

## CHAPTER 3

# Going to France

Albert looked at Captain Nicholls. ‘My father sold Joey to you, didn’t he?’ he said. ‘Well, if you take my horse to war, I’ll go with him.’

Captain Nicholls answered kindly. ‘You’re ready to fight, but you’re too young and you know it. Come back when you’re seventeen.’

‘So I can’t do anything now,’ Albert said.

‘No,’ the captain replied. ‘But what’s your name, young man?’

‘Narracott, **sir** – Albert Narracott.’

‘Well, Mr Narracott, this could be a long war. We’ll need people like you in the **cavalry**. When you’re older, tell them my name – Captain Nicholls. And don’t worry about Joey. I’ll look after him for you, I promise.’

Albert tried to smile. He patted my nose and touched my ears. ‘I’ll find you again, Joey,’ he said. ‘I don’t know how, but I’ll find you.’ Then he turned and walked sadly away.



**sir** you say this when you talk to an important man

**cavalry** soldiers who fight on horses

**throw** (*past threw, thrown*) to make something move quickly through the air

**draw** (*past drew, drawn*) to make a picture with a pen or pencil

My first few weeks in the army were very difficult. Our trainers rode us around the riding school. On other days, we waited for hours under the hot sun. My trainer, Perkins, was a short man who used his whip a lot. All the men and horses were afraid of him. I tried to **throw** him off my back a few times, but he always understood what I wanted to do, and he never fell. Over many weeks, I learnt how to be a cavalry horse.

Captain Nicholls visited me every evening. I was happy to see him because he talked to me, like Albert. He often brought pencils and paper, and he **drew** my picture.



‘I’m going to make a painting of you soon,’ he said one evening. ‘It’ll be a fine picture because you’re a beautiful horse. I’m going to send it to Albert. Then he’ll know that I’m looking after you.’

He looked up at me, then drew, then looked again. And he talked to me all the time.

‘It’s my hope that the war ends before Albert’s seventeen,’ he said. ‘Because the fighting will be terrible. Most of the **officers** in our **unit** think that this war will be easy, but Captain Stewart and I don’t agree with them.’ His face darkened. ‘I tell you, Joey, a few **machine guns** can stop the best cavalry in the world.’

Just then, Perkins came into the stables. ‘Are you drawing him again, sir?’ he asked.

‘I’m trying to,’ the captain answered. ‘Isn’t he beautiful?’

‘Yes, he is,’ my trainer replied. ‘But being beautiful isn’t everything, sir. Not in a war.’

‘Be careful what you say about my horse,’ the captain went on angrily. ‘And look after him well.’ Then he walked out of the stables.

**officer** a leader of a group of soldiers, for example, a captain

**unit** many soldiers that fight together in a group

**machine gun** a gun that shoots again and again very fast

**charge** when soldiers run at the enemy; to run at the enemy

**sword** a long knife for fighting

**proud** happy about something that someone has done

A few days later, Captain Nicholls rode me for the first time. We trained together all day. Captain Nicholls was in front of his unit, and next to him was his friend, Captain Stewart. At the end of the day, our cavalry unit was ready to **charge**. While the men held up their **swords** and shouted, I looked at Captain Stewart's beautiful black horse, Topthorn. He was stronger and taller than me, but he had kind eyes. We galloped across the field together, faster and faster. Neither of us wanted to lose, and we left the other horses behind us. Once we were at the other side of the field, we stopped. Both captains talked about their horses, and how we were the best in the cavalry. They were **proud** of us.

That night, they put Topthorn in the stable next to me, and the next day we were together on the ship to France. The weather was stormy, and many horses neighed and kicked. The soldiers came down and stayed with us, but Topthorn helped me the most. I rested my head on his body while the ship went up and down. I tried to be strong, like him.



The men were excited about going to war. But when we got off the ship in France, we saw hundreds of **wounded** soldiers. They limped past us, or people carried them onto the ship. When we looked at their faces, we were silent.

It was a long walk to the **front line**, and everyone soon forgot about the wounded soldiers. The men laughed and sang. Tophorn and I walked together, and Captain Nicholls and Captain Stewart talked. They were kind men, and they looked after us well. Often, to give us a rest, they stopped riding and walked next to us. Captain Nicholls was a big man, but he was a good rider. He didn't feel heavy on my back.

We stopped for a few minutes every hour, and the soldiers often brought us water. Tophorn always shook his head after he drank, and cold water fell on my hot face. In the end, we were near the front line, and the terrible sound of the guns was louder. At night, there were **flashes** of light in the sky, but Tophorn helped me. I didn't feel so afraid with him next to me.

The soldiers talked a lot, and we learnt what was happening from them. Some German units were trying to move behind the British army, and we had to find them. We walked around looking for the enemy for days. Then suddenly, we found them. They were in a field on the other side of a wood.

The officers shouted to the men. The soldiers took out their swords, and we walked into the wood in a line. Captain Nicholls was talking to me.

'Take it easy, Joey,' he said. 'Don't be excited. We'll be fine, don't you worry.'

I looked across at Tophorn while we moved through the trees. He was trotting now, and waiting for the sound of the **bugle**. Then suddenly, the bugle sounded and we charged out of the wood and into the light.

**wounded** hurt, often with a hole in the body

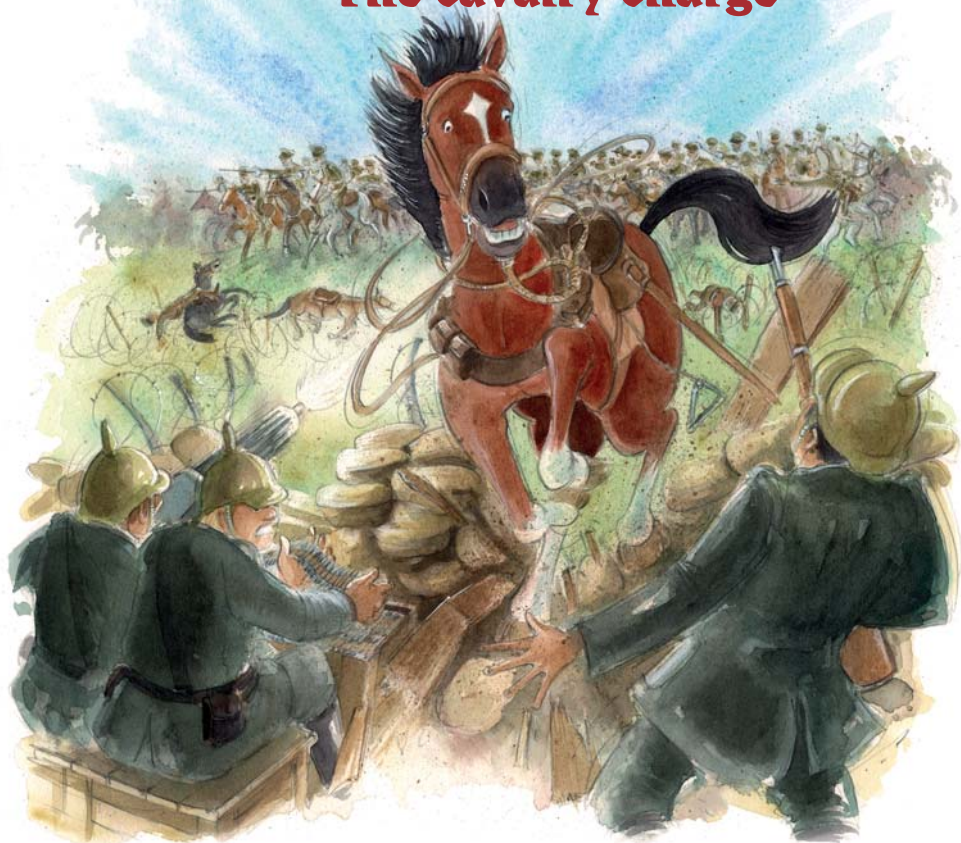
**front line** the line between two armies; soldiers fight here

**flash** a sudden bright light

**bugle** soldiers play notes on this instrument to give a signal

## CHAPTER 4

### The cavalry charge



The men shouted as we charged down the hill. In the field below us, German soldiers in grey **uniforms** stopped and turned. And then we heard their guns.

Suddenly, I had no rider. I was soon in front of everyone. I couldn't stop or turn with all those horses behind me, so I galloped on towards the enemy. The Germans moved out of the way as I crashed through their lines.

**uniform** a suit of clothes that is the same for everyone; soldiers wear it

I wanted to run on and on, away from the guns. But Captain Stewart found me and took me back to the unit.

‘We won,’ the British soldiers said, and they told stories about the **battle**. But there were dead and wounded horses and men everywhere. We lost a quarter of the unit that day.

‘He was proud of you, Joey. I’m sure of that,’ Captain Stewart told me. ‘He died in that charge today, and you finished it for him.’

That night, I thought about poor Captain Nicholls. Tophorn stood over me for hours, before I went to sleep.



Early the next morning, Captain Stewart came to see us. There was a **trooper** with him. He was very young and he had a red face. When I looked at him, I thought of Albert.

‘This is Joey,’ Captain Stewart told the trooper. ‘He was my best friend’s horse, so look after him.’ Then he stood near me and said quietly in my ear, ‘and you look after Trooper Warren, Joey. He’s just a boy, and his horse died yesterday.’

Trooper Warren wasn’t a good rider. He felt heavy on my back and he pulled on the reins a lot, but he was very kind to me. I couldn’t ride with Tophorn any more because the troopers rode behind the officers. But when we stopped, Trooper Warren always took me to see Tophorn.

Day after day, we looked for enemy units. When we found them, the troopers went off to fight. They usually got off their horses just before they fought, and after every battle there were a few horses without riders. During those long days and nights, Trooper Warren began to talk to me. He told me about his family, how he didn’t want to fight, and how his horse died in battle.

‘I tell you, Joey,’ he said, ‘I didn’t want to get on another horse after that battle. But you’ve helped me. I’m not afraid any more.’

**battle** when two armies fight

**trooper** an ordinary cavalry soldier, not an officer

Winter soon came, and it rained all the time. On both sides of the front line, the armies made deep, long **trenches**. The ground was too soft for cavalry horses, so they took us back behind the front line. The soldiers and horses were wet all the time. At night, we stood in deep, cold **mud**. After months of rain and snow, many horses went to the **veterinary** hospital. Most of them didn't come back. Even big, strong Tophorn had a bad **cough**, but we lived through that terrible winter because Trooper Warren and Captain Stewart looked after us well. When they came down the lines of horses at night, Tophorn and I were very happy to see them. Trooper Warren sometimes had letters from his mother in England. When nobody was around, he read them to me.

'Sally from the village says that she'll write soon,' he read aloud one day. Then he looked up at me. 'That's my girl, Joey,' he explained. 'After the war, I'm going to marry her.'



**trench** a long, narrow hole in the ground to hide in when fighting

**mud** very wet, soft ground

**veterinary** for looking after animals

**cough** when you make a noise in your throat because you are ill; to make a noise in your throat

**reach** to arrive at a place

**barbed wire** long circles of very thin metal with sharp knives on them

One spring night, the guns didn't stop. Early the next morning, the troopers came down the lines of horses. We were going into battle again. They rode us along the country roads. When the sun came up, they were singing songs. We went through an empty village, then **reached** the front line. Thousands of soldiers were waiting in the trenches. While we rode past them, they called out to us. There was no green here: only mud, holes, and black trees. In front of us, we could see a hill with a wood, and long lines of **barbed wire**. The troopers took out their swords, and we trotted. Then we heard the sound of the bugle.

'Do your best, Joey,' Trooper Warren cried when we started to gallop. 'I want to be proud of you.'

At first, it was quiet. Then I heard the sound of the guns and the terrible cries of wounded horses and men. The ground shook, and more and more of us fell while we galloped up the hill towards the wood.

‘Oh God! The barbed wire’s still in one piece!’ Trooper Warren shouted on my back. Very few of us reached that barbed wire, and fewer found a way through it. We jumped over the first German trenches, but they were empty. The shots were coming from the wood.

There weren’t many of us now, but we rode on towards the wood. Then we saw more barbed wire between the trees. It was too late for some horses. They caught their legs in the barbed wire and died there with their riders. I saw Topthorn in front of me. In one place, the barbed wire wasn’t so high and he jumped over it. I followed him into the wood. Suddenly, we were alone. Then German soldiers came out from behind the trees. Captain Stewart and Trooper Warren stopped. There were guns all around us.

