



GLASGOW HIGHLANDERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



1st Special Edition

October 2010

SPECIAL



EDITION

This is a special edition of the newsletter dedicated to the research carried out by Dr A D Chissel on his Grandfather George Penny Chissel

THIS IS A SPECIAL EDITION OF THE ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

As you know I am always on the lookout for stories and photographs that we can use for the newsletters concerning the **GLASGOW HIGHLANDERS**

Earlier this year I received a series of emails asking if he could submit a story concerning

a
George Penny Chissel



Dr Andre Chissel has spent a long time researching what he could of his Grandfather George Penny Chissel and has given the newsletter permission to publish his research. The normal Association Newsletters run to eight pages and Andre's story exceeded this. So this special edition was put together to allow his story to be told



If anyone else has compiled a story on a relative who served and would like it to be put into the normal newsletter or if it can't be placed into the normal edition we could make up other special editions and have them published through the RHF web site

A lot of research has went into this story and I wish to personally thank Andre for allowing us to read and publish his story

Dinger

GEORGE PENNY CHISSEL, THE GREAT WAR & BEYOND

By Dr A.D.Chissel



George Chissel in the 1920s (1)

My Grandfather George Penny Chissel known as 'Geordie' by his parents was born at No. 82 Broad Street, Mile End, in the Bridgeton area of Glasgow, Scotland on the 17th September, 1898. He was the eldest of nine surviving children (six others having died at birth). He was to have two brothers and six sisters. His Mother (Janet) owned a fish shop which came with a horse and cart as part of the business and his Father (David) owned a scrap yard.

Life when George was growing up was hard which was not untypical for the period, but was exacerbated by George's father who was a heavy drinker (although with nine children, some sympathy for his drinking could be understood). It was not unusual for George or another member of the family to wander down to the local Police station to either post bail (or bring food) for his father who, in a bout of binge drinking the previous night had been arrested for damaging the property of Catholics (usually the smashing of their windows with stones) in the Bridgeton area. (2)



The Chissel Family.
Back row – George, Ann, David, Jeanie, Christina, James
Front row – Helen, Janet (Mother), Jemima, David (Father), Emma (1)

This meant that at times, there was little to no money left to buy food and members of the family had to scour the bins of local bakeries in the early hours looking for burnt bread rolls that had been thrown out so that food could be put on the table. On several occasions, the family had to perform “moonlight flits” because they could not pay the rent and each member of the family had their own task, George's being to wrap the family's horse's hooves in sacking to deaden the noise of the animal as it pulled the cart carrying the family and their possessions as they slowly moved away in the dead of night. Despite moving house on a number of occasions as the size of the family grew, it seems that they were still able to remain in the Bridgeton area enabling George to continue his education at St James School in Green Street.

When George left school, he was no more than 13 or 14 and it is unclear what he did until the outbreak of the Great War and Britain's declaration of war on Monday the 4th August 1914. It would be almost certain that he would have found some form of work to help contribute to the household income. Nevertheless, Kitchener's call to arms on the 7th August 1914 saw the start of almost two and a half million men voluntarily enlisting into the British Army before the introduction inter alia of conscription through the Military Service Act of 1916. George, at just less than 16 years of age was one of the first to volunteer. Of the Regular and Territorial Force Regiments and Battalions in the local area,^A he opted for one of the Territorial Force Battalions in the area - the 9th (Glasgow Highlanders) Battalion, which was a Battalion of The Highland Light Infantry (9th HLI). They were known as the 'Pig and Whistle Light Infantry' or 'The Glesca Keelies' (The Glasgow Thugs).

The Territorial Force (TF) came into existence in 1908 under the "Haldane Reforms" of the British Army. Inter alia, it saw the amalgamation and overhaul of the old 'Volunteer Battalions' and guaranteed that the TF was only required for home defence (with the option to fight overseas under the 'Imperial Service' volunteer provisions).

In Scotland the TF was composed of two Divisions, the Highland and the Lowland, with certain troops outside of these formations. To join the Regular Army a volunteer needed to be 19, however, due to the Home Defence requirement of the TF, a TF volunteer only needed to be 17. As George was at most 16 years of age, he must have lied about his age to enlist. Although he could have said he was 17, the author will show that he probably said that he was 19 (the standard lie to tell the Recruiting Sergeant).^{B (see over)} The 9th HLI were formed from the former 5th (Glasgow Highland) Volunteer Battalion. They belonged to the 157th Brigade of the 52nd Lowland Division. (4), (5) strictly speaking the 9th HLI were not Highlanders, for they have always been the City of Glasgow's own Regiment.

The Divisional symbol of the 52nd Lowland Division during the Great War is shown below:



52nd (Lowland) Divisional symbol (6)

The three Infantry Brigades in the Division used the same design; but in the case of the 155th Brigade, the "L" was blue in colour, for the 156th Brigade it was red and for the 157th Brigade it was yellow (6). On the 15th August 1914 orders were issued to separate the Home Service men

A Of the Regular Battalions in the area (3) there were the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion, Royal Scots (Lothian Regiment) based in Glencorse, Edinburgh; the 1st Battalion The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders also based in Edinburgh; the 1st Battalion, The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles), based in Glasgow and their 3rd (Reserve) Battalion and 4th (Extra Reserve Battalion) both based in Hamilton; and the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion and the 4th (Extra Reserve Battalion) of the HLI again both based in Hamilton. Of the Territorial Force Battalions, there were the 5th, 7th and 8th Battalion, The Cameronians; (Scottish Rifles) based in Glasgow; (its 6th being based in Hamilton); the 5th and 6th (City of Glasgow) Battalion, The HLI; the 7th (The Blythswood) Battalion, The HLI; and the 9th Glasgow Highland Battalion, The HLI all based in Glasgow.(4)

from those who had volunteered to serve overseas, under the Imperial Service provisions (should the need arise) with the intention of forming Reserve Battalions made up of those who had not so volunteered. Those Reserve Battalions became the Home Service or 'Second Line' Battalions. The original Battalions now became known as the 'Foreign Service' or 'First Line' Battalions. (7) The Second Line Battalions were officially formed on the 31st August 1914. The TF men who had agreed to serve overseas under the Imperial Service provisions were issued with their Imperial Service brooch (see below) to be worn above the right breast pocket of their tunic.



Imperial Service Brooch (8)

In the case of the 9th HLI, an Imperial Service (or First Line) Battalion was formed and because the war was initially not going favourably for the allies (and to actually avoid the war "being over by Christmas" Kitchener was forced to deploy many of the First Line Territorials. This eventually saw the 9th HLI deployed to France in November 1914.



The First Line 9th Glasgow Highlanders passing through Southampton on their way to France in November 1914 where they formed part of the 5th Brigade 2nd Division. (10) Interestingly, none appear to be wearing Imperial Service Brooches !

B Interestingly, the pre war TF attestation form (E.501) did not ask for a statement of age and although new forms that did ask for such a requirement were brought in, many Recruitment Offices were still using up the old forms well into 1915. Therefore it is quite possible that George did not need to mention his age at all. (9)

Its Second Line Battalion (was to be used for Home Service and to reinforce the First Line) was actually formed in September 1914. Although the permissible strength of a Second Line Battalion was initially only half that of a First Line Battalion, this was raised to full establishment early in 1915, after which many of them were sent overseas.

It is unclear whether George was attested into the Second Line in September or whether he was attested into the First Line in August (and did not volunteer for overseas service ^C) but in any event, what is clear, is that he became part of the Second Line of the 9th HLI. George's motivation for joining up was probably the same as most young men, but there was also the added factor of being able to provide his Mother (with whom he had a very strong bond) with some additional income to help feed the family. His presence in the Army, (where he would receive three square meals a day himself) also meant in practical terms that there would be one less mouth to feed in the Chissel household.



65th (2nd Lowland) Divisional symbol (12)

A desire to be away from his father whom he despised was probably also a factor. George gave all of his first wages to his Mother and she had some of the coins turned into a Brooch as a keepsake. The Second Line of the 9th HLI became part of the 196th Brigade on the 24th April 1915 which in turn formed part of the 65th (2nd Lowland) Division (see above).



Cap Badge of the 9th (1/9th, 2/9th, 3/9th) HLI
The translation of the Motto **Nemo Me Impune Lacescit** is
"No one attacks me with impunity" (13)

^C As George did not receive either the 1914 or the 1915 Star medal and would not have been stripped of either had he gone to France and Flanders in either 1914 or 1915 for being underage (had he been found out) and sent back to the UK to be discharged, it is a reasonable assumption that he was first sent to France in 1916. (11)



D An underage George with his Mother in late 1914. Note what appears to be a Sgian Dubh poking out of his right sock top. Further evidence suggesting that George joined up shortly after the outbreak of hostilities is provided by the fact that he is in the correct uniform. Uniforms soon ran out due to the surge in recruiting and only those that joined early received the correct uniform. Later recruits had to train in their civilian clothes until the shortfall in the supply of new uniforms could be met which in most cases took many months.(1),(14)

D There is some controversy about whether George joined The Glasgow Highlanders or The Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) as the latter had two Territorial Battalions, the 4th (City of Dundee) Battalion (Territorial Force), and the 5th (Angus & Dundee) Battalion (Territorial Force).(15),(16) Neither however, drew their recruits from Glasgow or its environs, preferring instead, to draw its recruits from the area of Perthshire. As my Grandfather was in Glasgow and spare money was used to buy food, it is unlikely that we went to Perth by train to join up. In addition, his Blazer badge which I have seen is that of the 9th HLI and a close look at the right hand shoulder of George in the photo above shows an elongate shoulder title with the "U" shape of a bugle towards its base, similar to the shoulder title of the 9th HLI - see two pages over

In 1915 the First Line and Second Line Battalions throughout the Army were renamed the 1/Xth and 2/Xth respectively. In the case of the Second Line of the 9th HLI, they became the 2/9th HLI. A 3/9th HLI (known as the “Fireside soldiers” as they were initially billeted at home) would eventually form in March 1915. As a Battalion, the 9th HLI had always worn the “Government” or “Black Watch” (the Royal Highland Regiment) Tartan and their cap badge is virtually identical save for the writing on the scroll.

The bonnet is called a Glengarry and was blue in colour with a red ‘Pom-Pom’ or ‘Tourie’. The jacket would have been Khaki brown with the classic ‘cut away’ (only found in Scottish Regiments) below the waist so as to clear the sporran. The buttons would have been brass and above the top pockets, were rifle patches (pieces of cloth sewn onto the jacket to cover the area where the butt of the rifle would rest when fired).



A 9th Glasgow Highlander in 1914 – What George would have looked like in colour ! (See photo on previous page) (17)

The box pleats on the pockets indicate early 1914 issue. The shoulder lanyard is simply a linkage to a pocket knife that sits in his left hand top pocket. The belt is the '1914 leather' (as manufacturers could not produce webbing belts fast enough at the beginning of the war), and not the standard '1908 webbing' that should have been issued. This is probably due to the fact that the TF Battalions would have received "whatever was left", once the Regular Battalions had been kitted out. Typically, for war, the kilt would have been devoid of the sporran and surrounded with a leather apron. Early in 1914, the tops of the boots and the lower parts of the legs were covered with canvas spats, however, this was unsuitable for front-line wear and was replaced in late 1914 by 'puttees' (lower left picture) and 'short puttees' by 1916.

Kilted Regiments also wore stocking tops with garter tabs (red in George's case) projecting below the turned-over tops on the outside of the legs. The cane George is holding is a 'swagger cane' the ultimate in military fashion accessories of the time. Underpants or 'drawls' were not issued !



Shoulder title of the 9th HLI (18)

On the 26th July 1915 orders were received that 600 was the minimum strength for any Second Line Infantry Battalion and any men in excess of that number could be taken for overseas service. George would have remained in Glasgow until August 1915 when (as part of the 196th brigade) the Battalion was moved to Dunfermline. Their Headquarters was in the Carnegie Institute and the main billets were the gymnasium and the Queen Anne School. (19) In Dunfermline, George spent the winter training and on "Home Service" duties. (20)

Between November 1915 and January 1916, the 2/9th HLI were temporarily re-numbered the 24th Battalion before reverting to its original designation as the 2/9th HLI (although the reasons for this change and subsequent 'U' turn remain a mystery). At about this time, according to his daughter, one of his duties included looking after an Officer's horse. (21)

GLASGOW HIGHLANDERS READY FOR THE REAL THING



Members of the Glasgow Highlanders in training for the front. With wild shouts and bayonets fixed, a wave of sturdy Scots surges over the heather. A week hence they will be pitting themselves against the Hun

Headline and quotes taken from The War Illustrated 23rd October 1915 showing the “spill over” troops of the 2/9th HLI (from the 600 minimum strength stipulated previously) who had volunteered for overseas deployment. (22)



A striking photograph giving an excellent idea of the lay of the line of trenches. It will be seen that the line of trenches can only be taken in sections. It is not a question of wrestling a trench from the enemy and enfilading hundreds of yards of front with machine guns owing to the zigzag construction which necessitates the use of hand grenades to dislodge occupants from one section in turn



Member of the 9th HLI issued with a Goat Skin winter coat 1915 (10)

In March 1916, the 65th Division moved to England and joined the Southern Army, Home Forces (Army Headquarters in Brentwood). The 196th Brigade was stationed near Danbury with the 2/9th HLI (and George) being based in Woodham Mortimer, Maldon in Essex.

When the Military Service Act (Conscription) was introduced on the 2nd March 1916, all members of the Territorial Force were deemed to have agreed to overseas service and thus **all** Second Line Battalions became available to be sent overseas.

This was just in time for the 'Big Push' which was to take place on the Somme on the 1st July 1916.



2/9th HLI - Fun and games training Woodham Mortimer, Maldon Essex 1916 (10)



2/9th HLI C Company Field Kitchen Woodham Mortimer, Maldon Essex 1916 (23)



2/9th HLI C Company Field Kitchen Woodham Mortimer, Maldon Essex 1916 (23)



CQMS Timoney - 2/9th HLI C Company Field Kitchen Woodham Mortimer, Maldon Essex 1916 (23)



Pte Finlay - 2/9th HLI C Company outside the Headquarters of the 2/9th HLI in Woodham Mortimer, Maldon Essex 1916 (The Building is now St Peter's Hospital and the uprights at the entrance that you can see are still there) – note the Imperial Service Brooch he is wearing above his right tunic pocket (23)



The view opposite the Headquarters on Spital Road – the result of the second ever Zeppelin bombing raid over Britain ^E(23)

E Under the command of Kapitan Oberleutnant Freiherr von Buttlar, Naval Zeppelin L6 (which took off from Nordholz in Cuxhaven) carried out the raid on the night of the 15/16th April 1915 and the wrecked building is the workshop of an Arthur Smith. The only fatality was a speckled hen belonging to Henry Hutson of Gate Street (!) Apparently, von Buttlar was completely lost and had no idea what he had bombed (24)



Members of C Company 2/9th HLI taken on the London Road in Woodham Mortimer, Maldon Essex 1916 (23)



Members of C Company 2/9th HLI taken on the London Road in Woodham Mortimer, Maldon Essex 1916 (23)



The men's sleeping quarters (Officers slept in tents as well but at some distance from the men) – How George would have lived (23)





Private George Penny Chissel 2/9th HLI^F
 George is seen below in "walking out dress" (his uniform, less most of the equipment). (1)

F It is unclear whether George volunteered to go overseas prior to the Military Service Act coming into force (entitling him to wear the Imperial Service brooch) or whether he was an "unwilling" victim of the Act. Personally, as he is a Chissel, the author would like to think that he had had the sense to delay his departure for as long as possible as the absence of the brooch in the photograph suggests. However, as he is a Chissel, he may well have volunteered for overseas service under the Imperial Service provisions knowing that the Battalion was going to be sent overseas anyway and the Battalion may have run out of Imperial Service brooches to issue.

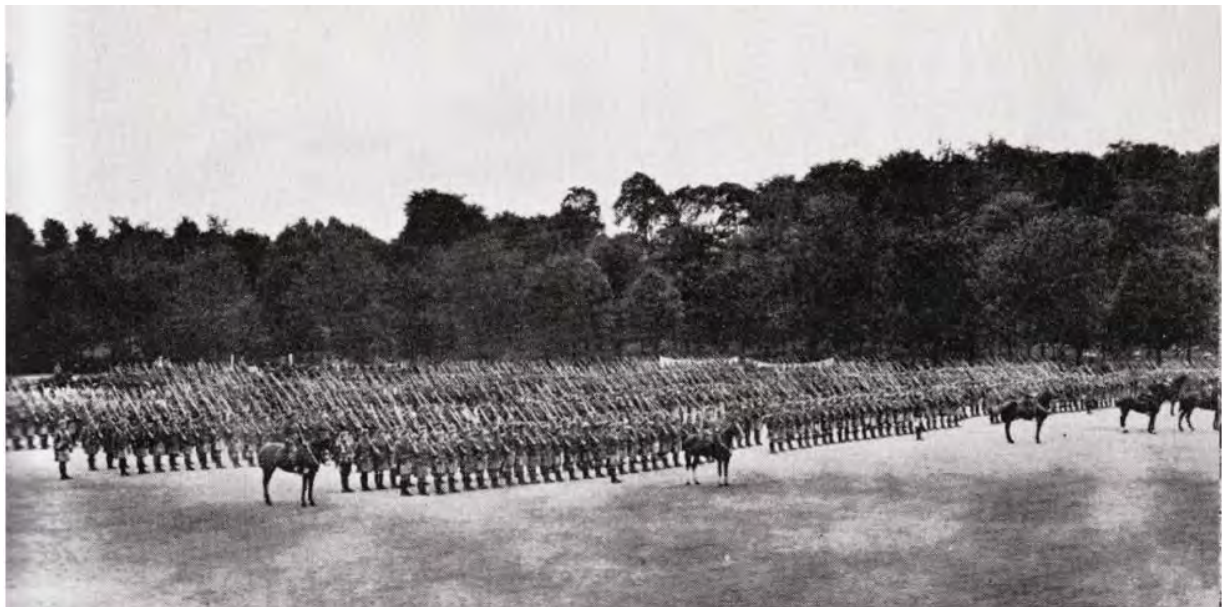
The difference in age between the first photo and the one above is noticeable and is probably between 18 months and two years. Given the expense associated with a posed photo in those days, the author suspects that it would probably have been taken for a special occasion which may have been his Mother's birthday but in George's case it may also have been a pre-deployment photograph for France and Flanders.

It is common today for soldiers about to deploy to a war zone to obtain tattoos, however, in 1916 it was more common for them to obtain a photograph.

The hand written sentiments on the photograph are a neutral indicator in support of the author's view, that it is a pre-deployment photograph (as they could equally have been written for his Mother's birthday). However, on balance, what drives matters towards it being a pre-deployment photograph rather than anything else is the war diary of the 9th HLI (25) and a book about The Highland Light Infantry entitled "Shoulder to Shoulder", (5) as it appears that the depleted ranks of the 1/9th were replenished in May 1916:

12 May at St-Omer - "The CO inspected the new Draft this morning. The men have all been supplied with wet equipment in place of the leather equipment with which they arrived. All details in Camp under Sgt Major this morning" (25)

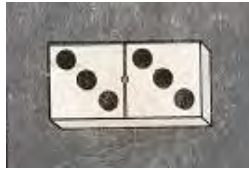
On the 29th May - "The Battalion was again concentrated — and at full strength for the first time since November 1914. The numbers were 55 Officers and 1006 Other Ranks" (ORs)(5)^G



9th HLI St Omer on Parade 26th May 1916 (19)

On the 29th May, the Glasgow Highlanders (some of whom were still in brogues and Highland spats) arrived in Bethune at 10pm (having left St Omer at 10.40am) and marched to billets in Annequin, about a mile from the frontline in Cuichy. They were now part of XI Corps and part of the 100th Brigade of the 33rd Division (having replaced the 1/6th Scottish Rifles).

^G Their pre-deployment training behind the lines at the "Bull Ring" in France means that they probably arrived in France in early May. Thus, if George gave his age at attestation as 17, he would still officially have been underage and would not have been deployed to France at this time. That is why the author believes that he gave his age at attestation as 19. This of course, assumes that he arrived in France at this time, but the author believes this to be a reasonable assumption given the pending "Big Push" of the Somme offensive that was to start in July with the requirement for boots on the ground and the passing of the Military Service Act.



33rd Divisional symbol (26)

On the 9th June, the Brigade went into the line. The Glasgow Highlanders relieving the Worcesters in the Auchy Right Sector eventually taking over the new Cuichy Sector (Auchy right and left). This was a long way north of the Somme Sector where the Big Push was to take place, nevertheless, troop numbers in the Auchy Sector had already been depleted (and moved south) for the offensive. However, on the 13th June 1916 a War Office Instruction, No. 1186 came into force (which was well publicised in the British media nine days later) and it stated inter alia that boys who were under the age of 17 were to be discharged and boys over 17 and under 19 were to be placed in the Reserve. (9) This was a blessing to his Mother who instantly sent off George's birth certificate to the appropriate authorities to ensure that her son was sent back home as soon as possible. All of this however, would take up to two months. In the meantime, George settled into the routine of frontline service where he experienced the pleasures of lice and was shown various methods (each with varying degrees of success) on how to get rid of them:

"You would run your thumb nail down the pleats of your kilt and collect the lice eggs on your thumb nail" (27)

At some point between the 22nd June and late August then ^H George was returned to the UK as proof of his age had been received and dealt with accordingly under "War Office Instruction No. 1186", where he may have been discharged or put into the Reserve. Between these dates, the Glasgow Highlanders took part in two major engagements with the enemy each of which will now be reported as George would have played his part in each. The first was the Trench Raid on "Mad Point" which prompted the Commander in Chief of British Forces, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig on the eve of the Battle of the Somme to send a personal signal of congratulations on the achievement performed by a single Company of Glasgow Highlanders that were responsible for the raid. (5),(25),(28).

THE TRENCH RAID ON MAD POINT

A "Trench Raid" is:

An operation undertaken to obtain information and prevent the enemy from sapping forward Mad point was a bulge in the German front line with two craters in front of it a short distance north of the Hohenzollen Redoubt and in front of the Cuichy Right Sector. Scheduled for the night of the 27th/28th June 1916, No. 4 Coy of the Glasgow Highlanders was tasked with carrying out the raid. The object of the raid was:

"To advance to the German second line behind Mad Point, and hold this for 60 minutes, to enable old and new craters to be examined and any mine destroyed. Also to get as many live

^H The Silver War Badge, sometimes wrongly referred to as the Silver Wound Badge, was instituted from the 12th September 1916 under Army Order 316. (29). The badge was awarded to all of those military personnel who had served at home or overseas during the war, and who had been discharged prematurely from the Army under King's Regulation 392 (or KR 392). There are various different ways in which someone could have been discharged under KR 392 and they included: "Having made a mis-statement as to age on enlistment" The award of the badge was noted on the individual's medal index card. As George's medal index card fails to mention the award of a silver war badge, he may have remained in France up to 11th September 1916 and been discharged from the Army – however, this is unlikely – read on !

prisoners as possible and any other articles and to do damage to defences and dug-outs”

The raid consisted of the following men from No. 4 Coy: 4 Officers and 148 ORs. A Miners Party was also attached consisting of 1 Officer and 4 ORs whose job was to demolish any mine shaft found. Trench maps and aeroplane photographs were examined and a full scale plan of the trenches was marked out in a large field south of Bethune adjacent the La Basse road near the billets. Here, No. 4 Coy (excused fatigues) carried out rehearsals both by day and night on the 25th. The pass word to be used during the actual raid was “Sauchiehall”. On the night of the 26th at 11.30pm guns bombarded Mad Point for the double purpose of wire cutting and getting the Hun used to the idea of a sudden night bombardment. In the morning, Lewis guns were trained on gaps in the wire and at night fire was put down on the gaps to discourage their repair.

The War diary of the Glasgow Highlanders also notes that:

26 June Annquin - “The new Draft to billets in BEUVRY for drill, but to be utilised on carrying fatigues each night at trenches”

indicating that George did not take part in the raid but was, nevertheless, fully occupied. By the evening of the 27th, everything was ready. The equipment to be used by the raiding party included 660 grenades, 87 buckets (for the grenades), 150 sandbags, 150 smoke cases 8 heavy wire-cutters, 4 rifle wire cutters, 27 electric torches, 3 guiding tapes, and 2 telephones.

“All unnecessary equipment was discarded and special care was taken that no-one should have anything about him to jingle”

Zero hour was 11.30pm. The sky was overcast and the night was very dark and quiet. At 11.00pm the raiders were divided into three Parties. No.1 Party using the “Sally Port” (a short sap on the right), consisted of three Sections the leading one made up of two bombers, two bayonet men (bombers), two bomb carriers and eight bayonet men, the support Section was the same in composition with the addition of three men (for prisoners), four bayonet men (for machine guns), three destroyers (carrying patent explosive boxes) and one man laying out tape to show the way back. The other two parties had a similar composition.

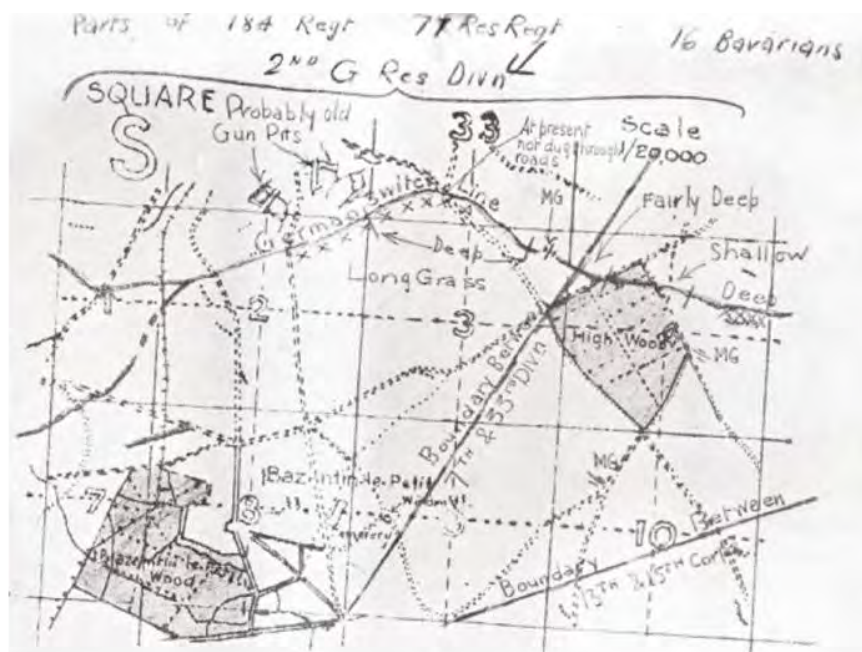
No.2 Party was to use No.1 sap in the centre and No.3 Party was to use No.2 sap on the left. A Headquarters party under Captain Frame was also formed consisting of two buglers, two telephonists and three runners. At 11.30pm a large mine was exploded at "railway crater" on the left to distract the enemy together with smoke from No. 3 Coy At the same time a hurricane bombardment on the German frontline and craters lasting three minutes began and then the guns laid down a box barrage around the affected area. At this point, a small mine was also exploded at Mad Point.

Following the mine explosion, the leading section of No. 4 Coy rushed forward and No.1 & 2 Parties broke through the gaps in the wire (generated by the bombardment on 26th and kept open by the Lewis gunners) in front of the craters. The craters were found to be empty, but in the centre of each was a mineshaft and eight prisoners were captured in the mine galleries. The Parties pushed on to the frontline trench and left no German alive within it. No.2 Party then

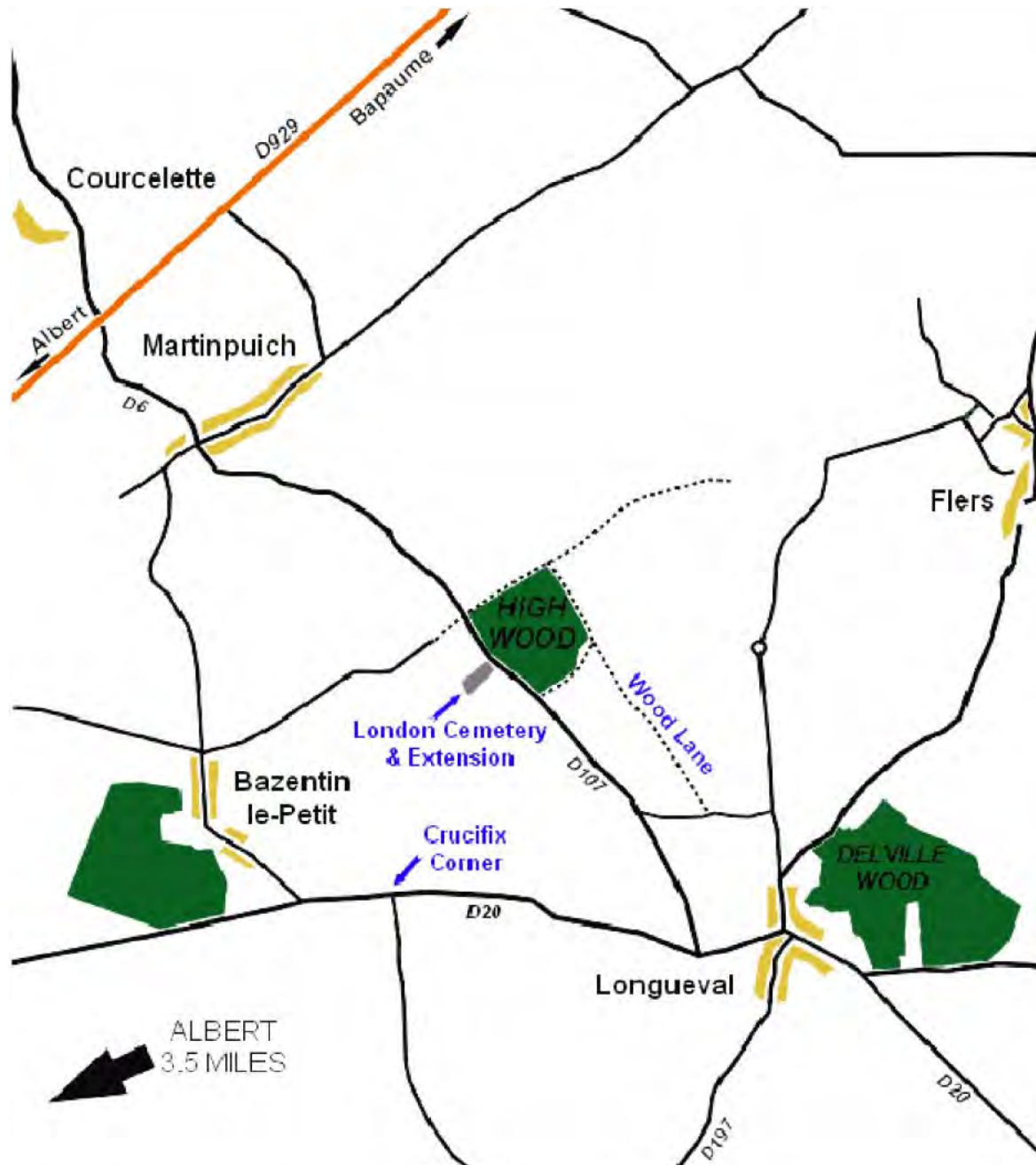
proceeded down the right communication trench bayoneting their way down it until they established themselves in the second line trench. Meanwhile No.3 Party had broken through a gap in the wire on the left, overcame all opposition and made its way down the left communication trench forming posts in the front and second lines to prevent bombing attacks from the north. In each case, men were left behind to guard the dugouts. The Headquarters party established itself in one of the craters and soon received reports that all three Parties had linked up in the second line and established flanks by pulling down the sides of the trenches to form barricades and were busy filling and using some of the 150 sandbags for defence.

The charge into manned enemy trenches eight feet deep (which were apparently in excellent condition) in the middle of a pitch dark night must have been terrifying with the screams of bayoneted Hun and the crash of exploding grenades rising above the roar of the barrage. All objectives had been taken and the German first and second lines were in the Glasgow Highlanders' hands on a frontage of 120 yards and to a depth of 85 yards.

The miners immediately began their work. At midnight a second mine was put up on the left (which had the effect of drawing the enemy's shell fire in that direction which No. 3 Coy bore the brunt of). At the end of the hour the buglers sounded recall and the raiding party returned its sole casualties being 11 men wounded, all but one slightly. Soon after, three explosions (from the mining party) were heard (the two mine shafts and a bomb store). No-man's land came under enemy shell fire during the withdrawal, but the whole company got back safely. The enemy's losses were heavy, 38 unwounded prisoners, 9 wounded prisoners, 1 Officer killed, 10 ORs killed, 7 wounded (and an unknown number killed and wounded). Two machine guns were brought back, a number of rifles, smoke helmets, steel helmets and other loot including some mining timber (to save the Highlanders carrying their own from Cambrin !). The raid resulted in the award of 10 military medals. It was the most successful of the 40 raids carried out by XI Corps and officially reported as the most successful raid ever made.



5th Scottish Rifles - Commanding Officer's Map (30)



Map of High Wood location (31)

AMBUSH AT HIGH WOOD

Following the 60,000 casualties which occurred on the first day one of the Somme Offensive and the ongoing casualties it was obvious that the 33rd Division would be drawn into the maelstrom. At 5.45pm on the 7th July, the Battalion marched to La Vallée arriving there at 8.00pm. They rested there the next day but were told to entrain from Lillers Station early the next day. The Battalion left La Vallée at 2.00am, marched to Lillers and entrained. They left Lillers at 4.51am arriving in Saleux at noon. They were then ordered to billets in Vaux but were stopped after

marching four miles and subsequently ordered to Vequemont. They marched through Amiens and arrived at Vequemont at 9.00pm. They had marched 17 miles and only four men fell out. Less than two days later they marched a further 10 miles to Morlancourt (southwest of Albert). Only three men fell out.

The 33rd Division now formed part of XV Corps (which was part of the 4th Army). At 3.00am on the 14 July, the Battalion were stood to and moved to Fricourt at 11.00am where they remained until 5.00pm when orders were received to move to Flatiron Copse. They arrived there at 8.00pm where they received orders to move to High Wood to take up a line from the northwest corner of the wood westwards along the road to Bazentin-le-petit joining 1/Queens who continued the line westwards and to dig in on the high ground in front of Martinpuich. The Highlanders had been told by the OC 2/Queens that High Wood had been captured and was under British control but as the Highlanders (and 1/Queens) approached it, they were met with withering enfilading machine gun and rifle fire from the wood, the Highlanders being on the right of the line caught the brunt of the attack and immediately suffered heavy casualties.



9th HLI soldiers in France 1916 – by now issued with Tin Hats, the body armour of the day (10)

As most of the fire was coming from the wood it was necessary before anything else could be done, to clear at least the edge of it. Accordingly, the bombers on the right of A Company were ordered to attack it. This they did with great gallantry, throwing bombs and dashing in with the bayonet in an endeavour to get to close quarters with the enemy but the wood was too strongly held, and the enemy's fire frustrated all efforts to clear the flank. Some German trenches along the edge were occupied by part of "A" Company, and this made the position a little more secure for the time being.

Meanwhile, the two companies were returning the enemy's fire from the front, and had reached the enemy line to find the wire intact and were forced to dig in. This was done not without further loss. When some men were observed to be dribbling out of the south corner of High Wood, it was obvious that immediate action would have to be taken to secure the right flank and prevent the precarious position of the leading companies from becoming much worse. Captain Cowie led three Platoons of "C" Company in an advance through the wood.

The Highlanders entered the wood, moved up a ridge some distance without initially meeting any resistance and driving those that they met before them and was able to get into a position in line with "A" Company's right. The Hun's resistance increased and the small denuded force dug in. This successful little operation was not achieved without considerable loss.

The remnants of these three Platoons were in a most precarious position but the remainder of the Battalion spent the night on the open spur, which was even worse. The right flank being now comparatively secure and the left in touch with the Queens, it was decided to consolidate the ground won at such terrible cost.



High Wood seen from the site of Bazentin-le-Petit Windmill – For the 9th HLI for 36 hours in July, Hell on Earth (31)

This work had to be done under a galling fire. All through the night the numbers of killed and wounded continued to mount up. The stretcher-bearers, as always, worked indefatigably without regard for their own safety. Dawn found the Highlanders clinging to the slopes of the valley, more or less dug into shell holes in an irregular line, with the right near the wood somewhat held back. A slight ridge running south-west from the wood gave some protection to the second line, but in front the position was very exposed.

Behind, was the open valley swept by the enemy's fire from two directions. Their CO Colonel Darling did much to steady the Battalion during the tragic night and morning.

His presence in the front line while the work was going on, the cool way he proceeded from post to post long after there was sufficient light for him to be seen by the enemy snipers, and above all his confidence and ready smile for everyone, acted as a tonic to sorely-tried nerves.

At 5.50am on the 15th July, an order was received. The 33rd Division was to attack the enemy's switch line in front of Martinpuich at 1.00a.m. with the 100th Brigade on the right on a frontage of 1000 yards from High Wood westwards, and the 98th on the left with its outer flank on the Martinpuich-Bazentin-le-Petit railway. The 19th Brigade was in reserve.

The Highlanders and Queens were to carry out the attack, which was to be preceded by a half-hour bombardment, during which the attacking Battalions were to push forward as near the enemy's positions as possible. The 16th Battalion of The King's Royal Rifle Corps (KRRC) was to be in support and the 2nd Worcesters in reserve.

The difficulties in carrying out this order were tremendous. The assaulting Battalions had both been hard hit during the night; both were holding lines of shell holes with no communications. Behind them the valley was open and under direct enemy observation. Worst of all, the enemy held the northern half of High Wood including the western corner, which was full of machine guns enfilading the line of advance. Col. Darling was fully alive to this danger and pointed out that the attack could not succeed until the wood was cleared.

He was not believed.

Eventually, at about 7.30am Col. Darling received a message that 7th Division should be asked to clear the wood prior to the Highlanders attack. However, the local commander of 7th Division tasked with the job of clearing the wood had received no direct order to attack it although it had apparently "been suggested" that he attack it. From his point of view it was too big a task anyway and Col. Darling and the Highlanders was left to tackle the problem himself

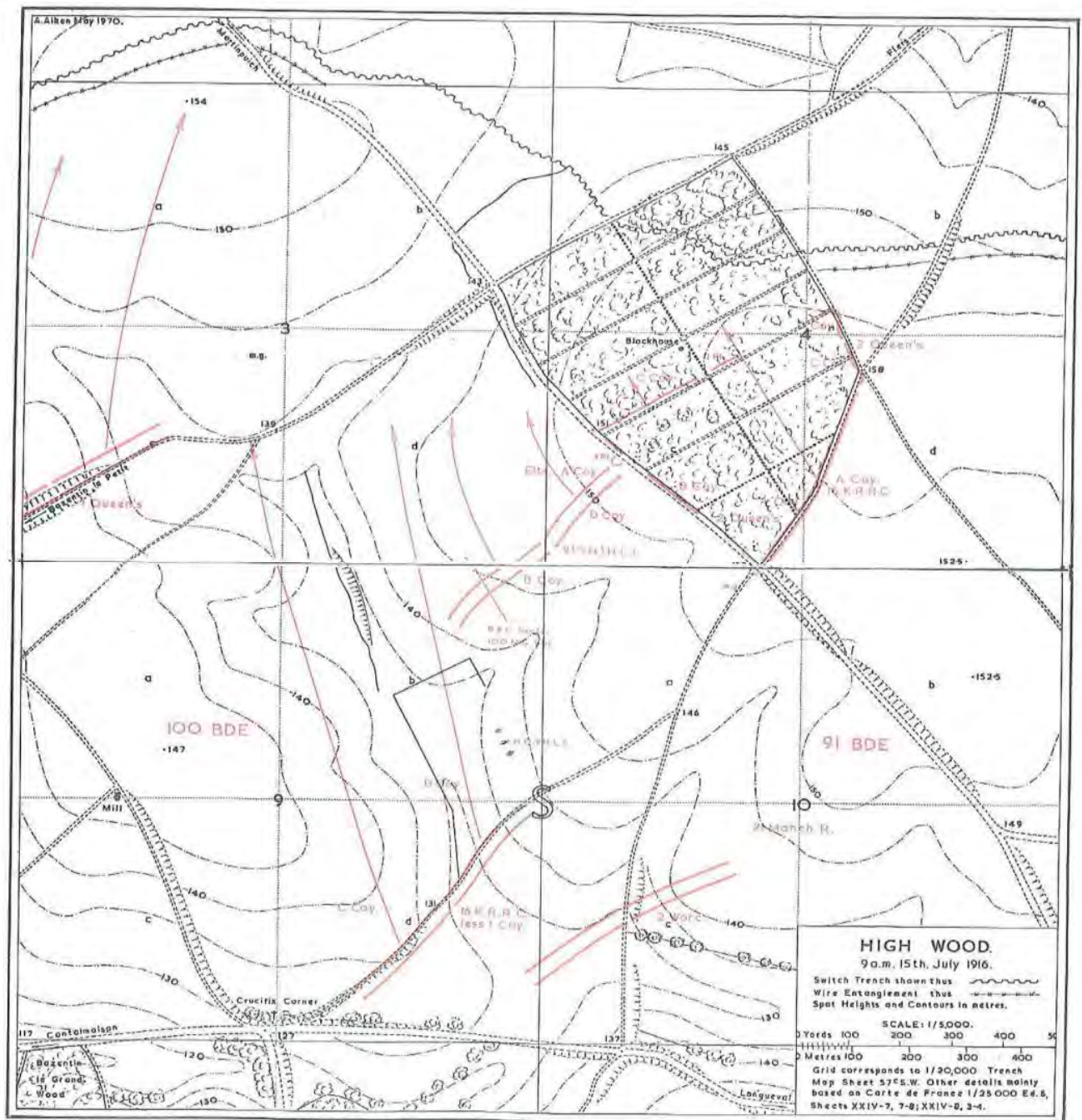
The force at Darling's disposal was inadequate. Three Companies were already engaged with the enemy, one in the wood and two in the open.

All had lost heavily, particularly A Company. Col. Darling decided to attack up the valley with "B" and "D" Companies, "B" on the right and each on a frontage of about 500 yards, while "C" Company (less one Platoon) was given the task of clearing the wood. The 4th Platoon of "C" Company was in support of "B" and "D".

One Company of the 16th KRRC was detailed to support this attack in the wood, leaving only three behind the main assault of the Brigade. At 8.30am the bombardment commenced and the Companies began to feel their way forward.

The enemy guns replied, and heavy machine gun fire from the corner of the wood made movement almost impossible.

Troop movements during the ambush



Very little ground had been gained when the barrage lifted at 9.00am. At once the 3 Companies dashed forward, Capt. Cowie in the wood and “B” and “D” up the open slope. “C” Company and the Rifles made some progress, but were soon held up, Captain Cowie being wounded. The non-success of this forlorn hope doomed the main attack to failure. As they advanced, the Highlanders were simply mown down like grass.



Aerial view of High Wood taken around 18th July 1916

The road going south east heads towards Longueval whilst in the opposite direction it is headed towards Martinpuich (19)
From the front and right flank a deadly fire was poured in on them. "C" Company's Support Platoon now came on. As it advanced up the slope it came under a withering fire and lost

heavily. The attack had simply melted away, the remnants of the two Companies taking precarious refuge in shell holes, from which they continued to fire at the enemy. The KRRC lost heavily before reaching the position held by the Highlanders. The Worcesters then came forward, penetrated the wood for some distance, but by noon it was evident that the attack of the 100th Brigade had been a terrible and costly failure. About 150 yards had been won and held, but the new position was hopelessly exposed. The 7th Division made two attempts to clear the wood in the afternoon and failed. Under cover of darkness the line was adjusted, some of the more advanced posts which had been held all day, being abandoned. At 3am next day the Highlanders were relieved by the 1st Cameronians of 19th Brigade and moved back to Mametz Wood.



Field Ambulances Mametz Wood 17 July 1916 (19)

The Battalion suffered the following casualties: 5 Officers killed, 15 wounded and 1 missing. 87 ORs killed, 214 wounded and 99 missing (believed killed). The final battle count was 192 killed. This was in all likelihood, George's baptism of fire. How many of his friends were killed is unknown but in later years he always referred to those with which he had served as:

“All good chaps” (32)

The pity of it was that these lives seemed to have been thrown away. In battle, the staffs of higher formations cannot of course be in close touch with the situation in the firing line; their information is nearly always belated and very often incorrect.

On the evening of July 14th, the Highlanders were ordered to dig in as a line with their right resting on High Wood which was reported to be definitely held by the 7th Division. This order was carried out although with some loss, owing to the information about the Wood being false. But no great harm was done for the Battalion remained steady and secured its flank. The attack next morning, however, when the situation was clear is difficult to justify. Although it was well known that the enemy held the Wood and could enfilade any advance that was attempted, an attack was ordered. The attack was made. It failed as it was bound to fail; obviously someone

had blundered. A DSO and two MCs were awarded to 9th HLI Officers over those 48 hours of fighting.

George also had a wry sense of humour and was noted in later years for saying:

“It’s not the bullet with your name on it that you have to worry about; it’s all of the other’s addressed ‘To whom it may concern’ that you have to worry about”

There was also a more serious side to him as another of his comments relating to the Great War was:

“Too late chum”

relating to how much opportunity one gave to the enemy to surrender. Once that opportunity had passed, it was simply too late chum. Perhaps these expressions were first coined as a result of George’s experiences at High Wood.



Memorial to the Glasgow Highlanders, High Wood (31)

After being relieved at High Wood in the early morning of the 16th July, the Glasgow Highlanders had moved back to Mametz Wood. The front line was 3,000 away, and there were ‘bivvies’ in which one could sleep. But there was little cover from shell-fire, which was continual for the battle, was still raging with unabated fury. The Battalion remained at Mametz Wood for four days. Each day the enemy guns took their toll, one or two being killed and five or six wounded every 24 hours. A draft of 355 men arrived to replace some of the losses. Included in it were a few of our own men, but the majority belonged to Lowland Regiments: The Royal Scots, (RSs) Royal Scots Fusiliers, (RSFs) King’s Own Scottish Borderers (KOSBs) and The Scottish Rifles (SRs), being represented. Some were very young, some rather old, and some just out of hospital. The draft was medically inspected, and no fewer than 79 were judged to be unfit.



9th HLI training in France (10)

A tremendous amount of work had now to be done in reorganizing the Battalion after its heavy losses. This and training, especially bayonet fighting, occupied the next few days. The A.D.M.S. inspected the 79 men of the draft which the M.O. had found unfit for duty in the line. He confirmed the verdict regarding 18, but the balance had to remain and do their best. An excellent (further) reinforcement arrived on the 4th August; 87 of our own men and nine junior Officers.¹ On August 7th the 100th Brigade went into the line again, relieving the 152nd Brigade. The Highlanders took over from the 8th Argylls at High Wood, the greater part of which was still occupied by the Germans. Work was immediately started joining up saps in the wood and improving the defences generally. On the 8th August, the wood was very heavily shelled and they lost 2 Officers and 22 men.

Next day was as bad; Battalion Headquarters at the south end of the wood was under heavy fire all afternoon and eleven enemy aeroplanes flew overhead. The shelling continued all night and the 24 hours cost the Battalion another Officer and 22 men. The 2nd Queens took charge of the wood and the Battalion went back to Bazentin-le-Grand. While in support there during the 10th, 11th and 12th, shell-fire casualties were 20, 11 and 7.

Early on the 15th August, 4th Suffolks, 98th Brigade, took over and the Battalion moved back to Becordel. During the relief the Battalion had nine more casualties. The 100th Brigade was now in Divisional reserve, and as usual, working parties were wanted every day.

On the 19th August having received a useful reinforcement of 15 Lewis gunners and 15 trained signalers, the Battalion went into the front line again between High Wood and Delville Wood (nicknamed Devil Wood for obvious reasons). As there was now a regular system of trenches, losses were not so heavy. Wood Lane, our front line, was partly occupied by the enemy. Both

¹ It is always possible that George arrived with either batch of these Battlefield Casualty Replacements (BCRs). However, the author feels that this is unlikely. The first batch of BCRs were, for the most part medically unfit. George, from the photo who was 18 appears to be fit and healthy and likely to have been one of the first sent to the front and as a result is likely to have arrived in May as stated above

from the point of view of present comfort and future progress, it was considered advisable to clear him out. On our left was a bombing post and beyond that the Boche, who held about 80 yards of trench. At 11p.m. on the 20th the Highlanders attacked and secured the position without loss. We were now in touch on the left with the 20th Royal Fusiliers 19th Brigade, the 2nd Worcesters being on our right with the 14th Division beyond them.

Since the middle of July there had been almost continual fighting in the Delville Wood — High Wood salient, but with no very marked result except heavy casualties. Delville Wood and Longueval had changed hands several times, and had finally been recovered at the end of July by our old comrades of the 2nd Division. Guillemont to the south-east had been entered more than once, and as a result of an advance in co-operation with the French our troops now held the outskirts of that village.

And this was the situation for the Battalion when George left them. With the 2/9th HLI now in Dublin, it is actually unclear where he was sent into the Reserve. However, some reasonable assumptions can be made.

If he had been closer to the age of 19, he would have been kept in France but placed in a base camp but as he was not even 18, he was sent home but given that his Reserve Battalion (2/9th HLI) were now in Ireland, it would be reasonable to assume that he would have been sent to another TF Reserve Unit of the HLI.

Of the available HLI TF Battalions that George could have been returned to in the UK, there were the 3/5th HLI, 3/7th HLI and the 3/9th HLI Battalions which were formed in March 1915. On the 8th April 1916, they were renamed as Reserve Battalions and based at Ripon.



3/9th HLI Field Defences Ripon (19)

On the 1st September 1916, the Battalions were moved to Catterick where the 3/5th HLI Battalion absorbed the 3/7th HLI Battalion and the 3/6th HLI Battalion absorbed the 3/9th HLI Battalion. The amalgamated 3/5th HLI Battalion then absorbed the amalgamated 3/6th HLI Battalion in July 1917 and the re-amalgamated 3/5th HLI Battalion moved to Edinburgh in September 1917 and to the Bridge of Allan in December 1917, where it remained as part of the Forth Garrison. (4)



Cap badge of the Highland Light Infantry
The translation of the Motto **Montis insignia Calpe** is
"The badge of the Rock of Gibraltar" (8)

It seems to make sense to assume that George was initially put into the 3/9th HLI Reserve Battalion based in Ripon or Catterick (depending on when he returned to the UK) as this was his Parent Battalion if not his particular Battalion.

He would also have been in Edinburgh by September 1917 offering an explanation for his availability to appear in the photograph overleaf.

Thus, given the changes that occurred it is likely that George would have eventually first swapped his 9th kilt for a 6th kilt and then he would have swapped his new kilt for trews when he became a member of the 3/5th Battalion HLI in 1917.

No wonder then that with all of the changes, there is no shoulder title in the photo of George overleaf. The more usual cap badge of the HLI is shown above. However, the TF equivalent would be minus the word "ASSAYE"^I on the scroll.

The HLI that wore the type of cap badge just described or the one above were also known as "Hell's Last Issue".

The photo overleaf shows George in his 3/5th HLI uniform.

^I **Assaye** is a small village in western India. The village was the location of the Battle of Assaye in 1803, fought between the Maratha Confederacy and the British East India Company. Wellington commanded and beat a vastly outnumbered combined force of British and Sepoy Regiments against the horde and always described this as his greatest military victory. The Regulars (and not the Territorials of the HLI took part in the battle and accordingly, it is commemorated on their cap badge and not the cap badge of the Territorials (33)



George, now 19 and eligible for overseas service is in a 3/5th HLI uniform (not the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) as his buttons are not black). The photo is taken sometime after the 22nd October 1917 as this is when his Brother David (on the right) joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. Having already saved her eldest son's life once by sending in his birth certificate (and with no end to the war in sight and with British casualties already in the hundreds of thousands), the expression on George's Mother's face says it all. Two of her sons are now about to go to the front and this time there would be nothing she could do to bring either of them home. (34) The emblem worn by George's father David is a Royal Engineers (REs) Cap Badge, as at the time of this photo, he was working for the Inland Waterways and Docks Section of the REs. He joined the REs on the 25th May 1917 and was eventually discharged on the 14th December 1918 earning the SWB (No. B136530). (1),(35)

The cap badge on George's Tam-o-shanter cannot be seen but it is likely to be the cap badge of the HLI shown previously. The "missing" shoulder title in the photograph is a shame as it would confirm (or not) the author's opinion of which Regiment George was part of at this time. All that is known for sure from his medals is that when he did return to France and Flanders, probably in December 1917 or January 1918 (30) it is clear that he did so as a member of the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) - known as "The Poison Dwarves" and not officially with the HLI. It is likely from family stories that he was a BCR for the 5/6th Battalion ^J as George recounts being at Polygon Wood and Trones Wood. (36) Only the 1st and the 5/6th Battalion were at these places but as it was only the 5/6th SRs that received a batch of BCRs at anywhere near the correct time of very late 1917/early 1918, and as they were also a TF Battalion, it is reasonable to assume that George, a TF soldier, formed part of this particular Battalion. Interestingly, George may well have kept his HLI cap badge (at least for a while) as the following passage from the book "The Fifth Battalion The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) 1914 – 1919" (30) shows:

"A draft of 400 men from the 5th, 6th, 8th, & 9th, Royal Scots arrived, and were posted to companies. In order to indicate that welcome addition to our strength were now members of the 5th S.R., a small patch of Douglas tartan was sewn on each sleeve near the shoulder"

As the above event occurred in 1916, the author assumes that by late 1917, the practice of simply replacing soldiers that belonged to one cap badge to form BCRs for Battalions or Regiments of other cap badges was common practice – soldiers were just sent in to "plug the gaps". Therefore, there is no real mystery as to why George was HLI one minute and SR the next. From an interest point of view, during late November 1917, it was soldiers from the 5/6th SRs First Aid unit who, during an attack in the Messines/Passchendaele sector, occupied an abandoned German pill Box. With the aid of the Pioneers, they turned it into a "respectable dressing station" (30) and christened it Tyne Cot. It is now the famous cemetery.



CAPTURED GERMAN PILL BOX CONVERTED TO BATTALION AID POST
SITE OF THE NOW FAMOUS BRITISH CEMETERY

(30)

^J The 5th SRs merged with the 6th SRs in September 1916 to form the 5/6th SRs



A Cameronian soldier (Scottish Rifles) in France and Flanders 1917 (37)

The 5/6th SRs (which were part of the 19th Brigade, 33rd Division) actually received their BCRs by the 4th January 1918 and were back in the line in the Ypres Sector and then back in St Omer by late January.



Cap Badge of the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles)
Their Motto is identical to that of the 9th Glasgow Highland Battalion HLI
The translation of the Motto **Nemo Me Impune Lacessit** is again
"No one attacks me with impunity" (8)

Soon thereafter, George was transferred (en masse with many others who had a similar Army number to him it would seem) into the Labour Corps. (38) He was transferred to either 775 or 776 Company of the Labour Corps where his Army number became 418969. (39) Both the 775 and the 776 Company were formed to support the Graves Registration Unit. Their work would have been to bury the dead and help create cemeteries.



Cap Badge of the Labour Corps
The translation of the Motto **Labor Omnia Vincit** is
"Work overcomes all" (40)



Soldiers of the Labour Corps returning to their base after a day's work (40)

However, it is possible that he was either transferred or that these Companies were re-tasked as it seems that he did spend some time with a Tunneling Company. (36) With the German 'Ludendorff offensive' in March 1918, George would have spent a lot of his time either retreating or digging new trench positions, blowing bridges and railroads (and then re-building them when the offensive was over and the Allies were on the counter attack.

It is best summed up by Captain Grant Grieve in his book "Tunnellers" (41)

"Most of the Tunnelling Companies became involved in the fighting, especially those sections working in advanced areas and sustained heavy casualties. Long established conditions changed in a day The Tunnellers who had been accustomed to long periods in settled billets or camps, found them involved in another phase of their varied career. A war of movement. Day after day, they found themselves hurriedly evacuating camp, continually marching and counter-marching, digging and holding posts, beating off attacks and counter-attacking bombing and machine gunning and executing all the tactical manoeuvres usually regarded as the prerogative of the infantry"



Labour Corps soldiers carrying out road repairs in Bucquoy (40)

Amongst the many things that George would have seen upon his return to France and Flanders were tanks in large numbers which left a lasting impression as he thought that they were:

"Bloody useless, bound to get stuck in the mud and they DID !" (27) ^K

K This was the one and only time that the author ever heard his Grandfather say a "rude word" and at the age of 7 or 8, when the author had this conversation with his Grandfather, it left a lasting impression.



A British tank stuck in the Passchendaele mud – “Bloody useless” (27),(30)

As the situation between George and his Father was not the greatest, George, when he received Leave (which for the British soldier at the time was once a year) did not go back to Scotland, but instead spent his Leave in Birmingham with a family of a friend of his whose surname was “Fiddler” and whose family were in the Salvation Army. (21)

There is also a family story that says that George was at one point promoted (presumably to the rank of Lance Corporal) however, a fracas with a Sergeant saw him demoted once again to the rank of Private. (42)

Whether this is true or not will now never be known however, none of the photos of George display a good conduct stripe so although the Jury will remain “out” on that one, the story may well have some substance.

It is to be assumed that he would have spent some time in France (and possibly Germany) after the war with the Graves Registration Unit continuing to either dig graves for the fallen or exhuming bodies for reburial.

Furthermore, support had to be given for the Army of Occupation in Germany.

The last Labour Corps soldiers returned to Britain in 1921. (40)



George (Masonic No. 2369) and his Father David (Masonic No. 563) as Freemasons at Shettleson St John Lodge (Lodge No. 128) (1)
 When George was eventually de-mobbed, he did not return home but instead lived for a time in the YMCA (presumably in Govan, Glasgow where he lived, eventually landing a job at Skinners Bakery in Govan as Assistant Manager.

He also joined the Salvation Army where he became a bandsman and this was where he met Margaret Motherwell. As they had gone to the same school they may have been childhood sweethearts but now, when they met again, their relationship blossomed and after a two year engagement (and after George had got the job at Skinners) they were married at Pollockshields Church Glasgow on the 12th December 1922.

The family moved from Govan to an area near St Georges Cross when Margaret their daughter was small and moved to Springboig when Margaret was five.

Eventually George was promoted to Manager of Skinners, the family had to move back near St George's Cross, where they stayed for about three years before moving to Drumchapel. (21)
 During the Second World War George also formed part of the Civil Defence becoming an Air Raid Precaution Warden. George eventually left Skinners to set up in business with his brother in law Alex in Largs Ayreshire. They were to run three shops (newsagents & tobacconists) so the entire family moved to Largs. The business was not a success as Alex did not pull his weight.

The shops were eventually sold leaving George without a job but he bought a shop in Parkhead in Glasgow. So the family moved to Cambuslang. The shop did very well indeed until David their son, back from the war joined the business and could not keep his hand out of the till.



George, his wife Margaret (Nee Motherwell) and his two children, Margaret and baby David (The author's Father) (1)

As a result the shop had to be sold and the family bought another shop in Manor Park Ilford in 1950 where they lived above the shop.

This carried on for a few years but George eventually became ill and the shop was sold and he began work at Plesseys as a buyer.

The family then moved to Gants Hill Ilford and when George retired, they all moved to No. 4 Columbine Gardens, Frinton on sea in 1963.

Here, he remained active becoming the chairman of the Walton Residents' Association for five years and the Walton Hobbies club for a similar period.

He died aged 85 in 1983 at Black Notley Hospital.



George Penny Chissel
How the author will always remember him – gentle, kind and always smiling

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