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Opening extract from

War Game (Special 100th Anniversary of WW1 Edition)

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IN MEMORY OF MY UNCLES, WHO DIED IN THE GREAT WAR.

WILLIAM JAMES FOREMAN, KILLED AGED 18
FREDERICK BENJAMIN FOREMAN, KILLED AGED 20
WILLIAM HENRY GODDARD, KILLED AGED 20
LACY CHRISTMAS GODDARD, DIED OF WOUNDS CHRISTMAS DAY 1918 AGED 24

FOUR AMID A MULTITUDE

Two brothers walked out of my Grandfather's little Suffolk cottage amongst the hollyhocks and went to War. Their names are on the village War Memorial. A third brother, my father, was too young to go with them.

Two other young men, my mother's brothers, left Granny's Norfolk village pub and went to war. Their names are on another War Memorial.

There are no photographs of these young men. They didn't live long enough to have children. They left just four names amid a multitude.

My father died one month before I was born … but, back then, all my friends were growing up without their fathers. They were all away in World War II. The only local men around were too old for this new War, but were still haunted by the ghosts of World War I. Soon, however, our village became full of men. Fathers and brothers from other lands, all on their way to war. They trained on our cliffs and beaches, camped in our woods and fields. They made a fuss of us – the last children they would see before hitting the beaches of occupied Europe. And so another multitude went off to war.

As I write this, sitting in our London garden, there are hollyhocks standing to attention in the shade like the hollyhocks around Grandfather's cottage.

There are four of them.

MICHAEL FOREMAN



The day after the football match was a Sunday, and the vicar boomed out the same message from his pulpit. The local squire, in the front pew, wore all the medals he could get his hands on, and his son wore a brand-new, tailor-made officer's uniform. After the service, Will, Freddie, Billy and Lacey sat by the signpost under the oak and elm at the corner of the green. Here they had sat almost every day of their lives, after church, after school and after work.

'I think we should join,' said Freddie. 'None of us has ever been outside the county. It's time we saw something of the world.'

'Yes! An adventure – and home by Christmas,' said Billy.

Will wasn't so sure. After all, he thought, a lot of people can get killed in a war. But they agreed that next day after work, they would go into town and see what was happening at the Town Hall, the local army recruiting office.





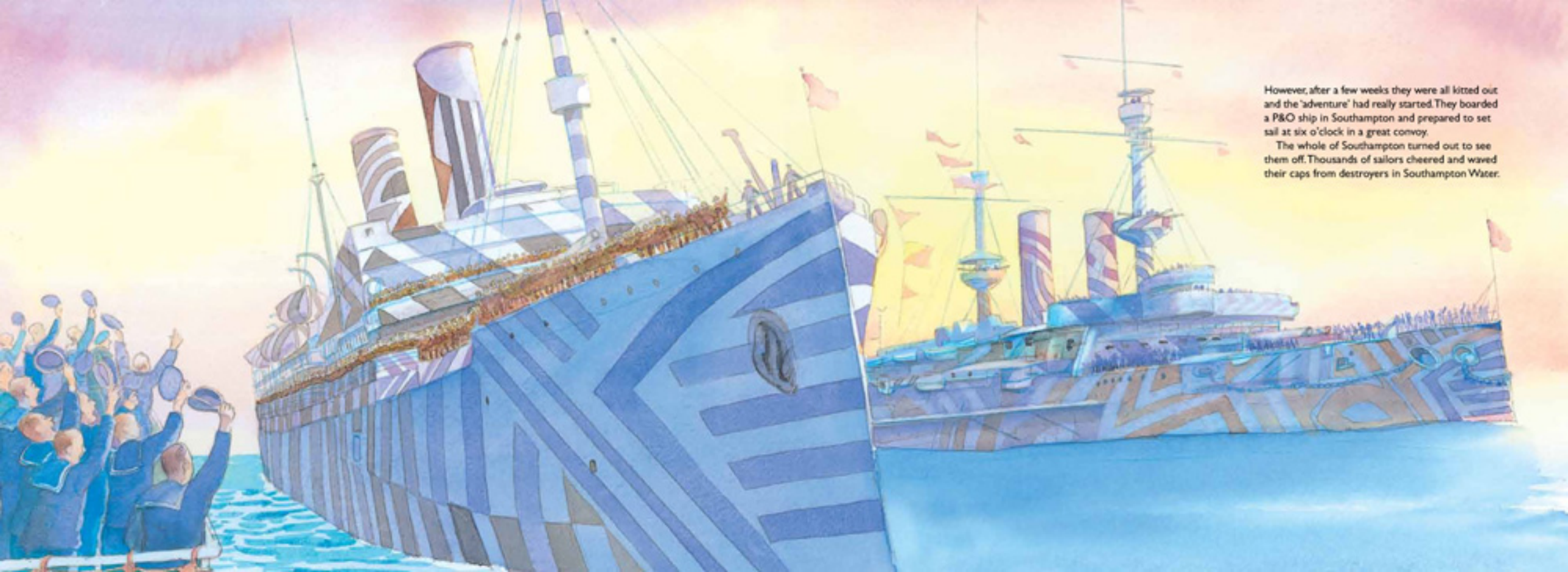


THE ADVENTURE

They had never seen such a crowd. There was a great feeling of excitement and even of fun as the flags waved and the band played. Every time a lad went to join up, the crowd gave him a hearty cheer.

Before anyone could stop him, Billy was up the steps and the crowd was cheering him. Then Freddie followed. Lacey had to go to look after Billy. Will knew he couldn't let his friends go off to war without him, so to wild cheers all four joined the army. They were given railway warrants and told to report to barracks in four days' time.

They had a lot of explaining to do when they got home that evening.



However, after a few weeks they were all kitted out and the 'adventure' had really started. They boarded a P&O ship in Southampton and prepared to set sail at six o'clock in a great convoy.

The whole of Southampton turned out to see them off. Thousands of sailors cheered and waved their caps from destroyers in Southampton Water.

At last the marching came to an end, and Will, Freddie, Lacey and Billy and the rest of the brigade were ordered on to a fleet of London General omnibuses that were to rush them up to the Front to fill a gap in the 'Line'. They drove through the ruins of a devastated town. The lads had never been to London, yet here they were riding on a London bus in the middle of France. The conductor's bell was still working, and one of the men kept ringing it and shouting 'Next stop Piccadilly Circus!' The glassless windows were covered with boards, but there were plenty of holes to peep through. Will's first reaction was: 'Doesn't it look pretty? Just like fireworks.'





At dawn, when the British were all 'Stood To' on the fire-step, they saw a world white with frost. The few shattered trees that remained were white. Lines of wire glinted like tinsel. The humps of dead in No Man's Land were like toppled snowmen.

After the singing of the night, the Christmas dawn was strangely quiet. The clock of death had stopped ticking.

Then a German climbed from his trench and planted a Christmas tree in No Man's Land. Freddie, being a goalkeeper and therefore a bit daft, walked out and shook hands with him. Both sides applauded.

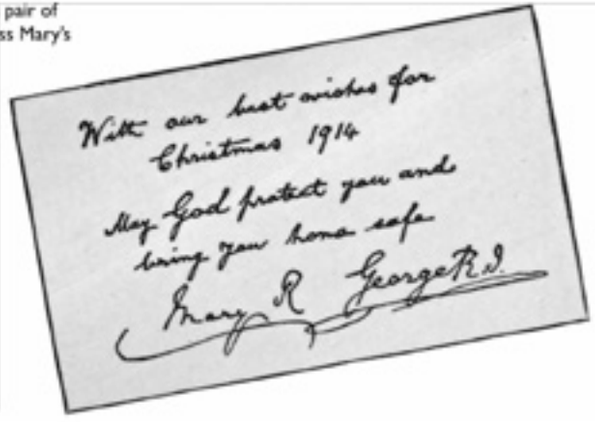
Both sides then returned to their trenches for breakfast. Will and the lads were cheered by the wonderful smell of bacon, and they had a hot breakfast for a change.

One by one, birds began to arrive from all sides. The soldiers hardly ever saw a bird normally, but Will counted at least fifty sparrows hopping around their trench.

Christmas presents for the men consisted of a packet of chocolate, Oxo cubes, a khaki handkerchief, peppermints, camp cocoa, writing paper and a pencil. After breakfast a pair of horses and a wagon arrived with Princess Mary's Christmas gifts – a pipe and tobacco and a Christmas card from the King and Queen.









It was just terrific to be no longer an army of moles, but up and running on top of the ground that had threatened to entomb them for so long. And this time Will really could hear a big crowd – and he was playing for England!

He was playing in his usual centre forward position with Lacey to his left and little Billy on the wing. The game surged back and forth across No Man's Land. The goalposts grew larger as greatcoats and tunics were discarded as the players warmed to the sport. Khaki and grey mixed together. Steam rose from their backs, and their faces were wreathed in smiles and clouds of breath in the clear frosty air.





Some of the British officers took a dim view of such sport, and when the game to its exhausted end, the men were encouraged back to their trenches for a carol service and supper. The haunting sound of men singing drifted back and forth across No Man's Land in the still night air.

'Good night, Tommies. See you tomorrow.'

'Good night, Fritz. We'll have another game.'







But Boxing Day passed without a game. The officers were alarmed at what had happened on Christmas Day. If such friendly relations continued, how could they get the men to fight again? How could the war continue?

The men were not allowed to leave the trenches.

There were a few secret meetings here and there along the Front, and gifts and souvenirs were exchanged.



They were on the attack. Running in a line, Will in a centre forward position, Lacey to his left, young Billy on the wing.

From the corner of his eye Will saw Freddie dive full-length, then curl up as if clutching a ball in the best goalkeeping tradition.

'Daft as a brush,' Will thought.

Suddenly they all seemed to be tackled at once. The whole line went down. Earth and sky turned over, and Will found himself in a shell hole staring at the sky. Then everything went black.



He closed his eyes.

28 June
Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria

4 August
The 5 Great Powers are at war: Russia, France and Britain against Germany and Austria-Hungary

11 August
A Call to Arms!
Lord Kitchener sets out to raise a new volunteer army of 100,000 men. Newspapers and posters called on every man to do his duty 'for King and Country'.

Pal's Battalions
It was thought that men would be more willing to join up if they could serve with people they already knew. The first 'Pals Battalion' was formed in Liverpool. Other towns and cities soon followed. Just like Will and his pals – brothers, cousins, friends, workmates and teammates all enlisted together spurred on by a spirit of patriotism and promises of adventure.

THE CONTENTS OF THE PRINCESS MARY GIFT BOXES WERE EXCHANGED WITH GERMAN SOLDIERS



22 November
Trenches are formed along the entire Western Front. Reality of life in the trenches was far from the glorious adventure that the enthusiastic young recruits had expected.

1914

25 September
The Battle of Loos
The British use gas for the first time but the wind blows it back over their own troops.

1915

1 July–mid November
The Battle of the Somme
By the end of the first day nearly 60,000 are dead, wounded or missing. The struggle continued for many long and bitter months, resulting in more than a million casualties and no real winner.

1916

6 April
America formally enters the war

31 July–10 November
The Battle of Passchendaele
One of the most costly campaigns of the war. Both sides suffered huge losses for no strategic gain.

1917

11 November
The Armistice is signed and at 11am the fighting ends.

Millions of men from both sides had been killed or wounded including many of those men who celebrated Christmas 1914 together. For those who survived, the truce was a memory that would stay with them forever.

1918

Remembering the fallen
Once the war was over, scarlet corn poppies were one of the few plants to grow on the devastated battlefields of France and Belgium. The vivid red of the delicate flower came to represent the blood of the fallen soldiers. Today the poppy remains a lasting symbol of remembrance for those who died.



WWI AND THE CHRISTMAS DAY TRUCE



GERMAN CELEBRATIONS IN THE TRENCHES

CHRISTMAS 1914
Hopes that the war would be over in a few months seemed to be dashed, but then, on Christmas Eve, something remarkable happened. The German and British armies stopped fighting . . .

Rifleman Leslie Walkington described the moment he saw the candles from the German Christmas trees lighting up the night sky.

'One of them shouted "A Merry Christmas English, we're not shooting tonight." . . . [then] they stuck up a light. Not to be out-done, so did we. Then up went another. So we showed up another. Soon the lines looked like an illuminated fete.'

The sound of rifle shots and exploding shells stopped, and the two sides serenaded each other with Christmas songs. The German 'Silent Night' was met with a British chorus of 'Auld Lang Syne'.

'On Christmas Eve I went to the trenches and the Germans were singing carols to our men and we singing to them. Then they shouted to us, "A Merry Christmas, British comrades. You English are fine singers."'
RIFLEMAN E. E. MEADLEY,
QUEEN'S WESTMINSTER RIFLES



A GERMAN POSTCARD FROM 1914



'A FRIENDLY CHAT WITH THE ENEMY'

Then men from both sides began to emerge slowly from their trenches and met in no-man's-land. The men shook hands and exchanged food and souvenirs. Both sides saw the lull in fighting as a chance to bury the bodies of their comrades. In some parts of the front the men even staged a football game, kicking around empty bully-beef cans and using their helmets as goalposts.

'Timidly they approached each other – unarmed, of course – until finally a German and an Englishman met and shook hands to the sound of a happy burst of cheering. Within seconds hundreds of people were shaking hands, laughing, exchanging drinks of rum and cognac, cigars and cigarettes, chocolate, sausage and so on.'
RIFLEMAN PH. L. WALKINTON,
QUEEN'S WESTMINSTER RIFLES



SOME OF THE SOUVENIRS EXCHANGED BY TROOPS: CAMPAIGN BADGES, UNIFORM BUTTONS AND A GERMAN BELT BUCKLE WITH THE INSCRIPTION 'GOTT MITT UNS' ('GOD WITH US')

Rifleman George Eade of the 3rd London Rifles became friendly with a German soldier. As they parted, the German said to him *'Today we have peace. Tomorrow, you fight for your country, I fight for mine. Good luck.'*

The end of the truce
Sadly, the story did not end there. In some parts of the front the truce lasted a few hours, in others it carried on until the New Year. But everywhere, sooner or later, the fighting resumed.

THE GREATER GAME

FOOTBALL IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

'There was a time for all things in the world. There was a time for games, there was a time for business, and there was a time for domestic life . . . but there is only time for one thing now, and that thing is war. If the cricketer had a straight eye let him look along the barrel of a rifle. If a footballer had strength of limb let them serve and march in the field of battle.'

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

As strange as it may seem today, football played an important part in the First World War. It was used to help recruit volunteers and to drive men on as they went 'over the top' into no-man's-land; and it famously brought together the warring armies during the historic Christmas Day truce of 1914.

The Football Battalion

At the start of the war the football league continued to play but the pressure was soon on for it to be abandoned so that the players and their fans could 'play the greater game'. Footballers began to enlist en masse in Pals Battalions and in December 1914, the 17th Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment, known as 'The Footballers' Battalion' was formed.

One of the first to join was the England centre half Frank Buckley and Clapton Orient (now Leyton Orient FC) were the first English Football League club to enlist together. Many other recruits were club supporters wanting to fight alongside their sporting heroes.

The Fate of the Battalion

On 15 January 1916 the Football Battalion went to the front line. The battalion fought bravely but at great cost. By the end of the war they had lost more than a thousand men, including 462 in one battle alone at the Battle of Arras, 1917.



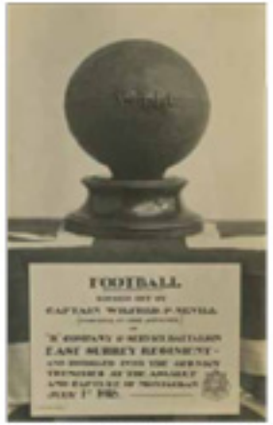
MEMBERS OF THE 17TH BATTALION IN PLAYING KIT







RECRUITMENT POSTERS DELIBERATELY TARGETED FOOTBALL FANS BY COMPARING WAR TO FOOTBALL



ONE OF THE FOOTBALLS USED DURING THE FAMOUS 'FOOTBALL' CHARGE TOWARDS THE GERMAN TRENCHES

The Final Whistle

On Christmas Day 1914 football had brought men from both sides together in friendship. Throughout the war football was a popular form of recreation for troops on both sides. Later it would be used to spur those same men on to play a more deadly game.



ALLIED TROOPS PLAYING FOOTBALL

On 1 July 1916, the first day of the Somme, Captain Wilfred 'Billie' Nevill encouraged his men to go over the top by kicking two footballs into no-man's-land as they began their charge. Their goal was the German line. Nevill was killed within a few steps of leaving the trenches. It was the final game he and many of his men would play.



THIS BRITISH ARMY WHISTLE WAS ISSUED IN 1916, THE YEAR OF THE SOMME. THE WHISTLE WAS BLOWN – JUST LIKE AT THE START OF A FOOTBALL MATCH – TO SIGNAL THE START OF WHAT WOULD BE ONE OF THE BLOODIEST BATTLES OF THE WAR.

FAMOUS FOOTBALLING SOLDIERS





Walter Tull
One of the most celebrated and popular members of the Football Battalion was the ex-Spurs player, Walter Tull. He was one of Britain's first black professional footballers and became the first ever black infantry officer in the British Army. His leadership and courage won him a recommendation for the Military Cross but he never received his medal. He was killed at the Somme in 1918 soon after entering no-man's-land. His body was never found.



Pom Pom Whiting
The goalkeeping star Robert 'Pom Pom' Whiting was another hero of the Football Battalion. He was one of 34,795 killed and missing in action who are commemorated on the Arras Memorial in France.

Vivian Woodward, the England centre forward and Chelsea icon, helped to persuade many a Blues supporter to head for the front by parading around Stamford Bridge perimeter fence with a marching band and calling for new recruits to join up. He survived the war and went on to coach the British Army football team in the Second World War.

Frank Edwards, also known as 'The Footballer of Loos', was a rifleman with London Irish Rifles during the Battle of Loos. He led his battalion across no-man's-land by first kicking a football ahead of the troops.