



# Hold the Oxo!: A Teenage Soldier Writes Home (Canadians at War)

*Marion Fargey Brooker*

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*Short-listed for the 2014 Forest of Reading - White Pine Award for Non-Fiction*

Canada was young during the First World War, and with as many as 20,000 underage soldiers leaving their homes to join the war effort, the country's army was, too. Jim, at 17, was one of them, and he penned countless letters home. But these weren't the writings of an ordinary boy. They were the letters of a lad who left a small farming community for the city on July 15, 1915, a boy who volunteered to serve with the 79th Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders.

Jim's letters home gloss over the horrors of war, focusing instead on issues of the home front: of harvesting, training the horses, and the price of hogs. Rarely do these letters, especially those to his mother and father, mention the mud and rats, the lice and stench of the trenches, or the night duty of cutting barbed wire in no man's land. For 95 years his letters remained in a shoebox decorated by his mother.

Jim was just 18 when he was wounded and died during the Battle of the Somme. *Hold the Oxo!* tells the story that lies between the lines of his letters, filling in the historical context and helping us to understand what it was like to be Jim.

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