

## Cameron Downing - Diary Entry

Dear Diary,

September 1915

Time was quickly approaching; it was the day I handed over my life. I remember glaring out of my window to the masses of people crammed in my tiny little village to wave me off. The clear blue sky is already a distant memory and all but obscured with toxic gases.

When I glared around at the crowd, my eyes kept catching with Mrs Oag (family friend). I was trying to avoid her, but it proved to be more difficult than I thought. I can't do goodbyes. I won't forget her rose gold eyes that shine in the afternoon sun. The brooch she gave me is still grasped tight in my hand. The curious look on her face told it all. She was just as frightened as me. The jubilation and cheerful colours isolated me as the growing sense of panic rose within me.

When I arrived at camp the early morning rain belted down on the muddy trenches. I am trapped in this rat infested trench. There was no slacking; everyone knew what happened to slackers. The rancid smell of rotting heroes made gag reflexes twitch. The smell of dead corpses lingers in the back of my throat. It was such an abnormality from home-life I felt lifeless and ancient. I couldn't help but notice the vast amount of uniforms unaccounted for that lay beneath my eyes, full of blood smears. I took a deep breath; this is me for the rest of time. The contrast with the leaving parade clashes in my mind – all those smart, hopeful lads. It leaves me hollow and angry.

**Dear Diary,**

**December 1915**

Three months on, I am still going. The sounds of war have a varying degree of terror – the worst one is “gas, gas, gas” screeched by a Sergeant. When I heard that, I was in a state of panic – I couldn’t find my gas mask. Most of the others knew what to do, I was new to all this. We were advised to run, run as fast as we ever have. But, the gas had already caught so many in the short race. I heard a cry from nearby. I couldn’t ignore it. The guilt would eat me alive. I limped over. I arrived at the suffocating soldier; his mask had a pierced hole in it. He knew just as well as I did that it was over for him. It felt so surreal. I thought I recognised him under the filth and mud smears on his face. I managed to make him out. It was a boy who I recognised from school – a boy who I had seen at assemblies and Christmas carol services, a boy who knew and loved the same streets as I did in our shared childhood. Despite not knowing him, I knew of the life we had both left and felt a bond in this hell we were suffering. His face was mangled – it was as though he had been broken into pieces, broken and yet all the pieces were there they just did not fit together any more. His white eyes writhed in pain looking up for a heaven that he could not see. His dirty face looked frail with famine, his black hair made all the darker as it sponged the black blood seeping out of the back of his crown. I raked through my rucksack to find the brooch. I carefully placed it on his uniform. I held his head as he drifted off to sleep with the thick mist devouring us in its putrid yellowness.