

**The following letter was written Sept. 13, 1916, by Canadian soldier Hart Leech from Winnipeg shortly before he died in battle. It was lost in his belongings when he died and wasn't read by his mother until 12 years later in 1928. Leech served as a lieutenant in the 61st Battalion. Along with being recognized for his military skills, he was known for his baritone singing voice.**

Dear Mother

Just a wee note. I am "going over the parapet", and the chances of a "sub" getting back alive are abut nix. If I do get back, why you can give me the horse laugh. If not this'll let you know that I kicked out with my boots on.

So, cheer up, old dear, and don't let the newspapers use you as material for a Saturdaymagazine feature. You know the kind: where the "sweet-faced, grey-haired, little mother, clutching the last letter from her boy to her breast, sobbed, "He was such a fine lad,' as she furtively brushed the glistening tears from her eyes with a dish rag, etc. etc."

I'm going to tell you this in case my company commander forgets. Your son is a soldier, and a dog-gone good one, too, if he does say it himself as shouldn't. And if he gets pipped it'll be doing his blooming job.

In a way it's darned funny. All the gang are writing post mortem letters and kind of half ashamed of themselves for doing it. As one of our officers said: "If I mail it and come through the show, I'll be a joke. If I tear it up and get killed I'll be sorry I didn't send it." S'there y'are...

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**Canadian soldier Fred Adams wrote the following letter on May 2, 1915, to his aunt after experiencing the first German gas attack of the First World War near Ypres, Belgium. The Canadians were able to hold the line during that attack, but suffered heavy casualties. Adams was originally from Cobourg, Ont.**

Dear Aunt:

This is the first day they have allowed us to write letters since this battle began and I have no doubt you are anxious to hear from me. Well, we have lost an awful lot of our fellows, and to those of us who are left it seems just a miracle that any of us came through alive.

How I did not get hit I do not know, but I was one of the lucky ones that got through it without a scratch, although I got several bullet holes through my clothes.

About two brigades of Canadians held about five times as many Germans. It would have done you good to see the boys. I did not see one show the white feather, but each had a set face and went right at it.

We held the Germans and charged them back until they started to use that awful gas, and they forced the French on our left to retreat. So we had to retreat too or we would have been cut right off.

It was just a nightmare, a hell, retreating across the ground, with the Jack Johnsons digging great holes and the shrapnel raining down upon us, and the bullets striking everywhere. We could see the boys falling everywhere, and it was just awful to hear them cry out.

Thank goodness the Artillery and English reinforcements came up when they did and drove the Germans off.

Our machine gun sergeant is to be recommended for the V.C. He sure is a brave man, and he is very badly wounded. Our machine gun wiped out hundreds of Germans.

Poor Tom Smith of Cobourg. Tom is gone. I am very sorry for Mrs. Bolster, but Major Bolster died a brave death. He was the last of his company to leave the trench and he had a smile on his face.

We have lost two of our guns and there are only eleven of us left out of the section. Well all the boys did the best they could and I for one am ready to do it again, only I hope the war will soon end, for the sake of the poor parents, wives and sweethearts of all the soldiers.

Still I thank God that I am spared and always pray that He will soon end the war.

With Love.  
FRED.

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**Private Arthur Hubbard wrote this letter to his mother on July 7, 1916, while in the hospital suffering from shell shock. Shortly after the war he took his own life. Shell shock was cited as a contributing factor.**

Dearest Mother,

I thought I should write to let you know I'm safe and I'm recovering. I miss you and the rest, give everyone a hug from me and tell Rosie I hope she's being good.

The hospital is constantly got new soldiers coming in suffering from nervous exhaustion and shell shock too so I'm not the only one, the doctor said it is an injury to the nerves and told me to rest and they are putting in place electric shock treatment. All the nurses are very sympathetic but sometimes when they think we cant hear them they call us all weak and say we are cowards.

I'm not suffering as much as most, a young gentleman has been learning to walk again yet he still wants to get back to the frontline. Yes, I am returning to the frontline soon so that's why I took this opportunity to write.

We had strict orders not to take prisoners, no matter if wounded my first job was when I had finished cutting some of their wire away, to empty my magazine on 3 germans that came out of one of their deep dugouts they was bleeding badly begging for them to be put out of their misery. They cried for mercy, but I had my orders, they had no feeling what so ever for us ... it makes my head jump to think about it.

One time I was in serious danger I was almost completely paralysed with fear. I was sitting with Taylor (a fellow soldier) on the fire-step of a trench during an intense bombardment, when it seemed certain that we must be killed at any moment. Shots fired around us; each moment threatened to be the last. I was conscious of biting the fabric on my top to prevent my teeth from chattering. If I had been alone on that occasion I believe that I would be dead now; it was the presence of others that saved me.

Arthur Hubbard

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**German soldier August Stramm wrote this letter to his wife Else on May 20, 1915, after a battle in what is now southern Poland. Stramm was a renowned poet and playwright prior to serving in the First World War. He died in action in September 1915.**

Dear Wife!

Since the last letter that was written directly from the battle under heavy shelling and infantry fire, it has constantly continued that way ... there is no word for it! And not for that which followed.

Shooting, slashing, stabbing, bashing. It all took half an hour as the clock showed afterwards when things had calmed down. There were no more Russians, only corpses, a few ragged, dreadfully trembling prisoners, otherwise all dead! Heaps! Heaps!

The first lines moved in with hand grenades, behind them with rifle and bayonet, behind them - unbelievable! Unbelievable! Multitudes with clubs and axes, certainly only to finish us off like cattle, those of us who had escaped the other weapons alive and were still breathing.

Dogs! Dogs! They had not yet known Prussian soldiers. Certainly not. There was no more mercy!

I have never experienced such a thing, never want to experience it again and will never speak of it again.

Oh Wife! Oh love! Be strong! Be brave! It is all going well! Surely! Post even arrived yesterday morning!

I send you kisses,

Your Papa

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**This letter was written in September 1915 by army nurse Patricia Tuckett while she serving in the Mediterranean. In it, she discusses her latest involvement in the war and gives her impression of life where she was stationed. Tuckett was one of more than 3,000 nurses who served in the First World War. Nurses, like Tuckett, were often referred to as “Sisters of Mercy” or “Angels of Mercy” by soldiers injured in battle.**

My Dear,

Just a hurried line to tell you how glad I was to get your lengthy epistle that has been the first one I have received from you since I left home. I had not had Canadian mail since I left England, and was surely glad to get your letters. Our life now consists of work, and incidentally, eat and sleep. We have had two innings recently. They were all in that big engagement at Gallipoli last Monday. I have charge of 25 tents with 8 patients in a tent so you can imagine how busy I am. The patients never groan and they will stand any operation nearly even without an anaesthetic. Of course they have the best medical officers that can be had.

The patients have the most interesting tales to tell but really sometimes I do not want to listen. I think of them all when I go to sleep. We have a mattress on a board to sleep and even if I did not have the mattress I could sleep well. My candle has blown out twice since I started to write this and this stand is rather shaky. Of course you understand the censor will not allow very much to be told so I have no idea how much is crossed out.

I received a St. Marys Journal [local newspaper from small town in Ontario] from you which I was glad to see. It was opened when it came and I thought perhaps there had been another one with it. The natives here have just finished their Christmas season, called the Ramadan. The mosque is near our camp and I can see the Muezzin go up in the tower and chant his prayers to Mecca. They fast in this season from sunrise till sunset. The Muezzin goes up in the tower and lowers a flag when he sees the sun drop into the sea as it were and on the level a man at the gun fires it off when he sees the flag go down and you can hear all the children cheering and screaming because they all go to eat. They pray anywhere and at any time. They drop on the streets and turn to Mecca and pray for about 20 minutes.

I think I will soon be like the Mohamed women. They cover their faces up. My face is all tanned and bitten with insects so it needs to be covered.

The Arab children are the queerest [oddest]. They go floating around on little donkeys. All the male children wear night shirts on the street and you cannot distinguish between boys and girls. You surely would be amused at the shops and the street cafes. They are very amusing. We went to the quay [dock] in the motor ambulance last night and on one street corner the band was playing "You Make We Love You" and a fearful creature was singing it in French. There is a great deal of French here. I will hardly know Canadian money when I see it. We are dealing now in piastres and milems, Egyptian money.

I would surely love to see a Canadian, but I suppose it will be a long time. All the patients here are from British Isles, Australia and new Zealand. They all say that I talk like a "Yankee" and I am sure they have never heard an American speak. Of course I cannot change my accent. I suppose you have hared that English expression "Swankey" I should say you were "swankey", of course Right Oh! and Cheer Oh! are very prevalent. When I tell an orderly to do anything he always says "Right Oh!".

Well my dear I must go to my slab and sleep. Give my best love to all the family. Letters are my only thing to live for now so write often.

Love,

PATT

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