

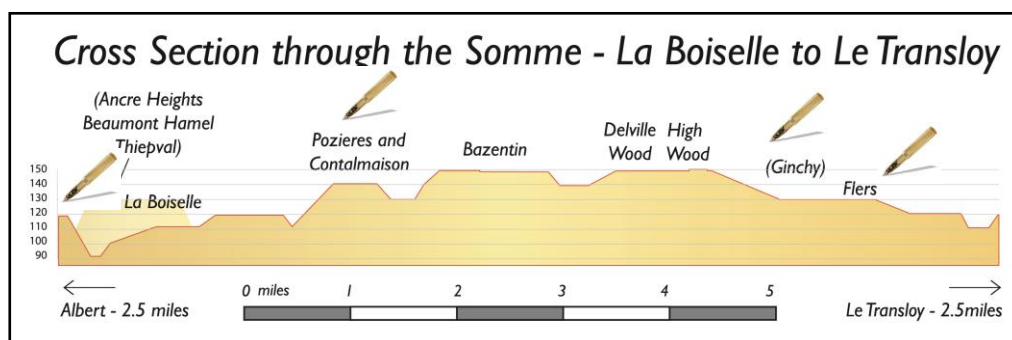
The Battles of the Somme, November 1916



Pte. F. Dee

One of the continuing limited operations took place on **5 November 1916**, when the *2nd Worcesters* carried out an attack on a sloping German position known as *Boritzka Trench* – in an effort once again to gain higher, drier ground before the final days of the campaign. The attack, however, took place during a thunderstorm, accompanied by lightning. The trench was, in fact, captured – but there were 200 casualties including **Pte. Fred Dee [V]** of the Berkeley Arms, who died of his wounds the next day. The *Register* merely reported “another *Tewkesburian* killed”.

At the time of this last death, however, Field Marshal Haig ordered that offensive operations should cease on 6 November, except for small attacks intended to improve positions and divert German attention from attacks being made by the French army.



Cross-Section through the Somme Battlefields [P. Finnigan & S. Eedle]

The attempt to capture strong-points on the *Ancre Heights* that had proved impossible earlier in the campaign was not called off and *Beaumont Hamel* was, at long last, captured. Nevertheless trenches had to be consolidated and the Germans were still using artillery. **Pte. L. Gurney [V]**, was “killed instantly by a shell whilst out with a party at night”. His body was – again – never recovered nor identified.

The last *Tewkesburian* to be killed in the campaign was a 40-year-old former Grammar School student and emigrant to Australia. **Pte. W. A. Gorton [V]** had served with the Australian Infantry in the *Gallipoli Campaign* and on the Somme at *Pozières* and *Flers*. **Pte. Gorton** was killed in action on 14 November but, again, his body was never recovered nor identified.

13 days after the decision to end the battle had been made, the Battles of the Somme petered out in mud and mutual exhaustion. It is said that every family in Britain had been affected by the Somme. I lost two great-uncles from Lincolnshire on 14 and 16 November.

To my own family, it seems such a waste – but was it in the national perspective? The **Battles of the Somme** had, therefore, petered out in atrocious, wintry conditions after 141 days of relentlessly intensive fighting. The British and French had advanced about 6 miles on the Somme, on a front of 16 miles at a cost of 419,654 British and 202,567 French casualties, against 465,181 German casualties.



Thiepval Memorial to the 72,195 Missing

At the time, when the towns of northern England especially were mourning the loss of so many “*Pals*” and “*Chums*” – and the small town of *Tewkesbury* had lost 30 - it must have seemed that the British had suffered a very serious defeat.

The Army, however, felt it was a victory – if a costly one. Attitudes later changed and, since the 1930s, it has been lambasted as a campaign of “*Lions led by Donkeys*”. Nevertheless, German losses could not be replaced and Britain was now conscripting millions. The Germans sacked their commander – we promoted ours. What we did not know is that on 5 September, during the victory at *Ginchy*, the German High Command had made the decision to retreat to a new defensive line well behind the Somme front - the ***Hindenburg Line***).

John Dixon. [For more information, see THS Publication 9, “*A Noble band of Heroes*”]