



Teenage Tommy

Richard Van Emden

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Benjamin Clouting was just sixteen years old when he embarked with the British Expeditionary Force for France in August 1914. The youngest man in the 4th Dragoon Guards, he took part in the BEF's celebrated first action at Casteau on August 22nd, and, two days later, had his horse shot from under him during the famous cavalry charge of the 4th Dragoon Guards and the 9th Lancers at Audregnies. Ben served on the Western front during every major engagement of the war except Loos, was wounded twice, and in 1919 went with the Army of Occupation to Cologne.

The son of a stable groom, Ben was brought up in the beautiful Sussex countryside near Lewes and from his earliest years was, as he often said himself, "crazy to be a soldier". He worked briefly as a stable boy before joining up in 1913; his training was barely completed when war broke out. The Regiment, knowing Ben to be under age, tried to stop him embarking for France, but he flatly refused to be left behind. During the next four years, he served under officers immortalized in Great War history, including Major Tom Bridges, Captain Hornby, and Lieutenant-Colonel Adrien Carton de Wiart VC.

Teenage Tommy is a detailed account of a trooper's life at the front, vividly recalling, for example, the privations suffered during the retreat from Mons. and later, the desperate fighting to hold back the German onslaught at 2nd Ypres. But this is more than just a memoir about trench warfare. Ben's lively sense of humor and healthy disrespect for petty restrictions make this an entertaining as well as a moving story of life at the front.

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