



WW1 CENTENARY

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Captain shot in the chest

In the latest of our ongoing series, **Richard Ault** looks at the exploits of Captain Guy Jukes Worthington at the Battle of Loos

IN THE aftermath of the attack Acting Captain Guy Jukes Worthington held close the Bible which had saved his life. He knew he should be dead.

But by some strange stroke of luck, or fate, he had survived where dozens of the men he led over the top had fallen and died.

The reason was simply the Bible – which had somehow stopped the bullet that would otherwise have killed him.

On October 13, 1915, Capt Worthington, a 29-year-old officer from Leek, was one of the first men to climb out onto the parapet to attack the German machine gun positions at the Hohenzollern Redoubt and Big Willie Trench.

As the leader of A Company, the first section of the 1st/5th Battalion of the North Staffordshire Regiment ordered to the attack, that was his responsibility – and he led bravely from the front.

Alongside him was Captain Reginald Tavenor Johnson, commander of B Company. At precisely 2.05pm the whistle sounded and the two officers climbed out of the crowded trench onto the parapet, waving their canes to encourage the men forward.

The whole line of A and B companies rose out of the trench and advanced. They were met by a hail of bullets.

Capt Worthington was shot in the thigh almost immediately and fell down, but got up straight away and, ignoring the pain, carried on – only to find there were no more than four or five men still standing near him. The rest had already fallen to the relentless onslaught of machine gun fire.

Across the open terrain they continued, until they reached a communication trench crossing diagonally over the open terrain.

The men jumped across it and lay down. By now they were the furthest party forward. No-one else was to be seen. They took cover, with a rush jumped down into the trench.

The trench they now sheltered in



The wounded are taken care of at triage in France.

was in fact a communication trench which had been dug by British troops during a brief occupation of the Hohenzollern Redoubt some days before. The trench was in fact connected to Big Willie Trench, one of the objectives on that fateful day.

Already sheltering in the communications trench were several men from bombing parties that had attacked with both the 1st/5th North Staffords, and the South Staffordshire Regiment, further down the line.

Pinned down by the enemy machine gun fire, and with the rush of adrenaline from the initial charge now fading, Capt Worthington winced at the pain in his chest.

He was stunned to find a bullet hole in the left breast of his tunic. In the pocket, was a small New Testament Bible, which had been issued to each of the troops.

Taking it out, he could see a bullet had struck the spine, ricocheting through it lengthwise and remaining embedded inside.

The Bible had saved his life.

His brother officer, Capt Johnson, commanding B Company, was not so fortunate. He had last been seen shouting, 'Come on B Company!', as the attack was launched.

Like Capt Worthington, he had fallen when a bullet struck his side. Unlike the A Company commander, Capt Johnson didn't get up again. He

was never seen alive again.

For Capt Worthington and the other men gathered in the narrow communications trench, there was no way to go further.

Behind them, C and D companies followed and now the deadly rattle of the German machine guns was trained on them. They met the same fate as A and B companies, and soon the numbers of men sheltering in the communications trench was swelled further.

Major Charles Barke was now the senior officer still alive in the position. Assessing the situation, he realised it would be suicidal to resume the attack over open ground. He decided the 1st/5th North

Staffords would remain in the trench.

Fighting continued over the next two hours. There were breakthroughs at different points along the line. Some men of the North Staffordshire Regiment did reach the Hohenzollern Redoubt and Big Willie.

But Capt Worthington and the rag-tag band of survivors could go no further.

By 4pm, the fighting was over. There was nothing to do but wait for darkness to fall, when the survivors could crawl back across No Man's Land to the safety of their own positions.

Roll call the next day was a tragic affair. Around 700 men had entered the line on the night of October 12, 1915, ready to take part in the attack. Barely 200 men marched out of the trenches when the battalion was relieved.

The 1st/5th Battalion of the North Staffordshire recruited from the Potteries, had suffered the heaviest casualties of all the units which made up the 46th (North Midland) Division.

Capt Worthington was born in Leek in 1886, and according to the 1891 census, was raised in Haregate, the son of well-to-do silk manufacturer Ernest Worthington and his wife Margaret. In 1891, the five-year-old Guy Jukes was living with his parents, older sister Margaret, then aged seven, and younger siblings Geveneth, aged two, and one-year-old Roger.

The family also shared their home with six servants, including a nurse and a nurse maid, who presumably helped to raise the children.

Guy Jukes had joined the Territorial Army long before the war. He had been commissioned to the rank of lieutenant in 1909.

When war was declared, he immediately reported to his battalion. He was one of the officers with the men when they first entered the war, in March, 1915, landing at Le Havre.

He had survived the battalion's first experiences in the trenches at Wulverghem, where

at points in the line the British trenches were just a few yards away from the Germans. The main



Lucky to be alive, Guy kept his 'talisman' with him for the rest of the Great War

THE story of Captain Worthington and the Bible which certainly saved his life was uncovered by historians Lee Dent and Richard Pursehouse, of the Chase Project.

The military researchers came across the story of an officer's pocket Bible stopping a bullet while researching the role played by the North Staffordshire Regiment during the Battle of Loos.

Intrigued, they contacted Jeff Elson, who heads the research team at the Staffordshire Regimental Museum

and asked him if he knew what happened to the Bible.

Mr Elson, a former Staffordshire Regiment soldier, checked the inventory and found the museum possessed the Bible itself. He provided photographs of the Bible, of Captain Worthington himself and information from the Regimental War Diary and archives.

Mr Dent and Mr Pursehouse found information in the battalion war diary, which described Capt Worthington's role in the charge,

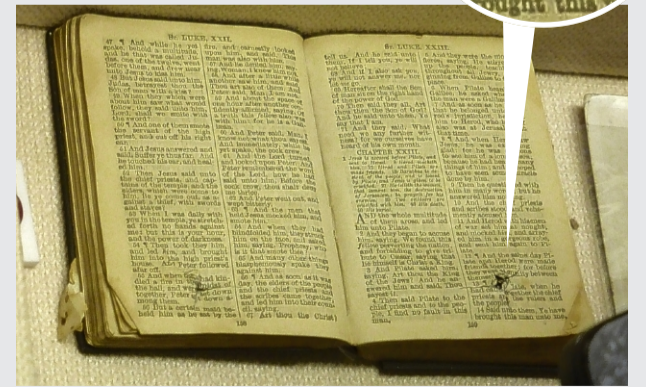
how he was struck by a bullet in the thigh, but got up immediately and made it to the communication trench.

It was there he discovered the small New Testament Bible with a bullet trapped in the spine.

Mr Pursehouse, aged 52, of Cannock, said: "This area of France has been described as, 'The Corpse Fields of Loos', in which the 1st/5th Battalion, 'was all but decimated', as the Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel described the costly, failed attacks.

"There were nearly 4,000 British casualties that day; over 700 men of the 1st/5th Battalion had marched into the trenches, barely 200 survived unscathed. Over 300 men from the 1st/6th North Staffords were also casualties.

"Captain Worthington was one of the lucky ones and kept his talisman with him for the rest of the Great War. "One hundred years after the attack at Loos, his Bible can be viewed at the Staffordshire Regimental Museum near Lichfield."



DID YOU KNOW?

The Battle of Loos was the first time gas was used by the British during the First World War.

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