

PROLOGUE

Farewell, Dear People

Major Geoff McCrae snatched a private moment from the busy preparations at his headquarters. He was nervous. Not because of the danger — not mainly. He had seen plenty of that at Gallipoli. McCrae was more concerned about making sure that everything was arranged properly. Pompey Elliott's praise was gratifying and encouraging. But there was so much to remember, to think about, to organise.

As for the attack itself, McCrae was philosophical. It was clearly a difficult task, and they would be relying on inexperienced artillery. Having to get ready in haste didn't help, either. It was hard to avoid the conclusion that things had been too rushed. Lugging everything forward around the clock had left the men exhausted.

But the big push down south had evidently fallen short of expectations. If he and his men could help by carrying out this attack, so be it. They were at the main arena now, and had to contribute somewhere. Geoff McCrae had no doubt where his duty lay. He had to lead his men forward to the best of his ability.

McCrae thought of home, as he always did when danger threatened. He felt impelled to write to his family at Anchorfield. They had received many letters from him in the last two years, but this brief note was like no other:

Today I lead my Battalion in an assault on the German lines, and I pray to God I may come through alright and bring honour to our name. If not, I will at least have laid down my life for you and my country which is the greatest privilege one can ask for. Farewell, dear people, the hour approacheth.