



British Soldiers at Neuve-Chapelle

## Calne Man in the Trenches

Pte. Donald Bridges, of the 7th City of London Regiment, whose family lives at Goatacre, Calne [Hilmarton], in a letter to his mother narrates some of the incidents in the fighting in which his regiment has borne a valorous part, and for which it has earned the commendation of the General and Brigadier. After mentioning the loss of one of his pals and an officer whilst engaged in trench digging at night, he goes on to tell of the capture of a German trench, and the duty laid upon his regiment to hold it.

"We had to advance up a road under heavy shell fire, but most of us managed to get there all right. We had to stay there four days, and were under shellfire nearly the whole of the time. I am sorry to say we had a good many casualties.

When we returned we had about 20 in our platoon instead of 50. Very few were killed, most of them had slight wounds. I had another pal wounded in the knee with shrapnel. I saw a good many prisoners – many of them only boys about 16 or 17, and some of them were grey-headed. Most of them seemed pleased to be taken. I think most of them were Saxons. One of the worst things seems to me to be the ruins; some of the houses are quite destroyed, some have only a bit of a chimney stack standing. I don't think the people in England can understand what it would be like to have their homes treated so. If they did there would not be any trouble to get recruits. In one place there is a church smashed to pieces, but the most remarkable thing is that a crucifix, standing a few yards off, has not been touched. In several places I have seen them standing among a heap of ruins.

Well, we came out of the trenches and went back into town, from which I last wrote, where we stayed two nights. We were jolly glad of a rest, as we had only one whole night's rest for nearly three weeks. We are now in the large town where we have been several times before, and are billeted in the tobacco factory again. We can go out and get a good meal for about a franc (10d.). The French soldiers get ½d. a day!

"While I was in the trenches I met with my own county regiment, but did not see anyone I know. I suppose the Goatacre lads were there somewhere. Please let me know what company they are in in case I see them again. The ones I saw said they were at Neuve Chapelle, but that it was not so bad as when we were there.

We have all got respirators, so shall be all right in case of gas. I heard the cuckoo some time ago. The birds don't take any notice of the firing, but keep on singing amongst it all, especially the larks."

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