

World War One Song n' Dance Show

The play is a concert party to raise the spirits of British soldiers in the middle of World War One

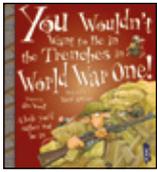
British soldier Lendon Payne attended one of the many wartime concerts given by the music-hall singer, Harry Lauder:

‘The troops used to sing a lot in the trenches when nothing else was happening. They very often made up their own songs. I remember when Harry Lauder came along and his stage was an orange box and there was a small piano they brought with them and he sang for over an hour. He was only a little man but he had a fine voice and he was a great comedian. The troops were absolutely delighted at it.’

It is Christmas 1916 in the trenches, shortly after The Battle of the Somme.

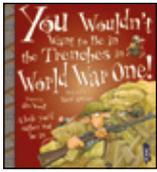
Parts:	Sergeant	in charge of the concert
	Charlie	a soldier comic
	Alf:	another soldier comic
	Lena Ashwell	(1872 – 1957) a British actress and acting manager, organising entertainment for troops at the front during World War I
	Lilly	a young actress and dancer
	Harry Lauder	(1870 – 1950) a Scottish music hall singer and comedian

Sergeant: It gives me great pleasure to present a show to warm our spirits on this bleak December night as we gather in this little hut near the front that is to be our grand theatre for this evening. So without further ado, I bring to you two of our own corporals who reckon they're a couple of comedians. If they don't make me laugh, they'll be scrubbing my dugout with a toothbrush all night! Here they are – Charlie and Alf (*applause*)



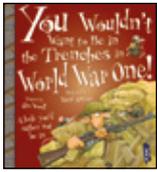
World War One Song n' Dance Show

- Charlie: I say, I say, I say... do you come here often?
- Alf: Not if I can help it. But my dear boy, we're here to entertain the troops. They need cheering up so tell them a joke.
- Charlie: Did you hear about the army officer who stuffed bread crumbs in his boots?
- Alf: He stuffed bread crumbs down his boots? Whatever for?
- Charlie: To feed his pigeon toes. In fact, I tied myself to a carrier pigeon so it could fly off and tow me back home. In the end I changed my mind.
- Alf: Why was that?
- Charlie: I'd end up being pigeon-towed. Pigeon toed – just like the sergeant! Do you mind giving me a little water in my glass?
- Alf: Certainly - what do you want it for?
- Charlie: I want to take a bath.
- Alf: That won't be enough for a bath.
- Charlie: Nonsense. (*He uses it to wash behind ears, under arms etc.*) You only need a few drops for a good bath in the trenches!
- Alf: I say, I say, I say... does a hand grenade have legs?
- Charlie: Does a hand grenade have legs? Of course a hand grenade doesn't have legs.
- Alf: Oh dear. In that case I've just thrown a rat at the enemy.



World War One Song n' Dance Show

- Charlie: I say, I say, I say... I wouldn't say the sergeant is tough but when he eats corned beef he doesn't even open the can.
- Alf: I say, I say, I say... I wouldn't say the sergeant has got a big mouth but he's the only man I know who can eat a banana sideways.
- Sergeant: Careful! (*laughter*) Besides, we've got no bananas!
- Charlie: I say, I say, I say... I wouldn't say the food out here is bad but even the rats dine out. They prefer German food in their underground tunnels. It still tastes horrible but deep down they quite like it. VERY deep down!
- Alf: And did you hear about the German soldier stuck in no-man's-land up to his neck in mud? Only his face and the top of his spiked helmet could be seen. A British Tommy took pity on him and crawled out to help pull him out. He managed to get a rope around the German's chest and safely crawled back to the safety of his trench where he got his pals to help pull the stuck German. After the squad heaved for ten minutes the Tommy shouted across:
- Charlie: "Sorry Fritz, we can't seem to shift you."
- Alf: The German soldier replied: "Would it help if I got off my horse? My feet are still in the stirrups."
- Charlie: And now for a quick song to the tune of 'Happy Birthday to you'.
- Both: (*To tune of Happy Birthday to you*)
We don't want to be here
Getting shot up the rear
Keep your heads down in the trenches,
Pray the bombs disappear.



World War One Song n' Dance Show

Alf: And now to finish with a proper song – so please join in...

(To the tune of 'Keep the Home Fires Burning')

All: We were brought here from our loved ones,
We were sent here by the King,
We have come to do our duty
At the risk of everything.
Let no tears add to our hardships
For we soldiers must keep strong,
And although our hearts are breaking,
We must sing this cheery song:

Keep us in the trenches,
That is where the stench is,
That is where the mud's so deep,
Where trench foot spreads...
And it's where the lice are
As we fight the Kaiser
Just so we can end this war
And return back home. *(They exit)*

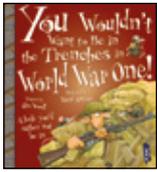
Sergeant: Thank you, gentlemen. There'll be a court marshal for both of you later! And a firing squad in the morning. But now it's time for our special guest artists who have come out here to the front to entertain us. Some of you may have forgotten what ladies look like but here are Lena and Lilly...*(applause)*

Lena: Ooh, it's very posh here, isn't it, Lilly?

Lilly: Ever so. And all these soldiers look so handsome... *(cheers – they dance)* Do you come from a theatrical family, Lena?

Lena: No, my parents are in the iron and steel business.

Lilly: Really?



World War One Song n' Dance Show

Lena: Yes, My mum irons and my dad steals. (*sounds of distant gunfire*)

Lilly: Ooh, can you hear those Germans?

Lena: I'm half German, you know.

Lilly: Really? Your left half or your right? Surely you don't like that awful German food, do you?

Lena: Not much. But I know a man who eats German food all the time.

Lilly: Why's that?

Lena: He's a German. He's always hungry, too.

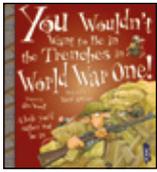
Lilly: Hungry for what?

Lena: Hungry for power. He's nibbling through Belgium right now.

Lilly: Then let's hope he doesn't bite off more than he can chew. But at least these boys here are going to make sure he soon chokes!
(*Loud cheers*)

Lena: I think we should sing a song, don't you? Something patriotic...

Both: (*To the tune of the National Anthem*)
Make sure you win the war
That's what you're fighting for,
You'll conquer yet!
Our troops are always brave,
They never fear the grave...
Those selfless men, their lives they gave,
We'll not forget.
(*Curtsey and exit to applause*)



World War One Song n' Dance Show

Sergeant: Thank you, ladies. And now for a very famous comedian and singer all the way from Scotland... Harry Lauder.
(Applause)

Harry: *(To tune of It's a long way to Tipperary)*
It's a long way to march with bunions,
It's a strain on the hips.
It's a long time since pickled onions
And a plate of fish and chips!
Goodbye piccalilli,
Farewell chutney, too
It's a long way from dear old blighty,
And a half decent loo! *(Applause)*

Sergeant: It's delightful to have you with us, Harry. Were you born in Scotland?

Harry: Aye.

Sergeant: Which part?

Harry: All of me.

Sergeant: Have you lived there all your life?

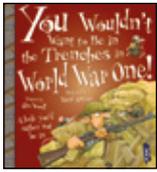
Harry: Not yet.

Sergeant: Any other famous men born in your town?

Harry: No, only babies.

Sergeant: I hear it's very windy in Scotland.

Harry: Not always. I had two windmills in my garden but I took one of them down. There wasn't enough wind for both of them.



World War One Song n' Dance Show

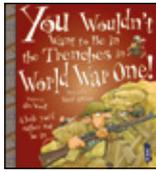
- Sergeant: There's too much wind here – it's all the beans and turnips in our stew! (*Big explosion*) Quick – take cover everyone.... (*Mad scramble/screams*)
- Lena: There's a horrible smell. Is it mustard gas?
- Lilly: It smells like burning flesh and rotten eggs.
- Sergeant: That's right. It's tonight's supper.
- Harry: It smells like a very strong blue cheese is on the menu.
- Sergeant: No, that's my blue feet. It's foot rot – known as trench foot.
- Charlie: I think we're safe now, Alf. You can take off that hideous gas mask.
- Alf: I haven't got it on!

As the dust settles, Charlie and Alf return to the stage to lead the singing:

(To the tune 'Glory Glory Hallelujah/John Brown's Body' - The Battle Hymn of the Republic)

The guns keep firing night and day, the bombshells blast away.
The mustard gas is deadly as it burns your skin away.
You want to run and hide but you'll be shot to disobey.
But still we're fighting on.

Glory, glory hallelujah
Don't let anybody fool-yer,
War is brutally peculiar
But still we're fighting on.



World War One Song n' Dance Show

Your pants are damp, the food is rough - if that's not bad enough,
The mud and blood and bitter cold make every day so tough,
As rats and mice hide in your bed and gnaw through all your stuff
But still we're fighting on.

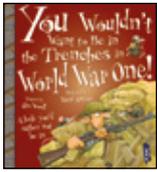
Glory, glory hallelujah
Don't let anybody fool-yer,
War is brutally peculiar
But still we're fighting on.

You wouldn't want to be in trenches right up to your neck,
A hole you'd rather not be in, you'd hate in half a sec!
If you stayed for just one minute, you'd become a nervous wreck
But still we're fighting on.

Glory, glory hallelujah
Don't let anybody fool-yer,
War is brutally peculiar
But still we're fighting on.

Sergeant: It seems to be quiet out there again. When I looked across No-Man's-Land earlier I could only see snowflakes dancing over the barbed wire. Well, it's Christmas Eve, after all. So all I have to say to you all... what was that? Sshsh – listen... (*The faint Humming of 'Silent Night' in distance*)

Lena: Why don't we join in?
(*Leads everyone in Silent Night*)
Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright.
Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child.
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.
(*as their singing gets quieter, we hear German singing getting*



World War One Song n' Dance Show

closer)

Stille Nacht! Heilige Nacht!
Alles schläft; einsam wacht
Nur das traute heilige Paar.
Holder Knab im lockigten Haar,
Schlafe in himmlischer Ruh!
Schlafe in himmlischer Ruh!

Alf: Happy Christmas, everyone.

Charlie: If only the silence could last.

Alf: Let's go out there and meet them. *(Puts on greatcoat)*

Charlie: Are you sure? What do you think, Sergeant?

Sergeant: Very well, everyone. We'll risk it and head out there through No-Man's-Land. *(He ushers out the troops)*

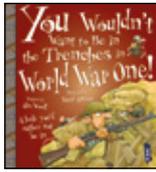
Harry: Good luck, lads. It's been good to meet you all.

Lena: We have to get back to the officers' mess. Come on, Lilly.

Lilly: Goodbye, boys. Best of luck. Happy Christmas. *(She, Lena & Harry exit left)*

Sergeant: *(Just Alf & Charlie left)* Well done, you two. A good show tonight. You didn't seem nervous – nothing like I am now. *(Puts on his greatcoat)*

Charlie: *(Going to his kitbag)* I've been keeping this chocolate for Christmas Day. But I'm going to take it as a gift to Fritz.



World War One Song n' Dance Show

Alf: And I'll take them my chewing gum. See you in No-Man's-Land, Sergeant. *(They both exit right. Sergeant is about to follow but goes back for his rifle)*

Sergeant: *(Dithering)* No, maybe I'll leave it. I hope I don't live to regret this decision. It might be the last I ever make. Out here you know each move could be your last. Which all goes to show **YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO BE IN THE TRENCHES IN WORLD WAR ONE... EVER!** *(Exits right)*

(Long silence. Sudden burst of loud gunfire. Blackout)

Did you know?

Opposing troops in the trenches stopped fighting in 1914 to share Christmas carols and exchange gifts, as well as play football. Some historians believe this also happened at Christmas in 1915 & 1916.