



# **Last Man Standing: The Memoirs, Letters & Photographs of a Teenage Officer**

*Richard Van Emden*

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# Last Man Standing: The Memoirs, Letters & Photographs of a Teenage Officer

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**Last Man Standing: The Memoirs, Letters & Photographs of a Teenage Officer** Richard Van Emden  
It hardly seems credible today that a nineteen-year-old boy, just commissioned into the Seaforth Highlanders, could lead a platoon of men into the carnage of the Battle of the Somme. Or that, as the machine gun bullets whistled past and shells exploded, he could maintain his own morale to lead a platoon, keeping its discipline and cohesion, in spite of desperate losses. Norman Collins, the author of this superb memoir, was this remarkable man. Despite being wounded three times, Norman lived to see his hundredth birthday so becoming one of the last surviving combatants of this terrible conflict. Through his eloquent memories recorded late in life and a rare collection of letters that he wrote from the front, he tells the story of his life as a young subaltern at the front during 1916 and 1917. Using Norman's own words, this book follows him from his childhood in Hartlepool to his subsequent service in France. The book also covers such shattering events as the German naval assault on Hartlepool in December 1914 when, as a seventeen-year-old, Norman was subjected to as big a bombardment as any occurring on the Western Front at that time. Norman's enlistment and training are covered in detail in his letters, as is his posting to France and the epic attack at Beaumont Hamel in November 1916. Service at Arras in April 1917 and in the weeks prior to the Third Battle for Ypres is also recorded before serious injury hospitalized him for a year. Norman's love for, and devotion to, the men under his command shine out in this book and his stories are gripping and deeply moving. They are illustrated by a rare collection of private photographs taken at or near the front by Norman himself, although the use of a camera was strictly proscribed by the Army. Most of the images have never been published before.

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