



## Tanks for the Memories!

Just as was the case with last week's story, the topic for this one has jumped right into my lap ... only this time quite literally!

I'm over in Canada at the moment on a visit to my family. Because my work was so intense during the past year, I didn't get over here at all during 2013, and due to that long absence, everybody seems to have changed quite a bit. This is perhaps quite noticeable with me too I presume, and I suppose that my daughters were thinking to themselves, "Wow, Dad has so much white hair now!"

Well, such is life. But the greatest changes are of course visible with my grandchildren. At their stage of life, miss them for a *week* and they'll be different next time you meet, let alone for a year and a half!

I was hugely pleased to find that - at last - they have arrived at a stage in life where one can have a normal conversation with them, not just broken baby talk. I phoned my daughter when I arrived in town, and when she put 7-year old Alex on the phone I could barely believe my ears. He could *talk* to me!

Now please relax, I'm not going to totally bore you today chatting about my grand-children (or am I?); there is a 'story' here.

I spent a few days staying at their place, and Alex's parents were quite happy to let Grandad help out just a little bit with the child care. The first evening I was there, Alex grabbed a book off his bookshelf, took me to the couch, and announced that tonight it would be my turn to do the evening 'let's read together' ritual.

As you might expect, that suited me just fine, and I sat down and got ready for a session of 'Cat in the Hat,' or some such thing.

No way.

He dumped the book on my lap. No Dr. Seuss here; it was thick and heavy ... 'Introduction to the First World War.' He opened it up to the page where he and his father had left off the evening before, and began to read out loud, tracing under the lines with his finger.

The page in question dealt with one of the turning points of the war, just after the Battle of Amiens, where the Allies began to push towards the Hindenburg Line. I sat there kind of stunned, while he read confidently through each line, only occasionally hesitating over a longish word. After we had done a few paragraphs I just had to find out if he was really understanding any of this, or just phonetically going through the words without much comprehension, so I asked him a few background questions, the first one about the then-new tanks that were being used in those battles.

He eagerly replied, flipping back through the book to the pages where those were introduced and starting to give me a capsule history of their development. One of the photos showed a tank with a large circular bundle of wood on top of it, which I assumed was something that the operators could dump into a trench to ensure the tank could cross easily, and he told me that that was correct, and then added that this was called a *fascine*.

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Now I'm no dummy, and I myself have read about that war extensively, but here was a little seven-year old explaining things to me, using words that I myself didn't know!

Well alright! If he was trying to get my attention, he succeeded in spades! We enjoyed the rest of our read-along session, and he then scrambled off for his evening bath with his brother.

But Grandad certainly took note of this, and lost no time in getting online to a couple of book stores. Next time young Alex visits my parents' place, where they have been starting to feel a bit at a loss as to just how to 'entertain' their great-grandson when he drops by, he'll find a few things of interest waiting for him.

These next few years should be fun!

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