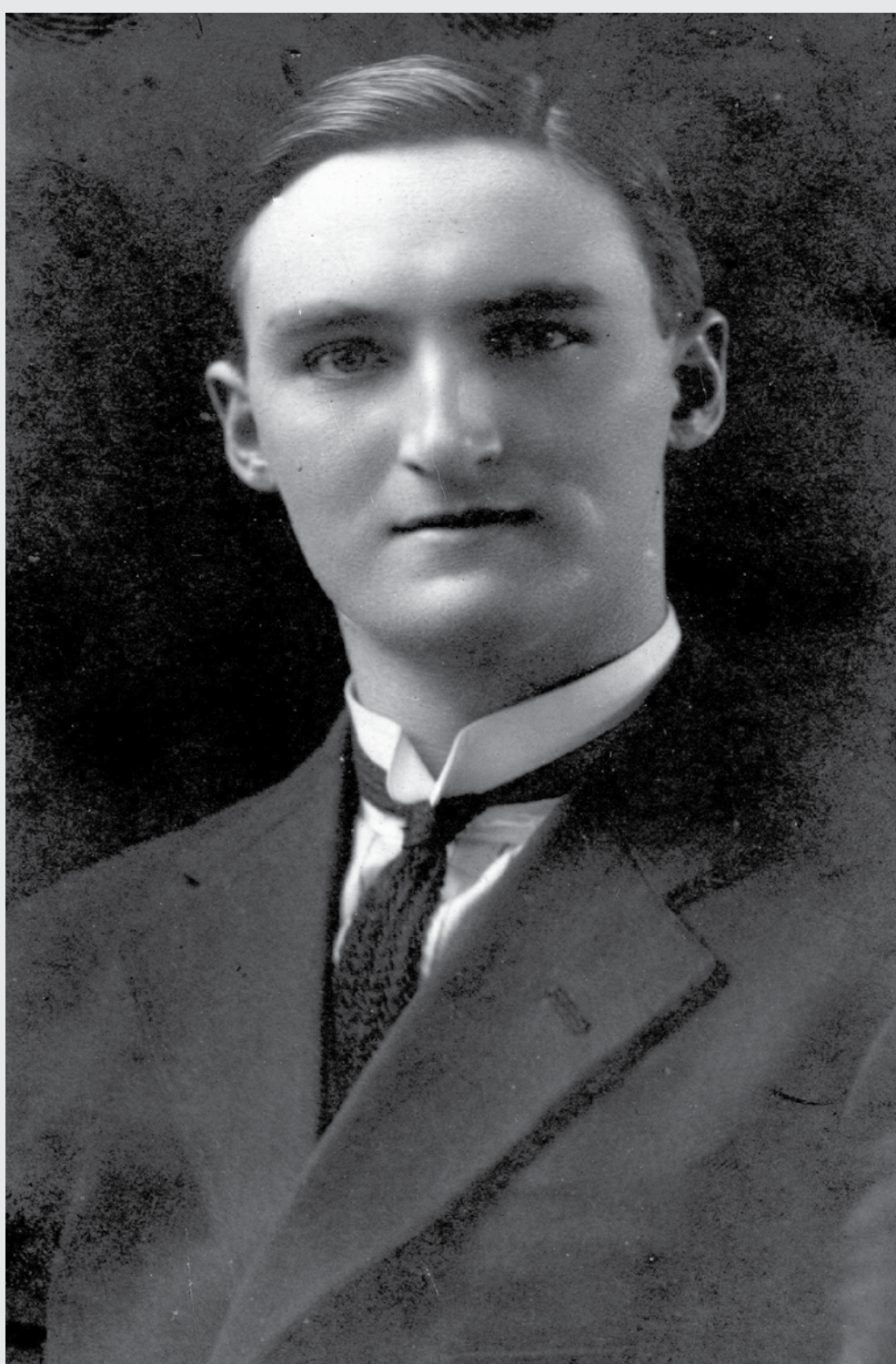


LIFE IN THE TRENCHES



THE MIXED FORTUNES OF WAR

JOHN WILLIAM FEATHERSTONE
of Lanehead
1890 - 1961
Son of lead miner Ralph Featherstone
and his wife Sarah Hannah Hodgson
Private, 4th Battalion,
Durham Light Infantry.

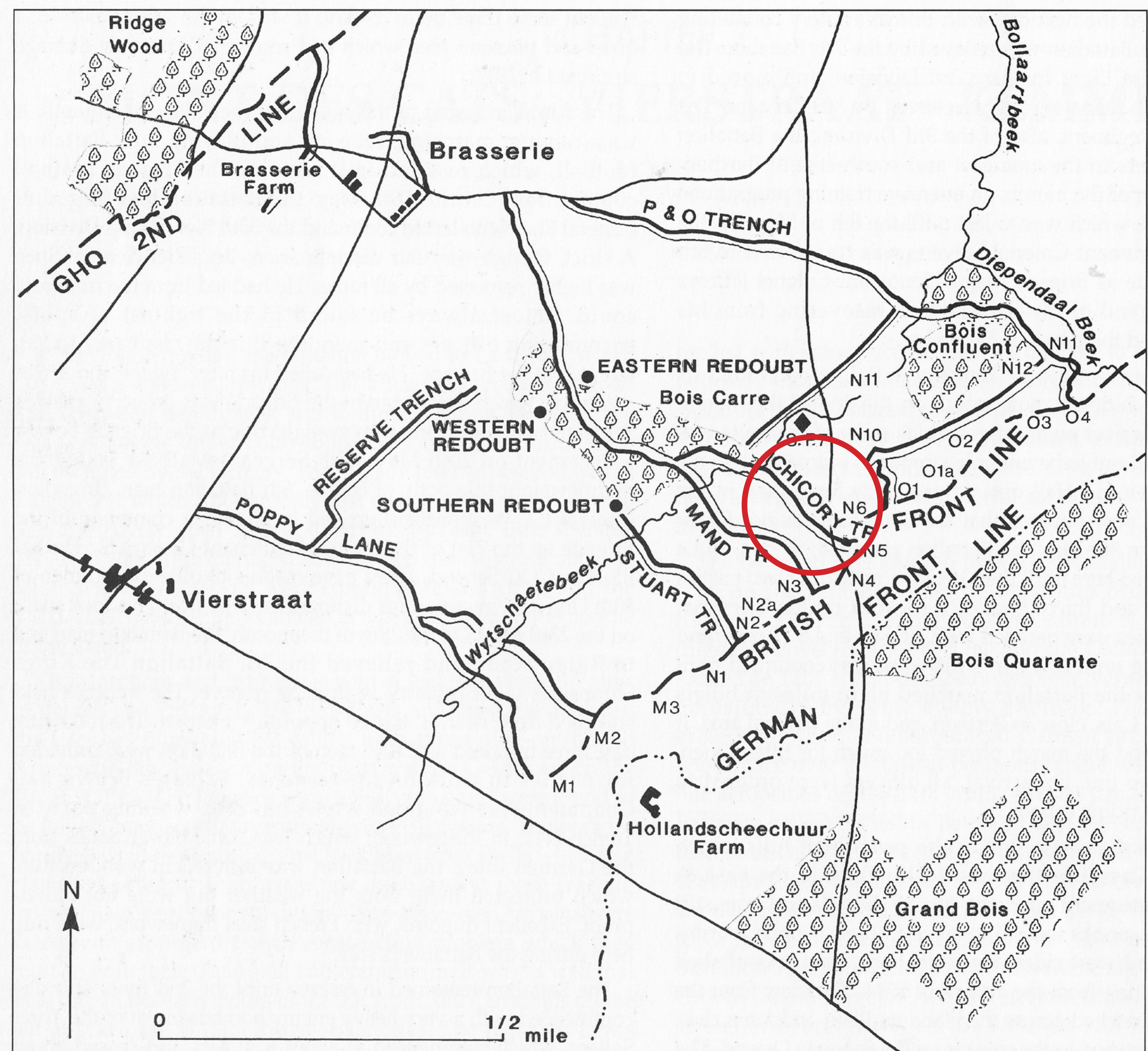
JOSEPH DAVISON
of Helme Park, Wolsingham
Born 1897
Son of farmer John Davison
and his wife Jane
Corporal, 6th Battalion, Durham Light
Infantry
Severely wounded - lost a leg

GEORGE WILLIAM BATY
of Broaddale House, Rookhope
1892 - 1924
Son of Lead Smelter William Baty and
his wife Ann Fairless
Private, Durham Light Infantry
Severely wounded by shrapnel, and
gassed; died of his wounds in 1924



Serjeant O'Neill left for a course of instruction prior to being commissioned a officer. At 6 pm the enemy began a fairly heavy bombardment by Nard Trench Mortars of the ground just behind Nard O. trenches and of N12 and bombers retreat. A man of the Battalion wounded but not seriously. 5 of the East Yorkshire regiment joining our left were blown to pieces by a "Run jar" and Trench Mortar. Corpl Davison dangerously wounded as in Chicory C.T. about midnight. Serjeant O'Neill left for a course. At mid-day the enemy opened an intricate fire with Whizz-bangs and Howitzers on our front line and Communication Trenches. This lasted for 10 minutes, very little damage being done and no casualties.

Battlefield Diary (above) and trench map (below) where Corporal Davison was "dangerously wounded when in Chicory C. T.", 18th June 1916.



Vierstraat Sector - 1916.

DEATH OF EDWARD FAIRLESS

Everything was quiet until late afternoon when they commenced to shell our communication trenches with high explosives. They had the range accurately and there was practically no trench at all in places. Soon after tea our curiosity concerning Minenwerfers was satisfied forever. From half-past five until half-past eight we were subjected to a strain almost beyond endurance. As soon as the first Minnie burst we jumped to our feet. We realised what the unfamiliar explosion was. Then we craned our necks upwards searching the sky for the new thing. Fortunately they began to fall on our right at first. From spotting the first one we could see them coming. They were of two shapes, one like a big shell, the other a cylinder nipped in the middle. The first kind rarely revolved but came from a great height point downwards. The cylindrical type slowly turned over and over. As soon as then fell we heard an ear-splitting report more terrible than anything we have known. The ordinary trench mortar was as nothing to these things. They exploded as if the earth itself had burst. Soil, sandbags and anything they fell upon splashed upwards to an enormous height, like some devilish subterranean fountain. Our trenches crumbled like an empty box. As long as these horrible things fell away from us we watched them with an absorbed impersonal interest. We watched the Minenwerfers falling away from us with more interest than fear. But when one seemed to be coming straight for us our whole being concentrated on our safety. "It's going to land in the bay," shouted Frank. "Run to the right," I yelled. We ran. The rushing, swishing sound of the mortar became louder, until we knew without a word that the time had come to duck. There was an alarming report: the trench shook; it had fallen just behind; it had missed us. The black smoke and earth were blown thirty feet above; soil and sods fell on us but we did not care. It had missed us. Rising to our feet we watched for another.

"Listen for the report of the gun," said Arthur. Presently was heard a sound resembling a rifle shot except that it was duller and longer. "There she goes!" we

exclaimed together. "I can see it!" cried Bill pointing at the sky. "Oh it's going well over," I said. "We'll stay here."

The shell reached its height and for a moment was lost in low cloud. We waited with anxiety until was seen to emerge, making in our direction but over. We had a fine view of it. As it dropped we crouched to the side of the parados to escape flying splinters. The sound of the explosion was terrifying; it threatened to blow in our ears. Afterwards we found a base plate measuring nine inches across.

In such a manner we listened for the report of the gun; searched the sky for the shell; judged its destination and acted accordingly. It was difficult to dodge one coming very near. It's falling a few yards in front or behind meant life or death to us. On one of these occasions Lance Corporal J Hall was hurled against the door of a shelter and pinned up to the neck with the debris. He was soon dug-out and we were very relieved to see he had sustained nothing worse than a few bruises and slight shock.

At the beginning of the bombardment we had one of the finest men in the company killed, Lance Corporal Fairless, a Saint John's College man. His death was an instance of how fine may be the boundary between death and safety. Fairless was standing in the middle of a bay; on his right and only a few yards away was a comrade. The shell that knocked the trench in and killed one, left the other shell shocked but with no other hurt. Sergeant R N Thompson was near Fairless too and was fortunate to escape.

EDWARD FAIRLESS
of Westgate
1892 - 1916
Son of Edward Fairless
and his wife Mary Thompson
Head boy at Wolsingham Grammar
School.
Teacher
Died in action 27th July 1916

