

DOP/01/024

Mr. Sid Coles (born 1893)
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010 One of battalions camped in field above Bedford and Oxford Street. Invited fellows from the Works went up and spent evenings with them. Whole division in the area. Born in Wolverton in April 1893. In 1913 started footballing and athletics. Worked at Works in Stores Accounts Office. Had no contact with soldiers in 1913. Father came from Derby – a footballer – finally became Trimming Shop foreman. In later years became one of leading local horticultural showmen – finally became a judge. Lived in Green Lane – like Victoria Street the better end of town.

060 When War broke out appeal went out for people to go. Most of Wolverton Boys were going in 1st Bucks Battalion Territorials, the 48th Division. He went with the crowd of Wolverton Boys. He'd joined up within a week. He was marched to Aylesbury – slept on streets for a time as there were no proper billets. Had a wonderful instructor from Eton College – he got us into line. At Aylesbury till fitted out with kit and had done elementary arms drill, when full battalion together, marched to Chelmsford – put in private billets. He was in billet in Springfield Road with about five others.

095 Discipline was very strict. Parade every morning at 7.30 – back for breakfast – parade again. Finally, before they went to the Front they did a 26 mile route march, full loaded. Scarcely anybody fell out – they were that fit. Early in 1915 went over to France.

121 When war broke out – everybody advised you to go everybody sort of pulled their weight. A few got into reserved occupations, but most went.

134 Knew two noted lads at athletics who were killed – he was there. One was Alf Meacham – he was outside right, Sid was centre half. He was a star footballer would have been if he had lived. This day went in attack he and another lad from Bradwell was with him – on a machine gun, ran where the Germans were fighting at us – ran across that, got within about 20 yards of the wire and they was mowed down. Sid was about 150 yards away but they stood out as they went forward.

157 What effect did it have? Well, you see them all hanging over the barbed wires. You'd see them all coming back wounded and we lost, oh, I don't know how many, hundreds, thousands, you know. July 1st 1916. Still I don't think much about the War myself I'm more on what went on after the life in Wolverton and that after the war when we used to be footballing.

178 Show picture of people in "F" company of Battalion at Chelmsford.

208 Joe Scragg looked after Birchall, his batman. Family rewarded him.

220 Landed at Boulogne, marched to Front Line. People there were Regulars – they relieved them. They were High Command trenches, not dug ins – like a barricade with slots for rifles to shoot through.

232 Shows picture of himself in Royal Engineers Football Team at Purfleet.

238 He was wounded in 1916. Shot through wrist and shoulder, went to hospital, convalescence in Ireland. A month ago he was ill, all life had had a dull ache in back under shoulder blade – sent to Northampton – found shrapnel still in back. Did all athletics with this.

265 When wounded, was wearing a tin hat. When got into ambulance station the rim had been blown away. That stopped too much damage.

277 In Ireland for three months. One day ordered to orderly room to see Commandant of Camp, had instructions for him to report to Purfleet. Set off next day. Had to find his own way from Ireland. Describes trip. Accountant at Wolverton Works tried to get him back into works when Army found he'd had experience in Stores Accounts and so they had him. He was made Sergeant there. Stayed there from 1917 onwards. Shipping all railway staff to France, and 3 x 5000 ton boats – sending petrol locos and rails for engineers in France. Sent a boatful each week. People from Wolverton belonged to the Railway Battalion in France. They laid tracks – for petrol tractors running on a 20" rail, to carry supplies and stores.

395 Any feelings of relief when wounded? Damn relief when I came home, yes, we went on the first daylight raid on the German front line at 3 o'clock – and when we got half way there the Germans opened fire. And it was just one rain of bullets and I went down in shell crater, cos they'd shelled before what is it and if anybody got out of one of those shell-holes and tried to run back to his line, he was shot immediately. And that's how it was happening, all round me. Well, I'd got me head down and I decided I'd lay quiet, so I did. I laid there from say 3 o'clock till it was dusk at night as you might say, all wounded, terrible. Then I finally decided I'd crawl back and I wasn't the only one. They were crawling back there and that was, oh, four or five hours after when everything had died down you see. All the firing had stopped.

420 It was 3 o'clock in the afternoon when they went over. Has book of history of 1st Battalion. Had extensive bombardments from 8.00 a.m. with 200-300 guns. Finished up at 2.45 p.m. before they get the word move.

441 What are feelings waiting to go over. You can't tell your feelings. You've got to go. Everybody's got to go. You go with the rest. Make the best of it.

450 Morale never low. It was a different generation today. You can't I can't picture the silly people today. There was nothing of that in those days. What kept you going? The country was stable. There was no such thing as striking for rises in pay, in those days. The wages that you had at 14 they was there when you passed out of your time on to 21, you went on to another stage and everybody was the same. Just the same in the Army – went in at 7/- a week, stayed on it. You took discipline. In the light of experience would he have still gone? I suppose I would yes yes.

551 Every man in the Bucks Battalion was a proper tradesman – not a novice – they could have outclassed the Engineers.

528 Shows picture of tennis team. Mother, father, sister and himself. His sister still alive and lives in Buckingham. Pictures shows home on leave when wounded – uniform has wound

stripe. What did you tell people? Didn't tell anybody anything. Everybody was the same. They was all in trouble and got like people killed or people wounded or something like that.

564 Had temporary Cenotaph after War built in Works – looked like one in London – has picture of it.

282 Doesn't think attitudes to life changed much. Had chance to go to Rhodesia. Befriended a Captain in R.E.'s when he got discharged he came after him to go out. decided to go, tried to contact him, got no reply – his friend was killed going home, in a train crash. Thinks life returned to normal..

651 His chief thing has been encouraging young people in sport. Ran National Cross Country race – 1926 at Wolverton – described organisation – did this twice. Sports ground declined in early 50's. Whitsun Sports went on after War, bony on Tuesday.

700 Describes dance on Whit. Monday before war.

Side Two

The War? I cut it out. It seems such a short event in my life really. Just banged into four or five years and then you went active again and started up with sports meetings.

013 He was at Romford the night Armistice declared. Crowds rejoicing till 6.00 a.m. in morning. Pubs too crowded to get in. People jumping about, linking arms, singing.

032 Denies there was a pecking order with foremen at the top. He was an office man went to work in a bowler hat. Went into office because he was recommended by the schoolmaster. Told to report to Chief Accountant. Parents not involved. All apprentices were sacked at 21. When he was that age the motor industry was starting and many moved there. Not same for office. Went to work at 9.00 a.m. when others in factory went at 6.00 a.m. Finished at 5.30 p.m. Office staff paid for holidays – salaried.

099 T.A were mobilised at outbreak of war – lot of men were Wolverton boys encouraged others to join up 40th Territorial division was first Territorial division in action in France.

114 Went for reasons of patriotism, different feelings today. Can't imagine people going off like that today. Those who didn't go were given white feathers – not much in Wolverton as they responded well.

126 Didn't go with any feelings of excitement – you thought it was your duty as a national person so you naturally went off. Yes, there were no ill feelings at all. The comradeship in the Army generally has never been equalled. You see, everybody's on the same level.

140 Can't remember resentment of G.H.Q. staff.

144 A little resentment in people retaining the jobs they had when they left – debatable whether all went back into an equivalent level of job as before.

160 When wounded – in one respect thought were lucky to get out of it and get home.

173 Didn't feel disillusioned with England when got back. There were pressures that led up to 1926 strike. The country had got to find its feet again, like now.

188 Waited patiently for demob – no disturbances and dissatisfaction he can remember. He went 6-7 months after the war.

208 What was war for? To stop expansion of Germany. There was a point at which somebody had to call a halt. Your own country was in danger.

221 Was it worth it? What personally? Well, its nothing personal, its just a matter of people. There's always got to be a point when you've got to take a stand an we had to make a stand with France against Germany who were, well, they would, the Germans in those days was out for expansion.

240 Did you feel Germans were any different to you? Yes – thought they were more ruthless and by fighting them, not on their own territory made a big difference. They were the enemy and you were endeavouring to drive them back into their own country.

253 Experience didn't change attitude to war – should fight imperialistic powers, like Russia today.

265 Thought people in Wolverton did have idea of what was going – had cards and field postcards.

285 In his letters – wanted good woollen vests and pants – supplied with them. Those provided with were too coarse. Didn't tell them where he was, talked about weather.

290 Each company had cooker with large urns, in "D" company remembers stew having been cooked in big urns and when cook went to stoke up fire there was a large explosion. A cartridge case of bullets had been placed in the fire by accident – lost their stew.

325 Got used to food – you had to be satisfied with bread and corned beef if you was exceptionally hungry. When first went out battalion had no cookers – they were served with raw meat. Half of it was thrown over the hedges as you marched along and you was really if you was proper mafti you'd cut your meat up and put it in your little mess tin and cook it on a fire. Cookers when they arrived were cheered in. Funny things happen in war, all those little things you remember.

357 People sent cakes – shared them out – at birthday and Christmas.

362 Can remember French people fell in love with tea, in village where they were on rest, brought bottle of wine in exchange for can of tea. French troops had pint of wine a day.

372 Can't remember parcel from the people of Wolverton. Did not notice when Christmas came – hardly knew what day it was. When resting after trenches, washed underclothes and darned socks.

391 No athletics in France up forward. Family sent pumps out. George Odell a trainer. Went out two or three mornings to have a run, to keep fit, and if sports meeting did come up they could compete. Only went a couple of times – somebody took his gear. Could have been when he was wounded and his kit got mislaid. Went over the top led by officer with call or whistle and would run not walk you didn't see anything really. You'd see where wire had been cut by artillery. Often attack was checked – can only remember one time actually getting into German trenches. Germans had good dugouts with furniture.

485 Had rum ration whilst waiting – could wait for a couple of hours for end of artillery bombardment. No slightly merry when went over? No you was just solemn and – can't really explain it. The chief thing was watching the surface of the ground, how to run on an incline or slope down and where the shell-holes – course it was one mass of shell-holes.

520 Fatty Odell – a character, a good soldier, respected by everybody, good ambulance man I anybody was wounded you wouldn't have a better man to come to you than he was. He knew his job too. He's treated more badly wounded people when anybody, I know, yeh, right where they're practically dying he'd be there. Reckless? No, no, he was a balanced man all round. Good friend and a bad enemy. He didn't take risks unless he was going to get some result. I knew a fellow that he, laid out in a shell-hole, badly wounded, Wolverton man, nobody went out to him till it was decided George Odell'd go and George Odell went, got to him in the shell hole, stayed with him till he died. He was too cut about and ill to be brought. At first thought man was safe, but it then appeared that Germans could have got round the back of it, and they shelled him while he was in the hole, from close range. George Odell got Military medal and foreign decoration R.K. says that H. Mundy says if it hadn't been for the court martial he'd have got V.C. Well I don't know anybody that deserved one more meself.

607 George was a gambler. Has photo of himself George Odell and Joe Scragg. Smith and Holly oaks – on rest, decided they'd walk to a town, five or six miles away. Had dinner there and found photographer – went in and had photos taken. Returned to camp late at night.

666 Talks about Wolverton Park. Has opening day programme. Gives history of Park Originally used as storage space and bivouac (camp site for labourers – Hells Kitchen) When Wolverton a young town, Railway Company provided facilities – including a Recreation Ground – the Park. Added to it bit by bit. Directors then decided to give it to town of Wolverton.