

My dear Nicholas

I know how shocking these revelations must have been for you, and given your past experiences no one could blame you for the decision you have made to turn your back on your uncle's strange request. Nonetheless, while we are still unsure of the purpose of the document I think it would be a mistake to relinquish the task he has set you.

I must admit that I find it almost impossible to reconcile your current view of Tiberius with the man we both knew, and so I have taken the liberty of deciphering the next chapter of his will myself, in the hope of revealing more information that might help us to understand him better. I know that its contents will not entirely reassure you, but I think you owe it to yourself, if not to Tiberius, to read on.

In the meantime allow me to share some remarks concerning the will. Throughout my professional life, I have had the misfortune to read a number of final letters written by men driven to self destruction and I must tell you that this has an entirely different feel to it. There is a frankness which suggests that Tiberius is more concerned for the truth to be known than he is to protect his reputation. I have a feeling that Tiberius understood that this would be hard for you, but whether you like it or not I am certain that you will learn the truth if you complete the challenge he has left you.

You said that we should maintain the greatest discretion, but I am sure Tiberius would remind you that a Caesar shift cypher could not possibly provide you with the degree of security you require. I suggest that you might follow Tiberius's lead and use something more secure like an affine shift cypher for your reply.

Yours,

Charles

Plaintext

The news that you had been picked up by Military Police trying to volunteer for your local regiment filled me with dread. You were not alone, I later met many underage boys who had deceived the recruiting sergeants and made their way to the battlefields of France and Belgium, but your courage shamed me into joining the fight myself.

At that time I had only just begun to hear stories of the misery of trench warfare but it was clear to many of us that this was a new kind of war, one in which technology would play a central role. This fact was not lost on my erstwhile employers who were quick to learn that I had joined up and to my surprise the two gentlemen from VERONA met me as I disembarked on the continent with a thousand other new recruits. I was taken to a chateau for briefing on the German development of gas weapons, and on the twenty first of April nineteen fifteen I was sent by train to join the Second Army sector in the Ypres Salient at St Julien.

The following day I was introduced to the full horror of modern warfare. At five o'clock the lead pipes laid over the edge of the German trenches hissed and a mist rolled towards us across the open land. It was yellowish-green, a hellish, sulphurous haze, and the effects were almost instantaneous.

VERONA had anticipated the attack and my orders were to record my observations on the deployment of the weapon. I learned later that the valves were open for just five minutes before the gas cylinders were empty and the gas was blown by a gentle northern breeze at about five miles an hour. But the effects were felt for hours afterwards, and the leisurely pace of the billowing cloud belied its destructive power as it drifted along a section of the trenches at least a half mile in length.

The gas left many survivors unable to speak, and this increased the panic, especially among the younger troops. Those who were not overwhelmed by the choking chlorine withdrew to Boesinghe, but fear of the terrifying new weapon seeped through the lines and that position too was soon lost.

While other VERONA agents continued to take observations across the battlefield I was sent to the rear to examine the survivors, and to record the efforts of the medics to alleviate the soldiers' suffering.