Popular Experience and Cultural Representation of the Great War, 1914-1918

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Edited by

Ruth Larsen and Ian Whitehead

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

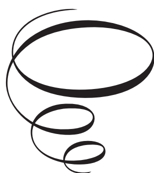

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments vii

Introduction 1

Chapter One 5
"Mechanical Human Beasts": The Experience of Killing
Phillip Booth, Kieran Hull, Daniel Turner and Konrad Wells-Corp

Chapter Two 15
Pals in Arms: Homosociability, Hegemonic Masculinity and the Great War
Jenny Cook, Ashton Cunningham, Leanne Jones and Matthew Wood

Chapter Three 25
Beyond *War Horse*: Animals and Total War
Vicki Fordham, Sophie Birch, Calvin Smith and Ryan Khaira

Chapter Four 35
"Tickling Men to War": The White Feather Campaign
Victoria Hammonds, Tracey Handley, James Malley and Rebecca Sturgess

Chapter Five 45
Life in Ruhleben Camp: Edwardian Britain in Microcosm
Christopher Batten, Jason Pickering, Ellie Walsh and Nathan Willcox

Chapter Six 57
Teddies, Toy Soldiers and the Militarisation of Playtime
Lydia Mcgraw, Helen Wright and Jade Kelly-Smith

Chapter Seven 63
Beyond Franz Ferdinand and Belgium: Britain's Real War Aims
Elliot Chapman, Charlie Bradley, Leigh-Ann Harris and Bradley Warren

Chapter Eight 73
Trouble in Paradise: The West Indies at War
Jorden Crawford, Alexandra Kempson, Fern Pithers and Lewis Wale

Chapter Nine 81
Australia: A Nation Made in War? Defiance, Disappointment and Determination
Adam Al-Safi, Shelby Squire and Sophie Philips

Chapter Ten 91
Requiem: Foulds, Beaverbrook and a "British" Festival of Remembrance
Anthony Butterworth, Thomas Debaere, Laura Jackson and Rickesh Patel

Chapter Eleven 101
"Biggles Sorts it Out!" Captain W.E. Johns and the Reinvention of the Heroic Ideal for British Boys
Beth Harris, Dan Dunning, David Pugh and Laura Winspeare

Chapter Twelve 109
Crisis of Faith? C.S. Lewis, Religion and the First World War
Nichola Tonks and Katherine Sykes

Selected Bibliography 119

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INTRODUCTION

The chapters in this volume were originally delivered as papers at the University of Derby's seventh annual Public History Conference, which in 2014 marked the hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War.

Each year, the Public History Conference is planned, organised and delivered by second year undergraduate History students. The Conference enables students to engage in a significant piece of collaborative research and writing. As the Conference is open to the public, it provides an exciting opportunity for students to convey their ideas to a wider audience and so promote public debate about the past and how it informs the present. Thus, at a time when Britain was reflecting on the momentous events of 1914, the Conference was able to promote discussion about how the British people responded to the challenge of the War, as well as exploring the extent to which perspectives on the conflict have evolved over the subsequent century.

A number of the chapters examine the role of prevailing ideas about gender in determining social expectations of how men and women responded to the national cause. Chapter One discusses how men coped with the harsh reality of combat and killing on the Western Front, whilst Chapter Two considers the ways in which masculine gender ideals and male social relationships influenced men's willingness to take up arms and subsequently sustain the fight. The emergence of new technology was one of the factors which shaped the soldiers' experience of the battlefield. However, as Chapter Three highlights, despite the mechanisation of modern warfare, animals continued to be an important resource. Horses are the best known and perhaps the most romanticised of the animal participants in battle, but the chapter highlights the key part played by other creatures. It also draws attention to the role played by animals on the Home Front.

The Home Front has generally been seen as providing a vehicle for advancing progressive ideas about the role of women in society. However, as Chapter Four highlights, the controversial White Feather Campaign

drew on traditional ideas of gender roles in war and ultimately became an embarrassment to those championing the female cause. The White Feather Campaign was a reflection of the patriotic feeling that overtook the British nation in 1914. A strong sense of British identity and a faith in the superiority of British values, customs and institutions underpinned the collective war effort. Chapter Five looks at how British prisoners in the Ruhleben internment camp were able to create a version of their homeland, through the organisational structures that governed their lives in captivity and the sports and recreations that they organised, in order to relieve their boredom. On the Home Front, recreation also provided a means for reinforcing patriotism and pride in British institutions. Chapter Six highlights how both before and during the War, children's toys, games and organisations evolved to ensure that boys and girls identified with their nation and were prepared for the roles that, as adults, they might be called upon to undertake in war.

In 1914, British propaganda emphasised the extent to which Britain's involvement in the War was driven by defending 'poor little Belgium'. Later in the War, Lloyd George's declaration of British War Aims also reinforced the collective belief that Britain was fighting in the cause of liberty and democracy against the tyranny of German militarism and expansionism. Such justifications provide a version of why Britain fought that sits comfortably with us today. However, as Chapter Seven reminds us, Britain was at the apex of the World's greatest empire. For Britain, the War was one which had to be fought, in order to preserve and potentially extend that imperial domain. It was also a conflict in which Britain's colonies made vital contributions to the war effort through the supply of manpower, goods and finance. Chapter Eight examines the contribution of the West Indies to the war effort, highlighting the extent to which racial prejudice exposed the limitations of the shared British identity that supposedly united the Empire. As a consequence, the War played a significant part in promoting West Indian nationalism and undermining faith in the competency of British rule. Similar themes are explored in Chapter Nine, which considers the role that the War played in fashioning and promoting a distinct sense of Australian identity.

Commemoration of the First World War, and in particular the ANZAC Myth, continues to be a significant factor in reinforcing a contemporary sense of Australian identity. Chapter Ten highlights how different political and cultural agendas have shaped the way in which Britain has remembered the War, through an examination of changing attitudes to the

performance of John Foulds' *A World Requiem*. Perhaps even more so than music, literature has played a significant part in shaping how we remember the War, most famously through the works of the 'soldier poets'. The latter, particularly writers such as Owen and Sassoon, helped to construct a collective memory of the War that stressed its futility. By contrast, an author who sought to emphasise the extent to which the War had offered the opportunity for the development and display of positive British attributes was W.E. Johns. Chapter Eleven charts how Johns, through the exploits of his fictional creation, Captain James Bigglesworth (Biggles), provided a role-model of British heroism that inspired and entertained his readers for decades.

Throughout the book, the chapters highlight the pitfalls of generalising about how Britons reacted to the War, how they coped with its challenges and how they came to rationalise it in its aftermath. In the final chapter, there is an examination of the means by which one individual, C.S. Lewis, came to terms with his war experiences, reflecting on how these feelings influenced his writing and personal beliefs.

As we look back on the Great War from the standpoint of the centenary commemorations, we will continue to debate what the War meant to its participants and how it has shaped us since. Given the purpose of the Public History Conference, from which this volume arose, the authors hope that they have made a valuable contribution to that discussion.

—Ruth Larsen and Ian Whitehead

CHAPTER ONE

"MECHANICAL HUMAN BEASTS": THE EXPERIENCE OF KILLING

PHILLIP BOOTH, KIERAN HULL, DANIEL TURNER AND KONRAD WELLS-CORP

This chapter explores how soldiers experienced killing during the Great War. It proceeds to examine the pleasure that soldiers gained from fighting and killing, highlighting the relationship between the experience of killing and the machine mentality. It considers the background factors, which affected how soldiers could respond to the act of killing, and also looks at case studies of how individual soldiers reacted to their own killing exploits. The chapter demonstrates that many soldiers in fact enjoyed the experience of killing their enemies, and that this conclusion can help add significantly to our knowledge of the Great War and of the nature of warfare in general.

Joanna Bourke rightly observed in her 1999 book *An Intimate History of Killing* that 'the characteristic act of men at war is not dying, it is killing'.[1] Yet when it comes to conventional portrayals of the Great War, this is a truth which is all too often avoided. Instead, most give the impression that soldiers simply went to war in order to be miserable in the trenches or, if they were not so lucky, to end up with their name inscribed on some well-tended war grave or neglected village cenotaph.[2] This is perhaps a more palatable tale than one filled with murderous Tommies. Yet, History should be about an unblinking pursuit of truth, rather than a timid quest for the cosiest narrative. When the act of killing is given its due attention, we are permitted to get just a little closer to the truth of the Great War, and of those who fought and killed in it.

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[1] Bourke, J., *An Intimate History of Killing: face-to-face killing in twentieth-century warfare* (London: Granta, 1999), p. 1.
[2] Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 2.

Initially, it is important to state that soldiers experienced the act of killing through a wide variety of emotions ranging from pleasure, to guilt, to moral outrage. However, perhaps pleasure is the most interesting of these, if only because it is the response that many may find most discomfiting, and which may most challenge prevailing representations of the Great War soldier. Indeed, evidence of soldiers enjoying killing is not difficult to find. Such evidence should hardly surprise us, when we realise that soldiers were trained and instructed to enjoy the act of killing, and if they did not then they could not properly be called members of the infantry. [3] For example, the 1918 Handbook for the 42nd East Lancashire Division exhorted officers to "be bloodthirsty, and never cease to think how you can best kill the enemy or help your men to do so".[4]

In fact, many men required no such instruction to enjoy the experience of fighting. As Martin van Creveld has stated:

> War ... far from being merely a means, has very often been considered an end – a highly attractive activity for which no other can provide an adequate substitute ... However unpalatable the fact, the real reason why we have wars is that men like fighting.[5]

Such considerations led some men to feel relief upon the outbreak of war in 1914. For example, Rupert Brooke was thankful to God because He had "matched us with His hour, and caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping" and had saved him from "a world grown old and cold and weary".[6] A love of war is also apparent in the testimony of a German sailor at the Battle of Jutland, as described by Lawrence Freedman. The sailor in question reported being impatient for the guns of war to sound, as he relished the very thought of battle. He marvelled at the sight of the German ships, which he described as being like elephants charging forward.[7] As the grandiose drama of battle unfolded, he was not simply afraid. Rather, he experienced a strange mixture of fear, joy, curiosity, apathy and a sheer love of war.[8] Yet we should remember that such

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[3] Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, pp. 1-2, 3, 369.
[4] 'Maxims for the Leader', *42nd East Lancashire Division, Handbook* (Aldershot, 1918), p. 8, cited in Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 2.
[5] M.V. Creveld cited in Ferguson, N., *The Pity of War* (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 360.
[6] R. Brooke cited in Wilson, T., *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Polity, 1986) pp. 10-11.
[7] Freedman, L. (ed.), *War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 20.
[8] Freedman, *War*, p. 22.

attitudes to war did not only result from the anticipated (or actualised) joys that fighting could bring. They were also possible because, at this point, people were still relatively unaware of the horrors that modern, industrialised warfare could bring, as well as just how worthless the products of costly victory could be.[9]

In order to understand how soldiers experienced fighting and killing, it is important to consider the relationship between war and the machine mentality. As Daniel Pick has argued, there is a certain mechanical element in the way that human beings kill one another. The human psyche is reduced to a machine-like state, while the machines of war are imbued with excessive destructive power, even a kind of sexual energy. Soldiers ultimately came not only to see themselves as machines, but also their opponents. This enabled the rationalisation of killing as the mere termination of an opposing 'machine', rather than the destruction of a human life.[10]

However, due to the amoral connotations of the machine mentality, it can also be utilised as an effective image in propaganda material. Such was the case during the Great War, when the Allies related stories of German atrocities to the machine-like mentality, which the German nation had purportedly developed during the course of the nineteenth century. The supposed 'high culture' of Germany had finally been laid bare as a nightmarish 'monstrosity' within Western civilisation.[11] On the other hand, German propagandists portrayed England as having something like a dual personality. There was the 'Anglo-Saxon' part, which reflected honesty, outspokenness and a love of liberty, yet there was also a 'Norman-French' part, which displayed taciturnity, ruthlessness, and enterprise in the pursuit of conquest. When viewed in such terms, the War could easily be rationalised as the inevitable unleashing of formerly hidden instincts and passions.[12]

We must also not forget the background factors that affected how soldiers experienced killing. For example, there were distinct differences between the traits of those soldiers who savoured killing, and those who were horrified by it. One belief is that soldiers from urban areas lacked the

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[9] Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, p. 10.
[10] Pick, D., *War machine: the rationalisation of slaughter in the modern age* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 21.
[11] Pick, *War machine*, p. 155.
[12] Pick, *War machine*, p. 151.

resolution and toughness of their rural counterparts, who were more traditional recruits to the armed forces.[13] It is also thought that soldiers from rural areas were more used to handling weaponry, as opposed to urban soldiers who were often younger and thus had little, if any, experience with firearms. These factors ultimately lead officers to view urban youths as being inherently weak, which then meant that they felt the need to emphasise an offensive mentality in order to compensate for the supposed weakness. The fact that they were surrounded by soldiers who did not balk at the act of killing also placed added pressure on urban recruits to face the act of killing with, at the very least, equanimity.[14]

Those soldiers who did not naturally enjoy the experience of killing were not simply left alone to deal with their feelings as best they could. Rather, before being sent to the front, they were specifically trained in how to use weaponry, in the course of which the minutiae of killing was often described to them. For example, a War Office training pamphlet on the use of bayonets stated that:

> If possible the point of the bayonet should be directed against the opponent's throat, especially in corps-d-corps fighting, as the point will enter easily and make a final fatal wound on penetrating a few inches and, being near the eyes, makes an opposite 'funk'. Other vulnerable exposed parts are the face, chest, lower abdomen and thighs, and the region of the kidneys when the back is turned. Four to six inches penetration is sufficient to incapacitate and allow for quick withdrawal, whereas if the bayonet is driven home too far it is often impossible to withdraw. In such cases a round should be fired to break up the obstruction.[15]

More and more training ultimately became necessary during the course of the war as the pace of weapon development accelerated. Intense struggles took place to try and connect men with their weaponry, which also coincided with a shift in the image of the battlefield. The latter changed from being seen as primarily psychological, to become more technological in nature.[16] However, these processes also served to reduce the responsibility

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[13] Jones, E., 'The psychology of killing: The combat experience of British Soldiers during the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41.2 (2006), p. 231.

[14] Jones, 'The psychology of killing', p. 232.

[15] Cited in Bridger, G., *The Great War handbook* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Family History, 2009), p. 79.

[16] Travers, T., *The killing ground: the British Army, the Western Front and the emergence of modern war, 1900-1918* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2003), p. 77.

of individual agents for the act of killing, which could make some feel much less anxious about the act. For example, teamwork was required to operate any form of artillery, which helped to spread the responsibility for killing beyond any single soldier.[17]

One mechanism which infantrymen employed to cope with the trauma of killing was to fire their rifles only in the general direction of the enemy, with only relatively few men, such as snipers, actually taking deliberate aim at a lone individual and killing him. The development of machine guns, some of which could kill at a range of up to a thousand yards, also helped to make the killing experience more indirect.[18] However, even though killing became less intimate, soldiers could still not escape the knowledge and feelings which came with the act. Therefore, some men felt they needed a motive for killing in order to make the experience more palatable. For example, Frank Brent, an NCO in the Australian Imperial Force, remarked that: "there was the feeling of exultation that once again you were going to be able to extract retribution from the fellows that had killed your mates".[19] Indeed, this quote starkly illustrates one of the most important reasons why soldiers carried on fighting during the Great War: in order to have the opportunity to avenge the deaths of former comrades.

In order to explore the experience of killing in more detail, it is necessary to examine case studies of individual soldiers, to see how they personally responded to the act. One such example, which is well-documented in the historiography, is the story of Julian Grenfell. Grenfell was born in 1888 into a landowning family with a long tradition of military service. He then went on to be educated at Eton and Balliol College, before joining the First Royal Dragoons as a cavalry officer in 1910. Over the next four years, he saw action in India and South Africa, before being posted to France upon the outbreak of the Great War.[20] Raymond Asquith knew Grenfell personally, and wrote of his character:

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[17] Jones, 'The psychology of killing', p. 237.
[18] Bridger, *The Great War handbook*, p. 112.
[19] Frank Brent cited in Siebert, D. (dir.) *I Was There: The Great War Interviews* (BBC Two, First Broadcast: 14 March 2014).
[20] Bergonzi, B., *Heroes' twilight: a study of the literature of the Great War* Third edition (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996), p. 40; Hynes, S., *The soldier's tale: bearing witness to modern war* (London: Pimlico, 1998), p. 34; Walter, G. (ed.), *The Penguin book of First World War poetry* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 341.

> Perfectly made and perpetually fit he flung himself upon life in a surge of restless and unconquerable energy. Riding, or rowing, or boxing, or running with his greyhounds, or hunting the Boches in Flanders, he 'tired the sun with action' as others have with talk.[21]

Whilst he served in France, Grenfell also stated his own views on war when he declared: "I *adore* war. It is like a big picnic without the objectlessness of a picnic. I've never been so well or so happy".[22] These statements help to put into better context Grenfell's killing exploits, and the way in which he understood those exploits. In one such case in October 1914, Grenfell crawled out into no man's land; as he recorded in his diary, he then spotted a German "laughing and talking. I saw his teeth glisten against my foresight, and I pulled the trigger very steady. He just gave a grunt and crumpled up".[23] The following day Grenfell crawled out again and spotted a lone German "coming along upright carelessly, making a great noise. I let him get within 25 yards and then shot him through the heart. He never made a sound".[24] Neither incident seems to have served any obvious strategic purpose. The only real point to both seems to have been to sate Grenfell's bloodlust, since, for him, war was something akin to hunting or sport.[25] However, Grenfell's war adventure was ultimately cut short on 27 May 1915, when he died of his wounds in France. His death was perhaps symbolic of a wider decline in the aristocratic, chivalric view of war that he stood for, a view which became increasingly difficult to maintain as the war ground on, and even more so after the Battle of the Somme.[26]

Comparing the stories of two of the most notable writers of war, Ernst Junger and Siegfried Sassoon, can also help to shed more light on how soldiers experienced the act of killing. Firstly, it is clear that the motives which Junger and Sassoon both had for fighting and killing their enemies were vastly different. Junger viewed the prospect of killing enemy soldiers through a martial and sportsman-like lens, such as when he stated in his memoirs that: "Throughout the war, it was always my endeavour to view my opponent without animus, and to form an opinion of him as a man on

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[21] Asquith, R., *Pages from a Family Journal 1888-1915* (privately printed, 1916), p. 37, cited in Bergonzi, *Heroes' twilight*, p. 41.
[22] Hynes, *The Soldier's Tale*, p. 39; Ferguson, *The pity of war*, p. 360; Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, p. 10.
[23] Hynes, *The Soldier's Tale*, p. 40.
[24] Hynes, *The Soldier's Tale*, p. 40.
[25] Hynes, *The Soldier's Tale*, p. 41.
[26] Bergonzi, B., *Heroes' twilight*, pp. 37, 45.

the basis of the courage he showed. I would always try to seek him out and kill him, and I expected nothing else from him".[27] By contrast, in his diaries Sassoon only expressed his desire to kill an enemy combatant after he had suffered the traumatic loss of one of his close friends: "I used to say I couldn't kill anyone in this war, but since they shot Tommy, I would gladly stick a bayonet into a German by daylight".[28] This emotional desire for revenge, brought forth by the death of one of Sassoon's friends sits in stark contrast to the response that Junger had to the death of the territorial Deiner, killed by British fire whilst attempting to restore the trench defences. Junger's apathetic reaction to his comrades' efforts to exact revenge on the lone rifleman is best summed up when he says: "They seemed to feel personal enmity for the Britisher who had fired the mortal shot".[29] Junger also demonstrates a sportsman-like attitude towards the enemy on the occasion when he attempts to pinpoint the location of an English rifleman and eliminate him; Junger describes the whole event as a duel.[30]

Both writers also describe the casualties they inflicted in some detail, as, for example, when Sassoon relates his efforts to clear a German strongpoint of snipers: "When I got there I chucked four Mills bombs into their trench and to my surprise fifty or sixty ... ran away like hell into Mametz wood. Our Lewis-gun was on them all the way and I think they suffered".[31] Sassoon's writing here comes across as being somewhat dispassionate and detached from the situation, despite the fact that he has killed a number of people. Junger, likewise, often exhibits a cool and methodical tone when he narrates the details of his military exploits. One example of this can be seen when Junger describes how, in 1917, he and his unit placed themselves in a perfect position to inflict catastrophic losses on an attacking Indian colonial force emerging from a wood.[32] However, in contrast to Sassoon, Junger takes great pride in this achievement. He boasts about how he and his band of only twenty men were able to see off a much larger force, whilst managing to inflict

[27] Junger, E., *Storm of Steel* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 58.
[28] Hart-Davis, R. (ed.), *Siegfried Sassoon diaries, 1915-1918* (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), p. 52.
[29] Junger, *Storm of Steel*, p. 55.
[30] Junger, *Storm of Steel*, p. 65.
[31] Hart-Davis, R. (ed.), *Siegfried Sassoon diaries*, p. 52.
[32] Junger, *Storm of Steel*, p. 150.

maximum casualties on the enemy. Indeed, he says that it was the kind of engagement of which earlier he could only have dreamed.[33]

Junger also writes extensively about the subject of killing on a much more personal level, for example when he describes picking off unwary British soldiers behind the front line: "I grabbed the nearest sentry's rifle, set the sights to six hundred, aimed quickly just in front of the man's head, and fired".[34] He then stated morbidly that, through his field binoculars, he could see his brown sleeves shining for a long time yet.[35] What can be gleaned from this is that Junger took great pleasure in the mechanics of the kill, something which is absent from Sassoon's war diaries. Throughout his memoirs, it is clear that Junger's military mind is the part of his psyche that most responded to the act of killing. His attitude is especially evident when he describes the killing of two British soldiers who, as part of a ration party, had blundered unknowingly into the German lines:

> They were shot down at point-blank range; one of them landing with his upper body in the defile, while his legs remained on the slope. It was hardly possible to take prisoners in this inferno, and how could we have brought them back through the barrage in any case.[36]

The same uncompromising mind-set can also be seen when a surrendering British soldier was brutally killed:

> One young British soldier had already surrendered to me when he suddenly turned round and disappeared back into his dugout. Then as he stayed there, apparently ignoring my call to come out, we put an end to his dithering with a few hand grenades, and went on.[37]

Clearly, the soldiers who fought in the Great War reacted to the experience of killing in a variety of ways. It is evident that many soldiers not only responded to the experience of killing with equanimity, but also took great pleasure in it. This finding presents a considerable challenge to traditional, over-sentimentalised portrayals of Great War soldiers. Soldiers were not just good pals, or innocent victims of some amorphous entity called 'War'. Neither were they simply "Mechanical Human Beasts", stripped of all feeling and agency by the dehumanising effect of technological innovation.

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[33] Junger, *Storm of Steel*, p. 151.
[34] Junger, *Storm of Steel*, p. 151.
[35] Junger, *Storm of Steel*, p. 151.
[36] Junger, *Storm of Steel*, p. 151.
[37] Junger, *Storm of Steel*, p. 241.

Rather, they were active, emotional agents who weaved elaborate narratives in order to deal with the extreme circumstances presented by the Great War. They could be unfeeling when confronted with the death of their comrades, and they could also feel exhilaration in the act of killing. Furthermore, some of the instances of killing featured in this paper appear to have served no obvious strategic purpose, but rather seem only to have been carried out in order to sate the bloodlust of the killers. Such behaviour would rightly disgust us in peacetime, but in wartime a love of killing is not only permitted, but often actively encouraged by officers in order to ‘work soldiers up’ for the fight. Beneath the all-too-comforting stories, which we tell about the Great War, lies a four-year period in which conscience, empathy and charity were all but discarded in favour of animalistic slaughter, in the pursuit of grandiose national and individual motives. As we continue to mark the centenary of the Great War, there is much capital to be made from telling the ‘right’ story about the War. Surely, therefore, it is timely to recall how truly amoral and barbaric war can be.

CHAPTER TWO

PALS IN ARMS: HOMOSOCIABILITY, HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AND THE GREAT WAR

JENNY COOK, ASHTON CUNNINGHAM, LEANNE JONES AND MATTHEW WOOD

The Edwardian concept of the towering masculine figure of a household moulded the generation of young men who volunteered to fight in the Great War. From the outset, wartime propaganda emphasised the role of men as protectors of their families and communities, drawing on contemporaneous notions of hegemonic masculinity.[1] Through this propaganda young men were encouraged to be patriotic and it inspired them to fulfil ideals of masculinity and embrace their duty to risk their life for their family and their country. Through the array of posters produced both prior to and during the Great War, young men were manipulated, often through overt emotional blackmail. This is most notable in Saville Lumley's poster *Daddy, What Did You Do in the Great War?,* which was published in 1915.[2] Young men were reminded that their decisions now would have long lasting consequences. As soldiers, men now had to fulfil the ideals of masculinity that had been established throughout the Victorian and Edwardian period. An example of this is a propaganda poster entitled *A Veteran's Farewell*.[3] A young soldier is being greeted by a veteran, dressed in a military uniform, in the background a line of young men are

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[1] Connell, R.W. and Messerschmidt, J., 'Hegemonic masculinity: rethinking the concept' *Gender and society,* 19:6 (2005) pp. 829-830

[2] Lumley, S., *Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War* (1915), Imperial War Museums Collections Website, accessed 25 September 2016, http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/17053

[3] Dadd, F., *A Veteran's farewell* (1917), Imperial War Museums Collections Website, accessed 25 September 2016, http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205324797

marching to their duty. The veteran is stating that he wishes it were him that was going to war. This image illustrates the pressure that was placed on these young men; they not only had to live up to the expectations of their families and local community, but also they were judged by the ideals developed by the previous generation. The pressure of propaganda can also be seen in a poster produced in 1915, entitled *The Three Types of Men*.[4] This poster states that the three types of men are the ones who obey, the ones who delay, and the ones who are the 'others', encouraging those who had not already enlisted to do so. A religious factor is also prominent with the use of the phrase 'those who hear the call and obey' as it indicates a calling from God. With the phrase 'and the others' groups together the men that had not enlisted as some form of deviant.

The power of these propaganda posters to develop a desire to fulfil locally shared ideals of masculinity can be seen in the development of local regiments, commonly called 'Pals battalions'. The power of the ideals of hegemonic masculinity played a strong part in the recruitment of these units, as men were encouraged to join up together, in order to do their duty as defenders of their nation and communities. The idea of Pals Battalions was to utilise pre-existing relationships between men and to use them as a basis of morale and discipline within the rapidly mobilised volunteer army.

However, responding to the call to join up was not the only challenge young men faced to their masculinity identity. The arena of war could also be a problematic stage for the display of masculine ideals. Letters to loved ones provide important evidence of how soldiers portrayed their ideas, experiences and emotions regarding their participation in the War. Over twelve and a half million letters a week were written over the course of the war. Men wrote letters to reassure their family and describe the events which unfolded in front of them.[5] The appeal to still be seen as remaining true to the masculine ideal becomes apparent throughout the letters, as they provided a means for men to express their heroic masculinity.[6] Many personal letters from the soldiers were in fact censored by their superior officers to filter out the extreme brutality of war and harshness of the war

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[4] Anonymous, *There are three types of men* (1915), Imperial War Museums Collections Website, accessed 25 September 2016, http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30632

[5] Meyer, J., *Men of War, Masculinity and The First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 14-18

[6] Meyer, *Men of War,* p. 46

in order to maintain morale on the home front. The letters were also self – censored too. The need to maintain military discipline and effectiveness, combined with the expectation that men would naturally cope with the challenges of war, ensured that much of the hardship experienced by the soldiers was not taken seriously or was hidden from view. In particular, those suffering from psychological injuries were often regarded as cowards, or as individuals who had failed the manly test of war. For the most part, men were expected to deal with their war experiences by themselves. The only acceptable form of emotion that a man could express would be grief following the loss of a fellow soldier. The importance of male friendship echoed throughout the war, and units like the Pals Battalions took with them to war the pre-existing friendships from their social circles at home.

The rush to arms of the 'Pals' demonstrated the power of the masculine ideal. However, as the Great War continued it progressively altered how these young men saw themselves. Their views on masculinity and the need for comfort became blurred by the realities of war. Thus, alongside the many social, political and technological advances of the time, the Great War also acted as a catalyst in changing the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. In order to explore these changes this chapter will consider the 11th service battalion, East Lancaster Regiment, more commonly known as the "Accrington Pals". The chapter also considers the case studies of Lance Corporal J.B. Middlebrook, W.P Gooding, Arthur Hubbard and Harold Gillies in order to analyse how these individuals coped with the challenge of fulfilling the masculine ideal in war.

The Pals Battalion initiative was created during the drive for more men to volunteer for the Army, in the first few months of the War. It was hoped that more men could be enticed to join up by giving them the incentive of fighting alongside their neighbours, friends, family and 'workmates'.[7] Entire units were taken from villages, cities, factories and neighbourhoods, thus creating an army that was far from its traditional roots. A good example of a Pals Battalion is the one created in Accrington, where eleven hundred men were recruited.[8] The men of the Regiment fought well alongside each other, offering camaraderie to a level that had never been

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[7] Simkins, P., *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies, 1914-16* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 91

[8] Further details about The Accrington Pals can be found on a website dedicated to the memory of the11th (Service) Battalion (Accrington) East Lancashire Regiment, http://www.pals.org.uk/pals_e.htm

seen before; this attitude and enthusiasm stayed with the Accrington Pals until the Battle of the Somme. The Somme was the first real fighting they saw and the outcome for the unit was devastating; 584 men were killed, wounded or missing out of a total of 720 who took part in the offensive.[9] As every person was a family member or a friend they had known all their lives, the losses were felt keenly by every individual in the battalion.[10] The huge loss of life within the Pals Battalions not only affected the troops, it was also felt back home in Britain. Whole towns and villages were left to mourn a lost generation of men and those that were lucky enough to return from the war suffered with survivor's guilt.[11] Survivor's guilt not only affected their relationships with friends and family but also had a profound effect on their own mentality. They were left with a feeling of depression as most wondered why they were left alive whereas their friends and comrades were left for dead on a battlefield, far away from home. Many men were left with a feeling of incompleteness and a job not well done, whether this was because of their inability to protect their friends or whether they believed they should have been the ones to have died in their place. All of these emotions had potentially crippling consequences for the surviving soldier's pride. On returning home, some men felt a loss of direction and were left to wonder where they fitted in society.

Friendships between the soldiers were extremely important. The soldiers of the Great War fought together and their leisure time was spent together, this meant that they formed very strong bonds. For many men the ability to fight on the front line was fuelled by the need for revenge for their friends that had been killed.[12] During the war, male friendship provided the soldiers with a "stable anchoring point [in] a world of crisis."[13] The Great War challenged the pre-war Edwardian concepts of manliness, which included repressed fear, toughness, stoic endurance and emotional

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[9] The Accrington Pals website: http://www.pals.org.uk/pals_e.htm
[10] Wilkinson, R., *Pals on the Somme 1916* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, 2006)
[11] Morrow, J., *The Great War: An Imperial History*. (London: Routledge, 2004) pp. 318
[12] Shaw, M., 'How did soldiers cope with war?' British Library Website, accessed 25 September 2016, http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/how-did-soldiers-cope-with-war
[13] Cole, S., 'Modernism, male intimacy and the Great War', *English Literary History*, 68:2 (2001), p. 469.

restraint.[14] Alistair Thomson argues that "[m]asculine identities [were] forged and lived in a dynamic tension between the subjective experiences of individual men and shifting social expectations of appropriate masculine behaviour."[15] Under the pressure of war, many men developed intense and intimate forms of friendship. Therefore, male friendship as a result of the war challenged the soldier's own ideas of masculinity. Men would look after each other when wounded or ill, wrap blankets around each other and sleep within close proximity.[16] These close forms of friendship went against the rigid principles of manliness of pre-war Britain and against what was deemed as 'proper behaviour' within the army. Prior to the Great War some of these expressions of close male friendship would have been perceived as effeminate and therefore officers would be prejudiced against men who were seen to have formed too close an emotional bond.[17] Although Susan Grayzel argues that the basic ideas about gender remained consistent throughout the war, the soldiers of the Great War no longer knew what masculinity meant to them. As Joanna Bourke asserts, "the need for emotion was never as intense as when faced with mortality".[18] In the one sense they were fulfilling the role of the heroic soldier, yet on the other hand they experienced deep fear as well as intimate friendships with their fellow soldiers, all of which went against the strict Edwardian masculine ideals. It is a great irony that the Great War, which treated the male body with such brutality, "nurtured the most intense and intimate of male bonds."[19]

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[14] Roper, M., 'Between manliness and masculinity: the "war generation" and the psychology of fear in Britain, 1914–1950', *Journal of British Studies*, 44:2 (2005), pp 343-62.

[15] Thomson, A., 'A crisis of masculinity? Australian military manhood in the Great War' in Lake, M. and Damousi, J. (eds.) *Gender and War: Australians at war in the twentieth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 133

[16] Das, S., 'Sensuous life in the trenches' British Library Website, accessed 26 March 2014, http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/sensuous-life-in-the-trenches

[17] Grayzel, S.R., 'Changing lives: gender expectations and roles during and after World War One', British Library Website, accessed 26 March 2014, http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/changing-lives-gender-expectations#

[18] Bourke, J., *Dismembering the male: Men's bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion, 1999), p. 25

[19] Das, S., 'The Dying Kiss: Gender and Intimacy in the Trenches of World War I', World War I Centenary Website, accessed 31 March 2014, http://ww1centenary.oucs.ox.ac.uk/body-and-mind/the-dying-kiss-gender-and-intimacy-in-the-trenches-of-world-war-i

The men returning to domestic roles after the war often experienced this return differently, depending on whether or not they became physically or mentally disabled after their experiences in the trenches. It was assumed that men would quickly readjust to their peacetime employment and easily slip back into their traditional roles in society.[20] The Edwardian ideals of masculinity focused heavily on the idea of the man as the breadwinner and sole provider for his family. Those who returned mentally scarred or physically injured and dismembered, found themselves unable to meet traditional expectations and were commonly pitied as emasculated individuals.[21] Men who were still relatively young wanted to continue in the world of work instead of relying on the pensions, which were given out to a substantial number of soldiers after the war, or relying on the earnings of wives and children.[22]

One of the major disabilities that resulted from soldiers' experiences in the Great War was shell shock. This was relatively wide spread; there are no accurate figures as to how many men suffered from it as it was often ignored or dismissed, particularly in the early years of the War. Due to the fact that this condition was often not recognised, many men were expected to fight on and deal with the symptoms themselves. Soldiers who suffered from the psychological impact of war frequently faced ridicule from the army and from society as a whole. Joanna Bourke uses the example of Arthur Hubbard to show the effects of shell shock and how he was treated by his fellow combatants.[23] Hubbard was targeted by a few soldiers and officers referring to him as a coward whenever he displayed signs of emotional weakness. Individuals like Hubbard were no longer conforming to expectations of masculine behaviour, which was unsettling for their comrades and for the individuals themselves. In his poem 'Survivors', Siegfried Sassoon writes about the impact that shell shock had upon male pride. He often refers to sufferers from shell shock as children, not to insult the soldiers, but instead to emphasise their childlike tendencies in respect to the display of fear.[24] Such emotional displays were deemed unmanly. For men who had fought in the War and who suffered emotional

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[20] Meyer, *Men of War*, p. 97

[21] Shermen, D., 'Monuments, mourning and masculinity in France after World War One', *Gender and History*, 8:1 (1994) pp. 82-107

[22] Meyer, *Men of War*, p. 106

[23] Bourke, J., 'Shell shock during World War One', BBC History Website, accessed 25 September 2016, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/shellshock_01.shtml

[24] Sassoon, Siegfried, *Survivors* (October 1917) cited in Bourke, 'Shell shock',

and psychological trauma as a consequence, it came as a severe blow to have their status as a soldier and as a man diminished because of something out of their control.[25]

Turning to physical disabilities, Wendy Gagen's research provides the example of Lance Corporal J.B. Middlebrook, highlighting the crisis of masculinity he suffered after he lost his left arm in 1916.[26] Gagen studied the private letters which he sent to his family. In his earlier letters, when he wrote about his injury, he ensured the pain and agony he felt was not discussed as he wanted to live up to the image of the ideal masculine patient.[27] Repression of emotion was what was expected of men in the trenches, and it is challenging for historians to identify certain underlying feelings portrayed in letters and personal correspondences without the letters identifying with easily recognisable masculine behaviours.[28] Middlebrook's later letters began to reveal how he truly felt, showing his need for comfort from his parents.

Middlebrook was not an isolated example; just fewer than five hundred thousand individuals were in receipt of artificial limbs, mobility aid or in need of some form of surgical appliances. Jessica Meyer has argued that these men, in physically losing part of their body, were seen to have lost their masculinity too.[29] The main issue was the lack of employment opportunities for disabled men and therefore the inability for them to provide for their families. Meyer uses the example of a schoolmaster, W.P. Gooding, and highlights how he relied on the help from his family doctor to hide his inability to work to an efficient standard.[30] Whether it was a mental or physical issue, the inability to slip back into the world of work immediately after the war was what challenged the Edwardian template of masculinity most of all.

Men suffering from facial injuries and disfigurement often felt particularly marginalised and emasculated. There were around 60,500 soldiers who

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[25] Bourke, 'Shell shock'
[26] Gagen, W.J., 'Remastering the body, renegotiating gender: Physical disability and masculinity during the First World War, the case of J.B. Middlebrook', *European Review Of History*, 14:4 (2007), p. 528
[27] Gagen, 'Remastering the body', pp. 530-531
[28] Connell and Messerschmidt 'Hegemonic masculinity', pp. 836-837
[29] Meyer, *Men of War,* pp. 97, 113
[30] Meyer, *Men of War*, p. 111

were injured in their head or their eyes as a result of the war.[31] Katherine Feo uses the case study of Dr Harold Gilles, a doctor from New Zealand, who in 1916 established his own wing of a hospital in Aldershot, where he received over 2,000 soldiers requiring facial reconstruction surgery after the battle of the Somme. Feo states that for many of the men under Dr Gillies' care, their main motivation for the surgery was to re-establish their sense of ability to work, as there was a common belief that there was a correlation between being seen as injured and a lack of productivity.[32]

The concept of masculinity changed due to the impact of the First World War, from the enforcement of the image of a 'dominating man' propagated by social and cultural norms, to the demands from the emotional blackmail produced in various sources of propaganda. The end of the War brought home the survivors and the trauma they had experienced, both physical injuries and mental ones. The physical injuries the men experienced during the War meant that some men could no longer be the primary breadwinner for the family. The Edwardian ideal of a man was one where he was always the sole provider for his household; if a man could not even fulfil his most basic role, what use was he to his family. Historians such as Meyer, Gagen and Katherine Feo have analysed soldier's disabilities and how they coped after the war. They have established different case studies to show how some men did not want the sympathies of their families and loved ones as they tried to keep intact the Edwardian template of how a man should act and what a man should say. However, generalisation is impossible, as another segment of men were just as emotionally unstable but were not afraid to display said emotions to loved ones.

Jessica Meyer has studied the changes men in the armed forces faced both during and after the war. She uses case studies from various soldier's letters to home to establish a generalised argument concerning the changing face of manhood. The creation of the Pals Battalion forced levels of friendship and love for fellow soldiers that had never been seen on the battlefield before. This had a catastrophic effect on both soldiers and their loved ones in Britain; it not only affected morale but it also changed men's perspective of masculinity through being closer to their fellow soldiers. The government latched onto the concept exploiting the Pals Battalion idea and the male bonding it could offer in a way of friendship and a way to prove one's courage.

[31] Feo, K, 'Invisibility: Memory, Masks and Masculinities in the Great War', *Journal of Design History,* 20:1 (2001) pp. 19-21
[32] Feo, 'Invisibility', pp. 19-21