



Military: Attitudes to servicemen at home, playscript

These letters from the *Wolverton Express* and interview extracts from the 1980s highlight the tension that existed between those at home and the soldiers whose dreams of excitement and adventure had been realised, but in a much more horrible way than they could ever have imagined.

Soldier's letter:

"We, the Wolverton and District Terriers, of the 1st Bucks Battalion, read with delight every weekend the *Wolverton Express*, to read what is going on at home through your paper. Having been home on leave for a few days, we were all disappointed with the questions we all had to answer to some of our shop-mates and friends, which - to put the matter in a nutshell - made us all feel disgusted with the ignorance shown by their talk.

Generally, the first question was "Have you been in the fighting line yet?" or "Have you seen any Germans yet?" At the same time, when we have explained to them as far as we are allowed to by our oath to His Majesty, they smile and add the remark, "You are having a good time and look well."

We are sorry for their ignorance in military matters, but do the Wolverton men and lads left at home think we're all out here for a picnic or only for Fritz to snipe at? We do not wish to boast about what we have done, or wish for any praise from anyone, but we should like some of those at home to realise that things are not exactly a continental holiday with us!

We, who have been home on leave and returned to our respective units, are asked by the men out there, "What do they say about us at Wolverton?" When we explain to them the questions asked etc. and also tell them the number of lads still left at home who are hiding behind that remarkable word 'munitions', we should not like the parents of our boys to be in the hearing of their remarks."

Wolverton man's reply:

"Dear Sir,

As I am one of the shop-mates referred to in the letter to your paper last week, I feel I must take exception to some of the remarks which it contained. With regard to the young men hiding behind the magic word 'munitions', I should like the soldiers to know that over 20 young men in this shop have applied for leave to join the Army and have been refused. And every man in the shop has volunteered to work on munitions, and possesses a letter from the Minister of Munitions saying he can best serve his country by staying in his present employment. And that I think the men and lads in this shop have done all they can for the country's cause."

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Sid Carroll: I went into a pub and a chap there, he said, "Oh, the Territorials are not in the trenches." I remember saying to him, "Well, where do you think I got my wounds from then?" He said, "Self-inflicted". I remember him saying that and old Arthur Toogood, he was the landlord, heard it. He told him to get out the pub and not go in it again!

Narrator: It was not surprising that many people at home didn't understand what was going on, for many soldiers coming home on leave, did not talk about their experiences. Alice Gear's cousin Alf Meacham used to live with her family:

Alice Gear: He wouldn't talk about it much, he used to say "Auntie, it's awful, it really is. It's dreadful Auntie, don't talk about it.... It's hell there, Aunt, I shall never see you again Aunt." Mum said "Oh, yes you will. You're worrying because you've had enough of it boy, after two - over two - years of it". "No Auntie, it's dreadful. You haven't got much chance of coming out of there alive." And of course ... he didn't.

Well, of course you had to send him off as well as you could. "See you next time" and "Keep your chin up" - that sort of thing, you know? Fellows of that age don't talk about their feelings very much, do they? Not as a rule - not unless they break down and cry - which some of them did of course. How many wanted to leave their mothers?