



Letters from the Trenches: The First World War by Those Who Were There

Jacqueline Wadsworth

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A history of the First World War told through the letters exchanged by ordinary British soldiers and their families. Letters from the Trenches reveals how people really thought and felt during the conflict and covers all social classes and groups – from officers to conscripts and women at home to conscientious objectors. Voices within the book include Sergeant John Adams, 9th Royal Irish Fusiliers, who wrote in May 1917: 'For the day we get our letter from home is a red Letter day in the history of the soldier out here. It is the only way we can hear what is going on. The slender thread between us and the homeland.' Private Stanley Goodhead, who served with one of the Manchester Pals battalion, wrote home in 1916: 'I came out of the trenches last night after being in 4 days. You have no idea what 4 days in the trenches means...The whole time I was in I had only about 2 hours sleep and that was in snatches on the firing step. What dugouts there are, are flooded with mud and water up to the knees and the rats hold swimming galas in them...We are literally caked with brown mud and it is in all our food, tea etc.' Jacqueline Wadsworth skilfully uses these letters to tell the human story of the First World War – what mattered to Britain's servicemen and their feelings about the war; how the conflict changed people; and how life continued on the Home Front.

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