Trench raiding was an integral but controversial tactic in warfare on the Western Front during the Great War. This article examines the experiences of the 1/1st Battalion of the Cambridgeshire Regiment in 1916, focusing on two raids carried out simultaneously on one night just to the north of the River Ancre at a time when most British forces were concentrated further south on the Somme. Occurring between two major actions on this section of the front, they were part of a wider policy that sought British domination of no man's land. The raids, however, were calamitous and resulted in the deaths of four officers, ensuring that, as far as officers of the battalion were concerned, small actions were as potentially fatal as full-scale battles on the Western Front during 1916.

**Trench warfare and trench raiding**

The huge casualty figures resulting from such major battles as Loos (1915), the Somme (1916) and Fashoda (1917) still attract attention today, but the persistent number of killed, wounded and missing during the long intervening periods of static trench warfare on the Western Front also have the capacity to surprise. The daily casualty lists of battalions in the line fluctuated. Although normally quite small, there were occasions when a sustained artillery bombardment or a lucky strike could cause significant casualties in an instant. Thus by the end of a tour of duty the cumulative effect of small but regular losses could place a strain on morale and raise doubts about competence. For instance, the young subaltern Anthony Eden, of 21st King's Royal Rifle Corps, wrote of the inevitable trickle of casualties in the trenches: 'I loathed each one of them. For more than six months now we had worked hard and trained together in our small group, No. 9 Platoon. I had grown to know my riflemen and liked them immensely. I tried to put out of my mind the inevitable and bloody side of our business, perhaps with the result that I felt each casualty the more. 1 In the 1/1st Cambridgeshire Battalion (1/1 Cambridgeshire) another young subaltern wrote of trench life: 'I find it a very strange feeling, living always as it might be in the presence of death... there is always a leakage, both of officers and men, and the strain in the trenches is continuous. It is sometimes a little overpowering to think that a small mistake on your part may mean several lives lost. 2

Shellfire, rifle grenades and snipers' bullets caused most of the casualties in trench warfare, but some were the result of activities across no man's land and up to (and sometimes beyond) the enemy's front line. These hostile activities varied in size and purpose and first became frequent occurrences during the winter of 1915-16. Most common were very small, nightly patrols of one officer or NCO and a couple of other men, whose task was to lie out in no man's land close to the German wire listening for sounds of enemy movement and activity and seeking weak points in the enemy's defences. Others might have disagreed, but for Anthony Eden, our activities in no-man's-land became a war within a war and, for me at least, the more meaningful part of it: whilst Charles Carrington, moving beyond his company's wire at night with revolver loaded and cocked, was 'utterly happy to find that I could do this thing and was not afraid'. 3 Gaining experience in this manner, however, was fraught with danger, even though it can be argued that there was no alternative strategy available.

**The 1/1 Cambridgeshire and no man's land**

The 1/1 Cambridgeshire Regiment was a territorial force unit which was mobilised in August 1914, as part of 82 Brigade, 27th Division, in February 1915. It soon saw action, at Second Ypres and in February 1916, after a few months as a training battalion for Third Army School, it joined 118 Brigade, 39th Division. This was primarily a New Army division, but supplemented by the all-Territorial 118 Brigade (the three other battalions were 1/6 Cheshires, 1/1 Herftfordshires and the 4/5 Black Watch). The battalion spent most of its time in the Givenchy-Festubert region but in August 1916 the division moved south and went into the line near Hamel, abutting the River Ancre and overlooked by the notorious Redoubt and Thiepval. The Cambridgeshires, alternating with 4/5 Black Watch, held the right flank north of the Ancre, which included the marshy ground along the northern bank of the river.

In June at Givenchy Lieutenant Colonel Edward Fius Arthur Riddell had taken command of the battalion, which at the time was regarded with suspicion - it had been 'thoroughly strafed' at an inspection by a new brigadier in April and its use as a training battalion suggests that official confidence in its fighting capacity was low. 4 A Boer War veteran who had transferred to the Rifle Brigade, Riddell was determined to improve his battalion's reputation. Acting as 'a new broom' whilst the battalion was still holding the line around Givenchy and Festubert, he sought to forge self-respect in the battalion by remodelling the billets, latrines and cook-houses and establishing plunge-baths for his men out of wagon tarpaulins. The war diary shows that throughout the summer, working parties permitting, he put the battalion through an intensive programme of training for the coming offensive. As a result of his efforts, Riddell later claimed, 'The whole spirit, military knowledge, and bodily and mental condition of all ranks grew and prospered'. By the time the battalion marched to the Ancre he was 'watching their improvement as a trainer watches a much prized racehorse'. 5

Riddell was a thorough, meticulous planner, anxious to obtain intelligence on every part of the terrain beyond the frontline, both at Givenchy and on the Ancre. On the evening of 2 July he brought all his officers together to give a short address on the 'value of detail, and on the attack'. 6 Detail included local tactical intelligence and Riddell, supported by divisional orders to create sustained pressure to prevent the Germans from transferring units to the south, encouraged nightly patrols and raids. There had been incursions into no man's land before Riddell's arrival, as when Second Lieutenant Harold Vaughan, a South African with war experience in South-West Africa, had taken to spending daylight hours in no man's land reconnoitring the German wire (he was shot dead attempting to repeat the manoeuvre), but the prevalence of patrols and raids greatly increased under the new commanding officer. Hardly a night went by, when the battalion was in the line, without at least one patrol, some under the command of an NCO but most with subalterns leading. They reported on such matters as the numbers holding the enemy front line, the ease of movement over the terrain and the state of the German wire. Casualties were few but quite regular: the bombing and
scouting officer Lieutenant R H Carrette was wounded on 3 July, one other rank on the night of 15-16 July and another on the following night. During the whole X Corps' Temporary Captain R J Tebbut, of 'A' Company, was shot in the back whilst on patrol (one of three brothers in the regiment, he was the only one to survive the war). (9)

Officer casualties

These patrols were preliminary to major raids north of La Bassee Canal. The raiding party had been commissioned in the Cambridgeshire regiment, from 1/6 Cheshires. Yet another officer, Captain Sir George Monad, who had been brought up at Winchester and Balliol College, was killed and six wounded. (10) Casualties amongst the officers were high. Second Lieutenant Arthur Looker managed to walk back to his lines, though suffering from wounds in his hands, his stomach and his foot, to receive a DSO for keeping the enemy at bay whilst the wounded were withdrawn. A South African like Vaughan, he survived his wounds, but was subsequently posted to the 3rd King's African Rifles. He was to die, aged only 45, in Melbourne, Australia in 1926. (11)

Two other officers died in the raid. Lieutenant George Herman, a product of Winchester and Trinity College, Cambridge and 2 I/C 'A' Company, was reported missing and his body never found, despite the efforts of a search patrol from 1/6 Cheshires. Yet another South African, Second Lieutenant Guy Rawlinson, who had been commissioned in the Cambridgeshire Regiment in 1915 after service with the Natal Carbineers, was captured but died of his wounds on 23 July. Riddell informed his parents, who had thirteen other children, that Rawlinson 'was last seen alive in the German trenches, fighting like the brave man we all knew him to be'. (12) Officer casualties in this operation - which appear to have been disproportionate (only one other rank was killed and six wounded) - were compounded by the wounding of two subalterns on 20 July, one of whom died. Immediately on arrival at the Ancre front on 26 August, Riddell ordered three night patrols to begin the process of gaining familiarity with the new conditions. Every night for the next week patrols were out, often in very bad weather, as it was known that a major attack was due on 3 September. They reported on shell damage to the German wire and also made gaps in the British wire preparatory to the battle. This was for the benefit of the 4/5 Black Watch, which had been ordered to carry out the attack on 3 September on this part of the front. The Cambridgeshires were to be in support.

On the objectives of the 39th Division on 3 September, were to take the front line of the trenches on a spur south of Beaumont Hamel and then advance up the valley of the Ancre, protecting the left flank of 49th Division advancing on the other side of the river. (13) 118 Brigade's attack began well, but failure south of the river led to the attackers being enfiladed from the Schwaben Redoubt and its environs, with the result that the 4/5 Black Watch fell back to its original line. At one point the threat of a gap appeared in the British line as a German counter-attack developed. On his own initiative, Riddell ordered his battalion up to fill the gap and stopped the enemy attack successfully. No progress was thus made on the day, but Riddell found the men 'elated at the success of their efforts . . . laughing, smoking, eating, and talking about the prospects of getting tea sent up to them'. (13) Casualties were one officer killed and four wounded with fourteen other ranks killed or died of wounds and forty-seven wounded. (14)

The raids on 16/17 September 1916

When the British bombardment began in the early hours of 3 September Riddell had heard one of his young officers shout excitedly: 'Nothing on earth can withstand that. Will this mean the end of the war?' (15) This optimist was the 22-year-old Captain Arthur Innes Adam, late of Winchester and Balliol College, Oxford.

Adam, brother of the subsequently celebrated sociologist Baroness Wootton, had joined the battalion in June 1915 and had had a swift baptism of fire. On his first day in the trenches two officers were mortally wounded, one, Lieutenant Hugh Crookham, having arrived with him, and on 2 July he was himself slightly wounded in the hand by a sniper. Like Rudyard Kipling's son John, Adam was extremely short-sighted and had only passed the army medical after finding a sympathetic doctor who would give him a reading prescription. He had been a child prodigy, a mathematician, a Poet's Apprentice, a Fabian in politics, he was also a First Class Honours degree in Modern Languages at Exeter College, Oxford, where he was a friend of the poet, Richard Aldington. He was a First Class Honours degree in Modern Languages at Exeter College, Oxford, where he was a friend of the poet, Richard Aldington. He was a child prodigy, a mathematician, a Poet's Apprentice, a Fabian in politics, he was also a First Class Honours degree in Modern Languages at Exeter College, Oxford, where he was a friend of the poet, Richard Aldington.

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On 12 September the battalion relieved 4/5 Black Watch in the Haucourt, 12th section of the trenches. (31) This area included a detached post - a mill on the edge of the Ancre. It was from here between 1.00 am and 3.15 am on the morning of the 13th that a patrol from 'A' Company moved up the northern bank of the river, pacing out the route and making detailed notes of the terrain and every object they passed: hedges, trees, barns and even the mill on the edge of the river. They eventually saw, across the river, what the war diary described as a shanty, from within which they heard a man coughing. Another patrol the next night discovered that the shanty was in fact a brick emplacement (in Riddell's later words, 'a strong-point'), close to the German second line, in which three men were working. The alarm was raised, whistles were blown and the Germans emerged from their workplace wearing their equipment. The patrol managed to retire without casualties. But Adam and Shaw were now hatching a plan.

In the meantime, under divisional orders to maintain pressure on the front, Riddell was reluctantly planning a large raid to be carried out by 'C' Company under the command of the 23-year-old Captain Francis Marr. Like Adam, Marr was the son of a Cambridge Don. He had joined the battalion in France in April 1915 and was to survive the war as a brigade major with a DSO and MC. He died in 1942 when a U-boat torpedoed the SS City of Cairo.

Among the officers who were to take part in this raid was Second Lieutenant Harry Blythe King Allpass, known as Rex to his friends and regrettably called 'Alpress' in the regimental history. The son of a clergyman who had revived the ancient but moribund Sir George Monod School in Chigwell, Allpass had obtained a First Class Honours degree in Modern Languages at Exeter College, Oxford, where one of his friends was 1 R T Tolstien, who would have had the misfortune to fail to prevent a depressed student friend from shooting himself. (22) In September 1914 he took up the position of Head of Modern Languages at St Bees School in Whitehaven, where he also commanded the Junior OTC. Now acknowledged as one of the 'War Poets' and a Fabian in politics, he was also...
a comic writer of some talent. He wrote for The Westminster Review and Isis and, having received a commission in the Essex Regiment in February 1916, edited the magazine Stars for Subalterns at Halton Camp. In this he published a series of whimsical letters to his mother, portraying himself as a bumbling innocent: mistaking the adjutant for his colonel and another colonel for a railway porter; forgetting to wear his Sam Browne belt in public; and calling his batman by the wrong name for three long months. He gently parodied some of the army’s more arcane customs, as when he suggested that his daily role of inspecting the kit of five cooks and his sergeant was ‘rather an arid life for a Man with a Moustache’. (23)

Like Adam and many other young men, Allpass’ view of the war was ambiguous. He wanted it to stop, but not before he had experienced it firsthand: ‘A week in the trenches, one charge, the DSO (which is much more dignified than a VC), and a wound in my left arm’ was his preference, (one of his two brothers had been killed with the Sherwood Foresters in August 1915 at Gallipoli.) There was little chance of his achieving his aim whilst in a reserve battalion of the Essex Regiment, so he organised an attachment to the Cambridgeshires, joining the 1/1st in the trenches in mid-July 1916. He was appointed Bombing Officer, was present at the 3 September defence of the line and was recommended for the Military Cross.

The objectives of the raid under Marr, according to the war diary, were ‘to enter the enemy’s trenches, kill Germans and obtain identifications’, but the chances of catching the Germans by surprise were minimal, for their greatly reinforced barbed wire defences required daily artillery and trench mortar bombardments before action could be contemplated. Facing the 1/1st Battalion, moreover, was the 119th Reserve Infantry Regiment, comprising mainly Württemburgers with a high reputation as a fighting unit. Riddell had little confidence in the plan, but gave his approval once it had been...
Trench map of the Ancre Sector - Robert's Trench picked out in green
reported that the wire had been cut. He was more sanguine about the other, smaller raid that Adam and Shaw had proposed, which would involve a small number of men, led by Shaw, who, using a ladder to cross the trickle that was then the River Ancre, would either capture or kill the 'garrison' in the shanty (now called 'the Summer House'). The larger raid would begin first and would act as a diversion for the smaller one.

Riddell was right to be pessimistic. During the night of the 16th, no sooner had the British barrage begun and 'C' Company moved out of Roberts Trench than a strong German counter-barrage struck no man's land. The troops managed to reach the wire, only to find it uncut. The enemy front line was also strongly garrisoned, although the war diary claimed they 'had the wind up'. Marriott's men were forced back to Roberts Trench. Unfortunately, Allpass had somehow managed to get through some of the wire. He was last seen lying badly wounded beyond the reach of the stretcher-bearers. It was hoped that he might have been taken prisoner, but he was never seen again. One other rank was also reported missing and eight were wounded. Just to the south a larger tragedy was unfolding. In addition to Adam and Shaw, two other officers were involved in the raid on the Summer House. In defensive support was Lieutenant Alfred Bradford, the Lewis Gun Officer. Born in 1894, he had attended Bedford Grammar School; his father, a widower, was owner of the imposing University Arms Hotel in Cambridge. Bradford initially enlisted in the Middlesex Regiment, was commissioned in May 1915 and joined the 1/1st in France not long after Adam. Finally, overseeing the operation from the mill was the Adjutant, Captain Sir Guy Butlin. A 23-year-old Old Harrovian whose father had been President of the Royal College of Surgeons, Butlin had graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge in 1914 and was training to become a barrister when war broke out. He immediately joined the Cambridgeshire Regiment and went to France with the 1/1st in February 1915. Thus, like all the other officers involved in the operation, he was very experienced in trench warfare. After an exchange of bombs and rifle fire which, according to the war diary, left several of the raiders dead, the raiders were forced to withdraw. As they crawled back to the stream, it was discovered that a wounded man had been left behind. Fatally, Adam and Shaw, either separately or together, decided to return to find him. Close to the Summer House both were hit by machine-gun fire. In the meantime the rest of the party had returned safely to the mill. There Butlin decided to take his orderly and Bradford back to find the missing officers. They found them lying in a very exposed position. Ordering Bradford back to get help, Butlin remained with the wounded men. A stretcher was brought up and Butlin was in the process of placing the more badly wounded Shaw on it when he too was shot, together with one of the bearers, who managed to crawl away. Butlin then ordered the other stretcher-bearer to get further assistance.

By now dawn was breaking and Riddell, having moved to the mill, denied permission to Bradford to return to the wounded by the route used by the raiding party, but he did allow him and his own orderly, Lance Corporal William Nightingale, to seek a passage to the wounded through the dense bushes near the bank of the river. Sometimes up to their necks in water, they managed to find the right place, but no bodies were visible. (24) Both returned safely, although Riddell had to creep out to re-direct Nightingale, who had lost direction and was heading towards a German trench. It was surmised that the Germans had taken the wounded into their trenches as prisoners. All three, however, died, Shaw as late as 27 September. The Germans buried them, but Butlin's body, like Allpass', was never recovered. These two are commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial. Adam's remains were later exhumed from a small graveyard and reburied in the Acheit-le-Grand Communal Cemetery Extension. Shaw's body now lies in the Porte-de-Paris Cemetery, Cambrai.

Aftermath

The 1/1 Cambridges played only a small role in the major offensives of 1916 on the Somme battlefront. This explains why the significant impact of trench warfare on the Somme battlefront. Altogether, seven were killed, including Bradford, during the battalion's one major attack in October during the Battle of the Ancre Heights. Altogether, seven were killed in offensives, one in the trenches and no fewer than seven in trench raids. Raiding tactics were still being developed, by trial and error, in 1916 and were to improve as the war ground on, but they were always capable of producing significant casualties. In more ways than one, therefore, they might be seen asjenis 'in miniature' as well as useful training for larger operations. (25)

In the regimental history Riddell called the Summer House raid 'a deplorable adventure' and regretted Adam's decision to accompany the raiding party. 'As a soldier he was wrong', he wrote, but 'as they were all mere lads', none could be blamed for the consequences. (26) It is true that all involved were young, either aged 22 or 23, but they were not inexperienced. All but Allpass had been in France for more than a year; Adam was a company commander and Butlin was the battalion's adjutant. These 'two minor demonstrations', as the war diary called them, occurred for tactical and strategic reasons, not in order to give young subalterns experience of warfare. None was fighting out of a sense of naïve idealism. Misfortune turned into tragedy because of the strong esprit de corps that Riddell had infused into the battalion. A wounded man could not be left alone without some attempt to rescue him. From this unwritten rule, everything else followed.

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