

**MAJOR CECIL HOWE CROPPER D.S.O., M.C.**  
**173rd / 250th / 257th Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers**

Born 27 April 1882 at Goulburn, New South Wales, Cecil was the son of Charles Michael Walsh and Mary Ann (nee Howe) Cropper. Other children in the marriage were Charles William; Ada Fanny Hare; Elizabeth F.; Annie J. H. and Mabel Helen

The *Sydney Morning Herald* of 23 December 1904 reported that Cecil had achieved a Pass in 2nd Year Mining Engineer exams at the University of Sydney. The *Sydney Morning Herald* of 12 April 1906 reported he had received his Bachelor of Engineering, Mining and Metallurgy, Degree. In April 1906 he was a passenger on *Himalaya* from Sydney to Fremantle. In December 1907, Cecil and his brother Charles were passengers on *Mongolia* from Fremantle to Adelaide.

In October 1908 Cecil was a passenger on *Moldavia* from Fremantle to the Eastern States. In December 1908 at age 27 he was a Saloon passenger on *Salamis* from Sydney to Durban, South Africa. An entry in the records of Ellis Island in the United States shows Cecil Howe Cropper entered New York on 18 January 1910 from the ship *Baltic* from Liverpool. His address was given just as Helsby, England (not far from Liverpool).

*Goulburn Evening Penny Post* – NSW – Thursday 5 May 1910:

**OBITUARY.**

Mr. Charles Michael Walsh Cropper, a former resident of Goulburn, died in Sydney on Monday, at the age of 89. Mr. Cropper was inspector of conditional purchases here. He leaves a widow, one son, and four daughters, one of whom is married to Mr. Harry Atkinson, formerly manager of the London Bank of Australasia in Goulburn, and now of Victoria. Another is married to Dr. McCormack of Sydney.

**Cecil Howe Cropper** applied for a Commission on 21 November 1914 stating he was British Born. His application was accepted on 23 November and he was appointed a Lieutenant in the 11th Battalion, Northumberland Fusiliers.

Cecil Cropper is mentioned in the books: ‘*War Underground – The Tunnellers of the Great War*’ by Alexander Barrie; ‘*Tunnellers - The Story of the Tunnelling Companies Royal Engineers, during the World War*’ by Captain W. Grant Grieve & Bernard Newman, and one by Simon Jones, ‘*Underground Warfare 1914-1918*’.

On May 12th 1915, while inspecting the two-mile length of front facing Wytschaete and Messines, Major John Norton Griffiths first had the idea of a great mining attack against Messines Ridge. Initially rejected for its lack of detail, the scheme to ‘earthquake the Messines Ridge’, from Hill 60 in the north to near Ploegsteert in the south, was eventually approved in early January 1916.

The London Gazette of 23 March 1915 records Cecils’ transfer to the General List and he is then appointed as a 2nd Lieutenant to the 173rd Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers. He first entered France on 25 March 1915, probably with reinforcements for the 173rd Tunnelling Company.

Towards the end of March he (Norton Griffiths) travelled with one batch on the crossing to Le Havre. Shortly before the miners were put ashore he searched out the officer temporarily in charge – a young Northumbrian, Lieutenant Cecil Cropper – and gave him a reminder about marching etiquette. “Don’t forget the compliments, Cropper,” he said, meaning such refinements as the “Eyes Right” and “Eyes left” courtesies given to high-ranking soldiers or civilians who happened to pass by. Cropper was astounded. He knew his men would never have heard such commands and he ignored the advice. Barrie p.38

Cecil Cropper was never a Northumbrian. Norton Griffiths description of him as such was possibly due to Cecil still wearing his Northumbrian Fusiliers insignia when he arrived at the 173rd Tunnelling Company, which, according to his family, caused some consternation among the Engineers. 173rd Tunnelling Company moved into the Fauquissart area and were employed under the command of 1 and Indian Corps on operations in preparation for an attack at Aubers Ridge.

General Rawlinson:

This is most unsatisfactory. Where are the Sherwood Foresters? Where are the East Lancashires on the right?

Brigadier-General Oxley:

They are lying out in No-Man's-Land, sir, and most of them will never stand again.

*Rifle Brigade Official History*, p. 186

In the northern sector, the attack of General Rawlinson's 4th Corps was to be led by the 24th and 25th Brigades of 8th Division, operating on much the same plan as the 1st and the Indian Corps to the south. There were some minor differences in execution, however, and these, added to the fact that the 25th Brigade under brigadier-General Lowry-Cole was made up of some of the most gallant and well-disciplined troops in the Expeditionary Force, gave the attack here an appearance, to begin with, of partial success.

A number of ingenious and unconventional means had been devised to break up the German emplacements. Two mines had been sunk and run under the enemy lines on the extreme left where the 1/13th London Regiment was to break through and hold the enemy communication trench as a switch line protecting the flank. The sinking of the shafts had been a perilous business, for the engineers had first to penetrate a thickness of fifteen feet of water-bearing loam before they reached the hard blue clay in which the tunnel was drilled. The tunnel itself was made only just wide enough for a man to crawl along, with 'lay-bys' at intervals of twenty feet, and each ounce of the tell-tale blue soil had to be carried away in sandbags. Proper ventilation of the tunnels was impossible and sometimes men with a load of explosive on their back would pass out unconscious en route, blocking the passage-way, and have to be dragged out by their feet over hundreds of yards. By the day of the attack, though, over 2,000 lb. of black gunpowder had been packed at the base of each mine.

*"see page 115. Aubers Ridge. 9th May 1915*

*The object of these two offensive mines was to destroy the machine guns sweeping "No-Mans land" from a salient bastion in the German trenches about 100 yards from the British trenches. On the early morning of May 9th 1915, as soon as the British artillery bombardment of the German trenches lifted, the mines were fired and were a signal for the attacking infantry to go "over the top" to assault and capture the German position, which they did. But, later in the morning, a German counter attack drove the British Infantry back to the position they had left. Lieut. C.H. Cropper of 173rd Tunnelling Co., Royal Engineers, was ordered to undertake this work and told the mines had to be ready in three weeks from the time he received the order to go ahead. By working day & night under great difficulties of ventilation and concealment from the Germans the job was achieved. The Military Cross was awarded to Lieutenant C.H. Cropper for his part in this work."*

Pencil note on Cecil Croppers' own copy of 'The Donkeys'

p. 126:

The losses of the one day's fighting that was the "Battle" of Aubers Ridge were 458 officers and 11, 161 men. It had been a disastrous fifteen hours of squandered heroism, unredeemed by the faintest glimmer of success.

But, in fact, more than heroism had been squandered, for the divisions broken on this day, like those at Ypres in the weeks before, were the last of the old regular British Army, that had the training and discipline of years behind them and whose musketry and "fifteen rounds rapid" made German observers in 1914 think that there must be 'a machine-gun behind every tree'. Thereafter the gaps in individual units were filled first by brave but hardly trained volunteers, the 'New Armies' of the Somme; and, later, by the conscripts whose turn was to come at Passchendaele.

p.173

*One of the German battalion commanders spoke later of the revolting and nauseating impression made on them all as they watched the slaughter; so much so that after the retreat had begun they ceased fire... dozens of khaki-clad forms rose up once again and began to limp and crawl back to their own lines. "No shot was fired at them from the German trenches for the rest of the day, so great was the feeling of compassion and mercy for the enemy after such a victory." There had been twelve battalions making the attack, a strength of just under ten thousand, and in the three and a half hours of the actual battle their casualties were 385 officers and 7861 men. The Germans suffered no casualties at all.*

### **The Battle of Aubers - 9 May 1915**

#### *Underground*

173rd Tunnelling Company RE planted two 2000-pound mines under the German front lines in the northern sector. To do this they drove two galleries, 70 yards apart, with tunnels 285 and 330 feet long respectively. Four other galleries, driven towards the enemy from the sector of the 7th Division, became flooded and were abandoned.

#### *Casualties*

More than 11,000 British casualties were sustained on 9 May 1915, the vast majority within yards of their own front-line trench. Mile for mile, Division for Division, this was one of the highest rates of loss during the entire war.

There is no memorial to the attack at Aubers Ridge.

<http://www.1914-1918.net>

Perhaps it was with the battle of Aubers Ridge that the following alleged exchange occurred:

*Ludendorff: The English soldiers fight like lions.*

*Hoffman: True. But don't we know that they are lions led by donkeys.*

The 173rd Company was extended to Rue du Bois and Red Lamp areas soon afterwards and were employed under the command of 2nd Division on operations near Cuinchy in Summer 1915.

### **Sir John French's Ninth Despatch of 15 October 1915**

*The ninth Despatch of Field Marshal Sir John French, Commander in Chief of the British Armies in France and Flanders. Printed in the Fourth Supplement to the London Gazette of 1 November 1915. It dealt with the fighting during the summer of 1915 and the largest offensive yet undertaken, the Battle of Loos. French goes into some depth concerning the deployment of the reserves for this battle - a matter over which he was eventually sacked.*

#### **Para:**

24. I desire to call your Lordship's attention to the splendid work carried out by the Tunnelling Companies. These companies, officered largely by mining engineers, and manned by professional miners, have devoted themselves whole-heartedly to the dangerous work of offensive and defensive mining, a task ever accompanied by great and unseen dangers. It is impossible within the limits of a despatch to give any just idea of the work of these units, but it will be found, when their history comes to be written, that it will present a story of danger, of heroism, and of difficulties surmounted worthy of the best traditions of the Royal Engineers, under whose general direction their work is carried out.

<http://www.1914-1918.net>

That month (November 1915) a newly formed company, 250, was settling down to a most ambitious programme under the command of Captain Cecil Cropper, a metal mining engineer from Northumberland. Cropper was a handsome man of good physique and commanding manner; his experience of active service tunnelling had been brief but intensive. He had come from 173 Company and some sordid fighting at Aubers Ridge, a black spot in the British line about half way between Ypres and Vimy.

He was an able but temperamentally somewhat difficult commander. He resented interference from Harvey, and regarded Norton Griffiths as hardly more than a showman-adventurer who "threw his weight about". But he kept these thoughts to himself and Norton Griffiths responded with feelings for Cropper that were approving and even cordial; his satisfaction increased when he heard that Cropper was planning a scheme that lined up very well with his own ambitious plans for a major shake-up of Messines Ridge.

Cropper's headquarters were at la Clytte in the Canadian Corps' area, centrally facing the ridge and about three miles back. The Canadian Chief Engineer, Brigadier-General Charles Armstrong, worried about the mining situation on his front, had been pressing for tunnelling companies for the Corps' own to be formed as hurriedly as possible. He had a large number of former miners already available, and authority was given for the formation of one company on the spot the next month, December. Two more were also authorised, but to Armstrong's disappointment were to be formed in Canada and shipped out during the spring. Meanwhile the main underground defence had to fall on 250 Company. Armstrong ordered Cropper to lay out an aggressive scheme.

For a while Cropper scraped about at some shallow waterlogged tunnels in poor sandy soil, dug originally by Hepburn's 172 Company and abandoned months before. It soon seemed clear to him that nothing could be achieved from these starting points.

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He moved further towards the rear one day, testing the ground for changes in its geology, and found places where the clay came to within 15 feet or so of the surface. This was promising and he ordered trial shafts to be sunk; but even here the clay proved too deep to reach. At about 10 feet, terrific hydraulic pressures were set up that forced sand through the timbering faster than it could be dug out, and eventually each shaft began to tilt out of plumb, a preliminary to collapsing. So Cropper went further back still, until, in the beds of streams and elsewhere, he found the fine, smooth, stiff, blue clay coming up almost to ground level. He decided to start the scheme back there. Soon he walked round to see Armstrong, to explain his plans and to hand in a report setting them down in formal terms. Armstrong listened in surprise at the ambitiousness of the proposals, then gave the word to go ahead, adding that he would see that the report was sent on at once to 2nd Army headquarters. "And if you can do it, Cropper," he said doubtfully, as they parted, "you're a darned good man." Cropper was quite confident that he could.

On December 18th, Norton Griffiths came bustling round. By then, Cropper had four shaft sites marked out and was already well down into the clay at three of them. Matter-of-factly he explained that he was aiming a four-gallery attack at the ridge. There were a number of strongly fortified German posts up there, opposite his two-miles-long front, and he was already planning to attack five of them – marked on British maps as Hollandscheschuur, Petit Bois, Peckham, Spanbroekmolen and Kruisstraat – from underground. It was amazingly audacious, and even Norton Griffiths must have been somewhat taken aback for a moment. The distance to go was an unprecedented 2,000 to 3,000 feet in most cases.

Cropper's four tunnels were to be of quite exceptional importance – were, in fact, to win a permanent place in the history of war. Norton Griffiths saw that what he had grown accustomed to describing as "the big idea" had been grasped and acted on by somebody at last.

Barrie p.193/194: *Abridged*

Now, as his time with the tunnelling companies drew towards its end, Norton Griffiths had another major inspiration; in certain collieries, mechanical borers were used to drive mine headings and roads through coal seams. Could these not be adapted to bore through clay? It seemed very probable; larger models of broadly similar design had already been used on the London underground railway tunnels in clay.

Norton Griffiths put the idea forward with predictable zeal. He asked Harvey for immediate action, and urged that several machines should be obtained. As usual he was utterly confident. To order just one, for trial, he argued, would simply waste time; four or six should be brought out at once, and he listed what appeared to be six reasons why Harvey should agree. But behind the outflow of words only two valid points were being made – though both were important: that mechanical diggers would speed the work; and that speed was vital. In particular, he wanted a borer provided for Cropper, and another for the unit immediately on Cropper's right, the new 3rd Canadian Tunnelling Company. Two machines would be the minimum.

Harvey stood firm against all eloquence and pressure Norton Griffiths put on him, and permitted one only to be ordered for the present; it was to be used by Cropper. Plans to obtain it, the Stanley Heading Machine, manufactured in Nuneaton, went forward with a rush. A special cutting head designed for the hard, Ypresian clay had to be made, but was promised by the makers for delivery in six weeks.

Norton Griffiths and Harvey together called on Cropper to tell him about the decision. Evidently Norton Griffiths had it in mind that a gallery should be driven all the way to Wytschaete village, a full 3,000 feet further than the present plan. Inwardly Cropper was affronted at the way they seemed to have taken over his scheme, which they now discussed as if it had been all their own idea. The situation was full of Irony. Undoubtedly, Norton Griffiths and Harvey *did* feel it was theirs; and certainly it bore a strong resemblance to the plans they had been pushing for months. But Cropper had known nothing about this behind-the-scenes campaign and was amazed at their attitude. But he was keen enough to try out the machine and agreed to go forward with arrangements to receive it. He undertook to have a chamber dug at the foot of what had been named Petit Bois (also known as SP13) shaft, into which the borer could be lowered and assembled.

On February 10th (1916) Norton Griffiths called again, and was seemingly a shade displeased to find that Cropper was pushing hard ahead with clay licking work on the tunnels, but had not made much progress with the arrangements necessary above and below ground for the borer. However, he extracted a promise that these works would now be speeded up, and assured Cropper that "Kitchener is personally interested in this". He dropped off a crate of port to engender good will, not knowing that Cropper was an almost total abstainer, then hurried away.

Barrie p.195-197: *Abridged*

Norton Griffiths arranged for a skilled engineer named Carter to be sent out to install the machine and train Cropper's men in its proper use. The machine arrived at Boulogne on the 17th of February and was loaded on lorries.

Urgent matters in other parts of the line kept him away from Petit Bois shaft throughout the next two days. But on February 20th, he called on Cropper to find that the reception arrangements had gone ahead well, as promised. The hand-driven gallery had been driven forward about 300 feet. Cropper had had another shaft dug near by for the machine. His plan was to let it dig its own tunnel parallel to the present one and then, if it succeeded, it could go ahead on its own. Much of the machine had already arrived on the site and Carter, the expert, had been busy testing components.

Barrie p.198-199: *Abridged*

On February 14th, the Commander-in-Chief had (joylessly) accepted the French plan for a great mid-summer battle along the Somme. But he still believed it was in Flanders that something like a decisive victory could be won; so he reserved the right to make a push of his own near Ypres, a week or two before the Somme joint operation began. The Messines Ridge mines were to be an important part of it; orders went out to be ready for action by mid-June.

The main worry was Cropper's Petit Bois tunnel. It had been aimed at a little salient overlooking the German lines. Probably it was the most important tunnel of them all; but it was also the longest and the least likely to be ready in time if hand and foot digging had to be relied upon. And Cropper already had doubts about the machine.

At a consultation with the Controller of Mines, Stevenson, Cropper was asked if he could double the rate of advance at Petit Bois. The tunnel was still 1,000 feet short of even the British line and some such dramatic speed-up was clearly needed. How this could be achieved remained obscure. The men were already under pressure. By now two of the 250 tunnels – Spanbroekmolen and Kruisstraat – had been taken over by the 3rd Canadian Company. But there were still three major ones to drive, Hollandscheschuur and Peckham, besides Petit Bois. The men were working as fast as they could.

On about February 23rd, a grave faced Cropper arrived at the Petit Bois site and asked for the officer in charge, second-Lieutenant Henry Tatham. He described a new method of working he wanted tried out. Instead of timbering close behind the advancing face, he said, the face gang was to work seven feet ahead of a tidying up gang which, in turn, was to work ahead of a timbering gang.

Tatham protested. He said the face gang would be in great danger from collapse so far ahead of the timbering, and pointed out that they had already had what he called "slickensides" with a mere none inches of unsupported clay. Tatham added that he was afraid there would be loss of life. But the order stood.

Next shift, Tatham went down with the men and told them of the new procedure. He was quite aware, he said, of the risk involved; but orders had to be obeyed. He arranged for a niche to be dug for his own occupation near the face and for work to be stopped for a minute each hour while he went fully forward into the face to listen.

The rate of progress leapt up. For three days Tatham lived in his niche, having food sent down, straining at all times to catch the slightest sign of soil slippage, and going forward each hour for the official check. While carrying out the last of these face checks - just prior to being relieved – Tatham detected a faint groan from the soil. Immediately he gave the Miners' warning cry of "Hist!" and shouted for them all to run for their lives. As he and the men scrambled in startled confusion towards the rear, 40 feet of the tunnel collapsed; about two weeks' work to put right. But no one had been killed, or even hurt.

Barrie p.200-202: *Abridged*

Cecil Howe Cropper was awarded the Military Cross at Aubers Ridge, the award promulgated in the London Gazette of 14 January 1916.

*The West Australian* – Perth – Saturday 4 March 1916:

SOCIAL NOTES.

(By "Adrienne.")

"Aim Aim" writes from Kalgoorlie under date February 28:--Mr. Cecil Cropper, formerly of the Ivanhoe mine at the beginning of the war volunteered as a private in the Royal Engineers in London. He is now Captain Cropper, of the Royal Engineers, and commands a company of 360 men, and recently won the Military Cross. He is a brother of Mr. C. W. Cropper, who was for many years associated with the Kalgoorlie Racing Club, holding the position of secretary. Instead of returning to Kalgoorlie, as he had intended he at once proceeded by way of the Siberian railway to London, where he is at present.

*The Sydney Morning Herald* – Saturday 4 March 1916:

**AWARDED MILITARY CROSS  
CAPTAIN C. H. CROPPER, R.E.,**

Who was mentioned in Field Marshal Sir John French's despatch of November 30 last for distinguished conduct in the field, and who subsequently was awarded the Military Cross. Captain Cropper is a son of the late Mr. Charles and Mrs. Cropper, late of Goulburn, N.S.W. He was educated at Armidale, and studied engineering at the Sydney University, obtaining his B.E. degree in 1906. He was also a prominent member of the Sports Union, and was captain of the boats in 1905. When the war broke out he was engaged as an engineer to a tin-mining company in the Malay States. Returning to England in November, 1914, he obtained a commission in the Northumberland Fusiliers in March last year, and was transferred to the Royal Engineers. He has since been engaged in tunnelling work in Flanders. Captain Cropper is a brother of Mr C. W. Cropper, secretary of the Australian Jockey Club, and of Lady MacCormick.

*image at right accompanied the article*

Similar articles appeared in: *Goulburn Evening Penny Post* Tuesday 11 April 1916 & the *Kalgoorlie Miner* of Friday 7 April 1916



Cropper was again Mentioned in the Despatches which was promulgated in the London Gazette 15 June 1916, p.5931.

**Sir Douglas Haig's Spring 1916 Despatch**

*The first Despatch of Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, Commander in Chief of the British Armies in France and Flanders. Printed in the Third Supplement to the London Gazette of 29 May 1916. It covered the fighting at the Bluff, St Eloi and other actions of early 1916.*

Haig replaced Sir John French as Commander-in-Chief of the British Armies in France and Flanders.

8. While many other units have done excellent work during the period under review, the following have been specially brought to my notice for good work in carrying out or repelling local attacks and raids: —

173rd Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers.

Para:

13. The work of the Tunnelling Companies calls for special mention. Increased mining activity on the part of the enemy has invariably been answered with enterprise combined with untiring energy on the part of our miners, who in carrying out duties always full of danger have shown that they possess in the highest degree the qualities of courage, perseverance, and self-sacrifice. Their importance in the present phase of warfare is very great.

<http://www.1914-1918.net> Abridged

**THE COMMONWEALTH JOINS IN**

By early June (1916), Hollandscheschuur Tunnel had been forced 800 feet across no-man's-land in the face of persistent flooding, accurate German mortar fire (aimed deliberately, it seemed, at the mine entrance) and heavy German countermines. At Peckham, a mile and a half further south even worse trouble had been met. Here a short, quiet spoken, former coal-mining Welshman, Second-Lieutenant Haydn Rees, had been exhorting the men to conquer what, at times seemed impossible odds; the clay alone was a serious hindrance; it swelled uncontrollably. Timbers, that proved strong enough in other tunnels, snapped like cheese sticks and had to be replaced with massive seven-inch balks. The floor wracked so badly that a wooden tramway laid for spoil-removal trolleys had to be ripped up and replaced. As elsewhere, mortar fire had had a devastating effect of progress; and on April 29th an unexpected raid, that looked as if it might succeed, had sent the Tunnellers rushing to the firestep, to fumble with unfamiliar rifles. But, when morale was low, Haydn Rees pointed out that they were really fortunate to be where they were; for Peckham was the only tunnel site along the Ridge where German countermining was wholly absent. This was curiously true. German miners were fighting back with spirit to the north and south, but at Peckham they never came close enough to be heard—though geophones were constantly manned in case.

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## THE COMMONWEALTH JOINS IN

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The most dramatic spring and early-summer advance of all was made at Petit Bois, in the long, fateful tunnel where Norton Griffiths's machine and the controversial new digging method had both failed. By early June, Cropper's men had kicked their way through 1,600 feet, despite more of the mortar fire and endless trouble with the maddeningly swollen clay. Electric lighting and compressed air ventilation plants had both been installed. At 1,600 feet the tunnel was to divide into a two pronged fork to allow twin charges to be fired. Early on the morning of June 10th, twelve men were down at the fork when surface workers felt the ground give the, by now, unmistakable quiver of a major mine shock. Two spouts of clay erupted from just in front of the German line and fell back to form ominously blue crater rims, easily seen from the British side. That blueness meant the mines had been deep as well as powerful. The Petit Bois workers had been heard by Germans standing on the bottom of an old crater overhead. This was their reply. With one charge in particular they had aimed well; it was almost directly over the tunnel.

A rescue squad in Proto anti-gas equipment was rushed to the scene. They reported a grave situation; a blockage had been found 1,250 feet in from the entrance shaft; it looked as if 300 or more feet of tangled debris might have to be cleared to reach the men. Their chances of survival were now rated poor. Probably they had already been crushed or, if they escaped that, gassed. In any case, it would take many hours—maybe several days—to reach them and there was little likelihood that the air trapped near the face would last out. But Cropper ordered an all-out rescue attempt to be made on the assumption that there might be survivors.

After a hurried consultation of officers, it was decided that instead of clearing the debris, a new bypass tunnel would be driven alongside. Periodic probes would be put out to see where—if anywhere—the old tunnel could be re-entered.

Haydn Rees, knowledgeable about rescue work from his days in the collieries of Wales, was called from Peckham tunnel to join with other officers in running the operations. The men sprang at the clay and tore their way through it at incredible speed. Normally, 15 feet a day was considered good. But the Petit Bois rescue teams held an average of 40.

In fact the trapped men had all survived the concussion of the mines. It had come with fearful suddenness—the crash of the explosion, the slow rumbling and splintering of wood as the walls and roof closed in behind them, and the sudden total darkness. But no one had been hurt. They had picked themselves up and crawled towards the broken end of the narrow tunnel to inspect the damage. There, when they found they were trapped, an argument had begun. Some had thought that they should try to dig their way out. One rock of a man in particular, Sapper Bedson from Cumberland, had said No. Bedson was an experienced miner from White Haven collieries; his advice was to lie still, so conserving energy and air for a long wait; in time, help would come.

It was too much to ask of trapped men. They clawed in turn at the wreckage, gripped now by an animal instinct for freedom that reason could not, for the moment, reach. But the foetid atmosphere soon stopped them, and brought them down, fighting painfully for air.

They gathered eventually by the fallen end of the tunnel where a little air still seeped through a break in the ventilation pipe. It was no more than a trickle and next to useless. But they breathed it deeply and in hope. Then shortly after three in the afternoon, the trickle calamitously stopped. Death was coming very close.

At five o'clock, Bedson advised the others to spread out and made his own way slowly to the face end of the tunnel. There he made himself a bed of sandbags, lay down, removed the glass from his watch so that he could feel the time, and placed his water bottle beside him. The face end was slightly elevated and the air a trifle less foul.

The others remained where they were for a while, gasping together at the opposite end of the tunnel. Bedson half dozed. At about three o'clock in the morning, a Sunday, he heard them spreading themselves out at last. Soon there was silence but for a cough, an occasional moan and the jerky, exaggerated breathing of eleven men slowly suffocating to death. The first died that Sunday afternoon. The others followed. By eight o'clock on Monday evening, all but Bedson were gone.

On the Tuesday, the rescuers uncovered a damaged length of ventilation pipe which they repaired in the hope that some air might find its way through. A little did, enough for Bedson to detect a slight improvement in the atmosphere quite quickly. Each day he made a slow, painful journey to the fallen end. There he listened for sounds of help coming. Day followed day and none could be heard. As he crawled past his comrades he paused by each one to make sure he was dead. Every 24 hours he wound up his watch. Thirst was a worry. He had about a pint of water to keep him going. Often he took some into his mouth and swilled it round but always put it back in the bottle. With massive resignation, he waited.

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## THE COMMONWEALTH JOINS IN

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On about the fourth day, though work went on at top speed, hope was abandoned by Rees and in other rescuers. Twelve graves were prepared in a village churchyard and left ready. Then at last, after six and a half days, contact was made. An officer peered in on the Friday morning, saw the row of dead men and withdrew from the appalling smell to let clean air drift through. He carried the news to the surface; All dead.

Bedson neither saw nor heard them; but he was slowly aware of a pressure drop and crept off to investigate the reason. He was standing at the hole when the rescuers returned in the afternoon. They gaped for a moment, wordless with surprise. "It's been a long shift," Bedson murmured, "For God's sake give me a drink."

Harvey heard of the incident with amazement, and at once sent word that he wanted to question the indestructible Bedson, whose mind, even when he first emerged, had been described by a doctor as "clear and rational". But he was too late. The medical corps had rushed him home to recuperate. And one of the graves in the churchyard went unused.

Work on Petit Bois tunnel was resumed at once. It was taken on to 1,800 feet where, once more, it split right and left to allow two immense charges to be placed.

But by now, mid-June 1916, 250 Company had lost its place as principal miners of the Messines Ridge. The distinction had gone to 171 Company, holding the southernmost three and a half miles underground.

Barrie p.215-219: *Abridged*

*The Daily News* – Perth – Wednesday 23 August 1916:

### MAINLY ABOUT PEOPLE

"Franziska."

Major C. H. Cropper, of the Royal Engineers' Tunnelling Corps in the British Army, has again been mentioned in despatches, this time in those of General Sir Douglas Haig, under date April 30. The previous occasion was in despatches of Field-Marshal Lord French, under date November 30 last, when he was awarded the Military Cross, and subsequently promoted to his present rank. Major Cropper is a brother of Mr. C. W. Cropper, secretary of the Australian Jockey Club in Sydney.

*Article Abridged*



Major Cecil Howe Cropper M.C.  
photo courtesy Tom Cropper, son of Cecil Cropper

South of St Eloi came the mines laid by Cropper's 250 Company, an astounding *tour de force* of 7 major charges. Cropper himself was not present to see the finishing touches put to them. The long strain of commanding an overworked company through its most difficult times had been pulling him down. Then, shortly before Christmas 1916, he had caught German measles and Controller of mines Stevenson had been firm that he must go for treatment and probably leave. To Cropper this had meant only one thing: that he would miss the firing of the mines. "I don't want to go," he had said with feeling, but unavailingly. Stevenson and the Medical officer sent him off still protesting, and he never returned to Messines.

The first of the 250 Company mines was a cluster of three at Hollandscheschuur: 34,200, 15,900 and 17,500 lbs., completed at the rate of one a month between June and August, 1916, and all to be fired by exploders. A 1,000 yards or so to the right lay twin ammonal-with-blastine mines: 30,000 lbs. each, more than 1,800 feet down the second longest tunnel of them all – Petit Bois, the tunnel in which the rock of a man, Sapper Bedson, and the eleven others had been trapped, and where the now forgotten boring machine still lay, quietly rusting. Next to Petit Bois came the second biggest charge of the series: Maedelstede Farm. Here 94,000 lbs. of (mostly) ammonal was still being laid on June 2nd, a slender four days ahead of zero; but the job was done in time. This, and the two Petit Bois, were all elaborately wired for firing by lighting set electricity.

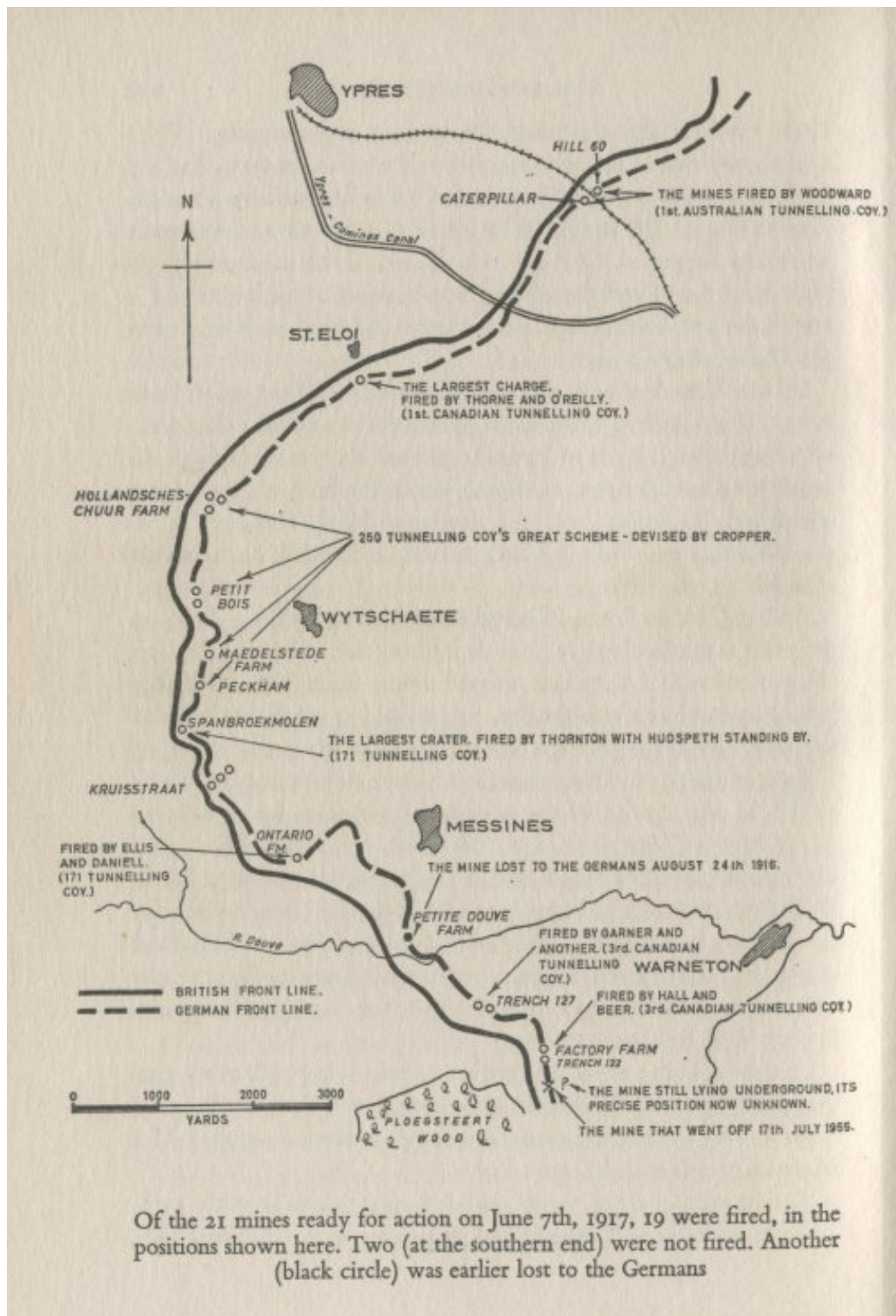
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South of Maedelstede was Peckham, the last of the 250 Company mines, and one that had been so beset by constructional difficulties that only miners of heart could have carried on. Such a man was Captain Haydn Rees, the stocky little Welshman from the collieries and section officer in charge. At least three serious landslips had damaged the 1,159-foot main tunnel – a tunnel which even in good times was full of water, sand and slime. Then, in January, 1917, when it seemed that most of the troubles had been overcome, the main gallery suddenly collapsed. Resolutely, Rees had re-driven it, using steel in place of wood props, by-passing the ruined part, and re-wiring the 87,000-lb. charge for firing by an exploder that he planned to use himself.

Barrie p.252-253: Abridged



The commander of 250 Company, Cecil Cropper, had already begun sinking shafts with the sanction of the Canadian Corps and 2nd Army:

“The crux of the whole matter ... was that we should be able to get down into the Ypresian Clay Bed, blue clay formation, in which we could carry on tunnelling operations. It became clear to me that this could not be done by trying to sink shafts in the front or support trenches. I discovered that by choosing a contour further down the slope of the hill of ridge the clay bed lay at a depth we could expect to reach. I chose a site situated in the cover of a wood where work could be concealed from the enemy. We were successful in getting the shaft down on to the blue clay beds. But this opened other questions, was it of any value now we could get to the blue clay? We were some distance from the enemy’s position and a good depth below it. The enemy at this point were holding a strong point on high ground known as Spanbrukmolen (sic). It would mean a tunnel of about 250 to 300 yards to get under it and it would be a question of a very large amount of explosive in a deep charge.

Along the sector facing the Messines Ridge for which my Company were responsible and in a North or North Westerly direction from Spanbrukmolen the enemy was very strongly situated at places known as Peckham (Farmhouse), Maedelsted Farm, Petit Bois & Hollandschur Farm.

I thought it would be possible to destroy all these positions by deep mining attack so I submitted my proposals for this to the Chief Engineer, Canadian Corps, who put them forward to the 2nd Army High Command. On receiving orders to proceed with the scheme we began work on shaft sinking about the middle of December 1915.” (Captain Cecil Cropper, 250 Tunnelling Company).<sup>44</sup>

Simon Jones ‘*Underground Warfare 1914-1918*’. pp. 92-93

44. Letter to Alexander Barrie 7/2/1960, Barrie papers, REM. Cropper later felt that Norton Griffiths and Harvey had taken the credit for his idea to go under the ridge using the blue clay layer, partial interview transcript, Barrie papers, REM; Barrie, War underground, op.cit., pp. 193-194

*referring to the mines at Bois Carre and Grand Bois:*

South of this area were the schemes conceived by Cecil Cropper. On the left of the sector of 250 Tunnelling Company, the gallery that he obtained permission from the Canadian Corps to drive went under the Hollandscheschuur salient, or Nag’s Nose, where the German line enclosed a piece of high ground. German shelling of the shaft head caused flooding to the tunnel and the objective had to be reduced to three charges laid within the salient. The British drove a gallery 825ft into the rear of the salient. The St Eloi blows caused the Germans to be considerably more alert to any indications of British mining and in June 1916 they heard sounds beneath their lines at both Petit Bois (known to them as Alfweg Cabaret) and Hollandscheschuur. They hurriedly sank timber-lined shafts to meet the noises and managed, despite the wet conditions, to get them to 5m. As the British were completing their gallery the Germans fired charges from shafts Coln and Cassel in their own lines at the shoulders of the salient. The British managed to repair the damage and laid three charges in June, July and August 1916 of 34,200lbs, 14,900lbs and 17,500lbs at between 55 and 60ft. The Germans blew a very heavy camouflet on 10 February 1917, but the British were able to repair the damage.

Cropper began Petit Bois tunnel in late 1915 from the ruins of Van Damme Farm 500yds behind the lines, and sank a shaft 97ft into the clay. In February 1916 he sank a second shaft for a tunnelling machine that was to be unsuccessful. From the first shaft, however, he made good progress by clay-kicking of 100 to 150ft per week and the tunnel passed beneath the German front line and was branched in a ‘Y’. From the bottoms of shallow shafts at Petit Bois the Germans could hear the voices of the British miners and they blew two heavy charges on the morning of 10 June at the shoulders of the salient just in front of their front line. These produced deep craters, but the Germans noticed that very little debris was thrown up by the northernmost charge. In fact the charge was almost directly above the British main gallery and the wet sand had poured down into it, completely blocking it beyond the 1,250ft point. It also trapped twelve men at the face.

[see above: ‘The Commonwealth Joins In’ by Barrie]

The gallery was repaired and branched and mines of 41,150lbs and 32,850lbs were placed beneath the German salient at the end of July and mid-August 1916. When the Germans reflected on the behaviour of the debris after their blows at Petit Bois on 10 June they concluded that the British must be in the clay levels and that their charges had broken the clay over the British galleries, allowing the wet running sand to pour down into their galleries.

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They further concluded from the evidence of British deep mining at Petit Bois that if they had broken the covering of clay over their galleries then the British might go even deeper to prevent this occurring again. Therefore it was essential that they forestall the British before they could reclaim their galleries.

To the right of Petit Bois, two shafts were sunk by 250 Company late in 1916 from Maedelstede Farm. They ran two long drives parallel for about 670ft then branched: one to place a mine 2,600ft away in the Bois de Wyschaete, the other beneath the front line. The Germans blew several heavy camouflets in the area and work was delayed as the miners were withdrawn from the face for about three hours each day, presumably the Germans' favoured times for blowing. The first gallery was driven 1,600ft but was halted when it became clear that it would not reach its objective. The second gallery was charged with 94,000lbs and only completed on 6 June 1917, one day before the attack. Bad ground gave particular trouble to a drive towards Peckham Farm, started in December 1915, with one shaft sunk to 65ft and a second to 70ft. At 1,123ft it was beneath the objective and was charged with 87,000lbs. A branch was run off to a second objective but collapsed with an inrush of sand and water, which almost buried the men at the face. A second drive broken out to the right also had to be abandoned, but a third found good clay and was driven to a point just before the German support line until the ground again gave way. Several small chambers were constructed with difficulty and a carefully waterproofed charge of 20,000lbs laid. The electric pumps broke down and the main gallery collapsed, cutting off both charges. The gallery had to be completely redug about 10ft above the old gallery for almost 1,000ft before rejoining the old tunnel. The detonator leads were reconnected in March 1917, but the smaller charge was too difficult to recover and was abandoned.

Spanbroekmolen was the first of the mines that Cropper started behind the British lines in December 1915 to get to the clay level. It took several attempts to sink a shaft to 60ft and 250 Company had run a gallery 90ft when it was taken over by 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Company in late January 1916. The Canadians advanced it 790ft and it was then taken over by 171 Tunnelling Company, who completed a 1,717ft run until it was beneath the powerful German position at Spanbroekmolen. At the end of June 1916 the charge of 91,000lbs of ammonal in 1,820 tins was complete, the largest yet laid by the British. With the postponement of the attack the British selected the additional objectives of two German strong points, Rag Point and Hop Point, 2,700ft and 3,500ft from the shaft. A branch from the Spanbroekmolen gallery was started and inclined down to 120ft depth.

By mid-February 1917 the branch was driven 1,140ft and had passed beneath the German lines. The Germans had been attempting to sink but found that all their efforts with timber-lined shafts at Spanbroekmolen proved futile. They lined the shaft with concrete but even this came to a dead halt in the sand. Eventually, by February 1917, they had managed to sink two shafts in the salient and five to the south, where the British branch gallery crossed the German line. The Germans blew two camouflets, the first of which did little damage, but a second a week later smashed 500ft of the branch incline and some of the main gallery. The British decided to abandon the branch because an aggressive attempt to destroy the German shafts would further alert them to the presence of deep British mines in the area. On 3 March the Germans blew the British main gallery, probably with a 13,000kg camouflet laid from their Ewald shaft, leaving it beyond repair and resulting in it being cut off for three months. The British had to drive a new gallery alongside, which was cut in at 1,429ft. They placed a new priming charge of 1,000lbs of dynamite in contact with the original charge and the tamping was completed just a few hours before zero on 7 June:

One of the most dramatic incidents of the Battle of Messines was the receipt by headquarters of the 36th Division of a pencilled note from Major H.M. Hudspeth, commanding the 171 Coy, to the effect that it was 'almost certain' that the Spanbroekmolen mine would go up next morning.

The Germans often believed that their countermeasures were successful, but they could never know whether the British had already laid mines. Because they had to blow from the bottom or very close to the bottom of their shafts they destroyed them in the process and so had only one attempt at stopping a British gallery before having to sink another shaft. At Kruisstraat, as at Spanbroekmolen, Cropper aimed at a salient which had the potential to enfilade strongly the British line and no man's land. This was also part of Croppers' original scheme, but was worked on by several companies, in particular the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Company, who sank the shaft to 66ft. By the time it was taken over by 171 Company the gallery was run 1,051ft. In July 1916, 171 Company placed two charges of 30,000lbs beneath the German front and support lines. It was then decided to place a third charge beneath the next German line, at which point difficulties were encountered with the ground, first with hard clay and then a fissure which leaked water into the tunnel floor. On 25 August the third charge, also 36,000lb, was laid at the end of what, at 2,160ft, was the longest of the Messines operation tunnels. Henry Hudspeth, who commandeered 171 Company from July 1916, arranged a water detector to sound an alarm when the level rose to a point to affect the charge.

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Another further objective, a German redoubt at Bone Point, 1,160ft from the last mine, which would have required a tunnel in total 3,329ft, was dropped. In February 1917 the Germans heard British maintenance work and blew a charge from a 40m shaft. When they saw flames issue from the British lines they knew for certain that they had found the mine galleries and that the blast had been directed back up the shafts. The camouflet damaged and flooded the first of the charges, requiring a new chamber to be cut adjacent, which was charged with an additional 19,000lbs on 11 April. The four mines were ready by 9 May 1917. Fusslein still suspected that the British had mines laid at Kruisstraat, but had no shafts in the immediate area of the British gallery. South of Kruisstraat the geology became particularly difficult for sinking shafts as the blue clay lay deep beneath 93ft of water-laden sand and sandy clay. This also meant that the Germans often made little headway with defensive shafts. Ontario Farm in the German lines faced south, covering the whole front towards Ploegsteert, but after abandoning two shafts to attack the position, 171 Company identified a location through test borings. Steel tubing was used, which decreased in diameter as the shaft descended and during February 1917 the shaft was sunk 95ft to the level of the Ypresian blue clay. The gallery had to be sunk deeper after having been driven about 100ft owing to the depth of sand increasing. Even so, after about 500ft, a third of the way across no man's land, the clay overhead suddenly gave way. Water and quicksand poured in within, filling 100ft of the gallery, which was promptly sealed. Belgian geological records were studied which suggested that they had encountered an ancient river channel. This was confirmed by large blocks of shingle which had been swept into the gallery. The gallery was branched to the left and inclined down, but with the delay and damage to the shaft head from shelling it appeared impossible that the objective would be reached. There was no German interference below ground as a single shaft had failed to get deep. However, German suspicions were aroused by the British response to the blowing of some craters as anti-tank ditches at Ontario Farm by very heavy and uncharacteristic artillery shelling. In addition the change in the water level after the craters were blown suggested that they might have broken through the British gallery and drained into them. Fusslein wished to blow a heavy mine from the shaft (Gerhard) but the divisional commander refused on the grounds that it would destroy the German concrete defences in the locality. The British were therefore able to continue unmolested and connected the detonator leads just two hours before zero.

Simon Jones 'Underground Warfare 1914-1918'. pp. 149-153

Cecil was passed fit for return to duty in January 1917 and took command of the 257th Company on 8 February 1917, the unit at that time was still in the Neuve Chapelle/Laventie/Fauquissart area where he had originally started with the 173rd.

The War Diaries of 257th Company, are reasonably extensive and for the most part were completed and signed by Major Cropper during his Command.

The Company had been active at Neuve Chapelle area in April 1917. They left No.4 Base Depot in Rouen in June 1917, and moved to Bethune area. They assisted 5th Gloucesters in repelling an enemy attack near the Ducks Bill, Givenchy.

257th Tunnelling Company left No.4 General Base Depot at Rouen in June for Bethune, Captain Hannay being in charge. Attached to the 3rd Australian Tunnelling Company for a few days instruction, they eventually took over the line Winchester to Sign Post Lane.

*The Story of the Tunnelling Companies Royal Engineers, during the World War*  
Captain W. Grant Grieve & Bernard Newman p. 110

Cropper would have been at Laventie at the beginning of June 1917 when the Messines Ridge was blown and no doubt would have had very mixed emotions. Disappointment not to have fired the mines but great satisfaction in seeing his work succeed.

He may have thought the toughest part of the war was over for him but on the 27th June the Company moved to Coxyde and Oost Dunkirke to construct subways at Redan in Nieuport for Operation Hush. On 10th July the Germans commenced Operation Strandfest. They used a new form of gas for the first time – Yellow Cross – Mustard Gas.

[see also on this site: 2nd Australian Tunnelling Company – The Affair at Nieuport-Bains]

After the initial attack was halted at the Yser the Germans continued the shelling and gas attacks throughout July and August. The 257th suffered more casualties in this period than at any other time. Cropper was granted leave between 27 July and 24 September 1917.

On the 21st November 1917 the Company marched to 10 Elms Camp, Poperinghe and were in that area until February 1918 with various camps at places like Morocco Farm and trenches all in the vicinity of the battle of Passchendaele which had effectively only just ended. Judging by the diary reports they were there to help clean up the mess.

On 20th February the Company were on the move again to the caves and tunnels around Arras. Preparing the defences in the front line trenches and tunnels for the anticipated German Spring Offensive, which duly arrived on the 21st March.

The character of their activities changes dramatically at this point as the Allies are driven back. The Company operating like conventional Engineers and mine bridges and roads to cover the retreat and at times join the Infantry in the trenches and man machine gun posts. They ended up SW of Arras when the tide eventually turned in the Allies favour.

Major Cropper was awarded the DSO on the 3rd June 1918, the award appearing in the London Gazette of 3 June 1918, page 6458.

*The Sydney Morning Herald* – Friday 14 June 1918:

PERSONAL

Cable advice has been received that Major C. H. Cropper, M.C., of the Royal Engineers, brother of Mr. C. W. Cropper, secretary of the Australian Jockey Club, has been again mentioned in despatches, and has been awarded the Distinguished Service Order. Major Cropper has been on active service In France since March, 1915, and has been once wounded.

*Article Abridged*

*The Border Morning Mail and Riverina Times*

Albury – Thursday 20 June 1918:

THE TURF

(By "Justice")

A cable message has been received stating that Major C. H. Cropper, M.C., of the Royal Engineers, brother of Mr C. W. Cropper, secretary of the Australian Jockey Club, has been again mentioned in despatches, and has been awarded the Distinguished Service Order. Major Cropper has been on active service in France since March, 1915, and has been wounded.

*Article Abridged*

Similar article appeared in the *Western Mail* – Perth, on Friday 5 July 1918.

In a personal letter, he was congratulated on his D.S.O. by A.B. 'Banjo' Patterson, and by Dr. Edgeworth David, the geologist who had arrived in France with the Australian Mining Corps.

When the pressure was off a little there was some time for Rest & Recuperation.

There is a report of the Company coming second to the 3rd Australian Tunnellers at a bullet and bayonet competition on the 12th October at the 5th Army Mine School at Carne.



Major Cecil Howe Cropper D.S.O., M.C.  
photo courtesy Tom Cropper, son of Cecil Cropper



It was back to work later that month by which time they had moved North again to Aire and Hazebrook following the Allies advance towards Lille. Again their role had changed. They were now being used to spot booby traps and to some extent bomb disposal. At times they were working in advance of the Infantry as the Germans retreated.

There is a report on file of members of the 250th entering Lille on the 16th October ahead of the Infantry and Cavalry.

The activity slows considerably from that point although one event worthy of final mention is the record of an urgent request on the 21st October for the Company to provide a guard of honour for the visit of the French President Poincare to Roubaix (adjacent to Lille) to celebrate it's liberation.

At the Hotel de Ville, the Company duly obliged. "My grandfather only passed on 2 photos of his time in the war and one of them was this Guard of Honour. It's that which sparked our interest to find out more about him." – Mike Fallon.

The photo below, courtesy John & Mike Fallon, was endorsed on back:

"Dear Sgt Fallon,

Am sending you hereby a souvenir of the Great War, which might amuse you in years to come.

Was unfortunately unable to wish you good bye personally as please accept my best wishes for a happy and prosperous future.

Yours very sincerely

P.B. Salto, Capt

2/1/19 257 Coy. R.E."



Note: At Le Cateau a charge of 500 lbs was removed from the clock tower of the Hotel de Ville by 182nd Tunnelling Company.

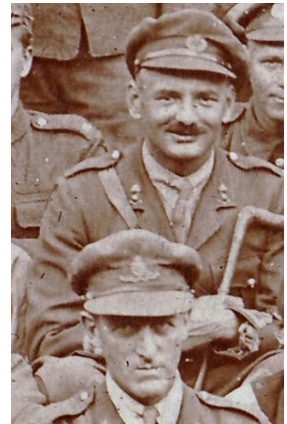


257th Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers with Chinese labourers  
location and date unknown – photo courtesy John & Mike Fallon, England

It is believed that Major Cropper is not in the photo above. Of the two officers at the centre of the photo, the family thinks the lower officer most resembles their father. This officer, however, appears to be wearing an Artillery cap badge and there is no record of Cecil Cropper being associated with the Royal Artillery.

There is a portrait of Cropper at the Imperial War Museum. Unfortunately it is not an image available on line.

Cecil Howe Cropper served in France with the 173rd Tunnelling Company from March to October 1915. He was the Commanding Officer of the 250th Tunnelling Company from its formation in October 1915 until December 1916.



In February 1917 he took command of the 257th Tunnelling Company until the Armistice.

Cecil married Liliast Marion Stuart Salvesen at Edinburgh, Scotland on 26 March 1919. Liliast was born 16 February 1893 at Edinburgh, Scotland. She was a Nurse in Military Hospitals in WW1. On 30 September 1920, Cecil retired from the Army, his address recorded as c/o Bank of New South Wales, 29 Threadneedle Street, EC 2.

In May 1921 the 1914/15 Star, British War Medal and the Victory Medal were issued to Cecil in respect of his service.

Cecil Cropper, with his wife and two small children left Greenock, Scotland on 29 December 1924 on board *Aorangi* bound for Sydney as 1st Class passengers.

Cecil performed one more 'Tunneller' duty before leaving England.





The images above are of the WAR MEMORIAL OF THE INSTITUTION OF MINING AND METALLURGY which honours the British Tunnellers of WW1. The memorial was first unveiled in June 1922. Some details of the memorial are in our Potted History section under the heading 'British Tunnellers War Diary.'

The images were provided by the UK National Inventory of War Memorials, located at the Imperial War Museum, and are reproduced here with their kind permission.

Official description: The crowning figure represents an officer of the Tunnelling Companies in the act of firing a mine by means of an electric exploder. He is depicted as standing in mud, with the exploder on a pile of sandbags, which in turn rest on a portion of a trench-board. In a simple way, four phases of warfare are suggested – the exploder representing "attack", the sandbags "defence", the trench-board "transport" and the petrol-tin "supplies".

Col. Nissen approached Major Cecil Howe Cropper who agreed to be the model for the crowning figure.

An interesting by-line for anyone who's ever been in the services is that this Memorial was designed and modelled by Lt. Col. P.N. Nissen, D.S.O., an architect by trade; he also designed the famous 'Nissen hut'.



In February 1925 the Register of Tunnelling Company Officers - No.1 was issued. C.H. Cropper (London) was one of the former Company Commanders who expressed themselves in favour of an Old Comrades' Association.

A provisional London committee of Tunnellers were to evolve a simple organisation to formalise a 'Tunnellers Old Comrades Association'; Major C.H. Cropper representing Australia.



*The Sydney Morning Herald* – Saturday 10 October 1925:

DANCE AT KILMORY.

One of the biggest dances held during race week was that given by Sir Alexander and Lady MacCormick at their residence, Kilmory, Point Piper, last night. The court-yard was decorated with waratahs and arum lillies. A wealth of red roses decked the ballroom and supper tables.

Lady MacCormick wore a gown of black georgette, embroidered in red roses. Miss MacCormicks gown was of green flared georgette.

The guests included:-Lady Knox, Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Cropper, Colonel and Mrs. Bundock, Mr. and Mrs. Percy Willsallen, . . .

*Article Abridged*

*The Sydney Morning Herald* – Tuesday 11 November 1930:

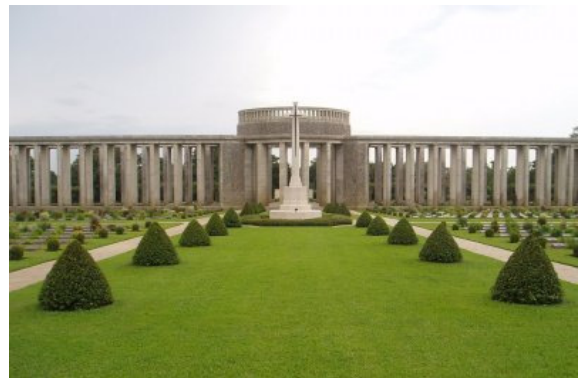
BIRTHS

CROPPER.—November 8, at Sydney to Mr. and Mrs. Cecil H. Cropper—a daughter.

The family are again recorded leaving London on 1 April 1933 on board *Ormonde* bound for Australia as Tourist Class Passengers.

In 1936 Cecil and Liliass are recorded on the Electoral Roll as living at Greenhills, Willow Tree, NSW where Cecil is a grazier. The UK Electoral Roll for 1939 records Cecil and Liliass sharing a house at 11 Hyde Park Street, London.

155638 Lieutenant Douglas Cecil Cropper,  
born 14 January 1920 at Edinburgh, Scotland.  
1st Battalion, Royal Scots,  
died 3 April 1943,  
Commemorated on:  
Face 4, Rangoon Memorial, Myanmar.  
Son of Cecil Howe Cropper and Liliass Marion Stuart  
Cropper, of Willow Tree, New South Wales.



The UK Electoral Roll for 1945 records Cecil and Liliass at 97 Baker Street, Chilton Court, Tower Hamlets, London.

The ship *Ormonde* left London on 1 November 1946 bound for Melbourne, Australia. Cecil and his son Tom, then 20, travelling as 'A' Class Passengers.

In 1949 the family are still at Greenhills and children Joan Marion and Thomas Ross Charles, an Engineering student, are of voting age and living with them.

The ship *Orontes* left London on 7 November 1950 bound for Sydney, Australia, this time Cecil was accompanied by his adult daughter.

In 1953 and 1958 Cecil and Liliass are still at Greenhills and children Joan Marion and Thomas Ross Charles, an Engineering student, and Ann Margaret, student, are living with them. In 1963 they are still at Greenhills and Thomas Ross Charles, an Engineering student, and Rosalind Evelyn are living with them.

There are several entries for C.H. Cropper in Sands Directories, New South Wales from 1926 thru 1932/3.

Cecil died on 10 November 1969 in Sydney, New South Wales aged 87 and was privately cremated; his ashes spread on his property at Willow Tree.

*Sydney Morning Herald* - Wednesday November 12, 1969:

DEATHS

CROPPER, Cecil Howe, D.S.O., M.C.,—November 10, 1969, beloved husband of May and loved father of Douglas (deceased), Joan, Tom and Ann.

Lilias died on 5 November 1987 at Sydney, Australia aged 94:

*Sydney Morning Herald* - Saturday November 14, 1987:

DEATHS

CROPPER, Lilias, Marion (May) Stuart—November 5, 1987, beloved wife of Cecil (deceased) loving mother of Douglas (deceased) Joan, Tom and Ann, loved grandmother of their children. Privately cremated.

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[www.tunnellers.net](http://www.tunnellers.net)

with the very great assistance of Tom Cropper, son of Cecil Howe Cropper,  
and of John and Mike Fallon, grandson of Ernest Fallon, 257th Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers,  
who provided much of the detailed research of Cecil Howe Croppers' service.