

For the Empire: Chapter 1

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A young man in the British army during World War One, describes his experience.

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Mortar shells go off no more than thirty meters away, the Jerry's surprisingly have made themselves at home in the hell holes less than a kilometer away. I sat down and wrote home hoping it would reach my parents.

Dearest mother and father,

I am here in Belgium, we are at a place they call Passchendaele, at this moment we are less than a kilometer from the enemy, who is waiting for us in the trenches three days ago they charged over the no-mans-land and were shot down, but enough of that I saw that Red Baron again today, will no one shoot him down? I love you dearly.

Your Son

Harold Smith.

The only thing left to do now is wait for the courier to get these messages and bring new ones. While thinking a young man came and sat down pushing a hot canteen before me "Here," I drank then passed it back, "I'm Will, Will Huntsman, I got this off of a dead Fritz a few days ago, bugger snagged some sort of beer I'm going down the line bringing a bit of morale with me," he stood, I shook his hand then he spoke again, "I'll be passing one or two runners want me to take that letter?"

"Thank you Will, you going to be back this way again?" he nodded and took off. Several days later I saw him again getting yelled at, I approached him and could hear the major speak, "What if there was an attack? What if a sharpshooter would have taken you out? You cannot do that or you will be going home in a bag!" Huntsman was ramrod straight, nodding and giving a yes sir, no sir, I don't know sir, when appropriate. "Go on that's all." With a quick salute Huntsman walked my way.

"Will I'm sorry you got lectured on my account." I was going to go on but he stopped me.

"Don't flatter yourself it wasn't for you it was for the men they need something to be happy about, it's almost Christmas and we can't leave the trench." He said putting his arm around me like I would to be reassuring Jeremy, my little brother. "Now how about some food I'm starving," he joked but I could see his hands shaking so either he was starving or he was worried about something.

"I saw a man pretending to be dead crossing the No-Mans-Land wonder what he was doing?"

"I hear he was going to discuss a truce for Christmas day, hope they take him well, Jerry's aren't too likely to suffer fools." just then I saw a German with his hands up followed by a one of ours.

"Can I speak to your commander? I have a proposition."

The colonial, Hammond, stepped up, ragged and sad-looking "What is it?"

"My commander wants a truce for Christmas eve and Christmas day, do you accept?"

Hammond looked to his men all of low morale a Christmas party would raise spirits even if it was with the enemy. "Yes we accept where should we meet?"

"My men have put up a white flag almost in the middle of No-Mans-Land we meet there, no shooting we give you warning and you the same deal?" Hammond nodded and the German took off back for his ground.

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The day before the party I wrote home again.

Susan,

Yesterday a German approached the trench and offered a truce we are to meet tomorrow and have a day of not fighting but peace I can't wait the young man who negotiated said there would be German pigs as big as me and mugs overflowing with beer Even the Red Baron has promised no fighting I'm intrigued by him I hope I can meet him tomorrow, I hope to hear from you I miss you extraordinarily.

Your soldier,

Harold Smith

Huntsman approached me, I kissed the letter and as he sat down the courier took the letter and put another in my hand. "From your girl?"

"No, parents," I said. He smiled. My relationship with my parents was one I was proud of we had never argued and if I was ever hit I deserved it, I was raised to respect my father and mother and fear God so I would respect his commandments.

"Good I'm glad I'm not the only one who writes my parents." he laughed. I don't know why but this man reminds me so much of Yance my elder brother, from how he takes criticism, his laugh, even his jokes, ones like a lame horse they should be put down. He even kind of sort of looks like Yance. "Hey they need help, wanna aid in the defusing of some mills and their grenades?" he chuckled.

"What for?" I asked almost laughing.

"The Tree." he said pointing at a pointy object in the distance. "They got them off dead soldiers. Seems fitting they died for peace now their weapons will symbolize peace." I looked down, "Hey we get out of these damned trenches." By the time he said this we were up and out walking for the symbol of the pause of monotony.

"Who are you two?" A mean looking German asked.

"Huntsman and Smith British and you."

"Wilhelm Fredericks you helping?"

"Yes we are, are the all the grenades defused?" Wilhelm nodded, "Do they still need painting?"

"Yes right this way." we spent all day painting explosives, talking and joking with men we were told to hate. When the sun started to recede we bid farewell and headed back to the trench silently. we sat down in our small hole and tried to sleep, but soon Hammond woke us. "Boys, hey we're heading over come on." We followed and saw gun shots I sprinted and noticed they were celebratory so in good spirits I drew my Webley and fired into the air.

"Four O'clock friends time for breakfast." the German leader shouted, and oh what a breakfast they had prepared, ham, biscuits, gravy, other succulent meats, as well as bacon Belgium waffles and maple syrup. The men were soon seated and about to dig in when the two commanders stood and crossed their arms and began to speak in the languages of their men.

"Dear God thank you for allowing us this day to feast and observe Christmas day with our new friends and bless this food that it may nourish and strengthen our weary bodies and that this war will be over soon. Amen" The men gave a chorus of "Amens" then half eating half talking we ate amongst the "Enemy" soon some young men brought out several large barrels.

"We've got some more if we need it so don't be shy!" They shouted. some men filled their helmets others took their canteens or mess kit bowls with the bitter liquid. It was cold in the cold weather but Hell I filled my canteen my cup my bowl and my helmet with the cold beer.

I sat down next to an upset looking German, "Sprechen sie englisch?" I asked politely.

"Yes," he said his English a little rough, "Name is Manfred Von Richthofen. Good to see a Brit on the ground." we laughed.

"Harold Smith, Richthofen I know that name from somewhere." I said pondering where.

"They call me the Red Devil, silly I'm a talented pilot I hope they find a nonlethal use for me after this if not I think I should like to go home maybe ask my sister for some land, or test myself at gymnastics again, but even

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as a child I was bred for military life I rode horses hunted and was a cadet at an early age hell if we didn't put up so much barbed wire I would have only told headquarters where you were." He handed me a picture, there was a family a young woman holding a baby, a young man, whose hand was on a boy's shoulder, and another boy. "That is my mother and father that is me," he pointed to the oldest boy, "This is my sister and my two brothers. I loved them all, they are all good, good people I hope to go and see them again after the war ends." he said putting the picture back.

"You will," I said pulling out a picture of my family taken only a year ago, "the oldest is my father next to him my mother, under at the left is Yance my older brother, Me, Jeremy, and Lydia. Yance was killed last year, a month after this photograph was taken, a sharpshooter hit him in a charge, but I forgive the man who killed my brother, Yance was told he had gangrene in his left leg, I'm glad the sharpshooter killed him before he could suffer more."

The day continued like this, talking to Germans talking about family, lovers and how we would spend life after the war. Soon there was massive pigs set on the tables we scrounged together. Everyone grabbed what they could and sat on the ground, I had found Huntsman talking to Richthofen so I sat near them. soon the commanders stood up again. "Dear God thank you for allowing us this day of rest and thanks giving and we hope this food may nourish and strengthen our bodies and that we may not be ordered to fight tomorrow. Amen"

Again there was a chorus of "Amens" then we ate talking to our new friends, Huntsman was talking about his childhood and that's when I knew why he reminded me of Yance, this is William Huntsman, Yance's best friend they looked so alike they could have been brothers, this is the man who helped me kill my first stag in Scotland. "Did Yance tell you to keep an eye on me before he died?"

Will's eyes welled up, "Yance is, dead? Yes he asked if I would God I can't believe he's dead."

"I'm sorry I didn't know you weren't told." I said trying to comfort him.

"Yance was stricken with gangrene, then taken by a sharpshooter." Richthofen said.

"Did he suffer?" Huntsman asked regaining composure.

"No he had just been diagnosed the day he was shot." I said Huntsman looked relieved.

Chapter 3: For the Empire: Chapter 3

Susan,

I can now see why they call modern warfare a symphony we play one song, Death, composed by Soldiers in arms, our rifles are violins, we play the Devil's music. Susan I love you but I fear I may never see you again, I'm afraid I'm now a traitor my men have not told the higher ups, I stopped to listen to a dying German boy's last wish, which was to kill him with HIS weapon. I love you so much Susan and as I am writing this I wish I could see you and be with you but I'm afraid I'm here until the war is over I LOVE YOU so, so much.

Love,

Harold Smith

We charged and charged after the courier took that letter, we killed men my age charging in stabbing them with bayonets moving on like that all day I was cut by a boy not yet 17 and I, I killed him. My emotions fade more and more every hour it was like that stag, we moved again to a new trench we had just been pushed back from, Huntsman charged sprinting a Fritz was waiting for him in a crater and caught Will with a bayonet just above the collar bone I rushed to his side and he thrust my cross back into my chest, I dug in my pocket and retrieved his knighthood medal and put it in his hands just as he died. I left him and ran on crossing half a kilometer to the back of the troops. We continued the fighting and death, I looked to the sky and saw a small red dot burst into flames and collide with the ground, "Good bye Richthofen." I said to myself. I was plunged into a fight of knives, bayonets, and small clubs, taking a cut to the arm and a blow to the leg, but such is war we charged over the wall when I heard a loud whistle, then my world went black.

A letter from Susan on November 11.

Harold,

I have just reached word that the war is over I'm so excited to see you, I've missed you terribly, I love you, see you in my dreams my soldier.

Yours always,

Susan.

This I read while laying in a hospital bed. How could I face Susan like this? I now have one leg, and cannot see from my left eye. The mortar hit a boy directly sending shrapnel and bones into the boys around him a large shard took my foot, I took another smaller shard to my eye, I cannot face her. But in one week I must. The days passed and soon I found myself on a train planning what I could tell her to help her understand that I accept that she no longer loves me. when I arrived at the train station I had help out and when I could walk with my crutch I approached the pad where Susan embraced me, still as beautiful as I had left her, wait no more beautiful, because now I don't see that sadness in her eyes, she kissed me and welcomed me back not talking about the leg just telling me of the house she was dreaming of and of how life was going to be.

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