

# 15711 Private Frank Goodwin



Missing in action, Guillemont, Somme, 30th July 1916

**Regiment:** The King's (Liverpool Regiment).  
**Battalion:** 17th (Service) Battalion (1st City).  
**Brigade:** 89th Brigade.  
**Division:** 30th Division. A New Army Division.

**Medal entitlement:**  
1914/15 Star. British War Medal. Victory medal.

## The Formation of the Pals Battalions. Autumn 1914

In August 1914 Field Marshal Lord Kitchener was appointed as the Secretary of State for War and almost immediately appealed for volunteers. His famous 'pointing finger' poster was soon to follow.

Most of the units of the first three of Kitchener's 'New Armies' were raised by the normal, if hugely expanded, army recruitment and induction methods. But in some areas local organisations and people took steps to form 'their own' battalions. These were often known as Pals or Chums battalions, because this style of recruiting encouraged men to join up with their friends from work, from their local football club or church. The idea was that men would join up together, train together, and eventually go to war together.

On Friday 28<sup>th</sup> August 1914, The Seventeenth Earl of Derby appealed to men from the commercial and business houses of Liverpool to enlist and serve King and Country together in a single battalion.

Well before 7:30 that evening, St Annes Street was crowded with eager young men queuing to get in to the drill hall of the Kings Liverpool Regiment. The crush was so great that a second room was also opened to take all who wanted to enlist. Lord Derby addressed both groups, using the word 'pals' for the first time. The would-be recruits were then asked to attend St Georges Hall the following Monday for attestation. It is apparent from his service number that Frank Goodwin was amongst those men on that Monday morning.

Within three days over 2,000 men responded to the call providing sufficient recruits to form two battalions.

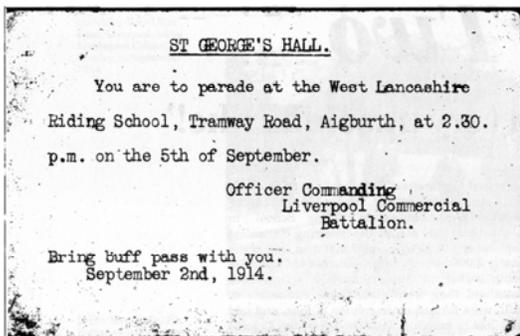
The scenes that had occurred in Liverpool created a record for enlistment in the history of the British army. The city supplied 3,800 men to the regular army since the war began, and almost 2,000 for the territorial force. Now, with the two battalions of 'Pals' the total number of men recruited from Liverpool had reached almost 8,000.

By the beginning of November the city of Liverpool provided another two battalions, making

a complete Brigade, called the 89<sup>th</sup>. As one of the earliest to volunteer Frank was assigned to the 17<sup>th</sup> battalion within that Brigade

A few days later, at the start of September, he received a post-card commanding him to muster for a parade at The West Lancashire Riding School, Tramway Road, Aigburth. After the briefest of instruction in the meanings of commands 'Quick March' and 'Halt' they formed into fours and marched into the city. Not surprisingly onlookers remarked that they appeared

*"A motley crew and very unsoldierlike".*



Also in September, the old watch factory in nearby Prescott was requisitioned as accommodation for the 17th Battalion, cleaned out and given a coat of white-wash which had been donated jointly by Cunard and the White Star Line. By Monday 14th it was

ready and this was the day that men of the Battalion moved in.



Frank's 17th Battalion lead the march down Lime Street on the 20th March 1915. Only the first 100 men have rifles

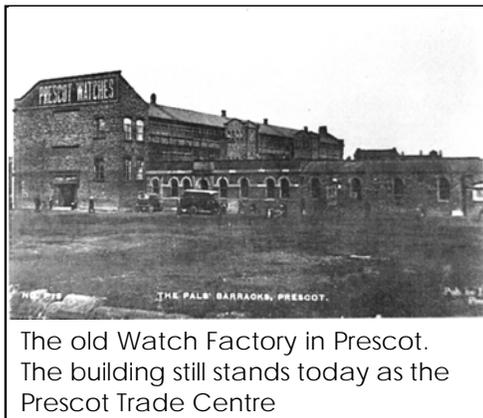
On 20<sup>th</sup> March 1915 the Brigade was inspected by Lord Kitchener and the four battalions marched past St. George's Hall for him to take the salute. The 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion were proud to lead the parade. The Liverpool Echo reported the event, capturing the excitement and the pride of watching crowds, said to number around 100,000 people.

*'We are watching the 'Comrades' swing past, and we are thinking how the thousands of homes represented in the crowd have also their representatives in the ranks, and how the hearts of the spectators must thrill with pride as their kith and kin in the trampling battalions go on their way'.*

Their military bearing obviously made a contrast to the last time they marched through the city.

A routine soon developed. Under the watchful eyes of ex-Grenadier Guards Sergeants they would rise at 6:30 for a three-mile run that preceded breakfast. Some would then set about the inevitable chores of running the barracks such as loading and unloading wagons, guard duty and cleaning. The remainder would be drilling and training, at intervals swapping around so that everyone had a chance to drill with the few elderly Lee Metford rifles the Battalion then possessed.

In the afternoon they would leave the barracks for route marches in the immediate



area, to learn section, platoon and company formations. Once a fortnight they marched to St Helens where they were allowed to bathe in the municipal swimming baths.

Much of the training took place near the site of the new barracks being built on Lord Derby's estate at Knowsley Park. Eventually the other three Battalions were to be billeted here. The 17<sup>th</sup> however, remained in the watch factory and marched there and back daily.

Because Prescott was on the tram route into Liverpool Frank would have been able to return home for comparatively frequent free weekends, a luxury not available to those from further afield.

By early 1915 news was beginning to filter back across the Channel that the system of trenches, albeit hurriedly dug at first, were there to stay. This caused a rethink of the training with extensive digging of an earth bank on Lord Derby's estate giving rise to many complaints that the recruits had been duped into work designed to improve the view from his Lordship's house. He was of the opinion that actually digging trenches was not so important as getting office workers used to handling picks and shovels. Whatever the reason, once or twice a week each Battalion in turn was ordered to set to and dig out the earth bank. Despite

their efforts the removal was not complete when the troops finally left Knowsley in April 1915.

Meanwhile, with typical Merseyside humour, the soldiers had made-up their own parody on the song 'Moonlight Bay'

*We were digging all day  
On Derby's clay  
The picks and shovels ringing  
They seemed to say  
If you don't do any work  
You'll get no pay  
So we dug dug dug like hell  
For a bob a day*

On 30<sup>th</sup> April 1915, the Brigade left Liverpool, headed for Belton Park Camp, Grantham. The 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion boarded their train from Prescott Station at one o'clock.

The journey from Liverpool to Grantham took around four hours, at the end of which they were marched to their new camp behind a band from the Manchester Regiment.

The people of Grantham, which was only a three-mile walk from the camp, were soon bowled over by the charm of the Pals and before long they had opened their homes and their hearts to them and treated them like their own families.

However, the Pals were not in Lincolnshire to enjoy the local hospitality; Brigade training became commonplace. Once the long-promised Lee Enfield rifles arrived musketry training was started and something was taught of gas warfare.



The pals, now part way through their training, march through Grantham town centre

Meanwhile, back in Liverpool, Lord Derby and Mrs. Stanley formed a committee to raise funds to buy 'Comforts for the Pals'. Between November 1915 and March 1918, thousands of articles were sent to each of the four battalions. In the early weeks of war the people in Liverpool generously sent out as many comforts as they could. As the war went on they turned their attention to looking after bereaved families and those whose husbands or fathers or sons had become prisoners.

By early September 1915 the troops were judged ready to move to the next step in their training. This was to take place at Larkhill Camp on Salisbury Plain. As the trains drew out of Grantham Station to the strains of Auld Lang Syne, played by the Manchester's band, the carnival mood in evidence on leaving Prescott was still present, perhaps this time a little more reflective though.

On arrival at Salisbury Plain, on and around which some three quarter of a million men were under training, they were stationed at Canada Lines, Amesbury, very close to the ancient stone circle at Stonehenge. Nearby there was an aerodrome which would have given many of the men their first ever sight of an aircraft.

At Larkhill the men completed their second ever musketry shoot, the next time they would fire their rifles would be on active service in France. They also practiced large scale manoeuvres including a memorable night exercise on the 23<sup>rd</sup> / 24<sup>th</sup> September, which descended into total chaos.

As Autumn wore on the men

became fitter and more skilled. Repetition of the training left them frustrated and eager to get 'out there'. Finally on the 31<sup>st</sup> October they were given one week's warning of impending departure.

## France. Winter 1915

On the 7<sup>th</sup> November the four Liverpool Battalions left Salisbury Plain for the last time and were entrained for Folkestone. Here Frank and his comrades embarked on the steamer Princess Victoria, leaving harbour in the early afternoon escorted by two destroyers and an airship to spot for submarines. As the boat left the quay it passed a leave boat returning to England. As they neared a voice from the other boat shouted "Are we down-hearted?" to which the Pals all shouted back the ritual answer "No!" The same voice was then heard from across the water "Well you bloody well soon will be!".

For many of the Pals, landing at Boulogne was their first sight of a foreign country. They were given a tumultuous welcome by the townspeople to which the Pals responded in like fashion until they found they needed all their

breath to hold the pace up the very steep hill that runs through the town centre, whilst carrying around 130lbs of equipment on their backs.

They spent just one night under canvas at the Ostrehove Rest Camp before marching back into town to the Railway Station, the 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion heading for billets in the town of Bellancourt.

By December their training in trench warfare began in earnest. The Brigade was divided for this purpose with the 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion going to Englebelmer in the northern end of the Somme sector, arriving on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

The trenches they found there were appalling, nothing like the practice ones they had spent so long digging in the park at Knowsley and in Grantham. The weather had rotted the sand bags and the brick floors had disappeared under the mud. As Brigadier-General Stanley reflected in his diary

*'It really was very bad, and had only one redeeming feature, which was that the Germans were supposed to be worse off.'*

This was a quiet section of the line where nothing much would happen from one month's end

to the next. Their role there was to strengthen the much depleted Royal Irish Rifles.

They remained in this sector until Christmas Eve on which day they were pulled back out. Whilst it had been largely uneventful they had, at least, had their first experience of the Front, and were judged fit to take up their own positions in the line.

In January they were allotted to the area near Carnoy, recently vacated by the French. The trench system was in awful condition and they set about consolidating and repairing in the worst imaginable weather.

A German set-piece attack to mark the Kaiser's birthday on January 29<sup>th</sup> brought them the first experience of intense artillery bombardment. However the French counter attack on the 30<sup>th</sup> removed the immediate threat from the Pals flank.

As Spring brought improved weather the 17<sup>th</sup> dropped into a routine in their quiet part of the line. A period would be spent in the front line trenches, then a time in support a little further back, followed by a move to the reserve which meant days spent at the pleasant little village of

Etineham. When the firing stopped, as it did from time to time it was hard to imagine that there was a war on at all. Nevertheless, by the end of March some thirty one men from the four Battalions had been killed in action.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> March, Frank and his comrades marched to their new billets at Franvilliers, near Corbie.

Like the rest of the army they found themselves preparing for the attack at the River Somme. It was the intention of the Allied Command to relieve pressure on Verdun, which the Germans had been attacking heavily since 21<sup>st</sup> February, to wear down the strength of the enemy, and to stop further transfer of German troops from the western front.' In reality this meant the building of roads and railway lines, the accumulation and storage of ammunition and stores, placing communication trenches and telephone wires, observation posts, hospital stations, dug-outs, shelters, and water pipes for an adequate water supply. All this was done under constant fire.

After another spell in the line the whole Brigade was sent back on the 25<sup>th</sup> May towards Abbeville for specialist training linked to

the forthcoming push. Here they practiced assaults on trench systems that were supposed to duplicate those they would encounter in the actual attack. It was arduous work and was often more hated than being in the line.

This lasted through to the 17<sup>th</sup> June when, under cover of darkness, Frank's Battalion was moved into the trenches at Maricourt. Everyone now knew of their role in what would become known as the Somme Offensive. Watching the unbelievable amount of guns and equipment that was filling the Somme valley none of them could possibly have thought that the attack could ever fail

On the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigadier-General Stanley sent out orders informing them of the attack.

*'It is with the utmost confidence that we go forward, the Battalions of which the City of Liverpool is so justly proud, determined to make a name for themselves in their first attack. The 89th Brigade occupies the most honourable positions in the whole of the British Army, because not only are we on the extreme right, but we are fighting side by side with the celebrated French Corps de Fer'*

## The first day of the Somme Offensive, July 1st 1916

The attack was originally planned to have taken place on 29<sup>th</sup>, but heavy rain and mud made it impossible. So it was that on the 1<sup>st</sup> July at 6.20 a.m the first phase began. Frank, with the rest of the 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion, found himself on the right of the British attack.

Brigadier-General Stanley described the scene in his diary.

*"Those miles and miles of men just went steadily forward with the artillery pouring shells in front of them... Trench after trench was collared, and then prisoners started to pour in."*

Frank and his comrades crouched in their trench with as little as two hundred yards separating them from the Germans opposite. At exactly 7:30 the first four companies went over the top and advanced in quick time towards the wire. As soon as they had covered 100 yards the second wave climbed from the trenches and followed them.

They were engaged by weak artillery and small arms fire, but nevertheless crossed the first two German trenches with little diffi-

culty. By 8:30 they had crossed four defensive trenches and Germans Wood, their initial objective. With the right of the line thus secured the village of Montauban itself was taken by



The memorial to the Pals in the centre of Montauban today

10:35. Complete success had been achieved. Compared to the slaughter elsewhere on the Somme that day it had been a cake walk for the 17<sup>th</sup>.

As Montauban fell telegrams were sent to Lord Derby by Divisional Command to inform him of the 89th Brigade's achievements:

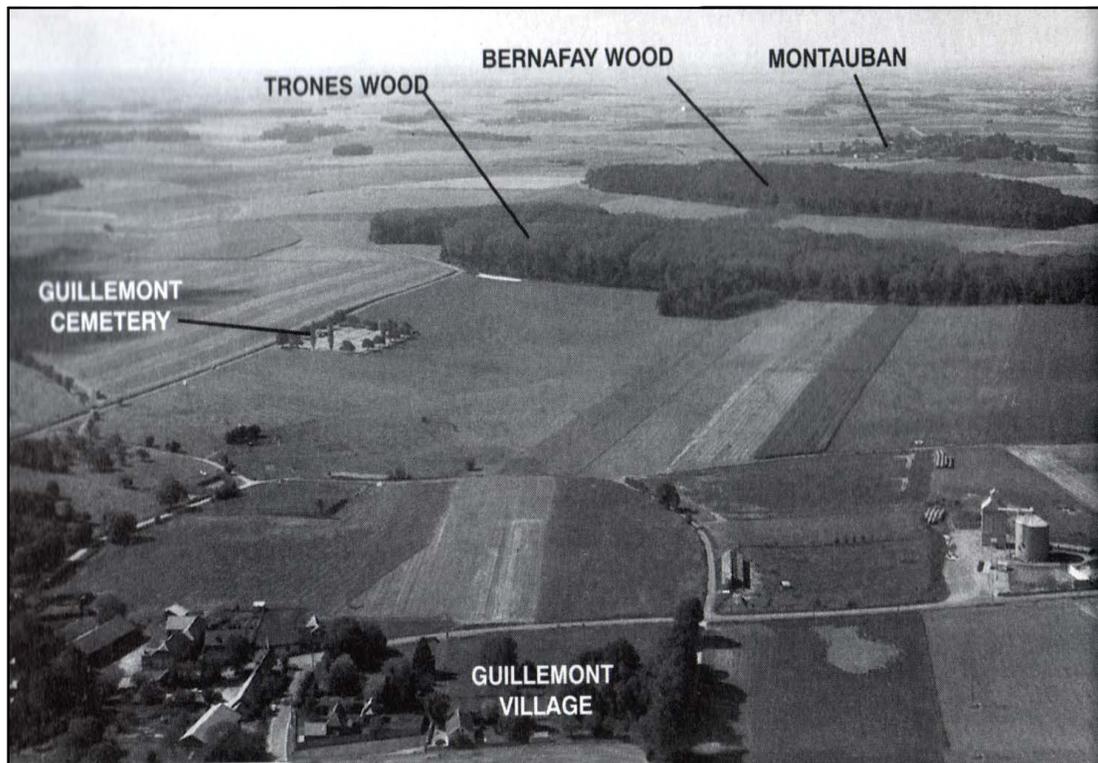
*"Successful both in attack and defence and are fighting like heroes."*

The Brigade as a whole had suffered badly, the 18th Battalion for instance had been left with little defence to its left and had come under heavy shrapnel fire. Of its twenty officers, seventeen had been hit. Private Johnson later wrote,

*'On post out of line, in wood close to Montauban. Casualties - 520 killed and wounded. About 30 men left in a company out of 180. 2 men killed out of our section, 41 wounded.'*

Frank's battalion, on the right of the advance, had escaped astonishingly lightly. Not a single casualty is recorded for the first day of the Somme offensive; a day that saw other Pals battalions, such as the ones from Accrington, virtually wiped out.

For the next few days the battalions of the Brigade consolidated their positions and repelled enemy attacks, but the success of the right flank of the British front had not been matched further north and continued progress could not be made



## A brief respite

Four days later the 30th Division was replaced by the 8th Division and returned to camp behind the line, reorganising itself ready for its next effort. Frank and his surviving friends must have been both proud of their achievement and thought themselves very lucky to have survived.

On 8<sup>th</sup> July the Brigade held a church service, and immediately received orders to move to Trones Wood, which was between Montauban and Guillemont. The wood, in common with all the woods of the battlefield, was entangled with a mass of undergrowth. Heavy bombardment had helped to render the wood completely impassable, except through paths which were well protected by enemy weapons. Trones Wood was, therefore, a formidable and treacherous obstacle.

## Attack on Trones Wood

From 8 -12<sup>th</sup> July all four of the Pals's battalions were engaged in gallant, but largely fruitless attacks on the wood, and when the Division was relieved of its

duty on 12<sup>th</sup> July the wood, except for a small footing in the southern extremity, was still in enemy hands. In his diary for 14 July Brigadier-General Stanley described the events of the four days:

*'We marched off to Montauban which was full of troops. I don't think I have ever spent so uncomfortable a night. It was bitterly cold; our transport had gone wrong; we had to flounder through the mud in pitch darkness and got filthy and wet, added to which the guns were going off just over our heads and making a deafening noise'. Private Johnson also recorded "A miserable night of it, Germans sending shells over preventing me from sleep."*



Trones Wood as it looked in 1916. Shattered and impenetrable.

The wood was so thick that it was impossible to see more than three yards ahead; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bedford's had managed to cover most of the wood and had dug in. But the Germans had hidden behind screened dug-outs, and

once the Bedfords has passed them, they emerged from their protected bases and shot at them.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion was sent to try and stop the shelling from a strong German post on the right of the wood, but the manoeuvre was not very successful and there were many casualties.

Even Brigadier-General Stanley recorded that

*"It is impossible to understand the operations that occurred, unless one first realises (a) that it was difficult to assemble troops for the attack by day; (b) that only one covered approach existed to the wood fit for small parties and a bad passage at that; (c) the overwhelming artillery fire which could be produced by the Germans owing to the nearness of the wood to the German second line; (d) the thickness of the wood itself which allowed the defenders to keep up a sort of bush warfare which rendered organised movement difficult by day and impossible by night."*

On 11<sup>th</sup> July congratulations were sent to the 30<sup>th</sup> Division for its gallant action in Trones Wood, by the General Officer Commanding the British Armies in France.

On 13<sup>th</sup> July General Balfourier of the 20<sup>th</sup> French Corps also ex-

pressed his admiration for the magnificent efforts of the Division:

*'His desire is to find himself fighting alongside this Corps during subsequent operations'.*

It wasn't until the 14<sup>th</sup> July that the wood finally fell to the 18<sup>th</sup> Division who had taken over that sector from the 30<sup>th</sup>.

On 15 July all the survivors of



Even in 2003 evidence, such as these shells, of the fierce fighting in and around Trones Wood remains

Frank's Brigade paraded before General Shea who was, gratified at the praise the Division had received from the French Corps de Fer.

Private Johnson recorded in his diary for the 15<sup>th</sup>:

*'Inspection of Brigade by Divisional General. Complimented and said could not have done without us'.*

The two weeks from the 12<sup>th</sup> July were spent in a turmoil of orders and counter-orders, and no-one was happy to hear that they were soon to be involved in attacking the village of Guillemont, which lay east of Trones Wood. There was something sinister about the village itself; it had a siren-like characteristic of enticing its victims to their doom. Whole units, on penetrating its gloomy surroundings, had disappeared, leaving scarcely a trace.

## 30th July. The attack on Guillemont village.

On 30th July the 30th Division attacked on a grand scale, with the co-operation of the French XX<sup>th</sup> Corps to the right and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division to the left. It was a bloody day. Three Liverpool Pals battalions, including Frank's 17<sup>th</sup>, the were engaged; the 18<sup>th</sup> remained in reserve.

At 5am, they slowly advanced through an early morning fog towards Guillemont. Although some elements on the left reached the edge of the village they came under very heavy machine gun fire from a nearby quarry. At the same time, the enemy began to shell the area between Trones Wood and the village. This was preventing

The view today, looking across from Trones wood to the now peaceful village of Guillemont.

Without machine guns and barbed wire, just a few minutes' pleasant walk



reinforcements moving up but, more importantly, meant they could not be re-supplied with ammunition.



The headstone of a 'Pal' who, from his service number, enlisted just forty men ahead of Frank Goodwin and died in the same action

They continued to take casualties throughout the morning and by the evening Frank's Battalion alone had fatal casualties of 5 officers plus 105 men from the rank and file including, of course, Frank himself. Many more would succumb to their wounds received in this Battle at a later date. Most had not reached the village and were still lying in

No Man's Land. It would be some six weeks before the area was fully secured and the bodies could be recovered and buried. It is no surprise that, by this time, it was not possible to identify many of the men. Those who, like Frank, have no known grave are commemorated with him on the Thiepval Memorial

Brigadier-General Stanley wrote of some of the terrible difficulties,

*'The fog was so thick it was impossible to keep direction and parties got split up. The Germans had devised a new kind of gas shell which had a nasty effect of burning eyes and throats at first, and later causing bad headaches and stomach pains'*

Private Johnson's diary reads,

*'Today the Germans have been sending tear shells and gas over my eyes and nose were running something awful through the effect of them.'*

By 10 a.m. the fog had cleared and it was left to individuals to look after themselves. Snipers and machine guns had made 'easy prey of them all. Some managed to get through to the village but they were overwhelmed by the Germans. It was obvious that the Brigade could not get to their objective.

Private Johnson noted that

*'Our division up line again - attacked Guillemont, managed to gain a foothold but resistance was terrific, had to retire. Had the attack been successful our battalion, the 18th, had the job of digging a support trench in broad daylight - it would have been suicide for us all. Relieved'.*

The attack was entirely a failure. The cost in lives was very severe; over 1,450 men were lost to the 89th Brigade. Brigadier-General Stanley recorded in his diary

*'Nothing would have mattered if it had been a complete success. It is so awfully sad now going about and finding so many splendid fellows gone. It is dreadful to think of; I shall never forget it. I can't say enough for the splendid way in which everyone fought; they were absolutely grand, as they always are, and I don't mind saying that we, our Brigade, have come out of it with a lot of credit.'*

The Brigade, sadly now without Frank, was sent back to Huppy to rest and reorganise.



The Guillemont Road Cemetery, in which so many of the Liverpool Pals are buried. Of the 2,259 headstones, just 750 are named. The remainder are unidentified, their names recorded instead on the memorial at Theipval though their bodies lie here.

Next day, Brigadier-General Stanley wrote Frank's epitaph.

*'We knew that we were in for a bad time and that very many people in Liverpool would be sad; that unfortunately has come only too true and it makes one very miserable. As usual, they did magnificently, but the task was too big'*



Although his grave remains unmarked it is almost certain that Frank's body lies in one of the hundreds of unnamed graves with a Liverpool Pals headstone in this beautifully tended cemetery within sight of Trones Wood and Guillemont itself

Can you add anything to the story of Pvt Frank Goodwin?

Any information would be gratefully received

[Frank@sandrapritchard.com](mailto:Frank@sandrapritchard.com)