

never passed any specific blame (Lloyd states: 'no damning judgement') on his shoulders; BUT the exoneration is particularly at HW's expense. I understand and appreciate Lloyd's argument in setting out his own research into the actual episode: indeed it is of great importance that the correct facts should be known (of any and every situation). But I cannot see how HW's account in *Fox* is 'inaccurate', nor why HW should take full blame for any supposed inaccuracy when so many *bona fide* research writers (mentioned by Lloyd in his text and notes) have apparently explicitly picked over the bones of the debacle and queried Holland's supposed order – but are not included in Lloyd's 'blame'.

Fox shows us what it was like at the Battle of Loos and particularly the attack on the Lone Tree entrenchment: we are transported into the battle itself. HW is portraying the scene as it would have happened at the time and the facts given are those that were known at the time. As far as I can ascertain there are no 'technical' inaccuracies. I am also convinced that a man of Spectre's character in the front line and under the circumstances given would react in the manner shown.

In fact the more one actually analyses how HW handled all the official information and wove it into his own tale, one can see how extraordinarily cleverly he manipulated it all and, as I have shown, he did actually pick up on the problems of the 'Lone Tree' attack being highlighted by Lloyd. It is all there if one looks for it and I am actually grateful to Lloyd for making the opportunity for this analysis.

That concludes the part of the action concerning Lone Tree, and thus my riposte to Nick Lloyd. I hope I haven't been too severe – but as far as I am concerned he did rather set himself up as an 'Aunt Sally'. But the Battle of Loos raged on for over another two weeks and HW follows this in *Fox* and so there are a few other points I want to cover while on this subject. The first is that of the absurd.

HW uses, in the good Shakespearean tradition of comic relief, to lighten the atmosphere and to impart information, the character of 'Twinkle' as Phillip's extraordinary batman. The importance of Twinkle to HW can be seen in an ms note written on the flyleaf of the *Official History* thus:

Twinkle drunk, "Their oficers looked a proper lot of twots, if yer understand my meaning, sir."

"They didn't understand much when I was with them certainly."

"Those poor sods, foot-slogging past – if you'll excuse my meaning, sir."

The two sides of Twinkle in juxtaposition. The old soldier, freed by drink: the old soldier cowed by discipline.

The interplay of P. a little drunk, also.

Twinkle tells P. about the "pass", see page 278.

And turning to page 278 in the *Official History* one finds information about advance of the General Reserve (a very critical and moot point – Sir John French held them back so they were not in position to support when urgently needed which was one of the main problems of the battle), relating the chaos on the road system for reserve troops marching up, troops going the wrong way: 'up' a road meant to have been marked 'down', etc. – delays of traffic at every crossroad – and problems at numerous level crossings due to supply trains. This is, of course, all in *Fox*. At the bottom of the same page in the *Official History* it relates an incident on the outskirts of Béthune where a military policeman stopped 72 Brigade because the Brigade commander had no pass to enter the area: Twinkle's tale retold to Phillip over the prunes and (er) 'cream'!

HW uses Twinkle, or Mad Jack the deserter as he turns out to be, apart from his comic relief aspect here, as a personification of that side of the war. He shows his sympathy for Twinkle's plight when Phillip learns, on his return to London (he leaves France on 13 October, the day of the final disastrous attack, as he has been posted to the Dichards as HW himself had been on 9 October 1915) where he meets his Aunt Dora so fortuitously, that 'No 431 Pte Nobbs, J.S., 1st Battn Essex Regt was shot as a deserter on 8 Oct. 1915.' Although the coincidence is a little artificial and rather too hard to swallow, it does tie up the loose end rather neatly. One does feel sorry for the old rogue, and particularly for his poor 90-year-old mother, Grannie Nobbs.

HW also uses the Battle of Loos to kill off Bertie Cakebread, based on his cousin Hubert Simpson. I have explained elsewhere¹⁷ that Bertie's role in the war seems to be entirely fictional and

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The two sides of Twinkle, in
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The interplay of P. a little
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Twinkle
tells P.
about the
pass;
see page
278.

HW ms note on flyleaf of Official History (Vol IV), enlarged $\times 2$.

Twinkle, drunk. "Their officers looked a proper lot of twots, if you understand my meaning, sir."
"They didn't understand much when I was with them certainly."

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The two sides of Twinkle, in juxtaposition. The old soldier freed by drink: the old soldier cowed by discipline.

The interplay of P. a little drunk, also.

Twinkle tells P. about the 'pass', see page 278 [i.e. Official History, re Brigade Commander who had NO pass.]

part of the battlefield could be overlooked from
 Maroc, a village inside the old front line, immediate
 and still there, for here the right flank
 of the attack had rested, on a long, grassy
 spur back the best part of a mile in length
 and forty feet high, extending into the German
 lines, and known as the Double Crassier.

"Pray you would be careful in Maroc, for
 men watch it, and these German still
 on the Crassier" said Twinkle. "Now don't
 be late tonight, and get on all main front,
 will you?"

"Twinkle, in the morning was his sister, crafty
 self, playing with pink and toothless gums,
 the fast of the larvae all grandad, but the
 world was that Twinkle had at least two husbands
 before, and the other in Normandy, who he was
 better in Mayaguez, for he showed regular
 with sandwiches & other things. This trade in horseflesh
 was prospering, and he made a bit each night
 as the Derr-lure with his the money-and-
 anchor board. He was a deserter since August
 1914, and had existed in and around
 large, routing, ants, beginning at Villeneuve
 outside Paris. He had attracted many of the vain
 work parties of new troops, and he had managed
 to get along the line by the side of the
 league, Abbeville. He had again with
 Rouen, and up the line again with
 new troops, attacking, where the great was
 in Mayaguez, he had called down
 as half a to act. Doolally Tap, or, the Doolally Tap.
 [Measurite]

Goldilocks had
 been!

like two sheep
 side by side,

twinkle
 was that he
 had seen the face before.
 This was Mad Jack, the
 the
 home deserter, a
 French year
 before, he had been
 living off the
 in the railway
 sidings at
 Villeneuve,
 with a sack
 of half beef
 as his "iron
 cabinet" and
 the alias
 of Mad
 Jack.
 "How
 about it?"

on his
 communication
 until the
 red dot
 arrived

had driven
 him
 away
 to

all right. He
 had in the district
 one in

A page of ms for A Fox Under My Cloak depicting 'Twinkle'.
 Written in black and red ink it shows HW's modus operandi.

no records have been found to support that Hubert Simpson was ever in the war. He appears to have married in 1909, and I can find no further records from that point. Hubert was certainly never engaged to the fair Doris Nicholson in real life!

In Fox (pp 363-4) Phillip meets up with Bertie Cakebread when he (Phillip) is leading a file of wounded men back to Le Rutoire farm, after having been involved in an attack with the Cantuellaunians (whom he had left in Newmarket just two weeks previously, and who quite miraculously appear here as the company struggling up as Support!) opposite Bois Carré, north of Lone Tree. As one can deduce, this scenario involving the Cantuellaunians at Loos would appear to be made up. There is no mention of 2/1st Cambridge being involved in the Battle of Loos in the *Official History*. HW was very subtly (or not!) scoring a point off them!

They are totally out of their depth and Phillip comes to their rescue and leads them to their recce point, but, overrun by the Germans, many are killed or wounded. However, the Germans magnanimously allow Phillip to take the wounded back to the British lines at Le Rutoire. Also returning are many 'stragglers'. They meet a small group of officers of the Guards, marching proudly and smartly forward towards the Lone Tree, who shout to the stragglers to turn round 'You damned cowards', and one officer cracks his whip at two of these men, wounding them across the face. Phillip recognises one of these officers as Hubert Cakebread. Bertie, obviously thinking Phillip is one of the 'cowardly stragglers,' tells Phillip rather sharply to join him, and so he turns round and once more is heading towards Lone Tree. After a while, once Phillip has explained the situation, Bertie dismisses him and while he continues on to his attack, Phillip goes back to Le Rutoire alone.

The basis of this rather amazing scene did actually happen in real life and can be found in Feilding's 'War Letters'.¹⁸ On 26 September Feilding and fellow officers and men of the Coldstream Guards marched to Le Rutoire, and at dusk the next day were ordered to advance prior to an attack. Feilding wrote to his wife:

I met a stream of battle stragglers. Many were wounded, but with them there was also a liberal accompaniment of unwounded "friends" and others who obviously should not have been there. ... I called on them to turn, but they were in no mood for that: they were surely and sullenly bound for home. I had no time to waste, so left these men to the tender mercies of young Dermot Browne, who had just then walked up, and who began to deal with them very thoroughly, as they deserved, with a heavy hunting crop which he carried.

One point that strikes me is the almost casual way HW relates Bertie's death. Phillip learns of it quite by chance on the railway station at Béthune while waiting to board a train for the port and thence England and very briefly relates his thoughts on the train: 'Bertie, always so easy and smiling; he could not imagine Bertie dead'. Helena Rolls also is shown to have a very restrained reaction to her fiancé's death. This restraint is not just a feature of the novels: it is even more noticeable in real life – when Charlie Boon dies, there is very little mention of it in HW's letters and personal papers. [A tribute to Charlie Boon can be found on p 94.] Of course in real life Bertie had not been killed – so perhaps HW was unable to inject emotion into his description! But in fact there was so much death all around them that emotion was a luxury they could not afford. It was just something to be endured, and one had to get on with life regardless.

I want to return now to Douglas Bell, just to clarify his real role at the Battle of Loos as shown in his *Soldier's Diary*. As previously stated he was in 2nd Battn Camerons, who were one of the five battalions of the 1st Brigade (London Scottish, 8/Royal Berks, 1 Black Watch, 10 Gloucesters, 1 Camerons) of IV Corps who were detailed for an attack on 13 October 1915 along the Lens/La Bassée Road. (The Germans still held Lens and the road was of strategic importance as a supply route. See my sketch map on p 13.) Bell records that on 3rd October he had ridden up to Philosophie (*Soldier's Diary*, p 135) and I have picked out a few phrases to tell his story:

Riding ... in the rain and in a kilt, bare skin to the saddle, was no joke ... My kilt and waterproof rode up & my hose came down, so I exposed bare legs from thigh to ankle ... Eventually we reached the battered heaps of bricks that had been the hamlet of Philosophie. The spot was a desert; rubble and chalk and broken bricks, disembowelled mules, ... shell-holes filled with yellow water, stench, & silence. ...

... I was snowed under with detailed staff orders for an attack by the battalion, which I personally thought almost bound to fail ... I told the C.O. so. "I can't help it, my boy," said he, "they are divisional orders." ...

[To his frustration Bell was ordered to remain at the Company HQ back in the trench.]
Oct. 13: The attack is over: an utter failure. We were opposite a few mounds of rubble still known as the village of Hulluch close to the famous Hohenzollern Redoubt and when no reports came in I guessed things had miscarried and I pushed my way along the trench ... until I saw a heap of bodies ... a bomb shaped like a hairbrush came over the German barricade & fell hissing at my feet. I swung round on my heel & it exploded behind me, blowing me off my feet. The shock was so severe I thought I was done for ... but found I could crawl ...

[He then with great difficulty rallied the remaining men to mend the barricade]
I was feeling faint by this time, with my kilt in ribbons & my backside in a bloody mess ...

He was sent to the CCS (Casualty Clearing Station) at Lone Tree (HW's '1915 Notes' as printed in HWSJ 34 mention this CCS) but because there was no room for a stretcher in the narrow trenches, he had to walk, but they couldn't reach Lone Tree due to severe shelling and so he was left in the trench with some other wounded men. He lost consciousness and awoke to find the dugout dark and deserted. The other men had been collected up and he had been left for dead. By crawling he managed eventually to get to the CCS at Lone Tree, and from thence he was sent to hospital at Le Touquet on 17 October, where he was on the danger list for a fortnight before being sent back to England. He was later awarded the MC for his leadership that day – his diary entry about this is modest in the extreme: he presumes it was 'handed out with the rations'.

The *Official History* records that 1st Brigade were to capture the new German trench – 1400 yards – from west of Loos to opposite Hulluch. Bombardment and gas to be discharged prior – this of course let the Germans know, once again, that an attack was imminent, and again wire was not cut by the bombardment. Bombers, and their supply of grenades, were soon exhausted, suffered heavy casualties, counter attacked, and only the bravery of a few individuals kept the Germans at bay. Overall, the attack was a failure: the day's fighting cost the 1st Division 1200 casualties.

While recovering in England, Bell records that on 5 January 1916 he 'married Norah, a glad day'. He returned to France on 11 May (his twenty-sixth birthday) but was not directly involved in the first day of the Battle of the Somme. In August 1916 he transferred to the R.F.C. While in England he and his wife obviously conceived a child for he records on 5 April, 1917, back at the front and flying sorties, 'Dreadful news from home; wife very ill and baby dead' and has a few very anxious days before hearing on 9 April that Norah is out of danger. Luckily Bell did survive the war, and he and Norah went on to have other children as HW notes in his introduction to *A Soldier's Diary*:

Happily married, with a small but jolly family. More I will not say about him, except that he will probably reappear one day, as he was in 1914, in another book or books.

Dated 28 December 1928, the proposed *Chronicle*, as it was to be, was never far from his thoughts!

It may interest you to know that Douglas Bell wrote at least three other books: *Elizabethan Seaman*, – copy in HW's archive inscribed 'From the author to Henry Williamson, who is a master of English prose, in the hope that he will find herein some true and heart-stirring stories.' (Plus Bell's signature on the title page.) *Drake* (no copy in the archive), a biography, and *Drake was My Captain*.¹⁹ Bell appears to have been living in Devon at this period – which explains these titles!

Another point I want to cover concerns F.O.O.: I mentioned earlier that I would return to him. The credit for this part of the story must actually go to Ian Walker, who revealed this stunning information in a talk he gave at the Redhill meeting in November 2005, entitled 'The Literary Alchemy of the Battle of Loos' (reprinted here on pp 5-12). As Ian states, he had obtained a recent reprint of F.O.O.'s book *With the Guns*, where F.O.O. is revealed as Captain C.J.C. Street, OBE, MC, and he immediately made the connection between text in F.O.O.'s book and that in *Fox* relating to Phillip's foray onto Tower Bridge – those memorable towers on the southern outskirts of Loos marking the pit-head – after an intensive attack on 26 September (see map and illus. pp 13-15).

I had been aware that HW had used F.O.O.'s book and this escapade – indeed the book is full of markings by HW – but I had not realised exactly how closely the text in *Fox* follows that in *With the Guns*. I do not want to steal Ian's thunder – nor reiterate his own thoughts – but there are one or two points that illustrate this further that are in HW's archive copy.

You will recollect that Phillip, on 'light duties' for four days after the initial attack due to a whiff of gas, decides 'to take sandwiches and full water-bottle and watch the new attack from high ground. The Guards were going over sometime that day.' From Feilding's book, also a source of background information, this is recorded as at 4 pm on Monday 27 September. On the advice of Twinkle Phillip goes to Maroc (see the ms page on p 25) (where of course F.O.O. was actually positioned), but he decides Maroc is no good for such observation and continues on to Loos and thence to Tower Bridge itself. In F.O.O. an anonymous friend of the author (I personally feel that this is actually F.O.O. himself) makes his way to these towers and proceeds to climb them exactly as Phillip does in *Fox*. An ms note by HW at the beginning of this section in F.O.O. states: 'Phillip, visiting friend Bob in R.G.A., arrives just in time to accompany Bob over the village first then the pylons.' – an idea he obviously decided against later. As Phillip wends his way to Loos he notices 'two light-draught horses, their harness hanging awry' (*Fox*, p 374) – directly lifted from F.O.O. (p 120): 'Close by, two horses ... were quietly grazing on the rank grass that covered the fallow land, their broken harness still hanging on their backs ...'. Other details used by HW include the 'woolly bears' that keep bursting on the scaffolding. In fact I think the only original offering of HW for this scene is the swallow's nest that Phillip so poignantly finds – and which echoes, I am sure quite deliberately, his early stories about the lone swallows written so soon after the War had ended.

I am full of amazed admiration for the skill in which HW manipulates his material and convinces us that Phillip really did do all these things we read in his tale – and especially that someone did actually climb up those towers at this point, a pretty dangerous undertaking!

On the flyleaf of his copy of F.O.O. HW has written,

Loos 26 Feb 1954 Fox Cloak

Begin description of Part III as on p 62 & include Gerry Cakebread as gunner observer

"South of the battlefields known to ———"

Page 65 Plans known by German staff – prisoners

75 Black smoke tinged with pulverised pink dust of bricks

HW incorporated the information as noted in the pages above, but he obviously abandoned the idea of Gerry Cakebread's involvement at Loos, putting Bertie there instead.

To digress briefly to one other tiny point which I relate to my own schooldays: the *Official History*²⁰ notes in a paragraph just prior to the final action of this Battle on 13 October that on the previous day, 12 October, Miss Edith Cavell, the British nurse, had been executed in Brussels for helping British and French soldiers to escape. At both the boarding schools I went to I was, quite strangely, in Edith Cavell House; also living near Norwich I frequently stood before her memorial at the Cathedral – so her heroism was a blazing torch in my formative years. *STAND TO!* covered commemoration ceremonies in her honour. She was a lady who should indeed be saluted as a heroine.

My final words are by way of a tribute to all those men who took part in this battle, and for that I return once again to the *Official History* where, as I have already related once, it states that the offensive that began on 25 September 1915 'was undertaken on the order of Lord Kitchener in order to do our utmost to help France in their offensive, even though we may suffer heavy losses.' Casualties at Loos were indeed very heavy: from 25 September to 16 October they numbered 2,013 officers, 48,367 other ranks. Of these 800 officers and 15,000 other ranks were killed, or missing presumed killed. (The total losses for 1915 were 12,009 officers and 173,098 other ranks.)

The comment in the *Official History* states, one feels with some bitterness:

*Such was the tremendous sacrifice made by all ranks to support fully and loyally our French Ally, and the price paid in flesh and blood for unpreparedness for war.*²¹

But it wasn't just for the unpreparedness for war – it was the price they paid for the protection of their country and in the long run, for all of us. There was no winner of this Battle, although the British made a small gain. Summing up, the *Official History* says, in effect, that Command learnt a great deal from it: but so, of course, did the Germans.

Notes

1. Nick Lloyd, 'Command and Control in 1915 – the attack on Lone Tree, 25 September 1915', *STAND TO!* 74, Sept 2005, pp 5-10. There are several good IWM photographs, including one of Lone Tree.
2. Henry Williamson, *A Fox Under My Cloak*, Macdonald, 1955, 1985; Sutton Publishing, p/b 1996: vol. 5 of *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight*.
3. *History of the Great War, based on Official Documents, Military Operations, Belgium and France*, in several volumes, compiled by Brig.-Gen. Sir James E. Edmonds, Macmillan, over several years. Vol IV, *France and Belgium, 1915*. For background to the Battle of Loos, see pp 111-143.
4. F.O.O. *With the Guns*, Eveleigh Nash Co, 1916 – now known to be Capt. C.J.C. Street, OBE, MC, recent rep., Naval & Military Press.
5. Rowland Feilding, *War Letters to a Wife, 1915-19*, Medici Soc., 1929 (Lt-Col., DSO, Coldstream Guards, CO 6th Connaught Rangers & Civil Service Rifles). See p.17-18.
6. *Official History*, op cit, p 209 (interestingly NOT marked by HW).
7. HWSJ 34, HW, 'A Selection of Notes re 1914 and 1915' (facsimile), pp 17-23 – his notes for the Battle of Loos.
8. Anne Williamson, *A Patriot's Progress: Henry Williamson and the First World War*, Sutton Publishing, 1998 – see pp 56-58; reissued as *Henry Williamson and the First World War*, Suttons, p/b, 2004 – where see pp 69-72.
9. Info in K.W. Mitchinson, *Gentlemen and Officers – the History of the LRB, IWM*, 1995.
10. Anon (Capt. D.H. Bell), *A Soldier's Diary of the Great War*, long introduction by HW, Faber & Gwyer, 1929, (I understand recent rep. but I don't have the details).
11. See HW, *Fox*, p 244. Phillip goes to see Fairy 'one afternoon in the second week of September': twenty-four hours later he is en route for France.
12. For discussion about this character see Paul Reed, 'Henry Williamson and the Kaiserschlacht', HWSJ 18, pp 12-15: also Anne Williamson, 'Some thoughts on 'Spectre' West [etc]', HWSJ 34, Sept 1998, pp 86-88.
13. The extracts HW uses are taken from the *Official History*, op cit, p 171; and *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig 1914-19*, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1952, p 104, detailed in AW, *HW and First World War*, op cit.
14. See HW, *Fox*, pp 325-6.
15. See *Official History*, pp 216-17, 218, 220.
16. See *STAND TO!* Lloyd, op cit, p 8. I cannot personally decipher the signature on this message as 'Holland'. While it may have been the practice for officers to sign on behalf of the CO, Lloyd should have clarified this, as it is the main point of his argument. Also, the first word is surely, correctly, 'Sussex' (not 'Sussex's' as Lloyd reads it): some (small) text – unreadable by myself – has unfortunately been omitted from the transcript.
17. AW, *HW and First World War*, op cit, p. 186-7, note 5.
18. Feilding, *War Letters*, op cit, p 42.
19. Douglas Bell, *Elizabethan Seaman*, Longmans, 1936; *Drake*, Duckworth, 1935, Great Lives Series No 46, and *Drake was My Captain*, Fred. Warne, 1952.
20. *Official History*, op cit, p 380.
21. *Official History*, op cit, p 391.



Lens Monument: 'To Her Children'.