

## DOP/01/002

Frank Gillard  
Born November 1<sup>st</sup>. 1891  
26 Stacey Avenue  
Wolverton

INTERVIEWED BY: Roger Kitchen 21.11.80

Born in Stony Stratford,  
Moved to Wolverton 1908. Played for Wolverton Football Club. Lived in Church Street.

- 013 Old Stony Stratford families on mother's side. Father came from West Country with brother to work in Works. Moved from Wolverton Road to Church Street. Father a body maker. Younger brother and sister and older sister.
- 033 When war broke, was courting, on holiday in Yarmouth. "All of a sudden war broke out, they turned the lights off and all the military bands all went home and we had to find our way home best we could from Yarmouth". Army took over all the trains. Took no notice of War breading out, "bad that's all, you come back home". Got fed up listening to radio. Then few youths in work shops decided one morning they'd join up, shouted an went through workshops until they had 20-30 and then came out and jointed up. Railway put special train on to Oxford. FS in very first group of on first day.
- 054 Doesn't know why he joined up. Didn't think about it – went with crowd. Said it wasn't going to last long. Not afraid he was going to miss anything, just went with crowd. Flabbergasted at Oxford at Cowley Barracks. Had to find own bed and breakfast and pay for it themselves.
- 064 Joined up in September 1914
- 070 Had Recruiting Office in Stratford Road where Grafton Cycles is now. No pressure from family, took no notice. Too early to think about bad things.
- 077 Eventually Army got them into barracks. Fed them and gave them a medical examination. Went to Salisbury Plan for training – others went to Wiltshire. He was in 78<sup>th</sup> Brigade.
- 108 Most of Wolverton men in 'D' Company in Oxford and Bucks Battalion.
- 120 "Eventually you became a robot, you see, you lost all interest to the outside world at all. You were in the army and all you had to do was what they told you, you see". Became apparent when you went overseas.
- 124 Didn't enjoy the army, he was indifferent, you didn't enjoy it. You can't enjoy carrying a 26lb pack on your back, tramp and do route marches of 10, 20, 30 miles, no motor vehicles, you know.

- 130 Joined in sudden rush of doing the same as everybody else. Also wasn't a lot of sobbing, sighing on last leave, knowing they were going to France. Indifferent, didn't enjoy or dislike Army life, hard life.
- 145 In training went from square bashing, to rifle drill and shooting, to field work and attacks. Doing P.E. all the time.
- 152 Never worried about what would happen to him. Made Lance-Corporal when put in charge of Platoon (15men) Lewis Gun. Didn't get Lewis Gun until went to France.
- 162 D Company Football team almost completely Wolverton men. FG didn't play because he was injured. In team when overseas. Plenty of sport, very good cross-country running team.
- 176 First class officers, all volunteers. Frank Devenham formerly on Capt. Scott's expedition as geologist. "Finest gentleman I've ever met in all my life".
- 197 Regular soldiers had time of life putting the recruits into shape. "Most terrible Institution I've ever heard about". Comprised those dodging law, underground people, riff-raff, orphans. Discipline was pretty heavy. Old soldiers had time of lives shouting at them, didn't go overseas with tem. The were so amazed the recruits could pick up so easily things it had taken them years to learn and be made Sergeant or Quartermaster.
- 220 Not enough khaki when arrived at barracks. Some had old Redcoat and Cavalry uniforms – wore blue serge suits, while clothing factories were getting re-jigged up. All for a shilling a day.
- 240 Was a cabinet-maker in the Works. 23 when he went away, just courting. Doesn't know what finance thought about him going away.
- 250 Nobody has ever questioned or listened to him talk about war. Everybody wanted to forget it.
- 267 Railway Co. said all men who had volunteered would get their job back. They did, but cut down and were on 2, 3 and 4 day week. "In June 1921 everything was forgot and they started sacking us left and right."
- 283 Didn't feel he was owed anything for his service. "Oh no, we volunteered and that was the end of it. If you volunteer that's the end, isn't it?" Only expected to go back to pick up where left off.
- 294 Demob account, has photocopy. "That was goodbye and thank you very much".
- 327 People didn't ask what has happened afterwards – just wanted to forget. Didn't talk much to others what served either, you'd been and done what you wanted to do and come home"
- 345 Christmas cards sent

- 370 Wolverton then as now, dull, nothing going on. Fiancée and sister saw him off on final leave. Wolverton didn't seem changed by the War except that there was no football team.
- 386 Not used as example to other young men to join up. Although later white feathers were handed out.
- 395 First experience of trench fighting in France. Had to do probation, went in to learn with 7<sup>th</sup> Northants. One section had just got in dugout when shell killed several of them from Stony Stratford. "Thy never did see anything of war". Had no feelings, just carry-on automatically. Trenches alive with rats. Hated them. Once in old barn woke up and saw rat smelling pal's ears. Had mascot, white haired terrier, rat in biscuit tin and terrier found it. "You would have thought a shell had dropped through the roof". No rats in Greece.
- 447 Deaths of people from Stratford didn't frighten, because one of crowd, gets fright on own – just passed it off.
- 474 Life in trenches awful, don't take any notice, automation, have no feelings, do as you're told, no individual life. Become so part of the machine that you carry on. Only about a month in France.
- 445 Whole division (40,000 men) entrained to Marseilles. Their batallion put on HMS Terrible. Called in various ports on way to Salonika.

## Side Two

- 000 Went ashore at Port Said while ship was coaled by natives with baskets. 4'6" guns, machine guns, crews put on these to practice. South Wales people put on stoking.
- 046 Greeks didn't like them when they arrived in Salonika, as Greece not in war. Spent a lot of time digging trenches.
- 051 No contact with local population. Terrible climate, dysentery, malaria, waters a problem.
- 060 Several route marches – only allowed to drink when ordered. March 50 minutes, 10 minutes rest, first 10 minutes no drinking. Hot day given the work, "The men may drink". You fancy being told when you could drink and when you couldn't. Then you talk about having feelings of your own. You've got no feelings of your own, how could you have any feelings of your own.
- 074 Special friends were 6 men in Lewis Gun team. With malaria, etc. Had reinforcements – including Cockneys.
- 085 "That's a job you see. You have these doings at night in the dark, and all you can see are these shells going on, smoke and the stink of cordite. You know the next man to you hardly".

- 089 May 9<sup>th</sup> tried to Storm Mountain. Twice had go and couldn't take it. Feelings? "Wished yourself were dead. More than once I wished a shell had come over and blown me to hell. Why? Because you'd nothing to live for. What you didn't to today, you'd got to do tomorrow, hadn't you? There's no end to it, you couldn't see an end to it, you see"
- 102 Trenches 12 yards down from peak, more difficult for artillery to hit. Buglars on other side of ravine, wanted prisoners. Officer decided good idea to dig trench in middle of valley. Corporal, Signalmen and 6 men would go there each night. "Like putting a bit of cheese on a mousetrap". FG had to go – worst night he'd ever had in life. In charge – 12 hour night. One night the party were all taken. Quiet on night he went, "wonder my hair didn't turn white". Every tuft of grass seemed to be moving.
- 140 Never went on a raid for prisoners. Others did. One night prisoner was brought. FG. Corporal and Gas Guard, he had to take him to Brigade HQ – he pinched his cap badge.
- 158 Two men deserted and gave themselves up to him. Sent men out from machine gun post through barbed wire to get them. Took them to officers – one asked if they spoke English, "Yes sir, one says, he speaks American, said Cockney.
- 182 Afterwards went n as army of occupation. Went to Rushchuck by side of Danube. Told friends he was going to cross bridge so that he could tell mates he'd crossed the Blue Danube.
- 197 Had to help put Rumanian officers in Bulgarian villages, very difficult.
- 206 Felt "all of shaky on edge" before a battle, don't know what to expect. Afterwards flop. Not much food, miserable. Wet through to skin and lousy too. Lice in shirt. 2 shirts, not much chance of washing them. Job to dry it too. Rest between front line duties, but no real rest as had to make roads etc
- 228 Describes incident during Occupation time – sent to buy food. Stated overnight and ate with Bulgar family.
- 293 Was it worth it? No terrible, nothing's worth it. Why is any of worth it? Just because a few politicians fall out over power. Political power and a bit of land they gain. They use the people on that bit of land as pawns. Bulgar States always argued over, but people lived happily together just politicians making trouble.
- 315 Worthwhile – no Waste of time. Only worthwhile part was preventing Germans taking over our country. When came back, everything ruined, no food, rationing, lack of jobs.
- 340 Conditions bad, wet clothing, sleeping in slits in dugouts on wet blankets, shaving every morning with cold water, cold wind and rains. Had to keep rifles clean. Hated and detested it.

- 360 War experience turned him socialist. Hadn't thought about politics before he went. Thought political power and money and country being run by people with the money and rest were nowhere was wrong. Didn't join Home Guard in World War 2, but wouldn't have been pacifist, knew what it was like to be overrun, as British had done. Not against 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, but didn't take part in it.
- 390 Had no leave in 4½ years, therefore in first party to be demobbed. Didn't know how those who got leave were chosen.
- 402 War had no effect on Wolverton after War. Before War went to work at 6.00 a.m. At 8.15 had three quarters of an hour for breakfast, then till 12.30, then 1.30 till 5.30p.m. And Saturday mornings as well. 54 hour week. (52 years ago was earning £5 per week). Working week hadn't got shorter by 1918. After war rows to get better conditions. 1926 general strike – not affected by War, but more “stand up for yourself” than there was before.
- 433 Didn't make any difference to his family. Came back and slotted in as before.
- 441 Started demob in Bulgaria, long train journey via Turkey, Greece, Italy and up to Le Havre. Allowed half pint bitter with meal. Came across to Southampton, then to Salisbury Plain to be demobbed. Got pay and handed in rifles. Train went from Andover to Oxford. At Oxford sent to telegrams, to mother and girlfriend saying arriving in afternoon. Two of them who lived in Wolverton. Train half hour late. Arrived, threw bag on platform. Brother, sister and young lady standing there.