



WFA SUFFOLK BRANCH

Branch Briefing

July 2023

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Our Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/WFASuffolk>

WFA Suffolk



Tonight's talk

John McCarthy - Brest - Litovsk



NEWS FROM THE COMMITTEE

Looking forward to tonight's talk by our very own John McCarthy.

The attendance last month was back to pre-Covid levels which is excellent news

We could do with a wider pool of contributors to this Briefing so please consider submitting an article.

And it's not too early to think about giving a short talk at the December meeting. By tradition we only have member's talking at the December meeting and we usually aim for three short talks so let Tom Mudd know if you want to give a talk.

Thanks to Kelvin Dakin for three excellent articles this month !

Finally a last call for anyone wanting to join our September 'Big Coach' trip. We are close to closing the books on this.

David Hedges and 'The Committee'

UPCOMING TALKS Tom Mudd

09/08/2023	New Zealand Generalship	Dr John Peaty
13/09/2023	Zeppelins over Norfolk and the East coast	Steve Smith
11/10/2023	Artillery conquers, Infantry Occupies! A study of the effectiveness of the British Artillery at the 3rd battle of Ypres	Simon Shephard Yes
08/11/2023	German commerce raiders 1914-15	Dr Graham Kemp Yes
13/12/2023	3x15 minute cameos talks TBC	

Tour Proposal -The Battlefields of Champagne 7-11 September 2023

Julian Whippy and Keith Cooper

This often-overlooked campaign lasted through the Summer of 1918 but commenced on 27 May with the ‘shock and awe’ of the German Blücher offensive, one that almost destroying three British divisions on the Chemin des Dames. The German advance to the Marne, directly threatened Paris but was held at Chateau Thierry by a mixed force of US Infantry and Marines, the first major intervention by the AEF on the Western Front.

What followed saw the ‘Rock of the Marne’ and the Mangin offensive, both of which events were acknowledged by the Germans as the turn of the tide of war, weeks before the 8 August attack to the north by BEF. Our tour will enable us study if that was in fact the case by exploring the British, French, Italian and American contribution to the Allied campaign. Based in Reims, there will also be chance to explore the Champagne Houses and vineyards, many of which had direct links to the Battle of the Marne.

7 September *Travel Day* Pick-up in Suffolk and Ebbsfleet for onward travel to Reims, a stop on-route on the Chemin des Dames to look at the opening phases of the battle and provide some context to the tour. – Overnight Reims

8 September *Chateau Thierry and Belleau Wood* - A morning study of the battle for Belleau Wood including the advance into the wood, visits to a number of associated sites and the nearby ABMC and German Cemeteries. After lunch we look at one of the great what ifs of the war, the Battle of Chateau Thierry and the unmanned bridge spanning the town. We also visit the US Memorial and Visitors Centre that stands guard over the river Marne and offer commanding views of the battlefield. We end the day by studying the Rock of the Marne a true symbol of American resistance in 1918

9 September *The British in the Ardre Valley* - The day is spent touring the nearby Ardre Valley where the British fought two actions in the summer of 1918. Firstly, the defensive battle fought by the 19th (Western) Division that slows the German advance as they attempt to encircle Reims. We then consider the offensive actions of the 51st (Highland) and 62nd (West Riding) Divisions over the same ground as they fought their way through the dense forests and rolling vineyards before reaching the commanding Montagne de Bligny at the conclusion of an intense 9-day battle. We end the day in Epernay and tour the Avenue de Champagne, the mile long thoroughfare offers an unbroken boulevard of champagne houses and bars.

10 September *The battlefields of Reims* - We start the day with a visit to the nearby Fort de la Pompelle to consider the French battlefields prior to the British arrival in July 1918, after visiting a number of sites connected to the French fighting between 1915 and 1917, we end with a visit to a Reims Champagne House for a cellar tour & tasting.

11 September 2023 *Travel Day* – after some free-time in Reims to visit its magnificent Cathedral, we head home via Calais and to Suffolk.

Price- £710 per person £180 Single supplement. This includes Coach, Ferry, Guide and 4 nights in Hotel on B&B basis. This is based on minimum of 18 people booking. £100 deposit.

To register your interest please email Keith Cooper keith-cooper@hotmail.co.uk

THE STORY BEHIND A BADGE Kelvin Dakin



I found this Silver War Badge in an Antiques Centre in Norfolk recently. It was heavily tarnished with a rusty pin and had obviously been neglected for years. As many will know these have a serial number stamped on the back which can be traced to the man who received it.

At the time, I realised it could have been awarded to a soldier from anywhere in the country but with a good chance it belonged to someone fairly local.

Cleaning off the worst of the tarnish revealed the stamped number, and this quickly led me to "C H Bloomfield" who was discharged from the Queens (Royal West Surrey) Regiment on the 9th May 1919 having enlisted on the 26th September 1916¹.

Checking his details against other military records revealed that Charles Howell Bloomfield was from Ipswich!

Charles was born on the 13th October 1898² - the son of James and Annie Bloomfield - and in 1911 the family was living at 55 Newton Road, Ipswich. James was a Police Constable - Charles, and his sister Gladys, were at school.

Charles's service record has not survived but the date of his enlistment was a few weeks before his 18th birthday. A Pension Record card³ for Charles has "Yeo Cyclist" written on it in addition to "RW Surrey" indicating that he may have served in the Territorial Force earlier.

Charles's medal records show that he served initially with the 7th and the 3rd/4th Battalions of the Queens before being transferred to the 8th. The 3rd/4th Battalion served in France from the 1st June 1917 until disbanded on 11th February 1918. The War Diary of the 8th Battalion for the 13th February 1918 states that "10 OR's joined the Battalion from the 3rd/4th Queens" - another five joined on the 16th February.

About a month after Charles joined them, the 8th Battalion are in the front line, as described in their War Diary entries:

18th March 1918

"The Bn relieved the 1st Royal Fusiliers in the left sub-sector of the Bde front (NAUROY. Special sheet Ed 2^B 24a 5.6 to 30b 9.1) The relief was completed by 10PM. Two Coys found outposts in the forward zone ie C and A Coys. C Coy headquarters were at SHEPHERDS COPSE (23D 3.8) and A Coy HQ at GRAHAM POST (29B 9.0) Two remaining Coys D & B held strongpoints in and around LE VERGUIER. Bn HQ were situated in the village.

19th March 1918

The day was extraordinarily quiet as far as the enemy were concerned but our own artillery very active. A Coy HQ removed to GRAND PRIEL CRATER (29B 2.8)

20th March 1918

Conditions as on the previous day.

A member of 'C' Company, Charles was wounded and captured at Roisel on the 21st March. Roisel is a village a few kilometres west of his Company's original position and believed to have had a Field Ambulance stationed there. His wounds, to one leg and arm, were caused by shellfire, according to a Red Cross Prisoner of War record:

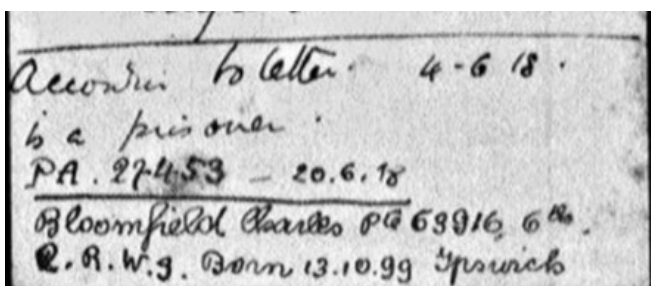
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	BLOOMFIELD	Pte	6th.	Roiselle, 21.3.18	Ipswich - 13.10.99
4.	Charles	P.R.W.S.		A.G. 1 Bein und Arm	Ipswich, England. Mrs A. Bloomfield. 55 Newton Rd. Ipswich - England.
	63916		G.	Westliche Etappe.	

("A.G." = Artillerie Geschoss – Artillery shell)

The War Diary entry for the opening hours of the battle on the 21st March indicates that 'C' Company was cut off from the rest of the battalion (see appended War Diary entry and trench map). Charles was probably wounded in the intensive bombardment before the German attack and evacuated behind the lines to the village of Roisel.

The first that the family appear to have known about Charles's fate was a letter received on the 4th June 1918. It seems likely that the letter was sent by him, or on his behalf, as the War Office report that he was a prisoner of war was not issued until the 25th September 1918.



Extract from Red Cross records

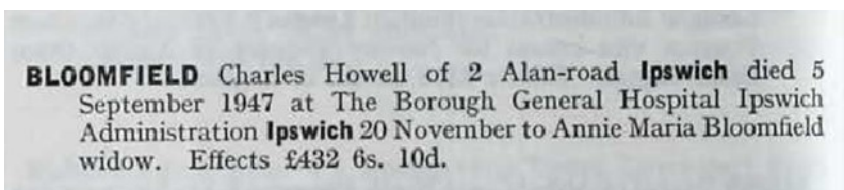
Clearly seriously wounded, he was repatriated to the UK and admitted to hospital on the 24th October 1918:

REPATRIATED PRISONERS OF WAR FROM GERMANY			
NO.1 RECORD OFFICE - H O U S L O W			LIST NO. H.B. 15194.
12857 Pte. Fordham, R.	11/R.W. Surreys.	Wounded.....	Adm. 2 London Gen. H. Chelsea 24 Oct. 18.
98931 Pte. Kingston, E.	2/M'sex.	-do.....	Adm. 2 London Gen. H. Chelsea 24 Oct. 18.
63916 Pte. Bloomfield, C.H.	8/R. West Surreys.	-do.....	Adm. 2 London Gen. H. Chelsea 24 Oct. 18.
207560 Pte. Richards, C.	11/R.W. Surreys.	-do.....	Adm. 2 London Gen. H. Chelsea 24 Oct. 18.

Finally discharged on the 9th May 1919, Charles returned home to Ipswich - the 1921 Census records him as living back with his parents at 55 Newton Road, joining his sister Gladys and younger brother Jack (born in 1913).

Charles married Florence Rose Simpson in 1933 but she died in 1935. In the 1939 Register he is described as a widower, incapacitated and living with his parents now at 2 Alan Road Ipswich.

He died in 1947 and his estate was passed to his now widowed mother Annie.



Footnotes:

- 1 Silver War Badge record – Ancestry
- 2 1939 England and Wales Register
- 3 Western Front Association Pension Record Cards

Appendix

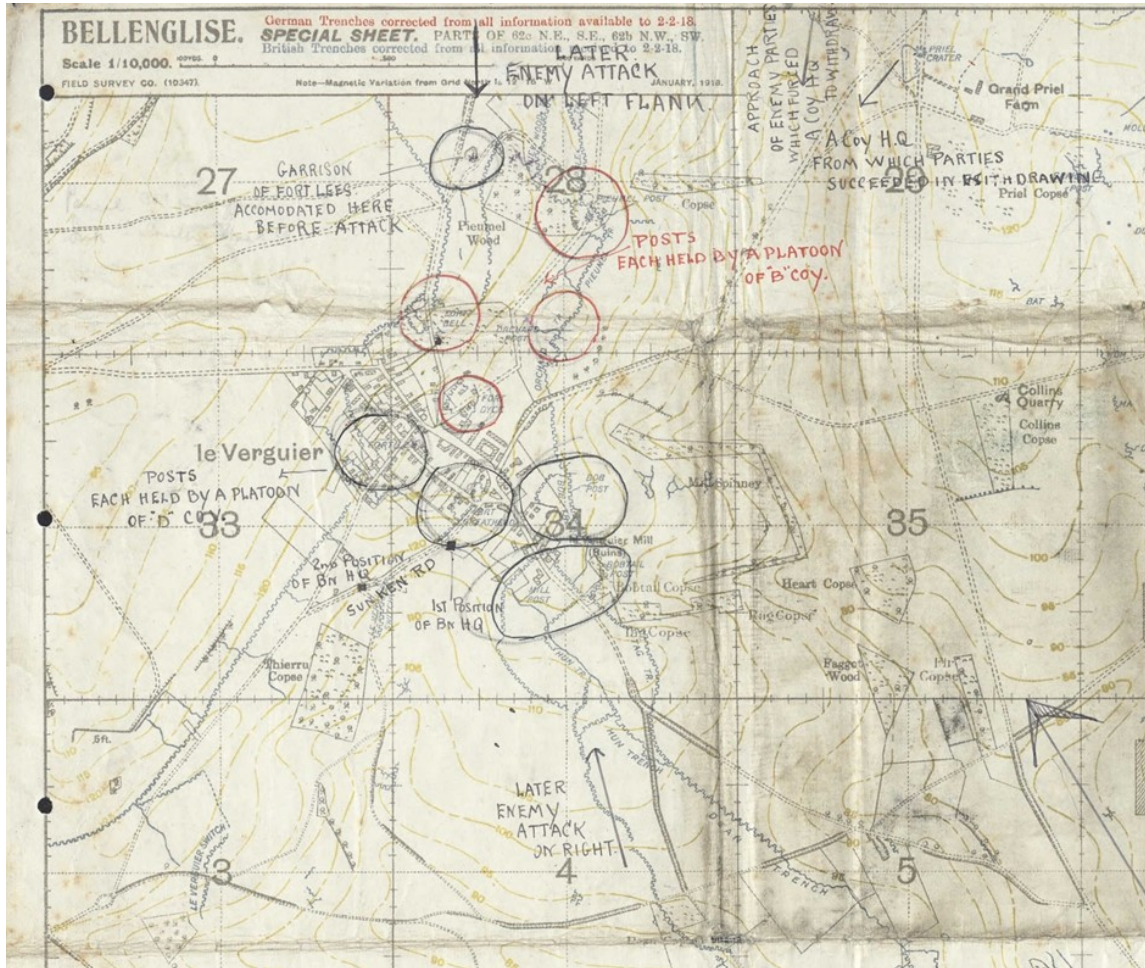
WAR DIARY of the 8th Battalion Queens Royal West Surrey Regiment

21st March 1918 (Part entry 4.30am to 10.30am)

At about 4:30 AM the enemy began an intense bombardment of LE VERGUIER and the back areas. For eight hours shells of all calibres, including a large proportion of gas shells fell on the village and battalion headquarters soon became untenable. Advantage was taken of a lull in the bombardment to shift HQ from the village to a deep sap in a sunken road leading in the direction of VENDELLES. The front or outpost line was comparatively free from shelling. At 4:00 AM Second Lieutenant Field and two NCO's had been out in the front of our line working in the direction of ASCENSION WOOD to investigate a report of noises having been heard by sentries and a wire patrol. Nothing suspicious was seen or heard by this party and the cause was put down to a patrol of 'C' company which had been due to return through the right company posts but which it was subsequently discovered had returned on the left. At 4:30 AM as Second Lieutenant Field came in the shelling started and he immediately warned GRAHAM and MOLLY groups proceeding to Right Company HQ at PRIEL CRATER. Telephone communication between battalion headquarters and the forward companies was severed before 7:00 AM but the message was forwarded from DING POST which reached 'A' Company Commander at 9:50 AM. It was sent off at 9:00 AM but the runners losing direction in the fog came via 'C' Company headquarters where everything was in order when they left. The first intimation of the German attack as far as 'A' Company Headquarters were concerned was the approach of a few men from the right post of 'C' company at 10:30 AM closely followed by the enemy. They came from the direction of PRIEL FARM and declared that the Germans had cut off the posts. Fire was opened on the enemy, but Company Headquarters was soon subjected to machine gun fire from a northerly direction on the western side of the PRIEL Road. Second Lieutenant Field, Sergeant Feist and a party of a dozen men suffered from this in taking up a position in the rear of headquarters. They then tried to connect with 'C' Company at SHEPHERDS COPSE. Enemy approaching along the valley from the direction of VILLERETTE however prevented this and seeing they were being surrounded and that the enemy were established between the forward companies and battalion headquarters they made for ORCHARD POST which they succeeded in reaching. Lieutenant Mackenzie commanding 'A' Company had followed Lieutenant Wands party with Lt Carter and 15 other ranks but became separated in the fog. He reformed them at ORCHARD POST with the addition of Second Lieutenant Lovelace who had succeeded in getting away from the left (C) Company. The fog aided those parties in withdrawing when 'A' Company headquarters were being surrounded. Sergeant Feist reported to Battalion Headquarters and also Lieutenant Mackenzie who explained the situation. It appeared that the enemy had succeeded in working around both flanks cutting the wire undercover of the fog which rendered it difficult to discern a man 10 yards away. By the time the report of the situation reached Battalion Headquarters the front companies were completely cut off and no further news was obtained concerning them.

Section of trench map from War Diary

Section of trench map from War Diary



IPSWICH CHUMS - 1937 Kelvin Dakin

The following article and picture appeared in the *The Old Contemptible* – No. 43 of July 1937.

Sadly there were no names to accompany the photograph but I am guessing that it was taken at the back of the Halberd Inn, Northgate Street, Ipswich, where they normally met.

Reproduced here with the kind permission of Andrew Thornton

www.facebook.com/OldContemptibles1914

IPSWICH BRANCH. – Our endeavour in the Coronation procession was a success; three Chums in Pre-War Uniform caused great interest (R.H.A., 4th Hussars and Essex Regt.). We had “Old Bill” and “Erb” (sic), complete with dug-out, etc., which created some excitement. Parts were taken by Chums. Had the weather been kinder we should have had a larger muster. All are welcome at our Headquarters. More news next time.

A. H. B.



LEST WE FORGET Kelvin Dakin

Extract from a report in the Bury Free Press - Saturday 3rd August 1918

MILITARY FUNERAL AT BURY

AN IMPRESSIVE SCENE

The funeral of Walter Hardy, of Ipswich, a member of the band of the Suffolk Regiment (whose death occurred the previous Wednesday at Bury St. Edmunds), took place Saturday afternoon in the Borough Cemetery with full military honours. There was a large concourse of people present, and on every hand signs of sincere sympathy and respect marked the solemnity of the occasion. The coffin was covered with the Union Jack, on which rested several magnificent wreaths, and large number officers and men were in the procession. The band of Suffolk Regiment, under Bandmaster B. Beale, led the cortege, and played Chopin's "Funeral March" on the way, and, upon approaching the Cemetery, Handel's "Dead March" in "Saul". The Rev. Father B. S. McCaul, of Ipswich, met the procession at the gates and conducted the last rites. A detachment of soldiers fired three volleys, and "The Last Post" was given with much effect. The mourners included the deceased's mother and other relatives. The coffin was of polished elm with brass fittings, and on the breast-plate was the inscription: "9750, Boy Walter Hardy, Suffolk Regiment, died July 24th 1918, aged 16 years".



Walter Louis Hardy's birth was registered in the first quarter of 1901 in Ipswich. He was the son of James and Mary Ann Hardy and in 1911, age 9, he was living with his widowed mother at 34 Phoenix Road, Ipswich.

According to the death certificate, Walter had suffered pneumonia for 8 days and 22 hours which lead to heart failure.

Picture from www.findagrave.com

THEY SHALL GROW NOT OLD

**Talk at the Norwich Branch
Tuesday 5th September**

KATE WILLS : 'THE FALLEN CHORISTERS OF KING'S COLLEGE CHAPEL CAMBRIDGE

**Our next month's talk
Wednesday 9th August**

Dr John Peaty: New Zealand Generalship

Please send any contributions for the *Branch Briefing* to:
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telephone: 01394 272677 and email: david.j.hedges@btopenworld.com
Next Committee meeting: tba
Approach a committee member if you want any issue raised.