

In Memory of  
Company Quartermaster Serjeant  
**Herbert Lansbury Ward**

4198432, 8th Bn., York and Lancaster Regiment who died on 24 March 1944 Age 26

Son of Thomas Herbert and Ethel Maud Ward, of Birkenhead.

Remembered with Honour  
**Taukkyan War Cemetery**



Commemorated in perpetuity by  
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

**Herbert Lansbury Ward**





4198432 CCMS  
H. L. WARD  
THE YORK & LANGASTER REGT.  
24TH MARCH 1944 AGE 26

IN LOVING MEMORY. A CORNER OF A FOREIGN FIELD  
THAT IS FOR EVER ENGLAND





Grandad's old metal war trunk lived in my grandparent's attic. As a child, I often played with its contents; war items; uniform, tin helmet, gas mask, and other things. I dressed in the uniform, parading myself in the rust mottled mirror. I'd march up and down, inspecting my dolls and teddies, saluting them. It was a magical trunk, full of treasures.

After my mother died 10 years ago, I inherited Grandad's old trunk. It is well-travelled, the military green paint scraped, with large rusty patches. A large indentation in the lid, holes where the lock had been, although the handles were still attached.

Now it was mine. Yet, despite happy childhood memories, it sat unopened in a dark recess of my hallway. For years, an invisible wall stopped me acknowledging it. It had been in the shadows so long. In truth, I was afraid to open this Pandora's box. I knew the battered trunk held much of my family history; their secrets, happiness and sorrows. Once opened, it would bring the past into the present.

One morning, the sun shone through the porch window into the hallway, and penetrated the dark corner, lighting up the trunk. I looked at it, then carried on with my chores. However, I couldn't shake off the vision of the sunlit trunk. It caught my attention. The paintwork seemed brighter. It didn't look so imposing. I wondered what had made me so hesitant. *Ok, I thought, it's time to open the old war chest.*

Cup of tea in hand, I sat on the floor next to the trunk. Thoughts tumbled around my head. I took a large breath, and opened the lid. It creaked like a prop from a horror movie. Age-old dust particles rose into the air, dancing in the sunlight. The musty smell and shimmering dust hit the back of my throat, making me cough. The smell took me back to my grandparent's attic.

*How old was the dust I'd swallowed?* I gulped my tea, burning my tongue. *Perhaps this wasn't such a good idea.* Clearing my throat, I thought, *don't be so silly.*

Tentatively, I peered inside. The trunk was full of things. Some wrapped in old yellowed newspapers. There were books, journals, photographs, cardboard boxes, personal items, and envelopes of different sizes. Decades of memorabilia. My family's treasures.

One large, brown, dog-eared, well-thumbed envelope stood out. It read; 'ON HER MAJESTY'S SERVICE PLEASE DO NOT BEND'. Curious, I lifted it out. Dated 20 November 1953, it was addressed to my grandfather. Inside were 2 books, war medals, cap badges, letters and telegrams. Leaving the other items in the envelope, I took the correspondence out, and arranged them by date stamp.

I settled down to read each one. The contents were a mixture of humour, birthday or Christmas greetings, information, or just heart-breaking. Correspondence between members of my family, from the War Office, to and from different people, etc. As I read, I either laughed or cried. I tried to imagine how they felt reading these. When I recognised some of the hand-writing, I didn't know whether to feel happy or sad. *Bittersweet*, comes to mind.

The final envelope was addressed to my grandparents, marked 'ON HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE', sent by Registered Mail. The date stamp was obscured, it had numbered stickers, and a purple stamp depicting King George VI's head. Stomach churning, I knew instinctively what it was. *The Telegram*. It was in the trunk all this time, as if waiting for me to find it.

I read the words '**Killed in Action**'. My heart pounded. My head spun. Then, everything hit me. *My poor grandparents*. I knew exactly how they felt; their shock, pain, sorrow, loss and grief.

In the same envelope was a ration book stamped '*deceased*', and an old black and white photograph. In pencil, on the back, it read, '*To Mam. Jnr. NCO Course*

*passed A1 above average 18/10/1940'. It was Uncle Lans. I knew these items would be some of my saddest and most precious possessions.*

At that moment, I realised I had unknowingly grown up with a share of the family's grief, as yet unreleased. His death impacted the whole family; from me, the youngest, to my great aunts and uncles. With a lump in my throat, I sat beside the trunk clutching the photograph to my chest, and sobbed uncontrollably. My shoulders shook, and tears streamed down my cheeks onto my blouse. Through my tears, I saw my uncle looking at me from the photograph. Proud in his uniform, this handsome young man was about to go to war.

I was overwhelmed. I wept for Nan and Grandad, who lost their son; for my mum, Irene, who was so close to him; for my Uncle Tommy, and my aunties, DoDo, (Ethel Dorothy), Peggy and Marjorie, who lost their brother; and for Lans, for what he had suffered. Finally, I wept for myself, the child and the adult.

My uncle, Herbert Lansbury Ward was born 20 November 1917. Although he died before I was born, I came to know him through the family. I understand he was happy, kind, and cheerful, even when times were rough. He was outgoing, personable, clever, a fashionable dresser, keen sportsman, and family orientated. His photographs show him as an upright handsome man, with, *in my opinion*, an enigmatic smile.

After his Birkenhead Institute education, he became a Local Government Officer in the Education Department. At twenty years old, he became the youngest officiating Registrar, until he joined the Army. Both he and mum were musical and enjoyed trips to the cinema, amateur dramatics and operetta. Mum told me he could dance, and had a good singing voice, as did she. Both made many stage appearances, especially in Gilbert and Sullivan performances.

Uncle Lans was also a scriptwriter of plays and farces. In Grandad's trunk, I found a script he wrote in 1938, entitled, *'Here and There'*, handwritten on musty, sellotaped, foolscap paper. His humorous personality is shown in the first line, as *'the dispenser of trash and baloney'*. His play is set in *'Much Yapping Convalescent Home'*. His six by three foot Christmas card from the residents seized by Scotland Yard for fingerprinting, after thirty-five windows were broken during the home's Christmas Pantomime, *'Snow White and the Seven Quarts'*. *'Mr. Sealing-Wacks'*, the treasurer was recently seen wearing a new overcoat, and *'Percy Wifflesnook'*, is progressing well and should be out by Easter. The villains, *'Big-Hearted Archibald'*, and his side-kick *'Stinker'*, eventually meet their fate. I wept again, this time, with tears of laughter. Yes, Lans had a wicked sense of humour.

Grandad's trunk contained photographs he sent home for *'Mam'*, and letters to various members of the family, mentioning he will *'buy everyone Christmas presents when he comes home'*, and thanks them for their *'gifts of books, socks, and other needful things'*. He hopes *'the family are well'*. Messages from a caring son and brother.

My Grandparents house was the focal point for the family. I lived with them for some considerable time after several hip operations at Leasowe Hospital for Crippled Children. Even as a child, I could tell when they, or any of the family were talking about Lans. Occasionally, conversations stopped if they thought I was listening.

*'Not in front of the child'*  
or *'don't get upset'*  
or *'wait till Wendy goes to bed'*  
or *'go and play in your room'*.

So many hushed whispers. Their grief was always there, it was tangible, even if under the surface. Sometimes Nan would cry, or my mum. I didn't understand but I knew they were sad. Mum spoke about him often. Nan and Grandad never mentioned him, to me, anyway. Grandad never spoke about the war either. I wanted to help them, make the pain go away, but I was only a child, so I drew them pictures.

There were family photographs all around the house. Lans's photograph was proudly displayed on Nan's sideboard, next to her crystal vase, which was always full of flowers. I thought, perhaps, they were for him. In this head and shoulders photograph, he was smiling. His eyes followed you. Mum said, '*he was watching over us*', and I believed her. Sometimes I talked to him; well, to his picture, a silent and constant presence. I thought I sensed him occasionally. I felt he was never far away.

Things always became tense around November. It was Remembrance time and his birthday. I was allowed to stay up and watch the Remembrance service from the Royal Albert Hall on TV. They said it was important to remember. This made me feel grown up and part of it. The grief, the sorrow, I mean. We watched in silence, until the hymn singing, when Nan and I joined in. The following morning, the whole family attended the service in Hamilton Square, where the huge white Cenotaph stands in front of the Town Hall, where Lans had worked.

The year I was nine years old, I wore my favourite dress, and had a poppy on my lapel. The whole square was full of people, jostling to find a space. We stood in a family group. The crowds were so deep, my dad lifted me up so I could see. Suddenly, I heard the BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, of the big drum. Then the trumpets. I strained to see them. The parade marched into the square, all in step. I couldn't be excited as I knew this was a serious occasion. I watched the march-past, and pretended Lans was walking with them, smiling at us.

That year, when the crowds had dispersed, I was given a small wooden cross marked 'HERBERT LANSBURY WARD, KILLED IN BURMA'. We walked over to the Cenotaph, where I pushed the cross into the grass, in line with the other wooden crosses. I realised that my role was important, and it was an honour to pay tribute to my uncle.

#### **BURMA: SECOND BATTLE OF ARAKAN 1943-1944**

Lans enlisted in the Army when World War II broke out in 1939. At 22 years old, he was assigned Company Quartermaster Serjeant, 8th battalion, the York and Lancaster Regiment. After training, his battalion was posted to India.

In December 1941, Japan invaded British territories in Asia, and after several battles in Burma, the Allied forces withdrew into India. Plans were already being made to recapture the plain, harbour and airfield of Akyab Island, on the Mayu Peninsula, a narrow front, bordered by steep jungle-covered mountains of the Mayu Ranges, Arakan State.

Lans's battalion became part of General Slim's 14th Army, India Command, formed for this offensive. Orders were to fight through the monsoon, no stopping, no withdrawal. The 14th Indian Division, each man carrying his heavy kit and weapons, began the long march towards Arakan, facing problems of extreme terrain, severe weather, and disease.

I can only imagine the horrors he faced. Monsoons hampering progress through unmapped, and dangerous, mountainous territory. Men hacking their way through thick jungle, surrounded by dangerous wildlife, unfamiliar sounds, poisonous insects and plants, all hidden in the semi-darkness of overgrown

vegetation. Dragging their supplies through fierce heat, torrential rain, muddy quagmires, and swamps, home to malarial mosquitos.

I can almost smell and taste the stench of rotting vegetation, and the wet mud that penetrated everything, and the fate of those who succumbed to tropical diseases. I could only imagine the physical and mental state of the troops, living with the perpetual threat of ambush. Despite these conditions, they reached the Mayu Ranges, where the Japanese had well-established, camouflaged, impenetrable bunkers.

The troops cleared vegetation, and *dug-in* to wait for the monsoons to cease, and ready themselves for *The Second Battle of Arakan*. The 14th Army would launch their attack during the dry season, when mud turned to thick red dust, which was just as penetrating. During this time, sounds of explosions, screams, and fighting, pierced the darkness below, while tracer-fire and star-shells illuminated the sky.

During the conflict, Lans could only write home sporadically. Censorship meant he could only give glimpses of his experiences in his letters; *'Can't say where I am, so hot in the daytime, so cold at night.... lots of mosquito's... so tired...I have bronchitis now... I don't want to see any more jungle if possible, I've had my share...no comfort, sleep or respite'*.

He also describes eating *'monkey curry, cooked by the Indians, chameleons, wild fruit, silk worms, parrots, and other pretty things'*.

Waiting in the mountains, Orders to advance came unexpectedly. Their mission was to attack *'a Japanese held feature'* and *'cut their lines of communication'*, at dusk, that evening. Lans was *'in charge of handling defence and vital supplies'*. I doubt they would admit to being afraid, but Lans alludes to the men having *'some trepidation'*. At dusk, with weary shoulders, aching legs and blistered feet, the forward parties advanced with *bayonets fixed*.

Lan's group, transporting vital supplies and ammunition, were the last to move. Cloaked in darkness, barely able to see, they stole into the jungle, dragging a 25 pounder by rope up a narrow dusty animal track, towards the Japanese position. The rear guard ready with Bren guns. As they neared the crest, they heard machine-gun fire in front. But, before they could move any further, a Japanese ambush party surrounded them, and opened fire. Nobody survived. The group was *'obliterated'*, killed in a hail of bullets. Lans was dead.

Military records show that his body was recovered, and buried by his comrades the following evening, the Divisional Padre officiating.

He died 24th March 1944. He was just 26 years old, and had been a soldier for less than 5 years. This young, dutiful, patriotic, and brave soldier, would have been proud to learn that the troops captured their target, and succeeded in their mission. His death had not been in vain.

In 1952, he was re-interred in Taukkyan Military Cemetery, near Rangoon, where he lies under Eastern skies for perpetuity.

Chosen by my Grandparents, his gravestone reads, *'4198432 C.Q.M.S. H. L. WARD 8th Bn. The York and Lancaster Regt. 24th March 1944. Age 26. In Loving Memory. A corner of a foreign field that is forever England'*.

## TRIBUTES

*'Sir, I have had the honour to command the Company in your son served...his death caused serious upset to myself...we worked side by side ...his work has been invaluable maintaining 100% efficiency. My company was called away at short notice...your son was bringing vital supplies, unfortunately the Japs laid an ambush...your son died as he would have wished...the men of my company wish me to convey to you...we have all lost, myself especially, a great friend'*. CPT J Pattison to T H Ward 8 April 1944

*'I hesitated before sending this snap...a memorial built and erected by the men as a mark of esteem to Lans...dedicated at a field memorial service...the place is now a small cemetery...as a mark of my affection for Lans, I decided to send it to you'. Cmd Sgt Mjr John Moore India Command to Mr/Mrs Ward 17 Jan 1945*

*'I wish to pay tribute to a friend...more like a brother...100% tops...his wise cracks and jolly disposition making light of things made life bearable'. Cmd Sgt Mjr John Moore India Command to Mr/Mrs Ward 18 Feb 1945*

Such was the impact of Lans's character, and his untimely death, that I have carried the family's grief throughout my childhood, to the present day. Without fail, wherever I am, each Remembrance Day, I place a small wooden cross, with the same wording, next to the Cenotaph. My Act of Remembrance and personal tribute to him, ensuring he will not be forgotten.

How I wish I had met him.

## **OPTION 1 PART 2 COMMENTARY**

For this assignment, I chose Life Writing in autobiography form, from a first person point of view, and narrator. I had already written about my chosen subject in various activities from the Creative Writing Workbook. This gave me a good starting place, with plenty of material to select from during my writing.

The subject matter concerns my uncle, my childhood, and the impact he has had on my family, myself, throughout my life, to present day.

I had initially chosen this subject for TMA04, but with a wealth of information, it was better suited for the EMA, to do my subject and my writing more justice.

Early in the module, from a clustering exercise, and from the nucleus word CONFLICT, Activity 1.3 (Anderson, 2006, p.27), details about my chosen subject flowed. This gave several good prompts for further writing, such as, 'jungle, medals, death, war, grief' (Wood. 2016).

Although a fictitious character was required for the next exercise, as I never met him, I felt justified in selecting my uncle as the subject for Activity 19.4 (Anderson, 2006, p.276). He was born close to the year prompt and seemed a worthy subject. I invented facts about him and wrote around them, for example, 'he was a young fit athletic man' (Wood. 2017). The second part was writing about 'being forced to leave a much-loved house', and describe the circumstances. I knew he'd gone to war, and decided to write about his 'conscription'. It gave me opportunity to write about 'cause and effect', with 'imagined emotional and physical consequences'. During that exercise, I was unaware of the facts of his leaving, but I had some idea of the effects.

For Activity 20.4 (Anderson, 2006, p.288), I wrote about him further. This encouraged me to think about my relationship with my chosen subject, and allowed me to expand into prose form, resulting in five pages of freestyle writing in my personal notebook.

To prepare for the EMA, I wrote a story plan and checklist. I checked through items I had inherited, including War Office correspondence, and documented my reactions on discovering what these primary sources contained. I selected the most poignant ones, and made notes.

I discovered I needed to further research, and gather more information. I watched films and TV documentaries, making more notes and references. I telephoned my Auntie Marjorie, age 90, my Uncle's Lans's youngest sister (Wood, 2017).

I chose to structure the narrative in separate sections. The first section contains actual events, and how they have affected me to the present day. The narrative moves

between past and present. In the opening paragraph, I am a child dressing up, and in the final paragraph, state, 'I wish I had met him'.

I chose a separate section to write about Lans's and his character, and the effects on the family. A further section relates his war experiences, with an explanatory heading, indicating a significant mood change, time period, and subject matter.

I write about my uncle as a young man, an army recruit, and soldier, following him through to his death. I use fictional techniques and details from my research to fill any gaps. I chose selections from his correspondence to convey his character, and voice. I use vivid imagery throughout this section.

There is a separate section headed Tributes. I have concluded this Assignment with a short summary of personal thoughts.

I have made several changes while editing this piece, reflecting upon tutor feedback and advice, to try and improve my writing; for example, better use of through-lines (Whittam, 2017).

This module has given me a greater understanding of the methods involved in Creative Writing. It has taught me how to think independently from a writer's point of view. It has helped to develop my writing skills by stimulating my imagination, to produce clear and presentable assignments. Also, how to learn from the module resources, and to improve by using a range of techniques in various genres. I have gained skills in the use of formal properties, including layout, language, structure and creativity. I have also learned how to edit and polish to a professional standard. This module has given me a different perspective, other than a reader's point of view.

My marks have remained consistent despite more difficult and lengthier assignments, requiring a variety of skills.

This has been a journey of discovery throughout. It has revealed long hidden parts of my life. Yet, has been therapeutic, with moments of joy and sadness. More importantly, bringing comfort and closure through a variety of emotive subjects.

© Subject to copyright. This may not be reproduced without permission from the author.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Anderson, L. (2006) (ed.) Creative Writing: A workbook with readings, Abingdon, Routledge/Milton Keynes, The Open University.

Canopy (2013) Directed by Aaron Wilson [Film]. Toronto, Odin's Eye Entertainment.

Cmd Sgt Mjr Moore J. India Command (1945) Letter to Mr/Mrs Ward 17 Jan  
Cmd Sgt Mjr Moore J. India Command (1945) Letter to Mr/Mrs Ward 18 Feb  
CPT Pattison J. South East Asia Command (1944). Letter to T H Ward, 8 Apr

Daniels M. (2017) Telephone conversation conducted by Wendy Wood, 5 May

Forgotten Army: Destination Burma (2013) BBC4 16 May

Horror in the East: Japan and the Atrocities of World War II (2000) Yesterday 15 May

Ward H L. (1943) Letter to I Ward, 15 Nov

Ward H L. (1944) Letter to T H/E M Ward, 12 Jan

Ward H L. (1944) Letter to T K Ward, 8 Mar

Weapons of War: Sinews of War (2000) Discovery History, 19 May

Whittam H. (2107) Telephone conversation with Wendy Wood, 23 May

The Imperial War Graves Commission. (1958) Burma 1 1939-1945 The War Dead of The British Commonwealth and Empire, Taukkyan War Cemetery, Rangoon Part V1, Great Britain. Weatherby & Sons Ltd.

The Open University (2012) A215 Creative Writing: Assessment Guide, Guidance Notes, Printed in the United Kingdom, The Open University.

The World at War (1973-74) Yesterday, 13 May.

Wood, W. (2017) A215 Assignment EMA, unpublished work.

Wood W. (2017) Notebook 1, unpublished work.

Wood W. (2017) Personal photographs, Unpublished.

© Subject to copyright. This may not be reproduced without permission from the author.