

## Fact File: William Little

---

### Profile

Surname: LITTLE

First names: William

Date of Birth: 1881 Covington, Lanarkshire, Scotland

Marital status: Single

Religion: Presbyterian

Occupation: Coach and motor trade

Final rank: Second Lieutenant, commissioned 12 October 1915

Regiment/Service:

1. Southern Rhodesia Volunteers.
2. 1st Rhodesia Regiment: No. 133, attested 20 October 1914 in Bulawayo, rank colour-sergeant. Demobbed 31 July 1915 when 1RR was disbanded. Saw active war service in German South West Africa from 22 December 1914 to 26 July 1915.
3. 6th Battalion Durham Light Infantry.

Date of Death: 1 October 1916, at the Battle of le Transloy, The Somme, France. His body never found. He was 32 years old.

Family: Son of Mr James Little, Cormiston, Biggar, Lanarkshire, Scotland.

### Obituary

Hamilton Advertiser 14.10.1916

*"Biggar*

*Died For His Country*

*Mr James Little, Townshead, has just had official notice that his son, Second Lieutenant William Little, Durham Light Infantry, has been killed on the 2nd inst. Lieut Little went through the Boer War, the "De Wet" rebellion, and on the outbreak of the present war he joined the Durham L.I. he was 32 years of age. He served his apprenticeship with the late William Haldane, coachbuilder here, and until his enlistment he carried on a successful business in South Africa".*

### Memorials



**Thiepval Memorial, France**

**Little's name is on: Pier and Face 14 A and 15 C**



The Biggar War Memorial, High Street, Biggar, Lanarkshire, Scotland



Biggar High School Roll of Honour



The Royal British Legion, where this author has lodged the following commemoration:

***First served with Southern Rhodesia Volunteers,  
then 1st Rhodesia Regiment, before enlisting with DLI.  
All Rhodesians remember your sacrifice.***

William Little appears on both the 1st Rhodesia Regiment medal roll and the Southern Rhodesia WW1 Roll of Honour. The latter shows W. Little as 1st Rhodesia Regiment and Durham Light Infantry, killed in action in France on 1 October 1916.

Little is listed on the *Roll of Persons who left Southern Rhodesia for Active Service*, giving the 1st Rhodesia Regiment as his unit.

The London Gazette of 11 October 1915, lists William Little receiving his commission into the Durham Light Infantry, with the rank of second lieutenant.

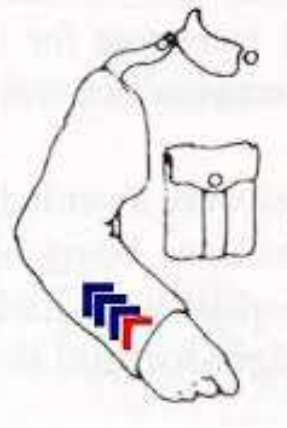
### **Medals and Awards**

1. World War I trio
2. Red Chevron
3. Mention in Despatches
4. Southern Rhodesia Volunteers Shooting Medal



**1. Left to right: 1914-15 Star, issued by South Africa; British War Medal; Victory Medal**





2. The award of a Red Chevron acknowledged any service prior to 31 December 1914. The rest of their service would lead to Blue Chevrons.

A man who arrived in German South West Africa with the 1st Rhodesia Regiment in December 1914, would have been entitled to a Red Chevron, and those who were reinforcements in 1915, would only have received a Blue Chevron. So if a member of the initial party had transferred to one of the British regiments (as many did) in France, and had served out the war in France with that unit, he would have been entitled to one Red (1914) and four Blue Chevrons: 1915, 1916, 1917, and 1918, thus receiving the maximum of five chevrons.

Red chevrons were therefore rare to Southern Rhodesians.

3. Second Supplement to The London Gazette of Tuesday, the 2nd of January 1917:

*THURSDAY, 4 JANUARY, 1917*

*War Office,*

*2nd January, 1917.*

*The following despatch has been received by the Secretary of State for War from General Sir Douglas Haig, G.C.B., Commander-in- Chief of the British Armies in France: —*

*General Headquarters, 13th November 1916.*

*Sir,*

*I have the honour to submit a list of names of those officers, ladies, non-commissioned officers and men, serving, or who have served, under my command, whose distinguished and gallant services and devotion to duty I consider deserving of special mention.*

*I have the honour to be,*

*Sir,*

*Your obedient Servant,*

*D. HAIG,*

*General.*

*Commander-in-Chief,*

*The British Armies in France.*

**DURHAM LIGHT INFANTRY.**

Bradford, Lt. (temp. Lt.-Col.) R. B., M.C.

Irvine, Maj. (temp. Lt.-Col.) A. E.

Clark, No. 10535 Serjt. J.

Mason, No. 11007 Serjt. (acting Co. Serjt.-Maj.) W. C.

Parker, No. 3/12021 Serjt. J.

Milne, No. 3/11913 Corpl. J.

Greenwell, Capt. (temp. Maj.) C. O., Spec. Res.

Spence, Lt.-Col. G. O.

Meek, Lt. (temp. Capt.) E. A.

Robson, Lt. W. H.

Green, 2nd Lt. H.

Marston, No. 1053 Serjt. A. J. F.

Dobson, No. 1359 Serjt. W.

Little, 2nd Lt. W. (killed).

Hope, Qrmr. and Hon. Lt. W. M.

Macintyre, Lt. (temp. Capt.) R. G.

Mottram, No. 2365 Serjt. S.

Down, No. 2141 Lce.-Serjt. J.

Lee, No. 2628 Corpl. J.



Mention in Despatches, 1914-1919

The device of bronze oak leaves denoting a Mention in Despatches during the First World War, is worn on the riband of the Victory Medal

Name	Corps	Rank	Regt. No.
LITTLE William	6 <sup>th</sup> Durh L.I. (T.F.)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lieut	

Medal	Roll	Page	Remarks
VICTORY	D.L.I. off 120	210	Decd 1. 10. 16
BRITISH			14x/6624 dt 22/2/23. NW/6/24329
'15 STAR	EMBLEM issued Aug S. Africa		enclg Mini 8 NW/6/24329
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

NW/6/24329 K. 1580

**Correspondence**

Facts - J. Little, Esq.  
 Address: Cornerton,  
 Biggar,  
 Lanarkshire.

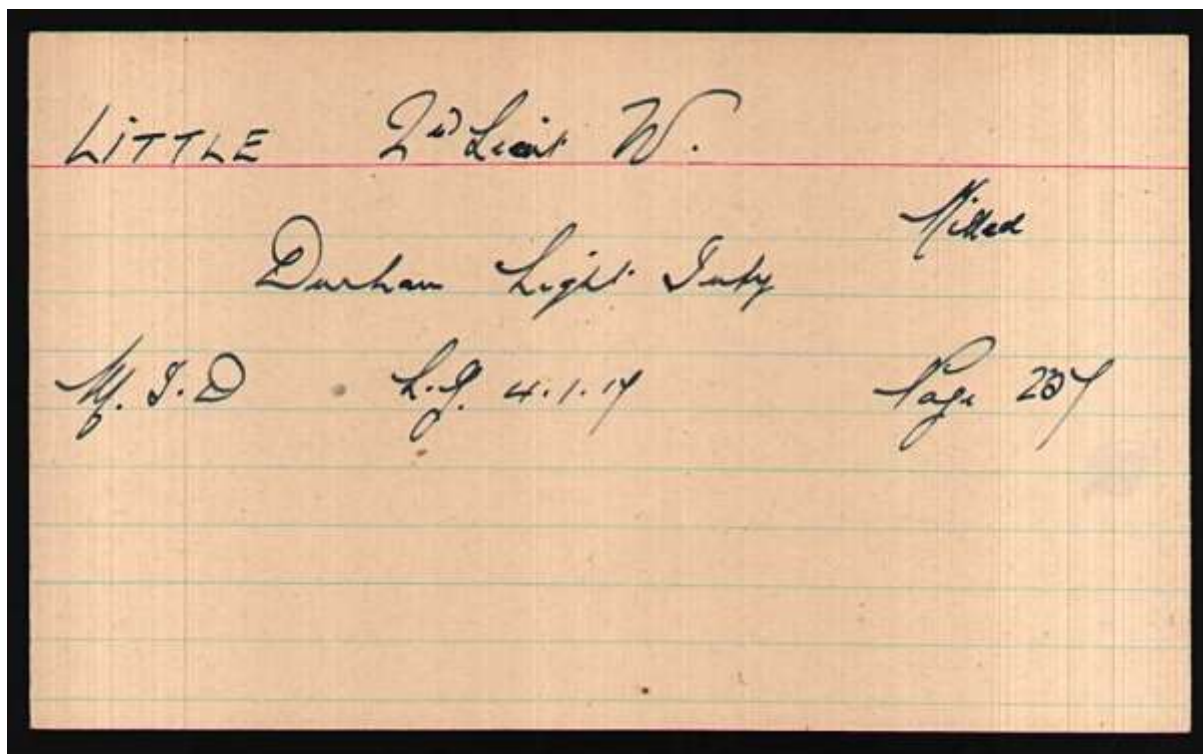
10/2/23

(1875) W. WINDHURST 1,000m 12M I.P.W. E 8251.

Medal Index Card

Due to the fact that 1RR were on garrison duty prior to being deployed to German South West Africa, the South African authorities were responsible for the issue of the 1914-15 Star. Upon joining the DLI, this then became the responsibility of Britain.





Service card showing Mention in Despatches award

No.	Corps	Name	
	DURHAM L I	LITTLE W	
		2nd Lt	
	Operations	Vol.	Page
	LGS		
	4.1.17	29890	237

File Nos.:—

7669/4676L D0688264 50M 10/79 TP Gp 3628/2

Further documentation for the Mention in Despatches award



4. Southern Rhodesia Volunteers Shooting Medal, awarded to Sgt W. Little in July 1908. The Stirling silver medal was struck in Birmingham in 1904 by silversmith Robert Chandler. The 'BYO' mark below the suspender stands for Bulawayo.



## **6th Battalion Durham Light Infantry**



The 6th Battalion Durham Light Infantry, when deployed to the Western Front in France, was attached to the 151st (Durham Light Infantry) Brigade, 50th (Northumbrian) Division. The Division's general officer commanding (GOC) was Major-General Sir Percival S. Wilkinson, a post he held from August 1915 to February 1918. (It is interesting to note that the Division's first General Officer Commanding was Lieutenant-General Sir Robert Baden-Powell, the 'father' of the Rhodesia Regiment.) The Division formed part of III Corps (Lieutenant-General William Pulteney), IV Army (Lieutenant-General Henry Rawlinson)

17 April 1915: landed at Boulogne.

14 May 1915: became 151st Brigade in 50th (Northumbrian) Division.

3 June 1915: after taking heavy casualties, 1/6th and 1/8th Battalions merged to form 6/8th Battalion.

15 July 1918: with major losses, reduced to cadre strength and transferred to Lines of Communication.

16 August 1918: transferred to 117th Brigade in 39th Division.

6 November 1918: disbanded in France.

### **Killed in Action**

On 10 August, 1916, the 6th Battalion, Durham Light Infantry (DLI) entrained at Godewaersvelde, a village near the Belgian border, about 16 kilometres southwest of Ieper (Ypres) and, detraining at Candas, marched to Gézaincourt, where they spent four days resting. The 15th, 16th and 17th were spent in marching through Vignacourt and Ovillers. It was about this time that the Battalion began to wear the cloth red diamonds, which came to be regarded with almost as much pride as the cap badge, and continued to be worn as long as the Battalion existed as a unit in France.

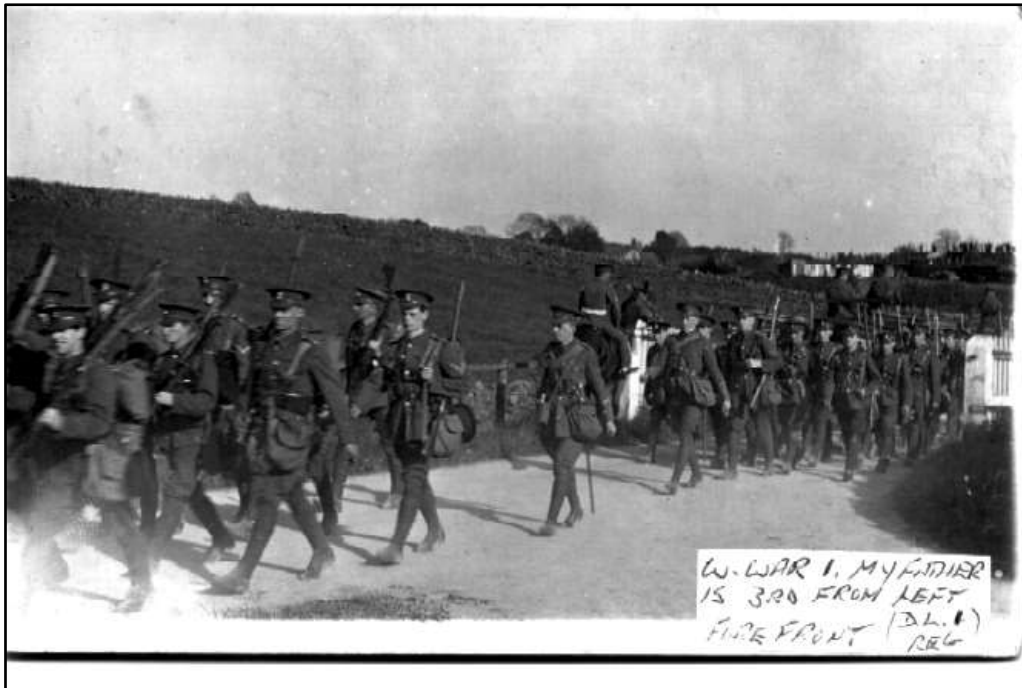
On 6 September, Brigadier-General N.J.G. Cameron took over command of the Brigade. Four days later, the Battalion moved to bivouacs in Bécourt Wood, and there the final preparations were made for action. Then, amid the growing violence of the artillery preparation, it moved again on 14 September to Shelter Wood.

Zero for the second phase of the Somme battle was 0620 hours on 15 September. The 149th and 150th Infantry Brigades were then in the front line between High Wood and Martinpuich, with the 151st Brigade in reserve.



**British troops at Martinpuich, Battle of the Somme; the very same scene that met Little when he arrived here in mid-September 1916**

At zero, the Battalion moved from Shelter Wood, by way of Sausage Valley, to an old German trench at the southwest corner of Mametz Wood. About noon, a further forward advance was made: 'Y' and 'Z' Companies to the northern edge of the wood, and 'W' and 'X' Companies to a position a little further forward, between Mametz and Bazentin-le-Petit Woods. So far, the Battalion had escaped shellfire, and the men were very interested in prisoners who were being escorted to the rear. At about 1100 hours, a message was received that the 47th Division had failed to take High Wood, and that the two Brigades of the 50th Division had secured their objectives. Later came a message that the 47th Division had taken High Wood at their second attempt. Rations arrived about 1700 hours, and whilst they were being distributed, Lieutenant-Colonel Jeffreys returned from Brigade Headquarters with orders to move up at once.



**Elements of the Durham Light Infantry on the move**

By this time, the area was full of movement. Guns, ammunition, ration wagons, and troops were everywhere, moving up after the advance. After a conference at Brigade Headquarters, orders were again issued for a move, and at about 2100 hours, the Battalion, in fours, led by the commanding officer and a guide from the Northumberland Fusiliers, moved from the Quarry with orders to attack from Eye and Clark's trenches at 2130. The attack was to be made in four waves, with the 9th Durham Light Infantry, who had been in position on the right all that afternoon, the 6th in the centre, and the 5th Border Regiment on the left.

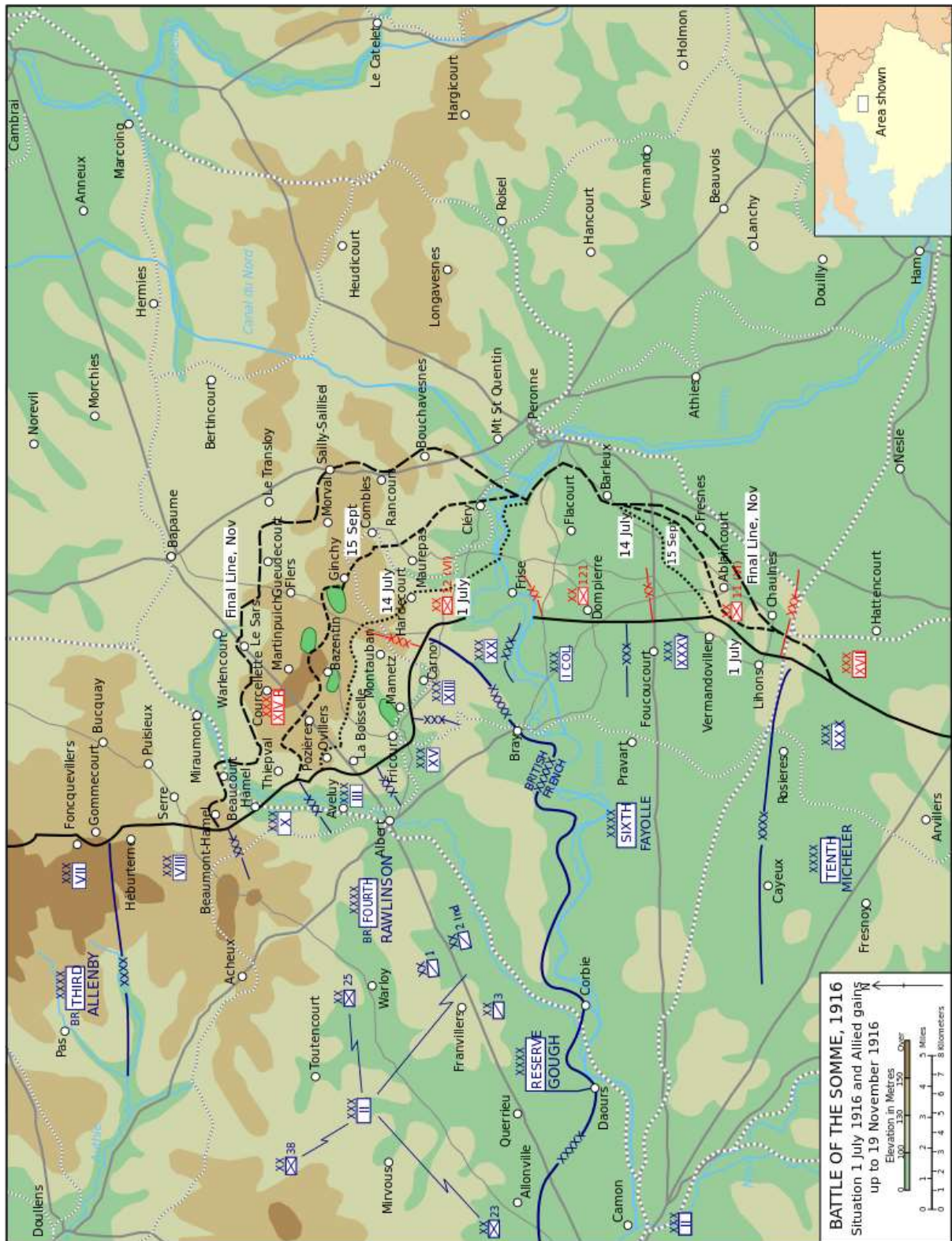


**A Durham Light Infantry forward post on The Somme, with telescope and signalling equipment**



Unfortunately, the guide lost his way, and after unnecessary wandering, the head of the Battalion arrived in Clark's trench, at the junction with Bethel Sap, at 2115. After considerable difficulty, owing to ignorance of the ground, the companies got into position: 'W' Company, under Captain J. Cook, was on the left of the first wave, and 'X' Company, under Captain W.F.E. Badcock, on the right. 'Z' (left) and 'Y' (right) companies were in support.

Just as they got into Clark's trench, Second Lieutenant Annett, commanding 'Y' Company, was killed, and Second Lieutenant B.J. Harvey, though wounded, took command. At the time appointed for the attack, the 5th Border Regiment could not be located, so the 6th and 9th Durham Light Infantry, after waiting about an hour, advanced. Crossing Hook trench, which had been the enemy frontline in the morning, and was now held by remnants of the 149th Brigade, they moved down the slope towards Starfish and Prue trenches, the first objective. They were met by a certain amount of machine-gun and rifle fire, and had a few casualties, including Captain Badcock, who was wounded. The 6th Battalion continued to advance, however, until completely checked by machine-gun fire, and then took cover in ditches and shell holes.



**Battle of The Somme: July–November 1916**  
 Rawlinson's IV Army was headquartered at Albert, with III Corps just to the northeast

It was then discovered that there was a considerable gap on the right, but by moving men in that direction, contact was regained with the 9th Battalion. At about 0330 on the 16th, the commanding officer took up 'Z' Company to reinforce the frontline. The 5th Border Regiment also moved up at the same time. The whole line was then pushed forward and straightened. Battalion Headquarters remained in Clark's trench. Accordingly, the Battalion paraded and marched up the road to the Quarry at Bazentin-le-Petit.

Further orders were received to attack again at 0915, but they never reached the companies, and nothing happened. Things were fairly quiet during the day, and at night a shallow communication trench was dug over the ridge, and attempts made to improve the forward positions. Efforts were also made to collect the Battalion into companies. However, on the 17th, the only parties under the control of Headquarters were half of 'SV' Company, under Captain Cook, part of 'X' Company, under Lieutenant Harris, a platoon of 'Z' Company, under Lieutenant W.B. Hansell, and 'Y' Company, in reserve in a sunken road, under Second Lieutenants McVicker and Richardson. It was known that other isolated groups were in positions in the front line. One of these was organized for defence under orders of Private B. McLinden of 'X' Company, who subsequently received the Military Medal.



**The horrific devastation that was The Somme**

The chief obstacle to a further advance was an enemy strongpoint called the Crescent. Accordingly, a party was organized to attack it, consisting of two bombing squads, one each from the 6th and 8th Battalions under Second Lieutenant J.F.G. Aubin, now Brigade Bombing Officer. Leaving by way of Crescent Alley at 1800, they met with considerable shellfire and were disorganized. Re-forming, however, they went out again with the same result. The shelling proved to be the preliminary to an attack on the 150th Brigade, which was beaten off, 'Y' Company being used to assist their neighbours with Lewis guns.

The following day (18th) was misty, and it was thought that the Germans were evacuating Starfish trench. An attack was therefore ordered to occupy it. This attack was made by the 6th Battalion on the left, and the 9th on the right, each providing 100 men.



**Second Lieutenant William Little**, with fifty men of 'W' Company, composed the Battalion's frontline, and **Second Lieutenant William Ferrier Charlton**, with fifty of 'Z' Company, the supporting line. A few men of other companies were also mixed in with these two lines.

Shortly after starting, they came under heavy machine-gun fire, taking a number of casualties, including **Second Lieutenant Charlton**, who was killed. Some of the party returned to their line during the day and others that night. All who had been near the enemy trench reported it to be strongly held.

During the morning, 'Y' Company was sent up to relieve 'W', 'X' and 'Z' companies in the frontline. Owing to the trenches being very muddy after rain, and at all places very shallow, this was a difficult operation. To add to the difficulty, the 8th Battalion began to arrive to relieve the Battalion before the company relief was complete, however, they at last got out and moved back to 6th Avenue East and the intermediate line, where two days were spent in cleaning up. Here **Lieutenant Ebsworth** rejoined as Adjutant, and the officers and men who had been left at the transport lines came up.



**Over the top!**

On 20 September, the Battalion moved farther back to shelter in Mametz Wood, where a draft of fifty men from the 2/6th Battalion, Essex Regiment, joined. After four days' rest, it again went forward to the intermediate line. The same day, **Major Wilkinson** of the 149th Machine-Gun Company, joined as second-in-command. The following night, the whole Battalion turned out to dig a jumping-off trench. **Lieutenant-Colonel Jeffreys** took them as far as the Battalion Headquarters of the 5th Durham Light Infantry, from where **Lieutenant**

Ebsworth and a guide led them to the position. The guide lost his way, and after wandering about nearly all night, the Battalion returned without doing any work.

On 26 September Lieutenant-Colonel Jeffreys left the Battalion to for England for three months' rest, and Major Wilkinson took over command. The following day, a move was made to Hook trench, where the men lived in small shelters and provided working parties at nights. This trench was on the skyline, and as a result received considerable attention from the German gunners. To prevent casualties, and also to provide more room, two companies were pushed forward on the 28th to Starfish trench. From these positions, in the afternoon, the Battalion relieved the 9th Battalion in the frontline. The relief was observed by the enemy, and the communication trench shelled.

The disposition of Companies was, from right to left: 'Y', 'Z', 'W', 'X', each company having two platoons in the frontline (North Durham Street), and two platoons in the support line (South Durham Street). At night they occupied battle positions, and extended the trench they occupied by 150 to 800 yards. The 9th Battalion was in support in Crescent Alley. On the left was the 5th Border Regiment, and on the right the 47th Division, but it was not possible to communicate with the flanks during the night.

By dawn, all preparations, including the alteration of watches to wintertime, were completed for the attack, which had been ordered for 1 October. The preliminary bombardment commenced at 0700, and continued until zero (0815), when it changed to a barrage. Unfortunately, there were some casualties from shells falling short: the total casualties for the day being about forty, including the commanding officer, who was wounded. Lieutenant-Colonel Roland Boys Bradford (24), now commanding the 9th Battalion, asked for and was given permission to take command of 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion also. For his subsequent work that day, was awarded the Victoria Cross.

He arrived at Battalion Headquarters at zero, and at once went up to the front line. The attack commenced at 2015 but, partly on account of the failure of the 47th Division on the right, and partly owing to the wire not being properly cut, the attackers were held up by machine-gun fire, resulting in heavy casualties being sustained.

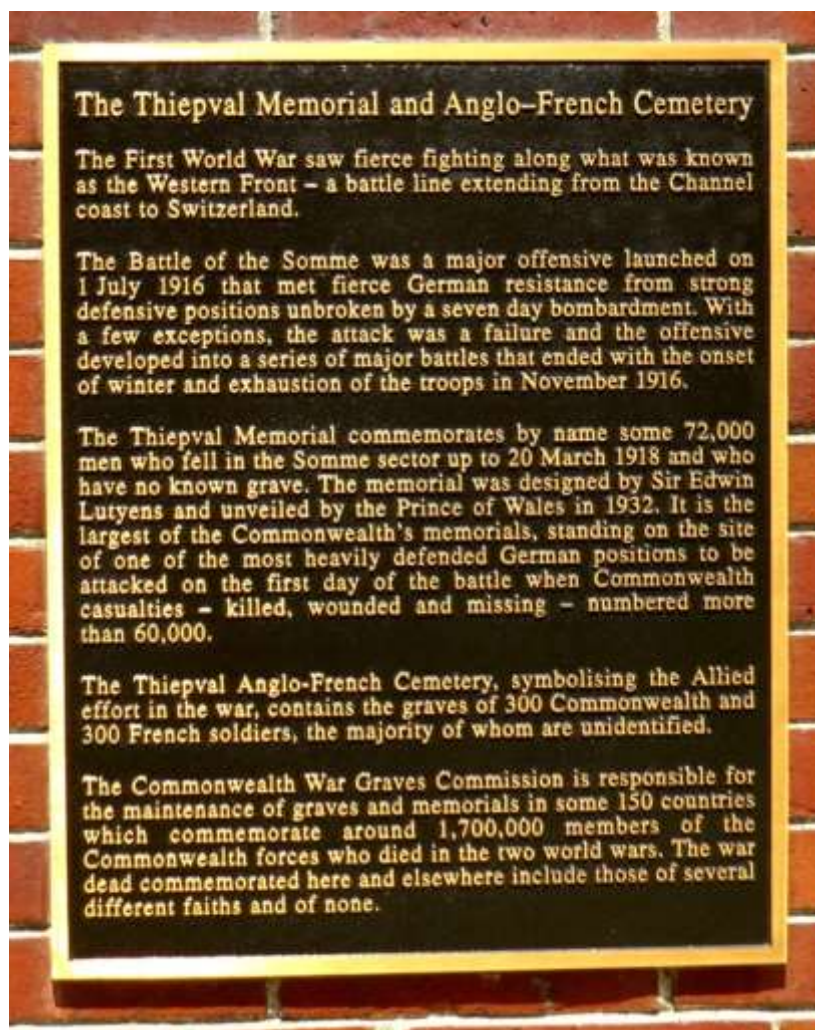


**Lewis machine-gun team**

After considerable fighting with bombs and rifles, three Lewis-gun teams of 'X' Company, under **Second Lieutenant W. Little** and Second Lieutenant C. L. Tyerman, and one team of 'W' Company under Second Lieutenant Barnett, succeeded in getting a footing in the first objective. These organized the position and carried on bombing attacks, but in the action, **Second Lieutenant Little** was killed.

During these operations Lieutenant-Colonel Bradford arrived on the scene, and immediately took charge of the situation. Under his direction and leadership, the whole of the first objective was gained. A Company of the 9th Battalion then came up, and using the new position as a starting point, advanced and took the final objective after dark.

Lieutenant-Colonel Roland Boys Bradford, also a recipient of the Military Cross, (he had been promoted to the rank of brigadier-general, the youngest general officer in the British army of modern times, and the youngest promoted professionally; earlier young generals were simply due to position) was himself killed in action on 30 November 1917. One of four brothers, Roland's brothers, Lieutenant Commander George Bradford was also awarded the Victoria Cross, Captain Thomas Bradford the Distinguished Service Order, and Lieutenant James Bradford the Military Cross.





I acknowledge, with grateful thanks, invaluable assistance given during this search by Ralph McLean, of the South Africa War Graves Project, Peter Silk, and Craig Fourie. As always, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission was a reliable source of information.

This document is not for publication.



*G.R. van Tonder*

*Copy Editing, Proofreading and Research Services*

47 Hollis Street, Alvaston, Derby, DE24 8QW, UK

e-mail [g.van-tonder@sky.com](mailto:g.van-tonder@sky.com)

Website 'The Rhodesian Soldier' <http://www.rhodesiansoldier.com/home.html>

March 2015