THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH / JUNE 1 2014

The Telegraph INSIDE THE

Sunday, June 1, 2014

FIRST WORLD WAR

PART TEN: TOMMY'S WAR

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WELCOME

THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH / JUNE 1 2014



ne abiding image of the First World War is, for many, the trenches – a temporary solution that turned into something far more permanent once it was clear the war wasn't going to end any time soon.

In this issue, we look at what life was like in those labyrinthine trenches stretching thousands of miles along the Western Front. We also consider the role played by the similarly complex war underground, where armies of tunnellers burrowed beneath enemy lines and risked being gassed, shot or buried alive.

Given the horrors of trench life, just what made men remain devoted to the cause? Desertion and mutiny were surprisingly rare, so Professor Jonathan Boff asks what kept soldiers' morale and motivation alive when so many around them were dying. One answer, suggests the IWM's Anthony Richards in his feature on communication and censorship, was letters to and from loved ones back home – a way to ease the painful separation and make sense of the chaos.

We also bring you our regular features on wartime art, poetry, readers' letters and Michael Ashcroft's profile of a VC hero.

Zoe Dare Hall Series editor



⋙ THE TRENCHES

They were often like hell on Earth, sodden and deadly, but they weren't new to warfare. Nigel Jones P4-5

>>> WAR IN WORDS

Correspondence and censorship on the Western Front. And a touching letter from Private Ted King. Nigel Steel

>>> ART UNDER FIRE

How CRW Nevinson's painting Paths of Glory Richard Slocombe

>>> BOY HERO George Peachment was

just 18 when his actions won him the VC. Michael Ashcroft

>> TUNNEL VISION Presented with a static

front and formidable defences, the war went underground.

Patrick Bishop

■→ IN IT TOGETHER It was remarkable that, despite daily facing death or mutilation, the men

kept on fighting. Jonathan Boff P12-13

POST BOX

Your letters describing the courage, humour and sacrifice of loved ones.

DIGITAL MEMORIES

IWM's Lives of the First World War will become the permanent digital memorial to more than eight million men and women, IWM is urging everyone to discover their First World War connections and remember and share these with the rest of the world online at livesofthefirstworldwar

Front cover: men of the Border Regiment in shallow dugouts in

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Inside the First World War, a 12-part series, is sponsored by Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC, an international businessman, philanthropist and military historian. Lord Ashcroft is sponsoring the monthly supplements because he wants to promote a greater understanding of the

to remember those who gave their lives in the conflict. Lord Ashcroft has established himself as a

champion of bravery. building up the world's largest collection of Victoria Crosses (VCs), Britain and the Commonwealth's most prestigious award for courage in the face of the enemy. He has also written four books on bravery: Victoria Cross Heroes, Special Forces

Heroes, George Cross Heroes and Heroes of the Skies. In each of the Ashcroft tells the

Lord Ashcroft

courage not in the face of the enemy. He currently owns 14 GCs. Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collections are on display in a gallery that bears his name at IWM London. along with VCs and GCs in the care of the museum. The gallery, built with a £5 million donation from Lord Ashcroft, was

prestigious award for

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of pounds to charities and good causes. He founded

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First World War and

12 supplements, Lord incredible stories behind First World War VCs from his collection.

purchased his first VC in 1986 and currently owns more than 180 of the decorations. Three years ago, he began collecting George Crosses (GCs), Britain and the Commonwealth's most

for the past four decades, launching, buying, building and selling companies both private and public -

in Britain and overseas. He is a former Treasurer and Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party. In September 2012, he was appointed a member of the Privy Council and was made the Government's Special Representative for Veterans' Transition. He is Treasurer of the

Union (IDU) and one of Britain's leading experts on polling. Lord Ashcroft has donated several millions

Crimestoppers (then the Community Action Trust) He is the founder of

University. His numerous

•For information about the Lord Ashcroft Gallery visit iwm.org.uk/heroes. For information on Lord Ashcroft, visit lordashcroft.com Follow

Living and dying in the trenches

Trench warfare reached new levels OF SOPHISTICATION IN THE FIRST WORLD War, as **Nigel Jones** explains

n 1914, trench warfare was nothing new. Conducted at least since biblical times, static fortified warfare had been a regular feature of conflict since the Middle Ages. By the 17th century, with the development of musketry and artillery, "digging in" was the commonest method of avoiding enemy

firepower, and trench lines were the standard way of conducting a siege.

The defensive lines of Torres Vedras, dug by the British in Portugal to deny Napoleon victory in the Peninsular War, were again used by the British in the siege of Sebastopol in the Crimea, and by both sides in the American Civil War. By the end of the 19th century – especially after the invention of the machine gun – increasingly sophisticated trenches were the usual way of going to ground to avoid the lethal storms of shot and shell sweeping the battlefield.

When the German advance across France was halted and flung back in the early

autumn of 1914, both sides reached for spade and pick. The first trenches were crude and shallow and – at least in the waterlogged ground around Ypres in the north – barely more than scrapes in the boggy ground with sandbag breastworks. By Christmas, however, when the enemies emerged from their trenches to fraternise in the contested no-man's-land, the trench lines had taken on an air of

permanence and sophisticated and complex systems had developed. Officially trenches should be seven feet deep, though in practice in wet ground they were shallower, with piled sandbags making them appear deeper.

The Germans had adopted an offensive strategy against the Russians in the East

in the hope of a speedy victory, and a more defensive policy on the Western Front. Consequently, their trenches tended to be deep, strong and solidly built. They had redoubts lined with timber and even concrete, offering their troops protection from

artillery bombardment – as before the British offensive on the Somme in 1916.

The trench systems of both sides resembled a spider's web, with the killing zone strip of no-man's-land - in places as little as 50 yards wide, but in swampy areas up to half a mile – running between them. By the end of 1914, the rival trench lines snaked from the Belgian coast near Nieuport to the Franco-Swiss border at Belfort, a vast highway of death and devastation 450 miles long and manned by millions of men intent on annihilating each other. By the war's end, the labyrinth of British trenches totalled an astonishing 12,000 miles.

Seen from above in aerial photography, the trenches looked like the castellated battlements of medieval castles, thanks to the block-like zigzagging impediments dug at regular intervals to shield soldiers from shell blasts and to prevent an enemy getting into the trenches from having clear fields of fire on either side.

Although very high casualties only occurred in major battles such as the Somme and Passchendaele, there was always a steady rate of attrition from sniper fire and random shells in the trenches. In the three month "quiet period" that he commanded the 6th Battalion, Royal Scots Fusiliers, at Ploegsteert Wood in Belgium early in 1916, for example, Winston Churchill's unit lost 15 men killed and

123 wounded – a casualty rate of 20 per cent.

British systems evolved a front line of deep, lightly-manned trenches protected by belts of barbed wire and parapets of sandbags. A hundred yards behind this was a second line, the support trench, where men spent most time, the officers in dugouts, their men in "funk-holes" cut into the sides of the trenches. Troops gathered in these trenches before attacks. Up to 300 yards further back lay a third line of defence, the reserve trench, supposed to be a last line of defence if the front and reserve trenches were overwhelmed by the enemy.

Thin alleys called communication trenches ran laterally through the three



lines. The communication trenches were a constant hive of activity, with messages being run to and from the front lines, returning battalions being relieved or new ones going "up the line", wounded evacuated, mail and newspapers delivered, and

food and drink or fresh rolls of barbed wire being brought to the front.

But enemy artillery could reach far behind the front lines into the communication trenches, as 2nd Lt Lionel Sotheby of the 2nd Black Watch discovered in 1915 during the battle of Aubers Ridge: "Shrapnel was sweeping the 500 yards of communication rampart leading up to the front line. A solid wall of shells seemed to be everywhere... Meanwhile, heavy German rifle fire was sweeping overhead so I kept under the parapet. It seemed impossible to me that we could ever reach the front line. We rushed along the communication ridge at awful speed. The wounded were crawling about in the passage and the dead were innumerable.

Troops were supposed to spend roughly equal amounts of time rotating between the front lines, in support, reserve or resting miles to the rear, spending up to a week in each sector. In practice, these proved difficult to enforce, especially during

periods of hard combat, and many soldiers spent weeks in the combat zone.

Officers were given more leave than the men (though junior subalterns paid for the privilege by having a higher chance of being killed or wounded). From the front lines, Blighty could seem tantalisingly close. It was possible for an officer to receive his ticket of leave at dawn in the trenches and to be watching a popular show such as Chu Chin Chow in London that same evening.

Daily routine in the trenches between major battles varied enormously but typically each day began and ended with "stand to", when troops would man the front lines with helmets on and bayonets fixed in preparation for an attack. If no attack materialised, the men would be "stood down" and served food.

Food in the trenches would have horrified Jamie Oliver. The mouth-watering dishes enjoyed included sandbag duff (a stodge cooked in sandbags), cold bully beef, Maconochie's (a popular brand of stew) and bacon, which could be quickly fried and made little telltale smoke to attract enemy fire. Tea was often served from tins which had contained fuel and tasted accordingly. Alcohol was generally reserved for officers' whiskies, though a rum ration – a generous tot of grog to give

Dutch courage – was served to men about to go over the top in an attack.

The time between dawn and dusk was filled with a multiplicity of tasks to keep men awake. These could include repairing shell-damaged trenches or draining flooded ones, emptying latrines, writing letters or cleaning kit. At night, duties included mending or laying barbed wire or making raids to take prisoners.

Though soldiers were supposed to maintain a constant posture of alertness and

"hate" towards the enemy, in quiet sectors of the front an unofficial "live-and-let-

live" understanding sometimes developed Such local truces were observed to allow the collection of dead and wounded from noman's-land, or simply o give soldiers som

FOOD IN THE TRENCHES INCLUDED SANDBAG DUFF - A STODGE COOKED IN SANDBAGS

R&R secure in the knowledge that the enemy would not shell or attack them. The British did what they could to humanise the nightmare landscape of the trenches and create a home from home. One way of achieving this was nomenclature – baptising the trenches with familiar names such as London's Piccadilly or Dublin's Sackville Street, though trenches and landmarks in an otherwise featureless landscape could also bear more realistic names such as Dead Man's Alley, Dead Cow Farm or Hellfire Corner. In their dugouts, officers tried to reproduce elements of clubland, with gramophones churning out ragtime

tunes, magazine photos stuck to the mud walls, and orderlies serving whisky.

During the offensives of Loos, the Somme and Arras, British soldiers abandoned the dubious safety of the trenches to advance across the fire-swept no-man's-land. the dubious safety of the trenches to advance across the fire-swept no-man's-land. At the third battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) in 1917, they discovered not enemy trenches but – because artillery had destroyed drainage ditches and turned the boggy battlefield into a quagmire of quicksand-like mud – a network of concrete pill-boxes and bunkers laced together with barbed wire. Men were dragged to slow deaths in the mire or hung, wounded and screaming, on the wire.

Lt Richard Dixon of the 14th Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery, witnessed the carnage: "All around us lay the dead, both friend and foe, half-in and half out of the water-logged shell holes. Their hands and boots stuck out at us from the mud. Their rotting faces stared blindly at us from coverlets of mud. Their decaying

Their rotting faces stared blindly at us from coverlets of mud. Their decaying buttocks heaved themselves obscenely from the filth with which the shell burst had covered them. Skulls grinned at us. All around stank unbelievably. These corpses were never buried for it was impossible for us to retrieve them. They had lain, many of them, for weeks and months; they would lie and rot and disintegrate foully into the muck until they were an inescapable part of it to manure the harvests of a future peacetime Belgium. Horror was everywhere."

That, all too often, was the reality that the nostalgic names of Piccadilly and

Leicester Square tried but failed to erase.

• Nigel Jones is author of The War Walk: A Journey Along the Western Front and Peace and War: Britain in 1914. He directs historicaltrips.com

A TOUCH OF HOME Trenches were often given familiar names as a way of humanising the nightmare landscape that was the soldiers' day-to-

A TRENCH DICTIONARY

ALLEYMAN

A German (from the

BILLET

⇒ Place of rest, safety

BLIGHTY Britain, home (from the Hindustani).

BLIGHTY ONE A wound sufficiently

serious enough for the recipient to be sent home.

BOMBERS

Soldiers armed with grenades in trench raids

BREASTWORK Trench defences

CRUMP The noise of ar exploding shell.



DUCKBOARD

>> Wooden slats on the trench floor.

DUGOUT >>> Shelter dug beneath trenches; usually reserved for officers. Also soldier's slang for retired officers

FATIGUES

cooking, cleaning or mending defences.

FIRESTEP >> Knee-level ledge in frontline trench on which soldiers stood.

FIVE-NINES A type of shell.

HUN



the Kaiser's pre-war comparison of his soldiers to Attila's Huns).

JACK JOHNSON A type of shell emitting black smoke named in honour of the black American world boxing champion.

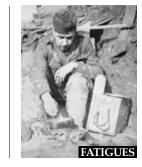
LAST POST Bugle call signalling

the day's end. Also played at military funerals and

LOOPHOLE >>> Hole to fire at or observe the enemy

PARADOS >>> The rear of a trench

PARAPET



SALIENT A bulge in the front line, vulnerable to flank attack.

SAP

A short observation trench protruding into noman's-land and at right-

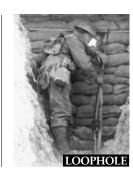
SHELL SHOCK

slang or euphemism fo combat stress.

SHRAPNEL Small projectiles flung from an exploding shell

WHIZZ-BANGS

WIPERS ⇒ British Tommv's slang



THE IMPORTANCE OF LETTERS

Keeping the Home Front posted

CORRESPONDENCE AND CENSORSHIP DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR, BY ANTHONY RICHARDS

ach week, more than 12 million letters were delivered to soldiers during the First World War, providing opportunities to exchange news with family and friends, request parcels and confirm that they were still in one piece. As the main method of communicating with home, servicemen placed huge importance on correspondence which, from our modern perspective, can reveal the writer's thoughts, beliefs and experiences while providing an immediacy often lacking in diaries or memoirs. Letters therefore remain a vital source for understanding the First World War.

Frederick Wade worked as a mining engineer in South Africa at the outbreak of war but decided, against his mother's wishes, to enlist back in England. He broke the news to her in a letter.

"The news I'm going to tell you will probably upset you at first," wrote Frederick, "but afterwards I hope you will get used to it. I'm really going to the front this time, and what is more I'm going to England with my chum to enlist there. I think the spirit of adventure in my case is more the lure than patriotism; perhaps it's a mixture of the two. I've had to sit still

and watch most of my pals go off, and it is not a pleasant sensation, Mother dear, to feel that your friends think you wanting in grit to embark on such an undertaking. I hope that you will become reconciled to the idea and that you will be able to say that you are proud to have a son as a volunteer in His Majesty's army."

While some soldiers enjoyed the opportunity to

while some solders enjoyed the opportunity to leave home and visit foreign lands, for others the excitement was tainted by separation from wives, sweethearts or children. Private Frank Haynes wrote to his wife Emily, who was at home caring for their infant son: "I can just imagine Harry writing to his Daddy and you egging him on. The pages are not wasted, dear, as it always brings you both so near to me in my mind... I smiled when I read of your feelings when you see other couples making a fuss of each other, but never mind, dear, our turn will come again and we shall have the satisfaction of knowing that it was our country's welfare that caused our temporary separation."

Many soldiers were young men of limited life experience who had seldom been away from home. The father of Private Ralph Honour, RAMC, expressed

a particular worry over his son's financial acumen: "We are most anxious for you to save as much money as you can for you will surely need it later on. We know something about the temptations of soldiers and whatever you do be careful to avoid the temptation to play for money as so many soldiers do, there is only one name for it and that is gambling and it always leads to disaster. Even if it did not, the men who indulge in it are as a rule unscrupulous and often crafty and bound by hook or crook to win in the long run."

Censorship of soldiers' letters was undertaken by regimental officers. Its main purpose was to avoid mention of operational details that might prove of value to the enemy. Forbidden information included references to locations, numbers of troops, criticism of superiors and even the weather (which might indicate the state of the trenches). However, letters were an important way to maintain morale and freedom of expression was widely indulged. In a letter to his sister, Lieutenant Henry Brundle reflected: "Censoring is interesting at first but it rapidly becomes boring; no letter is allowed to leave without it having been read by an officer and franked

by him on the envelope; fortunately my platoon do not write very long letters though they write very LETTERS often. A typical letter starts like this. 'My Dear Father and Mother, Ellen and Mary, I take pleasure in WERE AN writing these few lines hoping that you are in the pink as it leaves me at present.' Many of the men talk **IMPORTANT** awful drivel about cannon balls flying around them, but as a general rule they are short and rather formal WAY OF letters... The men always write very extravagantly after a spell in the front line – 'All the ravines were **MAINTAINING** full of dead Germans and Bulgars', 'It was absolute **MORALE** Hell!', 'I said more prayers then than at all of the Church parades I've attended'."

To avoid censorship, soldiers could use a "green envelope" in which the writer would seal his letter and confirm that "the contents refer to nothing but private and family matters". While the letter was still liable to be checked, this method encouraged soldiers to write more personal communications which, invariably, contained military details that might otherwise have been suppressed.

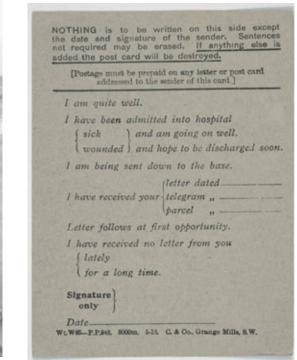
Another option was the Field Service Postcard, a pre-printed card with optional text which could be deleted as appropriate to transmit basic information

("I am well, letter to follow") in a quick and simple way. Captain Billie Nevill, who later found fame for kicking a football ahead of the advance on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, confirmed the importance of such postcards: "It's a wonderful thing, a Field Service Postcard. It costs nothing, takes no time, and gives no mental energy. It is in fact the essence of laziness, the ideal of the wordless correspondent and the bored nephew alike. From it may spring a parcel, a letter, anything!"

For Billie and others who were never to return from the battlefields, their final letters would be regarded by loved ones as a poignant testimony of their sacrifice and treasured as their last written expression. The constant threat of death encouraged soldiers to be more honest and open than might normally have been the case when writing home and the words that they have left us can be treasured as a valuable historical record of the First World War.

JUST A FEW WORDS

From far left: Royal Horse Artillery gunners writing letters; military post office handing out the mail; the Field Service Postcard









FROM IWM'S ARCHIVE - LETTERS HOME

I am not much of a letter writer...

MILLIONS OF LETTERS WERE SENT BACK AND FORTH EVERY WEEK OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR FROM THE TRENCHES TO



This letter, written by Edward (Ted) King to his sister Lizzie, shows that even when only loosely connected, simple words can still release a powerful cry of anguish over the wretchedness of life at the front.

Ted King was a private in the 2nd Battalion, the Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment who had, it would appear, served in the South African War and as a reservist been recalled to the colours in 1914. This is a direct transcription of what he wrote, including its mis-spellings and its lack of punctuation or organisation.

Lızzıe

You mush Excuse not riting before as we get very little time for any think we are at the extreme front not many yards from enemy lines you may have read in the papers about that bayonet charge we had my company leading it a pleasher to write this letter after that charge it was one mass of fire both gun and rifle fire we lost evey it was hot as for Fred he may be in a Neraby he cant be in front to write every week as for writing you don't get much heart to write things are always busy day and night when you get a few weeks in the trenches you get crippled up in health besize if you get a sheet of paper to right on it get spoilt in you pockets I had to borrod three pieces of pencel to write these few lines

I ham sending you a box Princess Mary compleat as a present for you it been carry many a time in the trenches so I hope you will look fter it we get plenty of lotobacco to smoke so I don't want you to sent any think I spent my Xmas holiday in the trenches I had a piece of pudding so I must not grumble I ham sent thise few lines in the box becouse I cant borrow a enelope we shall get some paper seleply to us shortly so don't trouble because I never get it out hear besize I not much of a letter riter I fell better not writing becouse you must not speak the truth fore they read them all before you get them I like to expose the lies those papers print a home you are not dry fore days I wish you would not trubble about letters I should fell much better as I find I get enouth to look after myself for some mounth to come

Ted

HOMES ACROSS THE WORLD. SOME, THOUGH CLUMSY AND INEPTLY WRITTEN, WERE TOUCHINGLY PROFOUND

With a bit of help, Ted King's deep, underlying emotions can flow out more easily. Given the clear difficulty that he had in expressing himself, the fact that he wrote six heartfelt pages to his sister is testament to how important it was to him to tell her what was going on.

Lizzie

You must excuse [me] not writing before, as we get very little time for anything. We are at the extreme front, not many yards from [the] enemy lines. You may have read in the papers about that bayonet charge we had. My company [was] leading. It [is] a pleasure to write this letter after that charge. It was one mass of fire, both gun and rifle fire. We lost heavy. It was hot. As for Fred, he may be nearby. He can't be in [the] front to write every week. As for writing, you don't get much heart to write [as] things are always busy day and night. When you get a few weeks in the trenches, you get crippled up in health. Besides, if you get a sheet of paper to write on, it gets spoilt in your pockets. I had to borrow three pieces of pencil to write these few lines.

I am sending you a complete Princess Mary's box as a present for you. It [has] been carried many a time in the trenches. So I hope you will look after it. We get plenty of tobacco to smoke, so I don't want you to send anything. I spent my Xmas holiday in the trenches. I had a piece of pudding, so I must not grumble. I am sending these few lines in the box because I can't borrow an envelope. We shall get some paper supplied to us shortly, so don't trouble because I never get it out here. Besides, I [am] not much of a letter writer. I feel better not writing because you must not speak the truth, as they read them all before you get them. I'd like to expose the lies those papers print at home. You are not dry for days. I wish you would not trouble about letters. I should feel much better as I find I [will have] enough to look after myself for some months to come.

• Commentary by Nigel Steel, IWM's principal historian for the First World War Centenary Programme

The Princess Mary's

gift box and the letter it

contained is now in IWM's

archive. It is unclear when

Ted King wrote his lette

as, not surprisingly, it has

no date. It must have been

after Christmas 1914 but

before January 20, 1915

killed in action. He has no

known grave but is now

commemorated on the

Belaium.

Ploegsteert Memorial in

as on that day King was

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ART OF WAR



CRW Nevinson: Paths of Glory

In March 1918 an art exhibition called War opened in London's Leicester Galleries. Visitors from all backgrounds flocked to see a series of sombre canvases of deluged landscapes and battle-weary British soldiers. However, one painting stood out from the rest, its grim subject of dead British troops partially obscured by a strip of brown paper inscribed "CENSORED". This painting was entitled *Paths of Glory* and its artist was a young avant-garde painter and former medical orderly called Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson.

Paths of Glory emerged from a frenetically creative eight-month period beginning with Nevinson's appointment as an official artist in June 1917. For all its horror, it was – and remains – an enigmatic painting. Nevinson was reticent about its intent, especially its title, derived from Thomas Gray's Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard, which included the line: "The paths of glory lead but to the grave". So for some commentators, the painting is a straightforward lament for the British dead of the First World War that captures the war-weariness pervading Britain at the time.

Others detect greater cynicism. The use of Gray's *Elegy* meant ironically to deny notions of heroic death in battle. There is even the suggestion of a self-portrait in the painting;

that for all Nevinson's wartime notoriety, but for a change in the conscription rules, he too could meet the same fate as those denicted.

Whatever the underlying sentiment, *Paths of Glory* caused alarm to the War Office censor, Major A N Lee. He promptly banned it, reasoning that "representations of the dead have an ill effect at home".

Nevertheless, Nevinson expected a last-minute reprieve for Paths of Glory and included it in his official solo exhibition. Yet as he recounted, "when permission was finally refused, I pasted brown paper over it rather than leave a hole on the wall, and wrote 'censored' across it".

It was typical of Nevinson, who had already suggested he

publicise the exhibition by flying over London showering handbills. The semi-obscured painting caused an immediate press furore. The War Office took a dim view and severely admonished Nevinson for his "stunt".

Not that this particularly mattered to him; the public had flocked to see *Paths of Glory* and Nevinson gleefully reported "a record-breaking attendance".

• Richard Slocombe, senior art curator, IWM

 Paths of Glory will feature in IWM's Truth and Memory: First World War Art exhibition, which will open on July 19, along with the new First World War Galleries. www.iwm.org.uk

WAR POEM

Forever an artist and poet: Isaac Rosenberg's 'Louse Hunting'

or 21 gruelling months from June 3, 1916, until his death near Arras on April 1, 1918, 22311 Private Isaac Rosenberg served in France and, during that time, wrote some of the most profound and enduring poetry of the First World War. What marks Rosenberg out from other well-educated, middle-class writers is that he was a working-class Jew from the East End of London. A noted artist as well as a writer, Rosenberg was in South Africa when war broke out.

He returned to Britain in March, 1915, and although despising the idea of fighting, enlisted the following November. By April, 1916, he was in the 11th Battalion, King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment, one of the new "Bantam" battalions for shorter men less than 5ft 2ins tall.

Louse Hunting

AND RAGING LIMBS

Nudes – Stark aglisten

Rosenberg arrived at the front in summer 1916. He was never a good soldier. Unconventional and impractical, he found life in the Army hard and struggled with the physical privations of living in the open. He immediately began to write about his situation, investing his poetry with a different perspective from other mainly officer poets. Subjects such as battling with lice, as in this poem, were something he lived with daily.

In February 1918, Rosenberg was sent to the 1st Battalion,

In February 1918, Rosenberg was sent to the 1st Battalion, King's Own Royal Lancasters near Gavrelle. When the German spring offensive began on March 21, the battalion fell back and, 10 days later, Rosenberg was killed at Fampoux. He is buried in Bailleul Road East British Cemetery, St Laurent-Blagny. His headstone reads simply "Artist & Poet".

That the scene being evoked is part of Rosenberg's own experience is made clear through his repeated use of "we and "our". To fellow poet and dramatist . Gordon Bottomley, soon after arriving in France he wrote: "Last night we had a funny hunt fo fleas. All stripped by candlelight some Scots dancing over the candle & burning the fleas, & the funniest, drollest and dirtiest scenes of conversation ever imagined."

From the beginning of

his service, Rosenberg made it clear he

Turning away from the regular verse style he

had already tried, he

more dynamic form to reflect the urgency and

energy of this moment

"Rosenberg's verse is

at its best when, as here, his artistic vision

is subsumed into his

His biographer, Jean

Moorcroft Wilson,

observed that

poetic one".

intended to use his

experiences as inspiration for his work.

WITH OATHS
GODHEAD MIGHT SHRINK AT, BUT NOT THE LICE.
AND SOON THE SHIRT WAS AFLARE

WHIRL OVER THE FLOOR ONE FIRE,

YON SOLDER TORE FROM HIS THROAT

FOR A SHIRT VERMINOUSLY BUSY

YELLING IN LURID GLEE. GRINNING FACES OF FIENDS

OVER THE CANDLE HE'D LIT WHILE WE LAY.

THEN WE ALL SPRUNG UP AND STRIPT TO HUNT THE VERMIN BROOD.

SOON LIKE A DEMONS' PANTOMIME +

THE PLACE WAS RAGING.

SEE THE SILHOUETTES AGAPE,

SEE THE GIBBERING SHADOWS

MIXED WITH THE BATTLED ARMS ON THE WALL.

SEE GARGANTUAN HOOKED FINGERS

Dug in supreme flesh
To smutch the supreme littleness.

SEE THE MERRY LIMBS IN HOT HIGHLAND FLING

BECAUSE SOME WIZARD VERMIN

CHARMED FROM THE QUIET THIS REVEL

When our ears were half lulled

By the dark music +

BLOWN FROM SLEEP'S TRUMPET. +---

In February, 1917, Rosenberg sent Bottomley a drawing of a louse hunt He also wrote a conventional rhyming poem called The *Immortals* describing how he had killed lice "till all my strength was gone". In reply Bottomley harked back to the event described in his earlier letter, saying "that would yield quite a different kind of composition, all moving and flowing lines, like a Witches' Sabbath of long slim bodies as if Botticelli had gone mad and designed a naked ballet for the Russian dancers".

and language Rosenberg powerfully evokes the violent and atavistic nature of what is happening. Yet, in the closing lines, he deftly steers the poem away from the specific to the general. The subtle mention of "dark music" and "Sleep's trumpet" ends the poem with echoes of the ubiquitous presence of death that hangs over everyone in the trenches.

Through his imagery

THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH / JUNE 1 2014 JUNE 1 2014 / THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

VC BRAVERY

'No man could have been braver...'



Private George Peachment was only 18 WHEN HIS ACTIONS WON HIM THE VC, AS MICHAEL ASHCROFT EXPLAINS

he Imperial War Museums made an extraordinary revelation last year as commemorations began to mark the 100th anniversary of the start of the Great War. It was disclosed that the youngest authenticated combatant of the conflict was a 12-year-old boy who went on to fight at the Somme. In fact, Private Sidney Lewis was only 12 years and five months when he enlisted in August, 1915, into the East Surrey Regiment.

This disclosure was quite exceptional but thousands of boys in their teens, like Lewis, lied about their age in order to enlist because, with many predicting a short conflict, they did not want to miss out on fighting for their country. Many had little or no idea of the horrors that they would encounter. Away from the protection and support of their families, many teenagers who served during the Great War were looking for a father figure to guide them. Some built up close relationships with the officers who commanded them, particularly their immediate company commanders, and this, in turn, often inspired immense loyalty on both sides.

George Peachment was not the youngest man to be awarded the Victoria Cross

(VC): that honour is shared by Andrew Fitzgibbon and Thomas Flinn, who were both just 15 years and three months old when

they respectively showed great bravery in China in 1860 and India in 1857. The exact day on which Flinn was born is not known, only the month, so it cannot be determined whether he was a few days older or younger than Fitzgibbon. Nevertheless, Peachment remains among the youngest to receive Britain and the Commonwealth's most prestigious gallantry award during the First World War, and his devotion to his company commander, Captain Guy Dubs, after the officer had been seriously wounded, was truly remarkable.

Peachment, a barber's son, was born near Bury, Lancashire, on May 5, 1897. After schooling, he became an apprentice fitter at Ashworth & Parker, and later at a second Bury firm, JH Riley. On April 19, 1915, he enlisted into the 5th Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps, falsely giving his age as 19 years and one month (he was only 17 years and 11 months old). Peachment wore his father's bowler hat to make himself look older than he was (a soldier had to be 19 to serve overseas). His military career got off to an inauspicious start when he

went absent from 7.30pm on July 2, 1915, until 8.10am on July 5, for which he was fined seven days' pay. Peachment then transferred into the 2nd Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps upon being posted to France on July 27, 1915.

On September 19, 1915, and now aged 18 years and four months, he was confined to barracks for three days for having a dirty bayonet while on parade. Yet six days later he found himself in the thick of the action on the opening day of the Battle of Loos, the largest British offensive mounted on the Western Front during 1915.

The battle had begun in earnest at 6.34am on September 25, although by then

there had already been a four-day artillery barrage of the German front line to "soften up" the enemy. However, it was also the first attack in which the British decided to employ poison gas and things did not go according to plan.

On the day there was little wind and the gas cloud, released from canisters in the British lines, remained static, hanging over the British trenches instead of drifting towards the Germans. When the men of the 2nd Battalion King's Royal Rifles and 1st Battalion Loyal North Lancs came to advance, they were forced to go into their

own gas. As a result they were soon choking and coughing in no-man's-land.

Almost immediately, two enemy machine guns which had somehow escaped damage during the artillery bombardment took a terrible toll on the advancing British soldiers. A few Tommies managed to reach the enemy's barbed-wire defences but were soon cut down by heavy fire. Unsurprisingly, the attack faltered

and soldiers were forced to take cover in shell holes and natural hollows.

At 7.30am, those few who had survived began to straggle back to their trenches although young George Peachment was not among them. Showing great bravery, instead he went to the aid of his officer who had been seriously wounded.

In the event, Dubs survived his injuries and later wrote two moving but clearly guilt-ridden letters to Peachment's mother, Mary, spelling out how courageous her





son had been both in battle and in death as he struggled to tend Dubs's wounds. Both letters are now held in my collection at the IWM. In the first, written only a month after the battle, Dubs explained: "I cannot tell you how sorry I am that your brave son was killed, but I hope it may be some little consolation to you to know how bravely he behaved and how he met his end...

"When we reached the [barbed] wire we found it absolutely untouched by our artillery fire and an almost impassable obstacle as a result. However, we had to push on, and I gave the order to try to get through and over it. Your son followed me over the wire and advanced with me about 20

yards through it till we were only about 15 yards from the German trench.

"None of the other men of the line was able to get as far and he was the only man with me. As a matter of fact I had not noticed your son was with me, but at this point a bomb hit me in the eye, blowing it and part of my face away. I fell to the ground but on sitting up, found your son kneeling beside me.

The German fire was at this time very intense, but your son was perfectly cool.

"He asked me for my field dressing and started bandaging my head quite oblivious to the fire. His first thought was to help me, and though there was a shell hole nearby where he might have got cover, he never thought of doing so. Of course the Germans were bound to see us sitting up, and one of them threw a bomb which hit your son in the chest while at the same time I received a bullet also

"Your son was beyond feeling any pain, though still alive. I tried to drag him into the shell hole and at the same time keep him from moving, but at that moment a bullet hit him in the head and killed him. After his first wound he was bound to die, in fact he was already, immediately after he received it, unconscious to any pain. I lay beside him there all day, and eventually we were both picked up in the late afternoon when the trench was taken by a flank attack.

"I can't tell you how much I admired your son's bravery and pluck. He lost his life in trying to help me and no man could have been braver than he was... I have recommended him for the VC and have heard that the Commanding Officer has seen the recommendation.

"If he gets it, it is sad to think he is not in this world to receive all the congratulations he would get, but perhaps it may be a comfort to you... Your son died the finest death that man can die, he showed the greatest gallantry a man can show; and I hope these facts may help you in your sad loss, together with the fact that he was spared all pain and suffering."

The recommendation by Dubs for Peachment's VC was approved and the *London*

Gazette detailed the baby-faced rifleman's courage when publishing his citation on November 18, 1915: "During very heavy fighting, when our front line was compelled to retire in order to reorganise, Pte. Peachment, seeing his Company Commander, Capt Dubs, lying wounded, crawled to assist him. The enemy's fire was intense, but, though there was a shell hole quite close, in which a few men had taken cover, Pte Peachment never thought of saving himself.

"He knelt in the open by his officer and tried to help him, but while doing this he was first wounded by a bomb and a minute later mortally wounded by a rifle bullet. He was one of the youngest men in his battalion, and gave this splendid example of courage and self-sacrifice."

Three days after the announcement Dubs told Mrs Peachment in his second letter that he had made George his orderly just before the battle in an attempt to prevent him having to go over the top. He was unsuccessful and confessed: "I am afraid I feel very responsible for his death, because I might have sent him home a short time before when I found out his age, only he was so keen to stay."

Peachment's posthumous VC was presented to his mother by George V at Buckingham Palace on November 29, 1916. His body

was never recovered but he is commemorated on the Loos Memorial, alongside the names of more than 20,000 British and Commonwealth soldiers who died during the battle.

I bought Peachment's gallantry and service medals at auction in 1996, 10 years after buying my first VC.

In October 2006, the residents of Bury honoured

their "forgotten soldier" at a ceremony to unveil a plaque commemorating the life of Peachment, the only Bury serviceman to be awarded the VC. I was approached by Alistair Burt, then Conservative MP for Bury North, and asked if I would allow Peachment's VC to be brought to the service.

I readily agreed and was later delighted to read a report in the *Bury Times* that the event at St Anne's Church, Tottington, Bury, had been a success. The bronze plague that was unveiled had originally been installed at Park Hills United Methodist Free Church but was later found in the back room of the Lancashire Fusiliers Museum.

The Rev Hugh Bearne, vicar of St Anne's Church told his local paper: "No one knew we had the VC and you could cut the atmosphere with a knife when the procession entered the church. When we played the traditional sunset hymn for the Army, there was not a dry eye in the church. We are proud and honoured to have this monument in our church."

HEROIC STORIES Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a Tory peer, businessman philanthropist and author. The story of George Peachment's VC appears in his book, Victoria Cross Heroes. For more information, visit: victoriacrossheroes. com. Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collection is on display at IWM. London. You can discover more at iwm.org.uk/heroes. For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, visit: lordashcroft.com. Follow him on Twitter:

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Lord Ashcroft

The war underground

WHEN PROGRESS WAS MINIMAL ABOVE GROUND, THE ARMY STARTED DIGGING, AS PATRICK BISHOP EXPLAINS

the close of autumn 1914, the war on the Vestern Front had frozen into a deadly asis. Neither side's soldiers could go orward. Instead, they headed down.

For a few years, small armies of hardy

determined men burrowed into the clay, sand, gravel and chalk of Flanders, driving tunnels under their enemy's lines. They packed explosives into tamped chambers, sometimes in massive quantities, which when detonated sent huge geysers of earth, trenchworks and human body parts spouting hundreds of feet skywards.

As with most of the war effort, all the ingenuity

and the expenditure in resources and lives brought few positive results. That did not stop the frantic activities of the tunnellers, whose underground war added an extra dimension of horror to the soldiers' experience.

The Germans were the first to attack from below, in the Ypres salient early in 1915. The British responded by expanding tunnelling companies to retaliate, soon out-digging their rivals. Much of the drive was provided by John Norton-Griffiths, "Empire Jack", an abrasive, hyperactive Tory MP, engineer and amateur soldier who recruited "clay kickers" from British mines for handsome pay and poached skilled underground workers from the Army ranks.

Tunnelling seemed to offer the chance of winning a brief tactical advantage that could help break the paralysis at the front. The idea was that in the confusion following a big blast, troops could rush forward and occupy the smoking crater. It held particular attractions in the flat Ypres sector, where possession of the 200ft-high Messines Ridge gave the German occupiers oversight of the British lines.

The tunnellers' work was exhausting. claustrophobic and dangerous. In the first months in the Ypres salient, the British teams spent six days in the line, working in pairs at the face by candlelight, one clawing out the clay with a grafting tool, the other packing it into sandbags that were hauled or trolleyed to the rear, breathing foul air only marginally freshened by antiquated air pumps dating

from the Crimean War.

They worked in silence, fearful of alerting the Germans. Frequently they found themselves locked in desperate races to get their explosives in place before the enemy blew its mine.

The tight space of the battlefield brought a strange intimacy. The rival teams could often hear laboured breathing, the chink of pick and slam of spade through the soil. Both sides were soon countering each other's operations, blowing *camouflets* (caverns) that brought down rival tunnels. On many occasions, they broke through into each other's galleries and

engaged in underground firefights.

By June 1916, there were 31 tunnelling companies in the British sector, including units from Canada, Australia and New Zealand, totalling more than 21,000 men. The casualty rate – from cave-ins, gas poisoning and enemy action on the way to and from tunnels – was high, about 1,200 a month.

The opening fanfare to the great Somme offensive of July 1, 1916, was provided by the blowing of seven large and 11 small mines. The one at La Boisselle created the largest crater of the war. Historian Alexander Barrie said it was "a single, vast smoothsided, flat-bottomed chasm measuring some 450 feet across the rim". The site has lain practically

undisturbed since 1918 and is now the subject of a major archaeological study.

The climax of the British tunnelling war came

where it had begun – facing the Messines Ridge. In February 1917, the commander of the Second Army, Gen Sir Hubert Plumer, agreed a plan to blow the Germans off the high ground which bulged into the British front line. Twenty-one mines were dug along a 10-mile sector. The subterranean systems were complicated: the one under Hill 60 was on four levels with 50 listening posts to monitor enemy activity.

The mines culminated in chambers packed with nearly 1.2 million pounds of explosive and, early on the morning of June 7, 1917, they went up. British official war correspondents were on hand to record the sight. It was "the most diabolical splendour I have ever seen", wrote the prolific English journalis and author Philip Gibbs. "Out of the dark ridges... there gushed out and up enormous volumes of scarlet flame from the exploding mines and of earth and smoke all lighted by the flame spilling over into fountains of fierce colour so that all the countryside was illuminated by red light."

LordAshcroft

Norton-Griffiths had long pressed for the operation, claiming the devastating effect of the mines would mean Allied troops would be able to walk to the top of the ridge "smoking their pipes". It was not quite like that. But the explosions undoubtedly stunned the defenders, 10,000 of whom were killed, and the subsequent capture and holding of the ridge was counted a big success.

None the less, the huge effort involved in mining – and the fact that the disruption caused could easily hinder as much as help the attackers – meant both sides refrained from further big operations. Tunnelling would be remembered chiefly as a symbol of the lengths - and depths - that men would go to in total war.

• Patrick Bishop is a historian and author



DIGGING IN La Boiselle, main picture; panel drawing of sappers at the tunnel face, left: French tunneller at work.







Tunnellers

THEMSELVES

IN DESPERATE

RACES TO GET

EXPLOSIVES

IN PLACE

Shot at, shelled, cold, wet and gassed... why did so many

It is remarkable how few felt COMPELLED TO PUT DOWN THEIR ARMS OR TO MUTINY, SAYS **JONATHAN BOFF**

B rig-Gen James Jack saw the war up close for longer than most. A regular officer who fought on the Western Front almost the whole way through, he was an austere man whose diary provides one of the most honest surviving descriptions of the war. On November 11, 1918, even Jack's stiff upper lip seems at last to have quivered. He wrote of "a frightful four years" during which his soldiers "have suffered bravely, patiently and unselfishly, hardships and perils beyond even the imagination of those, including soldiers, who have not shared them".

For us, 100 years on, it is the endurance of the millions of soldiers on all sides that mystifies and fascinates. What is remarkable is not how many

men ran away or broke down, but how few did. Very few tried to duck their duty. Out of five million British soldiers, fewer than 9,000 were tried for cowardice, desertion and mutiny. Only 287 were executed for these crimes.

For all the myths of savage discipline, statistically you were two and a half thousand times more likely to be killed by the enemy than by your own side. Cases of psychological breakdown were similarly rare. About one in 20 British and German soldiers suffered a nervous disorder.

But psychiatric casualties made up only about one in eight battle casualties.

Why did so many stick it out? Some reasons never

change. Ask a soldier in Helmand what motivates him to fight and most likely he'll look embarrassed and mumble something about doing it for his mates. As soldier Richard Williams wrote home: "It is only the spirit of brotherliness and mutual helpfulness that makes the thing tolerable."

But other factors were also important. It's almost impossible to generalise. Each soldier found his strength in all sorts of places. In untrendy but

eternal concepts such as duty, loyalty to regiment and King and Country. In the bottle. In God. In superstition. In humour - often of the blackest kind. In adapting to and making the best of even the most horrific environments. In hatred of the enemy and the thirst for revenge. In protecting home and family. In professional pride. For a few, in a disturbing love of killing. For many, in the youthful self-deception which says "it'll never happen to me". And, in almost every case, from knowing that dinner, relief, rest, even leave, were only hours or days away. Even when things were at their worst, they were always about to get better. So millions of men on all sides found it within

themselves to endure and to fight. No one could have forced them to do it. No one could have fooled so many into doing it for so long. We can see this when we look at the (very rare) mutinies which took place. They were hardly ever refusals to bear arms.

Between 1914 and 1918, the British Army had only one: the 1917 Étaples mutiny, portrayed with fine drama but dismal history in *The Monocled Mutineer* in 1986. This was not a brave and principled refusal



keep on fighting in the First World War?

from the front and to

a dressing station near

to fight but a tawdry rampage by 1,000 men in protest at conditions at a transit camp. COMPADE IN ARMS A British soldier carries

The same year saw a much larger mutiny in the French army. Perhaps 40,000 soldiers refused to leave their trenches. But this was also primarily a strike about conditions of service rather than a rejection of their broader duty. They remained ready to defend but refused to attack.

When they received concessions, including

increased leave, they returned to action and were soon operating at full capacity again.

Eventually, of course, morale did collapse. Not in the British Army, where even German historians acknowledge that it remained more or less constant throughout, but in the armies of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Historians still argue about how widespread this was, exactly when it started, and why. What is clear is that about one in every five German soldiers on the Western Front raised the white flag and surrendered to the Allies in July-

Some of them, infected by Bolshevism, refused any longer to fight for rich capitalists safe at home. But most gave up because they saw the war was lost and that there was no cause worth dying for. As one German soldier wrote to his wife: "Things are quite beyond description here. If they get too hot for me, and if it can be managed in any way, I shall let myself be taken prisoner, for otherwise one will never get out of this mess... I am fed up at the thought of being bowled over after four years of it.

This suggests that soldiers were prepared to risk their lives so long as there was a chance of success. As soon as that went, so too did morale. The interwar myth, that the German army was never defeated on the battlefield but stabbed in the back on the home front, is clearly false. The army collapsed before Germany slid into revolution, not after. But that didn't stop unscrupulous nationalists including the Nazis, using this lie to poison the politics of the Weimar Republic, to ease Hitler's path to power and set the stage for another and even

• Dr Ionathan Boff is a lecturer in war studies at the

tackled Fritz on the

my hobby.

eighth... The second do

was nothing more than a

bit of patrol work, which is

. "You'd laugh [if] you

could see me sometime:

walking by night in no-

man's-land with a big Ger

anything I can find. I find

that the neutral ground

place to work and I've

a junior in charge and

finding all I can on my

between the lines is a fine

formed the habit of placing

wn... "Well, dear brother of

mine, whether I survive or

you'll never have reason to

not, I'm glad to think that

be ashamed of me and I

if it should happen that I

go West before the war

don't want you to be sorry

pistol in my fist, looking for

Imperial War Museums has just launched its massive Lives of the First World War project and needs your help to tell millions of life stories of those who served Britain and the Commonwealth on the home and fighting

Over the next five years, Lives of the First World War will become the permanent digital memorial to more than eight million men and women. IWM is urging everyone to discove their First World War connections and remember and share these with the rest of the world online at

The launch of Lives of the beginning. IWM needs eight million life stories, so that we can collectively remember these people now and in the future. Everybody can

simply remembering someone online, uploading a picture from their family album or sharing a story passed down through generations, or by connecting official record to build a full and factual picture of what happened to that person throughout the First World War.

War was launched in May with the records of more than 4.5 million men and 40,000 women who served with the British Army overseas. More records are scheduled to be added over coming months.

FIRST WORLD WAR

FIRST WORLD WAR

FIRST WORLD WAF

FIRST WORLD WAR

FIRST WORLD WAF

FIRST WORLD WAR

FIRST WORLD WAR

FIRST WORLD WAR



JULY ISSUE

• The All-Arms Battles:

World War photos and memories. Write to: Telegraph Media Group, 111 Buckingham Palace

OInside the First World War is a compelling 12part series which is running monthly up to the centenary of the war's outbreak. To catch up with an of the nine parts published so far, visit telegraph.co.uk/

Lord Ashcroft

An online memorial to the FIRST WORLD WAR

the public to piece together contribute. It may be by

fronts.

the First World War is just

Lives of the First World



read about the multilavered British operation that faced . Germany's unrestricted submarine offensive: the winners and losers among the generals; and whether the Somme deserve its place as our the First World War?

• Please keep on sending us your First First World War. Road, London SW1W ODT, or email firstworldwar@ telegraph.co.uk

BACK ISSUES

A STRIP

OF KHAKI

Elizabeth Hopes from Northampton encloses a postcard (pictured below) with a poem and a strip o khaki uniform, sent by he grandfather Ernest Davies France" on December 20,

YOUR LETTERS

Post box

We have received a magnificent postbag and inbox

are just a few of the many we would like to share

with you. Please keep them coming.

of letters, documents and stories in response to our request for readers' First World War memories. Here

Write to: First World War, Telegraph Media Group,

111 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W ODT,

To the one that I love in the land of the free I greet you this year with a strip of khaki It's not a choice card, nor a sweet scented packet

my old khaki jacket. It has sheltered me long through storm and calm Through dangers I have been and come to no harm And when I return to the

But a strip of khaki from

land of the free You'll welcome me back khaki and me

"It was said my grandfather's regiment was billeted on the racecourse in Northampton before embarkation to France It is here he met my grandmother," says Mrs Hopes, "He was said to have been too young to enlist and lied about his age. In France he fought with the 6th Battalion Welsh Regiment on the Somme where he was wounded by a shot through his iaw and ea and was then deaf in the ear, wearing a hearing aid for the rest of his life. He would never speak of the horrors of the war - only

or email firstworldwar@telegraph.co.uk were home on leave (three

Last letter HOME

never in front of

uniform during WW2) and

ends. I've had a good time proved myself to my own Dave Walsh from Cardif satisfaction and settled shares the final letter of with the Boche for a good Corporal Frank Burke, few things. In that do on 10th Battalion, South the morning of the 8th I Wales Borderers, sent to squared matters for his elder brother Charles a good many things and, on October 17, 1918. although I took 23 Gers off "Frank was my my own bat. I was called a grandmother's brother bloody murderer by one of

Frank wrote: "We've just

had a turn in the front line

from head to foot but I feel

as fit as a fiddle. It seems

o me that they're anxious

to decorate somebody in

this Batt: as I've just been

recommended again, that

worth something as I did a

bit of good work when we

making it twice in eight

days. The first do was

and I'm caked with mud

my own men. "Of course he only and, as a child, I saw the original, but children don't called it half in fun but it understand always," says Mr Walsh. "I do hope this will give you some idea how I carried on... poignant memory may be shared with others."

"Whatever Fritz does now, he can never get his own back from me and if pass out, I go happily, for my work is done and my oath is kept. Don't get grieved if I get knocked out. I've lived my 'crowded hour' and you can remember me, if not with pride, at least without shame or regret."

Frank was killed the following day.



ALIVE AND **KICKING**

Mr ML Dinnage from Fareham, Hampshire, writes: "My mother Marion Lottie Freeman was born in Itchingfield, Sussex, in 1902 and worked as a seamstress. She was one of four sisters and they had an elder brother. William, nicknamed Billy born in 1896. He joined the Royal Sussex



Regiment in 1914 and sadly died on December 8, 1916, aged 20, in the battle of the Somme. His body was never found and his memorial is at Thiepval France, which I visited

"He wrote many letters home, all in pencil, which my mum kept and I acquired when she died. the papers said the war apparently read he had been killed, hence he confirms he is alive and kicking. He also liked his mentioned.

"My father was also in the First World War. He was associated with horses and died early, aged 58, probably due to gas as he was constantly coughing. He spoke little about the war but did tell me once that his commanding officer told him to take great care of

"Men are easy to ge hold of,' he said, 'but

Rosemary's grandfathe Rifleman Harry Ernest Ewington, who was transferred to Rifle Brigade 10th Battalion BEF while in France in September, 1916. In a letter sent on July 30. 1917. Harry writes: "I nearly got a Blighty. A shel burst about 15 yards from

A TREASURE

TROVE OF

MEMORIES

her mother from

Rosemary F Marshall from

Virginia Water, Surrey, has

more than 200 letters to

us, killed a pal and wounded

helmet, cut it right through

about an inch and a half

long, but did not cut my

head. It must have glanced

off. I was smothered in dirt

etc but didn't find out my

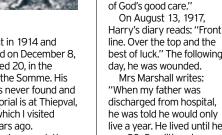
helmet was cut till

several others. A piece of

shrapnel pierced my

sometime after. Another bit

many years ago. In one letter dated 4/3/16, would finish on April 15. In another dated 8/11/16, he Woodbines, which he often



he was told he would only live a year. He lived until h was 90 Conditions in France once in the front line were poor. Parcels sent each week were always shared between friends. They contained tins of milk, peaches. pineapple, fresh fruit, cake chocolate, sweets, veal pie and on one occasion my mother sent a whole chicken... Money was short and the family used to send 5/- or 10/- [25p and 50p]. I expect my mother like many wives, went without. In one letter, father requested a pair of boots. Sometimes they were able to walk to a farn and buy eggs and milk.

"After my father was wounded, it was quite some time until my mothe was informed of his address and what his wounds were. This caused her a great deal of anxiety. All [we were told] was 'as well as can be expected'.



OLD BILL'S MAGIC The caption for the cartoon, far left, reads 'Well, if vou knows of a beter 'ole, go to it.' It was one of Bairnsfather's most famous illustrations;

daily life in the trenches, initially published in Bustande magazine in 1915. But in April that year he suffered the left, a weary Old Bill effects of a chlorine gas

sketches depicting

attack following the Second Battle of Ypres and was wounded by a shell, so was sent home to recuperate. From his hospital bed in London, where he was diagnosed with shell shock, he began a weekly series of drawings for Bystander, later published as the six-volume *Fragments from France*.
Old Bill was born shortly after, when Bairnsfather

was dispatched to the Isle of Wight to train recruits for France and Flanders, and the whiskered one was an instant success worldwide, appearing on mugs and postcards and becoming the subject of plays films and books. Realising the propaganda potentia of this cartoon soldier and his friends Bert and Alf

the British Government declined to send Bairnsfather back to the Western Front and instead commissioned him to draw other Allied forces, including the Americans and Italians.

Gen Sir Ian Hamilton, who commanded the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force during the Battle of Gallipoli, called him "the man who won the war", and during the Second World War Bairnsfather continued his prodigious output, becoming official cartoonist for American forces in Europe. He boosted morale for the Tommies in the First World War trenches and those back at home, yet never received official recognition by the Establishment.

He died in Worcester in 1959 in obscurity and poverty. An obituary said his talent, "almost to the point of genius", was founded on "one particular moment and one particular set of circumstances; and he was unfortunate in that he was never able to adapt, at all happily, his talent to new times and new

briefly when his children

Cartoonist whose Old Bill lifted spirits at home and on the front line



he chubby, curmudgeonly Old Bill, with his walrus moustache, balaclava and pipe, became one of the best known faces of the trenches. And his creator, the cartoonist Bruce Bairnsfather, found such wartime popularity from his morale-boosting sketches that he struggled to escape the type-casting for the rest of his life

Born in India and schooled in England, Bairnsfather began his artistic career drawing ads for Lipton tea and Player's cigarettes before he joined the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, aged 26, in 1914. He rapidly

he took charge of a machine-gun section. So appalled was he at life at the front that he declined leave to go home as he feared he would never return.

He said of the Christmas Truce of 1914, in which he took part: "It all felt most curious: here were these sausage-eating wretches, who had elected to start this infernal European fracas, and in so doing had brought us all into the same muddy pickle as themselves... There was not an atom of hate on either side that day; and yet, on our side, not for a moment was the will to war and the will to beat them



JUNE 1 2014 / THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH





Who will you remember?



St John Ambulance nurses with Billy the hospital's mascot Étaples, France, 6 July 1917

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