

The Battle of Mametz Wood: Eyewitnesses

A description of the fighting at Mametz Wood by Lieutenant W.R.M Gwynne, Swansea. Lieutenant Gwynne had returned home from France after having been wounded at Mametz on July 11th.

When questioned about how he felt in the middle of the terrible bombardment the young Lieutenant, who is only 21 years of age, said:

“It has a most peculiar effect on you. You can’t describe adequately your feelings at hearing the continued deafening roar of the guns and the continuous rain of shells.”

“Two days before the British took Mametz Wood the Boches (Germans) peppered Mametz with ‘weeping’ shells, and we had to put our goggles on. These shells give off a rather sweet smell, but they make tears come to the eyes, and eventually, if you don’t use your goggles, you get so bad that you cannot see.”

Cambrian Daily Leader, September 1916.

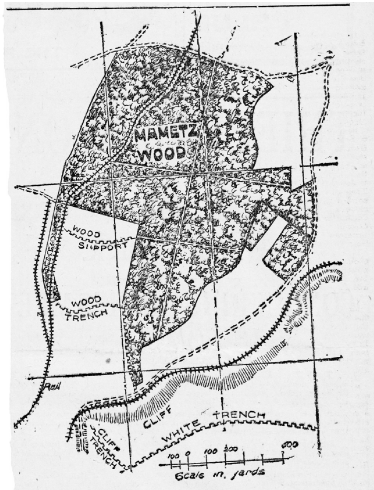
Selection and adaptation.

An account of the fighting in Mametz Wood by an officer of the Welsh Regiment.

Hand-to-hand fighting and bombing took place throughout the wood. The wood was extraordinarily thick. The Germans had tied the branches of the trees together and it was extremely difficult to force a path through. Machine-guns were also hidden in the woodland on either side of the front of the wood.

Cambrian Daily Leader, September 1916.

Selection and adaptation.



Questioned as to one's feelings in the midst of a terrific bombardment, the young Lieutenant—he is only 21 years of age—said: “It has a most peculiar effect on one. You cannot really adequately describe the sensation felt at the continued deafening roar of the guns and the incessant rain of shells. At Mametz the British artillery set up an intense bombardment, and shells were being poured into the German positions at the rate, I should think, of 100 to 150 a minute. The Germans were in a terrible funk about it, and gave themselves up in droves.”

“Two days before the British took Mametz Wood the Boches peppered Mametz with ‘weeping’ shells, and we had to put on our goggles. These lachrymatory shells give off a rather sweet smell, but they make tears come to the eyes, and eventually, if you don’t resort to your goggles, you get so bad that you cannot see.”

Hence, we suppose, the term “weeping” shells.

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A selection from a detailed account by a soldier who fought with the 38th Welsh Division in the Battle of Mametz Wood. This was published in a newspaper at the end of the First World War.

Friday evening, July 7, 1916

It continued to rain and in the dull atmosphere, Mametz Wood, which had already cost dearly, took on a more sinister appearance. It is known as the largest and thickest wood in the Somme area, and it has withstood repeated attacks. During the day its huge dark mass appeared impenetrable, while by night it lit up with shrapnel and heavy artillery and it seemed impossible that anyone could live there.

Cambrian Daily Leader, October 1918.

Selection and adaptation.

Early Monday morning, July 10, 1916

Shortly after midnight the troops for the front line of the attack began to pass down to White Trench. Then the barrage dropped on Mametz Wood. The 16th Royal Welsh Fusiliers were in position in the sunken road about 3 am and whiled away the trying hour before the attack with banter and snatches of song. Someone had struck up *Aberystwyth* as the moment of going over drew near. When the singing finished Colonel Carden called for silence. He said: "Boys, make your peace with God. We are going to take that position and some of us won't come back, but we are going to take it".

Cambrian Daily Leader, October 1918.

Selection and adaptation.

That evening a brigade of another division made an unavailing attack on the wood. Still it rained, and in the dull atmosphere Mametz Wood, which had already cost dearly, assumed a more sinister aspect. It was known to be the largest and thickest wood in the Somme district, and it had defied repeated attacks. By day its black bulk seemed to offer an impenetrable front, whilst by night lit up with shrapnel and H.E. it seemed impossible that anyone could live there. On Saturday the weather improved, and on Sunday part of the division was withdrawn to the hollow for a rest. The sun was warm, and the ground dried rapidly. Everything was favourable for an attack, when that evening an order was sent round drawing attention to the deeds of other Welsh battalions in the battle, and stating that in the morning it would be left to the 38th Division to decide whether the name of the Welsh Division was to live in history. It has figured on more than one glorious field since then, but this was the bloodiest of the Welsh Division.

The 16th R.W.F. were in position in the sunken road about 3.0 a.m., and whiled away the trying hour before the attack with banter and snatches of song. Their colonel had come in to lead the attack. A regular cavalry officer, who had been a prominent figure in polo circles in days of peace, Col. Carden was a striking figure known throughout the whole brigade. Immaculately dressed, came in hand, his appearance had now a reassuring influence. Someone had struck up "Aberystwyth" as the moment of going over drew near. When the singing had finished Col. Carden called for silence, and address-

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WARNING: THIS PAGE CONTAINS A GRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE OF MAMETZ WOOD.

Llewelyn Wyn Griffiths was a Captain in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers during The First World War. He wrote about his experiences in Mametz in his war diaries, and these formed the basis for his autobiography *Up to Mametz and beyond*. His brother Watcyn was killed during the battle.

Equipment, ammunition, rolls of barbed wire, tins of food, gas-helmets and rifles were lying about everywhere. There were more corpses than men, but there were worse sights than corpses. Limbs and mutilated trunks, here and there a detached head, forming splashes of red against the green leaves, and, as in advertisement of the horror of our way of life and death, and of our crucifixion of youth, one tree held in its branches a leg, with its torn flesh hanging down over a spray of leaf.

Up to Mametz and beyond, Llewelyn Wyn Griffiths, 1931.
Selection and adaptation.

Even now, after all these years, this round ring of man-made hell bursts into my vision. Blue sky above, a band of green trees, and a ploughed graveyard in which living men moved worm-like in and out of sight; three men digging a trench, thigh-deep in the red soil, digging their own graves. A bursting shell turned their shelter into a tomb; two signallers crouched in a large shell hole, waiting for an order to move, but showing in their patient and tired inactivity the look of dead men ready to rise at the trump of a Last Judgement.

Up to Mametz and beyond, Llewelyn Wyn Griffiths, 1931.
Selection and adaptation.

