



11a.m., 11th MONTH, 1918

Letter on the Battlefield

By Douglas How

1st South African Infantry Brigade

ON THE 10th NOVEMBER, 1918, we advanced and occupied the village of Hestraud. We encountered opposition of course, shelling, rifle fire and suffered some casualties. Fritz, (as we called him then) had dug himself in on a hill beyond the village. In those days we had no radio etc. Communications were maintained by telephone or runner. At the time, I was a battalion runner. On the morning of the 11th I had to take the Intelligence Officer to the Companies Headquarters.

On the way up we took shelter in a funk hole as Fritz was spotting up above. Whilst there, the Lieutenant told me that the war would all be over at 11 a.m. that day. An Armistice was to be declared. I laughed at that piece of news and told him I had heard that one before having been out since 1916, Egypt, Delville Wood, Armentiers Vimy Ridge, Butte of Warlencourt, etc.

However, he was right.

That morning, 11th November, 1918 Armistice was declared. We just didn't believe it. It was a sunny day and believe it or not, the birds began to sing. We could not realise that it was all over and expected the firing to start again. To think that our world of death, wounds, bullets, shell fire, gas and mud and more mud was over. Was it true? I shall never forget the feeling of joy and relaxation for all of us. The orders to the troops were: "Hostilities will close at 11 a.m. today, 11th November.

All ranks to remain at stand to in their trench. There is to be no fraternization with the enemy." We were however, very sad that afternoon when we buried ten of our chaps in the local churchyard killed on the 10th. One chap I know had been out with us very early. That evening, (strangely enough) we received rations of biscuits instead of bread. We swore that our bread had been sent to Fritz.

It nearly started another bloody war.

W. A. CULLEY

EVERY Remembrance Day the same scene comes back to my mind. As I hear the tramp of the veterans' feet and the majestic lament of *The Last Post*, I see a soldier lying in an Italian field. He is very young, little more than a boy — a private in the West Nova Scotia Regiment. He lies crumpled and alone in the fresh grass of May and no one has yet come to cover him with the grey blanket they use to cover the dead. He has fallen in the great and bloody battle of spring 1944 to break the Hitler Line, the last vicious barrier before Rome.

All around this young soldier is the lovely valley of the Liri River, shuddering under the blows of war. Behind lies the great rock where Monte Cassino stood, conquered after months of bitter fighting. To the left, in front of him, stands the city of Pontecorvo where the dead lie thick in the streets and the buildings gape in ruin. To the right is Aquino airport and the charred hulks of a dozen tanks caught in the open on a sunny morning and destroyed in a matter of minutes. Not far ahead lies the ugly apparatus of the Hitler Line itself, a mesh of steel and wire and guns, a thing so terrible that one wonders whether men could ever smash a way through it or even have the courage to try.

Just in front of the boy is a snarl of broken earth, torn asunder by the exploding shell that killed him. His hands stretch out towards it, and in one there is a sheet of

paper. I see it, white in the sun, as I come across the field, a war correspondent heading for Pontecorvo. I see it and something makes me reach down and take it.

It is a letter to his mother written shortly before he went into battle. "I am well," the letter says, "and hope you are the same." It says not to worry, and it goes on about little things. No immortal phrases. No eloquent appeal for courage if he should die. No mention of the battle ahead. Just a simple letter from a soldier to his home.

I stand there, reading it, stricken by an overwhelming sense of the loneliness of death in battle. I stand for a long time, wondering why he has the letter in his hand.

I picture him dying, and knowing he is dying. He takes out the letter he has written home. Perhaps he reads it. Perhaps he only wants to make sure it's seen and posted. Or perhaps, as he dies, he wants to feel some link with the most precious thing of all, his home and family. Perhaps he feels he has strength left to write good-bye.

I don't know. I didn't know then, and I don't know now. But every Remembrance Day that scene, and his name, come back to me. I found his name on the little tag soldiers wore round their necks. I found it later in the history of his regiment. It gave just his name and rank — listed, where they belong, under "The Immortal Dead."

(The Readers Digest)

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FOR ALL YOUR TRAVEL
REQUIREMENTS

They shall grow not old . . .

Steadfast — Sidi Rezegh

By Sapper Tom Vanston
— April 1942

BOTH Remembrance Day (November 11) and the anniversary of Sidi Rezegh (November 23) are commemorated in this month.

In tribute to the men of the Fifth SA Brigade and their ancillary arms who fell at Rezegh in 1941, Sapper Tom Vanston wrote this poem in April 1942. It was first published in S.A. Sapper:

Steady and still on Death's lasting parade
Rest ranks fallen out from the Fifth Brigade
The Vanguard moves on but they still remain,
Resting at ease on the bleak battle plain.

Steady and staunch they stood on that day,
Holding steel panzer waves at bay.
Steadfast, steel courage rolled steel back again,
Facing great odds, they died like brave men.

Steady strong showers at Christmas — tide
Heaven's sad tears soaked the desert wide,
Laid bright wreaths above graves of bold
Garlands of green, flowers purple and gold.

Sublime and solid their valour will stand
A symbol, a monument to the youth of our land.

THE fourth verse of Laurence Binyon's moving poem "For The Fallen", written in 1926, is a poignant component of the solemn ritual in every MOTH Shellhole and at every function of Remembrance.

Yet it is probable that a majority of Moths are unfamiliar with the poem in its entirety.

This was the thought with which *M o t h D a n K r ü g e r*, of Inchanga/Queen's Own Shellhole,

sent us the full text of Binyon's poem.

It is entirely in keeping with the spirit of this month in which Moths and other ex-Servicemen will stand in silence on Remembrance Day, November 11, in proud memory of those who fought by their side and did not return.

The fourth verse is inscribed on the memorial in front of the British Museum in London.

FOR THE FALLEN

*With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,
England mourns for her dead across the sea.
Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,
Fallen in the cause of the free.*

*Solemn the drum thrill: Death august and royal
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres.
There is music in the midst of desolation
And a glory that shines upon our tears.*

*They went with song to the battle, they were young,
Streight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,
They fell with their faces to the foe.*

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old,
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.*

*They mingle not with their laughing comrades again:
They sit no more at familiar tables at home;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time:
They sleep beyond England's foam.*

*But where our desires are and our hopes profound,
Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,
To the innermost heart of their own land they are known
As the stars are known to the night.*

*As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain,
As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,
To the end, to the end, they remain.*

LAURENCE BINYON, 1926

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