

University for the Creative Arts
Research Project Portfolios

A Young Soldier at the Battle of Le Cateau

By John Dargan



Project Details

Name of Researcher:	John Dargan
Name of Output:	<i>A Young Soldier at the Battle of Le Cateau</i>
UCARO link:	https://research.uca.ac.uk/3674/
Output Type:	Q – Digital or visual media; animated film disseminated through exhibitions and screenings
Year and mode of dissemination:	<p>EXHIBITIONS</p> <p><i>Inspiration=Dover</i>, Maison Dieu, High Street, Dover, 20th May 2016</p> <p>Work projected in an installation at the Magazine in the Western Heights on the following dates; 17th - 18th September 2016, 20th - 21st May and 16th - 17th September 2017, 19th - 20th May and 22nd - 23rd September 2018, 18th - 19th May and 7th - 8th September 2019</p> <p><i>Beyond War...Visualising Peace</i>, Beaney Museum, Canterbury, 10th November 2018 to 10th February 2019</p>
Key Words:	Industrial warfare, depersonalisation, reification, alienation, hierarchies, class relations
External Funding:	<i>A Young Soldier at the Battle of Le Cateau</i> was commissioned as part of a larger project by Dover Arts Development. The project had a budget of approximately £50,000 with funding from the Arts Council and Kent County Council, of which Dargan received £2,000.

Synopsis

A Young Soldier at the Battle of Le Cateau is an animated documentary film created by John Dargan. The short film addresses the reification of past events, eliciting forgotten narratives that challenge representations and perceptions of military spaces and activity. The focus of the research was on the Battle of Le Cateau which took place on the Western Front early in World War One, and the narrative centres around the tragic and brutal experience of a junior officer. The film foregrounds the hierarchical relationship of the officers and the calamitous consequences that relationship produced, as 400 men were killed or wounded in two minutes of unrestricted enemy machine gun fire.

Dargan was commissioned by Dover Arts Development as part of a larger initiative to enhance and expand audience participation in museums, historic associations and galleries

in the Dover area. *A Young Soldier at the Battle of Le Cateau* was then exhibited in two historical settings in Dover: the Maison Dieu and the Western Heights. Dissemination began in 2016 and recurred at the Western Heights twice-yearly, in May and September, until 2019. The film was also disseminated via inclusion in the *Beyond War... Visualising Peace* exhibition at the Beaney Museum, Canterbury.

The supporting information supplied includes evidence of the research aims, context and processes which led to new insights. It is illustrated with images of the film's production process, realisation and dissemination, and includes a book version of the story represented in the animation that accompanied its exhibition. The supporting information should be viewed alongside the animated film.



Still from the animation A Young Soldier at the Battle of Le Cateau (2016)



*Image from the publication for
A Young Soldier at the Battle of Le
Cateau (2016)*

Context

This research was part of a commission commemorating the 100th anniversary of World War One, in which artists were selected to respond to different museums and galleries in the Dover area. The title of the project was ‘WW1: Dover Museum and Galleries: Joined Up’, and other participants included musician Peter Sheppard Skaerved, photographer Mattias Koch and artists Colin Priest and Nicole Mollett.

Animation can be seen as uniquely placed to represent something that no longer has a physical presence. *A Young Soldier at the Battle of Le Cateau* is an animated documentary made in response to the ‘absence of filmed material’ (Honesty Roe, 2013) that would indexically link the subject to the event. It combines ‘non-mimetic substitution’ and ‘evocation’ (ibid) to link different narratives; the context of the battle and the war, and the individual soldier’s experience. This soldier’s testimony ‘brings hidden truths to light’ (ibid) in an attempt to re-position this event. Animation is a way of showing the internal world of an individual, interpreting the thoughts and feelings of the soldier.

Dargan’s animation utilises newsreels, photographs and reconstructed film footage sourced from Pathé, the Imperial War Museum, regimental archives, other historic material and online resources. He combined these to visually express the narrative, the main source of which was a book by Phil Eyden, of the Western Heights Preservation Society. The film links these fragments of the past by incorporating historical information, drawing, mapping, sketching, photography and subjective first-hand testimony, exposing the fact that its information is a reconstruction, something not final. It does not arrive at closure, and instead suggests that memory

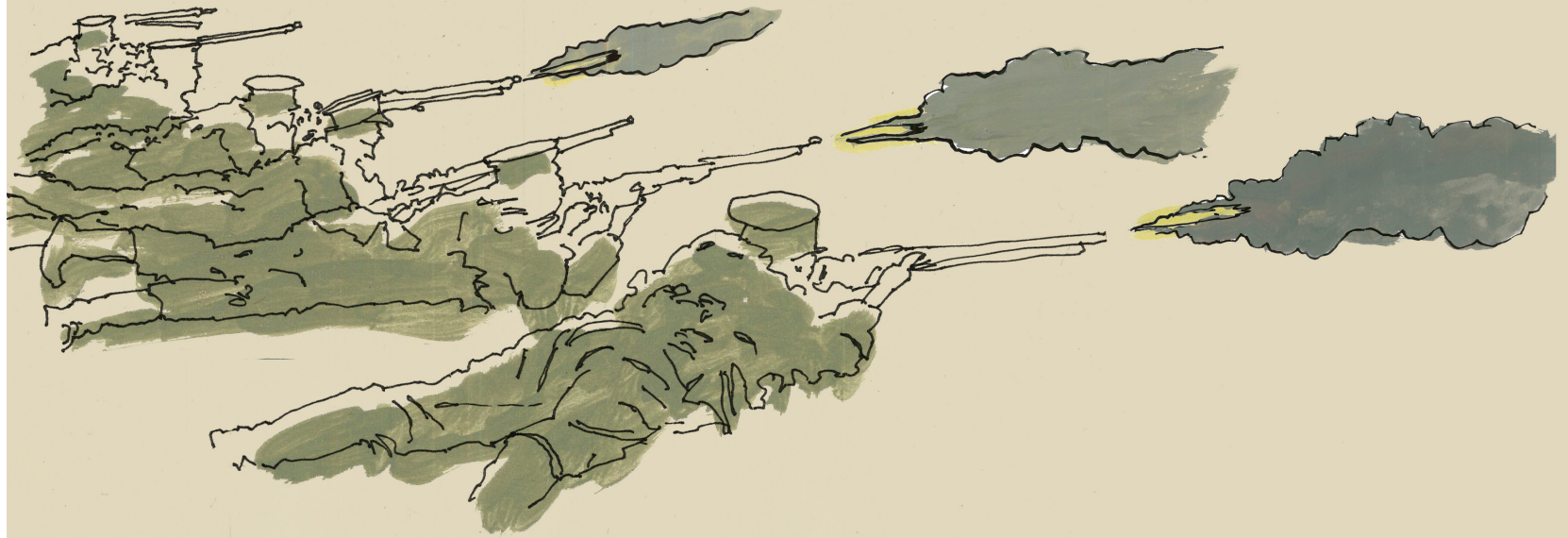
combines factual and subjective viewpoints to allow a viewer room for interpretation as their imagination fills in the areas between fragments. Not everything narrated is visualised.

This approach is situated alongside that of other animators such as Scot Coello, who in the *Life Inside Islamic State* series for the BBC (2017) maintains a unified digital style, with narration over a series of animated static scenes. Coello’s narrative visualises first-hand testimony, from inside that space, conveying the reality of the situation. Suzie Hanna’s 2016 animated documentary, *Known Unto God*, responds to a poem about an unknown soldier using morphs and fluid media on glass in an attempt to evoke the weather and the muddy terrain as well as the peril and the complex emotions engendered by the words. Winston McCay’s film *The Sinking of the Lusitania* (1918), attempted to recreate the German Navy’s torpedoing of a passenger liner, as told by the survivors, a very early example of using animation as a substitute for live action.

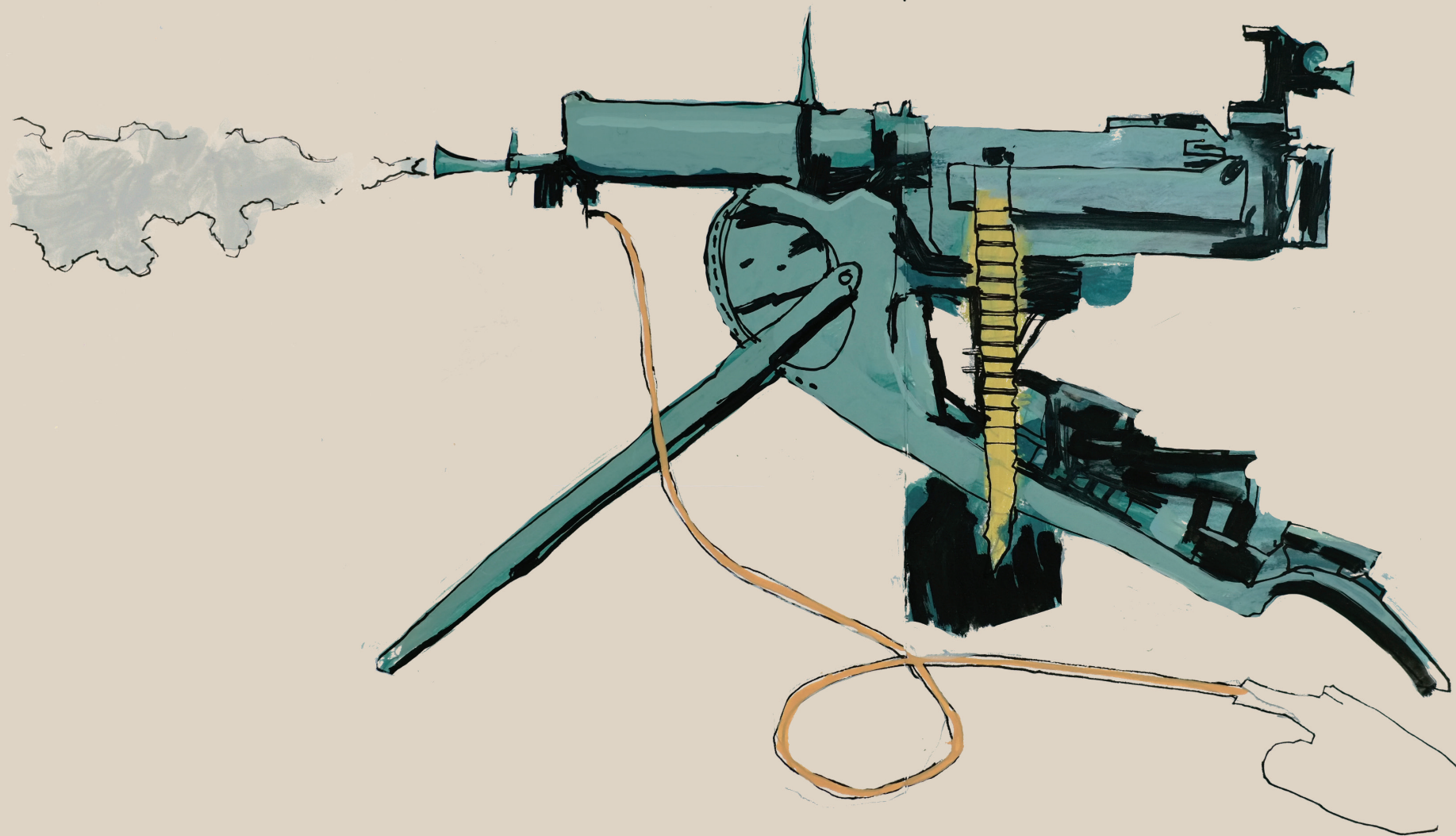
Animation as a medium can take a viewer to a time and space originally limited to a few people. With this film, Dargan builds upon the context of the animated documentary while creating his own approach: to recover the facts of the event without diminishing the fragmentary nature of that event, piecing it together as a kind of retrospective projection onto that time and space.

REFERENCES

Roe, Honesty (2013) *Animated Documentary*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.



*Still from the animation A Young
Soldier at the Battle of Le Cateau
(2016)*



*Still from the animation A Young
Soldier at the Battle of Le Cateau
(2016)*



*Still from the animation A Young
Soldier at the Battle of Le Cateau
(2016)*

Research Questions and Aims

Research questions:

How to provide new insights into a well-known event?

How to reflect on the operations of hierarchy or class in the military?

How to tell the story of a small critical moment, that has consequences in a larger narrative (WW1), using stylistic devices to convey different moments and different emotional states?

Research aims:

To convey the injustice of a hierarchical interaction in a military context, and its consequences, in the early stages of the industrialised warfare of World War One

To use the unique potential of animation to explore past events and overcome the challenge of sparse archival material

Research Methods and Process

The commission was for a site that had no relevant archival material apart from an historical account of the site in World War One. The scarcity of records and absence of visual material led Dargan to an account in a book by Phil Eyden of the Western Heights Preservation Society. This had contemporary resonance in terms of hierarchies and class, and included an eyewitness story of the Battle of Le Cateau. With this focus identified, Dargan decided that animated documentary was the best approach to answer the research questions; it could exist online, so be easily accessed, it would exist for a long time and not need any special archiving arrangements and 'has the capacity to represent temporally, geographically and psychologically distal aspects of life beyond the reach of live action' (Roe, 2013).

Initial research focused on the regiments that used the Western Heights, many of which came under the command of Major-General Ivor Maxse. Dargan then undertook research in the Imperial War Museum and other museums, and gained permission to use footage created at the time, available in the Pathé archive, as well as regimental records relating to the battle, physical and online photographic archives and other video material found online.

This process helped orchestrate the 'distal' elements by piecing them together through the research process to form a narrative according to Dargan's creative aims. These aims were to highlight the casual, almost cruel, indifference and

arrogance of an officer to a subordinate and to highlight the deference inherent in relations of class. Factual historical information was added to a script, written by Dargan, to contextualise the young soldier's account. Experimentation in drawing and painting from the research developed into the methodology of differing stylistic renderings of parts of the narrative. The advantage animated documentary has is the way it can link factual historical information, subjective moments and poetic realisations, employing metaphors in style as key elements of the narrative.

The use of expressive drawing techniques, still images, mapping, rotoscoping and painting digitally over live footage presents the story in an immediate way, allowing connections between the clips. This fragmentary approach could manage an account of a well-known subject, resist the obvious, and counter the homogeneity of other accounts to create a film recognising the authenticity of a deadly situation in moments that are prosaic.

This methodology also allowed for an interplay between word and image. The intimacy of drawing has a certain emotional tone, more immediate, more poetic. The depiction of graphic violence is resisted, but violence is implied through metaphor; via crude sketching with charcoal, with stalks of wheat snapping under gunfire, or mapping, where depiction of space veers between landscape, map and information graphics.

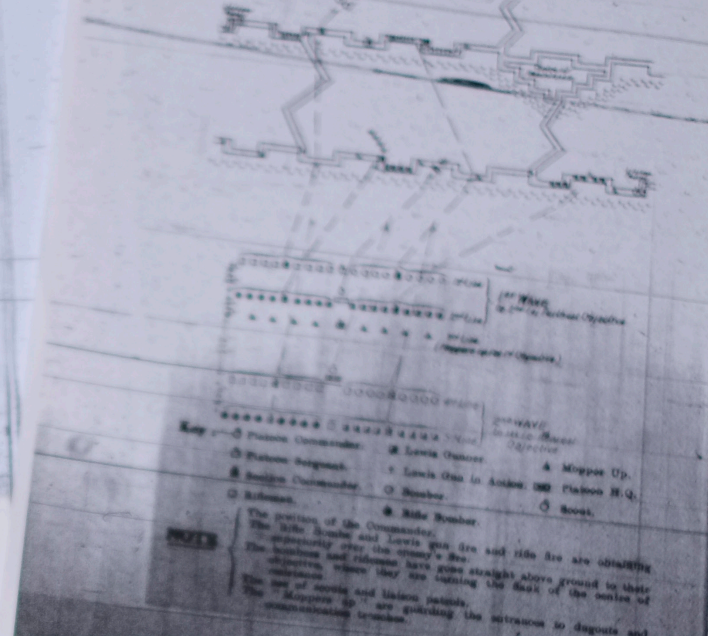
TRAINING LEAFLET, No. 2.

I.G. TRAINING.

PROGRAMME OF TRAINING FOR A BATTALION OUT OF THE LINE FOR TEN DAYS.

Time	Matter	Remarks
1st Day.	(c) This day is spent in overhauling all the equipment and checking arms. Batts are allotted by company. Clothing is cleaned and repaired. Trench-spades and shovels are taken out with soap and water. Barrow, fuel, etc. are sold off so that companies are left with their own equipment for the programme. All arrangements for the programme have been made before the battalion leaves the line. Orders, R.F.O.s and maps left out of the line have started in these preparations and is organizing everything so that the men are straight away. The leading quartermaster has arranged for digging material to be replaced with-out and (unserviceable articles). Everything has been inspected and the fact is confirmed, to ensure that no time is wasted and that the day's programme is worked out and communicated to company commanders before they leave the line. Organization of platoons and sections is checked. Section commanders' rolls examined and fresh ones made out where necessary. Understudy detailed. All arrangements were explained by the C.O. at a conference of company commanders in the trenches.	There is time in the organization and preparation for this that the time is generally available. The things in view of it to start with are not enough, then and only in their own hands leading. The men will probably be found at the same time. Section, who have who have been out of the line should have everything set and held for them. They can then get on with their work and train in. The men should be well as soon as they have changed. Sometimes they can go out, but not in line. Platoon commanders should go round during the day and see that the work is done. The quartermaster goes into questions of interior economy etc. with C.S.M. and C.I.M. in the platoons. Company commanders are going round their platoons after-wards to see how they are getting on.

APPENDIX VIII
TRENCH TO TRENCH ATTACK
PLATOON IN 1st WAVE
MEETING & POINT OF RESISTANCE



Formation for a Company when the Objective Attacked is not deep or against an Outpost Zone.

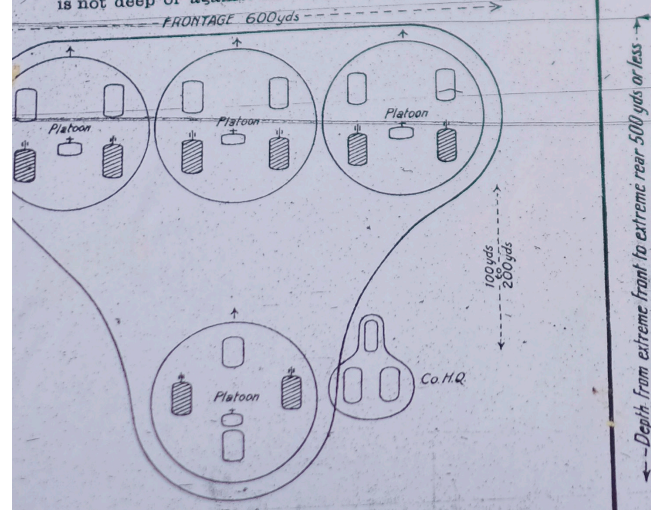
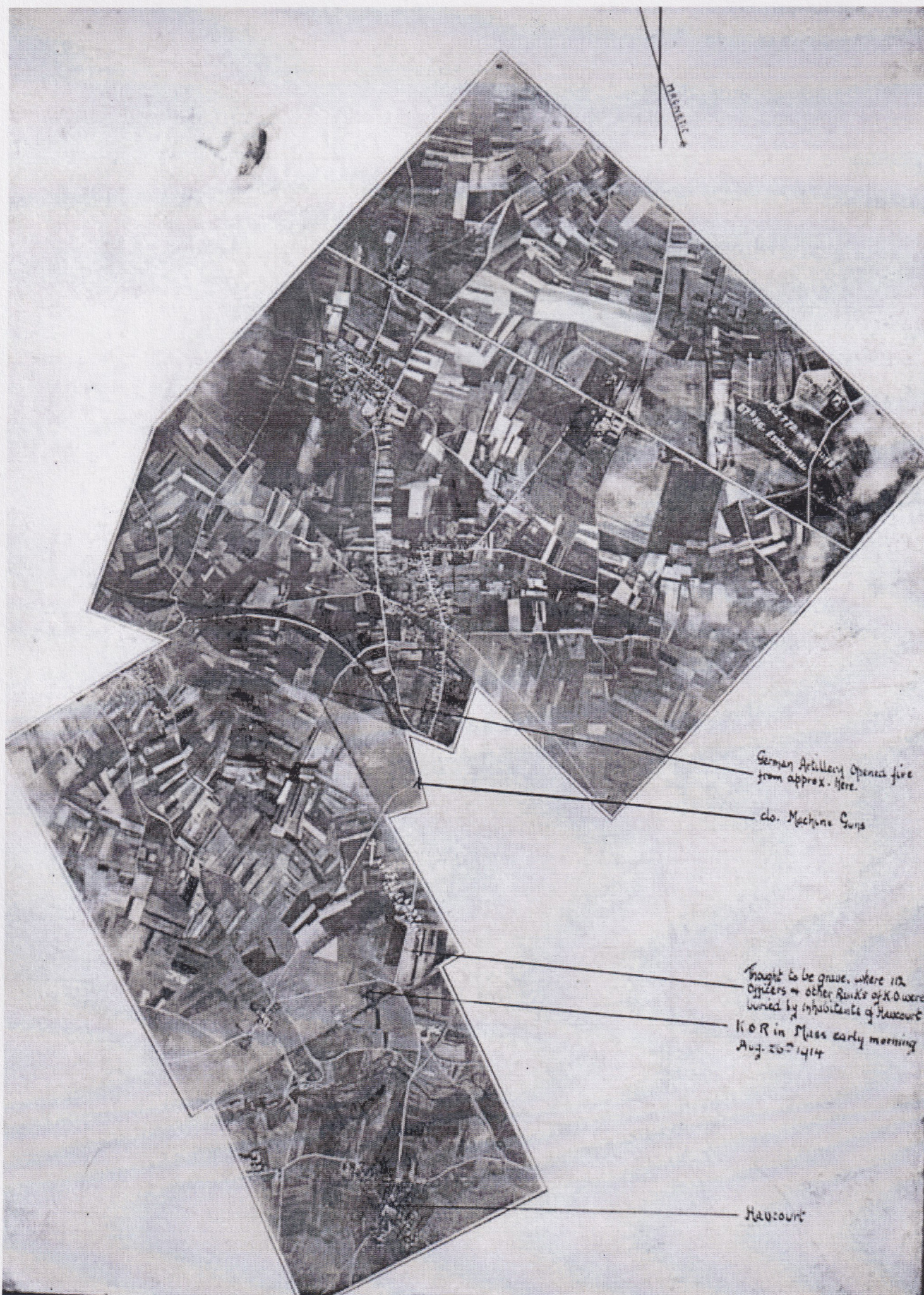


Fig. 4. Formation Fig. 4 is suitable for the leading companies in that part of the field where the objective is not far distant or where outposts only are likely to be encountered. The frontage may not be strong enough in depth, to drive home the attack on the whole position but the reserve platoon can support the attack of any one of the leading platoons which may be necessary. The gap made in the enemy line can be exploited by supporting platoons. The leading platoons must advance straight on their original objective. The formation in which the Lewis gun sections might advantageously change their position is the SQUARE or DIAMOND in which each platoon is formed should not be of the dimension shown in Figs. 1 and 2. The intervals between platoons are only approximate and intervals that you expect to work on in a fight. Each platoon is directed on its right or left flank. It becomes annoyed on your right or left flank. Do not stop till you meet organized resistance in front of your objective, and do not stop till you meet organized resistance in front of your objective. It would be easy to manoeuvre your reserve platoon. Your commander's pony should be ready.

INTENSIVE DIGGING.

- OBJECT: To keep each spade working CONTINUOUSLY day and night on great occasions, or to get definite tasks accomplished again time on minor occasions. In both cases THE TOOL is in use without a break until the job is completed and the men are below ground when shelled.
- METHOD: Direct the intensive labour of many men on to each trench by a system of relays. Thus, allot three men to each spade and keep that spade working without any pause. A pick to be added to two spades for hard ground, but no additional man is allotted to the pick.
- DRILL: An average man can work intensively for TWO MINUTES that is, if he really puts his whole heart, head and muscles into his digging and sweats like a pig. He should then REST FOR TWO MINUTES; dig again for two minutes, and so on for two hours. The essential point is that the relief of one man by another must be effected with lightning rapidity. After two hours put three other men to the same spade for two hours. The original three can then start on another hours task, and so on till completion. Encourage platoons to compete with one another against time.
- TASK: In average soil three average men should, on this system, complete in one hour a trench SIX FEET DEEP (below level) and sufficiently roomy to contain three men fully armed and equipped. It can be enlarged subsequently. Several trenches can then be joined into one continuous trench. The hardest soils require 1 1/3 hours. The trace of the trench is left to the ingenuity of the Platoon Commanders.
- TEACH: The only way to TEACH the above is for BATTALION COMMANDERS to arrange a demonstration and order all Company PLATOONS by the Platoon Commander, under the supervision of the Company Commanders.
- PRACTICE: The demonstration only requires three men, one shovel and a little common sense. Its success depends on the man with the spade digging with such intensity that on his brow is apparent to his two resting pals. They are people who COMPEL HIM (morally) to work himself out during the turn of two minutes. By PRACTICE, and by no other method, men soon get to know when the two minutes are up, without the need of a watch. At first they should be timed with a watch. Under the gibes of his pals the digger is a man of unmounted exertion.
- CASUALTIES: A Division becomes competent at intensive digging if EVERY MAN in it has been compelled to do several digging tasks himself. Lectures and demonstrations alone will not do.

Initial research;
Major-General Ivor Maxse's
training methods,
Imperial War Museum



Aerial images of the battlefield;
online resource



*Initial drawn ideas;
testing visual narrative strategies*

Research Contribution and Recognition

Research insights and contribution:

Dargan took a direct approach to the research material (including representations of artefacts, weapons, the space, the uniforms, the individual people), which was rendered in a variety of ways. This experimental approach led to a kind of flexible storyboard and the realisation that the narrative would work as a stylistically disparate animated documentary. An animated documentary would convey the fragmented nature of the event and could recover something about the authentic experience of something ultimately unknowable.

Focussing in on a detail of an event within this battle leaves room for the viewer's imagination and offers new insights into a familiar subject. This foregrounds the imaginative process of how a viewer can interact with the material.

Dissemination:

In addition to exhibition at *Inspiration=Dover* and the initial installation of the film at the Magazine in the Western Heights in 2016, *A Young Soldier at the Battle of Le Cateau* was presented to the public at the Annual General Meeting of the Western Heights Preservation Society at the Dover Discovery Centre in January 2017. This was attended by over 150 people including members and supporters of the society, donors and members of the general public interested in the Society. Dargan was invited to talk and show his films as part of a programme of entertainment and awareness-raising of the diversity of the activities the Society was developing at the Western Heights. He was then invited to show *A Young Soldier at the Battle of Le Cateau* twice each year at the Western Heights between 2017 and 2019.

The work was then shown at *Beyond War...Visualising Peace*. This 2018 exhibition at the Beaney Museum, Canterbury was on the subject of memorials to war. The film was screened throughout the duration of the exhibition.

Research Contribution and Recognition

Follow-on activities:

A Young Soldier at the Battle of Le Cateau led to Dargan receiving another commission in 2017, also related to World War One, at the Fleur De Lis Museum, Faversham. This culminated in an installation in the museum front window throughout August 2017 as a response to the museum's archive holdings related to World War One. The material available was limited and the response focussed on a photographic archive of a High Explosions factory on the North Kent Coast.

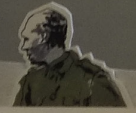
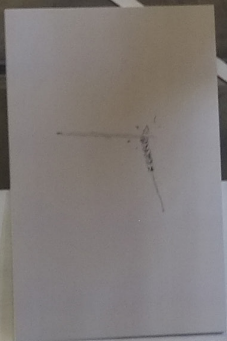
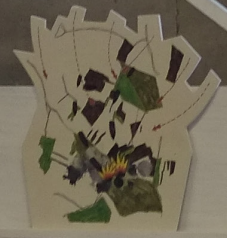
Ideas about new audience engagement led to a development of the ideas from the Battle of Le Cateau and the animated documentary *Cotton Powder Company* was made and projected onto the window of the museum (<https://research.uca.ac.uk/3678/>). This was played throughout the day and early evening.

N HEIGHTS PRESERVATION SOCIETY

A young Soldier at the Battle of Le Cateau



DCLX SIR THE BEACH

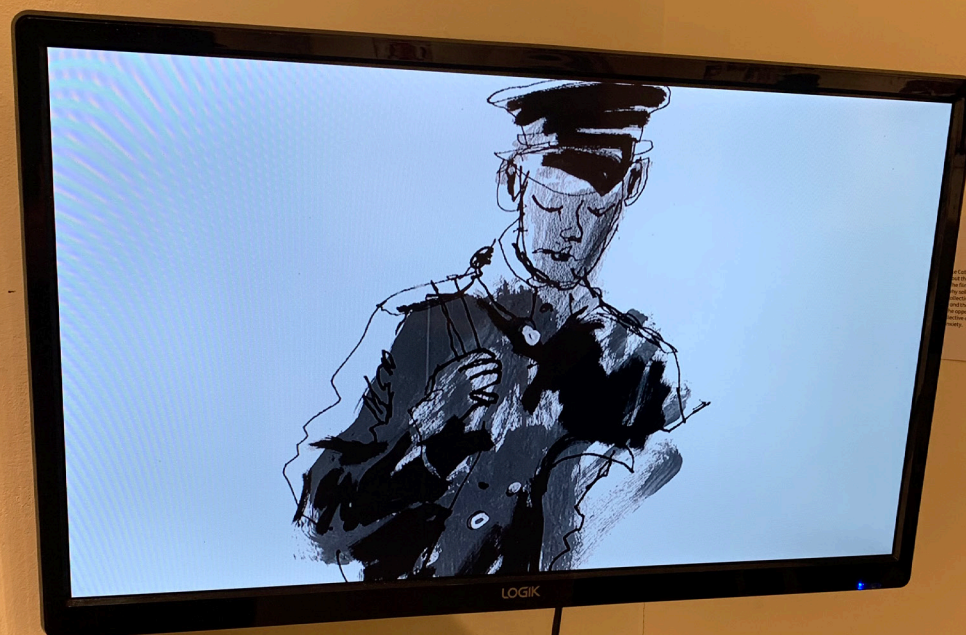


Publicity Stand at Maison Dieu,
Dover, 2016



*Image from publication (2016);
German forces attacking British
positions*

*Installation shot at Beyond War:
Visualising Peace at the Beane
Museum, Canterbury, 2019*





University for the Creative Arts
Research Portfolios

© Copyright All Authors

Graphic Design:

Studio Mothership

COVER IMAGES

*Stills from the animation A
Young Soldier at the Battle of Le
Cateau*

