



National Physical Laboratory

To The Glorious Memory

Stories of NPL's First World War Heroes



PREFACE

The Centenary year of the outbreak of the First World War gave renewed focus upon five brave individuals commemorated on the National Physical Laboratory war memorial at Teddington, where to a greater or lesser extent they have remained as just names upon a weather-beaten bronze plaque. The passing of time had severed first-hand acquaintance, faded the memories and seen the 'disposal' of the old NPL staff records of these individuals; so 100 years after the momentous period when some of those names enlisted immediately for war service, it felt fitting to research their stories in greater depth and thereby create a lasting written tribute in grateful remembrance for lives selflessly given in the cause of freedom.



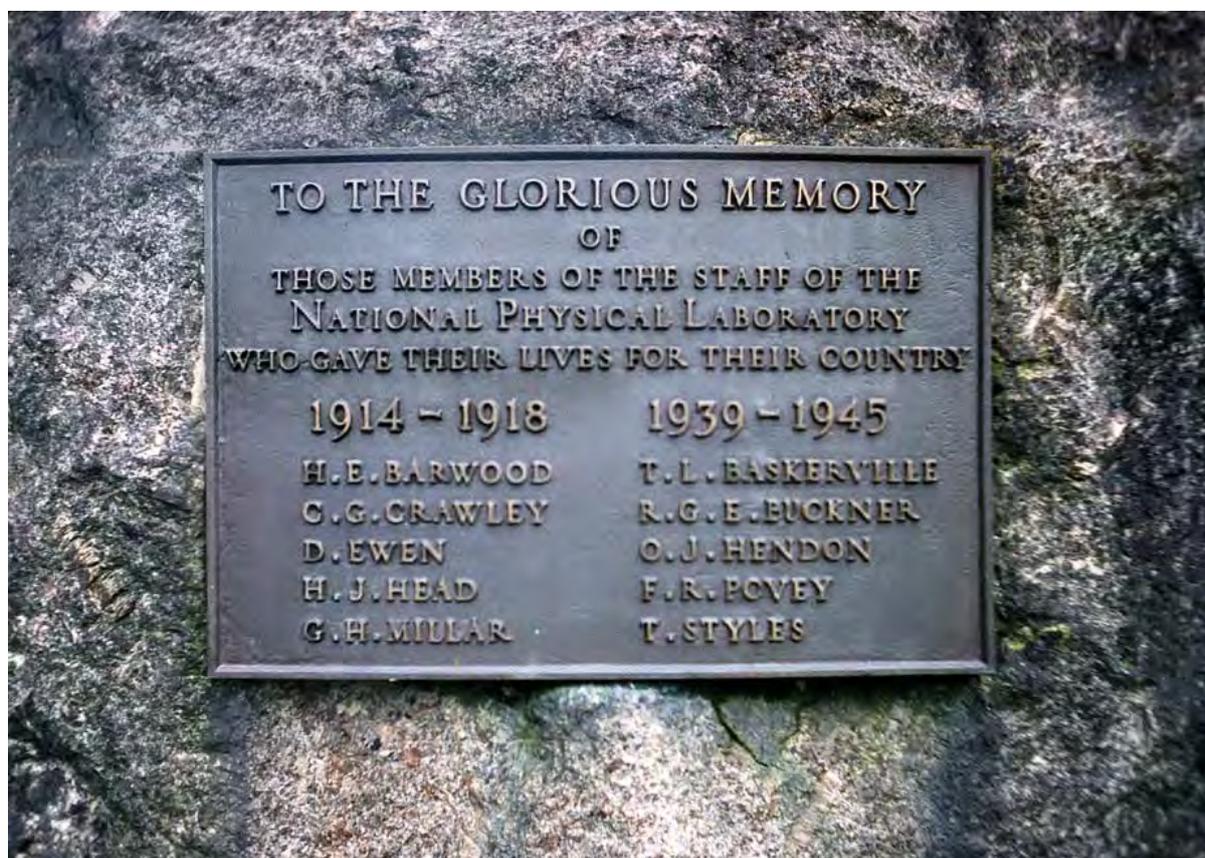
With growing sources of census and military records becoming available, some surprisingly detailed accounts have emerged and yielded stories of individual experiences no less worthy of remembrance than the well-known 'heroes' of 'The Great War' as the conflict was originally known. Considering there are just five individuals who gave their all, the experiences that each NPL hero had in the war are remarkably varied, though ultimately very tragic – they are a stretcher bearer who carried only the wounded and not weapons, infantrymen who fought at both ends of the war, a 'boy' soldier who lied about his age so he could fight and lastly a brilliant mathematician who became a prisoner-of-war, escapee, aviator and aircraft designer.

An appendix to this book lists all known members of NPL staff who rallied to serve King & Country from 1914 to 1918 and with only a small number in the list who lost their lives, it is hoped that more information about the other named individuals who fortuitously came home from the war will become known in the future. But as the Centenary of a horrifying war is remembered, this book principally commemorates five NPL members of staff whose courage 100 years ago is still an example to all.

There are a few friends and colleagues to thank for helping to bring this book to print. First and foremost Claire Jordan of 'Poppy Research', who helped to source very informative records and found the errors lurking in the first drafts of each story. Also, the NPL Communications Team for their support and assistance and the NPL Graphics Department for bringing it all together. Thanks as well to local Teddington historian David Neller for kindly sharing his research. Gratitude also goes to The War Graves Photographic Project and the Yorkshire Air Museum for their kind assistance and in generously allowing use of their images. Each story is presented as originally published within NPL's in-house e-newsletter 'NewsNet' and where applicable, with some additional new information.

Most of all, this is a poignant thank you to Harry, 'Guy', Donald, Horace and Gilbert. Not forgotten.

Dean Sumner 2014





*RAMC stretcher bearers struggle with a casualty in the horrendous mud of the Western Front
(image courtesy of the Imperial War Museum: collection no. 1900-13)*

NPL's First Loss - In Remembrance

An account of a brave young NPL employee who paid the ultimate price.

Note to reader:

When an earlier version of the story about 'H E Barwood' was published it had been assumed that the Henry Edward Barwood identified from research carried out by another source was the correct Barwood. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) records showed only one casualty identified as 'H E Barwood' and, without recorded Christian names, this regrettably led to a misidentification.

However, during recent research towards writing a more detailed account of NPL's first casualty of 'The Great War', census records revealed another 'H E Barwood' and by cross-referencing many sources of new information, the following account now proves the 'other' H E Barwood to actually be Harry Edward Barwood. It is to his enduring memory that we can now correctly attribute the brave service and sacrifice of NPL's Harry Barwood.

Harry Edward Barwood was born in South Road, Wimbledon, on 21 March 1896 to Harry Ernest and Kate Selina (née Steer) Barwood and the family background is 'interesting', to say the least. According to census and marriage records, Harry Ernest was previously married to Jane Runacre, who he wed at Lambeth in 1876 and who was five years his senior. Prior to his marriage with Jane, Harry Ernest was recorded to be a carpenter living and working at the North-west London Preventive and Reformatory Institution in Euston Road. However, the census record for 1891 shows Harry Ernest to be living with the previously-mentioned Kate at South Road in Wimbledon with five daughters, some possibly as a result of his previous marriage to Jane. Harry and Kate then had a son Thomas Edward Barwood, who came into the world in 1893, followed by Harry Edward three years later. (It is noted in a church registry that Thomas was "privately baptised" which usually means baptised at home on account of a child's frailty, and one who could not be brought to the church for the baptism.)

A surprising discovery in the marriage records show that, in the summer of 1900, Harry Ernest Barwood married Kate Steer at Lambeth; so they had for many years been living together and bringing children into the world in a society whose foundations were strictly governed by the 'Victorian values' of late 19th century Great Britain. The census record for 1901 shows the first of several name mix-ups that were to plague Harry Edward's memory where, in this instance, the census transcriber has erroneously written the 'Barwood' surname as 'Barmood'.

The happy legal union for Mr and Mrs Barwood was not to last very long as Harry Ernest died suddenly during the winter of 1901-1902, aged just 55. Unfortunately, the records appear to indicate that young Harry Edward's father was a bigamist and further loss to the family was to follow when Harry Ernest's first wife Jane passed away in Croydon in 1904, aged 62.

Harry Edward's mother Kate moved on after her husband's passing and, in 1904, she married James Gosling, but in the winter of 1907 Kate died at Kingston aged 55, leaving her eleven-year-old son Harry an orphan. The following period was a time when young Harry was passed between family members and friends and being put into the care of the Council Board of Guardians, resulting in him having a very unsettled upbringing during his early teenage years; in the 1911 census, Harry is recorded as a 'visitor' at the house of an Irish boot repairer named Richard Leitch in Clarence Road, Ventnor, Isle of Wight, and although he had brothers and sisters, Harry is the only 'Barwood' name recorded at this address. Two of Harry's siblings emigrated from England to Canada, whilst other older brothers and sisters settled down to family lives of their own, but they do not appear to have ever welcomed Harry into their folds.

Later, on returning to live in south-west London, Harry received education at Teddington Council School (now Stanley Road School) and it was in 1913, when aged 17, that Harry gained employment at NPL, though unfortunately there is no surviving record stating the department where he worked. Either before or at the time of starting work at NPL, Harry took lodgings in the house of Herbert and Clara Harding in Adelaide Road, Teddington, situated almost opposite the railway station. Herbert Harding's occupations are listed as both a 'decorator' and 'undertaker', and during the war he would cite his occupations as 'Grounds of Appeal' against conscription *"on the grounds that serious hardship would ensure if he were called up for Army service, owing to his exceptional financial or business obligations or domestic position"*. It was to be his good fortune towards continued longevity that Herbert Harding was successful in his appeal.

Herbert and his wife Clara are recorded as not having children of their own and, perhaps as a result of Harry's sad and unsettled upbringing, Clara looked upon Harry as an adopted son and it appears they did indeed forge a 'mother and son' relationship. Doubtless, Harry would have revelled in having a 'mum' again who would cook his meals and tend to his washing, etc. Coming 'home' in the evening to Adelaide Road from a long working day at NPL to find a hot meal on the table lovingly prepared by Clara must have been one of life's pleasures for a teenage lad in Edwardian Britain.

Like many young men prior to late 1914 and taking a lead from his peers, Harry put some of his spare time to worthy use by joining the Territorial Force at Surbiton and, principally, became a member of the 2/3rd Home Counties Field Ambulance, a component of the 67th (2nd Home Counties) Division. Throughout the long age of mankind, soldiers have taken up arms against their foe and those who have been wounded on the battlefield have naturally sought succour. British military medicine truly began after King Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660 when a standing army was also created on a regimental basis, with surgeons permanently assigned to a particular regiment. Only through wars was bitter experience gained in the humane treatment of the wounded - in the early days a surgeon would typically travel with a plush-lined box with his own outfit of knives, scalpels, saws, spare blades, tourniquets and forceps, along with strops to sharpen the knives - none of these 'tools' were sterilised. Additionally, a surgeon would make his own crude dressings and equip himself with sutures, needles and an array of generally ineffective medicines.



Badge of the RAMC

During the 19th century when, for example, Waterloo was fought on 18 June 1815, battles resulted in thousands of casualties caused by high-velocity shot from cannon and musket, and the lengthy Crimean War (Oct 1853 - Feb 1856) saw untold suffering, more from disease than battle wounds, all of which highlighted the desperate need for professional military medical care. This took a step forward in 1860, when the Army Medical School opened at Fort Pitt in Chatham, which then moved three years later to the new military hospital at Netley by Southampton Water. In the following decades a fairly competent field medical organisation evolved and, assisted by the reforming zeal of the celebrated pioneering nurse Florence Nightingale, the Army Nursing Service and the Army Hospital Corps was formed, but there was nonetheless a confused organisation at the centre of the Army Medical Service.

Added to this was a growing rift between civilian and military branches of the profession, because the War Office obstructed service doctors from holding military rank and enjoying the same privileges as other officers, so the intake of medical graduates almost ceased as they were told to boycott the Army Medical Service and seek a career elsewhere.

Eventually, this ridiculous impasse was overcome. On 23 June 1898, the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) was formed and given a badge featuring a heraldic blend of serpent, rod, laurel and crown - its

motto *In Arduis Fidelis* (Faithful in Adversity) was soon to be richly earned. So, out of an almost shambolic 19th century attempt to create a military medical service, it was only at the turn of the century that a new Corps of the army emerged - one that immediately faced a severe test, from which vital lessons were to be learned.

The South African War (also known as the Boer War) of 1899-1902 was a disaster for the British Army even though it prevailed, but both militarily and medically it had not planned or provisioned correctly. Much of the organisation was hasty and, as events unfolded, that organisation proved inadequate.

Notwithstanding the excellent marksmanship of the Boer farmers, with their modern Mauser rifles that exacted a heavy toll of British troops, bad hygiene caused a greater number of casualties from ailments including bowel infections and diseases like typhoid. Perhaps the one glorious element to come out of that war was the achievements of the RAMC, which carried out magnificent work treating the wounded from both sides in often appalling conditions, where sanitation was almost non-existent. In addition to infections and diseases, there were plagues of flies spreading dysentery, with the extremely hot climate causing sunstroke and heatstroke (conditions little understood at the time). With all that to deal with, it is no surprise that medical orderlies themselves became casualties to various causes, including when trying to recover wounded whilst under enemy fire.

From his observations, one commander wrote: *"Nothing could surpass the devotion either of the doctors or the nursing sisters with whom I came into contact. The charge of unpreparedness may stick, but no shortcomings could conceal what the men of the Corps achieved by sheer endurance and fortitude"*. This was exemplified by the fact that, during this war, over 300 members of the Corps lost their lives, and by the awarding of six Victoria Crosses, a number only surpassed by the Royal Artillery during the South African crises.

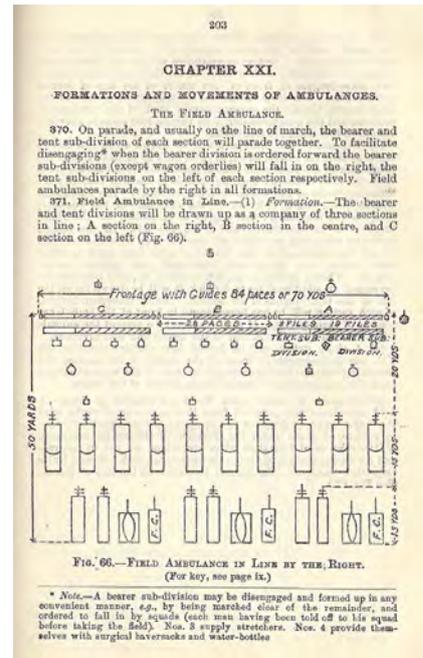
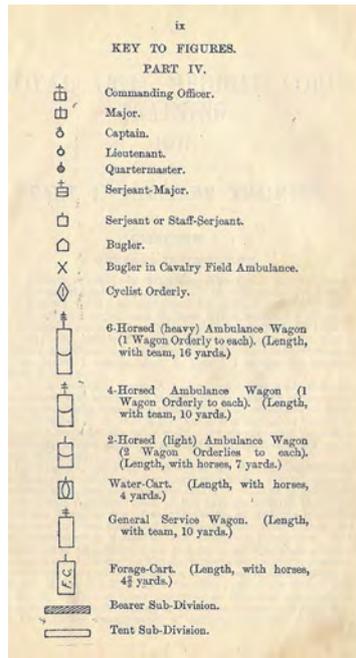
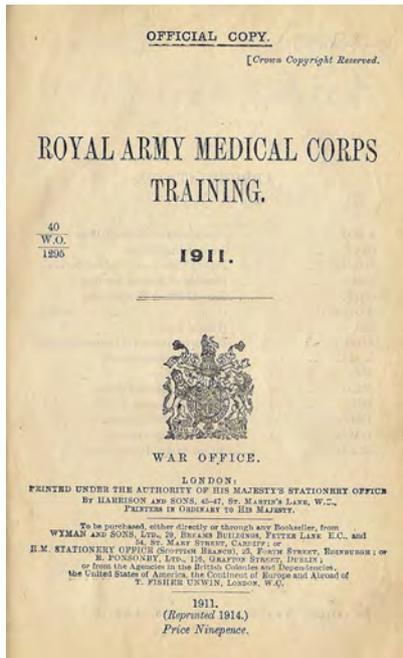


*Members of the RAMC give aid to wounded soldiers close to the Frontline
(image courtesy of Histomil.com)*

Being part of the RAMC, Private Harry Barwood will have possessed, either by self-purchase or on loan, a copy of the RAMC handbook, which was full of instructions about various aspects of caring for

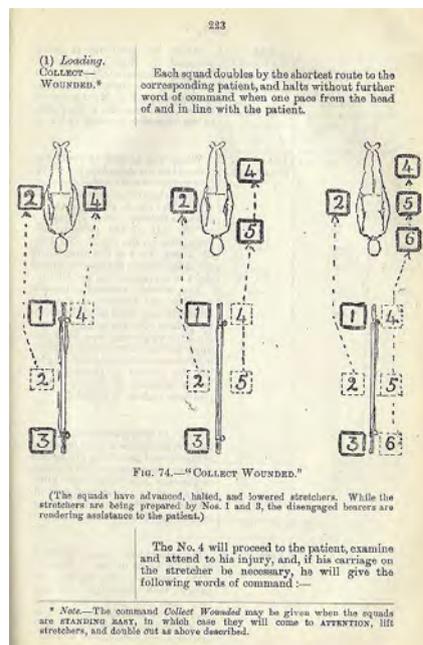
wounded soldiers and stretcher bearer duties, e.g. set out in the handbook were several drills to master in handling a stretcher with and without a casualty. Many of these aspects were learnt and formed during the Boer War, but the experiences of the next European conflict would re-write many of the previous laid-down instructions as the environment, clinical and administrative problems were vastly different to the South African battlefields.

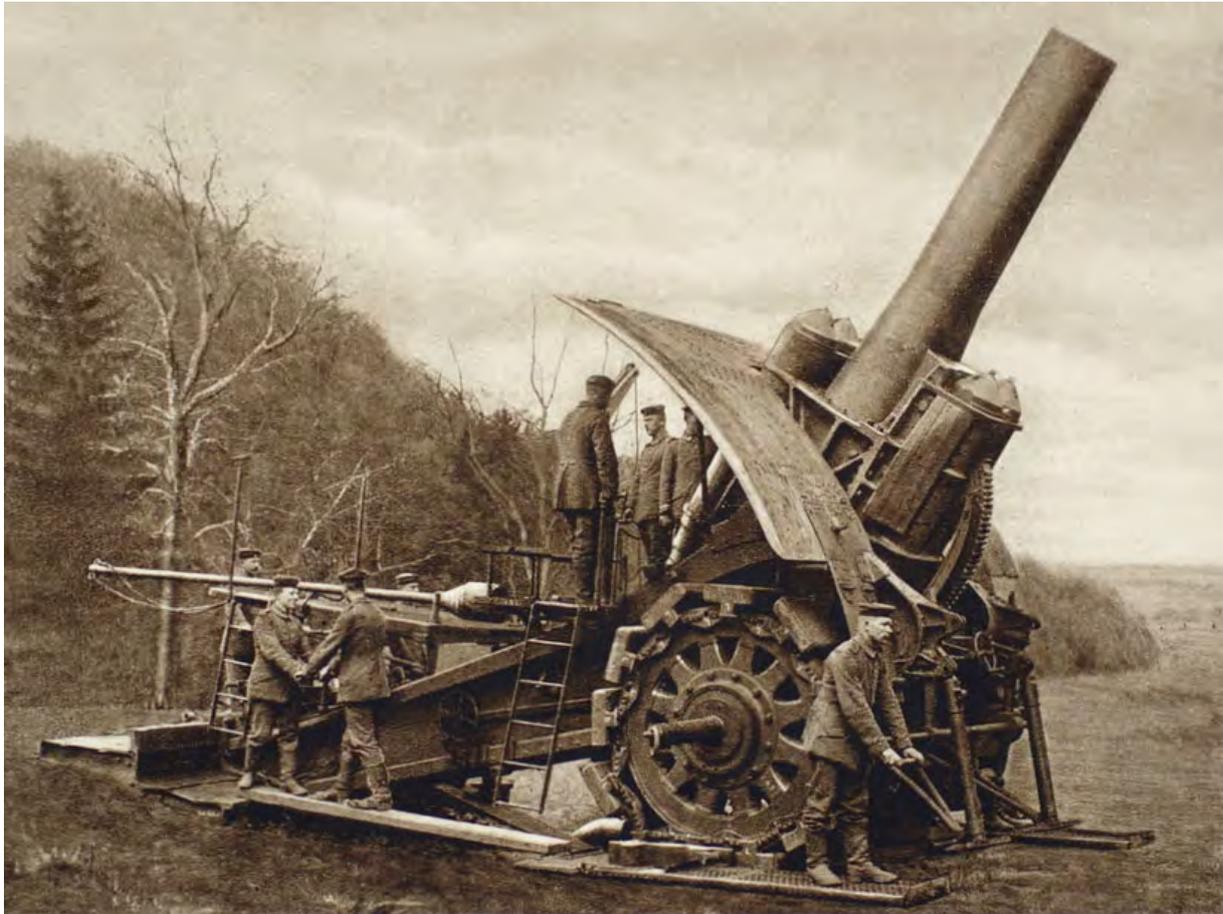
One development was the Field Ambulances (not an indication of wheeled transport), which were formed as mobile frontline medical units and these were responsible for establishing and operating an evacuation chain from a battlefield to the hospitals. Later, Sanitary Sections would be added, responsible for the provision of clean water supplies, cooking facilities, billets, delousing stations and other troop comforts, where possible.



Above (left to right):
RAMC Training manual; Key to manual figures; Field Ambulance formation

Below (left to right):
MkV Field Ambulance wagon; On the command: "Collect wounded"; Improvised seat for a pick-a-back





A 'Big Bertha' howitzer

With the deteriorating political situation in Europe through 1914, Great Britain found itself at war against Germany in early August. Although Harry was a member of a Home Counties Division, drafts were mobilised for service with units overseas. According to his Medal Index Card, Private Harry Barwood arrived in France on 22 December 1914 to join an RAMC unit attached to the 2nd Field Company, Royal Engineers on the Western Front and it would be good to imagine that Clara Harding waved her 'boy' off with a fond tear in her eye. (The name 'Boswood' was originally entered onto the Medal Index Card, which was then latterly crossed out and the name 'Barwood' added.) At a time soon after his arrival on the Western Front, Harry was posted to the British sector in Belgium, near the ancient medieval Flanders City of Ypres.

The early Western Front battles of advance and retreat on both sides soon bogged down into deadlock and trench lines eventually stretched from the Belgian coast near Nieuwpoort and weaved their way right down through France to the Swiss border.

At the outbreak of war, the RAMC numbered just 9,000 men and had to rely on horse-drawn transport (when available) with casualty evacuation based on a system where the wounded were moved back through a series of posts and stations depending on the seriousness of the casualty. Treatment began at the Regimental Aid Post, then the Collecting Post, followed by the Advanced and Main Dressing Stations, then a Casualty Clearing Station, and finally a General Hospital either in France or back in England via hospital ship.

As a low-ranked stretcher bearer, Harry would have been aware of the extent of any medical and first aid he could give, adhering to three basic principles: (1) To preserve the life of a patient; (2) To promote recovery; and (3) To prevent aggravation of the injury or condition. It would also have been impressed upon him that he would always have to seek the help of a Medical Officer at the earliest opportunity for any casualty he found himself responsible for.

The battles being fought across the countryside of Belgium and France were on soil that for centuries had been cultivated with manure and was thus ripe for producing infections, even in very slight wounds, e.g. a shell-splinter slicing open a finger and not speedily and properly treated risked gas-gangrene setting in, which could lead to the whole arm being amputated - in more serious wounds, left untreated, gas-gangrene could prove deadly. But correct treatment would ensure a soldier becoming fighting fit and returning to action and (as then suggested) the quicker the war could be won. (The generals might

have worried that casualties would be high, but even they could never have imagined that a long war would ensue, causing 2,700,000 British and Commonwealth dead and wounded.)

Another problem facing those dealing with more serious wounds, where either bullet or shrapnel passed into or through a body, was the instance of pieces of shredded fabric from a dirty uniform embedding itself into torn flesh or shattered bone; these pieces had to be removed, or again infection could result and pose an increased risk to a wounded patient.

Another responsibility enshrined into Harry and his fellow colleagues was that under military law they were required to protect the dead and wounded in their care from 'pillage and maltreatment' and that all personal property was to be collected and returned through the proper channels - including the property of any dead and wounded enemy. This otherwise humane edict had the unfortunate effect of opening up the RAMC to mockery, such that in some quarters it jokingly stood for 'Rob All My Comrades'!

Germany was fighting a European war on two fronts and, with the general stalemate across Belgium and France at the end of 1914, it thereby adopted a defensive position in the west, whilst in the east, the Germans were aiming to knock Russia out of the war as soon as possible. But the start of 1915 heralded a year of offensive action from the Western Allies, beginning in March with a measure of success at Neuve Chapelle; this however altered the Germans' resolve and they made plans for a major attack, focusing their effort on the British line at Ypres.

A great thorn in the side to the German advance across the border from Belgium into France was the stout defence by the Belgian, British and French Allies in holding onto the town of Ypres (often pronounced "Wipers" by the British), which had been savagely fought over during October and November 1914. In the spring of 1915, German forces surrounded the town on three sides, creating a salient, and the Kaiser's generals made their plans for another attempt to overrun Ypres.

In early April, the French handed over their five-mile-long eastern sector at Ypres to the British and took their anti-aircraft guns with them. Not able to put a similar defence in place, British forces on the ground began to see an increase in German aerial reconnaissance activity; these flights aided the enemy in targeting their artillery on important areas of Ypres and surrounding areas, which began to be shelled with greater ferocity.

The German artillery had almost 100 heavy howitzers in its arsenal around the Ypres Salient and, from Saturday 17 April 1915, these weapons began a long-range bombardment of the old city as a prelude to an attack planned for the following Thursday. The Germans had another 'surprise' for the British, which took the form of a huge 42 cm (17 inch) howitzer (or siege gun), located to the north of Ypres, that could fire pairs of shells weighing 816 kg (1,719 lb) each. When the shells came in, they were said to travel through the air with a noise like a runaway tramcar on badly laid rails. This gun had been named 'Dicke Bertha' by its designer, Professor Fritz Rausenberger in 'honour' of the owner of the vast Krupp armaments manufacturer in Essen, one Bertha Krupp. She herself may not have been flattered to have her name linked to an 'overweight' gun, but to the humble British Tommy on the receiving end, the gun was better known as 'Big Bertha'.

On 19 April 1915, the full force of the German artillery opened up at the start of an intense barrage, designed to hammer the British defences prior to a ground assault planned for Thursday 22 April, when they would also use poison gas for the first time. This would be known as the Second Battle of Ypres.



Devastated Ypres (picture dated 1919)

(Photo by W L King, Millersburg, Ohio. By courtesy of Military Intelligence Div., General Staff, US Army)



*Original stretchers on display at the 'In Flanders Fields' museum at Ypres
(image courtesy of Poppy Research)*

A British eye-witness to the shelling at Ypres gives an idea of what young Harry Barwood had to experience: "Shelling was now on the increase everywhere and all ranks had noticed it. On Monday 19th April the roads and bridges to north and east of Ypres had begun to receive attention. Now, on Tuesday, Ypres itself was being pounded. Enormous 1 ton shells from the German 42 cm howitzer had begun crashing into the old town. This 'Big Bertha' fired at the rate of ten rounds per hour and caused horrendous damage. A shell landing in the open blew a crater 15 feet deep and 40 feet wide".

Though he was a non-combatant, Harry still had to display immense courage tending to the wounded, often under enemy fire, treating injuries too horrific to describe and evacuate the wounded by stretcher - an often gruelling undertaking. In his role evacuating those caught in the shelling, Harry was pitifully exposed as the shells rained down and, on that Tuesday (20 April 1915), he was very badly injured by enemy shellfire. It was whilst resting in a house along with many others seeking some shelter that a large shell whistled over and fell onto the house, tragically killing eight men and wounding thirty others, including Harry. His brave comrades hurriedly evacuated him away from the scene of the terrible carnage and devastation, but the seriousness of his wounds required hospital treatment. Very soon Harry was transported back to the Casino Hospital at Boulogne, where he was visited by Monica Glazebrook, the daughter of the then NPL Director, Richard Glazebrook (later knighted in 1917), as she was serving with the Red Cross at the French port. Monica sent an encouraging report back to England regarding Harry's condition and soon after he was embarked upon a ship for passage across the English Channel to the now well established Royal Victoria Military Hospital at Netley.

Bravely fighting for his life, Harry was visited by his 'mum' Clara Harding and a Mr A.C. Cooper from NPL and despite the optimism shown for him and the best efforts of hospital staff, 19-year-old Harry succumbed to his wounds on 4 May 1915. His death certificate cites 'Cause of Death' as: 'Exhaustion - wounds of thigh, back and arms and secondary haemorrhaging'. But, as a last insult to his memory after all the previous errors in how his name was recorded, the certificate bizarrely identifies him as 'Hugh Barwood'. A military cemetery was already established in the hospital grounds and, with no family members seemingly wanting to claim him or able to afford the expense of a home burial, young Harry Barwood, NPL's first war casualty, was laid to rest there.

Interestingly, when Harry's will was disclosed, it was found that he bequeathed all his possessions to Mrs Clara Harding, his 'Teddington mum'. It is noteworthy too that, although not a resident by birth in Teddington, the town has claimed him as one of their own and his name can be found on the war memorial near to the junction of Queens Road and Hampton Road, outside Teddington Memorial Hospital and also on the Teddington Council School War Memorial.

The huge quarter-mile-long Royal Victoria Military Hospital closed in 1956 and, apart from the chapel (now a visitor centre), all of the buildings were demolished; today the cemetery where Harry rests lies within the peaceful grounds of the Royal Victoria Country Park.



*General view of Netley Military Cemetery in Hampshire,
where Harry Barwood is buried*



Harry Barwood's headstone

The centenary of the outbreak of WW1 in 2014 brings a timely opportunity to reflect upon the fact that Harry Barwood went to war for humanitarian purposes and that there are those who bear no arms, but put themselves into the firing line to save those wounded in fighting. The following two poems were penned by those who served in WW1 and reflect the experiences of the ordinary soldier:

The Stretcher Bearer

My stretcher is one scarlet stain,
 And as I tries to scrape it clean,
 I tell you what - I'm sick of pain,
 For all I've heard, for all I've seen;
 Around me is the hellish night,
 And as the war's red rim I trace,
 I wonder if in Heaven's height
 Our God don't turn away his face.

I don't care whose the crime may be,
 I hold no brief for kin or clan;
 I feel no hate, I only see
 As man destroys his brother man;
 I wave no flag, I only know
 As here beside the dead I wait,
 A million hearts are weighed with woe,
 A million homes are desolate.

In dripping darkness far and near,
 All night I've sought those woeful ones.
 Dawn suddens up and still I hear
 The crimson chorus of the guns.
 Look, like a ball of blood the sun
 Hangs o'er the scene of wrath and wrong,
 "Quick! Stretcher-bearers on the run!,
 Oh Prince of Peace! How long, how long?"

Thomas Albert Crawford - RAMC 1916

(This item is from the *First World War Poetry Digital Archive*, University of Oxford
 © The Great War Archive, University of Oxford / Primary Contributor)

The Red Cross Spirit Speaks

Wherever war, with its red woes,
Or flood, or fire, or famine goes,
There, too, go I;
If earth in any quarter quakes
Or pestilence its ravage makes,
Thither I fly.

I kneel behind the soldier's trench,
I walk 'mid shambles' smear and stench,
The dead I mourn;
I bear the stretcher and I bend
O'er Fritz and Pierre and Jack to mend
What shells have torn.

I go wherever men may dare,
I go wherever woman's care
And love can live,
Wherever strength and skill can bring
Surcease to human suffering,
Or solace give.

I helped upon Haldora's shore;
With Hospitaller Knights I bore
The first red cross;
I was the Lady of the Lamp;
I saw in Solferino's camp
The crimson loss.

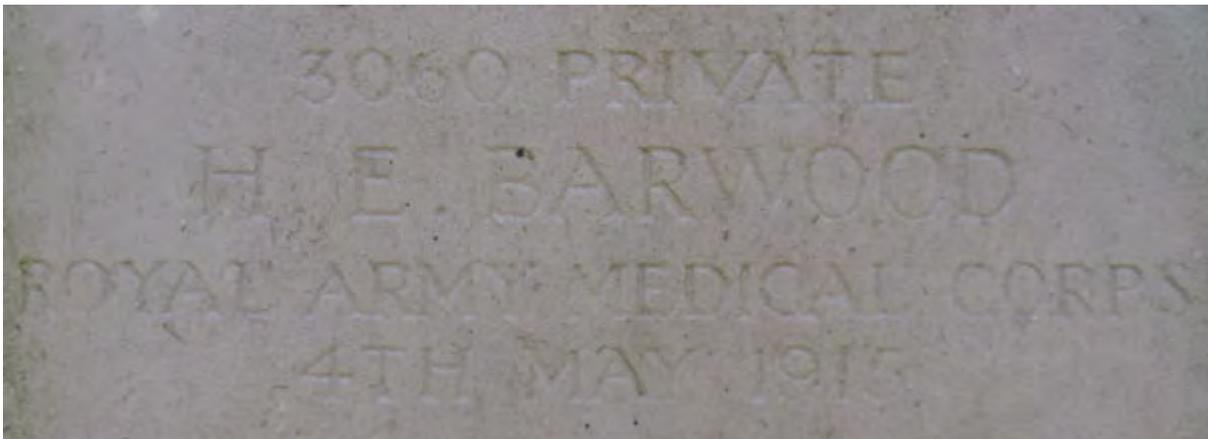
I am your pennies and your pounds;
I am your bodies on their rounds
Of pain afar;
I am you, doing what you would
If you were only where you could
Your avatar.

The cross which on my arm I wear,
The flag which o'er my breast I bear,
Is but the sign
Of what you'd sacrifice for him
Who suffers on the hellish rim
Of war's red line.

John Huston Finley

(George Herbert Clarke, ed. *A Treasury of War Poetry: British and American Poems of the World War 1914-1917*.
Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917.

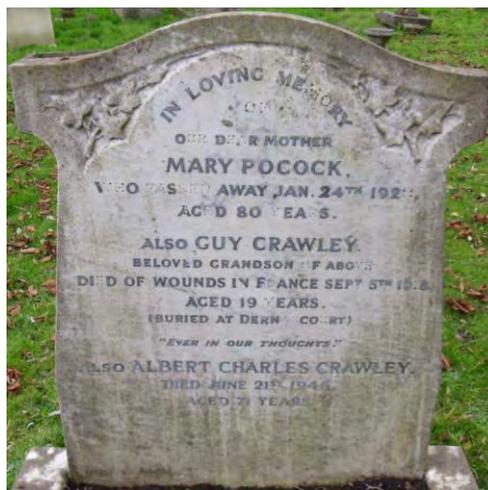
John Huston Finley headed the Red Cross Commission in Palestine during WW1.)



"We left a pitiful trail of dead boys..."

How a young NPL employee did his duty and gave his all.

On Friday 3rd November 1916, a young man from Teddington, not yet 18 years of age, travelled from his family home in Field Lane to the Drill Hall on the Hanworth Road, Hounslow, stepped inside and went through the procedure for signing his attestation for military service. The second half of the year had been dominated by the awful events of the Battle of the Somme that had raged from 1st July, at huge cost in manpower and a continual supply of new recruits was needed to replace the tens of thousands slaughtered in the chaotic muddy and shattered French landscape. (The British had lost some 400,000 men killed, 'missing' or wounded from July to late September).



Guy Crawley remembered on the family grave in Teddington Cemetery



Charles Granville Guy Crawley who was working as a Laboratory Assistant in the Aeronautical Department at the National Physical Laboratory, gave his particulars to the Army Recruitment NCO and took the following oath:

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

Effective from the following day, 'Guy', as he was better known to his family, was placed on the Army Reserve and thus returned to work at NPL and there awaited his call-up.

As their only child, proud parents Albert and Annie Crawley felt blessed to enjoy another Christmas with Guy

in their neat little Victorian terrace in Field Lane. He was born to them in 1899 at Farnborough in Hampshire and after the family later settled in Teddington, Guy was educated at the Council School (now Stanley Road School). As a young boy he delighted his mother and father when he sang as a chorister at the Royal Chapel, Hampton Court Palace. Also keen on sports, he competed as a member of the NPL Athletics Club.

Still awaiting his call-up papers, the New Year brought no telegram for Guy ordering his mobilisation, but that notice did eventually arrive, effective from 13th February 1917. He was appointed to the 5th (City of London) Battalion, The London Regiment, whose headquarters were located at Finsbury. With the rank of 'Rifleman', Guy then began many months of hard training to turn him into a fighting soldier who could do his bit to 'hammer' the Boche.

The long training on home soil with his regiment complete, Guy and his fellow riflemen comrades were despatched as members of the British Expeditionary Force to Southampton on 6th December to board a troopship for France that would take them across the English Channel to Le Havre, and the following day they disembarked into the 'welcoming' confines of No 7 Infantry Base Depot - this was a holding camp where troops were kept in training before being posted to a unit on the Front Line. It was here that Guy was almost immediately transferred to the King's Royal Rifle Corps, but that proved very temporary, for on 11th December he then found himself a member of the 15th Battalion, The London Regiment, otherwise recognised as the Prince of Wales's Own Civil Service Rifles (CSR).

The Battalion had just recently been engaged in some ferocious defensive battles against determined German counter-attacks to the British advances made during the Cambrai campaign of November 1917 and heavy casualties had been sustained, including many suffering the effects of gas attacks. Pulled back from the Front Line for a post-battle 'rest', when Guy reached the depleted Battalion on 14th December, they had been sent forward again to man a piece of trench line at Havrincourt, south-west of Cambrai, for six cold and thankfully uneventful days.

After these few introductory days to life in a trench, with cold and wet mud, sporadic enemy shellfire, little warmth and the poor monotonous rations of bully beef and hard-tack biscuits, Guy left the trench with the Battalion after it was relieved and set off by train to the rear area at Morlancourt for a further rest and a Christmas 'holiday' with time to rebuild its fighting strength during what would be a freezing winter with snow thick on the ground.



British 'Tommies' rest before receiving orders to advance

Fate soon intervened as Guy was struck down by German measles soon into the New Year of 1918 and he was packed off to 56 (South Midland) Casualty Clearing Station at Dernancourt for treatment - it wasn't until the beginning of March that he was declared fit to rejoin his unit. At this time the British Army numbered half a million men on the Western Front (just 36% of the required full strength) and was still recovering from the horror that was the Battle of Passchendaele of late 1917 when the British suffered over a quarter of a million casualties, many of whom simply 'drowned' in the mud. The manpower shortage had necessitated a reduction in Battalion numbers per Brigade from four to three in the British Divisions, but the CSR

survived the 'cull' and they returned to the war on 19th March to take up positions at Flesquières, 'new' ground near Cambrai they were unfamiliar with.

Another horror awaited the Allies as the Germans were about to launch their meticulously planned Spring Offensive. At 4:40 am on 21st March, German artillery began blasting the first of over three million shells on that first day alone at points along a stretch of the Allied front line over 40 miles long. Learning from a British tactic, the German barrage (*feuerwalze*) crept forward with the massed divisions of German infantry including their 'new' Stormtroopers (*Stosstruppen*) advancing behind the thunderous exploding wall of death, which all combined to punch great holes in the Allied defensive lines. Many British trenches were being overrun with scores of troops being killed and captured and by nightfall the Germans had inflicted 38,000 casualties that included 21,000 prisoners. The Kaiser demanded victory against the Allies and the capture of Paris - the original goal at the start of the war in August 1914.

The days that followed were one of continual fighting retreat whilst trying to maintain a defensive line to stop the Germans outflanking British units - in the very thick of the fighting the CSR were losing many men killed, wounded and captured. The 'Great Retreat' fell back through areas of the Somme captured by the Battalion at great cost in 1916, now seemingly in vain - the Battalion diarist recorded: "... *the desolation of the Somme country was in keeping with our feelings. Feet were sore with marching over rough country; stomachs were yearning for nourishment; mouths parched; bodies tired with a heavy numbing fatigue; these things produced a desolate feeling akin to the quiet sorrow of the surrounding country*".

After six days, the remnants of the Battalion reached Warloy-Baillon for 24 hours' rest - it might not have felt like it, but the German attack was running out of steam. Records suggest that Guy came through this baptism of fire unscathed and, by virtue of the conduct shown by the men during the March Retreat, is considered one of the Battalion's finest achievements of the war. Back on the Front Line on 29th March, the CSR took up position at Aveluy Wood, just outside the town of Albert where, on 5th April, the Germans opened up another huge bombardment and attempted to advance across the ground, but the CSR held firm and repelled all of the attacks - right along the battle front, German commanders realised that the *Kaiserschlacht* (Kaiser's Battle) was over, their strength exhausted and Allied resistance too strong to break.

The months of May, June and July 1918 were, for Guy and the CSR, a mix of duty on the Front waiting for expected German attacks that never materialised, rest periods, training and preparations to strike back at the enemy. Despite being only 19 years of age, the combination of casualty numbers and replacements/reinforcements looking all the more like 'schoolboys', placed Guy as one of the more experienced members of the Battalion rank and file which, with undoubted leadership potential showing, earned him promotion to Lance Corporal in early July and he settled well into his new responsibilities.

With British defensive lines strengthened and a sense of a weakening German resolve, Allied commanders were prompted to launch raids and probing attacks against enemy positions and the



Typical open ground barbed wire emplacements along the German Hindenburg Line

general success of these endeavours set in motion the 'Great Advance' and the last campaign of the war - the victorious 'hundred days' opened on 8th August when British artillery rained shells down onto the German lines.

Guy's Battalion did not move forward until 13th August when they took over some recently captured ground between the Ancre and Somme rivers. Next, they pushed on past the old rest area at Morlancourt and on 22nd August assembled in a small wood at Bois des Tailles to engage in battle and reach objectives they could see across the battlefield to Bonfray Farm near the present day Albert - Picardie Airport. The momentum now was to keep the fighting out in the open and not get bogged down in continued trench warfare; the men of the CSR still encountered strong German resistance and on 24th August had a fierce encounter at a enemy strongpoint in the less-than aptly named 'Happy Valley', where they captured over 300 prisoners and many machine guns and trench mortars. The next day Guy and his fellow comrades reached Bonfray Farm and, after relief, returned westwards past Morlancourt to enjoy three days of rest around Marrett Wood. Incredibly, despite a long drawn-out battle and heavy shellfire over three days, the Battalion only lost nine men.

On 29th August, the Civil Service Rifles moved up again to the ever-advancing Front Line to take up positions in an area recently vacated by the enemy, which was just to the north of Maricourt and a careful watch had to be maintained to not be caught out by enemy 'booby-traps'. Steadily pushing the Germans eastwards, the CSR 'marched' across the Maurepas Ravine and on 1st September were in position to take part in the capture of Rancourt village, which was achieved with light casualties the same morning.

There was to be no let-up in the ambition of the Allied Commanders to keep up the pressure on the German forces, and a more complicated attack was planned for the following day to take the villages of Moislains and Nurlu; but things went horribly wrong and the advance was caught by well-aimed enemy artillery and machine-gun fire causing half of the Battalion to be either killed or wounded. But, showing incredible courage, they pressed home the attack and eventually took the Moislains trench just west of the village. A post-battle commentator remarked that the advancing soldiers of the CSR who were wearing khaki shorts looked, "... like a lot of boys going to a football match".

One of those boys in the khaki shorts was Guy, who during the course of the attack on that second day of September, suffered a very severe wound to a shoulder; he was hurriedly despatched rearwards all the way to 55 (2/2nd London) Casualty Clearing Station at Dernancourt (now known as 'Edgehill' on account of some nearby rising ground), to receive urgent medical treatment.

With Guy now missing from the fighting ranks of the CSR, those who had survived the carnage gathered together to form the remnants of the depleted Battalion and they rested near Rancourt for the next two days. During this time young Guy continued to fight for his life at the Casualty Clearing Station. On Thursday 5th September the remaining men of the Battalion returned to the fray to continue the advance, their final objective lay 4,000 yards ahead with just this day and the next



Left: Guy Crawley's headstone at Dernancourt
Right: A view of the Dernancourt Communal Cemetery, where Guy Crawley rests with his comrades
(Images courtesy of The War Graves Photographic Project)

expected to complete the advance and then the CSR would be pulled from the line, their share of fighting done. Now only able to assemble as two companies with two platoons each, they took position just east of Moislains and waited to participate in the next fight in support of other units.

As they waited, these last survivors of the Battalion came under shellfire at intervals, whilst at Dernancourt 19 years old Guy was losing the battle against the trauma of his serious wounds, where despite the best efforts of the medical staff he sadly succumbed to his injuries. During the night of 6th September, the Battalion was relieved and though there was satisfaction at the ground gained and an Allied victory in sight, there would be few surviving CSRs to enjoy the peace - as one surviving CSR veteran recalled later in life, that having pushed ahead under sustained enemy fire, they left "... a pitiful trail of dead boys behind".

Apart from a recall to the Front Line in Belgium to chase the Germans from Tournai a week before the Armistice of 11th November, the Civil Service Rifles' war had ended. Having fought so bravely through many dreadful battles of 1918, Guy's run of luck fell agonisingly short – his life ebbed away just 24 hours short of his Battalion being relieved. Had he avoided getting so badly wounded, he could still have been blessed to enjoy a safe return home to that neat little Victorian cottage at Field Lane in Teddington, from where he had set out less than two years earlier to sign up for King and Country.

In January 1919, Albert Crawley had the heartbreaking duty of collecting his son's personal effects that had been brought back from France and were listed as: coin; cigarette holder in case; silver medallion; two wallets; disc; cigarette case; key; letters; photos; purse; and various cards. In June

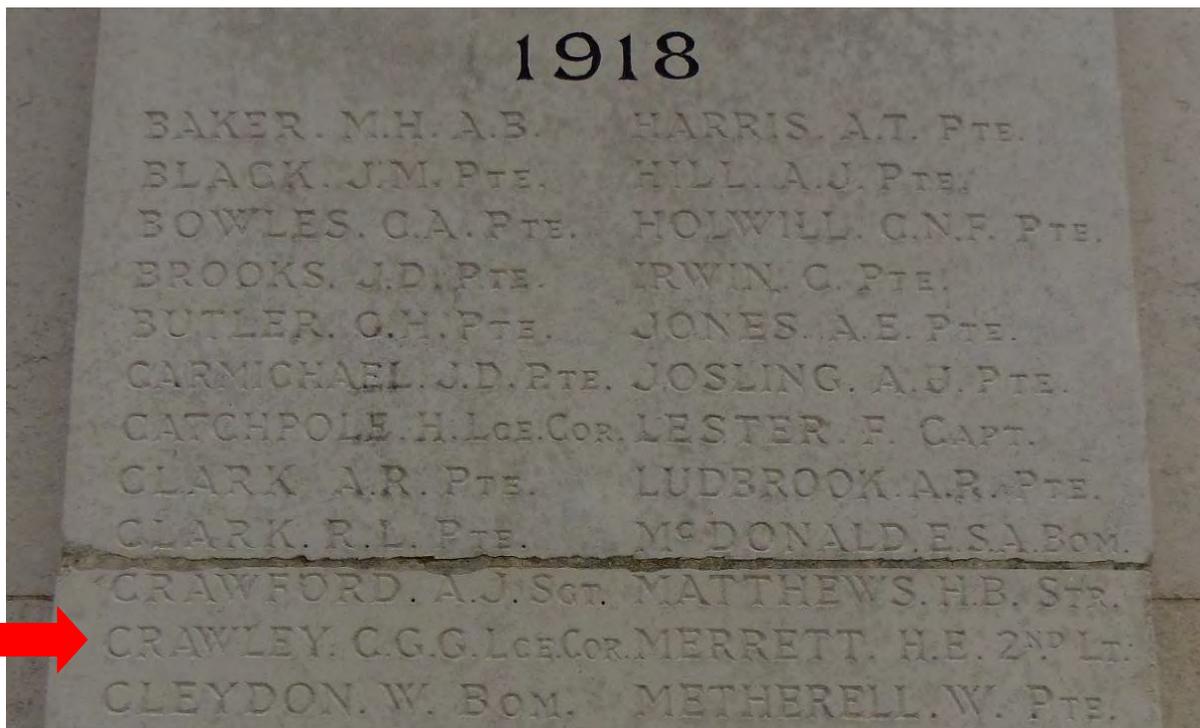
1922, Guy's parents received the two little medals earned by their son, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal - not much for an only son who gave his all and was laid to rest a long way from home, in Dernancourt.



Left: British War Medal
 Right: Victory Medal
 Below: Reverse side of the Victory Medal



Teddington has claimed Guy as one of their own and he is commemorated on the War Memorial outside Teddington Memorial Hospital and also upon the Teddington Council School War Memorial. Remember him.



'Guy' Crawley commemorated on the Teddington War Memorial

The Telegram That Came Too Late

The story of NPL's brave Donald Ewen

At Edgbaston in Birmingham on 27 July 1887, proud parents Thomas Ewen (1852-1940), a mechanical engineer, and Susan Ewen (née Knowles, 1855-1942) welcomed their second son into the world and named him Donald.

The young Donald grew up with his older brother William and younger sister Mary at Gough Road in Edgbaston, where the family were wealthy enough to employ domestic staff. In 1901, the family (and their domestic staff) are recorded as living south of Birmingham at North Bromsgrove in Worcestershire. In September of that year, Donald went to Oundle School in Northamptonshire and was boarded in Sidney House where he received education built on excellence in science and engineering. Proving himself a very keen sportsman, he gained recognition on both the playing field and on the river. School records show he was awarded his House Colours in 1904 and was also made a House Prefect. On leaving Oundle School the following year, Donald gained a place at Birmingham University to study metallurgy and in 1909 he took his BSc and gained the Wiggins and Bowen Research Studentship, followed by his MSc.



*Portrait of Donald, pre-war
(courtesy of Oundle School Archives)*



Left: Donald Ewen, Sidney House, Oundle School circa 1905 (courtesy of Oundle School Archives)

Above: Oundle School Rugby 1st XV 1905: Donald is second right, back row (courtesy of Oundle School Archives)

In 1911, his recognised academic achievements gained him a position at NPL in the Metallurgy Department, working as a Research Assistant, and the census returns for that year show 23-year-old Donald living at Clarence Road in Teddington as a single person.



London Scottish members, seen in the Regimental Tartan of Hodden Grey

Like many of his generation, a sense of duty inspired Donald to join the Territorial Force as a Reservist and in 1913 he decided to join one of the London Regiments - with the name 'Donald Ewen' there was only one choice for him, and he enlisted with the 14th Battalion, The London Scottish, whose regimental headquarters were at 59 Buckingham Gate in Westminster (where the enquiry into the loss of the Titanic was held in 1912). It was a regiment always keen to attract ex-public school and university-qualified individuals who had aspirations to become officers, and this was certainly reflected within its ranks of 800 men. Pre-1914, one could only join the regiment if Scottish, or of Scottish descent, and to make sure no-one less than middle class joined, a fee of £10 had to be paid (a considerable sum in those days), which went into Regimental Funds and ensured the Battalion was very well equipped.

On the last Sunday of June 1914, pistol shots rang out in Sarajevo as bullets fired by the assassin Gavrilo Princip killed the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife Sophie, thus stoking the fires towards a European war where the great Imperial military powers had positioned themselves with their various allies. Despite hopes that peace would prevail, a very serious diplomatic crisis soon erupted, and on 28 July 1914, with support from Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire declared war on Serbia, who in turn had been promised support

by Russia, which then mobilised its forces on the last day of that month. The next day Germany declared war on Russia.

Back in England, the Territorial Regiments were looking forward to their annual August training camps and the London Scottish had arranged to travel to Ludgershall Camp on Salisbury Plain, and thus early on the Sunday morning of 2 August, the Battalion (under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel J A Malcolm) entrained at Paddington Railway Station to join up with the advance party already at Ludgershall. With incessant talk throughout the train journey centring on the rumours of war, the men of the London Scottish marched into the rainswept camp that afternoon and made themselves as comfortable as possible before 'Lights Out' sounded in the late of the evening. Fifteen minutes after the camp fell silent, bugles blared to rouse everyone up. A telegram had arrived from the War Office with orders for the Battalion to return to London immediately. After a moment of confusion the men fell in, were dismissed, fell in again and following a long wait, the Battalion then marched off the camp leaving a small party behind to clear up and follow on the next day.

Upon their return to London, the men of the Battalion were dismissed, but with orders to be ready for a mobilisation call. Elsewhere, Germany had declared war on France, with Great Britain pledging to defend Belgian neutrality and issuing severe warnings aimed at Germany - but to no avail. The next day, on 4 August, German troops invaded Belgium, launching the so-called 'Schlieffen Plan' and, despite repeated appeals to Germany, the British Government declared war in the late evening. To German surprise during the opening days of their offensive, brave Belgian resistance slowed the advance and it took two months before almost the entire country was overrun.

Wednesday 5 August brought mobilisation for the London Scottish and the men streamed into the headquarters before even receiving their notices, and the growing throng at the large hall of Buckingham Gate included Regimental Reservists like Donald and those eager to sign up immediately. Through all the massed crowding, the Battalion was able to quickly organise itself and allocate men to their companies, get them medically inspected, and issue weapons, ammunition, field dressings, identity discs and many other pieces of kit, making all those that passed muster ready for active service.

After the thrust of the efficient mobilisation, there were no actual orders for the Battalion and not much to do, so the rank and file who lived within reasonable distance could return home each evening to sleep. But growing fear of a German invasion led to the decision that the Battalion should be kept together and no-one was allowed away from their quarters, except for the daily morning march to Westminster Baths. As the first week of the war passed, it became apparent that having many men cooped up together proved negative to morale and general wellbeing, so some short route marches around the streets of London were organised and proved popular for both the men, and with the public cheering their support from the pavements, shops and offices. The route marches took on a greater significance as the weight of kit and ammunition carried was increased - this would prove ideal training for the serious marches to the Front that would follow.

In mid-August 1914, the first elements of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) landed in France and on 21 August they began moving towards the French-Belgian border. Two days later, forces from the German First Army and the BEF 2nd Corps clashed at the canal in front of Mons in Belgium; despite valiant resistance by the smaller British force, overwhelming German troop numbers slowly pushed the BEF back. The advances made by the Kaiser's army cost them dearly, as incredibly accurate and rapid British rifle fire caused many casualties to their enemy.

After reporting their mobilisation complete, the London Scottish, as part of the 4th London Brigade, were ordered to their training station at Watford, and on Sunday 16 August marched northwards from their HQ - it was a boiling hot day and, though not yet fully hardened to carrying full active service equipment, the Battalion was proud to boast that not one man fell out and, on reaching their overnight stop at Canons Park, the men slept under the open sky. The march resumed the following day and on reaching Watford the various Battalions of the Brigade split off to their separate billeting areas; the men of the London Scottish found themselves put up in farmhouses and barns around Abbots Langley.

When the Territorial Force was originally set up, it was on the theory that the Battalions would be employed on home defence. However, with the BEF now abroad and undoubtedly requiring a greater force of men to put a stop to the German advance, the idea was mooted that perhaps the Territorials should be asked whether they would volunteer to serve overseas - and it was decided that if 75% of a Battalion willingly volunteered, then the whole unit would go. In the case of the London Scottish, care was taken not to bully any man into volunteering, so each man was asked individually and in private with time to consider their decision - on giving an answer, it would be accepted without further comment. As it turned out, greater than 75% volunteered, including Private Donald Ewen, and immediately rumours spread that they would be sent off on garrison duty to India or the Mediterranean. But first there was the other matter of training which, from a pre-war ruling, was supposed to last six months after mobilisation.

The first month of training was earmarked for squad drill, individual training and section training to the point of weariness before more 'exciting' exercises commenced on musketry, bayonet use, etc. But before any practice 'shots' were fired, a summons arrived with the Battalion on 13 September - the War Office had decided to send Territorial units to France, and the London Scottish now had orders to entrain at Watford for an onward journey to the port of Southampton and thence embarking for a Channel crossing to Le Havre. A telegram then duly arrived:

"Colonel Malcolm, I congratulate you and your splendid Battalion on the high honour conferred on you as being the first chosen from the whole Territorial Force to go to the Front. Give my hearty greetings to your officers and men for auld lang syne".

Lord Esher, President, Territorial Force Association.

The sense of pride in the men heading off to war was not overlooked on a local level, as at this time the *Surrey Comet* newspaper produced a 'Roll of Local Patriots' and Donald's name was one of those listed.

On the afternoon of 15 September 1914, the Battalion, consisting of 31 officers and 921 other ranks, arrived at Southampton and began embarkation on the *SS Winifredian*, along with 16 vehicles and 59 horses. After darkness, the voyage across the Channel began and Le Havre was reached early the following morning. After disembarking, the Battalion proudly marched through the town with the pipers playing 'La Marseillaise' to welcoming cheers from the local French citizens.

Thoughts of heading straight to the Front were soon dashed when it was decided to put the London Scottish in support roles, like moving stores and ammunition, and the eight companies of the Battalion were sent to separate locations across northern France. This varied work, which also included escorting German prisoners of war to French ports, left little time for much-needed training during a

time when the frontline battles had become a series of flanking manoeuvres and counter-attacks as the Allied armies tried to halt German advances, and the 'race to the sea' began as opposing troops moved northwards to the Belgian coast.

From mid-October the BEF was concentrated just across the border at Ypres in Belgium, to plug the gap between the French and Belgian forces, and the First Battle of Ypres erupted on 20 October 1914. As Allied and German troops clashed in the Flanders countryside, the powerful forces of the Kaiser showed how vulnerable parts of the British line were, held by a pitifully weak force; fresh manpower was needed to prevent the enemy breaking through. Thus it was that Colonel Malcolm was ordered to gather his Battalion together at St Omer, where the BEF General Headquarters was located, and now the moment had arrived for the London Scottish to enter into battle.

In the late afternoon of 29 October, under a steady downpour of rain, the London Scottish marched out of St Omer towards the Front and boarded buses to speed up their deployment; these buses, like most men of the Battalion, had only recently been on the streets of London. With nearly 1,000 men crowded onto 34 buses, some had to hang on the outside and there was no room for machine guns, a loss of firepower the Battalion would very soon have cause to rue.

After many hours of slow bumpy travel through the night, it was at 3 am the following morning that the convoy of buses reached Ypres, where the sky towards the east flashed continuously from heavy gunfire and the ominous distant rumble of battle echoed across the old medieval city. To add to the drama and nervousness of impending fighting for men like Donald, was the sight of an almost continuous stream of walking wounded and horse-drawn Red Cross ambulance wagons loaded with stretchers carrying the more severely injured.

After a brief rest lasting only a couple of hours, the men paraded with their full kit in the early dawn with thoughts that they would be fighting before this new day was over. As the London Scottish marched eastwards out of Ypres, they passed streams of city residents heading in the opposite direction with carts and barrows carrying or pulling whatever possessions they could. Soon they crossed the moat at the Menin Gate and moved onto the long straight Menin Road. Later, orders were received directing them to Hooze. On the road still came the wounded from the battlefield and now, in range of enemy guns, hostile shells burst left and right, but fortunately not close to the road; lifting the morale of the advancing Battalion were lines of British artillery pouring fire back towards the frontline.

On arrival at Hooze, the Battalion was directed ahead to a reserve position in a wood, later to be famously known as 'Sanctuary Wood', which faced the village of Gheluvelt from where the Germans were launching their attacks. The 'fresh' British soldiers lifted off their packs and took the opportunity for further rest while they waited to be called forward to the fighting line that stretched across the shell-cratered ground just 400 yards away. Later, news was received that the line had held and the enemy attacks had died down, thus reinforcements were no longer required, so the London Scottish fell in and marched off back down the Menin Road and into Hooze to await further orders.

Reports were then received of a worsening situation at the battle lines to the south of Ypres along the Messines Ridge, where the cavalry corps were fighting dismounted against another enemy onslaught, so the London Scottish were ordered back to Ypres after their first day at the Front without sustaining any casualties or facing any actual fighting. After so much marching with full kit back and forth, the men were hoping for a good rest and a meal, but on reaching Ypres they discovered a long line of buses waiting to take them to St Eloi village via the road to Armentières. On reaching St Eloi that evening, they sought out billets in the village, tucked into rations and rested so they would be ready the following morning.

In the early morning of Saturday 31 October, the Battalion paraded and marched off towards the reserve line, where ahead the fighting had erupted at dawn and the British, though losing ground, were just holding the line to prevent a German breakthrough. Orders arrived at 8 am to reinforce the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge and the London Scottish marched off in that direction. On approaching Wytschaete, a lone German Air Service spotter plane was seen in the sky, followed shortly after by enemy artillery shells raining down on both sides of the road, but the exploding shells in the soft ground did no damage. Yet, on marching through the town, shells started blasting apart roof tops and scattering tiles, bricks and stones in all directions, and these caused some of the first casualties to the Battalion amongst members of the rear company.

The heavy shellfire blocked the route towards the fighting line, so the Battalion took another direction and advanced towards the battle in columns of half-companies with men walking a distance of five paces from one another. Their objective was to plug a gap on a ridge to the east of the town and, as they moved steadily up the slopes of the ridge, the London Scottish came under intense shellfire;

those that reached the crest of the ridge became targets of rifle fire and searched for what cover was available to build a defensive line and dig-in where they could. Holding their ground, they returned rifle fire whenever enemy targets presented themselves, but their opening shots revealed an awful



'Stand of the London Scottish on Messines Ridge', depicted by artist Richard Caton Woodville

problem with their rifles, which had not actually been fired since being issued.

Shockingly the 'new' rifles handed to the London Scottish back at Abbots Langley were defective and, having had no opportunity for rifle practice, the problem had not revealed itself. Their weapon was the older Mark I Lee Enfield long rifle, modified to supposedly take Mark VII ammunition, but a weakness in the magazine spring meant fresh bullet rounds did not feed into the firing chamber properly, thus stoppages were frequent. Realising the magazines were useless, the rank and file of the Battalion had to resort to using their rifles as single-loaders, seriously reducing their effective weight of rapid fire.

After enduring several hours of sustained shellfire, the men of the London Scottish were ordered "Stand to!" when, at 9 pm, along the moonlit Front came the sound of men cheering and shouting loudly, and bands playing - the shouts were in German as the enemy made their first main assault on the ridge being held by the British. However, determined rifle fire sent the Germans quickly into retreat, the dense concentration of close range targets in the moon-bathed landscape made 'easy' work for the many marksmen of the London Scottish, despite their almost useless rifles.

The Germans came again just after midnight, when the full moon was high in the sky, and for almost an hour they repeatedly rushed the British line, but the return fire of the London Scottish stopped them and seemingly exhausted the attack. There was a short lull until 2 am, when the crescendo of noise and bands playing the German national anthem started again and a great wave of enemy troops surged at the British line. With the horrifying mix of shouts and screams, the crack of rifle fire and the flashing glint of bayonets, sheer weight of enemy numbers forced their way over the top of the advanced shallow trenches of the London Scottish and caused them to retreat. The enemy charge began to expose a weakening left flank that could sweep around and destroy the Battalion. Realising the immediate danger, Colonel Malcolm ordered his small reserve into battle and they valiantly pushed the Germans back to re-strengthen that part of the line. However, the Germans were now attacking in force from Messines and had cleared a path that could prove decisive to the whole battle.

The fight on the ridge itself continued unabated, but the London Scottish were still in a perilous position and, to not give more ground, ran the risk of being overwhelmed and captured, so a retreat was organised towards Wulverghem in order to establish a new fighting line and prevent a breakthrough by the enemy. Some men of the Battalion had been taken prisoner, whilst several

company sections had been cut-off, but with great cunning most got through the forward ranks of the advancing enemy to re-join the Battalion. During the withdrawal Colonel Malcolm had paused to take a roll call of the men with him - they numbered only 150 from the original 1,000-strong Battalion, but there was hope that 'missing' men would join-up again very soon.

At Wulverghem stood British reinforcements and the dawn of 1 November heralded more units to hold the line, even though the enemy now held Wytschaete and Messines. But having sustained very serious casualty numbers of their own, the Germans seemed to have little desire to pursue the elements of retreating British.

The London Scottish eventually moved back from the fighting line to rest at Kemmel and then on to La Clytte, where it was now possible to count the cost from the bitter baptism of fire. The Battalion had lost 394 killed, wounded or 'missing', though some of the latter were prisoners of war, and, happily, at this juncture Donald Ewen remained fighting fit. Considering the London Scottish had been hastily brought together from detached duties with almost no training, defective rifles, no machine-gun support or maps, and thrust into one of the earliest and most desperate frontline battles of the war thus far, they had held back superior numbers of a forceful enemy long enough to prevent what could have been a catastrophic breakthrough of the British position at Ypres. Despite their serious losses at the Battle of Messines, it was noted in the Battalion war diary: *"... that both officers and men had behaved with great steadiness"*.

Colonel Malcolm brought the defective rifles to the attention of the High Command and requested that his men be re-armed before being committed to battle again - he was ordered to take the reliable Lee Enfield short rifles from the wounded of other regiments being treated in a nearby hospital, but not enough were obtained before a sudden order sent the London Scottish back to the Ypres frontline as another German attacking force was assembling. Taking position at Brown Road Wood, to the south of the Menin Road, they found German rifles and ammunition left from a previous battle and some of the men, still carrying defective Lee Enfields, chose to take up the enemy weapons in preference to their own.

On 6 November, the Germans began a series of furious attempts to break through the British line and the Wood came under shellfire for six days and nights. In the most appalling conditions, Donald and his comrades had to hold firm; there was little shelter and the weather became very unpleasant, which added to the difficulty in bringing up fresh supplies of ammunition and food, and in close range combat the survivors of the Battalion still had to rely on the accuracy of their rifle fire to cut down the attackers.

Then, on 11 November, in an offensive headed by the much-vaunted Prussian Guard, the enemy launched an attack all along the British line. At one point the right flank of the London Scottish was in danger of being enveloped by the onrushing enemy but, through incredible leadership yet again, Colonel Malcolm led a counter attack that pushed the enemy back. In momentous actions like this it was no surprise that the Germans described the kilt-wearing soldiers of the various Scottish regiments: 'Die Damen aus der Hölle!' (Ladies from Hell).

The offensive failed to break the stubborn British line and, with still worsening weather, the battle began to peter out as the Germans 'relaxed' their efforts. Lord Cavan, the Brigadier of the 4th Guards Brigade, to whom the London Scottish were attached during the battle, wrote to the Commanding Officer of the London Scottish:

"Dear Colonel Malcolm,

I must send you a line of most true thanks for the splendid behaviour of the London Scottish in the very difficult position in Brown Road Wood. To have held the line successfully with the men dead beat for 96 hours is a feat I'm sure will some day be written very big in history. I hope so much you and your men will get at least 24 hours' good rest.

Yours most gratefully,

Cavan".

The fighting during the First Battle of Ypres, where the British just managed to hold the old city, cost over 58,000 officers and men of the BEF. The losses were no less serious for the Germans, who called the battle 'Die Kindermord zu Ypern' - the Massacre of the Innocents at Ypres.

Now able to march away from the line, the surviving London Scottish numbered less than 300, including Donald, whose luck still held. But after such prolonged bitter fighting the men were heavily fatigued, bearded and with feet in need of medical attention. For the next month the Battalion rested,

re-organised, trained and received new members to its ranks. But for some the strain of battle proved too much - their health broke down and they had to be returned to England, including Colonel Malcolm. Command of the Battalion, now attached to the 1st Guards Brigade, was taken over by Major Sandilands DSO of the Cameron Highlanders.

On 8 December 1914, His Majesty King George V visited Pradelles where the London Scottish were resting; they paraded for inspection and the King congratulated the men for their good record in France and Flanders. With Christmas approaching and parcels from home in abundance, there was hope for comfortable billets and a good time for all. But on the afternoon of 20 December there was a sudden call for the Brigade to make great speed for the Front; the London Scottish were having a football match when the call came and the players had only 30 minutes to change their boots and be ready to march to Béthune.

Eventually taking position around the area of Givenchy, the London Scottish endured four miserable weeks of trench warfare in ever-hardening winter weather of rain, frost, sleet, snow and constant freezing cold, where the sticky mud started to accumulate ankle-deep in the trenches and a new disease emerged, called 'trench foot', that invalidated many soldiers.

Added to those conditions was the daily grind of a diet mostly consisting of bully beef (tinned corned beef) and hard tack biscuits that were impossible to bite into, so they were usually smashed into pieces and left to soak in water - clean drinking water was mostly non-existent at the frontline, as the water was often ferried into trenches in old petrol cans that were rarely cleaned out properly. Boiling this water just about made it suitable for brewing tea, though that tended to taste of a 'petrol blend'. Then there were the plagues of huge rats to be found everywhere, often to be seen 'feasting' on fresh corpses, as well as the sight of stray dogs roaming across No Man's Land scavenging for anything to eat. Soldiers also had to contend with the lice that infested their uniforms; it became a regular task to run the flame of a lighted candle along the seams of clothing to kill off the eggs. About the only daily treat in the trenches was the rum ration usually served at dawn and dusk that, when consumed, had a wonderful warming effect and gave a most welcome sensation in a bitter winter of warfare. Some men who didn't drink would save their ration and rub their feet with it to fight off trench foot, though this was not an approved use; if the rum ration never arrived it could cause much bitterness within the ranks and it was said that the jars stamped with the initials 'SRD' actually stood for 'Seldom Reaches Destination'!

Criss-crossing artillery fire, mortar rounds, grenades, sniper and rifle fire continued unabated day and night, and casualties mounted. In these hell-like conditions, men still had to bring up supplies and repair trenches. For those who endured this horror, they were relieved on 17 January 1915 and marched back to Béthune for a rest.



Troops advancing across 'No Man's Land' at the Battle of Loos

At this time, the Battalion looked to the men in its ranks to fill the vacancies for officers and the most suitable candidates would soon be commissioned. Private Donald Ewen was one of those hoping to become an officer, but unfortunately and undoubtedly a result of suffering many bombardments, close explosions and loud gunfire, it was discovered that Donald's hearing had been affected to the extent that he was turned down for a commission. It also made him unfit to serve as an armed frontline soldier. Loyalty to his Battalion, however, made Donald decide to volunteer to be a stretcher bearer, a most perilous duty.

With each new month through 1915, the London Scottish were continually in and out of the frontline, engaging in many battles followed by rest periods, training and 'welcoming' new drafts from England to replace the losses within the ranks. Though there are no specific accounts of Donald risking his life as a stretcher bearer to bring wounded comrades safely out of harm's way, he undoubtedly did so. The one result of all the continued fighting was a stalemate on the Western Front and Allied commanders were becoming frustrated. By midsummer of 1915 they began to draw up plans for a major combined British and French offensive that they were confident would break through the German lines and possibly lead towards an end to the war. This was going to be the so-called 'Big Push' along a 20-mile front, with the BEF given the task of attacking in the area of Loos (pronounced 'Loss'). NB: this is Loos-en-Gohelle to the north of Lens and not the Loos on the outskirts of Lille.

In April 1915, at the Second Battle of Ypres, the Germans had used poison gas for the first time; now, at Loos, the British were going to follow suit. Preceded by several days of bombardment of the German lines, it was not until 25 September that wind conditions were favourable enough to begin the attack using gas. On release, however, the gas behaved erratically, either reaching the enemy trenches or drifting back towards the British trenches, causing over 2,500 gas casualties with several deaths. At noon, the London Scottish, now having been in France for just over a year, made a full frontal attack just to the north of Loos and were met by a hail of machine-gun fire that cut them down in droves. Men who managed to cross No Man's Land found the barbed wire defences intact and all attempts to cut the wire ended in failure. It was decided to abandon the attack at this point of the German line.



Platoon of the London Scottish, August 1915

Advances were being made elsewhere along the battlefield, but at a huge cost in lives, and after three days of fighting the British units had suffered over 20,000 killed and wounded. Skirmishing continued for the next 10 days, but the great breakthrough for which the Allied commanders had hoped did not come and the stalemate continued even after a German counter-attack on 8 October, which was beaten back.

During this time, an application had been made to the War Office requesting Donald's return to NPL so that he could take charge of optical glass research, an area of scientific work gaining greater emphasis for war-related purposes. The application was granted and a telegram was then summarily dispatched to the Western Front ordering his recall to England.

On the afternoon of 13 October 1915, the British re-launched their offensive at Loos in another attempt to break the German line and after a repeat use of gas the London Scottish attacked enemy positions along the Lens to La Bassée Road between Loos and Hulluch. Like the disaster of over two weeks previously, the artillery bombardment had not cut the German barbed wire and, as the clouds from both the gas and smoke candles dispersed, soldiers were left exposed to aimed machine-gun fire as they tried to cut their way through the lethal wire - the attack ground to a halt and survivors retreated back to the trenches from which they had started out.

At some point during the attack, Donald was reportedly assisting in heroically bringing back a wounded colleague across No Man's Land from near a German trench. At a point near where the road from Lens to La Bassée is joined by the road from Loos, bullets or shellfire cut him down and Donald was tragically killed - his body was not recovered or identified and he was listed as 'Missing'. The telegram that could have saved Donald and taken him away from the firing line was too late in arriving. His Commanding Officer wrote about him in glowing terms as he commended his bravery

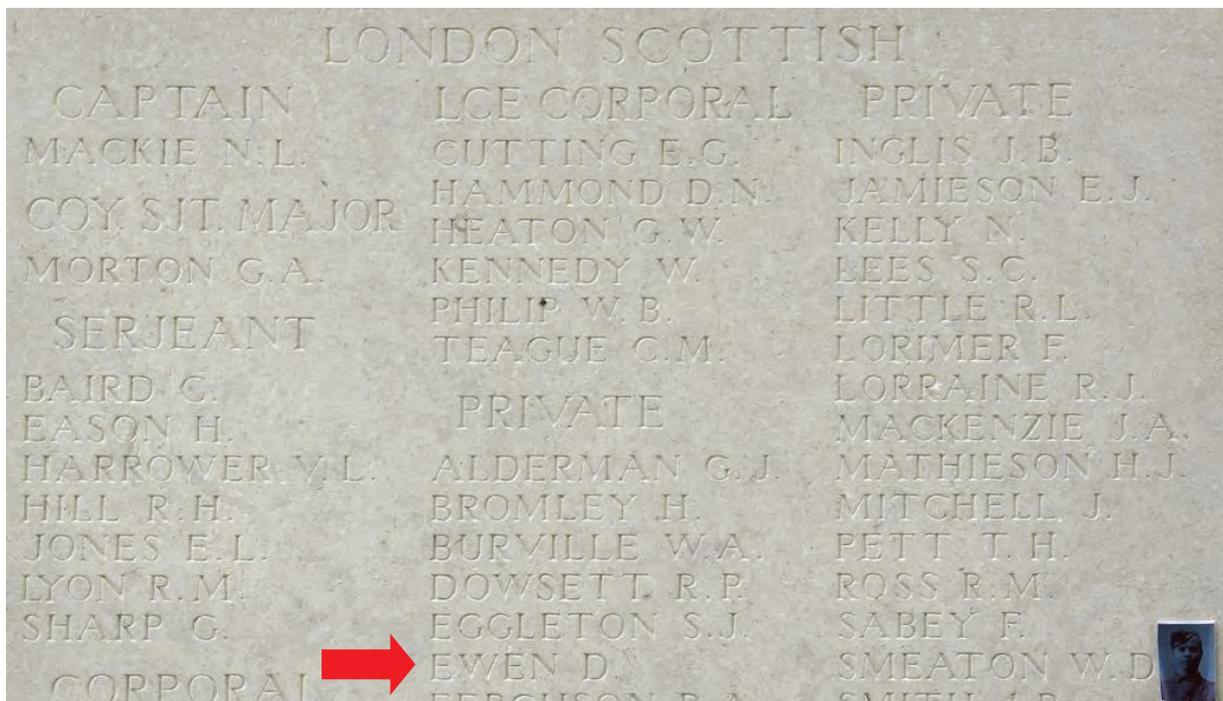
and constant optimism under the most trying of conditions experienced during the first winter campaign of the war.



Loos, after the artillery bombardments

The Loos offensive fizzled out in the days that followed and, for the little ground gained from the enemy, there were over 61,000 British casualties recorded from 25 September to 16 October 1915. French losses were of a similar number, with German casualty figures roughly half the figure of the British.

28-year-old Private Donald Ewen was one of the many thousands killed on the battlefield during the autumn of 1915 and, sadly, he has no known grave. His name is commemorated on the Loos Memorial along with over 14,000 missing British and Commonwealth men lost forever during the Battle of Loos.



*Private Donald Ewen commemorated on the Loos Memorial
(courtesy of The War Graves Photographic Project)*

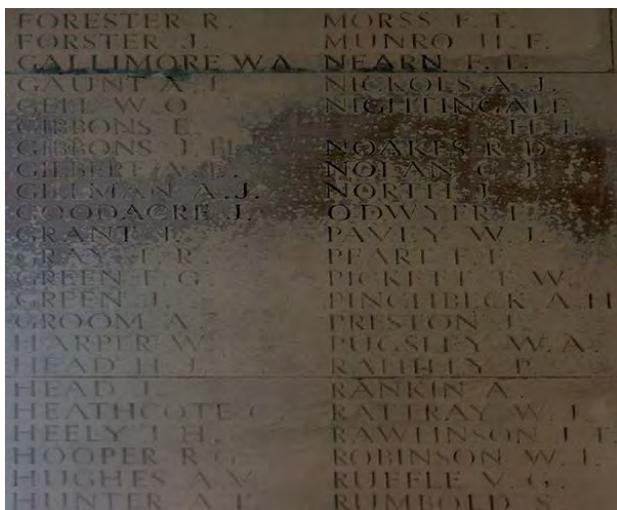
Lost, but not forgotten.



*Left: Loos British Cemetery and Memorial
(courtesy of The War Graves Photographic Project)*

Horace Head - the forever 'Boy Soldier'

An account of a brave, but ultimately tragic, young NPL employee



Above left: Horace remembered on the Thiepval Memorial | Above right: The sacrifice remembered at Thiepval (images courtesy of The War Graves Photographic Project)



On 4 September 1898, Edith Head gave birth to her first-born, a son she and her husband John, a journeyman butcher by trade, named Horace John Head.

Growing up at Wayland Avenue near Hackney Downs, London E8, little Horace was there in 1904 to welcome into the world a baby sister called Dorothy. In 1911, the Head family were living in Lodge Road, Teddington, from where Horace's father went out to gain employment as a house decorator (Lodge Road is no longer on the map due to re-development of the town). Horace was schooled at Teddington Council School (now Stanley Road School) and also Hampton Grammar School.

After leaving school, 15-year-old Horace gained a job with NPL in 1913 and was initially given a position in the Administration Department, before he subsequently started work within the Metrology Division. In 1914 the Head family moved home again and took residence in Walpole Road.

In August 1914, Great Britain plunged into war and NPL took on a leading role in supporting the technical and scientific aims of the War Office and the Admiralty. As members of the

Territorial Force or as Reservists, employees were soon mobilised for war, whilst others volunteered to serve in other branches of the Armed Forces. Horace, like very many of his teenage peers, felt a huge swell of national pride, and perhaps an arguably immature fervour led many of them to try to enlist, despite being underage. About 40 members of NPL staff were sent off for active service in late 1914 and, for the duration of their absence (and hopeful safe return), it was agreed that their posts would remain open by way of treating service for King and Country as service for the laboratory.

By spring of 1915 the Western Front, that stretched from Nieuwpoort on the Belgian coast all the way to the Swiss border, had descended into a stalemate of trench warfare. The many clashes on the battlefields since the German invasion, that struck through Belgium and into northern France in 1914, had caused a massive number of casualties to the British pre-war Regular Army and the Territorials, thus the military leaders had to look to volunteers to fill the ranks. Despite the losses and the fact the war was meant to be over by Christmas 1914, this relatively early stage of the conflict saw no shortage of volunteers, many of whom were very young indeed.

The regulations at this time stipulated that to serve in the army a man had to be aged 18-38, stand at least 5' 3" tall, have a 34" chest and pass a number of physical tests; also, an individual soldier had to be 19 years of age before he could serve overseas.

The army recruitment offices were finding many 'boys' entering the door trying to sign-up to 'fight'. Some were successful by virtue of their physical stature; others tried to hoodwink the recruitment sergeants and their officers simply by stating they were at least 18 years of age or by giving a false name, and if a birth certificate was not requested to be seen, then these boys were getting into uniform with little difficulty. Despite the watchful eyes of the majority of recruiting staff, it wasn't unknown either for some staff to turn a blind eye to the particulars of eager youngsters trying to become soldiers, as staff could earn two shillings and sixpence per recruit, so potentially a most profitable enterprise for the unscrupulous. (The youngest recorded British Great War soldier was Private Sidney Lewis from Tooting who signed-up aged 12 and went to France with the East Surrey Regiment. Incredibly, at just 13 years old, he fought on the Somme before his mother managed to persuade the War Office to send her boy home.)

Apart from the various inducements encouraging boys to put on khaki, perhaps most saddening are recorded incidents of mature-looking boys in their civilian clothing being labelled cowards for not being in uniform and handed a symbolic white feather, which subsequently, but undeservedly, shamed them into signing up. Whether that happened or it was the influence of friends, or down to his own patriotism, 16-year-old Horace reportedly first visited the recruitment office in Kingston in April 1915 (where the aforementioned Sidney Lewis also signed up) and, according to the recruitment register, Horace stated (lied - to be precise!) that he was 19 years and 3 months of age, worked as an errand boy and was born in Belmont. His height is given as 5' 3" (did he stand on his toes?) and on the scales he weighed 108 lb (just under 8 stones), so quite a diminutive lad; his chest measurement was recorded to be less than the minimum at 32½", but with a satisfactory 2" expansion. It wasn't unknown for medical officers and drafted-in civilian doctors to state a potential recruit suspected to be underage of being "*a little underweight, but well proportioned and will develop physically*". Thus they were letting boys through not for what they were, but for what they could become. However, many boy recruits soon found the physical regime too tough, so were deemed unsuitable for the rigours of military service and were discharged and sent home.

On 16 August 1915, Horace took his Attestation and, having sworn his allegiances, became a member of the East Surrey Regiment; soon to start his training to become a (boy) soldier and, having given the age as recorded in the register, Horace cunningly ensured he would not be prohibited from serving overseas as soon as the opportunity arose.



Punch cartoon from 1915:

Officer to underage boy trying to enlist: "Do you know where boys go who tell lies?"
Boy: "To the Front, Sir"

Due to the loss of Horace's full service record, the actual date he was mobilised is not known, but from the date of his Attestation at the recruiting office, he must have kept secret what he had done from both his parents and his 'boss' at NPL, so quite what they thought of his actions once they realised he was leaving home is not recorded. But there is no documentation recalling Horace back home either - he was off to war to take on 'Fritz'. Surprisingly, there are recorded instances of parents supporting their teenage sons after learning they'd signed up to serve King and Country, who gave their blessing and did not seek to have the War Office return them home.

The government, War Office and the army were all culpable in not stopping boys signing up, or in not sending them home forthwith after their true age was discovered; but at the time Horace was in uniform, so were thousands of other boys collectively making a significant contribution to the numerical strength of the army on the frontline where a heavy price was being paid in dead and wounded. New regulations were put in place to try and deal with the situation of underage soldiers that was becoming an ever-increasing national focus (and scandal), with the authorities often taken to task by the press, who at the same time would extol the heroic deeds of boy soldiers fighting overseas. The fate of an individual boy could ultimately be determined by his commanding officer, who might deal with him as the regulations demanded or be sympathetic to his feelings in wanting to serve and not be sent home - or as, in many cases, the officers just ignored the problem or didn't prioritise it and busied themselves with other regimental matters.

Horace was attached to the 2/6th Battalion of the East Surreys, which was a Home Service (second line) unit first formed at Kingston in September 1914; the battalion conducted reserve and training duties and provided drafts for overseas service. Horace may have joined the battalion at Tunbridge Wells, where it had been based since May 1915, before being billeted at Redhill in October, then later moving out to Gore Street in Thanet during June 1916.

On transfer from the East Surrey Regiment, NPL's boy soldier was destined to become a rifleman and join the ranks of the 1/8th Battalion, The London Regiment, otherwise known as the 'Post Office Rifles'. As the now 17-year-old Horace neared the end of his home-based training and duties during the summer of 1916, he continued to disguise his true age to his NCO instructors, regimental sergeants and officers in the hope he would be drafted for overseas service (and he was far from being alone in his actions). The War Office had given assurances to parents of underage soldiers that whilst serving with 'Home' regiments, boys would not be sent overseas until they were 19 years old, but in a great many cases, this was not to be.



Allied troops go 'over-the-top' and advance across the battlefield

The Battle of the Somme was launched on 1 July 1916 and the British Army suffered one of its bleakest days - with 60,000 men killed and wounded and little enemy ground gained for the terrible level of sacrifice made. The Post Office Rifles did not participate in the opening of the campaign and were camped in the Abbeville area for training in anticipation of further fighting on the Somme. The

Battalion then marched to various staging posts during August towards Franvillers and arrived at Round Wood, where the training became more specialised for a projected attack on an area known as 'High Wood' to the south west of Flers; this was a place that had been the scene of many previous sanguinary fights on account of its important tactical position and the Germans had always maintained a vigorous defence, at great cost to both sides.

On 4 September 1916, a British cross-Channel troopship docked at a French port and one of the disembarking soldiers was Rifleman Horace Head, his arrival in France coinciding with his 18th birthday, now legally of serving age but still officially too young to be on overseas soil. Sent to a holding camp, it is unlikely that someone as fresh and inexperienced as Horace would have been rushed onwards to join up with the Post Office Rifles (POR) who had been training intensely to form themselves into a well-drilled unit, where each man would have known precisely what his role was for the planned battle - 'new' soldiers would have had an unsettling effect.

The battalion reached its battle assembly lines on the night of 13 September at Bécourt Wood and 'luckily' for them they were not to lead the attack, which was the responsibility of the 1/15th Battalion, The London Regiment (Civil Service Rifles). This battle was part of a major new offensive by eleven divisions on a broad four-mile front from Courcellette to Flers and would be historic by virtue that it was where the first use of tanks in warfare was carried out, albeit with mixed fortunes. Now only a wood by name, High Wood was in a hellish state and described by one eye-witness as only *"rugged stumps sticking out of churned-up earth, poisoned with fumes of high explosives, the whole a mass of corruption"*.

The battle that ensued early on the morning of 15 September was one of total carnage, with charge after charge at the enemy lines cut down by murderous return fire and the terrain proving totally unsuitable for the supporting tanks. With the POR managing to reach some of their objectives, and also joining other units to throw themselves into the sickening slaughter, the Germans still kept hold of High Wood. It took a massive close bombardment by the 140th Brigade Trench Mortar Battery teams, who fired over 700 rounds onto the defenders in 15 minutes that eventually caused them to surrender or retreat, and soon after midday High Wood was at last in British possession; but those who survived would forever recall *"men torn to fragments by the near explosion of bombs and - worse than any sight - hearing the agonised cries and shrieks of men in mortal pain"*.

There was little time for the Post Office Riflemen to lick their wounds before being thrust into the next battle, the capture of the Flers trench line. The attack was launched on 18 September and, after a bitter struggle with the enemy, the trenches were successfully captured. Relieved from the new frontline, the POR headed to Hénencourt for a rest, but from the recent actions they left behind eight officers killed, one 'missing', with four more wounded and amongst the other ranks, about 300 had been killed and wounded or listed 'missing' - reinforcements would be needed after such heavy losses. But, as noted from the Battalion diary: *"the reinforcement system worked well and a large draft was received, although few officers, which brought the Battalion back up to strength. There was, however, to be little time in which to absorb the newcomers, who were keen, but untrained in the very special methods the Somme fighting entailed"*. In all likelihood, this was when Rifleman Horace Head arrived as one of those reinforcement 'newcomers'.



Left: His Majesty King George V seen climbing the Butte | Right: Butte de Warlencourt after the war with memorial crosses

The 'up-to-strength' Battalion then moved on to Albert on 29 September before taking over a bivouac area on the first day of October and then three days later spent one night's duty in the frontline at Flers, which would have given Horace his first taste of a war trench; on moving up to the line he may have experienced the 'evening hate' when a short bombardment by both sides usually took place (at dawn came the 'morning hate'). When there were no offensives, it was generally at night-time when the frontline came alive as darkness allowed men more freedom of movement to undertake many tasks like bringing rations forward, carrying out repairs and improvements to trenches and going out to patrol 'No Man's Land'. Days were often 'quiet' allowing soldiers not on sentry duty to sleep, eat, write letters home and complete menial tasks whilst keeping one's head below the parapet to avoid the attentions of an enemy sniper.

On 6 October 1916, orders were received to move into the trenches ahead of Eaucourt L'Abbaye in preparation for an attack the next day with the main objective being the capture of the infamous Butte de Warlencourt.

The Butte was a prehistoric mound of excavated chalk, which rose sharply to a height of 70 feet and still stands to this day. The Germans had turned the mound into a 'fortress' by digging tunnels into it and building observation posts and machine-gun positions covering large swathes of the lower ground. A trench line in front of the Butte called 'Snag Trench' needed to be captured and secured before a final assault to capture the Butte and the job was given to the POR, whose orders were to advance just behind a creeping barrage. Defending to their left flank was the German 361st Regiment of No 4 Ersatz (replacement) Division and immediately facing them was the 16th Regiment of the 6th Bavarian Reserve Division.

The attack was timed to start at 1:45 pm and, as whistles blew, approximately 650 men (and boys) of the POR went 'over-the-top' only to find that the promised creeping barrage was far from consistent and was landing too far ahead ... through the gaps in the shellfire and smoke came the unbroken rattle of enemy machine-gun fire.

The charge across the ground to Snag Trench was slammed to a stop as Riflemen fell in droves when the hail of bullets from the Butte scythed them down; the inexperience of the 'new' soldiers like Horace became all too evident as they bunched together worrying more about the 'friendly' shellfire whizzing over their heads from behind, than the withering fire from the enemy ahead. Two whole companies (upwards of 200 men per company) were wiped out with only seven men returning unscathed - within this horrifying maelstrom 18-year-old Horace fell and was never found.

One survivor who could share his experience of the massacre told: "There was not a rattling roar of heavy and light field guns over our sector of the battle - only the fierce pattering of Jerry's machine-guns cutting remorselessly at the handful of No 1 Company Post Office Rifles ... I was bowled over, so were men on my left and right".

Added to the slaughter were the 1/7th and 1/15th Battalions of the London Regiment whose casualties were just as severe as the POR and the attack on the Butte failed catastrophically. If there was any 'glory' to be found, it came as one observer recorded for the divisional history, in the idea that *"Not a man turned back and some got right under the Butte, but they were not seen again. Parties dug themselves in where they could"*. One of these parties was gathered together by a Captain G Gates of the 1/15th Civil Service Rifles, who, along with some POR men, dug in along a sunken road and held out without support for two days. For his gallant leadership, Gates was awarded a Military Cross.



Butte de Warlencourt memorial plaque

The recorded losses for the Post Office Rifles on 7 October 1916 amounted to three officers killed, seven wounded and one 'missing', and amongst the other ranks, 40 were confirmed killed, 160 wounded and a staggering 200 listed as 'missing', including young Horace Head. What remained of the Battalion moved out on 9 October to Albert via Mametz Wood. The Butte that Horace had so pitifully and quickly given his life for remained in German hands until early 1917 when they withdrew to the Hindenburg Line and British Forces took charge of the mound. Later that year in July 1917, the



*The Thiepval Memorial and Anglo-French Cemetery
(image courtesy of The War Graves Photographic Project)*

Teddington Council School war memorial and the Hampton Grammar School Roll of Honour.

One officer described boy soldiers as the 'little heroes' - it is estimated that there were in excess of 250,000 little heroes who volunteered to serve and because so many lied about their true age or gave false names, it can only be estimated that between 100,000 and 110,000 were killed and wounded in the First World War. Horace Head was one of those little heroes - a courageous 'lion cub' and he deserves to never be forgotten.

Right: Sidney Lewis, the youngest recorded 'boy' soldier, pictured in his army uniform when just 13 years of age. Discharged once his true age was disclosed after his mother had sent his birth certificate to the War Office, he later re-enlisted in 1918 and served with the Army of Occupation in Austria. Following his army service, Sidney joined the Police in Kingston-upon-Thames and served in bomb disposal during the Second World War. In later life he ran a pub at Frant in East Sussex. He passed away in 1969.

Butte was visited and climbed by His Majesty King George V, the one whom Horace had sworn to faithfully serve - he did that and more. (The Germans regained possession of the Butte during their Spring Offensive in 1918, before it returned to British hands in late August as the final Allied Offensive brought about the Armistice on 11 November).

As well as the NPL war memorial, Horace is officially commemorated on the huge Thiepval Memorial to the 'Missing of the Somme', which bears the names of more than 72,000 officers and men of Great Britain and South African forces who died in the Somme sector before 20 March 1918 and have no known grave. Over 90% of those commemorated died between July and November 1916. Horace can also be found commemorated on both the



NPL's Extraordinary Gilbert Millar

The remarkable story of a very talented individual who excelled in his varied personal pursuits and work, served his country and gave his absolute all.

PART ONE

Heathdown (the early years)

However one views Victorian Britain in the latter half of the 19th century, the one overriding element, which was key to the astonishing achievements of that time, was the calibre of individuals in public service, science, engineering, medicine, education and many other areas of new discovery, invention and development. The distinct class system of that era, coupled to a privileged background and upbringing, was certainly an advantage in gaining access to the highest standards of education, and positions of great status, in both civilian and military occupations.

In the late spring of 1884, at a grand home called 'Heathdown' situated along East Heath Road in Hampstead, lived 27-year-old Henry Edward and Ada Margaret (née Prance) Millar. Henry was a successful merchant who had married Ada in May 1879. Also living at Heathdown were their two sons Edric and Cecil, as well as Henry's younger brother Ernest, who would soon take up studies at Cambridge University. On 2 June 1884, Margaret gave birth to her third son, named Gilbert Henry Millar, who was baptised within a month of his birth.

The following year the three boys gained a sister, Doris, and by the time of the 1891 Census, the house had also welcomed Ion, Herbert and Winifred. Also resident was their cook, Annie Hampton; housemaid, Ellen Wicks; and two nurses, Ellen Iddenden and Catherine Gordon, who were kept very busy indeed by the energetic young brood. More Millar children followed with the birth of Basil, Muriel, and the twins Violet and Olive, but there was a sad bereavement in 1896 when second-born Cecil died at the tender age of 13.

In 1897, young Gilbert followed in the footsteps of his older brother Edric and gained a place at the renowned Rugby School in Warwickshire with a Scholarship for Classics and Mathematics, the latter subject a good pointer to his future scientific path. His recognised academic achievement at the school saw Gilbert made Head of his House for three years. Gilbert left Rugby in 1903 and went up as a Mathematical Scholar to Pembroke College at Cambridge University, where he became 15th Wrangler (order of score as a first-classman in the Mathematical Tripos) and took a First Class in the Mechanical Sciences Tripos. After leaving Cambridge, Gilbert studied engineering with the London and North Western Railway before joining the National Physical Laboratory (NPL) in 1910 as Assistant and second-in-charge of the William Froude National Tank (later known as No 1 Tank), for testing models of vessels and conducting experiments on seaplane floats. On starting work at NPL, Gilbert took residence in a house in Waldegrave Road, Teddington.

From a young age, Gilbert developed a liking for the water and yachting at sea in particular, thanks in part to the family having a holiday home at Nefyn on the North Wales coast. With experience, his competence at the helm in later life often saw him setting out solo upon the seas around Great Britain. On one occasion, when sailing across the Irish Sea, he was caught in a gale that lasted six hours, but skilfully battled through the stormy waters and made it safely back to harbour. In 1912, Gilbert had his finest moment under sail when he won the Royal Cruising Club Challenge Cup. Despite this proud self-achievement, the year also saw the loss of his father Henry Edward, aged 55, who died in seemingly mysterious circumstances at Nefyn, when his body was found on the shore several weeks after he had 'disappeared'. Further tragedy for the family followed the next year when Gilbert's brother Herbert died aged 24.



Gilbert Millar pictured in his Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve uniform

Gilbert's continuing work at NPL was vital for the aims set out by the Admiralty, especially as war clouds were looming in Europe, but his combined fondness for the oceans and his patriotism gave him the conviction that he would rally to 'the cause' if war broke out. Thus it was when, four days after Great Britain's declaration of war with Germany on 4 August 1914, Gilbert enlisted with the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) with the rank of Signaller. From that moment, he could never have imagined just what lay ahead for him.

Antwerp (off to war)

In August 1914, fighting quickly exploded across the frontiers of Belgium and France, and the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), numbering 100,000 men, was hurriedly despatched to the Continent to help stem the advance of the German Army. They soon joined battle at Mons and the River Marne. As deadlock spread across the ever-widening battlefields, the opposing sides sought to gain advantage on the flanks, and through September and into October 1914, trenchlines crept ever northwards in the 'race to the sea'. Key to Belgian resistance was the vitally important fortress city of Antwerp - it was all too apparent it was a target for German forces and that British units would inevitably be sent in haste to support the Belgians in its defence.

Gilbert Millar was mobilised for service on 22 August 1914 as a reservist member of the Royal Naval Division (RND), a composite force formed of four battalions of the Marine Brigade and two Naval Brigades totalling eight battalions. He was attached to the 'Benbow Battalion', so-named after Admiral Benbow (1653-1702) - these units, comprising about 1,000 men per battalion, were named after famous historical Royal Navy commanders. It was Winston Churchill, the then First Lord of the Admiralty, who decided to form the RND that was visualised to be a force available for the purpose of securing and defending foreign ports, vital for Navy ships and supply vessels to enter and berth in safety. Thus, any thoughts Gilbert had of going to war at sea serving on board one of His Majesty's mighty warships were blown to the four winds as he found himself detailed for 'soldiering'.

To their future cost, the men of the RND were viewed purely as lightly-armed infantry and were not given support from either artillery, engineering or even medical units. Assembling at locations in Kent, training for overseas service was slow for the Navy men. Little in the way of uniforms or equipment was issued as priority for resources went to the BEF. This is exemplified by the fact that weapons from Royal Navy stockpiles only arrived in late September, comprising 'old' charger-loading Lee-Enfield rifles (Boer War vintage), rather than the latest short magazine Lee-Enfield rifles which the BEF were using to great effect to halt the German advance across Flanders.

German forces, under the command of General Hans Hartwig von Beseler, began a heavy bombardment of the fortifications at Antwerp on 28 September 1914. Belgian defenders knew they could not hold the city without reinforcements and made plans to evacuate their forces to Ostend. The following day the Belgian Prime Minister, Charles de Broqueville, appealed to both the British and French governments for help. The response from the British was to send the RND which included Gilbert within its ranks who, in his case, only had one month of limited training and was poorly equipped for the role of engaging a vast opposing army with more modern weaponry.

For the security of Antwerp, there were numerous forts and defence positions constructed during the previous century and military planners considered the city to be impregnable. The original German plan was to lay siege to the city but, after invading Belgium and forming the view that the Belgian army had lost its offensive capability, and in wanting to outflank any British or French advance, the German generals decided instead to attack the city in great force. As a prelude to the planned ground



Recruitment poster

assault, an attempt was made to break the morale of the civilians and the garrison army when huge Zeppelin airships were sent to bomb Antwerp.

On 1 October 1914, German troops began attacking defence positions on the furthest outskirts of Antwerp and during the following nights and days made a steady advance, capturing various forts and redoubts as Belgian forces fell back against the unrelenting enemy pressure and vainly tried to hold new defence lines. Some positions had to be given up as ammunition ran out. On 4 October, some of the reinforcement that had been pleaded for arrived when the Marine Brigade leapt off requisitioned London buses to support the 7th Belgian Regiment and occupied positions around the northern line of Lier, a town to the south-west of the city. But, to the marines' dismay, the defence line consisted of little more than sections of shallow trench between hedgerows, with just a single strand of wire stretched across their front. Some marines were sent to an advanced post on the River Neth to relieve some very exhausted Belgian troops.



Belgian defence position at Antwerp

With the outer forts ahead of this frontline in enemy hands, the trenches occupied by the marines came under bombardment during that first night and into the following morning of 5 October when forward units of Germans began a crossing of the river. The 7th Belgian Regiment began to withdraw around midday exposing the right flank of the British marines, but a vigorous counter-attack led by Colonel Tierchon of the 2nd Chasseurs with aeroplane support managed to restore the situation that same afternoon.

However, a new disaster unfolded during the night of 5-6 October after a failed attempt by Belgian forces to drive the Germans back across the river, with the result that the Belgians evacuated most of their trenches. There were now too few troops available to mount another counter-attack and the Marine Brigade faced becoming surrounded. So, under an intense enemy bombardment, the marines retired from their positions in a well-organised manner to some hastily prepared new defensive positions.

In the early hours of 6 October, the battalions of the Royal Naval Brigades, which included Signaller Gilbert Millar in their number, arrived at Antwerp expecting to reinforce the Marine Brigade, but instead were hurriedly sent to occupy forts of the inner defensive ring. To their disgust, the Navy ratings also found shallow trenches with large areas of cleared ground ahead, making them easily observed by German artillery spotters. Despite these ill-prepared positions, the ratings took up positions in the trenches to cover the withdrawal of the marines that continued through the night of 6-7 October, thankfully without much opposition. Even with these setbacks, Major-General Archibald Paris, commander of the British Forces, was ordered by Winston Churchill to continue the defence of

Antwerp for as long as possible and be ready to withdraw at very short notice, rather than surrender. The Germans, now having crossed the River Scheldt, were closing the net and the escape route from the city was now less than twelve miles wide.



Depiction of German troops attacking Antwerp

At midnight on 7-8 October, the Germans began a fierce artillery bombardment of the city, forts and trenches, where any fires that erupted could not be subdued on account of the water supply being cut off. With German pressure unrelenting, it became apparent to Major-General Paris that the Belgian Army could not continue to hold the last forts and, late into the afternoon on 8 October, the British commander concluded that, to avoid a terrible disaster to his men, a total retirement under cover of darkness was unquestionable - this was agreed with Belgian commander, General de Guise, who ordered that roads and bridges be cleared to allow the passage of the British troops.

At around 7:30 pm, the British began their mass withdrawal under very difficult conditions, only to find the rapidly advancing Germans cutting off the direct escape route westwards, necessitating a 15-mile detour to the north. Roads were now crowded with fleeing Belgian troops, refugees, herds of animals and countless wheeled contraptions that led to a rapid breakdown in communication between the British units and, all too soon, large numbers of men from the Naval Brigades became detached. During the night of 8-9 October, the Belgian field army made good its escape from Antwerp, leaving behind the garrison army of 33,000 soldiers (about one-third of the whole Belgian army) to their fate. The following morning, German troops started occupying the inner ring forts, so the German commander, General von Beseler, ordered a halt to the bombardment and summoned General de Guise to surrender. Not receiving a response, von Beseler threatened to resume the bombardment, but civilian representatives of Jan de Vos, the Mayor of Antwerp, reached the German commanders and signed a capitulation. The next morning, on 10 October, when the Belgian military looked set to start discussions about surrendering Antwerp, they were presented with a *fait accompli* and little choice but to agree to the terms already signed. The garrison army laid down their arms and fled towards neutral Netherlands, where they would be interned for the duration of the war - German troops entered the city and remained in occupation until the end of the war in November 1918. The fate of the British marines and the Naval Brigades was very much in their own hands.

Moerbeke and Eksaarde (captured by the enemy)

As the British retired from Antwerp during the night of 8-9 October 1914, they endeavoured to make use of the cover of darkness to march long distances and reach trains that could swiftly evacuate them westwards towards Allied lines. Some battalions were fortunate enough to reach Sint-Gillis-Waas where they boarded trains and evacuated with little further incident. A large contingent of Navy men took the decision to march towards the Netherlands, where approximately 1,500 of them crossed the border into the neutral country and were interned for the remainder of the war. (Had the Dutch subsequently released the British, they would have violated their neutrality and risked 'attention' from the Germans).

In the desperate race to get away, Gilbert found himself mixed with hundreds of his fellow ratings, marines and a mixture of Belgians military and refugees. They managed to board a train late on the evening of 9 October, but the Germans were in close pursuit and, near the town of Moerbeke, managed to get ahead of the train and cut the line which caused a derailment at around 11 pm. There was great confusion, not helped by the darkness and agitation of the large numbers of refugees, making it difficult to pass orders. The marines in particular were not keen to surrender and engaged with the Germans. Some of them, in words later recorded by Major-General Paris, "*behaved admirably*" and managed to break through and march a further 10 miles to Zelzate, where they entrained and returned to safety. However, they still left over 300 of their comrades behind along with all the remaining Navy ratings, including Gilbert Millar, who had to face up to the fact that he and all his comrades were now Prisoners-of-War (PoWs). The prospect of an unknown future as a PoW at the hands of the Germans left many of the British captives feeling very desperate indeed.

Despite having lost a squad of his men during the engagement with the marines, the German commanding officer is said to have behaved in a most gentlemanly manner towards his British prisoners and accepted the fact that one patrol of marines had not realised the decision had been taken to surrender and consequently opened fire on their enemy. The headcount of those who had been captured amounted to approximately 600 Naval Brigade ratings (including Gilbert), 300 marines and between 400-500 Belgians. In his subsequent report to the Admiralty, Major-General Paris listed the Marine Brigade having 23 killed, 103 wounded and 388 'missing', with the Royal Naval Brigades losing five killed, 64 wounded and 2,040 'missing' (the missing included internees and PoWs).

The victorious Germans then conducted a less-than-thorough search of the new prisoners, with no reports of either money or private property being taken, before assembling the large mass of men into a column and ordering them to march several miles south in the direction of Eksaarde. Gilbert was towards the rear of the marching column when a disturbance broke out up ahead, with repeated gunfire which resulted in about 10 Navy men and a couple of Germans being shot before calm was restored. Apparently, due to the darkness, a German patrol behind a hedge mistook the prisoner column for armed British troops and opened fire. That was not to be the last tragic incident.

The bedraggled prisoner column reached Eksaarde at about 2 am and was herded into a church where they would be confined in great discomfort for the next two days. The German guards attempted to supply food to the British prisoners, which only amounted to small amounts of bread along with what was described as 'cow'.

There soon followed another tragic event concerning one of Gilbert's officers from the Benbow Battalion, who was executed by the German Military Authorities on 10 October in connection with an attempted escape at Eksaarde which resulted in a German guard being assaulted. From evidence later given by fellow officer Lieutenant Commander F Grover RNVR from the Hawke Battalion, he described the event that befell Lt Cdr Oswald Hesketh Hanson:



Headstone of Lt Cdr Hanson

"Poor Hanson was shot by the Germans on 10th October 1914. He had struggled with a sentry who was about to fire on one of our own men trying to escape after we were taken prisoner on the night of the 9th, and under German Military Code such an act can be punished with death. I tried to get the sentence mitigated, and so did the Commandant of the troops guarding us, for it was evident that Hanson was overwrought by the fatigues of the previous days. The matter was referred to the highest authority; at that time, General von der Goltz was Military Governor of Belgium, but it was to no avail, and Hanson was shot at midday and is buried by the Church at Eksaarde".

(Commonwealth War Graves Commission records give the date of death for Lt Cdr Hanson as 11 October 1914, but all the evidence points towards his execution occurring on 10 October 1914. His body was later exhumed and re-buried at Dendermonde.)

At around 8 am on 11 October 1914, the British prisoners were ordered out of the church to be once again assembled into a column and then marched off southwards towards Termonde (Dendermonde) Railway Station. The hundreds of men reached the destination at about midday where a stew was prepared, which only amounted to a couple of fragments of beef and a sip of gravy for each man before they were all ordered onto a train. Along with every other man, Gilbert climbed aboard a four-wheeled closed wagon that each held 35 PoWs and two guards. Eventually, the wagons started clanging and lurching as the train began to move off to an unknown destination, but all the guards would say, with a knowing wry smile, about where the train was headed to was, "*Deutschland*".

PART TWO

Döberitz (life as a prisoner of war)

The train journey to incarceration far from home was a nightmare from the beginning - cramped conditions and little in the way of comfort, sanitation, food and water. The train slowly trundled its way eastwards because it would often have to halt and give way to military traffic with greater priority. Not until 15 October 1914, four days after setting off from Belgium, did the wagons of British prisoners arrive at its destination. The hunger felt by every man was incalculable - Gilbert, like all his comrades, had only received two meals during the long journey when stops were made adjacent to wooden canteens set up alongside the tracks. The first meal was a supper of soup and the second meal a breakfast of sausage, bread and coffee; other than that some crusts of bread were handed around, but there was little in the way of drinking water. Despite these deprivations, there were no reports of brutal treatment by the guards towards the prisoners.

As the captive Navy men were directed off the train and through high wooden and wire gates into an enclosure, the realisation of where they were began to sink in, especially with those who knew the geography of Germany - they were at Döberitz, just a few miles west of Berlin. Originally just a village, the area had been turned into a military proving ground by the Imperial German Army in the late 19th century and the inhabitants of the village were forced to leave. The men of the Royal Naval Division were not the first new inhabitants; approximately 2,500 BEF men, captured during the earliest battles on the Western Front, had arrived some six weeks previously.

The camp was under the charge of the Commandant, Colonel Alberti, who is said to have done the best he could for the prisoners with what scant resources were initially available. He had the prisoners organised into companies or sections of various sizes, with NCOs from within their own ranks in charge to facilitate co-operation and communication via the camp interpreters. But Alberti took the task of keeping his charges under control very seriously and machine-gun posts were strategically positioned around the perimeter, with barrels continuously pointing inwards. Armed guards also patrolled the ground on foot and there were several instances of prisoners being shot without justification; not as a policy of terrorisation, but more a lack of understanding of prisoner behaviour and frustrations.

The facilities within the camp were primitive, to say the least, as the high influx of prisoners had not been fully anticipated. The accommodation that Gilbert found behind the wire consisted of 'tents' made from torn canvas stretched on rickety wooden frames over a bare earth floor. Washing was available at an outside horse trough with latrines consisting of open trenches that were decidedly inadequate. A slight plus to begin with was the quality of the food which, although it could be watery and affected the health of those accustomed to finer dining, was, by comparison to what followed, most acceptable.

Thankfully the tented accommodation was only temporary and, just before the onset of a harsh winter, Gilbert was moved into another part of the camp which consisted of about 40 wooden huts and several buildings housing kitchens, offices and latrines. Construction work within the camp was ongoing and eventually some wash houses were built, including a bath house in which showers (even hot ones) could be obtained. Despite the new accommodation there were insufficient huts to sleep all the prisoners so tents went up again, this time with wooden floors and linings. Although it made for very cramped conditions, most chose to squeeze into the huts during the winter of 1914-15, which saw up to 120 men in rooms measuring just 30 feet by 30 feet.

In addition to the seasonal discomforts was a severe lack of winter clothing, and only a few prisoners were lucky to possess a greatcoat. Cases of frostbite were common and sadly some prisoners died from exposure and pneumonia. Clothing was sent out from Great Britain and the Germans themselves provided some forms of clothing to help alleviate the bitter weather.

Throughout all the hardships and day-to-day difficulties of creating a comfortable and safe existence at Döberitz, the Germans were petrified of mass illness or disease spreading amongst the prisoners and, to counter this, carried out regular vaccinations which, on the whole, kept the camp in a healthy state.

Interestingly, for those prisoners who had 'money' there were canteens in the camp, separate from the kitchens, where bread and other 'things' could be purchased, but all that was to change on 1 February 1915, when new laws came into force. The Royal Navy had begun a blockade of German ports accessed from the North Sea as soon as the war started, and the effects of this blockade on food supplies began to be felt very soon into the conflict. What were known as the 'Bread Laws' came into force and hit daily rations really hard. With immediate effect no bread was obtainable from the canteens, no matter how much 'money' a camp prisoner had. The ration was reduced to a fifth of a loaf of poor quality bread per man, per day. From April 1915, the daily meals Gilbert could expect to receive consisted of the following: Breakfast (5:30 am) - Bowl of rice, barley or some sort of oatmeal, all of the poorest quality; Dinner (12:30 pm) - Bowl of soup made with vegetables and occasional fragments of meat (usually horseflesh or dried fish); Tea (6 pm) - Bowl of tea, coffee or rice. If tea or coffee was chosen then some 'bad' cheese or a foul-smelling tinned herring was sometimes offered to those with a strong stomach, able to avail themselves of it. (The soup on offer at dinner reportedly improved during the summer months, but could still not be called 'good'!)

Although bread was now almost unobtainable, apart from the daily ration, the camp canteen had quite a varied assortment of food available to buy. Margarine was usually always in stock, but anything from tinned milk, artificial honey, sardines and tinned herrings were plentiful, though only as the summer months appeared could fruit and salad vegetables be found on a prisoner's plate.

Since Gilbert and the other British prisoners had started arriving at Döberitz, various other nationalities, hostile to Germany, began to be housed in the camp, including Belgian, French and Russian troops. As the numbers continued to swell, the Germans decided to put all this manpower to use without openly contravening the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, which stated that prisoners could not be made to carry out work that directly helped the war effort, e.g. working in munitions factories. During the summer months of 1915, the Germans decided to start turning areas of the camp over for the training of their army recruits, and they obviously got billeted in the better quality huts. This did not impact on prisoner welfare too harshly though, as prisoner numbers began to thin at the same time as they began to be sent away to other areas, to work on farms and in factories.

The work done by prisoners in the camp was mostly the roughest and dirtiest forms of labouring, such as digging pits and trenches, hauling various things around in heavy wagons, cutting down trees and loading the trunks onto carts, cleaning out stables and latrines, plus any other demeaning work the Germans demanded. A working day in the beginning was usually about nine hours with every third day a 'rest' day, but rest days became fewer as the demands for labouring increased. There were some 'soft jobs' in the camp like orderly duties for German NCOs and postal sorting, which were eagerly sought after by the prisoners, but only a lucky few got to do this work.

In the spring of 1915 the 'farming system' began, whereby volunteers were requested from all nationalities in the camp for forming into parties to work away from Döberitz at farms, factories and mines. Those engaged in this work were generally well housed, fed and paid a very small wage, but they had to work very hard for these privileges, at least 12 hours a day. When not enough volunteers stepped forward on request, the prisoner NCOs were forced to choose men from their ranks.

Gilbert seemingly remained within the confines of the camp, keeping out of trouble and maintaining a quiet and smart appearance. But, after hearing reports of Russian prisoners escaping from farms, Gilbert began to take note of the Germans' activities and started plotting a way of escape.

For prisoners who didn't 'behave' themselves, the punishments ranged from stopping the receipt or despatch of letters and parcels, to more physical penalties which could be both brutal and severe. 'Tying up' was a feared punishment where an individual would be tied to a pole, his hands above his head with heels off the ground. There was no consideration for the weather, so for up to three hours the 'offending' prisoner would suffer loss of circulation as he endured the cold, rain or hot sun. Tying up could be the sentence for something as trivial as being caught smoking in the huts, and many of Gilbert's Navy colleagues fell foul of this.

'Flogging' was handed out to prisoners for misbehaviour like drunkenness (alcohol was often smuggled into the camp) and the punishment was inflicted whilst tied to a pole and stripped to the waist, no matter what the weather was like. The camp had punishment cells where offending

prisoners would be held for varying lengths of time, but usually not less than three days. The individual cells measured six feet square with only a plank of wood to lie on, no blankets and a daily ration of plain water (for the first three days) and poor quality bread.

Having noted the varying degrees of success and failure of Russian escape attempts, Gilbert wasn't going to try an escape of his own without some form of planning; he was helped in this aspect after obtaining a German atlas. Although the map of Germany wasn't too detailed, it nonetheless enabled him to decide that the best option after escape from Döberitz would be to head northwards to the Baltic and, with luck, obtain a boat and strike out to find a neutral ship at sea or make landfall in a neutral country. Electing to escape on his own, Gilbert did not expect a colleague to risk his life in the attempt. Those with whom he confided thought Gilbert foolhardy and that finding a suitable boat to procure was highly optimistic but, given his experience under sail, Gilbert remained confident. The only questions remaining were, when to escape and from where in the camp?

From the Royal Fusiliers regimental history during the winter of 1915-16:

"... the battle [Hulloch] had by this time practically died down, and the battlefield sank into that uneasy state of rest which covered the whole line. Winter had come, and the new battalions had time to grow accustomed to the realities of the war. Many of them amused themselves by erecting notice-boards near the German trenches when any particularly heartening piece of news was available. Thus, on December 10th [1915] the 10th Battalion placed a large notice-board with a report of a peace demonstration in Berlin on the German wire. Three months later the enemy retaliated with a German cartoon showing a Highlander gathering the German harvest. On the back was written, *"Come on and let us have drink at Döberitz, the newest British colony"*. This was found, neatly wrapped in oilskin near the battalion's wire; but unfortunately, the postmen were shot".

Döberitz to the Baltic (the 'great escape')

In August, a sudden transformation took place at Döberitz when the German Army began reclaiming the whole camp for recruit training and made plans for all the prisoners to be sent away to another camp at Dyrotz, several miles to the west. About 1,000 men of the Naval Brigades, including Gilbert, were to remain at Döberitz to perform the 'dirty work' around the camp. Realising that there was no prospect of an early end to the war, and that incarceration was to continue indefinitely, made up Gilbert's mind that he had to try and escape. Gilbert decided that September was a good time of year to break out, on account of the longer nights and possibilities of finding ripe wild fruit. He discounted trying to speed up distance covered via train journey as his German language skills were limited and he lacked the necessary passes so, though it was ambitious, he would endeavour to walk the 125 miles (as the crow flies) north to the Baltic. It was whilst the remaining prisoners at Döberitz were being moved to another part of the camp that Gilbert seized his chance.

The move of prisoners to the old camp with its tented accommodation began on Monday 30 August 1915 and was due to be completed the following Saturday. Gilbert observed that, although there were guards in both areas of the camp, there were only five guards in the movement area and that in certain places the fencing was just a single length of wire and easy to duck under. He then made haste to complete his preparations.

Having recently made a rucksack out of a canvas kitbag, after an unsuccessful attempt to 'acquire' one from a German worker, he packed a map, compass and flashlight inside the rucksack (the map was a tracing from the aforementioned atlas and the latter two items had been obtained from a German civilian). Gilbert had hoped to lay his hands on some pliers, but had no luck doing so. He would have to escape in clothes he had been wearing for some considerable time; these consisted of old black trousers supplied by the Germans, that were actually part of a prison uniform with the yellow stripes removed, a blue jersey and a brown cardigan jacket. He also had an old pair of navy gaiters that he blackened and decided that he would wear as much underclothing as possible and take a dark green light overcoat with him. He also packed a black silk scarf, woollen scarf, felt hat, spare pair of socks, knife, pencil, scissors, safety razor, shaving brush, soap, boot blacking and brush, hair comb, nail brush (suitable as a clothes brush), Vaseline[®] and boracic powder (for his feet), spare compass (of inferior quality to his other one), pocket mirror, two boxes of matches, needles and thread, three handkerchiefs, towel, boot-laces, string and wire, beer bottle (for water), two one-pound tins of Plasmon biscuits*, small piece of cheese, two small packets of chocolate and some meat lozenges. [* Plasmon biscuits comprise a dried milk compound and were considered a health food - Sir Ernest Shackleton made use of them during his 1902 Antarctic expedition. They are still available today and made in Italy].



A 'Plasmon' biscuit of the type Gilbert packed in his escape kit to help sustain him as he endeavoured to evade the enemy across Germany

Having carefully studied the enclosure wire, Gilbert felt a 'gap' existed in a dark area on the eastern side of the compound and as the daylight faded on the evening of Friday 3 September, he knew this was his last chance before all the prisoners were moved. Telling no-one this was the moment, and with his rucksack on his back, Gilbert began reconnoitring the area he wanted to break out from, without drawing attention to himself. At a time he noted to be 8:45 pm, and unseen by anyone, especially any guards, Gilbert slipped under the wire and crawled about 300 yards to reach cover in a nearby wood.

Knowing his absence would not be realised until 6:30 am the following morning, he had to make the best advantage of the first hours of freedom to distance himself from the camp.

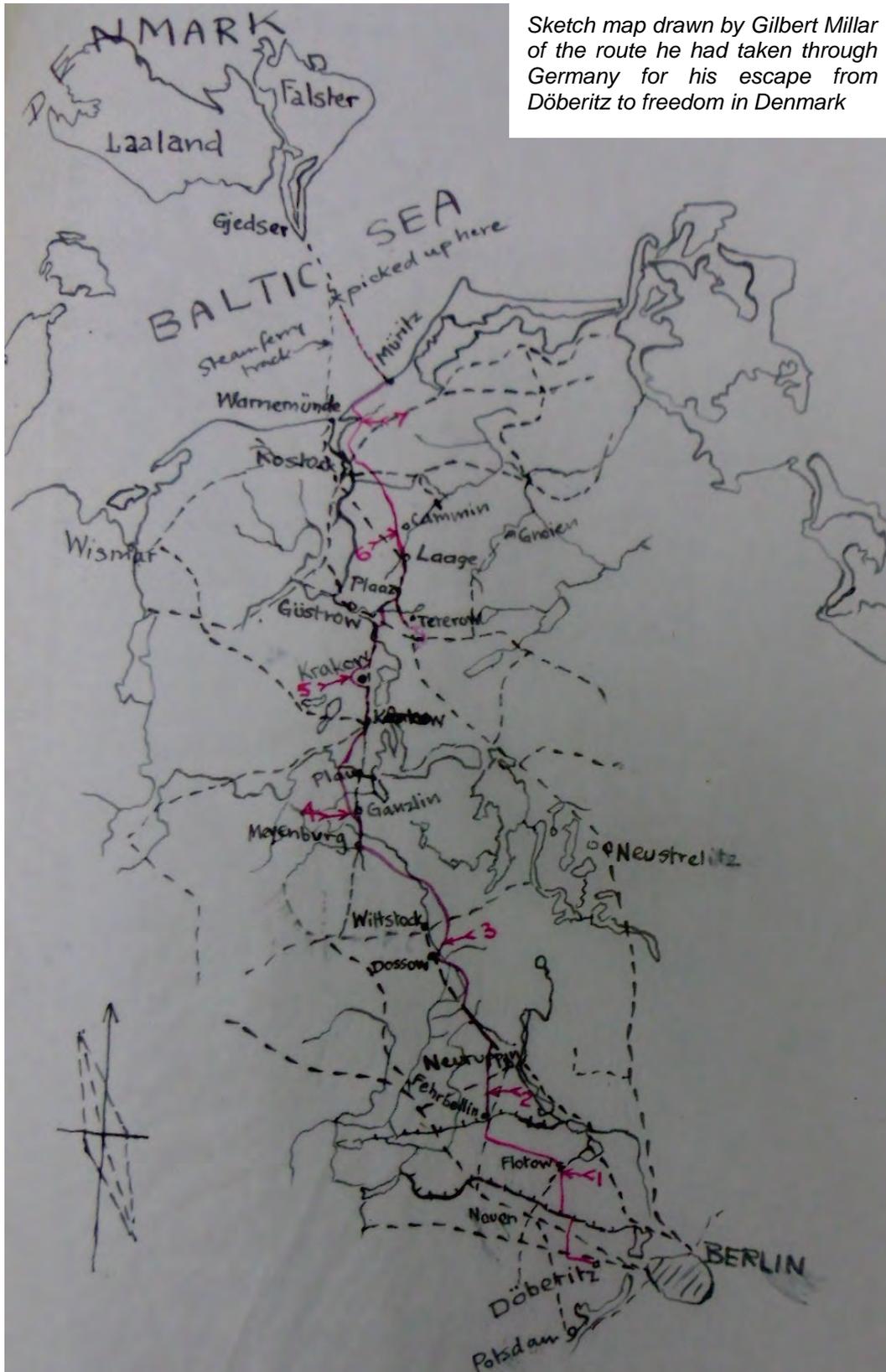
Gilbert's first main obstacle was to cross a railway line, which he found both well-lit and guarded, so decided to keep west of it on a parallel line for about three miles until he felt daring enough to approach the track to cross over. Crossing the railway track he discovered he had hit upon a junction, with several branches of track running down cuttings or on embankments, and he had no choice but to cross each in succession. Next up came two small canals, but he crossed these by bridge before reaching a main canal where had little choice but to walk westwards along its edge, through very wet four foot high grass, for well over a mile until he found a punt and made use of it to cross, but was mindful enough to push the punt back towards the other bank.

About 200 yards further on, Gilbert could see a bridge on which there appeared to be a sentry. On reaching a road he found it went away from the bridge in a northerly direction with woods on either side. Cautiously following the road, he covered about half a mile before reaching a crossroads. He stopped to look at a signpost when, suddenly, he heard footsteps so hastily dropped into some cover. He had to lie very still for half an hour as the sentry paced up and down, until fortunately a cart came along and its driver was challenged by the sentry. Gilbert took advantage of this distraction and stealthily crawled away through the wood, later reaching another crossroads which he passed over safely, electing to keep going north through the wood. Day was breaking as he reached a railway crossing at Flatow. Gilbert had covered 15 miles that first night.

Having remembered the advice given him by a Russian prisoner at Döberitz not to sleep in the woods because of foresters and shooting parties, Gilbert bedded down in the middle of a potato patch consisting of a lot of weeds. But, feeling too exposed, he moved to the shelter of a patch of young trees which was more suitable as it afforded some cover, yet the sun would still play on him and dry him off. Before he tried to get some sleep Gilbert decided he would have a shave! In the best traditions of the Royal Navy, he had grown a beard and moustache, so had not shaved since leaving England - but in deepest Germany, with only a little soap and water, he took the razor he carried to his face and, though finding it a laborious task, he removed his beard and moustache. Then he felt his feet becoming numb with cold, so emptied out his boots, wrung out his socks and rubbed some Vaseline[®] and boracic powder into his sore feet, before he eventually managed to fall asleep, and did so for much of the day even though he was aware of a man and woman at work 100 yards from where he lay.

Feeling alert again that evening, Gilbert tidied himself up and had a meal - he'd divided his rations into 15 portions so that one portion was equal to one day's ration. It consisted of five or six small biscuits, a mouthful of cheese and a small bar of chocolate per day, often supplemented by any fruit he could steal, normally pears and plums from a village garden, but not from isolated farms as they invariably had a large dog or two. As dusk fell, Gilbert headed into a nearby wood, crossed another railway line and struck out across the countryside for Fehrbellin, situated about 10 miles away. It was a dark night and started to rain as he tried to make his way across rough ground which slowed his progress. He came upon the railway line to Fehrbellin several miles further south than he intended so started to walk parallel to it before deciding to walk on the line itself to save his energy. He eventually reached Fehrbellin station just as it started to get light and he was desperately thirsty. Searching for a tap he eventually found a rainwater pipe and collected what drips he could. Remarkably, Gilbert then boldly walked straight up the main street into the village, climbing over gates and fences before coming upon

a good plum tree and took time to fill his pockets with the fruit. Deciding to press on for several more miles across country in the continuing rain he looked for shelter and found it in the form of a big stack of straw, some 20 feet high and roofed over. It was some distance from the nearest house and, though exhausted by this point, Gilbert managed after three attempts to get atop the stack, took off his wettest clothes and bedded down in the straw for a soft and ever so slightly warm sleep.



Waking in the early evening of 5 September, he set off northwards again at about 6:30 pm, but took a path to keep him a few miles west of the town of Neuruppin. He crossed a railway line then followed a branch line along the track itself as he felt quite safe to walk in this manner whilst it was dark. Stations generally had to be avoided before 10 pm, but after that time, until 5 am, all remained relatively quiet. No trains were heard and Gilbert could walk straight through a station to read the nameboard, trying to do so as quietly as possible without stirring local dogs.

About six miles before reaching the village of Dossow, Gilbert left the railway as his map told him that a river lay ahead and he didn't want to get caught on the wrong side of it. He thought it best to bypass the village a couple of miles to the east. However, he need not have been so cautious as, much further on, and beginning to feel tired, he reached a village and on checking the station sign found he was in Dossow. The time was 5:30 am and villagers were beginning to stir. Walking through the village, a door to one house opened just as Gilbert was walking by and a man came out with his bicycle. All Gilbert could think to do was say an anxious "*Guten Morgen*" [Good morning] and to his relief the man returned the greeting. Gilbert hurried out of the village and, once clear, sought shelter in some woods and turned in again for the day.

That evening, after his day of resting, Gilbert set off slightly earlier than usual and stopped at a mill pond for a drink and a fill-up. He could hear voices at the mill about 150 yards away but considered himself hidden by some reeds and was not unduly worried. Unsuccessfully trying to strain water through a handkerchief, Gilbert realised that a man and two children were coming in his direction from the mill, so he placed his things down and lay flat facing the water. To Gilbert's horror the man stopped behind him and said, "*Was wollen Sie hier?*" [What do you want here?]. All Gilbert could do was smile and reply with, "*Guten Abend*" [Good evening], but the man repeated his question. Gilbert responded with, "*Das macht nichts*" [It doesn't matter], hoping his accent would not betray him, but the inquisitive German asked quizzically, "*Das macht nichts?*" There then followed several seconds of silent strained staring at one another, before the German turned about and walked away. As soon as the man and the children were out of sight, Gilbert made off in the opposite direction towards the mill, strode past and away into the open countryside. Eventually coming to a road to the north of Wittstock, he set off along it for a few miles until reaching Meyenburg village just as the first rays of light appeared over the horizon. He followed the railway for a couple of miles then tried to rest up in a cabbage patch but couldn't get comfortable, so walked on another mile until reaching a young wood at Ganzlin where he bedded down more snugly. Looking at his map, Gilbert could see that he was just over halfway to the Baltic and with some self-satisfaction at the distance he'd covered on foot in four days and nights, he soon fell asleep.

As dusk fell on the evening of 7 September, Gilbert set off across country with the intention of passing four miles west of the village of Plau; en route he crossed a river next to a wooden bridge where he watered up and washed. Pressing on again he came to a railway line at Karow and followed it through the night until daylight returned just as he approached the town of Krakow am See. Gilbert later remembered it to be "... a lovely morning and the latter part of this walk was quite beautiful". Bypassing the town to the west he then hit upon a swamp area and, after some difficulty, eventually managed to get around that obstacle to find shelter in some woods.

Deciding to set off early before dusk he came to a main road but found many people walking about so decided that caution was the better part of valour (and progress) and took cover until darkness descended. Once on the move again he followed the railway line all night, but stopped at a small lineside hut, which he broke into and found "... a straw hat of the peculiar kind favoured by German navvies". He took this to wear in the hope he would look more like a 'local' and could pass other civilians during daylight hours with more confidence. Reaching the town of Laage as daylight was returning, Gilbert left the railway and walked on through the town towards Cammin and after about two miles decided to rest up in a wood.

Possibly getting a little lax after being 'on the run' for almost a week, he hadn't chosen the best cover and in the mid-morning two small boys stumbled upon Gilbert, but he pretended to be asleep. They exclaimed what sounded to Gilbert like "... *hinliegend*" [or perhaps "*untenliegend*" – lying down] before running off. Not wanting to be around should the boys return with some men, Gilbert departed in haste and after a mile felt he'd found a 'safer' spot and made his 'bed' there. Also finding a discarded beer bottle, he placed it into his rucksack for use as an extra water bottle. Gilbert set off that evening in the hope that he would reach the sea, but the distance proved to be longer than it appeared on his map. He continued, close to a river opposite the large town of Rostock, and eventually decided to stop and rest in a wood not far from the river mouth. It was now the morning of 10 September and Gilbert was nearly at the shores of the Baltic.

Eagerly waiting for dusk to settle, Gilbert started walking the remaining miles to the coast and struck the shore about two miles east of the river mouth. He found the shore to be sandy and backed by dense woods with heavy timber groynes at intervals and, after walking several miles along the coast, he came upon a groyne with a pile driver on it. Noticing a wooden hut at the top of the beach, Gilbert went to investigate and, shining his lamp through the window, he could see a table with cups and plates on it. Entering the hut he quickly helped himself to a welcome meal of 'Kriegsbrod' [war bread], caster sugar and cold coffee - the remains of the bread and sugar, along with some fragments of bacon and sausage he subsequently found, Gilbert packed into his rucksack. After walking another mile along the beach he spied a dark object and, hoping it was a boat, went to investigate, but walked slap-bang into two men sitting there. Pursued by their yelling, Gilbert quickly retraced his steps for a couple of hundred yards and dived into the woods. After fighting his way through the dense wood for about a mile he returned to the beach where, after covering another mile, he came upon some bathing tents and discovered, to his joy, two small skiffs of the type used back home on the River Thames. About 50 yards away was a house built up on pillars with an open cellar underneath, so Gilbert went to see if he could find some all-important sculls to use for one of the skiffs. He found the cellar to be full of large spars and timbers, and it took him 30 minutes of searching to find what he was looking for when eventually his flashlight picked out a pair of sculls and rowlocks, tucked up in the ceiling. To his relief, with all his scrambling about, no dog was heard to bark and no occupants in the house appeared to stir.

Choosing the skiff with the smaller beam, he dragged the 12-foot-long craft towards the water but, with his tiredness, he had difficulty actually launching the small vessel and, when he eventually got afloat he noticed it was a bit leaky, but fortunately there was a bailer. The time was about 1:30 am on 11 September 1915 as Gilbert set his course across the Baltic Sea to Denmark - he was not sorry to be leaving Deutschland.

The '*Prinsesse Alexandrine*' (freedom and the return to England)

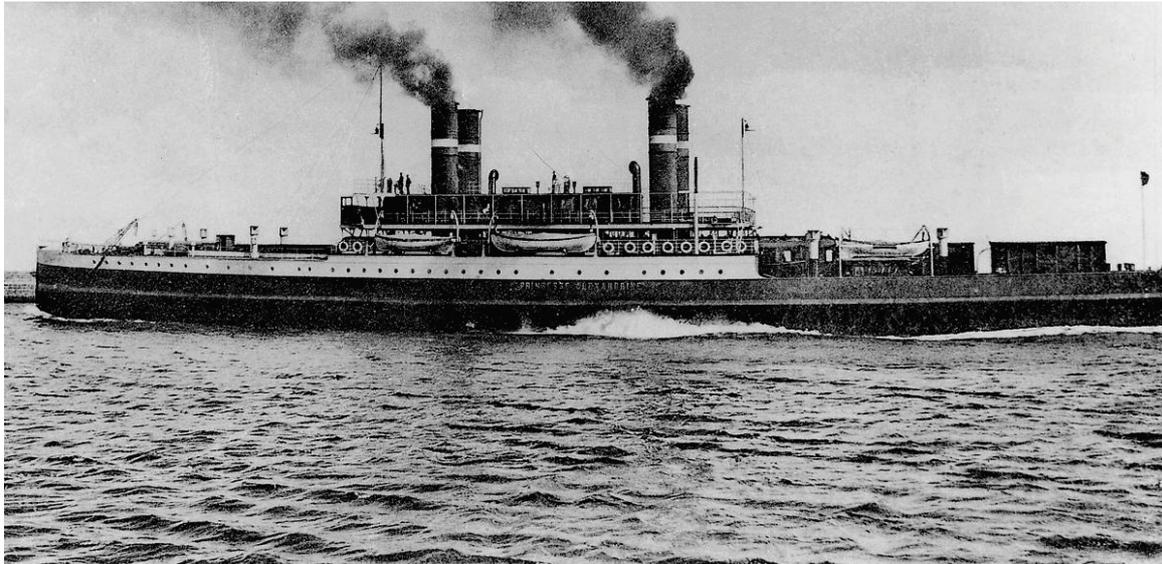
Knowing from his sketch map only the approximate position from where he had launched, Gilbert was nonetheless confident that Gedser, on the southern tip of the Danish island of Falster, lay directly across this stretch of sea at a distance of 22 miles. His pre-war sailing and navigation skills were now going to be put to very good use as he set his compass for N.30°W (true) and, thankful that he could see the heavens above, Gilbert began to steer by the stars. As he struck out, pulling hard on the sculls, Gilbert tried to make up some lost time as he had hoped to have set off earlier - to have waited until the following night was not an option as he had left 'tracks' and feared being caught when so near to total freedom.

Gilbert could allow himself a little reflection as he skimmed across the water in what were ideal conditions with only a light westerly breeze to battle against. His epic walk through northern Germany, about 150 miles long on his intended route, was more probably closer to 200 miles long on account of the various detours he had been forced to make. And, although he had escaped through a 'hostile' land, he'd had remarkably few encounters with the 'enemy' and thankfully none that showed a particular war-like attitude to him.

Getting further away from the German coastline, Gilbert surmised that there were five small patrol boats whose courses he could plot, thanks to the lights they carried. These appeared to comprise overlapping ovals that stretched to about six miles out to sea but, in his little skiff, Gilbert slipped through their 'net'. He also observed a ship whose searchlight swept across the sea at intervals away to the northeast, but he dismissed the idea of it causing him any problem to the course he was taking.

Maintaining his momentum with the sculls through the darkness, once daybreak came the patrol boats vanished from sight as did (in Gilbert's own words) "... *the hated Deutschland*". There then appeared across the water two small tramp steamers that slowly chugged their way ahead of his bows, so Gilbert pulled up for a moment to let them go by and whilst waiting he ate a little breakfast. Then, on the horizon, appeared a somewhat larger vessel. Recognising it to be the train ferry from Warnemünde and behind which there then appeared another steamer, Gilbert could sense that the first vessel would get rather too close to him. In making his plans for escape, he had hoped to obtain a timetable that might tell him whether the boats were German or Danish, but he hadn't managed to do so. As it got closer the bright colouring on the hull made Gilbert think it was more than likely a Danish boat but, not taking a chance, Gilbert tried to position himself to let the vessel go by. However, the ship kept altering course towards him and was soon bearing down on him. Only when within close proximity could Gilbert breath a small sigh of relief - it was flying the colours of Denmark.

Hailing the skipper as loudly as he could, Gilbert got assurances back that the ship was indeed Danish and was headed for Gedser, so the intrepid Englishman requested that he be taken on board whilst declaring himself an escaped British prisoner. To Gilbert's great delight and blessed relief his request was immediately granted and within moments he was stood on the deck of the '*Prinsesse Alexandrine*', as crewmembers hauled up the skiff - the time was 6:15 am and he learnt that he'd been picked up near to the halfway point across this stretch of the sea. (The '*Prinsesse Alexandrine*' was a side-wheel paddle steamer, originally built in 1894 and later rebuilt to increase the length of the ship and take two train tracks. The ship continued to ply its trade until 1933). There was only a goods train on the ship but no passengers and Gilbert was given a most hearty welcome on board. The steamer that was behind the '*Prinsesse Alexandrine*' had passed by just as Gilbert was being taken aboard the Danish vessel and he could see that it was German - another lucky escape.



The Danish steamer Prinsesse Alexandrine that picked up Gilbert from the Baltic Sea

The '*Prinsesse Alexandrine*' eventually docked at Gedser behind the German steamer and, in a moment of light-hearted jesting, the captain had Gilbert's skiff sent over to the German boat with compliments and thanks! Gilbert had time to reference a chart and determined that he had actually launched off from the German coast at Müritz, several miles east of Warnemünde. Danish police then came aboard the '*Prinsesse Alexandrine*' to take charge of Gilbert and, stepping onto Danish soil, he was effectively a free man. He was placed in quarantine for two days at Gedser before being taken to Copenhagen and kept for four days in the Øresundshospitalet (an epidemic hospital). Having survived on scant rations for over a week and expending a lot of effort and energy during his escape from captivity, Gilbert had lost about two stones in weight, but on the whole felt in good health and just needed some sound rest and full plates of food to overcome his general weariness. With the doctors satisfied that he was suffering no ill-effects from his incredible escape, Gilbert was released into the care of the British Consul who soon fitted out this 'new British hero' with some smart clothes and made arrangements for his return home to England. From all accounts it appears that Gilbert was the first British serviceman to escape via Denmark.

Gilbert was directed to Bergen, then onwards for a journey across the North Sea to Newcastle. Throughout his time in Denmark, he was struck by the kindnesses shown him by the Danes with whom he came into contact and it gladdened him to know how warm the feelings were of the Danish people towards the British. Gilbert safely arrived in the port of Newcastle and stepped onto home soil on 23 September, just 20 days after making his escape - an astonishing feat.

PART THREE

Eastbourne-Calshot-Cranwell (taking to the skies)

Gilbert's arrival back in England was not unexpected as, soon after he 'landed' in Denmark, he had sent a telegram to his elder brother, Edric, who worked as a civil servant in the Treasury. Thus his family were in excited anticipation of seeing him again, once he was released from another period of

'quarantine'. Also taking a very keen interest in this escaped PoW were Gilbert's 'masters' at the Admiralty. They soon realised that they had a very talented and intelligent individual in the lower ranks of their Navy and, after an initial de-briefing, requested that Gilbert write accounts of both his escape and his observations of life within Germany and its military forces. After writing his accounts in very great detail, including a neatly drawn map of Döberitz camp, he submitted them. They soon found their way to many naval departments where they were widely lauded. In late October 1915, Gilbert received a letter at his Heathdown home:

"My Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty have perused with much interest the report prepared by you on the Prisoners Camp at Döberitz, and I am to convey to you Their appreciation of the ability displayed in its compilation and of the close observation and resource which alone can have enabled you to collect the necessary data.

By Command of Their Lordships"

What their Lordships weren't going to allow was to have Gilbert sent back into the lower ranks as a Signaller. On learning of his desire to follow an aeronautical path, there was little in the way of obstacles placed in front of Gilbert to prevent him setting out on his way to the next stage of his remarkable 'war'.

Obviously officer material, Gilbert received a commission as a Lieutenant in the RNVR on 28 October 1915. By happy coincidence, Gilbert's younger brother Ion was home in early November, after returning from fighting on the Western Front, to take up a commission in the East Surrey Regiment. This, coupled with Gilbert receiving his commission, was cause for much added celebration at Heathdown.

So that Gilbert could pursue his desire to become a pilot, he was granted secondment from the RNVR for 'air duties' and underwent training towards gaining his aviator's certificate from the Royal Aero Club (RAeC). At this time, a potential pilot was required to pay for his own training, even though it was to the ultimate benefit of the military, but grants were available depending on personal circumstances. Whilst Gilbert awaited notice to begin his flying training, he served as a staff officer in a department run by a 'Mr Booth'. What this work entailed exactly is not known, but it was likely to have been administrative.

Gilbert had to wait until early February 1916 before he was instructed to arrive on the airfield at Eastbourne to begin his flying training. Originally established in 1909 upon the formation of the Eastbourne Aviation Company, the facilities at the airfield were taken over by the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) to train aspiring young men keen to take on the thrills and perils of flying. The RNAS was the flying arm of the Royal Navy and came into existence in July 1914, although initially it was considered to be the Naval Wing of the British Army's Royal Flying Corps (RFC). In August 1915, the RFC became the flying branch of the army with the RNAS an *"integral part of the Royal Navy"*. Within the RNAS, Gilbert's equivalent rank was that of Flight Commander.



Maurice Farman biplane



Short 184 Seaplane

In mid-March 1916, after successfully attaining the minimum 15 hours of solo flying, Gilbert took his Royal Aero Club flying test in a Maurice Farman biplane (which incorporated a 'pusher' engine behind the pilot). He passed the test to be awarded his RAeC Aviator's Certificate Number 2555.

With the prospect of active service again, in mid-May Gilbert moved on to the Naval Air Station at Calshot in Southampton Water, for further flying training on seaplanes and flying boats configured for convoy protection and anti-submarine duties. Aircraft types in use included the Short 184 Seaplane and the Wight Seaplane.



Gilbert's Royal Aero Club records stating his certificate number 2555 and the particulars of his solo flight that earned him the qualification as a pilot

2555.	
MILLAR, Gilbert Henry	
Heathdown, Hampstead Heath, N.W.	
Born	2nd June 1884 at London
Nationality	British
Rank, Regiment, Profession	Lieut. R.N.V.R.
Certificate taken on	Maurice Farman Biplane
At	Royal Naval Air Station, Eastbourne
Date	15th March 1916.

Another move for Gilbert occurred at the end of June when he transferred to Cranwell in Lincolnshire, which was the RNAS Central Depot and Training Establishment under the command of Commodore Godfrey Paine CB, MVO. It had only officially opened in April to begin accepting pilots for graduation, and through the early summer the camp started to take further shape with increasing accommodation and a hospital being built along with a series of boiler houses. In true naval fashion, the RNAS ran its own bakery and butchery and soon the camp was said to be "humming like a ship". Under a 'General Memorandum' issued for Cranwell, it decreed that "all officers under instruction in aeroplanes, kite balloons and airships are to graduate as pilots at Cranwell".

The memorandum was strictly specific about the standards expected of pilots no matter how experienced they were, as all were to complete a finishing course at Cranwell before graduation. Any officer under the rank of Squadron Commander would have to requalify periodically. After graduation, a pilot would then have to spend 14 days practising gunnery and bomb-dropping at Freiston aerodrome near Boston on the Lincolnshire coast. Afterwards, they would be appointed to a Home Station to gain further experience before any possible appointment to a posting abroad. The memorandum also stated that: "Officers who show lack of zeal and insufficient progress in their instructions, or who, in the opinion of the Commanding Officer of the Training Establishment, are not likely to become good pilots, will be liable to discharge from the Service".

Gilbert had nothing to fear from that last statement as he spent a glorious summer flying a variety of aircraft that included machines manufactured by Avro, Bleriot, Curtiss, Farman and the Royal Aircraft Factory. Experience in the air was gained from the advanced training that included cross-country flying, navigation, wireless telegraphy and aerial photography. Flying was yet another example of Gilbert's excellent abilities, albeit there was probably some luck involved. Fatal air accidents were a regular occurrence in the fragile wood and canvas aeroplanes and the tragic statistics recorded that more aircrew were losing their lives in training accidents than in actual operational duties or air combat against the enemy. During the course of the war, from when Cranwell opened, there would be almost 50 flying-related deaths at the station.

Despite the harsh realities of training for war, the establishment of the flying station at Cranwell led to increased social and domestic activities in the neighbouring communities who took a keen interest in the variety of aircraft to be seen in the sky and some of the antics performed by certain daredevil pilots. At Skegness, the flights from the Freiston detachment became a daily exciting feature for those on the ground, where one notable pilot (said to be Flight Lieutenant Ray Hinchliffe) would perform aerobatics and finish his routine by dropping a box of chocolates on the end of a miniature parachute, with instructions for them to be taken to a certain schoolmistress in the town.

A set of instructions, possibly issued to Gilbert as an airman with the RNAS, were: "Instructions Regarding Precautions to be Taken in the Event of Falling into the Hands of the Enemy". These were

'Secret' and were not to be carried in aircraft, but instruction number 28 might well have bemused Gilbert, which stated: *"Don't be downhearted if captured. Opportunities for escape will present themselves. Keep your eyes and ears open for any information which you think may be of value should you succeed in escaping"*.

At the same time that Gilbert had been flying seaplanes at Calshot, his brother Ion had completed his officer training and had received the order for a return to France as a Second Lieutenant to take on 'Fritz' once again in the trenches of the Western Front. For their mother, it was a new time of worry, with her beloved Gilbert performing 'derring-do' in the sky and her treasured Ion heading back into the hell of trench warfare.

The Somme (Gilbert's brother Ion)



Gilbert's younger brother Ion Millar

Ion Millar, whose civil trade was that of a merchant, like his late father, had followed his older brother Gilbert in joining up for King and Country very soon after the outbreak of the war. At the end of August 1914, he enlisted, aged 27, as a Private with the 10th (Service) Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (unofficially known as the 'Stockbrokers'). After training, he embarked for the Western Front in July 1915 as part of the British Expeditionary Force in the knowledge that his brother was a PoW in Germany.

Ion and all the other Stockbrokers embarked on a troopship at Folkestone and landed at Boulogne on the evening of 30 July and within 10 days had travelled forward to near the frontline at Armentières. Within range of the German guns, Ion and his comrades spent much time digging trenches and receiving instruction on how to 'survive' on the frontline. On 25 August, the Battalion marched eight miles to Bailleul, and two days later a slow, dirty and cramped train took the men to Doullens.

After travelling through more French towns and villages, the Stockbrokers reached the frontline at Foncquevillers on 3 September and the next day were in the trenches facing the enemy and their bullets. After one week of introduction to this hell, the battalion was relieved and left the trenches filthy and exhausted. But after only a few days of rest, they were back again in those same trenches during the latter part of September.

The weeks that followed through the month of October continued in a similar pattern of one week in the frontline and then a week pulled back away from the lethal shell and gunfire to rest and reorganise. Ion evidently impressed his commanding officers as he was interviewed and then recommended for a commission, and was given orders to return to England where he arrived at the start of November.

Successfully completing his officer training, Ion was transferred to the East Surrey Regiment and reported to the 1st Battalion on the frontline near Arras on 29 May 1916. Two days later, Ion faced up to German troops who were throwing hand and rifle grenades towards the trenches occupied by his battalion. The British replied in kind, thankfully suffering no reported casualties from the enemy's close-quarter weapons - the trenchlines here were too close for comfort. The battalion was relieved at the start of June and were billeted behind the lines at Agney, where they spent a week catching up on rest and carrying out training tasks. They were then ordered back to the frontline to take over a sector in the Arras region. The sector was usually accessed via a notorious point called 'Dead Man's Corner' near Porte Baudimout, so-called on account of regular enemy bombardments of this area, so an alternative route was advised and taken.

The week on the frontline consisted of keeping one's head down and regular patrols into 'No Man's Land' until relief arrived again and the battalion took billets at Arras, before moving to Wanquetin. The time out of the frontline was spent on fatigues, parades, lectures and yet more training. As the end of June came, the British High Command finalised a plan they were convinced would lead to a major breakthrough on the Western Front.

On 1 July, the Battle of the Somme began, but Ion's battalion was not involved and thus are not numbered among the 60,000 British casualties on the opening day of the attack. The huge numbers of dead and wounded was a high price for so little gain made along the frontline where the opening offensive took place. The next day, however, the battalion was ordered to leave Wanquetin for Beaudricourt but only made it as far Le Cauroy before returning to Wanquetin on 8 July. During the week that followed, the battalion was constantly on the move and usually marching in poor weather, but on 17 July were ordered to the frontline at Bécordel-Bécourt to prepare for an assault on enemy positions. An instruction was issued to the officers that they were to dress like the men and carry rifles and bayonets, which had to be 'borrowed' on account that such weapons were not standard issue to the officer class. The original plan changed late on 19 July when the battalion was ordered to relieve hard-pressed British units at Longueval, where they took position in the early hours of 20 July. Here they observed an attack on German positions at Delville Wood by a Suffolk Regiment that proved disastrous, with large numbers of casualties as men were mown down by enemy machine-guns.

The East Surrey Battalion held their position on the line whilst under frequent enemy shellfire, making repairs to the trenches they occupied and burying numerous dead from earlier battles. In the process, they suffered casualties of their own, numbering three officers and 39 other ranks. For the next two days, Ion and his fellow comrades sat under continued enemy bombardment and the number of casualties continued to mount. An order was then received that the battalion was to take part in a divisional attack to capture Delville Wood which remained in enemy hands after the previous failed assault several days before. Their task was to take two particular enemy strongpoints, one of which was thought to hold the machine-guns that wrought such devastation on the men of the Suffolk's.

Preceded by a 'friendly' bombardment, the assault started at 3:15 am when a section of the battalion struck forward to take the first strongpoint. But straight away the commanding officer and his Sergeant were cut down with serious wounds and, with the arrival of daylight, the objective proved impossible to approach. Greater success was achieved against the second strongpoint which was captured and several machine-guns were put out of action, with about three dozen enemy troops killed during the struggle. Unfortunately, the main attack on Delville Wood met with determined German defence and the attack could not be sustained. The British forces had to fall back to their starting positions. Ion's battalion paid another high price, suffering over 100 casualties from their part in the attack.



A view of the pitiful Delville Wood battlefield – known to those who fought there as 'Devil's Wood'

For the next two days enemy shellfire rained down on the British positions and there were casualties to the men of the East Surrey Battalion, but they stayed steadfast in their trenches. Another attack was launched by British units against the area of Delville Wood on 26 July and, the next day, Ion's battalion was ordered forward to occupy German trenches now overrun by the British advance. The German response was continued shelling and the East Surrey Battalion continued to suffer further casualties from bomb blast and red hot shrapnel. 28 July was spent consolidating the captured positions whilst still under bombardment which was growing in intensity. Despite the unimaginable terror, the men were commended by a Divisional Commander who stated: *"The way in which the troops held onto their positions in spite of heavy shelling had a great effect on the general situation"*.

That night the battalion was ordered to occupy a position in the northwest corner of Delville Wood which had just recently been taken from the enemy. All these movements were carried out as shells continued to rain down, causing many wounded casualties who couldn't be evacuated. More wounded lay where they had fallen in shell holes, calling out for help and water. Many were screaming in pain, with some having been stuck there for several days. To the frustration of those in the trenches, it was almost impossible to reach the wounded or get them water as the shelling was relentless.



East Surrey Regimental Colours with the 'Somme 1916-18' battle honour. It hangs in All Saint's Parish Church, Kingston-upon-Thames

On the afternoon of 29 July 1916, a new order was received to attack enemy posts near Longueval, where a pre-attack bombardment was promised to take out any machine-guns. But as the men advanced they were met by withering fire and there were heavy casualties. The attack faltered and the men withdrew to their original positions after dusk. The Regimental history notes the day as *"one of the most trying days experienced by the Battalion during the war"*. The recorded casualties suffered by the 1st Battalion East Surrey Regiment since 27 July totalled nearly 350 officers and other ranks. One of the East Surrey officers who failed to return from that last attack was 29-year-old Second Lieutenant Ion Millar, apparently killed as the attack opened. He was buried that night between the lines of the opposing forces - the only items recovered in his possession were a field message book and some trench maps. His Commanding Officer paid tribute by writing, *"He was killed while leading his men with the most conspicuous gallantry. The regiment has lost a very brave young Officer who was beloved by his men and who, had he been spared, would have rendered invaluable service"*.

On 2 August, Mrs Millar received the following Post Office Telegram at Heathdown: *"Deeply regret to inform you that 2 Lt I K Millar 1st East Surrey Regt was killed in action July 29th. The Army Council expresses their sympathy"*.

Ion's body was never recovered from his grave on the battlefield and thus he is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial on the Somme, that records over 72,000 British and South African soldiers who have no known resting place. [CWGC records erroneously record Ion's death as 27/07/16].



East Surrey Regiment memorial gates – All Saint's Parish Church, Kingston-upon-Thames (These are situated south of the church adjacent to Kingston Market)

Eastchurch (designing a fighter plane)

As the Millar family continued to come to terms with the loss of their Ion in such tragic circumstances, Gilbert still had his duties to perform. Perhaps by virtue of his scientific background and excellence in mathematics, after his graduation from Cranwell in August 1916 he was posted to the RNAS Experimental Flight at Eastchurch on the Isle of Sheppey. Here, he was commanded by an Australian called Harry Busteed. Eastchurch had a Naval Flying School much the same as at Eastbourne where Gilbert first took to the air and there were also flying units based on the station for home defence. Busteed, having reviewed Gilbert's academic excellence, gave him the challenging role of Chief Technical Officer - aeronautical problems would be presented to Gilbert and the team, and it would be their job to find a solution.

With the introduction of the aeroplane into warfare, its development by the standards of the day was rapid, and an ever-expanding range of roles were filled by an ever-growing variety of aircraft with increasing superior performance. Some developments required extreme and radical measures, either because there was little time to find a well-engineered solution, or a particular form of flight had not been tried before. The Royal Navy might have had its air service, but the aircraft were either land-based, or of the type that could land on water yet required support from shore bases. Taking aircraft to sea aboard ships was another matter entirely.

Ships of the Royal Navy when operating out across the North Sea were often observed and harassed by Zeppelin airships and, being too far from land, it was not possible to intercept the enemy with fighter planes (aircraft carriers did not exist then). Although it was starting to prove possible to carry and/or launch an aircraft or seaplane from a ship, by use of a crane or by building a section of decking over the gun turret of a warship, it was not possible to recover the aircraft directly back onto the ship. On return, the aircraft either had to ditch close to the ship where, hopefully, a recovery of both pilot and aircraft would be successful; or, as in the case of a seaplane landing on the water, it had to be craned back on-board if sea conditions allowed.

Though there was a longer planned view to develop ships that could launch and recover aeroplanes, the Admiralty needed a quicker solution and in 1916 tabled the following requirement for *"a small single seater fighter landplane intended to fly off short platforms on the forecastle of the Royal Navy's destroyers and other small ships to provide a widely distributed airship interceptor"*. This requirement found its way to the RNAS Experimental Flight at Eastchurch and Busteed presented it to Gilbert. A man who only two years previously was caught up in the disaster at Antwerp, was now to design and build a fighter plane for the Admiralty. As was often the case, these sorts of requirements from Higher Command were open to other designers, so Gilbert faced competition to have his eventual design selected.



The 'Eastchurch Kitten' – a fighter plane designed by Gilbert

The type of aircraft Gilbert would seek to produce had to be 'diminutive' and light, with a small engine able to lift a man and a loaded fixed machine gun to a sufficient height that it could shoot down enemy airships, and then still have the range to safely deliver the pilot back to his ship (after ditching) or set down on land if within reach.

Gilbert threw himself keenly into the work for this little fighter plane and, in the months that followed through to the spring of 1917, a flying machine gradually took shape from the drawing board to the workshop. But, in March 1917, Harry Busteed was ordered to the Marine Experimental Aircraft Depot at Port Victoria on the Isle of Grain. Showing faith in Gilbert and his work, Busteed took his Chief Technical Officer and the part-built fighter with him to Port Victoria on the River Medway, and the work continued in the Experimental Construction Depot.

At the depot, Gilbert found some competition to his design in the form of another little fighter plane designated the PV7 (Port Victoria design number 7), and christened the 'Grain Kitten'. Having arrived from Eastchurch, it naturally followed that Gilbert's machine would be designated the PV8 and called the 'Eastchurch Kitten'. The competition was slightly ahead of Gilbert's efforts and the Grain Kitten first took to the air in June 1917, but its performance was a little disappointing. Events elsewhere however were also moving on apace, and the Royal Navy was putting much resource into a heavily modified ship called '*HMS Furious*'. The ship boasted a flight deck from which aircraft could take off, but it was the landing phase back onto the deck that was still causing much difficulty, especially with the vessel ploughing through the water. In June, Gilbert was ordered to drop his work on the Eastchurch Kitten and report for duty with *HMS Furious*, once he had completed an observer's course, which he duly did at Eastchurch, and qualified as an Observer Lieutenant.

Despite Gilbert's departure from Port Victoria, work did not stop on the Eastchurch Kitten and eventually, in September 1917, the small fighter biplane was ready for flight testing. It looked so diminutive, one could be forgiven in thinking it could be picked up and launched like a paper aeroplane. The machine measured less than 15½ feet in length, with a wingspan of just under 19 feet, and stood on its wheeled undercarriage no higher than 5 feet and 2 inches. It weighed 340 pounds (empty), was powered by a 35 hp ABC Motors Ltd Gnat air-cooled two-cylinder engine, and its armament consisted of a single 0.303 inch Lewis machine gun fixed to the upper wing, that was offset slightly to starboard.



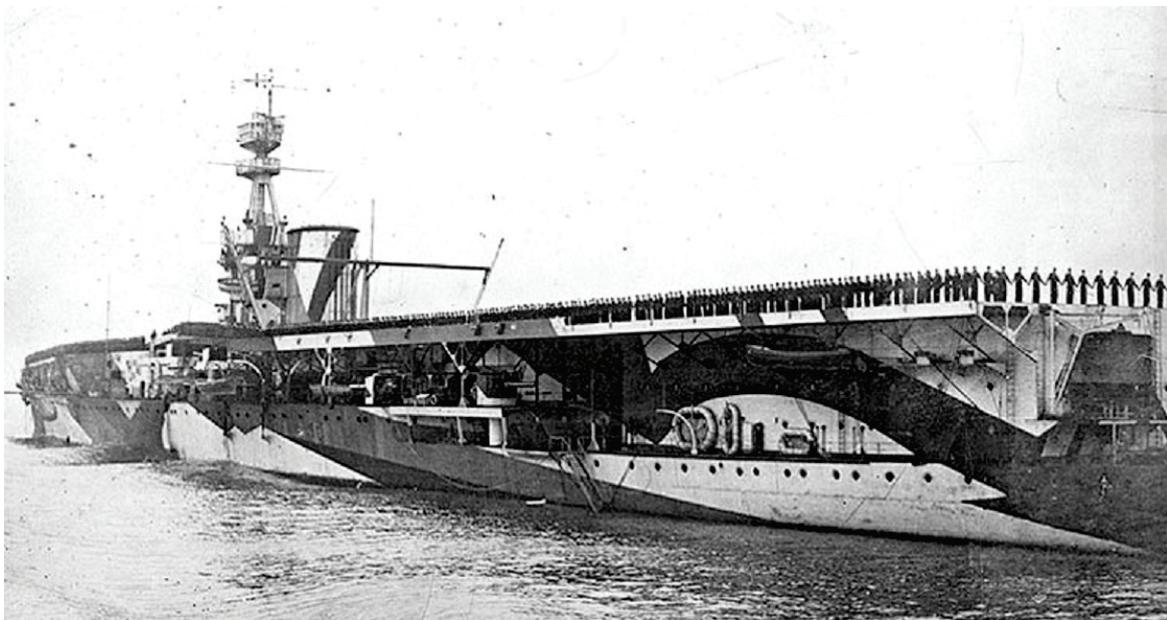
The Eastchurch Kitten takes to the air

The Eastchurch Kitten, resplendent in standard day fighter camouflage and allocated the serial number N540, was first flown on 7 September 1917. In flight tests Gilbert's 'Kitten' managed 95 mph and could attain almost 15,000 feet in altitude. The aircraft was initially found to be unstable, so was modified with a small fixed tailplane and revised elevators. It was subsequently found to have good handling in the air, afforded a satisfactory view for the pilot and was considered to be a superior machine to the Grain Kitten. The one main concern about the design, however, was its fragility, and it

was felt it could not sustain too many flights. Unfortunately, due to the consistent unreliability of the Gnat engine and the progress of flying on *HMS Furious*, the Admiralty gradually lost interest in the little fighter planes. It is perhaps also a shame that there is no record of Gilbert ever taking the controls of his aircraft. In fact, 'his' machine was disassembled to be shipped to America for further development work, but its actual fate is unknown.

***HMS Furious* and East Fortune (guarding the Grand Fleet)**

Gilbert arrived on *HMS Furious* on 25 July 1917, which at this time was anchored at Scapa Flow in the Orkneys. The ship itself was originally laid down in June 1915 and built at Newcastle upon Tyne to be a *Courageous*-class battlecruiser. *HMS Furious* was launched in August 1916 with an overall length of nearly 900 feet and a normal displacement of 19,500 tons. Before completion, the ship was modified with a hangar on the forecastle in place of the front turret over which a 160-foot wooden forward flight deck known as a 'flying-off deck' was built. There was no original provision for a proper landing deck as the funnel and superstructure were still in place. Commissioned into Royal Navy service during June 1917, the complement of *HMS Furious* consisted of almost 740 officers and ratings plus several RNAS personnel, including Gilbert.

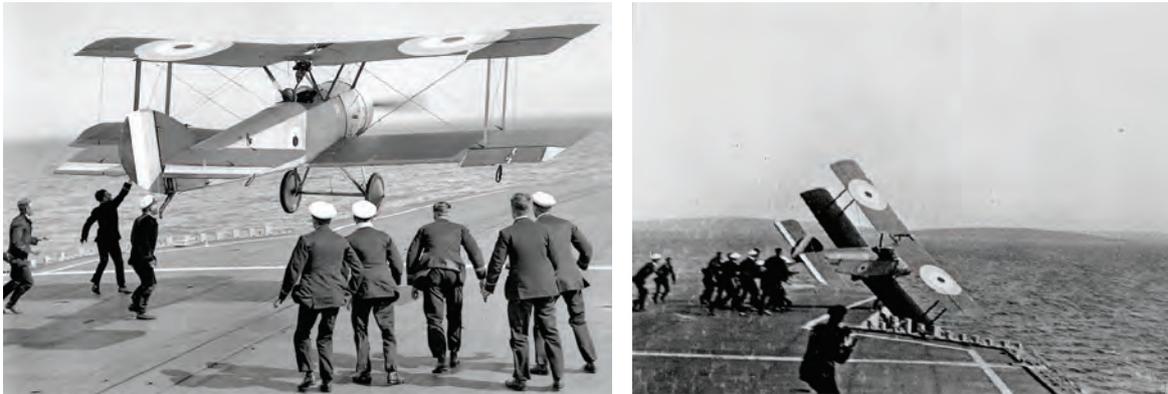


HMS Furious seen painted in 'dazzle' camouflage on the hull

The aircraft on board *HMS Furious* had to be craned onto the deck and, for the first trials, consisted of three Short 184 Seaplanes and five Sopwith Pups. Officially called a 'Sopwith Scout', the 'Pup' was a fighter used to great effect by both the RNAS and the RFC over the Western Front, but was becoming outclassed by new German Air Service fighters. However, its docile flying characteristics made it ideal for experimental carrier deck flying. The fact that the Royal Navy could begin operating 'normal' fighter planes from ships was another death-knell to Gilbert's 'Kitten'.

A brave individual, Squadron Commander Edwin Dunning DSC from South Africa, was endeavouring to successfully land an aircraft on the flying-off deck of *HMS Furious* whilst at sea. Dunning had to manoeuvre around the funnel and superstructure before touching down, which risked causing turbulence. Gilbert was in all likelihood a witness when, on 2 August, Dunning made the first successful attempt to land on a moving ship when he touched down at the controls of a Pup, though deck crew had to physically grab the aircraft at the point of touchdown to prevent it going over the side. Buoyed by this success, Dunning took off to repeat the endeavour five days later and, after another successful landing, took off again. But as he tried to land, Dunning was reportedly unhappy with his approach, waved away the deck crew and opened the throttle of the Pup to go around and attempt the landing again. Disaster followed immediately as the engine faltered and the aircraft fell and landed heavily on the starboard wheel. The Pup swung off in that direction before any of the deckhands could grab the aircraft and it fell off the deck and plunged into the sea. There was no sign of Dunning and it took about half an hour to hoist the broken Pup from the sea. Tragically, they found

the South African pilot still strapped in the cockpit - he had seemingly been knocked unconscious and drowned.



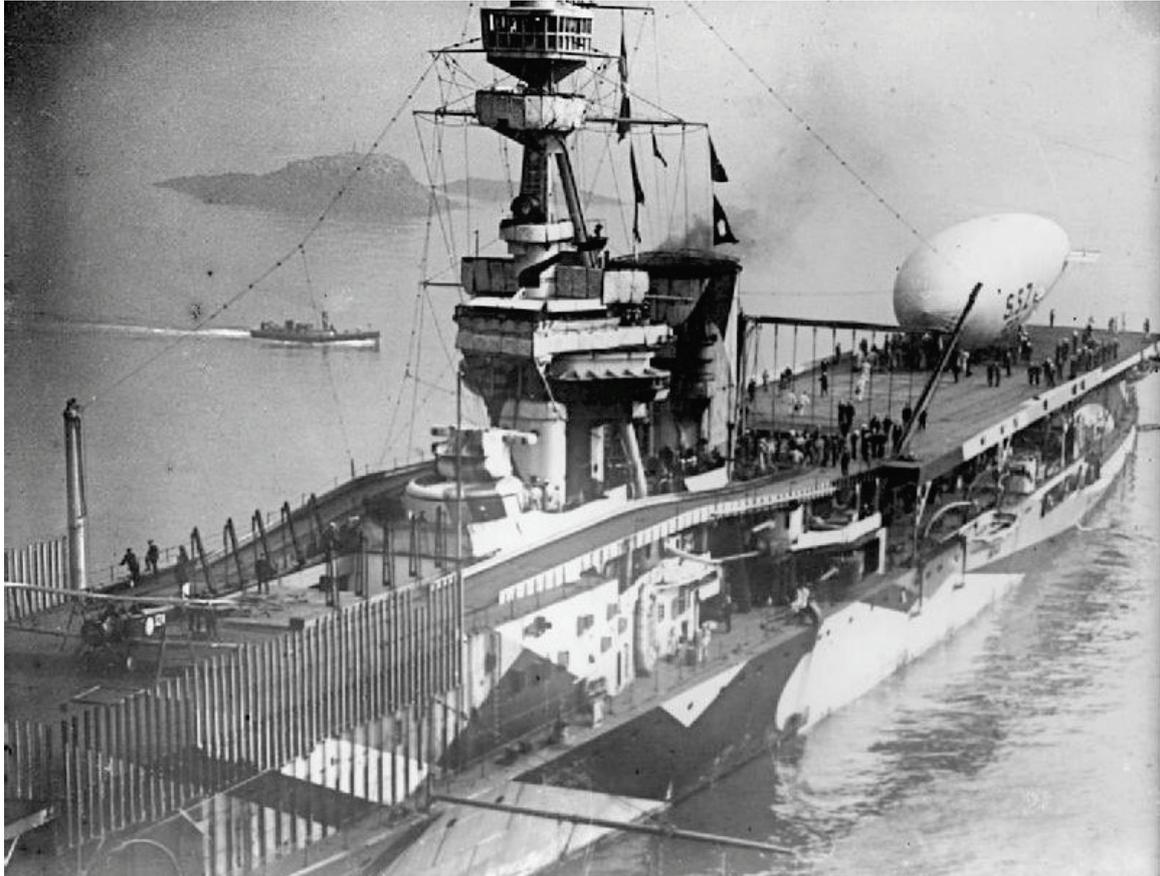
Left: Squadron Commander Dunning makes the first successful landing on HMS Furious in a Sopwith Pup (note deck hands 'grabbing' the aircraft to stop it rolling on touchdown) | Right: The moment of Dunning's later fatal accident as the Pup goes over the side of the ship and into the sea

It was decreed that the deck arrangement was unsatisfactory for operational flying, so test flying was halted and *HMS Furious* sailed for Rosyth on the Firth of Forth. This would be the vessel's home port for the remainder of the war as part of the Grand Fleet. Elsewhere, it is recorded that, on 21 August 1917, Flight Sub-Lieutenant Bernard Arthur Smart, took off in a Pup from a platform on the cruiser *HMS Yarmouth* and managed to intercept and shoot down Zeppelin L23 at 7,000 feet near the Danish coast. Smart had to subsequently ditch into the sea, but he was rescued by the crew of the destroyer *HMS Prince*. For his great exploit in being the first airman to destroy a Zeppelin after launching from a moving ship, Smart was awarded a Distinguished Service Order and during the following month he was posted to serve aboard *HMS Furious*.

Flying as an observer from *HMS Furious*, and usually within sight of the magnificent Forth Rail Bridge, Gilbert often took to the air with a young 19-year-old naval pilot, Flight Sub-Lieutenant Jack McCleery from Belfast. It is recorded, for example, that on 18 September 1917 they took off in a Short seaplane, but had to return after 40 minutes because the wind became too strong and made flight conditions too bumpy. They flew together again five days later for an even shorter flight in another Short seaplane that had to be delivered from *HMS Furious* to *HMS Engadine*, a seaplane carrier converted from a cross-Channel steamer. But because the engine was 'popping' very badly, McCleery decided instead to taxi the faltering aircraft across the stretch of water. After arrival, Gilbert and McCleery had lunch on the *HMS Engadine*, before disembarking and walking several miles from Rosyth docks to Charlestown. There was no picket boat available to fetch them straight back to *HMS Furious*, so they took tea at a nearby hotel before help came via *HMS Glorious*, an unmodified sister ship to *HMS Furious* that eventually helped them to return to their home ship.

In mid-October 1917, the Admiralty learnt that there were threatening German ship movements that might possibly herald a surface raid of some kind, so the Grand Fleet commander, Admiral Sir David Beatty, gave orders for most of his cruisers and destroyers to put to sea and search for the enemy. *HMS Furious*, being assigned to the 1st Cruiser Squadron, was detached and sent to patrol a specific area of the North Sea, but with instructions to return before darkness settled. Despite the screen of British warships, two German light cruisers slipped through a gap and attacked a Danish convoy and the British destroyer escort during the morning of 17 October causing great loss. Learning of the engagement too late, an attempt to intercept the escaping German warships failed.

After this brief spell of action, *HMS Furious* returned to the builders' dockyard in November for further modifications, which saw the rear gun turret removed and another hangar built with 300 foot of decking installed over the top to act as a landing deck. Elevators were installed so that aircraft could be sent down to, or retrieved from, the hangars. The funnel and superstructure were still intact, so a narrow strip of decking was laid to enable aircraft to pass from the landing deck to the flying-off deck. It wasn't until March 1918 that *HMS Furious* was returned to Royal Navy service resplendent in striking 'dazzle' camouflage paintwork over the complete hull, intended not for concealment, but to make it difficult for an enemy to estimate range, speed and heading of the ship.



A view of the layout of the flight decks on HMS Furious after the modifications. Note the lowered elevator platform at left and the connecting strips of deck between the flying off and landing decks

The last flight (a tragic end)

Whilst *HMS Furious* was in dock for the major work, the flying personnel were temporarily shore-based in billets at Dunbar on the East Lothian coast. Most days, they had to make their way by Edinburgh train to East Fortune aerodrome to enable them to keep up their proficiency in the air. The winter months in the North proved bitterly cold almost every day and flying could be hazardous, but some comforts could be found. On Christmas Day 1917, Gilbert and McCleery shared a festive dinner of chicken followed by plum pudding and, on days when ponds froze over and flying was cancelled, the two naval airmen would go skating and a local hostelry could provide off-duty entertainment with card and board games and piano accompaniment by anyone not shy of 'tinkling the ivories'.

Though not new to the frontline strength of the RNAS, an aircraft type made available for use at East Fortune in early 1918 was the Sopwith 1½ Strutter (official designation was the Admiralty Type 9400). This was a two-seat general purpose aircraft in which the observer sat behind the pilot and could operate a machine gun for rear and side defence. The nickname '1½ Strutter' came from the 'W' shape of the central wing struts when viewed from the front. In RNAS service it was sometimes called a 'Ship Strutter', but by whatever name it went by with individual naval units, it was mostly utilised as a bomber. Like the Pup, it was a favourable shipboard type, but, as it became outclassed for frontline service, found widespread use as a trainer. One of the duties Gilbert carried out when aloft in a 1½ Strutter was use of W/T (wireless telegraphy - transmission of Morse code by electromagnetic waves). There is a record of Gilbert going aloft on 4 February with McCleery for 'wireless', but conditions were rather windy with the flight described as "*rather unpleasantly bumpy up topsides*".

Pilots like McCleery used some of their time at East Fortune practising carrier landings on a marked out area of the aerodrome to try and simulate the accuracy of approach needed to recover upon the deck of a moving ship. But coming to a quick stop was still a problem to be solved. In mid-February news filtered through that the modification work to *HMS Furious* was progressing very well and the ship could be ready the following month. So, in preparation for flying operations recommencing at sea, the pilots were sent to the RNAS experimental station on the Isle of Grain to try out one of the

first developments in arrestor gear. A series of wires raised up on blocks were stretched across a dummy wooden deck, with hooks fixed to the undercarriages of the test aircraft, some with wheels and others with skids. From the experiences recorded by McCleery, the landings were fairly successful, but repeating the feat on the *HMS Furious* would be another matter entirely.

On 17 March 1918, the newly fitted-out *HMS Furious* left dry dock at Newcastle and sailed north for return to Rosyth under Royal Navy command once again. As the aircrews were recalled to rejoin the ship, it was the most experienced pilots of higher rank who tried their hand first at landing on the new aft deck of *HMS Furious*. However, events did not turn out very well, with some alarming crashes in both the Pups and 1½ Strutters. As the pilots struggled to adopt the best techniques for landing back on a moving ship, another upheaval occurred on 1 April that disgusted the men of the RNAS in particular.

After the recommendation of an official report to form an independent air force was accepted by the British government, the decision was taken to amalgamate the RNAS and RFC under the new 'banner' of the Royal Air Force (RAF), which in an instant became the largest air force in the world. So incensed were many naval airmen, that some threatened to resign, as they considered the RAF to still be the air arm of the army. Gilbert, it seems, took the change in his stride and, as RNAS ranks were abolished in favour of the Army structure for the RAF, he went from being a Flight Commander to a Captain.



Sopwith 1½ Strutter

With a greater role envisaged for *HMS Furious*, more 'naval' men of the RAF were drafted to serve aboard the ship, including one very young pilot by the name of Henry Frank Mears, who began his flying career soon after turning 18 in July 1917. He arrived on *HMS Furious* with an endorsement that stated he was a "very good flyer". Henry came from an interesting background - his late father, Henry Augustus Mears (widely known as 'Gus' Mears), owned Stamford Bridge and founded Chelsea Football Club in 1905. Despite the death of the founder in 1912, the football club remained in the ownership of the Mears family and young Henry worked for his uncle at Stamford Bridge before he enlisted.

As the landing techniques to recover aircraft onto the deck of the *HMS Furious* had proved haphazard, further attempts were curtailed for the foreseeable future. Although launches from the flying-off deck continued, it meant landings had to be carried out on land or water and by ditching, if necessary. To aid rescue if the latter landing method had to be used, the aircrew set to task in repainting their aircraft in bright colours to assist rescue craft. Jack McCleery chose to paint the metal engine cowling of his 'bus' (as pilots often called their personal aircraft) in large horizontal navy blue and red stripes. The varied artistic flair shown by the crews met with the approval of the ship's Captain.

The weather was still a daily additional hazard for the Navy airmen and there were a number of accidental crashes during early April 1918, resulting in some of the first fatalities for the RAF. But the war was at a turning point on the Western Front. During the previous month the Germans had launched their last-ditch effort to beat the Allies with their Spring Offensive. After initial rapid advances, the momentum slowed and, with the Allied line holding, new attempts by the Germans to push on further failed (refer to the story 'We left a pitiful trail of dead boys ...' about NPL's 'Guy' Crawley who fought through this period of the war on the Western Front).

On 15 April, *HMS Furious* sailed out into the Forth for another attempt at trying to get aircraft to land back on the ship. With much jubilation among the crew, two pilots were successful in setting down without incident before *HMS Furious* had to return to drop anchor at a new buoy. Learning of this success, the exercise was repeated four days later in the presence of some Navy top brass and with

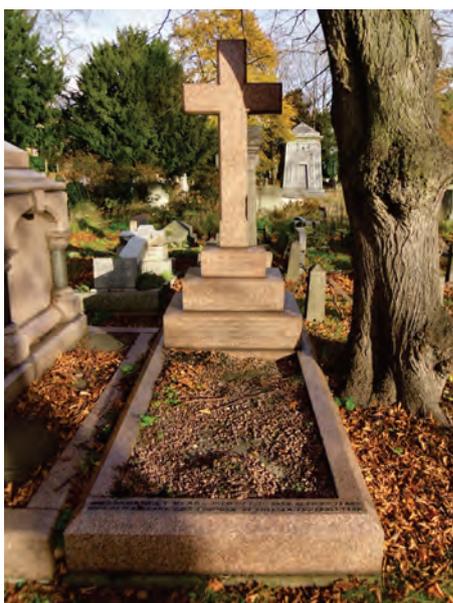
relief, further 'happy' landings were performed. The morale on *HMS Furious* at this time was quite healthy and there were many moments of off-duty high-jinks, or 'rough housing' as they were known, whereby officers, in particular, teamed up to do battle with each other across the ship. Being tied up for hours and being given a cold bath were common occurrences.

There was another step-up in action at sea from 20 April when there was an encounter between British and German forces off Harwich, followed two days later by large British naval raids on Ostend and Zeebrugge by the Dover Patrol. On 24 April, the German High Seas Fleet went looking for an encounter with the Royal Navy in the North Sea. They sought out a Scandinavian convoy off Norway to try to entice the Grand Fleet to put to sea and fall into a trap. Unfortunately for the German plan, thick fog was encountered that both scuppered the search for the convoy and stopped Zeppelin airships carrying out reconnaissance of British warship movements. Despite German measures to observe wireless silence, the Grand Fleet was nevertheless alerted and put to sea comprising over 30 battleships, several large cruisers, over 20 light cruisers and 85 destroyers.

As the large Royal Navy force set off in pursuit of the High Seas Fleet, fog was still a problem and, with the German plan in tatters, the enemy ships were ordered back to port. *HMS Furious* had a slight false start due to a technical problem, but eventually launched in the mid-afternoon and didn't catch up with an element of the Grand Fleet until the evening. The next day, in glorious weather, *HMS Furious* was still in pursuit across the North Sea and signals alerted the ship to sightings of enemy airships and surface vessels, but there were no encounters. The biggest threat came from mines and *HMS Furious* had to steer cautiously after several of the lethal devices were almost 'bumped' into.

The chase over, *HMS Furious* returned to Rosyth during the early morning of 26 April. Before dropping anchor, one pilot took off in a Pup, only to crash it onto the deck giving himself a nasty bump on the head. For the next two days *HMS Furious* remained at anchor, but on notice to put to sea again should the Germans reappear in the North Sea. However, not much flying was done, either from *HMS Furious* or from shore bases on account of windy conditions.

It was still very windy on Monday 29 April when Gilbert and the young Henry Mears disembarked from *HMS Furious* and travelled across to the air station on the northern shore of the Firth of Forth at Donibristle to fly a 1½ Strutter. With Mears in the pilot's seat and Gilbert strapped in as the observer, they lifted off from Donibristle in Strutter A5986. It became evident that the windy conditions were making control of the aircraft somewhat difficult. Still in the vicinity of the airfield, and at about a height of 200 feet, the Strutter was seen to perform a climbing turn to port, when seemingly a strong gust of wind slowed the aircraft and caused it to stall. The engine was heard to go to full revs but to no avail as, in the next moment, the Strutter plummeted nose first and smashed into the ground, giving neither Gilbert or Henry any chance to jump for their lives. The sight that greeted those who were first to reach the scene of the devastating crash was sickening and there was nothing that could be done for the tragic crew. Gilbert was dead at the age of 33 and Henry was just 18 years old.



The Mears family grave at Brompton Cemetery in London where Henry Mears was laid to rest

When news reached *HMS Furious* about the crash and the deaths of Gilbert and Henry, it was received with great sadness and viewed as a huge loss to the ship, as young Mears had proved himself to be a "fine young chap", with Gilbert recognised as a "very fine maths and theoretical man". It might seem callous in some quarters, but, to take minds off the tragedy among the younger aircrew, a rough house was organised.

The heartbreak at Heathdown when the telegram arrived informing Mrs Millar that she had 'given' another son for King and Country can only be imagined. Gilbert had experienced a most astonishing war, following a very promising academic and scientific career, but tragically his luck

finally ran out. This robbed a family of a treasured son and NPL of someone who undoubtedly would have gone on to achieve so much more.

During the morning of 2 May 1918, Gilbert was laid to rest at Dunfermline Cemetery. A funeral party from *HMS Furious* attended, with aircrew colleagues acting as pallbearers. Whether any of Gilbert's family travelled the long distance to Scotland to attend the funeral is not recorded. The Mears family reclaimed their forever young Henry and he was laid to rest with his father in Brompton Cemetery.

Gilbert's loss had been keenly felt and was exemplified by the tributes paid to him. His commanding officer on *HMS Furious* stated: *"He will be a great loss to me personally, to the Ship and to the Service. A most capable and keen Officer in every way, he was of the very greatest assistance to me, and was developing the navigational side of flying, which is of the very greatest importance"*.

So highly-prized was Gilbert's expertise that Lord Rayleigh, President of the Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, wrote: *"Captain Millar became an Assistant at the William Froude National Tank in 1910 and was, from the first, closely connected with the experimental work carried out there in relation to seaplanes. The Committee was much interested in his experiments and he has since rendered valuable service as a Mechanical Officer in the RAF. His loss is deplored by all who knew him and were acquainted with the value of his work and his mathematical and technical ability"*.

NPL can be justifiably proud of Gilbert and his memory deserves to be ensured.



Postscripts:

- The 'Eastchurch Kitten': Even though the ultimate fate of the original Eastchurch Kitten is unknown, a private project attempted to build a replica of the aircraft in the 1980s. The project was eventually taken over by volunteers at the Yorkshire Air Museum. After many years of devoted work, an accurate full-scale non-flying replica of the Kitten was completed in 2014. It has a working two-cylinder air-cooled engine of similar configuration to the original, allowing the aircraft to be ground-run.
- *HMS Furious*: After the war the ship was reconstructed and received a full-length flight deck. Used for trials of many new types of naval aircraft through the 1920s and 1930s, the carrier went on to see extensive operational service during the Second World War. Age caught up with *HMS Furious* in 1944 when the ship was placed in reserve and then decommissioned in April 1945, before finally being sold for scrap in 1948.
- Gilbert's younger sister, Olive, married the future Admiral of The Fleet, Algernon Willis KCB, DSO, in September 1916.
- His other sister, Violet, married Clement Attlee in January 1922. Attlee was elected Prime Minister for a Labour Government in 1945 in succession to wartime leader Winston Churchill.



The Eastchurch Kitten working replica at the Yorkshire Air Museum



NPL WW1 SERVICEMEN LIST

Men who were working at NPL at the time of their enlistment during WW1.

Archbutt, Sydney Leonard
Atkins, R.W.G.
Barwood, Harry Edward +
Bell, A.H.
Bell, F.H.
Blackie, A.
Brookes, C.
Challoner, A.
Chamberlain, E.
Crawley, Charles Granville Guy +
Crosier, E. T.
Davis, H.
Eastland, W. H.
Ewen, Donald +
Gough, H.J.
Gridley, A.
Grogan, J. D.
Haine, C.
Hathaway, S.F.
Head, Horace John +
Hearn, Leslie
Jenkins, C.
Johnson, R.
Jolly, Mr
Kaye, Dr George William Clarkson
King, J.R.
Meacock, H. F.
Milford, W.
Millar, Gilbert Henry +
Parkhouse, R.
Robinson, J.
Rogers, F.C.
Shepherd, E. A.
Skelton, Walter Charles
Strand, Ralph Rixon
Sturgeon, Horace Charles
Sullivan, H.
Sutherland, E. G.
Toomey, S. V.
Tucker, N. P.
Turl, W.
Unstead, G.
Watts, S.
Wells, C.

+ Died on active service

Compiled by David Neller.
Teddington Society.
October 2014.



Teddington War Memorial



Harry Barwood commemorated on the Teddington War Memorial

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