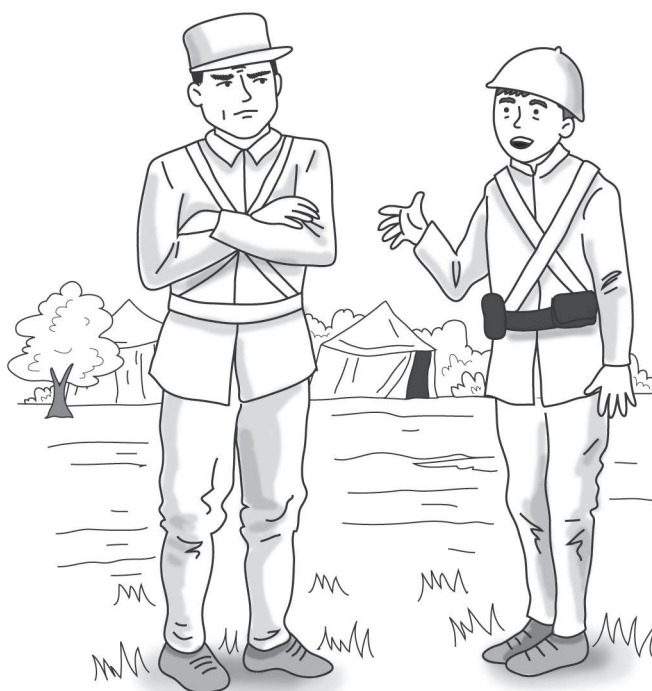


World War I: A Young Boy's Story

Stewart Ross

After his father was killed during the First World War, 14-year-old Pierre Villequin joined the French army by lying about his age.

- 1 When I joined the famous “Iron” (20th Infantry) Corps in the middle of July it was camped south of Rheims, well behind the front lines. My new colleagues were veterans of several battles. They weren’t at all as I imagined they would be. Although still in their twenties, their gaunt faces made them look much older. They didn’t talk about the war, either. When I asked them what going into battle was like, they shrugged and told me I’d find out soon enough. The conspiracy of silence confused me. It reminded me of how Papa had written about wild flowers, rather than killing Germans.
- 9 Something didn’t add up. The newspapers and military command remained optimistic. Things had not gone too well, they admitted, and regrettably there had been heavy casualties. But now the French armies had been reorganised and re-equipped. Our British allies had increased the size of their forces, too. Moreover, the Germans had to fight on two fronts: the Russians in the east and ourselves in the west. The tide of the war was turning. Soon, there would be a new, unstoppable offensive that would bring the war to a victorious conclusion by the end of 1915.
- 20 But the men of the 20th Infantry were more cynical, none more so than our section commander, Antoine Cousseau. When I mentioned that I had heard the war would be over by Christmas, he just snorted.
- 28 “You think the report’s wrong, sir?” I asked.
- 30 “No, it’s not wrong, Sonny,” he replied. “The war will be over by Christmas – Christmas 1925.”
- 34 I thought it a rather bad joke.



Name:	Class:	Date:
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- 1 Look at paragraph 1, beginning “*When I joined*”.

Why does the author use the word “*veterans*” to describe Pierre’s colleagues in the Iron Corps?

2g

☐

1 mark

- 2 Look at paragraph 1, beginning “*When I joined*”.

Which word is “*gaunt*” closest in meaning to?

Tick **one**.

dirty ☐

healthy ☐

smiling ☐

thin ☐

2a

☐

1 mark

2d

☐

1 mark

- 3 Why do you think the soldiers didn’t want to talk about what going into battle was like?

- 4 Look at paragraph 2, beginning “*Something didn’t add up.*”

Find and copy one word that tells you that the military command is saying they think they will win the war.

2a

☐

1 mark

- 5 When Pierre joined the Iron Corps, he was proud of joining the army but he was confused by what he found.

Explain **two** reasons for his confusion, using evidence from the text to support your answer.

2d

☐

3 marks

- 6 Look at paragraph 2, beginning “*Something didn’t add up.*”

Tick **two** reasons why the military command were optimistic.

The Iron Corps was famous. ☐

Something didn’t add up. ☐

There had been heavy casualties. ☐

The French armies had been reorganised. ☐

The British had increased the size of their forces. ☐

2b

☐

1 mark

Name:	Class:	Date:
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- 7 What evidence is there in the text to show that the Russians were fighting on the same side as the French?

2d

☐

1 mark

- 8 Compare the report from the military command with the expectations of the men of the 20th Infantry.

2h

☐

2 marks

- 9 Which of the following would be the most suitable summary of the narrator's attitude?

Tick **one**.

He didn't like being part of the 20th Infantry. ☐

He thought his colleagues were cowards. ☐

He didn't like his commanding officer. ☐

He wanted to believe that the war would soon be over. ☐

2c

☐

1 mark