

**Major Philip Achilles Townshend [6A25]**

**Philip (L) in 1917 and his Son Robert Vere [6A51] in 1938**



**First World War - Philip in the trenches**



Extract from a letter from Captain Philip Townshend dated 18 March 1915  
recounting his experiences during the Battle of Neuve Chappelle 10 March 1915

1d  
The prisoners were a d-d nuisance - Our first advance was about 300 yards. There was then another artillery bombardment & the Rifle Brigade advanced over our captured trenches, & through us, & advanced through the village. They also got a lot of prisoners, & about ten officers. During this second bombardment I had a rotten time & my subaltern Saunders & the Adjutant were shot in the back, the reason being the 23rd Brigade on our left had not got so well forward as we had, & the Huns opposite them turned

1a  
BELTWOOD, SHEFFIELD.  
Extract from letter from Captain Townshend dated March 18, 1915  
"I have been through the most dreadful experiences, & had a very nerve-racking time. Well - on the 10. at 7.30 P.M. our guns started. They shelled the German trench 150 yards in front of us. we were four deep in our breast-work. The 6 inch Howitzers fell short & got us in our breast-work.  
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1b  
badly - I had over 50 men in my company killed & wounded. One of our shells full of feet from me, & I was knocked sick for 3 or 4 minutes, & woke up to discover myself covered with bits of humans. My poor men I almost cried when I saw the sights. It was too awful for words. The bombardment lasted ~~30~~ 35 minutes - the most dreadful time I have ever endured. Then came the attack. Our first two lines swept forward in a rush & jumped clean over the Huns first trenches & carried the 2nd. & 3rd. in

1c  
me bound. I led the 3rd. line & we supported the 1st. & 2nd. line - A few line Germans were in their trenches & the bullets fired into our backs as we pushed on to their support trenches. Anyway some of my company nipped back & shoved their bayonets into the Huns stomachs, & they soon went on their knees praying for mercy. I captured a machine gun & a lot of prisoners. Our advance was so rapid the Huns were badly surprised & ran like hares giving themselves up in batches of 50.  
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2d

turned on again & they succeeded us instead of the Huns. It was awful. All the telephone wires were cut. We were then ordered to attack again. Another company went forward & in 2 or 3 minutes only five or six were alive. We then stood fast for further orders. I had to go back 100 yards to fetch up one of my platoons. I thought I was dead a dozen times. I got back safely however. My last subaltern Hogan was shot during our advance from the 2nd. & 1st. trenches. Very sad - he was quite a youngster.

2a

BELWOOD,  
SHEFFIELD.

2.  
I fired into our backs after we had broken through their line. I reorganized my company & found I had only my colour-sergeant, & one sergeant left out of seven sergeants. We were ready then to go forward, but the General didn't let us go. The Indians on our right broke through the Hun lines half a mile to south, & we killed or captured all the Huns between us. The Indians did very well & made the Huns retreat.

2b

On the 11th. we were supposed to have a combined attack - all three Brigades, but the telephone wires were cut & the Indians attacked before us, & got a check. They must have suffered a bit, I am afraid. We moved up to our front new trenches three times but the attack was postponed each time.

On the 12th. we were to attack at 10 A.M. The guns started but the Huns had by then brought up a battery of four 8.5 inch Howitzers. They gave us absolute H-C. I was buried twice

2c

& my poor old ears they felt as if the drums were broken. The men stood it very well considering. I had about six men, two killed & four wounded by the heavy guns. We then went over the top to the first trench. They saw us & opened a very heavy fire from machine guns & rifles. The Rifle Brigade were to do the attack, & us to support them. The Rifle Brigade had a company wiped out. The Colonel went to the General & told him it was impossible to get forward, as our guns were

3d

When we captured the Hun trenches a wounded German officer reported water from the "swine-dogs of English soldiers". They were British they put two fuel boxes of ammunition in their fire hoping to blow up some of my men if we didn't notice it. He's hard to write concisely when I have to lie flat in the trench every few minutes. Their guns are good very good. Their observation is excellent but I don't think much of their infantry. One watched wounded Hun gave himself up to me & I let one of my men carry him pick-a. back to the aid post - He seemed very grateful.

3a

BELWOOD, SHEFFIELD.  
I buried him last night.  
I did many heroic things & done  
& can recommend three of my  
men for decorations.  
Well - last night we occupied  
the 2nd. line trenches about  
100 yards behind the 1st. line  
held by the Rifle Brigade. We  
had a quiet but cold night -  
we could have no fire. I used  
a tin of spiritine to heat up a  
cup of cocoa. Thomson & Moody  
Ward were wounded & Hogan killed  
I am now 2nd. in command.  
We moved in to ~~some~~ <sup>some</sup> ~~partially~~

3b

dug trenches this morning & I  
at once set to work to deepen  
them - it's just as well I did as  
I am now lying in the bottom of  
one & they are sending over  
dozens of shells. The concussion  
is awful. My nerves will be on  
edge when I do get home. I keep  
getting astonished in mind.  
Dear oh - I am still going  
strong! I hope you will like  
the Hun helmet. The Huns  
were giving themselves up in  
bunches yesterday - All the  
wounded up towards our  
trenches - not their own.  
They attempted an attack

3c

yesterday morning & a fine lot  
of them were killed. The at-  
tack was beaten off as easy  
as they beat us off yesterday.  
It's quite impossible to ad-  
vance against properly organ-  
ized troops these days unless  
they are in their trenches un-  
less you have over-whelming  
guns & men. I can't write any  
more. I don't know what is at  
now. I expect we will wait  
for a Hun attack. we can easily  
sock them. The village of Nuvve  
Chapelle is nothing but a heap  
of big shell craters. I gave all  
my morphia to the wounded -  
have now got ~~some~~ <sup>some</sup> ~~partially~~

Transcription by Philip's grandson Athelny Townshend [6A56]

I have been through the most dreadful experience & and had a very nerve racking time. Well, on the 10th at 7.30AM our guns started. They shelled the German trench 150 yards in front of us. We were four deep in our breastwork. The 6" howitzers fell short & got us in our breastwork very badly. I had over 50 men in my company killed & wounded. One of our shells fell 9 feet from me & I was knocked silly for 3 or 4 minutes, & woke up to discover myself covered with bits of humans. My poor men. I almost cried when I saw the sights. It was too awful for words. The

bombardment lasted 35 minutes. The most dreadful time I have ever endured. Then came the attack. Our first two lines swept forward in a rush & jumped clean over the Huns first trenches & carried the 2nd. & 3<sup>rd</sup>. in one bound. I led the third line & we supported the 1st & 2<sup>nd</sup> line. A few live Germans were in their trenches & the brutes fired into our backs as we pushed on to their support trenches. Anyway some of my company nipped back & shoved their bayonets into the Huns stomachs, & they soon went on their knees praying for mercy. I captured a machine gun & a lot of prisoners. Our advance was so rapid the Huns were badly surprised & ran like hares giving themselves up in batches of 50 and 60.

The prisoners were a d---d nuisance. Our first advance was about 300 yards there was then another artillery bombardment & the Rifle Brigade advanced over our captured trenches & through us, & advanced through the village. They also got a lot of prisoners & about ten officers. During the second bombardment I had a rotten time & my subaltern Saunders & the adjutant were shot in the back, the reason being the 23rd Brigade on our left had not got so well forward as we had, & the Huns opposite them turned & fired into our backs after we had broken through their line. I reorganised my company & found I only had my colour sergeant, & one sergeant left out of 7 sergeants. We were ready then to go forward, but the General didn't let us go. The Indians on our right broke through the Hun lines half a mile to south, & we killed or captured all the Huns between us. The Indians did very well & made the Huns run like hares.

On the 11<sup>th</sup>, we were supposed to have a combined attack, all three Brigades, but the telephone wires were cut & the Indians attacked before us, & got a check. They must have suffered a bit I'm afraid. We moved up to our front new trenches three times but the attack was postponed.

On the 12th we were to attack at 10am. The guns started but the Huns had by then brought up a battery of four 8.5" howitzers. They gave us H---l. I was buried twice & my poor old ears - they felt as if the drums were broken. The men stood it very well considering. I had about 6 men, 2 killed & and 4 wounded, by the heavy guns. We then went over the top to the first trench. They saw us & opened a very heavy fire from machine guns and rifles. The Rifle Brigade were to do the attack & us to support them. The Rifle Brigade had a company wiped out. The Colonel went to the General & told him it was impossible to get forward, so our guns were turned on again & they shelled us instead of the Huns. It was awful. All the telephone wires were cut. We were then ordered to attack again. Another company went forward & in 2 or 3 minutes only 5 or 6 were alive. We then stood fast for further orders. I had to go back 100 yards to fetch up one of my platoons. I thought I was dead a dozen times. I got back safely. My last subaltern Hogan was shot during our advance from the 2nd and 1st trenches. Very sad - he was quite a youngster. I buried him last night. I saw many heroic things done and can recommend three of my men for decorations. Well last night we occupied the second line trenches about 100 yards behind the first line held by the Rifle Brigade. We had a quiet but cold night. We could have no fires. I used a tin of spiritine to heat up a cup of cocoa. Thornton & Moody-Ward were wounded & Hogan killed. I am now second in command. We moved into some partially dug trenches this morning and & I at once set to work to deepen them - it's just as well I did as I'm now lying on the bottom of one & they are sending over dozens of shells. The concussion is awful. My nerves will be on edge when I do get home. I keep getting smothered in mud. Cheer-oh - I'm still going strong. I hope you will like the Hun helmet. The Huns were giving themselves up in bunches yesterday - all the wounded (up) towards our trenches - not their own. They attempted an attack yesterday morning & a fine lot of them were killed off. The attack was beaten off as easily as they beat us off yesterday. It's quite impossible to advance against properly organised troops these days once they are in their trenches unless you have overwhelming guns & men. I can't write any more. I don't know what is on now. I expect we will wait for a Hun attack. We can easily sock them. The village of Neuve Chapelle is nothing but a heap of shell craters. I gave all my morphine to the wounded. Have now got some more. When we captured the Hun's trenches a wounded German officer refused water from the 'swine-dogs of English soldiers' They were brutes. They put two ful (sic) boxes of ammunition on their fire hoping to blow up some of my men if we didn't notice it. It is hard to write consecutively when I have to lie flat in the trenches every few minutes. Their guns are good very good. Their observation is excellent but I don't think much of their infantry. One of the wretched wounded Huns gave himself up to me and I let one of my men carry him pick-a-back to the aid post - he seemed very grateful.

**Philip's wife Zoe Elaine Howells aged 15 ½ months**

