

# "...Suddenly We didn't Want To Die"

A Marine Remembers the Battle for Belleau Wood

By: Elton Mackin



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History of Civilization II

Article Response #1

Saturday, September 26, 2009

This particular story was written by a United States Marine, named Elton Mackin, who fought at the Battle of Belleau Wood. Mackin's nickname was Slim. Slim's story is a recollection of the fears one feels while fighting on the front lines of the war for the first time and how war will change a man.

Most of the men that made up this marine brigade, including Slim, had never been in action before. They were called the "Damned Replacements". He recalled the first night lying next to other marines in darkness and how they were awakened at dawn from the sounds of distant gunfire and explosions. These sounds got closer and were soon followed by the sounds of men screaming in pain. He talks about his First Sergeant McCabe yelling at them to fix their bayonets and how he felt sickened over the thought of actually using his bayonet in battle. Slim remembers the feeling of doom that went through his mind when Sergeant McCabe told him to shoot low and not to turn yellow and run, because if he did and the Germans didn't shoot him, he would. Slim remembered feeling ashamed of his fears after hearing the sergeant's words.

Slim wrote about how the men in his unit tried so hard to hide their fears from each other. He said that they looked forward to night time because it was easier to hide their fearful eyes in the dark. He talked about the runner's job and how it

was totally a voluntary position because of its dangers. The runners were considered the suicide squad. He talked about the smells of war which included the smell of gun powder, smoke, and above all, the smell of death.

Slim is not only explaining in detail exactly what he saw, he is trying to explain how a young soldier goes off to war for the first time feeling fearless and invincible. Once the soldier is finally in action, the soldier realizes how scary the situation really is. The soldier, now feeling afraid and doomed, suddenly realizes that he doesn't want to die. Because of the human desire to survive, among other reasons, the soldier realizes that he has to kill or be killed. This is what makes him a soldier. Regardless of how scared a soldier really is, he pretends to show toughness. Slim explains how, after fighting this battle for eleven days, they became a dozen years older. It is more than obvious how war will make a man out of a young boy.

Although there were a lot of war terms I did not understand, I did understand that Slim was explaining the fears of war. Much of what he explained in detail, helped to paint a picture in my mind of what actually happened at this battle. I feel sickened and sad for any young boy who had to go through this and for those who may go through anything like this in the future.