

COURCELETTE

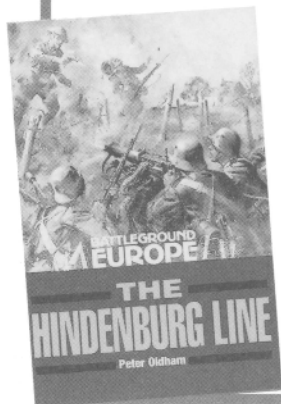
Somme



Paul Reed

BATTLEGROUND
EUROPE

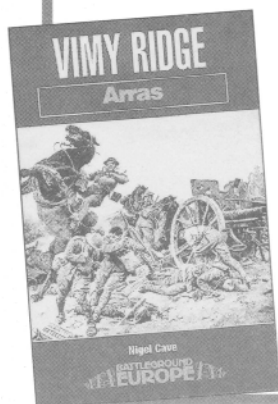
BATTLEGROUND EUROPE



THE HINDENBURG LINE

One of the strongest defence systems the world has ever seen. Because of this it saw some of the fiercest fighting during World War One. The author, Peter Oldham, follows the whole length of the line from Arras to St Quentin and describes the various actions against the background of concrete and steel still to be found today.

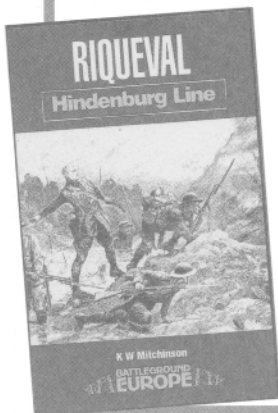
ISBN 0-85052-568-3 208 pages £9.95



VIMY RIDGE

Scars of the Great War dominate Vimy Ridge giving some indication of the intensive fighting, first by the French in 1915 and then by the British in 1916. The Canadians finally took the heights in 1917. Underground tunnels riddle the hillside and huge overlapping craters from mining explosions beg explanation – this book by Nigel Cave satisfies the casual inquirer and the serious historian.

ISBN 0-85052-399-0 208 pages £9.95



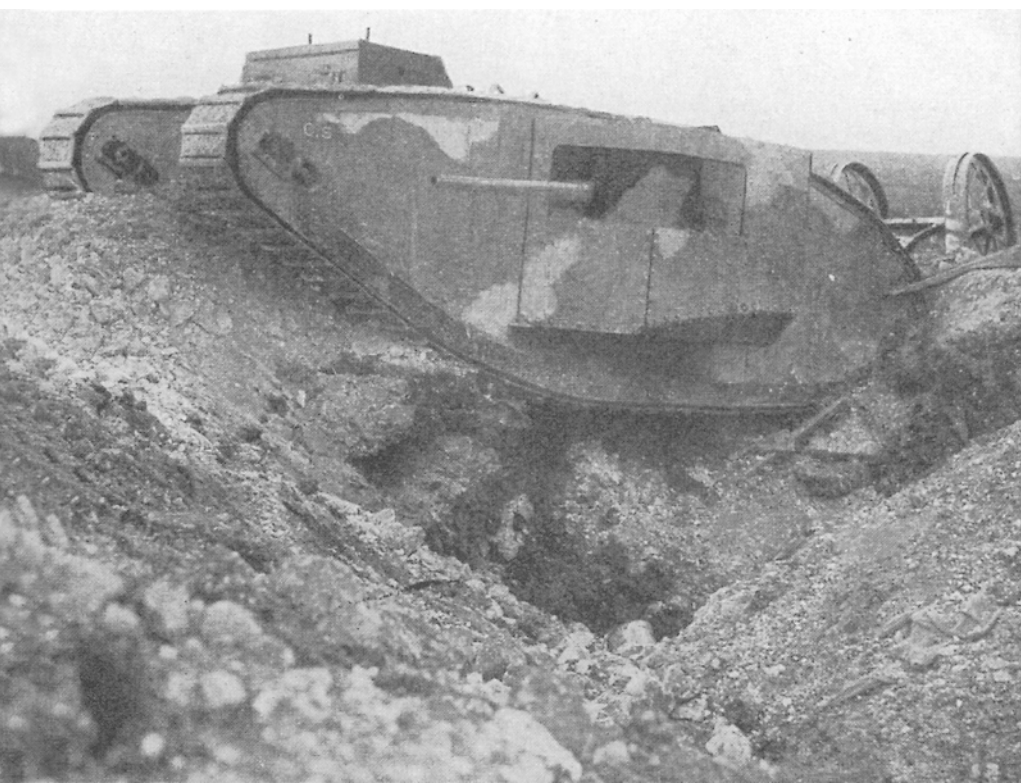
RIQUEVAL

The bridge over the St Quentin Canal at Riqueval is one of the most readily recognized images of the Great War. The bridge and its surrounding countryside witnessed many ferocious engagements in the period between the retreat to the Hindenburg Line in 1917 and the final assault against the canal's defences in September 1918.

ISBN 0-85052-622-1 £9.95

To order any book in the the Battleground series phone
01226 734222

Battleground Europe
COURCELETTE



Other guides in the Battleground Europe Series:

Ypres - Sanctuary Wood and Hooge by Nigel Cave
 Ypres - Hill 60 by Nigel Cave
 Walking the Somme by Paul Reed
Ypres - Passchendaele: The Fight for the Village by Nigel Cave
 Somme - Serre by Jack Horsfall & Nigel Cave
 Somme - Beaumont Hamel by Nigel Cave
 Somme - Gommecourt by Nigel Cave
 Somme - Thiepval by Michael Stedman
 Somme - La Boisselle by Michael Stedman
 Somme - Fricourt Mametz by Michael Stedman
 Somme - Guillemont by Michael Stedman
 Somme - Pozières by Graham Keech

 Arras - Vimy Ridge by Nigel Cave

 Hindenburg Line by Peter Oldham
 Hindenburg Line - Riqueval by Bill Mitchinson
 Hindenburg Line - Epehy by Bill Mitchinson

Battleground Europe Series guides in preparation:

Walking the Salient by Paul Reed
 Ypres - Polygon Wood by Nigel Cave

 Somme - Combles by Paul Reed
 Somme - Delville Wood by Nigel Cave
 Somme - Boom Ravine by Trevor Pigeon
 Somme - Carnoy-Montauban by Graham Maddocks
 Somme - High Wood by Terry Carter

Boer War - The Relief of Ladysmith, Colenso, Spion Kop by Lewis Childs
 Boer War - The Siege of Ladysmith by Lewis Childs

Hindenburg Line - Cambrai: Right Hook by Jack Horsfall & Nigel Cave

Battleground Europe

COURCELETTE

Paul Reed

Series editor
Nigel Cave



LEO COOPER

*Dedicated to Yves Foucat, of Pozières
1929 - 1997*

First published in 1998 by
LEO COOPER
an imprint of
Pen Sword Books Limited
47 Church Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire S70 2AS

Copyright © Paul Reed

ISBN 0 85052 592 6

A CIP catalogue of this book is available
from the British Library

Printed by Redwood Books Limited
Trowbridge, Wiltshire

*For up-to-date information on other titles produced under the Leo Cooper imprint,
please telephone or write to:*

Pen & Sword Books Ltd, FREEPOST, 47 Church Street
Barnsley, South Yorkshire S70 2AS
Telephone 01226 734555

Cover painting: A Tank In Action by John Hassell (1868-1948)
Reproduced Courtesy of the Lincolnshire County Council: Usher Gallery

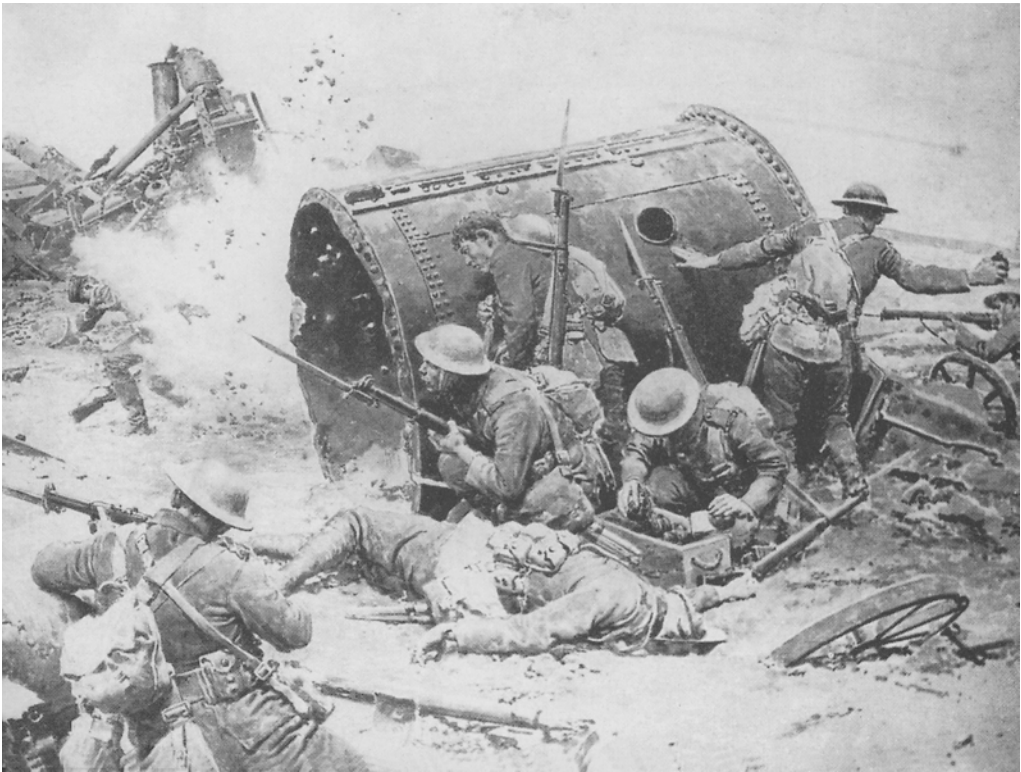
**Puchevillers Cemetery in 1919, where many pre-Courcelette Canadians
were buried.**



CONTENTS

Preface.....	6
Introduction by Series Editor.....	7
Acknowledgements.....	10
Advice for Travellers.....	11
 Chapter 1 Canada to Courcellette	 15
Chapter 2 The Capture of Courcellette 15 September 1916	33
Chapter 3 Carrying on - Zollern Graben and Thiepval Ridge	61
Chapter 4 The Fighting for Regina Trench October-November 1916	79
Chapter 5 The End - Desire Trench 18th November 1916	107
Chapter 6 Return to Courcellette	117
Chapter 7 A Guide to the Courcellette Battlefield Today	125
Chapter 8 Other Canadian Cemeteries on the Somme	135
 Further Reading.....	 141
Selective Index.....	142

Canadians fighting at close quarters in front of the sugar refinery at Courcellette.



PREFACE

The Somme continues to remain one of the most popular areas along the old Western Front for pilgrims to the battlefields. Come the summer almost every other car on the Albert-Bapaume road is British, tracing grandfathers and, increasingly, great grandfathers who served in the battle. Time and again such visitors see the same places - there is almost an accepted list of them. And one date obsesses them all - 1st July 1916. At times the casual visitor might be forgiven for thinking that the battle began and ended on that date. But the Somme slogged on until November 18th; beginning in the heavenly weather described by Siegfried Sassoon and ending in a snowstorm which blotted out the landscape.

Courcelette is one of those places on the Somme battlefields often overlooked by the summer visitors. Indeed, a member of the Western Front Association asked me during the research for this book, 'Did anything ever happen at Courcelette?' He went quiet when I mentioned 24,000 Canadian casualties, three Victoria Crosses and over two months of fighting.

Courcelette was indeed primarily a Canadian battlefield, but today few Canadians have either heard of it or come this way. Vimy overshadows the sacrifice on the Somme, and there is nowhere near the interest in things Great War in North America as there is, for example, in Britain or Australia. One can only hope this changes.

The joy of the *Battleground Europe* series of guides is that they provide answers to the sort of questions my WFA friend posed. Here the Courcelette volume covers the fighting for the village from the first attack with tanks on 15th September to the murderous fighting for Regina Trench to the final push on Desire Trench at the end of the Somme Battle.

Today the fields around Courcelette are silent. Occasionally, staring across the chalk downlands on the Ancre heights, one might hear the faint whisper of echoes past on the wind; talk of Jimmy Richardson piping his men into action, of Lieutenant Howard alone and surrounded, fighting to the last, or of Canon Scott making the long search for his son's grave at Regina Trench. There are countless stories. Many have their memorial in stone - what they did has never before appeared in print. So here, at last, I would like to hope the memory of them and the other 8,000 Canadian soldiers who fell on the Somme is not forgotten.

Paul Reed, Sussex & The Somme. Autumn 1997

Introduction by Series Editor

The Somme village of Courcelette was a place of considerable importance to the Germans from the time that the line stabilised in the area in 1914. One of its most important features was the large sugar refinery that was built there in the early years of the twentieth century. The only remnant of this place may now be found in the garden centre that is to the south west of the village, on the north side of the Albert-Bapaume road. In the grounds of the centre may be seen the top of the workings of the shaft that was sunk to provide the many gallons (or perhaps one should say litres) of water that were required for the refining of the beet. Its significance for the Germans was that this plentiful supply of water could be pumped forward to trenches and strongpoints in a part of France where water supplies are notoriously difficult. Indeed one of the reasons for the paucity of individual farms and instead their clustering into the typical Somme village is so that this water problem could be resolved by the use of communal wells and, in more recent years, water towers.

Courcelette is a most important place in the development of Canada's military history. It was here that the fourth Canadian division finally came into the same sector as its three fellows, although not for long; the final joining was to come in the winter of 1916 as the Corps took its position on the slopes of Vimy Ridge. Just as war often speeds social and technological change, so also it increased the speed of the political development of Canada as an independent nation, able to take its place in the councils of war and to follow a policy, if necessary, of its own.

The actions at and around Courcelette between mid September and mid November cost the Canadians just over 24,000 casualties; the nature of the battlefield was such that many of those who were killed in the fighting never received a proper burial – or if they did, they were often unidentifiable. Thus many of those who died here are commemorated on the monumental walls at Vimy; and a visit to that place and the recently opened (November 1997) Visitors' Centre, which attempts to explain the origins and recruitment of the Canadian contingent as well as the action at Vimy, is strongly recommended.

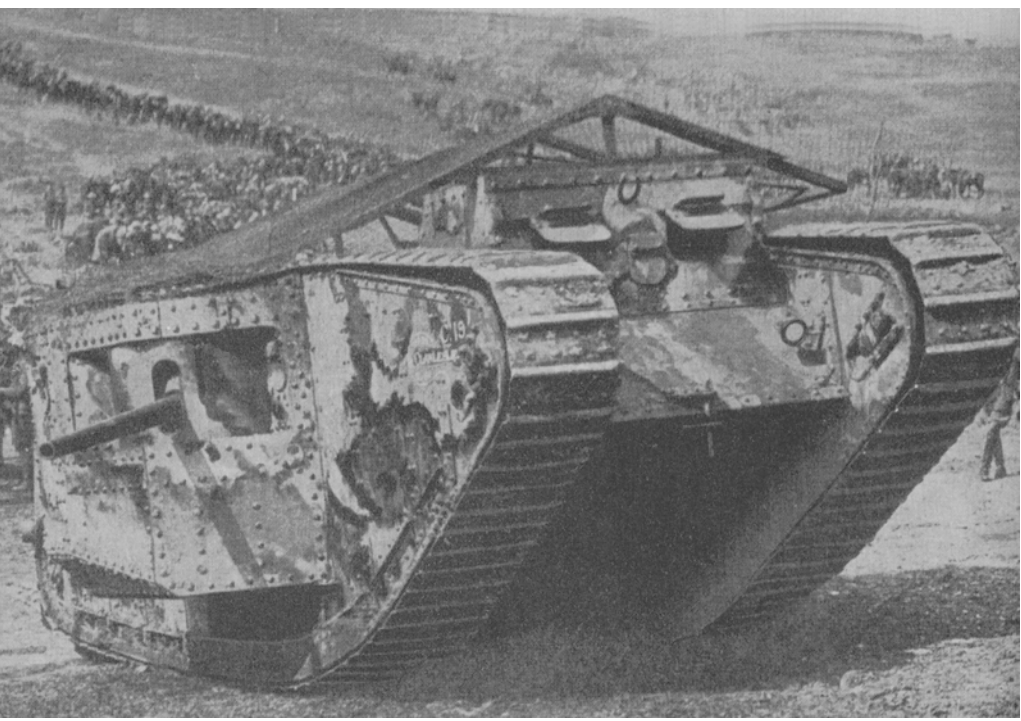
Paul Reed has the great advantage of living in Courcelette, and his house (which is also run as a Bed and Breakfast establishment) provides easy access to the killing fields around and about. Now they are quiet – a landscape that is quite bleak, with the customary open and vast fields that are a characteristic of this part of France. In the winter months, on a cold, bleak and foggy day it is not difficult to recreate an

atmosphere (minus, of course, the stench of the dead and of cordite and the sound of the guns and small arms fire – and of the danger that they presented) which Canon Scott might have faced when he went out amongst the destroyed fields to look for the broken body of his son.

This is the second book in the Battleground series on the Somme to break out from the old 1 July start line. It illustrates something of the development in the thinking of the British army as it struggled with the reality of its first long, slogging major offensive against the might of German arms. The limited offensives that were now taking place in the later stages of the Somme required new skills in artillery and the management of the guns; in supplies; in infantry tactics and in reaction to those methods used by the Germans. Courcelette also witnessed the first use of tanks, admittedly in penny packet numbers, but that was to a large extent perforce. These great, unwieldy, cumbersome beasts, as far from their present descendants as the flintlock is from the self loading rifle, have their strangely effective memorial just outside Pozières, on the Albert-Bapaume road, on the high point, marked so conveniently by a large radio mast, one of the great marker points for those visiting the battlefield to-day.

I cannot let this opportunity pass without paying tribute to a person who features prominently in this book. Lance Cattermole served as an underage soldier in the CEF for a catalogue of reasons which I suspect

The tank was the chief innovation contributed by the British during the war. The scene below is after the action on the Somme in September 1916,





The Tank Corps Memorial, outside Pozieres on the Albert-Bapaume road. The photograph was taken in 1922.

were quite common to many in that army. I had the privilege of knowing him for a few years before his death in the 1992. Anything more unlike the caricature of a Canadian lumberjack or Mountie it would be difficult to find; a quiet, articulate, cultivated man, who made his living from his art, most notably his painstaking recreation of the uniforms of the British army and empire. His wife Lydia maintains the contact, and I enjoy my periodic whiskey with her. It was a privilege to know veterans like Lance, acquaintanceships that I made in the early 80s and alas now all but gone, victims of time. They were not necessarily great men – but they had shared in a great experience, and were willing to share it with other, later, generations, people striving to understand something of what had happened so many years ago.

These men can talk no more, but it is the objective of books in this series, admirably carried out in this book, to try and ensure that what happened here in the fields, the ridges, the valleys and the byways of the Somme should not be forgotten; and to help people, however inadequately, to understand something of the who, the why and the wherefore, at least on the small scale of particular parts of the battlefield.

Nigel Cave, Ely Place, London

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My old friend Tom Gudmestad, of Seattle, USA, proved his worth time and again by supplying me with copies of a mass of Courcelette material from his extensive archive of books, photographs and ephemera. Tom's knowledge of the CEF battlefields is second to none, and I hope that one day he will share that knowledge with us in the form of his own book.

The only veteran I knew who served at Courcelette was Lance Cattermole of Worthing, Sussex. Like all old soldiers Lance has 'faded away' but he left us a harrowing account of his service on the Somme – which is reproduced here with the kind permission of his family.

Others who have helped in a multitude of ways include: Paul Bardell, Roger Davies, Tom and Janet Fairgrieve of Delville Wood, Margery Giles for permission to use John's aerial photographs, Captain John Haslam CD of Newcastle, Ontario, Clive Harris, Mr G. Kingsley Ward of the Vimy Ridge Group, Matthew Richardson of the Liddle Personal Experience Archives, Tim Richardson, Klaus Spath, Frank & Lou Stockdale, Ed Storey of Kingston, Ontario, Julian Sykes, Trevor Tasker, Tom Tulloch-Marshall, Pam Waugh and Terry Whippy.

In France my thanks goes to Yves Foucat of Pozieres, who sadly died during the preparation of this book. Yves worked for the CWGC for forty-three years, and spent much of his spare time and retirement acquiring a knowledge of the Somme battlefields that is difficult to quantify – in particular he knew the Mouquet Farm-Courcelette area very well. I, and many other English visitors, learnt much from him. For me he was good friend of some fifteen years, particularly so to my family since we bought our house at Courcelette, and his wife continues to be so. We shall all miss him.

In Courcelette itself I am very grateful to my fellow villagers, who are always friendly and interested, and supported the writing of this book fully. In particular I would like to mention the mayor, Monsieur Philippe Gonse, whose family have owned Mouquet Farm for many generations, and Xavier Vandendriessche, whose father was born at Mouquet before the Great War, and sold us our house in Courcelette. Monsieur Gonse shows great interest in the history of his village, and recently donated a large piece of ground at Mouquet Farm to the Australian government so that a new memorial could be erected there. This was unveiled in September 1997.

The team at Pen & Sword also deserve mention, for help on this and my previous book. Roni Wilkinson in particular performs miracles

with his DTP and I would like to thank him especially for all his good humour and assistance.

The staff of the Public Record Office have put up with my frequent demands and requests for material over many years. William Spencer in particular is always willing to share his knowledge of the records. At the Canadian National Archives in Ottawa, Ms Helen De Roia of the Reference Services was extremely helpful with requests for official photographs. Those members of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission who tend the cemeteries in and around Courcelette merit their own special acknowledgement for the dedicated work they do to keep these gardens of peace in such immaculate order.

Finally, my love and thanks to Kieron and Ed, who have walked the ground at Courcelette with me so many times and were willing to share the dream of owning a house on the battlefields, despite all the odds. This book is for them, and for our village – Courcelette.

ADVICE FOR TRAVELLERS

The Somme Battlefield is one of the easiest to reach from the channel ports and the tunnel. The motorway starts both at the Channel Tunnel and at Calais Port, and the Bapaume exit is reached within an hour and a half. Courcelette is then only a quarter of an hour away by the main road which runs from Bapaume to Albert. Indeed, Courcelette is almost in the centre of the 1916 Battlefields and is never far away from the many sites covered by other *Battleground Europe* guides. For those without transport, a train service runs from London to Amiens, where another train can be caught for Albert. But beware – local trains in France are few and far between. There are no local buses on the Somme, but a taxi service is available by the railway station in Albert. An overnight coach from London to Amiens is the most inexpensive way to reach the Somme. Cars are available for hire in Amiens, and bikes in Albert.

Accommodation poses few problems. In Courcelette itself, the author's wife runs an inexpensive Bed and Breakfast, which is in walking distance of all the places mentioned in this guide. Contact Ms Kieron Murphy at 'Sommecourt' on Tel/Fax (0033) 3.22.74.01.35. In nearby Martinpuich another English couple have recently opened up a Gite de France Bed and Breakfast, offering a variety of accommodation options, including full board. Colin and Lisa Gillard can be contacted on Tel/Fax: (0033) 3.21.50.18.87. At Pozieres, the

enterprising Dominique Zanardi has transformed a local bar into 'Le Tommy' with many Great War exhibits, maps and photographs. He offers inexpensive lunches and from 1998 will have rooms available. Tel: (0033) 3.22.74.82.84. A number of similar B&Bs exist in the Somme area, and in Albert there are several good hotels, with many more in Amiens. Camp sites are found in Albert, Authuille and Miraumont. Information on all these can be found in the Tourist Office opposite the Basilica in Albert.

The Somme has two main museums. In Albert the underground Musee des Abris (Tel: 0033 3.22.75.16.17) has an excellent display of uniforms, weapons, maps, photographs and other artefacts. It is open every day from 10 am to 6 pm, but closes for lunch 12-2pm in winter months. Safe battlefield souvenirs are on sale here. In Peronne the Historial de la Grande Guerre (Tel:0033 3.22.83.14.18) is a very modern museum with much audio-visual material. It is open every day from 10am to 6pm but, as with the museum in Albert, opening times vary in the winter months. The souvenir shop here has a good range of books in French and English, and takes major credit cards.

The weather on the Somme can vary a great deal and a good waterproof and strong shoes are never wasted in the out of season

The 'Iron Harvest' at Courcellette 1997. Just some of the many types of shells found by farmers in and around the village. This pile included several gas shells.



months. In the summer there is little protection from the blazing sun in the open fields and a hat, sun cream and sunglasses are equally wise – as is extra water on a very hot day. A small walker's rucksack to carry your gear in is a good idea. Provisions can be bought in either Albert or Bapaume – Courcellette is roughly equi-distant from them both. The Visitors Centre at nearby Delville Wood, Longueval, offers liquid refreshments and snacks along with a good range of Great War books, maps, postcards, stamps, films and guides – and safe battlefield souvenirs. The complete *Battleground Europe* series of books is also on sale here.

The Courcellette battlefield, like any other area of the Somme, is littered with unexploded munitions of all types, which are still deadly and should be left well alone. Dumps of old shells and grenades can be found in at least two places in the village – by all means photograph and look, but do not touch! Each year people are maimed and killed while tampering with the so-called 'Iron Harvest'; in late 1996 three members of the Somme Bomb Squad were killed by Great War shells that exploded after eighty years in the ground.

The farmers in Courcellette are among the friendliest you will find on the Somme, and welcome British visitors. However, do bear in mind that crops can be damaged by walking on them, and that private property and people's personal privacy should be respected at all times.

For those with more than a passing interest in the Great War, membership of the Western Front Association is essential. Founded by author John Giles in 1980, the WFA now has branches all over the United Kingdom, and indeed overseas – some of which meet on a monthly basis. The annual subscription includes copies of the in-house newsletter, *The Bulletin*, and the glossy magazine, *Stand To!* Members also have access to the WFA's collection of trench maps and cheap photocopies of them are available – including several of Courcellette and Regina Trench. For further details contact:

The Western Front Association
PO BOX 1914
Reading
Berkshire
RG4 7YP