



## THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

**T**he First World War from 1914-18 was fought between the Central European Powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary and their allies on one side and on the other, the Triple Entente of Britain and the British Empire, France and Russia and their allies, including the United States of America which entered the conflict in 1917. It was fought on the eastern and western fronts, in the Middle East, in Africa and at sea and an estimated ten million lives were lost and twice that number were wounded.

The causes of the war are attributable to the competition of trade markets and imperial possessions world wide which had led to a growth of nationalistic sentiment that created great political tension between the single nation states such as France and Germany and threatened the stability of multi-nation states such as Austria-Hungary. These tensions were reflected in jingoistic propaganda, an arms race between the major powers, and trade barriers and tariffs which exacerbated the situation further while at the same time, German diplomatic efforts to recover the stability of Bismarck's day in Europe by combining Central Europe into a formidable bloc increased fears of German expansionism in France and Russia.

The war broke out on 1st August 1914 following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian empire, in Sarajevo, Bosnia, on June 28th by a Bosnian student backed by the Serbian nationalist Black Hand organisation. Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia (July 28th), Germany declared war on Russia (August 1st),

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Germany declared war on France (August 3rd), Germany invaded neutral Belgium (August 4th) and Britain declared war on Germany (August 4th). Japan declared war on Germany (August 23rd), Turkey entered the war on the side of the Central European Powers (October 29th) and finally, the United States declared war on Germany (6th April 1917). The call to serve with the colours dwelled on a patriotism embodied in the famous poster of a uniformed Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, [he had become known as Kitchener of Khartoum for his distinguished service in defeating the dervishes in the Sudan 15 years before], appealing for volunteers to join his new army. The poster showed him pointing directly at the reader and saying: "Your country needs you", a slogan that became an emotional appeal to young men, some of them still boys, who flocked to enlist and fight for their country.

### RECRUITING IN BOURNE



In the summer of 1914, regular recruiting meetings began throughout Britain and many were held around Bourne where passionate speeches were made urging young men to rally to the cause. Among the first to enlist for military service were fifteen recruits who left Bourne to join the Lincolnshire Regiment on Monday 31st August. The company met at the recruiting depot in West Street [at the indoor rifle range next to the Bourne Institute] and were escorted to the railway station by the town's brass band

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with a large number of residents following behind to give them a hearty send-off. The recruits, who were photographed with Recruiting Sergeant Todd and an unknown lad, were: **Arthur Maxon, Fred W Savage, John Thomas Baldock, George Sherwin, George Carver, Frank Baldock** (married), **H Cleary, W Herbert Bloodworth, Percy J Vickers, Walter Parker** (married), **Ernest Robinson, Harry Darnes, Joseph Smith, Walter Archer** and **Percy Cave** (Witham-on-the-Hill). The last three had been induced to enlist at a recruiting meeting held at Witham-on-the-Hill the previous evening when the speakers were Lord Kesteven and Lieutenant K R G Fenwick, with Colonel C Birch-Reynardson in the chair.

More young men joined up after a recruiting meeting held at the Corn Exchange in Bourne on Wednesday 2nd September 1914. The *Stamford Mercury* reported the following Friday:

The Corn Exchange was packed at a meeting to encourage recruiting in the district. The chair was taken by Mr Arthur Wall, the chairman of Bourne Urban District Council. Having read apologies from several who were unable to attend, rousing speeches were delivered by Lord Ancaster, Major Willoughby MP, the Rev J Carvath, Mr H A Sneath, Mr A W Dean and Captain Blake. At the close, some 50 young men enlisted.

But still more recruits were needed and open air meetings which could attract a larger attendance were arranged. Crowds flocked to the Market Place on Saturday 26th October 1914 to hear several speakers urging young men to enlist. They included Major Cecil Bell, Bourne's Recruiting Officer who had commanded H Company, the 2nd Battalion, the Lincolnshire Volunteer Regiment, Captain Sir Francis Vane, who had just returned from the seat of the war in France, Sir Arthur Priestley, MP for Grantham, the Rev Harry Cotton Smith, Vicar of Bourne, Mr T W Mays and Mr J J Davies.

Major Bell told the young men at the meeting that it was necessary for them to give in their names at once because they did not know how long the war might last and a new army could not be trained in a few days. "I would have liked to have gone myself", he said. Sir Francis spoke of the German atrocities in Belgium, denouncing their methods of barbarism and detailing graphic stories of the war as he had seen it. He concluded by

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making an appeal to all young men to join the forces and calling attention to the recently increased separation allowances for married men who enlisted.

Mr Davies referred to the historic association of this part of Lincolnshire in the battlefields and expressed a belief that the men of the day would be as willing as their forefathers to fight for their country. Sir Arthur referred to the origin of the war which he said, no country but Germany wanted. Their objective was to become masters of the whole world and that the war must be carried on till it was made impossible for their ambition to be fulfilled and he denounced their methods of warfare in the strongest possible terms.

Recruiting meetings continued throughout the war with increasing urgency as more and more soldiers were needed. The *Stamford Mercury* reported on 28th May 1915:

Some 250 men of the 2nd/4th and 3rd/4th Battalions of the Lincolnshire Regiment visited Bourne on the 20th inst. and received a civic welcome from Mr T M Baxter (chairman of Bourne Urban District Council), supported by Mr W Hayes (chairman of Bourne Rural District Council), and members of both councils. Captain Eking was in charge of the Luton Section, with Captain Phillips (adjutant), Lieutenant Clarke, Lieutenant C Harvey, and Lieutenant Porter; and the Lincoln contingent were under Major Lowe, Lieutenant Harrison and Lieutenant Cannon. Major Lowe responded on behalf of the regiments for the warmth of their welcome.

As the men moved off, the Caledonian Pipers' Band, under the command of Lieutenant West, came in. Mr Baxter welcomed them in a few remarks, and Lieutenant West, in responding, made a short recruiting speech. The men were afterwards entertained to dinner in the Corn Exchange. Regimental Sergeant-Major Stevens thanked all concerned for their hospitality. In peace time, he said, they had only two battalions, but now they had 12, and were likely to have more.

A meeting was held in the Corn Exchange in the evening, presided over by Mr T M Baxter. It was well attended, although there were not a large number of a recruitable age present. Lieutenant West made a stirring

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appeal for men, remarking that Lord Kitchener's remark that he was satisfied with the rate of recruiting had been misconstrued. It did not mean that they had obtained sufficient recruits. Lord Kitchener's appeal was for an immediate 300,000, but they wanted in all at least a million more men. Several recruits came forward, the first being an old soldier. A vote of thanks was accorded Lieutenant West, on the proposition of Major Bell, seconded by Mr T W Mays, and the meeting concluded with the singing of the National Anthem.



All of the speeches at these meetings were jingoistic and designed to appeal to the deeply rooted patriotic feelings of young men in the hope they would enlist and the ensuing flood of recruits was evidence that they had succeeded.

Many of the soldiers from Bourne who went to war had been pupils at the Boys' Council or Board School [now the Abbey Primary School in Abbey Road] and before leaving for overseas they had been persuaded by their old headmaster, Joseph Davies, of North Road, Bourne, to keep in touch by letter and he replied to each one. In addition, he kept up a regular correspondence with his own two sons, Victor, serving in Gallipoli, and Oliver, in France. This produced a considerable archive of life in the trenches but most of it has been lost. Only a small part has survived

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because Davies was then the Bourne correspondent of the *Stamford Mercury* and the newspaper published periodic selections that he had submitted as war letters from the front. They appeared on the dates stated but the exact locations of the writers are not known because all correspondence home was censored for security reasons.

### **Friday 3rd September 1915**

Some of the writers preferred not to give their names for publication and one correspondent wrote as "An old boy from Bourne Council School". He was serving somewhere in Flanders and had been involved in the war from the outset:

You don't know how pleased we are to hear from you again. The French book you sent is just the thing for us out here. I can tell you we were glad to read of the hearty welcome Bourne gave to Corporal Charles Sharpe VC [he had visited the town on a recruiting drive on August 6th]. I expect it livened up the young men who heard him to see what is their duty to their country and to themselves. They ought to come out here and have a taste of the kind of warfare where we are now. It is sometimes so quiet day and night, then suddenly the silence is broken by shells and bullets screaming overhead. The bullets seem to shriek in an agony of rage when they miss us and when they hit us they seem to mock, and so with shells. When we hear them coming nearer and nearer, to fall near us (and we can tell), they seem just before they burst to give a mocking, screaming devilish laugh. This is the only way in which I can give you an idea of their awful noise. S-----, who is near to me, looks real well and he wishes to be remembered to you. We don't forget our old school motto "Watch and pray".

**Lance Corporal Percy J Vickers**, B Company, the Lincolnshire Regiment, was serving with the British Mediterranean Expeditionary Force at Gallipoli:

We have had a pretty rough time since we landed and have had ten days in the trenches, viz., three days in the firing line, five days in support and two days in reserve. We got it pretty hot while we were in the firing line from snipers. If we give them half a chance, it means instant death. They always aim for the

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head and they are dead shots. When we were in support, we went out at night trench digging, very often under fire, but we came through all right. I have had a few close shaves from shrapnel and snipers but they have not got me yet and I shall take care they don't if I can help it. The boys from Bourne out here are all quite well. I expect you will hear from them before long. The weather is very hot and when marching to and from the trenches it makes the sweat run off, not half. I expect things at Bourne are a bit quiet now that most of the young men have enlisted: but wait till we come home! Tell the Boys at Bourne to be like us and keep smiling.

**Private Victor Davies**, of the 30th Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps, was one of Mr Davies' two sons who were in the army. He was also serving with the British Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and he wrote home from aboard ship off Gallipoli while moving from one base to another:

We arrived at our second port of call on Friday and remained there till Sunday evening. We had a very interesting time owing to the strangeness of the people but it would have been still more interesting if we had been allowed to go out into the town a little more. As it was, we could only go on to the quay (and not always there) except on one occasion. There was a nice little YMCA hut on the quay, fortunately where we could get tea, cakes and biscuits after the somewhat monotonous fare on board. This change was welcome.

On Saturday night we were allowed out in parties for a few hours into the town. It was a most fascinating experience which I wouldn't have missed for a good deal: it was like taking a few pages out of the "Arabian Nights" - people, costumes, shops, were so different from our customary experience. French seemed to be the prevailing European language, names of streets being always, and shops often, in French. The passage from ----- to here has been the pleasantest part of the voyage. It has been cool and calm; the sunrises and sunsets have been gorgeous. For over a day we have been able to feast our eyes on a succession of glorious islands and islets. Nearly all were mountainous and with a slight mist on the sea, the cliffs often appeared suspended in mid-air. In many cases, the rocks were brilliantly covered and where this was not so, the sunlight transformed them into something rich and rare. I can't say

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anything about where we are now. I am feeling first-rate now and fit for anything.

**Friday 17th September 1915**

**Private Victor Davies** had now landed and joined the main forces and he wrote home to his father from their new base, presumably at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli peninsular where Allied troops had landed on August 6th:

August 15th: We are at the scene of operations but not under fire though a stray shell sometimes comes near. It seems to be a regular habit of the Turks to plough up a bit of ground every morning at about 10 o'clock with shrapnel. After that, their gun power seems to get exhausted and the things drop shorter. I think they must bring up a new gun every day which fires its one shot then goes under to the naval guns. We left our previous base on Monday night week and arrived at daybreak in a bay here. We remained on board all morning and witnessed a terrific battle. Some of the shrapnel came over our boat but I think the enemy must have found their attention fully occupied elsewhere for they soon ceased to fire on us. You will no doubt see in the papers an account of the events of August 6th and 7th.

We landed in the afternoon and soon had a place cleared for the camp. Only the tent sub-division came here and we have a sort of hospital fixed up. We were just doing fatigues when the whole of us, cooks and all, were called up to the firing line with stretchers. I went up late in the morning and got the hottest part of the day. It was about four miles all up hill with the long-legged one to lead us. We were pretty tired even before we had a patient to carry. We found one in a dugout on the top of a hill. But, my word, we tired before we got him back. We were under fire for quite a long time but curiously enough I didn't mind it, the fatigue and the thirst being so strong as to overcome the sense of danger.

I had not long had my tea before I had to go out again and this time I had a real adventure. We got into a place which our men had for the time being vacated and the first we knew of it was the sound of firing bursting out suddenly all round us. We dashed across the open and lay down under some bushes but the fire kept up quite close to us. We had to make a move but one

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party had a wounded man to carry. We went through thickets and rocks for some distance and I should say for quite three quarters of an hour the firing followed us, keeping close up. We finally got out of danger but then had to traverse very broken ground for miles and miles before we got in. There were 26 of us and every man was absolutely exhausted with taking his turn at the stretcher. We got here at 11.30, starting out at 6.30. There was luckily a cup of tea and some supper for each of us. We worked as usual next day.

It is very hot here in the day but we are not plagued by the flies. This place is in many ways very much nicer than our previous base. We have no waterproof sheets, blankets or even overcoats. We lie on the cold (and dirty) ground. My word, aren't our clothes lovely and clean! You should see them and us. The climate here has affected me much the same as the other places. Please tell me, has Achi Baba fallen? [The Allied plan to take the commanding heights of Achi Baba on the Gallipoli peninsular failed because the enemy was fully prepared and the terrain ill-adapted for offensive operations].

August 19th: Up to this, since we left ----- we have had only one chance of writing home and of that I availed myself though it meant writing in a great hurry. Things have, of course, been very unsettled here and it has naturally taken a little time to install those home comforts on a foreign and inhospitable soil. We have now the supreme luxury of a letter box which, I believe, is cleared every day. Up to the time of my last letter, we had remained at the place where we first landed. We had cleared a considerable space of the prickly bushes which abound and formed a rough and ready hospital. Here at first we had wounded, but it became latterly more or less reserved for cases of sickness. This was because the firing line had advanced out of reach.

On Tuesday, accordingly, we moved up and we are now in a better position for our particular work. We have had an easy time today, for which we are duly thankful (as we have been going it). I for one feel miles better. The boys of our division have done yeoman service, as you have doubtless read ere now. The cost, I fear, is in proportion to the achievement. These things don't bear thinking about. They only make us realise what a hideous and monstrous thing war is and what a miserable, antiquated and senseless method it is of settling difficulties.

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I think I told you of my first visit to a battlefield. Last Monday, I went beyond the place I reached on the previous Monday but whereas it was then very near the firing line, it was this time comparatively safe, the bullets that came flying were far overhead. We came in for a little shell fire but none of it touched us.

By the way, the shells take a lot more getting used to than bullets. They whistle so long before they burst. Such as they are, they are falling beyond, around and in front of us most of the day. It has been very hot most of the time, but very cold in the early hours of the morning. Tuesday and Wednesday were about the hottest days I have known; I could hardly move. It was too much trouble to turn my head to see where a shell burst or where an aeroplane was.

Today has been much cooler, verging towards cold. A north wind has risen and I find solid food more acceptable than drink. We have had several battles here. In our last place, the shore was rocky and it was hard to get into the sea. But here there is a lovely sandy bottom and the water is as clear as crystal. We have just begun to live in dugouts. They keep the draught off a bit at night. The sun has just set and it is time to turn in.

These were the last letters written home by Private Davies before he was badly wounded during an aerial bombing attack and sent home for surgery to a hospital in Exeter. Later, while recovering, he was visited by his parents who made the trip from Bourne to Devon by train.

### **Friday 8th October 1915**

British and French forces fighting in Gallipoli were meeting stiff opposition from the Turks who had built strongly fortified lines of trenches and refused to give up without a struggle, mounting a series of night attacks against Allied troops in trenches filled with the dead and wounded of both sides. The men were worn out as much by the heat and disease, and the flies feeding off the corpses, as they were by the fighting. After three months of intensive fighting, the Allies renewed their assault with the landings at Suvla Bay on 6th August 1915.

**Lance Corporal Vickers** was injured during the landing at Suvla Bay and sent home to a hospital at Newcastle-on-Tyne where he was confined to

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bed for eight weeks with wounds to his leg but he still continued to write letters to Mr Davies:

After we came from the trenches at Gallipoli, we went to ----- for a rest and then came our fateful night of August 6th when our division made the landing in Suvla Bay. We were in reserve to two other brigades so we started to dig a few dugouts for ourselves but just as we got them done, the order came for us to advance and on we went quite cheerfully. But it was not long before we came under fire from the Turks' artillery and machine guns and they played havoc among us. How I got as far as I did I do not know but our boys kept going and smiling as they always used to do. It was like murder to keep going but it had to be done.

Then came the time when it was my turn to fall. It was a cross shot that hit me. Two of my comrades cut my trousers and soon had me bandaged up and I had to lay in the field all night and was taken away about eleven o'clock next morning. The stretcher bearers carried me nearly four miles to the beach and they then took us to the boats to be conveyed to the hospital ship and then on to Alexandria, arriving there on the following Saturday. I was operated on next day. We were up against great odds. It would not be a long job out there if it were not for the German officers who are brutes to the men. In making an attack they are always behind, driving the men, and in the retreat they are well to the front.

### **Friday 5th November 1915**

**Lance Corporal Oliver Davies**, who was also Mr Davies' son, was serving as a signaller with the 2nd Battalion, the Lincolnshire Regiment, at the headquarters of the British Expeditionary Force somewhere in France. He had volunteered for the army after his mother, Mrs Elizabeth Davies, had offered to take over his teaching duties at Edenham where he was master of the village school in order to free him for military service. He wrote poetically, comparing his present surroundings with those of his home town:

If you want to imagine the kind of country we are in, take a walk down Bourne Fen as far as Twenty. Put heaps more poplar trees there; blow down nearly all

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the houses; grow crops of barbed wire instead of corn; and, above all, don't forget the mud, mud and more mud! There you have a fairly good idea of what the country is like.

Many of the French people seem loth to leave their homes which are within shell range. If this were only a holiday, one could enjoy the country and the conversation of the people immensely. In some parts we saw truly magnificent scenery, the railways and villages resembling County Wicklow to a truly remarkable degree.

There are here varied species of mahogany, flat varieties of unwanted coleoptera [insects, usually beetles or weevils], "things of beauty which nightly do their beetley best to make you feel for ever, their loveliness increases", and, in spite of persevering pursuit they "will never pass into nothingness, but still will keep our bowers lively for us, and a sleep full of sweet (?) dreams".

Thus far Keats! But Keating's [a well-known proprietary brand of flea powder at the time] is the sovereign remedy for those sleep-slaying irritating aliens. And I therefore proffer my request for a ton of Keating's wherewith to dose all our habitable "bowers" and wearable materials. The guns are at it pretty frequently. Some fairly rattle, like gigantic carpet beaters.

**Lance Corporal Davies**, like his brother, was a regular correspondent:

The men with whom I am working are jolly and cheerful and are an antidote to fits of the blues. This spirit of unconquerable cheerfulness is a great asset to the force out here. The more miserable the conditions the better their spirits. In some places, the trenches are over the knees in mud. Yet our men laugh over it. It is difficult to write letters when we are in the trenches. Room is conspicuous by its absence. There is plenty of room outside but the paper is liable to get wet and, moreover, Fritz's stray bullets are conspicuous by their presence. We have had much better weather during this turn in the trenches than during the last but there is still beaucoup de mud.

One thing has struck me very much out here - the day scenery may change but the night scenery is similar to that of home. I don't mean the landscape, but

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the sky. On looking out the other night there were the Great Bear and the Pole Star. It seemed as if one ought to see the home orchard just underneath. Orion, Pleiades, Casseopein, and Altair were there, blinking steadily, in spite of whizz-bangs and machine guns going off merrily in the distance.

Every now and then, Fritz kept giving us a display of coloured lights which have a very beautiful effect when seen from a distance. The whole scene reminds me of the line "God made the country and man made the town". Here, in its quiet beauty, we have revelation in God's handiwork in the sky and of man's in the trenches - guns, ruined houses and devastated country. It seems a shame to pass fields lying fallow and overgrown with rank weeds and houses practically razed to the ground. But there, it's part of the result of ambition meeting with opposition.

We all manage to keep cheerful and full of spirits and there is plenty of fun to be had in a quiet way if you only have a sense of humour. It may interest the Boy Scouts to know that we often cook our own rations. That, you may guess, is just in my line, making a fire and frying bacon and bread in a canteen lid.

**Private George Sherwin**, son of Mr Luke Sherwin, a hairdresser, of West Street, Bourne, was serving with the 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment, somewhere in France:

We are up to our neck in dirt as we are having so much rain. I was grieved to know that one of Mr Larkinson's sons was prisoner and one missing\*. That was in the fierce fighting we had on September 26th. My word! It was just fighting, too, all day long. We took three lines of the enemy's trenches and the devils got some back again.

\* Frank Larkinson was posted missing presumed dead on 26th September 1916 and his brother Percy was captured by the enemy on 17th September 1915, his 18th birthday, and spent the rest of the war at a prisoner of war camp in Germany. In December, Mr and Mrs Larkinson, of Coggles Causeway, Bourne, received two letters from their unit, the first from one of their officers, Lieutenant F Cragg, who wrote: "They were both really good boys and I knew their work well. With regard to Frank, far be it for me to discourage any hopes you have that your dear boy may be alive but, as he has been missing for so long, I doubt very much if he still is. All my men getting cut up so has quite saddened me but we have the recollection that they died a glorious death, fighting for their country and its freedom." The second letter was from Sergeant B Cummins who had heard that Percy had been taken prisoner. "I am

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pleased to hear that news has come to hand of Percy. With regard to Frank, I am sorry I cannot give more news. Of the two gun teams that went out that night, not one man returned. The night before Percy went into action, he was talking about his mother and it made us all think of our homes in England."

**Private T Phillips** was also serving in the Gallipoli campaign and although he makes no mention of it, he was recommended for [and later awarded] the Distinguished Conduct Medal for an act of conspicuous courage under difficult and dangerous circumstances:

I have been through the whole of the fighting and have come out of it without so much as a scratch. I see by some of the papers that the 10th Division got all the praise for the landing and attacking. I can tell you they did not land till ten hours after the 11th Division who did all or most of the hard fighting and drove the Turks back at the point of a bayonet. It was a terrible struggle; in fact, to put it plain, it was perfect hell. We are now having a few days' rest from the trenches but the flies will not let us have an hour's peace from dawn to dusk. It is very hot here in the day but cold at night.

**Private Ernest W Bull**, whose mother lived in Hereward Street, was based at the headquarters of the 63rd Brigade with the British Expeditionary Force in France and he also wrote to his old headmaster:

I have been made an orderly for the brigade major, who has four, so I only go to the trenches when he goes. But we are within shelling range as we are billeted only three quarters of a mile from the German trenches. I have only been in the front trench once since we have been here. But our division (including the Bourne boys) are likely to take over the trenches very soon. It is calm here now, not like it was at Loos [the Battle of Loos in France was fought from 25th September to 8th October 1915]. According to reports, the enemy has no big guns here; all they seem to have is machine guns and snipers.

All our men who got killed or wounded are the victims of enemy snipers who are, we guess, living in old houses against the firing line. It is really marvellous how they hide themselves in the daytime for they can never be found. Here is an incident of their (the Germans) murdering cruelty. A little dog the other day came up quite friendly in front of the trenches. The German sniper potted it and shot the poor little thing in the leg. Our men in the trenches say why

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don't they come out and have a good open air fight and see who is the master but they won't. As soon as they see our bayonets they run and out belches their artillery fire on us.



**Friday 3rd December 1915**

**Lance Corporal Davies** was short of reading material and wondered whether his family could send him some books:

November 11th: I am afraid that I have very little fresh news. Having settled into the routine of life out here, there is very little change from day to day. The roads here would not be considered first class in England. One makes a journey over them in a series of dashes. The skies closely resemble the foreshore of the Witham or the Welland at low tide. There is the Krupps' and Lloyd George's again [guns firing from either side]. This morning we marched away and had a delicious hot bath. My word, it was fine; plenty of hot water and all that.

November 13th: It puts great heart into one to know all's well at home. After all, we have great reason to be thankful to God for what he has done for us. I don't know what we should do out here without mighty help of Christianity. That is our great help at all times; but it comes very much home to one out here in these times. I was glad to receive the local and other papers you sent, including the "Scout" which is now very eagerly read by the others, besides myself. That brings me to the subject of literature of which we are very short out here. Could you possibly manage to send me a copy (6d. edition) of any of Scott's, Dicken's or Thackeray's novels?

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We get magazines but it would be just as well to patronise the best old work as well as the modern. I ask for cheap editions so that I can pass them on and they can easily be pushed into a valise. I could also do with a French book. One likes to know the language of the country one is in.

The villages look like ghosts of a bygone age. Houses are without roofs, some have the rafters standing, making them appear as gaunt skeletons. Of course, the big houses and the churches suffer most from shell fire. Just picture Abbey Road and the church in that plight. Not a house with a wall or roof standing intact; a church without a roof or spire; just traces of walls showing where it once was. Some of the villages round here must have been very pretty in peace time. They are so prettily studded with trees. But now there is nothing but rain and mud. The untilled fields, some of them with unreaped standing crops in them, form another very melancholy setting in the countryside. I suppose the people hereabouts must take war as a natural thing for I believe this is commonly termed "the cockpit of Europe".

It seems to have suffered a good deal in past history for Marlborough and Napoleon fought here and there must also have been some strafing hereabouts in 1870. Aeroplanes are too common to bother very much about. If Fritz ventures this way he soon has to go back for our airmen don't give him much time to look round. In fact, he gets a very warm reception. The big shells coming over make an awfully crazy sort of noise, something like an un-oiled cat call. Did I tell you I have seen George Sherwin\* since I have been here? He is with D Company along with Hubbard of Morton. He is a very good sort and has come off very lucky; been through three attacks sans scratch.

\*Private Sherwin was officially notified as missing and later reported dead in the spring of 1917 and a memorial service was held for him at the Abbey Church in Bourne on Sunday 13th May.

November 17th: We work in one dugout and sleep in another. We are not so far back but that stray bullets don't reach our way for they do whizz harmlessly over the trench or dugout. I had a very lucky (or rather merciful) escape from some stray Fritz not so long ago. I was with a corporal looking after wires in the bottom of a ditch when pop! pop! pop!, a machine gun planted bullets through the hedge above us. However, a miss is as good as a mile and you don't

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come out here to sit tight all day. We had a good laugh when it was all over. But I got the wind up while it was on and no mistake.

However, bullets don't hurt you when at the bottom of a ditch. It is wet, but safe. The signalling portion of the work is most interesting but involves a great deal of night work. Of course, one must be on the alert every minute for napping on a telephone would be more traitorous to the men in the front line than going over to the Allemande [the Germans] and firing on them. It is a case of responsibility and plenty of it. *Vigila et ora* [Watch and Pray, the old school motto].

It is a bit cold out here at times, especially about 6 am. When we can get a coke fire, the dugout is nice and comfortable. But once we get the supply exhausted, then it is decidedly cool. In fact, to use a Lincolnshire expression, one feels "frozzened". However, a good stamp around warms one up. The thunder of the heavy artillery is daily with us, sometimes near, sometimes distant.

Last night, there was a continuous roar somewhere or other which shook our windows. (Hallo! It is starting again. No, that was only an odd shot.) It was one continuous roar. We passed some shell holes yesterday that were deep enough for a man to stand upright in and not show his head above ground. It is a rare method of intensive cultivation but rather expensive. As I said before, aeroplanes are a common sight here. The other day an Allemande ventured over us. He looked pretty enough with his plane glistening in the sunlight. Soon, from another direction, another plane appeared. We were expecting to see a good scrap but Fritz, having learned in the expensive school of experience that our airmen are not "contemptible", did an about turn towards the safety of his own lines and the protection of his anti guns.

The whole attitude of the Germans in the west reminds me of the tale of a man who locked himself up in a room and shouted to his antagonist: "Oh, if only I could get at you!" He doesn't like the ground above the trenches very much. Kindest regards to all friends at Bourne and Edenham and to the schoolchildren and the scouts. Tell Sandall that this place is muddier than the Hob Hole at Boston [a Lincolnshire fenland dyke]. Now it is past midnight. (Hark! Boom! Bang! again).

## *Letters from the Trenches*

**Driver Joseph Bullimore**, son of Mrs Bullimore, of West Street, Bourne, had served throughout the Boer War and had re-joined his old unit at the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. He had been home to Bourne on three weeks' leave in November 1915 and was now back at the front, somewhere in France and, as with his comrades, he had the utmost confidence in an ultimate victory for the Allies:

*We've got the Germans in a firm grip. It is impossible for them to get food or supplies through. Mud? Yes, a bit. But we're all right and hearty.*

**Trooper Fred Flatters** was serving with B Squadron, the 1st Lincolnshire Yeomanry (North Midlands Mounted Brigade) and was sailing to join the British forces in Egypt. He wrote from aboard the troopship Mercian somewhere in the Mediterranean Sea to his mother who lived in Victoria Place, Bourne:

*I expect you were anxious about me when you heard the news. But please mother, don't worry, I'm all right. We had a surprise visit from a German last week and got damaged a bit. But we got away safe, thanks to our captain. We had to put into port for repairs for about a week. But we are sailing again now. I must not write any more; it would only be crossed out. I have not yet got to know where we are going.*

**Sapper George North** was the eldest son of Mrs North, a widow, of the almshouses in South Street, Bourne, who had two other sons serving in the army. George had been a soldier for 12 years and had rejoined the Royal Engineers at the outbreak of the war in 1914, subsequently serving in France where he had been badly wounded, spending three months in a military hospital before being transferred to a hospital in Leicester.

*The ship bringing us home from France was the next to cross after the hospital ship that was mined. We saw her masts sticking out of the water. Wasn't it awful! So many cot [bed] cases.*

The ill-fated Gallipoli campaign was finally abandoned in a communiqué from the War Office in London on 20th December 1915 after ten months of

### *Letters from the Trenches*

bad luck, muddle, indecisiveness and outstanding heroism by British, Australian and New Zealand troops. Eight days later, the evacuation of some 90,000 men, with 4,500 animals, 1,700 vehicles and 200 guns was carried out at night-time with great skill and ingenuity under the very noses of the powerful Turkish forces and not a single life was lost. Casualties in the Dardanelles, however, were reported to Parliament as 25,000 dead, 76,000 wounded, 13,000 missing and 96,000 sick and admitted to hospital.

**Friday 7th January 1916**

**Private Ernest Bull** wrote again to Mr Davies from the headquarters of the 63rd Brigade somewhere in France about conditions in the trenches:

I am in the best of health. I am pleased to tell you I have met a lot more of our Bourne boys who joined our Division a few days ago in the 1st Lincolns. You can guess our boys were pleased to see some of their old pals, especially those that were in training with us in Halton Park.

Among our lads in the 1st Lincolns here are Lance Corporal Goodley R Pattison, young Bradley, Jack Michelson, of West Street, Jack Stevenson, Sergeant Kettle, and a young fellow who worked at Kelham's [Kelham and Son, tailors, North Street]. So a good company of Bourne boys have got together. Young Jack Bannister is at Ypres; Corporal Walter Kettle, of Austerby, is here in the Royal Field Artillery as a blacksmith.

Those "healthy" Germans keep sending us a few of their shells; we have to keep our eyes and ears open. We hope they'll soon have to give over sending them. Then we shall have peace. I went up the trenches this morning and saw a few of the boys working up to their knees in water.

They all wish to be remembered to you and to all our friends in Bourne. We all hope and wish to see dear old England again. So farewell for the present, from all your old schoolboys here. Please remember me to the Rev Cotton Smith [Vicar of Bourne] and Mr Harrison [assistant master at the Boys' Council School], and to all.

## *Letters from the Trenches*

Friday 7th January 1916

**Trooper Fred Flatters** wrote again to his mother giving a vivid account of an attack on the troopship Mercian by a German submarine in the Mediterranean:

November 23rd: I have not found young Stennett from Billingborough yet but I shall look out for him. I sent my last letter from Gibraltar. It was the same day we left there that we were attacked by the submarine. The ship we were in was the troopship Mercian from Liverpool. I expect you would read about it. Well, don't you worry the least bit about me as we are as happy and contented as we were in England, and as safe, as we are now nearly as far away from the fighting as we were then. I mentioned that on our voyage we were shelled by a German submarine the day we left Gibraltar (I had posted my letter the night before). We had reached Gibraltar about dark. It was a fine night too. We set off next day and got on well till about 2 o'clock when about 20 of us were having a lecture in the hospital on deck with three of our officers. We heard a whizz and a bang and a shell dropped some distance behind us. We didn't take much notice of that until another dropped just in front. The buzzer blew for us to get into our lifebelts and stand by our boats. Of course, we started to come down off the hospital decks. I was nearest the steps and so was one of the first to get down to the bottom. Another shell came and killed two of our fellows I was with and smashed up the wireless room. I got a belt and stood by my boat. Shells were now dropping all over the show. If it had been good shooting we should not have got away. I should think she sent 60 or 70 shells at us. But not a quarter of that number hit us. Still, that was quite plenty. Some jumped into the sea without belts. Some got away in boats, 23 were killed outright. A good few got wounded.

Lord Kesteven had the thick part of his leg blown away and died next day in a French hospital at a place called Oran in Algeria. I had another narrow escape. I was leaning over the rail watching the submarine fire at us when a shell burst about a foot or two under my nose. Goodness knows how it missed me. But it did. I was nothing worse than being deaf for a day or two. It was shelling us for about an hour and 40 minutes. Nearly long enough, wasn't it? About a quarter of an hour before it left us, it disappeared from right behind us and came up broadside of us, I expect with the intention of trying to torpedo us.

### *Letters from the Trenches*

But the captain swung the ship round, stern towards it so it did not get the chance and it dare not come any nearer as we had our maxim guns firing at it.

But I think we have only the captain of the ship to thank for getting us away. All the boys behaved well. There wasn't a bit of rush or panic after the first two or three minutes. In fact, when the shells were dropping the thickest, we all struck up "Are we downhearted?" It would have done anyone good to have heard them. But we have got over it and landed safe.

At present we are in camp and I hope we stop here for a bit. It is close to a town and the trams run close by. There are some lovely things too. We are as up-to-date as any of our towns, if not more so. If I wrote dozens of pages, I shouldn't be able to tell you all I have seen since we left England. So that must wait till we meet. I am hoping to see you all again. Remember me to Mr J J Davies when you see him, and to all old friends.

**Friday 14th January 1916**

**Private S Tipler**, grandson of Mrs Tipler, Eastgate, Bourne, was serving with the Northampton Pioneers, and he wrote from Flanders about their Christmas celebrations and was inspired to put his patriotic thoughts into verse:

We heartily wish you a very happy New Year. On Christmas Day, we enjoyed a very happy and pleasant time here in the trenches and we hope our generous friends in Bourne who sent us each good things and a Christmas pudding, oranges and nuts, will accept our sincere thanks. It was very kind of our good friends at home in England to do all they could to make our Christmas as happy as possible. Soldiers out here, though they have to face many difficulties, feel in spite of that, the happy Christmas spirit which brings remembrance of home. But I'll tell you about what has happened here.

If you'll listen I'll recite  
How our brave Northamptons fight.  
They're men of the bulldog breed,  
Staunch in the hour of need;  
Toughest of Britons to beat,

## *Letters from the Trenches*

They know where to plant their feet;  
Right to the Huns' trenches they race,  
    Impelled by a righteous hate,  
    To avenge their fallen comrades,  
    Thinking of sweetheart and mate.  
Through the levelled town of -----  
They march with a swinging pace,  
    To take up some position  
    (I must not name the place).  
'Tis somewhere out in Flanders  
    (This I am allowed to say),  
    But hard 'twill be to tell you  
    The story of that day.  
    Picture a broad expanse -  
    Green hills and either hand -  
The Germans, cunningly concealed,  
    Wait like a tiger band.  
But the Fighting Fifth charge in then  
    With every nerve strung high.  
We're quick at grips, we hurl them down,  
    They squeal and turn to fly.  
Hurrah! We've won their trenches  
    The snarling tigers vex'd,  
    Their shells will quickly find us,  
    We wonder who'll go next.  
    The shells begin their havoc,  
    Death stares us in the face,  
    But every man among us  
    Sets his teeth and keeps his place.  
"Say, boys, are we downhearted?"  
    "No", each man holds his own.  
We've done our best with all the rest,  
    At home 'twill soon be known.  
Right well our General thanked us,  
    This day has proved your deed,  
Each man has done what man could do,  
    True to our bulldog breed.

### *Letters from the Trenches*

May God have mercy on our chums,  
Who lie beneath the clay,  
On that eventful day.  
And should the time come round again  
For us the Huns to shift,  
We'd show them once again we're still  
The good old Fighting Fifth.

I hope you like this piece of poetry. I've been thinking it out and writing it here in the trenches. I want every word to tell its plain story. To my mind it was a glorious day. I've tried to tell you how we face battle. May God hasten the day of victory when we shall have the Germans in our grip, for victory is coming.

It's coming, sons of Britain,  
Some help is on the way  
To keep the old flag flying  
Till victory crowns the day.

You know, sir, there are now three of us in the King's forces. Brother George has joined the Northamptons and Walter is in the navy so I can honestly say we Tiplers of Eastgate, Bourne, are trying to do our best for old England, serving under her good old flag. I am hoping to meet some of our old Bourne Council School boys when we come across the Lincolns. It will be jolly to talk over our old schooldays and the things that have happened between then and now. I hope you have had good news of Victor [one of Mr Davies' sons serving in Gallipoli who had been injured in a bombing raid] and that he is now quite well and fit again. Will Blanchard is back again with the company.

We still are going strong and we hope to keep so. Please remember me to Mr Harrison and the school boys. You ought to be proud of Mrs Davies, taking Oliver's school to free him for war service. Aye, it is a grand thing to serve our country and if every man who is able were to do so, we should soon drive the Huns beyond the Rhine and win our way through to Berlin. We don't forget our old school motto: "Watch and pray". I wish you all a happy New Year.

## *Letters from the Trenches*

**Friday 28th January 1916**

**Private Percy Lunn**, of the 1st Battalion, the Northamptonshire Regiment, was the son of Mr Edward Lunn, of Woodview, himself an old soldier who had served with Lord Roberts in the Kandahar campaign during the Afghan War of 1878-80. Four other sons were serving in the army. Percy wrote about Christmas Day in the trenches from somewhere in Flanders:

We had a happy Christmas here and enjoyed ourselves merrily singing songs and carols. The music of the voices really sounded beautiful on the still night air. We sang some of our old songs that I learnt at our old school. We will all make up for lost time when we all get home together after this is finished.

NOTE: Percy's brother, George Lunn, a private with the Lincolnshire Regiment, was seriously wounded in action in October 1916 and died of his injuries a week later.

**Lance Corporal Oliver Davies** wrote:

We are back in the old lines once more. We had an eighteen mile march one day and a nine mile march the next, so you will understand that feelings of stiffness were not entirely absent when we had finished up. In many places, the roads are none too good and that makes matters no more easy. However, all's well that ends well. I don't expect to go into the trenches for a few days.

**Private Phillips**, writing from the Gallipoli peninsular before the Allied withdrawal, had fond feelings for home. He had been in the Mediterranean since the first landings and was feeling the effects of the bad weather:

I received your welcome letter this morning. I have not seen Corporal Bloodworth for over a month as they have shifted from where they were. But he sent me a note by one of the orderlies that come to where we are and he was then in the best of health. I thought we should have been home by Christmas. But I am afraid we shall winter here. We had last week three days of very severe snow and sleet and frost. I can tell you it was very cold. It was a pitiful sight to see so many young soldiers coming from flooded trenches and being carried to the hospital ship. Their feet and legs were frost bitten.

## *Letters from the Trenches*

**Friday 3rd March 1916**

**Lance Corporal H H Steel**, assistant master at Bourne Council School, was serving in France with the 1st Battalion, the Lincolnshire Regiment:

We had an aeroplane over our billets in this town three nights ago, bombs dropping too. I heard the report of the explosion and we took little notice, for shells find a resting place in the vicinity every day. The Germans have certainly surprised many with regard to these aerial monsters. A fortnight ago, the German yelled over to our lads, "We shall be in ----- (the town we billeted in) in less than a week".

We are still waiting, for they are rather overdue. The boys of our company asked to "go over the top and stick into 'em" but of course, we were not allowed. The Old Corps, as we Lincolns are called, still has lads who know no fear, lads who will, when opportunity occurs, add further lustre to the glorious history of the Gallant Old Tenth. Please remember me to the staff and the boys and friends.

**Corporal Arthur Webster** of C Company, the 7th Battalion, the Lincolnshire Regiment, who had been wounded in the Gallipoli campaign, wrote from France:

I am now first rate. We are out at the front again, not far from the enemy - indeed not many yards - so we shall be alright. I hope we shall all have the luck to come out of it all right. At present, it is very cold out here. There have been heavy rainfalls and very sharp frosts at night and that has made it a bit cold. All well. Kindest regards to the boys of the old school.

**Private J Stevenson**, son of Mr C Stevenson, of Bourne, serving with the machine gun section of the 1st Battalion, the Lincolnshire Regiment, wrote from France:

The weather is unpleasant at times; we have had so much wet that it is a job to keep our feet warm. I am now in the trenches and am writing this in my dug-out where I spend my spare time. Please remember me to the boys at the old

### *Letters from the Trenches*

school and to my friends in Bourne. What a happy thing it will be for the world when this war is over.

**Lance Corporal Oliver Davies** wrote again about the daily bombardments they were experiencing some where in France:

We have had a tremendous lot of artillery work on both sides lately. Whizz-bangs and pip-squeaks [types of shells fired by the German field artillery guns] are not nice but they are here the order of the day. Not long ago we had a taste of bombs but they didn't get us.

Our billets are as comfortable as can be expected, quite dry. In the last one, we had wire beds raised from the ground. Just now, we are on a nice dry wooden floor, hard but comfortable enough to have a good night's rest. We have had no sign of snow as yet. In fact, this is the mildest, and of course the muddiest, winter I have known.

#### **Friday 10th March 1916**

**Private W Davies** (no relation to Mr Davies) was enjoying life in the Middle East:

There is something in the air of Egypt which seems to make movement quite easy in that sandy plain, even in the heat of the day. There is also a very great pleasure in sea bathing in February.

#### **Friday 17th March 1916**

**Private Percy Lunn** had left the Northamptonshire Regiment to join the Royal Machine Gun Corps and he wrote again to Mr Davies from somewhere in France to tell him about the move:

I have been transferred to a new regiment, the depot of which is in Belton Park [near Grantham in Lincolnshire]. I have now passed two birthdays in the trenches. We have had pretty bad weather out here lately. There is now a lot of snow on the ground and the nights are very cold.

### *Letters from the Trenches*

**Private Vernon Bradley**, serving with the Lincolnshire Regiment, wrote to say that he had been wounded in action.

I had about twelve days in the trenches and was returning to base when I was hit in the arm by a machine gun bullet. The wound is not serious.

**Friday 7th April 1916**

**Private E Moisey**, son of Mr Charles Moisey, of Woodview, Bourne, wrote to Mr Davies from somewhere in France:

We are having a warm time here, the Huns being busy with mining in front of their trenches. But I think the war must be over soon.

**Friday 14th April 1916**

**Private Harold Robinson**, son of Mr Frank Robinson of West Street, Bourne, and Private Stephen Grummitt, son of Mr John Grummitt, Willoughby Road, Bourne, wrote a cheery letter together from somewhere in France where they were both serving with the Royal Army Medical Corps:

Although during the past three months we have been under the rough conditions of active service, we are yet always happy. Our rations are fine; we have always plenty to eat; altogether at the front, we are properly looked after and are quite content. We are proud to see that Herbert Kelby, one of our old school comrades, has been recommended for the DCM\*.

\*Lance Corporal Herbert Kelby, serving with the Lincolnshire Regiment in France, was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for bravery in action in wiping out a number of German snipers and when he returned home on leave, the medal was presented by the Earl of Ancaster during a civic ceremony in the Market Place at Bourne on 30th September 1916.

**Driver Fred Hinson**, son of Mr Jabez Hinson, of Woodview, Bourne, wrote to Mr Davies from "a far country" which turned out to be Egypt:

### *Letters from the Trenches*

**Private Hobbs and I** are still with the transport section and are getting on well. We are having beautiful weather here. The dates are now beginning to form on the trees and everything looks lovely.

**Friday 12th May 1916**

**Driver Fred Hinson** wrote again, this time from the 31st General Hospital at Port Said, Egypt, where he was recovering from illness:

I have got through the worst of a bad attack of pneumonia and am beginning to feel better.

**Private J W Wyles**, son of Mr E Wyles, of 10 Stanley Street, Bourne, serving with the Yeomanry, wrote from somewhere in Egypt:

It is very hot here. We have plenty of bed pals, quite an unenviable variety. I am seriously thinking of taming some of these; they would make a pretty menagerie. Please don't think for a moment I am grumbling; we simply don't care about these accompaniments of campaigning under African skies.

In fact we always make the best of things. All the same, I shall be pleased to see old England again. It will interest you to know that when we moved I drove the engine of our troop train from ----- to ----- . The driver was taken ill and he could not be replaced before reaching -----.

**Friday 19th May 1916**

**Lance Corporal H H Steel** wrote again to Mr Davies from somewhere in France after a chance meeting with his son Oliver:

I suppose you heard from Oliver about our meeting while our battalion were in billets in a little village somewhere in Europe. I was astonished to behold a stranger in company with Sergeant Kettle; then it suddenly struck me it was Oliver. I arranged to pay him a visit at his brigade headquarters where we had a good talk together, a good tea and then a good walk to a prettily situated town about the size of Stamford where the Huns have left an enormous impression.

## *Letters from the Trenches*

We have been doing some long marches lately. The lads stick it well. The weather is almost ideal now, plenty of sunshine. Kindly remember me to my old colleagues at the Council School, to my boys who are still with you, and to Victor and Mrs Davies.

**Private Bull**, whose mother had recently died, wrote again to Mr Davies, and he too had met Oliver:

I have had the pleasure of meeting your son, Oliver, whom I was pleased to see looking quite well. We do not think it will be long before the "Day" comes for which Britain and her Allies are longing; and we can all trust that the Lord will bring us safely home.

**Private Victor Davies** meanwhile, was still in Salonika serving as a stretcher bearer with the RAMC but hankering for a few sweets from home:

Good Friday: I was delighted to have the parcels and I thank you very much for the same. You can always send plenty of acid drops, malted milk tablets and anything of that sort. Sweet things are what we are really short of. I was very glad this morning to be allowed to attend Easter Communion.

**Friday 26th May 1916**

**Private Fred Fisher**, son of Mr T Fisher, of Hereward Street, Bourne, wrote to Mr Davies from Egypt:

**It is twice as hot as England in summer. We are miles from any town. I only wish the water was as good as St Peter's Pool and then it would be all right.**

**Friday 7th July 1916**

**Private Victor Davies** had recovered from his injuries and been sent back to his unit which was now somewhere in Greece:

## *Letters from the Trenches*

We left our lovely camp in the hills last Tuesday, very much to the regret of nearly all of us. The climate there was mild and pleasant and I could have put in the summer there with profit and ease. This place is our HQ now. It is much better than the old place, no dust, fairly high up and not in a congested part. We have adopted a sort of daylight saving, though it is, I imagine, more to avoid heat than to gain light. The heat is nearly as great as I experienced last summer out here. I am feeling very fit and occasionally strenuous. The spell up the hill did me a world of good and perhaps saved me from sickness. There seems to be a note of hope beginning to sound. Many think the war will be over this year. I have seen a few of our national next door neighbours. What jolly and cheerful men they seem! I find I am able to talk fairly easily with them. Darkness is closing in over the hills, so I must conclude.

**Friday 14th July 1916**

**Gunners Charles and Edward Garfoot** were serving with the Royal Artillery and they wrote to Mr Davies from somewhere in France about a news item that had appeared earlier that year in the Stamford Mercury, the newspaper that was sent to them regularly by their mother, Mrs Garfoot, of Woodview, Bourne:

We are both in the best of health and spirits and we are pleased to see that the vicar and his curate are doing their bit.

NOTE: The newspaper had reported on Friday 12th May - "The shortage of labour occasioned by the war and the difficulty in obtaining persons to undertake cartage has had a sequel. The Vicar, the Rev Harry Cotton Smith, is responsible for the management of a club for which a truck of coal had arrived. The usual carter being employed on his land, a hand truck was borrowed and during the course of Friday and Tuesday last, five tons were delivered by the vicar and his curate, the Rev D H Henderson, assisted by the verger, Mr Moisey. On Tuesday, the two clerics were undeterred by the heavy downpour of rain."

**Friday 21st July 1916**

**Private John Bannister**, son of Mr J Bannister, of 38 Woodview, Bourne, was serving in France with the Lincolnshire Regiment but had been wounded in the Battle of the Somme and he wrote from a convalescent camp at Boulogne:

## *Letters from the Trenches*

I have been reported missing because I was buried for about four hours. They thought I was blown up. But I wasn't. I don't suppose I shall get to England this time. All the boys are confident that the war will be over very soon. Then we shall be able to tell you a bit about the "Big Push".\*

\*The Big Push began on 1st July 1916 with the Allied offensive on the River Somme during which severe casualties were inflicted on both sides. It was seen as Britain's first real chance to open up the Western Front and enable French and British troops take the initiative away from Germany. British generals planned to break through the enemy trenches and advance to victory through German territory but the campaign brought little advantage. The success of the artillery was overestimated and the inflexible military strategy meant that plans could not be revised. There was poor communication between the troops on the ground and the officers which also contributed to the death toll of 600,000, the greatest number of casualties in British military history while five months of fighting advanced British lines only eight miles. The men realised for the first time that they were not heroes but simply expendable.

**Private Victor Davies** wrote again from Salonika:

Contrary to the experience in England, at the time of writing no rain has fallen for weeks. The work we are getting is all fatigues, digging and so on.

**Friday 25th August 1916**

**Private Victor Davies** soon found that the dry weather did not last as he explained in his latest letter home from Salonika:

The storms have caused endless trouble and discomfort as there has been lack of proper shelter. We had reveille at 1.30 am today and as it was dark, we had to feel around for breakfast and to pack our kit. It all seems like a dream. We are all wearing khaki drill shirts. We are like an army of footballers.

**Friday 28th July 1916**

The old boy from Bourne Council School gave his assessment of progress in the war:

**The opinion of all here is that the end, a glorious one for the Allies, is not many months distant.**

## *Letters from the Trenches*

**Friday 11th August 1916**

Another letter from the old boy from Bourne Council School who wrote again:

Here, in our part just now there is the same old routine of strafing [bombing from the air] and returning the compliment. The weather has been very hot with the mercury somewhere in the nineties. But then we do not have it as bad as they have in Egypt and Salonika. Moreover, our dug-outs are deliciously cool, affording a pleasant retreat from the heat and sunlight reflected from the chalk.

**Friday 15th September 1916**

Another letter arrived from the old Bourne Council School boy who was writing about the district near where he was based, cleverly calling it "Somme-where in France" [the Battle of the Somme had begun on July 1st], and gave a tongue in cheek description of life in the trenches:

The hills are of the oolite and chalk brand but the eastern slope is at present of a decidedly eruptive character. The people are real cave dwellers who hide in holes by day and only go on the prowl by night. The population is predominantly male. There are traces of an ancient high state of civilisation, these traces comprising ruined temples, some of great beauty, others characterised by ugliness. There have evidently been houses at some remote period and the modern inhabitant make use of the still extant underground apartments. The ancients, who inhabited these dwellings up to the remote historic era ending August 1914 [when war was declared], evidently had a passion for digging into the bowels of the earth for there are seemingly bottomless pits surmounted by much ingenious machinery. Tradition that living men in that bygone age descended these pits, in cages suspended by wires, in order to obtain a wonderful stone that burns with great heat. Truly wonderful were these people of a former day! But alas! they are only now to be found in the remoter parts of the land and their works of art and civilisation are given up to the all-powerful devastating barbarians of the Hun tribe. But enough of this. All's well!

## *Letters from the Trenches*

**Friday 6th October 1916**

The old boy from Bourne Council School sent another letter to Mr Davies, again revealing himself as a man of learning and of philosophical thought:

At present, as I write, Fritz is busy playing his machine guns up and down a railway. The Great Bear looks down with friendly eye. But somehow one feels as if there ought to be that old wooden wall (is it still there?) behind the boys' playground, showing out black against the northern sky. And just now, too, Orion shows up in all his glory with the faithful Dog-star blinking at his heel. And a year ago today, a big battle was raging here! That time seems already to belong to a remote past. It's a fact that we manage it out here, even with a nice little flavour of grouse. But that only shows that we are of the same race as Dr Johnson and many more of the "freshly-remembered" descendants of the Anglo-Saxons or, more truly, Brito-Roman-Anglo-Saxon-Norman. Hearty remembrance to all friends.

**Friday 13th October 1916**

**Sergeant Cedric W Lloyd** of the Royal Fusiliers wrote to his mother from a military hospital somewhere in France after being wounded on September 18th during the Battle of the Somme. Mrs Lloyd, of Hereward Villa, West Street, Bourne, had two other sons on active service, Sergeant Raymond Lloyd and Sergeant Lance Lloyd\*, both with the Yeomanry. Cedric described some successful attacking operations in which he and his comrades took part and referred to the effectiveness of tanks that had been used for the first time but was at pains to tell his mother that he was recovering from his injuries:

I am pleased to tell you that my knee is getting on very well. The wounds just above the knee have practically healed and I am now allowed to get up for a few hours a day.

\*Sergeant Lance Lloyd was later killed in action.

**Friday 17th November 1916**

The task of writing to bereaved relatives to tell them that loved ones had lost their lives in battle was usually the job of the dead man's commanding

### *Letters from the Trenches*

officer but in view of the high number of casualties during the Great War, particularly during the Battle of the Somme, he delegated this responsibility to his junior officers and when Private W Lane was killed in action on November 1st, his platoon officer, a young lieutenant, wrote to his next of kin, his sister Miss Gertie Lane, of West Street, Bourne. Before joining the army, Private Lane had been employed for 14 years by Mr Alfred Stubley, a painter and plumber, of West Street, Bourne, and originally joined the South Staffordshire Regiment, later transferring to the South Lancashire Regiment, and had been at the front only two months. The subaltern wrote:

It is with much regret that I have to tell you that your brother has been killed in action. It will perhaps be a great help for you to know he was killed outright. May I, as his platoon officer, offer to you my deepest sympathy in your bereavement. He was always willing, and I am sure he will be a great loss to me and his platoon comrades.

**Friday 8th December 1916**

**Private Martin Barnes**, of Willoughby Road, Bourne, was serving with the Sherwood Foresters but had been wounded at the Battle of the Somme and was now recovering in hospital somewhere in France from where he wrote to Mr Davies about the quiet courage of his comrades:

Every man who has been engaged on the Somme front has earned a name for himself that ought never to be forgotten. We were engaged in the fighting at Trones Wood\* and to lose that wood was one of our greatest setbacks for it changed hands no fewer than four times before the 21st Division took it. We were their reserves.

It took six hours and a half to drive the Germans out. The Northamptons and West Kents at last succeeded in driving them out but not until those battalions had lost nearly all their men. We relieved them. I am proud to say we even took the enemy trenches in front of us. But the roll call proved how heavily we had paid for it. Sir Douglas Haig [Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force 1915-18] congratulated us on our gallant stand against the big odds and their heavy fire.

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\*Trones Wood was one of the first major actions during the Battle of the Somme. It lay behind the German lines, to the east of the village of Montauban, where fighting continued from July 8th to the 14th, resulting in heavy British losses.

Dramatic film taken during the Battle of the Somme was given two public showings by the Bourne Electric Theatre Company during the first week of December 1916 when the Corn Exchange was packed on both occasions and additional seating was installed to cope with the crowds.

The flickering silent images on the screen were probably the first pictures to be seen in Bourne of the war, certainly of the mud and blood of the Somme, and the audience was stunned into total silence and many were moved to tears. The response was the immediate formation of a fund to buy Christmas parcels for the Bourne boys, the proceeds of £35 from the two screenings being the first contribution followed by a flag day in the town which produced a further £14 3s. 7½d. and a house-to-house collection that pushed the figure up to £102 [almost £4,000 at today's values].

Over 200 parcels containing food, sweets and tobacco were eventually dispatched to local serving soldiers at the front while postal orders of 7s. 6d. [£14] were sent to 30 soldiers who were wounded and recovering at hospitals in both Britain and France because they were not receiving any money while patients.

There were also four Bourne boys who were prisoners of war and 24s. for each was sent to the Central Relief Committee in London to pay for parcels valued 6s. to be forwarded to all of them for a period of four weeks. This was the first indication of how many men and youths from Bourne were serving with the armed forces, a total of 234 from a population at that time of 4,310 [the 1921 census figure].

### **Friday 15th December 1916**

**Private W Watts**, serving with the Lincolnshire Regiment, wrote home to his family in South Fen, Bourne, from his hospital bed in Newcastle that he was lucky to be alive:

### *Letters from the Trenches*

I was wounded in France. The bullet which struck me passed through one cheek, over my tongue and out through the other cheek, afterwards killing a comrade who was close by.

Note: His brother, Private Sidney Watts, was also wounded in France and was recovering in hospital at Darlington where he had undergone two operations.

#### **Friday 16th February 1917**

**Private Victor Davies** was still in Greece but was able to reveal that his camp was located at Salonika:

Our present conditions are favourable and the troops are having a pretty quiet time. The trenches are quite impervious to the elements and there is nothing to fear should there be a heavy fall of snow. I am feeling first rate, better even than when I first came here. We had a little diversion last week in the shape of a concert. Let us hope that our next move will be to turn our swords into ploughshares.

#### **Friday 6th April 1917**

**Private Percy Milan**, of Thurlby Road, Bourne, was stationed in Egypt, and he wrote to Mr Davies about a plucky fight in the desert:

We are all optimistic here over the splendid news from France [there were signs of a German withdrawal], and even to a greater degree over that from Kut\*. The latter may have an important bearing on the operations here. It is really most disappointing after trekking over some 120 miles of desert, with all that it means, to find the Turk declines to fight, but keeps retiring and evacuating places he has held. Still, I suppose sooner or later we shall catch him and then he will be "out of a mess". Despite all these great disappointments, we still get samples of the British spirit. One of the Scottish Horse unit tailed twenty Bedouins and though he was alone, he put up a good fight and chased them, shooting two. His camel was then shot under him. Nothing daunted, he gave chase on foot until he himself was shot through the ankle. An Australian airman and his observer were flying over the spot and the

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observer saw the little drama. They descended with their aeroplane. The observer stayed behind with his machine gun whilst the pilot returned to his aerodrome with the wounded man, afterwards returning for his observer. We brought the wounded man down the next day. The veracity of this story cannot be doubted and it is the first case I know of where wounded have been transferred by plane.

\*Kut al Amara in Iraq was occupied by a small British expeditionary force on 29th September 1915 but became the scene of an historic siege when its numbers were reduced from 15,000 to less than 7,000 under the command of Major-General Sir Charles Townshend who surrendered to the Turks on 29th April 1916 after holding out for 143 days. Kut was eventually recaptured in the spring of 1917.

### **Friday 11th May 1917**

**Private Tipler** was still stationed somewhere in France with the Northampton Pioneers and writing to Mr Davies about tactics and bravery in battle:

I hope you have heard the good news of our success out here. We have done better than ever before and we are still pushing forward, hoping to reach the Rhine. We have made very good captures both of prisoners and guns. About a fortnight ago, two gun teams and myself were acting as an anti-aircraft section. The second day after the attack, I had the pleasure of seeing the first batch of prisoners coming along the road under a strong escort. The road being near to our position, I strolled across and stood beside the road, watching them go past.

One could read in their hollow faces and in the worn-out form they walked that they had had a very rough time. Their fighting spirit was badly broken. They seemed glad to be taken prisoners. They looked as if they had not had anything to eat for days. Some of our boys gave them a tin of corned beef and other things they had and they ate all that we gave them ravenously, like a drove of wild wolves.

It was the morning of the 9th, a fine morning with a gentle breeze blowing. Our guns had been firing all night on the enemy lines. It was growing daylight, just after dawn. The guns lifted up their fire. Picture to yourself a battle raging.

## *Letters from the Trenches*

Shells are raining on the German trenches. The guns are gradually lengthening their range. To the right and left we observe long lines like white chalk stripes. These mark the trenches, ours and the enemy's.

See how the good old British fighting breed are hunting back on the ridge. They top the hills; now they vanish over the skyline! But see (from our observation point) how they charge down the other side of the ridge, nearer and nearer to the village of ----- . And the fight! It is a hard, tough fight but we capture the village. Our men still go forward a good distance and make a stand. Every man knows his job. They had not been there long before the Huns started a furious shelling. But they were too late. Our men had advanced further than the enemy expected.

Then our men were told they were being relieved. My! It was a fine sight to see our boys marching through the town. They looked splendid, rough, indeed, after the fight, but that made no difference. They had been and they had done their bit grandly and now they were on their way back for a rest. And soon they will be ready to go again!

Well, every one of us hopes that some day we shall all be back again in dear old Blighty, enjoying the days of peace. We know the good friends at home hope that we shall all be returning home safely. Trust us, we shall do our best to bring the Huns to the dust, defeated and disgraced. Kind remembrances to yourself and all old friends in Bourne and at the good old school.

**Private Victor Davies** wrote again from somewhere in Salonika:

The climate has manifested a further eccentricity by jumping straight from winter into summer. It is quite hot now but we are not as yet troubled with flies. The industrious ant, however, is already busy with his fatigue parties. We have been able to keep up the Easter season, more or less. Nearly all the camp turned out for the service on Sunday evening and it was really an inspiring gathering.

**Friday 1st June 1917**

## *Letters from the Trenches*

**Private Davies** wrote again to his parents from Salonika that he was surviving under fire, despite being involved in a battle of some severity:

April 29th: A call for the front line we had long been expecting came suddenly on Monday 23rd April and since then things have been too warm to allow any opportunity for writing. I have the good news to tell you I have come safe and sound out of the hottest fire I have ever been under. We had a night of it last Tuesday. But we continued work without sleep until three or four o'clock on Thursday morning under fire, but intermittent. We of our ambulance who were chosen as bearers came off very well, though we had a few wounded. We feel very thankful, for in one place the splinters were falling like rain. Most of the night we were over in front picking up wounded and carrying them in. Here's the wonderful part - not one of us who went over the top was hit. For my own part, I felt less nervous than when the camp was shelled. I felt a sort of reassurance that I should be kept, and my friend as well, and my attitude to the shells, &c, was almost one of apathy. Afterwards, work, want of sleep and continual danger, made one rather jumpy and I was glad we came down. We are all right now and enjoying the feeling of security, as if it were a new thing. We have been most wonderfully preserved and I pray that God will keep us thankful to Him who alone could have brought us through such a time.

I have just had the privilege of going to an open-air service taken by the same chaplain who spoke to us a fortnight ago when we were expecting this. He is a fine speaker, just the one to address men, and he made everybody shake hands with him at the end. I think he made an impression on some who are not in the habit of going to services. It is Sunday evening, about 8.30, that is about seven o'clock at home. It is now quiet here; no guns. How often we have strafed them; and the noise they make!

May 7th: We are very busy at present. We have no sooner finished breakfast than we are off to work and when we have had dinner and cleared up in the evening, it is about bedtime. My last letter may have alarmed you a little (though I hope it didn't), so I must first assure you that there has been no particular danger for us since the affair I spoke of. We went down to headquarters after that; we had a day or two of rest, then began fatigues. We are getting pretty good at digging and I don't think I need ever be out of work. I should always be able to get a job with some corporation.

## *Letters from the Trenches*

May 8th: I must send this in now. We are just going to move again. Feeling quite well.

May 12th: You will be surprised to hear that I am having yet another spell in hospital but you may rest assured that it is nothing serious this time. I only expect to be here for a few days. We had another scrap on the night of May 8th-9th. Our section was called out early in the morning. As before, we had a very hot time and I did not escape without a slight scratch. I had another turnout in the afternoon, of a fairly exciting nature. On this occasion, ----- was hit in the arm. Our trip, however, had taken some time and ----- was ahead of me at every stage of the journey. But two of our men came into the hospital with me and I have seen one other who came from the last push. So I am here once more in Salonika. The wounds are as trivial this time as they were serious last time."

**Private Milan** had moved from Egypt and was now writing from somewhere in Palestine:

Sunday! What a contrast to Sunday at home! Out in the desert in Egypt we are unable to distinguish Sunday from any other day. I was reminded that it was the Day of Days [Easter Sunday] by seeing some British West Indians at drumhead service as we came down the line this morning. I am back on my train again. There was an abundance of interest in the change of scene. One's eyes grow tired of always gazing on sand and the awful glare which is reflected by the sun's rays. As I write this I am within 50 yards of the blue sea in which I have just had a delightful bathe.

Truly, life is much better nowadays. We travel through quite delightful scenery. Palestine is very different from Egypt. One's eyes become quite rested before crossing the border. In the place of the eternal sand of the desert one sees fig trees in hundreds with, here and there, a wahlad (boy) or a bint (girl) in charge of a flock of sheep or goats. Higher up the coast one sees sights that take the mind's eye back to the orchards of our own Blighty. Here, for miles, are fig trees, almond trees and trailing vines.

## *Letters from the Trenches*

Despite the fact that it so seldom rains (the last was on Christmas Day), everything is beautifully green. Up here, too, we note a remarkable difference in the natives. Presumably they are Syrians, some of whom are of quite fair complexion. The contrast with the swarthy Egyptians and the ebony Sudanese is most remarkable.

This morning, I saw a little girl, about eight years old, quite fair and (think of it!) hair almost grey. In the midst of such scenery and associations, it does not require a very imaginative mind to take one back to biblical days, or even to the patriarchal age. To see the Syrians ploughing, with camels at the plough and two oxen yoked together trampling out the corn is, indeed, to visualise the past. Yes, I shall have much to tell my friends when I return.

**Friday 6th July 1917**

**Private Albert J Adamson**, of West Street Bourne, wrote to Mr Davies from somewhere in France with some cheery news from the western front:

In the Big Push, I was hit in the hip with a piece of shrapnel. In the rest camp here, I have found a chum who hails from Morton so we are, for our rest time here, very happy beyond the roar of the guns and the awful sights of war. During my service in France, I have seen a great deal of the efforts we are making to obtain right and justice in our struggle against the German kultur and its barbarous work. As we have moved from sector to sector we have seen whole villages razed to the ground by artillery fire. As we have moved through the larger towns we have seen the destruction wrought by the relentless enemy. In one town (probably you have heard) the ruin of the cathedral is pitiful; a figure of the Virgin, with the Infant Christ in her arms, that stood erect on the spire, is now overhanging and facing the street below. What a shame that Fritz should have wreaked his vengeance on such a noble edifice!

We shall come out on top. At every turn our artillery's superiority is evident. If it had been at all possible for you to have witnessed the bombardment on Thursday 8th June, when our battalion went over the top, you would have thought it impossible for anything living to have survived that terrible storm of shells. We advanced with very few losses. Hundreds of Germans, with a terrible look of fear, came over to us and surrendered. One thing in their

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favour was their willingness to assist in removing the wounded. In this rest camp we can, with the aid of a good pair of glasses, see the white cliffs of Blighty. So near, and yet so far!

**Sergeant F A Yates**, son of Mrs Yates, of West Street, Bourne, was serving under General Jan Christian Smuts, the South African soldier and statesman who commanded the troops in British East Africa from 1917-18:

March 25th: As it is some time since you heard from me, you may perhaps be thinking either I am sick or something has happened to me. Such is not the case. I have not had a day's serious illness since I have been up here. Of our dealings here lately I can say but little, as our activities have suffered an enforced curtailment since the advent of the rainy season. The only excitement we have had of late was as far away as the end of November, and again on Christmas Day and the three or four days following. The November engagement lasted for  $2\frac{1}{2}$  days. But we had our usual luck as regards casualties, losing only a few killed and wounded. The Christmas Day trip we had no casualties at all. But we spent an unpleasant day. We kicked off at 4.30 am to dislodge the enemy from a position amongst some hills which commanded a road. After a march of six miles we took position amongst some very dense bush, acting as support to an Indian regiment. About midday, it commenced to rain in torrents and continued without a break until the following day. We had no covering except our coats, which are now showing considerable signs of wear. To crown it all - no rations except mealie meal and tea (such as it was).

It was a miserable night. What with the rain and the continued drip, drip from the bushes, sleep was out of the question. So the only thing to do was to sit and think of the good Christmas Days we have spent in good old Bourne and of the good days to come. But even the longest night comes to an end. With daylight our spirits rose. They fell again, however, when we learned that the enemy had cleared off without putting up much of a fight. The brutes got clean away. Since this, we have been doing very little. But with the dry season coming on, our force will be ready to give Mr Hun the "knock out" as far as this country is concerned.

At present, I am sergeant in charge of a party of Rugga-Rugga, or native scouts. I am in charge of a post and patrolling parties. The regiment is at -----.

## *Letters from the Trenches*

We have just had news of the good work in Europe. Our informant tells us our forces have advanced about 30 miles in three days. This seems almost too good to be true. I have not heard of our good old Lincoln Regiment for a long time; I guess they have had most of their battalions in the "Great Push".

In reading a South African paper today, I read an account of the first meeting held in connection with the recruiting rally for the purpose of reinforcing the South Africans in Europe. You can imagine how pleased we all here are to hear of General Smuts' selection as a member of the Imperial War Conference, although we are sorry to lose him as Commander-in-Chief. But we all recognise his usefulness in his new sphere of responsibility. Indeed, I would not be at all surprised to hear that the Imperial authorities had offered him a command in one or other of the theatres of war. With all our heart, we of his old command here wish him "Good luck!" He has been a good leader and a right gentleman. In fact, I think I am absolutely right in saying he has enjoyed the confidence of all - from general to drummer boy. And well he deserved it. We are proud of him!

The only news of late to note has been that of the rather severe fighting down about Rufigi River during which the 130th Baluchis did wonderfully well. Personally, I think the Baluchi regiments are second to none in East Africa. They did good work at the beginning of the campaign and have kept at it ever since. Some say the Cashmeri Rifles are best. But I pin my faith to the Baluchis.

The country is looking splendid just now. Everything is a lovely green and the birds are whistling cheerily all day long. In fact, one feels glad to be here. The place in which I am at present is infested with leopards. On the night of the 18th, they broke into a native house close to me and severely injured a woman and a boy. I went down the following day to get a shot but was too late. Since then, they have been a nuisance on several occasions. But it is very difficult to sight a rifle correctly at night so we do not bother to shoot.

Reading a cable supposed to emanate from the United States, I was led to believe that the British Government had practically stated that the future of the German colonies was uncertain. If they are so foolish as to restore to Germany the fruits of so much labour and bloodshed, I think they will be guilty

### *Letters from the Trenches*

of a criminal act. To think that countries like this should be handed back to such a barbarous race as the Huns makes one's blood boil. Anyway, time will tell. (Rumour is an old offender at inventing evidence.)

Personally, I would not give back the enemy one square inch of the captured territory. Indeed, I would deprive them of everything they had that would tend to increase their overseas' trade; confiscate all their shipping that has been built up since the commencement of the war and all that is interned in neutral ports; in short, cripple both Germany and Austria in such a manner that their recovery would be a matter of nine or ten generations. Then, for that period (of their powerlessness to harm), peace would probably be secured. For have not the Huns proved themselves the foes of humanity, justice and freedom?

**Friday 26th October 1917**

**Private Victor Davies** sounded a note of hope for the end of the war when he wrote from somewhere in Salonika:

October 8th: It would be difficult for you to see our situation, though our surroundings seem everyday and commonplace to us. We are just on the southern slope of the southern and terminal line of the tumbled mass of hills and mountains, in the heart of which are the opposing trenches. North of this mass is a big plain, bounded by a tremendous barrier of the ----- mountains which we can see from most spots round here. Southward, the slope on which we lie, verges into a small plain and there are low, white hills beyond that which limit our view, except that sometimes, on a clear day, we can see high hills near Salonika. In the plain is a lake. I can see about half of it from the bivvy [bivouac or tent] as I write. It looks peaceful and blue in the morning sun. At sunrise and sunset, the lake and the hills near it take on gorgeous colours. But, magnificent as they are, these sights don't seem to have the effect on me that they would have in England. There is always the obsession at the back of the mind which prevents you from enjoying the finest pleasures.

Am still going backwards and forwards with the ambulance wagons. The journey is about as far as from Bourne to Stamford and back but not nearly so varied as the road runs along the foot of the hills and you have nearly the same

## *Letters from the Trenches*

prospect all the way. Strange as it may seem, the heat continues to be quite powerful throughout the day; the mornings are occasionally cold. Still, for a change, it would be nice to be back again in old Lincolnshire, to have an enjoyable run out on an October afternoon, then back home again to drink tea, out of cups, with no dust in it. Well, those happy days may come again and, perhaps, sooner than we dare to hope.

The correspondence ends here because for some unexplained reason, no letters written by Bourne soldiers were published by the *Stamford Mercury* during 1918. By that time, it was expected by the people at home that the war had been won and perhaps first hand accounts of life in the trenches no longer had a readership appeal. Fighting ceased at 11 am on Armistice Day, Monday 11th November 1918, and within weeks, the boys started coming home and were honoured during the official peace celebrations that were held in Bourne the following year, on Saturday 19th July 1919.

## **The Great War peace celebrations**

**T**he armistice which was signed on Monday 11th November 1918 ended the Great War and brought unprecedented scenes of public revelry and rejoicing throughout Britain and, as one observer remarked, the country became "like a giant school let out on holiday".

Victory Day began quietly under grey and sombre skies and then at 11 o'clock precisely, as the armistice took effect, the church bells started pealing and the people flocked out into the streets while boy scouts sounded the all clear on their bugles. There was continual cheering and flag waving as a war weary Britain celebrated and every available serviceman was hoisted shoulder high and carried through the streets and soon there were dancing and fireworks to add to the celebrations.

In Bourne, flags were soon flying in all parts of the town as the news began to circulate. Hundreds thronged the Market Place. Factories and offices closed down for the day, street lights that had been subdued for the duration were unmasked and blackout curtains and covers discarded.

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Rigid licensing laws imposed to deter drinking during the war years were ignored and the public houses were packed until nightfall and many ran out of beer.

Tuesday was a day of thanksgiving services. Ministers from all churches in the town met at the vicarage and arranged for a united service at the Abbey Church at 12.15 pm. It was well attended and conducted by the Rev H Drake. Lessons were read by other ministers including the Rev J Bateman and the Rev J Carvath and prayers were offered by the Rev J Comyn Jones.

The service included the Te Deum and hymns of a national thanksgiving character with Mr W Leary at the organ. There was also largely attended service at the Congregational Church conducted by the Rev J Comyn Jones, closing with the singing of the national anthem, and services at other free churches in the town during the evening with a second service at the Abbey Church.

The official celebrations were held the following year, on Saturday 19th July 1919, after several weeks of planning, and the atmosphere on that occasion was captured in the picture above that was taken on that day, most probably by William Redshaw, from a vantage point on the top floor of the Nag's Head Hotel, and provides an emotive glimpse of the town released from four years of war and its accompanying fear and restrictions.

The *Stamford Mercury* reported the following Friday:

The peace celebrations commenced with a procession from the Market Place, soldiers still serving taking the lead followed by those who had been discharged and disabled, with a sprinkling of those still in khaki, whilst ex-prisoners of war were among the number. The fire brigade also attended, the members of the General Johnson Society and Manchester United Oddfellows with their banner. The procession, certainly, was not so large as had been anticipated. The principal streets of the town were paraded. Hundreds of people assembled on the Abbey Lawn for the united service at noon. The band was in attendance and the church bells rang periodically during the day. The singing of the selected hymns was of a hearty character. The Rev H G Drake, the Baptist minister, offered an appropriate prayer, and the lesson was read

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by the Rev James Carvath; the Vicar, the Rev H Cotton Smith, following with an appropriate address. At the close, the National Anthem was sung.

An interesting ceremony after the service was the presentation to about twenty former Red Cross nurses who had laboured unselfishly at the Bourne Military Hospital during the war. The presentation took the form of a gold bar brooch with a Red Cross on a white lozenge inside a circle with the inscription "Bourne V A D Hospital, 1914-18." The following were the recipients: Miss Gibson, Mrs Cabourn, Miss Cartwright (Grimsthorpe), Mrs R A Collins, Miss Cooper (Dyke), Mrs J Galletly, Miss Hinson, Miss Mays, Mrs D S Paton, Mrs E Pearce, Miss Pool, Mrs Redshaw (Dyke), Miss Scotney, Miss Shilcock and Miss Story. The following were also recipients of similar brooches in recognition of assiduous work: Miss Lunn, Miss Andrew, Miss A Bell (Thurlby), and Mrs E Holland. All, excepting where otherwise stated, reside in Bourne. In the unavoidable absence of the Countess of Ancaster, the presentations were made by Dr W J Gilpin MBE, who spoke of the ungrudging spirit with which womankind had taken their part in the war.

A no less popular incident took place subsequent to the presentation to the nurses - that of War Certificates to local soldiers who have been awarded medals. Councillor F E Wherry, chairman of Bourne Urban District Council, performed this pleasing duty. Several of the men were present to receive the gift from the town whilst those absent will receive such by post. Rounds of applause went up as the "boys" received their gifts.

Some 300 men, soldiers and ex-soldiers, were entertained to dinner in the Corn Exchange. The catering was superintended by Messrs J B Shilcock, G Nash and J T Holmes, and many other ladies and gentlemen waiting upon the diners. Councillor G H Mays, president of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Federation, gave the loyal toasts and expressed sorrow for those men who had fallen in the fight but the town offered their heartiest congratulations to those who had returned. Rounds of lusty cheers were then given for Mr Mays and the caterers and waiters.

Subsequently the children marched to the Abbey Lawn and sang with an enthusiastic fervour (Mr Alf Stubley conducting) an excellent composition entitled "A Song for Lincolnshire" from the able pen of Mr J J Davies, the

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popular local author and schoolmaster, to the tune of *The Lincolnshire Poacher*. An impressive moment during the afternoon's proceedings was a silent tribute to the dead heroes of Bourne.

Later in the afternoon, tea was provided for the children on the Abbey Lawn and it is estimated that between 900 and 1,000 were present, a large committee of ladies serving as waiters. Peace medals were also presented to the children of the Abbey Church Sunday School who did not receive one on the occasion of the peace thanksgiving service recently. There was an odd shower or two during the day, but not sufficient to cause inconvenience until about five o'clock. The sports programme, however, had to be abandoned. For the excellent arrangements, special thanks are due to Mr F H Sones who acted in the capacity of honorary secretary.

The sports took place on Tuesday evening, the first available time the band could attend. The events were principally confined to the juveniles and the prize money was distributed by Mr G H Mays. Dancing was indulged in, and about 10 o'clock a display of rockets was witnessed by a large crowd. In place of the bonfire some flares were provided.

## **The War Memorial**

**T**hose who died in two World Wars are remembered by the War Memorial and a Garden of Remembrance established alongside the Bourne Eau in South Street in 1956. The design of the stone memorial was based on the cenotaph in Whitehall, London, and is the work of the architects W E Norman Webster and Son who once had offices in North Street.

The land, known as Wellhead Fields and Baldock's Paddock, had been purchased from the Marquess of Exeter by Bourne United Charities in 1945 to be preserved as a permanent open space for the town and part was used for the development of a Garden of Memory to those who had fallen in the two recent world wars.

A memorial fund was opened and the public were asked to contribute with the result that £1,700 had either been donated or promised by 110

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subscribers and £200 of this had come from people living outside the parish. In addition, William Castledine bequeathed £500 towards the cost of developing the land and a benefaction under the will of Alderman Thomas Whyment Atkinson JP, of Haconby Hall, who died in 1954, provided the rental income from 142 acres of land towards the project.

The War Memorial was unveiled and dedicated on Sunday 16th September 1956. Brigadier Edward Richards, MC, of the Royal Lincolnshire Regiment, performed the unveiling and dedication ceremony and a guard of honour was provided by the Territorial Army, the regimental colours being carried by Lieutenant John Swallow of A Company. The ceremony was attended by relatives of those named on the memorial, civic leaders, councillors, the charity trustees and many ex-servicemen and women, and the band of the 4th/6th Battalion of the Royal Lincolnshire Regiment (TA) provided the music.

Ministers from all denominations took part in the service during which the chairman of Bourne Urban District Council, Councillor Leslie Day, read lines from the war poem For the Fallen by Laurence Binyon. Wreaths were placed at the base of the cenotaph and the escort and colour party then paraded through the town to the Market Place where the salute was taken by Major General Griffin and the ceremony ended when the band beat Retreat. Since then, a service of remembrance has been held at the memorial every November to commemorate the town's war dead.

It is not recorded how many men left the town to join the armed forces during the Great War of 1914-18 but it is known that 97 men lost their lives and their names are inscribed on the stone cenotaph although there have been suggestions that the figure is nearer 140 and that 40 names are therefore missing.

The memorial also includes the names of 32 men who did not return from the conflict of 1939-45 and a further three who died on active service before the century ended. During the Second World War, many men also volunteered for service with the Home Guard which raised a total force of 1,600 from the town and district.

## *Letters from the Trenches*

The first casualty of the Great War from Bourne was Sgt Arthur Bates who was serving with the 1st Battalion, the Lincolnshire Regiment. He was a regular soldier who had already been in action during the Boer War and was subsequently posted to India, returning home in 1913 to visit his sister, Mrs Albert Scotney, who lived in North Street. At the outbreak of the war in 1914, he was sent to France, arriving with his battalion on August 17th and was killed in action at Mons a week later, on August 24th. He was 33 years old and is buried in Frameries Communal Cemetery in a suburb of Mons.

Sgt Bates was a native of Morton and so his name is also on the village war memorial. Mrs Scotney subsequently lost her eldest son Fred on the Somme in 1916 where he died from exposure after being trapped in mud, and her husband was killed shortly afterwards. News of the death of Sgt Bates did not arrive in Bourne until Wednesday 30th September and he was remembered at a memorial service held at the Abbey Church the following Sunday.

The last name of the last soldier who died in the Great War of 1914-18 to be added to the Roll of Honour on the cenotaph is that of G Coverley. He had been overlooked when the edifice was built and approaches from his relatives to remedy the omission were originally refused but the case was taken up by the Royal British Legion and his name was added to the memorial in 1985. The addition, together with the names of three servicemen who had died in more recent wars, William Dodd, Richard Jennings and John Booth, was dedicated at a special service on VE Day, May 8th, conducted by the Vicar of Bourne, Canon John Warwick, and attended by the Mayor of Bourne, Councillor Mrs Lesley Patrick and Lady Jane Willoughby.

35397 Private George Coverley of the Labour Corps died on 16th December 1918 as a result of war wounds. He was aged 35 years and it is said that he died in a military hospital in Scotland and his body brought to Bourne for burial in the cemetery. George Coverley's brother kept the New Inn on the Spalding Road which is now a private residence. No relations of Private Coverley are now left in Bourne.

## *Letters from the Trenches*

When the war ended, many grieving parents refused to believe that missing sons were dead and continued seeking information about them through public notices in the newspapers. A poignant example of this which reflects the heartache of war for those at home, appeared in the Stamford Mercury on Friday 24th January 1919:

Private *George Hare*, No 140820, of the A Company, 34th Machine Gun Company, was taken prisoner on 10th April 1918. Nothing has been heard of him since July 25th last. If anyone can give any information it will be gladly welcomed by his parents at 26, Hereward Street, Bourne.

There was no news and the name of G Hare appears on the War Memorial.

The names that appear on the War Memorial are as follows:

**World War I - 1914-18:** H Allen, F N Andrews, A Ash, P Barsby, F Baldock, H Baldock, A Bates, C H Baxter, R Benstead, J V Bosley, H Brightman, G A Brooks, W Bray, J Brown, S Brown, J Burt, E Carvath, J A Carter, A Chambers, H P Cleary, H Clark, J E Clark, A E Clark, W E Close, J A Clare, I Cooper, W Cook, C R Creek, A E Cursley, E Grummitt, C A Green, G Hare, H Fortescue, J T Haines, G A Holland, C Hornsey, J C Hudson, S Jackson, H L Joyce, S Kettle, F J Keal, B Kettle, T Knowles, A W Lane, H Lane, F Lloyd, L Lloyd, F Larkinson, C Leary, G Lunn, W Lunn, G Marvin, A Mason, W S Michelson, J Morton, C Mills, F Needham, W Needham, F North, W A Oakden, C E Osgathorpe, R Osborn, R Pattison, E Parker, J Parry, R Parker, H Pearce, H Pridmore, H C Reeves, G H Rix, T B Rhodes, E Robinson, G Rouse, F Scotney, G Sherwin, J J Smith, J H Smith, F J N Smith, R Smithson, F Stubbley, E Stubbley, J Stevenson, P E Stevenson, G Tabor, A Thornton, H W Teat, W Thompson, A Thompson, W M Toulson, A Watson, F E H Wass, W C F Watts, W Watson, G A Woodward, E Wyles, E P Wass, G Coverley.

**World War II - 1939-45:** J Brightman, C Bryant, J Clay, R J Cross, R H Cook, R C Dewey, R J Gable, C Girling, J Green, C A Green, B J Katoff, E E Lockton, D Milner, C E Michelson, H J E Mason, C H Nield, W A Northern, W Pont, F J Pattison, W H Riley, A J Rout, L Riley, C R Schofield, R J Sayer,

## *Letters from the Trenches*

G A Sibley, R G Squires, W A Smith, F R Sones, D Steel, H Showell, R Waller.

**Malaya 1957:** D J Webb.

**Borneo 1962:** R Jennings

**Northern Ireland 1975:** J R Booth.

Four more of our war dead are buried together in the town cemetery with headstones from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. They are (left to right) Private R J Sayer of the Lincolnshire Regiment, killed on 26th October 1940, aged 19, Lance Corporal D Milner of the Loyal Regiment, killed on 3rd October 1941, aged 21, Sergeant J R Everett of the Parachute Regiment Army Air Corps, killed 13th March 1944, aged 34, and Sapper C E Michelson, Royal Engineers, killed 9th November 1944, aged 29. The last headstone is a particularly poignant one because it also contains a memorial inscription to Private W S Michelson, killed during the First World War in Belgium on 7th October 1917, aged 35, and so successive wars claimed both father and son.