

Oklahoma HUMANITIES

FALL 2014



BEFORE THE NEW AGE and the New Frontier and the New Deal, before Roy Rogers and John Wayne and Tom Mix, before Bugs Bunny and **Mickey Mouse** and Felix the Cat, before the TVA and TV and radio and the Radio Flyer, before *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Gone with the Wind* and *The Jazz Singer*, before the CIA and the FBI and the WPA, before airlines and airmail and air conditioning, before LBJ and JFK and FDR, before the Space Shuttle and Sputnik and the *Hindenburg* and the *Spirit of St. Louis*, before the Greed Decade and the Me Decade and the Summer of Love and the Great Depression and **Prohibition**, before Yuppies and Hippies and Okies and Flappers, before Saigon and Inchon and Nuremberg and Pearl Harbor and Weimar, before Ho and Mao and Chiang, before MP3s and CDs and LPs, before **Martin Luther King** and Thurgood Marshall and Jackie Robinson, before the pill and Pampers and penicillin, before GI surgery and GI Joe and the GI Bill, before AFDC and HUD and Welfare and **Medicare** and Social Security, before Super Glue and titanium and Lucite, before the Sears Tower and the **Twin Towers** and the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building, before the In Crowd and the A Train and the Lost Generation, before the Blue Angels and Rhythm & Blues and *Rhapsody in Blue*, before **Tupperware** and the refrigerator and the automatic transmission and the aerosol can and the Band-Aid and nylon and the **ballpoint pen** and sliced bread, before the Iraq War and the Gulf War and the Cold War and the Vietnam War and the Korean War and the Second World War, there was

the First World War,
World War I,
The Great War,
The War to End All Wars.

Excerpt from *The Last of the Doughboys* by Richard Rubin
(New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013)

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Oklahoma HUMANITIES

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FALL 2014

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The Oklahoma Humanities Council (OHC) strengthens communities by helping Oklahomans learn about the human experience, understand new perspectives, and participate knowledgeably in civic life. The humanities—disciplines such as history, literature, film studies, ethics, and philosophy—offer a deeper understanding of ourselves and others by confronting us with the questions, values, and meanings of the human experience. As the nonprofit, state partner for the National Endowment for the Humanities, OHC brings people together to explore these ideas through programming and community grants that support book groups, exhibits, film festivals, teacher institutes, and more. OHC engages people in their own communities, providing forums for education, critical thinking, and productive civil discourse.

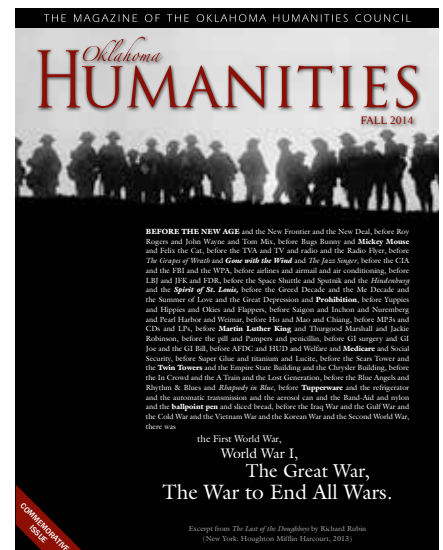
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ON THE COVER

British troops at dawn near Thiepval Sept. 15, 1916, at the outset of The Battle of Flanders during the months-long Somme Offensive. The Flanders-Courcelette conflict marked the first use of tanks on the battlefield, introduced by British forces. Photo by Ernest Brooks, courtesy The First World War Poetry Digital Archive (oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit), University of Oxford; © copyright The Imperial War Museum.





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OklahomaHumanitiesCouncil



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OKHumanitiesCouncil

IN THIS COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE we mark the centenary of the First World War, 1914-1918, a conflict that ended empires, engendered new nations, and initiated warfare technologies that wrought devastation on a global scale. We added eight pages to our normal page count to bring you the brightest minds on the war and its impact. This issue is a keeper, one to read now and to use later as perspective on the books, films, and documentaries to be released in the next four years.

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From the Executive Director
ANN THOMPSON

LEST WE FORGET

One hundred years is a long time and those with any memory of WWI are all but gone, yet it really isn't that long ago considering our connections to it. Like many of my generation, my grandfather served in the war. He was with the 149th Field Artillery, the Rainbow Division, which saw combat in the trenches of France and later went to Germany after the armistice. I knew my grandfather but never heard him speak of his experience and it wasn't until long after his death that I explored the footlocker containing his helmet and other military memorabilia. I'm only two degrees separated from the war; to me, one hundred years is therefore not that long ago.

Though the Great War was touted as a war to end all wars and fought so the world would be made safe for democracy, we now know better. With over 37 million estimated killed, wounded, or missing, the war bears remembrance. Its legacy is profound. Many tensions in the Middle East today can be traced to the converting of former German and Ottoman Empire territories and colonies to Allied-managed mandates following WWI, and to Britain's Balfour Declaration of 1917 which gave support for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." Within a short twenty years following the Treaty of Versailles' severe concessions and reparations against Germany, WWII began.

The legacy of war continues to be an important humanities theme that has obvious relevance. Recent conflicts have impacted our communities, our veterans, and their families. In recognition of the need to understand the cost of war, the National Endowment for the Humanities has recently initiated "Standing Together: The Humanities and the Experience of War." This special initiative draws on the power of the humanities to support advanced research in the humanities that explores war and its aftermath; to promote discussion and deepened understanding of the experiences of those Americans affiliated with the armed services, whether active duty or veterans; and to support returning veterans and their families.

Our state council is exploring public programming that will help us better understand the war experience. We will explore the critical role that war has played in our nation's history. Through the breadth of disciplines in humanities scholarship, we can better understand our past and our present, and make informed decisions for our future.

Letters

INFORMED CHOICE

I just received my Summer 2014 edition of *Oklahoma HUMANITIES* magazine. I am looking forward to reading the great articles. I love the cover and I am happy to have contact with like-minded individuals, an important factor here in Oklahoma.

I always find the articles informative and good reads. Last year I even took my Fall 2013 issue to my cardiologist's office for reference. The article on "End of Life Decisions: Exercising Your Right To Choose" by Phillip J. Rettig, MD was a great help in my having an informed discussion with my doctor. The article dealt clearly with the impact Oklahoma's law HB1403 has on an individual's end of life decisions and/or medical treatments and test requests. I found this article very helpful in clearly discussing those very decisions with my doctor.

I eagerly look forward to this same caliber of article covering a wide variety of areas in all upcoming issues. Thank you all for the efforts made to bring this great magazine to us.

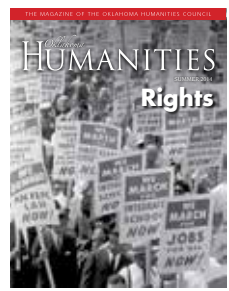
—Jo Ann Duck Teter, Perkins

POSITIVELY INSPIRING

I wanted to drop a line and thank you for *Oklahoma HUMANITIES* magazine. It is a good read and you have some very thought-inspiring articles. Certainly a positive addition to the humanities, cultural anthropology, history, and the arts.

—Merl Paaverud

Director of the State Historical Society of North Dakota



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“The painful, moving, inspiring, and important story of Chief Standing Bear has found a worthy chronicler in Joe Starita.”
—IAN FRAZIER, author of *On the Rez* and *Great Plains*

The Best Investment

WHY I GIVE

I have always had a great love for history and literature and the Oklahoma Humanities Council is the number one organization in my area offering programs and events that reflect my interests. I was introduced to the Council and its programming by board member John Martin of Enid, and I have been a supporter ever since my initial gift in 2008. We are a young state and it's very important that we support the Council so that it can continue to provide free programming to Oklahomans of all ages.



Bert Mackie, Enid

When I think of the Oklahoma Humanities Council, words that come to mind are: education, cultural events, and teacher training—the aspect of the Council's work that gives me the most satisfaction. In training teachers and offering opportunities for professional development in the field of the humanities, the Council is in a prime position to instill the importance of history, literature, and culture in thousands of our young men and women. The Council is worthy of my support and I would highly encourage Oklahomans to invest in their mission to ensure cultural programming is available to all. It will be the best investment you can make!



And the winner is ... *Oklahoma HUMANITIES Magazine*

Oklahoma HUMANITIES Magazine is again named among *the best* in the region, taking top honors for writing. Thanks to all the authors, artists, archives, and donors that help make our publication “the tops.”

2014 GREAT PLAINS JOURNALISM AWARDS

(8-state regional competition)

Winner, Magazine Feature Writing:

“Rabbit Punched” by Howard Faulkner,
Edited and introduction by Carla Walker

2014 SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS AWARDS

Oklahoma Pro Chapter

1st Place, General Writing:

“One’s Self I Sing” by Lori Lindsey

2nd Place, Best PR Publication:

Winter 2013 “Popular Culture”

3rd Place, Best PR Publication Cover:

Winter 2013 “Popular Culture”

3rd Place, Best Promotional Material:

Oklahoma Roots Music Concert



From the OHC Board of Trustees

DR. WILLIAM BRYANS, CHAIR

GRAY MATTERS

Admittedly, I learned little in my eighth grade English class. However, I did gain a life lesson. Several times during the year, my soon-to-be retired teacher uttered: “He who knows all the answers, seldom knows all the questions.” Even before I realized he was paraphrasing Confucius, that quote became embedded in my conscience and provided a foundation for my understanding of the humanities.

To me, the quote means asking questions is as important as providing answers. It also conveys that nothing really is simply black or white. Reality is often gray. Understanding ourselves and the world in which we live is complex and difficult. It requires being open to myriad questions, thinking about them, and then deriving answers—while knowing there are multiple “right” answers that may guide us.

Knowledge of history, literature, philosophy, ethics, and all the humanities disciplines provides an invaluable foundation for asking and answering the questions necessary to confront the complexity of the world around us. It is obvious to me that this humanities-based perspective is especially critical at this time. We face significant social and political questions that defy simplistic black-and-white answers. Meeting these challenges requires thoughtfully pondering the questions they pose and striving to answer them in ways that will make ourselves and all of society better.

The insights and counsel the humanities provide are as essential to our collective success as the currently-touted mantra of science, technology, engineering, and math—arguably more so. So, for one last time before stepping down as chair of the OHC board, I urge you to support the Council's vital work. Contribute financially, but also attend a Council-sponsored program, actively participate in it, and speak out on just how necessary the humanities are to all of us.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Early discussions for this issue had us planning for a topic on “memory.” Ed Linenthal, editor of the *Journal of American History*, is an expert in the area, but he pointed me in a different direction. “The bigger story in 2014,” he said, “will be the centenary of World War I.” *World War I? It’s ancient history, it happened a hundred years ago, nobody remembers anything about that war!* Exactly. What we have forgotten (or never learned) about WWI would fill volumes. It was a good reason to bring you an extended commemorative issue—on The Great War.

One factoid I read stated that, in the United States, the collective memory—written histories, journalism, and popular culture—of the Second World War far exceeds that of the First. Using my local library to test the theory, I found twenty-eight shelves on WWII. The books about WWI fit on two shelves. Though crude, the comparison isn’t unfair.

In his recent book, *The Last of the Doughboys*, Richard Rubin notes that the United States left most of the history writing on the First World War to Europe (excerpt/Q&A, pg. 17). Europeans, after all, were in it much longer than Americans and had a lot more to say, some of it not too flattering to the U.S., who, in their estimation, dragged its feet for years before taking part. Too, the press was highly censored. Andrew Huebner tells us that the war was a massive sales job for the federal government. In the interest of molding a pro-war public, the press could say little about what was really happening at the front. Writers David Lowry, Chip Kooi, and Gary Lindsey show us that even in the tiny community of Cordell, Oklahoma, dissent against the war could get you a life sentence in Fort Leavenworth. Speech wasn’t free in WWI America. The Espionage and Sedition Acts enacted fines and jail time for expressing opinions, publicly or privately, that didn’t toe the patriotic party line.

To maximize effect, the propaganda needed a villain. Xenophobia against German immigrants wasn’t just person-to-person prejudice, it was prescribed by government to control “enemy aliens.” Christiane Brandt Faris found evidence of the discrimination in a family letter written by her great-grand uncle: “We were insulted and shunned and called spies, even if our sons fought with the military overseas.”

It was called world war for a reason—it was epic. John Kinder accepted our daunting assignment to communicate the scope of the war, an event he calls “the deadliest and most wasteful military conflict the world had ever known.” It was the dawn of industrial warfare and it exacted a loss so great, took so many soldiers’ lives that they were called “the lost generation.” Out of this loss, says Jay Winter, came a new culture of commemoration. Remembrance had to evolve, had to be practiced in new ways and gave rise to modern war memorials.

The Great War changed the world for women, too. Jennifer Keene and Melissa Strong tell us how women not only took up the slack on farms and in factories when men left to fight, they rushed to volunteer at the war front as ambulance drivers, nurses,



and as growing ranks of female military personnel. They dodged bullets and bombs *and* the unwanted advances of male superiors.

So, this issue is about memory after all. Our authors look beyond the selective stories journalists were allowed to tell and the narrow facts used by past historians. They find the real story of war in the firsthand accounts of veterans and nurses and volunteers who witnessed terrible events. They show us how propaganda shaped the messages of war and, thus, the way it was remembered—even dictating how it should be mourned. The discrimination, government control, and narrowing of freedoms in WWI America will shock contemporary readers. There’s much that bears remembering.

Carla Walker, Editor
carla@okhumanities.org

P.S. The historical images in this issue are archival treasures, offering additional insight into the WWI era. Take time to “read” their stories, too. The captions are detailed, and worth your time. Image above: From Overseas to You, Hear her Story at Chautauqua, Gordon Grant, 1919. Courtesy Library of Congress, collection details on pg. 29 EXTRA!

Have a comment, question, or suggestion?

Email the editor at carla@okhumanities.org or tweet us: @okhumanities



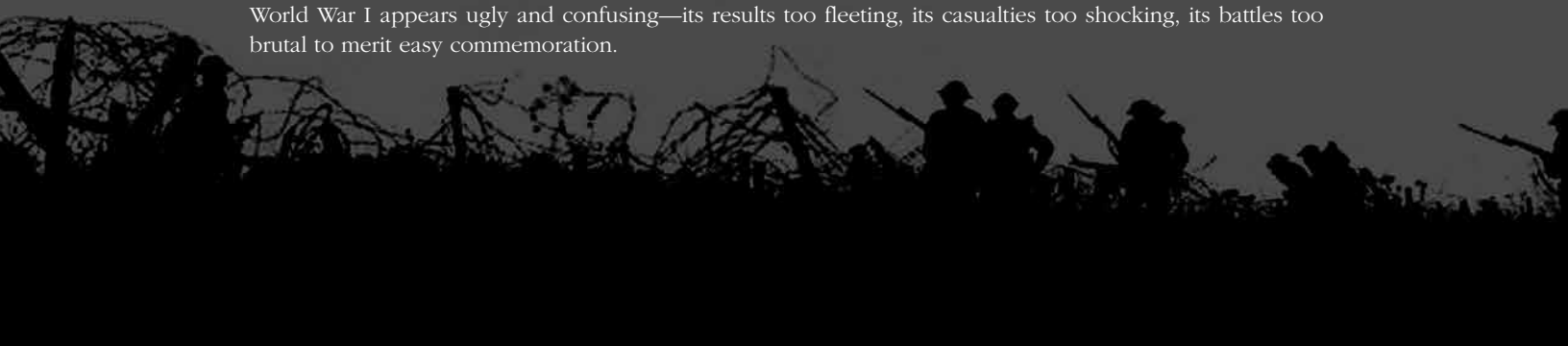
A War of Many Names

By John M. Kinder

*World War I. A conflict too large for any one name.
A generation of dead, too many to name.*

A hundred years ago, at the dawn of what promised to be an age of cultural and political enlightenment, Europe erupted into the deadliest and most wasteful military conflict the world had ever known. By the war's end in 1918, more than *ten million* combatants would die on the battlefield, another *twenty million* from disease. For many of the survivors, including the millions with permanent disabilities, World War I marked a loss of faith in civilization and technological progress. Ernest Hemingway, who drove ambulances in Italy, called it "the most colossal, murderous, mismanaged butchery that has ever taken place on earth." Others saw the conflict as an omen for a new future of mechanized slaughter—a time, in novelist John Dos Passos' words, when soldiers were reduced to "cogs in the great slow-moving Juggernaut of armies."

Until recently, U.S. memories of the twentieth century's first world war have been obscured by nostalgia for "The Good War," Studs Terkel's ironic nickname for World War II. For those raised on the cinema spectacles of Audie Murphy and John Wayne, where battles are bloodless and the "good guys" always win, World War I appears ugly and confusing—its results too fleeting, its casualties too shocking, its battles too brutal to merit easy commemoration.





From page 7, top to bottom: Single file of infantry going forward in the last stages of the 1918 offensive, Canal du Nord, France, Sept. 27, 1918; photo by D. McLellan. The Somme Offensive on the Western Front, Thiepval, France, Aug. 7, 1916; photo by Ernest Brooks. Above left and right: Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele), near St. Eloi, Creuse, France, Aug. 11, 1917. General John J. Pershing during a parade in New York, Sept. 10, 1919; photo by Bain News Service (courtesy Library of Congress).

Even the war's name was—and remains—contested. In September 1914, German philosopher Ernst Haeckl deemed the conflict the “First World War,” a reference to his belief that no previous war could match its global scope. “The Great War,” a label especially popular in Britain, appeared in print a month later, while “World War I” did not gain popularity until after 1939, when it came to be used as a corollary to World War II. In his April 1917 war declaration, Woodrow Wilson described the conflict as a war to make the world “safe for democracy,” a phrase that would be mocked throughout the postwar period, as would the even more utopian formulation, the “war to end all wars.” Most combatants simply preferred “the war”—a term as nondescript and unromantic as the battlefield itself.

Empire, Alliance, Assassination—War!

Even today, unraveling the spiderweb of treaties and national ambitions that led to World War I is daunting. At its heart, World War I was an imperial conflict, the product of Europeans’ decades-long contest for wealth, territory, and colonial power. Yet, to the untrained eye, the chronology of the Great War’s origins appears little more than a random list of national resentments and strategic alliances (Austria-Hungary and Germany; France and Russia; Great Britain and Belgium). Standard accounts of World War I often begin on June 28, 1914, when radical Serbian nationalists assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, on the streets of Sarajevo. Within little more than two months, the repercussions of Ferdinand’s death would set much of Europe aflame. Eager to consolidate control over the Balkans, Austria-Hungary sent Serbia a ten-point ultimatum effectively blaming the royal government for the crime. Although the Serbian response conceded nearly all of Austria-Hungary’s demands, the Empire—egged on by their German allies—declared war on Serbia on July 28.

The dominoes quickly began to fall as more and more nations were pulled into the conflict. The first was Serbia’s ally, Czarist Russia, which began to mobilize its defensive forces in anticipation of future attack. Looking for an excuse to expand its military influence, Germany interpreted the Russian maneuvers as a *casus belli* (“justification for war”). On August 1, Germany

declared war on Russia; two days later, it declared war on France, which was obligated by treaty to come to Russia’s defense. On August 4, Britain along with its colonies and dominions abroad (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India) entered the fray, bound to support neutral Belgium, which had been invaded by Germany. Other nations followed. In late August, Japan joined the war on the side of Great Britain. Two months after that, the Ottoman Empire, under pressure by Germany and eager to regain recent territorial losses, suddenly attacked Russian ships in the Black Sea. Meanwhile, Italy—which had declared a Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1881—managed to sit on the sidelines until May 1915, when it signed a secret treaty with the Triple Entente of Great Britain, France, and Russia.

From their vantage point an ocean away, Americans watched the fighting unfold with a mixture of shock and incomprehension. None of it made sense. The era of “great wars” was supposed to be over (in 1911, historian G. P. Gooch predicted that war between “civilized nations” would soon be “as antiquated as a duel”), and few Americans could comprehend how the death of an obscure central European monarch—singled out as the primary catalyst for the conflict—justified the annihilation of European youth. Woodrow Wilson, upon hearing of the German invasion of Belgium, cautioned American citizens to stay neutral. In his words, the Great War was “a distant event, terrible and tragic, but one which does not concern us closely.”

Home by Christmas

In August 1914, when the Great War began, many in Europe predicted that fighting would be over by Christmas. At a combined strength of more than six million men, both the Allies (Great Britain, France, Italy, Russia) and the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire) were confident of rapid victory. Germany’s ambitious offensive strategy was to avoid a prolonged, two-front war by defeating the French forces within six weeks, thus freeing its troops for an all-out assault on Russia. If everything went to plan, boasted Kaiser Wilhelm, the Germans would have “Paris for lunch, Saint Petersburg for dinner.” And, at first, Wilhelm and his military cohorts had reason for optimism.

With devastating efficiency, German armies swept through



Left: American troops, Bardouville, France, March 17, 1918. Right: Men of the 2nd Australian Division using a periscope in a front line trench, Croix-du-Bac near Armentières, France, May 18, 1916; photo by Ernest Brooks. Except where noted, images for this article are courtesy The First World War Poetry Digital Archive (oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit), University of Oxford; © copyright The Imperial War Museum.

the boggy fields of southwestern Belgium, waging ferocious battles against French and Belgian armies before smashing through British defenses at the Battle of Mons near the French border. However, Germany's timetable quickly fell apart. In early September, advancing German troops were halted by Franco-British forces near the Marne River, twenty-five miles outside of Paris. Over the next month and a half, German and Franco-British armies maneuvered northwest, toward the English Channel, as both sides struggled to outflank the other and win a strategic advantage.

In a move of desperation, German forces tried to restart their offensive near the Belgian town of Ypres, where tens of thousands of reservists and young volunteers (many of whom were enthusiastic students just a few months earlier) were cut down by the British line of fire. Known in Germany as the *Kindermord bei Ypern* ("Massacre of the Innocents at Ypres"), the First Battle of Ypres signaled the end of mobile warfare. As winter approached, both sides began to dig in along the Western Front, gouging out a 475-mile-long network of trenches, barbed wire, and redoubts stretching from the North Sea to the Swiss Alps.

For three years, both sides tried—and failed—to gain advantage. If the definition of insanity, to paraphrase the old cliché, is to do the same thing over and over and expect a different result, World War I elevated mass lunacy to a global scale. Throughout 1915, 1916, and 1917, German forces flung themselves at Allied dugouts, only to be beaten back by a hail of fire and metal. Then the Allies would have their turn—and the cycle would start again. Winston Churchill, who served as an officer on the Western Front, lamented, "The War was decided in the first twenty days of fighting, and all that happened afterwards consisted in battles which, however formidable and devastating, were but desperate and vain appeals against the decision of Fate." For all the waste of life, fighting in Europe remained a virtual stalemate, where progress was measured in yards—and body counts.

As the war dragged on, both sides sought technological solutions to break the impasse. Initially used for reconnaissance, airplanes became powerful weapons in their own right. World War I introduced the aerial "dogfight" to modern warfare—and

along with it the romantic image of the combat fighter ace (the proverbial "knight of the sky," whose thrilling duels were celebrated as the last vestiges of martial chivalry). At the same time, World War I spawned the bluntest of military instruments, the tank—a multi-ton armored vehicle designed to traverse the muddy terrain of No Man's Land on caterpillar tracks. To the disappointment of military strategists, tanks failed to transform the conflict into a war of mobility (many became stuck in the mud and crews frequently suffered from carbon monoxide poisoning). Still, they confirmed one of modern war's fundamental truths: that human flesh is feeble armor against the explosive power of machines.

If the warring parties retained any pretense about "civilized" fighting, all of that went out the window with the introduction of poison gas. On April 22, 1915, German forces released a greenish-yellow cloud of chlorine vapor against French Caribbean troops stationed near Ypres. (In the earliest attacks, Germans discharged gas from cylinders installed in the trenches, relying upon favorable winds to disperse the fumes; yet both sides quickly turned to trench mortars and high-explosive shells as a more effective means of delivery.) Victims of chlorine gas attacks fell into fits of violent coughing and nausea; gasping for breath, some died within minutes while others suffered for days before asphyxiating. Introduced in late 1915, phosgene was deadlier still, often killing those exposed to the gas within forty-eight hours. Most feared of all was mustard gas, an oily liquid named for its noxious odor. Dispersed by bursting shells, mustard gas blistered men's skin and eyes and, when inhaled, left casualties susceptible to tuberculosis and fatal infections.

Despite such technological "advances," the strategy behind most World War I battles would have been familiar to generals a hundred years earlier: a sustained artillery barrage followed by waves of men and gunfire. In the summer of 1916, British and French armies spearheaded what they predicted would be the break-through battle of the war—a massive infantry assault near the River Somme in northern France. For eight days, British artillery bombarded the German front lines to clear a path for the offensive. On the morning of July 1, 1916, more than 100,000 British soldiers stumbled over their parapets and began a slow



Above left to right: A line of U.S. soldiers on a muddy road in France, c. 1918-1919; photo by U.S. Army Signal Corp (courtesy Library of Congress). Sentry looking out through a loop-hole, Worcestershire Regiment of British Expeditionary Force, Battle of the Somme, Aug. 1916. Opposite, top to bottom: Men of the Australian 2nd Division outside the Mairie in Bapaume, France, March 1917. A stretcher case being brought in from La Boisselle, France, July 3, 1916; photo by Ernest Brooks.

march toward the German trenches. Within seconds the fatal flaw of the British plan was apparent. Secure in their concrete-fortified bunkers, German forces had survived the shelling and unleashed a torrent of bullets on the approaching “Tommies” (slang for British soldiers). It was a massacre. Roughly 60,000 British troops were killed or wounded on the first day, many within the opening minutes of the attack. In some cases, German machine gunners were so disgusted by the carnage that they stopped firing altogether. Four and a half months later, when the Battle of the Somme was finally over, the combined British, French, and German casualties numbered more than 1.2 million.

Other campaigns produced similar results. In the ten-month Battle of Verdun in northeastern France (February-December 1916), the combined German and French casualties exceeded those of the entire American Civil War. During the Battle of Passchendaele in Flemish Belgium (July-November 1917), British, Canadian, and other Allied forces waged a three-month campaign to capture a strategically-located ridge from German forces. At the battle’s end, hundreds of thousands were dead and the ancient city of Ypres lay in ruins—all to win a few miles of territory. It was the third major battle over the same terrain in three years.

Overture to “Over There”

All the while, the Great War’s escalating violence crept ever closer to U.S. shores. Beginning in 1914, both Great Britain and Germany launched a campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare designed to blockade the North Atlantic and cut off much-needed supplies. All enemy vessels were fair game for attack; even ships from “neutral” countries could not necessarily expect safe passage. (Very often, the fog of war—quite literally—made it tough to distinguish friend from foe.) In May 1915, a German U-boat torpedoed the Cunard ocean liner *Lusitania* off the coast of Ireland. Overburdened with tons of undeclared munitions, the ship exploded upon impact, sinking in only a matter of minutes. Nearly 1,200 passengers and crew members drowned, among them 128 Americans. These were not the first U.S. casualties in the Great War (American volunteers had been serving under British, French, and Canadian command from the very start). Still, many

Americans expressed outrage at what they considered a threat to U.S. sovereignty and a gross violation of maritime law. Although Germany imposed some limitations on its submarine policy, super-nationalists such as former president Theodore Roosevelt saw the *Lusitania* attack as a harbinger of coming bloodshed—and a reason why Americans should ready themselves to fight.

Despite such warnings, the vast majority of Americans wanted no part in the Great War. The killing fields of the Civil War were still in living memory, and isolationist roots ran deep, particularly in the South and Midwest where farmers and old-guard populists rankled at the thought of fighting on European soil. Pacifists

**For all the waste of life,
fighting in Europe remained
a virtual stalemate, where
progress was measured in
yards—and body counts.**

argued that no cause justified the indiscriminate bloodletting of modern warfare, while socialists—at the time, a potent force in American politics—saw the war as a grand scheme to sell arms and drain the blood of the working class. Feminists worried that hyper-masculine “war fever” would sap public support for their suffrage campaigns. For many recent immigrants, Europe’s so-called “war for civilization” was another reminder of what they had fled the Old World to escape. In 1915, the antiwar song “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier” was a national hit and Woodrow Wilson was reelected the following year on the slogan “He Kept Us Out of War.”

Such sentiments never disappeared entirely. By early 1917, however, U.S. intervention seemed increasingly inevitable. After a lengthy congressional debate, the United States officially entered

the war on April 6. Was the nation prepared to fight? The short answer was no. At 5,791 officers, 121,797 enlisted men, and 167,768 National Guardsmen, the military was undermanned and ill-equipped to fight a modern war an ocean away, much less come together as a cohesive force. Some troops were stationed along the Mexican border, the scene of a failed expedition to capture outlaw-revolutionary Pancho Villa. The National Guard was spread out across the country with disorganized units still under state jurisdiction.

The federal government had not attempted a national draft since the Civil War. Critics warned that reintroducing one now would be a stain on the United States' democratic ideals. Even so, Woodrow Wilson believed that only a conscripted army could provide the manpower needed for the long fight ahead, and on May 18, 1917, he signed the Selective Service Act into law. More than nine million American men between the ages of 21 and 31 registered for the draft on the first day. After years of urging a hands-off policy, Wilson quickly set to work bolstering public support and congressional funding for the war effort. Eager to put muscle behind the war message, he established the Committee on Public Information, a federal agency devoted to spreading "affirmative propaganda" and censoring anything deemed a threat to public morale. Wilson also pushed for passage of the Espionage (1917) and Sedition Acts (1918) to stifle political dissent. By November 1918, four million Americans were in uniform, half of them serving overseas.

Beyond the daunting task of mobilizing, housing, equipping, and training an army in wartime, U.S. war planners faced an additional challenge: the poor health of recruits. Nearly a third of the men were rejected as unfit for service, and those who made the final cut were hardly the barrel-chested farm boys that recruiters were hoping for. The average American soldier stood only five feet seven inches tall and weighed in at a meager 142 pounds. Over half of the men enlisted with some form of "physical defect," and some 324,000 soldiers were discharged for health reasons early in their training.

"The Yanks Are Coming"

Although advance units of recruits began arriving in France as early as June 1917, it would be nearly a year before the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) was ready for battle. Allied commanders complained that the United States was intentionally dragging its feet, but the AEF's new leader, John J. "Black Jack" Pershing—a decorated veteran of the Spanish-American War—resisted Allied calls for fresh cannon fodder. Upon arrival, most "doughboys"—the nickname given to U.S. soldiers—were raw and undisciplined (some had yet to fire a weapon with live ammunition). The typical enlistee spent his first few months training under British and French command. Later on, his unit would transfer to a "quiet" sector where it could slowly acclimate to wartime life. By January 1918, some 175,000 Americans were serving overseas; over the next four months, nearly a million more would disembark for European shores.

The United States' role in active combat began in the late spring of 1918, when the German army launched a massive offensive to crush the war-weary Allies, capture Paris, and end the war. American forces were expected to help repulse the German assault and fill gaps in the front line, already stretched thin because of sickness, mutiny, and attrition. On May 28,



American troops won an early (albeit largely symbolic) victory by recapturing the German-held village of Cantigny in northern France. A few days later, U.S. Marines assaulted German positions at Belleau Wood, a nearly impenetrable thicket of trees, boulders, and undergrowth bordered by fields of red poppies and wheat. Little more than a square mile in area, the former hunting reserve held three lines of German trenches, along with machine-gun nests, mines, and dense belts of barbed wire.

Newspapers at home reported a quick victory, but for three weeks, wave upon wave of untested Marines poured into the forest, only to be cut down in a spray of bullets. Nearby hospitals were swamped with injured troops. In one five-day period, Evacuation Hospital No. 6 at Juilly, which was meant to house only 250 beds, received over 2,000 fresh casualties. At one point, the fighting was so bloody that withdrawing French armies urged the Americans to pull back. U.S. Captain Lloyd Williams' response would go down in Marine Corps legend: "Retreat? Hell, we just got here." For the Marines, clearing Belleau Wood was more than a military assignment; it was a chance to prove their martial valor to the Allies and Germans alike. Their triumph came at a steep price. By the battle's end, more than 9,500 Marines were wounded, killed, or missing in action.

Having thwarted the German threat to the French capital in mid-July, Allied forces, including more than 310,000 Americans serving under French command, countered with an offensive of their own. The Second Battle of the Marne is often viewed as the turning point of the war, after which the Central Powers remained on the defensive. According to historian Robert H. Zieger, by the summer of 1918, "more than 30,000 American soldiers, most of



Belgian soldier seated on the ground, near a war grave, Ramscapelle, Belgium, Sept. 9, 1917.

them in infantry and machine gun battalions, were debarking daily at the French ports, sowing defeatism among the enemy as much by their sheer numbers as by the battlefield prowess they might display.” On September 12-16, the first all-American field army—finally unified under Pershing’s command—led a successful campaign to flatten the German salient at Saint-Mihiel. Flushed with victory, Pershing and other American generals believed that well-entrenched German troops were no match for the battle-hungry Americans.

Nevertheless, in the rugged wilderness of northeastern France, U.S. forces once again learned a hard lesson about the advantages that nature and modern weaponry lend to the defense. The Meuse-Argonne campaign (September 26-November 11, 1918) was the largest American operation of the war and the most dangerous to U.S. doughboys. Quickly bogged down by torrential rains, dislodged trees, and a band of man-made defenses thirteen miles deep, the AEF won as little as a few hundred yards per day.

Life in the Trenches

Even in quiet sectors, life in the trenches was a special kind of hell. Rain fell in torrents, and soldiers ate, slept, fought, and died amidst a sea of stinking mud. James Norman Hall, author of the best-selling memoir *Kitchener’s Mob: The Adventures of an American in the British Army* (1916), wrote:

[W]e could not get away from the sight of the mangled bodies of our comrades. Arms and legs stuck out of the wreckage, and on every side we saw distorted human faces, the faces of men we had known, with whom we had lived and shared hardships and dangers for months past.... One thinks of the human body as inviolate, a beautiful and sacred thing. The sight of it dismembered or disemboweled, trampled in the bottom of a trench, smeared with blood and filth, is so revolting as to be hardly endurable.

Body lice infested soldiers’ clothes and hair, and black rats swarmed the trenches by the millions, contaminating food supplies and biting men while they slept. Fertilized by decaying bodies, the soil oozed with gas-forming anaerobic bacteria, which easily entered traumatized tissue in the wounded, producing a deadly infection known as gas gangrene. Hemmed in by barbed wire, sometimes miles thick, soldiers’ lives vacillated between tedium and terror. Night patrols crept out into No Man’s Land, the nightmare landscape between opposing trenches, but most

days were spent hunkered down trying to stave off boredom and disease.

Worst of all was the constant threat of immediate and impersonal death. Snipers, sometimes concealed in artificial trees, picked off soldiers at random. Artillery barrages went on for days on end, some designed to do little more than rattle the enemy’s psyches. Historian John Ellis calculates that British forces fired off more than 170 million shells over the course of the war, including a million during a single day in September 1917. The noise, recalled one French infantry sergeant, was like a body blow.

It is as if one were tied tight to a post and threatened by a fellow swinging a sledgehammer. Now the hammer is swung back for the blow, now it whirls forward, till, just missing your skull, it sends the splinters flying from the post once more. This is exactly what it feels like to be exposed to heavy shelling.

Eventually, all soldiers on the Western Front began to break down from the strain. Identified at the time as “shell shock,” psychiatric casualties were epidemic on all sides. Men who had behaved courageously under fire began to twitch uncontrollably, whimper nonsense, or scream in terror. Journalist Philip Gibbs described one traumatized boy standing outside a dugout.

His steel hat was at the back of his head, and his mouth slobbered, and two comrades could not hold him still. These badly shell-shocked boys clawed their mouths ceaselessly. It was a common, dreadful action. Others sat in the field hospitals in a state of coma, dazed, as though deaf, and actually dumb.

Beyond the Western Front

Despite its name, the popular image of World War I is surprisingly selective. Media representations of the conflict—from *All Quiet on the Western Front* to Charles Schulz’s *Peanuts* cartoons (Snoopy’s alter-ego as the WWI Flying Ace was introduced in 1965 to do battle with the Red Baron)—tend to focus on the Western Front. Yet World War I truly lived up to its global moniker. Fighting extended to East Asia, the South Pacific, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Arabian Peninsula, the setting of the 1962 film *Lawrence of Arabia*. Along the Eastern Front, which ran between the Baltic Sea in the north and the Black Sea in the south, German, Austro-Hungarian, and Bulgarian forces fought pitched battles against Russian imperial armies until early 1918, when the newly-formed Bolshevik government signed a peace treaty with the Central Powers. Elsewhere, over a million colonial troops from France and Great Britain saw active combat, and thousands of others took up arms in the name of national liberation.

One of the Great War’s most important campaigns took place in the Dardanelles, a narrow strait in northwestern Turkey that connected the Mediterranean to the Russian Empire. In February 1915, British and French naval forces attempted to break the Ottoman blockade of the strait but failed because of artillery and mines. On April 25, an amphibious force of British, French colonial, and Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) troops landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula on the northern bank of the Dardanelles. Two thousand Australians were killed

Continued on page 39

The War for Family

By Andrew J. Huebner

Selling the nation on going to war

ON THE RAINY EVENING OF APRIL 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress for the authority to join the terrible war raging in Europe. However immediate the *cause* of Wilson's proposed intervention, he quickly sought to imbue it with higher *meaning*. Fighting the Germans meant opposing autocracy, intrigue, deception, and militarism. In place of those relics of barbarism, Wilson hoped, would come self-determination, open diplomacy, and unfettered capitalist exchange. In his memorable words, "The world must be made safe for democracy." One can scarcely imagine a more ambitious project—to promote a particular political, economic, and social vision in a world roiling with armed conflict, ideological upheaval, and colonial decline.

It was uncertain whether such a mission would inspire Americans. Many of them took a rather dim view of overseas entanglements and had appreciated Wilson's 1916 campaign slogan, "He Kept Us Out of War." Significant numbers of Americans opposed foreign adventurism, some favored the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary), and still others saw eastern financial interests behind the push for war. Many citizens warily regarded mass conscription when it came in May.

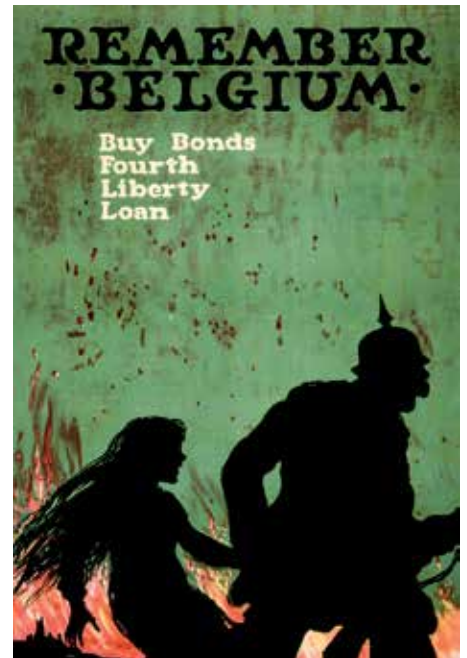
So how to sell such a war? The promise of progressive internationalism might have appealed to some citizens and, indeed, Wilson kept up its advocacy from April 1917 through his failed campaign to commit the United States to the League of Nations after the war. But the administration and like-minded interventionists in popular culture developed an additional, more personal argument. They keyed the war to the protection, redemption, and even survival of the traditional American family. By this pattern of logic, patriotic and familial obligations overlapped: good sons and husbands must be selfless soldiers; good parents and wives must be patient patriots.

In the material of official culture (speeches, public statements, propaganda) and, soon enough, in popular culture (films, newspapers, songs, literature), the message spread that this was a war for family. Particularly busy was the federal propaganda agency, the new Committee on Public Information (CPI), which put out a daily newsletter called the *Official Bulletin*. The *Bulletin* circulated government announcements to every post office, university, newspaper, magazine, chamber of commerce, armed services member, governor, and mayor in the United States. According to an early history of the CPI, the agency's work "touched the private life of virtually every man, woman, and child." The government enjoyed such reach, in part, because it blurred the boundary between official and popular culture, endowing the CPI with advisory influence over every major form of communication. Beyond the famous Four Minute Men who spoke for the government in theaters across the country, the CPI furnished guidelines and suggestions (often willingly accepted) to educators, advertisers, journalists, and artists.



For Home and Country, Victory Liberty Loan, Alfred Everett Orr, 1918.

Governments around the world used posters as a key tool in disseminating public information and promoting broad support for the war effort. American posters, many illustrated by well-known artists, encouraged military enlistment, Red Cross recruitment, food rationing, and savings programs to finance the war. Posters in this article are courtesy Library of Congress.



The enemy, often identified as a German, was portrayed as beast and brute, from which womanhood must be protected. Left: *Destroy this Mad Brute. Enlist*, Harry R. Hopps, 1917. Middle: *Help Stop This. Buy W.S.S. [War Savings Stamps] & Keep Him Out of America*. National War Savings Committee, W.F. Powers Co. Litho, 1917. Right: *Remember Belgium. Buy Bonds. Fourth Liberty Loan*, The U.S. Prtg. & Lith. Co., c. 1917.

Enter: The Villain

Since 1914, Americans had been hearing stories about German atrocities against the family. From France and Belgium came tales of raped women, mutilated children, and ransacked communities—some true, some not, but widely circulated either way. In 1915, when the Germans executed British nurse Edith Cavell for helping Allied soldiers escape capture, *The New York Times* struck at the heart of the violation:

Man's love of life, the chivalric sentiment of man for woman, tender consideration for the helplessness of age and of youth, all these she [Germany] has maimed and bruised and effaced with her mailed fist, all these she has trampled under foot.

The reference to chivalry was deliberate and oft-repeated, suggesting that Germany's crimes offended American attitudes about proper masculine behavior. Civilized white men were to protect the home and the women and children inside. They should be restrained, resolute, and decent, violent only when stirred by threats. Germans, on the other hand, exhibited flagrant sexual depravity, disregard for chivalric virtue, and unprovoked aggression—all vividly portrayed in U.S. propaganda posters.

U-boat attacks on civilians had prompted President Wilson to call the Germans “unmanly” in his war message of April 1917. He didn't mean womanly; he meant *hyper*-masculine—muscled, bestial, unable to control his sexual and violent impulses. American schoolchildren now found this imagined German marauder in their classrooms; in lessons furnished by the CPI, elementary school children learned that doughboys were traveling to Europe to keep German soldiers from devastating American homes as they'd devastated those of the French and Belgians.

Words and images thus envisioned the American family as an object of protection—not least for the consumption of the soldiers

who'd be doing the protecting. *The Stars and Stripes* (a military newspaper created to keep up morale and provide a sense of unity among the troops) ran a drawing in early 1918 of a mother holding a sleeping toddler under the headline, “What We're Fighting For.” Beneath the picture was a poem imploring the men to “keep the flame and sword / From our children and their mothers.” If they missed the idea there, soldiers in training camps received a pamphlet reading, “You are going to fight for the spirit of young girlhood raped and ravished in Belgium by a brutal soldiery. You are going to fight for it in this country, too, where you yourselves are its protectors.”



Poster messages were directed to both men and women and helped delineate gender expectations. Left: *Join the Navy, The Service for Fighting Men*, Richard Fayerweather Babcock, 1917. Right: *Gee!! I Wish I Were a Man. I'd Join the Navy. Be A Man and Do It*, Howard Chandler Christy, 1917.

A short film released in 1918 reinforced the point, linking feminine purity to whiteness and religion, all menaced by the mythic Hun—a disparaging term equating Germans with those fifth-century invaders of Europe. Mae Marsh played a Belgian girl in *Stake Uncle Sam to Play Your Hand*, a film containing suggestions of rape and shown in association with a fund-raising campaign for the war effort. The German rapist-as-villain reappeared later in Marine veteran Thomas Boyd's postwar novel *Through the Wheat*. Boyd's fictional drill sergeant barks this motivational rhetoric: "All right, you men. Now you want to forget that these are sacks of straw. They are not at all. They are dirty Huns—Huns that raped the Belgians, Huns that would have come over to the good old U.S.A. and raped our women if we hadn't got into the war."

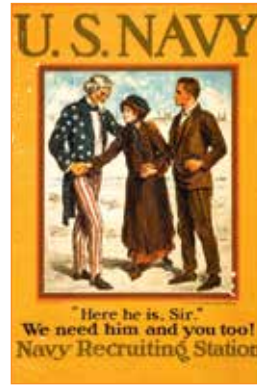
Fighting for Family

The protection of womanhood carried great rhetorical appeal as the Wilson administration mobilized for war, and policymakers quickly developed a second justification that built upon the first. The war offered the chance to showcase, preserve, and even strengthen the traditional family—the institution at the heart of national character. If America's enemies were sexual miscreants, America was the opposite—a nation built on traditional notions of domestic virtue, with the genders in their proper places and families ready to sacrifice for the nation.

The Germans formed only part of the threat here; other enemies lurked closer to home. Traditional gender roles had been strained for decades leading up to World War I, with the expansion of the female work force and emasculation of industrial labor, the alleged "closing" of the frontier, the proliferation of "sex novels," and advancements in the women's suffrage campaign. At the turn of the century, Teddy Roosevelt had written in "The Strenuous Life" of gender roles in peril: "When men fear work or fear righteous war, when women fear motherhood, they tremble on the brink of doom." In the same period, naval theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan spoke for many traditionalists when he warned that women's suffrage would obliterate the "constant practice of the past ages by which to men are assigned the outdoor rough action of life and to women that indoor sphere which we call the family."

War offered one way of correcting such imbalances, as many middle-class arbiters of respectability saw them. Jingoists had savored the opportunity in 1898 to sharpen masculine vigor in the war against Spain, coming to Cuba's rescue and hardening American men made flabby by white-collar work and consumer comforts. By 1917, American commentators were likewise looking to the European war to clarify and bolster conventional gender norms. "Foolish violations of those laws of God and nature which have been falling into contemptuous neglect in the United States," said a writer in the *Atlanta Constitution* in July 1917, "must be brought to a sharp end at this time of crisis in the world's affairs." War demanded women be caretakers, men be protectors. Policymakers and journalists who valued such a renewal touted the traditional American family as a war asset or imagined the conflict as a way of shoring it up. The health and future of the family remained vital to explaining, understanding, or justifying the war.

The first draft registration day, June 5, 1917, offered occasion to celebrate—and demand—the family's patriotic contributions. At a registration event in Georgetown, Secretary of War Newton Baker had all the domestic actors in their proper positions. The CPI's *Official Bulletin* printed his remarks for millions of readers: "Fathers and mothers are escorting their sons to the places of



Propaganda communicated high ideals—that this was a war for family and families were expected to sacrifice and suffer hardships out of loyalty to the nation. Left: *U.S. Navy. "Here he is, Sir." We need him and you too! Navy Recruiting Station*, Charles Dana Gibson, c. 1914-1918. Right: *For the Safety of Womanhood, For the Protection of Childhood, For the Honor of Manhood, And for Liberty Throughout the World, Help 'Till It Hurts*, Liberty Loan Committee of Washington; *The Delineator*, April 1918.

registration; and the young women of every community, filled with pride in the encouragement of a duty, which always makes woman an inspiration to man in an hour of trial, are going with the young men to the places of registration, and beautiful and spontaneous things are happening."

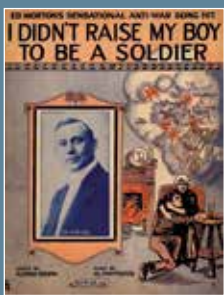
Millions of men stood in line for hours, endured confusion over the location of registration centers, and refrained from drink in towns that closed saloons for the day. Women and girls, in turn, pinned ribbons of appreciation on registrants in New England, across Tennessee, and in Wisconsin. They mobilized automobiles to drive boys to the registration. New York's Committee on Aliens dispatched emissaries to immigrant wards, demanding that women encourage their men to register. Mothers escorted sons to enroll. Women handed out printed copies of Wilson's war message in Montgomery, Alabama, as a preacher told an assembled crowd, "Our richest gift [is] the gift of our sons on the altar of our country." Just as popular rhetoric and imagery vilified the enemy, such calls for women's participation appeared in newspaper cartoons, Liberty Loan posters, sheet music covers, and assorted propaganda generated by the U.S. government.

The Soldier as Guardian

Newspapers across the country reveled in the mobilization of both individual families and a symbolic *national* family. Officials and newspapers alike imagined potential draftees as guardians of women, children, and domestic tranquility. The Woman's Liberty Loan Committee circulated the chivalric theme in the CPI *Official Bulletin*:

Bonds or Bondage!
Which Do You Choose?
Will You Let Your Country be Conquered?
Or Will You Do Your Part to Help Her Now?
The Men of America are Fighting *Your* Fight.
Stand Back of Them!

An ad in an Iowa paper for a liberty loan drive put the future doughboy's motivation even more bluntly, if that was possible: "He fights for you and your family as well as his." Newspapers often distilled the war's bigger political promises down to everyday



Music of the period reflected Americans' early reluctance to enter the war, with popular hits like "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier" (Ryan and Piantadosi, 1915) and "Don't Take My Darling Boy Away" (Dillon and Von Tilzer, 1915). As the war became equated with patriotism, sentiments in popular music joined the refrain with titles like "I'm Raising My Boy to be a Soldier to Fight for the U.S.A." (Ryan and Ryan, 1917). Courtesy Historic American Sheet Music Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

terms. A war ostensibly about democracy and rights and humanity, in fact, guaranteed things more concrete—cherished lifestyles, values and traditions, everyday comforts and happiness—as shown in these lines from *The Baltimore Sun*:

But still for God and land our song—
A safe world for democracy!
A world in which we still can live
In our own place and our own way.

This narrative of protection offered men a stark choice—demonstrate manly vigor by going to war or reveal its absence by staying home. One young woman in Worcester, Massachusetts, so associated male desirability with military service that she refused to marry her boyfriend unless the local draft board lifted his exemption as a skilled worker. "Down my way," she told the board, "all single fellers between twenty-one and thirty-one are divided into just two classes, those who go, and those who don't go. That's my classification. Now if [he] don't go, I'm through with him."

In short, the purveyors of popular culture joined government spokesmen to communicate the national message. They fused as inseparable the ideals of proper gender roles, the family, and patriotic dedication—often in stark visual terms. Families were to proudly give up sons and husbands, wait patiently, and subdue fears of loss. Conscription pushed all citizens, theoretically, to share in the possibility of sacrifice, to imagine their patriotic and familial obligations in harmony. George Cohan's instant hit of April 1917, "Over There," put these ideas to music:

Make your mother proud of you
And the Old Red, White and Blue.

Morale to Mourning

The story of war's regenerative possibilities did contain a paradox: war promised familial *disruption* as much as it promised *redemption*. People knew the realities of war—soldiers visiting prostitutes, children losing fathers, women joining the labor force, men vacating the civilizing environment of the home. In war loomed familial disaster, not stability, cried the composers of 1915's antiwar anthems "I Didn't Raise My Boy to be a Soldier" and "Don't Take My Darling Boy Away!" Just as the war's promise might be framed in familial terms, so could its tragedy. "To whom does war bring prosperity?" asked the antiwar senator George Norris in April 1917. "Not to the soldier ... not to the broken hearted widow ... not to the mother who weeps at the death of her brave boy." Norris's emotionalism brought cries of "Treason!" on the Senate floor. But for the most part, such ideas went quiet in a wartime climate that discouraged dissent. Much more prevalent than 1915's antiwar songs were tunes like "America, Here's My Boy."

The message to mothers and wives was that they should wait with positive energy and optimism, applying themselves to domestic chores with renewed vigor. They should eschew sadness and loneliness. The 1918 memoir *Silver Lining: The Experiences of a War Bride* echoed official voices in distinguishing good from bad waiting—and implied the dire consequences of the latter. The model mother's cheerful support of her son steeled him for battle; the despondent wife's tearful visits to camp kept her man from marching "with a song in his heart."

Did ordinary people accept these connections between the war and the American family? That's hard to say. But we know this—over the course of 1918, the CPI's *Official Bulletin* replaced the appeals to familial virtue with long lists of American casualties. Gradually the tragedies of individual families edged out paeans to the symbolic family.

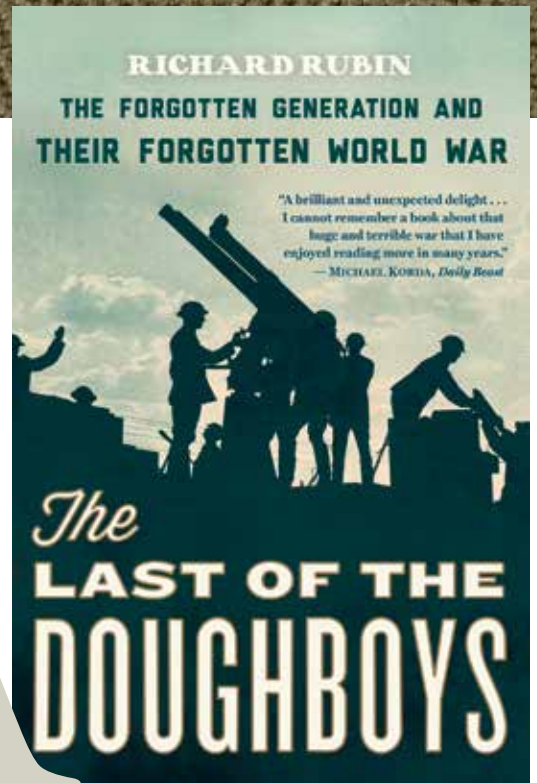
A young woman named Carrie, her sweetheart blown apart by a shell in France in October 1918, found no comfort in wartime assurances of noble sacrifice. The war had shattered her dreams of domestic bliss. "I see all of the boys and girls so happy together with their plans for the future," she wrote to Nell, her would-be mother-in-law, in 1920. "I dare not face even the thought of tomorrow with all of its aching *longing, loneliness, emptiness, unfulfillment.*" Two years after the war's end, commemorative culture in the U.S. still was asking mothers and widows to face the vacant chairs in their homes with stoicism rather than sorrow. It wasn't working on Carrie. "Oh, Nell," she wrote, "*why, why, why!!*"

ANDREW J. HUEBNER is associate professor of history at the University of Alabama, and is the author of *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture from the Second World War to the Vietnam Era* (University of North Carolina Press, 2008). He is currently working on a book called *Love and Death in the Great War*.

EXTRA! | READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- ▶ *HathiTrust Digital Library*. Read copies of the *Official Bulletin* issued by the Committee on Public Information, which disseminated federal communications on the war effort. hathitrust.org (click on the *Catalog* tab of the search box and enter: *Official Bulletin / Committee on Public Information*)
- ▶ *The Authentic History Center*. Collections and commentary on WWI history as told through popular culture of the era, including music, cartoons, and print propaganda. authentichistory.com
- ▶ *The Stars and Stripes*, Library of Congress. Read issues and view an online exhibit highlighting the content and staff behind the WWI military newspaper. loc.gov (enter this full notation in the search box: *The Stars and Stripes: The American Soldier's Newspaper of World War I, 1918-1919*)

Q&A



Finding the Forgotten Generation A Conversation with Richard Rubin

Interview By Carla Walker, Editor

Richard Rubin's race to capture memory and piece together a forgotten history.
A conversation and an excerpt from his book, *The Last of the Doughboys*.

RICHARD RUBIN CALLS HIS BOOK A MOSAIC. And, indeed, with luminous tales of duty and service, with glittering snippets of music and novels and battlefield memoranda, Rubin has fashioned a multi-faceted, panoramic view of events that changed the world, and are seemingly forgotten. By the time he formulated a plan in 2003 to interview all the living American veterans of the First World War, and set out with questions and a video camera, the remaining vets were few and almost impossible to find. At the advanced ages of 101 to 113, most were living in the homes of relatives or in care facilities, no longer listed in the local phone book.

Time was not on his side.

And yet Rubin spent ten years accumulating the layers of story that form his newest book, *The Last of the Doughboys: The Forgotten Generation and Their Forgotten World War*. Any reader of history knows that first-person accounts lend relevance and meaning to facts and events. But Rubin didn't stop with interviews at bedsides or living room chats over cups of coffee. He used these firsthand accounts as seeds to tell a larger story, to give contemporary readers perspective on a conflict so vast that its moniker, the *World War*, was no exaggeration.

This is not your high school textbook of names and dates. It's not a military history or trivia digest. It draws on the same essential facts—and so much more. It will surprise you. It will move you. And it will leave you astonished at what you *didn't* know.

First, a conversation with Richard Rubin. And later, an excerpt from his book.

CARLA WALKER: Tell us about this mammoth project. Did you have a plan going in, beyond the interviews with WWI veterans? The research and travel must have consumed your life for a time. What drove you to spend an entire decade working on it?

RICHARD RUBIN: Probably stubbornness as much as anything else. In early 2003 I realized that we were looking at the 85th anniversary of the end of the war and, not having read anything about America and WWI in a very long time, I wondered if I might be able to mark the occasion by interviewing two or three American WWI veterans for a magazine article, pegged to Memorial Day. Of course, I hadn't encountered a World War I veteran for many years, but I did the math and figured that, although they would certainly be more than 100 years old, at least a few of the four million-plus Americans who'd served in that war must still be living. The problem was, it took me so long to find even one—several months—that I missed Memorial Day and decided, in a fit of pique one day, that since I was expending so much energy in the search, I might as well just plough ahead and find all of them, if I could. Never mind that I had no idea how many that might be.

Eventually, I started finding more and more, and it became obvious to me that there was too much material—too many fascinating stories—for an article; it would have to be a book. But in doing the research required to put these stories in context, I came up against the fact that relatively little has been written about America and World War I; and I decided that, if I were to go ahead and write a book, I didn't want it to be a book just about the men and women I interviewed and what they had to say, but about America's experience in the First World War.

I sometimes tell people that I wrote this book because I wanted to read this book, and eventually I figured out that no one else was working on anything like it. If they had been, I could have narrowed my scope to just the people and their stories, and finished up in about half the time. But because it was just me and the entire subject of America and WWI, I had a lot of research to do. I was a history major, and then a journalist, and because of that (and probably my sense of pride), it was tremendously important to me that I get it all right. And that takes a lot of time.

CW: I was struck by the fact that so many of the vets were literally kids—as young as fifteen or sixteen when they enlisted. Tell us about American mentality at that time that allowed such very young people to risk their lives.

RR: Early life had been hard for most of the people I interviewed; childhood and adolescence were luxuries that most families simply couldn't afford. They grew up in homes without electricity or running water, in families where their labor was needed from a very young age so that they might all avoid starving to death. Many of them lost their fathers in childhood; even more lost siblings. At least one man I interviewed, who enlisted when he was sixteen, was already an orphan and had spent years being passed along to relatives and institutions.

I doubt many of them ever had the privilege of even regarding themselves as children. Joining the army got them off the farm and out of the tenement; it got them clothed and fed and far away from the drudgery and hopelessness that had defined their lives

until then. It's easy to romanticize "olden days" if you haven't lived through them. And, as I write in the book, the possibility of being killed or maimed in battle always seems remote at the recruiting station.

CW: The histories I've read paint the U.S. as terribly ill-equipped for war. Can you offer perspective on that—the extent of preparations and speed at which the government had to mount its force?

RR: At the beginning of 1917, there were only 200,000 men in all of the branches of the United States military. Up until that point, President Wilson had been determined to keep America out of the war, and most Americans agreed with that position. Now, suddenly, America needed to build an army, and fast; and they did. When you consider that by the end of the war—just 19 months after we entered it—America had 4.7 million men and women in uniform, that's an astounding feat. The British and French, of course, were quite eager to get those men into the trenches; but, to his credit, General Pershing refused to let Americans see combat until he deemed them ready. More important, he refused to let them fight under foreign commanders, aware, as he was, of how badly British and French generals often used foreign troops under their command. Pershing doubtless saved many thousands of American lives by doing so.

CW: It's evident in the detail of your book that you've spent a great deal of time in Europe, particularly France, researching and visiting WWI battlefields. Why was that important to your storytelling?

RR: For me, it added an entirely new dimension to the stories that these very old men had told me about what they'd seen and done over there. They spoke of the where and the what, but rarely of things like terrain and topography. To really appreciate what they went through, and how much they accomplished, you have to see it. And, of course, I was completely unprepared for just how much there still is to see Over There, a century later. That speaks, too, to how horrible that war was; scars were inflicted upon the earth that will take thousands of years to heal, if ever.

Quite simply, that war was the worst thing that ever happened to France. Every family there lost someone; many families lost almost everyone. Every village lost a good chunk of its male population; in some villages, by the end of the war, there were no men left at all. People still argue about this facet of the war or that—who's to blame for this defeat, who deserves the credit for that victory, if only this had been done or that not done, the war would have ended much sooner, etc.—as if it all happened last week. In contrast, you hear almost nothing about the Second World War there. And I should add the French are still extremely cognizant, and grateful, to America and Americans for what we did in the First World War. They give us a lot more credit than we give ourselves.

CW: World War II is the war that has captured American imagination. We refer to those veterans as "The Greatest Generation." Why do you think the First World War has faded from American memory?

RR: That's a very complicated question. In part, we forgot because we wanted to forget; that war turned out to be a terribly traumatic experience for Americans. In part it's because the men and women who fought and won that war weren't comfortable being the center of attention, and demanding they get their due. They weren't raised with that ethos. And in part it's because, in our drive to forget, we ceded the history of that war to British historians, who, angry that America sat out the first 32 months of the war, wrote revisionist histories that glorified the British part in the war while denigrating and minimizing the American contribution. Eventually, we came to believe that version ourselves, even though it's always been far from true.

CW: What should we know about Germany and German soldiers' experience of WWI?

RR: Whenever I go to France, I'm always extremely impressed with the defenses and fortifications the Germans built during the war, and the intricacies of their entire war machine. Their technology was superior in just about every instance, and the level of planning they brought to the enterprise is mind-boggling. As I write in the book, it's difficult to see this stuff and not come away with the impression that the Germans really should have won that war. And for quite a while, they thought they had. Certain parts of France are full of monuments the Germans built to their fallen comrades in 1915 and 1916; you don't do that sort of thing if you think you're only going to be staying for a while.

The other thing I discovered in doing these interviews is that American soldiers and Germans didn't really hate each other in that war; quite the contrary, in fact. They had a tremendous amount of respect for each other. Still, they killed each other just the same.

CW: Armistice didn't mark the end of service for many Americans. What were the duties of post-war troops and what were vets' experiences upon coming home?

RR: Their first duty after the armistice was to guard German prisoners, transport them back to Germany, and occupy sections of that country for a while. For the most part, that only lasted until 1920 or so. The first American troops to come home were given parades, but most of them came home later to nothing of the sort. In fact, what many of them came home to were failed businesses, farms gone to ruin, jobs given to someone else in their absence, and poor prospects for rebuilding what they'd lost. There was nothing like the GI Bill of Rights for America's WWI doughboys. But they made sure, when their sons went off to fight the next war, that there would be a GI Bill in place for them when they got home. They don't get any credit for that, but they should.

CW: As a reader, I came to care about these men and women. I was moved by them and by the sheer weight of the war that would affect generations to come. What piece of the story moved *you* most?

RR: The human pieces, the stories that I could relate to even though I've never served in the military, much less gone off to war: being frightened; being excited; being frightened and excited at the same time. Losing people you care about. Being young and

vigorous and dropped into the middle of a country where you don't speak the language. Finding something to laugh about amidst horror and misery. Finding a way to make peace with terrible memories. Most of all, I think, I was moved by how clear these memories still were to them 85 years later, and how willing they all were to share them with me. In hundreds of hours of conversation, I heard the equivalent of "I don't want to talk about it" exactly once.

CW: Is there a question you wish you had asked these vets, maybe something that came up in writing and editing the book after they had all passed?

RR: With one exception, they were all gone by the time I made it over to France. I would have liked to have been able to come back and talk to them about the places I visited that they had talked about, show them pictures, ask more questions. Hardly a day went by while I was writing the book that I didn't feel the impulse to pick up a phone and call these guys with just one more question. Their stories were so vivid that they still felt very much alive to me. Part of that, I'm sure, is due to the fact that I have all of these conversations on video.

CW: What question have you not been asked—something you'd really like readers to know?

RR: I'm not often asked about the men and women themselves as men and women: What were they like? I think we tend to regard centenarians as marble statues more than human beings, but the people I met and interviewed were very human, with very distinct personalities and foibles and, in some memorable cases, fantastic senses of humor. It's a strange experience, at first, to have a 106-year-old man tell you hilarious risqué stories; but you get used to it soon enough. Very early on, I asked another man what it was like to be 106 years old; he told me it was no different to him than being my age (36 at the time) was to me. He said he never gave age a thought. That really influenced how I approached everyone I interviewed after that.

CW: How did this project change you?

RR: It made me much more patient, for one thing; the very old often speak slowly, with generous pauses, and you just have to wait them out or you might miss something fascinating and important, something you may never get another chance to hear. I'm a New Yorker; I speak quickly, and expect everyone else to do so, too. Or at least I used to.

It changed the way I view aging, the way I view America's role in the war, the way I think of war (it's a much more personal affair to me now), the way I think about memory and remembering... I could go on like this for a long time—but I don't want to test anyone else's patience.

CW: Thanks, Richard, for this terrific insight. It's time to give readers a sample of your work. Turn the page and enjoy an excerpt from *The Last of the Doughboys*.

EXCERPT:

The Last of the Doughboys

The Forgotten Generation and Their Forgotten World War—By Richard Rubin

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is but a fraction of the conversation Richard Rubin had with veteran George Briant, Battery B, 76th Field Artillery, 3rd Division, U.S. Army, American Expeditionary Forces (AEF). Rubin notes that, among the men and women he interviewed, George Briant was the most emotional—and came the closest to being killed. He was 103 years old at the time of their conversation and fuzzy about only a few of the facts: the age he enlisted (military records show he was sixteen) and how many places he was hit by shrapnel (George guessed around seven; Rubin's research notes wounds to the shoulder, hip, eye socket—lucky, he wasn't blinded—and that blasts knocked out all of his teeth). More immediate were his recollections of battle and his feelings at the time. It was 1918. On one of the worst days, near the sleepy village of Le Charnel, France, George's battery got caught, unprotected in an open field. Memories of his experiences were still sharp, vivid, even gripping. "At my age, everything was wild," George recalled, and he was ready for any assignment the Army handed him. "I was at the height of my glory then." But it didn't take long for war to sober him. "We grew to be adult persons," he remarked. "And even though we were kids, it was do or die."

From *The Last of the Doughboys*, Richard Rubin speaks first, followed by the unforgettable George Briant.

I asked him why he'd joined up. "To become a man," his wife declared; he, though, just chuckled at the question, and considered it for a moment.

"The conversation," he said finally, "was generally on warfare at that time, you see. This one was going to join, that family was going to join – in other words, families were being separated right and left. Young people – young people wanted to join because of youth, age. They all wanted to know what warfare was. So did I. And I sure learned too much about it."

"I was tickled to the death that they let me [enlist]," he recalled with a smile at one point; but then, suddenly, he grew serious. "But let me tell you, it was no fun," he said, leaning forward as his voice softened a bit and started to waiver. "War is hell, it's real hell. It's nothing to joke with, nothing to laugh with. You might think it's a journey, having fun or something." He shook his head. "There's no fun in war. War is do or die. It's you or me. And who can pull the trigger faster."

"Were you scared the first time you went into battle?" I asked him. He was silent for a beat. "Yeah," he said soberly, then shook his head. "It's a funny feeling. There was a *thrill*, you understand?" he explained, raising both hands. "You knew you were in real action then, you see. They wasn't saying, 'We're going to train you.' or nothing." He raised his hands again, pointing both forefingers to form rifle barrels. "You're going to take those guns and you're going to fight *for your life*."

None of the other veterans I interviewed, before or after, had ever gotten near a word like "thrill" when describing combat. They all must have understood, on some level, that such a composite of terror and excitement is an awfully heavy thing to carry with you throughout a life, and that you'd better find a way to set it down and move on without it if you wanted yours to be a long one.

But not George Briant. He had borne an awful lot of pain in his life, not just during the war but throughout what sounded like a wretched childhood – and then he lost his only child, his son, his namesake, at a terribly young age. Any one of those is the kind of thing you might never get over; all three together could kill you. But they didn't kill George Briant; in fact, by all accounts he led a happy, fulfilled, godly life. He never had much money – eventually, after passing through several other jobs, he set up shop as a sign painter – and spent most of his retirement living in a trailer. But I read, in one of his obituaries, that he and Germaine were in the habit of plucking old toys out of the trash, repairing and restoring them, and then giving them to needy children.

A crushed man doesn't do that sort of thing.

So I wonder if, maybe, George Briant managed to do something that seemingly no one else I'd met had – that perhaps like them he had, a ways back, set down his load, but that he had also, somehow, always kept track of where he'd left it, always knew where it was so that he could, if the occasion should call for it, run back and fetch it.

"I'll tell you something," he said once, after a long pause. "There's two things about warfare. You want to be there, but you don't *want* to be there. But you've got to be in both places, and you can't do it. So you try to" – he moved his hand around from point to point, mimicking with his pinched fingers the dance one might do in trying to avoid incoming fire – "and you keep trying. But of course, you wind up in the graveyard."

The 76th had spent the second half of July on the offensive, chasing the Germans across the Aisne-Marne Sector. They moved often, almost always under cover of darkness. "Jumping from place to place," Mr. Briant recalled. "You're moving as fast – I mean, you're here now, and three hours later, you get all packed up and be ready to leave. They don't tell you where you're leaving for, but be ready to leave in three hours. So you get all the equipment together, pack it all up, and in three hours you're standing out there in the open field, like that, waiting, waiting."

Battery B was ordered to move in daylight; and then, already dangerously exposed, they – well, they got stuck in traffic. "We were changing positions," he recalled. "We were going to take a French position, you see, and they were supposed to have moved. But when we got there, they had never moved. They left us out in the open." Literally: Battery B was stuck standing in an open field, the sun high overhead, illuminating them, as if an artillery battery surrounded only by grass and hay needed further illumination. They could do nothing but stand there and wait, wondering which would reach them first – orders that they could finally move, or something very bad.

And then they heard it: something very bad.

You can't help but marvel, nearly a century later, that aircraft were still so new at that point that "planes" required an apostrophe up front to remind you that it was short for "aeroplanes." Planes themselves were also still objects of marvel for many; but for the men of Battery B on July 28, 1918, they were just objects of terror, moving unfettered overhead as you were trapped down on earth, as free to kill you as were those unseen German soldiers hiding just off the road in the dark of night. Unlike those soldiers, though, the planes didn't hold their fire.

"I had seven holes in me," he repeated at one point. "Biggest one was the size of a silver dollar, right in here." He touched his right shoulder. "Then I had one over the eye" – he raised a hand to his left eye – "how I didn't lose my eyesight, I don't know. It was a miracle.

He spent three months in the hospital, and even after that, the Army was inclined to just ship him home. He pleaded with them to send him back to the 76th, instead.

He was discharged from the hospital on October 20, 1918, and was back with Battery B within the week. And he saw how the war ended.

For the rest of his long life, though, he wished he hadn't.

RICHARD RUBIN has written extensively for magazines including *The Atlantic*, *AARP The Magazine*, and *The New York Times Magazine*. He was the 2008-2010 Viebranz Visiting Professor of Creative Writing at St. Lawrence University in Canton, NY, and writer, producer, narrator of the NPR radio documentary "World War I at 78 RPM." His other work includes short stories; "Over There – And Gone Forever," a Veterans Day essay named a 2007 *New York Times* notable Op-Ed; and *Confederacy of Silence: A True Tale of the New Old South* (Atria, 2002).

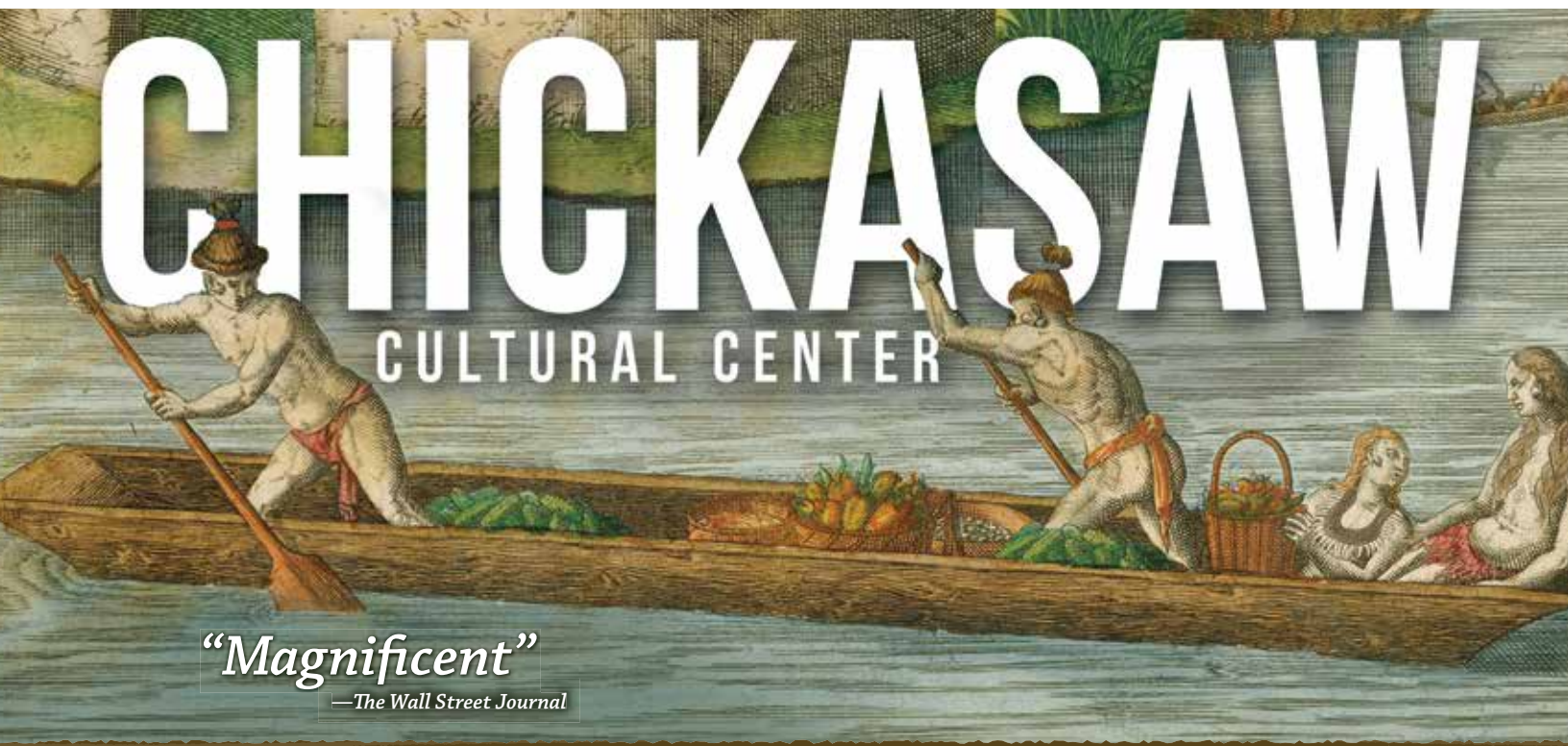
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EXTRA! | READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- ▶ "The Last of the Doughboys," *Journal of American History*. Audio interview: Richard Rubin discusses his book with *JAH* editor Ed Linenthal. journalofamericanhistory.org/podcast (select the Jan. 2014 entry)
- ▶ Richard Rubin's website has photos and video clips from his interviews with WWI veterans, and audio of WWI-era music. richardrubinonline.com (click on the *Media* tab for video, photos, and music; click on the *Press* tab to read and hear additional interviews)



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Call to Duty

Women and World War I

By Jennifer D. Keene

How women adapted to a world at war

*Women Awake!
Your Country
Needs you.*



Saying good-bye to her fiancé Roland Leighton in London as he headed to the Western Front was an emotional experience for Vera Brittain. Her fear for his safety bubbled forth as she angrily confronted him about why he had decided to fight. In her 1933 memoir, *Testament of Youth*, she recalled:

He replied that he hardly knew.... He neither hated the Germans nor loved the Belgians; the only possible motive for going was “heroism in the abstract,” and that didn’t seem a very logical reason for risking one’s life.

Watching loved ones depart, uncertain if they would return—this was an experience that women around the world shared during the Great War. The continual scene of women sending men off to fight was troubling; paradoxically, it was also a familiar, traditional ritual that reinforced gender roles within western societies.

Promoting Patriotism

A tremendous amount of wartime propaganda urged women to send their men off bravely. The exchange between Vera and Roland helps explain why governments believed this propaganda was necessary—to ensure that enough men would agree to leave their loved ones to fight. British posters entreated men to enlist to protect family honor. Propaganda leaflets urged women to ask their menfolk if “they were not worth fighting for.” The poster captioned “Daddy, what did *YOU* do in the Great War?” (displayed in sidebar at right) forecasts a future where children hold their fathers accountable for wartime actions—or inaction. Admiral Charles Penrose Fitzgerald suggested that young British women hand out white feathers (a symbol of cowardice) to publicly shame young able-bodied men in civilian dress.

U.S. propaganda posters pictured voluptuous women encouraging men to enlist, reflecting an emerging advertising culture that relied on sex appeal to sell products. German posters took a more traditional stance, depicting women as dutiful mothers and wives willing to serve the nation in any capacity. Consensus and unity were dominant German themes rather than American-style sexual adventure and virility. French posters addressed the nation’s preoccupation with its declining birthrate. A French woman’s patriotic duty did not end with sending her husband off to war. She was also instructed to procreate, safeguarding France’s future by building the next generation of soldiers.

Danger and Deprivation

You love us when we're heroes, home on leave
Or wounded in a mentionable place;
You worship decorations, and believe
That chivalry redeems the war's disgrace.

These words from British poet Siegfried Sassoon's poem "The Glory of Women" reveal the dichotomy in wartime roles for men and women. Men fight and women support them. Men learn about the horrors of war; women on the home front remain innocent and somewhat foolish by continuing to believe in the glory of battle. Reality was more complicated.

For many women there was no distinction between battlefield and home front. Either way, the war came to them. The German invasion and occupation brought the very real danger of rape and death to the doorsteps of women living in Belgium and northern France. Along the Eastern Front, large swaths of territory changed hands frequently between Allied and Central Power forces. To escape the paths of advancing armies, hundreds of thousands of civilians in the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires fled, often traveling far behind the lines. This massive refugee crisis disproportionately affected women, who lost their homes and livelihood and were left struggling to shelter, feed, and clothe their children. The plight of women along both the Western and Eastern Fronts aroused the sympathies of aid societies (often run by women) in the United States and British Empire who mobilized to send humanitarian aid overseas.

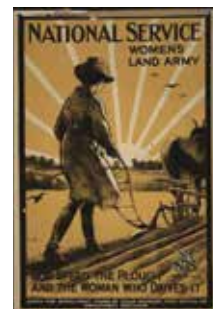
The novel methods used to wage war also brought physical suffering and even death into the daily lives of many women. German Zeppelin raids on London and aerial attacks on Paris killed women going to church or taking their children to school. In Germany and Austria-Hungary, the ever-tightening Allied blockade forced millions of women to spend hours each day waiting in bread lines. "Our thoughts are chiefly taken up with wondering what our next meal will be," noted one woman in Berlin in 1917. Some lost patience. Food riots were not uncommon. In Russia, where the war disrupted agricultural production, authorities recognized the political implications of women's rising desperation. On the eve of the 1917 Russian Revolution, one official report warned: "The mothers of families, who are exhausted by the endless standing in line at the stores, who are worn out by the suffering of seeing their children half-starved and sick, may be much closer to revolution."

Food shortages prompted officials to regulate women's shopping and cooking activities. From London to New York and Africa to Australia, propaganda urged women to readjust their families' diets. Germany, France, and Britain implemented rationing to limit supply. In the United States, a major food producer for the Allies, the Food Administration launched a massive campaign to stimulate food conservation. Women who signed a pledge card agreeing to abide by Food Administration guidelines received a pamphlet with suggested recipes. They also got a sign to hang in their windows to advertise their compliance to neighbors. "If you have already signed, pass this on to a friend," the pledge card instructed. These peer-pressure tactics proved quite effective. Enlisting women to monitor the housekeeping practices of their neighbors, the Food Administration expanded its reach into kitchens across the nation.

"For the first time I was going to be someone, I would have a personal role to play, I would count in the world."



Vera Brittain's fiancé, Roland Leighton, and her brother, Edward, volunteered for the British army and were dispatched to fight at the Western Front. Wanting to join their efforts, she left her studies at Oxford to become a nurse with the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD). Image courtesy The First World War Poetry Digital Archive (oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit), University of Oxford; © copyright Literary Executors, Vera Brittain Estate and The Vera Brittain Fonds, McMaster Univ. Library, Canada.



Governments used peer pressure, guilt, sex appeal, and other tactics to compel citizens to fulfill the needs of the war effort. "Enlist!" was the major message to men. Women were called to "duty" everywhere—at the office, in the fields, at the war front, and at the family dinner table. Top row, left: *Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?* Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, London, 1915. Right: *I Want You for The Navy*, Howard Chandler Christy, 1917. Middle row, left: *Stenographers! Washington needs you!*; Prudential Litho. Co., 1917. Right: *National Service, Women's Land Army. God Speed the Plough and the Woman Who Drives It*, H.G. Gawthorn, 1917, London. Bottom row, left: *Third Red Cross Roll Call*, Haskell Coffin, 1918. Right: *Eat less, and let us be thankful that we have enough to share with those who fight for freedom*, A. Hendee, 1918. Courtesy Library of Congress.



Daring Discrimination

Rather than simply wait for loved ones to return and normal routines to resume, many women chose to put on uniforms. In the heroic spirit of Joan of Arc and Florence Nightingale, women volunteered to serve in medical units as nurses or ambulance drivers. With no news as to the fate of her fiancé or brother, Vera Brittain's decision to become a nurse, she said, brought "tranquility to exactly the extent that it diverted my mind from the letter that had not come or the telegram that might be coming."

"A young girl in ordinary life is nothing or next to nothing," noted one young French woman, offering a different reason to become a nurse. "For the first time I was going to be someone, I would have a personal role to play, I would count in the world." Women, however, did not escape discrimination by joining the nursing corps. Male doctors and orderlies refused to recognize their authority, and it required constant vigilance to deflect unwanted advances or physical assaults from male patients. American nurses argued, to no avail, that giving nurses military rank was one way to solve these inter-connected problems.

A mixture of patriotism, hopes for adventure, and the desire to share a male relative's experiences prompted some women to serve as soldiers, most famously in Russia. Nearly five thousand Russian women fought, some clandestinely by donning male clothing and others after making a personal appeal to the Tsar to serve in male units. The female Russian soldier's body was often violated by both the enemy and male comrades. Maria Botchkareva, for instance, suffered a spinal injury in combat—after already serving in a male regiment where fellow soldiers continuously pinched, jostled, and rubbed against her. The government formed in the wake of the February 1917 revolution organized these women into all-female battalions. Their exploits drew tremendous press coverage. For the fledgling democratic Russian government (overthrown in the November 1917 Bolshevik Revolution), the propaganda value of these female battalions was two-fold: the government hoped both to shame male deserters into returning to the line and to galvanize public support for continuing the war.

The general loosening of morals during wartime made it difficult for authorities to tell the difference between women who slept with men for money and those embracing the opportunity for sexual liberty.

Row 1, left: Women's regiment from Petrograd relaxing in front of their tents, Feb. 1918. Right: Navy girls on review, Washington, D.C., with three naval officers between rows of Yeomanettes, c. 1918. Row 2, left: Members of the Woman's Radio Corps stand beside an Army car, Feb. 1919. Right: A woman activating the filter press in a glucose factory, Lancashire, England. Row 3, left: Two young women operate machinery, Armstrong Whitworth's and Co., Elswick, England. Right: A woman carries a hundredweight sack of coal, London, 1918. Row 4, left: Members of the Women's Land Army raise their hoes in salute. Right: A pupil at the Cheshire Agricultural College at Holmes Chapel being taught how to handle cattle. Row 5, left: Members of the Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF), based in Cologne, France, as part of occupying forces, boarding Air Force tenders. Right: Women's Auxiliary Army Corps at Etaples, France, uniformed in heavy coats and sturdy boots. First three images courtesy Library of Congress. Remaining images courtesy The First World War Poetry Digital Archive (oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit), University of Oxford; © copyright The Imperial War Museum.

Female nurses and soldiers took pains to distinguish themselves from prostitutes, and this often involved an explicit disavowal of any sexual impulses. The chastity of the uniformed female participant stood in stark contrast. Female soldiers dressed like men, while nurses wore white starched uniforms that resembled nuns' habits.

Women's Work

Very few women could vote, so they found other means for voicing political views. The international ties that western female suffragists had created to share ideas and tactics in the pre-war era laid the foundation for an international women's peace movement. In April 1915, female activists from most warring nations and many neutral ones, including American Jane Addams, met at The Hague to hold the Women's Peace Congress. Claiming to speak on behalf of mothers whose children perished in the war, the Women's Peace Congress urged world leaders to seek a negotiated peace settlement. Most delegates received a hostile reception when they returned home. Even in the neutral United States (which had not yet entered the war), the press vilified Addams as an ignorant, naïve old maid for venturing into the male domain of diplomatic relations.

Women also stepped into new economic roles during the war. How would a family survive if the male breadwinner left to fight? Governments tried to allay this fear by providing financial support for soldiers' dependents. For reasons of both necessity and opportunity, many women took on traditionally male jobs during the war. In rural areas women had to harvest crops and feed livestock. In urban areas, burgeoning orders for guns and artillery shells created a surplus of high-paying, skilled jobs.

By 1917, Russian women were forty-three percent of the industrial workforce; French women filled one-third of the positions in munitions factories. Women's labor was so important to the war effort that British and German officials even discussed the possibility of conscripting women to work in war-related industries. Some women entered the workplace for the first time, but most were already working. The war gave them a chance to move into better paying, higher prestige jobs. The shift from domestic, clerical, or agricultural work to factory jobs was only temporary, however. After the war, laws in many nations returned those jobs to male veterans.

The reliance on female labor and support for the war begged the question of why western societies continued to deny women the vote. Radical suffragists saw the war as a moment to press forward, while moderate activists counseled restraint lest women be seen as unpatriotic. End results were mixed. Revolutionary Russia granted women suffrage, as did postwar governments in the United States and Germany. Britain granted women over 30 the vote, essentially ignoring the fact that young women in their twenties had provided the bulk of wartime military and industrial service to the state. The French Parliament briefly debated granting female survivors of fallen soldiers the vote, but in the end French women remained disenfranchised until 1944.

Forever Changed

The war produced nearly three million widows: 600,000 in France and Germany; 239,000 in Britain; and 33,000 in the United States. These women faced numerous challenges, including

single-parenthood, economic insecurity, and grief. Mourning, however, evolved into a carefully scripted public ritual. Widows were expected to exhibit stoic acceptance of their fate, modeling how entire nations should accept personal loss as necessary for the community's survival. Grieving took place in private.

Reuniting with a loved one who survived brought joy and relief to many families. For others, the years of separation or the lingering effects of battle became permanent scars. Women had balanced the household budget, tilled the fields, and made decisions about schooling the children. Relinquishing these responsibilities was difficult when the family patriarch returned from war. Most governments offered some aid to disabled soldiers. Nonetheless, many veterans convalesced at home, out of public view, where women remained the primary caregivers.

After reluctantly seeing her brother and fiancé off to war, Vera Brittain had become a nurse in hopes of staying close to them in body and spirit. She received the news of Roland's death in 1915. Her brother, Edward, was killed in 1918, just a few months before the Armistice ended hostilities. Walking amid the cheering crowds in London at war's end, she recalled:

For the first time I realized, with all that full realization meant, how completely everything that had hitherto made up my life had vanished with Edward and Roland.... The War was over; a new age was beginning; but the dead were dead and would never return.

These words aptly note the sweeping change brought to women's lives and the lingering shadow of The Great War.

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EXTRA: | READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- ▶ *The First World War Poetry Digital Archive*, University of Oxford. An extraordinary resource. The Vera Brittain Collection contains correspondence, images, and extracts from her war diary. Other collections include biographies, photos, and verse by major poets of the period; a wide network of film and audio clips; and WWI-period photographs linked to Google Maps to pinpoint locations. [oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit](https://www.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit)
- ▶ *First World War* collection, Imperial War Museums. Online exhibits of wartime photos, art, and propaganda, including sections on "The Women War Workers of the North West" and "The Women's Land Army in Pictures." iwm.org.uk/history/first-world-war-home-front
- ▶ *American Women Rebuilding France, 1917-1924*, National World War I Museum at Liberty Memorial. Online exhibit follows 350 American women volunteers who traveled and worked to restore war-ravaged areas in northeastern France. theworldwar.org (click on the *Explore* tab; select *Exhibitions*, then select *Online Exhibitions*)



Nurses of the Great War

By Melissa Strong

Filling the gaps—“women’s work” in the Great War

When he could stand it no longer, he fired a revolver up through the roof of his mouth, but he made a mess of it. The ball tore out his left eye, and then lodged somewhere under his skull, so they bundled him into an ambulance and carried him, cursing and screaming, to the nearest field hospital. The journey was made in double-quick time, over rough Belgian roads. To save his life, he must reach the hospital without delay, and if he was bounced to death jolting along at breakneck speed, it did not matter. That was understood. He was a deserter, and discipline must be maintained. Since he had failed in the job, his life must be saved, he must be nursed back to health, until he was well enough to be stood up against a wall and shot. This is War.

—Ellen La Motte, *The Backwash of War* (1916)

An American nurse described this harsh, illogical reality of war, and she is one of thousands of women whose experience in World War I has been forgotten. Scholars of history, English, nursing, and gender studies have addressed gaps in history and memory, devoting increasing attention to the writing and experiences of World War I nurses. Much work remains to integrate female voices into the cultural memory of the Great War, and it will be challenging. Indeed, researching this article proved more difficult than I anticipated. The diaries nurses kept, the letters home they wrote, and the accounts they published of their experiences tend to be rare, hard to find, and out of print.

More than 21,000 females served in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps alone. Women like Irma Tuell were eager

to contribute to the war. Tuell recalled that she “jumped at the chance” to join the Red Cross Nursing Service after graduating from nursing school at Seattle General Hospital. “Nobody had to recruit me,” she said. But red tape, regulations, and resistance from the military, the government, and civilians hindered women’s efforts to serve and undermined campaigns to recruit women for a variety of organizations.

American women exasperated with endless delays often joined foreign organizations such as the Scottish Women’s Hospitals and the French Red Cross. Some women of means formed and deployed units of female medical personnel. One such individual was Mary Borden, who received for her service British medals of distinction and the French Legion of Honor. A Chicago native and Vassar



The glamorous portrayal of Red Cross duty bore little resemblance to women's real work. Author Melissa Strong refers to artist Harrison Fisher and his "Christmas Roll Call" poster (at top left, opposite) with its moving appeal to *Join the Red Cross, All you need is a Heart and a Dollar* (1917). In the image at center left, Fisher wraps a woman in the American flag, adding a quote from Woodrow Wilson: "I summon you to comradeship in the Red Cross" (1918). Other posters, clockwise from top left: *American Red Cross Serves Humanity*, Lawrence Wilber, c. 1914-1918. *Join! Yesterday, Today, Always, The Greatest Mother*, Lawrence Wilber, c. 1917. *Five Thousand by June. Graduate Nurses Your Country Needs You*, Carl Rakeman, c. 1917. *Join now! The Red Cross serves humanity*, C.W. Anderson, c. 1914-1918. *Join. America's answer to humanity's challenge*, Hayden Hayden, 1917. *Join. The Spirit of America*, Howard Chandler Christy, 1919. Bottom right: Mrs. Hammond, American Red Cross, serving water to wounded British soldiers on platform of railroad station at Montmirail, France; U.S. Army Signal Corps photographer, 1918. Images courtesy Library of Congress.



graduate, Borden was living abroad when the war began. She financed and staffed a mobile field hospital at the Western front and worked there as a nurse from 1915 until armistice. In *The Forbidden Zone* (1929), a book drawn from her time in the mobile unit and at a hospital in Dunkirk, Borden reveals the conflicted feelings of a nurse in the paradoxical situation of rehabilitating soldiers for return to harm's way.

A section of *The Forbidden Zone* entitled "Conspiracy" depicts nurses and doctors as war conspirators who perpetuated destruction and dehumanization. Borden felt that medical personnel obstructed humane death by intruding into combat-ravaged bodies. She writes that: "[We] add the insult of our curiosity ... send[ing] men to the war again and again, just as long as they will stand it; just until they are dead, and then we throw them in the ground."

Ellen La Motte, a professional American nurse who served in a French field hospital in Belgium, described similar feelings of conflict in her account *The Backwash of War* (1916). La Motte's haunting description of a "surgical triumph"—a young French soldier brought back from death after losing his arms, legs, nose, mouth, teeth, and eyes—juxtaposes the seeming miracle of the boy's survival with his longing for death. In La Motte's view, these interventions reduce the soldier, and the medical personnel who treat him, to a state less than human; the civilized thing to do would be to kill the boy or let him die. Instead, he becomes trapped "in a stagnant place" of "much ugliness ... churned up in the wake of mighty, moving forces" that

La Motte calls "the Backwash of War." The French soldier imprisoned in a broken body, his heartbroken father, and the agonized nurse are just three of the "many little lives foaming up in the backwash."

Mixed feelings about their work represent just one of the challenges World War I nurses faced. Military nurses occupied an auxiliary position of uncertain status and frequently experienced gender-based workplace hostility. Specific examples of this are rare since many were afraid to speak. For instance, Canadian Army Medical Corps nurse Clare Gass criticized her military superiors as "fearful," incompetent, and ruinous to soldiers' morale, but she kept these thoughts to herself, recording them in her diary. In a 1915 diary entry Gass wrote, "The OC is a doting old idiot & the Matron is surely mentally unbalanced. The good men are disgusted & the poor men are lazy & won't do their work." But Gass could do or say nothing about this because institutional practices made clear nurses' second-class status in the military: they received less pay and benefits than men, and they possessed rank in name only.

African American nurses faced prejudice against their race as well as their sex. Despite repeated requests for nurses from the Army Surgeon General, they were not called up until the influenza epidemic of 1918. Even then, African American nurses were kept behind the scenes and out of sight. Professional nurses like Aileen Bertha Cole requested to serve in the Army Nurse Corps, hoping to go overseas, but were offered positions in the Red Cross instead.





Nurse and other medical staff load a motor ambulance with a wounded soldier, Western Front.



Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) workers starting up a motor ambulance presented by the Canadian Red Cross, Etaples.



An operation taking place within an hour of the man being wounded, Oct. 1918.



The interior of a British ambulance train, showing the narrow aisle and triple bunks, with nurses, patients, and orderlies, near Doullens; D. McLellan, April 27, 1918.

Cole recalls, “Some of us were asked to go to West Virginia to work among the coal miners ... We were told, ‘We’ve got to save the miners’ lives to keep the transports moving.’” She did not receive an invitation to join the Army Nurse Corps until after armistice.

Things were no better in the Navy. U.S. Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels’s efforts to enlist women met with resistance from the Navy’s legal advisors, who called the idea of female yeomen not only “ridiculous” but a “Damn’d outrage! Helluva mess!” Meanwhile, civilians sent enraged letters to newspapers, local recruiting offices attempted to avoid accepting females, and women’s family members refused to support their decision to enlist. Some naval bases did not provide housing for female yeomen. Their uniforms were poorly made, few received training, and many were assigned to mind-numbingly menial tasks. When Yeoman Nell Weston Halstead of Chicago looked back on her assignment in the file room at the Bureau of Engineering, she said the monotony “got my goat so completely” one day that she went to her captain’s office and “told him we didn’t like our jobs and we wanted to go to France.” The captain’s reply—“What the hell could a girl do on a battleship? Get back to your job”—clearly reflects the prevailing assumption that gender limited women’s ability to contribute to the war.

In spite of the perception that being female was a handicap, women proved crucial to the Allied cause. And contrary to their assigned role as “protected,” nurses like Borden and La Motte often found themselves at the front lines. A 1918 edition of *The Stars and Stripes* reported: “Nurses, smack up in the combat zone, will hold the ‘frontest front’ record for American women.”

The saying that “War is long periods of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror” proved true for nurses of the Great War, and Clare Gass’ diary reflects these sentiments—long stretches of waiting in a semblance of normalcy until a convoy arrived with fresh casualties. On June 7, 1915, she wrote:

One young boy with part of his face shot away both arms gone & great wounds in both legs. Surely Death were merciful. Many head cases which are heartbreaking, & many many others ... These are the horrors of war, but they are too horrible. Can it be God’s will or only man’s devilishness. It is too awful.

Holding the “frontest front” took its toll on women and other noncombatants, just as it did on soldiers. Front-line nurse Marie van Vorst found herself able to bear more than she ever imagined, from treating gangrenous wounds to staying calm. Mildred Brown

was hit with shrapnel from a German plane flying low over Evacuation Hospital No. 7. Jane Rignel, one of three army nurses awarded the Citation Star for gallantry in action, related that a fellow nurse reported working “under continuous shell fire,” and that “operations continued until the operating theatre was hit.”

Experiences like these have been written out of the history of the war. If nurses are remembered at all, it is as an archetype from war propaganda. Recruitment materials for organizations like the Red Cross featured idealized nurses that drew upon stereotypes. Gender-specific ideas permeated North American culture. World War I recruitment and propaganda posters portrayed men as strong, daring, and ready for action and women as ethereal angels who seemed passive even at work. The model nurse is often depicted paradoxically: wholesome and alluring, simultaneously virginal and sexy, inaccessible yet available. We see her in posters such as Harrison Fisher’s December 1917 “Christmas Roll Call,” (opening photo, pg. 26) where an attractive young white woman wears a uniform reminiscent of a nun’s habit, her pained expression enhanced by red lipstick. She beseeches the viewer for aid with her outstretched right hand and with her left points to her lapel and the poppy commemorating the dead.

This image reflects conventional ideas that war means military and military means male soldiers. The military’s institutional culture reinforced rigid, discrete gender roles through assigning men the role of “protectors” and women the role of “protected.” The Army Nurse Corps and Canadian Army Medical Corps emphasized not clinical nursing skills but the feminine ideal of “selfless service” associated with Florence Nightingale, linking nursing to motherhood. This popular understanding defined wartime nursing as “natural” for women because it resembled caring and nurturing duties associated with domestic roles in the home.

Romanticized images like “Christmas Roll Call” surely influenced the prominent status of volunteer nurses. In England, nurses in the Voluntary Aid Detachments (VAD) received more public recognition than professional nurses in the organizations they supported, such as Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service and the Territorial Force Nursing Service. The visibility of the VAD at the expense of other women working in professional capacities demonstrates how preconceived ideas about femininity and the “proper place” for women work together to obscure full scope of women’s voices and experiences.

Why have nurses of the Great War been forgotten? Longstanding gender expectations and cultural memory (or collective understanding of the past) have allowed the dominance of a single “official” narrative of the war that focuses on male

participants. We typically regard the past as fixed and stable, but history and memory are constantly changing in response to the culture and attitudes of the present. This phenomenon is easy to see when we consider how popular culture from a range of eras informs current understandings of World War I. Plays, films, and novels such as *A Farewell to Arms*, *War Horse*, *Flyboys*, *Johnny Got His Gun*, *Paths of Glory*, and *What Price Glory* serve as many Americans' primary sources of information about the Great War. These popular titles tend not to include women's experiences. Because memory is filtered through and continuously shaped by gender expectations, even as those expectations change, women's contributions are diminished.

The shifting nature of cultural memory also shapes scholarly research. Some historians have misremembered women's service, perhaps attempting to make it fit into a preconceived box. For example, the work of the Red Cross, YMCA, and other relief organizations in WWI has been characterized by scholars as "cheering up the troops"—although more than 20,000 women in those organizations shared the horrors of frontline combat as they served alongside the U.S. military. Early studies of Great War nurses overlook the broad responsibilities, duties, and contributions made by professional nurses and the variety of additional women's roles, such as hospital administrators, ambulance drivers, and Red Cross volunteers.

By rediscovering the voices of World War I nurses, we can continue to learn more about them and forge a more comprehensive, multi-voiced understanding of the past.

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EXTRA! | READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- *World War I Posters*, Library of Congress. Approximately 1,900 posters, created between 1914 and 1920 to gain public and financial support, military recruits, and other workers for the American war effort. Many posters address women's roles, including recruitment of nurses and Red Cross volunteers. loc.gov/pictures (scroll through *All Collections* list and click on *Posters: World War I Posters*; to read about the role of posters, click on *Background and Scope* of the left-side navigation box; enter *Red Cross* or *Nurse* in the search box to view related posters)
- "Women's War Services," *The First World War Centenary*. Links to archives and events commemorating the First World War. In this podcast, women discuss their experiences in medical and military service during WWI, as well as taking on traditional male jobs while men were away, fighting the war. 1914.org/podcasts (scroll to Podcast 30: Women's War Services)
- *The American Field Service (AFS)*. Read about the roots of 19th-century war zone medicine. Includes video clips, diaries, and recollections of individuals (many of them students) who served as American volunteer ambulance drivers during WWI. ourstory.info



Masks were a common sight in the American workplace as flu spread in the fall of 1918. From the indoor work of secretaries to the public duties of policemen and street sweepers, everyone took precautions against the deadly pandemic. The St. Louis Chapter of the American Red Cross worked ambulance duty, recruiting volunteer drivers and automobiles to supplement ambulances, and chauffeured nurses between quarantined homes. Images courtesy National Archives and Records Administration, facilitated by the National Endowment for the Humanities.



Silent War—The Spanish Flu

REACTIONS TO THE "SPANISH FLU" pandemic of 1918-1919 were framed within the context of the biggest concern of the day—the First World War. As wartime flu deaths accelerated, many viewed it as an extension of the dying to which they were already accustomed.

Influenza pandemics have been occurring for thousands of years. In 1918 there was no worldwide monitoring system and you could only know if there was a pandemic after reports of multiple deaths had begun to circulate. One of the first places to notice this outbreak was Camp Funston in Kansas in the spring of 1918, where American soldiers were being readied for overseas duty.

European imperial dominance and expanded trade ensured that the entire world experienced this flu to some extent. But what influenced perceptions of the pandemic more than anything else (at least in the West) was the Great War. Americans, having fought for a shorter period, tended to have far greater and more exaggerated responses to the pandemic. People were told to wear masks and there was widespread compliance. Britons, who had been in the war since the beginning, had a more relaxed attitude. Officials in the U.K. rightly advised that masks were completely ineffective. And when British war poet Robert Graves arrived in London, another couple eagerly shared a cab with him, even though he warned them he was ill with influenza.

Flu Facts

- Why the label of "Spanish Flu"? Some point to the long tradition of labeling pandemics after places that were deemed "backwards," as in 1889 with the "Russian Flu." Others argue that Spain, neutral in WWI, had no press censorship and released some of the first news of the disease—first news of flu from Spain, thus, Spanish Flu.
- Hand washing, avoidance of touching the face, and covering coughs and sneezes was the prescribed protocol to prevent the spread of flu in 1918 and 1919—the same advice used today.
- Doctors at the time noted that, due to the loss of oxygen, when someone was about to die their skin would darken so that differences in race could not be detected between blacks and whites. No one that got to that dire point recovered.
- Scholars believe that 40-100 million people died in this influenza pandemic.

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CHICAGO, 1919:

“We are and will always remain HUNS”

By Christiane Brandt Faris

Images courtesy the author

Anti-German prejudice in WWI America

AT THE OUTBREAK of the First World War, Germans constituted the largest pool of European immigrants in the United States. Since the late seventeenth century, Germans had settled and moved on from the Philadelphia area to successfully farm the upper Midwest. They were respected for their hard work, skilled craftsmanship, easy conviviality, and their great love for music. As members of civic organizations, sports clubs, orchestras, and singing groups, they created a distinct German culture in cities like Milwaukee, Cincinnati, Chicago, and St. Louis. Many cities had German-speaking church communities where German liturgy was observed. Even Oklahoma City had a well-to-do German-speaking Methodist Congregation, with Anton Classen as trustee. Throughout the nineteenth century, German newspapers prospered and much of the nationwide food and beverage industry was in German hands.

The late nineteenth century saw a rise of xenophobia, particularly against Irish and German immigrants. Americans feared the loss of traditions and business to these newcomers. With entry into WWI looming, anti-German sentiments increased across the country and in Washington politics. Theodore Roosevelt denounced German-Americans as “hyphenated” citizens whose dual loyalties could not be tolerated. The sinking of the British passenger ship *Lusitania* by German U-boats stoked further anti-German propaganda. Orchestras replaced German compositions with French music. The conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and several musicians lost their prestigious positions. “Down with the Kaiser,” sung to the melody of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, became a popular tune. Immediately following the U.S. declaration of war in 1917, “Enemy Aliens” (first identified as German males, fourteen years or older, and later expanded to



Adolph Brandt

include women) were required to register with the Justice Department; some faced future internment camps and other punitive action.

The case of Adolph Brandt illustrates the tragic circumstances the war created for a now-detested immigrant population whose sons would join U.S. troops to fight their own countrymen on the battlefields of Europe. Adolph and his brothers had come to the United States in the 1860s, hoping to follow the success of several members in the previous generation of the Brandt family. As a new citizen in 1873, Adolph took the Oath of Allegiance “to support and defend the United States Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic.”

Living in Chicago with his wife and children, he had achieved solid middle-class standing as a broker for the Callahan Yeast Company and the Busch Bavarian Beer Breweries.

Adolph had sufficient means to return to his home country several times to visit family and old friends. Several postcards from Berlin testify to his travels. A cheerful beer garden photo, amidst family and friends in his hometown of Dissen, shows him wearing a top hat reminiscent of Abe Lincoln. His passport of June 18, 1906, bears his description as 54 years of age, with a stature of 6 feet, a high forehead, blue eyes, a straight nose, light hair, and a round face. The elaborate document guarantees him all legal rights: “The undersigned Secretary of State of the United States of America, hereby request all whom it may concern to permit *Adolph R. Brandt* a Citizen of the United States safely and freely to pass, and in case of need to give him all lawful Aid and Protection.”

In a letter to his brother Franz more than a decade later, June 1918, Adolph speaks of the shameful role reversal for German immigrants after WWI.

Mein lieber Bruder Franz,

Finally, after many years, we received permission from President Wilson to write to our loved ones in enemy lands. I waited for three days to collect my emotions for this task. It weighs on our hearts to find out what became of the family. How are you, your sons and their friends? Did they return from the war, were they wounded or disfigured? I wait with fear and worry for your answer. I pray that God watched over your lives.

A report follows about the six American Brandts who saw action overseas or had domestic government work. All of them returned unharmed. Adolph would later learn that one of the three nephews in Germany succumbed to war injuries. The letter continues:

Let me warn you: I am not sure what I may say in this correspondence to pass the surveillance inspection. Newspapers here reported about the Russian terrors when the Czar was still in power. But here, in the so-called land of the free, we have been dictated laws that put Russia to shame. Whoever was of German descent found himself in a frightful situation. But all who were born over there and immigrated here, were even worse off; we are and will always remain "HUNS," and that's the end of the song. It has been most difficult for us Germans here. We no longer speak our beloved language, we were insulted and shunned and called spies, even if our sons fought with the military overseas. Letters were opened or stolen from our mail boxes. Our public libraries took German books out of circulation. If a person mentioned the slightest complaint or criticism he was told to pack up and return to Germany on the double. Thousands and thousands were sent to various detention camps as prisoners, even if they were American citizens. Many are still incarcerated today, a year after armistice. This includes many of my friends and acquaintances.

It cannot be denied that the rich made much money as war profiteers, but the middle class has suffered immensely. I have lost everything I ever had, and that after working in this country for fifty-one years. I am as poor as a church mouse. Fanatic groups play a very important role here. As of July 1, 1919, all pubs have been closed. Wine, beer or liquor can no longer be served or produced. The president ordered: No more liquor! Congress declared January 20, 1920, as the day when Prohibition starts. You cannot imagine what that means for Chicago. The city has 7,500 restaurants and beer gardens that bring in \$1,000 each in fees and taxes. Just think of all the people who became unemployed! I am one of the thousands of employees who lost their jobs in the distilling industry. What will the future hold? I would never have thought that the American people take all of this without protest. Before the war, we Germans were admired. We were on the side of the liberals, but if we speak up today we are told to keep quiet or we could be incarcerated. (Trans. Christiane Faris)

It is obvious that Adolph Brandt felt betrayed by his adopted country. The pursuit of happiness and the assurance of legal rights and protection stated on his passport had turned into broken promises. Without doubt, the introduction of alcohol prohibition went against



Adolph, the bearded gentleman in a top hat seated at the table, enjoys time at a beer garden with friends and family in his hometown of Dissen.

all cultural traditions of German immigrants, who thought of beer as “liquid bread.” But Prohibition was hotly debated in the general population as well.

The letter concludes with more information about the American side of the extended Brandt family. Adolph then develops his ideas for starting a worldwide wholesale importing company. He feels that Chicago, with its population of three million, would be a ready market—if his German brother would become a partner and secure the purchase, inspection, and shipping of Westphalian ham, bacon, and sausages. This dream misjudged the situation in post-war Germany completely. The country was changing from an empire to a republic and was sliding towards its worst-ever inflation. Adolph’s company did not materialize; his wife found positions in domestic service and the couple spent their remaining years with Adolph’s daughter’s family.

Information about the actual extent of incarcerations and detention camps for Germans is not easy to find today. However, camps for some 6,000 non-naturalized German “Enemy Aliens” operated in Georgia and Utah from 1917 until as late as 1920. No records can be found for internment of naturalized, German-born citizens, but they did have to register and lived under the full impact of anti-German propaganda. Whether factual in every detail or not, Adolph Brandt’s letter provides a candid account of ethnic prejudice in the World War I period.



Adolph's 1916 passport

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Cordell Prospective Preachers, 1914-1915 school year. WWI conscientious objector Benjamin Randolph is seated on the floor, second from right.

When the Nation Came to Cordell

By David Lowry, Chip Kooi, and Gary Lindsey

The high price of dissent and conscience in Oklahoma

FREEDOMS OF SPEECH AND CONSCIENCE are rights that Americans not only expect but demand. The freedom to speak our minds and defend our convictions is an essential American ideal. But free practice of those ideals hasn't always been upheld. During World War I, federal and state governments actively quashed dissent. Even the small community of Cordell, Oklahoma, did not escape compliance with the prescribed patriotism. Anything but "all-in" support for the U.S. war effort was not just suppressed, but prosecuted. Punishment meant fines or prison sentences. The following account reads like a screenplay or novel, but for Benjamin Randolph and Terrell Clay, conscientious objectors from Cordell, the event was all too real. When they refused the draft because of their anti-war beliefs, the sentence was swift and harsh.



FORT LEAVENWORTH

Daybreak: the prisoners were marched out, lined up, blindfolded. The firing squad marched into place and was given the order: "Present arms!" The squad readied their rifles.

A representative from Washington had arrived the day before and tearfully pleaded with these young men, including Benjamin Franklin Randolph and Terrell Clay, to accept some kind of military service—ANY kind of service, including many non-combatant options—in order to avoid the firing squad. They refused.

Weeks before, one of their mentors and heroes, J. N. Armstrong, the president of Cordell Christian College (CCC) had made the trip to visit them with the same plea. Armstrong went away having been "reproved" by his former students for his theological position that would allow a Christian to participate in the war endeavor, and for encouraging them to violate their consciences.

"Aim!" They heard the command. They had a final opportunity—a moment of hesitation in the sequence—to cry out, to revoice their commitments, to accept the bargain. They did not do so.

The command to "Fire!" was never given, and they were marched back to their barracks.

Cordell Christian College, a Churches of Christ-affiliated school, was established in 1907. Benjamin Randolph was a student there when the Great War presented a moral dilemma. Randolph's college roommate, L.C. Sears, related the above account in his book *For Freedom: The Biography of John Nelson Armstrong*. It demonstrates the heightened passions that World War I ignited among Oklahomans.

Once war was declared, the federal government passed numerous measures in quick succession to garner public support and facilitate military operations. To address personnel needs of the armed forces, Congress created the Selective Draft Act, requiring male citizens to register. In May, the National Council of Defense instructed each state to create its own council and the Oklahoma Council of Defense emerged with eleven committees. It organized an Oklahoma Loyalty Bureau (OLB) and worked with the American Protective

League to identify and jail dissenters. In its mission to “enforce” patriotism, the OLB pressured Oklahomans to sign pledge cards avowing loyalty to the federal government and a duty to report disloyal statements or acts. County and community councils soon emerged and, in the absence of specific directives for identifying dissenters or “slackers,” acted on their own perceptions of suspected miscreants.

There were other, more positive tacks. The Oklahoma Patriotic Speakers’ Bureau enlisted members to bolster support. Three thousand volunteers served as “Four Minute Men,” giving brief patriotic speeches based on the pamphlet *The War: Its Justification and Purpose*, authored by Dr. Angelo C. Scott of the University of Oklahoma.

In the wake of this hyper-patriotism, anti-German hysteria spread in ways large and small. Americans began referring to German-named foods—such as hamburgers and sauerkraut—by more “appropriate” English names—Salisbury steak and liberty cabbage. Communities with German-inspired names Americanized them. The Oklahoma towns of Kiel, Bismark, and Korn changed their names to, respectively, Loyal, Wright, and Corn. Many states banned the speaking and teaching of the German language and some Oklahoma communities compelled German-language newspapers to stop publication.

Nevertheless, given its Progressive foundation and early devotion to socialist ideas, many Oklahomans overtly opposed the country’s entry into World War I. Congress quelled such opposition with sweeping laws forbidding anti-war activities, publications, and public criticisms of the U.S. role in the war. The Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918 empowered the government to arrest, try, convict, and imprison thousands of citizens across the country. Refusal to serve in the military often resulted in imprisonment in Fort Leavenworth. Though there is disagreement about the actual number of men and women imprisoned, author Stephen M. Kohn notes the arrest and imprisonment of twenty-five Oklahomans (*American Political Prisoners: Prosecutions Under the Espionage and Sedition Acts*, 1994).

Among those Oklahomans affected by anti-dissent laws were members of the Working Class Union (WCU). Membership had grown to more than 20,000 in southeastern Oklahoma, making it one of the largest socialist organizations in the nation. The WCU opposed the war for a variety of reasons, including the economic hardships it imposed on Oklahoma agricultural workers. In August 1917, hundreds of men embarked on a march from Oklahoma to Washington to protest conscription and to end the war, proposing to subsist on roasted green corn along the way. The march, later known as the Green Corn Rebellion, devolved into acts of vandalism, such as burning bridges and cutting telegraph lines. The “rebels” were soon apprehended—three men were killed, 400 were arrested—and the march ended in failure before it even left the state. Scrutiny and harassment by the Oklahoma Council of Defense and the federal government proved too much for the WCU and the Socialist Party and weakened their influence.

Wartime tensions touched every part of Oklahoma, including the small town of Cordell, the Washita County seat. To curb publicity of the so-called Green Corn Rebellion, and the embarrassing national perception of Oklahoma resulting from it, the Washita County Council of Defense (WCCD) and local officials resolved to flush out opposition to the war. The persuasions were apparently effective. The June 7, 1917, edition of *The Cordell*

Beacon reported that its draft registration day “was observed thoroughly over the county, and the number of registrations exceeded by 300 what was expected.” As evidence of strong local support, “no trouble from any source was reported.” Even its German-American precinct indicated “a very heavy registration and showed that they were loyal, or at least that there was no movement in any way to prevent registration.”

Though most Cordell citizens supported the war, some opposed it because of long-held religious convictions. Pacifists from the religious movements of the Mennonite Brethren and Churches of Christ were among those who objected to military service. Cordell Christian College (CCC) president J.N. Armstrong and most of his faculty and staff believed that Christians could serve in non-combatant roles. About fifty CCC students enlisted in combatant and non-combatant roles. A few students and faculty members, including professor S.A. Bell, took the more radical stance that Christians should neither participate in combat nor accept non-combatant status. Ironically, on the day the Sedition Act went into effect, May 16, 1918, Bell published his position in the *Gospel Herald*, a religious journal edited by Armstrong. It was known that three or four CCC students had refused military service and were serving time in Fort Leavenworth. As copies of the journal were being mailed, local postmaster Henry C. Hubbard noticed the potential violation of the Sedition Act and reported it to his superiors. On July 12, the WCCD held a hearing to investigate Armstrong and the perceived disloyalty.

A report submitted to Alvin Bingaman, head of the WCCD, charged that Armstrong had stated in a chapel session that Christians could not take even a non-combatant role in the war effort. A charge of “agitation” was added because of Armstrong’s correspondence with other Christian college presidents via the U.S. mail. He had initiated a strategy of gaining student draft exemptions on the grounds that the Christian colleges were training ministers. Two members of the church he attended, where a long-standing feud festered, reported that Armstrong had called the Fort Leavenworth conscientious objectors “heroes.” Armstrong affirmed his position and Bingaman convened an official hearing. The final report of the Bureau of Investigation (now known as the F.B.I.), filed by James G. Findley, February 15, 1919, shows the confrontational exchange:

Bingaman: Now, I will get you to state whether or not you didn’t state . . . some time in May that these boys were heroes?

Armstrong: Yes, sir.

Bingaman: Why did you think that?

Armstrong: I think that any man who stands for his convictions is.

Bingaman: You still say they are heroes?

Armstrong: If they are standing by their convictions.

Bingaman: Why do you say that?

Armstrong: I have just stated that any man who stands by what he believes he should do is a hero.

Bingaman: Would you say that Brigham Young was a hero?



S.A. Bell
Science, Bible



J.N. Armstrong
President, Bible



Lloyd C. Sears
Dean of English

Armstrong: Yes, sir.

Bingaman: Would you say the woman who throws her children to the crocodiles to appease the wrath of her god was a hero?

Armstrong: Yes, sir.

Bingaman: (Apparently baffled, Bingaman badgered Armstrong in an attempt to convince him that his position was illogical.) Do you not believe that a man is responsible to the government?

Armstrong: Yes, sir; but he first owes allegiance to his God.

Bingaman: Then is there any reason it would not be wrong for a sinner to fight?

Armstrong: If he believed it would be wrong and against his convictions it would be wrong.

Bingaman: You place it as a man's individual belief?

Armstrong: Yes, sir.

Bingaman: You think it is not possible for a man to have an erroneous idea?

Armstrong: I think he can and often does.

Bingaman: You believe in the government in all its units protecting your life and property?

Armstrong: Yes, sir.

Bingaman: Would you put it up to the sinners to protect the church?

Armstrong: It wouldn't be my duty to put it up to anybody.

Bingaman: You think the government should not use anybody but sinners to fight with?

Armstrong: I didn't say that.

Bingaman: We will suppose you have a Christian who is really a good man. He believes as you believe and a bunch of German soldiers, or any one for that matter, should take his 15-year-old daughter out and were about to commit an unspeakable crime against her, do you think this man should stand by with a gun in his hands and permit them to do this?

Armstrong: The New Testament teaches it is not right to take life.

Bingaman asked Armstrong what he would do if someone tried to burn or burglarize his house. Armstrong consistently responded that Christians could not kill without violating a command of the New Testament, that governing authorities were ordained by God to keep order, and that Christians were forbidden to participate in any governmental action that would include taking human life. He eventually protested: "Are these questions fair? Do they pertain to the matter I was brought here about?" Bingaman answered "yes" and the questioning continued.

Bingaman didn't limit his belligerence to the hearing. On August 13, Oklahoma Supreme Court Justice Thomas Owen traveled to Cordell to conduct another hearing. D.R. Dial, a CCC board member, testified that Bingaman threatened him twice, asserting that he had fifty Cordell men ready to assault Dial for his pacifist leanings. Bingaman extended his threat to include the chairman of the CCC Board of Regents, W.D. Hockaday, whom Bingaman publicly slapped and insulted on a downtown street. Only Justice Owen's arrival in Cordell halted the threats and avoided almost certain vigilante violence.

With the country's wartime mood fueled by anti-dissent

policies, Cordell Christian College leaders, faculty, and students were targets of patriotic zeal, enduring harassment, public censure, and threats of imprisonment for their beliefs. The lives of the young men who stood by their principles in front of a Fort Leavenworth firing squad were forever altered. In another incident during their confinement, they refused to work after being denied a time of Sunday worship and were hung up by their thumbs until a senior officer intervened. Biographer L.C. Sears reports that Randolph and another man died within three years of their release from prison at the war's end. A third suffered a nervous breakdown. Sears conducted Randolph's funeral in 1921 and he was buried in Cordell.

Amid ongoing intimidations—and to avoid further hostilities—Cordell Christian College reluctantly closed its doors in 1918. According to Armstrong, "This college did not die, rather it was a martyr for the convictions of the faculty and of its board."

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Images courtesy Stone-Campbell Movement Archives, Beam Library, Oklahoma Christian University



The Cordell Christian College campus was co-ed and included the administration and classroom building (left) and a girl's dormitory.

EXTRA: | READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- ▶ *Emma Goldman*, American Experience Series, PBS. Companion website for the documentary series. Emma Goldman was a Russian emigrant, WWI dissenter, and founder/editor of the anarchist publication *Mother Earth*. Includes scholar commentaries, timelines, images from *Mother Earth*, and links to other resources. pbs.org/wgbh/amex/goldman
- ▶ *The Gateway to Oklahoma History*, Oklahoma Historical Society. Read the June 7, 1917 edition of *The Cordell Beacon*, which reports county participation in military draft registration and plans by Cordell women to organize a National Red Cross branch. gateway.okhistory.org/search (enter *The Cordell Beacon*, June 7, 1917 in the search box)
- ▶ *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History & Culture*. "World War I" discusses Oklahomans' initial aversion to the war and gradual acceptance as European markets improved the economy for state agriculture. "Oklahoma Council of Defense" notes anti-German hysteria in Oklahoma and the activities of state and local Councils of Defense to suppress dissent. digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia (click on the Search tab, then enter *World War I* or *Oklahoma Council of Defense*)

Poppies in a field, Thiepval Wood,
Somme, 2008



SITES OF MEMORY, SITES OF MOURNING

BY JAY WINTER

FOR EUROPE, THE TOLL OF WAR WAS ICONIC, MYTHIC, AND UNIVERSAL.
IT SHAPED MEMORY, COMMEMORATION—AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR IS WHAT MADE EUROPE, in the twentieth century, European. It created a series of wounds that, to a degree, have never healed—staggering casualties of a magnitude that no one had ever seen before.

When we talk about losses on the scale of the First World War, we enter surreal terrain. I have great difficulty getting my mind around *one million* casualties for the Battle of Verdun in 1916, the longest battle in history, ten months without a break. It pushed soldiers beyond the limits of human endurance.

The way this war has been remembered, in an array of commemorative practices, describes what European identity not only was, but is.

There are many reasons why the remembrance of the First World War is carried on in a defining way. One is technology. The First World War happened at the very moment that the film industry became the centerpiece of mass entertainment. This was the very first filmic war. The technology provided motion picture cameras for all major armies, but they almost never filmed battle. Generals didn't want cameras on the battlefield because it might produce evidence useful to the other side. And the film might get back home. What would happen if families saw it?

There's a fictional film representation of war which is iconic in European consciousness about the past. In 1916, the British propaganda office decided to make a film to buck up public morale. They filmed mock episodes with soldiers in training. The problem was that people didn't know it was phony. When the film was shown in August-September 1916, twenty million people saw it—half the population of the country. There has

never been a film seen by half of the population of any country before that date or since. It broke all box office records. It showed the preparation for battle, artillery barrage, and men going over the top, some who slid right down again as if wounded or dead. Women in theaters fainted. They didn't know that this was fiction. As a filmic war, the war turned into myth at the very moment that it was being fought. Nobody had ever seen the dark side of the moon that was created by industrialized war.

I'll give you another powerful example. In February 1916, the German army decided to push through French lines at Verdun. In the course of the battle, stories turned into legend. One is the Trench of the Bayonets. There were no trenches in the Battle of Verdun; there were isolated pockets of men in big underground forts, with artillery barrage going on day and night. Little pockets of men would be caught in one part of the battle, and stayed put to make sure the Germans would not get through. One group was buried by a landslide. The weight of mud would move when artillery hit a particularly wet part of the front. The German platoon that took it left the bayonets sticking up out of the ground to indicate where to find the dead. The French interpretation was, "Here are fifteen French men who stood with their bayonets until they were buried alive and they didn't move an inch, *ils ne passeront pas* ("they won't get through"). This is a completely made-up story, but it became a sacred site, commemorated every 22nd of February.

The Great War created myth in other ways. Another came from the landing in Gallipoli, the Turkish peninsula south of Istanbul. The idea of the Allies was to knock Turkey out of the war, help Russia, and possibly encircle Germany—not by attacking directly through the Western Front but by coming around, through Asia Minor. Nobody had a look at the ground where the Allies were supposed to land. They didn't take into account the fact that there were very big cliffs to climb. It was a complete failure. The landing took place on the night of April 25, 1915, using Australian





Tyne Cot Cemetery is the resting place for nearly 12,000 soldiers of the Commonwealth Forces.

and New Zealand troops alongside British and French ones. That landing was the birth of the Australian nation. To this day, Anzac Day (Australia and New Zealand Army Corps) is sacred. It's the moment of winning national pride through the shedding of blood. The point is that remembering the First World War is remembering sacred themes that define nations. The oddity is that these nations were defined because they were a part of imperial powers, but this war was the apogee and the beginning and end of empire. Hence, nations that affirmed their loyalty to Britain by dying at Gallipoli earned the right to break away from Britain—another sacred moment in how the Great War turned into myth.

Remembering the First World War is remembering a series of myths. They're iconic in the sense that they describe not just what happened at a particular moment, but what the rest of twentieth-century Europe might become and did become.

The second reason why remembering the First World War is iconic in Europe is that it is universal. It's family history. Universal conscription presented armies of a size that had never before been pulled together. These armies suffered casualties of roughly one out of eight killed and one out of three wounded. We're talking about *seventy million* men in uniform, nine million killed, roughly twenty-five million wounded, eight million prisoners of war. One out of every two men who served in the First World War was a casualty.

This created an astonishing and unprecedented challenge of commemoration. The commemorative forms of the First World War created cultural practices that are still important today. Anybody going to England on Armistice Day, November 11, will see everyone wearing a little red poppy in their lapel. This is what you buy for a couple of pennies, whatever you want to give, as a contribution to The Royal British Legion, the biggest charity in Britain.

It is, to this day, the biggest charity for families and survivors and successive generations of those who served their country and were wounded or died.

The mythic representation of war which came out of film has been matched by a family representation of war that comes through cultural practices of remembrance. The First World War was remembered and still is remembered within families. Why is that? It's because of the universalization of bereavement. The problems are threefold. The first is the missing. The second is the irrelevance of conventional religious practices. The third is the search for some kind of collective statement of why these men died. For what? What price, victory?

Half of those men who died in the First World War have no known graves. Not a trace of them exists. (This is exactly the same proportion of those who were killed at Ground Zero on 9/11. Half of them vanished completely.) That matters a great deal to the families who need something to remember, to mourn. The fact that roughly four million men died without a trace made commemorating war very, very difficult. Conventional religious practices require a site, a grave, a place to go to where individuals can honor those who die.

What ways did they have to handle this? During the war, nothing, because the confusion was overwhelming. If a family got a message saying, "Your husband, your brother, your son, your fiancé is missing in action," it could mean anything. It could mean that the individual was in a prison camp. It could mean that the individual was in a hospital. It could mean that there was a confusion of identity and that the person was still alive, but somebody else found his dog tag. It could mean that the person had been blown to pieces and there was nothing that remained of him. None of that could be sorted until the end of the war, and even then it couldn't be sorted out. This lack of knowledge is the poignant origin of commemorative practices that followed it. The scale of human loss in the First World War challenged conventional institutions and frameworks for understanding what was happening.

The need to create a substitute tomb, a place in front of which to mourn is what creates the extraordinary vogue of war memorials. The enormous development of commemorative forms (in particular sculptured, architectural war memorials in the twentieth century) comes from the First World War. Maya Lin studied First World War memorials before creating the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Why? If you go to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial you'll understand the genius of First World War commemoration: the names are what matter. To touch the names is the way—inadequate perhaps, symbolic perhaps—to bring the dead back home, to bring them to the center of American history, in the middle of the Mall, between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Memorial.



Top: Inspired by the WWI poem "In Flanders Fields," red poppies are an international symbol to commemorate soldiers who died in war. Paper poppies, photos, and other mementos decorate graves and war memorials across Europe. Bottom: Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing, Ypres, Belgium. Inscribed on the memorial are more than 54,000 names of British and Commonwealth soldiers who were killed near the Ypres Salient and have no known grave. At eight o'clock each evening, local police stop traffic under the gate and the Last Post is played by volunteer buglers from Ypres fire station.



The Thiepval Memorial commemorates more than 72,000 soldiers who died on the Somme battlefields, July 1915-March 1918, and have no known graves. Color images are courtesy and © copyright The First World War Poetry Digital Archive (oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit), University of Oxford; Kate Lindsay, photographer.

The universalization of mourning in the First World War meant that these war memorials are all over Europe. There are 38,000 of them in England. Every village has one. There are 30,000 of them in France alone. They are places where, on the 11th of November, there will be ceremonies. It's a public holiday in France. The mayor of the town will head a procession in which school children will march—in the rain and the sleet, it doesn't matter—to the local war memorial. The mayor reads out the names of those who died in the First World War. The children, after each name, will say “*présent*,” will answer for the men who aren't there. This bonding between the living and the dead was a substitute ceremony for burials that could never take place.

How did it all happen? The commemorative wave took place through political leadership. There is a fundamental difference between the way in which men are remembered, in the winners and in the losers. In the case of Germany, where two million soldiers died in the First World War, this is an enormously difficult problem. You not only need to remember the dead, but you have to find a way to answer an eternal question: How is it possible to glorify those who die in war without glorifying war itself?

Most of the time politics became local. Small groups of people in towns and villages took it upon themselves to answer the question: *What will we do? How will we remember the men of our village?* We're talking about three, four brothers in agrarian towns, fathers and sons who never came back. Everybody knew the families. High politics—the cabinets, the politicians, the generals—may have set out certain lines, but what's extraordinary is how democratic commemoration was, and how much life there was in civil society to create forms that were separate. That's why I mentioned the poppy fund. This is a private organization. It's not a public charity, it's not the state. It's civil society speaking its compassionate language of remembering not only the fallen, but those left behind.

I'll give you an example of how civil society and state power vary. On July 14, 1919, just two weeks after the Germans were forced to accept the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, there was a victory parade in Paris. That parade had a march past the Champs-Élysées, through the Arc de Triomphe (it's only happened twice in history and this was one) to celebrate the victory. The French were there. The Americans, the Brits, the Italians—all the Allies were there.

Two things happened. One was that Georges Clemenceau, the French prime minister, decided, *We need a symbol of the lost generation*. So, he had a papier-mâché catafalque built, a big, ornate plinth. On top of it was a cenotaph, an empty tomb to

symbolize the tombs of all those soldiers who died in the war, half of whom have no known graves. To start the parade, Clemenceau insisted that the people who led the way were the most badly mutilated men of the war, the *gueules-cassées* (“men with broken faces”), the men without arms, without legs. This vanguard of the suffering transformed a victory parade into a day of mourning. This was extraordinary.

The Brits decided they had better do something, too: *A million men from British forces died in the First World War—we need a victory parade*. So, they asked architect Edwin Lutyens to put together another papier-mâché memorial called The Cenotaph. They put it right in the middle of Whitehall, right next to 10 Downing Street, next to Buckingham Palace, right in the middle of official London. They had their parade. Two million people came and deposited whatever they had to offer. This was an empty tomb, a Greek form. It meant that the language of commemoration was ecumenical and not Christian. Lutyens wanted a memorial that would suffice for Hindu soldiers—Muslim soldiers, Jewish soldiers, Anglican, Catholic, Irish, those of no belief at all—and he found it, the simplest possible way. As a result of the extraordinary outpouring of feeling, they had to keep shoveling away flowers, there were so many things left. These are families who finally found a way to express a symbolic exchange.

It happens at the Vietnam Wall, too. People leave things. Why? *Those people whose names are on the wall have given everything—I need to give something*. Pilgrimage is not tourism, it should be difficult. You should give, not just get. Clearly the British people voted with their feet for the national war memorial. So the cabinet said, “Lutyens, could you do it again, this

time in stone?” He did. A year later when the Unknown Soldier was buried in Westminster Abbey, people went and paid their respects. You can still do it today. The Abbey is the home of kings and poets. The people's monument is The Cenotaph in Whitehall. It remains so to this day.

Edwin Lutyens designed another set of war memorials that lead us directly to Maya Lin. Thiepval is a small village that no longer exists in the Somme, in northern France. Lutyens was asked to do a memorial for the 72,000 British soldiers who died in that one battle and have no known graves. What he created was an extraordinary arc, an “Arc of Triumph” that has small arches on top of it. When you get close, you see that the walls are covered with names. There's a vanishing point where you suddenly see them.

It's *that* which Maya Lin heard about—Lutyens and commemoration—that inspired her to create the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The forms that were created in The Cenotaph have

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place, and in the sky,
The larks, still bravely singing, fly,
Scarce heard amid the guns below.



—From “In Flanders Fields”
by John McCrae

endured throughout the twentieth century to describe how war is remembered. The Cenotaph is pre-Christian, one more move away from the institutionalization of religion. It's not that the sacred died in twentieth-century Europe, it moved out of the churches. It can be found elsewhere. One of the places where it will be found is in war memorials that were placed in villages, towns, marketplaces, all over Europe.

Returning to that process of civil society commemorations, the first thing you have to figure out is: How much does it cost? The cost factor matters substantially. If you want something sculptural, something like a piece of architecture, the cheapest possible form is an obelisk. It has a great advantage in that it doesn't require you to distinguish between Protestant, Catholic, Jew. It's an ecumenical form and it's the most popular one. In France, there are two kinds of representations: a Gallic rooster or a soldier, the *poilu* ("the hairy"). For the French, the idea of a soldier should be hairy, a *poilu*, somebody who never shaved, a tough guy. These could be bought through a mail-order catalog. The images are not triumphal, they are mournful. Again, this is decided by small groups of people who put together money to describe the ways that war memorials should be organized, designed, and paid for. They were paid for, overwhelmingly, by popular subscription—with sours, francs, deutschmarks, whatever you had.

What about the inscriptions? Many war memorials list people either alphabetically or by the year in which they died, rather than by rank. There is a democracy of death—and of commemoration. It is something extraordinary that goes on when loss is so general that it isn't possible to separate those who died in high rank from those who died as privates.

Then we come to the third part of the commemorative process. The first is political—small politics more than big politics. The second is business—the money, the commissioning, the putting together of the project. The third is the ritual. What do people do when they stand in front of a war memorial? The answer is very different things. The first thing that happens is that women enter the narrative. Women are at the center of the commemorative practice. They are *not* at the center of the narratives of war. There are those who believe that the gendering of the narratives of war separates the stories told by soldiers from those of the societies for which they fought. I'm not sure if that is true or not, but what we *can* say is that the ritual that happens in front of memorials are rituals of families. Historically, women have been associated with mourning practices since the Egyptians. There are tombs in the Valley of the Queens in Luxor that show professional mourners, women who have tears painted on their cheeks, from the time of the pharaohs. *Stabat Mater Dolorosa* ("the sorrowful mother stood") is a Catholic trope of great power and importance in understanding how societies configure loss of life in war.

So, women and families are there. There is a didactic function too: school children come there. This is a very important point. The rituals have a byword that dominates the message: *never again*, the phrase we frequently associate with the Holocaust. The phrase *never again* comes out of the First World War. This is the war to end all wars. This is a war so dreadful that it is *not at all* the purpose of commemorative forms to prepare the next generation for their turn. On the contrary. The notion of commemoration in inter-war Europe is *never again*. The names of those who



Two WAACs (Women's Auxillary Army Corp) tending graves of the fallen, Abbeville, France. The wreaths are inscribed "To Our Dear Son" and "To Fred From Mother and All." Courtesy The First World War Poetry Digital Archive (oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit), University of Oxford; © copyright The Imperial War Museum.

died in the Second World War were tacked onto First World War memorials. Part of the reason is financial; if the First World War impoverished Europe, the Second World War bankrupted it.

There's another reason. How many times can you say, *never again*? If the idea was that these men died to make war impossible—their sacrifices were such as to eliminate the need for their children to go to war—then what do you do in 1939? This is true in Germany, too, where the outbreak of the Second World War wasn't greeted by marching bands and parades. It was a day of sadness in Germany, as it was elsewhere, because everybody knew the costs. The Great War told them what war is. The casualties were so devastating that even the losses of the Second World War didn't change the landscape of remembrance that was constructed between 1918 and 1939.

It is clear to me that political culture follows history, follows the understandings people develop of the world in which they live. It doesn't stop militaristic groups like the Nazis, who wanted to reverse the verdict of 1918 under the Treaty of Versailles. But there's no doubt in my mind that the First World War message of *never again* survived the Nazis, survived Stalin, to create a different kind of Europe in which armies don't matter anymore. States are defined in terms of the way in which they defend the wellbeing of their populations, not in terms of the military force that they can deploy in defense of national interests or their imperial power. The First World War hammered the nails in the coffin of the old vision. The story of warfare killed the old idea of state sovereignty.

The First World War left indelible traces in families, the most powerful reasons why it remains the iconic disaster that created a Europe that no one had ever seen before, and that was vastly different, in the minds of ordinary people, than the Europe that existed in 1914.

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Continued from page 12

or wounded on the first day alone. Over the next eight and a half months, Allied forces were pushed back repeatedly—with mounting casualties on both sides. By the time the Allies evacuated in January 1916, more than 100,000 men were dead, including some 56,000 Ottoman troops and 11,400 Anzacs.

Known in Turkey as the Battle of Çanakkale, the victory at Gallipoli was a defining moment in Turkish nationalism. Likewise, in the minds of many modern Australians and New Zealanders, Gallipoli was World War I. In both countries, April 25, Anzac Day, remains the most celebrated military holiday of the year. To this day, generations of children are taught—through public rituals, parades, and the consumption of Anzac biscuits—to commemorate those who died on Turkish shores.

The Long Shadow of the Great War

On November 1, 1918, U.S. forces, using a combination of artillery bombardments, gas attacks, and aerial bombing, renewed their offensive with some success, but they would not get a chance to follow up on their achievements. More than four years after invading Belgium, the German army lacked the supplies and fresh men to sustain its war effort. Amidst political upheaval at home, the German government agreed to a ceasefire, which commenced on November 11. In five and a half months of sustained action, 1.3 million American soldiers, Marines, airmen, and sailors had served in the combat zone; at the war's end, roughly a quarter of these men were missing, captured, wounded, or dead.

A century later, World War I appears little more than a four-year bloodbath. It was not a war to make the world safe for democracy, nor was it a war to end all war. The Ottoman Empire was devastated; but within a generation, most of the conflict's major players—Germany, Britain, France, Italy, the United States—were back to fight all over again, this time with even more disastrous results.

The consequences of the Great War resonate to this day. The war sparked revolutions across the globe and redrew the political map from Eastern Europe to the Pacific. Much of the contemporary political discord in the Middle East, including the ongoing conflicts in Palestine and Iraq, stems directly from false promises made at the end of World War I. Europe, once the undisputed seat of global power, never fully recovered its previous stature after the Great War, though it would take another global conflict to fully knock it from its imperial pedestal. The United States suffered its own traumas: more than 116,000 dead (more than half from disease); 224,000 wounded; and countless more suffering the lingering effects of shell shock and battlefield collapse. Still, compared to their European counterparts—with their bombed-out landscapes, ruined cities, shattered economies, and millions dead—Americans emerged from the Great War *relatively* unscathed. And, over the next half century, the United States began to fill the power vacuum left behind by World War I and cement its position as one of the world's reigning superpowers.

Ultimately, the Great War stands as a further reminder—as if another were needed—of modern nations' willingness to abandon all sense of rationality and moderation on the battlefield. Having perfected the techniques of mass slaughter in the colonies, Europeans turned the arsenal of genocide—automatic weaponry, aerial bombing, poison gas—on themselves, rendering their



America's highest dignitaries of state, Army, and Navy stand at salute while the casket containing the body of the Unknown Soldier is borne to the caisson taking it from the Navy Yard to the Capitol. In the group are General John J. Pershing, Commander of the American Expeditionary Forces; Major General John Archer Lejeune, Commandant of the Marine Corps; and Army Major General James G. Harbord; c. 1918-1922. Courtesy National Photo Company Collection, Library of Congress.

claims of civilization tenuous at best. The mechanization of death in World War I sowed the seeds for future killing programs on an even more horrific scale—from the extermination camps of the Holocaust to the “strategic bombings” of Tokyo and Dresden in World War II.

In these and many other ways, the Great War created the world in which we live—and reflected how easily that world might end.

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EXTRA! | READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- ▶ *The Great War*, PBS. Companion website for the documentary series “The Great War and the Shaping of the 20th Century.” Includes WWI history, scholar commentaries, maps, timelines, and audio clips. pbs.org/greatwar
- ▶ *Europe Plunges into War*, The Map as History. Short audio and animated map illustrate the history, nations, and locations of events that led to world war. the-map-as-history.com (scroll down the home page and click on *World War I*, then select *Europe Plunges into War*)
- ▶ *Digital History*, University of Houston. History of WWI and America's involvement, including period documents and speeches, popular music, film trailers, images, and links to other resources. digitalhistory.uh.edu

Next up: L-O-V-E | Winter 2015

With Valentine's Day and romance in the air, we'll look at match-making, romance novels, the history of valentines, women's love poetry, what the movies tell us about kissing, and sports! Just *some* of the things that stir our passions.



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