Gunner Cedric Hunter

Gunner Cedric Hunter:—Poor Cedric, who “listed in January, 1915, and went straight to the front, refusing to enter a training school for officers, was killed in action on last August 24th. Aged 24 years. We feel that our best tribute to his memory is to publish the following letter, written to his mother by one who, with many and many another, knew and loved poor Cedric Hunter.

The letter runs: “At about half-past eight I was turning into bed, after having been on duty since 3am, when the Huns began to shell the battery position. Ced., being off duty, had spent the night in the officers’ dug-out, a good safe one, and I believed he was still in bed there. One shell hit the trench just outside our dug-out. No one took any particular notice of it (over here we are accustomed to consider a miss as good as a mile), until we heard someone call out that Ced. had been hit. He had risen early, and was cooking our breakfast at the fireplace in the trench a few yards from where the shell landed. I pulled on my boots and hurried out, to find them placing him on a stretcher. A large fragment had cut through his steel helmet and entered the back of his head. There was, unhappily no hope from the first. I went down to the dressing station with the stretcher party, and was allowed to stay with Ced. until the end. He died about ten minutes after reaching the station, without regaining consciousness.

I cannot tell you what his loss means to me. Today, the first day we have been separated since he came to the 10th, has been utterly desolate, and I dare not think of the many such days before me. We were friends at school and afterwards, over here, we were inseparable. We slept in the same blankets, used the same mess tin—everything either of us had belonged to both—money, clothes, everything … often lying in bed, with
shells screaming over our heads, we would yarn till early morning of the good times we had had at home, and the better times we would have when we got back—if we did get back. Always he spoke lovingly of you, and worried because you would be anxious for his safety. In the battery he is missed as none other of our dead have been missed since we came to France. Everyone with the battery was his friend, and, for a friend, he would do anything, as I, his friend, know well. Poor Ced. we had hoped to be wounded together, and spoke of what we would do when we got to England. Indeed, it seemed unlikely that one of us could be hit and not the other, since we were never apart.

I will always be proud of the fact that the Corporal in charge of the Signallers always took us with him on any job involving extra risk. Ced. always volunteered because he was afraid of nothing and liked the excitement, and I because I wanted to be with Ced. and because I drew courage from him. I will never have a friend like him again. It seems almost insincere to offer you words of consolation. And yet it should be of some comfort to know he died in the way he would have chosen: died the hardest death a man could wish for; died swiftly and without pain; died young and strong and brave, giving his life for an ideal; and, above all, died in the grace of God. It hurts me to think of your great sorrow. But Ced. would have wished you to meet it bravely and proudly, as the mother of a soldier and a very gallant gentleman. Almost I find myself envying Ced. He is at rest and in peace after twenty weary war months, with all the privations and hardships inseparable from such a life, and I am left to carry on, deprived of the sunshine and strength his very presence gave me. May you all have comfort and consolation in your hour of sorrow, is the heartfelt prayer of one who loved him in life and does not forget him in death."

We do not publish any signature, as the letter was never meant for public eye, but do beg of the writer, for our mutual love of a dead friend, to forgive any presumption on our part in persuading the recipients to allow its publication. Lastly the School offers the deepest sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Hunter and family in their sad loss. Prayers were asked on the news of Cedric’s death, and they are still said at the school day by day, for the repose of their gentle and great-hearted son. May he rest in peace.