World War I & the Great Depression
Robert Lindsay Mackay's First World War Diary

These passages are selections from the First World War Diary of Robert Lindsay Mackay. Mackay was from Scotland, an American ally. He was an officer, or leader, with the 11th Battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders from 1915 until the end of the war.

THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES. BEGUN 31ST JULY 1917

30th. July. My 21st. birthday. Champagne Dinner at night. Had to go away at 11.30 p.m. with my 50 Argyll stretcher-bearers. Got them on the move and moved up towards the 'show' which would begin in a few hours time. Another officer and 50 men of the 13th. Royal Scots now joined my party so I had 100 men.

Got to Bivouac Camp. We were now all ready for the show. Felt things strange of course. Although I had by this time begun to dread1 this corner of the earth I did not feel the least bit afraid. In previous shows I had gone into action feeling that I would come out again. This time I had no such feeling. Felt, almost knew, that I would not come out again. Did not, however, leave any addresses or messages behind because I believed it unlucky….

As we marched along, I felt quite cheerful, in spite of this somewhat melancholy2 reflection, and would not consciously have wished myself anywhere else. Soon, I became so engrossed,3 that I lost every outside thought, and could only think of the present business. No regrets for the past, and no fears for the future worried me….

THE ECOLE, YPRES. 1ST. AUGUST 1917

Wed. 1st. Aug. My H.Q. are in the Ecole. The men are in a cellar, indescribably filthy, with an awful odour and three inches deep in water. Here they have to rest, sleep and eat if they can. I should be down with them but preferred risking it above ground in a tin hut (which was constantly being bombed) behind a broken down wall. A pip-squeak could have finished it and me.

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1 dread – be afraid about
2 melancholy – deep sadness
3 engrossed – completely absorbed
I've read so many descriptions in newspapers of the ruin and desolation caused in this war. Famous literary men have tried their powers of description and all (with the possible exception of Gilbert Frankau) have failed to convey the repulsiveness and awfulness of the scene. The Ecole was one of these places - That's all!

STRETCHER BEARING

Began work at 3.15 a.m. - a cheerless hour. It was raining I think. Moved up. Searched ground up to Blue Line. Terrific rain, heavy and prolonged. Ground churned up. We could scarcely move one foot after the other. Our job was to carry down wounded. This is my first job as a bearer. I hope to goodness it is my last - prefer going over the top.

Heard about the Battalion. MacCallum killed. I'll have to write to his girl. Also Leitch and D.R.Cameron, Gray and Robinson and Sinclair wounded.

RLM War Diary - Arras (2) 1917-18

21st. …. Our casualties were 15 killed and 20 wounded, including the five officers. Very expensive this, for a day's outing. Relief completed in hopeless confusion. Back to Bn. H.Q. at 3.30 a.m. Arras at 4.45 with Stark. Bed at 6 a.m. Really tired.

4 desolation - the sad aftermath of destruction or the sadness of the ruins that are left
1. What is the job of the stretcher-bearers?
   a. to carry wounded men away
   b. to bear arms during battle
   c. to carry food to the troops
   d. to fill in the gaps between soldiers

2. Who wrote the diary entries and how are they ordered in this passage?
   a. multiple British soldiers, in chronological order
   b. multiple American soldiers, in no particular order
   c. a Scottish officer, in chronological order
   d. a French soldier, in order of importance

3. The author of the diary would probably agree that
   a. conditions in war are better than most people think.
   b. no good authors tried writing about the war.
   c. it is difficult to describe what war is really like.
   d. getting enough sleep is easy on the front lines.

4. Read the following sentence: “Our casualties were 15 killed and 20 wounded, including the five officers.”
   The word casualties means
   a. civilian clothing
   b. people hurt or killed
   c. food supplies
   d. plans of attack

5. This passage is mainly about
   a. how Scottish military was unique in World War I.
   b. one person’s experience serving in World War I.
   c. how Mackay became one of the great heroes of World War I.
   d. the different jobs that soldiers had in World War I.
6. Describe the cellars where the men had to rest, sleep, and eat.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

7. Explain why the author thought it was unlucky to leave behind addresses or messages when going into battle.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

Mackay did not want to be anywhere else, __________ it was a melancholy occasion.

   a. so
   b. for example
   c. above all
   d. even though

9. Read the following sentence.

During WWI, stretcher-bearers were responsible for carrying away the dead and wounded at the battlefields.

Answer the questions below based on the information provided in the sentence you just read. One of the questions has already been answered for you.

   1. Who? stretcher-bearers
   2. What were stretcher-bearers? __________________________________________
   3. Where? ___________________________________________________________
   4. When? ___________________________________________________________
10. **Vocabulary word**: melancholy: deep sadness

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: ____________________________

________________________________________________________________
Teacher Guide and Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 710

Featured Text Structure: Sequence – the writer provides an order of events or steps in a process

Passage Summary: This passage excerpts diary entries describing a very harsh, brutal time during WWI. The soldier tells about his experiences being a stretcher-bearer, the conditions of war, and the experience of witnessing death.

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   b. **one person’s experience serving in World War I.**
   c. how Mackay became one of the great heroes of World War I.
   d. the different jobs that soldiers had in World War I.

6. Describe the cellars where the men had to rest, sleep, and eat.

   **Suggested answer:** Answers will vary, but should include that the conditions were horrible. The cellars were filthy and bad smelling, underground level, and with three inches of water at their feet.

7. Explain why the author thought it was unlucky to leave behind addresses or messages when going into battle.

   **Suggested answer:** He is being superstitious and saying that it is unlucky to leave addresses or messages behind because it means that you think you will die in the battle.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

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2. What were stretcher-bearers? responsible for carrying away the dead and wounded

3. Where? at the battlefields

4. When? during WWI

10. Vocabulary word: melancholy: deep sadness

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence. Answers may vary.