Date: 3rd December, 1917

My Family

Dear Everyone:

The first thing I want to say is, I regret being so eager going to war. Living conditions are really tough; there’s no proper sewerage, rotting corpses are everywhere, you can get trench foot at any time, and the fact that your trench could collapse on top of you and bury you alive from a bombardment of shells isn’t reassuring. I still want to stay though.

Back to the living conditions, they are terrible. It reeks. Rotting corpses lie everywhere, and there’s no sewerage to take all of the waste away. There’s also no way to wash. The soldiers all around me smell and because of there being no hygiene, rats infest the trench. The rats have grown to incredible sizes because of all the rotting meat they eat. I have once groups of rats killing dogs and cats. Chats (lice) are also a big problem here. Because there’s no way to wash them off, you will scratch any part of your body and get a handful of them. When it rains the bottom of the trenches become full of muddy water, and many soldiers get trench foot. Trench foot is when your foot becomes frostbitten and over time it rots off. I have not gotten it so far which is good, because many soldiers have to have both legs amputated off so the infection doesn’t spread to vital parts of the body. We are given a mug of rum every morning to keep our spirits high and it helps remove the stench. It also helps us eat amongst dead bodies and rats.

Also, the trench doesn’t give complete protection from enemy fire. Hundreds of shells can rain upon the trenches every day, some of them destroying the trench and burying everyone in it alive. We aren’t on the front line charging all the time though. Going over the top is more of an exception than a rule. Most of the time is spent repairing trenches, on guard or resting. When going over the front line, it is very dangerous. You could be chatting with your mate and look back to see him blown 50 yards away. Also, as you get close to the Germans, machine gun fire is lethal. 8 bullets a second are fired and the chance of survival is very low.

After all of this, I still want to stay. I have a great feeling of achievement, much greater than I have got at home. I feel like I’m fighting and defending her majesty’s country, and therefor will do so to protect my people. The amount and quality of food is actually quite good (but I still prefer when you send me cakes from home!). There’s also a lot of rest. About 60% of my time is spent doing light work, or even having a game of footie.

Sincerely,

Oscar Bystedt