

# CHANNEL ISLANDS GREAT WAR STUDY GROUP



**The Trenches at Christmas?**

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Hello All

Well, I have received a couple of excellent articles for this issue. First, as befits this time of year Liz has looked at each of the Christmases experienced, contrasting the goodwill felt in 1914 with the truces, to “getting the job done” approach in 1917. With regard to the 1914 Christmas Day truce we will no doubt recall the recent death of Alfred Anderson, the last surviving Tommy of that period, and who was present in the trenches on that day. Meanwhile, Ned has come up with a *tour de force* on his great-uncle, Philip. The article came with numerous photographs, but because of space, I have rationed them although by the same token, I’ve added a couple for Liz. Some more of Ned’s will appear next time. Without further ado, it’s ladies first.

### **Christmas at War 1914-1918** **By Liz Walton**

At the outbreak of war in the summer of 1914, most people would have scoffed at the idea that Britain would still be at war in four years’ time. The attitude of Harry Fellows, who joined up in 1914, was typical of the time:

*“Meeting to collect our wages on the first Friday afternoon in September I and two other lads in my department decided to join the army on the following morning. It would certainly ease our financial problems, we would be assured of food and clothing and, in any case, didn’t everyone say it would be all over by Christmas?!”<sup>1</sup>*

However Sir Douglas Haig wrote in his diary of 4<sup>th</sup> August, 1914 that:

*“...Great Britain and Germany would be fighting for their existence. Therefore the war was bound to be a long war, and neither would admit defeat after a short struggle”.<sup>2</sup>*

Haig was proved to be correct, and as a result thousands of men and a smaller number of women spent one or more Christmases in uniform far from home.

The first Christmas of the Great War is probably best remembered for the famous truce, which Captain Sir Hamilton Westrow Hulse of the Scots Guards (who was killed in action in March, 1915) described in a letter to his parents as:

*“...the most extraordinary Christmas in the trenches you could possibly imagine”.*

After noting how on 25<sup>th</sup> December, 1914, the shooting gradually stopped and four Germans left their trenches and approached the British lines, he describes his meeting with them in no man’s land, the few hundred yards between the trenches.

*“They were three private soldiers and a stretcher bearer and their spokesman started off by saying he thought it only right to come over and wish us a Happy Christmas and trusted us implicitly to keep the truce.....They protested that they had no feeling of enmity towards us at all, but that everything lay with their authorities, and that being soldiers they had to obey”.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Fellows, F. (1914), *The Memoirs of a Volunteer*

<sup>2</sup> Sheffield, G. and Bourne, A. (2005) *Douglas Haig War Diaries 1914-1918*, p.54

<sup>3</sup> Hulse, Edward H.W. *The Albatross Book of English Letters*, in Lewis J.E. (ed) (2003) *How It Happened: WW1*, London, Robinson.

Hulse went to Headquarters to report this, and when he came back a couple of hours later heard large numbers of men from both sides singing and laughing, and noted that:

*“...Scots and Huns were fraternizing in the most genuine possible manner. Every sort of souvenir was exchanged, addresses given and received, photos of families shown etc.....It was absolutely astounding, and if I had seen it on a cinematograph film I would have sworn that it was faked!”*

There were many reports of the cold, damp, snowy conditions that prevailed over that Christmas. Private Clifford Lane of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Hertfordshire Regiment also describes with some degree of sarcasm how the English newspapers reported that the British troops in the Front Line “enjoyed” their special Christmas dinner- tinned bully (corned) beef and Christmas pudding, both eaten cold! <sup>4</sup> One thing that pleased him however was that he, like all soldiers under the command of Field Marshal Sir John French, and all sailors serving under the command of Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, was given a Princess Mary’s Gift Box, a small tin containing a selection of small luxury items such as cigarettes, chocolate and tobacco. The Princess, the only daughter of King George V and Queen Mary, had originally intended to pay for these from her private allowance. This was considered impracticable, so it was proposed that her name should head a public fund to raise money for the gift. She appealed directly to the public, saying:

*“I want you now to help me to send a Christmas present from the whole of the nation to every sailor afloat and every soldier at the front. I am sure that we should all be happier to feel that we had helped to send our little token of love and sympathy on Christmas morning, something that would be useful and of permanent value, and the making of which may be the means of providing employment in trades adversely affected by the war. Could there be anything more likely to hearten them in their struggle than a present received straight from home on Christmas Day?”<sup>5</sup>*

The idea was good but there were problems with deciding on appropriate contents, for the original ideas were not considered suitable for members of ethnic minorities, women, boys and non-smokers. Also production of the embossed brass box itself was not easy under war conditions. Then there was the fact that the Princess's gifts, and the Christmas card sent from the King and Queen to each man and woman serving in the forces added to an already enormous quantity of letters and parcels in the two weeks prior to Christmas and imposed a great strain on the Army administrative and postal services.

However the main aims of the Princess’s goal were achieved. In all 355,716 gifts went to the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), 66,168 to the men at home either on furlough or sick leave, 4,600 to the French Mission to the BEF and 1,390 to members of the various army nursing services, making a grand total of 426,724 gifts.<sup>6</sup>

By Christmas, 1915, however, the mood of the nation had changed considerably. The French army had already suffered 1,961,687 casualties, of which 1,001,271

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<sup>4</sup> Lane, Cpl C. in Arthur, M. (2003), *Forgotten Voices of the Great War*, London, Ebury Press

<sup>5</sup> <http://collections.iwm.org.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.994/setPaginate/No>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

were killed or missing.<sup>7</sup> In Gallipoli the British had suffered 205,000 casualties (43,000 killed). There were more than 33,600 ANZAC losses (over one-third killed) and 47,000 French casualties (5,000 killed). Turkish casualties were estimated at 250,000 (65,000 killed). In the battle of Artois and Loos there had been 50,000 British casualties, while the French lost 48,000 and the Germans about 24,000. Llewellyn Wyn Griffith of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers describes an attempted truce in his section at Mametz Wood. Some German soldiers ventured into No Man's Land, singing and offering drinks but Griffith says:

*“Some of our men would not go. They gave terse and bitter reasons for their refusal. The Officers called our men back to the line, and in a few minutes, No Man's Land was once again empty and desolate. ....A few days later we read in the paper that on Christmas Day 1915 there was no fraternizing with the enemy – hate was too bitter to permit of such a yielding.”<sup>8</sup>*



**Princess Mary's Gift Box**

The bitter facts of life at the Front are also reflected in “Saki's” version of a favourite Christmas carol:

*“While shepherds watched their flocks by night  
All seated on the ground  
A high-explosive shell came down  
And mutton rained all round.”<sup>9</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> Barnett, C. (1963) *The Sword Bearers*, Eyre and Spottiswood

<sup>8</sup> Griffith, LW (1930) *Up to Mametz* in Lewis, J.E. (ed) (2003) *How It Happened-World War 1*, London, Robinson

<sup>9</sup> Munro, H.H. (1963), *The Bodley Head Saki*, Bodley Head.

Adjutant Mary Booth, grand-daughter of the founder of the Salvation Army, spent Christmas, 1915 visiting the hospitals and rest camps in the Boulogne region. She gives a moving account of the contrasting moods of the time:

*“On Christmas Eve our Ambulance band played outside some of the hospitals, to the delight of some hundreds of the wounded..... The music had hardly died away on the night air; “Peace on Earth, Goodwill towards men” still echoed in our hearts and minds, when the contrast to it all was forced upon us. A train with three hundred cases came in, followed by another with three hundred more, and over the rough road all night the ambulances went to and fro with their burden of suffering men, until the day dawned, and we thought of the angels who sang “Glory to God in the Highest!” I wondered whether the angels this morning were not weeping!”<sup>10</sup>*

She also describes how the Salvation Army tried to provide some home comforts for the troops:

*“Brigadier Haines and the Officers have spared no trouble to give the men a good time. Hundreds of Tommies “Somewhere in France” spent their Christmas as our General’s guests.”*

She then quotes from a soldier’s letter, which said:

*“Dear Walter,*

*I promised to let you know how I spent Christmas on active service. You will be surprised to learn that I had a very happy one. At four o clock on Christmas Day we met round a table in the Salvation Army hut, spread like home. Fancy a white table cloth, real cups and saucers, and such delicacies - on active service! Almost like a dream yet it was real.....We wish the members of the Salvation Army in Hyde to know how much we appreciate their comrades out here, in their kindly services in providing the room and waiting on the table. The Officers were like parents to us, and helped to make our little party a huge success. They presented us with souvenirs, Christmas cards from General Booth, and we placed our names on the back of each, and we are sending them to our nearest relatives as keepsakes. ...*

*(Signed) Joe”<sup>11</sup>*

By Christmas, 1916, Britain had been at war for two and a half years. Corelli Barnett<sup>12</sup> describes 1916 as:

*“...the year of deadlock; at sea as on land the only means to victory lay in the gradual attrition of the enemy’s will and resources”.*

At home, blockades and the huge call on resources needed to run such a long war were causing shortages in all aspects of everyday life. Barnett says that:

*“For the civilians as for the soldiers the war had thus acquired the character of a grim permanent institution.”*

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<sup>10</sup> Booth, M.B. (1916), *With the B.E.F. in France*, London, Salvation Army

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p.

<sup>12</sup> Barnett, C,(1979), *The Great War*, London, Park Lane

There had also been terrible casualty numbers on all sides. On the first day of the Battle of the Somme, on the 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1916 the BEF suffered 58,000 casualties (a third of them killed), making it the worse day in the history of the British Army, a record that still stands. By the end of the year, the British had suffered 420,000 casualties in total, the French lost nearly 200,000 and it is estimated that German casualties were in the region of 500,000. Allied forces gained some land but it reached only 12 km at its deepest points.<sup>13</sup> The Battle of Verdun, the longest of the war, had ended with success for the French but at great cost to both sides. Conscription had been introduced, as the earlier spirit of patriotism was drying up as every town and village in the country had its ever lengthening list of men wounded, gassed, killed or simply reported as lost. Thus it is hardly surprising that William St Leger reports that on Christmas, 1916:

*"The Army has orders to shoot at sight should the Hun want to fraternize and come across".<sup>14</sup>*

There are few reports of Christmas celebrations that year. The following statement from Arthur Daulman RE is typical of the mood of the day:

*"We moved to Morbecque to work on railway sidings and an ammunition dump. We had Christmas 1916 here. We left for a camp, Renngelst-de-Klijte by road."*

John Potts Middlemiss, a prisoner of war in Westphalia took a more philosophical view. After describing the routines of the day, he concluded:

*"I cannot say that I have had a pleasant Christmas Day - I consider that impossible without freedom - but in all sincerity that of 1916 has passed tranquilly for me and in summing up for the day I come to the conclusion that although things could certainly be better, they could also easily be worse".<sup>15</sup>*

However a few home comforts were still available. Private Alister Robinson, a young New Zealander serving in France wrote in a letter to his parents:<sup>16</sup>

*"I got the biggest mail of my life for Xmas. 11 letters 4 Presses 3 parcels including 4 or 5 from you."*

He also described the weather there as

*"...decidedly cold nowadays. Yesterday we had the biggest frost I've ever seen & it was still on the ground till 3 pm when the weather suddenly changed & it has been raining ever since though still cold.....On Xmas day the artillery were very active in reply to Fritz's peace proposals."*

There was no truce on that Christmas Day.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWsomme.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Vansittart, P. (2003) *Voices from the Great War* London, Random

<sup>15</sup> Middlemiss, J.P. *Christmas 1916 - How I Spent it*,  
<http://www.geocities.com/philandmarge/Christmas1916.html>

<sup>16</sup> Robinson, A. *Letters from France* in <http://www.nzine.co.nz/features/warletters>



**A Card for Christmas 1917 – 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division**

1917 was to prove to be the last full year of the war, as though the Peace was not signed until 1919, Armistice was declared in November, 1918. 1917 saw the overthrow of the Tsar and the beginning of the Russian Revolution, and it was the year when America entered the War. It was also the year of Passchaendale. By early December 1917 around 250,000 had been killed, wounded or were missing on each side. There had been air raids air on London and other towns and cities, bringing the war to the people at home as well as those actually at the front. Despite all this life seemed to have not been totally unpleasant for some. Robert Lindsay Mackay, OBE, MC, MB, CHB, MD, DPH<sup>17</sup> was with the 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders from 1915 until the end of the war. He spent Christmas 1917 in the Arras region, but there is no mention of the bitter fighting that had taken place a month earlier at Cambrai. The entry in his diary reads;

*"25th. Christmas Day. Rose at 8.45, feeling very pleased with life. Church. Grand morning. Heavy lunch at Officers' Club, then wrote a few letters..... Tremendous Christmas Dinner at HQ. We killed several fatted calves. Adjourned to 'B' Coy. where we found the rest of the battalion in grand form (some in too good form!). Rather a jovial time. Bed 1 a.m."*

Franklin B Skeele served in the US Ambulance Service, and he described his Christmas celebrations in a letter to his parents back in California:<sup>18</sup>

*"One of the men said to me just before Christmas that he thought it sounded like sarcasm for folks to wish us a 'Merry Christmas.'*

<sup>17</sup> Robert Lindsay Mackay's First World War Diary at [http://lu.softxs.ch/mackay/RLM\\_Diary.html](http://lu.softxs.ch/mackay/RLM_Diary.html)

<sup>18</sup> History of the American Field Service in France from <http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/memoir/AFShist/AFS2c.htm#c1>

*He was basing his remark on our surroundings at that time.*

*The barracks were cold with their damp ground floors. It was so cold, in fact, that I found ice caked in my Ford commutator, and even my fountain-pen ink became solid, though it was in my trunk. Occasionally I wore my overcoat to bed, slept under seven blankets, and for two weeks never took off my clothes. However, my friend was wrong. We had a lively time. As Christmas Day approached, every one got busy. Some went for a tree, others helped the French cook prepare the big meal, while still others were writing little somethings and wrapping mysterious packages that bulged peculiarly. When the men returned with the tree in an ambulance and a load of holly from the woods, we all began decorating the café, our dining-room at that time, where the insides of tin boxes made good reflectors for the candles.”*

In Western Europe the Great War ended on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918. However the last document officially ended all hostilities was not signed until 20<sup>th</sup> August, 1920, and few of the men who had been fighting at the Front actually got home for Christmas, 1918. There was scarcely a home that had not known someone who had been killed or injured in the conflict, soldiers had seen their friends and relatives die and just disappear in the chaos of the battlefield, and bad news was still coming in. The relatives of Lance Corporal James Weir, of Etchingam Park, Finchley, who was in the Middlesex Regiment, were told on Christmas morning 1918 that he had been killed on the 16<sup>th</sup> October that year. There were still severe food and fuel shortages caused by the depletion of the civilian labour force, forcible government transfer of labour to the armed forces, and shipping shortages. Also, many families had lost their main breadwinner. Overall the mood was more sombre than celebratory. SB Butler<sup>19</sup>, an officer with the divisional supply train of the AEF sent a letter home to his parents in America, describing his Christmas far away from his family which started:

*“Just a line to tell you I have been thinking a lot about you to-day and rather wishing I might be spending the day with you... We had some special lunches put up at the men's mess for the men who are at the hospital - turkey sandwiches & a little of everything - and the company commanders took them up to their own men. We got the best that could be gotten together for the men's mess, and I guess all in all no one is forgotten. However I expect everyone looks forward to their 1919 Xmas with considerable more relish.”<sup>20</sup>*

Thus although the first peacetime Christmas for over four years was not a time for real celebration, it was the start of some sort of return to normality. However for the majority of families in Britain and right across Europe, Christmas would never be quite the same again. The breakdown of class divisions that came about as a result of men from every social background fighting and dying side by side, and being buried in identical graves, plus the new opportunities for women in other, better paid areas of work meant that the era of domestic service was coming to a close. Women had also had to work at all sorts of occupations that would have been unthinkable before the war, to release men to go to the Front. Many had either wished to continue their independence or had been forced to continue working after the war in order to support families who had lost a male breadwinner. Many people were choosing to emigrate to Australia, Canada and New Zealand, possibly to make a new start after the war, possibly because their horizons had been widened by travel

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<sup>19</sup> [http://www.cromwellbutlers.com/sbb\\_1218.htm](http://www.cromwellbutlers.com/sbb_1218.htm)

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.firstaif.info/pages/42\\_battalion.htm](http://www.firstaif.info/pages/42_battalion.htm)

and meeting soldiers from these places during the war. Food shortages continued for some time, against a background of unemployment and financial insecurity. However for the next twenty years, most people were able to spend Christmas in peace at home with friends and family rather than at war far from home.

**Editor's Note:** The 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division Christmas Card was from a recent Irish Regiments Exhibition at the Passchendaele Experience, Zonnebeke – appropriate in view of Channel Islanders serving with the Irish! It was also interesting to note that the Division commemorated their success after Guillemont and Wytschaete by presenting members of the Division with silver matchbox covers engraved with the names of those battles. Meanwhile the Princess Mary's Gift Box is a recent acquisition for my wife who was quite taken with having one after seeing another at a local WFA meeting recently.

**MIDSHIPMAN PHILIP REGINALD MALET de CARTERET**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> January, 1898 - 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1916**



**The Young Philip Malet de Carteret**

At 4.26 p.m. on 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1916, a terrific explosion occurred on the British battle-cruiser, HMS Queen Mary, at the beginning of the greatest of modern sea battles of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - Jutland. One and a half minutes later, the ship sank with a complement of 1,266 officers and crew, of which there were 20 survivors. Philip Malet de Carteret was not among them.

Born in Sydney, Australia on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 1898, Philip was the eldest son of Jurat Reginald Malet de Carteret (1865 - 1935), Seigneur of St. Ouen's Manor in Jersey. He was educated at Ebor Preparatory School in Lausanne (1907) and Mr Rhodes' Mottingham and Eltham College, before entering RNC Osborne in 1911. He took first prize in French on leaving for RNC Dartmouth in 1913 to take his Midshipman's course. His father, Reginald had left Jersey for Australia and en-route met and married there in 1895, Amy Anne Armstrong (1865-1950). Philip's younger brother, Guy was born in 1901 and an elder sister, Ella Marie (Ellie) had been born in 1896.

Philip was a keen sportsman. His 54 surviving letters written during the Great War constantly narrate sporting events – swimming, hockey matches and tennis. He wrote 37 letters to his father, 15 to Guy and 2 to Elizabeth (Grandma). 7 were written prior to 1914.

**1914:** At the outbreak of the war, he was passed out as Midshipman on 4<sup>th</sup> August, 1914, even though he had not passed his exams, and he was posted to HMS Canopus. Canopus was a pre-war dreadnought, which was commissioned in 1899. She was originally built for service in China, but did not get past Aden on her maiden

voyage due to engine troubles. Canopus was due to attain a speed of about 28 knots, but hardly made 18 knots at full speed. She was a great disappointment to the fleet. The ship displaced 12,950 tons and her armour consisted of four 12 inch guns, with an approximate range of 12,000 yards, and twelve 6 inch guns. When Philip joined the ship it was under the command of Captain Heathcote S Grant.



**HMS Canopus**

Canopus was at first patrolling in the North Atlantic, when she was ordered to assist the South Atlantic Battle Squadron of Admiral Sir Christopher GFM Cradock. The ship arrived in Port Stanley on the 20<sup>th</sup> October, 1914. Cradock's squadron had already left in pursuit of the German Battle Squadron under the command of Vice-Admiral Count von Spee.

Canopus left for the Magellan straits on 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1914 to join the rest of the British squadron, which consisted of three old armoured cruisers, Good Hope (the flagship had two 9.2 inch modern guns, with a range of 13,500 yards, and sixteen 6 inch guns), Monmouth (fourteen 6 inch guns) and Cornwall, two light cruisers, Glasgow (two modern 6 inch and ten 4 inch guns) and Bristol, and the armed merchant cruisers Otranto, Macedonia and Orama.

Cradock's ships were far inferior in both firepower and age to von Spee's Squadron which consisted of the two modern cruisers the Scharnhorst (twelve 8.2 inch guns, with a range of 13,500 yards, and also 5.9 inch guns, with a range of 11,000 yards) and Gneisenau (twelve 8.2 inch guns) both of which had sailed from the China Sea to the South Pacific together with three light cruisers, the Leipzig (ten 4.1 inch guns, with a range of 11,500 yards), Dresden and Nurnberg.

The German officers and crew numbered some 2,200 men. They were seasoned professionals in the main and had served together for over a year. The vast majority of the British crews on the other hand had been civilians less than six months previously.

**The Battle of Coronel:** The Battle took place on 1<sup>st</sup> November, 1914 off the coast of Chile. Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty was convinced that Cradock had orders not to engage the Germans without the protection of Canopus. However Canopus was slow and although she was steaming towards the British fleet at 15 knots, Cradock thought she was travelling at 12.5 knots. She had two colliers with her and at 6.18 p.m. Cradock increased his speed to 17 knots and radioed Canopus with a message "I am about to attack the enemy now"

At 7.04 p.m. the Germans opened fire at a range of 12,000 yards. The Scharnhorst hit the Good Hope with its third salvo and rendered the fore 9.2 inch gun useless. It continued to fire four salvos a minute. By 7.23 p.m. the range was 6,600 yards. At

7.53 p.m. the Good Hope was shattered by an explosion which produced a column of flame that rose over 200 feet above her decks.

Canopus had intercepted a message from Glasgow to the Good Hope reporting the enemy in sight. She increased to full speed and dispatched her colliers to Juan Fernandez and headed northwards in the hope that she would arrive in time to engage the enemy. At about 9.00 p.m. she received a signal from Glasgow that it was feared that the Good Hope and Monmouth were lost and the fleet scattered. Canopus turned around, picked up her colliers and made back for the Magellan Straits via Smyth's Channel, probably the first battleship to make use of them, a great navigational credit to her.

Cradock perished along with 1,600 men.

Rear-Admiral Stoddart was now in command in the South Atlantic, on the Carnarvon and he decided to go south to Montevideo to meet the remainder of the scattered fleet.

It was just before Coronel, that a great management change was taking place in the Royal Navy. Prince Louis of Battenberg was being hounded out of office as First Sea Lord because he was German born. He had resigned on 29<sup>th</sup> October, 1914 and was replaced by Lord Jackie Fisher, a formidable old gentleman who had been in the post from 1904-1910 and who had been in charge of the Royal Navy overseeing its complete transformation into the greatest fleet in the world.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> November, 1914 Canopus was back in the Falklands but was ordered go to Montevideo but was called back and arrived in Port Stanley on 13<sup>th</sup> November, 1914. Canopus could not get a reply from the Wireless Station in Port Stanley and thought that the harbour had been captured by the Germans. The islanders thought that they were the enemy. The island had at that time a population of about 1,000, mainly Scottish crofters.



**Admiral von Spee's Battle Squadron  
26<sup>th</sup> November, 1914**

Finally, Canopus was ordered back to Port Stanley to act as guardship.

Captain Grant took the ship through the outer bay and into the land locked harbour itself and finding that anchors and warps could not hold the ship, he grounded the ship so that her broadside could fire over a low neck of land and into the required beaten zone.

The upper decks of the ship were daubed with all colours of the rainbow, an observation and gunnery control post were set up, twelve-pounder guns were sent ashore and mounted in three batteries.

In a letter to Reginald dated 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1914 and published in "The Morning Post" of 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1915, Philip wrote:

*“My Dear Dad,*

*I wish you a very happy Christmas! We are still in the Falkland Islands and are organising a proper defence in case the enemy meditate an attack. The only thing worth having is the Wireless Station, which is valuable to us as it is the only British Wireless Station in these parts.*

*You have doubtless seen in the papers all about the German armed merchantman Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse being sunk by our cruiser Highflyer. Well we had been specially sent out to the North Sea to sink her, but before we got there, we found our work had been done for us by the Highflyer. We were frightfully sick.*

*Do you remember seeing about a midshipman on the Cressy who saved 87 lives (or thereabouts) including that of his commander, when the Cressy, Houge and Aboukir went down. His name was Cazalet. Well he was a chap in our term who had mobilised with us at Dartmouth. Of course we were very glad to see it although we were sorry to see the list of the drowned midshipmen whom were in our term also. Talking of drowned people, eight people were drowned here while crossing a creek in a punt three days ago. The punt capsized, and none of them could swim so they were all drowned. They were not men from the ship, but from the shore. They grappled, dredged and dived for their dead bodies and succeeded in recovering seven. I had to convey them to the Town in my boat. It was pretty ghastly work!*

*Although the Canopus seems to have taken but a small part in the war yet she has really done more than any other ship hereabouts, and a good deal more than most ships in the Navy, for although we have not fought an action, yet we have kept all the trade routes clear and unmolested and frightened away any marauding German armed merchantmen or cruisers, that might have been skulking around.*

*We have run the ship hard and fast on to the mud (on purpose) so it looks as if we were going to stay here till the end of the war – whenever that will be.*

*Our poor dilapidated engines have at least got a rest after tramping up and down the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans for weeks on end with scarcely an interval.*

*I hope everyone at home is quite fit and well  
With love to all from your affectionate son  
Philip”*

Lord Fisher acted swiftly. He ordered the immediate release of three battle-cruisers to serve in the Atlantic, two to go to the Falklands, Invincible and Inflexible, and one, the Princess Royal to the West Indies to guard the Panama Canal.

On 7<sup>th</sup> December, 1914 the battle-cruisers arrived in Port Stanley with Vice-Admiral Sir Frederick Doveton Sturdee flying his flag in Invincible as Admiral of the Squadron. His mission was the annihilation of Von Spee’s Squadron.

**The Battle of the Falkland Islands:** The 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1914 was to prove an exception to the rule in the Falklands where it usually rains for 21 days during the last month of the year, for it was a perfect mid-summer’s day as the fleet was coaling in harbour.

At 7.56 a.m. the Glasgow fired a gun to attract the attention of Invincible who was busy coaling, that Canopus had reported smoke in sight to the south. At 8.15 a.m. a signal came from the flagship to "Raise steam for full speed, report when ready"

The enemy's two leading ships Gneisenau and Nurnberg were in sight approaching the Wireless Station. When they were near Wolf Rocks they stopped engines and turned north-eastwards. Canopus opened fire over the low neck of land at 9.20 a.m. with her 12 inch guns, firing five rounds at a range of 12,000 yards. Hoisting their colours, the enemy turned away to the south east to join the main squadron.

From survivors it appears that one of Canopus's shells had ricocheted, striking the Gneisenau at the base of her after funnel. It was also claimed that a piece of another hit the Nurnberg.

At 9.45 a.m. the British squadron weighed and proceed from harbour, the last of whom cleared by 10.30 a.m.. Glasgow came out first, followed by the two battle-cruisers doing 25 knots, followed by Kent, Carnarvon and Cornwall doing about 22 knots. The Admiral reduced speed for an hour to 20 knots at 11.15 a.m. to allow the "County" cruisers to catch up. At 12.47 p.m. he hoisted the signal "Open Fire" and eight minutes later the Inflexible fired the first round of the battle at the Leipzig. The Invincible followed almost immediately after. Both ships were going their full speed, nearly 27 knots and firing at a range of 16,000 yards (over 9 land miles).



**HMS Inflexible recovering survivors from the Gneisenau**

The fight between the two British battle-cruisers and the German cruisers lasted between three and six hours. The Scharnhorst sank at 4.17 p.m. while the Gneisenau heeled over at about 5.45 p.m. Invincible had been hit about 22 times, 18 directly and had a list to port as two shells had struck below the waterline. The Wardroom had been demolished. There had been no casualties amongst her crew of 950 men.

The Inflexible had been hit twice with 1 crew member killed and 3 wounded.

The British squadron in total lost 7 men killed and 18 wounded (3 subsequently succumbed). The Germans lost 2,260 men. The Dresden was the only ship to escape and was later sunk on 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1915 by the Kent and Glasgow. For this action, Vice-Admiral Sturdee was rewarded with a baronetcy.

In a letter dated 9<sup>th</sup> December, 1914, Philip would write:

*"After the action off the Chilean coast, we sent home word for reinforcements. These did not arrive until the day before yesterday, when a large fleet came here comprising the Invincible, Inflexible, Carnarvon, Cornwall, Kent, Glasgow and Bristol. Up to this time we had heard nothing of the Germans. The very next day*

*(yesterday), the whole fleet of Germans, which had been in the action of November 1<sup>st</sup> – Scharnhorst, Gneisenau, Leipzig, Dresden and Nurnberg – turned up. They couldn't have come at a more opportune moment, as if they had arrived earlier our fleet would not have been here and if they had arrived later the fleet (which was to have left today) would have gone!*

*We, the Canopus went to General Quarters about 10.00 am and opened fire with our 12 inch guns. Our other ships could do nothing, as the land was between them and the enemy, and most of them were coaling. We fired a lot of shots and hit the Gneisenau. By this time the fleet had weighed and were coming out at full speed. The Germans turned tail and fled with the fleet at full speed after them.*

*Of course we could not follow as we were on the mud. Still we had opened up the action, prevented the enemy from shelling the Wireless Station and saved the fleet from being attacked while at anchor. All that day we waited anxiously for news. Towards evening we got the welcome news that the Invincible and Inflexible had sunk the Gneisenau and Scharnhorst. Later we heard that the Leipzig was on fire fore and aft and she sank soon after. Then the signal came through from the Kent "Have sunk the Nurnberg". We were frantic with joy. We have got a lot of prisoners on board. The officers are being kept in the Captain's lobby, where they are guarded by sentries with fixed bayonets. They get quite respectable food, however! The men are all forrard. One prisoner who can talk English told us they had intended to destroy the Wireless Station, to land by night and sack the town and sink all the colliers and store-ships in the harbour, sink the Canopus if we made any resistance and decamp to West Africa taking the crew of the Canopus with them. There was only one thing they didn't know all about and that was the arrival of our fleet.*

*If the fleet had arrived only two days earlier or two days later, it would have been all up with us and everyone else on the Falkland Islands.*

*However it turned out all right. I am only sorry we were not able to go out and settle some of them ourselves, but anyhow we could not have kept up with the fleet.*

*Still we did our little lot."*

Meanwhile, on 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1914 Philip would report that the Canopus was off the Abrolhos Rocks off the Brazilian coast, and that there was no news of the Dresden or Karlsruhe which were still at large

**1915:** The Canopus would not stay in the South Atlantic too long in 1915, for Philip would write back as follows:

- 6<sup>th</sup> January                      At Port Stanley
- 15<sup>th</sup> February                    In docks in Malta
- 6<sup>th</sup> March                         At the Dardanelles. Silencing of Fort 8.

In the letter to Reginald dated 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1915 published in "The Morning Times" of 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1915:

*"My Dear Dad,*

*I wish you many happy returns of the day. I hope this letter will arrive more or less on the right date, but of course one can't choose one's own time for letter writing nowadays – one takes one's chance.*

*We have been having an exciting time lately. After leaving Malta, we went up to the Dardanelles where there are heaps of other ships bombarding the place. We have made a base of a small island just outside the entrance and take turns to bombard.*

*The other day it was our turn. We went up about 10 miles, past all the forts which have already been silenced, till we came to those which had not. It was our business to silence "No 8" fort, which is on the European side. We opened fire on it, and got the range pretty quickly, and then kept on firing with our 6 inch guns and an occasional shot from our 12 inch, it was not until 1 ½ hours after the start that the fort thought of returning our fire, but when they did so they were pretty accurate. They brought our main topmast down, made a large hole in the Quarterdeck, the shot going through and damaging the Ward Room, a hole was made in our after funnel, besides the damage done by splinters of shell (they had been firing shrapnel) which I found on the Quarterdeck after the action. Anyhow we went on firing till sunset, which was about 6 o'clock, and then we chucked it in having silenced the fort.*

*Next day we went along the Asiatic coast outside the Dardanelles hunting for hidden field guns and things which might open fire if we attempted to land men or anything. We rooted out several and silenced them with our 6 inch – blew most of them into the air since we were at such close range. Today we were mostly employed in watching where the shots from the big ships went who were firing overland, and correcting their range for them since they could not see- we fired a few desultory shots ourselves.*

*P."*

While a further letter dated 12<sup>th</sup> March, 1915 stated:

*"A few nights ago we delivered a night attack, the whole ship being pitch dark herself. The mine-sweepers went ahead sweeping for mines, of which they picked up several, while we followed on astern firing at any lights or searchlight we could see on either shore. Some batteries replied to our fire, but nothing hit us.*

*But it seems that the Turks did more damage to us than we did to them, for although we managed to extinguish one or two of their searchlights, they sank two of our mine-sweepers, one I'm afraid with all hands - in the other all were saved.*

*We spent all last night patrolling outside the straits and in the morning came across a floating mine. We tried to sink it with rifle fire, but failed, though we hit it often enough. Then we tried a Maxim, which was equally ineffective. A 3-pounder gun was next tried, and after several shots we managed to sink it. Later we saw three more and sank them all.*

*The Admiral has called for volunteers of officers (including Gunroom officers) for work on the trawlers and mine-sweepers. All the Gunroom of Canopus has*

*volunteered, but so many others have also that I don't suppose we shall get much of a chance."*



**Gallipoli - HMS River Clyde run aground at V Beach (note the Senegalese troops)**

Further letters would contain news of the following:

- 15<sup>th</sup> March Minehunting
- 18<sup>th</sup> March Sinking of Irresistible, Ocean and Bouvet
- 29<sup>th</sup> March Greek island?
- 6<sup>th</sup> April Sailed for Malta with the damaged Inflexible.  
Tows her by the stern much of the way.
- 15<sup>th</sup> April At Skyros. Just back from Malta
- 2<sup>nd</sup> May Wounded at Anzac Cove. (See photograph)

In Philip's letter to his brother Guy dated 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1915:

*"My Dear Guy,*

*I may as well tell you about the lucky accident, which resulted my getting a slight scratch, which I proudly call a "wound". I was sitting in my boat, which was alongside the pontoon on the beach waiting for the wounded to come along.*

*Shrapnel was bursting all round us, several in fact, got into the boat. I was hit on the head by a shrapnel bullet and started bleeding like a pig. Luckily the thing was spent, and so, after being bandaged up at a field ambulance place, I was quite all right."*

In his book "Gallipoli" by John Masefield, published in 1917, Reginald has annotated a mark on page 48:

*“The boatmen and beach working-parties were the unsung heroes of that landing. The boatmen came in with their tows, under fire, waited with them under intense and concentrated fire of every kind until they were unloaded and then shoved off, and put slowly back for more, and then came back again.”*



**Philip and his “wound” on his lighter ferrying troops and wounded – Anzac Cove, Gallipoli  
[Ned’s caption, not mine – BB]**

In his Letter to Reginald of 15<sup>th</sup> May, 1915, wrote of heading from Gaba Tepe to Mudros and the sinking of the Triumph by U21:

*“My Dear Dad,*

*The submarine scare turned out to be quite a justifiable one after all. Several times we heard that there was one in the neighbourhood, whereupon we had closed all the water-tight doors (which meant that the Gunroom is inaccessible) and steamed about in circles keeping a sharp look out but it was not until yesterday that we actually saw the effects of it. The flap started at 7.30 am, so we were away all the forenoon. We were off Gaba Tepe at the time, but we were expecting to be relieved by the Vengeance some time during the forenoon after which we were going to Mudros to coal and ammunition. At about 10.00 am we sighted the Vengeance coming along to relieve us, but when she was about 5 miles away she suddenly altered course, and appeared to be steaming away from us. We wondered what was up, but presently she signalled to us that she had sighted a submarine and fired a torpedo at her, which had barely missed. The scare immediately got worse, and all ships which were anchored, weighed, and we were all cruising about independently. By that time, the Vengeance was close to us, but our Captain being the senior NO out there, shifted over to the Vengeance, while we cleared out for Mudros without him and with a destroyer escort.*

*At 12.30, I was standing on the Quarterdeck with several other people, when someone shouted "They've bagged the Triumph" we all looked at her through our glasses (we were about 4 miles away) and saw her heeled over at an angle of 60 degrees. She was actually struck at 12.26 and soon sank after 12.30. All the torpedo craft and trawlers immediately dashed to her aid and about 700 survivors were picked up, which was very good work indeed, as it means that very few people were lost.*

*Still, it is a very great disaster, as besides the loss to the Navy, one has to consider the effect it will have on the Turks bucking them up considerably. In fact some Turkish Officers who were captured said that the Turks would have chucked up the sponge long ago had it not been for the sinking of the Irresistible, Ocean and Bouvet on March 18<sup>th</sup>.*

*The Triumph was a pre-dreadnought battleship, a sister ship to the Swiftsure both of which were purchased by us from Chile. She carried four 10 inch guns and fourteen 7.5 inch beside several smaller ones. The Swiftsure is also out here. The Triumph was engaged in the capture of Tsing-Tao at the beginning of the war, and had not been home for 3 years, so it was especially hard luck for the people of those who were drowned.*

*I think the Canopus is about the luckiest ship in the service (touch wood) whenever a disaster occurs we always seem either to miss it or to clear out just in time e.g.*

- 1) off the coast of Brazil where we were nearly torpedoed by the Karlsruhe*
- 2) missing the Coronel Action*
- 3) Admiral Sturdee's fleet turned up just in time to save us from Von Spee at the Falkland Islands.*
- 4) Missing the TB, which sank the Goliath, by 10 minutes.*
- 5) Missing the submarine, which sunk the Triumph by a hair's breath.*

*Still we are not out of the wood yet.*

*With much love to you all  
Your affectionate son  
Philip"*

For most of the summer, Philip remained in the Mediterranean, save for a brief period at RN Chatham (Editor: Presumably For a course?):

- 23<sup>rd</sup> May            Canopus tows Albion off Gaba Tepe after it had run aground. Canopus hit a good many times. 1 killed and 10 wounded.
- 11<sup>th</sup> June            At Malta for repairs, with lots of French ships in the harbour.
- 23<sup>rd</sup> June            At Malta
- 3<sup>rd</sup> July             At Mudros
- 13<sup>th</sup> July            At Meteline – Port Iero
- 28<sup>th</sup> July            The Admiral has been down in Chatham, Euraylus and Canopus. Preparation for a landing.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> August          At Meteline – Port Iero
- 16<sup>th</sup> August        At RN Chatham

Philip would report his return to Canopus:

- 5<sup>th</sup> September Returned to Canopus.  
New Commander GD Stevenson  
Their sub AEB Giles awarded the DSO for saving Inflexible.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> October At Meteline – Port Iero  
Making ready for winter.  
Concrete piers.  
Rattlesnake mentioned in despatches.
- 11<sup>th</sup> October At Meteline – Port Iero  
Olympia dwarfs all other ships
- 19<sup>th</sup> October At Suvla Bay.  
Glory struck 3 times before Canopus arrived.  
Are they going to wind up the show?

In a letter to Reginald dated 21<sup>st</sup> October, 1915:

*“My dead Dad,*

*I got ashore this afternoon much to my astonishment. Apparently the Commander has either forgotten that my leave is stopped or else he has compassion on me in my loneliness; anyhow he let me go. We did not go very far (of course one is not allowed up to the trenches unless in khaki) but stayed with the beachmaster at C beach who is an RNR Lieutenant who used to be in the Canopus. He gave us tea and we gave him newspapers, he took us to his various dug-outs which are very sumptuous as he is in command of the whole peninsular on the southern side of Suvla Bay and therefore a great personage. We yarned the time away, and he sent us back in his own picket boat together with several pieces of shells etc. in the way of curios. We had intended to search in the area of the Great Salt Lake for old shells or bayonets and also climb Chocolate Hill, but as we did not do so today we will have to leave it for some other time. I am going to appease the Commander with the cartridge-case of an 18 pounder field gun which I brought off today – it may work wonders in the leave line.*

*The night before last was a fearfully rough night – of course it was my turn for the patrol. It was much too rough for patrol, so we simply tied up to one of the buoys of the gate and showed a light whenever a ship wanted to get in or out. Only the Glory, a destroyer and a trawler wished to go either in or out, so we spent all the night in a miserable condition, rolling and pitching like anything, with the seas breaking green over us incessantly. Of course it was impossible to get any sleep even in the stern cabin as the water came in over there and soaked us through. At 5 am it became so bad that the senior officer ordered us back to the ship as we were in danger of being swamped.*

*Winter has begun to set in properly here and we have got fires lit both in the Wardroom and the Gunroom. I always pity the military in winter-time - they must have a thin time of it in the trenches what with the cold and wet while we live in comparative comfort in the ships.*

*The other day I was in a picket boat about a half mile off W beach when the Turks, realizing I suppose what a chance they had of wiping out one of the most promising young officers in the British Navy, slung a shell across which pitched in the water about 20 yards from us. Whether it was meant for the beach or for the trawlers, it*

would have been a pretty bad shot for either, anyhow it was quite close enough to us for my liking. Last night at 11.15 pm a stoker expired in his hammock quite suddenly. They had a post-mortem examination this morning and came to the conclusion it was from heart-failure that he died. Anyhow he was buried at sea from a trawler at 10.30 this morning.

*Love to all from Philip.”*

- 3<sup>rd</sup> November At Mudros
- 26<sup>th</sup> November Lord Kitchener visits
- 7<sup>th</sup> December At Meteline – Port Iero

**1916:** For Philip would leave the Canopus and the Mediterranean to return to the Home Fleet.

- 8<sup>th</sup> February At Meteline – Port Iero
- 7<sup>th</sup> March HMMG Mary Rose, a gunboat off Long Island
- 17<sup>th</sup> May Appointed to HMS Queen Mary



**HMS Queen Mary**

The last letter home to Reginald was dated 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1916 having been on HMS Queen Mary at Rosyth for ten days:

*“My Dear Dad*

*The Queen Mary is the most up to date ship. Among the many luxuries are a bathroom with hot water constantly laid on and two long baths. Also a cinema show to which I went last Thursday and it was quite decent. The Gunroom is well above the waterline (in the Canopus you could scarcely have the scuttles open at sea for fear of the water coming in) and contains a gramophone and a pianola.*

*There are 23 of us in the Gunroom including 2 subs, an engineering sub and 2 clerks. All the rest of us are snotties, some junior and some senior to us.*

*My chest and trunk arrived quite happily on the same day as I did. Are you able to get plenty of tennis? How are the gooseberries and the other fruit getting on? I suppose Jack has left to join his ship again.*

*Hoping you are all quit well,  
With much love from your affectionate son  
Philip.”*

Sadly, there came the Battle of Jutland:

- 30<sup>th</sup> May Queen Mary sails for Horn Reef
- 31<sup>st</sup> May Sinking of Queen Mary at 4.27 p.m. by Derflinger and Seydlitz. Both these battle-cruisers were seriously damaged by the 1<sup>st</sup> Battle Squadron. Philip was in A turret.



**The Queen Mary Sinking**

**Condolences:** The following is an extract from a letter dated 5<sup>th</sup> June, 1916 from Midshipman JL Storey – one of the 20 survivors of the Queen Mary from its complement of 1,266:

*“Poor Malet de Carteret who was with me in the Canopus all this time is also gone. I feel it dreadfully. We had been together 6 years all told.*

*....The actual fight was something like this. We left Rosyth on Tuesday evening and steamed towards the Danish coast. At about 3.50 we sounded off “Exercise action”,*

*and all went to our turrets and tested through everything. We were then told that A & Q turret crews could go and get their tea. Q was my turret, the one amidships in the waist between the funnels. At 4.24 "Action" was sounded and we all went to our stations, and at twenty minutes to five the order was given "Load all Guns" we all then realised that the real thing had come at last. At 7 minutes to 5 we opened fire at 8 ¾ miles range at the third ship in the enemy's line, and everything went beautifully until 5.21 when Q turret was hit by a big shell, and the right gun put out of action. We continued firing with the left gun for two or three minutes, and then a most awful explosion took place which broke the ship in two by the foremast, it was I believe a torpedo into one of the fore-turret magazines. When the explosion took place, our left gun broke off outside the turret at the rear and fell into the working chamber: the right gun also slid down. The turret was filled with flying metal, and several men were killed. A lot of cordite caught fire below me and blazed up, and several people were gassed. The men left and myself got to the ladder leading out of the turret and climbed quickly out. There was no panic or shouting at all, the men were splendid heroes. Just as I got out of the turret and climbed over the funnels and masts which were lying behind the turret, and had got off my coat and our shoes, another awful explosion occurred, blowing me into the water, - and the remaining part of the ship, - the after-part blew up. X turret magazine going off.*

*However eventually we got to Rosyth at 8pm on Thursday."*

It is interesting to note that either his memory or watch was wrong by 1 hour.

Letter of condolence to Jurat and Mrs Malet de Carteret dated 27<sup>th</sup> June, 1916:

*"Dear Mr & Mrs Malet de Carteret*

*Just a very short line to express my sincerest sympathy for you all. It must have been a most dreadful blow and I can assure you all that you are not alone in your sorrow. He spent quite a considerable time in the London with us all and most of the senior officers, as well as ourselves, remember him well and have expressed their regret that "such a promising officer" should have been lost.*

*Everybody has remarked from time to time how calmly he went about his work even under the most trying conditions and more especially at the time when he was wounded at the Dardanelles, when his first thought was for the men under his charge.*

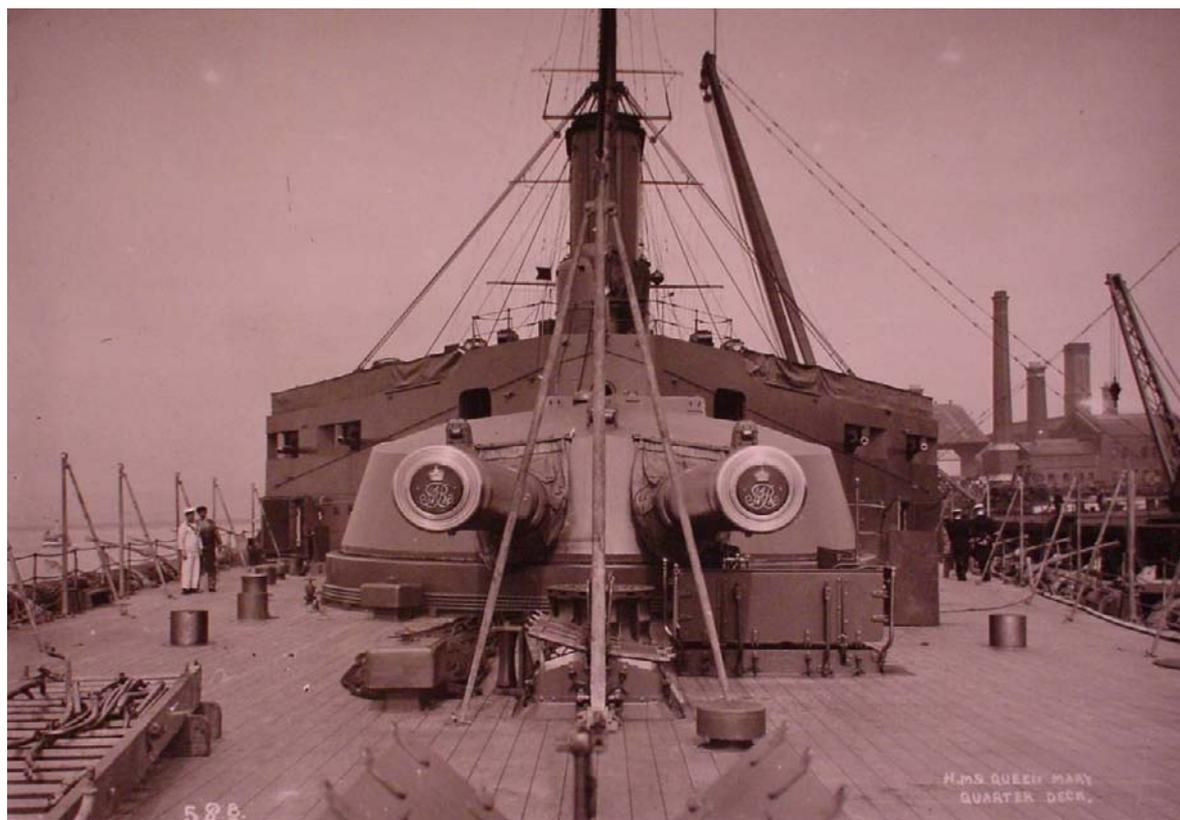
*I am also sure that when his ship went down, although we can obtain no details, he met his death as a true British officer and gentleman.*

*Yours very sincerely  
E Oloff du Wet"*

**About HMS Queen Mary:** Launched in 1912 and completed in 1913, she had a displacement of 27,000 tons and had a capacity of 75,000 Shaft Horse Power giving her a speed of 28 knots, while her armour consisted of:

- Eight 13 inch guns
- Sixteen 4 inch guns
- Two torpedo tubes

She was commanded by Captain Cecil Prowse



**The Quarter Deck – HMS Queen Mary**

Extract from “The Times” 9<sup>th</sup> June, 1916 regarding the Battle of Jutland

#### *“TIGER IN THE FIGHT - HOW THE QUEEN MARY WENT DOWN*

*One of the gunners of HMS Tiger, the latest vessel of the British Battle Cruiser Squadron, has given the following account of the battle of Horn Reef:*

*The Lion which was leading the line, followed by the Tiger, Princess Royal, and the Queen Mary, was the first to open fire, the range being about 18,000 yards, and common shell being used. Range-finding continued for a few minutes, neither squadron doing what might be called really good shooting till then.*

*Then it could be seen that each of the British battle-cruisers had begun business in earnest. Control firing was adopted, the speed of each salvo being remarkable. The Germans, too began to get the range as the vessels drew towards each other, and a particularly lucky shot cut away part of the Indefatigable's fire control.*

*About 4 o'clock every man in the British battle-cruiser squadron, each vessel of which had been singling out an opposing vessel, realised that the Germans not only had a preponderance of guns, but more than double the number of vessels. They were clever in realising their superiority. They began concentrating their fire, and every gun of the German Squadron was first turned on the Lion, but hardly a shell hit her. Two asphyxiating projectiles fell on her upper deck behind the bridge, but the majority fell short, sending up terrific volumes of water.*

## GUNS CONCENTRATED ON THE QUEEN MARY

*The two squadrons approached each other for about 20 minutes, and then the enemy suddenly bore away to port, soon turning completely as if they were breaking off action. We turned as well, and manoeuvring continued for 15 minutes, when the German squadron again came ahead, their guns being concentrated on the Queen Mary. They had been poking about for range for some minutes without effect, when suddenly a most remarkable thing happened. Every shell that the Germans threw seemed suddenly to strike the battle-cruiser at once. It was as if a whirlwind was smashing a forest down, and reminded me very much of the rending that is heard when a big vessel is launched and the stays are being smashed.*



**Vice Admiral Sir David Beatty,  
Commander 5<sup>th</sup> Battle-cruiser  
Squadron**

*The Queen Mary seemed to roll, slowly to starboard, her mast and funnels gone, and with a huge hole in her side. She listed again, the hole disappeared beneath the water, which rushed into her, and turned her completely over. A minute and a half and all that could be seen of the Queen Mary was her keel, and then that disappeared.*

*Standing beside Admiral Beatty on the Lion during this awful spectacle of the destruction was his Flag Captain EM Chatfield. "We both turned around in time to see the unpleasant spectacle.... Beatty turned to me and said, "There seems to be something wrong with our bloody ships today" whether the destruction was caused by inadequate armour or poor flash protection in the magazine will never be established."*

### **The last Journal**

In my small piece *The Courcoux Men in the Great War* I mentioned discovering a couple more branches which came to Jersey in 1910. In one case, it appears that at least one returned to fight in the French Army after mobilisation in 1914. I'd welcome any thoughts on learning more of the French in Jersey at that time. The Roll of Honour mentions 130 Frenchmen who died and but I understand that St. Thomas RC Church carries a memorial naming some 200. But it would be interesting to see a list of the 2,000+ who served and survived. Regarding the descendants in Edmonton, Canada, I am still awaiting a letter.

### **A Failure To Exploit By Barrie Bertram**

Like so many others, the First Day of the Somme holds a fascination for me, particularly the effort spent in preparation. For the most part, the enormity of the undertaking was incredible and the logistics that were involved to get man and machine into position required innumerable man-hours spent planning, discussing, organising and progressing on what must have been on an industrial scale. All that appeared to come to naught some thirty or so minutes after the zero hour of 7.30

a.m. on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1916 such that when coupled with the 57,000 plus British casualties, a third of them dead, the assault appeared to be an outright failure.

Undoubtedly, the loss of so many men, so many of them in action for the first time as members of the Pals Battalions, was rightly considered a tragedy for their families and friends, their communities and for the British Army. However, in reality there was not outright failure, for on the British right the French attacking forces involved in the Battle achieved their objectives as did the British XIII Corps under Lieutenant General Sir Walter Congreve VC and also elements of XV Corps under Lieutenant General Henry Horne. It may sound cold-blooded, but was not the real tragedy of the 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1916 a failure to exploit the success achieved by the French under Fayolle, and that of the troops under Horne and Congreve?



**General Sir Walter Congreve VC after WW1 as Governor of Malta**

The Battle of the Somme had its beginnings at the Chantilly conference of December 1915 where the civilian and military commanders of France, Russia, Italy and Great Britain decided that they would simultaneously assault the Central powers during 1916 with the clear aim of bringing the war to a successful conclusion. The simultaneous assaults were seen as the means of preventing the transfer of troops from one front to another. For the French and British, this would mean a side-by-side assault and it was decided by the French, they being the senior partners, that this would take place in the area of the Somme and the numbers of French Divisions that would be used would be in excess of those of the British. However, Germany, who was not part of this Anglo-French plan, decided to launch their attack at Verdun on 21<sup>st</sup> February, 1916!

At the time of Chantilly, the senior British Commanders were new in that General Sir William Robertson had become CIGS in London, while General Sir Douglas Haig had taken over from Field Marshal Sir John French as C-in-C of the BEF. Very early on in his new role Haig recognised that, with the rapid expansion of the British Army, his Divisions were comparatively untrained and untested when compared to the more experienced French Divisions to the right. With that in mind, he was comfortable with the French-led December 1915 plans. Verdun changed all that, with the result by April that this attack would now be British-led and the frontage to be assaulted by the French would reduce from some 25 miles down to about 8 miles.

Haig was under pressure from a number of fronts. With a largely untrained army he wanted to attack as late as possible in 1916. However, the French wanted a much earlier assault to help relieve the pressure being experienced at Verdun by drawing off German reserves. Similarly, the politicians back in Britain wanted an end to the war in 1916, and they saw a breakthrough on the Somme as a means to that end. Meanwhile, Robertson as CIGS was also struggling to find extra men, particularly in

light of Haig's concern that the fighting men were also having to expend time on fatigues when out of the line. The choice of ground was not Haig's, who as has been seen with Ypres in 1917, would have preferred one with a more strategic benefit. In terms of material, shell production was not up to the levels required for the Somme battle, and the shell problem would be exacerbated by duds and shells of the wrong type.

Responsibility for the conduct of the Battle was given to General Sir Henry Rawlinson's 4<sup>th</sup> Army on the line between Serre and Maricourt where the British met the French, while it was determined that VII Corps from General Sir Edmund Allenby's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would provide a diversionary attack at Gommecourt. Rawlinson, a cautious man, appeared not share Haig's vision of achieving and then exploiting a breakthrough, and his own view would be to adopt a "bite and hold" approach whereby portions of the German line would be captured and immediately turned into defensive positions in expectation of immediate counter-attacks, a recognised German tactic.

And so the attack went in at 7.30 a.m. on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1916. In the north, the VII Corps diversionary attack quickly ran into trouble with 46<sup>th</sup> (North Midlands) Division stalling at the German trench line. On the south edge of Gommecourt Park the 56<sup>th</sup> (London) Division fared better with lodgements in the German trench system, albeit temporarily. The hoped for meeting up of the Divisions did not materialise, and the 46<sup>th</sup> Division Commander was later dismissed, if somewhat unfairly.

From Serre to La Boisselle, a further number of lodgements were achieved, notably by the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division, but these reduced as nightfall approached. However in the north of Fricourt and around Mametz and Montauban the two British Corps engaged there achieved many of their objectives and in particular, XIII Corps were effectively in possession of their 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> objectives at the end of that bloody day. Meanwhile on the right of the British right flank, the French who attacked later than the British had also been successful.

Why had the two Divisions, both of them New Army, in XIII Corps been successful? There were a number of factors in this. Good artillery work, some of it French. Training, the Commander of 18<sup>th</sup> (Eastern) Division was Major General Ivor Maxse who proved to be, then and later, an excellent trainer of men, taking them into his confidence and ensuring that they understood the plans. 18<sup>th</sup> Division fully consisted of Service Battalions while 30<sup>th</sup> Division consisted of Pals Battalions leavened by a number of the old Regular Battalions. This mix was little different to the other Divisions engaged elsewhere. Considerable emphasis was also placed on mopping up so that isolated German pockets were not left behind the advance line to engage later waves. Furthermore, 18<sup>th</sup> Division (as had 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division further around) advanced into no-mans land before the assault. It is possible that the Germans may have been distracted by Gommecourt to the north and more so with Verdun in mind, not believing that a French attack would materialise. Therefore, the German lines in front of XIII Corps might have been less populated also.

Having said that XIII Corps were in possession of their objectives at nightfall, disguises the fact that they were already in possession of many of these in the late morning! So much so, that at around lunchtime Congreve's staff felt able to report that the Germans were streaming back in some disorder past Bazentin Le Grand and Longueval and towards High Wood, and Congreve requested that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indian

Cavalry Division be released to advance across the area from their holding area at Happy Valley some 4 miles south-west of Maricourt. Meanwhile, on the British right the French Divisional Commander, General Balfourier, also wanted to exploit his success and asked Congreve's Corps to advance forward with him. **It was at this critical point, that Rawlinson refused to release the Cavalry Division**, telling Congreve that he should not move forward of his objectives, and as a result Congreve, a stickler for following orders, had to withhold support from Balfourier!



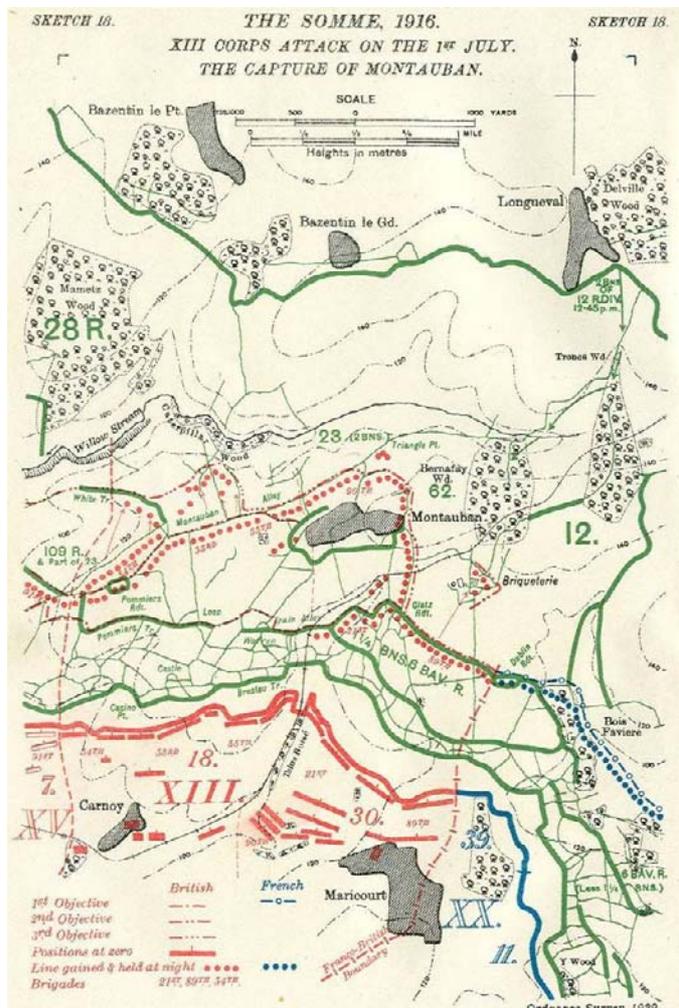
It is difficult to see why else Rawlinson (pictured left) refused to deploy the Cavalry, since it cannot be that the ground over which they would have had to advance had been shelled. After all, all of the German line in the Somme area had been shelled and how would the breakthrough that Haig sought be achieved, if not by advancing the Cavalry. Certainly, General Sir Hubert Gough the Cavalry Corps Commander wanted to go on the charge!

One can consider the characters of Haig and Rawlinson, and their interaction as Commander and subordinate. Both were learning on the job, with commanding larger forces than any British Generals before them. Haig was dour, almost shy, and highly loyal to his subordinates in protecting them from criticism by the political leadership back home. Rawlinson seems to have been ultra-cautious and probably unwilling to fully support the breakthrough wish that Haig expressed. Therefore, one must question whether Haig should have replaced Rawlinson or have been more forceful in getting Rawlinson committed to follow his own direction prior to 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1916. Rawlinson shared Haig's belief that the troops were under-trained, yet, as Maxse had demonstrated, that training could be given with the consequent success on the battlefield. And what of Congreve's request for the Cavalry? Was Haig aware of it? Surely Rawlinson should have consulted Haig? Did Rawlinson get cold feet at that critical time?

In looking at the involvement of Haig and more especially Rawlinson, one should consider a Corps Commanders' conference held some three months earlier, on the 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1916. At that meeting, Congreve was heavily criticised by Rawlinson for his Corps' plan for the assault with Rawlinson suggesting that it lacked dash. Two days later, on 7<sup>th</sup> April, 1916, Congreve wrote the following in his diary:

*"Sent for to see Army Commander who told me that as he did not consider me fit to take command of five divisions in coming operations. He had been to see C-in-C who is sending Horne to take over two of mine: 7<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> and the left attack. I to keep 18<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, and do the right attack. I had expected something of the sort from the combination of Rawly and Haig, both of whom consider nothing and no one of use unless from First Army. A severe slap in the face all the same....."*

There may have been sound reasons for reducing Congreve's span of control from five down to two, yet it seems clear that Rawlinson lacked for something in terms of man management as evidenced by Congreve's last line. On the other side of the coin, with Horne in place and Congreve smarting, did a better plan result for XIII Corps?



Almost ninety years on, it seems easy to do a “what if” analysis by assuming that the Cavalry Division had been released and that the French and British infantry had advanced together as Balfourier had sought. Would it have successful though?

I believe that there was a reasonable chance. Looking at the Official History maps, I feel that the Cavalry could have driven through the gap between Bazentin Le Grand and Longueval onto High Wood and also swung to the left around the north of Mametz Wood towards Pozieres. Beyond High Wood there was the Albert-Bapaume Road to take for at that time the German 3<sup>rd</sup> Line was still incomplete. However, could the advance be sustained and the land taken being held?

There remains the argument that logistically this would have proved difficult for Haig, with the artillery not keeping up but there would have been less well-prepared defences as the Germans had not, at that time, adopted their defence in depth approach encountered by the British later on.

In summary, the real tragedy of Rawlinson's failure to exploit cannot just be the casualties sustained on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1916. It may well be that his decision in response to Congreve's request resulted in the many deaths at Poziere, Mametz, High Wood, Delville Wood, Ginchy and Guillemont that may have been unnecessary at that time. For by the 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 1916, the Germans had demonstrated their resilience by restoring their front with XIII Corps. Congreve was vindicated in that the area of his Corps' advance was used as a springboard for further British operations northwards, while there were no immediate advances around Thiepval, Serre and the other sectors of the British Front. Whether success on the Somme would have contributed to a Central Powers collapse as hoped for at Chantilly that is another debate.

## Guillemont 1926

Further to Ian's photograph of the dedication ceremony, he has been good enough to send a group photograph and a JEP article of the Jersey Contingent that day in August 1926. Colonel Stocker is in uniform, while Lieutenant Roy Oliver Binet is identified as second from the left in the front row wearing the MC. He had joined the KRRC on commissioning from the Jersey Contingent. Hopefully Ian will try to have the faces identified through the *Temps Passé* page of the JEP. Homburg hats were surprisingly popular then!



Meanwhile, at the back of the Journalm I attach a few of Guillemont from my October trip for you to do a "Now" and "Then" comparison with Ian's earlier photograph. I would guess that the 1926 picture had been taken from the balcony on the house in the top right picture. Meanwhile I also noted that there was a Bertrand commemorated on the French memorial in the bottom right picture.

## A Recent Visit to London

I could be found in London for a couple of days last month. First of all, it was to attend the Old Victorian's London Dinner which, since I've been attending (5 years running at least), is held in the Naval and Military Club in St. James Square. The Club is now lodged in the former home of Nancy, Lady Astor, and housed the exiled Norwegian Government during WW2. More recently, it was the next door neighbour to the Libyan Embassy and opposite is the memorial to WPC Yvonne Fletcher. As it

suggests, the Club has a great deal of militaria on display and a particularly good library of books to lose ones self in!

However, whilst attending, I approached Victoria College's current headmaster, Mr. Robert Cook and suggested that it would be a good idea if the College website held the Books of Remembrance (both WW1 and WW2) in digital format. He was very welcoming of the idea, and a few days later I received an E-Mail from him saying that the website team had been tasked to carry this out – so it's a case of "watch this space".

Some of the time in London was spent at the IWM, taking in the Lawrence of Arabia exhibition which is very good in terms of artefacts and the length and breadth of TE's life. It mentions his living in the Channel Islands as a result of Frank Helier's birth but nothing more unsurprisingly. If anyone can make the trip it is well worth the time there. The art gallery is again fully open in the John Singer Sargent Wing, with his "Gassed" taking pride of place. Meanwhile, money again exchanged hands when I bought the book to the Sir William Orpen exhibition that ran there earlier this year.

### **Personal Bits**

Further to Ned's news last month, he has been busy with an at-home IT upgrade and he has another new E-Mail address, namely:

[nedmaletdecarteret@localdial.com](mailto:nedmaletdecarteret@localdial.com)

His postal address for any "snail mail" is: 3 Clos des Champs, La Route de Maufant, St. Saviour, Jersey, JE2 7HX.

Looking ahead, I have booked to be on Jersey 18<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> February next year to continue with some of my research. I'm planning a good solid four days in the Halkett Place Library with time at the Archive and SJ Museum. I'm hoping to get my first view of a combined data set of the JRHS, 1st Bn RMIJ and VCBR ready by then, tempered with inputs from the Soldiers Died in the Great War and CWGC, and also Australian and Canadian War Memorial data. I'm also trying to see if I can spend a few days in Guernsey later on, as, apart from a Junior Muratti in the early 50s, I have never ventured far from the mailboat pier!

Meanwhile in New Zealand, Elizabeth tells me that she is spending three weeks off at Christmas "to catch up on correspondence and family history/military history research". Perhaps an article will emanate from that?

### **Looking Ahead to 2006**

I received the following from Liz a couple of weeks aback, and thought that I would save it until this Journal:

*"I've been thinking again about what I said yesterday - about reinventing the wheel. I was wondering if it might be appropriate for us to let people in the CI but currently outside the WFA know about our existence. If I remember correctly you got our names from the WFA originally. It occurred to me that there might be other people out there working away at things to do with the Great War, or even just in possession of family documents etc who might well share our aims and have*

*expertise/information that we don't have. Would a short letter to the local newspapers in Guernsey and Jersey be appropriate at this stage?*

*I know we discussed the possibility of a website at one stage as another way of informing more people of what we are about and exchanging ideas on a wider scale. My friend Roger in England has offered to build a site free of charge. However we both think, for various reasons, that any site would need a domain name of its own i.e. not be part of a member's personal web space, and this involves some cost. Just thought I'd throw a few ideas into the pot. We have lots of interest within the group but I'm sure there's a lot more out there that we could tap into.*

*I've addressed this just to you initially, but please feel free to circulate it as a discussion document if you feel that it is appropriate."*

For my part, I would say yes to the thrust of Liz' note, and in terms of expansion, both she and Ned have already identified a number of people who are or might be interested in sharing in our interest. With respect to that, my next job is to E-Mail or write to them about it. One has recently been appointed Senator in the States of Jersey and that might bring some political interest.

With regards to providing publicity, I have been in contact with Gill Kay at the JEP, while I know from Ned and Ian that they have had dealings with Eric Blakeley at CTV, and some of the other JEP reporters. Liz is occasionally in touch with Eddie Parks (at BBC Guernsey still?) Some form of campaign would be needed to unlock what must be a reservoir of information on Channel Islanders in the GW. Alasdair Crosby at the JEP might also be a good contact with his involvement in *Temps Passé*. He is an OV too.

Money always raises its ugly head in the end! I don't know how much a website costs, but could we obtain sponsorship, a grant from the respective island governments, assistance from the SJ or SG? Regarding these Journals, although I have had a few of you offer to pay for postage, printing etc, I have been happy hitherto to treat this as a hobby. An expansion might need a more stylish output than a few (as in this case dozen) A4 pages, good publicity in itself but at a cost. What about occasional one day seminars?

To give a better link, we would need to have more advocacy for our interest on the islands. I am happy to help, but it would be easier with those who are resident. I leave you with the question – "What do you think?" Please come back with your thoughts.

### **Enfin**

Ned has very kindly loaned me a copy of a CTV Parish Pumps video looking at the memorials in the CI, and featuring Doug Ford from the Jersey Heritage Trust, film of the RGLI parading in Guernsey and then later shipping out, the Victoria College VCs – Bruce and McReady-Diarmid and Ned himself talking of his great-grandfather, Capt Harold Ackroyd VC MC RAMC. Two questions for the Guernsey recipients – in the background of the parade, a tall building can be seen, is this the monument that was brought down by the Germans during the Occupation because it was blocking the coastal artillery sighting? Can the location of the parade be pinpointed?

In return, I've loaned him two videos, one of the two Last Tommy programmes, the other a Channel 4 docu-drama on the Somme, based on letters from the troops at the time. Feel free to borrow them via Ned.

Talking of McReady-Diarmid, the latest Stand To carries on article on his name changes! The article did not mention however (the VCBR does though) that his mother, Fannie McReady, was a Jerseywoman.

I mentioned the Australian War Memorial earlier, if you get the opportunity, check out the website as follows: [www.awm.gov.au](http://www.awm.gov.au)

I have gone into the Roll of Honour Section and they have tagged group and individual photographs to the casualty, as well as the original manuscript input regarding the casualty. Look under the surname Bussell as an example (No CI link, I was following this up for one of my wife's friends).

Jersey Post is issuing two stamp sets in January, one commemorating 150 years of the Victoria Cross, the other a further Militia issue. Meanwhile the UK commemorates the VC in September.

I found the recent "Not Forgotten" programme to be excellent though from some of my local WFA branch comments it seems that it should have mentioned that people were commemorated by the CWGC. Liz indicates that Tardif (in programme 1) is a Guernsey name (as does Diex Aix), while it proved (in programme 4) that I did not always pay attention to the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation building in Fulham Road when going to and from Chelsea games in the last 45 years!

A new IWM linked book is recently out showing the GW Battlefields in a set of panoramic pictures. Highly recommended in the latest Stand To, I'm very hopeful that one is appearing in my Christmas stocking! Priced £50, it can be got from Amazon for £35, postage free.

Looking to producing this for the New Year, I would appreciate contributions for 13<sup>th</sup> February, 17<sup>th</sup> April and 12<sup>th</sup> June as appropriate. I'll look to the three subsequent issues later.

Regards and Merry Christmas to all  
Barrie Bertram  
13<sup>th</sup> December, 2005

**Postscript: Fully Revised and Renamed as a Journal on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2008.**

## VIEWS OF GUILLEMONT TODAY

