

1. 'Towards the end of the war, we were so fed up we wouldn't even sing 'God Save the King' in church parade. 'Never mind the King' we used to say, he was safe enough, it should have been 'God save us'.' Private J A Hopper

2. 'I was up nearly all last night mending the barbed wire entanglements in part of our trenches and this morning can hardly keep my eyes open. There is nothing glorious in trench warfare ... And it is all for nothing.' Second Lieutenant Roland Leighton, April 1915

3. 'We were happy that our country had gone to war ... We were going to do great things for one another and for the folks at home. We were going to win fame and glory ... We really believed that we were going to fight for freedom, as the newspapers told us.' Officer writing to a newspaper

4. 'The time came for us to go over ... before we were going up over our own trenches about half of us were knocked out, killed or wounded, and going across the meadow a lot more were killed. We laid down and tried to get shelter. A sergeant just in front of me jumped up and said 'Come on men, be British!' Alan Bray, NCO, 1915

5. 'We saw some infantrymen down the slope in front of us. They ... looked as though they were walking in their sleep. I saw Tommy's colonel going out to see them. 'Come on lads' I heard him say ... they took no notice of him ... He called some of them by name 'Don't let the Regiment down'. His voice was pleading not ordering. ... It was the first time I had seen men who were finished.' Artillery Officer P J Campbell, 1917

6. 'Well we mucked in all day. Talking one thing or another. One of the Germans said to me, in excellent English too. 'Well' he said, ... 'how long do you think this damn war's going to last? I'm fed up to the neck.' 'Oh' I said, 'you're not the only ones fed up ... we're up to our necks in water and mud'. He said 'and we're the same.'" Infantryman Frank Richards, talking about the Christmas truce 1914

7. 'The Battle of the Somme was a great triumph for the genius of British leadership and command.' Colonel J H Boraston, Field Marshall Haig's personal secretary

8. 'I felt like laughing with the excitement of it. It was the whole country, the whole Empire at war together.' Lieutenant Adrian Stephen

9. 'We came out of action at 5.30 pm ... we are going to a rest camp ... We need it very much and are to sorry to get away from Ypres ... [On] the last day of the battle ... we lost our Major, Captain, two officers, Sergeant Major, two sergeants and about 20 NCOs and gunners, besides 20 drivers ... A very dear price to pay, but that I suppose is war. I count myself very lucky.' General C B Burrows November 1914

10. 'Our present billet is in some charming scenery; a village in a valley surrounded by wooded hills with the many varied autumn tints on the trees and as the sun has been brilliant yesterday and today the whole place is beautiful ... But our time here is limited ... soon we shall be in the War again ... I am afraid not so much for myself but for the men under me.' Second Lieutenant Geoffrey Thurlow October 1916

11. 'We are in another lot of wet tents surrounded by mud and it is very cold as usual; consequently our men, with the customary cheerfulness of the British, are singing joyfully.' Captain E Brittain October 1917

12. 'We were told to walk over. Walk. Which, in itself, was stupid. And you had to go over in a line, walking. That was the stupid idea. But, still, we had to do what we were told.' Private Frank Lindley

13. 'I remember thinking that if we survived, it would be a miracle ... After a couple of hours we got into a shell-hole and there was a youngster in it, crying. He was obviously in a state of terrible shock, he flung himself on us and threw his arms round my neck, shouting for his mother ... My brother-in-law ... had his right leg shattered and it was removed. He was nineteen years old.' Gunner W Lugg 1917

14. 'I am ... feeling thoroughly cheerful and happy, more so than I've felt for many months past. In the first place the show is being a success, a great success, I believe and hope. At first I was very depressed at our losses ... so many people I have seen ... who I miss so much. But now that there seems no doubt that [the war] is going to be a great success ... I have the consolation that these brave men gave their lives for a successful effort and not in a forlorn hope.' Captain L Spicer, July 1916

15. 'The enemy is facing a defeated enemy. Risks [with the soldiers] may be freely taken.' General Allenby
16. 'It achieved nothing except loss' Captain B Liddell-Hart 1917 (Passchendaele)
17. 'While we were there some men of the Lincoln regiment came through ... they had had a very bad time in the front line and were getting out as quickly as they could. They were stopped by our officers and told to join us. They weren't reluctant, they were quite happy to stay, they just hadn't known what to do.' Private Alex Jamieson 1918 (Heudicourt valley)
18. 'During our advance, I saw many of my colleagues killed by German machine gun fire. I came to the conclusion that going on would be suicidal ... Lieutenant Wallace said that we had been ordered to go on at all costs. At this he stood up and within a few seconds dropped down riddled with bullets ... I felt that I must do the same. I stood up and was immediately hit by two bullets ... I am now convinced that when it comes to the crunch, nobody has any fear at all.' Private Henry Russell 1916
19. 'We have heaps of gassed soldiers. I wish those who call this a holy war could see the poor things burnt and blistered all over with great mustard-coloured, festering blisters, with blind eyes all sticky and glued together, always fighting for breath with voices a mere whisper, saying their throats are closing and they will choke.' Private G Chapman (not before 1915?)
20. 'We formed a line and walked slowly forward. We had only gone a few yards when my mate was hit. Lines of men were just disappearing. The Germans' machine guns fired at us like it was target practice. It was all over in ten minutes. It was slaughter. The commanders, Haig and Rawlinson, didn't care about us. I don't think they cared about human life.' Private G Morgan
21. 'It was a misty morning, but this soon cleared up when the sun came right up - lovely day it was later on. We felt tense, but this is what we'd waited for - for a year now. To know we were at last 'going over the top' was a sort of relief. In a way we were frightened and excited at the same time.' Private Frank Bastable, after mid-1915
22. 'Whether they did this on purpose to show how lucky we were and had nothing to fear, whether they did it to cheer us up or whether they really thought they were correct, I don't know. But they made a huge mistake, a wicked mistake. There's no doubt about that.' Private Russell Bradshaw, talking about the order to walk across No Man's Land
23. 'It is noon now, and some of them are blowing on hot tea to cool it, or eating out of their dixies a hot stew of meat, potatoes and peas. The day is fine and other men are asleep, basking like cats on little sunny shelves and bunks cunningly sculptured out of the trenches' firm clay walls. One little knot of men off duty are bending over a comic paper.' Officer C E Montague
24. 'We were smelly, unshaven and sleepless. My uniform was rotten with other men's blood and partly spattered with a friend's brains. It is horrible, but why should you people at home not know? I cannot describe the horror. I honestly believe these men were murdered through the stupidity of the men in charge.' Lieutenant J A Raws
25. 'Very successful attack this morning ... All went like clockwork ... The battle is going very well for us and already the Germans are surrendering freely. The enemy is so short of men that he is collecting them from all along the front line. Our men are in wonderful spirits and full of confidence.' Field Marshall Haig, July 1st 1916
26. 'We saw the bombardment the Germans were getting. We thought this was the chance to get our own back. Everyone was wildly enthusiastic. Not many men were off sick. Nobody wanted to miss the fight.' Private Williams
27. 'We couldn't speak, but it was an amazing show. We stood behind the lines and watched the giant fireworks in the darkness. No one could live through that.' Lieutenant John Parker
28. 'I thought of all the things I liked, and all the things I wanted to do. I told myself that it was all over but I was sick with sadness. A rat ran down the trench. The men stabbed at it but it got away. In five minutes I would be dead.' John Masefield
29. 'I am writing this on the night before my first action. Tomorrow we go to the attack in the greatest battle the British army has ever fought. It is a great war and I am here to serve King and Country. I hope I will have the courage and strength to lead my men well.' Lieutenant Eric Heaton
30. 'I kept reminding the men what to do, wiping the mud off my rifle, over and over again. Five minutes to go ...' R H Tawney, NCO

31. 'Our High Command had not advanced beyond the tactics of the Stone Age. They could not think of any other form of warfare, except to throw into battle large numbers of men month after month.' Infantryman Lovatt Fraser
32. 'Four of us were talking and laughing in the road when about a dozen bullets came with a whistle. We all dived for the nearest door ... and fell over each other, yelling with laughter ... I adore war. It's just like a big picnic ... I've never been so well or so happy.' Captain Julian Grenfell, October 1914
33. 'One day towards the middle of the month we heard away across the other side of our camp boundary the old familiar sound of bugles on the march. Later we heard it was a unit marching to the railway station on route to the Front. There were many light infantry units in the army but we know that there was a chance that it was our own 3rd Battalion. How we wished we were going too! Bandsman H V Shawyer 1914
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