**The Great War – Sea**

(Singing – “Pack Up Your Troubles In Your Old Kit Bag”

followed by male speaker)

As a young soldier, your training is pretty tough, it’s almost brutal, because you have to get to a stage where you will do what you’re told immediately you’re told so you don’t know what’s going on in the next field. You don’t know what the other units of the Allies are doing. You don’t know why you’re there. You’re a soldier and you’re told that this is something you’ve got to do and so you fight and you live for today because there might not be a tomorrow.

(Singing continues)

(New male speaker)

They got soldiers to learn how to dig trenches and board them up. These trenches still exist and they must have been very hard work because they would have dug these trenches out and learned how to put little guard posts in them and all the rest of it and they would have dismantled it and filled it back in ready for the next lot to come and train.

It was the only protection they had so they had to know how to put it up and put it up properly. They had no other protection when they went out onto the battlefield. They’re still there at Browndown up against Grange Farm. Personally, as a kid we used to play in them but we didn’t know what they were. We used to ride our bikes up and down them and mess about. We didn’t know they were World War One training trenches.

(New speaker)

You get to a stage where if you go any further, you’re going to get shot down and so you stop and you build some earthworks and you call them trenches. The two armies come within a shooting distance and then you try to get the upper hand somehow. Very often the move forward is at dawn. Initially I suppose, it was thought you’d catch the enemy unawares but they are also thinking in those terms and they would be up before dawn. So you reach a stalemate and you go back to your lines and that therefore leaves this space between the two armies and it is no-man’s land and you attempt to cross that at your peril.

(Sound of gunfire in background)

Sooner or later, you have to cross it so you make use of heavy artillery to battle the others and make them keep their heads down. And then you move forward again but it’s dangerous because when you move forward you haven’t got time to dig a trench or throw up earthworks or something. You lay in a crater that’s been created by the shells that fell short of the enemy.

Nobody wants to die and that’s the very great possibility when you start to run forward without cover, without protection. It’s a lottery, you could stand up and be shot immediately. You could crawl out of the trench and start running forward and be lucky enough to make it to the next bit of protection. But it’s absolute abject terror because in the next moment you might be dead.

(Sound of shell fire and sombre music)

People who were too reluctant, got too scared could probably be shot by our own officers. Fear spreads; emotions are picked up by everybody, you know, and I suppose the best way is to go as a group because they can’t shoot everyone at once.

(Sombre music continues)

It is cold; it is muddy because it is subject to whatever weather there is and so if it was snowing, if it was raining, anything like that, that all came into the trench. And your feet were in water. You were wet through. When you leaned against anything you became covered in mud and you didn’t have a room to go back to, at night-time, to clean the mud off so it just got thicker and more smelly and it was unpleasant, to say the least.

(Sound of squelchy mud)

A bit like soldiers through the ages, the thing you had to do was keep the weapon dry and keep that protected because it was your protection.

The awful thing, because of the vast numbers that we were facing, when they did charge forward and they started firing, you felt very frightened and almost horrified at what you were doing but it was self-preservation. You fired and perhaps the first line of the enemy fell, and others stepped over and kept coming. And the awful thing was here you were killing the enemy and yet as a group they were getting closer all the time. It is difficult to say quite how frightening that can be because, although they’re soldiers, that was Death coming closer, all the time: one step at a time.

(New male speaker)

Royal Marine Light Infantry was stationed at Forton Barracks in Forton Road. The main job of the marine is the protection of ships. It’s the Royal Marine’s job to protect the officers from the men but also supply them with a squad of highly trained marksmen: very disciplined fighting men if they ever had to board another vessel or go ashore and do something. And, of course, they were also used for communication. Before wireless came in, everything on board ship was done with a bugle call or a drum roll. Again, on the battlefield, everything was done with a bugle or a drum and the Royal Marines would do that. They would supply communications: one bugle call to another, to another, to another. And they would stand their ground: a very disciplined bunch of people.

(New male speaker)

My father’s brother, he enlisted in May of 1915. He fought in France and Flanders from July 1st ,1916. He then took part in the fighting on the Somme and he was killed in action, unfortunately, on 15th April 1917 at the tender age of 17. The reasoning behind the death was he was drawing water from a newly captured well when a shell burst alongside him. And this is the reason why he hasn’t got a grave: he’s got a name on a memorial. Full name and rank was Percy Alfred Rendell. He has the two medals, the Victory Medal and the British War Medal, which I think is the “Squeak and Wilfred”: he didn’t get the “Pip”.

(Sombre music to end)