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“World War One and the Luck family
maps”

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The Charles Close Society was founded in 1980 to bring together all those with an interest in the maps and history of the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain and its counterparts in the island of Ireland. The Society takes its name from Colonel Sir Charles Arden-Close, OS Director General from 1911 to 1922, and initiator of many of the maps now sought after by collectors.

The Society publishes a wide range of books and booklets on historic OS map series and its journal, *Sheetlines*, is recognised internationally for its specialist articles on Ordnance Survey-related topics.

World War One and the Luck family maps

Gerry Zierler

When war broke out, my English grandfather Larman Luck was in his twenties and already a surveyor. I never knew him: he died from the after-effects of another world war, before I was born. My family talked proudly of him of course, but never of his wartime exploits so long ago, in common with many who suffered the ravages of WW1.

I'd always enjoyed maps, even as a kid, drawing them for fun, of places real and imaginary. Interests like buses and trains and cadet force ops and flying meant I collected Ordnance Survey (of course!) and London Transport maps of wherever I went, from an early age. Much later on, I found myself publishing maps as promotional aids to my businesses. My son, too, exhibited impressive amounts of spatial awareness in maps that he had doodled from the age of about six. I often wondered why this passion was hereditary.

They cracked the human genome about the same time as I discovered what Grandpa Larman had been doing: I wrote a tongue-in-cheek piece about there being a map gene in our family. This began to be a serious theory, and I have wanted ever since to do some serious research into it. Perhaps now I'm about to retire I shall at last give it time!

Larman had a brother, Bernard, late father of cousin Roger Luck. Knowing my interest in family history as well as maps, Roger kindly passed to me my great uncle's maps, which included those used in earnest during WW1. I took some of these out to the Western Front with tv journalist friend Rob Kirk, who had done a lot of research on our use of tanks with Philippe Gorczynski, a battlefield historian from Cambrai. Imagine the adrenalin when Philippe confirmed that one of Uncle Bernard's maps had been annotated on the first day, 20 November 1917, of the massed tank advance towards the Hindenburg Line near Cambrai (*fig 1*).

The other pencilled notations on this map were also explained: 'R W K' were Royal West Kents, 'DCoyB' was 'The Buffs' D Company, and numerous little circles were German gun emplacements (remains are still there), and the two heavy blue lines were the route taken by the tanks.

The initials in the maps' inscription 'B U Luck, M G C' gave the lie. 'Tank' was of course just a subterfuge, when they were first shipped to France. It was the Machine Gun Corps (Heavy Brigade) who drove them and fought in them. Could Uncle Bernard have been a tank man?

But what else had he done? Another 1:10,000 map in the collection is that of *Gueudecourt 57C S.W. 1., Edition 3 A*¹ which has trenches corrected to dates in January that year (see figure 2). On this map, 4 miles to the west of the 'tank' map, a pencilled arc of gun ranging lines have been drawn northwards over that village towards the German trenches. Where dividers had pierced the map, I stood in the same spot and gazed down over the peaceful countryside, full of wonder.

¹ Italicised sheet names and punctuation are shown exactly as printed on the maps themselves.

Figure 1: Extract from Bernard Luck's composite sheet of GSGS3062 maps: Trench Map Bantouzelle. 57B S.W.1. Edition 2A Scale 1:10,000 (but mostly: Gonnellieu 57C S.E.2 Edition 3A Trenches Corrected to 30-9-17.). Annotated for tank battle preparations, 20 November 1917.

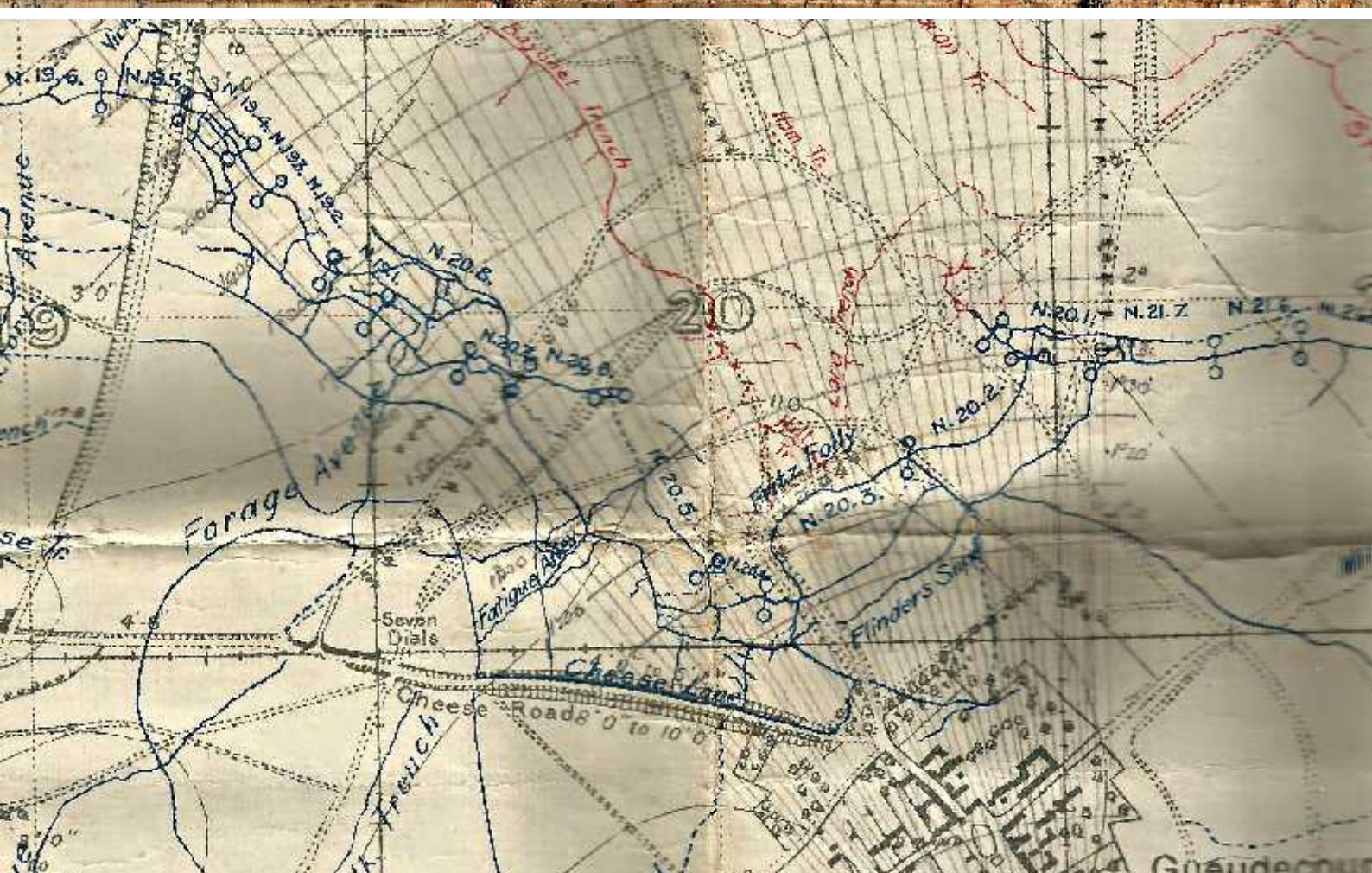


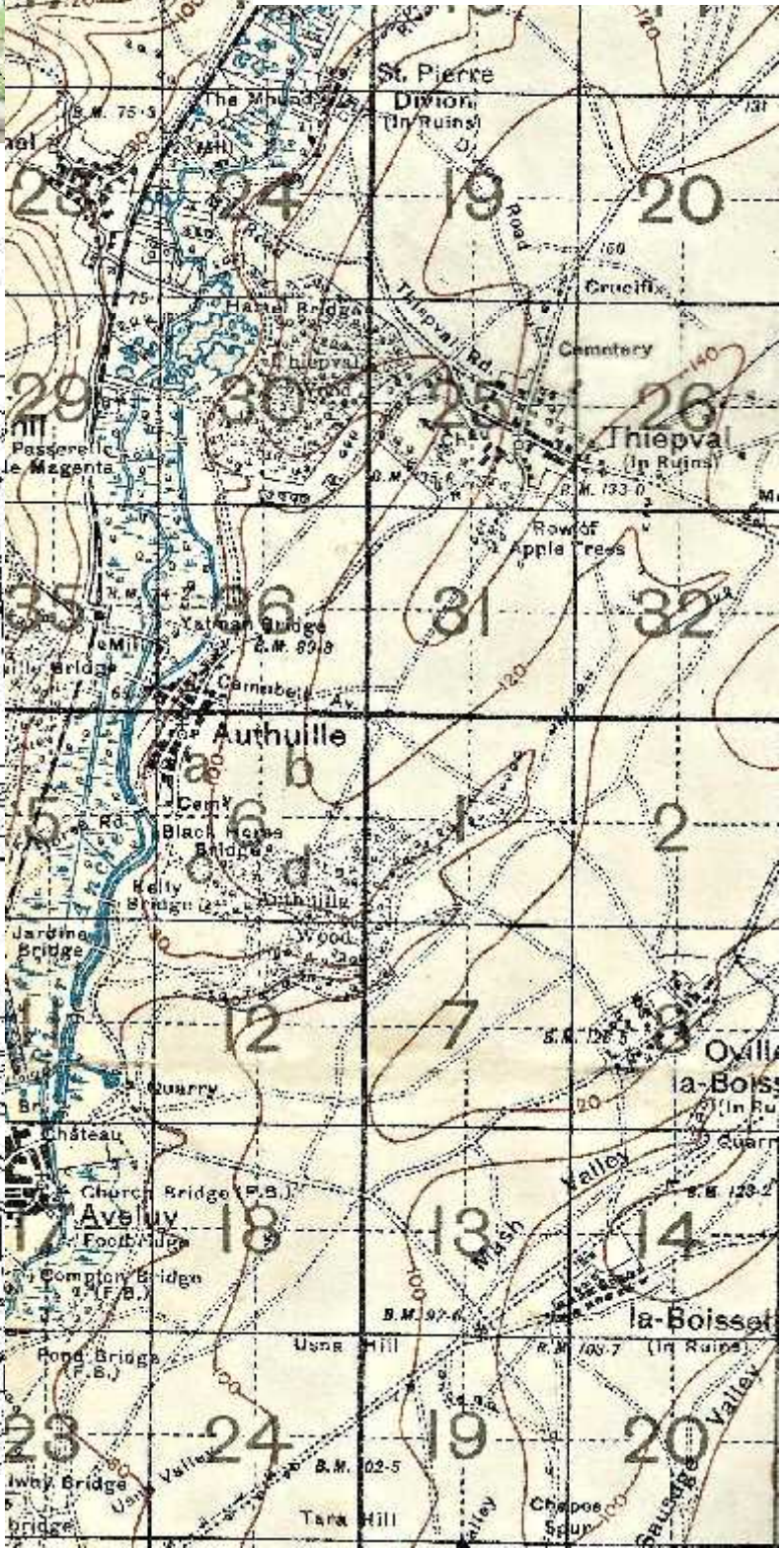
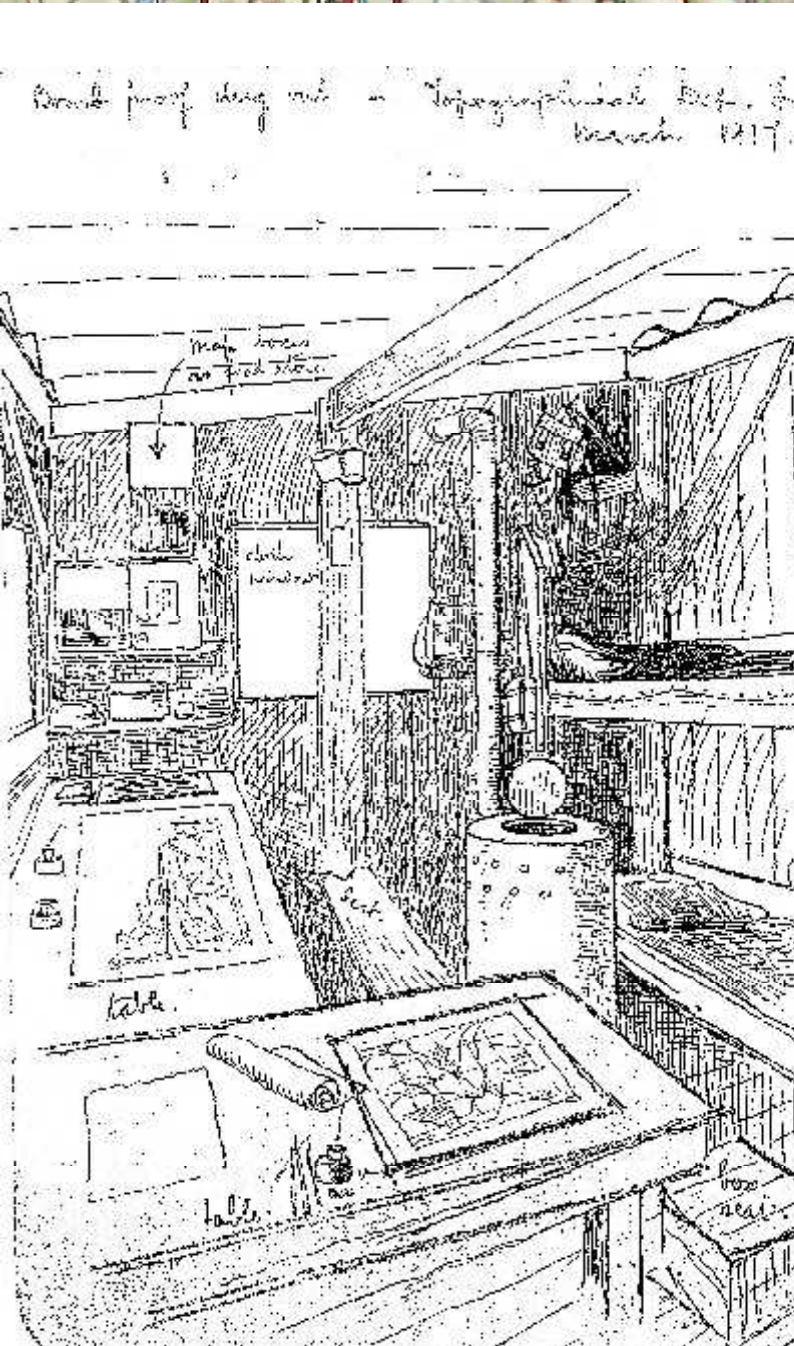
Figure 2: Extract from GSGS3062 1:10,000 Gueudecourt 57C S.W.1 Edition 3A, Trenches corrected to 6-1-17 showing gun ranging lines drawn over the village towards the German trenches. Note the hole near bottom right hand corner, where dividers punctured the map.



Figure 3 (left): Extract from GSGS2364 Belgium 1:100,000 sheet Hazebrouck Edition 2. 5A of 1916.

Figure 4 (below): Extract from GSGS2743 France 1:40,000 Edition 2. Sheet 57D 1917. Showing the front line near Thiepval in the Ancre valley north of Albert.

Figure 5: Larman Luck's pen-and-ink sketch of his mapmaking bunker at Foucaucourt, between Amiens and St Quentin.



Having Rob point his tv camera at me while gazing at the map and this once-deadly view, and expecting me to speak, was quite an emotional experience.

Other maps in this small but priceless collection include a GSGS2742 sheet entitled: *1/20,000 Trenches...to 25-5-18. France Edition 8b (Local) Sheet 57C N W* (around Bapaume). A most attractive map is the not uncommon GSGS2364 *Belgium 1:100,000 Hazebrouck Edition 2. 5A*, on cloth as with all the others, from 1916 (see figure 3 for an extract of Ypres).

An example of a GSGS2745 1:40,000 map in the group is *France Sheet 57D Edition 2*. Figure 4 shows an extract of this map covering the beautiful Ancre valley below Thiepval, site now of the massive Lutyens' memorial to those lost without trace there in WW1. I know that Bernard's brother Larman – my grandfather – had fought there, and my cousin knows that they contrived to meet

more than once. I wonder if one brother was using the maps to which the other had contributed in the making?

Larman Luck's field notebook, a precious survivor from WW1, is full of exquisite drawings and paintings, which I had borrowed from my mother but not studied in detail. Waiting to be discovered on page 77 in this was a pen-and-ink sketch headed 'Bomb proof dug out - Topographical Dept. Foucaucourt, March 1917' (see figure 5). This dugout was his mapmaking bunker on the Somme near Amiens: the peacetime surveyor had become a soldier cartographer. So perhaps there is a map gene after all!

In the same notebook is a beautifully detailed manuscript map of a British raid over German trenches a few miles east of Foucaucourt, obviously drawn by him (figure 6). This tallies exactly with German records of their trenches at Hargicourt, near St Quentin.

Given the relevance of the commemoration in 2014 of the start of World War 1, I hope this short report of my English forebears' mapping history is of interest, and I hope you will forgive any shortcomings. Much more research is clearly called for, and I look forward to my imminent retirement releasing enough time to study these maps and their locations rather more.

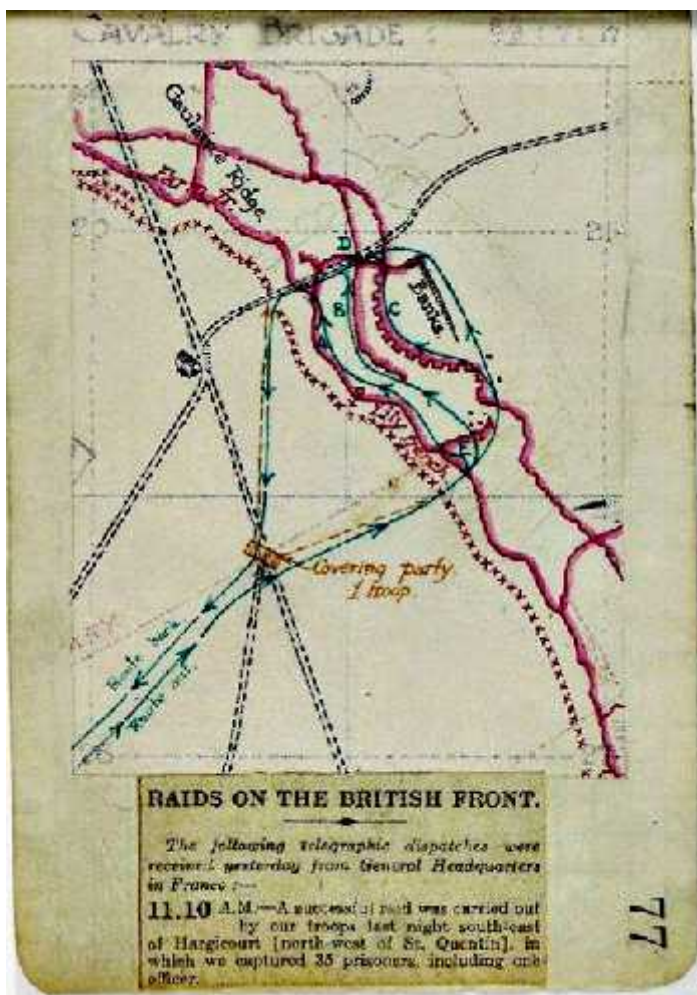


Figure 6: Manuscript map by Larman Luck of a trench raid at Hargicourt near St Quentin, headed Cavalry Brigade: 8/9:7:17, with British news cutting announcing the success of the raid.