

A letter from the trenches



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

I had intended to write earlier, however the Germans had us covered with the constant rain of shells falling, we had to stay on Guard duty to make sure they did not get here. On the way back, Zack got caught in a mudslide after one of the bombs hit the nearby hill. He went out like the others. My company just acquired some new novices to fight and obviously they hadn't seen rats before, consequently they were scared and it wasn't helped by our stories of how the brown rats ripped through the Germans brains and was still hungry. In fact, he got scared so much, we tried to hide in No Man's Land to get away but their snipers shot through him quite literally.

By the time it was safe, we had finished breakfast from the last of our uncontaminated supplies. And just after that we got on ' Lice Duty', picking out all those eggs was futile, as there were some hidden in the seams of the clothing. Those slugs and beetles were worse than ever, crowding the walls of the little area for themselves. Just got a haircut so I am bald again so I have avoided the new nits problem.

During when I am free, I like to do loads of stuff but I decided to make a war poem, I mean everyone else does. How does it sound? (Extract from Jesse Pole, ' The Cole')

Who's	for	the	trench--
Are	you,	my	laddie?
Who'll	follow	French--	
Will	you,	my	laddie?
Who's	fretting	to	begin?
Who's	going	out	to win?

And who wants to save his skin--

Do you, my laddie?

What I am not going to include, is that rat problem. It is just too insensitive in my opinion as they killed 1.7 million people so far because of their diseases and their extremely high fertility rate makes it almost impossible to get rid of them. They are like a swarm of bees they will constantly annoy you. You know that trench foot I had, I finally got rid of it, I am cured no more shall those fungi on the side of the wall get the better of me.

Stand to and Morning Hate wasn't any different, repairing those bayonets. Those 3 hours of peace while breakfast was just amazing, the relief of not having to be in a trench, but there is Guard duty. You know, when someone out of each company waits behind at the machine guns, it's yet to be me, but I've leaving the front line soon thankfully it's been 70 days and the whole trench cycle thing will take over and I'll be free for a year.

Our platoon is quite lucky in my opinion as we are being provided free rum for our duty along with breakfast, because some of the others don't get anything. Breakfast is during stand to and morning hate. Just cause the guns stopped firing, doesn't mean there is rest, I mean if you come here, you will find yourself scurrying across like a mouse, because of the cleansing and checking of equipment. Both of the sides unofficially declare a truce I think, I mean at the time we are most off-guard; there is no gunfire. Just wait until a SO, senior officer, finds out that it happened again, he will send out one company to the German's trenches through No Man's Land and deserters were just killed.

The kind of things we have to do after breakfast can be tiring I mean it is fun refilling sandbags and repairing duckboards but the amount of time it takes is forever. We would normally find out what we do by our NCOs. They'd assign us each a chore everyday just to try and make it more comforting to stay. After another heavy storm last night, I suspect we have to spend at least 2 hours reshaping the walls of the trenches to the correct shape because what usually happens is that the rain deforms the walls and makes the floor super muddy and almost impossible to work in. But that is not as hard as it seems, the equipment here is actually quite good compared to back out at home. The pumps functioned and all the muddy water was taken away without all the hard labour. There were a few other small roles that the NCOs would give us, that is to repair the trenches from yesterdays shelling for todays and also to prepare all the ammunition.

The main problem out here is boredom, the snipers on the Germans side look out over the 500 yard gap between us and them so it is almost impossible to move during daylight, otherwise you would be 'moving' ducks. Whilst stand to and morning hate was going on, if you finished your chores you do personal stuff like reading or writing letters back home. Most of them are censored, luckily being an Officer, I can write these types of things.

Today I'm on patrol duty so I've been training in hand to hand combat skills such as knifing and boxing because whilst patrolling if we find a German patrol, we would have to either fight or run, and to me, running is not an option. Out on No Man's Land, there is a variety of things to do such as repairing barbed wire and going to listening posts. However the most

gruesome thing you could possibly do out there is retrieve the dead bodies,, I mean that is gross.

When you see dusk coming, you know you have to get ready for a big fight or probably a small battle, you would know it's coming cause the general will launch a special cannon into No Man's Land just to tell you to get ready. During these times supplies are normally shipped over because you would be likely to see enemy and friendly movement, and also that crawling over long grass to repair barbed wire can make a lot of sound and theoretically, get you killed Sometimes, lucky men would be sent to the supply trenches to pick up rations and ammo, whilst we are all on firing duty.

During these times there is some one normally operating a machine gun for 2 hours. Any longer and they'd fall asleep. If they did, the penalty of risking the lives of everyone, is getting killed by the firing squad, but I don't see how that is fair, I mean we are all sleep-deprived.

Men were relieved form their roles as marksman and ground troops at night as well, these men would then cross the maze of networks to get back to safety. It once took an hour or two, because our equipment is heavy and it takes forever to actually get anywhere.

Something you'll have to get used to around here is that horrid smell. When something dies, it rots away and if not disposed of, it can really stink. Once, I heard this story that at the Somme Line, approximately 200 000 men were killed and it stank out the entire place, I mean dead corpses and noses just don't go together well. The smell of creosol in the morning is OK now but when I first came, I almost killed myself.

Well that's all I can think of on the top of my head right now, got to go and do morning hate soon you know. Writing whilst I am meant to be sleeping doesn't exactly help my sleeping problems but it does comfort in me knowing I'll have the time to write it. You could come and help out one day, I mean they don't ' need' you back home working with the land girls and business men to grow and sell the food that you are making on mom's farm.

You're sincerely

Christopher, your dear Brother