

FIRST WORLD WAR

PART TWO: BATTLES THAT SHAPED THE WAR

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War on other fronts

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Tolkien's inspiration in the trenches

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Welcome back to *Inside the First World War*, a supplement sponsored by Lord Ashcroft that will run in *The Sunday Telegraph* every month in the lead-up to the centenary of the conflict. In each issue, we will explore the world-changing events of 1914-18 and challenge received wisdom about them.

This month, we bring you a guide to the battles that defined the war, with the insight of leading military historians and authors. We begin with major battles on the Western Front, including the Marne – which marked the shift from a war of movement to the trenches – and the Somme, whose opening day saw the worst casualties of the war. We will look again at examples of battlefield art, poetry and letters home from the front with insight and commentary from IWM (Imperial War Museums). There are also the wonderful memories of loved ones you have sent us – please keep them coming – while Lord Ashcroft tells the story of another recipient of the Victoria Cross. Finally, what does Middle-earth have in common with the Western Front?

The answer is 2nd Lt JRR Tolkien. Turn to page 15 to read how *The Hobbit* was born in the trenches.



Zoe Dare Hall
Series editor



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to remember those who gave their lives in the conflict.

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Heroes, *George Cross Heroes* and *Heroes of the Skies*. In each of the 12 new supplements, Lord Ashcroft will tell the incredible stories behind First World War VCs from his collection.

Lord Ashcroft purchased his first VC in 1986 and currently owns more than 180 of the decorations. Three years ago, he began collecting George Crosses (GCs), Britain and the Commonwealth's most

prestigious award for courage not in the face of the enemy. He currently owns 11 GCs. Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collections are on display in a gallery that bears his name at IWM London, along with VCs and GCs in the care of the museum. The gallery, built with a £5 million donation from Lord Ashcroft, was opened by HRH The Princess Royal in 2010. Lord Ashcroft has been a successful entrepreneur

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Lord Ashcroft has donated several millions of pounds to charities and good causes.

He founded Crimestoppers (then the Community Action Trust) in 1988.

He is the founder of the Ashcroft Technology Academy and Chancellor of Anglia Ruskin University. His numerous other charity roles

include being Vice Patron of the Intelligence Corps Museum, a Trustee of Imperial War Museum, an Ambassador for SkillForce and a Trustee of the Cleveland Clinic in the US.

For information about the Lord Ashcroft Gallery, visit www.iwm.org.uk/heroes. For information on Lord Ashcroft, visit www.lordashcroft.com. Follow him on Twitter: @LordAshcroft

THE OPENING SHOTS AUG-SEP 1914

Saul David presents a timeline of the war, right and throughout the supplement, summarising the key battles that helped decide the outcome.



August 4-25, 1914
German invasion of Belgium German troops captured most of Belgium, including the fortress of Liège, with the Belgians losing 30,000 men and the Germans just 2,000.



August 7-25, 1914
Battle of the Frontiers The French Plan XVII called for an offensive to recapture Alsace and Lorraine, but the Germans drew them into a trap and inflicted huge casualties.



August 16-19, 1914
Cer Mountain An invading Austrian army, surprised by Serbian forces, was forced to retreat. By August 24, all Austrian troops had left Serbian territory.



August 20, 1914
Gumbinnen A Russian advanced guard repulsed an attack by two German corps near the East Prussian border, inflicting 8,000 casualties on a force of just 30,000.



August 23, 1914
Mons Having advanced into Belgium with the French, the BEF fought a holding action on the Mons-Condé canal against a German force three times its size.



August 26, 1914
Le Cateau A rearguard action by BEF's II Corps, at a cost of 7,800 casualties, delayed the advance of the German First Army and allowed the British retreat to continue.



August 28, 1914
Heligoland Bight An ill-coordinated raid by British naval forces on the entrance to Germany's North Sea bases ended in the sinking of three German light cruisers.



August 26-30, 1914
Tannenberg The German Eighth Army encircled the Russian Second Army in thick forests in East Prussia, capturing 92,000 prisoners and nearly 400 guns.



August 26-30, 1914
Gnila Lipa A defeat of the Austrian Third Army in Austrian Galicia by General Brusilov's Russian Eighth Army allowed the latter to capture the fortress of Lemberg.



Sept 2-Nov 7, 1914
Tsingtao After a stout defence, a tiny 4,000-strong German garrison in the Chinese treaty port of Tsingtao surrendered to a besieging force of 25,000 Japanese and 1,500 British.

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In an identity parade of British First World War generals, it is difficult to pick out the villain – or the hero. They look so alike with their swagger sticks, walrus moustaches, jodhpurs and shiny knee-high boots that it appears they have been turned out from the same factory production line manufacturing major generals in Aldershot or Sandhurst.

This is almost true. The generals of 1914 were the products of a rigid military system designed to fashion servants of Empire, who could keep their heads when, in the words of poet Sir Henry Newbolt's *Vitai Lampada*: “The sand of the desert is sodden red/Red with the wreck of a square that broke/The Gatling's jammed and the Colonel dead/And the regiment blind with dust and smoke”.

The officer corps of Britain's pre-war professional army was trained to fight small colonial wars in far-off places such as the Sudan, South Africa and India's North-West Frontier, against indigenous people armed with spears, swords and ancient muskets. What the British Army – apart from a few visionaries – was not expecting was to be pitched against a huge modern war machine equipped with heavy artillery and machine guns and trained to fight and win on the fields of Europe. But that is exactly what they got in 1914.

The military CVs of the two men who commanded the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in France and Flanders were remarkably similar. Sir John French, in charge from the start of the war until his forced resignation in December 1915, and Sir Douglas Haig, who replaced French and remained commander-in-chief until the end of the war, were cavalrymen. They were superb yet utterly antiquated pig-sticking horsemen from elite hussar regiments fighting an industrial war that would prove their beloved cavalry as obsolete as the knights of Camelot. Both had served in the Sudan – French had fought at Abu Klea, the battle celebrated in Newbolt's poem – against the Mahdi's Islamist followers and against the Boers. The similarities, however, stopped there.

French was a short, choleric, bow-legged Anglo-Irishman happiest in the saddle. His racy love life almost cost his Army career when he had an affair with the wife of a brother officer. He was rescued from ruin – after a careless financial gamble – by Haig, who lent him the money to cover his debt.

As reckless politically as he was impulsive privately, French's career again hit the rocks in 1914 in the so-called Curragh Mutiny, when he had resigned as chief of the Imperial General Staff rather than send troops against fellow Irish Protestants in Ulster. The outbreak of war four months later restored him to favour; as one of Britain's most senior soldiers, he was immediately offered command of the BEF.

Haig, though a fellow Celt, could not have been less like his old friend. French, like Gallic counterparts Joseph Joffre and Ferdinand Foch, was in his mid-sixties when the war began, Haig a decade younger. A dour, taciturn, lowland Scot from a family of wealthy whisky distillers, Haig was as careful and calculating as French was changeable and excitable.

It was not that Haig did not feel or express strong emotions, he just chiefly confided them to his loving wife Dorothy, a lady-in-waiting at Buckingham Palace ready to murmur admiring words about the fine qualities of her husband into receptive royal ears. It may have been Haig's skills as an intriguer and his influence in royal circles that finally brought him the top job rather than his military ability.

Certainly, he did not shine in the initial clash of arms in France in 1914 but then neither did French. Told to liaise closely with the BEF's nearest French military neighbour, General Charles Lanrezac's Fifth Army, Sir John was hampered by his failure to understand French and meetings with Lanrezac ended in mutual misunderstanding. He also bore a grudge against Sir Horace Lockwood Smith-Dorrien, commander of one of the two corps making up the BEF, and had strenuously opposed his appointment.

It did not help French's authority, therefore, that it was Smith-Dorrien's II Corps that fought the two opening battles of Britain's war, at Mons and Le Cateau, and distinguished itself in doing so. Smith-Dorrien had in effect disobeyed French in making a stand at Le Cateau rather than continuing a retreat that threatened to become a rout. Haig contented himself with sniping from the sidelines.

Given his quarrels with the two generals above and below him, it is astonishing that French managed to keep the BEF more or less intact for the fortnight that



Lions or donkeys?

NIGEL JONES LOOKS BEYOND THE STEREOTYPES AND ASSESSES THE BRITISH AND FRENCH GENERALS OF 1914

its retreat before the German juggernaut lasted – let alone rallying it to join the French counter-attack on the Marne that turned the tide of war.

The Marne ensured Allied survival by foiling the German plan to win the war in six weeks but made inevitable the four-year nightmare of trench warfare. Credit for defeating Germany's ambitions for a swift victory belongs not to the squabbling generals but to the superb professionalism of the BEF – the old sweats whose ranks would suffer heavy losses in the war's opening year.

But what of the French? It was their country and Belgium that had been invaded and occupied, and for whose liberation the war was being fought. Did their commanders, veterans of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, when their territory had been overrun by invading Germans, better grasp the realities of modern warfare? The two elderly French generals who bore the brunt of the 1914 fighting, stoical commander-in-chief Joseph Joffre and fire-eating Ferdinand Foch, were characters as sharply contrasting as those of Haig and French.

Joffre – portly, white-moustachioed, ponderous – owed his supreme command more to the fraught politics of Republican France than to being a new Napoleon. In the radical, anti-militarist mood that swept France following the Dreyfus affair, Joffre was seen as secular, anti-clerical, loyal to the Republic.

Foch, by contrast, whose brother was a Jesuit priest, was regarded with suspicion as a general whose only thought was to attack the enemy regard-

less of losses. “My centre is in retreat, my right is giving way. Situation excellent. I am attacking” – though probably apocryphal – gives a fair idea of the fiery southerner's pugnacious attitude to war.

Joffre came into his own on the Marne, when his calm stolidity and refusal to panic helped rally the ranks and stem the German tide at the very gates of Paris. Foch would have to await another crisis and another German breakthrough, in 1918, to achieve his hour of glory. Appointed generalissimo of all the

“
MY CENTRE IS IN RETREAT, MY RIGHT IS GIVING WAY. SITUATION EXCELLENT. I AM ATTACKING

Allied armies – French, British Empire and American – his offensive “everyone to battle” spirit brought final victory, and with it the honour of dictating the 1918 armistice terms to the Germans.

In 1914, with the establishment of the 400-mile trench lines from the Belgian coast to the Swiss border by Christmas, the war settled into its pattern of attrition punctuated by bloodbath battles caused by frequent and fruitless Allied attempts to break through stubborn German defences: Loos, 1915; the

A CLASS ABOVE?
Clockwise from main picture, Sir Douglas Haig and his private secretary Sir Philip Sassoon; Sir John French, who was replaced by Haig as commander-in-chief in December 1915; Blencques Château, where Haig was based. Haig and his staff enjoyed relative comfort but worked hard



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Somme, 1916; Arras, Passchendaele and Cambrai 1917; and the climactic German offensives and Allied counter-strokes that brought the 1918 armistice.

Through these four terrible years, the generals settled into a seemingly comfortable and complacent way of life that a century on is horribly easy for TV screenwriters to mock. The image goes like this: ensconced in clean beds in rambling châteaux, safely miles behind the front lines, the generals led a leisurely life planning battles in which they sent thousands of men to their deaths. They frequently paused to schmooze visiting VIPs and make sure that supplies of quails' eggs and champagne kept coming.

It is true that the generals exercised their commands from châteaux rather than squalid dugouts but the rest is manifestly unfair. My father, who served on Haig's staff and wouldn't hear a word against him, told me that he had never worked so hard in his life as in his years serving “the chief”.

During 1918's German offensives, when Haig issued his “backs to the wall” order of the day, my father and the staff spent four consecutive nights without sleep. “Fighting the battle until the situation stabilised and the crisis passed,” as he put it. That was the truth, though Edmund Blackadder might never believe it.

● *Nigel Jones is author of The War Walk: A Journey Along the Western Front and directs www.historical-trips.com. His new book, 1914: Britain in War and Peace, will be published by Head of Zeus*



Battle of the Marne: end of the beginning

PATRICK BISHOP ON THE CLASH THAT TURNED A WAR OF MOVEMENT INTO A TRENCH-BOUND STATE OF PARALYSIS

At the start of September 1914, with the Germans only a few days' march from Paris, the French city's military governor-general, Joseph Gallieni, ordered demolition charges to be laid under the Eiffel Tower.

The Government was preparing to scuttle to Bordeaux, abandoning the capital to its fate. Allied co-operation had all but broken down and the dispirited commander of the British Expeditionary Force, Field Marshal Sir John French, was anxious to pull his men from the front line. The position seemed hopeless and German victory assured. Yet only a fortnight later, the situation was reversed. The Germans were in retreat with the Allies hard on their heels, confident that it would only be weeks before the enemy was driven back to its borders.

The battle that turned the tide would be remembered as the Miracle of the Marne, when a Francophile God intervened to save the nation. The Allied victory was essentially due to German miscalculation and the vigour and determination of the French and British defence. The Germans' first major defeat destroyed their dream of a six-week campaign and transformed a war of movement into a state of bloody paralysis.

On September 4, things still seemed to be going wonderfully well. “It is the 35th day,” the Kaiser told his ministers. “We are besieging Reims, we are 30 miles from Paris.” His optimism was justified. The power and efficiency of the German forces had steamrollered the opposition.

Success after success seemed to prove the infallibility of the plan devised nine years before by Field Marshal Alfred von Schlieffen. Its strategy was to allow Germany to fight a war on two fronts by swiftly crushing France before turning east to face the bigger menace of the Russians.

The plan depended on the Germans outflanking and encircling the Allies before destroying them in a battle of annihilation. But as the Kaiser spoke, the German First Army under General Alexander von Kluck was straying disastrously from the plot. By setting off in pursuit of the retreating French Fifth Army, he exposed his right flank and opened a 30-mile gap between his troops and the German Second Army. The French commander-in-chief Joseph Joffre manoeuvred his forces into a position on the Marne where they could exploit the German loss of coherence and counter-attack.

The action began on September 5 and lasted a week. The Allies had 36 divisions, the Germans under 30. The images of the fighting are very different from what we have come to expect of the First World War, with troops charging over virgin fields unmarked by shot and shell.

But the battle saw some of the most concentrated slaughter of the war, with nearly half a million casualties. Despite the Allies' greater numbers, victory was never assured. At one point, 6,000 troops were rushed to the front in Paris taxis, an event that was seized on as proof of the “sacred union” between the French people and their fighting men.

On September 9, the Germans had lost their grip of the battle and, with the threat of envelopment growing, began to retire to positions along the river Aisne. There they started to dig the trenches that would define a new and unimaginable sort of warfare. Thus ended the Battle of the Marne. No one really won and no one really lost. The outcome, though, had terrible significance. It meant the war would go on and on and on.

● *Patrick Bishop is a historian and author*

SAVED BY A MIRACLE SEPT 1914-MAY 1915

German plans for a rapid victory are foiled on the Marne; a setback for the Royal Navy at Coronel and heavy casualties for the Allies at Gallipoli.



September 5-12, 1914
First (Miracle of the) Marne
The French and British counter-attacked on the Marne and the Germans withdrew to the Aisne. The German plan for a rapid victory had failed.



Oct 19-Nov 22, 1914
First Ypres Heroic British, French and Belgian resistance
thwarted a German attempt to reach the Channel ports by launching a huge attack on the Ypres salient in Belgium.



November 1, 1914
Coronel First major setback for the Royal Navy when armoured cruisers Monmouth and Good Hope were sunk off Chile by von Spee's German East Asiatic squadron.



November 4, 1914
Tanga A disastrous British attack on the East African port of Tanga, when 8,000 men of the Indian Army were repulsed by a 1,000-strong German force, mostly African askaris.



December 8, 1914
Falklands In the most decisive naval engagement of the war, the Royal Navy sank most of von Spee's ships, including the armoured cruisers Scharnhorst and Gneisenau.



January 24, 1915
Dogger Bank Intercepted signals allowed the Royal Navy's battlecruisers to intercept a German scouting group and sink the armoured cruiser Blücher.



January 31, 1915
Bolimov An inconclusive battle west of Warsaw in Russian Poland in which an initial attack by the German Ninth Army was repulsed by the Russian Second Army.



March 10-13, 1915
Neuve Chapelle The British made an early gain by taking the village of Neuve Chapelle in Artois but reserves were slow to move forward and a breakthrough was thwarted.



April 22-May 25, 1915
Second Ypres Using chlorine gas for the first time, the Germans drove the Allies back to the outskirts of Ypres but lacked reserves and the town remained in British hands.



April 25, 1915-Jan 9, 1916
Gallipoli British and Empire troops landed at Cape Helles, Anzac Cove and Suvla Bay. Stout Turkish defence prevented a breakthrough and the Allies suffered 140,000 casualties.

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The Somme: lesson in how to win or pointless slaughter?

HISTORIANS HAVE CHALLENGED THE BATTLE'S POPULAR IMAGE AS A TRAGIC WASTE, SAYS **NIGEL JONES**

To most modern Britons, the word "Somme" sums up the whole horror of the First World War. What they are thinking about is July 1, 1916, the first, terrible day of an enormous struggle that continued for another three-and-a-half gruelling months, consuming around a million lives in casualties on both sides, before an exhausted Allied High Command called off the offensive in mid-November as the autumn rains set in.

The battle opened on a sunny summer Saturday that would be the bloodiest day in British history. At the end of that day almost 20,000 of our soldiers were dead and 58,000 wounded, a "butcher's bill" greater than the casualties of the Crimean, Boer and Korean wars combined. Most men died in the first few minutes after 7.30am when, laden with 60lbs of kit, they had climbed laboriously out of their trenches in obedience to their officers' whistles, and advanced at a steady walk towards German lines supposedly pulverised by a five-day artillery barrage and the explosion of giant mines.

But the enemy were ready and waiting. Deep underground in their dugouts, the Germans had sat out the British bombardment. As soon as it lifted, they rushed up the steps with their machine guns and rubbed their eyes in delighted disbelief as they saw the long lines of khaki plodding towards fields of barbed wire tangled but not destroyed by the shelling.

The machine guns began to speak, and continued doing so until their barrels glowed red hot and their operators' trigger fingers were sore. Their gunners could hardly miss.

Among the men who suffered that day were the boys of the Pals battalions – mates who lived and worked in towns and cities such as Burnley, Sheffield, Accrington and Bradford. They had volunteered together in 1914, trained together and now died together, cut down by the chattering machine guns. "Two years in the making," wrote one bitter survivor. "Ten minutes in the destroying; that was our story."

The grand plan for the Somme had been laid in December 1915 when the British and French High Commands decided on a joint offensive where their trenches joined hands in the rolling Picardy downland north of the River Somme. But by July the French had been surprised by a German attack on their fortress of Verdun and were under extreme pressure. The Somme then morphed into a British-led attack designed to draw the Germans away from Verdun and relieve the French. It attained that object but at fearful cost.

Modern military historians have emphasised the positive aspects of the battle: that the Germans died too – their casualties almost matching those of the Allies; that the Somme taught the British commanders valuable tactical lessons; that it saw the birth of the tank; above all that it was a cruelly necessary catastrophe in a long – and ultimately victorious – war of attrition.

None of this has had the slightest effect on the popular conception of the Somme, which will always remain a vision of skylarks singing across summer skies, while on the torn earth beneath, the flower of the nation's youth fell.

on December 18, when the Germans finally accepted they had failed to break the French line or spirit. Estimates of total casualties range from 700,000 to 900,000, most killed or maimed by shellfire.

The Germans had initial success when they captured Fort Douaumont, at the centre of the fixed defences. The combat then settled into a murderous rhythm of attack and counter-attack on a narrow front of shell-churned, blood-soaked ground that seemed to one German soldier to be destined only to end when "the last German and the last French hobbled out of the trenches on crutches to exterminate each other with pocket knives".

Verdun left a lasting scar on the French psyche and marked all who fought. Among them were General Henri-Philippe Pétain and Captain Charles de Gaulle who, a quarter of a century later, would take opposing stances when Germany attacked again.

In 1984, Verdun became a symbol of reconciliation when Presidents François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl stood side by side, holding hands at the Douaumont cemetery. The ghosts of Verdun, though, remain unexorcised.

How the bloodshed of Verdun left a lasting scar on the French psyche

GERMAN ATTEMPT TO BREAK ENEMY LINES CAME TO HAUNT A NATION, SAYS **PATRICK BISHOP**

Nearly a century after the battle, Verdun is still a haunted landscape. Visitors are struck by the pall of melancholy that hangs over the hills and valleys where it seems no birds sing. Of all the battlefields of the conflict, this is where you feel most acutely the folly and pathos of the struggle.

The Germans chose the citadel of Verdun for a massive assault because of its perceived strategic and emotional importance to the French. The chief of staff, Erich von Falkenhayn, said he believed they would "throw in every man they have" to defend it. German logistical advantages would then allow them to "bleed to death" the French armies. His account of his intentions was later disputed but that is how the fight developed.

The attack began on February 21, 1916 and ended



PITY OF WAR
Clockwise from main picture, troops going over the top; a helmet and rifle marking the burial place of a French soldier at Verdun; a ruined house in the village of Sainte-Marie-A-Py, Verdun; first aid for a casualty near Fort Douaumont



TOP PHOTO: GETTY

FROM IWM'S ARCHIVE - LETTERS HOME

Neville Woodroffe's last battle

Neville Woodroffe embarked for Flanders with the 1st Battalion Irish Guards on August 12, 1914 and took part in the first battle fought by the British Expeditionary Force against the advancing Germans. By August 23 the British infantry were entrenched along the Mons-Condé canal. Early that morning, British and German cavalry met north of Mons and the Germans began to shell the canal line. The town remained in British hands by late evening but, after German advances to the east, the French Army began to retreat and the British had little option but to retire south and

re-group. Woodroffe was killed leading his men against the German trenches in the battle for Ypres on November 6. He was 21. In a letter of condolence to Neville's mother, a fellow officer wrote: "He was killed leading his men against the German trenches. Of the 35 that went with him not one returned. Only two days before he had been specially mentioned for bravery in action." Neville's name is listed on the Menin Gate, along with others whose bodies were never recovered.

● *Anthony Richards, IWM head of documents*

The other night we billeted in a village... We woke at 7 o'clock and found the town surrounded by Germans and the village partly blown down. The home next to ours was shattered and all windows and roofs of the neighbouring home were smashed and the streets torn up. We made out as quickly as possible but before we had gone far we saw a German patrol of cavalry at the corner of the street so we rushed into a house till they passed, then ventured out again until we saw another patrol when we did the same thing. We finally got on the main road with about 20 of these Uhlans behind us not more than 180 yards. We kept well into the hedge and came to an outpost of the Queens. When the Uhlans saw them they went back...

➔ **August 28, 1914**
Woodroffe's first letter home is scribbled in haste during the arduous retreat from Mons. The Germans were not far behind.

We have been trekking hard all these last days. Heat and dust terrible. We were in action the day before yesterday. We got in a wood with only the Coldstreams and were surrounded by Germans. The wood was very thick and the enemy was no less than 100 yards off at some time. We lost considerably ... The CO was shot though no one has heard where. The 2nd in command killed. Others are missing. I think we may have some rest now as the trekking has been awful and very little sleep.

➔ **September 3**
A few days later, Woodroffe seized another opportunity for a quick message home. The long, fighting retreat was clearly exerting its toll.

Mons was awful and we had a terrible week of retirement, covering sometimes 30 miles a day, starting in the dark and not stopping until it was again dark. Our men stuck it well and we were complimented on our marching by the general. We had very little sleep as the time we ought to have slept was devoted to making trenches and barricades.

I can't explain to you every engagement as it is impossible to describe on paper the feelings and experiences which one has been through. Some are awful and when I return I shall have a great deal to tell you. We have been in the hottest of places and people who have been through South Africa describe it as being a picnic compared with this war.

The Brigade of Guards have lost heavily as regards officers, and besides that the very best of fellows, many of whom ranked as one's very best friends... Lockwood was shot yesterday while standing up telling some wounded Germans to convey in their language to another party of Germans that if they held the white flag up they were to throw down their arms. John Manners shot himself when he saw the alternative was to surrender to superior numbers of Germans, he only had about five men with him.

The German atrocities are outrageous, as one saw marching through villages they had left, and details one heard from the inhabitants. There are several instances of firing on the wounded... The other day a large force of Germans showed the white flag and our people went to take them prisoners, when they immediately fired on us and killed several.

The village here, I am certain, is infested with spies, as whenever one goes up the road with a company you are immediately shelled. We caught two Germans on a haystack with provisions for over a month and all the telephone apparatus intact. They were in uniform so can be only taken prisoners of war; if they were in plain clothes they would have been shot as spies. One fellow was caught and I think shot for moving the hands of the town clock and so signalling to the German artillery observation post...

I am afraid I have not had time to write though I have heaps to tell you. The last two days have been ghastly – the Germans broke through the line. We lost 10 officers in the last two days and yesterday the battalion was less than 200 though I expect some stragglers will turn up. All the officers in my company were lost except myself. All in No 3 Coy and all but one in No 4. We have had no rest at all. Everyone is very shaken. I hope we are put in reserve to reform for a few days. I will give a full account later.

➔ **September**
The German offensive which had opened the war and threatened the outskirts of Paris was halted by the Battle of the Marne from September 5-12. This significant Allied victory, followed immediately by the offensive on the Aisne, led to the Germans retreating to positions where both sides would trench for much of the next four years.

Woodroffe's letter is undated, but was clearly written during the latter half of September. He reflects on events of the previous weeks.

➔ **September 30**
Woodroffe reported that they continued to hold the same entrenched position next to the Aisne.

➔ **November 3**
The battle for control of the strategic town of Ypres opened on October 19 and was well under way by the time this hastily-scribbled postcard was sent home three days before Woodroffe was killed.

ALLIED SETBACKS MAY 1915-FEB 1916

A lack of shells at Aubers Ridge brings down the government; humiliation for Townshend's Anglo-Indian force at the siege of Kut-al-Amara.



May 2-June 22, 1915
Gorlice-Tarnów A short preliminary bombardment helped Austro-German troops rout the Russians in Galicia and retake Przemsyl fortress and the Carpathian passes.



May 9, 1915
Aubers Ridge A failed attack by Haig's First Army, a setback blamed in the press on the lack of high-explosive shells. The "shell crisis" brought down the government.



May 15-27, 1915
Festubert The first night attack of the war by the British First Army on German positions south of Neuve Chapelle. After significant early gains, later assaults made little headway.



June 23-July 7, 1915
First Isonzo After joining the Allies, the Italians attacked Austrian positions across the Isonzo River in north-east Italy. The attack petered out for lack of artillery support.



Sept 25-Oct 14, 1915
Loos Using gas before the raid, the British made early progress but could not break into open country. High casualties led to French being replaced by Haig as BEF commander.



Oct 5-Nov 23, 1915
Serbia Having twice repulsed Austrian offensives, the Serbians were overwhelmed by the combined forces of Austria, Germany and Bulgaria, with Belgrade falling on October 9.



Oct 18-Nov 3, 1915
Third Isonzo With better artillery preparation, the Italians made good ground on either side of the town of Gorizia but were stopped by fierce Austrian counter-attacks.



Nov 22-25, 1915
Ctesiphon A Pyrrhic victory for Gen Townshend's Anglo-Indian force. Its march on Baghdad was halted near Ctesiphon by fierce fighting. Townshend retreated to Kut.



Dec 7, 1915-April 28, 1916
Siege of Kut-al-Amara After a 147-day siege, Townshend's garrison surrendered to the Turks. Of the 10,300 soldiers taken prisoner, more than 40 per cent died in captivity.



Feb 11-16, 1916
Erzurum The Russians defied snoustorms to capture the chain of mountain forts protecting Erzurum in eastern Anatolia, the gateway to the Turkish heartland.

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YOUTH MOURNING (1916)

When we consider the art of the First World War we tend to recall the work of young artists such as Paul Nash, CRW Nevinson and Percy Wyndham Lewis, who had experienced the trenches and brought us emotive images of devastated no man's land and humanity mercilessly subjugated by the machinery of modern war. George Clausen's *Youth Mourning*, however, offers a different artistic perspective of the First World War: but one that is no less affecting.

When Clausen created this picture in 1916 he was 64 and an established Royal Academician specialising in agrarian scenes infused with Edwardian nostalgia for the disappearing traditions of the countryside.

Too old for military service in the First World War, Clausen was no less immune to its tragedy. Moved by the death of his daughter Katharine's fiancé in 1915, he painted *Youth Mourning* as a personal lament for the country's lost armies. It saw the artist depart from his customary naturalism and return to earlier French Symbolist influences; most notably the decorative murals of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898).

The result was an intensely allegorical evocation of grief, with the almost foetally hunched nude female figure capturing the raw emotion of bereavement and the featureless landscape the emptiness and finality of death.

As one of the more enterprising Royal Academicians, Clausen was later appointed an official war artist and took part in the ambitious British War Memorials Committee art scheme in 1918. His suitably elegiac canvas, *In the Gun Factory at Woolwich Arsenal*, is perhaps a curiously urban theme for an artist best remembered for his invocation of a vanished rural idyll.

Richard Slocombe, senior art curator, IWM

Youth Mourning will feature in IWM's *Truth & Memory: First World War Art* exhibition, which will open in summer 2014 along with new *First World War Galleries* at IWM London. www.iwm.org.uk



WAR POEM

What death means: Charles Hamilton Sorley's sonnet 'When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead' (1915)

Many believed that Charles Hamilton Sorley was the best of the soldier poets of the First World War. His death near Hulluch on October 13, 1915 during the Battle of Loos extinguished one of the war's most promising literary talents.

As a highly intelligent and observant student at Marlborough, in December 1913 Sorley won a scholarship to University College, Oxford, but first decided to spend time exploring and studying in Germany.

His affinity and affection for the German people invested his poetry in 1914 with a depth and maturity lacking in many others. Sorley rejected the easy sentimentality and popular patriotism so prevalent at the time.

Arriving at the front in May 1915 as an officer in the 7th Battalion,

Suffolk Regiment, he quickly sensed both the immensity of the conflict and, in the trenches around Ploegsteert in Belgium, the ubiquity and finality of death, questioning the traditional Christian consolation of his faith.

Over the summer, Sorley wrote three sonnets. This one was found in his kit bag after his death. What appears to be his last poem is a bleak but stoical piece that implores those beyond the battlefield simply to recognise that the dead are gone. Death offers no hope, nor new beginnings. It is just the end.

With three years of the war remaining, this was a remarkably sophisticated insight. It suggested that, had he survived, Sorley may well have gone on to blend the hard accusations of Sassoon and Owen with the quieter questioning of Graves and Blunden.

Following Rupert Brooke's death in April 1915, his sonnet sequence *1914* was widely read and admired. At the end of that month Sorley specifically criticised Brooke and his style in a letter to his mother: "He is far too obsessed with his own sacrifice... [and] has taken the sentimental attitude." These references in his own sonnet provide a further rebuttal of Brooke's sacrificial language and Georgian romanticism of death.

Among the quiet alliteration of the opening lines, Sorley subtly places two military phrases that show he is writing from the front line. The brutal "gashed head" echoed a previous account in one of his letters describing the wounded: "The animal cries of the wounded... hauling in of the great resistless body in the dark, the smashed head rattling; the relief, the relief that the thing has ceased to groan: that the bullet or bomb that made the man an animal has now made the animal a corpse."

WHEN YOU SEE MILLIONS OF THE MOUTHLESS DEAD

WHEN YOU SEE MILLIONS OF THE MOUTHLESS DEAD

ACROSS YOUR DREAMS IN PALE BATTALIONS GO,

SAY NOT SOFT THINGS AS OTHER MEN HAVE SAID,

THAT YOU'LL REMEMBER. FOR YOU NEED NOT SO.

GIVE THEM NOT PRAISE. FOR, DEAF, HOW SHOULD THEY KNOW

IT IS NOT CURSES HEAPED ON EACH GASHED HEAD?

NOR TEARS. THEIR BLIND EYES SEE NOT YOUR TEARS FLOW.

NOR HONOUR. IT IS EASY TO BE DEAD.

SAY ONLY THIS, "THEY ARE DEAD." THEN ADD THERETO,

"YET MANY A BETTER ONE HAS DIED BEFORE."

THEN, SCANNING ALL THE O'ERCROWDED MASS, SHOULD YOU

PERCEIVE ONE FACE THAT YOU LOVED HERETOFORE,

IT IS A SPOOK. NONE WEARS THE FACE YOU KNEW.

GREAT DEATH HAS MADE ALL HIS FOR EVERMORE.

Sorley's own attitude to death was much more self-effacing and prosaic. In November 1914 he had written to his former headmaster, quoting (in the original Greek) a line spoken by Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*: "Died Patroclus too who was a far better man than thou" before adding that "no saner and splendor comment on death has been made."

Four months of fighting at the front had convinced Sorley of the absolute nature of death. The harsh, bleak tone of his final poem suggested that he no longer retained any hope of an afterlife or of spiritual salvation through death. Steeped in negative implanations, his closing lines make it clear that the dead are dead and lost forever.

VERDUN AND SOMME FEB 1916-MAY 1917

Two titanic struggles: the Germans plan to break the French lines at Verdun, and the Anglo-French offensive on the Somme weakens the Germans.



Feb 21-Dec 18, 1916

Verdun In the longest battle of the war, the German plan to wear down the French army and break civilian spirit failed. Casualties were huge: 355,000 German and 400,000 French.



February 25-April 1917

Hindenburg Line German forces south of Arras pull back up to 25 miles to a new, straighter line of defences – a response to their heavy casualties in 1916.



May 15-June 10, 1916

Asiago/Trentino Offensive A surprise Alpine attack by the Austrians drove the Italians back 14 miles. But the rugged terrain and Italian reserves eventually halted the offensive.



May 31, 1916

Jylland The Royal Navy took on the German fleet in history's greatest naval battle. Britain's losses were bigger but she kept the strategic initiative for the rest of the war.



June 4-Sept 20, 1916

Brusilov Offensive Russian General Alexei Brusilov attacked the southern Austrian defences, advancing the front more than 60 miles and inflicting a million casualties.



June 5, 1916-Oct 1918

Arab Revolt Led by the Sharif of Mecca and British-backed (with T.E. Lawrence in liaison), the anti-Ottoman revolt began in Medina and spread across the Arabian peninsula.



July 1, 1916-Nov 18, 1916

Somme An Anglo-French offensive relieves pressure on the French at Verdun. It failed to achieve a decisive breakthrough but the Germans were considerably weakened.



August 3-5, 1916

Romani In an attempt to win control of the Suez Canal, German and Turkish forces attacked the British base of Romani in the Sinai but were driven off by counter-attacks.



August 6-17, 1916

Sixth Isonzo The Italians used railways to shift troops back to the Isonzo front where their offensive resulted in the capture of Gorizia and the first bridgehead across the river.



April 9-May 17, 1917

Arras Battle intended to pin German forces in Arras-Somme while French attacked in Champagne. Canadians took Vimy Ridge but became a costly attritional struggle.

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During the four long and traumatic years of the Great War, only one individual was awarded the Victoria Cross (VC) and Bar – the equivalent of two VCs. The recipient of this exceptional double honour was not even a frontline soldier: Captain Noel Chavasse, a bishop's son, was a medical officer but this did not stop him from being responsible for some of the bravest and most unselfish acts of the entire conflict.

Noel Chavasse, narrowly the younger of identical twin boys and one of seven children, was born in the vicarage at St Peter-le-Bailey, Oxford, on November 9, 1884. When his father became Bishop of Liverpool in 1900, Chavasse was educated at Liverpool College School, and in 1907 he graduated with a first in philosophy from Trinity College, Oxford.

While at university, he was a talented sportsman, earning "blues" for athletics and lacrosse. He and his twin brother, Christopher, represented Britain in the 1908 Olympics, both running the 400 metres. After qualifying as a doctor in 1912, Noel Chavasse became house physician at the Royal Southern Hospital, Liverpool, and the following year he was appointed house surgeon at the same hospital.

As war loomed, Chavasse was commissioned as a lieutenant into the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) and, after the outbreak of hostilities, he served in France and Belgium, where he was attached to the 10th Battalion King's (Liverpool Regiment), known as Liverpool Scottish. This battalion saw action in June 1915 at Hooge, near Ypres, where Chavasse continually went into no man's land for nearly 48 hours until he was satisfied there were no more wounded who needed treatment. He was awarded the Military Cross (MC) for his heroic efforts and, shortly afterwards, he asked one of his sisters to buy 1,000 pairs of socks and other comforts out of his own money for the battalion.

On July 27, 1916, the battalion was moved to trenches in front of Guillemont, on the Somme. Despite being unable to reconnoitre the enemy positions, the men were still ordered to attack at 4.20am on August 9.

Not surprisingly, within a few hours they had sustained 189 casualties out of 600 men. Chavasse attended to the wounded all day under heavy fire, frequently in view of the enemy, while during the night he searched for injured men directly in front of enemy lines.

The next day, he recruited a stretcher-bearer and, under heavy shellfire, carried a critically injured man 500 yards to safety. On the return journey, Chavasse was wounded but it did not stop him from further sterling deeds that same night.

Helped by 20 volunteers, he rescued three more wounded men from a shell-hole just 25 yards from the enemy trenches. He also buried the bodies of two officers and collected numerous identity discs from dead soldiers. It was estimated that during those two days Chavasse saved the lives of 20 seriously wounded men as well as treating the countless "ordinary" cases that passed through his hands.

Chavasse's parents heard through official channels that he had been wounded but, almost immediately, they received a letter from their son playing down the injury: "Don't be in the least upset if you hear I am wounded. It is absolutely nothing. The merest particle of shell just frisked me. I did not even know about it until I undressed at night."

Chavasse was awarded his VC "for most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty" and his citation, announced in the *London Gazette* on October 26, 1916, concluded: "His courage and self-sacrifice were beyond praise."

The *Liverpool Daily Post & Mercury* said of the city's local hero: "Letters from the Front have constantly told how eager he was, how ready he was to expose himself to dangers beyond those called for in the discharge of his duties, and how many a wounded soldier has brightened under the radiance of his cheery disposition...His battalion almost regard him as their mascot."

A Canadian machine-gunner told the paper: "I was up at the line that day, and the men were talking a lot about the fine courage of Captain Chavasse...Hell would have been heaven compared to the place he was in, but he never troubled about it. It's men like him that make one feel that the spirit of old is still alive in our midst."

Moreover, Chavasse had particular sympathy with soldiers who had lost their nerve, some of whom even inflicted injuries on themselves in the hope of being invalided away from the front line.



A LIFE OF SACRIFICE

Clockwise from main picture, Chavasse's regiment, the Liverpool Scottish, leaving for the front in 1914; Noel Chavasse in uniform; Chavasse's medals, now owned by Lord Ashcroft; Christopher, left, and Noel receiving their Cambridge running "blues"; wounded waiting to be evacuated at Guillemont, where Chavasse saved at least 20 lives in August 1916



The doctor who braved hell for others

This compassion was highlighted by the regimental historian who wrote of Chavasse: "The Doctor has a genius for picking out those men who were near a breakdown, either in nerve or general health, but not yet so run down as to be hospital cases.

"Rather than send them to the trenches where their collapse sooner or later was inevitable, he kept them at his aid post as light-duty men, where in comparative comfort they had a chance to rest and recover."

By the summer of 1917, the battalion had moved to trenches near Wielte, north-east of Ypres. Preparations were made for what was to be the third Battle of Ypres – an attempt to recapture Passchendaele Ridge. The offensive began on July 31 and the Liverpool Scottish, poorly protected against mustard gas, lost two officers and 141 other ranks.

On the first evening of the battle, Chavasse was wounded in the skull. He had his injury bandaged but refused to be evacuated. Time and again, under heavy fire and in appalling weather, he went into no man's land to search for and attend to the wounded. With virtually no food, in great pain and desperately weary, he undoubtedly saved numerous lives until, early on August 2, he was finally taking a rest at his first-aid post when it was struck by a shell.

Everyone in the post was either killed or wounded. Chavasse suffered at least six injuries but crawled for half a mile to get help for the others. He was taken through Ypres to the 46th Field Ambulance and then on to the 32nd Casualty Clearing Station, but his face was unrecognisable and he had a serious wound to

the abdomen. After an operation on the latter injury, he found the strength to dictate a letter to his fiancée (and cousin), Gladys Chavasse, in which he explained why he had carried on working in spite of his injuries, insisting that "duty called and called me to obey". He died at around 1pm on August 4.

Gladys Chavasse was distraught when she heard the news: the couple had intended to get married later that month. A memorial service was held in his honour in the Parish Church of St Nicholas on Merseyside on August 29.

During August, Chavasse's parents were inundated

“IT'S MEN LIKE HIM THAT MAKE ONE FEEL THAT THE SPIRIT OF OLD IS STILL ALIVE IN OUR MIDST

with letters praising their lost son. Brig-Gen LG Wilkinson, who commanded the 166th Brigade until April 1917, wrote: "I constantly met your son and appreciated his work. He was quite the most gallant and modest man I have ever met, and I should think the best-liked. What he did for his battalion of Liverpool Scottish was wonderful, and his loss to them is irreparable. I do not believe a man of more noble character exists."

The Bar to his VC was announced on September 14, 1917, when the citation praised his "extraordinary

energy and inspiring example", and the posthumous decoration was later presented to his family. Chavasse is buried in the Brandhoek New Military Cemetery, Belgium, where his headstone bears a representation of two VCs. The wonderfully apt inscription in the white stone, chosen by his father, reads: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Gladys Chavasse is believed to have visited Chavasse's grave several times and each year she marked the anniversary of his death with an "In Memoriam" notice in *The Times*. She also kept a photograph of him, his "Officer's Advance Book", his writing case and his miniature VC until her death in 1962, when she was fatally struck by a car while holidaying in France.

Christopher Chavasse, who was awarded the Military Cross (MC) for his own bravery during the Great War, gave an insight into his own loss in a letter, written in 1961, to a woman whose identical twin sister had just died.

He told her that "also as an identical twin, how truly I can sympathise with you, as I still mourn my Noel every day of my life, and have done so for 44 years, and shall do till I see him again – quite soon now." Christopher Chavasse, who was the Bishop of Rochester for 20 years until 1960, died in

March 1962, at the age of 77.

Since his death, Noel Chavasse has had at least 16 memorials dedicated to his memory, including one at Liverpool Cathedral, and this total of memorials is greater than for any other VC holder in the world.

Decades ago, Captain Chavasse's service and gallantry medals were left by his family to St Peter's College, Oxford. However, in 2009, after lengthy private negotiations, the college took the decision to offer his medals to me. An exclusive report in *The Sunday Telegraph* quoted college sources as saying the price was "close to £1.5 million", which easily topped the previous world record for a medal, rumoured to be a private sale worth £1million.

I was thrilled to add the Chavasse medals to my collection, which now totals more than 180 VCs, the largest collection of such decorations in the world. I was especially glad that the money I paid for the group of medals was going towards academic purposes: indeed this encouraged me to pay what some people have suggested was an "uncommercial" price for this unique group of medals.

I had long felt that my VC collection would never be truly complete until it contained one of the three VCs and Bars that have been awarded since the decoration was instituted by Queen Victoria in 1856.

In many ways, I look upon the Chavasse decorations as the ultimate group of gallantry medals. I am immensely proud to own them and to know that they are now on public display at the Imperial War Museum.



CAPTAIN NOEL CHAVASSE VC & BAR, MC IGNORED HIS OWN INJURIES TO TEND THE WOUNDED, SAYS **MICHAEL ASHCROFT**

HEROIC STORIES

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a Tory peer, businessman, philanthropist and author. The story behind Noel Chavasse's VC & Bar appears in his book *Victoria Cross Heroes*. For more information, go to victoriacrossheroes.com. Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collection is on public display at IWM London. For more information visit iwm.org.uk/heroes. For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, visit: www.lordashcroft.com. You can also follow him on Twitter: @LordAshcroft.

ENTER THE TANKS APR 1917-JUNE 1918

An Allied attempt to win the war fails at Chemin des Dames; in the first major tank battle at Cambrai, early British gains are wiped out.



April 16-May 9, 1917
Nivelle Offensive Hailed as the battle that would win the war, the Germans were ready for the attack at Chemin des Dames and inflicted 100,000 casualties on the first day.



June 7-14, 1917
Messines Nineteen mines were exploded to shatter German defences and capture the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge, guarding the southern flank of the Ypres salient.



July 1, 1917-Aug 3, 1917
Kerensky Offensive Russia made initial headway on the South-Western Front but a series of fierce Austro-German counter-attacks drove them back beyond their start line.



July 31-Nov 10, 1917
Third Ypres An offensive designed to continue wearing out the Germans and capture the Belgian coast, it achieved only the first. Passchendaele was captured on November 6.



Aug 18-Sept 12, 1917
Eleventh Isonzo Successful but costly Italian offensive that crossed the river in several places and captured the high plateau of Bainsizza, threatening the port of Trieste.



Oct 24-Nov 19, 1917
Caporetto (Twelfth Isonzo) Launched to save Trieste, the Austro-German offensive tore through weak defences in Caporetto and drove the Italians back 50 miles.



Nov 20-Dec 3, 1917
Cambrai The first major tank attack of the war. Big first-day British gains were wiped out by a German counter-attack using stormtroop tactics on November 30.



March 21-April 5, 1918
Operation Michael Germany inflicted a humiliating defeat on the British Army with a massive bombardment that ripped a hole in weak British defences on the Somme.



April 9-30, 1918
Operation Georgette The Allies clung on to the vital railway junction of Hazebrouck in the German assault on British defences on the River Lys in Flanders.



May 27-June 6, 1918
Operation Blücher (Third Aisne) German forces smashed through Allied defences in Champagne but a French/US counter-attack saved Reims on June 2.

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POST BOX

Your marvellous memories and tributes to loved ones who fought in the First World War continue to flood in. Do keep them coming. While we can only feature a small selection in the supplement each month, you can see more of these fascinating fragments of history online at telegraph.co.uk/firstworldwar. Write to: First World War, Telegraph Media Group, 111 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 0DT or email firstworldwar@telegraph.co.uk

RARE ACTS OF COURTESY

There were times when mutual respect between foes triumphed over the brutal demands of warfare. John Hammond from Market Harborough, Leicestershire, writes about his peace-loving uncle Jack, who served in the infantry, probably in the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment (The Dirty Half-hundred).

"He was ordered to take a sniper's rifle and camouflage and, just after dusk, climb a tree with a view over German trenches 300 yards away. I've no idea what his prowess as a sniper was considered to be.

"He sat there all night with his rifle at the ready, awaiting dawn. As light improved, he glanced at a tree just beyond enemy trenches. There perched a German sniper looking straight at him, eye to eye. Uncle Jack raised his rifle to sight but at the same time his German enemy saluted him. Jack saluted back and, as if by mutual consent, both shinned down their trees and returned to the trenches.

"Possibly one, maybe two, lives were saved that day. After the war, my uncle became a nurse and orderly at a hospital and mental-health institution near Canterbury. Many of the inmates were severely battle-scarred and mentally damaged from their time in the trenches."



Anthony Martin, of Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, recalls the moment his pilot father met the German who shot him down then helped him contact his family to say he was safe. "My father, Arthur William Martin (right), was a Royal Flying Corps bomber pilot who was shot down over enemy territory in 1916 but survived where so many other pilots did not. Born in London in 1893, he joined the 2nd/5th Yorkshire

Regiment and was commissioned on July 19, 1915. He was a gunnery officer and married my mother in September 1916 just before being sent to France.

"Shortly after arrival, he was briefed on a bombing mission over enemy territory. He was piloting an FE2b 'pusher' and his gunner, sitting in front of him, was supposed to place his feet on the narrow edge of the front cockpit and fire the backward-facing Lewis machine gun fixed on the top wing. My father's gunner was taken ill and a sergeant machine-gunner was taken out of the front line to join him. Understandably, the poor fellow was terrified.

"Over enemy territory, the flight became separated in cloud and, coming out of it, my father was attacked by three German fighters. The gunner was too frightened to get up and fire the gun. The bullets passed through the main tank without setting it on fire, sliced through my father's flying coat from his groin to his feet but missed his vital organs. The bullets cut all his flying cables except his landing wires.

"My father dived and, seeing a green field, made an emergency landing, only to find it was an enemy airfield. The German officer who shot him down landed behind him and took my father to his mess.

"Discovering he was recently married, the officer told him to write a note to my mother saying that he was a prisoner of war but uninjured. The German then put his note into a canister and dropped it over our lines. This courteous act resulted in my mother receiving his note a few weeks later. After a few months, she had an official notification from the War Office to say that my father was missing in action and presumed dead.

"My father was a prisoner for two years, during which time he learnt German so well that he ended up teaching it to other prisoners."



HEADING TO THE SOMME

Melanie Dodd from Beccles in Suffolk shares a letter her father, Maj-Gen Sir Donald Banks, wrote to his mother on the eve of the battle of the Somme. He fought in various offensives and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order, the Military Cross for gallant leadership, the Croix de Guerre and was twice mentioned in dispatches. He lived until 1975.

June 28, 1916 - 10th Essex Regt, BEF

Darling of Darlings, Tomorrow night we shall commence our ordeal of battle and the next day will see us at last go over the top and advance to what I hope will be a splendid and glamorous victory for England and the cause of the Right. We are not downhearted - why should we be? Doing our utmost for the highest we know there must be an inner peace of mind which brings a contentment which unkind circumstances cannot deeply disturb.

The thought of what the next days may have in store for me does not worry me much. But what it may mean for the loved ones from which it may separate me is another thing. Heartache and sorrow and pain for many long days cannot but result. But I know, and only this can lessen the pain of the parting, that this great sorrow will be lightened by the communion of our spirits and by a love that Death will only strengthen.

Don



Peter Morrall, from Keighley, West Yorkshire, recounts the 100-year-old wartime memories of his neighbour, who was haunted for the rest of his life by what

happened one day in France: "In the late Seventies, my wife and I used to care for our neighbour, a coal merchant called Norman Feather. Often his conversation would turn to the First World War. His stories were repeated so many times that I remembered them word-for-word.

"One day, while marching in a troop somewhere in France, another troop of soldiers came towards them. At the very front of the column, Norman recognised his brother. Instinctively, he stepped sideways and called out 'Harry'. Immediately, the officer in charge disciplined him and told him to expect Field Punishment No1 for stepping out of line. This involved being strapped with his arms and legs outstretched to the wheel of a gun for a day.

"However, when the case was brought before a hearing, Norman looked at the officer and said that it was his brother and he hadn't seen him for years. 'For God's sake, have some compassion man.' The case was dismissed.

"Before one battle, a Captain Rearden asked Norman why he was upset. Norman replied that he had just heard that his brother had been killed in action. After the battle, the British troops had captured several Germans who were waiting in a trench to be escorted back down the lines, but it was clear that the captain wanted his men to press on. He placed his hand on Norman's shoulder: 'Remember your brother, Norman,' he told him. At this, Norman dropped a hand grenade into the trench and killed all the prisoners.

"When Norman told me this, his eyes would fill with tears and he would cover them with his hand. This kind old countryman sitting by the fireside in his small farmhouse kitchen was still haunted by what he had seen and done 60 years before."

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The logo for The Lord Ashcroft Gallery, featuring a stylized crest with two crosses and a crown above them.

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