



Honours to the Brave

Presentations to Lance-Corporal Ladd, D.C.M.

A Hero of Neuve Chapelle

A glance at the Holt Roll of Honour discloses the fact, of which the villagers are justly proud, that of their number over 100, which works out at over 10% of the population, have, since the outbreak of war, been serving their King and country in different spheres of activity. Some of them, alas, live only as a "fragrant memory", but among those who have survived the previously unimagined horrors of modern warfare is Lance-Corporal W. H. Ladd, of the 2nd Battalion Wilts Regiment. How this young soldier won the D.C.M. and the Russian Order of St. George at Neuve Chapelle has already been related in these pages, but the story of how the inhabitants of his native village recognised his bravery and true English spirit in this sanguinary engagement remains for us to tell.

Holt has been happy for many years in the possession of an up-to-date Institute or Reading Room, and it was here on Saturday evening a gathering of quite exceptional interest, which it is hoped may be the precursor of others of a similar character, was held. It was the outcome of a movement largely set on foot and carried into effect by Mr. W. Buckland, who made an appeal for subscriptions for a presentation to Lance-Corporal Ladd. These were readily and willingly given and sufficient money was forthcoming to enable an enlarged life like photograph of himself and an illuminated watch to be procured, which, with a purse of money, were handed to him at the gathering referred to. On both the photo and the watch is the following inscription:- "Presented by the inhabitants of Holt to Lance-Corporal W. H. Ladd, D.C.M., and the Russian Order of St. George, for conspicuous bravery at Neuve Chapelle, March 15th 1915".

Lieut-Colonel T. H. B. Forster took command of the proceedings, and among those also present were Mrs. and Miss Forster, Mr. E. C. Beaven, (Mrs. Beaven was prevented by indisposition from attending), Hon. S. F. O'Grady, Mr. F.T., Mrs and Miss Beaven, Miss Trim, Miss Barclay, Mr. E. P. Alexander, Miss Alexander, Mrs. J. Beaven, Miss K. Beaven, Rev. L. K. Fletcher, Messrs. J. Sawtell, H. Trent and W. Buckland, Mr. and Mrs. J.C. Longstaff, Miss Gee, Mr. and Mrs. E. Ladd and Misses Ivy and Isabel Ladd (Lance-Corporal Ladd's parents and sisters) and numerous others.

The platform was decorated with the Union Jack and groups of pot plants.

The Lance-Corporal's Record

The Chairman, having remarked that in addition to Mrs. E. Beaven, an apology had been received from Mr. Tom Beaven, said that meeting was one of the rare occasions at the present juncture that they could call a happy one. They wished to place on record their good fortune in having sent from their midst a soldier whose gallantry had been specially honoured by his King and country, and not only by his King and country, but by the ruler of one of our Allies, The Czar of Russia (applause). No. 8402 Lance-Corpl. Ladd of the 2nd Battalion Wiltshire Regiment, enlisted in February 1909. They would therefore see that he was already a soldier of considerable experience. He was not raw to the work, and he had no doubt he had applied himself well to his profession and knew all the details already. He served all last winter in France, and in the engagement at Neuve Chapelle in March last he signalled himself by such gallant action with the machine gun section of his battalion that he was specially mentioned in dispatches by Sir John French. They must know that things took time, and that even after reports had been made as to gallant conduct and dispatches written it took further time to obtain the reward. The result of this was that it was not until last month, he thought, that Lance-Corpl. Ladd received the D.C.M. which with the exception of one was one of the most honoured recognitions we had in our Army and Navy, and also from their Ally, the Russian Order of St. George (applause). In the interval between his gallantry in March last and its recognition last month, Lance-Corpl Ladd was again in one of the most serious battles of the war and on September 25th, in the attack on Loos, he was wounded in the leg by a bullet and was invalided home; but the wound having healed he was returning to duty with the home battalion next week. Doubtless he would shortly join the Army in France, and he hoped, his old machine gun section. He was sure all present would join him in saying they wished him continued good fortune and a safe and successful return, with still further honours, at the end of the war (applause).

We are Proud of You

Mrs. Forster then made the presentation. A typical specimen of the smart Wiltshire soldier, Lance-Corpl. Ladd stood at attention on the platform, while Mrs. Forster handed him the gifts, and voiced the pleasure which it gave her to do so as the representative of the subscribers, in recognition of his gallant conduct. "We all hope you will live long to be a credit and an honour to your village. We are proud of you" she said, amid applause.

With becoming modesty, Lance-Corpl. Ladd disclaimed that he had done anything worth speaking of or deserving of the nice gifts he had been presented with. The only thing he could really claim to have done was his duty, and that was what every soldier in France had done and was doing. There was, however. One thing he would like to say, and that was that every young fellow, who had no home ties, no family or anything of that kind to keep him, and who was not working on munitions, ought to get into khaki forthwith. They did not want married men with children; it was an expense to the country to keep them; but it was the duty of all eligible single men, of whom there were plenty about to betake themselves to the recruiting officer, and, concluded the Lance-Corporal. "If there are any who would like to join my regiment, the Wilts, I will take them right along" (applause).

"Some" Wars

The Chairman, after a reference to a letter written by Mrs. E. Beaven, in which she stated that the Holt men were doing well, that they were proud of their little village and that every man who gained distinction would be congratulated in the same way as Lance-Corpl. Ladd, said that he would like to draw the attention of the public to the fact that Holt was more than doing its duty in the war. When it was recognised that over 100 men had joined the colours, or had been serving with the colours since the commencement of the war, it would be realised that over 10 per cent of the population were actually serving. If that was the case throughout the whole of England they would have over four million men, which was rather more than they had at present. Therefore it was quite plain Holt was above, and well

above the average. While that did not justify them relaxing their efforts it was a matter for congratulation (hear, hear). He would also like to point out – he had been talking to Lance Corpl. Ladd about it, and although he was quite a young fellow he had a sound judgment – that it was much more important to send grown men to the war than it was to send boys. He did not say boys did not deserve great credit and honour for wishing to serve, but it took longer for a boy of 17 or 16, and sometimes, he was sorry to say, of 15 to become a soldier than for a grown man over 30, who learnt to serve his country much more quickly than a boy. They were very glad to see boys show the energy they were doing, but they wanted a larger number at the present moment of grown men. He had seen that in several places. He had seen it in England and abroad and in Bath that day, with a battalion of the New Army apparently. They not only wanted grown men for the actual fighting, but men whose constitutions were set and who could resist the attacks of climate and illness to which they were so dreadfully exposed at present, not so much in France, as in the Mediterranean. They had not heard much about illness in Serbia yet, but they had heard of it in the Dardanelles and roundabout. It was not actually fair that boys should be sent abroad before they had served a year or two at home, and he hoped those that went in future from Holt would be grown men. The war had already been a long affair, and it was not over yet. They had great troubles and made occasional mistakes, as was invariably done in directing enormous operations of the kind they were now engaged in. They were fighting practically all over the world, in half a dozen places. The only little war they had finished was that which Louis Botha and his English and Boers had finished for them in South-West Africa but they had it everywhere else. They had the campaign in Mesopotamia, where they were threatening Baghdad. They had East Africa which had not been tackled yet, but which he thought the South Africans were going to tackle for them. It had never been tackled properly hitherto. They had the Suez Canal, a most important communication, which they were obliged to guard with the utmost care. They had the Dardanelles business, which they had heard too much about. They had the campaign in Serbia against the Bulgarians, Germans and Austrians, and then they had the great campaign in France. They also had to assist the Russians in their campaign in various ways, and Italy on the north-east frontier, so that this country was engaged everywhere. They could not expect to be successful at once at all these points. He would like to remind them that their enemies, and especially their enemies the Kaiser and Germany, had their troubles too. There was not the least doubt that they were reaching a stage when they had not too many men, when they were obliged to change them backwards and forwards, from Russia to France and France to Russia, and when they talked about having 300,000 men in the Balkans they could boil it down a bit. It was however a tough job England had to tackle, but they would be ultimately successful if they tackled it aright (hear, hear). They wanted heaps of young fellows like him they had honoured tonight. That was the class of men they wanted – men with sturdy backs and stout hearts. If there were plenty of splendid young fellows like Lce-Corpl. Ladd, willing to give their lives for their country, it would all come right (applause).

Congratulations

Mr. E. C. Beaven, in proposing a vote of thanks to Mrs. Forster, said that he was sure that every time Lce.-Corpl Ladd looked at the watch, whether in the trenches in France, or in foreign countries, he would always remember that evening, when it and the other things were presented to him in such a pleasant and graceful manner. To what the Chairman had told them of Lce.-Coprl. Ladd, he would like to add that about six years ago he worked in his (the speaker's) garden and all the time one could see his bent was towards soldiering. Everything in connection with the Army was of great interest to him, and one morning he was missing. He went to see his mother and to ask where he was. She replied that he had not been home since the previous evening, and they thought he had gone to Devizes and enlisted. So it turned out to be. It was a great pleasure to see him back safe and sound, and he hoped, when the war was over, he would again come back, still safe and sound (applause).

Mr. Sawtell seconded. He was sure what had transpired that evening would be an incentive to Lce-Corpl. Ladd to go back with more energy and pluck, and with a desire to achieve more than he had already accomplished. That must be a proud evening for his father and mother. Those who had children did not let them go to the front without great anxiety, but when they came back and were honoured in the way Lce.-Corpl. Ladd had been, it made them feel proud and happy. He hoped Lce.-Corpl. Ladd would be

able to make his parents and the village even more proud of him than they were at that moment (applause).

The Rev. L. K. Fletcher proposed a compliment to the Chairman. He (Mr. Fletcher) once had to deal with an occasion like that, and the hero of the hour told him he could stick a little job over there (pointing his thumb in the direction of France) but what he could not stick was a meeting like that. He did not know but what he had a certain amount of sympathy with that hero, but so far as Lce. Corpl. Ladd was concerned their Chairman had made it as little embarrassing as it was possible to be. They congratulated the Chairman on his epitome of the war. Personally he should have been glad if he had told them a little more; but perhaps it would not have been appreciated in some quarters, though it would have been by those present. They lived in a village and they hardly saw a wounded soldier. Consequently some of them had almost found it hard to realise the great events that were really taking place not very far from where they were. However, there was not one there who had not interest and sympathy with the forces at the front, and more than interest and sympathy, some very close and personal associations. The lads of the village went away and they took their part, and they were sure they would do their duty honourably and nobly (hear, hear). He added his felicitations to those already uttered on the distinction gained by Lce.-Corpl. Ladd, and said he was sure the others that had gone from the village, if they could not say they had received the D.C.M., had equally honourably and nobly done their part (hear, hear). He hoped they might shortly be asked for another presentation and when one of their lads came back with a still greater distinction they would give him at least as hearty a welcome as they had given Lce.-Corpl Ladd that evening (applause).

Mr. J. C. Longstaff seconded, and said, as an old schoolmaster of Lce.-Corpl. Ladd, he felt perhaps a little more interest in him than some others might feel. In his case the child was father to the man. As a boy at school he never shirked his duty, and they who knew him well were sure that he would nobly fulfil his part when he went for a soldier, and especially when he went to France. He had no doubt that when he returned there he would continue to do his work as faithfully and conscientiously as he had done it hitherto. He congratulated him and his parents most heartily (applause).

The Chairman, in acknowledging the vote, said he hoped they would receive their share of honours in Holt. The more young men went out and came back as Lce.-Corpl. Ladd had, decorated honoris causa, the better they should be pleased. (applause).

A vote of thanks was also proposed by Mr. E. C. Beaven to Mr. W. Buckland for taking up the presentation and carrying it through so successfully.

Mr. Buckland said it had been a great pleasure to him, because Holt was not like a good many other places. It was always a pleasure to him to go round and see the people. They had answered nobly, there being some 200 subscribers to the gifts which had been presented that evening. He hoped that would not be the last occasion of that sort but that there would be many others. They knew that all their boys were doing their utmost for them and they could not do too much for them. They were fighting to protect their homes, their wives and their children, and he hoped they would continue to encourage them by every means in their power (applause).

These happy proceedings then terminated with the National Anthem.

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