VARIOUS

500 OF THE BEST COCKNEY WAR STORIES

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Содержание

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EDITOR'S FOREWORD

In the remembering, and in the retelling, of those war days when laughter sometimes saved men's reason, Cockneys the world over have left to posterity a record of noble and imperishable achievement.

From the countless tales collected by the London *Evening News* these five hundred, many of them illustrated by the great war-time artist, Bert Thomas, have been chosen as a fitting climax and perpetuation.

Sir Ian Hamilton's story of another war shows that, however much methods of fighting may vary from generation to generation, there is no break in continuity of a great tradition, that the spirits of laughter and high adventure are immortal in the make-up of the British soldier.

Sir Ian's story is doubly fitting. As President of the Metropolitan Area of the British Legion he is intimately concerned with the after-war welfare of just that Tommy Atkins who is immortalised in these pages. In the second place, all

profits from the sale of this book will be devoted to the cause which the Higher Command in every branch of the Services is fostering – the British Legion.

SIR IAN HAMILTON'S STORY

The Great War was a matrix wherein many anecdotes have sprouted. They are short-lived plants – fragile as mushrooms – none too easy to extricate either, embedded as they are in the mass.

To dig out the character of a General even from the plans of his General Staff is difficult; how much more difficult to dig out the adventures of Number 1000 Private Thomas Atkins from those of the other 999 who went "like one man" with him over the top? In the side-shows there was more scope for the individual and in the Victorian wars much more scope. To show the sort of thing I mean I am going to put down here for the first time an old story, almost forgotten now, in the hopes that it may interest by its contrast to barrages and barbed wire. Although only an old-fashioned affair of half a dozen bullets and three or four dead men it was a great event to me as it led to my first meeting with the great little Bobs of Kandahar.

On the morning of September 11, 1879, I lay shivering with fever and ague at Alikhel in Afghanistan. So sick did I seem that it was decided I should be carried a day's march back to G.H.Q. on the Peiwar Kotal to see if the air of that high mountain pass would help me to pull myself round. Polly Forbes, a boy subaltern not very long from Eton, was sent off to play the part of nurse.

We reached the Peiwar Kotal without any adventure, and

were allotted a tent in the G.H.Q. camp pitched where the road between the Kurram Valley and Kabul ran over the high Kotal or pass. Next morning, although still rather weak in the knees, I felt game for a ride to the battlefield. So we rode along the high ridge through the forest of giant deodars looking for mementoes of the battle. The fact was that we were, although we knew it not, in a very dangerous No Man's Land.

We had reached a point about two miles from camp when we were startled by half a dozen shots fired in quick succession and still more startled to see some British soldiers rushing down towards us from the top of a steep-sided knoll which crowned the ridge to our immediate front.

Close past us rushed those fugitives and on, down the hillside, where at last, some hundred yards below us, they pulled up in answer to our shouts. But no amount of shouts or orders would bring them up to us, so we had to get off our ponies and go down to them. There were seven of them – a Corporal and three men belonging to one of the new short service battalions and three signallers – very shaky the whole lot. Only one was armed with his rifle; he had been on sentry-go at the moment the signalling picquet had been rushed – so they said – by a large body of Afghans.

What was to be done? I realised that I was the senior. Turning to the Corporal I asked him if he could ride. "Yes, sir," he replied rather eagerly. "Well, then," I commanded, "you get on to that little white mare up there and ride like hell to G.H.Q.

for help. You others go up with him and await orders." Off they went, scrambling up the hill, Forbes and I following rather slowly because of my weakness. When we got up to the path, ponies, syces, all had disappeared except that one soldier who had stuck to his rifle.

All was as still as death in the forest where we three now stood alone. "Where are the others?" I asked the man. "I think they must be killed." "Do you think they are up there?" "Yessir!" So I turned to Forbes and said, "If there are wounded or dead up there we must go and see what we can do."

Where we stood we were a bit far away from the top of the wooded hill for a jezail shot to carry and once we began to climb the slope we found ourselves in dead ground. Nearing the top, my heart jumped into my mouth as I all but put my foot on a man's face. Though I dared not take my eyes off the brushwood on the top of the hill, out of the corner of my eye I was aware he was a lascar and that he must be dead, for his head had nearly been severed from his body.

At that same moment we heard a feeble cry in Hindustani, "*Shabash, Sahib log, chello!*" "Bravo, Gentlemen, come along!" This came from another lascar shot through the body – a plucky fellow. "*Dushman kahan hain?*" – "Where are the enemy?" I whispered. "When the sahibs shouted from below they ran away," he said, and at that, side by side with the revolvers raised to fire, Forbes and I stepped out on to the cleared and levelled summit of the hill, a space about fifteen feet by twenty.

All was quiet and seemed entirely normal. There stood the helio and there lay the flags. Most astonishing of all, there, against a pile of logs, rested the priceless rifles of the picquet guard with their accoutrements and ammunition pouches lying on the ground beside them. Making a sign to Forbes we laid down our revolvers ready to hand, took, each of us, a rifle, loaded it, fixed the bayonet and stood at the ready facing the edge of the forest about thirty yards away.

Even in these days when my memory is busy chucking its seventy years or so of accumulations overboard, the memory of that tense watch into the forest remains as fresh as ever. For the best part of half an hour it must have lasted. At last we heard them – not the Afghans but our own chaps, coming along the ridge and now they were making their way in open order up the hill – a company of British Infantry together with a few Pathan auxiliaries, the whole under command of Captain Stratton of the 22nd Foot, head Signaller to the Force.

In few words my story was told and at once bold Stratton determined to pursue down the far side of the hill. Stratton had told me to go back to camp, but I did not consider that an order and, keeping on the extreme left of the line so that he should not see me, I pushed along.

I noticed that the young soldier of the picquet who had stuck to his rifle was still keeping by me as the long line advanced down the slope, which gradually bifurcated into two distinct spurs. The further we went the wider apart drew the spurs and the deeper

became the intervening nullah. Captain Stratton, Forbes, and the Regimental Company commander were all on the other or eastern spur and the men kept closing in towards them, until at last everyone, bar myself and my one follower, had cleared off the western spur. I did not want to cross the nullah, feeling too weak and tired to force my way through the thick undergrowth. Soon we could no longer hear or see the others.

Suddenly I heard Click! "Take cover!" I shouted and flung myself behind a big stone. Sure enough, the moment often imagined had come! Not more than twenty paces down the slope an old, white-bearded, wicked-looking Enemy was aiming at me with his long jezail from behind a fallen log. Click! again. Another misfire.

Now I was musketry instructor of my regiment, which had been the best shooting regiment in India the previous year. My revolver was a rotten little weapon, but I knew its tricks. As the Afghan fumbled with his lock I took aim and began to squeeze the trigger. Another instant and he would have been dead when bang! went a rifle behind me; my helmet tilted over my eyes, my shot went where we found it next day, about six feet up into a tree. The young soldier had opened rapid fire just over my head.

At the same time, I saw another Afghan come crouching through the brushwood below me towards a point where he would be able to enfilade my stone. I shouted to my comrade, "I'm coming back to you," and turned to make for his tree. Luck was with me. At that very moment bang went the jezail and when we

dug out the bullet next morning and marked the line of fire, it became evident that had I not so turned I would never have sat spinning this yarn.

That shot was a parting salute. There were shouts from the right of the line, and as I was making for my tree the Afghans made off in the other direction. I shouted to Stratton and his men to press down to the foot of the hill, working round to the north so as to cut off the raiders. Then, utterly exhausted, I began my crawl back to the camp.

Soon after I had got in I was summoned into the presence of the redoubtable Bobs. Although I had marched past him at Kohat this was my first face-to-face meeting with one who was to play the part of Providence to my career. He made me sit in a chair and at once performed the almost incredible feat of putting me entirely at my ease. This he did by pouring a golden liquid called sherry into a very large wine-glass. Hardly had I swallowed this elixir when I told him all about everything, which was exactly what he wanted.

A week later the Commander of the Cavalry Brigade, Redan Massy, applied to Headquarters for an Aide-de-Camp. Sir Fred Roberts advised him to take me. That billet led to unimaginable bliss. Surrounding villages by moonlight, charging across the Logar Valley, despising all foot sloggers – every sort of joy I had longed for. The men of the picquet who had run away were tried by Court Martial and got long sentences, alas – poor chaps! The old Mullah was sent to his long account by Stratton.

But that is the point of most war stories; when anyone gets a lift up it is by the misfortune or death of someone else.

Ian Hamilton.

1. ACTION

The Outside Fare

During the third battle of Ypres a German field gun was trying to hit one of our tanks, the fire being directed no doubt by an observation balloon.

On the top of the tank was a Cockney infantryman getting a free ride and seemingly quite unconcerned at Jerry's attempts to score a direct hit on the tank.

As the tank was passing our guns a shrapnel shell burst just behind it and above it.

We expected to see the Cockney passenger roll off dead. All he did, however, was to put his hand to his mouth and shout to those inside the tank: "Hi, conductor! Any room inside? – it's rainin'!" —*A. H. Boughton (ex "B" Battery, H.A.C.), 53 Dafforne Road, S.W.17.*

"Barbed Wire's Dangerous!"

A wiring party in the Loos salient – twelve men just out from home. Jerry's Verey lights were numerous, machine-guns were unpleasantly busy, and there were all the dangers and alarms

incidental to a sticky part of the line. The wiring party, carrying stakes and wire, made its way warily, and every man breathed apprehensively. Suddenly one London lad tripped over a piece of old barbed wire and almost fell his length.

"Lumme," he exclaimed, "that ain't 'arf dangerous!" —*T. C. Farmer, M.C., of Euston Square, London (late of "The Buffs").*

Tale of an Egg

I was attached as a signaller to a platoon on duty in an advanced post on the Ypres-Menin Road. We had two pigeons as an emergency means of communication should our wire connection fail.

One afternoon Fritz put on a strafe which blew in the end of the culvert in which we were stationed. We rescued the pigeon basket from the debris and discovered that an egg had appeared.

That evening, when the time came to send in the usual evening "situation report," I was given the following message to transmit:

"Pigeon laid one egg; otherwise situation normal." —*D. Webster, 85 Highfield Avenue, N.W.11.*

"No Earfkwikes"

On a bitterly cold, wet afternoon in February 1918 four privates and a corporal were trying to take what shelter they

could. One little Cockney who had served in the Far East with the 10th Middlesex was complaining about everything in general, but especially about the idiocy of waging war in winter.

"Wot yer grumblin' at?" broke in the corporal, "you with yer fawncy tyles of Inja? At any rate, there ain't no blinking moskeeters 'ere nor 'orrible malyria."

There was a break in the pleasantries as a big one came over. In the subsequent explosion the little Cockney was fatally wounded.

"Corpril," the lad gasped, as he lay under that wintry sky, "you fergot to menshun there ain't no bloomin' sun-stroke, *nor no earfkwikes, neither*."

And he smiled – a delightful, whimsical smile – though the corporal's "Sorry, son" was too late. —*V. Meik, 107 King Henry's Road, N.W.3.*

A "Bow Bells" Heroine

For seven hours, with little intermission, the German airmen bombed a camp not a hundred miles from Etaples. Of the handful of Q.M.A.A.C.s stationed there, one was an eighteen-year-old middle-class girl, high-strung, sensitive, not long finished with her convent school. Another was Kitty, a Cockney girl of twenty, by occupation a machine-hand, by vocation (missed) a comédienne, and, by heaven, a heroine.

The high courage of the younger girl was cracking under the strain of that ordeal by bombs. Kitty saw how it was with her,

and for five long hours she gave a recital of song, dialogue, and dance – most of it improvised – while the bombs fell and the anti-aircraft guns screamed. In all probability she saved the younger girl's reason.

When the last raider had dropped the last bomb, Kitty sank down, all but exhausted, and for long cried and laughed hysterically. Hers was not the least heroic part played upon that night. —*H. N., London, E.*

Samson, but Shorn

During the German attack near Zillebeke in June 1916 a diminutive Cockney, named Samson, oddly enough, received a scalp wound from a shell splinter which furrowed a neat path through his hair.

The fighting was rather hot at the time, and this great-hearted little Londoner carried on with the good work.

Some hours later came the order to fall back, and as the Cockney was making his way down the remains of a trench, dazed and staggering, a harassed sergeant, himself nearly "all in," ordered him to bear off a couple of rifles and a box of ammunition.

This was the last straw. "Strike, sergeant," he said, weakly, "I can't 'elp me name being Samson, but I've just 'ad me perishin' 'air cut!" – "*Townie," R.A.F.*

"What's Bred in the Bone – !"

When we were at Railway Wood, Ypres Salient, in 1916, "Muddy Lane," our only communication trench from the front line to the support line, had been reduced to shapelessness by innumerable "heavies." Progress in either direction entailed exposure to snipers in at least twelve different places, and runners and messengers were, as our sergeant put it, "tickled all the way."

In the support line one afternoon, hearing the familiar "Crack! Crack! Crack!" I went to Muddy Lane junction to await the advertised visitor. He arrived – a wiry little Cockney Tommy, with his tin hat dented in two places and blood trickling from a bullet graze on the cheek.

In appreciation of the risk he had run I remarked, "Jerry seems to be watching that bit!"

"Watching!" he replied. "'Struth! I felt like I was walking darn Sarthend Pier naked!" —*Vernon Sylvaine, late Somerset L.I., Grand Theatre, Croydon.*

A Very Human Concertina

In March 1918, when Jerry was making his last great attack, I was in the neighbourhood of Petit Barisis when three enemy bombing planes appeared overhead and gave us their load. After

all was clear I overheard this dialogue between two diminutive privates of the 7th Battalion, the London Regiment ("Shiny Seventh"), who were on guard duty at the Q.M. Stores:

"You all right, Bill?"

"Yes, George!"

"Where'd you get to, Bill, when he dropped his eggs?"

"Made a blooming concertina of meself and got underneaf me blinkin' tin 'at!" *—F. A. Newman, 8 Levett Gardens, Ilford, Ex-Q.M.S., 8th London (Post Office Rifles).*

A One-Man Army

The 47th London Division were holding the line in the Bluff sector, near Ypres, early in 1917, and the 20th London Battalion were being relieved on a very wet evening, as I was going up to the front line with a working party.

Near Hell Fire Corner shells were coming over at about three-minute intervals. One of the 20th London Lewis gunners was passing in full fighting order, with fur coat, gum boots, etc., carrying his Lewis gun, several drums of ammunition, and the inevitable rum jar.

One of my working party, a typical Cockney, surveyed him and said:

"Look! Blimey, he only wants a field gun under each arm and he'd be a bally division." *—Lieut. – Col. J. H. Langton, D.S.O.*

"Nah, Mate! Soufend!"

During the heavy rains in the summer of 1917 our headquarters dug-out got flooded. So a fatigue party was detailed to bale it out.

"Long Bert" Smith was one of our baling squad. Because of his abnormal reach, he was stationed at the "crab-crawl," his job being to throw the water outside as we handed the buckets up to him.

It was a dangerous post. Jerry was pasting the whole area unmercifully and shell splinters pounded on the dug-out roof every few seconds.

Twenty minutes after we had started work Bert got badly hit, and it was some time before the stretcher-bearers could venture out to him. When they did so he seemed to be unconscious.

"Poor blighter!" said one of the bearers. "Looks to be going West."

Bert, game to the last, opened his eyes and, seeing the canvas bucket still convulsively clutched in his right fist, "Nah, mate!" he grunted – "Soufend!"

But the stretcher-bearer was right. —*C. Vanon, 33 Frederick Street, W.C.I.*

"I Got 'Ole Nelson Beat!"

Several stretcher cases in the field dressing station at the foot of "Chocolate Hill," Gallipoli, awaited removal by ambulance, including a Cockney trooper in the dismounted Yeomanry.

He had a bandage round his head, only one eye was visible, and his left arm was bound to his breast with a sandbag.

His rapid-fire of Cockney witticisms had helped to keep our spirits up while waiting – he had a comment for everything. Suddenly a "strafe" started, and a shrapnel shell shot its load among us.

Confusion, shouts, and moans – then a half-hysterical, half-triumphant shout from the Cockney: "Lumme, one in the blinkin' leg this time. I got 'ole Nelson beat at last!" —*J. Coomer (late R.E.), 31 Hawthorn Avenue, Thornton Heath.*

Two Kinds of Fatalist

A German sniper was busy potting at our men in a front-line trench at Cambrai in March 1918. A Cockney "old sweat," observing a youngster gazing over the parapet, asked him if he were a fatalist.

The youngster replied "Yes."

"So am I," said the Cockney, "but I believes in duckin'." –

"Brownie," Kensal Rise, N.W.10.

Double up, Beauty Chorus!

One summer afternoon in '15 some lads of the Rifle Brigade were bathing in the lake in the grounds of the château at Elverdinghe, a mile or so behind the line at Ypres, when German shells began to land uncomfortably near. The swimmers immediately made for the land, and, drawing only boots on their feet, dashed for the cellar in the château.

As they hurried into the shelter a Cockney sergeant bellowed, "Nah then, booty chorus: double up an' change for the next act!"
—G E. Roberts, M.C. (late Genl. List, att'd 21st Divn. Signal Co.), 28 Sunbury Gardens, Mill Hill, N.W.7.

The Theatre of War

During the battle of Arras, Easter 1917, we were lying out in front of our wire in extended order waiting for our show to begin. Both our artillery and that of Fritz were bombarding as hard as they could. It was pouring with rain, and everybody was caked in mud.

Our platoon officer, finding he had a good supply of chocolate, and realising that rations might not be forthcoming for some time, crept along the line and gave us each a piece.

As he handed a packet to one cheerful Cockney he was asked, "Wot abaht a programme, sir?" —*W. B. Finch (late London Regiment), 155 High Road, Felixstowe.*

"It's the Skivvy's 'Arf Day Orf"

Easter Monday, April 9, 1917. Night. Inches of snow and a weird silence everywhere after the turmoil of the day. Our battalion is held up in front of Monchy-le-Preux during the battle of Arras. I am sent out with a patrol to reconnoitre one of our tanks that is crippled and astride the German wire 300 yards out.

It is ticklish work, because the crew may be dead or wounded and Fritz in occupation. Very warily we creep around the battered monster and presently I tap gingerly on one of the doors. No response. We crawl to the other side and repeat the tapping process. At last, through the eerie silence, comes a low, hoarse challenge.

"Oo are yer?"

"Fusiliers!" I reply, as I look up and see a tousled head sticking through a hole in the roof.

"Ho!" exclaims the voice above, "I'll 'ave ter come dahn and let yer in meself, it's the skivvy's 'arf day orf!"

The speaker proved to have a shattered arm – among other things – and was the sole survivor of the crew. —*D. K., Fulham, S.W.6.*

Cricket on the Somme

"Spider" Webb was a Cockney – from Stepney, I believe – who was with us on the Somme in 1916. He was a splendid cricketer.

We had had a very stiff time for six or seven hours and were resting during a lull in the firing. Then suddenly Jerry sent over five shells. After a pause another shell came over and burst near to "Spider" and his two pals.

When the smoke cleared I went across to see what had happened. "Spider's" two pals were beyond help. The Cockney was propping himself up with his elbows surveying the scene.

"What's happened, Webb?" I said. "Blimey! What's happened?" was the reply. "One over – two bowled" (and, looking down at his leg) – "and I'm stumped." Then he fainted.
—George Franks, M.C. (late Lieut., Royal Artillery), Ilford, Essex.

M'Lord, of Hoxton

We called him "M'lord." He came from Hoxton – "That's where they make 'em," he used to say. He was a great asset to us, owing to the wonderful way in which he went out and "won" things.

One night, near Amiens, in 1916, "M'lord" said, "I'm going

aht to see wot some uvver mob has got too much of." One or two of us offered to accompany him, but he refused, saying, "You bloomin' elephants 'ud be bahnd to give the gime away."

About three hours later, when we were beginning to get anxious, we saw him staggering in with a badly wounded German, who was smoking a cigarette.

Seeing us, and very much afraid of being thought soft-hearted, "M'lord" plumped old Fritz down on the fire-step and said very fiercely, "Don't you dare lean on me wif impunity, or wif a fag in your mouf."

Jerry told us later that he had lain badly wounded in a deserted farmhouse for over two days, and "M'lord" had almost carried him for over a mile.

"M'lord" was killed later on in the war. Our battalion was the 7th Batt. Royal Fusiliers (London Regt.) —*W. A., Windsor.*

The Tall Man's War

In our platoon was a very tall chap who was always causing us great amusement because of his height. Naturally he showed his head above the parapet more often than the rest of us, and whenever he did so *ping* would come a bullet from a sniper and down our tall chum would drop in an indescribably funny acrobatic fashion.

The climax came at Delville Wood in August 1916, when, taking over the line, we found the trench knocked about in a way

that made it most uncomfortable for all of us. Here our tall friend had to resort to his acrobatics more than ever: at times he would crawl on all fours to "dodge 'em." One shot, however, caused him to dive down more quickly than usual – right into a sump hole in the trench.

Recovering himself, he turned to us and, with an expression of unutterable disgust, exclaimed, "You blokes can laugh; anybody 'ud fink I was the only blighter in this war." —*C. Bragg (late Rifle Brigade, 14th Division), 61 Hinton Road, Herne Hill, S.E.24.*

Germany Didn't Know This

One night in June 1916, on the Somme, we were ordered to leave our line and go over and dig an advance trench. We returned to our trench before dawn, and shortly afterwards my chum, "Pussy" Harris, said to me, "I have left my rifle in No Man's Land."

"Never mind," I said, "there are plenty more. Don't go over there: the snipers are sure to get you."

But my advice was all in vain; he insisted on going. When I asked him why he wanted that particular rifle he said, "Well, the barrel is bent, *and it can shoot round corners.*"

He went over…

That night I saw the regimental carpenter going along the trench with a roughly-made wooden cross inscribed "R.I.P. Pte. Harris." —*W. Ford, 613 Becontree Avenue, Chadwell Heath,*

Essex.

Better than the Crystal Palace

One night, while going round the line at Loos, I was accompanied by Sergeant Winslow, who was a London coster before the war.

We were examining the field of fire of a Lewis gun, when the Germans opened up properly on our sector. Clouds of smoke rose from the surrounding trenches, crash after crash echoed around the old Loos crassier, and night was turned into day by Verey lights sent up by both sides.

Suddenly a lad of 18, just out, turned to Sergeant Winslow, and in a quivering voice said: "My God, sergeant, this is awful!"

Sergeant Winslow replied: "Now, look 'ere, me lad, you'd have paid 'alf a dollar to take your best gal to see this at the Crystal Palace before the war. What are yer grousing abaht?" —*A. E. Grant (late 17th Welch Regt.), 174 Broom Road, Teddington.*

A Short Week-end

One Saturday evening I was standing by my dug-out in Sausage Valley, near Fricourt, when a draft of the Middlesex Regt. halted for the guide to take them up to the front line where the battalion was. I had a chat with one of the lads, who told me

he had left England on the Friday.

They moved off, and soon things got lively; a raid and counter-raid started.

Later the casualties began to come down, and the poor chaps were lying around outside the 1st C.C.S. (which was next to my dug-out). On a stretcher was my friend of the draft. He was pretty badly hit. I gave him a cigarette and tried to cheer him by telling him he would soon be back in England. With a feeble smile he said, "Blimey, sir, this 'as been a short week-end, ain't it?" —*Pope Stamper (15th Durham L.I.), 188A Upper Richmond Road, East Sheen, S.W.14.*

Simultaneous Chess

At Aubers Ridge, near Fromelles, in October 1918, my chum and I were engrossed in a game of chess, our chessboard being a waterproof sheet with the squares painted on it, laid across a slab of concrete from a destroyed pill-box.

The Germans began to drop 5·9's with alarming regularity about 150 yards to our rear, temporarily distracting our attention from the game.

Returning to the game, I said to my chum, "Whose move, Joe?"

Before he could reply a shell landed with a deafening roar within a few yards of us, but luckily did not explode (hence this story).

His reply was: "Ours" – and we promptly did. —*B. Greenfield, M.M. (late Cpl. R.F.A., 47th (London) Division), L.C.C. Parks Dept., Tooting Bec Common, S.W.*

Fire-step Philosophy

On July 1, 1916, I happened to be among those concerned in the attack on the German line in front of Serre, near Beaumont Hamel. Our onslaught at that point was not conspicuously successful, but we managed to establish ourselves temporarily in what had been the Boche front line, to the unconcealed indignation of the previous tenants.

During a short lull in the subsequent proceedings I saw one of my company – an elderly private whose melancholy countenance and lank black moustache will ever remain engraved on my memory – seated tranquilly on the battered fire-step, engrossed in a certain humorous journal.

Meeting my astonished eye, he observed in a tone of mild resentment: "This 'ere's a dud, sir. 'S not a joke in it – not what *I* calls a joke, anyway."

So saying, he rose, pocketed the paper, and proceeded placidly to get on with the war. —*K. R. G. Browne, 6B Winchester Road, N.W.3.*

"Teddie" Gets the Last Word

Sergeant "Teddie" was rather deaf, but I am inclined to think that this slight affliction enabled him to pull our legs on occasions.

Our company of the London Regiment had just taken over a part of the line known as the Paris Redoubt, and on the first evening in the sector the company commander, the second in command, Sergeant "Teddie," and myself had a stroll along the observation line, which was just forward of the front line, in order to visit the various posts.

Suddenly a salvo of shells came over and one burst perilously near us. Three of the party adopted the prone position in record time, but on our looking round "Teddie" was seen to be still standing and apparently quite unconcerned.

"Why the dickens didn't you get down?" said one of the party, turning to him. "It nearly had us that time."

"Time?" said "Teddie," looking at his watch. "A quarter to seven, sir." —*J. S. O. (late C.S.M., 15th London Regt.).*

"Nobbler's" Grouse

Just before the battle of Messines we of the 23rd Londons were holding the Bluff sector to the right of Hill 60. "Stand

down" was the order, and the sergeant was coming round with the rum.

"Nobbler," late of the Mile End Road, was watching him in joyful anticipation when … a whizz-bang burst on the parapet, hurling men in all directions. No one was hurt … but the precious rum jar was shattered.

"Nobbler," sitting up in the mud and moving his tin hat from his left eye the better to gaze upon the ruin, murmured bitterly: "Louvain – Rheims – the *Lusitania*– and now our perishin' rum issue. Jerry, you 'eathen, you gets worse and worse. But, my 'at, won't you cop it when 'Aig knows abaht this!" *—E. H. Oliver, Lanark House, Woodstock, Oxford.*

Dust in 'Indenburg's Sauerkraut!

To all those thousands who remember Shrapnel Corner and the sign: "DRIVE SLOWLY! SPEED CAUSES DUST WHICH DRAWS THE ENEMY'S SHELL FIRE" this incident will appeal.

I had rounded the corner into Zillebeke Road with a load of ammunition, and had gone about 200 yards along the road, when Fritz let go with a few shells.

"Rum Ration" (my mate's nick-name) looked out of the lorry to observe where the shells were falling.

"Nah we're for it," he exclaimed, "our dust must 'ave gorn into ole 'Indenberg's blinkin' sauerkraut." *—J. H. Clarke, ex-Pte.,*

M.T.A.S.C.

A Valiant Son of London

Crack! Crack! Crack! – and men falling with each crack. It is terrible; we are faced with mud, misery, and despair. A German machine-gun is taking its toll.

It seems impossible to get at the gunners, and we spend hours lying in wait. This waiting proves too much for one of us; single-handed he takes a chance and crawls away from my side. I keep him covered; minutes roll by; they seem hours, days; and, as he is now out of sight, I begin to give up hope for him, my Cockney pal.

Some instinct warns me to keep watch, and I am rewarded. I feel my eyes start from my head as I see the approaching procession – four Germans, hands above their heads, and my pal following, carrying the machine-gun across his shoulders. I marvel at his courage and wonder how it was done … but this I am never to know. As I leap from the trench to give him assistance I realise his number is nearly up. He is covered with blood.

I go to relieve him of his burden, and in that moment one of the Germans, sensing that my pal is almost out, turns on us with his revolver. We are held at the pistol-point and I know I must make a desperate bid to save my pal, who has done his best in an act which saved a portion of our line.

I drop the gun and, with a quick movement, I am able to trip the nearest German, but he is quick too and manages to stick me (and I still carry the mark of his bayonet in my side).

The realisation I am still able to carry on, that life is sweet, holds me up, and, with a pluck that showed his determination and Cockney courage, my pal throws himself into a position in which he can work the gun. *Crack!* and *Crack!* again: the remaining Germans are brought down.

I am weak with loss of blood, but I am still able to drag my pal with me, and, aided by his determination, we get through. It seems we are at peace with the world. But, alas, when only five yards from our trenches a shell bursts beside us; I have a stinging pain in my shoulder and cannot move! Machine-guns and rifles are playing hell.

My pal, though mortally wounded, still tries to drag me to our trench. He reaches the parapet … *Zip* … *Zip*. The first has missed, but the second gets him. It is a fatal shot, and, though in the greatest agony, he manages to give me a message to his folks…

He died at my side, unrewarded by man. The stretcher-bearer told me that he had five bullet-holes in him. He lies in France to-day, and I owe my life to him, and again I pay homage to his memory and to him as one of England's greatest heroes – a Valiant Son of London. *—John Batten (late Rifleman, 13 Bn., K.R.R.C.), 50 Sussex Gardens, Hyde Park, W.2.*

A Hint to the Brigadier

Alec Lancaster was a showman at the White City in pre-war days. Short in stature, he possessed a mighty heart, and in the ghastly days in front of Poelcapelle he made history as the sergeant who took command of a brigadier.

The brigadier had been on a visit to the front line to inspect a new belt of wire and, passing the – headquarters, paused to look around.

Just then a few shells came over in quick succession and things looked nasty.

Alec Lancaster took command and guided the brigadier somewhat forcibly into a dug-out with the laconic, "Nah, then. We don't want any dead brigadiers rahnd 'ere." —*Geo. B. Fuller, 146 Rye Road, Hoddesdon, Herts.*

"Salvage? Yus, Me!"

On the third day of the German offensive in March 1918 a certain brigade of the R.F.A. was retiring on Péronne.

A driver, hailing from London town, was in charge of the cook's cart, which contained officers' kits belonging to the headquarters' staff.

As he was making his way along a "pip-squeak" came over

and burst practically beneath the vehicle and blew the whole issue to pieces. The driver had a miraculous escape.

When he recovered from the shock he ruefully surveyed the debris, and after deciding that nothing could be done, continued his journey on foot into Péronne.

Just outside that town he was met by the Adjutant, who said, "Hullo, driver, what's happened – where's cook's cart with the kits?"

Driver: Blown up, sir.

Adjutant (*anxiously*): Anything salved?

Driver: Yus, sir, me! —*F. H. Seabright, 12 Broomhill Road, Goodmayes, Essex.*

Almost Self-inflicted

The London (47th) Division, after a strenuous time on the Somme in September 1916, were sent to Ypres for a quiet (?) spell, the depleted ranks being made up by reserves from home who joined us *en route*.

The 18th Battalion (London Irish), were informed on taking the line that their opponents were men of the very same German regiment as they had opposed and vanquished at High Wood.

Soon after "stand down" the following morning Rifleman S – mounted the fire-step and, cupping his hands to his mouth, shouted, "Compree 'Igh Wood, Fritz?"

The words had hardly left his lips when *zip*, a sniper's bullet

knocked his tin hat off his head and Rifleman S – found himself lying on the duckboards with blood running down his face.

Picking himself up, he calmly gathered his souvenirs together and said as he made his way out, "Cheerio, boys, I've got a Blighty one, but don't tell the colonel it was self-inflicted." —*A. C. B., Ilford, Essex.*

Nobby's 1,000 to 1 Chance

Our division (the Third) was on its way from the line for the long-looked-for rest. We were doing it by road in easy stages.

During a halt a pack animal (with its load of two boxes of "·303") became restive and bolted. One box fell off and was being dragged by the lashing. Poor old Nobby Clarke, who had been out since Mons, stopped the box with his leg, which was broken below the knee.

As he was being carried away one of the stretcher-bearers said, "Well, Nobby, you've got a Blighty one at last."

"Yus," said Nobby; "but it took a fousand rahnds to knock me over." —*H. Krepper (late 5th Fusiliers), 62 Anerley Road, Upper Norwood, S.E. 19.*

That Derby Scheme

The Commanding Officer of a Territorial battalion was

wounded in both hands during the third battle of Gaza in 1917. He had much service to his credit, was a lieutenant-colonel of over two years' standing, had been wounded twice before, and held the D.S.O.

He pluckily remained with his unit for thirty-six hours. Then, worn out with lack of sleep, pain, and loss of blood, and filled with disappointment at having to leave his battalion still in the fight, he trudged back to the field ambulance.

His sufferings, which had aged his appearance, and the Tommy's tunic which he wore in action, apparently misled a party of 10th London men whom he passed. They looked sympathetically at him, and one said, "Poor old blighter, *'e ought never to 'ave been called up.*" *—Captain J. Finn, M.C., Constitutional Club, W.C.2.*

"Shoo-Shoo-Shooting"

There were no proper trenches in front of Armentières in early December 1914, and a machine gun section was doing its best to build an emplacement and cover. It was in the charge of a young Londoner who in times of excitement stuttered badly.

Not being satisfied with the position of one sandbag, he hopped over those already in place, and in full view of Jerry (it was daylight too), began to adjust the sandbag that displeased him.

Jerry immediately turned a machine gun on him, but the

young officer finished his work, and then stood up.

Looking towards Jerry as the section yelled to him to come down, he stuttered angrily. "I b-b-be-lieve the bli-bli-blighters are shoo-shoo-shoo-shoo-ting at me." At that moment someone grabbed his legs and pulled him down. It was a fine example of cool nerve. —*T. D., Victoria, S.W.1.*

Ancient Britons? – No!

It happened late in 1917 in Tank Avenue, just on the left of Monchy-le-Preux. It was a foul night of rain, wind, sleet, and whizz-bangs.

My battalion had just been relieved, and we were making our way out as best we could down the miry communication trench. Every now and again we had to halt and press ourselves against the trench side to allow a straggling working party of the K.R.R.s to pass up into the line.

Shells were falling all over the place, and suddenly Fritz dropped one right into the trench a few bays away from where I was.

I hurried down and found two of the working party lying on the duckboards. They were both wounded, and one of them had his tunic ripped off him by the force of the explosion. What with his tattered uniform – and what remained of it – and his face and bare chest smothered in mud, he was a comical though pathetic sight. He still clung to his bundle of pickets he had been carrying

and he sat up and looked round with a puzzled expression.

One of our sergeants – a rather officious fellow – pushed himself forward.

"Who are you?" he asked. "K.R.R.s?"

"'Course," retorted the half-naked Cockney. "Oo d'ye fink we was – Ancient Britons?" —*E. Gordon Petrie (late Cameron Highlanders), "Hunky-Dory," Demesne Road, Wallington, Surrey.*

Desert Island – Near Bullecourt

Between Ecoust and Bullecourt in January 1918 my platoon was passing a mine crater which was half-full of water when suddenly Jerry sent one over. Six of our fellows were wounded, and one of them, a Bow Road Cockney, was hurled into the crater.

He struggled to his feet and staggered towards a pile of rubble that rose above the muddy water like an island. Arrived there, he sat down and looked round him in bewilderment. Then: "Blimey," he muttered, "Robinson ruddy Crusoe!" —*E. McQuaid (late R.S.F.), 22 Grove Road, S.W.9.*

"Tiger's" Little Trick

On October 11-12, 1914, during the Mons retreat, a small

party of 2nd Life Guards were told off as outpost on the main road, near Wyngene, Belgium. After we had tied our horses behind a farmhouse at the side of the road, we settled down to await the arrival of "Jerry."

Time went slowly, and one of our troopers suggested that we all put a half-franc into an empty "bully" tin, and the first one of us who shot a German was to take the lot. To this we all agreed.

It was about midnight when, suddenly, out of the shadows, rode a German Death's-head Hussar. We all raised our rifles as one man, but before we could shoot "Tiger" Smith, one of our real Cockney troopers, shouted, "*Don't shoot! Don't shoot!*" During our momentary hesitation "Tiger's" rifle rang out, and off rolled the German into the road.

Upon our indignant inquiry as to why he had shouted "Don't shoot," "Tiger" quietly said, "Nah, then, none of your old buck; just hand over that tin of 'alf francs I've won." —*Fred Bruty (late Corporal of Horse, 2nd Life Guards), City of London Police Dwellings, No. 3, Ferndale Court, Ferndale Road, S.W.9.*

Raffle Draw To-night!

Near St. Quentin, in October 1918, I was in charge of a section that was detailed to cross a railway to establish communication with troops on the other side. Unfortunately we were spotted by a German machine gunner, who made things very hot for us, two men being quickly hit. We managed, however, to reach a small

mound where, by lying quite flat, we were comparatively safe.

Glancing in the direction from which we had come, I saw a man whom I recognised as "Topper" Brown, our company runner, dashing as hard as he could for the cover where we had sheltered.

"How do, corp?" he said when he came up. "Any of your blokes like to go in a raffle for this watch?" (producing same). "'Arf a franc a time; draw to-night in St. Quentin." —*S. Hills (late Rifle Brigade), 213, Ripple Road, Barking.*

Exit the General's Dessert

In the early part of the War we were dug in between the Marne and the Aisne with H.Q. situated in a trench along which were growing several fruit trees which the troops were forbidden to touch.

The Boche were shelling with what was then considered to be heavy stuff, and we were all more or less under cover, when a large one hit the back of the trench near H.Q.

After the mess staff had recovered from the shock it was noticed that apples were still falling from a tree just above, and the mess corporal, his ears and eyes still full of mud, was heard to say: "Thank 'eaven, I shan't have to climb that perishin' tree and get the old man's bloomin' dessert to-night." —*E. Adamson, Overseas Club, St. James's.*

"Try on this Coat, Sir"

In September 1916, while with the 17th K.R.R.C., I lost my overcoat in a billet fire at Mailly-Maillet and indented for a new one, which, however, failed to turn up.

We moved to Hebuterne, where the line was very lively and the working parties used to be strafed with "Minnies" all night.

One night, while on patrol, with nerves on the jump, I was startled to hear a voice at my elbow say, "Try this on."

It was the Q.M.'s corporal with the overcoat!

I solemnly tried it on there and then in No Man's Land, about 300 yards in front of our front line and not very far from the German line.

The corporal quite casually explained that he had some difficulty in finding me out there in the dark, but he did not want the trouble of carrying stuff out of the line when we moved! —*S. W. Chuckerbutty, (L.R.B. and K.R.R.C.), 3 Maida Hill West, London, W.2.*

On the Kaiser's Birthday

In the Brickstacks at Givenchy, 1916. The Germans were celebrating the Kaiser's birthday by putting a steady succession of "Minnies" into and around our front line trench.

Just when the strain was beginning to tell and nerves were getting jumpy, a little Cockney corporal jumped on the fire-step and, shaking his fist at the Germans forty yards away, bawled, "You wait till it's *my* ruddy birthday!"

Fritz didn't wait two seconds, but the little corporal had got his laugh and wasn't taking a curtain. —*"Bison" (late R.W.F.).*

"Chuck us yer Name Plate!"

In June 1917 we were ordered to lay a line to the front line at "Plug Street". Fritz started to bombard us with whizz-bangs, and my pal and I took cover behind a heap of sandbags, noticing at the same time that all the infantrymen were getting away from the spot.

When things quietened down we heard a Cockney voice shouting, "Hi, mate! Chuck us yer name plate (identification disc). Y're sitting up against our bomb store." —*S. Doust (late Signal Section, "F" Battery, R.H.A.), 53 Wendover Road, Well Hall, Eltham, S.E.9.*

To Hold His Hand

While on our way to relieve the 1st R.W.F.s, who were trying their utmost to hold a position in front of Mametz Wood, it was necessary to cross a road, very much exposed to Jerry's machine

guns.

A burst of firing greeted our attempt, and when we succeeded, a Cockney who had a flesh wound caused a smile by saying, "Go back? Not me. Next time I crosses a road I wants a blinking copper ter 'old me 'and?" *—G. Furnell, 57a Southwold Road, Upper Clapton, E.5.*

The New Landlord

During an advance on the Somme in 1916 my company was rushed up to the captured trenches to search the dug-outs and to bring in the prisoners.

My Cockney pal was evidently enjoying himself. As he went from one dug-out to another he was singing:

> "Orl that I want is lo-ove,
> Orl that I want is yew."

Entering one dug-out, however, his voice suddenly changed. In the dug-out were three Germans. Showing them the point of his bayonet, the Cockney roared: "Nah, then, aht of it; 'op it. I'm lan'lord 'ere nah." *—C. Grimwade, 26 Rotherhithe New Road, Rotherhithe, S.E.16.*

"Out of Bounds" in the Line

One night in October '14, in the neighbourhood of Herlies, "Ginger," a reservist, was sent out to call in the men of a listening post.

Dawn came, but no "Ginger" returned, and as he did not turn up during the day he was given up for lost.

Soon after dusk, however, a very worn and fed-up "Ginger" returned. We gathered that he had suddenly found himself in the German lines, had had a "dust-up," had got away, and had lain out in No Man's Land until dusk allowed him to get back.

The company officer was inclined to be cross with him, and asked him, "But what made you go so far as the enemy position?"

"Ginger" scratched his head, and then replied, "Well, sir, nobody said anyfink to me abaht it being aht o' bahnds." —*T. L. Barling (late Royal Fusiliers), 21 Lockhart Street, Bow, E.3.*

Epic of the Whistling Nine

On May 14, 1917, the 2/2nd Battalion of the London Regiment occupied the support lines in front of Bullecourt. "A" company's position was a thousand yards behind the front line trenches. At 2 p.m. the enemy began to subject the whole area to an intense bombardment which lasted more than thirteen hours.

In the middle of the bombardment (which was described by the G.O.C. – in-Chief as "the most intense bombardment British troops had had to withstand"), No. 3 platoon of "A" company was ordered to proceed to the front line with bombs for the battalion holding it. The platoon consisted of 31 N.C.O.s and men and one officer.

The only means of communication between the support and front lines was a trench of an average depth of two feet. Along this trench the platoon proceeded, carrying between them forty boxes of Mills bombs. Every few yards there were deep shell holes to cross; tangled telephone wires tripped the men; M. G. bullets swept across the trench, and heavy shells obtained direct hits frequently, while shrapnel burst overhead without cessation.

A man was hit every few minutes; those nearest him rendered what aid was possible, unless he was already dead; his bombs were carried on by another.

Of the thirty-one who started, twenty-one were killed or wounded; the remainder, having taken an hour and a half to cover the 1,000 yards, reached the front line *with the forty boxes of bombs intact.*

They were ordered to remain, and thus found themselves assisting in repulsing an attack made by the 3rd Lehr Regiment of Prussian Guards, and two of the men succeeded in wounding and capturing the commanding officer of the attacking regiment.

Of the ten N.C.O.s and men who were left, a lance-corporal was blown to pieces in the trench; the remainder stayed in the

front line until they were relieved four days later. On their way back, through Vaux Vraucourt, they picked clusters of May blossom, and with these in their equipment and rifle barrels, marched into the transport lines whistling. —*Captain, London Regiment.*

Tale of a Cook and a "Crump"

Our cook was having the time of his life. The transition from trench warfare to more or less open warfare in late October 1918 brought with it a welcome change of diet in the form of pigs and poultry from the deserted farms, and cook had captured a nice young porker and two brace of birds.

From the pleasant aroma which reached us from the cottage as we lay on our backs watching a German aeroplane we knew that cook would soon be announcing the feast was ready.

Suddenly from the blue came a roar like that of an express train. We flung ourselves into the ditch… *K-k-k-k-r-r-r-ump!*

When the smoke and dust cleared away the cottage was just a rubbish heap, but there was cook, most miraculously crawling out from beneath a debris of rafters, beams, and bricks!

"Ruddy 'orseplay!" was the philosopher's comment. —*I. O., 19 Burnell Road, Sutton, Surrey.*

" – Returns the Penny"

When my husband commanded the 41st Division in France he was much struck by the ready wit of a private of the Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment) in a tight corner.

A bomb landed in a crowded dug-out while the men were having a meal. Everyone stared aghast at this ball of death except one Tommy, who promptly picked it up and flung it outside saying: "Grite stren'th returns the penny, gentlemen!" as he returned to his bully beef. —*Lady Lawford, London, S.W.1.*

"In Time for the Workman's?"

A night wire-cutting party in the Arras sector had been surprised by daylight. All the members of the party (21st London Regiment) crawled back safely except one Cockney rifleman.

When we had reached the trenches and found that he was missing, we were a bit upset. Would he have to lie out in No Man's Land all day? Would he be spotted by snipers?

After a while our doubts were answered by a terrific burst from the German machine guns. Some of the bolder spirits peered over the top of the "bags" and saw our Cockney pal rushing, head down, towards our line while streams of death poured around him.

He reached our parapet, fell down amongst us in the mud, uninjured, and immediately jumped to his feet and said, "Am I in time for the workman's?" —*D. F., Acton, W.3.*

A Lovely Record

The Time: March 1916.

The Scene: The Talus des Zouaves – a narrow valley running behind Vimy Ridge from Neuville St. Vaast through Souchez. The weather is bleak, and there is a sticky drizzle – it is towards dusk.

The Man: A native of "somewhere just awf the 'Bricklayers Arms' – you know where that is, sir." Height, just over 5 feet; complexion, red; hair, red and not over tidy; appearance, awkward; clothes don't seem to fit quite. Distinguishing marks – a drooping red moustache almost concealing a short clay pipe, stuck bowl sideways in the corner of the mouth. On the face there is a curious – whimsical – wistful, in fact, a Cockney expression.

The Occasion: The Boche is putting down his evening "strafe" – an intense and very accurate barrage laid like a curtain on the southern slope of the valley. Our hero, his hands closed round the stock of his rifle held between his knees, is squatting unconcernedly on the wet ground in the open on the northern side of the valley, where only a shell with a miraculous trajectory could have scored a direct hit, watching the shells burst almost every second not a great distance away. The din

and pandemonium are almost unbearable. Fragments of H.E. and shrapnel are dropping very near.

The Remark: Removing his pipe to reveal the flicker of a smile, he remarked, in his inimitable manner: "*Lor' blimey, guv'nor, wouldn't this sahnd orl rite on a grammerphone?*" *—Gordon Edwards, M.C. (Captain, late S.W.B.), "Fairholm," 48 Alexandra Road, Wimbledon, S.W.19.*

Logic in No Man's Land

Fritz had been knocking our wire about, and a party of us were detailed to repair it. One of our party, a trifle more windy than the rest, kept ducking at the stray bullets that were whistling by. Finally, 'Erb, who was holding the coil of wire, said to him, "Can't yer stop that bobbin' abaht? They won't 'urt yer unless they 'its yer." *—C. Green, 44 Monson Road, New Cross, S.E.14.*

Fousands … and Millions

It was on the Mons-Condé Canal, on the afternoon of August 23, 1914. Our artillery had just opened up when a tiny Cockney trumpeter, who could not have been more than 15 years old, came galloping up to us with a message.

"How are the gunners going on, boy?" said my captain.

"Knocking 'em down in fousands, sir," replied the lad.

"Good," said the captain.

"Yus, and they're coming on in millions," replied the boy as he rode away to his battery.

A plucky kid, that. —*W. H. White, 29 Clive Road, Colliers Wood, S.W.19.*

Lost: A Front Line

Two or three American officers were attached to our brigade H.Q. on the Somme front.

We were doing our usual four days in the front line when one morning an American officer emerged from the communication trench. Just then the Germans opened out with everything from a 5·9 to rifle grenade. We squeezed into funk-holes in the bottom of the trench. Presently there was a lull, and the American officer was heard to ask, "Say, boys, where is the front line in these parts?"

"Tich," a little Cockney from Euston way, extracted himself from the earth, and exclaimed, "Strike! j'ear that? Wot jer fink this is – a blinkin' rifle range?" —*W. Wheeler (late 23rd Battalion Royal Fusiliers), 55 Turney Road, Dulwich, S.E.*

"If Our Typist Could See Me Nah"

Imagine (if you can) the mud on the Somme at its worst. A

Royal Marine Artilleryman (a very junior clerk from "Lambeff") was struggling up the gentle slope behind Trones Wood with a petrol tin of precious water in either hand. A number of us were admiring his manly efforts from a distance when the sudden familiar shriek was heard, followed by the equally familiar bang.

We saw him thrown to the ground as the whizz-bang burst but a few feet from him, and we rushed down, certain that he had "got his." Imagine our surprise on being greeted by an apparition that had struggled to a sitting posture, liberally plastered with mud, and a wound in the shoulder, who hoarsely chuckled and said: "If our typist could see me *nah*!" *—C. H. F. (W/Opr. attached R.M.A. Heavy Brigade).*

Q! Q! Queue!

The scene was an observation post in the top of a (late) colliery chimney, 130 ft. up, on the outskirts of Béthune, during the last German offensive of the War.

A great deal of heavy shelling was in progress in our immediate vicinity, and many of Fritz's "high-velocities" were screaming past our lofty pinnacle, which was swaying with the concussion. At any moment a direct hit was possible.

My Cockney mate had located a hostile battery, and after some difficulty with the field telephone was giving the bearing to headquarters.

Faults in the line seemed to prevent him from finishing his

message, which consisted of giving the map square (Q 20) being "strafed." The "Q" simply would not reach the ears of the corporal at headquarters, and after many fruitless efforts, using "Q" words, I heard him burst out in exasperation: "Q! Q! Queue! … Blimey! you know – the blinkin' thing wot the pore blighters at home wite abaht for 'mawgarine' in." —*B. W. Whayman (late F.S.C., R.E.), 24 Oxford Street, Boston, Lincolnshire.*

"Fine 'eads er Salery!"

We were in a deep railway cutting near Gouzeancourt. Jerry's aeroplanes had found us and his artillery was trying to shift us.

On the third day we had run out of cigarettes, so the sergeant-major asked for a volunteer to go to a canteen four miles away.

Our Cockney, a costermonger well known in the East End, volunteered. He could neither read nor write, so we fixed him up with francs, a sandbag, and a list.

Hours passed, the strafe became particularly heavy, and we began to fear our old pal had been hit.

Suddenly during a lull in the shelling far away along the ravine we heard a voice shouting, "Ere's yer fine 'eads er salery 'orl white." He was winning through. —*"Sparks," Lowestoft, Suffolk.*

The Old Soldier Falls

After my battalion had been almost wiped out in the 1918 retirement, I was transferred to the 1st Batt. Middlesex Regt. One old soldier, known to us as "Darky," who had been out since '14, reported at B.H.Q. that he wanted to go up the front line with his old mates instead of resting behind the line.

His wish was granted. He was detailed to escort a party of us to the front line.

All went well till we arrived at the support line, where we were told to be careful of snipers.

We had only gone 20 yards further when the old soldier fell back into my arms, shot through the head. He was dying when he opened his eyes and said to me, "Straight on, lad. You can find your way now." —*A. H. Walker, 59 Wilberforce Road, Finsbury Park, N.4.*

Not Meant For Him

At the end of September 1917 my regiment (5th Seaforth Highlanders) were troubled by bombing raids by enemy aircraft at the unhealthy regularity of one raid per hour. We were under canvas at Siege Camp, in the Ypres sector, and being near to a battery of large guns we were on visiting terms with some of the

gunners, who were for the most part London men.

A Lewisham man was writing a letter in our tent one day when we again had the tip that the Germans were flying towards us. So we all scattered.

After the raid we returned to our tent and were surprised to see our artillery friend still writing his letter. We asked him whether he had stayed there the whole time and in reply he read us the following passage from his letter which he had written during the raid:

"As I write this letter Jerry is bombing the Jocks, but although I am in their camp, being a Londoner, I suppose the raid is not meant for me, and I feel quite safe." —*W. A. Bull, M.M., 62 Norman Road, llford, Essex.*

An Extra Fast Bowler

During the defence of Antwerp in October 1914 my chum, who was wicket-keeper in the Corps cricket team, got hit in the head.

I was with him when he came to, and asked him what happened.

"Extra fast one on the leg side," was his reply. —*J. Russell (late R.M.L.I.), 8 Northcote Road, Deal, Kent.*

"I'll Call a Taxi, Sir"

During an engagement in East Africa an officer was badly wounded. Bill, from Bermondsey, rode out to him on a mule. Whilst he was trying to get the officer away on his mule the animal bolted. Bill then said, "Me mule 'opped it, sir. 'E's a fousand miles from 'ere, so I'll giv yer a lift on my Bill and Jack (back)."

The officer was too heavy, so Bill put him gently on the ground saying, "Sorry, sir, I'll 'ave ter call a taxi." Bill then ran 500 yards under heavy machine-gun fire to where the armoured cars were under cover. He brought one out, and thereby saved the officer's life.

After the incident, Bill's attention was drawn to a bullet hole in his pith helmet. "Blimey," he said, "what a shot! If he 'adn't a missed me, 'e'd a 'it me." Bill was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. —*W. B. Higgins, D.C.M. (late Corpl. Mounted Infantry), 46 Stanley Road, Ilford.*

Attack in "Birthday Clothes"

We came out of the line on the night of June 14-15, 1917, to "bivvies" at Mory, after a hot time from both Fritz and weather at Bullecourt. When dawn broke we were astonished and delighted

to see a "bath." Whilst we were in the line our Pioneers had a brain wave, dug a hole in the ground, lined it with a tarpaulin sheet, and filled it with water.

As our last bath was at Achiet-le-Petit six weeks before, there was a tremendous crowd waiting "mit nodings on," because there was "standing room only" for about twenty in the bath.

Whilst ablutions were in progress an aeroplane was heard, but no notice was taken because it was flying so low – "one of ours" everybody thought. When it came nearer there was a shout, "Strewth, it's a Jerry plane."

Baths were "off" for the moment and there was a stampede to the "bivvies" for rifles. It was the funniest thing in the world to see fellows running about in their "birthday suits" plus only tin hats, taking pot shots at the aeroplane.

Even Fritz seemed surprised, because it was some moments before he replied with his machine gun.

We watched him fly away back to his own lines and a voice broke the silence with, "Blinkin' fools to put on our tin 'ats. Uvverwise 'ole Fritz wouldn't a known but what we might be Germans."

I often wonder if any other battalion had the "honour" of "attacking the enemy" clad only in tin hats. —*G. M. Rampton (late 12th London Regt., "Rangers"), 43 Cromwell Road, Winchester.*

His Good-bye to the Q.M

Scene, Ypres, May 1915. The battalion to which I belonged had been heavily shelled for many hours, and among the casualties was "Topper" Brown, a Cockney, who was always in trouble for losing items of his kit. Taken to the dressing station to have a badly shattered foot amputated, he recovered consciousness to find the C.Q.M.S. standing by the stretcher on which he lay.

The C.Q.M.S., not knowing the extent of Brown's injury, inquired, "What's the trouble, Brown?"

In a weak voice the Cockney replied, "Lost one boot and one sock again, Quarter." *—E. E. Daniels (late K.R.R.), 178 Caledonian Road, N.1.*

From Bow and Harrow

We were in the line at Neuville St. Vaast in 1916. A raid had just been carried out. In the party were two inseparable chums, one from Bow and one from Harrow. (Of course they were known as Bow and Arrow.)

The bulk of the raiders had returned, but some were yet to come in. Some time later three forms were seen crawling towards our line. They were promptly helped in.

As their faces were blackened they were hard to recognise, and a corporal asked them who they were.

"Don't yer know us?" said the chap from Bow. "We're Bow and Arrow." "Blimey!" said another Cockney standing by. "And I suppose the other bloke's Robin 'ood, aint 'e." *—G. Holloway (late London Regt. and 180 M.G.C.), 179 Lewis Buildings, West Kensington, W.14.*

Piccadilly in the Front Line

Towards the end of September 1918 I was one of a party of nine men and an officer taking part in a silent raid in the Ypres sector, a little in front of the well-known spot called Swan and Edgar's Corner. The raid was the outcome of an order from Headquarters demanding prisoners for information.

Everything had been nicely arranged. We were to approach the German line by stealth, surprise an outpost, and get back quickly to our own trenches with the prisoners.

Owing perhaps to the wretchedness of the night – it was pouring with rain, and intensely black – things did not work according to plan. Instead of reaching our objective, our party became divided, and the group that I was with got hopelessly lost. There were five of us, including "Ginger," a Cockney.

We trod warily for about an hour, when we suddenly came up against a barbed-wire entanglement, in the centre of which we could just make out the figure of a solitary German.

After whispered consultation, we decided to take him prisoner, knowing that the German, having been stationary, had not lost sense of direction and could guide us back to our line. Noiselessly surmounting the barbed wire, we crept up to him and in a second Ginger was on him. Pointing his bayonet in Fritz's back, he said, "Nah, then, you blighter, show us the way 'ome."

Very coolly and without the slightest trace of fear, the German replied in perfect English, "I suppose you mean me to lead you to the British trenches."

"Oh!" said Ginger, "so yer speak English, do yer?"

"Yes," said the German, "I was a waiter at a restaurant in Piccadilly before the War."

"Piccadilly, eh? You're just the feller we want. Take us as far as Swan and Edgar's Corner." *—R. Allen (late Middlesex Regt., 41st Division), 7 Moreland Street, Finsbury Park, N.4.*

"Wag's" Exhortation

On a bitterly cold night, with a thick fog settling, the Middlesex Regt. set out on a raid on a large scale on the enemy's trenches. Fritz must have got wind of it, for when they were about half-way across the enemy guns opened fire and simply raked No Man's Land. The air was alive with shrapnel and nearly two-thirds of the raiders were casualties in no time.

Those that could tried to crawl back to our lines, but soon lost all direction in the fog. About half a dozen of them crawled into a

shell-hole and lay there wounded or exhausted from their efforts, and afraid to move while the bombardment continued.

Meanwhile "Wag" Bennett, a Cockney, though badly wounded, had dragged himself out of a shell-hole, and was crawling towards what proved later to be the enemy lines when he saw the forms of the other fellows in the darkness. As he peered down upon them he called out, "Strike me pink! Lyin' abaht dahn there as if you was at the 'Otel Cissle, while there's a ruddy war agoin' on. Come on up aht of it, else you'll git us all a bad name."

In a moment they were heartened, and they crawled out, following "Wag" on their hands and knees and eventually regained our lines. Poor "Wag" died soon afterwards from his wounds. *—H. Newing, 1 Park Cottages, Straightsmouth, Greenwich, S.E.10.*

Making a King of Him

Our company of the Middlesex Regiment had captured a hill from Johnny Turk one evening, and at once prepared for the counter-attack on the morrow. My platoon was busy making a trench. On the parapet we placed large stones instead of sandbags.

During these operations we were greeted with machine-gun fire from Johnny and, our numbers being small, we had to keep firing from different positions so as to give the impression that we were stronger than we really were.

It was while we were scrambling from one position to another that "Smudger" Smith, from Hammersmith, said: "Love us, Sarge, 'ow's this for a blinkin' game of draughts?" The words were hardly out of his mouth when Johnny dropped a 5·9 about thirty yards away. The force of the explosion shook one of the stones from the parapet right on to "Smudger's" head, and he was knocked out.

When he came round his first words were: "Blimey, they must 'ave 'eard me to crown me like that." —*W. R. Mills (late Sergt., 2/10th Middlesex Regt.), 15 Canterbury Road, Colchester, Essex.*

"Peace? Not wiv you 'ere!"

Two Cockney pals who were always trying to get the better of one another in a battle of words by greeting each other with such remarks as "Ain't you blinkin' well dead yet?" earned for themselves the nick-names of Bill and Coo.

One evening they were sent to fetch water, and on the return journey the Germans started to shell rather heavily.

Coo ran more quickly than Bill and fell into a shell-hole. He scrambled out in time to see his pal blown sky high by what appeared to be a direct hit.

Coo was heard to remark: "I always told 'im 'e ought to be reported missing, and blimey if 'e ain't."

He then went to see if he could find the body: instead he found Bill alive, though badly wounded.

When finally Coo got his pal back to the trench, Bill opened his eyes. Seeing Coo bending over him, he said: "Lumme, I thought peace 'ad come at last, but it ain't – not wiv you 'ere." —*William Walker, 30 Park Road, Stopsley Road, Luton, Beds.*

An Expert on Shells

We were billeted in the vaults of Ypres Post Office. Towards dusk of a summer's day in 1916 four of us were lounging at the top of the vault stairs, discussing the noise made by different shells. Jerry, a Cockney, was saying, "Yes, yer can always tell big 'uns – they shuffles," and went on to demonstrate with *Shsh-shsh-shsh*, when someone said "Listen!"

There was the real sound, and coming straight for us. We dived or fell to the bottom of the stairs. Followed a terrific "crump" right in the entrance, which was completely blocked up.

Every candle and lamp was blown out; we were choking with dust and showered with bricks and masonry.

There was a short silence, and Jerry's voice from the darkness said, "There y'are; wot did I tell yer?" —*H. W. Lake, London.*

A Camel "on the Waggon"

During the battle of Gaza in April 1917 camels were used for the conveyance of wounded. Each camel carried a stretcher on

either side of its hump. Travelling in this manner was something akin to a rough Channel crossing.

I was wounded in the leg. My companion was severely wounded in both legs. Some very uncomplimentary remarks were passed between us concerning camels, particularly the one which was carrying us.

When we arrived at a field dressing-station a sergeant of the R.A.M.C. came along with liquid refreshments.

"Sergeant," said my chum, "if you give this bloke (indicating the camel) anything to drink I'm going to walk, 'cos I believe the blighter was drunk before we ever set eyes on him." —*Albert J. Fairall, 43 Melbourne Road, Leyton, E.10.*

Parting Presents

It was on Passchendaele Ridge in 1917. Jerry had been giving us a hot time with his heavies. Just before daybreak our telephone line went west and we could not get through to our O.P.

I was detailed to go out and repair the line with a young Cockney from Hackney. He had only been with us a few days and it was his first time up the line.

We had mended one break when shells dropped all round us. When I got to my feet, I saw my pal lying several feet away. I escaped with a few splinters and shock. I dragged my chum to a shell-hole which was full of water and found he was badly hit about the shoulder, chest, and leg. I dressed him as best I

possibly could, when, *bang*, a shell seemed to drop right on us and something came hurtling into our hole with a splash.

It turned out to be a duckboard. I propped my chum against it to stop him slipping back into the water. After a few minutes he opened his eyes, and though in terrible pain, smiled and said, "Lummy, Jeff, old Jerry ain't so bad, after all. He has given me a nice souvenir to take to Blighty and now he has sent me a raft to cross the Pond on." Then he became unconscious.

It was now daybreak and quiet. I pulled him out of the hole and went and repaired the line. We got him away all right, but I never heard from him. I only hope he pulled through: he showed pluck. *—Signaller H. Jeffrey (late Royal Artillery), 13 Bright Road, Luton, Chatham, Kent.*

Bluebottles and Wopses

We had just gone into the front line. Two of us had not been there before.

During a conversation with a Cockney comrade, an old hand, we told him of our dislike of bombs. He tried to re-assure us something like this: "Nah, don't let them worry you. You treat 'em just like blue-bottles, only different. With a blue-bottle you watch where it settles an' 'it it, but with bombs, you watch where they're goin' to settle and 'op it. It's quite simple."

A short time after a small German bomb came over and knocked out our adviser. My friend and I picked him up and

tried to help him. He was seriously hurt. As we lifted him up my friend said to him, "You didn't get your blue-bottle that time, did you?" He smiled back as he replied: "'Twasn't a blue-bottle, mate; must 'ave been a blinkin' wopse." —*C. Booth, 5 Creighton Road, N.W.6.*

The Cheerful "Card"

On that June morning in 1917 when Messines Ridge went up, a young chap was brought in to our A.D.S. in Woodcote Farm. A piece of shell had torn a great gap in each thigh. Whilst the sergeant was applying the iodine by means of a spray the M.O. asked, "How are things going this morning?" The lad was wearing a red heart as his battalion sign, and despite his great pain he answered: "O.K. sir. Hearts were trumps this morning." —*R. J. Graff, 3/5th L.F.A., 47th Division, 20 Lawrie Park Road, Sydenham.*

Great Stuff This Shrapnel

During the retreat from Mons it was the cavalry's work to hold up the Germans as long as possible, to allow our infantry to get in position.

One day we had a good way to run to our horses, being closely pursued by the Germans. When we reached them we were all

more or less out of breath. A little Cockney was so winded that he could hardly reach his stirrup, which kept slipping from under his foot.

Just then a shrapnel shell burst directly overhead, and the Cockney, without using his stirrup, vaulted clean into the saddle.

As we galloped off he gasped, "Blimey, don't they put new life in yer? They're as good as Kruschens." —*E. H. (late R.H.G.), 87 Alpha Road, Surbiton, Surrey.*

Wot a War!

Three of us were sitting on the high ground on the Gallipoli Beach watching shells dropping from the Turk positions.

A "G.S." wagon was proceeding slowly along below us, the driver huddled in his coat, for the air was chill.

Suddenly he jumped from the wagon and ran in our direction – he had heard the shell before we had.

The next moment the wagon was proceeding skywards in many directions, and the horses were departing at top speed in different directions.

The driver surveyed the scene for a moment and then in a very matter-of-fact voice said: "Blimey! See that? Now I suppose I've got to *walk* back, and me up all night – wot a war!" And away he trudged! —*C. J. A., N.W.11.*

The Umpire

After a retreat in May 1915 we saw, lying between our fresh position and the German lines, an English soldier whom we took to be dead.

Later, however, we advanced again, and discovered that the man was not dead, but badly wounded.

On being asked who he was, he replied in a very weak voice, "I fink I must be the blinkin' umpire." —*W. King (late Royal Fusiliers), 94 Manor Grove, Richmond, Surrey.*

"Don't Tell 'Aig"

Little "Ginger" was the life and soul of our platoon until he was wounded on the Somme in 1918.

As he was carried off to the dressing-station he waved his hand feebly over the side of the stretcher and whispered, "Don't tell 'Aig! He'd worry somethin' shockin'." —*G. E. Morris (late Royal Fusiliers), 368 Ivydale Road, Peckham Rye, S.E.15.*

"… In Love and War"

During a most unpleasant night bombing raid on the transport lines at Haillecourt the occupants of a Nissen hut were waiting

for the next crash when out of the darkness and silence came the Cockney voice of a lorry driver saying to his mate, "'Well,' I sez to 'er, I sez, 'You do as you like, and I can't say no fairer than that, can I?'" —*F. R. Jelley, Upland Road, Sutton, Surrey.*

"Afraid of Yer Own Shells"

I was on the Italian front in June 1918, and our battery was being strafed by the Austrians with huge armour-piercing shells, which made a noise like an express train coming at you, and exploded with a deafening roar.

An O.K. had just registered on one of our guns, blowing the wheels and masses of rock sky-high. A party of about twenty Austrian prisoners, in charge of a single Cockney, were passing our position at the time, and the effect of the explosion on the prisoners was startling. They scattered in all directions, vainly pursued by the Cockney, who reminded me of a sheep-dog trying to get his flock together.

At last he paused. "You windy lot o' blighters," he shouted as he spat on the ground in evident disgust, "afraid of yer own bloomin' shells!" —*S. Curtis, 20 Palace Road, Upper Norwood, S.E.19.*

The Leader of the Blind

In July 1918, at a casualty clearing station occupying temporary quarters in the old College of St. Vincent at ruined Senlis we dealt with 7,000 wounded in eight days. One night when we were more busy than usual an ambulance car brought up a load of gas-blinded men.

A little man whose voice proclaimed the city of his birth – arm broken and face blistered with mustard gas, though he alone of the party could see – jumped out, looked around, and then whispered in my ear, "All serene, guv'nor, leave 'em to me."

He turned towards the car and shouted inside, "Dalston Junction, change here for Hackney, Bow, and Poplar."

Then gently helping each man to alight, he placed them in a line with right hand on the shoulder of the man in front, took his position forward and led them all in, calling softly as he advanced, "Slow march, left, left, I had a good job and I *left* it."

—Henry T. Lowde (late 63rd C.C.S., R.A.M.C.), 101 Stanhope Gardens, Harringay, N.4.

Pity the Poor Ducks

We were in the Passchendaele sector in 1917, and all who were there know there were no trenches – just shell-holes half-

filled with water.

Jerry had been strafing us for two days without a stop and of our platoon of twenty-three men only seven came out alive. As we were coming down the duckboard track after being relieved Jerry started to put over a barrage. We had to dive for the best cover we could get.

Three of us jumped into a large shell-hole, up to our necks in water. As the shells dropped around us we kept ducking our heads under the water.

Bert Norton, one of us – a Cockney – said: "Strike, we're like the little ducks in 'Yde Park – keep going under."

After another shell had burst and we had just come up to breathe Bert chimed in again with: "Blimey, mustn't it be awful to have to get your living by ducking?" *—J. A. Wood, 185 Dalston Lane, E.8.*

Waiting Room Only

It was in No Man's Land, and a party of New Zealand troops were making for shelter in a disabled British tank to avoid the downpour of shrapnel. They were about to swarm into the tank when the head of a London Tommy popped out of an aperture, and he exclaimed, "Blimey. Hop it! This is a waiting room, not a blinkin' bee-hive." *—A. E. Wragg, 1 Downs Road, Beckenham, Kent.*

Not Yet Blasé

We arrived at the Cambrai front in 1917 – just a small bunch of Cockneys – and were attached to the Welsh Brigade of Artillery, being told to report to B.H.Q. up the sunken road in front of Bapaume.

En route our escort of Welshmen were telling us of the "terrible" shelling up the line. It was no leg pulling, for we quickly found out for ourselves that it was hot and furious.

Down we all went for cover as best we could, except one Cockney who stood as one spellbound watching the bursting of the shells. One of the Welshmen yelled out, "Drop down, Cockie!" The Cockney turned round, to the wonderment and amusement of the rest, with the retort, "Blimey! Get away with yer, you're windy. I've only just come out!" —*Driver W. H. Allen (attached 1st Glamorgan R.H.A.), 8 Maiden Crescent, Kentish Town, N.W.1.*

Paid with a Mills

During severe fighting in Delville Wood in August 1916 our regiment (the East Surreys) was cut off for about three days and was reduced to a mere handful of men, but still we kept up our joking and spirits.

A young Cockney, who was an adept at rhyming slang, rolled over, dead as I thought, for blood was streaming from his neck and head. But he sat up again and, wiping his hand across his forehead, exclaimed: "Strike me pink! One on the top of my loaf of bread (head), and one in the bushel and peck (neck)." Then, slinging over a Mills bomb, he shouted: "'Ere, Fritz, my thanks for a Blighty ticket." —*A. Dennis, 9 Somers Road, Brixton Hill, S.W.2.*

The Guns' Obligato

The day after the Canadians attacked Vimy Ridge my battalion of the Royal Fusiliers advanced from Bully Grenay to a château on the outskirts of Lieven under heavy shell fire.

At the back of the château a street led to the main road to the town. There, despite the bombardment, we found a Cockney Tommy of the Buffs playing "Tipperary" on a piano which had been blown out of a house into the road.

We joined in – until a shell took the top off the château, when we scattered! —*L. A. Utton, 184 Coteford Street, Tooting, S.W.*

In the Garden of Eden

We had reached the district in "Mespot" reputed to be the Garden of Eden. One evening I was making my way with six

men to relieve the guard on some ammunition barges lying by the bank of the Tigris.

We had approached to within about one hundred yards of these, when the Turks started sending over some "long-rangers." The sixth shell scored a direct hit on the centre barge, and within a few seconds the whole lot went up in what seemed like the greatest explosion of all time. Apart from being knocked over with the shock, we escaped injury, with the exception of a Cockney in our company.

Most of his clothing, except his boots, had been stripped from his body, and his back was bleeding. Slowly he struggled to his hands and knees, and surveying his nakedness, said: "Now where's that blinkin' fig tree?" *—F. Dennis, 19 Crewdson Road, Brixton, S.W.*

Santa Claus in a Hurry

A forward observation officer of the Artillery was on duty keeping watch on Watling Crater, Vimy Ridge, towards the end of 1916.

The observation post was the remains of a house, very much battered. The officer had to crawl up what had once been a large fireplace, where he had the protection of the only piece of wall that remained standing.

He was engrossed on his task when the arrival of a "Minnie" shook the foundations of the place, and down he came in a

shower of bricks and mortar with his shrapnel helmet not at the regimental angle.

A couple of Cockney Tommies had also made a dive for the shelter of this pile of bricks and were crouching down, when the officer crawled from the fireplace. "Quick, Joe," said one of the Cockneys, "'ang up yer socks – 'ere comes ole Santa Claus!" —*A. J. Robinson (late Sergeant, R.F.A.), 21 Clowders Road, Catford, S.E.6.*

What Paderewski was Missing

It was on the night of October 27, 1917, at Passchendaele Ridge. Both sides were "letting it go hell for leather," and we were feeling none too comfortable crouching in shell-holes and taking what cover we could.

The ground fairly shook – and so did we for that matter – with the heavy explosions and the din was ear-splitting.

Just for something to say I called out to the chap in the next shell-hole – a Brentford lad he was: "What d'you think of it, Alf?"

"Not much," he said, "I was just finkin' if Paderewski could get only this on 'is ol' jo-anner." —*M. Hooker, 325A Md. Qrs., Henlow Camp, Bedford.*

A Target, but No Offers

During the battle of the Somme, in September 1916, our Lewis gun post was in a little loop trench jutting out from the front line at a place called, I believe, Lone Tree, just before Combles. Jerry's front line was not many yards away, and it was a very warm spot.

Several casualties had occurred during the morning through sniping, and one enterprising chap had scored a bull's-eye on the top of our periscope.

Things quietened down a bit in the afternoon, and about 4 p.m. our captain, who already had the M.C., came along and said to our corporal, "I believe the Germans have gone."

A Cockney member of our team, overhearing this, said, "Well, it won't take long to find out," and jumping upon the fire-step exposed himself from the waist upwards above the parapet.

After a minute's breathless silence he turned to the captain and said, with a jerk of his thumb, "They've hopped it, sir."

That night we and our French friends entered Combles. —*M. Chittenden (late "C" Coy., 1/16th London Regt., Q.W.R.), 26 King Edward Road, Waltham Cross, Herts.*

Their own Lord Mayor's Show

In April 1918 our unit was billeted near Amiens in a small village from which the inhabitants had been evacuated two days earlier, owing to the German advance.

On the second day of our stay there Jerry was shelling the steeple of the village church, and we had taken cover in the cellars under the village school. All at once we heard roars of laughter coming from the street, and wondering what on earth anyone could find to laugh at, we tumbled up to have a look.

The sight that met our eyes was this: Gravely walking down the middle of the street were two of the "Hackney Ghurkas," the foremost of whom was dressed in a frock coat and top hat, evidently the property of the village *maire*, and leading a decorated mule upon the head of which was tied the most gaudy "creation" which ever adorned a woman's head.

The second Cockney was clad in the full garb of a twenty-stone French peasant woman, hat and all, and was dragging at the end of a chain a stuffed fox, minus its glass case, but still fastened to its baseboard.

They solemnly paraded the whole length of the street and back again, and were heard to remark that the village was having at least one Lord Mayor's Show before Jerry captured it!

And this happened at the darkest time of the war, when our backs were to the wall. —*A. C. P. (late 58th London Division),*

Fulham, S.W.6.

Pill-Box Crown and Anchor

In the fighting around Westhoek in August 1917 the 56th Division were engaged in a series of attacks on the Nonne Boschen Wood, and owing to the boggy nature of the ground the position was rather obscure.

A platoon of one of the London battalions was holding a pill-box which had been taken from the Germans during the day. In the night a counter-attack was made in the immediate vicinity of the pill-box, which left some doubt as to whether it had again fallen to the enemy.

A patrol was sent out to investigate. After cautiously approaching the position and being challenged in a Cockney tongue, they entered the pill-box, and were astonished to see the occupants playing crown and anchor.

The isolated and dangerous position was explained to the sergeant in charge, but he nonchalantly replied, "Yes, I know all abaht that; but, yer see, wot's the use of frightenin' the boys any more? There's been enough row rahnd 'ere all night as it is." —*N. Butcher (late 3rd Londons), 43 Tankerville Drive, Leigh-on-Sea.*

"C.O.'s Paid 'is Phone Bill"

On the Somme, during the big push of 1916, we had a section of Signallers attached to our regiment to keep the communications during the advance. Of the two attached to our company, one was a Cockney. He had kept in touch with the "powers that be" without a hitch until his wire was cut by a shell. He followed his wire back and made the necessary repair. Three times he made the same journey for the same reason. His mate was killed by a shrapnel shell and he himself had his left arm shattered: but to him only one thing mattered, and that was to "keep in touch." So he stuck to his job.

The wire was broken a fourth time, and as he was about to follow it back, a runner came up from the C.O. wanting to know why the signaller was not in communication. He started back along his wire and as he went he said, "Tell 'im to pay 'is last account, an' maybe the telephone will be re-connected."

A permanent line was fixed before he allowed the stretcher-bearers to take him away. My chum had taken his post at the end of the wire, and as the signaller was being carried away he called out feebly, "You're in touch with H.Q. C.O.'s paid 'is bill, an' we'll win the war yet." *—L. N. Loder, M.C. (late Indian Army), Streatham.*

The "Garden Party Crasher"

In April 1917 two companies of our battalion were ordered to make a big raid opposite the sugar refineries at 14 Bis, near Loos. Two lines of enemy trenches had to be taken and the raiding party, when finished, were to go back to billets at Mazingarbe while the Durhams took over our trenches.

My batman Beedles had instructions to go back to billets with all my kit, and wait there for my return. I was in charge of the right half of the first wave of the raid, and after a bit of a scrap we got into the German front line.

Having completed our job of blowing up concrete emplacements and dug-outs, we were waiting for the signal to return to our lines when, to my surprise, Beedles came strolling through the German wire. When he saw me he called out above the row going on: "I 'opes yer don't mind me 'aving come to the garden party wivout an invertition, sir?"

The intrepid fellow had taken all my kit back to billets some four miles, made the return journey, and come across No Man's Land to find me, and see me safely back; an act which might easily have cost him his life. *—L. W. Lees (Lieut.), late 11th Batt. Essex Regt., "Meadow Croft," Stoke Poges, Bucks.*

Those Big Wasps

Salonika, 1918, a perfect summer's day. The 2/17th London Regiment are marching along a dusty road up to the Doiran Lake. Suddenly, out of the blue, three bombing planes appear. The order is given to scatter.

Meanwhile, up comes an anti-aircraft gun, complete with crew on lorry. Soon shells are speeding up, and little small puffs of white smoke appear as they burst; but the planes are too high for them. A Cockney of the regiment puts his hands to his mouth and shouts to the crew: "Hi, don't hunch 'em; let 'em settle." —*A. G. Sullings (late 2/17th London Regiment), 13 °Cann Hall Road, Leytonstone, E.11.*

Why he Looked for Help

On July 1, 1916, the 56th (London) Division attacked at Hebuterne, and during the morning I was engaged (as a lineman) in repairing our telephone lines between Battalion and Brigade H.Q. I had just been temporarily knocked out by a flat piece of shell and had been attended by a stretcher-bearer, who then left me and proceeded on his way back to a dressing station I had previously passed, whilst I went farther on down the trench to get on with my job.

I had not gone many yards when I met a very young private of the 12th Londons (the Rangers). One of his arms was hanging limp and was, I should think, broken in two or three places. He was cut and bleeding about the face, and was altogether in a sorry plight.

He stopped and asked me, "Is there a dressing station down there, mate?" pointing along the way I had come, and I replied, "Yes, keep straight on down the trench. It's a good way down. But," I added, "there's a stretcher-bearer only just gone along. Shall I see if I can get him for you?"

His reply I shall never forget: "Oh, I don't want him for *me*. I want someone to come back with me to get my mate. *He's hurt!*"

—*Wm. R. Smith, 231 Halley Road, Manor Park, E.12.*

The Winkle Shell

Above the entrance to a certain dug-out somewhere in Flanders some wit had fixed a board upon which was roughly painted, "The Winkle Shell."

The ebb and tide of battle left the dug-out in German hands, but one day during an advance the British infantry recaptured the trench in which "The Winkle Shell" was situated.

Along the trench came a Cockney with his rifle ready and his bayonet fixed. Hearing voices coming from the dug-out he halted, looked reflectively at the notice-board, and then cautiously poking his bayonet into the dug-out called out, "Nah,

then, come on aht of it afore I gits me blinkin' 'pin' busy." —*Sidney A. Wood (late C/275 Battery, R.F.A.), 32 Lucas Avenue, Upton Park, E.13.*

Forgot his Dancing Pumps

We were in a trench in front of Carnoy on the Somme when the Germans made a raid on us. It was all over in a few minutes, and we were minus eight men – taken away by the raiders.

Shortly afterwards I was standing in a bay feeling rather shaky when a face suddenly appeared over the top. I challenged, and was answered with these words:

"It's orl right. It's me. They was a-takin' us to a dance over there, but I abaht-turned 'arfway acrorst an' crawled back fer me pumps." —*E. Smith (late Middlesex Regt.), 2 Barrack Road, Aldershot.*

Lift Out of Order

One day in 1916 I was sitting with some pals in a German dug-out in High Wood. Like others of its kind, it had a steep, deep shaft. Suddenly a shell burst right in the mouth of the shaft above, and the next instant "Nobby," a Cockney stretcher-bearer, landed plump on his back in our midst. He was livid and bleeding, but his first words were: "Strike! I thought the lift were outer order!"

—J. E., Vauxhall, S.W.8.

Lost: A Fly Whisk

During the very hot summer of 1916 in Egypt it was necessary, while eating, to keep on flicking one hand to keep the flies away from one's mouth.

One day a heavy shell came over and knocked down my Cockney chum, Tubby White. He got up, holding his wrist, and started looking round.

I said: "What have you lost, Tubby?"

"Blimey," he said, "can't you see I've lost me blooming fly whisk?" It was then I noticed he had lost his hand. *—J. T. Marshall (Middlesex Regiment), 17 Evandale Road, Brixton, S.W.9.*

Change at Wapping

When Regina Trench was taken in 1916 it was in a terrible state, being half full of thick liquid mud. Some of the fellows, sooner than wade through this, were getting up and walking along the top, although in view of the Germans.

The Cockney signaller who was with me at the time, after slithering along the trench for a time, said: "I've 'ad enough er this," and scrambled out of the trench.

He had no sooner got on top when *—zipp–* and down he came with a bullet through his thigh.

While bandaging his wound I said: "We're going to have a job

to get you out of here, but we'll have a good try."

"That's all right," said the Cockney, "you carry on an' leave me. I'll wait for a blinkin' barge and change at Wapping." —*H. Redford (late R.F.A.), 49 Anselm Road, Fulham.*

"The Canary's Flowed Away!"

I was in charge of a party carrying material from the dump to the Engineers in the front line. One of the party, a man from Camberwell, was allotted a bulky roll of barbed wire.

After a desperate struggle through the muddy and narrow support trenches, we reached the front line. There was still another 400 yards to go, and our Cockney decided to continue the journey along the parapet.

He had not gone far before the German machine guns began to spit and he fell in a heap into the bottom of the trench with the coil of barbed wire on top of him.

Thinking he was wounded, I went back to him and inquired if he was hit.

"'It? 'It be blowed," he said, "but if somebody was to take this blinkin' birdcage orf me chest I might be able to get up."

The journey was completed through the trench, our friend being a sorry sight of mud and cut fingers and face.

On arriving at our destination he dropped the wire at the feet of the waiting corporal with the remark, "'Ere you are, mate; sorry the canary's flowed away." —*A. S. G. (47th Division), Kent.*

"Go it, Applegarf! I'll time yer!"

Our battalion was making a counter-attack at Albert on March 29, 1918, against a veritable hail of lead. Wounded in the thigh, I tumbled into a huge shell hole, already occupied by two officers of the Fusiliers (Fusiliers had been on our left), a lance-corporal of my own battalion, and three other men (badly wounded).

Whilst I was being dressed by the lance-corporal another man jumped in. He had a bullet in the chest. It didn't need an M.O. to see that he was "all in," and he knew it.

He proved to be the most heroic Cockney I have ever seen. He had only minutes to live, and he told us not to waste valuable bandages on him.

Thereupon one of the officers advised me to try to crawl back before my leg got stiff, as I would stand a poor chance of a stretcher later with so many badly-wounded men about. If I got back safe I was to direct stretcher-bearers to the shell hole.

I told the officer that our battalion stretcher-bearers were behind a ridge only about 100 yards in the rear, and as my wound had not troubled me yet I would make a sprint for it, as the firing was still too heavy to be healthy.

On hearing my remarks this heroic Cockney, who must also have been a thorough sportsman, grinned up at me and, with death written on his face, panted: "Go it, Applegarf, an' I'll time yer." [Applegarth was the professional sprint champion of the

world.] The Cockney was dead when I left the shell hole. —*F. W. Brown (late 7th Suffolks), 247 Balls Pond Road, Dalston, N.*

That Other Sort of Rain

We were out doing a spot of wiring near Ypres, and the Germans evidently got to know about it. A few "stars" went up, and then the *rat-tat-tat* of machine guns told us more than we wanted to know.

We dived for shell holes. Anybody who knows the place will realise we did not have far to dive. I found myself beside a man who, in the middle of a somewhat unhealthy period, found time to soliloquise:

"Knocked a bit right aht me tin 'at. Thought I'd copped it that time. Look, I can get me little finger through the 'ole. Blimey, 'ope it don't rain, I shall git me 'ead all wet." —*H. C. Augustus, 67 Paragon Road, E.9.*

Better Job for Him

I was at Vimy Ridge in 1916. On the night I am writing about we were taking a well-earned few minutes' rest during a temporary lull. We were under one of the roughly-built shelters erected against the Ridge, and our only light was the quivering glimmer from a couple of candles. A shell screeched overhead

and "busted" rather near to us – and out went the candles.

"Smith, light up those candles," cried the sergeant-major to his batman. "Smithy," who stuttered, was rather shaken and took some time to strike a match and hold it steadily to the candles. But no sooner were the candles alight than another "whopper" put them out again.

"Light up those ruddy candles!" cried the S.M. again, "and don't dawdle about it!"

"Smithy," muttering terrible things to himself, was fumbling for the matches when the order came that a bombing party was required to clear "Jerry" out of a deep shell-hole.

"'Ere!" said "Smithy" in his rich Cockney voice. "J-just m-my m-mark. I'd r-rather f-frow 'eggs' t-than light c-c-candles!" *—W. C. Roberts, 5 Crampton Street, S.E.17.*

Sentry's Sudden Relief

I was the next turn on guard at a battery position in Armentières one evening in the summer of 1917. A Cockney chum, whom I was going to relieve, was patrolling the position when suddenly over came a 5·9, which blew him about four yards away.

As he scrambled to his feet our sergeant of the guard came along, and my chum's first words were, "Sorry, sergeant, for deserting me post." *—T. F. Smithers (late R.F.A.), 14 Hilda Road, Brixton, S.W.9.*

The World Kept Turnin'

The Poperinghe-Ypres road. A large shell had just pitched. Among the wounded was a Cockney who was noted for his rendering on every possible occasion of that well-known song, "Let the Great Big World Keep Turning."

He was lying on the roadway severely hurt. Another Cockney went up to him and said "'Ello, matey, 'urt? Why ain't yer singin' 'Let the Great Big World Keep Turnin',' eh?"

The reply came: "I *was* a singin' on it, Bill, but I never thought it would fly up and 'it me." *—Albert M. Morsley (late 85th Siege Battery Am. Col.), 198 Kempton Road, East Ham, E.6.*

That Blinkin' "Money-box"

I was limping back with a wounded knee after the taking of Monchy-le-Preux on April 11, 1917, when a perky little Cockney of the 13th Royal Fusiliers who had a bandaged head caught me up with a cheery, "Tike me Chalk Farm (arm), old dear, and we'll soon be 'ome."

I was glad to accept his kindly offer, but our journey, to say the least, was a hazardous one, for the German guns, firing with open sights from the ridge in front of the Bois du Sart, were putting diagonal barrages across the road (down which, incidentally,

the Dragoon Guards were coming magnificently out of action, with saddles emptying here and there as they swept through that deadly zone on that bleak afternoon).

Presently we took refuge in a sandbag shelter on the side of the road, and were just congratulating ourselves on the snugness of our retreat, when a tank stopped outside. Its arrival brought fresh gun-fire on us, and before long a whizz-bang made a direct hit on our shelter.

When we recovered from the shock, we found part of our roof missing, and my little pal, poking his bandaged head through the hole, thus addressed one of the crew of the tank who was just visible through a gun slit:

"Oi, why don't yer tike yer money-box 'ome? This ain't a pull-up fer carmen!"

The spirit that little Cockney imbued into me that day indirectly saved me the loss of a limb, for without him I do not think I would have reached the advance dressing station in time. *—D. Stuart (late Sergeant, 10th R.F., 37th Division) 103 St. Asaph Road, Brockley, S.E.4.*

"Oo, You Naughty Boy!"

In front of Kut Al-'Amarah, April 1916, the third and last attack on the Sannaiyat position, on the day before General Townshend capitulated. Days of rain had rendered the ground a quagmire, and lack of rations, ammunition, and shelter had

disheartened the relief force.

The infantry advanced without adequate artillery support, and were swept by heavy machine-gun fire from the entrenched Turks. One fellow tripped over a strand of loose barbed wire, fell down, and in rising ripped the seat nearly off his shorts. Cursing, he rejoined the slowly moving line of advancing men.

Suddenly one sensed one of those fateful moments when men in the mass are near to breaking point. Stealthy looks to right and left were given, and fear was in the men's hearts. The relentless tat-tat-tat of machine guns, the "singing" of the driven bullets, and the dropping of men seemed as if it never would end.

A Cockney voice broke the fear-spell and restored manhood to men. "Oo, 'Erbert, you naughty boy!" it said. "Look at what you've done to yer nice trahsers! 'Quarter' won't 'arf be cross. He said we wasn't to play rough games and tear our trahsers." *—L. W. Whiting (late 7th Meerut Division), 21 Dale Park Avenue, Carshalton, Surrey.*

Cool as a Cucumber

Early in 1917 at Ypres I was in charge of part of the advance party taking over some trenches from another London battalion. After this task had been completed I was told of a funny incident of the previous night.

It appeared that the battalion we were due to relieve had been surprised by a small party of the enemy seeking "information."

During the mêlée in the trench a German "under-officer" had calmly walked over and picked up a Lewis gun which had been placed on a tripod on top of the trench some little distance from its usual emplacement. (This was done frequently when firing at night was necessary so as to avoid betraying the regular gun position.)

A boyish-looking sentry of the battalion on the left jumped out of the trench and went after the Jerry who was on his way "home" with the gun in his arms. Placing his bayonet in dangerous proximity to the "under-officer's" back, the young Cockney exclaimed, "Hi! Where the 'ell are yer goin' wiv that gun? Just you put the 'coocumber' back on the 'barrer' and shove yer blinkin' 'ands up!"

The "under-officer" lost his prize and his liberty, and I understand the young sentry received the M.M. —*R. McMuldroch (late 15th London Regt., Civil Service Rifles), 13 Meadway, Bush Hill Park, Enfield.*

The Sergeant's Tears

One afternoon on the Somme our battery received a severe strafe from 5·9's and tear-gas shells. There was no particular "stunt" on, so we took cover in a trench behind the guns.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.