



Quarter Four – December Update

2014



Creeping Barrage

News & Notes
from the Herts &
Beds Branch

NEXT PRESENTATION:

**“PYRAMIDS & FLESHPOTS: MIDDLE EAST CAMPAIGNS 1914-1916
AN ILLUSTRATED TALK BY STUART HADAWAY, SENIOR RESEARCHER, AIR
HISTORICAL BRANCH (RAF)
ST. GEORGE’S SCHOOL, SUN LANE (SPORTS HALL ROOM SP101),
HARPENDEN AL5 4TD**

12 DECEMBER 2014 AT 8:00PM

Personnel serving in Egypt in the Great War often complained that the popular impression of the campaigns, still widely held, was that it was a sideshow, with troops enjoying a holiday among the pyramids and the 'fleshpots' of Cairo. Actually they faced appalling heat, abrasive sand, poor rations and water shortages. In the desolation of the Western Desert they fought the Senussi, an Islamic sect supported by the Ottomans in a reversal of Lawrence's later work with the Arabs, while in the Sinai Desert they countered German-backed moves to dominate this strategically important area. Meanwhile, the Royal Navy fought to keep the supply lines to Gallipoli open, and keep men and material flowing to France from India, Australia and New Zealand. This talk will tell the true story of their experiences and achievements in fighting a determined enemy to protect the Suez Canal - the lifeline of the Empire.

DONATION AT THE DOOR £3.50

www.westernfrontassociation.com

Zone Call - A Few Notes from Geoff Cunnington, Acting Chairman and Branch Secretary



A very warm welcome to the December Q4 2014 update edition of 'Creeping Barrage'. I have received a number of favourable comments about our revised format Branch Newsletter – so thank you to all of you who got in touch.

The WFA newsletter for November is well worth a look and brings us all up-to-date with the recent Armistice commemorations that took place around the country.

The link is here: <http://us2.campaign-archive2.com/?u=b727059489ecdacccf6340260&id=b2e9bb0f48&e=88af2786d>

It is still not too late to book a place at the 'Remember Scarborough' Conference – details opposite. Being a keen student of the naval war, it looks like a first-class event and a good excuse to be relieved from the duties of Christmas shopping.



Some of you will remember the presentation given by Steve Fuller in May 2013 about the Bedfordshire Regiment and the campaign for a memorial to their fallen at Tyne Cot. That project has been completed and Ian Mould from the team has contacted us to say thank you for the kind donation of £100 which we contributed towards the enterprise and which reached fulfillment with the unveiling of the memorial at Tyne Cot on Monday 10 November 2014 in a small ceremony.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as can make to the December meeting – mulled wine and Christmas cake are on offer as refreshments at the interval.

Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Geoff Cunnington, December 2014



Previously at Herts & Beds 14th November 2014 “Empire, Faith & War” - Parmjit Singh



Committee Member, Simon Goodwin writes:

Parmjit Singh is an independent researcher who specialises in the culture, history and heritage of the Sikhs and the Punjab. He has lectured extensively on Sikh art and heritage and has contributed to several television documentaries, radio programmes, exhibitions and publications on the subject. He has co-authored the following publications:

Warrior Saints: Three Centuries of the Sikh Military Tradition (1999)
'Sicques, Tigers, or Thieves': Eyewitness Accounts of the Sikhs (1606-1809) (2004)

In the Master's Presence: The Sikhs of Hazoor Sahib (2009)

The Golden Temple of Amritsar: Images of the Past (forthcoming)

He is a founding member of the UK Punjab Heritage Association (www.ukpha.org), an apolitical heritage organisation founded in 2001 to preserve, promote and increase awareness of Punjab's cultural heritage. In 2006 he also founded Kashi House (www.kashihouse.com), a not-for-profit publishing enterprise dedicated to preserving the artistic, historic, linguistic and cultural heritage of the Sikhs and the Punjab through the publication of high quality books.

Parmjit travelled from Slough, on Friday evening, to speak to about 25 Branch members about his ongoing research into the stories of Sikh troops in WW1. He explained that he had recently completed an Exhibition of his findings to date and was now engaged in three new strands of research.

- (i) Collecting stories of WW1 Sikh troops, and their families at home, during the conflict.
- (ii) Researching the history of those Indian groups and individuals who campaigned against the service of Sikh troops in the British Army during WW1. Whilst there was no conscription and, therefore, no groups of conscientious objectors, there were certain groups who made a conscious decision not to enlist.
- (iii) Recording the stories of British Officers serving with Sikh Regiments during the conflict.

Parmjit explained that in 1914 only 1% of the population of British India was Sikhs (primarily based in the Punjab region of the country) but that they made up 20% of the Army.

He went on to explain that on a visit to his family's home village of Narangway he spotted a plaque on a wall which stated that 105 men from the village had fought during WW1 and that of these 1 had lost his life (although subsequent research on the CWGC database suggests it could be closer to 4 casualties). His own Grandfather had served in

the British Army in Afghanistan and then in China during the Boxer Rebellion.

At the outbreak of the War 250,000 Indians volunteered to serve, of which 194,000 became combat troops. Of these combat troops 45% were from the Punjab region and 18% were Sikhs. During the four years of the war, 1.4 million Indian combatants and non-combatants served and this figure equaled the total combined number of men serving from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and white South Africa. Approximately 125,000 Sikh combat troops served at some stage during the war and one in every six men serving in the entire British Army was Indian.

The Sikh forces formed three Regiments of the British Indian Army, the 15th, 34th and 47th and many of these men arrived in France in December 1914.

Sadly, few relevant documentary records remain in India from that time for a variety of reasons including poor levels of literacy and the absence of any particular subsequent national policy to preserve them. Sometimes letters home are discovered but these are few and far between.

Many British officers in command of Sikh troops wore turbans, not least because this made them far harder to specifically target by enemy snipers. British Army officers in charge of Indian troops often had a greater strategic significance than perhaps their fellow officers in British Regiments did. This is because they knew the languages and customs of the men under their command and when they were killed the negative impact on the fighting strength of their units was high.

Indian troops were soon in combat and took part in a number of actions including the Battle of Neuve Chapelle in March 1915. Four Indians also served in the Royal Flying Corps although the first of these actually fought with the French Air Force to begin with because the French had far less of a "colour bar" than the British. Of these four men only one survived the war.

A number of hospitals in Britain, predominantly on the South Coast, became famous for treating Indian troops, including Brighton and Bournemouth.

Early in the war many captured Indian troops were shot by the Germans but later a number were taken prisoner and special POW Camps were set up for them. Perhaps the most famous was the "Half Moon Camp" which was the first place in Germany a Mosque was ever built. The Germans did this to try and "turn" the Indian Prisoners to fight against the British, fortunately, with little success.

After a year on the Western Front, due to casualties, sickness and falling morale, the Indian units were shipped to other theatres of war including the Middle East. Almost 700,000 were to serve in

Mesopotamia during the war and of these 13,000 were besieged by Turkish forces, in the town of Kut, in late 1915. The British defenders held out for 147 days before, on the 29th April 1916, they were forced to surrender. Half of those Indian troops captured soon died of disease and maltreatment and the survivors fared little better when they were forced to make a 1,000 mile march to Aleppo in Syria.

Sikhs also fought at Gallipoli where the 14th Sikhs took part in the 3rd Battle of Krithia - losing a staggering 379 men out of an original strength of only 514.

During the war one in seven Sikh men of battle age joined up and Parmjit helped explain to us a common problem that many of them must have experienced. Letters home would, just like those of their British Army counterparts, have been subject to the military sensors and this might have deterred some men writing home to loved ones expressing their true feelings of love and separation. In addition, and perhaps unique to the Indian troops, the low levels of literacy at home

Simon Goodwin, November 2014

would often mean that any letter received might have to be read to the wife or mother by a village elder. Not really a very satisfactory, or private, way to share the soldier's deepest written feelings.

At the end of his talk Parmjit kindly took questions from the floor and in answer to one he explained how despite a very slow start commemorative events in India, marking the centenary of the Great War, were beginning to grow more frequent. This, he suggested, was because the Indian government sees the country as a new global power and that marking the anniversary helps promote that image.

Contact details for Parmjit's Research :

info@ukpha.org

facebook.com/gt1588

tweet : @gt1588 #UntoldStories #WW1Sikhs #EFW



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CAMOUFLAGED FLEET AEROPLANE CARRIER.*

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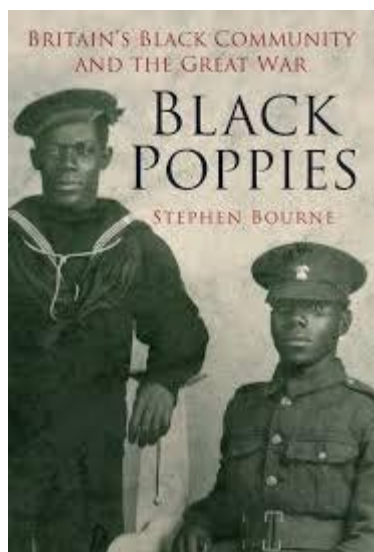
Coming-Up at Herts & Beds 9th January 2015 “The Art of Dazzle Painting”

Cultural historian **Robert Hewison** explores the history of World War I naval camouflage, and its connection to avant-garde art.

<http://www.heritageexchange.co.uk/content/professor-robert-hewison>

THE BIG PUSH 2015 – ON THE HORIZON

FUTURE BRANCH PRESENTATIONS AT ST. GEORGE'S SCHOOL, SUN LANE (SPORTS HALL ROOM SP101), HARPENDEN AL5 4TD. ALL MEETINGS START AT 8.00PM. TEA, COFFEE & BISCUITS INCLUDED IN £3.50 MINIMUM DONATION ON THE DOOR.



20 February

Black Poppies: Britain's Black Community and the First World War

Author **Stephen Bourne** lectures about the black soldiers who fought in the Great War, conscripts who signed up in Africa, the Caribbean or at local British recruitment centres. Sometimes they were allocated separate regiments such as the British West Indies Regiment, or they were integrated. Sometimes they were allowed to fight on the front line, other times they were given ancillary roles. Bourne tells us that black recruits were allowed in all branches of the armed services although not as officers. Footballer, Walter Tull, commissioned as a second lieutenant, was the only black man to break the colour bar, and then only because of his fame. He was killed in action in France in 1918.

20 March

Espionage during the First World War

Secret intelligence was a growth industry during the Great War, in Britain and other countries. Between 1914 and 1918 both military and civil authorities deployed agents throughout the world to gather

information (and spread disinformation) that might help to win the war. Some of these are famous, like Mata Hari or Lawrence of Arabia, some less so; sometimes it was the less famous who were most effective. In addition, thousands of civilians put their lives at risk in order to collect intelligence for the war effort. Former Chief Historian of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, **Gill Bennett's** talk will cover both the major organisational and technical developments that took place during the war, and some of the extraordinary personal stories of spies professional and amateur, invaluable and inept, working alone or together; as well as their portrayal in literature by the many writers, from John Buchan to Somerset Maugham, who were involved in secret intelligence themselves.

24 April

Domestic Women on the Home Front

Professor **Maggie Andrews** will focus on how the war caused shifts in the role of women looking at changes in domestic responsibilities, the impact of food shortages, letter writing, gardening and charity work which facilitated the more well-known areas of women's wartime contribution such as nursing and working in munitions.

22 May

The Camps at Cannock Chase

Stephen Dean is a Principal Archaeologist at Staffordshire County Council. His presentation will review the two divisional-sized Great War camps constructed on Cannock Chase during late 1914/early 1915, their infrastructure and the range of services provided by the camps. Discussion will also focus on the recent excavation of the Messines terrain model, built by the New Zealand Rifle Brigade with the assistance of German PoWs in early 1918. This model is thought to be unique to the United Kingdom for this period and is one of only a handful known from the Western Front.

26 June

The Angels of Pervyse: Elsie Knocker and Mairi Chisholm

Elsie Knocker and Mairi Chisholm spent most of the War saving hundreds of soldiers' lives by giving basic first aid just a hundred yards from the German trenches at Pervyse. They received 17 medals for their bravery and became known as the 'Madonnas' and 'Angels of Pervyse': they

are two of the iconic women of the Great War in the company of Edith Cavell and Mata Hari. A project is underway with the aim to unveil a statue to mark the centenary of the arrival of the women in the village. This talk by **Diane Atkinson** will describe their lives, their works and the project to commemorate them. Diane taught history at secondary schools in London before moving to the Museum of London, where she worked as a lecturer and curator, specialising in women's history.

9 October

Public Schools and the Great War

David Walsh will analyse the contribution of British public schools and their alumni to the war effort and examine the effect of the war on those institutions during the war itself and subsequently. David Walsh taught history at Tonbridge School in Kent, retiring as Deputy Head in 2009. He has subsequently written two books - 'A Duty to Serve: Tonbridge School and the 1939-45 War' (TMI 2011) and 'Public Schools and the Great War: A Generation Lost' (Pen and Sword 2013) with Anthony Seldon. He is a member of the WFA and occasionally takes groups of friends on battlefield trips.

13 November

The Battle Bus Project

A 100-year-old London bus has been converted into a First World War 'battle bus' for a commemorative tour of Western Front locations in Belgium and France. During the Great War, more than 1,000 London buses played a vital role transporting troops to and from the front lines, removing the wounded and those due rest periods, and bringing in new soldiers. They would often travel at night, in convoys of more than 70 vehicles, and many of the drivers were the same men who had driven them in London. Before the breakout of war, the 'battle bus' served on route nine from Mortlake garage in south west London, and took passengers from Barnes to Liverpool Street. **Tim Shields**, project manager of the restoration project, will describe the conversion of the bus which was made possible by a Heritage Lottery Fund grant; additional funding was provided by the London Transport Museum Friends and public donations.

11 December

To Be Confirmed

Tail Spin - You Might be Interested In.....

The 'Everyday Lives in War' Centre will be holding another in its series of events to explore the stories, themes and legacies of the First World War early in the New Year. This event will be held on **Wednesday January 7th 6-9p.m. at the University of Essex** and brings together four speakers to offer their perspectives on the legacies of the First World War.

Paul Rusiecki, author of 'The impact of catastrophe: the people of Essex and the First World War, 1914-1920' will consider the war memorial movement in Essex and its work to commemorate the fallen of the county in the interwar years. Tony Morrison will report on Essex County Council's HLF funded project 'Now the Last Poppy Has Fallen' and the direction contemporary remembrance has taken. Michael Roper will present his research into family legacies of the conflict - how the war lived on for veterans. Rainer Schulze will talk on the response to commemorating the war in Germany and how it differs from the response here in Britain.

The evening will also feature a display of First World War artefacts and ephemera courtesy of SSAFA volunteer and researcher Sue Laidler. Refreshments will be available. If you are interested in attending this free event then please let us know at firstworldwar.herts.ac.uk

Herts at War Battlefield Tour 2015 & 2014 Year Summary

Dan Hill of the Herts at War Team writes.....Just a quick email on behalf of the Herts at War Project to inform you about the latest in our series of Battlefield Tours following the fortunes of the Hertfordshire Regiment throughout The Great War. This coming April (24-26th) in collaboration with Herts based Battlefield Tour Company; Battle Honours, we will embark on a three day trip to follow the 'Herts Guards' on the Western Front during 1915. 100 years ago today the Hertfordshire Regiment was resting in the French town of Meteren, after having spent their first three weeks in line near Zillebeke in the Ypres Salient. The Herts remained in Meteren until 23rd December 1914 when they marched to the Givenchy sector for the very first time. The Herts spent Christmas 1914 in front line trenches on the 'Rue De Bois' and far from experiencing a truce, had two men on sentry duty killed by a sniper on Christmas Day!

Over the following year, the Herts spent most of the time in the often overlooked Givenchy and Cuinchy sectors where they took part in actions with the 4th Guards Brigade at Cuinchy, Festbert, Givenchy and Loos, earning the affectionate nickname 'Hertfordshire Guards'. Our trip in April has been designed to follow in the footsteps of the Herts throughout 1915, utilising previously unseen diaries, military records, photographs and contemporary documents to bring their story back to life, exactly 100 years to the day, in the exact locations that the events occurred.

Details of the tour can be found here: <http://www.battle-honours.eu/herts-at-war-1915>

We are currently working on some very exciting plans for next year and updates for the exhibition, be sure to check out www.hertsatwar.co.uk for more detail on what we are up to.

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