

# A soldier's diary essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Surreptitiously, she placed the corroded, antiquated key into the timeworn lock of the decrepit leather trunk, glancing circumspectly over her shoulder to distinguish whether or not she was being watched. She wasn't. Her tenuous, slender fingers trembled with tangible trepidation as she gradually rotated the ancient, rusty key. Click. The lock was open.

Breathing heavily, she apprehensively raised the lid of the chest, blew away a mountain of dust and extracted a dense, elaborate chronicle. Inscribed on the exterior in ornate, interwoven characters were the words, ' Kenneth Walker: Diary of a Warrior'; the familiar sight of his delicate, meticulous handwriting sent a heartfelt shiver down her spine. Poignantly, a solitary tear rolled soothingly down her cheek as she caressed the intimate journal of her recently deceased husband. A fifty year old memoir was all that remained of her loyal, affectionate spouse. His innermost thoughts and feelings from bygone days were concealed in one neglected account that she had previously never contemplated touching.

Would this be the day that she finally summoned the vast amount of courage necessitous in order to peruse this confidential journal? She broke out into a nervous sweat whilst retiring to Kenneth's cherished armchair, inhaling his lingering transcendent aroma. The aroma of a hero. An oscillation of nausea swept over her as she tensely opened the front cover. Delicately fingering the discoloured pages, she began to read..

. January 18th, 1915I have done it! I have pledged to taste the salt of life, I have scaled the first rung on the ladder of prosperity, I have enrolled in the British Armed Forces! Hurrying down to the local recruitment office with my

comrades, exhilaration pulsed rhythmically through my veins. The four of us eagerly expressed our patriotism, confabulating the depth of our enthusiasm at the prospect of assailing the nefarious Fritz on the Front Line. Gordon affirmed that he would never wish to endure the sheer humiliation of being deemed a coward and forced to wear a degrading white feather in his cap.

I agreed. Conscientious objectors infuriate me; I cannot cognize the motivation for their incongruous decision. Throughout my life, I have continuously felt as though I am meant for something remarkable, something extraordinary. By joining the Sheffield Pals Battalion, I feel that my opportunity to leave a legacy has arrived. I am determined to succeed.

Approaching the extensive queue, it soon became apparent that the number of young men applying to enlist is monumental! After months of being persistently bombarded with propaganda, masses of vigorous young chaps feel morally obliged to comply with Earl Kitchener's cogent commands and sign up to our country's prestigious army. Each and every one of us yearns to be involved in Britain's perpetual military success. Whilst we patiently waited in line, withstanding the blistering winter snow, my comrades and I discussed our dissimilar justifications for joining up. Predominantly, I enrolled for the reverence, distinction and veneration that soldiers inevitably gain. I also yearned for the adrenaline rush of fighting for your nation. Percy avowed that he primarily anticipates travelling abroad as he has not yet experienced the elation of visiting overseas.

As the length of the line imperceptibly decreased, my anxiety manifested. Peculiarly, irrational reservations regarding joining up began to wander through my mind. How would my darling Lily manage alone? Would I be capable of withstanding the inordinate isolation? What if I never returned? I instantaneously cursed myself for having the audacity to imagine such a preposterous vicissitude. After a short while, we found ourselves leading the queue. As the Lord Mayor vociferated “ Next!” my heart ephemerally terminated beating.

Putting on a brave face, I strode towards the desk; I strode towards my auspicious future. Butterflies danced around my stomach as I signed my name on the ceaseless indenture. An inexorable smile spread relentlessly across my visage as I recognized that I had transformed my life forevermore. Hitherto, I earned my wage as an unadorned coal miner; a blue-collar worker who scarcely managed to earn sufficient money to survive. However, I resigned from my laborious occupation in the hope of, at twenty-six years of age, accomplishing something in my life.

My only true reservation is that of abandoning my devoted fiancée, Lily. I sincerely hope that she will be competent whilst alone, and that my absence will not consume her half as much as the guilt of leaving her is devouring me. Personally, I feel that it is up to us, the Sheffield Pals Battalion, to justify the hopes of our friends and to carve for ourselves a niche in the temple of history. Contrary to the opinion of conscripts, we will return to Sheffield having won honour for our city and our country. I impatiently await tomorrow's sunrise, for that is when we commence our military preparation.

Now that I have ultimately enlisted I am in an overwhelming state of bewilderment. My lifelong aspirations are about to be realised. I am one step closer to achieving my eternal ambition of one day witnessing my name amongst the victorious articles within the broadsheets: Kenneth Walker, Hero of the Great War. 3rd February 1915 My dearest Lily, Despite the fact that I pine for you dearly, I am currently relishing in my time at Redmires Training Camp.

My insipid preconceptions of the other fellows couldn't be more amiss! Personally, I feel that each and every one of the chaps has topping charisma and we are all decidedly compatible. Moreover, there is a profound sense of camaraderie within the group. We are proud to be British. Fortunately, I have effortlessly become pals with some exceptionally congenial, encouraging and supportive chaps.

Due to our shared aspirations, we excel in cooperating with one another; this will be greatly profitable when we serve in the Great War. Furthermore, we regularly delight in obtaining a recreational beverage from the nearby public house, Three Merry Lads. We have a ripping time. Surprisingly, our living quarters are relatively spacious and my bed is unexpectedly comfortable.

Frequently, along with the chaps in my hut, I will stay awake into the early hours of the morning and candidly converse about our hopes and dreams; no wonder we barely sleep. Bizarrely, it is not uncommon to wake in the morning and uncover a snow drift blocking the doors to our hut! In such peculiar circumstances, we have no other option but to force the smallest comrade, John, out of the window to release us. How spiffing! On the other

hand, the cuisine at Redmires leaves a great deal to be desired. After all, the preponderance of the chefs are trainees, therefore it is arbitrary whether the food is edible or not. Nauseatingly, a couple of nights ago one cook inadvertently discharged the ashes from the oven into the stewing pot! It was revolting. Needless to say, the vast majority of us went hungry that night.

On account of this substandard matter, it would be immensely appreciated if you could dispatch a food package. Although the incessant exercising is fatiguing and the artillery practice is arduous, I remain in high spirits. The awe-inspiring training has roused my jingoistic temperament, considerably intensifying my anticipation with regard to the Great War. I cannot wait. In addition to this, the concept that my newly acquired chums and I will soon be an acclaimed battalion of soldiers defending our King and Country on the Front Line is overwhelming.

Latterly, a pal brought to my attention a well-known phrase: behind every great man is an even greater woman. To me, you are that woman. You are the woman who I cannot live without, you are the woman who presides over my deepest thoughts, you are the woman who I love. I confidently assure you that I shall be back in your arms, where I belong, before you know it.

I guarantee that I will write again soon. Love Always, Kenneth x x x3rd  
February, 1915  
Tentatively, I studied the intimate epistle which I have recently composed for my beloved fiancée, Lily. I shroud the personal letter in secrecy as I fear the chaps from my dormitory may unearth it and ridicule me due to my ulterior vulnerability. Repeatedly reading through my

exaggerated glorification of Redmires, I laughed half-heartedly to myself. If only she knew the truth. Although merely a few days have elapsed since my untimely departure, I miss Lily disproportionately.

I yearn to hear the reassuring sound of her benign articulation, sense the soothing floral tones of her ravishing perfume, and experience the compassionate touch of her angelically smooth skin. She is my soulmate. With each passing second I pine for her increasingly, optimistically counting down the days until I return home. Her letters are a welcome ray of dazzling sunlight glistening through the formation of dismal, discouraging clouds that are military life. In my opinion, the most ignominious and intolerable aspects of Redmires are the icy draughts, relentless precipitation and blistering winds that howl each and every night. Even when I am wrapped up cosily in my densely padded overcoat, I suspect my internal body temperature to be well below freezing point.

Nightly, I scavenge every available piece of clothing in the hope of remaining temperate. I never succeed. When morning ultimately arrives, conditions rarely ameliorate. Once we have eradicated the immense layers of frost that have amassed on the inside of the glass, we must propel the smallest fellow out of the aforesaid window so that he is able to unblock the door. This is onerously time consuming.

Once we have escaped the utilitarian cabins, we commence our training. The physical activity is excruciating. Compulsorily, we seize a 60lb rucksack and stomp up and down a colossal hill with a severe incline. At the culmination of each session, I am thoroughly exhausted.

I have never been one to excel in the physical side of matters, therefore I often feel as though I am on the verge of collapse. It takes every ounce of energy to trudge back to my meagre living quarters and I am certain that my chums have similar feelings. On the upside, my muscle is building by the minute; before long I will have legs of steel. If I had the confidence, certainty and conviction, I would stand up to the irreverent majors. Iniquitously, they seem to cantankerously subordinate us due to our lack of refined education.

This is unwarranted. Our superior commanders should respect us as we are the ones who shall be honouring our King and Country. Despite the dismal time I am having at Redmires, my emotions towards the war remain expectant. I am progressively fervent when it comes to defending my country; I cannot wait to assail the Kaiser.

I am driven by an unprecedented force greater than myself which compels me to fight for what is moral, even though that may never be clear to me whilst I am alive. The prospect of prevailing in the war against the beastly Fritz is the only thing that keeps me going. Aside from that, the wages are dire, the circumstances intensify with each passing day and the exercise is strenuous. Uncharacteristically, I'm beginning to wish I did not join up. 16th June, 1916  
My beloved Lily, Initially, I must show gratitude for your amorous response to my preceding letter. I am sincerely appreciative.

Reading your solicitous words and seeing your elegant calligraphy brings a myriad of tears to my eyes. It feels as though there is an element of you within each of your missives. Presently, I am industriously serving in the perpetually pernicious trenches of Sierre, France. As I write, I am partway



through the eight week duration of my invigorating term in the reserve trenches, approximately three-hundred metres behind the front line.

Regrettably, due to my increasingly busy schedule, my letters to you have been sporadic within recent months, However, I intend to discontinue this tendency by corresponding frequently. Trench life is thoroughly spiffing! Possessing a Lee-Enfield bolt-action rifle makes me feel amply equipped for battle and scrupulously primed to assail the malicious Fritz. Furthermore, the food here is decidedly palatable; the bully beef and maconochie stew are utterly appetizing. It is a considerable improvement on the substandard cuisine that was served at Redmires. Occasionally, we are permitted a ration of bacon, cheese or jam as a merited indulgence. How spiffing! Last week, Percy caught a Blighty one.

Spending days on end immersed in contaminated water had led to him developing Trench Foot; the calamitous open sores were unmitigatedly repulsive. Catastrophically, Percy's symptoms exacerbated, resulting in his decomposing foot requiring amputation. I hope his condition improves rapidly. Yesterday, the chaps and I waved goodbye to him as he returned to Blighty. How are you managing? Although I habitually pine for you, I find solace in the certainty that the sunrise I perceive each morning is the same sunrise that you witness.

In the end all that matters is love. Love Always, Kenneth x x x16th June, 1916“Trench life is thoroughly spiffing!” Never in my twenty-two years of existence have I heard such a deceitful untruth. A deceptive fiction flagrantly fabricated by me. Ashamedly, I cannot bear to divulge the true details of my

military life; I abhor the concept of my beloved fiancée<sup>1/2</sup>ascertaining the full extent of my anguish. To begin with, I have contracted lice.

Perennially, I find myself abrading every inch of my body in the hope of eradicating these repellent creatures which reside in the seams of my uniform. I am in constant agony. Occasionally, I resort to scalding the lice with matches, enraging myself when my seams begin to fall apart. My yearning for the lice to perish is ongoing.

Despite my suffering, I consider myself to be comparatively fortunate.

Developing Trench Foot like Percy would be cataclysmic; he was forced to have his decaying limb amputated and almost gave up the ghost in the process. In my opinion, operating on the front line is intolerable.

Theoretically, we are supposed to spend a week in a front-line trench, four weeks in a support trench and eight weeks in a reserve trench. However, the generals are so busy resting their exceedingly over-worked bodies that they often forget to interchange the soldiers' positions.

Unfortunately, when it was my turn on the front line I ended up out there for twenty-six days! Ordinarily, I would take up my grievance with the field marshal, but I perilously fear being discriminatorily slaughtered like poor Henry. My comrade was inhumanely beaten by the generals and then slain with a fatal strike to the pate. He merely purloined a piece of cheese. The front line is a living hell.

Shells are catapulted towards us at rapid speeds, G8 bullets hurtle over our heads like an incessant meteor shower and our Vickers guns put on an ostentation as psychedelic as Bonfire night. The constant reverberations of

gunfire echo ceaselessly around my head, deteriorating my eardrums with the amplitude of each shot. One of the chaps who tragically reached his demise was my pal Gary. Earlier this morn, he was utilizing the trench latrine when a punctiliously aimed bomb soared through the air and landed with great accuracy.

Instantly, Gary was fallen. We are told that death is not to be feared. We are told that death will, in due time, come to us all. How are we expected to embrace the end of our existence when we have witnessed firsthand death's devastating aftermath? However, the mortality rate of our Battalion is negligible in comparison to that of Fritz'. Recently, we have been inundating them with lethal shells day and night in the hope of forcing them to surrender.

An insider from our foes' regiment told one of the Generals that their force has lost over half of its' soldiers! This is a major achievement for us and has given our troop a much-needed morale boost. Being a sniper is...bizarre.

We have the job of picking off any of the Kaiser's troops who dares lift his head above the parapet. Astonishingly, each time I compress the trigger of my Lee-Enfield, it spells the end of a life in the German camp. Anyone who feels no remorse at that sickening fact is utterly callous; I simply overlook this fact and effect my duty. If I took the time to contemplate the consequences of my actions, I would have great difficulty shooting somebody. After all, Germans are only people. People just like you or I.

Why should we discriminate against someone simply because of their nationality? I feel that we should unify, not conflict. Regrettably, I must push

my rational thoughts to the back of my mind and carry on with the conflict. In all honesty, the masses of dead soldiers from both squadrons have led me to realise that it is not my choice whether I live or die. It breaks my heart to think that the fallen troops have families. Each and every one of them has loving relations back home.

Pitifully, there are millions of children who have lost their fathers, millions of mothers who have lost their sons, and millions of women who have lost their partners. I am determined not to let my dear Lily become one of those millions of women. God will protect me. 1st July 1916  
Dearest Lily, Today could be the greatest day of my life. Presently, we are on the verge of terminating the seemingly ceaseless stalemate.

We are exceedingly close to making an immense push, defeating the Fritz once and for all and bringing the war to a judicious end. We will be the fellows who win freedom, independence and sovereignty for ourselves and for future generations. For the past few days we have been preparing for the climax of the war. In mere hours we shall go over the top. As I write, I am watching dawn break, listening to the tender, soothing birdsong as I gaze up from my trench dugout.

I am decidedly confident about the day ahead. Morale is running exceptionally high. Hopefully, I will return home very soon. As I climb over the top of the trenches and play my significant part in the Allies' victory, I shall be thinking of you.

Everything I do is for you. I love you forever; no matter what.