

# Letter from a soldier in the first world war essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Dearest Mother, I hope this letter reaches you as many others who have sent letters have not had their letters reach their intended destination, I also apologise for not writing to you sooner, although finding time to write is becoming increasingly more difficult as we push towards the German front line. Every day we are bombarded by shells and a good man comes to the end of his life, whether it be from the shells or a snipers shot to the head, they rarely miss, but neither do we. The conditions that we have to endure in the trenches are unbearable.

At the foot is a six-inch river of mud that must be stood in all day, this results in a disease called " Trench foot" that many soldiers have contracted. This is the swelling up of the foot, senses are lost and it puffs up so much a bayonet could be stuck in a trench foot without pain. Perhaps the most sickening part of the trench though, is the build up of human bodies, flung on top the trench in order to provide a basic blockade, occasionally a body falls back down and must be hoisted back up.

It is disgraceful to think what has been done to these men who joined the war to fight valiantly for their country and are repaid by being used as a primitive defence. The trenches are designed in such a way that if shots are fired down it, they will not travel all the way down killing many men this results in a zigzag pattern. Breaking up the lines of trenches are dugouts that are used to stay in when we are being shelled, or as simple shelter for injured men. Higher ranking officials also stay in these dugouts when we are being heavily bombarded or attacked.

It seems the higher ranked an officer is the more cowardly he becomes, any respect I have had for my seniors has now gone as they proceed to send us in on suicide marches. Death is commonplace here on occasions when a soldier puts down his guard for a second and stands in the trench, German snipers shoot him down, although we would gladly return the favour and shoot down enemy soldiers. When we attempt to gain ground, hundreds of men are lost with every rampage, shot down seamlessly by enemy fire hailing from a machine gun. Sometimes we are forced to retreat at the expense of a few hundred lives.

And for what? A few yards of meaningless ground. If we do successfully take an enemy trench, many more lives are taken from both sides. Those who have surrendered are mercilessly shot down without a second thought. There are no rules in war, you either kill or get killed. In the early hours of yesterday, a good friend of mine decided that he could face the war no longer after hours of shelling and no sleep for days, a good man took his own life with a single shot to the head. No one said anything of the incident he was simply thrown on the pile with the rest of the bodies.

No doubt his parents will receive a letter claiming their son died, fighting valiantly for his country. The thought is almost sickening. A week ago to this day I had my first encounter with gas. As we were marching towards some seemingly empty fields towards the front lines, we came across eight or so canisters. Being curious, two men approached them, the rest of the regiment waiting behind. We had been told of gas attacks before, but had never

witnessed them. As the two men approached the canisters, a number of German soldiers appeared and duly shot them down.

It was as if they appeared from nowhere, we had been set-up. The enemy was too far away to be within firing distance, all that could be done was to wait and watch. A single German soldier approached the canisters and released the gas, before retreating. With the wind towards us, it wasn't long before the gas would reach us. A call came for us to strap on our gas masks and retreat, although for some, it was far too late. Men began to wheeze and cough under the influence of the deadly gas, the masks seem to have little effect for some.

Eyes would bulge from their sockets in a devilish way. It was as if they were overcome by evil. A truly horrendous sight, after an hour or so the wind changed direction and we could continue our path, with the walking wounded. Those who could not see dumbly walked on, tagging with the soldier ahead of them. Those who were dead were simply left behind; there was no time for burial, only for retribution. The bitterness I am feeling is unlike me, I no longer know my own true character. I just have urges to kill and maim the people who have killed my compatriots.

Although this bitterness is not just of the enemy, but also of my own country, whom I chose to fight for. Now I am aware of the realities of war, I accept that it is truly an awful thing. When I left old blighty I was full of optimism and hope, believing I was going to make a difference and aid my country in times of need. I once believed in fighting for an honourable cause, peace

through power and even honourable sacrifice. All that has long gone, what I am feeling now is indescribable, pure hatred and despise. I have seen more men die than I ever thought was possible in the entire war.

Our country informed us that the war would soon be over and that it would be for a glorious cause. War was portrayed as exhilarating and honourable by the power bearers of Britain, instead it is simply murder through the cold constraints of power. The suffering I have witnessed is unimaginable.

Sometimes I feel guilty for still being alive, when other, better men, have been long gone, perhaps to a better place, although I cannot imagine a place worse. We are commanded by senile old fools who still play war by the old method of bursting through the German lines in order to allow cavalry to restore open fighting.

These officers sit in their comfy huts and plan attacks through terrain they could not possibly be familiar with. It seems they are satisfied with sending us in to die due to old fashioned, undeveloped tactics. It is incredible and hard to believe just how naive these old fools are. Maybe if they spent a day, or even an hour down with the rest of us they'd change their ideas. The concept of modern warfare seems non-existent to our generals, who seem to believe that hundreds of men running towards a hail of enemy machine gun fire is a good idea. They really ought to try it themselves.

Although not all hope is lost, the grim realities of war are slowly being shown to the unknowing public. Poets such as Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen are really trying to get the message across concerning the brutality of war.

The images they depict are on occasions, truly horrendous. Needless to say, our government is not too keen on letting these poems become widespread gossip. Letters, such as this one, which should reach you via a friend of mine on leave, would otherwise not be allowed through. A ranked officer must read all outgoing letters, and those that contain “ inappropriate material” will not get through.

In extreme cases, being court-martialled is an option for the people in charge. I doubt if I can write you a letter of such sincerity to you again, because of those not smuggled from the frontline are prohibited. However I will be waiting for a reply with great anticipation. Hopefully I will still be alive to read it, if not, all hope is not lost, death may be my only chance of escape. New orders are thought to be coming in any day, with the command to advance and go “ over the top”, with any luck I’ll have made it, although few others will have in comparison to the great numbers being sent out.

More men are arriving every day, younger and younger by the minute I wouldn’t doubt that we are running out of suitable candidates to die for their country, perhaps soon the elderly will be asked. I hope the brutal honesty of my letter has not been too shocking for you, if I make it through a couple more weeks, I will be able to return home and see you all once again. That’s the only thing that has been in my mind since the first day I joined this war. Send my love to the rest of the family.