanders should have the freedom and authority to respond quickly to local threats and opportunities.

For Lossberg it was not difficult to see there were signs of a British build-up across the Ypres salient. A major indicator was the increase in new roads and railway construction behind the area to be attacked. This, coupled with the building of new gun sites, new encampments, and the digging of new communications trenches, were observed. There was an increase in radio transmissions and a failure to restrict unnecessary messages relating to the material build up of supplies. In the air, there was an increase in the number of balloons for air observation, and the fight for air supremacy by the R.F.C., intensified significantly. This directly influenced the pace at which the Germans moved reinforcements

⁹⁶ Captain G. C. Wynne, *If Germany Attacks. The Battle in Depth in the West* (London, 1940, reprinted USA, 1976), p. 284.

⁹⁷ Headlam, The History of the Guards Division, Vol 1, p. 227.

around the Flanders front and, more importantly, where they were to be positioned. The defensive preparations were described as 'frenzied', the unknown factor for the Germans was the date of the opening of the attack.⁹⁸

The 'Ypres Group' in the centre was the responsibility of the III Bavarian Army Corps under General Freiherr von Stein. It covered the proposed British XIV Corps area of attack on the Pilckem Ridge. In early 1917, the Germans had two lines of defence, one behind the front line and a second line which ran along the reverse slope of Pilckem Ridge, known as the 'Albrecht Line'. This area now became known as the 'Forward Battlezone'. The old third line of defence was a further 2,000 yards back, and starting behind Langemarck and running south behind St Julien. This was now the 'Wilhelm Line' and the area in front was now the 'Greater Battlezone'. In between these first two zones was the river Steenbeek, which by the time of the attack had become an extended bog and a real obstacle. By mid-July this extended defensive network was near completion, and between the first and second systems Lossburg had scattered machine-gun posts and gun positions. Behind this system there was an increase in the number of field guns to support the front line troops.

The basis of the German defensive system was their ability to assess the situation in order to commit their reserves and launch an effective counter-attack. Lossberg was promoted to Major General the day after the attack, for his organisation of the 'Flandern Position'. His conduct of the defensive battle from 31 July 1917 onwards has been regarded as a 'masterpiece of the artist in war'. 99

The German Front Line

Physically, it was almost impossible to dig underground in Flanders, unlike on the Somme. Therefore, the Germans had constructed large numbers of concrete pill boxes and blockhouses above ground. These were sited either individually or arranged in groups to give mutual support. The scale of this enterprise across the German front lines was enormous and in the Ypres salient it has been estimated

⁹⁸ Jack Sheldon, *The German Army at Passchendaele* (Barnsley, 2007), p. xii.

⁹⁹ Wynne, If Germany Attacks, p. 302.

that the number of concrete constructions totalled over 2,000.¹⁰⁰ When the Welsh Division began its advance the complexity of this defence work grew as each and every one of them became strong points to be overcome. This was the meaning of defence in depth and was the reason for the individual training that platoons of the Welsh Division had given before the attack on Pilckem Ridge.¹⁰¹

The smaller pill boxes were difficult for the artillery to destroy owing to their low elevation and the use of camouflage, however the bombardment had 'resulted in the exposure of many concrete dug-outs'. 102 The Germans also used existing farm buildings and, by heavily reinforcing them with concrete, they had turned them into strong points. The farms had concrete cellars where troops could take cover during bombardments. There were large amounts of barbed wire placed in front and to the sides of these emplacements, to add to the difficulties of the attacking infantry. This interlocking system of defence, created within the 'battle-zone', required a great deal of skilful outflanking and courage to overcome. These buildings provided shelter and served as focal points in the defensive position. However, smoke screens, mists and darkness turned the advantage to the attacking troops. The British attack began at 3.50am, which was just before sunrise. During the bombardments these concrete buildings were prone to sink in the waterlogged ground surrounding them, which could trap the men inside.

The German artillery during this period fired mainly at night into the British rear area. At dawn they concentrated on the British front, support and communication trenches, and much of this bombardment contained 'mustard gas shells'. The British raids just before the attack had been looking for 'signs of evacuation by the enemy from his front line system and culminated on the 27 July, when they were found to have retired – probably to Pilckem Ridge'. ¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Peter Oldham, *Pill Boxes on the Western Front* (Barnsley, 2011), p. 39.

¹⁰¹ Peter Barton, *Passchendaele Unseen Panoramas of the Third Battle of Ypres* (London, 2007), p. 193.

¹⁰² TNA W.O. 95/2548/4 War Diary, 176th M.G.C., 5 June 1917.

¹⁰³ TNA W.O. 95/912 XIV Corps, p. 1.

Pilckem Ridge, first objective of XIV Corps, was on a spur which runs north-east off from the main Menin Ridge, behind which is the valley of the Steenbeek. The main town is Langemarck, the furthest point of the Corps' front objective. However, all this area was overlooked by the Passchendaele Ridge. The architecture of defence was the pill box, the blockhouse, the barbed wire, the strong points, and the current German philosophy was to fight the battle where they were strongest. In this case it would be along the line running in front of Langemarck covering the Steenbeek River.

British Intelligence

On 30 June, the contents of a letter written on 4 June, by a German soldier of the 80th Reserve Division stated that his division 'had very heavy casualties in the Arras –Loos sector, several companies came out with only 40/50 men'. The report also indicated his division was now in the Boesinghe sector and that it 'contains a large proportion of young recruits whose fighting value is not high.' As this was opposite the Welsh Division it was deemed useful information and passed on.

There can be little doubt the General Staff was aware the Germans were changing their defensive plans. A document captured in April 1917 revealed the change in 'German Tactics' and the 'regimental sector of the 3rd Bavarian Division shows increased organisation in the depth.' On 2 July aerial observation identified a new belt of wire, west and south west of Langemarck area near the railway line and provided a photograph. This information was important for the Welsh Division as this was on the west side of its ultimate objective on the opening day of the attack. As a result, further investigations was made and on the night 3/4

 104 TNA W.O. 157/212 Summary of Intelligence, 30 June 1917.

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¹⁰⁵ Further investigation found that this was not the case as he was captured elsewhere but it does gives an impression of how fluid the intelligence picture could be and also the problems of assessing its accuracy.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. Summary of Intelligence, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ TNA W.O. 157/212, 3 July 1917.

July a raid took place on XIV Corps front between the Ypres and Pilckem road by the canal bank south of the Ypres – Staden railway line. The raid found the front trench unoccupied in each case, and 'the trenches badly damaged and in the latter case practically obliterated, while in the former case there was wire in the trench at one point'. It also revealed 'the support trench at the Pilckem road was unoccupied, but the Canal support concrete dug-outs were found to be occupied by the enemy'. It confirmed the new belts of wiring in the Langemarck area, and was 'to provide obstacles in unexpected places as they show a tendency to follow the line of hedges, tracks and roads, probably to a view of concealment'. 108

Lossberg's defensive system should have now been clear to the planners from these summaries. The German close range artillery batteries 'were now being withdrawn and moved back being converted into field batteries so as not to be overrun by the attacking infantry which had happened at Arras'. The enemy defences in front of the Welsh Division, south of Stray and Rudolph Farms, were being reinforced with wire defences. And to the east of Stray Farm, along the hedge to Jolie Farm, small shelters or huts were identified by photographs. On the east of the Welsh Divisional front, between Villa Gretchen and Zouave House going westward 'there was an increase in wiring operations'. 109

This supported the suggestion the rear lines or what the Germans called the 'Stutzpunktline', had considerable work completed, especially on the Langemarck – Gheluvelt line. A new trench was found, and 'a considerable amount of wire has been put up, especially along the Steenbeek and around Langemarck.' The arrival of the German 23rd Reserve Division was reported on 11 July, being in 'reserve round Langemarck in bivouacs and in the ruins of

¹⁰⁸ TNA W.O. 157/212, S of I, 5 July 1917.

¹⁰⁹ TNA W.O. 157/212, S of I, 7 July 1917.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

houses.' It indicated the relieving pattern of the regiments in this division in the line was every five days.¹¹¹

The Germans also heavily reinforced the wire defences from Pilckem to Iron Cross, and in front of the farms on the Welsh Divisional front. One report stated, 'the enemy's front line and support trenches immediately west of the Pilckem road are in bad condition, but very few dugouts have been destroyed' probably because they were 'made of concrete and hold 4 to 9 men'. The Germans, were keeping small sectors of the front trench in the neighbourhood of the dugouts in sufficient repair, and strongly held. This was confirmed by prisoners, who reported the "Stutzpunktline" in this area was, on the whole, in good condition, even though in 'places much damaged by our shelling'. 112

A prisoner from the 100 Res. Grenadier Regiment (23rd Res. Division) provided intelligence regarding the approach route used from Langemarck to the front lines. This also included the route taken for the supply of arms being brought into the Langemarck sector, and identified the epaulettes of the regiments in this division. Information continued to come in from prisoners indicating there were two regiments in the line on the 18 July, with one in reserve, with a further reserve battalion between Langemarck and Poelcappelle. More prisoners of this division stated they had been issued with 10-15 rounds of armour piercing ammunition each for use against tanks. As for the morale of the 23rd Division, it appeared to be deteriorating owing to the shelling. Prisoners thought a heavy attack by the British was 'expected any day and the men do not think they will be able to hold their present positions in the face of it'. ¹¹³

¹¹¹ TNA W.O. 157/212 S of I, 11 July 1917.

¹¹² TNA W.O. 157/212 S of I, 12 July 1917.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Organisation of the Attack

The progress of the events, leading up to 'Z day' had to be carefully choreographed so that the plans reflected the positions of the divisions waiting to attack. The movement of these divisions into the forward areas prior to the attack was critical as the more time spent in the front line increased the casualty rate on the one hand, and reduced their chances of success on the other. The policy was laid down very early, 'as it is not proposed to relieve Divisions in the line after very short tours'. It was considered if the troops were be asked to 'fight longer then in compensation they could rest longer'. 114

The 'battle for the mastery of the air' was to maintain the secrecy of the build-up to the attack. Even as late as Saturday 28 July, General Trenchard reported to Haig, that the day before the R.F.C., had experienced fighting which was 'most severe.' Another important phase was locating exactly where the German artillery was sited, so that it could be destroyed. Counter-battery work by all Corps had to be carried out to achieve this aim, however, 'XIV Corps has been ordered to ease off until all its guns are in and the French are ready to co-operate with their full power'. This may explain why both Guards and Welsh Division's positions were so heavily bombarded in the days prior to the battle commencing.

The Welsh Division Plan of Attack

XIV Corps' plan of attack put the Welsh Division on the right next to the boundary with XVIII Corps, and 51 (Highland) Division, with the Guards Division, on its left. Essentially the objectives for 'Z' day were determined by a series of bounds identified by coloured lines drawn on a map. (see Map. 6) The first bound was the blue line, the second the black line, the third the green line and the fourth the green dotted line. And when, 'these have been secured Cavalry patrols will be pushed forward to reconnoitre the red line. All ground gained by the Cavalry would then be taken over by the Reserve Infantry Brigade of the Division'. ¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ TNA W.O. 95/912 Corps Commanders Conference, p.6.

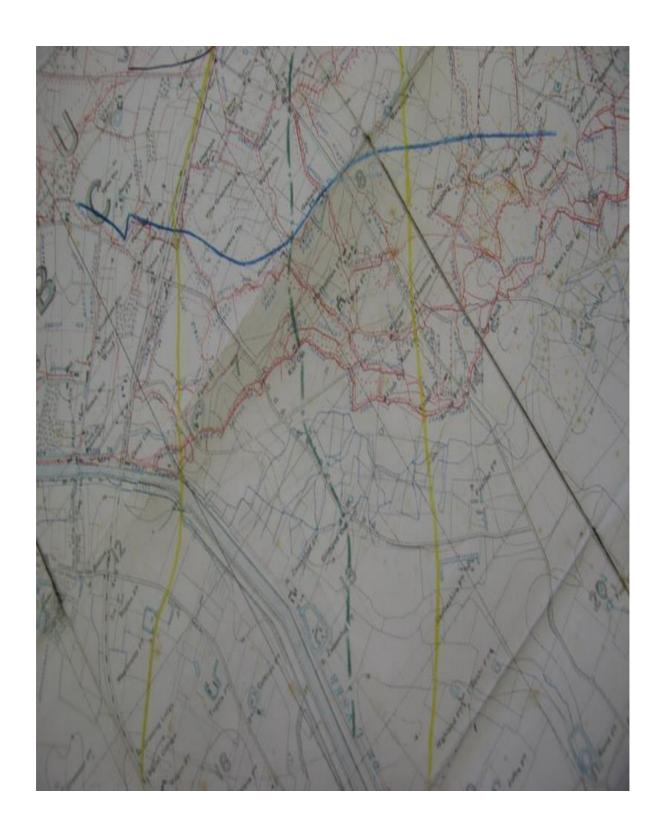
¹¹⁵ Douglas Haig, War Diaries and Letters, p. 305.

¹¹⁶ TNA W.O. 95/520 Fifth Army Operation Order No7, appendix 8.

¹¹⁷ TNA W.O. 95/2540 Operation Order, Nos.107.

<u>Map showing the Blue Line of the attack on Pilckem Ridge (W.O. 95/2540)</u>

Map showing the Blue Line with the Green dash dot line indicating the centre line between attacking brigades. The Yellow Lines show the boundaries of the adjoining divisions. The Red lines show the German Front line on day of the attack.



The infantry of the Welsh Division would be lined up with the 114th Inf. Bde attacking on the right, and the 113th Inf. Bde on the left. Both brigades were to employ half-battalions at various stages of the assault. After the first objective was achieved, all the subsequent objectives were to be achieved by the following half-battalions. The fewer men moving forward, capturing and consolidating would allow the follow up battalions to continue the assault. These 'leap-frog' tactics had been part of the training period prior to the battle, and offered fewer targets during the attack. Various strong points would be established as they advanced. On the Blue Line, 114th Inf. Bde would use an enclosure on the west side and Gallwitz Farm, while 113th Inf. Bde would use House 10 and Zouave House. On the Black Line 114th Inf. Bde would use Jolie Farm and another enclosure, and 113th Inf. Bde would use an enclosure marked by 'P' on the map of 'Pilckem' and Telegraph House. On the Green Line, there were only map references and had no names for the objectives, and these would be held by platoons and sections of RE's.

The 115th Inf. Bde was in reserve with the RE and Pioneer battalion, with objectives on the 'Green Line'. The Brigade was instructed to gradually follow up behind the two leading Inf. Bdes and arrive on the German Front Line at zero plus three hours and at the Black Line at zero plus four hours. It would later try to make its H.Q., on the line of the Steenbeek at 'Au Bon Gite'.

Meanwhile the 113th and 114th Inf. Inf. Bdes would adopt the following dispositions, with two battalions holding the Green Line and ground between the Black and Green lines. One battalion was designated to hold the Black line and 'German 2nd Line system'. Another battalion would be 'disposed behind Candle–Cancer Trench in Brigade Reserve. Consolidation of objectives at various points was to be made and then held as points of resistance'. These included the line from Jolie Farm, through Candle Trench, Cancer Trench, to Telegraph House. The eastern bank of the Steenbeek was to be held.

The operation order fully accepted that forward units would be subject to counter-attacks and by creating an outpost line as a line of consolidation it was seen as the best form of defence. 'Cruciform posts' were to be established providing support fire prior to a continuous trench line being established. Strict instructions were given regarding troops on their flanks even if the unit on the flank was held up

'on no account' should this 'check their advance'. They were instructed to form, 'defensive flanks', and 'assist by enfilade fire the troops held up and press forward so as to envelope the point of resistance which is holding up the attack'. Closely following the barrage was the key to the advance and it was very important for the infantry to follow it as closely as possible. If any "nest" of Germans were missed they were to be dealt with by reserves.

The artillery would lay down of two types of barrage: the 'standing' and the 'creeping' barrage. The standing barrage was held at a position at some point in front of the lines and would be concentrated on the area. The creeping barrage moved in front of the troops at a pace that was supposed to coincide with the infantry advance. The barrage would first concentrate 'on the German front line for six minutes', then the barrages would be laid on to each objective in the German second line system. This was to allow the leading lines of infantry to move as the 'Ordinary lifts are made by 100 yds every four minutes'. Once the barrage lifted the infantry would move into the German line that the artillery barrage had just cleared. Moreover:

Protective barrages are formed on all hostile trenches within 400 yards of an objective, otherwise 200 yards beyond each objective. These barrages will sweep and search. These barrages will become intense 30 seconds before the advance from the BLUE, BLACK and GREEN LINES.

The whole question of the timing of the artillery bombardment required 'halts' at various points. The purpose was to give the infantry time to be catch up and be ready for the next move, and as a result, it was 'decided that the halt at the blue line will be approximately ½ hour', and again 'on the black line one hour for XIV Corps'. The pause of the Green line would be short, 'probably 15 minutes to ½ hour, when fresh troops will be pushed through with orders to gain as much ground as possible within the limits of the pink line, under a barrage of heavy artillery.' The co-ordination of the plan on the boundary between the British and French forces resulted in XIV Corps having to adjust its timetable.

¹¹⁸ TNA W.O. 95/912 Notes on a Conference at Lovie Chateau, on 19 June 17, Fifth Army H.Q.

Therefore, both the Guards and the Welsh Division operation orders and the timings were different from the rest of Fifth Army.

Smoke barrages were part of the artillery support to the infantry and as Zero Hour was 3.50am in the morning it was hoped this would cause a great deal of confusion for the Germans. Equally at Zero plus 3 minutes there would be a discharge of oil drums from gas projectors on the German 2nd Line system covering an area from Chemin Drive and Telegraph House, Canal Drive and Cariboo Trench to near Telegraph House. (see Map. 7)

All the barrages would be laid down at various intervals after 'Zero hour', so that timings could be followed, for example, when the Green line was captured, 'at Zero plus 4 hours 10 minutes', it would allow certain artillery brigades to move forward to their next position. This would be done by the divisional artillery. Heavy artillery would be remain available to the divisional commander after Zero and unlike Mametz Wood the year before, he now had control of the artillery element of his own during the attack.

The significance of all the training during the period at the replica grounds comes into focus regarding the machine-gun barrage instructions. Their role was divided into two parts; one was to support Corps and divisional barrages, and the other to accompany the infantry brigades. The concept of this barrage was ruthless in its application, as it consisted of sixty machine-guns laying their barrage five hundred yards beyond the artillery barrage. They were to be divided into three groups, two groups maintaining fire and the third moving forward. Any S.O.S. signal would indicate an enemy counter-attack was in progress and would take the form of 'a coloured rifle grenade bursting into red and green lights.'

The role of the Royal .Eengineers was two-fold as they made preparations prior to the attack in order to provide pontoons to cross the canal. 119 They had to construct and erect the 'Cactus Pontoon Bridge' at 'Zero plus 2 hours.' Similarly smaller pontoons had to be built and erected at various points during the

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¹¹⁹ 38th Divisional R.E. consisted of 123rd, 124th, and 151st Field Companies.

initial assault. They also used 'Belgian mats' which were five foot wide, 750 long and made of wire netting with a canvas cover and was used successfully in crossing muddy ponds. Some of these 'roll mats' were handed over to the Guards on their arrival on the Canal, who used them successfully in the period before the offensive begun. ¹²⁰ Equally, the tramways had to be extended to the new forward positions and this was scheduled to be done 3 hours after 'Z hour'. While the 123 Field Company was being used to create strong points on the Blue and Black lines, 124 Field Company was to do the same thing on the Green line. The 19 (P) W.R., worked under the supervision of the R.Es' on these projects. One company 'was to work on the Corps light railway, while two will take pack mules forward at Zero plus 2 hours to Kiel Cot., Pilckem Mill, and Iron Cross.' The use of pack mules in bringing large supplies of ammunition forward was a great asset, and reduced the number of men required. The 151 Field Coy was to be held in reserve on 'West Canal Bank' ready to move forward as and when required.

The final two points, of the seven page operation order, related to the role of contact aeroplanes and liaison between divisions. It was anticipated 9 Squadron R.F.C., they would fly over the line at various times to observe 'white' flares from the leading troops. This would take place over the Blue Line at Zero plus 1 hour, then over the Black Line at Zero plus 2 hours 25 minutes. By Zero plus 4 hours 20 minutes, they would fly over the Green Line, and the Green Dotted Zero at plus 5 hours 40 minutes. Flights would be made over the Line of the Steenbeek between 1-30 pm and 4 pm and up to 8 pm. ¹²¹ Advancing troops were expected to be able to recognise the planes by 'two rectangular flags on the fuselage'. ¹²² The visual recognition of aircraft during the heat of the battle, with the intensity of the shelling and the numerous flares from the enemy, was difficult. Pigeons had been used successfully in previous battles, but were not without problems. Runners despite their gallant efforts were often, even if successful, subject to a time delay. Visual signalling was still being used, but was prone to all the problems associated with an open battlefield. The final method used to improve the communication system was to send forward wireless sets. One set was designated to go forward with 113th Inf. Bde, to its final position, in the neighbourhood of 'Iron Cross'. This was to serve both 113th and 114th Inf.

¹²⁰ Headlam, *History of the Guards*, pp. 228-9.

¹²¹ TNA W.O. 95/2540 Op Order 107, p.6.

¹²² TNA W.O. 95/912 Corps Commanders Conference, pp. 3-4.

Bdes. A second set, was to be dismantled at Welsh Harp and manhandled to 'Iron Cross' and join 115th Inf. Bde. It was hoped 'during the time the Cavalry are reconnoitring the Red Line, this set will be erected at the bridgehead at Au Bon Gite, where it will establish communication with a set at Huddersfield Road, the Inf. Bde Headquarters'. ¹²³ Once 115th Inf. Bde 'forward station 'was established, it was expected to link up with the set at 'Iron Cross', and create a direct line back to Welsh D.H.Q., These sets required signallers, and but also a four man carrying party to transport them, not an easy task during the midst of battle, especially as this equipment was fragile, and the ground muddy and cratered. The whole 'Operation Order' gives an insight into how the planning was, and what was expected of the Welsh Division.

The Battle of Pilckem Ridge - 'Flandernschacht'

Pilckem Ridge was fourteen metres above the Canal Bank, the starting point of the attack, and five metres above the highest point in the divisional lines. The Welsh Division attacked with 114th Inf. Bde on the right, with the 10 W.R. (Lieut.-Colonel G. F. Brooke) and 13 W.R. (Major G. S. Brewis) leading the attack. On the left side of the line, 113th Inf. Bde attacked with 13 R.W.F. (Lieut.-Colonel R. O. Campbell) and 16 R.W.F. (Major Hankin). The 16 R.W.F. were in the front line, and instructed to 'side-slip' to the left, to allow the 13 R.W.F. to move into their old positions by 10.30pm, with final dispositions and bayonets fixed at 12.30am (on 31 July). Trench mortars and machine-guns moved into their positions at 9.30pm. The 14 R.W.F., (Major Wheldon) and 15 R.W.F. moved into their 'Assembly trenches' at 10.30pm without any difficulties. Many of the pontoons had been smashed but 15 R.W.F. found one at '6 Z which was still crossable' and the battalion was across and in position by 2.30am. ¹²⁴ Price-Davies found his 'new dugout made for a double battalion H.Q. was nearly knee deep in water'. Some of the troops had been in the trenches for two nights already, and although wearisome they were anxious to get started. The day, when it came was overcast and drizzling with the odd shower. All three infantry brigades of the Welsh Division reported their dispositions, complete by 2.54 am. ¹²⁵ The

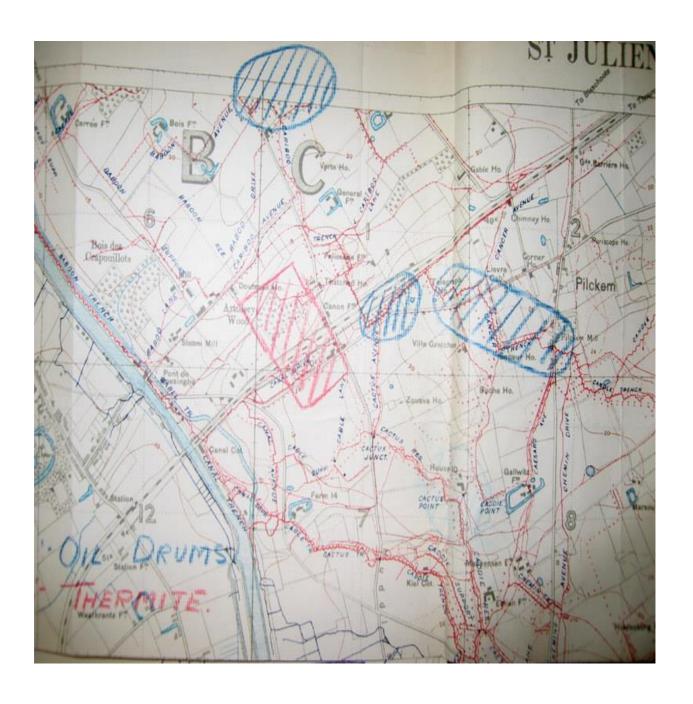
¹²³ IWM, Amendment to Operating Instruction No.4 dated 16 July 1917.

¹²⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2556/1 War Diary 15th R.W.F., 31 July 1917.

¹²⁵ TNA W.O. 95/2540 War Diary 38th Division, 31 July 1917.

barrage & bombardment opened at 3.30 am, 'with a beautiful display of burning oil drums & some other fearful forms of frightfulness'. 126

6. Map showing target of the 'fearful forms of frightfulness' at Pilckem Ridge on 'Z' Day (W.O. 95/2540)



 $^{^{\}rm 126}\,\rm IWM$ Price Davies, letter to his wife dated 31 July1917.

With the 3.50 am 'Zero hour' the night 'proved to be very dark at the time and some difficulty was experienced in keeping direction, in spite of the excellence of the barrage'. Every officer had a compass bearing and this was the only reliable method of advance. Except for a few trees it was very hard to pick up landmarks, as the whole country presented a dull brown aspect'. When the whistles blew, the men of the Welsh Division moved forward behind the creeping artillery barrage. On the 114th Inf. Bde front the 'Hindenburg Farm' caused 10th W.R., some casualties, so they captured it, despite it being in Highland Division's area. The movement forward to the 'Blue Line' met with little resistance, other than 'some opposition from enemy snipers and machine-guns, which caused a few casualties. This opposition was felt mainly on the left'. 128(see Map 8)

At 5.22 am the F.O.O. confirmed that the 'Blue Line' was captured after very hard fighting, although hostile artillery fire had been limited. 129 Now began the process of mopping up pockets of resistance and consolidation, before the leap-frogging support battalions made their way forward. Despite a few casualties 15 R.W.F. was passed 'with the bn still in good formation'. As these battalions moved forward to the Black line, the resistance began to 'stiffen on the right but not on the left'. As expected the 13 R.W.F. began to encounter strong machine-gun emplacements near Pilckem Village and across to Corner House. At Battery Copse considerable opposition was encountered by 15 R.W.F. who now had few officers remaining and had been left behind by the barrage. The 16 R.W.F. were also troubled by snipers on their left hand side, which was caused by the Guards Division, being held up for at least 30 minutes. The smoke barrage which came down on the leading lines tended to confuse the men. Corner was proving a difficult task and 13 R.W.F. was taking casualties when Corporal James Llewellyn Davies, who had already been wounded, took control of the situation. With the skilful use of bombers this problem was overcome, and despite being wounded again Davies continued to engage the enemy until he died of his wounds. For his actions he was awarded the Victoria Cross. 131

¹²⁷ TNA W.O. 95/2553 Report on Capture of Pilckem Ridge, p.3.

¹²⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2553, ibid, p. 3.

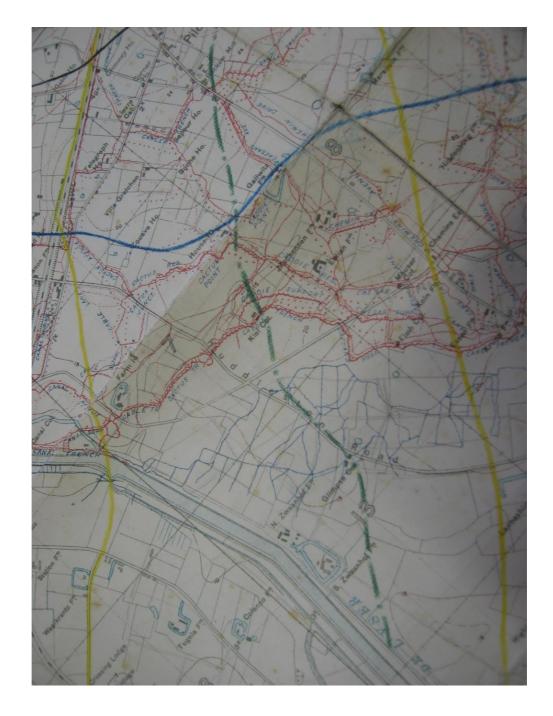
¹²⁹ TNA W.O. 95/2551 War Diary 13th R.W.F.

¹³⁰ TNA W.O. 95/2553, ibid.

¹³¹ Corporal James Llewellyn Davies of Ogmore Vale was a miner by occupation. He died at the C.C.S., and is buried at Canada Farm Cemetery, Elverdinghe, Belgium. The citation for his

8. Map showing Blue Line (W.O. 95/2540)

The Red Lines indicate the German positions. The fortified positions are shown in black with names attached.



posthumous award of the Victoria Cross reads '[D]uring the attack on the enemy line, he single-handedly attacked a machine gun emplacement after several men had been killed trying to take it. He bayoneted one of the gun crew and brought in another, together with the captured gun. Then although dangerously wounded, he led a bombing raid on a defended and killed a sniper who had been harassing his platoon'.

On the other side, progress was being made by 114th Inf. Bde. By 5.35 am, 10 W.R. had captured Candle Trench. By 5.47 am the divisional artillery reported 'our infantry are over Cancer and Candle Trench'. By 5.47 am the divisional artillery reported 'our infantry are over Cancer and Candle Trench'. Both these trench-lines had already caused problems for the 16 R.W.F. including Telegraph House, which was taken by 13 R.W.F. at 8am, with Bn H.Q. established by 11.am. Liaison was made by this battalion with 1st Scots Guards on their left. It was now daylight, and the practice over the replica was paying dividends, as the men were recognising farms and buildings. Meanwhile, the 13 R.W.F. experienced some difficult fighting towards Pilckem Village, where they encountered machineguns and pill box shelters. Each of these was outflanked and dealt with separately.

By 6.15 am 13 R.W.F. reported that Pilckem ridge had been crossed and, half an hour later, that the black line had been reached. (see Map 9) The 114th Inf. Bde move was at first held up by Marsouin Farm, but it was captured by 15 W.R. while Stray Farm was mistaken for Jolie Farm. Pilckem Village had been taken by 113th Inf. Bde, after some heavy fighting. Both attacking brigades of the Welsh Division arrived on the Black Line on time, which speaks volumes for the efforts of the men concerned.

At first German artillery fire was light, but the increasing number of pill boxes delayed the advance. ¹³⁶ The move forward of 15 R.W.F. from the Blue line had been given extra support of two companies of the 16 R.W.F., and 6 Lewis Guns from 14 R.W.F. By 5 am Bde H.Q. was established at Villa Gretchen and the forward elements of 15 R.W.F. were trying but unable to establish and consolidate on the Green Line. As they advanced to Brierley Road, the enemy were using the ruins of the houses to fire on them. With no officers left to command the battalion was now taken over by R.S.M. Jones, who

¹³² During the attack of 10 W.R., Lt Clifford Stanton, the son of Charles Butt Stanton M.P. for Merthyr Boroughs was killed in action. See personal file W.O. 339/38215.

¹³³ TNA W.O. 95/2540 38th Division War Diary 31 July 1917, p.4.

¹³⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2540 War Diary, p. 5. Lt.-Col W.C.E. Rudkin R.A.

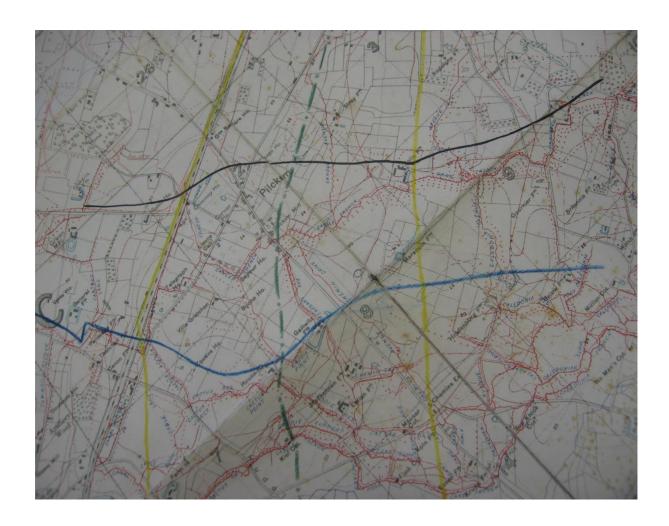
¹³⁵ TNA W.O. 95/2540 War Diary Welsh Division 31 July 1917, p.7.

¹³⁶ Marden, Welch Regiment, p. 416.

prepared the position for a possible counter-attack. 137 This was some way in the rear of the Green Line. 138

9. Map showing the advance from the Blue Line to the Black Line W.O.95/2540)

Map showing both the Blue Line and the Black Line. It should be noted that the attack is now moving East but keeping the railway Line as the boundary with the Guards Division on the West side. Pilckem village was approximately two miles from the British Front Line.



The opposition found at Brierley Road was on the left side of the boundary between the Guards and the Welsh Division, and caused great difficulty on this flank. The Black Line was also reached on time, but

¹³⁷ TNA W.O. 95/2556/1 War Diary, 15th R.W.F., 31 July 1917.

¹³⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2553 Capture of Pilckem Ridge, p.4.

from there, the opposition stiffened near Battery Copse, from a strong point, at Vulcan Crossing.¹³⁹ This block-house was on the Ypres-Staden railway line and marked the boundary between the Guards and the Welsh Divisions.¹⁴⁰ Here the Guards assisted the Welsh in driving back the Germans and showed the practical results of working together.

The 114th Inf. Bde move forward was held up, first at Stray Farm and then at Rudolphe Farm, which was on its boundary with 154th Inf. Bdes and was one of their objectives. This farm was on a slight rise just to the east of Iron Cross, and was difficult position to outflank. It was 15 W.R. who captured this farm, while 14 W.R. overcame three machine-guns in their fight for Iron Cross, killing 20 of the garrison and taking 40 prisoners.¹⁴¹

Meanwhile, on 113th Inf. Bde front, the barrage was lost, and casualties began to be suffered near the railway embankment to their left. Despite this setback the Green Line was captured on the whole of XIV Corps front. At this point the fighting was particularly fierce, and was not helped by heavy fire coming from a farm on the 51st Division's front which had not been taken. Price-Davies recorded 'as the line of the Steenbeek was approached more & more blockhouses appeared but my brigade had gained all its objectives'. Both the 113th and 114th Inf. Bdes began the process of consolidation, having achieved their objective on time with great skill and ability, using their new techniques in dealing with pill boxes. The distance from the front line to this position was about one and three quarter miles.

The leading battalions of 115th Inf. Bde made their move forward at zero +1.40 hrs, and were clear of the Canal Bank at 05.30. Opposition mounted as they left the Green Line and advanced across the Steenbeek trying to keep the momentum of the attack going. (see Map. 10) The Steenbeek was a

¹³⁹ TNA W.O. 95/520 Fifth Army Narrative, 6pm on 31 July 1917, p.2.

¹⁴¹ O.H. Mil. Ops, 1917, Volume 3, p. 161.

¹⁴³ IWM Price-Davies letter to his wife, 31 July 1917.

¹⁴⁰ Headlam, *History of the Guards*, p. 246.

¹⁴² This was probably Rudolphe Farm.

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difficult and hazardous barrier with a sloping bank on the near side and on the far side; it was 5ft above ground. The 'enemy resistance had now 'stiffened' and their artillery was more active, so as the brook was crossed and parties pushed forward, casualties were severe'. 144 Three strong points were established at Au Bon Gite, at 12.30pm which was about half a mile further on from the Green Line, and was 600 yards short of the village of Langemarck. (see Map.11). The leading elements of this Bde were the 11 S.W.B. and the 17 R.W.F. who were heavily shelled and enemy aircraft dropped bombs on their positions. 17 R.W.F. was now reduced to 4 officers and two hundred other ranks. 145 They came under considerable fire from both snipers and machine-guns from the direction of Langemarck. On their left flank they made contact with the 2nd Grenadier Guards who also had suffered heavy losses from accurate enemy machine gun fire from Langemarck. Now they were both trying to establish and consolidated an outpost line. 146

Brigadier General Gwyn Thomas (115th Inf. Bde) sent one company of 16 W.R., forward to reinforce 17 R.W.F. and 'D' company of 10 S.W.B. to reinforce the 11 S.W.B. However, at 2.pm the position became critical as the Germans began massing for a counter-attack. At 3.pm, 10 S.W.B. moved forward under enemy artillery fire from the western edge of Iron Cross. The first German counter-attack began at 3.10pm. Such was the strength of this attack 11 S.W.B. at Au Bon Gite sent up S.O.S. but managed to hold the position. 17 R.W.F. was forced to retire to the western edge of the Steenbeek, leaving 11 S.W.B. with an open flank and as a result, in an untenable position. (see Map. 12)

The situation was difficult, and when Lieut.-Colonel Radice, and 2nd Lieut. L Lloyd 11 S.W.B. were badly wounded at Bn H.Q., his command was taken over by Captain B. E. S. Davies. Communications between battalions at the front was difficult throughout this period due to the heavy bombardment and heavy rain. Reinforcements were delayed and it was not until 5pm that 'D' Coy 10 S.W.B. reached the forward troops.

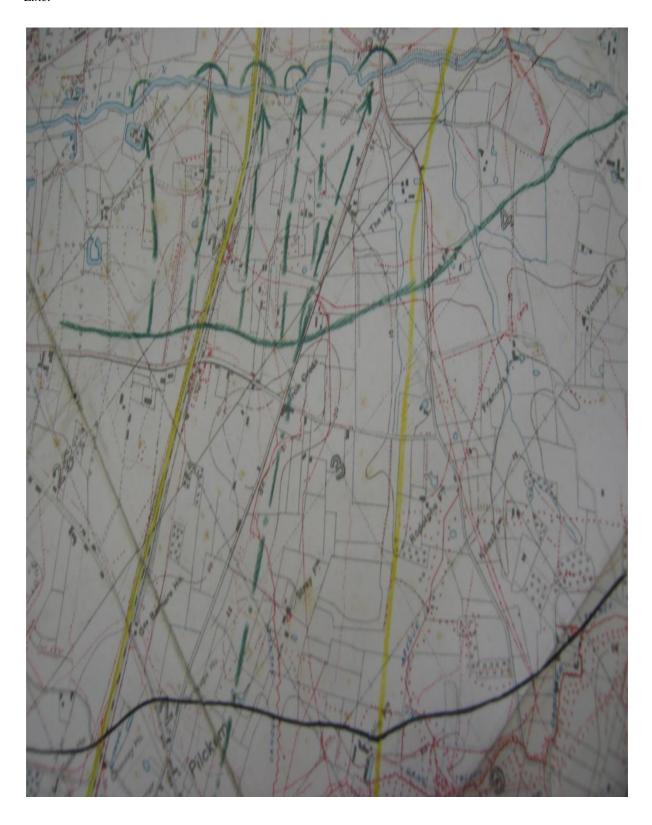
¹⁴⁴ Marden, Welch Regiment, p. 416.

¹⁴⁵ O.H. 1917 Volume 2, p. 161.

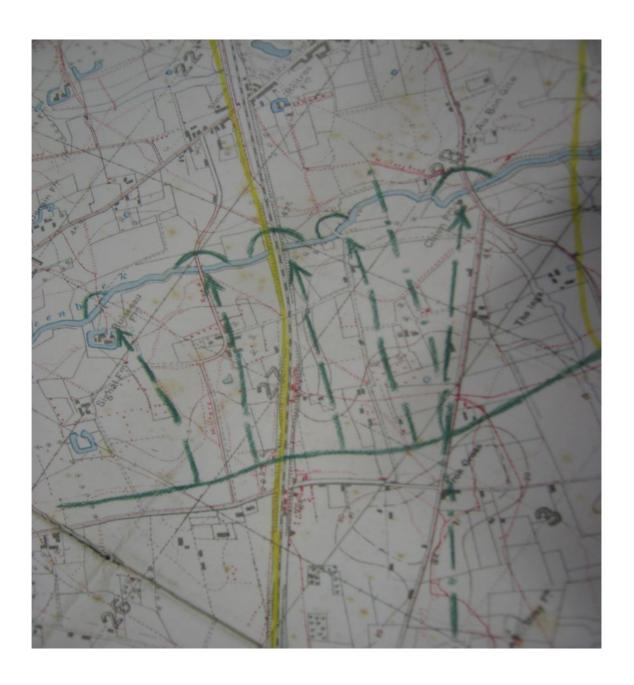
¹⁴⁶ TNA W.O. 95/912 Corps Commanders Conference, p.4.

10. Map of advance from Black Line to the Green Line (W.O. 95/2540)

This map shows the line of advance of the 115th Infantry Brigade from the Black Line to the Green Line.

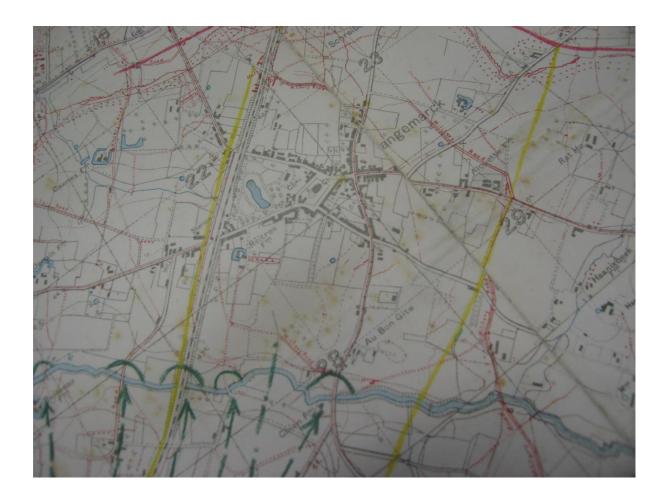


11. Map showing the move forward from the Green Line to the Steenbeek (W.O. 95/2540)



12. Map of the Steenbeek and Langemarck (W.O. 95/2540)

This map shows the line of the Steenbeek and the pockets troops of 115th Infantry Brigade had established. Langemarck is also shown.



Significantly, the Germans were prepared to hold the line east of the Steenbeek, and were reinforcing the line along the Langemarck– Wijdendrift road. This was entirely in keeping with the plan laid out by Lossberg. Just after 6.pm, Price–Davies at his H.Q. in Periscope House ordered Major Wheldon (14 R.W.F.) to move his unit forward to build strong points on the Green Line to connect 114th Inf. Bde on the right and the Guards Division on the left. A decision was made by Welsh D.H.Q, at 7.50pm, to hold a line on the 'Western Bank of the Steenbeek' and fight on the east bank of the Steenbeek. The

¹⁴⁷ TNA W.O. 95/2552/2 War Diary 14th R.W.F., 31 July 1917.

river itself with the onset of the rain, was becoming swollen and more of an obstacle to getting men and supplies across.

At 8.30pm, the Germans counter-attacked again and an SOS from 11 S.W.B. was quickly answered, and this artillery and machine gun barrage, repelled the attack which 'successfully employed in wiping out some 1,000 Germans who had got through our barrage'. He By 11.pm the Welsh Division still held the west bank of the Steenbeek, and was in touch with both its flanks. He one good thing was that the deteriorating weather conditions also hampered the Germans who were trying to organise counter-attacks. He one good thing was that 11.30 pm, 113th Inf. Bde strong points and Posts 'were all dug in to a significant depth', and connected with the Guards but 'it was not until 1am (1.9.17) that the nearest post of 114th Inf. Bde was found'.

On 1 August 1917, at 6.15 am, 115th Inf. Bde reported they had been able to hold onto the east bank of the Steenbeek, and 17 R.W.F, were in touch with the Guards on their left. 10 S.W.B. had set up its H.Q, at Rudolphe Farm and had sent 'B' Company (2nd Lieut. Cobb) forward to reinforce its other company on the front line, the afternoon before. By morning the front line consisted of three garrisoned 'battle outposts' of about 20 men each. While 'A' Coy (Captain Goldsworthy), had also moved forward to consolidate and create a support line alone the 'INGs' parallel to the front line. The 11 S.W.B. were reported to have seized the position with patrols, but this was not confirmed. At 11.am, 2nd Lieut. G. Ward (11 S.W.B.) went forward with orders for 'B' Coy to form a bridgehead at Au Bon Gite, and although the attack was scheduled for 1.30pm, little was known about the situation right of Pilckem-Langemarck Road. Captain B. E. S. Davies and the Bde Major went forward to ascertain if the attack was possible, unfortunately Davies was killed by a sniper just short of the Steenbeek. The Bde Major cancelled the attack at 1.pm, owing to the unknown situation of forward units.

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¹⁴⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2540 Narrative of the attack on Pilckem Ridge by the 38th (Welsh) Division, p. 5.

¹⁴⁹ TNA W.O. 95/2540 38th Division War Diary, 31 July 1917, p. 8.

¹⁵⁰ O.H. Mil Ops, 1917, Volume 2, p. 183.

¹⁵¹ TNA W.O. 95/2552/2 War Diary 14 R.W.F, 1 August 1917.

Also at midday the 113th Inf. Bde had 14 and 15 R.W.F. were holding positions near the Green Line, with 13 R.W.F. moving forward from the Black Line to the line of the Steenbeek. 152 The 16 R.W.F. were in reserve at Harvey and Essex Trenches. The Bde T.M.B. and M.G.C. were still at Villa Gretchen. The 114th Inf. Bde had consolidated their lines north of the Chemin House and reported to be in 'good condition except for one or two places'. 153 During the morning and afternoon heavy rain, which had been falling since 4.10pm the previous day continued to fall putting any active operations under greater pressure. Despite the weather at 2.40pm, 17 R.W.F. reported the enemy were massing on their front, and therefore a barrage of 4.2's was brought down on the Steenbeek. At 3.pm, the Germans opened a heavy artillery barrage on 11 S.W.B. Bn H.Q. as well as any lines of approach from Bde H.Q. forward to the Steenbeek. By 4.20 pm they reported that 'hostile artillery fire most severe' but 'no sign of the enemy advancing'. 154

Between 3.pm-5.pm, many of the wounded began to fall back through the positions held on the Green Line. At 4.pm, Major Wheldon (14 R.W.F.) received his orders to relieve 17 R.W.F. in the front line. At 5.5pm, 115th Inf. Bde reported heavy shelling on their front line west of the Steenbeek. The situation at 5.52pm revealed 17 R.W.F. were still holding out west of the river, but very lightly, and reinforcements were being sent to 11 S.W.B. The forward positions consisted of a number of shell holes and mud supported by the effective use of the Lewis guns. Despite holding out for so long demoralisation had set in and 'considerable parties of unwounded men belonging to 17 R.W.F. were to be seen retreating to our lines'. 155 Orders from 113th Inf. Bde H.Q, laid down that everyman was to 'stand to' on the Green Line, and to 'hold up stragglers at all costs', as it was expected that a German counter-attack was about to be launched. At 6.pm, this measure was agreed with G.O.C. 115th Inf. Bde, who ordered 14 R.W.F. with any available men to reinforce 17 R.W.F.

By 7.25pm, a pigeon message from 115th Inf. Bde reported an S.O.S., signal, about the seriousness of the situation, which was confirmed by the F.O.O. who reported, 'the Germans are across the

¹⁵² TNA W.O. 95/2555/1 War Diary 13 R.W.F, 1-2nd August 1917.

¹⁵³ Ibid. 1 August 1917, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ TNA W.O. 95/2555/2 War Diary 14 R.W.F., 1 August 1917.

Steenbeek'. However, Major Jesse Williams went forward to 'ascertain whether an enemy counterattack was taking place'. At 8.15pm, he reported 'that there was no counter-attack, nor any evidence of enemy massing for a counter-attack'. However, it was a very fraught situation and Major Williams was able to rally the men present, and stabilised the situation. The line of 11 S.W.B. had fallen back 250 yards, undercover of a hedge owing to the heavy shelling. ¹⁵⁶ Between 8.30pm-9.45pm the whole of the Green Line moved forward in extended order, and by 10.pm, the front line had been 'reconstituted'. ¹⁵⁷ By this time, 17 R.W.F. were only 140 strong, with a wounded Captain commanding. Both 10 S.W.B. and 11 S.W.B. now had less than a company each holding the road behind the Steenbeek, and communication to Bde H.Q. was only possible by runners. The rain which had fallen throughout the day ensured that all the men were saturated, and the whole place was a sea of mud and filth, and water lay on the country everywhere. ¹⁵⁸

During 2 August, there was intense artillery fire all day by both sides and at 8.30 pm and 10.30 pm S.O.S. signals went up from the front line for artillery support. The entrenched men had made good use of coiled wire left behind by the enemy and by midnight had started sending out patrols along both flanks of the Steenbeek. During the day Captain R. Bower, who taken over command of the 15 R.W.F. from the R.S.M, the previous day, was hit by machine gun fire while carrying out a reconnaissance of outposts held on the line of the Steenbeek. By early morning, 3 August, the 113th Inf. Bde started the continued to take over of the front line along the Steenbeek from the 115th Inf. Bde. By the time the 17 R.W.F. were relieved they had 324 O.Rs' and 16 officer casualties and were commanded by 2nd Lieut. Thomas Llewellyn Williams. Fortunately, 13 R.W.F. suffered no casualties during the relief but found the 'going was extremely difficult'. At 5.55pm, instructions were given for the 114th Inf. Bde to withdraw from the front line at midnight 2/3 August. However, there were many men in forward positions who were unable to disengage from the enemy, and had to

¹⁵⁶ TNA W.O. 95/2562/2 War Diary, 11 S.W.B. 6.pm-9.pm on 1 August 1917.

¹⁵⁷ TNA W.O. 95/2555/2 War Diary, 14 R.W.F. 1 August 1917.

¹⁵⁸ NAM Lt. Colonel Jourdain, diary for 1 August 1917.

¹⁵⁹ TNA W.O. 95/2562/1 War Diary, 10 S.W.B. 1to 3 August 1917.

¹⁶⁰ TNA W.O. 95/2556/1 War Diary 15 R.W.F. 2 July 1917.

¹⁶¹ TNA W.O. 95/2561/2 War Diary 17 R.W.F. 2 August 1917.

remain.¹⁶² By 6.30pm, 113th Inf. Bde tried to push out patrols to ascertain the positions of the enemy, but due thunderstorms this was an impossible task. Price-Davies remarked, 'the rain is very disheartening I have still have suspicions as to the strict neutrality of the almighty. Well I think if he is against us we deserve it.¹⁶³

Conditions were so bad on 3 August, the Divisional Sniping Coy found 'observation impossible.' ¹⁶⁴ During the day the trenches were full of water, and the battlefield was 'a sea of mud'. ¹⁶⁵ Thanks to R.S.M. Tucker, 14 R.W.F. every man of this battalion 'had his feet rubbed and dry pairs of socks and a hot drink'. ¹⁶⁶ The following day, (4 August) the weather improved and the rain ceased. The enemy continued to bombard Pilckem Village and support lines during the afternoon, but no counter-attack was mounted. During the 4 /5 August the 114th Inf. Bde relieved the 113th Inf. Bde in the front line and after a misty morning it became clear in the afternoon. ¹⁶⁷

On 4 August, 113th Inf. Bde was relieved by 114th Inf. Bde, with the battalions moving back slowly across country with the 14 R.W.F., arriving at Elverdinghe Chateau by 2.am the following day. By 6 August, the whole of the Welsh Division had been relieved by 20th (Light) Division whose task was to capture Langemarck but they would first have to take the Steenbeek Valley. By 1.pm, 16 R.W.F. arrived at Persia Camp, numbering only 160 men and received hot meals, drink and dry clothing and they were allowed to bathe and sleep. Other battalions were equally reduced but the bombardment like the fighting went on.

On 7 August, the Earl of Cavan (Corps Commander), visited the division and was pleased with the excellent work done during the recent operation. The following day, General Gough went round a

¹⁶³ IWM Brigadier General Price-Davies, letter dated 1 August 1917.

¹⁶⁶ TNA W.O. 95/2555/2 14 R.W.F., War Diary 3 August 1917.

¹⁶² TNA W.O. 95/2562/1 10 S.W.B., War Diary 4 August 1917.

¹⁶⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2540 War Diary Welsh Division, 3 August 1917, p.3.

¹⁶⁵ TNA W.O. 95/2556/1 15 R.W.F., War Diary 3 August 1917.

¹⁶⁷ TNA W.O. 95/2555/1 13 R.W.F., War Diary 4 August 1917.

number of the battalions of the Welsh Division congratulating them on their success. Training continued during these days with 'special attention being devoted to the organisation of the platoon in battle formation and patrols'. 168 On 11 August, parts of the Guards and Welsh Division went into reserve for the attack of the 20th and 29th Division, and would continue to be in 'local reserve'. Once again making a hold on the east side of the Steenbeek had proved far too difficult. During the fighting by the 21st Division, the strong point at Au Bon Gite was not taken but sufficient ground across the Steenbeek was now in their hands. 169 The next major operation was to capture Langemarck and as a result two battalions of the Welsh Division were sent up in reserve to 20th Division.

On 15 August, 10 W.R. moved up to Marsouin Farm and 15 W.R. (both 114th Inf. Bde) to Jolie Farm, from where they moved forward the following day at the start of the 'Battle for Langemarck'. While the attack was in progress, elements of 15 W.R. (now were under the command of 61st Inf. Bde, 20th Div.) moved forward. Positions were set up at Au Bon Gite, before moving on to the outskirts of Langemarck. 10 W.R. (who were also under the command of the 60th Inf. Bde, 20th Div.) were employed in the exhausting task of supplying carrying parties. This was invaluable work bringing up water, rations ammunition and both these battalions became involved in the capture of the Langemarck and its consolidation. 170 News of the capture of the village, and 620 prisoners, was tinged by the knowledge the forward line had been enfiladed by enemy guns and suffered heavily. 171

The divisional hand-over took place on the night of 17 August, 61st Inf. Bde (20th Division) was replaced by the 114th Inf. Bde who established their H.Q. in Periscope House, near Pilckem. 172 Here Brigadier General Marden gave a briefing, after which seven of the 114th Inf. Bde staff, were killed by shrapnel shellfire on leaving this strong point, whose exit was facing towards the enemy front line. The Welsh Division completed the relief of the 20th Division and took over command of the Langemarck

¹⁶⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2555/2 War Diary 14th R.W.F., 5-10 August 1917.

¹⁶⁹ O.H. 1917, Volume 2, p. 199.

¹⁷⁰ Captain V.E. Englefield, *The History of the Twentieth (Light) Division* (London, 1921), p. 165.

¹⁷¹ NAM Lt. Colonel Jourdain diary 16 August 1917.

¹⁷² Periscope House was the most advanced radio station at this stage of the battle.

sector at 10.am, 19 August. 173 The front line was 800 yards beyond Langemarck, and despite poor weather and heavy shelling especially on the ruins of the village, the position was held. Rations were now being brought forward by pack mules and later a tramway was established as far as the Steenbeek. 174 During the night, reserve units like 10 S.W.B. were busy draining, strengthening and creating fire steps along 'Candle Trench'. Local attacks were made during this period in an attempt to gain tactical advantage, especially at Eagle Trench and Pheasant Farm. The work on the Green Line and the Steenbeek continued with the pioneers establishing three L.G. posts at each place to deal with low flying aircraft. 175 On 22 August, 10 S.W.B. relieved 15 W.R. and set up its Bn H.Q. at Au Bon Gite, which was a large concrete shelter relatively undamaged. On 23 August, 11 S.W.B. relieved 13 W.R. in the front line and established their Bn H.Q., at Alouette Farm, despite the intense shelling they only lost one casualty, and one officer wounded. For the next couple of days Eagle Trench became the most important target for the artillery and was shelled heavily. The 16 W.R. attacked Eagle Trench on 27 August at 1.53pm, but the move forward was hampered by intense M.G. fire and heavy enemy artillery barrages, which lasted until 5.30pm. Torrential rain and thunderstorms began making the conditions impossible for the infantry attack to keep under the covering barrage, and as a result they became easy targets for the defending machine gunners at Pheasant Farm. The 11th Division also attacked but failed to capture Pheasant Farm, as movement of any sort was impossible during daylight. During the night 16 W.R. were withdrawn, and 15 R.W.F. was in Candle Trench area, a reserve position. They were reinforced by a company of 11 S.W.B, however both suffered heavily from the enemy bombardment and had to be supported by 'A' Coy, 10 S.W.B.

Before the relief of 115th Inf. Bde took place, some battalions of 113th Inf. Bde, were training over replicas with specialist officers, as reconnaissance of the forward position of the front line at Langemarck was taking place. By the time the brigade relief went forward everyone understood what was expected of them, and was familiar with the layout of the front line area. Company commanders went forward the day before to reconnoitre the new front so that the relief was complete at 2.22am on 29/30 August. Wiring parties and patrols being pushed forward immediately, and information received

¹⁷³ TNA W.O. 95/2540 War Diary, 38th (Welsh) Division.

¹⁷⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2562/ War Diary 11th S.W.B., 19 August 1917.

¹⁷⁵ TNA W.O. 95/2548/2 War Diary 19 (P) Welsh Regiment 21-22nd August 1918.

from 11 S.W.B. found Eagle Trench strongly held with some movement behind the White House. ¹⁷⁶ On 30 August, a dull drizzly day, with intermittent shelling along the Steenbeek Valley, patrols of the Welsh Division entered the White House. On the same night, the last of the men from 16 W.R, came into the lines of 16 R.W.F. after being in 'No Man's Land' since the 16 August. ¹⁷⁷ The Welsh Division was relieved from the front line during 11 September, by 20th Division and moved back to Proven Camp, and then transferred to trench warfare near Armentieres until March 1918.

Aftermath of battle

At 6.pm, 31 July 1917, the Fifth Army recorded the assembly was completed satisfactorily in all Corps areas, and when the attack was launched the hostile barrage was 'late and weak.' It stated:

The Blue Line was captured up to time, there being some doubt as to CANDLE and Cancer Trenches, but after the capture of these trenches was confirmed very shortly afterwards. It was discovered that the 23rd Reserve Div. was in the process of relief by the 3rd Guards Reserve Div. One Rgt of the latter, viz, 3rd Guards Fusiliers (BERLIN COCKCHAFERS) is reputed to be a crack Rgt. Of the Prussian Army, and prisoner state that this Rgt. had been brought up specially to hold CANDLE TRENCH. The Rgt. was utterly broken by the Right Div. of the Corps (WELSH Div.)¹⁷⁸

The German 3rd Guards Reserve Division 'rated as one of the best German divisions.' by its own estimates suffered very heavy casualties, including over a thousand prisoners. ¹⁷⁹ The 23rd Reserve Division was 'purely Saxon' in its composition, and recruited exclusively from that area. It was badly mauled during the bombardment leading up to the attack on its position. Its divisional history states

¹⁷⁸ TNA W.O. 95/520 Fifth Army Appendix 15 Narrative, p.2.

¹⁷⁹ Histories of Two hundred and fifty one Divisions of the German Army which participated in the War (1914-1918). Compiled from records of the Intelligence Section of the General Staff, American Expeditionary Forces, at General H.Q's: Chaumont, France 1919. (The London Stamp Exchange, 1989), pp. 72-5.

¹⁷⁶ TNA W.O. 95/2562/2 War Diary 11th SWB 29 August 1917.

¹⁷⁷ NAM Lt. Colonel Jourdain, diary 30th August 1917.

'that after the losses which it suffered in July 1917, it received mediocre replacements (elderly men and returned convalescents).' By 1918, this division was rated as third class, but was considered to have 'considerable power of resistance'.¹⁸⁰

The very fact that these divisions were in the process of relieving each other indicates German intelligence were still unsure of the date of the attack. It also suggests, by moving a very strong offensive minded division into the front line that it was preparing itself for the attack but got the timing wrong. Either way it was a tremendous achievement for the Welsh Division and this was reflected in the praise given to them by Brigadier General Price-Davies. He wrote home about how they broke one of the German crack regiments, the famous 'Berlin Cockchafers' and 'my officers have been superb & some have come out most determined too so I think staff work went well'. ¹⁸¹

Munby stated the success in taking 'Pilckem Ridge may be attributed to the excellent work done by the artillery in breaking down the wire and smashing up trenches and emplacements and also to the way in which the men rapidly out-flanked numerous concrete dugouts met in the area captured'. ¹⁸² Marden's appreciation of the battle is worthy of note:

The attack on Pilckem Ridge was a fine example of the combination of artillery and infantry work. The guns paved the way for the infantry advance, protected them during consolidation and broke up counter attacks, but the infantry had to tackle the "pill-boxes" unaided, and it was careful training of platoons which enabled them to do this so successfully. The 31st July was the day of the platoon commander. 183

He identified exactly what had made the difference, the role of the 'platoon commander' in attack whether it be an officer or a senior N.C.O. The time spent practicing and training before the battle

¹⁸⁰ Histories of Two hundred and fifty German Divisions, pp. 337-340.

¹⁸¹ IWM Price Davies Letter dated 4 August 1917.

¹⁸² Munby, *History of the 38th (Welsh) Division*, pp. 27-8.

¹⁸³ Marden, Welch Regiment, p. 417.

really paid off and the ability to use these tactics in the heat of battle was the result of hard work. However, the cost of battle should never be forgotten and the casualty list reflects how hard won the battle was. Between 31 July and 31 August 1917, 35 officers were killed, and 140 wounded, while 630 other ranks were killed, 2991 wounded with recorded as 269 missing.¹⁸⁴

It was clear the achievement of the Welsh Division in attaining all its objectives and defeating one of the Kaiser's favourite elite regiments not only lifted the spirits of the men involved but more importantly cast aside the shadow of Mametz Wood. The Welsh Division had performed well and had advanced three miles against Lossberg's new plan of defence under horrendous weather conditions. Once again despite the losses the *esprit de corps* remained a significant factor, enhanced by good leadership at all levels, and appropriate training which combined to make their attack a success. Until recently the only memorial to these events was the memorial plague on the pill box at Gournier's Farm which the Welsh Division had taken by storm. The new memorial lies in the shadow of this concrete fortress and bears testimony to the courage determination and sacrifice of all those men of the Welsh Division. As Lieut.-Colonel Pryce-Jones wrote, 'I am pleased the Division has done so well & I feel we shall now get some of the kudos which has been long overdue'. 185

¹⁸⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2541 War Dairy A & Q Branch 38th Welsh Division.

¹⁸⁵ NAM Letter no 1931 dated 31 July 1917.

Chapter Four: The Final Push - April to November 1918

The 'Great Advance' took the Welsh Division across the old Somme battlefields of 1916, including

Mametz Wood, to just south of Mons. Once again the Germans were initially holding the high ground

which provided every advantage to the defenders, and would inflict a terrible price on the attackers.¹

The British offensive began in August and although its progress on occasion was slow, it was

unrelenting. It was this continual pressure which brought about the destruction of the German Army

and created the conditions which led to the Armistice.² During these months the Welsh Division was in

the vanguard of V Corps, Third Army, and the Allied offensive on the Western Front. The objective of

this part of the thesis is to assess how successful the Welsh Division was in contributing to the

downfall of the Kaiser's Army.

The Somme region was one of the fronts where the Germans had carried out their series of major

offensives known as the 'Kaiserschlacht' which severely buckled the British line, but did not break it.³

The Germans pushed their front 20 miles deep, 40 miles across, and gained a tactical advantage but

failed strategically to break through the line between the British and the French. The last blow fell on

the British front on 4/5 April against Australian and British forces at Villers Bretonneux, after which

this offensive was called off. These battles caused huge casualties on both sides, but Ludendorff's

gamble had not succeeded. The Germans were fought to a standstill. The Welsh Division arrived in V

Corps at a time when both the strategic and tactical situation of Third Army was uncertain, and the

intentions of the German High Command unknown.

The position of Third Army was very much one of relief when the Germans attacked in the south, as it

gave their commander, General Byng and his staff time to strengthen their defences and plan for future

operations. Its commander had seen action in the Sudan, South Africa and in 1915, Gallipoli. At the

beginning of 1917, while commanding the Canadian Corps he was instrumental in taking Vimy Ridge,

¹ J.P. Harris, *Amiens to the Armistice* (London, 1998), p. 119.

² Brian Bond, The Pursuit of Victory from Napoleon to Saddam Hussein (Oxford, 1996), p. 116.

³ Gary Sheffield, Forgotten Victory (London, 2002), p. 221.

and in November of that year, was commander of Third Army, during the Cambrai attack. Although this was not a sustained success, there is little doubt he clearly understood the military capability of the German Army to retaliate with devastating consequences. Equally his experiences during the 'Spring Offensive' may have made him deeply cautious, in the opinion of one historian, yet he never underestimated the competence of the Germans during the campaign. His command now covered an area from Arras in the north, to Albert on the Somme in the south, and consisted of IV, V and VI Corps.

The Welsh Return to the Somme 1918

It was into this tense atmospheric cauldron of anticipation the Welsh Division took its place, as did the new V Corps Commander, Lieut.-General Cameron Deane Shute.⁵ He had previously commanded 32nd Division, which was in VI Corps but still part of Third Army. Educated at Marlborough, he was originally commissioned into the Welsh Regiment in 1885, before transferring to the Rifle Brigade, but unlike many of his contemporaries, he did not serve in the Second Boer War. Although he had an uncomfortable time in command of the 63rd (Royal Naval) Division during late 1916 and early 1917, he was to prove an energetic and a very much a 'hands on' commander of V Corps.⁶

The transfer south of the Welsh Division without its artillery on 2 April, to the northern outskirts of Albert and on the western bank of the river Ancre, had saved them from the German 'Operation Georgette'. Due to the crisis in manpower each of its brigades of infantry had been reduced from four to three battalions, which allowed the other battalions to get up to strength, and have the 'pick of the crop' of officers and men from the disbanded battalions. ⁷ Their proposed first assignment was to

⁴ Harris, Amiens to the Armistice, p. 122.

⁵ HMSO Major A.F. Becke *Order of Battle of Divisions, Part 4* (London, 1945), p.161. Lt. General C. D. Shute was appointed to command V Corps on 28 April 1918 replacing Lt. General Sir Walter Norris Congreve (1862-1927).

⁶ Leonard Sellers, *The Hood Battalion Royal Naval Division: Gallipoli, France 1914-1918* (London, 1995), pp. 207-8.

⁷ The disbanded battalions were 15 (London Welsh) R.W.F. 10 and 11th S.W.B. as well as 16 W.R. which amounts to four however 2 R.W.F., was brought into the Welsh Division from 33rd Division.

relieve 2nd and 47th Divisions who were badly mauled during the German advance. Both these divisions had been involved in a fighting withdrawal, until the Germans reached the 'high water' mark of their advance however the threat was still continuing to cause concern.8 On arrival, Third Army placed the Welsh Division into its reserve, where 'it was not to be used in front line but could relieve reserve troops'. The newly merged M.G. companies, had now become the 38 Bn. M.G. Corps, and relieved their counter-parts in 63rd (Naval) Division. The infantry elements of the Welsh Division were not to be used on the construction of defences at night and were placed on varying degrees of standby notice'. On 5 April, both the 2nd Australian and 12th British Division attacked the Germans northwest of Albert, with the Welsh Division taking up the reserve brigade positions in support at Baizieux, Hedaville and Toutencourt.¹⁰ It was not until 11 April that command of the Welsh Division was passed from Third Army to V Corps. Their task now was to relieve 12th Division with the warning of a high 'probability of hostile attack within next day or two'. 11

It was into this unsettled environment the Welsh Division made several moves during the next week, before eventually relieving the 12th Division on the night of 11/12 April, in the front-line just north of the outskirts of the town of Albert, and on the west side of the River Ancre. Unlike previous experience they occupied partially finished trenches dating back to 1914, however, the enemy was still on the high ground. 12 Photographs of the enemy line west of the river Ancre indicated a 'series of isolated post disposed in depth, some of these posts are organised shell holes'. 13 During this period both British and enemy aircraft were very active over the lines, reflecting how this new dimension of warfare which was influencing the tactical situation. Equally, the artillery on both sides carried out specific and

Effectively the infantry element of the British Divisions on the Western Front was reduced roughly from 18,000 to 16,000 men.

⁸ 47th Division was relieved later by 35th Division and the 63rd Division was relieved by 2nd Division.

⁹ The four M.G. Companies, the 113th, 114th, 115th and 176th had been brought together to form the 38th Battalion M.G.C, on 2 February 1918.

¹⁰ TNA W.O. 95/370 War Diary, Third Army Operations, April 1918.

¹¹ TNA W.O. 95/749 War Diary V Corps, April 11, G .547 refers.

¹² Munby, A History of the 38th (Welsh) Division, p. 42.

¹³ W.O. 95/2540 War Diary H.Q. 38th Division, 13.4.1918.

harassing fire, with the 35th Divisional artillery being attributed with toppling of the 'Golden Virgin and Child' basilica in Albert at 3.45pm on 16 April 1918.¹⁴

During April and May the Welsh Division practised various training schemes in conjunction with adjoining divisions, intending to push the line forward by identifying tactical points, and tailoring operations to seize these positions. The 'fighting patrols' were now in constantly in use by battalions in the front-line during the hours of darkness, and were regularly probing the enemy line. Any weakness or vulnerable point found would result in a 'raiding party' being used in combination with either trench mortar or artillery programmes in support. One operation combined both 35th Division and the Welsh Division (113th Inf. Bde) and was carried out at 7.30pm on 22 April, whereby 'hand to hand fighting took place in which much bayoneting was done & severe casualties inflicted on enemy'. The net result was two enemy officers and 80 other ranks captured.

On 1 May, 17 R.W.F. sent forward two platoons commanded by Captain Gledhill advancing under cover of a trench mortar barrage, and attacked the enemy front line at 'Lone Tree'. Although the objective was not reached they were able to consolidate a position which gave them observation of the enemy ground in the valley below. Once again, the Germans tried unsuccessfully to counter-attack the new positions at 5.30am on 9 May, after a trench mortar barrage, the advanced parties of the enemy were in skirmishing order and under cover of the mist shouted loudly to 'retire' in English, the report states 'no enemy reached our line'. May, Lieut.-General Shute made his first visit to see Major-General Cubitt, the new Welsh Divisional commander at Contay. The G.O.C. Third Army, General Byng visited the Welsh Division on 27 May, and watched battalions in training and a brigade exercise with tanks the following day. At a Conference was held on 29 May, for all Divisional

¹⁴ Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Book of the Somme* (London, 1996), pp. 6-7.

¹⁵ TNA W.O. 95/2555/1 War Diary, 13 R.W.F., 22-25 April 1918. Battalion casualties were 60 O.R's killed, 2 died of wounds, 199 wounded, 2 suffering from shell shock and 2 missing: TNA W.O. 95/2555/2 War Diary 14 R.W.F. Their Casualties were 5 killed including 1 Officer, 1 Officer died of wounds, 95 wounded including two officers and 14 missing.

¹⁶ TNA W.O. 339/91005 personal file of Lt John Churchill Gledhill.

¹⁷ TNA W.O. 95/2561/2 War Diary 17 R.W.F. 1-2 May 1918

¹⁸ TNA W.O. 95/749 Fifth Corps, May 1918. See also John, Carmarthen Pals, pp. 157-9.

commanders, their staffs and brigade commanders, first to discuss future operations and secondly to get to know his commanders. ¹⁹(see Map 13 for V Corps boundary)

During June 1918 both sides continued raiding each other's positions all along the Welsh Divisional frontage however; the British raids were becoming increasingly bigger. In the early morning 21 June, both 12th Division and the Welsh Division launched a two battalion raid. The 2nd and 14 R.W.F. took up positions along the railway line north from Authuille to Hamel and was covered by trench mortars, artillery and machine gun barrage. Faced with overwhelming odds the Germans withdrew and the raiding party blew up ammunition dumps and several dugouts were destroyed. Part of the success of this raid, was down to the practice over a replica of the ground to be attacked, and the deception plan included the use of 'spurious wireless and telephone messages being made by Corps H.Q.²⁰ The key fact established by this raid 'was that they sector is only lightly held by patrols with -gun posts south of Hamel'.²¹

On 11 July, the Welsh Division's carried out its most successful raid on the village of Hamel by 2 R.W.F. (114th Inf. Bde) using four companies. The objective was achieved, and 19 prisoners (one wounded) were taken, 50 killed, 20 dug-outs blown up and one machine gun captured.²² However, the month was a 'turning point' as more than one division on the Ancre front noticed, that apart from limited and intermittent artillery fire, the 'enemy were showing no sign of aggressive enterprise'.²³ The Welsh Division was back in Corps reserve from 19 July until 6 August, where they began using the new rifle grenades, signals rockets, and training at Herissart on tactical exercises 'applying the principle of fire covering movement' for the coming offensive. Battalion commanders taught all

¹⁹ TNA W.O. 95/2540 War Dairy, 38 Welsh Division, May 1918. Major General Cubitt was appointed to his new position on 23 May 1918.

²⁰ TNA W.O. 95/750 War Diary, Fifth Corps, General Staff (G.S.), June 1918, Operation Order No. 124, 17.6.1918.

²¹ TNA W.O. 95/2555/2 War Diary, 14th R.W.F. 20 June 1918.

²² TNA W.O. 95/2540 War Diary, 38 Welsh Division. It recorded that the Corps Commander visited D.H.Q, and that the Army Commander, General Byng issued his congratulations for the successful raid.

²³ A. Hilliard Atteridge, *The History of the 17th (Northern) Division* (Glasgow, 1929), p. 366.

officers and senior N.C.O's about 'attack formations' by during this period.²⁴ Battalions practised route marching by companies, to map references. Instructions issued for training, emphasised its progressive nature, first by section, platoon, company, and by battalion and all tactical training was now based on open warfare whether in defence or attack. Attacks were practised with and without barrages, where the enemy would be represented by a 'few men with blank ammunition'. Each battalion spent five hours training each day, and commanders were encouraged to call on artillery and M.G.C. officers for cooperation in battalion training.²⁵

The success of the battle of Amiens, launched by Rawlinson's Fourth Army on 8 August, was a major disaster for the German high command and had far reaching consequences. It was followed by the second battle of the Somme, and marks the beginning of the advance to victory. On 18 August General Plumer's Second Army attacked in the north, and two days later two French Armies attacked further south. Both the British First and Fourth Army were now poised to attack on the 21 August. Third Army would deliver its attack on a 12 mile frontage towards Bapaume, with a subsidiary push across the river Ancre. From 8 August to 11 November, the Welsh Division would entered a period of time in the British Campaign which was to become known as the 'Hundred Days' and signifies a distinct passage during which the German Army was defeated. The Welsh Division was now part of the 'impulse eastward which the Western Front had been given' and was very much involved in the 'gathering mass and momentum'. ²⁶

²⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2558 War Diary 114th Inf. Bde, 25 May.1918.

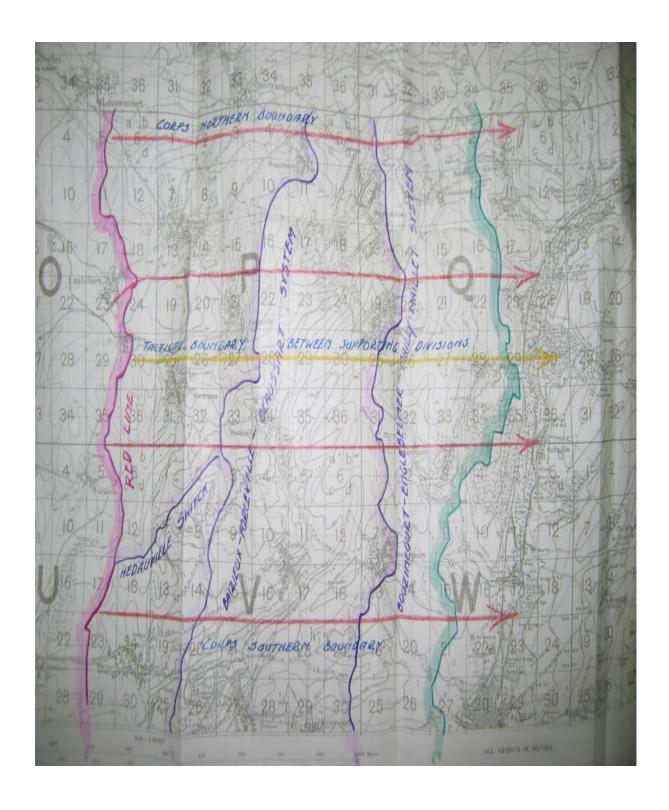
²⁵ W.O. 95/2558 War Diary 114th Inf. Bde, 'Instructions for Training, July 1918', Appendix II.

²⁶ J. C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew 1914 – 1919* (London, 1987), p. 507.

13. Map of V Corps boundary July 1918 (W.O. 95/750)

The Yellow line in the centre shows the boundaries between the two forward divisions of V Corps. The Ancre River lies just east of the Green Line. Above the Northern boundary is IV Corps of Third Army.

On the Southern boundary covering Fourth Army and III Corps cover the town of Albert.



Crossing the River Ancre

Third Army's planned attack was to cover its southern neighbours Fourth Army's advance of 13 August, in order to protect their flank. Third Army consisted of VI Corps to the north, IV Corps in the centre with V Corps in the south, on the boundary of Fourth Army. On the night of 13/14 August, the commanders of German forces at Serre and Beaumont Hamel in the north unexpectedly withdrew, allowing the V Corps to probe to a more forward rigorously. By pushing across the river Ancre towards the Pozieres Ridge, they would be attacking the southern element of General der Infanterie Otto von Below's German 17th Army.²⁷(see Map. 14)

Within V Corps, the Welsh Division was working in tandem with either 17th or 21st Division on the Corps front.²⁸ After each attacking division had taken their objective the reserve division would 'leapfrog' through and carry on the advance, as the forward division. Importantly, the artillery of each division would come under the control of the leading division's C.R.A., and as a result, the artillery would be in almost continuous action for three months.²⁹

On 18/19 August, the enemy withdrew from Aveluy Wood, allowing the Welsh Division to extend its line northwards of Hamel. Battalions had already trained on tactical schemes, such as, 'Practice to Advance to occupy evacuated area'. 30 The divisional pioneers began repairing all roads leading to the crossing points, near the river Ancre. 31 The Welsh Division's initial objective was to cross the river Ancre, and gain the high ground and form a bridgehead. This was part of a larger offensive which began at dawn, on Wednesday 21 August. With General Byng's Third Army attacking between Arras and Albert it was the start of the 'glorious advance that was to end the War'. 32 At this stage V Corps,

²⁷ O.H. Military Operations 1918, Volume IV, pp. 181-2.

²⁸ TNA W.O. 95/1985 War Diary, 17th Division.

²⁹ Major General H. D. Depree, A History of the 38th (Welsh) and 33rd Divisions in the last five weeks of the Great War (Naval & Military Press, 2005, original not dated), p. 336.

³⁰ TNA W.O. 95/2551/1 War Diary, 13 R.W.F., 18-21 August 1918. This training was done as a rehearsal and in accordance with an Operational outlined in B.M/S/588.

³¹ TNA W.O. 95/2548 War Diary 19 (P) W.R. 16 August.1918

³² Atteridge, *History of the 17th (Northern) Division*, p. 375.

instructed both '21st and 38th Divisions to carry out subsidiary probes to investigate vital crossing points over the River Ancre'. The Welsh Division used patrols from two brigades to move forward with the 113th Inf. Bde designated the right brigade, and the 114th Inf. Bde the left brigade. 33 The 115th Inf. Bde moved up into the centre, in support. The river Ancre was a serious physical obstacle, with a swampy approach to a fast flowing river, deliberately flooded to a width of 200 to 300 yards. With no bridges remaining, it had marshy islands in the middle. The northern brigade (114th Inf. Bde) used both 13 and 14 W. R. who detailed four 'Special Patrols' of 1 N.C.O. and 4 men. Each patrol was backed up by a platoon, and moved forward at 4.30am.³⁴ Although smoke barrages were used, thick fog assisted the enterprising efforts of one of the patrols of 14 W.R. during the night 21/22 August. Despite strong opposition from concentrated machine gun fire, they crossed the river near Hamel with four rifle sections, and took up positions on the high ground at Chickweed Trench, on the edge of Thiepval Wood, where they hung on all day against fierce German counter-attacks.

The overall objectives set by V Corps for 23 August, was for 21st Division, to advance towards Beaulencourt. The 17th Division was in support, with its brigades assisting the attacks of the other two divisions. The primary objective of the Welsh Division, was to use one brigade to attack south-east opposite Hamel (114th Inf. Bde), and the other north-east (113th Inf. Bde) of Authuille, with the closing point of the triangle, at Pozieres. (see Map. 15) The centre brigade (115th Inf. Bde) would 'mop-up' in 'Nab and Blighty Valley'. The divisions were to 'act independently of the progress made on their flanks even if their flank is thereby exposed for the time being'. The general direction of the Welsh Division afterwards was towards Bouzincourt, La Boiselle, Contalmasion, Longueval, Ginchy and Les Bouefs.35

³³ TNA W.O. 95/2559 War Diary, 13 W.R. Both 14 and 15 W.R. had been reinforced with two companies each of the 13 W.R. to add weight to their attacking options. Officers of this battalion were used in a liaison role at Brigade H.Q.

³⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2558 War Diary, 114th Inf. Bde. Special Order for Patrols B.M. 909 issued 20 August 1918.

³⁵ TNA W.O. 95/750 War Diary V Corps, Operation Order No. 233, issued by Brigadier General, R.H. Mangles G.S. V Corps at 9pm 23 August 1918.

On the night 22/23 August, two companies of 15 W.R. (114th Inf. Bde), crossed the river Ancre near Hamel. After capturing a number of prisoners and five machine guns they establish posts on the east bank near St Pierre Divion, north of Thiepval Wood. Later in combination with a flanking movement of their left from 13 R.W.F. they captured USNA Hill.

The 113th Inf. Bde had attacked across bridges with the 13 and 14 R.W.F. in support, plus of 1st Tank battalion, just north of Albert.³⁶ This move was made in conjunction with 18th Division's flanking movement, and by 9.45am all objectives were taken.³⁷ By midday, 18th Division reported the town of Albert was clear of the enemy. Two hours later, 13 R.W.F. moved uphill and reached its objective at the Chalk Pit, while its brigade was sending out patrols towards Ovilliers. The 115th Inf. Bde, crossing was made by possible by the attack by 2 R.W.F. who then overcame opposition at Crucifix Corner, taking 200 prisoners and 17 machine guns.³⁸ By 4.45pm, 115th Inf. Bde was coming up on the left of 113th Bde. A divisional bridgehead had been established, and at 5.30pm they were in touch with III Corps, Fourth Army.

³⁶ TNA W.O. 95/2559 War Diary, 13 W. R

³⁷ TNA W.O. 95/2555/2 War Diary, 14 R.W.F, 23 August.1918. The total the battalion captured was 117 prisoners and 5 machine guns. Captain Arthur Erskine Owen Humphries Owen, 2nd in Command was wounded. All the battalion objectives were consolidating and they remained in reserve.

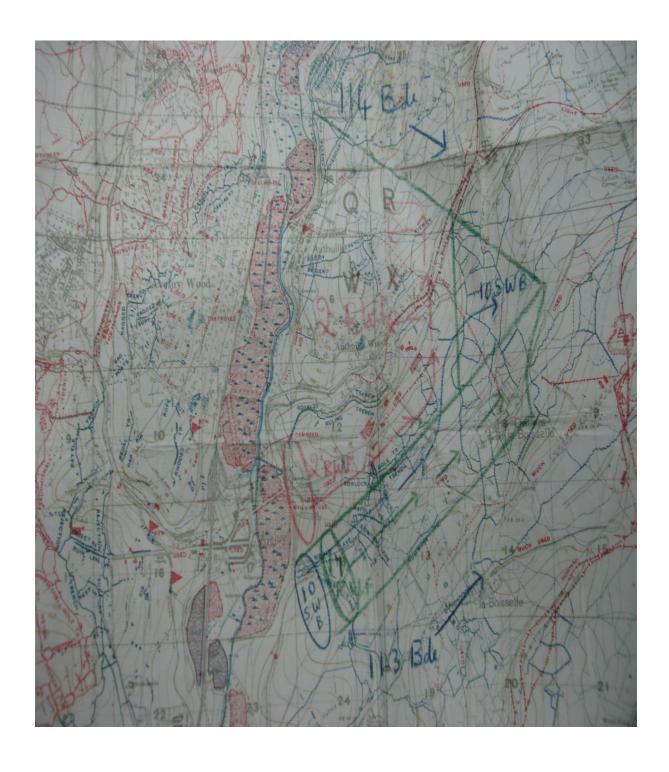
³⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2561/1 War Diary, 2 R.W.F. 23 August.1918. Their casualties were under 30, with 2 Officers wounded. For his endeavour Lt John Owen Smith was awarded an M.C. He successfully found a crossing over the river near Aveluy and took his men across capturing eight machine guns and taking prisoners. He was wounded on 28 September 1918 near the railway line during the Battle of Bapaume.

14. Map showing the swampy areas which reduced the crossing point along the Ancre River. (W.O. 95/2540)



15. <u>Map showing the attack of 114th Inf. Bde and the route taken by 113th Inf. Bde towards Le Boiselle. (W.O. 95/2554)</u>

Note the area in the centre of the triangle was the area where the Germans were to be pocketed.



However, by late evening the enemy resistance began to stiffen. The 114th Inf. Bde, on the left 'had heavy fighting throughout the day on the east bank of the river Ancre between our outposts and parties of the enemy in considerable strength'. The 124th Field Company R.E. was employed with the forward battalions and assisted the infantry in reinforcing tactical points gained, while 176th Tunnelling Company moved forward to deal with any mines or bobby traps left behind. The engineers of 123rd Field Company built footbridges at various points. The 151st Field Company was employed making Chateau Bridge in Aveluy fit for the use of wheeled traffic, and the following battalions of 115th Inf. Bde.

The following day (Saturday 24th) was for 113th Inf. Bde to moved north-east towards La Boiselle, while the 114th Inf. Bde moved south-east towards Thiepval, thus 'forming a pocket between converging attacks'.³⁹ The 115th Inf. Bde would mop-up the pocket and after taken prisoners, move towards Ovilliers. The attack started at 1am and 17 R.W.F. advanced 1,000 yards before being held up by heavy machine gun fire, but fought their way through, and captured 200 prisoners and a number of machine guns. By 6pm, they assembled at Crucifix Corner and marched across country on 'a compass bearing to a mile N.W. of Pozieres'.⁴⁰ For 10 S.W.B. (115th Inf. Bde), due to the heavy mist and darkness in the river valley found themselves 1,000 yard short of their objective. (see Map. 16) The enemy machine gun posts, in front of La Boiselle, made progress impossible.⁴¹ However, by 5am, the right brigade (113th Inf. Bde) was on its second objective at La Boiselle, which now allowed 10 S.W.B. to move forward towards Contalmaison. By 6am, 113th Inf. Bde had taken its third objective, and was carrying out reconnaissance towards Contalmaison, using cyclists.

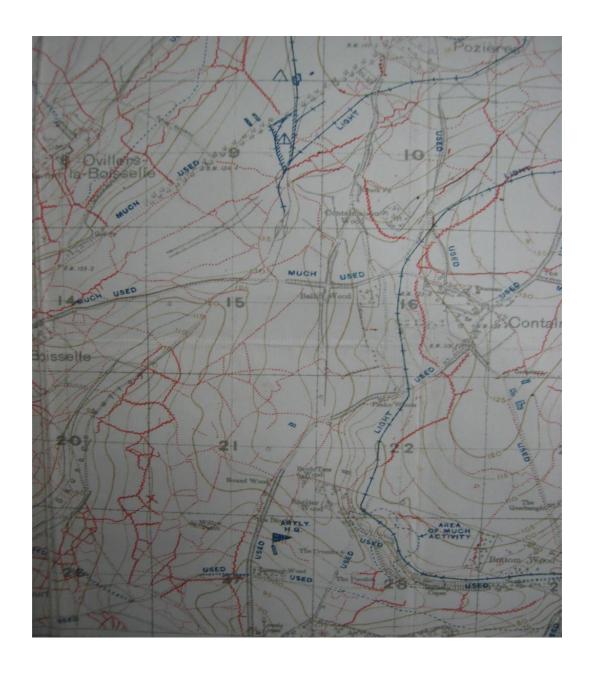
³⁹ TNA W.O. 95/2540 War Diary 38th Division, 23 August 1918.

⁴⁰ TNA W.O. 95/2561/2 War Diary 17 R.W.F., 24 August 1918, Casualties amounted to 6 Officers and 100 O.R's.

⁴¹ TNA W.O. 95/2562 War Diary 10th S.W.B., 23 August 1918.

16. Map showing Pozieres to the North, Ovilliers Le Boisselle on the East side and the West Side of Contalmaison.(W.O. 95/2540)

One can now appreciate how difficult the night march from Pozieres to Contalmaison by 10 S.W.B., was.



By midday the Welsh Division had captured five officers and 399 other ranks, but was being strongly opposed by the enemy at Ovillers. At the same time, the divisional artillery supported by both 24th and 64th Divisions artillery, were now moving across the river Ancre. Orders received at 4.20pm, from Corps to 113th Inf. Bde (Right Bde), instructing them to move towards Contalmaison, and the 114th Inf. Bde (Left Bde) to be directed towards Pozieres. The 14 W.R., in particular made good progress, and by 5pm, they were in a position west of Pozieres where Lieut.-Colonel G. F. Brooke resumed command of his battalion. The remainder of 15 W. R. pushed rapidly on to Pozieres Ridge, reaching the village late in the afternoon. Instructions sent from V Corps to the Welsh Division at 7.20pm, instructed them to continue clearing the Ovilliers Spur and move east towards Contalmaison Wood 'with a view to pocketing enemy in vicinity of Ovilliers'. Resistance by the Germans at Ovilliers continued, but realising they were being turned from the north by 115th Inf. Bde (Centre Bde), they abandoned their stronghold.⁴² The 115th Inf. Bde now made a night march towards Contalmaison with 10 S.W.B., arriving at 5.30am 'without halt or hitch' and 'used Lucas Lamps as a means of keeping the battalion in touch throughout the journey'. 43 It was found afterward, that over 200 Germans had hidden in the cellars of the village. The battalion now moved on towards Mametz Wood where they were greeted by a 'hail of machine gun bullets.'44

A major priority on 24 August 1918, was for the Corps Heavy artillery to progress across the Ancre bridges as it was vital 'all arrangements must be made to push guns forward as soon as situation allows'. ⁴⁵ The vital work entrusted to REs and 19 (P) W.R. repairing the roads within the divisional boundary, between Albert – Bapaume, Anthuille–Thiepval and Aveluy towards Ovillers made these moves possible. ⁴⁶ At 11.pm, the objective for the Welsh Divisions the following day was to move towards Flers. The Germans had formed a defensive line which ran from Mametz Wood through Bazentin le Grand to High Wood and this would have to be broken in order to move east.

⁴² O.H. Military Operations 1918, Volume IV, p. 250.

⁴³ Lucas Lamps were named after their manufacturer and were normally used for signalling at night time. The use of these lamps in this way shows a degree on initiative by the officers concerned.

⁴⁴ TNA W.O. 2562 War Diary, 10 S.W.B. 24/25 August 1918.

⁴⁵ TNA W.O. 95/750 Appendix No. 87. Message G.548 of 24 August to 17th, 21st and 38th Divisions.

⁴⁶ TNA W.O. 95/2548 War Diary, 19 (P) W.R.

At 1am Sunday 25 August, 14 R.W.F. attacked Contalmaison along the Sunken Road, keeping in touch with 16 R.W.F. on their right and 10 S.W.B. on their left. By the end of the day, this battalion was in a position looking down on Mametz Wood and preparing to move through towards Bazentin-le Grand. (see Map. 17) The Welsh Division continued its 'pursuit' at 2.30am with all three brigades moved forward in line supported by a brigade of field artillery. They reported to Corps at 5.am, the 113th Inf. Bde (Right Bde), had moved forward in conjunction with two troops of 20th Hussars. However, when General Rhys Pryce (G.O.C. 113th Inf. Bde), moved into Contalmaison, he was fired upon by enemy troops who had been overlooked such was the confused nature of the advance. ⁴⁷ By 7.am, to aid the speed of movement, cyclist patrols pushed forward to exploit any opportunities. At the same time 114th Inf. Bde (left Bde) was moving towards High Wood. The 15 W.R. had left Pozieres and moved south towards Bazentin-le-Petit and at 4.30am, they turned east towards High Wood. Although held up by heavy machine gun fire, they took up positions along the Bazentin–Bapaume Road, where the rest of 114th Inf. Bde joined them. ⁴⁸ Now two battalions attacked Martinsart from where they tried to push on to High Wood, but the Germans stopped their advance. The 114th Inf. Bde held this position in front of High Wood all day and throughout the night.

During the advance 115th Inf. Bde (centre Bde) had moved to the north-side of Longueval, and thus trying to outflank the Germans in High Wood. At 9.55am, this Brigade took the ridge but was held up just short of Bazentin-le-Petit, and north of Mametz Wood. During the late evening there was a determined enemy attack on 10 SWB (115th Inf. Bde) at Bazentin-le-Petit, which they managed to overcome. The Transport Officer of this battalion brought forward a supply of water supply which was the first issued since the attack began.⁴⁹

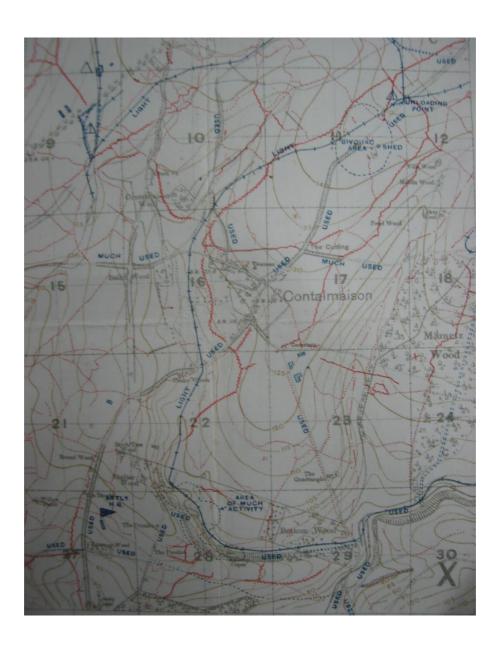
⁴⁷ Munby, Welsh Division, p. 51.

⁴⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2559 War Diary 15 W.R. The 114th Inf. Bde now went into the Welsh Divisional Reserve at this point.

⁴⁹ TNA W.O. 95/2562/1 War Diary 10 S.W.B., 25 August.1918.

17. Map showing the direction of attack on Mametz Wood from the Contalmaison.

(W.O. 95/2540)



At 1.30pm, 16 R.W.F. (113th Inf.Bde), had heavy fighting going through Mametz Wood, which must have seemed an historic moment for the men involved and for those who had fought there two years previously. ⁵⁰ At the same time in pitch darkness 10 S.W.B. and 2 R.W.F. (115th Inf. Bde), were trying to take Bazentin-le-Petit, and moved on to attack towards Bazentin-le-Grand and Longueval. ⁵¹ Both 14 and 15 W.R. took the heights south of Martinpuich, but High Wood was strongly held. The Divisional C.R.E. reported at 5.pm, the bridge at Authuille crossing was complete and field guns, including the heavier 60 pounders, could cross. This was an important moment in the drive forward, as it allowed the artillery to keep the tempo of their support as close as possible to the infantry advance. The movement of the artillery emphasised why the pursuit was 'resumed at the earliest moment and to be continued with the greatest rapidity and determination giving the enemy no time to recover himself '.⁵² In the late evening, there was a heavy German counter-attack from Trones Wood and High Wood, which was driven off, and the line restored in the early hours of the morning.

On 26 August V Corps ordered the 21st Division to advance on the left and concentrate on Ligny-Thilloy and Flers. The 17th Division would advance on Flers, in the centre, and the Welsh Division was to clear Bazentin Woods, and advance on the right against Longueval, and capture High Wood. (see Map. 18) The 6th Carabineers (Corps, Cavalry Regiment) would assist the right brigade of the Welsh Division. After heavy thunderstorms overnight, the attack began with a creeping barrage. 14 R.W.F. (113th Inf. Bde), taking Bazentin-le-Grand by 7am, and with the help of 10 S.W.B. they took a stronghold on its east side, which had been holding up the advance. The 14 R.W.F. then attacked uphill, with 13 R.W.F. in support, and became involved 'in some of the heaviest fighting since the beginning of operations, and for tired men wonderful dash & spirit were shown'.⁵³

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⁵⁰ O.H. Military Operations Volume IV 1918 p.292. States that it was not until 9.30am, on 26.8.1918 that the wood was completely cleared

⁵¹ TNA W.O. 95/2561/1 War Diary 2 R.W.F. 25 August 1918

⁵² TNA W.O. 95/750 War Diary V Corps. Appendix No. 95. Urgent Operations Priority G.583 24.8.1918.

⁵³ TNA W.O. 95/2555/2 War Diary 14 R.W.F. 26 August.1918

18. Map showing the easterly direction of the Welsh Division with High Wood to the north on the edge of the boundary with 17^{th} Division. (W.O. 95/750)

The Southern boundary of Third Army is the lower Green Line and is the boundary of Fourth Army.



Elements of the 114th Inf. Bde were temporarily held up at a ridge south of High Wood in the early morning. The 52nd Inf. Bde (17th Division) and also had problems with flanking fire from High Wood and resulted in them crossing the divisional boundaries to drive the enemy out from the right wing of their front.⁵⁴ On their right, 113th Inf. Bde were entering Longueval, which commanded High Wood, with a proposed move on Guichy and Morval, and then on to Guillemont Ridge. This move was to assist advance of III Corps (Fourth Army). Although High Wood had been captured at 10.45am by 17 R.W.F. (115th Inf. Bde), there was still the pressure from counter-attacks coming from south-east towards Bazentin-le-Grand. At 1.45pm, reports indicated that the Germans were preparing to counter-attack the troops at Bazentin-le-Grand and Longueval. News from V Corps reached the Welsh Division at 4.20pm, the neighbouring 18th Division to the south, was held up west of Montauban. At the same time 113th Inf. Bde, had beaten off attacks to their flanks, where, Captain Paine 16 R.W.F. was able to hold the position at Delville Wood.⁵⁵ The 113th Inf. Bde now realised there was a worrying gap opening up between the two divisions. By 5pm, the 14 R.W.F. (113th Inf. Bde), flank was exposed and as a result the decision was made to withdraw.

By late evening, the 114th Inf Bde (left Bde) was being enfiladed by enemy fire coming from Delville Wood, from where the enemy troops counter-attacked unsuccessfully four times during the day, the support of the forward artillery units now paid dividends. However, the line was withdrawn, to the Longueval–Flers road. During the day there had been intense and confused fighting around High Wood. The attack by two companies of 10 S.W.B. from Bazentin-le-Petit had greatly assisted both 17th Division, and 113th Inf. Bde.⁵⁶ D.H.Q. now moved forward from USNA Hill to Contalmaison, opening there at 4pm, which suggest the man on the spot, General Cubbit, and his staff were close to the action. By this stage, V Corps was advocating night advances and attacks which they suggested were more likely to succeed and be less costly than daylight operations. By the end of the day, the Welsh

⁵⁴ Atteridge, 17th Division, p. 389.

⁵⁵ TNA W.O. 339/36634 Personal file of Captain William Arthur Paine M.C.

⁵⁶ TNA W.O. 95/2562/1 War Diary 10 S.W.B. 26 August 1918. They were able to take the high ground and captured 30 prisoners and 4 M.G's. They were lead by Captains Hornsby and Hoffmeister.

Divisional line ran from the north edge of Bernafay Wood in the south, to a point 1,000 yards west of Longueval and 1,000 yards east of High Wood.⁵⁷

On 27 August, the Welsh Division attacked at 4am, under cover provided by both field and heavy artillery and although Longueval was reached later in the morning, heavy fighting continued centred around Delville Wood. Longueval was reported captured by 2.pm, and 113th Inf. Bde (Right Bde), continued their move on Ginchy. The 114th Inf. Bde passed through 115th Inf. Bde and attacked from the eastern edge of High Wood, towards Morval but were checked by hostile artillery and machine gun fire, 'which was very heavy from Delville Wood'.⁵⁸ At 3pm, the enemy counter-attacked from Delville Wood towards 10 S.W.B. position between High Wood and Longueval but were held, with the guns of 122nd Bde R.F.A. firing at close range.⁵⁹ By 8.40pm, it was reported contact was made with 17th Division (Northern boundary) by 15 W.R. (Left Bde), however, because of enfilading fire from Delville Wood and a series of counter-attacks, the brigade line was held on the west side Longueval–Flers Road for the night.⁶⁰

The Welsh Division now attacked along the Ginchy Ridge and Spur, where Corps was suggesting there was an opportunity of 'pocketing the enemy still in occupation of Delville Wood and to west of Ginchy'. The Corps commander wanted his divisions to 'consider the advisability of co-ordinating a simultaneous attack'. As a result, he asked each divisional commander to present their views as to when 'zero hour' could be co-ordinated and offered three choices for the operation to be decided on, at a conference to be held at 17th Division H.Q, on 28 August 1918. The final paragraph states:

⁵⁷ TNA W.O. 95/2540 War Dairy, 38 Welsh Division. 26 August.1918.

⁵⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2558 War Diary 114th Inf. Bde. 27 August.1918.

⁵⁹ TNA W.O. 95/2562/1 War Diary 10 S.W.B., 27. August 1918. The diary states 'An American forced to serve in the German army gave himself up & volunteered valuable information as to enemy dispositions'.

⁶⁰ TNA W.O. 95/2559 War Diary, 13 W.R. Such was the intensity of the fighting the 13 W.R. who were one of the support battalions found itself leading the attack.

In considering the time for these operations it must be remembered that although Officers and men have had a very hard time and seven days continued fighting, the enemy has probably had long marches and are also tired. Further that the German if he can be rattled and engaged before he is probably settled down is a very different proposition to the German who has had a few hours respite to get his bearings.⁶¹

The Operation Order gives the Welsh Division a 5.30am zero hour, which was supported by a heavy artillery barrage on enemy positions with the troops attacking the high ground east of Ginchy from the south and north of Delville Wood, thus trying to create the pocket suggested around Longueval and Delville Wood.⁶²

By early morning 28 August, Longueval and the western edge of Delville Wood were clear of the enemy, and patrols were pushed into Delville Wood. The 115th Inf. Bde attacked toward Morval and Les Boeufs and the railway line south-west of Les Boeufs was taken, with 20 prisoners. By early evening, the Welsh Division was in touch with 18th Division, III Corps to the south, which was swinging its attack to the left, to conform to the attack of V Corps. The barrage commenced the following day (29 August) at 5.15am, and Zero hour at 5.30am, with 113th Inf. Bde advancing south of Delville Wood to occupy Ginchy, which was taken without opposition. The task of 114th Inf. Bde was to mop-up Delville Wood, and 115th Inf. Bde was to push through towards Morval. (see Map. 19) However, each of the divisions within the Corps had different start times, so when the Welsh Division went forward, the 17th and 21st Divisions were holding their positions with the proviso that should the German resistance slacken they were to take advantage of this. Reports from III Corps at 7.29am, stated '18th and 38th Division were in touch at the Sugar Refinery'. While 17th Division reported at 9.50am, it was in touch with the Welsh Division on the line of Guedecourt, and 21st Division was north of the same point. Just before midday 113th Inf. Bde, pushed out 'battle patrols' which came into touch

⁶¹ TNA W.O. 95/750 War Diary V Corps. Appendix, No. 114, G.S. 490/80, p.3.

⁶² TNA W.O. 95/750 Operation Order No. 234 issued at 3.45pm 28.8.1918.

⁶³ TNA W.O. 95/2555/1 War Diary, 13 R.W.F. for 29 August 1918, it states that a few prisoners were taken. This position had held out for over a month during 1916 Somme offensive.

⁶⁴ Atteridge, 17th Division, p. 392.

with the enemy on the forward slopes of Morval. The Welsh Division was now engaged at Les Boeufs and Morval, while both forward brigades had taken a line north from Guinchy. The guns of 122nd Brigade R.F.A. had come forward in support and assisted in repulsing the enemy counter-attacks. By early evening the Welsh Divisional line ran west of Morval and east of Les Bouefs but the line from Morval south towards Combles was still in enemy possession. Delville Wood had been mopped up by 13 W.R. who spent the night in the Wood before advancing towards Morval the following day.

19. Map of Morval and Lesboeufs. (W.O. 95/2540)



The village of Morval proved a stumbling block as it was strongly held by the Germans throughout the day. On 30 August, the 114th Inf. Bde advance guard tried to enter Morval but continued to be held up by heavy shelling and machine gun fire. Curiously the Germans were continuing to reinforce this position despite the prospect of it being outflanked. Brigadier General Hulke (115th Inf. Bde), went forward to reconnoitre for his attack on Morval, but whilst visiting B.H.Q., near Les Boeufs, he was hit by a shell fragment on his left knee and was unable to continue. His command was taken over by Lieut. Colonel Norman, 17 R.W.F.⁶⁵ The attack continued the following morning (31 August) at 4.45am, with 14 W.R. reaching the Sunken Road and railway, after heavy fighting. During these attacks Lieut.-Colonel Parkinson, 15 W.R, was wounded by shrapnel. ⁶⁶ The command of the battalion passed to Major Helme, who had been acting as second in command. The 13 W.R. move forward was held up by intense machine gun fire losing their adjutant Captain Boulton M.C. in the process. ⁶⁷

Once again the Corps Commander, Lieut.-General Shute varied zero hour, with the 21st Division attacking Beaulencourt at 2am, and Welsh Division at 4.45am against Morval, with all three divisions of the Corps attacking at 5.40am. The Welsh Divisions attack was supported by a barrage of three brigades of field artillery.⁶⁸ By 7.40am, 1 September, it was confirmed that the Welsh Division (114th Inf. Bde) had taken the shattered remains of Morval, and the Germans had withdrawn from Les Boeufs.⁶⁹ As a result, both 2 R.W.F., and 17 R.W.F. (115th Inf. Bde), moved forward towards on a line south-east of Morval across open country risen uphill towards Sailly Saillisel, and came under heavy enfilade fire. The 5.40am attack was practically at the same time as 18 Division (Fourth Army), on their southern boundary. The 18 Division were forced to retire to a line in front of Morval. The 17 Division to their north, had taken Beaulencourt, and were attacking Le Transloy but failed to come up

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⁶⁵ TNA W.O. 374/135533 Pension File Brigadier General Walter Blackhouse Hulke D.S.O. (1872-1923).

⁶⁶ Marden, Welch Regiment, p. 466.

⁶⁷ TNA W.O. 339/46935 Personal file of Captain Clifford John Boulton.

⁶⁸ The Welsh Division used 114th Inf. Bde and 115th Inf. Bde in attack with 113th Inf. Bde in a supporting role.

⁶⁹ TNA W.O. 95/2555/1 War Diary of 13 R.W.F On 1 September 1918, the village of Morval was captured at 6am, which means the time delay back to D.H.Q, was approximately one hour. Both 13 R.W.F, and 16 R.W.F. (113th Inf. Bde), now moved forward with the main attack, the dividing line being the Morval - Sailly Saillisel road.

to the Welsh line. Although the enemy was offering strong resistance, three brigades of the R.F.A. were in action west of Morval.

However at 7am, the Germans counter-attacked the two leading battalions of 115th Inf. Bde on their open left flank. As a result 10 S.W.B., were brought forward and attacked the enemy's left flank with success. All during the day prisoners were being taken, and by 6pm, it was recorded that 3 officers and 293 other ranks were in the Welsh divisional cage. Verbal orders were given to General ap Rhys Pryce (113th Inf. Bde) by General Cubbit to attack eastwards in conjunction with 55th Infantry Bde (18th Division) who were also attacking Sailly Saillisel at 7.am. The operation was covered by converging creeping barrages and such was the speed of the advance that at 10am, 115th Inf. Bde reached the outskirts of the village. Sailly Saillisel was attacked by both 113th & 115th Inf. Bde at 6pm, with fire support from the divisional artillery, and although the enemy put up a stubborn resistance within the village, it was occupied by 8pm.

By 2.30am, 2 September, 17th Division to the north of the Welsh Division were mopping up at Le Transloy and to the south 18th Division (Fourth Army) were on a line just west of the natural obstacle of St. Pierre Vaast Wood, and south of Sailly Saillisel. The Welsh Division was now being outflanked by the enemy, as it was already two miles in advance of 17th Division to the north and no movement forward could be achieved until Le Transloy was secured. Patrols of the Welsh Division did move forward during the day, with 114th Inf. Bde taking up a line just west of Sailly Saillisel, but with its flanks were exposed, and most of the day was spent in consolidating the position. Although an attack was made at 5.pm, under a creeping barrage, towards the east of Sailly Saillisel-Le Transloy Road, it was held up by heavy machine gun fire. It was during the night of 2/3 September, with the breaking of the Drocourt-Queant position just south of Arras, by the Canadian Corps and the turning of the Somme line by the Australians at Peronne and St. Quentin, was now putting greater pressure on the Germans

⁷⁰ O.H. Military Operations 1918, Volume IV, p. 412.

⁷¹ TNA W.O. 95/2542 War Diary C.R.A. Welsh Division, 2.9.1918. During the day news was received that the Germans had brought three new divisions and this may have been another reason to consolidate. Both 121st and 312th Artillery Brigades were withdrawn to Morval for this reason.

facing V Corps. By now, V Corps front had now passed the furthest point of the front line of Somme battle of 1916, and were pushing forward advance guards to keep up the pursuit of the enemy.

By dawn on 3 September there were signs of a 'number of big fires' behind enemy lines and the Welsh Division's advance continued towards Mesnil en Arrouaise. By 2.30pm, 14 R.W.F. (113th Inf. Bde), had carried the village, and 115th Inf. Bde consolidated a position south-east of the village as St. Martin's Wood. The 114th Inf. Bde passed through 115th Inf. Bde and with support from 122nd Bde R.F.A. began moving through towards the heights overlooking the Tortille River. There was some indication suggesting the Germans were beginning to fall back to their positions on the Canal du Nord. Instructions from Third Army to V Corps were 'for 17th and 38th Division to advance towards the Canal du Nord'. Because of the narrowing of the front, General Shute, ordered his divisions to form advance guards. 72 (see Map. 20) One of the reasons was the high number of casualties which had been sustained, for example, when 115th Inf. Bde was relieved, 2 R.W.F, they were 'down to about ninety'.73 The advanced guard consisted of 113th Inf. Bde, 122nd RFA, 123rd Field Company RE, plus one bearer party R.A.M.C. and importantly a Corps cyclist squadron and a troop of Carabineers. Early in the day the artillery carried out 'counter-preparations' in anticipation of a hostile attack, which failed to develop.⁷⁴ By 6pm, patrols reported the enemy had apparently withdrawn during the night east of the Canal du Nord and River Tortille. 75 Later in the afternoon, a new advanced guard of 114th Inf. Bde, 122nd R.F.A. Brigade and the engineers of 123rd Field Company passed through the position gained earlier by both brigades and pushed on to high ground running on the west bank of the Canal du Nord from Manancourt to Etricourt. Despite heavy gas shelling, the line was held west of the Canal for the night.

⁷² O.H. Military Operations, 1918, Volume IV, pp. 418-20.

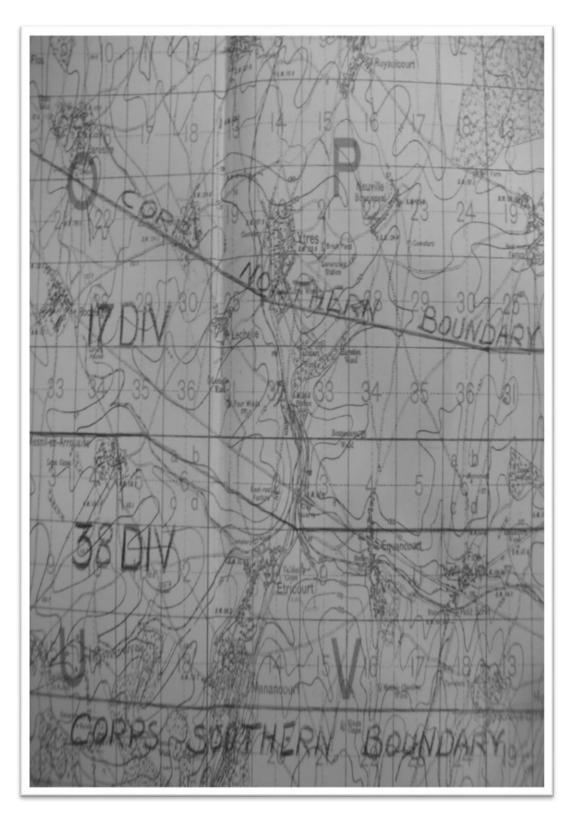
⁷³ Dunn, War the Infantry Knew, p. 537.

⁷⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2542 War Diary C.R.A, 3.September 1918

⁷⁵ TNA W.O. 95/2540 War Diary 38th Division 3 .September.1918

20. Map showing the narrowing of V Corps boundary. (W.O. 95/751)

This map clearly shows V Corps boundary narrowing and the reason for the advance guards as they approached the Canal du Nord.



The Welsh Division had fought its way across the old battlefield of the Somme, and in doing so, demonstrated the tactical change which was taken place, and the lessons learned over the past two years on the Western Front. The Welsh Division's progress across the battlefield of 1916, in such a short time, crossing the Ancre, night marches and early morning attacks and its intuitive use of the topography, always searching to exploit its own mobility by the using both cyclists and cavalry, are clear indications of a military evolution. Their experience reveals the Welsh Division as being extremely progressive and trying to break into open warfare. By coordination of their attacks were keeping the momentum running, and had unbalanced the enemy's defences. Combined with the presence of both field artillery, points towards an 'all arms' approach to open warfare of 1918.76 Although as the autumn weather deteriorated 'the terrain improved once the devastated Somme area had been left behind.'77 The application of the 'man on the spot' was clearly demonstrated by the progress of the decisions middle ranking officers of the Welsh Division were making.

Their operational orders of 1918 reflect a duality of purpose, where the Welsh Divisions was confident in working conjunction with other divisions whether in their own Corps or in different Corps, and Armies. This in many ways was the missing link from the Somme of 1916, as no longer did divisions fight in isolation as the Welsh Division had done at Mametz Wood. The struggle to introduce an 'all arms advance guards' also points to a subtle change in the way Third Army was attempting to overcome its tactical problems. However, none of this was without costs, the casualty lists of the Welsh Division during these two months bear witness to the defensive capability of the German Army, who still knew how to defend positions. This is clearly reflected in the Welsh Division experience during the 'advance to victory', and was the price paid to defeat the German Army in the field

From the Canal du Nord to the Selle

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⁷⁶ TNA W.O. 95/750 War Dairy V Corps. Secret appendix No. 85. 23 August 1918.

⁷⁷ Boff, Jonathan, Winning and Losing on the Western Front: The British Third Army and the Defeat of Germany 1918 (Cambridge, 2012), p. 100.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.136. Despite attempting to use cavalry in the advance guards it did not appear to have been successful. Corps cyclists appear to have been more useful.

On arrival at the Canal du Nord which was the forward position of the Hindenburg Line, they found all the bridges destroyed and the enemy holding the east bank in strength. Initially, the Welsh Division's advance guard tried to cross, but were stopped on the forward slopes of the west bank, and took up positions along the Etricourt-Manacourt line. During a 48 hour period before the Welsh Division's attack, the whole area of the west bank was smothered with gas shells, making preparations for overcoming the canal and river Tortille very difficult. The canal was a major obstacle to the advance of V Corps, and the operation to cross it was lead by 114th Inf. Bde, who expected to take the line of Nurlu–Equancourt. Once taken 115th Inf. Bde would pass through them as the advanced guard.

On 4 September, the attack began with Major Hobbs in command of 13 W.R. (114th Inf. Bde), on the left who found the road bridge at Etricourt destroyed, although the bridge debris was not covered by machine guns. This allowed a platoon of infantry to crawl across under fire, when Captain Beech and only six men charged the machine gun posts and disposed of snipers. ⁷⁹ Once secured, they established a bridgehead on the Spur on the east bank for the battalion to cross. ⁸⁰ Major Daniel, 14 W.R. carried out a similar action at Manancourt, and by 11.30am an advance guard of two companies of the brigade crossed the canal, and an outpost line was formed. The crossing of the Canal du Nord was a major feather in the cap for the Welsh Division, which was acknowledged by V Corps, who on the 5 September sent their congratulations to 'General Shute and his division'. ⁸¹ Later that day, resistance stiffened and the counter-attack on Equancourt was repulsed, afterwards the Germans withdrew from this position. ⁸² That night the 21st Division relieved the Welsh Division, and Brigadier General Hugo Douglas du Pree took over command of 115th Inf. Bde from Lieut.-Colonel Norman. ⁸³ During the previous fortnight the Welsh Division had driven the Germans back fifteen miles, lost approximately

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⁷⁹ Captain Ernest Bolitho Beech was awarded the M.C. (L.G. 11.1.19) for his command and 'conduct which was magnificent throughout the fighting'.

⁸⁰ Howard Frederick Hobbs acting Major was awarded M.C. (L.G. 1.1.18) and a D.S.O. (L.G. 2.12.18) and was also M.I.D., 28.12.18).

⁸¹ O.H. Military Operations, Volume IV 1918, pp. 424-6. It should be noted that the part of the canal the Welsh Division attacked from Manacourt to Etricourt did have water in it, unlike further north which was dry. This in itself made the operation that much more difficult as the Canal was 40 yards wide in this area. See also Munby, *Welsh Division*, p. 59.

⁸² Atteridge, 17th Division, p. 403.

⁸³ Tyler R.W.F. Officers 1914 – 18. (Private publication), p. 300.

3,614 casualties during intense fighting and taken 29 officers, and 1,886 other ranks prisoner of war, as well as six guns and many machine guns.⁸⁴ The divisional artillery which had been in action during this whole period was estimated to have fired over three hundred thousand rounds.⁸⁵

By 11 September, the Welsh D.H.Q, moved forward from Les Boeufs, and the infantry brigades relieved their opposite numbers of 17th Division in the Lechelles area. On arrival 115th Inf. Bde, found the line in front of Gouzeacourt was held by a Jaeger Division which was putting up a stout resistance. (see Map. 21) After taken over the front line, the brigade realised it was occupying a trench system which had been dug by the British in 1917. This system of trenches ran along the ridge from Epehy to Trescualt, and was above the Scheldt Canal, where the enemy were holding this high ground. The 113th Inf. Bde was in support near Dessart Wood, the 114th Inf. Bde occupied the trench system built by the Germans at Equancourt. The next day, attempts were made by 10 S.W.B. (115th Inf. Bde), to capture enemy held trenches, in conjunction with the New Zealand Division (IV Corps) to the north, but the positions proved too strong to hold.⁸⁶ The length of the line 2 R.W.F. (115th Inf. Bde), were holding was considered too long, with too few men, and the Germans were in old British trenches about 150 yards away on the high ground. 87 The enemy attacked on 12 September at 9.20am, but were driven off while they also hit a low flying enemy aircraft with L.G. fire. 88 During this advance, forward 151st Field Companies R.E. and the divisional pioneers, promptly began laying the light railway between Fins and Heudecourt, while work continued repairing roads going east, to keep the arteries of supply flowing. The bad autumn weather was beginning to hamper operations of the British but plans were being put into place for a huge set piece battle by V Corps, to take the Hindenburg Line.

⁸⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2540 War Diary, 38th Division, September 1918.

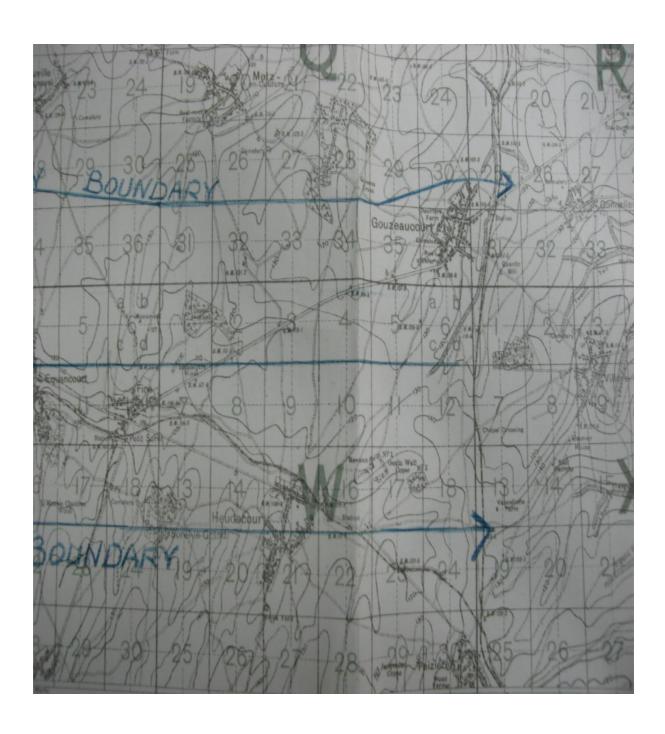
⁸⁵ Munby, Welsh Division, pp. 60-1.

⁸⁶ TNA W.O. 95/2562/1 War Diary 10 S.W.B, the battalion lost three officers killed and two wounded and sustained 79 casualties during this attack.

⁸⁷ Dunn, War the Infantry Knew, p. 538.

⁸⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2561/1 War Diary 2 R.W.F., 12 September 1918.

21. Advance of the Welsh Division from Equancourt and Fins through Heudecourt to the line running south of Gouzeaucourt. (W.O. 95/751)



On the rainy morning of 18 September, the major attack went in at 5.20am, under a terrific artillery and trench mortar barrage. The 113th and 114th Inf. Bdes attacked, in conjunction with the remainder of V Corps, and combined with 5th Division, (III Corps), on their left. Although opposition was stubborn causing many casualties 114th Inf. Bde reached their objectives, a position south of Gouzeaucourt but did not take the village. The reason was the presence of enemy machine guns located on their flanks, outside the opening barrage line.⁸⁹ At 6pm, orders were received by 114th Inf. Bde, to launch another attack from both sides of the railway line at Gauche Wood in conjunction with 50th Inf. Bde (17th Division). However, due the disorganisation and difficulty of movement forward, troops did not arrive in time to attack Gouzeacourt from the south-west.

The 113th Inf. Bde was held up by flanking fire from the north, although 14 R.W.F. had a partial success, reaching its second objective in front of Gouzeaucourt. The loss of eleven of the twelve officers involved may have been the reason why the brigade was unable to hold the position and returned to their original line. ⁹⁰ At 9.pm, 113th Inf. Bde attacked again in conjunction with 17th Division, 'with the intention of joining hands south of Gouzeaucourt'. ⁹¹ During these brigade attacks, attached companies of pioneers had taken part in the fighting, after which they did useful work in consolidating the position. ⁹² Later that evening the enemy counter-attacked the 113th Inf. Bde, along 'African Trench' and although they managed to get into the front line, before they were eventually driven off after heavy fighting. ⁹³ The German counter-attack on the night of 18 September had been led by two enemy divisions and although one historian has stated that it was 'beaten off very easily', for

⁸⁹ TNA W.O. 95/2558 War Diary, 114th Inf.Bde. *Narrative of Operations near Gouzeaucourt, September 1918*. These machine guns were dealt with by rear waves of attacking infantry using Rifle Grenades.

⁹⁰ TNA W.O. 339/78297 personnel file of Lt. James Richards, 16 R.W.F.

⁹¹ TNA W.O. 95/2540 War Diary, 38 Division, 18 September 1918

⁹² TNA W.O. 95/2548 War Diary, 19 (P) W.R. the losses were 1 Officer wounded, 4 other ranks killed and 16 wounded.

⁹³ TNA W.O. 95/2555/1 War Diary, 13 R.W.F, 20.9.1917 During the night of the German attack on Africa Trench six fusiliers of the battalion 'were rushed from behind by a superior numbers & forced to surrender'.

the troops involved it was a bitter struggle, during a night of heavy fighting. ⁹⁴ Over 100 prisoners were captured during the fighting.

On 19 September, the enemy attacked at 6.30am and captured Africa Trench, and the fighting continued, with 13 R.W.F. taken over line from 16 R.W.F. (113th Inf. Bde), at 12 noon. At the same time 14 R.W.F. supported by a heavy bombardment made a bombing attack on the enemy at Africa Trench, along the Metz-Gouzeaucourt road. Despite 'determined resistance' the attack reached all its objectives expelling the enemy from the Africa Trench system. During the day the enemy attacked two forward companies of 14 R.W.F. six times. By 11pm, 113rd Inf. Bde was relieved by 2 R.W.F. and 10 S.W.B. (115th Inf. Bde), without any enemy interference. On the night 20/21 September, 17th Division extended its front line, after taking over from Welsh Division to the west of Gouzeaucourt. ⁹⁵ The Welsh Division was placed in reserve and would have a week's rest, which gave it time to absorb new drafts, refit and reorganize. Brigades immediately began training (chiefly musketry), practising attacks, using German stick grenades, with junior officers spending more time on map and compass exercises. On 20 September, Major General Cubitt, issued a 'Special Order of the Day' regarding a telegram from the Prince of Wales, he had received the previous day:

Please convey to all ranks of the Welsh Division on my most sincere congratulations on their magnificent successes in the recent offensive on the Western Front. These I have followed with the greatest interest, particularly in view of my close connection with the Division during the Battle in Belgium last year.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Ibid, Boff, *Winning and Losing*, p. 45: W.O. 95/2558 War Diary 114th Inf. Bde 18/19 September. 1918.

 ⁹⁵ TNA W.O. 95/2558 War Diary, 114th Inf. Bde. Casualties involved in the fighting for Gouzeaucourt were, 1 Officer killed, 18 wounded and 1 missing, 33 other ranks killed, 338 wounded and 48 missing.
 96 See Appendix 5 for the full Special Order of the Day.

The General's reply stated 'that all ranks 38th Division are deeply grateful for your Royal Highness most gracious telegram which has filled them with the utmost enthusiasm. 97 One battalion recorded 'the victories from all fronts are raising the moral of the men to a very high degree.'98

On 28 September, the Welsh Division moved from Equancourt area to Finns Ridge Wood. Officers from both 113th and 115th Inf. Bdes went forward to reconnoitre the St. Emilie area. On the same day, the Germans began to evacuate Gouzeaucourt and started their retirement towards the St. Quentin Canal. Not until 3 October were orders received to move forward but the plan of attack had depended very much on the success of the neighbouring Corps of Fourth Army, to the south.⁹⁹ Their role now was to move south of Vendhuile in support of 50th Division (XIII Corps, Fourth Army) which had captured Le Catelet and Guoy, then move on to attack north-east towards Beaurevoir. The divisions of Third Army now moved forward, with V Corps reaching the west side of the St. Quentin Canal. Observers from 15th Squadron R.A.F. indicated the enemy were evacuating parts of the Hindenburg Line. Later that afternoon the Welsh Division began pushing patrols on towards Bonabus Farm, which allegedly was being held by one machine gun. 100

The Battle of the Beaurevoir Line

The scale of the German withdrawal was five miles deep, settling back on Vaucelles in the Hindenburg Support Line. 101 On the night 4/5 October 115th Inf. Bde left Bony and made their way to the high ground north of Le Catelet and La Panniers South, to relieve part of 50th Division. The Welsh Division objective for 5 October was to advance through the ground captured by the 50th Division and swing north-eastwards and advance on Aubencil, Villers Outreaux and Mortho Wood. During the advance the Welsh Division held a position west of Aubencil to Bonabus Farm during the night. The advance guard of 113th Inf. Bde moved through Bony to the west of Bois du Mortho, which was strongly defended by

September 1918.

⁹⁷ TNA W.O. 95/2558 War Diary, 14 W.R. Friday, 20 .September.1918

⁹⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2562/1 War Diary, 10 S.W.B. 30.September 1918

⁹⁹ Munby, Welsh Division, p. 65.

¹⁰⁰ TNA W.O. 95/751 War Diary V Corps, 5.10.1918: W.O. 95/2558 War Diary, 114th Inf. Bde 18/19

¹⁰¹ O.H. Military Operations 1918, Volume V, p. 156.

machine gun fire. By the end of the days fighting, they held a line from Vauxhall Quarry, via the eastern edge of Aubencil, to the western edge of Mortho Wood. The vast amounts of kit left behind by the retreating enemy and it was seen as if, 'the retreat was being accelerated to the point where it must surely become a rout'. ¹⁰²

Once again the work of the Welsh Division's 124th Field Coy, R.E. and the Glamorgan Pioneers (19 W.R.) proved of vital importance as they constructed a bridge across the St. Quentin Canal at Ossus, which was on the boundary between Third and Fourth Army. The bridges were ready by 3pm on 5 October, and both the artillery of 33rd Division and Welsh Division crossed, and took up a position, to support the progress of the advance that day. Some battery officers of 121st and 122nd Bdes R.F.A. went forward to reconnoitre positions on the east of the canal, so when the batteries already in assembly positions were ordered to go forward to new positions, they could do so. Brigadier General Topping (C.R.A.) who had proved his worth during the Battle of Lys in April, showed great tactical ability in being able to position 122nd Bde R.F.A. south of Basket Wood, and 121st Bde R.F.A. south and north of the wood. Both batteries were in close liaison with 113th and 115th Inf. Bdes respectively. Once both R.F.A. units were in place, the rest of the artillery assigned to the advance guard moved forward, bearing in mind, the heavier guns of the R.G.A. took longer to move into new positions. Two days were spent in making arrangements for the next attack.

During the night 5/6 October, 17 R.W.F. (115th Inf. Bde), took Aubencil Aux Bois inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy. The 10 S.W.B. moved towards the sunken road south-west of Villers Outreaux, and the Quarry to the east of Aubencil. Contact was made between 2 Royal Munster Fusiliers (150th Inf. Bde, 50th Division) on the right, and 17 R.W.F. on the left. The position was consolidated, and night patrols indicated the enemy positions were strongly held by machine guns, and heavily fortified with, 'barbed wire being very conspicuous its numerous belts of thickness not hitherto encountered in such a quantity'. There was little doubt the enemy would make a stand in defence of

¹⁰² Dunne, War the Infantry Knew, p. 548.

¹⁰³ TNA W.O. 95/2546 War Diary, 19 (P) W.R

¹⁰⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2562 War Diary, 10 S.W.B., 7 October 1918

this position. Patrols sent forward by 13 R.W.F. and 14 R.W.F. (113th Inf. Bde), found trenches in the rear of Mortho Wood strongly held but managed to hold the mid-way point.¹⁰⁵ Both had found the heavily wired Hindenburg Line, which was covered by numerous machine gun posts in concrete emplacements.

On the night of 7 October, the battalions of 114th Inf. Bde made their way forward through the rain to west of Aubencil reaching a line from Le Catelet to Nauroy, the forward staging area for the attack. (see Map. 22) Movement was hampered by enemy artillery fire, and was not helped by the tanks cutting the signal lines. Repair of these lines was proving difficult due to the heavy gas shelling northeast of Villers Outreaux. During the morning, 149th Inf. Bde relieved the 150th Inf. Bde and attacked Villers Farm but failed to take it. ¹⁰⁶ This farm was on the outskirts of the village to the south-west, and on high ground, and marked the divisional boundary between the Welsh Division and 50th Division.

The 8 October, was described as presenting 'perhaps the stiffest fighting of the whole advance'. ¹⁰⁷ The R.F.A. plan to support the Welsh Divisional attack was split-up into four separate barrages, supporting the three brigade attack. The first two barrages would support both right and left battalions of 115th Inf. Bde attack, and lay a barrage to support the attack of 113th Inf. Bde. At a later point, when 114th Inf. Bde had passed through its objectives, and in order to carry out this last barrage, the batteries would move forward to new positions to do so. ¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ TNA W.O. 95/2555/1 War Diary, 13 R.W.F., 6 October 1918

¹⁰⁶ O.H. Volume V 1918, p. 188.

¹⁰⁷ Munby, Welsh Division, p. 66.

¹⁰⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2542 War Diary, C.R.A. Welsh Division, 7 October 1918.

22. Map showing the staging area for the frontal attack towards the Masnieres Beaurevoir line $(W.O.\,95/2540)$

It shows the position of the Sugar Factory to east Aubencheul aux Bois.



Patrols throughout the previous day had established the Germans held the Beauvoir-Masnieres line in some strength. This attack was to be made by two divisions, with an advance of over five thousand yards, through a very strong defensive position. Each division had to coordinate its movements with the units on its flanks during night-time. The plan was to carry the Beaurevoir Line, with 21st Division (left division) objective the capture Walincourt (North), while XIII Corps on the right occupy Serain (South). The Welsh Division (Centre) would secure the line east of Malincourt, after capturing Villers Outreaux. This was two and half miles into the Hindenburg Line.

At 7pm on 7 October, orders were issued leaving barely six hours before the attack. The staging area for the Welsh Division was a trench line running towards the north-south of Villers Outreaux on its west side, which was heavily fortified with concrete machine gun posts, deep dug-outs and surrounded by double thick wire entanglements. It was one and half miles long and 500 yards deep, with the ground rising on the east side to 140ft high. On the south-west side at the same height was Villers Farm, which commanded all the approaches from Aubencil to the north-west, including the Sugar Factory. This was to be a two brigade attack, with 113th Inf. Be on the left and 115th Inf. Bde to envelope Villers Outreaux. The 115th Inf. Bde would approaches from the north, via Mortho Wood and Angelus Orchard, and cross Pierre Hill and descends on a line towards the Station–Brickfields and the Sugar Factory. This was the task of 17 R.W.F. with 2 R.W.F. acting as 'Moppers up'. It was 10 S.W.B. task to take this farm, and join up with 17 R.W.F.

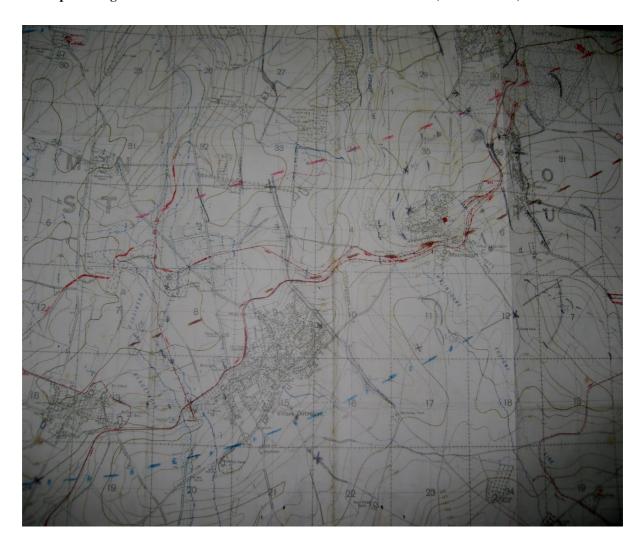
At 1am, 8 October under cover of a heavy artillery barrage 113th Inf. Bde (left Bde) attacked the Mesnieres-Beaurevoir Line from east of Mortho Wood, with 16 R.W.F. on the right, and 13 R.W.F. on the left, and 14 R.W.F. in reserve.¹⁰⁹ They immediately met stiff resistance from a trench line west of Villers Outreaux which had been reported as unoccupied. Moving forward in the darkness they found thick belts of uncut wire in front of this line, which was covered by machine guns. Captain Wynne Edwards had marked two gaps in the wire while on reconnaissance the previous day, and guided the 13

¹⁰⁹ O.H. Chapter V, p.200.

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R.W.F. through. 110 Once again progress was slow, owing to machine gun and sniper fire from Chateau de Angles. 111 However, 113th Inf. Bde made good progress with the help of two tanks pushing through the enemy defences at the centre, with both flanking companies of 16 R.W.F. to the north and south capturing Angelus Wood and moving towards Pierre Mill. By 11.15hrs, after reorganisation the final objective was reached. 112. The 114th Inf. Bde then passed through 14 R.W.F. positions at 11.30hrs, and 'found the enemy in full flight'. 113 (See Map 23)

23. Map showing the direction of the advance east of the Welsh Division. (W.O. 95/2540)



¹¹⁰ TNA W.O. 339/21851 Personal file of Captain later Sir Robert Meredydd Wynne-Edwards C.B.E, D.S.O, M.C. and Bar, 13 R.W.F.

¹¹¹ TNA W.O. 95/2555/1 War Diary 13 R.W.F.

¹¹² TNA W.O. 95/2554 War Diary 113th Infantry Brigade, October 1918.

¹¹³ TNA W.O. 95/2555/2 War Diary 14 R.W.F. 8.October 1918.

The 115th Inf. Bde (right Bde) objective was the main road running from Marliches Farm, along the north-east edge of Villers Outreaux to the light railway line. One of the leading battalions, 17 R.W.F. on the left of the brigade front, had no problem finding its assembly positions before the attack. The task of 2 R.W.F. was to move at dawn with four tanks and clear the village. The route taken by 10 S.W.B. was to 'side step' their attack to the north-east of the village, and then join up with 17 R.W.F. at Villers Farm. In order to do this the 10 S.W.B. had to be pulled out of the line and move forward to their right, to the south-east, which was done at night. The net result was the battalion only arrived just before the lam, 'zero hour'. Their attack went in, and was confronted by heavy belts of barbed wire coupled with strong German machine gun cover, which held them up. In the dark some men lost direction, and had to be re-organised before renewing the attack. During the fighting C.S.M. Williams 10 SWB seeing his company was taking heavy casualties from an enemy machine gun, outflanked the enemy posts and rushed the position. His action enabled both his company and those flanking it, to continue the advance, for which he was later awarded the V.C. Major J. H. J. Montieth, who was commanding, was now able to carry the objective. The confusion was created by the failure of the guides to arrive, which led to some of the battalion starting from the wrong place. It was also due to part of the line not being properly cleared of Germans by 50th Division as was expected. The attack of 17 RWF was held up as they found the enemy wire uncut, and despite great endeavour and losing ten officers and 120 men they were unable to make progress. 114 At this point, Lieut.-Colonel Norman seeing that the front line had not been taken by 17 R.W.F issued fresh orders to attack. As a result, 2 R.W.F. began working around the east of the village using their four tanks and elements of 17 R.W.F. This combined with the assistance of 'C' battery, 122nd R.F.A, under the enterprise of Major Clarke, the wire was cut and the attack was successful. 115 With the support of the tanks and the two battalions co-operating with artillery support, the objective was achieved and the Villers Farm taken. During the fighting through the village there was more evidence of equipment left by the Germans, as they withdrew in a disorderly manner. By 1600 hrs, all the battalions of 115th Inf. Bde had reached their final objective, and in doing so, had turned the German flanks which changed an 'awkward situation into a great success.'116

¹¹⁴ Munby, Welsh Division, p. 68.

¹¹⁵ TNA W.O. 339/37326 personal file of Major Alfred David Conrad Clarke D.S.O, M.C, R.F.A

¹¹⁶ Dunn, War the Infantry Knew, p. 555.

The 114th Inf. Bde was the reserve brigade, and on arrival at the assembly positions at 5am, with 13 W.R. going forward on the right and 15 W.R on the left and were to pass each side towards Malincourt. (see Map. 24, 25 and 26)) However, they soon became involved in the fighting before they reached their start line, which threw out the timings of the original barrages and the forward movement of the artillery. Unfortunately it was only possible to stop 13 W.R. from moving forward. 117 The two other battalions had already moved forward to a position between Villers Outreaux and Mortho Wood, where they expected to find the positions taken. However, this was not the case, and as 14 and 15 W.R. moved through the wood, their leading platoons attacked at 5am in conjunction with 14 R.W.F. (113th Inf. Bde reserve), and despite heavy fighting were unable to make progress. At this stage, Lieut.-Colonel Brooke made a personal reconnaissance, and found all along the wood was heavily wired and covered by machine guns but with the help of two tanks these obstacles were soon overcome. A well sited anti-tank gun put the tanks out of action, but was overwhelmed by the advance of the infantry. At 11.30am, the 114th Inf. Bde moved off under a creeping barrage and fought their way forward towards Villers-Outreaux. The 13 W.R. became involved in heavy fighting in the Sunken Road on the southern outskirts of the village. Meanwhile 15 W.R. captured the Chateau d'Angles which was north of the village, and had previously enfiladed their flanking movement. By 11.50am, the brigade continued moving forward under a creeping barrage towards Malincourt. The movement of the divisional artillery played a significant role in the success of the brigades attack and continued to support them in the forward position at Malincourt.

The 13 W.R. moved forward into a position south of Malincourt, while 14 W.R. pushed through the village under a creeping barrage, establishing a line to the east of the village, supported there by both machine guns and stokes mortars.

¹¹⁷ TNA W.O. 95/2558 War Diary, 114th Inf. Bde. Narrative of Operations near Villers-Outreaux, 8 October 1918.

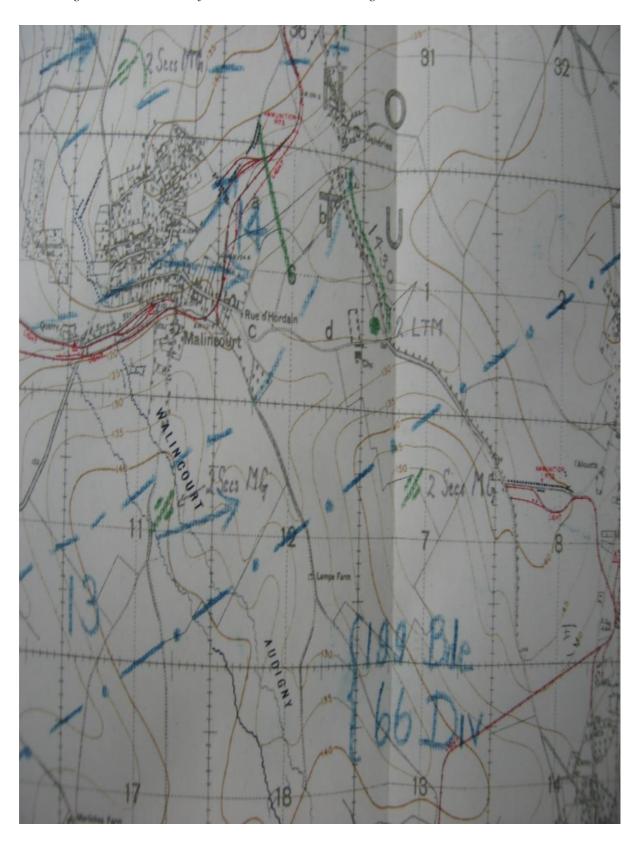
24. Map showing position of Angles Chateaux clearly on the high ground and gives a significant position to stop the movement forward. (W.O. 95/2540)

The area around Mortho Wood shows there was a heavy concentration of wire defences. The Chateaux is cut through by on the northern divisional boundary, indicated by red pencil dashes.



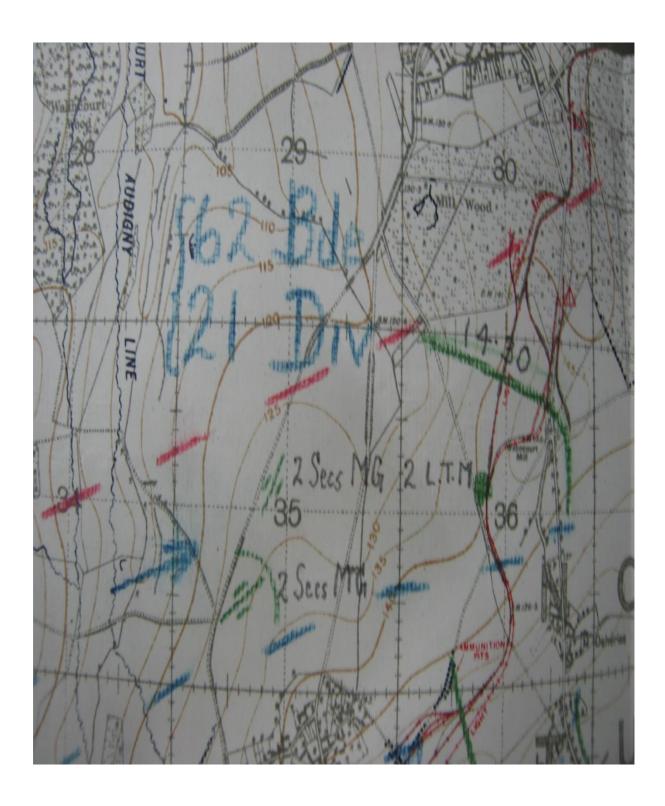
25. Map showing Malincourt (W.O. 95/2540)

Note the contours which allowed the Germans on the high ground a commanding view of the approach to the village .Note the direction of the divisions advance is moving north-east.



26. Map showing the north side of Malincourt. (W.O. 95/2540)

The Green Line marks the boundary of the Welsh Division's advance and shows the timings. It also shows the difficulties Mill Wood presented as the divisional boundary cuts through the south side of it.



Evidence of the speed with which the Germans had left, was recorded in the numbers of machine guns, three 5.9 howitzers and two heavy mortars with limbers left behind. The 15 W.R. to the north had reached a line from the southern corner of Mill Wood, to the junction Malincourt and Elincourt road by 1.30pm. From Mill Wood, which was an 21st Division objective, the battalion suffered a number of casualties. During the following hours they were harassed by enemy machine gun fire from Deheries Farm, as well as gas and high explosive shell fire. Batteries of the R.F.A. had moved forward to the west of the village and were able to give both supporting and harassing fire during the night. At 5.20am the following morning, the advance guard was taken over by 33rd Division who passed through the Welsh Divisions positions.

The Welsh Division captured seven officers and 373 other ranks during these operations, but at a frightful cost in casualties, with 69 officers and 1,221 other ranks. This was the most difficult day of the advance not just in terms of casualties, but in the determination needed by all ranks in successfully breaking through the greatest defensive system on the western front. Much of this was achieved by the leadership of middle ranking officers, who on finding difficulties pushed through enemy defensives. Equally important was the co-ordination between infantry, tanks and artillery working together to overcome problems. Significantly the psychology of the enemy forces was changing, as Captain J. C. Dunn put it:

I never believed we could lose the War, but I knew, like many more, that Gerry could hit very hard, and I expected he would do so again. Here we had been advancing from the Ancre, and the opposition was becoming weaker at every scrap. His readiness to give in to-day showed that his morale was gone.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2559 War Diary, 14th W.R. 8.October1918.

¹¹⁹ TNA, W.O. 95/2407 War Diary, 33 Division, 10.October 1918 states that 'Divisional Commander received a letter from V Corps pointing out that the action of the Division had not been sufficiently energetic and that several opportunities had been lost'.

¹²⁰ Munby, Welsh Division, p. 70.

¹²¹ Dunn, War the Infantry Knew, p. 556.

In contrast the morale of the Welsh Division was reflected in its effectiveness as a fighting unit it had become yet its achievement has gone unrecognised, though it stands alongside other British Divisions like the 46th Division as an example, of just how good they were.

Crossing the River Selle

The forward move of the Welsh Division continued to be regulated by the progress of the advancing division. The railhead which supplied the Welsh Division was now as far back as Fins, and the divisional train near Epehy, several miles behind. Despite the distances involved, and all the shelling, 330 Coy A.S.C. still managed to supply the wagon lines.

V Corps success in overrunning the Beaurevoir Line, General Shute made the decision to move the two advancing divisions (17th & 33rd Divisions) forward, without the usual barrage preceding the move. ¹²² His composite advanced guards contained a whole brigade of field artillery, and moved forward behind the infantry in close support. He also used Corps Cyclists squadrons to explore and gain more ground, while at the same time allowing the advance guards of the division to make more progress than would otherwise have been the case. ¹²³ One of the problems for the advance was the number of civilians they were encountering, civilians who had refused to evacuate their small villages, who on the one hand often supplied up to the minute intelligence, but on the other, created further logistical problems.

On 9 October, the Welsh Division moved forward again, with 114th Inf. Bde being heavily shelled at Bertry, so they continued on to Clary. The 113th Inf. Bde moved from billets at Malincourt, to Bertry on 12 October. At Bertry, the Field Ambulances 'were detailed to attend to nearly 2,000 civilians in the

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¹²² Boff, Third Army, p. 48.

¹²³ O.H. Military Operations 1918, p.219. General Shute's tactic was to have no preliminary barrages before the attack. This was not the practice with some of the other Divisions in V Corps in their respective advances at this time.

¹²⁴ Munby, Welsh Division, p. 71.

village, many of whom were terribly emaciated for want of food.'125 The 115th Inf. Bde remained in Villers Outreaux area until 12 October, when it moved to Troisvilles. The Welsh Division had now advanced a total of twelve miles over ground the enemy had held since 1914. They were now in support and reserve to the 33rd Division, whose advance moved forward to a line between Montigny and Troisvilles. The Corps cavalry were also trying to push their way forward to seize crossings over the river Selle. The Welsh Division established outposts at Troisvilles, with Le Cateau almost within sight. On the following day, both the 17th and 33rd Divisions were in touch with the enemy on the west heights of the valley of the River Selle, between Montay and Neuvilly to the north of Le Cateau. The V Corps orders for 10 October, stated all 'supporting divisions will maintain liaison with their respective front line divisions and will regulate their advance by the progress of the latter'. 126 The 113th Inf. Bde had moved to Troisvilles, and 115th Inf. Bde at Bertry, the remainder of the Welsh Division was ordered to 'stand fast'. Late on 10 Oct, the two advanced divisions of V Corps attacked at 5.pm, trying to gain a crossing over the river Selle, and had some partial success, however, lack of artillery hampered their progress. At 5.am, the following day, they continued their attack trying to gain the high ground east of the river, and once again were only partially successful. On 12 October, the Welsh Division relieved 33rd Division, and another attempt to cross the river in force was postponed. Despite the sacrifice and casualties of the recent fighting, it was seen by some 'as the happiest period of the advance occurred when the French civilians were released from the enemy's unscrupulous treatment'. 127 This was to put even greater pressure on the supply chain, by helping to feed the innocent civilian population and refugees. 128 As the Welsh Division had its own cinema, it was used at various towns and villages along its route to provide entertainment for the people in general and the children in particular. 129

On the night of 12/13 October, the Germans continued to shell the Selle river valley including the roads west of the river. The 115th Inf. Bde now had two battalions in the line, with 114th Inf. Bde in support

¹²⁵ C.J. Parry The Story of the Order of St. John in the Principality of Wales 1877 – 1956, Volume I (Newport, 1996), pp. 113-14.

¹²⁶ TNA W.O. 95/751 War Diary, V Corps, 10 October 1918

¹²⁷ TNA W.O. 95/2562/1 War Diary, 10 S.W.B, 12.October 1918

¹²⁸ Depree, 38th Welsh Division, pp. 478-9.

¹²⁹ Dunn, War the Infantry Knew, p. 560.

and 113th Inf. Bde in reserve. Immediately the routine of sending strong fighting patrols out at night was established, so that contact and pressure on the enemy was maintained thus reducing their operational freedom. An effort was made to gather information about the enemy's dispositions along a railway cutting east of the river Selle. During the first day, projectors for gas and burning oil were installed by 'N' Special Company R.E. on the divisional front for use in the early hours of 15 October, but only 'if conditions were favourable'. Although the Germans continued intermittent gas shelling (Blue Cross) during the night, the conditions were not favourable for the Welsh Division to retaliate. On 16 October, the Germans fired several thousand shells, mainly yellow gas on 121st Brigade R.F.A. battery positions, as well as on the dual headquarters of the two forward battalions on the high ground overlooking the Selle at Rambourlieux Farm. ¹³⁰ Four brigades now made up the field artillery covering the front of the Welsh Division but due to the shortage of ammunition they concentrated their fire on observed positions and specific harassing fire. However, on the night 15/16 October 121st Bde R.F.A. were subjected to double yellow-cross concentrations as they were engaging an enemy target and resulted in 12 officers and over hundred men becoming casualties. ¹³¹

At 5.20am 17 October, the situation on the Corps front changed as Fourth Army began their attack, and orders were passed from Third Army to V Corps, in case their final objectives were not achieved. Both 17th and Welsh Divisions were to be used in the first phase, with 21st and 33rd Division taken over for the second phase. The 66th Division (Fourth Army) was on the border with the Welsh Division artillery area and assisted with their bombardment plan. The 66th Division captured the railway line east of Le Cateau as far north as Baillon Farm. During 18 October, 66th Division cleared Le Cateau Station in the morning taking 400 prisoners and captured the high ground at Bazuel. That night the front of the Welsh Division extended to include the Montay-Forest road. The 115th Bde attempted to establish a new post on the east bank of the Selle, but with a little success and suffered some casualties. The 113th Inf. Bde took over the right front section and the 114th Inf. Bde the left, thereby relieving the 115th Inf. Bde in the process. While the Field Artillery carried out wire cutting and bombardments on the railway east of the Selle, the divisional boundary was moved south.

¹³⁰ TNA W.O. 95/2541 War Diary, 38 Division, October 1918

¹³¹ Depree, 38th Welsh Division, p. 482.

¹³² TNA W.O. 95/2561 War Diary, 2 R.W.F. October 1918

On 20 October at 2.am, Third Army launched its night attack on the Selle positions with all four Corps, under a full moon. Fifth Corps used five brigades of heavy artillery, plus the artillery of the two leading divisions and four brigades of field artillery, under the command of C.R.A. the Welsh Division, Brigadier General Topping. The attack was led by 17th Division on the left, and Welsh Division on the right, with 18th Division (Fourth Army) to the south. The objective was the high ground running southeast, known as 'Amerval Ridge' and overlooking the village of Forest. This was to be made by four bounds, with the Le Cateau-Solesmes railway the first, and then the three ridges were to be taken in succession. The Welsh Divisional engineers under Major Pressy, constructed twelve footbridges for each brigade, which were carried into position by the 17 R.W.F. (115th Inf. Bde). There were also two artillery bridges, underlining the need to keep the artillery mobile. Two tanks were to be used to assist the advance, one per brigade, and these were to cross the river by specially constructed bridges. The assembly was carried out without incident, while the creeping barrage commenced on the line of the railway. All the identified machine guns posts, specified centres of resistance, as well as groups of hostile artillery and wire cutting were targeted by the artillery. Also co-operating in the barrage were all light and medium mortars and the Welsh Divisions M.G.C, plus two companies of the 33rd M.G.C. Contact planes from 15th Squadron R.A.F. would fly over the advance from dawn onwards, and would drop a red smoke bomb if any hostile assembly for a counter-attack were seen. 133

The attacking brigades assembled on the west bank of the river Selle, as hostile posts had been identified on the east bank, as the preliminary bombardment had not been successful in driving these out. (see Map 27) Astonishing this would be the Welsh Division fourth river crossing since the advance began. Although the attack was scheduled for 2.am, advanced parties of the attacking battalions left their respective billets at 8.30pm and marched across country in the heavy rain and mist, to the assembly positions. The 113th Inf. Bde plan was for the two leading companies of the 13 and 14 R.W.F. to attack on the right, and take the first objective (Blue Line) with the other two companies 'leap-frogging' on to the second objective (Red Line). The 14 R.W.F. was responsible for the mopping up in the buildings. Two companies of 16 R.W.F. would follow 13 R.W.F. and carry the attack eastwards, with the remaining companies in this brigade were in reserve south-west of the river. The 114th Inf.

¹³³ Depree, 38th Welsh Division, p. 488.

Bde attack had 13 W.R. on the right, and 14 W.R. on the left, with one company of 15 W.R. attached to 13 W.R. and two companies attached to 14 W.R. with the remainder in reserve. It would use the leap-frogging companies to capture the third objective (Green Line) and on to the fourth objective (Brown Line). Both brigades would be assisted by two half companies of pioneers for their attacks, and consolidation of objectives. Just prior to the attack, both foremost brigades were able, despite the heavy driving rain, to push their leading companies across the river to the east bank.

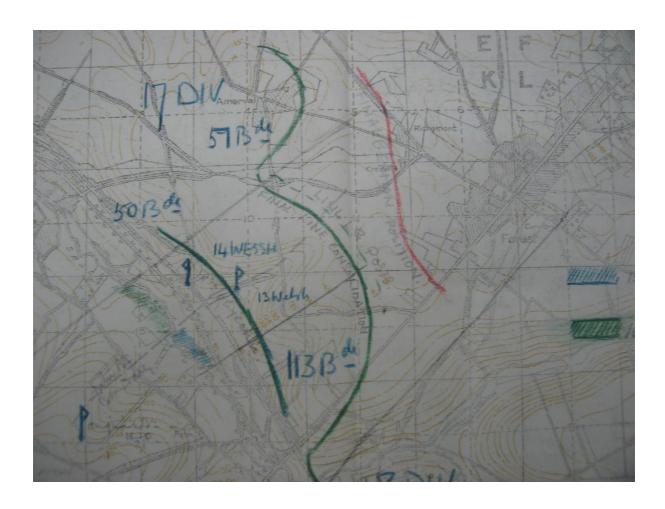
27. The map shows the difficult contours of the river Selle area. (W.O. 95/2540)

Note the number of the bridges marked by numbers along the river front. It also shows the Divisional and Corps boundary in black at bottom. It also shows the Blue, Red and Green Line. It also shows the railway line between Montay and Forest. The Red circles indicate the German positions.



28. The Map shows how the attack developed after crossing the river Selle by V Corps. (W.O. 95/2540)

Note once again the coloured lines of the advance developed east of the river towards Forest, and the divisional boundary with 17th Division, V Corps.



Despite the ferocious preliminary bombardment 113th Inf. Bde met considerable resistance along the railway line (Blue line), which was on a precipitous 50ft embankment. The position was finally overwhelmed by 2.30am after some 'stubborn fighting' by both 13 and 14 R.W.F. who were assisted by 16 R.W.F. led by Major Dale. ¹³⁴ At this point the enemy began surrendering, and despite some slight opposition, their final objective (Brown Line) was taken and consolidated, with the help of a

 $^{^{134}\,\}mathrm{TNA}$ W.O. 339/52774 personal file of Major Francis Richard Dale.

platoon of 19 Welsh (Pioneers). The defensive flank was formed along the Montay-Forest road by 16 R.W.F. and patrols from 14 R.W.F. found that the village of Forest was strongly held. (see Map 28)

The 114th Inf. Bde preparations did not go according to plan, 14 W.R. failed to hold their position across the River Selle, and as a result, their assembly position for the attack was on the West bank. The progress of 14 W.R. had overcome some confusion caused by shelling while crossing the river, and by 1.am, advance companies had managed to reach a position on the east bank 150 yards from the enemy, without being detected. The attack had been greatly assisted by the artillery and machine gun fire barrage which had drowned out the sound at the assembly positions. The 13 W.R. had no problem in taking their position, however 14 W.R. found four rows of barbed wire between the Montasy-Neuvilly road and railway at which point Lieut W. H. Brace 19 (P) W.R. reorganised the attack. 135 Luckily the German machine guns covering this area had been badly sited. Like the right brigade they too found the railway stubbornly defended and resulted in some bitter fighting to overcome the position. 136 While the two leap-frogging companies followed on the next objective 15 W.R, began mopping up on the railway position. 137 At 4.15am (dawn) the leading companies had advanced to the final objective (Brown Line), but only managed to hold the east crest line. After which they set a defensive flank of LGs with a good view of Richmont, and Forest. The Welsh Division covered the attack of 17th Division which would by-pass Neuvilly. The 14 W.R. captured 75 men plus two officers but recorded that 'the enemy left a considerable amount of dead'. 138

At 10am, Welsh Division made contact with 17th Division on the first objective (Blue Line), and the second objective (Red line) was reached on time, where the left brigade was again in touch with 17th Division. However, 17th Division had a long day's fighting near Amerval. This remained in enemy hands that evening, it was attacked again at mid-night, and the enemy were cleared out of this village

¹³⁵ TNA W.O. 374/8318 personal file of 2nd Lt William Herbert Brace.

¹³⁶ TNA W.O. 95/2558 War Diary 114th Inf. Bde, Narrative of Operations – North of Le Cateau 20 October 1918. The War Diary states that 'The Railway was found to be heavily defended by M.G's. About 30 of the enemy were killed on this line and about 60 taken prisoner.

¹³⁷ Dunn, War the Infantry Knew, p. 559.

¹³⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2559 14th Welsh, 20.October 1918

by 1am. ¹³⁹ At this stage both divisions of V Corps had taken their respective objectives, and established a line on the high ground beyond the Selle. During the night, patrols of the Welsh Division found the enemy was holding positions on the outskirts of Forest, Croisette and Richemont. The day had seen some very heavy fighting, with the Welsh Division casualties amounting to 18 officers and 400 other ranks, it was estimated the Germans lost over 225 dead, and three officers and 211 other ranks captured.

The 21 October found the Welsh Division's front unchanged, and during the afternoon and evening 115th Inf. Bde relieved the two attacking brigades, who moved back to Bertry area. Both 121st and 122nd Bdes R.F.A. (Welsh Divisional artillery), moved forward across the river and took up positions immediately east of it, but remained silent. The rest of the day was spent in consolidating the positions gained, while the enemy continued to shell them with both high explosives and gas. In the early hours of 22 October, on two occasions, lasting two hours each, the Germans shelled the valley of the river Selle with mustard gas. During the early evening, 33rd Division relieved the 115th Inf. Bde in the line. The advance of V Corps during the 23 to 25 October covered ten miles, and this drive forward brought them to the villages on the western outskirts of the Foret du Mormal. The advance brought a change in the terrain, it was a now 'rich, highly cultivated country of small fields and orchards, all with thick hedges and well timbered, so that in the distance it looked like a wide, far reaching forest. ¹⁴⁰ It was no longer open rolling countryside, but one ideally suited for an enemy fighting a retreat.

The Final Advance

On 23 October, the British First, Third and Fourth Armies renewed their combined offensive across the western front. V Corps attack began at 2.am led by 21st Division on the left and 33rd Division on the right, with both 17th and Welsh Divisions in support. The Corps final objective was a line running south-east from Poix du Nord. As a result, the attack swung to the north-east thereby covering more ground than the neighbouring Corps. The advance progressed well and the Welsh D.H.Q. was set up on

¹³⁹ Atteridge, 17th (Northern) Division, p. 447.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 448-50.

the Inchy-Le Cateau road. The 115th Inf. Bde was at Forest, the 113th Inf. Bde at Amerval Ridge, and the 114th Inf. Bde moved to Troisvilles.

The advancing troops were now being confronted by the way the Germans had left the area totally destroyed, this included railway lines, bridges, roads were either destroyed or were mined, and buildings which could be used by the advancing forces, were blown apart. They also took all the livestock, cut down fruit trees, poisoned wells and booby trapped houses, churches and hospitals, as well as leaving timed explosive devices which would cause havoc at a later date. As a result more and more engineers, pioneers and men from the labour corps were brought forward to repair the lines of communication and ensure that the advance was in a position to continue the pursuit of the enemy.

By 24 October, the advance of V Corps reached a general line running west of Englefontaine to the east of Chassignies. Two days later the Welsh Division began to relieve 33rd Division. However, this was cancelled on 26 October, as 33rd Division successfully attacked Englefontaine to the north and south of the village and after a heavy barrage captured it, taking over 500 prisoners. By 10.30pm, the Welsh Division had relieved the 33rd Division, with 115th Inf. Bde in the line, 113th Inf. Bde in support and 114th Inf. Bde in reserve.

On Saturday 26 October, the Welsh Divisional commander sent out a 'Special Order of the Day' in which he stated 'I desire to offer my most cordial congratulations to the Division on the brilliant feat of arms accomplished by them on the 20th instant':

I have personally, accompanied by many Senior Officers of the division, traversed the entire battlefield, and I am once again lost in admiration at the gallantry and determination of the troops of this Division in surmounting the obstacles with which they were confronted.

You formed up in boggy ground, crossed a difficult river (for the fourth time since 21st August), attacked up glacis swept by machine gun fire, stormed a precipitous railway

embankment 40 to 50 feet high, and in pouring rain, very slippery and deep going in the hours of darkness, established yourself on the final objective punctually and to time.

Very strong opposition was encountered on the railway, also when consolidating on the final objective; both direction and distance were maintained: this was especially noticeable on the right of the attack.¹⁴¹

He also congratulated both Brigadiers General ap Rhys Pryce (113th Inf. Bde) and T.R.C. Price (114th Inf. Bde) as well Brigadier General Topping (C.R.A.) and Lieut.-Colonel A.G. Lyttelon, for the artillery and machine gun barrage. He also praised Lieut.-Colonel T.E. Kelsall (C.R.E.) and the engineers for their 'endurance under heavy shell fire, and nightly gas, which resulted in 24 Bridges being built over the SELLE River which enabled our Infantry and Artillery to cross and achieve the results set forth'. But he singled out Lieut.-Colonel Harkness and his two companies of 19 (P) W.R. who:

[W]hen the left of the attack was temporarily checked, charged through the attacking Infantry overcoming opposition on the railway, and consolidating the final objective, capturing four field guns.¹⁴²

At 6am on 27 October, the enemy put down a heavy barrage in the area of Englefontaine and counterattacked on a 1,000 yard frontage, and although it was driven off, twelve men were captured by the enemy. The Germans continued to target these forward towns and villages, so it was important for the newly liberated population to be evacuated when the shelling was particularly heavy. The 2 R.W.F. on the same day attempted to capture two enemy posts about 300 yards from the front line, but was held up by heavy machine gun fire. At dusk the line of this battalion had advanced between 150 to 200

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¹⁴¹ See appendices 7 for full text.

¹⁴² TNA W.O. 95/2558 War Diary, 114th Inf. Bde. 26. October1918. See also appendices 6.

yards and was part of what was described as a 'Peaceful Penetration'. ¹⁴³ A planned operation was carried out by 17 R.W.F. two days later, which captured between 30 to 40 prisoners.

Now the Welsh Division was confronted with the forest of Mormal, the third biggest in France, and was expected to be a very difficult obstacle in the path of the advance. This forest was mainly made up of oak and beech trees and was nine miles in length north to south, and three to four miles in depth. The Welsh Division would remain on this line until 4 November, and the planning to continue the momentum of the advance was underway, at both Army and Corps level. As always raiding continued with 17 RWF (115th Inf. Bde), on 29 October, moved forward to the east of Englefontaine, supported by a creeping barrage at 8am. ¹⁴⁴ The battalion captured between 30-40 German prisoners and killed between 60 –70. ¹⁴⁵ The consequent German artillery retaliation followed, but slackened during the afternoon. Enemy aircraft were also prominent during the hours of darkness, bombing rear echelon areas to disrupt the build up before the next major attack. By the end of October, the Welsh Division had suffered 318 officers and 7, 638 battle casualties since the start of the campaign in August and would be under strength before the November attack. ¹⁴⁶

The planning for the offensive on 4 November was on a grand scale, and would be the most comprehensive attack made by the British during the war. The attack was on a 25 mile frontage, with General Horne's First Army attacking in the north. General Rawlinson, Fourth Army, was to force the line of the Sambre from the south. General Byng's Third Army would attack in the centre, and would have to fight its way through the Forest of Mormal. Once again liaison between V Corps, Third Army, First and Fourth Army's adjoining Corps, would be of vital importance in ensuring there were no open flanks. On 30 October, Major General Cubitt attended a Corps Conference at Ovillers, where the role of his division in the next major offensive, was unveiled. The final objective of Third Army was along the line Avenges, Faberge and Mons although no date was given for this to be achieved, and the attack

¹⁴³ TNA W.O.95/2561 War Diary, 2 R.W.F. 27.October1918

¹⁴⁴ TNA W.O. 95/2542 War Diary, C.R.A. Welsh Division, 29.Oct.ober 1918.

¹⁴⁵ TNA W.O. 95/2561/2 War Diary, 17 R.W.F

¹⁴⁶ O.H. Military Operations 1918, Volume V, pp. 386-7.

of the divisions would be in phases.¹⁴⁷ The final objective of the first phase was to push through Mormal forest, to a road running from north-east to south-east from Les Grandes Patures, which would be the Green Line. (See Map. 29) This was to be carried out by both 17th and Welsh Divisions. The second phase, would involve the 21st and 33rd Division pushing through to capture the Avesnes-Bavai road, which crosses the river Sambre at Pont-sur-Sambre.

Staff work went into high gear with Fifth Corps issuing orders for the attack on the 31 October, and the Welsh Division issuing its orders on 2 November. The plan was described as 'perfectly straightforward'. 148 The orders were simple, the 115th Inf. Bde would take the first objective (Blue Line), the 113th Inf. Bde the second (Red Line) and the 114th Inf. Bde the final objectives (Brown and Green Lines). The Welsh Division would attack on a 2,000 yard frontage, through trees and 'strongly fenced orchards'. And like Mametz Wood two years previously, the same problem of keeping direction was present. In the 'event of a brigade being held up at any one point, the brigades behind would push through and capture what caused the check by outflanking it and taking it from behind'. 149 The time difference between the attacks by adjoining divisions, would be forty-five minutes, before the Welsh Division could move, in order for them to catch up and advance together. The plan may have been uncomplicated on paper but the reality of advancing through forests was far more difficult in practice as the Welsh Division knew to its cost.

Despite not being in the front line, the support brigade (113th Inf. Bde) had occupied billets in the villages of Englefontaine and Poix de Nord with 14 R.W.F. in the latter. On 1 November, a patrol was pushed forward to establish a post in a house on the Hecq road, and was able to rescue thirty four civilians from the cellar at 'Spinning Wheel West'. During the following day 115th Inf. Bde, relieved 114th Inf. Bde in the line, and all the preparations for the forthcoming resumption of the attack were made. This included two brigades of the Welsh Division, who were behind the lines practising 'tactics & schemes' through orchards of Vendregies Wood, for this purpose the exercises in wood fighting,

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¹⁴⁷ TNA W.O. 95/752 War Diary Third Army, Operation Order No. 239 dated 1 November 1918.

¹⁴⁸ Depree, 38th Welsh Division, p. 173.

¹⁴⁹ TNA W.O. 95/2554 War Diary, 113th Inf. Bde. Operation Order No. 270. 2 November 1918.

¹⁵⁰ TNA W.O. 95/752 War Diary, V Corps, I November 1918.

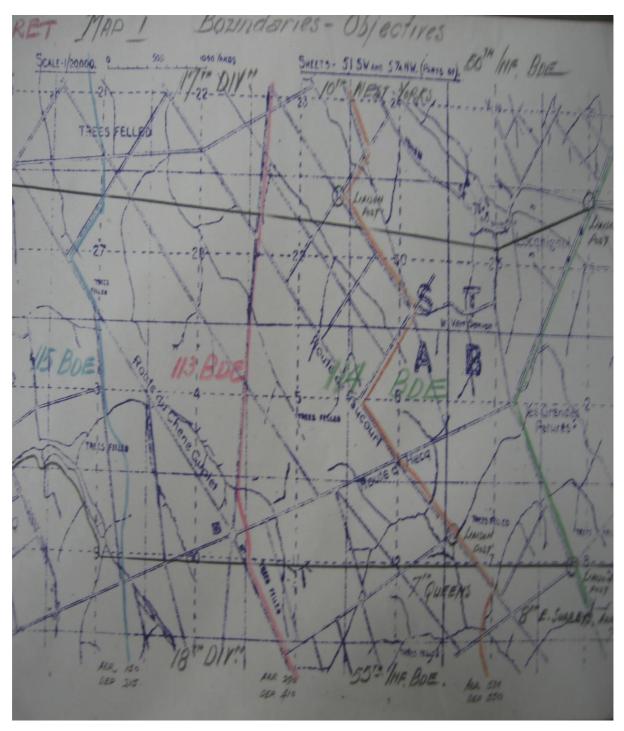
would also include working on compass bearings by platoons. The tactical notes emphasised every officer was to make full use of his compass, and the direction of the attack would be due east. ¹⁵¹ It was important for the infantry not to get involved in 'bush-fighting' in the denser parts of the forest, with small pockets of the enemy. They were to keep to the drives and paths, and let the following troops deal with them. ¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Depree, 38th Welsh Division, p. 179.

 $^{^{152}}$ TNA W.O. 339/112020 personal file of $2^{\rm nd}$ Lt. Vivian Richards.

29. Although this map shows direction of the infantry Brigades in the Wood. (W.O. 95/2560)

Divisional boundaries are shown black. Direction of the Bdes is indicated in Blue Red, and Green



30. Map shows the extent of how forested Mormal Wood was at this time. (W.O. 95/2560)

It also indicates the roads and tracks available provided they were not damaged or booby trapped.



The artillery plan took into account the problem of shells bursting in the trees by using shrapnel barrages to reduce the danger. Barrages would not creep through the denser parts of the wood, but concentrate on forest drives and clearings. (see Map. 30) The advance would work on a creeping barrage moving 100 yards every 6 minutes, thus allowing the infantry to work their way through

enclosed country. The barrage would be 300 yards in front of the infantry, and 18 pounders would fire both shrapnel and smoke. As the attack unfolded, the make-up of the artillery bombardment would include more smoke and thermite shells. The barrage plan was based on the advance not having too long to wait before moving on to the next objective. This would allow two sections of the field artillery to be moved forward to give the infantry close support, and to stop the enemy from establishing new machine gun positions. Both the trench mortars and machine gun battalions would contribute to the barrage and would move forward in support of the attacking brigades. Four tanks were allotted to the division in order to break down hedges, and any wire obstacles that might cause a hold up before entering the wood. The divisional engineers and pioneers would assist in the clearing, rebuilding and maintaining roads and tracks, as well as cable-laying. The 183rd Tunnelling Company would deal with time delayed mines and 'bobby traps'. Contact air patrols, with two squares attached to the rear of the lower wings would call for flares to be fired to identify the advance of troops so as to inform both Corps and D.H.Qs'.

On the night before the attack, tactical instructions were issued which emphasised maintaining the direction of the troops through the woods by keeping them concentrated and under the command of the respective leaders. Each battalion was to attack with two companies in the front line, the first objective was the edge of the forest, at which point the two rear companies would leap-frog through and move to their final objective the blue line. At this point, the next brigade would leap-frog through the position and carry on the attack to the red line.

The Third Army attack began at 5.30am on 4 November, with V Corps having 17th Division on the left and the Welsh Division on the right. The advance began later at 6.15am, so that the adjoining divisions either side could reach their starting point. The 18th Division (XIII Corps, Fourth Army), which was on the Welsh Division's right, would also have the same start time. The 115th Inf. Bde led the attack of the Welsh Division from the south-eastern outskirts of Englefontaine. The 2 R.W.F. was on the right, 10 S.W.B. in the centre and 17 R.W.F. on the left. Their objective was the Blue line, which ran along a ride running north-south 500 yards east of the western edge of the Foret de Mormal. The morning began misty, which made keeping direction more difficult, 'it hampered the enemy's movement and

was very helpful to the battalion in overcoming opposition, which was particularly heavy in MG and TM fire'. 153 The tank allotted to 2 R.W.F. failed to appear, but one allotted to 18th Division lost its way but did contribute 'valuable service' by keeping down enemy machine gun fire and covered the flank of the advance. The advance was made by column of platoons at wide intervals and although there was considerable machine gun fire, these positions they were taken from the rear. The 2 R.W.F. was so reduced it required the assistance of the H.Q's staff to clear the houses in its path. Another company crossed the stream at Ruisseau-des-Eclusettes, and cleared the enemy as far back as the village of Hecq. 154 At the centre of the attack 10 S.W.B, with the help of two tanks went 800 yards into the forest, reaching their final objective by 7.05am. The 'opposition offered by elements of 16th & 58th German Infantry Divisions was very weak and easily overcame'. 155 The attack of 17 R.W.F. was successful and they penetrated into the wood in small groups creating disorder among the defenders, as they took hostile posts from the rear. Therefore, all final objectives of 115th Inf. Bde were reached at 7.15am, one hour later 113th Inf. Bde, passed through the 'leap-frog line'.

The 113th Inf. Bde had a more difficult approach, in as much as their assembly point was south-west of Englefontaine, and they attacked from the west of the Blue Line (the final objective of 115th Inf. Bde). The move of 113th Inf. Bde into the assembly positions began at 5am, but they moved forward at 8.45am, to attack their objective on the Red Line. However, they were subjected to the counter-battery fire from German positions during which casualties did occur especially among 16 R.W.F. The role of 13 R.W.F. on the right attacked in conjunction with 8th Berkshires (18th Division, IV Army) and as a result this battalion had to work separately from the others. This battalion found 'numerous batches of the enemy still hiding in the undergrowth'. One company moved along the Ruisseau-des-Eclusettes to meet up with the neighbouring battalion on the right at the high ground and establish 'International Post'. The 14 R.W.F. attacked in the centre and 16 R.W.F. were on the left. Both move was straightforward with two companies attacking and the other two companies leap-frogging through to the brigades final objective. During their attack from the Blue Line they had the support of the 38th M.G.C,

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¹⁵³ TNA W.O. 95/2561/1 War Diary, 2 R.W.F, 4.November 1918

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ TNA W.O. 95/2562/1 War Diary, 10 S.W.B, 4.November1918

¹⁵⁶ TNA W.O. 95/2555/1 War Diary, 13 R.W.F, 4.November1918

and four stokes mortars. In the event there was no serious resistance and both battalions made good progress capturing their final objectives on the Red Line. 13 R.W.F. overwhelmed a battery of 10 cm guns and took 65 prisoners, in the process.

The final attack was led by 114th Inf. Bde, left their positions at 10.am and passed through 113th Inf. Bde position at 11.30am. (see Map. 31) They had the longest march to the assembly positions from their billets at Croix and Cailuyaux, and by the time they reached the point of assembly at 9am, the mist had lifted and the men given a hot breakfast from the field kitchens. During this time they had been subjected to a degree of shelling while waiting for the reconnaissance parties to return with information about the state of the attack and to re-arrange starting times.¹⁵⁷ They moved forward on the roads and tracks, following the two previous brigades but compass bearings were important, as they had to cross the forest in a diagonal direction. Essentially, the general line of the advance that morning would be 'a little left of the sun.' The 14 W.R. attacked on the left and moved by the Route de Chene-Couplet to their deployment position, while the 15 and 13 W.R. moved astride the Route-d'Hecq. The order of the attack was first 15 W.R. followed by 13 W.R, and finally 14 W.R. On reaching the Brown Line a pause of 20 minutes was to be taken.

The distance between 15 W.R. and 13 W.R. was 500 yards and the advance was behind the creeping barrage which began at 12.20pm towards the Brown Line. Finding very little opposition from infantry and machine gun posts the Brown Line was reached without casualties. By 2.30pm, their 6 inch mobile mortars had reached the same positions. Within the hour they were bombarding the houses of Les Grande Patures 'with good effect'. 159 Just before 4.pm, both 14 and 15 Welsh had pushed on to the outskirts of Locquignol, where a patrol approaching towards the church, found the village empty. With the final objectives reached by 5pm, the position was consolidated.

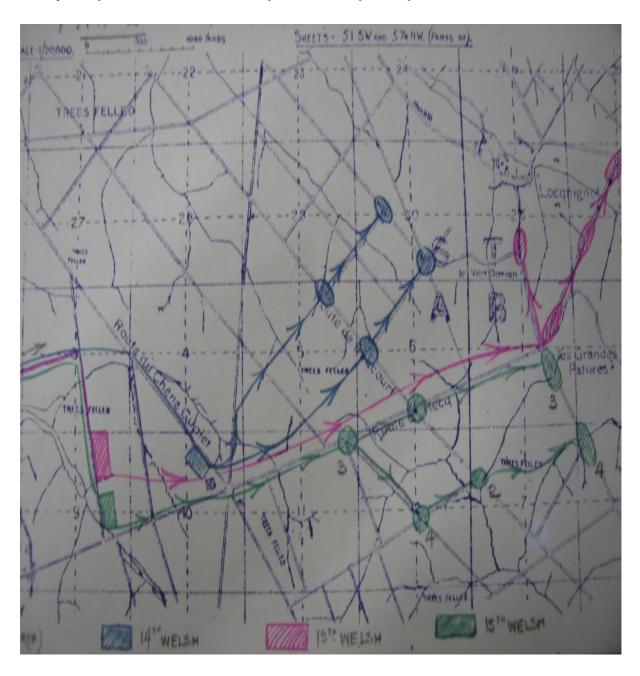
¹⁵⁷ TNA.W.O. 95/2559 War Diary, 13 W.R

¹⁵⁸ TNA War Diary, 113th Inf. Bde. Operation Order 270, point 5, the General bearing of the Advance was 102 degrees and the back bearing 282 degrees.

¹⁵⁹ Depree, 38th Welsh Division, p. 187.

31. Map indicating the route taken during that attack by 114th Infantry Brigade. (W.O. 95/2557)

The map clearly shows the routes to be taken by the battalions of 114th Inf. Bde.



General Cubitt now ordered patrols to be pushed out and by night-time companies of 114th Inf. Bde had advanced to a line east of Sabaras –Le Croix Daniel, and Le Tete Noire. ¹⁶⁰ This task was given to 13 W.R, at 11.30pm, and by 2.30am on 5 November, the two villages of Sabaras and Le Croix Daniel were surrounded and captured with little resistance. Patrols were now pushed out to Berlaimont, and

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¹⁶⁰ TNA W.O. 95/2541 War Diary, 38 Division, November 1918

with the help of the inhabitants, these patrols captured the village with 64 prisoners. This was an outstanding piece of work which was done during night-time. At 4.am, an unconfirmed report from the Welsh Division was received by V Corps, stating they had 'captured German orderly bearing a message ordering a withdrawal to river during tonight and later to Mauberge'. ¹⁶¹ The bridge at Berlaimont would prove to be the only one not destroyed by the Germans on Fifth Corps front. ¹⁶² At 6.30am the Advance Guard of the 33rd Division pushed through the front line of 13 W.R. and continued the advance. ¹⁶³

From the start of the offensive, companies of 13 W.R. had covered a distance of just over 14 miles under shell fire at the early stages, and contact with the enemy in the latter stages. ¹⁶⁴ As a result of the Welsh Division had reached a point which was 5,000 yards ahead of the troops on their flanks. They had also captured 500 prisoners, 35 guns and sustained over 500 battle casualties, before 21st and 33rd Division passed through their positions on 5 November. ¹⁶⁵ The capture of the single bridge intact across the River Sambre at Berlaimont was vitally important. As a result by 7 November, all traffic of both IV and V Corps were able to use it.

Once again this achievement could not have been completed without the help of all the supporting arms especially the M.G.C, heavy mortar units and the forward elements of divisional field artillery batteries which had come forward during the attack. Despite fallen trees and craters caused by the heavy artillery fire all the batteries of the field artillery were either supporting from their original positions or forward in places like at cross roads and clearings, in order to support the infantry attacks. This would not have been possible without the efforts of both the divisional engineers and pioneers, whose work often goes unnoticed. These roads were used by the following up troops, field guns and tanks of divisions and Corps, who took up the momentum of the battle, laid by the success of the Welsh Division.

¹⁶¹ TNA W.O. 95/752 War Diary, V Corps, 5.11.1918

¹⁶² TNA W.O. 95/752 Situation Report, G. 739. 5.pm, 5.Nov.1918

¹⁶³ TNA W.O. 95/2559 War Diary, 13 W.R, 4/5th November 1918

¹⁶⁴ Depree, 38th Welsh Division, p. 188.

¹⁶⁵ TNA W.O. 95/2541 War Diary, 38th (Welsh) Division, 4.November.1918.

The pace of the pursuit was governed to a great extent by a number of factors not least the bad weather, which added to the deterioration of the roads. The enemy were using machine guns, snipers and artillery as the main form of resistance to delay the advance. The enemy continued systematically to destroy bridges, roads and using obstacles and mines to delay the advance. The Welsh Division crossed the river Sambre on 6 November. It moved forward behind the advancing divisions until 9pm, 7 November. They were on a line north and south of Dourlers and Bois du Temple, with 114th Inf. Bde in support in vicinity of Ecuelin, and 115th Inf. Bde at Pot de Vin. The position of resupply of ammunition from the railhead was becoming a difficult proposition for the gunners in particular. ¹⁶⁶

The 113th Inf. Bde took over the advance guard from 33rd Division and moved forward during the night, and at dawn on 8 November they had reached Doulers on the Avesnes-Maubeuge road. Here after a minor operation at midday Ferme de la Belle Hostesse was captured by 13 R.W.F. with only five wounded men. ¹⁶⁷ Patrols were pushed forward during the afternoon with 16 R.W.F. reaching a line north and south of Floursies–Bois le Roy, and by darkness the brigade had crossed the Ruisseau de la Braqueniere east of the Mauberg Road. The Oxford Hussars now moved forward and 115th Inf. Bde took over the advance while the divisional artillery had reached Doullers. During the night 8/9 November the enemy was continuing to withdraw and mounted troops and cyclists were moved forward to gain touch with them. They reported that the enemy had retired 10 miles to a stream west of Thule. ¹⁶⁸

By the end of the day, an outpost line was established covering the road leading east from Dimechaux, with cavalry patrols protecting the line Hestrud–Bois de Beaurieux. On 10 November, the outpost line remained unchanged with the advance guard at Wattignies, 114th Inf. Bde at Ecuelin and 115th Inf. Bde

¹⁶⁶ TNA W.O. 95/2542 War Diary, CRA Welsh Division, 7.November 1918. As a result of this problem only two artillery brigades (162 & 169) while 121, 122, and 156 R.F.A. Bdes as well as 13 Bde R.G.A. remained in position at SARBARAS.

¹⁶⁷ TNA W.O. 95/2551/1 War Diary 13 R.W.F, 8.November 1918

¹⁶⁸ O.H. Military Operations 1918, Volume V, p. 529-30.

at Aulnoye Station. 169 The following day hostilities ceased, and the brigades remained in their previous dispositions with the Corps Commander Lieut.-General Shute visiting the Welsh Divisional Headquarters. ¹⁷⁰ The casualties of the infantry for the period 27 September to 12 November amounted to 112 Officers and 1,790 other ranks which reflects how determined the Germans were even when their cause was lost. ¹⁷¹ On 15 November 1918, at Dimont, the 14 R.W.F. were informed that Cpl Weale had been awarded a V.C. for 'conspicuous bravery and initiative' during the fighting to take Bazentinle-Grand. 172

Conclusion of last battle

During the advance from banks of the river Ancre to beyond river Sambre at Berlaimont, the Welsh Division had covered a total distance of sixty miles in just over fourteen weeks. In terms of casualties it had fought the equivalent of its two previous battles. 173 Clearly the battle casualties during this period reflect the still lethal capability of the German Army in the field. The emphasis of the 'man on the spot' theory of command had been vindicated but at a terrible price with many brigadiers, battalion commanders and junior officers becoming casualties. 174 The leadership qualities, of both officers and senior NCO's had on a number of occasions, such as Villers Outreaux, made the difference between success and failure reflecting a confidence in the command structure. During their final attack of the war despite the onset of sunset at 4.21pm and the coming of darkness, 13 W.R. continued past their final objective. Although tactical discipline in woods was difficult, commanders did not consolidate on the ground already taken, but tended to 'push on'.

¹⁶⁹ O.H. Military Operations 1918, Volume V, p. 537.

¹⁷⁰ TNA W.O. 95/2541 War Diary, 38th (Welsh) Division, 11 November 1918.

¹⁷¹ O.H. Military Operations 1918, Volume V, p. 561.

¹⁷² LG, 15 November 1918. 'When the advance of an adjacent battalion was held up by enemy machine-guns, he was ordered to put them out of action. When his L.G. failed him, he rushed the nearest post and killed the crew, then went for the others, the crews of which fled on his approach. His actions cleared the way for the advance, inspired his comrades and resulted in the capture of all the machine guns.'

¹⁷³ Parry, Order of St John, p. 114. The casualty estimate stands at 8,700. It was estimated that the total casualties for Mametz Wood was 4,000 and the Battle at Pilckem Ridge just fewer than 3,854 so together they amount to a similar total.

¹⁷⁴ Simpson, *Directing Operations*, pp. 164-7.

The intensive training which the battalions underwent at Vendiges Wood before the attack on the Foret de Mormal, coupled with maps and photographs which were studied, shows how professional their approach was. 175 Pushing out patrols both day and night paid dividends. These operations were plainly encouraged by Lieut.-General Shute who during the pursuit made it clear that he did not want any preliminary bombardments before moving forward, and this placed V Corps far ahead of the adjoining Corps, on many occasions. As a result of this policy both V and IV Corps were able to use the bridge at Berliament which had been reached by the Welsh Division on 5 November, allowing the pursuit to continue. Both Corps were now able to outflank the main line of resistance further north at Maubeuge which VI Corps (Third Army) was about to attack.

During the German offensives of March 1918 one of the key lessons learnt by General Byng was an understanding of the relentless strain his Army would be subjected to. As Blaxland points out, 'how grateful they had been for any easing of the pressure during the German offensive, they were determined to allow no easing themselves.' 176 Although the same author goes on to suggest the result was a 'compromise' and that 'the divisions plugged steadily away, led as usual by the infantry and well supported by their artillery' until 'the prospect of victory, slowly dawning, there was no stimulant to reckless daring'. This comment is slightly misleading, constant pressure led to victory and senior commanders encouraged enterprise rather than daring. As Boff's magisterial work on Third Army points out, there were a number of reasons for these 'pauses' which occurred during the advance to victory. The experience of the Welsh Division suggests there constant probing on a major scale by advance guards of strong patrols of infantry, cycle units or cavalry, paid off. As the Germans fell back further and further the issue of 'pauses' becomes more apparent as the movement forward needed to be supported by the logistics to continue the advance. This was not made easier by the utter destruction of the roads, bridges, railway lines and the whole infrastructure needed to continue the pursuit which had to re-built almost from scratch by the R.E.s, pioneers and the labour battalions brought in for this

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¹⁷⁵ Dunn, War the Infantry Knew, p. 564.

¹⁷⁶ Blaxland, Amiens 1918, p. 218.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, Boff, *Winning and Losing*, p. 36. The Table provided reflects the nature of the time table of Third Army campaign during the period in question.

purpose. Quite clearly the communications question regarding 'time lags' in signal traffic getting through, could also be addressed by these pauses, whereby new lines had to be laid and old lines upgraded or replaced. As has been shown, the Welsh engineers and pioneers were at the forefront of this work. Sometimes the lack of information coming through to the division during the advance was overcome by the 'man on the spot' at whichever level of command, making an instant decision about a situation rather than wait for a higher authority further back.

One of the key elements which ensured the success of operations by the Welsh Division was the speed with which they were able to bring field artillery support into the attacking equation. Time and time again, as at Villers Outreaux and in the Foret de Mormal, great enterprise and courage was shown by the field gunners who brought their battery's forward ensuring they were in a position to provide close support when necessary. Lieut.-General Shute's decision to forsake the obligatory barrage at the point where open warfare was possible allowed the gunners time to move forward and establish field positions when required. It also allowed the divisional artillery columns more lee-way in pushing forward their dumps without having to replenish them. Overall this freedom of action made the gunners more effective, and greatly reinforced the capability of the commanders to create operations for the use of combined arms, providing sufficient fire-power to overwhelm enemy defences created high casualty rates amongst the enemy. It is therefore important to understand the use of combined operations relies inevitably on the men who have to put the theory into practice. A concomitant of these successes was the high confidence and morale of all ranks within the Welsh Division which was created by the effectiveness of their offensive.

The Welsh Division's ability to develop cross boundary liaison with the neighbouring divisions of Fourth Army, allowed them to maintain a 'spearhead formation'. Right from the opening attack, during the Battle of Albert, the Welsh brigades worked in well in close cooperation with their counterparts. Again and again through to the advance at the Foret de Mormal, this close linkage with Fourth Army was ever present and reflects the high degree of organisational professionalism the Welsh Divisions was able to achieve.

The performance of the Welsh Division in overcoming such a powerful defensive position, such as Villers Outreaux clearly places it, in what one historian has described as 'a select band of elite divisions'. The lessons learnt by the Welsh Division during the advance to victory are truly emphasised by the actions of 13 W.R. in the final battle in the Foret de Mormal. This was clearly noted by the Third Army Commander, General Byng who sent a message to the Welsh Divisional commander to commend the actions of this unit. In it he commends the work of the battalion who clearly 'illustrate the proper application of the methods of open warfare'. He continues 'the determination to get on and not to stop and consolidate a line which would never be attacked resulted in the capture of 137 prisoners with practically no casualties'. Byng also singles out the role of the company commanders 'as most commendable and I hope will be copied by leaders of other units'. There can be no finer praise for the Welsh Division, who collectively, were able to put a battalion in a position to exploit opportunities, speaks volumes for the character of the men, their training and dynamic leadership which together forged a fighting quality which made victory possible.

¹⁷⁸ Sheffield, *Finest Hour*, p. 63.

¹⁷⁹ TNA W.O. 95/2558 War Diary, 114th Inf. Bde November 1918.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The Welsh Division was formed in North Wales and trained in the hills above Winchester, and when it left for France on a rainy December day in 1915 it was the largest single manpower contribution of Welshmen to serve together on the Western Front during the Great War. At the beginning, it was described as 'Lloyd George's Army' a title which still lingers on to this day. However, it proved it was very much a 'Welsh Division' well trained, well led, by competent officers, and N.C.O's who were able to carry out their operations successfully despite horrendous casualties. This did not happen overnight and the transformation into one of the best fighting divisions was anything but a smooth process.

Their first major battle, like their last, was fought in a forest, which are unforgiving places, and can unsettled the balance upon which success was achieved. Above all, each constituent part of the division whether it was the infantry, the sappers, the artillery, the medics or any of the other integral units, worked together not just on the Somme but also at Pilckem Ridge a year later. By 1918 they had become a highly effective military machine. On their return to Picardy in August 1918, the Welsh Dragon emblem was displayed on the vanguard of the Welsh Division which was in the forefront of the advance to victory.

The 'balance of all arms' was part of the process the whole army was striving to achieve towards the end of the Great War, but getting it right and implementing its application was a vital test, for the whole military system on the Western Front. Part of this success was linked to the positive sense of patriotism embodied in the formations of Welsh Regiments which made up the infantry brigades of the Welsh Division. Although, most of the senior officers of the division were not Welsh, or had any connections with the principality, it was the middle and junior commanders, who carried the identity and honour of the principality. They were the men who tried to implement this new approach to warfare and paid heavily trying to do so. Research into the 275 Officers killed has shown that 108 of these officers were born in Wales. Over eighty are shown as having an address in England but many of

these were from the Welsh Marches and at least ten were from Liverpool.¹ A number were born or returned from overseas, including Argentina, Canada, South Africa and one was born in India. This analysis of a small number of the officers killed reflects the far larger number who saw service within the Welsh Division during the war. It also reveals how diverse their backgrounds were and suggests how difficult it is to be precise about how 'Welsh' the division was.

The work has focused on the military aspects of the Welsh Division's performance during three key periods on the Western Front, but little attention has been directed to the cultural aspects. The esprit de corps of the Welsh Division was very much about its strong sense of national identity, combined with the regimental traditions. The men who served reflected in the main the Welsh culture and society from which they came, with eisteddfodau being held in Wiltshire and on the Western Front. The approach has looked at the political undertone the Welsh Division supposedly took to France and the situation with regard to its battalion commanders. A case in point was Lieut.-Colonel Sir Hamar Greenwood, whose command of 10 (1st Gwent) S.W.B. battalion did not last long once he arrived in France. The fact that he was a Liberal M.P. reveals a great deal, as he was one of Lloyd George's men and could not work for two masters at the same time. He was a forty-six year old barrister by profession, who had been a P.P.S. to Winston Churchill, and from 1910 was the M.P. for Sunderland. His sister, Florence, was married to L. S. Amery and as a result he spent the latter part of 1914-15 working in the recruiting department of the War Office. His tenure on the Western Front did not last long, as a supporter of Lloyd George, it was deemed politically more important for him to be in London than at the front. On his return he served for a year as a Staff Officer with Lord Derby at the War Office, but with the onset of conscription this post was no longer required. His connection with Wales before the war was the commission he held in the old Montgomeryshire Militia, and he later helped to raise and train the 10 S.W.B. In his personal file, it states that in November 1915 he took the 'usual joy ride for instruction with 8 Gordon Highlanders at Hill 60 on the Ypres Salient'. His short time in France makes it quite obvious any political influence he may have had was extremely short lived, and did not have any bearing on the Welsh Division as a whole.

¹ D. Ben Rees, *The Welsh of Merseyside* (Liverpool, 1997), p. 48.

² See TNA W.O. 339/10862 Personal File of Lt. Colonel Sir H. Greenwood M.P. 10 S.W.B.

The second, battalion commander with a political connection was Lieut.-Colonel David Davies M.P. and again research into his military background has revealed a sequence of correspondence which throws new light on his move back from France before the Somme battle. Born the grandson of a very successful industrialist David Davies (1818-1890), he was educated at Merchiston Castle Public School and King's College, Cambridge and became a Liberal M.P. for Montgomeryshire in 1906. Like so many of the men in county families of this period, he took a part-time commission originally with 5 S.W.B. in 1900, and with the reorganisation of the T.F, was a Captain in 7 R.W.F. by 1914. At the outbreak of war, he worked hard in raising the 14 R.W.F, and was promoted in December 1914 to the temporary rank of Lieut.-Colonel. Like Sir Hamar Greenwood, his close association and support of David Lloyd George resulted in his appointment as P.P.S. in early 1916. The correspondence has shown that he spent very little time with his battalion after it landed in France in December 1915. As a result, this became a matter which needed to be dealt with urgently. However, given the bureaucracy involved, the paper trail revealed that the recommendation for his removal had eventually to gone to F.M. Haig, who then had to propose this course of action to the Military Secretary in London. Once again the length of time Lieut.-Colonel Davies was with the Welsh Division in France was so limited it can have made very little impression on the so called political ambience. What it did serve to do, was to draw attention to the Welsh Division association with Lloyd George. Quite clearly this research has shown that both of these M.Ps had left France long before the move south to the Somme in June 1916, and can therefore, be dismissed from playing any part in the 'political atmosphere'.

Both of Lloyd George's sons served in the Welsh Division and this may have played a part in the growing tension between the future Prime Minister and the high command of the B.E.F. His youngest son Gwilym Lloyd George (1894-1967) was educated at Eastbourne College and Jesus College, Cambridge University. On the promotion of Major General Philipps, he was made his aide-de-camp, and as such served on the staff of the Welsh Division in France. Apart from helping to run the officers' mess at DHQ, he was considered by Major Price-Jones to be at the time 'a very nice boy, though extremely brainless! Very good natured & ready to do anything for anybody'. One of the unusual

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³ N.A.M. Lt. Colonel Price-Jones Letter number 1113 to his wife dated 25 May 1916.

consequences of the removal of Major-General Philipps was the fact that Lieut. Gwilym Lloyd George was allowed to return to England with him. He would later transfer to serve with the Siege Artillery on the Western Front for the rest of the War. His elder brother Richard Lloyd George (1889-1968), was also educated at Cambridge, and was a civil engineer at the start of the War. He joined the Welsh Division and went to France with 19 (P) W.R, and took part in the assault on Mametz Wood. Apart from letters and visits home, neither of the two brothers would have been in a position to offer any sort of political threat to the higher command on the Western Front.

As far as the battle of Mametz Wood was concerned, the removal of Major General Philipps was more about political expediency rather than military competence, a point often forgotten by those who look to disparage military commanders who fail. There can be little doubt his political association with Lloyd George played a part in his downfall. Major General Philipps' mistake was not to be in control of all the forces supporting the attack on the wood. The second attack on the wood by Major General Watts reflects little sophistication and apart from a much earlier starting time and a better initial artillery barrage it displays little improvement from the first attack. Once the battle in the wood began, it was down to the battalion commanders initially to prosecute it, but owing to the high rate of casualties, the brigadiers took over. The defence of the wood by the Prussian Guards was stubborn to say the least, and took the best part of two days to overcome. As the northern side of the wood was within sight of the German second line of defence it was considered prudent and tactical to hold a position close to the edge of the northern side of the wood to avoid further casualties but to all intents and purposes the heavy fighting was over. On 12 July, Seventh Division was moved in to cover the eastern side of the wood and 21st Division took the other side and during the morning elements of this division found there was some lingering German presence in the wood which was cleared.

Despite its success in taking Mametz Wood, the Welsh Division left the Somme under a cloud, which was unwarranted, undeserved and hard to shake off. The evidence of the attacks on the other woods on the Somme like High Wood and Delville Wood go a long way to explain how difficult this type of fighting was. The Somme was not a battle but a campaign, which at this time of the war was far too big

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⁴ O.H. Military Operations 1916, Volume two, p. 54.

for the Army to control. Equally, the Army commander ignored the opportunity for any effective coordinated control between his Corps Commanders, who themselves did not take advantage of opportunities as they appeared. The net result was that the New Army Divisions paid the price for this failure, marking the Somme as a pivotal point in the move towards a more effective and professional Army.

The evidence brought forward in the 'secret memo' underlined the prejudices of the man who wrote it, rather than being a true reflection of the Welsh Division's training before embarkation to France. It also reflects the growing bitterness of some military commanders, like Paget, against politicians which had been made worse by the 'Curragh Mutiny'. The question is unanswered, if the Welsh Division was so poor, then why, was it upgraded from a K.4 to K.3? There is little doubt there was pressure to send them to France as they had successfully completed their training schedule. Once in France and under the command of Lieut.-General Haking they became one of his better divisions, and he wrote that he was sorry to lose them. The sting in the tail was his comment about Major-General Philipps, which suggests he was unhappy about his suitability to command. Whether this was a personal, military or political matter is hard to discern, however during the time Major-General Philipps spent under this Corps Commander, he was not appear to have been accused of being military incompetent.

The final aspect of the accusation that the Welsh Division had an unhealthy bias of a political nature was made by Major Drake-Brockman many years after the war had ended. These allegations made by this regular officer have been trotted out on a regular basis by many historians who fail to question his remarks and take it as being the last word on the subject. If his comments were true where is the independent evidence to support his theory? Each point has been examined and considered, and his evidence is nothing more than circumstantial based on personal opinion and unsupported by the facts. By the time Major General Blackader took over command there were no more politicians serving with the Welsh Division. It should also be remembered that the Kitchener Divisions did not have the same nuances of a Regular Division, as they were 'war only' formations. Both the correspondence of Major General Price-Davies, and Lieut.-Colonel Price-Jones, who served in the Welsh Division for a

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⁵ Simkins, From the Somme to Victory, p. 74.

considerable time revealed, no evidence to support Drake-Brockman's allegations. There is also no confirmation either to be found in the diaries of Lieut.-Colonel Jourdain, who served with the Welsh Division before and after Pilckem Ridge battle. He was from the Connaught Rangers and appears to have had no political or national connection with Wales and therefore can be regarded as an unbiased witness. The political debate, which has gone unexplored for far too long has now been examined, revealing evidence which reflects poorly on the impartiality of the higher command on the Western Front.

The changes in personnel at all levels within the Welsh Division after the Somme experience shows how well the system of integration worked whether it be the replacement of commanders or newly drafted junior officers. During 1916-17 the system of training expanded greatly at all levels which marked the growing professionalism and experience of the New Armies. The Welsh Division spent the bitter winter of 1916 in trenches north of Ypres. During this period trench raids became far more sophisticated, and much bigger in size, putting into practice a great deal of the new infantry tactics they were being taught. It was also an opportunity to exercise the use of new weapons like the rifle-grenade, which by 1917, had evolved into a weapon that enhanced the capability of a platoon in action. Similarly, Stokes Mortars also added to the arsenal that platoons used to give them an enhanced capability. This gave the infantry a means of targeting areas within 300-800 yards and as such added to the weight of firepower they could bring to bear on a specific enemy position. Equally important, as far as platoon tactics were concerned, was the use of the Lewis Gun which combined mobility with fire power and was generally used to suppress the defence, while allowing the platoon to move forward. The outflanking of a defended position in this manner allowed the infantry to target it with grenades which was extremely important in overcoming 'pill box' defences. All the new weapons and tactics had to be taught, practiced and used in operations so that the skills acquired could have the greatest effect. The level of competence in combining the use of new technology with infantry tactics was anything but amateurish and continued to improve as the war went on. These were the important lessons the Welsh Divisional infantry were taught in the schools set up for this purpose and in the various documents which propagated the flexibility of this new approach. One of the key points for the Welsh Division was the time they spent on the canal north of Ypres which, though subject to interruptions, allowed a consistent programme of training to be achieved.

Unlike their experience on the Somme, the Welsh Division was to be in forefront of the opening offensive, which became known collectively after the small village called Passchendaele. It became a series of small set piece battles which have been remembered for the mud and the high casualty rates against an enemy which held the high ground in concrete pill boxes. The defensive network of mutually supporting pill boxes and the difficult climatic conditions determined the nature of the fighting. Like the Somme, it offered very few opportunities for strategic or tactical surprise, and once again the higher command was very optimistic about what could be achieved even on the first day. Following a nine day bombardment the opening offensive was been split up into three major stages, the first of which began on 31 July 1917 at Pilckem Ridge, and lasted until 16 August around Langemarck. It was during this opening phase the Welsh Division took part in the fighting. Despite being extremely effective in achieving its objectives on the first day, the Welsh Division returned from the front line, and later took part in establishing a forward position around Langemarck. Evidence from the 'Intelligence Summaries' have been used to reveal a picture of what was believed to be the enemy's intention once the attack commenced. Even ten days before the attack Fifth Army 'Intelligence' was still unsure where the enemy intended to make its 'main line of resistance'. 6 Much has been written about the 'campaign in the mud' but even at this early stage of the offensive the Welsh Division had only broken into what the Germans termed the 'battle zone'.

It was only after the opening day of the battle that the Welsh Division began to realise it had caught the German Third Guards Division, which had not previously been identified, relieving the 23rd Res. Division. Like the Somme the year before, the Welsh Division had faced, fought and overcome some of the better German regiments. The high casualty rate reflected the great struggle which had taken place amidst some of the worst conditions experienced during the whole of the war. The Welsh Division had overcome the trials of the two pillars of slaughter which mark out the years of 1916 and 1917, and were now faced in 1918 with their greatest challenge of the war.

The winter months that followed were exceptionally cold and bitter but did allow the Welsh Division to go through the whole process of renewal it had experienced after the Somme. Yet again there were

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 $^{^6}$ TNA W.O. 157/212 Resume of situation on Fifth Army Front, 1-20 July 1917, p.5.

large number of changes in officers and men to make up for the losses sustained during the recent fighting. This time there was no implied stigma which had haunted the Welsh Division the year before, as they had been seen to succeed and in doing so had gained a reputation by defeating an elite German formation. Their efforts had not been wasted and they had overcome the challenging nature and character of trench warfare in difficult weather conditions. They could no longer be seen as a 'Kitchener Mob' of talented amateurs, they had been tested and not been found wanting.

Once again this process of regeneration took place but there was also an unexpected change of divisional commander. As a result of an unfortunate accident, Major-General Blackader was replaced in May 1918 by Major-General Cubitt, who had missed the early stages of the war owing to his commitments in Somalia. Since his arrival with the B.E.F, he had risen from commanding a battalion to divisional command, which speaks volumes about his capabilities. Here was a flexible commander, who was thriving on the demanding nature of warfare on the Western Front and from August to November 1918, he proved this to be the case.

However, there was one discordant note, which needs some explanation. Lieut.-Colonel Robert Ormus Campbell had taken over command of 13 R.W.F. after the Somme. He was a married man from Knighton, Herefordshire, born in 1872, educated at Wellington College and had served with 3 R.W.F. before the war for six and half years as a territorial officer. He rejoined the Army in October 1914, and five days later was given an immediate commission with the rank of Major, in the 13 (North Wales) Bn R.W.F. in which he served until 14 October 1917. On the promotion of Lieut-Colonel H. E. ap Rhys Pryce to Bde General, (in place of Price-Davies), he refused to serve under him. He explained in a letter to the General Blackader that he found it 'quite impossible to serve under him as I have no confidence in him and we are antagonistic to each other personally'. Unfortunately the row did not stop there, as he was arrested under Section 40 of the Army Act, and suspended from command of his battalion. It was found, at the end of October by Field Marshal. Haig, that Lieut.-Colonel Campbell was seen to have failed to understand 'his position in relation to his superior officers that I do not consider that his retention in command of a battalion is justified.' He was issued with orders to 'proceed home' and report in writing to the War Office. On his return he wrote a four page letter on 8

November 1917 to the Military Secretary, at the W.O. asking for the facts of the matter to be investigated 'in the interests of the Service'. As a result of his sense of grievance, he involved the M.P. for Cardiff, J. Herbert Cory, confidentially to plead his case, although this undermined whatever chance he had of retaining his commission. Although F.M. Haig was sympathetic initially to his plight, had he been a Regular Officer 'he would have known the proper course to take'. However, by February 1918, his name was removed from the list of officers 'recommended for further employment' and he was allowed to resign his commission. Lieut.-Colonel Campbell's career in the Army ended due to both his own misjudgement and the caustic relationship which existed between the military and politicians during the Great War.⁷

The Welsh Division's performance during the Great War was highlighted during their 'advance to victory period' where the role of the middle ranking officers excelled. Time and again, certain junior and middle ranking officers took advantage of opportunities which the very changing tactical situations presented. Unlike at Mametz Wood, Pilckem Ridge and Langemarck, these opportunities led to the end of the Great War. The crossing of the Ancre, the pocketing of Germans units around Thiepval, the drive through the old battlefield of the Somme, and the capture of Mametz Wood, High Wood and Delville Wood was a triumph. The breaking of the last major defensive position along the Hindenburg Line, the Beaurevoir Line, at Villers Outreaux and Morlancourt, which was noted as the hardest day's fighting of the war, reveals how capable they were. During this advance they crossed a number of rivers and canals including the Ancre, the Canal du Nord, and the Selle, and fought their way through the Foret du Mormal to the Sambre. Time and again it was the concept of the 'man on the spot' whether he was a senior NCO, Lieutenant, Captain, Major or battalion commander, and supported by an advanced divisional command, which made the difference. The night march through the Mormal Forest by 13 W.R. highlights the independent endeavour which brought significant results with the capture of Berlaimont on the river Sambre. Army Commanders very seldom praise units without good cause but General Byng had no hesitation in doing so on this occasion. In the big picture, this breakthrough allowed both IV and V Corps (Third Army) to push forward and to put pressure on Mons from the south, which allowed the Canadian Corps (First Army) the honour of taking the City.

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⁷ TNA W.O. 339/13649 personal file of Lt Colonel Robert Ormus Campbell.

When the curtain was drawn down on the Welsh Division its story was largely untold suffice to say that every Welshman who served returned to the Principality feeling very proud of its achievements. Owing to the industrial crisis over 3,000 miners left the division in December 1918, bound for demobilisation. In February 1919 another 2,243 left for demobilisation while 644 left to serve in the Army of the Rhine and in March another 1,438 left the division. During the months that followed the men left behind spent most of their time in recreation and competitions, playing football, rugby, boxing and cross country running. The standard of the Welsh Divisional Rugby team had been high throughout the war with matches against the Australian and New Zealanders, and in early 1919 they went to Paris and played two matches against France, wining the second game. Concerts and the cinema were very popular and well worth the investment made during the winter months of 1915. On Boxing Day 1918, an *Eisteddfod* was organised for the 115th Inf. Bde at the recreational hall in Aulnoye, northern France, and other brigades of the Welsh Division had similar arrangements. There were also lectures by Education Officers on retraining, but who were also trying to answer questions regarding the slow course of demobilisation. Like old soldiers, by a process of dilution whereby the life blood of the division was fading away, it was not until 17 June 1919, the Welsh Division ceased to exist.

In November 1919 Sir Douglas Haig wrote an introduction to Munby's history of the Welsh Division where he singled out two occasions whereby the division 'reached the highest level of soldierly achievement'. The first was at Pilckem Ridge in August 1917, where the Welsh Division broke the German Guard Divisions to 'pieces'. The second was in 1918 during the 21-24 August break-out when the division pocketed a large number of Germans near Pozieres. He continued 'all who fought with the 38th Division can look back with legitimate pride'. The purpose of this work was to break new ground by investigating in greater depth than hitherto the history of the Welsh Division, and to make it possible for both current and future generations to rediscover and take pride in its achievements.

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⁸ TNA W.O. 95/2560 War Diary, 115th Inf. Bde, December 1918.

⁹ Major A.F. Becke, *History of the Great War. Order of Battle Part 3 NEW ARMY DIVISIONS* (HMSO, 1938), pp. 81-9.

¹⁰ Munby, *History of the 38th (Welsh) Division*, Introduction.

Annex Number 1.

Kitchener's New Army Commanders First Appointments.

<u>K.1.</u>

9TH (Scottish) Division.

Major-General Colin John Mackenzie K.C.B.

Served with Kitchener in Soudan and South Africa 1899 – 1902.

ADC to Lord Roberts C in C India.

DAA – General Quetta District, Baluchistan; Director of Military Intelligence, South Africa: Military Governor Johannesburg: Command of Mobile Column S.A:

Colonel General Staff 5th Division: AAG Army HQ: Commanded 6th Brigade Aldershot: Chief of Staff Canada: Commanded Highland Territorial Division.

Served in Egypt, Burma, Gilgit, Hazara, Wazisrastan,

Nile Expedition (Including Khartoum) 1898.

Director of Staff Duties War Office 1915: Commanded 61st Division 1916 -18 (wounded 27th April 1918).

KCB 1918:

Colonel of the Seaford Highlanders since 1923.

Born 26 November 1861.

Educated Edinburgh Academy, Sandhurst.

Passed Staff College.

Date of Commission 1881. Seaforth Highlanders.

Date of Appointment 27 August 1914 – 11th October 1914.

Retired 1920. Died July 1956.

10th (Irish) Division.

Lieut.-General Sir Bryan Thomas Mahon K.C.B, C.B, D.S.O.

Served with Kitchener in Soudan and South Africa.

Egyptian Campaign 1896. Dongola Expedition (DSO); Khartoum Expedition. Served in India until 1899.

Commander of Cavalry and led the relief of Mafeking.

Military Governor of Kordofan 1901 – 04.

Commander of t 8th Lucknow Division 1909 – 14.

Commanded Division at Gallipoli.

Commanded Western Frontier Force, Egypt 1916.

Commander of the Salonika Army 1915 – 16.

Commander in Chief Ireland 1916 -18.

Born 2 April 1862 County Galway.

Date of Commission 1883. 8th (Kings Royal Irish) Hussars. Date of Appointment 24 August 1914 – 16 August 1915.

Retired pay August 1921.

Died 1930.

11th (Northern) Division.

Major-General Frederick Hamersley C.B.

Served with Kitchener in Soudan expedition 1884 and the Nile expedition where fought at the Battle of Khartoum.

Served in South Africa War, Severely wounded at Battle of Talana Hill 1899 -1900. CB 1908.

Commanded 3rd Brigade, Aldershot Command 1906 – 1911.

Served on Staff at Aldershot, Dublin and War Office.

Commanded Division but was invalided back from Middle East in state of collapse.

CB 1908.

Born 21 October 1858. Educated Eton, Sandhurst.

Date of Commission 1876 Lancashire Fusiliers

Date of Appointment 22 August 1914 – 23 August 1915.

Died 1924.

12th (Eastern) Division.

Major-General James Spens. C.B., C.M.G.

Played for the Army at Lords in 1877. Also played for Hampshire 1884.

CB 1900. CMG 1916.

Served Afghanistan 1879 – 80:

Served in South African War 1899 -1902, Commanded $85^{\rm th}$ Kings Light Infantry a

mobile column, 1901 to end of the War. In India 1903-1908.

G.O.C. Australian Training Depot, Egypt April – November 1915:

G.O.C. Cairo District 1915 -16.

Born 30 March 1853.Born in India.

Educated Haileybury.

Date of Commission 1872 Shropshire Light Infantry.
Date of Appointment 24 August 1914 – 15 March 1915.

Retired 1914. Died 1934

13th (Western) Division.

Major-General Robert George Kekewich.

Fought in the Perak War 1875 – 76. Served with Kitchener in Soudan. He was D.A.A.G. in Sudan Campaign 1888 and after to the Military Secretary Madras. Commanded 1st Loyal Regiment (North Lancashire) in South Africa. Commanded garrison of Kimberley.

CB 1902 was promoted Major General for winning Battle of Rooiwal in April 1902. Appointed Colonel of Buffs 1909.

Africa.

Born 17 June 1854. Educated Marlborough.

Date of Commission 1874 (Entered Army through the militia) Royal

West

Kent Regiment.

Date of Appointment 24 August 1914 – 26 October 1914.

Died 5 November 1914 (Suicide).

14th (Light) Division.

Major-General Thomas Lethbridge Napier Morland K.C.M.G, D.S.O.

Served in Nigeria 1897 – 98, 1901, 02, 03.

Inspector General, West African Frontier Force 1905-10.

Brigadier General 1910-13, 2nd Inf. Bde.

Served with B.E.F. and fought at Battle of Mon's with 5th Infantry Division.

Born 9 August 1865. Montreal, Canada. Educated Charterhouse, R.M.A. Sandhurst. Date of Commission 1884 Kings Royal Rifle Corps.

Date of Appointment 7 September 1914 – 17 October 1914.

Promoted Lieut. General 1915.

Commanded X Corps 15 July 1915 – 15 April 1918.

Commanded 12 April 1918 XIII Corps to end of the War and

until

1920.

GOC Aldershot 1922 made full General.

Retired 1923.

Died 21 May 1925 buried in English Cemetery at

Villeneuve, Montreux.

K.2.

15th (Scottish) Division.

Major General Sir Alexander Wallace K.C.B.

Served in Indian Army. Captain I.S.C 1887: Major 1896: Lieut.-Colonel I.A. 1902: Brevet Colonel 1904: Major General 1911:

Served in Afghan War 1879 – 80: Burma 1886 – 88: Hazara 1891: Miranzai 1891; Occupation of Chileas: N.W. Frontier 1897 -98: Waziristan 1901 – 02: East Africa 1903 -04: A.A.G Peshawar Division 1907; Commanded Jubblepore Bde 1908 – 13. Brigadier General 1908.

Major General 1911.

Suez Canal 11th Indian Division 1914.

M.E.F 1915. Egypt in command of Western Frontier Force 1915 – 16.

Knighted in 1922.

Born 22 August 1858.

Educated Framlington College, Suffolk

Date of Commission 1876. Indian Army. (Son of Indian Army

Officer).

Date of Appointment 14 September 1914 – 12 December 1914.

Died 25 December 1922. Aged 64 yrs.

16th (Irish) Division.

Lieutenant-General Sir Lawrence Worthington Parsons K.C.B, C.B, R.A.

Served in South Africa 1899 – 1900. Battle of Colenso & Relief of Ladysmith.

Inspector General Artillery India, 1903 – 06.

Major General 1903.

Commanding 8th Division 1906.

Commanded 6th Division Cork 1907 -09.

Retired 1909.

Colonel Commandant R.A – 1917.

Born 23 March1850. Educated Cheltenham

Date of Commission 1870.

Date of Appointment 23 September 1914 – 22 Jan 1915.

Died 1923

17th (Northern) Division.

Major-General Walter Rupert Kenyon-Slaney CB.

Served in the South African War.

Commanded troops, Secunderabad, India 1909 – 1913.

Retired 1913.

Born 25 September 1851.

Educated Eton.

Date of Commission 1869. Rifle Bde.

Date of Appointment 18 September 1914 – 25 January 1915.

Died 26 March 1936. Age 84 yrs.

18th (Eastern) Division

Sir Lieut.-General Lawrence Worthington Parsons

Served in the South African War.

Inspector General Artillery India 1903 – 06.

Major-General – 1903. Commanded 6th Division Cork 1906 – 09.

Lieut-General 1909. Retired 1909. Colonel Commandant R.A. 1917.

Born. 23 March 1850 Educated Cheltenham.

Date of Commission 1870 Royal Artillery.

Date of appointment 14 September 1914. (Transferred to 16th Irish

Division

22/9/14).

Died 1923.

19th (Western) Division.

Major-General Charles G. Mansell Fasken C.B. Indian Army.

Extensive Campaigns and Expeditions.

G.O.C. Ferozepore Bde, India - November 1907 – 1911 as Brigadier.

Major General 1907. Colonel 52nd Sikhs F.F. 1909.

Retired 2 January 1914.

Served and commanded 19th Division at Battle of Loo's 1914 (September – October

1915).

Invalided 1916.

Born 24 May 1855.

Educated Marlborough & Sandhurst.

Date of Commission 13 June 1874. Leicestershire Regiment

transferred to

Bedfordshire Regiment 1875.

Entered B.S.C (now Indian Army 1878).

Date of Appointment 25 September 1914 – 13 December 1915.

Died 1928.

20th (Light) Divisions.

Major-General Sir. Edward Owen Fisher Hamilton K.C.B.

Served in India before and after return from South African War where he commanded 2^{nd} battalion Queens Royal Regiment. Commanded 2^{nd} Bde April 1900 – 1902. G.O.C. West Africa 1908 - 1911and Lieut. Governor of Guernsey 1911 to his retirement, just before the outbreak of the Great War.

He oversaw Signalling in the Indian Army.

Born 17 February 1854 Ireland. Educated Hermitage School, Bath

Date of Commission

1873 Queens West Surrey Regiment.

Date of Appointment

15 September 1914 – 19 October 1914.

Colonel in chief

Queens Royal Regiment 1914 – 20.

Died 30 March 1944.

<u>K.3.</u>

21st Division.

Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Thomas Henry Hutton K.C.B, K.C.M.G.

Served in Sudan, Egypt and South African War.

Served in Australia and Canada.

Resigned as GOC Australian Army at end of 1904.

Commanded 3rd Division 1905 – 06. Eastern Command November 1907.

Promoted Lieut.-General shortly before his retirement.

Born 6 December 1848. Torquay, Devon.

Educated Eton.

Date of Commission 1870 Kings Royal Rifle Corps.

Date of Appointment 16 September 1914 – 11 April 1915. (Fell ill

after a

riding accident and was relieved of his

command).

Died 4 August 1923. (aged 74 yrs).

22nd Division.

Major-General Robert Arthur Montgomery C.B, C.V.O, R.A.

Posted Cork 1881 -85.

Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, R.A. War Office 1889 -94.

Deputy Inspector of Ordnance 1897 – 1902.

Commander R.A. Southern District – 1902 -3.

Served as Commander Transvaal District 1906 – 08.

Vice President Ordnance Board 1908 – 10.

Major General 1902.

Retired 1910.

Served with this division from September 1914 to June 1915.

Director General of recruiting 1915.

Born 7 September 1848 Date of Commission 1868 Royal Artillery.

Date of Appointment 7 September 1914 – 17 June 1915.

Died 1931.

23rd Division.

Major-General Sir James Melville Babington C.B, C.M.G.

Served in India and in the South African War, he commanded the 1st Cavalry Bde.

Commanded New Zealand Defence Forces 1902 – 07.

Brigade Commander Lowland Mounted Brigade 1908 -13.

G.O.C. 23rd Division 1914 -18 also served in Italy.

G.O.C. XIV Corps 15 October 1918.

Born 31 July 1854

Date of Commission 1873 16th Queens Lancers.

Date of Appointment 18 September 1914 – 15 October 1918.

Died 15 June 1936.

24th Division.

Major-General Sir John George Ramsay K.C.B.

Joined 14th Foot 1875 (formerly Buckinghamshire – The Prince of Wales Own) 1914

The Prince of Wales Own (West Yorkshire Regiment).

Transferred to Indian Army, joined 24th Punjab Infantry 1877.

Served China 1900.

Retired Colonel 24th Punjabis.

C.B 1900. K.C.B. 1911.

Born 5 November 1856.

Educated Queen Elizabeth School, Ipswich.

Date of Commission 1875 West Yorkshire Regiment.

Date of Appointment 19 September 1914 – 3 October 1914.

Died 1920.

25th Division.

Major-General Francis Ventris C.B.

Nile Expedition 1884 - 85.

Egyptian Field Force 1885 - 86.

A.A.G India 1895 – 97. Brigadier General Bombay 1897 – 1902.

Major General North China 1903-06.

Retired 1909.

Born 1857.

Educated Newport, Adams Grammar School

Date of Commission 1875 Essex Regiment.

Adjutant of Regiment 1880. Colonel 1889. P.S.C 1890.

Date of Appointment 18 September 1914 – 27 May 1915.

Commander British Forces China 1915 – 1921.

Died 1929

26th Division.

Major-General Sir Edward Charles William Mackenzie-Kennedy C.B.

Transferred Indian Army 1882.

Adjutant 1st Madras Pioneers 1887.

Major General 1908. Bde Commander 1909.

Served India and North China.

Commanded 26th Division 18 September 1914 to 22nd March 1917.

He went sick on 14 January 1917.

Born 1860.

Educated Canterbury and Sandhurst.

Date of Commission 1879 19th Alexandra Princess of Wales Own

(Yorkshire Regiment).

Transferred to Indian Army 1882.

Date of Appointment 18 September 1914 – 4 January 1917. Commanded XII Corps 4 -11 January 1917 (went sick).

Retired 1919 Died 1932.

K.4.

30th Division.

Major-General Sir William Fry C.V.O, C.B.

Served in the Afghan War and in South African War under Lieut.-Colonel F.W.

Kitchener.

Commandant Mounted Infantry School at Bulford 1905. Brigadier General Lancashire Regiment District 1907. Commanded East Lancashire Division T.F 1908 – 10. Deputy Director General of Territorial Force – 1910.

Commanded 1st London Division T.F 1912 – 15.

Born 8 September 1858

Date of Commission. 1878 West Yorkshire Regiment.

Date of Appointment 4 May 1915 – 13 May 1916.

Major General in charge of Administration Ireland until retirement in 1919.

Lieut.-Governor Isle of Man since 1919 - 1925.

Colonel of the West Yorkshire Regiment.

Died 30 March 1934.

31st Division.

Major-General Sir Edward Arthur Fanshawe K.C.B.

Served in the Afghan War 1878 – 80 and Sudan 1885.

Commanded R.A 6th Division Irish Command.

Lieut.-Colonel 1903. Colonel 1908. Commanded 5th Division 1909 – 13.

Commanded Wessex Division T.F in 1913.

CRA 1st Division BEF 1914 – 15.

Major-General 1915. Temporary Lieut. General 1916. Born 4 April 1859.

Educated Winchester & RMA, Woolwich.

Date of Commission 1878 Royal Artillery.

Date of Appointment 26 July 1915 – 16th August 1915.

Transferred to 11th Northern Division at Gallipoli.

Commanded V Corps 5 July 1916.

Removed from command controversially and as a result of Operation Michael.

August 1918 Appointed to Command XXIII Corps.

Transferred to garrison Firth of Forth until end of war. Lieut.-General 1919. Retired 1923.

Colonel Commandant R.A 1923 – 29. Colonel Commandant RHA 1930 – 34.

Died 13 November 1952.

32nd Division.

Major-General Sir William Henry Rycroft K.C.B., C.M.G, C.B.

Served in the Egyptian Army and Nile Expedition 1884 - 85.

Promoted into 7th Dragoon Guards 1888.

Staff College, Camberley 1891 – 92.

Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, York 1895 – 1896.

Served in N.W. Frontier 1897 - 8.

Staff South African 1899 - 1900. Somaliland 1902 - 5.

Commanded 11th Hussars 1904 – 1908.

On Staff South Africa 1911 – 1912.

Assistant Quarter Master General, Southern Command 1913 – 14.

Ireland 1920. Retired 1921.

Governor of British North Borneo 1922 – 25.

Born 17 February 1861. Educated Eton and Sandhurst.

Staff College 1891 - 92.

Date of Commission 1879 Highland Light Infantry.

Date of Appointment 29 June 1915 – 22nd November 1916.

Died 1925.

33rd Division.

Brigadier-General Robert Gordon Gordon-Gilmour C.B, M.V.O, DSO. (acting).

Served in Zulu War 1879.

Served Nile Expedition 1884 - 85, and in the South African War 1900 - 02.

Commanded 2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards during the 2nd Boer War.

D.S.O. – 1900; C.B. – 1902.

Aug – September 1914 Commanded 98th Infantry Bde and took it to France.

Captain Company of Archers.

Born. 27 February 1857.

Educated. Eton, Christ Church, Oxford. Date of Commission. 1878 Grenadier Guards. Date of Appointment 1 July 1915 – 9 July 1915.

Died. 24 June 1939.

34th Division.

Major-General Edward Charles Ingouville-William C.B, D.S.O.

Nick-name 'Inky-Bill'.

Served in the Nile Expedition, Sudan and in the South African War.

1903 - Transferred to the Worcester Regiment.

1910 – 12 Commandant School of Infantry.

1912 – 16th Infantry Bde, Irish Command.

Born December 1861

Date of Commission. 1881 East Kent Regiment from Militia.

Date of Appointment 5 July 1915

Killed 22nd July 1916 near Mametz

Wood.

35th Division.

Brigadier General John Gunning Hunter C.B.

Indian Army Retired, son of Colonel Alexander Hunter, Indian Army.

Served throughout the Afghan War 1878 - 79.

Served as Commandant 7th Jats and vacated on completion of 7 years tenure of command and after 25 years service in the Corps.

Served in Burma War 1887 – 90.

Promoted to Major General Special Appointment under the War Office September

1917 to the signing of the peace.

Retired 1919.

Born 1 November 1859.

Educated Cheltenham, and Sandhurst.

Date of Commission 1878 East Surrey Regiment (70th Foot).

Date of Appointment $1 - 5^{th}$ July 1915.

Died. 1926.

<u>K.5.</u>

36th (Ulster) Division.

Major-General Sir Charles Herbert Powell K.C.B.

Bde Commander Jullunder, India.

Captain Indian Army 1887; Major 1896; Lieut. Colonel 1902; Colonel 1904.

Various Indian Campaigns and Expeditions – China 1900.

Colonel of Regiment 1916 – 1943.

Serbis 1918 - 1919

Born. 23 October 1857. Educated Private School

Date of Commission 1876 Royal Marines transferred Indian

Army 1887

King George V's Own Gurkha Rifles.

(Portrait at Gurkha Museum).

Date of Appointment 28 September 1914 – 14 September 1915.

Died 1943.

37th Division.

Major-General Count (Albert) Edward (Wilfred) Gleichen K.C.V.O, C.B, C.M.G, C.V.O, D.S.O.

Lord Albert Edward Wilfred.

Nile Expedition in Guards Camel Regiment 1884 – 5: Intelligence Department War Office 1886 – 88: Staff College 1890 – 91: Morocco 1893: Special Service Sudan 1896.

Abyssinia 1897: Staff Captain & DAAG Intelligence W.O. 1894-99: Served in South African War 1899 – 1900: Director of Intelligence and Sudan Agent 1901 -03:

Military attaché Berlin 1903 – 6: Washington 1906.

Commanded 15th Inf. Bde at Belfast 1911 – 14: Commanded 37th Division

Born 15 January 1863 London.

Educated Cheam, Charterhouse, & Sandhurst.

Date of Commission 1881 Grenadier Guards.

Date of Appointment 6 April 1915 – 22nd October 1916. Organised and Directed Intelligence Bureau, Department of Information 1917 -18.

Died 1937.

38th (Welsh) Division.

Major-General Sir Ivor Philipps K.C.B, D.S.O, M.P.

Fought in Anglo – Burmese War 1885 – 1889.

Miranzai Expedition 1891; Isazai Expedition 1892; Tirah Field Force 1897 – 98. China 1900 – 1901 as Quartermaster - General; DSO November 1900 in recognition of his services in the Boxer Rebellion.

Retired 1903; Joined Pembrokeshire Yeomanry – Commanded 1908 – 1912.

1914 Appointed Director of Schweppes.

GSO 2 War Office 1914 at outbreak of War.

Major General 1915.

KCB 1917.

Held a seat in House of Commons 1906 – 1922.

Born 9 September 1861

Date of Commission 1883 Manchester Regiment transferred

Indian Army.

Date of Appointment 15 January 1915 – 9 July 1916.

Died 15 August 1940

39th Division.

Major-General Nathaniel Walter Barnardiston.

Staff College 1888: Governor of Bermuda 1889;

Staff Officer Intelligence War Office 1898 -99: Commander 2nd Middx Regt, South African War 1901 -02:

Assistant Director Military Training 1910 -14.

Commander of British Forces North China 1914 – 15: Commander 39th Division 1915 – 16:

Head of Mission to Portugal 1916 – 19.

Born 1858.

Educated Oxford 1877

Date of Commission 1882 – 86 2nd Bn Middlesex Regiment.

Date of Appointment 28 August 1915.

Died 1919.

40th Division.

Major-General Sir Harold Goodieve Ruggles – Brise. K.C.M.G, C.B, M.V.O.

Captain 1897: Major 1902: Lieut.-Colonel 1907: Colonel 1911:

Bde Major Gibraltar 1899: South Africa 1899 – 1900: Commandant School of

Musketry 1911.

Severely wounded as Brigade Commander 20th Bde, 7th Division 2 November 1914.

Served as a Military Secretary GHQ France 1917 – end of War.

Born 17 March 1864.

Educated Winchester, Balliol College, Oxford.

Date of Commission 1885 Grenadier Guards.

Date of Appointment 25 September 1915 – 24th August 1917.

Retired March 1920. Died June 1927.

41st Division.

Major-General Sidney Turing Barlow Lawford. K.C.B, C.B.

Captain 1894: Major 1900: Brevet Lieut.-Colonel 1902: Brevet Colonel 1908: Colonel 1912:

Commandant School of Mounted Infantry, Longmore 1912 – 13: Bde Commander Essex Infantry Brigade 1913.

Served in South African War 1901 -02. C.B. - 1915.

Nick name 'Swanky Syd': Knighted in the field 1918. GOC Lahore District 1920 – 23. Lieut.-General 1923.

Retired 1926.

Born 16 November 1865 Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

Date of Commission 1885 Royal Fusiliers.

Date of Appointment 13 September 1915 – 1918.

Died 15 February 1953.

Father of the actor Peter Lawford.

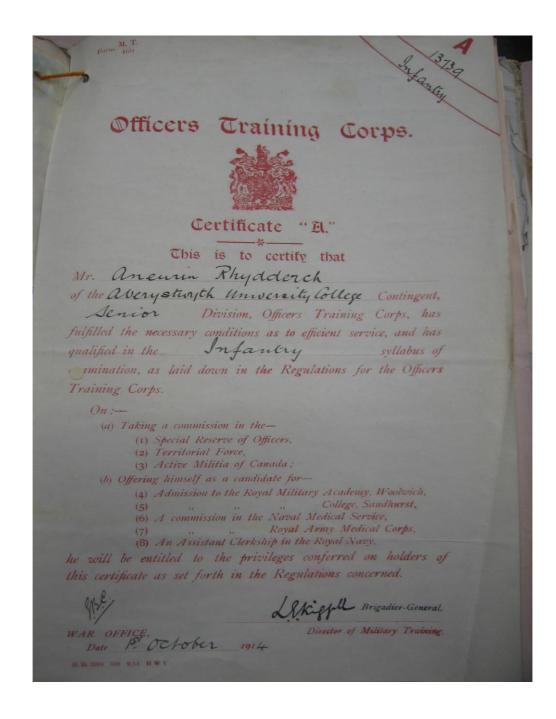
Annex 2.

The Welsh Divisional Badge.



Annex 3.

OTC Report Certificate 'A' Aneurin Rhydderch Oct 1914.



Annex 4.

Report No. 1.

G.S. Précis Report No. 117, page 2, No. 115, Referring files G.B/A. 6360; A.G.A. 17748; M.S.19518.

38th Division 1115 SECRET. Training of the 38th Division – December 1915 and September 1916

On 1/12/15 the W.O. say that the 38th (Welsh) Division is a little behind other Division recently sent to France in the matter of efficiency; it is understood the conditions at the front will admit of further training being given without inconvenience.

There is a D.O. letter from General Paget to the same effect. The Division was originally raised by Mr Lloyd George "As a consequence, practically all the Brigade Commanders and Commanders of Battalions, as well as many of the officers had to be changed. The original men were either aged or dug-outs".

In reply to the W.O. the C.-in-C. points out that the division is to replace well-trained troops sent from France, and urges the necessity of training in France being reduced to a minimum.

In Sept. 1916, Gen. Plumer in a D.O. says he is not satisfied with the 38th Division. There is lack of enterprise and real discipline, an infusion of new blood is wanted. The Welsh Division being the creation of Mr. Lloyd George makes the situation difficult.

G.H.Q. think it a pity to try and bolster up a Welsh Division with good officers and N.C.O's from English formations. No Divisions are so well placed as to be able to spare their best to make up deficiencies in an inferior division. The A.G. is said to be dealing with Gen. Plumer's official report; the latter is not in the file.

Annex 5.

MAJOR CRUITAL T. A. CUBITT, CAG.,DSO.,
Coumanding 38th (Velsh) Division.

Priday, 20th September, 1918.

The following telegrams are published for the information of all ranks.

PROM His Royal Highness the Prince of Valos, KC., CCMC.,CBE,MC., To the General Officer Commanding the 36th Division.

19.9.18.

Please convey to all ranks of the Welsh Division my most sincere congratulations on their magnificent successes in the recent offensive on the Vestern Front. Those I have followed with the greatest interest, particularly in view of my close connection with the Division during the Battle in Belgium last year.

TO His Royal Highness the Prince of Valos
Prom The General Officer Commanding the 38th Division.

20.9.18.

All ranks 36th Welch Division are deeply grateful for your Royal Highness most gracious telegram which has filled them with the utnest onthusiasm.

All Ranks Geth Welch Division are deeply grateful for your Royal Highness most gracious telegram which has filled them with the utnest onthusiasm.

Annex 6.

SPECIAL ORDER By Lieut. Col. R.B. Harkness, Commanding 19th Welsh Regt. The Commanding Officer wishes to place on record his high appreciation of the gallant conduct and splendid endurance displayed by all Officers and Other Ranks of "B" and "C" Coys., during recent operations. The G.O's. C. 113th and 114th Infantry Brigades highly appreciate the work done, and praise the conduct of all ranks whose gallantry contributed in no small manner measure to the success of the operations. Special mention is made of the following O.R's who showed exceptional courage and determination in the execution of their duty:-"B" Company. "C" Company. 206788 Sergt. Harper E.C. 31745 Sergt. Murphy M. 31575 " Wilkins W.C. 65323 " Stephens C. 30854 L/Sgt. Greenland A. 53823 Corpl. Bleasdale E. 47839 Corpl. Drake F.H. 31540 Partridge W. 93116 " Gale H. 31786 Pte. Evans O. 33680 Pte. Hill J. 31830 Parsons J. 31394 " Harris F. 39093 Pickering W. Rolt T. 55755 Turley C. (Signed) D.G. Davies. Lt.&. A/Adjt. 19th Welsh Regt. 91.10.18.

Annex 7.

EDMETAL CHERR OF WHI DAY

by

Major General T.ASTLEY CUBITT, CMG.,DSO., Commanding 38th.(Welsh) Division.

Saturday 26th Oct. 1918.

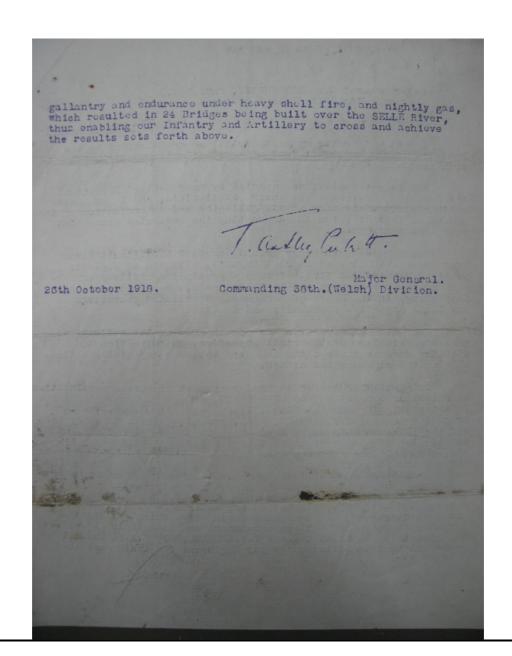
I desire to offer my most cordial congratulations to the Division on the brilliant feat of arms accomplished by them on the 20th instant.

I have personally, accompanied by many Senior Officers of the Division, traversed the entire battlefield, and I am once again lost in admiration at the gallantry and determination of the troops of this Division in surmounting the obstacles with which they were confronted.

You formed up in boggy ground, crossed a difficult river (for the fourth time since 21st August), attacked up a glacis swept by Machine Gun fire, stormed a precipitous railway embankment 40 to 50 feet high, and in puring rain, very slippery and deep going, in the hours of darkness, established yourselves on the final objective punctually and to time.

Very strong opposition was encountered on the railway, also when consolidating on the final objective, but direction and distance were maintained throughout; this was especially noticeable on the right of our attack.

In particular I wish to tender my most sincere congratulations to Brigadior General H.E.ap RHYS PRYCE, CMG.,DSO.,Gommanding 113th Infantry Brigade, and the 13th., 14th., and 16th.R.W.F., to Brigadior General T.R.C.FRICE, DSO.,Gommanding 114th Infantry Brigade and the 13th and 14th.Welsh Regiment; to Lieut.Colonel R.B.HARKNESS, and his two companies of the 19th.Welsh Regiment (Glamorgan Fioneers) who, when the left of the attack was temporarily checked, charged through the attacking Infantry evercoming opposition on the railway, and consolidated on the final cojective, capturing four field guns and accounting, with the bayonet, for their detachments complete; to Brigadier General T.E.TOPPING, CMG.,DSO.,C.R.A. and to Lieut. Colonel A.G.LYTTELTON, M.G.Battn. for their most carefully prepared and accurategun and machine gun covering fire which enabled the Infantry to storm the railway embankment and gain their objectives; and especially to Lieut.Colonel T.E.KELSALL,DSO, C.R.E. and all ranks of the 36th Divisional Royal Engineers for their sustained



Casualties of 38th Welsh Division.

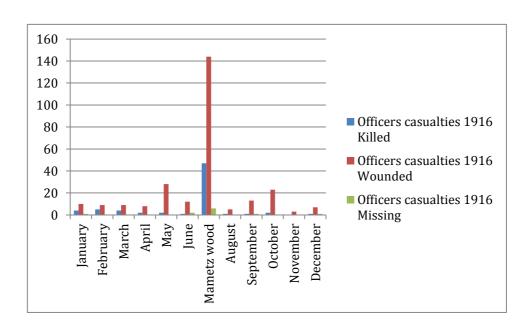
Officers' casualties 1915

Killed Wounded Missing

December 2 3 Both Officers died of wounds. Lieut.-Colonel Gaskell 16th Welsh admitted to hospital with broken leg after falling from his horse on Xmas Day.

Officers casualties 1916

	Killed	Wounded	Missing
January	4	10	1
February	5	9	0
March	4	9	0
April	2	8	0
May	2	28	0
June	1	12	2
Mametz			
wood	47	144	6
August	1	5	0
September	1	13	1
October	2	23	0
November	0	3	0
December	1	7	1



Other rank casualties 1915

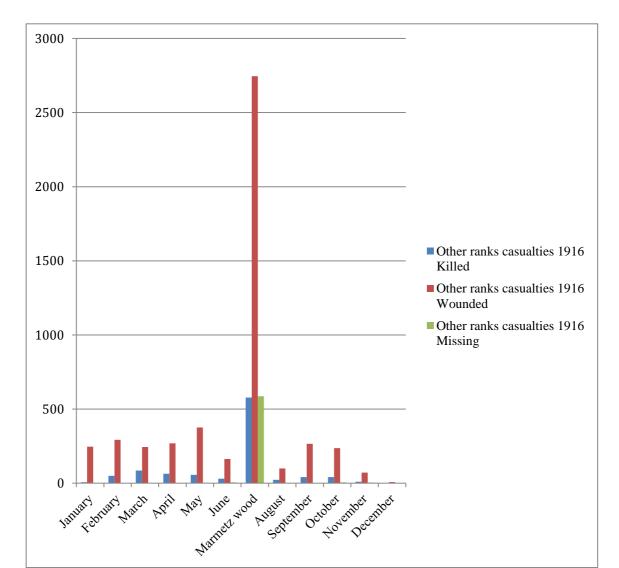
Killed Wounded Missing

December 6 33

On 21st December 1915 Quarter-master Sergeant was drown under a horse he was riding that went into the Canal d'Aire.

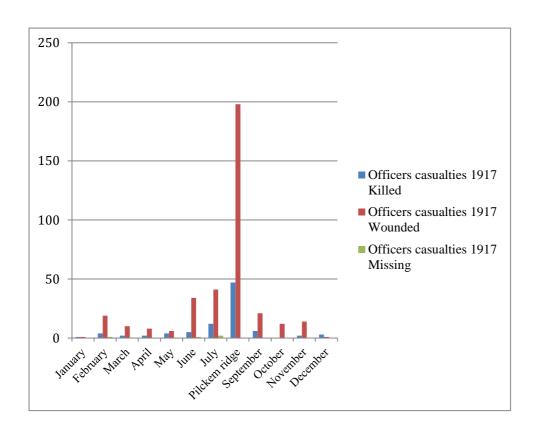
Other rank casualties 1916

	Killed		Wounded	Missing
January		6	246	0
February		50	292	0
March		85	244	0
April		64	269	0
May		56	376	2
June		30	163	5
Mametz				
wood		577	2746	586
August		22	99	0
September		41	265	1
October		41	236	5
November		10	71	4
December		1	7	1



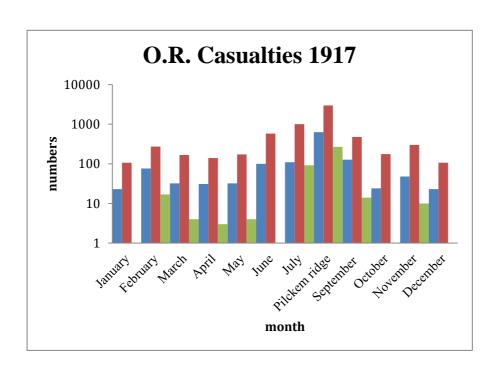
Officer Casualties 1917

	Killed	Wounded	Missing
January	1	1	0
February	4	19	1
March	2	10	0
April	2	8	0
May	4	6	0
June	5	34	1
July	12	41	2
Pilckem			
ridge	47	198	0
September	6	21	0
October	0	12	0
November	2	14	0
December	3	1	0



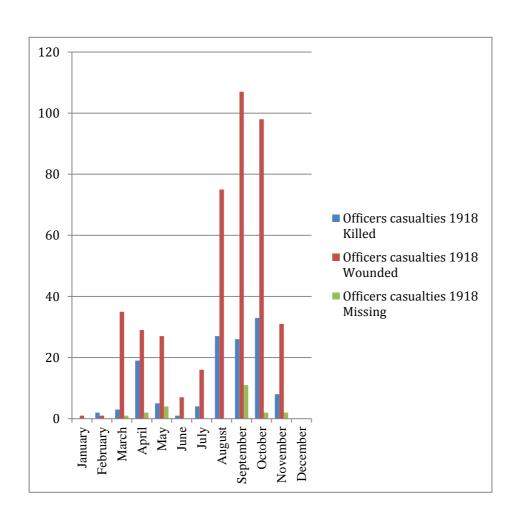
Other rank casualties 1917

	Killed		Wounded	Missing
January		23	107	0
February		76	273	17
March		32	167	4
April		31	140	3
May		32	173	4
June		100	582	0
July		110	1004	92
Pilckem				
ridge		630	2991	269
September		127	478	14
October		24	176	0
November		48	301	10
December		23	107	0



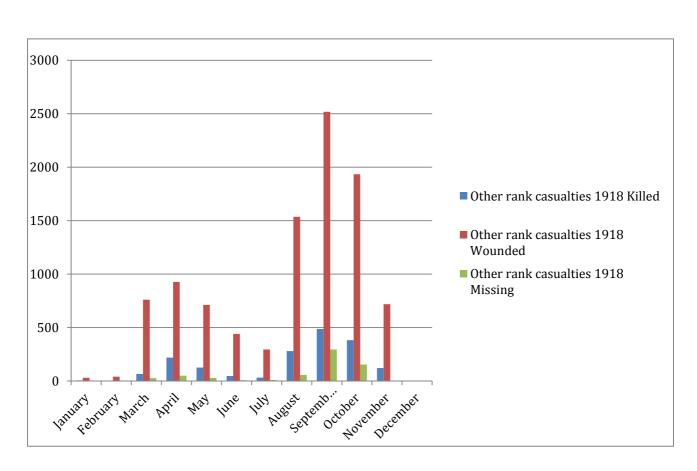
Officers casualties 1918

	Killed	Wounded	Missing
January	0	1	0
February	2	1	0
March	3	35	1
April	19	29	2
May	5	27	4
June	1	7	0
July	4	16	0
August	27	75	0
September	26	107	11
October	33	98	2
November	8	31	2
December	0	0	0



Other rank casualties

	Killed	Wounded	Missing
January	6	30	0
February	5	41	4
March	66	760	27
April	218	926	49
May	126	711	28
June	46	440	8
July	32	295	9
August	280	1535	57
September	487	2518	295
October	381	1933	154
November	121	718	3
December	0	0	0



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Acc No: 10147 - Mr Victor George Lansdown, 16th Bn Welch Regt. 4 Reels

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Acc No: 10917 - Mr Bill Smedley, 12th S.W.B., 19th Entrenching Bn Welsh Regiment, 14th Bn Worcester Regiment, 10 Reels

Acc No: 12232 - Mr Ivor Watkins 15th, 2nd, 6th Bn Welch Regiment, 9 Reels

Acc No: 12236 - Mr Alfred West, 1st Bn Monmouth Regiment, 9 Reels

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CAB 45/137 Somme 1929-1939 R - S.

CAB 45/138 Somme 1929-1939 T- Y

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 $CAB\ 45/140\ Ypres\ A-L$

CAB 45/141 Ypres M-Y

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Assistant Director Veterinary Services

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1915 Dec - 1916 Aug 120 Bde R.F.A

1915 Dec - 1919 April 121 Bde R.F.A

1916 Apr - 1919 Jan Divisional Trench Mortar Batteries

1915 Dec - 1919 May Divisional Ammunition Column.

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1915 Dec - 1919 June 124 Field Coy. R.E.

1915 Dec - 1919 June 151 Field Coy. R.E.

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WO 138/36 Major General Pilcher

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WO 339/24685 Captain Llewellyn Wyn Griffith, R.W.F.

WO 339/26225 Captain Edward Gill, M.C., 10th S.W.B.

WO 339/26233 Major Thomas Baddoe Phillips, 15th W.R.

WO 339/26571 Captain Richard Lloyd Williams, 17th R.W.F.

WO 339/26839 Captain Ralph Picton Daniel, 17th R.W.F.

WO 339/26847 Major James Owen James, W.R.

WO 339/28175 Captain John Chamberlain, M.C., S.W.B.

WO 339/28828 Lt. Donald Henry Devenish, 14th W.R.

WO 339/28979 Lt. Colonel E.W.P. Uniacke D.S.O, 14th R.W.F.

WO 339/29319 Lt. John Stanley Griffith Jones, 10th S.W.B.

WO 339/29995 Major Brindley Richard Lewis, R.F.A.

WO 339/30379 Captain Aled Owen Roberts, 15th R.W.F.

WO 339/30666 Lt. Peter Aubrey Roberts, 16th R.W.F.

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WO 339/34262 Lt. David Lyndsay Stranach Gaskell, 16th W.R.

WO 339/36634 Captain William Arthur Paine M.C., 16th R.W.F.

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WO 339/48412 Captain Harry Fenton Lambert, A.S.C.

WO 339/52774 Major Francis Richard Dale, M.C., 16th R.W.F.

WO 339/56927 Major John McMurtrie M.C, R.E.

WO 339/57821 Captain Morgan Watkin Williams, M.C, R.W.F.

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WO 374/59643 Major General W.C.E. Rudkin.

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