



WFA SUFFOLK BRANCH

Branch Briefing

April 2020



Our Website : www.suffolk-wfa.org

Our Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/WFASuffolk>

Special Email Edition ! (1)

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN Taff Gillingham



Good Evening Everyone,

I hope that you are all safe and well, and coping under the current conditions.

It hardly seems possible that only 3 weeks ago we were holding our usual monthly meeting at the Stowmarket Royal British Legion Club. I'm not sure that any of us could have guessed that, less than a month later, we would all be confined to our own homes.

Following our hugely successful Western Front 100 Centenary Programme, few of us could have imagined a pandemic following on so soon after, in a form of twisted historical irony.

Needless to say, our monthly meetings at Stowmarket have been cancelled until further notice. At this time it is difficult to predict whether any form of normality will have returned by September, let alone July. However, as soon as the restrictions are lifted, and the club is open again, we will let you all know.

Our two annual Western Front Tours have also been postponed until next year.

I am delighted to report that Dave Hedges has agreed to continue producing the Branch Briefing, which we will email to you all in PDF format each month.

If you can find the time to send Dave interesting articles, photographs or snippets

of information, it will certainly be a great help to him. Dave's email address is:
david.j.hedges@btopenworld.com

We have also been thinking of what we can do to keep some form of branch gathering happening each month from the comfort of your own homes. Therefore, as an experiment, on our meeting night next Wednesday, 8th April (technology permitting!), we will be posting our first online talk for you all on YouTube. The first talk will be given by me, talking on a Great War subject (although I've not yet decided what that will be). Whatever it is, I hope you will find it interesting and informative.

We will send the link directly to your email addresses next Wednesday, and also post it onto the branch Facebook page, Twitter feed and the Branch Website. We will send you all the necessary details.

The idea is that you can then all sit down to watch it at 7:45pm, around the time that our usual branch talks start (it will of course still be available afterwards so you can watch later in the unlikely event you have a previous engagement!). I hope to be hosting a live Q&A session afterwards on Facebook and Twitter (from 8:45pm) to answer any of your questions.

I'm afraid we will be unable to supply a buffet !

Stay safe and healthy.

Taff

PETER SIMKINS David Hedges

Former President and now Patron of the WFA Prof Peter Simkins has sent this message. For newer members, Peter was a regular attender at our Branch when he lived near Ipswich Staion. He is a long suffering Ipswich Football Club supporter.

Dear Taff

Thanks for sending me the Branch news. It is certainly a strange time and, as you say, ironic that we are having a pandemic after the Centenary of the Great War. Please would you pass on my best wishes to all my friends at the Suffolk Branch, and thank you for some rich memories.

Jane and I are OK at the moment, I have a stack of unread books to get through so have plenty to keep me occupied.

Stay safe all of you

Pete 'Prof' Simkins



VIRUS INFECTION David Hedges

As Prof. mentions above the Spanish Flu really played a major factor in the final weeks of the war. Many are quick to criticise senior officers on both sides but they must have felt overwhelmed by the complexity of the tasks they faced and how most elements that affected the performance of their armies were largely out of their control, whether it was major political and social upheavals at home and abroad to such an unforeseeable impact as a massive viral pandemic soon to claim 50 million lives. The subject is vast and books can be studied in detail but here are some snippets that give a flavour of the influence the outbreak had on both sides fighting in the momentous final months of 1918 :-

1) From the British side an entry from a typical Company doing a routine task

War Diary - 8th Railway Company RE, based at BARLIN, behind the lines in the Loos Salient in Summer 1918.

[June] "This month was fairly quiet on the railway lines maintained by the Company. One or two small line breaks were repaired expeditiously. An outbreak of '3 days fever', popularly known as 'Spanish influenza' started on the 19.6.18, affecting 45% of the Company at a time, by the latter end of the month....

[July] There was a continuance of "3 days fever", a large proportion of the Company strength being affected. By the end of the month however this had died down and on the last day of the month there was actually no case.

2) From the German side :-

War Diary - kb RIR 1 (1st Reserve Bavarian Infantry Division) "At the end of the month [June], a very severe epidemic of influenza set in, reducing the strength of the companies so that the division's assault squad had to be distributed among the companies. "

War Diary - kb RIR 2 (1st Reserve Bavarian Infantry Division) "The flu that broke out in June reached its peak in July; actually on the 6th of July in the Division, 749 of the men affected. "

War Diary - IR 209 (German 207th Infantry Division) "Outbreaks of flu were contained where possible, by the local commands, but the inevitable course of things was unstoppable. The quartermasters were the first victims of the infection. More illnesses soon followed. The influenza had already made its entry into the combat battalions through the logistic chain."

In my enforced isolation I am reading 'The Vanquished' by Robert Gerwarth, an excellent read that looks at the War from the perspective of a German historian but one who also takes a more geographically balanced view than perhaps we do in the West with our focus on the British, French and American experience. We are somewhat at fault in regarding the war as starting in Sarajevo and ending at Mons whereas from a Eastern European perspective the 14-18 conflict was but a increase in savagery that was otherwise continuous from the Balkan Wars before 1910 right through to the revolutions and nation building wars well into the mid 1920's. He talks about the impact the pandemic had on the German Army. From March 1918 onwards the desperate advances of the 'last throw of the dice' on the Western Front cost the Germans 915,000 casualties, compounded to this was the affect of the virus

“ ... On top of the military losses, the first wave of the 'Spanish Flu', a particularly aggressive influenza virus, which ultimately killed more than 50 million people worldwide, reached the German lines in the summer. Initially, the virus affected Allied troops less severely than German ones. Normally caused by a virus that affects children and the elderly most of all, this strain of influenza affected all soldiers regardless of age and physical fitness, including the elite assault formations. Just the German Sixth Army in Alsace alone reported 10,000 cases of influenza for the months of June and July 1918. By contrast, the whole British Army suffered 50,000 cases of influenza for the months of June and July.”

And a final entry showing nothing changes in the cycle of human history :-

A LETTER FROM F. SCOTT FITZGERALD, QUARANTINED IN 1920 IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE DURING THE SPANISH INFLUENZA OUTBREAK.

Dearest Rosemary,

It was a limpid dreary day, hung as in a basket from a single dull star. I thank you for your letter. Outside, I perceive what may be a collection of fallen leaves tussling against a trash can. It rings like jazz to my ears. The streets are that empty. It seems as though the bulk of the city has retreated to their quarters, rightfully so. At this time, it seems very poignant to avoid all public spaces. Even the bars, as I told Hemingway, but to that he punched me in the stomach, to which I asked if he had washed his hands. He hadn't. He is much the denier, that one. Why, he considers the virus to be just influenza. I'm curious of his sources.

The officials have alerted us to ensure we have a month's worth of necessities. Zelda and I have stocked up on red wine, whiskey, rum, vermouth, absinthe, white wine, sherry, gin, and lord, if we need it, brandy. Please pray for us.

You should see the square, oh, it is terrible. I weep for the damned eventualities this future brings. The long afternoons rolling forward slowly on the ever-slick bottomless highball. Z. says it's no excuse to drink, but I just can't seem to steady my hand. In the distance, from my brooding perch, the shoreline is cloaked in a dull haze where I can discern an unremitting penance that has been heading this way for a long, long while. And yet, amongst the cracked cloudline of an evening's cast, I focus on a single strain of light, calling me forth to believe in a better morrow.

Faithfully yours,

F. Scott Fitzgerald

GET TO KNOW YOUR FELLOW BRANCH MEMBERS Dave Hedges

I would be delighted if you would send me a picture and a write up

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None submitted this month. Now with many of you in a state of enforced idleness perhaps you could send a miniature 'This is Your Life'. Where's Eamonn Andrews when you need him.

CAPTAIN MARTIN OF THE DEVONSHIRES David Hedges

When we take first time visitors to the Somme Battlefield many remark that a visit to the Devonshire Cemetery was one of the highlights of their tour. Captain Martin is one of my heroes so this article that appeared in the Daily Mail was of special interest, the more so as it was about the sale of his medals and effects at our local Lockdales auctioneers in Martlesham.

World War One soldier foresaw his own death when he built plasticine model of Battle of the Somme and pointed out exact location where German machine gun would kill him

Captain Duncan Martin fought at the Battle of the Somme in World War One. An artist before the war, Capt Martin created a model of the Somme on the eve of the battle that identified a spot where the Germans could place a machine gun. Despite warning his officers, Martin was killed by that very gun on the first day. Capt Martin's medals were put up for sale and fetched £2,800 at auction in Suffolk.



© Lockdales BNPS
Captain Martin's medals were put up for sale and fetched £2,800 at auction in Suffolk

The tragic tale of a soldier who foresaw his own death after making a plasticine model of the Somme on the eve of battle can be told after his medals went up for sale.

Captain Duncan Martin, an artist before the war, identified an elevated spot where Germans could put a machine gun post after producing a scale model.

He tried to tell his commanding officers that his men would be charging into a bloodbath but his fears were ignored.

On the morning of July 1, 1916—the first day of the Somme—Capt Martin was one of the first to fall when the British launched an attack on the village of Mametz.

Capt Martin, of the 9th Battalion, Devonshire Regiment, was among the 464 casualties mown down by Germans stationed at the post he had identified.

As they went over the hill at Mansel Copse, they were in full view of the enemy and horribly exposed to shooters just 400 yards away.

The dead were buried in a trench with a wooden sign erected which read *'The Devonshires held this trench, the Devonshires hold it still'*.

Those words are today written in stone at the entrance of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery at nearby Carnoy.

Capt Martin's archive included his 1915 Star campaign medal, a map of the battlefield and the devastating telegram his family received informing them of his death.

It was sold at Lockdales Auctioneers of Suffolk, achieving a hammer price of £2,300. With fees added on the overall figure paid by the buyer from the north of England came to £2,800.

Capt Martin was born in Algiers in 1886 but his parents Thomas and Anne Martin moved back to England at the turn of the century. He went to school in Bristol and in 1908 moved to the artist haven of St Ives in Cornwall. He joined an art school there until he volunteered for the Devonshire Regiment and was commissioned as an officer in October 1914.

He arrived on the Western Front in July 1915 and fought at the Battle of Loos in September before moving to the Somme front. Before the major and disastrous offensive at the Somme, Capt Martin was allowed to return home to prepare for it. It was then he built the model of the terrain over which his battalion would attack. From studying his model, Capt Martin spotted the place where the Germans would install a machine gunpost to inflict major casualties.

A spokesman for the Keep Military Museum in Dorchester, Dorset, where archives of the Devon and Dorset Regiment are kept, said: *'Martin became convinced that, unless it was destroyed in the (Allied) barrage, a particular German machine gun at Shrine Valley would catch his company as it advanced.'*

'He even pointed out to his brother officers where he and his men would fall.

'At 07.27 hours on July 1, Martin's fears were realised. As his company topped the rise and moved downhill past Mansel Copse, the machine gun 400 yards away in Shrine Valley mowed them down. 'Martin was one of the first to fall. That day the 9th Devons lost 141 killed, 268 wounded and 55 missing - a total of 464 casualties amounting to 60 per cent of their strength.'

Another officer who shared Capt Martin's fears was Lieutenant William Hodgson, also of the 9th Battalion.

He wrote a prescient poem two days before the offensive which read: *'I, that on my familiar hill, saw with uncomprehending eyes, a hundred of thy sunsets spill, their fresh and sanguine sacrifice.'*

Capt Martin's plasticine model was displayed at the Royal United Service Institute in London for many years but was lost a long time ago.

Capt Martin's story lends weight to the suggestion that the tragic Tommies who served in the First World War were 'lions led by donkeys', a reference to the incompetent and indifferent generals who orchestrated the war.

The first day of the Battle of the Somme was the bloodiest day in the history of the British Army. The British forces suffered 57,470 casualties, including 19,240 fatalities - gaining just three square miles of territory.

Chris Elmy, specialist at Lockdales, said: 'This was a particular poignant archive and we were honoured to have handled the sale of it.'

OLD COMTEMPTIBLES Kelvin Dakin

Copies of the “Old Contemptible” magazine can be found on the Facebook page

@OldContemptibles1914

run by Andrew Thornton.

News from the Ipswich & District Branch was often published in these pages along with obituary notices of members. From the names mentioned and the details recorded it has been possible to trace some of these men's histories and here is one :-

6344 (later 5819137) CSM John C Parsons, 2nd Battalion, Suffolk Regiment
14th October 1882 – 15th April 1967

John Clover Parsons was born in Harwich, the son of John and Ellen Parsons. John snr. was a barge builder and in 1891 the family was living in Albemarle Street, Harwich.

In 1901 John jnr. was in Fort Albert, Alderney, Channel Islands, along with other members of the Suffolk Regiment. His occupation is given as a Shop Assistant.

By 1911 he was a Sergeant and stationed at Aldershot. He had married Emma Byham in Sudbury in 1908 and they had a daughter, Constance Emmie, who was born in Aldershot in 1910.

He crossed to France with the battalion on 15th August 1914, was Mentioned in Dispatches (London Gazette 17th February 1915) and listed as wounded in June 1915.

He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal –Gazetted in 1918:

In 1939 he is at 1 Newton Road, Sudbury – a widower (his wife Emma died in 1924) and he was Chief ARP Warden.

J C Parsons DCM, was a member of the Ipswich & District Branch of the Old Contemptibles Association and his obituary notice was published in the "Old Contemptible" magazine in June 1967.

	Name.	Corps.	Rank	Regt., &c.
		SUFF. R.	C.Q.M.S.	6344
	PARSOIS	A/WOI		
	J.C. Jm	# - - -	WOCL I	5819137
	D.C.M.			
No.	Mosial.	Enlist.	Page.	Remarks.
	VICTORY	+K/1103 B26	4989	
	BRITISH	- - -	- - -	
14	STAR	12/1/2	114	
	Emblems			
	Waps, Rank IV #570 d/c 121 Ant. C/LP/2401			IX.B. 1133 d/c 3.25 NW/3/15790
	# 165/M/Suff R/I			Black Malabar, IX. 631 d/7-5-25 NW/3/15790 NW/3/15790
	Theatre of War first served in			
	Date of entry therein	15.8.14		blusp/2401. K. 1702.



6344 CSM J.C. PARSONS (Sudbury)

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty, when his company commander was severely wounded a few yards from a nest of machine guns. He got him under cover and bound up his wounds under a heavy fire from these guns. He then took command of the company and held his position, sending in valuable reports at frequent intervals to battalion headquarters about the situation. His example of courage and presence of mind under fire inspired his men with great confidence.

(3.10.18)

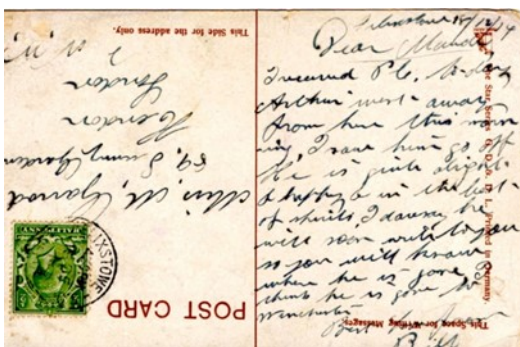
9516, Private Arthur James Garrod, 1st Battalion, Suffolk Regiment



Arthur was the second son of William and Mary Ann Garrod and he was born on 7th August 1896. The family lived in The Street, Bramford. In 1911 Arthur is living at home with his parents and working as a labourer.

He enlisted on the 10th August 1914 followed later, in September, by his older brother, William.

Arthur pictured right at Winchester.



This postcard (left) was sent by William to their sister Maude. It reads:

"Felixstowe 18/12/14

Dear Maude,
I received P.C. today. Arthur went away from here this morning. I saw him go off. He is quite alright & happy & in the best of spirits. I daresay he will soon write to you so you will know where he is gone. I think he is gone to Winchester.
Best Wishes from
Bill"

Arthur crossed to France with the battalion on the 16th January 1915 and William followed him on the 24th March 1915. Arthur was killed in action, age 18, on 24th April 1915 and William a few days later, age 23, on 8th May 1915. This was during the 2nd Battle of Ypres when the 1st Battalion suffered very heavy losses. The brothers are commemorated **on the Menin Gate and on the Bramford Village war memorial.**

THEY SHALL GROW NOT OLD

**Talks at the Norwich Branch
Postponed for the Duration !!**

**Our next month's talks
Postponed for the Duration !!**

Please send any contributions for the **Branch Briefing** to:
David Hedges, 99 Cliff Road, Felixstowe, Suffolk, IP11 9SA
telephone: 01394 272677 and email: david.j.hedges@btopenworld.com
Next Committee meeting: tba
Approach a committee member if you want any issue raised.