

Journal #18



Infantry fix scaling ladders in preparation for leaving their trenches on the day before the Battle of Arras on 8 April 1917.

Why is 1917 considered to be a turning point in the war?

Letter

Harold Mellersh, a young platoon commander who was in the Somme offensive.

Nothing happened at first. We advanced at a slow double. I noticed that it had begun to rain. Then the enemy machine-gunning started, first one gun, then many. They traversed, and every now and then there came the swish of bullets.

It's a bloody death trap, someone said. I told him to shut up. But was he right? We struggled on through the mud and the rain and the shelling. Then came a terrific crack above my head, a jolt in my left shoulder, and at the same time I was watching in an amazed, detached sort of way my right forearm twist upwards of its own volition and then hang limp. I realised that I had been hit.

I was suddenly filled with a surge of happiness. It was a physical feeling almost, consciousness of a reprieve from the shadow of death, no less. That I had just taken part in a failure, that I had really done nothing to help win the war, these things were forgotten - if ever indeed they had entered my consciousness.

1. After exiting the trench how did the soldiers advance?
2. What happened to Harold Mellersh?
3. Why was Harold happy?

Vocabulary

Jumping the bags: Going *over the top*. Attacking over the sandbags of the trench parapet.

On the wire: Missing or killed in action.

Over the Top: Make an attack, to go *over the top* of the trench parapet, or *over the bags* (sandbags).

Perisher: Trench periscope.