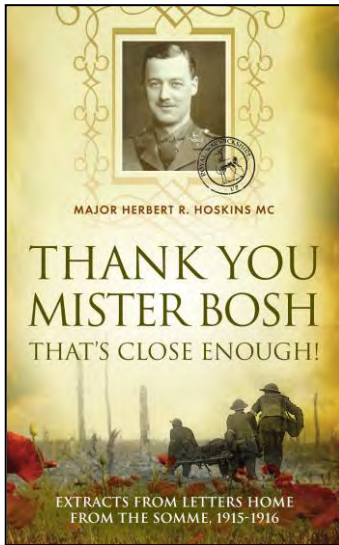


MEREO NEW BOOK: PRESS RELEASE

One of the most detailed, moving, as-it-happened accounts we have of life in the trenches: a soldier's letters home from The Somme – horrifying, heart-breaking and surprisingly humorous

PUBLICATION DATE: 1st DECEMBER 2013



“I am keeping merry all the time – of course no man alive can be told he’s to take his company over the top in a hour or two and not feel twitchy ...”

THANK YOU MISTER BOSH

THAT’S CLOSE ENOUGH!

EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS HOME FROM
THE SOMME, 1915-1916

Major Herbert R. Hoskins MC



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Waterstones; WH Smiths and Google Books (Also available as an ebook)

“I have hopes of seeing you all before Christmas and sitting down to Christmas dinner with peace declared. Is that too much to ask? I will not give up hope yet – unlikely as the prospect of peace seems ... Got gassed a little.”

Raised in The Midlands, Herbert Hoskins (and three of his brothers) joined the British Army in 1914. Herbert was soon serving in the muddy, disease-ridden trenches of The Somme in war-torn France. Herbert wrote letters to loved ones at home as often as he could – and now, almost 100 years after the terrible events of WW1, we too can read Herbert’s personal letters in this astonishing new book.

Apart from being one of the most-detailed accounts we may ever have of day-to-day life in the trenches, these letters home to “Blighty” also demonstrate the extraordinary courage and stoicism of the young soldiers as they faced illness, gas attacks, the atrocious weather, the deaths of their fellow comrades and the relentless conflict against an indefatigable enemy in this, the so-called “war to end all wars.”

Discovered in an attic after Herbert’s death in 1976 and meticulously collated by his grandson, Herbert’s letters to his loved-ones at home not only record the unimaginable hardship endured every single day in the trenches but also the good spirits and optimism that helped these men through their ordeal. In this book, Herbert’s courageous, dutiful yet humorous voice speaks to us all, loud-and-clear, from a century ago. His words are fresh, full of vitality and – while his tone of phrase may sometimes sound quaint to 21st Century ears – his words impart many revelations about the plight of the soldiers in the trenches that modern-day readers will find shocking, informative and extremely moving.

“Poor old Edkins has been killed. He lay out wounded for two days. He was found on the second night but we did not expect he could live. He was a topping fellow ... We were up at 1.30 am. I was not in bed before 11.30 ... I have to be up again at 3 am for early parade... The jolly old guns are all banging away in fine style just now. ... It’s a rotten evening to get shelled.”



Through Herbert’s letters, this book also tells the story of Herbert’s brother, Cyril, who died (aged 26) on The Somme on 1st July 2016. Cyril Hoskins’ body was never recovered.

“His body will be where he fell, as the Bosh retook all the ground. ... Do not be downhearted ... feel proud.... He is the first Hoskins to fall, and fell covered in glory”.

See over for further extracts from Major Herbert Hoskins’ letters home and more information >>>



To request a review copy or to be put in touch with the author’s grandson, please contact
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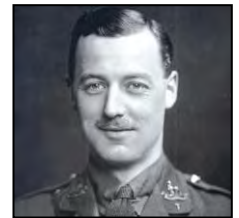
Mud, mud, mud ... the gas attacks, the cold, the flies, the exhaustion and even more mud...

Herbert's letters give us an extraordinarily glimpse into the horrific reality of life in the trenches as it was experienced by the young soldiers: details of their day-to-day existence, the losses they experienced and the comradeship they shared – as well as the jokes they made and the morale-boosting entertainment they organised while facing ever-present mortal danger. The conditions in the trenches were horrendous:

"I saw fellows up to their knees in mud. Some poor chaps were quite exhausted after eight days there. The mud is awful ... We will I am afraid be having most of our officers suffering with nerves if we do not get a rest soon."

"The flies!!! Never seen so many as in parts of the trench. Great big black and green fellows. I've got some gauze to cover my food and also a big piece for if I get a sleep by day to cover my face and hands".

"The great thing now is gas. Everyone imagines they are being gassed – it is very annoying. A man last night thought he was gassed and really it was only the concussion from a shell that had dropped near."



"We are sure to get some real cold weather soon. We are to be provided with whale oil and everyone will have to oil their feet and legs before going into the trenches. The cold is worst on the men who have to stand on sentry duty for several hours at a time, in all weathers."

Constant struggles to maintain the walls of the trenches in the terrible weather:

Mud was not just a horrible inconvenience and a potential bearer disease amidst the insanitary conditions of the trenches. The mud itself could be a killer with the constant threat of trench collapses that could bury the soldiers at any moment under a suffocating torrent of mud. Digging and repairing the trenches was a non-stop test of endurance and involved great physical exertion for the battle-weary young men.



"... there is mud and slush everywhere. Parts of the trench fell in and - to improve matters - half the men's dugouts also fell in. Luckily no one was buried. ... As fast as you clear up it falls down or rains and fills up again. But we just have to keep on keeping on ..."

"Ye gods - we are having a time in the trenches. It has rained for 48 hours and is still at it. We are in some new trenches ... and they are above knee deep in mud for the most part. No dugout - just rough shelters. Quite the worst line we've struck yet. ... The men are having a very rough time but keeping quite merry and bright. They do stick it wonderfully well ..."

Home leave was rare:

Herbert's letters describe how he is never sure when they might next get some "leave." Even when Herbert's father died, Herbert was refused "leave" to comfort his mother and attend his father's funeral because Herbert's youngest brother was still at home to perform those duties. However, after being awarded the Military Cross, Herbert was granted a few days of "home leave" in order to get married.

Christmas in the trenches:

Despite the fact that a football match took place between British and German troops on one Christmas Day during WW1, for most men in the trenches at Christmas, it was business as usual come the 25th December:

"There is to be no 'truce' this year - we are ordered that when the enemy are seen they are to be shot and any man trying to be friendly appropriately dealt with. ... I shall be up in the front line on Christmas Eve for four hours ..."

Further extracts and more information appear overleaf – plus details of media opportunities >>>



To request a review copy or to be put in touch with the author's grandson, please contact

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Lest we forget ...



As the number of casualties and fallen comrades mounted, Herbert expresses his grief in a stoic but not uncaring way while the fighting continues to rage around him ...

“Two officers have been killed - one last night and one today; both shot in the head when looking over the parapet ... We are all rather down. ... Eric Murray was wounded on Saturday, so that is another of my pals gone away. Mason has been gassed ... Bushill [who was Best Man at Herbert's wedding] was wounded in the leg by a piece of shell. Not very badly they think. Old Helsden was killed. He was a topping little fellow – I am very sorry indeed.”

Herbert's brother, Cyril, died aged 26 on 1st July 1916 on The Somme.

Herbert wrote to their mother on 5th July 1916:

“He was already hit in the shoulder, but pistol in hand he took his men ahead. He got another wound, but kept ahead. It was at the third line as he was aiming at a Bosh that he was shot dead. You can be assured he suffered no pain and died a glorious death, leaving nothing but praise and admiration behind for the wonderful way he led his Company. ... I am distressed at losing him, but so proud he proved his worth and died not only doing his duty but doing it so wonderfully well. ... His body will be where he fell, as the Bosh retook all the ground. ... Do not be downhearted, as it would not be fair to his memory; you should feel proud at his leadership. He is the first Hoskins to fall, and fell covered in glory”.



Despite Herbert's best efforts to find him, Cyril's body was never recovered.

That's close enough Mr Bosh! Herbert, himself, also had a number of close escapes from death ...



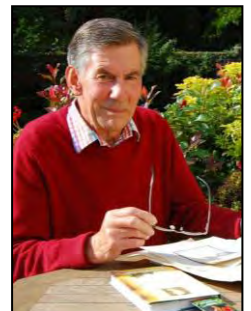
“It's a wonder I am not in hospital, as a shell dropped within a few feet of me just about 1 pm. It wounded three and one I am afraid is bad. A tiny bit hit me but made only a tiny scratch by my ear. I do not wish to see one burst any closer and am not particular about them being so near.”

“I had a near one last night. ... There was pretty heavy shelling. ... A man between Stone and myself, and also one behind Stone, were killed and one or two others wounded. ... I'll be having a score up against 'Mr. Bosh' soon. Let's hope I get a chance to wipe some of them out - I will be very annoyed if I get wounded or invalided back now without getting a chance of a smack at him.”

Full of tragedy and peril but also brimming over with laughter and triumph in the face of death, *Thank You Mister Bosh, That's Close Enough!* is an eye-opening collection of Major Hoskins' personal letters and one of the most complete accounts of life in the trenches we will ever possess.

“It's no use grousing on this show. Take what comes and make the best of it ... This war will go down in history ...”

Media Opportunities: Extracts/serialisation; Major Hoskins' letters are printed alongside photographs, maps and illustrations to provide a fascinating picture of the horrific world these young soldiers inhabited. **John Hopkins (pictured right) is available for interview.** John is Major Hoskins' grandson, and collated the letters in this book.



Major Herbert R. Hoskins MC was born in 1889 near Birmingham and attended school in Stratford-upon-Avon. He joined the Army in 1914. He served with The Royal Warwickshire Regiment. On 26th July 1916 his Division were involved in the capture of Pozieres during which he led a brilliant attack across the open. He was later awarded the Military Cross for this action. Major Hoskins died in 1976.

Photo credits: Poppy photos by Frances Hoskins; “Poppies on a British War Memorial” by Stuart Mills.



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