

HUSBAND AND SONS AT BATTLE FRONT

Another Son With 5th High-landers and Yet Another at Spirit Lake

HOW ONE WAS WOUNDED

Bursting Shell Tore Out His Eye and Lodged Ten Pieces of Shrapnel in Nose and Head

When the war started the family of Mr. and Mrs. William Owen, 1003 Greene avenue, consisted of four sons and one small daughter. The eldest boy resigned a good position with R. G. Dun & Co. to go with the 13th Battalion of the first contingent. Today Pte. William Ernest Owen lies in an English hospital with an eye gone and other serious wounds. When the call came for the second contingent the father gave up his position as a foreman plasterer, and with the next eldest son, Joseph Richard, enlisted in the 24th Battalion. He is now orderly for Capt. the Rev. A. P. Shatford. George, the next in line, joined the 5th Royal Highlanders, and Harry, 18 years old, is doing guard duty at the camp for aliens at Spirit Lake. In addition, Mr. Owen's brother, although 58 years of age, is at the front with his only son, and Mrs. Owen's brother is also in the trenches.

Recently the wounded son wrote to his mother describing how he came to be injured. His letter, which follows, is one of the most moving as well as graphic recitals which has come through the mail:

"Royal Hospital, Richmond,
Surrey, May 19, 1915.

"My Dear Mother—

"I am pleased to let you know that I am progressing splendidly. No doubt you have my other letter by this time, and so you have the news; but cheer up, you know I'm lucky to be here at all. The way I got wounded was this: The Germans broke through the French lines by use of gas; the poor French stood the gas as long as they could, but they soon went mad and ran. Our regiment was on their right, and when we saw them run we ran into the French trench and tried to retake it, but without success, so we had to retire, leaving many wounded and dead, and lots of them dying from the gas. We went back to our own trench. We had not slept for two days and two nights.

"The next day the Germans started to shell us, which lasted twenty-six hours, wounding many. That night we were informed that the Germans were surrounding us, so we had to retire, and we dug ourselves in about a mile back. We only had two hours to do it in. We were all dead tired and thirsty, for we had not had a drop of water for three days. At 3.30 that morning—Saturday, April 23, I think it was—we saw the Germans coming in thousands. We thought they were going to charge, but the cowards lay down in a ditch and started to shell us again.

"About 4.30 I was on the lookout and saw a German stick his head up to fire at one of our fellows digging, so up went my rifle and I fired. I saw his head go down, but, like a fool, I waited to see if it would come up again. When a shell burst on my right I let out an awful scream. I am sure I could not do it again. I had about ten pieces of shrapnel in my head, one piece passed through the bridge of my nose and cut the eyeball right off. The pain nearly sent me mad. I lay down in mud and water, not caring what became of me. I wished the Germans would come and capture us and shoot us. I wondered why the bleeding didn't stop: I knew afterwards that a blood vessel had been severed in my nose, and my eye was bleeding something awful. There were no stretcher-bearers around.

"If I had stayed there I should have died, but at the time I didn't care—the sooner the better. But when I was nearly fainting from the loss of blood I began to think, and the first one I thought of was you, mother. You would be surprised how much it inspired me, so without thinking what I was doing up I struggled, staggering more than running.

"No sooner was I up than they started shooting at me, so I dropped into a shell hole. I don't know how long I stayed there, but I knew I was in danger of getting hit with more shells, so up I got again and made for a potato field, and dropped in that, and started to crawl back. But my strength was failing me, and I got into another shell hole to die, as I thought. I said my prayers for about the hundredth time that day. So, with you in my mind, dear mother, I started to crawl again. I came to some barbed wire and crawled right through it, tearing my clothes to pieces. I didn't know where I was going, but I was on my way. I got away all right, but the dressing station was three miles away. I don't know how I got there, but I did it somehow. When they had dressed my wounds and messed about, I knew no more. When I awoke I was on a cart going like the dickens to the hospital to get operated on. I had my eye taken out, or what was left of it, and also had a shrapnel bullet taken out of my head, which I am keeping to show you. I am getting along finely now, although I get continuous headache, but I have got used to that. Well, mother, there is the whole thing in a nutshell, so I will close my eye, as it is aching; but one thing I will remember all my life is that it was the thought of my mother that saved my life. So good-bye for now, and give my regards to everyone, and you might warn Joe about keeping his head down.

"Your loving son,

"BILLY."

"P.S.—I was in the 13th Battalion, 13th Platoon, 13th man in the ranks, 513th rifle, sent to No. 13 Stationary Hospital, arrived in England on May 13th. Is thirteen lucky or unlucky?"