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**note: words or phrases in [square brackets] denote censorship.*

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My Darling Mother

I hope this letter finds everyone in fair health. You cannot imagine how much I am missing all of you back home. It seems that everything I knew has died or is so far away that I cannot reach it when I need those familiar things the most. The Hun has killed Gerald today. It was strange watching my beloved cousin so vibrant and full of life become still. I have been here for a month now, but nothing prepares you for this... nothing prepares you for [living amongst the dead bodies] of all the boys I knew from school. Gerald did not survive the battle. He escaped the melancholy that still aches in my soul. I wish I were either [dead] or at home. I know that my country relies on me and us all to continue on. [I just do not wish to die here; I just wish I were anywhere but in this war.] I must continue on and hope God allows me a future. [If I were to end my life now, I would end it] not knowing so many things.

If I were [to die here,] I would [die in a hole to become food for those scavenging rats.] I hate these rats more than anything. For the past hour my legs have been knee deep in cold water. I feel as if the feet underneath me are withering away and they will not stop throbbing. I know I have reached the [depths of despair]. The pain in my feet and the cold water against my legs are the only things that bring feeling into my repetitive existence. Even when I am not in No Man's Land [(with the constant shells, bullets, and Gas)] I feel like my life is hanging by threads [even thinner than the ones used to make our uniforms.] There is nothing but [bleakness, pain and tragedy.]

I think I might [have shell shock]. I am so weak I cannot seem to do anything. My hands are always shaking, like the branches on a tree during a summer storm. It is strange as I look out into No Man's Land, peering at the enemy that I am [supposed to hate.] I cannot steady my hands to pull the trigger and watch them die. It is hard knowing that you are the reason why someone's family is in agony, and mourning the loss of a son, father, brother or friend. It is hard to [kill someone] whose hands are shaking worse than yours and is frightened of what will become of him. I am frightened of what has become of me. I gazed at that dead boy, a boy really that's what he was mother, just a boy

with dirt on his clothes and a gun in his hands. Yet I had to shoot that young lad because we both had guns in our hands and I did not wish for my life to end in a ditch.

So very often I think of home. The cookies you have made with time and effort bring forth warm memories. The bully beef that the government gives us is horrendous [but it saves them money.] Sometimes I think that there is more to this life than money or politics. I wonder if the [taking of all these lives is worth whatever gain there is.]

I enlisted nearly four years ago but time does not mean anything to me anymore. I have been [rotting away in these trenches] and three years later the [government just drops all the conscripts] in the middle of the war. We need the conscripts but where were they when the war began? I will tell you where they were. They most likely were complaining about how hard their factory jobs were. Meanwhile being able to see their families every day and to hold their wives in their arms. At least they got the chance to have a wife and a family. When this war began I was eighteen, and next month I will be twenty-one. For the past three years the conscripts watched their brothers, fathers, and friends just disappear. [No one wants to fight, but it's no longer what we want to do,] it is what we have to do.

We all come from Scotland, Ireland, Wales or England...it is our motherland. Did they not feel the need to defend the land and culture our families descended from? That was the very reason why I enlisted. I cannot help but think in times of great [despair in this mud caked blood bath] what each of us will carry for a [lifetime but confusion and pain]. So to answer your last question about what it is we are doing at [Passchendaele] well I will tell you. What we do is sleep in [filth,] go over the top, and run [blindly into bombs, bullets] and [thick yellow-green mist that seeps into our lungs as we drop like flies.] The [gas] is the most horrific part of the battles. You can hide from bullets and shells in the trenches, but those trenches turn into [graves] when the yellow mist rises. The [gas is inhumane.] Watching all the men [scream in pain, rubbing their eyes, choking as they collapse succumbing to a long and painful death. The smell here is something I cannot describe: the urine, the bodies, and the rats, the rotting of our feet, and us in mud-plastered clothing.] I cannot remember the last time I even felt clean and safe except for when I was on home-leave. The days before I came here seem distant and precious. The only life I live is through reminiscence.

It is [chaos; a muddy hell.] I do not know how this [commander] could have made [Passchendaele any worse. I hate these cocky, wealthy English officers.] They continue to make us forge ahead [blindly into bullets and gas.]

Blowing their whistles that echo in our ears as they tell us to go over the top or [be shot for cowardice/insubordination]. You would think living in these mudholes that I would not care anymore. But I do. No matter how morbid my thoughts might be, the one thing that keeps me going is all of you at home.

Do not worry about me dear Mother, I am always home in my mind. I imagine I am sipping on a cup of tea with father, talking about whatever happened to be on our minds, while you and Marie are preparing supper in the kitchen. I pray that God will put an end to this war and that I will return safely home. It will be at least six months before I am on home-leave again. Pray for us all.

Your loving son,

Edward.