

# Charles Herbert Gotts 1882-1915

## Soldier Of The Royal Warwickshire Regiment

By Vivienne Hayward

In September 1900, my greatuncle, Charles Herbert Gotts, aged eighteen, enlisted in the Prince of Wales Own Norfolk Artillery, Eastern Division of the Royal Garrison Artillery. His father, John Gotts, had been a miller in Norfolk most of his life, but, by 1889, the success of the new watermill at Costessey had put his postmill out of business. Of his seven sons only the eldest took up milling. His third son, my grandfather, Albert Walter, moved to Nuneaton where coalmining brought him a more reliable income. When war was declared in August 1914 Charles, now 31, was with his brother Albert and his wife Alice (née Haddon) in Haunchwood Road, Stockingford; he enlisted at once in the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. On November 11th 1914 Charles wrote a hasty note to Albert and his family; "Sorry to tell you that I am on the point of going to France as they only warned us at 5 this morning so it is quick work.... 550 of us.... hope you get this am going on board". The 2nd Battalion had already suffered very heavy losses in the first battle of Ypres, four-fifths of the men being killed in three weeks. By December 12th, 22 officers and 939 other ranks, including Charles, were in trenches at Fleurbaix near Le Maisnil a few miles south of Armentières. Here they were regularly occupied in trench maintenance in terrible weather conditions, described in the official war diary day after day as very wet, cold, dull, windy, stormy, rain, snow, frost. So it was no wonder that before the end of January 1915 the diary comments "A large number of men are sick with minor ailments". Charles had to go to the Field hospital suffering from bronchitis and frostbite. The soldiers were also involved in "cutting out" parties, which Field-Marshal Haig defined as "brief attacks on a section of the opposing

trenches, usually carried out at night by a small body of men making a road through our own and the enemy's wire, crossing the open ground unseen, penetrating the enemy's trenches, hand-to-hand fighting in the darkness, uncertain of the strength of opposing forces, all done with gallantry, dash, quickness of decision, skill and daring". The war diary laconically states "350 men as working parties at night; 1 killed and 1 wounded". At the beginning of March 1915, just after Charles wrote home to say he'd "got the stripe"(Lance Corporal), the 2nd battalion moved about eight miles south, to trenches near La Bassée. His last letter, March 3rd 1915, tells my grandparents in Stockingford, "we got it a bit cold in the trenches as there was a thunderstorm and a snowstorm on at the same time, and we shall be glad when it gets warm here. I've got over my bronchitis now, as I feel well enough except for my feet which are still sore from frostbite". On March 10th the war diary notes that there was a heavy artillery duel all day but they retained their position, and on March 12th the 2nd Battalion was ordered to reinforce and occupy the British trenches on the Bacquerot-Piètre road, SW of Rue Tilleloy. Then a message came through that they were to hold the line near a large house on the road to Chapigny just south of Fouquissart. En route they observed "a column of infantry marching from our lines which turned out to be about 600 German prisoners who had surrendered to the Cameronians". In the afternoon the 2nd Battalion was ordered to "make an energetic move" to the NE side of the road to Moulin du Pietre near Neuve Chapelle, to repel a German counter attack. "At 2pm our troops advanced. Major Lloyd pushed forward I platoon to the SE side of the Moulin du Pietre road, and directed C Company to follow". They were held up by machine gun

fire and the men dug in for the night". In this engagement the casualties were 2nd Lt Owen and 26 other ranks, including great-uncle Charles, aged

32. As Charles has no known grave, he was presumably one of thousands of soldiers whose remains were either left in mine craters, or given an 'Unknown Soldier' burial in one of the war cemeteries in Picardy. His name, Lance Corporal Charles Herbert Gotts, is on the Le Touret memorial. I have the official parchment sent to the close relatives of all those killed in the war; it ends "Let those who come after see to it that his name be not forgotten". The war cemeteries and monuments in Flanders and the Somme, far better looked after than many in the UK, are a tribute to all those who fought and died there. We are indebted to Paddy Griffith, military historian, (who has recently moved from Nuneaton to Manchester), for organising and leading most informative and enjoyable tours of battlefields and cemeteries.

*War details are from official war diaries, and from Kingford's Story*

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