The spectre of Lone Tree

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(Talk given at the HWS Study Day, February 2006)

The autumn of 2005 saw the commemoration of the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Loos, officially noted as 25 September–13 October 1915. This paper (and note the spectre in the title is with a lower case 's', not a capital for 'Spectre' West, as you might expect!) arose as my response to an article which appeared in *STAND TO!*, the Journal of the Western Front Association, No 74, September 2005, entitled 'Command and Control in 1915 – the attack on Lone Tree, 25 September 1915', by Nick Lloyd,[1] which would appear to be an extract from his PhD thesis, 2005, and had already been given as a talk at a University of Kent colloquium.

In this, Lloyd gives an interestingly detailed account of the action at 'Lone Tree' at the Battle of Loos, fronting his argument with reference to, and quotation from, Henry Williamson's novel *A Fox Under My Cloak*,[2] but in his final paragraph he concludes that HW's account is 'compelling and dramatic, but not entirely accurate' – because, he states, Williamson criticises the 'criminal stupidity' of the orders of British command. Lloyd states that others have also made these criticisms – yet he singles out HW's account solely as being 'inaccurate'. While I can see how Lloyd's research has led him to his own conclusion re the battle I cannot actually agree with his dialectic as regards Henry Williamson and *Fox*. But, if nothing else, it has made an opportunity to examine in detail HW's treatment of this battle – a masterpiece by any standard.

This talk is based on my original response now enlarged for clarification, as I realised that would be a problem here in that very few, if any, of you will have seen Lloyd's article in *STAND TO!* and thus are disadvantaged for total understanding of the problem. I hope that by the end of this paper everything will be clear. Here is the opening paragraph and a few other sentences from Lloyd's article to set the scene and put you in the picture.

> *Henry Williamson's novel* A Fox Under My Cloak *contains a gripping account of the Battle of Loos (25 September–13 October, 1915) as seen through the eyes of Williamson's hero, Phillip Maddison.* [Lloyd has spelt 'Philip' with only one 'l' – how livid HW would have been!] *Maddison is attached to one of the special Companies that were tasked with releasing the cylinders of chlorine gas and lighting the smoke candles that would precede the British infantry assault. But he also becomes unwittingly involved in the dramatic attempts to take a German strongpoint known as Lone Tree. This position had resisted numerous attacks during the morning of 25 September. Phillip Maddison is present in the trenches when Captain 'Spectre' West, the acting commanding officer of one of the supporting battalions, receives orders to conduct another frontal attack. West is incensed at this and believes that a flanking manoeuvre is the only viable option. As he explains to the bewildered Maddison:*
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> > *' "The Hun position behind Lone Tree is threatened on both flanks. So what does the Staff order? Shall I tell you?" screamed Captain West, above the screaming of eighteen-pounder shells. "The Staff has ordered a second frontal attack against uncut wire! Does that, or does that not, strike you as the quintessence of criminal stupidity?" '*

Lloyd goes on to state that:

> *... numerous historians have echoed Williamson's criticisms about the action at Lone Tree and it deserves to be examined in more detail. ... Despite the importance of Lone Tree to the events of 25 September 1915, the action remains poorly understood. This article will analyse how the attack on Lone Tree was planned and conducted, and seek to examine whether Williamson's criticisms about the 'criminal stupidity' of British command were in fact justified. ...*

and so he proceeds – and at the end states in conclusion that:

> *Henry Williamson's account is therefore compelling and dramatic, but not entirely accurate.*

I, however, do not agree that that is so – and will try to show you the reason why I think Lloyd himself is wrong about HW and his account of the Battle. To clarify matters, I need first to give some background about the area and the Battle itself, and also the nub of Lloyd's argument.

The decision and plans for the attack on the German line in the Artois region were being formulated as early as June 1915, but were firmed up in August when Lord Kitchener (Secretary of State for War) ordered the offensive in order to 'do our utmost to help France in their offensive, even though we may suffer heavy losses'. Both Sir John French and General Haig, whose First Army was to carry out the operation, objected (not enough machinery, not enough manpower, not enough good 'staff') – but were overruled. Maréchal (Marshal) Joffre, in charge of the French army, was adamant. HW gives a succinct summary of the background in the opening paragraphs of Part Three of *Fox* 'LOOS' (pp 255-6) including the argumentative problems with the 'Frocks' as members of the British Parliament were known. Volume IV of the *Official History of the Great War*,[3] one of HW's main sources for information here, devotes over 30 pages just to explaining this background, and a further 20 about the gas preparations.

The particular area of the planned attack lay between the La Bassée canal to the north which runs east to west, and a railway line some six miles or so to the south, also running east to west connecting Grenay and Lens. The British and German Front lines, each with a myriad of trenches and connecting communications etc., snaked down more or less parallel to each other north to south from the east of Givenchy in the north to just east of Maroc in the south – with La Bassée in the north and Lens and Loos in the south, all important strategically, in German hands.

What was this area like? Around 1870 the district between Lens and the La Bassée canal, previously poor agricultural land – a thin chalk layer – had been opened up to coal industry. There were several principal pitheads, called FOSSES, within the battle area, plus a large number of auxiliary shafts, known as PUITS. Each was of considerable tactical importance. At the pitheads rose the tall rectangular iron lattice-girders that supported the wheel-houses of the cage-lifts. They towered above their surroundings to a height of about 100 feet and in this comparatively flat district, were invaluable observation posts. Also close to each FOSSE was a large dump – known as a CRASSIER – (sometimes DOUBLE) of waste slag: also of some height and fairly shell-proof, tunnelled out these made good observation posts and machine gun shelters (though apparently some were still uncomfortably hot!). All these industrial sites were of prime importance as military vantage points for various reasons.

The Germans held the advantage with these: FOSSE 8 in the north, above the German stronghold, the Hohenzollern Redoubt, gave total command of the landscape right back to Béthune some six miles away, and thus they could see every movement made by British troops, while at the FOSSE and PUITS on the southern outskirts of Loos, the twin towers known as the Loos Towers – or more usually TOWER BRIDGE – gave command of the land and thus all British troop movement for two to three miles back. (*Official History*, Vol IV, p 146). (The troops had the most wonderful sense of humour for the various names they attached to objects, which not only humanised the situation and made life bearable, but also were a huge aid for instant recognition and direction in times of chaos!)

A sentence particularly underlined by HW in the *Official History* is: The British heavy artillery strove in vain to destroy these watch towers prior to the battle. Ironically, once they were in British hands, the Germans made short work of them.

Apart from the description of the area in the *Official History* – worth reading if you are interested in the details – a very good description of the lie of the land and its characteristics can be found in a book entitled *With the Guns* written by F.O.O. (F-O-O, Forward Observation Officer)[4] who was based at Maroc in the southern part of the area just west of Loos. The importance of F.O.O. to HW will be clarified later – but this is his general observation of the area:

> *From the La Bassée Canal southwards to Souchez is a purely coal-mining district, one of the most important in France, an undulating country devoid of natural features, but abounding in artificial ones, such as chimney-stacks, mine-shafts and dump heaps. The miner's villages, locally termed CORONS, group themselves about the pit-heads, and form two lines of almost continuous brick and mortar, separated by a shallow valley in width from a few hundred yards to a couple of miles or so. In the centre of the valley lies Loos, a village of some two thousand inhabitants, conspicuous for miles around from the huge double shaft, the famous pylons, that rise nearly three hundred feet above the surface of the plain.*
>
> [NB. They were on higher ground at over 150 feet anyway – not themselves 300 feet high!]

I think it also of interest to point out that Hill 69 (the Loos Road Redoubt) and Hill 70 (to the east of Loos) both in German hands, strategically important, and mentioned many times throughout the Battle reports, were on the rising slopes of lowish spurs – not literally 'hills' as their name suggests, but high enough to give advantage to anyone holding them – as was discovered in due course. The area gradually rises upwards from the line of the La Bassée canal in the north where the 25 metre contour runs, to higher ground lying roughly on an east-west axis around Maroc in the south: the whole area lying within the 30–75 metre contours with a total difference of no more than 130 feet height overall.

The other well-known landmark was of course 'Lone Tree'. Descriptions of this include one by Rowland Feilding, at this time a Captain, 3rd Batt. Coldstream Guards, (later Lt-Col., DSO, and a CO) in a letter printed in his book *War Letters to a Wife*,[5] and dated May 30, 1915, from the Support Trench, Le Rutoire (the farm which featured in the battle as British Support HQ, and well-known to Phillip). Feilding wrote (the passage is marked by HW):

> *Out in Noman's Land, close to the German line, grows a tree, which, though small and insignificant considered as such, is the only object in the broad and desolate and otherwise treeless space intervening here between the German trenches and our own. This tree, therefore, has achieved a notoriety which it most certainly would never have done otherwise. It is known as the 'Lone Tree', and, I daresay, is as famous among the Germans as among our troops.*

It is also with some amazement that one finds mention of this tree in the *Official History* in a detail so personal that one can see the scene in the middle of paragraphs about the actual disposition of troops:

> *The 1st Division was disposed with the 2nd and 1st Brigades in the front line and the 3rd in divisional reserve. The 2nd Brigade (Br-General J.H.W. Pollard) on the right, was to assault on a 600 yard frontage between Northern Sap and Lone Tree, the solitary cherry-tree in No Man's Land that had blossomed in May, but was now so mutilated that only a bare trunk, 15-feet high, and broken stumps of branches remained.*[6]

You will recollect that Phillip, in September during the battle itself, smells the bark of this tree, thus realising that it is cherry: an extremely clever and subtle way of informing readers of this fact. HW's note of intention for this can be found in his 'Notes for 1915' (i.e. the Battle of Loos) published in HWSJ 34[7] – which you might like to reread in the light of this investigation.

'Lone Tree' was in fact on the western slope of a spur known as Grenay ridge, about 1½ miles north of Loos, with the German Front line trenches immediately behind it. During the 2004 visit to the battlefields by the HWS, we visited the Le Rutoire farm and gazed out over the fields about just over one mile to the distant point of 'Lone Tree'; a poignant moment. Paul Reed explained that a replacement cherry tree had been planted, a fitting tribute to the many who lost their lives there. The *Official History* sums up the area thus:

> *A more unpromising scene for a great offensive battle can hardly be imagined; and on 25 September 1915 the surface was a barren prairie of rank grass, intersected by trenches whose white chalk parapets defied concealment.*

The Battle was planned to commence at dawn on 25 September 1915 with gun bombardment and the turning on of the gas cylinders at sunrise, 5.50 am, for 40 minutes, with the infantry assault to commence at 6.30 am. All these plans were well-known to the Germans and they had prepared themselves well.

The minutiae of the dispositions of British troops for the Battle of Loos are extremely complex and cannot be encompassed here other than in an overview. Those of you with that kind of interest and expertise will no doubt know them anyway. Responsibility for the section of the Front Line under discussion was the First Army under the command of General Sir Douglas Haig, with I Corps under Lt-Gen. Hugh Gough in the north of the area and IV Corps under Lt-Gen. Sir H. S. Rawlinson in the southern section. The latter includes the area that is the immediate concern of Nick

Lloyd, and the area covered by HW – the attack on 'Lone Tree' – and included from the southern end, 47th Division, 15th Division (mainly Scottish) and 1st Division. 1st Division covered the 'Lone Tree' area and was under the command of Major-General Holland, and consisted of 1st Brigade, which included 1/Camerons & 1/14 London Scottish, 2nd Brigade under Brig.-Gen. Pollard, with various sections of troops. A Reserve 3rd Brigade was formed under Lt-Col. Green of 2/Royal Sussex consisting of components of the 1/14 London Scottish & 1/19 Kings (Liverpool) and was known as Green's Force.

The crux, or nub, of Nick Lloyd's argument rests on the cause of the failure to capture the Lone Tree entrenchment which held up the 2nd Brigade until after 3 pm (Lloyd states 'even after numerous attacks' – but it was actually three), which Lloyd says was due to misinterpretation or covering up of a message received by Green's force. (This will become clearer as the story unfolds!) Lloyd has discovered – 90 years after the event – a message sent by Holland (over-all commander of 1st Division) at 9.10 am on the morning of 25 September 1915 to Lt-Col. Green, which appears with different wording or interpretation in Green's own report. It appears that because HW does not mention this and appears to criticise Maj.-Gen. Holland – 'Staff' – for poor orders and grasp of conditions rather than Lt-Col. Green whom Lloyd considers culpable, Lloyd thus considers *Fox* is inaccurate. But I'm afraid I consider that Lloyd has not grasped how cleverly HW actually dealt with the situation. Let us proceed to unfold the story!

First, we must keep in the forefront of our minds the fact that *Fox* is a novel. One of HW's aims was to record an overview of the total war as it was at the time, NOT with hindsight or benefit of modern 'thinking'. When HW wrote *Fox* the Battle of Loos was already 40 years in the past, but he was meticulous in recreating the actuality of time and place. To gain this overview of the war necessarily meant giving his hero Phillip Maddison, based as is well known on Williamson himself, a far greater role in the war than his own actually was. Within a novel – a fictionalised account – this poses no problem. In a novel the author is allowed some licence. He does not have to stick rigidly to the facts as does an official battle report. However, in a situation such as this, where the actual facts are recorded in great detail and are very well known, the basic facts must be absolutely correct. And, although HW has changed some names, added his own characters, and manipulated the action to suit the purposes of his own story line, all the actual facts of the action as relayed in *Fox* (and in the other war volumes) are correct. That is one of the factors that makes his writing about the war so powerful.

HW himself never claimed to have been present at the Battle of Loos: that, in the past, readers may have assumed that he must have been is a tribute to the strength of his writing. HW did have a huge problem: because he was so closely associated with Phillip by his readers he was terribly afraid that the whole structure of his novel sequence would collapse if people started analysing the difference between his real life situation with his novels – like the pack of cards at the end of *Alice*. He wanted to tell the Truth – i.e. the true story about the war itself – and was terrified of being branded a liar. (There are many instances of his fears to be found in various notes and comments scattered throughout his personal papers and letters.) Today we find it of great interest to sort out these differences and can only admire his ability to maintain the same image of reality whether he was there or not – in fact it intensifies our admiration of his writing.

HW states quite openly in his 'Author's Note' to *Fox* that he used for source material the *Official History of the Great War* edited by Brig.-Gen. Sir James E. Edmonds and Captain G.C. Wynne (Vol. IV, 1915) – and I mentioned several marked passages in my *HW and the First World War* volume,[8] particularly concerning the details of the gas component, used by the British at this Battle for the first time (in retaliation for the German use earlier that year). There are indeed a large number of markings by HW which show exactly what he felt were details necessary for his own grasp and retelling of the Battle.

HW also states here that: '*Each of the characters in this novel had an existence in the 1914-18 war, though not all necessarily acted or played their part in the times and places mentioned in the story.*' (Note that: each character had an existence!) Below that he dedicates *Fox* to:

> '*Captain Douglas Bell, MC, his old school-fellow and comrade-in-arms,*
> *wounded at Lone Tree during the Battle of Loos, 1915.*'

Bell is of course the fictional Capt. Douglas of the novels. Born in 1890 (deduced from the entry in his own book for 11 May , 1916; 'My twenty-sixth birthday'), thus over five years older than HW, Douglas Bell had been a fellow pupil of Colfe's Grammar School, though they would not have known each other at that time. Bell had been in the London Rifle Brigade since 1908 (thus would seem to have joined on leaving Colfe's) and was with HW in 1914-15, a Lance Corporal in 'P' company (HW's own) when they went over to France in the *Chyebassa*.[9] In fact, we learn from Bell's book *A Soldier's Diary of the Great War*[10] that 'P' company was accommodated for the night crossing in 'horse-boxes with corrugated floor, excessively uncomfortable'. By the time of the Battle of Loos Bell was in the Cameron Highlanders (the Cameroons) – and I will expand on that in due course.

In the section in *Fox* which covers the Battle of Loos, Phillip is sent back to the front during the second week of September, which we know because at the end of the previous chapter HW tells us that Phillip goes to see his lady friend Fairy then – and twenty-four hours later is en route for France,[11] where mainly out of fear of front line service, he puts his name down for training as a gas officer. HW introduces into his novel at this point a character who plays a fairly major role within the war novels in total – an infantry captain in the 1st Batt. Gaultshires, Harold West, a pale gaunt man known as 'Spectre'. The Gaultshires are based on the Bedfordshire Regiment in which HW himself served and there has been much interest and discussion and various investigations among Williamson researchers about whom 'Spectre' was based on in real life.[12] My own conclusion, as I have stated in previous writing, has been that he is a composite character that allows for all the main contenders previously put forward, and that it is notable that he mainly only appears in those scenes that HW himself did not take part in real life. It is not insignificant that HW names him 'Spectre' – i.e. a ghost, a non-existent person. But one cannot ignore the entry in HW's diary for 30 April 1918: 'Heard Westy died.' I do not think even HW would record in his diary the death of an imaginary person – certainly not in 1918. (But this 'hiccup' has now been solved – see Mike Maloney's 'Detection' in this issue, pp 30-59.) Interestingly, there is in HW's archive a small book entitled *A Smaller Classical Dictionary*. It may ring a bell with some of you. On the flyleaf HW has inscribed:

> *The book that 'Spectre' West gave Phillip in June 1916, near Albert. In fact it was mine at school in 1912. But to me, now, it belonged to dear Westy. H.W. Williamson, 18 Decr, 1957 – (now writing No 7 Novel).*
> And the book is indeed inscribed originally in HW's schoolboy writing, '*H.W. Williamson, 1912.*'

I think there can no longer be any doubt that 'Westy' did not actually exist however convincingly HW portrayed him as a real person. The fictional Westy is in effect HW's *alter ego*: more senior and experienced than Phillip, he is able to say and do things in the novel that the character of Phillip cannot say and do, thus adding an important extra dimension to HW's structure.

Making Phillip a gas officer at this point was a stroke of genius: it picks up on a major factor of this particular battle (the first British use of gas and its attendant problems) and also allows Phillip freedom of movement so that we get a wider view of events than if he had just been in the trenches. Phillip meets 'Spectre' on 17 September, a few days before the battle itself is due to commence. 'Spectre' tells Phillip that the coming attack has already been put off from its original date of 15 September and that the Germans know this – apart from intercepting Staff messages, they watch the British lines from the vantage points of 'Tower Bridge'and Fosse 8, and are taunting the British with a notice in front of 'Lone Tree'.

The picture we get of 'Spectre' West at this point is not very pleasant. Physically he has a high forehead, is thin, pale, with blue-grey eyes – a bony face showing a skeletal image, and he has dirty nails – a fact which Phillip finds somewhat abhorrently fascinating. He is irascible and domineering (he cuts across Phillip with 'I do the talking here') – a bag of nerves, constantly drinking 'old-man' whiskey and as is revealed by his batman, Boon, 'keeps 'isself goin' with injections of morphine (*Fox*, p 319) due to constant headache from injuries sustained at Neuve Chapelle (March 1915 – Second Battle Ypres). His nervous state is shown by near hysterical outbursts about the idiocy of orders for the forthcoming attack. Thus it is the character of 'Spectre' West (not HW himself in the guise of Phillip) that criticises the British Command. I would consider such criticism to be legitimate within the context of time and place and character here. Phillip is shown to be somewhat bemused by these

outbursts in the beginning – Spectre thinks him a bit of a dolt – but comes to understand the finer technical points of West's argument.

In his *STAND TO!* article Lloyd relates the causes of the failure of the first attack – uncut wire, problems with gas dispersal and chaotic communications, points all well-covered in the *Official History*. In his novel HW also relates these in graphic detail, showing that Spectre, a maverick but with an excellent grasp of battle necessity, knows that the intensive bombardment prior to the battle has not been successful and the German wire defence remains largely uncut. HW also shows the concern of General Sir Douglas Haig, First Army Commander at this point, with extracts taken from the *Official History* and Haig's own published memoirs,[13] about the direction and strength of the wind necessary to disperse the gas onto the enemy lines, and not to blow back into their own trenches. In fact, Haig actually tried to stop the gas offensive at the last minute but was told by Gen. Gough that it was too late to cancel the arrangements.

The attack began on schedule with the dispersal of gas at 5.50am on 25 September 1915. The objective of the fictional Gaultshires (and indeed 2/Beds in real life) was the Loos Road Redoubt, which was on Hill 69. 'Spectre' West's company is held in reserve during the first attack. Once Phillip has carried out his own duties, he is 'free' to observe the ensuing action. One doubts whether this could have pertained in reality – but HW carries off his ploy with panache. I think that Phillip and Spectre would appear to be in position on the British Front Line at the northerly kink or 'bulge' about one mile north of Hill 69 and half a mile due west of Lone Tree. (If anyone disagrees with that please let me know.) Spectre cannot actually see the Loos Road Redoubt from where he is. A runner arrives from the front line with a message for him: relating aloud that men are lying before the (uncut) wire and gas is a problem. There is not enough wind to roll it up the slope to the higher German position, and thus it has been more damaging to the British soldiers than the German. Incidentally the gas was a particular problem to the men in the British trenches at this bulge at the moment of release because it rolled across what was the parallel British line here – which should surely have been foreseen.

Spectre now reports on the field telephone to his CO, Col. Mowbray, who gives him up-to-date progress information. It is this information that causes Spectre to explode into frustrated criticism of the Staff – who have ordered a further frontal attack against the uncut wire at the Lone Tree entrenchment. Note that this is the Second Attack – not the third attack concerning 'Green's Force' which is Lloyd's complaint – and this second attack was certainly a frontal attack, thus Spectre's outburst can be justified; and Lloyd's criticism is wrongly placed. This attack also failed.

Because it did not immediately concern the 'Lone Tree' attack, Lloyd does not mention the role of 2/Beds at the Battle of Loos, where their CO (Lt-Col. Onslow) and his Adjutant and all four company commanders were wounded, plus 250 other ranks, in their attack on the Loos Road Redoubt: a fact used by HW to put the mythical 'Spectre' in charge of his support company, now ordered to make the third attack against the 'Lone Tree' entrenchment, and when Spectre is also wounded, handing his command to Phillip, ordering him to lead an attack round the flank – in breach of the official order for a further frontal attack. Phillip rises to the occasion but sets off in great trepidation: only to find to his complete amazement and gratification that the German troops stand up and surrender.

Enter Captain Douglas: Phillip has already been challenged on the road at night by an officer who turns out to be Douglas, so we know who he is (*Fox*, p 294). Douglas takes over Phillip's prisoners, but is immediately wounded.

Bell was indeed wounded in action as he records in his own book 'with my kilt in ribbons and my backside a bloody mess'. In *Fox* HW uses these very same words to describe the injuries to 'Captain Douglas of the London Highlanders'[14] to whom Phillip has handed over the contingent of German soldiers from the 'Lone Tree' entrenchment who had surrendered to him, including Hauptmann Ritter himself! Now one could have understood if Lloyd had criticised that passage! Apart from the fact that HW is using artistic licence for Phillip's role, he also embellished Bell's role, for he was not involved in that particular attack and actually got his injury a few days later as I will show in due course.

But HW lets us know that the prisoners are then taken over by the Welch and the London Highlanders. We find in the *Official History* (p 394):

The leading of 2/Welch after it had broken through and arrived in rear of the enemy trenches near Lone Tree, which resulted in the surrender of Ritter's Force, and enabled the 2nd Brigade to advance, was an example of initiative only too rare on 25 September.

In fact two groups of Germans surrendered at this point (about 2.30–3 pm): about 160 to 2/Welch (Lt-Col. Prothero) and some 400 Germans of 157 Regiment under Hauptmann Ritter who surrendered to the 1/9 King's and the London Scottish (HW's fictional 'London Highlanders' where he has placed Douglas, so he is actually following the real life scenario very closely. Of course, both the fictional London Highlanders and the real-life Cameron Highlanders (Cameroons) wear kilts – so allowing HW to lift that description!). This third attack freed the area and allowed 2 Brigade (Green's Force) to advance at last across the German Front Line from behind (i.e. the western British side) Lone Tree. So HW leads us back to the true situation without a hitch in his own tempo!

Lloyd's argument that HW's account is inaccurate rests on the content of the message sent by Maj.-Gen. Holland – Staff, CO 1st Division – and received by Lt-Col. Edgar Green, commanding the reserve 'Green's Force'. Despite confusion and conflicting reports, by 9 am Holland actually knew the second attack had failed. He then sent a message at 9.10 am to Green's force, as shown by Lloyd from investigation of records (and apparently previously unknown) to have been worded as: 'support with your two battalions attacking Germans on flank if possible' [i.e. at the Lone Tree entrenchment which Green already knew would be his objective from the actual battle plan]. Lloyd relates (and this is of course also stated in the *Official History*) that 'Unfortunately, owing to the death of three runners, this message did not reach Lt-Col. Green until 10.55 am and it was past midday by the time another attack could be organised.' But the message received by Lt-Col. Green at 10.55 am is recorded in his records as: 'attack with one battalion on either side of Lone Tree'.[15] A message he appears to have interpreted as meaning a frontal attack on the entrenchment running to either side of Lone Tree. The CO of the London Scottish, Major J.H. Lindsay, conducted a recce and found that the 600 yards of the Lone Tree entrenchment was still held by the Germans with uncut wire. Horrified at the idea of a third frontal attack, Lindsay suggested a flanking movement but Green in effect said 'orders were orders'.

In HW's novel *Fox*, after his outburst about the second attack as related above, Spectre takes Phillip with him to report to his CO, Col. Mowbray, who outlines the current battle position (as after the second attack – all correct as according to the official records) and states that the Detached Force (this would be 'Green's Force' in real life) is to make a further attack on the Lone Tree entrenchment and the reserve company of the Gaultshires is to be in support. Spectre offers the alternative of proceeding to the left flank via the Bois Carré (just north of Lone Tree) – thus taking the real life role of Maj. Lindsay. Mowbray says that he realises this would be best but he has to obey orders – thus exactly mirroring Lt-Col. Green's actions.

In his novel HW does not specify any actual name (not even a barely disguised fictional one as was his wont) from whom orders to mount a further – third – frontal attack on Lone Tree emanate: they come from an impersonal 'Staff'. As stated above Lloyd shows that such a message was stated as having been sent by Maj.-Gen. Holland and gives a facsimile illustration[16] and that according to the records of Lt-Col. Green this is not the text he received. Firstly, if three runners were killed there would seem (to me) to be every chance that the message received by Green, not for nearly two hours later, could have undergone a change of wording. It is not clear whether it was the original message – retrieved in turn from three dead men – that was delivered, OR a version of it, even possibly verbal. Here, I feel, could lie the crux of this supposed discrepancy: a possibility not even mentioned by Lloyd.

Secondly, Lloyd rather undermines his own argument with the introduction of 'possible' and 'probable' interpretations of the meaning of 'on either side' and of 'Lone Tree' itself (i.e. the tree itself, or the German entrenchment behind it). One cannot know what either man's interpretation of these terms was, even if it is a distinct possibility that they attached different meanings to these words: if nothing else then the definition of such important points should have been made clear before the battle commenced. One can understand, however, how confusion could have arisen in the appalling chaos of the attack.

Lloyd seems extremely (peculiarly) anxious to exonerate Maj.-Gen. Holland from any blame whatsoever attached to this episode although, as he states, in the *Official History* Sir James Edmonds