

Spectamur Agendo



The Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association.

*From Southampton to the Aisne,  
The 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers  
In the First World War,  
22 August to 10 October 1914.*

A Souvenir Tour Booklet

14 to 19 June 2014

Tom Burke

## **Introduction**

To commemorate the centenary of the opening of the First World War in August 1914, on 14 June 2014, a party of twenty-seven members of The Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association departed Dublin on a five day tour of Le Cateau, Haucourt, the rivers Marne and Aisne which were the regions of northern France where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers (RDF) began their long and bloody campaign in that dreadful war. The tour was brilliantly planned and organised by RDFA Committee members Brian Moroney, Seamus Greene, Marie Guilfoyle, Niall Leinster and co-ordinated by DM Tours Ltd of Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan. My input to the tour was to produce this booklet and provide some historic background to the places and events the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF took part in between 22 August and 10 October 1914. I dedicate this booklet to the memory of the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and their families, some of whom after August 1914, never saw each other again in this life.

## Le Cateau and Haucourt

In the years leading up to the First World War, the British Government had prepared a detailed 'War Book' that covered every aspect of national activity in the event of a European war. It covered such matters as the requisitioning of naval transport, organisation of trains and the movement to mainland Europe of a British Expeditionary Force (BEF) which consisted of approximately 160,000 men. Telegrams were prepared for the recall of reservists. The result of the 'War Book' was that Britain was reasonably militarily organised when the First World War broke out.<sup>1</sup>

The BEF of August 1914 consisted of two army corps which was made up from a cavalry division and four infantry divisions namely the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Division. Approx. 50% of the BEF infantry regiments were ex-Regulars or Reservists who had left the Army up to seven years previous and in many cases were physically unfit for combat.<sup>2</sup> David Ascoli noted that some 62% of the embodied strength of the BEF was Reservists.<sup>3</sup> The BEF contained all the major regular battalions of the Irish Regiments who departed for France between 12 and 17 August 1914. When Irish troops arrived in France, they were met in France with cheers of ' *Vive les Anglais.*' John Lucy of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Rifles corrected them by saying, '*Nous ne sommes pas Anglais, nous sommes Irlandais.*'<sup>4</sup>

By 20 August 1914, in accordance with an agreed plan between the British and French armies, the BEF had completed its concentration in the Le Cateau-Maubeuge area of northern France and prepared to confront the advancing German 1<sup>st</sup> Army.<sup>5</sup> They, the BEF, adopted the name 'The Old Contemptibles' following an order made by the Kaiser who told his men to walk over 'General French's contemptible little Army.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Neillands, Robin. *The Great War Generals on the Western Front. 1914 -19* (London: Robinson, 1999).p.42.

<sup>2</sup> Johnstone, T. *Orange Green and Khaki* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992).p.17.

<sup>3</sup> Ascoli, David. *The Mons Star* (London: Book Club Associates, 1982).p.8.

<sup>4</sup> Johnstone.p.17.

<sup>5</sup> Ascoli.p30 See also Samuels, M. *Doctrine and Dogma - German and British Infantry Tactics in the First World War* (London: Greenwood Press, 1992). p.150.

<sup>6</sup> Gilbert, Martin. *The First World War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994).p.36.

According to Henry Harris, the first shots fired in war by a British soldier for over fifty years on the continent of Europe was fired by Corporal Edward Thomas of the 4<sup>th</sup> (Royal Irish) Dragoon Guards of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Brigade in the BEF at 7:00 a.m. on a misty 22 August 1914 outside the village of Casteau, a mining village five kilometres north-east of Mons.<sup>7</sup> The people of Casteau had set out that morning for Mass in their Sunday best. They were caught and torn to shreds in the cross fire of British and German artillery and rifle fire. For all of 23 of August 1914, the BEF fought unsuccessfully to hold the line against the German advance through Mons and southern Belgium.<sup>8</sup>

On the previous day, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers left Southampton on board the *SS Caledonia* bound for Boulogne in France. The battalion strength was twenty-two officers and 1,023 other ranks.<sup>9</sup> They were a battalion of the 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade (Brigadier-General J.A.L. Haldane), 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. (Major-General T. D'O.Snow) 3<sup>rd</sup> (III) Army Corps (Lieut.-General W.P. Pulteney, British Expeditionary Force. (Field-Marshal Sir. John French). A typical infantry division consisted of 585 officers, 17,488 other ranks, 5,592 horses, seventy-six artillery guns and twenty-four machine guns, two machine guns per battalion.<sup>10</sup> The three infantry brigades that made up the 4<sup>th</sup> Division were the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. The 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade was made up four battalions, the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Warwickshire Regiment, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Seaforth Highlanders, the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers, all located at Shorncliff and the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF at Gravesend. The 4<sup>th</sup> Division did not travel with the BEF in mid-August.<sup>11</sup> They were 'temporarily detained in England for the purposes of home defence'.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Harris, Henry E D. *The Irish Regiments in the First World War* (Cork.: Mercier Press, 1968).p.33.

<sup>8</sup>Not long after the Battle of Mons had begun, a rumour was started by the people of Mons that an angel had appeared 'on the traditional white horse and clad all in white with flaming sword', advancing and facing the Germans, 'forbade their further progress.' This heavenly hallucination created by frightened people of Mons was named The Angel of Mons. It wasn't until 10 November 1918 that Canadian troops liberated Mons from the Germans.

<sup>9</sup> Wylly, C. B. *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*, vol. 2 (Cork: Schull Books, 2000).p.14.

<sup>10</sup> Fuller, J F C. *The Army in My Time* (London: Rich and Cowan Ltd, 1935). *The Army in My Time.* p.133.

<sup>11</sup> Edmonds, J.E. Sir. (Brigadier-General). *History of the Great War Military Operations France and Belgium, Volume 1, 1914. Mons, the Retreat to the Seine, the Marne and the Aisne*, vol. I (London Shearer Publications, 1984). p.49.

<sup>12</sup> Wylly. *Crown and Company*. p12 Note - The Committee of Imperial Defence presented a report to the British cabinet in October 1908 recommending that home defences 'should be of adequate strength' to repel a German invasion of Britain. Ryan, M W. "The Invasion Controversy of 1906-1908: Lieutenant-Colonel Charles a Court Repington and British Perceptions of the German Menace," *Military Affairs* 44, (1980). p8

For fear of being cut off and surrounded at Mons by the German advance, early on 24 August, General French decided to withdraw his troops southwards away from Mons. The Commander of II Corps, General Smith-Dorrien, decided to make a stand and try to give a stopping blow to the seemingly inexorable advance of the German 1<sup>st</sup> Army. The place chosen for this dual was at Le Cateau, a village about twenty-five kilometres south-east of Cambrai. Both I Corps and II Corps of the BEF began to fall back. General Snow was ordered to move to a defensive position, 'where it was hoped that it (4<sup>th</sup> Division) would be able to render effective aid in the retirement of I and II Corps'.<sup>13</sup>

The 4<sup>th</sup> Division took up a defensive position on the left flank of Le Cateau with the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade at Haucourt and Esnes, the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade at Fontaine-au-Pire and 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade around Longsart.<sup>14</sup> Though complete in field artillery and infantry, the 4<sup>th</sup> Division was left short of much of its support units such as its divisional cavalry and cyclists, heavy battery, engineers, the greater part of its signal company, ammunition column and field ambulances. Consequently there was little means of attending the wounded, no means of removing them and above all in terms of command and control through communications there was, 'no means of controlling from divisional headquarters the general movements of some fifteen thousand men extended along a front of five miles, except by use of mounted officers and orderlies'.<sup>15</sup>

On 24 August, the day Field-Marshal French decided to withdraw his BEF south, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF were taken by train from Boulogne to Le Cateau. Late that evening, 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade received orders from GHQ to move northwards directly into the path of the German advance.

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Note for broader discussion on fear of German invasion of Britain see. Pennell, C. "Home Defence and Invasion Fears in the South East of England, August to December 1914," in *The International Society for First World War Studies* (Trinity College Dublin: 2005). p.3. Disagreement occurred between senior British naval and military staffs about precisely the size of the invading army. However it was finally decided that two of the six BEF divisions would stay at home to repel any German enemy attack. Williamson, Samuel R. *The Politics of Grand Strategy: Britain and France Prepare for War, 1904-1914*, 2 vols. (London: The Ashfield Press, 1990). p.98.

<sup>13</sup> Wylly. *Crown and Company*. p.17.

<sup>14</sup> Ascoli.p.98.

<sup>15</sup> Edmonds. *Military Operations-France and Belgium, 1914*. Pp. 147-148.

During the night of 24/25 August, they marched north from Le Cateau train station along the Le Cateau to Cambrai road turning north at Inchy / Beaumont-en-Cambresis on through Viesly and on still north towards Solesmes turning north-west to St. Python, a hamlet on the north-western outskirts of Solesmes. Gunfire was heard in the distance.<sup>16</sup> Early on the morning of 25 August, they set about breakfast. It would be their only meal for the day. At about 4:30 p.m. in the afternoon they took up a defensive position near a farm on the northern outskirts of St. Python named Fontaine au Tertre. They received their first German shells at 6:00 p.m. that evening making them dig in for the first time in the war. At 9:00 p.m., two Uhlan scouts spotted in front of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF line were shot.<sup>17</sup> These were the first shots fired by the RDF in the war and came from men of the outlying piquet under the command of Capt. Supple.<sup>18</sup> Corporal O'Donnell of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF claimed he heard the first shots fired in anger by his comrades at 11:00 p.m.:<sup>19</sup>

About 11:00 p.m. there was a sudden burst of rifle fire from the men on the orchard - - the first shots fired by the Dublins in the War. It lasted about two minutes. We in the farmyard ( Fontaine au Tertre Farm) could hear the foot beat of the enemy's cavalry for miles racing back along the road. A little later, a rider less horse belonging to the Germans was led in by one of our men.

Much like of the rest of the retreating BEF, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was met with a German army which surrounded and outnumbered them by approximately three to one. Just after 11: 00 p.m. on the night of 25 August, the battalion en-mass withdrew from Fontaine au Tertre via Quievy, Bevillers, Beauvois skirting the northern edge of Ligny to a position north-east of Haucourt, a distance of about twenty kilometres. (See Map on Page 7.)<sup>20</sup> They had no alternative to retire as the advancing tide of German shelling drove them back.

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<sup>16</sup> Hutton, John. *August 1914 Surrender at St Quentin* (South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military, 2010).Pp.47-48.

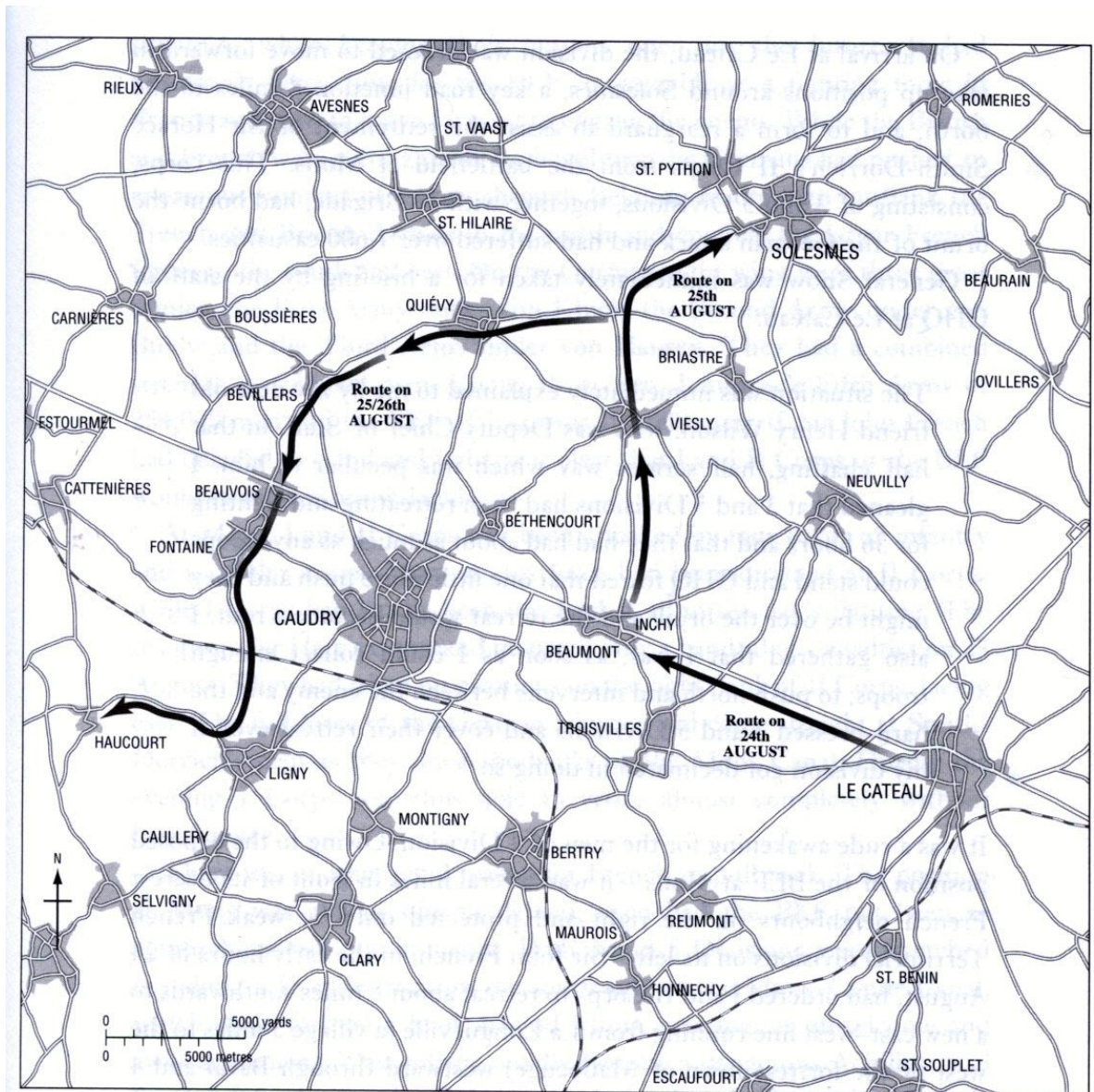
<sup>17</sup> "War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers, August 1914 to September 1916,W095/1481," (London: Public Records Office).

<sup>18</sup> Wylly. *Crown and Company*. p.17.

<sup>19</sup> Hutton. p.52.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.p.35.

Through the night, they marched south, shattered and confused the distance of about twenty kilometres from St. Python to Haucourt where they arrived at 5:00 a.m. on the morning of 26 August.<sup>21</sup> Lieut. Macky noted that ‘villages were burning in front of and each side of us’.<sup>22</sup>



The movements of the 1st Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment and the 2nd Battalion, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, 24–26 August 1914.

<sup>21</sup> "War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers, August 1914 to September 1916, W095/1481."

<sup>22</sup> Hutton.p.58.

Mainwaring sent his adjutant Captain R.M. Watson out to seek orders. Watson returned to say there was no sign of the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade staff. Col. Edmonds of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division staff instructed Mainwaring and his men to keep retreating south and not to delay. However, Mainwaring informed Edmonds that his men were tired and would move off after a brief rest.<sup>23</sup> At 06:15 a.m. on 26 August the battalion split up and was deployed 'in artillery formation' to take up defensive covering positions along the Haucourt to Ligny road.<sup>24</sup> At that time too, German advanced guards consisting of 'Cavalry and machine guns carried on motor cars' were firing into Haucourt.<sup>25</sup> The wave of this mobile German attack was edging towards Haucourt engulfing British battalions of the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade on the ridge to the north and northeast of the town as it moved forward. According Watson, under Mainwaring's orders, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF deployed as follows. 'A' Company under Capt. N. P. Clarke and 'D' Company under Capt. G.S. Higginson plus one platoon from 'B' Company all under the command of Major Shewan, took up a firing line position and support line on the high ground immediately east of Haucourt along the Haucourt-Ligny Road, now named the Rue du General de Gaulle D15. (See Map on Page 9) <sup>26</sup> According to Capt. Clarke they took part in an attack to capture the ridge above Haucourt to gain a high position. However, 'the enemy got to the ridge before we could reach it and drove our troops off it. So the company was ordered to retire and came back to its original position with the loss of two wounded'. <sup>27</sup> This initial flurry was over by 10:30 a.m. on 26 August. In the confusion of this withdrawal, 'B' Company under Capt. Conlon and 'C' Company under Capt. Wheeler retreated south. Captain Watson ran after them and told them to stop which they did and took up a position about 800 meters north-west of Caullery which is a little over three kilometres southeast of Haucourt.<sup>28</sup> The exact position they took up was at the T Junction on the Rue Martin Legrand which leaves Haucourt from the south-west of Haucourt, and, the Rue de Selvigny. (See Map on Page 10) <sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.p.76.

<sup>24</sup> "War Diary 10th Infantry Brigade August 1914 to December 1914 W095/1477," (London: Public Records Office). Report on action of 26 August 12914 by Capt. Wheeler, 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF.

<sup>25</sup> Hutton.p.78.

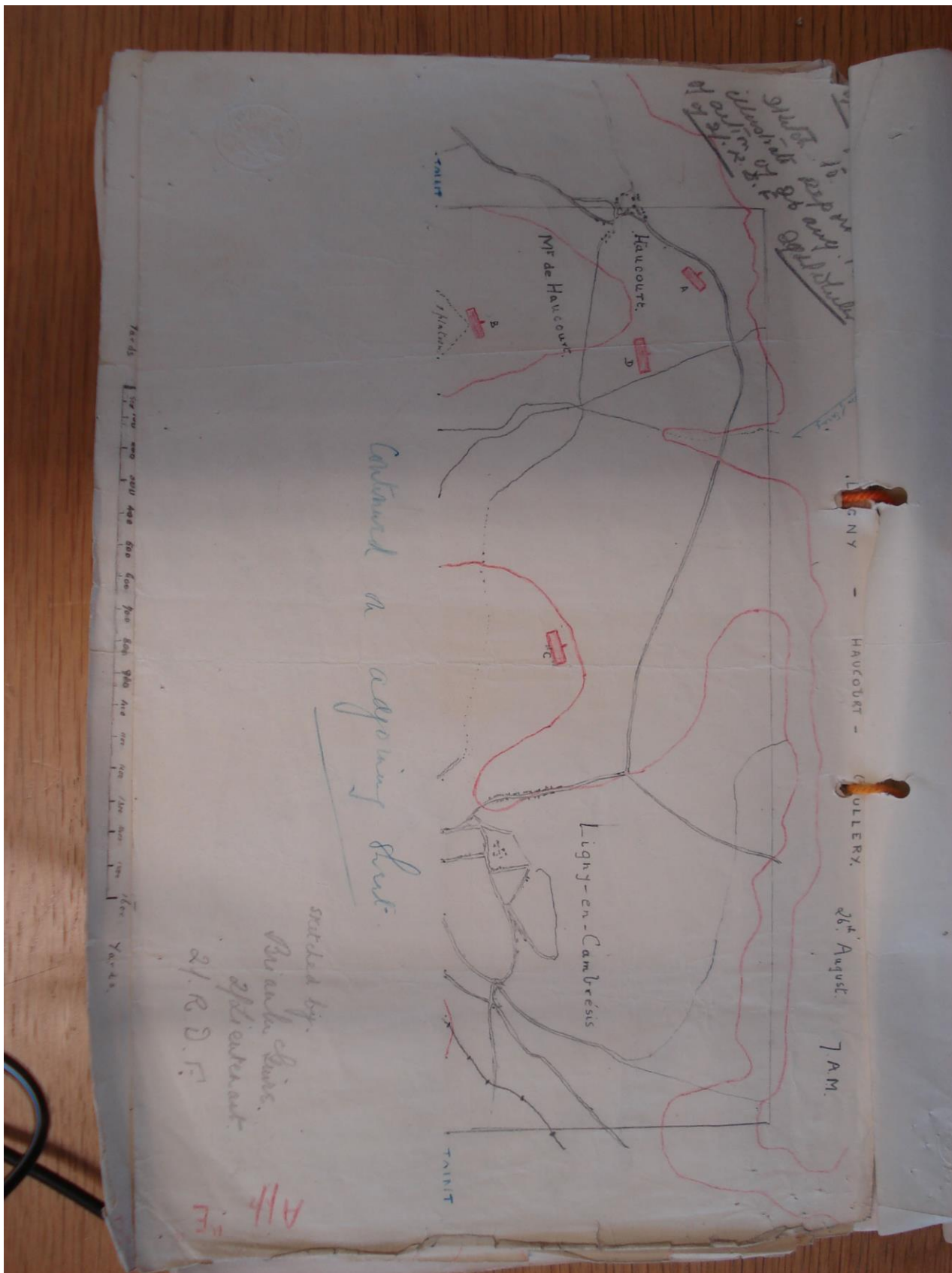
<sup>26</sup> "War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers, August 1914 to September 1916,W095/1481." Report by Captain R.M. Watson titled.' Account by Capt. Watson, Adj, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers. Haucourt. 1914.

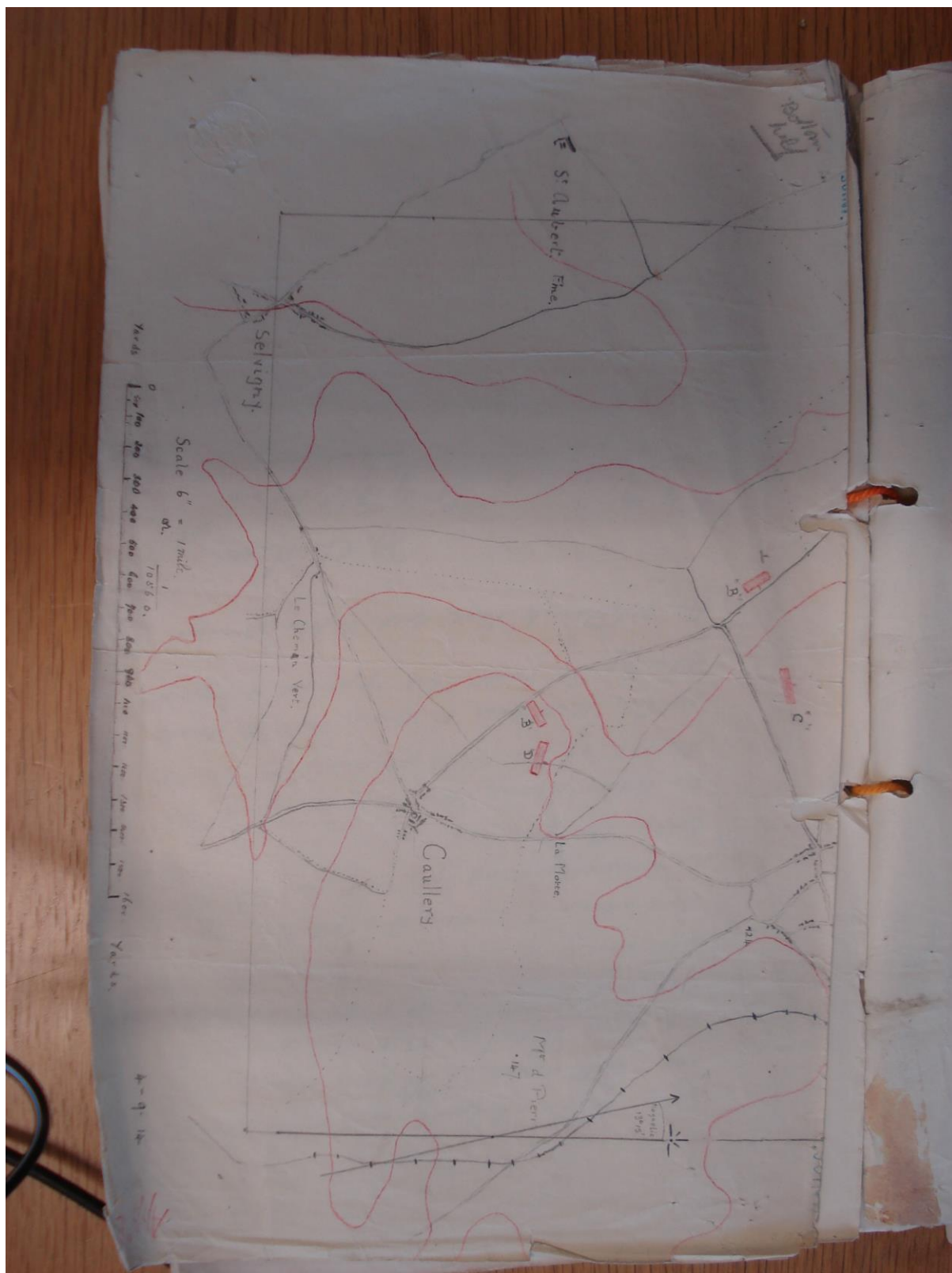
<sup>27</sup> Hutton.p.85.

<sup>28</sup> "War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers, August 1914 to September 1916,W095/1481." Report by Captain Watson.

<sup>29</sup> "War Diary 10th Infantry Brigade August 1914 to December 1914 W095/1477."







They tried to communicate their position with 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade H.Q. but failed, however they did manage to get a verbal message to 4<sup>th</sup> Division H.Q. At about 1:00 p.m. Capt. Wheeler received a message 4<sup>th</sup> Division H.Q. informing him, 'that there would be no retirement'.<sup>30</sup> Capt. Watson's report confirmed this order from 4<sup>th</sup> Division H.Q. He noted in his report that 'under no circumstances would anyone retire.'<sup>31</sup> They came under German shellfire from about 2:00 p.m. and at about 4:45 pm., the few artillery pieces that supported the battalion, began to move off for fear of being captured. Captain Wheeler noted in his report. 'We were informed that the guns were being withdrawn and that we had better get away as fast we could. This was about 5:30 p.m. One platoon of 'C' Company being the last infantry to leave the position'.<sup>32</sup> Mainwaring sent Watson back to find 4<sup>th</sup> Division H.Q. On his way he met a Staff Officer who informed Watson that 4<sup>th</sup> Division knew nothing about the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF situation and that all the guns had gone and the battalion should get away too.<sup>33</sup>

Communications between units in retreat were a disaster at Le Cateau. The breakdown in communications had a profound effect on Haldane. He attributed the breakdown to the disintegration of his 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade. However, he learned some bitter lessons as a result.<sup>34</sup> Watson returned to Mainwaring with the message and the remnants of the two companies began their getaway at about 5:30 p.m. In artillery formation, they headed over the fields towards Elincourt, about eight kilometres south of Haucourt. By that time, Mainwaring was 'nearly done'.<sup>35</sup> They had lost all touch with 'A' and 'D' Companies who were still in the firing line further back along the Haucourt to Ligny-en-Cambresis Road. In fact Watson assumed they had received orders and were also gone.<sup>36</sup> He was wrong. The column of men from 'A' and 'D' Companies under Major Shewan was about 400 strong. With them was a scattering of men from other regiments.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Report by on action of 26 August 1914 by Captain Wheeler, 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF.

<sup>31</sup> "War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers, August 1914 to September 1916,W095/1481." Account by Captain Watson, 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF on events of 26 August 1914 at Haucourt.

<sup>32</sup> "War Diary 10th Infantry Brigade August 1914 to December 1914 W095/1477." Report on action of 26 August 1914 by Capt. Wheeler, 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. Account by Capt. Watson, 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF on events of 26 August 1914 at Haucourt.

<sup>34</sup> Hutton.Pp.90-91.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.p.104.

<sup>36</sup> "War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers, August 1914 to September 1916,W095/1481."

Without any orders, Shewan took the initiative and moved his men southwards toward Ligny along the now named Rue du General de Gaulle where they arrived at dawn on 27 August. According to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Macky, ‘the men were very wet, fatigued and hungry and when we halted to ascertain our position and direction they immediately dropped into the puddles in the road and slept.’<sup>37</sup> They didn’t hang around Ligny for too long either. Having marched through the night, some nearly sleep walking; they left their wounded in the village church at Ligny and pressed on to the next village due south-east which was Clary. Major Shewan placed guards on the column. An advance guard of ‘A’ Company came under Captain N.P. Clarke with two platoons under Captain G.S. Trigona, a rear guard under Captain Higginson and point being under Lieutenant West.<sup>38</sup>

About one kilometre out the road to Clary, now named Route de Ligny (D15), the column reached a disused distillery when they heard the sound of gunfire coming at them from the direction of Montigny-en-Cambresis which is a little over one kilometre north of Clary. The advance party under Captains Trigona and Clarke were out the road ahead of the column and in view of Clary, the rest of the column were back the road and took cover around the distillery. It was still dawn and there was some confusion in the ranks as to who was actually firing at them, was it Germans or was it their own side.

The initial outburst of firing had wounded three of the five man ‘point’ who lay some meters ahead of Trigona. Their NCO was alive but still kept his head down. According to Captain Clarke their uniforms ‘looked British.’ The firing stopped and through binoculars from the distillery, Captain Trigona could be seen signalling towards Montigny while his men were lying down in extended order facing the village. (Note. *Crown and Company* stated Trigona was signalling towards Montigny, however *Dishonoured* suggests he was signalling towards Clary.) The main body was formed on the road and began to march forward, a cyclist scout was sent out to tell the villagers who ‘looked British’, not to fire on their own people. An English signal came from the village, ‘What regiment is that.’ Trigona replied ‘Dublin Fusiliers.’ The mysterious village signaller responded to Trigona saying, ‘Dublin Fusiliers, right, come on.’

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<sup>37</sup> Scott, Peter. *Dishonoured: The Colonel’s Surrender at St. Quentin. The Retreat from Mons, August 1914* (London: Tom Donovan, 1994).p.48.

<sup>38</sup> Wylly.p.22.

Unconvinced by this exchange, Trigona sent another signal. 'Will you send out a man?'<sup>39</sup> A man appeared walking out of the town and stopped about forty-five meters when he dropped prone on the ground. Trigona remained un-convinced, it was cat and mouse. By this time the cyclist had passed Trigona and came up to where the wounded 'point' men lay. The NCO by now knew the villages that 'looked British' were in fact Germans and told the cyclist to turn back. For some reason the cyclist ignored the order and carried on. He reached the outskirts of the village and was met with a single shot that killed him. This solitary shot heralded the outbreak of rifle and machine gun fire from concealed German positions along the margins of the village to the front and right of the Dublin Fusiliers. The main body of men back out the road went into a state of panic and ran out into the beat fields for cover and back down the road to towards Ligny where they took cover in a farmhouse.

The fighting on the Route de Ligny (D15), the road between Ligny and Clary, resulted in the death of one officer named 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. J.G.M Dunlop who came from Holywood, Co. Down. His father Archibold Dunlop, was the local general practitioner. His brother George was killed with the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF on 25 April 1915 at 'V' Beach in Gallipoli.<sup>40</sup> Six officers were captured, they were Major H.M Shewan (wounded), Captain G.S Higginson (wounded), Lieutenant J.E Vernon (wounded), Lieutenant C.H.L'E West (wounded), Lieutenant J.F.K Dobbs and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant F.C.S Macky.<sup>41</sup> Some forty-four other ranks were killed in action or died of wounds. One eye witness of the killing that went on at Le Cateau wrote: 'On the way we stumbled on a dead English soldier in the undergrowth with his skull split open: then another with a bent bayonet in his breast.'<sup>42</sup> The only men to escape back to their own lines was Captains Trigona and Clarke and a party of seventy-three other ranks, thirty-five of whom were Dublin Fusiliers. This desperate band of men struck out across country and tracked across German positions. On their way they picked up strays from ten different egiments, eight Gordon Highlanders who became detached from their battalion and who had lay hidden for three days, joined up with this band during the night of 29/30 of August.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Scott.p.60. See also Wylly. Pp.22-23.

<sup>40</sup> "Http://Www.Cwgc.Org the Commonwealth War Graves Commission", The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (2013).See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919*, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers (Suffolk: J.B.Hayward and Son, 1989).

<sup>41</sup> Hutton.p.85. and p.107. According to Hutton,2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Macky 'eventually ended up several days later in Holland, where he was arrested and interred by the Dutch authorities'. Major Shewan was captured and remained a POW until the Armistice in 1918.

<sup>42</sup> Gilbert.p.60.

<sup>43</sup> Scott. p.64.

They reached Abbeville on 4 September and Boulogne the next day. They returned to England where they were 'refitted and eventually re-joined their respective corps.'<sup>44</sup> The delaying action given by small units such as Major Shewan's achieved its objective in slowing down the German advance through northern France and thus allowing time for the BEF to escape to fight another day. Brigadier-General Sir James E. Edmonds referred to the positive combined effect these small rear-guard units had on inflicting a delaying action on the German advance:

Though a mere handful scattered along some eight thousand yards of front, they had prevented the enemy for several hours from advancing along the whole of that line...Beyond question they (the Germans) had suffered very heavily – as indeed was admitted by German officers to some of their British prisoners – and from one cause and another they were disinclined to take risks. The isolation of these British detachments was undersigned in no way detracts from the merit of their achievement.<sup>45</sup>

In his book *Unter Emmich vor Lüttich: Unter Kluck vor Paris*, Hauptmann Heubner confirmed Edmonds' conclusions about the effect of the parties left behind. His battalion of the 20<sup>th</sup> Regiment, 6<sup>th</sup> Division, III Corps, came into battle late. He wrote, 'in front of us there still swarmed a number of scattered English troops, who were easily able to hide in the large woods of the district, and again and again forced us to waste time in deployments, as we could not tell what their strength might be'.<sup>46</sup>

The Dublin Fusiliers who were captured at Le Cateau and Clary spent the next four years in German Prisoner of War Camps such as Limburg. Some men survived like Private Christopher Mc Donald from Rathfarnham in Dublin and 9259 Bandsman Percy Harvey from Tongham, near Seale in Kent.<sup>47</sup> Others like 9480 Private John Byrne of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF died in Limburg on 27 September 1918. His sister's husband, Private Michael Bowden of the same battalion died in Limburg on 23 May 1918.

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<sup>44</sup> Wylly, p.24.

<sup>45</sup> Edmonds, *Military Operations-France and Belgium, 1914*. p.197.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p.197.

<sup>47</sup> "Mc Donald, Private Christopher 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers," (Dublin: RDFA Archive). And "Harvey, Bandsman Percy 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers," (Dublin: RDFA Archive).

Both of these men came from Athy County Kildare.<sup>48</sup> Among those killed near the village of Clary was Lance Corporal John Boland of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF. John lived with his family at 16 Russell Street, off Dublin's North Circular Road. At nineteen years of age like hundreds of young men, he joined the Dubs during the General Lockout in 1913 in order to earn a living. He was a messenger boy before he enlisted. Before he left Gravesend, he wrote to his mother telling her he did well in his musketry training. He was twenty years of age when he died. The Germans buried John in a German Military cemetery. In 1924, John's body was re-interred in the British War Cemetery at Honnechy.<sup>49</sup> On the same day as John was killed, other Dublin soldiers died as well. Willie Clark from Talbot Street, James King from Clarence Street, James Martin from Finglas, Mathew Sharkey from Corporation Buildings, Foley Street, George Frazer from Pembroke Street and Ned Howey from Skerries were some of the Dublin Fusiliers killed that day. The majority of the men killed on the 26/27 August 1914 are buried at Honnechy Cemetery. However those whose bodies were never discovered are remembered on the La Ferte-sons-Jouarre Memorial.<sup>50</sup>

Out of a battalion strength of twenty two-officers and 1,023 other ranks that landed in France on 23 August 1914, all that was left on 13 September after twenty days of fighting was ten officers and 478 other ranks, the rest were either killed, wounded or taken prisoner.<sup>51</sup> This terrible loss of men was typical of the losses incurred by the British Expeditionary Force which was almost wiped out. The French army was also almost annihilated; within four days of fighting they lost 40,000 men, 27,000 in one day on 22 August 1914, the bloodiest day in French military history.

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<sup>48</sup> Family records given to author by Mr Tom Robinson, Portlaoise, Co.Loic.

<sup>49</sup> "Boland, Lance Corporal John 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers," (Dublin: RDFA Archive). Note. Brendan Behan lived in 13 Russell Street.

<sup>50</sup> "Http://Www.Cwgc.Org the Commonwealth War Graves Commission". See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919*.

<sup>51</sup> Wyllie, p.24.

## The surrender at St Quentin

At about 5:30 p.m. on evening of 26 August, Lieut.- Col. Arthur Mainwaring and a band of about 100 men marching in artillery formation, headed over the fields towards Elincourt. They arrived in St. Quentin shattered, broken physically and mentally. At fifty years of age and nearly ready for retirement, a veteran of the Boer War, Mainwaring was ill and totally exhausted when he reached the outskirts of St Quentin. With the Germans in pursuit, Mainwaring and his men could not hang around this town either. On their way they had met up with approximately 100 men of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment commanded by Lieut.- Colonel John Ford Elkington. With no adequate transport such as trains left in the town, the Commander of II Corps, General Smith-Dorrien advised Mainwaring and his men in St. Quentin to keep heading south.<sup>52</sup> Mainwaring approached the Mayor of St. Quentin for help in getting away. The Mayor was convinced that the Germans had surrounded the town and implored Mainwaring to surrender to the Germans whom he hoped would save the town and its inhabitants from annihilation. Mainwaring and Elkington agreed with the Mayor's request and their men laid down their arms. Their surrender document was intercepted by an officer in the 4<sup>th</sup> (Royal Irish) Dragoon Guards who were ordered to St. Quentin to act as a protective screen between St. Quentin and the advancing Germans. The Dragoons officer, Major Tom Bridges, mustered the men who had surrendered and led them to safety.

Late in the afternoon of Saturday 12 September 1914, Colonels Mainwaring and Elkington stood trial before a courts martial at Chouy, a small village about sixteen kilometres south-east of Villiers-Cotteret. They faced two charges: the first was cowardice, the second was dishonourable conduct, having behaved in a scandalous manner unbecoming the character of an officer and a gentleman.<sup>53</sup> In his statement to the court, Colonel Mainwaring said he met General Smith-Dorrien in the town of St. Quentin. When Mainwaring went to look for a train for his men they were all gone, including Smith-Dorrien. In his defence, what else could they do? Fight the Germans to the death and destroy St. Quentin, or, surrender and give some of his men a chance of life albeit in a German P.O.W Camp.

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<sup>52</sup> Hutton.p126.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.p.146.



On 14 September Mainwaring and Elkington were found guilty and cashiered out of the army in disgrace. Colonel Mainwaring, being a sick man, returned to England and over time fell into obscurity. He wrote several historical works on the history of the Dublin Fusiliers which included the history of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion in the Boer War. Colonel Elkington set about regaining his honour as an ‘officer and a gentleman.’ He joined the French Foreign Legion as a private and served on the Western Front. On 28 September 1915, he was wounded and invalid home. On 22 August 1916, he was re-appointed as a Lieut.-Colonel of the Warwickshire Regiment and awarded the D.S.O. He died on 27 June 1944. During the Second World War, his youngest son Captain Richard Elkington of the 10<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade was killed in Tunisia on 19 January 1943. They are jointly commemorated on a memorial window in Burghclere Church, Hampshire.

In January 1927, Colonel Mainwaring and his wife lived in Melbourne, Derbyshire. He suffered a stroke that paralysed him down one side. By the Autumn of 1930, they had moved to Pounsley Mill, Blackboys, Framfield, East Sussex. It was here on 11 October 1930, at the age of sixty-six, that Arthur Edward Mainwaring died of a heart attack, aggravated by a stroke, chronic asthma and persistent high blood pressure. In death there was at least a small measure of posthumous rehabilitation, his death certificate describing him as a ‘Retired Lieut. Colonel Royal Dublin Fusiliers.’<sup>54</sup> On 7 August 2012, members of the RDFA were welcomed at St Thomas a Becket Church (Framfield Parish Church) in East Sussex by Ms Joan Burne and Mr John Mordaunt on the occasion of the RDFA’s visit to the grave of Lieut.-Col. A.E. Mainwaring. The grave was discovered some years ago by RDFA deceased member Mr Dan Finnegan who took it upon himself to clean up and restore the grave.

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<sup>54</sup> Scott.Pp.70-73.

## The Marne and the Aisne

Those of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF who got away from Le Cateau and Haucourt, which was about 250 men, continued their retreat southwards. On 30 August 1914, they crossed the river Oise at Noyon and destroyed the bridge after they had crossed. They continued their journey south in the heat of high summer through the French villages of Berveuil-Sur-Aine, Valerie, Nery, Verbiere, Baron and Lagny-Sur-Marne where on 3 September the battalion crossed the river Marne and bivouacked at Lussigny on the night of 4 September. They blew up the bridges behind them for fear the Germans could use them in their attack on Paris. The German army was only forty kilometres from Paris. The Dublins carried on their march southwards and arrived at Chevry on 5 September. News of the German retreat had come through to 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade headquarters. Chevry was the furthest point south the remnants of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF had marched in their retreat from Haucourt. They had marched 321 kilometres (200 miles) from Haucourt in ten days.<sup>55</sup>

For thirty-three days nonstop the German troops had been in continuous advance, as had the British been on continuous retreat. The Kaiser's men had covered their advance mainly on foot carrying heavy packs of weapons and ammunition. Re-supply began to wane. Due to 'collateral' damage inflicted on the Belgian infra-structure, the Germans found it difficult to re-supply their advancing army, they were now vulnerable. The Battle of The Marne lasted for four days between 5 and 9 September and was essentially a French affair. The future of Paris and indeed the war depended on the French stopping the Germans. On 7 September, the Schlieffen Plan was stopped. The following day, RFC spotter planes reported German units retreating north. Their withdrawal presented an opportunity for the BEF to turn the retreat into an advance northwards. The war diary of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF at this time noted the men's morale had improved and they looked 'much better'.<sup>56</sup> On 10 September, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF re-crossed the Marne at the railway bridge at Saussoy (Ussy-sur-Marne).

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<sup>55</sup> "War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers, August 1914 to September 1916, W095/1481."

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

According to Kingston: <sup>57</sup>

The crossing was a slow process with the carts having to bump over the railway sleepers. To assist the remaining artillery and ambulances to negotiate the difficulties, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers remained at the bridge while the rest of the fighting troops continued to advance.

They continued their march back north through Villers Le Petit and Septmonts, the latter being reached on 13 September. Local villagers informed them that the Germans had retreated two days previous.<sup>58</sup> On the same day, the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade captured the iron girder bridge over the Aisne at Venizel which is about five kilometres east of the city of Soissons. The capturing of this bridge allowed the remainder of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division and other divisions to cross the Aisne and pursue the Germans who by that time had retired to the high ground above the Aisne along the Chemin des Dames.

Early on the morning of the 14 September, in an effort of continuous pursuit, a much depleted 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF crossed the Aisne at Venizel and occupied the high ground above the village of Bucy-le-Long, a small French village about eight kilometres northeast of Soissons. Their objective was to assist the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Brigades in their attack on the northern edge of the Vregny-Braye Plateau north east of Crouy and in particular the capture of La Montagne Farm.<sup>59</sup> (See Map on Page 20) A morning mist held up the attack until mid-day so objectives could be seen. German artillery and machine gun positions on the plateau presented huge resistance to the attack of the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade. Any movement attracted heavy fire of all calibres.<sup>60</sup> The attempts to take the plateau failed and by nightfall instructions were issued that all offensive action were to cease and existing positions, which included La Montagne Farm, were to be strengthened and consolidated. <sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Kingston, Grahame P. *History of the 4th (British) Infantry Division 1914-1919* (London: The London Press, 2006).p53.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.p.55.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.p.61.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.p.64.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.p65.







The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF remained at La Montagne Farm consolidating their position until 1 October when they received orders to move to St. Marguerite (Missy-Sur-Aisne) five kilometres east of Bucy-le-Long.<sup>62</sup> Reservists from Ireland began to arrive and a party of forty-five men who had been cut off from the battalion at Haucourt re-joined the battalion.<sup>63</sup> The German retreat had stopped and trench warfare began. According to Wylly:

It was now apparent that the German retreat had come to an end and that the enemy was holding positions which had been previously selected and prepared for defence; on the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup>, too, instructions were received that offensive action on the part of the British was for the present to cease and that the positions the troops were holding were to be strengthened. The trench warfare, which was for so long to endure, may now be said to have commenced.<sup>64</sup>

Field Marshall French issued no further operational orders to his command for two whole weeks between 16 September and 1 October, the period during which trench warfare, with all its attendant horrors, first began. It was by then becoming clear that the Allied armies could not break through with frontal attacks on the Aisne and Joffre decided on an outflanking movement - the so called 'Race to the Sea' which began in late September 1914. The War Diary of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF noted on 28 September. 'The French outflanking movement against 1<sup>st</sup> Bavarian Corps has itself been met by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bavarian Corps'.<sup>65</sup> The trench system on the western front was consequently created by weeks of flanking attacks, each one stifled by the enemy's defence line.

This shifting movement to the north-west caused Field Marshall French to review the position of his army. At the end of September he proposed to Joffre that the BEF, currently sandwiched between two French armies in the centre of the Allied line, should resume its position beyond La Bassée, and, with the aid of Belgium units, fill the gap between the town and the sea, a distance of some sixty-five kilometres.

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<sup>62</sup> "War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers, August 1914 to September 1916,W095/1481."

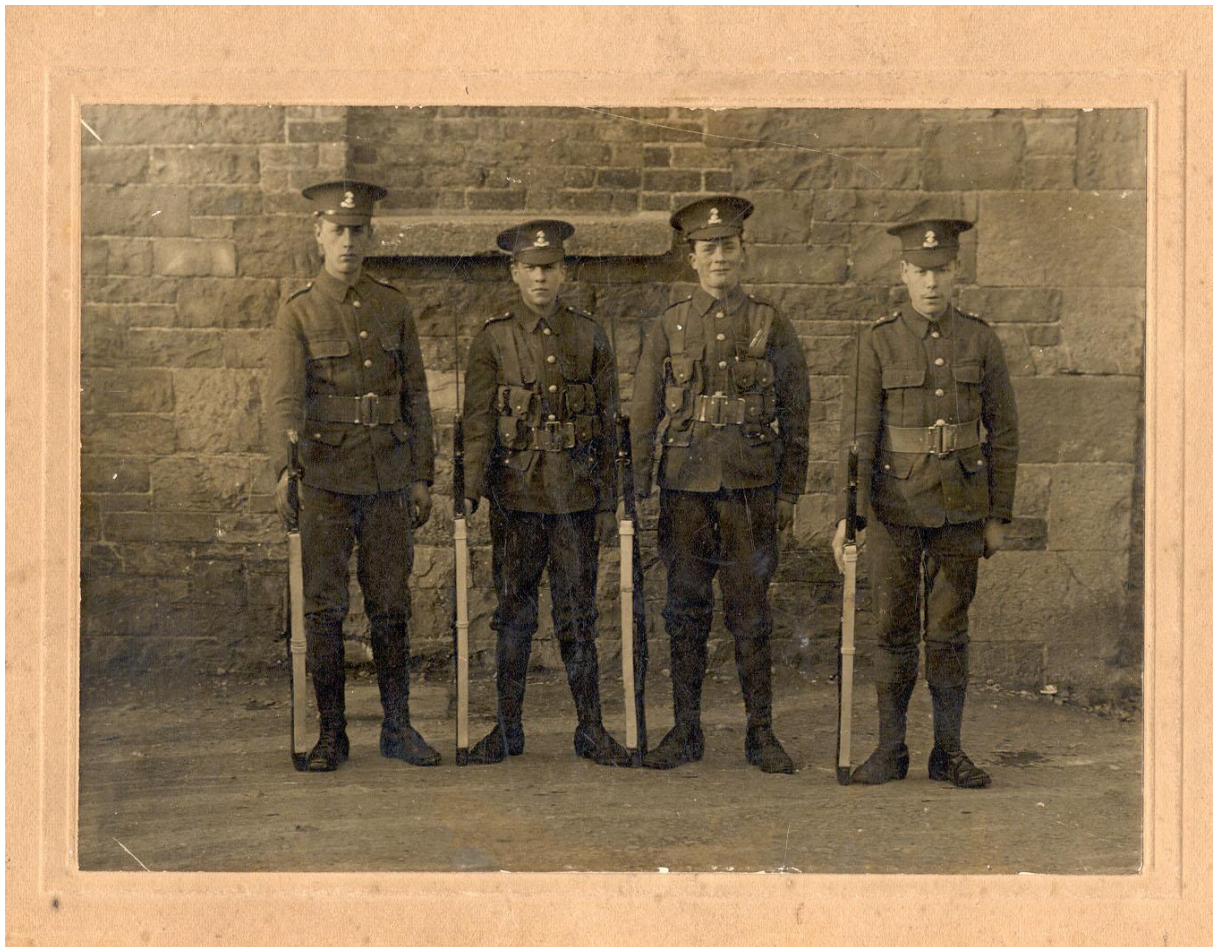
<sup>63</sup> Ibid. See also Kingston.p.68.

<sup>64</sup> Wylly.p.31.

<sup>65</sup> "War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers, August 1914 to September 1916,W095/1481."



This offered various logistical advantages. For example it placed the BEF close to their cross-Channel supply ports at Calais and Boulogne. Joffre was less enthusiastic, but on 1 October, the British commander told him, that with or without Joffre's agreement, he intended to shift his forces north and west. The move began on the night of 2 October 1914.<sup>66</sup> In terms of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, on 6 October they were relieved in their lines by French troops at St. Marguerite and began their journey north as per Field Marshall French's orders. They packed up their equipment and marched a distance of about eighty kilometres east from St. Marguerite through Harten-et-Taux, Ouchy La Ville, Pisseleux, Rully and arrived at the train station in Pont Sainte Maxence on 10 October. That evening at 7:30 p.m. they entrained for St. Omer in northern France where a new chapter their history in the Ieper salient awaited them.<sup>67</sup>



Lance Corporal John Boland, 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, killed in action 27 August 1914.  
John is second in from right.

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<sup>66</sup> Neillands.p.107.

<sup>67</sup> "War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers, August 1914 to September 1916,W095/1481."

## The Bandsman and the Conductorette

Sean Connolly

If there were Oscars for the presentation of the story of a soldier who served in the First World War, then Alan Twyford would be a worthy winner. He has donated a remarkable book to the RDFA archive which tells the story of his grandparents, Percy and Grace Harvey. Percy was a musician in the band of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, having enlisted in 1905 at the age of fourteen. He served in Egypt, Sudan and Malta before returning to England. He was based in Milton Barracks, Gravesend, where he married Grace Lydia Barrett in August 1912. She worked as a “conductorette” on the trams.

As a bandsman, Percy would have been expected to carry out medical orderly duties in wartime. Percy was one of those captured near Ligny on 27 August. He spent the rest of the war in various Prisoner of War Camps and did not return home until December 1918.

Alan’s booklet is remarkable for the collection of photographs and documents that it contains. These are beautifully integrated in the text which conveys a rounded picture of a remarkable man who lived for over ninety years and who celebrated a diamond wedding

anniversary with his wife. His story helps to convey an impression of the type of men who lie behind the long lists of names and serial numbers on the memorials.

When asked to write down some details of his life, Percy wrote a summary that is more memorable than many of the multi-volume autobiographies touted in the media:

*“Lived in Thurrock nearly 56 years. Played football for Grays Athletic. Several years. Several Gold Medals. Joined the Army Royal Dublin Fusiliers from the Duke of Yorks Royal Military School, Chelsea, in 1905. Married 1912 at Gravesend. Taken prisoner of war at Mons 1914. Sent to Russia for punishment to work. Got 4 children, 5 grandchildren, 5 great grandchildren. Received a letter from Royal Hospital Chelsea enquiring about my welfare but happy both are well.”*<sup>68</sup>

Alan has also included original audio recordings of Percy and Grace that were made in 1977. Percy comments on his experience in Egypt, among other things. The colour, design and layout of the book, with its realistic reproduction of documents set a very high standard.

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<sup>68</sup> "Harvey, Bandsman Percy 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers."



There are also photographs and postcards of purely military interest such as those of the battalion on duty during industrial unrest in 1911, prisoners during the war and the band in action. Those who are wondering how to present their research on a family tree will learn much from this labour of love.



Bandsman Percy Harvey, 'C' Co.2<sup>nd</sup> RDF team captain, seated behind the winner's shield. Aldershot 1911



Percy Harvey, Prisoner 1584 Chemnitz, Saxony, Germany

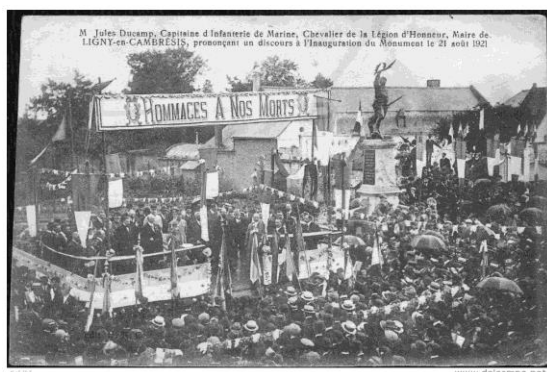
## Honnechy Military Cemetery

Honnechy is a village in the Department of the Nord, eight kilometres south-west of Le Cateau. Honnechy British Cemetery is north-east of the village, on the north-west side of the road to Reumont. Honnechy was part of the battlefield of Le Cateau in August 1914, and from that time it remained in German hands until 9 October 1918. There are some 348 men buried in this cemetery of which thirty-one are Royal Dublin Fusiliers, one of which was L/Cpl. John Boland. His grave reference number is IC26.

## La Ferte-sous-Jouarre Memorial

La Ferte-sous-Jouarre is a small town sixty-six kilometres to the east of Paris, located on the main road (N3) running east from Paris. The Memorial is situated in a small park on the south-western edge of the town, on the south bank of the River Marne, just off the main road to Paris. The Memorial Register is kept at the Town Hall. The memorial commemorates 3,740 officers and men of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) who fell at the battles of Mons, Le Cateau, the Marne and the Aisne between the end of August and early October 1914 and have no known graves.

There are seventeen RDF men on the La Ferte-sous-Jouarre Memorial. Among them is Sergeant 10062 Edward John Shakespeare who lived with his family in the married quarters at Wellington Barracks on Dublin's South Circular Road.<sup>69</sup> He joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and was a Sergeant when killed on 27 August 1914 at Ligny.



Unveiling of WW1 French War Memorial at Ligny on 21 August 1921.

He was the only son and had three sisters, Esther, Violet and Mabel. His body was never found and his name is listed on the La Ferte-Sous-Jouarre Memorial.

Also on this memorial is the name of Pte. 8514 Patrick Kennedy, 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, killed in action on 27 August or died of wounds on 28 August 1914, he was twenty-nine years of age. Patrick was born in 1885 at the Rotunda Hospital in Dublin enlisted into the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF at Naas, Co.

<sup>69</sup>Connolly, S. "The Career of Lieut Michael Andrew Condon," *The Blue Cap, Journal of The Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association* 18, (December 2013).p14. Wellington Barracks is now Griffith College., Dublin.

Kildare. He was one of the Reservists called back to the battalion at the outbreak of the war in early August 1914. Patrick had previously served with the battalion from 21 October 1902 to 20 October 1905 and had moved to Glasgow where he worked as a driver on the Glasgow Underground.

He was a married man and his wife Isabella or Bella as he called her, gave birth to their son, Joshua Patrick on 1 September 1914 just a few days after his father had died. The telegram of her husband's death was kept from Bella until after the birth of Joshua.<sup>70</sup>



Pte. Patrick Kennedy 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF marked 'X' with other members of the battalion at York.

<sup>70</sup> "Kennedy, Private Patrick 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers," (Dublin: RDFA Archive). Pte. Kennedy had four granddaughters, one of whom is Helena Kennedy Q.C. who holds a seat in the House of Lords.

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