

## Candidate 2 evidence

### A Soldier's Return Without His Brother in Arms

**23rd of July 1943**

I still remember the day the letter arrived, though I had been half expecting it. It came on a dull grey Monday, as if the sky itself knew what was inside. I was twenty, a farm boy from Sussex who had barely seen the world beyond my small village.

Mum cried when she saw it, clutching tightly to the letter as though she could hold back the inevitable. Her face crumpled, but she tried to hide it from me. Dad, too old for the draft at 52, just nodded, though his eyes betrayed him. There was pride there but also fear.

The day I left, Mum packed my rucksack as if she could shield me with her love. Fresh bread, a wedge of cheese, and a jar of her best jam. "just a little bit of home" she said, her voice unsteady. That is when it struck me. This might be the last time I would see her. The thought hit like a fist, hollowing out my chest.

We hugged tightly, her lavender scent wrapping around me like a memory I never wanted to lose. I forced a smile, trying to give her some strength I did not feel, pretending not to notice the tears pooling in her eyes. When I finally turned to leave, I did not dare to look back. Some things are too painful to see.

**15th September 1943**

The ship's engines hummed, and the horn sounded as we approached the coast of Normandy. The air thick with smoke and nerves. A few boys cracked jokes, their laughter forced, most of us kept our heads down, avoiding eye contact with anyone.

I was gripping my helmet strap, trying to keep my hands steady, Jack. My heart jolted, not from fear but from a sudden warm sense of familiarity. He was taller than I remembered, his shoulders broader, but that grin was unmistakable.

"Jack!" I called, louder than I meant. Heads turned, but I didn't care.

"Charlie?" he replied, his face lighting up as he pushed through the crowd. He clapped me on the shoulder, laughing. "Well, they dragged you into this mess too?"

His laugh cut through the tension like sunlight through clouds. For the first time in days, I felt a little less alone. Jack had always been my anchor, even back in school, having him there made the chaos more bearable.

We spent the rest of the wait catching up, talking about home, our families, anything but the shore we were about to storm.

Then the sirens blared. "Move! Move! Move!" The ramp crashed down, and the world exploded into chaos. Bullets hissed past, tearing into steel and flesh. Men screamed as they stumbled into the water, the surf turning red.

I froze. A boy no older than me crumpled nearby, his blood spreading through the waves. My legs locked, my breath catching as fear gripped me.

"Charlie! Move!" Jack's voice cut through the noise, snapping me out of my daze. He grabbed my arm and dragged me forward, pulling me through the water toward the beach.

### ***20th February 1944***

Winter had gripped France with icy claws. The once bright fields were now barren and frozen, patches of mud and shattered trees replacing the golden wheat I had once imagined.

Every inch of ground we gained was paid for in blood. For every two Nazis that fell, one of us went with them. Jack trudged ahead of me, his breath visible in the bitter air. His pack and rifle weighed him down, his steps slower than before, but he never stopped.

The camaraderie we had felt back in September had been worn thin by months of fighting. We had been promised the war would end by Christmas.

Jack kept going. Somehow he still found the light in the darkest places, his presence a reminder that hope was not entirely gone. Without him, I might have given up.

### ***11th May 1945***

The frost had begun to thaw, but the war's grip had not. The Germans were retreating, their lines crumbling, every step forward carried the weight of the lives lost.

Two nights ago, the commander called us aside. They needed two men for a mission. Fast, quiet, deadly. A high ranking German officer was carrying orders for a counterattack. If we intercepted the convoy, we could save countless lives.

Jack volunteered without hesitation. "We have come this far," he said, grinning "What is one more fight?"

We moved through the forest under cover of darkness, the silence broken only by the crunch of boots and the thudding of my heart. Every snapped twig felt like thunder, every shadow a potential enemy. We knew the stakes. Failure was not an option.

By dawn we spotted the convoy. Three trucks, lightly guarded, stopped near a broken bridge. That was our chance.

It happened fast. Jack moved like a force of nature, fearless and unstoppable. We secured the plans, and for a moment, victory seemed within reach.

Then the rifle crack sounded. Sharp. Final

I turned to see Jack stumble, his rifle slipping from his hands

I caught him as he fell, his blood soaking through my jacket. His lips moved, but no words came out. I begged him to hold on, my voice trembling as tears blurred my vision. He smiled faintly, his hands gripping mine for a moment before going still.

I stayed there, cradling him, whispering promises I could not keep. When German voices drew close, I had no choice. I ran clutching the plans, leaving a piece of myself behind.

The mission succeeded. The plans were delivered, the counterattack averted. None of it mattered though. Not without Jack.

### *3rd June 1945*

The war is over, or so they tell me. The medic called it shellshock, but it feels like something deeper, a hollow ache that nothing can fill.

They gave me a compassionate discharge, though it felt like being sent away from what was left of my life.

Jack's death haunted me. His laugh, his hope, the way he had held on even when the world crumbled around us. I owed it to him to tell his parents the truth.

It took me three days to gather the courage. Their house stood at the edge of a quiet street, the garden neatly tended as if it could keep the chaos at bay.

Mrs. Carter opened the door. For a moment, her eyes lit up, a fragile flicker of hope. Then her expression fell as she saw the uniform and the way I carried myself, like a man with too many ghosts.

"Mrs. Carter, I am," my voice broke. "I am so sorry." She swayed, gripping the doorframe. Jack's father appeared, his face set in stone but in his eyes brimming with unshed tears. They invited me in, their politeness automatic, brittle.

I told them everything. How brave Jack was, how he fought until the very end. His mother wept silently, her tears falling in the streams as his father nodded, his jaw clenched. "Thank you," he whispered. "For being with him."

I stayed for hours, sharing stories of Jack. The boy who once built forts in their yard, the man who fought for something greater than himself. When I left, Mrs. Carter pressed a photograph into my hand. It was Jack and me, from school grinning as if we had the whole world ahead of us. "He would want you to have this," she said softly. I nodded, unable to speak, the photograph clutched tightly in my hand.

The war took jack from them, and from me, but it could never take who he was. That is what he meant by hope. That is the peace he believed in.