

## Of Doubtful Value

The road from Albert to Bapaume cuts across the Somme battlefield. Next to the road, near the village of Warlencourt, is a small hill, a prehistoric burial mound. This is the **Butte de Warlencourt**. On 5<sup>th</sup> November 1916, Durham soldiers fought and died to capture this mound - Territorials from Bishop Auckland and Crook (6<sup>th</sup> Battalion DLI), Durham and Chester le Street (8<sup>th</sup> Battalion DLI) and Gateshead and Birtley (9<sup>th</sup> Battalion DLI).

There was heavy rain and gale force winds the night before the attack and the trenches and shell craters were filled with thick mud and water. When the attack began, just after 9 o'clock on 5<sup>th</sup> November, the cold, wet soldiers struggled to climb out of their trenches. Any man who fell wounded risked drowning in the mud. The attack went on all day in spite of the terrible conditions. Some of 9 DLI advanced under the heavy machine-gun and shell fire and captured the Butte but were driven back with appalling casualties that night.



The attack on the Butte de Warlencourt was a failure. The three Durham battalions lost over 130 men killed, with 400 wounded and 300 missing. Two weeks later, on 18<sup>th</sup> November, the Battle of the Somme officially ended.

### Roland Bradford

The Commanding Officer of the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion DLI during the attack on the Butte de Warlencourt was Lieutenant Colonel Roland Bradford. Roland, who was born in Witton Park near Bishop Auckland, was only 25 years old. In October 1916, he had won the Victoria Cross for his bravery in fighting at Eaucourt l'Abbaye, just a few hundred yards south of the Butte.

### The Attack on the Butte de Warlencourt

This report was written by Lieutenant Colonel Roland Bradford shortly after his battalion's failed attack on the Butte de Warlencourt on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1916. It is highly critical of the need for the attack.

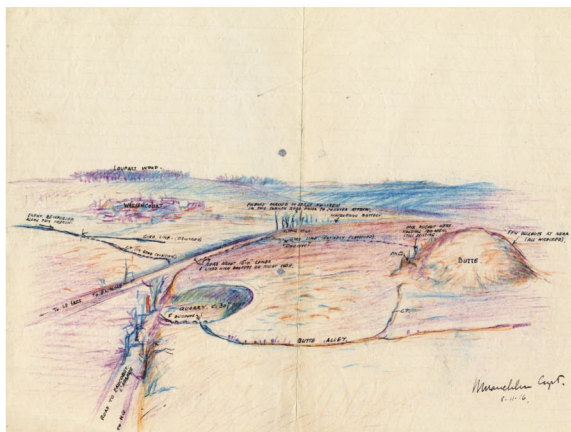
[Ref No: D/DLI 2/9/37]

*"It is wonderful, when one considers the difficulties under which our men were working and the fearful fire to which they were exposed, that they held on for so long as they did. And it makes you proud to be an Englishman."*

*Looking back at the attack on the 5<sup>th</sup> November, it seems that the results which would have been gained in the event of success were of doubtful value and would hardly have been worth the loss which we would suffer. It would have been awkward for us to hold the objectives which would have been badly sited for our defences.*

*But the BUTTE DE WARLENCOURT had become an obsession. Everybody wanted it. It loomed large in the minds of the soldiers in the forward area and they attributed many of their misfortunes to it. The newspaper correspondents talked about "that miniature Gibraltar". So it had to be taken.*

*It seems that the attack was one of those tempting, local operations which are so costly and which are rarely worthwhile. But perhaps that is only the narrow view of the Regimental Officer."*



### Sketch of the Butte de Warlencourt

This sketch was drawn by Captain Robert Mauchlen, 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion DLI, who took part in the attack on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1916. The sketch was then added to the Battalion's War Diary.

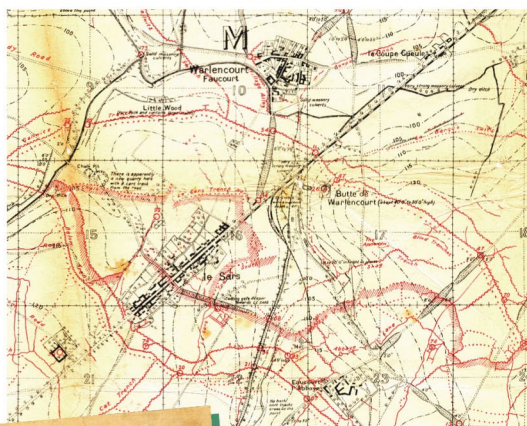
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### Soldiers Attacking the Butte de Warlencourt

This sketch was drawn by Captain Robert Mauchlen, 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion DLI, who took part in the attack on the Butte de Warlencourt on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1916.

[Ref No: D/DLI Acc 2795(D) Box 7/2/2]



### Trench Map, Le Sars

This map, used by the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion DLI, shows the British front line on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1916. The Butte de Warlencourt is clearly marked just off the main road.

[Ref No: D/DLI 2/9/244]

### Military Medal Citation

Harry Cruddace, 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion DLI, was awarded the Military Medal for his bravery during the attack on the Butte de Warlencourt in November 1916.

[Ref No: D/DLI Acc 2939(D) Box 1/13/2]

### Harry Cruddace

Born in 1898 in Bishop Auckland, Harry Cruddace enlisted in the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion DLI in February 1915. He was awarded the Military Medal for his bravery as a Lewis machine-gunner during the attack on the Butte de Warlencourt. He later wrote an account of the battle.

*"Rain fell during the whole time and early on the morning of Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> November, the Companies moved forward to man the front line trench.... Every man then looked to the loading of his rifle and the fixing of his bayonet as the zero hour was almost upon us. Serious men gazed eagerly into one another's faces and some muttered thoughts of God and their loved ones at home. Chums clasped hands and said "Cheerio" not knowing what the day held in store for them....."*

*At last the zero hour arrived and the officers' whistles sounded the advance. Immediately the first wave mounted the trench and made off in the direction of the enemy's trenches. They were met by terrific and annihilating fire and crumpled up like snow in summer.*

*The second wave was by this time on its way. I was in that wave.... We had suffered terrible casualties when our Company Commander Lieutenant Ludgate was wounded and fell into a shell hole. He ordered me to proceed and engage the enemy machine-guns, a task almost impossible....*

*Out of my two sections of 14 men, there were two of us left, my No 1 on the gun by name Private Allen and myself. I pushed on with one gun to about 30 yards from a German trench and took up a position in a shell hole....*

*After firing off one or two magazines, the enemy found us with a machine-gun and wounded my No.1 [Private Allen] in four places down his left side. Thinking him dead I pushed him aside and carried on until lack of ammunition forced me to withdraw.... A few minutes later I saw Private Allen who was out in front lift an arm.... I immediately ran out and brought him back to the shelter of the shell hole."*

July

August

September

October

November