

# The Opening and Closing Shots



## WFA Tayside Tour 4 – 10 June 2019

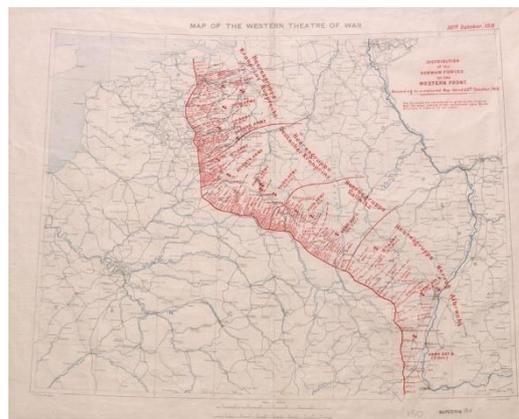
### Introduction

The 2019 WFA Tayside tour to the Western Front takes a look at the less visited and less examined parts of the British and Empire campaign that took place at the beginning and end of the Great War. First, the period before both sides went to ground in the trenches in September 1914, and second the final months when troops left the trenches behind and stormed the German positions in the “100 days” push to victory and on to the armistice in November 1918.

This was open country warfare where even the cavalry had a part to play. In 1914 the 250,000 strong, professional army of the BEF faced a new form of warfare. In 1918 after years of attritional trench warfare the battle hardened, combined arms force of almost three million fought the Germans to a standstill before hurling them back and onto surrender.

The Great Retreat refers to the period when the BEF retreated before a much bigger German army, names like Mons, Le Cateau, the Aisne and the Marne bear witness to that time. After the French victory on the Marne the Germans dug in and the Western Front’s trenches came into being. The Retreat was itself a feat of arms but a great cost, largely seeing the end of Britain’s professional soldiery. It’s also said that Germany lost the war in September 1914, but it took another three years of trench warfare for them to be convinced! It’s a fascinating story to follow, but a less-well known path for most visitors.

Following the final German onslaught in the spring of 1918, Foch devised a plan of constant, largescale attacks all along the allied front beginning in July on the Marne. At Amiens and attack in what Ludendorff calls “the black day of the German Army”, allied troops excelled themselves. The old Somme battlefields were recaptured. Attacks in Flanders followed and the Second Battle of Arras saw the fortified Drocourt-Queant line broken, paving the way in September and October when the fearsome Hindenburg Line is breached with huge advances. The allies prove to be a formidable combined arms force. All the infantry lessons learned in previous bloody battles, logistics, tanks, air power, and artillery all working together in the most powerful force ever assembled.



Final advances across the Sambre and Selle rivers and the Sambre Canal lead to the Germans suing for peace in November by which time the British have arrived back in Mons, where it all started for them four years before.

## The Tour

We will be based in Arras, ideally centrally located for our tour, and itself a BEF centre during the war and site of a major battle in 1917.

### DAY 1

Leave Dundee and head for Hull ferry port and the ferry to Zeebrugge in Belgium. Dinner and Breakfast on board are included.

### DAY 2

Arriving in Zeebrugge, our tour will visit the area around Mons where the BEF first encountered the German army; the site of the war's first VC's; St Symphorien cemetery where the first and last deaths of the war are buried. Le Cateau is the site of major holding attack by the BEF during the Great retreat. Then on to the Moderne hotel in Arras for four nights.



### DAY 3

After visiting the centre of beautiful Amiens and its magnificent cathedral, we will follow the war of movement from the Battle of Amiens where the Germans were pushed back in the first genuine all-arms attack more than 7 miles on the first day – one of the biggest advances of the war. Villers-Bretonneux was the location of the first tank-on-tank battle. The crossing of the St Quentin canal and the breaking of the Hindenburg Line was a pivotal event of 1918; the Ricqueval Bridge is the site of a daring *coup de main* crossing by allied engineers who secured the bridge from demolition; the nearby Bellecourt Canal Tunnel is a fascinating site too. We will also visit the excellent Peronne museum – the Historial de la Grande Guerre.



### DAY 4

As today is our drivers mandatory rest day, we will remain in Arras, an ideal shopping location with restaurants and bars, and two spectacular squares. Arras was also the scene of an enormous battle in 1917 and was on the northern sector of 'Operation Michael' in March 1918. On two short, optional, walks we will explore the Carriere Wellington (Quarries), a huge complex of medieval caves that were used to house allied troops prior to the battle. A second short walk will take us on a visit to the Faubourg d'Amiens CWGC cemetery, site of the Air Services Memorial, a memorial to the missing and of course the graves tell their own stories which we will explore. Both walks will be led and guided. The rest of the day will be yours to enjoy Arras, don't miss the Grande Place! A feasible alternative to the Arras day could be a visit to Paris which is a short



one hour train ride away. The station is two minutes from our hotel, trains are frequent and fast, the TGV takes about 50 minutes. Tickets available at the station.

## DAY 5

Tanks played a major part in the later part of the war and today we will visit “Deborah” in her spectacular new home in Flesquieres on the Cambrai battlefield. Travelling to Ors and Sambre Canal where the poet Wilfrid Owen was killed leading his men over the canal during the attack that breached one of the German final lines of defence. We will return via the town of Le Quesnoy, heavily fortified by the Germans, but was taken in a spectacular siege in one of the last major actions of the war. Due to large numbers of civilians in the town, medieval methods of scaling and infiltration were used to penetrate the defences forcing a German withdrawal leaving the town largely intact.

## DAY 6

On our last day we head back to the coast, visiting the Indian Memorial and the Portuguese cemetery at Neuve Chappelle en route. No visit by the Tayside Branch would be complete without a visit to Black Watch corner, where we will hear of the Black Watch’s exploits in 1914, and a visit to the Scottish Memorial at Frezenburg. Heading into Ypres for lunch and a few hours free to explore the town, revisit old haunts or enjoy a drink in the Market Square, before heading to our overnight ferry back to Hull.



Pic: Nick Stone @typejuncky)

## Day 7

Departing the ferry at Hull, we head home to Dundee.

## COST

Per person sharing a room/ferry cabin will be £550.00. Single supplement is £200. On registering a non-returnable deposit of £100 per head is required. Dinner and breakfast on the ferry, and breakfast in the hotel is included.

NOTES: 1. Tour details, costs and daily itineraries may be subject to change. 2. We have been advised the ability of drivers to use UK licences in Europe has not yet been settled in Brexit negotiations. Participants will be advised of any implications as soon as we know them. 3. There will be some walking on this tour, but nothing too strenuous! However, please bring suitable footwear and be aware that daytime temperatures may be a fair bit higher than Scotland in June.

## CONTACT AND PAYMENT DETAILS

To register, please complete the application form, a version can be found on the Branch website, and send to Scott Galloway:-

Email: [scott@noble-scotland.co.uk](mailto:scott@noble-scotland.co.uk) or Mail: 6A St Andrew Street, Alyth. PH11 8AT

A non-refundable deposit of £100pp is due with your booking. Final payment is due 15<sup>th</sup> April 2019. Payments can be made by cheque to the above address (please make payable to “WFA Tayside”) or electronically to:-

A/C: 00269148 Sort code: 831838. Please ensure your name appears in the reference field.