

## **Take One Hundred Boys...**

...freckle-faced, sandy-haired,  
chestnut eyes, tight black curls.  
Tall boys, short boys, cocky lads, shy boys,  
ciggies on lips, bitten nails,  
boys with coal dust in their shoes.

Oh! The glory.

Proud chins thrust high under peaked caps,  
khaki tunics, sweetheart's picture tucked away,  
hobnail boots march left, right, left, right.

Plunge into a melting pot of icy winds,  
flooded trenches, mud, rats, lice.  
Mix in a common purpose, a fire of shells,  
grenades and tanks.  
Stir with the gasp of poison gas,  
whose poker-hot fingers singe the lungs.  
Sniff an aroma of rotting flesh, faeces.  
The stench of Hell.

Yields 12 amputees, 14 razor-scorched lungs,  
11 walking wounded, 29 shattered minds.  
Eyes stare forever at Flanders Fields,  
ears echo boom and rattle of fire,  
comrades' death cries.  
33 tiny white crosses  
and one deserter, shot like a hare.

Serve with a dash of homecoming parade.  
People cheer as the boys limp along.  
They wave little flags above their heads.  
Mines fall quiet, factories still.

*By Sally Russell*