Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

The Last Flight

Written by

Terry Deary

Published by

A&C Black Publishers Ltd an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing PLC

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

First published 2013 by
A & C Black, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square
London WC1B 3DP

www.bloomsbury.com

Text copyright © 2013 Terry Deary
Illustrations copyright © 2013 James de la Rue
Cover illustration © 2013 Chris Mould

The rights of Terry Deary and James de la Rue to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work have been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

ISBN 978-1-4081-9168-2

UPDF ISBN 978-1-4081-9170-5

A CIP catalogue for this book is available from the British Library.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means – graphic, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping or information storage and retrieval systems – without the prior permission in writing of the publishers.

Printed and Bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Chapter 1

Secrets and spies

Somewhere in the South of England

Wednesday 13 December 1916

Dear Lucy

Hello, little sister. I promised I'd write while I am away fighting for Britain. The trouble is, the army is worried there may be spies around. If I tell you where I am, and where I am going, then a spy could read this letter and be waiting for me when I arrive.

But I can tell you I am still in England and waiting to sail across the English Channel. You know I trained to fight in the trenches. Just before I left home we read the newspapers together. You cried as we read about the terrible battle at the Somme. Brave British men walking across the mud into the teeth of German machine guns. They were tangled in the barbed wire and thousands died or were wounded. You were terrified to think that could happen to me. 'I'll pray every night,' you promised.

Soldiers who came home from the war said they didn't do a lot of fighting. Most of the time it was just cold, wet and boring. Still, you were frightened. I can tell you, I was frightened too. I tried to put on a brave face for you, but I had nightmares. What would happen when the sergeant blew his whistle and told us to walk towards the



machine guns? Would my legs carry me over the smashed earth and the deep pools of slime? Or would I collapse with fear and have to be dragged by my mates?

But now I don't have to worry any more. And you can sleep well too. The most amazing thing has happened.

All the men were lined up to have their photographs taken by an old fellow. The

pictures would be printed and sent home to our families.

Well, I know something about photography! Do you realise, I've been taking photographs since I left school six years ago, and I've had a studio for two whole years now?

I remember that last summer before the war started. The most beautiful summer of our lives. We went to Brighton beach and my photos of the swimmers in the glittering sea won prizes. You were so proud of me.

Well, as I was saying, this old bloke came along – and he had a pocket Kodak camera! Can you believe that? Even you have a better camera than that. I think Mrs Noah used a pocket Kodak on Noah's Ark.

He was shaking so much, poor fellow,



he took forever to take one photo – and there were a thousand men to get through. So I said to the colonel that I had my Zeiss camera with a Tessar lens. My pictures would be quicker and much clearer.

The colonel didn't like it much because it's a German camera, of course. But after the old chap had fumbled around for ten more minutes everyone was freezing.

'Here, Private Adams,' the colonel sighed. 'You take over.'

I'd finished in three hours. The old bloke would still have been snapping till New Year. And by that time the troops would all be in the trenches. But not me. That's really what I am writing to tell you about.

I am going to war but not in the trenches. It's amazing what happened. It was all because of my camera. I'd love to explain, but remember what I said about spies and secrets? I will have to ask the colonel if I



can tell you what I am doing before I write anything else.

I have to start printing off the thousand pictures of the troops now. The colonel says I don't have to go marching on the parade ground – the most boring and tiring thing in the army. When I tell you about my new post you'll see why I may never have to march again. Ever. Hurrah!

Will you take a photo of Mum and Dad and send it to me when you reply? Just a small picture so I can carry it in my wallet when I have my great adventure – the one I can't tell you about just yet.

Love to you and the family, the dogs, and of course your dolls.

Your loving brother

Alfred

Chapter 2

Kitbag and kites

Somewhere in the East of England

Monday 18th December 1916

Dear Lucy

Thank you for your lovely letter, the photo and your prayers.

I've been moved 150 miles on the slowest troop trains in the world. The railways are crowded with men and machines being sent all over the country. We spent a horrible hour waiting in a



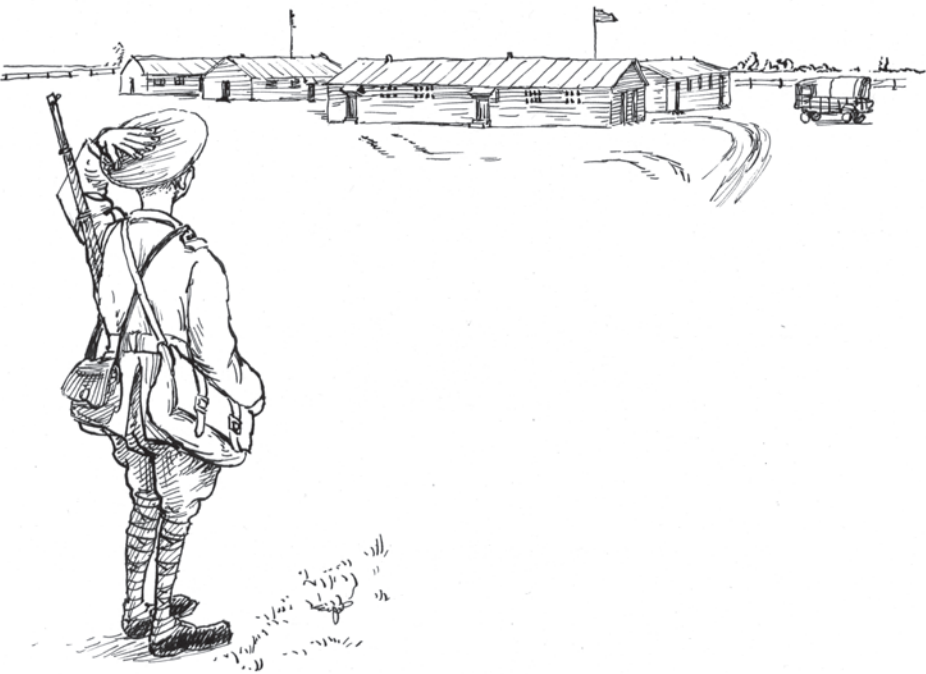
tunnel while the engine steamed and tried to choke us.

It took me twelve hours to get here and I arrived in a darkened station around midnight. The whole town is dark because of the blackout.

I stumbled around outside looking for a taxi and found one when I walked into it. It was a black taxi on a dark night. The driver was grumbling I'd scratched his

paint with my kitbag. I was more worried about my camera in the bag.

He was still grumbling when he dropped me off at my new camp. This is the East of England. There are no hills to shelter us from the wind that roars down off the



North Sea. The camp is as flat as the pond at the bottom of our garden and bald as Dad's head – not a tree to hide behind.

But I'm here now with a bed in a barn. The north wind cuts through the planks and through my blankets. I think I'll wake up as a block of ice tomorrow morning.

Thanks for the Christmas present. I'll open it on Christmas Day, wherever I am. I have no idea where that will be.

My big news is that in future you must send your letters to Lieutenant Alfred Adams. Yes, I have been made an officer in record time! Only officers can do this new job and I am one of the best at it.

I bet you're amazed. I bet you're saying, 'What is our Alfred so good at? Is it his shooting?'

No, it's not. My shooting is so bad I'd have more chance of hitting my sergeant in the

trenches than the Germans. (Hitting the sergeant is a nice idea. He never stopped shouting at me for six weeks at training camp.)

'Is it his marching?' you're asking.

No. Sergeant said I had two left feet.

Last guess. 'Is it because the men adore the handsome young warrior Alfred Terence Adams, and want him to be their leader?'

No. I will be an officer with no men to lead!

All right, I will stop teasing you now, little sister, and tell you. I have been made an officer for my photography. And I have been sent from the army to join the men in the kites. I am in the Royal Flying Corps.

Yes, I know I can't fly an aeroplane, but I don't have to. I will be what they call an observer. We sit in a two-seat plane. The

pilot flies it while I lean over the side and take photos of the battles a thousand feet below.

