

Dear Mrs Spinks

In reply to your notice in the Parish Newsletter I forward the following account of my family's participation in the Great War.

My Father, Thomas, joined the South Wales Borderers in 1910 and was in the 1st battalion posted to France in 1914. The battalion, I am reliably informed, fought off a regiment of Uhlans in the retreat from Mons. He also fought in the battle of Loos and the Battalion by its steadiness enabled the Worcestershire Regiment to make its famous charge at Gheluvelt. He was in France, on and off, from 1914 to 1918, mainly around Ypres. In the retreat in 1918 he was badly wounded by an aircraft bomb and was also shot through one hand resulting in gangrene, which was cured. The injury resulted in him losing a lung and he carried shrapnel in his chest for the rest of his life. He was invalided out and advised to take an outdoor job. He was in charge of laying deep water pipes in Studley, (what he didn't know about trench digging was not worth knowing). Of course he was always on hand to help my mother and her bicycle over those obstacles and they were married after he had established a milk retail business in Barnt Green where he was Vice Chairman and Treasurer of the British Legion. He died in 1935 from pneumonia - having only one lung and having been gassed twice he stood no chance in the days before M & B.

My mother's brother Kenneth Hall was at Alcester Grammar School in 1914 and in the army in France from 1917 in the Oxford and Bucks Light infantry. I have most of his letters to my mother from his time in the Army.. Two quotations from those I quote as follows :- The first on 6 May 1917

"I have thought a great deal during the last week. After seeing some dreadful things and having many near escapes I have considered life and death and the supernatural life a great deal. I might tell you I have said more prayers this last week than I have said in a week before. You know Father Prior gave me a little book before I joined up. Well I read that through a few times and found it very comforting. You don't hear much swearing when the whizzbangs are flying"

In October 1918 he wrote

"We have done such a lot since I wrote last. Jerry will not wait for us, but goes well before our splendid barrages. We are in civilised parts now again. In villages where civilians have been prisoners for 4 years. The old women and men of which inhabitants comprise wept for joy when we came into the town. It was really pitiful to see the sight - some of them had had things hidden for 4 years, but very soon dug their treasures up when we came through. It gives one a heart to fight when one hears their different tales of Hun militarism."

After being posted to Egypt and Palestine he became a pharmacist and worked for Philip Harris in Birmingham .