



Dear Diary,

Christmas night and all is quiet and still. It's been a very peculiar day. Whilst we as officers had been told to ensure it was a normal day and attacks continued going to plan, the lads had other ideas.

Turns out one of them had somehow spoken to a Jerry yesterday and arranged a game of football for today. All very odd. First there were Christmas carols back and forth – they sang some Fritz version of Silent Night, which we joined in with and then gave them God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen (some of the lads joked that they'd like them to rest for ever, but it was generally good natured). There were a few more songs and then it all went a bit quiet.

When the whistles sounded, we all tensed up; partly expecting them to come over the top, but it turns out this was the signal for the football game. The lads had a good knock about and came back quite cheerful. I got a food package from home, so I've shared that out with my squad. I also got a pair of lovely hand knitted fingerless gloves from Anna, with a flap to cover the fingers when you don't need them. I didn't have much to send her obviously, but I hope she likes the little bird I whittled for her.

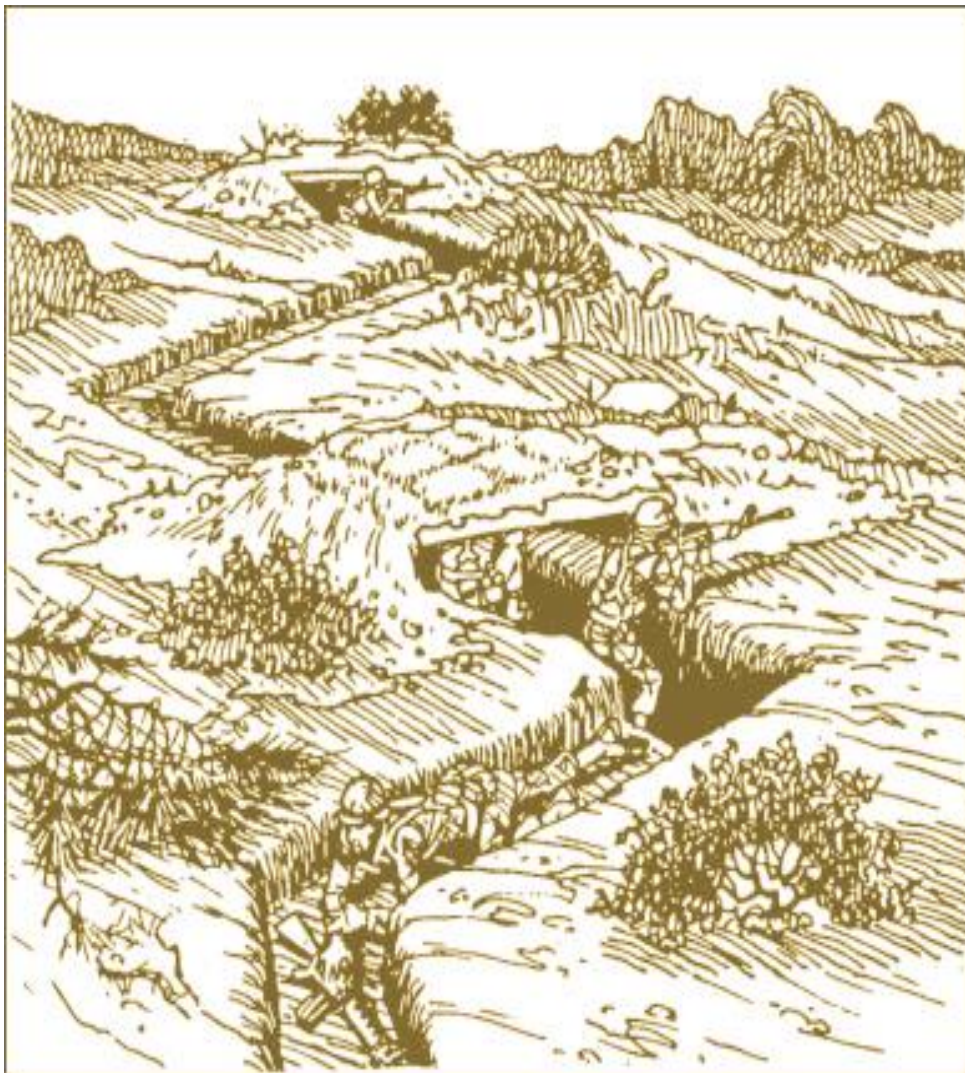


Dear diary,

All going spiffingly here. Only a few rats and the tins of salted meat have not sprung any leaks.

Have met a great bloke called Lieutenant Nicholas Wilson, another West Country lad. Get on like a house on fire. Sgt Hammond says we could be brothers. I can't really see it myself.

The trenches are dryish; we haven't gone anywhere for ages and we're able to make ourselves quite comfortable here.



Dear Diary,

Poor Hector bought it today. We were out exploring in no man's land, to see what was going on and the stupid bugger couldn't see over a lump of rock, so he stood up and a sniper got him in the neck.

Dear Diary,

My boots are rotting away (possibly along with my feet, it's difficult to check). It's so wet here all of the time, we never really seem to get a chance to dry them out. I've filled in a requisition form for a new set, but goodness knows how long it's going to take for them to arrive, or even if they'll be the right size when they get here.

Trenchers Feet

Them trenchers feet with knees knelt,

his brown eyes of soil washes away,

soldiers some ran, some they felt,

grass fields, or graveyards gray.

The trenches deep, like pits some fell,

stands there, wears the blood of war,

he cries endless fear as bullets yell,

knows of years of pain, he swore.

Dear Diary,

The gas attacks have started with a vengeance now. We aren't be more than a couple of paces away from our gas masks at any time, even if just going to the privy.

Boris was sat in there yesterday when an attack came. He's all blistered now and constantly sat in the privy; he's given him the shits, along with a vomiting episode. He was caught in an attack before and that seems to make people experience worse symptoms when they get it again.

Song Bird

It sings melodiously
high up on the tree, its roice
fills the air with nostalgia.
Memories from yesterdays
when we thought we knew it all
and frolicked to harmonies
played out by hundreds of them.
The sounds of orchestral bliss,
that followed us to the ground
where we would lie on the grass
dreaming of what they could do
with those calls of emotion.
Then they would fly away fast,
in mass movement together
in an extraordinary
escape from the whistler
who thought they might
understand.
Perhaps they did; flew away
just to tell the other birds

what the girl wanted to say:
that she loved their songs always,
and wanted them just to stay.
But then the sun would go down,
and we would run home to eat
forgetting about the one
who stayed to sing a lonesome
melody for the girl who
understood what true love was:
it was you and me in dreams
from the future or the past.
We knew the birds and the bees
would lead us to each other
someday, sending us love songs.
That's what I imagine now,
with the solitary bird
high up on its lonely perch,
just waiting for its love mate.
Like I waited for you
even before I knew that
you were calling for me too.

Diary Diary.

Poor Pegasus was lost yesterday. He went down in the mud and broke a leg and we had to shoot him. Such a kind and gentle horse, no officer could ask for anything more. He didn't deserve to be in this war at all. Lets hope he's galloping around happily up in hearen now. That's a nice thing to beliere and makes me feel better about the whole dreadful business.



Dear diary,

We had to shoot a deserter today, which was a shattering experience, both for those in the firing squad and for those of us who had to command them to do it. I tried my best to be a rock; talking to all those lads in the squad and keeping their spirits up.

Nicholas made sure the rest of the lads were there to watch and understood that there were severe consequences and that could be them if they did the same. I think they all now understand how serious these things are.

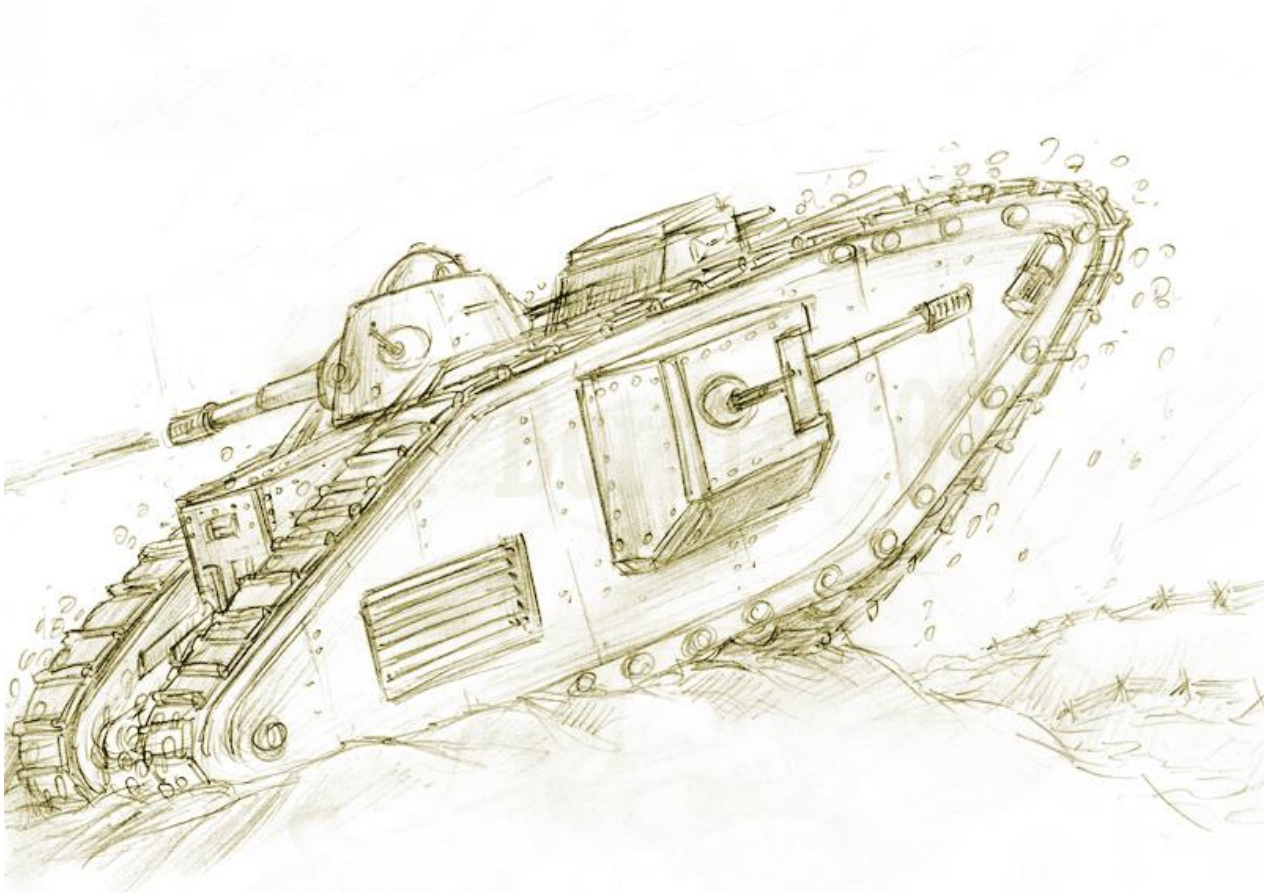
When war begins

When war begins
Nobody thinks about the ending
And the thousands who
Will be affected...
Displaced
Or
Dismembered.

Instead,
Those responsible
Blindly attack
Beating their chests,
Banging their drums,
Hoping
For
Justice.

Everyone
Suffers in the end,
And we promise
to learn from our mistakes.
Years go by,
Amnesia strikes again,
And we conveniently
Forget our promise
To humanity.

It begins again
Just like before,
And ends without resolve.
The world is again
Connected only
By the communal
Tears that fall.



Dear Diary,

I've just seen some prototypes for our latest armoured vehicles. They terrify the horses, but they seem to cut through the mud pretty well. They can only go about 50 feet before breaking down though, so I think they have a long way to go at the service of the Tommy. They are magnificent feats of engineering.

Dear Diary,

Lovely letter from Anna. She's a bit down; I can tell from the tone, but she's doing her very best to keep her spirits up. She writes with all the gossip from back home in Dulverton and what the old ladies are getting up to. I can't wait to get back to her.

When I get home on leave, I'll ask

Raymond if he minds if I give her grandmamma's ring as an engagement ring. I'm sure he won't mind. He's got mother's anyway. If I ask her as soon as I get home, we may even get the wedding in St Nicholas's before I have to leave again. I can't wait.



Dear Diary,

Saw the most beautiful display of flying by a lark this morning, which along with its glorious song really lifted the spirit. I could have been back standing at the top of Andrew's Hill with Anna and watching them fly about the corn fields.



Dear Diary,

Gas attack again. I've got this prickly rash on the skin around my neck and wrists, where it got in, but I'm not doing too badly. I did have a very annoying experience where the visor kept fogging, so I spent most of the attack wandering around blind. Nicholas said he had the same problem. We're got a toolkit, I'll see if we can sort it out.



