

A Lee Enfield I.D. Disc is Discovered – By David Gray

Many years ago, fellow group member Roger Negus and I used to visit the Somme battlefields and walk in the footsteps of the men who fought there during WWI. We brought numerous items back, but some were so small that they became lost in the bottom of dirty bags full of larger items, and were basically lost again after being found.

I used to take photos of all the items we brought back, usually in large groups as it was impossible to photograph everything. Looking through these photos recently I noticed an item that fascinated me. It was a brass disc, only about an inch in diameter, it had a hole drilled through the middle. It had some figures stamped on it which I could see in the photo. I knew immediately what it was and went to my garage straight away to see if I could find it again. Actually, it wasn't that difficult. I looked through the first bag of small items I found, and there it was, at the bottom. I soon had it cleaned up.



The item was a Lee Enfield Rifle I.D. Disc. (*left*).

These discs were screwed on to the buttstocks of every Lee Enfield rifle in the British Army to identify them. See the example of the rifle in the picture *below*. The disc is screwed on the butt on the left of the picture.

The **Lee-Enfield brass butt identification disc** that I found tells a clear story of a specific World War I rifle issued to a renowned British regiment. Based on official British Army marking regulations, the disc decodes to: **June 1915, 11th Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps, Weapon/Rack Number 28.**



The Breakdown

- **6. 15 (June 1915):** This is the **issue date**. It indicates the exact month and year the rifle was inspected, stamped, and issued to the unit. This timeframe aligns perfectly with the massive buildup of British forces during the first year of World War I.
- **11 KRR (11th Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps):** This is the **unit assignment**.
 - **KRR** is the standard acronym for the King's Royal Rifle Corps (often abbreviated as KRRC). They were an elite rifle regiment known for wearing dark green uniforms instead of traditional British redcoats during the Napoleonic wars. They fought with distinction across the Western Front.

- o The **11** tells you it belonged specifically to the **11th (Service) Battalion**. This unit was formed in September 1914 as part of Lord Kitchener's New Army. They landed in France in July 1915—just one month after the rifle disc was stamped—and fought in brutal engagements including the Battle of the Somme.
- **28 (Rack Number):** This is the specific **inventory or rack number** within the 11th Battalion. It was used by the unit armorers to keep track of which exact rifle was assigned to which soldier.

Historical Context

Unit-marked discs from this specific period are highly prized by collectors because they are relatively rare. In late 1915 and early 1916, the British War Office ordered armorers to stop stamping unit info—and eventually to remove or replace the discs entirely with blank ones. This was a security measure to prevent the German army from identifying which British units were stationed in the trenches opposite them if a rifle was captured. This disc survived that order, making it a tangible piece of Great War history.

Finding the disc on the **Somme battlefield** is an incredible, poignant discovery. It places this exact piece of history precisely where the **11th Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps (KRRC)** fought and suffered immense casualties.

Because it was found there, we can look at the exact history of the 11th KRRC on the Somme to understand how it likely ended up in the ground.

The 11th KRRC on the Somme

The 11th Battalion was part of the **20th (Light) Division**. They were heavily engaged throughout the entire **Battle of the Somme (July–November 1916)**. Two specific actions stand out.

- **The Battle of Delville Wood (August 1916):** The 11th KRRC was thrown into the brutal, chaotic fighting for "Devil's Wood." The conditions were horrific, characterized by intense German artillery bombardments and hand-to-hand combat in shattered tree stumps.
- **The Battle of Guillemont (September 3, 1916):** This is one of the battalion's most famous and costly actions. The 11th KRRC launched a highly successful attack to capture the heavily fortified village of Guillemont, but they paid a massive price, losing a huge portion of their men in a single day.

How it Ended Up in the Soil

Because the brass disc is missing its rifle, it tells a story of battlefield damage. Lee-Enfield buttstocks were made of walnut. When an artillery shell exploded or a rifle was struck by shrapnel, the wooden stock would frequently shatter or rot away over the last century, leaving only the durable brass disc and its central screw buried in the mud.

Alternatively, after a battle, "battlefield clearance" teams would gather broken or damaged rifles, strip them for usable parts, and discard heavily damaged wood stocks into old trenches or shell holes.

Because this disc was found specifically at **Guillemont** it links it directly to one of the **11th Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps'** most triumphant yet tragic days of the entire war: **September 3, 1916**.

Guillemont had been a fortress blocking the British advance for weeks. On that Sunday afternoon, the 11th KRRC, as part of the 59th Brigade, was tasked with a major assault to finally wrest the village from the German army.

The Attack on Guillemont (3 September 1916)

- **The Objective:** The 11th KRRC attacked from the direction of Maltz Horn Trench, charging directly into the ruins of Guillemont village and toward the German defensive line known as "The Quarry."
- **The Fighting:** The battalion advanced through a massive British artillery barrage. They successfully cleared German dugouts, captured the village, and secured all of their objectives. It was hailed as a magnificent tactical success, but the fighting was desperate and close-quarters.
- **The Cost:** The battalion paid a staggering price for the victory. In just that single day of fighting at Guillemont, the 11th KRRC suffered **over 300 casualties** (killed, wounded, or missing).

Weapon Number 28

The rifle carrying this disc was almost certainly carried by one of the men in that assault. Given the chaos of the day—where hundreds of men fell and the village was completely pulverized by heavy artillery—rifle #28 was likely shattered by shrapnel, buried in a collapsing trench, or blown from a soldier's hands during the charge.

Over the last 110 years, the wooden stock rotted away in the Somme clay, leaving only this brass disc behind as a permanent marker of that Sunday afternoon.

The official **War Diary for the 11th Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps (KRRC)** captures the exact timeline of events on that monumental day at **Guillemont: September 3, 1916**.

Notably, a young junior officer named **Anthony Eden**—who would later become the **Prime Minister of Great Britain** in the 1950s—was serving in the battalion during this exact phase of the Somme.

Here is how the day unfolded according to the operational records:

Timeline: Sunday, 3 September 1916

- **Before Dawn:** The 11th KRRC quietly moved under the cover of darkness up to their assembly trenches, located just west/south-west of Guillemont (near Maltz Horn Farm). The men were weighed down by their standard assault kit: **rifle #28**, 170 rounds of ammunition, two grenades, gas masks, two sandbags, and a full day's rations.
- **09:00 AM – 11:30 AM:** The morning was surprisingly quiet but thick with tension. Soldiers rested in the trenches while officers conducted final inspections.

- **12:00 PM (Noon):** The British heavy artillery unleashed a cataclysmic barrage, turning the German lines and the ruins of Guillemont into an inferno.
- **12:00 PM – 12:30 PM:** The battalion moved into its final jump-off positions. **A and B Companies** formed the first wave, with **C and D Companies** positioned right behind them to support.
- **12:30 PM ("Zero Hour"): The whistle blew.** The 11th KRRC went "over the top" into No Man's Land. Simultaneously, the artillery barrage lifted forward to act as a "creeping barrage" to shield the advancing men.
- **12:35 PM – 01:00 PM:** The first wave rushed forward under heavy German machine-gun and shell fire. They successfully breached the first German line (the "German Front Line Trench"). They did not stop; they swept through the southern and eastern edges of Guillemont village, ruthlessly clearing out dugouts where German defenders were hiding.
- **01:10 PM:** The battalion reached its main objective: **The Quarry** (a heavily fortified German strongpoint on the eastern edge of the village) and the **Sunken Road**. Hand-to-hand fighting ensued, but the KRRC successfully captured the position and took dozens of German prisoners.
- **02:00 PM:** The remaining men immediately dug in to defend their newly won positions, bracing for the inevitable German counter-barrage. They used their entrenching tools and the sandbags they had carried across No Man's Land to create a crude firing line.
- **Nightfall:** The assault was deemed a rare, clear-cut tactical success. Guillemont, which had withstood British attacks for weeks, was finally captured. However, the battlefield was a wasteland of shell craters and debris, littered with the broken equipment of the fallen.

The Aftermath & Casualties

The War Diary notes that while the objective was held, the battalion was utterly shattered by the intensity of the German defensive fire. The cost for the 11th KRRC on September 3rd was:

- **Officers:** 13 killed or wounded.
- **Other Ranks (Enlisted Men): Over 300 casualties** (killed, wounded, or missing).

Connecting the Disc to a Soldier

Because we know the **Unit (11th KRRC)**, the **Location (Guillemont)**, and the **Date (3 Sept 1916)**, we have a narrow window to research further.

Rifle #28 belonged to an individual soldier in that exact wave. While weapon serial numbers were tracked in individual soldier logbooks (which were largely destroyed by German bombing in WWII), the **Medal Rolls** and the **Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC)** records list every single man from the 11th KRRC who fell at Guillemont on that day. This will not identify the soldier who carried the rifle, but it is a good start until more information is revealed.