

Captain William Blyth FULLER 1883 - 1915  
The Queens Royal West Surrey Regiment.



**William Blyth FULLER was born 14<sup>th</sup> August 1883. He was killed in Northern France on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1915 age just 31 yrs. while leading his men during the fierce battle at Festubert.**

Capt. William Blyth Fuller, 2nd Battalion Royal West Surrey Regiment (killed in action), was born on August 14th, 1883, and appointed second-lieutenant Royal West Surrey Regiment in April, 1903, lieutenant in January, 1907, and captain in March, 1913. From February, 1911, till February, 1914, he served as adjutant of the Territorial Force.

He was the only son of surgeon Dr. William FULLER and Charlotte Isabella FULLER nee BLYTH of 111, Piccadilly and of Stoughton Grange Guildford.

His mother Charlotte the former Lady HILL had been married to Sir John HILL Baronet of Londonderry, a Major in the 19<sup>th</sup> Hussars who died of Sunstroke in 1872 at the age of 39.

**DEATHS.**

July 30, at 40, Lowndes-square, London, after a few days' illness, from the effects of sunstroke, Sir John Hill, Bart., of St. Columbs, Londonderry, aged 35.

His Parents Dr William FULLER and Charlotte (Lady HILL) were married in July 1879

A daughter Francis was born in 1881 and son William was born July 1883.

He was baptised at Christ Church Mayfair on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1883.

BAPTISMS solemnized in the Parish of <i>Christ Church, Allay Fair</i> in the County of <i>Middlesex</i> in the Year <i>1883</i>						
When Baptized.	Child's Christian Name.	Parents Names.		Abode.	Quality, Trade, or Profession.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
		Christian.	Surname.			
1883 August 5 <sup>th</sup> No. 825.	Emma Ada Anelia Born March 9/1883	Frederick & Mahilda	Cooper	17, Brick Street	Waiter	W. Edgar Williams Curate
August 19 <sup>th</sup> No. 826.	Harriette Isabel Martina Born July 13, 1883	Alexander Walter & Alice	Poplett	47 Brick Street.	Shop - Assistant	F. Ernest Spencer Curate
September 4 <sup>th</sup> No. 827.	William Rlythe Born August 4 <sup>th</sup> 1883	William & Charlotte Isabella	Fuller	111 Piccadilly	Surgeon	F. Ernest Spencer, Curate

In 1891 the family including his three step-sisters Letitia HILL 23, Mary HILL 19 and Louisa HILL 18 were all living at Stoughton Grange, Stoke, Nr Guildford.

In October 1910 William married Barbara PIXLEY from Woking and they had two daughters. Nancy Barbara born August 1911 and Eileen 'Patricia' born August 1913.

William was a career soldier. His interest in the military and in particular the Queens West Surrey Regiment was probably due to the fact that the West Surrey Regiment's barracks and recruiting base and the family home at 'Stoughton Grange' being very close and he would have been familiar with the soldiers from there from a very early age.

He was educated at Mr. W.M. Rhodes' school at St. Leonard's. From there he went to Winchester College, where he was a member of the Officer Training Cadets and later at Sandhurst. Where at the age of 19 he received his Commission as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the Royal West Surrey Regiment in April 1903. He became a Lieutenant in January 1907 and a Captain in March 1913.

He served with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the West Surrey Regiment in India and Aden from 1903 1909. From February 1911 – 1914 he was made Adjutant of the 7<sup>th</sup> Highland Light Infantry (Territorial Force).

During March 1914 he transferred from the Highland Territorial force back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of his beloved West Surrey Regiment which were serving in South Africa.

## World War One The Queens Royal West Surrey Regiment

Notes taken from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion war diary and from private mementoes of William B FULLER'S widow Barbara.

The first British soldiers to see action in the First World War were the serving Regulars, and the Queens Royal West Surrey Regiment was among the first British regiments of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) to land in France and would take part in all the major battles on the western front.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was in England and was mobilised on a war footing on the day war was declared on Aug 4<sup>th</sup>. 1914. They arrived at Le Havre on 13<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1914 entrained for the front at 3-00 am on the 15<sup>th</sup> and as part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Division of the

Original BEF. They were engaged in aiding the Belgians defending Mons and Antwerp and the subsequent retreat from Antwerp.

Until the end of November 1917 when the Battalion was deployed to Italy.. The Queen's West Surreys served in Flanders and were involved in many of the major actions on the Western Front including.....

1914: The major opening German offensive at the Battle of Mons and the subsequent retreat of the BEF and Belgian armies in August due to the lack of manpower and unreliable ammunition etc. against the overwhelming fire power of the Germans.

The **1<sup>st</sup> Battalion**. West Surreys were also at the forefront of the 'Battle of the Marne', which with the help of French re-enforcements literally sent to the front in Paris taxis commandeered by Gen Joffre, held the German advance and pushed the German army from within striking distance of Paris back to the other side of the river MARNE where the two sides dug in, so ending the Schlieffen Plan of a speedy German victory intended by swiftly sweeping through Belgium capturing the channel ports and south to surround Paris and then trapping the French against their own border with Germany.....

### The war of movement had ended.....

.....from now on for much of the next four years, the Western front would be a stalemate of defensive trench warfare with occasional attempts by both sides to breach the enemy lines. The West Surreys went on to be part of the Battle of the Aisne, First Battle of Ypres. And in 1915 the Battle of Festubert, and the Battles of Loos and the Somme etc.. Suffering huge casualties on both sides while trying to break through enemy lines.

When war was declared the **2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion** in which William was serving was on garrison duty in S Africa. After their return from Africa they fought at Zonnebeke, Ypres, Aubers Ridge, Festubert, Loos and the Somme.

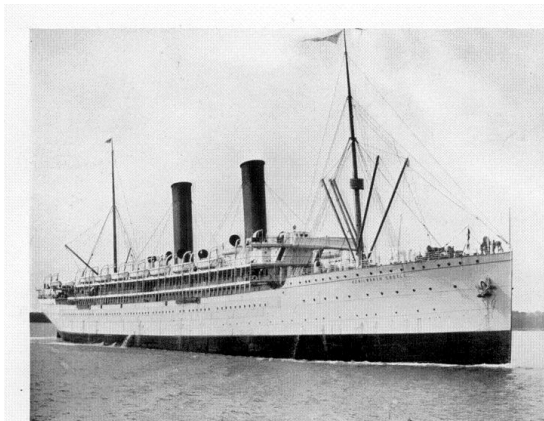
By the time the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the West Surreys arrived in Flanders, the German advance on Paris had been halted at the Battle of the Marne. The Germans having been forced to retreat beyond the River Marne. Antwerp had fallen and the enemy had Ypres in its sights.

The BEF was under overall command of the French General Joffre, mostly concerned with the defence of the Northern sector of the front especially Ypres, which stood in the way of the enemy reaching the channel ports. Although this beautiful city would be virtually destroyed -- *(It was said at the end of the war, "A man on horseback could see from one side of the city to the other")* -- Somehow throughout the war by some small miracle and the tenacity of the BEF and Imperial forces, this city on this small patch of Belgian soil never totally fell to the Germans.

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The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Queens West Surreys were assigned the British Expeditionary Force in September landing in Zeebrugge on October 7<sup>th</sup> 1914. They were attached to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division.

When war was declared, William's 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion were on Garrison duty in South Africa at Pretoria and were immediately recalled to England to join the British Expeditionary Force on the Western Front.



UNION-CASTLE R.M.S. KENILWORTH CASTLE, 1904  
Sister to Armadale Castle

Stuart

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Batt. Sailed from Capetown on the 'HMT Kenilworth Castle' on 27<sup>th</sup> Aug 1914. with '2000 souls onboard'

On arrival at Southampton on 19<sup>th</sup> Sep 1914 the Battalion disembarked and route marched to camp at Lyndhurst Hants.

Next day the battalion was attached to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division in preparation for action with the BEF on the Western Front.

While at Lyndhurst, between 21st-27th September the Officers and some NCO's were allowed 24 hours leave to visit their relations.

William was able to spend a little time with his young family. William seen here with his daughters Barbara and Patricia just before he embarked for France.



At 3 pm on 4<sup>th</sup> Oct 1914 the Battalion was ordered to proceed to Southampton for embarkation. The men who had been given leave to go into town had to be quickly rounded up and the Battalion eventually moved off at 5-30 pm.

The S.S. Turkoman sailed at dawn on the 6<sup>th</sup> and reached Dover in the afternoon to join other transports reaching Zeebrugge at dawn on the 7<sup>th</sup> Oct.

On disembarkation the Battalion totalled 1018 men, and 30 Officers Under the command of Lt. Col. M.C. COLES.

The battalion was divided into four Companies, A,B,C,& D, Capt. W.B. FULLER and Capt. T. WEEDING were in command of 'D' Company.

## Flanders

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion marched through the night to a rest near Ostend. On the 9<sup>th</sup> they entrained for Ghent to aid the Belgians in the siege of Antwerp which was by now under heavy fire. And the decision was made to evacuate the Belgians from Antwerp. On the 9<sup>th</sup> Oct Antwerp was forced to surrender to the enemy.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> Oct. the 2nd were at the small village of Gontrode about 6 km S E of Ghent. The area was still being held by the Belgians. They went into billets Nr MELLE. In the evening heavy firing broke out and the Battalion was ordered to 'Stand To'. A. and D. Companies were ordered to 'Hold the Village' At dawn on the 11<sup>th</sup> the battalion relieved the Belgian trenches. At 8-30pm the trenches were evacuated and the Battalion marched to Ghent arriving at midnight.

On the 11th-12th the men marched over 26 miles having been on the move for 24 hrs out of 26, finally reaching billets at THIELT after dark. The next day the Brigade left THIELT for ROULERS with the Queens as 'Advanced Guard'. The men being exhausted a number fell out on the way.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> owing to the numbers of footsore men, orders were received to send 400 Queens and 600 Royal Warwicks by train to YPRES. The men took cover in houses next to the train station to be out of sight of enemy aircraft. The men had hardly taken cover when an enemy 'Taube' flew over the station, wheeled

and came back over the Queens. Capt. FULLERS 'D' company opened fire from the street and the plane was hit and seen to crash some 3 miles off. A patrol captured the pilot and gunner and the damaged plane was brought back to Ypres.

On the 15th-16th The Queens and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of infantry marched out of YPRES to ZONNEBEKE where 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Queens entrenched covering the LANGEMARK road.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> Information was received that the Germans were entrenched on the Menin Road. The brigade was ordered to seize a forward position at KLYHOEK in readiness for a general attack on MENIN.

Capt William FULLER'S 'D' company along with 'A' Co. were ordered to re-enforce the left flank of the Royal Warwicks on the MENIN Road. 'B' and 'C' companies came under some heavy firing. A number of bicycles were spotted outside a house in the village and a party under Capt. LEWIS of 'C' Company were sent to get them. They got very close to the house when they were fired on by Germans hiding in the house. Capt. Lewis and most of his party were killed.

Meanwhile A & D Companies had managed to move about a mile south of LEDEGHEM where they surprised a party of 6 Germans killing or wounding most of them. Suddenly a German Battery began to target the two companies at close range. Sergeant SLATTEN was severely wounded. The companies were withdrawing from the exposed position when orders were received at the whole Battalion was to retire at once. During this retirement towards ZONNEBEKE Capt MASTERS was shot and had to leave. D Company along with A Company were then ordered to take up a position on the main road NW of DADIZEELE where the South Staffords were already entrenched.

## **First Battle of YPRES**

**First Battle of Ypres**, (19 October–22 November 1914). The German failure to break the Allied lines in desperate fighting at Ypres marked the end of the war of movement, with both sides constructing an elaborate trench network that stretched from Switzerland to the North Sea.

On October 19<sup>th</sup>, the Germans opened their first major Flanders offensive which the Allies steadfastly resisted. Fighting continued, with heavy losses on both sides, until November 22, when the arrival of winter weather forced the battle to a halt. The area between the positions established by both sides during this period—from Ypres on the British side to Menin and Roulers on the German side—became known as the Ypres Salient, an area which over the next four years would see some of the war's bitterest and most brutal struggles. During the First Battle of Ypres (the 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Division which included the 2<sup>nd</sup> Surreys suffered such heavy casualties it took until well into 1915 to rebuild up to full strength).

The first battalions to see action in the First World War were the Regulars. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion West Surreys were with some of the first BEF troops arrived in France in 1914, as part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Division.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion West Surreys joined the British Expeditionary Force in September 1914 and had joined the 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division. The scale of casualties in both battalions was horrific; by the end of the first week of November 1914 there were only thirty-two survivors out of a total of 998 men from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had suffered 676 casualties. Their ranks were later to be filled by Territorials, and inexperienced men from Kitchener's "New Army" and later Conscripts.

On the morning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Oct, orders were received to entrench at the ZONNEBEKE\_PASCHENDALE level crossing being held by the Royal Warwick Fusiliers. 'D' company came under heavy artillery fire.



On the 21<sup>st</sup> after a quiet night, at about 8-00am B + D companies came under heavy German shell fire which developed into a German infantry attack at about 10-00am. They held out until 1-00pm when a German machine gun was able to enfilade their trenches and were forced to retire. During their retirement they suffered several casualties when they came under heavy rifle and machine gun fire.

After 4-00pm the Queens were ordered to fill a gap alongside the Staffords. But by now it was pitch black and no one knew where the Staffords were? Some of the trenches of the original line were occupied by Germans. When a patrol eventually found the Staffords.

Fresh orders were given for the Battalion to retreat to the crossroads in the village of ZONNEBEKE and heavy firing broke out during the retreat.

On reaching the rendezvous the men fell out exhausted at about 4-30 am.

The casualties suffered by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battn on the 21<sup>st</sup> totalled 178 with 2 officers and 16 other ranks killed, 5 officers and 116 other ranks wounded and 37 other ranks missing.

The 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Oct were fairly quiet and the men spent most of the time on 'Stand To' and repairing the ZONNEBEKE trenches. 250 men were to attempt to collect abandoned equipment and bury the dead etc. but it soon became clear the village was occupied by the Germans and several men were hit. The strength of the Battalion was now 7 officers and 745 other ranks.

On the morning the 24<sup>th</sup> Oct A + C companies were sent to re-enforce a Battalion of Guards. But on the way a section under Lieut. BETHELL was fired on by some Germans hidden in some woods. Lieut. BETHELL and 15 other ranks were killed with a further 9 men missing. All from A + C companies.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> the men 'Stood To' all day with their full equipment on ready to move at a moments notice. At 6-00pm the men of William's 'D' Company moved out to re-enforce the R. Yorks at GHELUVELT on the MENIN Road. It was raining heavily. On arrival a staff officer found the drenched men some shelter in a barn. The men had hardly settled down when they were ordered to help secure some Germans who had been surrounded. On reaching the Brigade HQ it was found that 7 Officers and 188 men had been captured.

On the morning of the 26<sup>th</sup> the Queens took the prisoners over from the Guards and escorted them back to Division HQ.

B and D Companies rejoined the Battalion just west of GHELUVELT. The Battalion was then ordered to advance South of the GHELUVELT Road where they came under heavy shell fire, several men killed or wounded. After proceeding for about a mile the Battalion was ordered to retreat and dig in. At about this time the men saw one of the British planes circling overhead when it was fired at and caught fire the the pilot and gunner were thrown out and killed.

For much of the 26<sup>th</sup> Oct the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had been under shell fire taking many casualties, and at the end of the day the strength stood at 21 Officers and 731 Other ranks

On the morning of 27<sup>th</sup> after a night spent in the trenches Nr ZANDVORDE the Battalion was ordered to recapture the trenches which had been abandoned Nr

KRUISICK. 'B' and 'D' Company re-occupied the trenches without much opposition where they found a number of abandoned rifles, equipment etc. The field of fire from these trenches was limited and the enemy kept up heavy sniping, wounding Lieut. THATCHER of RAMC with a stray bullet at his dressing station.

Meanwhile 'C' Company had remained with the Guards who had relieved the Yorks on the Menin Road under a heavy bombardment of Shrapnel, Lyddite and high explosive shells. The Company suffered 12 casualties with Lieut. BIRD and one other Killed 9 Wounded and one Missing.

At 2-00am on the 28<sup>th</sup> the men left the trenches Nr KRUISICK from where they marched back to a rest Camp at KLIEN ZILLEBEKE Which they reached at dawn. The strength of the Battalion was now 19 Officers and 716 Other Ranks.

After a quiet night on the 29<sup>th</sup> the next three days Capt William FULLER would be involved in some of the most intense action since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had entered the front. Over the next three days the Battalion were in the front line along with the Guards near the GHELUVELT -MENIN Road. The enemy trenches were just 70 yards away!

On the 30<sup>th</sup> Capt. WATSON returned from Brigade HQ with the news that ZANDVORDE had been evacuated and a fresh line was to be formed running through a belt of trees. The Battalion was now under heavy fire from German guns which could be clearly seen on high ground S W of KRUISICK and also from the German Infantry on their Eastern flank. The Companies retired under heavy fire taking many casualties and managed to rejoin Brigade where they entrenched Nr GHELUVELT.

When the Germans attacked Lieut. WILSON and several crackshots from 'B' Company brought down a number of the enemy. However as B Company left one end of the trench as the Germans entered the other Lt. WILSON was wounded and had to be left in the trench with other wounded in the care of Lt. Winter, Doctor with the Yorks.

The casualties on the 30<sup>th</sup> amounted to 91. 8 Killed including Lt WILSON who later died. 34 wounded and 49 missing. Many of the missing were probably killed by shell fire.

31<sup>st</sup> Oct The enemy had broken through and at daybreak the enemy opened fire and shelled the Companies out of the newly prepared trenches that had been dug overnight. The shell fire was extremely heavy and almost impossible to avoid. Major BOTTOMLEY and Capt. WEEDING were hit.

At 11-00am orders were given to form a new firing line. Major CROFTS went forward to find the men still entrenched to the right where he found a few of the Queens and some of the Welsh Regiment. They saw some parties of men in the distance believed to be the French who were to make a counter attack in that direction, but it became evident that they were Germans. Major CROFT stayed with these men under violent shelling when some of them broke away as it was evident the Germans were working round the right flank. Major CROFT and the remaining men also retreated to a previously dug trench to the South which they held under heavy shell fire until Major CROFT was hit by a fragment of shell and the party then retreated further.

Col. COLES took forward about a 100 men from remaining companies up the hill but were immediately fired on by the German gun batteries. They moved to their right forming a new firing line. While they were doing this a shrapnell shell burst them severely wounding Col. COLES and several other ranks, also knocking Capt FULLER unconscious for a time.

During the afternoon a party of about 40 Germans suddenly appeared from one of the nearby houses with their hands in the air. One of our men fired a shot and they all bolted back into the house except one who surrendered. The house was later searched but the Germans had gone! The line was held until dark when the Queens retired to the Chateau Veldhoek.

Somewhere near this line Lieut. HAIGH, L/Cpl COOPER and Pte HARTWELL became separated from the main 'D' Company under Capt. FULLER but held the section of line alone from 1-30pm until dark. And were afterwards recommended for Gallantry. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the QUEENS WEST SURREYS had been holding a salient at GHELUVELT and had been surrounded. Only 2 officers and 32 men got away. The casualties for the day were very heavy. 11 Other ranks were killed, Lt. Col. COLES, Major CROFTS, Major BOTTOMLEY, Capt WEEDING (*Capt. FULLERS 2<sup>nd</sup> in command*) Lt. PHILPOTT along with 61 Other Ranks were Wounded and 22 were missing. The casualties for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion over the three days were 279 ! The depleted Battalions remained in reserve in the woods Nr the Chateau while the brigade reformed into 2 Battalions. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was formed from the Queens, the Welsh Fusiliers. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was formed from the Staffords and the Warwicks to which Capt. FULLER, Lieut s White, ROSS and SMITH were attached.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Batt remained here from the 1<sup>st</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov. the 2<sup>nd</sup> Batt were sent up to reoccupy a trench which had been abandoned. A platoon under Lieuts SMITH and WHITE managed to get into the trench, but Lieut White was hit along with 14 Other Ranks Wounded and 9 Killed. With Lieut SMITH being wounded on the next day.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> Nov a re-enforcement of 110 Other Ranks arrived under a Capt. ROBERTS.

The Front Line trenches stabilized east of Ypres at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battle of Ypres but with the Germans still holding the higher ground which only amounted to a rise of 10-12 metres but gave the enemy a huge advantage in observation and the ability to site its artillery behind the ridge. Much of the terrain of Flanders and around Ypres is very similar to that here on the Somerset Levels with low lying soft and boggy ground in places making it difficult to dig trenches deep enough to stand up in.

The Ypres salient although surrounded by the enemy on three sides would hold throughout the war despite several further attempts to take it!



## **The 1914 Christmas Truce and the Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment**

The Christmas Truce involving the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment was unlike the football, booze and carols which some other units shared with the Germans elsewhere on the Western Front. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was in the line around La Boutillerie, a few miles south of the Belgian border. On the 18<sup>th</sup> December two companies of the battalion had supported the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment in a disastrous failed attack on the German lines, the Queen's losing 97 officers and men, either killed, wounded, missing or taken prisoner. The dead and wounded lay scattered in front of the enemy lines overnight.



This truce was captured in photographs by newly arrived 2nd Lieutenant J B Coates, who, though only aged 17, found himself commanding a company. (2/L Coates would later go on to become Colonel J B Coates).



Unofficial Armistice, possibly 19th December 1914 2nd Bn Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment (SHC Ref. QRWS/3/11/3 p17)

A first unofficial truce occurred at daybreak on 19th December 1914, when the Germans opposite beckoned the 2nd Battalion out to collect its wounded and bury its dead.

Several officers, the Medical Officer and around 30 men went out to meet 60 Germans in No Man's Land.

The rival officers talked as the burial parties got to work, the Germans assisting in burying many of the British dead, many of whom lay close to their front line. They did not, however, play entirely fair: two British officers and seven stretcher bearers were enticed into the German trenches and taken prisoner.

As many dead still lay unburied, a further truce was agreed on Christmas day at 11am negotiated by the Wiltshire Regiment on the Queen's right. The 2nd Battalion's war diary reported that 'many German officers and men came out of their trenches to midway between the two lines' and more graves were excavated. However the frozen earth meant progress was very slow and a third armistice was agreed for Boxing Day to begin at 9am. A number of immaculate German Staff officers in fur lined coats '*of quite a different class to the infantry officers who were of a very low class*'. While the men hacked at the hard frozen ground, they chatted with their counterparts, sharing with the British their views on the war's progress: Both sides argued that the war would end in their favour! All gave the appearance however of being fed up with the war'. Finally, at 1pm, with the graves all now completed, the British chaplain read the burial service, in the presence of the digging party, some officers of the Queen's and 8 or 10 German officers. Both sides returned to their trenches. Never again would an unofficial 'Truce' be allowed!

## A spell in Blighty

However... William FULLER would not be involved with these events. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, after three weeks of heavy fighting, and the day after he had been knocked unconscious by a shell fragment, William succumbed to a bout of Enteritis, and found himself in a Field Ambulance heading for Poperinghe and then to hospital at Lijssenthoek.

*Lijssenthoek was a small village close to the town of Poperinghe. It was far enough away from the battlefields of the Ypres Salient to be out of range of the German artillery. For the Allied Forces it was in a good position to set up a medical centre for treating wounded from the Ypres Salient battlefields because it was next to the railway line which ran to Poperinghe and Hazebrouck in France. This line provided a direct connection route between the British-held battle lines at Ypres and the Allied areas to the rear, also connecting with the coastal port of Boulogne, where the British Base Hospitals were established.*

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov 1914 William was on one of the hospital trains headed for Boulogne where he was transferred onto the Hospital Ship 'Asturius' bound for Southampton and to a Military Hospital in London.

On 6<sup>th</sup> Nov he was a patient at the Fishmongers' Hall Hospital for Officers.

*Situated next to London Bridge it is said to be the first building to be used as a military hospital for the wounded of WW1*

*In November 1914 the King and Queen visited the Hospital, speaking to each patient.*

It is unknown how long William spent in hospital or even if the King and Queen spoke to him? But while convalescing William probably managed some leave to visit his family at home. From a photograph we know that in Dec 1914 William was still in England in charge of a draft of new Queens West Surrey men at Fort Luton, a transit barracks at Chatham for men en route to the Front.

On 26<sup>th</sup> Jan 1915 William left Chatham for L' Havre with the draft of new men for the front.

During the time William had been away, his 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion in Flanders had seen some really fierce trench battles with both sides suffering huge casualties and the Battalion diary records many instances of new men being drafted into the ranks.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> Jan 1915 William and 55 other ranks of the West Surreys landed at Havre and stayed in No 9 Rest Camp for two days moving on to No 14 Camp where they were posted to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Queens West Surrey Regiment.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> they were en-route to the front. Arriving at FLEURBAIX just south of ARMENTIERES

On 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb 1915. Capt FULLER along with 2/Lieut's. Furse and Hayes rejoined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion at LaToulette on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb. Where the Battalion were resting after a week of heavy fighting in the trenches. The strength of the Battalion had now reached 28 Officers and 874 Other Ranks.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb. the Battalion had been relieved from the trenches and retired to Billets at La Toulette where they rested until the 5<sup>th</sup> Feb. On the 5<sup>th</sup> a football match was arranged between the West Surreys and the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. The Welsh Fusiliers won 6-0!

William returned to the trenches with the Battalion on the 6<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> where for four days they came under enemy shell fire and sniper fire. 2nd Lt Hayes was wounded.

At 5-30pm and again at 7-30pm on the 10<sup>th</sup> the enemy opened heavy rifle and machine gun fire on the Battalions trenches, "Our men replied vigorously and over came the enemy's fire"!

On the 10<sup>th</sup> Feb the Batt. Moved back eastwards behind the line to rest until the 14<sup>th</sup> at Merville. They then returned to to take their turn under fire defending the front line trenches in places only 200 yds apart, near La Toulette where they remained until the last day of February.

On 28<sup>th</sup> Feb after a brief spell in billets the Battalion moved into the trenches facing Neuve Chapelle with divisions of Ghurka and Indian forces on their right in preparation for the Battle of Neuve Chapelle.

Williams 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade attached to the 7<sup>th</sup> Div. took up position in trenches just north of Neuve Chapelle facing the village of Aubers on the 1<sup>st</sup> March. William was now in command of company 'B' of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Queens. Much of the time over the next week between regular periods of artillery fire from both sides was spent repairing and strengthening the damaged trenches. The Germans were sending out small patrols to report on our trenches several of these patrols were taken prisoner.

## The Battle of Neuve Chapelle

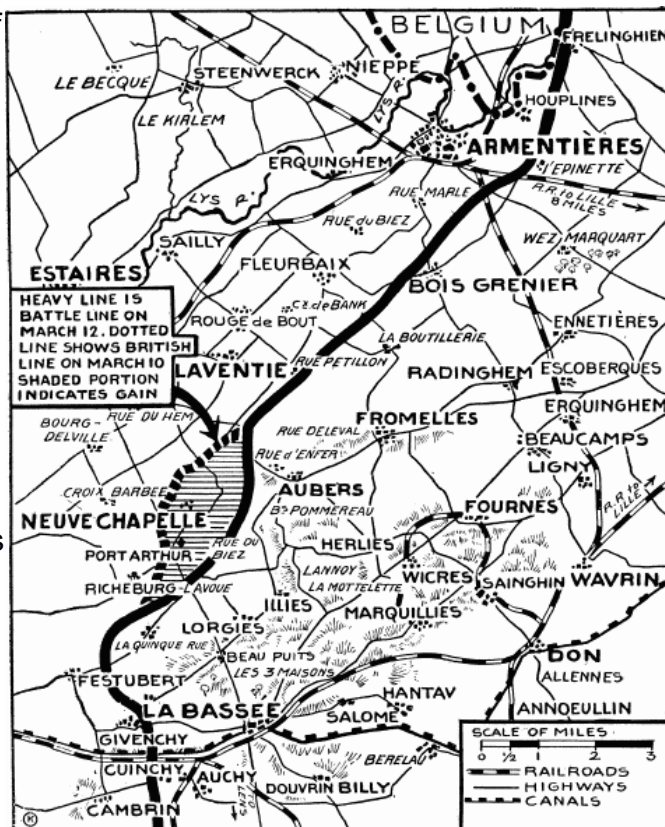
(10-13 March 1915)

The Battle of Neuve-Chapelle was the first major attack launched by the British Army, who emerged from the hardship of winter in the trenches and reinforced with fresh troops, for the first time since the beginning of the war.

The attack went in on the morning of 10<sup>th</sup> March with an intense artillery barrage which lasted for nearly an hour, At 9-00am the enemy artillery replied shelling the allied HQ area. At 9-55 information was received that the Indian division had taken the enemy's trenches in front of them. By 10-50am the main street of the village had been taken and the battalion was in touch with the Ghurka's on the right and had taken prisoners. By night fall the village had been taken. During the night the Germans reinforced their second line of defence just East of the village. And over the next few days little further progress was made. Failure to make progress after what was regarded as a victory was due to the initial artillery bombardment being too light mainly because of a shortage of reliable shells etc and too few reserves of men and supplies to follow up.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Queens held their line until relieved by the Border Regiment on the 19<sup>th</sup>. when they marched back to Billets in Estaires, there they rested and cleaned up for the day. The Battalion remained there until the the 6<sup>th</sup> April and gradually rebuilt its strength, which stood at just over 700 men with new drafts of men to well over 900.

While still under intermittent artillery fire much of the time was spent on route marches and training new recruits etc.



April 7<sup>th</sup> and the battalion was sent to the trenches Nr. Estaires. On the 11<sup>th</sup> they were relieved from the trenches by the Warwicks and moved to billets Nr Laventie.

From the 12<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> April William managed to snatch 7 days home leave and spend a few days at with his family. On the 20<sup>th</sup> he had returned to billets near the front at Estaires again.

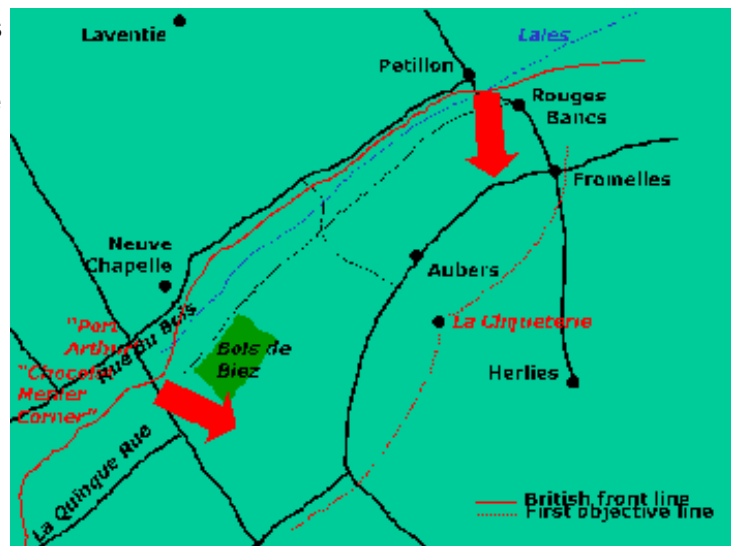
On the 28<sup>th</sup> April the men route marched to Merris S.W. of Armentieres where they billeted until 4<sup>th</sup> May resting and preparing for their next big action at Aubers Ridge.

## Aubers Ridge

(9<sup>th</sup> May 1915)

The attack on Aubers Ridge was a follow-up to the attack on Neuve Chapelle and an attempt to consolidate the ground taken there and gain control of the higher ground of the Ridge. The attack was planned for 9<sup>th</sup> May. However the enemy had used the break in the fighting to reinforce their defences.

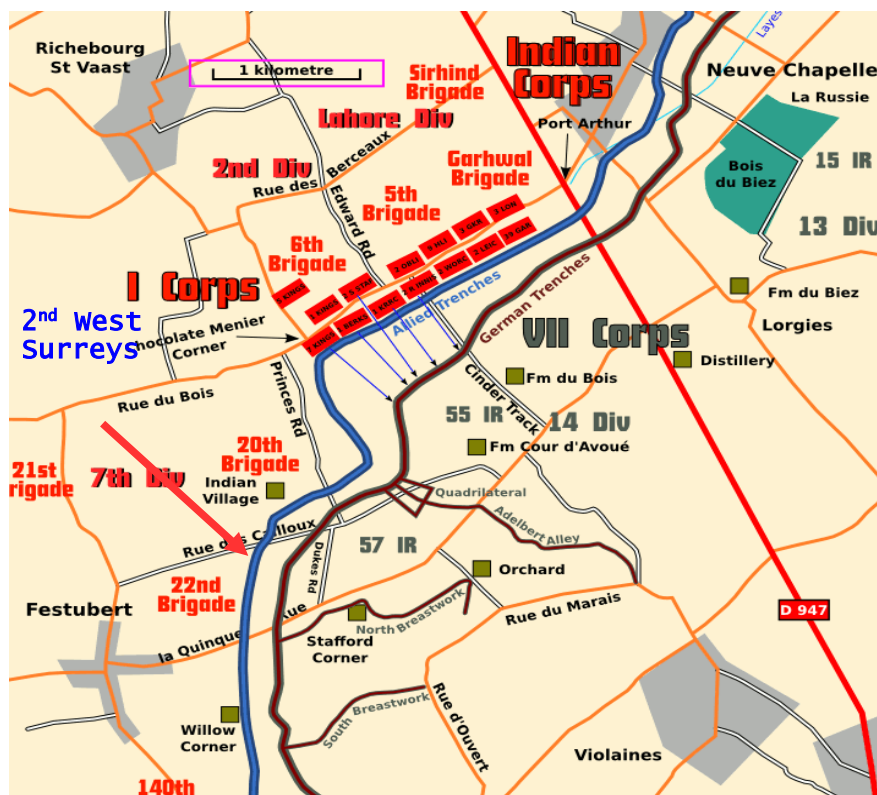
The plan was that the 7<sup>th</sup> Div would stand in reserve while the 8<sup>th</sup> would break the German line allowing the 7<sup>th</sup> to go through and take the defended areas of Aubers and meet up with the Indian Div. which would attack from the south surround the Ridge.



5am 9<sup>th</sup> May. The artillery Bombardment commenced. At 5-40am the 8<sup>th</sup> Div commenced its attack on the German trenches. The 7<sup>th</sup> Div and the Queens moved up in reserve just to the rear of the British first line of defence. They remained here for the rest of the day being shelled all the time and taking casualties. The 8<sup>th</sup> Div could not break the enemy line enough to let the 7<sup>th</sup> Div through! They remained in the support trench all day on the 10<sup>th</sup>. Finally at night the Battalion marched back to Billets at Essars where they met with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion West Surreys. The Battalions remained here until 15<sup>th</sup> May. The failed attack cost 11,000 British casualties.

# Battle of Festubert

15-27 May 1915



The battle of Festubert was a second phase to the failed Attack on Aubers Ridge. Again, the attack would take the form of a pincer attack on two assault fronts: a northern one along the Rue du Bois near Port Arthur and a southern one at Festubert. It was the first night attack of the war.

May 15<sup>th</sup> saw the men making final preparations for the attack on the 16<sup>th</sup>. May. The 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigades were to lead the attack. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion West Surreys in the 7<sup>th</sup> Div. of the 20<sup>th</sup> Brigade were in the first line along with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers on their left. They were to attack towards the Rue De Cailloux. Four Companies A,B,C and D were formed from the 700 or so men of the Battalion which included 17 Officers. Captain William FULLER was to lead Company 'B'.

The attack was scheduled to start at 3-15 am on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

At 6-30pm on the 15<sup>th</sup> the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion left Essars and marched to the trenches. A and B companies were formed up opposite the ladders to go over the top first, with C and D company lines to follow them. The interval between the lines was to be 50 yds. The British and German trenches were approx. 180yds apart. The ground was difficult,



uneven with shell holes, ditches and long grass. During the night of the 15<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> there were several showers of rain.

### **The battle commences.**

16<sup>th</sup> May 1915. At 2-30 am there was an issue of Rum. At 2-45am the bombardment of the enemy trenches and wire started and continued until 3-15am. At 3-15 precisely the leading platoons of Company A scaled the ladders and rushed toward the enemy trenches, followed by company B led by Captain FULLER. It was now just daylight and as soon as the men showed their heads over the parapet they were met intense enemy rifle and machine



gun fire who seemed in no way affected by the artillery bombardment. By the time the 1<sup>st</sup> platoon of C company went over the enemy fire seemed as hot as ever and the artillery was asked to open again on the enemy trenches, this second bombardment with high explosive lyddite shells for a quarter of an hour took effect and the rest of C and D companies were able to force the enemy from and along its trenches for some distance to the right.

The majority of the casualties among the officers and men occurred 'No Mans Land' between the trenches in the initial attack by the battalion. The remaining Officers and about 230 men managed to advance 800yds beyond the captured German trenches quite quickly with only slight opposition. There were many German dead in their first line and most of the rest had ran off to the right. The final objective, the German communication trench at 'Stafford Corner' on the map above was reached at about 6-00am, where the Queens connected up with the Staffords on their right and the Warwicks and Welsh Fusiliers on their left. The communication trench gave little cover in daylight and it was impossible to consolidate the position to any extent. The rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> Brigade had great difficulty in dislodging the enemy at 'The Orchard' and were unable to join up with the Queens as planned, leaving the Queens left flank open throughout the day!

Throughout the day the enemy heavily shelled the original British line and the captured German line. At about 3-30pm the Battalion came under an enfilade of high explosive shelling from both flanks taking many casualties. The left flank was still open and the position became impossible to hold. The remains of the Queens, Warwicks and Welsh Fusiliers withdrew at about 7-30 pm and occupied the first line of German trenches that had been captured in the early morning.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had done what was asked of it at great cost. If the 20<sup>th</sup> Brigade had been able to make headway, a further advance would have undoubtedly been possible.

## **The cost in casualties on 16<sup>th</sup> May at Festubert.**

*(Summarised from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Diary for 16<sup>th</sup> May 1915)*

**Officers.** 9 Killed, 10 wounded and 2 died of wounds later including the C.O. Total Officer casualties = 21

**Other Ranks.** Killed 147, Wounded 237, Missing 42, Died of wounds 6, Missing believed killed 2, wounded and missing 1. Total casualties Other Ranks = 435.

**Officers:** C.O. Major Bottomley was seriously wounded and died 2 days later.  
Major H E Kirkpatrick (A/Adj) wounded.  
Major R C Clarke (Ex Buffs) killed.

Capt. W B Fuller killed  
Capt. W H Hadden-Smith killed  
Capt. J A Lang-Brown killed  
Capt. J W Garnier wounded

Lieut. W A Stewart (R.A.M.C) wounded

2/Lt F J Birkett wounded  
2/Lt H G Heinekey wounded  
2/Lt A H Hillier Killed  
2/Lt J B Coates wounded  
2/Lt G L Pratt killed  
2/Lt H Messom killed  
2/Lt D G Humpries died of wounds  
2/Lt A P McCabe killed  
2/Lt W H de Rougement killed

“Special acts of gallantry were performed by Major Kirkpatrick, Sgt Cox and three of his men and Pte Williamson.

Major Kirkpatrick was first hit in the neck while still in when still in our own lines. He refused to go back and insisted on advancing with the battalion. He led the way to the final objective and stayed there until he was again hit in the head which compelled him to retire.

Sgt Cox, Cpl Harris, Ptes Cleaver and Aldridge did excellent work throughout the day maintaining telephone communication with the Brigade.

Pte Williamson of D company was recommended for bringing a wounded comrade and although exhausted refused to rest stating that ‘His place was in the firing lines’

Just before dawn on the 17<sup>th</sup> May orders were received for the battalion to withdraw and go back to the crossroads at Rue Du Bois for a few hours rest. Not long after they got there orders were received that they were to return to the support trenches at Brigade HQ.

The battalion’s strength was now down to 8 Officers and 526 Other Ranks.

**The Battle and the war for Captain William Blyth FULLER was over. He is presumed killed while bravely leading his men ‘Over the top’ in the first advance into ‘No mans land’.**

Finally, on May 25th, Sir John French called off the Battle of Festubert. The superior fire power and preparedness of the Germans simply could not be overcome. And less than a kilometer of ground had been gained at a terrible cost.

*Launched on 15 May by two infantry divisions, the attack was intended to draw German troops away from the French attack at Vimy Ridge which it certainly did. Some tactical successes early on and several sectors of the German front were taken, forcing the enemy to fall back to their second line. A second assault, this time entrusted to the Canadians, was launched on 18 May in torrential rain but failed because of the arrival of German reinforcements and the numerous losses caused by heavy shelling. A third series of attacks between 20 and 24 May resulted in the capture of the ruined village of Festubert.*

*In total, after twelve days of fighting, the British Army had advanced one kilometre on a limited front. By the time the battle finally came to a halt, on 27 May, British casualties amounted to some 16,000 without the operation having made any significant contribution to the French offensive on Vimy Ridge.*

*In addition to the slaughter wrought by the shelling and the machine gun fire, many soldiers died in hand-to-hand fighting and some were drowned in the flooded trenches and drainage ditches which criss-crossed the battlefield.*

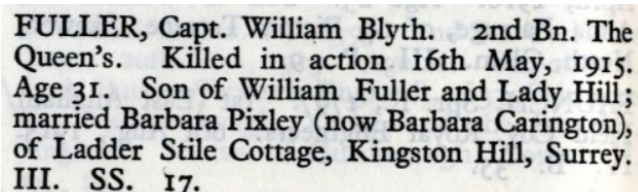
In 1919 his wife Barbara visited the site near Festubert where William fell. Seen here at Williams grave.





## Buried at GUARDS CEMETERY, WINDY CORNER, CUINCHY

William's body was reburied in the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery beside three of his comrades who died with him. Privates Simons, Taylor and Boniface.



FULLER, Capt. William Blyth. 2nd Bn. The Queen's. Killed in action 16th May, 1915. Age 31. Son of William Fuller and Lady Hill; married Barbara Pixley (now Barbara Carington), of Ladder Stile Cottage, Kingston Hill, Surrey. III. SS. 17.

## A brief WW1 time-line of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion West Surrey Regiment

### 2nd Battalion

04.08.1914 Stationed at Pretoria, South Africa.

27.08.1914 Embarked for England from Cape Town arriving at Southampton 19.09.1914 and moved to Lyndhurst to join the 22nd Brigade of the 7th Division.

06.10.1914 Mobilised for war and landed at Zeebrugge and engaged in various actions on the Western Front including;

### 1914

The First Battle of Ypres (the Division suffered such heavy casualties it took until 1915 to rebuild up to full strength).

### 1915

The Battle of Neuve Chapelle, The Battle of Aubers, The Battle of Festubert, The second action of Givenchy, The Battle of Loos.

20.12.1915 Transferred to the 91st Brigade of the 7th Division;

### 1916

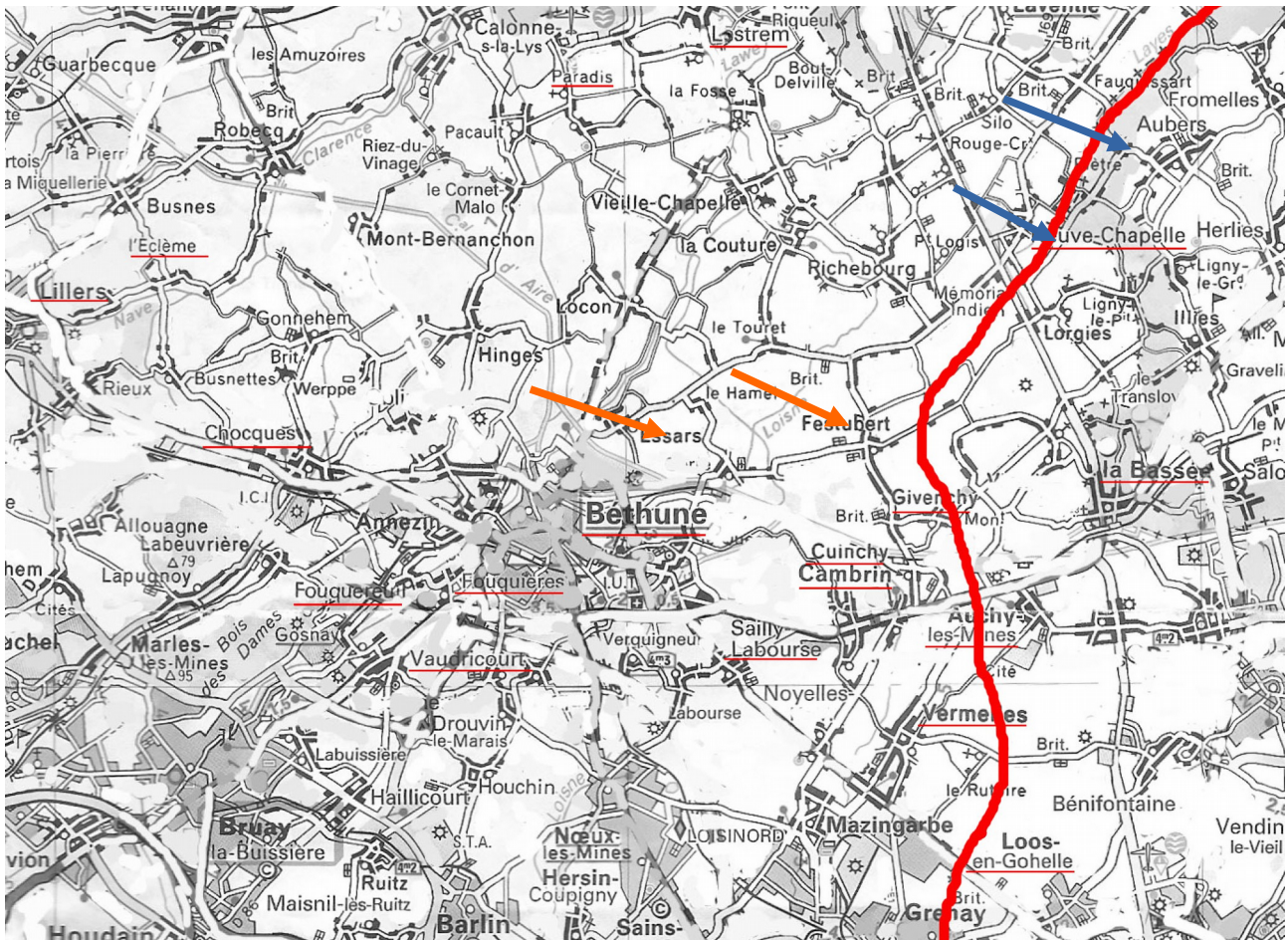
The Battle of Albert, The Battle of Bazentin, The Battle of Delville Wood, The Battle of Guillemont, Operations on the Ancre.

### 1917

The German retreat to the Hindenburg Line, The Battle of Polygon Wood, The Battle of Broodseinde, The Battle of Poelcapelle, The Second Battle of Passchendaele.

24.11.1917 Deployed to Italy to strengthen the Italian resistance after a recent disaster at Caporetto and positioned along the River Piave and engaged in various actions including; the Battle of Vittorio Veneto.

11.11.1918 Ended the war in Italy west of Udine.



## The history of 7th Division

The 7th Division was formed during September and very early October 1914, by the bringing together of regular army units from various points around the British Empire. They were assembled in the New Forest in Hampshire before initially moved to Belgium. The Division landed at Zeebrugge in the first week of October 1914, ordered to assist in the defence of Antwerp. However, by the time they arrived the city was already falling and the 7th was instead ordered to hold certain important bridges and other places that would help the westward evacuation of the Belgian army. Once the Belgians were through, the Division was moved westwards, where the infantry entrenched in front of Ypres, the first British troops to occupy that fateful place.

### 1914

The First Battle of Ypres: the Division fought the advancing German army to a standstill at Wipers. All units suffered grievous losses and it was not until the following January/February that it was once more in a complete enough condition to be considered at full fighting strength. After First Ypres, it was often known as the "Immortal Seventh".