

FROM BEXHILL OBSERVER - 24th October 1914

“BEXHILL CORPORAL’S GRAPHIC LETTER”

“NARROW ESCAPE FROM GERMAN ARTILLERY”

“I could have come back but I prefer to stop until the war finishes”. This is the characteristically British remark made in a letter by Corporal R. Jennings, a member of the 60th King’s Royal Rifles which has been received by some friends in Bexhill. The letter of which extracts are quoted below, were sent from No: 1 Convalescent Depot, St. Nazere, France, where the writer is stationed owing to having sustained a rupture. It is dated October 12th. After saying how pleased he was to have received letters from his friends and relatives in England, Corporal Jennings goes on to state “they were the first I received since I have been out here, and you can imagine how pleased I was to hear from you. No doubt the other letters have gone astray and will never be found again. Probably some of the Germans have had a good laugh amongst themselves over some of your letters that they managed to take possession of. One fellow of my regiment, who has come down with me from the Front, informs me that the Post Corporal was killed with a shrapnel shell while he was carrying two large bags of letters. Probably some of yours were amongst them. I have heard that two of our band are killed and several wounded. Delavante is amongst the wounded and I think he has gone back to England to get patched up again. Sergeant Sherwood was in this depot for a short time and I think he will eventually be sent back to England. I could have come back but I prefer to stop until the war finishes. More than half of my regiment’s officers are killed and wounded and a large number of the rank and file are killed and wounded. Three lots of reinforcements have been sent up, so you can guess that a good number are disabled. I imagine this war will be a long time before peace is concluded. “

The Retreat from Mons

“I shall never forget retreat from Mons as long as I live. We had some very narrow escapes. When the battle commenced on the Sunday, we marched through a long avenue with trees on either side of the road. The artillery was about 100 yards from us in the open firing at the German artillery about 1,000 yards off, and our shells were dropping beautifully amongst their artillery. The German fire was very erratic, going over our heads, just chancing to luck. We advanced right along our line through the trenches until we came to a large wood, and there we stopped for the night, sniping etc: In the morning firing resumed and a hasty order came from the General for us to retreat. No sooner had we left that wood than the enemy found the range with their heavy guns and half an hour afterwards nothing of that wood remained.”

A Rearguard Action all the way

“From there we retreated about 30 or 40 miles fighting a rearguard action all the way. You know I am not very fat at the best of times and if you had seen me when I arrived in the camp you would never have recognised me. I never had an iota of energy left in me for days after that lot. I am getting on all right now, and should very much like to have another trip to the Front, but I can’t say whether they will let me go yet.” Corporal Jennings concluded by hoping that he will receive more letters from his friends in Bexhill and remarks that he is afraid he will miss his Christmas in Bexhill “though no doubt” he adds “better days are in store”.