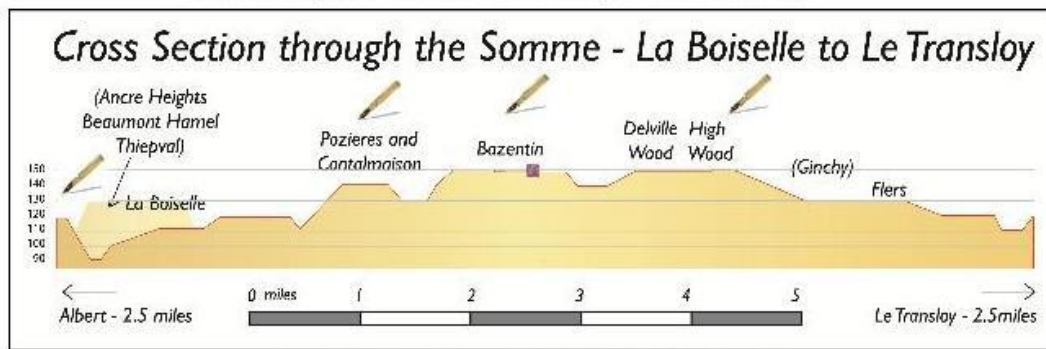


## The Battles of the Somme, July 1916



The Battle conjures up images of the 1 July - the “most disastrous day in the History of the British Army” with 57,470 casualties of which 19,240 were killed. The infamy lies in the fact that many of them were volunteers [V] in “Pals Battalions”, when friends joined up together - and then died together.

However, this was only the first of 141 days when a series of battles were fought uphill with the German defences dug into indestructible concrete defences at the top of the ridges. In July the ‘Tommies’ struggled from *Albert* to *High Wood* in **five** official battles, suffering **196,081 casualties including 12 Tewkesburians**.



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

No county battalions were involved in that first day but some local men were killed fighting for other battalions: **Rifleman John Walker [TA]**, a 41 year old with the *London Regiment* and **L/Cpl. G. M. Topham [V]** a former Grammar School boy serving with the *12<sup>th</sup> (Sheffield City) Battalion*. Like many he survived the first day but died later of wounds.

It was 3 July before the *8<sup>th</sup> Gloucesters* [V] reinforced a stalled attack, costing the lives of two of the first volunteers from the Watson Hall: friends **Ptes. L. Rossell** and **H.E. Rowley [V]**. Victory adjacent to the high village *Cantalmaison* took 12 gruelling days.

Land was gradually captured but losses occurred defending these successes: **Gunner W.A. Day [V]** was “blown up among the horses”. It was 19-20 July when the first local Territorial Battalion, *1<sup>st</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Glosters* moved into the attack but only at *La Boisselle*, which it failed to capture and “lost heavily” including **Sgt. Henry Cook [TA]**.

23 July 1916 was, however, the blackest day for Tewkesburians with 5 killed attacking well-defended high points. The *8<sup>th</sup> Glosters* had reached *High Wood* but lost the son of the Grammar School headmaster, **Lt. S. N. Priestley [TF]**. **Pte. P. C. Hawker [TF]** succumbed at *Delville Wood* while **Cpl. Austin C. Papps [TF]** (son of a leading shop owner) and **Pte. T. Parrott [TF]** were killed fighting for *Pozières Ridge*. There was nearby a concrete stronghold attacked by the *10<sup>th</sup> Gloucesters*, volunteers who had survived *Loos* in 1915; they lost **L/Cpl. A. E. Wilkes [V]**.

The end of the month saw the *8<sup>th</sup> Gloucesters* still in the thick of it, losing the grandfather-in-law of Cliff Burd, **Cpl. Joseph Walker [V]**, a week later on 30 July 1916.

**There were still 110 days to fight in the Battles of the Somme with our town losing 16 more of our Noble Band of Heroes.**

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