

A Dying Man Can Dream

By Marcus Baldwin

I am lying in a shell hole; I have shrapnel in my gut and I am dying. I know I am dying I will never get to see my wife and child again. I ended up here yesterday, today is the 2nd of July and yesterday was the first day of the battle of the Somme.

2 Days earlier...

I am in the support line and am waiting to head forward for the battle. It is like a party atmosphere some of the men are roaring drunk and it is like there is no war, but not me. I just had my usual rum ration and am writing a letter home to my family, my wife and my son, James. Then we got the order.

“Put out your cigarettes and let’s move up” the Sergeant bellowed.

I arrived at the front and immediately I could smell the smell of death. “Smells great,” my friend Tommy says, reading my thoughts. We all got told to put our gear down and then the guards were elected and I was one of them.

“Hey Rupert you hear that,” Tommy says.

“Yeah,” I reply. And then out of a shell crater came five men all with knives, grenades and shovels, and all German.

“Open fire.” I yell. Immediately Tommy and I opened up with our Lee Enfield each holding 10 rounds. All the Germans went down, not one got away.

Then at 00:00 hours came and our turn on watch was over. I moved away from the watch position and laid out my coat on the fire step and laid down under my blanket.

I was only able to sleep for a few hours before we were awoken and ordered to check equipment and sharpen bayonets. The thought of sticking this cold piece of steel into someone was scary but I had done it before and could do it again. At 06:45 hours we were ordered to stand by the ladders and get ready to attack. And then the order came, “Fix bayonets.” called our Sergeant.

I got my 12 inches of sharpened steel out and put it on my Lee Enfield. Then we waited, the artillery stopped at exactly 07:00 hours.

“Why have we not gone yet?” said a recruit so new I did not even know his name. Then the order came, “Charge.” called our Major. We all got out of the trench, screaming and yelling like wild dogs and ran at the German guns...

A shell exploded and I went down. I had been hit in the stomach and was in a lot of pain. I was down and I was lying half submerged in a disgusting, wet shell hole. I could see other men running past. Some fell but some kept on going, but I could hear the thud of them falling later on. None of us got to the enemy trench.

I am lying in a shell hole; I have shrapnel in my gut and I am dying, I know I am dying. I cannot call out for help and am stuck here. Even if I could call out no one would hear me over the almost constant crash of artillery shells. I can tell my end is getting nearer and I hold onto the photo that I have of my kid to distract myself in the hole, with my other hand I am clenching my blood covered stomach.

Night has come and gone and I am close to dying. I can only hope death comes sooner rather than later. More explosions. A shell has hit my hole and death finally comes.

15th July 1916

To Mrs Daws,

It is with great regret and sadness that we inform you of your husband, Rupert Daws' death on the 2nd July 1916. He was killed with great love and respect for the King.

Kind regards

British Army.

As I look down on myself, I can see the rain hitting my face. The rain has finally stopped and I can feel a soldier dragging me back to the trench where I hope my body will lie with the earth in peace.