

Lieutenant Gordon Stuart Frazier

Gordon was born on 23rd August 1892.ⁱ He was the younger of two sons born to George Rowland and Louisa Frazier. Around the time of Gordon's birth the family were living at 436 Coventry Road, Bordesley. His father, born in Oystermouth, Glamorgan, earned a living as a 'provision merchant'.ⁱⁱ

By 1901 the family had moved to 81 Golden Hillock Road, Aston (now Sparkhill) where George ran a grocer's shop. In 1904, Gordon joined his elder brother, Rowland, at King Edward's School (KES), New Street where he remained until 1908.ⁱⁱⁱ On leaving school he was articled to Mr C Silk, quantity surveyor, of Newhall Street Birmingham. Gordon had many outside interests, in particular, cricket. As a member of Moseley Ashfield Cricket Club and committee member he became vice-captain of the second team and was considered to be an excellent bowler. Gordon was also well known in local amateur theatricals and was a player in the Moseley Junior Shakespeare Society, then the Pitsani Players.^{iv}

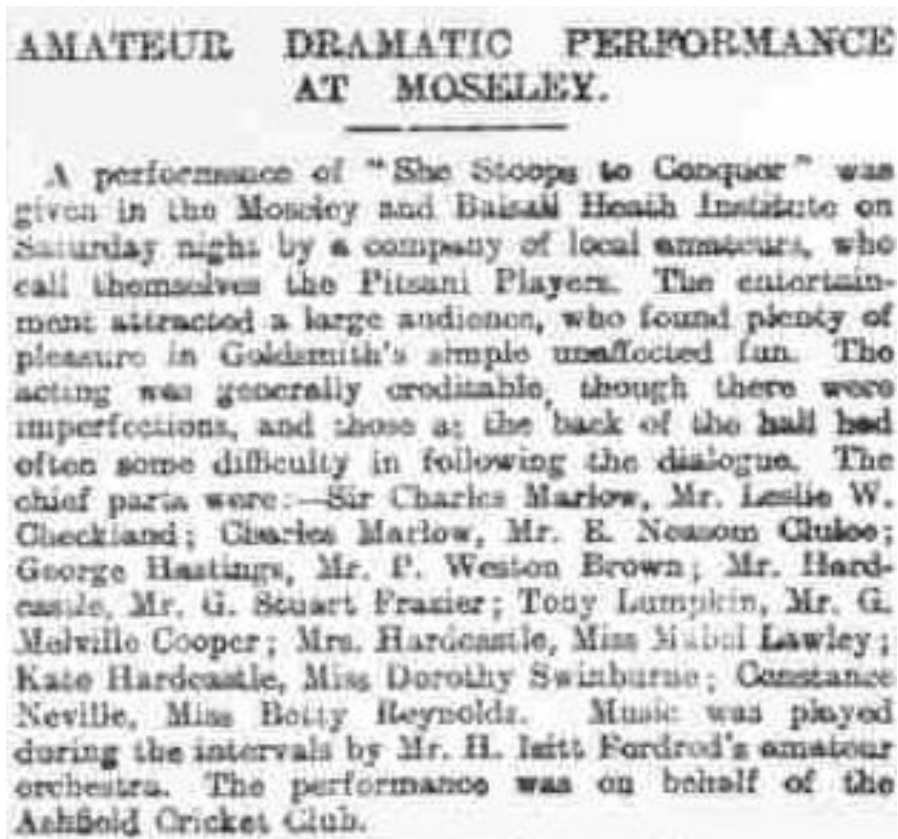


Figure 1: Birmingham Daily Post report on the Pitsani Payers and 'She Stoops to Conquer'.

A month after the outbreak of war in August 1914, Gordon applied to join the 14th Service Battalion (1st Birmingham Pals), Royal Warwickshire Regiment for three years with the Colours when it was formed in September by the Lord Mayor of Birmingham and a local committee. Gordon's attestation on 5th September records him as physically fit but not for regular service and as a consequence he was posted to the 17th (Local Reserve) Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment based at Chisledon, Wiltshire as Private G S Frazier, Number 225.^v On 1st July 1915 Gordon was promoted to Lance-Corporal. He quickly crept up the promotion ladder and by 18th February 1916 had attained the rank of Corporal and on 13th July the rank of acting Company Quarter-Master Sergeant. On 1st December he was transferred to the 92nd Training Reserve Battalion where he became a trainee officer in the 13th Officer Cadets based in Newmarket. The course lasted four and a half months.^{vi}

Around this time, Gordon would have heard that his brother, Rowland, had been posted as 'missing' after he and his pilot were shot down in an attempt to bomb the German sea-planes hangers at Gereviz, near Porto Lagos, Bulgaria on 1st December 1916. After what must have been an anguished wait for Gordon and his parents the news that Rowland had been captured and was being held as a prisoner of war at Philippopolis in Bulgaria on 14th February 1917 must have come as a relief but not without on-going concerns for his well-being.



After completing his training, Gordon was awarded a commission as a temporary 2nd Lieutenant on 27th March 1917 and attached to the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment.^{vii} Following a period of practical exercises with the regiment, Gordon was transferred to the 8th Battalion, part of the 51st Infantry Brigade, 17th (Northern) Division. On 14th June 1917 Gordon proceeded to France to join his Battalion.^{viii}

Figure 2: 2nd Lt Gordon Stuart Frazier

The Battalion at that time was heading towards St Nicholas, a village just north of Arras (see map on next page) from Mondicourt (about 17 miles SW of Arras). In the next three months the Battalion spent its time either in the front line trenches at the mercy of hostile enemy fire or in-camp training, which included PT, the techniques of bayonet fighting, and rapid rifle firing, together with general lectures on trench warfare followed by trench attack exercises.^{ix}

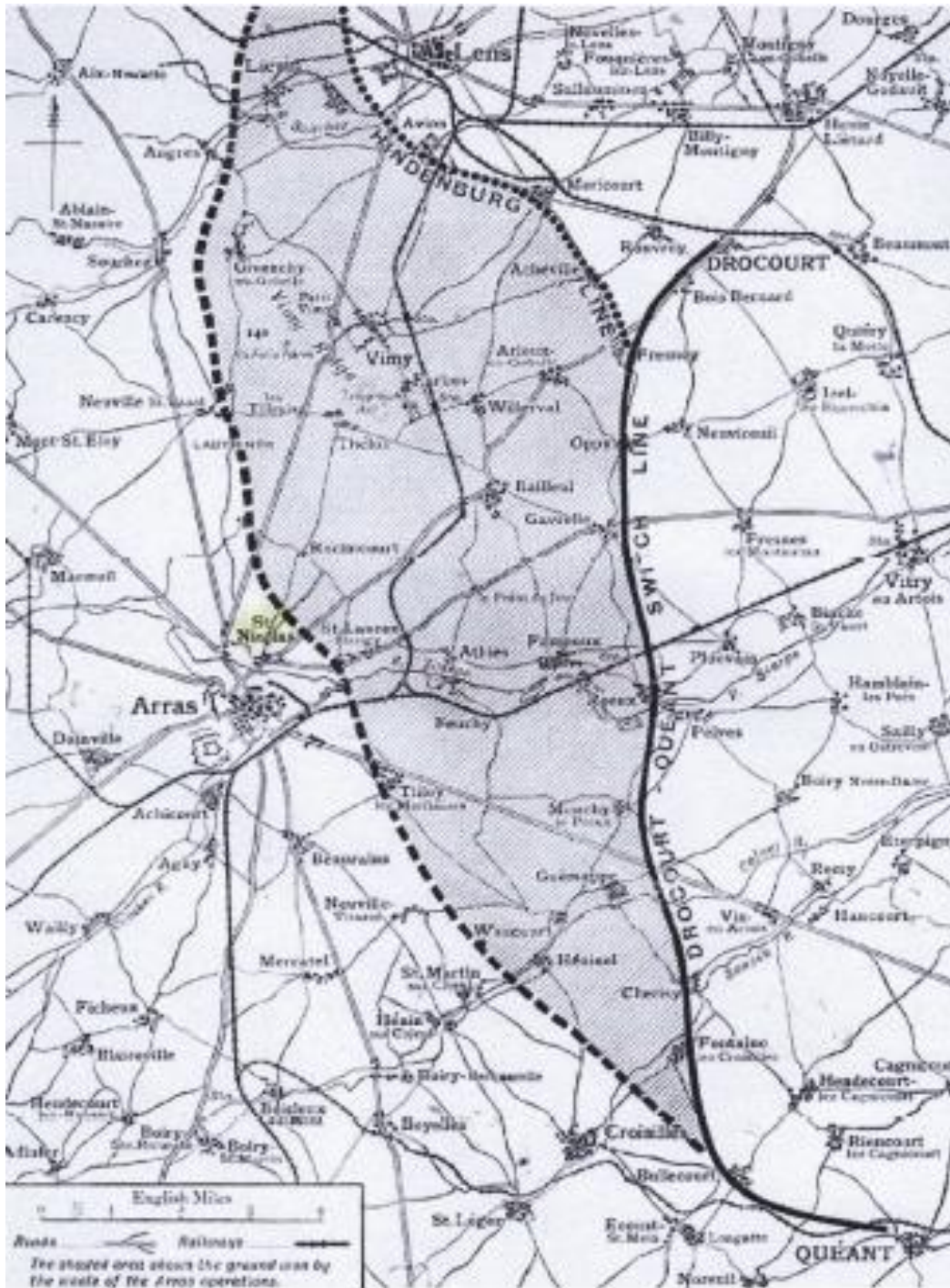


Figure 3: Map of the Battle of Arras, showing the position of St Nicholas

On 24th September 1917, the Battalion left the Arras sector and made its way north, eventually arriving at Suez Camp, near Hazenbrouck on 4th October. This was the prelude to the First Battle of Passchendaele, part of the 3rd Battle of Ypres which Gordon was to take part in on 12th October. The main aim was to breakthrough to the coast of Belgium so that German submarine pens could be destroyed at a time when German morale was supposed to be low after the allied

victory earlier that year in June at Messines. The impact of heavy rain and the artillery fire blocking watercourses turned the area into a quagmire. Unfortunately for General Haig, the Germans were expecting an attack and had brought in soldiers who had been fighting on the Eastern Front to bolster up the German forces already there in Passchendaele. Mustard gas was also used to assist them.^x

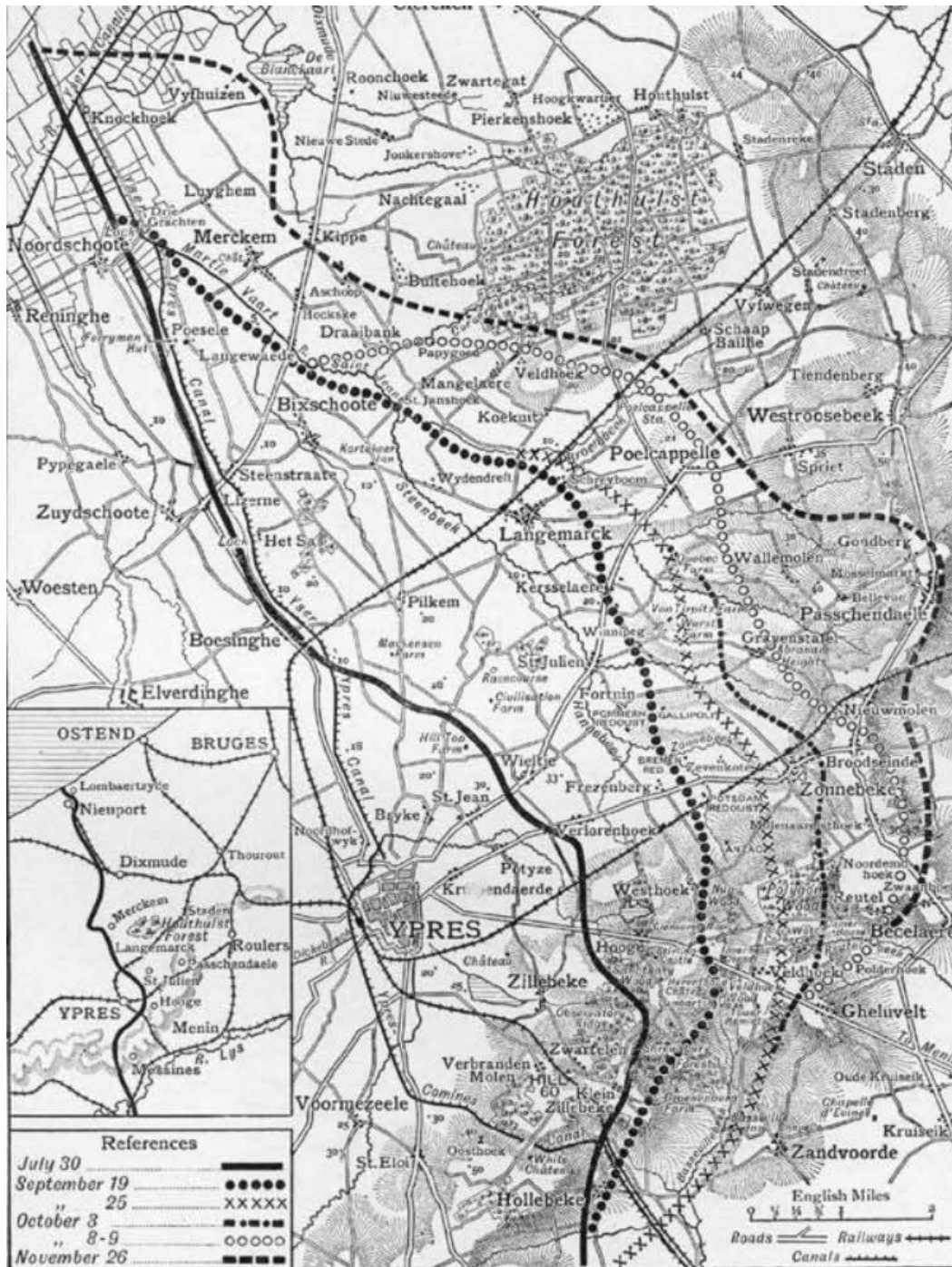


Figure 4: Map of the Ypres sector showing the location of Elverdinghe, Passchendaele, Houthulst Forest and the railway line running by it to Staden

At 8am on Tuesday 9th October, Gordon's battalion entrained for Elverdinghe and arrived at Whitemill Camp at 10.45 later that morning. Overnight the camp was bombed by German aeroplanes but, fortunately, there were no casualties. On the 10th October the Operational Orders were received and the Battalion left camp for Namur Crossing in readiness for the attack. The attack commenced at 5.25 am on 12th October 1917. The War Diary for that day records that:

A" Company lost all its officers before reaching the first objective; "C" Company had one officer left; "B" and "D" Companies had 2 or 3 officers left. Yet the enemy retreated and "B" Company reached its final objective, Turenne Crossing. 6.37pm, the battalion then consolidated on Turenne Crossing-Angle Point Road that was little more than an irregular line of shell holes and posts. By 6.45pm casualties were more than 200 other ranks while only 3 officers remained. The battalion was relieved at 4.45am on 14 October.^{xii}

Gordon was one of the officers wounded in the attack on the outskirts of Houlthurst Forest in the vicinity of the Staden railway (see Figure 4). Gordon was hit in the right thigh by a bullet from a machine gun which emerged close to the femoral vessels. It was 36 hours before he received treatment. He was eventually evacuated home on 27th October to the Prince of Wales Hospital in Marylebone, London.^{xii}



The attempted Allied breakthrough at Passchendaele on 12th October failed to materialise. The village of Passchendaele was not captured until the 6th November when Canadian troops finally reached the village. The Allied offensive then ceased, bringing the Third Battle of Ypres to an end with no significant gains amid 500,000 casualties experienced by all sides.

Figure 5: The morning after the First Battle of Passchendaele

161457 Prince of Wales Hosp'tt.
 Marylebone
 London N.W.1.
 4/2/18

RECEIVED
 5 FEB 1918

Sir

I beg to apply for a wound gratuity as I was severely wounded in the thigh during an attack in the neighbourhood of the Uffres-Staden railway on October 12th 1917 and did not reach a dressing station till 36 hours after being hit. As a result of the wound I have now got fluid on the knee. I reached England and this hospital on Oct 28th 1917 and a medical board dealt with my case about a fortnight later. I was before a second board on Dec 12th and a third one on Jan 28th 1918. I expect shortly to be leaving for a convalescent home so should be glad if you would address any communications to my home address
 29 School Road, Moseley, Birmingham

I have the honour to be
 Your obedient servant
 G. Stuart Traill
 8th Bn South Staffs Regt

The Secretary
 War Office

Figure 6: A letter from Gordon requesting a 'wound gratuity' while recovering in the Prince of Wales Hospital on 4th February 1918

On 2nd April 1918, Gordon reported to the Medical Board in Plymouth to review his recovery. The report states that:

Since his last board the swelling of the thigh has decreased – he can walk well but complains that the knee at times gives way going downhill. No swelling of the knee joint. No synovitis.^{xiii}

MILITARY WEDDING AT FINCHLEY.

FRAZIER—KEEBLE.

The Parish Church of St. Mary, Finchley, was beautifully decorated with palms and white marguerites yesterday for the marriage of Second-Lieut. Gordon Stewart Frazier, of Moseley, Birmingham, and Miss Marie Howard Keeble, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Keeble, of 27, Arden-road, Church-end. The service, which was fully choral, was conducted by the Rector, the Rev. W. St. Hill Bourne, assisted by the Rev. David Card, Vicar of St. Edward's Church, Birmingham. The hymns sung were "The Voice that breathed o'er Eden" and "O God our Help." Mr. Keeble gave away his daughter, who looked charming in her bridal dress of silk embroidered white georgette over white silk. She wore a white hat, and her bouquet was of white carnations and white heather. She was attended by Miss Muriel Gill, of Whetstone, as bridesmaid, who was prettily dressed in daffodil yellow and carried pale yellow roses. Lieut. Gelling was the best man. Mrs. Keeble, mother of the bride, wore a handsome black and white silk dress. After the ceremony a small reception was held at the residence of the bride's parents. The newly-married pair, who had received many beautiful presents, among which were not a few cheques, left later for their honeymoon at Morthoe, North Devon. The bride was beautifully gowned in a grey georgette frock, her hat of jade green being lined with the same material.

Both bride and bridegroom have a splendid record of war service. Lieut. Frazier joined the Army in the first week of the war, and has since seen continuous service in France. He was wounded at Ypres six months ago, and is still under hospital treatment at Sutton Coldfield, near Birmingham. Mrs. Frazier has been a V.A.D. nurse at the King Edward Hospital, Finchley, for nearly two years, while her bridesmaid, Miss Gill, has been a nurse there since its opening. A number of the nurses attended the ceremony yesterday to wish all happiness to their late fellow-worker.

During his time in London, Gordon met and fell in love with Marie Howard Keeble, a VAD nurse at King Edward's Hospital in Finchley. While home on leave recuperating and despite on-going treatment at hospital in Sutton Coldfield, Gordon married Marie on 25th April 1918 at the Parish Church of St Mary in Finchley. They had a honeymoon at Morthoe in North Devon.

In September 1918, Gordon was pronounced fit and rejoined the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment, and a month later his regiment in France, this time attached to the 1/6th Battalion, part of the 46th (North Midland) Division. On the 28th September he was promoted to temporary Lieutenant.^{xiv}

Figure 7: Newspaper report of the marriage of 2nd Lt G S Frazier and Miss Marie Keeble

When Gordon arrived in France, the Battalion, as part of the 137th Brigade, had just won a resounding victory with the capture, intact, of the concrete bridge at Riqueval over the St-Quentin Canal and the breaching of the Hindenburg line. This had done much to assuage the reputational blemish on the Regiment and the 46th (North) Division generally after being referred to as having 'a lack of offensive spirit' on the first day of the Battle of the Somme.

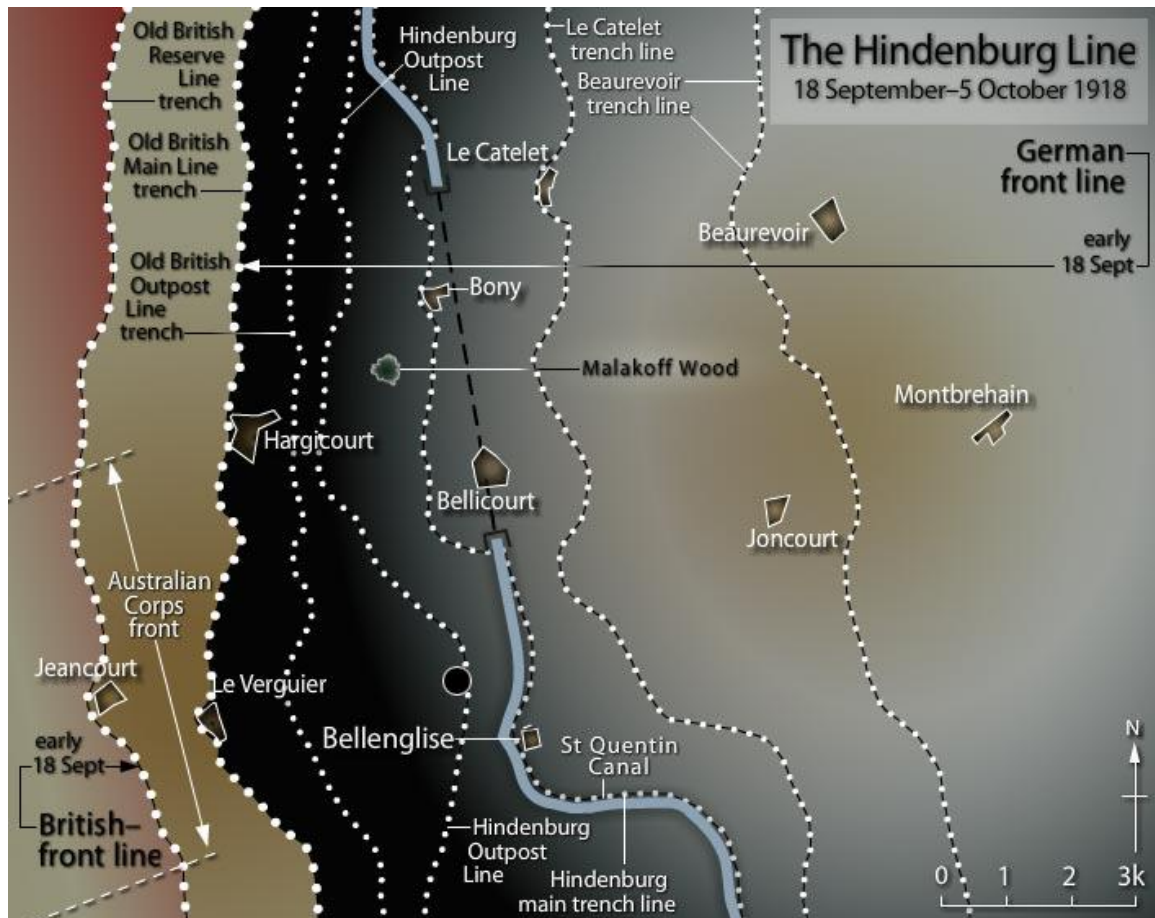


Figure 8: Map showing the progress of the Allies in September/ October 1918. The 46th Division were in the area at the bottom of the map around St Quentin and Bellenglise

In October, the Germans were on the back foot and retreating. The Battalion (as part of the 46th Division) were pushing forward despite the bombing by enemy aircraft of transport lines, assembly places and bivouacs to slow the British advance. The town of Bellenglise was taken on 3rd October, and hundreds of Germans prisoners were captured. The push forward continued, despite further enemy hostility, towards the Beaufort Line (the furthest line to the right on the Figure 8 map).

Progress was held up at Riquerval Wood on 11th and 12th October, just NE of Bohain. (See Figure 9. Riquerval Wood is shown in green as Bois de Riquerval on the map). On 17th October, the Battalion, holding a wide front in the wood, made a feint attack that allowed the 46th (North Midland) Division to clear Andigny-les-Fermes.

From the 1st November the Battalion together with the rest of the 137th Brigade was billeted at Bohain (about 15 miles NE of Saint-Quentin).

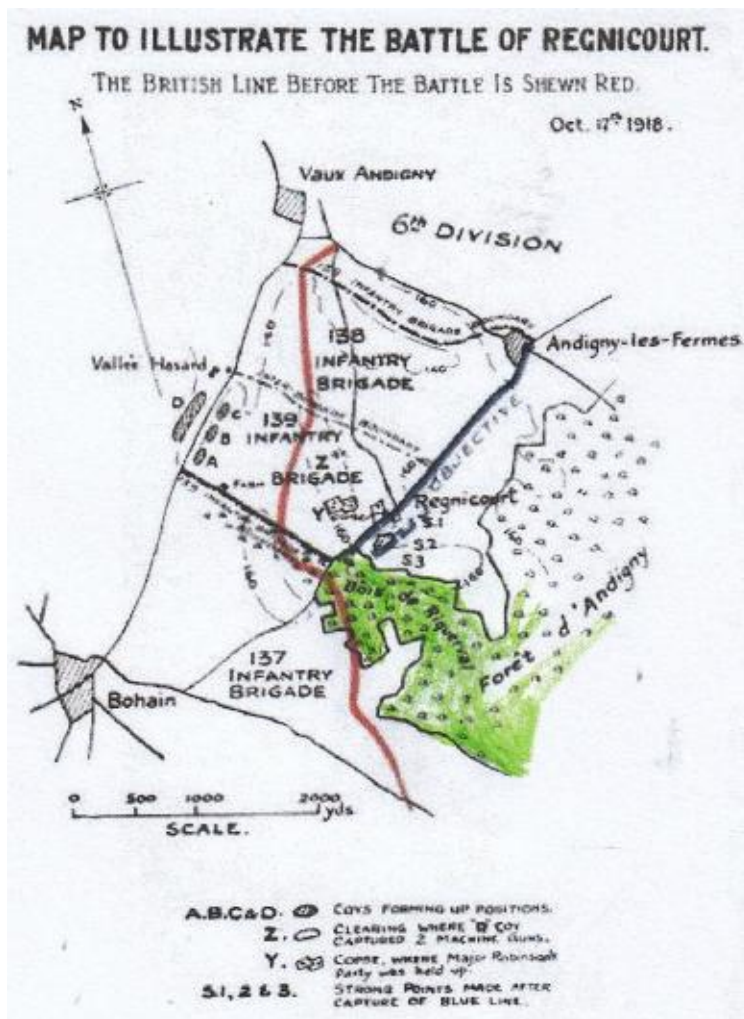


Figure 9: Map of the Battle of Regnicourt and the location of Riquerval Wood and Bohain

On 11th November 1918, the Battalion were in billets at Fourmanor when at 9.30 am, while on Muster parade, a wired message was read out to all assembled with great cheering. It read:

Hostilities temporarily cease at 11 o'clock today when all offensive action will cease. Present outpost line to be maintained and no troops of 46th Division to pass east of it other than on road etc. No conversation with the enemy to be allowed.^{xv}

The Battalion remained at Preux-au-Bois near Landrecies (about 30 miles NE of St-Quentin) from 15th November then the Le Cateau area in early January 1919, clearing the battlefields as demobilisation proceeded. The last cadres returned home in June 1919.^{xvi}



The Victory and the British War Medal Gordon received

Gordon on his return home took up his previous employment and went on to become a chartered quantity surveyor. In 1939 Register the couple are recorded as living at 27 Billesley Lane, Moseley, Birmingham. Gordon died in 1961 at Poole in Dorset and Marie eight years later. The couple had no children.

Researched and written by Edwina Rees

Moseley Society History Group

Endnotes

- i 1939 Register
- ii 1891 census
- iii Service Record of King Edward's School 1914-1919
- iv *Birmingham News*, 17th February 1917
Birmingham News, 5th May 1917
- v National Archives, Ref WO 339/80736
The Long, Long Trail: Training Reserve
<http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/training-reserve/>
- vi The Long, Long Trail: Officer Training in the British Army
<http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/officer-training-in-the-british-army-of-1914-1918/>
Service Record of King Edward's School 1914-1919
National Archives, Ref WO 339/80736
- vii *London Gazette*, 10th May 1917, Issue 30060, 4457
- viii WW1 British Army Medal Index
- ix National Archives, War diary of 8th Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment,
Ref WO 95/2007/2, pp 177-189
- x The Battle of Passchendaele
<http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/world-war-one/battles-of-world-war-one/the-battle-of-passchendaele/>
- xi 8th Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment 12th October 1917
<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?/topic/154562-8th-battalion-south-staffordshire-regiment-12-oct-1917/>
- xii National Archives, Ref WO 339/80736
- xiii National Archives, Ref WO 339/80736
- xiv *London Gazette*, 14th December 1918
- xv The War Diary of the 1/6th South Staffordshire Regiment, p 482
- xvi The Staffordshire Brigade
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Staffordshire_Brigade
The War Diary of the 1/6th South Staffordshire Regiment 1st October to 1st December

Illustrations

- Figure 1 *Birmingham Daily Post*, 5th January 1914
- Figure 2 *Birmingham News*, 5th May 1917
- Figure 3 Map of the Battle of Arras
<http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/battles/battles-of-the-western-front-in-france-and-flanders/the-arras-offensive-1917-battle-of-arras/>
- Figure 4 Map of the First Battle of Passchendaele
http://www.ossett.net/WW1/Bennett_Brook.html
- Figure 5 The morning after the first battle of Paschendaele
Frank Hurley - National Library of Australia file: la.pic-an24574133
- Figure 6 A letter held at the National Archives, Ref WO 339/80736
- Figure 7 *Hendon and Finchley Times*, 20th April 1918
- Figure 8 Map of the Hindenburg and Beaurevoir Line
<http://www.ww1westernfront.gov.au/bellenglise/what-happened-here.php>
- Figure 9 Map of the Battle of Regnicourt
<http://www.ajhw.co.uk/books/book311/book311.html>