

## *The History of the Somerset Light Infantry 1914-1919*

2nd November, 1918

### THE BATTLE OF VALENCIENNES

. . . it was here that the 1st Somerset Light Infantry ended its glorious record of fighting in the Great War . . . At 5:30am a heavy 18-pounder barrage fell on the German positions and the attack began, the troops moving quickly behind the screen of fire. The Seaforths swept on through the village, leaving the latter to the Somersets, who then began to mop up the place. This was no easy task. Large numbers of German snipers were still active in the village and nearly all the cellars contained Germans who readily surrendered when called upon to do so. The snipers were more difficult to deal with and caused considerable casualties before they were finally mopped up . . .

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### **Somerset Guardian**

Captain Cecil Lewin, MC, who fell while gallantly leading his men during the very last engagement in which his regiment took part, was the eldest son of Mr C J Lewin, formerly of Radstock. The deceased officer joined as a private soldier in the King's Liverpool Regiment, immediately after the outbreak of the war. He soon became Sergeant, and went out to France. Not long after, on account of special qualifications, he was made Company Sergeant Major on the field. In the battle for Trones Wood his commanding officer having become a casualty CSM Lewin took control of the men and carried on even after he had received two severe wounds.

The third bullet, which knocked him out, was not extracted until eleven months afterwards. For his conspicuous bravery he was awarded the Military Cross. Upon his recovery, after a prolonged illness, Sergt Major Lewin took a commission in the Somerset LI. He returned to France, and after some time was promoted to the rank of Captain. He came unscathed through much severe fighting, but was killed in the advance on November 2. Two of this officer's brothers had already made the supreme sacrifice, Captain Rex Lewin being killed in September, 1915, and Lieut. Kenneth Lewin in March, 1918. A younger brother, Lieut. Claude Lewin won the Military Cross last year and was badly wounded. The youngest of Mr Lewin's sons is at present a cadet in the RAF.

Captain Cecil Lewin.

1st Battalion, The Somerset Light Infantry.

Killed in Action.

France and Flanders.

November 2nd, 1918

## Somerset Guardian

Sergeant Christopher T Carpenter, 1st Batt. Coldstream Guards, son of Mr and Mrs Henry Carpenter, Radstock, who a year ago was decorated with the Distinguished Conduct Medal, has just been awarded the Military Medal. The award is made for valuable services rendered on November 3 and 4 last. He led an attack upon a German machine gun post at Villers Poll, outside Mauheuge, on November 3, and wiped out the crew of the post for the loss of one man killed and three wounded. On the following day his Company was held up until he led his platoon along a sunken road and the result of his work caused the Germans to retire and permitted his company to continue their advance.

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## THE LONDON GAZETTE

13073 Sgt. C T Carpenter, C. Gds. (Radstock)

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. When an enemy strongpoint, with a garrison of fifty men, was holding up the advance, he led his platoon with great gallantry and initiative round the flank under heavy fire and enfiladed the position. Owing to his prompt action the enemy was kept engaged and the position was captured. He has invariably set a magnificent example of courage and devotion to duty.

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## Captain Douglas McMurtrie

7th Battalion, The Somerset Light Infantry

Prisoner of War

10th November, 1918

At about mid-day on the Sunday, a German photographer came into the camp and took our photographs for nine marks a dozen. He told us a revolution was going to take place that day in Graudenz. We didn't believe him but an hour later, we saw all the Bosch officers and soldiers straggle out and into bunches with the officers remaining together. They had several shows of hands and then they all went away. Afterwards, we learnt that the men had told the officers that their powers were suspended and that the men had elected their own representatives.

By then we could get any German paper we wanted, and we also saw a few English newspapers which were smuggled into



the camp in parcels, so we always knew more or less how things were going. As soon as the push had begun, we'd bought a large map and hung it on the wall with Union Jacks showing the line in a pretty obvious fashion - for the Bosch's pleasure. That night the officers came in to take the roll-call in caps and without their usual shoulder badges. Every officer and man had taken down his cockades (representing the German and Prussian empires) and every officer had taken off their badges of rank - and any who objected had been helped. That night everyone, English and German, prisoners and guards were very happy.



# Armistice

## November 11th

### Somerset Guardian

The declaration of the signing of the Armistice between the Allies and Germany and the cessation of hostilities was received with great joy throughout the whole district on Monday morning. There were many more people about that morning than is usual on a Monday morning when all the collieries and works are in full swing. It is evident that nearly everyone expected the news and had been waiting for some authoritative announcement for two or three days.

Although everybody seemed highly pleased that hostilities had ended so soon after the signing of the Armistice yet there seemed to be no desire to go mafficking. I well remember the scenes in Radstock and district which followed the declaration of peace after the South African War and everything that was done was perhaps not creditable to the people who did it. But a very different state of things prevailed on Monday. People have learned a lot since the days of the South African War.

The war just ended has touched almost every home to a greater or lesser degree and it was anticipated that the joy that accompanied the declaration of peace would be of a sober and quiet nature, but none the less real and sincere. The news spread very rapidly throughout the district and soon the flags were seen floating from the church towers and flag poles in the neighbourhood and displayed at public buildings and private residences. There was apparently no organised attempt at decoration or illuminating in the evening, many people being afraid to attempt the latter in view of the lighting restrictions.

As the trains at eleven o'clock ran into the stations the explosions of detonators on the railway could be heard and the passengers on most of the four trains that came into Radstock at about that hour were thus first made aware of the great news on arrival at Radstock. The local collieries and works also let off some explosives and at some the steam whistles were sounded at full blast. The faces of the miners as they came from the pits at one or two o'clock clearly indicated their pleasure at hearing the news.

Children from the two elementary schools in Radstock assembled in Victoria Square and sang the National Anthem which was followed by ringing cheers. The scholars were given a half-holiday, and the youngsters seemed as highly pleased as the adults. No general holiday was proclaimed at the collieries or local works, but many of the men took one or two days on their own. Some of the pits were unable to start on Tuesday morning owing to the insufficient number of men and boys presenting themselves.

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Gwen Beauchamp

VAD Nurse

11th November, 1918

I was on duty on November 11th. As usual, night duty was a six weeks' stint and for the first week I couldn't sleep much in the day time. I was so tired I had gone to bed at 10 in the morning. When we got to the hospital that night we heard that a large convoy was expected and it started arriving as soon as we got on the wards. However, the stretcher bearers had celebrated rather too much to be able to negotiate the duck-boards and therefore most of our patients were deposited in the flower beds. That night, as every night at 10pm, Corporal Jones played the *Last Post* at the hospital gates. It always varied according to how long he had been at the pub, but on Armistice Night no one was going to complain!

Pte. Tommy Atkins

7th Battalion, The Royal Fusiliers

11th November, 1918

Me? I was in a field in Belgium. At 11 o'clock there were two gunshots fired and somebody told me it was the Armistice. You knew things were going wrong on the German side but we didn't know the war was anything like near its end. We didn't celebrate in any way other than having a great feeling of relief - and there wasn't anything to celebrate with.

Course, men went on being killed after the Armistice was signed. The Germans had left booby traps for us - you'd perhaps go into an estaminet and play a piano and when you got to a certain note up went the building and everyone who was in it. We were told not to touch anything until the Engineers had inspected it.

Captain Douglas McMurtrie  
7th Battalion, The Somerset Light Infantry

About 11am we heard that the Armistice had been signed and that evening we saw the terms in the papers. Then the Commandant appeared - in mufti - almost in tears. How are the mighty fallen! From then on we all started collecting souvenirs - cockades, eagles off the pith helmets, daggers and so on. On the 20th, 200 officers were told to be ready to leave on the 23rd but Saturday came and went. On Monday, 25th, everybody was allowed down town without a guard. We all went, going into hotels and restaurants. Bosch waiters would rush up and take your gloves, and cap and coat. The hotel we went to was full of English officers and not a Bosch in sight. It was very hard to get used to it. The situation was absolutely unique.

On Tuesday afternoon, we were ordered to parade at 8:15pm. We packed our suitcases - which we had bought at the canteen and which were made out of the paper et cetera from our parcels and cost 38 marks - and marched out of the camp for the last time, down to the station and left Graudenz very happily at about 10:30pm. It was the start of our long journey back to England. Rastatt and Graudenz soon faded away. War and blood vanished and we were left with no war, no Ypres salient, no Flanders mud, no soaking cold nights in filthy trenches, no marching up duck-board tracks with shells and machine gun bullets. I then began two month's leave with all the hopes of a twenty year-old.

Pte. Alban Chivers  
Royal Army Ordnance Corp

I were on leave at the time and I never believed it - you couldn't believe it - you'd heard it so many times before. And when I come through on the Friday they were still fighting proper. There were no celebrations round here that I knew - if there were I never heard of them, I don't remember any. So I went back. The next lot to go on leave never came back - then an order went out that every man had to go back to his unit before he could be demobbed. And then there was trouble, 'cause a lot refused to return.

Pte. Edward Hurd  
1st Battalion, The Gloucester Regiment  
November, 1918

After the Armistice we had a uniform come. That was a navy blue peaked cap with a yellow band and a glazed peak, and a very dark blue tunic with a yellow collar and a wide yellow stripe down. We could go out and move around the town on our own if we were sensible, but later on the place was cleared out and we were marched to Schweidnitz station and entrained. I spent Christmas Day in Berlin Station. From there we went to Swinemunde and

embarked on a Danish ship to Copenhagen, in Denmark. After a week there we left for Hull. Once there, we handed in our blue clothes and got issued with khaki. I said goodbye to Billy Aldin on Hull Station. I'd spent most of my imprisonment with Billy; we'd shared parcels from home and seen it all through together, but I don't think we even exchanged addresses. I never heard a sound of'n since. I come on home and that was that. When I got back I couldn't get no work. I didn't know what to do. I was gettin' browned off an' bitter to think what I'd come back to. I'd been offered jobs if I'd stayed in Germany and here I was, getting 29 shilling a week unemployment. And I had to hand in my greatcoat or pay 25 bob for'n. I handed'n in.

Pte. Francis Oakley

4th Battalion, The Gloucestershire Regiment

Those of us who survived the sinking of the *Cameronia* were taken to Malta. Our two Gloucester drafts got there without loss of a single man but other drafts were not so fortunate. Of the 3,000 or so on board, 145 were lost. Ten days later we were taken to a transit camp in Alexandria in Egypt, where we were kitted out again and after that we went to India, to the 7th Gloucesters' Indian depot in the Mahratta Hills, below Poonah. My wounded face - my teeth had not yet been replaced - kept me in India until the ending of the war. The surgery I needed was finally seen to there but before it happened I got leave to visit my brother Charles - able to go over to see him at Barrackpore. Of the ten days leave I was granted, seven were taken up with travelling across India and back. But it was worth it.

Pte. Stan Small

10th Battalion, The Devonshire Regiment

26th November, 1918

After the Bulgarians surrendered we had the order come to march 50 miles up to Bucharest to represent the British when they put the old king back on the throne again. It was a forced march and we had to cross the Danube to get in to Romania. We had four days to do it and we got there a day early. A day early! And what a greeting we had! In the coronation procession we marched eight abreast, right behind the royal carriage. We were the first British soldiers they'd seen in Bucharest but there were Union Jacks all over the place! Oh yes, we had quite a welcome.

Well, when we'd put he back on the throne we come back down to Gurgivoo [*Giugiu*] and then on big barges to Russia. When we got there that was beautiful. I don't know the name of the town [*Batumi, Georgia*] but it put me in mind of a fishing village. We were put in some cavalry barracks there to wait while some men from the Rifle Brigade joined us. I was only there about a week when the Sergeant-Major said, 'Small, you've never been home. Look, hand your mules over to your Sergeant, get your kit together and get on the next boat. And don't miss it'. And I didn't.

Pte. Sammy Taylor

3rd Battalion, The Coldstream Guards

I stayed in hospital for nearly a twelve-month. I were really hardened to the things I saw over there but me nerves caught up with me after the war and I were afraid to go anywhere on me own, even in the village. Funny, weren't it. While I were in hospital I used to correspond with my mate George [p.146] from Newcastle for a bit and I asked what had happened to my squeeze-box. He wrote and said the lads had given it to young Jack Britten who used to play with Oliver and we in Welton. Well, I were glad of that cause Jack could knock out a tune or two. But then I heard that he'd been killed. I were very sorry - he were a nice young chap. Oh, I were glad to get out of that place. It were a real hell-hole. But I were proud to be in the Coldstream - I never begrudge the day I joined em.

15202 Pte. William Britten

3rd Battalion, The Coldstream Guards

Killed in Action

France and Flanders

12th April, 1918

Aged 22

Pte. Jim Peppard

1st/4th Battalion, The Somerset Light Infantry

When we got demobbed we come back through Salonikal way - all by trucks. We come up through France and got a boat and ended up at Devonport. Then I come up here on the Pines Express. As we come through Chilcompton, Howard Veale were by the track and he seen me and we waved. Well, the train didn' stop in Chilcompton, nor at Norton Hill, so I had to wait until Radstock and then walk back up to Chilcompton. I were never so excited as when I walked up there that day. I walked in through and opened the inside door. I can see Mother now, sat in the chair. Aw, she didn' half look at me. An' I zed, 'Well, Mother, do seem good to catch hold of the old door-knob once more'.



# 1919

Captain Arthur Coombs

1st/4th Battalion, The Somerset Light Infantry

1919

In Mesopotamia we didn't know when we were going to get home and the rules came that the men would be returned as they were needed. The coal miners went off first, then various other people - students and things like that - and I, being nothing, stayed to the last with about 50 others. I found myself in charge of the cadre coming home on the troopship. There was a fog in the Channel so we were two hours late getting into Bath Station - at eight in the evening instead of six.

There were absolute crowds there to greet us and all of the people who had been out in India with us had paraded to meet us. I think the whole of Bath must have turned out to line the streets. I've never seen such masses. The police made a passage for us to get through the crowds and I gave the order to march, but then I turned round and there was only a young Lieutenant and the CSM behind me - nobody else. The crowd had scuppered them. Well, the police formed a rugby scrum and we got the men up to the YMCA where they were taken care of. We were then taken to the Fernley Hotel. It was eleven at night by then, and the first thing I did was to order a whisky. 'Very sorry, Sir. This is a teetotal hotel.' I have never found out who was responsible for that.

## From *The Coldstream Guards 1914 - 1918*

Following the precedent of the Crimean War, His Majesty the King ordered his Guards to pass him in review and to march through London. This ceremony, as far as the Household Troops were concerned, was their final act of the Great War . . . The Royal Review took place on the 22nd March, 1919. The procession formed up in Buckingham Palace Road; it was headed by the three Regiments of Household Cavalry, and then came the Guards Division led by their first Commander; General Earl of Cavan, with whom was HRH the Prince of Wales, and by Major General T G Matheson, CB, CMG, General Officer Commanding the Guards Division.

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## Casualties

### Somerset Light Infantry

### Coldstream Guards

Battalions	Killed*
1 <sup>st</sup> (Other Ranks)	1,315
1 <sup>st</sup> /4 <sup>th</sup> (ORs)	118
6 <sup>th</sup> (ORs)	849
7 <sup>th</sup> (ORs)	663
All Btns (ORs)	4,487
Officers (All Btns)	269
Total for all Btns	4,756

All Battalions	Other Ranks	Officers	Totals
Killed*	3,680	180	3,860
Wounded	9,183	325	9,508
Prisoners	753	16	769
Totals	13,616	521	14,137

\* numbers shown include those killed in action or died from wounds or other causes

## The Thankful Villages

Somerset's eight Thankful Villages were Aisholt, Chantry, Chelwood, Rodney Stoke, Stanton Prior, Stocklinch, Tellisford and Woolley. The smallest of these was Aisholt, with a population of 48. Chelwood, which was home to 164 villagers, was the largest. Woolley, with 13 families, sent 13 men.

## Acknowledgements and Epilogue

To thank the men and women whose stories are included in these pages would be superfluous; this book is intended to honour them.

Sir Torquhil Matheson (right), more than anyone, gave me the confidence to go ahead with my book and the support that he gave me was superb. I first met him about two years after I began compiling it, and a few months after I had 'found' Sammy Taylor. The fact that Torquhil lived a mere twelve miles from my home was a huge bonus for me and, for him, the discovery of Sammy was bliss. I now re-listen to the tapes I made then and find them peppered with Torquhil's, 'Oh, this is wonderful. Just wonderful. These men were heroes, absolute heroes. What joy to learn these things'. Torquhil was an outstanding man, with a huge zest for life and an impish sense of humour. He and his brother, Sir Fergus, were two of the 32 members of the Queen's Honourable Corps of Gentlemen at Arms; her ceremonial bodyguard. On one occasion Torquhil realised that I planned to include the picture of Oliver Brooks receiving his VC from King George. 'You know that is Crown Copyright, don't you? It's the Queen's. Never fear, I'm seeing her on Tuesday. I'll mention it!'



Torquhil's devotion to the Coldstream Guards, and in particular his beloved 3rd Battalion, was all embracing. What particularly impressed me about him was his knowledge of the details of so many private soldiers. He knew not only their names and their service records he also knew their pre-war - and often post-war - family situations. They meant the world to him. I am extremely grateful to Sir Fergus for agreeing to write the foreword for his brother.

Even before I met Torquhil, the Coldstream Guards had been very helpful and I am indebted to Warrant Officer Clive Candlin to whom I first wrote about Charlie Fry in 1980. One of the first things I learned was that Charlie had never been in the glasshouse - or a greenhouse [page 128] - it was an old soldier's tale. I thank the Oxford University Press for permission to quote from *The Coldstream Guards 1914-1918* by Lieutenant Colonel Sir John Ross-of-Bladensburg, KCB, KCVO, and similarly the Somerset Light Infantry Museum in Taunton for the help they gave me in allowing me access to trench diaries and their own regimental history, *The Somerset Light Infantry, 1914-1919*, by Everard Wyrall.

I am grateful to The Imperial War Museum for permission to use the pictures on pages 63, 81, 138 and 147, and to others for the use of their treasured photographs. Staff at The Commonwealth War Graves Commission were consistently helpful and their website ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)) has been of great value. I made considerable use of the Somerset Guardian and I am grateful to that newspaper as well as to the Frome Library and the admirable Midsomer Norton and Radstock District Museum, for allowing me access to the relevant issues.

In 1999 the Museum Society invited me to speak at their AGM. The date for my talk was the 60th anniversary of the start of WWII and it was suggested that I should take that as my subject. However, as my knowledge of the Second World War is no greater than the next man's, I offered WWI, and re-opened my shoe-boxes. My thanks to the Museum Society!

My family have been long suffering in their patience with me, especially Birgitta, who proof-read, and provided coffee, encouragement and the reassurance that I *had* to put it all into print. Many other people have helped and encouraged me in ways they probably don't realise but I am indebted to my American friend Bill Crichton, who was the first to read the text. With little knowledge of the war from the British perspective, Bill's suggestions were both astute and welcomed.

Others have lent pictures, advised, proof-read and made introductions or suggestions. They include: Shirley Appleton, Trevor Bailey, Bob and Lis Bates, Edward Boucher, Sheila Bishop, Maurice Chivers, Susan Darling, Janet Flagg, Mike Gorman, Francis Hillier (of the Somerset FA), John Howell, Paul Huber, Rachel Humphries, Richard Jeffrey, Geraldine Langley, David MacMurtrie, Nell Matheson, Andrew Moon, De Pickford, Tony Pickford, Paul Ring, Jeremy Robertson, John and Jane Sanders, Mike and Dave Selway, Joan Stevens, Nick Stock, Veronica Stokes, David Taylor, Gemma Taylor (and Quincy Greene), Ian Telfer, Geoff and Marie Urch, Ian Wallen and Jonathan Wood.

I am especially pleased that three of my former pupils were involved with the latter stages of the book: Robbie Polley for his excellent artwork; Nigel Carter, the Commercial Director of Butler and Tanner, who was invariably generous with his friendship and expertise and insistence that the book should be published, and Paul Norris, the Systems Manager at Radstock Reproductions - whose patience was exemplary.

I am, of course, extremely grateful to the many families who allowed me into their homes whilst I was recording material and, more recently, enabled me to prepare a few final lines about their parents and grandparents. I am, of course, especially indebted to Margaret Clare who introduced me to her father; SAMMY TAYLOR. 'When Dad got better after the war he went to work for Bristol Stone and Concrete - walked four miles there and four miles back every day - and stayed with them all his working life. He went on living up the road, by himself, until a couple of months before he died. And he was still singing his First World War songs right up until the end.'

Sammy died in 1991. A Coldstream Guardsman sounded the *Last Post* at his funeral and I never heard it played more sweetly. The notes are in my head as I am drafting the paragraphs that follow.

### TOMMY ATKINS

'When the war ended, Dad went on into Germany for a while, until they'd got things sorted out. He learned to speak the language and said time, and time again how much he liked the German people - people who'd been trying to kill him! Preferred them to the English, he said. When he came back he spent all his working life as a driver; lorries, charabancs, cars - the lot. Went on working until he was 70. One thing he loved to do then was to study the stars. He was fascinated by Halley's Comet - he saw it when he was eleven and couldn't wait to see it again. But he didn't, he missed it by just a few weeks.' (Janet Flagg)

### GWEN BEAUCHAMP

Gwen played tennis for Somerset, was Commandant of the local Red Cross Detachment, and in 1924 married Keith Malcolm and moved to Wimbledon where she lived for most of her life. She overcame her youthful innocence. When she was 86, she told me that a police inspector had just called to warn her that a man had been exposing himself on the Common. 'Oh,' she said. 'If he tries that with me I shall tell him: Young man, put it away and don't be so silly! I was a VAD nurse in the Great War. I've seen *heaps* better than that.'

### GEOFFREY BISHOP

'Like his father who was a doctor - and in the 4th Somersets before the war - Geoffrey decided that he would become one too, so he went off to Bristol University and the Bristol Royal Infirmary to qualify. He then became a country doctor and practiced in Shepton Mallet for the whole of his career with the exception of World War Two. He always stayed with the Somersets and was commanding them when war broke out. He spent the first year of the war with them in England up until the call came for him to stop playing soldiers and join the RAMC.



He served with them in forward Casualty Clearing Stations in North Africa and Italy, and was eventually made up to full Colonel with a staff job in the Area High Command, near Salerno - which is where I was serving as a Red Cross Welfare Officer, and where I met him. We moved here to Bath when he retired in 1964. Geoffrey died in 1987.' (Sheila Bishop)

### OLIVER BROOKS

Oliver Brooks first served in the Coldstream Guards between 1906 and 1913. He was recalled at the outbreak of the war and went immediately to France with the BEF. He left the army in 1919 and worked until his retirement as doorman at the White Hart Hotel, in Windsor. He died in 1940. In 1967 Mrs Brooks, and their grandson, Coldstream Guardsman Brian Lucas-Carter, presented Oliver's VC to his old regiment.



### HERBERT CAINES

'Dad loved his railways and, apart from when he was on the run from the Germans, he really rather enjoyed his war. He stayed on for a year when it ended, helping to clear everything up, with German prisoners to do all the work. When he did come back he returned to the railways for a while but then went into mining and became secretary of New Rock Colliery. He was just a few days short of his 102nd birthday when he died.' (Irene Sheppard)

### CHRIS CARPENTER

'When he was demobbed Chris was going back in the mines but his Captain gave him a gold cigarette case and arranged for his father, who was in charge of the Metropolitan Police, to get Chris in with them. Easy as that. Everything was set up and he was due to go up to London to be fitted for his uniform but then his wife said she was going to have a baby and he decided against going - but if she was, she waited three years to have it. So he went back down the mines. He always told us how he'd been created a King's Sergeant on the field, by King George himself, and when he was dying with the miners' illness in 1961 he told me he wanted a black headstone with the Coldstream badge and the words King's Sergeant of the Coldstream Guards on it. But the man who cut the stone just put Sergeant. That upset me.' (Cliff Carpenter)

### ALBAN CHIVERS

'They kept us out there clearing up the mess until the end of 1919. It was first out there, first back. The regular soldiers went back to England first, then Kitchener's Army then the Derby lot and then - least and last - us. I started back at the brewery in January, 1920, but t'was never the same. After the war the trade had gone. It was never the same.'

'I suppose if it is possible to have such a thing as a good war then Grandad did. Apart from losing his brother it never seemed to have had any great effect on him. Did he ever tell you about the time he sold his sentry-box to a Frenchman for firewood?' (Maurice Chivers)

## ARTHUR COOMBS

'In 1920 I went out to the tea and rubber plantations in Ceylon. Stayed for 32 years. At one point I was running a tea plantation and someone commented that I was far too young to be in charge. I was 38! It was pointed out that I'd been a major in the last war - which I was for a while, standing in for someone for a couple of months. When I retired I came to Bath to live and I now lunch every Wednesday and Friday with Geoffrey Bishop. Once a year those of us who are left from the 1st/4th get together for our Braemar Association dinner. We had a good crowd once: Cox and Nifton and Openshaw - the doctor's son from Cheddar - Clutterbuck, Willie Moger, Humphrey Tanner who was Frome - Butler and Tanner, you know - he was wounded out there, as was Sir Charles Miles. Lewis, whose father ran the paper in Bath - he was also wounded. Worger from Radstock always came. Charey died last year. Stourman - he's dead. Not everyone made it back of course: Baker, of Weston super Mare, and Lillington from Shepton Mallet, and the other Lewis were all killed out there. And the others. Only a few of us left now. Only a few.'

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More than 900,000 British soldiers died in the First World War. Seventy-two of them came from Midsomer Norton and fifty-eight from Radstock. There were countless thousands of other casualties. Reg Jones, who missed conscription by a matter of weeks, said that, 'Towards the end of the war you'd get a tap come on your door and there'd be a man with one arm or one leg, sellin' matches or bootlaces. You did see these blokes everywhere, everywhere. Fingers gone, legs gone, arms gone. Mind gone. I used to wonder what it were all about. What *were* it all about? That didn't impress me a lot. This were going to be a land fit for heroes'.

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## CHARLIE FRY

Charlie was a casualty, though he will not be found in statistical returns. He was not immediately discharged on his release from hospital because there were still jobs for him to do - as Torquhil Matheson put it - 'In the regimental cookhouses and shite-houses at home'. Charlie came home in March, 1919, with rotted feet and a confused mind.

It was largely because of Charlie that this book was written. His farm, such as it was, lay on one side of Underhill Lane, in Midsomer Norton and I was born in one of the three houses on the other. In 1944, had he a mind to, he might



have seen this five year-old attempting to march along the lane behind the Coldstream Guards who were then stationed in Midsomer Norton. But I doubt he was interested. Charlie fell from his cart in 1955 and died. He was still wearing his puttees.

### SID HAWKINS

Sid was 100 when I met him, and the last old soldier to contribute to the book. 'He worked in a bike shop for a few years when he came home and then spent the rest of his working life as an engine driver on the Great Western Railway.' (Veronica Stokes)

### EDWARD HURD

'Grandad was a policeman for 30 years after the war - had five children in five different police houses all over Somerset. It was only after your talks with him that he began opening up to us about his war - told us about when he was a prisoner of war and swapped a loaf of Red Cross bread for an Iron Cross he kept in a drawer in his bedroom.' (Paul Ring)

### CLIFFORD JEFFREY

'Once he'd come back, Dad stayed on the farm all his life until he retired in 1956. Forty years. If he'd not come out when he did, who knows what might have happened. He'd already been to Gallipoli and back. Albie David came back, too. They were the lucky ones.' (Richard Jeffrey)

### CHARLES LEWIN

[From the Minutes of  
The Somerset FA's AGM, 28th June, 1919]

'Mr Lewin said it was strange to say that it was five years to the very day that they had last held their annual meeting. Five tremendous years, fraught with changes for the whole country, affecting almost every individual, had passed. He could not trust himself to say very much about that, but on looking back at the minutes of their last meeting he found that he had then expressed his belief that footballers would not play an ignoble part in the great upheaval . . .' Charles Lewin was on the National Football Association Council in 1904; first represented Radstock on the Somerset Football Association in 1896, and was the Association's permanent Chairman from 1903 until his resignation in July 1945. He died three months later. Youngsters in Somerset still compete for The Lewin Youth Cup.



### CLAUDE LEWIN

'I spent quite a lot of time with Claude out in Africa. He was a pretty clever bloke, you know. When he was invalided out of the army, because of his mangled arm, he went to Reading University, and eventually went to Nigeria where he produced a special strain of cotton which went down very well. Then he had a most appalling show when his only two daughters went ski-ing in Switzerland, and were both killed by an avalanche. The Lewins were a pretty gutsome lot, you know.' (Douglas McMurtrie)



## DOUGLAS MACMURTRIE

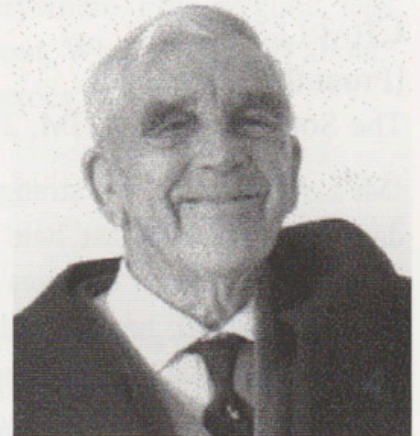
'After the war I became a regular officer with the Somerset's 1st Battalion for six years. Then I got tired of regimental life and went to Africa with the Royal West African Frontier Force. Which was when I met Claude Lewin again for the first time since before the war.'

(David McMurtrie) 'Father was actually in Africa on three different occasions. After that first stint he returned to England in about 1930, when he got married, and then he went back two years later and remained out there until the Second World War when he rejoined the Somersets' 1st Battalion and went to France. He stayed with them for a couple of years but then, as he was an expert on Africa, they sent him back out in late 1941 to create a Training Depot and the 11th Nigerian Battalion.

He left Africa in 1944 as a Lt. Colonel and then raised the 16th Holding Battalion in Clacton, for men returning from Europe. He stayed there until 1946 when, being also a Courts Martial expert he was posted to Palestine. He sailed first to Egypt and was making his way by rail to Palestine when his train was blown up by Israeli terrorists. He eventually settled for a peaceful retirement in the New Forest!'

## JIM PEPPARD

'My nerves went after the war - absolutely gone. An' that wen' on fer two year. I got so low. I just wanted to be on me own - didn't want to see nobody. Go in the garden. Hide. Once I'd got over that I learnt the mason's trade. I told you how I volunteered fer everything during the first war, well I done the same in the second. First thing I done was build a hostel for land workers on Bodmin, then I went in to Bath to clean up fer the blitz, same in Bristol and then t'were London - I were up there when the first two rockets come over, in Forest Hill and the building I were in copped it. You never seen such a mess. But I've always been the lucky one. It's bin a good life!'



## GEORGE POLLARD

George Pollard was a family doctor in Midsomer Norton for 43 years. He retired in 1929, when he was 70. From 1916 to 1919 he was with the RAMC at the Taunton Military Hospital. He served on dozens of committees, from mining and education to farming and football. He was a County JP and the Medical Officer of Downside School but nothing that he ever did meant more to him than his beloved 1st/4th Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry, and it was that for which he would want to be remembered.



## LESLIE POLLARD

'He stayed in India for the whole of his military career and retired as a Brigadier in 1939 - did you know, the Indian Army's Corps of Signals still holds its reunions at the Pollard Arena in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh? At the outbreak of the Second World War he went back into uniform as Commandant of Catterick Camp, the garrison town in Yorkshire. After that war he and his wife Patricia settled here in Stone Allerton with the Brigadier's batman, MacDonald, and their much loved Jersey house-cow, Jemima. He died in 1983.' (Joan Stevens)

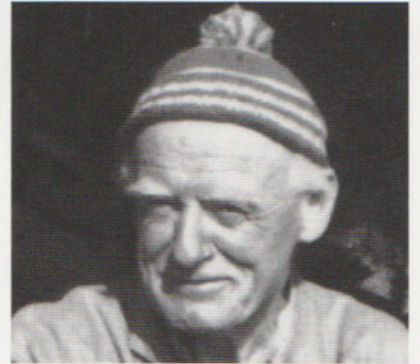


## JOSEPH REGAN and ARTHUR DINWIDDIE

Joseph Regan (No:10431) and Arthur Dinwiddie (No:10430) first joined the Grenadier Guards in August 1902 and both left the army after three years. They were then mobilised on 5th August, 1914 and were in France six days later. The gunshot wounds that Regan had sustained rendered his right arm unusable and he was discharged on 14th August, 1915, unfit for further service. Arthur Dinwiddie, who was unwounded, left the army on the same day having completed his period of engagement.

## STAN SMALL

'Dad spent the first few years after the war as Lord Strachey's chauffeur, but he couldn't afford to live on those wages so he went back to mining, this time up in Coventry. After that he became an aircraft engineer! First at Brize Norton - he used to cycle up there from home - and then at BAC in Bristol. He was there all through the Second World War and right up until his retirement in 1963. He died in 1983.' (Rachel Humphries)



## GEORGE TAYLOR

'When Dad came back he gave his sweetheart an ultimatum. Either she married him or he was off to America. Well, they married, and they bred well 'cause they had ten of us: six boys and four girls. He went back to the mines when he came home and worked there pretty-well all his life, apart from when he was injured by a rock falling on him underground, and a spell in a factory during the second war. He was 92 when he died. The story he told you about swimming across the river to get away from the Germans? Well, he could never swim. He hated the water. Dad reckoned it was the pack on his back that kept him afloat just long enough to reach the other side. He was scared out of his wits.' (David Taylor)



## SAMMY TAYLOR

The final paragraphs of this book are self-indulgent. I grew very fond of many of the people I interviewed but none more so than Sammy Taylor. On my office wall hang two of Sammy's tin whistles from the trenches, together with a framed, tinfoil Coldstream star that he made and gave me. He was the gentlest of men. On a couple of occasions Torquhil Matheson brought Major-General Sir George Burns, KCVO, CB, DSO, OBE, MC, BA, Colonel of the Coldstream Guards and Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire, to my home to meet Sammy, and I have happy memories of the former coal miner patting the General on his knee and asking, 'Are you all right, my dear?'



On his hundredth birthday, in 1991, Torquhil and I arranged a surprise for Sammy. His family was invited to my house for a celebration drink and at noon we put a seat in the porch for Sammy, who sat there - unwitting and uncomplaining - with a rug over his knees. At the same moment, from 100 yards away, a small corps of Guardsmen Drummers, drawn from all the Guards Regiments and led by the Senior Drum Major of the Household Division, marched up the road playing the regimental tunes of the Coldstream Guards. They were followed by half-a-dozen officers and men of the Guards' Association. Sammy loved it. We gave him his whistle and he gleefully played along with the flutes and the drums. Then he grinned and teased the musicians - especially the Grenadiers who were with them: 'Always the Coldstream. Second to none. Second to none.'



Thank you, Sammy



ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND

# No Thankful Village

the play

December 9th - 13th, 2003

## About *No Thankful Village*

Twenty-five years ago, I began interviewing men and women who lived through the awful period of the Great War and what they told me I related in my book *No Thankful Village*. Tonight's play depicts some of the incidents related in that book. The script of the play was written by Colin Thomas who has been scrupulous in using only the words found in the book. I am extremely grateful to him for the love and care with which he created it.

At the end of the Great War there were thirty two so-called 'Thankful Villages' in the whole of Great Britain; villages to which all the young men who went to war returned alive (though most came back with scarred bodies, stumped limbs or stunned minds). Remarkably, a quarter of those villages were in Somerset, but amongst the two dozen or so communities in which we now live, there was no thankful village.

Rehearsing the play has had a profound effect on many of the cast. All recognise that they are portraying real people and, like me, have come to *know* the person they are playing. Twelve year-old Karlos Osbourne, the telegram boy in the picture opposite, kept telling me that he was trying to imagine what was in the mind of the boy he was playing as he delivered telegram after telegram to the tragic Charles Lewin.

The play, then, is a small tribute from members of today's community to their forebears who experienced such horrors. Since writing the book I have learnt so much more about the effect that the war had on this area. I have discovered, for example, that three men from the few houses on my own street died in the war and that a young lad from the house in which I live was sucked into the mud of Flanders, never to be found.

Three hundred and thirty men are commemorated on memorials within three miles of where this play is being performed. Three hundred and thirty fateful telegrams.

Chris Howell  
December 2003

# No Thankful Village

a play based on Chris Howell's book of the same name

Directed by Jeremy Robertson

Produced by Chris Howell

*Below: Peter Bates, as Charles Lewin, receives a telegram telling of the death of one of his sons*





*Above: Cast members as Coldstream Guardsmen during the filming of No Thankful Village*

## The Soldiers

Fusilier Tommy Atkins	Royal Fusiliers	Luke Atkins
Lance/Sgt Oliver Brooks	Coldstream Guards	Richard Green
RSM Charles Buss, DCM	Somerset Light Infantry	Mike Plummer
Fusilier Alfie Chivers	Royal Fusiliers	Alistair Hannan
Pte Harry Cockle	Somerset Light Infantry	Will Burch
L/Cpl Wilf Cook	Royal Fusiliers	Neil Hardman
Lt Arthur Coombs	Somerset Light Infantry	Jonathan Layzell
Pte John Cosh	RAMC	Richard Astley
Daisy Boy	Somerset Light Infantry	Mike Blackmore
Pte Alfie Dowling	Somerset Light Infantry	Matt Taylor
Drummer Boy	Somerset Light Infantry	Asher Hughes
Guardsman Charlie Fry	Coldstream Guards	Simon Eade
Recruiting Sgt Frank Gummer	Somerset Light Infantry	John Brown



L/Cpl Walter Horler	Coldstream Guards	Euan Roy
Pte Edward Hurd	Gloucestershire Regiment	Simon Martin
Pte Arthur Hurley	RAMC	Peter Jones
Pte Alfie Jeffries	Somerset Light Infantry	Steve Barnes
Pte Arthur Jeffries	Somerset Light Infantry	Ross Curtis
Pte Arnold Langley	Somerset Light Infantry	Dan Jenkins
Driver Sid Latchem	Army Service Corps	Steve Unwin
Lt Cyril Lutyens	Coldstream Guards	Nick Earl
Maj Sir Torquhil Matheson	Coldstream Guards	John Plucknett
Fusilier James Martin	Royal Fusiliers	Jake Spurgeon
Captain Mawer	Rifle Brigade	Tom Browne
Captain Douglas McMurtrie	Somerset Light Infantry	Tim Layzell
Pte Herbie Osmond	Somerset Light Infantry	Tom Balch
Pte Harry Patch	Duke of Cwll Light Inf.	Paul Tarrant
Pte Jim Peppard	Somerset Light Infantry	Feargus Dunlop
Lt Col George Pollard	Somerset Light Infantry	Ian Telfer
Pte Stan Small	Devonshire Regiment	Greg Williams
Pte Sydney Smith	Somerset Light Infantry	Alex Wilkinson
L/Cpl George Taylor MM	Somerset Light Infantry	James Broderick
Pte Sammy Taylor	Coldstream Guards	Quinn Miller
Pte John Thompson	Devonshire Regiment	Joe Nicholson
Pte George Walters	Somerset Light Infantry	Chris Tang
Pte Bill Withers	Somerset Light Infantry	Colin Knowles
Pte Joe Withers	Somerset Light Infantry	Matt Knowles
Sgt Woodland	Coldstream Guards	Jeremy Hunt
Pte Frank Woods	Somerset Light Infantry	Steve Mullins

# The Cast (continued)

Annie Cleeves	Debbie Lovegrove
Band leader	Chris Hansford
Band members	Ben Langford-Young, Ben Vine, Dave Jewell, David Burnett, Dan Jenkins, Dan Paget, Gareth Burnett, Geoffrey Shepherd, Michael Shepherd, Mike Henning, Paul Fogg, Richard Green and Steve Westward
Barmaid	Shirley White
Charles Lewin	Peter Bates
Charlie Smith	Ben Langford-Young
Children	Abbie Burney, Amy Webb, Anna Carpenter, Annie Perrott, Esther Dickinson, Francesca Allen, Jade Fitch, Kayleigh Muspratt, Laila Banjar, Martha Green, Matt Rundle, Maxine Stride, Richard Perrott, Robyn Dexter, Sophie Bansall, Vicky Hutton
Clifford Carpenter	Greg Passingham
Cliff Latchem	Charlie Lovegrove
Cottager	Paul Fogg
Drinker in pub	Jeremy Evetts
Drummer Boy	Asher Hughes
Frank Jones	Phil Shirley
Herbert Caines	Darren Stevens/Michael Selway
Gwen Beauchamp (Nurse)	Jackie Stoffels
German Prisoner	Geoff Bendle
German Soldiers	Darren Stevens, Greg Passingham and Jamie Ross
Jacob Tucker - Undertaker	Alistair Hannan
Jonah Dando	Mike Henning
Lemuel Fry	Darren Stevens
Matron	Anne Penny

Miss Durnford

Mrs Osborne

Nessie Down

Nurses

Oliver Brooks as a child

Sammy Taylor as a child

“Somerset Guardian Ladies”

Squire’s Wife

Telegram Boy

Tribunal Chairman

Tribunal Clerk

Tribunal member

Uncle Matt

Ward Attendant

Debbie Lovegrove

Debbie Lovegrove

Wendy Worley

Becky Cooper and Hannah Dickinson

Ted Green

Tom Preston

Avis Heley, Doreen Marks, Farrida Farr, Gillian Stride, Gina Allen, Jan Randall, Norma Dando, Shirley White and Wendy Walker.

Jennifer White

Karlos Osbourne

Ian Telfer

John Plucknett

Tom Browne

Paul Ring

Jamie Ross



# Backstage

- Assistant Director: Jane Holmes
- Costume: Anita Usher, Ann Evetts, **De Pickford**, Jayne Webb, Mandy Green, Robyn Dexter, Wendy Worley
- Front of House Virginia Mitchard, Mallie Robertson
- Interval Singers: Eddie Brown, **Geoff Bendle**, Hanna Pocock, Jackie Carter, Jake Spurgeon, Jeremy Hunt, Jess Richardson, Lucy Milner, Martin Bendle, Martina Hopkins, Nikita Anstey.
- Make-up: **Caroline Burgess**, Emily Urch, Freya Lane, Karen Selway, Louise Muspratt, Rhianna Pole, Sophie Banjar
- Military Advisors: Bryan Hicks and Lionel Digby
- Scenery, Props and Backstage: **Jeremy Evetts**, Andrew Layzell, Jackie Carter, John Sanders, Lance Jukes, Mike Dexter.
- Sound and Light & Audio Visual: **Gary Sage**, **Wren Thatcher**, Gareth Burnett, Ray Whitcombe, Steve Cole, Tim Goode
- Technical Advisors: Gary Sage and Wren Thatcher
- Ticket Sales: **Jo Rundell**, *Reflections*, Sue Hobbs
- Video Record: Ruth Schofield
- Webmaster: Chris Ware
- Committee: Mike Gorman and Nigel Carter (Joint Chairmen)  
Jeremy Robertson, Chris Howell  
Jonathan Layzell (Assistant Producer)  
De Pickford (Treasurer)  
Birgitta Howell (Secretary)

## The TV Film

All of the photographs in this programme were taken during filming for the TV version of *No Thankful Village*. The filmed episodes used in the play have been created by Wildfire Television Company and were directed by Colin Thomas. Lee Cox was the producer, John Podpadec, the cameraman and Paul Baker the sound engineer. The Art Director was Hazel Gower and the Production Co-ordinator was Heidi Hinder. Wildfire have been filming rehearsals and scenes from the play and these are to be shown on HTV over three Thursdays next autumn, finishing with the final episode on Armistice Day, November 11th.



*Above: Mike Plummer (RSM Buss, DCM, Somerset Light Infantry), Steve Barnes (Alfie Jeffries, SLI), Luke Atkins (Tommy Atkins, Royal Fusiliers) and Nick Earl (Lt Cyril Lutyens, Coldstream Guards)*

## The Book

Critics have acclaimed Chris Howell's book as one of the best ever written about the First World War. Peter Cochrane a former soldier and publisher wrote "I don't think any book - WWI or WWII - has approached it in its total ring of truth and its realism". There are more reviews on [www.ficklehill.com](http://www.ficklehill.com). The book is available from *Reflections* in Midsomer Norton.

# Acknowledgements

At each performance of the play, individual actors playing soldiers are carrying the shoulder titles or badges of former Somerset Light Infantrymen who fought in the Great War. These belonged to: Bert Edwards, Ernest Gay, Henry Purchase, James Willis and Albert Whittock. Quinn Miller also plays Sammy Taylor's own tin whistle. In addition, the red sash that John Brown wears as the Recruiting Sergeant (worn right to left, as only the Somerset Light Infantry does) was worn throughout WWI and WWII by Francis Hillier's grandfather and father.

On average, 27 British soldiers died every hour of the 54 month long Great War - 4,756 of them with the Somerset Light Infantry. The men who fought were themselves fathers and grandsons, sons and uncles and brothers. And by what they did and what they gave, they became ours, too. So, we acknowledge and thank the many former soldiers and their families who told their stories - some of them for the first time - so that *No Thankful Village* could remind us of what they endured.

We also thank:

**Tim Layzell** for donating his superb painting of an unknown Somerset soldier and **Radstock Reproductions** for their great kindness in printing both Tim's painting, as our poster, and this programme. Also Terry Paget of **The Paget Press** for the finishing work on the programme and Michael Broadway of **Topflite** for printing scripts and other material.

**The Arts Council of England; Awards for All; B&NES; Roger Penny; Butler and Tanner; Lloyd's Bank; Oval Homes; Topflite** and two anonymous donors, for their invaluable sponsorship, without which the play would not have been possible. Also **Ken Biggs Contractors Ltd, and Swimco Ltd**, for their generous assistance.

**Terry Taylor** and his contacts for the outstanding facsimile badges and titles.

Lionel Digby of **Flame Torbay Costumiers** for his advice, attention to detail, generosity and patience; and Dinah of **Bath Theatrical Costume Hire** for her timely help!

**Bryan Hicks** of the **Great War Society** for his authoritative help and willing participation, and individual members of that Society for their help and encouragement.

**Major Bill Miles**, of the Royal Signals, and **Steve King** of RJ King and Sons, for the loan of equipment.

**Jackson Fencing**, and **Premier Paper** of Bristol, for donated material and Alan Walsh of **Jewsons** for discounted materials.

**Nigel Turner** (of Axis Scaffolding - 01225 722720) who came to our rescue at the eleventh hour when another company failed to fulfill its contract.

## Harry Patch

Harry Patch is 105, and one of only two dozen surviving men who fought in the Great War. He is planning to attend one performance of the play. In the scene shown below Harry is played by Somervale student Paul Tarrant. This and other war scenes were re-enacted on the Somerset levels, and for obvious reasons all mobile phones had to be turned off during the filming.

The scene below shows the occasion when Harry Patch came across a fatally wounded soldier from his own regiment - the DCLI. The dying man pleaded with Harry to shoot him to save him further suffering, but as Harry prepared to shoot the soldier uttered the word 'Mother' and then died. For 86 years Harry has been convinced that the soldier had seen his mother waiting to receive him into heaven.

At the last minute Steve Mullins, who was on the set as an extra, was asked to play the dying man and for almost half an hour lay motionless in a bloody pool whilst being filmed from different angles. Then, just as he was about to say 'Mother' - the soldier's dying word - a mobile phone rang. It was Steve's, and it was his mother. She'd called to see if everything was all right.





*Above: Quinn Miller as Coldstream Guardsman Sammy Taylor*

The Director and Producer have asked that there should be no speeches at the end of the play so I have asked if I might write a few words here about *No Thankful Village*, which is a landmark in Somervale's history. The school is deeply grateful to Chris Howell and Jeremy Robertson and the company, who have worked unstintingly over many weeks to make this loving and moving tribute possible. We are extremely proud to be so closely associated with it.

Michael Gorman, Head Teacher, Somervale School