

## **DOP/01/021**

Harry Blunt (born 22.1.1898)  
6 Wood Street  
New Bradwell

010 In 1914 lived at No. 42 Spencer Street New Bradwell. Fred, Harry, Jim, Jack, Lil, Tom. Lil born 1914. Fred the oldest, Harry the second. Dad a coach finisher in the Works.

022 Day after War declared, went into Works on Tuesday and "all hell broke loose". Had asked for volunteers – all chaps marched to station and caught train to Oxford to join up. Harry was 16. Had no thoughts of joining up early. He sat on the railings when they went off on the train and a mate gave him half a sovereign. Don't worry we shall be home soon. Little did he think he was going to join up in 1916.

034 Brother Fred was on camp with Territorials of course nobody thought about the killings really, not straight away. Family thought nothing of it. Came home on leave for a couple of days and then off they went. Everybody seemed confident.

052 Fred a bad letter writer. H thinks it a good point if you don't write too often. The old lady used to worry about him we haven't heard from our Fred have we. Once there was a rumour that a chap had said at Shenley who was out there with him, that Fred Blunt had been killed. Man told Dad in Works. He went all over the Works to find him – never did find him. He was made because of him. Fred went through war – came out a private.

068 When he came home he talked of those who'd been killed, but he didn't ever say he didn't want to go back.

073 He was conscripted under Lord Derby's scheme in 1916. He was not reluctant about going. HB was so small, a man in his shop bet him a shilling that he wouldn't pass. Nobody thought he would. 37 went from Works. Sergeant took them from the Drill Hall. Being a "B" he was the first one in. I was excited that when the old Naval Doctor whoever he was, said "A.I. course, I ran out without putting any clothes on. Yet of course, I had me trousers in front of me, out the door see, and said "Iv'e passed. Of course they were all conning me in the train, see, that I shouldn't pass. Only one didn't pass out of the 37 and he had a doctor's note because he was deaf.

084 George Mundy worked in same shop. Same age, joined up with him.

091 Reports of people being killed "Certainly, but when you're young like that and you go in camp and all that. I mean you've seen the sandbags hanging up and the blokes going, training going (gesticulates) I mean, it was a laugh really. Of course, I soon altered me tune, that's that, we went about it just ordinary.

103 Mum and Dad troubled over him then over others – another brother, Jack went – HB sent a field card to them every other day. When they didn't have one they were worried stiff, but Fred, he only wrote once a week. Jack still alive – joined Naval Air Service.

115 After passing medical went to Oxford Barracks for about a fortnight then went into civilian billets in Tiverton in Devon. In Oxford and Bucks first then went into the Training Corps. Were not told that many were being killed. Old major who'd had leg shot off rode a forest pony, asked for volunteers for the machine gun corps. Said that there would be lots of training and you wouldn't go out until you were 19 – generally glamorise it – of course we fell for it. Went to Grantham to join Machine Gun Corps – Sergeant there from Hanslope. As soon as you passed the test away you went. George Mundy was on draft for Salonika but HB was in France for 3 months before they went to Salonika. Oh it was an experience.

150 Major and sergeant told them nothing serious about the war that they were having lots of casualties in the machine gun corps and that's why they needed to recruit more. Training wasn't hard for him.

160 Wrote home regularly. Family was poor, father liked his beer and mother didn't have a lot to throw about. Had a lot of bacon and onion dumplings. Put in letter once I do miss the old bacon and onion dumplings. About 2 months later the Corporal who came up with the post had sandbag with letters and parcels in. Had just had 21 days on the line. They were lousy, Corporal came over and said I don't know what the bloody hell you've got here. It was hard and heavy. I know what it is. Your mouth would water if you'd had this. Went to Cook, had large saucepan of bully beef stew over fire, Got anywhere you can warm this mate. What is it? Bucks dumpling. He got it and threw it in. Went later with Dixie to get it. Normally it would have been bully beef stew with carrots etc. which French had given them. Went to his bivouac and cut open dumpling, lovely smell of onion and bacon. Officer would come round and say "Everything correct?" What the .... What the hell have you got there? I can eat that easy. I thought, You're not having any. His mate didn't want any – until he smelt it I think I'll have a little bit.

211 He used to have one, three or four times a week. Used to go over to grandparents at Old Bradwell to have a bit of his granddad's on Sundays. Father as good as gold but drank a lot, and the wage earners were at War. He gave mother 3/6d a week from his money (had 1/- a day – he had 3/6d left. The authorities in cases of the poor doubled this money to mother up.

244 Came home on final leave, can't remember things being very different. Cinemas open, chased girls along the road. (Wife in background says that the girls used to stand at the station every Saturday to see who was coming home. She didn't know HB at this stage). Mother was worried. Father didn't show it – often on beer.

261 Went from Folkestone to Boulogne on old cattle boat. Old soldier on same boat recommended they should have fish and chips and pint of beer before leaving. Did so HB had never drunk beer before in his life. Gangway swaying when went on board – went to toilet and was sick and lost his false teeth. camped outside Boulogne, then went to trains. Got in cattle trucks with braziers in them. Had to report at every stop. Took nearly a day to arrive at destination St. Elais near Arras. Went into hut at station – allocated to 13<sup>th</sup> Brigade Machine Gun 5<sup>th</sup> Division. Sergeant told them to go down sunken road to chateau. Naval gun went off – first gunfire he'd been near – sat down in middle of road frit us to death. When shock had gone, ears were going, went up to chateau and over the top the next morning.

310 Stayed in cellars overnight, fellows singing. Had to go over next morning. Had a big pack. When went over one person got wounded, dumped rifle and picked up his pistol and

belt. Canadians took Vimy Ridge that day – for dugout facing their lines. Germans down there. HB said to Corporal. There's a German laying down there. Course he were dead. I didn't know. That were the first dead man I'd seen. Corporal laid him down and put his head on him to have a rest. He and mates sat steps up dugout away from him. Course some of these old sweats you see were tied to it you see. Course you could do nothing about it. You couldn't help him at all. I daren't go to sleep, course I daren't I don't mind admitting it.

356 Only other local chap in crew was Harry Brooks from Newport. In gun crew. No. 1 carried the tripod, No 2 the gun, all the rest (the other four) carry a box of ammunition. Loaded down with ammunition. No. 1 fires the gun, all the rest (the other four) carry a box of ammunition. Loaded down with ammunition. No 1 fires the gun, another one lies at side putting the tape through the rest are filling the tapes as they use them. Can't carry too many tapes with you. Crew come out of dugout and w=then walks over the top. Until you have orders to "Mount gun" you have to keep walking, went across at break of day. A barrage went up to cover advance.

402 Conditions in trenches were terrible, especially at Passchendale "not trenches really – bogs, wooden track night up to Passchendale Ridge – Menin Road. Went up to Menin Road, had a tape to get hold of to show you way. When got to bottom of Passchendale Ridge a barrage was put up. When barrage lifted, officer gave orders to advance. Went to top of ridge and mounted gun, firing into spinney could see people running in. Started bombarding near top of ridge, a shell blew their gun away from them – three hadn't got to top of ridge, officer lay down beside him and put bit in gun and he fired. Officers leg blown off. He said Tie my leg up. HB went to field dressing out of coat and just as he put it round his leg before he could tie it, a piece of shrapnel caught him in the groin another two inches and would have had me.

447 He read afterwards in the Northcliffe Mail in a soldiers newspaper that the officer died. HB wasn't picked up till next morning. He was unconscious. Carried back by R.E. Sergeant, just before dawn. Sergeant came later to Etapes to see him in hospital didn't know his name. You see you don't know the damn .. you see you ain't got time. At night in hospital there was talk of Zeppelin raid and all had to be moved outside, I thought this is nice. There about a fortnight before came home on hospital ship. In hospital in Brighton. Should have gone to Scotland, but German POWs were carrying stretchers and first one caught foot in capstan and threw him on the dockside platform. Went in waiting room of station good job they did, because my mother would never have been able to come. The Scotland train had left by the time he recovered.

485 Everything free in Brighton. Humphreys, an old cricketer who owned a sports shop used to have so many every week to tea, taken there by nurse. Pier was free. There for 6-8 months. Had no end of operations.

511 Hospital was converted workhouse – up Elm Grove by Race Course run by Canadians. Queen Mary visited them with Princess Royal. Had discharge straight from hospital, didn't do convalescence.

540 Went to France in 1917. Just before the snow came. Wounded on October 22<sup>nd</sup>. Kept a record of his movements, but lost paybook and watch and record when wounded. Stolen doesn't know, It's a big thing to judge, isn't it?

591 In time became hardened. If you had someone killed when you were in the line and couldn't bury him immediately he'd sewn up in a blanket.

600 Discharged home in March 1918.

613 Feelings before battle? I don't think you've got a lot of feelings really. Riddled with lice and brought mobile steam baths to where resting and went in there, shirt put in boiler and cleaned and dried.

660 When Fred came home on leave and HB had been discharged HB said Where's he going to sleep? He'll have to get in with you. HB said You want to go and dig a hole in the garden and bury your shirt. (that fetches lice out quicker than anything) HB didn't know whether he had any lice, but he didn't want to take the risk. I didn't want him with me. I didn't want them damn things.

687 Machine gunners never in front line for attack. Infantry went first then machine gunners. Never in front line either when Germans came over, Go in support.

Side Two

004 Conscripted in April 1916. Doesn't think Works really changed at time or War. Painted the outside of ambulance trains. Worked with a man and a lad worked together. In latter years they had gangs.

033 In spare time went fishing. In 1912 up on canal with bent pin and worms catching gudgeons when saw aeroplane going from London to Birmingham going overhead.

052 Wanted to pass medical for army because everybody was getting at him for being small.

058 Worked for 54 hours a week. Started with 4/9d per week. Bonus and maximum of 3% of 4/9d.

069 Worked with man named Joe Kirk "a midget". Strict, couldn't leave job. HB. Jimmy Dunkley got some putty and JD threw it at electric light bulbs and broke one. Suspended for a fortnight. HB was put on blacking up underneath the coaches with no overalls. Plastered in thick black. Foremen had truck outside the office so that he could see you doing it. They weren't penalising me they were penalising my parents. The boy labourers had thick overalls normally. My Dad didn't half grumble. Foreman powerful people Oh yes dear oh pray yes. They were strict. Forman today is answered back, but then had to tae hat off when you entered the office.

115 Family poor. Kids went to Sunday school and were given 1d to go t old lady who made toffee in her front room, sat on kerb and Fred used to break it up and row about not having fair share. Went to Baptist Chapel. Lived in High Street when first came from Loughton. But went to Church Band of Hope.

130 Pleasant Sunday afternoon on the front, family were musicians – the Dythams – played religious music. Sister played piano also there was trombone, coronet, cello and violin. They

called it the PSA Pleasant Sunday Afternoon. Played at the Assembly Hall (where Telfords is now).

161 Mrs. B. talks of Father Guest – played piano beautifully – got up in middle of night to play it. challenged her dad a fight down at the Rec. once, that's the sort he was s- because her Dad didn't go to church. He'd start nagging with anybody. He used to swim. Went with her Dad down to the bottom of the river Ouse with their hands up, touch the bottom and come up again. But he'd come up and argue all the same.

170 HB challenged man named Hepworth to a race in the river. Hepworth a big chap just like Father Guest was a tall chap. Crowds there. Every morning would run along Old Bradwell Road in vest and shorts nearly to Old Bradwell. He'd do jumping etc. on the lawn every morning "Dear oh pray he was a card he was". Used to shout at Chapel people as they were going to Church as he went by on his bike. Used to call after Albert Brown, terrible.

190 Young people like HB used to laugh at the antics he used to cut. When they were married he was on holiday good job as he used to carry on at people for not going to Church.

207 Man named Betts had Band of Hope in his front room as so many people left the Church.

215 Collected shilling off parents for children's costumes and made £300 for Hospital. Mrs. Nellie Abbey from Wolverton organised it. Walked to Old Bradwell one week and write down what they would give in Bradwell. Happened in about 1920. Organised by Girls Club.

304 Armistice "Hell let loose" They went mad, absolutely HB was in work, everybody came out as soon as they heard. Blew the hooter, somebody shouted, and everybody came out. HB went around with the band. Mr. B. Dad sat in front of house and said they're cheering now but they won't be cheering in a few years time. They'll be out of work. There'll be trouble. People didn't stop to think – so glad it was over. So many killed – even from Bradwell. Lonely three of the 37 that went is still alive not all died in War.

360 When Armistice came thought "Thank God for that. You take 42 Spencer Street, 40 High Street, that's straight opposite our back gate there was one killed. Two gates away there was another killed across the road there was another. On the corner of High Street there was another. In Bridge Street there was one, two, three .. All just – you could throw a stone to all the houses.

376 Women opposite his house used to come in afternoon, bring tea to mother and have a cuppa. Old lady lived in Bridge Street that told fortunes in tea cups. When HB came home discharged he sat there and women said Fetch Old Kate. He laughed – she told him off. He didn't believe, but women did. She did his fortune but he laughed.

400 On Mondays these women went to Wolverton at 5.0 clock to the first house of the pictures. Always met them when coming home from work, just after the war. Only paid 3d – sometimes let in free. Four women lived near each other. Mrs. Fincher, Mrs Wood had lost sons in the war – next door but one to each other in High Street. Heard about sons death when HB at home Cor it was terrible man, terrible. And what id they give 'em what did they allow 'em 5/- a week wasn't it for the loss of their son.

426 Woman who took half pint jug to tavern in morning about 11 o'clock – neighbours talked the toffee-nosed ones – on morning she said the brothers have been on again. She got big jug out of was basin, got little jug under apron and went down with that. Chapel people in their street who were gossiping and didn't drink.

452 Attitude changed after War. John Scurr put up for Labour – they wouldn't let him speak outside the Works. By the old market. Boomed him. I thought well if they ain't going to let anybody speak we shall never get anywhere shall we. As regards War, I tremble now when I think of it – not for himself but for grandchildren.

480 Agrees that War did make people more militant when they came back.

484 Had to take it in turns to come out of line, take two loaded mules to lead them to line. On wooden Menin road there were dead mules all over the place. Used horses for the big guns Christ I mean it were terrible. Can you imagine having a gun standing there firing, its sunk in the mud and you've got crowbars and everything else trying to get them and horses out. I mean it were murder wasn't it. Used old barns for resting after being in front line, no roof on – using blankets people had been in weeks after week – Well, we were as lousy as cuckoos. Couldn't get hold of pair of socks unless from home – had some from a Wolverton girl put their names on.

525 Morale out there pretty good You'd got to look after yourself hadn't you. Every time we came out of the line for a rest, I said thank God for that. You see you've lost somebody nine times out of ten, see what I mean; I mean that you was with know what I mean. I mean it were terrible. And I mean, half the cross out there the soldiers ain't underneath them.

542 Recalls visit to home of Harold Springhall in London. HB had never been out of area till had joined army. Harold came for Plaistow and when he was killed he sent home paybook etc. to parent. His sister used to send HB fags. Wrote and said he could tell the family where he was buried – didn't tell them what they'd done. They'd sewed him in a blanket, buried him, officer brought a little cross.

580 Talks about watches – praying for the dawn to come. – stared for so long seemed to move.

590 HB's father had allotment – took kidney beans up to them father said they'd have no beans in London. Took beans in case. Looked for house, couldn't find it never dreamt it was big hotel – father was the manager of it. Walked in sheepishly, told them who he was oh they tot the band out nearly, they were waiting to see me. Taken to room, washed and came down. I could have had the moon you know like as regards drink and tackle.

640 Had wonderful spread You never see such a spread as they put on in all your life. Where I'd had a bacon and onion Clanger there were Oh Christ I don't know, I'd loved to have brought some for the old lady, you know what I mean. Went to see West Ham play, Sunday morning went on lake rowing with sister Never more embarrassed in my life. Had photograph taken she had his he had hers. He had a straw hat and demob suit that would have fitted Bottomley it were that wide. I looked like a little dwarf 12 o'clock at night Zeppelin raid.

Sleeping in brothers room – brother didn't bother to get up. No bloody fear they can't do no damage here.