**MMTCC TOUR TO THE BATTLEFIELDS OF FRANCE AND BELGIUM JULY 2022**

**IN AID OF THE MMTCC REPAIRS FUND**

**Sunday July 10th – Thursday July 14th 2022**

To raise fundsfor the Club’s Repairs fund, I am planning to take a trip to the Battlefield sites of France and Belgium in early July 2022. I’m delighted to report that Alan Reed, a friend of mine with whom I’ve written four books about the Great War, has offered his services as our guide, free of charge. He is one of the best guides in the business having taken countless trips to the Western Front his knowledge of which is second to none, in great part due to the fact that his father worked for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission all his life. I would like to think that between us we will offer an excellent 5 days, exploring the extraordinary and moving history and landscape of the ‘War to end all Wars’.

We will travel by coach from Moreton Morrell staying two nights in Arras, France at the Holiday Inn Express and two nights in Ypres, Belgium at the Novotel. The itinerary will be:

**DAY 1**: Sunday July 10th

Leave Moreton Morrell 7.00 a.m. Pick up others from M25 Service Stations. Take the ferry

from Dover to Calais. Visit the superb Canadian Memorial on Vimy Ridge en route to the

beautiful city of Arras.

**DAY 2**: Monday July 11th

The day will be spent in the **Somme** visiting various locations on the front line of 1st July 1916, the worst day in British military history when in a few hours there were 58,000 casualties including 19,000 deaths. We look at why it was such a disaster, whether it could have been avoided and whether it was a case of ‘Lions being led by Donkeys’. Many personal stories of derring-do and courage emphasise the horrific nature of the day. The sheer enormity of the losses is extraordinary.

We start at Mansell Copse from where the Devonshire Regiment attacked and we then visit

* The Lochnagar Crater- reckoned to be the largest British man-made crater in the world
* The imposing Lutyens-designed Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme on the walls of which there are 72,000 names of those with no known grave. We’ll mention some of those recorded
* Lunch at Le Tommy Cafe in Pozieres, an integral part of a trip to the Somme!
* Martinsart Cemetery where composer and gold medallist F.S. Kelly is buried. It is an unusual looking cemetery as the gravestones are of an experimental red hue rather than the commonly used white Portland stone
* The Ulster Tower Memorial to the 36th Ulster Division and Mill Road Cemetery located in the middle of No Man’s Land
* Newfoundland Memorial Park which commemorates 700 Newfoundlander casualties on 1st July 1916 where some of the original trenches are still visible
* The Sunken Lane – famous for a film taken by Geoffrey Malins of the Lancashire Fusiliers about to go ‘over the top’ at 7.30 a.m. on 1st July
* Serre Road Cemetery No.2 the largest in the Somme with 7,000 burials. We will explore the sector of the front line from where the Royal Warwicks battalions attacked with huge losses

Return to the hotel and the bright lights of Arras

**DAY 3**: Tuesday July 12th

* On our way to Belgium and Ypres we will visit the Faubourg d’Amiens Memorial in Arras where the mixed race footballer and officer Walter Tull is commemorated and there is a memorial to the Royal Flying Corps
* Rue des Berceaux Cemetery where one of the greatest but little known lawn tennis player is buried. He also played ‘jeu de paume’!
* Neuve Chapelle – the wonderful Indian Memorial to 4,700 Indians with no known grave who fell in 1915 designed by Sir Herbert Baker
* Lunch at L’Auberge in Belgium near ‘Plugstreet Wood’
* Ploegsteert Memorial- one of the most beautiful memorial designs on the Western Front and Hyde Park Corner cemetery where an England Rugby captain and a 16 year old are buried
* We will go on a walk following the route of the Royal Warwicks to the Christmas Truce site where they fraternised with the 134th Saxons. We will examine my grandfather’s account of the iconic event at the exact spot near the village of St. Yves and investigate whether or not there was a game of football played in No Man’s Land on Christmas Day 1914.
* Arrive Ypres, visit St. George’s Church and the Menin Gate Memorial, designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield, commemorating the 54,000 British soldiers who fought and died in the Ypres Salient with no known grave. Then free to wander round the beautifully restored Ypres which was destroyed during the War and was painstakingly re-built in the 1920s
* No trip to Ypres is complete without attending the Last Post ceremony at the Menin Gate at 20.00 hours

First of two nights at the Novotel in Ypres

**DAY 4**: Wednesday July 13th: To be spent in the **Ypres Salient**

* Essex Farm Cemetery: site of a former Advanced Dressing Station where the Canadian military doctor John MacCrae wrote the poem ‘In Flanders Fields’ which inspired the use of the Poppy as a symbol of remembrance and where the 15 year old Joe Strudwick is buried
* The Aristocrats’ Plot in Zillebeke Churchyard where 14 officers of aristocratic descent are buried including Avenel St. George who played American squash and real tennis at Moreton Morrell. His mother, Evelyn, from an immensely wealthy American family, commissioned a wonderful stained glass window in his memory
* Hill 60- two of the Messines Ridge mine craters
* Lunch at Sanctuary Wood where there is an intact British trench system
* Passchendaele Memorial Museum: probably the best on the Western Front
* Tyne Cot: the largest British War cemetery in the world with a breath-taking number of 12,000 graves
* Langemark German cemetery, a fascinating contrast to British cemeteries, is the final resting place for 44,000 Germans, 24,000 of them in a mass grave or ossuary and two British soldiers
* Pond Farm is located in the heart of the Passchendaele battlefield and the young farmer is constantly finding deadly unexploded shells in his fields. He has built a working replica of a tank
* Oxford Road Cemetery where one of the greatest English cricketers is buried

**DAY 5:** ThursdayJuly 14th On our return journey to Calais we will visit:

* Brandhoek cemetery – famous for the grave of Noel Chavasse the only British soldier to be awarded two VCs for his rescue work in No Man’s Land work for the Royal Army Medical Corps
* Poperinge: Talbot House known as ‘Toc H’ where the Army chaplains Neville Talbot and Philip "Tubby" Clayton opened a soldiers’ club. It was named after Neville Talbot’s brother Gilbert who was killed during the 2nd Battle of Ypres on July 30th 1915. From December 1915 onwards, and for more than three years, Talbot House provided rest, recreation and a brief escape from the horrors of the War. It was open to all soldiers regardless of their rank.

We also visit the place where several British soldiers were ‘shot at dawn’.

* The final stop is at the fascinating Lijssenthoek Cemetery which has a wide range of burials of interest including a plot for Chinese labourers. We look at several graves and hear the stories behind them

The trip is open to MMTCC members, family and friends, indeed real tennis and rackets players in general and anyone else who is interested! The cost will be between £500 and £550 per person depending on numbers which covers travel by coach, the ferry crossings and hotel accommodation for four nights including breakfast. The cost of evening meals, insurance, museums and Belgian beer and French wines is not included.

For those of you who have never been to the Battlefields and have been meaning to, this is your once in a lifetime chance! I promise you will not be disappointed – it’s an incredible experience. In July time the cemeteries are looking at their best with flowers and roses in full bloom, redolent of English country gardens as planned by visionaries like Sir Fabian Ware, the founder of the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission and his main architects Lutyens, Baker and Blomfield. If you have been before, I’m sure there will be plenty of sites on the itinerary you won’t have visited. We tend not to dwell too long on campaigns and tactics but highlight the personal stories of which there will be many. There are so many breath-taking sights and sites to take in, invariably sad and thought provoking, which return us to the enduring question – ‘How on earth can this slaughter have happened?’

If possible, we can factor into the itinerary any special requests to visit an ancestor’s grave …

The trip will soon be upon us but you have a chance to book it into your busy schedules! Please email me on achamilton43@gmail.com if you wish to come on the trip.

Kind regards,

Andrew Hamilton