

# A TEST TO DESTRUCTION

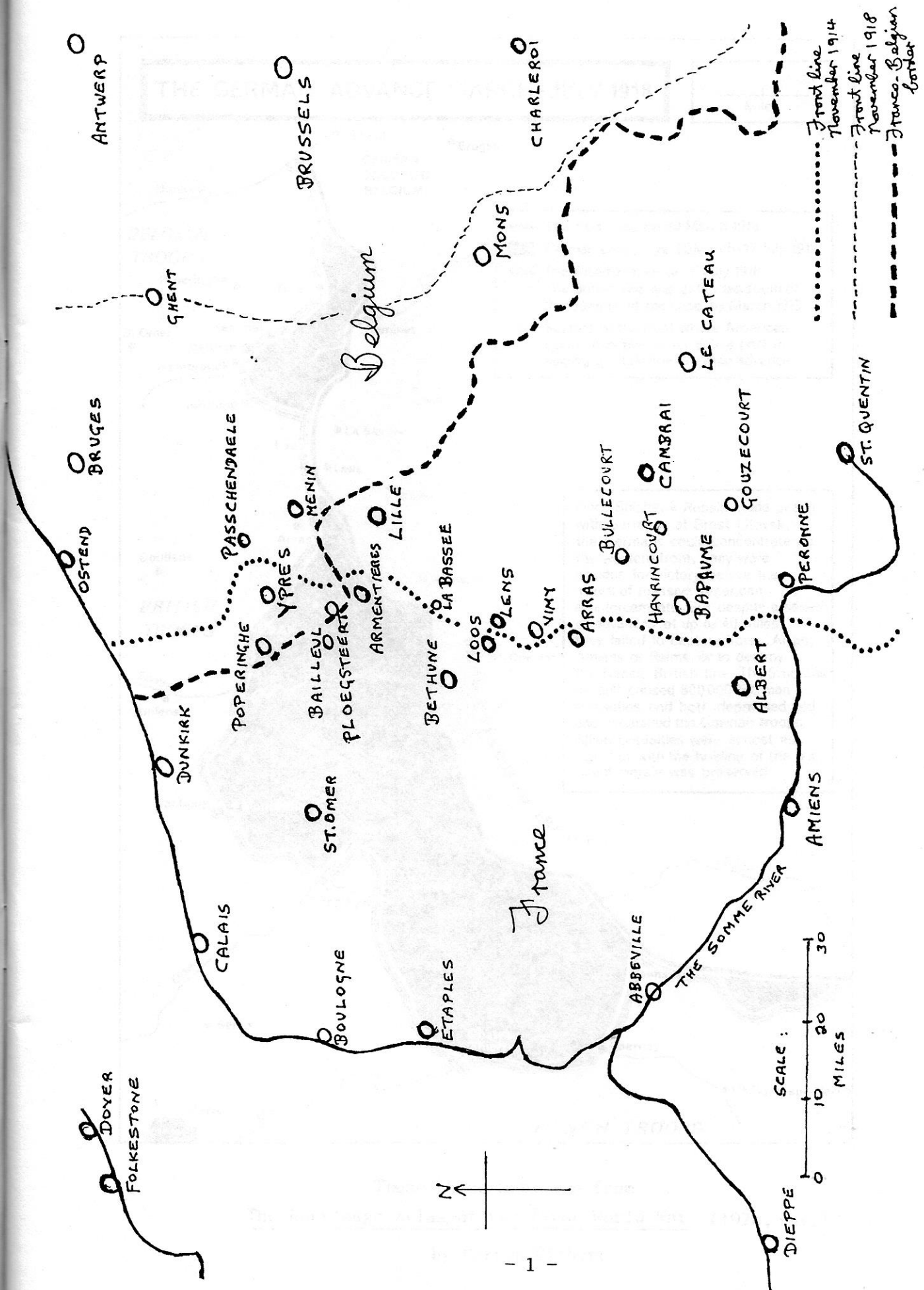
AN INDEX





Vol. 8 of A CHRONICLE OF ANCIENT  
SUNLIGHT

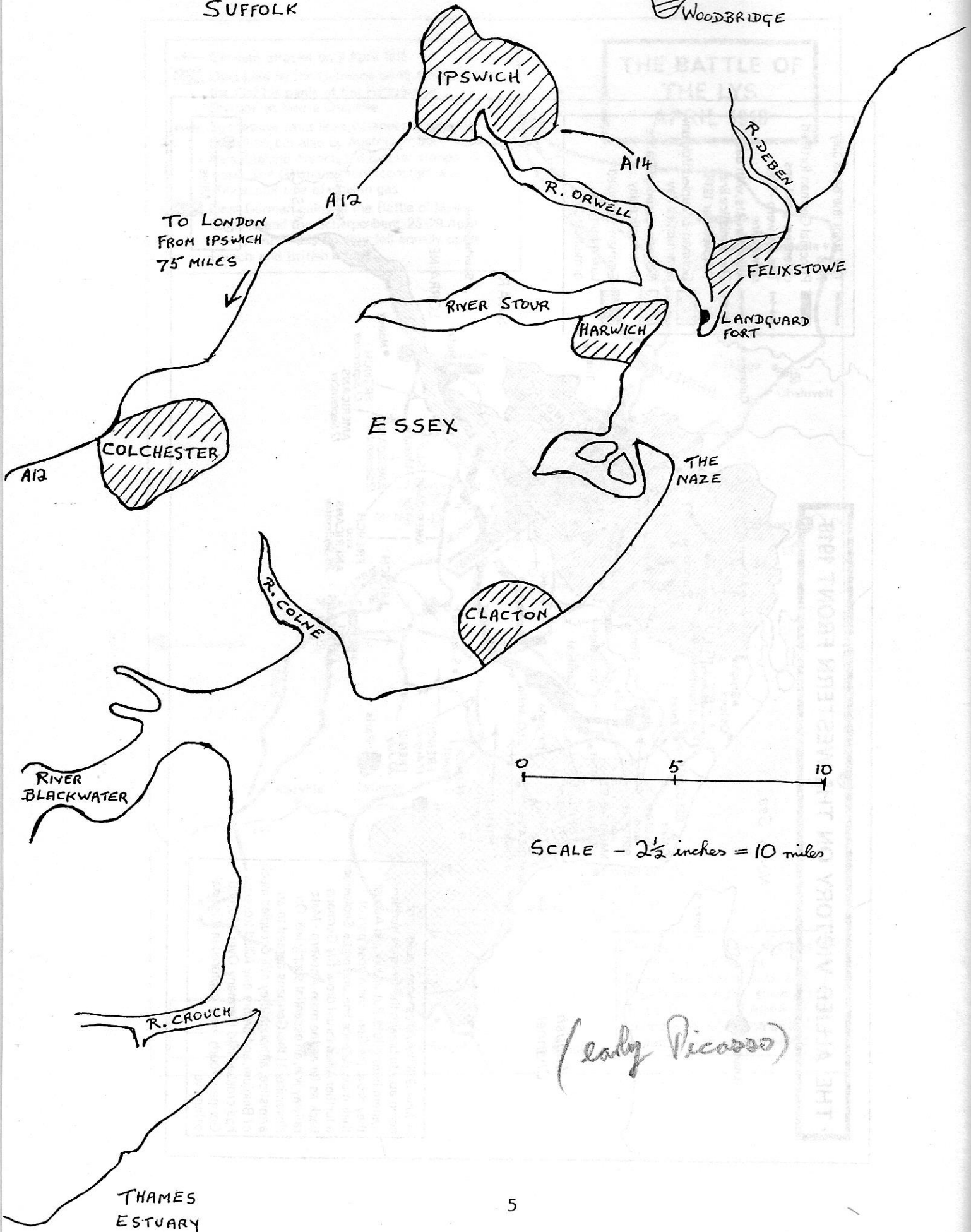
The year 1918 sees Phillip Maddison temporarily blinded by gas, decorated for bravery at Buckingham Palace and briefly imprisoned. Acting lieutenant-colonel no more, Phillip's future in civilian life stretches uncertainly before him as the war to end wars, extracting its toll of young life to the finish, finally halts. His family and he remain at odds, but in his love of literature he perceives the beckoning promise of a new career.

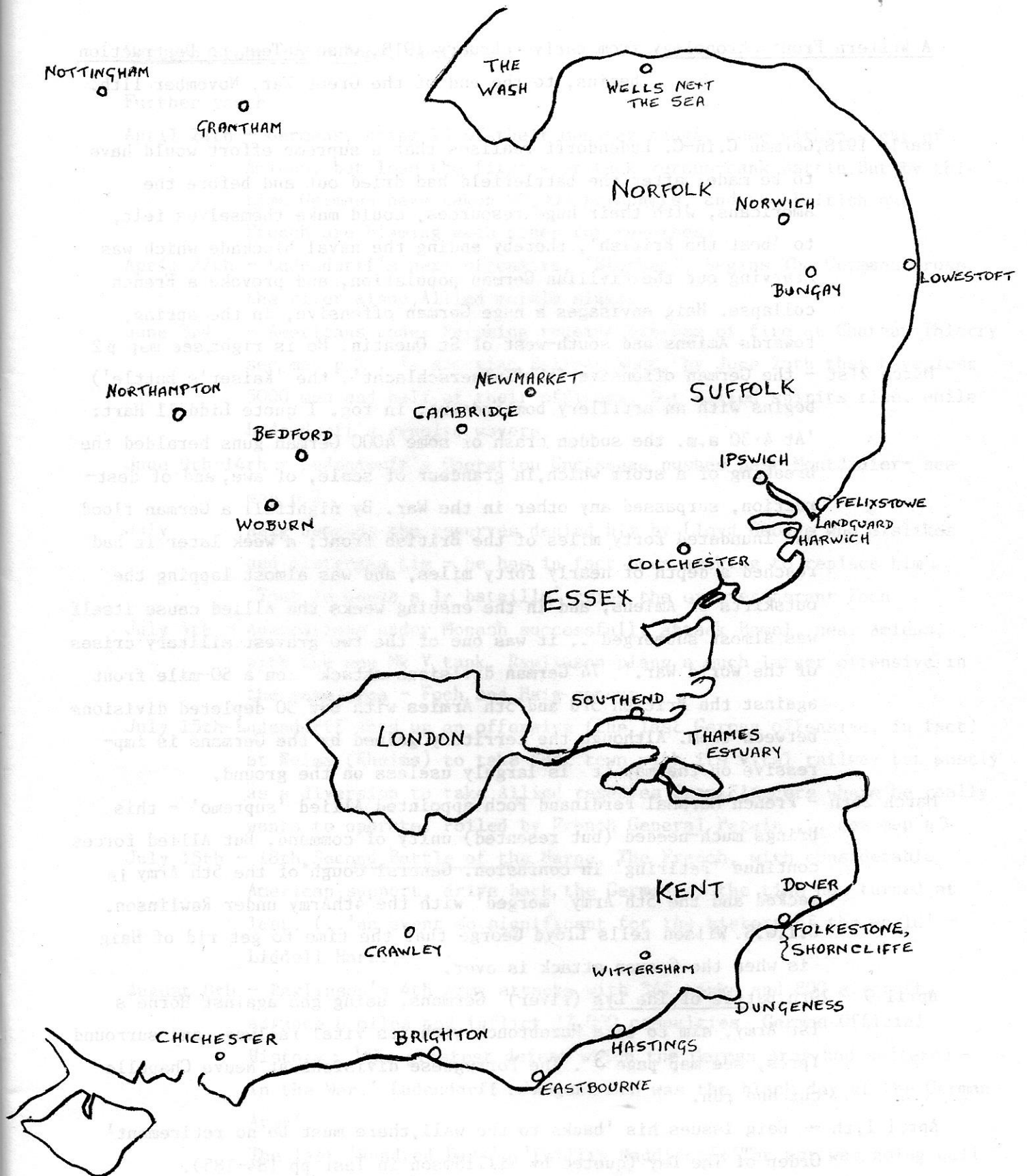




SUFFOLK

WOODBRIDGE





A Western Front chronology from early February 1918, when A Test to Destruction begins, to the end of the Great War, November 11th.

early 1918, German C.in-C. Ludendorff realises that a supreme effort would have to be made, after the battlefield had dried out and before the Americans, with their huge resources, could make themselves felt, to 'beat the British', thereby ending the naval blockade which was starving out the civilian German population, and provoke a French collapse. Haig envisages a huge German offensive, in the spring, towards Amiens and south-west of St Quentin. He is right, see map p 2

March 21st - the German offensive (the 'Kaiserschlacht', the 'Kaiser's Battle') begins with an artillery bombardment, in fog. I quote Liddell Hart: 'At 4.30 a.m. the sudden crash of some 4000 German guns heralded the breaking of a storm which, in grandeur of scale, of awe, and of destruction, surpassed any other in the War. By nightfall a German flood had inundated forty miles of the British front; a week later it had reached a depth of nearly forty miles, and was almost lapping the outskirts of Amiens; and in the ensuing weeks the Allied cause itself was almost submerged .. it was one of the two gravest military crises of the World War.' 74 German divisions attack on a 50-mile front against the British 3rd and 5th Armies with but 30 depleted divisions between them. Although the territory gained by the Germans is impressive on the map it is largely useless on the ground.

March 26th - French Marshal Ferdinand Foch appointed Allied 'supremo' - this brings much-needed (but resented) unity of command. But Allied forces continue 'retiring' in confusion. General Gough of the 5th Army is sacked and the 5th Army 'merged' with the 4th Army under Rawlinson. C.I.G.S. Wilson tells Lloyd George that the time to get rid of Haig is when the German attack is over.

April 9 - 29th, Battle of The Lys (river) Germans, using gas against Horne's 1st Army, aim to take Hazebrouck with its vital railway, and surround Ypres, see map page 3. The Portuguese divisions at Neuve Chapelle cut and run.

April 11th - Haig issues his 'backs to the wall, there must be no retirement' Order of The Day (quoted by Williamson in Test pp 184-185).

15th - Bailleul taken by Germans

25th - Kemmel Hill captured by Germans

29th - German offensive abandoned

Western Front chronology, cont'd

Further south,

April 24th - Germans, using 13 of their monster tanks, come within sight of Amiens, but lose the first-ever tank-versus-tank battle. But by this time Germans have taken 90,000 prisoners, and the British and French are blaming each other for reverses.

April 27th - Ludendorff's next offensive, 'Blucher', begins. The Germans cross the river Aisne, Allied morale sinks.

June 3rd - Americans under Pershing receive baptism of fire at Chateau-Thierry see map p 2 . In securing Belleau Wood, by June 25th they have lost 5000 men and half of their officers. But Allied spirits rise, while Ludendorff's resolve wavers.

June 9th-14th - Ludendorff's Operation Gneisenau pushes past Montdidier- see map p 2 .

July Haig demands the reserves denied him by Lloyd George who dislikes and mistrusts him - he has in fact been seeking to replace him. 'Tout le monde a la bataille' cries the over-exuberant Foch

July 4th - Australians under Monash successfully attack Hamel, near Amiens, with the new Mk V tank. Rawlinson plans a much larger offensive in the same area - Foch and Haig concur.

July 15th-Ludendorff sets up an offensive (the last German offensive, in fact) at Reims (Rheims) to take that town with its vital railway but mostly as a diversion to take Allied reserves from Flanders where he really wants to operate. Foiled by French General Petain ... see map p 3

July 15th - 18th, Second Battle of the Marne. The French, with considerable American support, drive back the Germans - the tide has turned at last. (... 'an event so significant for the history of the world' - Liddell Hart.)

August 8th - Rawlinson's 4th Army attacks with 342 tanks and 800 aircraft, advance 8 miles and inflict 27,000 casualties. German Official History: 'the greatest defeat which the German Army had suffered in the War.' Ludendorff: 'August 8th was the black day of the German Army'.

The last 'Hundred Days'. 'Phillip Maddison': 'The war was going well at last.' (Test p 286)

August 21st - Albert taken, Germans retreat across the old Somme battlefield  
29th - Bapaume taken



Western Front chronology, cont'd

- Sept 2nd - Peronne taken, but during August 80,000 British casualties.  
(During last 'Hundred Days' enormous casualties. All the shocking statistics of deaths and injuries recorded for WW1 are dwarfed by number of deaths caused by the influenza pandemic of late 1918, e.g. 62,000 Americans died of 'flu, far more than were killed in battle. Strangely, perhaps, this horrific scourge receives no mention in the Chronicle.)
- Sept 4th - Hindenburg Line broken
- 12th-15th - Battle of St Mihiel (salient) Mainly an American operation, towards Metz in the southern part of the Western Front (see map page 4 ) as a prelude to the much bigger Meuse-Argonne offensive south of Verdun. Objective, to pinch off the salient (bulge) and to capture up to 50,000 Germans trapped there; in the event a frustrating exercise, only partially successful.
- Sept 26th-Nov 11th Battle of Meuse-Argonne (Meuse river, Argonne forest)- see map 4  
This long campaign, a series of disjointed attacks upon rapidly retreating Germans, splutters on until the Armistice, Pershing's Americans outnumbering enemy eight to one.
- During these battles, further north, on the old Somme battlefields and in Flanders, Allied forces everywhere are on the move eastwards in actions called variously at the time Battle of Amiens, Second Battle of Cambrai, Second Battle of Albert, the 'Great Flanders Offensive', the Fourth Battle of Ypres, etc. The Germans withdraw, even from behind their Hindenburg Line, but the German Western Front is never actually broken. (read Test p 346.) As late as November the Allies plan to consolidate, drawing up plans to advance to Munich in the spring of 1919, to bomb Berlin, etc, the Armistice a surprise.
- Sept 29th - Bulgaria capitulates. Ludendorff warns that only an immediate armistice can avert a catastrophe. (He then has a fit.)
- October - Germans beaten back up to Le Cateau. October 4th - Wilfred Owen killed.
- Oct 1st - German government falls, replaced by a new one led by Prince Max of Baden
- Oct 27th - Ludendorff resigns to forestall dismissal.
- 29th - German High Seas Fleet starts to mutiny
- November 1st - Turkey capitulates
- 4th - revolution breaks out in Germany, and Austria signs armistice after defeat by Italians at Vittorio Veneto on October 30th
- 9th - Kaiser abdicates
- 10th - German government agrees to Foch's terms for an armistice (tantamount to an unconditional surrender).
- 11th - 5.00 a.m. Armistice signed at Compiegne (see map page 2 )  
11.00 a.m. Armistice takes effect, hostilities cease

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Wondering why Brigadier 'Spectre' West is sometimes referred to as General West (e.g. pp 175,187,188,189,208), I looked it up. There were (still are) four grades of General Officer : General, Lieutenant-General, Major-General and Brigadier, all entitled to be called General (and to wear red stripes down their trousers!).

I researched further, and for those with little or no knowledge of the composition of the various army units in the Great War (I understand that not much has changed since) I provide, somewhat belatedly, a rough guide. (I listed the British Army commanders of WWI on page 8 of my index of Love and The Loveless.)

There was a maximum of five British armies on the Western Front. (Incidentally, it was Germany's Western Front.) An army was commanded by a General, and consisted of two or more corps, each consisting of up to 120,000 men, commanded by Lieutenant-Generals. A typical corps consisted of a small number of divisions, each of some 10,000 men, commanded by Major-Generals. A division consisted of two or more brigades, each of some 5,000 men, commanded by Brigadiers. A brigade consisted of from two to five battalions, each of some 1,000 men, commanded by Colonels. A battalion consisted of from four to ten companies, each of up to 120 men, commanded by Majors or senior Captains. In time of war all these figures varied considerably, depending on circumstances. A company of 'poor bloody infantry', such as the one in which Phillip served, would have been commanded (usually) by a Captain, supported by three or four subalterns (1st and 2nd Lieutenants), with a Company Sergeant-major, two or three Sergeants, half a dozen Corporals and Lance-Corporals, and up to 100 'private' soldiers, usually making up three or four platoons or sections.

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When Captain Phillip Maddison was promoted (temporary) Colonel (p 103) in command of the hastily-assembled 'Composite' Battalion in March 1918, until he was gassed after some three weeks (p184), his battalion consisted of four companies numbered 1 to 4, commanded by Captains Tabor, Dawes (No 2), Whitfield and Hedges (No 4). Phillip's 'team' consisted of his reluctant second-in-command Major Bill Kidd, adjutant Lieut. Gotley (soon killed & replaced by Lieut. Naylor), Regimental Sergeant-Major Adams, Sergeant Tonks, and last but not least Phillip's faithful batman/runner Pte. O'Gorman.

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