

# BLOOD, SWEAT

## Hunt for a lost mural depicting Tommies brewing



**Sunday Mercury** 



### Cruise the Glorious Rhine

**On board welcoming Olympia**  
6 days from £659.00, 17 June 2016

Majestic Cologne and the picture-book villages of the Middle Rhine.

#### Highlights & inclusions

- Embark in Andernach and disembark in Cologne
- Walking tour of Boppard
- Calls at Boppard, Rudesheim, Mainz, Koblenz and Cologne
- On-board entertainment and English commentary
- Escorted by a friendly, experienced cruise manager
- Five nights' full board accommodation on board Olympia
- Coach travel from the local area and Channel crossings

\*Book by 29 Feb. Includes unlimited draught beer, house wine, soft drinks, breakfast, lunch, dinner, afternoon tea & cakes. May be withdrawn any time.

Call **0330 160 7727**   
Visit [www.newmarket.travel/bpm16476](http://www.newmarket.travel/bpm16476)

These holidays are organised & operated by Newmarket Promotions Ltd. ABTA V787X. Subject to availability. Single supplements apply. Standard phone charges. 

#### MIKE LOCKLEY

Staff Reporter  
[mike.lockley@trinitymirror.com](mailto:mike.lockley@trinitymirror.com)

**T**WO historians are searching for a lost 69-foot mural created by the men of the Staffordshire regiments to commemorate their part in the Great War.

Lee Dent and Richard Pursehouse, of First World War group The Chase Project, believe the huge canvas is still out there – and hope a Mercury reader has information that may solve the puzzle.

Richard, from Cannock, said: “It would be a tragedy if it’s been destroyed. I believe it’s been folded-up and put away somewhere.

“The regimental museum knows nothing about it and the last known sighting was 25 years ago.”

The striking canvas consists of 11 panels.

Richard said: “The canvas was first displayed in 1929 at the 10th annual regimental reunion dinner at The Grand Hotel, Hanley.

“According to one eye-witness it was last seen during a reunion at Fallings Park, Wolverhampton, in the 1990s.”

It is Panel 7 that Lee and Richard are particularly interested in. That commemorates the regiment’s involvement in the Battle of the Somme, widely regarded as this country’s greatest military disasters.

Richard believes the panel is highly significant. “That this episode in the regiment’s histories was proudly – defiantly – incorporated in the design says much about what the men and officers thought of the events of July 1, 1916. It is also a swipe at the army’s commander in chief, General Haig, who had the audacity to question the fighting spirit of some of the troops who faced machine gun fire.

“He questioned if the 46th (North Midland) Division ‘lacked offensive spirit’

“A quick count of the number of graves of



■ German barbed wire at Mametz

fallen North and South Staffords men – many not identified by name – at Commonwealth War Graves Cemeteries or on name plaques for the two regiments on the Thiepval Memorial to the missing is enough to dispel any such misconception.

Panel 7 is entitled ‘Gommecourt’ and shows two Tommies brewing-up in a trench.

It is a scene that flies in the face of the horror that erupted on July 1, 1916 – a day that saw the British Army lose 20,000 men. Almost 40,000 were wounded or never seen again.

Never before, or since, has the army endured such a mass loss of life in one day.

Yet the men of the North and South Staffords had been assured it would be a walkover, quite literally, a stroll to broken German positions that had been pounded by a week-long artillery barrage.

The 1st South Staffords were given a crucial part in the attack at Mametz in the Somme’s southern sector.

Yet not even the commanding officers of the North and South Staffords were told their

attack on the village of Gommecourt, in the north, was a mere diversion, intended to draw German forces away from the real battle in the south.

The “big push” was originally planned for June 29 but torrential rain pushed back the offensive – and condemned the enemy to two more days of heavy shelling.

At Gommecourt, the North and South Staffords’ trenches were only 250 yards from German positions.

“Zero hour” was to be 7.30am and an hour before the British artillery barrage intensified, with smoke candles and smoke bombs flung into the fray to mask the advance.

However, at the centre of No Man’s Land the pall of smoke cleared, making men involved in the first wave sitting ducks for the German machine guns.

The 1/5th North and 1/5th South Staffords were to follow the first advance, with 80 yards separating each wave.

The North and South Staffords – part of the 18,000 strong 46th (North Midland) Division