



David Harding <cnwwassn@gmail.com>

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

J STILLINGS <stillings@btinternet.com>

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Reply-To: J STILLINGS <stillings@btinternet.com>

To: "cnwwassn@gmail.com" <cnwwassn@gmail.com>

Dear Mr Harding

I am writing on behalf of the Army Cadet Force Platoon based in Rossett between Wrexham and Chester. It is a little long winded but I am attaching a report on the activities the Platoon has been involved in on the WW1 Somme battlefields.

Anyway, we returned with some wood from both the Lochnagar Crater and Mametz Wood (Customs were not overly impressed but accepted it when we outlined our intentions). We had identified a woodturner but, sadly, he has been made redundant and moved away. I am no expert but I believe we have some oak, hazel and, strangely, a little walnut. I do not want to get overly sentimental or nationalistic but this wood undoubtedly grew on the last resting places of both British and German troops. In a way it is "sacred". I suppose it may be somewhat ethically dubious to remove such wood but the reality is these sites have been kept in good order and anything chopped down is routinely burnt or shredded.

Consequently, we are looking for a woodturner(s) who may have an interest in military history / the Cadet Force / youth development or even a military background. Our original woodturner indicated he could make pace sticks and pens. I was pleased with this idea but have no fixed ideas as to what should be made.

As for payment, whether you would like to utilise this wood for a Club project, whether you would like to do something for charity I am completely open to negotiation. Ultimately getting Cadets to France 3 times a year is quite expensive and some items to sell to this end would be appreciated, however, I am keen not to overtly commercialise any endeavour. The Platoon is certainly not reliant on this type of income.

Should this idea catch the imagination of your membership we are heading to France again in May and could bring more wood back. Cherry ? Hawthorn ?

I live in Southsea, Wrexham. If your membership were interested I could get to one of your meetings and give them a very quick insight into the provenance of this wood.

Thank you for your consideration

Jim Stillings



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ROSSETT PLATOON ON THE SOMME 2013

BACKGROUND

Rossett Platoon, Clwyd and Gwynedd Army Cadet Force have been travelling to the Somme, France since 2006. Initially it was an annual trip, however, the Platoon has now become absorbed in a number of activities commemorating the First World War and those servicemen who made the ultimate sacrifice.

EX LOCHNAGAR DRAGON II

Ex Lochnagar Dragon II deployed to the Somme on 23 May 2013 for a very intensive 5 days of hard labouring. Despite awful weather on the first two days the determination and cheerfulness of the 9 Cadets involved never wavered and all objectives were achieved

The Lochnagar Crater, situated on the outskirts of the village of La Boisselle, is the result of a massive detonation within a tunnel dug beneath German lines, designed to create devastation and confusion as the first wave of troops went "over the top" on the morning of 1st July 1916. Rossett Platoon have been involved in the project to control the trees and scrub around the perimeter for some four years now. In the early years the Cadets struggled but with hard work and determination they have transformed themselves into an operation able to tackle the most impenetrable hawthorn and wild rose scrub.

The crater perimeter is now largely clear. Next year the Cadets will take the lead role in keeping the cleared area cut back. The massive increase in visitor numbers through the years 2014 – 18 will now enjoy the full battlefield vista.

Good work though seldom goes unnoticed and this year the Cadets were in receipt of further requests for their assistance.

Only a short distance from the crater lies a patch of land known as the "Glory Hole", a part of the British front line, surrounded on three sides by German positions occupying higher ground. (the German redoubt which existed above where the crater now lies formed part of this higher ground making it an obvious target to tunnel beneath and destroy) The land is almost unique in that it lies untouched since fighting finished. It is now the site of a major archaeological project which has accessed a series of military tunnels and has been the subject of a recent BBC documentary.

The tunnels have a particular relevance to the Platoon as Spr William Arthur Lloyd lies entombed in a collapsed branch tunnel. Spr Lloyd, aged 37 with a wife and 4 children, was a Wrexham coalminer. Coalmining was a protected occupation. Nevertheless, when he discovered the Royal Engineers were recruiting tunnellers he enlisted. After only a weeks military training he was sent to France. Some 3 months later the Germans detected his branch tunnel and detonated an explosion which brought the roof down killing Spr Lloyd

The Cadets were able to strim the area of the site yet to be dug by the archeological team to the delight of the French Lady owning the land who has the good fortune to be married to a Welshman. Plans are in their infancy but the Cadets are planning to

honour Spr Lloyd with the commissioning of an urn which will be placed at the branch tunnel entrance reviving an old Breton / Celtic tradition

Most poignantly for the Cadets however was the work needing to be done at the Mametz Memorial commemorating the men of the 38th (Welsh Division) which sustained over 4,000 casualties in Mametz Wood during the early stages of the Somme offensive. The view from the Memorial across the farmland to Mametz Wood, the German frontline, had become obscured. In fact, looking from the woods towards the memorial only the dragon's wing tips were visible. The Cadets were able clear the area to the front of the Memorial dramatically restoring the dragon's eye view.

It is now some 26 years since the Mametz Memorial was erected. The original bench at the site has become weather ravaged and, sadly, vandalised. The Cadets plan to source some appropriate Welsh timber and restore the bench to its original glory.

It is impossible to underestimate the Cadet's achievements. Each of these sites are representative of the ultimate sacrifice of thousands of our forebears in the service of their country. It is imperative that these sites are kempt and in good order for the forthcoming 100th anniversary commemorations. However, it is something more than that. Each of these sites, on their own, can evoke the strongest of emotions. But nothing, in a war of this magnitude, occurred in isolation. Everything happened in a much wider context and, for the visitor, a wall of impenetrable hawthorn destroys that context. In every sense the Cadets can be proud of their work.

EX SOMME DRAGON VIII

On 25 June some 37 Rossett Cadets plus 3 from other Platoons deployed on Ex Somme Dragon VIII. The trip started as an exercise primarily focussed on remembering those who gave their life on the first day of the Somme offensive. However, it has grown into much more than that.

The highlight remains the 1st July ceremony at the Thiepval Memorial commemorating the more than 70,000 Allied troops who gave their life on the Somme in 1916 and have no known grave. Due to the Regular Army's operational commitments, most years Rossett Platoon is the only sizeable uniformed presence in attendance. Consequently, over the years the Cadets have been granted a number of integral roles. This year the Platoon attracted the attention of, and favourable comment from, the Rt Hon Theresa Villiers, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and Sir Peter Ricketts GCMG, Her Majesty's Ambassador to France.

On a very busy 1st July the Platoon also plays a prominent role at the ceremony held at the Ulster Tower commemorating those from the 36th (Ulster) Division who gave their lives on the Somme. Whilst this occasion has a pronounced Ulster focus the Platoon has again provided the only uniformed contingent over a number of years. Consequently, the Somme Association of Northern Ireland have very much taken the Cadets to their hearts. The trip now incorporates a guided tour of Thiepval Wood courtesy of the Ulster Tower staff.

Thirdly, but at 07.30 in the morning, to the minute the time the Somme offensive began, the Cadets parade at the Lochnagar Crater. The Crater is the starkest remaining topographical manifestation of what occurred on the Somme. Unkempt in comparison to the manicured memorials it offers a tiny insight into the devastation wrought on this area in 1916. The ceremony concludes with a hugely evocative and moving joining of hands around the entire 1/6th of a mile perimeter.

Over a week in France gives the Cadets an opportunity to visit Belgium for the day and participate in the daily act of remembrance at the Menin Gate, Ypres. The Menin Gate being the memorial to the missing of the Ypres Salient. Despite this being a daily event, hundreds are in attendance through the summer months. As the Cadets fulfil numerous roles at other commemorations this is their opportunity to parade as one body. Having worked enthusiastically on their kit they were a credit to the ACF.

The trip also saw the Platoon return to the "Glory Hole" site at La Boisselle. The Cadets arranged a short act of commemoration and the laying of a wreath for Spr William Lloyd. Even though this years focus is on surface archaeology, on new areas of the site, the project Team were kind enough to ensure that everyone who wished to had a tunnel tour.

As part of the Platoon's ongoing efforts to foster good community relations contact has been made with a number of Wrexham's Historical Societies. As a consequence the Cadets were asked to visit the graves of two brothers who gave their lives in the Great War. Joseph and Henry Huxley were natives of the village of Holt located only three miles from Rossett. Pertinently for the Cadets both brothers served in the Royal Welch Fusiliers and both served in Battalions which were formed in Wrexham.

Cpl Henry Huxley's 9th Bn RWF formed part of the 19th (Western) Division . Having devoted so much focus to the village of La Boisselle the Cadets were hugely interested to discover that when the morning attack on the village, on 1st Jul 1916, faltered reinforcements were deployed. That afternoon the 19th Division captured the village. A Divisional memorial still stands outside the village church. In 1917 the Division moved north to Belgium to engage in the offensive pushing out of the Ypres salient. Cpl Huxley gave his life on the 12th May 1917, he is buried some 3 km outside of Ypres in the village of Vlamertinghe. The Cadets were able to visit his grave, pay their respects and lay a wreath in his honour.

2Lt Joseph Huxley's 10th Bn RWF were incorporated into the 3rd Division prior to deployment to France. Outside of Albert during the initial stages of the Somme Offensive the Battalion entered the fighting on 20th Jul at Delville Wood east of the village of Longueval. After a fierce engagement the Battalion was awarded two Victoria Crosses. The Battalion also moved to Belgium in 1917. Joseph Huxley's capabilities were recognised and he returned to Kinnel Park for Officer training. With the 10th Bn being redesignated as an Entrenching Battalion 2Lt Huxley was transferred to 14th Bn RWF in France. He gave his life on the 22nd Apr 1918 during the last major German counter offensive of the war. He is buried in the Bouzincourt Communal Military Cemetery, 5 km outside Albert. The Cadets visited his grave, lowered their standards, performed a brief act of remembrance and laid a wreath.

With so much of the detail of the Huxley brothers service yet to be unearthed the Cadets plan to have their wartime records professionally researched. With the 100th anniversary of the First World War fast approaching this may hopefully draw some focus and recognition on the RWF Battalions, formed in this area at the beginning of the war, who served outside of the 38th (Welsh) Division.

EX LOCHNAGAR DRAGON III

Ex Lochnagar Dragon III departed on 25 Oct for 3 days in France. Unfortunately, the trip coincided with the sugar beet harvest and the anticipated increase in visitor numbers. The 9 Cadets involved arrived to find heavy agricultural machinery and no less than 4 coaches impeding access. Nevertheless, with

characteristic resourcefulness, the Cadets pushed on with perimeter clearance work. Unfortunately, the task could not be completed in its entirety but the remaining small wedge will be a straightforward challenge for those deploying on Ex Lochnagar Dragon IV next spring. The extent of the Cadet's work at the Crater is now so great that it cannot be adequately photographed from the ground. Consequently, the Cadets hope to commission an aerial photograph which will do their labours justice.

The Cadets also found time to visit the Mametz Memorial. Everything chopped down during Ex Lochnagar Dragon II has now been disposed of. The Memorial therefore, with its new improved access, will be displayed to best advantage for the commencement of the 100th anniversary commemorations.

CONCLUSION

The fact that Exercise Somme Dragon attracts more Cadets year on year is testament to its success. Our motto – Historia Vitae Magistra – History, the teacher of life – signifies our belief that exposing young people to both the glory and futility of war nurtures them into becoming more objective, well rounded adults. The Platoon has been embraced by the organisations involved in Somme commemorations, we are applauded by all those we meet and feedback in the Wrexham area is universally positive. Exercise Somme Dragon reflects well not only on Rossett Platoon but also the wider ACF and greater military community.



Mametz Memorial to the Welsh



Presentation of Bench to Richard Dunning at Lochnagar



Ulster Tower Memorial



Menin Gate, Ypres, Belgium