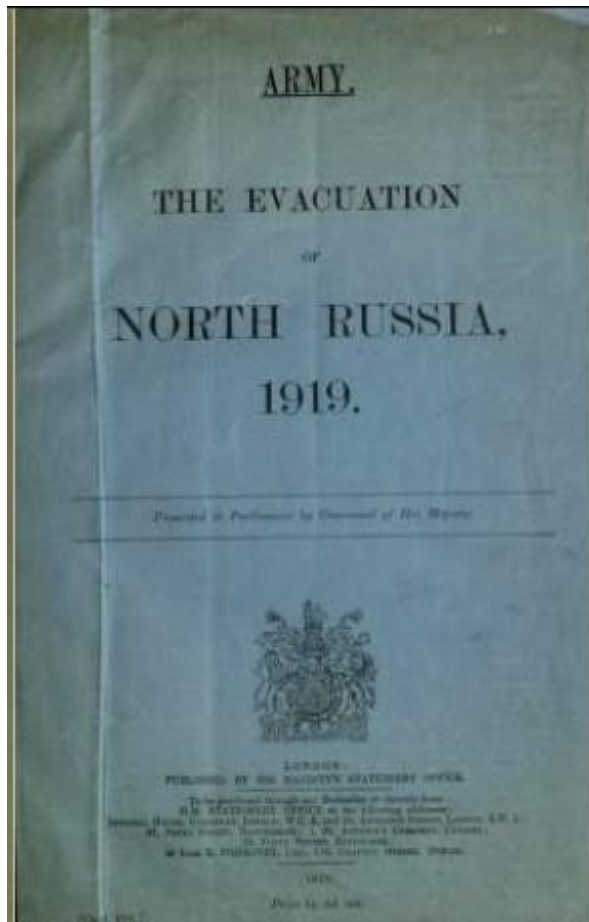


## The Allied Intervention in North Russia in 1919.



The book *left* was published by the British Government in 1920.

### ARMY

#### The Evacuation of North Russia

**Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty  
HMSO 1920**

The book is 54 pages long and very detailed, unfortunately I can only give a brief taste of what it contains.

‘Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War ...a complete statement and the reason underlying the various phases of the military operations connected with the British evacuation of North Russia...to understand...the difficulties and anxieties which attended the successful attempt to withdraw from North Russia without being involved in disaster or discredit...

Extract from a speech given by the Secretary of State for War in July 1919 explaining how the situation in North Russia at the beginning of 1919 arose out of the war against Germany.

...After Lenin and Trotsky had signed a shameful peace whereby they betrayed their country and falsified its engagements to its Allies, and whereby they liberated more than 1,000,000 Germans to come over and attack our people in the West – after that fateful event in history had occurred there was a Czech army of about two corps made up of prisoners taken from the Austrians by the Russians whose hearts were always on the side of the Allies, and this army refused to continue any longer with the Bolsheviks in Russia, and it demanded to be set free from Russia, and to make its way over to the Western Front where it could continue the struggle which the Bohemians were waging against German-Austria. After an attempt to secure the exodus of this army by Vladivostock, it was proposed that they should cut their way out by Viatka to Archangel. There was the danger of Archangel becoming a submarine base for the Germans, and the danger of the loss of all that great mountain of stores we had accumulated there in order to keep that means of contact with Russia, and for all these reasons, combined with the fact that it was hoped the Czechs would make their way out by that route, the Allies in 1918, as an essential military operation, and as part of the war, decided to occupy Archangel and Murmansk, and put an Inter-Allied force on shore there. This took place in August 1918.

The pressure upon us at that time was very great indeed, and it was not possible to spare any large force from any of the countries of the Allies, but a number of French, American, British and Italian troops, the British in larger numbers, were landed at Archangel and Murmansk, and population generally welcomed them. The town and surrounding district passed into our hands, and we became very deeply involved in the fortunes of that region. We were not able to send enough troops to occupy the whole of the area from which it was hoped a sufficient uprising of Russian manhood

would have resulted to enable a really large unit of Russian government to be established. We were not able to go to Volodga or Viatka and we had to confine ourselves to the comparatively small region of Archangel and Murmansk, and about 100 to 120 miles in various directions from those towns. The Czech troops who were trying to escape from the country via Archangel were unable to get as far as Viatka and they got only Ekaterinburg. Their advance slowed down and what had originally been intended to be a measure for affecting a junction with these troops and securing their safety, became a mere occupation of Archangel. But the committee would make a great mistake if they condemned the decision of policy which led the Allies to this country to make this movement although it did not achieve all the results we expected of it, it achieved results greater than anyone would have dared to hope for.



**Men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hampshires, Archangel front 1919**

Let the committee consider this. Up to the time we landed in Murmansk in May 1918, German divisions were passing from the Eastern, to the Western front at an average rate of six divisions per month to attack the Allied forces. From the time we had landed there, not another division was sent from the Eastern front, and the line there remained absolutely stable, the whole of the German forces being riveted by this new development, and the anxiety they had about Russia until the complete rebuff occurred in October or November of that year. Therefore it is very wrong to regard this as a mistaken enterprise either from the political principles which inspired it or still less by the results by which it was attended.

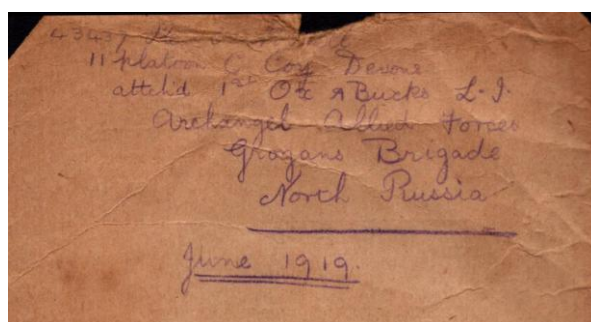
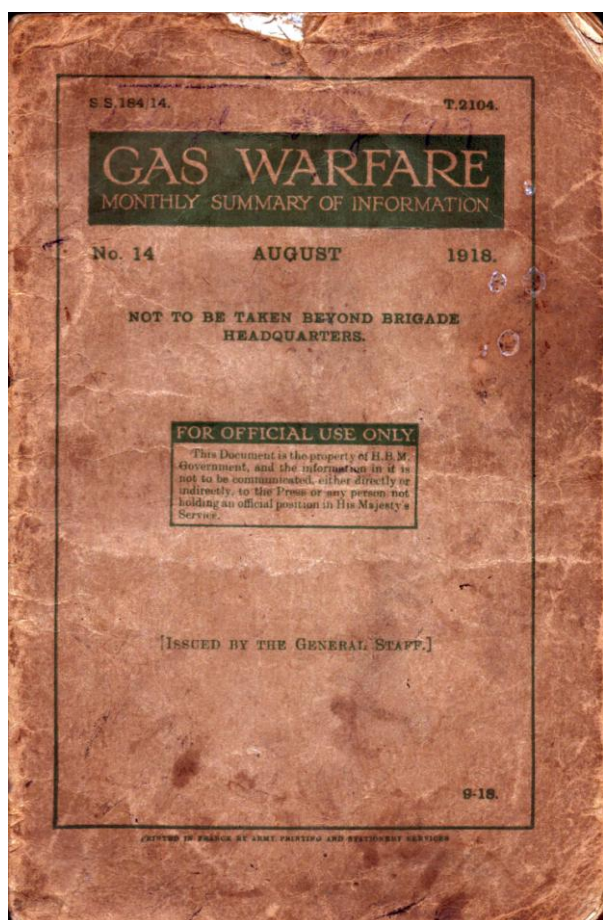
...Before the German resistance was broken and the Armistice signed, the winter had settled down on the North Russian coast, and the port of Archangel was icebound or practically icebound, and our men were forced to spend the whole of last winter in this bleak and gloomy spot in circumstances which caused the greatest anxiety, because it was evident that the Bolsheviks with whom they had been in collision, could if they chose, have concentrated on this particular sector of the circle by which they were invested, a force of indefinite size, and because our men were utterly cut off from the outer world except as far as small parties were concerned. Therefore their position was one of anxiety. They were men mostly of the O3 class, but they had a fine spirit, and once they were assured and promised that they should be brought home before another winter occurred, they discharged their duty with great determination, and maintained the position against some quite serious attacks, and others which might well have become very serious had they been allowed to proceed, and maintained the situation throughout this dark period. Not only was there considerable unrest amongst these troops during their imprisonment on this coast during the winter, but also, as the Committee recognises, in the exhaustion and prostration of the public mind which followed the triumph in the great struggle owing to the general dispersal of energies which had been so long held up by the great strain, there was the greatest difficulty in sending out any form of relief or assistance to those troops for several months.

...Such was the situation I inherited when I was sent to the War Office in the middle of January of the present year [1919]...no one could view that situation without the gravest anxiety...

The following summary of events is from this Wikipedia page [Australia in the Allied intervention in the Russian Civil War - Wikipedia](#)

In March 1919 the decision was made to withdraw the force. This could only be safely completed with the provision of a covering force, and until this could be raised the NREF was condemned to endure the harsh Russian winter.

Recruiting for the relief force began immediately in England on a voluntary basis and would ultimately include men from every regiment of the British Army, and all the dominions. The North Russian Relief Force (NRRF) subsequently formed two brigades—one under the command of Brigadier General Lionel Sadlier-Jackson, and the other under **Brigadier General George Grogan**, and both under the overall command of Major General Edmund Ironside.



The book *left*, in my possession, was once owned by a soldier who was in 'Grogan's Brigade'. We can see above he has written inside: **"43437 Pte. [name illegible] 11 platoon, c company, Devons, attached 1<sup>st</sup> Ox & Bucks L.I. Archangel Allied Forces, Grogans Brigade, North Russia, June 1919."**

Sadlier-Jackson's brigade included over 4,000 men, including the 45th and 46th Battalions, the Royal Fusiliers, supporting machine gunners from the 201st Machine Gun Battalion, as well as artillery, signallers and engineers. Grogan's brigade was primarily drawn from battalions of the Worcestershire Regiment.

Due to the high regard held for dominion troops as a result of their exploits in France during the war they were specifically targeted for recruitment. Indeed, some 400 to 500 men of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF)—who were in England awaiting repatriation to Australia following the end of the war—initially indicated a willingness to join, but nowhere near as many actually enlisted. All Australians who volunteered were discharged from the AIF and re-enlisted in the British army as private soldiers for a period of one year. This was necessary because the dominions had already indicated that they were not interested in providing forces for the intervention. Ultimately about 150 Australians enlisted to serve in the NRRF, most of them recruited by Major Harry Harcourt. The Australians mainly served in the 45th Battalion and the 201st Machine Gun Battalion under Sadlier-Jackson, although some may also have served in the 46th Battalion. Despite being enlisted in the British Army the Australians wore uniforms of the AIF and were formed into two mainly Australian companies in the 45th Battalion.



**Australian soldiers from NRRF in Russia 1919**

### **Arrival and early deployments, June 1919**

The NRRF arrived in Archangel on 5 June 1919 aboard the *SS Porto* and *SS Stephen* and almost immediately moved up the Dvina River to a camp at Osinova. There they began training for an offensive up the rail and river systems of the Dvina. This offensive was designed to push the Bolshevik forces of the Red Army back while the Allies withdrew without interference. A secondary aim was to leave the White Russian forces in a better military position, in the optimistic hope they could subsequently hold their own. Meanwhile,

with the arrival of the NRRF, the survivors of the earlier NREF were subsequently evacuated. Activity during this period also included small-scale patrol and ambush operations around Troitska to the south in an attempt to keep the Bolsheviks off balance, as well as to provide the White Russian forces with the motivation to fight. Both sides had a small air arm, and the British established a makeshift airfield at Bakaritsa, near Archangel. Later in the campaign Sopwiths from France were used from a strip at Obozerskaya. The allies soon established air superiority, shooting down several Bolshevik aircraft.

### **August offensives of 1919**

Corporal Arthur Sullivan (VC)

In early August, Major General Ironside launched his offensive against the 6th Red Army, the British force subsequently inflicting heavy casualties and taking many prisoners for relatively little loss to themselves. The offensive was mainly fought through thick pine forest and swamp which provided little terrain for manoeuvre and although hugely successful, may have been unnecessary. Indeed, the Bolshevik forces in the region perhaps numbered only 6,000 men, and was probably engaged in holding operations only. It has been suggested that they probably had no intention of interrupting the Allied evacuation, and may have been caught unprepared by the sudden offensive. The main Red Army activity in early August was on the Siberian front, where Kolchak's White armies were falling back in disarray.

During this time the Australians were prominent in several actions, taking part in at least four major actions—at Troitsa (Sergeevskaya) on 7 July, at Obozerskaya (Обозерский) between 20 and 23 July, at Seltsoe (Сельцо) on 10 August and at Emtsa (Емца) on 29 August. Meanwhile, the first significant engagement occurred on 23 July 1919 when Ironside had gone to investigate a meeting of White Russian forces at Obozerskaya. The Australian's subsequently repulsed a Bolshevik attack on a railway in the area surprising the enemy during a relief of their forward blockhouses. They attacked with their bayonets, perhaps killing 30 and wounding many more before setting fire to the blockhouses and withdrawing.

On 10 August 1919, one of the largest engagements of the intervention occurred, taking place at Seltso and the surrounding villages along the Dvina. In a confused battle through the marshy swamps Sadlier-Jackson's brigade battled a large Bolshevik force, with the Fusiliers—including the two Australian companies of the 45th Battalion—fighting their way through with their bayonets and re-occupying Seltso. Perhaps as many as 1,000 prisoners were taken and 19 field guns captured. Due to the terrain the Fusiliers had been unable to manoeuvre their mountain guns through the swamp, whilst Sadlier-Jackson had to use an observation balloon for situational awareness. During this battle



an Australian, Corporal Arthur Sullivan, won the Victoria Cross (VC) for saving a group of drowning men while under fire.



**Special Brigade Officers assembling bombs at Oberskaya airfield on the Archangel front 27<sup>th</sup> August 1919.**

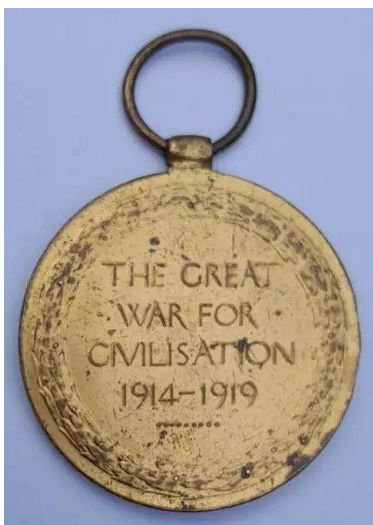
On 29 August 1919, the last British offensive along the railway occurred at Emtsa. The assault on Emsta was a planned attack, in which a White Russian unit was to make a frontal attack on the positions of the 155th Regiment of the Red Army. Attached were the Australians, on their right, and before the assault they moved under the cover of darkness to within 70 yards (64 m) of the Bolshevik positions. During the ensuing fighting an Australian, Sergeant Samuel Pearse, cut his way through the barbed wire entanglements under heavy enemy fire, clearing a way for others to enter. With the fire from blockhouses causing

casualties among the assaulting troops, Pearse then charged the blockhouses single-handedly with his Lewis gun, killing the occupants with bombs before being killed by machine-gun fire himself soon after. For his actions he was later awarded the second Victoria Cross of the campaign. The furious engagement then ended with the surrender of the Bolshevik forces.

#### **Withdrawal, September–October 1919**

The victories of 10 and 29 August allowed the allies the space they needed to withdraw. Following the August offensive minor patrol activity continued throughout September to provide a screen whilst forward positions were evacuated and stores either removed or destroyed. By the night of 26–27 September the Allies had subsequently withdrawn from Archangel, and Murmansk was evacuated on 12 October aboard a flotilla of troopships and escorts which sailed for Britain.

The Czech Legion was eventually evacuated and returned home via Vladivostok with Allied help.



This story explains why the British WWI Victory Medal carries the dates 1914 – 1919.

Simon Wilson has added the following information regarding Captain Driver, 7<sup>th</sup> Bedfordshire Rgt.

## Captain Harry Driver - From Bedfordshire Regiment to Archangel

Reading the above article on the Russian campaign of 1919, I was reminded of a group of medals I once saw, awarded to Captain Harry Driver DSO MC of the 7<sup>th</sup> Bedfordshire Regiment. After an adventurous war, in which he was decorated with the Distinguished Service Order and Military Cross, Captain Driver signed up for service in Russia with the 46<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers.



**Captain Harry Driver 7<sup>th</sup> Bedfordshire Regiment**

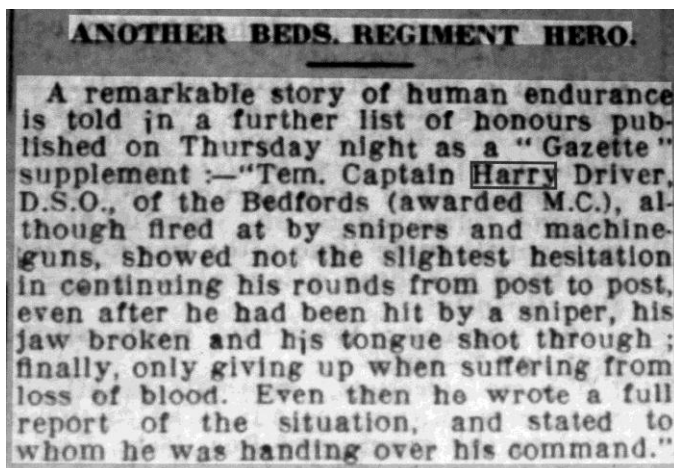
The first information I found about him appears in the preparations for a trench raid on 26 and 27 April 1916 at Carnoy. Returning to the battalion after recovering from a wound, he was given leadership of one half of the attack. I think the wound he was recovering from, if you will pardon the interruption, was one he sustained on 17/18 January when trying to secure a mine crater that had been exploded under the German lines. Whilst supervising a working party he was shot through the arm, the bullet going through to hit 2/Lt Donald Whatmoor in the head, killing him instantly. There were plenty of volunteers and the attack generally went well, although the second half of the party was delayed in its withdrawal and Driver's party had to fight off a German counter-attack as they waited 20 minutes for the other party to catch up. His citation for the DSO in the London Gazette on 31 May 1916 gives details.

*Temp. 2nd Lt. Harry Driver, 7th Bn., Bedf. R. For conspicuous gallantry on several occasions, notably when leading a successful raid on the enemy's trenches. He forced the enemy back into their dug-outs, entered a*

*deep dug-out and personally bombed the occupants, shot the sentry over another dugout, and, though himself wounded in two places, remained, at the point of exit till every man was reported present. He was wounded a third time on his way back to our trenches.*

The original two wounds were in the face and the foot.

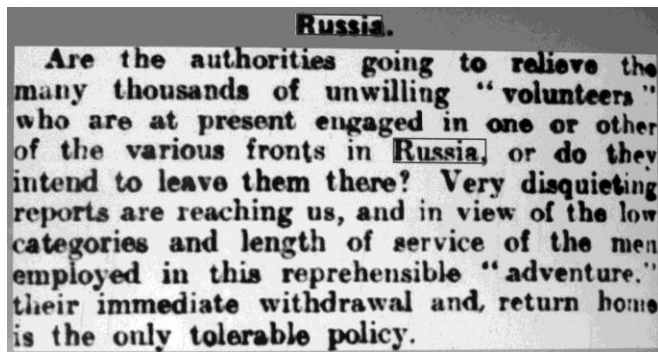
He was also mentioned in dispatches several times and awarded the Military Cross in August 1917 for his actions in the attack on Glencourse Wood, when he continued to command his company to great effect even though he had been shot in the face – breaking his jaw in two places and suffering a wound to the tongue.



When doing research it is always easy to focus on the military details of a man's life, as they are the ones most easily found. However, they don't always give a picture of the whole man. Harry Driver was born in Stoneham, Hampshire, though his father, a schoolmaster, seems to have moved around a bit, other children being born Southampton, Wisbech and Gloucestershire before the family settled in Ealing.

He attended Katharine Berkeley Grammar School in Gloucestershire before entering London University, where he graduated with a BSc degree in 1913. He taught maths at a number of schools and was a Lieutenant in the OTC, but in 1914 accepted an appointment as a surveyor in the Colonial department. He was clearly a talented and ambitious man, and would have done well if the war had not intervened..

On the outbreak of war he volunteered for service alongside his brothers Bertram (killed in action with the Civil Service Rifles at Le Sars in October 1916) and Rupert (seriously wounded with the Suffolk Regiment at Hulluch in November 1915 and seconded to the Indian Army).



The war in Russia was not popular. Although many men volunteered for service, having developed an appetite for battle, others just wanted to go home. There were several mutinies amongst British forces and the newspapers were full of reports criticising the intervention for its cost in both cash and in British lives, and many mothers wrote to the press, asking why their sons could not come home.

Driver seems to have been amongst the number who wanted more action and, whilst serving in the Army of Occupation in Germany, volunteered for the Russian relief force and helped recruit further volunteers in the camps around Salisbury Plain. He was attached to the 46<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers.

The other Royal Fusilier battalion was the 45<sup>th</sup>, where Arthur Percival DSO, MC was second in command. He had fought alongside Driver in the 7th Bedfordshire Regiment, and had also been highly decorated. His career would take him to Ireland, where he was accused of brutality in his counter-insurgency dealings with the IRA, and Singapore where, in 1942, he was made the scapegoat for what Churchill described as "the worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history."

On 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> August they would fight side by side once again, though the battle would have very different outcomes for the two of them. Percival would emerge as a victorious column commander and receive a bar to his DSO for his gallant and effective handling of his troops. Driver, after strenuous house to house fighting with the 46<sup>th</sup> battalion, would lead his troops in an attack on a strong Bolshevik position that was holding up the advance and, as the writer of the the history of the campaign says "a most gallant officer, Captain Harry Driver, D.S.O., M.C., of the Bedfordshire Regiment, lost his life, being hit in the stomach by a machine gun bullet. His death was universally regretted."

He is buried in the cemetery at Troitza Churchyard and commemorated on the Archangel Memorial.

Sources:

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