

The Sentry

Luca C Key Stage 4

Overhead there was the sound of shells whistling past missing us by just fractions of a metre. The whistle blew and I started to run across no-man's-land. I looked to my left, just in time to see my friend fall to the floor. I swerved and changed course to see if I could save him but when I reached him all that was left was the bloody remains of a childhood friend. My heart was telling me to stay and help him but my survival instinct kicked in as a round narrowly misses my head.

A few seconds later, a few yards further, I slipped in the boggy terrain. It felt as though it had been raining for the last year, everywhere was wet and muddy, covered in the rotting remains of fallen comrades. I didn't want to contemplate what the goo on my hands might of been. What a place to spend my last few seconds on earth! I watched as a mortar round landed less that twenty metres in front of me. The explosion kicked up dirt, blood, guts and the eternal mud that blinded me momentarily. I rubbed my eyes on the back on my sleeve. Once I regained my sight I half stood up and sprinted for my life, across the open field, negotiating the

carpet of dead bodies, mortar craters, grenades and bullets from the German trenches.

I made it to our objective, a small German trench or at least I thought it was the trench but a quick glance around told me it was just an empty ditch. Under my breath I muttered “Where have all the bloody Germans gone?” One of the men who had made it with me was our first officer. He sent us to clear the trench but I quickly discovered we were in an abandoned trench, there was nothing to clear.

A few moments later, the Germans bombs started exploding around us. I quickly learnt why it had been abandoned. The place was more like a tin shack than a trench. The sound of mortars ripped through the trench creating a thunderous noise. I reacted on instinct and sent Private James up a set of rickety wooden steps to our sentry and keep a lookout for Germans returning. The rest of us waited in the rat infested cesspit that came up to our waists. The muddy water stank and pulled at our boots when we tried to move.

Suddenly a mortar landed close to the top of the trench, much closer than the rest, had been. In front of my eyes, as if in slow motion, James was falling from his post. He hit the water and sank. I rushed over floundering around to get a grip on him, finally I found his jacket sleeve and pulled him up through the vile water. I had hoped to save him but when his body surfaced I saw his bloody guts spilling out from a hole in his stomach.

Amazingly, he was alive, drifting in and out of consciousness. I told him that he was going to be alright, a lie but a lie with good intentions. I knew that he was only moments from death. I held him while the life drained away into the German cesspit.

How quickly life moves on. My training kicked in and I organised the remaining men to move out through the rear of the trench. A shout went up. Someone had discovered five Nazis sleeping in their dug out, oblivious of what was going on around them. Our training had taught us to take them out with a single slit to their throat with our knives. What our training did not teach us was how to deal with the mental torment that killing a fellow human in their sleep would cause.