

Harry Drinkwater's Diary

Harry Drinkwater was a soldier who fought in World War One (1914-1918). He joined the army at the outbreak of war and served until the war ended. He kept a diary throughout the war, which has now been published as a book. The text below is an amended extract from his diary.

Monday, December 20, 1915

The trenches are in a terrible condition — anything up to 4ft deep in mud and water. We're plastered in mud up to our faces. Our food — cold bacon, bread and jam — is slung together in a sack that hangs from the dripping dugout roof. Consequently, we eat and drink mud.

5 Saturday, March 4, 1916

Nothing here but trench after trench and, in places, the ground blown into heaps of dirt. The trees have been hacked to pieces — only black stumps remain. Nothing grows. Utter desolation.

Tuesday, March 7

10 Worked at a feverish pace, digging and strengthening trenches all through last night. Then through the day, I have to do an hour's sentry duty* every third hour. This is followed by an hour as the relief man, when I'm able to sit down. For the third hour, I can sleep. I'm feeling like most of the other fellows — half dead.

Thursday, March 9

15 Owing to food transports going astray, we have one loaf between five of us, a few biscuits and half a tin of marmalade each per day. Have just heard we have a ten-mile march before we can be billeted* [for rest]. Jolly hard lines.

Friday, March 10

20 It was snowing as we set out at 11.15 last night. I saw two fellows — fast asleep as they walked along — walk out of the ranks and fall into the ditch at the side of the road. We halted for ten minutes' rest and I dropped down into a puddle and went to sleep. Was unable to get up without help, and ended up hanging on to Lieutenant Davis on one side and a stretcher-bearer the other. Tried to pull myself together and went headlong on the road. They got me to my feet again but I was helpless. Have a vague idea that I was laid on some straw. Then oblivion.

Sunday, May 7

25 Working in the mines — an awful strain mentally. We're some three-parts of a mile under the ground. Air is got down by means of a large pair of blacksmith's bellows*, connected to a long pipe. But it's very stuffy, and we work with backs bent for eight hours.

An extract from *Harry's War* by Harry Drinkwater.

Glossary

sentry duty — keeping guard

blacksmith's bellows — a tool which gives out air

billeted — housed