



6th International Conference on Military Geology and Geography, University of Nottingham, 19th-22nd June 2005

A Report by Dr John Peaty

The 6th International Conference on Military Geology and Geography was held at the University of Nottingham from Sunday 19th to Wednesday 22nd June 2005.

It was so hot that even those who had travelled from Nevada and Georgia were complaining of the heat - or more precisely the lack of air conditioning - in Britain's newly acquired Mediterranean climate! It was unfortunate that, because of inadequate publicity, comparatively few from these islands attended.

The Conference was superbly organised by Doctors Abraham, Nathanail, Bradshaw and Gear of the School of Geography and held at the University's lovely parkland campus. The delegates listened to 33 excellent papers, of which 21 were on historical subjects. There were two superb field trips. There was also a post-Conference battlefield tour of Normandy, which I did not attend.

For me the highlights were: Terrain and Tactics at Waterloo by Bob Abraham and Roy Bradshaw; The Civil War Sieges of Newark by Bob Abraham and Roy Bradshaw; Geographic Intelligence at Gallipoli by Peter Doyle; Terrain and the Korean War by Judy Ehlen; Casualties, Geology and Terrain in the American Civil War by Judy Ehlen and Robert Whisonant; Sichelschnitt by Francis Galgano; Crimean Photography by Hugh Hamilton; Peiper in the Ardennes by Stephan Harrison and John Thompson; Geology and the Battle of Brooklyn by Stephen Henderson; Geography and the First World War by Mike Heffernan; Hannibal's Debacle in the Alps by Bill Mahaney; Hannibal's Crossing of the Alps by Bill Mahaney; Fault Explosion and Crater by Paul Nathanail; Geography and the Battle of the Bulge by David Passmore and Stephan Harrison; History of Military Geology by Ted Rose; German Fortification of the Channel Islands by Ted Rose; Geology and Overlord by Ted Rose; Allied Tactics in Normandy by Kurt Schroeder; Military Uses of Nottingham's Caves by Russell Harmon; Geology and Chancellorsville by Bob Whisonant; Military Geology and Geography of Nottinghamshire by Paul Nathanail; Bosworth Field by Bob Abraham and Roy Bradshaw.

I learned or relearned a very great deal from the Conference. I would single out the following:

Bob Whisonant told us how by exploiting the terrain an inferior Army under Lee and Jackson almost surrounded and annihilated a superior Army under Hooker at Chancellorsville. Kurt Schroeder told us how similar yet at the same time how different US and British tactics were in Normandy, be it an amphibious landing, a *bocage* clearance or a river crossing. Ted Rose told us of the effort the Germans put into constructing fortifications in the Channel Islands, many of which survive. He told us of the recent discovery in Germany and in the US (National Archives and Records Admin) of geological maps produced by the German geological unit on the Islands and showed us examples. A comparison between these maps and the pre-war published British geological maps demonstrates the characteristic thoroughness with which the Germans went about their work. Peter Doyle told us that, contrary to common belief, there was a considerable quantity of good quality intelligence



available to the commanders prior to the Gallipoli landings. He told us that the 1908 1" map was enlarged to 1:40,000 and was perfectly adequate for planning purposes. He also told us of the captured Turkish maps enlarged to 1:20,000 and then used by the Allies. Ted Rose told us of the geological contribution to the success of Overlord as evidence by the recently catalogued papers of Major Fred Shotton (Univ of Birmingham) as well as the papers of 21st Army Group (British Library). Among the former are 1:5,000 beach maps showing obstacles and goings produced for D-Day by Shotton. Among the latter are 1:5,000 topographic maps of the beaches and a 1:1,000,000 airfield location map. Judy Ehlen told us of the correlation between terrain and casualties in the American Civil War, showing that the bloodiest battles were fought over open ground. Frank Galgano told us that, far from being impassable, the Ardennes favoured the Germans in 1940 in that they contained open country and good roads. Bill Mahaney told us that, unaccountably, Hannibal allowed himself to be ambushed with severe loss in an Alpine valley by the Gauls. Stephen Henderson told us that parts of a 1776 battlefield are still to be seen in the middle of New York City. Ted Rose told us of the history of military geology and showed us several geological maps, including a 6" map of Co. Londonderry made by the RE in 1828 (National Archives of Ireland), a 1:10,000 map of Wytschaete made by the OS in May 1918 and a 1:50,000 water-supply map of Kent made by the Germans in 1940 (NARA).

On Monday afternoon there was a field trip to Newark Castle and the earthworks that survive from the three sieges of the city during the Civil War. Slighted by Cromwell after the war, the still impressive remains of the castle (where King John died) continue to guard the bridge which carries the Great North Road over the River Trent. Some of the Civil War earthworks survive in a remarkable state of preservation (minus palisades of course), especially the Queen's "Sconce" (a star-shaped fort measuring 300 feet across) to the south of the city [*due to an outbreak of disease amongst the labourers contracted to demolish them – editor*]. The Parliamentary siege plan of Newark in 1645 by Richard Clampe, engraving, 20" by 17", survives in the British Museum.

On Tuesday afternoon there was a field trip to Bosworth Field and to Fauld. The precise location of Bosworth Field is disputed but one thing all are agreed upon (even the excellent Battlefield Ranger who took us round) is that it is not where the Visitor Centre says it is. Bob Abraham and Roy Bradshaw say it is to the south east. They point out that the first edition OS 1" map in 1835 showed Ambion Hill to the south east of where modern maps place it. Was the 1835 placement the result of local memory or cartographic error? Until bodies and, more importantly, arrow heads (which are a precise marker) have been found, we will never know for certain. After Bosworth we went onto Fauld to see what remains of the former RAF bomb dump after the catastrophic explosion of November 1944. Although largely overgrown, the 300 feet deep crater remains an awe-inspiring sight. We had dinner in the "Cock Inn", which had half its roof blown off by the explosion.

I took advantage of the free afternoon on Wednesday to visit Nottingham "Castle" (Cromwell again!), which contains the Regimental Museum of the Sherwood Foresters. The Museum contains relics of Great War flying ace Albert Ball VC, who is commemorated by a statue in the gardens outside.

My visit to Nottingham ended with a well-deserved drink in "Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem". Located in one of Nottingham's famous sandstone caves in the shadow of the Castle, it is



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allegedly the oldest pub in the world. I am pleased to report that Nottingham is a lovely city and belies its long-established reputation for criminality: I did not meet one person carrying a longbow or AK47!

I much look forward to the 7th International Conference in Quebec in 2007.