



Digging, by Ahmed Alsoudani, was shown last fall at Thierry Goldberg Projects, in New York City.

[Log]

A CORPSE TO STAND ON

By Captain Alexander Stewart, from *Somme: The Experiences of a Very Unimportant Officer*, published last fall at Grandfathersgreatwar.com by his grandson. Stewart spent two years fighting with the 3rd Scottish Rifles during World War I before he was sent home with a shrapnel injury in 1917. He died in 1964 at the age of eighty-six. The volume collects diary entries, letters, and reminiscences. "Boche" is slang for "Germans."

JUNE 2, 1916

Return to trenches. The dugouts in this part of the line are infested with rats. They frequently walk over one when asleep. I was much troubled by their licking the brilliantine off my hair; for this reason, I had to give up using grease on my head.

JUNE 30

The finest thing that ever happened in the trenches was the rum ration, and never was it more needed than on the Somme. Yet some blasted, ignorant fool of a general—damned in this world and the next—wanted to stop it and, for a time, did. The man must be worse than the lowest type of criminal, have no knowledge of the conditions in which the troops exist, and be entirely out of touch with the men who are unfortunate enough

to have him as their commander. He should have been taken up to the line and frozen in the mud. I would have then very willingly sat on his head, as he was a danger to the whole army. Curse him. Those who have not spent a night standing or sitting or lying in mud with an east wind blowing and the temperature below freezing may think that I am extravagant in my abuse of the man who denied the soldiers their rum rations. Those who have will know that I am too temperate.

JULY 20

Attack on High Wood. The Boche made a counterattack that was repelled. In a large shell-hole I found several of our wounded who could not move themselves. One poor chap had been shot through the stomach and was in very great pain. I told him to wait a minute and I would fix him so that his pain would cease. Getting out my little vial of morphine pills, I gave him one and told him to let it dissolve on his tongue. Never have I seen such a wonderful change in a man. He had been groaning and twitching, but a look of peace came over his face, and he said all the pain had gone. I felt I had done the kindest deed in my life.

AUGUST 26

Leave High Wood for trenches north of Bazentin-le-Grand. The flies in this part of the line are a perfect plague. They cover everything. They make it very difficult for a man to eat, as they cover the food he is about to put in his mouth.

SEPTEMBER 1

While on a march, I was unable to get on my horse and had to be pushed up by my men. When up, I could not get down. An awkward predicament when suffering from dysentery.

OCTOBER 28

In trenches by Les Boeufs. This part of the line is the worst in which I have been. All the land has been churned up by shell explosions, and for many days the weather has been wet. It is not possible to dig more than a foot without coming to water. The soil is more like thick slime than mud. When walking, one sinks several inches, and because of the suction it is difficult to withdraw one's feet. Men who are standing still or sitting down get embedded in the slime and cannot extricate themselves. As the trenches are so shallow, men have to stay where they are all day, and then we have to spend most of the night digging and pulling them out. The only way to do this is to put duck boards on either side of a man and then work at one leg, digging, poking, and pulling until the suction is relieved. Then a strong pull by three or four men will get one leg out, and work can begin on the other. Going to and from Battalion Headquarters, one hears men who got stuck calling out for help that often cannot be sent to them. All the time the Boche drop shells promiscuously. He who has a corpse to stand or sit on is lucky.

OCTOBER 29

We made an attack this morning at daybreak. Am now sitting in a hole dug in the side of a trench. It is raining, and thick mud is at the bottom of the hole. Outside, in the trench, the mud is about a foot deep and in many places up to one's knee. A heavy bombardment is going on, and this place continually vibrates. My puttees and boots cannot be seen for the mud they are covered with. I have got on a man's overcoat that on account of the mud must weigh about fifty pounds. Round my neck is a muddy, sodden balaclava helmet that I have put my head right through. I have not shaved for three days, and I have not taken off my clothes for ten. I am itching a lot, and my feet are wet. I have lost twelve very good men owing to a big shell exploding in the trench. I have a blister on my left heel. Cannot get any food cooked. Rather expect a counterattack tonight, but have just smoked a good cigarette and my pipe is drawing well, so I am feeling in remarkably good form.

NOVEMBER 9

I am very much annoyed by the memos sent from Headquarters. They come in at all hours of the day and night and stop me from getting a full night's rest. Some of them are very silly and unnecessary. When I am just getting off to sleep with cold feet, in comes an orderly asking how many pairs of

[Code]

TROUBLE HELIX

From a list compiled in 2006 by British police chiefs of more than 5,000 offenses warranting that the DNA of an arrested suspect be retained for life in a national database.

violating king's wife
violating king's eldest daughter
violating wife of king's eldest son and heir
throwing offensive weapon or matter at
sovereign with intent to alarm
levying war against the sovereign in his or her
realm
buggery
buggery with woman
buggery with animal
buggery with man in private
buggery with man other than in private
procuring a woman who is defective
procuring a woman by false pretences
abducting unmarried girl under eighteen
procuring poison to effect miscarriage
supplying poison to procure miscarriage
placing nonhuman embryo in a woman
counseling female to be circumcised
riding horse furiously in street
wantonly disturbing inhabitant by knocking on
door or ringing doorbell
keeping a disorderly house
obstructing railways
removing buoys
rout
affray
voyeurism
sacrilege
theft of wild creatures
theft of wild flowers
using explosive to take fish
discharging stone or missile to kill or take fish
handling salmon in suspicious circumstances
cruelty to badgers
disturbing badger when it is occupying badger
lair
possessing or controlling dead badger
offering prizes to forecast result of future events
opening an incorrectly delivered postal packet
fraudulently evading bingo duty
falsely pretending to be a deserter
abstracting electricity
failure to remove disguise when required by
constable
wasting police time

socks my company had a week ago. I reply, 141½. Back comes a memo: Please explain at once how you came to be deficient one sock. I reply, Man lost his leg. That's how we make the Huns sit up.

MAY 27, 1917

Attack Hindenburg. After my fourth shot, I found the bowl of my pipe and the smoke from it were obscuring my line of vision. Much to my annoyance I had to put my pipe in my pocket alight.

SEPTEMBER 28

Was wounded while coming out of the line. When we were about one hundred yards from a road, I, who was leading, stopped rather ostentatiously to show my contempt for the shells and lit a cigarette. A shell landed about ten yards behind us, and a small bit of its casing cut through the left side of my collar and then through my throat, where it came up flop against my wind pipe. I started to cough and brought up some blood and the bit of shell. McLennan very kindly retrieved the bit of iron out of the mud and, handing it to me, remarked that I might like to keep it. This I did.

[Confession]

RULES OF THE GAME

From a June 30, 1994, cable sent by the United States Embassy in Peru to the State Department, recounting an interview with an anonymous former member of Peru's Army Intelligence Service. The officer had retired the previous year and was under investigation for narcotics trafficking. Alberto Fujimori, president of Peru from 1990 to 2000, is currently on trial for human-rights violations including murder and kidnapping. In 1985 government forces killed about seventy people in the village of Accomarca. The cable was obtained by the National Security Archive.

The source claimed that he was assigned to a highly mobile, Lima-based "special company" of commandos sent to terrorist hot spots. The company spent most of its time on patrols, searching out and killing suspected terrorists. The company conducted assassinations, abductions, detentions, interrogations, harassment, and surveillance.

Interrogators normally began by asking suspects to incriminate themselves. Threats against suspects and their families, including threats to rape their female relatives or even the suspects themselves, would quickly give way to physical abuse if the suspects were not forthcoming. Common methods of torture included placing a stick behind the victim's knees, making him squat so

that his arms could be tied in front of him with the arms looped under the stick at the elbow joint, and then hanging the victim from a rafter. Our source claimed that he learned this method from "the Americans," but he did not elaborate.

He indicated that his favorite method involved placing the victim in a covered tank with enough water to force the victim to stand on the tips of his toes and with a minimum of air space, sufficient only for the victim's nose to protrude above water. Eventually the victim would tire of standing on his toes, sink below the water, and drown. Another favorite method was to tie a cord to the victim's testicles and pull on the cord. Our source explained that the cord was pulled backward through the victim's legs and added that it was best if the cord was left a little loose. Another method of torture was to place rat poison in the vagina.

He also recounted an incident during his tour when he visited a countersubversive base and found its commander and two junior officers using four live presumed terrorists for knife-throwing practice. He joined them in this activity until he received a radio message requiring him to leave.

A point of no return for the victims came when the interrogators began to mutilate them. Once a victim's ears were cut off, or if his eyes were pricked with a knife, he was invariably killed. The eyes were not normally gouged out, we were told, since pricking them served the purpose just as well and did not cause as much bleeding.

The procedure to dispose of the bodies, he explained, was to bury them in remote places under dirt and a layer of sticks, to prevent dogs and other animals from digging the bodies up. He criticized the soldiers who carried out the massacre in Accomarca for failing to use sticks, allowing dogs to dig up the bodies. The discovery of a mass grave led in turn to an international outcry.

The source became visibly bitter when the topic turned to human rights. He laughed and said that he had never seen human rights seriously discussed in the field. He was upset that the rules of the game had been changed on him in the past few months. Whereas a year ago his involvement would not have raised an eyebrow, officers were now hypocritically judging his actions. He claimed his motive for coming forward was his anger at being singled out for disciplinary action—for doing nothing other than what other officers had done. With no evident remorse, he described his actions as "good work" but realized that the civilian world considered his work "criminal."

The source gave a convincing level of detail about excesses in which he claims he was personally involved. Journalists who were concerned this might be disinformation are convinced of its veracity. As hard as it would be to fake the level of detail, it would be harder still to recount it, interspersed by chuckles and laughs, for three hours.