

# World War One

## The war to end all wars

### 1914 - 1918

## This is the story of William Bullas's War.

He felt the warm sun on his face, he could not see for a few minutes, his eyes needed to get accustomed to the light now he was 'back up on top'. Hankie in hand, he wiped the sweat and grime from his face, another shift as an underground loader down the mine was over, at least for another day!

Back home Emma had been cleaning and washing all day long but now she was making sure that there was hot water for her Tom and their lads ready for when they came back home from the pit.

Out on the back yard they chatted and washed the grime from their own and each others bodies, laughing and having the crack with each other.

Sunny summer evenings meant a night out for a pint with his mates to wash down the coal dust; maybe a night at the local flapping track to bet on the dogs or maybe to meet up with his lass?

Simple days, hardest of work but William didn't know anything any different, and at least he was working so money worries were few, although at 21 he tipped up his wages to his mum who then gave him spends.

Happy summer days and long warm evenings, and all was well in the world, or was it?

Thousands of miles away a string on events were unfolding. And all was not well with the world.

Little did they know that these events over the next few years was going to change their lives forever, and things were never, ever, going to be the same again.....

**Pte William Bullas  
of Chapel Street,  
Whittington Moor, Chesterfield, Derbyshire.**

Contents:

<b><i>Background and History .....</i></b>	<b><i>3</i></b>
<b><i>In 1914 William was 21 when he joined the 10th Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters. Is current occupation had been as a miner at Holmewood Colliery. 4</i></b>	
<b><i>William was born in Dudley 4th Feb 1893 - Died Ypres Belgium 16th Feb 1916 4</i></b>	
<b><i>[3] Extract from the war diary of the 10th Battalion of the Nottingham Sherwood Foresters. ....</i></b>	<b><i>5</i></b>
<b><i>February 14th 1916 .....</i></b>	<b><i>6</i></b>
<b><i>Taken Prisoner .....</i></b>	<b><i>7</i></b>
<b><i>William's Grave is in the Communal Cemetery of Menin (Now - Menen) which at the time of his death was held by the Germans. He was wounded and was a prisoner of war. ....</i></b>	<b><i>8</i></b>
<b><i>Enemy diversionary attacks around the Ypres Salient: the Bluff, .....</i></b>	<b><i>11</i></b>
<b><i>14 February - 2 March 1916.....</i></b>	<b><i>11</i></b>
<b><i>Map showing the Comines Canal, Trench 31 and the Bluff and the German line.....</i></b>	<b><i>12</i></b>
<b><i>Sources.....</i></b>	<b><i>13</i></b>

## Background and History

1900 - Out of work miner, Thomas Bullas with his wife Emma (nee' Bowman) took a brave step when they decided to uproot their family of three boys and four girls to take them from their home in Dudley, where their families had lived for many generations, to bring them to Chesterfield Derbyshire where they had been told a new pit had been sunk. Bond's Maine.

What a massive step that must have been, leaving the emotional support of their families behind.

I calculate that the family made, what must have been an epic journey north, at that time of day, between March 1900 and April 1901. Youngest daughter Ethel had been born in Dudley in the March of 1900. However by the 1901 Census, the Bullas family are found living at Carlisle Street in Whittington, Chesterfield and Thomas is a miner!

\*\*\*\*\*

August 1914 saw the outbreak of 'The Great War' [WW1]. Walter and younger brother William, both miners met the call of Lord Kitchener whose famous poster encouraged the men to join up.

\*\*\*\*\*



Soldiers Wages

Men with no Children 12 Shillings and sixpence Men with four children 22 shillings and sixpence

**In 1914 William was 21 when he joined the 10th Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters. His current occupation had been as a miner at Holmewood Colliery.**

His wage going to war as a single man would have been just 12 shillings and sixpence.

The Battalion was formed in September of 1914 and was finally sent to France on the 15th of July 1915 following extensive training after joining the 51st Brigade of the 17th Division.

It was destined to take an active part in the war. [1]



**William was born in Dudley 4th Feb 1893 - Died Ypres Belgium 16th Feb 1916**

[2] William's little sister Clara just six years younger often spoke fondly on 'their' Billie to her own Son and Grandson. She told them that she was very close to him as he always looked after her, stuck up for her if ever she was in trouble at home. Clara was to call her own son and only child, William.

The following account was recalled to me by Clara's Grandson Michael Shipley.

By the time her Billie went to war, Clara had married Wilfred Shipley and he was in the same Battalion as Billie and was possible the last person the see him alive.

When Wilf next saw Clara, he told her about the last time he had seen him. William was a machine gunner and that he had seen him holding the gun which would normally have been on a tripod, and firing, he had been surrounded by Germans. There was no sign of his ammunition bearer who when the gun was on it's tripod would have fed the ammunition.

### **[3] Extract from the war diary of the 10th Battalion of the Nottingham Sherwood Foresters.**

*The 1st January 1916 found the Battalion in a rest camp at Ouderdom and on this day the Battalion managed to partake of a New Years dinner, and as Christmas day had been spent in the trenches, this meal went fully to the satisfaction of all ranks. The 3rd January saw the Battalion again marching to the Ypres Ramparts where they relieved the 9th Northumberland Fusiliers and on the 4th they relieved the 7th Lincolnshire Regiment in the trenches. As both Battalions knew these particular trenches rather well the relief was completed fairly easily and quickly. During that night the enemy kept up persistent sniping both with rifle and machine gun fire, but sent up fewer flares. During the following morning the enemy were very active with trench mortars, but their ranging was bad and no damage was done. It was felt that the enemy troops could well have been a fresh unit feeling their feet. On the 6th January the Battalion was relieved by the 12th Royal Fusiliers (24th Division), which relief was completed by 5pm and they marched back to a rest camp for the night.*

*At 5.30 am on the 7th January the Battalion paraded and marched to Quentin, near Poperinghe, where they entrained for St Omer, arriving there at 1.50 pm. From here the Battalion marched to billets at or in the vicinity of Houlle. There was now a period of rest and re training in bombing, signaling, sniping etc. was carried out, many Officers and Other Ranks being sent to Brigade Schools for this purpose.*

*The 51st Brigade marched past General Sir Herbert Plumer K.C.B., G.C.M.G., on the 18th, along the Calais Road in column of route. The 10th Battalion was in the rear of the Brigade followed by the Transport, and it rained somewhat spoiling the occasion. However, the march past was reported as being satisfactory. Training continued in the Houlle area until the 4th February and on the 5th February orders were received that the 17th Division were to relieve the 3rd Division in the trenches in the Bluff" and Hill 60 sector. The 6th February saw the movement of "A" Coy and "C" Coy both of which had been placed under Brigade orders. A" Coy left St Omer by train at 5.30 am and detrained at Godewaersvelde, from where they marched to Poperinghe and on into reserve dugouts near the Canal. "C" Coy left Andruieq at 2.59 am and detrained at Poperinghe from where it marched to camp "A" at Ouderdom, then the same day joining "A" Coy in reserve dugouts. A proportion of machine gunners, snipers and bombers also left from Andruicq that day (7.59 am), detraining at Poperinghe, then onwards by bus to join "A" and "C" company's in the reserve dugouts.*

*The remainder of the Battalion entrained at St Omer at 5.39 am, on the 8th February following the route Godeswaersvelde, Poperinghe, Camp "A" Ouderdom. However this camp had been taken over by another Battalion and the 10th had to march on to Camp "B" which was not reached until*

dusk. Capt H Carpenter rejoined the Battalion here on the 12th having come over from England, however, his stay was a short one for he left on the 14th to join the 12th Battalion.

"B" and "D" Company's marched up to the trenches on the night of the 13th February to relieve the 7th Lincolnshire Regiment. "B" Coy took over trench 29, Crater and Supports, whilst "D" Coy took trench 32 and Supports. Battalion HQ was in dugouts on the North side of Canal Bank. All four companies were now occupying the front line and support trenches and there was no Battalion reserve. On the Right of the Battalion were the Lancashire Fusiliers and on the Left were the South Staffordshire Regiment.

### **February 14th 1916**

The 10th Battalion was now in the trenches immediately north of the Ypres - Comines Canal. The spoil from the digging of this canal had been heaped up on either side, which over the years had been covered with a layer of thin pine woods. A great mound of spoil, rising far above the level of the rest was known as the "Bluff". To the south east of the side facing the enemy it presented a very stiff and steep face, to the north west it sloped away more gradually to form the long drawn out heap known as "Spoil Bank". The face towards the enemy was full of snipers posts which completely overlooked the German front line trenches running almost at the foot of the "Bluff". From the top of the "Bluff" it was possible to obtain a very extensive view to the rear looking over the British lines and on a clear day points up to 12 miles away could be identified. There was a low ridge running away in a north easterly direction from the "Bluff", and the Battalions front trenches were about 100 yards over the crest of this ridge. On the crest and the Westerly side were to be found the support lines and also reserve wood. This latter was in fact a tangled mass of undergrowth and tree stumps about 200 yards wide. At about 8.30 am on the 14th February the enemy commenced an intermittent bombardment with trench mortars, rifle grenades, and a few artillery shells all of which appeared to be a registering exercise. This was shown to be a correct assumption when at 330pm a terrific bombardment on the front line and support trenches commenced. The next 24 hours were to test the fighting qualities of the Battalion most severely. The bombardment continued for about two hours and was most serious and effective. All telephone communication with the front trenches was cut, and the retaliation called for from the Divisional artillery was inadequate as they had only just completed a relief and had not yet registered on the enemy.

At approximately 5.40 pm a mine was exploded directly under trench 31, at that time occupied by "C" Company, which unfortunately caused many casualties. This mine explosion signaled the lifting of the bombardment which was now directed to reserve wood. The Germans, preceded by a large number of Bombers, jumped into the front line trenches as the guns lifted, and must have been well across 'No Mans Land before it did so. Finding little or no resistance in the front lines the enemy advanced both over the open

*ground and down the communication trenches, however, they were held by our troops in the support trenches.*

*Several immediate counter-attacks by our bombers under Lieut T.W. Daniel, ably assisted by the bombers of the Lincolnshire Regiment under Lieut Jones, were made but unfortunately without success and Lieut Daniel was wounded. A Company of the 7th Border Regiment (later to be changed to the whole Battalion) and two Company's of the 7th Lincolnshires reinforced the line about 7 pm, with a view to a counter-attack. However no impression could be made and the enemy had evidently managed to establish his newly gained ground. Captain J.W. Fisher carried out some magnificent work over on the left flank in command of "D" Company and totally denied the enemy any access to Reserve Wood, Capt Fisher was later to be awarded the D.S.O. for this work.*

*During the 15th February the Battalion was relieved by the 7th East York's, half the men in the morning and the remainder in the evening, the Battalion retiring to reserve dugouts. A counter-attack to be made by the 7th Lincolnshire's, with bombers, had been ordered for 9pm. The 10th Battalion supplied a party consisting of Lieut T.W. Daniel and 8 bombers with a carrying party of 30 men, the whole coming under the orders of the C.O. 7th Lincolns. Every effort was made during this counter-attack but it proved to be as unsuccessful as the previous.*

*It was now possible to ascertain the full extent of the casualties suffered over the last few days for the first time. The list was a heavy one and amounted to 16 Officers and 334 Other Ranks, this was broken down as follows:-*

<i>Other Ranks</i>	
<i>Killed</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Missing</i>	<i>163</i>
<i>Wounded</i>	<i>148 (including 31 at duty)</i>

William was one of the missing.

### **Taken Prisoner**

He was taken prisoner on the 14th of February 1916 when there was an attack on the trenches a he was then taken behind enemy lines to Menin where he died from his wounds one or two days later on the 16th of February 1916.

**\*\*Menin was never occupied by the allies and was a German garrison.**

Therefore when buried he was taken to the local 'Menin Communal' cemetery and was buried there.

Quite a dark and bleak place and William was the first war grave in there. He was alone until he was joined by a second body in June 1916.

American and Canadian's joined him and there is a row of (11) graves..



**William's Grave is in the Communal Cemetery of Menin (Now - Menen) which at the time of his death was held by the Germans. He was wounded and was a prisoner of war.**

Thomas and Emmie (Emma) and the family were informed by telegram.

[4] His loss was recorded in the Derbyshire times [ref DT May 16th 1916 - page 8]

### **Whittington Moor Soldier's Death**

Mr & Mrs T Bullas, 81 King Street, Whittington Moor have received official notification of the death in France (*of course this was incorrect*) of their son, Pte William Bullas, Sherwood Foresters. It will be remembered he was reported missing on February 14th last, when a large number of his battalion met their deaths or were wounded. It now transpires that he was wounded on that date and death ensued a few days later. (Actually 2 day later) The deceased was 23 years of age and was formerly employed at Holmewood.

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Approach to Menen  
Communal Cemetery, Belgium



Dark and dingie cemetery.  
William's Grave farrest away.



Left to right: William's ID tag - Dead Man's Penny sent to all families of the fallen. Theatre of war medals - Brass 1914 Christmas present sent out to all the soldiers from Princess Mary. Williams Grave Stone.

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Below is an article from the Long Trail

**re the**

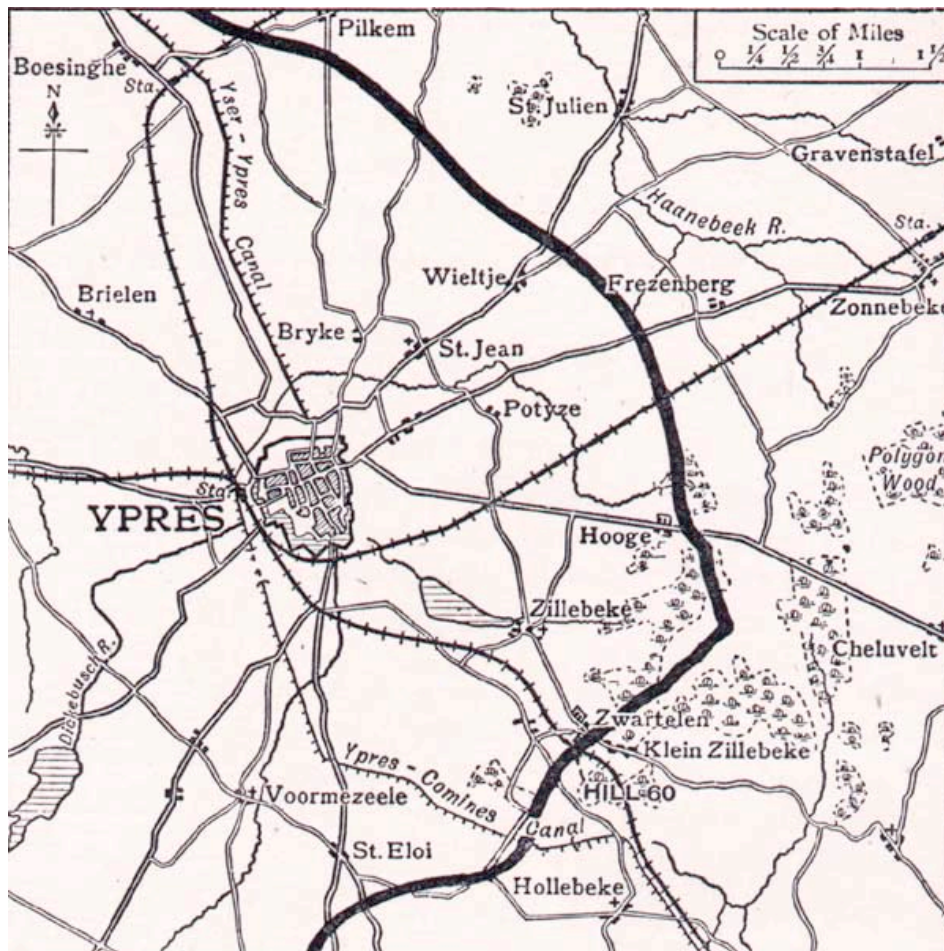
**14th February 1916**

<http://www.1914-1918.net/bat14.htm#bluff>

### Enemy diversionary attacks around the Ypres Salient: the Bluff, 14 February - 2 March 1916

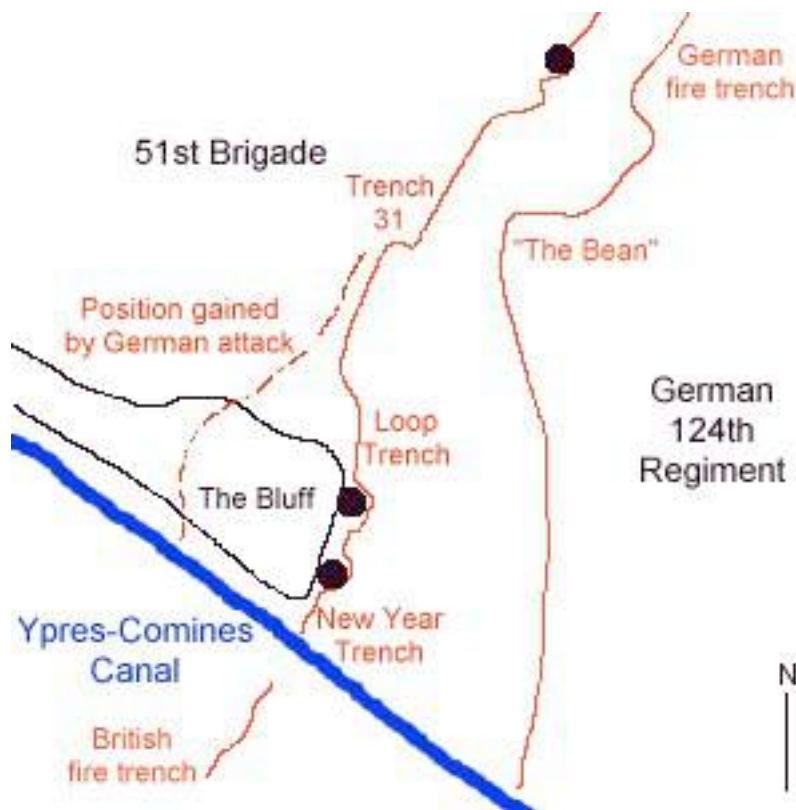
[5] The Ypres-Comines canal, running south east from the town, cut through the front lines about 3 miles from the Cloth Hall. This was the position at the end of the First Battle of Ypres and it was much the same by 1916, the Second Battle having not altered things. Facing the British, the village of Hollebeke; on the left was the hotly-contested ground of Hill 60 and Zwarteleen, and on the right the hotspot at St Eloi. On the northern embankment of the canal, a curious mound - a spoil-heap, created when the canal was excavated - gave the British front an unusual observation advantage over the enemy. If the enemy held it, the view across the rear areas of the Salient to Hill 60, towards Ypres and down to Voormezele would have made the Salient very difficult to hold. The position just had to be held.

The German front line fire trench lay some 200 yards ahead of this feature, which the British called the *Bluff*, and the Germans the *Grosse, or Kanal, Bastion*. British trenches ran around the forward base of the Bluff, snaking around the front of the lips of a number of mine craters that had been blown here in October and November 1915 and in January 1916. Communication trenches ran back over the Bluff itself. The canal cutting was steep sided, and over 100 yards wide. The trenches continued on the other side, with only a single plank bridge connecting the two banks.



17th (Northern) Division had moved to relieve 3rd Division in the canal sector between 5 and 8 February 1916, and placed 51st Brigade on a 1300 yard front at the Bluff position. It was also responsible for the south bank and had 52nd Brigade there. Enemy shellfire began to fall on both brigade fronts in the morning of 14 February, intensifying on the Bluff from mid afternoon. (The enemy was also shelling 24th Division at Hooze at this time). British artillery began to retaliate and the infantry at the Bluff stood by to meet an anticipated attack. All telephone wires were cut by the shelling, which severely affected the ability of units in the front line to call for support. German tunnellers blew three small mines at 5.45pm, one under the Bluff (which buried a platoon of the 10/Lancashire Fusiliers sheltering in an old tunnel) and two slightly further north, under the 10/Sherwood Foresters. Shortly afterwards, German infantry attacked between the canal bank and the Ravine. They entered and captured the front line trenches but were driven out of the support lines behind the front. Small local efforts to counter attack over the next two days failed. The all-important Bluff position had been lost, and it would take more than localised efforts to regain it.

The operations in the area of the Bluff from the start of the enemy attack to noon on 17 February cost the British 1,294 casualties.



**Map showing the Comines Canal, Trench 31 and the Bluff and the German line.**

Dena Fanshawe nee' Bullas Great Niece of Pte William Bullas .

**Sources.**

[1] Extract from - The History of the 10th Battalion 1914 - 1918 by C Hously.

[2] Family Stories

[3] War diary supplied by the Sherwood Foresters

Derbyshire Times May 1916

[5] Website - The Long Trail - Enemy diversionary attacks around the Ypres

Salient: the Bluff, [5] 14 February - 2 March 1916

See also Walter's story.

Brother Walter signed up to the 'Cold Stream Guards' on the 13th of November two days before the birth of my father, Thomas on the 15th Nov' 1914. He was Walter and Eliza's (nee' Ellis) fourth child.