Writing a Letter from the Trenches

Your assignment today is to pretend to be the soldier on the other side of this assignment. You should be writing to somebody in their life. Make sure you talk about what life was like in the trenches, what you miss from home, and what you’re hoping will happen at the end of this war. Be detailed!

Rubric:

- Introduction - ex. Dear ___________, My Darling _______________, To ______________
- Conclusion - ex. From _______________, Love _______________, Sincerely _______________
- Details about life in the trenches
- One weapon from WW1 that either you’ve used or has been used on you
- What you’re feeling/your emotions during the war - Make it personal
- Explanation of what you miss from home
- How do you think the war will end
- Which side of the war you are fighting for - Are you Central Powers or Allies?

**Your letter should be at least 1 whole page of writing!!!

Example of Layout

Hallo Ma,

I just wanted to send you a quick letter before I leave tomorrow. I’ve been ordered to go over the trench and head into No Man’s Land. We’re hoping to be able to move forward and take over some land from the British.

Life here isn’t great. The trenches are... I mean it’s not so bad if you can ignore the ... and the .... Remember Alfons? He got pretty sick because of the .... But he’s better now because he had ....

The Brits are getting pretty fiesty with their fighting though. Just last week they decided to try out the .... (their newest weapon). It killed quite a lot of people but it wasn’t so bad because we have the ....

I miss you all at home and give Da and Katherina my love. When I get back, the first thing I want is a plate of your delicious .... I can’t wait to see everyone and go to the .... because I miss doing ....

Well, I gotta go fight off some Brits. Don’t worry about me Ma, I know that soon the war will end when .... and I’ll be back soon.

Liebe,

Hans

This is just my example of the letter. It should not be the exact same as mine! Remember you want to make this a personal letter but it also needs to be at least one page long!
It was a love that survived the war’s toughest tests, only to end in tragedy. Childhood sweethearts Ernest West, 22, and Beattie Grove, 21, were engaged to be married when the young accountant signed up with the Royal Fusiliers. At first his loving letters gave no hint of what he was enduring on the Western Front.

“I am very sorry Darling, I haven’t been sending you letters each day but I am very busy indeed,” he said with classic British understatement. “I hope to tell you all about it later on Darling when you will, I am sure, forgive me.”

Later letters became bleaker in tone. In October 1916, after hearing about the death of one chum, he wrote of his relief that “it wasn’t a shell that killed poor Nob as I can’t bear the idea of a man being blown to pieces.”

Against all the odds, in October 1918, Ernest came home on leave to marry his beloved Beattie in Hawley, Hampshire. A brief honeymoon followed. After just two weeks of marriage, Beattie died of Spanish flu.

Heartbroken, Ernest returned to duty. In 1919 he was demobbed. In 1920 he married again. He died in 1984 aged 92, leaving a stash of letters from his brief marriage to ‘dearest B’.
Passionate devotion to wife Hannah was what saw Private Phillip Luxton through the darkest days of his life. Luxton was stationed in a trench throughout the French countryside. In May 1915, while serving in France with the Welsh Regiment, he wrote to her:

“Because I am away from you my love is not getting colder, for you are on my mind both day and night and when I returns to you I hope I will prove it because no man loves his wife and children better than I do.

“It will soon be 13 years since we was married and I am sure we have never regretted it and I hope and trust we will have another 13 years as happy as the last.”

Dad-of-two Philip, who was in his thirties, never did get home to Abertillery, South Wales. He died in action five months later. His children later grew up and fought in WWII. His letters were later collected and published in a book for other people to read.
Among the most emotional expressions of love from the Western Front are ‘last letters’. In 1917 Second Lieutenant Charles Alderton, of the Gordon Highlanders, wrote one to be sent to his parents and seven sisters at their home in Clerkenwell, central London, in the event of his death. Many soldiers would write ‘death letters’ that they would swap with their friends. If something happened to them, their friend would know to send the letter home with their body. It was their final way of saying goodbye.

“By the time you read this I shall have been called to make with many others the greatest sacrifice of all and my last long leave will have been taken,” he wrote. “I don’t want you to grieve or show any signs of loss. I have only done what many others have already done.

“I can never tell you how thankful I am for the happy home and comforts I have received from you all. I know it will be hard but be as cheerful over this parting as possible, and then set out to find a home where perhaps the bread earner has been called away and be a comfort and help to them. With love to all and do not grieve, Charlie.”

He died aged 21 at the Battle of Cambrai in 1917. His parents received a letter from a captain telling them: “Your son was a magnificent soldier. He died that others might be saved.”
Private Tom Fake, of the Rifle Brigade, may have done his duty but he was far from a born soldier.

A carpenter from Bristol, he couldn’t keep up on marches, got lost on his way to the front line in France and one night found himself alone in the trenches – an experience the 33-year-old recounted in a letter to wife Charlotte in April 1917:

“I went with a party to a village to fetch water. I kept up all right going but coming back with the water I was completely done up. Any rate I stuck to the water and carried it to the trenches.

“When I got there I found that our men had advanced farther on, so I had to stay in those trenches all night on my own as I did not know where to go. Next day I could not walk at all, so I have finished up in hospital again.”

Even when peace came Tom found little to celebrate, and wrote: “The day the armistice (This is the day when the two sides signed a peace treaty) was signed was the most miserable I have had since I have been out here, and all I feel is, roll on the time when I am free once more.”
Ernest Adams

Like so many who gave their lives in this cruel war, baby-faced Private Ernest Adams was just a teenager when he sat down to pen his ‘last letter’ to his parents back home in Leeds. Many soldiers would write ‘death letters’ that they would swap with their friends. If something happened to them, their friend would know to send the letter home with their body. It was their final way of saying goodbye.

His regiment, the Seaforth Highlanders, were preparing for the third Battle of Ypres in 1917. It’s clear the 19-year-old was already struggling.

He wrote: “My Dear Beloved Parents, I am writing this under very solemn conditions. “All around is turmoil and confusion and the wickedness and wrath of man… “If you ever receive this letter I shall already have gone to my Father. I know how you will grieve and my heart aches for you, but I beseech you to think not of me as dead, but just gone home to God, there to dwell in peace and rest, freed from all earthly strife.”

Ernest was wounded and died of his injuries several months later.
Sergeant George Fairclough was in the thick of the fighting from the start. An experienced cavalry soldier with the 4th Queen’s Own Hussars, he spared wife Cissie little of the horrifying details.

He was halted in a farmyard near Mons, Belgium, in August 1914, he wrote, when...“All of a sudden, a terrific fire of shrapnel burst from a concealed gun battery.

“The first shell almost cut the horse on my left clean in two. The second struck a man in the troop in front and appeared to simply blow the man and the horse to pieces.

“No troops could live under such fire and the brigade scattered.”

Weeks later he wrote of “the overpowering stench of hundreds of dead lying unburied” and described one clash as “Hell let loose – some of the sights too dreadful to see, men and horses splintered to ribbons”.

But Fairclough’s worst experience came when defending Ypres that November.

After days without rest, he fell into a deep sleep and, when difficult to rouse, his commanding officer assumed he was drunk and tried to send him to prison but he was freed because other officers knew he was innocent.

After the war ended in 1918, daughter Olive, eight, wrote (letter pictured above):

“Dear Daddy, you better hurry up and come home now peace has come. Yesterday the soldiers were singing and shouting. Some soldiers tried to catch Auntie Lil and Auntie Epp... and Auntie Epp nearly broke her glasses.”
Private Frank Harris, 24, married his Italian bride Pierina a week before going abroad with the Gloucester Regiment in 1916. Many soldiers would get married before they left for battle so they had something to fight for and they knew that there was someone at home who wanted them to come back.

In a letter from Mesopotamia to his mother in Gloucester in 1917, he described the constant shell-fire and the lice – but warned:

“Do not breathe a word of this to dear Pierina. I have not told her as she would only worry herself greatly.”

Frank did not want his wife to know about all the horrible details of the war so he kept his letter to her short and sweet. He let her know that he missed her but then when writing to his mother he was more honest.

Frank was killed in action three weeks later.
Biography Reflection Questions

1. Where is this soldier from?

2. What do you think this soldier experienced in the war?

3. Who did he write letters to in his spare time?

4. Did he survive the war?