

## The Buffs in Lenham

by *Henny Shotter*

As Lenham is in West Kent it is understandable that the photograph below was mistaken as depicting the Queen's Own (Royal West Kent Regiment) . This is, however, not the case.



The photo is of one company, a little over 200 men of 2/4 Buffs (East Kent Regiment). This was a Territorial battalion, formed from volunteers at Canterbury in September 1914. In November they were in Ascot. In May 1915 they moved to

Ashford and remained here and in other parts of Kent as part of 67<sup>th</sup> Division.

The second photo shows some of the troops exercising without their full kit, which indicates that they must have had their accommodation nearby. Were they based in Lenham and, if so, where? Steve Finnis<sup>1</sup> suggested that they were billeted with local families. Two letters<sup>2</sup> deposited in the Devon Archives confirm this. They were written by 28-year-old Charles Herbert Gribble to his mother in Devon. Charles was a lieutenant with 2/4<sup>th</sup> Buffs. He gave his address as Charles Herbert Gribble, The Buffs, c/o Mr Santon, The Square, Lenham.



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His first letter is dated 18/2/17. He writes that the next morning he must get up at 5.30 and march 10 miles to get inspected and that he has the long-expected cold. He was, however, looking forward to meeting his mother and his sister Rose at their aunts' place and he wanted to pay their fare, as he was travelling for free in his uniform. He would also meet Dot, his wife.

His second letter from Lenham is dated 4/4/17, and he wrote it after seeing his mother. He encloses a cheque for her fare: 'I am glad to think of you back at Splatton and I shall be glad

<sup>1</sup> with thanks to our member Steve Finnis for his expertise and the information about the Buffs

<sup>2</sup> see South West Heritage Trust: Devon Archive catalogue, ref B262/0/12/18 and B262/0/12/19 [https://devon-cat.swheritage.org.uk/search/all:all/0\\_50/all/score\\_desc/Lenham](https://devon-cat.swheritage.org.uk/search/all:all/0_50/all/score_desc/Lenham), accessed 13.9.2023

when Dot is down there with you...It is a dear old place, isn't it?' He expresses his hope: 'we shall soon be over with the war, turning to set our little and big houses in order.' Tragically, Charles did not return home. He was killed on 30.11.1917<sup>3</sup> in the Battle of Cambrai and is commemorated on Panel 3 of the Cambrai Memorial, in Louveral, France.<sup>4</sup> In November 1917, the same month as Charles was killed, the Buffs were disbanded.



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<sup>3</sup> see: <https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/1753346/charles-herbert-gibble/> accessed on 13.9.2024

<sup>4</sup> image: By René Hourdry - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=72680838> accessed 13.9.2023