

THE COST OF SURVIVAL.

Edmund Martin's wartime Diary, July
1950-November 1951.

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"To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield"

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

PROLOGUE

Wars does not end the way they begin. there are no big speeches or glory, just silence. Cities reduced to ash. Men turned to bones. People say it's for the country, for freedom, for something greater. But in the end, it's just about who's left standing. And sometimes, I wish it wasn't me.

We didn't lose all at once. It slipped away one by one. a burned village here, a retreat there, an empty ration tin at a time. By the end, there was no country left, just scraps of a flag fluttering in the wind. I often wonder, was it defeat? Or just survival? There's no making sense of it. Maybe there's nothing left to make sense of.

By 1951, England was broken. The bombs took the cities. Hunger took our strength. The war took everything else. At the start, we believed we'd win, every soldier does. They hand you a rifle, tell you it's for King and Country, as if that will steady your hands. But rifles rust, kings fall, and countries are just lines on maps by men who've never stepped into the mud.

This story is not about Heroes. Heroes belong to stories, not to wars like this. It's a story of what remains when the guns go quiet and the dust settles. It's about a man who went off to war with a name and came back with nothing but a number.

My name is Edmund Martin and once, I was a Second Lieutenant.

JULY 1950



2nd July 1950

Platoon B, 3rd Infantry Battalion

Dawn. Somewhere Near Lille, France

The morning came heavy with fog, The river feels as cold as ice. It's seems rather fitting you see. Almost like the place itself has gotten tired of this constant killing. I wonder if it knows we've already lost. I mean, these men fight as if by habit now, not hope.

There are thirty-eight of us left, though I see the fatigue in their eyes more often these days. There's no fire, Even the green recruits have stopped pretending to be invincible. Every step we take feels stolen, every breath like a gamble against the artillery that stalks us at night.

I think of home often, but it feels like a dream fading away. I carry a photograph of my family, taken before I left. My mother smiling, my father standing tall, Hilda's hand resting on my shoulder. I promised I'd return safe. Promises don't mean shit now. Bombs don't really honour them.

8th July 1950

Midday. Forward trench near Dunkirk, France

The trenches stink of shit and fear. Rats scamper over our boots as if they've claimed the land for themselves. Irony, they remind me of my country. The men laugh when they see me flinch. officers aren't supposed to fear rats, are we? They laugh less now than they used to, so I let go of it. Last night, a sniper picked off Corporal Hargreaves while he was laying barbed wire. One shot. Clean. He slumped like a puppet with its strings cut. I sent McDowell to retrieve his body, but by morning, Hargreaves was just another name to report up the line.

The worst part of command isn't giving orders; it's the silence that follows, when the men look at you, waiting for a reason. When I have none to give.

15th July 1950

Evening. Barracks.

The command gave us a day of rest, though it's more because supply lines are stretched thin than out of pity. I've spent the morning cleaning my Pistol and checking the maps for tomorrow's march. Routine, as always.

One of the lads, young Davies asked me about poetry today. Said his mother loved Tennyson and he wanted to learn a few lines to write back to her. The request caught me off guard; I've forgotten what poetry sounds like. I told him about Byron. It felt cruel to recite romantic verses in a place like this.

It is midnight and I am still awake, wondering if the world will remember us when all this ends. Not just as soldiers, but also as men who once dreamed.

22nd July 1950

Night. On the move.

The road ahead is endless, we march under the cover of the night, though the moon betrays us with its pale light. Every crack of a branch sounds like the start of an ambush. I grip my pistol tightly, as if it could protect us from the shadows.

Private Simmons is limping now from the shrapnel from last week's barrage. I ordered him to stay behind, but he refused. Couldn't press the matter, He said he couldn't bear to be left alone. none of us can.

The men talk less as we move deeper into enemy territory. The words they do say are clipped and functional. We've become men of survival, not conversation. I am writing these entries so hopefully, someone, someday, will understand what it was like to be here. To see the end of everything I believed in.

29th July 1950

Dusk. Outskirts of an abandoned village.

We reached Mons this morning. Or rather what's left of it. The buildings are torn down, dead and hollow. There's no sign of life, only radio silence. Walking through the rubble is bleak and depressing. The place the men are camping at had a few belongings of the people who once lived here, the lads found a doll buried in the ash, its porcelain face cracked but still smiling.

I handed it to Private Harris, who tucked it into his pack without a word. Maybe he has a daughter back home. Or maybe he just needed something, anything, to hold on to.

Tonight, we sleep here. The men have taken to calling me "the captain," though I've corrected them more than once. I'm no captain, just a man trying to keep thirty odd others alive.

July 1950

Midnight, Mons

My dearest Hilda,

We've been moving for days now, walking through mud and sweat, but somehow, there's still a part of me that still hopes for this war to end soon. I think of you often; your smile, the way you'd always know just what to say. It's the thought of you that keeps me going, that keeps me putting one foot in front of the other.

There is a lot of uncertainty here, but I've been able to keep their spirits up, telling them that this will be over soon that we're doing this for something greater. I believe it, too. I have to.

I know this will be over soon, Hilda. We will come through this. And when it's all over, I'll come back. I promise.

Until then, I am yours,
Edmund

SEPTEMBER 1950



3rd September 1950

Platoon B, 3rd Infantry Battalion

Midnight. Somewhere near the Ardennes.

The rain hasn't stopped for three days. It seeps into everything our uniforms, our boots, our bones. The men's tempers are as frayed as the edges of my map. The mud clings to us like a second skin, slowing every step, pulling us further into the earth as if it means to bury us alive.

The Germans know we're here. Their artillery found us twice today, but we were lucky; only minor wounds this time. McDowell joked that they must be aiming for someone else.

No one laughed.

Haven't slept in two days. Every time I close my eyes, all I see are the faces of the men we lost in July. I've stopped trying to remember their voices; it's easier to forget than to hear them wrong.

11th September 1950

Dusk. Abandoned farmstead, outskirts of Namur, Belgium

We stumbled across this farmstead after a forced march through the woods. The barn is still intact, though the house is little more than splinters and ash. Private Henry found a rusted pitchfork in the rubble and brandished it like a knight with his lance, much for the amusement of the others. It's good to hear them laugh, even if only for a moment.

Supplies are running low. We've scavenged what we can, canned vegetables, a jar of honey, even a live chicken, but it won't last. Gave half my rations to Simmons. His leg has worsened, and I fear it's more than just shrapnel now. He insists he's fine, but his demeanour betrays him.

The stars came out tonight, clear and sharp. I watched them for a while, trying to remember the names of constellations Hilda once pointed out to me. Orion? Cassiopeia? It doesn't matter. They're the same stars she sees, if she's alive to see them at all. I hope she is.

17th September 1950

Dawn. Forest clearing, near the front line.

We've been ordered to hold this position until further notice. "Further notice" always means more misery, though no one says it aloud. The forest is quiet, too quiet. The men whisper about traps, ambushes, mines. All I can do is to tell them to focus, but even I can't ignore the weight of the silence.

Private Davies, the one who asked me about poetry, was killed this morning by a sniper's bullet. The shot hit him in the neck as he was helping set up a machine gun. I stayed with him until he bled out, whispering some nonsense about England and peace. don't think he even heard me.

When the body was taken away, I found a scrap of paper in his pocket, a line from Tennyson, clumsily written: *"To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."* Don't know whether to feel proud or ashamed.



29th September 1950

Evening. Forward trench near Bastogne

They've pulled us back to the trenches again. I hate this place. This shit, its stench, the endless dissonance of shells. It strips away whatever shred of humanity we try to hold onto.

Private Harris found a harmonica in the satchel of a fallen German soldier. He played a few notes of "Danny Boy" tonight, but no one joined in. The music sounded out of place, like a robin singing in a graveyard.

Decided to write another letter to Hilda today, though I know almost certainly no one is left to deliver it. At this point, I write these to myself. To remember what it felt like to love, to dream. If she ever reads it, I hope she'll understand why I've become what I am.

DECEMBER 1950



3rd December 1950

Platoon B, 3rd Infantry Battalion

Evening. Somewhere near the Siegfried Line.

The cold has teeth. It bites at the fucking flesh; I've never known a chill like this. The men huddle together when they can, their breath clouding the air like ghosts lingering too long.

We've been ordered to hold this position, though what they expect us to achieve here is beyond me. There's no shelter, only the skeletal remains of trees and a few foxholes dug into the frozen earth. Simmons is now gone. His leg gave out last week. Wonder if I could've saved him, Not add another name on a growing list of losses.

McDowell keeps talking about Christmas. Says his family always sang carols by the fire. I haven't the heart to tell him there'll be no fires, no carols, no Christmas this year. I miss home.

8th December 1950

Night. Near River Rhine

The air still reeks of cordite and burnt flesh. What remains of my men is scattered across the frozen ground, charred and unrecognizable. We were moving under the cover of darkness, trying to reach a better defensive position when the bombers came. The first explosion threw me into a ditch; the second collapsed it on top of me. I clawed my way out, coughing up dirt and blood.

Of the thirty-eight men I had under my command in July, only five remain now. Harris is gone. So is McDowell. The harmonica he used to play lies twisted and blackened in the mud.

Don't know why I survived. Don't know if I even want to survive now. The men look to me for orders, for strength, but all I can feel is the weight of their absence. I hope they rest in peace; Lord knows I won't.

15th December 1950

Dusk. In The woods.

We've taken refuge in the ruins of a barn, though it offers little against the cold. The wind howls through the run down walls, seems like it'll snow soon. The men, or what's left of them, are quiet. Even the greenest recruit knows better than to hope now.

I rationed what little food we had left, but it's never enough. Hunger looks at us almost as relentlessly as the cold. I caught Davies... no, not Davies, it's Warner now. picking at the frozen bark of a tree, as if it might yield something edible. I didn't stop him.

There's no news from command, no word of reinforcements. For all I know, we've been forgotten. Perhaps that's for the best.

24th December 1950

Evening. The same lodge.

Christmas Eve. A night for miracles, or so they say. But no angels descend to deliver us, no bright stars to guide the way. Just endless snow. This silence is rather deafening.

We lit a fire tonight, though it feels like contempt more than celebration. The men sat close, staring into the flames, as if trying to remember what warmth felt like. Warner shared a half-frozen biscuit he'd saved, and we passed it around like communion.

Tried to think of home, of Hilda, of better days. But all I could see were the faces of those we've lost, ones I failed to save.

31st December 1950

Night. Moving toward the river.

We're on the move again, though to where, I can't say for sure. The cold is relentless, the snow knee-deep in some places. My boots are soaked through, my fingers numb, but we press on. There are only four of us now.

The river lies ahead. Command has ordered us to regroup with what remains of the battalion on the far side. If we make it that far.

I watched the men tonight as they sat in the snow, too tired to speak. They've stopped looking to me for answers. Perhaps they've realized I have none left to give.

Tomorrow is a new year, though I doubt it will bring anything new. Just more cold, more loss, more silence.

December 1950

Afternoon, Near a village

Hilda,

I don't know if I can find the words for what's happened. Don't know if I want to. The bombing took my men and it is playing again and again in my mind. We've lost so much. Our platoon is all but gone now, and I'm left here, surrounded by ghosts of the men I swore to protect. Can't help but feel like I've failed them.

It's hard to write with the same hope I had before. The light I carried with me, thinking of you, of coming home to you seems dimmer now. But I still think of you. I'll make it back to you. What else is there? What else is worth fighting for if not that? ~~I doubt you're even alive honestly.~~

Please don't think me weak, Hilda. I'll keep going. I must.

Love always,
Edmund



JANUARY 1951



13th January 1951

8th Consolidated Infantry Unit

Evening. Near the River Meuse.

It's just Warner and me now. The others didn't make it across the river; one froze, the other simply disappeared into the fog and snow. I've stopped asking questions, the answers change nothing.

Command, or what's left of it, found us two days ago. We've been reassigned to the 8th Consolidated Infantry Unit; a ragtag group of survivors from various battalions. The men here are mostly children, barely trained, and older men who've long since lost the fire they once had. There's nothing of the proud, disciplined force we were in the beginning.

The rumours have started again; Of England being on the verge of surrender. They say the cities are bombed beyond recognition, that the countryside burns. Someone claimed the King fled to Canada. Told them to ignore it, but the truth is, I don't know what's real anymore.

We've been ordered to move north tomorrow, closer to the front lines. The roads are choked with snow, and the sky threatens more. I'd be surprised if I'll see another sunrise.

22nd January 1951

Dusk. Forward trench near Nijmegen.

The new unit is barely holding together. We've been shelled relentlessly for two days, the ground still shaking beneath our feet as though the earth itself wants to swallow us whole. Warner says he saw a fox slinking through the trenches last night, its coat bright against the grime. He took it as a sign of what, he wouldn't say.

The buzz grows louder. England is finished, they say. London flattened, Dover taken, Churchill missing. The Germans will cross the Channel any day now, and there'll be no one left to stop them. Some of the men look at me like I should have an answer, a plan, some hope to offer, but all I can do is nod and tell them to focus on the task at hand. This war feels endless.

I try to remember the faces of those we've lost, but even they are fading now, blurred by time and grief. Lord, if this truly is the end, then let it come swiftly. ~~I'm scared of dying out here.~~

31st January 1951

Night. Forward post near Arnhem.

Never expected to find myself in command again. Yet, today I received word that I've been promoted to First Lieutenant, effective immediately. Don't know what to feel. My thoughts should be with those we've lost, and yet here I am, now carrying the weight of a rank I didn't earn the right way.

It's strange, this promotion doesn't feel like a mark of victory, but a slap in my face. The men in the unit treat me with a wariness but who can blame them? After all, what do I have to offer them? More death?

Warner, as always, has been quiet. He didn't say much when I told him. Perhaps he's thinking what I am, that it's only a matter of time before the enemy swarms us and this place, like so many others, becomes another forgotten trench in history.

But I must keep moving. I must keep them moving. Orders are orders, and now I have some of my own to give. I can only hope I do better by these men than I did by those who died at Maillard's Hill.

January 1951

Dusk, Somewhere in Occupied France

Hilda,

It feels like everything is slipping through my fingers. The men I've had to leave behind, I was promoted to first lieutenant given what happened to my men, it feels like a slap in the face. ~~I don't deserve this.~~

We've been fighting a war we knew we couldn't win. I knew it then, and I know it now. The thought of you, of our life together, is the only thing that keeps me moving, but it's getting harder to hold on to that. Every day it feels like I'm farther away from you, from everything I once believed in.

I can't help but wonder, Hilda, if I'll ever make it back to you. Maybe I'm not supposed to. Maybe we were never meant to have that life we dreamed of.

But still, I can't stop thinking of you. Even in the darkest hours, I still hold on to that light.

Yours,
Edmund

FEBRUARY 1951



3rd February 1951

Somewhere in outer England, GOZ

Dusk. POW Camp, German Occupied Zone.

The war is over. It is official. The papers were signed today; Britain surrenders to Germany. There's no joy, only the finality of it. My men are alive, but I'm not sure if that's something to celebrate anymore. The camp is crowded, freezing, and as empty of hope as my feelings. The snow clings to everything like a spit on the face, how far we've fallen.

We've been moved again, this time to a camp somewhere in the Northwestern part of the Reich. Don't know why we're still here waiting, every day like the one before. I can barely recognize the country we fought for. What's left of it seems a shadow of what it was. Maybe that's all it ever was.

Warner's still here. He's quiet. his distant glass eyes are lost; he's already somewhere else. No one can blame him. Wish I could leave, too. But where would I go? We're alive, at least. I'm not sure if the same could be said about my family.

11th February 1951

Evening. POW Camp, German Occupied Zone.

Another day. Another camp. This place is nothing but concrete and metal, the cold eating at our bones. No warmth, nor hope. We've been moved so many times I don't know where we are anymore. It's like we've forgotten what it means to stand on familiar ground.

I spoke to some of the other prisoners today. They say we'll be kept here for the months just shunted around until they figure out what to do with us. I don't think they care. We're just bodies to feed.

It's strange, being free from the front, yet feeling so trapped. Wonder if I'll ever feel anything but the weight of defeat. But at least my men are here with me. For now, that's enough.

20th February 1951

Evening. POW Camp, German Occupied Zone.

There are rumours today. I don't know how much of it is true, but they say Britain will sign an armistice with Germany soon. The official word hasn't come, but it's hard to ignore the shift in the air. Some of the men are holding on to the hope that things might change, that we'll get a chance to go home. If it is even possible.

I spoke with Lewis today. He's still in pain from his wound, though he refuses to talk about it. Maybe he thinks silence will make it less real. I told him there's no shame in it. But who am I to say? I've ~~led too many to their deaths~~ seen too many men die to believe in anything but survival now.

They've been taking us to work outside the camp, small jobs, it's nothing too strenuous. We shovel snow, fix fences, do whatever they tell us. It's a kind of waiting game. I hate it.

28th February 1951

Midnight. POW Camp, German Occupied Zone.

The camp is quieter now. More soldiers have been moved out, and the place feels emptier with each passing day. The Germans keep us here like livestock, shifting us around, moving us like pieces on a board.

Can't stop thinking about my family. I doubt they are even alive; Would Hilda recognize me if I ever made it back home? Some days I think I'd rather not know. This life, this survival feels more like a never ending nightmare now. I wonder if I'm the only one still awake.

I hear they've brought more prisoners in from other camps. British soldiers, some from the south. Their faces are familiar but blank. They've all seen what we've seen. Lost what we've lost.

The cold doesn't stop. The snow keeps falling, and it's hard to tell where the world ends and the sky begins. All of it feels so distant now.

March 1951

Afternoon, POW Camp, Bavaria

My dearest,

The camp is colder than expected. It's strange here; quiet, in a way that makes it feel like the world has already ended. The days blend together, and I don't know what's worse: the silence or the noise that never seems to stop. I've seen things, things that I can't unsee. And every time I close my eyes, I see their faces. The men I couldn't save. The faces of the soldiers I once led.

I can't stop thinking about home. About her. You know who I mean. I know I shouldn't. I should accept the truth, but I can't. I won't. She's still out there, somewhere. I know she is.

I write to you because you're the one who understands; if anyone can at all. I can't tell myself that she's gone. It's not right. The world took so much from me, and now it's trying to take her too. But I won't let it.

I don't know how much longer I can hold on to this, but I can't let go. Not now. Not yet.

Forgive me,
Edmund

MAY 1951



4th May 1951

Somewhere in Bavaria, POW Camp

Dawn. Barracks, POW Camp, Bavaria.

The frost has finally begun to lift. The mornings are still cold, but the air smells faintly of earth and pine rather than ash and iron. Spring is here, though it feels like it's arrived for someone else.

It's been months since I last wrote. Already tried to start a dozen times but couldn't bring myself to finish a word. Each entry felt like digging open wounds that refused to heal. ~~I don't know why I even bother. It's not like anyone's waiting to hear from me.~~ Not sure why I'm trying now. Maybe it's because the camp feels quieter lately, emptier. Maybe it's because Norman said my silence was starting to unnerve him.

The Germans have grown more lenient. They seem less like wardens now, more like men who are tired of guarding ghosts.

13th May 1951

Midday. Work Detail, POW Camp, Bavaria.

Today was warmer. The kind of day that would have been perfect for a cricket match back home. Instead, we spent it repairing fences along the camp's perimeter. The work is monotonous but oddly grounding. It's easier to not think with my hands busy.

I caught myself staring at the mountains by the stream. They're beautiful, untouchable, like they belong to a different world entirely. I wonder what it would be like to walk into them, to disappear and never come back but then went back to working; it's a dangerous thing to dream about freedom here.

One of the new arrivals, is a Scotsman named Fraser, He shared his bread with me today, said it was a good omen sharing food. I wanted to believe him, but omens feel like a cruel joke these days. But thanked him anyway. It was the first time I'd crack a smile in weeks.

30th May 1951

Evening. Barracks, POW Camp, Bavaria.

This place feels more frail now, like it could break down at moment's notice. The guards seem distracted, their bark softened into something almost human. I've overheard rumours about talk of negotiations, of releases. I don't dare believe it.

Fraser says he's ready for whatever comes next. He asked me if I was. Wasn't sure how to answer. What does readiness look like after all of this? What kind of man steps back into the world after he's watched it burn?

I keep thinking about my family. The thought of going back to an empty house terrifies me more than staying here. But then again, the mountains are green again, the snow melted into streams that run through the camp. Life continues, whether we deserve it or not.

JULY 1951



2nd July 1951

POW Camp, Bavaria / Repatriation to Britain

Morning. Barracks, POW Camp, Bavaria.

The camp feels like it's holding its breath. Guards reading off names, directing groups toward trains. "You're going home," they tell us, but it sounds more like an order than a comfort. ~~I question myself these days, if it is even worth coming back? Will anyone even miss my presence if I'm gone?~~

Fraser said I should be relieved, but instead, my hands won't stop shaking. Seen too many trains heading in the wrong direction, taking men to places they never came back from. Last night, Dreamt I was on one of those trains, and when I woke up, I was drenched in sweat, heart pounding so loud I thought it would wake the whole barracks.

They call it "nerves." Some of the older prisoners look at me with pity; the younger ones pretend not to notice. Warner says I'll feel better once we're on English soil. But soil doesn't matter, everywhere feels the same after a while.

8th July 1951

Evening. Railway Transport, somewhere in France.

The train smells of damp wood and sweat. The rattling sends jolts through my body with every bump on the track. I keep flinching at the sound of the wheels screeching, mistaking it for artillery.

At one stop, a young French boy ran alongside the train, waving a ragged flag. The sight made my stomach churn. I wanted to wave back, but my hand refused to move.

I sat stiffly for hours, gripping the bench as though it might disappear beneath me. Warner nudged me once, trying to lighten the mood. He asked if I'd thought about what I'll eat first when we get back. I couldn't answer. All I could think of was the way the sky looked over Calais, ash-grey and angry, the day we crossed into enemy territory years ago.

14th July 1951

Midday. Dover Port, Britain.

Home.

The word feels like a lie. The white cliffs of Dover stood unchanged, but everything else was foreign. The dockworkers watched us disembark; their faces unreadable. Some clapped politely, but the sound was half-hearted.

We walked through the streets to waiting transport. A child pointed at me, whispered something to his mother, and she pulled him away as though I might lash out.

I've learned to keep my hands still when I'm in a crowd. People notice the trembling, and their faces tighten with discomfort. "Battle fatigue," they whisper when they think we can't hear. They look at us like we're damaged goods, and maybe we are.

22nd July 1951

Evening. Warner's Family Home, Northern England.

Warner's family took me in with open arms. His mother fussed over me like I was her own, forcing me to eat second helpings of everything. His father patted my shoulder with a firm, reassuring hand. They called me "a hero" and told me I should be proud.

Every other night I wake up gasping, clawing at invisible debris. Yesterday Warner shook me awake, after breaking in to the room, his face pale. I'd been shouting orders in my sleep, reliving the night the platoon was shelled. He didn't say anything, but I saw the worry in his eyes.

His father keeps offering me whisky, as if it's a cure for everything. I sip it, if only to avoid the questions. ~~I wonder if they'd still welcome me if they knew the truth; that their hero is nothing but a coward who couldn't save anyone.~~

31st July 1951

Dusk. Family Home, Manchester.

The house is unrecognizable. The roof has caved in, the garden is a jungle of weeds, and the front door hangs crooked on its hinges. Neighbours told me the bomb hit September last year. I hope Hilda didn't suffer half as much as I did.

I stood in the doorway for what felt like hours, staring at the wreckage. Inside, found fragments of the life I'd been holding onto. A burned-out piano. A chipped teacup. The tarnished frame of a mirror where she used to fix her hair.

I can't stop hearing the sounds. Bombs whistling, glass shattering, screams that dissolve into silence. My hands tremble, and I press them into my sides, willing them to stop.

The neighbours offered their condolences, but their words rang hollow. One of them muttered, "He's one of those-" I walked away before I could hear more.

I don't belong here anymore. I don't belong anywhere.

NOVEMBER 1951



12th November 1951

Manchester, Britain

Evening. Rented Room, Manchester.

I went to the labour office again today. The clerk didn't even look up as he told me there were no positions for someone "with my skills." I guess ~~"former commander of lost causes" isn't a hot commodity these days.~~ I don't blame him, what use is a man who only knows how to lead others to their deaths?

I've learned to let the moments pass, but they're coming more often now. Memories from the war that refuse to stay buried. Warner wrote to me last month, saying I should visit his family again. I couldn't bring myself to reply. His home felt warm, alive. Mine feels like a tomb.

The truth is, I can't see a future anymore. Not for me, not for this country. Everything I fought for is gone, and I'm left with these broken pieces of a life that no longer fits.



November 1951

Evening, Manchester

Tonight, the air feels heavy. The city feels as hollow as I do, its silence broken only by the occasional hum of a passing car.

I tried to write a letter earlier, but the words wouldn't come. Who would I even write to? Warner? His family? My old commanding officers? No one would understand. No one could. I don't recognize myself these days.

The landlord was at my door this morning, the rent is due. I told him I'd have it by the end of the week, but it's a lie. I've been living off the stale bread and canned beans that I've rationed for weeks now. Every bite feels like I'm stealing it from the men who starved in the trenches beside me.

I'm tired. Tired of thinking there's a way out of this mess. Maybe tomorrow I'll laugh, pretend like nothing's wrong. But tonight, tonight I'll let myself grieve. For the man I used to be and the life I'll never have.

I see their faces in the dark; Hargreaves, Simmons, Davies. Men who never made it home. Men who, perhaps, were the lucky ones. If only I could shield you, Hilda, from the wretched sight of what I've become. But perhaps it's a mercy that you're gone, spared the burden of seeing me like this.

If someone ever finds these pages, I hope you understand. This isn't weakness or surrender. It's the end of a war I've been fighting alone, long after the world stopped counting.

Yours truly,
Edmund.

INDEX

Cordite – A type of smokeless propellant used in ammunition.

Siegfried Line – A German defensive line during World War II.

Maillard's Hill – A fictional location mentioned in the diary.

Consolidated Infantry Unit – Military term for a regrouped or combined unit of soldiers.

Dissonance – A harsh, jarring mixture of sounds; metaphorically used here to describe the chaos of war.

POW (Prisoner of War) Camp – Facilities where captured enemy soldiers are held.

Repatriation – The return of someone to their own country.

Armistice – An agreement to stop fighting temporarily, typically preceding a peace treaty.

Shell-shocked, Battle fatigue – Historical term for what is now understood as PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder).

Byron and Tennyson – Famous English poets, mentioned in the context of poetry discussions.

Forward trench – A military trench closest to enemy lines.

Occupied Zone – Territory controlled by enemy forces during the war.

Comradeship – The close relationships developed among soldiers during war.

Barrage – A concentrated artillery bombardment over a wide area.

Artillery – Large-caliber guns used in warfare on land.

Defensive position – A place fortified to protect soldiers from attack.

Forward post – A military position at the front lines.

Foxholes – Small dugouts in the ground used by soldiers as protection.

Calais – A French city important in both World Wars; tied to invasions and defenses.

Mons – A Belgian town that saw significant military action during both World Wars.

Namur – A Belgian city, often a strategic location in war.

Dover – Significant for British military and civilian history.

Rhine – A major river in Europe, representing a strategic point in military campaigns.

River Meuse – A river running through France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, frequently mentioned in war stories.

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