

**'A Different Existence Altogether' Constructing, Conditioning and Controlling the  
British Soldier's Body in the First World War.**

**A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy**

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This thesis is the result of the author's original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination which has led to the award of a degree.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the processes by which British male civilians became soldiers during the First World War. It contributes to the historiography on the British experience of the war by placing the human body at the centre of the analysis and considering the impact of bodies under the control and care of the British Army. It expands upon the sociological literature of 'the body' by establishing how these theoretical concepts are evident within the empirical research. Through an analysis of official records and publications, it explores how the state sought to transform the male civilian body for military purposes. A significant aspect of this research stems from the personal experiences of the men who served by painstaking consideration of their letters, diaries, and oral testimonies.

This research illustrates that the body was a core concern for the British military as well as being central in perceptions of physical worth within British society during the First World War. Between 1914-1918 British men's bodies were assessed, categorised, improved, damaged, recovered, repaired and destroyed. From enlistment to the end of service, soldier's bodies were repurposed for the pursuit of victory as the British military and the government focused on constructing, conditioning and controlling the bodies of regular, territorial, volunteer and conscript soldiers. In a letter to his mother, Lieutenant Godfrey classified the war as a 'different existence altogether' and indeed it was for many men whose bodies became fitter, healthier, and more skilled, while paradoxically also allowing them to resist military control, be wounded, harm their own bodies, and die. This work, therefore, explores the male military body within the chaos of the First World War, not simply as a faceless man in uniform but an individual whose body was a site of conflict focused on agency, indoctrination and military service.

## Contents

<i>Copyright</i>	ii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	iii
<i>Abstract</i>	iv
<i>Contents</i>	v
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	vii
<i>List of Images</i>	viii
<b>Introduction: 'A Different Existence'</b>	1
The Body	7
Military History	11
A Range of Men	17
Military Bodies	22
Military Medicine	32
Sources	37
Chapters	44
<b>Chapter One: Worthy Bodies: Recruitment and Enlisting for War 1914 – 1918</b>	51
Deciding to serve	52
Assessing the Body	67
Conclusion	89
<b>Chapter Two: Forging Bodies: Training and Creating Soldiers</b>	92
Locating the Recruit's Body	94
Controlling Appearances	98
Food and Feeding	106
Transforming Civilian Bodies	117
Punished Bodies	131
Conclusion	141
<b>Chapter Three: Lives on the Line: Active Service</b>	144
Healthy/ Hygienic Bodies	146
Bodies and Recreation	165
Endangered Bodies	196
Conclusion	199
<b>Chapter Four: Bodies Under Fire: The Frontline</b>	202
Frontline life	204
Fighting Bodies	214
Damaged Bodies	233
Conclusion	251

<b>Chapter Five: Soldiers No More: Debilitation, Demobilisation, and Death</b>	254
Recovering Bodies	255
Demobilised Bodies	270
Dead Bodies	289
Conclusion	306
<b>Conclusion: Bodies of War</b>	308
<b>Bibliography</b>	330

## **List of Abbreviations**

AMS	Army Medical Service
ASC	Army Service Corps
AMAB	Army Medical Advisory Board
ATA	Army Temperance Association
AWOL	Absent Without Leave
BMJ	British Medical Journal
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
CO	Conscientious Objector
CO	Commanding Officer
C.B	Confined to Barracks
DCM	District Court-Martial
GOC	General Commanding Officer
IMS	Indian Medical Service
IWM	Imperial War Museum
JRAMC	Journal of Royal Army Medical Corps
MO	Medical Officer
MOH	Medical Officers of Health
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
POW	Prisoner of War
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
TNA	The National Archives

## List of Images

1. Are you in this? Recruitment Poster 1915.	52
2. To the Young Women of London, 1915.	54
3. Vacancies Exist in all Branches of His Majesty's Army Recruitment Poster.	62
4. Specimens of men in each of the Four Grades, Report by the Ministry of National Service 1920.	65
5. Enlistment Form for Arthur James Walkden.	67
6. Medical History Attestment Form B178, for Arthur James Walkden	68
7. William Broadhead, Sketches in undated letter to his parents during training in 1916.	126
8. William Broadhead, Sketches in undated letter to his parents during training in 1916.	127
9. British Army Field Service Manual 1914, p.54.	169
10. The Drink Habit, The Wiper Times, Tuesday April 10th 1917, p.2.	174
11. Square hard tack 'army biscuit' with central section recessed to accommodate a family portrait photograph.	201
12. Sketch by William Broadhead, letter dated 11/04/15, p.3.	207
13. Sketch by William Broadhead, letter undated.	208
14. Soldier is medically assessed in 1918 for demobilisation.	272



15. Ministry of Pensions, Royal Warrant for the Pensions of Soldiers  
Disabled and of the Families and Dependents of Soldiers  
Deceased in Consequence of the Great War (1918), p.771. 275
  
16. Certificate of Employment during the War, William Mansel Floyd,  
1919. 279
  
17. Dead soldiers of one of the Highlanders regiments awaiting burial,  
August 1917. 290
  
18. The funeral of Liberal MP William Glynne Charles Gladstone, killed in  
action during the First World War while a Lieutenant for the Royal  
Welsh Fusiliers, takes place in Hawarden. 297

## Introduction

### 'A Different Existence'

At the age of 18 Lieutenant Godfrey was dispatched to the frontline in 1916 to take charge of a labour company bound for Mt. Kemmel. His private papers, including letters and sporadic diary entries, cover a range of experiences typical of the British soldier during the First World War. He described 'shepherding a mob of [drunk] miners' onto their ship for France, marching, basic training, sleeping in comfortable officer billets and being disgusted with insanitary conditions while he passed through 'the filthiest port I have ever seen'.<sup>1</sup> Godfrey described eating fine meals and 'even occasional champagne' as he and his fellow officers took advantage of their initial posting behind the lines. But it was not all fun and games. Later in his memoirs Godfrey also described how the field guns made his body tremble, 'the occasional 60-pdr really shook you' and explained that during the most intense battles the bodies of the dead remained where they fell as 'it was pointless to get more people killed burying corpses.'<sup>2</sup> As time wore on, Godfrey wrote in his diary how the constant pressure of war and particularly the regular gas attacks were affecting him. 'I am in a funk most of the time; but we are only mortal, and everyone admits the same at first. I don't think I show the fact more than anyone else, which is the main point.'<sup>3</sup> Godfrey faced combat several times and was finally wounded off the

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<sup>1</sup> Imperial War Museum (Hereby known as IWM) 14991, Private Papers of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant J.T. Godfrey, Memoir extract, no page numbers.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, no page numbers.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, diary entry dated 'probably June 16<sup>th</sup>'

frontline to be returned home to recover in England after a severe gassing.<sup>4</sup> Once his body had healed he returned to the frontline and saw the rest of war out in Belgium until being demobilised in January 1919, after he was struck down by a bout of Spanish Influenza.<sup>5</sup>

Godfrey's experience of the First World War is not unique, quite the opposite in fact. Godfrey's story is similar to that of thousands of men who experienced similar trials and tribulations as they served their country between 1914-1918. In 1917, Godfrey wrote to his mother and claimed 'The war is an extraordinary life altogether: one feels as if one had got right out of the ordinary world one knows, and been pitched into a different existence altogether'.<sup>6</sup> Godfrey's words succinctly encapsulated the reality of serving during the First World War as men's bodies were recruited, assessed, categorised, adapted, improved, organised, wounded, praised and rejected over the course the war between 1914-1918. It is this association between the First World War and the British soldier's body that this thesis seeks to explore while also questioning who predominantly held control over these bodies as these men transformed from civilians to soldiers.

Numerous scholars have already explored the events between 1914 and 1918. Richard van Emden, Gary Sheffield, Ian Beckett, Peter Simkins and Hew Strachan are

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, no page numbers.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, no page numbers.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, Letter to his mother, 25/5/17.

amongst some of the best historians who have explored the First World War from a top down position.<sup>7</sup> Yet, their focus often overlooks the individual body by presenting the men who served in relation to the victories and losses they contributed to. Conversely, the seminal works by Emily Mayhew, Joanna Bourke, Jessica Meyer and Peter Barham have all included a focus on the body as they have explored aspects of soldiers experiences during the course of First World War.<sup>8</sup> Yet, while brilliant, there is still more to explore as none of these completely centre the body at the focus of their research and instead expertly cover the relationship between the war and the body through the gaze of masculinity, lunacy or wounds. Specialist works such as those by Mark Harrison, Rachel Duffett, Ilana R Bet-El and Helen McCartney complete this round up of essential historiography on the experiences of soldiers in the First World War.<sup>9</sup> Collectively, these works provide a detailed account of many of the key facets of soldier's experiences by considering the physical priorities of war such as medical care, food, and the intrinsic differences between how conscripts and volunteers were assessed, trained and treated. Yet,

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<sup>7</sup> R. van Emden, *The Somme: The Epic Battle in the Soldiers' own Words and Photographs* (London: Pen and Sword, 2016) and G. Sheffield, *The Somme: A New History* (London: Cassell Military, 2003). I. Beckett, T. Bowman, and M. Connelly, *The British Army and the First World War* (St Ives, Cambridge University press, 2017), P. Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies 1914-1916* (Great Britain: Manchester University Press, 2007) and H. Strachan, *The First World War, A New History* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> E. R. Mayhew, *Wounded: From Battlefield to Blighty, 1914-1918 Kindle Edition* (Leicester: Thorpe, 2014), J. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male, Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), J. Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and First World War in Britain* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) and P. Barham, *Forgotten Lunatics of the Great War* (Bury: St Edmundsbury Press Ltd, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> M. Harrison, *The Medical War: British Military Medicine in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), R. Duffett, *The Stomach for Fighting, Food and Soldiers of The Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), I. R. Bet-El, *Conscripts, Lost Legions of the Great War* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1999); and H. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

again there is more to be investigated. This thesis explores the centrality of the body in the experiences of soldiers over the course of the First World War by building on the work of these ground-breaking historians and identifying the themes of power, control and transformation that crafted soldiers from civilians after 1914.

New soldiers like Godfrey found themselves clothed, directed, abused and controlled as they adapted to military service. From the food they ate, the haircut they wore, to the places that they served and the way that they relaxed, the British Army remained a constant controlling presence. Persistent attention was paid to soldier's bodies by the army from enlistment to demobilisation as men were tailored towards service. Even men's behaviours were controlled by the threat of retaliation upon their bodies. Therefore, the question must be asked of to what extent the militarised body was central to the experiences of men in the first decades of the twentieth century and how this focus impacted on men's agency and identity over the course of the First World War. This thesis will investigate how soldier's bodies became sites for conflict as men's agency clashed with the agenda of the British Army. During enlistment, the army, British government, and the public colluded to project a physical and masculine ideal that many men appropriated and then presented for validation in exchange for a uniform and a chance to fight the enemy. Within training and active service, conflict developed not only between armies but also soldiers and their own military as men found their bodies transformed but also extensively controlled. With each curtailing of liberty, the army often faced a breach

in conformity elsewhere as soldiers conspired to damage, often indirectly, the bodies that their trainers and commanding officers had so painstakingly sought to improve. Combat and proximity to the enemy were often the most destructive for the army's designs on the body as mud, blood and bandages incapacitated men and removed them from the fray, frequently become a burden on the same institution that had originally tailored them for battle.

Men's bodies were constantly at the centre of the British Army's focus on its soldiers. This is evident in the ways that men's bodies were continually assessed, reviewed, and directed as part of the process of selection, improvement and regulated military life. However, this did not mean that all men accepted this loss of physical autonomy. Godfrey's argument that the war was a 'different existence' was just as true for the British Army as it was for soldiers who served within it.<sup>10</sup> Not only did the British military face the largest conflict in its recent memory but it was also required to meet the enemy with a combination of volunteer, conscript, territorial and regular soldiers. Each group of men came with their own particular physical idiosyncrasies which the army attempted to overcome through training and indoctrination. The New Armies also presented significant issues for maintaining discipline as new 'soldiers' often complained and protested vociferously about the army's inability, or apparent reluctance, to meet their physical needs. This was behaviour that was unlikely to have been witnessed in the professional soldiers who

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

preceded them. The First World War raised new questions for the British Army as it was forced to adapt to the range of new soldiers under its command. 1914-1918 also brought new tactics, weaponry and challenges that the British Army had to incorporate into its attempts to indoctrinate soldiers to direct their bodies and actions both on the front and behind the lines.

Godfrey's view of the world is conveyed through the remains of his letters that were sent home as he served. It is his voice, along with many other voices, captured within testimonies and diaries as well as within oral history recordings, that resonate throughout this thesis. Using these sources this thesis will engage with the lived experiences of the men who witnessed first-hand the calamity of the First World War. Official records, newspaper articles, images and parliamentary debates will also be used to provide context for the examination but it is primarily the voice of the individual man and the impact upon his body that remains at the centre of this narrative. Furthermore, as this thesis considers the experiences of men through their bodies within the British Army over the course of the First World War it will draw from various historiographies and seek to extend them. This will include engaging with ideas of modernity at the beginning of the twentieth century and the impact of industrialised war on British society. Significant attention will be focused on the relationship between the body and power as arguments over physical

transformation, control, and masculinity will be tested against the societal changes in Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>11</sup>

## **The Body**

As societal and institutional impacts upon men's bodies will receive considerable attention within this thesis it is important to review the primary theory surrounding the body. French philosopher Michel Foucault remains one of the key voices in the debate regarding the body as a site of power and control. Using the seventeenth and eighteenth-century French soldier as an example Foucault considered the entry of the body into a 'machinery of power', which deconstructed and constructed it in line with the demands of those in power. Defining this as a 'political anatomy' Foucault explained that the body developed as a docile vessel that was manipulated and directed by the individual, institution or state that held dominance over it through discipline.<sup>12</sup> He wrote that 'the classical age discovered the body as object and target of power. It is easy enough to find signs of the attention then paid to the body – to the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds,

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<sup>11</sup> The term masculinity is used throughout this thesis. In the nineteenth century notions of 'manliness' developed as part of the increasing focus on physicality. Sinha argues that notions of 'manliness' were particularly distinctive within public school environments. Potentially the terms 'manliness' and 'masculinity' could be used interchangeably to identify the perceptions of ideal maleness in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, given the association with public schooling and for the purposes of clarity, the term masculinity will be primarily used throughout the continuing analysis. M. Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and The 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.9.

<sup>12</sup> M. Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 2012), p.138.



become skilful and increases its forces.<sup>13</sup> Essentially, the body within increasingly modern society was a blank slate which dominant powers could imprint upon and mould for their purpose.

Foucault has come under criticism for presenting a restrictive view of the individual body within society. Shilling discounts Foucault's narrow argument as the body of being docile by arguing that Foucault's malleable and unstable body view makes little room for considerations of resistance to dominance and control. He writes 'even when Foucault makes the occasional reference to the body putting up resistance to power and dominant discourses, he cannot say what it is about the body that resists.'<sup>14</sup> For Shilling, the body is overtly absent from the Foucauldian analysis of power. Obsessed with the domination of the institution over the mind, the Foucauldian blank slate body is left on the fringes of the argument. By missing out the body from the constructive framework, it becomes difficult to recognise it as 'material component of social action.'<sup>15</sup> Shilling uses Turner's 'phenomenology of embodiment' to reiterate that the experience of the individual is just as important.<sup>16</sup>

It is within these arguments on the construction of the body that this thesis considers the tailoring of the First World War soldier's body in Britain. As it considers how men were prepared, directed, treated and respected this thesis will examine the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.136

<sup>14</sup> C. Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 1993), p.81.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.80.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

place of the body within a myriad of controlling institutions. The focus of the military, the state, and culture as well as input from medical institutions will be considered to show how men's bodies were prepared for conflict. This consideration will include a focus on the quality of men and fluctuations in standardised requirements, physical and behavioural modification through training, the impact of technological and medical improvements and, the treatment of men's bodies when they were unsuitable for conflict.

Between 1914-1918 a vast array of different men entered the armed forces. These men not only differed in terms of class, background, education, region, and religion but also in how they enlisted, be they a conscript or a volunteer, a territorial or a regular, rank and file or officer. Differences even existed in the way that they served, such as if they were infantry or artillery, combatant or non-combatant, support or frontline. It is within these significant differences that this thesis seeks to uncover the individual experiences of the men as their bodies interacted, were conditioned and directed during the First World War.

Within theories of the body and society, theorists of class such as Marx and Weber have considered this disparity in the way that men were treated.<sup>17</sup> Both argued that class in the nineteenth and early twentieth century designated health, occupation,

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<sup>17</sup> M. Weber, 'The Nation' in J. Hutchinson and A. D. Smith (ed.), *Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.25-27. and K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto: Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition* (London: Penguin Random House, 2011).

and opportunity. Class defined for most, if not all, exactly how they lived, how they were perceived and how they interacted. The work of Bourdieu is also important here as Bourdieu's theory of how individuals internalise their perception of the world and their position within it through 'habitus' indicates the role of stature and social interaction in the construction of the self. Within his consideration of the importance of food as a signifier of social status, Bourdieu presents the assessment of the physical body as a primary site for the perception of worth, status, usefulness and wealth.<sup>18</sup> According to Bourdieu, the body is constantly communicating to others significant amounts of information which allows perceptions to be made about it and the individual who inhabits it. Ervin Goffman explores this discourse between bodies within his examination of the 'body idiom', a mutually understood non-verbal form of communication.<sup>19</sup> He writes '...although an individual can stop talking, he cannot stop communicating through body idiom; he can either say the right thing or the wrong thing. He cannot say nothing.'<sup>20</sup> Goffman argues that communication and interaction are ceaseless between beings, therefore, the body is constantly being used to expose, comprehend and internalise attitudes, emotions, and desires, through the means of social interaction.

Within the context of the First World War, this form of bodily communication was utilised to classify, assess and direct men's bodies for combat. Body idiom also

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<sup>18</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Distinction, A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (London, Routledge, 2010), p.190.

<sup>19</sup> A. Howson, *The Body in Society, An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), p.21.

<sup>20</sup> E. Goffman, *Behaviour in Public Places* (New York: The Free Press, 1966), pp.30-1.

provided different opportunities for different types of men whose non-verbal communication potentially indicated class status, education, work experience, physical capability or health. Bonding between men within the military was also dependant on their shared experiences, which would be reinforced through perceptions of the physical self as men looked for kindred spirits often from similar class, regions or working backgrounds. In many ways body idiom provided the format for reducing the difference between the wide range of men, transforming them from individuals into uniform soldiers. It is within these interactions that this thesis will consider the role of the body in the experiences of men within the British Army during the First World War.

### **Military History**

Within any review of the military, it is important to recognise the wider consequences and contributions of society upon the institution. No event within history occurs within a vacuum and the military both within and outside of conflict is no exception. There has been a significant amount of literature written on the history of the British Army. Much has been focused on the strategic practice of British military conflicts particularly throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> From the Napoleonic war to present a vast amount of literature has been

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<sup>21</sup> As this thesis will consider the lived experience of soldiers in the First World War, it is important to review some of the core studies from the extensive literature that have focused on the history of the British Military from a top down perspective. These scholars represent some of the best and most widely read reviews of core aspects of British Military history. This investigation has neither the

devoted to the study of British forces in battle as conflict increasingly modernised. For the nineteenth century, detailed analysis has been provided by key scholars such as Jeremy Black, Michael Francis Oliver, Richard Partridge, Christopher David Hall, Scott Hughes Myrerly, Trevor Royal, Hugh Small, Ian Knight, John Grehan, Martin Mace, Thomas Pakenham, Byron Farwell and Deneys Reitz.<sup>22</sup> Within these investigations lies detailed analysis of battle tactics, individual accounts of regiments or key members of the armed forces and reflections on the wider economic, political and social impact that these wars played both globally and within the British Empire. Shifting the focus to the twentieth century, the number of text considering the First and Second World War alone rises exponentially. For both conflicts, there are countless reviews focused from a top-down perspective on the institutions of the military, strategic warfare and numerous accounts of individual battles, locations or battalions. An endless stream of popularist writings both fictional and factional that consider the wars in detail support this academic review. Key authors focusing on the British forces include, but are not limited to, those mentioned in the opening of this introduction such as, Dennis Winter, Joanna Bourke, Jessica Meyer, Richard van

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space nor the opportunity to consider all of the seminal literature that exists. Therefore a wide array of core historians and researchers work has been chosen to demonstrate the extent of the detailed examinations that have contributed to the history of the British Military and British Wars.

<sup>22</sup> M. Oliver and R. Partridge, *Napoleonic Army Handbook: The French Army and Her Allies* (London: Constable, 2002), S. H. Myrerly, *British Military Spectacle: From the Napoleonic Wars Through the Crimea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), T. Royal, *Crimea: The Great Crimean War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2014), H. Small, *The Crimean War: Queen Victoria's War with the Russian Tsars* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), J. Grehan and M. Mace, *The Zulu War: The War Dispatches Series* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2013), I. Knight, *Companion to the Anglo-Zulu War* (Barnsley, Pen and Sword, 2008), T. Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London: Abacus, 1979), B. Farwell, *The Great Anglo-Boer War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), and D. Reitz, *God Does Not Forget: The Story of a Boer War Commando* (London: Fireship Press, 2010).

Emden, Gary Sheffield, Ian Beckett, Peter Simkins and Hew Strachan<sup>23</sup>. Additionally, specialist writers such as Mark Harrison, Emily Mayhew and Peter Barham, Rachel Duffett, Michael Roper, Ilana R Bet-El, Lyn Macdonald, Helen McCartney and Richard Holmes have all added excellent investigations into the history of soldiers and the British military.<sup>24</sup> This thesis seeks to add to the historiography by building on these primarily top-down scholarships by taking a bottom-up approach to consider the impact of the war on British men and their bodies as they became, served and experienced life as soldiers. Whilst applying a bottom-up approach to previous top-down scholarly research may at first seem paradoxical, it is clear that while many of these approaches cover the length and breadth of the First World War, they do so without centring the soldier's voice and experience within the analysis they present. These are often statistical or more overarching historiographies that are invaluable but often also relegate the soldier out of his own story. Therefore this thesis, picks up the narrative with the intension of continuing the seminal work carried out by the above scholars by realising the experience of the war from the perspective of those men who braved it.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, Meyer, *Men of War*, Winter, *Death's Men*, van Emden, *The Somme*, Sheffield, *The Somme: A New History*. Beckett, *The Great War 1914 – 1918*, Simkins. *Kitchener's Army*, and Strachan, *The First World War*.

<sup>24</sup> Harrison, *The Medical War*, Mayhew, *Wounded*, Barham, *Forgotten Lunatics*, Duffett, *The Stomach for Fighting*, M. Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), Bet-El, *Conscripts*, L. Macdonald, *Roses of No Man's Land* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers*, and R. Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front, 1914–1918, Kindle Edition* (London: Harper Collins, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> There is less of a focus on works of fiction and poetry that have covered the First World War. This is not because these texts are not important. Throughout this thesis the works of writers such as Graves, Owen, and Sassoon are utilised to illustrate emotions, reactions and experiences. However, given the scope of the literature and focus of the research, works of fiction and poetry have been deliberately omitted from the initial literature review. Instead reference to some of these significant works will be made as part of the ongoing argument throughout the following chapters.

The relationship between society and the military in the period prior to and during the First World War was a complicated one. Soldiers and the military evoked within British culture a variety of emotions and perceptions, ranging from disgust and mistrust through to admiration and pride. Scholars such as Graham Dawson, John M. MacKenzie and Stephen Miller have written at length about the rise of Victorian militarism which served to bolster the immediate rush to colours and cultural perceptions of the war in 1914.<sup>26</sup> MacKenzie argues that the popularity of the military developed significantly in the Victorian period as a result of public satisfaction and pride in the British victories during the series of colonial wars.<sup>27</sup> However, this relationship between the public and the military was relatively new. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, British soldiers were more commonly considered to be licentious, drunken reprobates. The Duke of Wellington famously described the rank and file as the 'scum of the earth'.<sup>28</sup> However, John Peck argues that public perceptions became more favourable after the Crimean War (1853-6) and the Indian Mutiny (1857).<sup>29</sup> By 1901, the popularity of the military in Britain was steadily on the rise. Michael Brown argues that the esteem of the military improved as a reflection of the changing political landscape within Victorian

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<sup>26</sup> S. Miller, 'In Support of the Imperial Mission – Volunteering for the South African War, 1899 – 1902' *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 69, No. 3 (2005), J. M. MacKenzie, "Introduction" in J.M. McKenzie (ed.) *Popular Imperialism and the Military: 1850-1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), and G. Dawson, *Soldiers Heroes, British Adventure, Empire and the Imaging of Masculinities* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> MacKenzie, p.12.

<sup>28</sup> C. Brown, *The Scum of the Earth': What Happened to the Real British Heroes of Waterloo?* (Stroud: The History Press, 2015), p.10.

<sup>29</sup> J. Peck, *The Army Abroad: Fictions of India and the Indian Mutiny* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1998), p.71.

Britain.<sup>30</sup> The public had historically distrusted the army because of its use in civil restraint such as at the Peterloo “massacre” of 1819 and the Kennington Common Chartist rally in 1848.<sup>31</sup> As the military diverted its attention from domestic troubles to reinforcing colonial control in the latter nineteenth century their unpopularity was increasingly overcome. As a result, Victorian society developed an obsession with the governing of Empire. Summers argues that the need to take a firmer hold over subordinate India merged into public rhetoric as the role of the military changed to reflect the new imperialistic outlook. This merging of militaristic ideals, she continues, would contribute to the mass voluntary move to recruitment for the war that occurred after 1914 driven by notions of ‘...patriotic soldiering’.<sup>32</sup>

Scholars such as Cunningham, Keagan, Spiers, and Sheffield have looked deeper into the relationship between class and service within the military. Cunningham argues that ‘...soldiering was traditionally an aristocratic calling and a lower-class way of life.’<sup>33</sup> For the upper classes, military service was associated with notions of gentry. According to Keagan, Britain in 1914 was still the polarised nation it had been seventy years earlier between the lower and upper classes.<sup>34</sup> Despite the abolishment of purchasing under the Caldwell reforms officer service remained the

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<sup>30</sup> M. Brown, “Like a Devoted Army”: Medicine, Heroic Masculinity, and the Military Paradigm in Victorian Britain”, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol.49, No.3 (2010), p.596.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p.595.

<sup>32</sup> A. Summers, ‘Essay: Militarism in Britain before the Great War’, *History Workshop*. No.2 (1976), p.106.

<sup>33</sup> H. Cunningham, *The Volunteer Force – A Social and Political History* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), p.155.

<sup>34</sup> J. Keagan, *The Face of Battle Kindle Edition* (London: The Bodley Head 2014), loc. 3444.



purview of the highest classes. Members of the upper class who accepted military roles often did so as an aid to social standing, for the aesthetic of the uniform or the glamour of military command and power.<sup>35</sup> Arguments about the relationship between the rank and file and their commanding officers are often interwoven with assessments of upper-class paternalism during the late Victorian era. Within his examination of Officer-Man Relations, Gary Sheffield indicates the role of paternalistic behaviour displayed by those in charge to those under their care. While not all officers adopted this role it is clear that lapses in behaviour were often tolerated as a means to maintain morale such as the soldiers gently woken while on guard duty by their NCO or the subaltern in charge rather than face a military trial as part of a court martial.<sup>36</sup>

For the lower classes, the motivations for enlistment and experiences within military service could be significantly different. Spiers argues that military service up to the First World War was within the lower ranks an indicator of an inability to progress successfully in society. The military was the final option for the lowest class of men where the alternatives were often death, the workhouse, or prison.<sup>37</sup> Both Bourne and Miller separately reiterate this lack of choice for the lowest classes but also consider that life within the rank and file could be just as bad as living on the poverty

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, loc. 3013.

<sup>36</sup> G. Sheffield, 'Officer-Man Relations, Discipline and Morale in the Great War' in Huge Cecil and Peter Liddle (ed.) *Facing Armageddon, The First World War Experience Kindle Edition* (London: Pen and Sword, 2003), loc.9792.

<sup>37</sup> E. Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p.147.

line.<sup>38</sup> The rank and file soldier existed within a climate of ever-increasing control throughout the nineteenth century and beyond the First World War that is reminiscent of Foucauldian notions of lost agency within institutions such as the military or prisons. Poor food and nutrition, insanitary conditions and institutional control were often part of the daily existence for most of the rank and file.<sup>39</sup> However, these controlling factors on the individual were also to be found outside of the military as they were increasingly incorporated into factories and work places in the nineteenth and early twentieth century

### **A Range of Men**

When considering the experiences of the British soldier during the First World War it is important to recognise the range of men who served at the front, not simply in terms of demographics but also in relation to how they were classified on entry to the war. Unlike any other large British military conflict that came before 1914, British soldiers during the First World War were separated into four distinct groups, Regulars, Territorials (Reservists), Volunteers and Conscripts.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> J. Bourne, 'The British Working Man' in Huge Cecil and Peter Liddle (ed.) *Facing Armageddon, The First World War Experience Kindle Edition* (London: Pen and Sword, 2003), loc. 8037 and Miller, pp.709-10.

<sup>39</sup> Bourne, loc.7955.

<sup>40</sup> It is worth noting that at the outbreak of war that over a quarter of the BEF was based in India. Indian troops quickly joined their British counterparts on the frontline however historians such as Terraine, Omissi, and Erickson have argued that the Indian troops were poorly trained and badly equipped with outdated weaponry and as such their contribution to the immediate war effort is questionable. This is made clear by Morton-Jack in G. Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front South Asia Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p.13.

Reform had very much been the watchword of the military since the end of the Boer War in 1902. From 1905, under the direction of the new War Minister Richard Burton Haldane and the Director of Military Training Major-General Douglas Haig, a new administrative process had been implemented to streamline and improve the distribution of command and responsibility for the British military.<sup>41</sup> Mallinson argues that much of this process focused on how to 'echelon the regulars and the auxiliaries at home', so much as how to organise and utilise them in the most effective way.<sup>42</sup> The result of these changes was the distribution of new service manuals which outlined tactical advice and mobilisation instructions. By the time that Lord Kitchener assumed the mantle of Secretary of War on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1914 the vastly improved British Expeditionary Force (BEF) had already been committed to service in France. Brigadier Sir James Edmonds considered the BEF in 1914 to be 'incomparably the best trained, best organised and best equipped British Army which ever went forth to war'.<sup>43</sup> However, Britain only had around 150,000 regular soldiers as Peter Simkins explains that during the interwar period of 1902 to 1914, the regular army had consistently failed to achieve its annual target of 30,000 recruits.<sup>44</sup> Excellently trained and organised the regular forces may have been but they were severely lacking in numbers.

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<sup>41</sup> A. Mallinson, *The Making of the British Army, From the English Civil War to the War on Terror* (London, Transworld Publishers, 2009), p.361.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Beckett, Bowman, and Connelly, p.207.

<sup>44</sup> Simkins, loc,1518.

The newly reformed territorial forces were theoretically supposed to fill this breach. However, Beckett argues in *Britain's Part Time Soldiers* that the new Secretary of State for War was extremely distrustful of 'amateur' soldiers.<sup>45</sup> Referring to them as a 'town's clerk army' Kitchener warily viewed territorials as "soldiers" who enjoyed unprecedented levels of independence and autonomy and were, therefore unsuitable for frontline combat.<sup>46</sup> Kitchener's solution was to raise a new army of volunteers as had been the traditional practice historically. Still, by September 1914 territorials were being dispatched overseas, although many of them were to free up regulars from colonial outposts or to shore up gaps at the front until the volunteer men were ready to join the fray.<sup>47</sup> In the early stages of the war territorial men also served in various training capacities until these roles began to be taken over by returning men from the frontline. By 1918, territorial men saw as much action as their regular, volunteer and conscript counterparts despite their entry into war having been more complicated.

Many of the men who eventually served on the frontline were volunteers. The men were often either members of Pal's Battalions or men who had been swept up by the patriotic fever to join the army between August 1914 and January 1916.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> I. Beckett, *Britain's Part Time Soldiers, The Amateur Military Tradition 1558-1945* (Barnsley: Manchester University Press, 2011), p.226.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p.227-8.

<sup>48</sup> Pal's Battalions arose out of the surge of patriotic fever which marked the beginning of the First World War in Britain. As the effectiveness of harnessing local ties to encourage large numbers of

Volunteers often receive the most attention within the historiography as they were the everymen, physically fit enough to pass the enlistment criteria and inexperienced enough to actively look forward to their “adventures” abroad. Simkins argues that the Pals Battalions represent the last manifestation of ‘late Victorian and Edwardian Liberalism’ in that they illustrated a blend of social, political, military and economic factors that were forever changed by the continuation of war and the creation of conscription in 1916.<sup>49</sup> One hundred and forty five service and seventy reserve battalions were eventually created which Simkins explains made up forty percent of the British Army in the first two years of the war.<sup>50</sup> Clive Hughes argues that for some men the war offered ‘a brief respite, an exciting and adventurous opportunity’. He is also keen to point out that the conception of the ‘rush to colours’ may be inaccurate as many men with commitments at home such as family or well-paid jobs did not immediately choose to sign up.<sup>51</sup> Jessica Meyer illustrates the role of women in aiding the war office to recruit soldiers, highlighting the link between the women’s movements and the military campaign. She argues that ‘...in the first half of the conflict, they invited the volunteers to lead army recruiting marches hoping that the sight of female soldiers would shame ‘slackers into enlisting’<sup>52</sup> This will be considered in greater detail further in the thesis as it investigates how the volunteers

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men to enlist became apparent, Lord Derby dubbed the eager men “Pal’s Battalions”. For more information, see Simkins *Kitchener’s Army*, Chapter 3.

<sup>49</sup> P. Simkins, “The Four Armies”, in D. G. Chandler and I. Beckett, *The Oxford History of the British Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.240.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> C. Hughes, ‘The New Armies’ in I. Beckett, *A Nation in Arms* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2004), pp.101-03.

<sup>52</sup> J. Meyer, *British Popular Culture and the First World Wars* (London: Brill, 2008), p.101.

that made up much of the primary forces that served were transformed into soldiers whilst being regarded, by themselves and others as being separate from their regular and territorial counterparts.

Finally, in 1916 conscription was introduced to meet the continually lowering rates of enlistment and to replace the partially successful Derby scheme. Mitchinson argues that this relatively unsuccessful program implemented by Lord Derby throughout 1915 had sought to stave off full conscription by allowing men aged 18-41 to attest and then wait to be called up.<sup>53</sup> On the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 1916, the Military Service Act came into force which allowed the enforced enlistment of every British man aged between 19 and 40. Ilana R. Bet-El has conducted one of the most definitive investigations into the final selection of British soldiers during the Great War in *Conscripts*. She argues that conscripts came from all elements of life just like their regular and volunteer counterparts and that they were by no means a minority with 2,504,183 men being conscripted between January 1916, and the end of the war.<sup>54</sup> These conscripts joined with the 2,466,719 volunteer soldiers to become an essential part of the British Army over the course of the war. Yet, Bet-El argues that conscripts experienced particular hardships as they were enlisted as their entry after 1916 occurred during extreme pressure on the army which resulted in reduced training that was frequently made more difficult by the increasing inclusion of less physically able men to meet staffing shortages.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> K. W. Mitchinson, *Gentlemen and Officers: The Impact and Experience of War on a Territorial Regiment 1914-1918* (London: The Naval and Military Press, 2012), p.140

<sup>54</sup> Bet-El, p.2.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, pp.2-4.

Within the four armies that served for Britain, there was a significant amount of diversity among the men. To overcome the uniqueness of these new soldiers a regiment of training and indoctrination into military existence was employed to ensure uniformity, compliance, and efficiency. Still, as is clear from the historiography and from the myriad of sources, men were still separated by their route into the army. They received different training, had different experiences and even wore different uniforms. This will be considered further within this thesis' investigation into how men's bodies were improved, indoctrinated and controlled over the course of the war.

### **Military Bodies**

As this thesis considers the transformation of men's bodies into soldiers, focus will be given to the role that medicine, science and the state had on the military body during the First World War. At the turn of the twentieth-century, the British government's increasing interest in the human body is particularly evident within its increasing concerns over the health of the armed forces. In 1899, for every 1000 enlisted men for the Boer War, 330 were rejected as unfit. In 1900, 280 out of every 1000 men were rejected for military service.<sup>56</sup> Searle argues that this 'scare of racial deterioration' prompted the state to turn to a 'military solution of a problem which

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<sup>56</sup> A. Penn, *Targeting Schools: Drill, Militarism and Imperialism* (London, Routledge, 1999), p.78.

had such grave military implications.<sup>57</sup> David Silbey explains that despite the programs which focused on improving national efficiency after 1901, many working-class volunteers still failed to meet the requirements for military service in 1914.<sup>58</sup> In 1914, after over a decade of programmes designed to improve the physical fitness of potential British soldiers, men's bodies were assessed again for their productivity upon the outbreak of war.<sup>59</sup> From enlistment to release men's bodies were categorised into groups that defined their worth according to the physical role that were considered capable of serving within the military. In *Civilians into Soldiers*, Newlands explains how during the Second World War this visual and written indication of effectiveness could ostracise or glorify men as their value was determined by a military trained medical officer.<sup>60</sup> During the First World War, this process of validation was not as complicated as what would follow two decades later. However, this does not diminish the extent to which the assessment process could impact on men's identity and treatment within society between 1914-1918.

Within her examination of the link between men's bodies and masculinity during the First World War, Bourke argues that men who were accepted for service often experienced a sense of belonging and camaraderie.<sup>61</sup> Bourke explains that the men's

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<sup>57</sup> G. R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency* (London, University of California Press, 1971), p.65

<sup>58</sup> D. Silbey, 'Bodies and Cultures Collide: Enlistment, The Medical Exam and the British Working Class 1914-1916' *Social History of Medicine*, Vol 17, No. 1 (2004), pp.61-76.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> E. Newlands, *Civilians into Soldiers: War, the Body and British Army Recruits, 1939-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), p.46.

<sup>61</sup> Bourke, pp.128-9.



new uniforms were an important aspect of the transitional process from soldier to civilian as they enhanced men's physicality by allowing them to present the masculinised soldier ideal.<sup>62</sup> Gullace agrees by explaining that the act of wearing a uniform was regarded by many as a symbol of masculinity.<sup>63</sup> In her consideration of 'khaki fever' in Britain during the war, Angela Woollacott develops this argument, stating that the soldier's uniform epitomised the excitement of war, bravery, and masculinity within public perceptions.<sup>64</sup> To be accepted into service demonstrated an individual's conformity to defined physical standards.

This was not a new concept in 1914 as Dawson argues that as the British military became more popular and military figures such as Gordon and 'Tommy Aitkens' assumed popular hero status, perceptions of physical fitness became entangled with military training and combat.<sup>65</sup> By the turn of the twentieth-century, paramilitary groups such as Baden Powell's scout movement were growing in popularity. Military training regimes and drilling had also become a regular aspect of boy's lives in private schools at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>66</sup> Paul Deslandes considers the increasing obsession with militarised healthy bodies within his exploration of students at Cambridge and Oxford in the nineteenth and twentieth century. He

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> N. Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War* (USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

<sup>64</sup> A. Woollacott, 'Khaki Fever' and its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Home front in the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 29 (1994), pp.326-8.

<sup>65</sup> Dawson, p.148.

<sup>66</sup> Penn, pp.23-24.

argues that militaristic masculinity was intrinsically linked to the experience of young men actualising at university prior to the war (p.167).<sup>67</sup> Deslandes uses the example of the boat race to draw similarities between terminology, training, and perceptions of self that existed within the militarised indoctrination into student life at Oxbridge. He notes that students used pseudo military terms and compared the race using terms similar to considerations of soldiers in battle.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, he claims that the rivalries between the two colleges developed the same cultural tone as was usually associated with what Dawson explains was the perception of the soldier hero.<sup>69</sup> Andrew Warwick makes a similar argument and discusses how studies and physical ability were intrinsically linked at Cambridge in the Victorian Period. He notes how students were expected to maintain a peak level of fitness, use their recreational time to hone their bodies through exercise and regularly contribute to sports and games.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, Warwick notes the ethos of endurance that students were expected to maintain resilient throughout. Again, the rhetoric of strength, hardiness and perseverance that had become increasingly associated with soldiers in the latter nineteenth century can be recognised within the perception of the successful middle and upper class academic.

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<sup>67</sup> P. Deslandes, *Oxbridge Men: British Masculinity and the Undergraduate Experience, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p.167.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Dawson, p.1.

<sup>70</sup> A. Warwick, 'Exercising the Student Body, Mathematics and Athleticism in Victorian Cambridge' in C. Lawrence and S. Shapin (eds.), *Science Incarnate, Historical Embodiments of Natural Knowledge* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.299.

This scientific and popular focus on physical fitness combined as part of the construction of the ideal physical body in late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Britain. Masculinity was very much at the centre of this focus on the body as perceptions of heroic physical superiority were projected on men's bodies, particularly soldier's bodies.<sup>71</sup> Paris argues that the wearing of a uniform served both as a demonstration of masculinity but also acceptance by the state of physical effectiveness.<sup>72</sup> This message of physical prowess being desirable, as linked to the shaming of civilian men and honouring of the soldier, epitomises the imagined socially constructed ideal of the 'proper man' within the context of the First World War. Soldiers in uniform were to be admired, desired and emulated as the body remained at the centre of men's experiences and state attention from enlistment to demobilisation or death.

The clothing of the body and the accompanying sense of worth is just one facet of the complicated process that created and maintained British soldiers during the First World War. Rationalism must also be considered as British society progressed into a period of modernity as an increasing obsession developed over the control and improvement of the body in service of the state.<sup>73</sup> This was not limited to the military, but also evident within trade and industry. Effectiveness, as is argued by

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<sup>71</sup> Dawson, p.1.

<sup>72</sup> M. Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture 1850-2000* (London, Reaktion Books, 2000), p.126.

<sup>73</sup> A. Rabinbach, *Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue and the Origins of Modernity* (USA, University of California Press, 1990), pp.238- 40.

Searle, under the heading of National Efficiency became the watchword of the early twentieth century.<sup>74</sup> It was here that Charles Bedaux incorporated 'scientific management' into Britain.<sup>75</sup> Frederick Taylor coined the term scientific management in the USA within his book *The Principles of Scientific Management* in 1911.<sup>76</sup> Within his book, Taylor focused on solving the problematic relationship between management and labour by viewing the worker as an 'object of knowledge and an asset for management.'<sup>77</sup> Taylor broke down the key components of a task into a series of actions that could be measured, assessed and importantly controlled to measure efficiency and increase profits through enhanced productivity. Miller and Rose argue that this deconstruction of tasks in basic repetitive steps occurred during the incorporation of scientific rhetoric focused on improving effectiveness through management within industry.<sup>78</sup> Rabinbach offers a similar view and claims that the climate of war would further lead to significant reform within the work place under focuses on efficiency.<sup>79</sup> Kries agrees and explains that by the end of the war, organisations such as the Health of Munitions Workers Committee (HMWC) sought to further improve effectiveness by surpassing Taylor to make '...scientific

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<sup>74</sup> G. R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency, A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1889-1914* (USA, University of California Press, 1971).

<sup>75</sup> S. Kreis, "The Diffusion of Scientific Management: The Bedaux Company in America and Britain, 1926-1945", in D. Nelson (ed.) *A Mental Revolution: Scientific Management Since Taylor* (USA: Ohio State University Press, 1992), p.169.

<sup>76</sup> F. Taylor, *The Scientific Management: The Early Sociology of Management and Organizations Reprint* (USA, Routledge, 2006).

<sup>77</sup> P. Miller, and N. Rose, 'Governing economic life', *Economy and Society*, Vol.19 (1990), p.20.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, pp.20-1.

<sup>79</sup> Rabinbach, pp.274-5.

management more scientific'.<sup>80</sup> The HMWC reported that improvements for fatigue, working hours and health requirements could dramatically speed up production. This led to the reduction of working hours, the introduction of breaks and holidays, and rudimentary health and safety.<sup>81</sup> Arthur Mclvor and Vicky Long consider these improvements in detail and conclude that this evolving period of development significantly benefited worker's health as well as being advantageous for productivity.<sup>82</sup>

State intervention into wider public health was also an important aspect of increasing effectiveness at the turn of the twentieth century. Robert Duncan argues that the early 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the domination of a 'perversion of social darwinism'<sup>83</sup> Duncan explains that restriction of alcohol fell under this ideological outlook as the failings in public health became more apparent after the Boer War crisis. Diet, in particular also received much attention especially for the maintenance and improvement of soldier's bodies for much the same reason. Soldier's testimonies from the First World War also demonstrate a constant obsession with food. The famous expression often attributed to Napoleon that an army marches on its stomach seems correct as countless memoirs and oral

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<sup>80</sup> S. Kreis, "Early Experiments in British Scientific Management: The Health of Munitions Workers Committee, 1915-1920", *Journal of Management History*, Vol. 1 (1995), p.67.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> V. Long, *The Rise and Fall of the Healthy Factory: The Politics of Industrial Health in Britain, 1914-1960* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.16-48 and A. J. Mclvor, *A History of Work in Britain, 1880 – 1950* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p.147.

<sup>83</sup> R. Duncan, *Pubs and Patriots: The Drink Crisis in Britain During World War One* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.21.

testimonies reflect on the role of 'hard tack' and bully beef as a soldier's primary and often despised daily sustenance.<sup>84</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska raises the issue of diet and nutrition as a key factor in improving wider British health.<sup>85</sup> She argues that the First World War had forced Britain to '...take stock of the health and physique of (its) manhood'.<sup>86</sup> Drawing comparisons to the large numbers of rejected men for the Boer war campaign between 1899-1902 she notes that lower working class men were particularly unsuitable for military service on grounds of ill health through malnourishment. Searle argues that as the First World War began much was still misunderstood about the importance of nutrition in relation to health and he notes that Rowntree's attempts at the turn of the century to determine the requirements for calories, proteins and fats for an effective healthy body were hampered by this lack of knowledge.<sup>87</sup> At the heart of this debate is the opposing arguments of Jay Winter and Linda Bryder who take up opposing arguments regarding the impact of improved diets on the health of the British public during the First World War. In noting the overarching issue of poor nutrition throughout the nineteenth century for much of the British population, Winter argues that significant improvements in the working-class diet were an important factor in decreasing mortality and improving general health both during and after the First World War.<sup>88</sup> Bryder disagrees and argues that evidence is lacking to demonstrate that there was a broad improvement

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<sup>84</sup> Beckett, Bowman, and Connelly, p.150.

<sup>85</sup> I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body, Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain, 1800-1939* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), p.193.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid p.64.

<sup>87</sup> Searle, p.65.

<sup>88</sup> J. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.280.

in public health through an increase of nutrition. She also questions Winter's assertion that wages rose for everyone in Britain which in turn allowed for greater flexibility and nutritional value in daily diets.<sup>89</sup> The ongoing debate aside, it is clear that over the course of the First World War the British government increasingly took an interest in caring for the health of the population. Hardy explains that by the summer of 1918 the Government controlled all crucial foodstuffs resulting in relatively equal distribution through rationing that continued for key items such as flour until 1921.<sup>90</sup> Bryder also highlights this increasing state involvement, noting that medical officers prior to the war had instituted nutritional programs in schools as an aid to improving health. The impact of the 1913 Educational Act was that by 1918 1 in 3 children received a meal every day at school.<sup>91</sup> According to Richard Titmuss, this focus on nutritional improvement for children also contained a wartime focus on preparation for the '...next generation of recruits', particularly as the population in Britain was also beginning to decline.<sup>92</sup> This is echoed during the war both in the increasing focus on soldier's diets and also for home workers through the setting up of industrial canteens in factories which Vernon argues were designed to provide nutritious meals to the hard working public.<sup>93</sup> Bryce Evans adds to this by discussing the role of National Kitchens within the First World War which he argues

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<sup>89</sup> L. Bryder, "The First World War: Healthy or Hungry?" *History Workshop Journal*, Vol.24 (1987), p.153.

<sup>90</sup> A. Hardy, *Health and Medicine in Britain Since 1860* (New York: Macmillan Education UK, 2001), p.52.

<sup>91</sup> J. Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (USA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p.164. and R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (London, HMSO, 1950), p.510.

<sup>92</sup> R. Titmuss, *Essays on the Welfare State* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p.78.

<sup>93</sup> Vernon, p.164.

were increasingly implemented by support from the government as a ‘...form of insurance against acute food shortages’.<sup>94</sup> Evans explains that while the National Kitchen served a purpose they were also plagued by unpopularity. Certainly, their legacy survived as they served as the inspiration for the National Restaurants of Churchill’s wartime Britain, but the National Kitchen was often unpopular and unorganised and as such limited to the First World War.<sup>95</sup>

The obsession with diet and food throughout the First World War demonstrates that physical sustainability and improvement within and beyond the climate of the war was an important focus for the British government and the military. Rachel Duffett, Anthony Clayton, and Andrew Robertshaw have separately discussed the focus of food and diet within the military as attempts were continually made to keep the men fit and healthy.<sup>96</sup> Duffett argues that ‘food was the site of complex and, it must be said, frequently contradictory, emotional responses: for many soldiers, it represented the best and worst of times.’<sup>97</sup> Certainly, food makes up much of the narrative within soldier’s letters, testimonies, and memoirs. However, there is still much to consider regarding the impact of food on the body as it was controlled under military rule.

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<sup>94</sup> B. Evans, “The National Kitchen in Britain in 1917-1919”, *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 10 (2016), p.121.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> R. Duffett, *Stomach for Fighting*, A. Clayton, *Battlefield Rations: The Food Given to The British Soldier for Marching and Fighting 1900-2011* (Solihull: Helion and Company Limited, 2013) and A. Robertshaw, *Feeding Tommy: Battlefield Recipes from the First World War* (London: The History Press, 2013).

<sup>97</sup> Duffett, p.21.



## Military Medicine

As well as being clothed and fed, soldiers bodies within the First World War also needed protecting and medically treating. Throughout the nineteenth century, there was a significant focus on public health within Britain which included improvements in sanitation and the rise of preventative medicine; a rise influenced heavily by the bacteriological revolution and the work of Koch and Pasteur. Roy Porter and Michael Worboys both emphasise the increasing attention upon sanitation and the bacteriological revolution. Porter argues that significant improvement in public health occurred through a trial and error attitude towards sanitary measures that became more effective towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>98</sup> John Snow's removal of the Broad Street Pump in 1854 to tackle an outbreak of cholera experimentation and discovery and John Simon's work as the first Public Health Officer between 1848 and 1872 to improve health through sanitation reform are both hallmarks of this period of improvement. Both men represented a significant shift in political and scientific response to disease prevention.<sup>99</sup> Inoculation also represents a significant focus on improving public health. Both Brunton and Williams agree that this originated with Jenner's vaccination for smallpox at the end of the eighteenth century. Vaccination remained controversial throughout the nineteenth century particularly after 1853 when the

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<sup>98</sup> R. Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind, a Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present* (London: W.W. Norton, 1999), pp.410-13.

<sup>99</sup> R. Porter, *Disease, Medicine and Society in England, 1550 – 1860* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.53-55.

practice became compulsory in Britain and protests intensified which combined fears about safety and the complaints against the loss of individual liberty.<sup>100</sup>

In terms of the British military, there was increasing state interference on the health of the public and by the end of the nineteenth century, experimentation into inoculation yielded innovations for both cholera and typhoid, the latter of which was carried out on British troops during the last Boer War from 1899 to 1902. Mark Harrison has explored the British Colonial government's attempts to improve public health through state institutionalised mechanisms in the latter nineteenth and twentieth century. He explains how these programs, punctuated by drug regulations, vaccination efforts and sanitation improvements stand as examples of British Colonial dominance as well as a core component of the civilising mission.<sup>101</sup> In 1907 compulsory vaccination was repealed in Britain and despite 97% of the British armed forces being inoculated for typhoid, an inoculation created by the military for military purpose, at no point was the vaccine mandatory for serving men or the general public. This unsurprising as within British society concerns over individual autonomy of the body had clashed for decades with the British government's attempts to improve public health and had part of the basis for the repeal for mandatory inoculation.

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<sup>100</sup> G. Williams, *Angel of Death, The Story of Smallpox* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and D. Brunton, *The Politics of Vaccination: Practice and Policy in England, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland 1800-1874* (Suffolk, University of Rochester Press, 2008).

<sup>101</sup> M. Harrison, 'Public Health and Medicine in British India: An Assessment of The British Contribution' *Bulletin of the Liverpool Medical History Society*, Vol.10 (1998), p.45.

Not all improvements were related to inoculation. Changes to sanitation and hygiene were successful responses to the curtailing of epidemics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Despite a significant period of improvement and recognition for these measures within society and an overhaul of the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) between its introduction in 1897 and 1914, the outbreak of the First World War did much to weaken initially the ability of the British Military to respond successfully to disease prevention on the frontline. Harrison notes that while ‘...the army on the western front certainly gave a great deal more thought to the organisation of sanitary work than in any previous campaign... in practice, military hygiene often left much to be desired.’<sup>102</sup> Harrison argues how the early stages of the campaign saw the RAMC hampered by a lack of equipment, something that alarmed the British public, and a loss of manpower as forces were stretched more thinly as the war developed.<sup>103</sup> However, as the First World War developed the RAMC developed with it and became an efficient force for dealing with the sick and wounded.

Some historians have used this improvement to illustrate how the climate of war was a positive force for medical innovation. Joan Lane’s examination of health and medicine argues that ‘...the unprecedented demands placed on the medical services in the 1914-18 brought great advances in therapies and equipment, some of

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<sup>102</sup> Harrison, *Medical War*, pp.125-26.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, p.24.

relevance later in civilian practice.’<sup>104</sup> Roger Cooter’s debate over war’s impact on medicine has very much been on the vanguard of this discussion within the historiography.<sup>105</sup> Uniting medical advances and military conflict Cooter consistently asks if war is good for medicine and/or if the reverse is also true. Within his examination of the First World War, Cooter demonstrates that the rigours of war both at home and abroad encouraged scientific and medical exploration to produce a range of new responses towards ill health and disability. Focusing on orthopaedics, Cooter argues that war stimulated immense growth into the field, which proved beneficial for both soldiers and those disabled by combat as well as those injured by munitions work.<sup>106</sup> Pickstone also regards the evolution of war medicine positively and argues that ‘...the lessons taught by the war to young surgeons and their superiors facilitated the development of specialists in civilian medicine.’<sup>107</sup> Pickstone focuses on Manchester Hospitals and considers at length the improvements in surgery and orthopaedics that assisted the rising number of crippled soldiers. He argues that this focus developed beyond the war. Hospitals such as Grangethorpe in Manchester became research centres. These went on to be funded by the Royal College of Surgeons and the Medical Research Council, formed

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid. p.180.

<sup>105</sup> M. Harrison, ‘Medicine and the management of Modern Warfare: An Introduction’ in R. Cooter, M. Harrison and S. Sturdy (eds.), *Medicine and Modern Warfare* (Amsterdam: Clio Medica, 1999), pp.18-9.

<sup>106</sup> R. Cooter, ‘War and Modern Medicine’, in W.F. Bynum and R. Porter (eds), *Companion Encyclopaedia of the History of Medicine* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.1544.

<sup>107</sup> J. Pickstone, *Medicine and Industrial Society, A History of Hospital Development in Manchester and its Region, 1752-1946* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p.208.

in 1919.<sup>108</sup> Simpson and David add to this argument by focusing on the impact of Harold Gillies and Henry Newland on reconstructive surgery.<sup>109</sup>

However, Bourke questions the value of the war on civilian medicine beyond 1918 as a significant amount of the improvements made were specifically conflict orientated and would rarely find applications within civilian life. Innovative methods of dealing with mass casualties affected by poison gas or being hit by a shell were significantly less useful in civilian medicine. The same can be said for battlefield medical training as, with the exception of a significant accident, triage and split-second decisions of life and death, were not required outside of a warzone.<sup>110</sup> Bourke does concede that the expansion of orthopaedics and enhanced understanding of fractures was useful in aiding disabled soldiers and civilians.<sup>111</sup> Still, she argues that the impact of military medicine on civilian medical advances, and therefore civilian health, must not be exaggerated because much of the improvement should be credited to the work of the Ministry of Health which was created in 1919.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid,

<sup>109</sup> D. A. Simpson and D. J. David, 'World War I: The Genesis of Craniomaxillofacial Surgery', *ANZ Journal of Surgery* (2004), pp.71-77.

<sup>110</sup> J. Bourke, "Wartime" in R. Cooter and J. Pickstone, *Companion to Medicine in The Twentieth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p.591.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

The question of military medical prowess has been expertly investigated by scholars who have shown the intricacies of medical care and disease prevention during the First World War. Yet, there are still questions to be asked of the ramifications of some of the medical practices such as inoculation on the physical man's body and scope remains to attempt to place the body under medical control and care within the terms of soldier's experiences over the course of the war.

### **Sources**

This thesis draws from a wide array of source materials comprising of official documentation, contextual publications, oral testimonies and significantly, private paper accounts covering diaries, letters, and memoirs. This wide array of sources was designed to allow for a wide investigation into the impact of the First World War on soldier's bodies, with a particular emphasis on their individual perception and experience.

Official documentation makes up much of the groundwork for the discussion of soldier's experiences. Between 1914-1918 a significant amount of propaganda literature was created by and in support of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee (PRC).<sup>113</sup> These documents, when used in tandem with soldier's accounts and the

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<sup>113</sup> P. Simkins, 'Voluntary Recruiting in Britain, 1914 – 1915. The British Library, (29/01/2014), accessible at <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/voluntary-recruiting> (accessed 01/07/17).

military enlistment forms illustrate the perceptions held of soldiers and their bodies by the public, the military, and the British government during the period of recruitment and enlistment. Official forms and documents recur in every chapter of this thesis. Several military training manuals have been examined to determine how the soldier's body was improved during training and active service and to outline the changing standards the military enforced upon men's bodies. Service Manuals and battalion records illuminate the dangers and pressures upon the body under active service while medical records and the articles printed in the Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corp (JRAMC) offer insight into the medical advances, hazards and impacts of service upon men's body. Finally, documents such as those prepared by the war graves commission and the demobilisation forms used as men left military service, shine light on the care of the body at the end of military service and explain how soldier's bodies were monetised and broken down literally to the "sum" of their parts. These documents have not always been presented in chronological order, nor has every single document been included in the analysis. Instead, the documents presented have been chosen as they aid the understanding of the environment in which the body was controlled, crafted and curtailed. Newlands uses the work of Turner and Waitzkin to explain that reviewing the contextual medical gaze in the Second World War illustrates how judgments arose on physicality through scientific knowledge.<sup>114</sup> This is just as true for the First World War as official documents allowed for a categorisation process, either formal or

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<sup>114</sup> Newlands, p.14.

informal, to be applied to men's bodies. These documents illustrate the physical ideals that were purported at the time and demonstrate how bodies were assessed for service. However, when using them as a historical source care must be taken not to overstate their effectiveness when interpreting their motivation and reception.

While official documents provide the bedrock of the examination, the true 'body' of the evidence is drawn from the voice of the soldier himself. Oral testimonies make up a significant part of the examination. These interviews, the majority of which were created and stored by the Imperial War Museum (IWM) over the last century, usually take on the form of a guided narrative. These structured conversations invite the listener to engage with the experiences of the subject as they often relive their experiences on tape. While this thesis was not involved in the process of creating the recording and therefore is not at risk of influencing the evidence provided, the information should still not be taken at face value. Peter Hart argues for both the value and the limits of oral history, particularly when utilised for an examination of former soldiers. Hart explains how oral history provides the opportunity to correct misconceptions and provide a unique bottom-up perspective of an event. Veterans are more likely to recount the 'grier' details of their experiences long after the event as opposed to writing about it in letters which could alarm family members. However, Hart also argues that this form of evidence should not be considered 'testimony' as each fact must be checked and nothing should be assumed at face value. He writes 'as a source of evidence, interviews are by no means perfect and



the veterans are not saints.’<sup>115</sup> Whilst investigating, it is important to be aware of bias, as well as issues with memory or the altering of recollections for a variety of reasons.

These are the pitfalls of engaging with oral history, yet, this does not diminish how essential these sources are. While dates may occasionally be wrong and events tempered by encroaching experiences, often the perception of the event, either then or at time of the recording, provide crucial evidence for soldier’s perceptions over their experiences and the impacts on their bodies during the course of the First World War. To balance the pitfalls of oral history this thesis has also investigated extensively memoirs, diaries, and letters of soldiers from the First World War. Memoirs both published and unpublished are an invaluable source of soldier’s experiences. Often these sources have been collected from diaries or notes taken over the course of the war. Many of the memoirs begin by explaining that the motivation for being written is to honour those that the author served with or to explain to future generations what happened between 1914-1918. On many occasions, the writing of these sources can be interpreted as cathartic, particularly the unpublished or posthumously published. This is not to state that the extensive number of published memoirs that have been in circulation from the start of the war onwards are completely sanitised or censored. However, often accounts of death, living conditions, disease, sex, alcohol, and misdemeanour are less visible in some of the earlier publically published narratives. Bourke’s *Dismembering the Male* remains

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<sup>115</sup> P. Hart, *Voices from the Front: An Oral History of the Great War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.5.

one of the best examples of drawing together written accounts, along with oral history testimony, to uncover a level of detailed barbarity which enhances the understanding of the impacts of war upon the body.<sup>116</sup> Stephen Morillo notes that written and pictorial serviceman's sources are particularly important as they offer perspectives and bias that are more difficult to find in other sources.<sup>117</sup> However, Morillo also notes that again care must be taken to evaluate the validity of the source by cross-comparative analysis.<sup>118</sup> Anthony Brundage agrees and argues that scepticism must be applied when using letters and diaries, especially if these testimonies have been made public or published.<sup>119</sup> He continues that it is essential to recognise the authors '...motives, ignorance, or capacity for self-deception'.<sup>120</sup> Richard van Emden also makes the point that 'literacy rates among pre-war soldiers were poor, much as they were among the civilian population that volunteered or were conscripted.'<sup>121</sup> Within this thesis there are testimonies from both officers and rankers and often officer's testimonies can be more eloquent with significantly less grammatical mistakes.<sup>122</sup> However, this does not mean that rankers did not keep recollections of their experiences as many still wrote home, kept diaries and created testimonies after the war that have then been incorporated into this thesis. One of

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<sup>116</sup> Bourke, p.77.

<sup>117</sup> S. Morillo, *What is Military History?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), p.105.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> A. Brundage, *Going to the Sources: A Guide to Historical Research and Writing Sixth Edition* (London: John Wiley and Sons, 2017), p.17.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, p.20.

<sup>121</sup> van Emden, *Tommy's Ark*, p.10.

<sup>122</sup> The term ranker is a common term used colloquially in this period and previously to describe men of the rank and file. This is used extensively throughout the primary historiography into military history and is solely used throughout this thesis to identify those men who were neither NCOs or Officers.

the best ways to ascertain validity when using such accounts is to collect as much appropriate evidence as possible. In *Wounded* Mayhew explains that her extensive research allowed her to ‘...assemble a history of the central experience that was repeated hundreds of thousands of times up and down the Western Front...’<sup>123</sup> Mayhew explains how this was only possible by the bringing of ‘all these [men and women’s] voices together’.<sup>124</sup> This is very much the same process undertaken in this thesis as sources such as testimonies, diaries and letters are challenged by comparison to each other to locate the body within the experiences of men over the course of the First World War.

Together, this combination of official, oral, personal and published testimony provides a vivid image of the experiences of the First World War British soldier. These sources can then be directed to consider the primary themes of this thesis. In terms of power, the dichotomy between what was and what was hoped to be is clear between the memoirs of soldiers and officers when set against the official documentation of the period. As Foucault indicates that control was directed downwards from those in charge, the accounts of men, both written and spoken, illustrate how control could and was subverted from the ground up. As this thesis considers at all times the relationship between the war and men’s bodies it is from these sources that most of the analysis is formed. Drew Leder argues that individuals do not particularly acknowledge their bodies unless they are in a state of

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<sup>123</sup> Mayhew, *Wounded*, loc, 141.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

dysfunction.<sup>125</sup> Yet, Bourke highlights that perceptions of the body are not as simple, particularly during times of discomfort and pain, where there is a divergence, often in war, between wound and perception of pain.<sup>126</sup> However, within the sources used within this thesis, the body is not simply brought to the front because it is suffering or even dysfunction but also because it has changed or an event has happened to it; be that a reflection on increased fitness, the undergoing of a sexual act or the implementation of a medical procedure such as inoculation.

This thesis seeks to use these sources not to explore particular battles or events but to analyse how soldiers have reconstructed their physical experiences of war. This thesis will question how men prepared their bodies for enlistment and how it felt to be successful or rejected? It asks how men felt about preparing their bodies for battle only to find that the training ground and the battlefield bore little resemblance to each other? What were men's responses to constantly watching their bodies change, especially as this was frequently outside of their own control? How did men view their bodies in combat as they both entered and left the fray and what was their opinion of those ultimately responsible for their bodies after the dust settled? These are just some of the questions that this thesis seeks to answer through its analysis of the sources.

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<sup>125</sup> D. Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1990), p.1.

<sup>126</sup> J. Bourke, *The Story of Pain: From Prayer to Painkillers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.14.

This thesis recognises that it cannot incorporate the experience of every single British soldier in the First World War. There is no blanket all encompassing analysis throughout the following chapters. Instead, what makes this research unique, as it builds on the seminal work that preceded it, is its focus upon the body as being central to men's experiences and the British military's needs during the First World War. This research seeks to uncover the considerations of men who found their bodies in a state of flux, transition and extensively controlled. Indeed, themes such as masculinity, medical improvement, physical disability and soldier's experiences have all been considered expertly previously. However, it is the goal of this thesis to contribute to the current historiography by bringing the body to the forefront of the discussion on the creation, crafting and controlling of soldiers during the First World War. This analysis will, therefore, focus on the individual agency of physicality, combined with a predominately bottom up approach, to enable the research within these chapters to provoke new interest into the experiences of the British men who found their bodies no longer their own in the name of defending the British Empire between 1914-18.

## **Chapters**

As this thesis is focused on the lived experience of British soldiers and their bodies over the course of the First World War it is logical that the chapter structure is presented in a semi-chronological format. Over the course of five chapters,

examination will be given to the enlistment, training, active service, combat experiences and the end of service. At the heart of these chapters lay the personal testimonies and official records that placed the body at the centre of the soldier experience between 1914-1918.

Chapter One considers to what extent the condition of the body was a crucial factor in the earliest stages of a soldier's career. Regardless of the condition of enlisting, for example, if the men were regulars, territorials, volunteers or conscripts, this chapter demonstrates how the body as an object was singled out in recruitment propaganda and practice and held in contrast to a physical ideal which both men and the military both aspired to achieve. Zweiniger-Bargielowska has argued that by the occasion of the war in 1914 British society was already taking stock of its population's health.<sup>127</sup> Jay Winter supports this argument and contends that the war presented the chance to increase this focus through regulated inspection as part of the enlistment process.<sup>128</sup> However, Silbey counters that the assessment process that men underwent was neither as regulated or fixed as was assumed as men and the military continued to reassess and negotiate the terms of their enlistment.<sup>129</sup> In fact as the war continued it became more apparent that the acceptable requirements for soldiers was extremely malleable and dependant on the need for manpower at the front. At the centre of this discussions lies the recruit and his body and it is this

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<sup>127</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body*, pp.192-3.

<sup>128</sup> Winter, *The Great War*, p.280.

<sup>129</sup> Silbey, p.75.

aspect that Chapter One examines as it charts the experiences of those who were weighed, measured, wanted and found wanting during the First World War.

Chapter Two continues the investigation into the preparation of the body for war, while also reflecting on what possibly could be considered the most controlled aspect of a British soldier's existence. Rachel Woodward explains that soldier's bodies were produced in training yet this thesis argues how this distinction is not nuanced enough to cover the transformation process between 1914-18.<sup>130</sup> As this chapter will illustrate, men's bodies were certainly made fitter, better and stronger through a regime of drill, practice, and games. However, their bodies in training also served as a site upon which to enact military domination. Internalising indoctrination through clothing, diet, and discipline was just as important for training soldiers during the war as was meeting the physical challenges of training. Yet, as their bodies and behaviours were brought in line with the requirements of the army, new challenges over control developed as many of the men in training were unlike any who had joined the army in recent memory. Many of whom refused to entirely submit their bodies to military regulation. Most men left training fitter and somewhat prepared for battle, but the process of getting them to that standard was not clear cut as conflict over the body defined many men's experience during their early days in uniform.

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<sup>130</sup> R. Woodward, 'Locating Military Masculinities: Space, Place and the Formation of Gender Identity in the British Army', in P. Higate (ed.), *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State* (London: Praeger, 2003), p.51.

The release from training into active service provides the focus for Chapter Three. This chapter discusses the range of experiences that awaited the soldiers and their bodies as they embarked around the world to take up their duties. Mark Harrison has discussed at length the issues of disease and poor sanitation, despite the improvements having been made within British Military during the prelude to the First World War.<sup>131</sup> As men arrived in their new living conditions a plethora of new experiences greeted their bodies and impacted upon the army's ability to control them. New technology such as inoculation offered both protection from sickness but also questions of agency. Exposure to alcohol and opportunities for sex offered new challenges for the army and new opportunities for men to damage their own bodies as they sought to please themselves. Chapter Three examines, through the experiences of soldiers, how their bodies were continually at odds with their environment. Indeed, they were controlled by assigned living conditions, diets, clothes and military discipline. Yet, soldiers also increasingly regained the autonomy to have impact and input upon their own bodies, particularly through ways in which to disable them.

Chapter Four brings the examination to the fighting front as here the fighting body and its experiences are considered. The occasion of combat resulted in a myriad of physiological responses from the men which the British Army was forced to attempt

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<sup>131</sup> Harrison, *The Medical War*, p.291.



to control. To counter fear, the army distributed alcohol, pity was curtailed through masculine rhetoric, and compliance controlled by discipline. This chapter examines how men were encouraged over the lines and the consequences of taking that action. Here men displayed their physical vulnerabilities as they became physically and psychologically wounded. Bourke has discussed the emasculation of fear and wounds showing how bravery and masculinity were often linked in an aid to keep men fighting and even lessen the burden of medical demands.<sup>132</sup> However, not all could simply 'soldier on' as this chapter continues to investigate how men and the military were forced to adapt to the trauma soldier's bodies received as a cycle of control, encouragement, and recovery developed around the act of combat. For some avoidance of combat or escape meant finding an alternative. In this chapter deliberate destruction to the body will also be examined as some soldiers tested to what extent they were willing to sacrifice parts of their body and even their lives to escape the reality they lived in.

Chapter Five ends the analysis by considering how men left the battlefield, be that via being demobilised with a pay-packet, wounded on a stretcher, or buried in a grave. For the wounded, their removal from the battlefield could often mean relative safety and comfort for their bodies but not necessarily escape from authoritarian control as command shifted from commanding officers to military staff. Wounded soldiers also could find their physical identity challenged as they

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<sup>132</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p.152.

exchanged their uniforms for 'hospital blues' and their damaged bodies kept hidden from public view. Men even sought to retake control over their bodies by allowing them to deteriorate to prevent being returned to the frontline. Those who anticipated demobilisation often did so with an eagerness to return to a civilian life that clashed their soldier status. For some men, the announcement of the armistice was enough for them to begin to openly reject the army's control over their bodies and lives as they demanded to be brought home, often complaining bitterly about the unorganised chaos that hampered demobilisation efforts. As the military and the soldier battled over the process of returning him home, men and their bodies were once again reduced to a series of physical attributes and skills as they were assessed to determine their financial cost to the military and the government. Finally, consideration will be given to those men who failed to escape army control as they were buried in their uniforms, with no control over how or where they were interred. Dying removed men from combat but not from service as their bodies sometimes became tools for living soldiers and even weapons for the enemy through the spread of disease and their impact on morale.

Ultimately, this investigation will illustrate how the body was central to the process of turning civilians into soldiers and explore how control over men's bodies was uneven and incomplete. Many men enlisted, wore a uniform and fought on the frontline, but that did not mean that they thoughtlessly followed orders. Between 1914-18 the average British Tommy was much more likely to be a volunteer or

conscript than a regular or territorial. The army quickly realised that it could not control and direct these men in the same way that it had its traditional forces in the previous century. Even if they were professional soldiers, the First World War was unlike anything any of them had faced before. This was a 'different existence altogether' and it was one that was keenly felt through the bodies of the men who served.

## Chapter One

### Worthy Bodies: Recruitment and Enlisting for War 1914 – 1918

#### **Introduction**

Between 1914 and 1918 nearly 6 million British men served as regular, territorial, volunteer, and conscripted soldiers.<sup>1</sup> Amongst the conflicts that the British Military participated in the First World War is unique because of the large number of men who served and the fact that over half of those men were volunteers. This chapter explores the enlistment process by which men entered the armed forces. It argues that the body was central to both the decision to seek admission to the military and to the procedures involved in being accepted, or rejected, for service. In considering the decision to join up the chapter will explore how men found themselves challenged to think about their bodies in new ways during the conflict and also the more practical corporal factors that may have made life in the armed forces seem attractive. In looking at the enlistment procedures themselves the chapter will argue that practices could be diverse and that they changed over the course of the war. In 1918 bodies were viewed, weighed and touched much as they had been in 1914, but categories and criteria shifted as to what constituted one ready for service. This chapter will also argue that all efforts to impose standardised procedures and

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<sup>1</sup>H. Strachan, *The First World War, A New History* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2001), p. 21

practices seem often to have been ignored by assessors with their own ideas or recruits desperate to play the system.

### **Deciding to serve**

During the Last South African War (1899-1902), the British government was able to put into action 400,000 regular, irregulars and militia men.<sup>2</sup> Eight weeks after the outbreak of war in 1914, Britain surpassed this total with volunteers alone.<sup>3</sup> This unprecedented level of military recruitment continued throughout the war. Simkins explains that by the end of 1915 2,466,719 men had voluntarily enlisted in the army, and while conscription did not surpass the numbers of volunteers, successful recruitment of men continued from 1916 until the end of the war.<sup>4</sup> In September 1914 alone, 462,901 men joined up. This was the highest number of recruits for a single month.<sup>5</sup> Around 500,000 men enlisted during the final year of the war.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> J. Grehan and M. Mace, *The Boer War 1899-1902: Ladysmith, Megerfontein, Spion Kop, Kimberley and Mafeking* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2014), p.vii.

<sup>3</sup> The War Office, *Statistical Abstract of Information Regarding the British Armies at Home and Abroad 1914-1920* (London: HMSO, 1920), p.363.

<sup>4</sup> P. Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies 1914-1916* (Great Britain: Manchester University Press, 2007), loc.205.

<sup>5</sup> I. Beckett, *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of The British Army in The First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p.364.

<sup>6</sup> Great Britain. War Office, *Statistics of The Military Effort of The British Empire During The Great War, 1914-1920* (London: HMSO, 1922), p.364. This is also displayed in Becket, *A Nation in Arms*, however, Becket also adds in the existing strength of the British Army, territorials, and reserve to bring the total figure of serving men up to 5,704,416.

After the declaration of war regular and territorial men were assembled as four of the six British Army divisions were on route to meet enemy forces in Belgium and Northern France.<sup>7</sup> While the Haldane reforms to the army between 1901 and 1914 meant that the British Expeditionary Force was the best equipped and organised of any preceding British force, it was quickly apparent that the army was still undermanned.<sup>8</sup> Under the direction of the newly appointed Secretary of War Earl Kitchener, servicemen were first recruited through voluntary campaigns before conscription was introduced following The Military Service Act on the 27 January 1916. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 1916, the Second Military Service Act extended eligibility for conscription to married men. From August 1916, only men who were not physical able or were working in exempt industries, aged under 18 or were over 41 were considered unsuitable for service.<sup>9</sup>

Simkins explains that recruitment after the outbreak of war on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 1914 began slowly but picked up rapidly because of the 'Pals Battalions' and the work of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee (PRC).<sup>10</sup> Formed on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August, the PRC put a network of local political organisations in service for the War Office which

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<sup>7</sup> C. Barnett, *Britain and Her Army, 1509-1970: A Military, Political and Social Survey* (London, Allen Lane, 1970), p.371.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.372.

<sup>9</sup> In 1918, this was raised to 51 and throughout men widowed with children, serving in the Royal Navy, a Minister of Religion, or working in one of a number of reserved occupations could be exempt from service.

<sup>10</sup> P. Simkins, 'Voluntary Recruiting in Britain, 1914 – 1915. The British Library, (29/01/2014), accessible at <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/voluntary-recruiting> (accessed 01/07/17).

resulted in a mass recruitment drive including the production of 54 million posters and 5.8 million leaflets and pamphlets.<sup>11</sup>

Theorists of masculinity had long argued that ‘manhood’ historically was an idealised image created by societies for men to aspire to.<sup>12</sup> Central to this idealised image has been the body, where physical size has typically been an identifier of masculinity.<sup>13</sup> Numerous historians have highlighted the centrality of masculinity in recruitment propaganda/posters in the twentieth century but what is important for this thesis is the centrality of the body to the posters produced.<sup>14</sup> Consider the “Are YOU in this?” poster created by Scout movement founder Baden Powell in 1915.

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<sup>11</sup> A. G. V. Simmonds, *Britain and World War One* (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2012), p.47. and M. L. Sanders and P. M. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914 - 1918* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.103.

<sup>12</sup> D. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New York: Yale University, 1990), p.3.

<sup>13</sup> Gilmore specifically refers to penis size and height.

<sup>14</sup> This has included the work of Christina Jarvis on the Second World War in C. S. Jarvis, *The Male Body at War: America Masculinity During World War II* (New York: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), J. M. MacKenzie on the late Victorian period and first half of the Twentieth Century in J. M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) and particularly Meg Albrinck for the First World War in M. Albrinck, “Humanitarians and He-Men: Recruitment Posters and the Masculine Ideal,” in *Picture This: World War I Posters and Visual Culture*, ed. Pearl James (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).



**Are you in this? Recruitment Poster 1915.<sup>15</sup>**

In the poster the physicality of those contributing to the war effort is obvious. The square jawed soldier and sailor, aided by the unflinching boy-scout, are given central stage under the British flag. Meanwhile the workers, led by the strong hammer-wielding industrial male, provides the support at the front. All of their bodies are caught in moments of activity and communicate purpose and commitment. The

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<sup>15</sup> IWM PST 2712, 'Are you in this?' Recruitment poster by Baden Powell, published by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, Printed by Johnson, Riddle, and Co, Parliamentary Recruiting Committee Poster No.112. (1915).



body of the man not involved in any of this forms a contrast. He is slope-shouldered and cross-legged, lacking the square-chin of the other males, and with his hands hidden from view in his pockets, whereas the hands of everyone else are on view to emphasise that they are doing something useful. The direct question at the bottom of the poster posed the challenged to men considering enlistment. Join up and achieve the ideal of the masculine, or reveal yourself as less than a man.

Albrinck has argued that such posters often had direct impacts, and recounts the story of a clerk who felt pressured, by the visual depiction of the heroic men in the posters, to improve his physique before seeking enlistment in order to ensure he measured up to the ideal.<sup>16</sup> She also argues that the military uniform was central to posters and pamphlets that sought to pressure men into considering military service. The following poster is from the 'Thank God I Too Was A Man' campaign.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> M. Albrinck, 'Humanitarians and He-Men: Recruitment Posters and the Masculine Ideal' in *Picture This, World War 1 Posters and Visual Culture* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), pp.277-287.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



To the Young Women of London, 1915.<sup>18</sup>

The measure of a man is whether he is 'wearing khaki'. If his body is not dressed in uniform, if it does not communicate through the correct military clothing that he is serving his King and Country, then the poster makes it clear that he is not 'WORTHY' of a woman. If not already in uniform then there is only one way to demonstrate that he is worthy of a female partner, and that is to hurry up and join up so that he is 'wearing khaki' as soon as possible. Tynan seems to have been right in concluding

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<sup>18</sup> IWM PST 4903, To the Young Women of London, Recruitment Poster. (1915).

that uniform was central in defining the masculine identity of soldiers during the First World War.<sup>19</sup>

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that such propaganda had real impacts and historians such as Michael Brown, Graham Dawson, R. J. Q. Adams and Philipp Poirer have shown how men were treated differently in and out of uniform throughout the First World War.<sup>20</sup> The evidence certainly suggests that many of those who enlisted recalled the power of the uniform in their decision to join up. Lieutenant Palmer, who served throughout the war in the RAMC, wrote in his memoirs that

As far as men were concerned, the great idea was to get into uniform so that they could be classified as having enlisted to fight for their King and country; the more men clothed in Kharki [sic] the more noticeable became those who had enlisted. Enlistment too meant popularity and pride and a certain amount of favour with the ladies and older people. Indeed, those not in uniform were despised by those who wore the Kings uniform, and the populace generally.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> J. Tynan *Men in Khaki, British Army Uniform and the First World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.19.

<sup>20</sup> G. Dawson, *Soldiers Heroes, British Adventure, Empire and the Imaging of Masculinities* (New York, Routledge, 2005), p.81, J.Q. Adams and Philip Poirer, *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987) and M. Brown, 'Like a Devoted Army': Medicine, Heroic Masculinity, and the Military', *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 49, Issue 03 (2010).

<sup>21</sup> IWM, 7275, Private Papers of Lieutenant K. Palmer, p.10.

Palmer went on to explain how the homogeneity of khaki changed public perceptions of men, turning civilians into heroes simply by covering their bodies with a military uniform.

The wearing of Kharki [sic] made all men look more or less the same and the populace opened their doors to one and all who wore Kharki [sic]; their rank mattered not one bit, all were heroes and treated as much.<sup>22</sup>

The uniform could carry other messages too. Private Brady explained his rush to join up in the following terms.

I didn't want to wait until they came and got me; I didn't want to be a conscript – a pressed man – I wanted to go under my own volition – a volunteer – like the regular who had fought and won many British battles on foreign fields – and made the Empire what it was. Most of us were like that – blindly eager to get into uniform come hell or high water. Hells bells the country was in peril, wasn't it?<sup>23</sup>

Military appearance was not simply used in posters and pamphlets though. Private Buffey's diary noted his awe of the recruitment sergeant in the local town.

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<sup>22</sup> Palmer, p.10. Source is presented exactly as is written within the Private Papers of Lieutenant K. Palmer.

<sup>23</sup> IWM, 17024, Private Papers of J. Brady, p.40.

[the sergeant was a] picture of what he represented, the ramrod straightness of his back, the immaculate tunic with its colourful medal ribbons plus the red and white and blue rosette sported in his hat, all tended us to look upon him as someone above the ordinary, which indeed he was...Gradually he talked us into following his sage advice especially after he told us that our local regiment was just our cup of tea. It's a regiment bursting with honours, not just campaign honours but these won at sport, boxing, swimming, running, soccer, the lot. All won by local lads like yourselves, lad whom you might know, lads will love to show you townies the ropes. Yes, chaps you plump for the York and Lancaster regiment and ill warrant you will not rue your decision, for it is as I say a regiment you will be proud and happy to serve in. your shoulder badge, just a plain Y and it will be a puzzle to the girls until you tell them it stands for Young and Loving. His spiel sounded so good and his manner so friendly we couldn't do any other than heed to his promoting so we forsook the cavalry for the infantry. 'Good' he said. 'Now let's get down to business.'<sup>24</sup>

For Buffey, the sergeant's uniform and medal communicated the glamour and potential of the militarised body. His speech seems calculated to confirm this, with the corporal delights of sporting success, and attractiveness to the opposite sex,

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<sup>24</sup> IWM, 7104, Private Papers of E. Buffey, pp.4-5.

rewards to flow from donning the uniform. Quite how far 'khaki fever', female sexual attraction towards men wearing a uniform in this period, actually existed is the matter of some debate among historians but Carol Acton has pointed out that it was certainly a recurring element of propaganda designed to encourage men to join the armed forces.<sup>25</sup>

Men certainly felt excited to be dressed as a soldier. Private Bickerton immediately changed into his uniform on receiving it, despite not needing to do so for two days, and having some misgivings.

So, off I went on my own and called in at the headquarters of the third battalion Hertford. I saw the doctor, he examined me. I was just over chest measurement and minimum height, he enquired my age, I said nineteen and he said 'what year were born in/ and I said /1896' – and he said: 'alright, young man, I think you'll do'. And forthwith I went through, giving all the particulars that were required and received a rather badly fitting suit of khaki, and a hat which was much too large for me. I got into the uniform

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<sup>25</sup> V. Cree, 'Khaki Fever' during the First World War: A Historical Case Study of Social Work's Approach towards Young Women, Sex and Moral Danger, *British Journal of Social Work* (2016), p.1841; A. Woollacott, "'Khaki Fever' and Its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 2 (1994), p.333; C. Acton, 'Best Boys and Aching Hearts: The Rhetoric of Romance as Social Control in Wartime Magazines for Young Women' in J. Meyer, *British Popular Culture and the First World War* (London: Brill, 2008), p.175; J. Bourke, p.159. and L. D. H. Sauerteig, 'Sex, medicine and Morality' in R. Cooter, M Harrison and S. Sturdy (ed.) *War, Medicine and Modernity* (Thrupp: Sutton, 1998), p.181.

immediately and packed up my civilian clothes; I received a pass for 48 hours so I was able to return home.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, Private Silver was keen to show off his new uniform to his family immediately after enlisting.<sup>27</sup> Having joined up before the outbreak of war he received a traditional scarlet tunic and recorded that he liked the replacement khaki uniform less.<sup>28</sup>

Precisely because reclothing the body in the uniforms of the British military communicated such strong messages there were those who strongly resisted it. Conscientious objectors, either voluntarily or after being arrested for ignoring their call-up, were dealt with by the British Army in a local barrack. Much like the willing recruit, there they underwent medical assessments, were given equipment and instructed to put on a uniform.<sup>29</sup> Despite being treated like soldiers, many conscientious objectors refused to act as soldiers and wear military dress. Fred Murfin explained that when he and others refused they were physically dressed by soldiers.

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<sup>26</sup> IWM, 4872, Private Papers of T. A. Bickerton, pp.3-4. Source is presented exactly as is written within the Private Papers of T. A. Bickerton.

<sup>27</sup> IWM, 7715, Private Papers of T. A. Silver, p.4.

<sup>28</sup> Silver, p.5.

<sup>29</sup> A. Kramer, *Conscientious Objectors of the First World War: A Determined Resistance* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2013), pp.74-77.

Next came the putting on of the uniform. The officer said: “now my lads, we want you to put khaki on.” We all refused, I think, and we each had a soldier to undress and dress us. My attendant suggested that as my feet smelled so badly I’d better see to my own socks. I did and we both enjoyed the joke... He was a nice fellow – we found, as a rule, that if the officer was decent, the men were. We were taken back to the guardroom and saw one another in uniform for the first time. One man came in later very flustered. He had resisted having the uniform put on and his words were: “they have got the uniform on but they haven’t got the man!” We tried to help him accept the situation and pointed out that we were still prisoners.<sup>30</sup>

For these men, the refusal to put on the uniform was symbolic of their determination not to serve in the armed forces. Similarly, Tynan argues that Quakers viewed their rejection of the uniform as a statement that they would not allow the military to claim their bodies.<sup>31</sup> G. Ewan was a devout Quaker who explained how young sergeant told him that he would be forcibly dressed if he did not put on the uniform. ‘He then told me I should be forcibly stripped and put in uniform if I objected to putting it on otherwise. I simply implied that I should speak on those points of interest with his superior officer.’<sup>32</sup> Ever polite, Ewan went to explain how he

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<sup>30</sup> IWM, 14, Private Papers of F. J. Murfin, pp.3-4.

<sup>31</sup> Tynan, p.3

<sup>32</sup> IWM, 1693, Private Papers of G. Ewan, p.3.



continued to dissociate himself from the uniform despite having the regiment cap placed unceremoniously onto his head.

Then, as one man collected these small goods, the other checked, and for my benefit called out each item as thrown down at my feet. That over, again one (meaning the soldier who accompanied him) was to take the whole pile on to my next, and last, a place to collect khaki suit and cap. Would I try it on? “No! thank you”. A few more charming words, then a laugh. “What size are you 5 or 6?” “Throw out what you’ve got, he’ll look a funny sight, but it will be his own fault.” The cap was the last item. A stag (I think the Warwick emblem) was pinned on, then it was stuck, none too lightly, on my head. This was placed by me on the floor, then the kit bags were brought in, and instructions as to how to pack these was the net move. The young men who went with me packed the bag as shown. “Aren’t you going to pack yours?” “No! I am not all interested in government property, and I will leave you to your own devices.”<sup>33</sup>

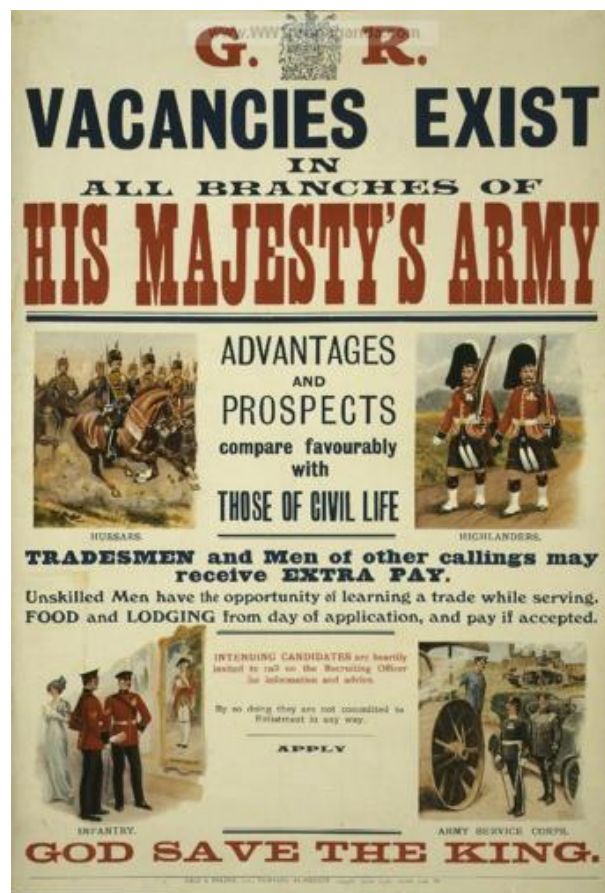
The uniform seems to have been central to the decision of many to enlist as dressing the body in it thought to immediately change the messages and meanings of that body. But for those like Ewan and Murfin those messages and meanings were

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.6.

precisely the reason to reject it. While they resisted the military dress they were resisting the militarisation of their bodies.

The body could also have an important place in the decision of many men to join the armed forces in the First World War for altogether more pragmatic purposes. The following poster offers mixed messages.



**Vacancies Exist in all Branches of His Majesty's Army Recruitment Poster (1914-1918).**<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> E. Ibbetson and J. McNeill 'Vacancies Exist in all Branches of His Majesty's Army', Recruiting poster for British Army Ernest Ibbetson and John McNeill, Aldershot: Gale & Polden, Ltd. (1914-1918),

For all the martial glamour on show in the images of bodies on the poster, the text offers the rather more practical inducements of FOOD and LODGING. For many these would have certainly been ‘advantages’ compared with ‘civil life’. Jay Winter and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska have explained how the diets of the lowest classes were poor at the start of the twentieth century.<sup>35</sup> Robert Roberts’ analysis on the dietary conditions of the British Working class within this period explains how families may have encouraged enlistment as it would lead to one less mouth to feed at home, and those leaving would have anticipated improved meals in military life.<sup>36</sup> Rachel Duffett has shown that some recruitment sergeants certainly promised ‘meat every day’ as part of their enlistment speeches and opponents of the war felt that this could be a powerful factor.<sup>37</sup> For example the Irish republican and socialist leader James Connolly asserted in 1914 that ‘hunger and fear of hunger have driven thousands of our class into the British Army’.<sup>38</sup>

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<http://www.ww1propaganda.com/ww1-poster/his-majestys-army-vacancies-exist> (accessed 03/04/2017).

<sup>35</sup> I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body, Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain, 1800-1939* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010) and J. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.280.

<sup>36</sup> R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum* (Manchester: Penguin, 1971), p.189.

<sup>37</sup> R. Duffett, *The Stomach for Fighting, Food and Soldiers of The Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p.76.

<sup>38</sup> T. P. Dooley, *Irishmen or English Soldier: The Times and World of a South Catholic* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), p.101.

## Assessing the Body

During the course of the First World War, the majority of men who served either joined as a volunteer or as a conscript and for every man there was a process of recorded assessment within which the body was central. First, men would report to a recruitment sergeant who often influenced which military role they eventually undertook. The recruiting sergeant could even end the hopeful's career at the door by deciding they were too young or making a snap judgement on the physical suitability. Once past the sergeant recruits had their bodies evaluated and categorised on the basis of their suitability for service. At the beginning of the First World War, men were sorted into five categories: A. Fit for General Service; B. Fit for Service Overseas; C. Fit for Home Service only; D. unfit but likely to become fit within six months; and E. unfit and unlikely to become fit within 6 months.<sup>39</sup>

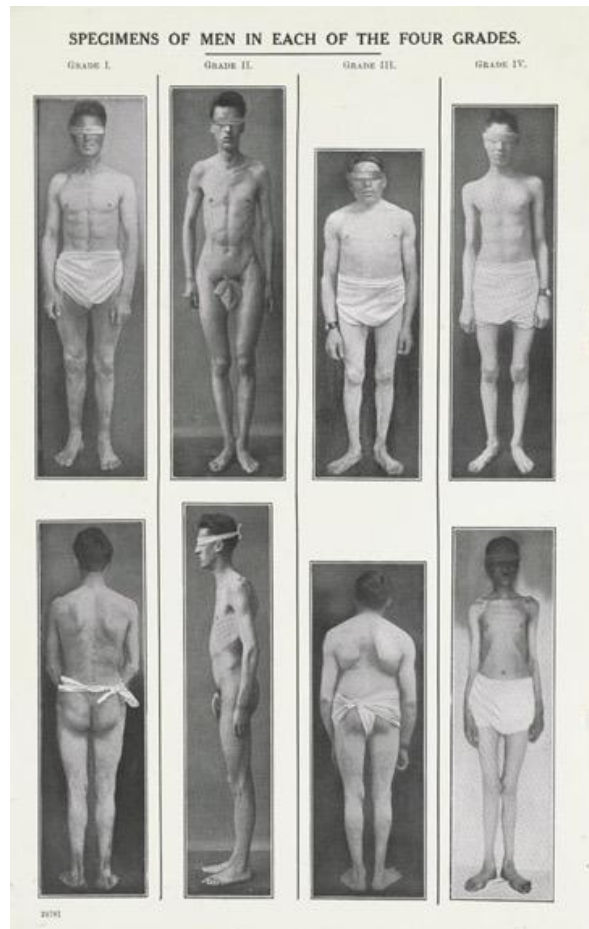
In 1917, this system was replaced with a 1-4 grading protocol. Grade 1 covered all the men deemed fit from the former category A. Grade 2 contained the men who had belonged to B1 and C1 which had been classified as fit because they could walk 6 miles with ease. Grade 3 covered the men unsuited for combat in the former category C and grade 4 covered those entirely unfit.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> J. Winter, Military Fitness and Civilian Health in Britain during the First World War, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 15, (1980), pp.211-44

<sup>40</sup> J. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male, Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), p.172.

Joanna Bourke has argued that the new categories were not designed to single out the disabled or diseased but to rather clarify suitability for service.<sup>41</sup> The image below, produced in the wake of the end of the war, suggests that a clear idea had emerged of what the typical body in each category would look like.



**Specimens of men in each of the Four Grades, Report by the Ministry of National Service 1920.<sup>42</sup>**

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> 'Specimens of men in each of the Four Grades, Report by the Ministry of National Service 1920', Wellcome Library London (1920) <https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/war-and-body/?image=1> (accessed 04/04/17).

As part of their examination, each man underwent eye and chest exams. The body was checked for deformities such as missing limbs, fallen arches of the feet, and missing teeth. Measurements were recorded for age, weight, chest expansion and height.<sup>43</sup> At the beginning of the war, men were required to be over 18, to have a minimum height of 5 ft. 3 inches and a chest measurement of at least 34 inches.<sup>44</sup> At 5ft 4 inches with a chest expansion of 34 inches and no deformities, 19-year-old Arthur James Walkden was the ideal recruit when he enlisted with the Corps of Hussars of the Line in Birmingham on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1914.

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<sup>43</sup> D. Silbey, 'Bodies and Cultures Collide: Enlistment, The Medical Exam and the British Working Class 1914-1916' *Social History of Medicine*, Vol 17, No. 1 (2004), pp.67-8.

<sup>44</sup> S. T. Beggs, *Selection of The Recruit* (London: Bailliere, Tindall & Cox, 1915), p.14. This is also mentioned by Silbey, p.64.

Description of Arthur James Walkden on Enlistment.

<p>Apparent Age: <u>19</u> years <u>90</u> <sup>days</sup></p> <p><small>To be measured according to the standards given in the Regulations for Army Medical Services.</small></p> <p>Height: <u>5 ft 8 1/2</u> ins.</p> <p>Weight: <u>110</u> lbs.</p> <p><small>(110 lbs when fully equipped)</small></p> <p>Range of Extension: <u>2</u> ins.</p> <p>Complexion: <u>fair</u></p> <p>Eyes: <u>blue</u></p> <p>Hair: <u>brown</u></p> <p>Church of England: <u>Yes</u></p> <p>Presbyterian</p> <p>Wesleyan</p> <p>Baptist or Congregationalist</p> <p>Other Protestants</p> <p>Roman Catholic</p> <p>Jewish</p>	<p>Distinctive marks, and marks indicating congenital perversion or previous disease.</p> <p><small>(Should the Medical Officer be of opinion that the recruit has served before, he will enter the date of previous service, except a day or two after, for the information of the approving officer.)</small></p> <p style="font-size: 2em; text-align: center;">Scar to chin</p>
<p><b>Certificate of Medical Examination.</b></p> <p>I have examined the above-named recruit and find that he does not present any of the causes of rejection specified in the Regulations for Army Medical Services.</p> <p>He can see at the required distance with either eye; his heart and lungs are healthy; he has the free use of his joints and limbs, and he declares that he is not subject to fits of any description.</p> <p>I consider him <u>fit</u> for the Army.</p> <p>Date: <u>14 AUG. 1914</u> 191</p> <p>Place: <u>BIRMINGHAM</u></p> <p><small>* Insert here "to" or "with".</small></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>[Signature]</i> Medical Officer.</p>	
<p><b>Certificate of Primary Military Examination.</b></p> <p>I hereby certify that the above-named recruit was inspected by me and I consider him <u>fit</u> for service in the <u>1st Corps of Success of the line</u> and that due care has been exercised in his enlistment.</p> <p>Date: <u>14 AUG. 1914</u> 191</p> <p>Place: <u>BIRMINGHAM</u> RECRUITING OFFICER. <i>[Signature]</i> CAPTAIN, Recruiting Officer.</p> <p><small>* Insert here "to" or "with".</small></p>	
<p><b>Certificate of Approving Officer.</b></p> <p>I certify that this Attestation of the above-named recruit is correct, and properly filled up, and that the required forms appear to have been completed with accuracy, and appoint him to the <u>1st Corps of Success of the line</u>.</p> <p>If selected by special authority, Army Form <u>2</u> (or other authority for the enlistment) will be attached to the original attestation.</p> <p>Date: <u>17 AUG. 1914</u> 191</p> <p>Place: <u>BIRMINGHAM</u> <i>[Signature]</i> CAPTAIN, Approving Officer.</p> <p><small>* The signature of the Approving Officer is to be affixed in the presence of the recruit. * Insert here "to" or "with" for which the recruit has been selected.</small></p>	

**Enlistment Form for Arthur James Walkden.<sup>45</sup>**

Walkden's Enlistment Form contains the signature of both the medical and recruiting officer, along with the confirmation of a commanding officer. Walkden's form illustrates to what extent men's bodies were scrutinised as well as highlighting how many officials were included in this process as men paraded past recruiting staff to medical officers while being continually evaluated for height, weight, and deformity. The design of the Enlistment Form, and Medical History Attestment Form reiterate

<sup>45</sup> The National Archives (hereby known as TNA), W0364 4405, Enlistment form for Arthur James Walkden (17/08/1914).

how central physical aspects such as age, height, weight, chest measurements, heart rate, and vision tests were for service in the British Army. Medical forms demanded closer inspections of men's bodies by asking for evidence of previous vaccinations through confirmation of scars, examination of the body for evidence of current or previously suffered disease and a statement on physical development and pulse rate.

ARMY FORM B. 178.

**To be used for recruits enlisting direct into the Regular Army only.  
Army Form B. 178A to be used for Special Reserve Recruits  
and Special Reservists enlisting into the Regular Army.**

**MEDICAL HISTORY of**

Surname..... *Walkden* ..... Christian Name..... *Arthur James* .....

TABLE I—GENERAL TABLE

Birthplace..... *Stretford* ..... Parish..... *Stretford* ..... County..... *Derbyshire* .....

Examined..... { on..... *12 NOV. 1914* ..... 1914.  
at *STOCKPORT* .....

Declared Age..... *19* years..... *15.6* days .....

Trade or Occupation..... *Warehouseman* .....

Height..... *5* feet..... *5* inches.....

Weight..... *119* lbs.....

Chest Measurement { Girth when fully Expanded..... *34.5* inches.....  
Range of Expansion..... *2.5* inches.....

Physical Development and Pulse Rate.....

Vaccination Marks { Arm..... Right..... Left.....  
Number.....

When Vaccinated.....

Vision..... { R.E.—V= *6* ..... at 20 feet.  
L.E.—V= *6* .....

(a) Marks indicating congenital peculiarities or previous disease.....

(b) Slight defects but not sufficient to cause rejection.....

Approved by..... (Signature)..... *R. Honford* .....  
(Rank)..... *Sgt* ..... Medical Officer.....

Enlisted..... at *STOCKPORT*.....  
on..... *12 NOV. 1914* ..... 1914.....

Corps.	Regtl. No.
General Service..... <i>A.S.C. 5082</i>	<i>57,028,694</i>

Joined on Enlistment.....

Transferred to.....

Became non-effective by..... *Discharge Para. 592 (ii) of M.O. 12*.....  
on..... *16* day of..... *November*..... 1914.....

(Signature)..... *Arthur James Walkden* .....  
(Rank)..... *Major* ..... *Command No. 1009 A.C.*

Swain & Co. Ltd., Printers, Stockport. P.T.O.

Medical History Attestment Form B178, for Arthur James Walkden.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> TNA, W0364 4405, Medical History Attestment Form for Arthur James Walkden, (12/10/1914).



Those who went through the process certainly remembered it. Within Lieutenant George Cotton's account of his enlistment in London in 1914, he described the process of being assessed in detail and noted how the process made him feel inconsequential.

The first stage consisted in giving information as to my age and many other personal concerns and a note of the corps we should like to join. The Sergeant who was in charge of this work, having heard we were clerks, strongly recommended the army pay corps where he said with that assurance which always accompanies there [sic] stripes (the write excepted), we should not only have every opportunity of covering ourselves with glory (and ink) but would also in all probability be sent overseas within a few days of enlistment. The ordeal of medical examination now had to be faced. In the early days of the War, when the number of recruits was large, the medical test was severe and only thoroughly fit men were accepted. Jack and I lost sight of each other at this stage. I was ordered to enter a cubicle which was made to fit three men on each side and told to take off every article of clothing and be ready to leave as soon as my name was called. The knowledge that all had to go through the same ceremony helped to lessen the shock. On hearing your name called, you walked, tripped or otherwise preceded out of the cubicle in a perfectly nude condition with as much dignity as could be summoned under the circumstances. Having been weighed,

measured, thumped, probed, questioned and generally treated like an animated piece of butcher's meat you were ordered to move along the floor on all fours. By this time, it can be realised that one's enthusiasm was on the wane. I was told to dress and having signed the document known as the attestation form, I was handed a small sum of money which I believe represented one day's army pay and ordered to report at St. James barracks in a few days' time.<sup>47</sup>

Cotton was clearly uncomfortable having his body exposed, objectified and classified. He defined the assessment as an 'ordeal' and regarded the process as impersonal and embarrassing as his body was put on show. The official guidelines for enlistment regulations demanded that men should be able to walk the length of the floor. Medical officers were even instructed to have men 'hop across the room on the right foot. Back again on the left foot. (The hops should be short and upon the toes.)'<sup>48</sup> Yet, Cotton described being made to crawl as part of his assessment. Whether this is an exaggeration for the good of the narrative to indicate just how inhuman Cotton felt the experience was or, actually what happened, is difficult to tell. Regardless, it is obvious that he felt that the whole process had been dehumanising as that his body had been reduced to the level of a 'a piece of butcher's meat'.

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<sup>47</sup> IWM, 14729, Private Papers of Lieutenant G. Cotton, p.2. This is exactly how the source is presented within the Private Papers of Lieutenant G. Cotton.

<sup>48</sup> Great Britain, *War Office Regulations for Army Medical Services* (London: HMSO, 1890), p.132

Cotton also noted how a friend failed the assessment and only gained entry to service after standards shifted in the following year.

My friend, Jack, was rejected on medical grounds which was a great disappointment to us both. He made several attempts later to enlist but was not successful in passing the medical until the Derby Scheme came into operation in 1915. He then joined the machine gun corps and we had the good fortune to meet on two occasions in France during the hostilities.<sup>49</sup>

Clearly notions of the ideal or suitable body for military service shifted during the war. In the early days of the conflict in 1914 the number of men coming forwards meant that the army could be selective about the criteria to be applied. Private Walkden whose completed form was included above, found that while he met requirements in October by November he was considered too short and discharged. By December the height requirement for enlisted men was raised from 5ft 3 to 5 ft. 6 by the British government as a way to stem the tide of volunteers which had overwhelmed the British military. This was the first of a series of changes to height requirements for active service between 1914 – 1918. There were some protests at this and William Anderson, Member of Parliament for Sheffield Attercliffe, was among those that pointed out the problems this caused.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

Mr. ANDERSON asked the Under-Secretary of State for War whether his attention has been drawn to the case of R. Hope, of Exeter, who attested under the group system in November last, was medically examined both at Taunton and Bristol, and passed as fit for service and placed in Group 6; whether he is aware that this man when his group was called up made all arrangements to leave civil life and gave up his employment as a shop manager; that on presenting himself he was again examined, informed that he was fit for Home service only, given 2s 9d., and sent away by the military authorities, who told him to hold himself in readiness to be called up in a week or a month or six months; and that similar cases are occurring in other places; and whether it is the intention of the Government to accept financial responsibility in respect of men treated in this way?<sup>50</sup>

Arthur Marwick has argued that this change in the regulations was responsible for alienating the working class in late 1914 as it branded them as unfit and unworthy of fighting for their country.<sup>51</sup> After the fluctuation in the height requirements, enlistment figures failed to ever again attain the levels achieved in the first months of the war. The rejection of those under 5ft. 6 inches in 1914 caused such resentment that a specialist battalion was created to allow men under 5ft 3 inches to serve. In 1914, permission was gained by MP Alfred Birkenhead to raise a special

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<sup>50</sup> HC Debate, 02 March 1916, vol 80 cc1182-3

<sup>51</sup> A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London: Little Brown, 1966), p.41.

'Bantam' battalion after a 5ft 2 inch Durham miner had threatened to 'thrash' anyone in the room in a fight to prove his suitability after he declined for service on the basis of his height.<sup>52</sup> Simkins explains that this battalion claimed that 'a man is as a good soldier and as plucky a fighter at 5ft. 2in., as at 5 ft. 6ins.'<sup>53</sup> The existence of the Bantams directly opposed the idea that only men of a certain physical standard were capable of service. However, rhetoric and reality clashed as the Bantam Battalion proved to be a short-term sensation in the media but a disastrous unit in the field. Simkins explains that physical capacity of the Bantam men was severely overestimated and as the war evolved and the unit disbanded, these men with a physical disadvantage struggled to keep up with their new unit counterparts and were an active tactical drawback in combat.<sup>54</sup>

Failure to match up to the military's ideal body type was also a particularly dispiriting experience for some men.

Pendleton town hall to consider a poster calling for volunteers for 'Bantam Battalions: men under 5ft two inches tall for the Manchester's and the Royal Lancaster Regiment. And there a strange thing happened; Jim was accepted, got his shilling and rail warrant and I was failed— 'too small: said the MO.

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<sup>52</sup> P. Simkins, "Each One a Pocket Hercules" The Bantam Experiment and the Case of the Thirty-Fifth Division' in S. Marble, *Scraping the Barrel: The Military Use of Sub-Standard Manpower: The Military 1860-1960* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), pp.80-1.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, pp.91-2.

‘You’d never be able to carry full marching order lad’. I was devastated, humiliated. Homecoming was a gloomy, painful experience.<sup>55</sup>

Brady did not want to join the Bantams, he wanted to be a ‘proper soldier’. This fear of failing to meet the ideal required physical standards even resulted in some men trying to modify or enhance their bodies ahead of the enlistment examination. Private Shaw recalled his anxieties and his plan.

I had misgivings that I could not pass the physical test of (I think) 35 inches’ chest measured as, although about 5-7 in height, I was very thinly built- yet tough and wiry. So, unbeknown to my family, I purchased a ‘chest expander’ and ‘dumb bells’ and in convenient times slipped up to my bedroom for exercises, especially deep breathing.<sup>56</sup>

Despite his efforts, Shaw was rejected twice for his chest size and weight until finally being accepted into the 25<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers as a Frontiers Man on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 1915, weighing 8 stone.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> IWM, 17024, Private Papers of J. Brady, p.40. Source is presented exactly as is written within the Private Papers of J. Brady.

<sup>56</sup> IWM, 17426, Private Papers of C. Shaw, p.1.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

Age was a decisive factor in the enlistment process. At the beginning of the First World War the limits for a British Army recruit were 19 and 35, the latter being an increase of five years from peacetime requirements. In *Boy Soldiers*, van Emden examines the under-aged men serving in the army during the First World War and argues that the patriotic excitement encouraged many young men to risk prosecution and lie about their age to gain entry into the military.<sup>58</sup> Not all were successful, although it seems that a harsh word was more common than prosecution upon being found out. Private Mullis was declined initially because he was only 18 and seems to have appeared younger to others.

I set off for the headquarters of the local territorial battalion, the 20<sup>th</sup> London Regiment, on Blackheath. Entering nervously, I found myself in a large room where were dozens of men in various states of nudity awaiting their medical examination. I was approached by a large red-faced man in uniform. "what do you want?" he demanded. Timidly I said that I had come to join up. "get out' he roared. "we don't want boys of 12 in here." My first attempt to join the army thus ended ignominiously. I was just one month past my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. There followed several unsuccessful attempts to join the Forces until I registered under a Registration Scheme to relieve the pressure on the Recruiting offices and on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1915 I was invited to report to the Town Hall at Deptford.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> R. van Emden, *Boy Soldiers of the Great War Kindle Edition* (London: Headline, 2005).

<sup>59</sup> IWM, 8013, Private Papers of F. Mulliss, p.1.

Private Brady recounted being refused twice for being underage. His second attempt was just as unpleasant.

Reception at the recruiting officer was, to say the least disturbing. 'ook, bawled a crimson-faced sergeant with the cap-badge of the Cheshire in his hat and a row of medals on his pigeon- chest. 'Why don't you two lads bugger off home and tell your mother to change your nappies?' Why indeed it was quite obvious we were not being viewed by outsiders as we saw ourselves, as Rabbe Burns would have said. Jim and I didn't argue.<sup>60</sup>

Brady's rejection illustrates the conflicting ways in which he and the recruiting sergeant viewed his body. Brady considered himself a potential soldier worthy of service, whereas the sergeant viewed him as a child, physically unsuitable for war. Brady's humiliation clarifies the underlying perception that was commonly held of soldiers as 'men' and rejects as 'boys'.

Belfast born David Starrett recalled being declined at first glance for being under-age as he attempted to join the Ulster Volunteer Force in August 1914.

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<sup>60</sup> IWM, 17024, Private Papers of J. Brady, p.40. Source is presented exactly as is written within the Private Papers of J. Brady.



Down I went with the boys, to stand outside all day long. At long last it came my turn to go in, and I got short shrift. 'Well boy, what is your age?' 'sixteen years, sir', "under age, son: next please." I could hardly believe I was turned down, but I tried again some days later, with the same fate. Determined to get into the army by hook or by crook I hung round that recruiting office all hours. On the 11th of September, I spotted a change of staff within, so had another go. I was expecting to hear 'get out son, and come back later, 'when the new officer looked me up and down, but instead he says: 'name?' "David Starrett, sir' "age?" "Nineteen years, Sir." My! I had the face of brass. And it worked. He reached me a paper. "doctor" he said, and away I went to the other room. 'Take your clothes off, boy" said the doctor. When I was stripped, he caught hold of me in the way old soldiers know. "cough" he says. I coughed like the shipyard knock of siren. "enough" he said, "orderly, pass this man A.I." So, inside an hour I was a soldier and got a railway voucher and orders to proceed to Donard [sic] Camp.<sup>61</sup>

This account shows that the process was not always smooth-running or effective. On the standard enlistment form it stated 'apparent age' which implies an element of leniency for the recruiting staff. However, recruits were actually supposed to provide evidence of their age. Accounts such as Starrett's illustrate how proof of age could be overlooked as recruiting officials often judged men on their appearance

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<sup>61</sup> IWM, 6659, Private Papers of D. Starrett, p.1.

rather than demanding proof. This initial assessment also prevented some recruits from enlisting. Silbey has argued that during the process of medical assessment, officials and the potential recruits cooperated and collaborated to assist men to pass through to the next stage.<sup>62</sup> For example, men were supposed to provide evidence for their proof of age but Private Calverley used this to negotiate his way his way into the army despite being too young:

I got away with my height measurement by cheating a little and the question of my birth certificate arose. I told the officer it had been lost, and though I do not think that he believed me he appeared to do so outwardly and I was accepted.<sup>63</sup>

Private Styles recalled an argument between two medical officers over his suitability.

But the last week in October (1914) I cycled again to Colchester to try for the Essex yeomanry, I knew they wanted men. They had an office in St Isaacs, from there I was sent to the town hall for medical, had to strip in front of an army doctor, he examined me well & while stripped he made me sit in a chair. He said what have you been doing this morning? I said 'only cycled here from Coggeshall.' Another doctor came in and he wanted his lunch and he asked what was the trouble? When the first doctor said '20&20', of course, I didn't

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<sup>62</sup> Silbey, pp.61-76.

<sup>63</sup> IWM, 12369, Private Papers of G. Calverley, p.3.

understand, he said 'oh he'll do' so my papers were signed A.1. Sometime later I had trouble when examined. So twice passed fit, I reported to yeomanry officer again where I was sworn in and the shilling given to me, this was Nov. 8.<sup>64</sup>

This sentiment of 'he'll do' was not uncommon. Private Butler recalled in his memoirs that he passed the medical in 1915 despite being half an inch short of the height requirement. He recounted '...the RQM said, "You're young, probably you'll grow the other half inch. Anyway, we'll take you on."' <sup>65</sup> Private Mullis' experience was similar as he too was accepted, albeit reluctantly, on the basis that his training would likely improve his physicality.

Here another little comedy was enacted as the two officials sought to appease their consciences as they devised a scheme to pass me: anyway, I was measured and medically examined, the doctor reluctantly passing me with the encouraging remark that 'it will either kill you or make a man out of you'<sup>66</sup>

Private Buffey was also told during his enlistment that his training would improve his body, 'Both my pal and myself passed with flying colours and as a pat on the back

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<sup>64</sup> IWM, 11417, Private Papers of Private E. S. Styles, p.1

<sup>65</sup> IWM, 1878, Private Papers of S. E. Butler, p.31.

<sup>66</sup> Mullis, p.1.

the MO said that within a few weeks of gym and square drill we would become perfect gladiators.<sup>67</sup> This seems not to have been uncommon as Joanna Bourke has shown that during the First World War the National Service Medical Boards frequently passed unfit men on the basis that training would improve their deficiencies.<sup>68</sup>

Clearly, some assessors during enlistment believed that physical inadequacies would be ironed out by military training. Men's bodies during enlistment were therefore not only viewed in their current state but also assessed for their potential for improvement; as sites upon which the British Army could create soldiers. Despite this faith in military drill and training for enabling men to overcome physical limitations, Simkins explains that the War Office and Army Council were criticised in the early stages of the war as men passed as grade A were being discharged from training for physical unsuitability.<sup>69</sup> An internal war memo from September 1915 claimed that 245,457 men were discharged after enlistment because they were not coping with the physical hardship of training. Silbey notes that haphazard medical assessments during the early stages of the war were blamed and that around 60% of those men deemed unfit were subsequently relocated to critical war industries.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Buffey, p.5.

<sup>68</sup> Bourke, p.174.

<sup>69</sup> Simkins, *Kitchener's Army*, loc, 2051.

<sup>70</sup> D. Silbey, *The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War, 1914 – 1916* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2004), p.32.

This led to a tightening of physical assessment protocols and continual questions over the practice of mass enlistment and assessment. Another issue was the reward system in place which paid recruiting staff for acceptance of suitable men into service. Initially, both the sergeant and the civilian medical officer received a 'capitation fee' of two shillings and sixpence for each man that cleared the recruitment process. After complaints rose that unsuitable men were being certified as fit this financial reward system steadily decreased. By 1916 recruiting staff were paid only one shilling for a successful applicant and medical officers were restricted to assessing only forty men a day.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the room for negotiation in the system, the incentives for assessors to wave them into service, and the determination of individuals to do so, many men still failed to gain entry into the army for a variety of reasons. Within his memoirs, Lieutenant Palmer explained that he had a hernia and poor eyesight yet he presented well physically and his determination to enlist resulted in 27 attempts before eventually being accepted into the RAMC.

Each time I had tried to enlist and I stood on the scales prior to going before the doctor for medical examination; the soldier or civilian weighing me, took a look as I stood on the scales and invariably said that I was a fine-looking chap and the army need men of my physique; it was all very set to me but

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<sup>71</sup> van Emden, *Boy Soldiers*, p.43.

after this had happened several times it got a bit boring because I guessed what the doctor would do with me. I am some six feet in height and then weighed about 12, ½ stones and I had a chest expansion of thirty-four inches. I was a fair athlete and had played many games with success and I consequently took a poor view of being rejected each time I tried to enlist; I certainly did not look the part of an unfit man and so I worked on the principle of if at first you don't succeed, try, try and try again.<sup>72</sup>

Palmer's experience shows how the assessment was not always limited to men's physical presentation. On paper, his height, weight, and chest all met requirement but his existing medical conditions and eyesight were enough to block his enlistment. Palmer clearly felt that his body was able and certainly looked the part and took rejection badly when his hidden shortcomings were identified. R. McKay was also rejected but in his case, it was his lack of teeth that counted against him.

Soon after the outbreak of war, early in September, I presented myself at the recruiting office, Brunswick street, Dublin, intending to join the [Royal] Inniskilling Fusiliers. Here I had an interview, first with a sergeant and was then passed on to a medical officer. The latter was a dapper little man, and evidently an old regular. After a cursory glance into my mouth, he told me I

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<sup>72</sup> Palmer, p.10.

wouldn't do as I had bad teeth. As a matter of fact, I had no bad teeth as all these had been removed before I entered college.<sup>73</sup>

Since the introduction of the 1890 General Regulations it had been a requirement that all recruits had acceptable teeth to join the British Army. Andrew Robertshaw explains that strong teeth were essential because a large part of a soldier's emergency rations contained the practically inedible hard tack, which men with poor teeth would be unable to eat.<sup>74</sup> The British Army also had very little provision for dentistry up until the First World War. During the Last South African War over 5000 men had been rejected for having poor dental health.<sup>75</sup> In 1915, the regulations changed to allow men into the army if the cost to improve the man's teeth came to no more than £3.<sup>76</sup> On the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1916 teeth and exclusion for service was raised as an issue in parliament by the Member of Parliament for Wednesbury who was reassured by the Under Secretary for War that very few men were being refused for poor teeth.

Mr. NORTON-GRIFFITHS: I beg to ask the Under-Secretary of State for War if he is aware of the large number of men who have failed to pass the medical examination on account of bad teeth, although fit in every other respect, and

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<sup>73</sup> IWM, 22065, Private Papers of R. McKay, p.1.

<sup>74</sup> A. Robertshaw, *Feeding Tommy: Battlefield Recipes from the First World War* (London: The History Press, 2013).

<sup>75</sup> P. C. Kochhar, *History of the Army Dental Corps and Military Dentistry* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 2000), p.36.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

whether he can take some steps to arrange for these men to be looked at by a proper qualified dental surgeon, so that in cases where the defects are slight and can be easily remedied good men may not be precluded from joining the Colours?

Mr. TENNANT: Instructions have already been issued to all medical examiners of recruits that no man who is organically sound is to be refused on account of bad teeth unless his appearance leads the medical officer to believe that the loss of teeth is a distinct cause of the man's malnutrition. Many highly-qualified dental surgeons and well-known dental institutes throughout the country are in communication with our recruiting officers and are patriotically giving their services for the free treatment of intending recruits whose acceptance for the army can be assured provided their dental defects are first remedied.<sup>77</sup>

This discussion in Parliament reiterates that over the course of the First World War physical standards for military service were continually under scrutiny and subject to flux. At the beginning of the war, unsatisfactory teeth were enough to restrict a man from service. By 1916, the increasing demand for soldiers meant that standards were altered. Lieutenant Creek recalled that his teeth were also identified as a weakness and that at enlistment he was told that they would require dental work.

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<sup>77</sup> HC Debate, 26 August 1914, vol 66 cc38-9 39.



He was an elderly kindly man but he had a job to do and no time to spare so the stethoscope was soon on the back and chest, the limbs were tapped and pulled, the eyes and ears tested, the teeth examined and the medical sergeant – who was writing it all down on a form was told A1, will need attention to some teeth.<sup>78</sup>

Yet, Creek recounted in his memoirs that he did not actually undergo his treatment and was instead immediately dispatched to his training camp.<sup>79</sup> His experience suggests that the enlistment process often seemed very distant once the soldier entered active duty.

Of course, the majority of men easily passed their enlistment assessment and were marked fit and ready to begin their military career. Private Williams, of the 7<sup>th</sup> East Yorkshire Regiment, barely mentions his enlistment experience in his oral history interview saying only ‘...all four of us passed’ before he moved on to describe in detail his experiences in training.<sup>80</sup> Private Warsop also expressed no difficulties as he joined the ‘Robin Hoods’ (7<sup>th</sup> reserve Battalion). Instead, he claimed in his memoirs that entry was easy as the assessment was lax because of the desperation for men ‘I went to enlist on march 15th, my twentieth birthday and they passed as fit anyone

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<sup>78</sup> Creek, p.27.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> IWM, 11804, Private Papers of C. W. Williams, p.1.

who could walk up to the office.’<sup>81</sup> For men such as Warsop and Williams, enlistment was a straightforward affair; simply a footnote at the beginning of their military career.

## Conclusion

I was called first as I went in I met a dejected or rather a rejected chap coming out and believe it or not, he had tears in his eyes as he passed me and he furtively whispered to me, saying “Gosh! He's keen, he's failed me. Says I have got fallen arches.” Perhaps in later circumstances, his poor feet were a godsend to him and kept him out of the wr [sic].<sup>82</sup>

This chapter has explored the place of the body in the recruitment and enlistment process during the First World War. Its conclusions help to make sense of the episode above contained in the papers of Private Buffey. In the early stages of the First World War the body was central to the strategies by the government and military authorities to encourage enlistment. The promise of food and lodging was an attractive one to many who, at this time, did not often enjoy the comforts of regular food, a varied diet, and a decent bunk. But recruitment strategies were more complex than that as visual and written propaganda squarely linked the ideal of British manhood to uniformed service in the conflict. To pass the examination and

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<sup>81</sup> IWM, 1876, Private Papers of A. C. Warsop, p.1.

<sup>82</sup> Buffey, p. 5.

to enter the armed forces was an endorsement of an individual's masculinity. It is clear from the account above that to fail it could be an intense experience as rejection carried with it the message that an individual's body did not meet the ideal and could not therefore be considered masculine or patriotic. Rejection also risked association with those who were seeking to avoid service or who were conscientious-objectors. The evidence suggests that those in wider society were keen to, or were actively encouraged to, endorse these assessments. The instances where women doled out white feathers stand at the extreme end of the ways in which society policed those not in uniform but it does point to the complex reasons men rushed to enlist. It also explains the remarkable persistence of many who remained determined to do so despite repeated rejections, and the decisions of those who adjusted and enhanced their bodies in advance of the medical examinations.

Of course, the chapter has also shown that between 1914-1918 the precise nature of the ideal military body changed. The rush to serve in 1914 meant that the authorities could set high standards and insist upon them in those they admitted to the ranks. But as the demand for troops continued, alterations were made to the height, age and physical ability requirements for enlistment so that those initially considered 'unfit' could suddenly find themselves meeting the ideal despite very little effort on their part. If the ideal British body was in fact a concept that the authorities shifted and redefined as the conflict went on it is clear that it was often

also unstable because of the room for negotiation and collusion in the enlistment process itself. The 'he'll do' outcome of the medical examination mentioned above points to the room within the procedures for local decisions and where strict requirements could be ignored or manipulated. Many found out that the ideal British military body over the course of the First World War was a malleable concept. For those who were successful at navigating the enlistment process this was the point where their body first fell under the control of the British Army. The next chapter looks at what happened next as each man was dispatched for training.

## Chapter Two

### Forging Bodies: Training and Creating Soldiers

#### **Introduction**

After successful enlistment recruits began their army training at one of the numerous training camps throughout the United Kingdom and overseas. The New Armies assembled in 1914 consisted of over 500 battalions, including reserve forces.<sup>1</sup> Their training regime extended over a six-month period and was focused upon army staples such as drill, parade and basic combat. After three months' men would progress to the development of specialist skills such as bombardiers, machine gunners or scouts.<sup>2</sup> But this regime began to change as the war continued. Conscription began in 1916 and after this the training process became more erratic so that some men trained for over five months while others were in preparation for less than three. Nevertheless, they still covered the same basic training regime as their volunteer counterparts.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brigadier E. A. James, *British Regiments 1914-1918 Digital Edition* (East Sussex: Naval and Military Press Ltd, 2012), Appendix II to Part II.

<sup>2</sup> P. Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies 1914-1916, Electronic Edition* (Barnsley: Manchester University Press, 2007), loc, 8180.

<sup>3</sup> I. R. Bet-El, *Conscripts, Lost Legions of the Great War* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1999), p.41.

Within the *Special & Supplementary Tables for Physical Training*, a pamphlet distributed and widely used as part of basic training by the British Army in 1916, the foundation for training was defined:

To sum up, Physical Training should be regarded as the foundation of all training, for the benefits derived from it are: -

- a. Strengthening of the Body = Power to overcome obstacles and perform arduous duties.
- b. Improvement and maintenance of health = Endurance of hardships and privations.
- c. Quickening of the Brain = More rapid assimilation of instruction in other training, orders readily understood and rapidly executed.
- d. Increase of Power of Mental Concentration = The Foundation of Good Shooting.<sup>4</sup>

According to this outline, training was designed to prepare and improve men's bodies for service and through this to also control and sharpen their minds for warfare. Bodies were at the centre of the British Army's strategies for producing soldiers from civilians. This chapter examines the experience of men who underwent this process.

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<sup>4</sup> *Special & Supplementary Tables for Physical Training*, 1916, located within A Curling, *Fighting Fit, 1914* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2014), p.68.

## Locating the Recruit's Body

Between 1908 and 1914 the annual intake for British Army regulars averaged around 29,626 recruits per year.<sup>5</sup> From the start of war in July to the end of September 1914 761,000 men had joined up. There was only limited space to accommodate them and the military authorities soon attracted widespread criticism as men were forced to live in tents, overcrowded barracks and even commute from home or private accommodation.<sup>6</sup> Private Milner recounted how men were forced to adapt to a lack of physical comforts as they were billeted together for training.

Our quarters were the huts, in long lines, each sleeping about thirty men. I suppose they were about thirty feet by eighteen, with a door at each end. On one end, there was a row of trestle tables and up each side were our beds consisting of three boards 6 x9 each and two trestles about six inches high with a paillasse filled with straw; we used our kitbag for a pillow. There was no official concern for creature comforts – the only thing that seemed to matter was to maintain a man in health and strength and train him to be proficient with a number of weapons.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> P. Simkins, 'The Four Armies 1914-1918' in D. Chandler and I. Beckett, *The Oxford History of the British Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.236.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> IWM, 20761, Private Papers of H. Milner, pp.4-6.

In his letters to his daughters, Private Parks in 1917 humorously described his morning routine.

The trumpet call awakes us in the morning at 6 o'clock...when you open your eyes you see some very funny sights – right opposite me this morning the first thing I noticed was a big ugly dirt & stained pair of feet projecting from a very small bed. Most of our men are very tall & when they pull their dirty blanket round their shoulders they expose their feet. ... then you will see another man sitting up in bed half scratching his head & some of them scratching their --- well never mind what.<sup>8</sup>

For both Parks and Milner, the introduction to military life was a very physical experience. Exposure, intimacy, itchiness and the bodies of others, together with physical discomfort feature in their recollections as does the inconsistency of standard-sized beds and blankets with the actual physical specimens they were meant for. Scratched genitals and dirty feet were the least of Lieutenant Minnitt's concerns. His response to a first night in barracks was similarly described in bodily terms.

The first night in the overcrowded barracks was horrible. Huge 12-gallon buckets were placed at intervals down the centre of the building, and drunks

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<sup>8</sup> IWM, 14165, Private Papers of T. Parks, Letter to Wife and Children (13/06/17). Source is presented exactly as is written within the Private Papers of T. Parks.



were coming in at all hours of the night. Fellows who wanted to use the latrines were constantly falling over sleeping figures, the lights all being out, and the language and the resulting mess was enough to put any decent fellow against the army forever.<sup>9</sup>

Minnitt, Milner and Parks may have been more fortunate than many as in the earliest stages of the war some recruits did not even have a bed. Private Rickett complained in his diary that he spent his early training days sleeping on a hard floor. He wrote, 'I went into billets, if you could call them as much. It was in a hotel in some empty rooms where we had to sleep on the floor with only to [sic] blankets to sleep on...'<sup>10</sup> Experiences varied considerably, as some recruits were billeted outside of the army training camps either at home or given an allowance to find alternative lodgings. G. Cotton was a new recruit into the Army Pay Corps (APC) in October 1914 and his early experiences sounded significantly more comfortably.

There was no room in the Red Barracks at Woolwich for APC men and we were therefore given a billeting allowance and told to find lodgings. Our first night, after a supper of sausage and mash at the soldier's home was spent in a small hotel but we found a private house billet the next day in Marion Street.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> IWM, 17631, Private Papers of Lieutenant B. A. Minnitt MC, p.4.

<sup>10</sup> IWM, 2797, Private Papers of C. G. Rickett, p.5.

<sup>11</sup> IWM, 14729, Private Papers of Lieutenant G. Cotton, p.4.

Private Jones recounted in his memoirs how he and his friend were instructed to sleep outside in for a couple of nights until the billeting situation had been resolved.<sup>12</sup> Luckily, they bonded with the guard officers, so were instead offered to bunk down with them with a mattress on the floor until they could be transferred to another regiment. It was argued in the previous chapter that the provision of lodgings was a key enlistment promise so it is clear that many did not immediately experience the comforts that might have been anticipated.

Responses to accommodation could be more complex however. Lieutenant North's poetic description of his discomfort suggests he saw it as a hardship to be heroically endured, and that the physical intimacy with others was a source of strength.

The odour of tobacco permeated the air and it was a strong sight to see the smoke spiralling up in the dark barrack room like the 'will- o – the –wisp- ...leading we know not where. In spite of the rough nature of our beds, we let our spirits soar above our discomforts.<sup>13</sup>

Private Herbert Smith's change of accommodation was certainly significant to him, as it clearly located his body in a regimental barracks for the first time, which seemed to signal his progress towards full soldier status.

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<sup>12</sup> IWM, 14938, Private Papers of C. E. Jones, p.14.

<sup>13</sup> IWM, 16692, Private Papers of Lieutenant H. L. North, p.6.

As more recruits kept joining up and older ones went to France, we were shifted from the Common to the well-known Welling Barracks. Here we were in barrack-rooms and I can tell you we felt quite proud of ourselves being able to sleep in better surroundings.<sup>14</sup>

The first contact with the realities of military life for those recently enlisted was through relocation, as they found themselves taken away from their usual dwellings and sent to new destinations where they were expected to dress and sleep next to strangers. The recruits seem to have experienced this in multiple ways, as some were shocked by the enforced intimacy, others complained of the discomfort, while some were thrilled by the sense of camaraderie that came from the closeness of others. The above examples, suggest, however, that the body was central to this initial experience of the transition from civilian to soldier.

### **Controlling Appearances**

One morning, I was asked by the sergeant when I shaved last. This was rather embarrassing as I had to tell him I had not started to shave yet. I only had soft hair on my face but I got the order to 'get a shave'. Hence my first attempt with a cut-throat razor.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> IWM, 1700, Private Papers of H. G. Smith, p.1.

<sup>15</sup> R. van Emden, *Boy Soldiers of the Great War Kindle Edition* (London: Headline, 2005), pp.59-60.

This extract from the recollections of an unnamed 15-year volunteer points to the ways in which the military hierarchy immediately took control of the appearance of the body. There may have been no real need for the young man to shave as he had no whiskers to remove but the act of shaving was imposed upon him. Command No. 1,695 of the official regulations stated that the 'the hair of the head will be kept short. The chin and the under-lip will be shaved, but not the upper lip...'<sup>16</sup> It was also an effective way during training to enforce uniformity through appearance which emphasised how far an individual's hair was now subject to military discipline. As Jessica Meyer has stated 'standardising practices like washing and grooming presented bodies under control.'<sup>17</sup> It is also worth noting that what had often been a private act for men in civilian life became something more of a public spectacle because of shared accommodation.

Geordie was the most awkward man I had ever seen shaving. He shaved without a glass and kept walking up and down the hut the whole time he was at it. Furthermore, he held the cut-throat razor with both hands. I was always intrigued watching him, but despite his awkwardness, I never saw him

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<sup>16</sup> HMSO, *The King's Regulations and Orders for The Army 1912: Official Copy: Re-printed with Amendments published in Army Orders up to 1st August, 1914* (London: HMSO, 1914), p.325.

<sup>17</sup> J. Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and First World War in Britain* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.72.

cut himself. Frequently, I had to strop his razor, as at this time I possessed a pig skin belt which served as a strop.<sup>18</sup>

For Private McKay, communal shaving was a source of amusement, but his account shows just how far meeting military requirements ensured that facial hair was no longer a private affair.

The demand for physical uniformity was not limited to shaving but also extended to hairstyles.<sup>19</sup> For Private Buffey a particularly arduous moment of his new life as a soldier was his haircut.

The inevitable hair cut was our next ordeal, but it was going to be no ordeal to me. An old seat had put me wise and told me that if I didn't want a prison cut I was to drop the Napy twopence [sic]. Gosh, what a shock I got when I viewed the hairdresser's handiwork through the mirror. I was nearly bald. I could understand how Samson felt after Delilah had shorn him.<sup>20</sup>

If Buffey had made an attempt to resist the will of the military authorities through bribery then clearly it had failed, as he ended with a regulation hairstyle regardless.

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<sup>18</sup> IWM, 22065, Private Papers of R. McKay, p.11.

<sup>19</sup> On the frontline short hair was also essential for sanitary purposes such as restricting the spread of lice, see Chapter Three for more details on the hygiene related reasons for shaving and haircuts.

<sup>20</sup> IWM, 7104, Private Papers of E. Buffey, p.6. From this quote, Buffey seems to imply that it was possible to bribe the hairdresser by paying him 'Twopence'.

Private Copson was also upset that the army could control his physical appearance after he was conscripted in 1917. He bitterly referred to his new hairstyle as a 'prison crop'.<sup>21</sup> The accounts of Buffey and Copson illustrate how the army immediately restricted their autonomy and changed the appearance of their faces to meet the expectations of the British Army during training, and how this process could be resented.

Jayne Tynan argues that many men only felt like soldiers once they were in uniform and that it was central to establishing the masculine identity of the soldier.<sup>22</sup> It was certainly the case that Second Lieutenant Carter, of the Kitchener Army 7<sup>th</sup> Hull battalion, only felt the part once his kit had been issued despite having been through drill and paid beforehand.

Twenty-four hours after enlisting, I was on parade with other recruits, all in civilian clothes, wearing an armband and carrying a rifle. In those days, everyone wore a hat of some kind. Some had caps, some trilbies, and some bowlers. Some wore macs and everyone was wearing a collar and tie. Our instructor was a restored regular sergeant and if he shouted "Form fours" once he shouted it and all the other elementary movements a thousand times. The next day we were paid. I got three shillings for three days. Early

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<sup>21</sup> IWM, 2614, Private Papers of P. G. Copson, Diary Entry 8/3/1917.

<sup>22</sup> J. Tynan *Men in Khaki, British Army Uniform and the First World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013) see also G. Dawson, *Soldiers Heroes, British Adventure, Empire and the Imaging of Masculinities* (New York, Routledge, 2005).

in November, we were equipped with uniform and greatcoats. We were real soldiers and all class distinctions were gone forever.<sup>23</sup>

Carter was one of many men who began their existence as a soldier without a uniform, namely because the British Army was unprepared to equip so many new recruits. For some this was a frustrating start to their training as they had to drill without full kit. To meet the demand, often spare uniform was taken from regulars for new recruits. Regular soldier Keller recalled in his memoirs having his kit taken despite having paid for it out of his own pocket.

We were barely out of the country when our kit bags were ransacked looking for any uniforms that were in them to outfit the new recruits. This was alright, as it happened they would not have been any good to those that did come back even though we had paid for them ourselves.<sup>24</sup>

Keller's account shows that the military clearly felt it important to get new recruits into uniforms as quickly as possible, even if this meant that those already in the ranks had to go without. This also indicates to what extent it was initially more important to clothe the men rather than to tailor the uniform to the recipient. For the British

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<sup>23</sup> IWM, 7988, Private Papers of 2nd Lieutenant C. Carter, *Army Life as it really was 1914-1919*, Unpublished Memoirs, p.2.

<sup>24</sup> IWM, 11876, Private Papers of C. R. Keller, pp.8-9.

Army, the pressures of the war meant often that “one size fits all” as comfort and even practicality gave way to uniformity and time constraints.

Not at all pleased to in uniform once it had been issued Private Milner’s commented, ‘A very awkward squad we must have looked in our new and ill-fitting uniform.’<sup>25</sup>

Private Barraclough regarded his uniform as problematic, particularly disliking his ‘dreadful puttees’.<sup>26</sup> The puttee was a long strip of bandage which was useful for keeping out water to the lower legs. Private Clark with the Hampshire regiment recalled how his uncomfortable footwear actually damaged his body at first when he explained, ‘ee went up to Winchester first and had our hair cut off and got these great big boots that, after wearing light shoes, your feet used to get right sore when you were on marches.’<sup>27</sup>

Private Buffey found his uniform very confusing. He recalled that

‘We were truly flabbergasted by the amount of kit we drew. There was so much that I, who only had but one suit in civy [sic] street, thought I shall never get around to wearing it all but eventually I did’<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Milner, p.4.

<sup>26</sup> IWM, 3453, Private Papers of E. C. Barraclough, p.7.

<sup>27</sup> IWM SA, 577, W. E. Clarke, reel 2.

<sup>28</sup> Buffey, p.6.



Buffey's comments also suggest that when compared with civilian life, service in the armed forces did give some men greater access to clothing.

Not that all men received a khaki uniform when they first enlisted as a temporary blue Kitchener uniform was initially introduced to clothe the large numbers of volunteers who enlisted in 1914. Richard van Emden explained that prior to the war Khaki dye had been imported from Germany so it took time for the British to synthesise a replacement.<sup>29</sup> Such was the concern to get men into a uniform quickly however that one was improvised with whatever was more readily available in the UK, which turned out to be a blue dye. In September 1914, Private Donald Murray began training with the 8th Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. He recalled the moment the men had their civilian clothes exchanged for Kitchener blues.

You have never seen Kitchener's uniforms, you should have seen it. It was blue serge, with blue borne [sic] buttons down the front, for all the world like a convict and we were all on parade in our rags one day and the colonel was on his horse in front and he says, 'fall out all the men with bad clothes' and I thought I'm stopping where I am because I want to see what it looks like', so a lot of them fell out and when they came back and we just rolled about laughing. They looked for all the world like a lot of convicts rolling out to do their day's stint you know. However, eventually we had to have one of these

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<sup>29</sup> R. van Emden and S. Humphries, *All Quiet on the Home Front* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2002), p.79.

uniforms, but to make them all look a little better, they issued us all with brass buttons, we could sew them on ourselves, soldier's buttons you know and a little pink cap with one side with little buttons on and that started our training.<sup>30</sup>

Murray compared his uniform to that of a convict twice. His account illustrates the importance for many men during the early stages of training of presenting themselves as 'soldier like' as possible, but also the eagerness of men to have uniforms that made them feel like soldiers. Appearance was clearly important to all involved, to the extent that 'soldier's buttons' were felt necessary as the brass looked more military.

Private Johnston also detested his prisoner-like uniform. When he joined in September 1914, he became attached to the 21st division during his training and complained bitterly about the lack of equipment available.

The majority of us had a uniform, the hated blue convict-style garb provided temporarily until complete khaki was forthcoming. The Battalion presented a rather motley appearance on parade. Apart from the uniforms, there were only 200 or so rifles between us, the rest having pieces of wood shaped like rifles for drill purposes. Neither the clothing nor munition factories could

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<sup>30</sup> IWM SA, 25548, D. Murray, reel 2.

keep pace with the rush of volunteers so that all our equipment was of a most elementary kind.<sup>31</sup>

The association between Kitchener blues and an image of a prisoner rather than patriotic hero indicates just how important uniform often was to the men who had enlisted. Many had been sold on the idea of khaki of as the colour of the national hero, and to find themselves clothed in a way that made them look quite the opposite, as criminals and convicts, caused much initial resentment. However, it is important to note that not all were this sensitive. Private Smith wrote that his blue uniform made him 'feel like a soldier' and Private Whitehouse recalled that 'It was essential to be fully dressed in full blue uniform, complete with gloves and whip wearing spurs before leaving barracks. I was very proud of my uniform in those early days.'<sup>32</sup> Their enthusiasm to be re-clothed in martial dress, regardless of the colour, showed how fundamental was the body's appearance in the process of transition from civilian to soldier for both the men and the military authorities.

### **Food and Feeding**

Efforts were made to reform the British Army in the wake of the South African Wars of the turn of the century, particularly between 1905 and 1912 under the Secretary of State Richard Burdon Haldane. While Haldane's reforms mostly focused on an

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<sup>31</sup> IWM, 12383, Private Papers of J. A. Johnston, p.4.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, p.1. and IWM, 13108, Private Papers of P. Whitehouse, p.4.

overhaul of the army structure, much was done to look at the life of the soldier, and this included his diet and food.<sup>33</sup> In 1909 the Committee On Physiological Effects Of Food, Training, And Clothing on The Soldier published its third report in the Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps (JRAMC).<sup>34</sup> This report concluded that food was ‘absolutely necessary for the maintenance of health and vigour, and for the supply of energy during the performance of muscular work.’<sup>35</sup> The report focused heavily on the amount of calories required to enable men to meet the physical constraints of soldiering, both in training and under combat. The report also concluded that weak men were ineffectual soldiers.

The starving body reduces waste by reducing muscular work to a minimum, and a starving man is consequently incapable of any hard-muscular work, even though his body still retains a considerable reserve of energy-producing material in the form of fat. To cut down the food supply of an army is thus a fatal form of economy. It renders an army wholly inefficient as a fighting machine besides hampering it by excessive losses by disease, and the necessity of providing for enormous numbers of sick men.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> R. Duffett, ‘A War Unimagined: Food and the Rank and File Soldier of the First World War: in J. Meyer (ed.) *British Popular Culture and the First World War* (London: Brill, 2008), p.50.

<sup>34</sup> Anon, *Third Report of The Committee on Physiological Effects of Food, Training, and Clothing on The Soldier*, JRAMC, (1909), pp.669-681.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p.669.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.672.

The report concluded that diets must be varied and rich in energy-providing foods such as meat and vegetables. Attention was also given to the importance of fresh meat, as issues with tinned food and high-fat contents were highlighted.<sup>37</sup> Alfred Keogh, twice Director General of the Army Medical Services, described the work of the committee as crucial in the creation of the healthy and strong soldier.<sup>38</sup> By 1914 soldiers were supposed to receive 4200 calories per day. This included 1lb 4oz of meat and 1lb 4oz of bread, 3 oz. of sugar, 4 oz. of bacon, 3 oz. of cheese and 8 oz. of vegetables.<sup>39</sup>

Over the course of the war, however, ideas about the ideal military diet shifted. In the 1915 *British Army Manual for Military Cooking and Dietary* it seems that the commitment to providing these measures of food was already wavering. The manual began with model daily menus for cooks to prepare for 100 men at a time. Within the 17 specimen days, the amount of meat offered to each man ranged from around 1lb 4oz of meat to 0.6oz.<sup>40</sup> With the exception of two, all of the menus fell short of the regulated amount of meat. Bacon was often substituted for the lack of meats such as beef, but at most, there was only 2 rashers of bacon offered which still failed to meet the standards outlined by the army. Some foodstuffs increased

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> R. Duffett, *The Stomach for Fighting, Food and Soldiers of The Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p.77.

<sup>40</sup> Great Britain. War Office, *Manual of Military Cooking and Dietary, Mobilisation, 1915* (London, HMSO, 1915), pp.4-37.

such as sugar, which remained consistent at around 0.9 lb per man per menu, and bread, which was noted simply as 'as required' and present in every menu.<sup>41</sup>

As shortages increased and meat allocations continued to fall, it was felt that a justification ought to be provided. Captain Basil Williams put a gloss on this in his 1917 report which was printed for public consumption.

In the first place, the allowance of certain articles of food, especially meat, was found to be excessive. This matter, however, was very soon taken in hand by the quartermaster-general department. The meat ration was reduced, and instruction handbooks for the systematic handling of the soldier's ration were issued to all units of the new armies, which had the effect of improving the soldier's dietary as well as reducing its cost.<sup>42</sup>

If the amount of food provided was one issue, a close second was quality. Bernard Minnitt recalled that supper on his first night in barracks was not to his liking at all.

A few words about that tea, never to be forgotten. The tea was served in a huge hall, on long grease –covered tables, seating some twelve men on benches each side of the table. Having been issued with a plate, cutlery, and

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> B. Williams, *Raising and Training the New Armies – Reprinted* (London: Forgotten Books, 2012), pp.50-51

a large, blue-striped basin, we watched some rather scruffy looking old soldiers (nicknamed ‘Old Sweats’’) come in carrying lard boxes, unwashed, full of inch-thick slices of bread. Going to the head of each table, a grimy hand clutched a handful of bread, which was slung down the table with the remark, ‘Help yourselves, boys.’ This was followed by other men carrying a box each of butter, in balls as big as a cricket ball. These were rolled down the table, and a request made to pass your basins up for the tea. The basins were dipped into the tea and were then passed down the table, dripping tea on route. This so disgusted us, most of whom were used to clean tablecloths, etc. at their homes, that a general complaint ensued. One lad, whose father was an M.P. in Nottingham, was the means by which we got the ‘Old Sweats’ shifted, after which we took turns to serve, scrub the tables, and clean the place.<sup>43</sup>

Private Charles George Templer was also less than impressed. He had begun to build a decent business career after leaving school in 1908 and was fond of sports.<sup>44</sup> He noted in his papers that

It was a strenuous effort especially on an empty stomach; moreover, there were many complaints about the food we were getting – the stew particularly

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<sup>43</sup> IWM, 17631, Private Papers of Lieutenant B. A. Minnitt MC, p.3. Source is presented exactly as is written within the Private Papers of B. A. Minnitt.

<sup>44</sup> IWM, 2617, Private Papers of C. G. Templer, pp.2-3.

contained very rough and fatty meat. It was rumoured that the cooks were flogging the best meat to local tradesmen and this was one of the causes of the trouble.<sup>45</sup>

The evidence suggests that for those in training there was often a discrepancy between the rhetoric of what the soldier's body was supposed to be fed and the reality of the quantity and quality on offer. Private Lenfestey was unhappy not only about the amount and diversity of the food but also what when it was made available to him.

During the winter months at dawn, we did physical training first having a hot cup of tea & biscuit, then parading only with shirt pants, socks, and light shoes. We were shivering before falling in but after cantering round a few jerks we were so warm as Sargt [sic] Busker was in charge & he usually gave us a hot time. Then we had an appetising breakfast followed by gun drill & lectures.<sup>46</sup>

Jonathon Boff explains that Lenfestey's experience was not unusual as training typically began with a only a hot drink followed by parading for an hour and a half to improve fitness before breakfast at eight.<sup>47</sup> There is no immediately apparent

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p.6.

<sup>46</sup> IWM, 7863, Private Papers of E. H. Lenfestey, p.3.

<sup>47</sup> J. Boff, 'Training to be Soldier', *The British Library*, <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/training-to-be-a-soldier> (accessed 05/08/2017).



information within the military training manuals of the period of exactly why men were forced to exercise before breakfast however, it is possible to hypothesise that this was designed to get men used to physical activity with limited availability of food. James Campbell has pointed out that throughout history soldiers had to travel long distances with limited nourishment and a significant bout of exercise after a night time fast could effectively simulate these conditions.<sup>48</sup> Of course, being forced to get up and immediately start to follow commands may also have been useful for both indoctrination and readiness within a combat situation.

It is clear that many recalled the training period as a physical experience because of the hunger endured and sometimes disgust at what was being served up. It is clear that this experience could be so vivid as to force men to resistance. An extreme example of this resistance was alluded to in a suicide case in the middle of the war which was discussed in the House of Commons where it was linked, in part, to food.

Mr. HIGHAM: asked if at Wangford Camp, Suffolk, about a fortnight ago a soldier, a member of the 2/5th West Riding Regiment, committed suicide as a consequence of the treatment to which he had been subjected in that camp; if it is a common occurrence at tea for the men to have only one loaf for twelve men; if men are reported and often punished for the most

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<sup>48</sup> J. D. Campbell, *The Army Isn't All Work: Physical Culture and the Evolution of the British Army, 1860 – 1920* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), pp.140-1.

insignificant and trivial matters; and if they are short of even the most ordinary medical supplies?

Mr. FORSTER: The War Office have no information either that the soldier committed suicide or that if he committed suicide it was due to the reasons stated, but inquiries are being made into all the points included in this question.<sup>49</sup>

Resistance was more commonly brought about simply through discontent in the ranks. Private Stanley Roberts certainly recalled in his memoirs that the state of the food in barracks stoked resentment.

Rations have been very poor. The bread mouldy and scarce. Tea, soup, and coffee cannot be distinguished from each other excepting by the time of the day. The cooks have never cooked before and it almost appears as though they will never cook again. Their sole efforts seem to be concentrated on spoiling whatever rations come within their sphere of operations. Some of the troops are able to purchase food at nearby restaurants, but others are too poor to do so, and have either to live on the swill that is thrown to them or starve. Many prefer the latter course, but obviously, this state of affairs cannot go on indefinitely, so there is grumbling and muttering of threats.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> HC Debate, 03 August 1916, vol 85, cols522-3W.

<sup>50</sup> IWM, 17248, Private Papers of S. Roberts, pp.11-12.

Duffett has argued that responses to the standards of the food varied according to class, as those from better-off backgrounds were used to a higher quality diet in their civilian lives and were therefore more likely to complain.<sup>51</sup> But Roberts above was not accustomed to fine foods as his father had died while he was young and he had several jobs to try support his mother until enlisted in 1914 to serve.<sup>52</sup> His account certainly shows that the army's dietary regime could be resisted in a number of ways, by using resources to source supplies elsewhere for those who could afford to do this, or by voicing grievances for those who could not.

In fact, many went beyond complaints and purchasing replacements to outright confrontation over the issue of food. Private Grindley recalled that a run after only a cup of black coffee caused his company to disobey orders in protest.

One particular captain of the company I was allotted to had his own ideas of how to make the new recruits 'fit for army service'. He got us up at 6 am, gave us a cup of coffee without sugar or milk, and requested us to run around Heaton park lake with him for about half an hour or more. For the first two or three days, it worked probably to the captain's satisfaction very well. But when we found ourselves having to run around one wet morning, I am afraid he was left to go around the lake alone. He found himself leading only the first few in the front. The remainder just fell back and crept quietly to their

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<sup>51</sup> Duffett, pp.84-85.

<sup>52</sup> Roberts, p.2.

huts. We soon had payment for that. After we had been in the usual morning parade we were expecting to be dismissed to go for our cookhouse lunch but were told to go back to the huts and lay out our kit for inspection.<sup>53</sup>

As the cup of coffee is central to his account of the activity that caused this disobedience it seems that feeding was at the heart of the grievance. It should also be noted that food was central to the punishment Grindley and his compatriots received as they were denied their lunch by way of retribution for their disobedience.

Resistance could be more confrontational than simply slipping away from the rear of a run. Lieutenant St. Leger recounted an organised protest that he witnessed in 1915.

For breakfast, we simply received coffee and bread, for dinner a stew and for tea just tea and bread. We did not mind very much, as we thought it must be active service fare, but the second day C Company which is composed almost entirely of Salt River Railway Workers fell in and marched in a body (about half the company) to the officer's quarters to protest. On the way they met the adjutant, who stopped them and asked them where they were going. Their spokesman was insolent, so the adjutant fell in an escort and

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<sup>53</sup> IWM, 15268, Private Papers of E. Grindley, no page numbers.

had him marched off to the guard room. He then told the overawed and completely subdued malcontents what he thought of them, and dismissed them. After that, the food was quite good and there were no more big complaints.<sup>54</sup>

This was not an isolated case. The 'grumbling and muttering of threats' noted by Private Roberts escalated into something more serious.

Mutiny is declared. The majority of the men have not been in the army a month. Morning Parade comes, and no one turns out. Everybody stands firm. Fortunately, or unfortunately, the N.C.O's are not billeted with the troops and this factor is the main reason for the short duration of the mutiny. The N.C.O's are the ones who feel the grievance most and are mainly responsible for the mutiny, but they are not with the troops to advise or lead....One result of the mutiny is apparent within twenty-four hours. The food improves, and we are no longer desired to eat mouldy bread.<sup>55</sup>

The dynamics of these encounters is significant. Hunger and disgust drove men to directly challenge the military hierarchy. They are punished for their insubordination. But that is not the end of the matter as, without overtly

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<sup>54</sup> IWM, 20504, Private Papers of Lieutenant W. B. St. Leger, p.7. Lieutenant Leger's reference to the Salt River Railway Workers refers to a unit made up men from were mainly from Cape Town, South Africa.

<sup>55</sup> Roberts, pp.11-12.

acknowledging that they had done so, the military authorities often addressed the problem of food by seeing to it that improvements were made. Here basic expectations for their own bodies had been at the heart of soldier's resistance as their diet did not match the expectations of those who had joined up. The body was also at the centre of the army's response which made a show of restoring order while quietly responding to the challenge by enhancing the experience of the bodies of those men. Significantly, the troops had demonstrated that they were not powerless victims of their officers but that they could exercise agency to improve their lot.

### **Transforming Civilian Bodies**

The body was at the centre of the initial experiences of life in the military because of the new ways in which it was rested, fed, clothed and groomed but also particularly because of the ways in which it was seized and forced to stand, move and shape itself in an entirely unfamiliar manner. Dennis Winter argues that training was diverse for many men and often dependant on the location where it took place, the desperation of the army to put men into combat, and the specific role within the army the man would undertake.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, broadly speaking basic training typically focused on the same three elements: drilling (marching in unison), parading (similar, but associated with military demonstrations or inspections) and physical improvement (exercises and games that were designed to develop strategic skills

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<sup>56</sup> D. Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Penguin, 1985), p.38.

and strengthen the body).<sup>57</sup> This was designed to ensure that the individual met the physical requirements of soldiering while adapting to military control. After joining up in August 1914, Private Drage outlined in his diary his introduction to basic training:

Aug 16<sup>th</sup>, received clothes and equipment and had cot in barrack room to sleep on. I stayed in barracks until the following Wednesday in the meantime we had a parade at 6 am, 11.15 and 2.15pm each day and we also did two route marches of 8 miles each day with full kit on, it was terribly hot. We were finally approached by the Colonel in command those that were approached were taken to Redam hill camp about 1 mile from the depot, we had to sleep under canvas there on the Saturday we had a route march of about 14 miles. On Sunday, we all had to attend church parade in the morning.<sup>58</sup>

Clearly, Drage was no longer at liberty to decide what he did with his body, as from the moment he arrived at barracks it seems that he was drilled, paraded and marched. Drill was a series of movements in unison with other men in the platoon guided by the commands of an NCO or officer. Private Lycette explained how drill was a staple activity for training soldiers.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, pp.38-39.

<sup>58</sup> IWM, 17674, Private Papers of E. Drage, Diary entry, Aug 16<sup>th</sup>. Source is presented exactly as is written within the Private Papers of E. Drage.

we were formed into platoons and handed over to NCOs who lectured us, telling us “We are in the army now”. We were taught to move in formations and all kinds of drill.<sup>59</sup>

Winter quotes the memoirs of a soldier called Noakes who described his experience in similar terms.

One third of the time for a start was given to drill alone ‘we sloped, ordered, presented, trailed, reversed, piled arms and did everything possible with them except fire them,’ wrote Noakes. “with rifles we marched, counter-marched, wheeled right and left, inclined and formed squads and about turned until we were streaming in sweat and weak in the knees with exhaustion.”<sup>60</sup>

The challenges to the body of this new physical regime featured recurrently in the accounts of the soldiers themselves but it is interesting that the effects of this regime were often noticed over the following weeks as men found their bodies changed and improved. Private Barraclough recalled that

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<sup>59</sup> E. Lycette, *Being an Account by Ernest Lycette of his life as a young man and soldier in the years between 1911 and 1921, Army of occupation – Rhineland, Auxiliary Corps – Ireland* (Levin: R. R. Lycette, 2007), p.13.

<sup>60</sup> Winter, p.39.



What with physical jerks, route marches, bayonet practice, firing, bombing, and drilling, I became much harder both in body and soul and further, I learned to swear with the worst of them.<sup>61</sup>

Private Milner wrote in a similar manner.

The cumulative effect of these conditions and training was to tighten, coarsen and harden us. We were being transferred from Civilians into Fighting Men, and in the infantry this new toughness was, we were to learn, necessary for survival.<sup>62</sup>

Private Williams joined in late 1914, and recalled that 'Easter came in 1915, I was in wonderful health. I was never so well in my life, I'd overcome various little defects, colds and such.'<sup>63</sup> Men became conscious not only of their enhanced bodies and health, but also of their new physical capabilities:

After about eight weeks at Widley, we were transferred to Fort Purbrook, a similar establishment about a mile to the East. Here we were under another lot of instructors and our training was stepped up becoming somewhat harder and we became more skilled in every way. Every day we had what appeared to be a

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<sup>61</sup> Barraclough, pp.1-2

<sup>62</sup> Milner, pp.3-4.

<sup>63</sup> IWM, 11804, Private Papers of C. W. Williams, p.2.

relentless repetition of all conceivable types of training so that we could almost do it in our sleep, we had to be perfect. I could throw a rifle about and go through musketry drill without thinking about it, it was irksome at times but later on I realised how essential it all was. I felt as fit as a fiddle. We were out on the downs before breakfast running all over the place and slept like logs from lights out to 'reveille'.<sup>64</sup>

Private P. Whitehouse placed his body at the centre of his recollections of the period of training, and makes the point that not only did he feel fitter for all the exercise but also felt 'more skilled in every way'. Others similarly took great pride in their new physical skills, and F.B. Wade noted that

I'm getting along famously now with all the details of my training. At the firing-range I am doing well in the practices and hope tomorrow when we commence the actual course to become either a marksman or a first-class shot. In the riding-school, I am in the first 'ride' and fast becoming accustomed to jumping hurdles and ditches with my sword drawn. Today we made a charge with drawn swords: it was very thrilling especially when we actually received the order and galloped off shouting at the tops of our voices. Yesterday we went to a private park nearby (Gilbey's) where we performed movements by troops over rough ground

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<sup>64</sup> IWM, 13108, Private Papers of P. Whitehouse, p.4.

including deep gullies, across country, through growing corn, along hedges, and under trees.<sup>65</sup>

Not all men adapted so well though. In a letter to his daughters in 1916, Private Parks recalled his confusion:

Parade again & then marched up & down sideways backwards and all ways until you get so messed that you do not know which is your "front" or whether you belong to the front rank or the rear rank. & [sic] that is a dreadful crime in the army because they call you all sorts of very nasty names & then make you run over so far as a penalty'.<sup>66</sup>

Similarly, Private Niblett recounted in a letter to his mother how he struggled with the new skills required of him:

I myself have fallen off with sheer fright at the Sergeant Major's voice on one occasion when with sword in hand and arm locked we would charge a supposed enemy. They were large sacks filled with sand swinging on a rope with a black disc in the middle representing the heart of a man. Somehow my spurs touched the side of my mount and he inclined away from the target. I heard galloping hooves and coming up behind me on a white charge the

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<sup>65</sup> IWM, 7976, Private Papers of F. B. Wade, p.26.

<sup>66</sup> IWM, 14165, Private Papers of T. Parks, Letter to his Daughters (13/07/16), p.5.

Sergeant Major, shouting “What are you trying to do, tickle that man to death?”<sup>67</sup>

When this was the case training was often intensified in order to transform bodies. One of the most illustrative examples of this relates to those who were left handed. As an experienced training NCO within the British Army, Sergeant Davidson certainly had a view on this.

The worst man to try and train was a left-handed man, he couldn't use the rifle with his right hand. I just had to try and get him to use his right hand. He was the worst man to train.<sup>68</sup>

Left-handedness was a significant issue for practical reasons. The uniform of the soldier kept small arms such as swords, pistols or batons on the left of the Sam Brown belt which could be easily retrieved by the right hand in a sweeping movement.<sup>69</sup> The design of the primary rifle, the SMLE Mk III, was that it had to be fired with the right hand and had the bolt for reloading on the right side. This was why training forced men to practice carrying the rifle on the left shoulder as it was easier to bring the rifle quickly into a firing position.<sup>70</sup> In *Unwanted Warriors*, Clarke briefly

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<sup>67</sup> IWM, 8408, Private Papers of C. A. Niblett, p.3.

<sup>68</sup> IWM SA, 16058, R. Davidson, reel 1.

<sup>69</sup> Great Britain. War Office, *Field Service Manual, Infantry Battalion* (London: HMSO, 1914), p.13.

<sup>70</sup> Curling, p.86.

mentions how left-handed men were less effective in the field than their right-handed colleagues.

Firing such weapons left-handed could potentially reduce the soldiers' rate of fire and accuracy significantly. Given that the British Army required its troops to be capable of a high rate of aimed fire (fifteen bullets a minute), anything that was likely to prevent a soldier from reaching this rate of fire – including, rightly or wrongly, handedness – was jettisoned.<sup>71</sup>

Clarke concludes that 'recruits were to adapt to the weapon, not the weapon to the recruits.'<sup>72</sup> In the case of the left-handed it is clear that the men were forced to physically change to meet the needs of the military. It is important to note, however, that this was related to attitudes in wider society. Chris McManus has shown that left-handed children were forced to switch hands to write with and that notions of social Darwinism and eugenics considered the left-handed as physically inept.<sup>73</sup> In British society of the early twentieth century, right-handedness was the social norm.

In the First World War, the rigours of drill, marches and parade provided the basis for the early stages of transformation from civilian to soldier. However, this was not the only means through which the British Army sort to improve its recruits. The 1916

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<sup>71</sup> N. Clark, *Unwanted Warriors: The Rejected Warriors of the Canadian Expeditionary Force* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016), pp.88-89.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p.89.

<sup>73</sup> C. McManus, *Right Hand, Left Hand* (Great Britain: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2002), p.219.

British Army instruction pamphlet *Games for use with Physical Training tables and Training in Bombing. 1916* began by explaining the importance of games such as ‘bomb ball’, rugby and ‘maze’ within soldier’s training. The manual stated that: ‘The essence of the following games is that they should be conducted with the utmost amount of energy and the rigid observance of all details connected with them.’<sup>74</sup> The manual went on to explain that the focus on games should not take priority over other forms of training and that such games should be limited to around ten minutes of effort. The primary method of physical improvement for men certainly came from marching or running, however, games were increasingly recognised as an important aspect of this process.

Games and sports provided an esprit de corps and a sense of camaraderie along with encouraging tactical cooperation and strategic teamwork skills which could be employed in a battle situation. French argues that team sports accustomed men to physical risk as a sacrifice for achieving their objective.<sup>75</sup> Mason and Riedi respond, that sport was not directly seen as training for combat as the usefulness of dodging and strafing against shells and machine gun fire was limited.<sup>76</sup> They do argue that as a result of the public school focus upon sport in the latter nineteenth century, that ‘a sportsman [was] already half a soldier’ and that it was widely believed at the time

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<sup>74</sup> Great Britain. War Office, *Games for use with Physical Training tables and Training in Bombing* (London, HMSO, 1916), p.2.

<sup>75</sup> T. Mason and E. Riedi, *Sport and the Military, The British Armed Forces 1880 – 1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.4.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p.89.

that 'the best sportsman [was frequently] the best soldier'.<sup>77</sup> This masculinised association between skill and sport illustrates the role that sport played in the life of an active soldier. The 1918 pamphlet issued by the army titled *Hints on Assault, Physical and Recreational Training* made this case plainly as it instructed that while games were not to replace official training measures they were an important addition.

There is a tendency to replace entirely or almost entirely the Trained Soldiers Table by Games. This should not be done... Games are an invaluable tonic and have a stimulating effect; especially after some of the monotonous forms of training. Instructors should preach everywhere that games should be taken for VERY SHORT periods when troops have become stagnant.<sup>78</sup>

The extent to which games such as football, cricket, and rugby were played differed according to the regiment and its location. Sport could also be influenced by class as officers, tended towards equestrian sports such as polo and hunting.<sup>79</sup> Sport could also unify men through a shared vocabulary and passion while the physical effort not only kept men fit but also taught them strategy and helped unit cohesion.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Great Britain. War Office, *Hints on Assault, Physical and Recreational Training* (France: Army Printing and Stationery Services, 1916), p.15.

<sup>79</sup> Mason and Riedi, p.67.

For the trainees, the number of sports and games on offer were varied. They included official sports such as football, rugby, boxing and cricket and numerous games such as 'jumping the bag', 'maze' and, 'bomb ball'. The majority of these games focused on improving physical strength, fitness, and hand-eye coordination. Jumping the bag focused on agility and anticipation as it consisted of leaping over a bag on a rope that was swung from the centre of a circle. Maze was concerned with problem-solving while simultaneously encouraging men to act on command and turn as a chaser pursued a runner around a man-made maze. Bomb ball is perhaps the best known and was a mix of rugby and football which was useful to teach bomber dexterity and strategy.<sup>80</sup> Mannell argues that football was a popular pastime and that every camp quickly assembled a team with no shortage of men capable of organising a football programme.<sup>81</sup> Private Snailham recalled that having joined the football team he enjoyed an easier life because he was physically talented enough represent the regiment.

I could hold me own because I was in the football team and the Colonel was a sport... the team must be fit to play other regiments, I got away with things because we had to be able to play.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Instructions found in 'Games for Use with Physical Training Tables and raining in Bombing, 1916', collected in S. Bull (ed.) *An Officer's Manual of the Western Front 191- 1918* (London: Conway, 2008), pp.108-111.

<sup>81</sup> J. Mannell, 'The Service Football Program of World War I: Its Impact on the Popularity of the Game', *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 16, No.3 (Winter, 1989), p.253.

<sup>82</sup> IWM SA, 9954, J. Snailham, reel 1.



Private Lycette recounted a similar experience in 1914.

There were plenty of flat fields for use as drill grounds. I used to keep up my training in athletics, running and walking and I was very fit. The Battalion held a sports meeting on the college grounds. I had entered in eight events, and was successful in five, so I became popular as an athlete in the Battalion.<sup>83</sup>

Sport was also good entertainment and recreation. This is evident in Private Park's letters to his daughters where he recounted an evening in 1917 of boxing between the drummer boys where the General awarded the winner a trophy.<sup>84</sup> Private Fox also noted how often sport was a popular past time during his training in Lucknow. Fox wrote that even watching sport was very popular and recalled watching boxing matches several times during his training in India.<sup>85</sup>

Sport was a means of making bodies fitter and more coordinated, but it could also be a source of damage. Private Fox also often played sport and once became so injured during a game of hockey that he was hospitalised for almost a week.

February 8<sup>th</sup> – I was playing hockey and got a nasty knock in the eye. Went into hospital.

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<sup>83</sup> Lycette, p. 15.

<sup>84</sup> Parks, letter dated 13/06/17.

<sup>85</sup> IWM, 15015, Private Papers of W. H. Fox, p.1.

13<sup>th</sup> February – Out of Hospital.<sup>86</sup>

Others remembered the physical toll taken by sport on their bodies. Writing home to his parents during his training William Broadhead depicted the physical toil of sport within sketches in his letters. In the five drawings he sent to his parents he showed rapid physical deterioration as his body suffered the exhaustion of a soldier's rugby match.



**William Broadhead, Sketches in undated letter to his parents during training in**

**1916.<sup>87</sup>**

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p.10.

<sup>87</sup> Sheffield Archives, L.D. 1980/54/1 and 980/54/2, Private Papers of W. Broadhead.



**William Broadhead, Sketches in undated letter to his Parents during training in 1916.<sup>88</sup>**

Broadhead's presentation of being exhausted could have been exaggerated for humour but still the overall impact of sport on his body can be recognised in his drawings as he stated alongside the images how tired he felt.<sup>89</sup> Boxing may have been useful for developing physical strength and fighting ability but it was also used to settle scores between ranks. Private Cordy explained how a fellow soldier resolved a grudge with an overbearing sergeant in the ring, illustrating how sport could be used as a disciplinary tool or even an opportunity to directly challenge authority safely.

The sergeant came across with a pair of boxing gloves and three[sic] them at Ted, hitting him in the face. Ted lost his temper and went for him but an instructor

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, L.D. 1980/54/3, 1980/54/4 and 980/54/5.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

grasped him – ‘the ring is the place for that’. Ted cooled down, a referee was chosen, and the bout started. Ted made rings round the sergeant, and in the second round, he wanted to call the bout off. Ted was not having it and gave him a real hammering before the referee could stop him. About a fortnight later the instructor persuaded Ted to enter the depot competitions. This he did and took the championship at his weight.<sup>90</sup>

Sport was an important part of the soldier’s experience in training throughout the First World War as it improved physical conditioning and promised enhanced coordination in individuals and also in units. While it could be the source of fun and recreation, it was squarely located in the body regime of the military designed to produce soldiers from civilians.

### **Punished Bodies**

If the body was at the heart of efforts to transform civilian recruits into soldiers, then it was also central to punishment when they had resisted military discipline. David Englander has pointed out that prior to the First World War control over soldiers was maintained through harsh and visible physical punishments which inspired obedience and fear. However, he argues that the mix of regular, territorial, volunteer and conscript troops during the First World War could not allow for control

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<sup>90</sup> IWM, 2624, Private Papers of J. M. Cordy, p.5.

to be maintained in same the fashion as it was thought that the civilian soldiers, used to enjoying certain civil liberties, would balk more openly to such forms of coercion.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, Private Calvert experienced punishment through his body. He had been guilty of deserting his first regiment and joining another regiment because he wanted to get to the front faster. He remained with the latter and the Brigade Commander decreed that he be Confined to Barracks (C.B.) as penance for his actions which meant no leisure time, additional duties and the suspension of privileges.<sup>92</sup> Additional drill ensured he truly felt his sentence.

The C.B. punishment included going on parade after the usual daily parades, carrying a full kit in the webbing pack and marching around the Barrack square for one hour. Sometimes if the drill sergeant was vindictive, he ordered tall kit carried to be laid out for his inspection and shortage was duly noted by the Corporal who paced the march. For every article of kit short, the punishment was one extra drill... This to me was all part of becoming a soldier so accepted without a grumble.<sup>93</sup>

Calvert was not the only man to experience increased duties and drill as punishment for a misdemeanour. In 1918 while training with his new Middlesex Regiment at the

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<sup>91</sup> D. Englander, 'Mutinies and Military Morale' in H. Strachan (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp.191-2.

<sup>92</sup> J. Brophy and E. Partridge, *The Long Trail Songs and Slang of the British Soldier: 1914-18* (London: E. Partridge Ltd., 1930), p.82.

<sup>93</sup> Calvert, p.2.

Kitchener Barracks, Private Arthur Smith received extra 'punishment drill' for returning late from embarkation leave.<sup>94</sup> This was similar in the case of Private Bill Smedley in 1917 who also received 'punishment drill' to encourage him to follow instructions more quickly by the zealous NCOs while he trained in Cork, Ireland.<sup>95</sup> Regular soldier Private Goodson explained that pack drill, which was essentially additional drilling whilst wearing a full pack, was a regular punishment for men who stepped out of line.

Normal punishment was confined to barracks and from that they often used to give a man pack drill, ...in fact I've done some, oh yes I done 7 days' pack drill for being absent over leave, I lost a stripe, I lost a stripe and I did 7 days' pack drill for overstaying my leave, I accepted it, I accepted it, all my life I accepted punishment if I had done wrong.<sup>96</sup>

However, punishment was not always official and could sometimes go unrecorded. Goodson also recalled an instance where he had an altercation with an NCO who kicked him during a training exercise for failing to physically conform to a task. Goodson was subsequently offered an unorthodox opportunity to punish the offender.

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<sup>94</sup> IWM SA, 9433, A. J. Smith, reel 3.

<sup>95</sup> IWM SA, 10917, B. Smedley, reel 3.

<sup>96</sup> IWM SA, 9831, J. Goodson, reel 5.

The cry is from the instructors, 'brace your knees, brace your knees'. Well you brace your knees as well as you can but you find that you can't do it like they want it done. So one of the young of the young assistants, a cocky fella, comes along and whilst I'm doing it just kicks me behind the knee and I go down. I get up and I'm going to bash him...The gym bloke comes after me and says 'that's enough of that' and I said, 'well that man kicked me behind the knee.' He says 'if you fancy your chance, you come over here tonight you'll be accommodated'. It was dropped that way. The NCO was in the wrong for kicking me, he would have been in trouble if I had a go at him, he started it...though in that moment, I could have hit him you know.<sup>97</sup>

While unusual, Goodson's account illustrates that punishment could be informal and often violent. It could even transcend the traditional rank hierarchy if the right set of circumstances warranted it.

At the extreme end of the spectrum of official physical punishments was Field Punishment No.1. This meant being strapped to a gun wheel on public display for an hour at a time. Field Punishment No. 1 was rare in training but did take place. One of the most well-known examples was at the 'Bull Ring' training camp at Étapes, which John Fairley and William Allison explain had the British soldiers 'crucified'

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

daily.<sup>98</sup> On the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 1916 during a debate in parliament, Mr Morrell, the MP for Burnley raised the use of field punishment to Mr Forster, Secretary of State for War. Morrell asked if Forster was aware of the case of Army Driver Graham who had been charged with the minor infraction of exceeding a speed limit and was facing 90 days' field punishment which may have included being strapped to a gun wheel for 2 hours a day as well as suspension of pay. Mr Forster replied:

I have now had the opportunity of perusing the proceedings of the court-martial which awarded the sentence of ninety days' field punishment, and I find that one month was remitted by the General Officer Commanding. With regard to the hon. Member's request for the abolition of field punishment, I regret I do not see my way to make any alteration in the law upon this subject. In regard to the particular punishment inflicted upon Driver Graham, in view of the fact that I am advised that the sentence, although modified as above stated, is in excess of the requirements of discipline, instructions have been issued that it shall be wholly remitted, and this procedure will have the effect of restoring to the man his pay and allotments to his wife.<sup>99</sup>

Compared to the offence the use of Field Punishment No.1 seems disproportional. Within the 1914 reprinted *Kings Regulations and Orders for the Army Service*

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<sup>98</sup> J. Fairley and W. Allison, *The Monocled Mutineer: The First World War's Best Kept Secret: The Etaples Mutiny* (London: Quartet Books, 1978), p.49.

<sup>99</sup> HC Debate, 08 August 1916, vol 85 cc841-2



*Manual*, the guidelines for Field Punishment No. 1 stated that the punishment must not extend beyond 28 days.<sup>100</sup> However, paragraph 496a, which focused upon offenses including the misuse of 'mechanically propelled vehicles', stated that punishment should 'be limited to the equivalent of a fortnight's pay. Any such recovery will form part of the disciplinary action taken in such cases.'<sup>101</sup> At no point is speeding directly referenced, but the paragraph does state that punishment would be levied for the damage caused by negligence or carelessness.<sup>102</sup> Unless Graham had killed or injured someone, which seems unlikely as there is no mention of this, the punishment would have been more severe, therefore the punishment certainly seems excessive. The punishment of Driver Graham illustrates how men could still be severely punished for a range of offenses, potentially beyond the scope of the crime they committed.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of December 1916, field punishment was still being debated in Parliament without any clear sign of resolution. Mr Morrell returned to the issue of field punishment in the army arguing that the practice was more common than prior to the First World War, particularly in the New Army.

He says in effect that when he was in the old army, under experienced officers, the infliction of punishment No. 1 was of very rare occurrence. He

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<sup>100</sup> Great Britain. War Office, *Kings Regulations and Orders for the Army* (London: HMSO, 1914), p.112, paragraph 493, iiii.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, p.114, paragraph 496a,

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*.

had known of only seven cases in his own company. When he was transferred to the New Army he found a completely different state of things, and I think he says there were no fewer than sixty cases, some of them for comparatively technical offences, in which this punishment had been inflicted. I think that is generally the experience that there has been a very large increase, and I think an unjustifiable increase, in this form of punishment. That seems to me an altogether regrettable state of things, and one that this House ought to guard against. It is very necessary that the punishment should be safeguarded, and that the offences in respect of which it may be inflicted should be clearly defined, because it is a severe and sometimes a cruel and a degrading punishment. In conversation with a general now in the War Office, he said to me, "This is a hard and degrading punishment, and it breaks the spirit of any man." Therefore, it ought not to be inflicted except for the gravest offences.<sup>103</sup>

Englander's argument that the spectacle of severe and humiliating physical punishment was considered inappropriate and counterproductive for volunteers and conscripts during the First World War certainly does not stand up when the experiences in this particular training camp are considered.<sup>104</sup> This was a debate that would continue for the duration of the war as the use of field punishment was even met with public outcry in 1916 after it was reportedly being used on

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<sup>103</sup> HC Debate, 31 December 1916, vol 88 cc1738-63

<sup>104</sup> Englander, p.193.

conscientious objectors.<sup>105</sup> Ian Beckett explains that the War Office officially banned field punishment no.1 in 1923.<sup>106</sup> However, it was not until the end of the 1920's that field punishment was officially abolished by the Labour government along with a number of other penalties such as execution for cowardice.<sup>107</sup>

If controversial, this form of severe public sentence could also be counter-productive. Private Templer recalled witnessing the use of Field Punishment No.1 at Horfield Barracks in Bristol as a fellow trainee was splayed out in the sun as punishment for drunken misbehaviour. However, while the army may have been quick to come down hard on men to control their behaviour, such actions could incite the opposite to the desired effect.

The spark that set it off was the arrest of one of the most popular men in 'C' company who, with others, got drunk and very tough. He was put into the guard compound and the next morning taken before the C.O. who ordered him to be confined to no. 1 field punishment, which was to be tied to the wheel of a limber in the guard compound for a number of hours each day. The weather was very hot at the time and his pals got angry and demanded his release or they would

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<sup>105</sup> A. Kilday and D. S. Nash *Shame and Modernity in Britain: 1890 to the Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p.37.

<sup>106</sup> K. Jeffery, 'The Post War Army' in I. Beckett, *A Nation in Arms* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2004), p.231.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, and C.R.M.F. Cruttwell, *A History of the Great War: 1914-1918* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1936), p.531.

go and take him out...the 'C' Company men surrounded the area, pulled up the railing, untied the prisoner and in spite of an officer, marched him round the camp yelling.<sup>108</sup>

Templer remembered that the men of C company feared another regiment was being prepared to come in to quash their brief rebellion yet even the fear of reprisals did not stop them. The body is at the centre of his story, as the recruits had resisted military discipline through unruly behaviour by getting 'drunk and very tough'. One of the men was singled out as an example and his body subject to a public punishment perceived as both harsh and degrading. His comrades made a point of freeing his body and then just as publically parading it to hammer home their defiance.

This short-lived uprising over physical treatment was not an isolated event. A regiment in 1915, made up almost entirely of volunteer working-class Welsh miners, twice refused to fall out and partake in training.<sup>109</sup> Their grievance was that one of unit had been assaulted by an instructor and another, who had protested vociferously, was given Field Punishment No. 1 for his insubordination. The rest of the corps effectively withdrew their labour and eventually the military authorities decided it was wise to transfer of the instructor out of the camp.<sup>110</sup> This allowed the

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<sup>108</sup> IWM, 2617, Private Papers of C. G. Templer, p.6.

<sup>109</sup> D. Gill and G. Dallas, *The Unknown Army* (London: Verso, 1985), p.44.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

army to save face and still maintain the appearance of control while simultaneously appeasing the rebellious trainees. Clearly, the New Army recruits could be controlled through punishment. However, the nature of their enlistment could also make traditional military discipline harder to maintain as physically punitive action could actively incite resistance.

Such punishment and resistance was at the extreme end of experiences though and Winter has argued that verbal and humiliation were more routinely used to break down a recruit's pride to encourage him to follow orders.<sup>111</sup> Private Lycette recalled chastisement for failing to come to attention properly

“I could bloody well eat you, now you listen to me: do you know Mrs Grocott, soldier?” I said “No”, “well,” he said “you will bloody soon know her, son. Now listen to me for a few moments. When I call your name in future, I want you to spring to attention immediately double up to me, click your heels and say, ‘sir’. Now go back to your tent, and wait until you are called.”<sup>112</sup>

Later Lycette was again accosted by the same officer but this time he presented his body appropriately. Pleased, the sergeant responded, ‘splendid, I want to make a

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<sup>111</sup> Winter, pp.38-39.

<sup>112</sup> E. Lycette, *Being an Account by Ernest Lycette of his life as a young man and soldier in the years between 1911 and 1921, Army of occupation – Rhineland, Auxiliary Corps – Ireland* (Levin: R. R. Lycette, 2007), p.13. Lycette unfortunately does not explain who Mrs Grocott, or what her relevance is to the situation.

soldier of you...'<sup>113</sup> A mild threat of physical punishment and a good telling-off was enough to ensure that next time Lycette was in the same situation, his body responded appropriately.

## **Conclusion**

Drill sergeant Robert Davidson of the 2/4<sup>th</sup> Gordon Highlanders argued that there was no definitive length of time for turning men into soldiers.<sup>114</sup> He concluded that this was down to the individuality of the men who trained under him; 'men are different. Some could fall into it and the drill quite quickly, some took a long time.'<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless he implied that all got there in the end. This chapter has argued that the body was central to this process of transformation and of the resistance to it. The military authorities had clear ambitions to change the way in which men saw, groomed, fed, rested and deployed their bodies. The uniform was a first step as re-clothing civilians began almost immediately upon recruitment. Many men looked forward to this transformation because, as the previous chapter has argued, the uniform had deliberately been associated with prestige and glamour. But the reality often sat at odds with the rhetoric as many early recruits found themselves in blue uniforms rather than khaki as the military failed to source enough materials of the

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Davidson, reel 1.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

latter colour. Regardless of the colour, others found their new clothing awkward to use and uncomfortable to wear.

The gap between rhetoric and reality was similar in other aspects of the life of a recruit in training. The promise of regular feeding was an element in recruitment campaigns and some effort was made by the military authorities to lay out recommendations on the calories to be consumed by each soldier to maintain his body in a state of preparedness and the sorts of meals to be provided. In practice, however, the quality and quantity of food varied, particularly as the war carried on and provisions became more difficult to source.<sup>116</sup> Men often recalled feeling hungry during training and were forced to eat poor quality ingredients, and this sometimes-provoked resistance, either through direct protest or by sourcing additional nourishment elsewhere.

These complaints were often associated with the demands being made on their bodies in training. The body was under constant pressure to improve both its fitness and its skills. The evidence shows that from the moment they awoke, men found themselves compelled to run, parade, drill and march in order to become fitter and more readily controlled. Before long they were expected to learn new skills, in shooting, throwing and operating equipment and machines, all the time through

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<sup>116</sup> Duffett, *Stomach For Fighting*, p.204.

repetitive exercises designed to make these techniques second-nature to be completed without thinking. Their bodies were retooled for military use.

Michel Foucault has argued that punishment and discipline are important tools in the transition from civilian to soldier and men were certainly punished when they registered or their bodies failed them in training.<sup>117</sup> This punishment was typically focused on the body and could often be brutal, but usually fell some way short of extremes, with extra drill or shouted threats and insults more common. However, training was designed to ready men for combat physically and psychologically. Punishment that ultimately physically inhibited the ability of soldiers to fight was counterproductive. The end goal for the British Army was prepare and release as many men as possible out to the frontline. Therefore, it is understandable that often even serious cases of resistance on the part of soldiers could be met with compromise rather than retribution.

Whatever the intentions of the military authorities it is clear from the primary sources that recruits recalled their period in vivid physical terms. Whether it was learning to shave for the first time, attaching brass buttons to a Kitchener uniform to make it more impressive, eating 'swill' or enduring a run before breakfast, it is clear that their bodies were central to the recollections of the men who experienced this entry into military life.

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<sup>117</sup> M. Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 2012), p.135.



## Chapter Three

### Lives on the Line: Active Service

#### **Introduction**

I have not had a wash or a shave for over a week. How pleasant it feels to be clean again. When washed I am carried into the operating theatre and the second operation is performed. I am so comfortable in bed, a real bed, with white sheets, and a pillow nice and white. At last, this is heaven, glorious heaven. They gave me chicken broth to drink and chicken to eat.<sup>1</sup>

Private Roberts was seriously wounded in his arm at the Third Battle of Ypres in 1917. It is therefore striking that his recollections of his immediate days after his injury were not of pain or anxiety, but of comfort, cleanliness and something good to eat; his subsequent response to a question about his condition was 'doctor I have never felt more comfortable in my life. I have no pain and I am so cosy'.<sup>2</sup> This chapter explores the experience of men on active service but away from the immediate frontline. Roberts may have been unusual in remembering the pleasure of a shave and the pleasure of fresh bedding over the effects of a wound and the operations that followed it, but he was certainly not unusual in experiencing military life away from the combat zone through his body.

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<sup>1</sup> IWM, 17248, Private Papers of S. Roberts, p.158.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

During the First World War millions of British men travelled to the Western front as thousands more dispersed around the globe to campaigns in the Middle East, Africa and Mesopotamia.<sup>3</sup> Men did not just fight at these locations for much if not most of the time they lived near the front or close to supply-lines in camps, billets or support trenches.<sup>4</sup> At all times men had to be ready and available, whether for fighting, rebuilding trenches, engaged in fatigues or burial duties, enjoying recreation or acting in support roles to organisations such as the Army Service Corps (ASC) or the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC). This chapter will consider how life at the front impacted upon the bodies of the British men during active service. It will illustrate that during the course of the First World War men's bodies constantly needed to adapt to their surroundings as they learned to live in unsanitary conditions, were medically assessed and treated to prevent disease, fed and watered and even sought out ways to relax. Even behind the lines, men could endanger themselves or find their bodies punished for misdemeanours.

Health and hygiene were important elements of life behind the frontline and the measure taken by the military to protect the bodies of troops from disease will be considered first. This chapter will then look at the complex role that food and alcohol played in affecting physical fitness and readiness for service. It will also consider sexual activities and the multiple ways that men sought to deal with their desires,

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<sup>3</sup> R. Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front, 1914–1918, Kindle Edition* (London: Harper Collins, 2004), loc. 613.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, loc. 4805.

often in spite of military efforts to regulate them. Finally, this chapter will examine other impacts of active service on men's bodies as they moved through environments littered with hazards. Life during active service may not have been as overtly dangerous as combat during the First World War, but even away from the frontline injury, sickness and death were daily occurrences.

### **Healthy and Hygienic Bodies**

Soldiers living at the front, typically spent eight days serving in the frontline with a further four in a reserve trench before being pulled back for four days of recuperation. This was designed to keep fit fighting men on the frontline and to help sustain morale by allowing recovery time and even the chance to take leave to return home.<sup>5</sup> However, the frequency and duration of time behind the lines frequently changed according to battle location and intensity of the war. Within Eaton's anthology of the men from the small town of Clayton in England who died, he notes:

The rotation of soldiers at the front effectively meant that men went from a three-day period in the frontline to a base camp to get cleaned and washed then effectively had a few days of reduced duties with social activities such as sports tournaments or film showings. After this, the soldiers would return

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<sup>5</sup> P. Cornish, 'The Daily Life of Soldiers' World War One', The British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/the-daily-life-of-soldiers#authorBlock1> (accessed 31/08/17).

to do a stint in the reserve trenches which, although safer from the frontline, were still prone to artillery bombing or later on in the war, air raids.<sup>6</sup>

Trooper Hollis served with the Bedfordshire Yeomanry on Western Front and he recalled that his rotation in the intensely fought over Hohenzollern Redoubt trenches in 1915 was ‘... four days in reserve, four days in support and four days in the frontline.’<sup>7</sup> Private Swales of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion York and Lancaster Regiment recalled that after 48 hours at the Somme in June 1916 he was relieved from combat duty.<sup>8</sup> However, Sergeant Ward claimed that the men’s stints at the front could be significantly longer as he commented on their ability to endure extended service. ‘In 1916, after the Somme battles we used to do 16 days on the frontline and 8 behind resting. After 16 days, they were covered in mud.’<sup>9</sup> Ward’s claim is supported by Reginald Gervais who acknowledges that these numbers could stretch given the requirements of the battle as was experienced by the 60<sup>th</sup> Canadian Overseas Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force at the Eble trench who saw at least 18 days on the frontline before relief.<sup>10</sup>

While the length of time away from the frontline could vary, the place of the body to the experience of active service away from the combat zone was crucial. In the

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<sup>6</sup> D. Eaton, *At the Going Down of the Sun, The Men from Clayton Who Died in the Two World Wars* (Durham: Roundtuit Publishing, 2007), pp.42-3.

<sup>7</sup> IWM SA, 27424, G. L. P. Hollis, reel 1.

<sup>8</sup> IWM SA, 26877, C. A. Swales, reel 2.

<sup>9</sup> IWM SA, 24550, W. Ward, reel 2.

<sup>10</sup> R. Gervais, *The Silent Sixtieth 100 Years On* (Victoria: Friesen Press, 2014), p.159.

first part this was down to the stress placed by the military on preserving health. Like many soldiers, Private Philipson was taught how to be a proper soldier from a range of training manuals. One of which, the 1914 *Notes for Lectures to Recruits of the Brigade of Guards* including instructions on appearance, explanations on how to gauge distances and measure wind resistance and a dictionary for basic semaphore.<sup>11</sup> There was also clear guidelines for rankers on the importance of avoiding disease and staying healthy during service.

Health which goes with cleanliness, is most important to a soldier; it is the absolute duty of every soldier to do all in his power to keep himself healthy, for a man, who is not strong and healthy can neither march nor fight, and a soldier is of no use unless he can do both. A man too, who goes to hospital is nuisance to his comrades, who have to do his duty. Men must therefore take great care of their health. For instance, no man need get ill by loitering about in the cold half dressed, after getting hot or leaving a hot room nor by running out in slippers to the pipe clay sheds or elsewhere during wet weather. Moreover, men must be careful not to drink too much, for excessive drinking will not get them into trouble but will also injure their health and the same applies to excessive cigarette-smoking, which may ruin a man constitution. Everything possible is done by drill and gymnastics to make soldiers strong, active and healthy, but men can do a lot for themselves

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<sup>11</sup> IWM, 11905, Private Papers of F. Philipson.

by cultivating regular and temperate habits. When a soldier feels ill or when he requires medical treatment of any kind, he will give in his name to the corporal-in-waiting at reveille, in order that he may see the surgeon. If he should be taken ill at any other time he will report himself to the sergeant-in-waiting. He will not treat himself or consult private doctors, as men are very severely punished for concealing disease, that is to say, for not reporting themselves sick to the military surgeon. Men must, however, make it a point of honour not to go sick, unless they are really ill.<sup>12</sup>

These guidelines placed much of the responsibility on the individual soldier for the assessment of his own health and both self-control and compliance within the military body regime were seen as vital. Moral issues related to excess and self-indulgence were combined with values such as duty and honour to communicate the message that the man's body was not his own, and that it was caught up with a larger project to which it was supposed to submit through self-regulation and suppression.

The evidence suggests that men certainly internalised such instructions and their values. Soldiers such as F. Hubard, who served with the 86<sup>th</sup> infantry brigade, was sure that no soldier would report sick unless absolutely necessary. He reported this in a letter home in September 1915 as he wrote '...none of us are feeling exceptionally grand. I have had a touch of dysentery and have almost felt at times

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp.9-12.

that a rest would be very welcome. I, of course, haven't reported sick...'<sup>13</sup> Private Fowler of the 1st (Lowland) Field Ambulance RAMC described a similar situation in 1915 when he claimed in his diary that he did not have time to be ill and so carried on working, refusing to report sick.

Sun 18<sup>th</sup>

- Just a little more work to do. I am feeling pretty bad, have been for the last fortnight. No use reporting sick. Eat nothing for fortnight.<sup>14</sup>

A week later he revealed why he felt compelled to disregard his own discomfort.

Mon 26<sup>th</sup>

- Still feeling rotten. Have a lot of work to do. 600 odd patients in OC is ill. Only 3 M.O. left. Have started to work in dispensary and working until 11 pm. Have a new CO. A lot of sick dying through heat.<sup>15</sup>

Evidently, the individual needs of the body could be side-lined when duty demanded men remain at their posts. This was not without its paradoxes however. In order to

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<sup>13</sup> IWM, 20211, Private Papers of F. Hubbard, Letter to Mr. And Mrs. Underhill, dated 07/09/15.

<sup>14</sup> IWM, 11625, Private Papers of W. Fowler (Hicken), p.8.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

'soldier on' men were clearly expected to self-diagnose to determine the extent of their ailments and this could run the risk of disregarding the order to report themselves sick to the military surgeon. It seems that this grey area was tacitly acknowledged by the military authorities as self-medication with home remedies was actually encouraged in certain circumstances. In the 1915 *Manual of Military Cooking and Dietary, Mobilisation*, there were several recipes including Chicken Broth, Jellied Calves Hoofs and Beef Tea which were all designed to aid ill soldiers to recover quickly and were presented under the heading, 'when soldiers are required to attend their sick and wounded comrades the following simple recipes are useful'.<sup>16</sup> Onion porridge which the manual claimed was 'an excellent remedy for colds' and all of the other concoctions were designed to render well again the bodies of troops who were ill or injured without the need to recourse to medical facilities.<sup>17</sup>

Because this was such a grey area some men ended up being punished for taking medical decisions themselves. Private Silver's priority when he completed a tough stint on the frontline was to get that he thought was 'frost-bite' attended to. His CO evidently disagreed as he issued Silver with a punishment and a reprimand because he had failed to keep himself clean.

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<sup>16</sup> Great Britain. War Office, *Manual of Military Cooking and Dietary, Mobilisation, 1915* (London, HMSO, 1915), pp.48-50.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p.60.



I was on listening post duty out in no-man's land in a hole half full of water and I had to stand in that freezing water for two solid hours I dare not move because of giving my position away to the enemy and that's where I got frostbitten. Now I will tell you of the punishment I got when I first reported sick with my feet the first time we came out of the frontline we were relieved at night and by the time we had marched back to our billets we were too tired to do anything and we were up to our neck in mud so the next morning the sick cpl. [sic] came around about six am and I reported sick then. Just before we marched off to the MO's quarters the RSM spotted me and he shouted to the Col. 'Where is the man going?' and the cpl [sic] replied 'sick sir', so the RSM said 'if that man gets medicine and duty report him to me' and so I did get M and D and I had to go back to the CO who asked how I went sick in that condition so I told him that I had no time to clean the mud off my clothes and my feet were more important so he sentenced me to seven days punishment which meant I had to do more dangerous and dirty jobs than the other lads, it include going out into no-man's land putting out barbed wire and cleaning latrines.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> IWM, 7715, Private Papers of T. A. Silver, pp.4-7. In this account, 'Medicine and Duty' potentially refers to the patient being given activities such as massage or to clean his feet instead of being removed completely from the line. Robert Atenstaedt, makes the point that in 1915 training was introduced to encourage men to massage their feet back to help, rather than pull them completely off the line. R. Atenstaedt, *The Medical Response to the Trench Diseases in World War One* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), p.171.

'Trench Foot' in all its varieties was a significant issue for the British Army during the First World War. Harrison explains that various forms of cold related damage to the lower extremities brought about by the combination of trench conditions and limited sanitation meant that over 75,000 men were admitted to hospital, many of whom eventually required extended treatment back in England.<sup>19</sup> Responses to dealing with trench foot evolved over the course of the war. In the 1911 RAMC training handbook, a section on 'Foot-soreness' advised that 'the ablution of the feet at least once daily should be compulsory for troops in the field.'<sup>20</sup> It recommended that a salicylic acid of potash is mixed with Vaseline or a powder made up of salicylic acid, starch and talc, are applied to washed feet every day. Atenstaedt explains that that by November 1915 the rise of trench foot forced the British Army to demand that all men dried and rubbed their feet and put on dry socks before they entered the frontline.<sup>21</sup> From 1916 onwards debate continued both in the military and within published medical journals such as the *Lancet* as to the best treatment for chilled feet and frost bite. By the end of the war, treatment ranged from the application of powders just as before the war, a method favoured by the French Army, through to the more common practice of applying whale oil which continued until the end of the conflict and was the preferred method in the British Army.<sup>22</sup> Despite this, the

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<sup>19</sup> M. Harrison, *The Medical War: British Military Medicine in the First World War* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 129.

<sup>20</sup> Great Britain. War Office, *Royal Army Medical Corps Training Manual* (London: HMSO, 1911), pp,64-5.

<sup>21</sup> Atenstaedt, p.199.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, pp.198-199.

case of Silver illustrates how men could become caught between conflicting regulations.

Active service also presented difficulties in maintaining levels of grooming and cleanliness that had been imposed in training. The ideal for troops on active service was outlined in an RAMC Training Manual.

It involves not only attention to the skin, but to the hair, nails, mouth, and other parts of the body. The skin is a covering for protection, and for getting rid of water in the form of sweat. This latter function is increased by exercise as well as by other causes. It sweat be allowed continually to remain and dry on the surface of the skin, or soak into clothing, it soon becomes irritating, unhealthy and offensive. For these reasons, we wash our bodies to remove, not only coarse dirt which we can see, but also the dried sweat which we cannot see. The act of washing further improves the skin, opens and cleans its pores and keeps it sweet and healthy. Most persons wash their hands and faces, but often forget parts covered by clothes. Of these, the following should be washed every day when possible: (1) between the legs and buttocks; (2) the armpits; (3) the feet and toes. In addition to this daily washing, a bath once or twice a week is necessary, but a bath should not be taken within two hours of a meal. After bathing or washing the skin should

be well rubbed and dried, as this prevents a chill and improves the circulation of the blood.<sup>23</sup>

The section on personal hygiene which filled nearly two pages also focused upon the importance of washing hands before meals and the manual argued that even in the worst environments, steps must be taken to maintain levels of hygiene by carrying a hairbrush and 'cleaning, shaking and exposing [underclothes] to air and sunshine'.<sup>24</sup>

Private Keller explained in his memoirs that whilst hygiene was important to the men it was not always possible.

There were hot showers which were a treat to a crowd of dirty men and we were permitted to use them as often as we pleased. Most of the men used them every day following the physical exercises and the route march which lasted from morning roll call until noon and this gave us a chance to get rid of the lice and other vermin that we were being bothered with. We did use them regularly at least once and sometimes twice a day. The French people seeing us going to the showers all the time remarked that the English soldier must be dirty as he is always washing himself. When we were retreating, we

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<sup>23</sup> *Royal Army Medical Corps Training Manual*, pp.22-3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p.23.

had very little time to even wash and when we wanted to shave we often had to use our tea to get something hot to soap our beards.<sup>25</sup>

Shaving also had a practical element as the removal of excess hair could restrict the spread of lice. Private Watson, who served with the Northumberland Fusiliers on Western Front between 1916-1918, recalled that they became covered in lice and had to buy candles and strip naked in the trenches to burn them off.<sup>26</sup> For Watson, personal hygiene was important but very difficult.

You see these barrels, war barrels you see, you would get some hot water if you were lucky, if you were on the first list you were alright. But if you were on one where there was half a dozen, it was a puddle, he had to bath himself in that puddle... I used to shave, when we were able to get water, I had an enamel plate and an enamel cup and I used to save tea to wet my face and shave myself. Somedays I went a week or more, in those days when you were a young one, the beard didn't grow as fast as it does now.<sup>27</sup>

Captain Rogerson vividly recalled the bodily pleasure he felt when, like Watson, he finally managed to tackle his unkempt chin, 'what bliss it was to lather up and feel the razor shaving of this unwelcome growth'.<sup>28</sup> This might have not have simply

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<sup>25</sup> IWM, 11876, Private Papers of C. R. Keller, pp.26-7.

<sup>26</sup> IWM SA, 11040, J. W. Watson, reel 3.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Holmes, loc, 10142.

been down to hygiene and health reasons though. Christopher Oldstone-Moore explains that during the nineteenth century beards were viewed as a masculine accessory and physical proofs of virility.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century and during the First World War French soldiers were mostly unshaven and known colloquially as the *poilu* in France, meaning 'a virile man with a beard.'<sup>30</sup> In Britain, by the turn of the twentieth century moustaches were more common and British soldiers were encouraged to grow them as a demonstration of 'military esprit de corps'.<sup>31</sup> Chapter Two has demonstrated the role of grooming and hairstyles in helping to craft soldiers and encouraged conformity. However, as the war continued, attitudes and regulations towards shaving changed. In 1913 General Nevil Macready voiced the view of many soldiers that the moustache regulation should be repealed, something that was vehemently opposed publicly by King George in 1915.<sup>32</sup> In his memoirs, Macready recounts how in 1916 a New Army officer on active service was actually court martialled for being clean shaven.

In the summer of 1916 a case was brought to my notice of a wretched officer of the New Army who had been court martialled for being clean shaven. In his defence he made the ingenious excuse that by profession he was an actor, and that if he grew a moustache it would spoil his upper lip and militate

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<sup>29</sup> C. Oldstone-Moore, *Of Beards and Men: The Revealing History of Facial Hair* (USA, University of Chicago Press, 2015), p.198.

<sup>30</sup> A. Clayton, *Paths of Glory, The French Army 1914-18* (London: Cassel, 2005), p.73.

<sup>31</sup> Oldstone-Moore, p.215.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

against his success when he returned to the stage after the war. I thereupon drew the former papers on moustaches from the registry, asked my colleagues on the army council if they had any views on the subject, to which apparently they were quite indifference, and finally obtained the approval of his Majesty the King.<sup>33</sup>

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of October 1916, Command No. 1,695 of the King's Regulations which had demanded that soldiers wear a moustache was abolished by General Macready and for the first time in decades, soldiers, regulars, conscripts and New Army alike, regained some control over their facial hair and ostensibly over their appearance whilst under military control.

While men were expected to do what they could to remain healthy through self-discipline and hygiene the military authorities intervened in their bodies in more direct ways in seeking to preserve their preparedness for service. Vaccination against infectious diseases was central to this strategy. By the beginning of the First World War, the British Army was routinely inoculating men for diseases such as smallpox, typhoid, and towards the end of the war trialled a mixture of pneumococci, streptococci to unsuccessfully combat the influenza virus.<sup>34</sup> In 1919, the *Times* reported that by the end of the war nearly 97% of all British servicemen had been

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<sup>33</sup> General Sir N. Macready, *Annals of an Active Life* (London, Hutchinson and CO., 1924), pp.258-259.

<sup>34</sup> Harrison, *The Medical War*, p.141-44.; Anne Hardy, "'Straight Back to Barbarism': Antityphoid Inoculation and the Great War, 1914' *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, Vol. 74.2 (2000), pp.265-290

protected against typhoid and paratyphoid using the TAB vaccine that had been developed in the middle of the conflict.<sup>35</sup> Harrison argues that typhoid inoculation was a significant tool for British forces in the First World War.<sup>36</sup>

From a peak of 3.1 admissions to hospital per 1,000 troops from all typhoid fevers in 1915, the disease was gradually brought under control so that by 1917 it had fallen to 0.7, and by 1918, to 0.2 per 1,000, notwithstanding a slight decrease in inoculation. By that time, it is likely that the pool of infected soldiers and civilians had diminished to such an extent that uninoculated soldiers had comparatively little chance of contracting the disease. As result, from being the second greatest cause of sickness (after trench nephritis) in France and Flanders in 1915, typhoid no longer posed a serious threat to the British Army after 1916.<sup>37</sup>

Hardy supports this argument by adding that inoculation worked in tandem with a focus on sanitary improvement which resulted in the majority of the soldiers in the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) approaching the battlefield in 1914 with substantial knowledge and expertise in basic sanitary procedures.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> 'Research in War' *The Times* (08 February 1919), p.5.

<sup>36</sup> Harrison, *Medical War*, p.144.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p.152.

<sup>38</sup> Hardy, p.265.



Reports and recollections from the period suggest that vaccination was often considered by men as another necessary aspect of military service, much like succumbing to a haircut or being required to don a uniform. Private Roberts who recalled that, 'We are now paraded for vaccination. All those who have not been vaccinated before have to be vaccinated. This is compulsory, although not mentioned upon enlistment.'<sup>39</sup> Thomas Mitchell-Fox was captured by the enemy in 1918 he and his fellow British captives refused to be inoculated by their captors on the grounds that they already received it. He noted '...most of the officers concerned said: "oh we've had it before, we have all had it before, you 'had to". Have to be vaccinated when you enter the service before you go abroad.'<sup>40</sup> In fact vaccination was not obligatory and men could ostensibly refuse the treatment, an option provided because of the controversies about the treatment that had begun in the 1800s and which had rumbled on into the twentieth century.<sup>41</sup> Such was the confusion that in November 1914 Mr. William Brace, the Labour MP for Glamorganshire South, demanded clarification from Mr. Tennant, Under-Secretary of State for War, that inoculation was not a requirement to be able to serve abroad as was commonly assumed.

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<sup>39</sup> Roberts, p.159.

<sup>40</sup> IWM SA, 315, T. Mitchell-Fox, reel 3.

<sup>41</sup> For more information, see D. Brunton, *The Politics of Vaccination: Practice and Policy in England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland* (Suffolk: University of Rochester Press, 2008), pp.91-105.; N. Durbach, *Bodily Matters: The Anti-Vaccination Movement in England* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2005), p.159 and pp.238-243.

Mr. Brace: Do I understand that soldiers may go to France or Belgium and fight in the ranks although they may have been conscientious objectors to being vaccinated or inoculated?

Mr. Tennant: Yes, Sir.<sup>42</sup>

Harrison explains that the British Military and government took a dim view of the anti-typhoid inoculation rhetoric being published by the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV).<sup>43</sup> He notes that Leishman, one of the creators of the original vaccine believed them to 'doing much harm' and resulting in battalions being dispatched filled with uninoculated men which Leishman equated to 'little short of murder'.<sup>44</sup>

Not all men consented to the practice. In January 1915, Lord Tenterden raised in Parliament the issue of soldiers being refused promotion and being badly treated for non-compliance.<sup>45</sup> This was raised again a month later after reports of a Colonel attempting to forcibly inoculate his men.

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<sup>42</sup> HC Debate, 17 November 1914, vol. 68, cols 318-9. Note – Prior to the First World War, the term 'Conscientious Objector' commonly referred to those who refused vaccination on moral or religious grounds.

<sup>43</sup> Harrison, p.148-9.

<sup>44</sup> Leishman quoted by Harrison, in *Medical War*, p.149.

<sup>45</sup> HC Debate, 07 January 1915, vol 18, cols 341-6.

Colonel Davies-Colley, of the 6th Reserve Manchester Regiment, recently issued instructions that all the men in the regiment must be inoculated against typhoid, and that if any objected force must be used to carry out the instruction; that on the 21st or 22nd January six men, who refused to be inoculated, were brought before Colonel Davies-Colley, who sent them to the doctor under escort; and that whilst an attempt was being made to forcibly inoculate one man, four others escaped and interviewed the Brigade officer.<sup>46</sup>

This was not an isolated incident, as a common complaint was that men were punished as a result of not accepting vaccinations. This could include the suspension of privileges, refusal for promotion or leave, and even accounts of bullying, where men were labelled 'cowards' in the army, which Harrison explains led to a series of articles printed and questions raised in the house of commons in reference to coercive treatment of New Army and conscript soldiers.<sup>47</sup>

The procedure of inoculation also had lasting implications for the body of the vaccinated as many became ill with side effects. A member of the Officer Training Corps (OTC), Jack Briscoe Masefield recalled that his inoculation made him very ill. 'Well it gave me hell I know that. For about three days you were like nothing on

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<sup>46</sup> HC Debate, 04 February 1915, vol 69, cols 139-40.

<sup>47</sup> Harrison, p.149.

earth and I suppose it worked'.<sup>48</sup> The hell that Masefield described could include swollen limbs, sickness, fever, fatigue and in extreme cases, death. In 1915, Private Watson wrote to his mother to say that he was pleased that his inoculation seemed not have taken as he had remained well while his friends became ill; '...I'm glad to say it did not take...I was very glad because I didn't want to be done again, some of our lads are very bad...'<sup>49</sup> For other men being able to withstand the effects of the vaccine was perceived as a mark of physical prowess. Walter Clark, who served with the Hampshire Regiment in 1917, recalled how the strongest of his new colleagues were the best able to endure the process.

Clark: But erm the worst part was when I had this vaccination. You know, it was over a month before I got over it.

Interviewer: This doctor who did your vaccination, I know you said he had a bad reputation; did many people like yourself suffer from the effects of vaccination?

Clark: Yes, yes quite a lot, some got over it quicker I suppose they were fitter stronger physically, getting you fit, doing a lot of marching, PT, that was one of the main things.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> IWM SA, 4609, J. B. Masefield, reel 1.

<sup>49</sup> IWM, 17138, Private Papers of F. Watson, Letter to his mother dated 1915.

<sup>50</sup> IWM SA, 577, W. E. Clarke, reel 1.

In November 1916 as the TAB vaccine was introduced to counteract against the new virulent strain of typhoid, The Secretary of State was forced to respond to the death of a soldier after being inoculated.

Attention has been called to the case of Private Edward Jobling, of Blyth, who is said to have died from the effects of anti-typhoid vaccination, who gave up a permanent situation and enlisted in September, 1914, in the Tyneside Commercial; whether he is aware that before his vaccination this man's health was good, as he had never been in the doctor's hands; that immediately after vaccination he felt ill, and never regained his former health; whether he is aware that Jobling was discharged in August, 1915, as no longer physically fit for war service, and was registered as having served 352 days...<sup>51</sup>

Jobling was one of three reported inoculation deaths that year, but eventually these were explained away with reference to reports of other medical conditions in each case.<sup>52</sup> Regardless of what had caused these fatalities the link with inoculation showed that some still regarded it with grave suspicion. When taken together these stories of vaccination and the British military in the First World War show that many encountered it simply as part of a wider process of bodily subjection, as individuals surrendered control of their bodies to the authorities. The doctor stood alongside

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<sup>51</sup> HC Deb. 02 November 1916, vol. 86, cols 1854W.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

the barber and the store clerk who issued their uniforms as agents of control asserted over the bodies of civilians as they were transformed into soldiers. However, like the issue of shaving, some resisted this chemical intrusion into their body. The evidence above suggests that despite their right to do so, at least one officer felt himself empowered to disregard the rights of these individuals and force vaccination in the cause of preparing his men for war.

### **Bodies and Recreation**

The papers, diaries and interviews of men who recalled time away from the frontline all recall the search for bodily pleasures to satisfy cravings and to alleviate their strain. Food was important. It kept men alive and their bodies capable of fighting, regardless of what format it came, be it varied hearty meal or the dreaded iron ration of hard tack and tinned stew.<sup>53</sup> Food also provided respite from the conditions of the front as leave and relief from duties were often devoted to the pursuit of obtaining more appetising dishes. Finally, food also provided a link back to home through parcels which usually strengthened camaraderie as men shared with each other. Essentially, food from home did not only vary men's diets but could also comfort their bodies as they served.

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<sup>53</sup> It is difficult to ascertain why the emergency ration that was only to be eaten on the command of the ranking officer was referred to as the 'Iron Ration', common assumption is that this originated from the metal tins that the rations were kept in. A 1921 dictionary claimed 'Iron Ration is adapted from Ger. Eiserne portion used of a reserve ration enclosed in a metal case.' E. Weekley, *An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English, Volume 1* (London: John Murray, 1921), p.771.

Field kitchens were established by the military authorities to provide food for those on active service. These kitchens were maintained by the Army Service Corp (ASC) which frequently endured scathing remarks from their fighting comrades for rarely being directly in the firing line. They were also often accused of nepotism and corruption in food distribution.<sup>54</sup> Of course, most of the criticism by soldiers was aimed squarely at the meals they received for being unappetising and unvaried. Among the many complaints about the food that of Private Peyton stands out for the communal response to it.

We were given the inevitable stew, potatoes in the skins (and dirt), the meat was half raw and very fatty, the vegetables uncooked. Being boys, or most of them were boys of tender ages, the expected thing happened – a huge lump of fat was thrown, hitting someone in the face – result pandemonium started – potatoes, meat etc. flying all over the place – when in walked the orderly officer. All names were taken and we were put on half rations for a week's well-deserved punishment. This meant no 'afters' and at that age, I was prepared to eat anything edible, so we were truly punished. Your pay was then eight pence per day. This was gone over the weekend in cakes (I

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<sup>54</sup> R. Duffett, *The Stomach for Fighting, Food and Soldiers of The Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp.110-11.

remember them now, hard lumps of royally overcooked flour and little else – but we scoffed them as if they were really delicious) in the canteen.<sup>55</sup>

While the food was poorly prepared and made from produce of questionable quality, Peyton and his comrades had found a way of resisting it that proved highly entertaining, albeit briefly. The resulting punishment was inflicted on their bodies through food, as they were denied pudding forcing them to spend money to meet their cravings. Peyton felt his punishment as a physical one as he was denied the opportunity to eat.

Behind the lines, men often supplemented their diet through the buying of food from canteens, soldiers' homes or local towns. Organisations such as the YMCA and Army Chaplains were particularly instrumental in providing alternatives to the usual menus. The Reverend Creighton noted the importance of a full stomach for the men's morale and was proud of his busy canteen which supported the overburdened field kitchens. However, he was also frustrated that his spiritual role was diminished as men only cared about food and entertainment and not his spiritual offerings.

We soon got the canteen going there. The men patronise it all the time. It is really extraordinary the part played by the stomach in life. It simply rules the world, and affects all our outlook on life. We are paralysed, absorbed,

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<sup>55</sup> IWM, 11545, Private Papers of H. N. Peyton, p.2.



hypnotised by it. The chief topic of conversation is rations with the men, and food and wine with the officers. Men pour into my canteens and buy everything up. For four Sundays, I have been up to Arras to hold evening service. Twice I arranged it at the canteen. The men filed out when it began and were back again for cocoa when it was over. (I have just stopped writing this to eat a piece of cake.) I felt rather furious last time. What is the use of feeding men if they deliberately set themselves against any attempt to teach or help them see the truth? I preached at all services one Sunday on " Man shall not live by bread alone," and said that while that was the first truth laid down by Christ, it was the last that man could understand.<sup>56</sup>

Private Whitehouse noted how men would spend much of their wages attempting to add some variety to their diet.

We could augment our rations by buying extras at the soldier's home, such as rice pudding, cakes, buns and biscuits and cups of various drinks. Most of my meagre pay went in this way.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Creighton, loc. 3639.

<sup>57</sup> Whitehouse, p.6

This is echoed by Private Niblett who recalled that, as food at the front was usually so measly, wages were commonly spent on ‘...egg and chips or crown and anchor, a stark choice between additional nutrition or the entertainment of gambling.’<sup>58</sup>

Men also resisted the monotonous or poor fare by taking the initiative and foraging for food. Duffett notes that during times of shortage the British Army frequently turned a blind eye as men scrounged and stole from land and local areas, not least of all as officers would also occasionally acquire food in this manner.<sup>59</sup> Private Keller recounted how a fellow soldier managed to ‘bag’ them an alternative dinner.

One of our gunners who must have been a fisherman in civil life made himself a small net on a wire loop and put it on a long pole to get hens out of the hen house which the farmer’s wife always kept locked. He was almost caught by the farmer’s wife and had to run leaving his net behind. She took the net as evidence to the Commanding Officer when reporting the incident; also, claiming the loss of some of her chickens, which could probably be true, and demanding payment. We didn’t hear whether she was paid or not but she probably was.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> IWM, 8408, Private Papers of C. A. Niblett, p.4. Crown and anchor is a simple gambling dice game that was originally popular with British Sailors see W. M. Mark, *Everyday Probability and Statistics: Health, Elections, Gambling And War (2nd Edition)* (London: Imperial College Press, 2012), p.53.

<sup>59</sup> Duffett, p.204.

<sup>60</sup> Keller, pp.32-3.

A significantly safer method of supplementing the army diet were parcels from home which often provided variety and additional nutrition. Lieutenant Lindsay thanked his mother profusely for her parcel and remarked in his letter how her gifts would allow him to supplement his lack of nourishment. He wrote, 'I can't say how much the tablets are welcomed for our water, and the Horlicks tablets will supply nourishment which bread and jam cannot.'<sup>61</sup> Whilst suffering from dysentery Private Mann depended on the food he received from home as the dry biscuits lasted him three days as he recovered.<sup>62</sup> Parcels from home also provided severely needed connections with loved ones and sated cravings for luxuries such as chocolate as men served away from home. Soldiers frequently wrote home with requests for clothes and food to improve their physical existence at the front. Unfortunately, the receiving of parcels could also be inconsistent as food sometimes arrived spoilt or simply not at all. Lt. Colonel Philip George Anstruther complained about this in 1917 as he wrote home asking again for supplies.<sup>63</sup> Parcels can also be seen to have demonstrated the role of class in relationship to food as often those men from more affluent backgrounds could be more expectant on parcels to meet their dietary cravings, assuming of course they arrived. However, despite the inconsistencies of parcels arriving, they played a very important role in meeting the physical needs of soldiers in active service.

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<sup>61</sup> IWM, 11765, Second Lieutenant W. Lindsay, Letter dated 15/07/15.

<sup>62</sup> Duffett, p.197.

<sup>63</sup> University of St Andrews Archive / Special Collections, MSDEP121/8/3/6/1/4 1917, Letters and collection of Lt. Col. Philip George Anstruther.

However, not everyone found their meals dirty, uncooked, overcooked, or unappetising. Private Butler remembered that:

There was always stew. The bobagee [sic] very often made a stew of bully beef, McConachie's stew and all that sort of thing and biscuits. They'd boil it all up in a big cauldron and it was good food.<sup>64</sup>

Private Whitehouse agreed as he remembered that 'the food was plain but quite good, we had a fairly regular diet having certain items on certain days. It must have been alright because we were all kept very fit and hardy'.<sup>65</sup> Whilst they may have been satisfied some historians have argued that the plain food, and its monotony, may have had nutritional consequences. Beckett, Bowman and Connelly argue that the limited variety and lack of focus by the British Army on the 'complexity of a healthy diet' resulted in 'boils, sore gums and bad teeth' for many soldiers.<sup>66</sup>

Another impacting factor on soldier's bodies was alcohol. Men frequently bought beer, wines and spirits for themselves, but this was also crucially supplied to many of them by the military authorities. Part of the reason for this was that at this time alcoholic drinks were still regarded as useful therapeutic substances and tonics, the

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<sup>64</sup> IWM, 1878, Private Papers of S. E. Butler, p.44.

<sup>65</sup> IWM, 13108, Private Papers of P. Whitehouse, p.6

<sup>66</sup> I. Beckett, T. Bowman, and M. Connelly, *The British Army and the First World War* (St Ives, Cambridge University Press, 2017), p.150.

1907 British Pharmacopeia, for example, stated that 'as a circulatory stimulant, the value of alcohol is undoubted; it increases the output of blood from the heart'.<sup>67</sup> The 1914 *British Army Field Service Manual* shows that ideally 126 pints of rum would be allocated to each battalion per day, although this would only be distributed only at the discretion of the General Officer Commanding (GOC) and with the recommendation of the Medical Officer.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Anon, *British Pharmaceutical Codex Pub Pharmaceutical Society* (London: The Pharmaceutical society, 1907). p.69.

<sup>68</sup> Great Britain. War Office, *Field Service Manual, Infantry Battalion* (London: HMSO, 1914), p. 54.

E.—SUPPLIES REQUIRED FOR ONE DAY.

The following table, which is inserted for the purpose of easy reference, shows the detail of supplies which would be required by a battalion for one day :—

Detail.	Bat- talion Head- quarters.	M.G. Section.	One Com- pany.	Bat- talion.
* Establishment { personnel ... ..	81	18	227	1,007
{ horses ... ..	81	5	5	56
Biscuits ... .. lbs.	81	18	227	1,007
Bread (in lieu of biscuits) ... ..	101½	22½	283½	1,258½
Bacon ... ..	20½	4½	56½	251½
Cheese ... ..	15¼	3¼	42¼	188¼
Groceries :—				
Mustard ... ..	¼	¼	¾	¾
Tea ... ..	3¼	¼	8¼	39¼
Sugar ... ..	15¼	3¼	42¼	188¼
Salt ... ..	1½	9 ozs.	7¼	31½
Pepper ... ..	½ ozs.	½ oz.	¼ lb.	1½ lbs.
Jam ... .. lbs.	21	5	57	252
Meat, { fresh (in lieu of	101½	22½	283½	1,258½
{ preserved) ... ..	81	18	227	1,007
{ preserved) ... ..	81	18	227	1,007
Oats ... ..	372	60	60	672
Vegetables—fresh (a) ... ..	40½	9	118½	508½
or dried ... ..	10¼	2¼	28¼	125¼
or				
Lime juice (b) † ... .. pts.	2	½	5½	25
Rum (c) † ... ..	10	2¼	28¼	126
Tobacco (c) †... .. lbs.	1¼ lbs.	5 ozs.	¼ lbs.	18 lbs.

\* Excludes A.S.C. drivers and horses of the train.

(a) To be issued when available, but not to be carried in regimental transport when troops are marching daily.

(b) Lime juice is issued when fresh vegetables are not supplied, or at the discretion of the G.O.C. on recommendation of the medical officer.

(c) Issued at the discretion of the G.O.C. on recommendation of the medical officer.

† Not carried normally in supply columns or A.S.C. trains.

**British Army Field Service Manual 1914, p.54.<sup>69</sup>**

During the First World War, the distribution of alcohol at the front was thought to enable men to endure the trials of active service and combat. Weeks explains that the giving of the rum at dawn was often accompanied by an enthusiastic cry of 'Up Spirits'.<sup>70</sup> Phillips notes that by the end of 1915 the British military had received over a quarter of million gallons of rum for their forces in France which were to be

<sup>69</sup> A. Weeks, *Tea, Rum and Fags, Sustaining Tommy 1914-1918* (Stroud: The History Press, 2009), p.21.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

distributed twice weekly as a ration per man but could be increased for frontline troops during times of poor weather.<sup>71</sup> Many men certainly believed that their bodies could more easily respond to the pressures and rigours of combat and the harsh environment after a measure of alcohol. Private Stapleton was one such man who considered his rum ration essential during his time in France in 1918.

We had a very hard day, when up came the Major on his horse and said 'every man to get into battle order ready for an advance' I trod over these miles of ground again, no sleep, no rest and the ground sodden, your feet slipped back as fast as you put one forward. There is nothing for it just a drop of rum and it gave us some heart and settled our burden and went forthwith. I for one could not have been one of the party if I had not had the rum.<sup>72</sup>

Sergeant McKay noted in his diary on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1916 that he and his fellow soldiers were extremely glad that rum was in plentiful supply after working constantly as part of the 109<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance. He wrote '...working day and night. Fortunately, plenty of rum can be had as there are jars lying about which ration parties throw from them when they get caught in shell fire at night.'<sup>73</sup> Private Bigwood, with the 7th Battalion Worcestershire Regiment, explained how rum

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<sup>71</sup> R. Phillips, *Alcohol: A History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), p.242.

<sup>72</sup> IWM, 16428, Private Papers of E. Stapleton, p.21.

<sup>73</sup> IWM, 22065, Private Papers of R. McKay, p.51.

played a crucial role in making him a keen and confident soldier because he got completely drunk.

There was the Sergeant Major in the corner there with a big bottle of rum and he was filling up his water bottle. So of course, he was startled to see me and he said 'Rum, Bigwood?' and I said 'Yes Sir, please' so I got the lid of his billy can and poured out a neat rum. And of course, I drank a good deal of rum and then I went back up on the frontline and they came around with the rum ration and I could have won the war as easy as anything, absolutely. That was the first time I had ever been drunk.<sup>74</sup>

Not all men were as positive about their rum ration. Before the war, NCO Alfred West with the 1/1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Monmouthshire Regiment had never partaken in drinking alcohol, still, despite his limited experience he felt that the meagre rations allotted to him and his men were too small to have an impact on their bodies.

West: When you had to dish it up. You had a dessert spoon, two dessert spoons per man, well what's that?

Interviewer: You hadn't drunk before, did you enjoy it, was it good?

West: 'No!'

Interviewer: Did you always take your rum ration?

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<sup>74</sup> IWM SA, 10115, E. Bigwood, reel 1.



West: I think most of the chaps did because there wasn't enough to do you any harm.

Interviewer: Did it warm you up all?

West: No! Two little spoonsful wouldn't warm anyone up.<sup>75</sup>

Private Ching had the opposite problem as he received a liberal amount of rum from his commanding officer to encourage him and his fellow soldiers to build a bridge over a cold river in Northern France.

You had a tot of rum when you went in, a tot of rum when you went out... this rum was special SRD, it was rum, not diluted I'm telling you, and this was distributed by the corporal... all that I can remember about that incident, all that I can remember and things that I've been told. Now we were so drunk with rum that I was hung over the side of this big bulk of timber and ten thousand troops had passed over that bridge without them kicking me over the side, this is what I was told, and I can well imagine it because I was brought back off the bridge, I was let on the ground. I must have been asleep by then of this drink you see, and I woke up and sick, being sick with it, and I spewed all over the Sergeant Major.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> IWM SA, 12236, A. West, reel 4.

<sup>76</sup> IWM SA, 15435 F. Ching, reel 4.

Some men even gave up drinking alcohol for fear that it rendered their bodies incapable of effective military service. Cecil Burnell Tubbs recalled that

[I gave up for] very good reasons, because I had to go around four companies by day and all four companies by night and everywhere I went, 'Tommy Boy' have a drink. So, I had to cut it out, I just had to cut it right out, otherwise, it was impossible...as I say I had four as I went along, possibly on doubles, in fact, I celebrated the armistice on ginger and bitters.<sup>77</sup>

Others took the opposite approach. British stretcher bearer Joseph Yarwood recalled being a strict teetotaler until he arrived at the front.

I wasn't a drinker, I wasn't, not alcoholic until I got to France and I had my first rum ration...between you and I, a lot of our difficulty was the fact that both my parents were fond of the bottle and they hadn't got the money, so I used to say I hope I drop dead the day I touch alcohol, quite truthfully you see, but I didn't (laughs).<sup>78</sup>

Such an experience was satirised in the trench newspaper the *Wiper Times*, with a mock advert placed by 'J. Supitup'.

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<sup>77</sup> IWM SA, 8865, C. B. Tubbs, reel 3.

<sup>78</sup> IWM SA, 12231, J. Yarwood, reel 2.

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## THE DRINK HABIT ACQUIRED IN THREE DAYS.

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If you know anyone who doesn't drink alcohol regularly, or occasionally, let me send my free book, "CONFESSIONS OF AN ALCOHOL SLAVE." It explains something important, i.e.: How to quickly become an

### **Expert "Bona-fide Toper."**

For the first 15 years of my life I was a rabid teetotaler, since the age of 16 I have never been to bed sober. If your trouble is with reference to a friend please state in your letter whether he is willing to be cured or not. Letters treated in a confidential manner. I can cure anyone.

Address: J. SUPITUP, Havana Mansions.

Telegrams: "RATS."

**The Drink Habit, *The Wiper Times*, Tuesday April 10<sup>th</sup> 1917, p.2.<sup>79</sup>**

A complex relationship between soldiers and alcohol was not unique to the twentieth century. Jones explains that the culture of drinking in the military had long been an issue and had been increasingly become a matter of concern in the mid-nineteenth century with the development of soldier's abstinence associations such as the 1888 Army Temperance Association (ATA).<sup>80</sup> By the end of the nineteenth-century, abstaining soldiers were given medals for abstinence as a badge

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<sup>79</sup> J. Supitup, 'The Drink Habit – Advert' *The Wiper Times* (April 10<sup>th</sup> 1917), p.2

<sup>80</sup> E. Jones, 'Alcohol use and misuse within the military: A review' *International Review of Psychiatry*, (April 2011), pp.166–167.

of honour.<sup>81</sup> Yet it is clear that alcohol remained an important tool for the British Army and was significant in the physical experience of service in the First World War.

Much as with food, men also sought to top up their supply of alcohol and to drink beyond their rations. In 1916 Private Perry also noted the link between alcohol and respite as he described resting away from the frontline with his battalion at Coulouvillers. He wrote in his diary 'Moved to Coulouvillers. Somewhere we can spend 13 enjoyable days only 13 kilometres from Abbeville, very nice. I go to Abbeville almost every day for beer and canteen stores.'<sup>82</sup> During his time as a 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion King's Liverpool Regiment NCO Percy Valentine Harris recalled witnessing many men spent their wages on a few drinks.

Living was cheap however, woodbines were 5 a penny and beer was fourpence a pint. Some men managed to get drunk once a week, but smokers and drinkers, unless they had money from home, had a poor time from Monday to Friday.<sup>83</sup>

Private Thorley recalled that men did not simply look forward to alcohol drink but were prepared to take considerable risks to secure a little variety in what they consumed.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> IWM, 7244, Private Papers of H. G. Perry, Diary entry 12/9/16.

<sup>83</sup> IWM SA, 8270, P. V. Harris, reel 1.

I heard two or three days ago a German shouted over 'Bring us some rum Tommy and we will give you some whiskey". A Cpl.in the Yorks and Lancs went over and made the exchange. They allowed him to come back out [sic] lines, but his company officer saw him and placed him under escort to await a 'Field General Court Martial'<sup>84</sup>

On occasion servicemen did get very drunk. On Halloween 1915 Lieutenant Stiven wrote home to his parents in Dundee and recounted the tale of a drunken labourer who had passed out in their barracks.

Four in the morning we discovered that there had been a pilgrim in the night seeking shelter in the unoccupied bed of Crawford, who is away on leave. The poor fellow had taken rather much liquid cargo aboard at Richmond's, and had sought a bed to sleep off the ill effects in our hut. You see there was navvies innumerable about here. A rough crew, who slept in the huts they are making. He had come in very late, and it was only early this morning that his presence was discovered by a couple of the servants who hauled him before Capt. [sic] Dummer, thus sadly giving him a premature awakening. Now when a man is wakened so abruptly, and that an hour or two before the proper time on a Sunday Morning, he might not be very reasonable, I imagine that the result would have been guardroom at least for the poor delinquent.

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<sup>84</sup> IWM, 16435, Private Papers of G. Thorley, p.34.

But such was not the case with Dummer, who gave him a wiggings [sic] and let him go unmolested.<sup>85</sup>

While this labourer escaped anything more than a telling-off, drunkenness was a serious military offence that could lead to the death penalty in certain circumstances. The reasons for this were dramatically illustrated by Private Lancaster who described how he discovered a British camp full of drunken soldiers.

We eventually got to a place called Noyon. We went into the British Expeditionary Force Canteen, where the officers usually had supplies of whiskey, tins of chicken and what have you and inside was a sight that I will never forget. About 500 of our troops, absolutely paralytic drunk and Jerry couldn't have been far off, in fact, they were entering the other side of the town at that moment.<sup>86</sup>

Within the published memoirs of Private Iriam who joined the war through the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Service lies the account of a man who was nearly

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<sup>85</sup> University of St Andrews Archive / Special Collections, MS38961/2, Letters of Lieutenant Stiven, Letter to his parents, dated 31/10/1915, pp.3-4. Source is presented exactly as is written within the records of Lieutenant Stiven.

<sup>86</sup> IWM SA, 33034, F. T. J. Lancaster, reel 1. The British were not the only soldiers who could be incapacitated by alcohol. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 1918, The *New York Times* reported that drunken German troops were taken unawares by Belgian forces advancing into the area. Anon, 'Left Soldiers Behind to Destroy Ostend But Unofficered Men Got Drunk and Failed To Set Off Mines Before The Belgians Arrived', *New York Times* (20/10/1918), p.5.

court martialled for desertion, a crime that could have earned him the death penalty, after being too drunk to join his regiment on the line.

One of the trio on one occasion had been drunk and absent when the battalion went into the line and was now under arrest pending a court-martial trial. One of his side-kicks succeeded in getting on as the guard that was detailed to act as general caretaker and wet nurse for him while he was in the clink. The guardroom was upstairs in the south end of the building and when the drunk pretended he wanted to go outside to a latrine or something he and his mate went down the stairs and around the back of the building. Here his mate got hold of a bit of wood hitting the court-martial case a wallop on the arm breaking the arm. He explained that the drunk had fallen when going down the stairs. He was sent down the line to a hospital and in that way escaped court martial.<sup>87</sup>

Private Farrer remembered a drunken regular being given strict punishment for drunken behaviour during his time as stretcher bearer in 1915 with the 3rd Battalion Green Howards.

I do remember one, a chappie, on this Christmas eve, he was drunk, very drunk and going back to billets he bumped into the Sergeant Major...and the

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<sup>87</sup> G. R. Iriam, *In the Trenches 1914-1918* (USA: ebookit.com, 2011), p.155.

quartermaster and this chap, being an old soldier and being drunk he started telling them what he thought of them. And I don't know if he assaulted them, but the whole thing was that he was put under arrest. Well of course when you are put under arrest you are first tried by your company officer, the company officer referred him to the CO, and he must have been sufficiently aggressive that the CO put him down for a court martial. At court martial he got six months.<sup>88</sup>

Ferrer explained more that the drunken regular man in question had been set for discharge having served his thirteen years of service, not an uncommon event for long serving regulars prior to the introduction of conscription in 1916. However, the imprisonment of the drunken man meant his release was delayed and instead six months later he was returned to the frontline where he was severely wounded.<sup>89</sup> For this particular soldier, the price of intoxication proved to be extremely high.

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant McCracken also recounted how in 1915 one of his men was given severe punishment for three days after being drunk and disorderly. He noted in his diary how the man's punishment would be expedient to deter future drunken behaviour of his men '...so (he) is strung up to a gun wheel for an hour per diem, I think it will be very effective.'<sup>90</sup> For the unluckiest men, and exclusively for the

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<sup>88</sup> IWM SA 9552, B. Farrer, reels 8 -9.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> IWM, 11617, Private Papers of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant A. M. McCracken, p.13.



lowest ranks, an excess of alcohol could mean execution, particularly if that consumption of alcohol directly impacted on the soldier's effectiveness on the frontline. Private Evans was executed on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1915 for being intoxicated and not reporting for duty.<sup>91</sup> Private Knight was another soldier who was executed after he became drunk and opened fire indiscriminately on his fellow soldiers in the 10 Battalion on the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1915.<sup>92</sup> However, these cases were exceptions as alcohol rarely resulted in execution and in both cases mentioned the men were tried for their behaviour under influence rather than for actually drinking. However, it was still as a result of drinking alcohol that they were put to death.

Food and alcohol were not the only sources of physical pleasure sought out by men. Bourke and Cherry have discussed in detail how sexuality and masculinity were regularly linked within military service during the First World War.<sup>93</sup> Makepeace explains that until the spring of 1918, brothels in France were open to men of all ranks, although the rankers and the officers could not frequent the same establishment.<sup>94</sup> Aside from the blue and red lamps which denoted the different establishment for officers and rankers respectively, Makepeace also notes that amateur prostitution increased during the war as women traded sexual favours for

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<sup>91</sup> J. Putkowski and J. Sykes, *Shot at Dawn: Executions in World War One by Authority of the British Army Act Kindle Edition* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2007), loc, 471.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, loc, 1083.

<sup>93</sup> J. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male, Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), pp.156-160 and B. Cherry, *They Didn't Want To Die Virgins: Sex and Morale in the British Army on the Western Front 1914-1918* (Wolverhampton: Helion Limited, 2016).

<sup>94</sup> C. Makepeace, 'Male Heterosexuality and Prostitution During the Great War' *Cultural and Social History*, Vol, 9:1, (2012), p.71.

gifts or an evening of entertainment rather than money.<sup>95</sup> Despite the problem of venereal disease, typically the British Army overlooked soldiers engagements with prostitutes. After conscription was introduced in 1916 the British Army even stopped telegraphing soldier's next of kin to inform them that he had contracted a venereal disease after concerns were raised of the effect this had on men's morale. Makepeace explains that many men feared this telegraph 'more than anything else'. As the war ground on it is evident that the military authorities arrived at the view that a less morally stringent approach to the bodies of soldiers in order to maintain morale was more important than encouraging them to be sexually healthy or faithful to their wives.<sup>96</sup>

Some men even felt that sex was a requirement of military service. Private Barraclough recalled that

I was by now nearly a full-blown private, but not quite, for to be a 'real' soldier I was told that I must get syphilis or some such disease and have a spell at Lichfield hospital. I was determined never to become a 'real soldier'.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p.73.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p.70.

<sup>97</sup> IWM, 3453, Private Papers of E. C. Barraclough, pp.1-2

NCO George Ashurst recalled that sex was very much part of the soldier experience abroad as he recounted the tale of drinking wine in a local brothel whilst billeted behind the lines at Armentieres in April 1915. However, his story also pointed to efforts to prevent them from satisfying their bodies.

It was absolutely crowded and there were five women in there and it was 5 francs a time. To do, you know, up the stairs and into the bedrooms. Fellas were coming in and going out, coming and going out, you know the bedrooms, with the girls. One night the padre walked into the establishment. On the stairs, leading up to the bedroom, was full, a man on every step, waiting his turn to be with a woman.<sup>98</sup>

The Army Chaplain came into the brothel to lecture the room about their loose moral, shouting 'have none of you any mothers, have none of you any sisters?' before threatening to tell the Battalion Commanding Officer (BCO). After having done so leave was restricted for all men until the battalion moved.<sup>99</sup> In this instance, the actions of this outraged priest combined with authority of the BCO to impose his sense of order on the bodies of these troops.

Despite the blind eye that the army would often turn to men's sexual activities the pursuit of romantic adventure could be rewarded with harsh disciplinary measures.

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<sup>98</sup> IWM SA, 9875, G. Ashurst, reel 8.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

Lieutenant Creek's body was central to the punishment he received for sneaking out to meet a local girl, and it was clear that he was made an example of even if it is not clear that he was as guilty as others.

It may be wondered why I had gone intentionally to meet Selma as I knew she came from the station through the coppice but in truth, I had no idea I would meet her as it was getting late. This was a very unfortunate incident for me, I heard later that some of the boys had been meeting girls in the wood and the MP had been alerted. I was marched in front of the battery commander the next morning, I had been caught red-handed so to speak and excuses were futile. I do not think that the C.O. would have been so severe if the MP had not pressed the case, but I suppose they were justified and fourteen days' number on field punishment I got. I had never been to the gun park in the evenings so I do not know if I was the first to undergo this torture; that evening I was marched by the sergeant of the guard with two escorts to the gun park, where my wrists were fastened with drag ropes to the rim of a gun wheel. The sergeant looked at his watch and said one hour Creek, I had just enough play in the ropes to enable me to bend my head to clear midges from my face, it was indeed torture, the next evening Bombardier Bridges gave me some lotion he had got from the farrier and told me to smear it over my face, before I was tied, it helped a lot.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> IWM, 1467, Private Papers of Lieutenant P. Creek, pp.59-60.

Not all men regarded sex as being so important to military life. Private Grainger recalled that although some men were sleeping with the women from the kitchens during his training, this was fairly unusual. He claimed that 'the majority of them were never bothered about sex, I was never bothered about it, I would much rather a game of football than bother about going knocking about with girls, we didn't bother at all.'<sup>101</sup> Private Holbrook also was not particularly interested in women explaining that he joined up as a young soldier before the war. However, he also recounted uncomfortably learning about sex via the stories of the rough, swearing men who shared his barrack.<sup>102</sup>

Of course, sexual satisfaction could also be sought by servicemen from other men. Weeks has shown that homosexuality in the military in the nineteenth and early twentieth century only became visible when it occurred between ranks.<sup>103</sup> Robb explains that between 1914 and 1922, 22 British officers and 270 rankers were court-martialled for homosexuality.<sup>104</sup> Many men including Captain Joseph Randell Ackerley, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon kept their sexuality a secret for the duration of the war.<sup>105</sup> Paul Fussell argues that within the work of men such as Owen, Sassoon and Ross the homosexual love between men was particularly

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<sup>101</sup> IWM SA, 10768, J. Grainger, reel 3.

<sup>102</sup> IWM SA, 9339, W. Holbrook, reel 2.

<sup>103</sup> J. Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society* (London, Wikinson-Lanthan, 1981), p.40.

<sup>104</sup> G. Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (London: Palgrave, 2015), p.83.

<sup>105</sup> R. Norton (ed.) *My Dear Boy: Gay Love Letters through the Centuries* (San Francisco: Leyland Publications, 1998), p.210 and p.235.

visible.<sup>106</sup> In a rare mention as part of an oral history testimony, Private Holbrook was asked if he was aware of homosexuality during the war, he replied:

I don't think so, I think it's something I would have been told about, they'd be talking about amongst themselves, don't think I knew of it, they were very strict about it I found out afterwards, I didn't know at the time, the sergeant would come in, they wouldn't dare, there wouldn't be any of that sort of thing, none of that sort of thing, very strict.<sup>107</sup>

Holbrook goes on to explain that within his barracks a game was played called the cork club which satirized homosexuality but also policed such activity in his unit. Each member had to retain a cork on their person which they had to show on demand or be fined a penny.<sup>108</sup> Holbrook describes this as fun and useful for establishing a kitty for the barrack and while he is unclear about how the presentation of the cork meant men were not homosexual, he infers that without it you were considered questionable and therefore financially punished.

In Weeks and Porter's *Between the Acts*, there are several accounts of homosexual men who served as soldiers in the First World War but much of the narrative is focused on punishment, fear and suspicion. 'Gerald' noted that he '...only met one

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Holbrook, reel 2.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. reel 6.

other homosexual in the army'.<sup>109</sup> Gerald explained that he only ever had sex with one man in the army as his rise to the rank of sergeant ended any further sexual experiences. He was even forced to report another man for homosexual behaviour and claimed 'there was nothing I could do, I couldn't protect him. I had to look after number one. See, I couldn't let the world know that I was homosexual, not in the army! Otherwise what was going to happen?'<sup>110</sup> 'Fred' describes a more open environment but also one where homosexuality was scorned when he was billeted midway through the war in Cardiff barracks full of 'strange chaps' when a drunken soldier openly presented his erect penis to Fred demanding he pleasure it to which Fred replied that the man must allow Fred to 'shag' him first, upon which the man lost his erection; '... his old boy went down just like that. And they all burst out laughing now, making him look like a fool.'<sup>111</sup> This intriguing story sits at odds to the experience of those like Rupert Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and Private Holbrook. The body was at the heart of an aggressive homosexual encounter which simply seemed to entertain rather than outrage those that witnessed it. If this story provides a glimpse of the segregation of 'strange chaps' in the services during the First World War, or is an instance where men who have sex with men managed to organise themselves a safe space and one another's company, then it shows just how far the body and its urges could shape life in the military during this period.

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<sup>109</sup> J. Weeks and K. Porter, *Between the Acts: Lives of Homosexual Men 1885-1967* (London: Rivers Oram, 1998), p.6.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p.7.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p.16.

Philippa Levine explains in *Prostitution, Race and Politics*, that with the beginning of the First World War, military officials anticipated that rates of venereal disease would increase and that there was some surprise by 1918 that these had not risen to the extent feared.<sup>112</sup> Private Surfleet of the East Yorkshire Regiment (31<sup>st</sup> Division) recalled the vivid educational campaigns organised by the army to encourage abstinence.

There seems a danger that 'our war' may only be remembered as a series of drunken orgies interspersed with a few cases of rape and almost nightly immoral relations with every available French and Belgian female. This sort of picture is far from the truth... At times, it was bloody and terrifying but, as for sex, most of the females were too old or too tired doing a man's job to be interested. There were 'red lamps' (brothels) in some of the bigger towns but they were, comparatively, little used. The propaganda against VD before we went out... and later... was good enough to deter the vast majority of overseas soldiers and those who 'caught a dose' suffered so much in so many ways, their misery killed the urge and discretion usually triumphed. I never saw any girl molested in any way, they were invariably treated with the utmost respect by most of the troops.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> P. Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p.145.

<sup>113</sup> IWM, 22369, Private Papers of A. Surfleet, Preface.



While Surfleet may have restrained himself Peter Simkins has shown that between 1914 and 1918 153,531 British and Dominion soldiers were given medical attention for the contraction of syphilis, gonorrhoea and any other form of sexually transmitted disease. After January 1917 fears of men's bodies being incapacitated resulted in those who contracted VD being denied leave for a year as attendance at all brothels was strictly prohibited.<sup>114</sup>

Treatments for such infections were a deeply unpleasant physical experience. In Max Arthurs *Forgotten Voices* Sergeant Alfred West described the practice of filling the bladder as a douche.

The doctors used to have parades to tell fellows what to do to prevent it. They had a tap of water and showed you how to put this tube into your penis and turn the tap on. The weight of the water would fill up your bladder and you'd pass it all out again along with any infection.<sup>115</sup>

Harrison notes that such treatments were remarkably unpopular with patients. So much so that during a series of trials for treatments, RAMC officers Donaldson and

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<sup>114</sup> P. Simkins, 'Soldiers and Civilians: Billeting in Britain and France' in I. Beckett and K. Simpson (ed.) *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Great Britain: Pen and Sword, 1985), pp.187-88.

<sup>115</sup> M. Arthur, *Forgotten Voices of the Great War* (St. Ives: Random House, 2011), p.94.

Davidson found that all of their patients rejected irrigation in favour of chemical treatment.<sup>116</sup>

Standard treatment for venereal disease was an arsphenamine regime which confined men to hospitals for several weeks. Harrison explains that the average stay in hospital lasted between fifty and sixty days as men were subjected to Salvarsan substitutes and mercury treatments that could be very dangerous.<sup>117</sup> As an orderly, James Payne regularly assisted doctors with the treatment of VD. He explained that because the hospital was short staffed he often undertook the duties of the physician by dissolving the arsenic and the mercury to be injected into the body. He recalled that '...it had to be done most carefully because it was deadly of course. Arsenic, if it wasn't utilised properly, it would kill you.'<sup>118</sup> Payne also explained that the medical staff were uncertain if the unpleasant procedure was even effective.

Well we wouldn't know, it takes years to know, but the treatment was 21 day's treatment 7, 7, blank, 7, 22 day's treatment with so many days blank in between you see. And then the other mercurial treatment on alternate sides of the buttocks about once a week but not every time... because the doctors had to do that, I would haven't experience to do it, but I learned by doing it, they all injected the needle into the veins, it's simply waiting for it all, er..

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Harrison, *Medical War*, p.157.

<sup>118</sup> IWM SA, 9894, J. A. Payne, reel 5.

gravity, the saline in one bottle and the err... sort of arsenic in the other bottle, it had the white clip in the bottom release them both together until they emptied they got up and walked away then.<sup>119</sup>

Despite the danger of the 'medicine', Payne claimed that the process wasn't that unpleasant, linking it more to the brief unpleasantness of inoculation.<sup>120</sup>

Not receiving treatment could be even more hazardous for the soldier's body. Private Trafford who served with 1/2nd Battalion Monmouthshire Regiment recalled how he saw a number of men who were being treated for VD whilst he recovered from a leg injury in 1915.

This particular day, I was stood outside...and I started looking at these fellas, and when I went back inside I said to the nurse, Curly they called me, she said, what were you watching Curly and I says 'I can't understand prisoners of war so near a hospital.' She said 'them are not prisoners of war they are our fellas'. So, I said, 'What's the matter with them' and she said 'they've all got the disease, you know the pox'. Dirty women like, and the barbed wire to keep them in. So, I went back out again to take a good look at them, oh the sights, I wouldn't look at a woman for years. Oh, their noses half rotted

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid. reel 6.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

and their arms all bandaged up, oh the s... [trails off] some of them with their ears half eaten. It's unbelievable, you wouldn't believe it.<sup>121</sup>

Trafford's chilling description of rotten body parts and being kept behind barbed wire like prisoners captures the dramatic consequences for soldiers of a risky sexual encounter, combining damage to the body with social ostracisation. His recollections of these consequences were more haunting still as he recounted a story from his combat experience.

Anyway, this sergeant had got it, a Welshman he was and we was [sic] going over the top...I know we were going over the top, as usual you know in a trench with 5 or 6 men, this sergeant came to me and he says, you lads, he says I want to get over first, he says you lads hold back whilst I'll get over. He says I don't want to go back home he says, I've got, you know, he says I don't want to give it the wife, he said. So, long story short we let him go over, and he hadn't gone far and he got it and he was killed you know. If I don't get killed he says, I'll have to do myself in, he says, I've got it bad he says, I haven't reported it, you were supposed to report these things, because, in different places, they'd have a little list of what to do if you'd been with a woman, but I never was with a woman after I saw those in the camp, but he killed himself.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> IWM SA, 24540, R. Trafford, reel 1.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

Trafford's account illustrated the shame that men could feel having contracted a venereal disease. Harrison explains that stigma of contracting a venereal disease could encourage men to avoid sex but not always.<sup>123</sup> Hall continues that a temporary culture developed within the climate of the war that oscillated between men seeking hedonistic pleasure as they soon die and concerns of contracting diseases.<sup>124</sup> Even during the war a range of treatments were available to soldiers, both pre and post the act of sex yet many of these were considered embarrassing and their success varied dramatically dependant on the commitment of the military medical services in place. Evidently treatment could be embarrassing, punitive and unpleasant. Therefore, it is possible to recognise why the sergeant ultimately decided that destruction of his body was a better alternative than the ramifications of admitting his illness.

### **Endangered Bodies**

The examples of soldiers suffering from venereal disease above draws attention to the hazardous nature of military life away from combat. The opportunities for sexual adventure presented by service during the First World War may have resulted in injury to the bodies of thousands of British men but there were plenty more risks away from the frontline. Historians face a problem in recovering those that suffered

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<sup>123</sup> M. Harrison, 'The British Army and Venereal Disease during the First World War' *Medical History* (1995), vol. 39, p.141.

<sup>124</sup> L. Hall, 'War Brings it on' in R. Cooter, M. Harrison, and S. Sturdy (eds.), *Medicine and Modern Warfare* (Amsterdam: Clio Medica, 1999), p.212.

or were killed through accidents as such cases were often simply recorded as ‘other casualties’ within the figures for the wounded either in action or behind the lines.<sup>125</sup> The 1932 published report *Medical services; casualties and Medical Statistics of the Great War*, argued that 46,309 men suffered an accident and were returned to duty and 506 died.<sup>126</sup> However reliable this figure may be, it certainly suggests that the body of the soldier was often in danger even when far away from the enemy.

The presence of live ammunition and the requirements to keep weapons ready for use and skills up to scratch carried all sorts of risk. In the middle of a celebratory letter home after the end of the war on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 1918, Lieutenant Erskine also expressed dismay because an accident had killed several of his men.

They have had an accident with 1/4<sup>th</sup>. A gun burst. This is the third accident they have had with Stokes guns out here. The 2/1<sup>st</sup> officer and three Askari were killed a week ago at firing practice, another officer of the cap corps and ten others were killed accidentally a short time before. I’m not taking risks now and I am not going to fire any more live shells.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> F. Reid, *Medicine in First World War Europe: Soldiers, Medics, Pacifists* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p.44

<sup>126</sup> Major T. J. Mitchell and G. M Smith, *Medical Services; Casualties and Medical Statistics of the Great War* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1931), p.144.

<sup>127</sup> IWM, 14937, Private Papers of Lieutenant P. Erskine, p.71.

In his service diary on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January in 1917 William Fowler, an orderly with the RAMC, recorded that he had been injured in a bomb accident along with 12 other men.<sup>128</sup> Private Prew recounted a similar experience as he trained with the Seventh London where a bombing accident had left his battalion ‘...down in the dumps’.<sup>129</sup>

It was not just bombs and shells that could result in injury. Private Hare recalled how he almost shot himself at point blank range whilst cleaning his Regimental Sergeant Major’s revolver. Hare explained how this event stayed with him as the most vivid memory of his experiences during the war. ‘Do you know, that upsets me more than all the shellfire and machine guns, to think that I was so near to death and it would have been my own fault.’<sup>130</sup>

Vehicles could also be particularly hazardous, NCO Oswald Croft described how he crashed his motorcycle after a red cross ambulance pulled out in front of him as he returned on a food run in 1918.<sup>131</sup> Motorcycle dispatcher Private Eustace Booth also explained that riding at night was a particularly hazardous part of the job, ‘oh I came off my bike many a time, I had fallen off, I was knocked off...I got bruised, oh yes, oh yes sometimes I did hurt myself quite a bit.’<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> IWM, 11625, Private Papers of W. Fowler (Hicken), p.11.

<sup>129</sup> IWM, 863, Private Papers of R. G. Prew, p.9.

<sup>130</sup> IWM SA, 11440, W. Hare, reel 7.

<sup>131</sup> IWM SA, 4440, O. Croft, reel 2.

<sup>132</sup> IWM SA, 9263, E. Booth, reel 3.

Another hazard was self-harm. Private Reynolds recorded the suicide of several men within a single diary entry on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1915.

Other incidents of the week were one man cut his throat on Parade ground - effects of home trouble and barrack life. Wounded soldier broke out of hospital - insane crying 'war is over! War's over' Caught with difficulty. Later in week another Recruit Smith of Anstey, cut his throat in entry in town. On Saturday night recruit in Black B went silly, caused a disturbance, overpowered with great difficulty, result of drink on mind affected by separation from home and home comforts. Tonight, rumour of another suicide. No details known so hope it is untrue.<sup>133</sup>

Reynolds seemed sure that the actions of these men were linked to their military service, as they suffered the strain of separation from home, the rigours of life in the barracks and alcohol consumption. Their bodies were central to the desperate strategies they devised to escape those strains.

## **Conclusion**

The British military authorities sought to maintain the control over the bodies of servicemen that they so carefully developed during training. Punishments were

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<sup>133</sup> IWM, 17236, Private Papers of T. C. Reynolds, p.4.



meted out to those who became ill and failed to report it, who managed to get themselves drunk or who transgressed rules on sexual activity. But this control was complex in practice. In the first place it often relied on self-discipline rather than on punishment. Troops were warned of the dangers of venereal diseases, and informed of best practice in maintaining health and hygiene, and it is clear that many complied and conformed. But military efforts over control of men's bodies while on active service but away from the front also seem to have been limited and partial. Troops were plied with alcohol to encourage them to take on tough duties or to prepare them for combat. A 'blind-eye' could be turned to sexual activity when rules were broken. Men found themselves responsible for self-diagnosis and reporting illness as the limits of medical surveillance were reached. It was as if many in the ranks of the military authorities felt that preparing the bodies of men for effective participation in the war meant allowing indulgence and pleasure as much as imposing control and discipline over them.

Whether indulgence and pleasure were licensed or not, it is clear that the soldiers themselves were often active agents in the fate of their bodies and that many of their clearest recollections of their time in the military were physical. Agency does not simply mean resistance of course, and as stated above it seems as if many were content to go along with the instructions given, the food provided and the rules outlined in keeping themselves fit and healthy. But active service also allowed men scope for non-compliance and non-conformity. Men often had the opportunity to

retake elements of control over their bodies from the army. They protested over food that was low in quality and quantity, and found ways around efforts to control their sexual activities. Their drunkenness enabled them to escape the physical rigours of their lives and surroundings, and to cheer themselves up but it could also inflame them to violence and even suicide. The body was central to the experience of troops as they prepared for combat or recovered from it. The next chapter explores the experience of these bodies on the frontline itself.

## Chapter Four Bodies Under Fire: The Frontline

### **Introduction**

Suddenly a German machine gun pre-set before darkness to fire on our parapet, let's rip a devilish traverse (a wide sweep of machine gun fire across a definite section of the enemy's trenches) which skims the top-most sandbags. Dirt is flung into the faces and foul language seethes through everyone's lips – the bastard. Not far off a Vickers gun (a British machine gun with a rapid rate of fire) returns the hate at an appreciably faster tempo: it shoots a hundred rounds or so across no-man's land. Although there is no special cause for alarm, intermittent rifle fire develops, as if to let Jerry know we are wide awake, and it's no bloody use his starting anything. Jerry responds, likewise, for it is the morning hate.

A Day in the Trenches, unknown.<sup>1</sup>

The prose piece 'A Day in the Trenches' by an unknown author during the First World War captures the physicality of frontline violence, with dirt, wakefulness and hate seething through men all against a backdrop of the noises of gunfire which the author is listening closely enough as to differentiate the different weapons used. As argued in the previous chapter, men did not live permanently on the frontline but while they were there the prospect of battle and the potential for death and injury

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<sup>1</sup> Anon, 'A Day in the Trenches', in G. Cooke, *Poetry and Writing of the First World War* (London: Lulu.com, 2015), p.34. This account is presented exactly as quoted in Cooke.

was ever present. Excited, exhausted and often terrified, men focused their attention on the soldiers sometimes only meters away across no man's land, who more often felt just as apprehensive.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter considers the place of men's bodies on the frontline and the impact of this experience as they served in the First World War. Firstly, this chapter will touch on some of the conditions they encountered there and the extent to which their time away from actual combat was almost as physically demanding as fighting itself. The military authorities themselves sought to keep the bodies of troops prepared for conflict, with uneven outcomes, while the environments around soldiers became increasingly hazardous. It will then consider combat itself and the impacts of fear and adrenaline on bodies as they responded to being continually in mortal danger. Finally, it will consider the bodies damaged by time on the frontline. The evidence suggests that men did not simply fear death or wounding, but rather they differentiated between types of death and built hierarchies of injury. In these circumstances it was as if men did not simply inhabit their bodies but spent time imagining their future ones, and considered damage to them. It also seems that the military authorities saw the bodies of the troops in multiple and complex ways. They devoted a lot of effort to repairing wounded bodies and maintained ideas about masculinity to encourage men to see themselves as ready to return to the activities that had just damaged them. But the authorities also proved capable of disciplining

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<sup>2</sup> A. Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Trench* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.86-87.

these wounded bodies, even punishing some with the death they had avoided on the battlefield. Dead bodies were recovered too, often at considerable risk which suggested that once killed the British soldier's corpse had a symbolic value. When taken together this chapter explores the ways in which ideas about the body and its experiences of the frontline were driven by more than just the violence encountered there.

### **Frontline life**

Food remained central to the control exercised by the military authorities over the bodies of British troops. The logistical difficulties of achieving this in practice was often overcome by the Army Service Corps who had the challenging task of ferrying food to the trenches for the men on the frontline. For example, Major Nicholson praised them for succeeding in keeping his men fed despite the difficulties

I have the highest praise for the Army Service Corps which never failed to get rations and food to us particularly when we were continually on the move in the early days before static warfare and they were sometimes under shell fire themselves.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> IWM, 6827, Private Papers of Major W. J. Nicholson, p.17.

However, there were plenty of times when it was not possible for the ASC to get through to troops on the frontline and Private Niblett's complaint that he had 'gone over the top on one slice of bread and jam' was not entirely uncommon.<sup>4</sup> It was to deal with these circumstances that each British soldier carried a pack of survival rations. In Duffett's examination of military food in the First World War, she explains that the iron rations were only supposed to be eaten as a substitute if other food was unavailable.<sup>5</sup> Consisting primarily of hard tack biscuits wrapped in paper, a tin of stew, beans or processed meat and occasionally a small packet of flavouring such as salt, pepper or sugar, the iron rations were neither particularly appetising nor overly nutritious. This was despite significant research carried out over the course of the nineteenth century by the British Army to attempt to improve the nutritious value of the iron ration.<sup>6</sup> Private Paul Whitehouse found the hard tack biscuits to be particularly inedible. He recalled that '...the bread situation was worst: if only we could have had more bread; but we had to manage on those very hard army biscuits. They told us they were full of goodness; they were damned hard.'<sup>7</sup> Made from flour, water, and salt, the biscuits were useful as they were unlikely to spoil, but eating them raw required a strong set of teeth. They were so durable that some men put them to other uses.

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<sup>4</sup> IWM, 8408, Private Papers of C. A. Niblett, p.4.

<sup>5</sup> R. Duffett. *The Stomach for Fighting: Food and the Soldiers of the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p.35.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.34-37.

<sup>7</sup> IWM, 13108, Private Papers of P. Whitehouse, p.32.



**Square hard tack 'army biscuit' with central section recessed to accommodate a family portrait photograph.<sup>8</sup>**

Major Cottell had condemned hard tack as early as 1903 in the *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps (JRAMC)* when he pointed out that in the Last South African War the army had come to rely on them and that a diet consisting of 'biscuits...was barely enough'. For him it had become a 'starvation diet' that had lasting effects on the soldier's physical health so that they 'were much weakened and could only do short marches with any ease.'<sup>9</sup> The response was to make greater efforts to provide other elements of a meal alongside the biscuits. This was not always a success however. Tinned food could rot in the environmental conditions of the frontline and become

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<sup>8</sup> IWM, EPH 1513., Picture Frame, Army Biscuit.

<sup>9</sup> Major R. J. C. Cottell, 'The Medical Services in The First Line', *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*, Vol. 1, (1903), p.303.

hazardous, and Private Stapleton remembered taking a fellow soldier to the doctor after he became sick from eating his tinned sausages.<sup>10</sup> Walter Clarke recalled how his appetite was lost on the march to Vimy Ridge as his tin of bully beef was ‘filled with maggots’. He never ate corned beef again.<sup>11</sup>

If efforts to maintain the health and fitness of military bodies through feeding could be frustrated on the frontline so could other elements of the body regime of the British Army. Private Cook recalled his introduction to life on the frontline.

Sgt Newsome did not only take us into his platoon he welcomed us and we took to him. His first instruction was clear and sound as he was: ‘you are in the frontline, the enemy are 600 yards away at this point, which is really a long way in the part of the war, he knows you are here and you must be always alert. Whilst you are in this trench you never sleep, you never leave your rifle and you keep it loaded, but not one round in the breech remember, I don’t want my head blowing off by someone who has not secured his safety catch and you never take off any equipment or clothing, nor do you wash or shave, you are on active service here and take no unnecessary chances, at any moment the enemy may strike.’ Quite a speech but what wealth of good advice from a man who knew from experience. ‘Any questions’ he asks. ‘Sergeant’ someone says ‘you said we never sleep, how long are we here for?’

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<sup>10</sup> IWM, 16428, Private Papers of E. Stapleton, p.11.

<sup>11</sup> IWM SA, 577, W. E. Clarke, reel 2.



‘well son’ he replies, ‘when I said you never sleep I mean there are no regular hours for sleep, you drop off when you get a chance but learn to sleep with one eye open and never go to sleep on sentry no, we don’t know when we will be relieved it is rumoured we are here for twenty-one days but no one knows and if they do they won’t tell.’<sup>12</sup>

Up to this point washing and grooming, the maintenance of uniforms in good condition, and regular sleep had been central to strategies to impose control over men as they were transformed from citizens to soldiers. Sergeant Newsome’s speech made it clear that these were no longer priorities in the face of the enemy. At the very moment where men were to be thrown into battle the military abandoned efforts to discipline their bodies through managing their appearance and their health.

Not that the enemy was the only threat to the bodies of troops while on the frontline. One of the most recurrent descriptions of the First World War is the filth in which men often lived. Public perceptions of the fighting between 1914-18 often invoke mental images of mud, blood, and rats.<sup>13</sup> Sergeant Ward recalled that the environment within which he lived during the battle of the Somme in 1916 was particularly arduous as ‘it was terrible in the mud and the dead bodies and the

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<sup>12</sup> IWM, 12149, Private Papers of W. Cook, p.24.

<sup>13</sup> P. Simkins, *From the Somme to Victory: The British Army's Experience on the Western Front 1916-1918* (London: Pen and Sword, 2014).

stench. It is surprising, when I look back now, how we did exist. Being young, full-blooded, we just tolerated the discomfort.<sup>14</sup> Private Keller also described the filth in which he and so many men existed.

The troops wallowed in the mud and slime in the trenches on the gun pits. The horse lines became a sea of mire. Someone once wrote; 'The physical conditions in the First World War raised both fascination and disbelief. How was it that the individual soldier put up with the cold, the wet, the dirt, the frequent death of comrades, the constant dangers and the apparent inevitability sooner or later of personal extinction, perhaps by a bullet in the open, but much more often by multiple wounds caused by a shell. Often times they were left to lie and die without help. To that could be added also the danger of drowning in a sea of slime in one of the many shells holes.'<sup>15</sup>

Private Williams emphasised this point and explained that the mud was not simply an inconvenience but a threat, stating that 'it was a problem, the muck, it was as much a battle, an enemy as the blooming shells, for us anyhow.'<sup>16</sup> The filth disrupted military strategies to keep men clean and hygienic but it was more of a threat still as it could kill men who were buried or drowned in it. This was a common

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<sup>14</sup> IWM SA, 24550, W. Ward, reel 2.

<sup>15</sup> IWM, 11876, Private Papers of C. R. Keller, pp.52-53.

<sup>16</sup> IWM SA, 9993, A. C. Williams, reel 2.

hazard as was noted by Private Warsop in his diary who wrote 'I had to change my position as the side of the trench was slowly sinking being only made of mud.'<sup>17</sup>

Mud could also make soldiers ill. Harrison has argued that on the Western front trench warfare encouraged environmental sicknesses like trench foot and louse infestations which caused fevers. He has also pointed out that environmental conditions on other frontlines were similarly a threat to the bodies of allied troops.<sup>18</sup> In Macedonia, Palestine and Mesopotamia supply line failures and the presence of insects caused outbreaks of scurvy and malaria.<sup>19</sup> On the East Africa front Private Shaw of the 25th Battalion Royal Fusiliers witnessed his entire battalion succumbing to disease as over three-quarters of the men contracted malaria.

By December, the battalion was reduced to less than 100 men (three signallers). But a draft of 400 men from England was on the way, (actually only about half the men arrived – Malaria had taken its toll).... Onward to the Rufigi [sic] river. A few days' rest and we were issued with an extra 200 rounds of ammo in readiness for crossing this (wider than the Thames) river. With no cover fire support, we all thought this would be the end of the Fusiliers. That very day, General Smuts arrived, took one look, and ordered a medical inspection. Now reduced to 140, only 44 were passed fit (I was

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<sup>17</sup> IWM, 1878, Private Papers of A.C. Warsop, p.16.

<sup>18</sup> M. Harrison, *The Medical War: British Military Medicine in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.291.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

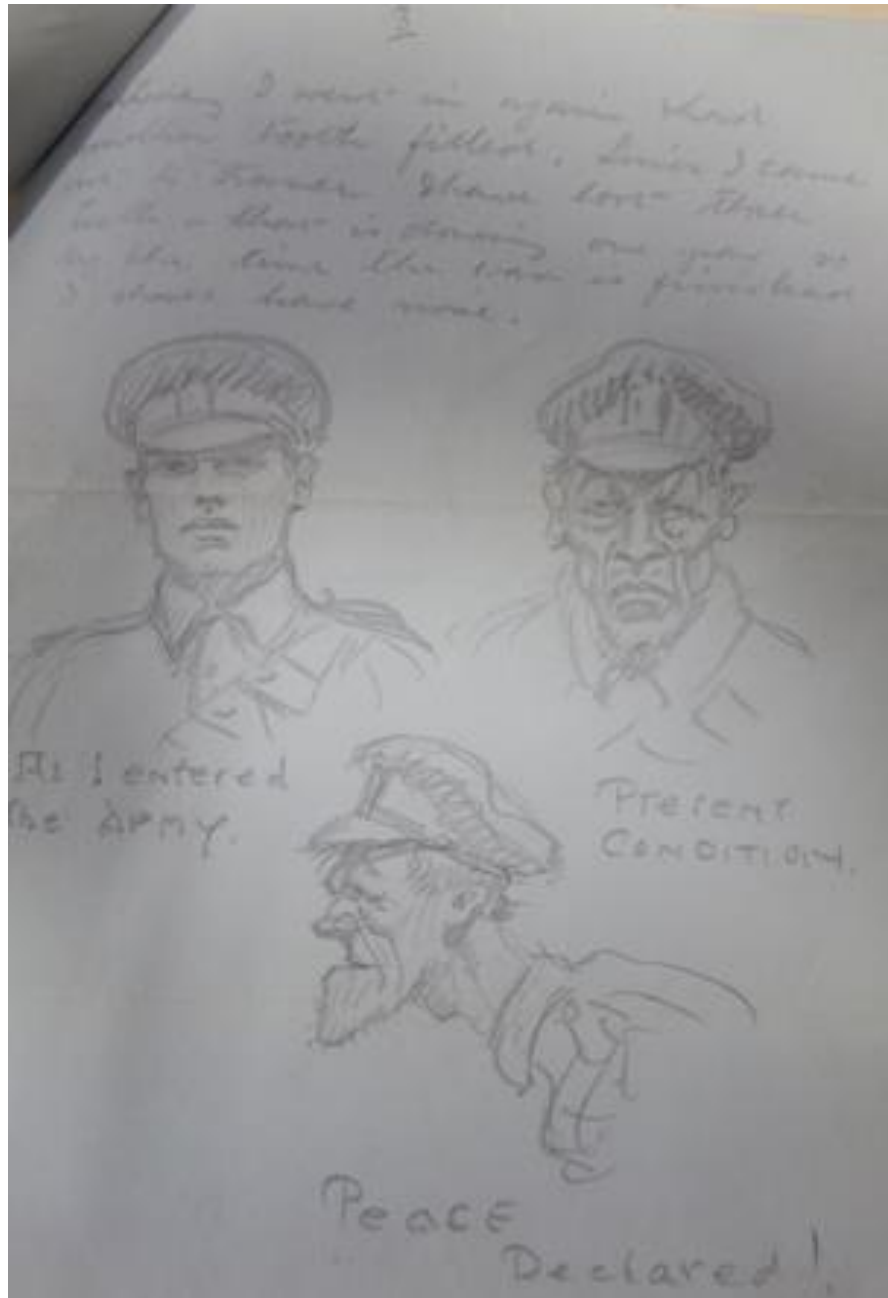
getting touches of Malaria and Dysentery). Smuts order was: - 'Go back immediately down to the Cape and recuperate.'<sup>20</sup>

Shaw noted that by the time that he had returned to Durban he also fell ill with malaria and had to recuperate in hospital. He reported his ability to withstand the disease proudly, 'prior to that I had had a good run, being one of the very few to do the long trek from Moschi in May 1916 to the Rufiji and back to Morogoro by January 1917 without having to report sick.'<sup>21</sup> Evidently, the enemy was not the only threat to the bodies of those sent out for combat. Frontline circumstances disrupted military efforts to control those bodies, so that inadequate food, poor hygiene, sleeplessness and environmental conditions all impacted upon physical discipline. The evidence above shows that men vividly recalled their experience there through their bodies. During his service as a volunteer soldier William Broadhead liked to send sketches within the letters he wrote home to his parents. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of April 1915, he illustrated the physical strain that the war was having on him.

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<sup>20</sup> IWM, 17426, Private Papers of C. Shaw, pp.6-7.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.7.



Sketch by William Broadhead, letter dated 11/04/15, p.3.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Sheffield Archives, L.S. 1980/1-59, Private Papers of William Broadhead, Letter dated 11/04/15, p.3.



Sketch by William Broadhead, letter undated.<sup>23</sup>

His drawings capture perfectly the impact of life in the frontline on the bodies of British soldiers and those efforts of the military authorities to control them. Gone is

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<sup>23</sup> Sheffield Archives, L.S. 1980/1-59, Private Papers of William Broadhead, letter undated, p.3.

the square-jawed young man in the neat uniform, who has become the unshaven, emaciated veteran, with crumpled clothing and unkempt hair who is forced to get by on the sleep he can grab whenever he has the chance.

### **Fighting Bodies**

In his study on the behaviours of soldiers in combat, Kellett explains that fear is a common element of any military engagement and argues that fear predominately arises for soldiers in combat when they feel a lack of control over their environment.<sup>24</sup> Figley and Nash also consider fear as being a normal part of the military experience noting that during their research soldiers claimed that death, injury, and loss of their friends were their primary fears during combat.<sup>25</sup> Figley and Nash argue that competent soldiers learn to control this fear and that paradoxically fear of failure and appearing weak is a common method used by modern militaries to encourage men to enter combat.<sup>26</sup> Noakes argues that in the early twentieth century it was widely expected that soldiers could control their responses to fear both during and after the First World War.<sup>27</sup> She quotes an unnamed author who wrote 'even the most bravest of men can feel afraid. The only difference between a

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<sup>24</sup> A. Kellett, *Combat Motivation: The Behaviour of Soldiers in Battle* (USA: Springer, 1982), p.305.

<sup>25</sup> C. R. Figley and W. P. Nash, *Combat Stress Injury: Theory, Research, and Management* (USA: Routledge, 2015), p.25.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> L. Noakes, 'War on the Web': The BBC 'People's War' Website and Memories of Fear in Wartime in 21st Century Britain', in L. Noakes & J. Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p.57.

brave man and a coward is the fear of one is controlled whilst the fear of the other is uncontrolled.'<sup>28</sup>

Of course the control over soldier's fear had been an important aspect of training from the moment that men joined the army, as a post-war report made clear.

Their brains accustomed during training to concentrate instantly and thoroughly, through sheer force of habit, will do the same during the mental and physical disturbance of battle. No training can be of lasting value which is performed carelessly and which lacks the necessary mental concentration. Will, decision, and the power of concentration are among the essential characteristics of leadership. Without them, a man is mentally flabby, undecided, incapable of assimilating and imparting knowledge, and utterly useless as an instructor, or leader, however subordinate.<sup>29</sup>

Adam Culling explains that this hardening of mind and body was a crucial element of soldiers training as instructors used set times to encourage recruits into completing tasks under pressure as preparation for combat situations.<sup>30</sup> The objective during training was to drill men and train them to be unthinking in battle. But even at the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> *Report of the War Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock'*, p.203.

<sup>30</sup> A. Cullen, '10 Golden Rules of Fitness for First World War Soldiers', *History Extra* (2014), <http://www.historyextra.com/feature/first-world-war/10-golden-rules-fitness-first-world-war-soldiers> (accessed 31/07/2017)



moment when fighting was to begin the military authorities sought to intervene in the bodies of the troops. One of the primary ways the army encouraged men to control their fears was by giving them alcohol. Private Gatley, of the 7th Battalion Manchester Regiment, recounted how men were given a rum ration to help them stay calm as they waited for the whistle at Gallipoli in 1915

Nearer and nearer creeps the Zero Hour and everyone is in a nervous state of excitement which shows in various ways. The waiting is a terrible strain, we are given our usual tablespoonful of rum.<sup>31</sup>

Alcohol was regarded by many commanding officers as being a crucial tool in getting men over the top. In 1922, Lt Colonel J.S.Y. Rogers, who had served in the war as the medical officer to the 4th Black Watch, claimed as part of his evidence to the enquiry into shell-shock that 'had it not been for the rum ration I do not think we should have won the war. Before the men went over the top they had a good meal and a double ration of rum and coffee.'<sup>32</sup>

NCO James Davidson Pratt provided a glimpse of what happened when this strategy went wrong as the liberal amount of rum consumed by his Sergeant- Major put them both in serious danger.

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<sup>31</sup> IWM, 15727, Private Papers of J. S. Gatley, p.30.

<sup>32</sup> E. Jones and N. Fear, 'Alcohol Use and Misuse Within the Military: A Review', *International Review of Psychiatry* (2011), p.167.

Always carry a little flask with you”, and he produced a flask and I said what’s that? Rum? He said “always carry a flask of rum with you, you need it up there”. So, he said “we better have one or two rums just now before we go, just to get up on the way.” So, we had a few rums, we got up, and put the fellows into the various trenches, and he said “Now we have got to go and visit sergeant so and so, he’s got an outpost which he’s looking after.” So off we went with him, well we fell into trenches, we fell into barbed wire, we seemed to go round and round in circles, we couldn’t find sergeant so and so. The old boy by this time, was getting very, bit squiffy I thought. I had a good head... next morning I looked out and I discovered where we had been. We had been, part of the time, messing about on the German wire, instead of own wire! We were completely lost. Thank God there was no activity otherwise we’d have got shot up.<sup>33</sup>

Control of emotions is a common theme within the accounts of soldiers from the First World War. William Ward also recounted being afraid while serving at Passchendaele but explained that once he entered the battle his fear dissipated as he focused on the fighting the enemy.

ahh yes, you get used to it, you had butterflies in the stomach, once you are over the top you are on your way, the worst part was getting over, when the

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<sup>33</sup> IWM SA, 495, J. D. Pratt, reel 6. Source is presented exactly as spoken in his interview by J. D. Pratt.

bullets starting flying, once you were over and started walking everything was all right.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, Lieutenant Reginald Savory recalled the feeling in his stomach, but was careful to frame it as anticipation rather than anxiety.

Those last few minutes before Zero Hour made no deep impression on me, except possibly the familiar feeling of waiting for the pistol before a sprint with a void in the pit of one's stomach and anxiety as to the result. And, then twelve noon – blow the whistle – scramble over the top – off you go! From that moment, I lost all control of the fighting.<sup>35</sup>

For Private Archer, who served with the 15th Battalion Durham Light Infantry at Ypres in 1917, fear was similarly a physical experience, but for him it was experienced in the heart as recalled in an interview when he banged his chest and stated '(Bangs chest), that went from the first day I went out to the last day I come away... (bangs chest again) oh bad, shocking'.<sup>36</sup>

Once the order was given and men climbed over the top or entered the fray their bodies could be transformed through a host of physical and biochemical changes as

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<sup>34</sup> Ward, reel 2.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in P. Hart, *Gallipoli Kindle Edition* (London, Profile Books, 2011), p.242.

<sup>36</sup> IWM SA, 8949, G. T. Archer, reel 2.

adrenaline flooded their system. An article in *Veteran's Today* links adrenaline and combat by claiming that '...many of those in the military who have experienced combat can relate to the feeling of adrenaline production that fear can produce, and understand the feeling of an almost euphoric state as the body goes into survival mode.'<sup>37</sup> Robert Sapolsky has described the effects of adrenaline as 'stress-induced analgesia'.<sup>38</sup> It seems that this experience was often linked to the blood by First World War soldiers. After the death of Lord Kitchener at the Battle of Jutland in 1916, Lieutenant Stiven wrote to his mother and claimed that tragedies that Britain had faced would encourage the British to fight harder. He wrote '...pity the Bosche' as the cries of 'remember Kitchener' (will) stir the men's blood to greater deeds than the "Lusitania", "Scarborough" or even Edith Cavell".<sup>39</sup> Dawson shows how such language was not unusual in relation to violent events by quoting accounts of the rebellion in India in 1857 which claimed it's depictions would 'set the blood of every Englishman boiling in in his veins.'<sup>40</sup> Within soldier's diaries, memoirs and testimonies from the First World War the theme of blood pumping is common. Battle excitement could encourage men to unnecessarily put their bodies at risk. In

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<sup>37</sup> E. Mattson, 'Adrenaline and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)', *Veterans Today* (2011), <https://www.veteranstodayarchives.com/2011/06/20/adrenaline-and-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/>, (Assessed 01/03/17).

<sup>38</sup> R. M. Sapolsky, *Why Zebra's Don't Get Ulcers: The Updated Guide to Stress, Stress Related Disease and Coping* (USA, W.H. Freeman, 1998), p.194.

<sup>39</sup> University of St. Andrews Archive / Special Collections, MS38961/2 Private letters of David Sime Stiven, p.2 - Stiven is talking about the sinking of the Lusitania, an American ship that was sank in 1915 by the German Navy, the attack on Scarborough by the German Navy in December 1914 and the execution of the Nurse Edith Cavell by German firing squad on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 1915 after being found guilty by court martial of aiding British and French Soldiers. All of these events had an international outcry and were used to galvanize propaganda against the Germans and goad men into joining up.

<sup>40</sup> G. Dawson, *Soldiers Heroes, British Adventure, Empire and the Imaging of Masculinities* (New York, Routledge, 2005), p.92.

a letter to his mother in 1917 Lieutenant Renny explained being disciplined after his excitement during battle training led him to remaining mounted on his horse. He noted afterwards the foolishness of his actions and stated that this was strictly forbidden by army regulations as he would have been an easy target for the enemy.<sup>41</sup>

Often associated with adrenaline and battle excitement was bloodlust. Bourke argues that 'the characteristic act of men at war is not dying, it is killing'.<sup>42</sup> She quotes an unnamed Army Chaplain from the First World War as saying, 'the soldier's business is to kill the enemy...he only tries to avoid *being* killed for the sake of being efficient.'<sup>43</sup> Niall Ferguson in *The Pity of War* argues that killing the enemy was an intoxicating opportunity for some men and claims that men considered fighting fun.<sup>44</sup> Private Pugh was one such soldier who fits this profile as he recounted in his oral history that he had joined the war because he was a 'professional killer' who 'killed animals for a living and humans for pleasure' and so was very keen to kill Germans.<sup>45</sup> Pugh explained that even as a quartermaster he could still kill enemy soldiers, 'was always able to do that, with a Vickers machine gun you could knock a few out.'<sup>46</sup> When asked if he enjoyed the killing the enemy he replied, 'I certainly did, I had a feeling that they were trying to come to England to knock us all off, so it

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<sup>41</sup> IWM, 1374, Private Papers of Lieutenant G. M. Renny, letter dated April 1917.

<sup>42</sup> J. Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing, Face to Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (London; Granta Books, 1999), p.1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p.2.

<sup>44</sup> N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London; Penguin Press, 1998), pp.447.

<sup>45</sup> IWM SA, 9928, R. Pugh, reel 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*.

was up to us to fight, I expect I was born a soldier see? (laughs).<sup>47</sup> After the First World War the psychologist John T. MacCurdy stated that the ideal soldier 'must be more or less a natural butcher'.<sup>48</sup> However, not all men were as enthusiastic about taking the lives of others. NCO Basford recalled vividly and despondently his first experience of violence at Oppy Wood in 1917.

When we reached the German frontline were they were all in these deep dugouts and we noticed quite a few Germans retreating down the communication trench and this was really the first time I remember shooting at a German and we did, you know give them several rounds from our SMLE and then turned our attention to the deep dugouts... and threw two mills bombs down the dugout steps, well the effect of two grenades exploding in a confined space was pretty ghastly, and I felt almost guilty at what I'd done.<sup>49</sup>

Clearly the killing of other men had a physical impact on the bodies of the men who dispatched to the war. For some it was a rush of excitement, others fear or guilt. Regardless of the emotion, it is obvious that many men keenly physically felt the ramifications of their actions during combat.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Bourke, *History of Killing*, p.113.

<sup>49</sup> IWM SA, 9987, H. Bashford, reel 3.

There are certainly accounts from the conflict that suggest that adrenaline did not only inspire bravery but could also numb pain and shock. When Private Warsop was wounded during heavy shelling in 1917 he was so focused on fighting that he felt nothing but surprise before he lost consciousness.

There was a flash in the sky. I realized with a shock that I had been badly hit. My right arm jumped up on its own and then flopped down. It felt as if my left arm and part of my chest had been blown clear away. My first thought was 'blow me, I never thought I should get killed' a feeling of nothing but surprise. Then I thought of home, before losing consciousness.<sup>50</sup>

Adrenaline had a powerful effect on the bodies of fighting men. It could get them into the battle and even help to endure the agony of injury. But sometimes it was not enough and the body was at the centre of the experience of failure in, or resistance to, combat. Sergeant Huggins remembered an occasion where an officer collapsed after spending five hours over the frontline during the battle of the Somme, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September.

At five minutes to 12 that night the tanks went over, and at 12 o'clock and we went and we were told, the captain said 'we went in extended over'. That's all I knew and as I said we were fully manned, officers and everything

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<sup>50</sup> IWM, 1876, Private Papers of A. C. Warsop, pp.16-17.

and we stumbled on and stumbled on and at round about 5 o clock breaking daylight, when I reckon, it would be about 5 o clock and er... when the officer said, 'I'm exhausted, I'm done and down he went'. I saw him fall. Well before...well in the flash like, what are you going to do and of course I was by him and I said the word halt, dig in and as I said it we were few yards ahead of him, and I did and I was to go back and ask him what to do, where we were going and what we had to all about it and I noticed this object ahead... and I saw it was Colonel Jefferies and I dropped me [sic] rifle and he walked up and he said 'Sergeant Huggins', I said 'yes', and he said 'what's the position' and I says, I told him Captain Cook is down, is exhausted and I say that can't, there isn't another officer so what I've done is stopped the halt and I've told the men to dig in and I was going back to ask the officer what to do and he went back, he was away, why like a few minutes or thing and he comes back and he says to me, he says 'get the men to fall in in two lines', and he says 'I'll take the first line and you'll take the second one and follow me in.'<sup>51</sup>

This officer's blackout and collapse was put down to exhaustion, which is similar to the account given by Private Price of an instance when he seemed to lose control of his body while on the frontline.

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<sup>51</sup> IWM SA, 11943, E. Huggins, reel 4.



I was so bloody tired I got hold of this chair, in the middle of the road and I started crying... I must have cried there for about half an hour you know. Sobbed my heart out... I was just bloody exhausted or something, you know I wasn't more than a couple of 100 yards from the frontline and I was crying my bloody eyes out. Well eventually I got back [to his officer] and he says 'you alright?' I said 'yes sir', he was in a dugout and now and again we had whiskey, I'll never forget it he gave me a glass of whiskey and he said 'off you go' and I went. I was in a semi trench in a sunken road with some holes at the side and I went to sleep, had a good night's sleep.<sup>52</sup>

Corporal Glendinning remembered the emotional turmoil that impacted many of the men around him as they huddled in a reserve communication trench before going into battle. 'It was a long dreary miserable night. Some chaps were crying, some praying, but most of us were optimistic. We all hoped that we would come through.'<sup>53</sup> Crying was something that those who witnessed it often recalled clearly as it was viewed at the time as a feminine action when, as Tosh argues, 'masculinity was defined by its public destiny, in a way which excluded so-called feminine qualities.'<sup>54</sup> This explains why Glendinning seemed so keen to distance himself from those men in his recollection by clarifying that he was one of the 'optimistic' ones.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> IWM SA, 10168, D. Price, reel 10.

<sup>53</sup> IWM SA, 1963, Corporal E. W. Glendinning, reel 1.

<sup>54</sup> J. Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (Great Britain: Yale University Press, 2007), p.184.

<sup>55</sup> Glendinning, reel 1.

The loss of control over the body could be even more extreme. British rifleman Robert Renwick, who served with 16th Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps on Western Front between 1916-1918, remembered witnessing this in his colleagues.

Renwick: Err.... they seemed to lose control of themselves and shaking and have to go over the top of the trench, go out to em [sic] and sometimes had to be held down.

Interviewer: They didn't know what they were doing

Renwick: No

Interviewer: Did it happen to weaker men do you think or was it any particular type of man who got it or did it depend on what had happened to them?

Renwick: I wouldn't say they were any weaker but I think some people were more susceptible to it than others, something different in our bodies. If you know what I mean.<sup>56</sup>

Renwick's recollections were related to a discussion of 'shell-shock', a term much discussed by historians and the meaning of which changed rapidly during the First

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<sup>56</sup> IWM SA, 12679, R. Renwick, reel 4.

World War but what was initially used to classify all sorts of behaviours in which men found themselves unable to fight.<sup>57</sup> He clearly thought that the condition was a physical one, manifested through a loss of control over movements and somehow linked to the inherent nature of each body. In *Shell-Shock and Medical Culture in First World War Britain*, Tracey Loughran discusses a paper given to Guy's Hospital Physiological Society by a former First World War soldier, R. Hodgkinson who had been diagnosed with the condition.<sup>58</sup> He had experienced, '...knocking heart, rapid pulse, laboured respiration, trembling muscles and limbs', sometimes so severe that 'his arms may vibrate so that he cannot light a cigarette and his knees knock together'.<sup>59</sup> Hodgkinson's fear rendered his body ineffective. Others recalled experiences of encountering men whose bodies had become so affected by the experience of combat that they shook involuntarily. Nurse Hartley recalled such soldiers as a V.A.D nurse in 1917, 'all the cases were shell-shocked, which meant they could not keep their hands and their heads still. I had to hold them gently behind their heads and feed them.'<sup>60</sup> Private Prew's story suggests that others simply went into a catatonic state where they were incapable of moving,

I noticed that this fellow was still lying on the ground so I went up to him and was very much surprised to find that it was my chum George, suffering from

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<sup>57</sup> B. Shephard, *A War of Nerves. Soldiers and Psychiatrists 1914-1994* (London: Pimlico, 2002), p.3.

<sup>58</sup> T. Loughran, *Shell-Shock and Medical Culture in First World War Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p.182

<sup>59</sup> Account of R. Hodgkinson speech to Guy's Hospital Physiological Society, 'Fear – The Major Emotion in War' (28 February 1919), as quoted by Loughran, p.182.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in M. Arthur, *Forgotten Voices of the Great War* (St. Ives: Random House, 2011), p.197.

shell-shock, his nerve had evidently failed him when running across the open. I obtained permission to take him down to the field hospital, he walking down with me, on the way we met a couple of fellows belonging to the RAMC with a wheeled stretcher who laid him on this and so I left him after shaking hands.<sup>61</sup>

Of course, if men found it impossible to control their bodies then they were also beyond the discipline of the military authorities. This could result in severe punishment, particularly in the initial stages of the conflict, as the army sought to reassert its control of troops by making examples of those considered to have failed. Exhaustion was not an excuse as being caught asleep on guard could mean the death penalty. Private Herbert Chase of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers was executed on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 1915 after being found 'dazed and exhausted' behind the lines after a gas attack. He was sentenced for desertion.<sup>62</sup> Putkowski and Sykes explain in *Shot at Dawn* that Chase was one of several men who were executed after being found confused and tired out after lengthy engagements.<sup>63</sup> Lance-Sergeant William Walton of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings Royal Rifle Corps suffered a similar fate.<sup>64</sup> During the first battle of Ypres he disappeared and was found some months later in a small village near St. Omer. Under interrogation, Walton struggled to speak coherently until he

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<sup>61</sup> IWM, 863, Private Papers of R. G. Prew, p.12.

<sup>62</sup> J. Putkowski and J. Sykes, *Shot at Dawn: Executions in World War One by Authority of the British Army Act Kindle Edition* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2007), loc, 837.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Shot at Dawn, loc, 618.

claimed he had undergone a mental breakdown. Despite this, he was executed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1915.<sup>65</sup>

When a man lost his nerve under fire he was sent to hospital instead of gaol, which should have been done in the first place. The only exceptions were to those who endangered the lives of the comrades by their actions. At the start of the war it was not known that most times it was not fear, but shell-shock that made some men react the way they did. Often times the officers sitting on the court-martial had not been in the frontline and had no idea of the stress that the men were under when the bullets and shells were coming.<sup>66</sup>

Private Keller's observations within his war memoirs have been echoed by historians such as Edgar Jones who has traced the emergence during the First World War of the idea that civilians were not 'natural warriors' and were, therefore, more susceptible to trauma following combat.<sup>67</sup> The outcome was a rise in medical research and psychiatric care for those that experienced psychiatric damage during the First World War.<sup>68</sup> They have explored the significant rise of research and psychiatric care that arose after the First World War which occurred during advances in psychotherapy and increasing recognition of psychiatric disorders. They also all

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, loc. 628.

<sup>66</sup> Keller, p.27.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> For more information on the history of shell-shock see Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, Chapters 1-12, Jones, 'The Psychology of Killing' and Loughran, *Shell-Shock and Medical Culture in First World War Britain*.

note that shell-shock could have significant physical repercussions. In 1917 the RAMC was identifying officers with experience in treating neurosis and mental illness to join frontline facilities.<sup>69</sup> By this time the executions had come to an end.

However, even as medical authorities on the frontline improved their ability to recognise and “treat” shell-shock the grey area between ‘treatment’ and ‘punishment’ remained blurred and violence towards the body persisted. Doctors were often unwilling to remove men from the frontline and frequently soldier’s bodies were physically abused to test the severity of their condition or attempt to shock them back into a coherent state. Men could be slapped, have tea poured on them and be throttled in an attempt to “treat” their condition.<sup>70</sup> Sergeant McKay remembered such an episode in dealing with a troubled man.

The captain had not been gone very long when Rutherford wakened up out of his drunken sleep and wanted to go out again. Of course, I had to prevent him, and then he said he was going to hang himself. I was in a bit of quandary as Rutherford was a powerful man. Fortunately, at this time the staff-sergeant returned and enquired what the row was about. I told him Rutherford was going to hang himself because I refused to let him out. ‘he’s what?’ I repeated Rutherford’s threat, and to my surprise, the staff-sergeant

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<sup>69</sup> F. Reid, *Broken Men: Shell-shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain 1914-30* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p.67.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, pp.65-6.

said 'well, we won't stand in his way. Get a rope'. This was got, thrown over a beam and tied around Rutherford's neck. A tug was given to the rope and the victim's face went black, and he was told to go ahead and finish it, as no one would stand in his way. The result was, Rutherford went over to a corner and sat down on his bed as quiet as a lamb. This example was one of the best lessons I had learned for a long time, and one which proved invaluable to me later under trench conditions when I had to deal with cases of shell-shock.<sup>71</sup>

While a complicated story to interpret, it is clear that a threat to the body of the confused soldier was deployed in order to assert control over him by the officers present. In other cases, violence towards the body was not dressed up as therapeutic. The military authorities continued to use a range of punishments in order to assert their control. Private Keller described the use of field punishment on a fellow soldier and recalled that it was not well received by many of the soldiers who witnessed it.

The thing that bothered us a lot was to see British soldier tied to the gun wheels in the barracks square where the people passing the gates to stop and watch. They were there as punishment for various crimes. Some of them we were told was for cowardice. This seemed to us to be inhuman and cruel. We felt that but for the grace of God and having horses to care for it could

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<sup>71</sup> IWM, 22065, Private Papers of R. McKay, p.11.

have been anyone of us. Some of us later learned of a young soldier in our battery that lost his nerve and refused to take ammunition through artillery fire and was sentenced to two years' imprisonment. When changes were made, he was freed and returned to the battery where he pleaded with the Commanding Officer to transfer him into the infantry where he might get a chance to prove that he was not a coward. It meant very much to him but he was refused. The people of Le Mans raised strong objection to this form of punishment, seeing men spread-eagled to the gun wheels. They took this to be a mockery of the roman catholic religion in some way, however, it is certain that such a thing was not in the mind of the officers that gave the order. Then, the people in Britain, heard that men were put in gaol [sic] or shot for cowardice. There was an uproar and after a while this form of punishment had to be changed.<sup>72</sup>

According to Strachan, after 1916, the use of field punishment during active service was revised within British Army regulations to make it, 'less of a public spectacle.'<sup>73</sup> However, it seemed that such severe forms of physical punishment still had those willing to defend them. For example, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, 1916, Sir James Macpherson, Under-Secretary of State for War asserted that

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<sup>72</sup> IWM, 11876, Private Papers of C. R. Keller, p.27. Source quoted exactly as printed within the Private Papers of Keller.

<sup>73</sup> H. Strachan, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.192.



In the stern conditions of war, when you deal with men—thank God, these cases are very few—on account of carelessness, negligence, or cowardice or other vice in the field, you have to deal with these men by the quickest and most effective method in order to encourage the others and to stimulate a sense of shame in the men themselves, and I know this punishment has had more effect than any other punishment could possibly have, because they know it is a disagreeable and irksome thing, and they must recognise that that punishment is given for very grave offences, often in the frontline. There is no alternative except the death penalty... It is an extraordinary thing that there again the House of Commons is responsible for that, because it has been laid down in the Army Act that this punishment can be given for any offence, and now there is an outcry that young subalterns, colonels, and so on, are fire-eating men who are anxious to continue this punishment.<sup>74</sup>

Lieutenant McCracken was one such officer who was very keen on discipline and punishment and wrote,

Got back to the Battery. Major tried two men who had been away on some excuse of cutting brushwood for 2 hours while the battery was in action and being so terribly shelled. They are to be tried by 4 officers for cowardice; I

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<sup>74</sup> HC Deb 31 December 1916, vol. 88, col. 1738-63.

hope they are dealt with severely, that sort of thing I have no use for in the battery.<sup>75</sup>

Helen McCartney has argued that officers like McCracken were not uncommon. She argues in *Citizen Soldiers* that many commanding officers displayed an enthusiasm for field punishment and notes that over the course of the war, many instances of castigation were redacted from the official record.<sup>76</sup> The extent to which the bodies of troops were punished as the military authorities sought to maintain and reassert control over them in the difficult conditions of battle will therefore never be known. What is clear, however, is that the body was central to the experience of combat. Getting the blood up encouraged men to fight despite the butterflies in the stomach or the pumping hearts that signalled anxiety. They could cry uncontrollably from fear or shock, and collapse from exhaustion. They could revolt against the demands placed upon them, so that men could no longer control them or force them into fighting. But in those circumstances they were still in danger of punishment from officers who sought to use violence to dominate and control their bodies.

### **Damaged Bodies**

Of course, the body was never more central to the experience of combat than when it was damaged. On average around 400 soldiers died and 2000 were injured per

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<sup>75</sup> IWM, 11617, Private Papers of 2nd Lieutenant A. M. McCracken, p.71.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p.166.

day between 1914- 18.<sup>77</sup> Private Jones of the 4th Battalion East Surrey Regiment recalled the pain of his injuries.

Suddenly a hefty Prussian loomed up in front of me, he seemed to be at the ready for a bayonet fight I also came to the ready. Unfortunately for me, he had a bullet in the breach of his rifle and he fired. I felt a terrific kick in my stomach and I fell forward. As I did so another Londoner Frank Baylis from West Ham ran his bayonet through the Prussian. I attempted to rise but found I could not move without great pain. I then rolled into a shell hole as shrapnel bullets were flying about. My wounds started to burn and pain badly. There was about a foot of water in the crater and the pain was increasing and I was getting weaker.<sup>78</sup>

During a battle wounds prompted Private Templer not simply to seek to repair his body but also to rapidly assess the implications of his wounds.

I pressed the trigger and intended to check my aim, but my rifle went up and I was blinded by splinters! I could not see! Thoughts went through my head like lightning. My parents would need my help and Dais [sic] was something I would not now know, especially if I got a bayonet through my guts. I lay face down and gradually pulled myself together and groped around, found a

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<sup>77</sup> Shot at dawn, loc.4672.

<sup>78</sup> IWM, 14938, Private Papers of C. E. Jones, p.4.

bit of rag, carefully wiped my eyes and tried to open them and began to see again. My left hand was a mess and face felt a mess also. ...I looked at my rifle and it was now useless. The bullet had hit my back-sight protector head on and blown it away. The stock was split from the band down to the magazine. Then the officer spoke on my other side and pointed to his face where a splinter had hit him.<sup>79</sup>

Even where the enemy was not immediately at hand bodies could be still damaged by them. Gas was a new effective weapon during the First World War. Chlorine gas filled the lungs with fluid and drowned men, while mustard gas could horrifically burn skin and the lungs if inhaled. Private Clarke recalled how he and his fellow soldiers felt 'dozy' after a gas attack at Petit Vimy in 1918 and his witnessed men weeping as they suffered '...massive amounts of pain' because of it.<sup>80</sup> Private Jones described the physical experience of a similar attack at St. Eloi in 1915.

I was called to a part of the trench where a shell had breached our defences. There seemed to be a thick mist coming up and we were slowly choking. There were six of us, who had to take turns at guarding the opening. The first, then the second man collapsed. By this time, I was feeling terrible and

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<sup>79</sup> IWM, 2617, Private Papers of C. G. Templer, pp.25-6.

<sup>80</sup> IWM SA, 577, W. Clarke, reel 3.

could hardly breathe. Lieutenant Woods ran up shouting. 'Come away you damn fools, 'they are poisoning us'<sup>81</sup>

Perhaps just as terrifying was an injury where there were no physical sensations. Private Caokes of the 10th Battalion Hampshire Regiment recalled 'it hit me in the hip and came out in the left galling...went right through and through the bladder, yes. I had no pain because I was paralyzed.<sup>82</sup> Once injured, the body became central to chances of survival. Private Parker's account shows that despite two bullet-wounds he managed to use what was left intact of his body to get himself off the battlefield.

It seemed as though I had been kicked by a horse, on the left knee, it gave way, and down I went, rolling down the bank. The only thing I thought of then was to get out before the only gap in the circle closed. I crawled, dragging that blasted leg, in between hundreds of our dead, towards what I hoped was the right way. I was more scared then than when I was behind my gun, so helpless. Even Jerry had to give me a parting gift a bullet in the hip. I don't think he liked me!<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Jones, p.4.

<sup>82</sup> IWM SA, 8287, F. Caokes, reel 1.

<sup>83</sup> IWM, 11787, Private Papers of G. K. Parker, p.31.

Signalman Grindley, from the 19th Battalion Manchester Regiment in 1916, recounted how he would not have been able to get medical attention without the help of a fellow soldier.

Another soldier jumped into the shell hole. I recognised him as a British machine gunner, a lance corporal. Why he was there by himself I never knew, but I pleaded with him to help me to get up and to help me back to the dressing stations in the British line. I knew I needed attention, and he said after he had helped me to my feet, 'can you walk?' I said no, I don't think so', he told me to put my arm round his neck, and to use my rifle as a crutch in the other hand. Somehow, we managed to struggle out of that shell hole aided by the darkness or else we would have been picked off by some German sniper. When we eventually reached the dressing station, I was taken over by two doctors. The doctors turned to my companion and asked him how the hell he had managed to get me walking so far. They said it was obvious I had some fractured bones in my body. He explained to them how I had got it. I remember hearing some doctor saying 'good God, however, did you manage to walk from the frontline to us?'<sup>84</sup>

Grindley's account is somewhat paradoxical. He takes pride in his ability to endure his injuries and walk to gain medical attention. Yet, he also openly admits that

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<sup>84</sup> IWM, 15268, Private Papers of E. Grindley, no page number.

without begging for help he would have not been able to reach the dressing station. Severe wounds often had devastating impacts on soldier's agency and masculinity as injured men like Grindley could find themselves begging other men for help. Lieutenant Anstruther adopted a bolder tone but he too had relied on the assistance of others when wounded.

I am getting on first rate, it is only a bit of a hole through my shoulder, which will make it stiff for a bit. Jamie Balfour and I are sharing a room in this mansion, which is the Palace Hotel, and very nice too.

Mackie was too capital when I got hit, he got me under cover, ripped my clothes off, and bandaged me up; we then set off to find the dressing-station [sic], which proved to be some way off; arrived there, they dressed me properly, and gave me some food- I lay there Monday night, with the shells bursting all round, and wounded brought in – and on Tuesday was taken to the clearing hospital by motor lorry.<sup>85</sup>

While Grindley and Anstruther survived a 'hit' others did not. Accounts from the First World War often refer to visions of the dead and dying and echo that of Major Nicholson of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade RHA in France in 1917 who was forced pick his way through maze of wounded and dead soldiers; 'there were dead and dying troops

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<sup>85</sup> University of St. Andrews Archive / Special Collections, msdep121/8/2/11/1/4, Letter from Robert Anstruther to his mother dated 20/09/14.

lying all over the place; the wounded were being taken into an improvised first aid post and any that showed any sign of life were also moved, although they could never have lived for much longer.<sup>86</sup> Private Parker of the 1/8<sup>th</sup> Battalion Sherwood Foresters recounted how his captain died.

The C/O of our company, a captain, was hit in the belly. Of all the horrible deaths, that is terrible to suffer, & to see! He stood bolt upright, and his screams, even in the surrounding din, were awful to hear. Death from wounds in the abdomen are not only the most painful way of dying but the most long drawn out.<sup>87</sup>

Parker illustrated not only the danger of combat but also that men began to create hierarchies that ranked preferable ways to die and types of injury. A death like the one above was worse than an instantaneous one, as an abdominal wound could take hours or days to kill a man. Often men hoped for a quick fatal wound rather than suffer the fate of Parker's captain. In 1915 Canadian born John Gallishaw enlisted with First Newfoundland Regiment who joined the British Army at Malta. Gallishaw explained how many men openly wished for a 'clean' bullet over more painful ways to die in battle. 'A bullet leaves a clean wound, and a man hit by it drops out quietly. The shrapnel makes nasty, jagged, hideous wounds, the horrible recollection of

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<sup>86</sup> IWM, 6827, Private Papers of Major W. J. Nicholson, p.7.

<sup>87</sup> IWM 11787, Private Papers of G. K. Parker, p.26.



which lingers for days. It is little wonder that we preferred the firing-line.'<sup>88</sup> Arnold Ridley recalled his response to being wounded in the hand, 'it's not altogether a right thought for a young man to hope he's been maimed for life - but I did. I thought 'well, if I've lost my hand I shall live. They can't send me out there again'.<sup>89</sup> In his view being seriously injured was preferable to death, and he admitted to hoping that his body was sufficiently damaged to require the army to release him (his hand remained virtually useless for the rest of his life), however morbid this line of thought. It seems that this was a common experience. George Ashurst, a former NCO who had served with the 2nd Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers on the Western Front in late 1914 claimed every man hoped for a 'blighty wound'.

Ashurst: Oh, yes, we knew what blighty wounds were.

Interviewer: so almost straight away

Ashurst: Oh, yes, they had been coming home for months before me you know, before I went out there.

Interviewer: Were people actively hoping to get a lightish wound?

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<sup>88</sup> J.A Gallishaw 'Gallipoli', in F. Reynolds and A. L. Churchill (ed.), *World's War Events, Recorded By Statesmen, Commanders, Historians And By Men Who Fought Or Saw The Great Campaigns* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son Company, 1919), p.231.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted In A BBC Article, Bethan Bell, 'The Real-Life Wars Of Dad's Army Actor Arnold Ridley', *BBC News*, 5 (2016), [Http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-35491036](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-35491036), (accessed 13/12/2016).

Ashurst: (Laughs) Everybody, everybody hoped to get a lightish wound!<sup>90</sup>

During the Battle of Arras in 1917 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Carter of 7th Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment hoped his leg wound was bad enough allow him to go back to Britain, he noted in his journal ‘...a ‘blighty’ I thought as I put my emergency dressing on the wound.’<sup>91</sup> The notion of the ‘Blight wound’ shows that in the unusual circumstances of the First World War and combat men began to consider their bodies in new ways. Men suddenly began to assess which parts of them they would consider as expendable and to calculate the level of damage that they would be willing to endure as to allow them to escape the army with their lives and their honour. This explains Private Keller’s ambivalence about his injury.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on which way one looked at I, I wasn’t too badly injured and I was able to carry on. A slight wound meant that I stayed with the battery, a serious one would possibly mean Blighty.’<sup>92</sup>

His account of his experience of seeking medical attention illustrates the ways in which injuries were given value by the military itself.

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<sup>90</sup> IWM SA, 9875, G. Ashurst, reel 5.

<sup>91</sup> IWM, 7988, Private Papers of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant C. Carter, p.20.

<sup>92</sup> Keller, p.41.

When we reached our horse line, the doctor came to dress my leg. He told me that his orders were not to send any of the original expeditionary army to hospital if it could be avoided as they needed to break in the new men and to stiffen their morale. I was excused duty, but that didn't mean anything as I was up the line with our next supply of ammunition, and the wound was not reported so I didn't have the right to wear a wound stripe. When I saw men with gold wound stripes I wondered how many of the older soldiers had suffered wounds or gas, but had no wound stripes. I have since learned that many found themselves in the same position. I know of one man with four wound stripes and one day when the anti-aircraft guns were firing, a little blood and the next day he had five wound stripes. I have had worse cuts shaving with the straight razors that we used than he had that day.<sup>93</sup>

Carden-Coyne has argued that the awarding of a gold wound stripe was introduced by the army in 1916 to convey a heroic status to wounded man.<sup>94</sup> Gold stripes signified that a man had been wounded in combat, whereas silver denoted a non-combat injury. The division between the two could be very stark as Carden-Coyne quotes a soldier who complained to his girlfriend that despite having engaged in combat for years because he was invalided for enteric disease he received

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p.42.

<sup>94</sup> A. Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds: Military Patients and Medical Power in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.8.

significantly less favourable attention than the inexperienced ‘...lads who were wounded on landing’.<sup>95</sup> In terms of public perception, a combat wound was linked to heroism and sacrifice while sickness was less likely to evoke sympathy or admiration. Keller’s story also shows that different bodies had different values in the frontline, as veterans were valued for their experience and expected to put up with injuries that might have seen other less experience men sent to hospital.

Private Stone’s recollection of his injury and that of a fellow soldier illustrates just how desirable a ‘blighty wound’ could be.

I got a piece of shrapnel in the finger actually, it bled quite a lot, I was very happy about it, it ran all down it, all down my arm and I went to my corporal and I said ‘got a piece of shrapnel corporal and he said you better go down the dressing station...’ I heard a shell coming over and I jumped into this hole and on one side of the heap and as I waited for the shelling to get easier a bit, another chap jumped in and went over the other side and there after a couple of minutes I heard a shot, a rifle shot, I saw him getting out, he had shot himself in the thigh to get back, they probably know he did because he couldn’t hold his rifle far enough back, he probably made a black powder mark but he shot himself and got out. I went down the dressing station and I got a bandage on my hand it and thought I might away and he said ‘that’s

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

alright you can go back to the line now'. Up I went back to the line and the sequel to that is, after some time afterwards this thing poison it came out and a long blister like that and I let it go on and on and on and then I thought if I don't go right now I'd probably get into trouble. I kept it going hoping I'd be able to get down perhaps a week away you know into err... at one of the rest camps. I let it go there and one of the doctors said why didn't you come before and I said I didn't know it was as bad as this, and all he did was to lance it and bind it up and then back you go, back!<sup>96</sup>

One man was so desperate to get out of the battle that he shot himself in the leg. For him a damaged thigh was a price worth paying to get free of the mortal danger he was in. However, he ran the risk of being detected and if the authorities suspected that the wound was self-inflicted he would have faced a court martial. Stone's actions were less extreme but he too played a dangerous game because he could have disciplined for malingering. In his case he was not prepared to wound himself for a return home, but he was prepared to endure the discomfort of a septic finger in the hope of securing a few days away from danger.

Carden-Coyne has shown how self-inflicted wounds during the First World War saw men labelled as cowards and treated with attitudes ranging from indifference to

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<sup>96</sup> IWM SA, 24883, H. V. Stone, reel 1.

contempt.<sup>97</sup> Between 1914-18 the British Army sentenced 3,080 men for cowardice of which 346 were executed.<sup>98</sup> Officially no men were executed for a self-inflicted wound however Putkowski and Sykes argue in *Shot at Dawn* that self-inflicted wounds were often presented as evidence of desertion and malingering in cases that resulted in the death penalty. Men who injured themselves could also be ostracised by their fellow soldiers. George Coppard recounts in his published memoirs that having been accidentally shot by a fellow British soldier he was treated with open contempt because he was suspected of being a malingerer.

Next morning, I discovered that there was something queer about the place which filled me with misgivings. None of the nursing staff appeared friendly, and the matron looked like, and was, a positive battle-axe. I made anxious inquiries, and quickly learned that I was classed as a suspected self-inflicted wound case. Unknown to me, the letters SIW [Self-Inflicted Wound] with a query mark added had been written on the label attached to my chest.<sup>99</sup>

Such behaviour was perceived as unbecoming of a soldier. During his oral history interview, Territorial soldier George Ashurst, was quick to distance himself from the

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<sup>97</sup> A. Carden-Coyne, *Gender and Conflict since 1914: Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.49.

<sup>98</sup> N. Barber, *World War I: The Western Front* (Lewis: White Thompson Publishing LTD, 2003), p.52.

<sup>99</sup> G. Coppard, *With A Machine Gun to Cambrai: The Tale of a Young Tommy in Kitchener's Army 1914-1918* (Great Britain: Cassell, 1999), p.100.

shameful act of malingering and make clear that no one from his battalion was ever accused of it.

IV: Had there been any cases of self-inflicted wounds?

Ashurst: Not in our battalion anyway, but we did hear about them you know.

IV: Even at this time of the war?

Ashurst: Yes, well round about them, what were the rumours, oh so and so had blown his toe off you know and he been sent down the line and of course that was the last you hear about it then, don't hear nothing no more then.<sup>100</sup>

If the constant risk to life on the frontline meant that men commodified their body parts and worked out which ones they would endanger or sacrifice in order to escape the fighting, suicide was something different altogether. Self-extinction was an extreme response to the frontline but Joanna Bourke has argued that 'it was an important option for a minority.'<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ashurst, reel 5.

<sup>101</sup> J. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male, Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), p.77.

I have shot myself as I cannot stand the hardship + suffering of this life any longer, and there is no chance of getting home again to see my parents whom may God bless + comfort in their trouble. Mr Clarkson + Mr Collinson are two fine officers and I hope they will come through this war safe + sound. Any of my pals can have what they wish of my things here. Goodbye and good luck to everyone.<sup>102</sup>

The suicide of Private Robert Andrew Purvis while serving with the Royal Scots on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 1916 illustrates how ending the body offered men a final way off the frontline. Within his suicide letter, Purvis succinctly justifies his decision for taking his own life and is careful to praise his officers and even demonstrates pragmatism by asking for his kit to be distributed to his fellow soldiers. As a pioneer in the study of suicide at the end of the nineteenth-century Emile Durkheim theorised that cases such the death of Purvis could be classified as ‘fatalistic suicide’. He argued that men like Purvis killed themselves because of an excess of ‘social regulation’.<sup>103</sup> Essentially, Purvis’ lack of agency combined with the ordeal of his experience, allowing him to conclude his existence was hopeless and to rationalise his decision to kill himself.

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<sup>102</sup> National Records of Scotland, SC70/8/418/2, Will of 4397 Private Purves or Robert Andrew Purves, 9th Bn., Royal Scots (Lothian Regiment), 1916. Note: Within Purves’ letter, he uses ‘+’ as an alternative to ‘and’

<sup>103</sup> N. Thompson and G. Cox, *Handbook of the Sociology of Death, Grief and Bereavement: A Guide to Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2017), p.23.



Private Jones recounted the suicide of his commanding officer in a context that suggests similarly fatalistic causes.

Thirty minutes the enemy with reinforcements attacked again. They showed us no mercy, they were also at our rear. They drove us out of the Sangars and down the valley, where they swept us with machine gun fire, I suddenly felt a blow on my left arm, then my right leg. Corporal Tait, Lance Corporal Lane and myself threw ourselves into a ditch. We never had a round of ammunition between us. Nearby lay Private Woodbine, suddenly a bomb came over, luckily it missed, but the blast hit Woodbine in the eyes and he cried out 'Jonesy I cants see' we quickly threw butts of our rifles away to make them useless to the enemy. Our dead were scattered everywhere, Lieutenant Nicholson then shot himself in the head.<sup>104</sup>

Jones does not criticise the officer who abandoned his men during the battle combat. Instead, he presents the Lieutenant's death plainly without judgement as another element of the battle. Very little has been written about the history of British Army suicide. In her consideration of nineteenth century suicide Padiak explains that, prior to the twentieth century, British soldiers statistically showed a higher risk of suicide than their civilian peers. This clashed with perception that soldiers represented the physical peak of masculinity and that their training and experience had made them

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<sup>104</sup> Jones, p.17.

physically superior as 'healthy warriors'.<sup>105</sup> During the First World War soldiers chose to take their own life for a multitude of reasons which impacted on them and their families, as well as those around them. Rothberg and Lande explain in their investigation into military suicide within the United States Armed Forces that historically suicide was overlooked, particularly during wartime as the low number of losses could be regarded as insignificant in comparison to battle fatalities. Additionally, suicide was commonly regarded, even in the nineteenth century, as a psychological issue. Responses to the act remained outside the purview of the traditional command structure. Suicide was an individualist rather than a collective problem and therefore difficult to combat within the military.<sup>106</sup> Essentially, in the nineteenth and twentieth century, suicide cases within the armed forces were difficult for commanding officers to comprehend, explain and attempt to prevent, as well as being a relatively low priority in relation to the losses of war.

Understanding motivations for suicide in the First World War is difficult as rarely were notes left behind or evidence recorded. Even in cases outside of this period Holmes and Holmes argue that notes are only left behind in 15% of 100 suicide cases.<sup>107</sup> Some individual stories provide glimpses of what could drive a man to such

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<sup>105</sup> J. Padiak, 'Death by Suicide in the British Army, 1830-1900' in J. C. Weaver and D. Wright (ed.) *Histories of suicide, International Perspectives on Self- Destruction in the Modern World* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2009), pp.119-120.

<sup>106</sup> C.P McDowell, J. M. Rothberg and R. G. Lande, 'Homicide and Suicide in the Military' in F. D. Jones (ed.), *Military Psychiatry: Preparing in Peace for War* (Washington: Office of the Surgeon General at TMM Publications, 2000), p.102.

<sup>107</sup> R. Holmes and S. Holmes, *Suicide: Theory, Practice and Investigation* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), p.81.

an extreme act of violence against his own body. As an NCO serving with Essex Regt on Western Front in 1918, John Charles Hart witnessed his Sergeant get up and walk into no-man's land.

We had one chap, a sergeant, I brought the post up in the trenches, he opened it, read it, he took his hat off, cause tin home ones were on loan, put his rifle on the side of the trench, opened his collar, tore the letter in four pieces, put it in his hat and deliberately walked out into the open, twenty feet away he was dead, he'd been shot. And we got his body back, whilst laying on our stomach, one after the other, one had the head of his body and one had feet... it was the wickedest thing out, a dear john letter, how a woman could write a letter telling her husband that she was living with another man and didn't want him back, could you understand it and that's what happened, not once but several times in the war...it gave us the feeling that our dear ones at home didn't understand our sorrow in France.<sup>108</sup>

Clearly factors far away from the frontline could influence these desperate acts. Hart's recollection of his superior's death also notes how deliberate actions of destruction could put other soldiers at risk as they attempted to retrieve the man's body from no-man's land. Despite this, it is clear that Hart did not judge the sergeant for his actions as he and the other men appeared sympathetic to his misfortune.

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<sup>108</sup> IWM SA, 32171, J. C. (Jonas) Hart, reel 3.

Private Burnett recalled being less sympathetic after a provost sergeant had jumped overboard during the journey to Greece and refused to grab hold of a life vest. Burnett claimed that the Sergeant had been 'a devil' to his men and had taken his own life to avoid punishment.<sup>109</sup> Unlike Hart, Burnett was not sympathetic but again noted how the men attempted to recover the Sergeant's body implying that even despite the man's reputation and suspected behaviour, his body was still worthy of the customary military burial. While these four cases suggest different motives and contexts, they point to a common feature. Each man became capable of the ultimate act of violence against his own body in order to escape his existence. Suicide for some men offered an alternative to the desperate situation within which they lived and could see no other way out.

## **Conclusion**

Of course the body was at the centre of the combat experience for soldiers in the First World War. After all, the battlefield was a place designed to damage and disable them and to encourage them to attack and maim the enemy. What this chapter has shown, however, is that the body was in the midst of multiple complex forces while in that hostile environment. The first of these were the military authorities. They had worked hard to prepare men to use their bodies unthinkingly in combat through training and drill. There was a complex system of punishment in

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<sup>109</sup> IWM SA, 8342, A. Burnett, reel 2.

place designed to encourage men to continue to resist fear and exhaustion in order to control their bodies in the most dangerous of contexts. Up to the moment that men launched themselves into battle officers sought to meddle in the bodies of their men by dosing them with alcohol.

The enemy were also keen to shape the bodies of British troops. A wide array of weapons was deployed not simply to kill and injure men but to terrify them. From the accounts of men on the frontline, it is clear that men could overcome fear and anxiety.<sup>110</sup> Their bodies emboldened them for the fight as adrenaline flowed and blood raced to muscles, heart-rate increased and pupils dilated. They dragged themselves from battlefields and made their way to find medical help despite horrific injuries. But death and wounding could happen at great distances from the enemy from shelling, shrapnel or gas or from being close to them, in hand-to-hand encounters or from frontline snipers. But death and wounding could also come from within the body itself, as fear and anxiety at the constant danger caused shell-shock, or exhaustion caused collapse or confusion that could be punished as desertion. It forced men to look at their own bodies in new ways, to think about which deaths they would prefer, and what value the different parts of their body had should they need to damage themselves in order to escape the conflict with their lives. Utter despair drove men to resist the control of the military over their bodies through self-inflicted wounds and even suicide to allow them to escape the frontline.

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<sup>110</sup> J. Bourke, *Fear, A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2005), pp.199-200.

But this issue of suicide is a reminder that even on the battlefield men could exercise agency and that they were not simply driven by the interventions of the military and their own physical impulses under duress. The man who decided to walk into enemy fire because his wife has left him, and the example from the previous chapter of the sergeant who did the same as he had an advanced case of venereal disease, are important for this reason. It shows that even on the frontline men could make decisions that were driven by personal concerns and individual decisions. Both men decided to die of their own volition not because of the pressure of war, or because they were driven by their training, their beliefs or the biochemical coursing through. They killed themselves because of the feelings they had for people far away from the frontline.

## Chapter Five

### Soldiers No More: Debilitation, Demobilisation, and Death

#### **Introduction**

While the rest of this thesis looks at ways in which citizens became soldiers in the First World War and the place of their bodies in that transition, this chapter considers the reverse process. Disability, death or demobilisation saw men's status as soldiers change and the ways in which the body was located in this transformation, and the experience of men as this took place will be examined.

First, this chapter will explore the experience of wounded men and discuss how the transition from fighter to convalescent introduced a new set of rules for men and their bodies. They exchanged officers for medical staff, billets for wards and khaki for hospital gowns. Consideration will also be given to the battle between the wounded and the army as attempts were constantly made to return men to the front.

The chapter will then consider the men whose service lasted beyond the armistice in November 1918. Once the fighting was over many soldiers remained in uniform as the logistical problems of demobilisations mounted. This interim period, when men remained soldiers despite the imminence of a return to civilian life will be

examined first. As men finally left the military they experienced another physical examination similar to the one that they had received upon enlistment. Once again their bodies were catalogued and assessed, forms given and clothing exchanged. It seems that their final experience of the military was remarkably similar to their first as again their worth was assessed physically to determine their value.

Finally, this chapter will focus on those who were killed. The treatment of the bodies of the dead was a practical problem as corpses would quickly become a source of disease for the living. But the ways in which those bodies were dealt with also addressed questions about how morale could be maintained among remaining troops, and also about the symbolic value of those who had sacrificed their lives for the nation.

### **Recovering Bodies**

By the end of the First World War over 160,000 men had to be treated for wounds.<sup>1</sup> From frontline to convalescent care soldiers had to go through a series of medical check points. Firstly, a Regimental Aid Post supplemented by stretcher bearers would issue immediate medical care and then the wounded were transferred to Casualty Clearing Station to be stabilised and assessed before being returned to duty or shipped out of the battlefield completely to a hospital or transport back to

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<sup>1</sup> I. Beckett, T. Bowman, and M. Connelly, *The British Army and the First World War* (St Ives, Cambridge University Press, 2017), p.168.



Britain.<sup>2</sup> As the previous chapter showed many made their way from the battlefield themselves often despite horrendous wounds.

I came to lying flat on my back in a nearby pillbox used as a first aid post. A doctor was just finishing bandaging me up and he said 'get a stretcher for this man as soon as you can.' I had been hit by a shrapnel shell full of steel balls the size of marbles that stretched from a height of twenty-five yards or so, one ball had blown an inch of bone out of my upper arm. One had taken a clean bit out of my jawbone without breaking it and one had gone deep into the left of my chest, breaking the collarbone on the way in. I found this out later at the time I remembered I had always made up my mind to walk out if I possibly could. There was a bombardment going on outside and I couldn't imagine any chance of four men carrying me down on a stretcher, they needed every man on first aid. I persuaded a first aid man to put his hand in the middle of my back and hoist me to my feet, I tottered out determined to get down to the Menin Road or die in the attempt – on this occasion no idle phrase.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I. Gordon, *Lifeline: A British Casualty Clearing Station on the Western Front, 1918* (Stroud: The History Press, 2013), p.31.

<sup>3</sup> IWM, 1876, Private Papers of A.C. Warsop, pp.16-17.

Those who could not walk or crawl had to find someone to carry them. This was the primary task for the RAMC stretcher bearers. Stretcher bearing was a dangerous and physically demanding role as the bearers were responsible for scouring the battlefields for the incapacitated and dragging them to safety often in the middle of combat. The nature of their role also came with unique hazards to their bodies such as the physical strain of carrying heavy soldiers over miles of uneven terrain. This resulted in aching limbs and permanent damage to their hands. Mayhew explains how the wood of the stretcher would frequently split through constant exposure to water and how metal wire had to be wrapped around it to keep it together.<sup>4</sup> Many stretcher bearers chose not to wear gloves because it made it difficult to hold the stretcher which meant that these men suffered often substantial damage to their hands and bore the scars for the rest of their lives.<sup>5</sup> As well as the gruelling and physically tortuous aspect of the role being a member of a medical team was no guarantee of protection from the enemy. Stretcher bearer Thirtle explained that that the risks to his body and those of his fellow bearers were very real as they sought to save others.

In one case, we had a stretcher case being carried down when the squad was incapacitated through one or more of its members being hit. It is half

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<sup>4</sup> E. R. Mayhew, *Wounded: From Battlefield to Blighty, 1914-1918 Kindle Edition* (Leicester: Thorpe, 2014), loc, 420.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

gruesome and half humorous to relate the result of enquires when the whole ones reported for reinforcements to replace their losses.<sup>6</sup>

Once clear of the battlefield the wounded were given medical assessments by First Aid Posts and Casualty Clearing Stations. Those who could not be returned to duty were transferred to local army hospitals or returned home for extensive care. Being in a hospital meant an entire regime change. As soldiers became patients their bodies were forced to adjust to a new environment where the priority was not combat but recovery. Upon leaving the front men found their uniforms replaced with hospital blues. This was a uniform type garment that Carden-Coyne argues signified that men were no longer soldiers but 'disciplined invalids' under medical care and control of medical staff.<sup>7</sup> 2nd Lieutenant Carter of 7th Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment recalled how his body was treated:

I was taken by ambulance to 22<sup>nd</sup> General Hospital at Camieres. Almost immediately I was operated on and the piece of shrapnel removed. It had not damaged the bone. It was taken out on the opposite side of the left from which it had entered on the theory that if there was a hole right through it could heal from the middle. The nurses enjoyed squirting disinfectant through! After nine days, another ambulance train took me to Boulogne and

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<sup>6</sup> IWM, 16647, Private Papers of T. O. Thirtle, p.15.

<sup>7</sup> A. Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds: Military Patients and Medical Power in the First World War* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014), p.215.

a hospital ship to Dover where several trains were waiting. It was pure chance where one was carried off to. I landed at Leicester and enjoyed eight weeks in the North Evington War Hospital. I had left all my kit and uniform in France and only possessed one set of underclothes and a blue hospital suit except that a few letters and my diary had been rescued.<sup>8</sup>

Carter illustrated how the agency of men over their body remained limited while under medical care. A surgical decision meant that his body was disfigured further after the original wound. He noted the loss of his uniform and kit and how he had to wear the hospital blues. Reznick argues that the blue uniform was supposed to project the heroic value of the soldier while Carden-Coyne retorts that when men underwent the loss of their weapon, uniform, and equipment they felt 'stripped of their status as men and citizens'.<sup>9</sup>

Private Parker's experience was similar because of his illness, and he recalled little more than a haze of medical procedures.

Our destination turned out to be Stockport, Cheshire, not far from Manchester. The Isolation Hospital, part of what had been the infirmary, now the General Hospital. We three were put in observation wards, glass on

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<sup>8</sup> IWM, 7988, Private Papers of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant C. Carter, p.20.

<sup>9</sup>J. Reznick, *Healing the Nation: Soldiers and the Culture of Caregiving in Britain During the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p.111 and Carden-Coyne, p.215.

three sides, no one but the Doctor's nurses were allowed near us. I had a silver tube down my throat, which was taken out and cleaned very often. Life was a series of throat swabbing, partial choking, bed rest etc. I must have been too ill to know much, weeks went by, which I do not even remember. I was told, afterward that it was touch and go for myself and the others.<sup>10</sup>

During recovery from diphtheria he was forced to hand over control of his body to medical staff. Parker also demonstrates the important role that the medical staff could play in the lives of their patients. Doctors and nurses often take a predominant role in the narratives of soldiers who have been hospitalised but they can be presented in very different ways. For example, Private Prew recounted how the doctor in a field hospital in France failed to interact with him directly and he only discovered that he was to have an operation after being informed by the sister much later.<sup>11</sup> While the doctor could often feature as this distant authority figure, Alison Fell argues that nurses frequently took on a quasi-maternal role for recovering men.<sup>12</sup> This was certainly the case for Private Jones who recounted in his memoirs how a nurse fed him 'like a child' and gave him a drink of milk.<sup>13</sup> What had certainly changed is that it was no longer military officers who were in control of the bodies of these troops, but medical staff.

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<sup>10</sup> IWM, 11787, Private Papers of G. K. Parker, p.16.

<sup>11</sup> IWM, 863, Private Papers of R. G. Prew, p.27

<sup>12</sup> A. Fell, 'Afterword: Remembering the First World War Nurse and Britain and France', A. Fell and C. Hallett (eds.) *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p.173.

<sup>13</sup> IWM, 14938, Private Papers of C. E. Jones, p.5.

Despite this continued lack of control, many men found their experience in the hospital to be immeasurably preferable to their experience as frontline soldiers.

Private Copson exclaimed:

What a relief! Some people hate hospitals but I call it a haven of rest. I slept for nearly a day here, and oh the joys of a real bed! I wondered where I was when I woke a nice nurse came and washed me and brought me some breakfast. For dinner, I had some jelly and custard as a favour. I was in bed for a few days.<sup>14</sup>

Copson described being clean, comfortable, well rested and fed, a description that could hardly be used to portray the daily life of an active ranker. The families of the injured also celebrated wounds that removed men from service. In a letter to Lady Anstruthers from her sister she received the news of a friend that had been hospitalised.

Dad passed through here today & left a message telling me to try find Rob which I immediately did & have just been sitting with the dear thing - looking so nice in his bed tho [sic] one wishes he were not there one can't help being thankful to know he is safely wounded again & out of danger.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> IWM, 2614, Private Papers of P. G. Copson, p.12.

<sup>15</sup> University of St. Andrews Archive / Special Collections, MSDEP121/8/2/10/1/5, Letter from 'Rosie to Lady Anstruther, undated. Emphasis given in the letter.

The reference to the man being 'safely wounded' seems oxymoronic, but as the previous chapter suggested many came to view their bodies, and those of friends and relatives, in new ways during the conflict. Safety from death seemed worth the price of the mess and the pain of an injury.

The medical authorities strove to ensure that hospitals were organised to aid recovery in ways that extended beyond the medical care provided. In a lecture published in the Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps (JRAMC) in 1916, Major Grey Turner praised and emphasised the importance of the hospital in helping men to physically and psychologically recover from their experiences of the war.

The influence of mind over body is an important factor which is well recognised by all who have to deal with the sick, and it is especially so in our military work. Here we are dealing with men who are frequently a very long way from home and friends; who have suffered the fatigues of war and have often for the first time been introduced to many of the horrors that follow in its wake. These men are not normal in mind, there is often a temporary loss of balance, and it is a wonderful commentary on the amount of backbone possessed by our nation that the wounded are so constantly cheerful and bright in spite of their great trials. But it is most important that you should recognise this aspect of the matter, and it says much for the wisdom of the authorities that as far as possible they arrange for wounded men to be sent

home to England as soon as they are fit to travel. To be once again in their home-country and within reach of friends does much to help recovery in bad cases. Similarly, the bright surroundings of our hospitals are valuable therapeutic agents and they ought to be aided by a cheery optimism which I think it will not be difficult for any of you to cultivate. Always remember that one of the most valuable and cheapest remedies we possess is HOPE.<sup>16</sup>

Carden-Coyne argues that often such an approach was success and that men often claimed to have enjoyed their experiences in hospital. As wounded men left hospitals like Bishop's Knoll in Bristol, for example, they remarked on it being like 'leaving one's home', rather than being discharged from a medical facility.<sup>17</sup> However, not all men had such a positive experience in hospital. Private Hurst explained in his oral history that he felt his hospital experience was not organised for his psychological benefit.

Hurst: ...It didn't seem to heal. It was a very distressing kind of septic condition which prevailed.

Interviewer: How long were you in hospital altogether

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<sup>16</sup> G. Grey Turner, 'The Importance of General Principles in Military Surgery', *Journal of Royal Army Med Corps*, (1916), Vol. 26, p.577. Emphasis is given in the original source.

<sup>17</sup> Carden-Coyne, p.192.



Hurst: Six months...I was limping about, there was a number of us, who had similar conditions of the legs and the feet and we were on no-duty, sitting out on the canal side, out on the canal side, because we weren't allowed for anyone to see us...terrible, there we were spending the day on the canal side to keep out of sight.<sup>18</sup>

Reid argues that this was not uncommon particularly for the extensively disfigured men who were often relegated to remote areas of hospitals to keep out of public view.<sup>19</sup> After the war, the Sunday Herald described these men as being the 'loneliest of all the Tommies' because of the way they tended to retreat from society.<sup>20</sup> Wounded men were frequently shielded from the eyes of the public even before they arrived into hospitals. Mayhew notes in *Wounded*, how Nurse Morgan made curtains for her carriage on the No.3 Ambulance train to prevent the wounded men being stared at by inquisitive civilians.<sup>21</sup>

Even within the confines of the hospital environment men could assert their agency and take control of their bodies. Lieutenant Carter, mentioned above, found himself in the East Midlands after repatriation.

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<sup>18</sup> IWM SA, 11582, A. Hurst, reel 9.

<sup>19</sup> F. Reid, 'Losing Face: Trauma and Maxillofacial Injury in the First World War' in J. Crouthamel and P. Leese, *Psychological Trauma and the Legacies of the First World War* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp.30-1.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.31.

<sup>21</sup> Mayhew, loc, 2666.

It was now July 2nd (1917) and the end of eight weeks at Leicester. Now followed fourteen days' convalescence at Uppingham, Rutlandshire. The grounds of the hospital were magnificent – the lives of the patients were miserable! The matron, a severe woman with a passion for discipline, treated us like children. But for the nurses, we should have gone hungry but they played the game and we usually got two platefuls of dinner by putting the first plateful under the table and waiting for the second. We had to be in by 6.30, every evening, or spend two days in bed which was bad enough but the last straw was a message on the notice board saying 'no patient must accept an invitation to tea in the village without first obtaining matrons sanction. We struck back. Everyone agreed to stay out until 10 pm. The next night we rushed the gate. The notice was removed.<sup>22</sup>

His actions suggest that not all men appreciated being treated like children while recovering from combat, or being confined to the hospital however agreeable it might be. They took their healing and the conditions under which they lived into their own hands and acted to assert control over their bodies.

A wound, hospitalisation and even a return to the UK were not necessarily the concluding event in a soldier's career. Lieutenant Lindsay described being

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<sup>22</sup> IWM, 7988, Private Papers of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant C. Carter, p.20.

surrounded by convalescing men as he recovered from typhoid in hospital in Alexandria:

Most of those who were in the ward when our batch arrived have been sent out to barracks as convalescents, whence they are sent, when fit, to Alexandria to be drafted on to their various regiments. The ward is full up most of the people are from Manchester. Some are pretty bad but the majority are getting on finely.<sup>23</sup>

For men like Lindsay his stay in medical facilities was a temporary one designed to prepare him once again for a return to the frontline. Private Stinton recalled the surveillance mechanism set up to track the state of recovery of those who, like him, had been wounded at Ypres in 1917.

About this time in the war, we had suffered some reverse in the fighting with the loss of a good number of men. Any man thought fit enough was sent from the hospitals to re-join their regiments. There were quite a number of men who left our hospital this way: most of them being those that had been convalescing. Every month, a board sat at the hospital to decide who was fit enough to return to their regiments. If a man was to attend, then the letters

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<sup>23</sup> IWM, 11765, Private Papers of Second Lieutenant W. Lindsay, letter dated 30<sup>th</sup> August 1915.

PB [Permanent Base] were written in blue chalk across the record board at the head of the patient's bed.<sup>24</sup>

When describing the 'reverse fighting' and losses, Stinton was likely referring to the ongoing battle of Passchendaele during which both sides lost accumulatively over 600,000 men between July and November 1917. This costly battle resulted in little tactical gain for the British but combined with the losses at the Somme in 1916 reinforcements were desperately needed. Private Lewis of the 2/5th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment was another convalescing soldier who had to justify his inability to serve on the frontline. Lewis had been wounded twice, first in October 1916 at the Somme and then again through the chest during the battle of Ypres in December 1917.<sup>25</sup> His injuries eventually took him off frontline for the remainder of the war where he convalesced working as a clerk for the Royal Engineers at Sandwich in Kent until his demobilisation in January of 1919. Lewis recalled how his presence off the lines was challenged by his new Commanding Officer in August 1917 who ordered him to be reassessed by the selection committee and undergo another medical exam to determine his suitability for active service.

The day after arrival at Ripon I was before the Board and immediately selected by the Defence Corps Officer. I thought, "here we go again" and told

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<sup>24</sup> H. Stinton and V, Mayo (ed.) *Harry's War, A British Tommy's Experience in the Trenches in World War One* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002), pp.217-8. Note: 'Permanent Base' meant that men were deemed no longer suitable for active service and restricted to base duties only.

<sup>25</sup> IWM 16506, Private Papers of F.C. Lewis, p.86.

him I had been retained in the army for clerical duties only. He told me there was no such arrangement and I should have to do anything right up to the limit of capacity. Having Russia in mind, I then said that I did not think I could carry a rifle and equipment because of the wound and he handed me a rifle to try. I had to admit that I could hold it for a short time but would not be able to do so as a regular duty. He then ordered me to an adjoining room where there was a doctor and said: "God help you if he passes fit". My luck was in; the doctor was an elderly and a very kindly man and, after examining me said "No son, you shan't go again" and marked me BIII which was a very low category. On returning to the Selection Board I had to be careful not to show my elation and was quietly accepted by the Royal Engineers officer as a clerk in the Inland Waterways and Docks Section.<sup>26</sup>

This is an important example as it shows how the capacity of the body could be contested. The Defence Corps Officer was determined to revise all previous decisions about disability and Private Lewis was not keen to test the Selection Boards ambivalence. But the doctor was convinced that the soldier's wounds meant that he should not be sent to the frontline again and the Royal Engineers were content to find him work to do that suited his capabilities. Private Lewis himself was happy to simply avoid any efforts that might have been made to send troops to Russia. While the injuries sustained by Lewis meant that he could not be returned to duty

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. pp.86-7. Extract is presented exactly as printed in Private Papers of F.C. Lewis.

others went further and ensured that this would be the case by neglecting treatment and refusing to heal their bodies to suit the military. Private Stinton recalled a fellow convalescent who refused to carry out the exercises that the medical staff had instructed him to perform.

When my wounds were healed, I was advised to try and use my arm. The exercise, though painful, would help towards getting it better. Up until then, I had had my arm in a sling but after getting the advice I left it off. This other chap got the same advice but disregarded it. Confidentially, he told me that he didn't want it better whilst he was in the army for, he said: 'I have had enough of the trenches. If my arm gets well I will be sent out again. Let them give my discharge and then I don't mind getting the arm better!' He had been at the hospital longer than I had, and by persisting in not trying to use his arm and keeping it in one position, it was gradually getting withered.<sup>27</sup>

Stinton's friend clearly took control of his own body to damage it, in the name of avoiding the risk of being passed fit again for the frontline. Since enlistment men had been physically assessed, in training they were judged on their ability to improve, in service on their capability to endure, and in combat on their capacity to fight. The stories of Lewis and Stinton show that they continued to be assessed for their military potential even after wounding and injury. The latter's recollections

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<sup>27</sup> Stinton, p.217.

suggest that some men were not content to be passive participants in this process and could act decisively to ensure that their bodies did not recover in time to return to the fighting.

### **Demobilised Bodies**

For many soldiers the end of fighting brought with it an end to their patience with the army's control over them and their bodies.<sup>28</sup> At first, the 11<sup>th</sup> of November was a moment of celebration and relief. In his handwritten journal, Trooper Wells from the 2nd Troop, 'C' Squadron, 9th Queen's Royal Lancers recounted the joy of the moment when the conflict officially ceased.

At Eleven o'clock on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918, everyone had to stand to arms where, when & no one was to advance on the penalty of death our boys were not sorry it was all over so made the best of billets & enjoyed themselves for a week. The idea was to give Jerry time to get back into his own country & stay there after a week, 2 divisions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> army who were nearest the German Frontier advanced unto [sic] Germany.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> A. R. Selpp, *The Ordeal of Peace: Demobilisation and the Urban Experience in Britain and Germany, 1917 – 1921* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> IWM, 18542, Private Papers of A. Wells, no page numbers.

N.C.O Johnston had returned from France to transfer to R.F.C and recalled more raucous celebrations back in England and how, briefly, military control collapsed.

About thirty of us held up an empty A.S.C motor lorry passing through Uxbridge. The tramcars swarmed with soldiers, inside and out, singing and shouting. The safety valve was fully open and, for one day at least, all the past years of misery were forgotten. We could not get beyond Chiswick. All the trains trams, taxis, and 'buses had double their normal loads, crammed with people who had no desire to go anywhere in particular but who had to have some outlet for their feelings. Night fell and no one bothered to return to camp at the proper time. Men were trickling past the Guard Room at all hours of the night and early morning without a word being said. The following day, discipline was gradually restored and things became matter of fact once more.<sup>30</sup>

Johnston also recalled how quickly thoughts turned to the end of military life, 'the burning question now was, when would we be released from service and allowed to return home?' but also shows that his service dragged on; 'By the end of the month demobilisation papers were being filled in and, on my return before Christmas from the 12-day's leave granted to all ranks, I found the first batches leaving for the depot to be returned to civilian life'<sup>31</sup> As demobilisation began slowly and impatience grew,

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<sup>30</sup> IWM, 12383. Private Papers of J. A. Johnston, pp.149-50.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.



many men failed to see why they should still be in the army and subject to its controls and unrest grew. Winter explains that on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1919, the War Office announced that 106,294 officers and 2,625,811 other ranks had been processed for demobilisation.<sup>32</sup> Over a million, men awaited their release and would continue to leave the military in small numbers until 1922.<sup>33</sup> This was a slow and aggravating process that continued to upset many civilian soldiers who no longer saw the need for their bodies to remain outside of their own control.

At Addington rest camp in late 1918 where soldiers reportedly telegraphed the King promising to burn down Buckingham palace unless they were released from service. They protested that they had had no leave for two years, barely any pay for nine months and atrocious hygiene facilities while in Mesopotamia.<sup>34</sup> In the summer of 1919, Private Jamieson recounted how Winton Churchill was mocked by a troop of soldiers on parade because of his involvement in the farcical organising of demobilisation.

There was a lot of dissatisfaction. During the summer of 1919, we had a military tattoo and Churchill was suddenly introduced and was greeted with

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<sup>32</sup> D. Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of The Great War* (London: Penguin, 1985), p.109.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.240.

loud booing because he had a great deal to do with drawing up the arrangements for demobilisation.<sup>35</sup>

Where they could, some took the initiative to get out of the army as soon as they could. Sergeant Robinson recounted how a fellow soldier who was in charge of general administration and had only recently joined the army, filed his own demobilisation papers within the first pile of men who were to be returned from service.<sup>36</sup> Challenges to authority once the fighting had ended show that men had not been turned into unthinking military pawns. Rather, they had complied with and accepted control only in the face of what they perceived to be a national emergency and the unique circumstances of the war with Germany and its allies. In many cases, once this was over men desired control back over their bodies and their lives. Such was the impatience of many that they rushed through demobilisation procedures even when this put their futures at risk. Private Denison was diagnosed during his service, as suffering from D.A.H. (disorder action of the heart), a physical defect that later prevented him from obtaining an insurance policy. Faced with the choice of signing himself out A1 fit or waiting for a medical assessment he opted for the former in order to end his military career as soon as possible.

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<sup>35</sup> Account of Private Alexander Jamieson, 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Scots, 27<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 9<sup>th</sup> Division, quoted in P. Heart, *A Very British Victory Kindle Edition* (London: Hachette UK, 2010), loc. 8980.

<sup>36</sup> IWM SA, 11461, H. Pettit, reel 6.

I only mention this to show that I must have been in poor shape when I was demobbed – you had to sign yourself A1 before you could get yourself discharged so that then you had no claim for a disability pension. They made all sorts of tempting offers to me to stay on. All I wanted was my freedom. My papers read ‘Transferred to the Reserve pending demobilisation.’ I came home with a month’s leave, it was great to be free again.<sup>37</sup>

Part of the reason for the impatience of many was that life in the military continued to be hazardous to their health and their bodies. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 1919, Winston Churchill, speaking in his new role as Secretary of State of War was forced to respond to a series of soldier’s deaths that had occurred during the journey back to Britain. These men had died during as a result of sickness, overcrowding and lack of hygiene facilities.

As already stated, every effort is being made to improve the conditions, but owing to the enormous movements of troops which are taking place I fear it is not possible to avoid hardships in isolated cases. As regards the overland route from Taranto, this question has been very carefully taken up and a medical officer travels on every train, and special precautions are taken throughout the journey. I would remind my hon. Friend that every section of the community has suffered acutely from the influenza epidemic, and I do

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<sup>37</sup> IWM, 12168, Private Papers of D. G. Denison, pp.19-20.

not think that the proportion of casualties from this cause among soldiers is higher than among the civil population. I would also point out that persons travelling from one climate to another are, under any circumstances, more susceptible to illness. I very much regret the death of the four soldiers mentioned.<sup>38</sup>

Churchill's reference was to 'Spanish Flu' and Weaver and Van Bergen explain that the British Expeditionary Forces (BEF) listed 313,000 cases in 1918 of the disease that became a global epidemic.<sup>39</sup> Van Bergen notes in *Before My Helpless Sight* that while there is a connection between Spanish Flu and the end of the war, this correlation was essentially limited to the relocation of the men which resulted in epidemiological contact to spread the disease rather than the disease arising from a physical susceptibility caused by the men's diminished bodies.<sup>40</sup> Spanish Flu aside, transportation and relocation often left much to be desired in terms of care of the men as they made their journey home and the period that men remained in military service could be hazardous to their health. Private Barrow was one such soldier who recalled accidents occurring despite the end of the fighting, as he recounted in oral history that during the stocking of shells one exploded resulting in 'one or two men

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<sup>38</sup> HC Debate, 24 March 1919, vol 114, cols 59-61W.

<sup>39</sup> P. Weaver and L. van Bergen, 'Death from 1918 pandemic influenza during the First World War: a perspective from personal and anecdotal evidence' *Influenza Other Respiratory Viruses*, Vol. 5. (2014), p.538.

<sup>40</sup> L. van Bergen, *Before My Helpless Sight: Suffering, Dying and Military Medicine on the Western Front, 1914-1918* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), pp.164-5.

[being] badly injured.<sup>41</sup> Before being demobilised in December 1919 NCO Wainwright also recalled an accident happening while he served in Duren with the 8th Battalion Tank Corps.

We were just sitting pretty with nothing to do...well you kept the tanks in order and so forth and it was there that one of the tanks going down the main street as it was of this village there, something had happened and one of the battalion had gotten in front of the tank and he was flattened by the tank, there was this accident that happened he was killed. I remember that very well indeed.<sup>42</sup>

Evidently, even after the fighting had stopped, men's bodies remained in danger from military service.

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<sup>41</sup> IWM SA, 8327, H. Barrow, reel 7.

<sup>42</sup> IWM SA, 10600, J. Wainwright, reel 14.



**Soldier is medically assessed in 1918 for demobilisation.<sup>43</sup>**

When troops finally made it to the point of demobilisation they found that their bodies were once again at the centre of the process. As the image above shows, the first stage was a physical examination and each man had to reveal his body for subjection to a medical assessment. The 1918 Ministry of Information film, *From Soldier to Civilian* showed demobilising men cheerfully entering a large room and undressing for a medical officer who listened to their chest in front of a seated official who took notes.<sup>44</sup> This assessment was similar to the evaluation men underwent during enlistment as men's physical attributes such as height, weight, and physical illnesses were recorded. Men also had their hearts listened to and their chest

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<sup>43</sup> IWM, 457, *From Soldier to Civilian*, British Government Film, 1918, reel 1 - 03:37.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

expansion checked. The film presented the assessment process as being an orderly and well-organised experience for soldiers as they were clinically and painstakingly reviewed. While the film may have exaggerated the care and attention each man received it does show that even in the final moments of a man's service the military continued to assert its control over his body.

Part of the reason for this is that where the body had been damaged it had to be valued. Prior to the First World War pensions for ex-servicemen or soldier's widows were granted haphazardly. In 1593 British soldiers were awarded a benefit that was paid from local taxes if they were wounded in the line of duty. From 1680, the Chelsea and Greenwich hospitals were created to emulate Louis XIV's Hôtel des Invalides, but this system was immediately overwhelmed. Hampton explains that payments continued to be awarded to men based on their 'length of service, severity of injury and the man's service record.'<sup>45</sup> Between 1806 and 1914 measures were taken to introduce a rudimentary scale to distribute benefits from the state which were based upon the capacity to work, ranging from one-quarter inability to complete inability.<sup>46</sup> From 1854 until 1957 the Royal Patriotic Fund, which took funding directly from the State, covered much of the financial care awarded to widows and orphans. However, the positive impact that this fund had is

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<sup>45</sup> J. Hampton, *Disability and the Welfare State in Britain: Changes in Perception and Policy 1948-79* (Great Britain: Polity Press, 2016), p.37.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p38.

questionable as Skelley argues that the fund organisers were particularly 'ungenerous and parsimonious'.<sup>47</sup>

The scale of the casualties in the First World War forced a change in this approach as the State took on some responsibility for those left with lasting physical ailments resulting from military service. Between 1914-1919 there had been 41,000 amputations in the army. 69% of these amputations were legs, 28% were arms and 3% were both.<sup>48</sup> Over the next two decades over 4000 veterans were diagnosed with epilepsy, over 42,000 suffered from tuberculosis, as well as 36% of all disability pensions in the 1930's being awarded for war neuroses.<sup>49</sup> The government's response reads like a macabre shopping list as each missing body part or wound is given a price to be awarded through the pensions scheme. Moreover, the price varied according to rank, so that a Warren Officer's thumb, for example, could be worth 50% more than that of a Private.

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<sup>47</sup> A. Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home, The Recruitment and Terms and Conditions of the British Regular 1859-1899* (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1977), p.217.

<sup>48</sup> Beckett, Bowman, and Connelly, p.168.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, pp.168-9.



FIRST SCHEDULE.

PENSIONS that may be granted for SPECIFIC INJURIES.

Degree of Disablement.	Specific Injury.	Proportion corresponding to Degree of Disablement.	Disablement Pensions.													
			If not entitled to a Service Pension.					Warrant or N.C. Officers entitled to Service Pensions.					Private, &c. (Class V.) irrespective of Service Pension to which entitled.			
			Warrant Officer, Class I.	Warrant Officer Class II, or N.C. Officer, Class I.	N.C. Officer, Class II.	N.C. Officer, Class III.	N.C. Officer, Class IV.	Warrant Officer, Class I.	Warrant Officer, Class II.	Warrant Officer, Class III.	Warrant Officer, Class IV.	Private, &c. (Class V.)				
Percent.	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>		
1	Loss of two or more limbs. Loss of an arm and an eye. Loss of a leg and an eye. Loss of both hands or of all fingers and thumbs. Loss of both feet. Loss of a hand and a foot. Total loss of sight. Total paralysis. Lunacy. Wounds, injuries or disease resulting in disabled man being permanently bedridden. Wounds of or injuries to internal, thoracic or abdominal organs, involving total permanent disabling effects. Wounds of or injuries to head or brain involving total permanent disabling effects, or Jacksonian epilepsy. Very severe facial disfigurement. Advanced cases of incurable disease.	100	42	6	37	6	35	0	32	6	30	0	27	6	27	6
2	Amputation of right arm at shoulder joint.	90	38	3	33	9	31	6	29	3	27	0	24	9	24	9
3	Amputation of leg at hip or left arm at shoulder joint. Severe facial disfigurement. Total loss of speech.	80	34	0	30	0	28	0	26	0	24	0	22	0	22	0
4	Short thigh amputation of leg or of right arm above or through elbow. Total deafness.	70	29	9	26	3	24	6	22	9	21	0	19	3	19	3
5	Amputation of leg above knee (other than 4), and through knee or of left arm above or through elbow, or of right arm below elbow.	60	25	6	22	6	21	0	19	6	18	0	16	6	16	6
6	Amputation of leg below knee (including Symes' and Chopart's amputation), or of left arm below elbow. Loss of vision of one eye.	50	21	3	18	9	17	6	16	3	15	0	13	9	13	9
7	Loss of thumb or of four fingers of right hand.	40	17	0	15	0	14	0	13	0	12	0	11	0	11	0
8	Loss of thumb or of four fingers of left hand, or of three fingers of right hand. Loss of two fingers of either hand	30	12	9	11	3	10	6	9	9	9	0	8	3	8	3
		20	8	6	7	6	7	0	6	6	6	0	5	6	5	6

NOTE.—In the case of left-handed men, certified to be such, the compensation in respect of the left arm, hand, &c., will be the same as for a right arm, hand, &c.

Ministry of Pensions, Royal Warrant for the Pensions of Soldiers Disabled and of the Families and Dependents of Soldiers Deceased in Consequence of the Great War (1918), p.771.

In 1918, the British government published the booklet, *Ministry of Pensions. Royal warrant for the pensions of soldiers disabled, and of the families and dependants of soldiers deceased, in consequence of the present war*, within which the financial remuneration for injury was minutely detailed by cost and rank for damaged body parts.<sup>50</sup> At the upper range losing two limbs, an eye and a limb, total sight, being facially disfigured or becoming bedridden, meant men were categorised as 100% disfigurement which paid 42s 6p for the highest warrant officer class (Class I) and 27s 6p for a private. At the bottom of the scale a 20% disability, which covered the loss of a thumb, four fingers of the left hand, three fingers of the right hand, or the loss of two fingers of either hand, meant a warrant officer (Class I) would receive 8s 6p and a private just 5s 6p.<sup>51</sup> This process was focused on the extent to which the debility of the man prevented him from being self-sustainable. Newlands refers to this process as a 'commodification of wounds' in her review of the pension process after the Second World War which quantified men by percentage of disability and rank.<sup>52</sup> After the First World War men's financial dependence on the State was entirely dependent on the physical damage they had sustained during service.

By 1921 1.1 million veterans were receiving a disability pension and this figure rose to 2.4 million by 1929.<sup>53</sup> Cohen in *The War Come Home* discusses at length the

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<sup>50</sup> Ministry of Pensions, *Royal Warrant for the Pensions of Soldiers Disabled and of the Families and Dependents of Soldiers Deceased in Consequence of the Great War* (1918), p.771.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> E. Newlands, *Civilians into Soldiers: War, the Body and British Army Recruits, 1939-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), p.171.

<sup>53</sup> Beckett, Bowman, and Connelly, p.169.

political, economic and social implications of the disabled soldier returning to society after the First World War and outlines the role that the War Pension and charitable bodies such as the Red Cross and the Soldiers Sailors' Families Association played in providing financial support for men who struggled to find suitable work after 1918.<sup>54</sup> Beckett, Bowman and Connelly note that after the war the mishandling of the pension process encouraged many veterans to consider themselves 'the neglected living'.<sup>55</sup> Reznick agrees and explains that after the war Galsworthy, like much of British society, lost interest in the broken bodies of the returning veterans as attention turned to the future rather than brooding on the past.<sup>56</sup> Britain began to neglect former soldiers despite the extent of their physical sacrifice, in much the same way it had prior to 1914.<sup>57</sup> Private Sumpter was one such soldier who was demobbed out of the army classified as disabled with a longstanding arm wound after the war ended.

I was demobbed from there at Chichester on January 26<sup>th</sup> 1921, as no longer, er.. disabled for military service, no longer able, I had a medical board and I was graded 30% disabled...My arm was useless, for years after this the thing wouldn't dry up...at the medical board I got 30% disabled, got a disabled pension, which they gave me. Which was taken away from me in 1922

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<sup>54</sup> D. Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany 1914-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp.35-38.

<sup>55</sup> Beckett, Bowman, and Connelly, p.170

<sup>56</sup> J. Reznick, 'History at the intersection of disability and public health: The case of John Galsworthy and disabled soldiers of the First World War' *Disability and Health Journal*, Vol.4, (2011),, p.26.

<sup>57</sup> Cohen, pp.17-19.

because the army, I was disabled according to the army, but according to the civilians I wasn't, according to the civilians I had full use because I could use it.<sup>58</sup>

Sumpter's experience illustrates the discontinuity between life in the army and civilian life beyond for the returning men. Despite his wounded arm, Sumpter had continued serving in the army for over four years beyond the end of the war where he had been responsible for his officer's horses.<sup>59</sup> The army had acknowledged his disability and responded by granting him non-combatant status followed by his disability pension. Yet, like many disabled men, release from the army meant not only a return of individual agency but also the end of direct care of these men and their damaged bodies, as the onus was passed from the military to the state.

Once the medical assessment was over men still faced assessments of their bodies. They were directed to dispersal centres where they were given a Z18 form (Certificate of Employment) which outlined the skills and abilities that men had developed during active service.

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<sup>58</sup> IWM SA, 9520, F. E. Sumpter, reel 8.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, reel 7-8.

ARMY FORM 7, 1918

### CERTIFICATE OF EMPLOYMENT DURING THE WAR.

(To be completed for, and handed to, each soldier.)

A soldier is advised to send a copy rather than the original when corresponding with a prospective employer.

It is particularly important that an apprentice whose apprenticeship has been interrupted by Military Service should have recorded on this form any employment in a Trade similar to his own in which he has been engaged during such Military Service.

Regt. No. W/5020 Rank Fitter

Surname FLOYD

Christian Name in full WILLIAM MANSEL

Eng. W/RTA Co. No 1 Section, Southern D.A.C.

1. Regimental Employment.

Nature of.	Period.
(a) <u>Fitter</u>	From <u>2.5.17</u> To <u>2.1.4.19.</u>
(b) _____	_____
(c) _____	_____
(d) _____	_____

2. Trade or calling before Enlistment (as shown in A. B. 64.)

Fitter (Engineering)

3. Courses of Instruction and Courses in Active Service Army Schools and certificates, if any.

(a) Passed Standard for

(b) 2nd Class Army certificate

(c) of Education 23.4.19.

(d) \_\_\_\_\_

\* The trade or calling must be filled in by the S.C. Cut from the Appendix to Special Army Order, No. 6, of 21st October, 1918 (219 of November, 1918). (P.T.O.)

**Certificate of Employment during the War, William Mansel Floyd, 1919.<sup>60</sup>**

These forms once again reduced men to measures of their physical effectiveness and usefulness. The Certificate of Employment was designed to allow men to demonstrate that some of these skills and abilities could enable them to secure employment. For some men, training and active service had actually encouraged them to develop useful abilities such as driving or technical knowledge. This

<sup>60</sup> IWM, 1481, Private Papers of W Floyd, Certificate of Employment During the War, 1919.

demonstrates that although many soldiers returned home with physical, psychological and financial losses, some men, such as Private Floyd who returned having received a certificate in education and engineering expertise, managed to return to new opportunities, indicating a relatively rare positive impact from military service during the First World War.<sup>61</sup> As a result of his remaining military service in 1919 Private Joseph Biglin was able to take advantage of the army Education Scheme and pass the Special Certificate of Education. This ultimately led to him being able to acquire a grant following demobilisation to achieve a first-class honours degree in civil engineering at Sheffield University.<sup>62</sup> However, this was not the case for all men as the interruption of the war had lifelong consequences for some. Private Snailham was once such man, whom had initially enjoyed his experiences because of the opportunity to play and develop his football skills, ultimately resented his service in the war and cited it as the reason for his failure to achieve his footballing career.

Well it made me bitter, because I was denied for the thing I had lived for football. I got to play with teams...but it weren't where I wanted to be. I had a trial with Preston but I couldn't stick it you see. Malaria had taken the guts out of me, I could play but I wasn't strong enough. Oh no, it made a mess of me.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> IWM SA, 11342, J. Biglin, reel 8.

<sup>63</sup> IWM SA, 1987, J. Snailham, reel 6.

Once the state of their bodies were assessed soldiers were also often given a Z44 form (a plain clothes form) as part of the demobilising process. This was an important moment captured in the film *Demobilisation* produced by the British government in 1918.<sup>64</sup> This depicted men being issued with civilian dress which was an important visual statement delineating the end of their service. In the film there is a direct correlation with the images of the smiling eager soldiers that were centre stage in the recruitment propaganda at the beginning of the war. In both cases, the men are presented as smiling, physical fit, patient and eager. The reality could be significantly different. Havardi argues that military films such as *From Soldier to Civilian* and *Demobilisation* should be considered carefully before accepting their presentation as reality because they were created primarily to please public audiences.<sup>65</sup> In *British Propaganda and the First World War*, Messinger explains that, by 1914, the cinema was growing in popularity, and that the British government had already begun to experiment with using film to alter public perception and mood during the Last South African War.<sup>66</sup> Films such as *Demobilisation* painted a glorious picture of men on their way home, proud of their achievements and noticeably uninjured, healthy and constantly cheerful as they moved forward into their new lives.

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<sup>64</sup> IWM, 486, 'Demobilisation', The Ministry of Information, 1918, reel 1, 2.24.

<sup>65</sup> J. Havardi, *Projecting Britain at War: The National Character in British World War II Films* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company Inc., 2014), p.68.

<sup>66</sup> G. S. Messinger, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p.42.

Tim Lynch explains that along with their final pay men could choose to accept the civilian clothes or to retain their uniform and be given a clothing allowance of 52s and sixpence but many chose to accept the civilian attire.<sup>67</sup> Most men received, along with their new clothes, a small amount of money and a Z50 form which required them to exchange their Greatcoat for £1 at a local railway station. Private Benwell seemed content with what he received in return for the uniform.

They gave us a suit, two pair of socks and some underclothes, a flat cap and it being summer they gave us a mac you see, it was rain proof and £27...so err I had a bit of time off they paid us though I think it was a month to settle down.<sup>68</sup>

In much the same way that some men had desperately desired their uniforms at the start of the conflict, at the end of the war soldiers began to fixate on the obtaining of civilian clothes and the shedding of their uniform as a visual representation of their end of service. In December 1919, Lieutenant Wade received a post card from his friend Geo. D. Roche with an old soldier's hymn on the back

...this kruil war is hover

...appy will I be.

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<sup>67</sup> T. Lynch, *Great War Britain Sheffield: Remembering 1914-18 Kindle Edition* (Stroud, The History Press, 2014), loc, 1553.

<sup>68</sup> IWM SA, 6838, H. M. Benwell, reel 1.



I puts my civvy clothes on,

...ore sodgerin' fer me

(Ancient Army Hymn)<sup>69</sup>

Private Johnston remembered gaining his freedom and on once again putting on regular clothes he hinted at his regret at having exchanged them for a uniform so readily after the outbreak of war.

I left Andover on April the 3<sup>rd</sup> 1919 and, proceeding to York, spent the night there before going to Ripon for demobilisation. A month's furlough was granted and the end of that time I was free. I had served 4 years and 8 months in His Majesty's Forces. In May month, I took up once more the threads of civilian life so hastily thrown down in the dark days of 1914.<sup>70</sup>

One set of forms assessed the damage done to the bodies of the men in order to establish the liability of the state to maintain them. Another noted the potential of those bodies for work in the economy to which they were returning. A further set was necessary to record the return of the uniform which had been one of the most potent symbols of their military service from the outset. Even in demobilisation, is apparent that the body was at the core of the process.

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<sup>69</sup> IWM, 7976, Private Papers of F. B Wade, Postcard from Geo D Roche, December 1919.

<sup>70</sup> Johnston, p.153.

## Dead Bodies

Over the course of the First World War 9 million uniformed men died, across the battlefields around the world.<sup>71</sup> Over 700,000 of these losses were British.<sup>72</sup> As the First World War progressed official approaches to the bodies of the dead changed and varied. Mark Harrison has pointed out that for the military it was of the utmost importance to remove corpses from the environment as they would present a real problem for maintain the health and hygiene of remaining troops and also their morale.<sup>73</sup> These logistical requirements meant that until 1914 soldiers were typically buried in mass graves while only those of the higher ranks might expect to be interred individually or transported back to UK for burial.<sup>74</sup>

This practice began to change from 1914 onwards however, and Fabian Ware is usually credited for taking the initiative on this once he took up his role with the Red Cross in that year. Ware became responsible for the transportation of casualties within the battlefield and also began to concern himself with recording where fallen men were buried. This was a sensitive and forward-thinking decision as families would later be able to retrace the final resting place of their loved ones. Such was

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<sup>71</sup> E. Kulman, *Of Little Comfort: War Widows, Fallen Soldiers, and the Remaking of Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), p.3.

<sup>72</sup> J. Winter, 'Army and Society: the demographic context' I. Beckett and K. Simpson (eds.), *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p.201.

<sup>73</sup> M. Harrison, *The Medical War: British Military Medicine in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.130-1.

<sup>74</sup> J. Geurst, *Cemeteries of the Great War by Sir Edwin Lutyens* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2010), p.13.

the significance of his work that he was transferred from the Red Cross to the army to set up the New Graves Registration Commission in 1915.<sup>75</sup> By September 1916, *The Times* published an article that outlined the regulations put in place to register the graves of the dead British soldiers. This also offered a free photograph of the grave if requested. This article ended with the statement ‘...the proper registration and marking of graves will necessarily be a lengthy and difficult problem’<sup>76</sup> To manage the expectations of bereaved families the article also featured a series of provisos relating to the complications of identifying individuals who died on the battlefield whilst also clarifying that the exhumation of bodies was forbidden.

Some time may elapse after burial before the grave has been properly registered and marked and the position accurately recorded. As soon as this is done a notification will be sent to the next-of-kin. This notification may be taken as final verification or correction information received from other sources....The exhumation of bodies during the war is strictly forbidden by both the French and British military authorities.<sup>77</sup>

These changes in the First World War suggest that the body of the civilian soldier of this conflict was somehow considered more valuable or sacred than that of professional troops who served before 1914. While a common grave was suitable

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Anon, ‘Soldiers’ Graves.’ *The Times*, 18 Sept. 1916, p.5.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

for the latter the former was marked out for an individual grave or at least painstaking notice was taken of where they were buried. Laura Wittman argues that the First World War was the first conflict where 'all combatants expected to be treated equally'.<sup>78</sup> No longer was the marking of the graves of the fallen limited to the ranking officers. All nations involved promised their soldiers that they would receive a proper burial and significant care was taken both during and after the armistice to ensure this promise was met. Post war, the French embarked on a complicated and costly campaign of 'demobilising the dead' and returning soldier's corpses back to their home villages. However, the British government refused to follow suit, choosing to leave their fallen abroad, some of which were moved from temporary and impromptu graves from the former frontline but almost all remained, officer or otherwise, in the War Graves plots designated for them.<sup>79</sup>

Clearly, the sacrifice of the range of men who had entered the war had an impact on the way that their bodies were ultimately disposed of. For the British, as was befitting of their civilian to soldier transition, it seems that extra care was taken to ensure that their bodies were treated with more respect, regardless of rank, than ever before.

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<sup>78</sup> L. Wittman, *The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Modern Mourning and the Reinvention of the Mystical Body* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), p.54.

<sup>79</sup> J. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning, The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.23.

In practice, of course, this orderly process of burying the nation's fallen heroes in ways by which each individual contribution would be recognised often fell short of aspirations. In the first place the collection of the dead was a dangerous affair. In 1915 Private Wright of the 1/7<sup>th</sup> Battalion Middlesex Regiment and Machine Gun Corps joined a burial and retrieval party after the battle of Neuve Chappelle. In his oral interview, he recounted how they were required to creep around no-man's land at night in an effort to retrieve the dead without joining them; 'We were sent at night time as a burial party...in with a mile of the line, no talking, single file... it was a matter of collecting up the wounded and the dead and tidying up the place and clearing up before daylight.'<sup>80</sup> Private Parker explained in his diary how alcohol was given to sustain the retrieval parties as they were given extra shots of rum to help them deal with the strain of body collection from a battlefield that was still being contested.<sup>81</sup> Chaplains such as Reverend Winnifrith and Reverend Watkins were renowned for setting aside their own safety by trawling the battlefield in the dim hours of twilight to recover the bodies of dead soldiers.<sup>82</sup> Often corpses could remain in the middle of no-man's land because it was simply too dangerous to collect them. During the battle at Ypres, Medical Officer Travis Hampson MC noted that the corpses of both sides lay out of reach, 'none of the dead are buried; they can't or won't trust each

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<sup>80</sup> IWM SA, 33696, A. H. Wright (Alec), reel 1.

<sup>81</sup> Parker, p.28.

<sup>82</sup> S.H. Walker, 'Saving Bodies and Souls: Army Chaplains and Medical Care in the First World War', *Postgraduate Journal of Medical Humanities*, Vol. 3, (2016), p.36.

other to go out to do it.’<sup>83</sup> Event when the risk was taken to retrieve bodies those that ventured out of safety often decided that their body was more valuable than that of a fallen hero. Private McKay recorded how fellow stretcher bearers wanted to unceremoniously dump a corpse, before they abandoned it themselves at its destination where it was met with indifference.

During the time we were stationed here, we were ordered by the Sgt. Major of the 10<sup>th</sup> Inniskillings to take a corpse to Authulle for burial. The morning was wet and we got an extra tot of rum before we started. We had not gone very far down the trench until Williamson wanted to dispose of the body in the swamp in our right. Neill was shocked, as Foreman also wanted to dump it. Neill would say ‘persevere, Jack, persevere.’ ‘ah, persevere my B.S.!’ William would answer. However, we got the body down as far as paisley dump, and Williamson and I said we would take it on by wheeled stretcher. When we arrived at Authuille, no one there would have anything to do with the body: ‘stand him up against the wall’ said Williamson, ‘and let us return’. We propped the corpse up against the wall and went back to our dug-out.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> T. Hampson MC and T.P.D. (ed.) *A Medical Officer's diary and narrative of the First World War* <http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/philsnet/T%20Hampson%20WW1%20Diary%20100.htm> (accessed 01/09/2017).

<sup>84</sup> IWM, 22065, Private Papers of R. McKay, p.19.

Often there were no simply no bodies to collect. Stretcher bearer Private Parker spoke of 'the awful deaths of some of them, and the total obliteration of others, because make no mistake, although new high explosives have been invented in recent years, a man, or even a whole company, could be wiped out with those big shells. Not a shred of any man would be left!<sup>85</sup> Others disappeared into the smashed and flooded environment, and only some of these were later retrieved. Lieutenant Godfrey recounted in letter home in July 1916 that:

We chose the two most unsavoury spots to dig in (putting in dug-outs). One had been an old refuse heap previously; and stank with a stink that would have knocked a pole-cat out: we had to work with gas helmets on very nearly! In the other spot, we unearthed the year-old corpse of a poor British Tommy; that was of course merely nauseating. We buried it again in a shell-hole nearby, and stuck up a cross, inscribed in pencil with 'TO AN UNKNOWN SOLDIER'. I added 'Requiescat in Pace' to the mystification of the Sappers. It is a sad world, and that is a sight I shall never forget; Those poor remains, laid on a bit of corrugated iron, buried in a shell hole, of some poor humble unknown who had 'done his bit'.<sup>86</sup>

Godfrey's actions were respectful and practical, showing that even when unable to identify the individual the uniform on the body accorded it a value. With the

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<sup>85</sup> Parker, p.20.

<sup>86</sup> IWM, 14991, Private Papers of 2nd Lieutenant J. T. Godfrey, letter dated 10/07/1916.

pressure on to create a defensive position there was no time to transport a rotten corpse behind the lines for official burial. They did what they could to mark the man's grave in a suitable way.



**Dead soldiers of one of the Highlanders regiments awaiting burial, August 1917.<sup>87</sup>**

Even the practice of burial was a complicated affair. The above image, taken during the Battle of Passchendaele between July and November 1917 illustrates the typical preparation of dead bodies for burial. Newlands claims that in the Second World War soldier's bodies became 'homogenised' as they were buried in identical graves,

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<sup>87</sup> IWM, Q7815, Dead soldiers of one of the Highlanders regiments awaiting burial, August 1917, Photograph taken by Lieutenant J. W. Brooke (3<sup>rd</sup> August 1917).



adorned with similar markers and prepared for burial in the same fashion.<sup>88</sup> Much of this process was perfected during the First World War as thousands of men were quickly prepared for interment. Dying at the front meant men were buried wearing their uniform having had their pockets emptied and boots removed. Chaplains and stretcher bearers would frequently take identification discs and any ephemera from the men's corpses as a means of identification and a way to send something back men's relatives. This is perhaps where stretcher bearers developed the reputation for robbery of the wounded and corpses. A recurrent joke during the First World War was that RAMC stood for 'Rob All My Comrades'.<sup>89</sup> William John Collins had been a stretcher bearer and claimed when asked during his oral history interview that this reputation was mostly unfounded, if for no other reason than most men had very little valuables on them to steal.

I must tell you, it ran off my back like water off a ducks, because after all said and done 99 soldiers out of 100 hadn't got sixpence to bless himself with. I mean there were no valuables on infantry men. Officers? Nobody would carry valuables, or anything worth carrying on the line...I never heard of a man carrying anything valuable. They never had it. How would they do it on a shilling a day?<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Newlands, p.161.

<sup>89</sup> J. Brophy and E. Partridge, *The Long Trail Songs and Slang of the British Soldier: 1914-18* (London: E. Partridge Ltd., 1930), p.136.

<sup>90</sup> IWM SA, 9434, W. J. Collins, reel 10.

It was not only RAMC men who were suspected of taking valuables from the dead. NCO Tom Bracey explained in his oral history testimony how the practice of stripping the dead was not uncommon and went as far as to conclude that a fellow soldier's injury, seeing as the man was known for robbing the fallen, was cosmic rough justice.

He was the one that had both legs off and it seemed to me as if it was punishment. I was afraid afterwards to do with my conscience, I never went down a dead man's pockets. I never... I used a body in a shell hole, to get some cover, so if there were bits blowing, I would pull a body across like that. But other than that, I never touched a body. I know that they cut the fingers off to get rings, but I wouldn't touch one.<sup>91</sup>

Bracey demonstrated a complicated relationship with the dead. While officially encouraged to see them as fallen comrades to be treated with respect he suggests that many were more inclined to see them in practical terms as resources. For him they were a useful source of cover, for others a potential site for loot.

Once stripped, the men had to be interred but this was not always carried out immediately. Stretcher bearer Collins explained that all men needed to be assessed and certified as dead by a medical officer and that often corpses waited days for burial.

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<sup>91</sup> IWM SA, 9419, T. Bracey, reel 8.

No man was ever carried out for burial unless the medical officers said he was dead. There was always two medical officers there... They used to pull back the lids of the eyes. They used to check the pulses, I mean if there was no pulse, there was no pulse...but I wouldn't like to certify that man was dead. I think it takes a doctor to do that...You see in any case, the man wasn't buried immediately. He was probably out there for a day before we could bury him.<sup>92</sup>

This final standardised test not only clarified that men were dead and suitable for burial but also demonstrates how even in death, men's bodies were still subject to the bureaucracy of the army.

Even burial itself was not without risk. Both Reverend Watkins and Reverend Winnifred recalled similar under fire burials during the battle of the Marne. In his published memoirs, Winnifred recalled how the danger of his task did not deter him. He wrote '...bullets whistled about us; but I went on with the prayers.'<sup>93</sup> At another graveside at Ypres, Watkins remembered conducting a burial under the warning that an enemy sniper was trying to pick them off in the dark.<sup>94</sup> Even when time allowed few burials were little more than a brief ceremony. In a letter to Lieutenant Albert

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<sup>92</sup> Collins, reel 10.

<sup>93</sup> D. P. Winnifrid, *The Church in the Fighting Line with General Smith-Dorrien at the Front, Being the Experiences of a Chaplain Electronic Edition* (London: Kessinger Publishing, 1915), loc. 1407,

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

Stiven's father after his death from a shell on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1917, his commanding officer described the small congregation around the burial.

The men of his platoon and other – men & officers – including myself were present at the simple but impressive service when he was buried by the Presbyterian padre. War is awful. I hope at this time you, his mother and other dear ones are sustained in your hour of trouble.<sup>95</sup>

Burial was primarily the only option for dealing with the bodies of dead soldiers. Davies explains that cremation was rarely used during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>96</sup> In 1916 questions were asked if cremation could be employed as an alternative for sanitation purposes at the front, to which the Secretary of State for War replied, '...it is not proposed to take any action with regard to cremation. I may mention that this question was fully considered by the French authorities, who decided against cremation.'<sup>97</sup> An exception to this decree was the open-air cremation in Britain of Indian Soldiers in 1915 which was carried out to meet the requirements of the Antyesti. However, this was unusual as Austen Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for India, explained in May 1916 when he clarified how it was impossible to cremate all the dead Indian soldiers and that their burial rites had been

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<sup>95</sup> University of St Andrews Archive / Special Collections, MS38426/55. David Stiven Collection, Letter to David Stivens from Captain P. Skeil, 27/01/1917, pp.2-3. Extract cited exactly as printed within the records of David Stiven.

<sup>96</sup> D. Davies, *The Theology of Death* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), p.128

<sup>97</sup> HC Deb 14 November 1916, vol 87, cc567-8.

left in the care of men from the same caste to ensure that respectful practice was followed.

Under the conditions of warfare, it is not generally possible to arrange for the cremation of the bodies of Hindu soldiers killed in action or otherwise dying at the front, nor is it required by religious precept. As far as circumstances have permitted, interments have been reverently carried out by fellow caste men with appropriate rites, frequently in special plots in the local cemeteries.<sup>98</sup>

Control over Indian bodies was not a new phenomenon. Mills and Sen argue that the British had habitually regulated the Indian body as a key aspect of colonial dominance.<sup>99</sup> Attempts to deal with Indian bodies respectfully were important as over one million Indian men served in the Indian Expeditionary Forces over the course of the First World War.<sup>100</sup> Tim Barringer argues that the involvement of Indian soldiers was opposed by the military elite in Britain, but was brought about because of manpower shortages and also because Viscount Hardinge, the Viceroy of India, believed that the involvement of Indian soldiers would promote imperial unity

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<sup>98</sup> HC Deb 09 May 1916, vol 82 cc448-9.

<sup>99</sup> J. H. Mills and S. Sen, 'Introduction' in J. H. Mills and S. Sen (eds.), *Confronting the Body: The Politics of Physicality in Colonial and Post-Colonial India* (London: Wimbledon Publishing Company, 2004), p.4.

<sup>100</sup> K. Coates-Ulrichsen, 'Learning the Hard Way: The Indian Army In Mesopotamia 1914-1918' in R. Johnson, *The British Indian Army: Virtue and Necessity* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), p.61.

and quash nationalist agitations.<sup>101</sup> In actuality, despite the government displaying some sensitivity to the nuances of Indian culture, after the end of the war the repressive actions of the Rowlatt sedition committee in 1918 and the Government of India Act in 1919 only enhanced calls for independence. Barringer argues also that ultimately this led to a reticence to support Britain after the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, even within remembrance, Indian soldiers were not treated as equals to their British counterparts as sporadic attempts to honour their sacrifice through monuments often omitted the names of their dead unlike the much more common structures devoted to British losses which more often named the fallen men.<sup>103</sup>

This limited attempt to respectfully deal with the bodies of dominion soldiers illustrates that the army was not entirely blinkered to the significance of interring the dead respectfully. However, the British military also faced significantly more losses daily than it had ever done before in recent memory so throughout the war had to quickly adapt to these increasing losses of civilian soldiers.

Of course, not all dead soldiers were buried abroad and graves from the First World War can be found around Britain. In April 1915, the body of Lieutenant William

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<sup>101</sup> T. Barringer, 'An Architecture of imperial ambivalence: The Patcham Chattri' in M. J. K. Walsh and A. Varnava (eds.), *The Great War and The British Empire Culture and Society* (Oxon: Routledge, 2017), p.217.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p.245.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p.248.

Gladstone, grandson of former Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone, was returned to his family estate after he was killed three weeks after his arrival in France. Gladstone was returned home after correspondence between the King, the Prime Minister and the War Office permitted his exhumation from his military grave in Levantie. His funeral at Hawarden was a local event as people travelled for hundreds of miles to pay their respects.



**The funeral of Liberal MP William Glynne Charles Gladstone, killed in action during the First World War while a Lieutenant for the Royal Wels Fusiliers, takes place in Hawarden.<sup>104</sup>**

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<sup>104</sup> Image referenced from H. J. Gladstone, *William G. C. Gladstone, a memoir* (London: Nisbet, 1918), p.121.

Gladstone's funeral was the last burial in Britain of any British soldier who died on foreign soil during the First World War as the return of officers incited fury from grieving families of rankers who could not afford to return their own sons, brothers, husbands and fathers. The practice of returning corpses was prohibitively expensive and required significant dispensations and permissions which made the practice exclusive to the officers of wealthy families. Julie-Marie Strange notes that the impact of men never returning was significant as the absence of a body often compounded the grief of soldier's families as they had nothing to project their grief upon.<sup>105</sup> Richard van Emden argues that the practice was also abandoned as the return of dead soldiers reiterated publically the losses that the British were experiencing over the course of the war, as well as went against conventions of the honoured military dead being interred together as a mark of their sacrifice.<sup>106</sup> Military bodies were eventually to be treated as classless in death in the First World War despite the class divisions that still riddled the country.

British troops who were buried across the UK are most commonly there because they died in the country. Controversies about the cost of dealing with them reveal much about attitudes towards their bodies. In November 1914 a question was raised in the House of Commons regarding the need for free transport for the corpses of the soldiers back to their families who died in training.

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<sup>105</sup> J. Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain 1870-1914* (New York: University of Cambridge, 2005), p.267.

<sup>106</sup> van Emden, p,132-3.



Mr. GRANT: asked the Under-Secretary for War if he is aware that relatives of soldiers who die while under training have to bear the cost of railway transport of the body if burial is desired at home; and if he will consider the desirability of free transport in such cases?<sup>107</sup>

No response was ever officially issued in parliament to this enquiry. However, four months later the Under-Secretary for War claimed that men who died at home were allotted a undisclosed sum based upon 'the merits of each case'.<sup>108</sup> This was in response to the case of in January 1915 where a deceased Royal Scots Fusilier who had been invalided home with enteric fever had only been able to be buried thanks to the 'generosity of the citizens of Linlithgow' who paid for his funeral as the army refused to take any further responsibility for his body after he died in Britain.<sup>109</sup> In October 1915 Sir William Pearce demanded to know why suffering families were being further aggrieved by local authorities who were charging families double to bury deceased soldiers as they were not parishioners

Sir WILLIAM PEARCE asked the Under-Secretary for War whether he is aware that soldiers who have died in home hospitals from wounds received in action have been considered non-parishioners, and that certain local

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<sup>107</sup> HC Deb 18 November 1914, vol 68, c435W.

<sup>108</sup> HC Deb 04 February 1915, vol 69, cc140-1.

<sup>109</sup> HC Deb 04 February 1915, vol 69, cc140-1.

authorities have charged their relatives double fees for burial or memorial; and whether cases of such hardship will be prevented in future?<sup>110</sup>

This occurred again in January 1918 when the family of a young officer was required to pay £48 for his funeral to which the Under Secretary of State was forced to respond in Parliament.

The general rule as regards officers is that, beyond providing the gun-carriage, the State makes no contribution to the cost of officers' funerals at home unless special cause is shown, when the case is considered on its merits. Normally the families of these officers are resident in this country and are in a position to make their own arrangements.<sup>111</sup>

These cases show that if efforts were made to standardise the treatment of the dead while at the front there was far less done for those that died while back in Britain, even where their deaths were linked to combat. The state, whether the national government or local authorities, were not keen to bear the financial burden of returning the dead to places from which they had been plucked to serve the nation. This is evident from the need to collect donations to bury the deceased Royal Scot Fusilier. The soldier's body immediately ceased to be a cost to the state upon death and it seems that the quickest way for a soldier to once again become a civilian was

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<sup>110</sup> HC Deb 19 October 1915, vol 74, cc1629-30W.

<sup>111</sup> HC Deb 31 January 1918, vol 101, cc1773-4W.

to die back in Britain. However, post war the British government would once again continue to retain financial responsibility for the upkeep of the cemeteries abroad where thousands of British soldiers remained.

## **Conclusion**

The body remained central to the experience of the military for those that served in the First World War even at the end of that experience. Wounded men swapped one commander for another as they lived under the rule of medical staff complete with uniforms, curfews and bodily restrictions. Though damaged, their bodies remained under scrutiny as the authorities sought to reclaim them and return them to combat. Even in these circumstances men could assert themselves and take control of what was happening, either through open resistance to hospital regimes, or through covert strategies such as leaving an injury to deteriorate in the hope of avoiding a return to the front.

Demobilisation was sought by most men who were impatient to escape the hazards presented by military life even in peace-time and keen to regain control of their bodies and their lives. Even as they left military life their bodies were poked, assessed, classified and valued by the authorities. Injuries could mean pensions, although some were happy to forego these in the rush to escape the clutches of the army. Damaged bodies were valued carefully, and payments increased according to

rank as well as to severity of disability. While beyond the remit of this thesis as it deals with what men did after leaving the forces, the case of Harry Green in 1917 is instructive, as his suicide that year was caused by despair that his wounds meant he struggled to get work.<sup>112</sup> Perhaps like many, even when demobilised, his body and what it had experienced during military service continued to define him and to fundamentally shape his life.

Hundreds of thousands did not survive to enjoy a life after the conflict. Dealing with their dead bodies was a complicated and emotive issues during the First World War as morale, sanitation, grief and expense combined within debates on how to best to honour the dead. The decision to stop mass burial and instead record the grave of each man meant that by the end of the war a sophisticated catalogue system had developed to inform families of that last resting place of their loved one. However, this was by no means perfect and over a century later bodies continue to be found that had originally been lost in the quagmire of no-man's land.<sup>113</sup> Even in death, soldier lacked control over their bodies as the army decided where they were interred and the clothes they rested in. Those families that sought to resist this, and to take back control over the bodies of their relatives, found that they enjoyed little support from the state.

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<sup>112</sup> 'Soldier Suicide', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 30 November, 1917, p.3.

<sup>113</sup> Anon, 'WWI soldier whose remains were found 100 years after his death is laid to rest with full military honours' *The Telegraph*, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2016 (accessed 01/11/2017).

## Conclusion

### Bodies of War

From the outbreak of war in 1914, the priority for the British Military was to field as many able men as was possible. From enlistment to release, these men served as the foundations of the British response to the conflict that ravaged across Europe and around the world for the next four years. This conclusion returns to the key themes of this thesis; the importance of the body and institutional control within the British Army and argues that above all else, men's bodies were centre to the British war effort. By focusing the analysis upon those bodies it is possible to view each soldier as a complicated individual caught in the middle of a chaotic existence whose actions and body were not always under their own command. This unique perspective contributes to the existing literature on the First World War by recognising the similarities and differences of the British men who served as it questions overall the impact the war took on their bodies throughout the process. The events, assessments, controls and regulations that occurred over the course of the war ultimately illustrate how British men's bodies were subjected to constant evaluation, domination, augmentation and destruction between 1914-1918.

Even before the outbreak of war men's bodies were a focus of interest for the British Army. The crisis of August in 1914 only hastened concerns that had been evident since the Last South African War regarding the physical health of the British people.

Zweiniger-Bargielowska has explained how malnourished working class population finally proved to be cause for concern when it impacted on the ability of the British to field a fighting force at the turn of the century.<sup>1</sup> Combined with the Haldane reforms which Barnett notes turned the British Expeditionary Force into an elite unit by the second decade of the twentieth century, it is clear that both the British government and the army placed significant emphasis on the health and effectiveness of men's bodies for service.<sup>2</sup> The outbreak of war resulted in an upsurge of this attention to the body as much of the propaganda for enlistment focused on masculine heroes which Dawson, Meyer and Albrinck have all separately argued were a fundamental aspect of the soldier identity and existence both before and during the First World War.<sup>3</sup> From the outset of war men's bodies were under considerable attention from both society and the military. It is here that this thesis has continued the analysis as it has illustrated how men improved, changed and came to differently perceived their bodies in line with militarised requirements as many strove to meet or refute the military ideal. Private Shaw went as far to purchase 'dumb bells' in an attempt to realign his body to meet the chest requirements needed to enlist in 1914.<sup>4</sup> Shaw was not alone as it is clear that the

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<sup>1</sup> I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body, Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain, 1800-1939* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), p.64.

<sup>2</sup> C. Barnett, *Britain and Her Army, 1509-1970: A Military, Political and Social Survey* (London, Allen Lane, 1970), p.371.

<sup>3</sup> G. Dawson, *Soldiers Heroes, British Adventure, Empire and the Imaging of Masculinities* (New York, Routledge, 2005), p.81, J. Meyer, *British Popular Culture and the First World Wars* (London: Brill, 2008), p.101, and M. Albrinck, 'Humanitarians and He-Men: Recruitment Posters and the Masculine Ideal' in *Picture This, World War 1 Posters and Visual Culture* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), pp.277-277-287.

<sup>4</sup> IWM, 17426, Private Papers of C. Shaw, p.1.

societal gaze on men's bodies during the First World War turned to evaluate them on the basis of their potential contribution to the war. Worth for many men between 1914-18 was defined by physical ability and aptitude for military service.

A significant part of this defining this process was the reduction of men's bodies to a useful criterion and statistics during enlistment. Here men's physical attributes were recorded and measured towards constantly changing sets of standards in order to provide men for service. Bourke explains how a complicated system of assessment developed and evolved over the course of the war as men were organised for service.<sup>5</sup> This system was far from perfect and almost immediately it faced challenges in the form of the vast numbers, incompetence, and corruption as well as having to incorporate the fluctuating guidelines that arose as the need for men overrode concerns over physical ability. David Silbey argues that the initial physical assessment could be negotiated between assessor and the assessed.<sup>6</sup> Further research into fluid process validates Silbey's argument as numerous men recounted how they manoeuvred their way through the enlistment process, often because their own ambitions, namely to serve in the armed forces, aligned with the goals of the men who assessed them. Despite being under regulation height in 1915, Private Butler recalled being told that he would grow into his new role as a soldier by his assessor who said 'You're young, probably you'll grow the other half inch.

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<sup>5</sup> J. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male, Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), p.172.

<sup>6</sup> D. Silbey, 'Bodies and Cultures Collide: Enlistment, The Medical Exam and the British Working Class 1914-1916' *Social History of Medicine*, Vol 17, No. 1 (2004), p.75.

Anyway, we'll take you on.'<sup>7</sup> Private Mullis was promised that despite his weakened physique his training would help him become a soldier after the doctor who gave him his medical exam told him 'it will either kill you or make a man out of you.'<sup>8</sup> Clearly assessment of men's bodies and the requirements that they were to meet was a malleable concept over the course of the war. The need for men for the British armed forces, at least in the early years of the war had encouraged a projected ideal of physicality that was then ostensibly tested during enlistment. Next these bodies would be tailored for service.

Once their bodies have been assessed by the military, for many men their relationship with their own bodies changed as from this point men lost basic freedoms such as what they got wear, where they went and soon what they were to eat and when to sleep. From enlistment to the end of service the British Army sought to improve and tailor men's bodies and their abilities towards the singular purpose of war. Denis Winter argues that training was a significant part of the process of crafting new soldiers, regardless of if they joined before or during the war.<sup>9</sup> Rachel Woodward agrees and argues that soldier's bodies were produced through a range of arduous and regimented training processes. It here that the thesis continues the investigation and argues that the transformation process between 1914-18 was indeed a physical process but also a conflict between men and the military over the

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<sup>7</sup> IWM, 1878, Private Papers of S. E. Butler, p.31.

<sup>8</sup> IWM, 8013, Private Papers of F Mulliss, p.1.

<sup>9</sup> D. Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Penguin, 1985), p.38.



control of men's bodies as they prepared them for combat.<sup>10</sup> As their bodies came under army control, men experienced the physical hardship that was associated with basic training. Each man underwent the standard routine of drill, marching, and parade as well as weapon and bayonet practice. The impact of this training was varied, but many men noted that their bodies significantly improved as they underwent the army training process. Private Williams recalled his training positively and claimed, 'Easter came in 1915, I was in wonderful health. I was never so well in my life, I'd overcome various little defects, colds and such.'<sup>11</sup> This was echoed in the memoirs of Private Barraclough who felt that he was '...harder both in body and soul' as a result of his intensive army training.<sup>12</sup> Not all soldiers were as positive about their experience, such as Private Warsop who gave up his newly earned command stripe because he struggled with drilling.<sup>13</sup> However, the majority of men left training significantly fitter and stronger than they had begun it as their bodies were adapted for the rigours of combat.

The First World War also saw a change in the process of training British soldiers as new methods such as games from the United States of America and new tactics such as grenade and gas warfare were incorporated. Training in this period was often about experimentation and innovation as both military staff and enlistees were

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<sup>10</sup> R. Woodward, 'Locating Military Masculinities: Space, Place and the Formation of Gender Identity in the British Army', in P. Higate (ed.), *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State* (London: Praeger, 2003), p.51.

<sup>11</sup> IWM, 11804, Private Papers of C. W. Williams, p.2.

<sup>12</sup> IWM, 3453, Private Papers of E. C. Barraclough, pp.1-2.

<sup>13</sup> IWM, 1876, Private Papers of A. C. Warsop, p.2.

forced to prepare their bodies for the rigours of twentieth-century combat. Sport was also a popular option which allowed men to practice military tactics and condition their body for active service. Private Watson recalled how football was essential for allowing men to relax during time away from the frontline.<sup>14</sup> However, sport could also be debilitating as Private Fox was hospitalised during the war from an injury he sustained at a hockey match.<sup>15</sup> Yet, even as their bodies improved many men rebelled over the conditions under which they trained. Resistance over food, lodgings, constraints and control ranged from grumbling through to outright insurrection which in turn led the army to retaliate against the very same bodies that they were improving.

Evidently the body was not only central to the process of transformation into soldiers but also of the resistance to it. The initial steps into service and the indoctrination that followed remained clear in the accounts of countless men who underwent the experience and all them invariably described these formative experiences with reference to the impact they had on their individual bodies.

Of course, many of the accounts that focus on how men's bodies experienced the transition into soldiers are centred on the controls, restrictions and regulations that curtailed them. Michel Foucault argues that in the creation of an armed force, autonomy must be replaced by compliance and reliance on others through

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<sup>14</sup> IWM SA, 17311, R. Watson, reel 2.

<sup>15</sup> IWM, 15015, Private Papers of W. H. Fox, p.1.

standardised practice.<sup>16</sup> During the First World War soldiers in the British Army consistently had their bodies directed, assessed and punished in order to retain control over them. As they served men were clothed, groomed, fed and rested according to the direction of the British Army. A crucial part of the process was adapting to the rules and regulation of military life and clothing. Meyer and Duffett separately illustrate how the British Army extended control over the body by regulating haircuts and shaving as well as controlling diet and recreational activities.<sup>17</sup> Food was a particularly effective way to control men's bodies throughout their career as soldiers as in training and active service the army had the primary responsibility for feeding men. Men who disobeyed army rules often found their food privileges rescinded. Private Peyton recalled how a food fight resulted in seven days of 'half rations' which encouraged him and his fellow punished soldiers to relish unappetising additions to their diet, '...cakes (I remember them now, hard lumps of royally overcooked flour and little else – but we scoffed them as if they were really delicious).<sup>18</sup> Punishment was almost always directly enacted upon the body; however, its application was made more complicated by the presence of civilian soldiers within the army. David Englander argues that the First World War witnessed a shift in the control of soldiers as no longer could their behaviour be regulated by extensive physical punishment.<sup>19</sup> The men who joined during the war

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<sup>16</sup> M. Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 2012), p.vi.

<sup>17</sup> Meyer, p.101 and R. Duffett. *The Stomach for Fighting: Food and the Soldiers of the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p.21.

<sup>18</sup> IWM, 11545, Private Papers of H. N. Peyton, p.2.

<sup>19</sup> D. Englander, 'Mutinies and Military Morale' in H. Strachan (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.192.

could not be perceived as mindless drones to be shaped and controlled at their commanders' wills. Instead, men had to be encouraged to act as soldiers. This is not to state that punishment did not take place as incarceration and the strapping of a man to a gun wheel for several hours a day were still used. Yet, much more common was the interplay between verbal haranguing and positive verbal reinforcement. Indeed, men's bodies were controlled, and on occasion their bodies paid the price for misdemeanour, however in light of the evolution of the First World War and the various ways that men were sourced for service the application of punishment as a primarily physical form of coercion was forced to change to accommodate the indoctrination of new civilian soldiers. Punishment for shirking and deserting was also directly enacted upon the body as was in keeping with military protocol. However, the physical penalty could be significantly more severe as 362 men were imprisoned and executed for similar crimes and dereliction of duty.<sup>20</sup> Putkowski and Sykes explain that even falling asleep at their posts could earn men the death penalty illustrating how a momentary lapse of control over their own exhausted bodies could have serious repercussions.<sup>21</sup>

Control over soldier's bodies was not always maintained effectively as men often successfully resisted army rules. As soldiers, men were directed, fed and often wholly reliant on their superiors to guide their daily existence, yet, they were also

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<sup>20</sup> J. Putkowski and J. Sykes, *Shot at Dawn: Executions in World War One by Authority of the British Army Act Kindle Edition* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* loc, 837.

able to subvert this control to shirk their duties, get drunk, have sex and resist military regulations. Private Roberts recalled taking part in a soldier's mutiny because the bread was mouldy.<sup>22</sup> Private Templer witnessed a similar uprising because a drunken soldier had been splayed to a wheel as punishment.<sup>23</sup> Even officers were not exempt from misdemeanours as evident in the case of Lieutenant Creek who was punished for sneaking out to meet a local woman.<sup>24</sup> Food, alcohol and sex could be powerful motivators for men to subvert the control that the military had over their bodies. Yet, the meeting of such physical needs could mean that punishment was enacted upon the body in an attempt by the army to reassert control and demonstrate dominance over the bodies of its soldiers. As the war ended in November 1918, the army's control over men's bodies became more complicated as many civilian soldiers no longer regarded their service necessary and demanded vociferously to return home. Even as soon as the ceasefire was called aspects of military discipline diminished as soldiers celebrated victory by ignoring curfew, going AWOL and getting drunk.<sup>25</sup> Yet, many men's good humour turned sour as they found themselves still under military control for beyond a year after the end of war, which led to a group of frustrated soldiers at Addington rest camp in 1919 telegraphing the King and threatening to burn down Buckingham Palace if they were not immediately released from service.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> IWM, 17248, Private Papers of S. Roberts, pp.11-12

<sup>23</sup> IWM, 2617, Private Papers of C. G. Templer, p.6.

<sup>24</sup> IWM, 1467, Private Papers of Lieutenant P. Creek, pp.59-60.

<sup>25</sup> IWM, 18542. Private Papers of A. Wells'. no page numbers.

<sup>26</sup> D. Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of The Great War* (London: Penguin, 1985), p.109.

Control over men's bodies was a core aspect of the British soldier's existence during the First World War, however, it is clear that this suspension of willing autonomy was only ever temporary as frequently civilian soldiers reasserted their agency if they felt particularly aggrieved at their treatment.

During the First World War, the most destructive element on the bodies of men was undoubtedly combat. New weaponry such as gas, grenades and weaponised vehicles presented new dangers for men's bodies, alongside the more typical dangers of enemy fire, treacherous conditions and shell fire. Countless First World War historians have described the devastation inflicted upon soldier's bodies during combat and active service, including Dennis Winter, Joanna Bourke, Richard van Emden, Gary Sheffield, Peter Simkins, Hew Strachan, Helen MacDonald and Emily Mayhew.<sup>27</sup> These reviews range from the sterile statistical investigations of losses and gains offered by Simkins and Strachan through to the more nuanced individual experiences explored by Mayhew, Macdonald and Bourke. With the exception of the latter, often the individual body is lost within the narrative, its experience diminished by the sheer numbers of casualties. Mayhew, Macdonald and Bourke have separately explored the impact on individual men and their bodies and it is with

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<sup>27</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, Meyer, Winter, *Death's Men*, R. van Emden, *Boy Soldiers of the Great War Kindle Edition* (London: Headline, 2005), G. Sheffield, *The Somme: A New History* (London: Cassell Military, 2003), P. Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies 1914-1916* (Great Britain: Manchester University Press, 2007) and H. Strachan, *The First World War, A New History* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2001), L. Macdonald, *Roses of No Man's Land* (London: Penguin Books, 1993) and E. R. Mayhew, *Wounded: From Battlefield to Blighty, 1914-1918 Kindle Edition* (Leicester: Thorpe, 2014).

these studies in mind that this thesis has focused more directly with the relationship between men's bodies and combat.

Combat had lasting and often devastating impacts of men's bodies. Damage to the body was likely and often clearly evident in the thousands of individual accounts of combat during the war. Private Parker's vivid description of his Captain's screams, audible even over the din of battle after receiving a fatal shot to the abdomen, provide stark evidence for the most obvious impact of the war upon men's bodies.<sup>28</sup> Yet, wounds also offered men an opportunity to retake control of their bodies and their destiny as some men traded parts of their body in exchange for safety either by managing to get a 'blighty wound' or by carrying out a self-inflicted wound which could, as a result, see them ostracised and court martialled for malingering.<sup>29</sup> These attempts to regain control also led some men to self-extinction which Bourke maintains remained a final but rare option for the very desperate.<sup>30</sup> Whilst not common, suicide was utilised by a number of men both on and behind the frontline for a variety of reasons which were not always related to war itself. Regardless, as they destroyed their own bodies men still were able to circumvent the will of the military who had been controlling and directing for combat.

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<sup>28</sup> IWM 11787, Private Papers of G. K. Parker, p.26.

<sup>29</sup> G. Coppard, *With A Machine Gun to Cambrai: The Tale of a Young Tommy in Kitchener's Army 1914-1918* (Great Britain: Cassell, 1999), p.100.

<sup>30</sup> J. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male, Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), p.77.

Disease also had a significant impact on the bodies of soldiers. Harrison argues that the expansive nature of the war still brought about a myriad of diseases that impacted on soldier's bodies as they served.<sup>31</sup> From their first arrival on the frontline, living conditions began to take their toll on men's bodies. Despite the improvements made by the Royal Army Medical Corps sanitation and disease prevention was a difficult and never-ending task. Over the course of the war men still contracted typhoid, malaria, typhus and dysentery as well as having their bodies plagued by environmental factors such as lice and rats, and developed trench fever and trench foot as a result of the constantly unsanitary conditions. Harrison and Hardy separately argue that inoculation was a particularly effective method at protecting soldier's bodies from diseases over the course of the First World War.<sup>32</sup> Still, inoculations for typhoid could actually render men's bodies incapable, albeit temporarily and there are accounts of men being forced to accept the vaccine against their will.<sup>33</sup>

As men developed and served as soldiers their bodies also experienced exhaustion, trauma, unsanitary conditions, injury and disease. In sketches home, Private Broadhead depicted his body visibly deteriorating after an intensive game of rugby.<sup>34</sup> His illustration of fatigue can also be applied to active service and combat as soldiers

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<sup>31</sup> M. Harrison, *The Medical War: British Military Medicine in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.291.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p.144.

<sup>33</sup> Research in War' *The Times* (08 February 1919), p.5.

<sup>34</sup> Sheffield Archives, L.D. 1980/54/1 and 980/54/2, Private Papers of W. Broadhead.



faced physical exhaustion along with fear on an almost permeant basis. Terror, exhaustion and excitement enacted radically different effects on men's bodies as they fought on the frontline. Private A. Surfleet summed up his experiences as a soldier in the First World War as '...awfully tiring and often very monotonous, despite periods of terror and much anxiety.'<sup>35</sup> This constant state of tension could be very detrimental to men's bodies as some men were no longer able to deal with the strain of their existence. This was the case for the officer of Sergeant Huggins who collapsed from exhaustion seconds before the whistle blew to climb over the top.<sup>36</sup> Fear could render men immobile and vulnerable to attack, excitement could lead soldiers to endanger their bodies through rash actions and total exhaustion could even result in being labelled as a malingerer.<sup>37</sup> Men's bodies were also at risk from sustained psychological traumas that manifested physical symptoms before, during and after combat. Lack of understanding of the complexities of shell-shock also led men to being tried by a military tribunal and often "treated" with violence in an attempt to bring them back to reality.<sup>38</sup>

Hedonist pursuits also put the body at risk as alcohol and sex remained a frequent aspect of many soldier's experiences over the course of the war. Peter Simkins explains that over 153,531 men were treated for venereal disease and that concerns about the debilitation of men through sex finally encouraged the British Army to

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<sup>35</sup> IWM, 22369, Private Papers of A. Surfleet, Preface.

<sup>36</sup> IWM SA, 11943, Edgar Huggins, reel 4.

<sup>37</sup> Putkowski and Sykes, *Shot at Dawn*, loc, 837.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, pp.65-6.

restrict brothel usage after 1917.<sup>39</sup> Meeting the body's need for sexual conduct introduced men to a host of potential physical dangers. For heterosexual men, there was the risk of venereal disease. Homosexual men also ran the risk of being arrested and incarcerated, not to mention ostracised by their fellow soldiers if their actions were uncovered. As was the case for 292 officers and rankers combined between 1914 and 1922.<sup>40</sup> Sex could be extremely hazardous for men's bodies, however, regardless of the punitive, physical and financial implications of engaging in sexual activities, thousands of men continued to damage their bodies for the sake of satisfying their libido. Much the same can be said for the drinking of alcohol. Berridge explains how drink was frequently condemned for damaging men's bodies and corrupting their morals.<sup>41</sup> Yet, alcohol was very part of the soldering experience. Drinking was social pursuit, a medical requirement, and an asset crucial for getting men into battle. Private Stapleton claimed that he could not have served without his rum ration.<sup>42</sup> Yet, Private Ching's invigorating 'tot of rum' made him vomit on his commanding officer.<sup>43</sup> Whereas Private Tubbs choose to give up alcohol as it interfered with his ability to carry out his duties.<sup>44</sup> Clearly, alcohol was considered essential for some but it could also incapacitate soldier's bodies and leave them vulnerable to attack from the enemy or punishment from their own side.

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<sup>39</sup> P. Simkins, 'Soldiers and Civilians: Billeting in Britain and France' in I. Beckett and K. Simpson (ed.) *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Great Britain: Pen and Sword, 1985), p.185.

<sup>40</sup> G. Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (London: Palgrave, 2015), p.83.

<sup>41</sup> V. Berridge, 'The art of medicine Drugs, alcohol, and the First World War' *The Lancet*, Vol.384 (2014), pp.1840-1.

<sup>42</sup> IWM, 16428, Private Papers of E. Stapleton, p.21.

<sup>43</sup> IWM SA, 15435 F. Ching, reel 4.

<sup>44</sup> IWM SA, 8865, C. B. Tubbs, reel 3.

Evidently, military service was hard on men's bodies during the First World War. Wounds and disease damaged men's bodies and forced them to be reevaluated and repaired in an effort to return them to efficiency. Service was inherently damaging for the men who served. The sheer exhaustion and stress as well as the pleasing and appeasing of men's bodies constantly opened soldiers to debilitation. As a result of these destructive forces against the bodies of serving men, throughout the war, focus increased on the recovery and repair of the body. Mark Harrison, Ian Whitehead and Emily Mayhew have done much to clarify the crucial role played by the medical services throughout the First World War. Harrison explains how despite being in its infancy, the RAMC was the most prepared and well-equipped unit of its kind across the world at the start of the First World War.<sup>45</sup> Whitehead concedes that the RAMC initially struggled to meet the demands of such a large conflict however he also illustrates that technological progress and adaption to the new climate of war meant that the RAMC's reputation was on the rise by the end of the war.<sup>46</sup> Harrison and Whitehead's considerations are cornerstones of the medical military historiography yet their focus remains principally on the medical professions and the top down consideration of the application of treatment and prevention. Experiences of the individual body are however much more evident in Mayhew's *wounded* which uses the individual experience of the protagonist expertly to illustrate soldier's perceptions from battle to bed rest.<sup>47</sup> It is here that this thesis has

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<sup>45</sup> M. Harrison, 'Public Health and Medicine In British India: An Assessment Of The British Contribution' *Bulletin of the Liverpool Medical History Society*, 10 (1998), p.45.

<sup>46</sup> I. Whitehead, *Doctors in the Great War* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 1999), pp.269-72.

<sup>47</sup> Mayhew, *Wounded*.

picked up and continued the assessment further onto the focus on the body under the military medical gaze as it was recovered, repaired and reassessed for suitable service.

Once damaged men's bodies needed to be recovered. Men like Private Warsop, who 'tottered' his bleeding shattered body off in search of medical attention post battle tested the limits of their bodies as they dragged themselves and others to find medical attention.<sup>48</sup> Even recovery could be physically damaging as retrieval teams of stretcher bearers, volunteers and chaplains came into enemy cross hairs and carried bodies through treacherous conditions.<sup>49</sup> Once in medical care, focus lay exclusively on their bodies as decisions were made about which parts of them would be saved, where they would be treated and even if they would actually survive. Anna Carden-Coyne argues that once out of the lines and out of uniform, wounded men ceased to be soldiers and transformed into 'disciplined invalids' under medical care.<sup>50</sup> While men were stripped of uniform and purpose they still remained under the command of medical staff. Lieutenant Carter recalled how he was 'treated like a child' as he recovered in hospital in Britain after being hit by a piece shrapnel.<sup>51</sup> Carter was not alone as many soldier's accounts illustrate that even as men transitioned from soldiers to patients their bodies were controlled and directed in new ways including being clothed to reflect their transition from soldier to patient.

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<sup>48</sup> IWM, 1876, Private Papers of A.C. Warsop, pp.16-17.

<sup>49</sup> IWM, 16647, Private Papers of T. O. Thirtle, p.15.

<sup>50</sup> A. Carden-Coyne, p.215.

<sup>51</sup> IWM, 7988, Private Papers of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant C. Carter, p.20.

Here men like Carter found new opportunities to retake control over the experiences of their own bodies. Curfews, controlled diets and bedtimes could be met with defiance whilst for others like Private Copson, hospitals and existence in recovery offered much needed rest, comfort and safety. Men could even malingering whilst in medical care and retook direct control over their bodies by refusing, usually by subterfuge, to allow their bodies to heal.

Evidently, initial medical reconstruction of soldiers during the First World War has not entirely been overlooked scholarly, however, the gaze has often omitted the bodies of soldiers themselves and has failed to fully explore how central men's bodies and their experiences were to the process of recovery and repair during the First World War. Therefore, this thesis has examined this closely by recognising the body as a site of conflict during recovery as soldiers still lacked agency over care of their bodies. Yet, through their own actions and changing of the guard, many men found the attention on their wounded bodies meant they could regain further aspects of self-control.

Still, even some of the most serious wounds could be viewed as fortunate when compared to remaining at the front indefinitely. This was the fate of over nine million uniformed men who died during the conflict as many were buried less than a mile from where they fell.<sup>52</sup> Often the dead remained in their uniforms, save for

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<sup>52</sup> E. Kulman, *Of Little Comfort: War Widows, Fallen Soldiers, and the Remaking of Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), p.3.

being stripped of valuables, identification tags and boots. Within the accounts of many men, there are numerous descriptions of corpses as part of the landscape.<sup>53</sup> However, the dead were not irreverently discarded but frequently shown significant respect as their graves were catalogued and ceasefires were recurrently organised to allow for the collection of the dead. Both sides would even occasionally bury the dead of their enemy as respect for the body of the soldier transcended battlefield antagonism. Indeed, much of the care for the dead arose from sanitary necessity. However, the setting up of the war graves commission and the role of chaplains throughout the front in laying the bodies to rest illustrates how the mass dumping of bodies was no longer acceptable as the war progressed. Unlike the wars that had proceeded the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new respect for the bodies that fell illustrated a wider political and societal recognition of the importance of those that had sacrificed for their countries. Initially men were haphazardly buried, by the end of the war grand cemeteries, memorials and the 'tomb of the unknown soldier' all focused on the preservation of soldiers bodies signifying a shift in official policy as the British government took responsibility for the bodies left behind.

Finally, it clear that men's release from their military duties was also significantly focused on their bodies. Dennis Winter has explained how demobilisation struggled with the sheer numbers of men keen for release from their duties.<sup>54</sup> Whilst Beckett,

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<sup>53</sup> IWM, 2880, Private Papers of G. S. Smith, G.S Smith, *Diary of Stories from the First World War*, no page numbers.

<sup>54</sup> D. Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of The Great War* (London: Penguin, 1985), p.109.

Bowman and Connelly have illustrated that the reintegration of the wounded meant a chaotic and complicated pension system which quickly became over whelmed and served as a bone of contention in the decades that followed.<sup>55</sup> The link between release and life after service has been explored by Emma Newlands in the Second World War as she explained how soldiers bodies were commodified as part of the demobilisation assessment at the end of the conflict.<sup>56</sup> This thesis has explored how during the First World War this process was no different, as men's release from service was predicated on a physical review of their bodies. These assessments reduced each man's body again to a series of statistics which were repurposed away from a focus on potential battle efficiency towards their potential financial burden on the state because of their physical sacrifice. Many men like Private Sumpter found that between enlistment and demobilisation they had exchanged a healthy body for a damaged one that experienced demobilisation with an accompanying physical or psychological trauma.<sup>57</sup> Conversely, some men also left the army with new skill-sets such as in the case of Private Floyd who left with a certificate in education and engineering skills that he could use in civilian life.<sup>58</sup> Even the limbo that existed between the calling of the armistice and men's eventual release allowed some men to challenge the control that their bodies had lived under throughout military service in the war as demands to be returned to civilian life transitioned in

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<sup>55</sup> I. Beckett, T. Bowman, and M. Connelly, *The British Army and the First World War* (St Ives, Cambridge University press, 2017), p.169.

<sup>56</sup> E. Newlands, *Civilians into Soldiers: War, the Body and British Army Recruits, 1939-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), p.171.

<sup>57</sup> IWM SA, 9520, F. E. Sumpter, reel 8.

<sup>58</sup> IWM, 1481, Private Papers of W Floyd, Certificate of Employment During the War, 1919.

demonstrations against the army. Ultimately, release from the military service demanded extensive scrutiny of the bodies of the men who had served. As their bodies readjusted to civilian dress and men retook agency over rudimentary aspects of their lives such as grooming, eating and sleeping, bodies were catalogued once more and those results would continue to define many men's existence outside of their military existence financially.

In closing, this thesis returns to Lieutenant Godfrey's words to his mother in a letter in 1917 it opened with which claimed that the First World War was an entirely different reality to anything he had experienced before. Godfrey, like thousands of other British men had found his body constantly under the gaze of the military from the moment he had enlisted until beyond his demobilisation. Men like Godfrey found their bodies assessed by 'experts' on entry before being clothed with ill-fitting uniforms of either khaki or blue and introduced to training regiments designed to craft their bodies towards filling out their uniform and station, both literally and metaphorically. This central aspect of creating the soldier from a civilian often collided almost immediately with the will and desires of the new recruits as men regularly also pursued their own aims, seeking to retain control over aspects of their own bodies, finding comfort in food and alcohol, and engaging in often dangerous acts with women and each other. Within their 'different existence' soldier's bodies were constantly tested, challenged, damaged and served as a site of conflict between the agency of the individual and the demands of the British army. On entry



men's bodies were assessed and tailored for service. During service the gaze shifted to maintaining control over these bodies and ensuring that they were able to meet the enemy effectively. In battle, men's bodies were subject to all of the chaos that surrounded them as bombs, bullets and their own blood tested their physical and psychological ability to serve to the extreme. Post battle, men's bodies would be subject to recovery, be they reclaimed for repair, revitalised in preparation for a return to combat or simply recovered for interment. Post war, those that survived often exchanged their uniforms and kit for civilian dress and a bank note during a reversal of the physical assessment process they had experienced on the way in. Many also found that by the end of the war they were forced to exchange the relatively healthy body that they had initially entered the army with and which had been so carefully crafted through military training, for a defective one complete with a promise of a meagre pension, commodified by their physical loss and attained rank. All men returned with physical memories of their endurance through the Great War.

The key conclusion within this complicated process of creation and deconstruction of the transition between civilian and soldier during the First World War is that essentially the body remained at the centre of this process throughout. Considerations of the experience of the war through analysis of the body allow a deeper understanding of the trials and tribulations that men experienced as they served. However, this is not to say that men were simply marionettes at the behest of the military. Godfrey may have expressed to his mother that the war was a

different experience but he said nothing of relinquishing complete autonomous control to the army. Between the regulations over hair, bedtimes, sex, drink and inoculations resistance occurred. Lack of sufficient bodily sustenance resulted in sporadic insurrections. Ill-deserved punishment elicited riots. Traditional demands for personal grooming fell away in the face of a larger body of serving men and a greater enemy than upsetting the old guard. Indeed, men's bodies were at the centre of their transition from civilian to soldier, and of course back again, but that does not mean that they were entirely passive during the experience. Here, finally, this thesis reiterates its relevance by repeating that it has shown that while the crafting of civilian men into soldiers during the First World War was certainly focused on the control of their bodies, it was not an all-encompassing, agency stripping process, despite often the best efforts of the British army. Men improved and fought, but they also rebelled and damaged their own bodies. Essentially, soldiers or not, authoritarian control or not; during the First World War, in battle, behind the lines, in hospitals, barracks, brothels and bars, men still lived; and they did so as soldiers in a different existence altogether than the majority of them had ever done before.

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