EDITED BY
MAARTJE ABBENHUIS,
NEILL ATKINSON,
KINGSLEY BAIRD AND
GAIL ROMANO

# THE MYRIAD LEGACIES OF 1917

## A YEAR OF WAR AND REVOLUTION

The Myriad Legacies of 1917

Maartje Abbenhuis • Neill Atkinson
Kingsley Baird • Gail Romano
Editors

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*Editors*
Maartje Abbenhuis
School of Humanities
The University of Auckland
Auckland, New Zealand

Kingsley Baird
College of Creative Arts
Massey University
Wellington, New Zealand

Neill Atkinson
Manatu Taonga
Ministry for Culture and Heritage
Wellington, New Zealand

Gail Romano
Auckland War Memorial Museum
Auckland, New Zealand

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—Maartje Abbenhuis, Neill Atkinson, Kingsley Baird, and Gail Romano.

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# Notes on Contributors

**Maartje Abbenhuis** is Associate Professor in history at the University of Auckland. Her research interests include the history of war, peace, neutrality, and internationalism, particularly in the 1815–1818 period. Her publications include *The Art of Staying Neutral: The Netherlands in the First World War* (2006) and *An Age of Neutrals: Great Power Politics 1815–1914* (2014), which won a CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title award. She is the recipient of two Royal Society of New Zealand Marsden grants. Her new book, *The Hague Conferences and International Politics 1898–1915*, will be published in 2018.

**Neill Atkinson** is chief historian and manager of heritage content at Manatu Taonga—Ministry for Culture and Heritage, Wellington. He is the author of six books, mainly focusing on New Zealand political, labour, and transport history. He has been actively involved in the development of the Ministry's suite of history and reference websites, including *NZHistory*, *28th Maori Battalion*, and *Te Ara—Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, and has overseen the Ministry's contribution to the New Zealand First World War Centenary History programme.

**Kingsley Baird** is a visual artist whose research into memory and war commemoration—particularly of the First World War—is expressed through sculpture and the written word. Commissioned works include: *New Zealand Memorial* (Canberra, 2001), *Tomb of the Unknown Warrior* (Wellington, 2004) and *The Cloak of Peace* (Nagasaki, 2006). Artists' residencies and exhibitions include: In Flanders Fields Museum (*Diary Dagboek*, 2007), Historial de la Grande Guerre (*Tomb*, 2013); and Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr (*Stela*, 2014). Kingsley is Professor of fine arts, School of Art Whiti o Rehua, College of Creative Arts, Massey University, New Zealand.

**Annette Becker** Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur (France), is a social and cultural historian of the First World War, Professor of contemporary history at Université Paris Ouest Nanterre and a senior member of the Institut Universitaire de France. Annette has written extensively on the two world wars and the extreme violence they nurtured, with an emphasis on military occupations and the two genocides, against the Armenians and the Holocaust. Her research interests include humanitarian politics, trauma, and memory, particularly in relation to the work of intellectuals and artists.

**Piet Chielens** is Director of In Flanders Fields Museum in Ieper, Belgium. From 1992 to 2007 he was artistic director of Peace Concerts Passendale. He aims for a constant renewal of the memory of the Great War in Flanders and to give special attention to the ways in which micro- (personal, family) and macro-history (that of cultures, nations, and the world) can be linked. In addition to numerous books in Dutch, Piet is co-author of two books in English: *The Great War as Seen from the Air: In Flanders Fields 1914–1918* (2014) and *Unquiet Graves: Execution Sites of the First World War in Flanders* (2000).

**Glyn Harper** is Professor of war studies at Massey University. He is Massey's Team Leader for the New Zealand First World War Centenary History programme and wrote one of its first volumes. A former teacher, he joined the Australian Army in 1988 and after eight years transferred to the New Zealand Army, where he rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel. Glyn was the army's official historian for the deployment to East Timor and is the author of fourteen books for adults. His most recent First World War publication is *Johnny Enzed: The New Zealand Soldier in the First World War 1914–1918* (2015).

**Michael S. Neiberg** is Professor of history in the Department of National Security and Strategy at the United States Army War College. He has published widely on the theme of war, especially in the era of the two world wars. His most recent books include *Path to War: How the First World War Created Modern America* (2016) and *Dance of the Furies: Europe and the Outbreak of World War I* (2011), which was selected as one of *Wall Street Journal*'s five best books on the First World War in 2014.

**Jock Phillips** is a public historian based in Wellington. He was New Zealand's chief historian for 14 years (1989–2002). He became the general editor for *Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand* (2002–11), and then senior editor in charge of its content (2011–14). He has published extensively on various aspects of New Zealand's history including its involvement in the First World War. His books include *A Man's Country: The Image of the Pakeha Male* (1987) and *To the Memory: New Zealand's War Memorials* (2016), which won a best Non-Fiction Book prize at the Heritage Book and Writing Awards.

**Gorch Pieken** studied history, art history, and Dutch philology in Cologne. From 1995 to 2005 he was curator and head of the multimedia department in the German Historical Museum in Berlin. He has also worked as author and producer of several documentary films for German and French television. In 2006, Gorch became project director of the new permanent exhibition of the Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr (Military History Museum of the Armed Forces). In 2010, he became academic director and director of exhibitions, collections and research in the Military History Museum and in 2016, vice-director of the museum.

**Gail Romano** is Associate Curator of history at Tamaki Paenga Hira Auckland War Memorial Museum where she works at developing, documenting, and researching the social and war history collections. Recent exhibitions include the military medal visible storage section in the Pou Maumahara Memorial Discovery Centre and *Entangled Islands: Samoa, New Zealand and the First World War*. She has worked previously at Waikato Museum following an earlier career in IT and business management, and education.

**Galina Rylkova** is Associate Professor of Russian studies at the University of Florida. She is the author of 20 published research articles, numerous book reviews, and a monograph: *The Archaeology of Anxiety: The Russian Silver Age and Its Legacy* (2007). Her current research interests include psychology of creative personality, Chekhov, cultural memory, biography, and Russian theatre. She is working on her second book, *Created Lives: The Art of Being a Successful Russian Writer* (forthcoming).

**Thomas Schmutz** is a PhD candidate at the Centre for the History of Violence in Newcastle, Australia, and the University of Zurich. He is interested in genocide studies, transnational, diplomatic and military history. His doctoral thesis concentrates on western diplomacy in Asia before and during the First World War. He challenges Eurocentric views on the global war. His findings on the Armenian Reform Question are published in *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 3 (2015), with Hans-Lukas Kieser and Mehmet Polatel.

**Radhika Singha** is Professor of history at Jawaharlal Nehru University. She works on the history of Indian labour in the First World War as well as the social history of crime, criminal law, and colonial governmentality. She is the author of *A Despotism of Law: Crime and Criminal Justice in Colonial India* (1998) as well as numerous academic articles.

**Monty Soutar** ONZM (Ngati Porou, Ngati Awa, Ngai Tai), is a senior historian at Manatu Taonga—Ministry for Culture and Heritage. He specialises in Maori history and has worked widely with iwi and Maori communities. His publications include *Nga Tama Toa: The Price of Citizenship* (2008), and *Whitiki: Maori in the*

*First World War* (2018). Currently, he is leading a digital project on Treaty of Waitangi settlements in New Zealand. He has been a teacher, soldier, and lecturer and has held a number of appointments on national advisory boards, including New Zealand's First World War Centenary Panel and the Waitangi Tribunal.

**Peter Stanley** is an Australian military-social historian and currently Research Professor at the Australian Centre for the Study of Armed Conflict and Society, University of New South Wales. He was head of the Centre for Historical Research at the National Museum of Australia from 2007 to 2013. Between 1980 and 2007 he was an historian and curator at the Australian War Memorial, including as head of the Historical Research Section and Principal Historian from 1987. He has written several books about Australia and the Great War since 2005. Peter Stanley was the recipient of the Prime Minister's Prize for Australian History in 2011.

**Jay Winter** Charles J. Stille Professor Emeritus of History at Yale and Visiting Fellow at the University of Melbourne, is a specialist on the First World War. His sole-authored books include *Sites of Memory. Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (1998) and *Remembering War: The Great War between History and Memory in the 20th Century* (2006). Jay was co-producer, co-writer and chief historian for the PBS series *The Great War and the Shaping of the 20th Century*, which won an Emmy Award, a Peabody Award, and a Producers Guild of America Award for best television documentary in 1997. He was the editor-in-chief of *The Cambridge History of the First World War* (three volumes, 2014).

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CHAPTER 1

# Introduction: Death's Carnival: The Myriad Legacies of 1917

*Maartje Abbenhuis*

Early in 1917, the poet Yvan Goll opened his most recent publication with the following lines:

> Let me lament the exodus of so many men from their time;
> Let me lament the women whose warbling hearts now scream;
> Every lament let me note and add to the list, …
> In every garden lilies grow, as though there's a grave to prepare;
> In every street the cars move more slowly, as though to a funeral;
> In every city of every land you can hear the passing bell;
> In every heart there's a single plaint,
> I hear it more clearly every day.[1]

Goll's book of poetry, entitled *Requiem for the Dead of Europe*, consisted of a series of recitatives, laments, choirs, and hymns, all despairing the war, that 'carnival of death', as it encircled the continent and then the world with its 'fiery breath', crossing oceans, islands, and mountain peaks, paving roads, invading ports, and embracing the very fibre of humanity: its devastation inescapable. Goll used the poems in his collection to narrate

M. Abbenhuis (✉)
School of Humanities, The University of Auckland,
Auckland, New Zealand



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how Europe had failed and faltered; how the war reduced the continent to a hell of eternal battle and its people to fearful and hateful beings.

Goll published his *Requiem* in neutral Switzerland, one of only a few countries left in Europe where such treasonous thoughts could be propagated. Goll himself fled France in 1914 to avoid conscription and survived the war as a student at Lausanne University. While there, he met with other exiled émigré artists and intellectuals. These included the Russian expressionist artist Marianne von Werefkin, who designed the collection's cover (Illustration 1.1), and the French pacifist Romain Rolland, author of the 1915 anti-war manifesto *Above the Battle*, to whom Goll dedicated his poems.[2] Goll himself was a French-German artist born in the contested borderlands of Alsace-Lorraine. His exile in Switzerland was essential to him, to preserve his complex and, as he saw it, 'European' self-identity.[3] He could not serve in a national army, for he would be fighting against his kin and against his vision of Europe. His conscientious objection was thus deeply tied to the political values at play in the war.

While Switzerland may have offered Goll a reprieve from becoming involved in a war he could not bring himself to fight, this neutral country could not offer him, or any of his *émigré* friends, a true escape. For much like the Dutch author Louis Couperus, who denounced this woeful conflict and despised his own pitiful neutrality in it, Goll's artistry between 1914 and 1918 also reflected the war.[4] To historians, Goll's 1917 *Requiem*


**Illustration 1.1** Yvan Goll, *Requiem for the Dead of Europe*, front cover (1917). Marianne von Werefkin (illustrator 1860–1938), cover image: Yvan Goll, Requiem für die Gefallenen von Europa. Zürich, Rascher, 1917. Source: Yvan Goll, *Requiem für die Gefallenen von Europa* (Zürich: Rascher, 1917)

evokes the high emotions of the time along with the hopes and fears for the future held by this exiled polyglot author.

It is, then, entirely fitting that in the final pages of his 42-page publication Goll issued forth a glorious 'Peace Festival', filled with buoyant refrains rejoicing in exultations of 'REQUIEM, REQUIEM'.[5] The juxtaposition to the despair permeating through his previous 'Hymn to the dead' could not be greater. In the Roman Catholic tradition a requiem mass offers mourners time to reflect, to grieve, to mourn, but also to rejoice. A requiem must include a jubilation, for the dear departed have reached the exulted realm. Similarly, Goll's *Requiem* both decried the war and exulted at a peace to come.

The timing of the publication of Goll's *Requiem* could not have been more apt, for in 1917 the strain of total war reached a disastrous crescendo. The publication of his work in a neutral country was also fitting. By 1917, no neutral could escape the impact of the First World War regardless how far removed it was from a military theatre. Switzerland was particularly precariously situated, surrounded by four warring powers: Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, and France. Nor could anyone in Switzerland (or elsewhere) fail to consider the monumental importance of two events that year: the Russian revolutions that effectively ended Russia's involvement in the war and would bring into being the Soviet Union, and the entry of the world's only remaining neutral great power, the United States of America, as an associated ally of the *Entente Cordiale*.

For many contemporaries, the year 1917 proved terrifying. Yet, much like Goll's *Requiem*, this year of despair also underwrote a year of expectation. As the French historian Jean-Yves Le Naour explains, 1917 witnessed the 'veritable birth of the twentieth century'.[6] It was in this year that the age-old, multi-ethnic Romanov, Habsburg, and Ottoman empires crumbled, that warring and neutral societies alike had to confront the uncertainties of a post-war future. After 1917, the world could not go back. However longingly some yearned for their idealised visions of the pre-war past, that past had become a place of no return. As Goll put it, 'Like apples falling from a tree, the world is separated from its past'.[7] For Goll, this was a call to action to reclaim the earth, to join hands, and to rise above the din of war. In reality, as 1917 unfolded only a few had faith in that same hopeful vision.

Yet the events of 1917 made questions about the future urgent: What would a post-war world look like? How would the map of the world be redrawn? What ideas and ideologies would shape its contours? How would

this Great War redefine the international system and who or what would rule supreme? How might balance and stability be restored? No government and no people could escape these questions, even if many of them focused on domestic concerns first and foremost. For 1917 was also a year of revolution and political upheaval. The war, which began as a war of nations and empires fought in defence of amorphous and competing ideas of 'civilisation', was now a battleground for the legitimacy of a wide range of antagonistic political ideologies: communism, self-determination, nationalism, democracy, fascism, collective security, racial equality.[8]

1917 was a fundamental year in shaping the course and contour of the future. It ended the nineteenth-century world order for good. The world of landed empires, aristocracies, and even nineteenth-century conceptions of liberalism was collapsing. It would be replaced by a new world order dominated (even in their isolationism) by the United States and the Soviet Union and by the rise of powerful political concepts that precipitated change and upheaval, economic uncertainty, and the collapse of empires.

This volume brings together scholars from a range of disciplines and explores the complex and multi-dimensional impacts of the year 1917. It does so at every level of analysis: from the personal to the global, from the intimate to the economic, from the political to the cultural. Goll's *Requiem* offers one perspective on the power of the war to alter international realities and personal priorities: the poet lamented how the conflict, pitting soldier against soldier, worker against worker, spelled the end of what he considered to be a nineteenth-century European brotherhood and necessitated a rethink of internationalist ideals.[9] However, Goll's is only one 1917 perspective. The chapters in this collection—all drawn from a stimulating symposium held on the subject at Museum of New Zealand/Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington in April 2017—offer many more.

Many historians focus on 1917 as the year that catapulted the world into the twentieth century.[10] This collection adds to that historiography. It does so by focusing not only on what changed in 1917, how the events and developments of this year of war and revolution created a myriad of legacies, but also on what was lost. Above all, it draws on a range of multidisciplinary approaches to reflect on the importance of this year of war and revolution to shape the commemorative landscape. Recently, Akira Iriye referred to the First World War as 'ancient history', as if its impact is of little importance today.[11] The contributions in this collection reject Iriye's claim. If the First World War is a 'foreign place' and a place of 'no

return' for most of us, we remain the inheritors of so much that was shaped and framed during that war and during the year 1917 in particular. The First World War remains very much 'living history'.

Even the life of Yvan Goll, who survived the Great War thanks to the neutrality of the Swiss, was shaped in fundamental ways by the war. Goll's fears for the future of Europe and the world were not mitigated or constrained by the fact he lived in a neutral society. He recognised that the war transcended Europe's borders and that the fate of the world lay in the outcome of the conflict. In many ways, Goll was not that different from another exiled intellectual, the Bolshevik revolutionary Vladimir Lenin, who also survived the war in Switzerland, where he composed his own treatise on the conflict entitled *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*.[12] Lenin's infamous train journey to Russia in April 1917 (which coincided with the United States' entry into the war and should be seen as the German government's most effective military operation that year) fostered the Bolshevik revolution and with it changed the fate of the world.

The collection opens with an insightful chapter by Jay Winter, who analyses the issue of social anxiety in 1917. Winter posits 1917 as the year in which the war shifted gears and moved from an imperial axis—a war of nations, governments, and empires—to a revolutionary axis—a war of societies, communities, and competing political values. By highlighting the interconnections between the two axes, which Winter describes as the imperial and revolutionary cultures of war, the chapter brings out the worries contemporaries had about the war, the values it instilled, and the destruction it wrought. After the Russian revolutions, American entry into the war, and the social and economic collapse of most warring (and some neutral) countries, the world at war changed irrevocably. The political truces that dominated domestic politics in many countries strained and often overwhelmed governments. Political polarisation resulted, bringing new ambitions and extraordinary anxieties to the fore. Winter also highlights how the choices made in 1917 by the political authorities on all sides determined the ongoing nature of the culture of revolt and anxiety. The choice for peace and reason could have been made that year. Ultimately, Winter depicts the First World War as a tragedy, and the year 1917 as the year in which the social fissures of the pre-war era brought forth a culture of anxiety and resentment that transcended the post-war period and continues to influence our present.

In Chap. 3, Michael Neiberg picks up the idea of the First World War as a global tragedy and asks questions of how the United States fits into the historiography of this 'war to end all wars'. His answers highlight how rarely American neutrality is considered as a context in which to read the origins of the war and even less as a contributing factor in the conduct and course of the conflict between 1914 and 1917. American entry into the war in 1917 is often simplified as a product of Wilsonian opportunism, economic vagary, or as an instinctual response to the sinking of the *Lusitania* or the reception of the Zimmerman telegram. Neiberg problematises the United States' wartime position both as a neutral and a belligerent. He argues for the importance of studying the perspectives of ordinary Americans in the years of neutrality to answer the question as to why the United States was willing to go to war with Germany and the Central Powers in 1917. In so doing, Neiberg makes a valuable contribution to understanding the First World War as a totalising and radicalising conflict in which the stakes were considered fundamental to all. The United States would not have gone to war in 1917 if Americans did not consider their nation and their political and moral values at risk. It was not Wilson that took the United States to war, but the American people.

Monty Soutar's chapter on Maori contributions to the British imperial war effort offers another powerful reminder of the global reach of the 1914–18 conflict. By explaining how Maori communities in Aotearoa New Zealand responded to Britain's declaration of war, Soutar highlights some of the complexities of Britain's imperial politics at war. Above all, Soutar shows how the mobilisation of Maori communities for war in the year 1917 in particular, had an extraordinary impact on those communities, their servicemen, and the political values at play around race and citizenship in New Zealand. The mobilisation of Maori at 'home' and 'abroad' influenced the political ideas Maori and Pakeha (European New Zealanders) embraced during and following the conflict.

Radhika Singha's chapter also emphasises the global reach of the First World War. The conflict may have started in Europe, but it soon transcended that continent to envelop the non-European world. Like Soutar, Singha's chapter reminds us of the key importance of the non-European face of the war and considers how the conflict infiltrated the Asian subcontinent. Singha's chapter focuses on war finance, on the gift of 100 million pounds to Britain's war expenses, which was raised by means of two war loans (issued in 1917 and 1918). She emphasises the anxiety felt by the colonial regime in asking the Indian population to support the war

in such a direct way. She also highlights how the needs of Britain's total war economy in 1917—stretched as it was to the limits—necessitated the economic mobilisation of India and Indians. In so doing, the British government and metropole became indebted to their colonial subjects, a reality that had a decisive influence on post-war political agendas in India. Singha's chapter weaves together the multifaceted and often ingenious ways in which ordinary Indians were sold on war loan subscriptions: much of the propaganda was self-serving and focused on the economic prudence of the loans, while other messages stressed the wider political values at play in the global conflict. In that propaganda, Indians were as much at war as their imperial masters.

In a provocative think piece, Annette Becker takes us from the lived reality of war to its artistic representations in Chap. 6. Beginning with Isak Dinesen's idea that 'all sorrows can be borne if you tell a story about them' and Karl Kraus's claim that the First World War was the artistic 'crucible of the end of the world', Becker unpicks the culture of grief and trauma that inspired artists during and after the war to represent the violence and tragedy of the conflict in certain ways. Using examples from 1917 and beyond, Becker takes us on a journey through the meaning and commemoration of the First World War in art, reflecting on ten key themes: tragedy, fracture, camouflage, wounds, trauma, race, gender, grief, sacredness, and commemoration. In her quintessential style, Becker accentuates the humanity of the war's destructive power and in so doing reminds us that 'mourning never ends', a theme Ivan Goll would have understood and supported.

In Chap. 7, Galina Rylkova also focuses on the destructive power of the year 1917 to define experience and meaning. She does so by analysing the work of Russian author Ivan Bunin and his 'autobiographical' reflections on the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and its aftermath. Bunin, a Russian intellectual who was extremely critical of the Bolshevik cause, used propaganda imagery of his time to describe the revolutionary violence that swept through Russia from 1917. He employed the same imagery to ascribe meaning to the violence, often revelling in his own literary ideals in doing so. Rylkova reminds us of the need to contextualise Bunin as an authentic source to reflect on the period. But above all, she brings out the phenomenal impact the Russian revolutions of 1917 had on redefining social values in Russia and around the world. Certainly, the revolutions helped to shape, define, and solidify Bunin's own sense of intellectual identity as a Russian who lived his life in exile in Paris during the 1920s.

Peter Stanley too concentrates on the theme of dislocation to investigate the little studied movement of British Territorial troops (or 'Terriers') from the United Kingdom to British India during the war. These volunteer Terriers replaced India's Regulars, who were responsible for policing the colonial population. While the Regulars went to war in Europe, the Terriers took over their predecessors' imperial policing duties. In the process, these men who had volunteered to serve the empire at war became agents of a different kind of state violence: policing local disturbances and riots and adopting the values of their predecessors. For Terriers, the year 1917 finally brought the reality of the war into sharp relief as some were sent to man Britain's Indian war fronts, while others suppressed riots and rebellions in this year of upheaval and crisis.

For Thomas Schmutz, the key theatre of war in 1917 was the Caucasus. In Chap. 9, Schmutz acknowledges the central importance of the Russian revolutions in changing the fate of the Turkish rulers of the Ottoman empire. With the revolutions, Russia retreated from its Ottoman fronts, opening up an attractive vacuum which the Ottoman leadership looked to fill. They did so by forgoing the Ottoman empire's commitments to its Middle Eastern fronts, not least in Palestine where British forces were making serious inroads, and focusing on acquiring a grand Turkish empire that stretched into the geo-strategically vital Caucasus region. That ambition brought the Ottomans into conflict and tension with their German allies. The German leadership never expected Russia to give up the Caucasus and was unprepared for a Turkish renaissance there. It was also confronted by the extreme violence and genocidal policies of the Turkish rulers against the Armenian peoples in the trans-Caucasian region. In the end, only defeat in the war brought Turkish ambitions to rest, although the reverberations of these 1917 developments continue to influence regional politics today. Altogether, Schmutz reminds us of the numerous unlooked for and unexpected implications of the collapse of the Romanov dynasty in 1917.

In Chap. 10, Glyn Harper uses the military history of 1917 to address the key importance of this year of war for New Zealand. He does so by explaining how New Zealand's military campaigns on the western European and Palestinian fronts impacted on soldiers and New Zealand society. For the global military history of the war, the year 1917 was crucial: it made and broke militaries on all fronts. The Russian revolutions evaporated numerous war fronts in south-eastern Europe and in the Caucasus, while the Battle for Caporetto effectively removed Italy from

the war. Even though the entry of the United States in the war offered much-needed material support and the prospect of future military assistance, only the western front and Middle East offered hope for victory for the *Entente* powers. Yet even on the western front, all was not well. French troops mutinied in May, leaving the front weakened and uncertain. It is in this context that New Zealand's contributions to the third battle of Ypres and Britain's Middle East expeditions were so crucial. The battle for Passchendaele was a major military disaster and is remembered as such in Britain and beyond. The failed attack of 12 October, which cost almost one thousand New Zealand soldiers their lives, was the most deadly single-day battle in New Zealand's twentieth-century history. As Harper reminds us, it was Passchendaele that ensured 1917 was a 'catastrophic year' for New Zealanders, who would mourn these losses for generations to come.

Piet Chielens takes up New Zealand's 'in Flanders fields' story in Chap. 11. He does so by explaining the central importance of the 85 kilometres of Belgian frontline to the way in which the world considers and ascribes meaning to the First World War. For Chielens, who is director of In Flanders Fields Museum in Ieper/Ypres, the Belgian portion of the western front offers the quintessential message of the war: of tragedy, needless loss of life, and ultimate destruction. Chielens narrates the importance of the West-Flanders region to commemorative cultures and stories around the world. He identifies the year 1917, and the battle of third Ypres/Passchendaele, as central to that commemorative story. His key contribution is in assigning ongoing relevance, a global *genius loci*, to the West-Flanders region and does so by singling out key stories to make his case for seeing Flanders as a space for 'foundational identity'.

In Chap. 12, Jock Phillips also revisits New Zealand's 1917 Passchendaele experience and asks why the third battle of Ypres does not have the same meaning and relevance in New Zealand commemorative culture as Gallipoli and the ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps). Phillips charts the ways in which New Zealand newspapers reported on the battle in 1917 and on subsequent commemorations of the battle's anniversaries to explain why Passchendaele could disappear from New Zealanders' historical consciousness, only to be recovered in the 1990s. He reminds us how the ebb and flow of public memory affects people's understanding of war and its meaning. Yet he, like many of the other contributors to the collection, also reflects on the longevity of grief as a durable legacy of the war and of the year 1917.

Gorch Pieken brings the collection to a close by asking some searching questions about German war culture and its memorialisation after 1917. Pieken pays particular attention to 1917 as the year which German historians consider marks the start of the 'modern era' and of 'contemporary history'. In so doing, he charts the relationship between the highly politicised writing of German history across two world wars and the Cold War division of Germany, and the ways in which the First World War is (and was) represented in public across that time. From 'war' and 'peace' museums in the 1920s and 1930s, through the glorification of war in the Nazi era, to the erasure of the wars from museum exhibitions in the Cold War years, Germans have had a problematic relationship to the First World War and the idea of war more generally. That complex relationship has a direct bearing on how Germans consider the war today and how they participate in the culture of collective commemoration that has defined the centenary project in the years 2014 to 2017.

Altogether, this collection bears witness to what Jay Winter calls the 'climacteric' nature of 1917: this key year that witnessed and inspired so much change at home and abroad. In 1917, the cataclysm that was the First World War came to a head. Its violence echoed around the world in a complex tangle. Its calls to arms altered and inspired revolutions and reshaped the world's political, social, economic, and cultural landscapes. These reverberations remain with us today: we witness their impact in our collective mourning, in our private rituals, in our family history. We witness their impact in the ongoing wars, revolutions, and conflicts that criss-cross the Middle East, and in the shape of our international system. The First World War is not the 'ancient past'. The year 1917 helped to create our present. We are its heirs, products both of Goll's 1917 laments and his exultations.

## Notes

1. Yvan Goll, *Requiem für die Gefallenen von Europa* (Zürich: Rascher, 1917). Translation used here by PoetryHunter.com, accessed September 2017, https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/requiem-for-the-dead-of-europe/.
2. Romain Rolland, *Above the Battle* (Chicago: Open Court, 1916).
3. Andreas Kramer, 'Europa minor. Yvan and Claire Goll's Europe,' in *Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism, and the Fate of a Continent,* eds. Sacha Bru et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 126–37.
4. Louis Couperus, *Brieven van een Nutteloozen Toeschouwer* (Amsterdam: Veen, 1918).

5. Goll, *Requiem*.
6. Jean-Yves Le Naour, *1917: La Paix Impossible* (Paris: Perrin, 2011).
7. Goll, *Requiem,* 38.
8. Cf Peter Jackson, *Beyond the Balance of Power: France and the Politics of National Security in the Era of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 83.
9. Cf William Mulligan, *The Great War for Peace* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2014).
10. For a recent reflection on the importance of 1917 to the United States: *Beyond 1917: The United States and the Global Legacies of the Great War,* eds. Thomas W. Zeiler, David E. Ekbladh, and Benjamin C. Montoya (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
11. Akira Iriye, 'The Historiographic Impact of the Great War,' in *Beyond 1917*, 34.
12. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism: A Popular Outline,* Second edition (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1934).

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CHAPTER 2

# War and Anxiety in 1917

*Jay Winter*

## The Culture of War Anxiety

The overthrow of the Russian Tsar Nicholas II on 15 March 1917 transformed the war and the world. It led directly to the victory of the Central powers on the eastern front and the withdrawal of Russia from the war. The resulting fracture of the Allied powers was repaired by the arrival three weeks later of the United States, not as an ally but as an associated power of the *Entente*. The full force of American military strength, though, would take at least a year to prepare and longer to arrive on the western front. After April 1917 it was American potential that mattered, and all understood that that was a prospect for the future.[1] In sum, in 1917, the 'ides of March' did not augur well either for the Allies or for the Central powers. Part of the reason was that there were disturbing signs among all the belligerents not only of domestic political divisions, but also of dangerous social polarisation in this, the third year of the war.

After three years of industrial mobilisation, the first stage of a series of strike-waves spread through Europe. They lasted until roughly 1923. The phenomenon was both war-related in the way it reflected wartime inflation and inequality of sacrifice, and secular. Since the 1880s, moments of

J. Winter (✉)
Yale University, New Haven, CT, USA

Monash University, Melbourne, VIC, Australia



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major trade union growth were often followed by strike activity. The year 1917 presented no exception. Significantly, the intensity of the strikes in 1917 suggested that the postponement of workers' demands on wages and conditions of labour, which had occurred in all belligerent countries and some neutral ones since 1914, acted like the lid of a pressure cooker. Inflation fuelled the fire, and trade unions and other social groups, in particular women protesting shortages and outrageous food and fuel prices, took to the streets or downed tools. They did so despite understanding the desperate needs of the war machine.[2] Indeed, the March revolution in Russia was triggered by a women's protest over bread prices.

In 1917, the domestic political truce of the first half of the war came to an end. The German Social Democratic party split in early 1917. Those wanting an end to the war met at Gotha on 6 April and founded the USPD, the Independent Social Democratic party. Once again, women's groups were prominent in this radicalisation of the political left. The British Liberal party split, in part over personalities, in part over conscription and the suppression of the 1916 rising in Ireland. In France, Georges Clemenceau, who became prime minister in November, was a divisive leader. He had his Radical colleague Joseph Caillaux arrested for advocating peace negotiations: Caillaux was convicted of treason in 1918.[3]

In 1917, bloody race riots broke out in the United States in East St Louis, Illinois, and even more ominously in Houston, Texas, where 156 black soldiers mutinied. Sixteen civilians and four soldiers died during the riots. Subsequently, 19 soldiers were hanged and over 40 imprisoned for long terms.[4] In 1918, American socialist leader Eugene Debs went to prison for violating the Espionage Act by urging men to resist the draft.[5] One opponent of the war, Robert Prager, a German national and trade unionist, was lynched in Maryville, Illinois. His killers were acquitted.[6] The gloves were off in domestic as well as in global politics.

Polarisation marked the advent of the increasingly strident political right as well. When the German *Reichstag* issued its peace resolution in July 1917, disgruntled deputies and their supporters set up the *Vaterlandspartei* (Fatherland party), with the notable support of Admiral von Tirpitz and the industrialist Alfred Hugenberg.[7] By then, the German war effort was almost entirely in the hands of a military industrial group that gave the army whatever it needed, but at the price of creating massive bottlenecks and shortages on the home front. Thus, social protest intensified at the same time as economic difficulties proliferated.

For the French, the war crisis of early 1917 antedated the Chemin des Dames offensive with its subsequent mutinies. There is no evidence that social agitation on France's home front influenced these mutinous soldiers, who refused to continue the futile and bloody offensive launched by General Nivelle on 16 April.[8] Instead both the mutiny and the existence of widespread unrest on the home front reflected the exhaustion and anger felt by most French citizens. To them, as to many around the world, the war appeared to be endless. The global conflict—the war of 1914–16—had produced a massive stalemate. Neither side had a sufficient advantage to bring the warring parties to the conference table. And in 30 months of war, the two sides had lost perhaps seven million men killed in action or dead of wounds, and another 15 million wounded or prisoners of war. The giant campaigns of 1916, which we today call the battles of Verdun and the Somme, had not changed the strategic balance on the western front one iota. Fatigue and social friction were evident everywhere.

One way to configure this period is to suggest that the war be divided in two, there and then, in March 1917 with the onset of the first Russian revolution. That is the turning point, the moment that the political character of the war changed. I call it the 'climacteric' of 1917, both internationally and domestically.[9] Russia's withdrawal from and American entry into the war presented a massive change. So did the reappearance, widening, and reconfiguration of the fault lines of pre-war social conflict that had been largely frozen or kept in check since 1914. Material hardships and the toll taken by war losses and war work intensified anger on most home fronts (including in many neutral countries) over profiteering and conspicuous consumption by the privileged few.[10] In addition, with eight million men in uniform in France alone, families had been divided for too long, and doubts appeared as to whether older forms of family life were actually under threat. The year 1917 augmented popular wartime anxiety and bitterness. Although these feelings were not directly politicised before 1917, they had explosive potential, which underwrote much of the social unrest and upheaval during and after 1917.

In 1917, the old order on both sides was well aware of a new menace: the prospect of social unrest leading to revolution and the potential of civil war concerned Europe's ruling elite. The spectre of domestic conflict justifies our sense of rupture in the midst of the Great War and of the importance of the simultaneous fragmentation and recombination of alliances. After March 1917, then, the conflict sustained two war cultures. One way to configure the difference between these two war cultures is to speak of

representations of 'imperial conflict' in the 1914–16 period and of 'revolutionary conflict' in 1917–18 and after. Making this distinction clear, the new Bolshevik regime in Russia published the contents of the Tsar's Foreign Ministry, producing undeniable evidence of the imperial future the Allies had in mind. They had engaged in extensive planning for an expansion of the imperial holdings of the victors at the expense of the losers. These imperial ambitions became problematic only when the United States entered the war. President Wilson's commitment to open diplomacy and to the principle of self-determination cut right across the imperial outlook of the other belligerents.

In France, the slow but palpable development in 1917 of a new set of revolutionary representations of war was hardly surprising. After all, it was only 46 years earlier—that is, within living memory—that a communist revolution in Paris had followed a failed war. Earlier traditions of revolutionary warfare in the 1790s were also a mainstay of the history taught in French schools. In 1917, alongside older images of the determination of the French nation to fight on until victory, there appeared a new and striking set of representations of *la Grande Guerre* as an apocalypse, as the end of one world and the beginning of another. For example, the winner of the Prix Goncourt in 1916, Henri Barbusse, ended his novel *Le Feu* with a post-apocalyptic scene of soldiers on both sides emerging from the trenches with a vision of a new world to build. Barbusse had been severely wounded in combat. He was not a pacifist, but a man who spoke for a growing number of people who believed that the war had to transform the international order that had precipitated the catastrophe.

The strength of the 'imperial' war cultures of the 1914–16 period was that they were dominated by compelling representations of war as a fight to preserve old and valued ways of life.[11] The new 'revolutionary' war cultures of the 1917–18 period were marked by anger and a sense of injustice, as well as more than a touch of what Nietzsche termed *ressentiment*.[12] But they also gestured towards positive transformations, in part to ensure that something good would come out of the immense suffering. The two antipodes—imperial war and revolutionary war—were both visible in 1917 and 1918. Given the military stalemate, it is hardly surprising that we can see the incomplete but striking emergence of what we term a culture of war anxiety, different in some important ways from the war cultures of 1914–16. The central question is how deep was the divide separating representations of war in 1914–16 from those circulating in 1917–18.

To highlight the centrality of 1917 as the dividing point in the cultural history of the war, the rest of this chapter is divided into three sections. The first surveys images of protest and anger in one part of the French soldiers' press in 1917 and 1918, with reference to similarities and differences in relationship to earlier caricatures and images. Secondly, I consider a counter-factual 'what if?': namely, the calling in April 1917 by the Petrograd Soviet and the Dutch-Scandinavian committee of the International Socialist Bureau of a peace conference in Stockholm, a meeting that never took place. Finally, I assess the usefulness of speaking of two war cultures, one focused on national solidarity and mobilisation, dominant in the first half, and another, focused on injustice, anxiety, anger, and resentment, which appeared alongside it in the second half of the war. The implications of this interpretation are far-reaching. It suggests that there was no one 'war culture' in operation throughout the conflict, but that, as conditions changed, so did representations not only of the conflict but also of the societies waging it. What I term a 'new culture of war anxiety' emerged from the enormous strains of total war, and in many places remained palpable in the post-war period.

## Unease, Insecurity, Hardships, Injustice, Protest, and Anger Among Civilians and Soldiers in 1917

What did the face of revolt look like in 1917? To be sure, there were many variations, but in western Europe there are very few photographs of strikes, protests, and demonstrations. Police spies recorded them all, but only for their masters and not for public consumption. There are thousands of written reports of supposedly subversive meetings in the F7 series of police reports in the *Archives Nationales* in Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, but very few images. Instead of direct evidence, we have a robust archive of indirect evidence, through mockery and humour. In particular, soldiers' newspapers offered their readers, both civilians and soldiers, choice titbits of spleen, annoyance, anger, jealousy, and anxiety on a broad range of subjects. These wartime journals, which varied from the entirely ephemeral to the enduring—*Le Canard Enchaîné* is now 102 years old—brought soldiers' grumbles to the home front and (in a number of cases) illustrated and circulated themes of social protest shared by soldiers and civilians alike.

One political position that annoyed a number of French soldiers and civilians in 1917 was that of the '*jusqu'auboutistes*': those civilians who stood for war to the bitter end, no matter what the price. The socialist writer and journalist Anatole France, for example, lampooned such civilian bravado among men who would never see the trenches in these terms:

> What would a compromise peace mean? It would mean peace without victory, and
>
> Peace without victory is bread without yeast, stew without wine, sea bass without capers, mushrooms without garlic; love without spats, a camel without humps, night without the moon, a roof without smoke, a city without a brothel, pork without salt, a pearl without a hole, a rose without a fragrance, a Republic without waste, a leg of lamb without the bone, a cat without fur, a sausage without mustard. It isn't even a shaky peace, on crutches, legless, one cheek separated from the other, a disgusting, fetid, ignominious, obscene, hollow, haemorrhoidal, in a nutshell, a peace without victory.

He concluded in the most sarcastic of tones:

> As to peace with victory, we can wait for that happy moment. We are not in a hurry. The war is costing France only 10,000 men a day.[13]

The battle of Verdun cost 3000 men a day: increasing the bloodletting by a factor of three was but a trifle to such patriots. How simple it was for them to contemplate even higher casualty levels in 1917, without any assurances that another bloodbath would change the strategic balance between the two sides.

In the soldiers' press there was a torrent of abuse awaiting such patriots. In the early years of the war, the abuse was directed also at the shirkers, the men who dodged military service, the *embusqués*. But by 1917, a new villain took centre-stage: the war profiteer. And rightly so, for 1917 witnessed a massive surge in the inflationary spiral that began at the start of the war, a spiral which took on dizzying proportions in Germany long after the end of the conflict. The 1917 inflation surge was the worst in living history, and its source was evident: too much money was chasing too few goods, and the governments at war were prepared to pay almost any price to obtain the munitions of war they needed. There were more effective controls on prices on the Allied side, but all over the world shortages and massive profits went hand in hand.[14]

A striking source of images of profiteers and profiteering is the up-market trench journal, *La Baïonnette*. It was read by soldiers of all ranks, and had drawings by both anonymous and well-established artists. It also reviewed the caricatures of the press published in Paris, London, and occasionally even in Berlin. While glossier than other trench newspapers, it matched the more modest mimeographed soldiers' publication in style and in substance.

In March 1917, *La Baïonnette's* readers encountered two well-dressed and well-fed men, who agree that 'We need a good peace, in ten years'.[15] In the same issue, an elderly gent opines that there was no rush to end hostilities; in two or three years his profits will mushroom.[16] The subject of profiteering was presented in a different way in another image, showing a well-dressed young man who may or may not be in a naval uniform, and two well-dressed young women, under the title 'They are also profiteers'.[17] Civilians—men and women—riding on the backs of soldiers came in for some harsh scrutiny at this time.

The same mix of the old and the new appeared in caricatures of the wartime *nouveaux riches*. A moustachioed and pot-bellied man finds it easy to afford things in wartime;[18] and once more gender equality in mockery is evident in a cartoon of two elegantly-dressed young women telling a soldier that 'It pays better to make shells than to face them'.[19] The obese capitalist is a throwback to socialist and anarchist caricature of the pre-war years, but the focus on women as elegant profiteers is new. The same mix marks a page of cartoons repeating older male images of cigar-smoking capitalists, alongside newer sardonic barbs directed against women, who are attracted to everything that the *nouveaux riches* have.[20]

Civilians who complained about shortages, particularly of coal, were 'roasted' in a *La Baïonnette* image of 16 October 1917. The spectre of a *poilu* comes to bring this privileged civilian down to earth, by telling him 'If you want to know what heat is, I'll take you there'.[21] Once again, earlier motifs recurred concerning how staggeringly ignorant civilians are of the war in the trenches. A cartoon published on 6 December 1917 shows an elderly man watching war footage in a cinema, turning to soldiers in the row behind him and telling them how lucky they are to be going back to the war.[22] A more conventional confrontation in Illustration 2.1 is between a soldier who won a medal in the Champagne offensive, and a civilian who earned a fortune at the same time.

Once again, it is apparent that women are both the subject of sympathy and of satire. A war widow shown in a cartoon of December 1917 cannot


**Illustration 2.1** 'Et à l'offensive de Champagne j'ai gagné la croix.' Blood money. Source: *La Baïonnette*. 17 janvier 1917

afford sugar anymore; the merchant to whom she is complaining has his own troubles—he had to 'work extremely hard to find 50 kilos' of the stuff.[23] There were images in the trench press that treated women as loyal and hardworking, but one of the new fault lines of 1917 is that there was room in the pantheon of mockery to berate women for their frivolousness, their ignorance, or their vanity. These barbs are slightly surprising, since most soldiers' letters and songs were intensely nostalgic, playing on the idealisation of women, who would be waiting for them when the war was over.

*La Baïonnette* had a page in each issue for the best cartoons in the Parisian press, and its choice for 7 September 1917 of a cartoon from *La Rire* is intriguing. Two soldiers returning from the front, possibly at the Gare de l'Est, say to each other: 'Dammit, we are back on the Chemin des Dames' (Illustration 2.2). This double entendre on the battlefield of 1917, where the ladies of the court of Louis XIV used to promenade, carried a bitter edge to it a few months after the French army offensive led by General Nivelle turned into a bloody disaster followed by mutiny among substantial parts of the French infantry. Humour here is cut by context, that of the feminisation of the major cities following military mobilisation over three long years. One would have thought that diving into such a place would have been a delight for many soldiers, but the joke does not hold.

Why not? One explanation is the emergence of a series of images of women which are either not flattering or border on the misogynic. What


**Illustration 2.2** 'Ah! Zut! Encore le chemin des Dames.' After the failed battle, another confrontation, in the streets of Paris. Women are an obsession and a subject of ambivalence. Source: *La Baïonnette*. 27 septembre 1917. Reproduced from *Le Rire*

is wrong with women? Frivolousness is one charge; they have no time for flirting with all the charitable work they do alleges one cartoon.[24] Others lampoon women's privileged position at home, far from the front, alongside their vanity, selfishness, and total lack of understanding of what their men in uniform are going through.[25]

The bill of indictment against women is never fixed; moments of anxiety are dominated by uncertainty about the future, and 1917 is one of them. Patriarchy is not at all secure when women move into trades and earn salaries they had never had before. Would they go back to the home, worried one amateur poet in *La Baïonnette* on 15 November 1917? If extra-domestic labour is freedom for them, why should they return to the kitchen and the *pot-au-feu*?[26] Why should the old ways continue at all, worries one cartoonist, showing a be-trousered woman asking a mother for the hand of her son, who was in addition, her godson.[27]

What makes these images particularly revealing is the extent to which they reflect worries about the stability of the very social order for which the soldiers were fighting. There were profiteers before the war, but what seemed worse was the hints of feminine betrayal not only of their men but of hearth and home as well. Some images express mostly hidden doubts about sexual fidelity or even the life after death of war widows. One titbit sounds conventional and time-worn: 'My wife can't cheat on me', says an older soldier to a man going home on leave, 'because I am not married'.[28] Another is darker and more directly war-

related. Entitled 'Merry Widows', the cartoon has the first few bars of the 'Blue Danube Waltz' on the upper right of the image.[29] The orchestra is empty, and the tables in this café are full of war widows, waiting for what? Triggered perhaps by the death of Emperor Franz Josef, this image suggests something much closer to home. The war had gone on too long; too many husbands have died.

Another area of superficial jesting at a time of uncertainty about gender roles and the freedom of women concerned the presence in France of black soldiers. The subject was not at all new, but war-time artists were not shy about caricaturing women in this context. In one, a white nurse holding a thermometer tells a doctor that she can't take this black soldier's temperature, because she is afraid of the dark.[30] This January 1917 jest may be only light-weight, but in another, depicting a black soldier handing flowers to a shocked and well-dressed woman, the black-face humour has him saying: 'And I dreamt of a blonde'?[31] The joke pales when we think of what would happen next.

Much of this comic material came out of the French custom of soldiers' writing to women pen-pals—*marraines de guerre*—many of whom were complete strangers. 'Adopting a soldier' in an epistolary sense was a way of supporting morale, though it inevitably provided comic material for those imagining what would happen when the two actually met. And what would happen if the soldier was black? Outcomes of such epistolary relationships were also treated by cartoonists. A story is told by the look on the face of a young girl being embraced by a black soldier, probably a *Tirailleur Sénégalais*,[32] who is being welcomed back from service. Another visual encounter concerned 'pen pals' on either side of a door who are about to get a shock when they see their correspondent is of another race.[33] The implied suggestion lingers: what happens when the door opens? Of course, that is what comedy is all about. All I want to do here is to point to the message between the lines. White women and black men were brought together by war; there is no reason why that should be a problem, unless the men reading these soldiers' newspapers were worried about their women or their chances of finding one on returning home.

These journals also included straightforward paeans of praise to women workers. One cartoon showed a woman factory worker with the caption: 'They are not all at Biarritz or Deauville',[34] fashionable coastal resorts. And yet the 'not all' reinforced the underlying point that there were

privileged women acting as if the hardships and suffering at the front did not exist. Even less ambiguous is the depiction of a woman who says she would prefer to be at the front, using the weapons she is building, and her man to be making them in a factory.[35] That would set her mind to rest. Here is an honourable woman; but not all women, the humour in these 1917 publications suggested, were her equal.

In sum, by mid-1917, though neither side seemed to have the upper hand in the war, its cost—physical, emotional, economic, social—had gone far beyond anyone's imagining. And at this very moment, fault lines in all combatant nations were appearing. They described older social divisions rendered even more intolerable than in the past by the bloodbath of the war. The rich were getting richer, and their profits were drawn from having supplied the weapons of war. This is old stuff, but in the context of the rebirth of labour militancy in 1917 after three years of labour peace, and furthermore in light of the transformation of a woman's bread strike into the overthrow of the Tsar in Russia, perhaps something new and frightening beckoned. Was the old order secure even in France?

This sense that the pre-war world had gone up in smoke and fire was what added anxiety to the notion visible in many of these images that half of the population—the female population—was privileged. They did not have to fight. They did not need to fear getting ripped apart by shrapnel or riddled by bullets. They tended to think about fripperies: some were what Madonna in our time called 'material girls'; others were silly or vacuous. And yet, women were what many men in uniform thought about all the time. What if their women did not want to go home to provide all the domestic services for their men? What if they had found someone else, even someone else of colour?

All wars produce some of these anxieties, but the Great War produced them all at once, and in 1917, they took on new force in large part because the populations at the front and in the rear were palpably exhausted. Caricatures and cartoons tell us less about high politics than about popular anxieties. These journals vanish unless they sell; and they only sell if they speak the language of their audience, and pose the questions they ask themselves. And by mid-1917, the two questions that prompted the greatest degree of anxiety were these: Would the war ever end? And would the world we know, the domestic world for which we are fighting, topple over or collapse before the fighting comes to an end?

## The Peace Conference that Never Was

In April 1917, *La Baïonnette* brought its readers the good news that the United States was in the war, but it did so with a caveat. In Illustration 2.3 we see Uncle Sam carving a club, but his back is to a bloody German, to whom he hurls a warning: 'Not yet, but soon'. While American reinforcements were on the way, and in massive numbers, the war was still taking its toll on the Allies.

One measure of that strain was the effort, led by the Petrograd Soviet and the Dutch-Scandinavian committee of the Socialist International Bureau, to hold an international congress of all combatant socialist parties in neutral Stockholm. In the swirling tides of Russian politics, this initiative was a matter of desperation. The new provisional government shared sovereignty with the Petrograd Soviet. Indeed, each occupied one wing of the Tauride Palace in the city. The Provisional government believed in the need to go on with the war, and expel German troops from Russian soil. The Allies supported them, but also asked them to launch a military offensive in early July. That move was a disaster. After early successes, the Russian army melted away, and with it, vanished any chance that Russia could stay in the war.[36]

The Allies refused to accept the new Russian reality, and sent Labour leaders to Petrograd to persuade Russia to carry on with the war. Both Albert Thomas, Minister of Munitions in France, and Arthur Henderson,


**Illustration 2.3** 'Pas encore, mais bientôt.' The United States is on the way. Source: *La Baïonnette*. 23 août 1917. Reproduced from *Life*, 4 August 1917

Cabinet member and secretary of the British Labour party, tried their best, but got nowhere. Both men saw how chaotic the Russian political world was, but neither was prepared to defy his respective government's rock-solid opposition to a conference of socialist parties, including German and Austrian socialists.

*La Baïonnette* did not deal with this issue directly, but instead reprinted two caricatures, both anti-Stockholm in character. The first was British, and showed a bearded delegate being told by a British seaman that if he wanted to go to Stockholm, he'd better start swimming. (Illustration 2.4) The German cartoon, wryly noted that it was a pity that while there was much to drink in Stockholm, no one showed up for the peace conference.[37] These cartoons first appeared in August and September 1917, when the fate of the Stockholm project was decided.

It is important to recognise how little anyone knew of circumstances in Russia in the summer of 1917. Diplomats and visiting dignitaries like Thomas and Henderson were bewildered. None of them had any idea of who or what were the Bolsheviks, or any of the other players in the new political constellation of revolutionary Russia. The correspondent of *The Times* (London) in St Petersburg, Robert Wilton, described Leon Trotsky in these colourful terms: He was, Wilton said, 'a four-square son-of-a-bitch, but the greatest Jew since Jesus Christ'.[38] Whether this was a compliment or not, I leave to you to decide.


**Illustration 2.4** 'LE PACIFISTE.—Je desire aller à Stockholm.' Anti Stockholm Conference. Source: *La Baïonnette*. 23 août 1917. Reproduced from *Bystander* (London)

And yet, by scuppering the Stockholm idea, those in power in the Allied camp, and those advising them, sealed the fate of the first Russian revolution. The July offensive showed unmistakably that the Russian army had voted with its feet against the war. They melted away and went home to claim land which they believed was theirs, and no longer in the pocket of the landowning and aristocratic classes. Recent converts to the sanctity of private property, the Bolsheviks coined their winning phrase: 'Bread, peace, and land', to indicate in what direction Russia should go. And without a negotiated settlement enabling the Provisional government to hold on to power, all the Bolsheviks had to do was to wait until, as Lenin felicitously put it, power dropped into their hands, like an over-ripe fruit from a tree. Thus the Bolshevik revolution was writ into the logic of the failure of the Stockholm idea.

Let us embark on a counter-factual mind experiment for a moment. Imagine a peace conference in Stockholm fuelling an attempt by the United States, still *au dessus de la mêlée*, to convene an international conference in November 1917, with the Provisional government in Russia at the table. Imagine a compromise outcome: total German withdrawal from the western front, and compensation for damage caused by their presence, matched by a partial German and Austrian withdrawal from the eastern front, with independence for Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Ukraine thrown in. Of course, this would not please everybody, but we all know what the alternative was: renewal of the war for another twelve months, the intensification of fighting, the toppling of the moderate regime in Russia, the abdication of the Kaiser, and the beginning of the civil war in Russia.

Can I be forgiven for finding some merit in what could have happened, but did not? Was the rejection of the Stockholm idea not 'a setting for a tragedy'?[39] Can we not entertain for a few moments the pleasant reverie that Leon Trotsky went back to being a two-bit extra in the Bronx, and Adolf Hitler resumed his miserable painting career in Munich? More importantly, can I draw attention to the deaths of several million men in the fighting that ensued after November 1917, not to mention the fighting in eastern Europe and the Middle East thereafter, including Allied intervention in Bolshevik Russia?

Could Woodrow Wilson, chairing a successful peace conference in 1917 actually have brought the United States into a real League of Nations, with Russia and America as full members, helping to prevent crises like that of 1914 from exploding into war?[40] Could the partnership

of a democratic Russia and a democratic America have changed the course of world history? We will never know, because at a time when even humorous soldiers' newspapers were publishing images disclosing severe social strains and tensions between soldiers and civilians, winning the war mattered more than winning the peace. A compromise peace could have slowed or even eliminated the polarisation of both left and right, which helped to undermine the Treaty of Paris of 1919. Imagining another way is indeed a reverie, but it is not a foolish matter. It helps show that under the very difficult circumstances of 1917, when both sides' war efforts were fraying, their leaders had choices, choices that could have been different, and could have had very different consequences.

To repeat, my view is that their choice for more war and not for peace in 1917 was over-determined, but it was not the only choice they could have made. Perhaps the decisive fact was the sheer weight of casualties already suffered. Could seven million men have perished only for a compromise peace? Anatole France's bellicose interlocutor said no. So did governments on both sides. What did the deaths of another three million men—including 100,000 Americans in uniform in 1918—accomplish?

Would the German leadership ever have considered the peace option? Perhaps not, but if so, such an indifference to the severe hardship suffered by the domestic population in 1917–18 was a mistake that Hitler never made in the Second World War. He displaced misery onto the shoulders of *Untermenschen*, and left Aryan families with the basic necessities of life virtually throughout the war. It was not only the hunger winter of 1916–17 which damaged the German war effort, but the shortages and inflation of the summer of 1917 which sent mortality rates up and productivity down. Germany's soldiers at the front were well aware of these disturbing developments. They were fighting for their families as much as any soldier on the Allied side. And what was happening in Berlin and Leipzig was happening even more alarmingly in Vienna and Prague.

Counter-factual history is only useful to highlight possibilities and alternatives.[41] But the choices were real and were made by men with profound limitations. Why should we not be prepared to examine their myopia in 1917 in the same spirit as Christopher Clark examined it in *The Sleepwalkers* of 1914.[42] These were the men who had not the imagination to look in the face of the destructive power they unleashed in 1914, already made visible by the popular press two years before in the Balkan wars. The same men who were blind at the outbreak of war in 1914 were blind to its turning point three years later. Perhaps Woodrow

Wilson can be spared that charge, since he had no responsibility for launching the war. But he had responsibility for going to war in 1917 and for the consequences of that decision, including his responsibility for creating a lasting peace.

Once more, I get the sense of the Great War as a tragedy unfolding without anyone being able to do otherwise than watch it happen.[43] When a camouflage artist in a late 1917 cartoon in *La Baïonnette* is asked by his mates what he was decorating, he responded 'A setting for a tragedy'.[44] He was right, and we are still living in its shadows.

The tragic dimension of the Great War was evident well before 1917. But until now, historians of 1917 have emphasised the theme of remobilisation, as marking the renewal of the commitment of home populations to the even greater sacrifices required of them three years after the outbreak of the war. Instead, it makes sense to sketch a more complicated story, and to suggest that after three years of war, there was a shift away from images of mobilisation of whole societies to images of social fissures within them. What I term the culture of war anxiety highlighted a sense of anger about injustice and privilege, which cut right across the *union sacrée* of the first part of the conflict. My claim is that the emergence of this competing war culture, one of resentment rather than of rallying around the flag, constituted a significant development in the cultural history of the Great War.

The culture of war anxiety was also evident long after the end of the conflict. On the levels of family life, deep anxiety was inevitable in the case of widows, orphans, and those caring for the millions of men wounded in the war. Divorce rates in many parts of Europe reached levels much higher than in pre-war years.[45] Would the victors realise the peace for which they had paid so high a price? Would the vanquished ever be able to escape from the disaster of the war and of the peace following it? Here too, the concept of a different war culture, one emerging in the second half of the conflict, and enduring after the armistice, provides a way of avoiding the binaries that have dominated the literature in the field so far. Instead of insisting on black and white choices—patriotism versus pacifism, consent versus coercion, mobilisation versus mutiny—we should recognise that the predominant colour of wartime was grey. Contradictory messages existed in vigorous incompatibility alongside each other. The Great War was simply too big to be encompassed by one cultural code or by one war culture.

In 1917 and after, the culture of war anxiety did not so much displace the culture of war mobilisation as to challenge and destabilise it. Most contemporaries still yearned for victory, but not at any price. This was the most disturbing message of the Bolshevik revolution, one which haunted all combatants in the last year of the war.

Focusing on the emergence of a culture of war anxiety in 1917 also helps us go beyond another binary division: that of cultural mobilisation during the war and cultural demobilisation thereafter. To be sure, there was a slow and painful disengagement of populations, social groups, and governments from wartime hatreds, but the lethal mixture of civil war and social revolution marked winners like Italy as much as it did losers like Germany, Austria, and Russia. The early post-war anti-imperial violence in Egypt, India, Korea, and China touched on the global interests of Britain, France, and Japan in direct and palpable ways. While (with the exception of Russia, Ireland, Poland, and Turkey), the culture of war mobilisation ended when the troops came home in 1919, the culture of war anxiety mutated into what I term a culture of post-war anxiety, accompanying various forms of social and racial conflict which flowed directly from the war itself. America's Red Scare and paroxysms of racial violence form part of the same tapestry of violence and exclusion woven both during and after the war.

It makes sense to see the culture of war anxiety and the culture of post-war anxiety as a continuum. To do so helps us to go beyond purely legalistic definitions as to what constitutes the end date of the war. The conventional dates arising from the peace treaties have only a surface utility. There had been too much bloodshed and too much bitterness to enable societies to close the door on the hatreds, antagonisms, and anxieties of wartime. These powerful forces had escaped from Pandora's box in 1914, and helped to make wartime bleed into peacetime.

For these reasons, I urge a reconsideration of the middle years of the war, those months in 1917 when revolution and social conflict returned to the centre of the European stage, and when all societies confronted significant social divisions within them. At that time new representations of war shot through with anxiety emerged alongside older representations of heroic solidarity. Those anxieties did not evaporate in 1918: they took on new and at times even more violent forms, fitting the context of civil war and revolution. In the decade of the Great War representations were not immutable: they changed over time as the war itself changed. And they gave to the conflict and to its aftermath a bitter taste it has never lost.

## Notes

1. Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War, America and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916–1931* (New York: Viking, 2014).
2. Charles Tilly, *Strikes, Wars and Revolutions in an International Perspective* (Cambridge and Paris: Cambridge University Press and Éditions de la MSH, 1989); Leopold Haimson and Giulio Sapelli, eds, *Strikes, Social Conflict and the First World War. An International Perspective* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1992).
3. Manuel Gomez-Brufal, *Joseph Caillaux: Traître ou visionnaire* (Paris: Dualpha Éditions, 2014).
4. Harper Barnes, *Never Been a Time: The 1917 Race Riot That Sparked the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Walker & Company, 2008).
5. Ernest Freeberg, *Democracy's Prisoner: Eugene V. Debs, the Great War and the Right to Dissent* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008).
6. E.A. Schwartz, "The Lynching of Robert Prager, the United Mine Workers, and the Problems of Patriotism in 1918," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 95, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 414–37.
7. Richard Bessel, "Mobilization and Demobilization in Germany, 1916–1919", in *State, Society and Mobilization during the First World War*, ed. John Horne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 50–67.
8. André Loez and Nicolas Mariot, eds, *Obéir/Désobéir. Les mutineries de 1917 en perspective* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008).
9. On the use of the term 'climacteric' in economic history, see Donald N. McCloskey, "The British Iron and Steel Industry, 1870–1914: A Study of the Climacteric in Productivity", *Journal of Economic History* 29, no. 1, The Tasks of Economic History (March 1969): 173–75.
10. Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, eds, *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2 vols, 1997 and 2007).
11. Stéphane Audoin Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *1914–1918 Retrouver la guerre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000).
12. Marc Ferro, *Ressentiment dans l'histoire: Comprendre notre temps* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2007).
13. As cited in Fabrice Pliskin, '"Paix sans victoire, c'est chameau sans bosses,'" *Nouvel Observateur*, 22 December 2016–4 January 2017, 104–105. The translation is mine.
14. J.M. Winter, introduction, Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (eds), *Capital Cities at War. Paris London Berlin 1914–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
15. 'Ceux qui tiennent…', *La Baïonnette*, March 30, 1917, 196.
16. 'Pas pressé', *La Baïonnette*, March 30, 1917, 7.

17. 'Il y a aussi les profiteuses', *La Baïonnette*, March 30, 1916, 13.
18. 'Tout cela me semblait si cher… avant la guerre', *La Baïonnette*, January 17, 1917, front cover.
19. 'Nouvelles riches', *La Baïonnette*, January 17, 1917, 37.
20. *La Baïonnette*, July 1, 1917, 37.
21. 'Tu te plains de manquer de charbon', *La Baïonnette*, October 16, 1917, 659.
22. 'Vous au avec de la chance…', *La Baïonnette*, December 6, 1917, 773.
23. 'Le sucre lui était pourtant défendu', *La Baïonnette*, December 20, 1917, 811.
24. 'La Pouponnière!', *La Baïonnette,* February 2, 1918, 92.
25. *La Baïonnette*, December 20, 1917, 801; February 2, 1918, 92.
26. Illustrated poem, *La Baïonnette*, November 5, 1917, 12. Verses III and IV include the following lines:

    III
    Women see in work their liberty,
    And feeling free, each will flee the family home with pride.
    IV
    We ask with a degree of anxiety,
    If, when the soldiers come home, domestic life will resume its old rhythms
    Will women, with a full heart, abandon munitions work for the vulgar *pot au feu*?

27. 'Madame, j'ai l'honneur de vous demander la main de mon filleul, votre fils', *La Baïonnette*, February 7, 1918, 13.
28. 'Mais non, mon ami, ma femme ne me trompe pas, moi…', *La Baïonnette,* March 7, 1918, 13.
29. 'Les veuves joyeuse', *La Baïonnette*, May 1, 1917, 14.
30. 'Le tirailleur', *La Baïonnette*, January 3, 1917, 141.
31. 'En permission', *La Baïonnette*, August 3, 1917, 149.
32. 'Mohammed trouve sa zoulie marraine', La *Baïonnette*, March 7, 1918, 17.
33. 'Par annonce', *La Baïonnette*, January 22, 1917, 13.
34. 'Elles ne sont pas toutes à Biarritz ou à Deauville', *La Baïonnette*, October 4, 1917, 629–30.
35. 'J'aimerais mieux que ce soit mois qui les envoie et lui qui les fasse; je serais plus tranquille', *La Baïonnette*, October 4, 1917, 628.
36. Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
37. 'L' Hotel de la Paix, Stockholm', *La Baïonnette*, September 6, 1917, 7. Reproduced from a Munich weekly, the *Lustiger Blätter.*

38. Jay Winter, *Socialism and the Challenge of War: Ideas and Politics in Britain 1912–1918* (London: Macmillan, 2nd ed., 2002), chap. 7.
39. 'Des décors pour une tragédie…', *La Baïonnette*, December 23, 1917, 540.
40. Adam Tooze argues along these lines in *The Deluge*, chap. 3.
41. On counter-factuals, see: Richard Evans, *Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2013); Niall Ferguson (ed.), *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); Geoffrey Hawthorn, *Plausible Worlds: Possibility and Understanding in History and the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
42. Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe went to War in 1914* (New York: Harper, 2014).
43. This is the essence of David Stevenson's excellent survey of 1917, entitled *Old Order Ending, New Worlds Emerging: Strategy and Statecraft in 1917* (London: Macmillan, 2017).
44. 'Des décors pour une tragédie…', *La Baïonnette*, December 23, 1917, 540.
45. Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British people* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2nd ed., 2000), chap. 8.

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CHAPTER 3

# American Entry into the First World War as an Historiographical Problem

*Michael S. Neiberg*

## Historical Methodology and the Study of the First World War

About two years ago, my high school-aged daughter came home with a history worksheet she had to complete for class. It asked which of the four listed events caused the entry of the United States into the First World War. My daughter was suitably pleased that her class was studying the topic her father also studied (so was I), and she wanted to know what I thought of her assignment. She then asked which of the four answers I considered correct. I replied, perhaps unwisely, that none of them was right, but that she should circle answer 'C' because that was the answer her teacher was looking for. 'C' was the sinking of the *Lusitania*, an event that occurred almost two years before American entry into the war and thus, as I tried to explain to my confused daughter, not a proximate cause of that event. I might also have explained to her that a survey done in 1915 of

The views expressed herein are those of the author alone, not those of the Department of Defense, the United States Government, or any portion thereof.

M. S. Neiberg (✉)
Department of National Security and Strategy, United States Army War College, Carlisle, PA, USA



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1000 American newspapers found just six in favour of going to war.[1] Nor were the members of the United States Congress any more anxious to press for war that year. The *Lusitania* sinking was important, as I will show in this chapter, but not as a cause of American entry into the war.

The fault for Americans' amnesia about the First World War lies not with the teachers, but with a major gap in our historical understanding of the topic. Surprisingly few scholars have wrestled in any detail with the reasons for the country's entry into the war in 1917. As a topic for historical analysis, it has generally failed to generate the heated debates that accompany the scholarship on the British, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and, of course, German involvement in the conflict. A scholarly study of American entry published in 2011 claimed to be a 'new' history of the subject, but it rehashed the same documents, the same debates, and the same people as the scholarship had for several decades.[2]

On one level, this lacuna is entirely understandable. There is no conceivable chain of historical events that caused the war in 1914 that one could trace back to the United States. Indeed, President Woodrow Wilson tried to do everything in his power to keep his country out of the war despite his recognition in 1916 that 'any little German lieutenant can put us into the war at any time by some calculated outrage'.[3] Even in his own time, Wilson took much more criticism for swallowing repeated German insults to American honour and interests than he did for finally making the fateful decision to take the nation into war in 1917.

American scholars have argued about the heavy-handed nature of the Wilson administration in curtailing civil liberties during wartime and about Wilson's motives for his decision to go to war in 1917. But no one sees that decision as predetermined in 1914, 1915, or even 1916.[4] Nor do scholars see the actions of the United States in the years before the war as having contributed to its outbreak. Consequently, there is no debate among American scholars remotely similar to the one Fritz Fischer set off in the 1960s when he argued that the war resulted from the long-standing global and imperialist aims of the German military and political elite.[5] Fischer inspired other scholars to look for blame across the continent's capital cities, challenging an older literature that saw Europe as having, in British Prime Minister David Lloyd George's recollections, gone to war almost by accident. In his 1933 memoirs, Lloyd George wrote that

> The nations slithered over the brink into the boiling cauldron of war without any trace of apprehension or dismay. … The nations backed their machines over the precipice … not one of them wanted war.[6]

Despite a recent reprise of sorts from Christopher Clark, Lloyd George's notion of an accidental 'slithering' to war has not stood the test of historical scrutiny.[7] In recent years, we have seen books by Geoffrey Wawro placing the blame on Austria-Hungary[8]; by Sean McMeekin, placing the blame on Russia[9]; and, most famously but least logically, by Niall Ferguson, placing the blame on the United Kingdom.[10] France has so far largely escaped such charges of direct blame, although some scholars accuse the French government of egging on their Russian allies a bit too eagerly.[11] This debate has a tendency to search for 'bad guys' and 'good guys' in a complex world, although it has also provided us with in-depth analyses of the cross-continental motivations for statesmen to turn a small diplomatic crisis in the Balkans into a world war.[12]

Because the United States was both too isolationist to care and too weak to influence European events in any case, Americans appear in the debates about culpability in 1914 only on the extreme margins, where they belong. Thus, and not for the last time in studying this war, do we see that the experience of the European great powers is at best a limited guide to an understanding of the role of the United States. Historians have followed this lead, naturally enough, almost always beginning their histories of the United States in the war in 1917.

As a result, the scholarship oversimplifies the complex period of American neutrality, assuming that neutrality is a bimodal characteristic: a nation is either neutral or belligerent. But, as almost everyone on both sides of the Atlantic then recognised, America's economic power and the pro-Allied sympathies of most of the American people turned the United States into an unusual kind of neutral. Some French leaders referred to the United States as 'our great neutral ally'.[13] From the other side of the lines, the Germans saw the United States as a member of the Entente in all but name. Their view of the United States as the Allies' principal banker and arms supplier (a much more powerful role than any military role the United States could have played between 1914 and 1917)[14] led the German government to oversee a massive sabotage campaign in North America, aimed largely at American industry and the rail links between the United States and Canada. The American economy benefited tremendously from the long peaceful border with Canada, then, of course, a part of the British empire and therefore an active enemy of Germany. For that reason, German saboteurs targeted the Welland Canal in Ontario (a key artery for trade into the American side of the Great Lakes), the rail links between Vancouver and the state of Washington, and the Vanceboro rail

bridge that linked the American state of Maine to the Canadian province of New Brunswick.[15]

To the extent that they have wrestled with the problem of American neutrality and entry into the war, scholars have kept the focus on the mercurial, controversial, and sometimes charismatic President Woodrow Wilson. Wilson famously told a friend upon taking office in 1913 that 'it would be an irony of fate if my administration had to deal chiefly with foreign affairs'.[16] That he took the United States into the deadliest of wars only four years later provides scholars and teachers with a nice narrative arc that places the president at the centre of the historical debates. Extensive work done by Wilson biographers Arthur Link, who edited his voluminous papers, and John Milton Cooper have made Wilson the central figure in the American war story.[17] Indeed, he has all of the characteristics of a great classical hero: pathos, tragedy, and failure.

As American historians generally shifted their focus from biography to social history starting in the 1960s, the topic of American entry into the First World War largely remained ignored. Myths, half-truths, and convenient fictions from the 1930s and 1960s have therefore remained unchallenged and annoyingly persistent. They include the idea that the United States became a belligerent in order to protect the profits of American millionaires like the financier J. P. Morgan, who loaned enormous sums to the British and French.

Such approaches to the origins of American involvement in the war mislead and obfuscate. No evidence exists that Wilson declared war in order to guarantee J. P. Morgan his profits. Wilson and his Democratic party, in fact, had terrible relations with the barons of Wall Street. Wilson's close advisor Edward House even moved uptown in order to get as far away from the financial district in downtown New York City as he could. Wilson's secretary of state (until mid-1915) was the famous populist William Jennings Bryan, the same man who repeatedly criticised the concentration of wealth and had famously yelled from the Democratic convention floor in 1896, 'You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold'.[18] Accusations of a billionaire plot to drag the United States into war belong more appropriately to the short stories of Jazz Age writers like F. Scott Fitzgerald or the American tradition of seeking conspiracies as explanations for large historical events.[19]

More importantly, looking at the issue from a top-down perspective either makes Americans passive in their own fates or divides them into binary categories of 'pro-war' supporters or 'anti-war' victims. Scholars

have devoted a great deal of attention to the latter, telling the stories of pacifists, persecuted German-Americans, and socialists. It is important to bring these stories to light, but too deep a focus on them distorts by giving the impression that by 1917 they were either numerous or influential.[20] As Andrew Preston and others have shown, by 1917, the pacifist movement had 'dwindled down to a small cast of hard-core activists who were willing to serve prison time for their beliefs'.[21] That they were in a tiny minority is, of course, no justification for leaving them out of the history of Americans' relationship to the war, but it does raise important questions about how much historians should assume about the minority group's influence.[22] However much we may admire their principled stand from a century of hindsight, we cannot give the impression that the 'anti-war' group was as numerous or as influential as those 'pro-war' Americans, many of whom supported American entry reluctantly. Historians must always guard against uncritically presenting a false equivalency.

I first began thinking about the importance of American entry into the war as I was finishing my *Dance of the Furies: Europe and the Outbreak of World War I*.[23] In that book, I looked at Europe in the fateful year of 1914 from the bottom up. The views and actions of diplomats, military leaders, and statesmen appeared far less often in the book than those of 'ordinary' Europeans who tried to make sense of an event that had hit most of them like a thunderbolt out of a clear blue sky. When looking at the outbreak of war in this way, an entirely different war appears. Instead of Europe being a tinderbox of nationalism and chauvinism awaiting a spark like the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, we see a continent of people who believed that Europe was in as peaceful and hopeful a period of international relations as any it had seen in decades. Rather than a people anxious to go to war in order to avenge the loss of a province centuries earlier or to aggrandise their own ethnic group at the expense of an ancient rival, we see people who accepted war only as a last resort to defend themselves against what they believed, often with good reason, to be an unprovoked invasion by an aggressor.

Looked at from this perspective, the war, its outbreak, its prosecution, and its conclusion come into sharper focus. As the wholly defensive logic of August 1914 gave way to allegations of more sinister motivations for war, people became disillusioned, both with the reasons for war and with the leaders who had so badly bungled the July crisis in the first place. By war's end, none of the great powers' war aims could explain to the people who fought the war what their sacrifices had

meant. This process of disillusion is evident from the war's opening months. Seeing the war through the lens of citizens in their everyday lives also makes it easier to explain the rise of popular anger over the failure of peacemaking and of alternative forms of governance (mostly fascism and communism) to fill in the resulting political void. It also helps to explain the complete collapse of the Austro-Hungarian, German, Ottoman, and Russian empires, all regimes whose 1914 logic looked bungling at best and deceitful at worst by 1917.

As I discovered with *Furies*, the problem in writing a new history of 1914 was almost entirely methodological. The sources for studying 1914 from the ground up were there all along, but few scholars had bothered to seek them out, preferring instead to keep the focus on the same set of about a dozen men (and they were all men) who made the key decisions in that year. But letters, diaries, memoirs, and other archival materials were everywhere.[24] The problem was not a dearth of material, but a lack of interest in the material sitting under the noses of scholars who did not consider that the views of those outside the circles of power mattered much.

The start of the First World War, so critical a topic to contemporary history, did not initially receive much attention from social historians, whose milieu is exactly in the types of sources I used in *Dance of the Furies*. When social historians did explore the war, they naturally focused on themes near and dear to their craft like class, gender, and ethnicity. In doing so, they brought to light an enormous and incredibly valuable set of works that expand our most basic understandings of this period and of the importance of warfare itself. But, for the most part, these scholars did not extend their reach into the causes of warfare, a topic that seemed to belong to an older generation of elite history. The near extinction of traditional diplomatic history exacerbated the problem, not only in reducing the number of scholars who might have had training in giving old sources a new read, but also in limiting the opportunities for diplomatic and social historians to exchange ideas and share common interests.

Nor had we as a community of scholars gone far beyond national history. The 'blame books' mentioned above all have a single national focus. There was also a series of short books explicitly dedicated to studying each of the major European nations and the origins of the First World War.[25] These national histories delved deep and wide; many remain classics of their type. But national history only carries us so far. It can also mislead. If it is true that French citizens went to war in French uniforms and (usually)

identified themselves as French, it is also true that they did not cease being Catholic, working class, socialist, or Breton at the same time. I was thus deeply influenced by the so-called 'transnational turn' in history, which seeks to break down an exclusive focus on nation-states as categories of analysis.[26] By seeing the people of Europe in all of the complex and multi-varied ways in which they saw themselves, a grainy black-and-white picture starts to develop colour and definition. We thus see common trade union, rural, and religious views of the war emerge, even across the borders of the nation-states that found themselves at war in 1914.

## American Responses, 1914–1917

American responses to the sudden outbreak of war in Europe went through three major phases. In the first phase, from the war's outbreak to the *Lusitania* sinking in May 1915, Americans (with some exceptions from groups mentioned below) sympathised with the Allies, but insisted on maintaining their own neutrality. The top-down models suggest that the American people followed their president's call on 4 August 1914 to 'be neutral in fact as well as in name'.[27] Wilson knew, however, that the vast majority of his fellow Americans sided with the British and French, who they saw as defending democracy against the unwarranted and unprovoked attack of Imperial Germany. He also knew that the American people shared his specific definition of neutrality, which insisted on the rights of Americans to trade with whomever they wished whenever they wished, a definition of neutrality that led to a massive increase in American per capita income.

Many American pacifists and socialists had hoped for a definition of neutrality that banned Americans from dealing in arms trades at all, so that the nation would not enrich itself through the suffering of Europe. German agents made the same point in newspaper articles and speeches nationwide, although their motives were, clearly, more self-interested. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan led this movement, but economic and social factors worked against him. In the first place, the war, and trade with Britain and France specifically, had pulled the United States out of recession and created a positive trade balance with Europe. Americans made money from selling all manner of industrial and agricultural goods to the Allies. They also made money by manufacturing products at home (everything from bicycles to eyeglasses to bibles) that they had bought from Europeans before 1914. Americans may have felt a

certain moral uneasiness with these new profits, but they managed to live with it nevertheless, partly by assuaging their guilt with charitable contributions. Julia Irwin estimates that one in three Americans gave to the Red Cross.[28] Hundreds of thousands more gave to causes designed to provide direct help to the French, Belgians, Serbians, and Poles.

American trade went disproportionately to the British, both because Americans favoured the British cause and because of the circumstances of the international trade network. Before the war, Americans depended on British shipping, insurance, and credit. Without a large trade infrastructure of their own, the Americans had had to play by Britain's rules.[29] The war reversed the trade imbalance and with it the power in the trade system. Americans were able from 1914 to 1915 to force the Allies into trade terms that increasingly benefited American banking, agriculture, and industry. With these new profits, Americans could invest in their own shipping, credit, and insurance capabilities, meaning that they would emerge from the war in a much stronger financial position.[30] As long as the war lasted, however, American prosperity depended on a partnership with the British.

The circumstances of the war reinforced these patterns. The British controlled the surfaces of the Atlantic Ocean, allowing the Royal Navy to stop American shipping when it wished, remove contraband items, and blacklist errant manufacturers. The system raised American ire, especially in the South because of British seizure of cotton headed to Germany, but, as even Wilson recognised, the blockade rarely did more than inconvenience people. The British sometimes even paid for the goods they seized. In contrast, the Germans waged their economic warfare by military means: launching submarine attacks, which only had the option of sinking a ship or letting it pass. Such drastic actions had the unsurprising result of invoking widespread American anger, exemplified by the sinking of the *Lusitania*, which went down with 1200 civilians aboard in 1915. Ultimately however, if an American company wanted to do business without risking overseas trade, it could always work through a Canadian intermediary. The bottom line was that American wallets and hearts both pointed toward the Allies.

During this first phase, Americans were careful to differentiate between the German people and the German government. Even many German-Americans tended to argue that since unification in the 1870s, the Prussian elite, whom one American minister called 'worshippers of Moloch', had eclipsed the peaceful, humane Germany of Beethoven, Goethe, and

Schiller. Before the war, Americans had spoken of their growing ambivalence toward a nation that could simultaneously produce the world's best universities, medicine, and social welfare programmes on the one hand, and runaway militarism on the other. The German government's willingness to push a minor diplomatic crisis in the Balkans into a world war that necessitated the brutal invasion of Belgium and France seemed to prove the point that the militarists had taken control of Germany. From August 1914 on, German actions seemed to show Americans an intent to extend this control over all of Europe.

That most Americans were pro-Entente and anti-German in their sympathies is quite clear from the thousands of Americans who volunteered to serve with the French and British as nurses, aid workers, and even soldiers.[31] Wilson's call for neutrality did not stop them from putting their careers and their lives on the line for the cause they believed was right. The American people also raised enormous sums of money through charitable giving for war relief. Almost all of this money went to the three countries Americans saw as the war's great victims: France, Belgium, and Serbia. Such generosity also allowed Americans to alleviate some of their guilt by giving back a symbolic portion of their new-found wartime prosperity to a higher end.

Nevertheless, in 1914 and 1915, most Americans did not want to see their nation become directly involved in the war. From the resolution of the diplomatic crisis caused by the *Lusitania* sinking in May 1915 to the first few weeks of 1917, Americans tried to walk a tightrope. This second phase of their response to the war was marked by a wish to maintain their honour and their freedom of trade alongside a growing protectiveness of that independence from an increasingly aggressive Germany. Although German U-boat attacks on neutral merchant vessels largely stopped in this period, the Germans were behind a wave of sabotage incidents on American soil, including the destruction of the so-called Black Tom railway depot in Jersey City (New Jersey), and were rumoured to have supported Pancho Villa's raid into New Mexico as well. Individual Germans, acting (we know now) without the support or knowledge of the German government, also left a bomb in the US Capitol building and tried to assassinate financier J. P. Morgan.[32]

Prominent Americans like Theodore Roosevelt screamed for retaliation, but Wilson had read the mood of the country correctly this time. Americans did not want a war with Germany, even if each additional incident caused more tensions. Wilson took smaller actions like declaring two

German officials *personae non gratae*, but he stopped well short of breaking off relations. There was just enough doubt about the ultimate responsibility of the German government in many of the sabotage plots (including the big one at Black Tom) to make a declaration of war legally questionable. The American people knew how deadly and murderous the western front had become. They were understandably chary of sending their loved ones into it. Only a direct threat to their own safety would force them to go to war, a conclusion on which German policymakers counted.[33]

In 1916, moreover, Americans were distracted by domestic issues and a tight presidential election. While we today sometimes recall it as the year Wilson used the slogan 'He kept us out of war', the truth is more complex. Neither Wilson nor his Republican rival, New Yorker Charles Evans Hughes, wanted to discuss the war on the campaign trail. They knew that the war was a divisive issue and that any discussion of it would anger an important section of voters.[34] They were also largely in agreement on the right American policy: remain neutral for as long as possible and go to war only when core American interests were threatened.

Even the issue of military preparedness caused controversy. Most Americans recognised the weakness of their armed forces and that such weakness made it more likely that one of the European great powers would try to take advantage. A few proactive measures proved non-controversial, such as the purchase of the Virgin Islands from Denmark (to keep them out of German hands), the fortification of Puerto Rico, and investments in new warships. But plans sponsored by the War Department to reform the Army met with political firestorms. The Department wanted to eliminate the inefficient and decentralised National Guard system, replacing it with a centralised Continental Army that took its orders from professional officers in Washington. The plan was modern, efficient, sensible, and entirely in line with the Progressive spirit of the age.

But the 48 state governors who controlled the National Guards objected to what they saw as an attempt to usurp their power. They had powerful allies in Congress who preferred to keep America's military strength, such as it was, decentralised. As a result, the 1916 National Defense Act kept American military power based in the states, although, to the Army's fury, it diverted badly needed federal defence dollars to the states for modernisation and standardisation. Secretary of War William Lindley Garrison and his assistant, Henry Breckenridge, both resigned in protest. We can read the controversy over the Continental Army Plan as a function of American federalism. We can also read it as proof that any

threat of war Americans might have felt in 1916 was still insufficient to force major changes in the way they managed their military policies.

After February 1917, Americans' response to the war entered a third phase, which was precipitated by Germany's announcement that its navy would resume unrestricted submarine warfare against all ships caught in the waters around Great Britain and France. German officials knew that sinking merchant ships would increase the risk of the United States entering the war, but they also knew that the failure of the American Army reform in 1916 meant that the United States had not taken the necessary steps to fight a modern war. More importantly, the stakes in the war were so high that Germany could no longer afford to leave a weapon as powerful as these submarines out of the fight.[35] The gamble that they could starve the British into submission with submarines well before the Americans could assemble and transport an army might have been desperate, but it was not completely unreasonable.

The resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare put the United States in a difficult position. It invalidated all of the careful diplomacy Wilson had used to resolve both the *Lusitania* incident in 1915 and the *Sussex* incident in 1916. By resuming the U-boat attacks, the Germans seemingly proved the bad faith of their promises from the previous years. Germany's submarine warfare would also inevitably kill Americans. Some Americans saw the resumption of the German naval campaign as equivalent to a declaration of war and wanted Wilson to respond in kind or at least break diplomatic relations with Germany. Wilson remained reluctant, saying instead that he would await an 'overt act', desperately hoping that the Germans would not follow through on their threat with action. Even the torpedoing of the *Laconia* on 25 February 1917, which famed American journalist Floyd Gibbons survived and documented, did not lead Wilson to declare war.[36]

The final breaking point came weeks later when American newspapers reported that the German foreign minister, Arthur Zimmermann, had made an extraordinary offer to Mexico. If the United States declared war on Germany in response to its resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare, Zimmermann asked Mexico to tie down the small American army by invading the American Southwest. If it did, and Germany won the war, the Germans would help Mexico reacquire Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, all lost to the United States after the Mexican-American War of 1846–1848. The telegram also asked Mexico to approach Japan about joining the alliance. Presumably, the Germans left California off the list of territories promised to Mexico to use it as a lure to draw in Japan.[37]

The Zimmermann Telegram proved that the fears of anti-German American leaders like Roosevelt had not been without cause. Just as they had done in Ireland and Russia, and Britain had done in the Middle East, the Germans were willing to meddle in the affairs of a neutral country in order to increase their own chances of victory. More importantly, the war was no longer about who won in the muddy fields of Flanders or which European power controlled Ukraine. It was now about the very future of the United States. In 1917, a German victory in the war threatened to force upon the United States the fate of China, torn apart by an alliance of avaricious states and lacking the military strength to defend itself.

## Looking at the United States from the Bottom Up

When we shift our orientation away from Washington D.C. and the daily acts of President Wilson, and consider the opinions and sympathies held by the wider community we see American ethnic communities in a different and far more complex light. It is, of course, impossible to speak of a single 'American' viewpoint on the events happening in Europe from 1914 to 1917. Americans also identified themselves by gender, by class, by region, and by ethnicity. Those identities often interacted and sometimes conflicted with one another. The complexity, naturally, is part of what makes the overall story so compelling.

To delve into one example, most Jewish-Americans tended to sympathise with the Central Powers in 1914. They did so in large part because of their deep hatred of Tsar Nicholas II and the intensely anti-Semitic regime he led. Hundreds of thousands of Jews had left Russia before 1914 in order to escape persecution and the state-sanctioned riots known as the pogroms. Many had come to the United States, but most ended up in Germany and Austria-Hungary. The latter especially had become a relatively open and tolerant place, even allowing some Jews to become generals in the armed forces (albeit mostly in the medical corps). Although Germany did not allow Jews to serve as officers in its armed forces, Jews did hold high-level positions in government and industry. Russia's ally France, by contrast, still suffered deeply from the scars of the titanic Dreyfus Affair, although during the war the French made strides to atone for the anti-Semitism of French society in the years before 1914.[38]

In August 1914, most American Jews hoped for a German and Austro-Hungarian victory, at least in eastern Europe. Jewish newspapers wrote editorials in praise of the Germans (horrifically ironic though that may

seem in retrospect).[39] It did not take long, however, for American Jews to realise that life under German occupation was little better for European Jews than life under the Tsar had been. Newspaper reports appeared of the German destruction of entire Jewish villages, the forced evacuation of Jews out of their communities, and the mass requisition of food from Jewish communities.[40] The war also led to a marked rise in anti-Semitism in both Germany and Austria-Hungary as Jewish refugees came to Berlin, Vienna, and other major cities, thereby putting pressure on an already stressed food and housing situation. German brutality in the east did not, of course, lead American Jews to find new sympathy with the Tsar. It did, however, turn many anti-German, much as Americans more generally were becoming increasingly horrified by German behaviour in Belgium, France, Poland, and elsewhere.

By 1917, two other major events changed American Jewish attitudes, crucially at about the same time that American attitudes more generally favoured intervention in the war. The first, and most important, was the fall in February of Tsar Nicholas II and his regime to a reasonably democratic provisional government in Russia. The end of Tsarism and its attendant anti-Semitism struck some Jewish leaders as so momentous as to merit a new holiday being added to the Jewish holy calendar.[41] While their fellow Americans were not quite so ecstatic, the end of the absolute monarchy in Russia opened up a space for Wilson and others to call for the world war to be the one to truly make the world safe for democracy. In other words, the (first) Russian revolution offered something to Jews both as Jews and as Americans. It also helped to align Jewish American views with those of their gentile countrymen much more closely than had been the case in 1914.

The second event, the Balfour Declaration, affected gentiles much less, but was important nevertheless. For American Jews, it meant that the British empire had pledged to support a homeland in Palestine for those Jews who no longer wanted to remain in Europe. Few American Jews wanted to immigrate to Palestine themselves, but they saw the British promise as a lifeline for those Jews who could not stay in the 'bloodlands' of Russia, Poland, and Ukraine.[42] This act of generosity, as American Jews described the Declaration, helped to cement Jewish support for the Allied cause. In short, as far as American Jews were concerned, by 1917 they had vested interests both as Jews and as Americans in a British victory. A German victory would not only annul any chance of Palestine becoming a Jewish homeland, it would condemn hundreds of thousands of Jews in the east to a future of perpetual misery.

Similar stories of shifting allegiances could be told for other American ethnic groups. Italian-Americans, for example, became avowedly pro-Allied in the spring of 1915 when Italy entered the war, coinciding with the moment that anti-German sentiment was rising in the wake of the *Lusitania* sinking. Italian-American fraternal groups in major American cities stopped working to welcome new immigrants and instead helped Italian citizens, who lived in the United States but had military obligations back in Italy, to return to their homeland to fight. Italian-Americans born in the United States had no such obligation, but they began to join National Guard units in large numbers. One machine-gun company in Connecticut was entirely Italian, an expression of both their American patriotism and their anticipation that the United States might one day be called to come to Italy's assistance.[43]

An ironic but important transformation happened in the Irish-American community as well. In 1914, most Irish-Americans either pledged their neutrality or actively hoped for a British humiliation in the war, an expression of revenge for the British Government's mistreatment of Ireland. But German meddling in Irish affairs, culminating in the 1916 Easter Rising, highlighted that Germany did not have Ireland's best interest at heart. A German victory suddenly seemed not to be Ireland's opportunity after all. Oddly enough, by 1917, Ireland's best chance was for the Allies, led by the United States and its ideology of national self-determination, to win the war. Then at a post-war peace conference, the victorious Woodrow Wilson could force the English to grant to Ireland either independence or Home Rule. Either way, England had to win the war, and owe the Americans a debt of gratitude for the military contribution of its men, including its Irishmen.

There was even a transformation in the German-American community. From 1914 to 1916, German-Americans were the group most likely to advocate for American neutrality. German-Americans reminded their fellow citizens that if the French had sent Lafayette to help Americans win their independence in the 1780s, then the Germans had sent von Steuben, and if the Hessian mercenaries became a hated presence in the United States, they had only come in the service of the British.[44] Nevertheless, German-Americans did not always support what appeared to be unnecessary aggression of the mostly Prussian leadership in Berlin. Indeed, many had moved to the United States specifically to get away from what they saw as an oppressive, anti-Catholic, and militaristic elite in Germany. The invasion of Belgium and the sinking of the *Lusitania*

were examples of such Prussian excess. German-Americans often grew anxious to separate their own positive contributions to their new homeland from the 'Hunnish' atrocities being committed by the Kaiser and his Junker elite in Europe.

As the relationship between Germany and the United States reached a boiling point in early 1917, the vast majority of German-Americans argued forcefully that they would defend the interests of the United States come what may. German-Americans were highly assimilated, disproportionately Catholic, and anxious to prove that their loyalties lay with their adopted country. German-American leaders like Cardinal George Mundelein and journalist Oswald Villard were among those who made the case that German-Americans had been loyal in the past and would be once again. Mundelein's own grandfather had been a Civil War hero in the Union Army. More importantly, non-Prussians like Villard argued in late 1916 that if war should come, German-Americans could fight it with no contradiction to either their German or their American ancestry as long as the war replaced the Kaiser's autocratic regime with a true democracy. Hundreds of thousands of German-Americans unquestionably answered their country's call, including men like Eddie Rickenbacker, John Pershing, and Dwight Eisenhower.

From this bottom-up survey we can draw two conclusions. First, between 1914 and 1917, the attitudes and beliefs of America's ethnic groups changed significantly and, secondly, those attitudes moved in the direction that American society more generally was moving.[45] In other words, there was far more consensus in American views relating to the war in early 1917 than there had been in the summer of 1914. The reasons for the mainstream shift, however, had little to do with '100% Americanism' campaigns or pressure from the Wilson administration. The reasons lay instead with dynamics inside these many different communities and the ways that the war affected both sides of their hyphenated identities. By placing the focus on Wilson and the federal government more generally, we miss the real dynamics at work.

## Conclusion

This interpretation of the American road to war in 1917 has important implications for understanding the American conduct of the war and the post-war period. Most importantly, it shows that the American people were fighting not to make the world safe for democracy, as their president

so famously proposed. While they would surely have welcomed a democratic world, in 1917 they thought they were going to war to defend themselves from an increasingly aggressive German nation, as the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare and the Zimmermann Telegram indicated. Americans went to war not as crusaders, but for what they believed was the most just reason of all: their own self-defence and the defence of their fellow Jews, Irish, Italians, and even Germans across the Atlantic. If they did so more out of determination than enthusiasm, they nevertheless did so almost unanimously.

That unity remained until 11 November 1918. When on that day, the Germans laid down their arms, millions of Americans thought their job was done and demanded the immediate return of their sons, brothers, and husbands from Europe. But their president had other ideas. His desire to reshape the world in America's image was received with far less unity across the nation. Thus the stage was set for the bitter fight over the meaning of the war and its legacies, revealing Wilson's true folly, that of misreading why his people thought they had gone to war in 1917.

## Notes

1. *Literary Digest* 1, May 22, 1915, 1197–1999.
2. Justus D. Doenecke, *Nothing Less Than War: A New History of America's Entry into World War I* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011).
3. Wilson made the remark to Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels. Quoted in Lee Allan Craig, *Josephus Daniels: His Life and Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 289.
4. Not even Michael Kazin, *War Against War: The American Fight for Peace, 1914–1918* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017) makes that case despite his very critical assessment of Wilson.
5. Fischer published *Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914/18* in 1961. It appeared in English under the less explosive title *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967).
6. David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George* (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1933), 32.
7. Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014) gives away the central thesis in the title. He does not lay the blame for the war on any single belligerent. Not surprisingly, the book found its most receptive audiences in Germany.
8. Geoffrey Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe: The Outbreak of World War I and the Collapse of the Habsburg Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

9. Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013).
10. Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).
11. See, for example, Stefan Schmidt, *Frankreichs Außenpolitik in der Julikrise, 1914: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Ausbruchs des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Munich: Oldenburg, 2009).
12. See Jack Levy and John Vasquez, eds. *The Outbreak of the First World War: Structure Politics, and Decision Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
13. Anna Murray Vail to Mrs. Schuyler Van Rennselear, January 1, 1916, American Fund for French Wounded Records, New York Public Library, Box 1, Folder 1.
14. Notably, almost all of the references to the United States in the 1,240 pages of Hew Strachan, *The First World War: To Arms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) deal with financial issues.
15. See Howard Bloom, *Dark Invasion, 1915: Germany's Secret War and the Hunt for the First Terrorist Cell in America* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014).
16. The statement is widely quoted. See James Chace, *1912: Wilson, Roosevelt, Taft and Debs, The Election that Changed the Country* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 243.
17. Arthur Link, ed. *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966–1993). The papers encompass 69 volumes. Link, *Wilson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947–1965) is a five-volume biography. John Milton Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 2009) is the best one-volume treatment.
18. Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 61.
19. Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1965). In his story, 'May Day,' Fitzgerald has a protestor shout 'Who got anything out of [the war] except J. P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller?' Fitzgerald, of course, depicted the protestor as a 'little Jew' who later gets beaten by the angry crowd. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tales of the Jazz Age* (New York: Scribners, 1922), 77.
20. See, for example, Kazin, *War Against War*.
21. Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Knopf, 2012), 240.
22. I had this issue emerge recently during discussions about a museum exhibit on which I advised. The curators wanted to devote almost half of the exhibit to 'anti-war' voices. I suggested that this approach would mislead visitors into thinking that half of America opposed American entry into the war in 1917 when, as Preston argued above, the number was in fact quite

small. I think I managed to get the space devoted to the anti-war movement reduced but the narrative of a positive and a negative in opposition to one another is powerful.

23. Michael Neiberg, *Dance of the Furies: Europe and the Outbreak of World War I* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).
24. I was teaching at the University of Southern Mississippi when I did most of the research for *Furies*. The university was founded in 1910 and its libraries bought almost everything written about the war from 1914 to the great depression. Most of those books had no bar codes in them because they had not been checked out since the library's adoption of the bar code in the early 1980s. The student library assistants eventually learned to keep a small pile of bar code stickers handy for when I showed up at the desk with yet another arm full of previously unread old books.
25. See, for example, Zara Steiner and Keith Nelson, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Samuel R. Williamson, *Austria-Hungary and the Origins of the First World War* (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 1991); and Volker Berghahn, *Germany and the Approach of War in 1914* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1993).
26. Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) is a great example of this kind of scholarship.
27. *New York Times*, August 5, 1917, 7.
28. Julia Irwin, *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
29. Nicholas A. Lambert, *Planning Armageddon: British Economic Warfare and the First World War* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012).
30. Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War, America, and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916–1931* (New York: Penguin, 2014).
31. See Michael S. Neiberg, *Path to War: How the First World War Created Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 109–113.
32. Bloom, *Dark Invasion*, 286–290.
33. Here a comparison to the Second World War is illustrative. From 1939–1941, Americans were mainly pro-Allied and willing to support the British. It was not until the direct threat to themselves of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, however, that Americans declared war.
34. Neiberg, *Path to War*, chap. 6.
35. Holger Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary*, second edition (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), chap. 8.

36. 'Floyd Gibbons and the Sinking of the Laconia: A Call for War', Duzenbery's Blog, accessed May 2017, https://duzenbery.wordpress.com/2012/03/02/sinking-of-the-laconia-a-call-for-war/.
37. For much more, see Thomas Boghardt, *The Zimmermann Telegram: Intelligence, Diplomacy, and America's Entry into World War I* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012).
38. The Dreyfus Affair is far too complex to explore here. One recent treatment in English is Piers Paul Read, *The Dreyfus Affair: The Scandal That Tore France in Two* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012).
39. The *Yiddish Times* wrote, for example, that 'The Jews support Germany because Russia bathes in Jewish blood' (Joseph Rappaport, 'The American Yiddish Press and the European Conflict in 1914', *Jewish Social Studies* 19 (1957), 116).
40. See Vejas Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
41. 'What It Means to Us', *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), March 22, 1917, 4.
42. Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2012). See also Jonathan Schneer, *The Balfour Declaration: The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Random House, 2012).
43. Christopher Serba, "'Your Country Wants You': New Haven's Italian Machine Gun Company Enters World War I", *New England Quarterly* 74 (June 2001): 2.
44. Washington *Evening Star*, September 28, 1914, 10.
45. There is little work on Hispanic Americans. Two studies of African Americans in this period are Chad Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) and Adriane Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans in World War I* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009).

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CHAPTER 4

# The Maori War Effort at Home and Abroad in 1917

*Monty Soutar*

This chapter invites the reader to contemplate the development of three processes and their results during 1917, so that they may understand the Maori situation after the First World War. The first is the reaction of Maori leaders to the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion's casualties, the mixed-race unit to which the majority of Maori volunteers were posted, which led them to focus more sharply on financial support for returning soldiers.

In parallel, after invaluable contributions as a mixed-race battalion to the battle for Messines in 1917, the Pioneers had a name change and became known as the Maori Battalion. By the end of the year, the unit morphed into an almost wholly Maori organisation. The chapter investigates the implications of the name change, including on the perceptions of those involved, on recruitment, and on Maori military representation in the Second World War.

Perhaps the most important process was the extension of the Military Service Act in 1917 to include the conscription of Maori, and 'especially the Waikato tribe', who the Minister of Defence claimed, had 'not answered the call to enlist voluntarily'.[1] The move to conscription had long-lasting consequences that dominated political activities after the war and led to the investigation of Maori grievances that, as one politician

M. Soutar (✉)
Manatu Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage, Wellington, New Zealand



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put it, 'had arisen from unfulfilled promises, arbitrary acts of Government land-purchase officers or, most serious of all, from the punitively excessive confiscation of Maori land'.[2] The year 1917, then, was a fundamental one for Maori.

## Maori and the First World War

When the war broke out in 1914, many Maori were as eager as Pakeha (New Zealanders of European descent) to volunteer for service with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF). The Maori population was less than 50,000 of a total New Zealand population of approximately 1.1 million.[3] Over 800 Maori already served in the country's Territorial Force and a number of these were among the first New Zealanders to answer the call to war. In September, when the proposal for a 500-strong Maori contingent was accepted by the British government, Maori enthusiasm only grew. At the Gisborne Garrison Hall, for example, hundreds came forward to be one of the volunteers required to fill that borough's quota of 45 for the contingent.[4] One burly lad, who missed out because he was over the 12-stone restriction, was seen jogging along the main road,

> and you would have laughed at the spectacle he presented. He had on a thick fur overcoat, a gorgeous affair …. It was a hot day, and the perspiration was running off him in great streams. And he was running, running; trying to get off enough weight to be a soldier.[5]

Apparently there had been initial reluctance on the part of the British authorities to involve dark-skinned troops in a war between white races, but once Indian and French colonial troops were mobilised to assist the Allied armies, this concern disappeared.

But what motivated the Maori volunteer? The sense of loyalty with which politicians, media, military authorities, and the public encouraged a strong response to Britain's call for aid was less of a motivation for Maori enlistment. As one of the Maori Members of Parliament, Apirana Ngata, later told his parliamentary colleagues:

> Talk about patriotism: that was not the reason for their enlistment. Talk about the flag: that was not the reason either. Those considerations came afterwards as excuses. I daresay it was the same in the case of those that

> comprised the First Expeditionary Force. After they had gone we began flag waving and called them patriots, but it was sheer love of adventure in them and it was the spirit of their fathers within them that called them to go.[6]

While a deep-rooted fighting spirit did stir many of the first Maori volunteers, most belonged to iwi (tribes) whose experiences with the Crown in the nineteenth century made them more amenable to notions of civic responsibility and service. Educated in Native Schools, nurseries of patriotic sentiment, they were more likely to be motivated by the obligations of citizenship inherent in the Treaty of Waitangi.[7]

Iwi such as Waikato and Taranaki were not so ready to throw their weight behind the empire. It was not that they were averse to war—they were the descendants of some of Maoridom's most daring resistance fighters—but rather because half a century earlier the British had branded their tipuna (grandparents) 'rebels', invaded their territory, and confiscated hundreds of thousands of acres of their land. Unsurprisingly, they bore much resentment towards the Crown. Loss of land, denial of access to resources, and poverty were among the reasons why few men from these iwi volunteered to serve.[8]

But there were many other Maori who did take up arms. Initially recruited as garrison troops, the Maori Contingent, at its own request, was sent to Gallipoli where 477 of its men prepared for the August offensive in the ANZAC sector. Like the other New Zealand units, the Maori Contingent's casualties were high and by December there was only 134 left on the peninsula, most of the others having been evacuated sick or wounded. After Gallipoli, Maori enlistments waned. This was partly because the contingent had been split up and its platoons attached to the four battalions of the New Zealand Infantry Brigade (NZIB) and to a certain extent because of the way some of the contingent's Maori officers had been treated by the higher command.[9] Four officers had been sent home, 'found wanting' in their performance when it appeared the matter had more to do with their Pakeha commanding officers' shortcomings.[10] The Maori politicians who were the drivers behind recruitment were 'very sore' about the whole affair.[11]

In 1916, the survivors of the contingent plus its reinforcements were subsumed into the newly-formed Pioneer Battalion for service on the western front. Although the Maori troops made up only half the strength of the 1030-strong Pioneers, NZEF commander Major-General Godley hoped the move would be seen by Maori politicians as a reconstitution

of the unit.[12] Evidently, these politicians saw the new battalion as an acceptable compromise and the Defence Minister Sir James Allen was pleased to be able to inform Godley: 'Impasse over. Pomare [one of the Maori MPs and chairman of the Maori Contingent Committee] on his way up North to recruit and a special NCO visiting Tauranga and Urewera [to do likewise]'.[13] Maori did continue to volunteer but nowhere near at the previous rate.

The New Zealand Pioneer Battalion's first serious action was on the Somme in August 1916, where it had a combat support role. Its duties, however, carried it constantly into the fire zone so that by the time it was withdrawn, six weeks later, its losses were 20 per cent killed, wounded, or seriously ill.[14]

In the European spring of 1917, the Pioneer Battalion moved from northern France to Belgium to prepare for the Messines offensive. At that stage, the 1000-strong battalion was made up of a combination of Maori (three-quarters of the unit), Pakeha, and Pacific Island troops. There were almost another thousand men stationed at transit camps or in hospitals throughout France and England. The latter were either fresh reinforcements (recently arrived from New Zealand) or men recovering from sickness and wounds sustained in France. The Pacific Island component of the battalion, 200 men recruited as part of the Third Maori Reinforcements in late 1915, had been reduced to platoon size (50 men) and included soldiers from the Cook Islands (the majority, a territory of New Zealand), Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, the Gilbert Islands (Kiribati), and even Norfolk Island. The reduction was due to the departure of 150 Niueans who had been returned home when it was found that the harsh European winter made them 'unfitted for service' in France. Most of the Pakeha pioneers were from the Otago district since the Otago Mounted Rifles had also been incorporated into the battalion.[15]

After the Battle of the Somme (in 1916) the Pioneer Battalion wintered in northern France near Armentières. Meanwhile, the casualty lists from the Somme had a sobering effect on the Maori people in New Zealand.[16] The Maori members of parliament now found more parents dissuading their sons from joining up. For Sir James Carroll, who had been the first Maori minister of the Crown and one-time acting prime minister, and Apirana Ngata, the member whose electorate could boast the largest number of Maori volunteers, recruitment had become personal. Carroll's adopted son was killed at Gallipoli and now a second whangai (adopted child) was with the Pioneers, while Ngata lost one of his closest friends at the Somme. Lieutenant Henare Kohere's untimely

death was a shock to all his Ngati Porou kin. The widower was from a chiefly family and left behind three young children. In response, Ngata composed a recruiting song—'A noble sacrifice'—that paid tribute to Kohere and commemorated the deeds of all the Maori soldiers.[17] The song was so effective as a recruiting tool that it inspired a fresh wave of Maori support for the war effort.

## Maori Soldiers' War Fund

Fundraising towards a Maori soldiers' war fund took on new meaning in the context of the Pioneer Battalion's military activities on the western front in 1917. Ngata and other Maori leaders in his electorate felt more should be done for their soldiers, given the sacrifices they were making at the front. Since August 1914 Maori had helped to raise patriotic funds that were managed by all-Pakeha committees. On 19 February 1917, Ngata combined the opening of the carved reception room at his homestead with a fundraising and recruiting event for returned Maori soldiers. More than 1200 adults attended despite 'severely adverse weather' and the disruption of the steamer service by a waterfront strike (200 Ngati Kahungunu gathered at Napier wharf were forced to go home, while others were stuck in Auckland). After Lady Carroll opened the ornately carved room, a collection was taken up. Following tradition, iwi representatives were invited to place their koha (monetary gift) on the marae (communal forecourt for social and religious gatherings)—in this instance, on a plate.[18]

Some £5890 in cash was collected and with other funds committed, the total was expected to reach £9000 (equivalent to $1.15 million in 2017 terms). A committee chaired by Lady Carroll was elected to collect and administer the money. This was the origin of the Maori Soldiers' Fund (MSF). The committee's immediate objective was to increase the fund to £25,000 and then invest it in pastoral farms and stock that promised a good rate of return.[19] Minister of Internal Affairs G. W. Russell subsequently praised this initiative and helped expand its work around the country.[20]

The MSF was based in Gisborne, where its secretary, Captain Pitt, had presided over the national headquarters of the Returned Soldiers' Association (RSA) since 1916. Trustees whose appointment was authorised by regulation in April 1917 'were empowered to acquire, hold, and farm land, invest their funds in farm property, and to work such property for the benefit of their fund'.[21] Given the limited resources of the Maori people at that time,

> a very large fund was out of the question, but it was hoped that sufficient capital could be raised to enable the trustees to obtain a farm or farms in working order, the revenue from which would be devoted to the relief of Maori soldiers and their dependents, so supplementing the State pension scheme and various patriotic schemes.[22]

Every Maori community in the electorate was allocated a quota and Maori were extraordinarily generous contributors to the fund. By the end of 1917, after less than a year's fundraising, nearly £20,000 had been raised, almost all on the East Coast of the North Island. The appeal was then taken to the larger centres and to other tribal districts. By war's end £58,600 (equivalent to nearly $6 million in 2017 terms) had been collected, a significant sum for a largely impoverished population.[23]

## Recruiting

Many Maori leaders expended considerable energy in urging their people to serve the war cause. They utilised traditional Maori forums, including the hui, and forms, like waiata (songs), to do so. Much of this activity was highly successful. The Waiomatatini hui held on 17–19 February 1917, for example, affirmed the decision among Ngati Porou to continue recruiting reinforcements for the Pioneer Battalion. The hui was also an opportunity to collectively mourn all the Maori soldiers who had died since the beginning of the war.

To demonstrate their on-going commitment to the war, a special effort was made to enrol recruits for the next reinforcement draft at the hui as well. Even though Ngati Porou had already sent twice as many men on active service as any other iwi, the renewed appeal saw another 34 volunteer, although many of them were under-age. Among them were Ngata's fifteen-year-old son, Purewa, and his brother's son, Moana Ngata. Perhaps the youngest volunteer was Hare (Charlie) Te Rauna, whose father had left with an earlier batch of Maori Reinforcements. Like Purewa Ngata, the not-quite-fifteen-year-old claimed to be twenty (Illustration 4.1).[24]

When on 20 February 1917 a storm hit the East Coast, closing the two bridges across the Waiapu River and isolating Waiomatatini, Ngata used the situation as an opportunity to select and prepare a group to accompany the Ngati Porou volunteers (Ngata's iwi) to Hawke's Bay the

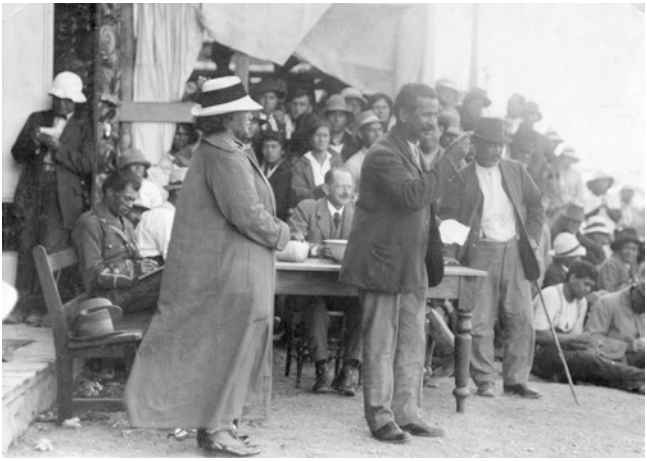

**Illustration 4.1** Lady Carroll and Apirana Ngata promote the Maori Soldiers' Fund on the marae. Source: Ngata Family Collection

following month for another fund-raising appeal and recruitment drive. He also discussed how Maori might continue to serve the military needs of the war cause. The hui issued some key recommendations to that end, which were sent on to New Zealand's military authorities:

- Maori who had seen active service should have preference for appointment as officers.
- If the military authorities agreed to bring the number of Maori up to battalion strength and change the name of their unit to Maori Battalion, those present at the hui would find the necessary men to keep it reinforced.
- Maori should no longer be employed as pioneers but as a fighting unit.
- Pakeha officers in the Pioneer Battalion should be replaced by Maori officers as opportunity arose.
- A Maori officer should be appointed to the New Zealand divisional staff.
- A Maori chaplain should be appointed to Narrow Neck camp, which had been without one since Archbishop Hawkins' departure with the Second Maori Contingent.[25]

**Illustration 4.2** Send-off for the Ngati Porou volunteers at Pakipaki, Hawke's Bay, 24 April 1917. Some of the Ngati Porou volunteers with the khaki-clad Kahungunu Poi Entertainers. Source: Ngata Family Collection

In the end, of these recommendations, all but the third were instituted, albeit over a seven-month period. The Commanding Officer of the Battalion remained Pakeha (Illustration 4.2).

## The Growth of the Modern Action-Song

A considerable amount of Maori civic time was dedicated to the war effort, which had an inevitable impact on wider Maori society and culture as well. For example, between 22 and 24 March 1917, a grand hui at Pakipaki doubled as a welcome to Sir James Carroll, who had recently returned from England, and as a send-off for the volunteers who were heading to camp.[26] It also tied in with the Hui Topu (a gathering of the clergy, synodsmen, parish elders, and their families of the Waiapu Anglican diocese) being held at nearby Omahu.[27] In preparation for the hui, Ngata composed words for his 'noble sacrifice' waiata. They were 'sung to plaintive and enchanting music well-calculated to move the emotions of pity and regret'. When his close friend Paraire Tomoana heard Ngata's group perform it, he immediately had his own group, the Kahungunu Poi Entertainers, adopt it too.[28]

After the Pakipaki hui, Ngata utilised the Kahungunu group to inspire further tribal contributions in support of Maori soldiers. The entertainers toured the North Island performing in halls and theatres in rural towns and major centres.[29] The novelty of poi dances performed with military precision by women in khaki gave the group a unique flavour. 'The noble sacrifice', along with Tomoana's compositions 'Hoea ra te waka nei' ('Come where duty calls') and 'E pari ra' ('Blue eyes'), which followed the trend of putting Maori words to popular English-language songs, were soon sung in every Maori community.[30] It can be said that the concerts and the fundraising hui on marae not only accelerated the development of the modern action-song, but it also generated inter-iwi visits at a regularity not often seen before the war.

Maori readily joined in their communities' demonstrations of patriotic fervour, taking part in its fundraising activities and subscribing money to the War Fund. Many, however, were cash-strapped and they looked to their land as the currency they could use to assist the war effort. It was only a matter of weeks after the war started, for example, that the Tuhoe people gifted a 3000-acre block to the government. The proceeds from the sale of the block went into the Empire Defence Fund.[31] At the end of the war, Tuhoe also leased about 3000 acres of land to the executive of the MSF and the Te Arawa tribe donated rents from their lands for five years.[32]

## Prejudice

These enthusiastic fundraising efforts by Maori also had their negative consequences. The all-Pakeha Gisborne Citizens' Defence Committee (GSDC), for example, which was responsible for administering loans to needy soldiers in the district, decided to exclude Maori soldiers from receiving relief on the grounds that the MSF fund was larger than their own. This was 'double-banking' fumed one member.[33] The Gisborne Committee then asked the MSF's council for a £200 donation—in effect, a refund of grants already made to Maori soldiers—but this was not possible because the fund had been raised for a special purpose. The council's secretary/treasurer, Captain Pitt, appeared before the Gisborne Committee asking that it rescind its new policy. Maori had subscribed generously to the defence fund in the three and a half years since it had been set up, he argued, and Maori soldiers were therefore entitled to benefit from it.[34] It seems that while the creation of the MSF was a demonstration of Maori rights as equal citizens, it gave some Pakeha the licence they needed to exclude Maori returned soldiers from the entitlements previously available to all soldiers.

Meanwhile, the MSF was unable to release grants from their investments to Maori returned servicemen. (They would not do so until 1952 in fact). In large part the inability to make grants related to the investment of the MSF in three leasehold properties worth £42,000.[35] In effect, because its money was tied up in these leases, Maori returned soldiers were doubly disadvantaged because they were largely unable to access the funds earmarked for all New Zealand's veterans. Still, the MSF hoped to employ Maori soldiers on their leasehold land and 'the profits from the venture were to be directed to the rehabilitation of all Maori soldiers'.[36]

Some of the MSF leased land was not as good as had been anticipated and the farms struggled in an economic downturn during the early 1920s. The fund suffered huge losses due to falling stock values and inexperience during the 1921 depression, so much so that one of the farms was abandoned and the funds put into developing the other two stations.[37] After a Commission of Enquiry in 1925, the administration of the remaining assets—approximately £12,000—was vested in the Native Trustee. The original Fund's equity disappeared during the great depression in the 1930s, but the Native Trustee, 'having regard to the social and sentimental value of the fund', kept it afloat with loans. Only when wool prices rose sharply after the Second World War did the fund return to a profit.[38] Ultimately, what started out as an admirable and promising initiative for Maori, ended up taking 35 years to realise the first returns for Maori returned servicemen.

## Gift of the Owhaoko Block

Maori land owners in the central North Island also responded to the call to assist returned servicemen by gifting land. On 2 October 1916, when Pomare met with the paramount chief of Ngati Tuwharetoa, Tureiti Te Heuheu Tukino, and other representatives at Waihi, on Lake Taupo, the 25,300 acres of the Owhaoko Block was ceremonially gifted to the government.[39] Five days later, at a meeting of owners in Taihape, an additional 20,000 acres of the block was offered by some of its Ngati Tama and Ngati Whiti owners and they also suggested that 100,000 acres in the Kaimanawa Block be set aside for Pakeha soldiers. These offers were held over, so absent owners could have a say.[40] This was their way of looking after the interests of Maori soldiers on active service who might otherwise be overlooked in the government's settlement schemes when they returned.[41]

The Owhaoko gift was eventually refined down to 35,582 acres and given legal status in October 1918, but Ngati Tuwharetoa soon found

themselves protesting against government moves to take more of their land. The Minister of Native Affairs, W. H. Herries, proclaimed that soldiers would be resettled on certain Maori blocks south of Lake Taupo, but the landowners were refusing to give these up, asking instead for assistance to help them make the land productive. So irate was Te Heuheu that he called a national hui in Wellington 'to protest against the power invested in the Native Minister'.[42] By the time the Maori Pioneer Battalion arrived in Auckland in April 1919, the government had acquired 500,000 acres of Maori land for soldier settlement and a year later the total had climbed to over one million acres.[43] In the case of Tuhoe, legislation had meant that the government was the only buyer able to purchase land in the Urewera district. Moreover, it achieved this at lower prices by using pre-war valuations.[44] Although much of the land proclaimed for soldier settlement was Maori land, it was mostly awarded to Pakeha returned soldiers.

## National Endowment Land

It was the Native Land Amendment and Native Land Claims Adjustment Act of 1917 that enabled the gifting of Maori land for settlement by discharged Maori soldiers. In advocating for the law, Ngata stated, 'We do not want to sponge upon the Government from the Crown lands for our Maori soldiers. We want as far as possible, to make provision for them out of their own lands'.[45] The Maori generosity in gifting land was admirable, given that by 1920 they owned only seven per cent of the country, having had one-third of their remaining land leased, sold, or compulsorily taken under various legislation in the previous decade.[46] In the end, however, the provisions of the 1917 land acts were limited to the gift of the Owhaoko Block. This meant that there would not be anywhere near enough land for returning Maori soldiers to be settled on.

Consequently, a few Maori soldiers entered the ballots for the government's farm settlement schemes, infuriating some Pakeha. These schemes had been created under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act of 1915. They provided the government with a way of assisting veterans to return to work on rural land. 'Farmland was allocated by a ballot system, mainly to Pakeha soldiers, as Maori veterans were assumed to have tribal land already available to them'.[47] Hence, when Maori soldiers applied for land in North Auckland in mid-1918 it 'provoked outrage in the local farming community, which enlisted the aid of their local member to ensure that the national endowment land in question was retained for the settlement of "European" soldiers'.[48]

Although the land issue exacerbated race relations at a popular level, the New Zealand government did make attempts to acknowledge Maoridom's war contributions by providing land specifically for settlement by Maori returned soldiers. One of these land blocks was the 560-acre Hoskings Estate between Maketu and Matata in the Bay of Plenty. When the Minister of Lands, D. H. Guthrie, tried to set it aside for Maori soldiers only, he faced a barrage of protests from settlers and returned Pakeha soldiers alike. A large deputation met the Minister on the property and pointed out that had they known that the block was to be set aside for Maori, then returned soldiers would not have gone to the expense of viewing it. Their real objection was that Maori were not good farmers. The chairman of the Tauranga County Council claimed that 'if Maoris were put together on the block … it would undoubtedly go back[wards]', while the Western Bay of Plenty RSA president believed 'it would be far better to mix them with the whites'. The member for Rotorua, F. F. Hockly, told the minister that the block 'was of such a nature that the Maori character was not calculated to keep it up to its present high condition'. It would be wiser 'to select a different class of country … which would not spoil if neglected'.[49]

Captain Vercoe, a highly decorated officer who had served with both the Pioneers and the Auckland Infantry Battalion, was also present at the meeting. He pointed out that so far something like 3000 Pakeha soldiers had been settled on land, but only about half a dozen Maori. The reason seemed obvious: Maori were outnumbered in the ballots by 100 to one. Vercoe, who was now working as an interpreter in parliament, proposed to the minister that small blocks be set aside for Maori ex-servicemen. 'It must be remembered', he said, 'that when the Pakeha acquired land by lease or purchase, money was available to him. But money was not available for Maori and that is a bar against him improving it'. Banks would not loan to Maori if the applicant did not own the land outright and Maori land was mostly in multiple ownership. Furthermore, in the matter of State Advances Funds from government, few Maori ever received assistance so that most had to depend on the Native Trustee who himself had insufficient money to meet their requirements.[50] Vercoe could also point out blocks of land in the district held by Pakeha that had not been improved.[51] Eventually, under continuing pressure from Hockly and Herries and facing letter-writing campaigns from non-Maori interest groups, Guthrie buckled and divided the Hoskings Estate between both Maori and Pakeha veterans.[52]

Historian Ashley Gould shows that at least 30 Maori discharged soldiers acquired farms under the government's settlement schemes. This was just over one per cent of all Maori returned soldiers, compared with the ten per cent of Pakeha helped onto farms.[53] Gould argues that the government's 'policy of providing repatriation assistance specifically for Maori soldiers was … piecemeal and aimed at … tribes with influential spokesmen'.[54] While the New Zealand government claimed to be concerned for the inclusion of Maori soldiers in the settlement schemes, most Maori saw its efforts as far from satisfactory.

## The Maori Battalion in 1917

Meanwhile, in Belgium, the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion became almost an entirely Maori unit when it was found there were sufficient Maori reinforcements in England to fill all four of its companies. On 1 September 1917, the Pioneers officially became the New Zealand Maori (Pioneer) Battalion. The original hat and collar badges of the Maori Contingent replaced the Pioneers' ones.[55] Most of the Pakeha in the battalion were transferred to infantry units in time for the brutal fighting that was to take place at Passchendaele (although there were still 50 Pakeha soldiers with the Maori Battalion at war's end).[56] Lieutenant-Colonel King, the most recent commander of the Pioneers was among them, and like so many others, was killed in the disastrous attack on Bellevue Spur on 12 October. In December 1917, the Pacific Island platoon entrained to Marseilles and in the New Year was shipped to Egypt where they joined the Rarotongan Company, which had been serving in the warmer climate of the Middle East since late 1916.

## Conscription

The New Zealand government introduced the Military Service Act in August 1916, which initially imposed conscription on Pakeha only. The option existed, however, to compel Maori to perform military service.[57] Keeping the battalion at full strength during the First World War required a constant stream of Maori reinforcements, so that in 1917 the various iwi contributions were being looked at seriously by government. Iwi that had supplied few volunteers were those from regions where the conflicts of the 1860s against the Crown had been most bitter and who, as a result, had endured the confiscation of large tracts of their tribal estate—especially

those in Waikato-Tainui and Taranaki. Nursing an inherited sense of grievance against the Crown, represented as they saw it by the government and Pakeha generally, these often destitute and aggrieved communities were in no mood to appreciate the obligation to serve abroad in the armed forces.

The most recalcitrant of these were the Waikato tribes. While it was only at the end of 1916 that they really attracted attention for their lack of volunteers, they had been of interest to the government since the return of their king, Te Rata, from England. In July 1914, Te Rata and his tumuaki (principal adviser) Tupu Taingakawa had gained an audience with King George V before whom they laid the grievances of the Maori people regarding their confiscated lands. When Te Rata arrived back in Auckland in September that year he was asked by Maui Pomare, who had been appointed chairman of the Maori Contingent Recruiting Committee, to support Maori military service abroad. At the time recruits for the First Maori Contingent were being sought, with a quota of 50 volunteers required from the Waikato and Ngati Maniapoto district. While most quotas were being filled enthusiastically, the people in this district had decided to wait until their king's return before deciding on their course of action.[58] Te Rata's response was 'Waiho ma te hiahia' (Leave it to individual choice). Most of his people interpreted this as code for 'do not go' and hardly a Waikato man volunteered for either the Maori Contingent or its reinforcements.

After several failed attempts to encourage Waikato men to enlist, on 24 November 1916, the fourth anniversary of King Te Rata's coronation, the Minister of Defence, James Allen, who was now Acting Prime Minister, went to Mercer for one last try. He took with him a bevy of politicians and 75 recruits from the Maori training camp in Auckland, undoubtedly to try to shame eligible Waikato youths into uniform.[59] But nothing could shift the tribe. Ngata said that Taingakawa (Illustration 4.3):

> received with contempt the olive branch held out by the Defence Minister. 'Ko wai te wha?' (Who will suffer?) said he, 'My people cannot suffer more than they have done in the loss of their lands and of their mana', meaning, that nothing the law could do now would be worse, and so nothing mattered.[60]

In 1917, the government extended conscription to Maori, but the target of this extension was really one iwi—Waikato. In authorising the government's statistician, Malcolm Fraser, to compile a Maori Register of the

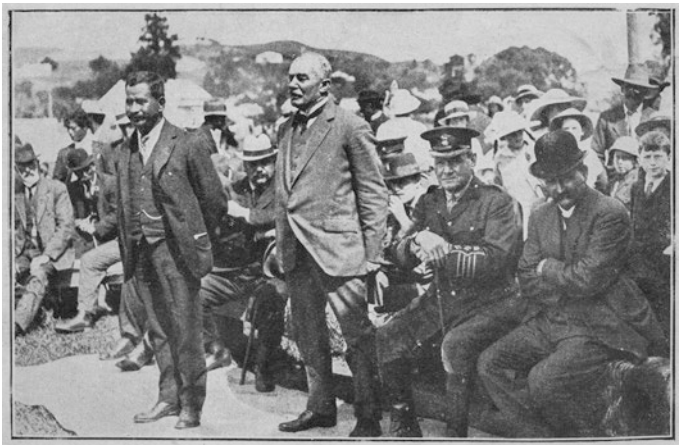

**Illustration 4.3** Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Defence James Allen addresses Waikato at Mercer. Ngata acts as interpreter. Maui Pomare is between Allen and Ngata, and to their right is Colonel G.W.S. Patterson, the officer commanding the Auckland district, and local MP R.F. Bollard. Source: Auckland Weekly News, 7 December 1916, 38.

Reserve, Allen wrote, 'the time has come when something will have to be done with regard to certain Natives'. With no real sense of the depth of hurt that was driving Waikato resistance, he told Fraser to target 'especially the Waikato tribe, who have not answered the call to enlist voluntarily'.[61] When conscription was introduced for Pakeha in 1916, it was thought that Maori, including Waikato, would continue to volunteer at a rate that ensured sufficient reinforcements for the NZ Pioneer Battalion. By 1917 it became obvious that this would not be the case.

The task of conscripting eligible Maori males proved challenging. With no Maori electoral roll the 1916 census was used to compile the register of eligible men. Information provided for the census was supposed to be confidential, and Fraser was told not to reveal that he had used it for the register.[62] This was the first of a number of duplicitous moves by the government aimed at getting Waikato men into uniform.[63] As it turned out it was a year before the first ballot could be held.[64]

Ballots were drawn from eligible men of Waikato and Ngati Maniapoto and purposely included some members of the Maori king's family. It was hoped that their compliance would encourage would-be dissenters to follow

their example. When none of the men presented themselves at the recruiting offices, they were rounded up and forcibly taken to camp. Their refusal to serve was not readily understood and the sequel was the imprisonment of a dozen or more of the most committed dissenters.[65]

Applying the policy to one electoral district was a mistake because it resulted in only a handful of Waikato men ever being put into uniform and none of them ended up on active service. Historian P. S. O'Connor, in his review of Maori recruitment in the First World War, noted that by 1919 only 74 Maori conscripts had gone to camp out of a total of 552 men called up. 'None had been sent overseas, 111 had been arrested, and warrants for nearly 100 more were still in the hands of the police'.[66] The whole conscription experience 'can only be described as shameful' and 'validated all the worst Maori fears about Pakeha duplicity'.[67]

There was a less obvious positive outcome of the imposition of conscription, however. After the war, the government began for the first time to seriously consider the long-standing grievances around Maori land loss, denial of access to resources, and the associated poverty which had underlain resistance to Maori enlistment by certain aggrieved tribes. Notwithstanding the many petitions that Waikato and others had placed before the government in the years before the war, it was Waikato's determined and public resistance to overseas service that brought about a willingness on the part of the government to remove the obstacles that had made them and other aggrieved tribes unwilling participants in the war effort.

Despite the condemnation Waikato faced from all quarters—military authorities, police, Pakeha, and other Maori—their sons who were willing to suffer in prison for their beliefs had unknowingly helped to set the government's agenda for the post-war period. How to address the injustices of the past, especially the seriously excessive raupatu (confiscations), preoccupied Maori MPs and cabinet ministers alike after 1918.

## Conclusion

Before the war, Maori lived separate lives from Pakeha, with their social events often centred on the pa (Maori settlement). The wartime overseas experience, however, brought the two races into increased contact with each other and in acknowledging their shared frontline experiences and sacrifices helped to increase mutual respect.[68] In the trenches, their countrymen had recognised Maori soldiers as ideal comrades-in-arms. The

more than 2200 Maori soldiers of the Maori Contingent and the Pioneer Battalion also helped expand the Maori worldview and Maori appreciation of events abroad.[69] At the end of the 1920s, the Pakeha commentator, Ralph H. Ward, observed that not only had the Maori race regained its mana (self-respect), not least because of its participation in the war, but that it was destined to play an increasing part in the development of New Zealand as a nation.[70] Still, the catch-cry 'equality of opportunity' had to be taken up repeatedly by Maori leaders during the difficult decades that followed.

The fact that Maori, with a total population of only 50,000, could maintain a battalion at the front also had ramifications during the Second World War. When Ngata and Maori leaders pushed for an infantry battalion to be included in the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force in 1939, the Maori population had almost doubled, so it could not be argued that the race would be unable to maintain reinforcements for an all-Maori battalion, which was an argument that had been used up until 1917.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the call for equality then would be answered with the formation of an infantry battalion manned almost entirely by Maori volunteers. The potential that others had recognised at Gallipoli and on the western front would reach full maturity when the 28th (Maori) Battalion went into action in the Second New Zealand Division's first campaigns in Greece and Crete. The veterans of the Maori Contingent and the Pioneer Battalion were the first to support the proposal for a rifle battalion, for they of all people understood and appreciated the spirit that moved their sons 'to venture where they first broke the trail'.[71]

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5. *Wanganui Chronicle*, January 18, 1916, 6.
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9. Godley to Allen, August 20, 1915 AD 10 20, 42/4, ANZ; Godley to Allen, February 15 1916, and Allen to Godley, March 6 1916, Allen1, M1/15 pt 2, ANZ.
10. Sir Peter Buck to Eric Ramsden, 1946, Mssc. Buck, Box 2.06, Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawaii; Allen to Godley, January 4, 1916 and March 6 1916, Allen 1/1, M1/15, Pt 2,
11. Allen to Godley, January 4, 1916, Allen 1/1, M1/15, Pt 2, ANZ.
12. Godley to Allen, March 4, 1916, WA252 1 [3], ANZ.
13. Allen to Godley, March 15, 1916, M1/15 pt 2, ANZ.
14. 'The Battle of the Somme', Ministry for Culture and Heritage, last modified July 31, 2014, http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/the-battle-of-the-somme.
15. H. M. Buchanan to ADMS, April 20, 1916, ACIO WA97/3, 4, ANZ.
16. Since 1868 the New Zealand Parliament had had four members elected from Maori electorates; in addition, during the First World War Sir James Carroll represented a general (European) seat.
17. James Cowan, *The Maoris in the Great War: A History of the New Zealand Native Contingent and Pioneer Battalion* (Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1926), 179.
18. *Te Kopara*, March 1917, 5–7; *Poverty Bay Herald*, February 28, 1917, 4; *Otago Witness*, April 25, 1917, 27; *Gisborne Times*, March 1, 1917, 5.
19. Ibid.
20. *Gisborne Times*, March 28, 1917, 6.
21. *Hastings Standard*, August 22, 1917, 3; *New Zealand Times*, August 30, 1917, 6.
22. *New Zealand Times*, August 30, 1917, 6.
23. *Te Ao Hou*, (Winter 1954): 58.
24. *Gisborne Times*, March 1, 1917, 4; 16/759 Pte Eruera Te Rauna and 19761 Pte Charlie Te Rauna, personnel files, ANZ. Monty Soutar, *Hiruharama School Centennial 1895–1995* (Ruatoria: Hiruharama School Centennial Committee, 1995), 248.
25. *Gisborne Times*, March 1, 1917, 6.

26. *Manawatu Herald*, March 27, 1917, 2.
27. *Te Kopara*, October 1917, 10–11.
28. Known today as 'Te ope tuatahi', 'The noble sacrifice' was composed by Apirana Ngata as a tribute to all Maori soldiers, but especially Lieutenant Kohere. *Poverty Bay Herald*, June 22, 1917, 5. The Nineteenth Maori Reinforcements were mentioned in the third verse as they were leaving to undergo basic training at Narrow Neck camp. Although correctly 'the Nineteenth Reinforcements' would be translated as 'Te ope tua tekau ma iwa', one supposes Ngata shortened the Maori title to fit the rhythm. It was often sung in English at fundraising events to help Pakeha appreciate its sentiments. The song was so effective that it inspired a fresh wave of Maori volunteers and helped raise almost £8000 more for the MSF. Ngati Kahungunu (mainly from Wairoa under Corporal Turi Carroll) made up two-thirds of the 50-strong Twentieth Maori Reinforcements. A. T. Ngata and P. H. Tomoana, *A Noble Sacrifice and Hoea Ra Te Waka Nei*, (Wellington: NZ Free Lance, 1919); *Evening Post*, August 31, 1917, 2; *Wairarapa Age*, September 4, 1916, 4; *Gisborne Times*, April 9, 1919, 2; Christopher Pugsley, *Te Hokowhitu-a-Tu: The Maori Pioneer Battalion in the First World War*, (Auckland: Reed Publishing, 1995), 118–21; Cowan, *Maoris in the Great War*, 179.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Te ope tuatahi | Te ope tuarua | Te ope tuaiwa |
| No Aotearoa | No Mahaki rawa, | No Te Arawa, |
| No Te Wai-pounamu; | Na Hauiti koe, | No Te Tai-rawhiti, |
| No nga tai e wha. | Na Porourangi. | No Kahungunu. |
| Ko koutou ena | I haere ai Henare, | E haere ana au |
| E nga rau e rima, | Me to wiwi, | Ki runga o Wiwi, |
| Te Hokowhitu toa | I patu ki te pakanga | Ki reira au nei |
| A Tu-matau-enga. | Ki Paranihi ra ia. | E tangi ai. |
| I hinga ki Ihipa, | Ko wai he morehu | Me mihi kau atu |
| Ki Karipori ra ia. | Hei kawe korero | I te nuku o te whenua |
| E ngau nei te aroha, | Ki te iwi nui e, | Hei konei ra e, |
| Me te mamae. | E taukuri nei? | E te tau pumau |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Our first recruits have come | The second lot has come | The nineteenth recruits |
| From the North Island | From the Mahaki tribe | From Te Arawa |
| From the South Island | From Hauiti | From the East Coast |
| We greet you warriors | From Porourangi. | From Kahungunu |
| Borne by all four tides, | Farewell, Henare! [Kohere], | I'm now departing |
| Our brave five hundred, | Who led your platoon, | To France, |
| The Maori Contingent | And fell while fighting | And there I'll weep. |
| Of Tumatauenga [war god]. | In the trench in France. | My own dear people. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Some fell in Egypt, | Is there a morehu [survivor] | I salute you |
| Some on Gallipoli. | To take your message | As I disappear |
| Oh how the pangs of pain | To your own nation, | Farewell my dearest, |
| Eat at our hearts. | In sorrow bowed? | My own true love. |

(Translation in *Poverty Bay Herald*, June 22, 1917, 5).

29. *Gisborne Times*, April 9, 1919, 2; *Te Kopara*, June 1917, 10; *Wanganui Chronicle*, April 12, 1916, *Hawera & Normanby Star*, April 18, 1916, 4, 7; *Hawera & Normanby Star*, April 18, 1916, 7; *Taranaki Daily News*, April 24, 1916, 4; *Otago Witness*, April 25, 1917, 27; *Poverty Bay Herald*, June 21, 1917, 6; *Te Kopara*, October 1917, 11.
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33. *Poverty Bay Herald*, October 29, 1918, 3.
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35. NZPD, vol. 177, 13 July 1916, 73; *Hastings Standard*, March 11, 1920, 4; *New Zealand Times*, November 3, 1919, 6; M. P. K. Sorrenson, ed., *Na To Hoa Aroha/From Your Dear Friend: The Correspondence between Sir Apirana Ngata and Sir Peter Buck, 1925–50, Volume One*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1986), 28.
36. Ashley Gould, 'Proof of Gratitude? Soldier Land Settlement in New Zealand After World War I' (PhD thesis, Massey University, 1992), 324.

37. Ibid., 325; *Te Ao Hou*, (Winter 1954): 58; *Auckland Star*, June 4, 1934, 14. The farms were Hoia Station (Hick's Bay), Hoata Station (Tikitiki), and Hereheretau (near Wairoa). In 1925 Hoata was abandoned.
38. *Te Ao Hou*, Winter 1954: 58; Gould, 'Proof of Gratitude?', 325.
39. *Nelson Evening Mail*, October 5, 1916, 3; *Bay of Plenty Times*, July 16, 1917, 2.
40. *Manawatu Standard*, October 12, 1916, 7.
41. *Nelson Evening Mail*, October 5, 1916, 3; *Bay of Plenty Times*, July 16, 1917, 2. The Owhaoko gift was never used for the purpose for which it was given, nor was the land returned to its owners until the 1970s. See Martin Fisher and Bruce Stirling, 'Taihape Inquiry District: Technical Research Programme: Sub-district block study—Northern aspect', Report commissioned by the Crown Forestry Rental Trust, September 2012, 116, 135.
42. *NZ Herald*, October 24, 1918, 4.
43. *Evening Post*, September 16, 1920, 7.
44. *NZ Herald*, February 12, 1919, 6.
45. *Thames Star*, August 15, 1916, 4.
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48. Gould, 'Proof of Gratitude?', 315.
49. *Bay of Plenty Times*, February 24, 1920, 3.
50. *Auckland Star*, July 10, 1923, 7.
51. *Bay of Plenty Times*, February 24, 1920, 3.
52. Gould, 'Proof of Gratitude?', 317.
53. Ibid., 328.
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CHAPTER 5

# India's Silver Bullets: War Loans and War Propaganda, 1917–18

*Radhika Singha*

The intensification of war demands in 1917 introduced many firsts to India's financial history. In March 1917, the government of India announced a 'gift' of 100 million pounds towards the British empire's war expenses, an unspecified portion of which was to be met by the First Indian War Loan.[1] Public loans had been floated before but usually to underwrite revenue-generating assets, such as railways or irrigation works. The First and Second Indian War Loans of 1917 and 1918 were staggeringly more ambitious exercises, oriented to an intangible object, the

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R. Singha (✉)
Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, India



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winning of the war. The even more ubiquitous reminder of government's wartime relationship of debt to its subjects was the increased volume of paper currency in circulation, representing as it did a claim on faltering specie reserves.[2] In December 1917 and January 1918, Rs.1/- and Rs. 2–8/- notes were introduced to supplement the silver-based one rupee coin, the medium of everyday transactions for India's population.[3]

This chapter explores the propaganda strategies the government of India deployed to negotiate its role as debtor to a subject population over which it also had to maintain its authority and standing. Called upon to develop more demotic forms of address, the colonial regime could never rid itself of the fear that if war-loan publicity was too strident, it might be 'mis-read'. Asked to loan their savings to the Raj, and to accept the new small denomination notes instead of coin, Indian subjects might conclude that Britain was on the verge of financial collapse and that the outcome of the war was uncertain. If millions of peasant and producer households responded by seceding from the market for goods, services, and labour, it would strangulate India's war effort. The colonial regime continued to rely substantially on its own revenue bureaucracy and upon Indian princes and other notables to push up war loan subscriptions. However, by evoking the figure of the 'small investor' it did open a space for dialogue with the politically vocal Indian middle-classes.

## India, 'The Sink of Precious Metals'?

To varying degrees the belligerent powers preferred debt to direct taxes in managing wartime finance.[4] As G. Balachandran points out, credit became the currency of power, and it was a resource that Britain, getting ever deeper into debt with the United States, defended with zeal.[5] From autumn 1915 onwards the balance of India's trade with Britain shifted decisively in the former's favour. The British government placed huge orders in India for agricultural and forest products, cotton and jute goods, hides, minerals, and munitions. However, Britain, intent on conserving its gold reserves, refused to pay India in gold. Nor could the trade surplus be addressed by increasing consumer and machinery exports to India, for British industry was being diverted to war needs.

Silver had to substitute for gold as the medium of remittances, but the price of this metal was rising and world output was declining. The government of India acquired unprecedented quantities of silver for coining in 1916–17, but in September 1917 to prevent competition with official

prices it also prohibited the private import of silver.[6] From December 1916, to ease the hectic call upon currency supply, the India Office restricted the sale of reverse council bills, the medium by which India's sterling balances were converted into rupee credits in India. These began to be restricted to those exports from India held to be crucial to Britain's war needs. India's credits piling up in London were invested in British Treasury bills, effectively enrolling the country 'in an involuntary war-savings programme'.[7]

In addition to this invisible contribution, India also assumed the 'normal' cost of the Indian Expeditionary Forces, even though not obliged to do so when these were used beyond the country's own frontiers. Nevertheless, the India Office came under repeated pressure to make further financial contributions to the empire's war effort.[8] The bleakness of news from the front encouraged stories in the British press and across empire about the 'peculiarity' of Indian attitudes to bullion, the hoards of silver and gold scattered about the country, and the financial might these would generate if monetised. The disasters of the Mesopotamian campaign were blamed on the 'parsimony' of the Viceroy of India, Lord Hardinge, and the Indian Finance Member, William Meyer. In addition to this political pressure, the other crucial reason for launching an Indian war loan was the expectation that by generating fresh rupee funds it would ease the pressure on currency supply.[9] With the same end in mind, British businesses in India also pressed strongly for the measure, hoping it would allow the India Office to ease restrictions on reverse council bills which were inhibiting exports.[10]

## Not Britain's Need but India's Opportunity

On 1 March 1917, the Finance Member, William Meyer, announced India's 100 million pound 'gift' towards Britain's war expenses, an unstated portion of which would be met by the Indian War Loan.[11] The Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, addressed the most likely contributors, the 'Princes and Nobles, and the wealthier commercial institutions and individuals … who have obtained such signal material benefits from British rule'. But he also called upon Indians as a whole to rally behind the loan.[12] Meyer stressed, therefore, that all classes of investors had been provided for: '(F)or the man who desires a semi-permanent investment' there was long-term paper redeemable over the period 1929 to 1947; for banks and others wanting a shorter tenure there were three- and five-year bonds; and

lastly, there were five-year income-tax free post office cash certificates beginning at Rs. 7–12/-.[13]

Sections of nationalist opinion pointed out that there had been no consultation with elected representatives in the Imperial Legislative Council about a 'gift' which would mean budgetary starvation for the 'nation-building' departments of education, sanitation, and irrigation.[14] The implication was that the Viceroy had succumbed to pressure from London, so war propaganda had to turn the story around. Britain's need had to be recast as India's opportunity.

The official stance was that the importance of the 'gift' lay not so much in the amount promised, as in the partnership India was being offered in empire, and the opportunity to participate in imperial forums side by side with the Dominions.[15] Tapping the widespread support for *swadeshi*, that is for national industrial and financial development, speakers at war loan rallies also emphasised that the money raised would be spent in India, thereby stimulating agricultural and industrial production.

Full propaganda value was extracted from the government of India's insistence that tax measures to pay for the 'gift' had to include an increase in the customs duties on British textile imports.[16] This secured a protectionist duty of four per cent for Indian cotton goods, a measure long-demanded, and one which helped to mute criticism. The Secretary of State for India's speech in Parliament dismissing Lancashire's vociferous objections was widely reported as an instance of the 'disinterestedness and justice of British rule'.[17] The post office certificate, described by Meyer as 'a permanent measure, to bring the Government into relation with investors of a smaller class than it has hitherto reached', also struck a chord with agendas of rural 'uplift' in India. A common theme in these agendas, emanating from 'constructivist' nationalists, missionary bodies, and movements for community advance, was that peasants had to be weaned away from 'hoarding' their surplus in the form of silver ornaments or wasting it on 'useless' ceremonies and taught instead to save through the post office and cooperative banks.

## Profiling the Investor

No target amount was set for the First or Second Indian War Loan (the second loan was issued in June 1918). In both cases, however, the sum realised outstripped expectations. Meyer had hoped for ten million pounds for the first loan and twenty million for the second. The amounts raised

were 35.5 million and 37.7 million pounds respectively.[18] These were unheard of figures, given that the rupee loan of 1906, the largest raised in India before the war, was a mere four and half crore rupees (three million pounds). Perhaps, speculated one official report,

> we now have in existence a large class of rentiers, the investment of whose savings in public loans should in future years, be of almost incalculable value in furthering the development of the country.[19]

In fact, in India, as in many of the states participating in the war, the bulk of war loan contributions came from larger players and from institutional subscriptions.[20] Princely states, business firms, mills, banks, cooperative societies, port trusts, district boards, municipal corporations, educational bodies, and charitable funds, such as the Imperial Indian Relief Fund, figured prominently in the official 'List of applications for rupees one lakh and above for the First War Loan'.[21] David Sunderland concludes that by value, 52.78 per cent of the applications for the First Indian War Loan came from Europeans in India of which 55 per cent were from banks and 19 per cent from commercial firms.[22]

Still, an official report on the First War Loan noted that the classification of subscriptions into European and non-European was 'somewhat misleading':

> Even where a bank is purely European in constitution and management, the applications made through it must consist to a considerable extent of non-European money; in particular, the Presidency Banks can scarcely be called purely European, so far as their shareholders and depositors are concerned.[23]

The princely states subscribed hugely, putting some of their profits from the stock market into war bonds.[24] The wartime difficulty of getting machinery and other industrial imports meant that Indian firms had capital to spare.[25] In contrast, smaller retailers and merchants who needed cash in hand for forward trading, were probably reluctant to tie it up in government paper. The Burma government, for example, complained that Chinese and Indian businesses, the latter represented by Marwaris, Chettiars, and Surati Muslims, stayed aloof, but acknowledged that the rice and timber trade had to be financed.[26] On the other hand, firms seeking wartime contracts, and privileged access to rupee credits, transport,

and coal, knew they had to subscribe. In Calcutta, Marwari merchants trying to establish themselves as honourable businessmen and loyal subjects in the face of relentless hostility from European firms, were said to have contributed three crores (two million pounds), with Rai Surupchand Hukum Chand Bahadur and Babu Keshoram Poddar contributing about half this sum.[27] In the booming textile town of Ahmedabad, Indian mill owners also figured prominently in the subscriber list.[28]

## War Finance and War Propaganda: Rallying Civic Publics

To survey the war loan drives of 1917 and 1918 in India is to see a pageant of colonial civic life unfold. Notables were expected to rally conspicuously to the support of empire and to use their influence with municipalities, district boards, caste and community associations to push up totals. Such signs of 'self-mobilisation' were valued as a demonstration that, in the face of calls for self-government, the ideology of imperial trusteeship on behalf of 'interests and communities' had not yet run its political course.

The campaigns were inaugurated by a meeting convened at some prominent venue by the executive head of the district, the ruler of a princely state, or the British resident at his court. This was a hierarchical assembly, at which urban and rural notables gave inspiring speeches, and a committee was set up to disseminate information about the war loan through newspaper advertisements, pamphlets, posters, and propaganda events.[29] In Burma, a War Loan train was flagged off from Rangoon on 7 August 1918, its arrival at every station being treated as a civic event with a band, refreshments, and arrangements to facilitate subscription on the spot.[30] It was praised by one contemporary as 'perhaps the first gigantic advertising campaign in the east through the medium of the Railway'.[31]

War-loan propaganda took on a more sustained form at prominent commercial and maritime nodes of empire, where wealth flowed into modern banks, insurance companies, and the stock exchange. The effort in rural areas was entrusted largely to landlords and the subordinate bureaucracy. The very mode of applying for a war bond, through a bank, or district treasury, and very often through a cheque, implied an urban location, social confidence, and economic standing. From Bombay and Calcutta, newspapers and periodicals like the *Times of India*, *Capital*, and the *Statesman*, wove their advocacy for the war loan into the role they saw

for themselves as spokesmen for the infrastructural and commercial needs of these metropolitan outposts of empire. British businessmen and an expatriate European community, feeling threatened by the prospect of constitutional change and sharper competition from Indian capitalists, wanted to show how important their leadership of Indian civic life was to the vitality of empire. Generous contributions to the war loan put Chambers of Commerce in a position to negotiate on issues such as the conscription of European employees, the allocation of labour, railway transport, and coal, and the dread possibility of excess profit taxes, without being accused of exhibiting a lack of patriotism.

## The Contributor's List: Emulation and Rivalry in the Public Sphere

The most mundane, repetitive, and yet crucial aspect of war-loan publicity was the contributor list published in newspapers, and circulated in pamphlets. Such lists had meaning in relation to the forms of associational life and the politics of a particular locale. Through a running comparison of the performance of princely states, provinces, districts, cities, businesses, and prominent notables, such subscription lists instituted a new index of loyalty and civic virtue. They fed off emulation and rivalry, discouraged back-sliding from public commitments and kept the pressure on district officials. *Capital*, the representative voice of the European business community, asked resentfully why Indian cotton and jute firms were not pressed harder to subscribe.[32] The *Statesman* juxtaposed the dials of three clocks, to compare the all-India total with the running total for Bombay and Bengal presidencies.[33] The clock was a particularly appropriate vehicle for stoking rivalry as Bombay and Calcutta had their own distinct time zones.[34]

Lists of contributors were also consolidated in official histories of the war services of the various provinces and gave birth to lists of honours and awards. Seth Sukh Lal Karnani's 'dramatic contribution of 11 lakhs' from Hissar, for example, saved Punjab from being beaten by the United Provinces for third place in the provincial list. He received an OBE and the title of *Rai Bahadur*.[35] The more modest applications of government employees, pensioners, municipal councillors, and the professional classes found a place in the lists published in smaller newspapers and in district histories of war service. Encouraging this strata to invest in government

paper was expected to expand the domestic loan market, and to entwine the financial future of the politically assertive middle-classes with the stability of the Raj. So the United Provinces and the Madras presidency, which came lower in the provincial list, highlighted their efforts to rope in the small investor.[36] To relieve the dreariness of lists, newspapers worked in small stories about even humbler subjects, whose act of subscription was read as an acknowledgement of the sheltering care of the Raj.

## The War-Loan Poster and the Newspaper Advertisement

War-loan publicity worked in a variety of different agendas and gave a significant boost to large and small printing presses, newspaper circulations, and film exhibitions. Nevertheless, in a country with such a low literacy rate it is remarkable how many official war loan posters were merely text-based compositions.[37] English newspapers in India often complained of the tepidity of war-loan campaigns, comparing them with the vigour and imagination of war-saving drives in the United Kingdom.[38] '(T)he draft of an advertisement', so went an edgy editorial in the *Times of India*, 'needs just as much brains, if not more, than to write a minute'.[39]

Why then was visual imagery not employed more extensively, given the culture of commercial art emerging in India from the late nineteenth century, whose rich hybridity had found expression in calendars, lithographic prints, theatre posters, trademarks, labels, and advertisements?[40] James Aulich and John Hewitt argue that the war blurred the line between the public notice, which informed, instructed, and commanded, constructing the citizen as the subject of power, and the poster, which constructed them as citizens with the freedom to choose what was on offer.[41] Reviewing India's typographic war-loan posters, and even some of those with an image, one senses a hesitation on the part of the colonial regime to step out from the sober realm of the public placard and into the exuberant world of advertising.

The question which hovered over propaganda asking Indian subjects to stop hoarding and melting down coin and to subscribe to the war loan was this: how safe was it to expose the financial crisis of empire? Writing in confidence, Lord Chelmsford advised provincial governors that the correct approach to the war loan was neither 'compulsion or flaring advertisement' because it might stampede people into withdrawing their money from banks.[42] In London, Prime Minister Lloyd George could call for

grim resolve to make the third British war loan a success. 'I want to see,' he thundered, 'cheques hurtling through the air. Every well-primed cheque is a better weapon of destruction than a 12-inch shell'.[43]

In India too, the population had to feel that their contributions would translate into military might, so some war-loan posters, modelled on the British ones, showed money mutating into weaponry: an oversized rupee coin crushing the Kaiser, currency notes transforming into bullets.[44] However, publicity steered away from too graphic an invocation of the interchangeability between money, munitions, and human blood. And, pathos could be allowed to mingle with pride only for the 'right' sort of reader. Subscribers to the *Statesman* were advised to take in the 'Battle of the Ancre and the Advance of the Tanks', playing at the Empire theatre, Calcutta, to understand the cause they were being asked to support.[45] For the urban masses, however, the British India Steam Navigation company constructed a sheet-iron and wooden model tank, which was taken around Calcutta on a motor chassis.[46]

The sober facticity of war loan posters, their resemblance to government placards and notices, the choice of official spaces for display such as post offices, courts, railway and tram stations, combined a message about financial security with a milieu of authorisation for the collection methods of the subordinate bureaucracy. Inevitably this also introduced an element of 'confusion' about a loan taken in aid of a 'gift'. The impression produced by a Gujarati poster which has a Sikh soldier asking, with a Kitchener-like glare, 'Have you bought war bonds or not?', must have been ambivalent to say the least.[47]

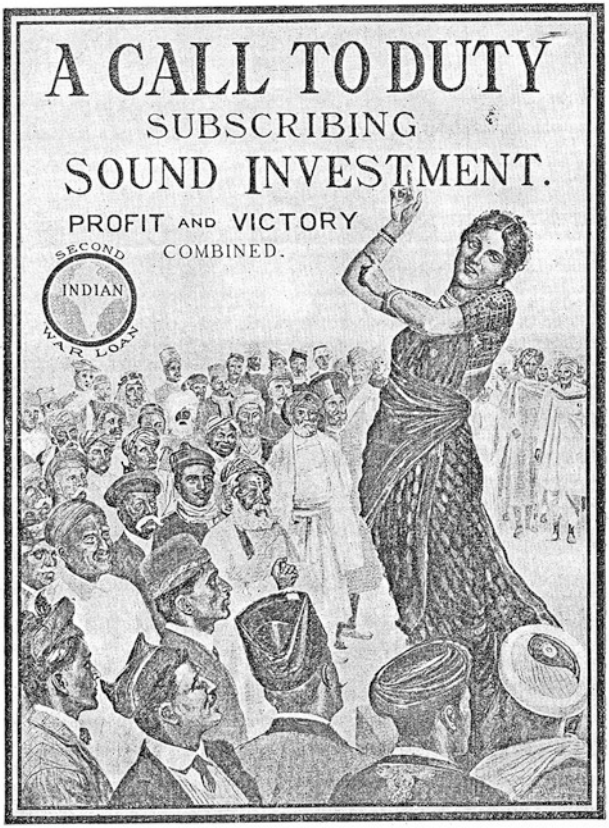
War-loan advertisements in the larger newspapers and in some periodicals were thematically more diverse than official posters because they were sponsored not only by the provincial war-loan committees but also by European businesses. There was a closer connection with the world of commercial illustration, and a wider range of emotions were tapped.[48] Nevertheless, the dominant message remained that loyalty to empire was also the prudent financial choice. An English-language poster reassured 'The citizens of Madras' no less than three times that their investment was: 'absolutely safe…. Your money is safe. Re-payment is guaranteed by the Government of India and secured by the whole Wealth of India. You cannot find a safer investment'.[49]

Some of the posters simply reproduced the themes of British posters, suggesting a limited and targeted address to an expatriate community, or an invitation to educated Indians to feel the pulse of the European war.

Few outside this circle were likely to grasp the symbolism of a robed woman holding an olive branch with the title 'Every War Bond Brings Peace a Step Closer'.[50] Such images had more resonance when reproduced in English newspapers of the port towns of Bombay and Calcutta. A full-page advertisement 'presented by the proprietors of the *Statesman*' uses the image of the British soldier and nurse to touch a nerve about allowing physical distance to translate into emotional distance: 'He is doing his part. She is doing her part. Are you doing yours by investing in the War Loan?'[51] The Bengal War Loan Committee channelled its despondency about lacklustre applications in May 1917 into an illustration which positioned a drooping British civilian between a British soldier and a brutish German soldier and admonished him sharply: 'Remember! Your Money Cannot Be Neutral…. You look to have an uneasy Conscience!'[52]

At the same time, the subscriber base had to be widened, so it was India, not Britain, which was presented as the object of protection, and the Indian sepoy was positioned among those to whom gratitude was owed.[53] Thus, a Sikh soldier, his arm in a sling, and a British soldier, limping with a cane, move together towards the reader of the *Statesman*, demanding a response: 'These Men Have Made Their Sacrifice. Are You Making Yours?' it asked.[54] Another advertisement, urging attendance at a war-loan meeting in Calcutta, shows a stream of Indians winding towards the colonnaded portal of the town hall. The figure last in line is a European, his face turned towards the reader, inviting him or her to approve of this re-framing of civic life.[55]

From the lower depths of another advertisement a British officer, surrounded by Indian soldiers, looks up in hope towards two businessmen armed with cheque books, the one clearly British, the other his equally suave but swarthy Indian counterpart.[56] The Indian is cast not as the caricatural *bania*, the traditional Indian merchant, but as someone who might belong to the same Chamber of Commerce, even if not to the same club as the European.[57] The throb of a confident 'vernacular' capitalism is captured in another advertisement captioned 'Mumbaidevi's sermon to her sons' designed by M. V. Dhurandhar, a product of the Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy School of Art in Bombay, and a significant contributor to the world of commercial art. In this illustration, published in the Gujarati journal *Vismi Sadi*, the goddess of Mumbai/Bombay, her arm curving upwards towards profit and patriotism holds a prosperous multi-ethnic Indian gentry in thrall (Illustration 5.1).[58]




ચિત્રકાર:] વૉર લોન પોસ્ટર [મી. એમ. વી. ધુરંધર.

મુંબાદેવીનો પોતાના પુત્રો પ્રતિ ઉપદેશ.

**Illustration 5.1** Mumbaidevi's sermon to her sons. Second war loan advertisement designed by Mahadev Vishwanath Dhurandhar (18 March 1867—01 June 1944). Source: Centre for Indian Visual Culture (CIViC). Originally published in *Vismi Sadi* (Twentieth Century), a Gujarati literary journal published from Mumbai (Bombay) between 1916–20.

A Gujarati poster drawn from the *Hindi Punch* does mine the caricatural image of the *bania* to warn of the dangers of 'hoarding' coin, probably tapping into incidents of looting caused by the soaring price of cloth and salt. In the poster, a worried trader, surrounded by bags of coin, strides away happily to lodge his money in war bonds.[59] Elite European and Indian women were also targeted by setting up women's branches of the War Loan Committee in Bombay and Calcutta and making special arrangements for those who observed the norms of *pardah*, veiling.[60] The *Times of India* carried a stylish advertisement inviting the ladies of Bombay to a special war-loan day, complete with tea, a band, and everything else 'to make the patriotic business of the day pleasant and enjoyable'.[61]

There were reassurances better relayed by chosen speakers than addressed in posters, such as those aimed at Muslims who hesitated to subscribe on account of Islamic strictures against usury.[62] The excuse may have reflected some ambivalence about a war in which the Ottoman sultan, custodian of the holy spaces of Islam, was on the enemy side.[63] In Punjab some Muslims responded by subscribing to war bonds but refusing to take any interest.[64]

## The Pedagogies of the Post Office: The Small Investor

The post office in India offered a particularly favourable medium of publicity for the war loan, as well as an infrastructure for collection. Post office savings banks had a wider social and spatial reach than modern commercial banks in India[65]; and, since they were already dealing with government paper, they could receive subscriptions for war bonds and savings certificates and disburse interest. The diverse services offered by the post office had always figured prominently in colonial pronouncements about the civilising effects of British rule in India.[66] In May 1914, just before the war, the finance member deployed the post office savings bank to compete ideologically and institutionally with *swadeshi* banks. He raised the maximum deposit allowed in any one post office savings account from Rs. 500/- to Rs. 750/- to mop up savings made available by the failure of many *swadeshi* banks in 1913–14 and to underline the foolhardiness of such nationalist ventures.[67] Now in 1917, the post office savings certificate was introduced as 'The Investment for the Man of Small Means…. Guaranteed by Government'.[68] And the postal frank, used to broadcast

health initiatives such as the availability of quinine in 'penny packets' for the treatment of malaria, was now used to publicise the war loan.

Reporting on the first Indian war loan the London *Times* noted approvingly that post office certificates were 'teaching the industrious and thrifty lower middle classes and working classes' of India, otherwise habituated to hoarding, 'the first principles of investment'.[69] While thrift, the defining virtue of respectability, was acknowledged in Indians of the middling sort, they had to be persuaded of the advantages of government paper, in this case the post office savings certificate, over savings in the form of specie and ornaments. Whereas the minimum unit for a war bond was Rs. 100/-, that for a savings certificate was just Rs. 7–12/-, and in sympathy with the small investors need for liquidity, the latter could be encashed at any time.[70]

The scheme was presented as an ideal one for middle-class families to secure their future and that of their children, and it was made easier for heirs to claim this investment.[71] Schools and colleges were told to gift savings certificates as prizes and to encourage students to save their pocket money to acquire them, so that the rising generation felt they were participating in the imperial war effort.[72]

The other important line of approach was to invite educated Indians to endorse the pedagogic value of the post office savings certificate for the 'improvident' lower classes, in particular for the peasantry.[73] *Capital* cast the popularisation of the savings certificate as a 'useful public service'.[74] War-loan committees in Bihar and Orissa consisted of 'leading gentlemen of the different communities', yet drew upon school masters, estate managers, and sub-registrars to promote the loan.[75] Two notables of the Purnea Bar were praised for raising Rs. 80,000/- from 'village folk' putting together 'subscriptions of only a few annas a head'.[76] One of the few war-loan posters in which the cultivator was configured as a potential contributor shows Bengali farmers, Hindu and Muslim, clustering around a post master's desk.[77] The economists, V. G. Kale and S. G. Parandikar criticised colonial war finance for sacrificing long-term national needs, but both welcomed the nexus which the post office certificate had established between government and the small investor.[78]

The reach of the post office savings bank cannot be overstated. In 1917 for a population of 320 million, there were only 1,647,419 active post office savings accounts.[79] In some provinces war bonds could also be purchased through sub-treasuries, but these did not have the personnel to disburse interest.[80] The subordinate officials who oversaw the collection of

the land tax—the *zaildar*, *tehsildar* or *mamlatdar*—had the widest reach into the countryside. However, in contrast to the post master, it was difficult to cast these figures in the role of benevolent advisor to the peasant. Before assessing what their deployment meant for peasant perceptions of the war loan, one has to note that it was the lure of chance, rather than the pedagogy of thrift which provided one of the liveliest exercises of 1917 in reaching out to 'the man of small means'.

## The Lure of Chance: Sweepstakes and Lotteries

Section 294-A of the Indian Penal Code made it an offence to hold any public lottery without government sanction and there were local by-laws in Bombay and Calcutta that made gambling an offence. Still lotteries did occur, mostly in the discreet confines of clubs. Wartime fundraising drives made it tempting to throw the net wider. In 1917, the government allowed the Western India Turf Club to organise a war loan sweepstake, agreeing, as an exceptional case, to waive any criminal provisions.[81] The organisers seized upon this concession to insert the phrase 'sanctioned by the Government of India' in the lottery prospectus and to print 'authorised by government' on its tickets.[82] Hoping for a considerable demand 'from *mofussil* villages, particularly from combinations of small subscribers', the Bombay government permitted district treasuries to remit cash payments for tickets.[83] The expectation was those with just a few rupees to spare would prefer the thrill of a chance to win a glittering portfolio of war bonds to the tedium of applying for a single savings certificate.

The Western India Turf Club lottery was lavishly advertised in newspapers, not only in India but also in Malaya and Singapore.[84] The point of tension was that in the columns of the same newspapers 'the gambling vice' had often been critiqued for putting vulnerable populations such as labourers, domestic servants, schoolboys, and respectable women on the path to ruin. Missionary bodies criticised government for undermining its own ban on lotteries.[85]

On 2 July 1917, a ripple of consternation ran through the vast crowd assembled in Bombay's Town Hall when it learnt that the draw for the lottery was postponed due to a civil suit lodged by the Parsi millionaire Sir Dorabji Tata.[86] Tata had commissioned Thomas Cook to buy ticket No.15315 for him, but the ticket with this number was mistakenly issued to one W. H. G. Hally instead. Four days later, the suit was dismissed, the judge arguing that permission for this one lottery did not change the posi-

tion that a civil action could not be lodged for a gaming and wagering contract.[87]

*Capital* which had initially supported the sweepstake, now criticised the official 'countenance' given to it: 'the rude wind of a boisterous publicity … offers to the poor and ignorant a kind of divine authority for the indulgence of sordid vice'.[88] Tata and Sons, it noted, had contributed one crore to the war loan and yet Sir Dorabji had 'squabbled like a corner boy over a lucky number'.[89] The surge of excitement generated by the sweepstake seemed to dilute the criticism which British businessmen levelled at their Indian competitors, particularly the Marwaris, of 'gambling' in futures rather than engaging in legitimate forms of business activity.[90] Embarrassed by the very success of the publicity surrounding the sweepstake, the government of India subsequently issued a statement declaring that the sanction given in this case did not mean that illegal lotteries were immune from prosecution.[91]

## Pathways of Collection

While non-official members of war-loan committees were encouraged to focus on the propaganda front, official members provided the administrative clout. In public Indian princes declared they were placing all their resources at the disposal of empire, but a glimpse behind the scenes gives us a sense of the wave of panic, the bargains and negotiations set in motion by the war loan.[92] The Bombay government urged chiefs and princes to invest the pay-outs they received from the liquidation of the Indian Specie bank in 1913 in the war loan.[93] They were also pressed to invest their reserves of silver coin and bullion in war bonds or to lend this treasure to government to prop up the metallic reserve.[94]

The shift in 1916 from fixed slabs for the assessment of income tax, to a sliding scale for those with annual incomes above Rs. 5000/- gave the colonial executive both information and leverage, which it used to pressurise local traders.[95] Heavy hints were dropped that if the wealthy classes did not loan their money, enhanced taxation would follow. Counselling the members of Bengal Landholders Association to subscribe voluntarily, the Maharaja of Kassimbazaar reminded them that the 'permanent settlement' of their land tax was no longer sacrosanct.[96] For his part, Malcolm Hogg, chairman of the Bombay Chamber of Commerce, urged fellow businessmen to 'spurn the meretricious attraction of the share bazaar, to turn a deaf ear to the blandishment of the gamble in cotton,

the speculation in sovereigns and to seek a safe retreat … in the lucrative security of the Indian War Loan'.[97] On a blunter note, he warned that: 'The failure or only partial success of this War Loan must be followed by greatly increased taxation as certainly as night the day'.[98]

Another new and important way of raising contributions was to tap the stable waged sector of the economy, small as it was. Arrangements similar to the monthly deductions made for contributions to a life insurance scheme, a pension, or a gratuity at retirement, were deployed to offer an advance to employees of government and private businesses to buy bonds and certificates. Such schemes could be presented as an extension of paternalistic exercises to make employees provide for their future, and the permanent employee could enjoy the sense of social standing arising from the fact that his wage, however small, made him a credit-worthy person. The East India Railway allowed the employee with a monthly wage as low as Rs. 4/- to be included in its instalment scheme.[99] The *Statesman* carried a full-page advertisement titled 'What the Burra Sahib had to say': the head of a firm addresses his staff, informing both the head clerk and the humble messenger about the advances which would enable the one to acquire bonds and the other to acquire certificates.[100] A notice in a side panel underlined the importance of such aggregate subscriptions, pointing out that: 'investment in the Loan on the part of Clerks and the Working Classes … would prove a wonderful advertising medium, and … it inculcates thrift'.[101]

Financial institutions like the Bank of Bengal and the Central Bank of India publicised their arrangements to give an advance for subscriptions, the money to be recovered in instalments.[102] The National Indian Life Assurance Company, Calcutta, worked in a life insurance policy: 'Support the Loan, And at the same time, Provide for your family and for your own retirement'.[103] Clearly, war loans expanded the dealings of some large banks in government paper. However, one does not come across any sustained official attempt to push scrip through the vast 'informal' banking sector, which sustained agricultural production and marketing.[104]

## The Trust Deficit

In the Indian countryside, the subordinate bureaucracy used the information and authority deployed for the collection of land taxes to set target amounts for the war loan and to meet them. Low collections meant adverse remarks from superior officers. The poverty of peasants, and the

huge distances which separated them from the nearest post office bank or treasury, meant that some arbitrator or other influential person apportioned the demand among them and got the bond or certificate made out in his own name.[105] In Lyallpur, Punjab, Rs. 33/- was levied for each 'square' of land held by a cultivator, and the amount was invested collectively, the interest to go towards the 'improvement' of the village.[106,107] In Ranebennur, Dharwar, the money collected from cultivators was invested in war bonds made out in the name of local cooperative credit societies. The occasional outburst against such arrangements revealed that they were not of the kind likely to constitute the peasant as a willing consumer of government paper.[108]

It required a leap of faith for peasants to accept that the official who enforced the state's tax demand was asking them to loan their money, not to give it outright. This trust deficit also manifested amongst Indian soldiers. Captain Tweedy, censor for troop mail, warned that some of the Indian cavalrymen in France did not distinguish between subscriptions to the war fund and 'the present offer of a good investment in the War Loan'.[109] Letters from India, he noted, revealed some 'excessive zeal' in war-loan collection.[110] Sepoys instructed their families to let subordinate officials know that since they had placed their lives at the disposal of their rulers, they were not obliged to pay money as well.[111]

Some educated Indians expressed a similar mistrust, at least at the outset of the First War Loan.[112] Recalling his schoolboy experiences, the Bengali revolutionary Kali Ghosh described the District Officer coming around 'and with a cordiality not entirely habitual to him', inviting villagers to subscribe: 'To me and my intimates the loan seemed like a punitive tax. They will never pay it back we said!'[113] In May 1917, D'Arcy Lindsay, secretary of the Bengal War Loan committee, hinted that the 'booming of the loan' and the juxtaposition of the word 'war' with it, had not always been understood. He blamed a slump in applications on the persistent belief that the war loan was a charitable donation not an investment.[114]

## Conclusion

At one level, the colonial regime had to persuade its subjects that the First and Second Indian War Loans offered the same security to the investor as any other form of government paper. Yet the scale of the enterprise, and the knowledge that levels of collection would be read as a mark of confidence in the outcome of the war, meant that the business of subscription

could not be left to banks, and that audiences more diverse than the usual 'investing classes' had to be addressed. Subscription was, therefore, cast variously as part of the financial pedagogy of empire, as a vehicle of national economic and political advance, and an optimistic augury of the development of a domestic loan market. While the frame of colonial authority had to be kept in the picture it had to be combined with cajolery and negotiation to a degree which often discomfited officials, even though the government of India exceeded its own expectations in the matter of collection.

Ironically, the very success of the effort to reach out to the 'small investor' made the colonial regime feel that much more vulnerable to any panic encashment of the post office certificates payable on demand; these amounted to six and half million pounds by early 1918.[115] The appeal to colonial subjects, even those of small means, to lend their money to the Raj, also created a new discursive ground for the demand for political rights. The notables, whom the government relied on to marshal loyal civic publics, found their influence waning as they failed to blunt the state's mounting economic demands.[116]

In June 1918, as drought set in and prices soared, the second war loan was launched in a politically more contentious context. The charismatic national leader Tilak named the call to subscribe for what it was, a cry for help which should be used to press for self-government within empire: 'Purchase war debentures, but look on them as title deeds of Home Rule'.[117] Yet even so loyal a figure as the Aga Khan pointed out that a war gift of 100 million pounds, offered without any consultation with India's Legislative Council, had changed the relationship of trusteeship and strengthened India's claim for federal autonomy and representative government. A 'guardian' after all, had no right to take financial help from a 'ward'.[118]

## Notes

1. At Rs.15/- to the pound, 100 million pounds was equivalent to 150 crore rupees. One crore: Rs. 100,00,000/-. One lakh: Rs. 100,000/-. Figures in official and newspaper reports shifted continuously between pounds and rupees.
2. Between 1915 and 1919 the gross circulation of notes increased nearly three-fold while the percentage of the metallic backing decreased by nearly half (Hashmat Rai Chablani, *Indian Currency and Exchange* (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), 22).

3. The composition of the one rupee coin was 91.7% silver. In theory it was 'token currency', because, from 1898, when its exchange was fixed at 1s 4 d, its face value derived from state authorisation, not from its specie value. However, the rising price of silver in 1917 made it a hedge against inflation.
4. Ott points out that taxation would not have fulfilled the crucial political goals served by the mass marketing of federal war debt in the United States (Julia Ott, *When Wall Street Met Main Street: The Quest for an Investors' Democracy,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014)). In India, higher taxation rather than loans met the larger part of war expenditure (Satyashraya Gopal Panandikar, '*Some Aspects of The Economic Consequences of the War for India*' (PhD thesis, University of London, 1921), 243).
5. G. Balachandran, '"Finance orientalism"? Britain, the United States and India's wartime currency crisis, 1914–1918', *South Asia* 16, no. 2 (1993): 89–106.
6. *Review of the Report on the Administration of the Mints at Calcutta and Bombay for the years 1916–17* (Calcutta: Government Printing: 1917).
7. Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War and the Remaking of the Global Order 1916–1931* (New York: Allen Lane, 2014), 210. In his restrained yet anguished account of India's hidden financial contribution to the war, Panandikar critiqued the denial to India of payment in gold for essential war supplies, and the stowing away instead of her export surplus in British Treasury Bills. Acquired when the exchange rate was 1 s 4 d to the rupee, these were realized, at a tremendous loss to India, largely in 1919–20 when the exchange rate was double (*Some Aspects*, 216).
8. David Sunderland, *Financing the Raj, The City of London and Colonial India, 1858–1940* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013), 83.
9. 22 March 1918, *Speeches By Lord Chelmsford Viceroy and Governor General of India* (Simla: Government Press, 1921).
10. *Capital*, January 19, 1917, 145; January 26, 1917, 199.
11. The balance would be worked off by taking over the interest payment for an equivalent portion of the British War Loan, and the capital would be gradually paid off from Indian revenues.
12. 7 February 1917, *Speeches by Lord Chelmsford*, 233–34.
13. 'Indian War Loan', *Times of India,* March 2, 1917, 9 (henceforth *Times*). The post office certificate was patterned on the UK war savings certificate introduced in June 1916 to attract first-time investors. Due to the marked preference for short-term bonds, the Second Indian War Loan, launched in June 1918, dropped the long-term loan and offered ten- and seven-year bonds at 5.5 per cent, and five- and three-year bonds at 5.75 per cent.

14. Lala Lajpat Rai, *England's Debt to India: A Historical Narrative of Britain's Fiscal Policy in India* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1917); 'India and the War', *Times*, March 9, 1917, 6. Vaman Govind Kale, *India's War Finance and Post-war Problems* (Poona: Aryabhushan Press, 1919), 12, 56–57.
15. Political Department, 96-I/W, Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai (MSA); *Times*, March 10, 1917, 9. For the hard financial bargains actually driven by the Dominions see Jatinder Mann, 'War Finance, Australia', accessed September 2017, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918.online.net/article/war_finance_australia.
16. However, tariffs would be reviewed again after the war.
17. 'The Indian Debate', *Times*, April 17, 1917, 7.
18. 'Indian Budget', *Times*, March 2 1918, 11; Stanley Reed, ed., *The Indian Year Book 1919* (Bennet Coleman and Co.: Bombay), 726.
19. Foreign and Political, Internal, B, January 1919, No. 268.
20. In the first loan, the long-term loan accounted for 8.3 million pounds, the three- and five-year bonds for 21.2 million pounds, and post office certificates for 6 million pounds. Excluding the last item, a mere 155,103 investors contributed 29.5 million pounds. In the second loan, the post office section accounted for 3.7 million pounds. Excluding this, 103,282 applications accounted for 34 million pounds (L. F. Rushbrook Williams, *India in the Years 1917–1918* (Calcutta: Government Printing, 1919), 82).
21. IOR/L/AG/14/17/1, India Office Library and Records, London (IOR).
22. Sunderland, *Financing the Raj,* 83.
23. Controller of Currency, India, 22 September 1917, IOR/L/AG/14/17/1.
24. *Capital*, June 15, 1917, 1412. Finding it difficult to get its revenues from mining and electric power remitted from London, the Mysore State invested 225,000 pounds worth of Treasury Bills in the Second Indian War Loan, through Coutts and Co. IOR/L/AG/4/17/2 (Somerset Playne, compiled, *Indian States, A Bibliographical, Historical and Administrative Survey* (London: Foreign and Colonial Compiling and Pub. Co., 1921–22)).
25. Panandikar, *Some Aspects*, 262.
26. IOR/L/AG/14/17/1. In the Central Provinces, middlemen and shopkeepers, reluctant to tie up trading capital 'practically ignored' the loan (Ibid.). The interest rates offered by the second war loan did not attract the 'middle class of tradesmen' in Punjab (M.S. Leigh, *The Punjab and the War* (Lahore: Government Printing), 76).

27. *Times*, March 12, 1917, 10; May 28, 1918, 7; Foreign and Political, Internal, B, January 1919, No. 268. Anne Hardgrove, chap. 4 in *Community and Public Culture: The Marwaris in Calcutta, 1897–1997* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). The Marwaris were Hindu and Jain merchants originally from western India.
28. *Times*, March 29, 1917, 8.
29. *Times*, March 13, 1917, 8; 'The War Loan', *Times*, May 18, 1918, 7.
30. 'Burma's War Loan Train', *Straits Times*, August 21, 1918, 9.
31. Foreword, Photo 59/5, Burma Railway Collection, IOR.
32. *Capital*, March 23, 1917, 687.
33. *Statesman*, April 3, 1917.
34. For an insightful exploration of conflicts around time zones: Jim Masselos, 'Bombay Time/Standard Time', *South Asia*, 40, no. 2 (2017), 281–84.
35. *India's Services in the War, Vol.V, Punjab* (Newal Kishore Press: Lucknow, 1922), 60.
36. *India's Services in the War*, *Vol. III, United Provinces*, 23; *Vol. IV, Madras*, 34.
37. Based on the collection in the Imperial War Museum, London. The 1911 census put the literacy rate for India at 5.4 per cent and the 1921 census at 7.2 per cent.
38. *Times*, June 6, 1918, 6.
39. 'The Small Investor', *Times,* August 5, 1915, 6.
40. Jyotindra Jain, ed., *The Story of Early Indian Advertising, Marg* 68, no. 3, 2017.
41. James Aulich and John Hewitt, *Seduction or Instruction?: First World War Posters in Britain and Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 2.
42. Chelmsford to Governor Madras, 15 February 1917, IOR/R/2/882/123. At the outbreak of the war there had been a run on banks and post office savings accounts and demands for the exchange of currency notes for coin.
43. *Capital*, January 19, 1917, 126.
44. Imperial War Museum Poster nos. 12561 and 12530 (IWM PST).
45. 'Tomorrow is Pay Day', *Statesman*, April 29, 1917. The image of a British soldier, spent cartridges around his feet, is essayed only in the *Statesman,* 'Help us to refill his pouches', *Statesman*, April 5, 1917.
46. F. A. Hook, *Merchant Adventurers, 1914–15* (London: A&C Black Ltd, 1920), 35.
47. IWM PST 12562.
48. *Statesman*, April 15, 1917, 13.
49. IWM PST 12514; IWM PST 12538.

50. IWM PST 12528.
51. *Statesman*, July 2, 1918.
52. *Statesman*, May 6, 1917.
53. *Statesman*, April 3, 1917; *Times*, 22 June 22, 1918, 7.
54. *Statesman*, April 8, 1917, 20.
55. *Statesman*, April 10, 1917.
56. *Statesman,* April 19, 1917.
57. The advertisement incorporated a list of prominent subscribers from Bengal. Well-known European businesses figured on the list, but so did the well-known firms of Pran Kissen Law and Baldeodas Jugal Kishore, the latter profiting hugely from jute shares (Ibid.).
58. Jyotindra Jain, *Bombay/Mumbai: Visual Histories of a City, Centre for Indian Visual Culture,* 2013, accessed September 2017, http://civic-portale.org/manage/downloadminpdf.php?download_file=pdf...pdf.
59. IWM PST 12573.
60. *India's Services, Vol. IV, Bombay*, 18.
61. *Times*, August 30, 1918, 12.
62. IOR/L/AG/14/17/1.
63. *Statesman*, April 6, 1917.
64. *India's Services*, *Vol. V, Punjab*, 83.
65. In 1918 there were just 90 head offices and 300 branch offices of modern commercial banks in India ('Banking Map of India', in L.F. Rushbrook Williams, *India in the Years 1917–1918* (Calcutta: Government Printing, 1919), 77). On the eve of war, India had 18,789 post offices, some of which offered savings bank facilities.
66. Geoffrey Clarke, *The Post Office of India and its Story* (London: John Lance, 1921).
67. 'The Small Investor', *Times,* May 5, 1914, 4.
68. IWM PST 12535.
69. 'City Notes', London *Times*, August 13, 1917, 11.
70. To encourage retention, interest would accrue only after a year.
71. Acts No. 17 and 18 of 1917.
72. 'Students and Thrift', *Times*, September 11, 1917, 8; Bhopal Political Agency, File 7/8, 1917.
73. Combatants and non-combatants returning with savings, mill-workers, and even 'criminal tribes' were also targeted as subjects for this pedagogy.
74. *Capital*, March 30, 1917, 760.
75. IOR/L/AG/14/17/1.
76. Ibid.
77. IWM PST 12555; also IWM PST 12595.
78. Kale, *India's War Finance*, 67. Panandikar, *Some Aspects*, 263.
79. *Annual report on the Posts and Telegraphs of India for the year 1916–17* (Simla, 1917).

80. IOR/L/AG/14/17/1.
81. The tickets netted Rs. 36,42,090/-, The Calcutta Turf Club Sweep netted Rs. 3,74,470/-.
82. Political, 96-I-W, 1917, MSA.
83. 11 May 1917, in IOR/R/2/747/321, File R/C, 559.
84. *Straits Times*, April 21, 1917, 13.
85. *Statesman*, April 24, 1917; May 6, 1917. *Malaya Tribune,* April 17, 1917, 3.
86. *Capital*, July 6, 1917, 10–11.
87. Sir Dorabji Jamsetji Tata, vs Edward F. Lance And Ors. on 3 July 1917, accessed September 2017, https://indiankanoon.org/doc/509066/.
88. *Capital*, July 13, 1917, 70.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid. Ritu Birla, *Stages of Capital: Law, Culture, and Market Governance in Late Colonial India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
91. However, the feeling persisted that it was the excitement of windfall gains alone which would induce the Indian trader and the man on the street to invest in government paper. European Chambers of Commerce pressed continuously but unsuccessfully for a Premium bond scheme as a component of the First and Second Indian War Loans (*Times*, January 29, 1917, 11; February 10, 1917, 13; March 2, 1917. *Capital,* July 20, 1917, 129; July 27, 1917, 195; September 28, 1917, 732).
92. Political Department, 96-I/W, 1917, MSA.
93. Ibid.
94. Ibid.
95. See *Report of the Commissioners appointed by the Punjab Sub-Committee of the Indian National Congress*, *Vol. 1* (Bombay, 1920), 17.
96. *Capital,* March 30, 1917, 760.
97. 'Bombay and War Loan', *Times*, June 13, 1918, 7.
98. Ibid.
99. '25 Lakhs from E.I Railway', *Statesman,* April 5, 1917.
100. *Statesman*, April 1, 1917.
101. Ibid.
102. *Times*, June 3, 1918, 10; June 17, 1918, 5; July 22, 1918, 9.
103. *Statesman*, April 8, 1917, 20.
104. However, presidency banks could pay a brokerage of one-eighth per cent to 'recognised bankers and brokers' for bringing in subscriptions to war bonds (*Gazette of India Extraordinary*, May 11, 1918, 315). 'Recognised' broker was interpreted broadly in this context.
105. K-11, 1920, Finance Department, MSA.
106. Foreign and Political, Internal, B, September 1917, No. 245; Leigh, *The Punjab and the War*, 75.

107. *Bombay Gazette,* December 25, 1919, 968–69.
108. An investigation into the lynching of a *mamlatdar* in the Bombay Presidency revealed that he had followed 'the not infrequent practice' of sending out summonses on official printed forms, under the Land Revenue Code, calling upon people to appear before him 'in regard to the War Loan'. He then made out a list and closed the village well until they paid (Benjamin Guy Horniman, *British Administration and the Amritsar Massacre* (Mittal Publishers: Delhi, 1984), 26–27; *Times,* June 2, 1917, 9).
109. Note by censor, 3 October 1917, IOR/L/Mil/5/828, Pt III, and IOR/L/Mil/5/827, Pt III, 472.
110. Ibid.
111. Shiv Ram to Sarab Narain Shah, from France, 22 January 1918, in David Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers Letters, 1914–18* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), letter 639.
112. Slater, then professor of economics, Madras University, recalled that many large subscribers simply wanted to win official favour, they did not expect to see their money again. However, when they began to receive interest, and found that scrip was accepted as security for a bank loan, they subscribed more willingly to subsequent loans. Gilbert Slater, *Southern India, its Political and Economic Problems* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1936), 292.
113. Kali Ghosh, *The Autobiography of a Revolutionary in British India* (Delhi: Social Science Press, 2013), 22.
114. 'Wake up Bengal', *Statesman,* May 25, 1917, 7.
115. Chelmsford to Secretary of State for India, 23 January 1918, Finance Department.
116. Douglas E. Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India: The Shaping of a Public Culture in Surat City, 1852–1928* (Berkeley, CA: University of Calfornia Press, 1991), 174–75.
117. At Chikodi, (1918 nd), in *Bal Gangadhar Tilak, His Writings and Speeches* (Madras: Ganesh and Co., 1922), 238.
118. Aga Khan, *India in Transition, A Study in Political Evolution* (Bombay: Bennet, Coleman and Co., 1918), 286.

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CHAPTER 6

# Artists and Writers Between Tragedy and Camouflage

*Annette Becker*

One of the most remarkable definitions of the Great War, complete with *avant-garde* poetic disordering, can be found in the final lines of French poet Guillaume Apollinaire's 'Il y a' (There's/There Are), published in 1917:

> There are Hindus who watch Western campaigns with astonishment
> They think sadly of those they wonder if they'll see again
> For in this war[,] invisibility's an art that's been taken to great lengths.[1]

Both banal and extraordinary, the war led *avant-garde* writers and artists to adopt a form of camouflage that often rendered military and domestic fronts 'invisible'. Pursuing life yet confronting death, *avant-garde* images and texts spoke to the immediacy of the war: a 'here and now' idea which permeated the military and domestic fronts of war. These *avant-garde* forms that constructed and reconstructed the war sprang from a common 'mental tool-kit' that combatants and non-combatants shared. They asked: how could meaning be found in the disaster of war or in the paradoxes of conflict? How could this disaster or these paradoxes be represented? The war, constructed through destruction, offered, to those who experienced, remembered, or witnessed it, extraordinary 'material' for art—even to those who chose to portray it only with silence.

A. Becker (✉)
Université Paris Nanterre, Lille, France



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Every artist and writer reconstructed the war in his or her own way. In order to represent what seemed *a priori* incapable of being represented, imagination took the lead. As Isak Dinesen explained: 'all sorrows can be borne if you put them in a story or tell a story about them'.[2] Dinesen's line applies to every aspect of the war, be it the experiences of mobilisation, demobilisation, remobilisation, or its prolongation, and to memory: writers and artists used them all to create their war stories and their war histories. As the Austrian writer Karl Kraus described it, the First World War was 'the experimental crucible of the end of the world'. And artists responded in kind.

After the burial of soldiers, both during the war and as part of the exhumation and re-burial processes of the 1920s, the actual bodies of the combatants were hidden from view and, thereby, sanitised. But in literature and art, on war memorials and stained-glass windows, they remained: artistic representations of what was no longer seen. From the 1990s on, efforts to repatriate unknown soldiers for a number of countries, including Australia and New Zealand, brought to view the extant remains of these bodies, part of the expanding archaeology of the battlefields. What was exhumed was the corporeal reality of death: the decay experienced by actual bodies, a century on. But ever since the outbreak of the war, artists have tried to do a similar thing: they have tried to represent the decay and destruction of war, to desanitise, and thereby shape the story of the war.

This chapter uses wartime photographs as well as paintings, drawings, and writings to argue Kraus's point about the omnipresence and totality of the First World War. Even if these representations sometimes attempted to camouflage and hide the reality of death, they nevertheless brought out the transformative impact of the conflict on the bodies of combatants and civilians. The chapter follows artists and writers through ten themes leading us from 1914 to 1917, 1918 to 2017. The themes highlight how the trauma and violence of this war continues to live in art and representation today, both camouflaging the violence and giving it due shape.

## Theme 1: Tragedy in Sounds, Words, and Pictures

In 1917, when American troops reached France, a poet, Jean Cocteau, heard jazz for the first time. He described his experience of the James Europe Orchestra as 'a domesticated catastrophe'.[3] Can we extend the same idea to the entire Great War? Can the conflict be styled as an undomesticated catastrophe? I generally prefer the term 'tragedy' to describe the First World War, probably because in French classical tragedies of the seventeenth

century, there is blood and death but also a certain humanity and aspiration to hope. These themes encapsulate the Great War for me: a bloodbath in which human beings sometimes could and did make admirable choices. The dialogue in a 1917 French cartoon expressed the same sentiment: its caption asked 'You were a painter for theatre sets before the war, what do you do now?' The response came: '[I paint] sets for a tragedy'.[4]

Images enable us to descend into the visual abyss of war: of wounds, or death, and of memory. They offer traces of life braided together with death. They are all images of extreme violence. As such, they present a double absence: that of the moment the image is created and that of the moment it is viewed, for instance now, a century after the Great War. The images that survived the war disclose the possibility, almost certainly illusory, of forming a visual sense of the disaster. These texts, objects, and images give us a sense of 'here and now'—as if the war is still with us. The question then remains: can the revelatory power of a photograph be found in other forms of representation as well: in writing, drawing, painting, film, or objects, even the most familiar ones? They present civil society in the midst of total war, and as a result represent only damaged men, women and children.

Yet it is also striking that all forms of war representation to date have served, and continue to serve, a double aim: firstly, they look to document and restore an experience (be it of tragedy, damage, or disaster), and secondly, they function as a weapon in the service of a cause. For all images are representations of the image maker and serve to educate his or her audience. In the war, Ernst Jünger referred to photography as a weapon[5]; the term was also applied to cartoons and drawings. If the Allies could maximise their naval and economic blockade as a war-winning weapon, all the belligerents attempted the same ends with their propaganda by the images. And the extant images from the war served both to 'sell' the idea of war and 'represent' its tragedy.

## Theme 2: Fractures

In June 1914, the owner of the Berlin gallery *Der Sturm*, Herwarth Walden, invited Apollinaire to pay a visit to open an exhibition of *avant-garde* art and read his poetry. Apollinaire never came. When January 1915 rolled around, he was preparing for battle as a soldier in the French army. Ever since the outbreak of war, the international community of artists and intellectuals, a network of friendships, engagements, and collaborations,

had become fractured and broken. As a result, most writers and artists returned to their national loyalties in reflecting and representing the war. The war created a major fracture in these artists' social and experiential worlds.

It is useful to exhume and give life to those individuals swept into the vortex of the war before they experienced its injuries, death, and grief. Doing so enables a focus on the idea of anticipation, like in Meidner's series of paintings of burning cities, which began in 1912. It also allows us to recover the importance of the idea of fracture. The fractures of war moved from mobilisation to combat, from military to domestic fronts, from invasion to occupation, and, finally, in the war's aftermath from demobilisation to memory.

The theme of fracture helped intellectuals and artists grasp the extent of the war's disorder and its impact on their perceptions of its importance. The spectacle of the war was a genuine inspiration to artists. As Fernand Léger put it:

> There was an over-poetic atmosphere on the front which deeply excited me. Good God! What faces! … I was dazzled by a 75-hp automobile open to the sun…. It taught me more for my own evolution as an artist than all the museums in the world.[6]

Everything oscillated between fascination for the war (a lot of artists, like children playing cowboys and Indians, pretended to be at the front) and terror at realising its horrors. Sometimes these artists evoked a re-humanisation of the soldiers by taking portraits of their 'normal' activities: as men who ate, drank, read letters or wrote them, who slept and laughed.[27] Often these photographs were not seen as 'works of art', rather as reflections of 'reality'. To place these photographs alongside other wartime art, then, helps to highlight the parallels between humanity and destruction.[28]

The re-humanisation of the soldier led to a fundamental ambiguity in the work of wartime photographers, who felt and represented beauty, violence, and despair, all at the same time. Such themes are evident in the armoured trains and the 'cannons in action' of the Futurists Gino Severini and Giacomo Balla, the soldiers returning to the trenches by Christopher Nevinson, or the symbolic portraits deploring the death of a Prussian officer by the American Marsden Hartley. All of these works of art remind us that the tools of modernity—colour and fragmentation—were also mobil-

ised to represent the modernity of war and industrial death. Severini was even bold enough to call his fragments of helixes, rivets, cannons, and flags the *Visual Synthesis of an Idea: War*. Severini's painting aestheticised and even approved of the violence of war. And yet, Walter Benjamin warned us:

> What gives something authenticity is all that it contains transmissible, its material life and its power of historical testimony, which itself rests on its durability. In the case of a reproduction where its material life escapes us, we find that its power as testimony is also undermined.[7]

In wartime, suffering might be captured by an image, but once reproduced, what iota of reality is left in the image? Do the words of writers and historians truly reflect the disaster of this war? Do images capture those messages better?

## Theme 3: *Mise en abyme*, Camouflage, Cubism, and the Paradoxes of War

Throughout the war, both *avant-garde* and conventional artists showed themselves ready to render visible the invisible, and make the visible invisible. The official uses of camouflage, censure, and prohibition made 'rendering invisible' an external, public form. But in an opposing way, camouflage was also a means of deciding what would be rendered visible, either through uncertainty or, as in the pictorial and religious sense of the word, repentance.

What does it mean to be camouflaged? It is a way to hide the drama of war in its entirety by trying to transcend the contradiction between the aesthetic and destructive force of war. The fragmentation of *avant-garde* art relayed the contradictions well: its painted objects reveal different sides. As a result, camouflage was used as a synonym for the homogenisation of a war that had become total.

The artist Henry Valensi provided a particularly clear description of these transformations of vision and representation, enabling combatants to 'disappear' behind the industrial armaments whose power they wielded:

> The battles of this war have no connection with the ideas [of war] one could hold if one relied on paintings of previous wars. There is nothing *paintable* anymore, because the bodies do not have a witness with an easel in hand.

> On the whole, we no longer see troops; rather, the explosions of shells indicate where the action takes place, marking by their continuity the borders of the military front.[8]

Although the *avant-garde* was a relatively new form of art before 1914, during the war its forms of aesthetic 'disorder' easily represented the prevailing military culture. Gertrude Stein, for example, recounted Picasso's epiphany that cubism had become a weapon of war. She and Picasso were walking in Paris when:

> All of a sudden down the street came some big cannon, the first any of us had seen painted, that is [*sic*] camouflaged. Pablo stopped, he was spellbound. It is we that have created that, he said. And he was right, he had. From Cézanne through him they had come to that. His foresight was justified.[9]

Fernand Léger, who was both fascinated and revolted by the violence, also described the war in cubist terms:

> I adore Verdun, this old city entirely in ruins with such an impressive calm. In this Verdun there are subjects that are totally unexpected but perfectly well formed to give joy to my cubist soul. For example, you come across a tree with a chair tilted on top. If you presented a painting composed in such a manner, well-meaning people would consider you mad. Yet that would be nothing but a copy. Verdun authorises all pictorial fantasies … Verdun, academy of cubism.[10]

The fragmentation of the pictorial type appeared so appropriate to the military situation that this technique led military officers charged with hiding artillery or vessels to invite artists to help. The First World War, which in most other ways made a mockery of aesthetic ruptures and the concepts of modernism and modernity, also mobilised artists to become agents of the totalisation of the war.

The variety of professions involved in altering, constructing, and reconstructing the landscape of war was truly breathtaking and included engineers specialised in optics, chemists working with colours, and all sorts of artisans, including masons, plasterers, carpenters, sheet metal workers, and house painters, as well as poets and theatre set designers. They all became agents of military camouflage. Set designers were particularly experienced in fabricating fakes that spectators took for the real thing. In its primary

meaning, which goes back to the fixed scenery of Renaissance theatre, 'props' are objects used by actors. During the First World War, however, camouflage manuals (most of them classified as top secret) pedantically insisted, with the aid of photographs, on the complexity of the *mise-en-scène*: of distracting the enemy from expecting the violence that would come.

If camouflage was a theatre within the theatre of war, it also offered an abstract form of understanding that war. As Léger explained:

> This war is truly surprising.... It is the perfect orchestration of all ancient and modern ways of killing.... It is as linear and dry as a geometry problem. So many shells and so much time on such a surface.... It is pure abstraction, even purer than the cubist painting 'itself'.[11]

In other words, the war was a giant *mise-en-scène*, with camouflage serving its purpose. Of course, in the end, the camouflage aimed at wounding and killing.

## Theme 4: Wounds

Given that it was virtually impossible to photograph or to film soldiers in battle, artists were the ones to capture the violence of war through their images. They expressed the pain of the wounded through visual symbolism. Where, at the outbreak of war, many artistic representations embraced romantic visions and exultations of wartime ideas, these soon gave way to the brutality of war, its violence, death, and grief. In photographs and drawings, ruins, the destruction of the countryside, broken trees, and shattered homes stood as metaphors for the bodily and emotional destruction caused by the war. 'Headless trees' and the stumps of branches represented injury and death and headless men.[12]

While on the battlefields, the wounded and the gassed were invisible, they were much more perceptible in medical shelters, hospitals, morgues, or inhumations. Ambulances and hospitals became favoured subjects for artists because suffering could be represented without glorifying combat or making it heroic. So while in photographs and paintings of battle, the truncated trees, stumps of branches (and so forth) stood in place of the wounded, in representations of medical facilities, artists could paint the immediate consequences of the war, the wounded in particular. This is best illustrated by Ossip Zadkine's paintings of aid posts or Sargent's line

of gassed men. Grosz and Beckmann showed soldiers in a hospital or the morgue, while Ernst Barlach depicted them lying in a common grave. If casualty stations and hospitals became the subject of choice for artists, it was because such representations made it possible to depict suffering and remove that suffering from the glorification of combat.

In this front of hospitals, Léger forcefully explained how everything, nevertheless, remained hidden or camouflaged:

> Hospital, '*Harmony in White*,' it is cold and silence, a small gesture of sound, everyone looks—nothing, a tiny breath, take on enormous proportions here. It is absolutely the opposite of the front. Here, everything is minutiae.[13]

He used his macabre 'tubist' irony:

> As for all those twits who've been wondering whether I'm still a cubist or will be one when I get back, you can tell them: more than ever. There's nothing more cubist than a war like this one which splits a man more or less tidily into pieces and tosses him to the four points of the compass.

But, he added, 'it's never-ending! Oh! God, it never ends. It's getting to the point where I can't stand it any more'.

Indeed, the horrors of war overwhelmed artists (as they did most people). The painter Jean Lurçat wrote extraordinarily crude letters to his parents to describe his experiences:

> You should have seen the last lot [of soldiers] leaving [for the front]. It was the third time for nearly all of them. Some were crying, and I was fighting back tears. Every day we hear about men who are going mad. Today at noon a mate was telling me he'd seen a man going over the top in the assault on Vauquois armed with a stick![14]

The young artist offered precise descriptions—sometimes accompanied by drawings—of the conditions at the front, from lice and rats to the lack of edible food and basic hygiene, of dysentery, the unceasing noises and smells, especially the smell of death:

> We lived with the corpses under the earth where we were sleeping and whose stench stung our nostrils and made the ground spongy over our heads. I had a German [*sic*] on the roof of my dugout just half a metre from my firing slots in the midst of a frenzied bout of shelling by the French artillery.[15]

A text, admittedly written later, by Jean Giono described Verdun in equally real and harsh terms:

> The whole world is watching us. We have huge problems. To win? resist? hold fast? do our duty? No. Going to the toilet. Outside it's raining iron. It's quite simple: every minute, there's a shell of every calibre falling per square metre…. We have to go to the toilet. The first of us who had to go went out; for two days now he's been lying there, three metres in front of us, dead, minus his pants.[16]

It is also extraordinary to encounter Cendrars' *avant-garde* text *J'ai tué* ('I have killed') which expresses a driven hatred towards the enemy who 'took' his right arm, and Léger's engravings on the same lines: 'stylised and scattered soldiers, caught by the strength of the attack and stopped by cannon shells in a mish-mash of steel and flesh.'[17] Form and function come together for the two friends in two pairs of parallel forces: archaism and modernity, fascination for and revulsion against war: 'Limbs fly through the air. Blood splatters right in my face…. You can see clusters of corpses, foul like ragpickers' bundles; shell holes filled to the brim like rubbish bins.'[18]As Léger explained to Poughon:

> I've seen the oddest things: men's nearly mummified heads emerging from the mud. So tiny in this sea of earth. They look like children. The hands in particular are extraordinary…. Several have their fingers in their mouth, the fingers have been cut by the teeth…. Someone who's suffering too much will eat his own hands…. You don't just die from shelling here, you can drown as well…. I wanted a pair of boots to make myself some leggings. The Germans have wonderful leather. All the pairs I've found so far still had their legs in them…. Amid all this, in this mix of rotting flesh and mud, infantry started to dig new trenches just a little higher! They were at it again…. I told you there were heaps of boots with their legs—well, they put four or eight of them in two rows, pack some earth on top, and there you are."[19]

Cendrars has the honesty to say 'I have killed' rather than the more common distancing phrase 'one has killed', which most soldiers used:

> Everything bangs, cracks, booms at once. Everything is on fire. A thousand bursts. Fires, explosions. It's an avalanche of cannons. Rumbling. Barrages. The pestle. In the light of departures you can see the distraught silhouettes of slanting men, the index of a sign, a crazed horse. An eyelid flickers. A blink by magnesium flash. A quick snapshot. Everything vanishes,

including bodies, as Cendrars describes the death of legionnaire van Lees:

> He was taken by a shell and I followed him with my eyes, I saw this fine legionnaire be violated, crumpled, sucked out, and I saw his bloody pants fall *empty* to the ground, as the terrible cry of pain from this man murdered in mid-air by an unseen ghoul in its yellow cloud rang out louder even than the shell exploding, and I heard this cry which went on, even as the body—which by now had been vaporized for a good while—no longer existed.[20]

## Theme 5: Trauma

As Freud said as early as 1915, modern warfare produced extraordinarily traumatising situations that nobody was prepared for: the mutilated bodies, the death of so many young people—an entire generation lost—and the massive destruction of homes and of hope. A nineteenth-century vision of progress and civilisation had left behind nothing but barbarity, cruelty, brutality—the expression of visceral patriotism, and which—whether it was accepted or rejected, fought over, or given into—would be reflected and refracted in the post-war period, in the private and intimate sphere and in the political, literary, and artistic worlds.[21] Trusting images more than words, some artists and photographers used all possible forms of figuration to represent shell shock, mutilation, prostheses, and disfiguration. Those suffering permanent wounds to body and/or mind were never demobilised. They were the proof of the horrors of war, and in the vanquished countries, they bore the shame of defeat.

Both poets—Apollinaire with his 'starry head' [*La tête étoilée*], Cendrars with his 'bloody hand' [*La main coupée*]—had fought for France. Can poetry camouflage war injuries? Ever since the Russo-Japanese war detailed in *La Prose du transsibérien* [*The Prose-Poem of the Tran-Siberian Railway*], whose 1913 edition was illustrated by the abstract colours of Sonia Delaunay, Cendrars had personally known that the modernity of war amounted to violence, injuries, and war neuroses:

> In Siberia the artillery rumbled—it was war
> Hunger cold plague cholera
> And the muddy waters of the Amur carrying along millions of corpses
> ….
> At Talga 100,000 wounded were dying with no help coming
> I went to the hospitals in Krasnoyarsk

> And at Khilok we met a long convoy of soldiers gone insane
> I saw in quarantine gaping sores and wounds with blood gushing out
> And the amputated limbs danced around or flew up in the raw air[22]

Apollinaire's war poetry details exploded bodies, bits of hands that have become *portmanteaux*, and soldiers atomised by artillery shells. There is so much that he would have seen but not spoken aloud, as this terrible line from *La Nuit d'avril 1915* ('April Night 1915') hints at: 'It is raining my soul it is raining but raining dead eyes'.[23]

But trauma is complicated and paradoxical. It is both destruction and survival, the experience of a catastrophe that one sinks into before, with some luck, rising to the surface at the last moment. Within trauma there is resilience. A famous war trauma victim, Ludwig Wittgenstein (who continued to wear his military uniform once back from the front, as Apollinaire did too) said of the war: 'I am transformed into stone and my fear continues'.[24] Conrad Felixmüller, who was locked up in May 1918 for refusing military service, represented a similar idea in his 1918 lithograph *A Soldier in a Lunatic Asylum*, which depicts the subject scrunched up between a military prison and a straightjacket for the insane. As Felixmüller said of his work and of other artists: 'We have to save ourselves before the war machine which devours everyone and everything can trap us'.[25]

## Theme 6: Race

In 1917, when the Americans entered war, the African American had a very specific war experience. The shell-shocked and disabled painter, Horace Pippin, recalled the importance of this racialised experience at the end of the Second World War:

> The world is in a bad way at this time. I mean war.... Now my picture would not be complete of today if the little ghostlike memory did not appear.... As the men are dying, today the little crosses tell us of them in the First World War and what is doing in the [American] South today—all of that we are going through now. But there will be peace.[26]

One contemporary book encapsulates the African American experience well, namely Victor Daly's *Not Only War: A Story of Two Great Conflicts*. For Daly, the two great conflicts were war and race, the will to fight of a group of young southern blacks, who encountered the racism of their

segregated society. They fought on two fronts, against the Germans in Europe (in two world wars) and against segregation and inequality at home (across two world wars). In some respects, fighting a war against well-identified enemies was an easier task. Racial violence was, in many respects, more dehumanising and traumatising. Daly's foreword exclaimed:

> not only war is Hell. All the high-sounding phrases that … allow the men … to make the word safe for democracy—war to end war—self determination for oppressed people. But they did not mean black people. Oh no, black people don't count. They only count the dead…. It was a white man's war. It would take more than war, and bullets, and death to wipe out race prejudice…. The war department would simply say that 'Private James O. Jackson died in action'…. It wasn't worth it—this dying for phrases. Prejudice was here to stay. Hell on earth.[27]

Daly, himself a soldier, used the high diction of racial politics in an ironic way to show that if all combatants knew hell, the non-white soldier had it harder than the others.

The message also applied to the colonial, indigenous, and autochthonous troops and their families caught up in the war, but their 'invisibility' in the history written about the war has only recently been acknowledged. Even now, we know very little about their intimate mourning. We know so much more of the grief and mourning of European troops and their communities. At the time, however, Apollinaire spoke about the camouflage of war, rendering race invisible (he used the word 'invisibility'). On some French war memorials, in Africa, Asia, or in the Caribbean, black soldiers were represented, very often side-by-side with white officers, and thus the message of paternalism was attached to them through death. In the end, colonial soldiers in France had to wait a long time for specific recognition. While there were cemeteries, there were few memorials erected in their memory. The collective mourning in France focused on the white victims and agents of the conflict, not its non-white victims, subjects, and agents.

French collective memory became more accommodating as the centennial commemorations of the war approached. For example, a work by Christian Lapie was installed in 2007, at the Chemin des Dames, entitled 'the constellation of grief'. Nine trunks of calcified timber, the faces of men without features, universal faces, stand out very tall and very black, in the horizontality of the white chalk landscape, as if risen from the poem by Senghor, *Hosties noires* in 1938:

> Hear me, Tirailleurs from Senegal, in the solitude of the black land and of death
> In your solitude without eyes, without ears, more than in my dark skin in the depths of the Province
> Without even the warmth of your comrades lying close against you, as once they were close in the trench, or in the village councils
> Hear me, black-skinned infantrymen, even though you have no ears and no eyes in your three-fold enclosure of night.

The contemporary artist Kader Attia also brought the brutality of the war to light by focusing on the facial wounds of its soldiers: he places photographs of 'mended' soldiers, with scars and striking deformities, face to face with African objects needing obvious repair. Men and objects are stitched together, hybridised, between traditional cultures and colonial borrowings, between war and peace. The soldiers' broken faces are like objects in every way, broken, and patched up in the reserves of colonial museums, far from the 'aesthetics of purity' preached at the time. The synthesis of the brutality is continued on the broken face of the photographs of the colonial soldiers. Attia's work obliges the spectator, horribly ill at ease in front of the photographs, to reflect on medical and military ethics, on trauma and impossible healing: for neither the repair of bodies nor that of souls is still imaginable after the war. Neither colonial subject nor imperial power can survive the impact.

## Theme 7: Gender, from Military Front to Domestic Front

The American cartoonist Oscar Cesare's double cartoon, encaptioned 'These died.... That these might live', highlights the truth that many soldiers gave their lives on the battlefields of the First World War to protect their wives and children back 'home'. Obviously, on the military and domestic fronts, men and women fought the same war, each with their own weapons. Without the domestic front, there would be no war: no weapons would be produced, no food grown, and no love harboured for the military combatants. The totality of war meant nothing without the 'home' front.

When Maurice Busset produced a large painting entitled *Bombardement de Ludwigshafen* in 1918, he was so proud of his work—

in both senses of the word—that he signed it 'aviator', a member of the new cavalry of the sky. His own plane can be seen above a factory in flames. Bombs fall in a colourful, almost joyful setting in which Busset, a very patriotic man, depicts the destruction of a German factory, perhaps one of those that had produced the asphyxiating gases used since 1915. What did civilian lives matter—the workers and residents of the area, including women—when what counted was winning the war? The painting shows that in this war, enemy civilians were no different from enemy soldiers. They were a faceless mass. They were simply the enemy, and could be rendered invisible.

As a result, works like Busset's made women invisible agents of the war. When they were depicted by other wartime artists, women showed up the obscenity of the carnage of war: mourning in front of a dead body or with an empty uniform coat, as the only thing left from the lost loved one. But the sacrifice, the martyrs, remained that of the soldier-men. Only in representation of atrocities did women play a central role, for example in the works by Otto Dix and Max Beckmann, or the symbolic 'disparition' of his mother's hands in Arshile Gorky's famous painting of 1926 'The artist and his mother', which is also a powerful statement about the genocide of the Armenians.[28]

In commemorative representations women sometimes feature, but often only as symbols or allegories of the nation, such as Marianne. But on certain war memorials, they do work, as real persons: so, the soldier is fighting, the woman is working in the fields, or on a factory line, the rooster says, we believe in the Nation to fight. It is Dumezil's Indo-European tri-functionality, an exception that proved the rule that for artists and their audience the male soldier (and white male soldier at that) was the primary agent and victim of this industrial total war.

The invisibility of the female agents and victims of the war explains why feminist militants and artists since the 1970s have used the Arc de Triomphe in Paris and war memorials elsewhere to bring out the specificity of female sacrifice in war. In 1970, a banner was held on top of the unknown soldier's tomb in Paris: 'there is more unknown than the unknown soldier, his wife'. And in 2010, the artist Valerie Bouillon set a real-time performance on the war memorial of Lescouet-Jugon in Brittany, hiding the names of the masculine heroes with pink material and adding: 'To the everyday courage of women, everywhere'.

## Theme 8: *Le poète assassiné*, from Grief to Commemoration

'From tomorrow on begins the new era. Poetry will exist no longer, the lyres too heavy for old inspirations will be broken. The poets will be massacred'.[29]

This line from *Le poète assassiné*, which Guillaume Apollinaire had started working on before the war, was published at the end of 1916. Through it, Apollinaire helped to invent the conception of modern commemoration. The final chapter of *Le poète assassiné*, entitled 'Apothéose' (Apotheosis), contains the invention of a/the commemorative monument:

> 'I ought to make a statue to him,' said the Bird of Benin. 'For I am not only a painter but also a sculptor.'
> 'That's right,' said Tristouse, 'we must raise a statue to him.'
> …
> 'A statue of what?' asked Tristouse, 'Marble? Bronze?'
> No, that's old fashioned. I must model a profound statue out of nothing, like poetry and glory.'
> 'Bravo! Bravo!' cried Tristouse clapping her hands, 'A statue out of nothing, empty, that's lovely, and when will you make it?'
> …
> On the following day, the sculptor came back with workingmen who fixed up an armed cement wall, (six inches broad on top, and eighteen inches broad at the base), so that the empty space had the form of Croniamantal, and the hole was full of his spectre.[30]

Perhaps the force of the artistic image enabled artists to mediate the horror that could not be seen directly. Apollinaire's ideas permeated through post-war commemorative art and most poignantly in the German military cemetery in Vladslo, near Dixmude in Belgium, where the mother and father sculpted by Käthe Kollwitz are brought to their knees by sorrow before the tomb of their son. When it rains, they 'weep'.

## Theme 9: Sacredness

The collective presence of the dead, or their constant 'return', went through many forms of representation in the years after the war. Each one of the war dead was remembered in his family, his village, his parish, his

place of work. The phrases uttered in public speeches or in private prayers and poems, the images offered in commemorative monuments, in stained-glass windows, in cemeteries, and ossuaries have mostly lasted to the present. We can try to think about the paradoxical situation this presented for many family survivors who were unable to recover the body of a lost loved one. Did commemoration replace grieving at a graveside? Could it do so? War memorials are scattered throughout the various home fronts, transforming time into space.

So, we can see that the acts of remembering and forgetting constitute subtle and complex choices. Each act operates at the same time in continuity with the past and as a series of selections drawn from it: their interaction constructing a new continuity. For individuals as well as for groups and communities, memory can constitute a burden, while forgetting can be seen as a survival tactic: the mourning process takes place in both cases. War memorials were also a work of total history, in a dialectics of time and spaces, industrial sounds, and silences. These spaces of commemoration became representations for their audiences of world history (and total history) and encompassed all themes, from politics to anthropology, from perception to religion. They encapsulated a totalised 'holy ground'.

To that end, war memorials have become the new Calvary, which represent our understanding of the modern ordeal of war. Such ideas permeate through many religious representations of the war, including in the stained-glass windows in Catholic or Protestant churches: 'Ex-voto to the Virgin: "I put my son under her guard. She gave him back to me, 1914–1918, Infinite Gratitude"'. Jews show the same sense of sacrifice, but they do so more in words.[31]

In 1924, the French painter André Devambez, who had signed on as a soldier in the war at age 48, painted a triptych, *La pensée aux absents*, in which he depicted three generations of women dressed in black, in deep mourning: a mother, a wife, and a daughter (or perhaps a sister?). The prédelle is a military cemetery replete with the white crosses of the war dead. The main picture is surrounded by two smaller panels, representations of war that have become memories for the mourners: soldiers in shell holes, soldiers who were still alive. The gender orientation is obvious: women are left with nothing but black gowns, hands that they torture by squeezing them, and tears: the result of the war sacrifice of the men. The women in mourning are represented as equals in sacrifice, matching that of their menfolk. Devambez's choice of a triptych borrows from a medieval religious form: it has the symbolic shape of the Trinity, and is a way to

shape deconstruction, the multiple horrors of war for soldiers or for civilians. These fragmented visions of horror, the fragmented bodies, and the fragmented minds beset by grief are perfect 'appropriations' of Christianity: dereliction, the reversibility of suffering, the imitation of Christ and the Virgin Mary, and of the motherland. (Form and content are totally linked: such polyptychs are probably hinged together like the memory of war itself: fragmented, multiple, and impossible to reassemble in in a single piece, in a single space, in a single moment).

As for the absence of God, or His eclipse, surely that too was a form of spiritual anguish. The *avant-garde* artists offered something similar, replete with the same grief, albeit in a different style, about a war without end. To fight, to believe in their fatherland, to mourn, and to commemorate were values that most of these modern artists attempted to explode with their personal arsenals of words, concerts, paintings, shows, staged public events, and happenings. Those ideas permeated their art forms after the war, and were encapsulated best by new cultural constructions, like dada.

## Theme 10: Unknown Soldiers, Unlimited Mourning

During the war, the conditions of the military fronts were often such that soldiers were rendered invisible, literally blown into pieces, drowned in mud. They physically disappeared, became unknown, if not unremembered. The inability to recover actual bodies helped to spur the rite of entombing 'unknown' soldiers after the war, in order to enable universal and communal mourning. How important the creation of tombs for the unknown soldier became is clear in a French novel, in which a detective Arsène Lupin is asked by a family to check whether it is actually their son buried under the Arc de Triomphe:

> 'Not an hour, not a day, I'll never leave Paris.'
> -'Why, Madam?'
> -'Because he is there, in the tomb'.

The sentiment was a common and shared one. Another widow stated at the end of the war: 'I'll cheer [on] the soldiers, then I'll come back home and cry'.

As early as the 1930s, some artists and activists mocked the 'Triumph of the unknown' soldier as pathetic, sentimental nationalism. Yet modern artists have brought back the significance of the theme of the 'unknown'

soldier and attached new importance and emotions to it. For example, in his work, *Tomb* (2013), Kingsley Baird brings together layers of memory, history, and anthropology to represent the complexity of the war. He asks: were not the fighting men of the Anzacs convinced that they were representing civilisation in the face of barbarians, those whom they called the Huns, their German enemies? *Tomb*, in its sophisticated composition, its 18,000 biscuits—in the mutability of chance and necessity, the number of New Zealanders who died in the Great War—shifts from the singular which represents the multiple, the unknown soldier, to the multiple which represents the singular, a single soldier in a single grave. *Tomb* is also full of voids, the 18,000 biscuits can never fill this hole, it is there, infinite, like the void of the *Poète assassiné*.

What dominates the efforts of museums and politicians during the war's centenary is the idea that all the combatants were the same men, dead together, for a cause that no one now wants to identify with historically. They have one reality in common: the death of so many, often on the same terrain, where they are now the watchmen of peace and strong emotions, examples of universal reconciliation in the rediscovered peace. The modern memorials, as in Lorette in France, present an up-to-date view of the war. No distinction of nationality or religious affiliation appears in them: the carved names record simply those who died there. As President François Hollande put it: 'It is true that it was one side against the other, for their own nation, that these young men died. It is in the name of shared humanity that they will henceforward be brought together'.[32]

The intention is not to offer further explanation for the terrible struggle of the early years of the twentieth century, but to exonerate it: commemoration has become a sort of reparation, offered by the living to the dead, in a desire to bring all the sacrifices together. The emphasis lies on the feelings and perceptions of today, to represent the internationalisation of suffering. Philippe Prost, who won the competition for the new memorial at Lorette, has been forced into marvels of invention to find enough space for the 600,000 inscribed names: an immense circular structure with its walls entirely covered with names—the circle standing as a symbol of the globe, of the whole world at war. The first name on the monument is of a Nepalese soldier, the last one, a German…. But there is a kind of hole under it, a fracture; it could fall at any moment; it represents the shaking tremor of time and war.

Contemporary artists, then, confirm the mourning and the loss of the war: they are the nearest we have to the modern preoccupations with the fate of bodies and souls in the First World War. Like the combatants of the time, artists come from across the world: the internationalisation of contemporary art, visible in the biennales of the great cities of the world, expresses the globalisation of the conflict that is now one hundred years old. Some sample works shown in western Europe, and also in Wellington, Cape Town, or New York, seem to signify these commemorative routes through and for the eye, recalling the eyes of the combatants and those whom they have loved, lost, or rediscovered, transformed by the war, between wounding and trauma.

For all those who explore the western front, however they do it, the traces of the Great War remain infinite. In 1934, the *avant-garde* sculptor Brancusi answered the call of the women of Romania where he was born, and gave to Tàrgu Jiu a war memorial which encompassed the whole city. It is a stone 'table of silence', surrounded by twelve empty chairs. Even the Apostles are marked by their absence; there are no guests at this commemorative feast. Here is a site of an empty house, a tiny and unheroic triumphal arch, an abstraction of Brancusi's already abstract sculpture *The kiss*; we only see the lovers' eyes, through which all that remains is their tears. At the other end of the city, in steel, caste iron and brass, Brancusi erected a giant *Unending Column*, a geometric spinal column, 30 metres high, standing only through the skill of an engineer. Abstract, set in relation to other elements recalling war and technical progress, and yet without survivors or heroes. In this commemorative landscape, like in Brancusi's column, mourning never ends.

## Notes

1. Guillaume Apollinaire, *Selected Poems*, trans. Martin Sorrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 182–85.
2. Quoted in Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 175.
3. Jean Cocteau, *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* (First edition published 1918. Paris: Stock, 2009).
4. *La Baïonnette*, 112, August 23, 1917.
5. Ernst Jünger, introduction to *Das Antliz des Weltkrieges: Fronterlebnisse deutscher Soldaten* (Berlin: Neufeld & Henius Verlag, 1930).

6. Quoted in *Fernand Léger: Rétrospective*, Catalogue Fondation Maeght (Saint-Paul: Fondation Maeght, 1988), 153: 'Il y avait au front cette atmosphère surpoétique qui m'a excité à fond. Bon Dieu ! Quelles gueules ! … Je fus ébloui par une culasse de 75 ouverte en plein soleil… Elle m'en a plus appris pour mon évolution plastique que tous les musées du monde'.
7. Walter Benjamin, 'L'œuvre d'art à l'ère de sa reproductibilité technique', in *Oeuvres* III (First published 1939. Paris: Folio-Gallimard, 2000), 176.
8. Quoted in the catalogue to his exposition *Aux Dardanelles*, Galerie Druet (1917), np: 'Les combats de cette guerre n'ont aucun rapport avec les conceptions qu'en peuvent avoir ceux qui se reportent aux tableaux des guerres précédentes. On ne voit plus rien qui soit *picturable* sur le vif, car les corps à corps n'ont pas de témoin palette en main. Dans l'ensemble, on ne voit plus les troupes. Mais des éclatements d'obus indiquent où l'action se passe et marquent par leur continuité, les méandres du front'.
9. Gertrude Stein, 'The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas', in *Writings, 1903–1932*, eds. Harriet Chessman and Catharine R. Stimpson (New York: Library of America, 1998), 753.
10. This comes from a 1916 letter, quoted in Charles Ridel, *Les embusqués* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2007), 288: 'J'adore Verdun, cette vieille ville toute en ruines avec son calme impressionnant. Il y a dans ce Verdun des sujets tout à fait inattendus et bien faits pour réjouir mon âme de cubiste. Par exemple, tu trouves un arbre avec une chaise penchée dessus. Les gens dits censés te traiteront de fou si tu leur présentes un tableau composé de cette façon. Pourtant, il n'y a qu'à copier. Verdun autorise toutes les fantaisies picturales. … Verdun académie du cubisme'.
11. Fernand Léger to Louis Poughon, in *Fernand Léger: Rétrospective*, 89: 'C'est tout de même une guerre bien curieuse…. C'est l'orchestration parfaite de tous les moyens de tuer anciens et modernes…. C'est linéaire et sec comme un problème de géométrie. Tant d'obus en tant de temps sur une telle surface…. C'est l'abstraction pure, plus pure que la Peinture Cubiste 'soi-même'.
12. For example, Paul Nash, *Void*, 1918, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
13. Fernand Léger to Louis Poughon, April 1917, *Les Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne* (1997), 82: 'Hôpital, '*Harmonie en blanc*,' c'est froid et silencieux, un petit geste fait du bruit, tout le monde regarde—un rien un souffle prend des proportions énormes. C'est absolument à rebours du front. Ici, tout est minutie'.
14. Jean Lurçat, June 1915. *Correspondance et écrits de guerre, (1914–1918)*, Institut de France/Herman, 2016.
15. Ibid.
16. Jean Giono, préface in Lucien Jacques, *Carnets de moleskine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1939).

17. Blaise Cendrars, *J'ai tué*, Francois Bernouard, 1918, réédité 2013, Fata Morgana.
18. *Ibidem*.
19. Fernand Léger, Lettres à Poughon, n°28, Verdun, 6-11-16, 66–67.
20. Blaise Cendrars, 'Dans le silence de la nuit', in *La Main coupée et autres récits de guerre* (Paris: Denoël, 2013), 337.
21. N. Beaupré, H. Jones, and A. Rasmussen, eds., *Dans la Guerre 1914–1918: Accepter, Endurer, Refuser* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2015).
22. Blaise Cendrars, *The Prose of the Trans-Siberian*, in *Complete Poems*, trans. Ron Padgett (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 16, 27. The original reads: 'En Sibérie tonnait le canon, c'était la guerre/La faim le froid la peste le choléra/Et les eaux limoneuses de l'Amour charriaient des millions de charognes…. / A Talga 100.000 blessés agonisaient faute de soins/J'ai visité les hôpitaux de Krasnoïarsk/Et à Khilok nous avons croisé un long convoi de soldats fous/J'ai vu, dans les lazarets, des plaies béantes, des blessures qui saignaient à pleines orgues/ Et les membres amputés dansaient autour ou s'envolaient dans l'air rauque…'. Blaise Cendrars, La Prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France, extrait de Du Monde entier, (Paris: Poésie/Gallimard).
23. Apollinaire, *Selected Poems*, 164–65. The original reads: 'Il pleut mon âme il pleut mais il pleut des yeux morts.' Guillaume Apollinaire, 'La nuit d'avril 1915', in *Case d'armons*, eds. Marcel Adéma and Michel Decaudin (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), 243–44.
24. Quoted in Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillère, *Histoire et trauma: La folie des guerres* (Paris: Stock, 2006), 104.
25. Conrad Felixmüller, *Menschen*, May 1918.
26. *Horace Pippin*: The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., Feb. 25–March 27, 1977 (Washington, D.C.: Phillips Collection, c. 1976).
27. Victor Daly, *Not Only War: A Story of Two Great Conflicts*, ed. David A. Davis (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 61–62.
28. Arshile Gorky was born Vosdanik Manoug Adoian in Ottoman Armenia. The painting is in the National Gallery, Washington.
29. Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Poet Assassinated*, trans. Matthew Josephson (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 134–35.
30. Apollinaire, *The Poet Assassinated*, 151–52.
31. Annette Becker, *War and Faith: The Religious Imagination in France and the USA* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 1998), new edition in French, Armand-Colin, 2016.
32. François Hollande, November 7, 2013.

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CHAPTER 7

# From *Cursed Days* to 'Sunstroke': The Authenticity of Ivan Bunin's Recollections of the Bolshevik Revolution in the 1920s

*Galina Rylkova*

In 2017, the year of the centennial of the two Russian revolutions—the February 1917 revolution which resulted in the abdication of the tsar Nicolas II, and the October Bolshevik revolution, which led to the formation of the Soviet Union in 1922—the meaning of these events remains open to discussion and interpretation. What was the connection between the First World War and the 1917 revolutions? Was the Bolshevik revolution a revolution or a *coup d'état*? Was the October revolution inevitable? Russians today ask these questions and debate them online, on television, and in other media. Even all these years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there is no consensus on how to commemorate the 1917 events. In January 2017, a special committee was formed in Russia, whose membership includes celebrated historians, directors of history museums, state

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G. Rylkova (✉)
Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA



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archives, and libraries, and writers and representatives of various cultural, educational, and public institutions. Their ambition is to produce a unifying and objective interpretation of the year 1917 and its aftermath, which most Russians can accept and comfortably identify with. The committee's work is ongoing, while the public waits.[1]

Of course, the need to interpret and attach meaning to the 1917 revolutions and the ensuing civil war that lasted until 1923 is not a recent development. Ever since its creation, the Soviet state and its people have grappled with the consequences of these enormously important and violent events. This chapter tells the story of the celebrated Russian author, Ivan Bunin (1870–1953), and his attempts to capture the enormity of the social upheavals in his day-by-day accounts.

'What the Russian revolution developed into cannot be understood by anyone who didn't witness it', Bunin wrote in a long letter to his French publisher on 21 July 1921.[2] Bunin was 50 years old at the time and for a year had been living as a Russian *émigré* in Paris. Bunin knew that Roche-Bossard would use his letter as an introduction to the first volume of his collected works in French translation, published between 1921 and 1923, and his narrative reads like an epic:

> The spectacle was quite unbearable for anyone who hadn't lost God's image and likeness. Everyone who was able to flee Russia did so. A large number of outstanding Russian writers also fled the country, and they did so, first and foremost, because, in Russia, they could either expect to meet with a senseless death at the hands of some random villain drunk on lawlessness and impunity, on pillage, on wine, on blood, and on cocaine or lead a life of wretched servility amid darkness and lice, in rags and in epidemics, suffering cold and famine, tormented by the primordial demands of the stomach and the unrelenting humiliating necessity to satisfy them …—witnessing all that in total silence because, in Russia, any free word could lead to having your tongue cut out.[3]

Understandably, in July of 1921, these recollections were fresh in Bunin's mind, not to mention their being meticulously recorded in his diary from the spring of 1917 to February 1920. Bunin's private observations were serialised in France in 1925 by the Russian *émigré* newspaper *Vozrozhdenie* (*Resurgence*) under the collective title *Cursed Days*. Bunin preserved the day-by-day structure of a diary, which gave his record the power of immediacy and authenticity.[4]

Today, both the detractors and admirers of the Russian revolution draw on Bunin's writings as if they were an unimpeachable record of the events that occurred between 1917 and 1920. They treat him as the ideal eyewitness to the revolutionary war. This view of Bunin's recollections was greatly reinforced in 2014 by Nikita Mikhalkov's film *Sunstroke*.[5] The film chronicles the reasons for the Bolsheviks' astounding victory and Mikhalkov chose to combine *Cursed Days* with Bunin's best-known story, 'Sunstroke', written in 1925 in the French Alps, to make his case.[6] Mikhalkov reverses the logic of Bunin's literary development by making the events of 'Sunstroke' (a one-night stand that quickly turns into an unforgettable moment in the characters' lives) serve as a precursor of the future Bolshevik terror. The male character's light-hearted attitude in the story is shown to lead directly to his execution by the Bolsheviks several years later. The numerous quotations from *Cursed Days* are meant to buttress the inevitability of the film's historical trajectory. But how reliable are Bunin's 'eyewitness' accounts? Was it even possible, we might ask, to write objectively about the tumultuous events engulfing Bunin in 1917 when the scale and the eventual consequences of the ongoing turmoil were not immediately obvious? Mikhalkov resolved this problem by making the narrator of *Cursed Days* an officer in the White Army[7] and by placing him within the confines of the detention camp, which explains the narrator's rather gloomy view of the Bolsheviks. But Bunin did not serve in the army. Nor did he affiliate with any political party or organisation, nor did his rather humble origins (he came from an impoverished gentry family who often had nothing to eat) make him a natural opponent of the Bolsheviks.

The largest part of *Cursed Days* covers Bunin and his wife's sojourn in Odessa in the years 1918 and 1919. They fled there from Moscow in hopes of lying low while waiting for the Bolsheviks to be defeated. By then, Bunin (a personal friend of Anton Chekhov and a younger acquaintance of Leo Tolstoy) was an accomplished writer whose contributions were recognised with various awards and honours. Valentin Kataev's memoirs[8] and Vera Nikolayevna Bunin's diaries[9] and letters[10] suggest that the Bunins' living conditions in Odessa (which included a tastefully furnished apartment and a housemaid) were better than in any other place the couple had inhabited prior to the Bolshevik revolution. Although the Bunins' living quarters were subjected to several searches by the ever-changing authorities,[11] each time the searches ended harmlessly, primarily because of Vera's resourcefulness and inge-

nuity (she would always come up with good reasons for keeping more clothes, linens and mattresses than was officially prescribed by the city's administration). In other words, although the Bunins experienced real hardships as a result of the First World War, the two subsequent revolutions, and the civil war, they had no direct experience of revolutionary violence and terror. When Bunin informed his French readers that many Russians lived 'in constant fear of being thrown out of their beggarly homes, or being sent to clean latrines in some barracks, or being wantonly arrested, beaten up and otherwise violated, or seeing their wife, sister or mother raped',[12] he was not speaking from personal experience: not least because he lived in decent surroundings and was afforded the leisure time to record his detailed accounts and discuss his impressions with like-minded intellectuals.[13]

As hard as he tried, Bunin was not a historian, but a passionate and emotional observer.[14] He was also a talented writer whose vision was informed by the works of Dante and Tolstoy; between 1917 and 1920, he would undoubtedly have been tempted to create a significant literary work comparable with *The Divine Comedy* and *War and Peace*. His stakes as a reputable writer were raised in proportion to the scale of the unfolding political events and the decisions he made as a consequence. Bunin was often tortured by the thoughts of his imminent death and by the thoughts of losing his relatives and friends.[15] As a result, *Cursed Days* bears all the characteristics of artists' *late style* (a term used to describe an artist's last work/s) as defined by Theodore Adorno:

> The maturity of the late works of important artists is not like the ripeness of fruit. As a rule, these works are not well rounded, but wrinkled, even fissured…. The accepted explanation is that they are products of a subjectivity or, still better, of a 'personality' ruthlessly proclaiming itself, which breaks through the roundness of form for the sake of expression, exchanging harmony for dissonance of its sorrow and spurning sensuous charm under the dictates of the imperiously emancipated mind. The late work is thereby relegated to the margins of art and brought closer to documentation…. At the very place once occupied by dynamic totality, there is now fragmentation…. The late style is the self-awareness of the insignificance of the individual, existent. Herein, lies the relationship of the late style to *death*.[16]

With this said, it is remarkable that Bunin's literary career did not end with *Cursed Days*. In fact, in the 1920s, he was about to embrace a new period in his literary development.

This chapter discusses the constraints and benefits of the documentary approach that Bunin deemed particularly appropriate in relaying the experience of Russia's tumult from 1917 on, and explains how his approach to these subjects changed dramatically in the 1920s. By 1922, Bunin realised the limits of mimetic representation and opted for what we can tentatively describe as nostalgic (or post-apocalyptic) realism. I see *Cursed Days* as a crucible that transformed Bunin-the-chronicler into Bunin-the-creator. In a sense, Bunin's conversion is similar to the transformation that Dante's pilgrim experiences in the course of his journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. Most significantly, Bunin's transition was successful, allowing him to stay productive for many years to come.

## The Eyewitness's Predicament

In 1917, Bunin found himself in the middle of the revolutionary uprising in Moscow. He did not engage with these experiences in cohesive writing until he composed *Cursed Days*. At that stage, they appeared as flashbacks as a result of his sorting through his old notes and comments. 'Generally speaking, how does one distinguish between that which is real and that which books, the theater, and films give us?', Bunin asked himself on 24 April 1919.[17] To alleviate his fears of historical incompetence, Bunin toyed with concepts of rational behaviour versus irrational behaviour, each time concluding that they did not apply in the case of revolutionary uprising. But Bunin did have a considerable primary source base for his reflections. Each day between 1917 and 1920, Bunin went out and wrote down what he saw and heard on the streets. Each day he read several newspapers, which informed him about the ever-changing situation on various battlegrounds and the most recent political developments in Moscow and Petrograd. The contributors to these newspapers were often as misinformed as their readers.[18] Yet Bunin treated these newspapers as his 'evidence' for putting Russia on trial. He meticulously copied the extracts that struck him as menacing or particularly meaningful:

> The lead article from *Power of the People*: 'The fateful hour has come—Russia and the Revolution will perish. Everyone to the defense of the revolution which has only recently begun to shine radiantly over the entire world!'—When did it shine? I ask. When did your shameless eyes see it shine?[19]

In exasperation, Bunin repeatedly blamed his fellow citizens for their blindness in their dealings with the Bolsheviks:

> In Odessa the people have been waiting for the arrival of the Bolsheviks. 'Ours are coming,' they say. Many everyday citizens are also waiting for them—they are tired of the change of governments; they want something stable and hope that life will be cheaper too. But oh, how they keep rushing to get things! Well, that's nothing; they'll get used to it. It's like the story of the old peasant who so wanted a pair of glasses that when he got them he literally burst into tears.
>
> His neighbor said: 'Makar, you've gone crazy! After all, you'll go blind if they are not the right ones for your eyes!'
>
> 'Who are you, a *barin* or something? You're concerned about my glasses? That's nothing, they'll change with my eyes…'.[20]

To support his immediate observations, Bunin liked to quote from his earlier diaries, giving his narrative an aura of documentary authenticity based on recent and unfolding events. The reader is expected to overlook the fact that it is the pages of Bunin's narration itself that give the events a particular slant.

The extensive passages from Théodore Gosselin's historical writings on the French revolution (using the pen-name G. Lenotre)[21] that Bunin reproduced almost verbatim in his *Cursed Days*[22] suggest that Bunin sometimes did not know how to describe his own 1917 revolutionary experiences and was looking for sources of inspiration. While writing about the legacy of the French revolution, Lenotre invited his readers to visit Robespierre's living quarters, acquaint themselves with Danton's mistresses, and admire or feel disgusted by Georges Couthon's invalid chair and his determination to serve his country. Lenotre was undoubtedly a gold mine and a source of inspiration (albeit unrecognised) for many generations of cultural historians. Bunin clearly liked Lenotre's anthropological and culturological approach to the bloody events of an earlier century, which helped readers reconstruct the atmosphere of those events. By contrast, Bunin had no access to such material (i.e., material viewed from the historically significant distance of a hundred years). He was, therefore, less equipped to show, with any of Lenotre's trademark subtlety, the absurdity of the Bolsheviks and their sympathisers among the Russian intelligentsia. In his narrative, Bunin privileged unsubstantiated rumours, newspaper articles, and random announcements.[23] In other words, in contrast with Lenotre, Bunin did not live outside the revolutionary fray, as it were, but

was actively engaged in it, having to deal with experiences he was not accustomed to. As Daniel Riniker noted, in 1925 Bunin did not know how his revolutionary narratives would end. His newspaper instalments continued to be written and published until 1927.[24]

*Cursed Days* was not Bunin's first work to paint an abhorrent picture of Russian history and its people. His short novel *The Village* (1910) brought him fame and notoriety for its daunting portrayal of Russian village life before and during the Russo-Japanese war of 1904 and the first revolution of 1905–07.[25] Although some critics admired Bunin's jaundiced outlook, others were dismayed by his ability to focus only on the degenerate and the depraved at the expense of everything that was hopeful, beautiful, and viable. In *Cursed Days*, Bunin underlined that the revolution and the civil war vindicated the disturbing picture of everyday life in Russia he had portrayed ten years earlier.[26] In places, Bunin selected ever-more harrowing scenes of revolutionary and wartime atrocities, which arguably confirmed his authorial perspicacity.

To a certain degree, in *Cursed Days* Bunin became a hostage to the reputation of *The Village*. Consequently, in his revolutionary diary he attempted to prove that he had been right all along. But no matter how hard Bunin tried to reveal the true cause of the escalating civil war, his recollections are at best painfully fragmented and are no match for the scale of revolutionary terror. Bunin's position *vis-à-vis* the unfolding events is similar to the position of the victims of the execution apparatus in Kafka's 'In the Penal Colony' (1918).[27] The machine inscribes the sentence on the body of the criminal who until that very moment is unaware of what he is charged with.

Whether because of a fear of losing his writer's edge or for some other reason, Bunin became an ardent collector of instances of violence, both imaginary and real:

> In the fall of 1917, near Elets, there were some peasants who after having destroyed a landowner's estate, got hold of some live peacocks and tore out and plucked their feathers just for fun. Then they let them go, all bloody, to fly and rush about, crying out shrilly wherever they went.[28]

He piled these examples over the top of one another in the hope of impressing his readers with their sheer quantity and incomprehensiveness. At times, Bunin seemed to wallow in his gloomy accounts. Even the most unfounded rumours were dutifully added to the general picture of violence and chaos. In his words:

> Dostoyevsky says: 'Give these [revolutionaries] complete freedom to destroy the old society and rebuild it from scratch, and they will generate such gloom, chaos, crudeness, blindness, and inhumanity that their entire half-constructed edifice will come crashing down under the weight of this abomination amidst humanity's cries of condemnation…'. These days Dostoevsky's description sounds bland.[29]

Dostoevsky might have sounded bland, but that was only because Bunin wished it so.

## The Eyewitness's Blind Spots

Throughout his life, Bunin was often praised for his extraordinary eyesight that endowed his narratives with astounding detail and legitimised his authenticity as an eyewitness.[30] Bunin took care to support this reputation with anecdotes, illustrating his ability to register minute details at a considerable distance. Thus, it is particularly striking that in *Cursed Days*, Bunin often describes his reaction to the unfolding events as literally 'being hit in his eyes':

> April 25, 1919: And on the square next to the Duma the rostrums for the first of May still assault the eye with their red color.[31]
>
> June 9, 1919: For the first time in my life I saw a man with a pasted-on moustache and beard—not on stage but in broad daylight on the street. This sight hit me in the eye; I stopped as if thunderstruck. Many wild people have had this ancient belief: 'The brilliance of the star to which our soul passes depends on the brilliance of the eyes of the people we have eaten in life'. Today that no longer sounds archaic.[32]
>
> June 11, 1919: 'But at the end of this summer [1917], when I opened the morning newspaper with my perpetually shaking hands, I suddenly felt that I was getting pale, that the top of my head was being drained, like just before one faints. A cry written in big letters hit me in the eye 'To one and all!'—a cry that Kornilov was a rebel, a traitor of the Revolution and of the homeland….[33]

But the question must be asked: was Bunin an eyewitness whose eyes did not function properly? To paraphrase Terry Eagleton, Bunin 'represents and points to the limits of representation in the same gesture': 'In picturing the world the self risks falling outside the frame of its own representation…. The human subject becomes the blind spot at the center of the picture, the absent cause of the world coming to presence'.[34]

Besides his eyesight metaphors, Bunin also admitted to his fears of becoming desensitised to violence and repeatedly taught himself how to un-learn this habit:

> April 21, 1919: I recently read about the shooting of twenty-six men, but it didn't seem to faze me.
>
> I am now in a stupor. Yes, twenty-six men, and not just any old time but yesterday, here, right next to me. How can I forget, how can I forgive the Russian people? But everything will be forgotten. I only *try* to be horrified; for I'm not shocked by anything anymore. This is the hellish secret of the Bolsheviks—to kill all sensitivity. People live as best they can; their sensitivity and their imagination have been taken away from them, for the people have crossed the fatal line.
>
> Take the price of bread or beef, for example. 'What? Three roubles a pound!' Then it goes up to a thousand—but there comes an end to the shock and screaming; stupor and passivity take their place. 'What? Seven were hanged?!' 'No, my dear, not seven, but seven hundred!' Already you are stunned beyond measure—you can still imagine seven being hanged, but try to imagine seven hundred, even seventy!'[35]

Bunin was determined to bring himself as close to violence as he possibly could. He coerced himself into recalling the instances of his own supposedly 'violent' actions in the past, such as the case with the woman Makhotochka, who had to drive for hours on end in a horse-drawn sledge on a cold winter night, all for the sake of delivering to Bunin an unimportant cable that was sent on the spur of the moment by his drunk literary friends.[36] He tortured himself with his recollections of wounded soldiers and how they were mistreated and misrepresented by the privileged classes in the war years 1914 to 1916. On 10 June 1919, Bunin recalled how in the summer of 1917 (when hunger was not a problem) 'a quiet, pretty-looking girl' showed no compassion for 'forty thousand Austrian captives',[37] arguing that it would be better to kill them instead of feeding them.

## The Narrative and the Poster

One of the remarkable features of *Cursed Days* is its appropriation of different media. In particular, Bunin drew heavily on the unmitigated power of the early Bolshevik propaganda posters. He carefully read and examined the various placards that he found in public places, and later reproduced them in great detail in his diary. Without exception, the posters that attracted Bunin's attention depicted and called for unflinching violence:

> April 24, 1919: A huge poster stands near the doors of the Political Administration Office. A red-skinned peasant woman, with an insanely savage snout and savagely bared teeth, is running full speed and sticking a pitchfork into the backside of a fleeing general. Blood pours from his rear.[38]
>
> April 25, 1919: Posters again hang all along Deribasovskaya Street: two workers are turning a press, under which lies a flattened bourgeois. Golden coins pour forth in ribbons from his mouth and ass.[39]
>
> May 23, 1919: The walls on Deribasovskaya Street have new pictures on them. In one, a sailor and a soldier of the Red Army, together with a Cossack and a peasant, are twirling a repulsive green toad with goggling eyes at the end of the rope—a symbol for the bourgeois. Underneath is this inscription: 'You've been crushing us with your fat belly.' In another, a huge peasant waves a club while, over him, a hydra raises its toothy, bloodstained heads. The heads all have crowns on them. The largest of these is that of the terrible, deathly, mournful, resigned Nicholas II. He has a bluish face with a crown off to the side of his head. From under it blood flows in streams down the cheeks of his face….[40]

As stand-alone primary sources, the posters are hard to find. Any Internet search for them leads one inevitably back to Bunin's own text. This does not mean that the posters Bunin described did not exist. I found the very last poster and a few others that look similar to those he mentioned in his diary (Illustrations 7.1 and 7.2). Significantly, Bunin described the posters' underlying violence in vivid detail, suggesting that every onlooker would see the same picture and take away the same message.

To begin with, the early Soviet posters (as specialists point out) were not intended for permanent preservation and thorough examination. They were printed on poor quality paper and would be destroyed by bad weather.[41] Thanks to Bunin, they have become part of his (and our) historical record. The posters were not only torn out of their natural context of the streets and other public places but, being inserted into Bunin's diary, they ripped open the world of Bunin's prose, an alien environment for them.[42] Bunin was clearly mesmerised by the posters. They served as entry points into the souls of the Bolsheviks, whom he neither understood nor liked. In Bunin's narrative, Bolshevik posters look like promotional advertising of sinister and senseless aggression toward defenceless civilians and potential supporters of the White movement.[43] Bunin reproduced the textual part of the posters in his diary entries and translated their visual components in his own words, which made them appear considerably more cynical and despicable. Reproducing such 'propaganda' posters by


**Illustration 7.1** *Obmanutym brat'yam* (To the deceived brothers). A Bogatyr-like Russian peasant takes on the hydra-headed monster of Tsardom. A. Apsit (1880–1944), coloured lithograph, 1918, 105 × 70 cm. Source: Wikipedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Aleksandr_Apsit#/media/File:23_Russland._Alexander_Apsit_(1880–1943)_Обманутым_Братьям_(Die_entschlossenen_Brüder)_1918_103_x_68_cm_(Slg.Nr._475).jpg


**Illustration 7.2** *Chortova kukla* (You Wretched Miscreant!). A Red Army soldier shows that the White Army movement was, in fact, heavily supported by the Entente military alliance. D.S. Moor (1883–1946), coloured lithograph, 1920, 70 × 44 cm. Source: http://www.davno.ru/posters/чортова-кукла.html

means of literary prose, Bunin enhanced their exploitation of the reader's basest instincts and their inherently crude approach to portraying the conflicting parties. In Bunin's descriptions, the posters appear simultaneously as sources and illustrations of committed violence. Bunin himself did not witness the atrocities and violence he ascribed to the posters. In effect, the posters became a window through which he could observe the savagery of the Bolsheviks, albeit through his own eyes.

Bunin's negative colour of choice is red (the Bolsheviks and their supporters indiscriminately have ugly red–or strikingly pale–faces and red bloodshot eyes). The Bolshevik posters left no doubt about who was going to win and who was going to perish. Bunin's approach to portraying his 'enemies' was very similar. In effect, Bunin erected a visible barrier between himself and the revolutionary masses, resorting to the nomenclature of forensic medicine, according to which all revolutionaries were degenerates and criminals. In his verbal escapades, Bunin uncritically sided with Max Nordau and his classic *Degeneration* (1892) and Cesare Lombroso's advocacy of criminal anthropometry.[44]

It should also be noted that both Bunin and the pro-Bolshevik poster artists were at a crossroads in 1918 and 1919 and were simultaneously searching for proper means of describing the unfolding revolutionary events. 'Many of our agitational posters', wrote a contributor to *Vestnik agitatsii i propagandy* (*The Herald of Agitation and Propaganda*) in early 1921, 'are bad, unsuccessful [and] do not achieve their intended purpose'.[45] As Stephen White explains,

> The problem was not simply their poor or inappropriate content, bad draftsmanship or clumsy text; it was also a matter of their overall appearance…. Too many posters were either colorless or too highly colored, and some drawings were unduly complicated and took some time to work out even after careful studying.[46]

By the early 1920s, both Bunin and the pro-Bolshevik artists would move on from the extensively detailed (Illustration 7.1) and militantly-agitational style of their discourse (Illustration 7.2) to essentialist representations as can be seen in the posters designed by G.G. Klutsis, A.I. Strakhov, and D.S. Moor (Illustration 7.3). For Bunin, the Bolshevik revolution would come to represent loss, more specifically, lost love or tragically ended relationships. The ugly, red female faces from the Bolshevik posters would turn into the beloved faces of the near and dear ones.


**Illustration 7.3** *Ty zapisalsia dobrovol'tsem?* (Have you volunteered to enlist?). D.S. Moor's best-known poster that was meant to bolster the recruitment into the Red Army. D.S. Moor (1883–1946), 1920, 106 × 71 cm. Source: Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ti_zapisalsya_dobrovolcem_1920_Moor.svg

Bunin's relationship with reality underwent numerous changes during his life. If at first he insisted (as with *The Village*) that his descriptions were directly inspired by what he saw in real life, by the 1930s, he would deny any connection between his works and reality.[47] It would seem that his readers' reactions to his writings in the 1920s had something to do with this transformation. The French reviewers of the French translation of *The Village* in 1922 were overwhelmed by the wretchedness and dreariness of Russian life, 'impervious to even a single ray of the sun'. The emptiness and coarseness of that life were of such an extent that even the revolution 'did not bring any happiness to the people who pinned so many hopes on it'. Another critic was 'badly shaken' by the 'strange characters' of *The Village*'. Still another wrote that Bunin's village life is 'a series of scenes from peasants' life on the boundless Slavic steppes, which are more horrible than the worst nightmare'. Bunin portrayed 'oceans of vodka', utmost squalor, and oppression that evoke pity and indescribable horror.[48]

Trying to find the village of Durnovka (the name literally means 'the place where everything goes badly') on a map of Russia would be the same as looking for Heaven and Hell in the vicinity of Florence. (At some point in the narrative, we are told that this particular village stands for entire Russia).[49] But the French reviewers had the benefit of reading *The Village* in 1922 and could barely dissociate its themes from the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Bunin's introductory piece to this edition, 'The Letter to a French Publisher' (discussed at the very beginning of this chapter), would have undoubtedly solidified such a perception. To a certain extent, Bunin's graphic portraiture of pre-war village life could not fail but legitimise the October 1917 revolution and even justify its atrocities. After all, what could one expect from a country like that depicted in *The Village*? How else could one rule over a people used to bestiality and the all-pervasive depravity of thought and actions? Such readings and interpretations would have made Bunin's later project, *Cursed Days*, redundant and inferior to his already famous novel.

In the 1920s, only those who wanted the Soviet regime to end could be expected to fully embrace Bunin's stance and recollections. The introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1921, with its goal of limited support for state capitalism ignited many people's hopes of achieving a peaceful and prosperous life in Russia/the Soviet Union after the Bolshevik revolution. In the 1920s, many Soviet writers were publishing their works both in the Soviet Union and in various *émigré* literary journals and news-

papers. The writers who gained popularity with their readers both in the Soviet Union and abroad, such as Mikhail Bulgakov, Boris Pilniak, Aleksei Tolstoy, and Isaak Babel, to name a few, became popular because they were able to come up with a unifying picture of Russia's immediate past, concentrating on individuals with their daily problems.[50] The fear of losing his readership could not fail to make Bunin search for a different perspective on the tragic events of the early twentieth century. *Cursed Days* suffers from too much 'truth' and negativity that Bunin applied unsparingly to his portrayal of Russia's turbulent state. His unmitigated criticism had to be toned down.

## From *Cursed Days* to the Nobel Prize in Literature

In the 1920s, Bunin turned from contemporary politics to literature's everlasting themes. Instead of demonising revolutionary Russia as a whole, Bunin resorted to depicting scenes of tragedy and doom in the lives of individual characters. He immersed his characters ('typical' Russians) in what can be described as a state of idyllic hopelessness. Bunin's stories from 1922 onward suggest that the impact of unrequited or doomed love on private individuals was as devastating as the trials and hardships of the First World War and the Bolshevik revolution.

His new approach proved to be fruitful. During the Second World War, Bunin sought solace in writing his erotically charged collection *The Dark Alleys*, which he considered to be his best work. In *Doctor Zhivago* (1945–55), Boris Pasternak expands the list of personal trials by equating the enormity of political upheavals with such major events in the life of an individual as childbirth, falling in love, and the deaths of loved ones. In *Cursed Days*, Bunin makes the Russian people responsible for every misfortune that befell them in the early twentieth century. His later prose, however, offers much-needed consolation and restores their dignity. The concluding portion of *Cursed Days* also bears signs of Bunin's radical departure from his propensity to judge and condemn.

In an entry dated 23 April 1919, Bunin reassessed his earlier visit to revolutionary Petrograd (formerly St. Petersburg). This time around, he compared his week in April 1917 to attending a funeral with all its sadness and piercing urge for forgiveness. Significantly, the time of Bunin's pilgrimage coincided with Orthodox Easter:

> In Petersburg I felt the following in a particularly lively way: there had been a great death in our huge, thousand-year-old home. This home had now been thrown open wide and filled with a huge holiday mob, which no longer saw anything sacred or forbidden in its rooms…. The world was host to Easter, to spring, and to such splendid days, the likes of which ordinarily never occurred in Petersburg at that time of year. But an immense sadness held sway over anything else I felt then. Before I left Petersburg I visited the Peter and Paul Cathedral…. Coming out onto the church porch, I stood for a long time in a state of shock; the entire endless universe that was Russia at springtime was opening up before my very attentive eyes. Spring and the Easter chimes called forth feelings of joy and of resurrection, but an immense grave yawned in the world. Death was in this spring, the final kiss….[51]

Quite unexpectedly, Bunin picked up this theme of irrecoverable loss at the very conclusion of *Cursed Days*. It seems that Bunin's narrator reached the end of his tether or so he stated in his diary entries leading to a totally unforeseen epiphany:[52]

> We again went to the archbishop's garden [in Odessa]…. From there … the view is unusually sad–an entirely dead land. Was it all that long ago that the port was bursting with riches and people? Now it is empty, completely empty. Everything that still lies around the docks looks pitiful; everything is rust-covered, peeling, and stripped bare. The protruding smokestacks of the factories over at the Peresyp have long died out. But it is still marvelous and quiet and solitary in the garden. We often also drop in at the church there; each time we are seized by an ecstasy that borders on tears when we observe the singing, the bowings of the priests, the incensing of the church; when we come into contact with all that is grand and decent, with the world of all that is good and merciful; and where all earthly suffering is lightened and assuaged with such comfort, tenderness, and relief. Just think that formerly people of the circle to which I partially belonged went to church only for funerals![53]

Bunin follows his mournful soliloquy with a dashing postscript:

> P.S. My Odessa notes break off here. The pages that once followed them I buried so well in a spot in the ground that when we fled from Odessa at the end of January 1920 I could not find them.

With this postscript Bunin effectively delivered himself from any obligation to continue as an eyewitness, merely registering reality.

In Bunin's stories of the 1920s, there are no Bolsheviks. The action of most of his stories is restricted to pre-revolutionary Russia, albeit a Russia that could only be imagined against the background of the Soviet and *émigré* ways of life, both of which Bunin rejected as stifling his creative endeavour. Do Bunin's later representations of a pre-revolutionary paradise lack violence? No, they do not, but it is a different kind of violence. Bunin transforms physical violence into sexual violence, as is the case with the officer in 'Sunstroke'. He ages violently (i.e., he looks and feels ten years older) within 24 hours.[54] Even the title 'Sunstroke' suggests a violent blow coming from above. Although the title word 'Sunstroke' seems to be fully grounded in the context of the story (the story takes place on a pleasantly warm evening followed by the scorching heat of the next day; and the female character openly compares her inexplicably strong and sudden attraction to the officer to the effect of a sunstroke), it might nevertheless evoke the stream of post-revolutionary posters that featured a blazing sun as a symbol of positive cultural, social and political reforms.[55]

Bunin's transition from his documentary-cum-diary-like writing to a more conventional style of fiction prose with its unreliable narrators and falsified accounts is somewhat similar to the experience of patients in narrative psychology sessions. The ultimate goal of trained analysts is not to help their patients in discovering some hidden truth (i.e., what 'really' happened), but to assist them in creating an autobiography they can go on living with and maintain productivity.[56] Bunin's 1920s love stories were instrumental in restoring his traumatised relationship with Russia. They were also instrumental in creating his love-based union with his readers, who, like Narcissus, fell in love with what they saw in Bunin's mirrors. The examples from readers' letters to Bunin are too numerous to mention.

To create a literary output of paramount importance that would get him the Nobel Prize in Literature, Bunin had to reinvent Russia by turning it into a Russia of many people's dreams. As he discovered while writing his revolutionary accounts in *Cursed Days*, Bunin had little control over the events that were unfolding in front of him. This might explain Bunin's decision to stop his literary clock and calendar somewhere at the beginning of the First World War. Dante similarly restricted the time frame of his narrative poem to the Easter week of 1300.

To follow my analogy with Dante, Bunin's transition from *Cursed Days* to 'Sunstroke' testifies to a profound psychological crisis and to how this

crisis was resolved. The conclusion of *Cursed Days*, like Canto XXXIV of *Inferno* ('through a small round opening ahead of us// I saw the lovely things the heavens hold, // and we came out to see once more the stars')[57] presents the beginning of Bunin's new style that received its full exposure in stories like 'Sunstroke' and in his semi-autobiographical novel *The Life of Arseniev* (1927–29, 1930).[58] In the 1920s, Bunin decidedly moved on from revolutionary chaos to tragic epiphany and catharsis. He overcame chaos by knocking the ground from underneath it. In other words, in his post-*Cursed Days* works, Bunin creates a congenial pre-revolutionary reality expected to evolve into something potentially lasting and viable.

In 1933, Bunin was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature 'for the strict artistry with which he has carried on the classical Russian traditions in prose writing'.[59] In his presentation speech, Per Hallstrom, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, stressed that in *The Village* (written in the year of Tolstoy's death) Bunin renounced Tolstoy's belief in ordinary people, such as Russian peasants:

> He attacked the essential point of the Russian faith in the future, the Slavophiles' dream of the virtuous and able peasant, through whom the nation must someday cover the world with its shadow. Bunin replied to this thesis with an objective description of the real nature of the peasants' virtues. The result was one of the most somber and cruel works even in Russian literature, where such works are by no means rare…. Now the book has had a strong revival because of events since then, and it remains a classic work, the model of a solid, concentrated, and sure art, in the eyes of the Russian émigrés as well as of those in the homeland'.[60]

In his own sketch that he wrote for the occasion, Bunin stressed his very Russian origin, describing his literary ancestry and his ties to ordinary people:

> All my ancestors had close ties with the soil and the people: they were country gentlemen. My parents were no exception. They owned estates in Central Russia, on those fertile steppes in which the ancient Muscovite czars had settled colonists from all over the country for their protection against Tartar invasions from the South. That is why in that region there developed the richest of all Russian dialects, and almost all of our great writers from Turgenev to Leo Tolstoy have come from there.'… There were several reasons why I was not widely known for a considerable time. I kept aloof from politics and in my writings did not touch upon questions concerning it.[61]

The years between 1910 and 1933 receive only a cursory account: 'I left Moscow because of the Bolshevik regime in May, 1918; until February, 1920, when I finally emigrated abroad, I lived in the south of Russia. Since then I have lived in France, dividing my time between Paris and the maritime Alps'.[62] In 1933, Bunin apparently was not sure how to describe his literary evolution from such texts as *The Village* with its direct criticism of imperial Russia and its institutions to his later works such as 'Sunstroke' and *The Life of Arseniev*, which made its readers mourn the very same country and the very same institutions.

## Conclusion

*Cursed Days* resembles and does not resemble Bunin's 'classic' works. It is through the prism of everything written after *Cursed Days* that the events described in the book can be understood as revelatory and emblematic of what happened in the years 1917 to 1919. Only after one conceives of the beauty of pre-revolutionary Russia, can one start to fully appreciate the enormity of social and cultural change inflicted by the Bolshevik revolution and its aftermath. In other words, the authenticity of *Cursed Days* is secured not so much by the events described in the book as by the author's reputation earned in later years. In the 1920s, Bunin discovered new avenues of exploring historical material. Although those avenues of exploration did not bring any new historical truths, they undoubtedly brought Bunin to the readers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

## Notes

1. 'The First Meeting of the Organizing Committee, to Honor the Centennial of the 1917 Revolution' (Pervoe zasedanie organizatsionnogo komiteta, posviashchennoe 100-letiiu revoliutsii 1917 g.), January 23, 2017, accessed October 12, 2017, http://rushistory.org/proekty/100-letie-revolyutsii-1917-goda/pervoe-zasedanie-organizatsionnogo-komiteta-po-podgotovke-i-provedeniyu-meropriyatij-posvyashchennykh-100-letiyu-revolyutsii-1917-goda.html.
2. B. A. Averin et al., eds, *I. A. Bunin: Pro et Contra. Lichnost' i tvorchestvo Ivana Bunina v otsenke russkikh i zarubezhnykh myslitelei i issledovatelei* (St-Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkogo Khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta, 2001), 32, 773.
3. Ibid., 32.

4. Daniel Riniker, '*Okaiannye dni* kak chast' tvorcheskogo naslediia I. A. Bunina,' in *I. A. Bunin: Pro et Contra*, 627–28. Averin is the editor and Riniker is the author of this article.
5. *Sunstroke* (*Solnechnyi udar*), directed by Nikita Mikhalkov (2014; Russia: Dream Team; Digital Cinema).
6. Ivan Bunin, *Sunstroke: Selected Stories of Ivan Bunin*, trans. Graham Hettlinger (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 3–12.
7. The White Army or the White Guard or the Whites were fighting against the Bolsheviks during the Russian civil war between November 1917 and October 1922. The White Army movement included everyone who opposed Bolshevism and wanted to restore the Russian empire.
8. Valentin Kataev, *Trava Zabveniia* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1967), passim.
9. Ivan Alekseevich Bunin and Vera Nikolaevna Bunina, *Ustami Buninykh. Dnevniki.* 1 (Moscow: Posev, 2004), 158.
10. On December 4, 1918, Vera informed her parents: 'Our apartment is very beautiful. It is tastefully furnished, with many antiques. The rooms are large and bright … and have many conveniences … I am living in comfort … such as I have never enjoyed in peaceful times'. Quoted in Ivan Bunin, *Cursed Days: A Diary of Revolution*, trans. Thomas Gaiton Marullo (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998), 10.
11. Marullo describes Odessa in 1918–20: 'When the Bunins arrived there in mid-June, the city had already changed hands twice that year. The Soviets had established power there on January 30, 1918; but German and Austrian troops occupied the city in March, holding it until November. In the ensuing months the Bunins would see Odessa become a "political Babel". The city fell to the Ukranian nationalist Petlyura, who controlled the city from December 11 to 18, 1918; to British and French troops, who held it until April 6, 1919; to Bolshevik forces, who occupied it for five months; and to General Denikin's White antirevolutionary forces, who entered Odessa on August 24, 1919. The beleaguered city was ultimately retaken by the Soviets on February 7, 1920; and the Bunins, having signed passage on a boat in the city port a day earlier, left Russia forever on February 9, 1920'. Bunin, *Cursed Days*, 9.
12. Bunin, *Pro et Contra*, 32. Bunin is the author. *Pro et contra* is a collection of Bunin's own writings together with the literary reviews of his works and his and other people's memoirs. Here Bunin is the author.
13. Bunin, *Cursed Days*, 45, 82.
14. 'We took a walk along Gimnazicheskaya Street. A charming springlike rain greeted us almost the entire way; and there was also a marvellous springlike sky among the storm clouds. But I almost fainted twice. I have to stop

writing these notes; jotting them down, I irritate my heart even more'. Ibid., 158.

15. 'Just before I woke up this morning, I had a dream that someone was dying and that he had died. Very often now I see death in my dreams–either one of my friends is dying, or a close family member, especially my brother Yuly…. Oh, these dreams about death! What a huge place death occupies in our short lives!… Day and night we live in an orgy of death'. Ibid., 81.
16. Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven*, ed. Rolf Tiedmann, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998), 123, 135, 160.
17. Bunin, *Cursed Days*, 128.
18. 'February 15/28, 1918: After yesterday's evening news alleging that the Germans have already taken Petersburg, the newspapers are all in despair. All the same, though, the newspapers issue calls "to stand as one in the struggle with the German members of the White Guard"'. Ibid., 44. 'April 20/May 3, 1919: I rushed to read the newspapers—but there is nothing noteworthy in them. "The enemy offensive is being met with equally strong resistance…". But, in the end, who is this enemy?'Ibid., 93.
19. Ibid., 35.
20. Ibid., 121–22.
21. G. Lenotre, *Vieilles maisons, vieux papiers* (Paris: Perrin, 1901); G. Lenotre, *Paris Révolutionnaire*, (Paris: Perrin, 1909).
22. Bunin, *Cursed Days*, 159–60, 181–84.
23. 'Derman came by–he had just escaped from Simferopol'. There, he says, "indescribable horror" is going on. Soldiers and workers are "walking up to their knees in blood". An old colonel was toasted alive in the furnace of a locomotive…. Yesterday we visited B. There were quite a number of people there–and everyone was unanimous in saying that, thank God, the Germans were advancing and that they had taken Smolensk and Bologoe'. [In fact, in 1918, the Germans did not capture Smolensk or Bologoe.] Ibid., 37–38. 'May 25/June 7, 1919: "Comrade Balabanova, secretary of the Third International, is visiting Odessa". Today I came unexpectedly upon a funeral with music and banners saying: "For the death of one revolutionary, a thousand bourgeois must die"!' Ibid., 171–72.
24. Riniker, '*Okaiannye dni* kak chast' tvorcheskogo naslediia I. A. Bunina', 628.
25. I. A. Bunin, *Derevnya, Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrech tomakh*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Pravda, 1988), 97–214. For critics' immediate reaction to *The Village* see N.G. Melnikov, ed., *Klassik bez retushi: Literaturnyi mir o tvorchestve I. A. Bunina* (Moscow: Knizhnitsa/Russkii put', 2010), 113–46.
26. Bunin, *Cursed Days*, 40, 86.

27. Franz Kafka, 'In the Penal Colony', trans. Ian Johnston, accessed July 22, 2017, http://www.kafka.org/index.php?aid=167.
28. Bunin, *Cursed Days*, 195.
29. Ibid., 130.
30. Irina Odoevtseva, *Na beregakh Seny*, in *Izbrannoe* (Moscow: Soglasie, 1998), 859–60.
31. Bunin, *Cursed Days*, 131.
32. Ibid., 180.
33. Ibid., 200.
34. Terry Eagleton, 'Pork Chops and Pineapples', *London Review of Books* (October 23, 2003): 17.
35. Bunin, *Cursed Days*, 102–3.
36. Ibid., 47–48.
37. Ibid., 195. Marullo's footnote: 'In the battles between Russians and Austrians in Galicia in early July 1917, the Russians took at least seven thousand Austrian prisoners. They were released after the Bolshevik Revolution'.
38. Ibid., 122–23.
39. Ibid., 131.
40. Ibid., 169.
41. Exhibition 'Revolutionary Events and the Civil War as Reflected in the Soviet Posters', no author, just the time (9 March–5 May, 2017) and location—Moscow, Russian State Library, Vozdvizhenka street, 3/5, accessed October 11, 2017, http://www.rsl.ru/ru/s7/s381/2017/posters1918.
42. 'June 2/15, 1919: 'Again those glassy rose stars in the evening twilight looked like something from the bottom of the sea. They were shining on Red Street, across from the Sverdlov Theatre and over the entrance to the building. And again, a terrible poster–the head of Nicholas II, dead, mournful, and blue. His crown knocked up to one side by a peasant's club'. Bunin, *Cursed Days*, 177.
43. Bunin conveniently forgets that the White Army posters (and for that matter, Russian First World War posters, which served as a source of inspiration for many posters in 1917–1921) were just as graphic and sinister as the early Bolsheviks' posters.
44. Bunin, *Cursed Days*, 198–200.
45. Stephen White, *The Bolshevik Poster* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 119.
46. Ibid.
47. Irina Odoevtseva, *Na beregakh Seny*, 874–75. Aleksandr Bakhrakh, *Bunin v khalate. Po pamiati, po zapisiam* (Moscow: Vargius, 2005), 126–27.
48. These reviews come from N.G. Melnikov, ed., *Klassik bez retushi*, 499–512, 542–55.

49. I. A. Bunin, Derevnya, 153.
50. See their long works *The White Guard*, *The Naked Year*, *The Sisters*, and *The Red Cavalry*, respectively.
51. Bunin, *Cursed Days*, 119.
52. Note that he changes from 'I' to 'We' (which would include his wife), while previously his pronoun of choice was always an 'I'.
53. Bunin, *Cursed Days*, 208–9.
54. C.f. 'I keep reading the newspapers and I almost cry from malicious delight. Generally speaking, this past year will take no less than ten years from my life!' Ibid., 72.
55. Note how the sun's expression changes in Illustration 7.2.
56. Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), passim.
57. Mark Musa, trans., *The Portable Dante* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 191.
58. I. A. Bunin, *Zhizn' Arsen'eva, Sobranie Sochinenii v chetyrech tomakh*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Pravda, 1988), 265–536.
59. 'The Nobel Prize in Literature 1933'. *Nobelprize.org*. Nobel Media AB 2014. Web. 12 Oct 2017. http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1933/.
60. Nobel Media AB 2014, 'Nobel Prize in Literature 1933—Presentation Speech', accessed July 17, 2017, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1933/press.html.
61. Nobel Media AB 2014, 'Ivan Bunin—Biographical', accessed July 17, 2017). http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1933/bunin-bio.html.
62. Ibid.

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CHAPTER 8

# Temporary Sahibs: Terriers in India in 1917

*Peter Stanley*

As a world war involving dozens of nations and colonies and as many million people directly and indirectly, the Great War of 1914–18 (and beyond) encompassed a vast range of experience. It included the horrors of combat and genocide, the trauma of physical and mental wounds and mutilation on a huge scale, and the impact of pestilence and hunger. Certainly the war brought compensations—the liberation of captive peoples, the destruction of hated governments, or the creation of new national identities; new opportunities and freedoms—though its hardships and costs surely outweighed any supposed benefits. The range and magnitude of the horrors of the Great War have become a staple both of popular representation and of scholarly research. Less common has been the exploration of aspects of the war that may challenge the conventional, understandably dark, view of the conflict. Extraordinary as it may seem, the experience of the more than 50,000 British Territorial soldiers, who formed the garrison of British India, has barely been explored in the century since they first arrived in Bombay harbour in December 1914. Tellingly, the Territorials' service in India is not mentioned at all in Trevor Wilson's 1984 book, *The myriad faces of war*, which gave its name to a 2017 symposium on that conflict and this book its title and theme. By 1917, the Territorial soldiers

P. Stanley (✉)
Australian Centre for the Study of Armed Conflict and Society, University of New South Wales, Canberra, Canberra, ACT, Australia



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who had blithely volunteered to serve in India in 1914 had become sahibs, hardened by exposure to the climate and lulled into the racial superiority fostered by the Raj. They also became useful to it, seeing war, if not against Germans on the western front as they had hoped, then against Ottoman Turks in Aden and Mesopotamia, and against insurgent tribes on India's north-western frontier.

The First World War was a war of empires. Britain's empire was largest and most diverse, and India was Britain's largest and richest—that is, most lucrative—possession. Its 300 million people were ruled by a body of a thousand British officials (supported by numerous Indian subordinates) and were held in Britain's imperial thrall by a large army of some 75,000 British and 150,000 Indian soldiers. The size and proportion of Britain's Indian garrison derived from the shock of the mutiny-rebellion of 1857–58, when a large part of the 'native' army of Bengal rose in revolt, feeding off and supporting civil uprising. The shock of 'the Mutiny' resulted in the fundamental revision of the nature of the Indian force (which lost its artillery, and was selectively recruited from ethnic groups that had remained 'loyal' in 1857) and an increase in the British garrison, which in 1914 amounted to one in three of India's armed force, a total of 52 battalions of infantry.

In 1914 Lord Kitchener (formerly Commander-in-Chief in India 1902–09) became Secretary of State for War. He soon realised that the war would be a long one, and that he needed the third of Britain's regular infantry then stationed in India. Kitchener knew that leaving so few (eight) regular battalions in India and sending out partly trained citizen troops presented a risk, but he saw that the war's first crisis would be on Europe's western front. Though like many regular officers he despised the Territorial Force, created in 1908 as a way of unifying Britain's three citizen volunteer forces (Militia, Yeomanry and Volunteers) into a useful supplement to the army, he decided to use it to garrison India. The Territorial Force, though not actually created for 'home defence', as was widely believed, was only permitted to serve outside Britain if its members volunteered for 'imperial service'. Only a tiny percentage of the force had done so by the war's outbreak: six out of over 200 battalions, though 70 had volunteered before the end of August. Kitchener asked these Territorials to volunteer to serve overseas in October 1914, reassuring them (through addresses from their divisional commanders) that they would 'share in all the honours of the War just as if they had gone to France'.[1] Thousands of men accepted his invitation to go overseas (mostly to India), on the understanding—a verbal assurance—that they would be able to train there and return to fight the Germans after about six months.

Despite the India Office's reservations, and the even more strident objections of the Commander-in-Chief in India, in November 1914 the first units of three Territorial divisions embarked from Southampton and steamed into the Channel under escort. The voyage gave the Territorials their first exotic experience. Like tens of thousands of Dominion volunteers they spent a month at sea, their accounts of sunshine, flying fish, and Eastern ports very similar to those in the diaries and letters of men from Australia and New Zealand. In the Suez Canal, Territorials passed transports carrying the first of the regulars back from Britain. Soon, the regulars would be fighting at Ypres in Flanders, and in April 1915 landing on Gallipoli as the 29th Division. The regulars called to the Terriers that they were 'going the wrong way'. The Territorials began to suspect what they had lost by accepting Kitchener's offer.

In December 1914 and January 1915 some 33 Territorial battalions travelled from Bombay to go to cantonments all over British India, from Quetta in Baluchistan to Rangoon in Burma, and from Cochin in the south to the cantonments clustered up the Ganges valley—Agra, Lucknow, Cawnpore, Benares, Dinapore. All but four of the Territorial battalions were from southern English counties—the three divisions selected to go to India were the 1st Home Counties Division and the 1st and 2nd Wessex divisions. The Home Counties Division included units from Kent, Surrey, Middlesex, and Sussex. The Wessex divisions included men from Hampshire, Dorset, Wiltshire, Somerset, Devon, and Cornwall. They were joined by battalions from Wales (the 1/1 Brecknockshire, a battalion of the South Wales Borderers), Shropshire (the 1/4th King's Shropshire Light Infantry), and what is now Cumbria (the 1/4th and 2/4th Border Regiment). In 1916, four Territorial cyclist battalions arrived, minus their bicycles, making 41 battalions in all. The complete list of Territorial battalions which served in India comprised:

1/4th and 1/5th Queen's Own Royal West Surrey
1/4th and 1/5th Buffs
1/4th, 1/5th, 1/6th, 2/4th and 2/5th Devonshire Regiment
1/4th, 1/5th, 2/4th and 2/5th Somerset Light Infantry
1/1st Brecknockshire Battalion, South Wales Borderers
1/5th and 1/6th East Surrey Regiment
1/4th and 2/4th Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry
1/4th and 2/4th Border Regiment
2/6th Royal Sussex
1/4th, 1/5th, 1/6th, 1/7th, 1/9th, 2/4th, 2/5th, 2/6th and 2/7th Hampshire Regiment

1/4th and 2/4th Dorsetshire Regiment
1/4th and 1/5th Queen's Own Royal West Kent
1/4th King's Shropshire Light Infantry
1/9th and 1/10th Middlesex Regiment
1/4th and 2/4th Wiltshire Regiment
1/25th London Regiment
1/1st Kent Cyclist Battalion.[2]

Though 29 batteries of Territorial artillery accompanied the infantry, no other units of the divisions arrived, and they were dispersed, never again serving as divisions after disembarkation. The Territorial battalions were either 'first line'—that is had existed before the war (designated '1/4th', say,)—or were 'second line'—that is, had been formed later in 1914 and designated '2/4th'. Either way, they comprised pre-war volunteers or men who had joined in the war's opening months.

Under the tutelage of parties of regulars, these Territorial men, who had never expected to see India, learned how to live in barracks, known as 'bungalows', no matter how big they were. For example, Dalhousie Barracks in Fort William, Calcutta, where the 1/10th Middlesex lived, was the largest single barrack block in the empire, but many bungalows in hill stations were the size of suburban houses, accommodating ten or a dozen men. They learned how to cope with India's heat, and its many hazards, such as snakes and mosquitos, to bargain in the bazaars, and how to treat the servants and vendors who lived off each bungalow. They were visibly different to regulars, differently dressed, often financially better off and less inclined to strike servants routinely; at least until they learned to. There is some evidence that they mingled more easily with Indian civilians than had regulars, when permitted (at YMCA functions, for example, and especially in south India, where more Indian Christians led to greater contact).

Territorials arrived either as barely trained pre-war soldiers or as virtually untrained volunteers in the first months of war, and many learned about soldiering after arriving. A Dorset man gained notoriety for telling an inspecting officer at Kirkee in January 1915 that he decided that he could do sentry duty as well 'sat down' as 'stood up'. He tried this only once.[3]

As Kitchener had promised, during their first six months in India they trained, facing as the hot season of 1915 began the 'Kitchener Test' (devised by him while Commander-in-Chief). Though all battalions

passed, some more easily than others, the Territorials were not considered ready for active service either on the north-west frontier or in Mesopotamia. They repeatedly faced negative comparisons with the regular soldiers they replaced. A 1915 book of propaganda by the novelist Edgar Wallace, for example, conceded that 'as splendid as our Territorials were, they could not compare' with the 'seasoned battalions' of regulars.[4] As a result, in the first two years in India, the men were only reluctantly released for active service. The 1/1st Brecknockshire Battalion, for example, was first posted to Aden, where a British Indian force fought a low-level campaign against an isolated Ottoman force throughout the war, but its first offensive sally brought heavy losses, including from heat exhaustion.[5] It was only later, after 1917, that the Territorials contested the condescension, when they were used more actively both at the front, in Mesopotamia, Palestine, and even in France. The Brecknockshire battalion in Aden, for its part, was replaced by other Territorial units, and four battalions served there in rotation, fighting a low intensity but constant war against the besieging Ottomans.[6]

But in their first two years in India, overwhelmingly, the Territorial battalions performed relatively passive duties, training, guarding, and relieving other troops to go overseas. Even the Territorials themselves deprecated their contribution. William Hughes told his family and neighbours in Great Chart (a Kent village which preserved letters from villagers serving overseas) that they were 'only doing garrison duty'. Because they were not 'exposed to the dangers of the firing line' they 'did not expect anything in the way of gifts from friends at home'.[7] For his part, Douglas Skinner confessed his fears that 'when we come home people might say that we volunteered to go out to India [because] … we were afraid to go to the front'. The truth was, of course, that 'we volunteered to go anywhere they sent us'.[8]

But 'Indian' Territorials had volunteered for active service, and as the war continued some achieved their desire. Through 1915, many battalions sent drafts of volunteers, usually older, pre-war men, to the regular British battalions serving with 'Force D', the British force invading Ottoman Mesopotamia. Perhaps a thousand volunteers went to serve in what they called 'the gulf'. Many were killed or wounded in the disastrous advance to Ctesiphon and the British division captured after the four-month siege of Kut-al-Amara ending in April 1916 included many Territorial volunteers. The actual figures are unclear, but hundreds of Territorials were captured, two-thirds of whom did not survive the rigours

of the march over the desert to Baghdad and Mosul and the hardships of captivity in Anatolia. In 1915 Territorial battalions began to go from India to Mesopotamia, and by 1918 ten battalions were serving there.

Territorials also left India to go east. In February 1915, the 1/4th King's Shropshire Light Infantry, which had been sent to Rangoon, was despatched at short notice to Singapore, to help round up mutinous men of the Indian 5th Light Infantry. Its members then helped to suppress a rebellion in Kelantan, Malaya, and went on to garrison Hong Kong. Parties of Territorials also escorted groups of German internees to Sydney. In 1917, the Shropshires' commanding officer successfully lobbied for his battalion to return to Europe; they did so, to France and not Britain first. Three other Territorial battalions also eventually reached France, via postings to Palestine, thereby achieving Kitchener's pledge, which had in general been repudiated even before his death on the way to Russia in June 1916.

For their part, the Territorials in India became accustomed to the vagaries and extremes of its climate. They served in stations on the plains, usually in the north and north-west, living in cantonments largely isolated from India and its people. In the north Indian hot season (April to July) drafts of younger and older men, about a third of the battalion, travelled to hill stations—Lebong (near Darjeeling), Naini Tal, Dalhousie, Subathoo and Chakatra—seeking relief from the oppressive heat of the Indian summer. In July, the monsoon arrived, and with it malaria and other fevers. In October the 'cold weather' allowed units to train. Units moved on at least once a year, so Territorials soon acquired extensive experience of India, invariably travelling by railways. One such journey resulted in the Territorials' single greatest disaster, when in June 1916 a train carrying reinforcements travelled from Karachi to the north-west stations through the Sind desert without adequate precautions—some thirty men died of heat exhaustion and a further 132 were hospitalised.

India's hazards proved to be a perennial theme in Territorials' writings, exemplified in a verse recorded by a Hampshire man and published in *Punch*:

> Ten Territorials fancied India fine,
> Till one caught malaria, and then there were nine.
> Nine Territorials mourned his hapless fate;
> One found a cobra, and then there were eight.[9]

And so on. (In fact deaths from snake-bite were very rare—only 2 out of 87,000 British soldiers in India died of snake-bite in 1918).[10]

At first excited by the prospect of serving in such an exotic locale, some Territorials later admitted to disappointment. Geoffrey Coombs of the 1/4th Buffs wrote to a former school-friend in 1916 describing how 'all my pre-formed notions of the mystic East were soon dispelled' on closer acquaintance with Indian bazaars, and many made much of their disgust at dirt, squalor, disease and poverty.[11] Many others, however, professed to finding India fascinating, and their records, especially scrap-books and photograph albums, disclose how they took a close and even 'anthropological' interest in the peoples of India, their religions, customs, clothing, farming practices, and languages. Though usually finding Indian towns 'out-of-bounds', Territorials were able to see much of India, and they took a much greater interest in India's peoples and their religions than regular troops had done. Temples and mosques, for instance, now found that they needed to provide cloth coverings for the troops' boots (much larger than civilian shoes). Pre-war regulars had never bothered to visit them.

On 'local leave', men would visit palaces, tombs, and other sights. Men sought longer 'furloughs', travelling across India by train to visit, say, Agra, Benares, and Calcutta. They visited and made records of the great sites of Mughal India—the Red Fort and Humayan's tomb in Delhi, the burning ghats of Benares and, of course, the Taj Mahal. While many Territorials, who encountered mainly cantonment servants and vendors, viewed Indians with the contempt of temporary sahibs, others became curious about India and its people, enlarging their knowledge of them. They found the sites of the Indian mutiny-rebellion of 1857–58 of particular interest, and their scrap-books and photograph albums include photographs and postcards of the Kashmir Gate at Delhi, the Residency at Lucknow, and the notorious 'massacre well' at Cawnpore (or rather the ornate memorial erected to its British civilian victims).

Their relationships with India's British civilian population were complex and constrained. Many civilians, whether officials, missionaries, or commercial people, treated Territorials as they had the regulars they had replaced, that is, as irrelevant when not disregarded. Territorials believed that as volunteer citizen soldiers, they were entitled to be treated with respect and consideration. In smaller cantonments and hill stations, where Territorials enriched their social and cultural scenes, relations were often good, and missionaries often welcomed soldiers (many soldiers visited

evangelical 'soldiers' homes'). These soldiers also complained that British civilians often did not sufficiently realise that there was a war on: in 1918 a Territorial medical officer complained that British-Indian civilians did not mark the war's end vigorously: because they had barely noticed it had begun.[12] Territorials themselves gradually understood what they had unwittingly avoided by volunteering for 'imperial service' and many noticed how friends, relatives, and former workmates were killed or wounded 'at the front'. Lieutenant Jim Mackie of the 2/4th Somerset Light Infantry, languishing in the remote and uncomfortable station of Ross, in the Andaman Islands, noted in the *Rangoon Gazette* the names of five young men who had been at Reading College with him. Two were dead, two wounded, and one had been posted missing, in France.[13] Many felt guilty at having evaded service on the western front especially, and often expressed the desire to see action. Henry Brain of the 1/6th East Surrey copied into his notebook a verse expressing his bitterness, but also his embarrassment, at not having been exposed to fighting in Europe, in which a 'lady visitor' asked men in hospital if they had been wounded in France:

> Oh no, Madam was the answer, I have come from India's shore
> I had a lot of sickness there and have been invalided from Peshawar
> Oh indeed, the lady answered, as she quickly turned away
> These flowers are for the wounded only, I will wish you a good day ….[14]

* * *

The year 1917 marked a watershed in the 'Indian' Territorials' contribution to the wider war. The fighting on the western front especially generated large numbers of men who had been wounded in ways that unfitted them to return to the front, but not severely enough to be discharged. They were drafted into 'garrison' battalions, 18 of which were sent to India in 1916 and 1917.[15] Their arrival released Territorial units, now trained and acclimatised in India, for service abroad. In the course of the year, 15 Territorial battalions—over a third of the initial deployment—left India for Mesopotamia and especially Palestine (where an entire division was formed of 'Indian' Territorials). They had had to wait three years for Kitchener's pledge to be redeemed.

Even more, in India itself the Territorials' long apprenticeship was ending. Pressures within India and on its north-west frontier saw Territorial battalions mobilised to fulfil exactly the internal security function for

which they had been intended, but also to fight on the frontier, where they had not been expected to be able to serve.

In India the cumulative stresses of failed monsoons and poor harvests, the stresses of wartime price rises, and communal tensions saw Territorial troops deployed to imperial policing in unprecedented numbers. Before 1917, small numbers of Territorials had been called out occasionally to police minor communal incidents. They periodically made 'flag marches', reminding the people who saw them of the incipient power of the British garrison (though, to be fair, the vast majority of Indians, who lived as peasants in villages, never saw British soldiers at all. They were located at about 40 cantonments, and huge stretches of India—Orissa, Assam, Rajputana—had no European garrisons at all). In 1917, however, the size and the incidence of troops being called out increased. In Bihar, for example, Somerset and Wiltshire Territorials (along with detachments of Indian infantry and cavalry) spent three months through the monsoon responding to large communal incursions by Hindus against Muslim neighbours.

The use of Territorials on the frontier saw an even greater change. The reduced British regular garrison of only eight infantry battalions had been left to carry the burden of service on the unstable north-west frontier. The year 1915 had seen a notable volatility among frontier tribes, and by 1916 it became clear to Army Headquarters that it would be necessary to train Territorial battalions for frontier warfare. Rather than learning 'on the job' as was traditional, courses in frontier warfare were established, eventually settling on the Frontier Warfare School at Abbottabad in the Hazara country run by the legendary Gurkha frontier tactician, Major William Villiers-Stuart.[16] Territorial officers and NCOs participated in month-long courses in which they learned the theory of frontier tactics and observed Gurkha and Nepalese troops demonstrate the realities of picquetting the heights, fighting rear-guards, and evacuating wounded. They then returned to their battalions to impart the lessons.

In 1917, Territorial troops first took part in a major frontier campaign, in Waziristan, south of the Khyber Pass. Mahsud and Wazir tribes sought to take advantage of what they saw as British weakness by raiding the plains west of the Indus. Large columns (mainly of Indian troops) assembled to mount punitive expeditions, operations calling upon large numbers of support troops and on new technology such as transport lorries and aircraft, supplementing the traditional mule-borne transport and cavalry reconnaissance. (Many of the support units depended upon Territorial infantrymen detached from their units, as drivers, technicians,

and supervisors).[17] The Territorial units taking part included some of the four Territorial cyclist battalions that had reached India in 1916 (without their bicycles), the last Territorials to arrive.

By the war's end, only 16 Territorial battalions remained in India. Ten were in Mesopotamia, ten had gone to Palestine, and four were in Europe, with the 2/4th Wiltshire marching into a defeated Germany. One battalion, the 1/7th Hampshire, was in Aden. The 1/4th Hampshire was distributed across northern Persia and Turkmenistan, fighting Bolsheviks in the messy wash-up of the Russian revolution. Another Hampshire battalion, the 1/9th, was in Siberia. It had sailed to Vladivostok in the midst of the great influenza epidemic and by May 1919 was at Ekaterinberg, deep in Siberia, where in 1918 the Tsar and the imperial family had been murdered. The 1/9th Hampshire returned to Britain in 1919, travelling east through Canada and becoming the only British battalion to circumnavigate the globe in the course of the Great War.

Though few might have imagined it in 1914, most of the Territorial units whose members had volunteered for overseas service in 1914 did in the end see active service. In the pivotal war years of 1917 and 1918, they fought against Ottoman Turks in Aden, Mesopotamia, and Palestine, against Bolsheviks in Turkmenistan or Wazir, and against Mahsud, Mohmand, and Pathan tribesmen on the north-west frontier of India. The service of these men highlights the global and imperial reach of the First World War.

* * *

Despite the lack of unit war diaries, the Territorials' service is abundantly documented, mainly by 'private records' such as collections of letters, diaries, memoirs, and especially photograph albums.[18] Maintained in surviving regimental collections and increasingly in county archives which are better controlled and maintained than ever before, the Territorials' service can be understood in detail by comparing records across the 16 regiments whose Territorials served in India. Despite the dearth of official records (the National Archives of India and of the United Kingdom have slim but vital holdings) the abundance of regimental and local material enables the story to be told with a richness of human detail. The subject remains virtually untouched.

The Territorials' parent regiments were naturally more concerned after 1918 to detail the epics of Mons, Gallipoli, Loos, the Somme, Passchendaele, and other active campaigns, which witnessed massive loss

of life. The Territorial battalions' Indian service merited scant references amongst these crowded regimental histories. One Territorial officer published a memoir in 1922, and after that, there were as good as no records of the Territorials' existence, at least not in the public sphere.[19] In recent years, several memoirs or collections of letters have appeared, notably about members of the Somerset Light Infantry, but no treatments by historians.[20]

That the most intensively mined aspect of British military history (the Great War) should have so neglected the Territorials' Indian story at the time of the war's centenary is at the very least extraordinary. The Territorials were arguably the largest single group of Englishmen (and, except for the Brecknocks, they were all English) to encounter India at the one time. And what a time it was! India in 1914 was a secure part of the empire, whose people were mostly quiescent and whose nationalist movement politely requested concessions. By the war's end India was in ferment. Its nationalist movement had thrown off its respectful demeanour and was demanding the repeal of repressive wartime surveillance legislation and was regarding the concessions offered by the Montague-Chelmsford proposals developed during 1917 as inadequate.[21] Under the leadership of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the Congress movement was to guide India to independence and partition within three decades. The Territorials' part in this dramatic transformation remains to be established. While they arrived largely free of the entrenched racial assumptions and prejudices of regular troops (Territorials freely played sport with 'native' teams, for example) they gradually took on the attitudes of sahibs. Increasing tension, protest, and violence, especially in 1919, when Territorials committed acts of brutality against both demonstrators and even innocent villagers, showed that their attitudes had hardened.[22]

The Territorials became conscious that they were part of the imperial epic celebrated by mutiny memorials and through the stories and verse of Kipling (which they knew—men of the Somerset Light Infantry sang his 'The Road to Mandalay' nightly on the voyage out in 1914). But they also saw India at first hand, and many developed a profound interest in its religions and cultures, and at a crucial time in its political history.

The Great War saw a crisis in India's relationship with Britain. In 1914 its political population was overwhelmingly 'loyal'. By 1919, that goodwill had evaporated and India faced years of protracted national struggle. Territorials represented the military force by which the British Raj maintained its power, but Territorials were seen by Indians as being different to

regular British soldiers (who saw them as 'soft', not least in 'dealing with' those they called 'natives').[23] But just as Territorials learned from regulars how to bargain in the bazaar and how to arrange a mosquito net, they also seem to have learned how to become 'temporary sahibs', adopting their politics and behaviours. How their Indian experience affected their perception of the political relationship between Indian nationalists and the Raj in the following decades remains, for the moment, opaque.[24]

The Armistice of 11 November 1918 brought with it the promise that men who had volunteered for active service at the war's outbreak might at last go home. No sooner had repatriation and demobilisation plans been made, however, than events in India intervened. The extremes of India's climate dictated the 'trooping season', when it was safe to transport large bodies of men around the sub-continent. The advance of the hot weather precluded much movement from April. Accordingly, along with the world-wide shortage of shipping, few men had been repatriated by the time civil unrest blew up in the Punjab especially in April 1919. As the hot weather began protests (especially *hartals*—general strikes) paralysed many cities. Indian National Congress activists, under the inspiration of Gandhi, were seeking the repeal of repressive wartime legislation. Repatriation orders were cancelled, leading to widespread dissatisfaction among Territorials, many facing their fifth hot weather on north India's plains.

In the Punjab, protesters were most active, and in Amritsar, men of the Somerset Light Infantry fired on angry crowds, killing several protestors. Within days further protests brought the most terrible repression. Brigadier Reginald Dyer, commanding in Lahore, believed that the protests heralded a second mutiny, and he ordered a party of Indian troops to shoot into a large gathering of civilians meeting in Amritsar, in an enclosure, the Jallianwalla Bagh, from which they could not escape. Some 379 unarmed people were killed and over 1200 left wounded in the heat of a Punjab summer. For several weeks Territorial troops perpetrated further abuses against civilians in the Punjab, defecating in wells in Amritsar, for example.[25]

If Territorials had thought favourably about Indian nationalism during the war, then the disturbances of 1919 changed their minds. A writer in the Kent Cyclists' magazine *The Invicta* damned the 'rabble of the bazaars and revolutionary and irresponsible youths of the student class' on whom they blamed the protests.[26] Evidence from Indian sources suggested that some Territorials took out their frustration on villagers in the Punjab.

They were reported to have helped themselves to food and goods from shops, to have mistreated Sikh men by pulling off their *pagris*, and even to killing a boy who had herded his goats too close to a military cordon (then dragging his body to a nearby pond).[27] Men of the 1/4th West Surreys, who formed a 'flying column' patrolling the Jullunder-Lahore railway in armoured trains fired machine-guns at villages along the track.[28]

While the Punjab disturbances saw Territorials patrolling the streets of north India's cities at the height of the hot weather, in May 1919 the new Amir of Afghanistan, Habibulla (who had murdered his uncle, the former Amir, or at least profited from his death) invaded British India and incited tribes along the frontier to join his troops. All along the thousand-mile Afghan-Indian frontier from Chitral in the north to Baluchistan in the south-west, Afghan troops crossed the frontier in what became the third Anglo-Afghan war (albeit the only one begun by Afghanistan). Again, Territorial battalions were mobilised to join the British and Indian regulars confronting the incursions. While some of the operations were clumsily handled, the Territorials performed at least adequately, especially in the relief of the Afghan siege of the mud fort of Thal (ironically, commanded by Brigadier Dyer, who proved to be as effective in conventional warfare as he had been incompetent in responding to civil unrest in Amritsar). British-Indian forces held and defeated the Afghan invasion at all points, but Britain conceding Afghanistan's ability to determine its own foreign policy was, effectively, a defeat.

Finally, the Territorials were able to return home. The last Territorial battalions left India at the end of 1919, becoming practically the last wartime volunteers to be demobilised. Some had served in India for four and five years. Relatively few of these men died in the war. Of the more than 50,000 Territorials who served in India, about a thousand men died there, mainly of disease (dysentery, typhoid, cholera, heat exhaustion and malaria) and accidents. More Territorials died on active service in Palestine, France, and especially in Mesopotamia and as prisoners of war in Ottoman Turkey, but they are almost impossible to identify individually, as are Territorial gunners who moved into other artillery units. Had Kitchener's pledge to send them to fight in France been honoured, and if the Territorials had fought in France or in other theatres sooner than 1917, then we might have expected 20 per cent to have died, as other British troops did. Despite the hazards of India's climate, some 8000 Territorials who served in India survived the war who otherwise would probably have died. In that, the Territorials' loyal response to Kitchener's request in October 1914 acted to preserve them from the ordeal of the western front, and its consequences.

On the other hand, although many returning Territorials were accorded civic welcomes, after their demobilisation (which usually occurred within days of their return) they were quickly forgotten. Both their parent regiments and their communities focused on the war's more immediate sacrifices. County and civic war memorials rarely mentioned India. Regimental histories often devoted at most a few pages to the service of their Territorials in India, compared to the very substantial attention to the service of battalions on more active fronts. While some Territorial battalions formed associations while still in India, and attended reunions for several decades, the Territorials' Indian service was substantially ignored. Nothing was published about them between 1922 (when Alban Bacon's memoir was published) and 1988, when Christopher Mills's *A Strange War* appeared.[29] No general secondary account of their service has yet been published: the book that I will soon complete constitutes (astonishingly) the first written about them in a century.[30]

Ultimately, what can we make of the Territorials' experience of India? There is little point in arguing that this 'forgotten' experience has any great significance in terms of the course of the wider war. In a war of empires, troops had to be found to ensure that those empires remained secure: the Territorials were used not to prosecute the war but to hold the empire. The Territorials' experience, however, offers several reminders: of the commitment demonstrated by British men at the war's outbreak, of Kitchener's prestige, and of the importance of the empire in both defining and constraining British military power. They also suggest that the war, supremely important though it clearly was, was certainly not the only consideration bearing upon the British empire: maintaining British rule in India remained sufficiently important to justify the deployment of over 50,000 Territorials, but also eight regular battalions, eighteen garrison battalions, tens of thousands of support troops, and hundreds of thousands of Indian troops. Though seemingly side-lined for the war's first two years, by 1917 they became used fully, both at the front and in ensuring the security of British rule. For the individual Territorials, their experience offers a powerful demonstration of how the war disrupted conventional assumptions and gave those caught up in the war experiences that they could never have anticipated.

## Notes

1. Comment by Major-General Colin Donald in Nigel Woodyatt, 'The Territorials (Infantry) in India, 1914–1920', *Royal United Services Institution Journal* 67, no. 468, (1922): 730.
2. Some sources claimed that three 'Territorial' battalions of the Rifle Brigade, the 18th, 23rd and 24th went to India. They did, but not as Territorials.
3. Regimental History Committee, *History of the Dorsetshire Regiment 1914–1919*, Part II, (Dorchester: Henry Ling Ltd, 1932), 71.
4. Edgar Wallace, *Kitchener's Army and the Territorial Forces: The Full Story of a Great Achievement* (London: George Newness Ltd, 1915), 164.
5. The 1/1st Brecknockshire Battalion suffered more deaths than any other battalion, losing some 80 men, with about a quarter dying in Mesopotamia in action or as prisoners of war, attached to other units. A further dozen died in the great influenza epidemic late in 1918: 'Our Comrades Graves', Box 17a 'Brecknock Battalion, South Wales Borderers. Correspondence relating to the grave memorials in Aden and India during the Great War', Museum of the Royal Regiment of Wales, Brecon.
6. The best single account of the fighting in southern Arabia is Mark Connelly, 'The British Campaign in Aden, 1914–1918', *Journal of the Centre for First World War Studies.* 2:1 (2005): 65–96.
7. Letter, 18 July 1915, William Hughes, 1/5th Buffs, Great Chart Soldiers and Sailors Fund, Book 5, Kent Archives and History Centre, Maidstone.
8. Letter, nd, Douglas Skinner, 1/5th Buffs, Great Chart Soldiers and Sailors Fund, Book 5, Kent Archives and History Centre, Maidstone.
9. 'A Territorial in India', *Punch*, 15 September 1915, 226.
10. *Annual Report of the Sanitary Commissioner with the Government of India for 1918* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1920), 22.
11. Letter, 21 March 1916, Geoffrey Coombs, 1/4th Buffs, EK/U127/2, Kent Archives and History Centre, Maidstone.
12. Philip Gosse, *Memoirs of a Camp Follower* (London: Longmans Green, 1934), 284–85.
13. Letter, 4 June 1915, Jim Mackie, 2/4th Somerset Light Infantry, in *Answering the Call: Letters from the Somerset Light Infantry 1914–19*, ed. John Mackie (Eggleston, UK: Raby Books, 2002), 75.
14. Memoir, Henry Brain, 1/6th East Surrey, ESR/25/BRAIN/2, Surrey History Centre.
15. Almost nothing of the garrison battalions' service is recorded, however—no unit in India maintained a war diary, for instance, unless actually on active service.
16. See Robert Maxwell, *Villiers-Stuart at War* (Edinburgh: Pentland Press, 1990).

17. Although there is little secondary literature on the mechanisation of the Indian Army, the papers of Lord Montagu of Beaulieu (the army's first Director of Mechanical Transport) in the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (London) documents the transition, and the involvement of the Territorials in it.
18. Virtually all of the historic regiments created museums and archives, now variously in the custody of national or county archives or museums, or the museums of successor regiments, located in collections across Britain. All of them hold surprisingly large collections documenting the Territorials' Indian service, even though neither their regimental histories nor those museums tell their story. (At most Indian territorials are represented by a handful of artefacts—a pith helmet, a colour patch or a souvenir swagger stick—in displays dealing overwhelmingly with the western front.) Notable in these collections are the large number of photograph albums relating to India, because Territorials had both leisure and often money, and many took a strong interest in India, its culture and people.
19. Alban Bacon, *The Wanderings of a Temporary Warrior* (London: H.F. & G. Witherby, 1922).
20. C.P. Mills, *A Strange War: Burma, India & Afghanistan 1914–1919* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1988); Mackie, *Answering the Call*; Ann Noyes, ed., *Engaged in War: the Letters of Stanley Goodland 1914–1919* (Guildford: Twiga Books, 1999), while in 2011 The Rifles published the journal kept by Fred Mundy, *A Journal of the 1/4th Battalion Wiltshire Regiment 1914–1918* (Salisbury: Rifles, Wardrobe and Museum Trust, 2011).
21. The best account of India's wartime politics is Algernon Rumbold, *Watershed in India 1914–1922* (London: The Athlone Press, 1979).
22. The *Report of the Commissioners appointed by the Punjab Sub-Committee appointed by the Indian National Congress* (Lahore, 1920) on the Amritsar protests, documented allegations of troops firing at villages and even killing individuals.
23. See Nirad Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography on an Unknown Indian* (London: Macmillan, 1951), 316–17.
24. I am pleased to record that the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at UNSW Canberra has allocated funds to enable a research assistant to explore Indian sources to establish how Indians, and especially nationalist activists, perceived Territorials and other British soldiers during the Great War.
25. See Brian Robson, *Crisis on the Frontier: The Third Afghan War and the Campaign in Waziristan 1919–1920* (Staplehurst, UK: Spellmount, 2004).
26. *The Invicta* III, No. 4 (1919), 26.

27. *Report of the Commissioners appointed by the Punjab Sub-Committee appointed by the Indian National Congress*, 121, 137, 115.
28. Ibid., 124, 135–36, 143.
29. Bacon, *Wanderings of a Temporary Warrior*; Woodyatt, 'The Territorials', 717–37; Mills, *Strange War*.
30. The book, provisionally entitled *Terriers in India*, will be published by Helion & Co., probably in 2018.

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CHAPTER 9

# The German-Ottoman Alliance, the Caucasus, and the Impact of the Russian Revolutions of 1917

*Thomas Schmutz*

## 1917: Turning Point for the Ottoman World

In 1917, a number of paradigm shifts occurred that echoed long after the war and framed the history of the ensuing century. In the New World, the economic, military, and political rise of the United States was cemented by its unprecedented intervention in the European conflict. On the periphery of the Old World, in Russia, two revolutions shattered the age-old Romanov dynasty that ruled the world's largest land-based empire. Within months, the other established European empires floundered too. For the Ottoman empire, 1917 was also a paradigmatic year of opportunities and challenges. This chapter focuses on the impact of this year on the maligned Ottoman-German relationship and developments on the often forgotten Caucasus front.

The year 1917 resulted in a number of watershed moments for the Near and Middle East. Unlike the stalemate that continued to plague the western front, in the Ottoman sphere of influence, territories, rulers, and

T. Schmutz (✉)
Centre for the History of Violence, Newcastle, NSW, Australia

University of Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland



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political entities changed rapidly and irreversibly in 1917. These changes set processes in motion that would shape the future of the region. One of these critical events was the capture of Jerusalem by British forces in December, which brought with it a renewed focus on the religious implications of the Middle Eastern campaigns and signalled that the Ottomans' own empire was shrinking rapidly in size. The Balfour Declaration in November 1917 offered Ottoman Jews a new homeland within the framework of a British-ruled Palestine. While Ottoman rulers had to deal with the reality that the Palestinian and the Arab provinces that they had ruled for centuries were no longer theirs, a more pressing and opportunistic situation arose on the Ottoman-Russian borderlands in the Caucasus which overshadowed all these other challenges. The Russian revolutions in March and November of 1917 effectively ended the dynasty and rule of the Romanovs and with it removed the Ottoman empire's rival in the Caucasus region. That reality altered the Ottoman government's ambitions and complicated its relationship with its wartime allies, Germany and Austria-Hungary.

The end of the Russian war effort in 1917 dramatically changed the geo-strategic situation for both the *Entente* and Central powers. For Germany, it spelled the end of a two-front war: it could now shift its eastern European divisions to the western front. With Russia's removal from the Middle Eastern theatre, the Sublime Porte regained its former territories in Eastern Anatolia and with the release of the troops stationed there the Ottoman defences in Palestine and Mesopotamia could finally be strengthened.

From the Ottoman perspective, the Russian revolutions came none too soon. They prevented the planned Russian attack on Istanbul and the Bosphorus, and with it guaranteed the survival of the Turkish regime. Strategic cities in Eastern Anatolia, close to the political heart of the Ottoman empire, had been captured in the spring of 1916 by the Russian general Nicolai Yudenich and Grand Duke Nicholas. As a result, the Ottoman army was in a critical situation in early 1917, not least because Russian forces were encroaching from the Black Sea coast and Eastern Anatolia. Two thirds of the Ottoman losses in 1916 were incurred in the Caucasus. Just how important the Caucasus was for Russia is clear from the fact that more than a million Russian soldiers were involved on this front from 1914 to 1917.[1]

Thus, the German secret mission to send the radical Russian communist Vladimir Ilych Lenin from Switzerland into the heart of Tsarist Russia in 1917 played well into Ottoman hands. The Russian revolutions in effect

saved the Ottomans. Still, the war effort exhausted and bankrupted the Ottoman empire, which had less industrial capacity than the major belligerent powers. By 1917, starvation spread across the empire. Riots erupted and the clear and present danger of nearby Russian troops inspired attempts to assassinate the Ottoman war minister Enver Pasha and the Grand Vizier Talaat Pasha.[2] Both Ottoman leaders were key figures in the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and had shaped Ottoman politics since their violent state coup in January 1913. Both were wanted by the *Entente* powers for 'crimes against humanity' due to their genocidal persecution of the Ottoman Christians.[3]

For the Ottoman empire's many subjects, the war was also total. It destroyed the social fabric of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire and heightened critique of the empire's ruling elite, the Pashas included. Despite the fact that it was the Young Turks who tried to re-establish the constitution after the revolution of 1908, which gave non-Muslims more rights and influence, the concept of Ottomanism—Arabs, Jews, Christians, Turks in the same empire—died under their rule.

Paradoxically, the global conflict allowed the Young Turks to pursue the Turkification and homogenisation of the Ottoman empire, since the European rival empires either aligned with the Sublime Porte or had to leave the Bosphorus after the summer of 1914. Internally, the Ottoman elite had a free hand. They feared and mistrusted the ambitions of the many ethnic groups within the empire and thought of them as a fifth column that aimed at their own self-determination or sought to align with *Entente* powers. The main 'enemy within' were the Ottoman Christians, but Djemal Pasha—the third key player in the Ottoman government—also considered Arab nationalists and Zionists as subversive. One could argue that his rule of terror actually pushed those groups into separatist movements and into British hands.[4]

The fear and perception of an 'enemy within' was not unique to the Ottoman empire. Before 1917, the Russians were known to deport Muslims living in Central Asia and the Caucasus to less strategically valuable regions than the militarised border area in which they resided. But they also targeted Jews in Galicia, actions that frequently resulted in extreme violence and mass displacement.[5] In the Ottoman empire, the persecution of Ottoman Christians by the ruling regime turned into annihilation in 1915. The genocidal policy of the Young Turks aimed to homogenise the core lands of the empire in Anatolia and had its beginning with the expulsion of Ottoman Greeks before the war.

This intention to exterminate made Ottoman violence against civilians and the empire's citizens a unique case in the First World War.[6] The Armenians in Eastern Anatolia were either killed or deported in 1915 and 1916. The Russian troops watched from across the military front as these events unfolded, but were not able to intervene. Once the Russians retreated from the Caucasus in 1917, the local Christian populations faced the Ottoman empire's authority, resulting in further violent reprisals. These actions complicated the military situation in the Caucasus and had an important impact on the on-going Ottoman-German relationship.

## Remodelling an Empire at War: The Caucasus in Ottoman Ambition

Generals and political leaders are often stunned by the 'divine forces' unleashed by war. Both Enver Pasha and Talaat Pasha longed for Ottoman military success or a favourable turn of events. The dissolution of the Russian army in 1917 was just such an event. Enver Pasha thought that the time had come to push into Central Asia and fulfil his dream of a pan-Turanian empire. The war minister considered the possibilities in ideological terms, as an expansion of the *Turk Yurdu*, the fatherland in Anatolia, and as an opportunity to regain former Ottoman provinces (including Kars, Ardahan, and Batum) that were lost to Russia in the war of 1877–78.[7] In December 1914, he had planned for an Ottoman invasion of the Sarikamis region and hoped that Ottoman success there would lead to a widespread anti-Russian Muslim uprising that would then result in Ottoman control over all the Caucasus. That winter offensive, however, turned into a disaster, not least because the Ottoman call for *jihad* in November 1914 did not stir up the Muslims in the borderlands as expected.[8]

Russia's unforeseen retreat from the Caucasus region in 1917 was an unimaginable outcome of the war situation. That development, however, also blinded the Young Turk government to the realities facing the wider empire at war. Of these, the military campaigns that they were waging in the Arab regions were most important: British forces were encroaching on Baghdad and Palestine. A wiser course of action might have been to move troops from the Caucasus to bolster Ottoman defences in the south. Instead, the Ottoman leadership decided to expand into the Caucasus and Central Asia. While the action might have bolstered the political position

of the elites and justified the on-going war effort in general, from a military point of view it was far from wise, not least because the Palestinian theatre of war became more active in 1917. British troops, after major setbacks in earlier in the year, captured Gaza in early November 1917. Jerusalem fell in December. The loss of the holy city had incredible symbolic value and was a huge blow for the Ottoman leadership, which was not helped at all when its forces failed to recapture Baghdad.[9]

By late 1917 then, the Ottoman empire was still facing a military disaster, which the removal of the Russians from the Caucasus could not obviate. Some hope remained on the German-Ottoman side that the British advance could be stopped. Jerusalem itself was not a main military objective for the Ottomans and their defences there had been much more limited than those they maintained in Gaza. The German general Liman von Sanders was establishing another line of defence in the north of Palestine, while the British advance slowed in the winter of 1917–18. The German reinforcements on the western front also drew London's attention back to Europe, postponing their Palestine offensive. For the British, the Middle Eastern theatre was a secondary one. Yet it remained highly important, not only for bringing the war to an end, but also for French and British imperial ambitions in the region.[10]

By late 1917 the window of opportunity presented by Russia's military decline in the Caucasus had not been fully exploited by the Ottoman authorities. In fact, after the fall of Jerusalem the Ottomans were fighting for the empire's survival, much like the Austro-Hungarians and Germans were. When the Ottoman government also lost the loyalty of key Arab leaders and the city of Mecca, any hopes for a pan-Islamic vision of the caliphate disappeared. When in December 1917 Leon Trotsky humiliated the Hashemites on the Arabian peninsula by revealing the terms of the 1917 Sykes-Picot agreement, it was too late for the Young Turk governor of Syria, Djemal Pasha, to change the political realities.[11] While for a short period of time the Young Turks had thought that it would be possible to regain Arab loyalty in the region and use it against the British invaders, their plans were dashed.[12]

The dissolution of the Ottoman empire was as good as guaranteed by early 1918. Although the terms of the Brest-Litovsk peace agreement (signed on 3 March 1918) nourished dreams in Berlin and Istanbul of a resurgent victory, these ambitions neglected the hard realities of defeat on all war fronts. Furthermore, the German-Ottoman relationship came under severe stress as a result of the Russian defeat in 1917, for the allies

had competing ambitions for the future of the Caucasus. In the end, the Russian revolutions offered false hope to a failing Ottoman military machine vainly trying to keep control over a vast and disintegrating empire.

## A German Orient

The Russian retreat from the Caucasus in 1917 changed Germany's ambitions for the Middle East, bringing it into direct competition with Ottoman ambitions. Berlin had long-term aspirations for Central Asia and the Middle East and 1917 showed how flexible German policy makers were in adapting to the new situation. Kaiser Wilhelm II wanted the German *Reich* to be an accepted power in the Muslim world. In a famous speech made in Damascus in 1898, he declared that all '300 Muslims' are friends of the Germans. From then, the entanglements between Berlin and Istanbul intensified. Despite the presence of rival European powers, the German *Reich* managed to establish a foothold in the Ottoman lands, one they maximised during the war.[13]

Well before the outbreak of war, the Germans had imperial and commercial ambitions for the Middle East. The Baghdad railway project was a symbolic representation of these ambitions. The idea was to establish a railway connection from Berlin to the Middle East. Germany saw its future as a partner of the Ottoman empire and opposed the attempts made by other European powers to carve up the 'sick man of Europe'. The main interest was to establish a German-controlled 'economic influence zone' (*Arbeitszone*) in Cilicia. Maps from the Foreign Department show that the Baghdad railway would be connected to port cities such as Alexandretta in order to link global trade routes with local ones.[14]

The strongest influence on the development of a German-Ottoman war alliance was the pre-war German military mission in the Ottoman empire. Prior to 1914, German officers helped to modernise the Ottoman army following the army's defeat in the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913.[15] Once the world war broke out in 1914, the Baghdad railway network offered essential infrastructure support for moving military materials and troops from the Ottoman centre to the Middle Eastern war fronts. Thus, it was in the interest of Berlin to strengthen its alliance with the Sublime Porte and to help the Ottoman empire in all its wartime endeavours. After Bulgaria joined the Central powers, the train connection to the German industries enabled a continous supply support for the Ottoman armies.[16]

These German ambitions had not changed much by 1917. The main aim was to keep the Ottoman empire militarily active in the war and successful in its operations against the British, French, and Russians. Apart from the direct military support to its ally, the German government also supported the rise of populist anti-*Entente* movements aligned with the caliphate. Germany sent agents into the peripheries of the British empire, including to Afghanistan, to inspire rebellion and form secret alliances among the local population. Persia, for example, was turned into a contested battlefield due to subversive activities by German and Ottoman agents.[17] However, by 1917, most of these activities had not achieved their intended goals. Nonetheless, they inspired a prevailing fear in British India of a German-sponsored Muslim uprising. The rather unpromising German attempt to infiltrate areas close to British India was still an active fantasy in early 1918, especially since the Russian collapse suggested the potential for Ottoman and German troops to reach Afghanistan.[18]

Berlin also tried to mobilise Ottoman Jews in their favour, and there were concrete plans for a German-Ottoman project of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. These plans pre-existed the Balfour Declaration.[19] Germany's pro-Zionist actions exemplify the attempts made by both sides—the Central powers and the *Entente*—to mobilise Jews and Arabs in the Middle East. The German and British sides alike hoped that their war fortunes might be advantaged through the creation of a Jewish homeland and consequent access to the support of the international Jewry.[20] The military situation in the Holy Lands had multiple implications for locals—especially for their loyalty towards the external powers and the new rulers—and for the international situation. It was also in Palestine where most German troops in the Middle East were stationed (aside from a short stint on the Gallipoli peninsula in 1915).[21] From Germany's perspective, then, Palestine was a most important war zone. In this it differed substantially from its Ottoman ally, who after April 1917 prioritised the Caucasus.

In fact, the German presence in the Caucasus was as good as nonexistent before 1917. Whereas the defence of the Gallipoli peninsula was a joint German-Ottoman undertaking,[22] the Germans offered advisory support but otherwise left the Caucasus to the Ottoman army. The Germans understood all too well how significant the region was to the Russians and did not expect the Ottomans to ever be in a position to end Russian authority there. They certainly did not want to take over responsibility for the Caucasus themselves: the region was inhospitable to

their military forces and a hornets' nest of rival ethnic and religious tension.[23] But they wanted the Ottoman campaigns there to be successful in order to occupy as many Russian divisions as possible.

The Russian revolutions forced the Germans to reconsider their plans for the Caucasus. Those plans became all too significant after the Ottoman empire refused to recognise the terms of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918, which brought the war between the Central powers and Russia formally to an end and opened up a power vacuum in the Caucasus. From this point on, the German authorities were well aware that they did not particularly wish for an expansion of Ottoman power in the Caucasus region. How to affect that desire, however, brought Germany into a path of confrontation with the Sublime Porte.

From the Porte's perspective, the treaty of Brest-Litovsk prevented the spread of Ottoman influence. In addition, the political leaders of the peoples in the Caucasus did not recognise the result of the peace negotiations. They no longer saw themselves as part of Russia and were trying to survive politically as a 'Transcaucasian federation'. Therefore, the Ottomans negotiated directly with Tiflis and Yerevan, the political centres of the local Christians (Georgians and Armenians). The Ottomans also used their military presence in the Caucasus to create new geostrategic realities. Ottoman General Vehib told the commander of the Transcaucasian forces that his troops had no hostile intentions and were advancing merely in order to protect the Muslim population against further harassment by marauding bands. With this assurance, any operation behind the armistice lines was justified. By the end of April 1918, the (former) Ottoman provinces of Kars, Ardahan, and Batum returned to the Sublime Porte. The Ottoman advance did not stop there. Ottoman politicians intentionally misled local representatives of the politically weak federation to stall for time and enable their armed forces to capture more territory. One example would be Alexandropol: local representatives met Ottoman leaders in Batum on 11 May 1918 for negotiations concerning new borders and the relationship to the Sublime Porte. The city of Alexandropol was one discussed issue. Despite this, the Ottomans took the city four days later.[24]

Since the 'Transcaucasian federation' was unable to protect the interests of the various peoples in the Caucasus, the Georgians, Armenians, and Azeri sought self-determination and all three declared their independence in the summer of 1918. At the same time, these Christian leaders used the German opposition to Ottoman expansion to foster a closer relationship

with Berlin. In response, the Germans recognised the Georgian state against Ottoman protest while the Sublime Porte strengthened the relationship with local Muslims and allowed the Azeri to become an independent actor.[25]

The Caucasus question dominated the German-Ottoman relationship throughout 1918.[26] The stakes involved were complicated: local rulers sought independence and recognition of that status from Germany (in order to protect themselves from Ottoman expansion); the Ottoman leadership looked to impose their own vision of an Islamic Caucasus with Turkish influence at its heart; and the Bolshevik regime in the fledgling Soviet Union also looked to the geostrategic importance of the region. Berlin even initiated back-channel diplomacy with Moscow in an attempt to de-escalate the fluid situation in the Caucasus.[27] Meanwhile, Enver Pasha and Talaat Pasha hoped to protect Turkish power by means of territorial expansion. The year 1918 then brought these Ottoman-German tensions to the fore, both diplomatically and in terms of military cooperation.

## Violence, Mistrust, and Military Crisis

The leader of the German military mission in the Ottoman empire, General Liman von Sanders, had the difficult task of defending Palestine and Syria in the spring of 1918. Supported by a range of German officers, he led three Ottoman armies. He took over the command of the '*Yildrim*' (*Heeresgruppe F*) army group from General Falkenhayn. This special army—previously known as the Seventh Ottoman Army—was organised as a German military unit. This exemplified the increasing 'Germanisation' of the command structures and operations in Palestine.[28] Throughout 1918, Germany's military actions in Palestine competed with the Ottoman army's activities in the Caucasus. Enver Pasha, for his part, only briefly entertained the idea of recapturing Baghdad and stopping the British conquest of Persia. This move in the northern part of the Mesopotamia front was connected to his major plan to push into Central Asia. Palestine, however, was a military front he barely took into account. His priorities were the spread of Ottoman influence in the former Russian territories, which led to perilous results. Similar to his first offensive as war minister in December 1914, which already pursued the same political and imperial aim, the young military leader lacked necessary experience and strategic oversight.[29]

While the military relationship between von Sanders and the Ottoman authorities had been complicated since 1914, the 1918 developments stretched the relationship to breaking point.[30] Von Sanders certainly advocated that Germany should lead all strategic operations, and that the Ottoman armies should stop their attempted conquest of the Caucasus. As the officer responsible for the German military mission, he invoked the German-Ottoman alliance agreement of 2 August 1914 to make his case.[31] Above all, he argued that the Ottoman armies should focus purely on defeating the British in and around Jerusalem. In his memoirs, von Sanders underlined the view that it was strategically crucial to fortify and strengthen the existing fronts and not to open up new operations.[32] In taking this position, he was supported by Mustafa Kemal, the famous defender of Gallipoli.[33] Kemal opposed the rise of German influence within the Ottoman general staff, but he also favoured the strong defence of the Ottoman heartland. However, it was Pasha's vision that dictated the direction of the Ottoman military efforts, and they were firmly focused on the Caucasus.

The German leadership well understood and worried about the geostrategic complications of the Caucasus developments. Above all, as the German ambassador in Istanbul, Johann Heinrich von Bernstorff, emphasised, the most important goal after 1917 was to keep Russia out of the region and from rejoining the war. In the case of a Russian re-entry into the war, German forces would not be able—or willing—to protect their alliance with the Sublime Porte.[34] The dilemma was, however, that there were no more viable alternative rulers for the Ottoman empire than Talaat and Enver Pasha. Germany, then, needed to continue its war alliance with the Young Turk leaders and try to redirect their ally's aims for the Caucasus.[35] It was no secret that Germany wanted to expand its own economic influence in the region: how that might happen was, however, in question.

Given that the Armenians and other ethnic groups in the former Russian Caucasus were agitating to establish their own independent countries, the military campaigns conducted by the Ottomans in the region were of immense concern to the German authorities. They were much more inclined to support the establishment of Georgian and Armenian independence than to allow for an expansion of the Ottoman regime. To this end, Ambassador Bernstorff presented two options to Berlin: leave the Ottomans to their own devices in the Caucasus (even if Russia might rejoin the war), or send so many German troops into Georgia and Armenia

that the Ottomans would be compelled to behave. The problem with the latter option was that Germany might then be held responsible for the ongoing annihilation of the Armenians in the Caucasus.

The Germans were aware of the Armenian situation and had been from the outset of the genocidal campaigns. In spring 1915, Ambassador Wangenheim used the term '*nobile officium*' (honourful duty) to debate the Armenian demand for protection by the co-religious European power. While the Russian and French empires declared their will to protect Christians in the Ottoman Empire on several occasions in the pre-war era, the German government sided with the Muslim rulers and did not see a moral obligation to protect the Christian minority. Furthermore, a German intervention on behalf of the Ottoman Christians would endanger the war partnership. This German standpoint remained until the end of the war and justified the non-interference regarding the persecution and annihilation of Armenians.[36] Berlin did not officially oppose the genocidal violence unleashed in 1915 and 1916 against Ottoman Christians. However, this does not mean that there was no protest and opposition from the German side. Most German diplomats inside the Ottoman Empire condemned the 'senseless' and 'unjustified' violence against the civilian population. The German officers tended more to believe the threat perception of the Ottoman military leaders and hardly opposed the official explanation of the deportations as military necessities. The Sublime Porte made it very clear that the empire would not allow Germany—or any other foreign power—to interfere with what the Ottoman government described as an 'internal matter'. The concept of non-interference was enshrined in the secret alliance agreement between the two powers signed on 2 August 1914: Germany would help the Ottomans to protect their empire with military means, the Ottomans would support the German war effort, but neither country would interfere in the upkeep of law and order in the other's sphere of influence. It is important to underline this fact. The Sublime Porte and the Young Turks were traumatised by decades of international pressure regarding their actions against ethnic and religious groups in the Ottoman empire and sought to keep Germany and all other foreigners out of these affairs.[37] The context of war offered an ideal opportunity to eradicate what the Ottoman government considered a 'disloyal element', a threat to imperial security and a fifth column of the Russian empire.

However, in 1918 the faith of the various Christian populations in the Caucasus was no longer an 'internal matter'. The situation in the former Russian Caucasus was somewhat different as it did not fall within the

sovereign borders of the Ottoman empire. As a result, there was no possible justification for the Ottomans to persecute local Christians with reference to fifth columns or as an internal threat. Berlin and Istanbul renegotiated the 'rules of engagement' of Ottoman forces in the region, including an obligation on behalf of the Sublime Porte to keep Berlin informed of its action. The Ottoman treatment of Christians in newly occupied areas became a matter of trust for the Germans. However, Berlin did not go as far as to claim the role of a protector of Christians, while the Sublime Porte obviously did assert the dominance of a pan-Islamic ideology for the region.

But the Germans also wanted to maintain good relations with the Georgians and Armenians in order to influence them. Most important was the establishment of political stability in the region. Berlin still feared the outbreak of anarchy and violence. In June 1918, Talaat promised Germany that it would protect the rights of the local Christian populations.[38] Yet, at the same time, he confessed to Bernstorff that he feared a Christian state in the Ottoman empire's backyard. Such a state could only serve as an ally of western powers and undermine Ottoman sovereignty. For their part, local politicans in the Caucasus applauded President Wilson's concept of self-determination. Thus, the Sublime Porte kept Ottoman military forces close to the main Christian centres in the Caucasus. Yerevan, for example, remained within artillery reach of Ottoman forces throughout 1918.[39] In the end, of course, both the Germans and Ottomans would only accept the establishment of small states in the region, if they had hope of influence and control over them.

The German-Ottoman relationship clearly soured in 1918 over the Caucasus. Bernstorff warned Berlin, for example, about Enver and Talaat's Caucasus agenda. He pointed to the lack of reliabilty in Ottoman assurances to protect the region and referred to a telegram from Enver which he received in early August. It revealed the ongoing intention of the Ottoman leaders to expand further than the borders of the Brest-Litvosk treaty and to annihilate more Armenians. The ambassador's response was matter of fact: he noted that he had always been aware of the Turks' intention to exterminate the Armenians. As he put it: the majority will always kill the minority.[40] The Armenian situation certainly worried the German authorities: during their discussions about the future of the Caucasus in the spring of 1918, for example, a number of German diplomats and officers wanted to prevent further German 'complicity' and send a clearer response to the Porte.

From the German perspective, it was crucial to establish law and order in a place of anarchy. At any rate, Georgia could both act as a buffer against the rise of a new Russia and give Germans a base to exploit the resources of the Caucasus and a bridge to Central Asia.[41] Regional stability was also a wish of their common ally Austria-Hungary, which was quite happy to support German developments in minimising the spread of Ottoman power in the Caucasus. Vienna had hardly any ambition in the Middle East, but was involved in the campaigns in Palestine with special units and artillery as auxiliary forces for the Ottomans. However, Vienna acted as an important intermediator in times of crisis between Istanbul and Berlin.[42] Information and back-channel diplomacy often went through Austria-Hungary, as well as weekly trains full of coal and military equipment for the Ottoman theatres of war.

## The Caucasus Question as the Empires Collapse

By the summer of 1918, the strains between the German Reich and the Ottoman empire over the situation in the Caucasus were all too obvious. However, despite the events on the western front and an expected resurgent British offensive in the Middle East, the end of the war was not yet clearly in sight for either ally.

The German leadership still hoped for decisive victory in Europe and the Middle East. The Ottoman authorities expected success in the Caucasus. Berlin contemplated becoming involved in the Caucasus offensives to enforce the terms of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk and to keep its Ottoman ally in check. Both the Ottomans and Germans desired to exploit the resources between the Black and the Caspian seas. They failed to coordinate their economic interests and were trying to deny access to each other.

Only the shared desire to prevent the British capture of the oil-rich city of Baku in late August and September 1918 brought the alliance partners together. The situation in Baku became highly complicated from spring 1918 to the end of the war, with various groups claiming to rule the city. The joint German-Ottoman operation was successful and restored order for a while. However, there were many cases of reprisals between Armenians and the various groups of Muslims. To underline the pan-Islamic agenda of the Sublime Porte, the Third Ottoman Army—which had operated in the Russian-Ottoman borderlands since 1914—was relabelled the 'Army of Islam'. Furthermore, Azerbaijan became an Ottoman protectorate with limited self-governance. With Azerbaijan under control, there was finally a bridge for Enver and Talaat to reach the peoples in Turkestan.[43]

In September 1918, Berlin sent for Talaat Pasha in an attempt to clarify the Caucasus question. When Talaat arrived first in Vienna, he formulated a new policy for the territories: the new states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia should serve as buffer zones against Russia, while Turkestan with its 14 million Muslims should be organised as an independent state. When he reached Berlin, Talaat tried to gain German support for these ideas. He asked for German military advisors to set up new Muslim armies that could be used on the various Caucasus fronts to protect these new Islamic regimes. Berlin tried to find a compromise and continued to emphasise the importance of their ongoing partnership. A secret protocol signed on 23 September 1918 by Talaat and German foreign secretary Paul von Hintze acknowledged the accommodations: the Ottoman empire recognised the independence of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, whereas Germany only accepted Georgian sovereignty.[44]

The question of the Caucasus, however, changed irrevocably when Ottoman soldiers entering Baku in the middle of September 1918 encountered heavy British-Armenian resistance. From this point on, neither the Sublime Porte nor the Germans had a strong hand to play in the Caucasus or anywhere else in the failing Ottoman empire. While the Caucasian question formally remained a priority for the Sublime Porte, the realisation of a vast pan-Turanian empire would not eventuate. The armistice of Bulgaria on 30 September 1918 ended the German-Turkish adventure in the Caucasus. Within weeks of the capture of Baku, Ottoman victories in the Caucasus lost virtually all of their political and military meaning.[45]

Yet the strength of the Ottoman-German alliance withstood the crises at the end of the war. The German authorities even successfully evacuated the Ottoman leadership, which had been responsible not only for bringing the war to the Middle East, but also for exacting genocidal violence on its Christian subjects. Regardless, the German archives highlight the clear intention of German politicians to prevent Enver and Talaat, among others, from being persecuted by the allies.[46] Even in defeat, the new German state kept its '*Nibelungentreue*'[47] and avoided condemning the atrocities committed by the Young Turk regime. Despite its deepest friction at the end of the war, the correspondence between the Bosphorus and Berlin shows that both regimes declared their bonds almost religiously. 'We will stand and fall together', was one example of a solemn assertion in the correspondence from ambassador Bernstorff to the Foreign Office in June 1918.[48] These diplomats were successful until the end in nourishing each other's illusions about a fatalistic common destiny.

When the armistice was finally announced in November 1918, Ottoman troops were stationed deep in the Caucasian territories, well beyond the Ottoman borders of 1914.[49] With the struggle for the empire over, the war for a new nation state began. Facing the potential of European penetration once more, Mustafa Kemal and his troops continued to fight. In contrast to the Russian situation, the transition from empire to nation was considered to be a struggle for independence, and not a civil war.[50] The power vacuum in the Caucasus, in what was effectively a post-imperial space dominated by fluid political entities, ensured upheaval and crisis for the whole of the Anatolian region for years to come. The Turkish core of the Ottoman empire seemed to have survived the war and continued to exude its influence. The idea of Ottomanism, on the other hand, was already dead at the outbreak of the Great War.

## Fallen Empires and a New Order

The Caucasus region was no side-show of the First World War. It revealed both the war's imperial face and its revolutionary face. On the one hand, the Caucasus witnessed the continuation of two centuries of hostilities between two rival empires, the Ottoman and the Russian. On the other side, the clash between these two empires created a unique constellation in the First World War: its genocidal impact, its irregular warfare, its ability to inspire extreme violence and hopes for change. Both empires had their revolutionary moments: the Young Turk revolution of 1908 was a conservative revolution against the weak Sultanate. It brought radical ideas and men into power in order to stop the decline of the empire. On the eve of the First World War, extreme measures of reshaping the empire started to take place. Although beginning as just another military conflict, the Ottoman government soon understood the First World War as the last test of its survival as a sovereign empire. But in contrast to the Russian collapse, the Ottoman empire did not end during the war or disappear with the armistice. The Turkish war of independence, another fight against foreign influence, extended the long struggle of the dying empire to 1922.[51]

The Russian revolutions of 1917 certainly inspired an extraordinary amount of change in the region and had tremendous effects. For the Central powers, it presented a range of unprecedented opportunities. Prewar fantasies of a Pan-Turanian empire, visions of Muslim unity, and a German Orient guided these leaders into military adventures and failures. The Ottoman war minister almost forgot the situation in Palestine in his

eagerness to push for strategic advantage in Central Asia. Friction and rivalry ensued between the German and Ottoman allies as they vied for quite different post-war visions for the Middle East.

In the end, German and Ottoman rival aspirations for the Caucasus both ignored the reality of their own strength. Only weeks before the armistice was signed in November 1918, the general staff and political leaders in both countries were planning for a glorious, victorious future there. The Germans looked for their own commercial and imperial expansion in the region. The Ottomans hoped for the return of Caucasus territories and the establishment of a Muslim-ruled Central Asia. But the war displayed the limits of pan-Islamic ideas and movements. *Jihad* had not unified the people in the region. The promise of self-determination, however, did. The First World War was more important for the Middle East and the Caucasus than any other conflict in the twentieth century. Europe's armies and diplomats introduced not only new rulers, but also the concept of the nation state.[52] At war's end, and rather paradoxically, the Turkish nationalists found a Russian partner in their anti-western struggle: the Bolsheviks.[53]

The year 1917 led to a paradigm shift in the Ottoman world. From Tiflis to Cairo, a new world order was being established. The struggle between imperial order and anti-imperial movements to achieve self-determination and modernity set the foundations for a century of conflict in the Middle East and the Caucasus. These war years unleashed ghosts that still haunt us today.

## Notes

1. Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *The First World War in the Middle East* (London: Hurst & Company, 2014), 69; Jörn Leonhard, *Die Büchse der Pandora. Geschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2014), 674–77.
2. Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 167–71; Sean McMeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame: War, Revolution and the Making of the Modern Middle East, 1908–1923* (London: Allen Lane, 2015), 315–34.
3. Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East* (New York: Perseus Books, 2015), 105–8; Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 142–48.
4. Donald Bloxham and Hans-Lukas Kieser, 'Genocide,' in *The Cambridge History of the First World War. Volume I, Global War*, ed. Jay Winter

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 585–614; Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in The Ottoman Empire 1815–1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 194–204; Hans-Lukas Kieser, 'The Ottoman Road to Total War (1913–15),' in *World War I and the End of the Ottomans. From the Balkan Wars to the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser et al. (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 29–53; Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 137–38.

5. Annette Becker, 'Captive Civilians,' in *The Cambridge History of the First World War. Volume III, Civil Society*, ed. Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 269: 'In Russia alone, a minimum of 5.5 million civilians were displaced far from their homes between 1914 and 1917, often with internment that might be temporary or prolonged.'; Firouzeh Mostashari, 'Colonial Dilemmas: Russian Policies in the Muslim Caucasus,'in *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversions, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, ed. Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 229–35.
6. Eric Lohr and Ug˘ur Ümit Üngör, 'Economic Nationalism, Confiscation, and Genocide: A Comparison of the Ottoman and Russian Empires during World War I,' in *Journal of Modern European History*, 12, no. 4 (2014): 500–522; Mustafa Aksakal, 'The Ottoman Empire,' in *The Cambridge History of the First World War. Volume I, Global War*, ed. Jay Winter, 459–478. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
7. Erik Jan Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk`s Turkey* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 174–76; Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 170–173.
8. Rob Johnson, *The Great War and the Middle East: A Strategic Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 163–65.
9. Ulrichsen, *First World War*, 33–41; Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, 349–351; Johnson, *Middle East*, 199–203.
10. Johnson, *Middle East*, 216–35.
11. Djemal was one of the three powerful Young Turk leaders, which came to power in January 1913 as part of a coup. During the First World War, he was administrating the Ottoman Syrian territories. He mistrusted the loyalty of Arab leaders towards the Ottoman masters even before the revolt in 1916. Furthermore, he was reluctant to accept the idea of Zionism. The rule of terror by the Syrian 'governor' Djemal Pasha even pushed, as it could be argued, the Arab tribes and the Jews of Palestine onto the side of the enemy.
12. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 170; Johnson, *Middle East*, 229.
13. Thomas Benner, *Die Strahlen der Krone. Die religiöse Dimension des Kaisertums Wilhelm II. vor dem Hintergrund der Orientreise 1898* (Marburg: Tectum-Verlag, 2001), 313–40.

14. Political Archive of the German Foreign Department (Auswärtiges Amt): AA (M) R 14080–14081 (7100); Malte Fuhrmann, *Der Traum vom deutschen Orient. Zwei deutsche Kolonien im Osmanischen Reich 1851–1918* (Frankfurt: Campus-Verlag, 2006), 47–51; Leonhard, *Büchse der Pandora*, 926.
15. Hans Werner Neulen, *Feldgrau in Jerusalem: das Levantekorps des kaiserlichen Deutschland* (Munich: Universitas Verlag, 2002), 24–25; Carl Alexander Krethlow. *Generalfeldmarschall Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz Pascha—eine Biographie* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2012), 416–51.
16. Neulen, *Feldgrau in Jerusalem*, 125–37.
17. David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2009), 209.
18. Ulrichsen, *First World War*, 71: 'The (British) Government of India began to panic following the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk … British military leaders in India expressed their alarm at the possibility of an imminent Turkish-German invasion of Afghanistan.'
19. Martina Berli, 'The Zionist Leaders' Fear: Perception of, Comparison with, and Reactions to the Armenian Genocide,' in *Journal of Levantine Studies* 5, no. 2 (2015): 87–111. Isaiah Friedman. *Germany—Turkey—Zionism. 1897–1918* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1988).
20. Ulrichsen, *First World War*, 161–62; Fromkin, *Peace to End All Peace*, 298.
21. Neulen, *Feldgrau in Jerusalem*, 30–54.
22. The German contribution consisted of the command and advisors in the officer corps, German guns on the coast and support with former German naval ships. The war experience at Gallipoli nourished nationalistic tales of heroism in the Turkish, Australian and New Zealand post-war societies. The German role and presence there was often neglected.
23. The German diplomats discussed at length the chaotic situation in the Russian-Ottoman borderlands in the months before the war. There was limited access to information on this region and a lack of overview of the Kurdish tribes and Armenian villages. German interest laid on Cilicia instead, see: AA (M) R 14078–14081; Eric D. Weitz, 'Germany and the Ottoman Borderlands: The Entwining of Imperial Aspirations, Revolution, and Ethnic Violence,' in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Prussian, and Ottoman Borderlands,* eds Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 152–69.
24. Ulrich Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire, 1914–1918* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 171–78.

25. Ryan Gingeras. *Fall of the Sultanate: The Great War and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 244–45; Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire*, 171–78.
26. AA (M) R 13803–13805.
27. Johnson, *Middle East*, 228; Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire*, 170–91.
28. Johnson, *Middle East*, 216–18.
29. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 171–73.
30. AA (M) R 13261.
31. AA (M) R 13804–2, Report from Bernstorff to Foreign Department, 20.06.1918, with the following citation from Liman von Sanders: 'Zum weiteren bin ich als Chef der deutschen Militär-Mission auf Grund mir durch den Vertrag der Militär-Mission zustehenden Rechte und des durch den Bündnisvertrag vom 2.August 1914 besonders zustehenden Rechts der influence effective verpflichtet, darauf hinzuweisen, dass der jetzige Zustand der türkischen Armee weitgehende Operationen, wie sie in Transkaukasien, soweit ich unterrichtet bin, geplant sein sollen, keinesfalls gestattet.'
32. Liman von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey* (Uckfield: The Naval & Military Press, 2015), 257: 'According to my view we already had too many fronts. It will hardly ever be advisable for one inferior in numbers to force a much superior opponent to form some new front. The urgent need of troops on the hard pushed battle front of Palestine should have disposed of this idea. At any rate it stands beyond doubt that, on account of the operations referred to, sufficient troops were not ordered by Turkish headquarters to Palestine'.
33. Johnson, *Middle East*, 190–91; Neulen, *Feldgrau in Jerusalem*, 30–54.
34. AA (M) R 13804–2, 27–28, Bernstorff to AA, 15.06.1918.
35. AA (M) R 13804, 44–45, Bernstorff to AA, 20.06.1918; AA (M) R 13804, 77–78. Bernstorff to Bethmann von Hollweg, Pera, 30.07.1918.
36. German ambassador Wangenheim reflected on Armenian demands for protection in spring 1915 and formulated that the Germans would not have the 'nobile officium' (honorful duty) to protect the Ottoman Christians. This term was used in the discourse about protection of co-religious groups. Wangenheim pointed out that this role was already taken by Great Britian and also Russia. However, at that point, he did not realize the scale of the violence used against Armenians and only later that year understood that the Young Turk used 'deportation' as a code word for annihilation (AA (M) R 14085:7116). After the summer 1915, all German diplomats and military officers knew about the genocide. Some of them believed in the Turkish conspiracy theory of an internal pro-Russian fifth column. Berlin oppressed critical opinions and messages from German wit-

nesses and made it clear that the 'Armenian affair' will not influence the war partnership with the Ottomans. The censorship inside the German Reich made the discussion about the mass violence inside the aligned Ottoman Empire difficult, but not impossible. The reports about the atrocities became a media event on the side of the Entente powers and the neutral United States of America. At a time when 'genocide' was not yet a coined and used term, the Entente powers declared the unprecedented violence against civilians as 'crimes against humanity' and demanded the persecution of the perpetrators.

37. Zürcher, *Young Turk Legacy*, 110–23; Tessa Hofmann, *Annäherung an Armenien. Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Munich: Beck 2006), 93.
38. AA (M) R 13804, Bernstoff to the Foreign Department (AA), 15.06.1918.
39. AA (M) R 13804, Bernstorff to the Foreign Department (AA), August 1918, 21; Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire*, 175–82.
40. AA (M) R 13804–2, Bernstorff to the Foreign Department (AA), 05.08.1918, 92–96: '[…] werden sie bei der im Kaukasus-Gebiet bestehenden vollkommenen Anarchie leicht einen Vorwand finden, um mit den Armeniern weiter zu kämpfen und ihr Versprechen nicht zu halten. Darüber lässt letztes Telegramm Enver Paschas an Feldmarschall von Hindenburg keinen Zweifel […] dass die Türken den Armeniern gegenüber gar keinen guten Willen haben. […] Es ist m.E. eine Utopie, wenn von Tiflis aus Garantien von den Türken für die Armenier verlangt werden. Wo auf niedriger Kulturstufe Rassenhass vorhanden ist, kann es keine Garantien geben. Wer in der Majorität ist, schlägt die Minorität tot. […] Ausserdem ist es den Türken durchaus erwünscht, wenn eine halbe Million Armenier umkommen.'.
41. AA (M) R 13804, 21, 85; Jürgen Gottschlich, *Beihilfe zum Völkermord. Deutschlands Rolle bei der Vernichtung der Armenier* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2015), 115–36.
42. State Archive in Vienna (Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv), PA XII, Box 209; Neulen, *Feldgrau in Jerusalem*, 144–51; Wolfdieter Bihl, *Der Erste Weltkrieg, 1914–1918. Chronik—Daten—Fakten* (Wien/Köln/Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2010), 276.
43. Johnson, *Middle East*, 235–40; Bihl, *Erste Weltkrieg*, 276–77.
44. Bihl, *Erste Weltkrieg*, 276–78.
45. Gingeras, *Fall of the Sultanate*, 247.
46. AA (M) R 13804–13805.
47. A term referring to the famous *Nibelungenlied*—an epic poem in Middle High German from the 13th century. The term expresses the highest form of trust and allegiance—a bond beyond death and defeat, absolute and often fatal.

48. AA (M) R 13804–2, Bernstorff to AA, Constantinople, 20.06.1918, 44–45.
49. The Ottoman troops did not retreat from their positions in the Caucasus until early spring 1919.
50. Zürcher, *Young Turk Legacy*, 211–23.
51. The 1910s frame the important stages of the decline of the Ottoman empire. The term *Ottoman Cataclysm* can be used to describe the cataclysmic—and irreversible—transformation of the Ottoman territory in the Near and Middle East in the years 1912 to 1922. The last period of the Ottoman empire starts with the Balkan Wars and the loss of almost all European territories and ends with the foundation of modern Turkey in 1923. The empire lost not only territories and influence, but millions of its citizens due to total war and the Armenian Genocide. See: Kieser, 'Ottoman Road to Total War,' 29–53.
52. James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 182.
53. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 252–67.

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CHAPTER 10

# New Zealand and 'The Catastrophic Year 1917'

*Glyn Harper*

The title of this chapter comes from Major General J.F.C. Fuller's introduction to Leon Wolff's *In Flanders Fields*. Published in 1958, Wolff's military history remains one of the most widely read and influential accounts of the third battle of Ypres (Third Ypres/Passchendaele), which waged on the western front between late July and mid-November 1917. Fuller described *In Flanders Fields* as:

> … much more than a military history, rather an invocation which summons from out of the depths of the past the catastrophic year 1917—the progenitor of the age in which we live.[1]

Wolff was a United States Air Force officer and, as no American troops had been involved in Third Ypres, he believed he could write a book about the events of 1917 on the western front with what he described as an 'inhuman neutrality' that 'would arouse an admiration of all shades of critical readership'. In the end, he realised that his ascribed task was impossible and admitted: 'I soon found that I could not believe what I was writing'. It was a situation he described as 'most distressing'.[2] Wolff's book followed a pattern established by the influ-

G. Harper (✉)
Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand



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ential military historian and theorist Sir Basil Liddell Hart in that it portrayed Third Ypres 'as a meaningless slaughter conducted by commanders without understanding or imagination'.[3] Wolff's account serves as an important warning to historians: that there are events so dreadful that it is hard (and perhaps impossible) to write about them objectively, even a century on.

There is little doubt that 1917 was the worst year of the war for the Allies. In 1917, the Germans achieved victory on the eastern front while the Allies floundered in all their main theatres of war. At the end of 1917, in Fuller's words:

> the British were bled white, the French were morally exhausted, the Italians nearly out of the war, and the Americans not yet sufficiently involved to make good a fraction of the enormous losses sustained.[4]

This chapter outlines what happened on several of the main battlefields of 1917 and explains why these military offensives went so badly for the Allies. It focuses primarily on the fortunes of the New Zealand Division, which was involved in some of the critical military actions of 1917 on the western front. It also looks at a campaign that continues to suffer from historical neglect, namely the experiences of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade in Palestine that year. The Brigade fought in several significant actions throughout 1917 and on 14 November suffered its heaviest casualties in a single day.[5] The Australian historians Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson describe how the military events of 1917 'brought dire consequences' for the Allies.[6] For the New Zealand armed forces, certainly, the year 1917 was filled with dire consequences, which have left an enduring legacy for New Zealanders.

## The Western Front 1917

Operations on the western front in 1917 were severely hampered by the appalling weather conditions. These included a late spring and a short summer that amounted to three weeks of fine weather. France also experienced the heaviest rainfall in 75 years which, combined with one of the most severe winters on record, spelled disaster.[7] Marshal Ferdinand Foch warned at the beginning of October, as the battles of Passchendaele were underway, that it was impossible to wage war against both Germans and mud.[8] Yet combat both they did.

From the battles of Arras (begun on 9 April) to Cambrai (begun on 20 November), all military offensives launched by the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) on the western front that year followed a similar pattern. After initial spectacular successes inspired hopes for a general breakthrough, the German defenders reacted with vigour and the offensives petered out into stalemate. At all stages of these offensives, even during the initial successful phases, casualties were heavy.[9] This was also true of the New Zealand Division, which was involved in three set-piece battles and two minor actions during the year, beginning with the battle for Messines in June 1917. Before that assault, the New Zealand Division was in the peak of its condition. At the end of the year, after suffering its worst-ever military disaster, the Division was a spent force incapable of further military action.

## Messines, June

As a preliminary to the launch of the BEF's main offensive for 1917, the Messines Ridge was to be captured. This ridgeline ran for nearly ten kilometres from St Yves in the south to just beyond Wytschaete. The offensive aimed at securing the southern flank of the Ypres offensive planned for later in the year, as well as ejecting the Germans from a vital piece of high ground and denying them observation over the potential Ypres battlefield.[10]

Responsibility for mounting the attack at Messines was assigned to General Herbert Plumer's Second Army. It had spent many months planning and preparing for this battle. Plumer, with his method of 'extreme deliberation', was one of the most able generals in the BEF.[11] The Messines operation involved several innovative features for which Plumer was responsible. For a start, the objectives were strictly limited in what Plumer's colleague General Henry Rawlinson called a 'bite and hold' operation.[12] Capture of the ridgeline was the ultimate prize: there was to be no attempt at breaking through the German lines. Artillery support, upon which the success of the operation depended, was to be overwhelming: more than 2400 guns of which a third were heavy and medium. This was an outstanding ratio of one gun to every seven yards of front.[13] The American military theorist, Stephen Biddle, has calculated that the ten-day artillery bombardment that preceded the infantry attack on 7 June was 'of literally atomic magnitude' with more explosive power than an American tactical nuclear warhead dumped on every mile of the German frontline trenches.[14]

The infantry from the nine divisions involved in the attack (with three more in reserve), were well trained. They moved into location early so that most were well rested before the attack commenced. Railways were constructed right up to the start line to ensure adequate logistical support throughout the operation. All preparations were made under cover of darkness so as to preserve the element of surprise. Finally, there was the knockout blow. Twenty-one mine shafts had been sunk deep under the German lines and filled with more than a million pounds of high explosive. Their detonation signalled the start of the assault.[15]

The New Zealand Division had a key role in the Messines attack. It was in fine form as a result of being involved in only minor actions since leaving the Somme in October 1916 and being able to train those formations not holding the front-line trenches. In April 1917, the various artillery and infantry brigades underwent twelve days of intensive training. The history of the New Zealand Division records of this training:

> … nothing was left undone to achieve realism. The ground at the training area happened to conform to the actual position to be assaulted, and replicas of the whole German trenches and our assembly ones were cut out a foot deep to scale. In these, battalions and brigades rehearsed the delicate operations of the assembly and attack, and attained the invaluable certainty of purpose. The final full-dress rehearsals were witnessed and criticized by the Second Army Commander and his Staff.[16]

The training for Messines included testing tactics for open warfare and for obtaining the maximum firepower from the recent reorganisation of platoons into specialised sections of riflemen, Lewis gunners, bombers, and rifle bombers. On the eve of the Messines offensive, war correspondent Malcolm Ross reported to the Defence Minister Sir James Allen that the New Zealand Division was 'at the very top of its form, training and discipline'.[17]

In the II Anzac Corps' sector, the New Zealand Division was situated in the southern zone between the 3rd Australian Division on the right and the British 25th Division on the left. Its role included the capture of the heavily fortified Messines village, upon which the whole Army plan depended. Once the village was taken, the 4th Australian Division could pass through it on the way to the final objective, a line about a mile beyond the crest.

At 3:10 am on the morning of 7 June, the mines went up (only 19 of the 21 exploded) and a colossal barrage over a kilometre deep crashed down on the German defences. The noise from the explosion was heard as far away as the United Kingdom and an observatory on the Isle of Wight registered

it on its seismograph.[18] The exploding mines had a devastating effect on the German defenders. It is estimated that 10,000 German soldiers were killed by the blasts. German casualties for the day amounted to over 23,000 and the German Army Group commander, Crown Prince Rupprecht, 'was appalled by what faced him' at the end of the day: 'All around Messines the ground was … covered by the bodies of Bavarian soldiers'.[19]

Immediately following the eruption, the infantry from the nine assault divisions moved off in the semi-darkness and advanced into the smoke and dust-cloud that hung over the ridge. Moving behind a protective artillery barrage, they occupied the Messines Ridge almost unopposed. So effective was the British artillery's counter battery fire that it was ten minutes before a feeble German barrage fired on the advancing infantry. By then it was too late for the Germans.

The New Zealand Division easily captured Messines village by 7:00 am. That afternoon the New Zealanders repelled a German counter-attack, which crumpled under heavy machine-gun and artillery fire. The New Zealand infantry remained around (but not in) the village of Messines for the next two days and it was during this period that they experienced the bulk of their casualties. The exposed ridgeline was overcrowded with Allied soldiers and the New Zealand position was no exception. Major General Andrew Russell requested but had not been permitted to thin out his defences.[20] The German artillery, once it had recovered from the shock of the opening attack, pounded the Messines village and its outskirts mercilessly. On 8 June, those New Zealanders on the ridge endured a German artillery bombardment that lasted uninterrupted for ten hours. Cecil McClure wrote of the searing experience:

> To sit tight; to hang on while the enemy batters and seeks to drive one out by the horror of his onslaught is more than flesh and blood can stand. There is no glory in it.[21]

Despite the casualties, the Messines attack was a complete success, the finest of the war to date according to the BEF's commander, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig.[22] For the German commanders in Flanders, the loss of Messines left them with 'a palpable sense of shock'.[23] The battle of Messines came to be regarded as a model for offensives on the western front. Careful planning, effective preparation, and excellent infantry-artillery cooperation produced an outstanding success. As Russell later commented: 'The battle … was won through the weight of metal thrown

on to the enemy positions and the quality of the men who advanced to attack. Everything went like clockwork.'[24]

The success did not come cheap though; it never did on the western front. When the New Zealanders were withdrawn from Messines village on the morning of 9 June, they had suffered nearly 4000 casualties, of which some 700 were killed in action in just over two days of fighting.[25]

## Third Ypres

Beginning on 31 July and ending on 10 November 1917, what we now call Third Ypres (or the battle of Passchendaele) consisted of eight separate battles. The long delay (more than six weeks) between the Messines battle and the start of Third Ypres and the decision to entrust the main attack to General Sir Hubert Gough, rather than Plumer, 'has long been regarded as one of Haig's cardinal mistakes'.[26] There were more cardinal errors made once Third Ypres was underway.

The New Zealand Division took part in two of the Third Ypres battles. They were the battle of Broodseinde on 4 October and First Passchendaele fought a little over a week later on 12 October. They rank as two of the most significant military engagements in New Zealand's history and were pivotal moments in the military history of the western front.

The attack of 4 October aimed to seize the first low ridge in front of Passchendaele as a preliminary to taking the village itself in a subsequent push. Twelve divisions took part along an eight-mile front. There was a unique element to this attack. In the centre making the main thrust, for the only time in history, four Anzac Divisions attacked side-by-side.

On the right (south) I Anzac Corps (1st and 2nd Australian Divisions) launched from a 2000-yard front with the village of Broodseinde and the surrounding ridge as their objective. To their north, II Anzac Corps with the 3rd Australian Division on the right and the New Zealand Division on the left, advanced along a 3000-yard front with the object of taking the Gravenstafel Spur. The three Australian divisions aimed at securing the whole of the Broodseinde Ridge including the town of Zonnebeke and Broodseinde village. The New Zealanders, advancing on a 2000-yard front to a depth of just over 1000 yards, were to concentrate on the Abraham Heights and the Gravenstafel Spur itself (Illustration 10.1).[27]

While the objectives were strictly limited, varying from 1200 to 2000 yards, they were formidable. Securing them would involve the four Anzac divisions advancing up open slopes chequered with strong defensive posi-

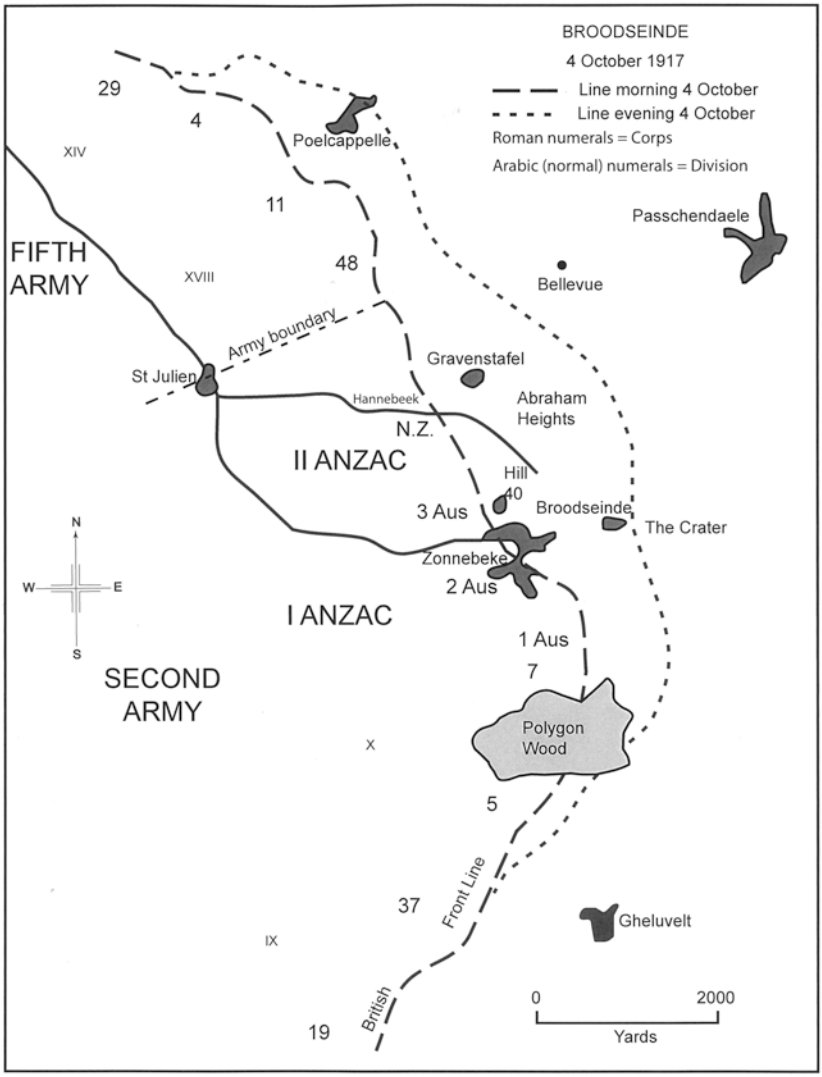


**Illustration 10.1** The Battle of Broodseinde. Broodseinde, 4 October 1917. Source: Glyn Harper

tions including many ferro-concrete pill-boxes. They would be under full observation of the Germans on the heights throughout the attack. However, the key to success was the overwhelming artillery support. Second Army had some 796 medium and heavy guns available and 1548 field guns and howitzers. The New Zealand Division was allocated a generous portion of this support: 180 18-pounders (field guns), 60 4.5-inch howitzers, and 68 machine guns. As one New Zealand historian noted, the attack was to be 'a limited advance with unlimited explosives to blast out a way. If the weather held it must succeed'.[28]

The weather did hold, if only just, and the battle of Broodseinde was a stunning success for all the divisions of the Second Army taking part. The New Zealand Division easily captured all its objectives, advancing the British line by nearly 2000 yards and taking 1159 German prisoners. New Zealand casualties were heavy, numbering 1853 of which more than 450 had been killed.[29] As one young soldier wrote of 4 October: 'It's marvellous the way these "Stunts" as we call them are got up, everything run like clockwork'.[30] Yet the New Zealand casualty rate was around 25 per cent in a battle where everything had gone according to plan.[31] Victory did not come cheap. But disaster would prove even more costly, as the events of 12 October 1917 revealed.

On the afternoon of 4 October, heavy rain started falling, turning the Flanders' region into a quagmire. Prince Rupprecht, Crown Prince of Bavaria and the German Army commander, described the rain as 'our most effective ally'.[32] Many experienced soldiers thought that this break in the weather meant an end to the Third Ypres offensive. It was not to be though, and in the most controversial and questioned decision he made during the war, Haig ordered that it should continue.[33] The New Zealand Division's next attack would be far from a textbook or 'clockwork' operation.

## First Passchendaele, 12 October 1917

The warning signs were clear to anyone who cared to notice them. Convinced that the Germans were near breaking point, Haig ordered a new attack on 9 October, which is known as the Battle of Poelcapelle.[34] Poorly planned, lacking adequate artillery support, ignoring weather and terrain conditions, the attack was a disaster for the eleven divisions involved. In the Anzac sector, two British divisions (the 49th and the 66th of II Anzac Corps and the 2nd Australian Division of I Anzac Corps) took part.

While their planned advance was a short one, between 600 and 900 yards, not a single objective was taken and the casualties were horrendous. The 49th Division alone suffered more than 2500 casualties in this attack. Yet still Haig persisted in continuing the offensive, writing in his diary that the 9 October attack had been 'a great success'.[35] Two days later he informed a meeting of press correspondents at his headquarters: 'We are practically through the enemy's defences.... It was simply the mud which defeated us on Tuesday [9 October]. The men did splendidly to get through it as they did'.[36] The New Zealand Division and the 3rd Australian Division were now condemned to make an attack that should never have gone ahead.

Never in its history have New Zealand troops been ordered to carry out a military operation in such unfavourable circumstances as those that existed on 12 October on the Ypres salient. Nothing at all was right for it:

- the terrain was like glutinous porridge and it was raining heavily. This made a mockery of any attempt at tactical finesse like fire and manoeuvre and outflanking enemy strong points.
- the objectives were very deep; over 3000 yards (equivalent to the length of 30 rugby fields). It included those set for 9 October.
- only two days were allocated to plan and coordinate the attack.
- artillery support was totally inadequate as the New Zealand artillery commander, Napier Johnston, informed General Russell before the attack commenced. Few guns had been moved forward; those that had been did not have stable gun platforms and were short of shells.
- the troops were exhausted before reaching the start line and their morale was low. The 3rd Rifle Brigade had just completed a month detached as labourers from the division. The history of the Brigade candidly admits that in October its soldiers 'were almost worn out and [were] certainly unready for immediate combative action'.[37]
- the German obstacles were formidable. These included many pill-boxes and two belts of barbed wire each about 30 yards thick, all of which were clearly visible from the New Zealand start line. What was not observed though were the many hidden machine gun nests and sniper teams moved into position for the attack.
- the German defenders knew the attack was coming. Not only could they see the preparations being made—surprise and deception were totally absent from the planning of these attacks—but a British deserter and three other soldiers captured in raids on the night of 11 October informed their captors of the exact time of the attack.[38]

In all reality, the attack was doomed before it even started. This is not merely the hindsight of an historian. Those New Zealand soldiers in the line on the morning of 12 October knew that the task ahead of them was formidable and that their prospects of survival were slim. The eve of the offensive, 11 October, was described as 'ominously quiet' by one New Zealand military history, which also noted that the 'great belts of wire ahead were apparent to the most casual observer'.[39] Gazing across no-man's-land in the dawn's growing light on 12 October, one New Zealand soldier noted in his diary that 'it was possible to discern the chief details of the slope above us, the broken trees, the torn ground, and on the summit "pill-boxes", black and threatening'.[40] A New Zealand stretcher bearer remained in absolute awe of the infantry who had 'jumped the bags' on the morning of 12 October. This First Battle of Passchendaele:

> … tells a story of almost unbelievable courage. Our citizen soldiers faced impossible odds. They knew what they were up against. They saw death staring them in the face—they saw no possible chance of success and with unfaltering courage, Officer and men walked to their deaths, because it was their job.[41]

First Passchendaele on 12 October was an absolute disaster. Nothing went to plan. The fate of the operation is best reflected in its opening artillery barrage, which was universally condemned as 'very feeble'.[42] It also damaged the wrong people. Leonard Hart of 1 Otago Battalion recalled:

> Through some blunder our artillery barrage opened up about two hundred yards short of the specified range and thus opened right in the midst of us. It was a truly awful time—our men getting cut to pieces in dozens by our own guns. Immediate disorganization followed.[43]

Leonard Hart's infantry company lost 148 of its 180 members that morning.[44]

The two New Zealand infantry brigades making the attack, namely the 2nd Brigade (the South Island Battalions) and the 3rd New Zealand Rifle Brigade, suffered appalling losses. Most New Zealand soldiers never saw a German that morning. Private Ernest Langford of 2 Otago Battalion was succinct: 'Attack a failure on account of wire encountered. Casualties extremely heavy. Hun machine guns and snipers play havoc. Absolute hell…. Brigade practically wiped out.'[45] A soldier in one of the Canterbury

battalions wrote a revealing letter to his father on 23 October 1917. It was an accurate account of what had happened:

> As in previous stunts, we all thought it would be a case of follow the barrage and dig in. Such was not the case as the barrage was poor, and missed the barbed wire and pillboxes, which were the means of our failure.

Needless to say, the price of this failure for his battalion was catastrophic:

> Flesh and blood cannot advance against a hail of bullets, and we were held up…. we lost many officers and men in this brigade, and the wounded had a rough time … as dozens lay out in the rain all night before the stretcher-bearers got them away.[46]

This letter, clearly uncensored, was surprising for both its candour and for the fact that it was subsequently published in a local newspaper. In the newspaper though, the soldier's identity was protected: he was described as 'a Mornington boy, writing to his father from France' (Illustration 10.2).[47]

Without fulfilling any of its objectives, the losses incurred on 12 October by the New Zealanders were massive. Some 846 New Zealand soldiers were killed on this dismal Flanders morning and a further 2000 soldiers were wounded. Another 138 New Zealanders died of their wounds over the next week.[48] More New Zealanders were killed or maimed in these few short hours than on any other day in the nation's history. That reality left a bleak and bitter aftertaste.[49]

Third Ypres formally finished in November 1917, after the Canadians finally captured the red brick stains in the mud that had once been the village of Passchendaele. The Canadian offensive advanced the British line by six miles and captured the objectives that had been set for the first two weeks of October. In these three short months, the BEF suffered some 275,000 casualties of which 70,000 had been killed.[50] The effects of this battle when combined with the dreadful climatic and terrain conditions 'brought dire consequences' upon the morale and fighting ability of the BEF.[51] Many writers have commented that for the first time in the war, the BEF lost its confidence and sense of optimism. After Third Ypres, they suffered from a 'deadly depression'.[52] That mood certainly pervaded the New Zealand Division, which experienced its nadir at the end of 1917. Every military formation has its breaking point and the New Zealand Division almost reached the limits of endurance that bleak October–November.

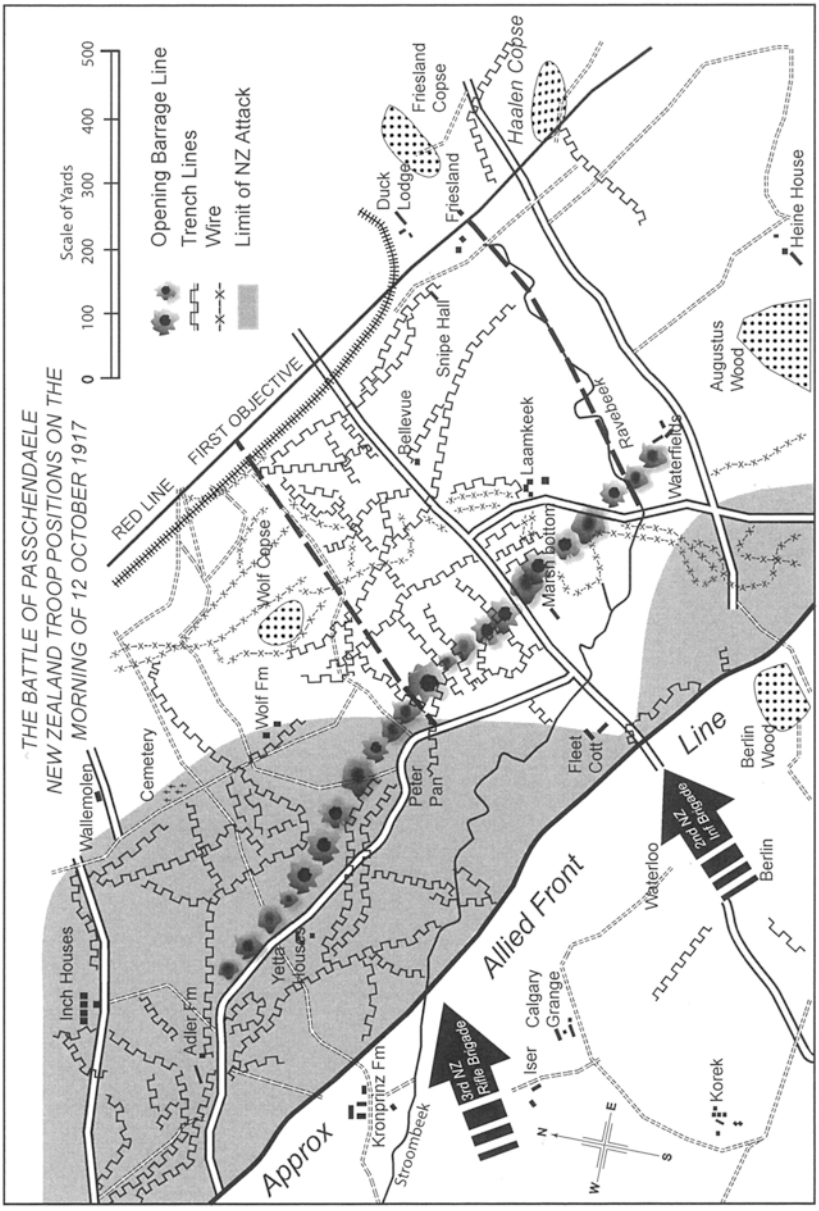


**Illustration 10.2** The Battle of Passchendaele, New Zealand Troops Positions on 12 October 1917. Progress on 12 October was minimal. Nearly 1000 New Zealand soldiers had died to take these few yards of ground. Source: Glyn Harper

## The Palestine Campaign in 1917

It is often overlooked that thousands of New Zealanders were campaigning in another theatre of war and for them 1917 was also a difficult year. The New Zealand Mounted Rifles (NZMR) were involved in three large set-piece battles in 1917. At its end, while pursuing the defeated Ottoman Turks in what was meant to be a minor skirmish, the Brigade experienced its worst day of the campaign.

When the New Zealand Division sailed for France in early 1916 to become the country's main war effort, the NZMR was left behind to fight little known, unpublicised campaigns in the deserts of Egypt and Palestine.[53] Later, two additional companies of men were supplied for the Imperial Camel Corps, and a Wireless Troop was provided for service in Mesopotamia (now Iraq). During this long campaign, almost 18,000 New Zealanders served in Sinai-Palestine.[54] The Sinai-Palestine campaign was little more than a sideshow to the main theatre of war in France and Belgium. It was a place where hopes ran high for a cheap, easy victory over an enemy that was not highly regarded by the Allied leaders. Such hopes were to be cruelly dashed, as the war here dragged on and experienced an equal share of disasters before victory was finally achieved.

The progress of the campaign hinged on logistical supply, especially the availability of water for troops and horses. New Zealand horses during the Sinai campaign were renowned for being able to go for long periods without water—between 60 and 70 hours when really tested. The horses endured the same privations as their masters during the campaign. In addition, they suffered from 'flu', ringworm, sand colic, and sores around the mouth and eyes caused by the ever-present flies. In all, New Zealand sent nearly 10,000 horses to the campaign.[55] At the end of the campaign most of the New Zealand horses were kept for the occupation force, but some of the older horses were shot, one of the hardest tasks New Zealand soldiers have ever had to perform. To make things easier, each squadron swapped over those horses condemned to death by their age or condition prior to them being shot. The dead horses, many with more battle scars than their owners, were left in rows along the Mediterranean shore.[56]

This campaign on horseback was very different to Gallipoli or to what the New Zealanders experienced on the western front. It was far from an easy war for the mounted soldiers. Intense heat, flies, sand, long marches in the

saddle, and constant thirst were reoccurring ordeals while serving in this theatre of war. One New Zealand trooper neatly captured the experience:

> It is a hell of a life. We need a spell and so do the mokes [horses] … If I ever get out of this don't talk desert to me. The only shelter from the sun is what we can rig up with our blanket. All manner of insects attack us at night, and at dawn they are relieved by an army corps of vicious flies … I suppose we are dinkum crusaders, but we don't look it or feel it. In the next war I'm going to be a rum buyer in Jamaica.[57]

Francis Twisleton immediately noticed two things upon arriving in Palestine from France in August 1917. One was the 'blistering' heat and the other the 'very urgent' necessity of water for both men and horses.[58]

Flies were a constant hazard too. The historian of the campaign wrote that the flies were 'anywhere and everywhere' and that 'one continual battle was waged against them from sunrise to sunset'.[59] They caused or aggravated the septic sores which afflicted most mounted soldiers. At the end of December 1917 the men of the Imperial Camel Corps not only had to contend with septic sores. That month 'an epidemic of skin disease broke out, and affected most troopers'. In one camelier section, only one trooper managed to stay free from the infection. The site of the affected skin often turned septic too.[60] It must have been an absolute torment for these men. There was no respite from the flies or the heat either even when on leave. This was 'one of the greatest disabilities suffered by troops campaigning in the East'. Port Said or Cairo was nothing like Paris or London. There was just no escape from the harsh conditions and the often hostile 'alien peoples' that were a constant part of campaigning here.[61]

The year 1916 saw one large engagement fought at Romani on 4–5 August. This Turkish attack had been anticipated and the British positions were well prepared. It was repulsed, with heavy losses for the Turks. About 5000 Turks were killed or wounded in this battle and a further 4000 captured over the five days of fighting.[62] As the Turks withdrew back across the desert, the Anzac Mounted Division pursued them. The rest of 1916 was spent clearing the Sinai and it was not until November 1916 that the British forces felt themselves able to advance across the Sinai Desert. El Arish was taken on 21 December and Magdhaba two days later. Rafa, on the Egypt-Palestine border, was attacked in January 1917 with the NZMR Brigade carrying out a successful flanking manoeuvre that

brought the Brigade in on the enemy's rear. Rafa was taken, along with 1500 Turkish prisoners.

With the completion of a water pipeline and railhead to Rafa, the Allied conquest of Palestine began. Gaza was the Allies' first objective and it was nearly taken in March 1917 after the Anzac Mounted Division completed a successful envelopment of the town. But with success in their grasp and the Turks preparing to evacuate, the British commander ordered the attack on Gaza halted and withdrew the force back to Rafa. It was a bitter disappointment for the Anzac Mounted troops.[63]

The second attack on Gaza occurred in the middle of April 1917, but the Turks, under the able leadership of the German commander, Colonel Friedrich von Kressenstein, had strengthened the Gaza defences and were expecting the attack. It was a costly failure for the Allies, despite their using tanks and gas in this theatre of war for the first time. The fortress town of Gaza was the only city or town to suffer extensive material damage during the Palestine campaign. The British bombardment caused the damage as did the preparation of the Turkish defensive positions.[64] British losses numbered 6500 and the disaster here led to a series of command changes.[65] The British commander, Lieutenant General Sir Archibald Murray, was replaced by General Sir Edmund Allenby.

Allenby was determined to break into Palestine and set about doing this by focusing on Beersheba, which was encircled by the Anzac Mounteds and captured in a famous charge by the 4th Australian Light Horse.[66] Fighting continued for another week before the Turkish frontier defences broke and the Turks withdrew. The NZMR, which had played a key role at Beersheba, were part of the pursuit force.

On the afternoon of 14 November, the NZMR reached the edge of the orange groves of Jaffa. It was here, about ten miles south of the town, that the NZMR made contact with a strong Turkish force positioned on a ridgeline and sand hills at Ayun Kara. The Turkish force numbered around 1500 men, supported by 18 machine guns and a battery of field artillery. The Auckland and Wellington Regiments attacked the Turks and the firefight that followed lasted more than three hours. The New Zealanders captured Ayun Kara after a fierce bayonet charge but the afternoon's action resulted in the heaviest casualty list of the campaign. Of the 800-odd soldiers who took part, 44 were killed in action and 141 were wounded. The New Zealand horses also suffered, 41 being killed and 22 wounded (Illustration 10.3).[67]

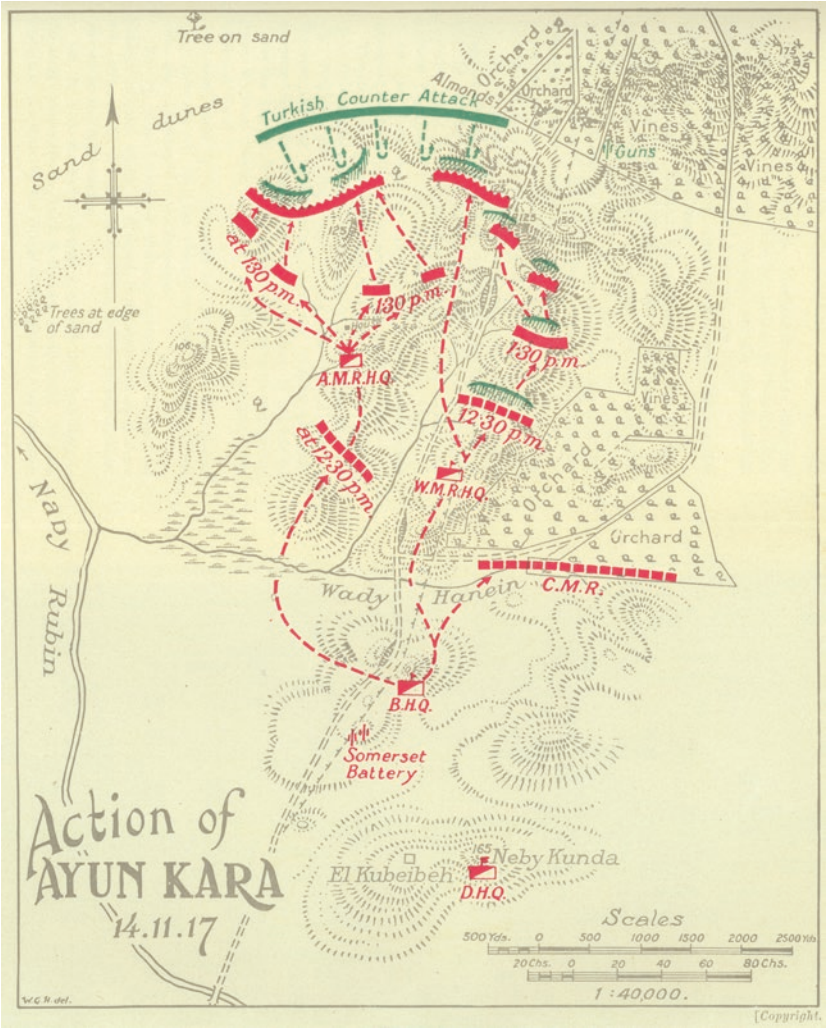


**Illustration 10.3** Action at Ayun Kara. The action on 14 November 1917 resulted in the New Zealand Mounted Brigade's costliest day of the war. Source: Lieut.-Colonel C. Guy Powles, *The New Zealanders in Sinai and Palestine*. (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, 1922)

Ben Gainsford recalled years later that Ayun Kara was 'our best scrap … We lost a lot of good men'.[68] Garioch Clunie's diary recorded a very eventful day:

> Stood to at 0400 and moved out at 0600. Passed through village of Gebuck 0800. Came to running creek at 0830. Had a good fill out. Both horses and men. Moved on about 2 miles and got met by bullets. Galloped into cover and dismounted for action, had three men hit coming in and during day our boys chased Jacko [the Turks] back 2 miles from ridge to ridge killing 500 and wounding 1200. Our casualties were heavy. Auckland had 11 killed and 37 wounded. Wellington 12 killed and 68 wounded and Canterbury had 1 and 12. The boys hung onto the line all night and it is believe[d] Jacko would retire. Bob Osbourne and Captain Herrick were killed today.[69]

Sergeant Robert Osbourne was one of four sergeants killed in the Wellington Mounted Rifles that day. Commissioned in the field at Gallipoli in June 1915, Captain Arthur Desmond Herrick MC was described by the unit's history as: 'Brave, keen, energetic and most proficient, he was probably the most versatile officer in the Regiment, and excelled in any capacity in the field'.[70]

As an indication of the significance of this action, an impressive memorial was constructed by the local Jewish villagers at Richon le Zion and a memorial service held on 14 November 1918.[71] The memorial recorded the names of all those New Zealanders killed at Ayun Kara on 14 November 1917. The fate of the memorial reveals much about how this campaign has been marginalised and what New Zealanders chose to remember and forget. It was later destroyed and nobody seems to know when and why this happened.[72] The campaigning in Palestine did end on a high note with Allenby entering Jerusalem on 11 December 1917. In the words of British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, desperate for some positive news in the war's hardest year, it was 'a Christmas present to the British nation'.[73] Jerusalem's capture was world news. In New Zealand, it provided some solace in what had been a very difficult year.

## The Legacy

The experiences of 1917 and especially those of the New Zealand soldiers during Third Ypres have left an enduring legacy for New Zealand and New Zealanders. First Passchendaele on 12 October 1917 was the one great military disaster the New Zealand Division suffered on the western front. It is the single event that encapsulates for most New Zealanders the expe-

rience of the First World War.[74] A. J. P. Taylor wrote that the Somme battle in 1916 'set the picture by which future generations saw the First World War: brave helpless soldiers; blundering obstinate generals; nothing achieved'.[75] But for New Zealand, which did not take part in the early disastrous stages of the Somme battle, it is the 12 October attack that dominates public memory of the western front. As Professor Peter Simkins wrote for the 90th commemorations of the war:

> Passchendaele has never lost its power to shock even the most hardened student of the Great War and, to many people, it remains the quintessential symbol of the horrors of the fighting on the Western Front.[76]

Passchendaele has become what Dan Todman has described as a 'cultural reference point': an event that 'sums up everything bad about war—what it does or does not mean, how it is fought and above all the risk of a disconnection between ends and means'.[77] Passchendaele epitomizes 'the horror, futility and waste of the Western Front'.[78]

Then there are the casualties. With the possible exception of the 1915 Gallipoli campaign, 1917 had the most significant impact on the New Zealand nation. It inflicted the deepest physical and psychological scars upon the New Zealand Division and on New Zealand society as a whole. Nearly every family was directly affected by the 1917 battles—be they in Europe or the Middle East—or knew people who were. Denied the rituals that are usually associated with death, no sense of closure accompanied these losses. The pain of separation and loss still endures.

Three examples, from the many testimonies in letters and diaries of the time, will suffice to show the depth of loss.[79] Joy Alley was a young, impressionable child during the First World War. She used to have nightmares about Germans invading New Zealand. The daytime brought little relief. Joy recalled: 'the waking nightmares were the telegram boys with their telegrams; I hated the sight of them'. Then one of the 'hated' telegram boys called into their house. He brought news that Joy's elder brother Eric Buckingham Alley, a captain in the Otago Battalion had died from wounds. The news transformed the family:

> I always remember the empty house, dark, and the sound of my aunt crying. The only sound in the house was wailing. I don't remember Dad's reaction, but Mother would never mention his name, even after many years.[80]

The arrival of the telegram boys and the deep trauma that followed was a common event around the country from June 1917 onward. Ellen (Nellie) Knight also received a telegram after the battle of Passchendaele, one of three she received during the war. It informed her that her second son, George Knight, a man of considerable leadership ability and charm, had been killed in action on 12 October. His body was never recovered from the Flanders mud. Nellie also received many letters of condolence, all of them commenting on George's strength of character. One from a soldier in George's platoon, who informed her that: 'Believe me lady he was a NZer through and through and a boy that any parents can be proud of. He was as good a soldier as ever left New Zealand'.[81] While Nellie was undoubtedly proud of her lost boys her dreams of making 'a lovely garden home' with her sons were destroyed.[82]

One New Zealand mother, Mrs Mary Ann Newlove of Takaka, received three telegrams in one week. All three of her boys; Leonard, Edwin, and Leslie were killed in the fighting around Passchendaele and not one has a known grave. Their names are recorded on the New Zealand Memorial to the Missing at Tyne Cot Cemetery in Belgium. All words are inadequate to describe this family's despair and suffering.[83]

Passchendaele remains New Zealand's worst military disaster and as such is a pivotal moment in the country's history. Military history is not just about generals and battles in faraway places; it is also, in every sense, family history. The distinguished military-social historians of the First World War, Jay Winter and Blaine Baggett, have commented: 'War is always the destroyer of families, and the Great War was to date the greatest destroyer of them all'.[84] This catastrophe at Passchendaele affected more New Zealand families and shattered more lives on a single day than any other in the nation's history. The effect of Passchendaele on New Zealand was exacerbated by the losses in Palestine in October–November 1917.

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, the losses and the appalling conditions endured at Passchendaele and in Palestine make it hard to be objective and dispassionate about the military events of 1917. Far too many sons, brothers, uncles, and fathers were turned into stark names in newsprint, on headstones, and on war memorials. To paraphrase the words of the New Zealand historian Michael King: at the end of 1917, New Zealanders 'did not need to be told that the angel of death had passed over the land: they had heard the beatings of its wings'.[85]

## Notes

1. J.F.C. Fuller, 'Introduction', in Leon Wolff, *In Flanders Fields: The 1917 Campaign* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1958), xi.
2. Wolff, Preface to *In Flanders Fields*, xxiv.
3. Nick Lloyd, *Passchendaele: A New History* (London: Viking, 2017), 7.
4. J.F.C. Fuller, *The Decisive Battles of the Western World: Volume Two 1792–1944* (Frogmore, UK: Paladin, 1970), 361.
5. For more than 80 years the only New Zealand account of this campaign was C. Guy Powles, *The New Zealanders in Sinai and Palestine* (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd., 1922). Terry Kinloch's *Devils on Horses: In the words of the Anzacs in the Middle East 1916–1919* (Auckland: Exisle Publishing, 2007) was a welcome break in the drought.
6. Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Passchendaele: The Untold Story* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2003), 200.
7. Glyn Harper, *Dark Journey: Three Key New Zealand Battles of the Western Front* (Auckland: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 25–26.
8. Foch was in Paris where he made this comment in an interview: '*Boche* is bad, and *Boue* (mud) is bad, but *Boche* and *Boue* together—ah!' and he raised his hands in a warning gesture. Quoted in Wolff, *In Flanders Fields*, 199.
9. For British casualties see Prior and Wilson, *Passchendaele*, 185–87, 194–95. For German casualties see Lloyd, *Passchendaele*, 262–63.
10. Prior and Wilson, *Passchendaele*, 50.
11. Cyril Falls, *The First World War* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd, 1960), 283.
12. Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), 462.
13. Wolff, *In Flanders Fields*, 94.
14. Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 30. Biddle points out that the 1200 tons of explosive applied to each mile of the German front-line line trenches is more than a kiloton in nuclear parlance. By way of comparison, the atomic bomb 'Little Boy' dropped on Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 was about 13 kilotons. 'Fat man' dropped on Nagasaki on 9 August 1945 was the equivalent of 21 kilotons.
15. Geoffrey Powell, *Plumer: The Soldiers' General* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Military Classics, 2004), 172–74, 177.
16. H. Stewart, *The New Zealand Division 1916–19. A Popular History Based on Official Records* (Wellington: Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd, 1921), 159.
17. Ross to Allen, 20 February 1917, Allen Papers, Box 9 Archives New Zealand (ANZ).

18. Richard Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front 1914–1918* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), 159.
19. Lloyd, *Passchendaele*, 58.
20. Christopher Pugsley, *On the Fringe of Hell: New Zealanders and Military Discipline in the First World War* (Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991) 190–91.
21. Cecil McClure, letter 8 August 1917, quoted in Patrick McClure, *Act Justly: the Life of Cecil McClure MC and Bar* (Sydney: Patrick McClure, 2003), 33.
22. Glyn Harper, *Johnny Enzed: The New Zealand Soldier in the First World War 1914–1918* (Auckland: Exisle Publishing Ltd., 2015), 410.
23. Lloyd, *Passchendaele*, 58.
24. Russell to Sir James Allen, letter, 19 June 1917, Allen Papers, ANZ.
25. Ian McGibbon, *New Zealand's Western Front Campaign* (Auckland: David Bateman Ltd., 2016), 115.
26. Lloyd, *Passchendaele*, 65.
27. Harper, *Dark Journey*, 40–59. Andrew Macdonald, *Passchendaele. The Anatomy of a Tragedy* (Auckland: HarperCollins Publishers (New Zealand), 2013), 144–76.
28. A.D. Carbery, *The New Zealand Medical Service in the Great War 1914–18* (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd., 1924), 332.
29. Harper, *Dark Journey*, 51.
30. Malcolm Beaven, letter, 7 October 1917, MB 195 Box 83, Macmillan Brown Library, Canterbury University.
31. Casualty figures are from Glyn Harper, *Massacre at Passchendaele: The New Zealand Story* (Auckland: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), 42.
32. Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, diary entry 12 October 1917, quoted in Jack Sheldon, *The German Army at Passchendaele* (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Military, 2007), 231.
33. C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918, Volume IV, The Australian Imperial Force in France, 1917* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1933), 883.
34. For accounts of the battle of Poelcapelle see Lloyd, *Passchendaele*, 226–35; Prior and Wilson, *Passchendaele*, 159–64; Harper, *Dark Journey*, 60–70.
35. Haig, diary entry, Wednesday 10 October 1917, Haig Diaries No.118, Volume 21, National Library of Scotland (NLS).
36. Quoted in Wolff, *In Flanders Fields*, 237.
37. W.S. Austin, *The Official History of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade* (Wellington: L.T. Watkins Ltd., 1924), 230.
38. The deserter was from the 9th (Scottish) Division which had returned to the front line on the New Zealand Division's left flank after a two week break. Two of the prisoners of war also came from this division; the other

was from the British 48th Division. See Sheldon, *The German Army*, 229, and Harper, *Dark Journey*, 71–80.

39. A.E. Byrne, *Official History of the Otago Regiment, N.Z.E.F. in the Great War 1914–1918* (Dunedin: J. Wilkie and Co., 1921), 213.
40. E.P. (Percy) Williams, *A New Zealander's Diary: Gallipoli and France 1915–1917* (Christchurch: Cadsonbury Publications, 1998), 265.
41. Linus T.J. Ryan, 'A Brief Record of My Three Years in Khaki', 128, unpublished manuscript, property of Smyth family, Hamilton. Quoted in Harper, *Massacre at Passchendaele*, 89–90.
42. Report on Operations 11–14 October 1917, War Diary, 2 Cant Bn, WA 78/1, ANZ.
43. Leonard Hart, letter, 19 October 1917, MS papers 2157, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL).
44. Harper, *Massacre at* Passchendaele, 101.
45. Private Ernest H. Langford, Diary entry, 12 October 1917, MS papers 2242, ATL.
46. 'A letter from France', 23 October 1917, *North Otago Times*, 18 January 1918, 8.
47. 'A letter from France', 23 October 1917, *North Otago Times*, 18 January 1918, 8.
48. Summary of Casualties, NZEF, reported 15 August–14 November 1917. Quoted in Harper, *Dark Journey*, 90.
49. For more on the memorial legacies of Third Ypres in New Zealand see Chap. 12 in this collection.
50. There is some debate over the accuracy of the casualty figures for Third Ypres. These figures are from Prior and Wilson, *Passchendaele*, 195.
51. Ibid., 200.
52. Harper, *Massacre at Passchendaele*, 94.
53. Harper, *Johnny Enzed*, 481.
54. The first history of the campaign, Powles, *The New Zealanders*, 6, states that 17,723 men left New Zealand to serve in the New Zealand Mounted Rifle Brigade.
55. Harper, *Johnny Enzed*, 482.
56. Kinloch, *Devils on Horses*, 337–39.
57. Unknown New Zealand trooper quoted in C. G. Nicol, *The Story of Two Campaigns: Official War History of the Auckland Mounted Rifles Regiment, 1914–1919* (Auckland: Wilson and Horton, 1921), 119.
58. Francis Morphet Twisleton, diary entries, 1 August and 4 November 1917, F. M. Twisleton, Anzac NZ, The Liddell Collection, University of Leeds.
59. Powles, *The New Zealanders*, 20.
60. John Robertson, *With the Cameliers in Palestine* (Dunedin: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1938), 147.

61. Powles, *The New Zealanders*, 121.
62. Harper, *Johnny Enzed*, 482.
63. Kinloch, *Devils on Horses*, 162.
64. Robertson, *With the Cameliers*, 81.
65. Harper, *Johnny Enzed*, 497.
66. Kinloch, *Devils on Horses*, 204–5.
67. Powles, *The New Zealanders*, 151.
68. Quoted in Kinloch, *Devils on Horses*, 226.
69. Garioch (Garry) Thomas Clunie, diary entry, 14 November 1917, G. T. Clunie, *From Gallipoli to Palestine: The War Writings of Sergeant GT Clunie of the Wellington Mounted Rifles, 1914–1919*, eds. Kevin Clunie and Ron Austin (McCrae, Australia: Slouch Hat Publications, 2009), 171.
70. A.H. Wilkie, *Official War History of the Wellington Mounted Rifles Regiment 1914–1919* (Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs Limited, 1924), 171.
71. Powles, *The New Zealanders*, 264–65.
72. Harper, *Johnny Enzed*, 504–5.
73. Harper, *Johnny Enzed*, 483.
74. Harper, *Dark Journey*, 128–29; McGibbon, *New Zealand's Western Front*, 135.
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79. Harper, *Dark Journey*, 126.
80. Joy, quoted in Lauris Edmond, ed., *Women in Wartime: New Zealand Women Tell Their Story* (Wellington: Government Printing Office, 1986), 105–7.
81. F.M. Hamill to Mrs E. Knight, letter 31 October 1917, MS Papers 5548, File 11, ATL.
82. Mrs E. Knight to Georgie, letter nd, MS Papers 5548, File 10, ATL.
83. Harper, *Dark Journey*, 126.
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CHAPTER 11

# 1917 in Flanders Fields: The Seeds for the Commemorative War Landscape in Belgian Flanders

*Piet Chielens*

'Flanders fields', the Belgian part of the western front, ran from Nieuwpoort/Nieuport on the coast of the North Sea to the river Lys, on the border with France at Armentières. The military campaigns on this front continued for almost four years, from October 1914 to the end of September 1918. Today it is a key *genius loci* for most nations who took part in the First World War. The destroyed and then reconstructed city of Ieper/Ypres is a particularly important site, which is visited annually by hundreds of thousands of visitors from all over the world. What happened in Flanders in 1917 helped to shape a commemorative landscape that is quintessentially linked with our image of the First World War to this day.

A number of national identities are connected to the military events in Flanders in 1917. The Ypres salient ranks among the most terrible and international battlefields of the war. No less than five major battles occurred between October 1914 and October 1918. These battles, and in particular those of 1917, involved participants from across the globe and were among the most destructive of the whole conflict in terms of lives lost. The summer of 1917 also saw many new arrivals other than fighting troops

P. Chielens (✉)
In Flanders Fields Museum, Ieper, Belgium



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on the Flanders front, including labour forces from China and the West Indies. But for the Flemish too, the Flanders front in that year was essential. Flemish identity was shaped by the events of 1917. In international reflections on the legacy of the First World War, it is often overlooked that Flanders also found its myth of emancipation on the battlefields of 1914 to 1918.

In July 1917, the architect Sir Edwin Landseer Lutyens (1869–1944) visited the battlefields of Flanders and France. He had been asked by the newly constituted (Imperial, now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission (IWGC) to form an opinion of how commemoration should be organised after the war. Lutyens's proposals helped to create a commemorative landscape that has kept its tragic history in place, even today. His initiatives, including the Commission's Memorials to the Missing, enabled a commemorative landscape in Flanders that focused on inclusivity: the world could come to Flanders to remember the war and mourn the loss of their loved ones. Importantly, Flanders remains a key (and possibly *the* key) site for locals and visitors to contemplate the First World War and its myriad legacies.

The In Flanders Fields Museum (IFFM) in Ypres aims to accommodate and address the many different and sometimes opposing nationalities whose identities are connected in some way to the western front or the First World War more generally. It aims to look after their unique memorial and bereavement needs, as well as represent the war as an expression of a universal sense of the horror and grief caused by the terrible losses suffered in the region. The museum's representation of the war is therefore bound to be multi-voiced and inclusive.

## The Utmost West: The Front in Flanders from 1914 to 1918

The western front, which ran from Nieuwpoort to the Swiss border, was of utmost strategic importance to the course of the First World War. The Flanders front, which marked the first 85 kilometres of that front, was a key site of military operations. The front was constant but also witnessed five major offensives. The first and last were of extreme strategic importance: the first (in 1914) because it created the front, the last (which began on 28 September 1918), because it finally brought trench warfare to an end.

The 1914 battles in Flanders, which raged from mid-October to the end of the year, were decisive in shaping this part of the western front. The combined battle of the Yser (17 October–11 November 1914) and the first battle of Ypres (which officially waged from 20 October to 22 November, but in reality continued until the end of that year), created two distinct battlefields. The two regions were linked together by a series of trench lines, but their geography and military fate were quite different. In the north, the German advance in 1914 was held up by formidable inundations that were maintained for the next four years. Until the summer of 1917, the line was held by the French and the Belgian armies, and the inundation was such that no major offensive could be launched there. As a result, it was a relatively calm front, defended mainly by the Belgian Army.

The Belgian troops who held the sector were inspired by their king, Albert I. At his behest, they refused to assist in any of the major allied offensives in order to vouchsafe Belgium's ongoing neutrality. Since its establishment as an independent country, Belgium had maintained its position in Europe as a permanently neutralised state and the king and government hoped to protect that status after the present war finished. As a result, Belgium's military activities during the war were intended to be defensive only. Belgium never declared war on Germany. It was only in the final stages of the war, during the final advance in Flanders in September 1918 that the Belgian army joined the allied offensive.

On either flank of the Belgian Army, a French detachment was stationed to help secure the line. On several occasions, their help was much needed. In June 1917, the French detachment at Nieuwpoort was replaced by troops of the British Fourth Army, as part of the British offensive towards Ostend and Zeebrugge. The plan for an amphibious operation supported by an infantry attack along the coast failed, and the British had to cede some ground. In the autumn, the French returned.

The inundations started a little south of Nieuwpoort and went as far as Steenstraat, only seven kilometres north of Ypres. The Ypres salient was situated to the south of this 'no man's water'. This curving front, which bulged into the German positions, was formed during the First Battle of Ypres. A huge force of French and British troops defended Ypres from 20 October 1914 onwards. They prevented the German armies' final chance of breaking through to the Channel ports, and so to possibly encircle the Allied armies. To many German officers this 1914 stand at Ypres meant that the war could probably never be won.

The First Battle of Ypres was key to establishing the western front. The Second Battle of Ypres, fought in 1915, achieved infamy as the first battle that included large-scale use of asphyxiating gas, which the Germans released on 22 April 1915. The 1915 Ypres campaign helped to carve out the reputation of the First World War as an inhuman war, needlessly cruel, and industrial: a war of machines against humans. But the bloody Ypres offensive of 1917 (the Third Battle of Ypres) made the Flanders front even more iconic, and solidified the lasting image of Flanders as a carnage in the mud: a supreme example of senseless war.

The 1917 British offensive at Ypres was the most costly in terms of human lives lost in Belgium's history. In West-Flanders, between 1914 and 1918, over half a million men and women died as a result of the war. At least 165,000 (or more than 30 per cent of all fatalities in Belgium) died during the 1917 Third Battle of Ypres. That campaign started in June 1917 with the Battle of Messines and officially ended in November at the village of Passchendaele. In the context of the horrendous 'bloodletting' battles of the Somme and Verdun, waged in 1916, it remains hard to understand that such massive waste of human live as witnessed during the Ypres campaigns in 1917 was still possible. Flanders became one of the supreme killing-fields of the First World War, and would be remembered as such for generations to come (Illustration 11.1).

## Founding Myths

By 1917, the British armies on the western front consisted not only of divisions recruited in the United Kingdom and Ireland, but also of troops from all of its dominions and colonies. The year 1917 witnessed the arrival of British troops from across the empire and labourers from the West Indies and China. They added even greater diversity to the existing range of over 50 nationalities (in today's terms) who played a part in the war in Flanders. After the war, pilgrims from all of these nations were welcomed back to commemorate the war and the fallen, in particular their own relatives. Some came back immediately, others only much later. Just after the war visitors were not only welcomed because these pilgrims brought money to the completely devastated region but also because the local population who had largely been refugees during the war and had returned from France, Great Britain, or the Netherlands, understood that the history of the war was as important to these foreign visitors as it was to themselves. The founding myths of Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, and

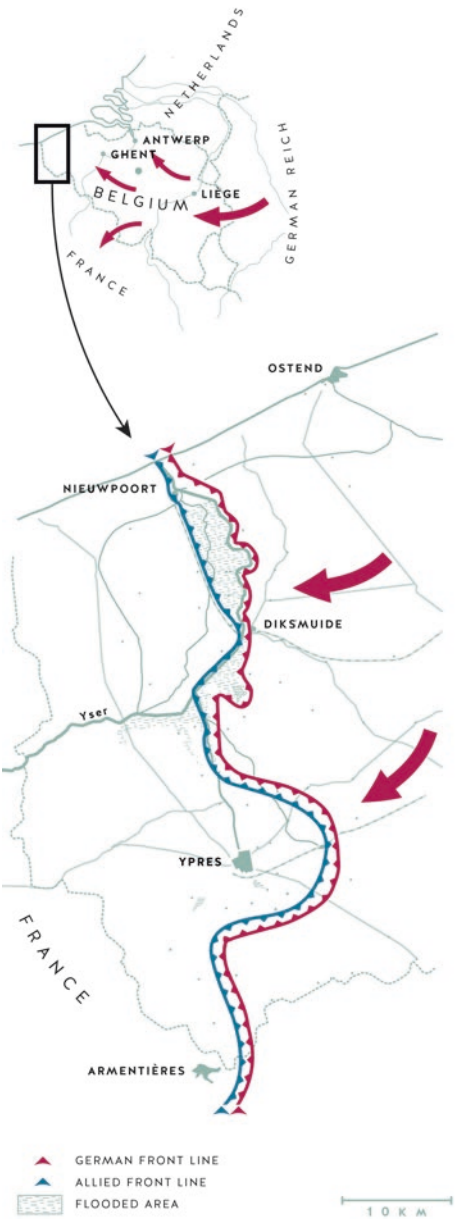


**Illustration 11.1** The front in Belgium. Source: In Flanders Fields Museum (IFFM)

their extreme losses in the Ypres salient, were similar to and recognised as being just as important as the myth of the Flemish soldiers' sacrifice on the Yser front.

## Flemish Independence Movements

The Flemish language problems and independence claims were present in Belgium long before the war, but actions in the spring and summer of 1917 in the Belgian army on the Yser front helped to turn this largely intellectual movement into a mass movement and a political force that has shaped the political structure of Belgium to this day. The issue of the Flemish language as it was first called, arose within the new Belgian state at the celebrations for the 25th anniversary of the Belgian revolution of 1830. Flemish intellectuals voiced their grievances about the total absence of Flemish or Dutch in public life. They would have to wait another 25 years for the first important laws to be passed regarding the use of Dutch in legal matters and public administration in Flanders. And there were still many more years to go before language legislation was applied within official education.

Before the First World War, Flemish Belgians had no options for higher education in the Dutch language. It took the general military reform of 1913 for the Dutch language to receive equal status to French in the army. The official equality of Dutch next to French did not, however, mean that this was already a fact for the army on the Yser. The predominantly French-speaking officer corps had obviously not adapted to the new situation, and there was little enthusiasm for the change. The first Belgian (acting) Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Maximilien Wielemans (1863–1917), who was of Flemish background, was a moderate supporter of Flemish demands in the army, but when he died unexpectedly on 5 January 1917, there was still a long way to go. Until then, Flemish language demands in the Yser army were modestly aired in 'study circles' run by junior army chaplains and non-commissioned or subaltern officers, who had been novices or university students before the war. There they had learned about the inferior position of the Flemish language and culture, and communicating this insight to the 'common Flemish soldier' on the Yser came as natural to them as their teachings to make them good Christians and 'morally decent' soldiers.

## The Front Movement

Wielemans' successor, the Walloon (French-speaking Belgian) Lieutenant General Louis Ruquoy (1861–1937), was more suspicious about the burgeoning Flemish consciousness in the Flemish part of the army. Shortly after his appointment, collaborationist militants in occupied Belgium decided to establish a Council of Flanders as an executive body, effectively creating Flemish self-rule under the authority of the German occupier. Ruquoy feared that any form of sympathy for the Flemish Movement in the army verged on betrayal of the Belgian struggle against Germany. All support for or dissemination of Flemish demands was forbidden in the Belgian Army. Any suspicion of dissidence was punished.

This forced the emerging Front Movement, which propagated Flemish demands and had an increasingly political and radical character, to go underground. In this climate of suspicion and prohibition, a series of open letters and pamphlets was circulated in the army to publicise the Flemish cause. The letters were far from perfect, as literary efforts or as political pamphlets, but from July 1917 onwards a growing number of soldiers who had been recruited in Flanders became aware of Flemish rights. Little by little, every frustration built up during this 'endless bloody war' increasingly became part of their perception of the injustice that they were suffering as Flemish soldiers.

In the final year of the war, every single one of the Flemish dead became a martyr for Flemish rights. The army leaders' attempts to suppress these developments only encouraged their feelings. When during—and particularly immediately after—the war, the separate commemoration of fallen Flemish soldiers was also opposed and, in some cases, even prohibited or violated by Belgian authorities, the battle for equal language rights took on a new dimension. What the Flemish movement had not managed to do for over 70 years became a reality in the years after the war. The Front Movement, which had created the open letters, became a Front Party, which succeeded in placing Flemish grievances at the top of the political agenda. Partly because of the Belgian authorities' reluctance to implement the promised reforms rapidly, what had been a modest political movement became a mass movement, which to this day continues to influence the political landscape of the strongly regionalised kingdom of Belgium. The First World War, which had had a unifying effect in 1914, rallying most Belgian round the flag in defence of the country when it was invaded in August, was to achieve the opposite from the summer of 1917 onwards.

## National Mythologies

What 'the Yser' represented and still represents to Flemish nationalist identity is comparable to what 'Gallipoli' and 'ANZAC' mean to New Zealanders and Australians, or 'The Somme' and 'Flanders' mean to the British collective memory of the First World War. Even if historical data may suggest that other theatres of war were more destructive or strategically of greater importance, these 'iconic' military locations and battles have effaced them in emotional importance. This is particularly telling when you consider that the number of fatalities in the Belgian Army during the war of movement (4 August–15 October 1914 and 28 September–11 November 1918), were not much smaller than those of the Yser front during almost four years of conflict (1914–18). Or that the number of Belgian military casualties on the Yser front was smaller than the number of Belgian civilians killed, either by German terror and forced labour, by war-related illnesses, or as collateral damage from shelling and aerial bombardments (from all sides).[1] Similarly, the number of fatalities of ANZAC troops at Gallipoli was smaller than those who fell in Belgium during 1917.[2] Yet Gallipoli rather than Passchendaele determines the national mythology of New Zealand.

The idea of Flanders in the collective memory and mythology of nations is also reflected by nomenclature used to describe the battles on the Flanders front. The 1917 campaigns in the Ypres salient are widely remembered by just the name of the village of 'Passchendaele', the British offensive's goal and one which was reached after a hundred days of agonising battle. But the 1917 campaigns reached much further than Passchendaele. At the time, the British Commander Field Marshall Douglas Haig wanted the world to believe that the taking of Passchendaele in November 1917 was a victory. Today the British offensive in Flanders in 1917 is considered a failure because of its enormous losses for small gain. The technical and more neutral 'official' name of the 'Third Battle of Ypres' would therefore be more appropriate and more accurate as a historical reference. But the myth of Passchendaele remains and the depth of emotion attached to the name continues to influence how we consider the war.

## Casualty Map

The IFFM has tried to break through the mythology of the Flanders front by combining casualty lists with aerial photography of the Belgian front.[3] The project combines two independent developments: aerial photography, which offers the most accurate positioning of front lines and actions, on the one hand, and a nominal count of all individuals who died or were mortally wounded along the front, a project called The Names List,[4] on the other. In combining the two, the IFFM produced a map of all the allied attacks and advances from 7 June 1917 (the Battle of Messines) to 3 December 1917 (the Polderhoek attack). For each large or small sector that was won during the long campaign by the allies, the museum's staff researched which troops were involved. For each of the units, the casualties sustained were counted. These counts offer a useful index to the loss of human life along the Flanders front, albeit only on the allied side (Illustration 11.2).

Of course, such plotting can only ever be an approximation of actual casualties, and thus far, the IFFM team has only worked with data for the allied side. A similar overview of the German side of the front cannot as yet be given, mainly because The Names List does not allow for an equally accurate count of German mortal casualties. Since the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V.* (the German War Graves Commission) does not commemorate the missing, there are still many unknown German soldiers. The museum is in the process of trying to trace these names using a variety of sources, including those registered on war memorials, in published *Ehrentafel* (rolls of honour), or regimental histories, but this research is ongoing and far from completed.

Nevertheless, the maps that are now available, both in absolute terms (number of casualties in a certain sector) and in relative terms (the number of casualties per hectare), give a very detailed image of the Flanders campaigns. They show that despite the initial 'success' on 31 July 1917, the sectors taken on that opening day of the Third Battle of Ypres and held at considerable cost during the following weeks, were among the most expensive in terms of human lives lost (see A, Illustration 11.2. Note all letter indicators A-G refer to this same illustration). Throughout the campaign, the difficulty of making progress on the Geluveld Plateau was obvious, and indeed the most costly area was the small strip either side of the Menin Road, reached by the end of September and held until the small bulge at Polderhoek Spur was taken by the New Zealand Division on 3

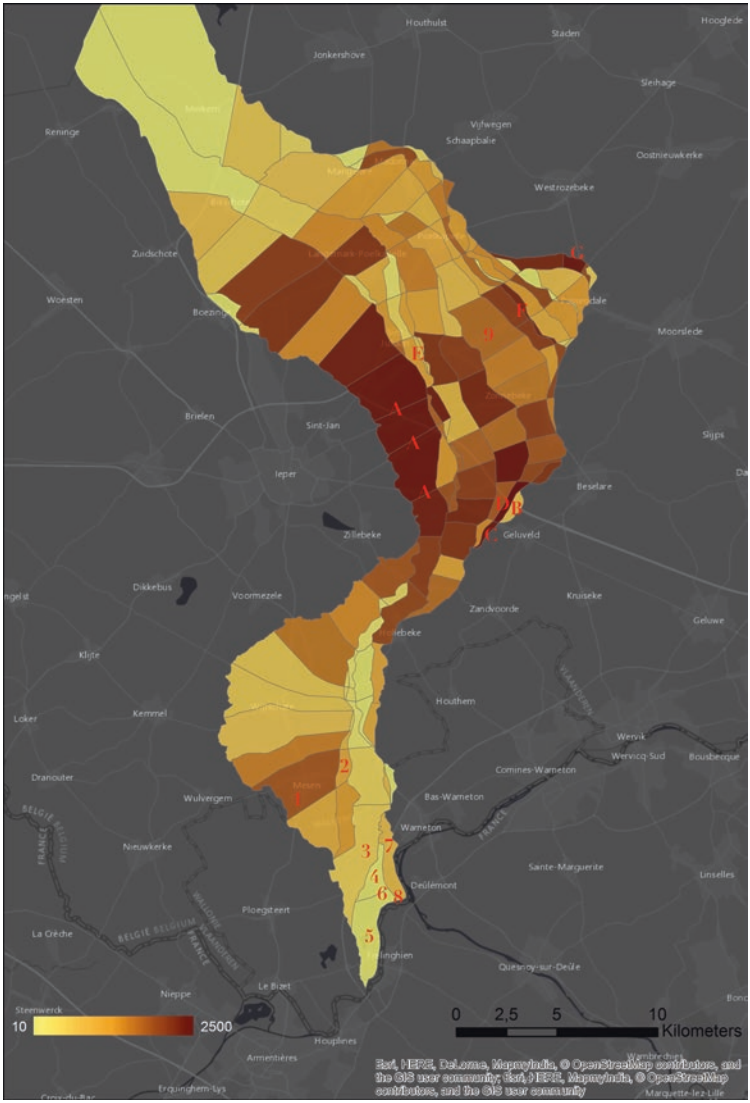


**Illustration 11.2** Casualty map of the 1917 battles in the Ypres salient. The number of mortal casualties per sector is expressed by colour, from pale yellow (12 dead for a sector won and held—i.e., the inundated plane near Merkem), to dark red (2497 dead for a sector won and held—i.e., the small strip north of the Menin Road, west of Polderhoek Spur). Source: In Flanders Fields Museum (IFFM)

December (B). To the South of the Menin Road, towards Tower Hamlets, the advance did not exceed two kilometres, but the casualties were enormous: with 95 dead per hectare (C) in the final sector, and over 76 dead per hectare in the northern sector towards Reutel (D). Taking the Wilhelm Stellung from mid-August to 20 September (E), and the Flandern II Stellung and beyond in October (F) was equally costly. The losses at and around the village of Passchendaele were certainly staggering. The Canadian corps lost over 4700 lives in one month. But the high number of fatalities in the sector of Mosselmarkt (G) was not only due to Canadian losses, but also to further attacks and counterattacks later in November and early December 1917, when the battle was officially long over.

Altogether, the weather played a major role, but the terrain and the German defences added to the sheer impossible task laid out for the British and Commonwealth troops. It was not lousy strategy nor fate alone that caused the high loss of life. It was not only the road to Passchendaele that was deadly. Rather, the combination of all factors ensured the tragedy: the land itself, with its succession of low hills and wet valleys, the liquid mud caused by the rain but especially by the destruction through immense artillery fire of the natural drainage system, and their geographic situation next to the German defence works, which occupied the high ground. These factors were exacerbated by the lack of care taken in calculating risks by the military leadership. The Passchendaele tragedy was circumstantial and human.

## New Zealand

The IFFM casualty maps can also indicate how devastating the campaigns of 1917 were to particular nationalities. As an example, consider the losses endured by the New Zealand Division during the Third Battle of Ypres (Tables 11.1, 11.2, and 11.3). The New Zealanders were involved in the campaign from early June to early December 1917. The total number of New Zealand lives lost during the First World War in Belgium stands at 5355. These losses occurred largely in 1917.

## *Genius loci*

Of course, using a numerical approach to show the scale of the 1917 slaughter is only one way of representing the war and its devastation. Ever since the war, the enormous loss of life sustained there has been very

**Table 11.1** Losses endured by the New Zealand Division at Messines, June–August 1917

| *Where* | *Date (1917)* | *Deaths* | *Reference Illustration 2* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Messines | 7 June | 550 | 1 |
| East of Messines | 8–12 June | 257 | 2 |
| Southeast of Messines | 13–15 June | 143 | 3 |
| East of Ploegsteert | 16 June–5 July | 202 | 4 |
| Le Touquet—Pont Rouge | 25 June–5 July | 40 | 5 |
| West of Warneton | 6 July–3 August | 295 | 6 |
| Southeast of Messines | 4–9 August | 111 | 7 |
| Pont Rouge | 10–31 August | 190 | 8 |
| **Total New Zealand deaths at Messines** | | **1788** | |

Source: 'The Names List', In Flanders Fields Museum (IFFM)

**Table 11.2** Losses endured by the New Zealand Division at Passchendaele, October–December 1917

| *Where* | *Date (1917)* | *Deaths* | *Reference Illustration 2* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gravenstafel | 1–5 October | 609 | 9 |
| Bellevue Spur | 9–15 October | 980 | F |
| Polderhoek Spur | 2–3 December | 209 | B |
| **Total New Zealand deaths at Passchendaele** | | 1798 | |

Source: 'The Names List', In Flanders Fields Museum (IFFM)

**Table 11.3** Total losses endured by the New Zealand Division in Belgium, 1916–19

| *Year* | *Deaths* |
|---|---|
| 1916 | 3 |
| 1917 | 4843 |
| 1918 | 508 |
| 1919 | 2 |
| **Total New Zealand deaths in Belgium** | **5356** |

Source: 'The Names List', In Flanders Fields Museum (IFFM)

tangible in the fields of Flanders. This is largely due to the insight of the (Imperial) War Graves Commission (IWGC) and to the initiatives of Edwin Lutyens, one of its principal architects. Lutyens and his associates ensured that Flanders would retain its place as the *genius loci* for the war's commemorations.

When Lutyens visited the battlefields of Flanders and France in 1917 his aim was to find a means of remembering the war dead. Lutyens travelled with Herbert Baker, another of the future principal architects of the commission, and with Charles Aitken, director of the National Gallery of British Art (now Tate Britain).[5] On 12 July 1917, Lutyens wrote to his wife that, in his opinion, no other monument was needed than the graves that were already there:

> The graveyards, haphazard from the needs of much to do and little time for thought. And then a ribbon of isolated graves like a milky way across miles of country where men were tucked in where they fell. Ribbons of little crosses each touching each across a cemetery, set in a wilderness of annuals and where one sort of flower has grown the effect is charming, easy and oh so pathetic. One thinks for the moment no other monument is needed.[6]

After the war, the Commission would have to accept that it was practically impossible to leave every grave in its original location. The War Graves Commission set the minimum number of unmovable graves to groups of 40. Whenever a group of 40 graves or more was found, a cemetery of the Commission was built. In the years that followed, the Commission also established many other monuments, including memorials to the missing and Lutyens' magnificent, non-denominational Stone of Remembrance, which was placed in all cemeteries that counted more than 600 graves.

Nevertheless, it became a principle that the cemeteries should remain where they were created by the circumstances of war. This principle more than any other has shaped the war landscapes of Flanders, and of all other theatres of war of the Commonwealth, since the First World War. It has also left an indelible marker on the lives and livelihoods of West-Flanders' residents. Over 140 IWGC cemeteries are kept in their original location in the region. As such, the geography of not only the battles but also the medical evacuation lines and other circumstances that caused the graveyards to be where they are today, was partly preserved. This sense of place, this *genius loci*, is one of the strongest elements defining the war landscape and its commemorative allure.

## The *genius loci*: Victor Spencer and The Huts Cemetery

How significant Flanders fields are for registering the special meaning of the war is well illustrated by the death of one soldier: New Zealander Pte. Victor Manson Spencer. By the time the New Zealand Division left Belgium at the end of February 1918, most of New Zealand's dead in Belgium had fallen. Only the New Zealand Entrenching Battalion stayed on, and would lose another 140 men. The rest of the New Zealand force left Belgium for France, where they were stationed until the end of the war. One of the final things the New Zealanders did before leaving, however, was to bury Victor Spencer from Otautau, a man who had served in the Otago infantry since October 1915. On 24 February 1918, Spencer was shot at dawn for desertion.[7] That same day, Achiel Van Walleghem, the parish priest of Dikkebus, wrote:

> 24 February 1918, Sunday: At the Comyn Farm an entire New Zealand Regiment gets on two long trains, of 45 wagons each, and 40 men per wagon. A little time later they come through Lamerant's Farm most probably leaving for another front.[8]

The exact place of Spencer's death and burial today has returned to a peaceful agricultural tranquility, yet it has kept the historic footprint of 24 February 1918. The only obvious reminder of the war and of Spencer's fate is The Huts Cemetery, where Victor Spencer is buried (Plot XV, Row B, Grave 10). The cemetery was opened in July 1917, when field ambulances used the wooden huts alongside the nearby railway line to set up dressing stations. Over one thousand burials occurred between July 1917 and the end of April 1918, when the spot became too dangerous to maintain a medical facility, as a result of the German spring offensive. The graveyard was also extensively used by allied artillery units, who operated wagon lines in the vicinity. Artillerymen occupy 63 per cent of the graves. After the war, Lutyens designed the cemetery himself.[9]

Because of the cemetery, one can put together Victor Spencer's end-of-life story. The landscape preserved its historical layers, but it is only thanks to cemeteries and monuments that we can or would want to appreciate them. The combination of Van Walleghem's diary entry and Spencer's headstone bearing the same date, allows us to reconstruct part of that fatal morning of 24 February 1918. One can imagine that while the New

Zealanders were relieved to leave this wretched Belgian front (the most costly theatre of war the New Zealand Division had thus far experienced), one last difficult task had to be dealt with: an execution and burial of a fellow soldier, a comrade in arms. As everybody was getting on the trains, only a few men had to carry the body a little beyond the leaving platform to the cemetery to give the last of the New Zealand soldiers to be executed his final resting place. The elements are locked in time and space, in the *genius loci* of the place, as can be seen in the aerial photograph of 1918 geo-rectified and laid next to the present-day ortho-photo: the features of The Huts Cemetery, the Comyn Farm and railway sidings and the New Zealand Divisional Field Punishment Camp where Victor Spencer was executed, are all present in the same, unchanged constellation (Illustration 11.3).

This *genius loci* allowed me not only to accompany Victor Spencer's family from Invercargill and Bluff on Anzac Day 2007 to his grave, but also to the extraordinary circumstances of his death.

## The Missing

Despite the great effort by the IWGC to bury the dead and honour their graves in historical graveyards, only a little more than half of all the Commonwealth dead were able to be honoured in name. In Belgium the numbers are as follows: 210,690 men (and a few women) belonging to the British imperial forces died or were mortally wounded in Belgium. Only 108,096 or 51.3 per cent have a known grave. If the Commission did not want to exclude the other 48.7 per cent from their commemorative endeavours, they had to create an additional form of remembrance.[10]

Two other members of the first Commission, writer Rudyard Kipling and Red Cross representative Sir William E. Garstin, had lost sons in the war. Neither knew in 1917 if or where they were buried.[11] By December 1918, they helped to inspire the Commission to list all the missing nominally. At first it was suggested to do this in the existing cemeteries. By 1922, however, it was clear that special and much larger memorials, each in a geographically and historically defined area, would have to be erected.[12] The planned national British war memorial in Ypres was to become the first of a limited number of 'missing memorials' dedicated to the missing soldiers of Great Britain and the Commonwealth—with the exception of New Zealand, whose government opted to create its own national memorials of the missing. On 24 July 1927, the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial


**Illustration 11.3** The Huts Cemetery, Dikkebus. Comparison then and now: ortho-photo 2015 and aerial photograph 1918. (1) The Huts Cemetery. (2) Comyn Farm. (3) The railway sidings. (4) New Zealand Divisional Field Punishment Camp. Source: In Flanders Fields Museum (IFFM)



**Illustration 11.3** (continued)

to the Missing was inaugurated. It was not an allied monument nor an international one (that is, one that included the missing soldiers of the enemy), but the step to commemorate together all troops from the British empire (barring those from New Zealand) can, in today's world, be interpreted as a first attempt towards transnational commemoration.

## Multivoiced and Inclusive Legacies

The example set by the original War Graves Commission of trying to be as complete as possible in the commemoration of all its soldiers and in acknowledging that every casualty counted, was an inspiration to the IFFM, whose mission is to accommodate the 'many voices' that defined and define the meaning of the Belgian war front. To that end, it is the principle of inclusivity that permeates the museum's ethos.

The IFFM and its research centre are visited by people from across the planet. It receives requests to provide details for casualties from many different nations, cultures, and ethnic groups. The addendum to this chapter offers an overview of all cultures, nations, and ethnic groups who were present at the front in Flanders during the First World War.[13] The list is certainly not complete. The ultimate and frequently sole proof that a member of a certain community was present at the front in Flanders or in its hinterland is a gravestone, a name on a monument, or an entry in a death register. In some cases, the museum has written confirmation, a film fragment, a photo, or an object 'proving' their presence.

But often there are no tangible markers, or (more frequently these days) the IFFM staff can state that there *was* nothing. Of course, to a family on pilgrimage no answer to their query about the grave or the death of a relative is absolute. 'We do not know' is an unacceptable response to their search. In 2003, the IFFM started a project to make an integral and integrated list of all casualties who died or were mortally wounded as a consequence of the war in Belgium. The Names List builds day by day and hopes to achieve an inclusive database of all the war's casualties in Belgium. Over the years, a more inclusive register of war deaths, including the often-overlooked groups of civilians and of German, French, and Belgian missing soldiers (who were not commemorated nominally by their respective war graves' institutes) has come into view, as do exceptionally small groups of casualties, or even individual cases, that are all equally part of this inclusive project. They all form part of the war's *genius loci* that was, and is, Flanders.

As the Belgian case has proved, the dead can be at once part of different and opposing groups. A Belgian soldier who died on the Yser Front could be Flemish, Walloon, or from Brussels, he could be Flemish- or French-speaking. The differing interpretations of the history of the war in both parts of the country, particularly regarding collaboration with the occupying enemy in the First and also Second World Wars, continues to influence a significant amount of the political discourse in Belgium, even if the facts presented in the discourse are often historically inaccurate. As a result, to this day, the significance of the First World War, even as we commemorate its centenary, has a distinct character in the different communities of the country. Their commemorations reflect both political meaning and communal commemorative ideas. One could argue that the differing interpretations may be the reason why the nine Belgian soldiers who, like Victor Spencer, were executed by their comrades for desertion or cowardice, have not yet received any recognition from the Belgian authorities, because, although the executed men came from Flanders, Brussels, and Wallonia, one group does not trust that recognising the fate of the others would not serve a political agenda in the present. For similar reasons, in Wallonia, the educational programme accompanying the First World War's centenary focuses more on resistance against the German occupiers and defence issues than on empathy for the casualties and on pacifist tendencies, the latter more widespread in Flanders.

These political concerns transcend the purpose of the IFFM. West-Flanders' landscape of commemoration, its numerous *lieux de mémoire*, are determined by the great sense of place, which confirms the war's primary message of tragedy. The world comes to West-Flanders and the ever-growing multinational and multicultural rituals of commemoration continue to play a part in the public life of the region. In this respect, Flanders fields is more multi-voiced and inclusive in its approach to understanding the war and its importance than the rest of Belgium. Among the residents of this region, there seems to be a general understanding that the legacy of the war can mean different things to different people, nations, and cultures, and even that the war can have contradictory meaning. The legacy is largely one of bonding and binding of groups, of people, of countries, via the historical links that were first made during the war. This agonistic (as opposed to antagonistic positing 'us' against 'them') model of commemoration presents a formidable legacy that makes the commemoration of the First World War an inspirational and aspirational asset of the region.

These same agonistic messages explain why Ypres calls itself a 'city of peace' and why an institute like the IFFM not only studies and explains the history of the First World War at the front in West-Flanders, but also fully invests in the permanent actualising of its educational and cultural programmes. In such a setting, remembering the Great War becomes an inspiration to contemplate cultural and national identities, and reflect on international relationships the world over. The *genius loci* of Flanders' many war fronts extends to this day.

## Addendum

**Table 11.4** Countries of origin

| Present-day countries of the places of birth of those lost during the First World War in Belgium | |
|---|---|
| **Sovereign states, member states of the United Nations** | |
| 1. | Algeria |
| 2. | Antigua and Barbuda |
| 3. | Argentina |
| 4. | Armenia |
| 5. | Australia |
| 6. | Austria |
| 7. | Bahamas |
| 8. | Bangladesh |
| 9. | Barbados |
| 10. | Belarus |
| 11. | Belgium |
| 12. | Belize |
| 13. | Benin |
| 14. | Bermuda |
| 15. | Botswana |
| 16. | Brazil |
| 17. | Bulgaria |
| 18. | Burkina Faso |
| 19. | Canada |
| 20. | Chile |
| 21. | China |
| 22. | Congo |
| 23. | Congo, The Democratic Republic of the |
| 24. | Côte d'Ivoire |
| 25. | Cyprus |
| 26. | Czech Republic |
| 27. | Denmark |

(*continued*)

**Table 11.4** (continued)

| | |
|---|---|
| 28. | Dominica |
| 29. | Egypt |
| 30. | Estonia |
| 31. | Fiji |
| 32. | Finland |
| 33. | France |
| 34. | Germany |
| 35. | Greece |
| 36. | Grenada |
| 37. | Guinea |
| 38. | Guyana |
| 39. | Iceland |
| 40. | India |
| 41. | Ireland |
| 42. | Italy |
| 43. | Jamaica |
| 44. | Japan |
| 45. | Latvia |
| 46. | Lesotho |
| 47. | Liberia |
| 48. | Lithuania |
| 49. | Luxembourg |
| 50. | Madagascar |
| 51. | Mali |
| 52. | Malta |
| 53. | Mauritania |
| 54. | Mauritius |
| 55. | Mexico |
| 56. | Moldova, Republic of |
| 57. | Monaco |
| 58. | Montenegro |
| 59. | Morocco |
| 60. | Myanmar |
| 61. | Nepal |
| 62. | Netherlands |
| 63. | New Zealand |
| 64. | Nicaragua |
| 65. | Niger |
| 66. | Nigeria |
| 67. | Norway |
| 68. | Pakistan |
| 69. | Paraguay |
| 70. | Peru |
| 71. | Poland |
| 72. | Portugal |
| 73. | Romania |

(*continued*)

**Table 11.4** (continued)

| | |
|---|---|
| 74. | Russian Federation |
| 75. | Saint Kitts and Nevis |
| 76. | Saint Lucia |
| 77. | Saint Vincent and the Grenadines |
| 78. | Saudi Arabia |
| 79. | Senegal |
| 80. | Serbia |
| 81. | Sierra Leone |
| 82. | Singapore |
| 83. | South Africa |
| 84. | Spain |
| 85. | Sri Lanka |
| 86. | Swaziland |
| 87. | Sweden |
| 88. | Switzerland |
| 89. | Tonga |
| 90. | Trinidad and Tobago |
| 91. | Tunisia |
| 92. | Turkey |
| 93. | Ukraine |
| 94. | United Kingdom |
| 95. | United States |
| 96. | Vietnam |
| 97. | Zimbabwe |
| **Non-independent countries or not members of the United Nations** | |
| 98. | Cook Islands (free association with New Zealand) |
| 99. | Falkland Islands (Malvinas) (UK) |
| 100. | French Guiana (F) |
| 101. | French Polynesia (F) |
| 102. | Gibraltar (UK) |
| 103. | Greenland (autonomous part of Denmark) |
| 104. | Guadeloupe (F) |
| 105. | Guernsey (British Crown) |
| 106. | Hong Kong (China) |
| 107. | Isle of Man (British Crown) |
| 108. | Jersey (British Crown) |
| 109. | Macedonia, Republic of (no member of UNO) |
| 110. | Martinique (F) |
| 111. | New Caledonia (F) |
| 112. | Niue (free association with New Zealand) |
| 113. | Réunion (F) |
| 114. | Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha (UK) |
| 115. | Turks and Caicos Islands (UK) |

Source: 'The Names List', In Flanders Fields Museum (IFFM), 2017

## Notes

1. Belgian soldiers killed during the 5 months war of movement: 17,486;
   Belgian soldiers killed during the 47 months on the stabilised Yser Front: 20,892;
   Belgian civilians killed during the war: 25,735 (and counting).
   'The Names List', In Flanders Fields Museum, accessed August, 2017, http://www.inflandersfields.be/en/namelist.
2. ANZAC dead at Gallipoli 1915 and in Belgium 1917:
   A.I.F. in Gallipoli, 25 April–31 December 1915: 8852;
   N.Z.E.F. in Gallipoli, 25 April–31 December 1915: 2859;
   A.I.F. 1 June–31 December 1917 in Belgium: 12,722;
   N.Z.E.F. 1 June–31 December 1917 in Belgium: 4582.
   'Find War Dead and Cemeteries', Commonwealth War Graves Commission, accessed August, 2017, https://www.cwgc.org/find and 'The Names List'.
3. Birger Stichelbaut and Piet Chielens, *The Great War Seen from the Air: In Flanders Fields 1914–1918* (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2013).
4. 'The Names List'.
5. Julie Summers, *Remembered*: *The History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (London, New York: Merrell, 2007), 17.
6. Mary Lutyens, *Edwin Lutyens by His Daughter* (London: Viking, 1980), 153.
7. Julian Putkowski and Julian Sykes, *Shot at Dawn*: *Executions in World War One by Authority of the British Army Act* (London: Leo Cooper, 1989), 236.
8. Achiel van Walleghem, *Het Dagboek van Achiel Van Walleghem* (Tielt: Lannoo, 2014). An excellent translation in English by Guido Latré and Susan Reed appeared as: Achiel van Walleghem, *1917 – The Passchendaele Year. The British Army in Flanders*: *The Diary of Achiel Van Walleghem* (Brighton: Edward Everett Root Publishers, 2017).
9. Commonwealth War Graves Commission, http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/15500/THE%20HUTS%20CEMETERY.
10. 'The Names List'.
11. Lt. Charles W.N. Garstin's grave in Audregnies Churchyard, Hainaut, Belgium became known only at the Armistice, whilst the grave of Lt. John Kipling, Haisnes, France, could not be identified until 1992. The identity of the body in John Kipling's grave is disputed. See Tonie and Valmai Holt, *My Boy Jack? The Search for Kipling's Only Son* (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Books, 1998).
12. Philip Longworth, *The Unending Vigil*: *A History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 1917–1984* (London: Leo Cooper, 1985), 82–95.

13. Piet Chielens, Dominiek Dendooven, and Annick Vandenbilcke, *In Flanders Fields Museum*: *Museum Guide* (Ieper: In Flanders Fields Museum, 2013), 86–88.

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CHAPTER 12

# Passchendaele: Remembering and Forgetting in New Zealand

*Jock Phillips*

Until quite recently, the 1917 battle of Passchendaele did not pre-occupy the commemorative culture of New Zealanders. The question as to why this was the case first drew my attention in the mid-1980s. At the time, I was writing a history of the Kiwi male stereotype.[1] I became interested in how war had shaped and reflected that stereotype, so I started reading diaries and letters of New Zealand soldiers in the First World War. I expected to find loyal colonials living out the British 'public school' ethos. Instead, I met men deeply cynical of the 'great adventure', appalled at the conditions they faced, and critical of their British allies. A good example were the letters of Leonard Hart, the son of lighthouse keepers, who had become a Railways cadet in Dunedin. He enlisted in early 1915, served in Gallipoli with the Otago Infantry Regiment, then moved with them to France. On 19 October 1917, Leonard wrote a letter to his parents and sister about the horrendous 12 October attack on Passchendaele Ridge. He eventually gave it to a mate for posting in England to avoid censorship.

Hart began: 'For the first time in our brief history as an army the New Zealanders failed in their objective with the most appalling slaughter I have ever seen. My Company went into action 180 strong and we came out thirty-two strong'. He described going up to the front line:

J. Phillips (✉)
NZHistoryJock, Wellington, New Zealand



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> Our track led over five miles of newly conquered ground without lines of communication, roads, or anything but shell holes half full of water. The weather had for some days been wet and cold and the mud was in places up to our knees. … It was quite common for a man to get stuck in the mud and have to get three or four to drag him out. You can have no idea of the utter desolation caused by modern shell fire. … The only structures which had stood the bombardment in any way at all were the German machine gun emplacements. These emplacements are marvellous structures made of concrete with walls often ten feet thick and the concrete reinforced throughout with railway irons and steel bands and bars. … The ground was strewn with the corpses of numerous Huns and Tommies.

Hart then described the attack. An artillery barrage was due to open at 5:25 a.m. on the German positions 150 yards ahead and then move forward every four minutes as the infantry advanced behind. It did not turn out like that:

> Through some blunder our artillery barrage opened up two hundred yards short of the specified range and thus opened right in the midst of us. It was a truly awful time—our own men getting cut to pieces in dozens by our own guns. Immediate disorganisation followed. … At length our barrage lifted and we all formed up and made a rush for the ridge. What was our dismay upon reaching almost to the top of the ridge to find a long line of practically undamaged German concrete machine gun emplacements with barbed wire entanglements in front of them fully fifty yards deep. The wire had been cut in a few places by our artillery but only sufficient to allow a few men through it at a time. Even then what was left of us made an attempt to get through the wire and a few actually penetrated as far as his emplacements only to be shot down as fast as they appeared. Dozens got hung up in the wire and shot down before their surviving comrades' eyes. … They were marvellous shots those Huns. We had lost nearly eighty per cent of our strength and gained about 300 yards of ground in the attempt. This 300 yards was useless to us for the Germans still held and dominated the ridge. We hung on all that day and night. … Some 'terrible blunder' has been made. Someone is responsible for that barbed wire not having been broken up by our artillery. Someone is responsible for the opening of our barrage in the midst of us instead of 150 yards ahead of us. Someone else is responsible for those machine gun emplacements being left practically intact, but the papers will report another glorious success, and no one except those who actually took part in it will know any difference.

Hart added that on the night before the attack they had discovered half a dozen Tommies, badly wounded and crying for help amid the frozen mud and water-logged shell holes, who had been left abandoned after an attack three days before. Hart was appalled: 'I suppose our armchair leaders call this British stubbornness. If this represents British stubbornness then it is time to call it by a new name. I would suggest callous brutality as a substitute'.[2]

On first reading Hart's account, I was deeply shocked. It inspired me to do some digging about Passchendaele. I discovered that internationally the term is used to describe the third battle of Ypres that was waged from 31 July to November 1917, in which there were about a quarter of a million Allied casualties.[3] The New Zealanders were directly involved in two actions—the successful advance at Gravenstafel on 4 October with the loss of no fewer than 484 dead (according to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) website)[4] and the event (sometimes called the attack on Bellevue Spur) described by Leonard Hart on 12 October 1917, which, it was initially believed, resulted in the deaths of 640 New Zealanders in about two hours (a figure subsequently revised to 843). But if we count those injured on the 12th who died in the subsequent three months, the actual number of deaths is 957.[5]

I realised that this must be the largest death toll in one day in New Zealand history, so why had I not heard about Passchendaele before? As a historian of New Zealand, I knew all about the 1931 Napier earthquake that caused 258 deaths and the 1953 Tangiwai railway disaster with 151. I knew about the battle for Gallipoli and the brief conquest of Chunuk Bair (when 507 New Zealanders died), but the attack on 12 October 1917 was entirely unfamiliar. Nor was I alone. Passchendaele and 12 October 1917 was a largely forgotten event within New Zealand.

I decided some years later that I would use my position as Chief Historian at the Department of Internal Affairs to hold a remembrance event on the 75th anniversary of the battle, which took place at the National War Memorial on 12 October 1992. That event received considerable press attention and many people came back after saying that the full horror of the disaster and the extent of the death toll were news to them too.[6] Eight years later, Glyn Harper published *Massacre at Passchendaele*, which began with the claim that this was 'an untold story', 'a tragedy without equal in New Zealand history', which 'remains unknown to most New Zealanders'.[7] Harper pointed out that the New Zealand amnesia about Passchendaele was in contrast with the battle's reputation in the United Kingdom, where it became a symbol for the ghastliness of the First World War.

That led me to ask why such a huge tragedy slipped from the consciousness of New Zealanders. Other New Zealand disasters have been followed by much soul-searching, and people responsible held to account—the Air New Zealand executives who covered up the possible cause of the Erebus crash in the Antarctica in 1979, the engineers who designed the Canterbury TV building in Christchurch which collapsed killing 115 people during the 2011 earthquake. In both cases, we asked: who was it who had blundered? But did New Zealanders ask such questions of Passchendaele, and if not, why not? Of course there is a huge difference between unexpected deaths in civilian life and deaths in war where participants are aware of the dangers. But the scale of the Passchendaele toll was such, and the circumstances so horrendous, that one might have expected many besides Leonard Hart to wonder about why it had happened and who was responsible. This chapter explores these questions by examining the New Zealand memory of Passchendaele, and particularly the 12 October debacle.[8]

For many New Zealanders, the first news of the battle came with a sad telegram telling of their son's or husband's death. Inevitably, they would want to know more about the circumstances. Often the telegram would be followed by a consoling letter from an officer or mate at the front reassuring the relatives that their loved one had not died in vain. For others, the most immediate source of information about the death might be the soldiers themselves. But here a crucial difference from the United Kingdom experience emerges. It would not have been long before British and Irish soldiers could tell their friends and relatives face-to-face about the awful experience. Many were sent back home to recover from injuries, others who had escaped injury soon had home leave. Either way, family and friends across the Channel would have learned the news first-hand before too long. But most of the New Zealanders injured at Passchendaele did not go home.[9] They were sent to hospitals in France and Great Britain. Those who survived the ordeal would continue to serve on the western front. They had the option of sending letters back home, but given the censorship restrictions there was little point in describing the war. Few took the opportunity to smuggle their accounts out as Hart did. Many of the survivors from Passchendaele did not get home until 1919, up to two years after the event.[10] By that time they were fêted as heroes who had won the war, and it was not surprising that they did not talk about the dark horrors of 1917.

If the soldiers were unable to tell their fellow New Zealanders about Passchendaele directly and immediately, then people were largely depen-

dent on press coverage. The general pattern of newspaper reports on war events involved initial brief telegraphed bulletins, then rather fuller accounts four or five days later written by correspondents such as the English reporter, Philip Gibbs, or New Zealand's official correspondent, Malcolm Ross.[11] These were followed, up to two months later, by detailed accounts arriving by mail. Australian reporters like Charles Bean and Keith Murdoch were well represented in the New Zealand media coverage. In general, both the newspapers and their correspondents were keen to paint the war in a positive way to reassure relatives of those serving and to maintain national morale. In 1917, coverage of the Ypres front began therefore in hopeful terms. In September, there were headlines such as 'British capture all their objectives' and 'Smashing blow'.[12] Readers were told that 'The infantry is fighting triumphantly, and the casualties are of the lightest'.[13] There were reassuring reports that the new German technique of fighting from pill-boxes with troops massed behind for counter-attacks rather than front-line trenches proved 'ineffective'.[14] Several correspondents suggested that the Germans were mutinous and that this was the last phase of the war. On 3 October, Philip Gibbs wrote that the Tommies told the Australians 'they only need to make a grimace at the Hun to make him "hands-up"'.[15]

On 6 and 8 October came the first reports of the Gravenstafel attack of 4 October. Beneath headlines such as 'Crushing defeat of picked German troops' came accounts of 'a smashing blow' (that phrase again), 'a complete victory', and 'the turning point of the war'.[16] Particular attention was paid to the success of the New Zealanders. Again headlines told the story: 'New Zealand troops never did better', 'New Zealanders' glorious achievement', 'Gallantry of high-spirited youngsters'.[17] The descriptions included several revealing historical comparisons. The first was that their success in scaling 'the heights of Abraham', as the ridge was called, rivalled General James Wolfe's famous ascent of the cliffs at Quebec to defeat the French on the plains of Abraham. The other comparison was Gallipoli where, as at Gravenstafel, the Kiwis worked alongside the Australians in climbing the heights.[18] The 4 October action was placed within a national and imperial tradition of military success. Without giving any numbers the newspapers noted that, 'the ANZAC losses have not been disproportionate and complaints do not exist'.[19] There were also light-hearted reports, such as of Kiwis drinking soda water and smoking high-class cigarettes at a farm where a German battalion commander had been taken prisoner.[20] On the eve of the disaster of 12 October then, the war front at Ypres was

seen in a heroic light, relatively free of casualties, and with occasional incidents of good fun.

On 13 October, the first reports arrived of the previous day's attack, but the cheery sentiments continued. A United Press cable reported that the British 'are still sweeping on, carrying all before them'.[21] Two days later, readers were told that Australians and New Zealanders had 'an honoured place in the latest attack'. But the same day came a qualification. Sir Douglas Haig conceded that 'heavy rain recommenced this morning, and continued with increasing violence all day, impeding our progress. Consequently it was decided to make no further effort to reach our final objective'.[22] The Christchurch *Press* headlined with 'Mud: the soldiers' worst enemy', but claimed that 'the British troops and Anzacs navigated the mud, the seas of mud, the mountains of mud, like miracle-men'.[23] This interpretation—that the men were heroic, but the weather and the muddy ground prevented success—was amplified in reports all over the country from this point on. The *Press* editorialised on 16 October that 'once again the weather has saved the Germans from a big defeat'.[24] Occasionally, reporters pointed to other factors—the uncut wire, the undamaged pill-boxes—but no blame was attached to these revelations for 'it is not unusual to meet uncut wire in such attacks'.[25] No, the weather and the mud were the problem. The *Evening Post* commented that it was 'the deep quagmire of the battlefield which really ruined the attack'.[26]

The mud and weather excused any failure on the part of the men and even more their commanders. Both points are worth considering. As regards the men, the conditions only made their heroism greater. Keith Murdoch, writing of the muddy conditions in the *Evening Post*, claimed that 'to less heroic troops the feat would have been impossible'.[27] New Zealand papers took special pride in reprinting accounts from British newspapers praising their countrymen's efforts.[28] Language from the heroic imperial tradition was sprinkled through the accounts—such words as 'gallant', glorious', 'dash'. Interestingly, the papers often interspersed coverage of the 12 October debacle with fuller accounts of the 4 October victory.

Nowhere did these newspapers criticise the men's leadership or the decision to continue fighting in such conditions. It is now clear that the leading officers, from General Haig down to Major-General Andrew Russell commanding the New Zealand Division, were aware that the weather had made the artillery preparation inadequate. There was evidence that the barbed wire was uncut and the pill-boxes undamaged.[29]

The logical and humane response was to delay the attack on 12 October. Instead on 17 October, Lord Northcliffe was reported as saying 'Sir Douglas Haig's smashing blows will continue no matter what weather prevails'[30] and the next day we read that Lloyd George had sent a congratulatory message to Haig from the war cabinet for 'his skill, courage and pertinacity which commands the grateful admiration of the peoples of the Empire'.[31] One correspondent told of 'the thoughtful care of the commanders' in providing thick wholesome stew within a few yards of the Huns. After a night's sleep 'the Anzacs were as merry as sandboys'.[32]

Nor was there any mention of the extent of the casualties. In his initial report published on 15 October, Haig said that 741 prisoners had been captured, but there was no such numerical precision about men lost—they were not even noted. Never throughout the subsequent months were readers told the extent of the losses. The cost was at times implied: Malcolm Ross described fulsomely the heroic work of stretcher-bearers which suggested the many who had become stretcher cases.[33] As more New Zealand families received sad news, and rolls of honour appeared in papers, there must have been a growing recognition of the scale of the deaths. But the appalling numbers of dead and wounded were not conceded, and when on 3 November lists were published, New Zealanders were told '35 killed in action, 30 died of wounds or disease and 853 wounded is expected to be the final casualty list for the Gravenstafel and Bellevue Spur battles', incidents in which over 1,300 New Zealanders died! When General Godley's official report arrived at the end of October, once more exact numbers of German prisoners were given, but New Zealand casualties remained unmentioned and uncounted.[34]

Soon after the 12 October attack on Bellevue Spur, newspapers had claimed that the achievements of the Anzacs would become a permanent legend. 'Their heroic efforts', the United Service cable of 18 October reported, 'will in future be told wherever Australasians gather'.[35] But by December there was a comment from Keith Murdoch that the New Zealand soldiers 'talk little about Passchendaele, which was their hardest fighting since Gallipoli'.[36] The question then was: did this also apply at home? Would the pain of Passchendaele lead to a long-term silence within New Zealand society? Was Passchendaele doomed to remain unrecognised?

The first test came with the anniversaries of the Ypres battles in 1918. Of all the New Zealand newspapers only the *New Zealand Herald* reported on the 1917 events, and did so by reproducing the cabled report from the

United Service from 18 October the previous year. Headlined with: 'Heroic effort recalled', that report described 12 October as 'a failure, but an inspiring failure in which the New Zealanders were beaten, not by the enemy, but by the weather'.[37] All other New Zealand papers observed the two days with a sad silence—no more than 'In Memoriam' notices inserted by grieving families. A month later, on Armistice Day in 1918 when newspapers surveyed the course of the war, the Passchendaele battles were included, and both the *Herald* describing 12 October as a 'dark day' and the *Evening Post* as the men's 'most terrible experience', conceded the pain. But the *Post* went on to cite the United Service 18 October account noted above.[38] Elsewhere there was little mention.

After the war, the lack of attention given to Passchendaele continued. From a statistical analysis of digitised newspaper reports involving 79 newspapers and excluding illustrations and advertisements between 1 January 1919 and 31 December 1928 on 'Papers Past', the following results appear (Table 12.1).[39]

In the 1920s, Gallipoli was far more commonly written about than other campaigns involving New Zealand troops: about four times more than the 'western front'. In contrast to both these terms, Passchendaele received very little press attention (under a tenth of the mentions of Gallipoli and much less than the major western front battles of the Somme and Messines). Comparing the number of articles relative to the number of deaths, the figures are even more dramatic—six articles per head in the case of Gallipoli, under one in the case of Passchendaele. The figures also suggest that victories in France and Flanders were far better remembered

**Table 12.1** Passchendaele and other battle site references in New Zealand newspaper reports, general search, 1 January 1919 to 31 December 1928

| *Search term* | *No. of articles* | *Articles per head of deaths* |
|---|---|---|
| Gallipoli | 17,438 | **6.3** (2,779 dead) |
| Western front | 4,404 | |
| Somme | 4,759 | **2.2** (2,162 dead) |
| Messines | 2,158 | **2.8** (780 dead) |
| Passchendaele | 1,667 | **0.9** (1900 dead) |
| Gravenstafel | 244 | |
| Bellevue Spur | 80 | |
| Le Quesnoy | 903 | **10.0** (90 dead) |

Source: *Papers Past*, National Library of New Zealand. Search 3 July 2017

than the defeat at Passchendaele, with Le Quesnoy having ten articles per death and Messines almost three—three times as many as Passchendaele. The inclusion of other terms referring to the Passchendaele battles—Gravenstafel and Bellevue Spur—does not significantly change the findings. I initially included 'Ypres' as a search term, but quickly discovered that most of the references were to the town and its ruined state rather than to the 'third battle of Ypres'.

One could argue that this imbalance in favour of Gallipoli reflected the fact that the main day on which the war was remembered in New Zealand was 25 April, Anzac Day, commemorating the first landing there. Still Anzac Day was supposed to be a time for remembering those who had served and died in all wars. Certainly, Gallipoli appeared more frequently on the days between 24 and 27 April (Table 12.2).

Interestingly, the mentions of both Messines and Passchendaele were significantly more common in 1919 and 1920 than subsequently, perhaps suggesting that initially Anzac Day was a genuine effort to incorporate the memory of all war.

But the congruence of Anzac Day with the Gallipoli landings does not explain the entire imbalance since the 999 mentions of Gallipoli in the Anzac Day period are a small proportion of the 17,438 mentions across all the days in those years. The Armistice period, 10–13 November, might be a better reflection of public awareness (Table 12.2). But here again, Gallipoli is over-represented and Messines and Le Quesnoy are also better represented than Passchendaele. When analysing coverage on the anniversaries of these key battles (Table 12.2), the imbalance remains in place. Significantly, only seven mentions of Passchendaele in newspapers

**Table 12.2** Passchendaele and other battle site references in New Zealand newspaper reports, specific date search, 1 January 1919 to 31 December 1928

| *Search term* | *Anzac Day (April 24–27)* | *Armistice Day (November 10–13)* | *Anniversary* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gallipoli | 999 | 151 | 459 (April 26) |
| Messines | 56 | 37 | 127 (June 7) |
| Passchendaele | 34 | 21 | 118 (October 12) |
| Le Quesnoy | 18 | 25 | 48 (November 4) |

Source: *Papers Past*, National Library of New Zealand. Search 3 July 2017

[a]Where the anniversary fell on a Sunday, the Saturday and Monday have been searched

after 1920 were not 'In Memoriam' notices inserted by grieving relatives. Families remembered their loved ones who had died on that date, but the community did not wish to be reminded of the mud and horror of that day.

The statistical evidence is clear that New Zealand's newspapers rarely covered Passchendaele in the 1920s, and when they did that attention was vastly outweighed by coverage of Gallipoli and other western front battles. Apart from the 'In Memoriam' notices the few articles about Passchendaele which appeared in the *Herald* and the *Evening Post* were largely a repeat of the views expressed during the war itself. The anniversary article in the *Herald* on 11 October 1919 was typical. The headlines read: 'Heroic New Zealanders. Gallant effort fails. Beaten by the weather'. The account admitted that the wire was uncut and the artillery was feeble, but it was 'mud, thigh-deep, waist-deep, and even neck-deep' that 'proved at last impassable to the most athletic, unwearying and dauntless of men'.[40] The accounts in the *Herald* for the next four years were shortened versions of that 1919 piece. There were no new perspectives, and far from any criticism of the command for the tragedy, in January 1928 there was a fulsome tribute from Gordon Coates to the memory of Earl Haig who had just died. Coates described Haig as 'a fine soldier and a gallant gentleman' whose 'greatest claim … was his unfaltering loyalty to the welfare of the plain Tommy'.[41] Not all New Zealand veterans of Passchendaele would have agreed.

Where else can we find evidence of the way the memory of Passchendaele was treated in the years immediately after the war? An obvious place to look is the official histories. The most important of these was Colonel H. Stewart's history of the New Zealand Division, which was published in 1921. Stewart admitted in his preface that he had not interviewed participants partly because of 'the unreliability of the human memory' and because the actors had dispersed. So he relied on operational orders, recommendations for honours, war diaries of units, reports to government, and Haig's despatches. It was not surprising that no trace of the bitterness of the digger remained. Of 619 pages, 49 were devoted to Passchendaele (Messines received 58). As regards the 12 October event, Stewart did not hide the casualties—he explained that 'the bodies of 40 officers and 600 men lay in swathes about the wire and along the Gravenstafel road'.[42] He also admitted that there were problems of inadequate communication and fields of uncut wire so that a postponement 'would have been welcomed, but the decision did not rest with the Division or with the Corps. The

Army's orders had been issued'.[43] But in his conclusion Stewart came up with the same old formula of magnificent heroism defeated by the weather: 'The strong fibre of the British stock withstood the strain', he wrote. 'Assurance was theirs that failure was due not to inferior generalship or equipment or fighting qualities, but to the mud and weather and unpropitious elements'.[44]

The regimental histories were little better in their coverage. All were written by officers, including two lieutenant-colonels and one major-general, and did not treat Passchendaele in great detail. In every case, the pages devoted to Gallipoli were at least three times the length allotted to Passchendaele or Ypres. Of the two histories of the regiments most directly involved on 12 October, the Otago and Canterbury regiments, Captain David Ferguson's Canterbury history was thin indeed. He provided the casualty figures but little detailed description or analysis of the event.[45] Lieutenant Arthur Byrne's work on the Otago Regiment was more impressive. He recalled Passchendaele as 'a place of revered but yet sinister memories'.[46] He too gave the casualty figures, and, quoting Brigadier-General Braithwaite, he listed the causes of failure as the uncut wire and undamaged pill-boxes, the weakness and inaccuracy of the artillery barrage, and poor communications. But he concluded with General Russell's judgement that, even if the conditions were fully known, there would have been no likelihood of a general alteration in the programme of two armies.[47] Lieutenant James Byrne's history of artillery admitted that only a few of the guns had been brought forward into position and they lacked platforms to keep them from sinking in the mud and so shooting short. He claimed that the problems were reported to the divisional and corps commanders but never asked why these warnings were ignored.[48] In sum, none of the histories questioned the army's decision-making.

The most revealing of the histories was Ormond Burton's work on the Auckland Regiment. He was a mere second lieutenant and a pacifist (which he admitted in his foreword), but the horrors of war were not his concern in the book. He wrote, 'Whatever one thinks of war and the causes of war, it is undoubtedly true that in battle the finest sides of human character develop themselves. Valour, self-sacrifice, steadfastness, devotion to duty, gentleness and brotherliness are all great virtues. … It is fitting that the boys who are now growing up to manhood should never forget that these are the things which should always characterise the New Zealander'.[49] When describing Passchendaele, Burton admitted that 'it is a dreadful place … a field of agony and death'.[50] But what moved him was the courage of

New Zealanders under the challenge of conflict: 'There is a great exaltation of soul and a wonderful consciousness of power. So Hector must have felt when the Trojans stormed the Grecian Wall and carried fire and storm through the camp and to the ships'.[51] Bravery and bloodlust were the theme, not the horrors of the whole enterprise. Admittedly Burton noted that before the 12 October advance the artillery had not cut the wire or smashed the pill-boxes, but 'the Higher Command insisted that the attack go forward'. Surely now we will get a critique. Not so. Burton excused them: 'The Staff had every reason to believe that the enemy were demoralised'.[52] So while the official histories provided more detail than had the newspapers, they did not give Passchendaele great space, nor did they ask serious questions about responsibility for the disaster.

Another carrier of the memory of the Great War in the 1920s were the 500 or so war memorials erected by communities around the country. A few of these, 13 by my count, did note places where New Zealand soldiers had died; but in most cases they only registered the countries where New Zealanders had fought and died, not particular locations. Christchurch's Bridge of Remembrance has France, Belgium, Palestine, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and, perhaps illogically, Gallipoli. Whanganui's Maori memorial has soil from Egypt, Gallipoli, Belgium, and France.[53] Only two memorials named Passchendaele—the Westport memorial and plaques on the walls of both Christchurch and Dunedin railway stations which were originally on the Passchendaele memorial locomotive. The locomotive itself had been built in 1915; but in November 1925 in the machinery court of Dunedin's New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition, the Governor-General, Lord Fergusson, named the engine 'Passchendaele' as a memorial to railwaymen who had died in the Great War.[54] Since the locomotive was visited by many at the exhibition and then was used to haul the train carrying the Duke and Duchess of York on their Royal Tour in 1927 it was seen by many New Zealanders and increased knowledge of the name if not of the horrors which the name represented. A final memorial which recognised the memory of Passchendaele was the National War Memorial, the carillon in Wellington. One of the (49) bells was named the 'Passchendaele' bell, and from the opening of the memorial in 1932 until the mid-1980s the bells were tolled on the nearest Thursday or Sunday to 4 October (not 12) along with a memorial recital.[55] These were imaginative memorials which must have kept the name of Passchendaele before some members of the New Zealand population, but they did not serve to inform New Zealanders about the battle.

Another form of memorial was street names. Significantly Messines, the Somme and Gallipoli were each recalled in three streets in New Zealand. Le Quesnoy was remembered at one location, but there is no Passchendaele street to be found.[56] There were also five memorials erected by the New Zealand Government overseas—at Gallipoli, Longueval, Messines, Le Quesnoy, and Gravenstafel.[57] These were not memorials to the New Zealanders who had died, but rather battle exploits memorials, to recall the achievements of the New Zealand forces. So it was indicative that the site of the New Zealand memorial at Passchendaele was not on Bellevue Spur where so many New Zealanders died on 12 October, but at Gravenstafel where they were comparatively successful on 4 October. The memorial was unveiled in September 1924 and while the press account described Passchendaele as 'a tragic failure' where New Zealanders 'shed blood like water', it was also noted that rain fell during the ceremony as a symbolic reminder of the conditions. Sir James Allen, who unveiled the memorial, spoke 'of the hardships, the gallantry, the desperate deeds against overwhelming odds, the noble self-sacrifice'.[58] A year and a half later, Hurst Seager, the architect responsible for these memorials, toured the country with 230 lantern slides of the memorials. While there were 60 shots of the Gallipoli memorial and 90 of the Le Quesnoy one, there were no more than 28 of the Gravenstafel memorial.[59]

What does this survey of press reports, official histories, and memorials in the 1920s lead us to conclude? Few New Zealanders in those years would have been entirely ignorant of Passchendaele; most would have known that it was a scene of tragedy and loss. But compared with other sites of the Great War, Gallipoli, Messines, even Le Quesnoy, Passchendaele was under-played and under-represented given the loss of life and the depths of the trauma. To the extent that New Zealanders encountered Passchendaele in the public sphere, they would have heard of the gallant efforts of the Kiwis whose bravery was in the end defeated by the mud and the rain. They would not have learnt that 12 October 1917 was the greatest loss of life in any day in New Zealand history, nor would they have been encouraged to ask questions as to why the tragedy occurred.

Why was the nation's greatest single disaster not fully explored in the 1920s? There are two reasons. The first is that for the thousands of people in the country who had lost men in the war and who had to care for injured soldiers, they needed to be given a sense that their sacrifice, the loss or maiming of their sons, had not been in vain. War memorials perpetuated the old language about the glorious nature of death in war.

Passchendaele, when it was described, had to be presented as the site of heroic deaths of long-term value. To suggest that men had died as a result of faulty decisions or had lost their lives pointlessly would have been highly socially disruptive. It might also have triggered a much larger questioning of the imperial connection. Repression of the Passchendaele story, or understanding it as an event in which heroic men were defeated by mud and rain, not irresponsible British commanders, was the necessary recipe. Of the many hundreds of 'In Memoriam' notices inserted by grieving friends and family on the anniversary of Passchendaele, there are none which ask questions or express any bitterness—the overwhelming sentiment was that their sons had died nobly in a great cause.

The second reason was that the survivors were not keen to talk about the horrors of that day or who was responsible. They clearly had a vested interest in being perceived as heroic men, who could justly claim support from their community. In the foreword to the regimental history of the Wellington Regiment, the authors hoped that their book may remind veterans 'of "those bad old days" which sometimes were not so bad, while at other times were too bad to talk about'.[60] Very occasionally, hints of bitter attitudes from ex-soldiers surfaced in the public arena. In the *Evening Post*, in September 1918, before the war ended, appeared a review of *'Counter-Attack' and other poems* by Siegfried Sassoon. It was written by 'a soldier who has been "there"', and who 'was in Messines, and, finally in the ghastly Passchendaele affair'. In his review, the ex-soldier endorsed Sassoon's picture of war and quoted as 'truly descriptive' these lines:

> Dim, gradual thinning of the shapeless gloom
> Shudders to drizzling daybreak that reveals
> Disconsolate men, who stamp their sodden boots,
> And turn dulled, sunken faces to the sky,
> Haggard and hopeless.[61]

Such views, so often found in the diaries or occasional uncensored letters of soldiers such as Leonard Hart, are rarely to be found in New Zealand of the 1920s. Indeed this is one of the few places where the ironic anti-heroic tradition of war writing appears in the newspapers before 1929. Heroic language kept the truth at bay.

But what about the years after 1929? I say 1929 because that was when the cynical voice of the ex-soldier began to be heard in the United Kingdom, especially with the translation and publication of the German

novel, Erich Remarque's *All quiet on the western front*.[62] Did the same shift have echoes in New Zealand and did it lead to a greater coverage and questioning of Passchendaele? Certainly as early as Anzac Day 1929, overseas cables noted the impact of the book in Britain and Germany in highlighting the agonies of trench life.[63] But the reception was not quite so positive when copies reached New Zealand. The Auckland, Wellington, and Dunedin public libraries (although not Christchurch) decided to ban the book because of 'its crudeness' and 'coarse and lurid' language.[64] The following year, the film version was banned by the film censor as not 'in the best interests of the people of the Dominion', a decision upheld by the Appeal Board.[65] A month later the ban was reversed after a showing to members of Parliament and after extensive cuts had been made. The *Evening Post* commented that to those who had suffered losses in the war, 'the film will be no consolation', although for the rising generation 'it may convey a salutary lesson'.[66] Thereafter, the film was seen 'by large crowds', with even small communities like Shannon having showings.[67]

The New Zealand newspapers also reveal some coverage in 1929 and the early 1930s of other anti-war literature—Robert Graves' memoir *Good-bye to all that*, R.C. Sherriff's play *Journey's end*, and the poetry of Siegfried Sassoon.[68] But publicity of such works also attracted criticism with letters from veterans who regarded the war literature as 'an insult to myself and my old companions', a speech from Colonel Powles and a protest from the Wellington Returned Soldiers' Association (RSA).[69]

It is also true that from the late 1920s and into the 1930s there was an organised anti-war movement which attacked some of the costs of the Great War. Beginning with an annual demonstration in Christchurch from 1925 and then an annual conference from 1929 a 'No More War' movement appeared.[70] But attendances were not great and their initiatives not always taken seriously. When members of the movement waited upon members of the Christchurch City Council, the mayor moved that the matter be referred to the Baths and Entertainment Committee. When a speaker for No More War addressed a Timaru audience, the audience responded by passing a motion disagreeing with the sentiments of the speaker.[71] Public sentiments highly critical of war and of the experiences of the First World War could be found only among a small minority in 1930s New Zealand.

Unsurprisingly, few newspapers questioned Passchendaele in the 1930s either (see Table 12.3).

**Table 12.3** Passchendaele and other battle site references in New Zealand newspaper reports, general search, 1 January 1929 to 31 December 1939

| *Search term* | *No. of articles* |
|---|---|
| Gallipoli | 4,842 |
| Western front | 4,358 |
| Somme | 1,521 |
| Messines | 634 |
| Passchendaele | 525 |
| Le Quesnoy | 124 |

Source: *Papers Past*, National Library of New Zealand. Search 3 July 2017

**Table 12.4** Passchendaele and other battle site references in New Zealand newspaper reports, comparison across two periods, 1919–1939 (15 newspapers)

| *Search term* | *1919–1928* | *1929–1939* |
|---|---|---|
| Gallipoli | 5,916 | 4,253 |
| Western front | 1,479 | 3,962 |
| Somme | 1,715 | 1,330 |
| Messines | 884 | 592 |
| Passchendaele | 643 | 486 |
| Le Quesnoy | 338 | 114 |

Source: *Papers Past*, National Library of New Zealand. Search 3 July 2017

Relative to the coverage of Gallipoli the proportion of articles on Passchendaele did rise slightly—from 9.6 per cent in 1919–28 to 11.1 per cent in 1929–39—but the numbers remained low, and significantly lower than reporting on the Somme and Messines. The numbers for the phrase 'western front' were high because of the controversy about the book and the film, *All quiet on the western front*, and not necessarily because there was increased attention paid to that theatre of war. If we look at the 15 newspapers which are available in the database for the whole period 1919–1939, the comparison for the two periods confirms the point (Table 12.4).

Furthermore, if we look at the newspaper coverage of Passchendaele more closely, we find a continued dominance of 'In Memoriam' notices from still-grieving relatives. On the anniversaries of the battle it was only in the early 1930s that there was any suggestion of a critical perspective in any newspaper articles. On the anniversary of the 4 October battle in

1930, the *New Zealand Herald* offered a piece entitled 'War at its worst' in which the writer claimed that returned men were unanimous that Passchendaele was 'the most horrible time'—'those who went through those terrible days recall them with a shudder'. It was a time 'of fiendish memories'. But the body of the article continued to assert that 'it was the vile weather that beat the division', and there was no suggestion of blaming anyone.[72]

For the most serious critique of Passchendaele in the 1930s we must look at the controversy raised by the publication of Lloyd George's memoirs in 1934. In the fourth volume of the memoirs, Lloyd George claimed that General Haig deceived the war cabinet and continued the Passchendaele offensive because it was his pet project.[73] The New Zealand newspapers reported the debate, quoting Winston Churchill's supporting view that Haig's strategy was 'a hideous muddle, conducted throughout by knaves and fools' and including a *Manchester Guardian* review which described Passchendaele as a 'reckless squandering of life in the service of a military theory'.[74] Significantly, these reports did not unleash an outpouring of bitterness from New Zealanders. Instead we find full reporting of speeches by General Godley to RSAs in Oamaru and Blenheim: 'With considerable depth of feeling' Godley described Lloyd's George's attack as 'scurrilous and unwarranted' and argued that the Passchendaele offensive had been forced upon the British by the weakness of the French and the failure of the first attack (presumably 12 October) was because of 'the weather … but no headquarters could be held responsible for the weather'.[75]

There was but one contrary New Zealand voice evident in the newspapers—two letters from a correspondent signing himself 'Escaped Gunmeat' who claimed that 'history places Earl Haig in the "butcher" class' and argued that while the public were told that 'the failure of Passchendaele was due to the ground having been rendered impassable, owing to the heavy rains. This was but a half-truth. … The whole debacle was due to the obstinacy of the High Command'.[76] In 1937, two pieces of New Zealand realism about the war experience finally appeared—Robin Hyde's *Passport to hell* and John A. Lee's *Civilian into soldier*.[77] Each was highly critical of the officer class and evoked the cynical attitudes to be found in many soldiers' diaries. But neither treated Passchendaele—Starkie, the anti-hero of Hyde's book, was in military prison at the time; and Lee ended his account before Passchendaele, but did include this comment: 'From end to end of that

Ypres offensive thousands of British troops perished to commemorate the stupidity of generals who should have been hung, English gentlemen valued for their accents and their breeding'.[78]

What then do we make of the memory of Passchendaele in New Zealand in the 22 years after the disaster of 12 October 1917? There can be no doubt that many New Zealanders would have heard of Passchendaele, and they would have learnt that it was an awful experience that led to much loss of life. But they would have little idea of the full extent of the losses, and they would have probably ascribed them to the weather rather than to irresponsible decision-making. Still, when the next world war broke out in 1939, the memory of Passchendaele does appear to have stood as a negative touch-stone which was to be avoided at all costs. When General Freyberg reported the losses in the Greek campaign of 1941, for example, newspapers compared those losses with other campaigns, Gallipoli, the Somme, and Passchendaele, while John A. Lee warned about 'the "do the same again" strategy that gave us Passchendaele'.[79] In his official history of the Italian campaign, N.C. Phillips wrote that Freyberg's determination 'not to make a Passchendaele of Cassino' was central to his attitude.[80]

So Passchendaele was sufficiently known to provide a negative example. But the memory did not last. The experience of the Second World War, a very different encounter, largely replaced the First World War in New Zealanders' consciousness about war. The 'Great War' was replaced in terminology by the phrase the 'First World War' as if it was but a prelude to the second. And apart from Gallipoli where the memory was kept alive by Anzac Day, the full horror of the First World War and Passchendaele in particular retreated from view after 1945. When the 50th anniversary of the event arrived in October 1967, Passchendaele was ignored. Newspapers on 12 October 1967 had other things on their mind—the first night of evening drinking, the departure of the All Blacks and speculation as to whether Jackie Kennedy would remarry. Not that anniversaries were forgotten—the *Herald* had coverage of the centenary of the Royal Society and 125 years since Scots settlers landed in Auckland, but no mention of one of the nation's great tragedies.[81] By 12 October 1992, the full disaster of the events 75 years before had disappeared almost entirely from New Zealanders' consciousness and when we told the story anew it came as a widespread shock.

The origins of New Zealanders' Passchendaele amnesia are to be found in the two decades after the event. First in the reporting in 1917 and then

in the coverage of the memory subsequently, New Zealanders were told little about the full extent of the losses, came to believe that Passchendaele was another battle in the roll-call of Kiwi heroism, and if they understood the horror of the 12 October events, then they did so as a disaster caused by 'thigh-deep, waist-deep, and even neck-deep' mud. It was not until the 2000s that Passchendaele was restored to its sad status as the greatest loss of life in one day in New Zealand's recorded history, and one that was arguably preventable.

## Notes

1. Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country: The Image of the Pakeha Male – a History* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1987).
2. Leonard Hart to parents, October 19, 1917, reprinted in Jock Phillips, Nicholas Boyack and E. P Malone, *The Great Adventure: New Zealand Soldiers Describe the First World War* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 142–50.
3. Paul Ham, *Passchendaele Requiem for Doomed Youth* (North Sydney: William Heinemann, 2016), 448. Ham gives total casualties for that period as 271,600.
4. This and other figures are derived from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (www.cwgc.org). I included all those who died on that day in the New Zealand forces, but subtracted those who died of wounds received earlier.
5. Ian McGibbon, *New Zealand's Western Front Campaign* (Auckland: Bateman, 2016), 377. Ian McGibbon subsequently slightly revised the figures, see https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/last-post-first-light/97750469/passchendaele-has-become-a-byword-for-the-horror-of-wwi.
6. *NZ Herald*, October 12, 1992; *Evening Post*, October 13, 1992. There was coverage on the main Television One news programme.
7. Glyn Harper, *Massacre at Passchendaele* (Auckland: Random House, 2000).
8. Obviously my interpretation is influenced by the debate about the British memory of the war sparked off by Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). See also Brian Bond, *The Unquiet War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Janet S. K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), and Jock Phillips, 'The Quiet Western Front: The First World War and New Zealand Memory' in *Race, Empire and First World War Writing,* ed. Santanu Das (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 234–48.

9. According to a report in the *Otago Witness* (22 May 1918) some 500 injured soldiers did arrive on the hospital ship *Marama* on 14 May 1918, the majority of whom had been wounded in fighting around Passchendaele the previous October. But this represented some ten per cent of those injured in the Ypres battles.
10. Glyn Harper, *Johnny Enzed: The New Zealand Soldier in the First World War* (Auckland: Exisle Publishing, 2015), 604. The last of the troops did not return until March 1920.
11. Janet McCallum. 'Ross, Forrestina Elizabeth and Ross, Malcolm', first published in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, vol. 2, 1993, and updated online in February, 2006. Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand, accessed July 3, 2017, http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2r28/ross-forrestina-elizabeth.
12. *NZ Herald*, September 22, 1917.
13. *Evening Post*, September 27, 1917.
14. *NZ Herald*, September 24, 1917.
15. *Evening Post*, September 27, 1917; October 4, 1917.
16. *NZ Herald*, October 6, 1917; Evening *Post*, October 6, 1917.
17. *NZ Herald*, October 8, 1917; *Press*, October 9, 1917; *Evening Post*, October 9, 1917.
18. For example, *NZ Herald*, October 8, 1917.
19. *Press*, October 9, 1917.
20. *Evening Post,* October 9, 1917*; NZ Herald,* October 10, 1917.
21. *Evening Post,* October 13, 1917.
22. *NZ Herald*, October 15, 1917.
23. *Press*, October 15, 1917.
24. *Press*, October 16, 1917.
25. *Evening Post,* October 16, 1917.
26. *Evening Post*, October 17, 1917.
27. Ibid.
28. *NZ Herald*, December 10, 1917; *Press*, December 11, 1917.
29. See especially Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Passchendaele: The Untold Story* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), Andrew Macdonald, *Passchendaele: The Anatomy of a Tragedy* (Auckland: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013) and McGibbon, *New Zealand's Western Front Campaign*, 142–45.
30. *Evening Post*, October 17, 1917.
31. *Press*, October 18, 1917.
32. *Press*, October 18, 1917.
33. *Evening Post,* October 15, 1917.
34. *NZ Herald,* October 27, 1917.
35. *NZ Herald,* October 20, 1917.

36. *Evening Post,* December 28, 1917.
37. *NZ Herald,* October 12, 1918.
38. *Evening Post,* November 12, 1918; *NZ Herald,* November 13, 1918.
39. All tables compiled from 'Newspapers', Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand, accessed July 3, 2017, www. https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers.
40. *NZ Herald*, October 11, 1919.
41. *Evening Post,* January 31, 1928.
42. Colonel H. Stewart, *The New Zealand Division 1916–1919: A Popular History Based on Official Records* (Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1921), 291.
43. Ibid., 279.
44. Ibid., 297.
45. David Ferguson, *The History of the Canterbury Regiment, N.Z.E.F.* (Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1921).
46. A.E. Byrne, *Official History of the Otago Regiment in the Great War* (Dunedin: J.Wilkie, 1921), 204.
47. Ibid., 226–28.
48. J.R. Byrne, *New Zealand Artillery in the Field, 1914–18* (Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1922).
49. O.E. Burton, *The Auckland Regiment* (Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1922), foreword.
50. Ibid., 169.
51. Ibid., 176–77.
52. Ibid., 179–80.
53. See Jock Phillips, *To the Memory: New Zealand's War Memorials* (Nelson: Pottin and Burton, 2016), 132.
54. *NZ Herald*, November 18, 1925.
55. Chris Maclean, *For Whom the Bells Toll: A History of the National War Memorial* (Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1998), 59.
56. Derived from search of Google maps, accessed July 3, 2017, https://maps.google.co.nz/.
57. http://www.mch.govt.nz/nz-identity-heritage/national-monuments-war-graves/list-national-monuments.
58. *Evening Post*, September 20, 1924.
59. *Otago Daily Times*, April 24, 1926.
60. W.H. Cunningham, C. A. L. Treadwell, J. S. Hanna, *The Wellington Regiment* (Wellington: Ferguson & Osbourne, 1928), v.
61. *Evening Post*, September 21,1918.
62. Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, trans. A. W. Wheen (London: Putnam, 1929).
63. *Otago Daily Times*, April 27, 1929.

64. *NZ Herald*, June 22, 1929; *Evening Post*, June 29, 1929.
65. *Evening Post*, July 12, 1930.
66. *Evening Post*, August 5, 1930.
67. *NZ Herald*, August 11, 1930; *Horowhenua Chronicle*, October 24, 1930.
68. *Evening* Post, November 18, 1929; Auckland *Star*, October 6, 1934.
69. *Evening* Post, November 20, 1929; *Evening* Post, December 9, 1929; *Otago Daily Times*, June 21, 1930.
70. *Press*, November 23, 1925.
71. *Evening Post,* June 27, 1929; *Evening Post*, April 11, 1930.
72. *NZ Herald*, October 4, 1930.
73. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs, vol. 4* (London: Ivor, Nicholson and Watson, 1934), 2110–13, 2149–239.
74. *NZ Herald*, November 10, 1934; *Evening Post*, December 27, 1934.
75. *Evening Post*, January 8, 1935; *NZ Herald*, February 6, 1935.
76. *NZ Herald*, September 11, 1935; March 19, 1936.
77. Robin Hyde, *Passport to Hell: The Story of James Douglas Stark, Bomber, Fifth Regiment, New Zealand Expeditionary Forces* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1937); John A. Lee, *Civilian into Soldier* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1937).
78. Lee, *Civilian into Soldier*, 222.
79. Nancy Taylor, *The Home Front, vol. 1* (Wellington: Government Print, 1986), 293.
80. N.C. Phillips, *Italy, vol. 1: The Sangro to Cassino* (Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, 1957), 352.
81. *NZ Herald*, October 12, 1967.

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CHAPTER 13

# The Forgotten Break in History: The First World War and the Year 1917 in German Commemorative Culture

*Gorch Pieken*

One hundred years after the end of the First World War, Europe's countries have their own traditions for remembering the conflict. These differ in terms of their rituals as well as their intensity. Yet, in essence, there is agreement that the war was a catastrophe for them all. Today, remembrance ceremonies tend to focus not on the distinction between friend and foe, but on reconciliation and the urge for peace, a theme befitting the European Union. For some years now, these ceremonies have had to do without the generation that experienced the conflict personally. The war lives in commemoration not in extant memory.

Unlike many other belligerent societies in Europe, however, the culture of remembrance in Germany has gone through a tumultuous history, which was shaped more by contemporary politics and events than by the need to grieve or reflect on the violence of the 1914–1918 years. This chapter analyses the history of German public engagement with the First

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G. Pieken (✉)
Zentrum für Militägeschichte und Sozialwissenschaften der Bundeswehr, Potsdam, Germany



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World War and considers how the war is and was commemorated, especially in German museums, at the interface between science, entertainment, and the public sphere.[1] It argues that Germans had (and continue to have) a peculiar relationship to the First World War, which is a reflection of their chequered twentieth-century history. In that history, the year 1917 plays a central role.

## 'Spoils of War' and Propaganda in German War Exhibitions Between 1914 and 1939

From the outset, the First World War was perceived as a significant event in world history. It was also the first war in which museums in almost every participating nation became involved. The museums most widely known for their war history—the Imperial War Museum in London and the Australian War Memorial in Canberra—were planned directly during the war years, or in 1917, to be more precise. But as early as 1914, numerous public institutions, associations, and private individuals in the German Empire, too, collected and exhibited war items.[2] In her comprehensive study, historian Christine Beil concludes that in no other belligerent country was there a higher abundance of war exhibitions than in Germany.[3] Virtually every large town in Germany organised a war exhibition or extended its local museum to include a war-related section, often showing captured enemy weapons and vehicles (they could not show their own military technology for fear of espionage). They preferred enemy items that exhibited obvious traces of destruction,[4] thereby documenting the supposed superiority of Germany's military capability.

'Spoils of war' exhibitions were frequently accompanied by so-called trench displays, which military personnel would excavate in public parks for visitors to walk through. These included machine-gun stations, gun mounts, and fully furnished soldiers' dug-outs decorated with items of daily use. The apparent impregnability of such positions was intended to dispel visitors' concern for their relatives and loved ones and bolster confidence in victory.[5] This form of spatial experience offered a new form of representation for museums, which continues to have a high level of appeal today.

The centrepiece of the German nation's war collection and museum policy was the *Berliner Zeughaus* (Berlin Armoury). Built in 1706 as an

arsenal, it was converted into a 'Prussian hall of fame' in 1880 by order of Kaiser Wilhelm I.[6] During the First World War, the Armoury received the bulk of all captured technology, which was put on display for the public. In contrast to the Armoury's displays, the Dresden and Munich museums aimed at visualising the war and soldiers' daily life with the aid of other types of artefacts, including paintings, photographs, and functional models of weapons. They looked to personalise the war as much as glorify the German army's military achievements.

As the war progressed, state-sponsored exhibition activity increased. It peaked in 1916 with the travelling *Deutsche Kriegsausstellung* (German War Exhibition), organised by the Prussian War Ministry and the German Red Cross. The exhibition featured captured technology, military art, film, and photographic material, as well as life-sized dioramas. In 1917, the Berlin exhibition alone attracted half a million visitors in three months.[7] The actual horrors of war and the soldiers' suffering, however, were always left out of such displays,[8] which primarily served as propaganda to counter growing war fatigue. A further aim of these exhibitions was to convey stereotypical images of the enemy and simple exemplary explanations to advocate for the continuation of the war. The war in the east, for instance, was stylised as a struggle between German 'culture' and the 'unculturedness' of eastern European peoples.[9] Racial prejudices familiar from newspapers and magazines were reflected in the dioramas, comprising life-size wax figures, not only in the modelled faces of enemy soldiers, but also in their postures, soiled uniforms, and 'archaic' behaviour, including enemy soldiers portrayed with a knife between their teeth.

Given the defeat of Germany and the collapse of the *Kaiserreich* in 1918, it is not surprising that during the initial post-war years the topic of the First World War largely disappeared from the German museum and exhibition landscape. Under Article 245 of the Treaty of Versailles, all captured weapons had to be returned to their countries of origin, and German guns had to be rendered non-functional or scrapped. As a result, most of the weapons held in German museums were removed or destroyed. Of course, the lost war had not faded from German people's minds. The war overwhelmed the cultural memory of the young Weimar Republic, which witnessed repeated political struggles over how to 'correctly' remember the war dead among veterans' associations and political groups.[10] These groups, and the public at large, were also preoccupied with Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles, which

assigned peculiar responsibility for the war to Germany. The German Foreign Office set up its own 'War Guilt Unit', tasked with invalidating the accusation on a scientific basis.[11]

The fragmentation of Weimar society into increasingly antagonistic groups also had an impact on exhibition activity, which rediscovered the First World War in the mid-1920s. Ernst Friedrich, a proponent of pacifism, opened an anti-war museum in central Berlin in 1925.[12] Its exhibitions displayed the horrors of war, including photographs of mutilated soldiers, and generally questioned the value of war as a political instrument. The population was shocked by Friedrich's images and nationalists insultingly called the curators 'unpatriotic types' who had offended the nation's honour.[13] Further anti-war exhibitions, organised by left-wing political groups, opened between 1926 and 1928.[14]

The nationalists also exhibited on the subject of war, creating battlefield dioramas that glorified military conflict, the cult of sacrifice, and nationalism. The accompanying texts often demanded a revision of the Treaty of Versailles. Their battle scenes were constructed with the aid of tin soldiers and mobile guns on detailed landscape models:

> Colourful little lights marked the chronological and spatial sequence of events. At the push of a button, visitors were thus able to view individual battles in progress before their very eyes.[15]

This mixture of operational history, war gaming, and heroic epic toured Germany in the form of numerous travelling exhibitions from 1928 onward. One of the most successful of these exhibitions was *Die Deutsche Front—Eine Heldenehrung* (The German Front—A Tribute to Heroes) which attracted 140,000 visitors in 18 months.[16] The explanatory texts were characterised by a nationalistic jargon and included the demand for a revision of the Treaty of Versailles.

In retrospect, this kind of exhibition activity appears as a natural prologue to the National Socialist dictatorship. Revanchism and militarism certainly gained support in the late 1920s.[17] Even before the National Socialists seized power in 1933, a number of museums re-opened their sections dedicated to the war, including the Berlin Armoury in 1931.[18] The exhibitions adhered to the wartime tradition of patriotism on display and tended to follow a political rather than an academic or scientific narrative. This also became clearly apparent in the Berlin Armoury through a special form of protest against the terms of the Versailles treaty: the plinths

on which the captured guns had once stood had not been removed. Text panels on the empty plinths referred to their forced return to the victorious powers.[19]

The seizure of power by the National Socialists led to *Gleichschaltung* (institutionalised conformity, 'coordination') of society and the suppression of non-compliant organisations. *Sturmabteilung* (SA, storm-trooper) squads wrecked Friedrich's anti-war museum and turned it into their meeting place.[20] Jewish museum workers all over Germany were dismissed. Military history museums were presented as important places for military education: they were also placed under the direct control of the military again. The permanent exhibition at the Berlin Armoury was redesigned as part of the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, with the 1914–1918 section now taking up a third of the entire floor space.[21] Words such as *Schandfrieden* ('ignominious peace') and *Dolchstoßlegende* ('legend of the "stab in the back"') were employed in the accompanying texts.[22] Germany's defeat was reinterpreted as a moral victory, and the soldierly virtues and the war service of Adolf Hitler, Hermann Göring, and other leading Nazis were glorified.

The so-called front-line trench warfare communities were of central importance for the history of National Socialism. The Berlin Armoury became the most important location for temporary exhibitions dedicated to the First World War, with at least 13 exhibitions between 1934 and 1939.[23] Remembrance of the war was already closely associated with individual memorial years, such as 1939 and the 25th anniversary of the Battle of Tannenberg. The showpiece of the National Socialist 'remembrance offensive' relating to the world war, however, was to be the so-called *Deutsche Weltkriegsmuseum* (German World War Museum), part of Hitler's gigantomaniac plans to turn Berlin into the 'Reich capital Germania'. The conceptual design envisaged a monumental structure 10,500 $m^2$ in size, to be built directly next to the Berlin Armoury and to serve both as a museum and a memorial. The exhibition would focus particularly on the 'education and training of young people willing to do military service'.[24]

All the exhibitions and exhibition plans dedicated to the First World War in the National Socialist state ultimately served one goal, namely to prepare the population for another war, which eventually began on 1 September 1939. That conflict not only ended plans for a German World War Museum but also ended almost all German exhibition activity on the First World War for a generation to come.

## From Loss of Relevance to Remembrance Boom

The First World War was followed by a second global conflict in which the German *Wehrmacht* overran, and fundamentally changed, large parts of Europe and the globe. The Second World War had the unimaginable magnitude of six 1914–1918 conflicts and resulted in Germany being divided into West and East. After 1945, the First World War was denied the attribute of being the 'Great War' in German memory. In a divided Germany, the First World War played no role at all in either public or academic interest. Only later did it gain a subordinate commemorative role.[25] For decades, all traces of the 1914–1918 conflict were removed from museum and exhibition programmes, along with all other topics concerning war. In the Cold War era, few Germans wanted anything to do with either war. The Allied bombing campaign and looting, moreover, had made many museums unsustainable, and military history museums were shut permanently on the order of the Allies from January 1947 onward.[26] While the First World War was, thus, forgotten as a commemorative moment, it nevertheless retained its political value on both sides of the East-West German border. In these debates, the year 1917 featured prominently.

It took the controversy around German historian Fritz Fischer's new book, *Griff nach Weltmacht*, in 1959 for the First World War to resurface as a topic of public discussion and historical controversy in West Germany. Fischer's research in the files of the German Reich Chancellery and Foreign Office led him to argue that the German Empire '… bears a considerable share of the historical responsibility for the outbreak' of the First World War.[27] According to Fischer, the German leadership trusted in the country's military superiority and willingly embraced the prospect of war in July 1914. In arguing his point, Fischer ran completely counter to the consensus of West German historians, who argued that Germany pursued a defensive strategy in 1914 and that all the major European powers bore some part of the blame for the outbreak of the war. Fischer thus destroyed the delusions of many Germans who portrayed Hitler's world war as an 'accidental' event in German history, rather than as a continuity of aggressive militant nationalist policies, or as a German *Sonderweg* (special path).[28] By focusing on German responsibility for the First World War, Fischer drew attention to Germans as long-term warmongers. The ensuing debate lasted several years, involving historians and politicians alike. It would be the first (of several) disputes about the importance of Germany's early twentieth-century war history. Even the German Chancellor, Ludwig

Erhard, and the President of the West German Parliament, Eugen Gerstenmaier, took a stand in the Fischer debate, both supporting Fischer's opponents. One consequence of the dispute was that it stimulated research work and publishing activity on the part of many historians and established a self-critical discourse about history among the West German public.[29] Fischer, thereby, returned the First World War to public relevance, and did so outside the field of commemoration.

Abroad and in East Germany, Fischer's theories met mostly with approval. According to the politically controlled historiography of the East German Socialist Unity Party (SED), both world wars were an inevitable outcome of the imperialism and capitalism of the major European powers in general, and of the German Empire in particular. Consequently, both wars were stages on the road to the 'socialist world revolution'. Only in that context did the SED assign any historical importance to the First World War. For East Germans, it was the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the (subsequent) revolution in Germany in 1918 that mattered most.[30] Of course, academic freedom and academic pluralism were forbidden in East Germany. Until the dissolution of East Germany and the reunification with West Germany in 1990, no view on the history of the First World War other than the one prescribed by the state was tolerated in East German research or in public. Outside the celebration of the 1917 revolution, in fact, there was no East German commemorative culture focused on the First World War either.

In West Germany, however, the First World War did gain greater public prominence, helped in no small way by the work of historians. In 1979, the American historian, George F. Kennan, described the First World War as the 'great seminal catastrophe of the twentieth century'.[31] Since then, hardly any exhibition text or newspaper report relating to the years 1914–1918 in the Federal Republic of Germany has done without Kennan's expression, often including it in a title or heading. According to Kennan's interpretation, National Socialism and the Second World War were a direct consequence of the First World War, much like the Cold War was a product of the 1917 Russian revolution. It was in the 1980s too that the notion that the two world wars should be considered collectively as the 'Second Thirty Years' War' became popular again.[32]

When in 1987, the German historian Ernst Nolte described the two world wars as a 'European civil war', he solidified the concept of a Thirty Years' War for German academics and the wider German public. For Nolte, it was the year 1917 that was most important. In his estimation, the

Russian revolution was the central event of the twentieth century. The attempt to forcibly impose socialism or Bolshevism led, according to Nolte, to a militant counter-movement based on extreme nationalism, namely National Socialism in Germany. The period 1917–1945, then, was the 'epoch of fascism and of European civil war between the radical fascist National Socialism of Germany and the increasingly state-driven Bolshevism of the Soviet Union'.[33] In combination with his thesis that the Holocaust was a response to the Bolshevik years of terror and mass murders under Stalin, Nolte sparked a second public dispute among German historians (which was also known as the *Historikerstreit)*.[34] The stakes in the 1980s were as heated as they were in Fischer's time and revolved around the question: how much responsibility should the German people take for the past actions of their country?

Irrespective of the historians' dispute, Nolte's work ensured that the First World War and (more precisely) the year 1917 preoccupied German academics. As early as 1953, in fact, West German historians had considered the periodisation of what they call *Zeitgeschichte* (contemporary history). That year, the historian Hans Rothfels explained the particular importance of the term in the first issue of the *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*. In his article, Rothfels laid the foundation for a field of research previously unknown in West Germany, which, according to his definition, devoted itself solely to the 'history of those who lived at the time' (contemporaries). In defining the concept of 'contemporary history', Rothfels paid peculiar attention to the 'epochal year 1917'. In his words:

> The concept of contemporary history … is based, thus, on the view that a new epoch of universal history began to emerge at around the year 1917/18. Its roots are to found in basic trends of imperialistic politics and industrial society.[35]

Moreover, 1917 marked the end of the age of European hegemony in the world. The events of that year created a clash of ideologies that dominated the remainder of the twentieth century and, with it, the research field of contemporary history.

Significantly, the field of 'contemporary history' exists in other countries, each with its own temporal starting points. In British 'contemporary history', the considered time period stretches back as far as the electoral reform of 1832, while French *histoire contemporaine* dates back to 1789, the start

of the French Revolution. Significantly, in countries with a lengthy tradition of democracy such as the United States and the Netherlands, this branch of research has failed to develop. It is also unknown in Russia.[36] What is more, the time period under consideration shifts from generation to generation, precisely because the focus is on the history of those alive at the time. In Germany today, 1945 increasingly marks the beginning of the contemporary period, thus taking the place of 1917. The year 1989 or 2001 will possibly acquire that importance for later generations. Nonetheless, 1917 will remain an extremely important year for research on German contemporary history, in large part because it dominated the academic discourse of the Cold War era and was etched into public consciousness.

The importance of the rejuvenated focus on 1917 in academic circles and a growing reconnection with the First World War among the (West) German public was most obvious in the Historical Museum of Frankfurt/Main's special exhibition in 1975, entitled *Ein Krieg wird ausgestellt. Die Weltkriegsausstellung des Historischen Museums (1914–1918)* [A war on display. World war exhibition by the Historical Museum].[37] Previously, no German museum addressed either war, not even the *Bayerisches Armeemuseum* (Bavarian Army Museum), which opened its doors in Ingolstadt in 1972.[38] The omission was unsurprising. When they paid any attention to the wars, museum curators in Germany presented them as a frightful apocalypse, which generations of young Germans lived through in order to kill and be killed. The only respite from this Thirty Years' War was offered by the brief democratic experiment of the Weimar Republic. In other words, the Thirty Years' War apocalypse offered a fitting narrative for (West) German historical museums: it served as a warning and offered historical guidance for the democratisation of post-war West German society. In the Cold War era, then, there was little room for heroic stories of strong men and courageous warriors; they all had fought for the wrong side, the side of the anti-democrats, totalitarians, and criminals.

By the 1970s, all things military had become suspicious. Peace was declared a national goal, and war deemed the greatest possible disaster for a state and its citizens. In French and Anglo-Saxon museums of the same period, the First World War was celebrated as the starting point in the birth of western democracy, which withstood a terrible test yet again in the Second World War. The lesson drawn from these same wars in West Germany was similar, but in reverse. References to war in West Germany served not only to call to mind, but also to appeal to, the end of totalitarianism and war from and on German soil.

This is not to say that all references to war disappeared from the West German museum landscape in the Cold War era. The weapons' display remained a mainstay of numerous exhibitions. These featured military technology from various epochs, presented in rows, like in a car park, and aimed to explain the history of technical systems. These exhibitions existed as study collections in which principles of classification and organisation were explained on the basis of largely interchangeable exemplary exhibits. The focus was on technical detail, detached from broader economic, event-related, or historico-cultural representations and perceptions. Cultural scientist Hermann Lübbe remarked on this form of presentation with a certain irony: 'Looking at so many museumised killing machines saved from past conflicts, one is forced to say that nowhere else do weapons look more benign than in a museum'.[39] Without context, the weapons lost their explanatory power.

In the public sphere more generally, the First World War faded from view. When West Germans did consider the wars of the 1914–45 era, they clearly preferred to focus on the Second World War.[40] Consider the following comparisons: in 1964, to mark the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the First World War, *Der Spiegel,* a high-circulation German magazine, dedicated only one cover story to the 'Great War', while National Socialism and the 25th anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War featured five times as cover stories in the same year. In Great Britain in 1964, too, an audience of some eight million, one-fifth of the entire British population, tuned in to the acclaimed television documentary 'The Great War', in which contemporary witnesses had their say for the first time.[41] In West Germany, only one regional broadcaster ran the 26-part series, with audience figures not being recorded.

The 1980s, however, witnessed a 'history boom' in the Federal Republic, which continues to this day and is evident quantitatively both in the demand for, and supply of, products that impart historical knowledge of any kind and address a broad public. Since the 1980s, the overall number of museums in Germany has doubled, and a new type of museum has emerged, namely supra-regional historical museums in which the First World War is regularly represented. The establishment of private television stations in the 1980s and the expansion of the nation's three-channel public television network have similarly boosted interest in the First World War. It was also the first war in mankind's history to be documented on film, making it ideal for television programme-makers. The period from 1933 to 1945 also dominates the television

medium: between 1998 and 2005 the ZDF, one of Germany's public-service television channels, broadcast 15 documentaries about the First World War and a phenomenal 210 documentaries about National Socialism and the Second World War.[42] The 'remembrance boom' favoured the latter war.

Still, the 90th anniversary of the First World War resulted in a renewed wave of television series, exhibitions, and publications,[43] while the centennial anniversary in 2014 surpassed the 2004 levels of interest. The German government, however, almost overlooked the centennial commemorations. Great Britain and France made 60 million euros available respectively for the 2014 commemorative year. Germany, in contrast, committed only 4.7 million.[44] The media and the historical community also criticised the German government's failure to come up with any initiatives for collective European commemorations. As Gerd Krumeich commented: 'Officially Germany stands out … through a general lack of interest'.[45] Nevertheless, the German public was well served: the First World War featured in a myriad of publications, television productions, and exhibitions in 2014. The German Museums' Association, for example, counted over 100 exhibitions dedicated to the subject.[46]

The year 2014 also offered up a surprising new academic furore around the question of Germany's war guilt. The source of inspiration and mouthpiece was the Australian historian Christopher Clark, whose 900-page academic book *The Sleepwalkers* topped German bestseller lists for months. German sales figures reached over 300,000 copies sold in 20 editions by late 2016.[47] The book had far less resonance in Great Britain and France. Some tried to explain Germans' interest in the publication as a need for 'exonerating literature' and the longing for a 'sounder history of one's own nation'.[48] Clark argues that Germans in 1914 felt encircled, and he identified France and Russia as the 'true troublemakers'.[49] The German Empire was, instead, 'an island of relative calm' in the July Crisis in 1914.[50] There were hardly any dissenting voices in Germany regarding Clark's theses, and prominent historians Oliver Janz and Herfried Münkler even followed Clark's argumentation to a large extent in their books to mark the commemorative year. Indeed, the question of war guilt remains a central and overwhelming point of reference for Germans as well as in German political and academic circles in dealing with the First World War. The war, then, engages the public, the politicians, and the historical community.

## Outlook

It is only since 2014, in line with other European centennial commemorations, that the First World War has re-occupied the German public sphere. The previous academic focus on the year 1917 has also shifted to the war more generally. Even though the last German veteran of that conflict died in 2008, the large amount of attention given to the war during the centennial years highlights the power of the First World War to mobilise public engagement. That engagement also underwrites the relevance of ongoing historical research in the field. As the historian, Martin Sabrow suggests:

> The period of contemporary history takes its bearings … from the intensity of the commemoration or public debate in the context of remembrance and awareness.[51]

The centennial commemorations highlight that Germans are interested in the First World War, or (more obliquely) that such an interest can be generated.[52]

After 100 years, the year 2014 denoted the high point and also the turning point in Germany's commemorative culture relating to the war. With the extraordinary numbers of new museum exhibitions commissioned for the centennial anniversary, only a few follow-up exhibitions appeared in 2015 and 2016.[53] A conference held by the *Zentrum für Militärgeschichte und Sozialwissenschaften der Bundeswehr* (German Federal Armed Forces Centre of Military History and Social Sciences) and attended by Germany's most prominent military historians and world war specialists went largely unnoticed, even though the conference participants declared 1916 as having been important for the outcome of the war from a military history viewpoint.[54] A large special exhibition on the Russian October revolution of 1917 is planned for 2017 in the German Historical Museum in Berlin. In addition, the *Bundeswehr* Museum of Military History in Dresden will also be putting on a special exhibition to mark the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in Russia, which will feature the Soviet Gulag system. No German museum is planning any exhibition explicitly dedicated to the 1917 year of war. In 2017, most of them are pre-occupied with a quite different anniversary, namely the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther posting his theses on the doors of Wittenberg Castle Church and the associated birth of German Protestantism (Illustration 13.1).[55]

**Illustration 13.1** The *Bundeswehr* Museum of Military History in Dresden. Source: Copyright MHM/Nick Hufton

Commemoration of the end of the world war in 1918 will in many European countries coincide in 2018 with the celebrations to mark their own foundation as nations. The year 1918 marks the point of departure for the national independence of Poland, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, and Yugoslavia, as well as the Ukraine and White Russia. The darker side of peoples' right to self-determination was the exclusion of minorities and an excessive nationalism that challenged the peace order negotiated under the Treaties of Versailles, Saint-Germain, Trianon, Neuilly-sur-Seine and Sèvres. This aspect of the history of 1918 should not be ignored in 2018, at a time of re-emerging nationalist tendencies throughout Europe.[56]

Some of the most visited and most interesting exhibition projects on the First World War in Germany are listed in the book *Erinnerung an die Zerstörung Europas* (Remembering the destruction of Europe) by Thomas Schleper.[57] Of the eleven German museums listed in it, only two will be opening exhibitions in 2018 dedicated to the war's end in 1918.[58] In 2018, the Bavarian Army Museum in Ingolstadt will be devoting itself to the German November revolution and to the disbandment of the army. The '"handling" of the great disaster' of 1918 led, in the assessment of the museum's director, 'to more changes of a long-term nature' than did the 'decision to go to war in 1914'. 'But', as he added, 'this will be much more difficult to communicate to a broader public'.[59]

The German Federal Armed Forces Museum of Military History in Dresden is also planning a major European exhibition project for 2018 entitled 'The Clash of Futures. Myths of Nations. 1914–1945'. Museums in France, Poland, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Italy, and Greece will also be taking part and a major television series is planned to accompany these collective exhibitions. The exhibition argues that the First World War should be considered as a constitutive phase of modern democracy. The term 'Western democracy' was invented in the war.[60] According to this narrative, the entry of the United States into the war and the democratic revolution in Russia in February 1917 marked the beginning of the age of ideologies. Although planned for 2018, it is the 1917 moment that this exhibition brings out as essential. In so doing, these museums return due public attention to the year 1917.

## Conclusion

In France and the Anglo-Saxon countries, the First World War is remembered as the 'Great War'. Certainly, the attribute 'great' refers to the political and territorial consequences of the conflict, yet also, particularly, to the huge number of dead the war claimed. If the number of dead is an important yardstick for the significance of historical events, then it is no surprise that in Russia, for example, the war is mentioned only marginally in school books because more Russians died in the civil war (1917–1923) than between 1914 and 1916,[61] and eleven times as many Soviet citizens died between 1941 and 1945. For similar reasons, remembrance of the Second World War is omnipresent in Germany. Despite or precisely because of these numbers, German historian Herfried Münkler titled his book on the First World War, published in 2014, *Der Große Krieg* (The Great War) since, according to the author

> The term 'Great War', firstly, has something disconcerting about it. And, secondly, it has a signal effect, at least in German ears. It is the war that, as a European war, defined the 20th century. One could say that, without that war, there would have been no World War II, presumably no National Socialism, either, no Stalinism, no Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd—it would have been a very different century. And in that respect the term 'Great War' fits.[62]

The peace of 1918 began with an unimaginable tragedy: the outbreak of a pandemic. Nearly 50 million people, according to the spring 2002 issue of the journal *Bulletin of the History of Medicine,* died of the so-called Spanish Flu. To date, not a single exhibition has been dedicated to that

event and its casualties. Is not the Spanish Flu also a 'great event' according to historical criteria, having claimed three times as many lives as the war? And is mankind's struggle against diseases and for improved hygiene and living conditions for all sections of the population not a comparable 'great' task and just as worthy of remembrance as a 'great' war? Each time we commemorate the anniversary of a war, do we not follow established patterns? Keeping them alive because we attach great importance to them? By opening exhibitions on wars which, as a rule, have contributed less to the progress of civilisation than world expos, art fairs, and faculties of science or literature studies at universities? In that respect, exhibitions are also indicators of a present that still construes and communicates history as a history of wars.

## Notes

1. The chapter focuses on the permanent First World War exhibitions at three German history museums: the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* (German Historical Museum) in Berlin, the *Bayerisches Armeemuseum* (Bavarian Army Museum) in Ingolstadt, and the *Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr* (German Armed Forces Museum of Military History) in Dresden.
2. 'A true collecting mania broke out, seizing soldiers on the front and individuals at home as well as armouries and military museums alike as people were attempting to grasp the world at war.' John Horne, 'Von Museen im Weltkrieg zu Weltkriegsmuseen', in *Mars und Museum: Europäische Museen im Ersten Weltkrieg*, eds Christina Kott and Bénédicte Savoy (Köln: Böhlau Köln, 2016), 38.
3. Christine Beil, *Der ausgestellte Krieg: Präsentation des Ersten Weltkriegs 1914–1939* (Tübingen: Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde, 2004), 33.
4. Thomas Weißbrich, 'Trophäen und Tribut: Das Königliche Zeughaus zu Berlin während des Ersten Weltkriegs', in *Mars und Museum,* 55.
5. Beil, *Der ausgestellte Krieg*, 147.
6. And has been open to the public since 1883. Cf. Weißbrich, 'Trophäen und Tribut', 53.
7. Beil, *Der ausgestellte Krieg*, 167.
8. Susanne Brandt, 'The Memory Makers: Museums and Exhibitions of the First World War', History and Memory 6, no.1 (1994): 94.
9. Beil, *Der ausgestellte Krieg*, 194.
10. Ibid., 209.
11. Arnd Bauerkämper, 'Gedächtnisschichten: Der Erste und Zweite Weltkrieg in den Erinnerungskulturen', in Auf dem Weg zur transnationalen Erinnerungskultur?, eds Monika Fenn und Christiane Kuller (Schwalbach: Wochenschau-Verlag, 2016), 43.
12. Beil, *Der ausgestellte Krieg*, 236.

13. Ibid., 239.
14. Ibid., 276.
15. Christine Beil, 'Kriegsausstellungen während des Nationalsozialismus', in *Nationalsozialismus und Erster Weltkrieg*, ed. Gerd Krumeich (Essen: Klartext, 2010), 99.
16. Ibid.
17. Beil, *Der ausgestellte Krieg*, 327.
18. Ibid., 215.
19. Ibid., 229.
20. Ibid., 300.
21. Ibid., 334.
22. Ibid., 349.
23. Beil, 'Kriegsausstellungen', 104.
24. Ibid.
25. Thomas Thiemeyer, *Fortsetzung des Krieges mit anderen Mitteln: Die beiden Weltkriege im Museum* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2010), 78. Ditto: Fabio Crivellari, 'Die Medialität des Krieges: Der Erste Weltkrieg in der populären Erinnerungskultur nach 1945 am Beispiel populärer Geschichtsmagazine' (Dissertation, Universität Konstanz, 2011), 24.
26. Thiemeyer, *Fortsetzung des Krieges*, 98.
27. Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914/18* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1961), 97.
28. Klaus Wiegrefe, 'Der Marsch in die Barbarei', *Der Spiegel*, August 2004, 78.
29. Konrad H. Jarausch, 'Ein Buch wie ein Sprengsatz', interview by Der Spiegel. *Der Spiegel*, March 30, 2004. http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/spiegelspecial/d-30300047.html.
30. Thiemeyer, *Fortsetzung des Krieges*, 80.
31. George F. Kennan. *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order: Franco-Russian Relations 1875–1890* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 3.
32. Winston Churchill used this term, which Charles de Gaulle had already coined in 1941, in his book *The Second World War*, published in 1948: Thiemeyer, *Fortsetzung des Krieges*, 21.
33. Ernst Nolte, *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917–1945: Nationalsoialismus und Bolschewismus* (Frankfurt: Propyläen Verlag, 1987), 502.
34. Ibid.
35. Tobias Arand, 'Epochenjahr 1917', *Geschichte und Geschehen*, Sekundarstufe 2 Themenheft (2007), 16.
36. Frank Bösch and Jürgen Danyel, *Zeitgeschichte: Konzepte und Methoden* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 30ff.

37. Gerd Krumeich, 'Der Erste Weltkrieg im Museum', in *Der Erste Weltkrieg in der populären Erinnerungskultur*, eds Barbara Korte, Sylvia Paletschek and Wolfgang Hochbruck (Essen: Klartext, 2008), 59.
38. Thiemeyer, *Fortsetzung des Krieges*, 100.
39. Hermann Lübbe, *Die Aufdringlichkeit der Geschichte: Herausforderung der Moderne vom Historismus bis zum Nationalsozialismus* (Graz: Styria, 1989), 26.
40. The situation is similar, for example, in Russia. 'It is noticeable that World War I has remained overshadowed by the 1917 Revolution and by World War II. One of the textbooks used for teaching Russian history is well worth mentioning as an example in this regard, where the chapter on the subject of World War I is titled 'On the way to the year 1917'.' Nikolav Vlasov. 'Der Große Vergessene Krieg: der Erste Weltkrieg in modernen russischen Schulbüchern'. Gendenken und (k)ein Ende?, 99.
41. Barbara Korte and Sylvia Paletschek, eds, *History Goes Pop: Zur Repräsentation von Geschichte in populären Medien und Genres* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009), 35.
42. Thomas Schleper, ed., *Erinnerung an die Zerstörung Europas: Rückblick auf den Großen Krieg in Ausstellungen und anderen Medien*. (Essen: Klartext, 2016), 90.
43. Bösch and Danyel, *Zeitgeschichte*, 122.
44. Monika Fenn, '"Der Krieg, der fern war, ist jetzt nah": Staatliches Erinnern an "1914" im Mega-Jubiläumsjahr 2014 in Deutschland' in *Auf dem Weg zur transnationalen Erinnerung?: Konvergenzen, Interferenzen und Differenzen der Erinnerung an den Ersten Weltkrieg im Jubiläumsjahr 2014*, eds Monika Fenn and Christiane Kuller (Schwalbach: Wochen Schau, 2016), 69.
45. Ibid.
46. Franziska Dunkel, '"Es fehlt etwas": Transnationales Erinnern an den Ersten Weltkrieg in Museen 2014', Fenn and Kuller, *transnationalen Erinnerung?*, 207.
47. Schleper, Erinnerung an die Zerstörung Europas, 31.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., 32.
50. Christopher Clark, *Die Schlafwandler: Wie Europa in den Ersten Weltkrieg zog*, trans. Norbert Juraschitz (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2013), 651.
51. Martin Sabrow, *Die Zeit der Zeitgeschichte* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012), 12.
52. This led to a 'barrage of remembrance', as Nils Freytag wrote. Nils Freytag, 'Neuerscheinungen zum Ersten Weltkrieg', Einführung, *Sehepunkte* 14, no.

7/8 (2014), accessed Jan 6, 2017, http://www.sehepunkte.de/2014/07/forum/neuerscheinungen-zum-1-weltkrieg-178/. Germans easily forget that 'not for all nations which took part in the war was the year 2014 the dramatic break between war and peace. Particularly the "latecomers" do not necessarily give that year that special place in their national tradition of remembrance as countries in western and central Europe do. Not only Italy, but also Bulgaria, Romania and Greece—i.e. the bulk of south-eastern Europe—fall into that category. Countries such as Portugal, China, the United States and Brazil also tend to remember other years'. Bernhard Bachinger, Richard Lein, Verena Moritz, Julia Walleczek-Fritz, Stefan Wedrac, Markus Wurzer: Gedenken und (k)ein Ende? Eine Einleitung, in: dies. (ed.): Gedenken und (k)ein Ende?. Das Weltkriegs-Gedenken 1914/2014—Debatten, Zugänge, Ausblicke, 2016, 9. Unpublished conference proceedings.

53. For example: *Der Große Krieg im Kleinformat. Graphik- und Medaillenkunst zum Ersten Weltkrieg* [The Great War in Small Format: Graphic and medal art for the First World War] (Ingolstadt: Bavarian Army Museum, 26.03.–26.07.2015); *Verdun—Ein Jahrhundert für den Frieden 1916–2016* [Verdun—A century for peace 1916–2016] (Institut Français), a photography exhibition shown for the first time in Paris on February 24, 2016, which afterwards toured several German cities, including Berlin, Stuttgart, and Tuebingen; and *'(Her)ausgestellt—Verdun—100 Jahre'* [Exposed—Verdun—100 years], a photography exhibition at HTWK Leipzig, which opened on November 2, 2016.
54. Christian Stachelbeck, introduction to 'Materialschlachten 1916. Ereignis, Bedeutung, Erinnerung', *Militaergeschichtliche Zeitschrift* (2017), 1.
55. 'Luther 2017: 500 Years of Reformation', Stiftung Luthergedenkstätten in Sachsen-Anhalt, accessed September 2, 2017, https://www.luther2017.de/de/2017/termine-veranstaltungen/termine-veranstaltungen/.
56. So as not to forget the starting point of national unity and independence—the First World War with its nine million fallen soldiers—amidst the 100th anniversary fireworks, former East German foreign minister Markus Meckel has set up an action group in Germany to organise an international decade of peace in cooperation with political, cultural, scientific and church circles to mark the end of the war in 1918.
57. This collection of essays mainly covers the German Rhineland region, but also refers to exhibitions in Berlin, Dresden, and various international cities.
58. In 2018, however, a new regional museum dedicated to the First World War will be opening on a mountaintop in Alsace known as *Hartmannsweiler Kopf* (Hartmansweiler Head), where ferocious fighting took place during the war.

59. Dr. Ansgar Reiß (director of the Bayerisches Armeemuseum), email to author, January 12, 2017.
60. Tim B. Müller and Adam Tooze, eds, *Normalität und Fragilität. Demokratie nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, trans. Jürgen Bauer and Edith Nerke (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2015), 20.
61. Oleg Jurjew, 'Verloren und vergessen', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, June 14, 2014, https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/verloren-und-vergessen-1.18321629.
62. Herfried Münkler, 'Der Erste Weltkrieg hat Signalcharakter', interview by Sarah Judith Hofmann. *Deutsche Welle*, August 1, 2014. http://www.dw.com/de/der-erste-weltkrieg-hat-signalcharakter/a-17460936.

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