

THE LAST OF THE NOBLEST GENERATION

Harry Patch, the last survivor of the First World War, and the man who reminded the modern world of its obscene massacre, died at the age of 111. His life ended on a fine summer morning in his native Somerset, many miles from the Belgian land of Ypres where so many of his comrades fell, and where he so nearly joined them. For decades he kept the sights and sounds of that terrible experience to himself. But then, at the age of 100, he began to talk...

Born in the village of Coombe Down, Harry left school at 14 for an apprenticeship with a plumber, and would, no doubt, have lived a life of peaceful anonymity if the war hadn't been declared. Being too young at first, at the age of 17 Harry was **conscripted**. "I didn't want to go and fight anyone, but it was a case of having to," he said. He was in charge of a machine gun, and, by his 19th birthday, was in a **trench** in the middle of one of the most famous and bloodiest battles of the First World War: the Battle of Ypres. "Anyone who tells you he wasn't **scared** is a damned liar," Harry would later say. "We lived by the hour... You saw the sun rise; hopefully, you'd see it set. If you saw it set, you hoped you'd see it rise."

Many didn't. One of them was a young soldier whom Patch and his comrades found in the battlefield, badly wounded by **shrapnel**. "Shoot me," he said, and then, before Harry could react, he died with the words "Mother!" on his lips. It was but one of the phantoms from the trenches that Harry carried with him until his death. Later on, in September 1917, came the German projectile which would hit Harry. It burst among his **mates** with such force that three of them were never found again. Harry, some metres away, was seriously wounded, his stomach pierced by shrapnel. He was taken to a **CCS (casualty clearing station)**, where he lay, untreated in maddening pain, for one day and a half. Finally, a doctor came, and, with no anaesthetic, took out the metal while four men held him down. Although he would not be **demobbed** for another year, that was the end of Harry's war. He returned home, to plumbing, marriage, two sons, and an old age that saw him survive both sons and his wife.

All this time, he had kept those memories of war to himself, telling no one. But then, as he passed his 100th birthday, a journalist called Richard Emden asked Harry if he would talk of war. He agreed and he wrote, with Richard's help, his life story, and became a witness for those comrades who had been killed so many years before. When Richard Emden went to see him, Harry sat at a table in the morning room of his house. The conversation went mainly one-way. Harry's mind was sharp, and his sight good, but his voice was soft and delicate, and he was practically speechless. The journalist ended the interview before he had intended, afraid to be more of an inconvenience than he had already been.

His voice and body may have died, but his words on war should live on, resonating strongly. Harry Patch had words for all his experiences. They were spoken with an anger that lasted all his adult life. "War," he said, "is organised murder, and nothing else."

Text adapted from *The Independent* (July 26, 2009)

conscripted: cridat a files, reclutat / llamado a filas, reclutado

trench: trinxera / trinchera

scared (to be scared): tenir por / tener miedo

shrapnel: metralla

mate: company / compañero

CCS (casualty clearing station): hospital de campanya / hospital de campaña

demobbed: desmobilitzat, que ha deixat de servir a l'exèrcit / desmovilizado, que ha dejado de servir en el ejército

Part 1: Reading comprehension

Choose the best answer according to the text. Only ONE answer is correct.

[4 points: 0.5 points for each correct answer. Wrong answers will be penalized by deducting 0.16 points. There is no penalty for unanswered questions.]

Espai per al corrector/a

Correcta Incorrecta No contestada

1. Which of the following sentences about Harry Patch is FALSE?
 - ☐ He was the only survivor of the First World War.
 - ☐ He only explained his experiences when he was 100.
 - ☐ He nearly died during the Battle of Ypres.
 - ☐ He died at the age of 111 in his home country.
2. When the First World War began, Harry Patch
 - ☐ was too young to be called into the army.
 - ☐ was looking forward to joining the army.
 - ☐ had already been enrolled in the army.
 - ☐ was ready to be enrolled but he was at school.
3. Harry explains that during the Battle of Ypres, the soldiers were
 - ☐ only focused on winning the battle.
 - ☐ constantly worried about their survival.
 - ☐ not quite aware their lives were in danger.
 - ☐ not really worried about being killed.
4. When Harry and his comrades found an injured soldier in the battle field
 - ☐ they took him to the trenches for shelter.
 - ☐ they took him still alive to a casualty clearing station.
 - ☐ they decided to shoot him because he asked them to.
 - ☐ they couldn't do anything to save his life.
5. After being seriously wounded, Harry was taken to a CCS where
 - ☐ he was operated on, after being in pain for more than one day.
 - ☐ he was left alone in terrible pain for less than one day.
 - ☐ he was immediately treated by a doctor.
 - ☐ four men took out the metal without anesthetics.
6. The war finished for Harry Patch
 - ☐ the year after he was demobbed.
 - ☐ several months after his recovery.
 - ☐ immediately after being wounded.
 - ☐ when he was sent back home.
7. Shortly before Harry died, Richard Emden interviewed him and
 - ☐ Harry did most of the talking.
 - ☐ Harry spoke in a surprisingly clear voice.
 - ☐ Richard did most of the talking.
 - ☐ Richard was not able to talk too much.
8. After all his experiences in the First World War
 - ☐ Harry thought that no war could ever be justified.
 - ☐ Harry's views on war became ambiguous.
 - ☐ Harry chose never again to talk about war.
 - ☐ Harry never again expressed his opinions about war.

Part 2: Writing

Choose ONE topic. Write about number 1 or 2. Minimum length: 100 words.

[4 points]

1. Imagine that you are a soldier in the First World War. Write a letter to your parents about your experiences in the war.
2. Harry Patch did not explain his experiences about the war until he was very elderly. Why do you think he waited for so many years? Write an opinion essay about it for your local paper.

Correctes Incorrectes No contestades

Recompte de les respostes

Nota de comprensió escrita

SÈRIE 5

Comprensió Escrita

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constantly worried about their survival.
4. When Harry and his comrades found an injured soldier in the battle field..
they couldn't do anything to save his life.
5. After being seriously wounded, Harry was taken to a CCS where...
he was operated on, after being in pain for more than one day.
6. The war finished for Harry Patch...
immediately after being wounded.
7. Shortly before Harry died, Richard Emden interviewed him and ...
Richard did most of the talking.
8. After all his experiences in the First World War...
Harry thought that no war could ever be justified.