

Jim Walters
Journal

21st April 1915

Dear Diary,

I have decided to keep a journal of my days here in the Great War. I have only been here 2 weeks, and I am already a changed man. I have seen things I can't unsee, heard things I can't unhear. This war has changed my life forever. Even though it was only 14 days ago since I left my wife and daughter to come to this war, it feels like an eternity since I heard their voices. I still remember every detail etched on their faces the day I left. My wife was quiet and subdued, and her hands shook as she took a deep breath to kiss me for the last time. But my daughter, my beautiful Poffy, was the opposite. Oblivious to the horrors I was leaving to, she was happy as always, and had a big grin plastered to her face. She was unaware of the grim, miserable atmosphere around her, and as she hugged me gently she asked why she couldn't go on the "holiday" me and my wife told her I was going on. This last image I have of her keeps me going through this unbearable battle.

22nd April 1915

Dear Diary,

The bombs never seem to stop. The ground outside constantly shakes and trembles and the sky lights up every couple of seconds. The noise is brightening and unbearable. This all makes the mood between my fellow soldiers very low, but I have found one thing that makes this place of brackion more bearable. I have discovered that an old school friend of mine, Eric Billing, is in the very same trench as me. He too has a family back home; a wife and two sons. We know how each other feel, and I feel less lonely now. I'm still having trouble sleeping. Everytime I shut my weary eyes my wife and daughter's faces swim round in my head, haunting me. I would give anything to be with them. I sent my wife a letter today, but how can I supposed to tell her of the horrors here? I do not want to worry her, but there are rumours that the papers make out that everything is so easy, like a walk in the park. They say we have victory. I do not see how this is victory - this is pointless manslaughter.

23rd April 1915

Dear Diary,

I am not going to lie; I have no energy to write today. There are rumours spreading like disease through the trench that we are going over the top soon. Let me tell you, as soon as you hear this news your heart stops and your head explodes over the top? Every man here knows what bloody hole awaits if you go into the dreaded No Man's Land. No matter how hard and disgusting the trenches are, nothing is more surreal in the war than a ferocious battle to get across No Man's Land. If these rumours are true, I fear what will become of me.

2nd April 1915

Dear Diary,

Today has been a strange day in emotions for me. I woke up in this hellhole, only to find a package had been delivered for me. I imagine my joy when I opened it to find some boots, socks, and jam sitting comfortably in the wrapping. I snuffed my socks straight away. All the mud and water of the trenches leaks through to your feet, even if you're wearing 3 pairs of socks like me! This leaves your feet cold, wet, and diseased with trench foot. Then me and Eric shared the jam on stale, crusty bread he'd been given. We also shared it with the hundreds of flies swarming round our mouths and head, like unwanted residents. I also discovered a little envelope stashed inside the shoe. My heart skipped a beat when I realized it was my wife's handwriting. She had wrote me a lovely letter, on simple things like the weather and neighbourhood pack home. I felt so homesick that moment you won't believe. And my darling Poffy had drawn me a wobbly picture of 3 stickmen: herself, her mother and me. And this is the moment I burst into tears, for I did not think my heart could take the pain of not being with them.

See you soon
daddy!



Daddy



Mummy



me



25th April 1915

Dear Diary,

Duce Et Decorem Est Pro Patria Mori?
That must be the greatest lie ever told. My closest friend Eric died today, leaving me once again alone in this war. But he did not die honorably, oh no. He died of dysentery. He was so weak, so listless, that me and another soldier had to carry him to the pit we use as a toilet. He was lying in his own excrement, what else could we have done? Once at the pit, he just sat there. He would of thought he was dead if it was not for his glassy blinking eyes. It was like he had totally given up. Then he simply slid off, his bloated body landing heavily into the pool of mud, water and excrement by our feet. We tried to get him out, I swear we did. But he was so heavy, and we were so tired. Duce Et Decorem Est Pro Patria Mori, what is honorable in drowning in your own excrement?

26th April 1915

Dear Diary,

I cannot take much more of it. The rumours were true. Today, we went over the top, and my world has changed forever. There are no words for what I saw. Bodies, endless bodies, some missing limbs, streams across No Man's Land. Rows and rows of deadly barbed wire, as far as the eye can see. The noise of bullets whizzing past your face, the screams of injured men, the bang of a bomb hitting the earth and sending pieces of mud and shrapnel into running soldiers. It was another world. It wasn't the same place as were my sweet wife and child lived. There was one image, that will haunt me more than the other dozens. A man, laid on the ground in No Man's Land, whimpering in pain, clutching his intestines to his stomach. He looked pleadingly into my eyes, before uttering the words "Please!" and dying. I imagine he wanted me to help him, but how can you help a man whose inside are on the outside? I am a lucky one. A very lucky one indeed.

27th April 1915

Dear Diary,

I have to write this quickly as I have just been told that me and 5 other soldiers in my trench have to crawl out into No Man's Land, find a crater made by a bomb, and wait all day, watching for movement in the enemy trench. As soon as we see anything, a light or movement... we shoot. With no hesitation. I am not a man who can kill easily. I have never killed a man in my life, and I hope I don't have to. I don't belong in this place. I belong with my wife and daughter, at home with each other. And I will get home, no matter what it takes. I love them.

I will write when I get back.