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Goodbye to all that

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**A. Chapter 17, p. 157**

Despite variance on this point, we all agreed that regimental pride remained the strongest moral force that kept a battalion going as an effective fighting unit; contrasting it particularly with patriotism and religion. Patriotism, in the trenches, was too remote a sentiment, and at once rejected as fit only for civilians, or prisoners. A new arrival who talked patriotism would soon be told to cut it out. As ‘Blighty’, a geographical concept, Great Britain was a quiet, easy place for getting back to out of the present foreign ministry; but as a nation it included not only the trench-soldiers themselves and those who had gone home wounded, but the staff, Army Service Corps, lines of communication troops, base units, home-service units, and all civilians down to the detested grades of journalists, profiteers, ‘starred’ men exempted from enlistment, conscientious objectors, and members of the Government. The trench-soldier, with this carefully graded system of honour, never considered that the German opposite might have built up exactly the same system themselves. He thought of Germany as a nation in arms, a unified nation inspired with the sort of patriotism that he himself despised. He believed most newspaper reports on conditions and sentiments in Germany, though believing little or nothing of what he read about similar conditions and sentiments in England. Yet he never underrated the German as a soldier. Newspaper libels on Fritz’s courage and efficiency were resented by all trench-soldiers of experience.

**B. Chapter 27, p. 240**

Anti-French feeling among most ex-soldiers amounted almost to an obsession. Edmund, shaking with nerves, used to say at this time: ‘No more wars for me at any price! Except against the French. If there’s ever a war with them, I’ll go like a shot’. Pro-German feeling had been increasing. With the war over and the German armies beaten, we could give the German soldier credit for being the most efficient fighting-man in Europe. I often heard it said that only the blockade had beaten the Fritzes; that is Haig’s last push they never really broke and that their machine-gun sections held up long enough to cover the withdrawal of the main forces. Some undergraduates even insisted that we had been fighting on the wrong side: our natural enemies were the French

**C. Chapter 17, p. 157-8**

Hardly one soldier in a hundred was inspired by religious feeling of even the crudest kind. It would have been difficult to remain religious in the trenches even if one survived the irreligion of the training battalion at home. A regular sergeant at Montagne, a second Battalion man, had recently told me that he did not hold with religion in time of war. He said that the niggers (meaning the Indians) were right in officially relaxing their religious rules while fighting . ‘And all this damn nonsense, sir – excuse me, sir – that we read in the papers, sir, about how miraculous it is that the way-side crucifixes are always getting shot at, but the figure of our Lord Jesus somehow doesn’t get hurt, it fairly makes me sick, sir’. This was his explanation why, when giving practice fire-orders from the hilltop, he had shouted, unaware that I was behind him: ‘Seven hundred, half left, bloke on cross, five rounds, concentrate, FIRE!’…His platoon, including the two unusual ‘bible-wallahs’ whose letters home always began in the same formal way: ‘Dear Sister in Christ’, or ‘Dear Brother in Christ’, blazed away.

The troops, while ready to believe in the Kaiser as a comic personal devil, knew the German soldier to be, on the whole, more devout than himself. In the instructor’s mess we spoke freely of God and Gott as opposed tribal deities. For Anglican regimental chaplains we had little respect. If they had shown one-tenth the courage, endurance and other human qualities that the regimental doctors showed, we agreed, the British Expeditionary Force might well have started a religious revival. But they had not, being under orders to avoid getting mixed up with the fighting and to stay behind with the transport. Soldiers could hardly respect a chaplain who obeyed this orders, and yet not one in fifty seemed sorry to obey them. Occasionally, on a quiet day in a quiet sector, the chaplain would make a daring afternoon visit to the support line and distribute a few cigarette, before hurrying back. But he was always much to the fore in rest-billets. Sometimes the colonel would summon him to come up with the rations and bury the day’s dead; he would arrive, speak his lines, and shoot off again. The position was complicated by the respect that most commanding officers had for the cloth – though not all. The colonel in one battalion I served with got rid of four new Anglican chaplains in four months; finally he applied for a Roman Catholic, alleging a change of faith in the men under his command. For the Roman Catholic chaplains were not only permitted to visit posts of danger, but definitely enjoyed to be wherever fighting was, so that they could give extreme unction to the dying, And we had never heard of one who failed to do all that was expected of him and more. Jovial Father Gleeson of the Munsters, when all the officers were killed or wounded at the first battle of Ypres, had stripped off his black badged and, taking command of the survivors, had held the line.

**D. Chapter 16, pp. 143-4**

Having now been in the trenches for five months, I had passed my prime. For the first three weeks, an officer was of little use in the front line; he did not know his way about, had not learned the rules of health and safety, or grown used to recognizing degrees of danger. Between three weeks and four weeks he was at his best, unless he happened to have any particular bad shock or sequence of shocks. Then his usefulness gradually declined as neurasthenia developed. At six months he was still more or less all right; but by nine or ten months, unless he had been given a few weeks’ rest on a technical course, or in hospital, he usually became a drag on the other company officers. After a year or fifteen months he was often worse than useless…It has taken some ten years for my blood to recover.

Officers had a less laborious but a more nervous time than the men. There were proportionately twice as many neurasthenic cases among officers as amongst men, though a man’s average expectancy of trench service before getting killed or wounded was twice as long as an officer’s. Officers between the ages of twenty-three and thirty-three could count on a longer useful life than those older or younger. I was too young. Men over forty, though not suffering from want of sleep so much as those under twenty, had less resistance to sudden alarms and shocks. The unfortunates were officers who had endured two years or more of continuous trench service. In many cases they became dipsomaniacs. I knew three or four who had worked up to the point of two bottles of whisky a day before being lucky enough to get wounded or sent home in some other way. A two-bottle company commander of one of our line battalions is still alive who, in three shows running, got his company needlessly destroyed because he was no longer capable of taking clear decisions.

**E. Chapter 26, p. 236**

Very thin, very nervous, and with about four years’ loss of sleep to make up, I was waiting until I got well enough to go to Oxford on the government educational grant. I knew that it would be years before I could face anything but a quiet country life. My disabilities were many: I could not use a telephone, I felt sick every time I travelled by train, and to see more than two new people in a single day prevented me from sleeping. I felt ashamed of myself as a drag on Nancy, but had sworn on the very day of my demobilization never to be under anyone’s orders for the rest of my life. Somehow I must live by writing.

**F. Chapter 17, p. 152**

The mess agreed dispassionately that the most dependable British troops were the midland county regiments, industrial Yorkshire and Lancashire troops, and Londoners. The Ulstermen, Lowland Scots, and Northern English ranked pretty high. The Catholic Irish and Highland Scots took unnecessary risks in trenches and had unnecessary casualties; and in battle, though they usually reached their objective, too often lost it in the counter-attack; without officers they became useless. English southern regiments varied from good to very bad. All overseas troops seemed to be good. The dependability of divisions also varied with their seniority in date of formation. The latest New Army divisions and the second-line territorial divisions, whatever their recruiting area, ranked low because of inefficient officers and warrant-officers.

We once discussed which were the cleanest troops in trenches, taken by nationalities. We agreed on a descending-order list like this: English and German Protestants: Northern Irish, Welsh, and Canadians; Irish and German Catholics; Scots, with certain higher-ranking exceptions; Mohammedan Indians; Algerians; Portuguese; Belgians; French. We put the Belgians and French there for spite; they could not have been dirtier than the Algerians and the Portuguese.