

BIRMINGHAM MEDAL SOCIETY – THURSDAY 2nd NOVEMBER 2023
THE DRUMMOND LECTURE – Baptism of Fire: 21st Division at the Battle of Loos.

Paul Handford opened the meeting and began by making reference to last month's meeting 'Dargai 1897 Revisited' by Chris Davies.

Chris reminded everyone of Piper George Findlater VC from his talk, who was injured at Dargai but continued playing the pipes. His audio had not been too clear at last month's meeting and so to remedy this he introduced member Rhys Fitter, who unbeknown to everyone is a bagpipe player! He entered with pipes and performed a BMS first by entertaining attendees with a live medley of three songs - the first two were mentioned in the October talk: namely that Piper George Findlater had played 'The Cock 'o The North' or 'The Haughs of Cromdale' to inspire the Gordon Highlanders rush at the Dargai Heights victory 20.10.1897. Findlater was awarded the VC; the final tune (which connects to the subject of tonight's talk) was 'Blue Bonnets over the Border' was played by Piper Denis Laidlaw to inspire the men of the King's Own Scottish Borderers at the Battle of Loos 1915. Laidlaw was also awarded the VC.



Paul thanked Rhys for his excellent piping skills and Rhys received a hearty round of applause.

Paul then introduced the Drummond Lecture, he explained the historical significance and then introduced the speaker for 2023. Dr Derek Clayton BA MA PhD.

Derek was born in Yorkshire and attended Batley Grammar School before beginning a long association with the University of Birmingham. He graduated in 1979 with a BA in French and German and went on to teach Modern Languages in three Birmingham Schools before retiring in 2015.

He returned to the university in 2004, following the publication of his battalion history, From Pontefract to Picardy: the 9th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry in the First World War, and completed his MA in British First World War Studies in 2006, having produced a dissertation on the 49th (West Riding) Division. He then went on to write his doctoral thesis: 'The Battle of the Sambre: 4 November 1918' and was awarded his PhD in 2016.

His book on the battle, Decisive Victory, was published by Helion in 2018. His third book, a History of the 21st Division in the Great War has just been published, and he is currently researching the Battle of Hamel, 4 July 1918. He is a member of the Western Front Association and has lectured all over the country.

Baptism of Fire: 21st Division at the Battle of Loos.

Derek explained that the units of 21st Division disembarked on French soil between 9 and 12 September 1915. Two weeks later, with absolutely no prior battlefield experience, and very little in the way of acclimatisation to the realities of the Western Front, they were thrown into action at the Battle of Loos. It is, perhaps, interesting to note that had the battle begun on the date originally planned (8 Sept), the division would still have been in England at the time.

It has been a topic of controversy for over 100 years now: the popular perception is that they "disgraced themselves and the New Army by retiring before the enemy". Thankfully, Edmonds does go on to warn the reader of the "legends" that have grown up regarding their actions.

The widely accepted narrative is that the 21st and 24th Divisions advanced against the German Second Line of defence on the second day of the battle and were routed by enemy machine gun fire. This is far too simplistic. The true picture is much more complicated and far less damning of the divisions' performance.

The 21st Division, along with the 24th and the newly-constituted Guards Division had been formed into XI Corps under the command of Lieutenant-General Haking. XI Corps would be the reserve force and would be used to exploit any initial successes.

The controversy begins long before the battle: Sir John French, Commander-in-Chief BEF, wanted to use the reserves only when initial success had been achieved, and thus intended to keep them under his control and command, releasing them to Sir Douglas Haig, Commander First Army, only when (according to Sir William Robertson) “the Germans were absolutely smashed and retiring in disorder”.

Haig’s plan, on the other hand, called for the reserves to be used to “ensure the hoped for initial success”



Lt Gen R C B Haking

This all boiled down to two points of disagreement between the two commanders: firstly, how far back from the battlefield the reserves would be held, and secondly, how soon they would be placed under Haig’s command. We do need to go back a little way before Haig’s acute attack of optimism just prior to the battle, however: the Battle of Loos was, of course, part of a grand French plan to win the war in 1915. The choice of the ground over which the BEF would attack was also down to General Joffre.

Sir John French sent Haig to recce the ground and then submit what would today be called a ‘feasibility study’. Haig sent his report to GHQ on 23 June. The five and a half pages did not make for reassuring reading. A supplementary report submitted two days later neatly summed up his thoughts: “this area is not favourable for an attack”.

Sir John French accordingly tried to scale down the BEF’s involvement in the grand scheme, but was told in no uncertain terms by Lord Kitchener that a full scale assault must go ahead.

The situation at the end of the first day – a day of mixed fortunes and high casualties. (Nick Lloyd estimates that they could be as high as 19,000 – over 6,300 fatal). Nine battalion commanders had been killed and a further 12 wounded. It is no wonder that none of the depleted battalions were asked to attack the German Second Line on day two of the battle. That unenviable task belonged to XI Corps.

In the end, the reserves were held approximately 5,000 to 7,000 yards from the 25 Sept front line. So was XI Corps HQ. An order issued at half past three that afternoon, based on nothing more than optimistic rumours, required 21 Div to capture the high ground around the village of Annay and then secure the canal crossings at Harnes. Annay and Harnes are, respectively, four and five miles east of Loos, behind the as yet unbroken German Second Line. Subsequent orders would be slightly less ambitious.



Field Marshal Sir John French

The first units to advance to the battlefield were the four battalions of 62 Brigade (Brigadier-General E.B. Wilkinson). They were to be temporarily detached from 21 Div and placed under command of 15 Div. Wilkinson, with no idea of the true position or of the ground ahead, simply pointed out Hill 70 to his battalion commanders on the map and told them “we do not know what has happened on Hill 70. You must go and find out”

Initially, at 1500 hrs, he sent just two battalions forward, the 8 E.Yorks and 10 Yorks, down the Bethune to Loos road. The 12 and 13 N Fus would follow an hour later.

As the leading battalion reached the old German front line, they came under heavy shell fire, mainly shrapnel. Their transport section at the rear of the column was practically wiped out. They should, at this point, have left

the road and advanced through Loos village, but in the confusion (not helped by a lack of maps) the 8 E.Yorks and some 10 Yorks men continued to the south and bumped into units of the 1/20 Londons at Chalk Pit Copse. They advanced beyond the copse and came under heavy machine gun fire. Confusion reigned: the men did not know exactly where they were, and an order sent by Wethered, Brigade Major 62 Bde at 1740 to 10 Yorks, sums it all up. "Push on as quick as you can to Hill 70. Have you seen anything of E.Yorks Regt." (62 Bde War Diary)

Clearly, 62 Bde HQ had no idea what was going on ahead of them. Luckily, Lt-Cols Way and Hadow of 8 E Yorks and 10 Yorks respectively restored some semblance of order and had their men dig in. The 12 and 13 N Fus marched towards Loos village and came under fire at about 1915. The 12th pressed on through Loos and eventually held station here..., ready "to charge with the bayonet in case of enemy appearance".

The 13th (by now 62 Bde had completely lost touch with them...) also pushed on through Loos village and were eventually ordered to hold their position in the open ground just east of the Loos- Hulluch road. B Coy was sent forward to support the remnants of the Scottish Regts on the slopes of Hill 70.



Gen Sir Douglas Haig

Brig-Gen Nickalls, CO 63 Bde, has orders to advance to the Loos-Hulluch road "by night" and then (here we go again!) advance against the German trenches in the direction of Annay. They marched down the main road towards Loos but then veered north, the 8 Lincs and 8 Som LI heading for Point 69.

The other two battalions, the 10 Y & L and 12 W.Yorks took a slightly different route to arrive at the same point. Three of the battalions were in place by 2300. (10 Y & L were late...). They arrived just in time to join the onward march at half past midnight.

12 W Yorks and 8 Lincs led the way across the open grassland on a compass bearing of 112 degrees. Given the lack of communication already in evidence, it is no surprise that 63 Bde's arrival at Chalk Pit Wood was unexpected. They came under MG gun fire as they approached, and fixed bayonets ready to attack before realising that the gunfire had come from Hill 70, and that the Wood was held by units of 44 and 2 Bdes. The latter had almost fired on their comrades, being ignorant of their imminent arrival.

An order to relieve these units had failed to reach Brig Nickalls, but after consultation with the incumbent Brig Pollard (2 Bde) decided that the relief should go ahead.

Positions – in places no more than improvised rifle pits - were taken up as follows....

- 10 Y & L along the Hulluch – Lens road.
- 12 W.Yorks to the south, but beyond the road.
- 8 Lincs straddled Bois Hugo, but did not place any troops actually in it.
- 2 Coys 8 Som LI were slightly further back and A & D Companies strayed some distance to the south, losing touch with their compatriots and taking part in the attack on Hill 70 the following day.
- 64 Bde brought up the rear, having a torrid time in the confused back areas, and only arrived in their supporting positions as daylight was almost upon them. They had no idea what was happening ahead of them, so decided to await events.

Plans for the assault on the German Second Line had, meanwhile, evolved...

To eliminate flanking fire, Hulluch and Hill 70 would be attacked at 0900 hrs, following preparatory artillery barrages. The 21 and 24 Divs would constitute the main attack at 1100.

Problem No. 1.

The German Second Line had been out of range of the British artillery on 25 Sept and the barrage planned for 26 Sept was very weak as units had struggled to bring their guns forward. And there would be no smoke or gas available.

Problem No 2.

During the night, the Germans had brought 22 additional battalions into the line. The second line was thus more strongly held than the first line had been the previous day.

Problem No 3.

- 21 Div was critically weakened already.
- 62 Bde was attached to 15 Div and earmarked to support 45 Bde in the Hill 70 attack.
- 63 Bde, in the woods, were by now struggling to hold back a counter attack from newly-arrived German units.
- 64 Bde's orders reflected a lack of clarity at HQ.

They were to get in touch with 63 Bde. Failing that they were to take part in the 1100 attack. If 63 Bde did in the end attack, they were to maintain their position in reserve. The order's final sentence sums up the confusion. "Make any move you think desirable".

The best case scenario for this supposed "divisional" attack was therefore a brigade-strength assault, possibly with a second brigade in support. In reality, with the other two brigades somewhat busy, (as we shall see) it came down to the discretion of 64 Bde as to whether it took place at all.

Orders for the attack on Hill 70 arrived late and men were caught under the British barrage as it began at 0800. (Quite feeble, as it turned out – two shells per minute per battery – but enough to cause casualties). Just as the attack went in, the early morning mist cleared from the valley, giving the German machine gunners on Hill 70 a clear view of the assaulting battalions. The attack captured the perimeter trenches of the Hill 70 redoubt after severe hand to hand fighting, but the centre of the redoubt remained in German hands, despite of attempts to push forward on either side of it.

120 of the 8 E.Yorks took part in the advance, led by Lt-Col Way. They were caught in frontal fire from the redoubt and in the left flank from positions on the Hulluch- Lens road. According to Major Ingles, writing in 1926, "[The] line just withered away". Col Way was severely wounded.

The 10 Yorks and the 12 N Fus advanced some 200 yards behind the leading 45 Bde assault. They were met some of the Scots retiring from the crest, but pushed on, carrying some of the Scots with them, back over the crest on either side of the redoubt. Here, the attack began to falter. On the left, the 12 N Fus were eventually forced to retire. On the right, the 10 Yorks were pinned down just short of the German front line. Gallant, but unsuccessful attempts were made to get the men forward. Lt-Col Hadow stood up, shouted "Charge" and rushed forward, only to be cut down immediately and killed. On seeing this, second in command Major W Dent also stood up to initiate a charge, but met the same fate as his CO. It is difficult to understand what followed: three more officers, Major Noyes, and Captains Charteris and Lynch all made similar unsuccessful, and ultimately fatal, attempts to lead the battalion forward.

A full retreat from Hill 70 ensued for the men of 62 Bde. Brig Gen Nickalls had established his HQ in the Chalk Pit adjacent to the Hulluch- Lens road and at around 0700 on the 26th he was briefing his battalion commanders on an attack on the German second line at 0800. Orders arrived just in time informing him of the proposed 1100 assault. He decided to wait.

To illustrate the vagueness of these orders it is merely necessary to hear Major Storer of 8 Lincs telling his fellow officers that "we were to attack the enemy trenches over there". No indication of the distance to, or the strength of, the German defences.

By dawn, however, these orders were fast becoming irrelevant.

The 63 Bde positions were under attack from the east and the south by the 153 Infantry Regt, the "Altenburger Regiment". The Germans were of the opinion that the loss of Hill 70 would be "disastrous". Orders to retake it, along with the woods to the north of it, were issued at 1900 hrs, 25 Sept. The eventual goal was the retaking of the village of Loos.

The 1st and 2nd Battalion Altenburgers were in position by 2140 and they were ordered to attack at 2300. Thankfully, the German awareness of the situation was almost as vague as that of the British. And their maps were not much better. At 0100, advancing in the dark, "into the unknown" as the regimental historian put it, they mistook a track for the Hulluch-Lens road and halted there.

Their presence was noted by the British and the 63 Bde men were able to fire at them from directly ahead and from the flank, successfully pinning them down. Some German troops did however manage to infiltrate the non-occupied stretch of Bois Hugo an, as soon as the morning mist lifted, were able to fire into the flanks and rear of the Lincoln's positions.

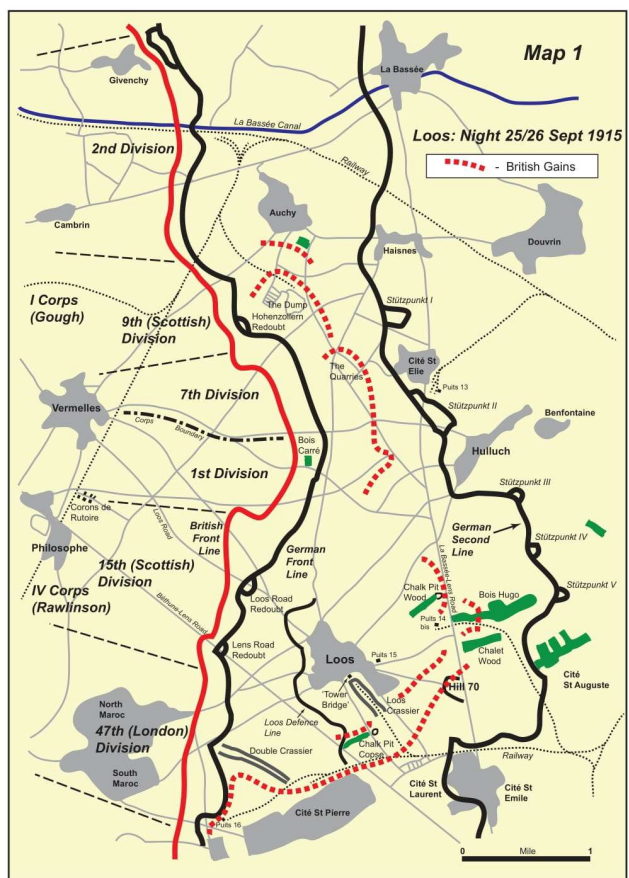
The 2nd battalion, moving north towards Hill 70, was able to make progress and made it into the north eastern sector of Chalet Wood. (Although they mistook it for Bois Hugo) They were suddenly fired on from the right. Both German battalions were firing on British positions – so they thought. They were in fact firing upon each other, and effectively pinned each other down.

The true situation became apparent at first light, but when further orders to advance were issued, only 1st Bn were able to comply. 2nd Bn had suffered such severe losses that all they could realistically do was to follow up their sister battalion's attack. (2nd Bn's left flank company, 147 strong the previous day, was down to 14 rifles.)

As the 1st Bn prepared to assault, they came under British artillery fire – preparations for the 9 o'clock assault on Hill 70. They huddled in their positions to wait it out, and were able to launch their attack at around 0930. They pushed forward in force, having been reinforced by 106th IR and the 8 Lincolns began to lose heavily. Brigadier General Nickalls, all thoughts of an attack on the German Second Line now dispelled, tried to reorganise his troops to avoid being outflanked on the right by the troops emerging from Bois Hugo. Two companies of 8/SomLI were to line the southern edge of the Chalk Pit and orders were sent to the 10.Y&L to send two companies to line the southern boundary of Chalk Pit Wood.

This order was misunderstood and three companies advanced through the wood, believing they were part of an attack, into the open ground beyond it, and came under very heavy machine gun fire. Not surprisingly, they were driven back with heavy losses. They withdrew to the Loos-Hulluch road, but enfilade fire from German positions near Benifontaine meant that these positions were untenable.

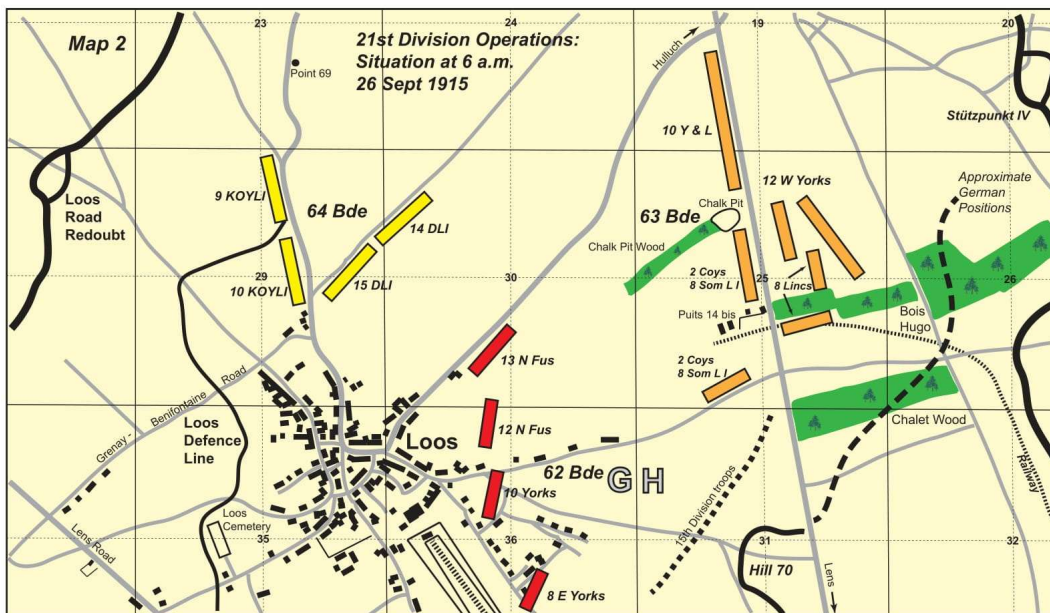
It was about this time that Brig Gen Nickalls sent a message back to General Gloster, CO 64 Bde, asking for a battalion to be sent forward to reinforce his positions. The 14 DLI were accordingly dispatched.



Meanwhile, 8 SomLI and 12 WYorks were dealing with a German advance from near Stützpunkt IV across open ground to the north of Bois Hugo. They poured heavy machine gun fire into the men in the open – about a dozen Germans made it back to the cover of the woods.

As previously mentioned, however, the 8 Lincs to the south, astride Bois Hugo, were in serious trouble. Lt Alcock later stated that the battalion was taken by surprise: “the enemy attacked in considerable force, and as far as we in support were concerned, utterly unexpectedly”.

The Germans had earlier infiltrated into the woods (No 8 Lincs there, you will remember!) and were able to attack the Lincs in the flank and the rear. Six officers, including two company commanders, became casualties, and the right flank fell back in some disorder. Lt Col Walter, CO, was able to rally a small group of his men and attempted to regain his lost trenches with a bayonet charge, but fell mortally wounded. He died in German captivity in hospital in Douai three days later.



Almost immediately after the ill-fated charge, Second in Command Major J Y Storer, was also killed. (Conflicting stories have him either blown up by a shell or shot through the head). Captain McNaught-Davis led three more forlorn bayonet charges and the Lincs were forced to retreat across the road towards the Chalk Pit. A small number were left behind to continue their resistance: no officers left unwounded, no Mills Bombs left, and British shrapnel shells bursting short meant that they were unable to last out until dark and were forced to surrender: Lt Alcock, senior officer left, was forced to give up the unequal struggle at around 5 pm, as, he later said, “I had only four unwounded men left, all of whom had very few rounds of ammunition, and the enemy were all around us”. (Alcock to the OH 29 Nov 1918). The two surviving officers, Alcock and Hall were taken prisoner, survived captivity and were repatriated in 1918.

Two of the 8 Lincs officers killed that day were twin brothers: 2Lt Arthur Bosworth and Lt Philip Bosworth. When war broke out, both were abroad, Arthur living in Valparaiso in Chile and Philip exploring the arctic regions of Canada with his elder brother, Dr T. Bosworth. Both returned to England to enlist. Bodies were not found – Loos Memorial.

It was sometime earlier than the final demise of the 8 Lincs that 63 Bde defences began to crumble – initiated possibly by the arrival of 14 DLI on the battlefield. The sight of them appearing from the right rear – and being mistaken for Germans – may have caused some panic amongst the men of 12 W Yorks. Their CO, Lt Col Leggett, earlier wounded, was on his way to a conference with Brig Nickalls when a sudden order to retire was given and was passed like wildfire from right to left along their positions. The battalion began to move back. The officers tried to rally their men, but a number were killed, including brothers Major J.H. Jacques and

Captain A. Jacques. They were both married, living in Hampshire, men of 'private means'. Between them, they left over £92,000 in their wills.

The contagion of retreat spread. Men of 10 Y & Lancs joined, as did the remnants of the 8 Lincs. Brig Gen Nickalls, soon aware of what was happening, ran forward from his HQ in attempt to rectify the perilous situation, but was killed almost immediately.

To add to the confusion, the advancing 14 DLI initially mistook the retreating Yorkshire battalion for Germans and opened fire. The mistake was soon realised, fortunately, but some of the DLI were caught up in the retreat. The rest continued towards Bois Hugo – where their initial orders had sent them – but came under withering fire from German machine guns lining the edge of the wood. Seventeen DLI officers became casualties, including CO, Lt Col A.S. Hamilton, who was wounded. All four company commanders were lost, along with the machine gun officer and 220 men. Unsurprisingly, the survivors, along with the rest of 63 Bde, withdrew towards 64 Bde positions.

What happened next shows just how out of touch with the actual situation on the battlefield the higher commanders were: 15 DLI, in accordance with their orders for a general attack at 11 am, and despite seeing the remnants of 63 Bde and the 14 DLI retreating towards them, set off towards Hill 70. Yes, this was wrong, they should have been attacking north of Chalk Pit Wood.

By 11:45, with Lt Col Logan already dead, the men of 15 DLI were pinned down on the slopes of Hill 70, on, as Major Johnson later wrote: "a bare stretch of open country." They were being enfiladed by the same machine gunners that had put paid to the 14 DLI advance and German shells from behind Hill 70 were falling amongst them.

With Major Johnson wounded and suffering severely from blood loss, Captain Babbage, the adjutant, found himself in command of fifty or so unwounded men some 200 yds short of the summit of Hill 70. He saw sense and ordered a retreat, which the battalion war diary asserts was carried out "coolly and orderly".

Johnson and two compatriots found themselves out on a limb and didn't fancy retracing their steps across the open grassland in front of Bois Hugo. They, instead, made directly for Loos village. They crawled towards it under shrapnel fire and eventually noticed a British held trench about 150 yards away. They decided to make a run for it, and Johnson, weak through the loss of blood, was practically carried the last few yards by Lt Barker, before they all three collapsed into a trench held by a company of Gordon Highlanders. They eventually made their way back through the village.

The withdrawal of the Durham battalions was observed from 64 Bde HQ. It coincided with the withdrawal of 24th Div units who, at 11 am, had attacked due east, as per orders, only to crumble on the uncut wire of the German Second Position.

The time was 12:30 pm. The Durhams and the 63 Bde units rallied in the rear of 64 Bde.

OH says: "It seemed that the fighting power of the 63 and 64 Bdes, that is of the 21st Division – for 62 Bde was detached with the 15th Div – was already broken".

The three woods north of Hill 70 were now securely in German possession, but it had been a costly gain. 63 Bde had exacted a heavy toll on the Altenburg men. They had advanced from Loison 2,000 strong. They lost over 700 taking the woods. All thoughts of retaking Loos village were dashed. They were ordered to dig in where they were, ready to defend their positions if necessary.

"The Brigadier and I took stock" Thus wrote Lt Col K. Henderson, Brigade Major of 64 Bde at the time, in his memoirs. He was at Bde HQ, just south of Point 69 (pointer!), in conversation with Brig Gen Gloster at around 1230 p.m. The retreating units were flooding past them as officers desperately tried to rally them.

They came to the conclusion that it would be some time before 62 and 63 Bdes were capable of any cohesive action. Also, with Hill 70 lost, and Chalk Pit Wood in German hands, Henderson urged that the two remaining battalions (9 & 10 KOYLI) could not be expected to achieve any success where whole brigades had earlier come to grief...

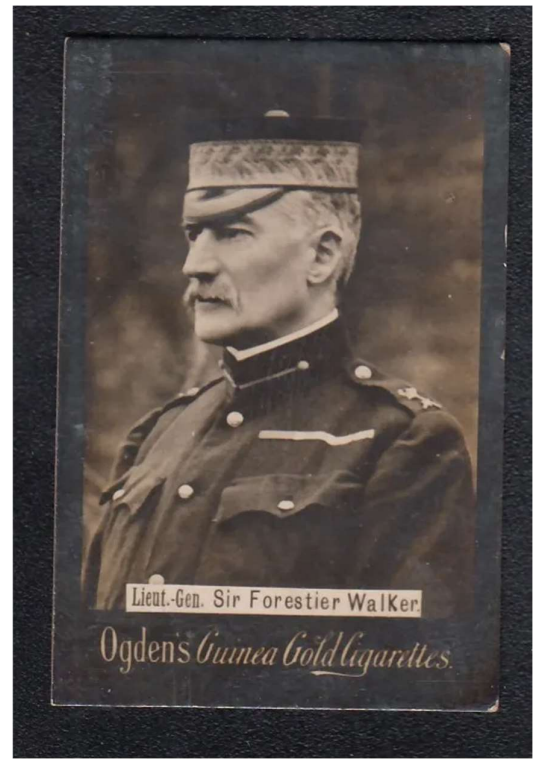
Gloster had all but made up his mind that Henderson was right when Major Campbell, GSO 3 of 21 Div arrived on the scene. Everything was about to go disastrously wrong.

He began urging General Gloster to resume the attack at once and at all costs...

He turned his back on Henderson, who was advocating caution, and told Gloster that the Divisional Commander would insist on the attack continuing...

Gloster began to waver, and, perhaps thinking now that he might be blamed if he did nothing, agreed to a limited advance: 9 & 10 KOYLI would go forward, and hopefully the reformed DLI battalions might be able to follow in support once they had been reorganised.

He sent for Lt-Cols Lynch (9 KOYLI) and Pollock (10 KOYLI) and outlined his idea to them: They were to advance, but with strict orders that they would stop and dig in if progress proved impossible, and under no circumstances to cross the Loos-Hulluch Road.



Suddenly, the men of the 9 KOYLI climbed from their trenches and began to surge forward. Henderson wrote: "Who sent them all forward, it is doubtful if anyone will ever know for certain. My own conviction is that this was the result of poor Campbell's interference." A 9 KOYLI version says that they were ordered forward by an unidentified Staff Officer.

Three companies of 9 KOYLI had gone forward with no idea where they were going or what they were to do when they got there. Pollock was quickly sent to use 10 KOYLI as support, and Lynch could do no more than run after his men and try to exert some measure of control. All to no avail, Urged on by company commanders, they headed for the only fighting they could see – on the summit of Hill 70.

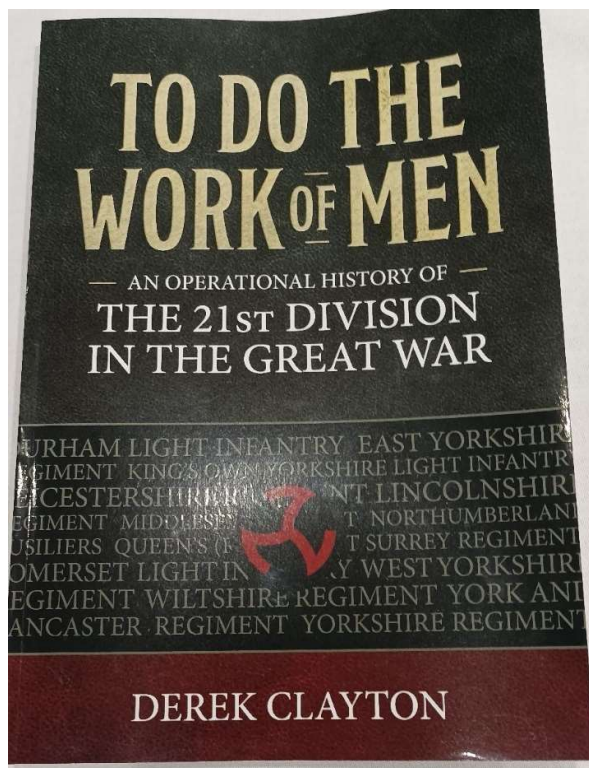
For the third time that day, the German machine gunners in Bois Hugo and Chalet Wood, escaping a frontal assault, were able to pour withering fire into the flanks of the Yorkshiremen. The Germans on Hill 70 joined in, so the unfortunate KOYLIs were taking fire from the front and left with little chance of replying. No wonder the advance stalled.

Lynch and a few men started to dig in at the bottom of the valley, but they soon realised that their position would be an impossible one and they joined in the general retreat, some back the way they came, some through the village of Loos.

The survivors made it back to their original starting positions and the question arose as to what to do next. Their situation was far more precarious now than it had been two hours earlier. Henderson went back to 64 Bde HQ and arrived just as Major Gen Forrestier-Walker (CO 21 Div) appeared from the opposite direction.

Forrestier-Walker saw sense and decided to inform the Corps Commander (Haking) that he intended to withdraw the 21 Div men to the old German front line once it was dark, and asked that reinforcements should be sent to meet them. Oddly enough, it was Campbell who took down what Forrestier-Walker dictated and the message was duly sent at 2:45 p.m.

The word came back, however, that they were to hold their ground at all costs until relieved, as any withdrawal might encourage a German attack on Loos village.



Relief was on its way: the Guards Division and the 3rd Cavalry Division were moving forward. They encountered the same problems on the march as 21 Div had 24 hrs earlier, and did not arrive at 21 Div positions until well after midnight, the relief not being completed until nearly four o'clock the following morning.

The 21 Div's involvement in the Battle of Loos was over. Casualty figures are, as ever, difficult to pin down. 21 Division reported them at the time as follows:

Only when fatalities were confirmed much later can we be sure of a degree of accuracy. Officer casualties must be regarded as high. If one assumes that a battalion went into action with 24 officers, and takes figures from the twelve attacking battalions, the rate is an average of 60%.

The 8/Lincs lost 19 officers, 14/DLI lost its CO, all 4 company commanders, the adjutant and ten other officers. 12/WYorks lost 20.

The use, or misuse, of the 21 and 14 Divs at Loos has been a subject of debate ever since the day it happened – one end

result was the removal of Sir John French as Commander in Chief and his replacement by Sir Douglas Haig.

Why did things happen as they did?

- 21 Div was new to the Western front – inexperienced.
- No battalion had more than one regular officer.
- All the COs were 'dugouts'.
- Officer losses meant that the men were quickly deprived of proper leadership.
- Arduous march to the battlefield, plus a shortage of food, water and sleep.
- They arrived too late to be of any practical use.
- 62 Bde was hived off to 15 Div – one third of the fighting force not available for any attack.
- 63Bde, defending the woods, was in no position to attack anything – too busy fighting off German counter offensives.
- The original order for the 11 o'clock attack came from a commander with absolutely no idea of the actual situation on the battlefield.
- Only one officer (the Brigade Major - Henderson) of 64 Bde saw a map of the battlefield – and it was exactly that: he was allowed to look at one at Div HQ on the afternoon of 25 Sept. Battalion commanders did not have maps.
- Subsequent modifications were made from a similar position, and communication problems meant that the forward units were too often left to improvise, but they also acted from a position of ignorance. In short, command and control fell apart with the inevitable consequences.

Lt-Col Leggett, CO 12/WYorks, wrote: "we Commanding Officers never, during the whole period before or during the battle, received a coherent order". That the men retreated from the battlefield cannot be disputed, but troops in their first battle, inadequately trained (later admitted by Forrestier-Walker to the OH), devoid of leadership resulting from the high officer casualties and facing determined and deadly opposition, perhaps cannot be blamed for such actions.

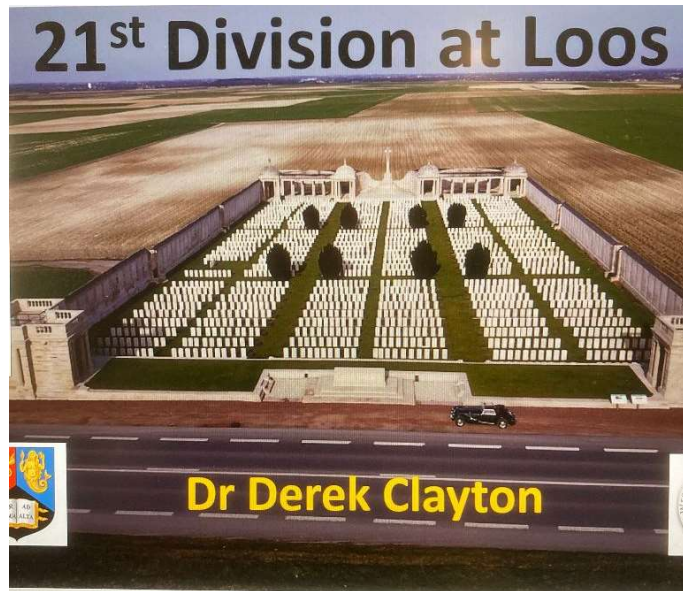
Attacks did fail, but 63 Bde's defence of the woods was both stubborn and brave, and left the German units facing them in no fit state to contemplate retaking Loos village.

The final word goes to the men themselves, described in the Official History as "Sheep without a shepherd". As they were being organised into their defensive positions as night fell, General Haking (XI Corps) spoke to

some of them. They all gave similar replies to his questions: "We did not understand what it was like: we will do better next time".

Next time would be the first day of the Battle of the Somme.

Paul thanks Derek for his excellent talk and questions were taken. Paul presented Derek with a BMS tie.



Members then showed a small number of medals relating to the Battle of Loos



Pte 11052 John James Fisher 8th Bn Lincolnshire Regiment.

He served with his two brothers in the regiment during the Great War. The eldest brother Sgt 406. 20020 Charles William Fisher served with the 4th and 5th Bn's Lincolnshire Regiment. The youngest brother Pte. 4007 Herbert Fisher served with the 4th Bn. All three brothers fought at the Battle of Loos in September 1915 where the Lincolnshire Regiment suffered heavy losses.

All three brothers survived this battle and the following year all three were engaged in fighting at the Battle of the Somme.

Sadly Herbert was killed by shellfire on the 4th July 1916 together with three other members of his battalion. He was buried with his comrades at Hannescamp Cemetery.

Both Charles and John survived the Great War.



MC MM group to Gordon Cogill Muirhead. The MM was awarded at Loos one of four to the 4th Camerons. He was later commissioned into the Gordon Highlanders, then Corps of Military Accountants in 1930. Recalled in WWII to the Pioneer Corps and landed on D-Day and involved in reinforcing supplies to Pegasus Bridge.



MM group to William Anderson the pair are named as Lt RAF, later Sqn Ldr in the Medical Branch. Anderson was a 2nd Lt at Loos at which he won his MC.