

Bexhill Soldier In A Great Charge

Forty Englishmen against 1,000 Germans.

Private A. Westgate, of the 2nd. Coldstream Guards, who, prior to the outbreak of war, resided at 22, Windsor-road, Bexhill, has been invalided home from the Front. His home is now at Fir Cottage, Ripe, near Lewes.

Paying a visit to Bexhill this week, Private Westgate was seen by an "Observer" reporter, who obtained from him an interesting account of his adventures at the Front.

A typical Guardsman, of gigantic stature and build, Private Westgate sailed from Southampton on August 13th, with the second part of the British Expeditionary Force, and landed at Havre. From there the Regiment proceeded to Mons, which they reached on Saturday, August 22nd. The very next day the famous retreat started, and while it was in progress our gallant soldiers had a very trying time. Private Westgate went without proper food for six days, during which period he sustained himself as best he could on the carrots and turnips which grew in the path traversed. During the same critical time he had to make a pint of water last two days. The retreat stopped at Landrecies, where the 2nd. Coldstreams were ordered to billet for the night in the French barracks. As soon as they got there the German patrols began to dash through the town, so they moved to a field and lay in ambush for the oncoming Germans. This force consisted of the 2nd and 3rd Coldstreams and five machine guns. The Germans came along with their rifles under their arms, in perfect ignorance of the ambush awaiting them, and, 500 of them were killed, the Coldstreams losing just a tenth of that number – 10. They then went to Compiègne, where they were instrumental in capturing fifteen guns.

Private Westgate has been in twelve engagements, including the Battles of the Marne, Aisne, and Arras. He was wounded at Ypres. "It was a silly thing", he said, with a smile; "forty of us were sent to charge about 1,000 Germans. There were only six left to tell the tale, and they were all wounded. I happened to be one of them. I had a bullet through my left shoulder, which went right through and came out at the back. I was also wounded in the right leg with another bullet. I was taken to a hospital in Ypres, and two days afterwards the Germans bombarded it with twelve shells, killing two civilians. We shifted out to a big house after it was over, and the next day we went to Boulogne. I was in hospital six days altogether, and on arriving at Southampton I was sent to Norwich Hospital.

Private Westgate added that when he and other wounded soldiers landed in England they had not had a wash nor a shave for a month, nor hair cut for two months. "We looked bright objects," he added with a laugh. Private Westgate has seen many instances of German brutality, among them being the driving of peaceful Belgians out of their houses with fixed bayonets. He also had one story of a black treachery to tell. The Germans took a number of British soldiers prisoners on one occasion in the neighbourhood of Lille, took their arms away from them, and placed them between two German soldiers. Naturally, our men were under the impression that they were being marched off, but as soon as their backs were turned, down they would be shot by the treacherous Germans.

Asked for his opinion of the German shooting, Private Westgate said: "Their shooting is bad, and if it was not for their artillery we should have been in Berlin before this. Most of the Germans shoot from their hips, and not from their shoulder, so one is in more danger in being in support than in the actual firing line." He has seen one shot from one of the German guns make a hole in the ground large enough to hold twenty-five men, and five feet deep. Private Westgate is a great admirer of the Belgian soldiers, "who are," he says, "very plucky and as for their King, I think he is the bravest one there is. He roughs it and sleeps in the trenches the same as the Belgian soldiers do."

On his return to Ripe, on Saturday evening, Private Westgate was met by the village band, proceeded by the Union Flag, and was thus triumphantly escorted to his home.

Before going to the Front, he was a member of the Church Choir, and he took to his old place at each service on Sunday.