

John Clay of Matlock and Matlock Bath joined the 10th Prince of Wales Own Royal Hussars in 1914, at the same time as his best friend William Henry Furniss (Bill). Below is a part extract of the letter his widow received from Bill in 1917, recounting how John died. Note the formal way he addressed John's widow, the norm for the times.

France May 23rd

Dear Mrs Clay

I was pleased to get your letter and get some more information about poor Jack. It came as a great shock when I heard he was dead, although how you at home must have felt God only knows. ... The morning he was hit was the same day when the regt. got badly cut up, but unfortunately Jack was hit by a shell splinter in the head just over the right ear, half of his ear being cut off & his left leg was broken below the knee. We were saddling the horses up about 5 am or just before and I was talking to him the other side of his horse, when the shell burst 10 yds away. The shell that hit him killed about 10 men & 12 to 15 horses & wounded about 20 men also many horses. He was quite conscious

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when I picked him up from under his horse & he was dressed & the Doctor was there in a very few moments & it was impossible to do more at the time. He was quite certain he was going to die, but I tried to cheer him up & I believe I was the most miserable of the two. I think his horse which was wounded, must have broken his leg with kicking for there was no wound. You will be proud to know that he was considered a very good soldier & in fact was a favourite with all who knew him. All the "boys" in the troop that are left wish me to express their sympathy to you and the children & also I hope you will accept the same from myself If I do get home, I will let you know details, but it is impossible to tell you everything in letters Hoping that you are bearing up as well as times will allow. I will remain

*Yours Truly
W H Furniss*