

From the football fields to the WW1 battlefields for Bernard

NOSTALGIA

with Mike Dewey

Last week we were with Wycombe Wanderers footballer Bernard C Hooper in Mesopotamia. He was serving with the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA) during the Great War. After his letter which was published in the BFP on May 17th 1917, he wrote again in June 1918, when he was described as being the Wycombe Wanderers FC Scribe.

He said " Since writing you last, I have travelled a few thousand miles, as I am now in Palestine – some long jaunt from the other 'old place'. Before coming here we had some weeks in Egypt at a base camp, and whilst there most of us were granted five days' leave in Cairo, a railway journey of some four hours – and a tophole place it is too.

We all had a great time, and it goes without saying we all thoroughly enjoyed getting back to civilisation for a short time, after being out in the wilds for so many months. And whilst at that camp we were also able to enjoy a daily dip in the Suez.

When leaving for here we started with a 20 hours' journey in railway trucks, not quite such comfortable riding as in a G.C.R. 3rd class compartment.

Then we tramped for some five or six days, practically the whole distance being through a tremen-



The players and officials of Wycombe Wanderers FC for the 1920/21 season, when they won the Berks & Bucks Senior Cup and the Spartan League. The club secretary Bernard Hooper is on the extreme left of the second row

dously extensive range of hills, and we are still amongst them. On one occasion we travelled uphill for about 11 or 12 miles – a gradual upward slope without even the sign of a downward dip. The particular hill we are now accepting the kindly shelter of is just under 3,000 feet high, and that will give you a good idea of the height of the majority of them: and you can also imagine what fearfully difficult country it is for fighting in – to say nothing of the great question of transport.

Water is rather scarce about here and the transporting of that is

done solely by camels, each animal carrying from 20 to 30 gallons in two tanks – slung either side of the hump.

We are now well up the line, but appear to be rather marking time. There is of course something usually going on, but the particularly heavy pills we dose 'Johnny' with are not administered in large quantities – he usually has time to digest one dose before we give him a second.

At the time of writing our Battery is sending him a few over to go on with. I am off duty now –

we have 24 hours on, and 24 off, whilst things are quiet. Don't think we get it all our own way. 'Johnny' returns our compliments but seems rather short with his ammunition. I did not tell you these hills resemble a miniature range of Rocky Mountains – nearly all rock – and we are living like cave dwellers of olden times, not in actual caves but amongst huge boulders.

Another small dose has just gone overhead – "Where did that one go 'erbert' ". We passed through the outskirts of Jerusalem on our way up. Hope to have an opportunity of seeing the city before very long, if circumstances will allow.

I trust all my friends and pals are well. Suppose the new age limit has found some of them out – all I can say is they have my sympathy. Glad to say that I am extremely fit – Kindest regards to everybody".

It was reported in the BFP of March 28, 1919 the 'Gunner B C Hooper is expected in Wycombe in a few days', so he did not arrive home until some five or six months after the war ended.

Now aged 36, Bernard took up the role of club secretary to Wycombe Wanderers for the seasons 1919/20 to 1924/25. He would have been instrumental in obtaining the club's elevation to the Isthmian League, the application being granted on March 18, 1921. The club went on tour to France in 1923, no doubt encouraged to do so by the ex-WWI servicemen still

associated with the club.

Bernard resigned as secretary at the AGM on July 19th 1925 as he had taken a hotel in Great Dunmow in Essex. He died in 1945 aged 60.

Great War Timeline

TO remind ourselves of the progress of World War I, we are detailing the main events affecting Great Britain which took place each week. Today we focus on the key events that occurred between November 7 and 13.

■ November 8 The British Naval High Command establish a unit known as Room 40, which becomes the centre of intelligence-gathering operations.

■ November 10 Private George Taberner of Woodburn Green dies

■ November 11 Private Charles Harman of Princes Risborough and Private Alfred Perry of Marlow are killed in action

■ November 13 Guardsman Leonard Brown of High Wycombe died of wounds at home.