

Key excerpts from the Stamford Mercury Nov – Dec 1914

Research by P. Massey

1914.13.Nov: p4

ANOTHER STAMFORDIAN WOUNDED

Pte E Rawden, a reservist in the 1st N'hant Rgt, whose home is at 16, Gas St, had received a bullet wound in the left shoulder in a recent engagement, and now lies in a Dublin hospital. He is well known in local football circles, being a playing member of St John's club.

STAMFORDIAN WOUNDED BY A DUM-DUM BULLET

Some of the soldiers whose parents live in Stamford and neighbourhood have had startling experiences in the course of their fighting in France and Belgium. One of them – Pte McCartney of the N'hants Rgt, who is now in hospital in Aberdeen, writing to his brother Tom McCartney, of the Stamford Company Lincolnshire Rgt, says he received a nasty wound from a short range, and the doctor told him it was a dum-dum bullet he was hit with; an ordinary bullet could not have made such a wound as that inflicted on the back of his hand. The patient has been under X-rays showing the finger next the little one has the bone nearly blown out and the back of the hand was simply smashed up.

He adds: *The doctor says it will be a fortnight before he will think of touching it. He bathes it twice a day to get to the proud flesh. It is very painful, and makes you sick to see it. The doctor says he does not think it will be necessary for me to have my finger off, but there will be a stiff one. As for how long I shall be here he cannot tell, but at the least it will take two months.....On the 23 Sept, while we were holding the trenches at a place called Landesmark in Belgium, and getting ready for tea – that is, of course, a biscuit and a drink of water about 5 at night – we heard of the approach of a German army corps, about 40,000. Well, they came on, and I can tell you we had a lively time of it. We killed a terrible lot before they got anywhere near us, but they kept coming up until at last they were on the top of our trenches, but we got re-enforced by 2 other Rgts and drove them back. I cannot tell you any more, as just then a shot came from over my right, so I stopped it in the left hand, and down I went for about 10 minutes, and then I carried my hand for about half a mile to the field hospital. There I got bound up and was sent down the line to a place called Poperhanger to a hospital and then home. ...The wound is very painful while they dress it. I went off twice, and they had to give me some brandy to bring me round.*

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STAMFORDIAN WOUNDED AT YPRES

FORGOT HE WAS ON THE RESERVE

Another name to be added to the list of Stamford men who have received injuries while on active service with the Expeditionary Forces in France is that of L/Cpl John Morley of 12 Queen's Walk, West-end. He was wounded in an engagement with the Prussian Guards at Ypres, and now lies in a private hospital generously provided by Lady Gladstone, at Neston, Wilts.

In a letter to his wife, received on Sunday morning, the unfortunate man said he was getting on as well as could be expected, and he hoped to be home as soon as he could get about again. The communication goes on to state that for 14 days and nights he was in the

trenches, and the appalling sights that met his eyes will never be wiped from his memory. L/Cpl Morley was a member of the old Volunteer Battalion, and after serving through the Boer War and returning to England, he signed on the reserve. This latter fact had quite slipped his memory, and after some years of married life, at the outbreak of the present war he received notice of mobilisation. So little did he think of the signing of the reserve papers that he had forgotten to tell his wife that he was liable to be called up for active service, and the mobilisation order came to them as a great surprise.

PROMOTION FOR A STAMFORDIAN

Pte Charles McCartney of the 2nd Batt N'hants Rgt, son of Mrs McCartney, Stokoe's Buildings, Gas St, has been promoted L/Cpl. He is now serving with his regiment at the war. His brother, who belongs to the 2nd N'hants Rgt, and is now in the military hospital at Aberdeen suffering from a wound in the hand received while fighting with the Allies, is progressing as well as can be expected.

THE CALL TO THE COLOURS

Mr F. J. Lenton ARIBA, youngest son of Mr+Mrs HS Lenton of Rock Terrace, and a partner in the firm of Messrs Traylen + Son, has enlisted in the Royal Engineers, and left the town on Tuesday to join his regiment.

1914. 11. Dec: p3

LETTERS FROM THE FRONT

STAMFORD MAN IN THE TRENCHES

LIKE A RABBIT IN ITS HOLE

Pte W Oldham, who is with the British Expeditionary Force in France, in a letter to his mother, who resides at 8, Bath Row, Stamford, says:

"I am quite well and safe, so there is no need to be anxious. We have had our baptism of fire, as we have had two days in the trenches, relieving some other regiment.the only danger was when the Germans turned their machine guns on us for about fifteen minutes on Thursday. The first night it was damp and cold, but I managed to sleep alright. The next day we had some snow, so that night was miserable and cold. We cooked tea and Oxo for ourselves, and fed alright. At present we are in a very comfortable billet, which has been vacated by refugees, so we have made ourselves very comfortable. We have to do that wherever we are, so cannot grumble at anything. We hear that we are going to the trenches for a fortnight, perhaps tomorrow, so I do not know when I shall write again....I heard about Lord Roberts' death; he reviewed us a week last Thursday, when we came into this district. We see plenty of the doings of the Germans in the various places we go through, and it makes our feeling much worse against them. I forgot about Mayor's Sunday at home – so you missed the soldiers this year. If ever i get back after this I ought to make a good help in the house, as I am getting used to cooking and doing things about the house in the various billets we get into....We can hardly realise it is so near Christmas....If you are sending anything out, send some chocolate and cocoa, as we cannot get these little luxuries where we are; the enemy has been before us."

In a later letter, dated Nov 29, Pte Oldham says:

"I am writing this in a dug-out, or hole made at the back of the trenches. There is just enough room for one to sleep in. We have been in the trenches since last Tuesday night. From then until Thursday night I slept in a hole like a rabbit, and had to curl myself up to get in. The hole has been condemned, so had to dig one out and roof it properly so that it could not fall in, as we have had two casualties through the earth falling in. We are under fire, both rifle and artillery. The German snipers have been having a go at us all day, but now our guns

have sent a little reward of shrapnel over them, and they will be quiet for a time. ... If you saw me at the present time, you would tell me to have a bath and general clean up. I am covered with mud from head to foot, and look a pretty picture. There are arrangements made to enable a few of us to get baths. I am going to have one tomorrow. That will be the first I have had since leaving England, but we are quite happy in all our dirt. We have had some rain, which has made the trenches in an awful state.... we get a mail about every day in the trenches....I should very much like a bit of your fire at nights, as we have to keep warm the best we can."

Pte Oldham commenced his education at the Stamford Endowed School (Bluecoat), and after spending three years at the Grammar School took up an appointment at Messrs Shoolbreds, London. He is a member of the Queen's Westminster (Territorials) Regiment.

THE REAL BRITISH SPIRIT.

Stamford Gunner's views on conscription

Gunner W. Haggar, 32nd Brigade RFA, writing from France, where he is serving with the Expeditionary Force, to his parents, Mr and Mrs H Haggar, 62, North St, Stamford, says:

"Your second letter to hand....I am in the best of health. You mention the Indian troops. Yes, they are splendid. I have seen them in action in India, and knew they would play havoc as soon as they were let loose. They do not fear death – especially the Gurkhas. They carry three knives in their ?; and they never reckon to lose their knives; they make sure of their mark in close quarters. They can cut a man's head clean off with one throw of a knife, and they never reckon to lose their knives; they nearly always recover them. The Sikhs are there also. They are fine soldiers and ? ..a fine.. ? I used to know a good many of them, but of course it is so long ago. The Allemandes (Germans) are having a d---d hot time of it – beaten in every quarter. They are well on the down track. Who would ever have thought they were such dirty, cowardly dogs? No name is too bad for them. We have actual proof of their brutality. It is just a matter of time with them now; they cannot go on losing as they are – 25,000 dead around Dixmude alone. All the troops are in good condition....you can send me a wooden pipe and a little dark navy cut."

In a later letter, Gunner Haggar acknowledges the pipe and tobacco sent by his parents, and says his mates had a pipeful each and enjoyed it. *"We are having a lot of rain. I am in the best of health and the troops are looking well and fit...Wine is very cheap, and so is rum, but it is not so good as in England. I think conscription will come in England, and right that it should. There are plenty of young chaps loafing about that ought to be made to serve. It is the duty of everyone that is able to take his part in this great struggle for right and freedom. I do not mind in the least losing my life, because I know that we are guarding our homes and the existence of the Empire. I am very accurate while gun-laying. I have met a lot of men I knew years ago – Lincolns, Northamptons, Engineers etc. We got treated very well by the French, and the Belgians make a great fuss of us. The little children walk with us holding our hands – one on each side at times – and they like a ride on your shoulder. They will ever think of the British Tommy. I have seen poor children along the road have hundreds of coppers given to them, also food. We give all food away that we can spare. Everything is going on well. I see the Emden? has gone under, so that leaves the five ships in the Pacific to be finished off. The sooner the better!"*

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WAR ITEMS.

COMMISSIONS.

Mr R. G. Evans has obtained a commission in the 16th City of London (Queen Westminster) Regt, and was to leave to take up his Captaincy on Friday.

Mr F. H. Brandreth, who for about three years has occupied the position of resident manager of the local branch of the Urban Electricity Supply Company, has left the town to take up military duties, he having succeeded in obtaining his commission as 2nd Lieutenant in the 7th Essex Regt., in which his brother holds the rank of Captain.

A SAILOR'S PLEASANT SURPRISE.

Plum Pudding from Stamford.

In a letter to his parents, who reside at 11, Tinwell road, Mr B. C. Watson, who is on HMS Hydra, says :-

. . . it is an honour to have a photo exhibited in Mr. Hare's window; it is very good of him to do it. . . . Am more than glad to hear the news of the destruction of the Good Hope's destroyers... . I think it has been very quick vengeance for sinking our two ships The officer commanding the squadron (Admiral Sturdee) was Admiral on the Good Hope during the time I was thereI should have been there to have had a shot, but we are required more on this side of the Atlantic. Had a pleasant surprise the other day in the shape of a plum pudding, It came from Stamford but do not know who sent it: there was nothing inside- to give me an idea." Mr. Watson spent two years on the ill fated Good Hope.

SOLDIER'S SEVEN MILE WALK FOR A BATH.

Writing home from France where he is on active service, Pte W Oldham of Stamford. says:

"We are now out of the trenches for a rest for a few days. We came out last night, but not till it had rained and made everywhere in a shocking state. The mud was coming off our things and now we are worse than ever. We look just like a lot of tramps. I have had a wash and a shave at last, after a wait of about eleven days. ... We are billeted in a cafe at present which has just been vacated by a regular regiment. We had to do a lot of clearing up to get settled down. Now we find they must have taken most of the cooking utensils away with them...

I shall not want any more tobacco for a long time to come, as I have a large stock at present. We get it from the Army, Tottenham House, and various newspapers. We expect to spend Christmas in the trenches, so it is not a very bright outlook. I shall not want any socks yet, as I am alright in that line....I managed to get a bath last Monday...we had to go seven miles to get it, but all the same it was worth it. The rain is making everywhere in a fearful state, so we get 'lovely and muddy'.

In a letter received by Mrs Oldham, on Wednesday morning her son says:-

We have gone back to the trenches after four days' rest,..... I am at present in reserve with my officer at a farm nearby, so am in the dry. It is miserable to go about with wet and cold feet, and not be able to get them dry. We are well in the danger zone, as shells are bursting not far away. But we don't trouble until they get nearer. I had a small plum pudding from Miss Richardson of Barn Hill last night, but no letter was enclosed. I am writing to her today if I get any time.....Have you got the soldiers in the town yet? You will be quite lively when they come. The 'Pictures' will do a big business, as that will be the only attraction.I had an Army postcard from Jim Flynn (a corporal in the Army Service Corps, and nephew of Mrs Rowett, of 9, Bath Row) saying he was quite well.....We don't know when we shall get out of these trenches. I shall not be sorry when things are settled up, as it is miserable in this wet and mud. It will be quite a change to have polished boots again.

RIGOURS OF THE CAMPAIGN

TROOPER Reginald Edinborough (Northants Yeomanry) gives a graphic account of the hardships our men are having to undergo in the campaign on the Continent, in the following letter to his parents, Mr and Mrs Edinborough, of Broad St:

"We have just got home from being in the trenches. It's over your boot tops in mud and water; it's like hell at times. We went in on Monday just after dark, and we had to go along about a mile of road, and we were under fire all the way along – bullets whistling all around. The Germans use an explosive bullet, and they make a cracking noise. When you go in the trench you have to go along some way, and you are given a position. There were six of us in ours next to a Maxim. It is awfully cold in them, and we had one night when it rained. You get no sleep, simply stand up and look through a loop-hole, and wait till you see some Germans, and then 'get out and get under' They got out of their trench one night, and we soon showed them the way back. They use a big searchlight and they shine it along and then fire like blazes (of course, so do we). Young Cole, one of the chaps that was in my tent at Hursley, got wounded in the knee, and other fellows got bullets through their caps. I got one through the bottom of my overcoat. We simply looked like heaps of mud. We have got a fine officer: he came into our tent and shared some chocolate with us, and he looks after us just like a father. You cannot describe what it is like in them: you cannot credit it. Still we are all happy now; had fresh socks given us, and had some hot water and had our feet in it. We all had awful feet. It was being in the water and mud so long. It comes nearly up to your knees. I had some cigarettes from Rubens just before we went up. Well, I'll close now; don't worry. I'm alright. PS. send me some chocolate."

DODGING THE "JACK JOHNSONS" (German 15-cm artillery shell.heavy, black - like heavyweight boxer Jack Johnson)

Corp. J. Cummins 9069. C Co. 1st Lincolns, who is serving with the Expeditionary Force on the Continent, writing under date Dec 11 to his relatives, who reside at the Prince of Wales inn, says:

"Just a few lines, hoping to find you all quite well, as it leaves me in the best of health and spirits at present considering the rough passage we are going through. I received the parcel with the shirt, socks, and 'mits', and I also had a small plum pudding from some of my Lincolnshire friends. You might thank the people if you know who sent them. I like how you rigged the shirts up. I hope I shall be spared to wear those things for a good long time, as I have said more prayers since I have been here than I did before. We are getting bags of tobacco and 'fags', so you need not send me anything without I ask you for it. The best thing you could send for the trenches is a little cocoa and sugar. I have dodged the "Jack Johnsons" up to now, but I have fallen in one or two of them (trenches) about up to the waist in sludge and clay at night. We are having very wet weather out here at present. I hope you were not upset when you heard I was wounded, but it was a great mistake, as I have not been touched yet with bullets or sickness. There were two Lincoln lads in the same Company the same name as me, but they got wounded the 1st November."

It is of interest to note that the writer of the letter, who also served in the late Boer War, has been twice promoted since going to France, which says much for his superior officers' opinions of him.

"Coal Box." The nickname for a high explosive German shell fired from a 5.9 howitzer which emits a heavy black smoke.