

**Away from the
Western Front**

**Creative
Writing
Competition
2018**

11-18 category

'Away from the Western Front' ran a Creative Writing Competition in 2018, inviting entries in the form of poems and short stories. This document includes shortlisted entries which met the competition rules (outlined [here](#)) in the 11-18 category.

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Poetry

War in the Dolomites

Colossal giants erupt from the blanched earth,
Sharp as razors, black as soot.
Soldiers march, drained of gaiety, drained of mirth
With snow crunching cheerlessly under foot.
One, lonesome, whistles a tragic tune
That reverberates softly like a lark
Whilst some glance up at the perpetual moon,
Basking in the lucence of the beacon in the dark.
Muscles aching from the strain,
Fatigue cursing the eyes,,
Soaked to the skin from the rain
Young ones breaking the stony silence with cries.
Cowering frigid at the summit,
The corpses can't be thawed by frozen drink
Skeletal figures cowering beneath a blanket,
Wondering how much further down they can sink.

© Anna Cannell, Southport, UK

World War I – British India

It wasn't easy to leave my family and friends
To leave for war so I can serve a ruling country
Who have had us under their grip for many years
Looked at us like we are nothing

But we didn't have a choice
We were demanded to fight the enemy
We were demanded to leave our motherland
But we didn't do this for nothing

We had hope, that we might be free
Free from the country's grasp around us
And finally get what we want
Some appraisal and recognition

Fearing death and danger every moment
Worrying about my family back home
Wondering if they are still safe and sound
Watching people die all the time

Many years passed, and Britain won the war in triumph
There were many tears shed for the dead ones
And tears shed from happiness for the ones that returned
But more than anything there was the expectance

Million of Indian soldiers bravely fought in the war
Hundreds of thousand gave up their lives and many got wounded
Back at home, people suffered with heart break of losing their loved ones
But still we didn't get independence

Even though British India supported their empire through the war
Giving them money, food, animals and warriors
But we suffered with high taxes and inflation
We still weren't free, until 15th August 1947

© Kaartika Chitturi, Northampton, UK

Anzac Cove

How empty the Cove and its unrelenting thirst
That drove so many to where rains of fire burst
In a sky sharpened by winds of searing sand--
But now all these men have deserted their last stand

Their white knuckles on the edge of ramshackle boats
With too many questions left unasked in their throats
Off to another frontline through a large sea of shrapnels
Leaving their friends pointlessly buried in the Dardanelles

Fed to the burning land through corpses and defeat's glory
They filled it to the brim with blood shed for King and Country
Now the water washes over their open mouths dried by heat
Their glassy eyes empty of dreams of any heroic feat

How empty the Cove and its carmine dust,
And its dead forming its blood-oozing crust!
For now it is quenched, and mud rather than sand
Shall swallow those who fled the horrible land.

© Firmin Lanoix, Borgo, France

Welcome to East Africa

Sand, like an ocean, as far as the eye can see,
Rolling hills, paradise beaches, a flowing tributary;
Quiver, Marula, Whistling Thorn,
Trees that have watched each coming dawn.
Welcome to East Africa, sang a voice loud and clear,
To the soldiers that landed here.

Zebra, giraffe, lion, wild as their landscape,
Yet the soldiers watched transfixed, agape.
Only the shrill scream of bullets awoke their minds
To dangers of varying kinds.
Leave us, cried East Africa, get back,
Your hearts are white, but your war is black.

None listened to their plaintive cries,
And so, came a war of incredible size.
East Africa had become one of the battlegrounds
For the First World War, for its echoing sounds.
Four empires gathered on its shore,
And released a storm like never before.

Troops from the UK, India, South Africa, Nigeria,
The war was spreading as quickly as hysteria.
The Gambia, the West Indies, Nyasaland,
Soldiers who chose to fight, to stand...
Overworked, underpaid, underfed,
It was away from home that they bled.

Disease such as malaria, dysentery,
Plagued the unfortunate infantry;
The jungle was a trap for the weak...
Hope of returning home was bleak.
Mountains to climb, deserts to cross,
How could they cope with so much loss?

Praise be to the King's African Rifles, other units,
Fighting in impossible climates.
Remember them, honour them all,
For it was they who chose to fight and fall,
And in doing so bring peace to a world of war...
A world that could then open a better door.

The Plea of a Falling Droplet

A Soldier's Memory from Gallipoli

Lusty breezes,
Reminiscences,
Floating bodies ashore,
Rattle of gunfire,
A crimson blanket of death.
Lost dreams,
Lost loves,
Death.

The spirit vacillates,
Back and forth,
Red and blue,
Back and forth.
Waves charging in with them,
Soon pulling away as
Ripples fluctuate shades-
The red topples the blue,
The blue topples the red-
Blue, scarlet, crimson...
Blue.

As dark shapes sear in from the horizon,
My battered body betrayed the
Vicious weapon vacillating in my grip.
Each drop falling off my helmet onto the sand
Screaming amidst the silence:
Time! Time! Time!

© Ahmad Aamir Malik, Lahore, Pakistan

Note from the author:

My poem focusses on the perspective of a Turkish soldier who must defend the Gallipoli peninsula from the in-coming Allied naval attack. War is a traumatic experience for all those involved and those back home; the poem intends to capture the very human spirit in a soldier who desires stability and peace, as opposed to the impending violence of warfare. The poem chronicles how the war affected a soldier in the midst of a naval battle to oppose the Gallipoli campaign. With one bout of battle portrayed in the first stanza, the soldier observes its aftermath in the image of the sea in the second stanza, while the last stanza of the poem recounts his feelings as he anticipates the next attack. Overall, the poem portrays the intensity of the War away from the western front to delineate its impact beyond Western Europe.

Gallipoli

We've heard the rumours in the news
And the whispers on everyone's breath,
Talking about this sudden and unexpected doom;
489,000 soldiers faced with inevitable deaths.
What was a victorious start,
Left our soldiers fighting with failing hearts.
"Gallipoli, Gallipoli! Have you heard about the disaster of Gallipoli," the nations cry.
But all I can do is wonder why,
My husband and the others
Left the rest of us with broken hearts.

© Holly Parker, Thaxted, UK

Note from the author:

My poem describes some of the thoughts and feelings the wives of the men who went to fight in Gallipoli might have felt when they heard that the campaigns were failing and that their husbands may barely be able to get out alive. Gallipoli was considered a disaster and I wanted to show just how much damage it might have caused to families back home.

East Africa – late 1915

As we lay in wait in the searing heat,
Illusory images just deceit,
Having slashed our way through the jungle terrain
Forgotten the look and feeling of rain.

The order was given, it happened so fast
We didn't want this fight to last
I ran and ran till I heard John swear
Then I heard a sound that gave me a scare

I spun to my left, gun loaded and aimed
And then slowly lowered and I felt ashamed
A boy, scared stiff, barely seventeen
Traumatised by all the horror he'd seen.

I hesitated, for just long enough
A lucky shot, not well aimed, just rough
I looked around and the last thing I saw
John on his knees and then flat on the floor

© Bethany Sankey, Bromley, UK

A Message from Heaven

Shhhh, Quiet.
I must hear the sound of silence.
Silence is all I need
please respect the mothers mourning.

These words are for a mother with sad eyes
full of sorrow, without will to live a new tomorrow.
This mother is one of many
who lost her son in the darkest time.

Dear mother, your son lost his life
on a cold, black, winter night.
The socks you knitted delicately
your son never got to touch.

Death was the only one
who got to warm him up.
The wind of war took him away
he gave his life for his land, so brave.
Yes I know he was very young
full of dreams and vibrance.

Strong mother please wipe your tears
because now he is a shining star from dreams.
Please don't look on the road now
because he will not come soon.

He gave his heart, life and eyes
for lovely wishes of every child.
Please mother, don't be so sorrowful
for his grave now is light and full of fate.

Now winter can't touch him
and his soul is within us all.
Hear the message from heaven
be strong, just as he was.

© Tara Stankovic , Belgrade, Serbia

Note from the author:

This song is dedicated to mother Makrena whose son died between the mountains in Albania while the Serbian army retreated in 1915. Makrena knitted a pair of red socks for him, while searching the battlefield where she met King Petar I. She begged him to find her son and give him the socks. The King quickly found out her son had died. After the war, he built a statue in honour of the young soldier and his mother who died of sadness. A few years later King Petar also passed away. Under his pillow were found the same pair of red socks.

Short stories

The Long Road East

Bagdad had fallen and with it dreams of German Expansion into the arid lands of Arabia. Germany, however, did not require land; they needed food and oil, Baku had both. Located in the crumbling Russian Empire, easily within the grasp of the Ottomans, the German people would be fed again. This couldn't happen, there could not be a link from Berlin to Baku. But who could stop it? A large army would be spotted and where would they draw the men? Lionel Dunsterville would be the solution. A small force of about 200 officers could travel through neutral Persia to Enzali then sail up to Baku, a short trip of 12 days at the most. On January 27th we set out from Bagdad. Only I and 10 other officers departed along with 47 drivers. We were to be bolstered along the way. No one was to find out. That is why we brought gold.

As the wheels of the Ford trucks roll on, a horrible sight greets us. The vehicles grind to a halt. Blocking our way were two men lying face down on the track. We all get out, John Wardman ran over, confirming what we all knew; they had both died of starvation. Dunsterville said that this was just the beginning of what was to come. We trundled on to Kermanshah. As we came over the Hilltop a galloping horseman rode up to meet us, dressed in a Russian uniform with a fur hat (hardly needed in Persia) and a fine jacket upon which hung many medals. My limited Russian told me that this man was Colonel Bicherakov, the leader of a group of Cossacks loyal to the Tsar, who acted as a rear guard for the departing Russian Troops. He explained how they would go with us. As we travelled on to Asadabad disaster struck and the misfortune we had eluded for some time came hurtling towards us like a Whizzbang. The snow started to pelt down, William Trevor joked that the war will be over by the time we get out of this mess. I began to believe him, the boredom of being stranded at 7000 feet is unbelievable. The Russians weren't much fun, but there Fur Hats (which once we mocked), became the envy of us all. A week we were stuck there before the snows finally fled before us like a Communist before a German. We had hardly travelled 30 miles before we were hit by bad weather again at Hamadan, although not for as long. This was certainly turning out to be an adventure, such a thing I would never have imagined, at home in Canada.

I almost forgot to introduce myself, I am Robert and was a captain before I chose to join the Dunsterforce. It was quite an adventure getting here too, we went around the Cape of Good Hope on a very 'dirty' transport. Dirty was an understatement, but we were colonial soldiers, a right mismatch as it happens, so anything would do. I sailed up the Persian Gulf before driving to Baghdad, where I met Lionel Dunsterville. He isn't the most competent commander I've served under, but he was fluent in Russian, which is more than can be said of me! We continued for another 200 or so miles, which passed without a hitch before our arrival at Qazvin. The city gates loomed over us as we approached. Suddenly the ominous silence that had surrounded us for the last mile was rent into a million shards, like smashing glass. The throngs of people, who surrounded us, started shouting in Persian. Roy Casey

turned to me and muttered “God damned Jangalis”. You see, the leader of this part of Persia (called Gilan) is Mirza Kuchik Khan. The people here are often called the Jangalis due to the jungle climate surrounding the hills. He was in league with the Communists who ran Enzali and together they vowed to never let the British through. I suggested going around the city to Lionel, but to this he merely muttered back, “Only road to the Caspian this. And even if we could it would be clogged up by Russians” I then recalled the roads littered with Russian men. I remember eating with one of them, he was an officer and was, I think, the only literate one there. There was friendship between us, but we were certainly not allies. Most of them were Bolshevik because that’s where they were heading. I heard one discussing the Soviet in Kazian. They spoke as though they believed in the cause but only because that’s what they were told to believe. Kazian must be where they came from, I thought at the time. I was suddenly snapped from my thoughts by a Russian voice behind me. “The Kazian road will be clear”. It was Colonel Bicherakov. He looked grave but no less proud. “It is ruled by a Soviet and this Khan must watch his back, Durachit” Suddenly a more worrying possibility opened itself to me, what if we were to be attacked? I hardened myself, I was a soldier not a foreign correspondent. I resolved to bed down for the night and wait for what little hope the day-light might bring. Waking to the sound of many movements in the camp, my fears were allayed, we were going.

The movement of people on the road was enormous. I couldn’t have believed for a second that we would have made it a mile, but we marched on. Kazian was apparently a Russian port right next to Baku. We abandoned our plans to make for Tbilisi, Kazian was so close. We trundled up, Lionel got out to meet a guard at the gate. I heard Lionel attempting to explain that we are British and on a special mission, the guard was having none of it. Lionel returned. “We must talk to the Soviet”. We all shivered, a change was in the air.

© William Bowden-Ritchie, Bideford, Devon, UK

Note from the author:

This fictional account describes one man’s journey as part of the Dunsterforce, which was a mission to secure the oil fields of Baku during the First World War.

Heat

Even through the closed blinds, beams of golden light had managed to escape through the cracks into the dark room. Dust motes floated slowly in their midst and settled on a faint floral pattern that was just visible on the faded olive bedspread. The day was hot and stifling. Bruce Mackenzie reached over to his left and picked up a half-opened book, squinting and adjusting his glasses to check the page number. The musty smell of moth eaten furniture had been intensified by the humid atmosphere and as he leant back into the armchair he could feel his shirt sticking to him like a sheet of cling film. He mopped his brow with a cotton handkerchief and called out in aggravation.

'Nurse!'

There was no answer and he readjusted himself in the chair irritably. Leaning forward and called again.

'Nurse!'

He could hear nothing but silence outside in the hallway. Most of the residents were outside enjoying the hot weather. The screams of excited grandchildren could be heard from the garden and he expected the nurses were making the most of the day by getting out of the home for a few hours. No one would have thought about him, or if they had, it wouldn't have held them back. In many ways he didn't blame them. He put his book down and stood up from his chair. The air conditioning might be better in the lounge, and, seeing as he was the only one inside on 'a day like this' it would be completely deserted. He made his way to the door and opened it to a wash of blinding light. He put a hand over his eyes, turning his head slightly and squinting through the gap of his wrinkled fingers.

It was a moment before he could see again. The screams of the children outside and the heat burning on his face seemed suddenly magnified. He reached for his handkerchief in his dressing gown pocket to wipe the sweat from his brow, but his hand slipped past his waist and fell into nothingness. The material against his skin began to feel coarse and ill fitting, beads of sweat were trapped on his neck against a starch white collar that was gently strangling his throat. He knew the uniform immediately, the khaki drill set of jacket and shorts, black tie and long socks, completed with a green hackle set in his bush hat. His heart raced. He knew exactly where he was, the sandy, dehydrated ground, the thin, stunted trees, the raging white sun that never ceased to bear down upon him, he knew it better than he would ever wish to. The parched and foul landscape of northern Cameroon stretched out before him. The children's screams had merged into the piercing wails of the wounded, and he could smell the pungent stench of horses and gunpowder mixed into a disgustingly familiar odour. The back of his throat was burning, his tongue felt like cardboard against his cracked lips. He reached for his water bottle, but it was empty. A man rushed past him and then stopped in his tracks. He turned around, a deep gash visible in his composed face. As the two soldiers looked into each other's eyes a flash of panic crossed the strange man's face and he shouted out in desperation.

'Mackenzie! We need to move!' The soldier waited for a response, but none came. In two minds, he looked behind him and then back at Mackenzie before slipping his shoulder under his friend's arm and dragging him forwards.

'Mackenzie, you need to snap out of it... If you want to get out of here, you need to move.' Mackenzie looked up at the man supporting him, and with a sudden wave of understanding, he recognised the face he was looking into.

'Blake?'

An expression of relief crossed the man's face.

'Yeah, that's right, it's me. Now do you think you can run on your own?'

Mackenzie swallowed and nodded. Blake made to move on but halted when he realised he was walking alone. He turned back to Mackenzie.

'What now?'

'What about MacLear?'

Blake's expression hardened, and he shook his head. Mackenzie froze as a huge rock dropped into the bottom of his stomach. If he had felt ill before, it was nothing compared to this. He had to move.

'Let's go.' He said and ran ahead of Blake, concentrating on his blistered toes and dry mouth. He let the heat consume him, focusing on every bead and drop of sweat that trickled down his pounding forehead. He tried to keep only the physical pain in his mind, but it kept screaming the same name over and over again, MacLear. He knew it was his fault, he knew that Blake knew it was his fault.

The screams inside his mind became louder and louder until he felt cold hands on his shoulder restraining him. The burning light was gone. The tight, scratching uniform was no longer trapping him, and he realised the pained wails were coming from his mouth. He silenced himself and spluttered. He was lying on the floor in the home, his dressing gown twisted around his neck and his throat burning. Three nurses stood around him with serious looks on their faces.

'It must have been the heat.'

'Someone should have been watching him.'

He tried to stand up, and the nurse held his arm to support him.

'Mr. Mackenzie we're going to take you to the lounge until they come to fix your air conditioning, is that alright?'

He nodded slowly and followed her down the hallway. The lounge was completely deserted, bar one resident who sat reading the paper with his back to them. As Mackenzie went to sit behind him, the man reading spoke quietly.

'I never did like the heat'

Blake put down his paper and gave Mackenzie a knowing smile.

© Constance Cottrell, Sherborne, Dorset, UK

Note from the author:

It is a memory/hallucination of a man who took part in the battle of Garua in Cameroon, Africa.

Lest We Forget

It was another oppressive, smothering morning in Eastern Africa, the type of atmosphere that could only be elicited by the imminent threat of violence. Innocent and unblemished mounds adorned the surrounding area, except for a large space to the East of the landscape, where deep patterns of train tracks of trenches were cut into the skin of the earth. These incisions were so vast and complex that they seemed, in some perverse way, to be a city of their own. The morning sun was rising, glowering purple anger over the land of Mahiwa, casting a deep, powerful hue over myself and all the other trees who stood like paralysed guardians around the land. Slowly the seconds ticked by, thick and heavy with a meaning that to us was not yet apparent. Then suddenly, so suddenly, the blanket of morning peace crumbled.

The orchestra of war began to play in total harmony, resonant and sonorous. Frenzied choirs of howling shells began to ring out, complemented by the hellfire of furious artillery and the cackle of laughing guns. Abruptly, swarming and buzzing, the men appeared like houseflies, bearing down on the trenches at remarkable speed. Almost instantly, the bustling city of trenches reared its head and removed its disguise, allowing its true nature as a hellish war machine to emerge. Black stubs of gun muzzles emerged and began licking their lips with fire and blood; heavier weapons were loaded and fired, creating their own symphony from the depth of hell itself. Gas masks were fumbled onto faces in a cacophony of discord, an organised panic that only war can bring. Then the bloodshed started. The once peaceful, undefiled soil was drenched with the wild blood of young men; men who were sons, fathers and husbands. The measureless fields, once as lush and verdant as the core of nature itself, were no longer green but an unadulterated red. Even the air was soon corrupted, viscous as soup and opaque as concrete. Those with the masks lived, those without died a death far too inhuman to articulate. I could not recoil nor could I intervene. Instead, all I could do was watch these men tear themselves and others so similar to themselves to bitter shreds. Men were not simply murdered nor were they killed. They were annihilated, mown down in a manner so brutal and efficient that it was scarcely believable that anyone with a soul could have contributed to such an act.

Yet, somehow, as quickly as the men were slaughtered like cows in an abattoir, more clambered over ridges, faces ghostly and pale while at the same time lined with a determination and a willingness fuelled by utter bravery. These men, these great patriots of men on both sides, continued to kill and to die in a cycle that was almost as vicious as it was mindless. As the scene unfolded in front of me, I was aware of what many of the men were not. Night was beginning to creep in, hushed and stealthy. The extra layer of darkness only thickened the confusion of the brutality. Soon the cursed chatter of machine gun fire was not only hitting opposing men but men wearing the same uniform and badge, those fighting under the same flag. Within the gloom, more and more men found themselves relaxing into the warm and comforting embrace of death.

Some days later, the battle was won. The habitants of the city of the earth were driven away, fleeing backwards as fast as pride would allow. The intruders swiftly followed, lions hunting their deer. When all those alive had left, the new landscape was finally revealed from underneath the mask of violence. Only on the very outskirts of the battlefield was any green earth visible, every other inch of space was covered with dead bodies and the oozing, stinking brown bog that had been stamped into existence by thousands of battle hardened

feet. The dead totalled 3,300 men, lying in their final resting place, hundreds of miles from anywhere they had ever called home. The silence left was not simply an absence of noise but a crushing weight that bore down on this place. So many fathers perished, so many sons and so many husbands. Yet whilst they gave their lives for the freedom of others, they will not be remembered. They will merely make up a number, their lives will be boiled down to a statistic, a page on a textbook that will simply induce innocent shock and disbelief in a child in a classroom. It is seemingly beyond the comprehension, beyond the ability of most humans to hold these heroes in the blaze of glory they merit, so perhaps it is down to nature and to the natural laws of our universe to do so. One day, I will too die and join these valiant warriors but until then, with every fibre in me, I will remember them.

© Matthew Gittleton, Radlett, Hertfordshire, UK

Note from the author:

My story commemorates all of those who fought as bravely as the men in the Western Front, in battles as horrific as those on the Western Front but whom receive little recognition. Over 1 million local men, known as Askaris, were forced into battle and over 100,000 died during the campaign in Eastern Africa for a war not pertinent to them yet very few people even know of their existence.

Illan

I remember feeling my heart racing so fast that I felt it would explode. I remember the look of complete horror on my mother's face and look of immense pride on my father's. I remember the shouting, the crying and the begging. Most of all I remember the fear as Illan walked out of the house dressed in a uniform that I didn't recognise. Leaving us behind. The day my family was changed forever.

Every day felt like there was a bomb ticking away, just waiting to explode. Waiting to slash my family to tiny pieces. He wasn't even old enough. At least that's what mother had shouted in the many arguments we'd had before he left. He was only 16 when he joined. Father always said he was a tall lad and that it would do him good. Be the making of him. Even after Illan had left, the arguments continued.

1915 October 15th. I'll never forget that dreadful day. I had been lying on my bed thinking about what I would be eating for my dinner. When I look back at that moment I wonder how I could have been thinking of something so trivial when the most horrific moment of my life was about to unfold.

I heard a sudden shriek that sounded like someone was being strangled. I leapt up from my bed and sprinted down the stairs. I found Mother crumpled in a chair with tears streaming down her face. "Illan, he...he's gone" she sobbed. I felt my heart wrench. I felt like I'd just been stabbed in the chest. We'd been close. Closer than anyone realised. That's what had kept me going. Knowing he was out there fighting. Knowing he'd be back one day. Except he never did come back. My life had been torn to shreds and there was nothing I could do about it.

Our once vibrant home felt dreary, bitter, cold, gloomy, empty. The house was almost silent. I could often hear the clock ticking, or the newspaper being rustled. It didn't feel like the cheerful, warm, welcoming home it had once been. Before Illan left. Before Illan died. As days past, my heart ached more and more for him. I couldn't concentrate on anything else. I kept thinking about how if we'd have convinced him to stay, he wouldn't be dead. It was hard to believe that a year ago my family had been complete, perfect. How one moment could destroy that. It was hard to accept our family could never be the same again. I think Mother took the news of Illan's death the worst. From that day onwards, she looked pale and exhausted. She couldn't get her head around the fact he was gone. She refused to let any of us into his room. This caused more arguments because Father thought we should have cleared out his room and moved on. I couldn't believe that he could just move on. He had once said, "We're all upset that we've lost Illan but we need to move on". I couldn't bear Father talking like that anymore so I interrupted their argument shouting "He's not a pen that you've lost. He's a person and he's not lost he's dead and he always will be". They were both taken aback. I rarely ever spoke since his death. "Mishka that's enough," Father had bellowed before storming out.

More than a year later I found myself being told to enter Illan's room. As I set foot in the room in my house I had not entered for so long, I felt a harsh chill shoot down my spine. It looked the same as it had when Illan had left. No one had been in the room since that day. The room smelled musty and there was dust almost everywhere. The room seemed to have lost the vibrant colour it had once had. It seemed grey and lifeless. I opened the creaky

wooden wardrobe and saw all his clothes neatly put away. He'd always taken great pride in making sure his room looked its best.

I remembered why I was here. It wasn't to cherish all the items he'd once used daily. It was to pack up. Bring only a few items. It seemed impossible to bring just a handful of his possession. Especially as the room had contained everything he had owned.

Images of him in the room seemed to appear in my mind. I could almost see Illan sitting on his bed sketching. His favourite pastime. I knew in the bottom drawer was where he kept all his sketchbooks. They contained sketches of almost everything he had seen in his far too short life. He would spend hours sitting anywhere and sketching. The smooth leather covering of his crimson sketchbook, where all his best sketches went, reminded me of how he had planned to go to art school once he had returned. He had everything planned out. Plans he would never be able to fulfil.

We weren't packing up just *his* belongings. All of us were packing. Russia was no longer a safe place to be. Everything I'd ever known, I was leaving behind. I was leaving my bedroom, my school, my house, my town, my country. I was moving to New York.

© Darcey Keegan, Bromley, UK

The Battle for the Suez Canal

23/01/1915, British

"All able-bodied soldiers are to immediately get to the Suez Canal; The Ottomans are threatening an attack," called out Lieutenant Mangle "We must retain control!"

Corporal James Scant had volunteered to join the British Army, charged with 'Doing whatever the hell Lieutenant Mangle told him to'. He wasn't exactly cut out to be an Army man, being short and not particularly fit. Nevertheless, he was doing his part for the war, battling the Ottomans. James joined the march to the Canal alongside his fellow soldiers. The march was long and uncomfortable, but James wasn't allowed to complain. The regiment silently marched onwards towards the battle that would soon begin.

The regiment arrived at the Canal on the 25th of January 1915 at 23:00hrs.

"This is it, men," Mangle shouted, "Ottomans will be here soon. We must hold the Canal. If we fail. Africa will become a foothold for the Ottomans advancing towards our colonies."

"Sir, we have information from High Command. You'll want to hear this," bellowed an Officer, "Due to the death of Captain Rampant you've been promoted to Captain. Corporal James Scant has been promoted to Sergeant. Oh, also, approximately 20,000 Ottomans are on the way toward your position. High Command has ordered your immediate preparation"

"Very good, Officer," said Captain Mangle "Now we wait. Let the Ottomans try to take our Canal"

The British dug out a barricade for when the Ottomans came, set up machine gun nests and decided to relax for as long as they could before the Ottoman scum arrived. Hundreds of soldiers remained alert, keeping a lookout for enemies.

The next morning, when James was on watch, many shapes began to appear on the horizon. It looked like men on horses, but it couldn't have been horses from the awkward way the men were sitting... James instructed a Private to alert the stationed troops at the Canal. Within 5 minutes, everyone was prepared, watching the figures draw ever closer. A soldier, obviously panicked, fired his Marlin M1894 rifle at the figures. A burst of bullets hit one of the advancing silhouettes. Other soldiers began aiming their weapons at the shapes.

"CEASE FIRE! CEASE FIRE!" yelled Mangle. Turning towards the soldier, he spat, "What were you thinking!? These could be allies or supplies. What is your problem?"

"But, Sir..." pleaded the soldier helplessly

"I shall not tolerate this!"

"Sir?" James said slowly.

“What? What is it Sergea...”

Captain Mangle was cut off as his head exploded. The near-by British forces sat, stunned briefly. The shapes continued to advance.

21/01/1915, Ottomans

Birinci Ferik, Kassad Al-Bambi, was in command for the Attack on the Suez. The Ottoman troops were mobilising for an assault, as the Canal was in a strategically important position. He had approximately 20,000 troops from Germany and the Ottoman Empire at his disposal, as opposed to the estimated 25,000 British troops. Nothing could go wrong! He ordered all his troops to drink before they left their encampment, as it would be a long time before they could drink water again. All his troops mounted camels and began the long ride to the Suez Canal.

26/01/1915

A few days later, Al-Bambi's troops had the 'Highway to India' in their sights. The Imperialist Dogs had made it obvious they were stationed there, as they were flying their Colonialist flag. He ordered his men to continue the camel march until they were right on top of the British forces.

“Birinci Ferik, I see a British Sergeant,” reported his sharpshooter. “Shall I kill him?”

“Hold fire,” Al-Bambi said, bluntly. “Keep marching.”

A sudden burst of bullets hit and killed a soldier. It was quickly followed by a booming voice as a British Captain stood up shouting at a soldier.

Al-Bambi Smiled. “Shoot him,” He said to his sharpshooter, gesturing towards the Captain.

The marksman complied and fired his gun. He struck the Captain in the head. The British in the area seemed stunned. Seconds later, the Sergeant Al-Bambi had spotted earlier hollered “Return Fire!”. The British regiment opened fire on the enemy.

26/01/1915 16:00hrs Ottomans

Very quickly, Al-Bambi realised he had underestimated the British soldiers at the Canal completely. He knew the chances of a successful attack were low. He ordered all his troops to dismount their camels and begin the assault. He didn't see the machine gun in its nest beside the British barricade. The Brits behind tore through the Ottomans. Swiftly, Ottoman troops disposed of the machine gunners, and began attacking the other enemy troops.

“My God,” Al-Bambi muttered, aiming his Snider-Enfield Mk III rifle at the British. “This'll be fun...”

19:00hrs 04/02/1915, British

The Ottomans began retreating. James almost laughed at how easy it had been annihilating the Ottomans. The nine-day siege had been a resounding failure for the Ottoman Empire. Underestimating the skill of the British and their numbers had been their folly. Once the last of the Ottomans had retreated, James returned to the British encampment with his fellow soldiers and wrote an urgent communiqué straight to London.

Suez, defended. 30 Brits Killed. 1500 Ottomans defeated. Captain Mangle dead.
Advise what to do next.

James stood up and walked to an officer.

“Has the message sent?” He asked

“Oh, not yet sir,” the officer replied, hesitantly. “I can’t imagine they will be pleased about the news of Captain Mangle, however... he was a good soldier, and an even better tactician”

“Tell me the moment you hear anything. Understand?”

“Yes, sir!”

James rubbed his eyes, wearily. After days of fighting, he decided to go to bed. Except, he couldn’t fall asleep; after seeing what he’d seen. The noises of the guns remained in his head. The distressed screams of his comrades and enemies. The faces of all the people he had killed, and the people who had sacrificed themselves in service to their country in this bloody war. James felt he would never sleep again.

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Note from the author:

The Raid on the Suez Canal was fought in Middle Eastern Territory, which is thousands of miles from the western front. It was fought in early 1915, during the First World war between Britain, against the Ottoman Turks and the Germans.

East Africa in World War 1

40 years ago, I was a young mere 27-year-old, who had a whole life ahead of them, yet it was ruined by a pointless political escapade, in which many innocents lost their lives. The dreaded deathly war. I had recently married a stunning lady called Edith, the apple of my eye, and we had just had our first child together, she was called Patricia, a pretty fair haired brown eyed girl, when I got a telegram from the War Office requesting for my services as a medic in the war, in East Africa. I was desperate to decline but knew that would have been selfish and I would have been seen as a cold-hearted man.

So here is my story...

On July the 28th 1914 I waved goodbye to my dearly beloved family in hope that I would see them shortly again, and climbed into a big truck full of medics, and equipment, the overpowering smell of disinfectant was like an isolation room in hospital. As we set off on our long journey to Africa a wave of dread hit me, the war was not only going to be a few months as promised, it was going to be a year if not more. I would miss my daughter grow up, passed being a baby and fast becoming a toddler.

After weeks on end of travelling and shifting from truck to truck and boats we finally arrived in East Africa, we were all briefed about the rules about the animals and their behaviours. Africa, as I soon came to learn was very different to England, it had intense heat with temperatures hitting 40 degrees far in excess of anything I had previously experienced. The food would not keep and there were swarms of different insects and bugs causing many fevers, resulting in some deaths to the weakened soldiers. On the first evening we all dug holes in the firm soil, and then lined them with blankets to sleep in, once we had 'dug himself in' (a common phrase in the trenches) we covered ourselves with mosquito nets to protect ourselves from their vicious bites. However, those on picket duty were almost eaten alive by the crawling midgets by the morning.

By the end of the week our makeshift hospital was littered with the wounded and weak. Many had suffered from the bullets, or some form of fever, trench fever which was transmitted from the lice was the most common. Other soldiers were temporarily affected by the burrowing flea which layed millions of eggs under the toe nails soft layer of skin, this had to be removed by a large brass safety pin, using a plucking process which resulted in screams of agony. The poor effected soldiers then struggled to walk on the foot for a day or two.

Over the coming months I was responsible for disposing of the dead corpses. The dead had to be undressed to keep the clothing and boots for new recruits, or those who had lost some of these items whilst in the dark death-defying trenches. The scent of death was in the air, the lingering scent of cordite from battle front guns, the putrid decaying flesh was poignant and pungent, it stung the back of my throat. The hardest part of this was seeing friends, those you had tried to save die, and knowing it could easily be you next. I quickly learnt to not become attached to others, and to not think about family as the likelihood of seeing them again slowly diminished, pieces of my heart were slowly breaking off, yet the only thing that I clung to, that kept me sane night in and night out was the thought of my wife and daughter.

The war dragged on and on, from days to weeks, to months and eventually years. I was getting sick of this pain staking war, it was slowly killing me from inside to out, soon all that would be left of me was a pile of bones, no longer a body full of soul or spirit.

After another of the endless shifts I stopped for some lunch, by that I mean a plate covered with earth and dust, with a miniscule amount of some vile tinned food, today it was rock solid biscuits and a meat stew which was fat, not even a morsel of meat, this led to the soldiers upset stomachs, and me having to clean up the mess they had made. The food was nothing like my wife's delightful vegetable and meat pies with potatoes, and the occasional piece of sweet cake.

Whilst working on the never-ending queue of wounded soldiers you lost track of all your senses, fingers were numb with working so rigidly, you could feel the grit scratching the soft insides of your mouth, tasting of dirt which has accumulated onto your skin, noses were blocked with the surgical smell of sterilizers, the constant sound of gun shots ringing in your ear, and the worst was seeing the vast mass of injured and dying people, men not pulling through. The drowsy and lonely feeling kicked in once I had reflected on my day's work. You had to accept death was just sitting on the horizon, gradually getting closer, machine guns at the ready. Prepared to launch an unforeseen attack.

Next morning, I woke up to the noise of the hippos wallowing in the waterhole, the warming sun gently rose in the east and shone down on my back. The elephants and giraffes were waking from their shelters, preparing for the baking sun, which seared through anything and everything. I went for a little walk whilst it was still cool, the dusty dirt track led me through the dense forest and the undergrowth, there were Wattles, and small shrubs like the Oleander, it was the only colourful thing there was in this terrifying war, the fabulous fuchsia flowers. But nothing could prepare me for what I saw next. Battle fields. Littered with motionless bodies, the ground soaked in seeping blood of the wounded and the deceased, little did anyone know how much use it would have been, how many lives could have been saved with the precious vital blood, given away to what... nothing. Feeding the dry scorched ground. A waste beyond human comprehension.

By the time the evening came, the medical staff refreshed their list of injured people who would be sent home for they were not fit to fight, those whose families were not ever going to see their loved ones again. The lists were endless. Once we had finally finished list after list, we were given our jobs by our general. I dreaded this every time, the only worse thing other than disposing of lifeless corpses was entering the death zone to retrieve the injured from the days carnage. That death zone was my new assignment, it would be dreadful, checking bodies for life and then hauling them back to the medical tents all the while having to listen to the wailing like a sea of screeching sea urchins being hunted down by a seagull. The next few weeks were awful, I was barely getting by, my own health was rapidly deteriorating, sounds of the bullets pierced through me like a dagger, going straight through me.

I was bringing back my final soldier on a stretcher, thinking about how lucky I was, and if my wife would still accept me as a war beaten man, when gunshots open fired, I narrowly missed a shot to my arm, but my back was paralyzed, I couldn't move. The last thing I remember was crashing to the ground. The world came to a standstill. I was dipping in and out of consciousness, there was distant chatter and blurry faces... everything stopped. Little did I know my body went into a coma. I was lying there stationary for days. I woke up at

home in my bed with my dear Edith, what had happened, it must have been a dream from 40 years earlier, yet the memory was still so vivid in my mind, still traumatizing me years later, but my question was answered, my wife's love was unconditional towards me, and she still accepted me for who I was.

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Editor's note:

This story was too long to be entered in the competition but we are happy to include it in this compilation.

Eye to Eye

Blue waves spill messily across the land smudging the straight line that separates the land and the sea. New lands...The earth is dry and arid beneath my feet, suspended in the air is the smell of spice, the sensation is new to me. I look behind me to see the grand vessel with the words 'Deutsch-Mittelafrika' stamped in bold red letters that scream with hunger. This has been a dream of ours for some time now. To expand our empire into new lands. The landscape is stunning. Luscious green trees sway in the breeze, Animals are flocked round. They are all roaming free here! The rest of the troops are holding a meeting to discuss strategy, I ventures outside however. I have no interest in their political madness. I'm interested in the travel and the diversity, the only downside being that this wretched war has dragged my anchor to a standstill. It's not leisurely, not in the front lines, not where bodies explode like fireworks and screams are heard more than laughter.

The skyline amazes me every time I walk, always something new, I love the wonderful land we call our own. I have crept away from the party in the village centre, one of the grandmothers has just turned 80. The reach beat of the drums echoes for miles and the laughter is never ending. The path gives me peace and sometimes, when I feel brave enough I try to look beyond the horizon and the everlasting blue see and imagine what lies beyond. My ancestors blood all runs through the rivers and the earth, in the animals and in the sky above this land. This is our birth right and our home. I'll be back soon, back to the world I knew and love. I'm going to go to the coastline first, the water droplets beckon me. I'll take a quick dip in the water and then head back.

I see a man, walking along a dirt road. He has dark skin, the colour of rich dark chocolate. He has a mop of black hair and is wearing a loose top and shorts. He doesn't notice me, at first he appears to be gazing at something beyond the horizon. I can hear the sound of men chattering and I know that their meeting is coming to a close, I don't know what they'll do to this man if they find him. In a split second the man notices me. His eyes widen in alarm. We are 5 metres away now. From here I can see his eyes although they are a hazel brown to my cool blue, they mirror each other. I can see in that moment that no matter what the other troops may say, these people are just that, people. We are just people black, white or green, they really are just people. I see fear in his eyes and in that moment I see them in mine too. Fear of the unknown. The plans the troops have for here is awful, I've seen them, hushed up in whispers and rolled up in wisps of paper we all know. There's to be bloodshed. The people at the top have no humanity and cannot see that these people are just people. I have to warn this man...

The man in front of me has skin like the pale zebra stripes. He has a mop of curly blonde hair that sticks outwards at awkward angles from a black cap. We are standing close so I can see his eyes so clearly. They are blue, not like any colour I've seen in anyone's eyes. I feel like I could fall forever within their depth. The man says something, his tongue is foreign to me. He knows I don't understand and he wildly gestures towards the direction I have come. He's pointing using one bony calloused finger and then does strange motion. I don't understand. He seems more urgent now, almost tearful.

I push him. I physically push him. He has to go NOW. I can hear the voices of the other troops harmonizing with the tread of rubber heels. The man looks at me blankly after

wobbling backwards only slightly. I can't tell if he is angry or upset, he stands stone still as he sees the shoal of identical troops marching towards us.

"Left, right, left, HEY LOOK!" they cry as they see me face to face with the man. Their guns are already drawn when they see how close we are standing. The man sees the sharp smooth metal glinting in the sun and begins to run.

The huddle of troops suddenly aim these metal contraptions towards me. From the tone of their shouts I can tell it's not good. My instincts kick in and I run for my life, like the zebras being hunted by the lions. My legs burn as my breath shallows. I don't look back, I just keep my eyes focused on the people behind the horizon. Is this what they're like? Are these the people I've been wondering about since I'm a child. Is this the humanity on the other side of those perpetual blue waters?

I shout for the men to stop, I scream but it's too late, a jet of bullets is pelted towards the poor man and he fall. The air is sucked from my lungs as he does. This is not what I signed up for. I knew there would be killing, there's more than I imagined. I did not agree to the killing of the innocent and defenceless. What's worse is that my fellow troops, men I've laughed with and travelled with show no remorse. Their faces remain stone cold as they march towards the distant sounds of laughter. Is this what is left of humanity? I look at the man's bleeding corpse and I try to imagine the wondrous light I saw in his eyes mere moments ago. I can't imagine it now.

© Jasleen Singh, South Gloucestershire, UK

Note from the author:

My entry is based around the East African Campaign. I decided on this theme as I met Dr. Anne Samson from the GWAA recently and she inspired me to research more into WW1 and WW2 beyond the classroom and the involvement that different countries played. I wanted my short story to give an emotional sense to the reader about what it must have been like for both the Germans and Natives of East Africa when they first met. The inspiration as well as my research and interest of the event itself is a collection of photographs I found online. They showed the relationship between the Germans and the Natives and how both sides treated teh other.

I have deliberately included the name 'Deutsch-Mittelafrika' which is the name created for a geostrategic region in central and east Africa. it originally articulated Germany's foreign policy aim (at the time I am writing for), prior to World War I, of bringing the region under German domination. It was significant to use this as I feel like the name is quite an important aspect especially in my two sided short story. I wanted to incorporate the German views on what they were doing as well as the one of the natives. I feel this allows the reader to get a better overall grasp on what things would have been like.

They showed how the natives were treated when the German troops arrived. This made me feel incredibly sad and I reflected on the injustice that had happened to these people living peacefully in their home. That's why I wrote this short story as it gives a snapshot (of although fictitious characters) of the fact that these were all people with real lives and real stories that it is crucial we remember and I think that an emotional short story can trigger empathy and raise awareness about these events.

Long Live War

The nameless soldier ignored the sweat running down his forehead and stinging his eyes. He didn't have a choice: strength was a requirement and not an option out here, especially when he was alone. He thought of the words the sergeant had said--he didn't understand them, but he guessed they were meant to be motivational. Sometimes he wasn't so sure, though. They were supposed to be motivational, so why did soldiers say it with suicide on their minds and sarcasm in their tones? If it was good, why was it screamed in fervent delirium? Why did men down bottle after bottle to forget it? It was the only English he could read or say: two years of military training had been effective at drilling it into him. He didn't even understand the words in question--just parroted them to please everyone. It was funny, he thought, he could kill a man with an English weapon but not propose peace in the English language. It didn't matter, English or no, there was no one to talk to, so he just repeated the military mantra over and over. It was all that kept him sane, as he sat in the heat, waiting to kill a man he didn't hate for a country he didn't love. It was all that kept him sane as he waited to watch an English war unfold underneath an African sun. All that kept him sane, and he didn't even know what it meant. What did it mean? What did those hopeful words in that hopeless tongue mean? What was the meaning of "long live war"?

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اجتنب مصاحبة الكذاب فإن اضطررت إليه فلا تُصدِّق
("Avoid the company of liars, but if you can't, don't believe them")

Harun's last breath disappeared into the scorching heat of the sandy dunes. Regardless, he died happy. Truly, genuinely happy. For once in his life, Harun knew that he had truly made a difference; He had aided the liberation of Arabia from the tyrannical Turkish rule, and consequently, he knew he would be remembered as one of the heroes who freed them. With that idea in mind, he eagerly awaited the angels of death to present him to Allah, who would undoubtedly praise him for his valiant efforts. The Arabs would finally be free.

#

Hundreds of miles away, in a lavish, decorated room, three affluent and well-dressed diplomats discussed how they would partition the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire after its collapse to merely the control of the European powers. Without hesitation or regret, Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot co-authored a secret agreement radiating with deceit and imperialism, silently congratulating themselves on achieving additional global influence for their respective nations while they betrayed the Arabs that continued to die in the deserts, dedicated to fighting for their promised state which the two, smirking men had understood from the start would never reach fruition. It wasn't as if they should care what happened to a foreign territory known as "Asia Minor", surely? They both felt a jolt of self-righteousness at their heroism, bringing their refined Western civilization to the barbarians of the Middle East. Yes, they were heroes. Undoubtedly.

At that moment, the men received news of a report that had been created regarding casualties inflicted on the Allies so far during the war. Reading through the figures, Sykes skimmed past the tens of thousands of Arabs to discover that the poor citizens of Newfoundland had already lost 1000 men to the brutal war. Sykes was genuinely outraged; How dare the Germans offer their blanket support to Austro-Hungary in private? Secret treaties were truly the bane of modern society, and it sickened both men to the very soul.

#

Asima wept for her brother. Her hands moved precisely and rhythmically as she continued her pottery, a distraction from acknowledging his certain fate. She was so proud of him. So, so proud. Yet, every morning as she rose, she cried at his stupidity; Why? Why fight just to transfer their leadership? Yes, the pan-Arab state would finally be free but what insurance did they have of the British? She had heard tales of Imperialist monstrosities, and it ensured she'd never participate in any revolt herself. She had become more optimistic though; With the prospect of Harun already being deceased, she could not let even a single negative thought leak into her mind. Doing so would be a betrayal of his contributions: Now, Asima understood that if they were to be betrayed, she could never live with the guilt of allowing her poor, innocent young brother to enter the war.

She had tried to prevent him from doing it. She had insisted that their family needed him to become employed in tanning to remain in their relatively stable, albeit poor lives. Regardless, he had been firm.

His words still echoed in her ears, “Yes, I care for our family. But, is our family just our blood? We are one family, the Arab family, and we will be reunited.” She’d almost laughed, hearing something that sounded so serious and intended to motivate coming from little Harun. Little Harun who she’d run across the sand with, taught to cook, covered with cloth upon his sleep early into the night. Harun, who’d been so sweet as a baby, who’d always joked around about anything and everything, who’d cried about losing simple meaningless games. It felt like centuries, to Asima, but remembering that Harun had only just turned 15 only further instilled horror into her soul.

In a way, she was conflicted about her desires. She wanted to know what had happened to her younger brother; The burden of anxiety regarding his situation threw her mental state into jeopardy. At the same time, if she was given the offer of the absolute, undeniable truth, would she accept? She couldn’t answer. If he was really dead, there’s no way she could survive following the reception of that information. Regardless, she knew in a twisted way that she would never uncover the truth regarding the situation. Undoubtedly, Harun’s corpse would be lost in the sands and would never be located, not that anyone with the resources to effectively do so would even be inclined to.

One of the worst things about it, for her, was that he had joined the revolt so early. The Europeans liked to refer to the Ottomans as the “Sick man of Europe”, but they had not seen first-hand how brutal their armies could be. Asima couldn’t even fathom the possibility of an Ottoman collapse in 1916, especially considering how extensive they were. Not to mention the fact the Europeans didn’t genuinely care for them at all and were presumably sending her brother and the rest of the Arab peoples to their deaths as a mere distraction to the Central Powers. She didn’t really comprehend the war; It just seemed to be one of Dynasties, something her people had experienced for centuries. She supposed it was considerably more widespread than the prior ones, but how did she even know lands such as Japan or Australia even existed? Their only sources were modern and from Europe, which hadn’t proved to be entirely truthful or accurate in the past.

Ultimately though, she just sobbed. Her hands had become shaky, their soothing nature disrupted. The piece was worthless now, but she didn’t really care. She strode out to the fresh air, and shakily began to run to where she thought her brother had been recruited. She could never maintain her running for the entirety of the journey, but that didn’t matter to Asima anymore. The only thing that mattered was making sure Harun’s probable sacrifice wasn’t in vain. She too would help make a difference.

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Note from the author:

This entry refers to the Arab Revolt, which was an Allied effort against the Ottoman Empire spanning from 1916-1918. The story primarily takes place in Arabia.