



Battledress Times

The General Newsletter of the Herts at War Project

Comments & copy to (jontywild@hertsatwar.co.uk)

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Updates

Hi this is not a full newsletter, but an Intermediate update providing some information about our September tour and some other news.

In this newsletter you will find:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Monthly Talk Programme▪ The recent tour | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The next tour?▪ New book |
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Monthly Talks

Forthcoming talks - more coming, but maybe subject to change

9-Oct-23	Guy Thomas	London Colney Airfield
16-Nov-23	Steve Chambers	Mapping the Old Front Line
21-Dec-23	Doug Kirby	A Harpenden Soldier of the Great War
14-Jan 2024	Roy Larkin	The Invisible Corps (The Army Service Corps)
15-Feb-24	Geoff Cunnington	Royal Navy - Sailors Lives in the First World War
20-Jun-24	Helen Fry	Women In Intelligence - MI9

Our Recent Tour

For those that didn't know we ran the Hindenburg Line Battlefield Tour in September and in association with our good friends, the Hertfordshire Constabulary Great War Society.

Based around St Quentin in France, it was a three-day, two-night tour. Baking hot, packed with information and stands and great fun. Even the escaped convict checks and the Eurotunnel's seemingly deliberate delays couldn't spoil it.

The last few times I have gone across on coaches there seem to be long delays and talking to the coach drivers there seems to be a deliberate move to discourage coaches from using the Eurotunnel – including a late £800 surcharge for this tour – *ouch!*

Below there are links to a couple of videos and overleaf are some photographs, but first:

What's your view?: We probably all know the potential advantage of the Eurotunnel – a 30-minute crossing should mean less hassle and more time for the tour, however if we are going to experience delays of 2-hours (or even one?) then we might as well go for a cheaper option and at least be able to relax with a coffee in the ferry lounge or restaurant. That is only my view, but I would love to hear yours especially if were on the tour or would consider going on future ones.

Talking of which, if you are potentially interested in future tours, and have a particular views on what to cover, do let us know by email or by having a chat after one of the talks.

Video Clips:

[Video 1](#)

[Video 2](#)



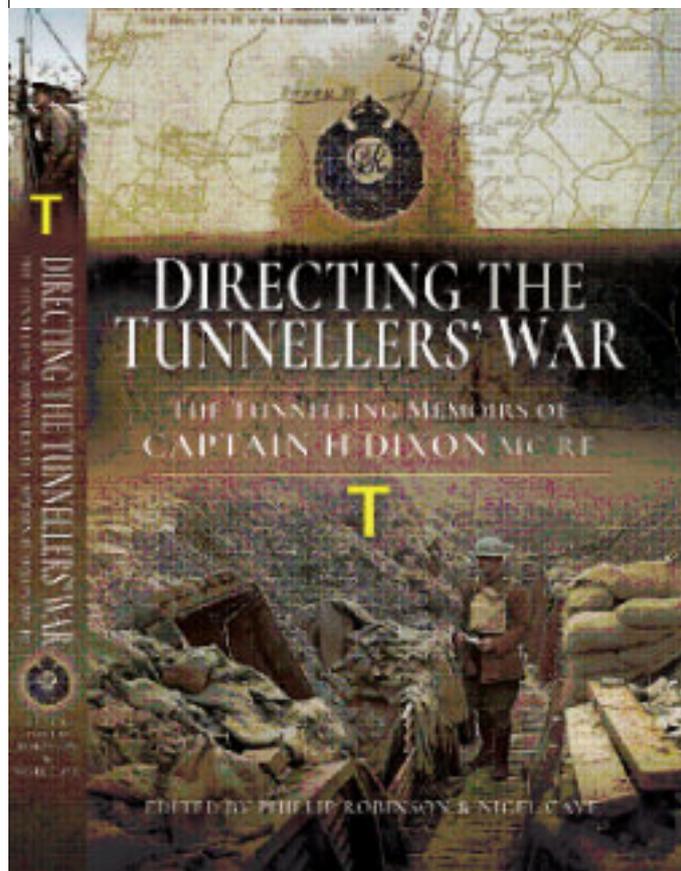
Photographs from September Hindenburg Line Tour



The following was provided by Phillip Robinson on behalf of himself and Nick Cave (authors) both are supporters of the HAW Project so I am happy to provide the information here.

Gonty Wild

The original version of this memoir, entitled “The Lighter Side of a Tunneller’s Life”, was produced in 1933, mostly from memory when Dixon was working in China. He had hoped to get it published but this was a period when many publishers considered that there was memoir fatigue as regards the Great War so it remained no more than a draft until rescued by one of the editors from the Royal Engineer archives at Chatham.



After a short spell instructing at Chatham on explosives, with his background in mining and tunnelling Dixon was appointed to a Tunnelling Company. He clearly distinguished himself as he was then transferred to GHQ in Montreuil to handle mining plans and records. In due course he was appointed as one of the Assistant Inspectors of Mines, a small group of Royal Engineer officers who operated as the eyes and ears of the Inspector of Mines exercising overall control on mining operations that were centrally directed from GHQ. His activity in this role is particularly pertinent to the period after the June 1917 Messines offensive, when the use of mining for blows against the enemy all but disappeared and the tunnelling companies were reallocated to a variety of engineer tasks.

In his manuscript, Dixon remarks that “the carnage and horrors of war have been deliberately omitted, for enough and to spare had been written about these aspects by countless others”. His manuscript,

alternatively, provides a valuable insight into the overall conduct of mining operations and the tactical and strategic considerations that rarely feature in other accounts. He was also at the centre of staff activity countering the effects of the German Kaiserslacht offensives in March, April and May 1918, and the preparations for a possible German breakthrough to the channel ports. Subsequently, with the allied advances of the Last Hundred Days, he was much occupied by the hazards of dealing with delayed action mines and booby traps and experiments in means of locating them.

Aside from these tactical and strategic considerations, he recounts, by means of numerous humorous anecdotes, the personalities and work of the staff at GHQ, ranging from humble clerks and the misdemeanours of his batman to senior officers, not least the Royal Engineer hierarchy. He brings to life the exceptional endeavours of the often maligned senior staff and the individual characteristics of many senior staff officers and specialists who are otherwise but shadows in accounts of the Great War.

The editors have added extensive notes explaining and, on occasions correcting Dixon’s accounts. These are illustrated with explanatory plans and diagrams along with photographs of many of the GHQ personalities along with short biographies. The combination not only provides a very personal perspective of the tunnelling endeavours by the Royal Engineer and Dominion miners, but also reveals much about the conduct of the war at GHQ and the Royal Engineer contribution.

Available from:

- Pen & Sword Books Limited, 47 Church Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, S70 2AS, Tel: 01226 734555
- Naval & Military Press,
- Amazon.com or eBay at various prices.
- In Canada available through Login Brothers see:- <https://lb.ca/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/newsearch1?Z109991>