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M. Pottle & J. Ledingham *We Hope to get Word Tomorrow: The Garvin Family Letters 1914-1918* Pen & Sword 2009 £25 307pp ISBN: 978 184832 5456

The moving title for this book comes from a letter from father to son on 21st July 1916. Sadly the recipient, Captain Gerard Garvin, was killed in action on 23rd July. He was a 1914 volunteer in 7th South Lancashires, 56th Brigade, 19th (Western) Division. His father was none other than J. L. Garvin, editor of *The Observer*. Imagine sitting in your dugout reading about your father's dinners with Winston Churchill, David Lloyd George, Jacky Fisher and Arthur Balfour!

The battalion was fairly slow in getting fully uniformed and equipped, but Garvin was incredibly lucky in his choice of parents (!) who responded with alacrity to his very demanding list of 'requirements'. His mother, not always in the best of health, visited seventeen shops to buy him a new service revolver! The battalion was in Belgium by July 1915, though it was September before they took over a trench system on their own account. As a young subaltern, he was helped enormously by an experienced platoon sergeant. (This makes sense of the War Office reluctance to promote too many NCO instructors in the early part of the war).

Gerard worked diligently and was 'a little father' to his men. His parents were naturally relieved when he got a posting to divisional HQ but he was too good a regimental officer and, on his promotion to captain, his CO wanted him back as a company commander. To JL Garvin's credit he never pulled any of his formidable array of strings to swing a cushy job for his boy.

With all due respect to a young officer killed in the line of duty, his letters are a good deal less interesting than those of his father. JL Garvin makes a running commentary on the higher direction of the war, and some useful asides on the early problems of the Lewis gun, on Clausewitz and on Marlborough.

Gerard took a lively interest in training and it would have been useful to those of us keen to see how the BEF developed as a war machine to have more of this relatively rare material. How frustrating to see some pages of notes on training taken at 'officer school' merely produced as facsimile illustrations! We want the whole document. It would have been a perfect Appendix. And I would dearly like to know why the divisional commander had a 'running feud' with this battalion.

The warmth of the letters from home, always headed 'My dear old son', or 'My dearest laddie', 'Dearest lad of mine', 'Dearest beloved son', make the end all the more poignant. Knowing that his battalion was to make their first big attack late on 22nd July 1916, Gerard wrote a 'last letter' on 20th July to be opened in the event of his death, saying goodbye to those he loved.

The editors have done a very good job filling in all the full details of this last attack.

John Lee Mars & Clio 27 Autumn 2009