

## JAMES EDWARD SOUTHREN 1894 - 1918.

Gunner 52498, 37<sup>TH</sup> Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery.



**James Edward Southren** was the son of James Bell Southren and his first wife, Kate Adelaide Taylor. He was born in Sunderland, then part of County Durham, in North East England, in 1894.

He was barely one year old when his mother died, aged 23, and he was bought up by his father's brother Edward and his wife, Sarah Elizabeth Cansfield, as his father was a ships engineer and spent a lot of time at sea.

This led to a certain amount of acrimony in later years. On the Commonwealth War Graves citation it shows their address as 2, Wallace Street, Monkwearmouth, Sunderland. Jim was the half brother of my grandmother Kate Adelaide Southren, who was one of 6 half siblings of Jim through James Bell Southren's second wife Anne Cansfield.

Before the First World War Jim worked in the coal mining industry, one of the main employers in the North East of England at that time. By the time Jim volunteered at the beginning of WW1 he was a blacksmiths striker at Wearmouth Colliery, one of the mines in Sunderland.

Jim went to war at the beginning of the First World War and served as a Gunner in the 37th. Siege Battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery. I had been told several times by older members of the family that he went unscathed throughout the war, until, five days before the armistice on 6 November 1918, during a rest period with his colleagues, was that he was struck in the head by an allegedly stray bullet and killed instantly.

I have discovered more about Jim's time during the Great War from various sources including the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the National Archives and the internet. Especially helpful have been the contributors to the Great War Forum (<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?act=idx>) who have answered every question I have asked, even the most banal.

Jim is commemorated on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission web site. He is buried in Harlebeke New British Cemetery in Belgium. Block IV, plot C9. He is also commemorated on a plaque at the Miners Hall of the former Wearmouth Colliery, and his name also appears on the Book of Remembrance 1914-18 at The Holy Trinity Church in the section of those living in Southwick. Although, as with the CWGC and the colliery plaque, his family name is spelled Southern instead of Southren.

### Jim's War.

Jim served in the Royal Artillery through the 1<sup>st</sup> World War. Service number: 52498.

Unfortunately his service record appears to have been destroyed during the blitz in WW2 and all that remains is his medal card. However, we do know that he was a gunner in the 37<sup>th</sup> Siege Battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery<sup>1</sup> (citation on Commonwealth War Graves website).

His British Army Medal Roll Index reveals that after undergoing basic training he was sent with his unit to Egypt and on 29 December 1915 his unit arrived in Egypt. Working back from this it is believed he attested (that is took the oath to become a member of the armed forces) quite close to the outbreak of war in July 1914. Within a couple of months he and his unit were shipped to France, landing in Marseille. I have been unable to trace his route through France, but by 1918 they are in Flanders. At the end of war 37<sup>th</sup> Siege Battery was part of 59<sup>th</sup> Brigade Royal Garrison Artillery, serving with the 2nd Army.

I have pondered on why Jim became a Gunner in the Royal Artillery. The obvious unit for a County Durham man to join would surely have been the Durham Light Infantry. The City of Sunderland now has close links with the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Royal Artillery, which has recruited from the Sunderland area since January 1915, when the War Office wrote to the Mayor of Sunderland requesting permission to recruit from the area. These men were recruited to the 160<sup>th</sup> Wearside Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery. This was after Jim, had already volunteered and become a Gunner in the Royal Garrison Artillery. In the very earliest days of the war a R.G.A. battery paraded through Sunderland on its way to coastal defence duty at Cleadon Hills, north of the city. Possibly Jim saw this parade and that effected his choice.

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<sup>1</sup> On 1 June 1899 the Royal Regiment of Artillery was split into two branches: the Royal Horse and Royal Field Artillery and the Royal Garrison Artillery. In 1924 the two branches were re-amalgamated.

After attesting Jim would have been sent to one of the Heavy and Siege Artillery Depots for basic training. These depots were: No.1 Depot Derby; No.2 Depot Gosport; No.3 Depot Plymouth; No.4 Depot Ripon or A Depot at Catterick, on or around the 18th Nov 1914. It is likely he was first sent to a home Company before being posted to 37 Siege Battery. By Aug 1915 they were at the Siege Artillery School at either Lydd, Kent; Horsham; or Aldershot. After further training this 4 x 6inch (30cwt) Howitzer battery was sent to Devonport, to depart on the 15th Dec. 1915, for Egypt, where they were part of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Heavy Artillery Brigade.



6-inch 30cwt howitzer of the Royal Garrison Artillery being moved up into position by an FWD lorry near Mametz, July 1916.

They arrived at Port Said on the 29th Dec. 1915. This made Jim eligible to receive the 1914-15 Star, which I have with his other medals, the 1914-18 War Medal and the 1914-19 Great War for Civilization medal and his "Death Penny".

In Egypt they could possibly be part of the Army defending the Suez Canal from attacks by the Turkish forces, which were allied to Germany. The Suez

Canal was vital for two main reasons: 1). to allow the passing of Empire troops, from India, Australia and New Zealand to the battlefields of Europe and 2). to allow the transportation of oil, vital to keep the British Naval Fleet at sea, from Persia (Iran) to the UK.

In February 1915 the Turkish and German forces actually crossed the Suez canal, but were driven off by the Allied forces defending the canal. A second attack in 1916 was driven back before it reached the canal.

At the time Jim was there the Army in Egypt numbered about 70,000 and made up of British, Indian Army and ANZAC troops.

Or they could have been en-route to the disaster at Gallipoli, from which the Allies retreated on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of January 1916.

Four months after arriving in Alexandria, on 8th April 1916, they departed from Alexandria, and arrived at Marseille on the 15th April 1916.

On 9 May 1916 they became part of 3 Corps Heavy Artillery.

From Marseille they were deployed to the northern end of the Western Front where the British Army was stationed, straddling the Franco-Belgian border.

Accounts of the journey from Marseille to the northern area of the Western Front, give some indication of the squalor which was later to become the lot of soldiers at the front. Most traveled the length of France locked into goods wagons or cattle trucks with no comfort other than a couple of inches of old straw on the floor, often with some of their horses in the same wagon. The cattle trucks had gaps between the floor boards (to allow for the hosing out of the cattle droppings in civilian use). Consequently not only was the accommodation uncomfortable it was also drafty and wet if raining. Jim was traveling in May, so possibly the weather was warmer than it was for those men who made the journey in winter. The train stopped frequently and then the men were let out to exercise, eat and take a "personal comfort break". The journey would often take several days due to the congestion on the French railway system. Possibly the worse part of the journey was the straw. It was invariable old straw that was not changed very often, with the result that it had become infested with lice. Most men who traveled on these trains became lousy.

In late May 1916 Jim's battery became part of the 27 Heavy Artillery Group (HAG).

They were moving up to the firing line in the period leading up to the Battle of the Somme, which started on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916, Jim may have been at the Somme, but I cannot confirm that.

On 30th November 1916 they were transferred to the 66 HAG, where they remained until returning to the 27 HAG on 30th March 1917.

On 30th June 1917 they were moved to S.U.B. Group, rejoining 27 HAG on 12th July 1917.

On 28th September 1917 they moved to 79 HAG .

Their final move was to 59 HAG, part of the British 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, on 18th December 1917 where they remained until the end of the war. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had been based at the Ypres section of the front from the beginning of the war.

I have been unable to trace Jim's exact whereabouts in the period from May 1916 to November 1917. But referring to the book by Capt. E.A. James "A Record of the Battles and Engagements of the British Armies in France and Flanders, 1914-1918" I have pieced together a list of "possible".

As part of the Second Army Jim's unit could have been arriving at their section of the line in late May. At that time the 2nd Army were engaged in the battle of Mount Sorrel (2<sup>nd</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> June 1916).

In 1917 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were engaged in what was called "The Flanders Offensive" from June to November 1917. Actions included The Battle of Messines (7<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> June) and The Battles of Ypres (31<sup>st</sup> July - 10<sup>th</sup> November) which covers engagements the Battle of Picklem, Battle of Langemark, Battle of Menin Road, Battle of Polygon Wood, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battles of Passchendale. In the German offensive of 1918 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was engaged in the Battle of the Lys; The Battle of Messines; the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battles of Kemmel.



I attempted to get a copy of Jim's service record only to find that it no longer exists, probably incinerated during the blitz on London in World War 2 when one of the Government Records Depositories was burnt down. All that exists is his Medal Card.

Name <b>SOUTHERN</b> <b>SOUTHERN</b>		Corps <b>R.G.A.</b>	Rank <b>Capt.</b>	Regt. No. <b>52498</b>
J. <i>James</i>				
Medal <b>VICTORY</b>	Roll <b>RGA/122B</b>	Page <b>2177</b>	Remarks <b>K in a. 6. 11. 18</b>	
<b>BRITISH</b>				
<b>15<sup>th</sup> STAR</b>	<b>R.G.A. 3B 754</b>		<b>15. Star obtained for amended CIV 770. 459. 9. 30. Amk. 3877/1946</b>	
Theatre of War first served in <b>(S) Egypt</b>	Date of entry therein <b>29. 12. 18</b>		<b>E/714361/2</b> <b>2877/1946</b> <b>K 1220.</b>	
<i>Service amended 9/45. Amk. 3877/1946. Ena 1A</i> <b>Correspondence.</b>				
Address.				

Jim's Medal Card.

In 2012 I contacted a website "Great War Forum" to ask for help. Another contributor to this site sent me the following information concerning the disposition of Jim's unit at the time of his death:

The War Diary of 59 Brigade on the 6.11.18 records "In the Field, 37 SB had 2 men killed at their forward Battery position by hostile shell fire". One of these men was Jim.

This discounts the family story that he was killed by a stray bullet; it appears he was killed by enemy artillery fire, probably by shrapnel as shrapnel shells were used extensively. The contributor continues:

"59 Bde were under II Corps until the 3<sup>rd</sup> November, when that Corps HQ

went into rest and its Brigades came under XIX Corps. The Corps HQ position taken over was at Harlebeke Church Sq and in XIX Corps War Diary the closest recorded position (to his demise) for 37 S/B is on the 5.11.18:

4 howitzers at J.19.d.58.60

2 howitzers at I.12.a.8.0

1 howitzer at Workshops.

These are sheets 28 & 29; 37 SB next moved forward on the 8th to a position near Caster.

Whichever is the more forward is where he met his demise, along with his colleague Bombadier Walter J. REAKES 50580."

Some time later I received information from a contributor on the GWF informing me that the co-ordinates above are located at the village of Anzegem, close to the railway station approx 1km south of the village. Jim's battery had just moved to their forward positions in preparation for the Battle of the Scheldt, when the British Army were to cross the river Scheldt to the west of Oudenarde.

I wrote to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and asked if they had any further details of where Jim was killed and where he was initially interred, and received the following details in their reply:

**"Casualty Details**

Rank: Gunner

Surname: SOUTHERN\* (this spelling shown on Jim's medal card and on his grave stone).

Forenames: JAMES EDWARD

Service No: 52498

Age: 24

Unit: 37th Siege Battery.

Regiment: Royal Garrison Artillery

Date of Death: 6 November 1918

**Additional Information**

Adopted son of E. and Elizabeth Southern\*, of 2, Wallace St.,  
Monkwearmouth, Sunderland.

**Commemoration**

HARLEBEKE NEW BRITISH CEMETERY, Harlebeke, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium,  
Plot: IV. C. 9.

From our archival material, it appears that Gunner Southern\* was buried at the following map reference of 29 K. 31 d 9. 3



*The map reference given above refers to the First World War maps held at the Imperial War Museum. However, the maps are in the process of being digitised, and this is expected to take some considerable time."*

\*note misspelling of Southren.

I have visited the Imperial War Museum, the National Archives and the British Library and cannot find Sheet 29, I suspect that any map sheet still in use on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918 will probably have become a war souvenir of the holder.

#### Note about the later stages of World War 1.

Following the October Revolution in Russia (In November by the way, because Russia had not changed to the Western Gregorian system) Germany negotiated the treaty of Brest-Litovsk (now in Belarus) with Lenin's Russian government on 3rd March 1918. This freed up 700,000 German soldiers. Troops that were far more accustomed to a war of movement than their counterparts in the trench bound stalemate to the west.

The German commander, General Erich Ludendorff realised that he could not beat the Allies in one single, massive battle, so he put together a strategy of major assaults across the entire western front. These assaults would be led by what we have come to call Stoßtruppen (Shock troops or Storm Troopers). These hardened soldiers would be specifically trained to break through the opposing trenches, then to move swiftly against the enemy and press on, leaving the regular troops to mop up and consolidate behind them. The enemy would not get the chance to recuperate.

The attacks, the Kaiserschlacht or Kaiser's Battle began on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1918, on the Somme. On 9<sup>th</sup> April the assault on Flanders (Ypres) began, followed by an offensive in the Champaign region on 27<sup>th</sup> May.

After spectacular initial success the German attacks stalled and the Allies started to push them back. First by the French, in the Champaign region, on July 20<sup>th</sup>. Followed by the counter-attack in Picardy by the British 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies on 8<sup>th</sup> August. Finally the advance into Flanders (Ypres) got under way on 18<sup>th</sup> August.

After over 3 years of almost static trench warfare the German Army was being slowly pushed back by the Allies. By the late summer of 1918 the Germans were in rapid retreat along the majority of the Western Front. In the north (where Jim was located as part of the II Corps of British 2nd Army) the advance had taken the allies past Ypres and well on the road to the Belgian capital, Brussels. Earlier in the war the huge guns of the Siege Artillery were fairly stationary, moving occasionally when the German guns located their position and concentrated their fire. However, at this stage of the war they were moving more frequently and advancing all the time into newly liberated areas. As a unit the 37th did not have its own official War Diary, they were included in that being maintained at Divisional level, as was usual at this time. It was a major undertaking to move a battery if only because of the number of men and horses involved and the fact that they were moving over land devastated by up to three years artillery bombardment, so things such as roads had ceased to exist.

The battery of four artillery pieces would include

- Personnel: 5 officers and 177 other ranks
- Horses: 17 riding, 6 draught and 80 heavy draught
- Transport: 3 two-horse carts, 10 four-horse wagons

The battery would normally be with three others, under command of a Siege Brigade. The brigade that included Jim's 37<sup>th</sup> Siege battery was made up of the 30<sup>th</sup>, 335<sup>th</sup> and the 305<sup>th</sup> as well as the 37<sup>th</sup>.

The brigade would also include an Ammunition Column of:

- Personnel: 3 officers and 104 other ranks
- Horses: 13 riding, 2 draught and 72 heavy draught
- Transport: 1 two-horse carts, 16 four-horse wagons

The brigade would also include its headquarters of:

- Personnel: 7 officers and 137 other ranks
- Horses: 21 riding, 5 draught and 72 heavy draught
- Transport: 1 one-horse cart, 2 two-horse carts, 16 four-horse wagons

So moving was a bit more than packing the tents up, hitching the guns to the wagons and moving on.

The following are extracts from the War Diary of the British Army 59th Division, to which the 37<sup>th</sup> Siege Battery were attached at this stage of the war. Original is held in the National Archives at Kew, ref: WO95/322.

(Visited in December 2013). Sections in red in brackets are my comments / questions.

The extracts are those where the 37th is mentioned in the diary.

### War Diary of 59th Brigade Heavy Artillery Entries

December 18th 1917

The system of the Royal Garrison Artillery Brigades came into force at 4pm. The 59th Brigade consisting of: 30th Siege Battery; 37th Siege Battery ; 335th Siege Battery; 1 section of the 288th transferred from the 79th Heavy Artillery Group to become part of the 305th Siege Battery. The 37th Siege Battery transferred from 79th HAG. Lt Col. W. Arthy left the Brigade to take command of the 79th Brigade, Lt. Col. T.H. Blew returned from Senior Officers Course (to take command of the 59th Divn.)

December 19th

59th Brigade takes over the Heavy Artillery Report Centre at BELLEVUE.

(?)

December 27th 1917

A premature occurred in 37th SB and another in 305th SB. (A "premature" is where a shell explodes in the gun or immediately after firing and leaving the barrel).

## 1918

January 31st 1918

The HQ and 1 section each of 37th, 335th & 350th SB's pulled out (of line) for rest and proceeded to ESQUELBECQ. They were relieved by the 115th, 212th & 202nd SB respectively of the 65th Brigade, RGA.

February 1st

The remaining sections of the 37th, 335th & 350th SB pulled out to rest. Stripped guns only were left in position for the relieving batteries.

February 15th

Orders received for the Brigade HQ and batteries to return to the line tomorrow in relief of the 65th Brigade, who were ordered to move.

February 16th

Brigade HQ & 4 batteries left WORMHOULT en route for the YPRES SALIENT, combining at CLIFFORD CAMP for the night. During the 15 days at rest the batteries had spent the time in profitable training & recreation. The mornings were devoted to training, drill and overhaul of equipment. The afternoons and evenings being for recreation. A football inter-battery (sic) tournament had been arranged & commenced.

February 17th

Batteries started to relieve the batteries of the 65th Brigade by sections. Stripped guns were taken over in position.

February 18th

Remaining sections of batteries took over.

59th Brigade HQ. moved to the line relieving 65th Brigade and their HQ. Sheet 28 (Belgium) C19d.2.8 (see note on system of British Army battlefield maps in WW1).

March 22nd

37th SB shelled again today. This battery has been shelled intermittently for the past 3 days.

April 1st

37th SB shelled with aeroplane observation inflicting casualties. Battery pulled out at night and went into their alternate positions.

April 8th & 9th

30th SB & 37th SB shelled with HV (?) gun.

My note: This bombardment is the prelude to the German Kaiserschlacht. This is known as the Battle of the Lys, or the 4<sup>th</sup> Battle of Ypres. The next few entries, up to April 30<sup>th</sup> are showing that the Germans are advancing and the British front line is being pushed back. It finally halts at the Canal Bank (see below). The canal in question is the Lys Canal, just north of Ypres.

April 12<sup>th</sup>

Orders to move back to ARMY LINE positions, except 185<sup>th</sup> & 145<sup>th</sup> SB's who were to move to SIEGE PARK with 1 section of 30<sup>th</sup> SB.

37<sup>th</sup> & 350<sup>th</sup> SB's to move back to ARMY LINE complete, 335<sup>th</sup> SB moving 1 section today and the remainder tomorrow.

April 13<sup>th</sup>

Brigade HQ moved to TROIS TOURS CHATEAU (B.29a)(This refers to map B 29a)

April 25<sup>th</sup>

Heavy shelling of Battery positions on the CANAL BANK (?). 350<sup>th</sup> SB had one gun knocked out during the evening.

Enemy attacked on our right and captured KEMMEL HILL.

### The Second Battle of Kemmel Hill.

At 02:30 hours on 25 April 1918 over 250 batteries of German guns opened up on Allied artillery positions with a mixture of gas and high explosive. For the next two hours they concentrated solely on destroying gun emplacements.

After a short pause, at 05:00 hours the German barrage was switched to the French front line.

French soldiers who had survived the horrors of Verdun described it as the worst they had ever encountered.

Opposite a single French Division were amassed three and a half German Divisions. An hour of such a furious bombardment was considered sufficient by the Germans and at 06:00 hours they launched their infantry to the attack.

By 07:10 hours Kemmel Hill was theirs and by 10:30 hours it was all over.

Even the German airforce had joined in with 96 aircraft dropping 700 bombs and machine gunning the French positions as the Leib Regiment of the élite Alpine Corps (In fact a Division) stormed forward.

The fact that the French Ossuary on the hill contains the remains of more than 5000 unidentifiable soldiers, mostly, from fighting in this area in April says more about the fury of the bombardment than mere words.

April 26th

30th SB ordered to pull out and proceed at once to ESQUELBCQ under administration of 25th Brigade RGA.

37th, 335th & 350th SB's ordered to pull out 1 section and get it into action on the RED LINE position.

350th SB subsequently pulled out remaining section. 335th SB were badly shelled on the CANAL BANK during the move, 1 man being killed and 4 wounded.

April 27th

HQ moved from TROIS TOURS to STEENTJE.

37th SB were shelled in their RED LINE positions. 1 casualty.

All Batteries set to work to construct positions for defence of the GREEN LINE.

April 28th

37th SB continued in action at forward position, CANAL BANK. Firing day & night with this section. Some very good shooting accomplished.

April 29th & 30th

Continuous harassing on enemy roads, tracks & strong-points was carried out during the latter part of this month by the forward sections of Batteries, which were in action day and night almost continuously.

May 2nd

37th SB forward sections carried out a very successful visual shoot on a hostile battery in POELCAPELLE setting ammunition on fire and dispersing personnel.

May 5th

37th SB engaged in gassing hostile batteries. This action was continued each night when conditions permitted.

May 7th

30th SB was heavily shelled with yellow x gas. About 200 rounds were fired in the neighbourhood of their position. The particular hostile battery was gassed by the 37th SB the same evening.

May 8th

30th & 350th SB's again heavily shelled with gas & HE. Apparently 3 batteries were firing at them from different positions.

May 12th

II Corps took over a large additional front on the right from the XXII Corps, extending as far south as VOORMEZELE.

37th & 350th SB's moved their rear sections from the RED LINE to intermediate positions. As soon as the section of 350th SB was in action in its new position the other sections at ROME WOOD pulled out and joined them.

May 13th

Forward section of 37th SB at CANAL BANK was relieved by 268th SB and pulled back to intermediate position making 4 guns of the battery in action in 1 position.

June 15th to 19th

37th & 350th SB's moved guns each night to the alternative positions in view of possible enemy attack.

June 27th

37th SB moved 2 guns over the YSER CANAL to FOCH FARM, about 2500 yards from the front line. (Is this the Lys canal? Foch Farm is on the east side of the Lys canal).

June 30th



Throughout the month the Batteries have carried out continuous harassing fire on enemy roads, tracks and strong-points. A large percentage of rounds being fired during the hours of darkness.

July 1st to 4th

30th & 37th SB's were engaged in breaking up enemy main crossroads with aeroplane and balloon observation. Some very successful shooting was achieved.

July 2nd

37th SB moved another gun forward to FOCH FARM (C10d) making 3 guns in all at this position.

July 26th

37th SB had a premature when firing an experimental series in connection with air burst ammunition. 2 men killed and 5 wounded.

July 30th

37th SB received notification that they would be raised to a 6 gun battery by the addition of a section of the 510th SB arriving at HAUKE on 1st August.

August 1st

Orders received to reconnoitre and prepare positions for covering the defence of the WEST POPERINGHE LINE.

August 6<sup>th</sup>

37th SB shelled at intervals during the afternoon and evening, 1 man being killed. The section of 510th SB joined up with 37th SB making the battery up to establishment of 6 guns.

HM the King (George V) visited the Corps area today. All batteries sent representatives to LA LOVIE CHATEAU to line the road as the King drove by.

August 9th

Heavy concentrated bursts were fired on the defences of VOORMEZEL during the afternoon, batteries cooperated.

August 17th

37th SB (forward position) was heavily shelled. 2 men killed and 3 wounded and 1 gun put out of action.

August 19th

37th SB carried out an experimental shoot with a star shell at night time. Results were not altogether satisfactory.

August 20th

In conjunction with 33rd (British) Division Batteries of the 59th Brigade cooperated in the bombarding of LAUKHOFF CHATEAU and LA CHAPELLE, S/E of YPRES.

37th SB took another gun (making 4 in all) to their position across the YSER CANAL.

August 27th

Batteries cooperated with the Belgian Army on the left in an attack which resulted in pushing the enemy line back to the STEENBECK.

August 31st

The enemy evacuated MOUNT KEMMEL on our right.

(This shows the Germans are starting to retreat from their gains made during the attacks of April).

September 1st

We occupied VOORMEZELE and pushed our line further east on the southern part of the Corps front.

September 6th

30th SB moved guns to forward positions EAST of YPRES.

September 8th

All batteries cooperated with the Belgian Army on our left in pushing forward their front line by about 500 yds.

September 16th

Brigade HQ moved to forward position at STERN FARM near ELVERDINGHE.

37th SB moved forward 1 section to a forward position near ST. JEAN with orders to remain silent.

September 17th

Work commenced on building 3 battery positions for incoming batteries.

September 22nd

37th, 335th and 350th SB's each moved 1 section forward to new positions in preparation for the battle.

September 23rd

37th SB shelled in their new positions. 1 man killed, 3 wounded.

September 25th

37th, 335th & 350th SB's moved remaining sections to forward battle positions. The Corps commander visited Brigade HQ.

September 27th

30th SB moved remaining sections to forward battle positions.

Orders received to attack tomorrow.

September 28<sup>th</sup> (Start of the 5<sup>th</sup> Battle of Ypres)

II Corps, with the Belgian Army on the left and XIX Corps on the right attacked at 5.30am. (Summer time). Batteries of this Brigade (i.e. 59th Brigade) were reinforced for the barrage with batteries of the 77th Brigade and 86th Brigade RGA. This brigade covered the front of the 9th Division and fired a creeping barrage in conjunction with the 9th Divisions Artillery.

The attack was a complete success, the objectives being all captured according to programme. The enemy was pushed back beyond the BROODSEINDE RIDGE. (Just south of Passendale)

On conclusion of the barrage 350th SB pulled out and moved to a previously prepared forward position The 335th SB moved during the afternoon to a forward position.

The enemy put up a very poor reply to our barrage and generally offered but little resistance to our advance.

September 30th

All batteries were out of range. 37th & 350th SB's were ordered to pull out and advance towards MOORSLEDE and report to 9th Division.

Lorries got ditched on the ZONNEBEKE ROAD and orders were subsequently received to delay any further advance owing to the bad state of the roads.

Forward Brigade HQs were established on the BROODSEINDE RIDGE.

October 1st

Brigade HQs were established on the BROODSEINDE RIDGE.

Reconnaissance made new forward positions for batteries.

October 2nd

37th SB moved forward to a position near WATERDAMHOEK

October 3rd

350th SB moved forward to a position near WATERDAMHOEK

October 4th

335th SB moved forward to a position near WATERDAMHOEK

October 6th to 11th

Generally quiet. Batteries did no firing, but were subjected to much area shooting, with HE and gas. Enemy put down counter preparations each morning.

October 12th

37th SB moved one section to a forward position in front of WATERDAMHOEK.

October 13th

350th SB moved one section to a forward position in front of WATERDAMHOEK. (approx. 12km east of Ypres).

October 14th

II Corps attacked (the Battle of Courtrai Oct 14<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>), with the Belgian Army on the left and XIX Corps on the right. All batteries (including 88th

SB & 152SB) joined the barrage. Good progress was made and all objectives gained.

One section of each of the 37th, 335th and 350th SB's moved forward and took up positions west of WINKEL & ELOI (approx. 22km east of Ypres), reporting to the 9th Division for orders.

October 15th

II Corps again attacked. One section of each battery joined in a Heavy Artillery Barrage. Remaining sections moved forward and parked in the forward area ready for orders.

Brigade HQ's moved forward to the neighbourhood of ROLLEGHEM CAPPELLE.

October 17th

Positions were reconnoitred for covering an attack on the LYS RIVER. Each battery subsequently moved forward and got into action by nightfall near HULSTE. (approx 6km north of Courtrai (Kortrijk) the river Lys is an Anglisised version of the Belgian name Leie, which runs through Kortrijk)

October 18th

Remaining section of 37th SB moved forward and joined the battery near HULSTE.

October 19th

Brigade HQ's moved forward to a position between LEADELEDE AND HULSTE.

October 20th

II Corps forced a passage over the RIVER LYS during the night of 19th/20th and attacked at 6am from the other side. Good progress made by 9th Division (right) but the 36th Division on the left was held up and formed a flank only.

October 24th

37th, 335th and 350th SB's crossed the RIVER LYS at HARLEBEKE and parked at the latter place whilst positions were reconnoitred. These batteries subsequently pulled into position east of DEERLYCK Approx. 4km east of Harlebeke).

59th Brigade HQ's were moved across the river during the afternoon and opened in the vicinity of the batteries.

October 25th

At 9 am II Corps attacked (action at Ooteghem) with the object of reaching the crossing over the RIVER ESCALUT. The attack was held up on the left and an average of about 1000 - 2000 yds advance was made including the capture of INGOYGHEN.

Batteries (6 no. Howitzers) joined in a creeping barrage and bombarded key points.

October 28th

30th SB moved up from YPRES, where they had remained parked since the beginning of the FLANDERS battles owing to their lorries not being available. The battery crossed the (river) LYS today and parked in HARLEBEKE.

October 30th

335th & 350th SB's moved to forward positions near KNOCKE (approx 6 km west of Oudenarde), 37th SB moved forward another section to a forward position which had been taken up by 1 section during the advance of 25th October.

October 31st

II Corps attacked (action at Tiegheim) at 5.25 am with French on the left and XIX Corps on the right. All objectives were taken and the RIVER ESCALUT reached. Batteries cooperated by bombarding strong points on the approach of our infantry.

November 1st

Brigade HQ's moved forward to KNOCKE.

II Corps, with French on the left, continued to push forward towards the (river) SCHELDT but heavy artillery did not participate in the fighting.

November 2nd

Positions were reconnoitred in the forward area, for batteries of the Brigade for the purpose of covering a forcing of the (river) SCHELDT.

November 3rd

II Corps was withdrawn from the line and Brigade came under the orders of XIX Corps Heavy Artillery.

Col. A.J.H. Keyes was attached to the Brigade Head Quarters.

November 4th

Batteries proceeded with the preparation of the forward positions.

November 6th

Capt. M. Wilks, RAMC posted to Brigade HQ as Medical Officer in place of Lt. E.B. Peace M.O.R.C. USA.

37th SB had 2 men killed at their forward battery position by hostile shell fire. (ONE OF THESE FATALITIES WAS JIM)

November 8th

37th, 335th & 350th SB's moved their guns forward to positions near CASTER (KASTER in Belgium) preparatory to the Battle for the crossing of the (river) SCHELDT. A guard only was left with the guns, the personnel of the batteries still remaining behind at their old battery positions.

KASTER is approx 2 km north of the river Scheldt at its closest point and 10km west of Oudenaarde.

November 10th

Enemy retired from the East bank of the SCHELDT and batteries were ordered to stand fast with the move of their personnel and stores to their forward positions.

Report received that the Kaiser had abdicated.

II Corps Heavy Artillery took over command of the Brigade from the XIX Corps Heavy Artillery.

Notification received that Armistice terms had been accepted by the German Government.



November 11th

Orders received to "Stand Fast" at 11 am.

November 13th

Brigade HQ moved into billets at DEERLYCK. 37th & 350th SB's also moved into DEERLYCK.

November 15th

XIX Corps Heavy Artillery took over command of the Brigade from II Corps Heavy Artillery.

Jim is commemorated on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission web site. He is buried in Harlebeke New British Cemetery in Belgium. Block IV, plot C9. He is also commemorated on a plaque at the Miners Hall of the former Wearmouth Colliery, and his name also appears on the Book of Remembrance 1914-18 at The Holy Trinity Church in the section of those living in Southwick. Although, as with the CWGC and the colliery plaque, his family name is spelled Southern instead of Southren.



Jim's grave in Harlebeke New British Cemetery, Belgium.

If any of the Southren or Appleby families wish to contact me please  
contact me at my by e-mail at: [john.oz\\_osborn@yahoo.com](mailto:john.oz_osborn@yahoo.com)