

Journal #13



A Cheerful Front
Members of the Worcestershire Regiment put on a brave face for the camera on their way to the front on 28 June 1916. This was the type of image that was welcomed by British politicians, anxious to show the war in a good light.

Governments on both sides tried to keep casualty figures and other bad news from reaching the public. If this was made public, how might it affect the attitude of the people back home?

Letter

John Raws a member of the Australian Corps fought at the Battle of the Somme. He wrote a letter to a friend dated 4 August 1916 and was killed soon after.

I write from the battlefield of the Great Push with thousands of shells passing in a tornado overhead, and thousands of unburied dead around me. It seems easy to say that, but you who have not seen it can hardly conceive the awfulness of it all.

My battalion has been in it for eight days, and one-third of it is left - all shattered at that. And they're sticking it still, incomparable heroes, all. We are lousy, stinking, ragged, unshaven, sleepless. Even when we're back a bit we can't sleep for our own guns. I have one puttee, a dead man's helmet, another dead man's gas protector, a dead man's bayonet. My tunic is rotten with other men's blood, and partly splattered with a comrade's brains. It is horrible, but why should you people at home not know?

1. What was John Raws' nationality?
2. Where was the Battle of the Somme located?
3. How does John's description of his equipment contrast to the British belief in this regard before the battle?

Vocabulary

Great Push: or "Big Push" originally referred to the Battle of the Somme, but later could refer to any large-scale British offensive.

Puttee: a long strip of cloth wound spirally round the leg from ankle to knee, as part of a soldier's uniform to give additional support for the ankles.

Tunic: outer jacket of a military uniform.

Windy: Afraid, nervous. Such a person was said to have *the wind-up*.