

Keep Your Head Below the Firing Line

Words and Music: Nigel Harbron

The musical score is written in 6/8 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). It consists of five staves of music. The lyrics are written below the notes. Chord symbols (F, Gm, C, Bb) are placed above the notes to indicate the harmonic structure. The lyrics are: "When the Chi - nese show their tricks with their sho-vels and their picks, It won't be long be - fore the trench is done. With the duck - boards on the ground and the fire - steps all a - round, It's time for us to have some 'fun'. Make sure your trench is deep and its sides are sound, but steep And keep your head be - low the fi - ring line."

When the Chinese show their tricks with their shovels and their picks,
It won't be long before the trench is done.
With the duck-boards on the ground and the fire-steps all around,
It's time for us to have some 'fun'.

*Ch.: Make sure your trench is deep and its sides are sound, but steep
And keep your head below the firing-line.*

You're safe when in the trench, if you can tolerate the stench,
But you're not the only life that's living there:
The rats won't let you sleep, from every hole they seem to peep,
You've lice and fleas, with nits all in your hair.

We get up in the dark, quite some time before the lark,
To rouse the enemy with 'the morning hate'.
Then it's 'Fill those bags with sand, and make sure the guns are manned',
As you contemplate the dry bread on your plate.

When the sun shines in the sky and the temperature is high,
We stand a chance to dry our sodden clothes,
But soon the clouds build up again, and once more it's back to rain,
And the mud that every soldier loathes.

We can stand the rifle fire coming through the old barbed-wire,
But once the shells are launched into the sky
All there is to do is pray that we'll see the end of day,
And last another week - before we die.



At the time of writing this song, there were daily reports on the radio about the appalling conditions in Syria being endured by innocent victims of the civil war, but conscripted soldiers in WWI were as much innocent victims, as most had not rushed to volunteer their services. Conditions in the trenches must have been unbelievably miserable and frightening, and death possibly came as relief to many within them. The above picture shows duckboards (just) and firing-steps. Hopefully, the prostrate body is simply sleeping.