

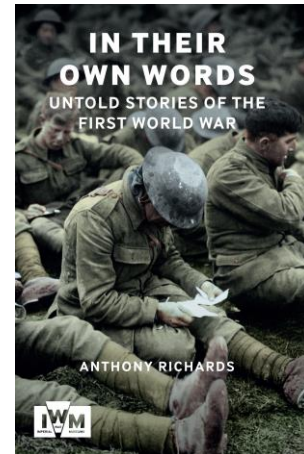
**Immediate Release**

## **Remembering Them – In Their Own Words**

***'I left our trenches at the head of my company and set out into the night on my way to the unknown.'***

*Eric Gore-Browne, Battle of Loos.*

A new book published by Imperial War Museums (IWM), *In Their Own Words: Untold Stories of the First World War* reveals for the first time the unique personal accounts of 11 people who lived through the conflict, in a compelling and poignant collection from IWM's unparalleled archives.



The stories include that of Lawrence Gameson, who served as a Medical Officer in the last months of the Battle of the Somme in 1916. After the huge number of casualties on 1 July 1916, the first day of the Somme, casualty figures remained consistently high throughout the campaign, with an average of almost 1,000 per day from the British lines alone. Lawrence recalled with great detail the atmosphere at a medical clearing station in the latter stages of this four-month long battle:

*'Our working space was limited. We got in each other's way. There was a constant movement of bearers shuffling and staggering with stretchers, negotiating the cellar stairs, seeking a way in or out and a bare space whereon to deposit their burdens. Walking wounded sat on benches or squatted between the stretchers on each available foot of floor, patiently waiting their turn to be dressed or to get their shot of anti-tetanic serum. Sometimes a man on a stretcher would vomit explosively, spewing over himself and his neighbours. I have seen mounted troops brought in with liquid faeces oozing from the unlaced legs of their breeches. Occasionally a man would gasp and die as he lay on his stretcher. All this was routine; and the waiting crowd looked on perforce. It looked on unconcerned.'*

Other stories include that of Herbert Ward, a pilot with the Royal Flying Corps, who enlisted at the age of 17 in June 1915. Herbert's accounts reveal how, at barely 18 years of age, he survived after his aircraft was shot down by German soldiers while on a reconnaissance mission taking photographs of enemy defenses. He was then taken prisoner before spectacularly escaping after almost five months in captivity:

*'I felt an intensely sharp burning pain in my left leg, in response to which my right foot spasmodically gave the rudder-bar a jab that sent the machine into a turn and thereby lost us our remaining height ... In a scunch of splitting wood I was somersaulted forward and pinned upside-down, as the after end of the fuselage folded over on to itself like a scorpion's tail. German soldiers came running up and stood there gaping at the wreck while I shouted and cursed at being left in my capsized position, with my legs in danger of being crushed by the swaying fuselage. Buckley, now held captive between two soldiers, called out that he was sorry not to be able to help, and I saw him being led away. The tail of my poor No. 1717 was eventually lassoed and hauled back, leaving me the right way up, with a compulsive desire to stay where I was and go to sleep. Efficient hands nevertheless lifted me out, and I was taken into a communication trench on a stretcher.'*

After his capture on 30 November 1915, Herbert became a prisoner of war and was held at locations including Valenciennes, Cologne and the citadel at Mainz. In April 1916, he and a number of his fellow POW's escaped captivity by jumping from the window of a moving train whilst being transported:

*'To our great annoyance we found that the vital window could not be lowered more than half-way. Never mind: it was now or never. True to form, Newbould, the first to go, became wedged head downward and had to be given a heave which sent him crashing on to the track below. It was an anxious moment, but sounds of ponderous German laughter came filtering through from the end compartment, so out went McKeagh followed by Champion and myself, each of us landing with a most resounding thud... Champion and I, as previously arranged, walked unhurriedly along the length of the train ... There was no cover except a distant wood, and we felt that the guards, having now discovered our absence, might at this very moment be taking careful aim with their rifles, yet to hurry would have been fatal. After what seemed like an endless wait, we heard the train give a whistle and then puff slowly away. We resisted the temptation to look back, but could hardly believe that we had not been missed – yet it was true. We were now on our own, though with few provisions, no compass of any kind, and only a sketchy and far from accurate map. On the other hand, we could not be much more than 20 miles from the Swiss frontier.'*

Other stories featured include the female dance troupe trapped in Germany at the war's outbreak, the disgruntled munitions worker who defected to join the Women's Police, and the Conscientious Objector who received a death sentence for disobeying military orders. Unexpected, immediate and personal, the accounts in this book offer a direct and revealing insight into the critical events of 1914-1918, through the words of those who were actually there.

Anthony Richards, Head of Documents and Sound at IWM and author of *In Their Own Words* said: *'IWM holds thousands of personal accounts in the form of letters, diaries and memoirs which are all unique, informative and significant. The archive is well-known as one of the most important resources across the globe for studying experiences of the First World War, and it has been an immense privilege for me to work with the collection over many years, discovering new stories and ensuring that this wealth of personal testimony is preserved for future generations to appreciate. 'In Their Own Words' is based around 11 lives, with each writer telling us something new or interesting about their individual experiences of the war which, when read collectively, form a unique personal journey through the First World War as told by those who witnessed it.'*

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## **Notes to Editors**

*In Their Own Words: Untold Stories of the First World War* is on sale now, £9.99. For further information please visit: [iwmshop.org.uk](http://iwmshop.org.uk)

*In Their Own Words: Untold Stories of the First World War*

Anthony Richards

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## **IWM**

IWM (Imperial War Museums) tells the story of people who have lived, fought and died in conflicts involving Britain and the Commonwealth since the First World War.

Our unique Collections, made up of the everyday and the exceptional, reveal stories of people, places, ideas and events. Using these, we tell vivid personal stories and create powerful physical experiences across our five museums that reflect the realities of war as both a destructive and creative force. We challenge people to look at conflict from different perspectives, enriching their understanding of the causes, course and consequences of war and its impact on people's lives.

IWM's five branches attract over 2 million visitors each year. [IWM London](#), our flagship branch, marks the Centenary of the First World War with new permanent First World War Galleries and a new Atrium with iconic large object displays. Our other branches are [IWM North](#), housed in an iconic award-winning building designed by Daniel Libeskind; [IWM Duxford](#), a world-renowned aviation museum and Britain's best preserved wartime airfield; [Churchill War Rooms](#), housed in Churchill's secret headquarters below Whitehall; and the Second World War cruiser [HMS Belfast](#).

### **First World War Centenary**

**2014 - 2018** marks the centenary of the First World War, a landmark anniversary for Britain and the world. IWM will mark the centenary by leading a vibrant, four year programme of cultural activities across the country. For more information, visit [www.1914.org](http://www.1914.org).

