

## **Ink and Mud**

*05/08/1914*

So apparently, we're at war. King did a big speech over the radio yesterday, guess I'm just waiting for everyone to go nuts but life just sorta carries on as normal, except the printing companies must be getting a fortune, the number of newspapers everyone's buying. But what can you expect out in the country? The biggest local gossip here is when everybody learns some idiot asked his girl to marry him on the same day Britain went to war. That's me by the way. Absolute dunce. Anyway, I decided to keep this diary full of memories I'll share with her, I may be a sarcastic git, but I can be a nostalgic one.

*21/12/1915*

Call me selfish but I really didn't want to sign up. Half my mates are dying in France and the other half are off to buy their uniforms. There're posters everywhere saying 'We need you!' What... to die? And since I don't have a death wish I should get beat up on my way back from planting 125 acres of wheat the army will be eating next year. Don't worry, you should have seen the other guy, or that's what I said to my fiancé anyway. I don't want to have to lie to her like that, I want to make her proud. Seems the only way to do that these days is to put your life on the line. And my dad says he's fine without me on the farm, not sure what he's hinting at but I'm pretty certain I don't like it. Basically, what I'm trying to say is that I signed up. And that I'm going to regret it, especially when I see the look on her face. Maybe I'll wait till after Christmas to tell her.

*07/02/1916*

Been training for about a month now if you can call it that. All the military officials are in France or Belgium, so they had to bring in old ones from out of retirement and when I tell you that they were not prepared to get back to their old job... let's just say if he had managed to get onto it, the horse probably wouldn't have been able to stand let alone gallop into the fields of battle. I think his dignity might have been slightly bruised cause when I mentioned giving him a hand, he told me that in the prime of his life he could get on a horse without idiot privates questioning his every move. 'Shame it's not the prime of his life.' I said to the guy next to me a little too loudly, didn't mean to, but my tongue is like a rogue balloon when I think of something stupid to say. And that is the story of how I got a black eye and why I've been transferred to the infantry.

*09/04/1917*

We started the artillery bombardment at the crack of dawn on what must be the coldest day in history, although I'm sure I said that yesterday. The bombs are still going off, which by now is a given but could they stop? It's giving me a headache. In about an hour we head over the top to get our heads blown off by machine guns or tossed 5 feet in the air by exploding shells. My fiancé often writes to tell me I should be less pessimistic. She's probably right but also miles away.

10/04/1917

Bit of a bittersweet day, well mostly bitter. The attack was successful, the bombardment actually cut the wire so we could get into the stinking German trenches but to be honest I wish it'd failed. Cause as soon as I got through, a bloody awful pain tore its way up my left leg, and I realised I'd been shot. So, when I say we invaded the enemy line I mean I fell gawkily into the sopping mud and hopped. Soon we were surrounded by gibberish-speaking Germans who stuck their bayonets between our shoulder blades and marched us to a van. We drove for about half an hour, but I can't be sure cause time's a bit irrelevant when you're drifting in and out of consciousness with a bullet in your leg. Now we're in some sort of camp so I think I can safely say we are officially POWs. They rapped my leg in a dressing with a very questionable brown stain and it took me a while to realise they were re-using materials because they'd ran out ages ago. I'm using the bandage of a dead man. Don't think about it. Trying not to picture my fiancé when she gets a telegram saying MIA.

11/11/1918

It's over. I don't think I can cheer louder or jump higher, (Hypothetically that is... this war has left me with a limp.)

It's over.

07/06/1923

Found this old thing at the back of a drawer left to be forgotten like I keep hoping my other memories will be. Sorry lads, this is going to be a serious one. No cocky quips or wise cracks. Basically... we won. But not really. Not for the poor sods that did the winning. The ones who lie in a bed too soft and safe for their broken backs. Who can't remember the last time they even tried sleeping without a cold, wriggling sweat breaking out all over their body and finding their eyes might permanently be glued open. Unless it was last night. The men who can't shut out the screaming until they realise its their own voice. One day, someone'll read that and think I'm off my head. No mate. Just been to hell and lived that's all. Well, not sure many of us would call it living, but better than the ones whose only tombstone will be the poppies. That was poetic. But I hope no one ever sees it, it'll only make my wife worried that the echo of bombs is ringing in my head again.

She doesn't know it never stopped.