

Charleston

American History

Mr. Nees

November 29, 2023

The Great War- Creative Letter

To my dearest love Mary,

It has been six long months since I was drafted to go across the Atlantic, and I have missed you and Mother dearly ever since. Nothing could have prepared me for the long months in the trenches... I long dearly to go home, to see you and my son. I keep your picture close to me, and reminisce about you every chance I get. I pray that James is doing well; it is hard to believe he is already three years old. The time sure does pass by fast there; I bet it is not like that in the trenches, however. Mary, I am having a hard time coping with all of the things that have taken place ever since May, and I wanted to write to you about them, and the conditions we American soldiers go through every day that makes me miss you and James so much more.

There is constant sound of gunfire... it is all that I hear, it seems... gunfire, and screams. Even in the waiting time, which is, to be honest, a majority of the time, all I hear is the ringing of the gunfire. The sounds have penetrated so deep into my brain that the few hours of light sleep I get when I have a chance are riddled with shouts of pain and death. I often wake sharply alert, convinced that we are in the middle of cross fire when it was nothing but my mind playing tricks on itself.

We sleep standing, or on the ground, in the mud. The ground gets rough and filthy fast, with shards of metal, shells, and blood. Our squad often huddles together shivering in the cold... it gets cold fast, and it hits hard. Our sergeant often hollers at us to act like men, not children; he tells us with tank shells our entire squad can be killed in one single shot, well aimed or not. It

pained us to admit at first that he is in the right, but we learned quickly to swallow our pride. It serves our country no good to lose men just because they can not tough out the cold.

We sleep with rifles and munitions nearby, and masks at the ready in case of mustard gas attacks. The trenches reek of gunpowder and blood, of waste and burning metal, or decay and festering. The bodies of fallen brothers are often left to rot, because any man who steps out of the trench into no man's land is condemned as a dead man. Every new recruit to the trenches are often seen gagging and keeled over at the horrific stench and sights, often hidden in some corner, out of embarrassment. Every man in the squad understands this, however; this war, and every war, is a crude, disgusting thing. Over time, I have, somehow, grown accustomed to the stink of the dead and rot. In the long hours of waiting, and sometimes, even in short pauses between the crossfire, I often find myself wanting to climb out over the barrier of barbed wire and craters from bomb shell explosions, and bury the piles of bodies out there. But doing so, even in what seems to be in time of calm, is a death wish. Our soldiers who have had their lives taken from them should be brought home, and buried, but no. We must let them be. Let them lie there. Let them decay.

I have had some time to read the Bible since I volunteered, and I now think deeply of many things. We must fight and show no mercy, but we are men killing men... I often wish Wilson would make peace with Germany and Austria-Hungary. I wish strongly for this war to end, but I often think that this will never end. Humanity, it seems, are at root just like animals; kill and survive, or resist and die. Of course the Central power are animals... but I sometimes think, treacherously, that we are somehow the animals, too. But I can not spend so much time reminiscing about these things. This is war.

I long for Mother's cooking, I am not afraid to admit. The food, though not in small quantity, is poor quality, and tastes like the dirt and mud we sleep in. Or at least it did, three months ago. I have somehow come to look forward to tinned rations and hard biscuits, but I long for home made meals much more. The only thing worse than the blasted food, however, is the

water. It is filthy. I have not seen a lot of the winter conditions, but Sergeant Thompson tells stories of melting snow for water. Sometimes, when the water runs out, we have to drink from the craters from old bombshell craters. Both Arther Higgins and Richard Lawrence have gotten stomach worms from the filthy water. There are rumors of deaths, of course, but none from our squad.

Oh, how I miss your pretty face, Mary! I long to hold you and James in my arms. I feel like a caged feral animal in these trenches, and I always wonder how no one goes mad in these conditions. I am honored, surely, to serve under the United States Army, and would certainly offer up my life again if need be. In six months, when I return home, I wonder if this ringing in my ears, the waking up in terror, will ever leave my mind alone. I dread that they will not. Perhaps when I return, we could move to the west... I do not wish to live close to the city anymore. Mother would understand. Send my regards to William; tell him that his brother loves him, and misses him, despite the situation last year. Let Mother know I will be home soon. I love you, Mary. I will send you another letter in December.

With love and regards,

Michael Foster.

October 19, 1917.