

## Second Lieutenant Frank Neville Cowper

The Cowper family's origins are in Leicestershire after Frank's great grandfather, who was born in Canterbury c1810, married a Leicestershire girl and set up his turning business employing two men.<sup>i</sup> Grandfather William (born c1841) started out as a book keeper to an elastic web manufacturer and then became its agent.<sup>ii</sup> By 1871, William had moved his family to Birmingham having taken on a new dealership in leather and lived for sometime at 24 Trafalgar Road, Moseley. By this time John Stert Cowper, Frank's father, having left school, started earning a living as an elastic web agent. Following in his father's footsteps, John became a commercial clerk and then a leather merchant.<sup>iii</sup> By 1901 John had married Emily Gilmer and had two children, Stert Gilmer, born 1895, and Frank Neville, born 1897. Initially residing in Augusta Road, the family, by 1911, had moved to 'Ewell', Belle Walk, Moseley. The leather business must have been thriving as John was affluent enough to employ two domestic servants and afford to send both boys to King Edward's Grammar School, then in New Street, Birmingham.<sup>iv</sup>

Frank commenced his education at KES in 1908 and remained there for five years. On leaving school he joined a firm of accountants in Birmingham.<sup>v</sup>



**Figure 1**  
2<sup>nd</sup> Lt F N Cowper

When war was declared, both brothers having previously been in the Officer Training Corps at school, joined the 14<sup>th</sup> Warwickshire Regiment (1<sup>st</sup> Birmingham Pals) together on 10<sup>th</sup> September 1914.<sup>vi</sup> Frank became Private F N Cowper, No 14/588, and his brother Private S G Cowper, No 14/589.<sup>vii</sup> They were both given commissions on the same day, 11<sup>th</sup> August 1915, as Second Lieutenants in 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment.<sup>viii</sup>

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Suffolk Regiment was designated a reserve battalion based in Felixstowe and was where Frank and Stert undertook their officer training.<sup>ix</sup> Frank arrived in France on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1916, at an early stage of the Somme campaign. He was attached to the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion Suffolk Regiment (7<sup>th</sup> Suffolks). The battalion had arrived in France the previous year on 30<sup>th</sup> May and had been involved in heavy fighting in the Front Line.<sup>x</sup>

The 7<sup>th</sup> Suffolks, part of the 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, were ordered to Douzens on 26<sup>th</sup> September where they came under the orders of the 12<sup>th</sup> Eastern Division in preparation for the Fourth Army's assault of the Transloy Ridge planned for early October. The fighting commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> October in worsening weather and dreadful battlefield conditions. The 7<sup>th</sup> Suffolks at this time were in training and in reserve in a hurriedly made camp south of Longueval. On the 10<sup>th</sup> October they relieved the 10<sup>th</sup> Middlesex Regiment in Bulls Run near Flers. There was heavy shelling of the Front Line by the Germans resulting in some casualties and trenches blown in. Despite these setbacks, preparation for a full scale attack continued for the 12<sup>th</sup> October. The 7<sup>th</sup> Suffolks war diary for the 12<sup>th</sup> October records very briefly the regiment's unsuccessful attempt to gain their designated objectives against impossible odds.

Front line. Attack to be made on Bayonette Trench and Luisenhoof Farm. Morning very quiet  
 5am: Battalion lying in shell holes in front ready  
 10am: Major Henty went forward to advanced battalion HQ in Grass Street to receive reports  
 2pm: Zero. Attack started. German barrage very intense. Battalions proceeded in four waves, each company with a platoon front.  
 No definite report until 6pm when battalion was back in front line having failed to obtain objectives. B & D Coys gained objectives but were driven out by superior numbers. Battalion withdrew to Reserve in Flers Trench. C.<sup>xi</sup>

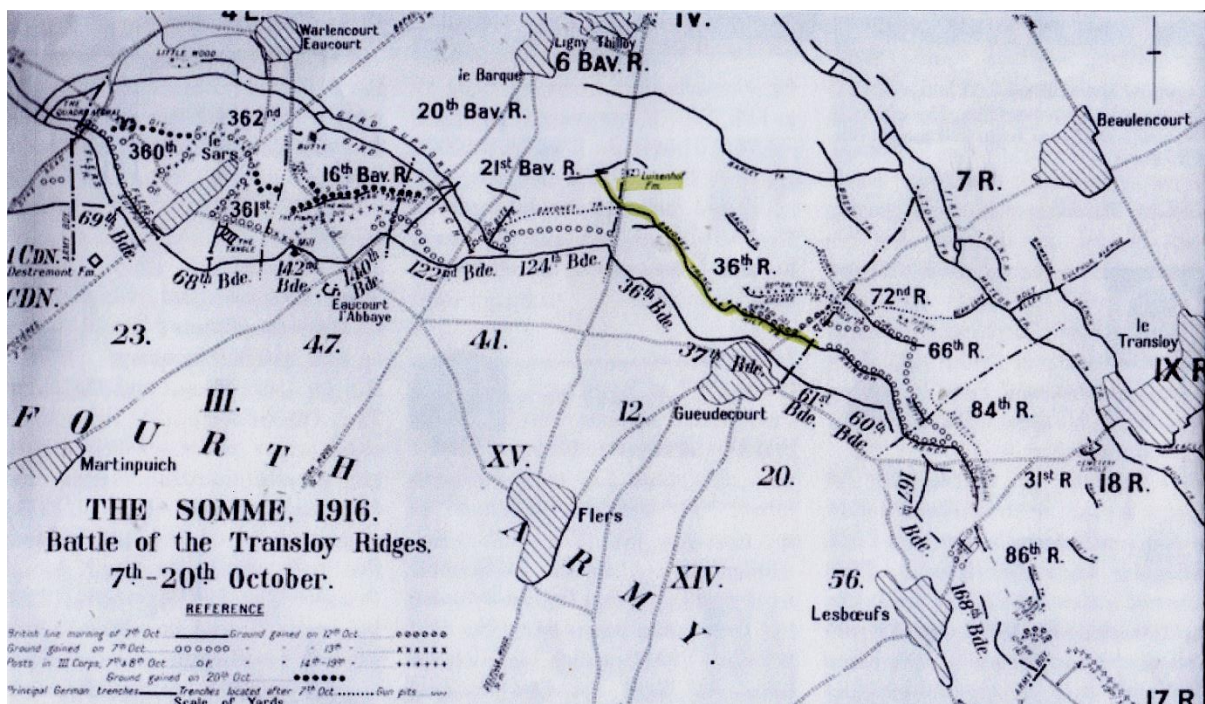


Figure 2: Map showing the position of Bayonette Trench and Luisenhoof Farm (highlighted in yellow), the objectives of the 7<sup>th</sup> Suffolk Regiment on 12<sup>th</sup> October in the Battle of the Transloy Ridges

Casualties are reported on 10<sup>th</sup> October, but are conspicuously absent from the regimental diary on 12<sup>th</sup> October. By extrapolating the names of those who were killed on 12<sup>th</sup> October from the 7<sup>th</sup> Suffolk Battalion's Roll of Honour for the whole of the Battle of the Somme, it is possible to deduce that 9 officers and 98 NCO's and other ranks were killed. The number of wounded must have also been considerable but again unrecorded.<sup>xii</sup>



**Figure 3: (Above) Thiepval Memorial  
(Right) St Mary's Church WW1 Memorial,  
Moseley**



**Figure 4: Senorita Lizano,  
the Chilean tennis star with  
Mr Stert Cowper between  
games at Tally Ho**

Frank is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial, France and at St Mary's Church, Moseley.

Frank's brother, Stert, was with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Suffolk regiment in France from 28<sup>th</sup> August 1916. He survived the war despite being wounded on two occasions. On his recovery he was posted to 2/7<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry and from 7<sup>th</sup> October 1918 saw the war out in North Russia before the battalion was withdrawn in January 1920.<sup>xiii</sup> In 1926 he married Nora Sophie Hall and carried on working as a member of William Cowper and Sons, leather factors at Hinckley Street Birmingham. He became vice president of the Lawn Tennis Association.<sup>xiv</sup> He died on June 4<sup>th</sup> 1945, aged only 51 years. His father had died only seven months previously leaving him £38,896, about £1,641,411 in today's money.

In February 2017, the Moseley Society History group was contacted by Jamie Robertson. In his email he wrote:

There was a family tradition that my daughter's great-great aunt had a boyfriend who died on the Somme. But no one knew his name, or anything about him. She was born in 1894, and christened Rhoda Marian Goodwin, but the family, which had a passion for nicknames, knew her variously as Ruby or Bunter. The only hard evidence of the boyfriend was a photograph of a middle aged lady with faded writing on the back: "Mother of Bunter's boyfriend. Lived to 100. Mrs Cowper." The photographer's name was AE Lane of Moseley.

At 60, she gave up tennis and took up golf

**TENNIS** players who faced Mrs. Emily Cowper on the courts in the 1920s were nearer the mark than they thought when they spoke enviously of her staying power.

For she did not give up the game until she was 60, promptly took up golf, which she played until she was 70—and on Saturday will celebrate her 100th birthday.

Only three years ago did Mrs. Cowper, a resident now at Wroxton Nursing Home, Olton, permit herself to take life more easily.

That was after she had broken a leg for the second time. She gets about now in a wheel-chair.

☆  
**WITH** daily help, she was still running her own home in Billesley Lane, Moseley, when she was 92.

She played most of her tennis at the Tally Ho! and Newton clubs, golf at Moseley—and the piano at a succession of house parties.

Her father was a professor of music and through him, Mrs. Cowper met the composer Granville Bantock, a family friend, on many occasions.

"He was a charming man who was not afraid to say what he thought" Mrs. Cowper says.

Similarly frank in her own conversation, Mrs. Cowper, who has read *The Birmingham Post* "since I was 15," says she is "not excited at the promise of a champagne party and 100 candles on Saturday."

"Too much fuss" she says "and unless the matron is very strict, there may be too many people."



Figure 5

(Left) Newspaper cutting on the occasion of Mrs Emily Cowper's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1964.

(Above) Photograph of Mrs Cowper sent by Jamie Robertson. A E Lane was a local Moseley photographer

Mrs Emily Cowper did indeed live to be one hundred years old. In addition Frank and Stert were in the Felixstowe area of Suffolk, eleven miles away from where Bunter lived, when they received their commissions on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1915 in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Suffolk Regiment. Having confirmed the likely link between Bunter and the Cowper brothers, Jamie sent a series of photographs, but only the photograph pictured below, one of a series of three, stood out as a possible match for the brothers, The third figure from left, sitting next to Bunter, bore a very close resemblance to Frank Cowper's picture taken soon after he became a Second Lieutenant and as Frank was killed on the Somme in October 1916 he was therefore the most likely match for Bunter's boyfriend.



**Figure 6**  
**(Top) The Goodwin family picnic at 64, Christchurch Street, Ipswich, taken around 1915/6 showing two officers in the Suffolk Regiment uniform**  
**(Left) Picture of Frank Cowper as a newly commissioned officer with a close-up of him from the picnic photograph showing a strong resemblance**



**Figure 7**

(Left) A photograph of Bunter  
(Right) Close up of Bunter and Frank at the picnic



Bunter never married. She ran a "Lady's Wear" establishment called 'Mary Garden' in Woodbridge, Suffolk with one of her sisters, and those who remembered her recall an affectionate, jolly lady, with a fondness for children.

**BIRMINGHAM BRIDE**  
—  
**Married to Son of Brigadier-General**

St. Agnes' Church, Moseley, Birmingham, was the scene yesterday of the wedding of Miss Daphne Tullett, daughter of Mrs. Stert G. Cowper, of 5, Ashfield-avenue, King's Heath, and Mr. Henry Caddell, son of Brig.-General W. B. Caddell and Mrs. Caddell, of Rossetti Gardens Mansions, London.

The bride's step-father, Mr. Stert Cowper, was the former secretary of the Warwickshire County Tennis Club.

The vicar (the Rev. J. P. Wilkinson) officiated. The bridesmaids were Miss Shelia Stanford (cousin of the bride), Miss Nancy Postlethwaite (cousin of the bridegroom), Miss Connie Major (friend of the bride), and Miss Elizabeth Hall (cousin of the bride). Mr. Dick Murray (a friend of the bridegroom) was best man.

**Picture on Back Page**

**Figure 8: Marriage of Stert's step-daughter in 1937**

**MR. STERT G. COWPER**

The death took place suddenly on Monday of Mr. Stert G. Cowper, 31, Grove Avenue, Moseley, a vice-president of Warwickshire Lawn Tennis Association. For seven years (1930-36) Mr. Cowper was county secretary, and during that time greatly developed the activities of the Association and nearly doubled the number of affiliated clubs. In 1937 he became one of the county representatives on the Council of the Lawn Tennis Association. He had acted as honorary referee at Moseley, Yardley and Priory tournaments, and he had been handicapper for most of the local tournaments. He was a member of the firm of William Cowper and Sons, leather factors, Hinckley Street, Birmingham. He leaves a widow.

**Figure 9: Stert Cowper's obituary in 1945**

Written and researched by Edwina Rees, with thanks to Jamie Robertson for the information on Bunter and to Jim Hone for the census information on the Cowper family.

Moseley Society History Group

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Endnotes

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- i 1851 census
  - ii 1861, 1871, 1881 census
  - iii 1891,1901, 1911 census
  - iv 1911 census  
Service record of King Edwards School (1914-1919)
  - v *Birmingham Daily Post*, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1916
  - vi British Officers after 1913, National Archives, Ref WO 339/36174
  - vii Birmingham City Battalions Book of Honour, 1920
  - viii *London Gazette*, 11<sup>th</sup> August 1915, Issue 29259, page 7989
  - ix See vi
  - x The Long, Long Trail. 3<sup>rd</sup> Suffolk Regiment  
<http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-british-infantry-regiments-of-1914-1918/suffolk-regiment/>

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- xi The National Archives. WO 95/1852/3. Regimental War Diary of 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion Suffolk Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> September 1916-31<sup>st</sup> December 1917, pp 30, 31
- xii Battle of the Somme, Roll of Honour 7<sup>th</sup> battalion Suffolk Regiment  
[http://somme-roll-of-honour.com/Units/british/7th\\_Suffolk.htm](http://somme-roll-of-honour.com/Units/british/7th_Suffolk.htm)
- xiii The Long, Long Trail, 2/7<sup>th</sup> Durham light Infantry  
<http://www.1914-1918.net/dli.htm>  
Service Record of King Edwards School 1914-1919
- xiv *Birmingham Daily Post*, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1915

## Illustrations

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- Figure 2 Map of the Battle of Transloy Ridges, 7<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> October 1916  
<http://forum.irishmilitaryonline.com/showthread.php?9058-The-Somme-Day-by-Day/page5>
- Figure 3 Commonwealth War Graves Commission
- Figure 4 *Birmingham Daily Gazette* 19 April 1938
- Figure 5 *Birmingham Daily Post*, 5<sup>th</sup> August 1964  
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- Figure 7 Photograph of Bunter with thanks to Jamie Robertson and his family
- Figure 8 *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1937
- Figure 9 *Birmingham Daily Post*, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1945