

**JAMES NEVILLE MARSHALL**  
**VC MC & BAR**

**BY ARTHUR GRAHAM**



LIEUTENANT (ACTING LIEUTENANT COLONEL)

JAMES NEVILLE MARSHALL VC MC & BAR

IRISH GUARDS (SPECIAL RESERVE)

ATTACHED LANCASHIRE FUSILIERS

A BIOGRAPHY BY ARTHUR S GRAHAM

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FOR  
FRANK GROVES  
KEN BIRRELL and JOHN BAILEY

AND  
IN MEMORY OF

PRIVATE JOSEPH CULVER 10601  
2<sup>ND</sup> BN IRISH GUARDS  
KILLED IN ACTION 9<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 1917 AGE 25

L/CORPORAL HORACE JOHN WATSON 2721048  
2<sup>ND</sup> BN IRISH GUARDS  
KILLED IN ACTION 18<sup>TH</sup> JULY 1944 AGE 28

L/SERGEANT ROY PRIOR 2722012  
3<sup>RD</sup> BN IRISH GUARDS  
KILLED IN ACTION 5<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 1945 AGE 24

THESE MEN LIVED IN WHAT IS NOW THE DISTRICT OF HARLOW  
AND ARE COMMEMORATED ON LOCAL WAR MEMORIALS

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## NOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Notes

So far as the chapters 'The Early Years' and 'Living in Harlow' are concerned the sources of information have, for the most part, been given in the text. The relevant Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths have provided a great deal of 'family' information, including the removals from place to place.

Without reference to the sources listed in the Bibliography below the chapter 'The War Years 1914 - 1918' would not have been possible. In addition, access to the archive material held at the Regimental Headquarters of the Irish Guards proved to be invaluable.

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## PREFACE

In January 1987 I started to research the army career of an uncle who was killed in action in March 1918 and, within a couple of months I had joined the Western Front Association (WFA). It wasn't long before I started to take an interest in the names on Harlow's War Memorials and in 1990 I volunteered to do some work for the National Inventory of War Memorials.

At this time James Neville Marshall, although obviously rather special, had not attracted my particular attention but then I read a piece about him in a local WFA newsletter. Although my knowledge of Marshall was rather limited I realised that the article contained a number of errors. I made enquiries and subsequently agreed to produce something that would present a more accurate picture of the life and times of this remarkable man.

The events I attempt to describe, in some instances, happened over a hundred years ago and the most recent, with a few exceptions, are almost eighty years old. Fortunately, the Great War of 1914-1918 is one of the best documented happenings of this century but, when it comes to the personal, family details of a man's life, the trail is often very cold. Anecdotes, myths, the repetition of inaccurate information, all lie in wait for the biographer, and an amateur such as myself has to learn the hard way.

We will never really know why Marshall literally gave his life away on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1918. He expected to die during the war and told his mother so in 1914, and it has been said that he had a reckless disregard for his own safety. He was a bold, brash extrovert who set an example and inspired his men. He died as he had lived, out in front, larger than life but not quite all that he claimed or seemed to be, he will never be forgotten.

Arthur Graham  
August 1998



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## THE EARLY YEARS

James Neville Marshall (Neville) was born on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1887 at 2 Crosby Place, Steven Street, Stretford, Manchester. His father, James Henry Marshall (Henry), came originally from Fermanagh in Northern Ireland where he was born around the turn of the year 1847/48. Henry's father, Edward Marshall, was said to have been employed as an Inland Revenue Officer. In 1862, at an address in Portland Street, Southport in what was then the County of Lancaster, Mary Ann Walmsley gave birth to a girl who was named Mary. The baby's father, William Henry Walmsley, was described on the birth certificate as Book-keeper. In due course this baby would become Neville Marshall's mother; she was born on 11<sup>th</sup> August.

Henry Marshall is now fourteen years old and has probably made a start on his career in the haberdashery business. He has left Ireland and by 1880 is living at 33 Great Clowes Street, Lower Broughton, Manchester; he is employed as a Buyer on behalf of a warehouse. Mary Walmsley has appeared on the scene and on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1880 they are married in the Parish Church of St Philip, Manchester; he is 32 and she is 18. The entry in the Register of Marriages describes her father as Book-binder and his father as Inland Revenue Officer. The couple settle down together at 33 Great Clowes Street and their first child, Mary Louisa, is born on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1881. The Population Census in April of that year records his age as 33, that he was born in Fermanagh and his occupation as Small Ware Buyer; Mary's age as 18 and her place of birth as Southport, Lancs. A second daughter, Nanny Constance, is born on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1883 and almost two years later another girl, May, is born on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1885. Sometime during the next two years the family move to 2 Crosby Place, Steven Street, Stretford, Manchester where, on the 12<sup>th</sup> June 1887 the main character in this story, James Neville Marshall, makes his appearance. Another move takes place to 64 Steven Street and on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1890 Dorothy is born. The Population Census in April 1891 shows them still at this address but they now have a maid-servant living with them. Yet another house move is made to Broad Road, Acock's Green, Solihull where their second son and last child, Klein, is born on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1892.

Neville is now 5 years old and it seems likely that he has started his education at Wellesbourne House private school in the Acock's Green area. The school no longer exists and no records appear to have survived but reference is made to it in an unidentifiable newspaper cutting from 1919. One can only speculate about a reason for the move from Manchester to Solihull. Now in his mid-forties, Henry has a young family and may have wanted to make a career move, although he continues to work as a Buyer. Neville apparently does well at his primary school because early in 1899 age 11, he obtains a Foundation Scholarship, one of four awarded in that year, and becomes a pupil at King Edward VIth's Grammar School at Camp Hill, Birmingham. By this time, perhaps because of it, the family are living only a mile or so away from Camp Hill at 'Melrose', Clifton Road and the school records show that Henry is working as a Hosiery Merchant. By September 1899 Neville, age 12, has moved up a class and is now with 25 other boys in an age range of 10 - 14 years, the average being about 11½. The occupations of fathers include commercial travellers, shop-keepers, skilled tradesmen and a stock-broker.



King Edward VIth's School, Camp Hill, May 1905



The School's Memorial Gateway, June 1922

In the school's 'School Chronicle', No 32, published at Christmas 1899 Neville's Scholarship is recorded along with the prize in his Class for General Work and also one for Mathematics & Arithmetic. From a Class List dated 21<sup>st</sup> January 1902 he is now, age 14, with 20 other boys ranging in age from 11 to 16, fourteen of them are in fact 14 or 15. His father is now described simply as 'Hosier'. On 5<sup>th</sup> March 1902 Neville Marshall leaves Camp Hill Grammar School. No explanation for this rather premature departure has come to light. Three months short of his fifteenth birthday he was the only one in his class to leave at that time. Henry, now working as a Hosiery Merchant/Hosier, may be actually running a retail outlet on a tight budget and wants his children of working age out earning some money. Whatever the reason, Neville left school with a good reputation. Some research carried out by a Mr C J Mabey, a former Clerk to the School's Governing Body, records that he was remembered at school by a contemporary as a big, well made boy, nicknamed 'Bogey' but in fact the very opposite to that character; he was of a kindly and considerate disposition; a very useful forward in the rugger team. After school his favourite sport was in the water, he achieved distinction in swimming and diving.

In an obituary notice published in the Birmingham Post of 15<sup>th</sup> February 1919 it was stated that when Neville left school he went to work as a clerk at the Midland Institute and then later in the Medical Faculty of Birmingham University. It is thought that he stayed for about a year at the Institute which suggests that he arrived at the University in 1903, perhaps just in time to celebrate his sixteenth birthday in June that year. There is absolutely no doubt that he was employed here as a clerk. In the 1963 edition of the Medical Graduates Newsletter of Birmingham University, a Dr Neville C Penrose (1907 graduate) writing about Neville Marshall's war record said, 'I remember him as the cheerful pink and white junior clerk in the Dean's Office, always happy and obliging, no one less like a fire-eater could be imagined.' The two Nevilles will meet again in December 1916. It seems reasonable to assume that the information about Neville's work experience, published in the Birmingham Post, came from his family at Acock's Green. The obituary says that he left his clerical job at the University after two years which seems to make it 1905, by which time he may have been eighteen years of age. He was certainly at the Medical School in 1904 because he played cricket for the faculty against Anstey Physical Training College at The Leasowes in that year. Unfortunately there is nothing about him in the archives of the School or the University either as a student or a member of staff. The obituary goes on to say that 'subsequently he took up veterinary work with success, established a business at Harlow, Essex, and became associated with some of the most prominent Newmarket Trainers.'

The trail that leads from Acock's Green to Harlow is not a matter of record. As we shall see, Neville was certainly around in Harlow in 1910 but what he was actually doing during the preceding three to five years is far from clear. It seems likely that he gained some experience, perhaps even actual training, in the treatment of animals, particularly horses. However, if this was the case it did not lead to formal professional qualifications, both the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and the Royal Veterinary College confirm this. Extensive enquiries around the various Schools of Veterinary Medicine, including those in Chicago, Illinois failed to produce any record of a student named James N Marshall.

It is quite true that success is more likely to be recorded than failure. The enquiries in Chicago arose because his army 'Record of Service' states that he was educated at King Edwards, Birmingham and Rush College, Chicago, USA. The Passport Agency has advised that at the period in question a passport and visa would have been required to visit the USA for educational purposes; there is no record of a passport being issued to Neville at this time. No doubt his family would have been aware of where he was and what he was doing but unfortunately it seems to have been 'not for publication'. The 'missing' years were undoubtedly Neville's formative years. He left his clerical job, lets say in 1906 at the age of 19, as Dr Penrose would have it, 'the cheerful pink and white junior clerk'. He was a keen and competent sportsman, in particular, his swimming and high-diving was said to have placed him in the front ranks of amateur aquatics during the period 1903 - 1905 ('The Graphic' 21<sup>st</sup> October 1916). By 1910 he was living in Harlow, carrying out veterinary work with a reputation for being good with horses; perhaps more importantly he was a man, in fact he was shortly to describe himself as a gentleman.



Cricket match at The Leasowes in 1904  
Middle row, 1<sup>st</sup> left J N Marshall, 4<sup>th</sup> from left Dr N C Penrose

## LIVING IN HARLOW

The electoral register for the parish of Harlow, effective from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1911 records Neville Marshall as an Occupation elector (as opposed to a house owner or lodger) living in New Road, Harlow in a dwelling house. The returns leading to the compilation of the register were probably completed during the Autumn of 1910 which confirms that he must have taken up residence during that year. The name of the house is remembered by some as 'Laurel Villa' but another source suggests it was 'Milton House'. By the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1912 he had moved to a house in the parish of Latton called 'Bromleys' and here he stayed for the rest of his life. The 1910 edition of Kelly's Directory of Essex, published in the Autumn of that year, includes in the list of private residents - F Neville Marshall BSc, Milton House, New, Road, Harlow. This could be 'our' Neville because there is no mention of this person in the 1908 Directory and by 1912 the entry is for Jasper Neville Marshall, Bromleys, Latton, Harlow; in 1914 the name is simply J N Marshall. Kelly's contains no mention of Neville as a vet and no evidence has been found that he described himself as such. A suggestion that he had a surgery/consulting room at Langham House, Spellbrook, Sawbridgeworth, Herts., just a few miles from Harlow, was investigated with the help of the Herts County Record Office but could not be confirmed.

If it was actually the case that Neville came to reside in Harlow, say in the summer of 1910 it may have had something to do with the death of his father on 27<sup>th</sup> May in that year. It was a tragedy which must have affected the whole family because James Henry Marshall hanged himself, the Coroner's verdict being 'suicide whilst of unsound mind', he was age 63. Attempts to locate the relevant Coroner's records failed and research among a wide variety of local newspapers was unable to find a report about Henry's death. The Probate Registry have no record of a Grant of Probate so if there was a will it may never have become a public record document. By this time the Marshall family had moved again and were now living at Eastbourne House, Warwick Road, Acock's Green. It is possible that Neville may have benefited financially from the death of his father, thus enabling him to establish himself in Harlow.

Sometime during 1911 he moved to a large farmhouse known as 'Bromleys' located in the parish of Latton. It had a fair sized stable block associated with it and, as subsequent events seemed to indicate, this was in preparation for his marriage and to facilitate his veterinary activities, in particular his work with horses. His bride to be was a well known local horsewoman who may have also have had an interest in the breeding of horses; the coming together of these two people could well have been for 'business' reasons. The marriage of Neville Marshall and Edith Taylor on 20th September 1911 was well recorded in the Essex County Chronicle newspaper and the text of the complete piece is at Appendix A. Reference has already been made to Neville's formative years, the 'missing' years that transformed him from a junior clerk to a gentleman with an entry in Kelly's Directory of Essex. According to the entry in the Register of Marriages he had decided to call himself Jasper Neville Wellesley Marshall and to state his age as 32, when in fact he was only 24. His Rank or Profession is shown as Gentleman; his father's name as James Henry Wellesley Arthur Marshall, Rank or Profession as Soldier. Presumably the inspiration for the additional first names was the First Duke of Wellington, unlikely to have been the First Viscount Peel.

Of course, it was, and still is an offence to give details for an official record knowing them to be false. It is also of interest to note that the newspaper report of the marriage states that Neville was 'of Bromleys, Latton, Harlow, and Las Palmas, Grand Canaries' this Spanish 'connection' will crop up again in 1915. Neville's father was married on Wednesday, 15<sup>th</sup> September 1880, age 32. Perhaps there is some sort of link with the fact that Neville was married on Wednesday, 20<sup>th</sup> September 1911 and gave his age as 32, trying to follow in father's footsteps. Edith, his wife, was 25 when she married him. The report in the Essex County Chronicle described the couple as 'well-known followers of the Essex Hounds with which they have hunted for the past five seasons, the bridegroom also having ridden at the steeplechase of the Essex Hunt and followed with distinction the Essex Staghounds'. If accurate this suggests that Neville, at age 20, was already an accomplished horseman and living in Essex but quite how this was achieved will probably always remain a mystery. See Appendix B for information about hunting and Point to Point Steeplechasing in Essex at the time

It is always most satisfying to deal with known facts and with authentic documents, of direct relevance to Neville's activities. A case in point is a report he wrote in 1913 about his examination of a lame horse, making use of X-ray techniques. The report was found in 1984 by a former officer in the Irish Guards who knew about Neville Marshall; the horse belonged to the officer's father. The relevant transcripts are at Appendix C and the assessment of the report raises important points regarding the competence of the examination. Neville certainly spent time in the Newmarket area where one of his associates was Sir Arthur Fitzgerald Bt. The latter was a very devoted jockey, winning many races until he broke his back whilst riding in the Prix de France in 1913. Sir Arthur's son says that his father and Neville became very special friends before the First World War. He remembers Neville being described as a very, very good vet and the first ever to use an operating table for a horse. Expert advice suggests that such a table would probably have been imported from France, they were available from around 1900. However, it is considered most unlikely that Marshall would have had such a table; in any case he was not qualified to carry out operations.

Irrespective of the fact that Neville Marshall was probably not all that he seemed, or claimed to be, we do know that he was well liked in the Harlow community during the years just prior to the First World War. Some years ago an elderly lady recalled '....I do remember he was a vet and rushed around the countryside on a motor-bike. He took a great interest in sport especially taking Boy Scouts camping etc. I think his one great love was swimming and he spent much time in the summer at Latton pool which was the swimming venue for many of us. At the Gala, which was held every August Bank Holiday, he always did something very spectacular. I especially remember 1914 when he caused to be erected a very high diving board and he dressed up as a fairy all in pink. After removing his hat and putting down his wand he dived from the very top, the crowd was thrilled.....' Harry Moore MC (died in January 1995 age 102) remembered a similar occasion thus '.....He was a member of the Harlow Swimming Pool/Club, he did not know what fear was, he was of Irish descent. On an August Bank Holiday Monday there was a swimming gala and he was the star turn, a good diver. Dressed as a French Mignonette he stood on the top board smoking

THE MARRIAGE OF NEVILLE MARSHALL AND EDITH TAYLOR

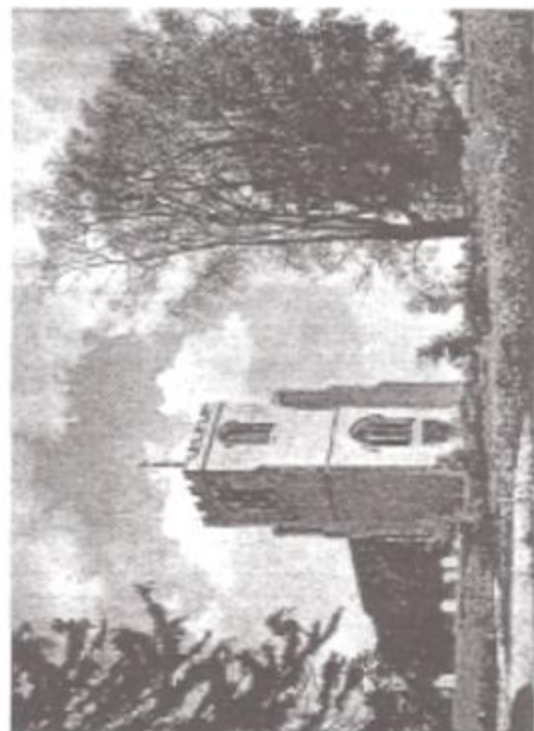
1899. Marriage solemnized in the Parish Church of Luton in the County of  Beds

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Residence.	Rank or Profession of Father.
82	Sept. 15 1899	Jos Neville Marshall Edith Maude Taylor	32 25	Bachelor Spinster	Gentleman Schoolmaster	Luton Great Pardon	James Henry William Arthur Marshall Henry Algernon Taylor	Soldier Private Private

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church by me, J. F. Partridge  
Minister of the said Church, in the presence of Mrs. Margaret Taylor and John Bridge  
Edith Maude Taylor and Jos Neville Marshall



Mr Neville Marshall



St. Mary at Luton Church



Miss Edith Taylor



a cigarette. He lit another one, twisted it into his mouth and jumped into the pool, he came up and got out smoking the cigarette; he did not know what fear was, he was a card.....' There seems little doubt that people who were resident in Harlow before the outbreak of war in 1914 remember Neville Marshall with affection. Most, if not all, are now dead but, the abiding memory is of an out-going, larger than life character, a helpful man.

In spite of the fun and gaiety of the swimming gala on Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1914, all these young people must have known how acute the international situation was. The assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife on 28<sup>th</sup> June, and the sequence of events that followed during the next five weeks or so, must surely have cast an immense shadow over all activities. Having declared war on Russia and France, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> August Germany demanded free passage through Belgium in order to attack France. This was refused and on the morning of 4<sup>th</sup> August Germany invaded. Britain then delivered an ultimatum that Germany should respect Belgian neutrality. This expired at 11pm, German time, which led immediately to a declaration of war by Britain on Germany. Neville Marshall, now age 27, was soon to embark on the first stage of his service in the Great War.



Neville Marshall at the Latton Pool Gala, August 1914

## THE WAR YEARS 1914-1918

### Belgian Field Artillery 14<sup>th</sup> September 1914 - January 1915

It has been said that Neville Marshall attempted to join the Army Veterinary Corps at the outbreak of war but was turned down because he was unqualified. If it was the case that he actually wanted to be a commissioned veterinary officer then the Army's response should not have come as a surprise. What is a matter of record is that Neville applied for and was issued with a Passport, Number 103353, on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1914, his age was confirmed as 27. According to information given by his sister Dorothy to the Irish Guards RHQ in December 1970 he left Tilbury two days later en route for Antwerp. It seems that the ferry was stopped and examined by a boarding party from a British torpedo boat which allowed it to proceed. In Antwerp he was passed to the British Military Attaché who sent him on to the Belgian War Office. Here he was given a laissez-passer authorising him to travel to Malines where he joined the 1st Division of the Belgian Army, attached to the 1st Regiment of Field Artillery.

The successful crossing of the River Marne by the Germans on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1914, and the heavy fighting that ensued in that area, had left the German armies rather exposed on their right (western) flank and, in places, unable to protect their rear. Accordingly on 9<sup>th</sup> September a general retreat was authorised and they fell back over a period of five days to the River Aisne. The general feeling in the Allied command was that the French and British could now advance with very little opposition and perhaps even be in Germany within a month. But the Allied advance petered out because at the Aisne they came up against entrenched machine guns; the war of movement had ended and trench warfare had begun. The so called 'Race to the Sea' now commenced, in fact both sides were attempting to turn or overlap the other's western flank. General Falkenhayn, who on 14<sup>th</sup> September, had replaced General von Moltke as the German Chief of Staff decided to finish the campaign in Belgium by taking Antwerp and sending a German cavalry force across to the Belgian coast as part of the attempt to overlap the Allies' western flank. The French and British commands refused to send the Belgians any assistance but the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, was allowed to send some 3,000 marines and naval volunteers to reinforce the defenders of Antwerp. This delayed the capitulation of the town but most of this British force ended up interned in Holland. Two British divisions, landed at Ostend and Zeebrugge in October, were able to assist the escape of the Belgian army down the Flanders coast.

Neville Marshall joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Belgian Field Artillery on about 14<sup>th</sup> September. They were situated in the area of Malines (Mechelen) some 20km south of Antwerp. Already heavily fortified and defended by forts and redoubts, further defences around Antwerp were hastily erected and prepared. Until the forts of Waelhem and Wavre St. Catherine first felt the destructive power of the great German siege guns, to the north of Malines, Antwerp was thought to be impregnable. The bombardment began on 27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> September. The Belgian army had evacuated Malines on 27<sup>th</sup> September, leaving only a small detachment of the 1st Division to the South of the town. It has been estimated that the Germans had some 125,000 men in the besieging army with numerous field guns including massive pieces of 28cm, 30.5cm and 42cm, some firing from 15km away. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions of the Belgian Army were now in the line between Fort Waelhem to the North of Malines and Fort

Lierre to the South-East of Lierre where the 1st Division was heavily engaged in the area of Duffel. The British Marines arrived in this the Nethe front, taking its name from the River Nethe, on 3<sup>rd</sup> October followed on the 5<sup>th</sup> by the poorly equipped and inexperienced British naval volunteers. The following day the Germans crossed the River Nethe in force between Duffel and Lierre and the exhausted Belgian army now moved to cross the River Scheldt during the night of 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> October. Antwerp continued to be defended by a garrison of some 30,000 troops until the capitulation on 10<sup>th</sup> October.

Perhaps now is the time to consider what sort of contribution Neville was making during his time with the Belgian Artillery. There is no record of him having had any form of military experience prior to August 1914 and no indication what he had in mind when he decided to travel to Belgium. It is probably reasonable to assume that the Belgian War Office, allowing him to travel to Malines, also decided to instruct him to report to the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Field Artillery. Subsequently, when the Belgian authorities were dealing with the award of his Belgian decorations he was always referred to as 'Lieutenant Doctor of the English Army'. This description, to be found in copies of official documents supplied by the Central Office for Historical Documents in Brussels, suggests that he volunteered his services, claiming to be a doctor with the uniform and rank applicable to such a job, and the Belgians accepted him at face value. No further information is available from Brussels and the Official History of the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Artillery makes no mention of James Neville Marshall.

Fortunately, some letters that Neville wrote to his mother during the war have survived. On 10<sup>th</sup> December 1914 he wrote from Belgium saying, among other matters, '....there has been no scarcity of food since I have been fighting.....please do not send me a parcel.....the other officers (Belgian) will not have any and I must be the same.....No, I did not see much of Antwerp I was only there a few hours I have been with the field Army, we fought eight days in front of Antwerp and then advanced a hundred miles in four days to the Yser. We passed over the Scheldt at midnight 63,000 strong.' In an undated letter, probably a week or so later, he says '.....No, I am not in the trenches often as I am in the Field Artillery and we are usually behind a hedge or wall.....Things are quieter now. Nothing like the fighting south of Antwerp when we fought eleven pitched battles in 3 weeks, and never slept in the same district twice in 48 hours.....After the battle of Duffel we lost in our Division alone 1,400 dead & 3,300 wounded.....I assisted to bury 60 as there were very few soldiers near the spot.' He comments on the loss of life, the courage of the Germans and concludes '.....You will be glad to hear that the King has conferred on me the decoration of Knight of the Order of Leopold. It was given as the General told me this morning for Conspicuous Bravery at the Battle of the Nethe and needless to say I am very overcome.' In a piece published in London Opinion of 9<sup>th</sup> January 1915 the decoration was given for rescuing wounded under machine and rifle fire at the battle of Schoorbakke; it noted that Neville volunteered for service with the Belgian Artillery, and had been wounded three times. There is clearly a conflict of location here. The Battle of the River Nethe took place early in October, to the South-East of Antwerp. The 'battle' of Schoorbakke, if that is what it was, was part of the much larger engagement which came to be known as the Battle of the (River) Yser during the last two weeks of October 1914. The Belgian authorities have no record of a formal citation relating to this decoration but the award was mentioned in an Order of the Day, issued by the Belgian Army Commander from his GHQ at Furnes, on 6<sup>th</sup>

December 1914; eleven Belgian officers of similar rank were awarded the same medal. In an earlier letter, on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1914, Neville says, among other matters '.....Yes, I have done well from my wounds, but still suffer a little from my lung, my leg has quite recovered.....I am glad that I have been born young enough to take part in such scenes. There is little money but much glory, and I am quite happy if I am killed in the field of battle. One's mind returns always to Napoleon, Ney, Sonet & Murat. I hope I do well and reap much honour before I am killed.....' This letter was sent from De Panne, a Belgian coastal town near the French border.

Following the retreat from Antwerp during 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> October the six, now very weakened divisions of the Belgian Army, supported by a brigade of French marines, had been occupying the line from Nieuport on the coast almost to Ypres. On the 19<sup>th</sup> three German divisions released from Antwerp attacked this Belgian sector and the Battle of the Yser had begun. On the night of the 22<sup>nd</sup> October the Germans managed to cross the river and by the 24<sup>th</sup> had brought two and a half divisions across to expand this foothold, causing the Belgians to give way. In spite of strong resistance in the Dixmude area the situation remained critical. But on the 25<sup>th</sup> King Albert authorised the opening of the locks at Nieuport so as to flood all the country between the river Yser and the Dixmude to Nieuport railway embankment. This process took some days but eventually the Germans retired back across the Yser to avoid being cut off by the flood-water. A correspondent of the London 'Observer' newspaper reported : 'Without a doubt it is to the Belgians that we owe the fact that the enemy has not reached Dunkirk. As at Liege and Antwerp, the little army of King Albert has again held up and delayed the Germans in a way which is of inestimable value to the Allies, but on this occasion the Belgians have had the pleasure of assisting the defeat and destruction of their enemies. The Battle of the Yser was the most complete and severe defeat and the bitterest deception that the Germans have met with of any of the great tactical struggles of the war.'

The Belgian army had succeeded in barring the coast road to the 4th German army. The crisis on the Yser was over by the end of October 1914 but a greater crisis had been building up at Ypres. This developed into what became known as the first Battle of Ypres but has no direct relevance to Neville Marshall's activities in Belgium. From the letter he wrote at the end of November from De Panne it would seem that he was out of the line, possibly due to the wounds he had suffered, said to have occurred on 28<sup>th</sup> September and 18<sup>th</sup> October. A wound in the lung would surely have been regarded as serious, from which it would take some time to recover sufficiently to return to active service. The notes prepared by his sister Dorothy in December 1970 originally stated that he was wounded many times but this was amended to several times; she went on to say that he was decorated by the King (of the Belgians) on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1915 and then given two months sick leave to England. From this it would seem that Neville had either not fully recovered from the wounds he received, or had been wounded again. In the event, he returned home to Harlow early in 1915 and did not rejoin the Belgian army after his two months sick leave; it seems reasonable to assume that he spent some months convalescent until he joined the Irish Guards in December of that year.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion Irish Guards 8<sup>th</sup> December 1915 - 12<sup>th</sup> May 1916

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Irish Guards went to France in August 1914 as part of the 4<sup>th</sup> (Guards) Brigade of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division. The 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion was located at Warley Barracks, near Brentwood in Essex. Reserves, both officers and men, were there in abundance and were used as replacements for the casualties suffered by the 1st Battalion in France. However, in July 1915 the King approved the formation of two additional Battalions of Foot Guards, one of which was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Irish Guards. By the summer of 1915 the number of Special Reserve Officers was at its peak. According to Kipling's account they came from every corner of the Empire and represented almost every profession and state of life in it, from the school boy of eighteen to the lawyer of forty odd. The newly formed 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was very largely officered by the Special Reserve and with ample men available at Warley Barracks this battalion was ready for active service within a few weeks. They left Brentwood Station early on 16<sup>th</sup> August and by midnight were in France.

It is thought that Neville Marshall was sponsored and encouraged by his friend Sir Arthur Fitzgerald to join the Irish Guards. He was gazetted as Lieutenant (on probation) in the Special Reserve on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1915 and joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion at Warley Barracks. He must have made quite an impression; a photograph taken at the time shows him wearing four medal ribbons. His official 'Record of Services' form (Army Book 63) includes, among the first entries made on his appointment, some interesting information. Under a sub-heading 'Previous Service' is recorded Cape Mounted Rifles (Trooper) 1900 to 1902; it is further stated that he was wounded in South Africa on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1901, in the jaw and left arm and that he was awarded a South African medal. This all seems to be pure fantasy because Neville left school in March 1902, three months short of his fifteenth birthday and then worked in Birmingham at least until 1904, very probably longer. There is a note to the effect that he served in the Spanish Moorish Campaign at Mellila in 1908 and was awarded a Spanish Moorish 1908 medal. It is true that there was plenty of activity in this area and the Spanish authorities issued a Mellila medal in 1910 for service in 1909, and later, also in 1911 and 1912. A third medal, 'Belgian 1914' is noted. Not one of these three medals seems to have survived after the First World War. The South African service/wounds/medal have been dealt with. So far as the Mellila incident is concerned it is interesting to recall that the report of Neville's marriage in September 1911 referred to his association with Las Palmas, Grand Canaries, however, nothing has been found to substantiate any connection whatsoever with Spain. If the Belgian authorities had issued a medal in particular recognition of service with their forces during 1914 there can be no doubt that Neville would have qualified. In fact the 'War Medal', issued in 1919, was awarded to all those who served in the Belgian forces during 1914-1918, but Neville does not seem to have received one. Neville's decoration as Chevalier de l'Ordre de Leopold is correctly noted and the wounds he



Special Reserve Officers, Warley barracks, early 1916  
Neville Marshall, centre, middle row

sustained in Belgium are described thus - Sept 28<sup>th</sup> 1914, Rifle bullet through thigh; Oct 18<sup>th</sup> 1914, Shrapnel bullet in leg, & rifle bullet through liver, bullet in back still. Reference was made earlier to a letter he wrote to his mother on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1914 in which, he says '....Yes, I have done well from my wounds, but still suffer a little from my lung, my leg has quite recovered.....' It is thought unlikely that 'a rifle bullet through liver, bullet in back still' would be confused with a wound affecting a man's lung, however, it seems that the South African 'wounds' and those received in Belgium in 1914 were recorded in his Service Record as three wounds. (see Appendix D) His Service Record shows that he was born at Broughton in 1886 when in fact it was Stretford in 1887; that he was educated at King Edwards, Birmingham and at Rush College, Chicago, USA; his height was 5'10"; that he was married on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1911; qualifications were recorded as 'Steeplechases' and French as a foreign language; his wife's name and address were correct.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Irish Guards 13<sup>th</sup> May - 8<sup>th</sup> September 1916

Lieutenant Marshall remained at Warley Barracks until 12<sup>th</sup> May 1916, his substantive appointment being published in the Gazette of 4<sup>th</sup> April in that year. Posted, as a replacement to the 1st Battalion, he arrived in France on 13<sup>th</sup> May and joined an Entrenching Battalion which was located near the town of Albert, some two miles or so behind the front line. Writing to his mother on 9<sup>th</sup> June he says '....We had a lively shelling yesterday. The Huns gave us a decided peppering at lunch time.....As I am soldiering with the finest fighting men in the whole world, I am happy, but I see many who are not the same. We have to censor all the men's letters, and there I see the true nobility of man's mind. In their ill educated way they write to mother, father or wife not asking to return safe and sound, but that a prayer may be offered each night for courage and strength to do well. That is the spirit, and that is the only prayer I should offer if I ever feel weak. Up to the present I am very strong I love the battle, and all its glories. I look with fear to the rotten times of peace. I am close to the town of Albert which is terribly demolished. Belgium and France have suffered out of all proportion to ourselves. What a varied career I have spent ? Eh what. Today I have received another decoration, the Croix de Guerre. Your son's coat will be like Jacob's soon. As I write I hear a Regiment passing by singing 'There is no place like home'. They are going to the trenches poor souls. Never in our history has such magnificent material been thrown away....(words obliterated by censor) The Brockers should be put in prison. (Brockers is thought to be derived from Brock the badger, a dirty stinking fellow).

The Croix de Guerre to which Neville refers was a Belgian medal instituted in 1915 and awarded to those mentioned in despatches for acts of courage on the field of battle or for long service at the front. The Belgian authorities have confirmed that, in response to an enquiry from the Minister of National Defence, the Major General Chief of Staff at Army GHQ advised that six officers of the French Army and 'MARSHALL, lieutenant medecin a l'armee anglaise', had been decorated with the Croix de Guerre by order of the Army Commander; this 'Note for the Minister' was dated 19<sup>th</sup> June 1916. Subsequently Neville received formal notification that by Royal Decree of the 20<sup>th</sup> July 1916, No. 35519, he had been awarded this medal; there is no record of a citation but it would seem reasonable to assume that he had been mentioned in despatches during his service with the Belgian Army. At about this time he also received formal advice from the Belgian Minister of War about his decoration

as Chevalier de l'Ordre de Leopold; copies of both these documents (in translation) are at Appendix E

On Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> June 1916 Neville joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Irish Guards near Ypres where they were working in the line assisting Engineers. The Battalion relieved the 11<sup>th</sup> Essex and the 8<sup>th</sup> Bedfordshire Battalions on the night of the 16<sup>th</sup>. The trenches were said to be in poor condition, enemy snipers were active and casualties occurred on a daily basis. The following Monday, whilst out with a working party, he was sniped in the arm but finished his work before reporting it; one man was killed and two more were wounded. Neville's wound required attention in hospital from where he returned ten days later on 29<sup>th</sup> June. Writing to his mother in a letter dated 9<sup>th</sup> July he said '.....I have been wounded a month ago, but am back again at duty. It was a clean bullet wound in arm, but I am sorry to say that we have lost many good young officers killed.....I had many nice days in hospital at a pretty little town..... It was a happy change after the war but I am glad to be back with the men.....' He also said the war was no longer interesting, like a game of rat catching; curious comments from an officer with so little front line experience, it actually amounted to four days followed by nine days in hospital and then another eight days in the line.

On 7<sup>th</sup> July the Battalion moved into support on the broken and filthy banks of the canal north of Ypres. Then followed nightly fatigues repairing parapets and carrying out drainage work. It was impossible to stand upright, men were stooping and crawling between bursts of enemy machine-gun fire forcing them to keep their heads down. Back in the front line trenches within a week, the 13<sup>th</sup> July was said to be a 'light' day with 'only' seven men wounded. On the night of the 14<sup>th</sup>, the sector being rather too active and noisy, a patrol under Lieut. Marshall went out to see what the enemy might intend in the way of digging a sap across No Man's Land. Neville was wounded in the side as he left the trench but insisted on doing his work and was out for two hours. He stayed with his unit but was on light duty, however by August he was in hospital and on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1916 he was sent home to a hospital in England. In a letter to his mother on 26<sup>th</sup> July he says '.....As you will have seen in the Times of the 25<sup>th</sup> or 26<sup>th</sup> July I have been wounded again. A shrapnel bullet in my back, but what is more important I have received a personal letter from my Brigadier General thanking me for my work, and appreciating my patrol work after I had been wounded. I am not in much pain, and still continue light duty. Yes. Of course you see and feel all the romantic sentiments of war, but a good soldier becomes absolutely callous and an animal. I have no hatred at all for the Germans, but simply love killing them.....'

On 27<sup>th</sup> July the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Irish Guards was relieved by the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment who had been fighting on the Somme. By the 4<sup>th</sup> August the former were at Vauchelles-les-Authies, just off the Doullens-Albert Road and there they waited until on the 11<sup>th</sup> they went into support as the rest of the Brigade took over trenches east of Englebelmer; but the next day orders came to move out of the line to Louvencourt. By this time of course Neville would have been in hospital and at this point it is clear that neither he, nor the Battalion at this time, had taken part in the Battle of the Somme. There is no doubt that the wound he sustained on 14<sup>th</sup> July was more serious than perhaps at first thought. In addition there may have been complications in connection with the back wound he received in Belgium on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1914. For the work he did and the example he set during the period he was



with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion near Ypres Lieutenant Neville Marshall was awarded the Military Cross, this was Gazetted on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1917.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion Irish Guards 9<sup>th</sup> September 1916 - 29<sup>th</sup> March 1917

Neville was to remain in the UK for almost seven months. One can only assume that he received medical, perhaps even surgical treatment, during the Autumn of 1916. He was out of hospital by December and writing to his mother from an address at Thorpe Mandeville, near Banbury. It is likely that this large house was being used for convalescent officers, but there is no record of it being in use 'officially' as a nursing home or hospital. In his letter dated 12<sup>th</sup> December he says he is feeling better but still very depressed with the war, going on to say '.....There can only be one termination. This last campaign carried out by Mackensen in Roumania is one of the most brilliant military feats. Not only a strategic effort, but as an illustration of the physical powers & morale of our enemy. History will index it with great military accomplishments. You see it shows how very little attention the Germans paid to our last Somme offensive. Costly in life and treasure. Whilst English people imagined Germany in her death struggles and just capable of hanging on. All the preparations for this Roumanian offensive were being organised & methodically carried on. What is still more so wonderful is the welding of such an assorted Army (the Danube Army) into a one minded and one objected instrument. The material prizes are enormous:- Grain, oil, wealth. No. I still believe as I always have done and hope that soon people will realise that there is no possible chance of obtaining an overwhelming decision. I look upon any peace that is made as the death knell of the British Empire. It has been one blunder after another, and the first time in history when we have failed to discover a great military leader. To me it is too awful, and look at the sacrifices in lives & wealth. Well. More pleasant matters I am sending you a goose, and I hope you will have a good 'tack in'. It is no use me wishing you a Happy Xmas that is impossible. There is just a chance I may spend it with you.....'

During his stay at Thorpe Mandeville Neville was certainly ill enough for one of the local doctors to be asked to come and see him. This turned out to be Dr Neville C Penrose, of South Bank, Oxford Road, Banbury, who was a student at the Birmingham University Medical School at the time Neville was working there as a clerk. In 1963 Dr Penrose recalled '....I remember him as the cheerful pink and white junior clerk in the Dean's Office, always happy and obliging, no-one less like a fire-eater could be imagined. I next came across him during the 1914-18 war when I was in practice at Banbury. I was called to see an officer convalescing at one of the big country houses



Lieutenant J N Marshall, late 1916  
attached 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion Irish Guards

who was bringing up blood from his lung. When I entered the room I saw a tunic hanging on the end of the bed showing a colonel of the Irish Guards with numerous decorations and five wound stripes. This was Marshall. He still had a bullet in his lung but his one cry was that he must get back to the front. I told him that was impossible, but you will see from the enclosed correspondence that somehow he got there and won the VC when he was killed in action seven days before Armistice Day. What a tragedy? I feel certain from my talk with him that that is the death he longed for.....'. When Dr Penrose wrote to his Medical School's Graduates' Newsletter in 1963 he was remembering a meeting that took place some forty-six years previously and one could be forgiven for thinking that an old man's memory may not have been entirely reliable. However, he was correct in saying that Neville was wearing numerous decorations and five wound stripes and it is possible that he mistook a lieutenant's stars for the crown and star of a Lieut. Colonel. What is most interesting are the comments that he went to visit an officer 'bringing up blood from his lung' and that Neville 'still had a bullet in his lung' which prompted Dr Penrose to say that he should not return to the front. It will be recalled that when he wrote to his mother from Belgium in November 1914 he referred to his wounds and commented '.....but still suffer a little from my lung.....' ---When this wound was recorded in his Service Record it was described as 'rifle bullet through liver, bullet still in back', could it have been that he was deliberately avoiding any mention that in 1914 he had been wounded in the lung, in case this prevented him from joining the Irish Guards. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that at the end of 1916 Neville did not appear fit enough to return to active service.

Neville visited his mother and family again in the New Year and wrote to her on 26<sup>th</sup> March from the Great Western Royal Hotel, Paddington, London. He sent her a photograph, taken after he was invested with his MC at Buckingham Palace, saying that he expected to sail for France, probably on Saturday the 31<sup>st</sup>. He commented.....There are many more fit to go than myself, but such is war .....The war will be over this Autumn. I will write to you on arriving there. Do not worry about me, I am much happier at the prospect of duty.....

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Irish Guards 30<sup>th</sup> March - 24<sup>th</sup> May 1917**

In fact he returned to France on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1917 and joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Irish Guards. The Battalion had left the line at St Pierre Vaast Wood on 19<sup>th</sup> March and were laid off at Montauben the next day to help with railway construction work. With the 3rd Battalion Grenadiers and the 4th Battalion Coldstream they helped to make the broad-gauge line from Trones Wood to Roequigny and eventually into Ypres, work which lasted until 27<sup>th</sup> April. Then came orders to strike their camp at Bois de Hem, pitch it on the Lesboeuifs road and get back to road-work between Ginchy, Lesboeuifs and Le Transloy. The area was desolate after the fighting on the Somme the previous year and the efforts of the Germans to destroy anything that could possibly be of any use; even the dead had been left unburied. Work in this area consisted largely of digging out shell-holes till they reached firm ground and then filling up with timber and brick and then topping off with road metal. And so it was until 9<sup>th</sup> May when the Battalion went off to a training-camp at Curlu, almost on the banks of the Somme, in cleaned-up country where even dead men were hard to find.

Neville wrote to his mother on 2<sup>nd</sup> May and mentioned the shell-holes with their grim relics still to be buried, friend and foe alike, and how immersion in water tends to preserve bodies. He referred to the 'Times' of 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 'Foreign Decorations' which announced that he had been awarded the Officier de l'ordre de Leopold. He says '.....I am feeling stronger I do not wish.....(words obliterated by censor).....of me whatever happens. Live or die.....(words obliterated by censor).....Will write you soon we are in a pretty safe place.....' On 15<sup>th</sup> May, Tuesday, the Battalion, as part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Guards Brigade was inspected by the King of the Belgians who asked for Neville to be presented and decorated him. No citation has survived and the Belgian authorities do not seem to have a record of the award but it certainly appears to have been made, it would be worn as a rosette/bar on the Chevalier ribbon. In a further letter to his mother dated 18<sup>th</sup> May he refers to the visit of the King and says '.....One cannot write. I start heaps of letters. Tear them up and never wish to write again. There are so few of one's comrades left & new faces are always coming which rather annoys me. I am transferring from the Guards, and have been recommended for a command in the New Armies.....'

On 17<sup>th</sup> May 1917 authority was given in 4<sup>th</sup> Army Order No. A/200/5 for the appointment of Lieutenant J N Marshall as Second in Command of 1/6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers which carried the acting rank of Major. On the same day Neville, along with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Irish Guards had set out for Mericourt where for the first time in six months they were billeted in real houses; on the 25<sup>th</sup> May he left to join the Lancashire Fusiliers. On the face of it this could be regarded as an unusual appointment. From his arrival in France on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1916, after five months at Warley Barracks, until he went to the Lancashire Fusiliers on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1917, his front line fighting experience amounted to about three weeks. He spent a month with an Entrenching Battalion; having been wounded twice his period of light duty and time in hospital in France amounted to six or seven weeks, and on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1916 he was invalided home to England. Then followed almost seven months convalescence until he returned to France on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1917 with what must have been a significant query regarding his fitness for active service. Having re-joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Irish Guards the next eight weeks, until the 24<sup>th</sup> May, were spent on construction work of one sort or another. Neville's front line experience with the Irish Guards was restricted to a few weeks in June/July 1916. But it must be emphasised that during that short period he demonstrated his bravery and, for the work he did and the example he, set he was awarded the Military Cross. But did this really add up to the Second in Command of a battalion, over the heads of experienced company commanders?

On his return to France at the end of March 1917 Neville was now wearing seven medal ribbons and five wound stripes. The latter included the three wounds credited at the time he joined the Irish Guards and the two wounds he sustained in 1916. He wore four ribbons when he was at Warley; three campaign medals and the Order of Leopold. To these had been added the Military Cross, the Belgian Croix de Guerre and what in photographs, appears to be similar to a Mention in Despatches Emblem of bronze oak leaves mounted on a plain ribbon, but this could not have been a British award; by the time he arrived at the Lancashire Fusiliers he had added a rosette to the Order of Leopold to mark the award of 'Officier' of that Order. He most certainly would have looked the part of an experienced fighting Guards officer and, if later anecdotal information is to be believed, he acted the part. Could it have been that this is what was wanted; it has been said that he inspired and led his men from the front

and cared for their needs. If that required some 'window-dressing' some would say it was probably worth it; on the other hand the Irish Guards did not make much use of his 'ability', 'not one of us' perhaps.

#### **1/6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers 25<sup>th</sup> May 1917 - 12<sup>th</sup> February 1918**

The 1/6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers was part of the 125<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, 42<sup>nd</sup> (East Lancashire) Division. A Territorial Division which volunteered for foreign service arriving in Egypt on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1914. They took part in the Gallipoli campaign from May 1915 returning to Egypt in January 1916. After completing some two and a half years of service in the Near East the Division sailed from Alexandria at the end of February 1917, en route to the Western Front. Disembarking at Marseilles they eventually assembled at the end of March in an area ten miles East of Amiens, with the Divisional HQ established at Mericourt. The strength of the Division on 1st April 1917 was 727 officers and 16,689 other ranks. Vastly different to the 15,500 Lancashire men who set sail for Egypt in September 1914, in fact some hundreds of men were repatriated as unfit for foreign service. Of the 14,000 who landed at Gallipoli only about 5,000, in spite of replacement drafts, arrived back in Egypt, the Division sustained 8,547 casualties, killed, wounded, and missing. Although now up to strength it seems that there was a need, with certain exceptions, to replace senior officers and this took place from time to time, bringing in men experienced in the war on the Western Front.

By the time Neville Marshall arrived as Second in Command of the 1/6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1917 the Division had been 'introduced' to the activity in front line trenches, carried out construction work on road repair etc, leave had been granted, new kit issued. On 3<sup>rd</sup> May the Division took over a sector of the line at Ronsoy, South-East of Epehy and several night attacks in company or platoon strength were made. On 23<sup>rd</sup> May the Division relieved the 20<sup>th</sup> Division on a newly captured sector running from the Canal du Nord to Villers Plouich, where they remained, fairly quietly until 8<sup>th</sup> July. Neville wrote to his mother on 3<sup>rd</sup> June asking for a small pair of curling irons and a little methylated lamp for his birthday present. He said he had to curl his moustache. '.....We are just out of the line for a day or so, and shall be in again for my birthday (12<sup>th</sup> June) if I am alive. Yes. There is a great difference in the men and officers of this Regiment, but the men only need discipline and leading. They are all tough Lancashire miners, and sit on their heels all day long in the trenches. I used to see them doing the same as a little boy at Wigan. Was very lucky to come out alive last time.....'

On 1<sup>st</sup> June the Division was ordered to advance its front by about 300 yards, to be completed by 6am on the 10<sup>th</sup>. This was carried out by the 126<sup>th</sup> and 127<sup>th</sup> Brigades



A/Major J N Marshall MC, late 1917  
2<sup>nd</sup> in Command 1/6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers

and was rewarded by a Special Order of the Day from the Corps Commander. Night patrolling was undertaken in order to test and train officers and men; many patrols were sent out with the primary object of giving the men confidence and experience and this policy was completely successful. There was a considerable amount of German sniping in the vicinity of Havrincourt Wood but Sgt O Durrans of the 1/6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers spent some two and a half hours in No Man's Land on 4<sup>th</sup> June and accounted for four of them, he was wounded and awarded the DCM. On the 8<sup>th</sup> July the Division was relieved and went into the Third Army reserve area at Achiet-le-Petit where the 125<sup>th</sup> Brigade was stationed at Gorniecourt. The next six weeks were taken up with intensive training, instructional visits to the Somme and many sporting activities until, on 22<sup>nd</sup> August, the Division entrained for the Ypres front.

Having spent the greater part of the summer of 1917 opposite the Hindenburg Line, near the extreme right of the British line, the move to Ypres required a further period of training, this was achieved by various attachments to the 15<sup>th</sup> Division. The 42<sup>nd</sup> relieved the 15<sup>th</sup> and took over a sector of the line, some 1,500 yards in width near Frezenberg. The forward positions were regarded as unsatisfactory as a base for further operations. It was therefore decided that an attack should be launched with a view to obtaining a better line. The task of the 125<sup>th</sup> Brigade was the capture of Borry Farm, Beck House and Iberian Farm in an area to the North-East of Frezenberg. Two companies of the 1/5<sup>th</sup> Battalion were to take Borry Farm whilst the 1/6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, commanded by Lt-Col M F Hammond-Smith MC, were to attack Beck House with one company while two companies dealt with Iberian Farm. The prospects were not good. Two similar assaults in this area had already failed, one by the 15<sup>th</sup> Division and the second on 5<sup>th</sup> September by the 61<sup>st</sup> Division.

Under a heavy barrage by the divisional artillery the advance commenced early in the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> September. A thunderstorm the previous day made the going very heavy and the German machine-gunners directed a devastating fire on the advancing companies. Borry and Iberian were never reached and although Beck House was captured it was retaken by three companies of German storm-troops who killed or captured the occupants. The attack was abandoned and the survivors withdrew with difficulty from an impossible position. There were nearly 800 casualties, including 86 killed in the 1/5<sup>th</sup> Battalion while the dead of the 1/6<sup>th</sup> numbered 119. On the 18<sup>th</sup> September the Division was relieved by the 9<sup>th</sup> Division and moved North to the coast where it relieved the 66<sup>th</sup> (2<sup>nd</sup> East Lincs) Division, on the Nieuport sector. Although glad to leave the Ypres salient it seems that morale in the 42<sup>nd</sup> Division was low, the men were not in a happy frame of mind and felt that, given the opportunity, they were capable of better things. Major General B R Mitford, CB DSO, commanding the Division went home on leave, possibly sick-leave, on 1<sup>st</sup> October from which he never returned; he retired the following February. On the 15<sup>th</sup> October 1917 Major General A Solly-Flood CMG DSO, assumed command of the Division. A very experienced officer, including some months as Director of Training at GHQ in France, he quickly made an impact and the Division responded to his leadership.

The Division spent a relatively quiet two months in the Nieuport sector. Plenty of construction work to keep them occupied but the activity consisted very largely of artillery duels and aircraft bombing. There is nothing special to record about Neville Marshall but as the second in command of the 1/6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers he

would certainly have been involved in the preparation for if not actually in the attack that took place on 6<sup>th</sup> September. During the time at Nieuport he wrote to his mother on 11<sup>th</sup> November, a somewhat disturbing letter which included the following '.....I am feeling pretty fit, but have been hit in the head again, and have very bad headaches. The war still drags on & is likely to do so. What I feel is simply terrible depression because I have seen this coming for so long & in my humble & modest position have not been able to do anything to prevent this catastrophe. From the first weeks of the war I have seen this appalling condition. Incompetently lack of boldness & corruption. You will see that my early views of the war will be vindicated to the last letter. This is the mightiest disaster that has ever overtaken an army, 200,000 prisoners!! It is too appalling. I suppose General Mackenson is the greatest tactician the military world has ever seen. I have no news and if I did not love my men should be very bored.....' It is perhaps surprising that Neville should have written to his mother in such terms. The 'mightiest disaster' to which he refers would seem to be the German offensive in the Tolmino-Caporetto sector of the Italian front, planned by General Ludendorff which resulted in some 250,000 prisoners falling into German hands; the reference to General von Mackenson in this context is not understood. It should be noted that in this letter he claims to have been wounded at least twice in the head however, there is no confirmation of this in his 'Record of Service'; Neville did not write to his mother again until October 1918.

After what has been described as 'two months beside the sea' the 42<sup>nd</sup> Division was relieved by the 133<sup>rd</sup> Division of the French Army and ordered to the La Bassée Sector on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1917. The troops marched the sixty or so miles to their new location and at about twelve miles a day, with a rest for two days at Aire, the five days of road-marching was said to have acted as a tonic. On 29<sup>th</sup> November they relieved the 25<sup>th</sup> Division in the line. Once again the Division had arrived in a 'quiet' area there having been no major actions in this sector for almost two and a half years. The Germans did attack on 10<sup>th</sup> December, following a bombardment with poison gas, but were beaten back by men of the 1/10<sup>th</sup> Battalion Manchester Regiment; Private Walter Mills received the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross and considerable other casualties were suffered by this Battalion. Although generally there was 'nothing to report' during the Division's stay in this sector there were regular trench raids, with active snipers and patrols, plus a great deal of working party labour in support of construction work carried out by the Royal Engineers.

Although festivities continued well into January all troops managed to celebrate Christmas, with plenty to eat and drink along with a Divisional pantomime and with concerts and other entertainment organised at unit level. On 15<sup>th</sup> February 1918 the Division was relieved by the 55<sup>th</sup> Division and withdrawn to 1<sup>st</sup> Corps Reserve with the Divisional HQ at Hinges and later at Labouvriere. This was now a period of 'rest' but a great deal of training in, for example, open warfare, use of ground for manoeuvre and use of different weapons was carried out. Sports and entertainment were encouraged and, as usual, large working parties were provided for defence construction work.

Shortly before it was relieved the Division had embarked on a fairly extensive reorganisation. The Divisional strength on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1918 was 732 officers and 14,314 other ranks but by 1<sup>st</sup> March it was 773 officers and 15,514 other ranks. The arrival of a fourth machine-gun company was joined by the three brigade companies

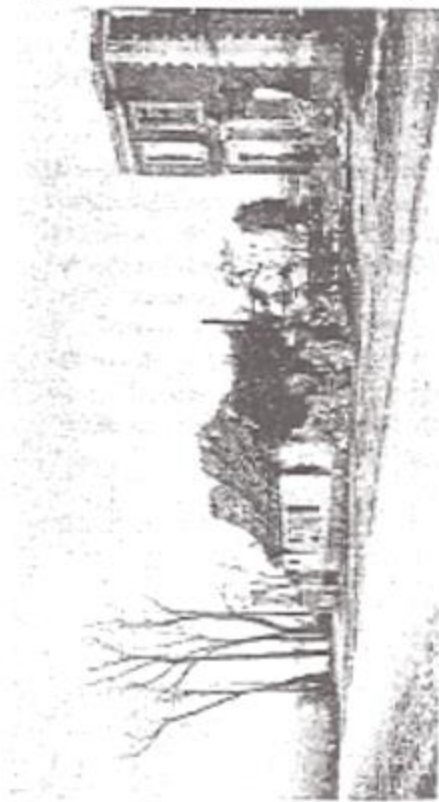


to form the divisional machine-gun battalion, three trench mortar batteries were formed into two and a pioneer battalion was created by the transfer of the 1/7th Northumberland Fusiliers from the 50<sup>th</sup> (Northumbrian) Division. Perhaps the most important part of the reorganisation was that which affected the three infantry brigades. Many infantry battalions were under strength and because replacement manpower was not readily available it had been decided to reduce the establishment of infantry brigades from four to three battalions. This was accomplished in the 125th Brigade by transferring the 1/6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers to the 197<sup>th</sup> Brigade, where it was amalgamated with the 2/6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the combined unit thenceforth known as the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, now part of the 66<sup>th</sup> Division. These battalion changes took place on 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> February 1918 with the result that those that remained were now up to strength but, in the process, Neville Marshall lost his appointment as a Second-in-Command. However, he retained his rank as acting Major and was employed on headquarters duties with the Lancashire Fusiliers and stayed with the 125<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

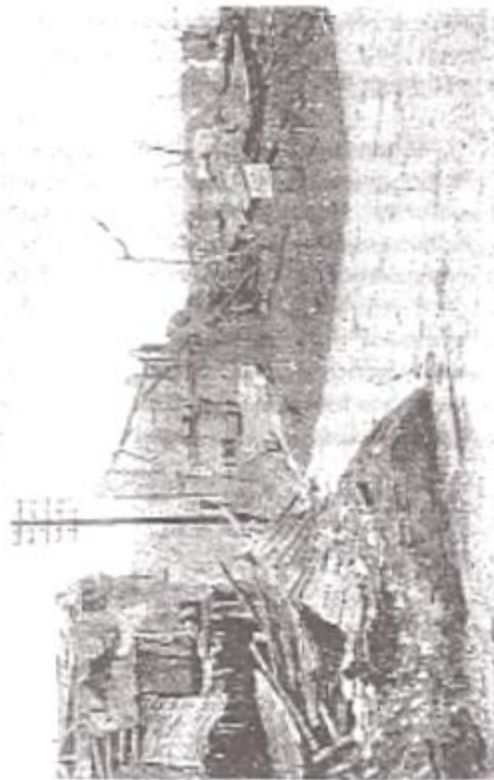
#### **125<sup>th</sup> Brigade (Lancashire Fusiliers) 13<sup>th</sup> February - 6<sup>th</sup> May 1918**

The Division remained in the La Bassée sector with regular rotation of brigades and battalions, carrying out raids and frequent patrolling in No-Man's Land, along with plenty of training in the Divisional rear areas. On 1<sup>st</sup> March the Division became part of the General Headquarters Reserve until on the evening of 21<sup>st</sup> March a call was received with warning orders that the Division might suddenly be called to move southwards into action; the great German offensive had begun. On the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup> the Division started to join the 6<sup>th</sup> Corps, Third Army in the Somme area. Packed into lorries and motor-busses the three infantry brigades travelled to Adinfer, just North-West of Alette, where at about 7pm the 125<sup>th</sup> and 126<sup>th</sup> Brigades debussed to bivouac in Adinfer Wood. The Division went into battle on the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup> March and was heavily engaged in fierce fighting in the Ervillers-Behagnies-Sapignies area along the Bapaume-Arras road. The Division fell back to a defensive line near Bucquoy-Ablainzeville and were able to beat off determined German attacks on 28<sup>th</sup> March and again on 5<sup>th</sup> April; shortly afterwards the German offensive was called off. The Division was taken out of the line on 8<sup>th</sup> April to a rest area some fifteen miles South-West of Arras. Since going into action on 25<sup>th</sup> March it had suffered 2,965 casualties. Three battalion commanders of the 125<sup>th</sup> Brigade had been killed and the same brigade had been awarded three DSOs and a Bar, fifteen MCs and a Bar, eighteen DCMs and thirty-five MMs.

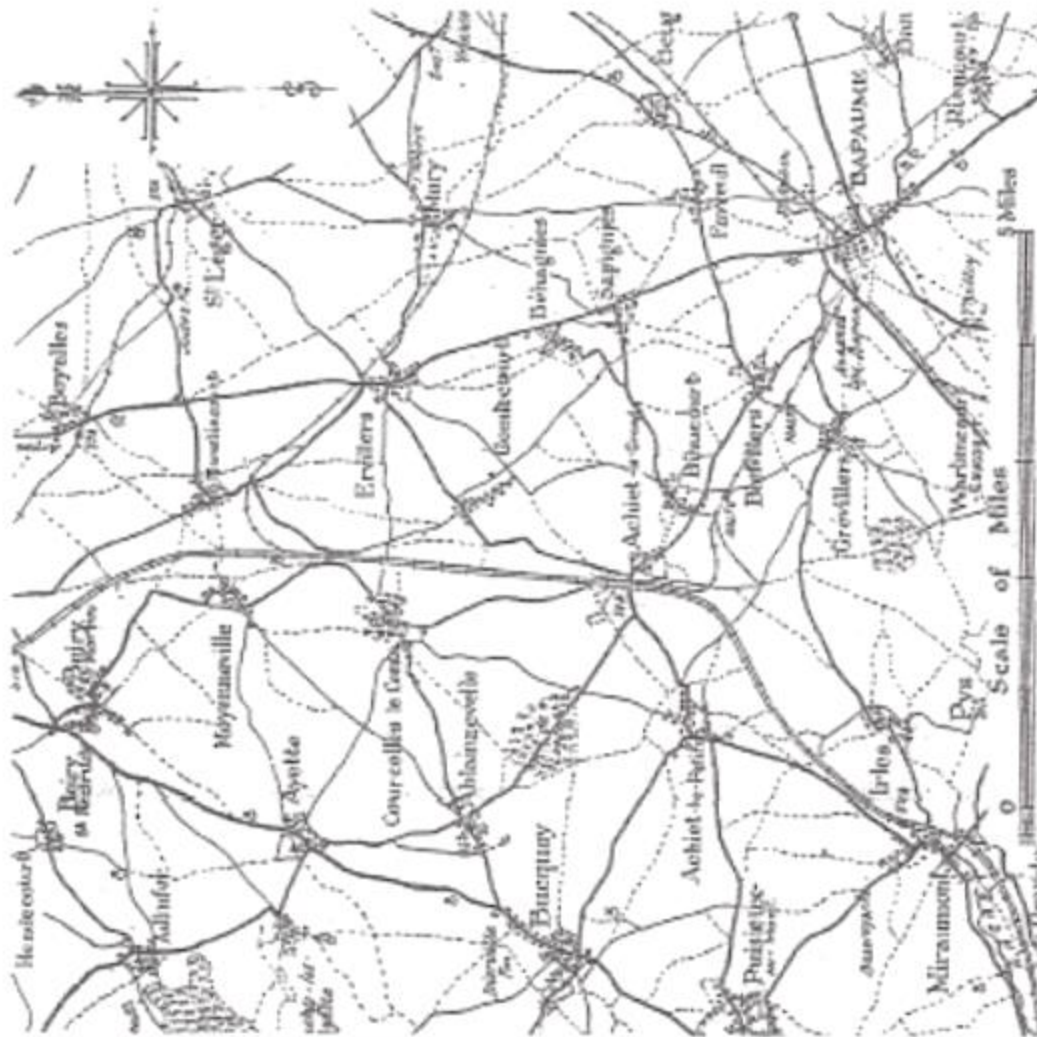
On 15<sup>th</sup> April the 42<sup>nd</sup> Division returned to the front line, relieving the 37<sup>th</sup> Division at Gommecourt-Hebuterne and were mainly engaged on construction work until relieved by the 57<sup>th</sup> Division on 7<sup>th</sup> May. On the same day Neville returned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Irish Guards in his substantive rank of Lieutenant; for his work with the 125<sup>th</sup> Brigade he was Mentioned in Despatches for 'Distinguished Conduct in the Field' (London Gazette 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1918).



Spoignits, the scene of heavy fighting for the 125<sup>th</sup> Brigade



Bucquoy Cross Roads; The scene of severe hand-to-hand fighting on April 5<sup>th</sup> for the 125<sup>th</sup> Brigade



Location map etc. German offensive March/April 1918 -- shows places where 42<sup>nd</sup> (E Lancs) Divn was in action

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Irish Guards 7<sup>th</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup> May 1918**

On 27<sup>th</sup> April 1918 the battalion had been taken out of D'Aval Wood and were now billeted in farms round Hondelghem on the Cassel Road. They were working north of Hazebrouck strengthening that side of the Hazebrouck defence systems. Inspected by General Plumer on 15<sup>th</sup> May for a distribution of medal ribbons the battalion entrained for the Doullens-Arras line on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Their task was to man the GHQ line of defence which ran to the east of Barley Wood. On 11<sup>th</sup> June the battalion transferred to camp in the grounds of Bavincourt Chateau where the time was pleasantly spent digging to maintain the GHQ line along with Divisional and Brigade sports. At the end of May Neville Marshall was promoted acting Major and appointed 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command of the 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment where he arrived on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1918.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Manchester Regiment 1<sup>st</sup> June - 11<sup>th</sup> October 1918**

This battalion disembarked at Havre on 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> August 1914 and was part of the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 5<sup>th</sup> Division. However, by the end of 1915 battalions of the New Armies were coming out from home in constantly increasing numbers and it was considered desirable, at any rate at first, to divide the New Army troops amongst those more experienced in war. Consequently, in December 1915 the 95<sup>th</sup> Brigade replaced the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the 5<sup>th</sup> Division and, on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1916, the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade joined the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division at Henecourt; the battalion was now the only one remaining of those that comprised this Brigade in August 1914. Apart from one battalion being relieved for a short time during July 1916 the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade remained unchanged until the reorganisation of Infantry Brigades that took place in January/February 1918. This resulted in the transfer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Manchester Regiment to the 96<sup>th</sup> Brigade to join the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Battalions Lancashire Fusiliers. The Battalion was moved up at regular intervals into the front line and suffered a general depletion of its officers and men. On 12<sup>th</sup> May 1918 a move was made to the neighbourhood of Blairville. During the previous four weeks the Battalion had lost 3 officers and 11 other ranks killed, with 6 officers and 97 other ranks wounded. No fewer than 14 officers joined for duty, including 9 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants. By the end of May 8 men had been killed and 30 men, including 1 officer, wounded.

The month of June was again one of considerable activity in the front line, with heavy fatigues of all kinds when the troops, by a 'pleasant' fiction, were considered to be 'at rest'. The casualties continued among all ranks, and the depleted condition of the senior commissioned ranks of the Battalion may to some extent be gauged from the announcement which appeared in the battalion diary on 1<sup>st</sup> June thus: 'Lieutenant J N Marshall MC Irish Guards, joined today and took over the duties of second-in-command!' The exclamation mark and the fact that the word 'Lieutenant' had been given some emphasis seems to suggest that the person who wrote the entry in the diary was expressing some surprise at the appointment. It may not have been realised that Neville had held the acting rank of Major since May 1917.



Officers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Manchester Regiment  
Front row – Lt Col G McM Robertson MC, A/Major J N Marshall MC

After a very stressful June, with casualties in killed, wounded, missing, and gassed increasing daily, the battalion went into Divisional reserve near Blairville, moving to La Bazeque on 6<sup>th</sup> July and to Proven a week later. A very restful period with bathing and 'recreational' training including sports, the month of July came happily to an end with no casualties at all in the battalion. The Manchesters left Proven on 7<sup>th</sup> August and on the night of the 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> were bivouacked in a field between Mezieres and Beaucourt. From here at 4am on the 10<sup>th</sup> the battalion moved up into action and attacked Parvillers and Damery Woods, in support of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers. The battalion held the outpost line until the night of the 11<sup>th</sup>. During this advance Neville and a subaltern were wounded and the former was awarded a Bar to his MC with the following citation 'For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty during an advance. He was ordered to take a company and two platoons and fill a gap and capture a position in the hands of the enemy. He succeeded splendidly, and, advancing further than the unit on his left, he formed a defensive flank and beat off a hostile attack. Though wounded early in the attack his courage and fine leadership were chiefly responsible for the success of the operation.' (London Gazette 7<sup>th</sup> November 1918)

Following a brief period out of the line, plus the arrival of a draft of some 300 non-commissioned officers and men, the battalion quickly saw action at Harbonniere and at the end of August were heavily engaged in the area of Vermandovillers, Ablaincourt and Cizancourt. On the 27<sup>th</sup> August Brigade Order No.478 contained the following remarks: 'The work of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Manchester Regiment today is beyond praise. I am proud to have such a battalion in my brigade, and I thank all ranks for their splendid behaviour. May good fortune attend them tomorrow.' The price of such success, during the four days 27<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> August was, 16 killed, 43 wounded with 2 missing. The German retreat was now everywhere in progress with heavy fighting and many casualties in all attacking units. The 32<sup>nd</sup> Division left the front line on 30<sup>th</sup> August and were able make good deficiencies and carry out some training in fairly comfortable conditions, located mainly in the La Neuville area.

All good things come to an end and by the end of September the Division were back in action. The 96<sup>th</sup> Brigade moved via Vendelles and at about 8.30pm on the 29<sup>th</sup> crossed the St Quentin Canal, staying for the night in a line of old German trenches almost two miles east of the canal. Preparations were made for the Brigade to attack Joncourt and to gain the Beurevoir-Fonsomme Line round Chataignies Wood, in conjunction with the 97<sup>th</sup> Brigade. Throughout the day of 1<sup>st</sup> October and into the night the fighting was very heavy, including some stiff hand-to-hand combat but complete success crowned the attack. In two days the 2<sup>nd</sup> Manchesters had lost 7 killed, 106 wounded with 7 missing. On 2<sup>nd</sup> October their commanding officer Lt Col G McM Robertson, (North Stafford Regiment who joined the battalion two weeks before Neville Marshall) circulated the following message to 'all companies': 'The GOC desires me to thank on his behalf all ranks for their extremely gallant conduct yesterday and especially last night. He will tell them when they come out what extreme importance was attached to their behaviour, and if today's operations are successful their conduct will have led to one of the greatest successes of the war, maybe. They are the only men in the division who did their task and held it. May I be allowed to offer my sincere thanks to all for their work and the honour they have again added to the battalion's credit which is so dear to us all?'

On 3<sup>rd</sup> October, having been relieved by the 1/8<sup>th</sup> Battalion Nottingham & Derbyshire Regiment, the battalion moved back to dug-outs on the banks of the St Quentin Canal near Lehancourt but, in the course of the relief, suffered further casualties numbering 23 killed, 70 wounded with 1 missing. On the 5<sup>th</sup> a move was made to Hancourt near Vendelles for rest and recreation until eventually the battalion went into the line again on 29<sup>th</sup> at St Souplet. Relieving the 56<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade the 96<sup>th</sup> moved to a line West of the Sambre-Oise Canal, North of Ors; it was understood that an attack over and beyond the canal was to be made at an early date. On 12<sup>th</sup> October Neville left the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Manchester Regiment to assume command of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, one of the two battalions of Lancashire Fusiliers in the 96<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

#### **16<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers 12<sup>th</sup> October - 4<sup>th</sup> November 1918**

As part of the 96<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade the 16<sup>th</sup>, along with the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Manchesters, had been heavily involved in the fighting on 1<sup>st</sup> October. On the following day, the 16<sup>th</sup> were part of the attack designed to capture Ramicourt which lay to the East of the Fonsomme Line. This line was crossed but the troops to the left of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been unable to progress which left some German machine-guns well placed to fire on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Serious casualties soon occurred. One company lost all its officers, another was left with only one and the position was for some time very obscure to those at headquarters. Lt Col A Stone DSO, the commanding officer, was killed at an early stage on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October; Major D Lindsay was wounded on his way up to take command and eventually Major P E Robathan came up from the transport lines and assumed command. The Brigadier ordered a withdrawal to the Fonsomme Line, which was successfully carried out. Several junior officers and the CSM of the company that lost all its officers did very useful and gallant work that day. The 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Battalions Lancashire Fusiliers were withdrawn early on 3<sup>rd</sup> October; the 16<sup>th</sup> were awarded 3 MCs, a DCM and 8 MMs. During the period of rest and recreation at Hancourt from 5<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> October Neville took command of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Along with the rest of the Brigade the battalion was in the line for a day at St Souplet and then, during the night of 30<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> October, took part in the relief of the 56<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the line West of the Sambre-Oise Canal, North of Ors; an attack over and beyond the canal was thought to be imminent.

It must have been around this time that Neville wrote to his mother for the last time, his letter is recorded here in full.



The Sambre-Oise Canal, November 1918

Lt/Col. J.N. Marshall  
Commanding, 16th Lanes Fusiliers.  
B.E.F.

(the letter was not dated)

My darling Mother,

Please note my new address. I have hardly felt like writing to any body for a long time now but as we are living in hazardous times I write to you. You will notice a change in my unit I am Lt Colonel commanding this Battalion.

The summer has been full of very hard fighting and although I am hard at work & in the Field my wounds & privations have left a very wrecked body behind. Thank God we have gained victories I have been decorated again for taking some guns at Vermandovillers last August. All I hope is to be able to stick it out. I think it is my heart that troubles me. I get big joints. They disappear and then I get cardiac pains. Well. That is nothing I have tasted success & military glory, and I love soldiering when I am fit. It is a glorious moonlight night & my men are sleeping in the open by their bivouac fires. It is in keeping with my dreams as a little boy. I feel very proud of my men & love their bayonets.

Give my love to all. Tons of love to you dear Mother.

Your loving boy Neville.

There is much more fighting to be done

It is difficult to assess what Neville is writing about when he refers to 'my wounds & privations'. In November 1917 he said '...have been hit in the head again...', however, the only wound recorded for 1917 & 1918 is the one he sustained during the action at Parvillers and Damery Woods on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1918 when he was awarded a Bar to his MC. His reference to Vermandovillers is mistaken, this action took place at the end of August and the Germans may well have lost guns. The picture of '...my men sleeping in the open by their bivouac fires....' seems to be a rather impracticable one, even though they were out of the line at Hancourt at the time. One is bound to think back to Neville's long period of sick leave and convalescence from September 1916 to March 1917, and the fact that the Doctor in Banbury told him that, with a bullet in his lung he was not fit for active service; perhaps he was now paying the price.

To return to the Sambre-Oise Canal. At the end of October the right of the British line was close to the canal but not right up to it in all places, some Germans remained on its western bank; these were cleared out during the night of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> November. The forcing of the canal was the major task and it was indeed a formidable obstacle. At least seventy feet from bank to bank and some thirty-five to forty feet wide at water level, it was narrower at the locks. In November 1918 it had an average depth of seven feet and was everywhere unfordable; all bridges had been demolished or partly broken. The IX Corps commander decided to use the 1<sup>st</sup> and 32<sup>nd</sup> Divisions to force the canal, on the right and left respectively. Major General Lambert, commanding the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division, arranged that the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade should cross the canal just South of Ors,



and the 96<sup>th</sup> Brigade immediately South of the elbow in the canal North of Ors. Success depended on obtaining complete superiority of fire over the enemy holding the eastern bank of the canal, and arrangements were made for the crossing of the infantry to be covered by a powerful artillery barrage and smoke screen. After effecting a crossing both Brigades were to reorganise before renewing the advance to the bridgehead line under the creeping barrage.

Zero hour for the IX Corps attack was fixed for 5.45am on 4<sup>th</sup> November. The barrage came down in front of the Corps along the East bank of the canal and the infantry of the two Divisions moved forward to the attack. The 96<sup>th</sup> Brigade on the left of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division front advanced with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Manchester, 16<sup>th</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers and 15<sup>th</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers in line from right to left, with two companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry from the 97<sup>th</sup> Brigade in reserve, (the remainder of this Brigade was held in reserve at St Souplet). The 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion, in the centre of the Brigade, were to cross the canal by a bridge to be erected by the Royal Engineers about 1,500 yards North-East of Ors and advance, with its left flank on the canal and its right in touch with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Manchesters, to the final objective the Guise-Landrecies road.

At 5.50am the companies of the 16<sup>th</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers were in position on the West bank of the canal and providing covering fire for the Royal Engineers while they put up bridges. The Sappers completed their task in about half an hour in face of great difficulties. As soon as the bridge was ready for use by the 16<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt C J Stapley was one of the first to cross, though under heavy machine-gun fire. As Capt H C Pemberton began to cross the floats at the enemy's end of the bridge broke loose, but he and Stapley managed to repair it, still under intense machinegun fire. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt G H Potts and three men were now able to get across before the bridge was again broken by shell fire, the Battalion was thus held up. Lt Col Marshall at once came forward and organised parties to repair the bridge, but the first party formed were soon all killed or wounded. But such was the inspiration of Marshall's example that volunteers sprang forward to take their place. He stood on the bank under intense fire and with a complete disregard, for his own safety, encouraging them and helping with the work. In spite of German fire, the repairs to the bridge were completed. Marshall tried to rush across at the head of the company waiting to cross; he was shot through the head and instantly killed. Losses had been heavy throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the job of the second-in-command, Capt J B Dunn MC, was to reorganise the depleted companies. Soon after 8.30am orders were received that no further attempts were to be made to cross at this location but that the Battalion was to cross the canal by a bridge put up by another brigade at Ors. Fighting continued until the 8<sup>th</sup> and firing was heavy even up to the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> November. But for the 96<sup>th</sup> Brigade its part in the war came to an end on the 6<sup>th</sup> when it went into a rest area at Sambreton where, at 11am on the 11<sup>th</sup>, all ranks learnt that an armistice had been declared.

## Conclusion

The very heavy fighting, in which the 96<sup>th</sup> Brigade was involved, at the Sambre-Oise Canal resulted in a high rate of casualties. Many acts of gallantry took place and in the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers these were recognised by the award of – VC (1), DSO (2), MC (6) and MM (9). In addition to Neville Marshall's VC another posthumous VC was awarded to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt James Kirk, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Manchester Regiment. Sergeant J Clark, 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, along with Major Water and Sapper Archibald of the 218<sup>th</sup> Field Company of the Royal Engineers, also received this decoration for their gallantry and work during the fighting and attempted crossing of the canal, they survived the conflict.

The citation relating to Neville's Victoria Cross was published in the London Gazette of 13<sup>th</sup> February 1919 as follows:

"For most conspicuous bravery, determination and leadership in the attack on the Sambre-Oise Canal, near Catillon, on the 4<sup>th</sup> November 1918, when a partly constructed bridge came under concentrated fire and was broken before the advanced troops of his battalion could cross. Lieutenant-Colonel Marshall at once went forward and organised parties to repair the bridge. The first party was soon killed or wounded, but by personal example he inspired his command, and volunteers were instantly forthcoming. Under intense fire and with complete disregard of his own safety, he stood on the bank encouraging his men and assisting in their work, and when the bridge was repaired attempted to rush across at the head of his battalion, and was killed while doing so. The passage of the canal was of vital importance, and the gallantry displayed by all ranks was largely due to the inspiring example set by Lieutenant-Colonel Marshall"

His VC was presented to his widow, Mrs Edith Marshall, by His Majesty King George Vth in the Ballroom of Buckingham Palace, London, on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1919.

Neville Marshall is buried in a quiet corner of the Ors Communal Cemetery no more than a mile or so from where he was killed, just North-East of Ors (the reference in the citation to 'near Cotillon' is not very accurate). The cemetery is located in the Nord Department of France, 3½ miles South-West of Landrecies, North-West of Ors near the railway station and his grave is located 'In line with Plot A, Grave 22'. Also buried here are James Kirk VC age 21 and Wilfred Owen MC age 25, also killed on 4<sup>th</sup> November, along with 60 other UK dead, 6 Russian and 9 German.

It is perhaps of some interest to note that the Lancashire Fusiliers have always claimed that Neville's VC 'belonged' to their Regiment. However the War Office held that as he was an Irish Guardsman, and only attached to the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, the decoration must be credited to the Irish Guards



Headstone on Neville Marshall's grave in Ors Communal Cemetery

Splendid is death  
When thou fallest courageous  
Leading the onslaught

# Army Orders

BY  
**GENERAL SIR H. S. RAWLINSO, BART.**  
G.C.V.O. K.C.B. K.C.M.G. COMMANDING FOURTH ARMY.

MILITARY SECRETARY'S BRANCH.

## IMMEDIATE REWARDS

(a) His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to approve of the award of the Victoria Cross to —

Lieutenant (Acting Lieutenant-Colonel) James Neville MARSHALL, M.C., Irish Guards attached Lancashire Fusiliers.

For most conspicuous gallantry, determination and leadership in the attack on the SAMBRE-OISE CANAL near CATHILLON, on the 6th November, 1918.

A partly constructed bridge consisting of small rock culverts had been thrown over the canal by the Royal Engineers and Pioneers, but before the advance troops of Lieutenant-Colonel MARSHALL's Battalion were across, the bridge came under a concentrated fire of Artillery and machine guns and was broken. On hearing of this Lieutenant-Colonel MARSHALL at once took up full charge of the situation and organized parties of volunteers for the repair of the bridge. All the first party of volunteers were killed or wounded, but as great was the personal example of the Commanding Officer that other volunteers steadily took their places. Throughout the repair of the bridge Lieutenant-Colonel MARSHALL, standing on the bank, encouraged and assisted the men under a hurricane of heavy fire without any regard to his own safety.

When the bridge was repaired Lieutenant-Colonel MARSHALL attempted to rush across at the head of his Battalion and was killed while so doing.

The forcing of the line of the Canal was of vital importance, and the gallantry displayed by all ranks at this spot was largely due to the personal example given by Lieutenant-Colonel MARSHALL.

He had been wounded ten times during the War and fell in the last great fight in which the Division was engaged.

(b) Under authority delegated by His Majesty the King, the Field Marshal Commanding-in-Chief has made the following awards, for gallantry and devotion to duty in action —

### THE MILITARY CROSS.

Temporary Second Lieutenant A. C. ANDREWS, Royal West Surrey Regiment.  
Lieutenant E. F. LESSEUP, Essex Regiment.  
Second Lieutenant A. S. BOSTOCK, Essex Regiment.  
Second Lieutenant H. MOORE, Essex Regiment.  
Second Lieutenant R. S. EARLE, Royal West Surrey Regiment.  
Lieutenant G. J. C. WELCH, Royal Berkshire Regiment.  
Temporary Captain A. J. FORDE, Royal Army Medical Corps.

### THE DISTINGUISHED CONDUCT MEDAL.

No. 36348 Gunner A. E. LOUPE, Royal Field Artillery.  
No. 36225 Corporal J. E. AITCHISON, Royal West Kent Regiment.  
No. 20221 Sergeant C. G. S. CARYON, Royal West Surrey Regiment.  
No. 5826 Lance Corporal R. C. COOK, Northamptonshire Regiment.  
No. 5824 Private E. H. GIFFORD, Northamptonshire Regiment.  
No. 10550 Sergeant W. J. CARVILLE, Essex Regiment.  
No. 4232 Private J. A. PRESTON, Royal Berkshire Regiment.  
No. 26118 Private T. W. RICHARDSON, Essex Regiment.

### THE MILITARY MEDAL.

No. 25910 Sergeant H. C. ROBINSON, Northamptonshire Regiment.  
No. 1261 Lance Corporal E. LOVE, Northamptonshire Regiment.

H. C. HOLMAN, Major General,  
D.A. & Q.M.G., Fourth Army.

Syl. March 1919

50

Note: 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt H Moore MC, lived in Harlow.  
He knew Neville and is mentioned in page 12

## EPILOGUE

All soldiers were encouraged to make wills, most probably did but Neville was one of those that did not. He died intestate and the grant of Letters of Administration included the following information:

BE IT KNOWN that James Neville Wellesley Marshall VC of Matching Green, Harlow, in the County of Essex, a Lieutenant-Colonel with the army died on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of November 1918 at Ors in France, intestate.

AND BE IT FURTHER KNOWN that at the date hereunder written Letters of Administration of all the Estate which by law devolves to and vests in the personal representative of the said intestate were granted by His Majesty's High Court of Justice at the Principal Probate Registry thereof to Edith Maud Marshall of Matching Green aforesaid the lawful widow and Relict of the said intestate.

Dated the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of July 1919

Gross Value of Estate           £303.3.7

Net Value of Personal Estate   £303.3.7

The name 'Wellesley' has occurred again, no doubt because his wife Edith would have been required to produce her certificate of marriage when she applied to the Probate Registry. Edith had moved from 'Bromleys', Latton, Harlow and was now living at 'Lascelles Lodge', Matching Green, just outside Harlow. It is believed that her sister Helen lived there with her. Sir Arthur Fitzgerald and Edith kept in touch and in 1928 she spent some time with Sir Arthur and his wife at the family home at Valentia Island, Kerry. Soon after this visit Edith and her sister went to Kenya where they bred polo ponies. She died there, probably just before 1970, in her early eighties, leaving miscellaneous memorabilia relating to Neville's war-time activities to her sister-in-law Dorothy Stevens and Dorothy's son.

Dorothy inherited various items concerning her brother Neville, the most important being his medals and the bronze memorial plaque given to the next of kin. On the 17<sup>th</sup> December 1970 Dorothy, now age 80, presented the medals and the plaque to the Regimental Headquarters of the Irish Guards; at the same time his sword, swordstick and various photographs and letters were given to the Regiment for safe keeping. The Regiment made arrangements for Neville's disabled brother Klein, age 78, to travel from Bromsgrove to attend the presentation. The ceremony was reported in the national press which resulted in several letters from men who had known Neville during the Great War and wished to recount their experiences. Of course, after his death and the award of the VC a wide variety of people wrote to Neville's wife Edith to express their sympathy etc.

Some years ago one person who enquired about Neville Marshall's background commented that there was 'no mention of his marriage nor of family history. But, reading between the lines, it was deduced that he came from not very affluent lower middle class stock; it was thought that this may have accounted for the reluctance of his family to provide details.' It is true that the obituaries published in the Birmingham area contain some false information, do not enlarge on his transition from



Regimental Headquarters Irish Guards 17<sup>th</sup> December 1970  
Mrs Dorothy Stevens, Neville Marshall's sister  
presenting his medals to the regiment



Victoria Cross



Military Cross



British War Medal



British Victory Medal



Order of Leopold



Croix de Guerre

Note: These are typical illustrations, they are not Neville's medals.

clerk to veterinary worker and make no mention of his marriage. The local newspapers serving Harlow in Essex do refer to Edith his wife but have very little if anything to say about his family at Acock's Green. Unfortunately, these papers appear to have influenced most, if not all, of the biographical information that has been produced hitherto. There is no doubt that in the order of society, class, during Neville's lifetime, was a relevant factor. So far as the regular army was concerned the officer class consisted almost entirely of men who were products of the public schools. However, by early 1916 the majority of temporary commissions were given to men selected from the ranks and specially trained. The Special Reserve of Officers existed before the war and consisted largely of men with previous experience. During the war commissions in the Reserve were granted to specially selected men, mainly of a similar background to regular officers.

Following his death, and the award of his VC, Neville's wife received some letters from men who had known him during the war; the following extracts may be of interest:

**From an officer who served with him in the 42<sup>nd</sup> (E. Lancs) Division**

I am quite sure that it was under circumstances that displayed the almost reckless disregard of personal safety that was one of his characteristics. I served under him for several months in France & Flanders and some of the episodes are burnt in my memory. I was Battalion Intelligence Officer & Col Marshall (then Major) & I on many occasions were out alone in No-Mans Land when his health was such that he could have been at home in safety. We have laid out in shell-holes together on our own and other occasions when he was suffering from old wounds; been blown up, sniped and shelled together. Lt Col Marshall was in many respects certainly the most extraordinary man I have ever met & I can never forget the weird experiences I shared with him.

**From his 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command 16<sup>th</sup> Bn Lancashire Fusiliers**

I saw him fall with a smile on his face and I knew for he had often told us, that he died in a manner after his own heart – the death of a soldier and a gentleman. I have been with the Battalion but a short time, but in all my military experience I have never seen such a marvellous effect of one personality on a body of men. He came to the Battalion when it was practically disorganised owing to heavy casualties and during the few weeks he was with it he created an atmosphere of confidence and a Battalion of smiling well-disciplined, and contented men. We would have followed him anywhere.

**From the Commanding Officer of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Manchester Regiment**

It may lessen your sorrow when I tell you that at his funeral the officers and men went like one man, not as a parade or by order, but just to pay their last respects to the man who we had all learnt, not only to admire but love for all he did for us while he was with us. For myself, I can only say that my admiration for him practically amounted to hero-worship. That a man with his experience & knowledge, not only as a soldier, but of the world; his standing in nearly every walk of life; could so easily subordinate self to serve under me, my every word law to him no matter what he thought, was a trait which I can only marvel at. His courage & endurance & cheerfulness in all sorts & kinds of conditions is too well known. I for one only hoped to try & equal it if I could.



#### **From a Private soldier in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Manchester Regiment**

Often we have grouched about the way he put us through the mill. But he said one day on parade he knew our feelings towards him, saying he cared not a jot about it & at the same time, he was not afraid of us or anyone else, & he would go into action with us, and he did too. I know the value of a leader and a man. He is the bravest and best leader of men that I have ever had the honour to fight under. He is now the most beloved of men in the Battalion. He got a wound in the leg but that did not stop him at all; he carried on all day, speaking a kind and encouraging word to everyone, even cracking jokes before the enemy's guns. If ever I met a man who deserved the VC he earned it many times that day. I raise my hat to our hero & a gentleman of England.

*Written by this soldier after the action at Parvillers and Damery Woods on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1918, Neville won a Bar to his MC.*

#### **From a fellow officer in the Irish Guards**

I was in the Irish Guards with your husband in 1917 & had the good fortune to serve in the same company with him, No 4 Coy, 2 Batt. (*this would have been 30<sup>th</sup> March – 24<sup>th</sup> May 1917*) We became very close friends & the more I knew of him, the greater grew my love and admiration for his wonderful personality & his many fine qualities. There is no need for me to tell you how the men adored him with all the Irishman's faculty for worship for courage and generosity. All I wish is to add my small testimony to the many tributes you must have received from others. When he left the battalion I was very lonely and missed the long discussions we had held nightly in our tent. He was really larger-minded and was filled with scorn for the 'littleness' of life and man, himself included. I have never met anyone who so justified one's belief in humanity as he did. Simple mindedness was I think, his chief characteristic, certainly the one that made him loved. At the time I knew him his old wounds were giving him trouble. He insisted on working with the men when on 'fatigues' and in consequence he suffered from sudden haemorrhages. Often these attacks would make him a little delirious & he would lie tossing on his bed in the evening & talking of many things. But recurring again and again to his own wish – to be allowed to fight and be brave, really brave. 'Let me show them how to be brave' was his cry, and the fates answered it. He did 'show them', not once but many times

**Note:** Neville returned to France on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1917 after nearly seven months convalescence in England. The doctor he saw during this period said he was not fit for active service; the mention of 'sudden haemorrhages' and being 'a little delirious' confirms that he was far from well.

Until he was killed in action on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1918 Lieutenant Wilfred Owen MC was serving with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Manchester Regiment and of course knew Neville Marshall when the latter was Second in Command. It is recorded that in a letter he wrote to his mother Owen described Neville as 'the most arrant utterly soldierly soldier I have ever come across. Bold, robust, dashing, unscrupulous, cruel, jovial, immoral, vast-chested, handsome-headed, of free, coarse speech.'

The reports in the national press about the presentation of Neville's medals to the Irish Guards prompted several 'old soldiers' to write to the Regimental Headquarters in December 1970; some extracts from their letters now follow.

#### **From someone who served in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division 1915 – 1919**

After the Somme in July 1916, in which this Div was badly mauled, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Manchesters were brought in. Their OC was a Lt Col Marshall, a much decorated soldier. He was a man of outstanding courage and a stickler for discipline. Many times he would 'tear a strip off' men, irrespective of their unit and would generally finish with the remark 'Do you know who I am?' and on receiving a negative reply would inform the offenders 'I am Marshall of the Guards and don't forget it' (never Marshall of the Manchesters). The end of the war was in sight when the Colonel was killed and, although recollections have been dimmed by the passage of time, the memory of this man shines out like a beacon. He was a gallant soldier and a gentleman.

**Note:** The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Manchester Regiment, as part of the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, joined the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1916. Marshall joined the battalion as second in command on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1918.

#### **From Neville's adjutant in 16<sup>th</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers**

This man joined the battalion just after Neville took command. He says – At this stage of the war after the very heavy casualties that had been incurred during the whole of 1918 from the 21<sup>st</sup> March onwards both in officers and men, particularly in officers, the Battalion was in no sense a smart body of men of substantial physique, on the contrary, they were rather under size and under strength and it was an enormous task to attempt to instil a sense of discipline and smartness but this is exactly what Marshall attempted to do, and he had some success. But of course, as you know only too well, the lack of experienced officers is something which is almost impossible to overcome in a short space of time.

Marshall's own reputation with the Division was such that he was asked to do the reconnaissance of the divisional front on behalf of the divisional staff. This was simply a tribute to his courage and experience as an infantry battalion commander. Orders were then prepared and issued to the battalions which Marshall criticised on the grounds that it was virtually impossible for the attack to succeed at all as all the troops had first to cross the Sambre-Oise Canal and then to climb a gentle rising slope which was obviously pitted with machine-gun positions. The Staff Officer said 'You will find that the weight of the artillery behind you will block out all the opposition.' The upshot of it was that the attack was an entire failure. We had probably a hundred casualties without moving an inch. I was his adjutant for three weeks and there is no doubt at all that he was a tremendous fellow in many ways. He had been wounded 9 times and I believe he had the MC and Bar, or with 2 bars, these things speak for themselves I think. He was a character of considerable guts and determination. He didn't seem to fear anybody or anything at all and it was a complete tragedy that a man of this quality should have been lost at the end of the war. He would have made a fine Brigadier if only the opportunity had ever come.

Some say that he seemed rather inhuman. I wouldn't have said this myself. In the mess he was very amiable and sociable and quite believed in having a good mess and suitable drinks. But when the troops were in the line that was the end of that and there was no alcohol of any sort to be had by anybody and you will know all experience would indicate to me that he was very experienced and knew a great deal about war and a great deal about the circumstances in which troops were being called into action

in those days. It would not be surprising if an officer of the Guards tradition felt that sternest discipline was absolutely essential. This, anyway, is how it appeared to me and I would strongly support him in that way

#### **From a staff car driver attached to 42<sup>nd</sup> Divisional Headquarters**

What follows are the salient points from a very long letter. I had the privilege and pleasure of driving Major Marshall, as he was then, hundreds of miles in France. In the short time that I knew him he induced in me a regard and admiration far exceeding that of any other officer I contacted during the war. He was a great disciplinarian but off parade the code of non-fraternisation between officers and men could some times be ignored. He was always concerned about the comfort and moral of his men, as if they were his own children. He sometimes queued with the men for their midday meal and having eaten it would say 'If its good enough for me you So & So's, its good enough for you.' Sometimes referred to as the Mad Major, scrupulously fair and just with those under his command, he would never tolerate inefficiency, no matter the rank of the offender. There was no doubt that he was a thorn in the side of our Divisional HQ and rumour had it that they were glad when he left the Division. Major Marshall always set a very high standard. An inspired leader, proud of being an Irish Guardsman with the special button arrangement on his tunic, his men would follow him anywhere.

This driver also mentioned how Neville would give slovenly soldiers lessons in standing to attention and how to salute an officer; and how well he looked after his batman (apparently a Scots Guardsman) and the driver if they stayed overnight somewhere.

#### **From a Private soldier of the 16<sup>th</sup> Bn Lancashire Fusiliers**

As we were almost continually in action from 10<sup>th</sup> Aug 1918 I only saw Col Marshall on four occasions; the attack on Damery on that date, later near Libous where my unit had several losses thro' MG fire and Col Marshall slipped over the top and returned with a MG sight; on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1918 when we moved up from Bazuel and he visited us before the action of Nov 4<sup>th</sup> 1918. This would be about midnight, and he told us what a tough job we had to do, and also that he intended to try for a VC. He said he had almost every medal but that.

On the embankment of the Sambre-Oise canal he stood there encouraging us in terrific fire (the worst I have ever seen) and as I passed him to cross the very flimsy pontoon I saw him drop. I got halfway across when a shell hit the pontoon and I jumped into the water but was hit by MG fire three times. I was told that he died at once, but it was the most fearless thing I have ever seen.

**Note:** On 10<sup>th</sup> August 1918 Neville was 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Manchester Regiment.

#### **From a Battalion Medical Officer, 42<sup>nd</sup> (E Lancs) Division**

I was in the same division (42<sup>nd</sup> E Lancs) and had just joined it in Feb 1918 as battalion MO, at my own request after serving in Gallipoli & E. Africa. We were bussed down to the Somme from Bethune & bivouacked for the night previous to action to stop the enemy in his push March/1918. I could not sleep, I had never been in action in France, far less as Bt. MO & was wondering how it would all be, knowing how critical it would be we held him at Buoquoy.

I was walking around & came across an officer also on his own & we spent two hours or so talking together, not about the war but chiefly of literature & the things in life we most appreciated. I have never felt such an affinity to a man before or since. We never met again except to wave to each other since we were in different brigades but I have often thought of those two hours & curiously enough those thoughts were with me on the night of the presentation which is the reason I am troubling you with this letter since I feel it was some sort of telepathy.

He was well worthy of your regiment whose history I have read – he was wounded many times, was known in the division as the 'Mad Major' & it was the saddest thing that he did not survive that last action when the 5<sup>th</sup> E. Lancs lost 200 out of 400. Such a foolish action.

**Note:** At around the time Neville was killed the 5<sup>th</sup> Bn East Lancashire Regiment, part of the 42<sup>nd</sup> (E Lancs) Division, was advancing through the Forest of Mormal to subsequently cross the river Sambre and capture the town of Hautmont; this action was some 17 miles North-East of Ors where he was.

#### **Conclusion**

Neville Marshall is commemorated on the Memorial Cross in the grounds of Harlow (St Mary) Church, along with the names of 74 other Harlow men who died in the Great War. His name is also one of 31 on the 'Potter Street, Latton and Surrounding District' Memorial Cross and is included on the Roll of Honour held at the St Mary at Latton Church. Part of Harlow's commemoration of this war was the building of the Harlow War Memorial Institute which, among other facilities, included a billiard room. One of the tables has a brass plate fixed to it with this inscription:

This Billiard Table presented to the Harlow War Memorial Institute  
IN MEMORY OF THE LATE  
LIEUT COLONEL J N MARSHALL VC MC & BAR  
Legion de Honneur, Croix de Guerre, Chevalier de Order Leopold  
Officier de Order Leopold and Irish Guards  
By a few personal friends

This is the end of the story about James Neville Marshall. The boy who left grammar school, three months short of his fifteenth birthday without any recorded academic achievement and was commissioned in the Special Reserve of the Irish Guards age twenty eight and a half. He was 'good with horses' and although he cared for their animals and rode with them Neville did not seem to be fully accepted by the county gentry. It was clear that he was not all that he seemed or claimed to be and the record of his marriage gave rise to some interesting information. However, the

'ordinary' people with whom he came in contact regarded him with some respect and affection.

There is very little doubt that in 1914 he went to Belgium under false colours. If the Belgian authorities let him loose to work as a doctor lets hope he did more good than harm; whatever he did, they thought quite highly of him. Neville would have had some influential support which enabled, or persuaded, him to join the Special Reserve of the Irish Guards. What is surprising is, that having trained him for five months, the Regiment made so little use of him. After his second wound on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1916 he was then on light duty, in hospital or on sick leave for 8½ months. Although he returned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion for a total of some 3 months, once in 1917 and again in 1918, he saw no more front line action with the Irish Guards. The obvious reason is that he went off to be 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command of a battalion of Lancashire Fusiliers and then similarly to the Manchester Regiment where he certainly did good work, receiving a Mention in Despatches, a Bar to his MC and, finally, his Victoria Cross. But was there a 'hidden agenda'.

From the time of his arrival in Harlow, Essex, to the day he died Neville Marshall was never all that he seemed to be and certainly not all that he often claimed to be. Wilfred Owen probably came closest in his choice of words to describe him. Others would say that Neville was a brave but reckless man who had a job to do and acted out the part as he saw it, with a fair measure of success. His men appeared to admire him as did many of the 'ordinary' people with whom he lived before the war. But such evidence as there is suggests that he was never really accepted by those he attempted to emulate. Peace-time would have been a horrible anticlimax for him.

## APPENDIX A

Extract from The Essex County Chronicle (page 5)  
Friday, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1911

### ROMANTIC WEDDING AT LATTON

#### MR NEVILLE MARSHALL AND MISS EDITH MAUD TAYLOR

An interesting wedding, in which there was a degree of romance, was solemnised at the Latton Parish Church on Wednesday morning when Mr Jasper Neville Wellesley Marshall, of Bromleys, Latton, Harlow, and Las Palmas, Grand Canaries, was quietly married to Miss Edith Maud Taylor, daughter of Mr Henry Algernon Taylor, of Northbrooks, Parndon. There was only a small company of intimate friends present at the wedding, and the ceremony was performed by special licence. Both the bride and bridegroom are well-known followers of the Essex Hounds, with which they have hunted for the past five seasons, the bridegroom also having ridden at the steeplechase of the Essex Hunt and followed with distinction the Essex Staghounds.

The bride, who was attired in a grey travelling dress, with dark grey felt hat, was accompanied by her sister, Miss Helen Taylor, who wore a blue travelling dress and red felt hat, and who acted as bridesmaid. She was joined by Mr Ivor Parry, of Denbigh, who gave her away, and upon arrival at the church was met by the bridegroom, who was accompanied by Mr John Bridge Aspinall, of New Hall, Harlow, acting as best man. The other occupants of the little church at Latton included Dr and Mrs Collins of Sawbridgeworth, friends of the bride and bridegroom, a representative of the Essex County Chronicle, the church clerk and a few village children. The Rev J B Andrewes, vicar of Harlow, officiated and at the close of the service he impressively declared the couple man and wife.

All the wedding party above-mentioned then repaired to the vestry, where the register was signed and witnessed by them, and Mr and Mrs Neville Marshall drove straight to Harlow railway station where they caught the 10.50 train for Eastbourne where the honeymoon is being spent. The newly-married couple received many presents from friends and acquaintances in the hunting field among whom they are worthily esteemed and popular.

## APPENDIX B

### HUNTING WITH HOUNDS AND POINT TO POINT STEEPLECHASING

At the time of their marriage Neville Marshall and Edith Taylor were said to be '.....well known followers of the Essex Hounds, with which they have hunted for the past five seasons....' and, in addition, Neville had '.....ridden at the steeplechase of the Essex Hunt and followed with distinction the Essex Staghounds.' A very comprehensive reference for all these activities, covering the period in question, is 'The Essex Foxhounds 1895-1926' by Brig.-Gen. C D Bruce, CBE, published by Vinton & Company in 1926.

To have hunted with the Essex hounds for the five seasons prior to September 1911, the time of his marriage, Neville would have to have started in the Autumn of 1906 when he was age 19. Knowing that he was quite definitely working as a clerk in the Medical Faculty of Birmingham University in 1904, and probably for a few years after that as well, the statement in the local press about his hunting experience in Essex is unreliable. In fact Bruce makes no mention of Neville or Edith in his book. Not even when he makes reference to '.....the terrible reckoning the Great War exacted from some of the best and finest of the younger generation of Essex sportsmen.....who gave their lives.....men of all classes who made the great sacrifice.....' One would have thought that Neville would have been included in the dozen or so names mentioned but perhaps, in spite of his decorations, he was not regarded as one of the 'Hunting Fraternity'.

There is certainly a reference to Neville, and perhaps even to Edith, in the results of some Point to Point Steeplechasing in 1910-1912. In those days certainly, the Regulations of the Masters of Hounds Point-to-Point Committee made it clear that Point-to-Point Steeplechases would be confined to horses which were bona fide the property of the persons in whose names the horses were entered, and which were certified by a Master of Foxhounds to have been regularly and fairly hunted during the current hunting season.

In 1910 the Essex Point-to-Point Meeting was held at North Weald and in the Heavy Weights class Mr J B Aspinall's 'Bonaventura' (ridden by J White) came second and Miss Taylor's 'Whitelegs' (ridden by T Howard) came third. Aspinall was Neville's best man at his wedding the following year and 'Miss Taylor' is thought to have been Edith.

In 1911, when the Meeting was near Hatfield Heath, Aspinall's horse 'The Priest' , ridden by Mr Marshall was placed third in the Heavy Weights class. The following year, at the same place, Aspinall had another horse 'Loominster' ridden by Mr Marshall, again third in the Heavy Weights. This class was not included at the meetings held in 1913 and 1914. There seems to be very little if any doubt that the 'Mr Marshall' riding J B Aspinall's horses was Neville; neither of them is mentioned in the results before 1910. No reference is made to John Aspinall in the text of the book.

## APPENDIX C

### REPORT BY MARSHALL ON HIS EXAMINATION OF A HORSE

Consultations 9 to 10am  
6 to 8pm

Bromleys, Harlow  
20<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1913

No. 687 Bay Gelding

I have today examined bay gelding with Röntgen & Sanguin Rays the following is my deduction from screening and plates. The lameness is due to an old injury (2 to 3 years ago) there has been partial rupture of the ligamentum teres, and there are now definite signs of articular & periarticular osteophytes. Etostores are evident on the rim of the cotyloid cavity (socket into which hip bone fits) and a dense ring is evidently significant of fibrous tissue. Having arrived at this unquestionable issue we naturally look for a treatment. At any time this must be local because the injury is local and not constitutional. Surgical interference at the moment is out of place & speculative, but I do recommend massage and Ionic medication of the parts.

A complete cure I do not anticipate, not a very great improvement is to be hoped for.

A shoe with wedge heels would relieve a good deal of tension. Lack of condition & flesh will always aggravate the trouble. Never at any time blister hip or give any form of medicinal treatment as they are in this case valueless.

Jas Neville Marshall

Ligamentum Teres = Ligament holding head of femur into Cotyloid cavity

#### End of Report

**Note:** This horse was 'Crooked Jack' who won the Oxford University Drag Hounds Point-to-Point, Heavyweight cup, in 1912, owned and ridden by J K Swire. The horse apparently then went lame but recovered sufficiently after November 1913, to be used during the 1914-18 war as one of the then Major Swire's chargers.

#### COMMENTARY ON MARSHALL'S REPORT BY PROFESSOR L C VAUGHAN

1. In 1913 it would not have been possible to obtain X-rays of the pelvis of a horse with the clarity required to demonstrate osteophytes on the rim of the acetabulum (he uses the term cotyloid cavity which is not wrong). At that time X-ray machines were in their infancy and were manufactured for use on Man, so their ability to penetrate structures as thick as the equine pelvis is very unlikely. Furthermore such machines that existed for veterinary use were mostly at Veterinary Schools, and were used for the lower parts of horse limbs and for dogs and cats. The exposure



times even for such narrow objects were very long and for the pelvis they would have been phenomenal, with all the problems this would have created with back scatter, and movement of the animal. Even now there are few machines in this country capable of producing films of the equine pelvis of diagnostic quality and they are at the Animal Health Trust and the Schools. How could he have possibly screened the pelvis? This is only just possible now using very expensive equipment and image intensification.

2. The description of the hip joint and of the pathology show a knowledge of anatomy and of the changes to which joints are prone. There is no way the X-ray would have shown partial rupture of the Ligamentum teres.
3. The mention of surgery as a treatment is pure fantasy for those days, but the use of wedge heels (on the shoe) would help to a limited degree if there had been injury to the hip joint.
4. The reference to Sanguin I do not understand. The reference books in the local library do not include this name whereas Röntgen is always recognised as the discoverer of X-rays.
5. I am unable to find reference to the word 'Etostores', but it appears to be used here as a synonym for osteophytes.

This is as far as I am able to go and I hope this proves helpful. I am left wondering if this report is authentic or if the author is stretching the truth about what he has actually gleaned from examining the horse.

L C Vaughan

6<sup>th</sup> December 1993

Note: Professor L C Vaughan had a particular interest in radiology and taught at the Royal Veterinary College, London; he retired earlier in 1993.

## APPENDIX D

### WOUND STRIPES

Information published in 'Stand To.', Journal of the Western Front Association  
Winter 1989 - Issue Number 27

The wearing of wound stripes in the Army was first authorised by Army Order (AO) 249 published on 6 July 1916. In the military manner, the stripes were never officially referred to as such but as 'Distinctions in dress for officers and soldiers who have been wounded.' The stripe was to be worn (the AO said 'will', not 'may') by those who had been wounded in a campaign since 4 August 1914. It was to consist of a strip of gold Russia braid No. 1, two inches in length and would be sewn perpendicularly on the lower sleeve left sleeve of the jacket. Subsequent stripes authorised were to be placed on either side of the original one at half-inch intervals. The gold braid and sewings were to be supplied free by the Army Ordnance Department but the sewing had to be done in the unit without expense to the public.

By AO 202 (7 June 1917), members of the nursing services became eligible. Later in the year, AO 236 extended the scheme to wounds received by enemy action at home. The wearing of wound stripes in civilian clothes after discharge was authorised by AO 9 of 1918. This AO also ordered the entitlement of wound stripes to be recorded in certain official documents. It also drew attention to the fact that the unauthorised wearing or supplying of wound stripes was punishable under the Defence of the Realm Regulations, No. 41.

These orders were consolidated by AO 343 of November 1918 which also dealt with administrative and other arrangements in relation to the authorisation of wound stripes. The classes eligible were listed as, (1) officers, (2) soldiers, (3) members of the Military Nursing Services, (4) members of the Voluntary Aid Detachments and special probationers in military hospitals, (5) officials and members of Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps, (6) members of the Women's Legion Motor Drivers, and (7) members of the Women's Army Forage Department.

If abroad, the person must have been wounded since 4 August 1914 and reported to the War Office as such in a casualty list rendered by the Adjutant-General's office at a base overseas or by a General Officer Commanding any force engaged in active operations. If at home, the recipient must have been wounded by enemy action since 4 August 1914 and reported to the War Office by the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of a Home Command.

It was laid down that reports in hospital lists were not to be regarded as authoritative and that accidental or self inflicted injuries did not qualify. On the other hand, reports 'wounded-gas' were eligible. In view of the controversy about the Army's attitude to shell-shock it is interesting to note that the AO stipulated that those reported 'wounded - shell shock' qualified for the wound stripe. Eligibility, together with the nature and date of the casualty, were required to be entered in Part II Orders. Entries were also required in AB 439 (for officers) or AB 64 (for soldiers) and, if overseas, on Army Form B103. The soldier's Army Attestation or Record of Service paper and Discharge Certificate were also to be endorsed.

In the case of the other eligible classes, an entry was required to be made in the appropriate official record of the individuals service.

Part II Orders was a list of 'personnel' movements and changes of status such as postings, promotions, wounds, etc, submitted by a unit to the appropriate records office. An AB64 (Army Book 64) or AB439 was, in effect, an identity document and field record of service. Some months after the Armistice, A0116 of 6 March 1919, extended eligibility to those wounded in any pre-war campaign. It is not known when the wearing of wound stripes - 'distinctions in dress for wounds' - was discontinued in peacetime but they were not reintroduced until towards the end of World War Two.

**NOTE:**

On the basis of the information recorded in his 'Record of Services' AB83, it is thought that the strict application of the rules and procedures described above would have resulted in Neville Marshall being awarded three wound stripes. The South African claim was in any case invalid. Although it seems clear that he was wounded by enemy action in Belgium, since 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914, these two wounds do not appear to have been recorded/authorised, as required in Army Orders and would not therefore qualify for the award of stripes. During 1916-1918 three wounds were recorded in Neville's AB83 and confirmed. When he was killed he was wearing ten wound stripes; the origins of six of these are known but the other four have not been accounted for. It may be that further research, especially concerning his time with 1/6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, may bring to light some relevant information.

**APPENDIX E**

**KINGDOM OF BELGIUM**

**THE MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Has the honour of informing Lieutenant doctor **MARSHALL** Neville  
of the English Army  
that by Royal Decree of the 20 July 1916, No. 35519,  
he has been awarded the Croix de Guerre.

Albert Deuèza

**KINGDOM OF BELGIUM**

**Minister of War**

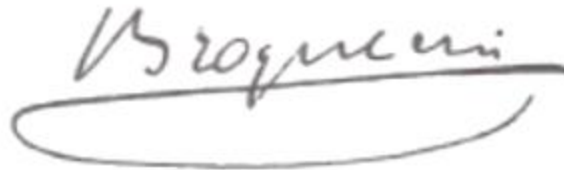
Doctor

I have the honour to inform you that the King, my August Sovereign, has deigned to accept my proposal to confer on you the decoration of Chevalier de l'Ordre de Leopold.

You will find enclosed with this notification an authentic copy of the decree of nomination dated 6 December 1914 duly certified.

I beg you to acknowledge receipt by returning, completed where indicated, the form attached hereto.

Accept Doctor, with my congratulations, the assurance of my great respect.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'A. Rogier', is written over a horizontal line. Below the line is a large, sweeping flourish that curves under the signature.

Le Havre, 24 June 1916

The Minister of War

To Mr **MARSHALL**, Neville Lieutenant doctor of the English Army attached to the 1st Regiment of Artillery.

(Note: the copy of the decree of nomination has not survived)