

“Grandpa, Grandpa!!! The Kentucky Derby is about to start!!!” Amelia tugs at her grandfather's hand, practically dragging him across the dusty wooden floors. He flops onto the couch as his dog Maisie joins him.

“I’m rooting for that one!” Amelia says, pointing at a tiny black horse. Charles smiles at his granddaughter.

“The horses are set!” the TV announcer says “And they’re off!!!” A gunshot echoes through the room. Except, Charles is no longer in the room. He is on the mud-laden fields of the war. The sky is filled with dark black smoke. He is on the front line with his best friend, Walter. That day, they are both there after a grueling 2 weeks of being in the trenches.

He and Walter had planned to use seven of their fourteen days leave around Christmas. They were going to go see Paris and celebrate Christmas together. Before they could romanticize about Paris, however, they had to survive these next six days.

Charles pulled his gun out, reloaded it, and fired. He did this many times before something strange happened. For a moment, it seemed like everything was in slow motion. He lowered his gun and through the thick clouds of dust, he saw a German man aiming his gun right at Walter’s heart. Charles dropped his rifle and scrambled towards Walter. He sprinted, tears drying up instantly. He reached out his arm to try and pull Walter away, but it was too late. A bullet grazed Charles’ outstretched arm and penetrated Walters chest. He immediately tumbled to the ground, Walter falling to his knees with him.

He stayed there for a minute, realizing that that same man now had his gun aimed at him. He quickly stumbled to his feet, dragging the now dying Walter along with him. He heard the crack of the gun and then a bullet penetrated his leg. Charles cried out in pain, clutching his leg, but kept going until he reached the support trenches.

Charles fell to the ground and leaned over Walter, knowing that he was already dead. Tears tumbled out of Charles’ eyes, mixing with the blood of Walter. He closed his eyes as his shoulders shuddered, the pain in his leg completely numb. A hand touched his back, and an unknown voice quietly told him that it was going to be okay.

Charles opens his eyes to his daughter, blurred because of the tears in his eyes. He’s clutching the couch and clenching his teeth, heart beating a million miles per hour. He’s breathing hard and sweating, still crying. His daughter opens her arms, he hugs her and sobs silently as she whispers, “It’s over now. You’re safe.” She strokes the back of his head, now teary eyed as well.

The war still lives on in the minds of those who survived. This year, let us not only remember those who died, but those who survived as well. For they still have the war on their minds each and every day.