

Marie- Andrée Pépin, Age 16
École Secondaire De Mortagne
Ste-Jule, Québec

October 29, 1917

My love,

You cannot know how much I miss the warmth and the softness of your skin and the scent of your hair. Here, it's nothing but shadows and dampness. The only smell that we get is the putrid scent of death and of sickness. When we took over from the Australians a few days ago I got the feeling that those poor guys were shadows of their former selves. Had they not been walking, I could have mistaken them for corpses. It gave me goosebumps. The rain has been falling for several days now. It's as if the sky is mourning this useless war and the death of all these unfortunate soldiers. It's been three days since the assault that we mounted against the Germans to take Passchendaele...What a bloodbath, what a horrible scene, what a massacre! I can't even find the words to express what I feel; never in my worst nightmares could I have imagined such a thing. Hell could not be any worse. Our Colonel broke down in tears when he found out how many people had survived the trap that the Germans had set for us. I distinctly remember having run through the mud, having stumbles, and at that moment being terrified that I would not be able to get out of there. But now I realize that moment of panic is what saved my life. I felt the burning heat of a shell exploding, then nothing. Then I saw a bright rocket that lit up the sky. The Germans had set a terrible trap for us. Among those who were on the mission, only 150 or so survived...I tried to save Franck; he had lost an arm to a gunshot; he was losing so much blood...I tore up my shirt and I tried to staunch the blood with a makeshift bandage. He was taken to the closest hospital. I hope that he will make it thought the night...the first das are always the ones that count.

The sky is scarlet red, the first rays of dawn are crawling across this muddy and hellish landscape of the battleground. Before this, it was a magnificent place, or so I am told, but now it is horrible. There are shell craters everywhere, full of empty cans, broken weapons, scraps of uniforms and unexploded shells, and sometimes a corpse or two. If an unlucky soldier falls into one of these horrible craters, he's as good as dead. There are so deep and unstable; they are like quicksand. I have to get going; the whistle just sounded.

Whatever happens to me, I want you to know that I love you with all my heart and that I think of you everyday.

Your loving and devoted

James Walker xxx