

Dear Mum,

How are you getting on? I hope that Dad's cold is better. Send my best wishes to everyone!

I am writing to you from the barracks of our regiment. My training is going well; I have many good friends here, and although the training I have been getting is necessary, I cannot wait to finish it, and get out to the Front, because the chances are that the war will be over within a few months, and I want to get a good chance to have my go at the Boche.

All kinds of rumours are spreading through the regiment about the things that the Boche are doing. They are supposed to have committed all sorts of atrocities in Belgium, such as butchering defenceless, innocent women and children, and also raping and pillaging.

I cannot understand why anyone would not want to take their place in Kitchener's New Army; it makes me angry that cowards should be able to duck out of their responsibility to their country. The whole idea of conscientious objection seems absurd to me; it is just a front used to cover cowardice. Conchies don't object to war, they are just scared that they might get hurt. They should see this war for what it is: a chance to help and serve their country, and earn some glory, both for themselves, and for Britain.

The Boche needs to be taught a lesson; they cannot expect to just march around the globe, invading countries for no reason, other than selfishness. If we do not step in and act decisively soon, who knows where they will stop?

How can the army act decisively if many of the men who should be soldiers decide to stay at home because they are scared?

Those who claim that their religion stops them from fighting are in the wrong as well; I am a religious man, and God has said to me (and I believe him) that He agrees with our fighting the war; God is on our side!

Lots of Love

----- END FIRST LETTER

Dear Mum,

I am writing this letter to you from one of the support trenches, about half a mile back from the front line. I am sorry that I have not been able to write properly to you for the past few weeks, but you can probably guess how it is out here. Everywhere you look, dead bodies are piling up, as we (our battalion) sit here, there is an almost constant flow of dead and injured soldiers from the front. When you hear about the glorious victories achieved by our boys, don't forget that we are losing men too; it is so depressing to hear the numbers at roll calls gradually going down. Whether you, or the man who is next to you dies, and also when it happens is completely random, there is no justice to it; great men, generous, cheerful men, who are lights to us all, they just disappear without warning, just like everyone else.

It is impossible to get any real sleep here; yes you can shut your eyes, and call that being asleep, but you never really relax; there is always the fear lingering over you that the Boche might overrun the trenches at any time, or that the perpetual thunder of the shells crashing down on the trenches might start to move in this direction, and the whistling projectiles might start slamming into the ground around you, throwing mountains of earth into the sky, or releasing their deadly cargoes of choking, blinding, gas into your lungs. Sometimes you do not take your boots off for days and days on end, and when you do, you suffer from Trench Foot, a rotting disease.

The conditions here are worse than you could imagine; when it snows, it is so

bitterly cold that quite a few of us get gangrene. But the worst thing is that generally the drainage in the trenches is awful - when the snow melts, it has nowhere to go to, the ground is already sodden, and so huge puddles build up. But they are not normal puddles; they have a consistency like treacle, and in places they are so deep that it is not unusual for injured Tommies who fall into them to drown, especially if they are trying to make their own way to a first aid post.

I expect that we will be sent back up to the front-line trenches in three or four days. The atmosphere in the trenches just before the order is received to go over the top is about the most depressing imaginable - you look around at the men who you are serving with, and you realise that this may well be the last time you see some, or all of them. The number of casualties we sustain in this action is the highest of any of the action we perform. The ground in no-man's land is more like glue than treacle, because it is churned up so often by the shells that rain down on it. You are supposed to advance calmly as a line, but the line breaks up quickly, as men fall from machine gun fire, or drop behind because they cannot move through the thick mud. Then we reach the razor wire, which is supposed to have been cut by shellfire, but hardly ever has, so you have to stop, and pick your way through it. While you are doing this, you are a sitting duck for Fritz's machine guns. If you do take the Boche's trench' then they will probably counter-attack within the hour. The whole cycle repeats endlessly.

Some of the Tommies, upon realising the sorry state of affairs that exists here, resort to getting a self inflicted "Blighty" - a wound that is serious enough to merit their return to Blighty (hence the name), but not serious enough to cause any permanent damage. You may think that such behaviour is understandable, given the circumstances, but I urge you to withhold any compassion you may feel for them, because they, like Conchies, are just cowards. Their course of action could be seen as even more cowardly than that of Conchies - They are abandoning their share of the fighting, and increasing the burden upon others, who are supposed to be their friends.

Conchies, though, are the worst without exception; they openly disapprove of the war, they claim that their consciences forbade their taking part in the war, and also from helping in the factories, because that would be encouraging the war effort. Yet they are more than happy to eat the food that has been brought to England for the nation by sailors who risked life and limb to bring the food to them from abroad past the Boche and their mines, and ships.

How are you and Dad getting on at home? I hear that the Zepp. raids are getting quite bad around you. All that you need to do is to pray to God; by a miracle, He has kept me safe and alive here, and if He will do that, then He will surely guard you if you ask him to.

We were all so misguided and naive to believe that the war would be over as quickly as by Christmas, but I think that this war cannot go on for much longer; we are gradually pushing Fritz back, and we have been told that they have been taking far worse casualties than we have. I think that the Boche will get fed up of this war before we do.

Pray to God that He should keep me safe here until the Boche admit defeat, and I will pray that you and Dad are kept safe from the Zepp. raids.

Lots of love,

----- END SECOND LETTER

Dear Mum,

I am still in the St. Mary's Nursing Home in Broadstairs. They say that I have almost completely recovered from the trauma, and I should be able to leave this place within the next two months. I think that I should be impatient to leave, but being here gives me a lot of time to think - do I really have that much to leave for? I know that I will always have you and Dad, but have I really returned to "A Land Fit for Heroes", as had been promised by the politicians?

The country to which we have returned seems to be an entirely different one to the one that we left - when we left, the country was full of enthusiasm, we were encouraged to enlist - indeed, anyone who did not enlist for service was made into a pariah. The country to which I have returned is recession-hit, and scarred by battle. No-one here can even start to understand the loss experienced by all of the Tommies who fought. That is not their fault, it is impossible to understand how it feels to watch your best friends dying one by one, and being totally unable to prevent it, or the fear that the next attack of the Boche might be the one where a bullet hits you in the head, that that you might not make it back from the next offensive, or that maybe you won't be killed but just be left stranded in no-man's land, with one of your legs blown off, that the next shell might explode on you. That this moment might be your last.

Very few realise that the scars carried by Tommies are not just those from amputations, but also from the things that we saw, and heard. The continuous drumming of the deluge of shells that continued for four years has sent large numbers of Tommies mad. The evil shells that spewed mustard gas into our trenches will be remembered for ever by those who saw them and their effects. Men who are in this nursing home still complain that the pernicious gas has caused them permanent damage, they say that their hearing has been impaired, or their eyesight, or their breathing.

What am I supposed to do upon being discharged? I have been trained only in how to kill, but I couldn't stand up to a life in the army. I have killed enough people for one lifetime. What kind of job can I get? I couldn't go and study books now, not after what I have seen and done.

For four years, I have lived close to all of the friends I had in the world; the friends changed, but the camaraderie was always the same - now I have no-one in the world apart from you.

The loss is not just my own. The country has been robbed of an entire generation of young men, and what have we accomplished, in return for this great loss? We are called the winners, but what does that mean? Have we actually won anything? It feels as though we have been betrayed, not just by the politicians, but by everyone.

Yours,

