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Opening extract from
What Are We Fighting For?
New Poems About War

Written by
Roger Stevens & Brian Moses

Illustrated by
Nicola L. Robinson

Published by
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What Are We Fighting For?

Illustrated
by
Nicola L.
Robinson

BRIAN MOSES AND ROGER STEVENS

MACMILLAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS



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To the memory of both my father, Harry Moses, whose 'During the war . . .' stories I often failed to appreciate as a child, and my father-in-law, John Joseph Ford, who, at fifteen years old, ran away from home to join the army.

(BM)

For my father, Tom Stevens, who drove a tank in the Second World War and told me the story of tanks passing by, and my father-in-law, Roy Pryor, who was in the Royal Army Medical Corps and was captured at Dunkirk, and who still tells me what life was like as a prisoner of war.

(RS)

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The First World War

'Swear by the green of the spring that
you'll never forget'

Siegfried Sassoon



The Great War

The First World War
Was known as the Great War
The War to End All Wars
Because it was hard to imagine
A darker war, a deadlier war
A grimmer or a grimier war
A scarier or a nastier war

A better name would have been
The Not-So-Great War
The Miserable War
The Senseless War
Or
The War That Did Not End All Wars
Or
The War That Taught Us Nothing

Roger Stevens

The Angels of Mons

Did the British have divine protection
in the first months of the war,
and was something seen on the battlefield
that had never been seen before?

Was there really an army of angels
when the British thought they were beat?
Were there shining figures among the clouds
that protected the British retreat?

Was the German cavalry stopped in its tracks
as the horses refused to advance?
And was it a supernatural sight
that gave the British a chance?

Some say that it was spectral figures
with flaming swords that lit the night.
Others say bowmen fired arrows
tipped with bright pulsating light.

Whatever happened soldiers escaped
when really they should have died.
And the Angels of Mons showed British troops
that Heaven could be on their side.



Brian Moses

Some British soldiers claimed to have seen visions in the sky while retreating after the Battle of Mons, August 1914.

Smile Please

I saw some old newsreels
Of the Great War

And I saw young men
From the towns and villages of Britain
Smiling for the cameras
Smiles as wide as sunshine
Like they were going on holiday

But as the French winter set in
And the mud in the trenches
Got thicker and colder

And more of their friends died
From bullet wounds
From explosions
From poisonous gas

The young men
Wading up to their waists in freezing mud
Tending the wounded and the dying
Were no longer smiling for the cameras

I saw some old newsreels
Of the Great War
And wondered
What were we fighting for?



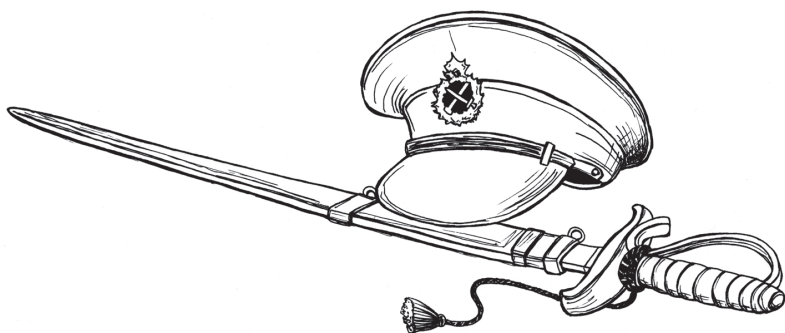
Roger Stevens

The General's Message on the Morning of Battle

It's a beautiful day for a battle,
the sun is shining bright,
birds are high in the sky,
it's a lovely day for a fight.

God is on our side, lads,
he's sure to help us win.
We're fighting the good fight,
impatient to begin.

The war will soon be over,
the war will soon be won.
We just need one more push to
help us rout the Hun.



Good luck to every one of you,
play up and play the game,
we've beaten them at football
and again we'll do the same.

So come on lads, do your duty,
it's over the top you go.
I'll be with you there in spirit
as you race to meet the foe.

Our enemy is weakened,
we're sure to have them beat.
But just in case we don't,
I'll be leading the retreat!

Brian Moses

The Hun – First World War slang for German soldiers

Christmas Truce

'Hey, Tommy, you like tobacco?'
'Hey, Fritz, have my bottle of beer.'
'It's Christmas Day,
goodwill to all men, so,
what are we doing here?'

And maybe it would have stopped
then and there, once Tommy and Fritz had realized
that both were ordinary men.
That both had families,
girlfriends, wives,
that both were a long, long way
from anywhere anyone
called home.

And all that sad, strange Christmas Day,
Tommy and Fritz shook hands with each other,
sang together the Christmas songs
that both discovered they knew.
They joked with each other
through gestures and signs,
in a language that needed
no words.

Then a football was found
and they played a match,
two nations in the midst
of war, the score unimportant.



And it finished with a rifle shot
that sent men back to their dugouts.
Shouts of, 'Merry Christmas, Tommy,'
and, 'Happy New Year to you, Fritz.'
'Meet you again tomorrow,
show you photos of my girl.'

But it wouldn't do
for the guns to stay silent
or to think of your enemy
as a friend.

The rules of war
are clearly defined,
and someone must win
in the end.

Brian Moses

Tommy – First World War slang for British soldiers
Fritz – First World War slang for German soldiers